

SONIC INTERVENTIONS:  
SILENCE, SOUND, AND MELODY IN MEDIEVAL LITERATURE

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For Dr. Patricia “Patty” Ingham,  
My dissertation chair, life guru, and infinite source of inspiration

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Kortney Stern

SONIC INTERVENTIONS: SILENCE, SOUND, AND  
MELODY IN MEDIEVAL LITERATURE

In “Sonic Interventions: Silence, Sound, and Melody in Medieval Literature,” I examine five early literary texts, spanning from the late-fifth to early-fifteenth-century: Geoffrey Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde*, the anonymous *Le Roman de Silence*, the aptly named *Book of Margery Kempe*, John Gower’s “Apollonius of Tyre” and the anonymous, late fifth-century *Historia Apollonii Regis Tyri*. These five works may differ in author, time of composition, and genre, but I yoke these stories together because of each author's treatment of agency and the sonic. In response to the latter, many texts from past and present include representations of sound, but there is more regarding the sonic in these five works than the mere presence of such a literary feature. What joins these five works is how each author draws upon sound as an alternative way to animate their marginalized characters when their voices fail. Even when voice proves to be impossible for myriad reasons, these early literary works showcase marginalized characters that can temporarily rebel, refute, and resist through their author's orchestration of what I refer to as “sonic expressions” or the ability to express through sound. In this dissertation, I examine expressions of silence, laughter, weeping, and song. As a result, I argue that each author repositions minoritized character(s) from the margins of the text to its center because the agency sound affords these figures, however temporarily. When marginalized voices are silenced, oppressed, or ignored in the story, their sonic expressions still pulsate across the page.

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## Introduction

There is so much I want to tell you, Ma. I was once foolish enough to believe knowledge would clarify, but some things are so gauzed behind layers of syntax and semantics, behind days and hours, names forgotten, salvaged and shed, that simply knowing the wound exists does nothing to reveal it.

I don't know what I'm saying. I guess what I mean is that sometimes I don't know what or who we are. Days I feel like a human being, while other days I feel more like a sound. I touch the world not as myself but as an echo of who I was. Can you hear me yet? Can you read me?

—Ocean Vuong, *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*

In this quote from Ocean Vuong's semi-autobiographical novel, *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*, the main character and narrator, Little Dog, poses two questions to the void of the page, "Can you hear me yet? Can you read me?"<sup>1</sup> While the answer to these queries might yield a swift knee-jerk response from a reader, "I can read what is written," it is worth revisiting what is being asked, "Can you *hear me* yet? Can you read *me*?" [emphasis added]. What does it mean to encounter a writer, a story, a figment of voice on the page? Can the words of a text ever allow us to access this constructed "me?" How do we—text, reader, writer—reconcile this representation of a "me" with the fact that what is signified in fiction is always anchored in a fantastical signified? There is no "me," yet I "hear you," Little Dog.

Preceding the question, "Can you read me?" Little Dog poses an even thornier query, "Can you hear me yet?" It is from this line of inquiry that this dissertation was launched. What does it mean to "hear," especially in the context of writing? Can readers ever really access an echoed "me," particularly when this voice represents a marginalized character (who may or may not align with the writer's identity)? After years of grueling research, writing, rewriting, and seemingly endless revision, I wish the answer to these queries resulted in a simple answer. Still, my conclusion to such questions remains as complex as the day I first began to grapple with such

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<sup>1</sup> Ocean Vuong, *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* (London: Penguin Books, 2021), 3-242, at 62.

musings, “Can you hear me yet? Can you read me?” Yes. No. Always. Never. It is impossible. It is possible in writing. All of the above. My most concise response is that the answer to these questions can be found on an axis of sound.

The beauty of sound theory is that it is compounded on a spectrum of possibilities. There is no need to oversimplify the myriad ways one might respond to the question, “Can you hear me?,” for when it comes to sound theory, all answers pulsate on a sonic spectrum that holds silence, sound, and noise on a continuum. On this spectrum, all presentations of sound are possible, whether said sound is voiced or written, audible to the human ear or imagined, a traceable echo from the past or the recognizable hum of modernity. All of these possibilities are treated as sonic in the field of sound studies. This disruption of our popular understanding of sound as a strictly aural concept allowed me to return to the questions, “Can you hear me yet? Can you read me?” and respond, “Yes, I hear you. I read you. I understand you.”

### **Past and Present Understandings of the Possibilities of Sound**

Whether directly or indirectly, each of the five early literary works I examine in this dissertation grapples with the questions, “Can you hear me yet? Can you read me?” My archive consists of Geoffrey Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde*, the anonymous *Le Roman de Silence*, the aptly named *Book of Margery Kempe*, John Gower’s “Apollonius of Tyre” and the anonymous, late fifth-century *Historia Apollonii Regis Tyri*. These five works may differ in author, time of composition, and genre, but I yoke these stories together because of how each author treats otherness, agency, and sound. In response to the latter, many texts from past and present include sonic references. Still, there is more regarding the complexities of sound in these five works than the mere presence of such a literary device.

What joins these five pieces is how each author draws upon sound as an alternative way to animate their marginalized characters when voice fails.<sup>2</sup> Even when voice proves impossible for myriad reasons, these early literary works showcase minoritized characters that can temporarily rebel, refute, and resist through their author's orchestration of what I call “sonic expressions” or the ability to express through sound. In this dissertation, I examine my archive's expressions of silence, laughter, weeping, and song. As a result, I argue that each author repositions its minoritized characters from the margins of the story to its center because of the agency sound affords these figures, however temporarily. When marginalized voices are silenced, oppressed, or ignored in the story, their sonic expressions still pulsate across the text.

To demonstrate, I turn to the most unlikely of examples: a modern-day video game. In *Mario Kart 8 Deluxe* for Nintendo Switch, players can earn items that give them advantages in the race. One of these items is the Super Horn. The Super Horn resembles a red box with a yellow megaphone on one end. Sound waves ripple across the screen when a player uses the Super Horn. This reverberative effect blocks, protects, or gives an advantage to its user. In short, the Super Horn is a powerful tool, and its power is rooted in the palpability of its sound waves. Notably, when the Super Horn is deployed, it makes a barely audible sound, as the game's music often drowns out its sound. Even so, all players comprehend its effect through its tangible

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<sup>2</sup> There are many reasons why voice fails. Much ink has been spilled on this topic, but for the purpose of this project I turn to Victoria Blud to summarize the inadequacy of language as a means to voice: “From the ineffable glories of the divine, plunging down to the murky depths of the ‘unspeakable sin,’ some things cannot be put into words.” See Blud, “Introduction: Words and Other Fragments,” in *The Unspeakable, Gender and Sexuality in Medieval Literature, 100-1400* (Suffolk: D.S. Brewer, 2017), 1. This impossibility of rhetoric and in turn voice is the reason why Jonathan Culler calls for a distinction between “voice” and “voicing” in his work on lyric poetry: “Rather than imagine that lyrics embody voices, we do better to say that they create effects of voicing, of aurality. Certainly a theory of the lyric must consider...effects of voicing rather than voice—as in the echoing of rhyme, assonance, or alliteration and rhythmic patterning.” See Culler, *Theory of the Lyric* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), 35. Here, Culler attempts to circumvent the issue of voice while still clinging to some semblance of it; however, what Culler is actually drawing attention to—what he refers to as “aurality”—lies outside the function of voice. “Echoing of rhyme, assonance, or alliteration” are all sonic features of the text that escape the quandary of voice. Thus, sonic devices prove most useful when advocating for a literary tool that can express beyond the convoluted nature of voice.

defenses. Similarly, in text, no one, including the author, can audibly hear a sonic reference on the page, but we can still comprehend the power of such textual features by first observing the sonic reference and then recognizing the ripple-like effects of its strategic deployment. These literary, sonic effects are often overlooked because readers typically associate authority with speech. Still, just as the deployer of the Super Horn achieves power not so much by the type of sound it produces or its volume but by the effects of its palpable sound waves, I argue that we can attune our “thinking ears”<sup>3</sup> more closely to the text to witness the pulsating impact that occurs when, for example, Margery Kempe wanders, weeping through the city of Rome, or Merlin laughs hysterically at King Ebain’s demand for an explanation.

Sound theorist Walter Gershon claims that sound can “be understood as a kind of vibrational affect,”<sup>4</sup> which, as I have shown, is literalized with the Super Horn. Still, such understandings of sound can also be found in the echoes of the prominent medieval philosopher Avicenna (c. 980-1037 CE). In Arabic, Avicenna uses the word *tamawwuj* or “vibration” to describe sound-carrying air.<sup>5</sup> It is this very palpable form of sound, that is, sound as undulated and affective, deployable and destructive, that I examine thematically in this dissertation. I identify sonic representations in each of my archive's five works. As a result of the presence of such literary features, I confront three perplexing questions throughout this project. First, what does it mean to “hear” a text when texts are but silent objects? Second, how do sonic references differ from the category of voice in literary works, especially regarding the voices of marginalized figures? Lastly, how do we, as modern readers, approach literature sonically? To

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<sup>3</sup> Anna Snaith, “Introduction,” in *Sound and Literature*, ed. Anna Snaith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 1-34, at 9.

<sup>4</sup> Walter Gershon, “Vibrational Affect: Sound Theory and Practice in Qualitative Research,” *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies* 13, no. 4 (2013): 257-262, at 258.

<sup>5</sup> Charles Burnett, “Perceiving Sound in the Middle Ages,” in *Hearing History: A Reader*, ed. Mark M. Smith (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2004), 69-84, at 75.

answer these questions, I turn to the fields of medieval and sound studies to show how scholars have tended to these questions and how this dissertation builds upon that great work.

What does it mean to “hear” a text when texts are but silent objects? To answer this question, I start by turning to medieval understandings of sound followed by modern approaches to hearing. In Chaucer’s *House of Fame*, he writes “Soun ys noht but eyr ybroken” [Sound is not but broken air] (II. 765).<sup>6</sup> Here, Chaucer simplifies what would have been a well-known passage from Boethius’ (c. 480-524 CE) chapter on hearing in the Middle Ages. More specifically, in his *De institutione musica*, Boethius argues that “just as circular waves are caused by a stone dropped into a pond, so the air when struck causes a sound and in turn strikes the air next to it so that it sounds, and this strikes the next piece of air and so on...”<sup>7</sup> This statement echoes a commonly held belief among medieval thinkers that air helped carry sound, though air was not considered to be sound itself.<sup>8</sup> Instead, the air was thought to be only one part of a three-part sound production involving a striker, a struck body, and the air.<sup>9</sup>

Though the medieval explanation of sound production is formulaic, the concept of sound proved much more complicated. As Charles Burnett elucidates, sound was often understood psychologically, epistemologically, and physiologically in the Middle Ages. To that end, medieval thinkers drew upon the Aristotelian argument that sound could be conveyed to the soul or the mind<sup>10</sup> and that objects carried potential or actual sounds depending upon the perceived sonority of said object.<sup>11</sup> Regarding the latter, Thomas Aquinas summarizes that potential sound

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<sup>6</sup> Citation to *House of Fame* refers to book and line numbers and is given parenthetically. The Middle English quotation is from Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). Modern English translation is my own.

<sup>7</sup> Burnett, “Perceiving Sound in the Middle Ages,” 75.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

(that is, before the sound is sensed) “resid[e] in the object whereas actual sound [i.e., when the sound is sensed] is not in the object but in the medium—i.e., between the object and the hearer.”<sup>12</sup> Thus, sound in the medieval imagining could be anticipated or actualized, literal or metaphorical, imagined or experienced, resulting in a much more nuanced comprehension of the possibilities of sound than our current understanding allows.

The mailable nature of sound theory in the Middle Ages invites modern audiences to approach medieval literary works as more than “silent objects.” Perhaps most famously, Boethius proposed a three-part division of music—only one part of which, *music aquae in quibusdam constituta, est instrumentis* [the music which is constituted in specific instruments], could be detected by human ears; the other two forms were too loud for the human ear to perceive.<sup>13</sup> What is clear from medieval sound and music theories is that sound was more so about the perceived relationship between the object of sound and the recipient of said sounds than audibility. If we apply this Boethian principle to modern reading practices, we can glean that to “hear” a literary text is not to imagine sounds that are not present but to allow our readerly minds to come into contact with the sonic references on the page. Angela Leighton echoes this sentiment by drawing attention to the sonic relationship that emerges when a reader encounters the text: “Between the silence of the page which greets us, and the sounds we recall or imagine and for which we might still listen at the end, literature happens.”<sup>14</sup> In this sense, the text is an artifact of sonic capacity

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Burnett explains that there were three divisions in Boethian music theory: “*musica mundane* [the music of spheres], *musica humana* [the music binding together body and soul] and *music aquae in quibusdam constituta, est instrumentis* [the music which is constituted in certain instruments]. Notably, only the last division of music in this list was believed to be audible by human ears. For further reading, see: Burnett, “Perceiving Sound in the Middle Ages,” 74-5.

<sup>14</sup> Angela Leighton, “Sound’s Work: An Introduction,” in *Hearing Things: The Work of Sound in Literature* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2018), 1-19, at 6.

activated through the relationship between the reader and the story. To read a story, in some sense, is to hear it.

### **Sonic Interventions: A Sensorial Approach to Reading**

To return to the question which opened this section, “What does it mean to ‘hear’ a text when texts are but silent objects?,” I assert that we must first be willing to interrogate what it means to hear as a story reader.<sup>15</sup> As Gerard Manley Hopkins succinctly commands, “Read it with the ears.”<sup>16</sup> Such instructions require readers to disentangle the auditory from the audible, an act that is necessitated by the fact that an attempt to “hear”—whether actually or referentially in the text—is to sonically imagine, for the sound is already an echoed record of the past by the time we process or encounter it:

The sound we hear is already in *medias res*, a passenger through time, cut off from its cause and quickly lost as it fades. Therefore, thinking about hearing is to think without fixities and boundaries in the flux of time that also runs through our sentences for thinking. Heard in time, and then lost in time, sound quickly traverses the spectrum from closely sensed object to mere faded after-ring, remembered and interpreted in the struck quiet it leaves behind.<sup>17</sup>

In short, audible sounds are only present for a fleeting moment, and, thus, when we attempt to recall sounds from the past, we must do so with what Anna Snaith refers to as our “thinking ears.”<sup>18</sup> The act of encountering sonic references in text functions the same way. We must engage

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<sup>15</sup> Although this dissertation does not situate itself in direct conversation with the field of disability studies, it is important to highlight the critical work on deafness that intersects with questions of hearing that this project is invested. As Rebecca Sanchez explicates, “In 2003, Jonathan Sterne observed that ‘scholars of speech, hearing, and sound seem largely ignorant of the cultural work on deafness.’ Since that time, a growing body of work has sought to bridge the gap between deaf and sound studies by considering the relationship between deafness and a range of phenomena of interest to sound studies scholars: music and sound art, vibration, cultural meanings of listening and sound, and the development of sonic technologies, and literary depictions of sound and silence. As this work has demonstrated, the richness of the intersections between deafness and sound, and their implications for literary study, has much to do with the multifarious meanings of deafness.” See Sanchez, “Deafness and Sound,” in *Sound and Literature*, ed. Anna Snaith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 272-286, at 272.

<sup>16</sup> Gerard Manley Hopkins, *The Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins to Robert Bridges*, ed. Claude Collier Abbott (London: Oxford University Press, 1955), 79.

<sup>17</sup> Leighton, “Sound’s Work: An Introduction,” 5.

<sup>18</sup> Snaith, “Introduction,” 9.

with an imagined sound that is not present. Thus, to hear a story is to bring that work to life through our readerly reconstruction of what the sonic references on the page represent. Just as literary features such as setting and character can only come alive through readerly engagement, so does hearing the sonic representations in a text depend upon a reader's willingness to engage with its sonic features.

If we are to question what it means to “hear” a text, we must also put pressure on whether or not a text is truly but a “silent object.” For many in the field of medieval studies and many medieval peoples of the past, the text is a locus of sound, for, as Susan Boynton et al. explains, “in the literature of the Middle Ages, with its strong oral component, sound can become the subject as well as the substance of the text.”<sup>19</sup> Scholars who have tended to the sonic features of medieval literature have tended to approach the text as a sonic object. For example, Timothy McGee, Sarah Kay, Stefano Milonia, Jennifer Saltzstein, and Helen Deeming have examined lyric, musical notation, and rhyme and rhythm—sonic qualities that explicitly express what said pieces should sound like or that such pieces were intended to be performed.<sup>20</sup> In this sense, the issue of audibility is less contentious as these musical and sonic texts anticipate sound through their stated features. Even so, Boynton highlights the inherently “slippery” nature of sound as a mode of “historical evidence”: “Music (although often written down) is only imperfectly represented in conventional notation; it demonstrates the instability of the relationship between a

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<sup>19</sup> Susan Boynton, Sarah Kay, Alison Cornish, and Andrew Albin, “Sound Matters,” *Speculum* 91, no. 4 (October 1, 2016): 998–1039, at 998–1002.

<sup>20</sup> Timothy McGee, *The Sound of Medieval Song: Ornamentation and Vocal Style According to the Treatises* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998); Sarah Kay, *Medieval Song from Aristotle to Opera* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2022); Stefano Milonia, “Mapping Medieval Identities in Occitanian Crusade Song,” *Medium Aevum* 92, no. 2 (2023): 398–400; Jennifer Saltzstein, *Song, Landscape, and Identity in Medieval Northern France: Toward an Environmental History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2023), doi:10.1093/oso/9780197547779.001.0001; Helen Deeming, “An English Monastic Miscellany: The Reading Manuscript of *Sumer is icumen in*,” in *Manuscripts and Medieval Song: Inscription, Performance, Context*, eds. Helen Deeming and Elizabeth Eva Leach (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 116–140.

nonlinguistic aural object and its written trace.”<sup>21</sup> Importantly, what Boynton highlights is not the impossibility of studying sonic features of medieval works but the challenges that come with the fact that the manuscript, the words on its page, and the time past between now and its composition all act as barriers between the modern reader and the locus of sound.

Returning to sound theorist Gershon's work, I echo the sentiment that to “hear” a text is very much to experience its sonic vibrations. In this sense, sound in all of its complex forms is as much about its affective effect on its audience as it is an audible possibility:

Sounds resonate in our bodies. They do so not only in our ears but also as something that is felt. There are sound weapons and sounds used as deterrents for particular populations, just as sounds used for healing, prayer, and love, vocal, instrumental, and otherwise. Finally, while at one level sounds ‘are,’ their interpretation and how they are utilized are inexorably linked to questions of power. This is manifest not only in sound weapons and deterrents but also in questions of agency and voice, as seen in discussions of noise abatement related to social class or the loss of hearing for workers on factory floors.<sup>22</sup>

Here, Gershon extrapolates the layers of sound, untangling what can be heard from how such soundings are perceived. This project seeks to nuance the “what” heard by turning away from the palpable voices of privilege found in my archive and, instead, turning toward the sonic expressions of those deemed marginal in their texts. Thus, I depart from the crucial medieval and musicological scholarship that treats the text as a sonic object and draw critical attention to how sound is represented in medieval literature. This distinction further nuances how we might “hear” a text, for I examine literary works that were not meant to be performed or sung, yet they are still ripe with sonic references. Thus, to hear in the context of this project is to recognize a sonic reference and recall its sound from our auditory catalog that exists in our minds so that we can process its vibrational affect. Thus, this dissertation is invested in the affective nature of sound,

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 999.

<sup>22</sup> Gershon, “Vibrational Affect,” 258.

an effect that occurs when we attune our thinking ears to the representations of the sonic found on the page.

By complicating what it means to “hear” a text, the question arises about how sonic representations differ from the category of voice in literary works, especially regarding the voices of marginalized figures. This line of inquiry builds upon the question of aurality in text in the sense that if a reader embraces their role in “hearing” stories, we must then ask what we are meant to recognize when we encounter a voice on the page. Whose voice do we comprehend? The authors? A fictional character? Is our readerly voice echoing the words on the page? These questions only begin to draw attention to the thorniness of the literary voice. Notably, this issue of voice only becomes more tangled when textual voice attempts to represent marginalized figures that depart from the identity of their authors. For example, in “Apollonius of Tyre,” Gower crafts a story involving a young female character, Thaise, who is sexually assaulted. In telling such a story, Gower is forced to grapple with how to convey such experiences through a fictionalized voice, imagining that he has no relation to the world outside of the text. Gower cannot fully capture such a voice because he does not have one to offer, but neither does Thaise, as her character is no more than masterful puppeteering on the page. This fact does not negate the significance of the issues presented in the story. Instead, it emphasizes the limitations of stories in their ability to speak for or about lived experiences.

When grappling with literary devices, one of the most challenging aspects is ironing out multifaceted terms such as “voice.” Louise D’Arcens and Sif Ríkharrðsdóttir capture the slipperiness of voice by describing its “fraught nature...as an embodied yet fleeting phenomenon that leaves only traces of its existence as a memory, a textual remnant or a transient sensation of

aerial vibrations.”<sup>23</sup> Adding to this conversation, David Lawton succinctly states that voice is a personification.<sup>24</sup> Later, he expands this definition, offering an encapsulation of the numerous forms voice can take:

Linguistic (the voice as tongue); intertextual (reading as revoicing); musical (the science of sound in the poem); grammatical (the Virgilian *vox* as brass tablet, the play on letters as sounds); visual/verbal (voice as image, echo as reflection, and the more general homology between seeing and speaking); and physiological (utterance, the ear as well as voice).<sup>25</sup>

What is clear from this list is that there is no singular definition of voice, for voice functions more as a category that encompasses rather than limits. This also proved true in the Middle Ages, wherein *vox* or “voice” was a grouping that included “utterance, text, language, and sound.”<sup>26</sup> To that end, Kay explains that the medieval concept of *vox* included the human voice and the voices of animals, angels, and even instruments.<sup>27</sup> Thus, both in the past and present, voice is an unwieldy category that attempts to capture aspects of the human experience. This lofty goal cannot but fail in some ways, mainly when such aims are delivered through fiction.

Returning to the second question, “How do sonic references differ from the category of voice in literary works, especially regarding the voices of marginalized figures?” I must turn to my terminology. I use “voice” and “sonic expressions” in this dissertation to signify disparate literary devices in my archive. What differentiates literary presentations of voice from the sonic is when and how such features operate in the story. When a sound is referenced in the text, what is signified is the imagined sound, unlike the voice, which conjures an illusion. More

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<sup>23</sup> Sif Ríkharrðsdóttir and Louise D’Arcens, *Medieval Literary Voices: Embodiment, Materiality and Performance* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2022), [Muse.jhu.edu/book/111942](https://muse.jhu.edu/book/111942).

<sup>24</sup> David Lawton, *Voice in Later Medieval English Literature: Public Interiorities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 1.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>26</sup> Ríkharrðsdóttir and D’Arcens, *Medieval Literary Voices*.

<sup>27</sup> Sarah Kay, “The Soundscape of Troubadour Lyric, or, How Human Is Song?,” *Speculum* 91, no. 4 (2016): 998–1002, at 1003.

specifically, sounds exist in a kind of retrievable auditory catalog in a reader's mind so that we can recall the sound of a bird referenced on the page. We cannot recall what does not exist, such as a character's voice. Thus, when each author in my archive is forced to abandon voice for one reason or another, I argue that we are not always met with the erasure of a character but rather the possibility of a new iteration through alternative literary devices such as sound. In the texts I examine, each author animates their marginalized character by linking their figures to sonic references, allowing them to persist in sonic representations.

Now, I turn to my final question: how do we, as modern readers, approach literature sonically? To read involves more than just our eyes; we need our "thinking ears,"<sup>28</sup> too, and yet such a statement is often met with perplexion. Perhaps the puzzlement of what it means to approach a text sonically stems from what David Howe calls the "orality/literacy divide."<sup>29</sup> This division tends to result in "an arbitrary contrast between illiteracy as necessarily the realm of the oral, and literacy as necessarily the realm of the visual."<sup>30</sup> Brigitte Cazelles troubles this assumption by arguing that "such division posits a historical evolution from the ear to the eye which is fundamentally Eurocentric..."<sup>31</sup> One need look no further than the medieval world in which silent, individual access to knowledge occurred alongside public, collective learning experiences. One approach to a text was not superior to the other. As Brian Stock explains, these two approaches to reading often overlapped and informed the other: "There was no orality without an implied textuality: there was no literacy without the primal force of the spoken

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<sup>28</sup> Snaith, "Introduction," 9.

<sup>29</sup> David Howes, *The Varieties of Sensory Experience: A Sourcebook in the Anthropology of the Senses* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 12.

<sup>30</sup> Brigitte Cazelles, "Introduction: Noise as Gloss," in *Soundscape in Early French Literature* (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies in Collaboration with BREPOLs, 2005), 1-22, at 7.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

word.”<sup>32</sup> Stock’s observation proves that literacy does not “ignor[e] the realm of sounds, nor that orality equates with illiteracy.”<sup>33</sup> Thus, the medieval world was one in which multisensory approaches to reading thrived, and, as a result, the number of ways one could engage with a text was indeterminate. For medieval audiences, then, the text was never a “silent object” but rather an instrument that contained potential and actual sound, and it is this fact that undergirds my proposal to read sonically.

To read sonically is not to invent sounds or stories that are not there. It is a reading approach that invites careful scans of the sonic references in the text. As modern readers, we often measure how much space a character takes up based on how many lines of dialogue are attributed to them. In this way, centrality and marginality are defined quite literally. However, reading sonically requires a shift in how we approach the text. This reading practice draws attention to presence through the sonic vibrations generated in the story. First, readers should scan the text with an eye for sonic references. Pause in these moments, and listen to these sonic echoes carefully. What does a nightingale twittering a sorrowful song outside Criseyde’s window sound like? How might Margery Kempe’s screech register in the body if the reader were standing beside Kempe and became unexpectedly assaulted by the commotion of her devotion?

The second step in this reading process is to look at the purpose of the sonic reference that has been located. Does this sound simply add more to the setting of the story? In this case, savor the sound, but continue reading. When one comes across a moment when the textual world seems impacted by the expressor’s sound effects or silence, pause. For example, in the case of *Le Roman de Silence*, Merlin enters King Ebain’s court, encounters a funeral procession, and begins

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<sup>32</sup> Brian Stock, “Introduction: Orality, Literacy, and the Sense of the Past,” in *Listening for the Text: On the Uses of the Past* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 1-15, at 4.

<sup>33</sup> Cazelles, “Introduction: Noise as Gloss,” 7.

to laugh hysterically. This a moment that begs us to pause. We must listen intently with our thinking ears to this strange scene. In the text, Merlin's laughter splits the solemn silence of the funeral. Merlin's laugh is tumultuous. The sonic effect of this laugh is affective. As soon as Merlin laughs, the text turns its gaze upon him, and we are asked to view the scene through the townspeople's lens: who is this outsider? Why is he laughing at such a time? Merlin's laugh invites him into the foray of the court while also immediately marking him as an outsider in the space. Like his laughter, Merlin seems out of place, but he also commands a presence through his hysterics, allowing him to take up space in this community. These observations result from sonic reading, for the ability to read and interpret sonic representations on the page stems from a reflection on the affective effect of sound in its literary representation.

The questions I raise about voice, agency, sound, and expression in this introduction are taken up at length in the preceding chapters. In Chapter 1, I draw attention to the traces of Philomela's figure, birdsong, and lyrical narrative featured throughout Chaucer's late fourteenth-century work, *Troilus and Criseyde*. Notably, there are not one but two ghosts that reside within the recesses of this story, however. Chaucer brings his tale of woe to life through the ill-fated figures of Philomela and Criseyde. In this sense, Chaucer's *Troilus* is filled with textually inherited and manufactured traumas; however, he fills with sounds and silences in the fissures such traumas create. Importantly, I do not prioritize speech over sound but rather draw attention to how Chaucer strategically interlaces sonic references alongside traditional speech acts in this text to offer extralinguistic utterances when words fail. Thus, reading Philomela's birdsong in conjunction with Criseyde's silence is imperative. By doing so, Chaucer yokes these two doomed characters together in their shared pain and fragmented narratives, creating not a whole but an

echoed exchange of birdsong and silence that does not erase the limits of the “unspeakable” but certainly disrupts how we might come to understand what was previously deemed inaccessible.

In Chapter 2, I read the sounds and silences in the thirteenth-century French romance *Le Roman de Silence* not in opposition to each other but as rhythmic exchanges that reverberate on the same sonic scale but at different frequencies. This sonic spectrum within the text muddies the boundaries between centrality and marginality as new forms of articulation and power are laid bare. Merlin’s laugh parallels Silence’s quiet resistance to being defined through the restrictive boundaries of language. Such powers come from the queerness of Merlin and Silence, each occupying bodies and utilizing sounds and silences outside of traditional categories of identity and expression. This is “queer” in a David Halperian sense: “queer” functions as a rebuttal to the normative systems in which one involuntarily participates.<sup>34</sup> Halperin’s definition of “queer” speaks not only to Silence’s diverse gender identities but also the refutation carried in Merlin’s laugh, a laugh that laughs back at the rules of King Ebain’s court. Silence and Merlin use sonic expressions as a means to respond politically within a dominant system that overwhelmingly excludes marginal voices, yet through sound; the court cannot turn away from the resistive retorts of queer silences and laughter.

Scholars have largely understood Margery Kempe’s outbursts as physical performances in her *Book*; however, in Chapter 3, I propose a reading in which her utterances can also be interpreted as a kind of sonic device that works to disrupt the cultural context in which she belongs. In one exemplary scene, Kempe leaves a church when a man suddenly “toke hir be the

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<sup>34</sup> In *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography*, David Halperin argues that “Queer is by definition whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. *There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers.* It is an identity without an essence. ‘Queer’ then, demarcates not a positivity but a positionality vis-à-vis the normative...[Queer] describes a horizon of possibility whose precise extent and heterogenous scope cannot in principle be delimited in advance” (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 62. Thus, I utilize Halperin’s definition of “queer” to speak to Silence’s diverse gender identities as well as the queerness of Merlin’s laugh.

sleve and seyde, ‘Damsel, why wepist thou so sor?,’” as if he had the right to demand linguistic meaning of her movements and sounds (I. 46; 148).<sup>35</sup> In response, Kempe merely replies, “‘It is not yow to telle’” (I. 46; 148). Afterward, Kempe turns her back and leaves with nothing but a veiled response, revealing that her cries conceal a cause but that divine purpose belongs to her. Of course, her flippant reply awards some linguistic power to Kempe, but as I will prove, she is only able to make such a remark because her initial sonic utterances are resistant to penetrability, which, as a result, repositions the power of translation out of the dominant hands of men and places it back into Kempe’s *Book*. Thus, Kempe reveals her noisy defiance to male religious leaders and authorial resistance to her scribes and readers, who are left with nothing but the echo of her veiled retort.

In my final chapter, I approach Gower’s fourteenth-century “Apollonius of Tyre” and the late fifth-century *Historia Apollonii Regis Tyri* (*HA*)—two versions of the widely circulated Apollonius story—comparatively. In contrast to the lengthy lyrics found in the *HA*, Gower’s Apollonius story may initially seem less enchanting regarding the tangibility of his presentation of Thaise and her constricted voice. However, Gower’s retelling highlights the moral dilemma of ethical representation in the text. Gower cannot offer a female voice behind the sonic descriptions of angelic singing, for there is none. It is this fantasy that the *HA* begs readers to forget as Tarsia is described as singing her tale of woe. In actuality, Tarsia can never truly “speak her story,” for her character, traumas, and voice are all creations of the text. It is this fact that

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<sup>35</sup> All Middle English citations provided for *The Book of Margery Kempe* are to book and chapter numbers and are given parenthetically in chapter three. In addition to the parenthetical book and chapter numbers for the Middle English quotations, I also provide page numbers to Modern English translations of the *Book*. Thus, for the quoted passage for this in-text reference, the parenthetical citation would be (I, Proem; 35), meaning the quoted text can be located in the Proem of Book I of the TEAMS edition, and the translation can be found on page 35 of the Barry Windeatt translation. More specifically, all Middle English quotations are from Margery Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. Lynn Staley (Kalamazoo: TEAMS Middle English Text Series, Western Michigan University, 1996). All Modern English translations are cited from Margery Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. B. A. Windeatt (London: Penguin, 1985).

Gower's "Apollonius" asks its readers to confront as he attempts to reanimate this story by emphasizing the sonic elements found in the *HA* rather than the vocal ones. In his version, Gower lingers on the sound of instrumental playing and the singer's melody rather than the vocalized lyrics captured in the *HA*. Similar to the *HA*, the references to song entice readers to imagine the sounds of the described scene, but rather than luring its readers to hear the shallow promise of voice as the *HA* does, Gower's text allows readers to imagine the musical features present in his telling. By shifting the focus from descriptions of voice to sound, Gower's text offers its reader something to deliver: a musical presentation of the tale.

This dissertation cannot offer an absolute solution to the complex matter of voice, sonic e-/affect, agency, or marginalization. Instead, this project tries to make sense of these problems. My archive's irregular but present sonic features disrupt the seductive nature of literary speech and remind us that there is no reliable content behind the textual voice. There is a critical reminder not to collapse female characters with actual female people, no matter how dear a reader may hold Chaucer's portrayal of Criseyde in their heart. However, this does not make the narrative of Troilus and Criseyde less impactful. Being attentive to the sonic features of text only draws us closer to the story. By reading sonically, I advocate not for a reading that favors dialogue over a sound but, in contrast, shows how the sonic features of the story represented alongside speech help us complicate our understanding of voice, the unspeakable, agency, and the sonic. Any feature of text that can yield such a powerful result is worth hearing.

## Chapter One

### A Silent Rebuttal: Reinterpreting the (Un)speakable in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*

Silence itself—the things one declines to say, or is forbidden to name, the discretion required between different speakers—is less the absolute limit of discourse...than an element that functions alongside the things said, with them and in relation to them within over-all strategies...There is not one but many silences, and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses.

—Michel Foucault<sup>1</sup>

Quid faciat Philomela? Fugam custodia claudit,  
Structa rigent solido stabulorum moenia saxo,  
Os mutum facti caret indice. Grande doloris  
Ingenium est, miserisque uenit sollertia rebus:  
Stamina barbarica suspendit callida tela  
Purpureasque notas filis intexuit albis,  
Indicium sceleris; perfectaue tradidit uni,  
Utque ferat dominae, gestu rogat; illa rogata  
Pertulit ad Procnen nec scit, quid tradat in illis.  
Euoluit uestes saeui matrona tyranni  
Germanaeque suae fatum miserabile legit  
Et (mirum potuisse) silet: dolor ora repressit,  
Urbaque quaerenti satis indignantia linguae  
Defuerunt, nec flere uacat, sed fasque nefasque  
Confusura ruit poenaeque in imagine tota est. (6:572-586)<sup>2</sup>

[What was Philomela to do? A guard shut off her escape, / the walls of the pen were firmly built in solid stone, / and her mute mouth had no power to testify to the crime. Great is the ingenuity / of grief, and resourcefulness comes to the unhappy. / Skillfully she hung her warp from the barbarian loom / and wove purple signs into the white thread / to bear witness to the crime, and when it was completed she passed it to her only maid / and by gesturing asked her to take it to her mistress. Once asked / she took it to Procne; she did not know what she was passing on in it. / The wife of the savage king unfolded the cloth / and read her sister's pitiable warp / and (a wonder that she could be) was silent. Grief stopped up her mouth, / and she searched for words to match her anger, but they failed to come / to her tongue; and she could nor weep but rushed on to confound / right and wrong and was all engrossed in the idea of punishment.]

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<sup>1</sup> Michel Foucault, "The Repressive Hypothesis," in *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 27.

<sup>2</sup> Citations refer to book and line numbers from Ovid's Latin narrative poem, *Metamorphoses*, and are given parenthetically in the opening of this chapter. All Latin quotations and English translations are from Ovid, *Metamorphoses V-VIII*, trans. D.E. Hill (Wiltshire: Aris & Phillips, 1992), 60-1.

In this passage from Book VI of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Philomela's story is primarily conveyed and understood through silent acts and mediums: "Euoluit uestes saeui matrona tyranni / germanaeque suae fatum miserabile legit / et (mirum potuisse) silet" [The wife of the savage king unfolded the cloth / and read her sister's pitiable warp / and (a wonder that she could be) was silent]. As if surprised by the reaction of his creation, the poet-narrator interjects and highlights Procne's silence: "Et (mirum potuisse) silet" [and (a wonder that she could be) was silent]. This gloss of the text draws attention to the complexity of silence. Trauma theorists often understand silence in such contexts as the unspeakable. However, it is from the violent fact of silencing<sup>3</sup> that I argue Ovid reimagines the possibilities of Philomela's silence as a new form of expression: "Stamina barbarica suspendit callida tela / Purpureasque notas filis intexuit albis, / Indicium sceleris" [Skillfully she hung her warp from the barbarian loom / and wove purple signs into the white thread / to bear witness to the crime]. Here, it is not the impossible voice of

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<sup>3</sup> For good reason, feminist scholarship has overwhelmingly approached silence as something to rally against, arguing that silence has historically been used as a crushing tool of the patriarchy to keep women glued to the margins of society. To be a female writer during the seventies—and arguably to this very day in many contexts—meant consciously writing under the judgmental gaze of a predominantly male audience that in turn reenforced the limitations of the female pen and the silencing of the female voice. In this environment, Adrienne Rich's claim that "in a world where language and naming are power...silence is oppression, is violence" rings unequivocally true (*On Lies, Secrets, and Silence: Selected Prose, 1966-1978* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1979), 113). In the 1980s, feminists of color fought for a space to be heard, a space that many writers and feminists of color did not feel white feminists curated in their own "women-centered" writings. Audre Lorde, Cherríe Moraga, and Gloria Anzaldúa, to name just a few feminist writers of color during this time, challenged the culturally imposed silences surrounding their bodies, backgrounds and lives by writing their voices into existence (Sheena Malhotra and Aimee Carrillo Rowe, eds. *Silence, Feminism Power: Reflections at the Edges of Sound* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 12). In the nineties and early 2000s, third-wave feminist scholarship began to tease out distinctions between "silence that is repressive and silence that is resistive" (Ibid., 13). One of the ways in which feminist scholarship grappled with the distinction between oppressive and personal silence is by asking others to "listen to silence" (Ibid., 14). To that end, Joanna Kadi posits that, "If you want to hear me, listen to my silences as well as my words" ("Speaking (about) Silence," *Journal of Women and Religion* 12 (1993): 57-63). While my readings in this chapter are most aligned with third-wave feminist theories on silence—that is, the advocacy to listen to silence because silence has the potential to carry and conceal linguistic meaning—my work, as a whole, is also built upon early, second-wave feminists' tangled relationship to silence, for I, a female writer, am always conscious of the ways in which my words may or may not be heard based on the implicit gender of my writings. While no one piece can offer a permanent or fixed response to silence, power, and women's positioning to such issues, my chapter aims to reconcile these seemingly disparate feminist responses by allowing silence to be the slippery slope that it is to women as they move about their days and lives.

the wound we hear, but rather, extralinguistic utterance reverberates from its fictionalized locus of pain. Ovid calls attention to this multidimensional kaleidoscope of silence<sup>4</sup> as it shifts within the passage from its most destructive form to a regenerative and palpable construction.<sup>5</sup>

From this tapestry emerges not a voice, for “Os mutum facti caret indice” [and her mute mouth had no power to testify the crime], but a new form of silent expression that appears almost physical as Ovid describes Philomela’s character as stringing a “stamina barbarica” [barbarian loom] with “notas” [signs], and, later, as “gestu” [gesturing] to her maid.<sup>6</sup> Upon receipt, Procne absorbs her sister’s story. Curiously, after comprehending the content of her sister’s message, Procne also, albeit temporarily, loses her ability to speak, an action described through the immobilization of her tongue: “Dolor ora repressit, / Uerbaque quaerenti satis indignantia linguae / defuerunt” [Grief stopped up her mouth, / and she searched for words to match her anger, but they failed to come / to her tongue]. In this final manifestation of silence, Philomela’s

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<sup>4</sup> Like speech, silence is not always used to non-verbally express the same message. In fact, silence is so diverse in its linguistic meanings, intentions and applications that Vincent Jungkunz classifies four types of “insubordinate silences.” Specifically, Jungkunz “identifies silences that empower as ‘attempts to address coerced passivity’; silences that protest are identified as ‘active forms of political expression, expressing anger, disgust, fear, anxiety, pain,’ among other strong emotions; silences that resist are described as forms of subversion which may ‘game the system’; and silences that refuse are those that involve leaving...leaving a world, a life, an identity, a relationship, a conversation, a self, a community, or a *nomos*” (Vincent Jungkunz, “The Promise of Democratic Silences,” *New Political Science* 34, no. 2 (2012): 144-7.

<sup>5</sup> It is generally assumed that silence does not take up space. Yet even as a void of soundwaves, silence nevertheless fills the places that voices occupy. The non-verbal presence of silence is just as palpable as speech. Verbal speech and non-verbal communication are not really opposites even if hearing audiences assume them to be. Dennis Kurzon approaches silence as an alternative to speech rather than a counter or copy of speech: “silence, in fact, does imply non-verbal communication, but only as a genuine alternative to speech, and not as a co-occurrent feature” (Kurzon, “Semiotics of Silence,” in *Discourse of Silence* (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Co., 1998), 13). Similarly, Political Scientist, Sophia Dingli, and Social Scientist, Thomas Cooke, approach silence as a configuration of transmission, noting that “...silence has long been considered as a form rather than the absence of communication, which is generally understood in continuum with speech rather than in opposition to it” (Cooke and Dingli, “Political Science, an Introduction,” in *Political Silence: Meanings, Functions and Ambiguity*, eds. Sophia Dingli and Thomas N. Cooke (New York: Routledge, 2019), 4.

<sup>6</sup> Lucy M. Allen-Goss offers a smart reading of Philomela’s infamous tapestry, arguing that this object is “a form of nonspoken testimony” that “models a form of survivor witness that is freed from the constraints within which speech organizes the articulating memory and the voice; it is shaped by dictates entirely new: those of the weaver’s loom, the thread, and the moving shuttle” (80). See Allen-Goss, “Dismembered Memories: Philomela in Chaucer and Gower,” in *Rape Culture and Female Resistance in Late Medieval Literature*, eds. Sarah Baechle, Carissa M. Harris, and Elizaveta Strakhov (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2022), 80-96, at 80.

silent expression inflicts, transferring the wound depicted on the tapestry to the receiver's, Procne's, body. This transference does more than duplicate traumatic wounds, however. Each sister's experienced and embodied suffering is mirrored and magnified, and so is Ovid's ability to transform the presumably speechless into an utterance of silence. As such, Ovid gives new form and movement to their wounds as their sorrows are transmitted silently through women in tapestry, gesture, and word as well as across the page and from one to another, resulting in a final physical manifestation of trauma that is not paralyzing but rather metamorphosing. This ultimate transformation of silence is the most resounding of all, for it is from the silence of Procne's steely gaze that her wrath radiates: "Nec flere uacat, sed fasque nefasque / confusura ruit poenaeque in imagine tota est" [and she could not weep but rushed on to confound / right and wrong and was all engrossed in the idea of punishment]. This brief passage is filled with myriad forms of silence, all of which highlight how Ovid complicates rather than suppresses female agents of power made possible through the silent expressions of each of his characters.

### **Interpretations of Female Trauma in Ovid and Chaucer**

Whether tending to the graphic depiction of Philomela's grisly rape or latter scenes in which Tereus cuts out Philomela's tongue in an attempt to silence her from voicing the violence of his actions, there are many "unspeakable" moments from the Philomela legend that writers and scholars alike have had to confront.<sup>7</sup> It is clear from the horror of the accounts within the

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<sup>7</sup> Ovid's version of the Philomela story is most recognized, particularly in the Western European literary canon. That being said, both Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and Apollodorus' *Bibliotheca* offer the most comprehensive accounts of this legend. Notably, in the Ovidian tradition, Philomela becomes a nightingale, Tereus a hoopoe and Procne a swallow; whereas, in the Apollodorus telling, it is Procne that becomes a nightingale, Philomela a swallow and Tereus remains a hoopoe. In the third classical account of the tale, Pausanias alludes to the fact that Tereus committed a crime but never directly mentions what occurred. In the conclusion of Pausanias telling, Tereus commits suicide. In the last of the Greek and Roman accounts, Virgil's *Eclogues* mentions Tereus only in passing as giving gifts to Philomela. Following the four ancient accounts, the legend has been interpreted by writers that span a wide range of literary periods, such as: Geoffrey Chaucer, William Shakespeare, Matthew Arnold, Sir Phillip Sidney, John Keats and Samuel Coleridge; this brief list is by no means exhaustive and continues to grow. For further reading on the history of the Philomela legend, including its various interpretations, see: Albert R. Chandler, "The

Philomela story that the traumatic narrative is infectious. The violence of this tale persists again and again from writer to writer, and in each retelling, this narrative seems to debilitate whatever reader it encounters. We cannot turn away from the trauma this text so blatantly displays. Yet, no explanation offers respite from the horrors of this narrative. This story leaves its readers speechless while daring us to peer into its unanswerable abyss.

As Victoria Blud does, one might argue that the unspeakable occurs “when speech fails for whatever reason.”<sup>8</sup> Thus, the unspeakable can be the gruesome act too painful to vocalize or a “sin” supposedly so heinous that it must be forced into closeted spaces out of the purview of the public eye. In its many manifestations—a grisly assault, a villain “who must not be named,” a taboo sex act, a family secret—the unspeakable frequently evades public discourse. Still, it bubbles to the surface in gestures, code names, and weighted silences. To that end, much of the scholarship that considers theories of the unspeakable traces its origins from Sigmund Freud<sup>9</sup> to Michel Foucault,<sup>10</sup> Jacques Lacan,<sup>11</sup> and Jaques Derrida.<sup>12</sup> For Foucault and Lacan, silence is a

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Nightingale in Greek and Latin Poetry,” *The Classical Journal* 30, no. 2 (1934): 78-84; Sarah Carter, “Rape, Revenge, and Verse: Philomela” in *Ovidian Myth and Sexual Deviance in Early Modern Literature* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 14-52; Charles Martindale, *Ovid Renewed: Ovidian Influences on Literature and Art from the Middle Ages to the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1988).

<sup>8</sup> Victoria Blud, “Introduction: Words and Other Fragments,” in *The Unspeakable, Gender and Sexuality in Medieval Literature, 100-1400* (Woodbridge: D.S. Brewer, 2017), 12.

<sup>9</sup> Ed Pluth and Cindy Zeiher, *On Silence: Holding the Voice Hostage* (Pittsburgh: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 32, assert “At the rare moments when Freud himself brought up the topic of silence, his points fell into two main categories: silence was either an indicator of repression (that is, it was a sign that repression was happening in real time), or it was a feature of the workings of the death drive.”

<sup>10</sup> In *The Unspeakable, Gender and Sexuality*, Blud elucidates, “Foucault’s emphasis on the contingency of what is otherwise thought of as a central and essential, and on the material traces not the narrative they might fit into, takes up the unspeakable in the architecture of the social and the epistemological, and especially with relation to power” (13).

<sup>11</sup> As Blud summarizes, “If Foucault’s fascination with discourse is the making and breaking of institutional power, Lacan’s interest is the negotiation of a symbolic order that ‘makes’ its speakers even as it represents where they must break from this same order... The Lacanian structural paradigm of the psyche and language develops the idea that language says something other than what is said and that language figures a ‘real’ that cannot be perfectly captured by either the ‘symbolic’ or the ‘imaginary’, but which may be traced by their gaps, dissonances, and shortcomings” (Ibid.).

<sup>12</sup> Deconstructionist Jacques Derrida grappled with silence in relationship to secrecy: “Yet, as Derrida shows in his late work, if we aim to be silent this does not mean we should be secret: translating the Freudian *Verneinung*, Derrida deconstructs the mechanism of the secret by showing how the initial negation—the assurance

frequent component of the unspeakable that can be intriguing as it is devious, astonishing as it is horrid, painful as it is euphoric. In short, there are innumerable reasons speech fails, but the result is always the same: there is a fissure where words once existed. This gap is created between the speaker's ability to express and the receiver's ability to comprehend.

The complexity of trauma becomes even more clouded in literature, for the text is always already removed from the cause of its pain in the sense that the pain is fiction<sup>13</sup> of the very story in which it is featured. Trauma in fictional narratives is a palpable performance in which suffering can be displayed and explored from the safe distance of language on the page. That is not to say that such heinous acts, such as the fictionalized account of Philomela's brutal rape and mutilation, cannot or should not be taken seriously. I would argue that the persistence of her tale speaks to the fact that writers and readers alike are haunted by this story and feel compelled to return to it many times over. This repeated action suggests that we, as readers, seek some unknown resolution in a story that promises none.

Chaucer is one of these writers haunted by the ghost of Philomela's literary past.<sup>14</sup> Traces of Philomela's figure, birdsong, and lyrical narrative are featured throughout his late fourteenth-

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that what is secret will not be repeated—is itself negated when the person who possesses this knowledge repeats and represents it for themselves” (Ibid., 2).

<sup>13</sup> Julie Orlemanski speaks to the complexity of fiction—how literary scholars understand it, what its aim is, and how we might grapple with the role of literary history in relation to the supposed emergence of fiction. To the latter point, Orlemanski challenges Catherine Gallagher's assertion that fictionality came to be through the rise of the novel in the eighteenth century (145-46). Orlemanski counters that medieval writings offer their own versions of fiction as seen in the “plural conventions of suspending referential truth claims, and of commenting on that suspension” (147). See Orlemanski, “Who Has Fiction? Modernity, Fictionality, and the Middle Ages,” *New Literary History* 50, no. 2 (2019): 145-170.

<sup>14</sup> Chaucer writes himself into a canon of male *auctores* by recycling narratives of female trauma, voiced and unspoken, throughout many of his works. In *Troilus*, Chaucer's admiration for classical and medieval male authors and their retellings of female suffering—which range from questionably sympathetic to overtly misogynist—all receive name recognition in Book V: Dante, Ovid, Virgil, Homer, Lucan, and Statius. It is from Dante's *Purgatorio* IX, Boccaccio's *Il Filostrato* and Ovid's story of Philomela found in *Metamorphoses* VI that scholars have argued Chaucer finds the most inspiration for his repeated references to Procne and Philomela in his *Troilus*. See Valerie A. Ross, “Believing Cassandra: Intertextual Politics and the Interpretation of Dreams in *Troilus and Criseyde*,” *The Chaucer Review* 31, no. 4 (1997): 349-352; Jennifer Garrison, “Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* and the Danger of Masculine Interiority,” *The Chaucer Review* 49, no. 3 (2015): 320-43.

century work, *Troilus and Criseyde*. However, not one but two ghosts reside within the recesses of this story. Chaucer brings his tale of woe to life through the unfortunate figure of Criseyde. Chaucer scatters three references to the Philomela legend in bird form and song alongside this condemned figure.<sup>15</sup> By doing so, Chaucer yokes these two doomed characters together in their shared pain and fragmented narratives, creating not a whole but an echoed exchange of birdsong and silence that does not erase the limits of the “unspeakable” but certainly disrupts how we might come to understand what was previously deemed inaccessible.

Scholars such as L. O. Aranye Fradenburg and Patricia Ingham have offered brilliant readings that draw critical attention to Chaucer’s intertextual exchanges between his Criseyde and Ovid’s Philomela, and I seek to add to this work by emphasizing the sonic urgency that imbues *Troilus*.<sup>16</sup> I argue that it is crucial to recognize that the birdsong in *Troilus*, like Philomela’s tapestry, is a product of the text, for we, readers, gain access to all features of the story, including its sonic qualities in the language of its pages. However, just because the

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<sup>15</sup> In the first intertextual reference to Ovid’s narrative found in Book II of *Troilus*, a sorrowful swallow can be found singing a song of lament; with its song, a lyrical translation is provided that recounts a woeful story of the rape of Procne’s sister and Tereus’ brutality. In the second reference to Ovid’s story of Philomela, a nightingale is featured outside of Criseyde’s window, so that the reader is responsible for associating the two characters, Philomela and Criseyde, with each other as a result of the first reference to Ovid’s legend found earlier on in the poem. Notably, the nightingale’s song in the second instance is not translated but left as a kind of indirect sound—that is, song referenced which could be transcribed but is left untranslated for the reader—in the poem. In the third Ovidian reference, Criseyde becomes Philomela, and Philomela becomes Criseyde, as the two are collapsed in their likening. This comparison is not innocent, though, for the narrator attaches the nightingale first to its fear which we are told occurs within the nightingale, itself, as it fears the approaching shepherd or man. Then, the nightingale is linked to the act of silencing, for the narrator states that the nightingale’s “vois out rynge,” (III. 1237) but neither voice or words are heard or transcribed by the narrator; thus, it is the fact of silencing that the narrator records. Since this third Ovidian reference works to collapse Criseyde and Philomela characters, the narrator also works to silence Criseyde’s voice, for the narrator explains that Criseyde “Opned hire herte and tolde [Troilus] hire entente,” (III. 1239) and yet we are never given access to Criseyde’s words of consent or “entente.” This final comparison between Criseyde and Philomela demonstrates the tension in this text, as the passage begins with Philomela (invoking her legend of violent silencing), moves to continued acts of silencing (by omitting her voice), gravitates towards a supposed voicing (by referring to Criseyde and Philomela’s voicings secondhand), and concludes with Criseyde (and her uncited voice).

<sup>16</sup> L.O. Aranye Fradenburg, “Oure Owen Wo to Drynke,” in *Sacrifice Your Love: Psychoanalysis, Historicism, Chaucer* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 199-239; Patricia Clare Ingham, “Chaucer’s Haunted Aesthetics: Mimesis and Trauma in *Troilus and Criseyde*,” *College English* 72, no. 3 (2010): 226-47.

birdsong in the narrative will always be text does not mean its sonic attributes are not worth imaginatively hearing. I claim Chaucer strategically turns to birdsong as an extralinguistic device for the same reasons that Ovid draws upon the object of the tapestry; both are alternative forms of expression that escape the parameters of speech, for objects and the text might generate sonic references, but they are not regulated in the same ways as speech.<sup>17</sup> Thus, the power of these creations lies not in language itself but in their aural representations. Sound in the text is always an instrument of its author, forcing each reference to its sound and, in turn, its maker to straddle the line of the pervasive and localized, temporary and anthologized, sonic and linguistic.<sup>18</sup>

I am certainly not the first to direct attention to the fissures, whispers, or haunted echoes frequented within Chaucer's *Troilus*. Much ink has been spilled on Criseyde's consent, particularly when read in conjunction with the foreboding references to Philomela that frame the dream scene of Book II.<sup>19</sup> Fewer scholars have tended to the sonorous entwining of Philomela's

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<sup>17</sup> Salomé Voegelin argues, "The inaudible is what expands the invisible, what questions its boundaries and confirms the inexhaustible nature of sound. It is the critical edge of sound art and musicality, both of which share the absent, the un-sound and the as yet unheard, the imagined and the ignored, and work from their present possibility into the unheard manifestation of its sonic materiality. The inaudible is a radical articulation but not the conclusion of a phenomenological possibilism. It is not only where doubt and astonishment suspend habits and taste and consider anew what is assumed as known before, but where we accept the presence of the unknowable. It is where perception must plunge not only into the possibility of the world but also into impossibility; into what might not exist, what is not yet known to exist and what goes as yet unnoticed, or what might simply be imagined, but which nevertheless might turn out to be possible." See Voegelin, "Listening to the Inaudible: The Sound of Unicorns," in *Sonic Possible Worlds: Hearing the Continuum of Sound* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 158.

<sup>18</sup> In "Unheard of," in *Sonic Somatic: Performances of the Unsound Body* (Los Angeles: Errant Bodies, 2012), 18, Christof Migone claims, "The *topography we could never map* is an apt phrase for a study of an art form that remains ungraspable, that speaks but remains unspeakable. Sound blurs boundaries, its frontiers are arbitrary and shifting. Any art form that has a living tradition necessarily displays the same fluidity, but sound art is peculiar in that it is intimately entwined with its antithesis: silence. Yet Cage taught us that silence is chimerical. Its purity is conceptual, it is an impossibility. As such, silence haunts all creative acts, its negation provides the constitutive ground for these acts. Silence is the empty vessel, the syncopal agent that rhythms the foreground which sound inhabits. Silence and sound add up to a beat, they drive the pulse, they are inextricable within the rhythmic."

<sup>19</sup> See Allen J. Frantzen, "The 'Joie and Tene' of Dreams in *Troilus and Criseyde*," in *Chaucer in the Eighties*, eds. Julian N. Wasserman and Robert J. Blanch (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1986); Constance B. Heatt, *The Realism of Dream Visions: The Poetic Exploitation of the Dream Experience in Chaucer and His Contemporaries* (The Hague: Mouton & Co, 1967); Carolyn Dinshaw, "Rivalry, Rape and Manhood: Gower and Chaucer," in *Violence against Women in Medieval Texts*, ed. Anna Roberts (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998); Jeannette Hume Lutton, "'Inviolable Voice': Philomela and Procne in Dante's 'Purgatorio' and Chaucer's 'Troilus and Criseyde,'" in *Spectrum of the Fantastic: Selected Essays from the Sixth International Conference on the Fantastic in the Arts*, ed. Donald Palumbo (Connecticut: Praeger, 1988), 3-19; Robert Sturges, "Ascalaphus and

featured birdsong and Criseyde's palpable silences and, importantly, to the shift from what cannot be spoken to what can be heard. As briefly noted, Fradenburg links the sound of the nightingale outside Criseyde's window as she drifts to sleep with the silence of Criseyde's dream when she is asleep so that sound and silence call and respond to each other, intertwining rhythmically. In this sonic interchange between Ovid and Chaucer, Criseyde and Philomela, sound and silence are brought together, climactically, within the space of the dream, and as a result of this culmination, Fradenburg argues:

It is possible to hear, behind Criseyde's inaudible (to us) voicing of her "entente," the mutilated mouth of Philomela. The undead voice of the survivor calls collect; Philomela, Procne, and Criseyde all survive to tell and, in one way or another, to warn, but their iterated voices (textile, legend, birdsong, avian poetry) are variously received. The possibility of Criseyde's rape is spoken in *Troilus and Criseyde* through intertextual haunting. Is this a groupification of trauma through intertextuality, an attempt to disseminate (dispel *and* relay) shock and responsibility?<sup>20</sup>

Here, Fradenburg draws critical attention to the traumatic echoing between Chaucer's Philomela and Criseyde. However, rather than lingering on the forms of sound displayed in myriad "iterated voices (textile, legend, birdsong, avian poetry)," Fradenburg seems to decode the "unspeakable" of such "voicings," deducing "the possibility of Criseyde's rape is spoken in *Troilus and Criseyde* through intertextual haunting." While the text certainly encourages its readers to bear witness to its "intertextual haunting[s]," in doing so, Chaucer also seems to be offering something beyond the limitations of voice. It is through the alternative forms of utterance that Fradenburg highlights—"textile, legend, birdsong, avian poetry"—that I insist we return.

To attempt to parse linguistic meaning from expressions that, for whatever reason, deflect comprehension is to try to force the unspeakable to vocalize in ways it simply cannot. Instead,

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Philomela: Myth and Meaning in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*," *ANQ: A Quarterly Journal of Short Articles, Notes and Reviews* 4, no. 2 (1991): 63-7.

<sup>20</sup> Fradenburg, "'Oure Owen Wo to Drynke,'" 226.

this is a narrative about the limitations of voice. For Ingham, this is a kind of textual divulgence within *Troilus*:

Chaucer's poem clarifies that the metaphor of voice can never be satisfied as a recuperative mechanism. Voicing raises its problems of epistemology, representation, and history; it is as implicated in imitating, hiding, and wounding as in testimony.<sup>21</sup>

As Ingham brilliantly argues, the voice, as a concept and in its literary application, is always tainted, untrustworthy, and biased, particularly in the layering of voices found in Chaucer's works in which there is the voice of Chaucer, the author, the echoes of voices found in references to past authors, the animated voice of the narrator, the imagined voice of response from the audience, and each of the characters' curated voices. To echo Ingham, the polyvocal nature of literary voice proves to be a limited feature of the text when measured against the independent agents of voice that vocalize in the actual world.<sup>22</sup>

For Blud, when speech fails, "the gap it leaves requires another, equally 'unspeakable' mode of expression to bridge it,"<sup>23</sup> but what happens when that "equally 'unspeakable mode'" is a recognizable yet extralinguistic form of utterance, as it is with the tapestry in Ovid's tale of Philomela and the birdsong that pulsates throughout Chaucer's *Troilus*? Many have tended to this precise question by arguing that Philomela's tapestry is a reimaging of voice. This argument is often entrenched in a feminist desire to rescue Philomela from the violence her male authors have subjected her to in writing. Yet, Lucy M. Allen-Goss cautions against this impulse: "The tapestry is more than a vehicle for expression or a substitute for speech."<sup>24</sup> For Allen-Goss, Philomela's tapestry can never be a metaphor for speech, for it is not produced in the same

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<sup>21</sup> Ingham, "Chaucer's Haunted Aesthetics," 232.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Blud, *The Unspeakable, Gender and Sexuality*, 12.

<sup>24</sup> Lucy M. Allen-Goss, "Dismembered Memories: Philomela in Chaucer and Gower," in *Rape Culture and Female Resistance in Late Medieval Literature*, eds. Sarah Baechle, Carissa M. Harris, and Elizaveta Strakhov (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2022), 80-96, at 80.

manner, and, therefore, the tapestry is not constrained by systems of language.<sup>25</sup> Like Allen-Goss, I, too, concur that none of the articulations of Philomela's form—whether as a female character, nightingale, or even birdsong—can offer Philomela a voice, for Philomela is always a creation of its author. If, by acknowledging the limits of voice in fiction, we can step away from the desire to see written speech as equivalent to voice, we must then ask what alternative modes of expression—such as the tapestry, birdsong, or silence—function as in *Troilus*.

### **Echoed Responses: Sonic Approaches to Philomela's Birdsong and Criseyde's Silence**

While Chaucer unquestionably inherits a tale of trauma, what he does in response to that wound works to reframe how we, as scholars, might grapple with the locus of pain in this text. Rather than settling into the agony of this canon or agitating the wound once more, Chaucer adapts by drawing upon a spectrum of sounds rather than the inadequacy of speech. As I have shown, scholars have long questioned the traumatic echoes of Philomela's figure within the framework of a tale that parades as one of "swich peyne and wo" and rightfully so. Ultimately, Chaucer does not rewrite the violence of Philomela or Criseyde's stories; instead, he animates these characters from and through their pains. However, much like theories of the unspeakable attest, "animation" is not always so straightforward. Thus, I call for a reading that draws attention to this text's sonic situated alongside speech. Through Chaucer's interplay of sound and silence, Criseyde and Philomela's characters are momentarily centralized and allowed to lay claim to territory in a narrative in which they have so often been denied in other versions of their stories. It is from their wounds that echoes of birdsong and silence pulsate. Thus, Chaucer's *Troilus* is as much about learning how to attune our ears to the sounds of the wounded as it is an ethical lesson on what it means to give utterance to the "unspeakable."

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 80-1.

It is not because women's words are inaudible that they so often go unheard but rather because of how power and privilege obstruct us from hearing the voices of the marginalized. In this sense, the unspeakable is not just containment of violent acts but also voices unheard. It is this truth that Chaucer holds our ear to through the birdsongs and silences of his female characters. Sound theorist Marcel Cobussen explicates the synergetic relationship between sound and silence as each is contained within the other: "silence does not disappear when a tone resounds, rather, it continuously resonates along with the tones. Here, a vertical conception of silence comes into play. Sound and silence develop in a parallel way without mutual exclusion; the one is always already present in the other."<sup>26</sup> Readers can see this sonic illustration represented within the echoed retorts of Philomela's birdsong and Criseyde's silence. As Chaucer grants each figure a sonic rebuttal in his *Troilus*, he brings their narratives to life not through the artifice of voice but through the pulsation of sounds and silences that carry the weight of their traumatic legends and the ability to express when words fail.

It is undeniable that sonic references found in the narrative are text, yet because they are meant to mimic sound in their represented, phonemic forms, the same structures do not control them as traditional speech acts.<sup>27</sup> This is not to say that Chaucer grants Philomela or Criseyde a voice, not even temporarily—no matter how much my feminist inclination wishes. I posit that it is because of this lack of voice that scholars such as Derek Pearsall, Carolyn Dinshaw, and Gretchen Mieszkowski have read Criseyde's character as lamentably and often circumstantially

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<sup>26</sup> Marcel Cobussen, "Cage and Silence," *Deconstruction in Music*, accessed December 28, 2023, <https://www.deconstruction-in-music.com/john-cage/cage-and-silence/316>.

<sup>27</sup> In "The Representation of Silence," in *Silence* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2015), 45, John Biguenet asks, "does reading assume that language is embroidered upon silence, that silence is the backdrop of speech?" to which he immediately responds, "though speech depends upon that assumption, reading does not." Written references to silence in poetry or prose signify more than an absence of sound—even when silent descriptors are used to merely delineate quietude rather than to non-verbally communicate. Written references to silences cultivate a doubled sensory and readerly experience: the reader must understand silence at the level of its articulation in the text while also imagining silence as an absence of narrative articulation.

passive.<sup>28</sup> However, such claims usually rest on the perception of voice as the only or primary vehicle for agency. Chaucer's *Troilus* proves that agency is more varied in praxis than usual. Chaucer animates Criseyde and Philomela in a way that shifts the preoccupation away from the inherited violence of their female bodies—bodies constructed, regulated, and controlled by the very words that breathe life into their stories—and redirects attention to the palpable nature of their songs and silences.

Alongside Criseyde, Chaucer creates agency for Philomela by invoking birdsong to transcend linguistic boundaries sonically. At the same time, he draws upon the territorial aspects of birdsong to lay a stake in spaces in the text that previous authors denied her character. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari remind scholars that birdsongs are territory markers: “The role of the refrain has often been emphasized: it is territorial, a territorial assemblage. Bird songs: the bird sings to mark its territory.”<sup>29</sup> Thus, to encounter birdsong on the page, its extralinguistic twittering alongside speech, is to be commanded to witness the presence of this song, its speaker, and its author. This is the agency that birdsong grants its writer on the page and its writer grants its character in story.<sup>30</sup> With each sonic instance, Chaucer generates a new way of encountering

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<sup>28</sup> Derek Pearsall, “Criseyde’s Choices,” *SAC*, no. 2 (1986): 17-29; Dinshaw, “Reading Like a Man: The Critics, the Narrator, Troilus and Pandarus,” in *Chaucer’s Sexual Poetics* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 28-64; Gretchen Mieszkowski, “Chaucer’s Much Loved Criseyde,” *ChauR* 26 (1991): 109-132, at 129.

<sup>29</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, “Of the Refrain,” in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 312.

<sup>30</sup> Carolyn Van Dyke explores the complexity of agency and subjectivity in the construction of fictional characters, particularly when those characters occupy marginal roles within the text: “Although it can be represented explicitly, subjectivity is a matter of perception, requiring only a reader’s assumption that a grammatical subject (or object) does or might think, feel, or intend. Readers normally make that assumption about human characters, of course. Multiple subjection validates the assumption by positing an agent who negotiates among determining discourses. On the other hand, various cultural and textual signals can suppress the perception of subjectivity. One such signal, though not a decisive one, is an external, objective narrative viewpoint; it strengthens when applied to a passive character. The strongest contradiction of subjectivity is behavior that is difficult to attribute to coherent motivations but easy to align with a stereotype based, for instance, on race or sex. That is the agency of the Other, both inscrutable and generic...It does not follow, however, that they never show legitimate signs of subjectivity. Representation as Other does not completely exclude an agent from the realm of thought and feeling.” See: Van Dyke, “‘That Am Nat I’: The Wife of Bath, Criseyde, and the Possibility of Subjective Agency,” in *Chaucer’s Agents: Cause and Representation in Chaucerian Narrative* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2005), 180-222, at 182.

Philomela through her song. As a result, Chaucer creates an innovative approach to Philomela's story through a new territory demarcated by birdsong. He orchestrates a song that is as beautiful as it is imposing.

Chaucer's *Troilus* is filled with textually inherited and manufactured traumas, but he fills with sounds and silences in the fissures that such traumas create through their unspeakable violence. In the following pages, I offer a reading that takes the extralinguistic utterances within Chaucer's *Troilus* seriously. Importantly, I do not prioritize speech over sound or vice versa; instead, I draw attention to how Chaucer strategically interlaces sonic references alongside traditional speech acts as a way to offer extralinguistic utterance when words fail. Thus, it is imperative to read Philomela's birdsong in conjunction with Criseyde's silence; in fact, the text nearly insists upon doing so, for in Book III, Philomela and Criseyde's figures are collapsed, an act that commingles female sorrows with animal and human sounds (III. 1233-39). As individuals and intertwined statistics, the two create harmony and discord within the text even when they cannot speak.

### **'Herkneth' to Uncharted Soundscapes of Sorrow within Chaucer's *Troilus***

The Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 061 (CCCC MS 61) contains a copy of Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* accompanied by one luxurious illustration, most likely produced between 1415 and 1425.<sup>31</sup> Though Chaucer died in 1400, the manuscript offers a visual imagining of Chaucer reading his *Troilus* aloud to a listening audience. In the illustration, the viewer can see Chaucer in a wooden pulpit with scarlet cloth billowing about his body as he gestures toward a gathering of courtly lords and ladies, including a prince and princess. All

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<sup>31</sup> To view a digitized version of the manuscript, see: "Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 061: Geoffrey Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*," Parker Library on the Web: Manuscripts in the Parker Library at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, accessed May 15, 2024, <https://parker.stanford.edu/parker/catalog/dh967mz5785>.

audience members are adorned in rich robes of blue and red and jewels and crowns illuminated in gold leaf. Upon first glance, it would be easy to assume that these listeners are carefully attuned to Chaucer's narration, as their noble faces are pointed towards his, and many of the faces pictured portray expressions of intrigue. However, upon closer look, a few inconspicuous audience members are hidden behind their listening counterparts, their heads held in their hands and their eyes closed in slumber.

The illustration allows modern audiences to gaze upon a culture of the past in which orality and literacy informed each other, a phenomenon Brian Stock refers to as "literate orality."<sup>32</sup> However, contrary to what the image may suggest, Alan T. Gaylord argues that Chaucer "purposefully intends his poem as a 'book,' and as a book to be read by a single reader—and that the work imagines an audience whose image of social company will be one of the continuing imaginations by that same solitary turner of pages."<sup>33</sup> I do not think the manuscript illustration disproves such a possibility. Instead, the illustration composed some fifteen to twenty-five years after Chaucer's death invites a picture of what "literate orality" might have looked like. Thus, the manuscript illustration offers an interpretation of what the rhetorical and spatial hybridity of the *Troilus* may have resembled. As such, we, viewers, are invited to imagine Chaucer reading his story aloud, invoking our desire to hear.

"Now herkneþ with a good entencioun," Chaucer's narrator commands as he begins to tell the story of *Troilus and Criseyde* (I. 52). Such an order speaks to the wishes as well as the anxieties of the text, as the audience is invited not to ingest this story passively but actively hear its content—a request not all (sleepy) listeners obeyed in the CCCC MS 61 illustration. This

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<sup>32</sup> Brian Stock, *The Implications of Literacy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983).

<sup>33</sup> Alan T. Gaylord, "Chaucer's Tragic Romance: Imagining Voices in *Troilus and Criseyde*." Plenary Address, 20<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the Medieval Association of the Midwest, Northern Michigan University, September 24, 2004.

aural component of the text can be traced to the *Middle English Dictionary*'s definition of "herkenen v.," meaning "to make an effort to hear, listen with close attention; also, pay attention, take heed."<sup>34</sup> As if the sonic quality of perceiving sound by way of listening was not clear enough, the narrator reinforces this auditory point in the following line when stating, "In which ye may the double sorwes here" (I. 56). Although the meaning of "double sorwes" remains unclear, the text is explicit about the aurally rich wound of anguish in this tale that the reader will soon "here":

Now herkneth with a good entencioun,  
In which ye may the double sorwes here  
Of Troilus in lovyng of Criseyde,  
And how that she forsook hym er she deyde. (I. 52-56)

While feelings of sorrow may not always have an apparent reason for occurring or explain how long such emotions will persist, this narrative offers an experiential way to come into contact with its contents. While the narrator certainly frames their role within the text as a kind of guide through Troilus' suffering, "That I myght to shewe, in some manere, / Swich payne and wo as Loves folk endure, / In Troilus unsely aventure," (I. 33-5) Chaucer, the author, nudges the reader to moments of anguish that lie outside of explanation yet are apprehensible by attuning one's ears to the text. Thus, this is a narrative that intertwines the importance of listening with the act of careful reading.

The opening and closing frames of the text echo in their auralty as well as the narrator's anticipated anxiety. To that end, Chaucer invokes the call to listen and the sonic descriptor of the song in the exact moments in which he loses control of his text, as the story begins and ends:

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<sup>34</sup> According to the *Middle English Dictionary*, "herkenen v." can mean "to make an effort to hear, listen with close attention; also, pay attention, take heed." For further reading, see: *Middle English Dictionary*. Ed. Robert E. Lewis, et al. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1952-2001. Online edition in *Middle English Compendium*. Ed. Frances McSparran, et al. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Library, 2000-2023. <<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/>>. Accessed 01 July 2023.

So prey I God that non myswrite the,  
Ne themysmetre for defaute of tonge;  
And red wherso thow be, or elles songe,  
That thow be understonde, God I biseche! (V. 1795-99)

This passage recalls Chaucer's sonic tribute from the opening frame of the tale in which he commanded his readers to "herkneþ" with "good entencioun" to what they may "here" (I. 52-3). At this moment, Chaucer speaks directly to his text, and so he seems to include himself in this invocation to listen and write carefully. Circling back to these sonic instances, Chaucer's imagining of the text in its oral and melodic iterations invites the possibility of a future for this text beyond the literary words on the page. These glimpses of hope are made possible by auditory practices illuminating the importance of approaching this text as a sonic instrument. To sing this story is to allow it to fill space, perhaps even territorially, and disturb through its melody, albeit only temporarily. Chaucer does this by drawing attention to the objecthood of his story as it is reanimated into "songe." In this sense, the futurity of the *Troilus* is as precarious as it is full of possibility,<sup>35</sup> a fact made tangible in Chaucer's descriptions of loss as he releases his "litel bok" into the world, potentially returning not as another traumatic retelling but as something beyond his making, a "songe."

Troilus' discernible anguish and Criseyde's inaudible suffering act as this text's primary story and undercurrent, as both of their pains are made visible to readers. Scholars such as Anne McTaggart, Sarah Stanbury, and Molly A. Martin have long noted the importance of the gaze in this text,<sup>36</sup> and in response, I add that there is a form of suffering found in *Troilus*, suffering that

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<sup>35</sup> For a smart reading that grapples with all of the complex reactions associated with the both the potential and the precarity of the future in *Troilus*, see Karma Lochrie, "No Future, Perhaps\*," *Exemplaria* 34, no. 3 (2022): 267-273.

<sup>36</sup> Anne McTaggart, "Shamed Guiltless: Criseyde, Dido, and Chaucerian Ethics," *The Chaucer Review* 46, no. 4 (2012): 371-402; Sarah Stanbury, "The Lover's Gaze in *Troilus and Criseyde*," *The New Chaucer Society* 16 (1994): 224-38; Molly A. Martin, "Troilus's Gaze and the Collapse of Masculinity in Romance," in *Men and Masculinity in Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde*, eds. Tison Pugh and Marcia Smith (Martlesham: Boydell & Brewer, 2007), 132-147.

words cannot express, that Chaucer allows us to experience not just with our eyes but with our “thinking ears,”<sup>37</sup> as well. With each glimpse of pain, there is a gentle, sonic reminder to see and hear this tale of woe: “And preieth for hem that ben in the cas / Of Troilus, as ye may after here, / That Love hem brynge in hevne to solas” (I. 29-31). The interjection, “as ye may after here,” creates a gap in the text made by possibility; we “may” hear a tale of Troilus’ faithful yet lost account of love, but we might not. As is the case with so much of Chaucer’s writings, he invites his audience to be on guard, but “for what” remains ours to decipher, and the sorrowful content of *Troilus* is no different. Much like Troilus, it is only in retrospect that the reader can fully understand how carefully we approach this text, for there are clues to listen to and pay attention to, but the “so what” is obscured until it is almost too late. In its conclusion, the message to listen signals an opportunity has already passed. This text is literally and metaphorically meant to engage our critical eyes, ears, and minds from start to end.

The narrator’s voice is one of authority. Still, beyond that, it is hard to peg down exactly how he feels about this story he is telling as his inserted opinions seem to shift from one moment to the next as the story progresses. In this sense, the narrative begins with a somewhat unreliable narrator. As Sarah Powrie astutely observes, the narrator’s opinions and attitudes are constantly in flux in this text as “he is by turns smitten with, patronizing toward, and dismissive of Criseyde.”<sup>38</sup> Of course, the narrator is always an extension or a messenger of Chaucer, and I claim that he delights in the freedom that this role gives him. At times, the narrator seems to present himself as a puppet of his authors, and at other times, he seems to suggest that he has insights into how this story operates. A. C. Spearing reminds us there is not so great of a

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<sup>37</sup> Anna Snaith, “Introduction,” in *Sound and Literature*, ed. Anna Snaith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 1-34, at 9.

<sup>38</sup> Sarah Powrie, “Criseyde, Consent, and the #MeToo Reader,” *New Chaucer Studies: Pedagogy and Profession* 2, no. 1 (Spring 2021): 18-33, at 22.

difference between the voice of the author and the speaker of the text: “the textual ‘I’ is often a means of expressing the attitudes, views, and discoveries of the Chaucer who wrote the poem, and this is especially the case in first-person passages discussing the poem’s narrative and poetic art.”<sup>39</sup> Spearing’s claim certainly holds, for the *Troilus* narrator is as hard to pin down as the writer himself. Where do the narrator’s sympathies lie? Is he a friend or foe of Criseyde’s?<sup>40</sup> There is not one clear or consistent answer to these questions.

The narrator’s first suggested cause, “Of Troilus lovyng of Criseyde,” does not state that Criseyde is at fault, for the subject of the line appears to be Troilus, and, thus, one might argue that the text suggests it is Troilus who is responsible for his suffering. However, not long after, it is the narrator that asserts that “Of Troilus lovyng of Criseyde” is but one of two “double sorwes” featured in this text; “how that she forsook hym er she deyde” is the second (I. 52-6). Notably, there is no direct reference to Criseyde’s sorrow here, so one must speculate as to whom or what this doubling applies. Karma Lochrie takes up this issue, arguing that Criseyde does have a claim to sorrow even if the text seems to deny that possibility: “Criseyde’s tragedy, therefore, is twofold: first, that memory and intelligence leave few viable options for the future, and two, that the future of a besieged city is, by definition, temporarily suspended.”<sup>41</sup> On its

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<sup>39</sup> A. C. Spearing, “Narrative and Freedom in *Troilus and Criseyde*,” in *New Directions in Medieval Manuscript Studies and Reading Practices: Essays in Honor of Derek Pearsall*, eds. Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, John J. Thompson, and Sarah Baechle (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2014), 7-33, at 12.

<sup>40</sup> Is Chaucer a friend of women? Elaine Tuttle Hansen seeks to answer exactly that in her work, *Chaucer and the Fictions of Gender*. For Hansen, the answer is as multifaceted as the author himself; Chaucer “seems to insist...that gender is socially constructed and historically experienced...,” (13) but such critiques, Hansen argues, do not necessarily equate to “a pro woman position” (10) In fact, throughout most, if not all, of Chaucer’s works, Hansen claims, “[the female character] is dead, or mutilated, victimized, violated, anesthetized, abandoned, mystified” (14). As a result, Hansen concludes that Chaucer’s writings “in various ways imply that in all orthodox prescriptions of gender roles by which experience is given social meaning, women’s voices are precisely those that have been silenced (14). See Hansen, *Chaucer and the Fictions of Gender* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992).

<sup>41</sup> Lochrie, “No Future, Perhaps\*,” 270.

surface, the text might resist such a claim by insisting this is a tale of love. Still, it is in this adamant denial—denial of Criseyde’s sorrows, denial of the possibility that Troy may fall,<sup>42</sup> denial of the need to preserve the self even before matters of the heart<sup>43</sup>—that the reader can glean how this narrative clings to the past and even at times the crumbling present to disregard the precarious future. As Lochrie claims, this is not a text about “Criseyde’s disloyalty” but “future itself with all the hap that can be imagined wreaking its havoc on Troy and Criseyde.”<sup>44</sup> By denying the “double sorwes” of Criseyde, the text, in a sense, can keep its gaze fixated on Troilus’ present pain and away from the uncertain future.

Though the text maintains its preoccupation with love by doubling down on Troilus’ ever-present and persistent anguish, there is a future that the narrator is willing to imagine; that is, a future in which Criseyde ceases to exist. In this sense, the future can also function as a convenient blank space to project desires. In a wishful fantasy, the narrator states that in the future, the reader will be able to glimpse “how that [Criseyde] forsook him er she died.” In this hope, the reader glimpses the narrator’s current attitudes toward Criseyde. As such, Powrie argues that these interjections work to reveal the narrator’s “gendered bias when he directs the reader’s scrutiny to evaluate Criseyde’s conduct.”<sup>45</sup> In its ending, though, the narrator does not have the power of foresight, and his wish does not come to pass as he envisioned. Thus, the precarity of the future, the complexity of doubling, and the narrator’s erratic responses towards Criseyde’s character all say more about the importance of careful reading than anything else. At the close of this frame, what becomes most apparent is not who the supposed culprit is for the

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<sup>42</sup> In “Criseyde’s Promises,” Elizabeth Allen astutely notes that “The time before the collapse of Troilus’s love and the end of Troy is radically dilated, which continually calls attention to the difference between the characters’ knowledge and that of the reader” (684). See Allen, “Flowing Backward to the Source: Criseyde’s Promises and the Ethics of Allusion” *Speculum* 88, no. 3 (July 2013): 681-720.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> Powrie, “Criseyde, Consent, and the #MeToo Reader,” 22.

“sorwes” we “may...here,” but what can happen when readers greedily consume what is nothing more than a fleeting interpretation. To approach this story “with a good entencioun”<sup>46</sup> is to truly sit with and “herkneþ” what happens as the text unfolds through our careful engagement.

References to listening and storytelling frame the text, and within the narrative itself, these gentle reminders become activated by engaging with references to birdsong, silence, and laughter. While descriptions of birds appear throughout the narrative, there are three specific instances in which nightingales and swallows appear by name. With these Ovidian references, birdsong is present (II. 64-73, III. 1191-97, III. 1233-39). Birdsong creates an echo that reaches out and makes contact with versions of Philomela and Procne in other retellings of this tale. These echoes also touch inward, reverberating between the avian representations of Philomela and Procne within the story and its central female character, Criseyde, who is circumstantially trapped by expectation and violence. While Philomela’s tapestry of horrors has a clear, intended audience (her sister, Procne), the audience for the birdsong that pulsates around Criseyde’s character often seems less clear. Where the text remains opaque in its intent, we, readers, are allowed to receive these sonic instances critically. Each sonic reference offers a moment to carefully engage with the story—unlike some of the audience members pictured in the CCCC MS 61 who fell asleep while listening.

In the *Troilus*, speech is a tool wielded by those with power, such as Pandarus, Troilus, and the narrator. Troilus confesses his love for Criseyde to Pandarus, and Pandarus immediately concocts a plan to make Criseyde romantically interested in Troilus (II. 988-1071). Troilus’

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<sup>46</sup> According to the *Middle English Dictionary*, “entencioun n.” can mean “purpose, intention or design; aim or object.” For further reading, see: *Middle English Dictionary*. Ed. Robert E. Lewis, et al. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1952-2001. Online edition in Middle English Compendium. Ed. Frances McSparran, et al. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Library, 2000-2023. <<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/>>. Accessed 01 July 2023.

emotions and Pandarus' scheme take up so many lines that one could easily forget the supposed cause of such lengthy passages, Criseyde. The reader does not hear Criseyde's response to her uncle's plan for several hundred lines. Notably, as Pandarus journeys to Criseyde's home to put his plan into action, what precedes the exchange is a description of a hazy dream vision of sorts in which Pandarus imagines Procne's sorrowful song as he lies between a state of sleep and consciousness:

The swalowe Proigne, with a sorowful lay,  
Whan morwen com, gan make hire  
waymentynge  
Whi she forshapen was; and evere lay  
Pandare abedde, half in a slomberynge,  
Til she so neigh hym made hire cheterynge  
How Tereus gan forth hire suster take,  
That with the noyse of hire he gan awake,  
And gan to calle, and dresse hym up to ryse,  
Remembryng hym his erand was to doone  
From Troilus, and ek his grete emprise. (II. 64-73)

Here, Chaucer does not merely invite an implied connection between Criseyde's impending doom and the Ovidian story of Philomela and Procne; he is explicit.<sup>47</sup> Chaucer strategically places this intertextual reference to "Proigne" and her "sorowful lay" to alert readers to the violence that is about to unfold. Although Chaucer elects not to save Criseyde from his own story, he can undoubtedly signal to his readers that they should not trust Pandarus. In this sense, Chaucer is bound by the canon; thus, he does not deviate too far from the Philomela legend. Here, "Proigne" sonically expresses what Chaucer does not: Criseyde's faultlessness.

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<sup>47</sup> In the first intertextual reference to the story of Philomela, Chaucer provides a lyrical translation of Procne's birdsong, a maneuver that directly evokes the Ovidian tale through the transcription of the sound of twittering that otherwise would have been unknowable to readers. As Carolyn Dinshaw, Fradenburg and Robert Sturges have noted, the allusion to Philomela and Procne's tale of woe in this precise moment foretells the rhetoric of force and violence that is soon to come, as Pandarus wakes to Procne's song, and then proceeds to relentlessly coerce and manipulatively force Criseyde in to having a sexual relationship with Troilus. See Dinshaw, "Rivalry, Rape and Manhood," 137-60; Fradenburg, "'Oure Owen Wo to Drynke,'" 199-238; Sturges, "Ascalaphus and Philomela," 63-7.

Procne's "waymentyng" begins not with lyrics about her husband's violence, but, instead, her change in figure, "whi she forshapen was," emphasizing the impact of metamorphoses in this text as women are so often turned into other than they are. This sonic reference to Prounce's "warmentyng" alongside her "forshapen" figure doubles as a warning to readers that Pandarus's proposition will all too soon transform Criseyde from a character of pity to one of blame. Such a reading is supported by the *Middle English Dictionary*, in which the verb "forshāpen" is defined as "to change the shape of appearance of (something), to transform (something, usually for the worse)."<sup>48</sup> Undoubtedly, the passage implies that Procne's figure will change. Still, the possible meaning of transforming "usually for the worse" speaks to how Pandarus and the narrator sometimes misshape Criseyde's character through their rhetoric. To be clear, Criseyde's character is variable on its own as she "has usually been characterized as cautious, not ambitious, and as responsive to circumstances, not idealistic."<sup>49</sup> Even so, such traits do not make Criseyde deserving of the slander those in power subject her to. Thus, readers should be careful not to judge Criseyde's human fallibility so haphazardly that her character and actions become unrecognizable from the one featured in the story.

As Procne's "waymentyng" fills the page, her song seems to pester but not register with Pandarus, mirroring Pandarus' unwillingness to listen to Criseyde's desires. Pandarus is depicted as "half in a slomberyng" (II. 67), but "the swalowe Proigne" (II. 64) continues "hire cheteryng" (II. 68). As Procne's song falls on sleeping ears, her lyrics transform from "sorrowful" descriptions of her "forshapen" body to "cheteryng" about her sister's rape (II. 68-

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<sup>48</sup> According to the *Middle English Dictionary*, "forshāpen v." can mean "to change the shape of appearance of (something), to transform (something, usually for the worse)." For further reading, see: *Middle English Dictionary*. Ed. Robert E. Lewis, et al. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1952-2001. Online edition in Middle English Compendium. Ed. Frances McSparran, et al. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Library, 2000-2023. <<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/>>. Accessed 01 July 2023.

<sup>49</sup> Allen, "Flowing Backward to the Source," 682.

9). No longer described through pleasing birdsong, her sister's account is conveyed in clipped, jagged bursts of sound. As Ingham pointedly notes, this is "the only direct account of Philomela's violation in the poem," as such, there is a "post-traumatic edge" to this scene. This tinge is apparent in the urgency of the passage, as the surge in volume from "cheterynge" to "noyse" increases the intensity of Procne's song.<sup>50</sup> She commands to be heard, but not for pleasantry or lyrical narratives; rather, for her noisy discord. Pandarus is roused from his sleep as her noise pierces the air, proving the forceful nature of "noyse." When Pandarus awakes, he misses the significance of the birdsong and instead recalls "his errand" for Troilus, but that is precisely what Chaucer invites his readers to see, Pandarus' misreading. While Pandarus overlooks the importance of Procne's extralinguistic messaging, Chaucer invites his audience to take Procne's figure seriously in this scene. Though her birdsong cannot erase the violence she sings, such sorrowful lyrics give extralinguistic utterance to Criseyde's foreseeable pain.

#### **At Its Center Lies a Torn Heart: Blurred Messages of Consent and the Unspeakable**

When Pandarus suggests that Criseyde should be Troilus' lover because he desires her, she is immediately shocked and even horrified that Pandarus would propose such a match to an isolated widow: "'I! God forbede!' quod she. 'Be ye mad? / Is that a widewes life, so God yow save? / By God, ye maken me right soore adrad!'" (II. 113-5). Criseyde's response leaves room for no uncertainty. She is explicit, "'ye maken me right soore adrad!'" Yet, even though Criseyde is clear that her uncle's proposal is inappropriate, Pandarus continues to push her as if her words

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<sup>50</sup> Ingham brilliantly traces the sonic movement of this passage, as she notes the larger implications of the shift in description from melodic to irritating to dramatic: "the displaced voice from the wound seems multiply wrought: from Philomela and Procne, but also from Pandarus himself, whose 'teene' [grief] in love converges on Procne's song, the noise of which awakes the groggy sleeper to the 'grete emprise' that lies before him. Procne's cry is itself ambivalently described—it is mournful lament ('hire waymenting,' 1.65) and poignant song ('a sorrowful lay,' 1.64), trivial annoyance ('cheterynge,' 1.68) and, as far as Pandarus is concerned, startling noise ('with the noyse of hire he gan awake,' 1.70). This multiple equivocation lies directly between Pandarus's lovesick past and his future acts" (Ibid.).

do not matter (II. 120-209). It seems Pandarus can only hear what he chooses to, and, thus, Criseyde's refusal does not register, much in the same way that Pandarus initially ignored Procne's "sorowful lay" (II. 64). Thus, Chaucer draws together two narratives of woe to highlight the fact that by ignoring Criseyde's desires Pandarus is behaving in a non-consensual manner. Though Chaucer does not prevent violence from occurring, he does allow his audience to hear such accounts even when characters of power attempt to silence the truth of their actions.

Pandarus uses a range of tactics to force Criseyde to consider a romantic relationship with Troilus. After much persuading, she concedes to her uncle's promptings and somewhat problematically falls in love. Once Criseyde reflects on Troilus' feelings, the narrative shifts from one of nonconsensual deception to a supposedly consensual partnering. Even so, Chaucer does not allow the reader to forget the harassment that Criseyde experienced in the supposed name of love. In Book III, Criseyde and Troilus are alone together, and just before they embrace, Chaucer likens Criseyde to a "nyghtyngale," (III. 1234), an Ovidian reference which would have registered as a symbol of sexual violence to medieval English audiences<sup>51</sup> Rather than mutual pleasure:

And as the newe abaysed nyghtyngale,  
That stynteth first whan she bygynneth to synge,  
Whan that she hereth any herde tale,  
Or in the hegges any wyght stiryng,  
And after siker doth hire vois out ryng,  
Right, so Criseyde, whan hire drede stente,

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<sup>51</sup> As Elizabeth Eva Leach asserts, "the vernacular lyric nightingale is a type that has been called the oral nightingale, as opposed to the literary nightingale more readily deriving from the classical myth of Philomela. The literary nightingale, however, is often female, and in Christianized medieval contexts becomes a cognate of the soul, singing the Hours, praising God in song, and ultimately dying for Divine Love. The devotional context for this is the popular piety of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, in which a more direct personal access to God became, progressively, and often on the margins of orthodoxy, acceptable. The new place of solitary silent reading within lay contemplative life led to the writing of meditative works in the vernacular. As with the 'oral nightingale,' the written nightingale may exemplify the communal subject, the singer, and the devoted self. Within this silent context, far from symbolizing the orality of the song, however, Philomela sings voicelessly directly from the heart." See Leach, "Birdsong and Human Singing," in *Sung Birds: Music, Nature, and Poetry in the Later Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), 100.

Opned hire herte and tolde hym hire entente. (III. 1233-39)

Rather than beginning with Criseyde's "entente," Chaucer frames this confessional scene with descriptions of a "abaysed nyghtyngale." Perhaps one could interpret "abaysed" as akin to a new lover who has not yet admitted their feelings; however, the passage lingers on how Criseyde is like a nightingale that "bygynmeth to syng" when she believes she is alone, yet when the bird hears outside voices, "she hereth any herde tale," she "stynteth." Since Chaucer utilized the image of Procne before this scene, readers would have been invited to liken this reference to Philomela, and in that sense, the bird's abrupt stop, in conjunction with the intrusion of outside voices, takes a much more sinister turn.

The sound of the shepherd's speech causes the nightingale to grow silent, signaling the intrusive power that speech acts often carry. Yet, even though the bird is startled, she waits, and once she feels "siker" does "hire vois out ryng." For Timothy D. O'Brien, the repeated use of "sikernesse" echoes in more ominous words in the text like "siker" and even "sik(e)." As such, "sikernesse," here, paints a picture not of safety but of a false sense of security or illness.<sup>52</sup> Criseyde's ever-unstable positionality in the text can be seen in this slipperiness between security and instability, which O'Brien draws attention to. The word "vois" here also speaks to this tension between security and unease, for this "vois" belongs to that of the nightingale, which acts as a mirror for Criseyde's fraught circumstances. Thus, the nightingale's feminine pronouns "she" and "hire," along with the collapsing of birdsong with "vois" parallels the figure of Criseyde with this image of the frightened yet powerful nightingale who may stand in for a legacy of violence but also an agent that has the power to elect when to claim space through song.

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<sup>52</sup> Timothy D. O'Brien, "Sikernesse and Fere in *Troilus and Criseyde*," *The Chaucer Review* 38, no. 3 (2004): 276-293, at 276-77.

The earlier quoted passage symbolically likens Philomela to Criseyde, and while this glimpse of Philomela does not offer a new telling of her story, nor does Criseyde escape unscathed from Pandarus and Troilus' plan, Chaucer utilizes these intertextual echoes between stories to express their shared sorrows sonically. Chaucer draws upon the figure of the "abaysed nyghtyngale" because of the trauma that that symbol carries in a medieval context. Earlier, he mingles Procne's lyrical narrative with the noise of birdsong, but here, Chaucer uses sonic references of silence and extralinguistic birdsong to bring the figure of Philomela to life. These sonic devices—silence, birdsong, and voice—are specific to the Philomela story in that she was brutally mutilated so that she could not use her voice. Yet, in the Ovidian tradition, Philomela is depicted as weaving her story to convey the brutal rape and mutilation that she experienced. Here, Chaucer draws upon this regenerative aspect of the story and links it to Criseyde's figure. When Chaucer's nightingale feels a sense of safety within herself, she lets her "vois out ryngge" (III. 1238). While, admittedly, this birdsong is not identical to that of a human voice, he grants this nightingale the agency to express a sense of "siker" before she sings out, which is more than any other version that offers her character. From her startled silence, she finds the song. Chaucer allows his readers to glean the bittersweet tragedy of a trauma taking flight.

Like the nightingale who eventually sings, Criseyde, too, waits for "hire drede stente" (III. 1238) and then "opned hire herte" (III. 1239) to Troilus. These moments of opening and utterance do not negate the trauma that led up to such expressions; instead, these songs acknowledge the pain that preceded it. Still, the nightingale sings. Criseyde opens her heart, and even Procne loved Tereus. Thus, moments of trauma are not necessarily void of love before despair. The shift of the nightingale from "abaysed" to "siker" certainly shows the dynamic nature of emotions, as the little bird's response changes with each subtle shift in circumstance.

The bird's shock is seemingly generated by something as trivial as a "herde tale." Still, it is not so much the action that defines what trauma is but rather the reaction and the nightingale's shift from song to fearful silence as well as Criseyde's movement from "drede" to vocalizing "hire entente" shows the nonlinear movement of trauma as it moves in the body.

Following Criseyde and Troilus' night together, the narrator interjects and playfully suggests that he cannot comment upon what happened. Still, he knows their evening together hovered "bitwixen drede and sikernesse" (III. 1316). Such a comment seems intended to make the reader imagine the intimacy between Troilus and Criseyde. However, if one were to pause rather than be seduced into playing this coy guessing game with the narrator, one would immediately recall these two words, "drede" and "sikernesse" from the previous scene that likened the frightened nightingale to Criseyde. Although the narrator seems intent on shifting the focus to the implied intimacy of the exchange, "I kan namore, but thus thise ilke tweye" (III. 1314) here, Chaucer's voice seems to spill forth from behind his character, prompting us to remember the feelings of dread that preceded this exchange. Only after the "herde tale" does the nightingale feel "siker" enough to sing. The narrator, a figure who claims he cannot comment upon Criseyde's "delit or joie soon the leeste / were impossible to my wit to seye" (III. 1310-11), assures the reader that "that nyght, bitwixen drede and sikernesse, / felten in love the grete worthynesse" (1315-6). As the passage shows, it is not so much that the narrator cannot access these supposedly private moments, but he is less interested in lingering on Criseyde's feelings that showcase her fears and "drede." Thus, in this passage, I read the narrator as resistant to engaging with such thorny moments directly because acknowledging Criseyde's fear would mean addressing the fact that Troilus is the root cause of such feelings. Rather than render

Troilus culpable in this tale of woe, the narrator speaks over and for Criseyde, oppressively silencing her voice.

Just like in the earlier passage, in which Criseyde is compared to a startled nightingale, scholars have noted how the lark and sparrow hawk images are used analogically to describe how Troilus has captured Criseyde predatorily.<sup>53</sup> Like the nightingale who is scared into silence before singing again, the comparison of Criseyde to a lark trapped by a sparrow hawk reveals how matters of consent,<sup>54</sup> which should be unmistakable and respected, can become confused when those in power pressure and persuade until one becomes trapped like a lark in a sparrow hawk's talons. The fact that such a topic appears in the context of a supposed love story raises the question as to whether this is a tale of "woe" or a story about the way Troilus, a figure of power, uses the guise of heartache to inflict unspeakable acts that blur not only matters of the heart but also the body and its ability to offer emphatic consent:

What myghte or may the sely larke seye,  
Whan that the sperhawk hath it in his foot?  
I kan namore; but of thise ilke tweye—  
To whom this tale sucre be or soot—  
Though that I tarie a yer, somtyme I moot,  
After myn auctour, tellen hire gladnesse,  
As wel as I have told hire hevynesse. (III. 1191-97)

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<sup>53</sup> In "Birds' Form: Enabling Desire and Identities in *Confessio Amantis*," in *Birds in Medieval English Poetry: Metaphors, Realities, Transformations* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2018), 179-218, at 193-4, Michael J. Warren claims, "Gower's simile closely mirrors Chaucer's depiction of Troilus and Criseyde's precursory sexual embrace, in which Criseyde, like Philomela, is implicitly portrayed as a seized bird. The narrator's question, rhetorically unanswered, conveys something of the metaphor's cultural force, the familiar assimilation of sexual desire and violent predation: "What myghte or may the sely larke seye, / Whan that the sperhawk hath it in his foot?" (III. 1191-2). The moment is a disturbing combination of adulation and anxiety ('gladnesse' and 'hevynesse' [III. 1196-7]) which resolves 'wo into blisse' (III. 1221) but does not shake off the menace of the predatory desire. Criseyde ends up singing like a nightingale, but this joy is accompanied by the fact that she 'stynteth first' (III. 1234), and because the bird recalls the earlier nightingale in Book II (918-24), which opens with Procne the swallow singing about her suster's plight (II. 64-70). The predator-prey motif, in fact, is a foreboding expression of the male-female sexual dynamic throughout Chaucer's poem: both the lovers are variously compared to the hawk, lion, falcon and eagle, and the lark, boar and deer."

<sup>54</sup> Warren explicates, "Chaucer's immediate source for this image is Boccaccio's *Filicolo*, II. 165-6. The act of predation necessarily presumes consumption, which Forbes Irving identifies as a metaphorical relation to sex generally in Greek myth, too, 'particularly between eating one's own family and incest', all of which exists in Gower's version of the Tereus myth" (qtd. in *Ibid.*, 193n32).

Unlike the other avian references in which Chaucer invokes his predecessor as a way to draw attention to the trauma of women, here, such comparisons between Criseyde and the lark are posed hypothetically by the narrator as his voice interjects onto the page: “What myghte or may the sely larke seye, / whan that the sperhawk hath it in his foot?”. Criseyde is caught like the lark in the sparrow hawk’s foot, Fradenburg claims.<sup>55</sup> Such descriptions shed light on the manipulation that led Criseyde to confess her love for Troilus, a fact that troubles those who are to blame for dishonest love in this text. Rather than address his question, the narrator retorts, “I kan namore,” as if the trauma he has just drawn attention to is too much to bear.

Following the lark and sparrowhawk scene, the narrator is quick to shift the audience’s gaze elsewhere, redirecting our attention to moments in the text in which the love between Troilus and Criseyde is supposedly sweet like “sucre” and full of “gladnesse” (III. 1191-97). After this dynamic change, the narrator redirects our attention again, this time to a topical change, “myn auctour.” At this moment, the narrator invokes the shadowy figure of the “auctour” to shift blame onto for the opaque violations that precede these moments of supposed joy: “Though that I tarie a yer, somtyme I moot, / After myn auctour, tellen hire gladnesse, / As wel as I have told hire hevynesse” (III. 1195-97). Before the audience is duped into believing such false displays of humility, we need only recall the analogy between the lark and the sparrow hawk from a few lines before. By doing so, we are asked what “hevynesse” the narrator is truly invested in telling as he pits himself against the author’s agenda.

These curated moments of tension animated through the figure of the narrator are Chaucer’s way of directing attention to the unspeakable. To this end, Fradenburg argues that “when, in Book III of *Troilus and Criseyde*, the narrator tells us that Criseyde speaks her

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<sup>55</sup> Fradenburg, “Oure Owen Wo to Drynke,” 225.

‘entente,’ but does not tell us what that ‘entente’ is, Chaucer draws attention to the inaudibility at the core of this most voluble poem.”<sup>56</sup> These rhetorical contortions beg us, as Fradenburg states, to analyze consent more closely.<sup>57</sup> By doing so, what we see is that even when the narrator attempts to change the direction of the story, and Chaucer is unable to voice that which has occurred, the text still creates opportunities to bear witness to the echoes of pain that reverberate between Criseyde and Philomela: “But if the signifier threatens to divert us from the event of violation, it also leaves a trail that we can follow, at least as far back at the story of Philomela.”<sup>58</sup> This textual echoing haunts these two texts and makes its presence perceptibly known.<sup>59</sup>

One of the most significant distinctions between the narrator's voice and Chaucer's can be seen in the handling of Procne and Philomela's birdsongs. When Chaucer refers to the Ovidian swallow and nightingale, he refers to its “waymentynge” (II. 63) lay and its burst of “vois” (III. 1237). Yet, the passage is void of sound when the narrator draws upon the image of the “sely larke” (III. 1191). The narrator gives the reader something to imagine but nothing to hear, not even a reference to silence. In this sense, the narrator uses sight to objectify in its most exploitative ways. The narrator invites the audience to look as outsiders and gaze upon a “sely” or helpless bird as it becomes food for the “sperhawk” (III. 1192). We witness this act of violence, void of pity, for there is no sonic reference to disrupt what the narrator asks the audience to imagine. We see predator and prey, Troilus and Criseyde. Notably, the narrator frequently suggests that Criseyde is the true hunter to blame. Thus, the subjugated individual, in

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 229.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 232.

<sup>59</sup> Here, I use the phrase “haunt” strategically to recall Ingham's argument in “Chaucer's Haunted Aesthetics: Mimesis and Trauma in *Troilus and Criseyde*,” which I place myself in conversation.

this case, Criseyde, becomes the hunter and hunts, for the social outsider is often an instrument of those in power.

The matter of consent, as it pertains to the sexual encounter involving Troilus and Criseyde in Book III, is murky at best. However, the fact that such a scene, a scene the narrator pushes readers to see as erotic, raises questions about rape is further evidence of how Chaucer channels his voice through the narrator so he can quietly poke at such views. Thus, the text allows both interpretations—consensual and non-consensual—not just in this scene but throughout all of Criseyde’s interactions, for she is consistently placed in a subjugated position in which the world of the text forces her to conform to the dominant agenda even when she says “no.” So often, Criseyde verbally resists but is later forced to concede with her body. Thus, the murkiness of this text, particularly surrounding issues of female consent, is a feature, not a bug, of this work, for it mirrors Criseyde’s vulnerable positionality.

Chaucer modulates his audience to glimpse what he is doing, but it is up to them to recognize what he is showing us. Perhaps the most significant obstruction to seeing Chaucer’s artistry at work is his narrator, whose frequent interjections negatively color Criseyde’s character. Contrarily, O’Brien argues that the narrator is afraid the reader will misinterpret Criseyde’s character because of what his author has animated him to say: “[the narrator] fears that his reader will misunderstand and thus condemn Criseyde because of what he must disclose about her (V, 1775).”<sup>60</sup> But, there is nothing to disclose, so the narrator truly “must” not do anything but tell this tale. Because so many of these disruptions are coded as necessary (as in they “must” be told), the reader is co-opted into viewing the story, especially Criseyde’s character, through his unreliable gaze. Importantly, though, Elizabeth Allen describes Criseyde as a character that

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<sup>60</sup> O’Brien, “*Sikernesse and Fere in Troilus and Criseyde*,” 276.

“‘mean[s] what she says’: she confirms her ethos in elevated literary language, and her allusions invite awareness of both dread and desire, both the fated end of love and the hope of avoiding such an end.”<sup>61</sup> In this sense, Criseyde’s words, though so often questioned, misconstrued, or omitted, are more truthful than those attributed to the narrator.

Just as the narrator’s opinions seem to shift about Criseyde, so, too, do matters of Criseyde’s heart, as is implied by the initial image of the lark and sparrow hawk (III. 1191-97) followed by the allusively consensual descriptions of Criseyde lying in Troilus’ arms (III. 1201). Of course, one can be pressured to the point that “no’s” becomes “yes,” and there are times when words cannot be expressed at all—all of which can be seen in the evolution of Criseyde’s feelings toward Troilus:

Criseyde, which that felte hire thus itake,  
As written clerkes in hire bokes olde,  
Right as an aspes leef she gan to quake,  
Whan she hym felte hire in his armes folde. (III. 1191-1201)

From avian to tree, Criseyde is described as a singular, shaking “leef.” Unlike the earlier descriptions of the nightingale bursting into song, this passage only describes Criseyde with visual descriptors. We cannot hear Criseyde as she “quake[s].” Without these sonic indicators, it is near impossible to interpret how Criseyde experienced the moment “whan she hym felte hire in his armes folde.” Was this quaking from fear, excitement, or a combination? This sonic absence highlights its need in our readerly understanding, for even when the text attempts to show what Criseyde “felte,” we, as readers, cannot interpret such feelings by visual indicators alone. In this void, then, the text creates yet another moment of unspeakable distancing, for all we are shown is the image of a leaf, not leaves, as it shakes beside Troilus, an image that suggests that though the two lie together, Criseyde remains emphatically alone.

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<sup>61</sup> Allen, “Flowing Backward to the Source,” 683.

In her dream, Criseyde imagines an eagle<sup>62</sup> violently ripping her heart out and replacing hers with its own, yet in this depicted dreamscape, Criseyde stands defiantly in stillness and solitude (II. 925-931). In response, scholars have read this ominous dream as a warning of the violent sexual exchange to come.<sup>63</sup> However, rather than forcing an answer from that which refuses to speak, we should turn toward this scene to examine how its lack of sound seems to offer something different than the silent image of Criseyde shaking like a leaf. Understandably, the gruesome image of this scene has led to such diverse readings, but what is often overlooked is how this pivotal moment offers a different posturing of both Criseyde and the unspeakable. Here, this vacant soundscape is desired alone:

And as she slep, anonright tho hire mette  
How that an egle, fethered whit as bon,  
Under hire brest his longe clawes sette,  
And out hire herte he rente, and that anon,  
And dide his herte into hire brest to gon—  
Of which she nought agroos, ne nothyng smerte—  
And forth he fleigh, with herte left for herte. (II. 925-931)

Undeniably, the passage resists any definitive answer, for just as there are descriptions of violence, “Under hire brest his longe clawes sette, / And out hire herte he rente, and that anon,” there are also defiantly conflicting responses to said violence, “Of which she nought agroos, ne nothyng smerte.” The opaqueness of this passage has led scholars such as Allen J. Frantzen to argue that Criseyde’s dream paints a picture in which she can love without pain—as can be seen in the eagle scene in which the bird of prey exchanges its heart for hers without any discomfort

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<sup>62</sup> For Ross, the significance of Chaucer’s revisions of the dream scene in *Troilus* lies within Chaucer’s decision to both embrace features of Ovid and Dante narratives—the motifs of the eagle, the dream vision genre, and female trauma—as well as his reversals of the dreamer from male to female (351-2). Furthermore, Ross argues by gendering the dreamer female in Chaucer’s poem, Criseyde is instilled with “...a direct figural transference of powerful agency,” which, she claims, allies Criseyde “more closely with the calculating eagle than the hapless masculinized nightingale” (352). See Ross, “Believing Cassandra,” 339-56.

<sup>63</sup> Dinshaw, “Rivalry, Rape and Manhood,” 137-60; Lutton, ““Inviolable Voice,”” 3-19; Sturges, “Ascalaphus and Philomela,” 63-7.

to Criseyde. Frantzen concludes that this allows Criseyde to accept Troilus freely in her waking life, which she does shortly after she awakes.<sup>64</sup> And yet, it is possible to read the void of sonic descriptors in this scene as not just indicative of violence but how survivors of such acts respond to trauma. In the waking world of the text, Criseyde's words fail her not because she is unable to speak but because power and privilege render her voice futile. However, in this dreamscape, Chaucer grants Criseyde a space to express in the face of violence. In the safety of her dream, Chaucer portrays Criseyde as defiant and strong in her solitude. Thus, this silent passage symbolizes the suffering and harassment that Criseyde undergoes throughout the story, which cannot be voiced or go unheard. The scene also shows how silence can be used resistively when chosen by its author. In this sense, Chaucer draws upon the sonic vacuity of the scene to generate a form of agency, a silent agency, that Criseyde cannot achieve with her voice.

The opacity of the dream scene has left much room for scholarly interpretation. For Victoria Warren, the violence within the dream is unquestionably gruesome, but it is not a signifier of rape. Instead, she reads it as a visual display of how this soon-to-be love affair will "violate Criseyde's subjectivity."<sup>65</sup> While it is possible to advocate for naming that which appears unspeakable, I do not offer a reading in which defining Criseyde's experience is essential to recognizing the textual violence that has occurred. Relatedly, Jennifer Garrison and Valerie A. Ross do not deny Criseyde's dream's brutality but offer interpretations in which scholars might recognize the violence in the dream scene as active. In Garrison's reading, the eagle—the bird with the power to kill—represents Troilus, while Criseyde is linked to the nightingale or the bird that cannot kill.<sup>66</sup> Although Criseyde cannot kill like eagles or warriors such as Troilus, Garrison

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<sup>64</sup> Frantzen, "The 'Joie and Tene' of Dreams," 109-10.

<sup>65</sup> Victoria Warren, "(Mis)Reading the 'Text' of Criseyde: Context and Identity in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*," *The Chaucer Review* 36, no. 1 (2001): 1-15, at 11.

<sup>66</sup> Garrison, "Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* and the Danger," 341.

argues, Criseyde does acquire the ability to motivate others towards a form of violence that ultimately “has the power to destroy masculine authority.”<sup>67</sup> Though I echo the sentiment that Criseyde acquires a sense of power within the dream scene, I do not read this temporary agency as a tool that can or should be weaponized against “masculine authority.” This is not a revenge fantasy. Instead, I argue that Chaucer turns to silence and empowers his character to feel strength from within despite the violent forms of authority found in the waking world of the text. Similarly, Ross calls for a new reading of Criseyde’s character, which she argues grows in agency, subjectivity, and authority within her dreamscape.<sup>68</sup> For Ross, Criseyde’s dream is not a graphic depiction of rape or a life of passivity. She reads Criseyde’s dream as her dream, and in that sense, she claims Chaucer grants Criseyde’s character “...the agency to imagine her emotional transformation...”<sup>69</sup> I situate my reading alongside Ross’, for I, too, interpret the creative space of the dream world as an environment Chaucer draws upon in his imagining of Criseyde’s agency.

Adding to this interpretive exchange, I claim that Chaucer does more than showcase Criseyde’s vulnerability or obscure gesture toward her trauma through intertextual echoes. He uses a spectrum of sounds as an alternative sonic rebuttal to the exclusionary speech acts violently wielded against Criseyde. Such claims resound in the avian references throughout the text. Notably, the figure of the nightingale returns in “ful loude song” (III. 920). In a space of her own, Criseyde lies in bed, falling asleep to the melody of birdsong. In a text cluttered with words, murky with consent, and harsh in its treatment of Criseyde’s character, Chaucer offers his audience a rare imagining of a woman in the comfort of her presence. Compared to the

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ross, “Believing Cassandra,” 352.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

nightingale, who grew silent when hearing the shepherd speak, this nightingale seems at ease in the safety of Criseyde's bedroom. This is, yet again, another unusual representation of Philomela, a figure so often defined by her trauma. Through song, Chaucer invites us to understand both of these figures anew:

A nyghtyngale, upon a cedre grene,  
Under the chambre walt her as she ley,  
Ful loude song ayein the moone shene,  
Peraunter in his<sup>70</sup> brides wise a lay  
Of love, that made hire herte fresh and gay.  
That herkned she so long in good entente,  
Til at the last the dede slep hire hente. (II. 918-24)

In this scene, we do not have to question what pleasure looks like; we know it. Chaucer yokes together the figure of Criseyde and Philomela yet again through the enjoyment of the song—both the act of singing and the listening to its music. The nightingale in “ful loude song” sings not of trauma, pain or woe but of a “lay of love.” While earlier in the text, Chaucer used the nightingale's song to express its traumas, it proves to be multifaceted, as it is used in this passage to convey a new story, one of love. So rarely is the figure of Philomela invoked for more than her suffering, and yet Chaucer utilizes birdsong to draw attention to her pain and delight.

“Upon a cedre grene” rests a solitary bird and an instrument for Criseyde's ear. This nightingale and its single audience find solace in song. Chaucer also invites his readerly audience to linger on this moment, for he echoes his early statement about listening mindfully, as Criseyde is described as “herkned...so long in good entente.” In this textual echoing, Chaucer yokes Criseyde and the audience with the verb “herkned.” Criseyde models careful listening as she

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<sup>70</sup> Notably, the “birddes” is referred to with the pronoun “his” here, but as Garrison argues, “his” is equivalent to the Middle English word “its” (341). While the evasive “his” or “its” certainly allows the reader to interpret this nightingale as any nightingale, Garrison reminds us that this nightingale reference occurs at the end of the same day in which we, readers, first encountered Procne's song; thus, “...Chaucer encourages readers to see the transformed Philomela behind the nightingale's love song” (341). See Garrison, “Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* and the Danger,” 341.

attunes her ears to the songs that lie outside of language but still express. Here, the aural offerings in the scene create visible feelings of enjoyment for Philomela and Criseyde.

The agency Chaucer grants Criseyde in her dreamscape does not translate to the waking world of the text. As *Troilus* nears its end, Chaucer animates his concern for the perception of her character through the animation of Criseyde's anxious worries, demonstrating that the reception of her character was always doomed to be blamed rather than interpreted carefully:

‘Allas, of me, unto the worldes ende,  
Shal neyther ben ywriten nor ysonge  
No good word, for thise bokes wol me shende.  
O, rolled shal I ben on many a tonge!  
Thoroughout the world my belle shal be ronge!’ (V. 1058-62)

Chaucer imagines the disdain of Criseyde in terms of how the rhetoric wielded against her will sound. Here, Criseyde laments that no matter who encounters her story—whether “ywriten nor ysonge”—the result will be the same, “No good word, for thise bokes wol me shende.” Chaucer seems to navigate his anxieties about how his audience will understand his story through Criseyde's impending doom. Monica McAlpine echoes this sentiment, explaining that though she reads Criseyde as “one of Chaucer's neglected prudent women...[medieval] readers who see Criseyde as the embodiment of carnality, as well as all those for whom her ultimate infidelity to Troilus must be *the* defining fact of her career, are unlikely to be willing to associate her with the chief of the cardinal virtues.”<sup>71</sup> This sentiment is reflected in Chaucer's fear that most readers will not interpret his text with “good entente,” as he instructed at the story's opening. The illustration from CCCC MS 61 reveals that an author only has so much control over their readers and stories.

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<sup>71</sup> Monica E. McAlpine, “Criseyde's Prudence,” *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 25 (2003): 199-224, at 200.

Even in the imagined slander of her character, Chaucer yokes her figure with sound as he foresees the gossip of Criseyde as a “belle shal be ronge.” With this ringing of the “belle,” Chaucer offers his reader one final chance to recognize that Criseyde’s character is drawing attention to here, a misreading of her story. Thus, this “belle” acts as a sonic alert, drawing our thinking ears to the page so we can listen closely to this final plea:

‘Allas, of me, unto the worldes ende,  
Shal neyther ben ywriten nor ysonge  
No good word, for these bokes wol me shende.  
O, rolled shal I ben on many a tonge!  
Thoroughout the world my belle shal be ronge!’ (V. 1058-62)

Here, Chaucer offers a triple rhyme between the words “ysonge,” “tonge,” and “ronge.” Each of these words registers sonically and recalls moments from earlier in the text, such as Philomela and Procne’s birdsongs, Philomela’s mutilated tongue, and Criseyde’s likening to a nightingale whose “vois out ryngge” (III. 1238). Chaucer strategically animates her figure so that such fears produce an intertextual rhyme that results in musical rhetoric. While Chaucer cannot control the fate of how his characters are read, a fear echoed in Criseyde’s plea; he can orchestrate a scene rich in sonority that can be heard even when readers may resist what Criseyde is saying. Thus, this triple rhyming invites audiences to listen to the echoes of Criseyde’s sonic utterances rather than the blame vocalized by the dominant voices of the text.

Shortly after, Chaucer vocalizes Criseyde’s fears of being spoken about poorly due to her representation in the narrative, “No good word, for these bokes wol me shende,” Criseyde’s character is not heard from again (V. 1060). As the text anticipates its end, the narrator’s voice takes up the most space before shifting to Troilus. There have been many interpretations of the seemingly inconclusive close of this tale.<sup>72</sup> Winthrop Weatherbee posits that the end of Book III

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<sup>72</sup> Book V of *Troilus*, which includes the text’s “ending,” has garnered much response for scholars. Rosemarie P. McGerr asserts that part of the feeling of inconclusion from the conclusion of *Troilus* is in part due to

signals the end of the narrator's role, for beyond the story of romance found in the earlier books, the narrator seems unclear on how to conclude a story that is no longer about love.<sup>73</sup> I draw upon this claim to bolster my argument that the narrator is ultimately biased toward Troilus. This does not mean there are no moments in which the narrator is sympathetic toward Criseyde, but ultimately, his purpose, as Weatherbee states, is to give voice to Troilus's emotive state. Once Troilus' amorous feelings have ceased, so does the narrator's voice.

In the supposed name of self-sacrifice, Troilus makes his final speech from the desolate solar system as his body commingles with the music of the heavens (V. 1800-1806).<sup>74</sup> In what appears to be a literary representation of Boethian music theory,<sup>75</sup> Chaucer paints Troilus'

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the "prayer to the Trinity that finally ends the poem comes after two exhortations to the audience, a prayer to God that the poem can be understood, two stanzas recapitulating elements of the narrative, and the two envoys" (96). However, McGerr argues that noting these features are significant to coming to terms with the open-ended nature of this poem: "Our perception of the poem's conclusion as conventional but inconclusive is crucial because it allows us to appreciate the many ways *Troilus and Criseyde* repeatedly encourages us to resist closed readings and to confront the complex relationship of meaning to ending" (96). See Rosemarie P. McGerr, "Meaning and Ending in *Troilus and Criseyde*," in *Chaucer's Open Books: Resistance to Closure in Medieval Discourse* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998), 96-118, at 96.

<sup>73</sup> Winthrop Weatherbee, "Troilus Alone," in *Chaucer and the Poets: An Essay on Troilus and Criseyde* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016), 205-223, at 206.

<sup>74</sup> Although I read this self-sacrifice as almost masturbatory in nature, meaning it is for the pleasure of the self and not the good of the people left behind on earth, Fradenburg and Holly Crocker offer two persuasive readings on Troilus' motivations in Book V. In her groundbreaking work, Fradenburg reads the heroes' sacrifice as the ultimate reward: "At the end of Book V, when Troilus seems so alone with his fate, his revenance has him virtually transmitting by satellite. The narrator is still there to listen, and we ourselves read the traces in the book made of his life. To this extent, Troilus's story is still structured by the economy of sacrifice: it is devoted to recovering, with a difference that is also a bonus, whatever he relinquishes. The bonus is enhanced sentience and prosthetic power. Having crossed the line, Troilus can not only see and hear in a new way; he can commune with the living, because we can hear him. Chaucer's art, not just Troilus's, is implicated. Art, war, and love seem to share the enjoyment of a chosen chance to lose: 'Go, litel bok' (V. 1786). To choose to lose is to reverse befallenness or melancholy into activity so active as to be godlike creativity or redemption" (235-6). Relatedly, Crocker argues that this heroic culture of sacrifice or what she terms the "virtues of violence—qualities including honor, courage, and bravery" work to glorify men while exposing women, in this case Criseyde, to emotional and physical suffering (76). Thus, for Crocker, this sacrifice comes at an ethical price. See Fradenburg, "'Oure Owen Wo to Drynke,'" 235-6; Crocker, "The Fragility of Virtue, from Chaucer to Lydgate," in *The Matter of Virtue: Women's Ethical Action from Chaucer to Shakespeare* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019), 41-77, at 76.

<sup>75</sup> Medieval approaches to music can be broken into two distinct theories: speculative and practical. Practical music theory pertains to the practice of singing, as the name suggests. On the other hand, speculative music theory resembles a mathematical approach to music, as Tekla Bude explains: "...notated music and speculative music theory [were] seen as primarily an academic exercise, more like geometry than art, because speculative theory was written in an arcane vocabulary of mathematical proportions that rarely discussed affect or emotion..." (3). Speculative approaches to music, with its numerical and mathematical preoccupations, can be traced to Plato who expressed that human life could be understood and categorized numerically. One of the most influential speculative

afterlife as both alien and sonic: “And ther he saugh with ful avysement / The erratic sterres, herkenyng armonye / With sownes ful of hevenyss melodie” (V. 1811-13). Such terrestrial landscapes recall Book III's lucid, solitary, and silent dreamscapes. Additionally, the verb to listen, “herkenyng,” is repeated here, just as the sonic references called upon careful listeners to hear bittersweet birdsongs. The question, then, is why Chaucer creates this echo between these two figures and the invitation to listen. What are we meant to recognize in this reverberation? In this cosmic moment, Chaucer allows his audience to hear what we otherwise could not, the “armonye with sownes ful of hevenyss melodie.” We are invited to listen not in anger or blame but in harmony. This scene offers a rare moment of serenity and unification between Troilus and Criseyde, reader and text, Chaucer, and “litel myn tragedye” (V. 1786). In the infinitudes of space, Chaucer leaves his audience with sound.

Although Boethian music theory states that there are three mediums of sound, of which only one is audible to the human ear, Chaucer allows his audience to imaginatively hear what such divine spaces sound like in the harmony he creates on the page (V. 1807-13). Yet, following Troilus' ghostly rise into the eighth sphere (V. 1807-09), he looks down upon “this litel spot of erthe” (V. 1815) and meets the celestial soundscape with the discord of his own sonically descriptive yet inaudible utterance:

And down from thennes faste he gan avyse  
This litel spot of erthe that with the se  
Embraced is, and fully gan despise

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approaches to music in the early Middle Ages came from Boethius' *De institutione musica* (The Principles of Music), a foundational text that was the primary source for Western European music theory for over eight hundred years. Boethius' *De institutione musica* divided music into three distinct categories. These three divisions were *musica instrumentalis*, music from instruments and the mouth and tongue of singers, *musica humana*, music that unites the earthly body and spiritual soul, and *musica mundana*, music that divine spheres and bodies made as they moved around the heavens. According to Boethius, only the first subdivision, *musica instrumentalis*, could potentially be heard by human ears, but that did not mean the other categories were soundless, for the other forms of music, *music humana* and *music mandana*, were either too loud for human ears or outside the range of what human ears could detect. See Bude, *Sonic Bodies: Text, Music, and Silence in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2022), 3.

This wrecched world, and held al vanite  
To respect of the pleyn felicite  
That is in hevenc above; and at the laste,  
Ther he was slayn his lokyng down he caste,

And in hymself he lough right at the wo  
Of hem that wepten for his deth so faste. (V. 1814-22)

The text presents an inward laugh that straddles the line of both sonic and silent, for this is a laugh meant for Troilus' relief as he occupies the stars alone. However, there is a series of visual descriptions that help the audience imagine this scoff as coded with spite. First, Chaucer describes Troilus as "lokyng down" upon the earth to garner a sense of superiority over those residing in the "wrecched world" below. Then, after "he caste" his eye downwards, he responds not with overt displays of sympathy but with an inward "lough" at those that "wepten for deth." If one were to read this passage literally, Troilus' behavior would seem mocking and arrogant, but behind such anger lies regret and insecurity. As Lochrie explicates, "future time, although it might be informed by memory and experience, cannot be foreseen by any human being: the failure to see the future is not Criseyde's singular flaw."<sup>76</sup> It is Troilus who comes to embody this truth as he looks down upon the earth from his perch of futurity. From the lonely space of the afterlife—the projected future of the living—Troilus realizes that not just Criseyde's future was precarious but his own. His eerie laugh echoes the void of disappointment, fragility, and human error.

Troilus is the tragic hero of this text. And yet, the story does not end how it typically does for the man promised the world. Troilus does not get the girl. There is nothing earned for sacrifice.<sup>77</sup> Even in death, he resides alone in a terrestrial landscape, unwilling to listen to the harmonious sounds of heaven. Instead, neither here nor there, he looks downward and sees

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<sup>76</sup> Lochrie, "No Future, Perhaps\*," 270.

<sup>77</sup> Fradenburg, "'Oure Owen Wo to Drynke,'" 199-239.

displays of “wo.” Of course, this is precisely what the audience was promised: a tale of woe, so the story comes full circle while Troilus’ broken promises finally register within him. Thus, the final inward laugh resounds most deeply with Criseyde’s pain, for it is a sound of sorrow that remains unheard by those in the text. The truth that emerges out of this tragic, vindictive laugh is that no one, not even those in dominant positions, “win” in tales of woe.<sup>78</sup> In its conclusion, this tragedy becomes most apparent not in the text’s margins but from the epicenter outward, tethering Troilus and Criseyde from above to below.

I read Troilus’ bitter laugh as a sonic expression of pained recognition in that upon looking down at “this litel spot of erthe” (V. 1815), Troilus realizes that he lost even after his courtly acts and heroic deeds. Though Michael Kimmel writes on the lives of actual men and masculinity, his argument that (heterosexual) men have been told a false promise that they have innate power and privilege that informs their gendered identity can be seen in the textual echoes of Troilus’ spiteful laughter.<sup>79</sup> Kimmel argues that in an attempt to live up to this construct of masculinity and exercise their supposed power, men often revert to harassing women, fighting other men, and ridiculing gay men. These acts are meant to protect themselves from the shame they feel from being unable to live up to the belief that men are naturally powerful. McTaggart confirms this sentiment in response to the role of identity, shame, and masculinity in Troilus, arguing that “the idea of performative identity emptied of essence is difficult to distinguish from the complete absorption of identity by the social codes that dictate honor and shame.”<sup>80</sup> Such

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<sup>78</sup> For additional readings on Troilus and masculinity, see: Marcia Smith Marzec, “What Makes a Man? Troilus, Hector and the Masculinities of Courtly Love,” in *Men and Masculinities in Chaucer’s Troilus and Criseyde*, eds. Tison Pugh and Marcia Smith Marzec (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2008), 58-72; Crocker and Tison Pugh, “Masochism, Masculinity, and the Pleasures of Troilus,” in *Men and Masculinities in Chaucer’s Troilus and Criseyde*, eds. Tison Pugh and Marcia Smith Marzec (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2008), 82-96; Martin, “Troilus’s Gaze,” 132-147.

<sup>79</sup> Michael Kimmel, “Masculinity as Homophobia,” in *Theorizing Masculinities*, eds. Harry Brod and Michael Kaufman (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 1994), 147-51.

<sup>80</sup> McTaggart, “Shamed Guiltless,” 402.

theories allow readers to glean how it is only after Troilus commits the supposed greatest display of masculinity—sacrifice for the state—that he realizes how empty his sacrificial performance was. Troilus is quickly forgotten, exposed to the rocky terrain of space, and left to look down upon Earth with contempt and coded regret. Unable to vocalize this matrix of masculinity and pain, Troilus turns to laughter—a sonic tool for those whose voices are overpowered by power structures, in this case, Troilus’ masculine identity.

### **The Sound of Futurity: The Life of the Text beyond Its Author**

Even though Chaucer’s telling is very much indebted to classical and contemporary versions of the Philomela tales that inspired his telling of *Troilus*,<sup>81</sup> there is also Chaucer’s own “good entencioun” (I. 52) that becomes clear as he chooses how to retell the trauma he inherited. When Chaucer sends his “litel bok” into the world, the author’s voice commingles with the larger canon as he takes possession of the “litel myn tragedye” that he composed (V. 1786). It is no accident that Chaucer, the author, seems to spill onto the page at this particular moment, for this concluding passage exemplifies Chaucer’s passionate connection to a text and subject matter that is painful to read as well as tell:

Go, litel bok, go, litel myn tragedye,  
Ther God thi makere yet, er that he dye,  
So sende myght to make in som comedye!  
But litel book, no makyng thow n’envie,  
But subgit be to alle poesye. (V. 1786-90)

First, Chaucer takes ownership of “myn tragedye” by drawing attention to the genre of this tale, essentially yoking together the traumatic narrative with its author. Next, Chaucer highlights the pain that telling such stories has caused him, as he prays to God to “er that he dye, / so sende myght to make in som comedye!” I linger on this moment to highlight the impact that such

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<sup>81</sup> See Ross, “Believing Cassandra,” 349-352; Garrison, “Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde* and the Danger,” 320-43.

traumatic narratives exercise over both reader and writer; it is in this moment of prayer that Chaucer allows his audience to witness that. In this sense, the narrator's description of a tale of "double sorwes" (I. 54) extends to the text's speaker, reader, and writer. To engage with trauma, even fictionally in a text, is to be implicated in such stories. Such assertions made apparent by Chaucer's prayer seem to work against the narrator's accusations of blame. All who touch this narrative's pain share in its grief.

As if too much to bear, Chaucer eventually shifts the narrative voice explicitly back to the narrator, who is quick to utilize the emotive weight of the text as fodder for his fickle feelings towards Criseyde: "Swich fyn hath, lo, this Troilus for love! / ... / And thus bigan his lovyng of Criseyde, / As I have told, and in this wise he deyde" (V. 1828, 1833-4). The text ends where it began: with pity for Troilus' grief and condemnation of Criseyde's betrayal. For Weatherbee, this remark (V. 1828, 1833-34) echoes the "increasing demoralization of the narrator in Books 4 and 5,"<sup>82</sup> but he also reads this textual agitation as a precursor to the narrator's more important realization—one that stems far beyond the characters of Troilus and Criseyde and his judgments of them.<sup>83</sup> According to Weatherbee, it is not until the poem's true ending that the narrator realizes his more significant purpose: to be a poetic, embodied aesthetic that readers can admire.<sup>84</sup> In others words, the narrator is a magnification of artistry. I echo Weatherbee in that the poetics of the poem allow us to witness human expressions of grief in all of their complexities. Wounds that fester are reopened again and again in the telling of this narrative, but, as Chaucer demonstrates, with prayers for "comedye" (V. 1788) and a willingness to relinquish control and

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<sup>82</sup> Weatherbee, "Troilus Alone," 205.

<sup>83</sup> Weatherbee, "The Ending of Troilus," in *Chaucer and the Poets: An Essay on Troilus and Criseyde* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016), 224-243.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 235.

release, “Go, litel bok, go,” (V. 1786) there is a chance to let these scars finally close. Thus, *Troilus* is as much a tale of anguish as a prayer for healing.

Chaucer’s *Troilus* explores deep, agonizing wounds from the inside out, relishing in pain, prompting his readers to ask what human devices can allow the trauma to heal or at least be processed. The issues of agency, expression, and pain that circulate in Ovid’s “Story of Tereus” abound in *Troilus*. Still, rather than merely reproducing the alternative forms of communication expressed in the Ovidian tale (i.e., weaving tapestry), Chaucer turns to a spectrum of sound when grappling with violence against women and the trauma that can be internalized from such experiences.

As I have shown, Chaucer allows his audience to engage with the unspeakable through sound in myriad ways. First, Chaucer creates an interplay of intertextual echoes within the text through birdsong and bird form, especially swallows and nightingales. These references bring Ovid’s “Story of Tereus” into the folds of Chaucer’s *Troilus*. Chaucer allows his audience to link the associations between the nightingale in Ovid’s story and the nightingale in his own so that the audience can come to understand the traumas of *Troilus* that Chaucer cannot speak about. Once the traumatic linkage between the two texts has been established, he animates the nightingale and the swallow to sing. Chaucer offers his audience lyrics of pain but also adds to these narratives by linking songs to feelings that are “fresh and gay” (II. 922) as well as vocal (III. 1237). As a result, these narratives of unspeakable trauma become songs that carry many emotions, including the healing potential. All we, as readers, need to do is listen.

From the opening frame of his *Troilus*, Chaucer invites his audience to “herkneth with a good entencioun” (I. 52). True to Chaucer, precisely what we are meant to listen to and how one might define “good” or “entencioun” remains unclear. However, as the poem unfolds, Chaucer

offers his readers clues about his meaning. Alongside the narrator's heavy-handed criticisms of Criseyde, Chaucer weaves one of the Ovidian echoes, birdsong, and silence in an alternative text. As I have shown, many of these sonic moments accompany the verb to listen, "herkneþ." The image found in the CCCC MS 61 acts as a reminder that this text would have been read to an auditory audience, and it is to these audience members that Chaucer most directly commands to "herkneþ" instead of dozing off absentmindedly. Ultimately, Chaucer alerts his audiences that to engage with this story beyond the literal level of accusation is to open our "thinking ears"<sup>85</sup> to all the ways a story can be encountered and engaged.

By listening to the sounds and silences of trauma—its "waymentynge" (II. 66)—, we can witness how such feelings and experiences pulse across the text, reaching as far as the eighth sphere as Troilus looks down below at the "litel spot of erthe" (V. 1815). In its completion, Chaucer paints a picture in which echoes of the past mix with imagined futures, blended in harmony. The implication is that trauma impacts all that it touches, including those who participate in traumatic narratives from dominant positions in the text. In the end, words fail Troilus, too, a realization made apparent not with language but with a silent, inward laugh. Thus, sonic representation cannot give voice to trauma but can express what might initially seem "unspeakable." What cannot be said might still be heard.

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<sup>85</sup> Snaith, "Introduction," 9.

## Chapter Two

### The Resistive Sounds of Queer Silence and Laughter in *Le Roman de Silence*

Silence is no longer the absence of sounds; silence itself consists of sounds. Silence begets sounds. Chiasm. Reversibility. Through the intertwining of silence and sound, their mutual penetrability now becomes appreciated. Each retains a part of its antipode; each requires the other as its frame. The necessary interdependency between sound and silence relates to two principal aspects: silence is not only the precondition for sound - this means that silence contains sound—every sound in turn harbors silence as well.

–Marcel Cobussen

In this quote, Marcel Cobussen calls attention to the synchronicity of sounds and silences, as each lapse in the audibly perceivable resounds in its silent vacancy and its echoing.<sup>1</sup> Silence and sound envelope each other, forming a kind of call and response in which a pause in the sonic anticipates its reply. In music, “call and response” refers to a composition technique that functions like a conversation: “One musician offers a phrase, and a second player answers with a direct commentary or response. The phrases can be vocal, instrumental or both.”<sup>2</sup> Much like call and response in music, Cobussen’s noted dialogue between sound and silence depends upon recognizing each element as an independent part that, when joined, results in a vibrational exchange.

Together, we might liken the sonic impact of sound and silence to the energetic force of an echo: “[an echo] physically takes place in the space between surfaces: [it] happens when a sound is reflected back towards its source after hitting a hard surface.”<sup>3</sup> Notably, the sound “reflected back” is not an identical match to its genesis, for as Ella Finer explains, “the physical

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<sup>1</sup> Marcel Cobussen, “Cage and Silence,” *Deconstruction in Music*, accessed September 28, 2022, <http://www.deconstruction-in-music.com/john-cage/silence-and-death/3171>.

<sup>2</sup> Samantha Meazell, “Call and Response – The Sound of Collaboration,” ISKME, accessed May 01, 2023, <https://www.iskme.org/index.php?q=our-ideas/call-and-response-sound-collaboration#:~:text=In%20music,%20call%20and%20response,sound%20that>.

<sup>3</sup> Ella Finer, “Feminism and Sound,” in *Sound and Literature*, ed. Anna Snaith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 315-333, at 317.

echo will always return a sound distinct from the original, bearing the traces of its travel through time and space.”<sup>4</sup> In other words, in its reverberation, the echo is a kind of sonic containment that obfuscates its origin while also expressing it. In this sense, the echo is a repetition of its source and a new iteration.

Sonic techniques and natural phenomena, such as call and response and echoes, are not confined to the aural realm. They also find expression in literary representation. When a reader engages with a text, the call is sounded by the spaces between words and the punctuated forms of silence dictated by grammar. In response to these syntactical divisions, units of sound coalesce into individual words, which in turn form complete sentences and narratives. This call and response, present at the sentence level, extends to the reader. Readers encounter the word on the page, grasp the signified sound, amplify it in their minds, and then return to the source to deepen their understanding by consuming more sonic signifiers. The text, as an 'object container', plays a crucial role in creating an echo from the call and response of words and their pregnant pauses to the reader through the textual medium. In this sense, the textual echo is not contingent upon that which is aural, but on the perceived and anticipated response of the signified sound on the page. This resounding relationship between sound and silence, as represented in the text, is further enriched by the silent vehicle of the story. The text offers a silent soundscape from which sonic representations emerge, shrouded in a veil of calm that is the page.

For medieval writers, this triangulation between the silent text,<sup>5</sup> its reader, and the resounding possibilities of the two together is innate to the echo concept. As Adin E. Lears

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Many French medieval works were read aloud to a listening audience, and, thus, have an auditory component by design; approaching the text as a sonic object builds on this aural history. Unlike medieval authors of the past, current reading practices frequently interpret dialogue as the dominant marker of power, a practice that renders paradoxical characters unheard and “marginal.” Intertwining the fields of medieval studies with sound studies makes legible that which has always been present in the text: sonic markers of power and resistance. To blend these two fields, then, is to adopt an approach to reading that echoes rather than modernizes authors of

explains, the Middle English word “eccō”<sup>6</sup> could hold three possible interrelated meanings, all of which highlight the reverberant effect of the echo as it pulsates in its myriad forms:

It referred to the aural re-sounding that we still call the echo today. It was also a term for flattery, a form of ‘empty’ speech or sound without substance that appealed to base personal pleasure. Finally, ‘echo’ appeared as a personification of both of these senses of the word. In one way or another and to varying degrees, all of these uses emphasize the echo’s persistent association with immersive sensory experience and with the principle of repetition or response.<sup>7</sup>

As Lears elucidates, the word “eccō” in Middle English was primarily used to capture a “repetition or response” rather than express a strictly aural phenomenon. By likening the resounding effect of an echo to a kind of response system, we can glean how this interpretation of the echo is relevant to sound, speech, and text. As a result, this medieval understanding allows the concept of the echo to reverberate as a physical phenomenon and a linguistic possibility in its textual representation. One form of the echo does not negate the other but complicates its potential with each resounding iteration.

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medieval past. To illustrate, medieval authors such as John of Salisbury encountered the leaf as an axis of both letter and sound, distinct from orality: “Littere autem, id est figure, primo vocum indices sunt; deinde rerum, quas anime per oculorum fenestras opponunt et frequenter absentium dicta sine voce loquuntur” [Letters, that is written symbols, in the first place represent sounds. Secondly, they stand for things, which they conduct into the mind through the windows of the eyes. Frequently they communicate, without even emitting a sound, the utterances of those who are absent]. Here, I paraphrase Kate Maxwell, James R. Simpson and Peter V. Davies who explicate, “Medieval authors drew key contrasts between orality and writing: John of Salisbury, for example, spoke of letters as signs for absent sounds, things and voices” (32). See Peter V. Davies, Kate Maxwell, James R. Simpson, “Performance and the Page,” in *Pecia. Le Livre et L’écrit* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015), 16: 7-16. Latin quotation from John of Salisbury, *Ioannis Saresberiensis Metalogicon*, eds. J.B. Hall and K.S.B. Keats-Rohan (Turnhout: Typographi Brepols Editores Pontificii, 1991), 32. Modern English translation provided from Daniel D. McGarry, trans., *The Metalogicon: A Twelfth-Century Defense of the Verbal and Logical Arts of the Trivium* (Gloucester: Peter Smith, 1971), 38.

<sup>6</sup> According to the *Middle English Dictionary*, “eccō n.” can mean “(a) Of sound: echo; (b) *fig.* indiscriminate obsequious approval of another’s words or actions, a servilely assenting answer; also, a servile assenter; (c) echo (in either sense) personified.” For further reading, see: *Middle English Dictionary*. Ed. Robert E. Lewis, et al. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1952-2001. Online edition in Middle English Compendium. Ed. Frances McSparran, et al. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Library, 2000-2023. <<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/>>. Accessed 01 December 2023.

<sup>7</sup> Adin E. Lears, “Introduction: Voice in Medieval Soundscapes,” in *World of Echo: Noise and Knowing in Late Medieval England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2020), 1-26, at 4-5.

The reverberation between grammatical markers and words, readers and texts, stories and sonic representations are amplified in the thirteenth-century French romance *Le Roman de Silence*. Commonly attributed to the elusive pen name Heldris de Cornouaille, this is a work in which laughter paradoxically illuminates the power of silence through its two primary yet peripheral characters, Merlin and Silence. From Merlin's laughter, we see the fluid, socially disruptive nature of Silence's queer gender identity. From Silence's silence, the audience can better understand the resistive nature of Merlin's alternative form of utterance.<sup>8</sup> The two together are doubled in their marginalization and resistive expressions. Thus, their characters call and respond to each other, generating a form of echoing best described as sonically resistive. These sonic refusals consist of moments of both refusing to speak and refusing to justify not speaking. Such powers come from the queerness of Merlin and Silence, each occupying bodies and utilizing sounds and silences outside of traditional categories of identity and expression. This is "queer" in a David Halperian sense: "queer" functions as a rebuttal to the normative systems in which one involuntarily participates.<sup>9</sup> Halperin's definition of "queer" speaks not only to Silence's diverse gender identities but also to the refutation carried in Merlin's laugh. Together, Silence and Merlin reverberate in their sonic refusal as a means to respond politically within a dominant system that overwhelmingly excludes marginal voices.

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<sup>8</sup> Merlin's laughter is not unique to this text but rather echoes in the expressions of his character found throughout the Arthurian tradition. To that end, Lewis Thorpe explains that "a feature of Merlin's behavior in the *Vita* was his disconcerting habit of suddenly giving vent to bursts of sardonic laughter" (324). See: Lewis Thorpe, "Merlin's Sardonic Laughter," in *Studies in Medieval Literature and Languages in Memory of Frederick Whitehead*, eds. W. Rothwell, W. R. J. Barron, David Blamires and Lewis Thorpe (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1973), 323-39, at 324.

<sup>9</sup> In *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography*, David Halperin argues that "Queer is by definition whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. *There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers*. It is an identity without an essence. 'Queer' then, demarcates not a positivity but a positionality vis-à-vis the normative...[Queer] describes a horizon of possibility whose precise extent and heterogenous scope cannot in principle be delimited in advance" (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 62. Thus, I utilize Halperin's definition of "queer" to speak to Silence's diverse gender identities as well as the queerness of Merlin's laugh.

Merlin and Silence's queer utterances and performances allow readers to remake perceived divisions, such as masculine/feminine, sounded/silent, legible/illegible, into spectrums that move and slide with each character's unique expression in any given time, moment, or space.<sup>10</sup> Spectrums permit characters to escape either/or, both/and binaries and invite a range of possibilities instead. In this sense, Silence and Merlin continue to echo each other, not just in laughter but in their usage of silence and the agency it can afford. Silence, as an abstract construct, is thrust upon Silence in her infancy. Still, as she grows and develops her relationship with their body, Silence utilizes silence for the queer possibilities it allows for their identity.<sup>11</sup> Rather than being either male or female or even morphing an either/or binary into an and/both dichotomy, the sound of silence allows Silence the agency to deny all limiting equations, resulting in an explosion of queer possibilities that exist outside of language. It is this queer possibility that calls to Merlin and to which Merlin responds with laughter. Together, their sonic exchanges reverberate, resulting in a sound that carries and distorts its original articulation until it is finally, wholly, acceptably other. Queer.

When Silence wields silence as a tool, silence does not equate to erasure. Silence grants Silence visibility on the page as their queer body defies the heteronormative rules that govern the text.<sup>12</sup> Echoed in sonic synergy, Merlin utilizes this precise form of silence, silence as an agency,

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<sup>10</sup> For an additional reading that claims *Le Roman de Silence* destabilizes "the categories of nature/culture, strong/weak, male/female, reward/punishment, in/out, and language/silence," see: Jane Tolmie, "Silence in the Sewing Chamber: *Le Roman de Silence*," *French Studies* 63, no. 1 (2009): 14-26.

<sup>11</sup> I use "they/their," "he/him" and "she/her" pronouns interchangeably throughout the chapter when referring to Silence in order to best reflect Silence's fluid gender portrayal and identity. When possible, I use pronouns that align with Silence's stated gender identity in the text (for example, when Silence uses the pronoun "he," to describe himself, I use male pronouns in the chapter).

<sup>12</sup> It is important to acknowledge that while I am advocating for silence as a tool capable of queer empowerment, silence has long been used to violently closet, oppress and erase the queer community. Julia R. Johnson speaks to both the harm and strengths that can come from utilizing silence as it intersects with her identities, including queer identity: "As a PhD student, I learned quickly how whiteness manifests problematically in/as silence—silence in the face of enacted racism, sexism, ableism, US nationalism, heterosexism, Christian supremacy, and classism. In the politicized environment in which I was growing, white, bourgeois liberals often demonstrated how *not speaking* and acting against racism reinforced white, middle-class, heterosexual privilege. In

as he stands before the King and his court, meeting the public's demand for speech with silence: "Com plus l'enquierent plus se taist. / Tant li delite li taisirs / Que parlers li est nonplaisirs" [The more they questioned him, the more silent he was. / He took such great delight in silence / that speech could offer him no pleasure] (*Silence* 6280-2). Merlin's brief episode of *jouissance* anticipates its end. Ultimately, Merlin puts himself in significant danger because of the temporary pleasure he extracts from his sonic refusals. His resistive acts pose threats not only to larger systems of authority but also to his bodily safety and integrity. As such, *Le Roman de Silence* explores the power and potential limitations of sonic resistance enacted by Merlin's inappropriate laughter and Silence's refusal to speak about their sex assigned at birth.

### **The Story of *Le Roman de Silence* and Its Scholarly Reception**

*Le Roman de Silence* begins with a frame story that explains the central tale that is about to be told. As an effect of such rhetorical maneuvers, the text works to establish a heteronormative standard within the narrative. It explains that there is and must be a justification for Silence's queer presentation within the main story.<sup>13</sup> To elucidate the reasoning behind Silence's parent's gambit—i.e., why they are forced to alter Scilentiä to Scilensiüs,<sup>14</sup> a change in

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alliance *with* me, US and "third world" activists and academics of color (and a few critical white people) verbally challenged my complicit silences, such as my immersion in white narcissism, my failure to speak when white people expressed racism, or my desires to have other white people like me. In addition to learning the negativity of silence, I also learned from these allies the rhetorical, social and political *value* of silence as a strategy of resistance. I learned that in order to embody and resist dominance as a white woman—both personally and as a member of the general category—I needed to actively engage silence or *perform silence* to form intimate and meaningful alliances with those defined as racially 'different.' As much as silence can constrain, it can also enable and transform." See Johnson, "Qwe're Performances of Silence: Many Ways to Live 'Out Loud,'" in *Silence, Feminism, Power: Reflections at the Edges of Sounds*, eds. Sheena Malhotra and Aimee Carrillo Rowe (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 50-66, at 58.

<sup>13</sup> Tolmie affirms this sentiment, claiming: "The ban provides the reasoning behind the disguise motif of the romance, which orbits an anxiety about female inheritance as disruptive to patrimony" (18). See Tolmie, "Silence in the Sewing Chamber," 14-26.

<sup>14</sup> Peggy McCracken offers a smart reading of this linguistically dense moment, arguing that "In a cautionary move that suggests his anxiety about the gender transformation, Cadour indicates that the name is mutable and could be changed to its feminine form if necessary. And he further qualifies the regendering imposed by the masculine name by calling the child "Silence": the name speaks an absence of linguistic content and puts into question the value of a name that proclaims its own inability to speak. Moreover, the gendered difference that the name is meant to speak in 'Scilentiüs' and 'Scilentiä' is effaced when the form 'Scilense' is used throughout the

suffix that works to reinforce Silence's transition from female to male (*Silence* 2067-2082)<sup>15</sup>—the frame begins with a tale of two husbands fighting over two sister's inheritance (*Silence* 277-300). While the combat between the two men is seemingly accepted and even encouraged within the frame of the text, the loss of two men's lives triggers a revision to the current inheritance laws (*Silence* 301-307). As a result, the changes to the inheritance laws come at the cost of women's financial security (*Silence* 308-316). The new law states women can no longer inherit. This change forces women to depend on men in newly sanctioned ways. At this point, the frame tale is complete and has set the stage for the story of two parents who secretly choose to bypass the new law by transitioning their newborn daughter to a son to ensure he has full rights to his inheritance.

Silence learns to become a man under the tutelage and protection of an appointed nursemaid and a seneschal (*Silence* 2463-2477). After some years pass in the secrecy of the woods, Silence is taught to be intelligent, strong, and tough. In other words, he fulfills all socially expected codes of conduct for men (*Silence* 2492-2496). As Silence grows in age, his father asks to meet with him. He explains to Silence that he was born with female sex organs but that he must continue to perform and act as a man to protect his inheritance (*Silence* 2439-2457). Silence agrees (*Silence* 2460-2462). Meanwhile, angered by Silence's continued displays of masculinity, Nature appears and works to convince Silence that he should, instead, fulfill the expectations associated with his biological female sex (*Silence* 2509-2530). Just as Silence begins to adopt Nature's perspective, Nurture argues that Silence is no longer a woman because

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romance. Although it is masculine as a common noun, 'Scilense' has no specific gender as a proper name, and 'Scilientia' returns only when gender is imposed on 'Scilense' at the end of the story" (526). See McCracken, "'The Boy Who Was a Girl': Reading Gender in the *Roman de Silence*," *The Romantic Review* 85, no.4 (1994): 517-536, at 526.

<sup>15</sup> Citations to *Le Roman de Silence* are to line numbers and are given parenthetically in chapter two. All Old French quotations and English translations are from Sarah Roche-Mahdi, trans., *Silence: a Facing-Page Translation* (Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 1992).

of how he was raised. In Nurture's eyes, Silence should embrace the gender socially attached to the clothes he wears, activities he performs, and privileges he receives because of how his body is externally perceived (*Silence* 2550-2604).

Following the debate between Nature and Nurture, Silence wanders home to find himself face-to-face with two minstrels touring England (*Silence* 2775-2792). Silence runs away with the minstrels, traveling and playing music with their company for four years. As time passes, the minstrels become increasingly jealous of Silence's musical abilities and devise a plan to murder Silence (*Silence* 3322-3338). Out of fear for his life, Silence flees to King Ebain's court, where he eventually becomes a retainer for the King. Queen Eufeme is instantly infatuated with Silence, and after Silence rejects the Queen's advances, the Queen grows angry and falsely accuses Silence of attempted rape (*Silence* 4071-4096). In response to the Queen's accusations, King Ebain sends Silence to the King of France. Meanwhile, Queen Eufeme sends a letter to the King of France, forged on behalf of the King of England, hoping to end Silence's life. Upon learning of this plot, the King of France spares Silence's life, and subsequently, Silence becomes a favorite at the French court (*Silence* 5115-5125). Eventually, Silence is ordered back to England, and when they arrive, Queen Eufeme attempts to seduce him again. Silence rejects her overtures for the final time (*Silence* 5695-5715). Angered by Silence's persistent refusals, Queen Eufeme instructs King Ebain to send Silence on what she believes to be an impossible mission: he must capture Merlin, a figure who can only be caught by the trick of a woman (*Silence* 5799-5803). Silence succeeds in capturing Merlin and brings him to court. Merlin, accordingly, reveals Silence's assigned sex and ousts the Queen's lover, who has been cross-dressing as a nun (*Silence* 6528-6540). The story ends with the execution of the Queen and her lover and the marriage of King Ebain and Silence, now reclothed and renamed Scilentiä (*Silence* 6629-6669).

Given the central concerns of the text, it is not surprising that much of the scholarship on *Le Roman de Silence* has centered around the presentation of gender, heteronormativity, and the linguistic possibilities and limitations that the text affords. To that end, one could distill scholarly preoccupations from the 1980s into two distinct categories: deconstruction and poststructuralist poetics<sup>16</sup> and feminism.<sup>17</sup> Kathleen J. Brahney offers a feminist reading that celebrates *Le Roman de Silence* as a tale "...indicative of a positive, forceful portrait of womanhood which runs counter to the misogynistic tide of much of thirteenth-century French literature."<sup>18</sup> Brahney's representative work speaks to larger preoccupations with feminine silence at the time. With the 1990s came a continued interest in reading *Silence* through a feminist lens with the addition of a queer theorist perspective.<sup>19</sup> For Elizabeth A. Waters, queer readings of *Le Roman de Silence* explode traditionally feminist interpretations of the text by thinking beyond binary

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<sup>16</sup> For deconstruction and poststructuralist readings of *Silence*, see: R. Howard Bloch, "Silence and Holes: The *Roman de Silence* and the Art of the Trouvère," *Yale French Studies*, no. 70 (1986); Peter Allen, "The Ambiguity of Silence: Gender, Writing and *Le Roman de Silence*," in *Sign, Sentence, Discourse: Language in Medieval Thought and Literature*, eds. Julian N Wasserman and Lois Roney (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1989), 98-112.

<sup>17</sup> Robert L.A. Clark proposed a revision to the scholarly groupings ("feminist and sociological") of the text put forth by Regina Psaki in her introduction to a special issue of *Arthuriana* on *Le Roman de Silence* (50). Instead, Clark claims *Silence* criticism from 1985 to 1989 can be neatly divided into "deconstruction and poststructuralist poetics...and feminism..." (50). He continues, "No fewer than eight analyses of the text appeared between 1985 and 1989 (Kathleen J. Brahney, Kate Mason Cooper, Anita Benaim Lasry, Michèle Perret, R. Howard Bloch, Heather Lloyd, Joan Ferrante, Peter Allen) in readings that very much bear the mark of that period's preoccupations: deconstruction and poststructuralist poetics, on the one hand, and feminism, on the other" (50). See Robert L.A. Clark, "Queering Gender and Naturalizing Class in *Roman de Silence*," *Arthuriana* 12, no. 1 (2002): 50-63, at 50.

<sup>18</sup> Kathleen J. Brahney, "When Silence Was Golden: Female Personae in the *Roman de Silence*," in *The Spirit of the Court: Selected Proceedings of the Fourth Congress of the International Courtly Literature Society, Toronto 1983*, eds. Glyn S. Burgess and Robert A. Taylor (Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 1985), 52-61, at 54.

<sup>19</sup> Importantly, the text's popularity was not always the case. Unbeknownst to Lord Middleton, within his manor house sat a box marked "old papers – no value," which contained the manuscript we now call *Silence*; but the text, alongside letters from Henry VIII, was not discovered until 1911 by W.H. Stevenson. Even after its finding, the manuscript was largely ignored except for a few, short mentions by Heinrich Gelzer in 1917, 1925, and 1927. Nearly fifty years later, the manuscript was edited for the first time in the 1960s by Lewis Thorpe and published independently in 1972. In 1992, Sarah Roche-Mahdi made revisions to Thorpe's out of print edition and published an updated modern English translation of *Le Roman de Silence*, which is still widely used today. Following Thorpe and Roche-Mahdi's English translations, scholarship on the text began to flourish. See Roche-Mahdi, "Introduction," xi-1.

categories and “heterosexist assumptions.”<sup>20</sup> For Waters, E. Jane Burns, and Peggy McCracken, queer theory highlights a pressing need for a kind of “third path”<sup>21</sup> for Silence and scholarship on the text. In its time, this new avenue worked to move the scholarly conversation beyond either/or binaries toward a wide array of possibilities brought forth by the “...valuation of cross-dressed, drag or transgender identities: queer identities.”<sup>22</sup>

In more recent scholarship, Jessica Barr builds upon Waters, Burns, and McCracken’s foundational work by arguing that *Le Roman de Silence* is a text deeply preoccupied with gender expressions that stem beyond either/or categories.<sup>23</sup> However, Barr also claims that Silence and Merlin can present as non-normative when they are out of sight.<sup>24</sup> More specifically, for Barr, Silence is only able to fully explore and embody such gender-fluid performances and queer identities within the space of the forest, a space that lies outside heteronormative court systems.<sup>25</sup> Similarly, she states that Merlin becomes the wild, beastly man he is when he is away from the public eye.<sup>26</sup> While such a reading allows for non-normative presentations to be momentarily accepted within limited spaces in the text, one must ask what we are to make of the remaining scenes in which Silence/silence and Merlin’s queer expressions prove central to the narrative.

Merlin’s laughter is best understood with the silence of this story. When Silence brings Merlin to the King, Merlin laughs hysterically and refuses to justify his sonic disruptions. In

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<sup>20</sup> Elizabeth A. Waters, “The Third Path: Alternative Sex, Alternative Gender in *Le Roman de Silence*,” *Arthuriana* 7, no. 2 (1997): 35.

<sup>21</sup> E. Jane Burns, “Conclusion: Bodies at Stake,” in *Bodytalk: When Women Speak in Old French Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 241-50, at 245; McCracken, ““The Boy Who Was a Girl,”” 517-536; Waters, “The Third Path,” 37.

<sup>22</sup> Waters, “The Third Path,” 37-8.

<sup>23</sup> Jessica Barr, “The Idea of the Wilderness: Gender and Resistance in *Le Roman de Silence*,” *Arthuriana* 30, no. 1 (2020): 3-25.

<sup>24</sup> In a similar reading in which gender identity is attached to a particular space, Tolmie argues Silence momentarily links femininity to domesticity after Nurture “teaches” Silence the socially accepted gender trainings of women and men in society. See Tolmie, “Silence in the Sewing Chamber,” 14-26.

<sup>25</sup> Barr, “The Idea of the Wilderness,” 18-9.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 3-25.

these moments of silent refusal, Merlin's laugh resounds in its resistance. Eventually, Merlin's refusal is met with consequences as Merlin's laughter and silent refusal are perceived as confrontations to the King: "Li rois par maltalent respont: / 'S'il orendroit ne le despont, / Gel ferai livrer a martyre'" [Vexed at this, the King replied, / 'If he doesn't come up with an explanation right here and now, / I will have him executed'] (*Silence* 6225-7). In an attempt to regain control over Merlin's laughter, the King turns to threats of violence to reassert the order Merlin's sonic disorder and silent refusal to answer have brought to his court. It appears that the only response that can save Merlin's life is a response of words, but such demands are met with even greater silence from Merlin. The King's threats prove to be, at least temporarily, powerless against Merlin's sonic and silent expressions as Merlin meets the King's commands with even more combative laughter and silence:

Ainc por blecier, ne por quasscier,  
Ne por le roi ne volt lasscier,  
Et li rois derve enaises d'ire,  
Qye Merlins ne li volt mot dire. (*Silence* 6235-8).

[Neither wounds nor blows / Nor the presence of the King could make him stop laughing,  
/ And the King was nearly beside himself with rage, / Because Merlin wouldn't tell him a thing.]

The passage reveals that the King vocalizes that there is no threat or demand, which can make Merlin lift the veiled cloak that conceals his laughter. No matter what the King threatens, Merlin "ne li volt mot dire" [wouldn't tell him a thing]. By depriving the King of a linguistic explanation, Merlin's laughter, at least at this moment, disempowers the words of the King and his rulership. Laughing, Merlin stands firm in resistance and defiance, wielding an agency of sound and silence beyond the King's reach in this passage.

This reading allows for the call of Silence's silence and the response of Merlin's laughter to resound in and through Merlin's body as he orchestrates a symphony of sonic and silent

refusal. In contrast, most of the scholarship on *Le Roman de Silence* that grapples with its sonic traces primarily fixates on the stigmatized silence surrounding Silence's (female) body<sup>27</sup> or how language often fails to capture Silence's queer gender expressions.<sup>28</sup> Thus, deconstruction and poststructuralist readings that touch upon sound have primarily done so from the angle of its absence.<sup>29</sup> Much of this critical conversation begins with R. Howard Bloch claims that the undefinable nature of Silence's body mirrors the relationship between the writer and their writing, each frustrated by that which language cannot say and the "always already dislocated [nature of] speech."<sup>30</sup> Drawing heavily on Bloch's argument, Peter Allen posits that the poem is intentionally filled with gaps and ambiguities. The textual insistence on silence resists our scholarly impulse to tear open the text for a univocal reading violently.<sup>31</sup> In response to both Bloch and Allen, Katherine Terrell argues that Silence's very name draws attention to the inadequacies of language, as neither Silence's name in Latin nor the vernacular captures the plurality and malleability of Silence's gender identity.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> For interpretations that code Silence's body female and equate such gendering to the fact of silencing, see: Simon Gaunt, "The Significance of Silence," *Paragraph: A Journal of Modern Critical Theory* 13, no. 2 (1990): 202–16; Allen, "The Ambiguity of Silence," 98–112; Roberta Krueger, "Questions of Gender in Old French Courtly Romance" in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance*, ed. Roberta Krueger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 107–110; Roche-Mahdi, "A Reappraisal of the Role of Merlin in the *Roman de Silence*," *Arthuriana* 12, no. 1 (2002): 6–21.

<sup>28</sup> For arguments that claim language fails or cannot fully convey Silence's queer performance within the text, see: Emma Campbell, "Translating Gender in Thirteenth-Century French Cross-Dressing Narratives: *La Vie de Sainte Euphrosine* and *Le Roman de Silence*," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 49, no. 2 (2019): 233–264; Katherine Terrell, "Competing Gender Ideologies and the Limitations of Language in *Le Roman de Silence*," *Romance Quarterly* 55, no.1 (2008): 35–48; Bloch, "Silence and Holes," 81–99; Allen, "The Ambiguity of Silence," 98–112.

<sup>29</sup> This is not to suggest that there are no interpretations of the sonic in *Le Roman de Silence*. For a reading that compares episodes of Merlin laughing throughout the Arthurian tradition, see: Thorpe, "Merlin's Sardonic Laughter," 323–39. For scholarship that tends to the sonic qualities of Silence/Malduit as minstrel, see: Linda Marie Zaerr, "When Silence Plays Vielle: The Metaperformance Scenes of *Le Roman de Silence* in Performance," *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal* 42, no. 1 (2009): 99–116; Clark, "Queering Gender and Naturalizing Class in *Roman de Silence*," 60; Kate Mason Cooper, "Elle and L: Sexualized Textuality in *Le Roman de Silence*," *Romance Notes* 25, no. 3 (Spring 1985): 341–360, at 349–50.

<sup>30</sup> Bloch, "Silence and Holes," 93, 98–9.

<sup>31</sup> Allen, "The Ambiguity of Silence," 109–10.

<sup>32</sup> Terrell, "Competing Gender Ideologies," 35.

The scholarship on Silence's silence and the limitations of language are crucial, and it is this work that I wish to build upon. To this end, I argue that we must read Merlin and Silence together, as both negotiate the complexities of their positions through sonic refusals. In both cases, this is the refusal to speak in specific prescribed ways. By moving from the fact of silencing thrust upon Silence at birth to a wielding of self-elected silence as a young adult, silence affords Silence a new form of agency. Silence, as a selected tool, allows Silence a fluidity of male, female, and trans identities. This reading celebrates the variability of Silence's gender expressions through the power of silence rather than its oppression. In their sonic refusals, Merlin similarly exerts his agency through laughter and silent resistance. Because of the tool of laughter, Merlin can embody the aspects of his identity that seem to contradict each other but coalesce within him: man/animal, wild/socialized, and insider/outsider. By interpreting the characters of Merlin and Silence as an embodied echoing, we, scholars, arrive at a new way of thinking about why Silence captures Merlin—linked together, I read both as hybridized, multiple figures who cannot be fully contained in language.

### **Untangling Oppressive Forms of Silence from Silence's Silent Agency**

*Le Roman de Silence* features both oppressive silences and agencies of silence, and while sound studies scholarship acknowledges the first form of silence,<sup>33</sup> I turn here to sonic approaches that reopen the possibility for scholars to see silence as a tool that empowers. When its author turns to silence as a mode of resistance (*Silence* 6273-85), *Le Roman de Silence* depicts a version of silence that is neither a repressive force nor an end to voice. In this sense, silence is not an absence nor a nothingness; it is a perceived presence that resides on a spectrum of sound.

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<sup>33</sup> While the field of sound studies is, as a whole, more interested in exploring the functionality and nuances of silence, sound studies scholarship certainly recognizes and problematizes oppressive forms of silence, too. For an exemplary essay that critiques the fact of silencing before pivoting to the agency silence can afford, see: Vincent Jungkunz, "The Promise of Democratic Silences," *New Political Science* 34, no. 2 (2012): 127-133.

For experimental composer John Cage, silence always contains sounds so that silence can be broken down into one of two categories. The first category, “audible silences,” includes “unintended silence,” or what is colloquially referred to as “background noise” or “ambient sound.”<sup>34</sup> This category is also composed of sounds that are too low or high in frequency to detect with the human ear; thus, such sounds are perceived as silence.<sup>35</sup> The second category of silence is “absolute silence,” which is “outside the range of the audible...silence in death, the silence of death, death as silence.”<sup>36</sup>

As it is represented in literature, the sonic blends “audible silences” with “absolute silence,” for the object-reader relationship is sonically symbiotic both in touch and the act of reading. All stories are inherently silent in the absolute sense, as Silence is merely a character brought to life through the silent words on the page. Yet, readers understand Silence through their representation of politicized silence. This act is perceived sonically as our readerly eyes skim the references to silence in writing and process those words in our mind as both the absolute silent sign and audible signifier. Thus, *Le Roman de Silence* exposes, and Cage brings to light in his musical composition, that silence is always present, coexisting on a pulsating spectrum alongside sound. Even when listeners cannot audibly hear what is being said or how a sonic reference in the text aurally sounds, its presence thrives in vibration through the sensory-stimulated act of reading and the tactile relationship between reader and text.

Throughout *Le Roman de Silence*, sonic utterances and extralinguistic expressions complicate perceived dualities whereby speaking confers visibility. Yet, when the eponymous Silence resists speaking and falls silent as a young adult, they do so to take up space and remain

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<sup>34</sup> Cobussen, “Silence and Death,” *Deconstruction in Music*, accessed September 28, 2022, <http://www.deconstruction-in-music.com/john-cage/silence-and-death/3171>.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

visible through their silent refusal and elected withholdings (*Silence* 2473-2496). However, this was not always the way Silence encountered silence. Silence first experiences a version of silencing through a cloak of secrecy. When Silence was born, Cadour and Eufemie, Silence's parents, chose to conceal, through the omission of language, that Silence was born with female sex organs (*Silence* 1747-1760). Before the age of twelve, Silence experienced their body without an awareness of their biological sex. However, at the age of twelve, Cadour, Silence's father, discloses Silence's assigned sex and the fact that he and Eufemie decided to raise Silence as a boy (*Silence* 2439-2454). Cadour insists, moreover, that Silence must continue living as a man, staying silent about his biological sex (*Silence* 2455-2457). Jane Tolmie suggests that Silence decides to remain male, at least momentarily, which "fuels the fictional possibilities of the romance."<sup>37</sup> Instead, I read Silence's silence as instrumental in providing a form of agency that allows him to express his gender identity as he desires rather than interpreting masculinity as the key to his agency. By embracing this inherited form of silence, Silence removes the secret his parents placed onto his body and morphs it into a form of elected silence (*Silence* 2439-2496).

Silence seems to accept the fact that he was born with female sex organs with relative ease and steadfastness (*Silence* 2439-2462). In many ways, their father's disclosure only seems to strengthen their desire to perform the prescribed roles of a man (*Silence* 2463-2496). It is only when Nature and Nurture appear that the textual narrator uses the subjunctive "si" [if] to speculate about the complexities they imagine surrounding Silence's transition:

Si est li voirs, cho dist l'estorie  
 Ki de Silence fait memorie,  
 C'onques ne fu tells abstinence  
 Com poés oïr de Silence.  
 Jo ne di pas qu'il ne pe[n]sast  
 Diversement, et ne tensast/  
 Diverse cogitatiön

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<sup>37</sup> Tolmie, "Silence in the Sewing Chamber," 19.

Com enfant de tel natiön,  
Meësmement enfant si tendre,  
Ki doit a tel usage entendre. (*Silence* 2657-2666)

[If what the story that keeps alive / The memory of Silence tells us / Is true, you never heard of such forbearance / As was to be found in Silence. / I'm not saying that he didn't / Go through periods of hesitation / And inner conflict, / As might be expected in a young person who came of such good stock, / But who was also a tender child / Who had to force herself to live that way]

Note the narrator's contortion of the poetics of the text here. The narrator draws upon the linguistic play of the narrative to sow doubt about Silence's gender performance through the inaccessible silences that Silence embodies: "Si est li voirs, cho dist l'estorie / Ki de Silence fait memorie, / C'onques ne fu tells abstinence" [If what the story that keeps alive / The memory of Silence tell us / Is true, you never heard of such forbearance]. Here, the narrator weaponizes the possibilities abundant in Silence's fluid gender identity by turning this linguistic play into a form of questionable uncertainty through the subjunctive "si" [if]. According to the narrator, Silence may have experienced the disjunction between his body and his gender performance as something to endure. The narrator finds support for this speculation by emphasizing the text's gendered puns: *he* might have gone through "diversment, et ne tensast/ / Diverse cogitatiön" [periods of hesitation and inner conflict] because this tender child "Ki doit a tel usage entendre" [had to force *herself* to live that way]. The case is complex—a fact the narrator selectively highlights and then hides behind: "Jo ne di pas" [I'm not saying] the narrator opines, "qu'il ne pe[n]sast / Diversement, et ne tensast/" [that he didn't go through periods of hesitation]. The statement posits inner conflict in the young protagonist only through a doubled negation ("Jo ne di pas qu'il ne pe[n]sast" [I'm not saying that he didn't]) rather than through any straightforward claim of Silence's suffering.

While the narrator may speculate about a possible tension or conflict within Silence, the subjunctive “si” [if] (*Silence* 2657) that frames this interjection also allows for the possibility to read such a transition as both non-linear and desired. This earlier moment of restraint or “abstinence” (*Silence* 2659) attempts to dismiss Silence’s decision to perform as male, even at times when that choice was made, at least initially, for Silence. Silence’s ability to exercise forbearance allows for a reading that presents Silence’s gender expression as more than a decision made on their behalf; they now begin to elect this identity out of desire. Thus, even in the narrator’s speculation lies a not-knowing possibility created by Silence’s fortitude. In this sense, I read the narrator’s glossing of Silence’s “abstinence” [forbearance] (*Silence* 2659) as a symbolic silence that highlights Silence’s desire to perform as male rather than as an example of “Diverse cogitation” [inner conflict], as the narrator suggests. Such a claim is supported by the fact that the passage above shows a shift from the silence of secrets made on Silence’s behalf to a silence of “abstinence” that Silence embodies from the inside out. This development offers iterations of silence as forced, accepted, and elected.

The reader can access Silence's inner thoughts after Nature, Nurture, and Reason visit Silence. These thoughts reveal that, at this moment, he not only performs masculinity but also identifies as male. This decision is one that Silence takes seriously, mulling over what life would be like as a man or a woman: “Et poise dont en son corage” [weigh[ing] in his heart of hearts] (2634) and seeing “Et voit que moils valt li us d’ome / Que l’us de feme, c’est la some” [in short, that a man’s life / was much better than that of a woman] (*Silence* 2637-38). As Silence weighs the culturally imposed benefits and drawbacks of each sex, he begins to associate masculinity with power and privilege and femininity with disadvantage and struggle: “Car vallés sui et ancient medicine. / Ne voel perdre ma grant honor, / Ne la voel cangier a menor.” [For I’m a

young man, not a girl. / I don't want to lose my high position; / I don't want to exchange it for a lesser] (*Silence* 2648-2652). While it may be tempting to interpret such a passage as a moment of internalized misogyny (i.e., an echoing that resounds in Nature and Nurture's earlier debate), I read this scene as an instance of recognition in which Silence can see the trap of gender systems. Roberta Krueger interprets this moment as one that carefully allows its readers to view both the limitations of gender and the text's prevailing voice: "Precisely because [the text] reveals so clearly the repressive political matrix of gender, the observant reader might glimpse a chink in the narrator's antifeminist armor."<sup>38</sup> To demonstrate, Silence draws attention to the socially prescribed rights he so happens to inherit at the expense of the female sex. Thus, Silence's inner monologue articulates the tension not of his own gender identity (for he embraces his own masculine identity here) but in the world that surrounds him.

As the narrative continues, Silence is allowed to curate a persona for himself as a minstrel,<sup>39</sup> and it is in this instance that Silence returns to the shrouded silence of secrecy to become a male minstrel named Malduit. As Malduit, Silence fuses silence with sound through the instrument of his own body:

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<sup>38</sup> Krueger, "Women Readers and the Politics of Gender in *Le Roman de Silence*," in *Women Readers and the Ideology of Gender in Old French Verse Romance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 101-127, at 112.

<sup>39</sup> Though Cooper and I interpret Silence's gender identity differently, she offers a brilliant reading on what the role of minstrel offers Silence in their character development: "Silence's heart is her own private Siren; she submits to its seduction by escaping from her isolated castle to join up with two minstrels bound for France, where she will learn the arts of singing and playing music. Once again, she becomes foremost in her art and finds in *joglerie* the perfect expression for the massive contradictions implied by her textual figure. The term *joglerie*, derived from the Latin *ioculari*, is alternately defined in the vernacular as 'playing tricks,' 'joking' or 'singing songs'; it is often assimilated in this and other writings of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries with the term *jenglois*, from the Latin *iactare*, designating in medieval French 'idle or empty speech.' In either case, playing tricks, joking and empty speech all have one thing in common - the use of signs or symbols to point to that which is not there, to indicate absence. An analogue may be established with the usage of the terms 'song' or 'music' in the graphic representation of writing. Silence as a *jongleur* is the androgynous inscription of the poet, for she is at once a depiction of that perfect emptiness which poetic language approaches (the unseen female body, the unheard female voice), and a representation of the quest for that perfect emptiness, that absent femininity, through song and music. In *joglerie*, Silence represents the maximum: self-contained, self-generated, she is harmony and consonance, the perfect union of desire and the expression of desire—all that is impossible to be said." See Cooper, "Elle and L," 349-50.

A cort se fait nomer Malduit,  
Car il se tient moult por mal duit,  
Moult mal apris lonc sa nature.  
Et sil refait par couverture.  
Il est forment de grant servisce,  
Et si se paine en tolte guise  
De çals server a volente.  
Avoir porcace a grant plenté.  
Por cho qu'ert bials, et si vallans,  
En son mestier si tres vallans, /  
Ert il a cort tols jors li sire. (*Silence* 3177-87)

[In public, he called himself Malduit, / because he thought himself very badly brought up, / very badly educated about his nature, / and also to conceal his identity. / He gave the very best service / and exerted himself in every way / to do the minstrels' bidding and please them. He earned a great deal of money. / Because he was handsome, gracious, / and such an accomplished musician, / he was the center of attention wherever he went].

At first, the narrator suggests that “Malduit” is a name shrouded in the silence of secrecy because of Silence’s shame: “Car il se tient moult por mal duit, / Moult mal apris lonc sa nature. / Et sil refait par couverture” [because he thought himself very badly brought up, / very badly educated with regard to his nature, / and also to conceal his identity]. Yet, the passage itself seems to resist this interpretation as Silence and the public are described as embracing this performer: “Por cho qu'ert bials, et si vallans, / En son mestier si tres vallans, / Ert il a cort tols jors li sire” [because he was handsome, gracious, / and such an accomplished musician, / he was the center of attention wherever he went]. Thus, this supposed silence of concealment can be read as a silence of election that allows Silence to rewrite the meaning of his body.

As Malduit, Silence is male and musical, and this possibility echoes in exchange with the powerful forms of silence that allow for Malduit’s sonic performativity. Similarly, Linda Marie Zaerr reads Silence’s silence as intrinsic to his musical performance:

The performance of *Le Roman de Silence*, however, does not allow us to hear Silence's voice. Instead, it reveals his silence. It is only in performance that the text's ambiguities

are embodied in the dichotomy between the explicit statements that the minstrel Silence is making music and the reality of his silence.<sup>40</sup>

Here, Zaerr echoes the ideas expressed in the chapter's epigraph, in which sound and silence are described in a rhythmic dialogue. From this exchange, Cobussen offers an interpretation of sound and silence in which both resound in the other.<sup>41</sup> This echoing is apparent in Zaerr's reading of the text, as she describes Silence's observable silence alongside the implied sonority of his performance. It is from this fusion of sound and silence that the figure of Malduit is born and empowered.

When Silence uses silence to electively conceal his gender identity, the reader witnesses silence as a sonic agent, but when Silence is forced to turn to silence as a form of self-oppression, the fact of silencing becomes self-inflicting. After leaving his life as a minstrel behind,<sup>42</sup> Silence becomes a retainer at King Ebain's court. There, Queen Eufeme pursues Silence aggressively, commanding Silence to live up to the expectations of his perceived gender identity and "bons hom" [be a man] (*Silence* 3819). The Queen chooses to interpret Silence's rejection as an indicator of homosexuality, claiming, "Se cis pensast / Viers feme, rien ne s'en tensast / Qu'orains n'eüst a moi joé" ['...if he were interested / in women, nothing could have prevented him / from taking his pleasure with me just now'] (*Silence* 3929-3931). In response, Waters asserts that "in a strictly binary discourse where an accusation of homosexuality should

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<sup>40</sup> Zaerr, "When Silence Plays Vielle," 103-04.

<sup>41</sup> Cobussen, "Cage and Silence."

<sup>42</sup> Zaerr asserts the impossibility of Silence as minstrel (beyond the time that he spends in that role) in that "the *conte* is built around two unreasonable interdictions, one against girls inheriting, and the other against minstrels. Silence defies both, the first by living as a boy so he can inherit, though he is by nature a girl, and the second by living as a minstrel, though he is by nature Silence. After asserting his superiority as a minstrel, he loses that identity as he returns to his role as son of Count Cadour. After asserting his superiority as a male knight, he loses that identity and returns to the role of woman" (114). Importantly, Zaerr draws attention to the generic limits: this is a text that proposes (for me) one "unreasonable interdictio[n]," and in this sense Silence's ability to perform as minstrel must end. Where I depart from Zaerr's reading is in her interpretation of Silence's gender identity. Silence never "loses" their gender identity, but I do read the ending of the text as a kind of "correction" to all the queer possibilities that have come to pass over the course of the story. For further reading, see: Zaerr, "When Silence Plays Vielle," 114.

imply feminine characteristics, this one functions, paradoxically, to reassert masculinity.”<sup>43</sup> I, too, read the Queen’s speech as an attempt to goad Silence into verbally explaining himself. But, rather than reading this “parado[x]” of “masculinity” as a result of the Queen’s “binary discourse,” I claim that it is because Silence remains steadfast in his silence, refusing to offer answers to the Queen’s demands that he maintains his elected gender and sexual identity for himself:

La dame por noient se painne  
Et li vallés fort se demainne.  
Pense s’or li issoit des mains  
N’i enterroit des mois al mains.  
Mais li ostoirs qui joint a l’anne  
Ne se paine plus ne ahane  
De restraindre, quant il a fain,  
Qu’el l’enfant...(Silence 3859-3866)

[The lady was expending all this effort for nothing, / and the youth was in extreme agitation. / He was thinking that if he could escape her clutches now, / he wouldn’t set foot in that place for at least a month. / But a hungry goshawk that has seized a wild duck / doesn’t struggle harder / to hold onto its prey / than did the Queen with this youth...]

In the passage, Silence’s silence is implied by his internal monologue, which simultaneously works to create a well-rounded character with motivations and complexity. Externally, the only form of communication that Silence offers is through the silent frustration of his body language: “Et li vallés fort se demainne” [and the youth was in a state of extreme agitation]. To understand the intricacies of the internal and external displays of silence here, I draw upon Vincent Jungkunz’s theory of “unsaying silences,” in which he argues that an individual might turn to silence as a way of disengaging from traditional modes of constructive meaning: “the intentionality of some of our silences and the effort to refuse speech, to undo what speech has accomplished, to rewind what has gone before.”<sup>44</sup> In this sense, Silence’s divided silences do not

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<sup>43</sup> Waters, “The Third Path,” 42.

<sup>44</sup> Jungkunz, “The Promise of Democratic Silences,” 134.

equate to external shame or internal secrets. Instead, we can understand this silence as a form of refusal: “Pense s’or li issoit des mains / N’i enterroit des mois al mains” [He was thinking that if he could escape her clutches now, / he wouldn’t set foot in that place for at least a month].

Silence refuses to engage with the Queen’s heteronormative speech acts through his represented silence.

Though poetry is often a genre that draws attention to sound beyond its meaning, in this text, punning and linguistic play become antithetical to silence, as such literary devices are often afforded to the dominant voices of the text and their heteronormative agenda, such as the narrator’s:

Car onques Tristrans por Izelt,  
Ne dame Izeuls por dant Tristran  
N’ot tele angoisse ne ahan  
Com eult Eufeme la roïne  
Por le vallet ki ert meschine. (*Silence* 3700-04)

[Tristan never suffered / such anguished yearning for Isolde / nor Lady Isolde for Lord Tristan / as did Queen Eufeme / for this young man who was a girl.]

Here, the narrator exploits this comparison between Queen Eufeme’s lust for Silence and Tristan and Isolde’s famous suffering to remind readers that Queen Eufeme only feels such intense emotions because she is under the guise that she is in a relationship that resembles theirs: “Car onques Tristrans por Izelt, / ... / N’ot tele angoisse ne ahan / Com eult Eufeme la roïne” [Tristan never suffered / ... / nor Lady Isolde for Lord Tristan / as did Queen Eufeme,” In this sense, the narrator uses this intertextual reference to set up a strategic conflict, turning a possibility into something it deems impossible. The narrator’s anxiety ultimately cannot prevent such fears, though, for at the tale’s end, the reader finds out that the Queen was in a same-sex relationship with a cross-dressing nun all along (*Silence* 6528-6540). Thus, what makes this relationship improbable is not anatomy but consent. As McCracken explains, “the relation of Silence’s body

to any kind of sexuality remains impossible to determine in *Le Roman de Silence*: although the young knight repeatedly becomes the object of desire in the romance, Silence her/himself never expresses any kind of sexual or amorous desire.”<sup>45</sup> Out of fear of drawing attention to the possibility that the Queen and Silence could be lovers, the narrative turns away from the fact that more significant issues of consent, harassment, and potential violence are at stake here. This is the real danger of this narrative, but it goes unaddressed to quell textual anxieties about queer desire.

As the relationship between the Queen and Silence evolves, so, too, do the Queen’s lustful feelings, revealing a tension between the rhythmic poetics of the text and Silence’s silent refusal. The text continues to showcase its linguistic play and puns regarding Silence’s gender, but with each rhetorical opening, the narrator interjects and reinterprets the rhythmic poetics of the text for its readers:

‘Eut hom de vostre parage onques,  
Tant fust de pris, ensi grant don?  
Mon cors vos doinse tolt a bandon!  
Et li vallés qui est mescine  
Est moult en dure discipline. (*Silence* 3782-86)

[‘Was any man of your lineage, / however exalted, ever offered such a glorious gift? / I’m offering you my body in complete surrender.’ Now the youth, who is a girl / is in a terrible situation.]

The language of the text oscillates between descriptions of Silence as a “hom” [man] and “li vallés qui est mescine” [the youth who is a girl]. Silence’s queer expressions make this fluidity possible, a sentiment echoed by Bloch in his assertion that “Silence represents the systemic refusal of univocal meaning.”<sup>46</sup> However, rather than allowing the fluid nature of Silence’s gender to lay bare in the shifting of pronouns legible in the text, the narrator is quick to suggest

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<sup>45</sup> McCracken, “‘The Boy Who Was a Girl,’” 530.

<sup>46</sup> Bloch, “Silence and Holes,” 88.

to its readers that the Queen is misreading Silence’s body through the correction “li vallés qui est mescine” [the youth who is a girl]. In this sense, the narrator clamps down on the possibilities Silence’s silence affords, showing how this character lies in tension with the text’s agenda. This tension positions the sonic poetics of the text, its rhythm, and linguistic play at odds with the figure of Silence so that silence and sound create discord rather than an echoed harmony here. In this sense, the sonic elements of poetry function as a literary device that permits Silence’s queer narrative while also correcting each instance as it arises.

Driven by anger at Silence’s persistent refusals, the Queen makes Silence a central figure in her revenge fantasy as she sends Silence on what she believes to be an impossible task: to capture Merlin in the forest, a feat that can only be completed by a woman, or so rumor has it:

La dame est plaine de grant rage.  
 L’engien a prest en son corage,  
 .....  
 ... ‘Rois Fortigieme  
 Fist une tor jadis ovrer  
 Mais ne pot machon recovrer  
 Ki peüst faire ester la tor.  
 .....  
 [Merlin] fist la tor al roi ester,  
 Et donc n’i volt plus arrester;  
 Mais il dist donc, ains qu’en alast  
 Et que la tor adevalast,  
 Qu’il seroit encor si salvages  
 Et si fuitils par ces boscages,  
 Ja n’estroit pris, n’ensi, n’ensi,  
 C’est verité que jo vos di, /  
 Se ne fust par engien de feme. (*Silence* 5779-80, 5784-87, 5795-83)

[The lady was filled with violent rage. / She had a clever plan all prepared, / ... / ... ‘King Vortigern / once wanted a tower built, / but couldn’t find a mason / who could make the tower stand. / ... / [Merlin] made the King’s tower stand, / and then he was ready to leave. / But before he left, / before he came down from the tower, / he said that he would take to the woods / and be so wild and hard to catch / that he could never be taken, / I’m telling you the truth, / except by a woman’s trick.]

The Queen's mission is central to relieving the text's deepest anxieties, as capturing Merlin plucks the "wild man"<sup>47</sup> from the forest and exposes the fact that Silence has female sex organs beneath their clothes. Admittedly, the Queen does not intend to send Silence to the woods to force some private secret about his body to be disclosed. Rather, she crafts a task that she believes he will not be able to complete, intending to erase him from the court forever. Of course, such an accidental exposure is a feature rather than a bug of medieval romance—that is, revealing a supposed "truth" through an impossible setup.

The effect of the Queen's mission is that her quest will, eventually, force Silence into the woman Nature has so aggressively attempted to morph Silence into from the very beginning of the story. Instead of waiting until the violent end of the tale in which the Queen's mission runs amuck, exposing both Silence as biologically female and the Queen's affair with a cross-dressing nun, the text precludes its conclusion by prompting the reader to "out" Silence on their own. This outing occurs when the King echoes the Queen's mission, a mission he insists can only be completed if one lied, for Silence could not have captured Merlin:

'Merlin, Merlin, li rois a dit,  
Or t'ai jo plus chier un petit,  
Por cho que m'as dit verité.  
Mais, se Dex me gart m'ireté,  
Jo te rehac moult d'altre part  
Car tu desis que ja par art  
N'estroies pris, n'estoit par feme.  
Par cele foi que doi Eufeme,  
Sor cuer te rai por ta mençoigne. (*Silence* 6341-49)

[ 'Merlin, Merlin,' said the King, / 'now I like you a little better, / because you are telling the truth, / But, may God preserve my inheritance, / I still dislike you, on the other hand, / because you said you would never be tricked / or captured, except by a woman. By the loyalty I owe Eufeme, / I am still disturbed by your lying. ']

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<sup>47</sup> Robert Sturges explicates that "in the medieval Arthurian corpus, Merlin is precisely a sorcerer who is also in some versions of the story a Wild Man alienated from, and critical of, human society. For further reading, see Sturges, "Raw and the Cooked in *Le Roman de Silence: Merlin at the Limit of the Human*," in *L'Humain et l'Animal dans la France médiévale (XIIIe-XVe s.)* (Leiden: Brill Publishers, 2014), 43-56, at 44.

When the King evokes the language of “verité” [truth] in this passage, the reader is prompted to arrive at an “ah ha” moment in which they are encouraged to think: “I know the ‘truth!’ Silence captures Merlin because Silence was assigned female at birth.” By doing so, the text invites its readers to divulge its secrets so they can be “properly” read.

Alternatively, Waters has read these moments in which the text calls upon its readers to process its gender quandaries less perniciously. Instead of using the reader to force Silence’s outing, Waters has interpreted this moment as the text’s invitation to its readers to witness the complexity of Silence’s gender identity and to potentially arrive at a new term based upon what we see:

[The text] demands that we meditate on identity and sexuality. In this way, the text forces thought toward a third possibility outside the heterosexual matrix: attentive readers must make sense of incongruous textual identities to keep them from collapsing in on themselves. Silence is more than a female, less than a male; we need a term to describe her that is not dependent on these either/or.<sup>48</sup>

Such a reading overlooks the violence of this readerly examination, though, an examination that displaces the agency of Silence’s queer performance and relocates such power in the hands of the subjective reader. Like Waters, Burns also proposes an alternative through the possibility of a “third path.” For Burns, this new possibility might allow “her,” Silence, to “acknowledge the difference of our biological femaleness and have it make a positive difference in the institution.”<sup>49</sup> However, as readers, if we were to vocalize some inherent “biological femaleness,” then we essentially subscribe to the King’s interpretation of “truth.” The implication of truth here, then, is that Silence’s gender identity is somehow a lie. In this sense, the Queen’s initial proposal to capture Merlin is not used to trap Silence, but, instead, it is a

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<sup>48</sup> Waters, “The Third Path,” 42.

<sup>49</sup> Burns, “Conclusion: Bodies at Stake,” 245.

textual device used to prod readers into preemptively “outing” Silence through the rhetoric of “verité” [truth] to quell its anxieties before reaching the end of the story.

### **Silence and Merlin’s Responses of Sonic Resistance and Silent Refusal**

The Queen and her ill-fated mission may have initially brought Silence and Merlin together, but when Silence and Merlin meet in the forest, their bodies echo in queer presentations, and their oscillation between silence and sound produces a synergy that moves well beyond the Queen’s masterful plan or the governing rhetoric of the text. To this end, Merlin and Silence’s synchronization is captured sonically and silently as Merlin’s extralinguistic laughter and refusal to answer mirrors the fluid and resistive presentation of Silence’s body and gender identity. Laughter has the potential to be audibly disruptive, while silence, in its deployment, can act as a stony refusal. Such sounds and silences generate frustration, confusion, and even rage, for no one, King, Queen, nor reader, can know what such sonic traces or withholdings imply (if anything) except Merlin and Silence. As such, laughter and silence allow impossible identities and expressions to form outside language. Such a reading provides us, readers, to see how the queer resonances of Merlin’s laugh echo the queer physicality of Silence’s body. Merlin and Silence move across private and public spaces of the text, forcing others to encounter their figures and the queer possibilities of their bodies without confining them to narrow heteronormative constructs.

Upon their return, the Queen’s shock and dismay speak to the fact that Merlin and Silence are both perceived as pawns that can be moved about to serve the Queen in her overarching plan to erase Silence from her court. Thus, to those in power, Silence and Merlin are objectifiable figures that can be used and discarded. Yet, in their network of sound—speaking

and not speaking, laughing and not justifying—Silence and Merlin begin to deconstruct the constraints imposed upon their bodies.

For Merlin, such constrictions manifest in the animalistic language used to describe his figure: “et si est com uns ors velus” [as hairy as a bear] and “si est isnials com cers de lande” [as fleet as a woodland deer] (*Silence* 5930-1). Based on this description, one might conclude Silence was hunting an animal rather than seeking a man. Robert Sturges reads this animalistic depiction of Merlin as elected rather than slanderous, arguing that “he took to the woods only after accomplishing one of his famous feats of engineering, specifically rebuilding Vortigern’s tower (II. 5784-5802); he has thus demonstrated his humanness and has a choice about living in the wild.”<sup>50</sup> The agency that Sturges points to here is essential, for it is Nature and Nurture that insist upon reading Merlin as part human, part beast (*Silence* 5994-6034). But, much like Silence, this binary approach is not the only way to perceive one’s self. This fact is apparent in that even when Nature and Nurture offer their teachings, Merlin and Silence continue to operate as they wish, proving there are more possibilities beyond Nature and Nurture’s stated options. Sturges elucidates this point by drawing attention to how Merlin’s body ultimately breaks down Nature and Nurture’s characterization: “He is defined by what usually defines the animal...his irresistible appetite, that paradoxically makes him recognizable as human. In some sense, we might say that these descriptions of Merlin deconstruct the opposition between animals and humans and the opposition between wild and civilized.”<sup>51</sup> Though Sturges does not use gendered language here, his description of Merlin’s figure as a body that deconstructs the assumptions that inform it while simultaneously upholding that which feels intrinsic to his being echoes in Silence’s queer agency.

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<sup>50</sup> Sturges, “Raw and the Cooked in *Le Roman de Silence*,” 44.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

When the figures of Nature and Nurture reappear, they chide Merlin's appearance and diet, a maneuver that attempts to reinforce the norms that Merlin's character defies (*Silence* 5994-6034). Such tactics are nothing new and create an echo with early scenes when Nature and Nurture use binary language to critique Silence's queer body (*Silence* 2497-2624). Just as with Silence, Nature and Nurture dispute what they perceive to be Merlin's two choices: either he returns to his "human nature," or he continues to live in a manner "nature est contraire" [contrary to [his] nature] (*Silence* 6000-6005).<sup>52</sup> Earlier, in response to Nature and Nurture, Silence utilized the agency of his silence to evade a definitive, limiting answer. Similarly, here, Merlin turns to sound to resist an either/or, both/and option, as each equation ultimately works to label and constrain.

Although Nature and Nurture encourage Silence and Merlin to conform to a prescribed gender formula, Silence and Merlin's return to court seems to contradict their binary teachings (*Silence* 6161-6169). Silence, a young man, however temporarily, brings Merlin to court, a feat that goes against the supposed rules of Merlin's capturing. At this moment, the reader can reimagine the projected outcome of the Queen's test. From ill-fated mission to queer success, Silence is momentarily victorious.<sup>53</sup>:

Al roi en vient la renomée  
Qu'or vient Silences et Merlins.

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<sup>52</sup> "*Contra naturam*" [contrary to nature] is a key category in medieval accounts of heteronormativity. However, Karma Lochrie explains, "counterintuitive as it seems for a heteronormatively organized world, sodomy is never opposed to heterosexuality in medieval theological discourse. Sodomy, instead, inhabits the zone of sexual acts *contra naturam* that includes other heterosexual acts, such as women on top during heterosexual intercourse. The role that gender deviance plays in the configuration of unnatural acts is crucial to the category, while our modern organization of heterosexual/normal and homosexual/abnormal does not apply at all." See Lochrie, "Introduction: The Heterosyncratic," in *Heterosyncrasies: Female Sexuality When Normal Wasn't* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), xv-xvi.

<sup>53</sup> Similarly, McCracken highlights the queer possibilities made legible in this text even when its ending attempts to hide this work: "However, in the *Roman de Silence* the conventional 'happy ending' is subverted by a subtle narrative resistance to Silence's new appearance. In a validation of Silence's successful masculine performance and of the crossdressed heroine's ambiguous claims about her body recounted throughout the story, Silence's assumption of a female identity is profoundly troubled at the end of the romance." McCracken, "'The Boy Who Was a Girl,'" 531-32.

Por .c. .m. livres d'esterlins  
Ne volsist pas li rois adonques  
Que Silences repairast onques.  
Or est il viers Merlin espris  
Por cho qu'il dist ja n'estroit pris,  
Se ne fust par engien de feme.  
Ei moult en est dolante Eufeme. (*Silence* 6173-6180)

[The King heard the news / that Silence and Merlin were coming. / Not for a hundred thousand pounds sterling / would the King ever have wanted / Silence to return. / And now he was furious with Merlin / because he had said he would never be taken / except by a woman's trick. / Eufeme was also very upset.]

Here, it is clear that both the King and Queen view Silence as male, as their anger and frustration speak to the fact that they do not believe a man could capture Merlin. At the same time, the text pushes for the reader to view the King and Queen's reaction as a moment of misrecognition on their part; their actions, in actuality, work to confirm Silence's gender identity. They did not believe a man could capture Merlin, but he did. As a result, this moment of capture fractures the text, allowing for a queer narrative to persist alongside the heteronormative desires of the text. Though not without its problems, this queer story is made legible through the external validation of the court. However, this readability also forces this queer narrative to come to its end, as the King later works to "correct" this very narrative that is momentarily allowed to thrive in conjunction with the dominant heteronormative preoccupations of the text.

When Silence and Merlin enter King Ebain's court, Merlin presents as a clean-shaven, recognizable man, but what his physical appearance no longer challenges, his laughter does. Barr reads this as confirmation that Merlin can only present as queer within the removed spaces of the wilderness.<sup>54</sup> However, Merlin can still agitate the norms of the court through disruptive modes of expression. This suggests that queer identity is not restricted to a particular space or anyone's external presentation but that it is something Merlin can vocalize in his expressions in any form.

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<sup>54</sup> Barr, "The Idea of the Wilderness," 15.

Merlin's laugh collides with traditional modes of discourse, proving that the power of extralinguistic utterance, particularly for those that have been othered, is located within the force of sound rather than the verbalization of speech.

Notably, when Silence brings Merlin to King Ebain's court, Merlin laughs hysterically at many of the sights he sees, but he refuses to justify the sounds of his laughter, much to the anger of those around him:

Dont rit Merlins, por poi ne derve,  
Et quant il les povres enterve  
Et cil prient que il lor die  
L'oquoison, mais il nel violt mie,  
Et cil muerent enaises d'ire. (*Silence* 6205-9)

[Merlin laughed so hard at this that he almost had a fit. / And when he was amusing himself at the expense of the poor / And they asked him to tell them / The reason why, he refused to say: / They almost died of rage, they were so mad.]

Here, I read Merlin's laugh as a legible fissure in the text, which commands observation and acknowledgment while simultaneously occluding rhetorical meaning. In the passage, "les povres" [the poor] quickly anger, but, I claim, Merlin's laughter does not simply result in feelings of rage, "Et cil muerent enaises d'ire" [They almost died of rage, they were so mad], because it is annoying—albeit that may play a part—but, more importantly, he generates such hostility because he is a man of the woods who was brought to a place governed by hierarchy, etiquette, and social standing.<sup>55</sup> With one "rit" [fit] of laughter, he rejects the social norms of the space feely and with his own accord. When "les povres" [people with low incomes] ask Merlin to explain his laugh—a sound perceived as an inappropriate reaction within the passage—Merlin simply "il ne violt mie" [refused to say]. His refusal results in such rage, "Et cil muerent enaises

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<sup>55</sup> Barr asserts that "Beyond the social world of the patriarchal court, perhaps there is room for gender fluidity. Merlin himself is certainly beyond Ebain's rule; he is a rule unto himself" (Ibid.). Here, Barr and I align in our reading of the court as the epicenter of social decorum in the text, but I depart from her reading when I argue that both Merlin and Silence can enter this space and disrupt using their silent and sonic refusals.

d'ire" [They almost died of rage, they were so mad]. Merlin's disruption quite literally laughs in the face of the social codes of the kingdom and the members of its court who demand justification from Merlin. Thus, Merlin's laughter is a tool that can be used to resist and refuse sonically.

When Silence captures Merlin and brings him to King Ebain's court, Merlin continues to disobey the social norms that structure the spaces of the kingdom. I turn to a lengthy passage in which Merlin greets the King's commoners with a series of laughs as he travels through the town laughing at "un villain" [a peasant] (l. 6191-97), "un mezel" [a leper] (l. 6202-09) and "l'entierer" [a funeral service] (l. 6220). In Merlin's encounters with the various individuals in the kingdom, the onlookers are discomfited by Merlin's inappropriate laugh. In the space of the court, gazing at a burial service or an individual of low status and laughing is considered an unsuitable response, yet it is the response that Merlin returns to again and again:

Voit Merlins enfoir un cors,  
Entre .ii. pieres ensierer.  
Uns priestres cante a l'entierer  
Et uns prodom i crie et pleure.  
Et Merlins en rist en es l'eure.  
Assés i a ki li enquiart  
Por quoi il rit, n'a quoi affiert,  
Mais ne degne un mot responder,  
Son ris esclairier, ne despondre. (*Silence* 6212-6220)

[Merlin saw a body being buried, / Enclosed between two stones / A priest was chanting the burial service / And a man was weeping and crying there. / Again, Merlin burst out laughing at this. / Plenty of people asked him / Why he was laughing and what was going on, / But he didn't deign to answer a word / To enlighten them or explain his laughter.]

The passage demonstrates the socially accepted sonic responses to grief and the objectionable: the priest is expected to chant, and the man is encouraged to weep, but Merlin's laugh disrupts the codes of conduct in the scene, along with his persistent rejection to communicate using words. Merlin's refusal is highlighted by its disruptive quality, as his laughter is out of place

within the described passage. Rather than dismissing his laughter as nonsensical or merely an inappropriate response by an outsider of the court, “Assés i a ki li enquiert / Por quoi il rit, n’a quoi affiert” [Plenty of people asked him / Why he was laughing and what was going on], Merlin meets their inquiries with a refusal: “Mais ne degne un mot responder / Son ris esclairier, ne despondre” [But he didn’t deign to answer a word / To enlighten them or explain his laughter]. The passage reveals the lengths Merlin is willing to go to withhold the meaning of his laughter. Merlin puts himself in significant danger, demonstrating how his sonic refusal threatens the system of power and his bodily safety.

As readers, we are told that Merlin laughs, but neither the narrator nor King Ebain can reveal its linguistic meaning, at least not initially. As a result, the cause or reason (if any) for Merlin’s laugh becomes a mystery of the text, akin to Silence’s silence. Since the narrative resists an explanation at this point, the reader, much like the King, is left with nothing more than the sound of unanswerable laughter to decipher. For Anca Parvulescu, the laugh “at its most basic...is this rhythmic opening of a mouth.”<sup>56</sup> In the case of *Le Roman de Silence*, this action of the mouth is implied rather than shown. More specifically, the text represents his sonic register, but the reader must imagine the physicality of Merlin’s laughter as his mouth opens and spills forth jagged bits of sound into the courtly space of King Ebain’s kingdom. Parvulescu draws further attention to how laughter mimics the physical motions of speech in the mouth, as if laugh straddles the boundary between speech and sound: “In laughter, the mouth opens, its ‘inside’ touching the ‘outside,’ as if it wanted to speak or ‘communicate,’ and yet what is communicated is only the very opening of the mouth, its gaping.”<sup>57</sup> While one does not necessarily laugh in the same register they speak, the physical movement of the mouth, as Parvulescu states, is nearly the

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<sup>56</sup> Anca Parvulescu, *Laughter: Notes on a Passion* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2010), 9.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

same. Importantly, *Le Roman de Silence* obscures Merlin's mouth, removing these communication indicators from the text. Thus, Merlin's laugh is not meant to function as an instrument of articulation. It resists such requests. Merlin's laugh is a sonic embodiment of refusal.

Merlin's rebuff of the mourners' command to justify his laughter creates a form of agency—albeit disruptive—that both draws on the fact that he is an outsider and reinforces his ability to occupy such space of his own accord. Undoubtedly, Merlin could have arrived at the court solemn and ashamed, but he draws attention to himself through his laughter and then through his refusal to explain the means of said laughter. Merlin's persistent refusal to use words as a form of communication leads to much frustration, but this does not change Merlin's behavior. Instead, Merlin continues to laugh seemingly without reason, and such disruptions are met with increasing hostility:

Se li tornent a grant desroi.  
Dont le mainnet dEbaint le roi,  
Se li ont dit de ses ris donques,  
Mais il ne volt mot soner onques. (*Silence* 6221-6224)

[This made [the people] very angry, / And they took [Merlin] before the King / And told him about Merlin's laughter / But he still refused to utter a word.]

The passage reveals the depth of the onlooker's frustration, as they "dont le mainnet dEbaint le roi" [and they took [Merlin] before the King] in hopes that his authority might strip Merlin of the agency afforded by his disruptive laughter by forcing him to provide a verbal explanation using words. Thus, the kingdom's people clearly do not interpret Merlin's laughter as just a response to something he finds humorous. Instead, their reactions suggest that Merlin's laughter conceals linguistic significance. Thus, it would seem that the issue for the hostile observers is that Merlin unconventionally expresses himself during a series of events that they believe are inappropriate

to laugh at and in a way that only he can understand. As such, Merlin's laughter challenges the social codes of the text.

When asked to explain his laughter in a linguistic lexicon, Merlin repeatedly refuses, undisturbed by the frustration he causes. As a result of his resistance, Merlin keeps the power in the mouth of the expressor rather than the receiver or even the icon of power, the King. The public's consistent demand to know also encourages the reader to wonder. Theorists of laughter "conceive of [laughter] as a response to something else, and it is this something else that they are after—the comic, jokes, humor, the grotesque, the ridiculous, the ludicrous, etc."<sup>58</sup> According to Parvulescu, the desire to uncover what is being laughed at can be traced back to the "Aristotelian premise that laughter is a reaction to something ugly or improper yet not producing pain. We laugh at such objects ('funny,' we call them today) on condition that they are harmless."<sup>59</sup> Parvulescu pointedly reminds scholars that while jokes may be funny, often, "there is no joke, and the question of laughter's cause or origin is beside the point."<sup>60</sup> In relation to *Le Roman de Silence*, what Merlin's laughter means (if anything) remains only accessible to him, and as Parvulescu suggests, that might be the point in and of itself. Such a claim invites readers to witness Merlin's laugh as laughter, visually and sonically. This is not a puzzle to be solved, but Merlin's laugh can be understood in its sonic form as a representation that challenges what is appropriate, expected, and courtly.

By destabilizing the King's authority, Merlin's laughter temporarily subverts the dualistic nature of ruler and subject and the powerful from the powerless. Merlin's sonic retort relocates the power of articulation, ownership, and knowledge back into the mouth of the speaker,

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 4-5.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 3-4.

regardless of said speaker's class status, gender identity, or centrality to the text. Merlin's laughter essentially disrupts the demand to speak, allowing alternative modes of communication to spring forth from characters often oppressively silenced by the rhetoric of those in power. Suddenly, Merlin, a queer, disorderly figure, has as much power as the King, for both are equally visible, heard and empowered. In response to Merlin's exercised agency, the King perceives Merlin and his laughter as a threat and sends Merlin to jail for refusing to divulge the secrets of his laughter:

En le cartre le fait empaindre  
Et sel fait .iii. jor geüner.  
Et al quart jor fait aüner  
Et ses barons et ses princiers  
Qu'il plus ama et plus tint ciers.  
Verront quell fin Merlins fera:  
U ochis, u pendus sera.  
Se il ne dist sa prophesie,  
N'en portera, cho dist, la vie. (*Silence* 6290-6298)

[[The King] had [Merlin] thrown into prison / And starved for three days. / And on the fourth day, he called together / The most trusted and valued / Lords and counselors of the realm. / They would decide Merlin's fate: / Whether he be beheaded or hanged. / If he did not reveal the truth, / He would not escape with his life, the King said.]

The King may have the power to starve, jail, and even behead Merlin, but he cannot erase the threatening memory Merlin's laughter posed to his authority. Thus, what is not said ultimately hangs Merlin's fate in balance: "Qu'il plus ama et plus tint ciers. / Verront quell fin Merlins fera" [They would decide Merlin's fate: / Whether he be beheaded or hanged]. What Merlin does not say with words, he creates with his laughter, for such sounds prove to have the ability to cause great concern: "ses barons et ses princiers/ Qu'il plus ama et plus tint ciers" [the most trusted and valued / Lords and counselors of the realm]. Such a gathering occurs among the King and those holding positions of power because Merlin's laughter invites other subjects to challenge the sovereign's authority.

Understandably, King Ebain attempts to regain control of the system of power he has constructed in his court, but he does not do so alone. His subjects work to validate the King's anger over the temporary loss of his authority, highlighting the panoptic quality of systems of power.<sup>61</sup> Rather than aligning with Merlin, the King's commoners perform on their own accord, acting out the anger the King feels towards Merlin: "Cil ont veü le roi irier. / Prendent Merlin a enpirier. / L'uns le sache, l'autres le boute" [Those who had witnessed the King's fury / Now began to attack Merlin. / One shook him, another knocked him down] (*Silence* 6243-645). Although initially fueled by their rage, the commoners stand with their King, defending his feelings of anger as well as his authority: "Cil ont veü le roi irier. / Prendent Merlin a enpirier" [Those who had witnessed the King's fury / Now began to attack Merlin]. Such violence on behalf of the King sheds light on how systems of power implicate their subjects. With each calculated, extralinguistic laugh in the court's space, Merlin rewrites his relationship with those in power, resisting his supposedly marginal status. This is a feat the King and his commoners work to conceal through rhetorical and physical violence.

Acts of disruption and refusal may offer more to the expressor than just the ability to refute dominant discourses of the text. Such expressions and the agency they offer can result in feelings of pleasure alongside power. As quoted at the beginning of this chapter, Merlin is described as taking "delite" [delight] in his choice to refuse: "Com plus l'enquierent plus se taist. / Tant li delite li taisirs / Que parlars li est nonplaisirs" [The more they questioned him, the more silent he was. / He took such great delight in silence / that speech could offer him no pleasure] (*Silence* 6280-2). Thus, this new agency is portrayed as a form of enjoyment, an enjoyment that

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<sup>61</sup> Here, I draw on Michel Foucault's panoptic theory in which he claims that systems of power become self-regulated and self-reinforcing by subordinate members of a system in which authority is believed and perceived, even when it is not actually present. See Michel Foucault, "Panopticism," in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 195-228.

two unlikely figures can experience not because of their forced conformity into a heteronormative landscape but because of their ability to resist such performances. In joy and serenity, Merlin and Silence illuminate not the dualistic nature of language but the immeasurable joys of sonic and silent expressions.

### **Sonic Possibilities: An Alternative Ending of Queer Refusal**

The pleasure that Merlin and Silence experience due to their newfound agency is short-lived as the text barrels towards its ending with the explicit aim of clamping down on the momentary disruptions Merlin and Silence caused. Thus, by no means is the story of *Le Roman de Silence* a utopian imagining, for its pages are filled with deep anxieties and even outright misogyny. Such troubled narratives both open and close the story, showcasing that heteronormative corrections and affirmations prove to be the dominant tale that the narrator reinforces over and over again:

Li rois en est encor en dolte.  
Fait Merlin fermement tenir  
Et dont a fait avant venir  
La nonain, sil fait despollier,  
Et Silence despollier roeve.  
Tosi si com Merlins dist les trueve,  
Tolt issi l'a trové par tolt. (*Silence* 6568-6574)

[The King still had his doubts. / He had Merlin seized and held firmly, / and then had the nun / brought forward and disrobed, / and he ordered Silence to be undressed. / It was just as Merlin had said: / he found everything in its proper place]

In the passage, the reader bears witness to how all of the non-normative characters are brought out of the shadows of the text and stripped and exposed for the secrets their bodies are believed to contain. Some of these concealed secrets, such as the cross-dressing nun, are a surprise, as these narratives were kept out of the reader's purview. However, others, such as Merlin's role in causing this disruption and Silence's queer body, are central components of the text. Merlin and

Silence are now forced to expose the “truths” of their bodies through their nakedness. While exercising the right to refuse may have offered Silence security and queer expression earlier in the text, the King’s demand to make Silence’s body speak by stripping said body of clothing acts as a violent silencing and assault on Silence’s temporary agency and identity. Upon seeing Silence naked, the court retrieves the answer they seek about who and what Silence is, as the narrative confirms, “Tolt issi l’a trové par tolt” [he found everything in its proper place]. In its violent exposure, the text works to correct that which was “improper”—Silence’s queer expressions—and by “righting such wrongs,” the text begins to put its non-normative figures back in their “trové par tolt” [proper place]. Thus, what Silence may not claim in their heart—that is, a female identity—the King chooses to read with his eyes, stripping not just Silence of their agency but also their chosen identity. For Brahney, it is this moment that enforces the heteronormative agenda of the text: “Nature and society align to place Silence or ‘woman’ in what is deemed a proper but—from a feminist point of view—minimal role.”<sup>62</sup> As Brahney asserts, it is through the King’s gaze that Silence transitions from queer to female,<sup>63</sup> and in this sense, the reader bears witness to the most violent of reading lessons, a reading lesson dependent upon a dominant bias and a subjective analysis.

Forced to choose between life and death, Merlin ultimately yields to the King’s demands, explaining the cause of his laughter in his speech. The King, thus, attempts to regain what Merlin’s laughter, albeit temporarily, threatened: his authority. Notably, the King can only force Merlin to justify the sounds of his laughter by way of speech because of his death threat,

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<sup>62</sup> Brahney, “When Silence Was Golden,” 57.

<sup>63</sup> McCracken offers a similar reading in which she argues that the text restricts its readers to adopting such a conclusion by only offering the King’s perspective in this moment: “Silence accepts the King’s identification of her gender, and although she admits that the disguise was motivated by a desire to hide female features, she makes no claims about how the masculine performance may have reshaped or reformed the body. In the absence of descriptions of Silence’s uncovered body either by the narrator or by Silence her/himself, the King’s observation stands as the only interpretation of her/his gender. See McCracken, “‘The Boy Who Was a Girl,’” 532.

revealing the significant risks and dangers Merlin was willing to undergo to enact such disruptions in the first place. Likewise, the King's threats seemed to have little to no effect on Merlin, proving how vacant Merlin found the King's words (6286-6298). After "en le cartre le fait empaindre / Et sel fait .iii. jor geüner" [He had him thrown into prison / and starved for three days] (*Silence* 6290-91), Merlin is brought before the court and given a final opportunity to rationalize his laughter for the last time or pay for such a disturbance and refusal with his life:

Li rois tient une espee nue.  
Dist li: 'U tu diras, dant fol,  
U jo te trenceraï le col.'

Or voit bien Merlins qu'il morra  
S'il ne parole, et qu'il pora  
Salver sa vie par le dire.  
Al roi a dit: 'Or oiés, sire,  
Jo ne vos puis pas par taisir  
Servir a gré, ne rien plasir.  
Or ne voel jo mal gré avoir.  
Se jo vos di de mo[n] savoir.' (*Silence* 6303-12)

[He said to him, 'Wither you shall speak, Sir Fool, / or I will cut your head off.' / Then Merlin saw he would surely die / if he didn't speak and that he could / save his life by talking. / He said to the King, 'Now listen, Sire. / I cannot please you and do your will / by remaining silent, / but I have no wish to incur your wrath / by telling what I know.']

This passage reveals the extreme lengths the King went to to force Merlin to speak. The King perceives Merlin's laughter as more than an innocent giggle to something humorous. Even when Merlin concedes to voicing the meaning of his laughter, he first acknowledges his silent refusal rather than his reason for laughing, a choice that draws attention to the effect of the laughter rather than the simple act of laughing: "Al roi a dit: 'Or oiés, sire, / Jo ne vos puis pas par taisir / Servir a gré, ne rien plasir" [He said to the King, 'Now listen, Sire. / I cannot please you and do your will / by remaining silent']. Even when yielding to the King, Merlin displays that he still, in some sense, knows more than the King and, thus, exercises some authority outside of his

rulership. In the end, Merlin chooses to save his own life by explaining the meaning of his laughter: ““Jo ris, bials sire, oiés por quoi” [‘Then I will tell you why I laughed, Sire’] (*Silence* 6314). Although forced into submission, neither Merlin nor the King will forget the disruption Merlin caused. Ultimately, Merlin’s laughter brought chaos and exposed the vulnerability of a system of power that presented itself as unshakable.

Not just in its ending but throughout the entire narrative, the narrator, Nature and Nurture, King Ebain, and Queen Eufeme work to enforce a heteronormative system as each figure of authority labels and limits Silence and Merlin’s queer expressions. Briefly, their queer expressions unmake the binary verbalizations that govern the text. However, such exercises of power are short-lived, and in the text’s conclusion, there is nothing to be found but an eager narrator,<sup>64</sup> ready to reinforce the heteronormative framing of the text at its close:

I fu la none donc deffaite,  
Et la dame a chevals detraite.  
Li rois en a fait grant justice.  
Or est la roïne as las prise  
Dont el volt Silence lachier.  
Si vait: tels cuide porcachier  
Honte et damage avoec altrui  
Ki soi me ïsme quiert anui.  
Nus hom qui fust ne plainst Eufeme.  
Silence atorment come feme.  
Segnor, que vos diroie plus?  
Ain sot a non Scilensiüs:  
Ostés est -iu, mis I est -a  
Si est només Scilentiä. (*Silence* 6655-6668)

[The nun was executed / and the Queen was drawn and quartered. / Thus was the King’s justice accomplished. / The Queen was caught in the trap / she had set for Silence. / That’s how it goes: he who plots / to harm others / seeks his undoing. / No one was sorry for Eufeme. / They dressed Silence as a woman. / Lords, what more can I say? / Once he was called Silentius: / they removed the -us, added an -a, / and so he was called Silencia]

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<sup>64</sup> Alternatively, McCracken argues that though the text presents its final outing of Silence as confirmation of her femaleness, “the story’s neatly sewn up ending leaves gaps and dangling threads that dispute the ‘naturalness’ of Silence’s reclaimed female gender and show that the gender identification is closely bound to a desire to integrate the newly reconstructed woman into society” (Ibid., 523).

Most violently, the text resolves its anxieties by erasing—through death, punishment, and language—that which momentarily thrived: queer possibility. This suggests that sonic refusals can challenge power systems, but they cannot eliminate them. The extreme modes of erasure at the end of the text do not exaggerate the disruption that the expressions of sonic refusal caused, though. Instead, this abrupt and brutal outing, marriage, and execution speak to the extent of Merlin and Silence’s sonic impact, which challenges the prevailing norms of this text.

It is worth noting what the story will allow to be corrected versus what it desires to remove permanently. It is the nun and the Queen who face painful, gruesome deaths while “Scilensiüs” functions as a kind of linguistic error that can be corrected with the flick of a pen: “Ain sot a non Scilensiüs: / Ostés est -iu, mis I est -a / Si est només Scilentiä” [Once he was called Silentius: / they removed the -us, added an -a, / and so he was called Silencia] (*Silence* 6666-6668). Of course, it becomes worth asking why each non-normative figure pays the price of punishment in such varied ways? Erin F. Labbie reads this murderous erasure at the poem’s end as a literary strategy that positions the “honorable woman,” Silence, as a replacement for the “transgressive Queen Eufeme.”<sup>65</sup> Alternatively, Allen posits that “Queen Eufeme is executed for expressing her sexual desire.”<sup>66</sup> Similar to Allen, I interpret this graphic, corporeal punishment of the cross-dressing nun and the Queen as a direct response to the physical relationship the two shared as same-sex lovers (*Silence* 6528-6540). Their actions cannot be undone without removing their bodies from the space of the text. Silence, on the other hand, is allowed to explain their earlier acts of silence and their meanings, an opportunity, much like Merlin’s, that pits the agency of silence against one’s ability to live:

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<sup>65</sup> Erin F. Labbie, “The Specular Image of the Gender-Neutral Name: Naming Silence in *Le Roman de Silence*,” *Arthuriana* 7, no. 2 (Summer 1997): 63-77, at 68.

<sup>66</sup> Allen, “The Ambiguity of Silence,” 101.

[O]r te conjur jo par le foi  
Que tu dois Dameldeu et moi,  
Por quoi tu t'as si contenu  
Et coment cho est avenue?  
Nos veöns bien que tu iés feme. (*Silence* 6582-6586)

[Now I conjure you, by the faith / you owe to God and myself, to tell / why you have conducted yourself in this manner / and how it came about. / We can see for ourselves that you are a woman]

Here, the King prompts Silence to speak as a means to save their life, and the King is clear about the answer he wants to hear, as is demonstrated by the fact that he commands Silence's admission that she is female: "Nos veöns bien que tu iés feme" [We can see for ourselves that you are a woman]. Imagining the situation Silence is in—they are stripped naked before the King and the court, they are aware of and potentially witnessed the deaths of the nun and the Queen, and they are being asked to explain their actions as a means to save their life—it is no surprise that Silence chooses to say that she performed as a man throughout most of her life: "Et por mon iretage quierre / Me rova vivre al fuer de malle" [And in order to claim my inheritance / [my father] asked me to live like a man] (*Silence* 6598-6599). Silence now voices what the text has tried to conceal and correct. In her confession, the anxieties of the text are quelled, for Silence utters the words that can never be shrouded in silence again: she was assigned female at birth.

Once Silence verbalizes what the King interprets with his eyes, the text moves from making a small linguistic change to the ending of Silence's name to physically altering her body so that all traces of masculinity are erased. As such, Nature is described as restoring Silence and her body to its feminine state:

D'illuec al tierc jor que Nature  
Ot recovree sa droiture  
Si prist Nature a repolir  
Par tolt le cors et a tolir  
Tolt quanque ot sor le cors de malle.  
Ainc n'i lassa nes point de halle:

Remariä lués en *son vis*\*  
Assisement le roze al lis.  
Li rois le prist a feme puis—  
Cho dist l'estorie u jo le truis—. (*Silence* 6664-6678)

[After Nature / had recovered her rights, / she spent the next three days refinishing / Silence's entire body, removing every trace / of anything a man had left there. / She removed all traces of sunburn: / rose and lily were once again / joined in a marital harmony on her face. / Then the King took her to wife – / that's what it said in the book where I found this story—]

Although it takes three days, the text concludes that Nature was able to remove all traces of masculinity from Silence's body, making it clear that there is no option to return to her former identity. Rather than depicting such actions as the violent, forceful measures that they are, the text presents Silence's transition as a kind of musical matchmaking: "Assisement le roze al lis. / Li rois le prist a feme puis—" [rose and lily were once again / joined in a marital harmony on her face]. Once Nature erases all traces of masculinity from Silence's body and Silence vocally sheds her male identity, the narrator quickly states that "Li rois le prist a feme puis—" [then the King took her to wife], as if the King's choice to wed Silence was the final form of correction needed to hide Silence's former identity away for good. In this sense, marriage functions as the end of Silence, or Scilensiüs, and the beginning of Scilentiä, a character the reader does not know or come to know.<sup>67</sup> Thus, the story's lesson proves to be one of correction, and in its conclusion, Silence and Merlin's sonic refusals cease.

While Merlin and Silence's figures are erased by the heteronormative endings of the story, our inclusive, scholarly readings of *Le Roman de Silence* can persist. Thus, by bringing attention to Silence and Merlin's moments of agency fostered within the sounds and silences found throughout the story, we, readers and scholars, allow for a second narrative, a narrative of

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<sup>67</sup> For Tolmie, Silence's marriage to Ebain results in a loss of a great many of things: "[Silence] loses her disguise, her voice and her property to Ebain." There is much at stake for Silence in this final textual silencing. See Tolmie, "Silence in the Sewing Chamber," 23.

queer refusal, to thrive even in the text's hope to correct and erase such stories. Such scholarly interpretations lie outside the hands of authority that govern the pages of the text, a fact that riddles the narrator with anxiety as he interjects one last time in the final stanza of the text:

Se j'ai jehi blasmee Eufeme  
Ne s'en doit irier bone feme.  
Se j'ai Eufeme moult blasmee  
Jo ai Silence plus loëe.  
Ne s'en doit irier bone fame,  
Ne sor li prendre altrui blasme,  
Mais efforcier plus de bien faire.  
Chi voel a fin mon conte traire./  
Beneöis soit qui le vos conte,  
Beneöis soit qui fist le conte.  
A cials, a celes qui l'oïrent  
Otroit Jhesus cho qu'il desirent. (*Silence* 6695-6706)

[If I have blamed Eufeme today, / A good woman should not take offense, / For if I have censured Eufeme, / I have praised Silence more. / A good woman should neither take offense / Nor blame herself for someone else's faults, / But simply strive all the harder to do what is right. / I want to bring my story to a close. / God's blessing on the narrator, / God's blessing on the author. / And as for those—male and female—who listened to it, / May Jesus grant them their dearest wish.]

Although conventional, this concluding passage showcases the narrator's anxiety and final attempt at controlling the narrative and, thus, the reader's interpretation of the text, as the narrator dictates how his imagined audience should comprehend the narrative by stating what "bone feme" [good women] should or should not take offense to in the story. In the final passage shown, the narrator sets up a series of binary oppositions between good/bad women, Eufeme/Silence, narrator/author, and male/female, all of which work to reinforce or "remake" the infinite possibilities that Merlin and Silence's characters momentarily created and permitted. In short, the narrator attempts to remake Merlin and Silence's narrative, but it is unmade. Of course, the narrator has little control over who can read this text or how they will interpret its

characters. It is up to the reader to decide how they will make sense of the issues that this text exposes.

Knotted together, the narrator's dominant narrative of making alongside Merlin and Silence's queer narrative of unmaking presents two versions of one text in dialogue, verbal and sonic. Such a reading allows us to see that sound and silence, as well as experiences of marginalization and power, lie on a sliding spectrum rather than in opposition, and thus, the narrative curated by those in authority positions within the text coexists and intertwines with Merlin and Silence's tale of unmaking. Neither version of the text can be erased. Instead, it is the reader's interpretation that lends itself to the process of remaking, for if the reader attunes their thinking ears to Silence and Merlin's sonic story, then they learn to read anew by reading sonically.

As I have shown, Silence and Merlin do not so much as emerge as they do sonically burst onto the page, redefining the norms of the text through their expressions of refusal. Unlike Barr,<sup>68</sup> I argue that Silence's silence and Merlin's laughter allow their queer bodies to move beyond the shadows of the woods and the secrets of a hidden cabin. Through their sonic expressions, Silence and Merlin rewrite every detail used against their bodies as evidence of their oppressed status. Silence and Merlin occupy centralized positions in the text through laughter and silence. By doing so, Silence and Merlin unmake the supposedly fixed forms of rhetorical power that govern the plot of the story, and, in their wake, Silence and Merlin remake the way queer bodies, sounds, and silences can be read. No longer exclusively a signifier of otherness, Silence and Merlin defy dualistic associations and boundaries due to their extralinguistic unmaking, at least temporarily.

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<sup>68</sup> Barr, "The Idea of the Wilderness," 15.

While *Le Roman de Silence* offers a glimpse of what elected forms of sonic agency look like, the violence at its textual end reminds readers that such radical manifestations often come with significant risk and punishment, a truth that echoes beyond the text to our moment. Both on and off the page, oppressive laws and the violent enforcement of codes of social decorum result in palpable terror and consequences for those who find themselves crushed beneath the weight of systemic oppression. Such experiences of subjugation thrive, sickeningly, beyond the pages of *Le Roman de Silence* as we see our twenty-first-century moment smattered with the violent, tyrannical rhetoric of the Texas Heartbeat Act<sup>69</sup> and the ever-growing list of GOP governors who have signed transgender sports bans, among a seemingly endless list of atrocities.<sup>70</sup>

Though such times often seem precarious and hopeless, we, as participants in modern-day American society, have also found ways to retaliate against those with the loudest or the only voices. Silent protests and marches are ways we can resist and respond to violent, authoritarian rhetoric. Such approaches to justice remind us of *Le Roman de Silence*'s teachings: protestation, refusal, and resistance do not have to be either/or activities. One can turn to a spectrum of sonic possibilities to disrupt.

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<sup>69</sup> On September 1, 2021, Texas Senate Bill 8, colloquially known as the “Texas Heartbeat Act,” when into effect, essentially banning abortions after the sixth week of pregnancy—a timeframe that is “sooner than many people learn they are pregnant” explains *Vox* news outlet. Notably, this law went into effect prior to the overturning of *Roe v Wade*. For more information, see: Ian Millhiser, “Texas’s Radical Anti-abortion Law, Explained,” *Vox*, September 2, 2021, <https://www.vox.com/2021/8/31/22650303/supreme-court-abortion-texas-sb8-jackson-roe-wade-greg-abbott>.

<sup>70</sup> According to the Movement Advancement Project (MAP), “anti-LGBTQ opponents have introduced – and passed – laws to ban transgender youth from participating in school sports, most frequently in K-12 schools but sometimes including in college. These laws mean that transgender girls, for example, would not be allowed to participate in sports with other [biological] girls. Local schools and state athletic associations already have policies that both protect transgender people and ensure a level playing field for all athletes. In contrast, the[se] policies...are blanket bans on transgender people’s participation in sports, and they are both unnecessary and harmful.” As of October 2022, 18 states have passed laws that ban transgender students from participating in school sports. For more information, see: “Bands on Transgender Youth Participation in Sports,” *Movement Advancement Project*, [https://www.lgbtmap.org/equality-maps/sports\\_participation\\_bans](https://www.lgbtmap.org/equality-maps/sports_participation_bans).

## Chapter Three

### A Force of Noise: 'Boistows Sobbyng' and Clamorous Teachings in *The Book of Margery Kempe*

Noise exists in relation to the context within which it is inscribed... Generally, noise is a resonance that interferes with the transmission of a message in the process of emission; it is the term for a signal that disturbs the reception of a message. Sounds are noise when they disturb our concentration (or sleep), when they are physically harmful to us (high sound volume). On a biological or physical level, noise can be a source of pain... Noise is an erratic, intermittent or statistically random vibration. A sound has been considered as noise for a long time if its originating frequency was non-periodic and therefore of no determinate pitch.

–Marcel Cobussen, “Noise as Undesirable Sound”<sup>1</sup>

In September 2023, I was invited to present an excerpt of this chapter at a Faculty Scholars Series on the Goshen College campus. Colleagues from all disciplines supported me and my work, though few were familiar with the fifteenth-century woman I had come to talk about, Margery Kempe. As the presentation began, I saw looks of fascination, bewilderment, shock, and surprise. I described an actual woman who spent most of her time traveling the medieval world in tears.<sup>2</sup> Page after page, *The Book of Margery Kempe* spares no shortage of

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<sup>1</sup> Marcel Cobussen, “Noise as Undesirable Sound,” *Deconstruction in Music*, accessed January 28, 2023, <https://www.deconstruction-in-music.com/john-cage/noise-as-undesirable-sound/312>.

<sup>2</sup> Whether modern or medieval, audiences of past and present cannot help but wonder why Kempe cries and what her tears mean. Moreover, many early and relatively modern readers of Kempe’s *Book* have responded with much agitation and even misogyny to Kempe’s expressions. Following the “discovery” of the manuscript in 1934, early scholarship, including the first modern editors of Kempe’s *Book*, Sanford Brown Meech and Hope Emily Allen, questioned the validity of Kempe’s tears; some critics even went as far as attempting to “diagnose” her behavior as a “puerperal breakdown,” an act of “hysteria,” or even a “post-partum psychosis.” All quotations are from Stephen Medcalf, “Inner and Outer,” in *The Later Middle Ages*, ed. Stephen Medcalf (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1981), 114-6. For an in-depth overview of Kempe’s early treatment, see Julia Long “Mysticism and the Hysteria: the Histories of Margery Kempe and Anna O.” in *Feminist Readings in Middle English Literature: The Wife of Bath and All Her Sect*, eds. Ruth Evans and Lesley Johnson (London: Routledge, 1994), 88-111. Such theories were later annulled, as feminist scholarship from the 1980s and 1990s worked to disprove such claims, as can be seen in the groundbreaking scholarship of Clarissa Atkinson, Karma Lochrie, Lynn Staley, and Carolyn Dinshaw, among others. See: Clarissa Atkinson, *Mystic and Pilgrim: The Book and the World of Margery Kempe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983); Karma Lochrie, *Margery Kempe and Translations of the Flesh* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991); Lynn Staley, *Margery Kempe's Dissenting Fictions* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994); Carolyn Dinshaw, “Margery Kempe Answers Back,” in *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 143-182.

details on the weepy, wet disruptions Kempe's tear-soaked displays caused her communities. As a result, Margery Kempe's figure, as presented in her *Book*, reads more like a character of an extraordinary work of fiction than an (auto)biography.<sup>3</sup> However, it is essential to emphasize that Margery is the dictator of her *Book*; in this sense, she is the puppeteer of this spectacle she creates.<sup>4</sup> We may not be able to look away, but it seems that is precisely the reaction she hopes to elicit.

At the beginning of my presentation, I began with descriptions of scenes of Kempe meandering the streets of Jerusalem, stopping periodically to wail. As the talk continued, I invited the audience to imagine what these moments would have sounded like for those present.

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<sup>3</sup> In scholarship, a point of contention is whether or not the central figure, Margery, or, the figure more commonly referred to as “the creatur” [the creature] throughout the *Book*, was a factual presentation or a character construction by Kempe. More recently, Anne E. Bailey refers to Margery as the *Book*'s “pious protagonist” in her essay “The Problematic Pilgrim: Rethinking Margery's Pilgrim Identity in *The Book of Margery Kempe*,” *The Chaucer Review* 55, no. 2 (2020): 171. For similar readings that interpret the figure of “Margery” or “the creatur” as fictional or constructed, see: Ellen Ross, “Spiritual Experience and Women's Autobiography: The Rhetoric of Selfhood in *The Book of Margery Kempe*” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 59, no. 3 (1991): 527-546; Cheryl Glenn, “Author, Audience, and Autobiography: Rhetorical Technique in *The Book of Margery Kempe*,” *College English* 54, no. 5 (1992): 540-553. Relatedly, in her recent article, Ruth Evans works to illuminate the ways in which Kempe the character is enmeshed with Kempe the author, as she claims, “Though the *Book* is clearly more than a set of propositional statements about its historical subject, it cannot conversely be read as a ‘pure narrative.’” For further reading, see Evans, “*The Book of Margery Kempe*: Autobiography in the Third Person,” in *Encountering the Book of Margery Kempe*, eds. Laura Kalas and Laura Varnam (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2021), 83-100.

<sup>4</sup> Although illiterate, scholars accept Margery's Kempe dictation as a form of authorship. Frequently referred to as the earliest surviving autobiography in the English language, *The Book of Margery Kempe* is as famous for its fractured composition as it is for its noisy biographical account. Kempe's life story is not the only aspect of her *Book* that is unusual; in fact, the writing of the *Book* has its own unusual story, too. First, it was not until “twenty yer and mor fro that tym this creatur had first felyngys and revelacyons er than sche dede any wryten” [twenty years and more from the time that this creature first had feelings and revelations before she had any written] (I, Proem; 35). As noted, twenty years or so after her first visions, Christ “comawnded” [commanded] that she write down her visions, but this was no small feat, as Kempe is explicit about the fact that she could not read or write (I, Proem; 35). Eventually, Kempe found an Englishman by birth whom was living abroad in Germany that agreed to write her *Book* when he returned (I, Proem; 35). Shortly after recording her tale, the Englishman died, and Kempe brought the book to a priest whom told her the account was illegible, as it was written in “neithyr good Englysch ne Dewch” [neither good English nor German] (I, Proem; 35). After much delay (due to much public scrutiny regarding Kempe's visions) (I, Proem; 37), in 1436, the priest (i.e., the second scribe) began to revise and rewrite her *Book*—an undertaking that was completed in 1438. Unfortunately, the location of the manuscript—the one and only known copy—went missing from roughly 1520 to 1934, when it was found by accident during an indoor game of ping-pong. The British Library gained possession of the manuscript in June of 1980, where it remains and is catalogued as London, British Library, MS Additional 61823. For further information, see: Mary Wellesley, “Ping Pong Merrily on High,” British Library's Medieval Manuscript Blog, last modified September 04, 2017, <https://blogs.bl.uk/digitisedmanuscripts/2017/09/ping-pong-merrily-on-high.html>.

Many would have first encountered Kempe through the sounds of her screams, her rapid sound waves ricocheting from ceilings and bouncing off walls before entering unexpected ears. For those who dared to decipher the origins of such shrieks, I wonder if they interpreted her noises as cries for help. Did others flee, misinterpreting her roaring as a harbinger of danger? For those who collided face-to-face with this woman, writhing in masochistic delight, what did they think of this extraordinary scene? And then the fire alarm went off.

After asking the audience to imagine what it would have been like to be assailed by Kempe's noise as a visual and sonic instrument, the fire alarm filled the room with a blaring ring so loud we became immobilized, stunned. This was not a drill. There was no warning in advance to prepare for this intrusion of sound. My mind succumbed to the sensory experience of sheer, unfiltered noise. For an eternity and a matter of seconds, we sat together, entrenched in this onslaught of clamor. Eventually, I became unstuck from my sonically incapacitated state and said, "That is a fire alarm. We need to leave the building." Now distanced from that experience, these words seem robotic and blatantly obvious, but when the mind is in a state of shock-induced paralysis, the body can feel so heavy, and utterance can seem so weighted. Following my announcement, we stood and quickly moved outside. I could see a look of relief on everyone's faces as we all realized this was an accident, not a catastrophe. With this assessment, I turned to our group and said, "So, this is what noise sounds and feels like."

In the field of sound studies, when tasked with defining "noise," scholars frequently turn to one of the earliest theorists of this phenomenon, Jaques Attali. In one of his early summations of "noise," he describes a force that carries destruction in its intrusion:

Noise is the term for a signal that interferes with the reception of a message by a receiver, even if the interfering signal itself has a meaning for that receiver...noise [has] always been experienced as destruction, disorder, dirt, pollution, an aggression against the code-

structuring messages. In all cultures, it is associated with the idea of the weapon, blasphemy, plague.<sup>5</sup>

One cannot read Attali's definition of "noise" and escape its physicality. Here, noise is tangible in dirt, toxic in pollution, and potentially deathly in illness. In the epigraph to this chapter, Marcel Cobussen echoes Attali's sentiments in which he describes how "on a biological or physical level, noise can be a source of pain."<sup>6</sup> To that end, noise can hinder one's ability to concentrate or sleep and, due to its volume and frequency, even result in physical harm.<sup>7</sup> Important in Attali and Cobussen's definitions, then, is the conception of noise as both "an erratic, intermittent or statically random vibration"<sup>8</sup> and an unwanted, disruptive, and potentially painful sound that can negatively impact its receiver.

Salomé Voegelin argues that part of the violence of noise lies in the fact that "*Noise* expands *Listening* to an extreme and exaggerates the issues of communication, sense and non-sense as articulated in the last part, demanding through its uncompromising nature a confrontation."<sup>9</sup> In this sense, noise is a form of expression that mirrors itself, offering nothing more to help the receiver identify what is being transmitted than the repetition of its utterance. Noise is noise. When forced to absorb the shockwaves of noise transmitted in Kempe's *Book*, one is made to internalize the violence of Kempe's sonically saturated performance. Through its noisy conveyance, Kempe's *Book* is an homage to her nuanced forms of lamentation and rhetorical interferences, rendering her tears into a kind of drippy, wet rhetoric that emanates from her body and splatters onto the page. In the text, Kempe's crying ranges in intensity: many of the scenes that take place publicly involve writhing on the ground and shrieking. In contrast, other

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<sup>5</sup> Jaques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 27.

<sup>6</sup> Cobussen, "Noise as Undesirable Sound."

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Salomé Voegelin, *Listening to Noise and Silence* (New York: Continuum, 2010), 44.

weepy moments take place introspectively as she describes tears silently streaming down her face as she imagines Christ's crucifixion. Whether externally or internally, these moments of saturated impact are best understood as a transmission of cacophonous force.

In Chapter 35, Kempe, the distanced author behind the words of her *Book*, describes a scene in Rome in which complex echoes of crying, roaring, weeping, and bitter sobbing abound.<sup>10</sup> In this scene, Kempe, as narrator, offers a third-person omniscient perspective in which she conveys how others saw her and experienced her cries as they escalated into roars, how she felt, and what caused her to react in such ways.<sup>11</sup> From this position, Kempe reminds that she is always in control of her presentation as this *Book* is her instrument, her noise, its music:

Sche was so meche affectyd to the manhode of Crist that whan sche sey women in Rome beryn children in her armys, yyf sche myth wetyn that thei wer ony men children, sche schuld than cryin, roryn, and wepyn as thei sche had seyn Crist in hys childhode. And, yf sche myth an had hir wille, oftyntymes sche wolde a takyn the childeryn owt of the moderys armys and a kyssed hem in the stede of Criste. And, yyf sche sey a semly man, sche had gret peyn to lokyn on hym les than sche myth a seyn hym that was bothe God and man. And therfor sche cryed many tymes and oftyn whan sche met a semly man and

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<sup>10</sup> Kempe's transmission of her text is quite unusual, as her desire to record her story comes from a command of Christ roughly twenty tears after her first vision (I, Proem; 35). Kempe initially finds an Englishman whom was living abroad in Germany to dictate her *Book* to upon his return, but shortly after he begins the transmission, he unexpectedly dies (I, Proem; 35). After much delay, Kempe is able to find a second scribe whom revises and rewrites her *Book*. Given the extraordinary circumstances regarding the completion of her manuscript, Kempe is, in many ways, greatly distanced from the actual writing of her *Book*. For further reading, see: Wellesley, "Ping Pong Merrily on High."

<sup>11</sup> In *Margery Kempe's Dissenting Fictions*, Staley analyzes Kempe's role as author, narrator, and character in her *Book*: "The *Book* offers itself as the written record of an oral reminiscence that describes the inner development of its subject, beginning with a single moment of despair and recognition. However, it neither makes use of the most obvious autobiographical techniques, the 'I' that is used to signify the shifting identity of the speaker and subject, nor falls into the confessional mode that tended to shape the medieval dialectic of the self. Instead, the *Book* is cast as a third-person narrative about a life, a narrative that does not follow a chronological progression but describes itself as an account of the random memories of its subject, one Margery Kempe of Lynn in East Anglia. At every juncture, it proclaims itself as a collaborative effort between the subject and her 'writer' that is intended to capture the spiritual experience of the growth in spiritual understanding of this one woman" (1-2). See also Lochrie, *Margery Kempe and Translations of the Flesh*, 97-134; Bailey, "The Problematic Pilgrim," 171; Ross, "Spiritual Experience and Women's Autobiography," 527-546; Glenn, "Author, Audience, and Autobiography," 540-553; Evans, "*The Book of Margery Kempe*: Autobiography in the Third Person," 83-100.

wept and sobbyd ful sor in the manhod of Crist as sche went in the stretys at Rome that thei that seyn hir wondryd ful mych on hir, for thei knew not the cawse. (I, 35; 123)<sup>12</sup>

[She had so much feeling for the manhood of Christ, that when she saw women in Rome carrying children in their arms, if she could discover that any were boys, she would cry, roar and weep as if she had seen Christ in his childhood. And if she could have had her way, she would often have taken the children out of their mother's arms and kissed them instead of Christ. And if she saw a handsome man, she had great pain to look at him, lest she might see him who was both God and man. And therefore, she cried many times and often when she met a handsome man and wept and sobbed bitterly for the manhood of Christ as she went about the streets of Rome so that those who saw her were greatly astonished at her because they did not know the reason.]

This is a passage that stuns in its clamor. One representation of noise upon another, Kempe inundates the reader with descriptions of her “cryin, roryn, and wepyn.” The passage climaxes in a “sobbyd ful sor” that inflicts rhetorical violence on its audience through its intensity and volume. Like the Book, this representative scene is aggressive and asserts its combative agency through its noise. Presented on the page, the reader experiences the calamity of Kempe's tears through the vicarious experience of the onlookers as they stop and stare in bewilderment: “thei that seyn hir wondryd ful mych on hir, for thei knew not the cawse.” Importantly, Kempe provides her readers with “the cawse” of her weeping by describing the “men children” and a “semly man,” figures she found so moving.<sup>13</sup> However, she does not explain the purpose. This is

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<sup>12</sup> Since its discovery in 1934, *The Book of Margery Kempe* has been published in a number of editions. The earliest of these scholarly editions first appeared in 1940 as an Early English Text Society volume. Throughout this chapter, I will refer to the most frequently cited Middle and Modern English editions of this text. All Middle English citations provided for *The Book of Margery Kempe* are to book and chapter numbers and are given parenthetically in chapter three. In addition to the parenthetical book and chapter numbers for the Middle English quotations, I also provide page numbers to Modern English translations of the *Book*. Thus, for the quoted passage for this in-text reference, the parenthetical citation would be (I, Proem; 35), meaning the quoted text can be located in the Proem of Book I of the TEAMS edition, and the translation can be found on page 35 of the Barry Windeatt translation. More specifically, all Middle English quotations are from Margery Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. Lynn Staley (Kalamazoo: TEAMS Middle English Text Series, Western Michigan University, 1996). All Modern English translations are cited from B. A. Windeatt, *The Book of Margery Kempe* (London: Penguin, 1985).

<sup>13</sup> Carolyn Walker Bynum asserts that medieval female laity and religious often “acted out maternal...roles in the liturgy, decorating life-sized statues of the Christ child for the Christ creche.” By doing so, women took “ordinary nurturing roles over into their most profound religious experiences.” See Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1991), 197-98.

not a text that vocalizes why it does what it does. This is a *book that illustrates its messaging and interference*. Kempe's rhetoric of tears assaulted like the violent sounds of the fire alarm that filled the conference room at Goshen College. Noise is a sonic intrusion.

In the only extant copy of Kempe's *Book* (London, British Library, MS Additional 61823),<sup>14</sup> scribal marginalia found in the manuscript draws attention to Kempe's tearful, noisy episodes.<sup>15</sup> To that end, in chapter 28 of Add MS 61823, when Margery first cries, the first annotator wrote a comment that reads, "nota de clamor," which Lynn Staley explains is "a noun that describes the 'noise' of penitential grief that could be heard in monasteries after the consecration of the host."<sup>16</sup> For Staley, such a note shows how monastic readers understood Kempe's *Book* as a devotional text.<sup>17</sup> Contrarily, for the first modern editors of Kempe's *Book*, Hope Emily Allen and Sanford Brown Meech, this annotation reads as a moment of misattribution, as "nota de clamore" recalls Richard Rolle's boisterous expression of divine love, "clamor iste canor est."<sup>18</sup> As a result, the commentator treats Rolle's and thus Kempe's "clamor as literal and physical instead of metaphorical and spiritual."<sup>19</sup> Relatedly, the second of the two

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<sup>14</sup> To view a digitized version of the manuscript, see: "Add MS 61823," British Library: Digitised Manuscripts, accessed April 13, 2023, [https://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Add\\_MS\\_61823](https://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Add_MS_61823).

<sup>15</sup> The first page of Add MS 61823 contains the inscription, "Liber Montis Gracie. This boke of Mountegrace," which suggests that the annotations were written by monks located at the Carthusian priory of Mount Grace in Yorkshire. For further information, see: Staley, "Introduction," 3.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> According to Sanford Brown Meech and Hope Emily Allen, the first modern editors of *The Book of Margery Kempe*, "Richard Rolle's most ecstatic experience and expression was auditory, but when he attempts to describe the 'canor' which makes the highest element in his ecstasy, he concludes (after a long discussion): '*sed uobis enarrare nec potui nec potero, quia ipsum sensum meum superare non ignoro, nisi forte dicere uelim quod clamor iste canor est.*' The annotator in 'small brown letters' applies *clamor*, Rolle's term for his *canor*, to Margery's 'cries,' and this word is certainly used for vocal religious outbursts. Yet it seems to me that Margery's friend has misunderstood Rolle, who is probably giving the word his own sense, and describing an ineffable mystical experience." For further reading, see: Meech and Allen, *The Book of Margery Kempe: the Text from the Unique Ms. Owned by W. Butler-Bowdon* (London: Published for the Early English Text Society by the Oxford University Press, 1940), 323n154.

<sup>19</sup> Adin E. Lears, *World of Echo: Noise and Knowing in Late Medieval England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2020), 62.

noteworthy scribes—the latter of which writes in red ink<sup>20</sup> dated to the early sixteenth century—also links Kempe to the school of Richard Rolle through the frequent use of hearts accompanied by phrases such as “fire of love” (Chapter 46) and “langyng love” (Chapter 74).<sup>21</sup>

Contemporary scholarship has frequently treated Kempe’s affective expressions as a rhetoric or emotive display of religious devotion. To that end, Santha Bhattacharji, Clarissa Atkinson, Liz Herbert McAvoy and Naoë Kukita Yoshikawa, Kimberly-Joy Knight, Karma Lochrie, and more recently Dorothy Kim, among others, have glossed Kempe’s weepy displays as a model of holy tears and the affective piety tradition. For Bhattacharji, Kempe’s ugly crying episodes are part of a more extensive practice in late medieval Europe in which religious weeping became violent and loud in its emotive displays. This new version of religious weeping departed from gentle, silent forms of devotion found in earlier Eastern Orthodox churches.<sup>22</sup> For Atkinson, such boisterous displays, like those depicted in Kempe’s *Book*, were meant to “move the heart of the believer.”<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, the affective tradition, Atkinson explains, is less about a particular theological teaching and more about prioritizing one’s love of God above all else.<sup>24</sup> Adding to the conversation, McAvoy and Yoshikawa claim that Kempe’s tears are not merely about her love of Christ. They are a tool Kempe uses to insert herself within the “trope of holy women’s redemptive tears.”<sup>25</sup> Relatedly, Knight concludes that the “gift of tears” was more

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<sup>20</sup> For further reading on the “Red Ink Annotator,” see: Katie Ann-Marie Bugyis, “Handling *The Book of Margery Kempe*: the Corrective Touches of the Red Ink Annotator,” in *New Directions in Medieval Manuscript Studies and Reading Practices*, eds. Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, John J. Thompson, and Sarah Baechle (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2014).

<sup>21</sup> Staley, “Introduction,” 4

<sup>22</sup> Santha Bhattacharji, “Tears and Screaming: Weeping in the Spirituality of Margery Kempe” in *Holy Tears: Weeping in the Religious Imagination*, eds. Kimberley C. Patton and John Stratton Hawley (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 229-241.

<sup>23</sup> Atkinson, *Mystic and Pilgrim*, 130.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> Liz Herbert McAvoy and Naoë Kukita Yoshikawa, “The Intertextual Dialogue and Conversational Theology of Mechthild of Hackeborn and Margery Kempe” in *Encountering the Book of Margery Kempe*, eds. Laura Kalas and Laura Varnam (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2021), 55.

prominent among women than religious men, for weeping was “one way of communicating this holiness and as such was a mode of nonverbal expression that ‘spoke’ when women could not.”<sup>26</sup> To this end, Lochrie argues that it is because of her tears that Kempe can “gain entry into the mystical text.”<sup>27</sup> Once she gains access to this world, Kempe uses her *clamor* to “disrupt[t] all human activity.”<sup>28</sup> Dorothy Kim carefully notes that such sonic displays are not unique to Kempe but are part of a larger tradition of boisterous weeping and crying that Kempe brings back to England from Jerusalem. Thus, for Kim, Kempe’s sonic displays function more as a symbol of white devotional appropriation than a unique feature of Kempe’s *Book*.<sup>29</sup>

Within the last decade, literary medieval scholars have approached Kempe’s *Book* as both a sonic object and a textual vehicle for literary representations of noise. Regarding the latter, Jeffrey Cohen reads the presented wetness of Kempe’s tears as an agent that can dissolve or liquefy her identity, washing away the self with her tears.<sup>30</sup> More recently, Tekla Bude has examined the noisy and silent relationship between the reader and the *Book* as the reader is prompted to attune to Kempe’s noise while silently listening and receiving the text’s sonic messaging.<sup>31</sup> Attuned to its textual noise, Adin Lears interprets Kempe’s *Book* as a form of *imitatio Rollis* in which Kempe adapts Richard Rolle’s theories of voice and sound into “her own lay theology of noise.”<sup>32</sup> Drawing on the complex expressions of Kempe’s tears, Julie

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<sup>26</sup> Kimberly-Joy Knight, “‘Si puose calcina a’ propi occhi’: The Importance of the Gift of Tears for Thirteenth-Century Religious Women and Their Hagiographers,” in *Crying in the Middle Ages: Tears of History*, ed. Elina Gertsman (New York: Routledge, 2012), 139.

<sup>27</sup> Lochrie, “Embodying the Text: Boisterous Tears and Privileged Readings,” in *Margery Kempe and Translations of the Flesh* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), 167-202.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 126.

<sup>29</sup> Dorothy Kim, “Margery Kempe, Racialised Soundscapes, Sonic Wars, and Cosmopolitan Jerusalem,” in *Encountering the Book of Margery Kempe*, eds. Laura Kalas and Laura Varnam (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2021), 205-233.

<sup>30</sup> Jeffrey J. Cohen, “The Becoming-Liquid of Margery Kempe,” in *Medieval Identity Machines* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 154-187.

<sup>31</sup> Tekla Bude, “Attending to *The Boke of Margery Kempe*” in *Sonic Bodies: Text, Music, and Silence in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2022), 61-90.

<sup>32</sup> Lears, *World of Echo*,” 64.

Orlemanski reads Kempe's noise as an instrument that incites viewers' reactions and garners their attention.<sup>33</sup> To that end, she argues that there is a three-part "crying plot" that can be found in each of the scenes of weeping found in Kempe's *Book*: "[the crying plot] begins with an initial process of spiritualized *perception*, leading to involuntary *vocalization*, which in turn incites the *reactions of others*."<sup>34</sup>

This chapter adds to the burgeoning body of medieval scholarship that has turned critical attention to the sonic representations abundant in Kempe's *Book*. In particular, many of my ideas are in direct dialogue with Orlemanski's; however, I depart from her "crying plot" schema in that I claim Kempe's tears are not "involuntary vocalizations," nor are they strictly "spiritualized." Rather than attribute the force of her noisy crying episodes to a higher power, I argue that Kempe sometimes performs her version of violent, ugly crying instead of the pious weeping scholars have long associated with the tradition of holy tears. Here, I use the term "ugly" to describe the blubbling, writhing, and, at times, discoloring components that frequently accompany Kempe's crying in that such actions physically distort the appearance of the body, resulting in unsightliness (I, 28; 105). Adding to this definition, I draw upon Ela Przybylo and Sara Rodrigues' reading of ugliness as a marker for social inclusion and exclusion:

Ugliness or unsightliness is much more than a quality or property of one's appearance. In Western contexts and histories especially, ugliness has long functioned as a social category that demarcates one's rights and access to social, cultural, and political spaces. People who are unsightly are framed as not only unworthy of being seen or of having eyes set upon them, but they then become the target of interventions to curb the possibility of their causing aversion and discomfort in others.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Julie Orlemanski, "Margery's 'Noyse' and Distributed Expressivity" in *Voice and Voicelessness in Medieval Europe*, ed. Irit Ruth Kleiman (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 123-138, at 131-36.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 131-32.

<sup>35</sup> Ela Przybylo and Sara Rodrigues, "Introduction: On the Politics of Ugliness," in *On the Politics of Ugliness*, eds. Ela Przybylo and Sara Rodrigues (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 1-30.

This passage allows us to re-see the sonority of Kempe’s represented weeping as a kind of exploitative, violent tool that forces audiences to witness that which we desire to turn away from Kempe’s discomforting, ugly crying. By forcing us to look and listen, she draws what is outside, i.e., herself. In this sense, Kempe’s tears, in their sonic and visual displays, function as a bodily tool that grants her a form of agency that is derived from her ability to weep in a messy, drippy, disfigured performance rather than as a result of “gifts of the spirit.” By harnessing the power of her sonic dissonance, Kempe morphs the private, aural experience in her mind—sound received—into a physical, witnessable display saturated in sound—her tears sonically expressed—so that the reception and consumption of her noise moves from private to public, aural to oral, witness to the teacher.

### **Sonic Education: Ugly Crying as Experiential Teaching**

Those who are moved by Kempe’s tears encounter her figure and recognize the divine significance that her tears visually and sonically capture. Kempe arrives in Sheen in one such instance and is entirely moved to tears. In response, a young man sees her and immediately desires to understand and replicate her sensorial experience:

A yong man wech beheld hir cher and hir cuntenawns, mevyd thorw the Holy Gost, went to hir, whan he myth goodly, be hymself alone, wyth fervent desir to have undirstondyng what myth be the cawse of hir wepyng, to whom he seyde, ‘Modir, yf it lyke yow, I pray yow to schewyn me the occasyon of yowr wepyng, for I have not seyn a persone so plenteuows in teerys as ye ben, and specialy I have not herd befor any persone so boistows in sobbyng as ye ben. And, modir, thow I be yong, my desir is to plesyn my Lord Jhesu Crist and so to folwyn hym as I kan and may. And I purpose me be the grace of God to takyn the abite of this holy religyon, and therfor I prey yow beth not strawnge unto me. Schewith modirly and goodly yowr conceit unto me as I trust unto yow.’ (II, 10; 290)

[A young man who watched her face and manner, moved by the Holy Ghost, went to her when he properly could, alone by himself, with a fervent desire to have some understanding of what might be the cause of her weeping. He said to her, ‘Mother, if you please, I pray you tell me the reason for your weeping, for I have not seen a person so abundant in tears as you are, and especially, I have not heard before any person so violent

in sobbing as you are. And, mother, though I am young, my desire is to please my Lord Jesus Christ, and so to follow him as I can and may. And I intend by the grace of God to take the habit of this holy order, and therefore I beg you not to be distant with me. Be so motherly and kind as to tell me your opinion, as I trust in you.’]

In this passage, the young man appears to witness and understand the power of Kempe’s tears. Moved by her expressions, he approaches her, as if prompted by Christ to do so: “‘And, modir, thow I be yong, my desir is to plesyn my Lord Jhesu Crist and so to folwyn hym as I kan and may’” [‘And, mother, though I am young, my desire is to please my Lord Jesus Christ, and so to follow him as I can and may’] (II, 10; 290). Such remarks reveal the young man’s apprehension of Kempe and her violent, commanding tears. He must internalize Kempe’s teaching to “folwyn hym,” Christ. Upon being forced to witness her noisy expressions, he asks Kempe to become his teacher and instruct him on how best to perceive and receive the performance of her tears: “‘I prey yow beth not strawnge unto me. Schewith modirly and goodly yowr conceit unto me as I trust unto yow’” [‘therefore I beg you not to be distant with me. Be so motherly and kind as to tell me your opinion, as I trust in you’] (II, 10; 290). His statement evidences how Kempe’s noisy utterances conceal a purpose only she can interpret. She must guide onlookers through the sensations she experiences and exemplifies. In this sense, the young man greets Kempe as her pupil, eager to learn this sonic hermeneutics.

While scholars in the fields of psychology, environmental studies, acoustics, and architecture have critiqued noise as a disruption in spaces of learning,<sup>36</sup> sound theorist Walter Gershon has responded by asking, “What would it mean for a listener to hear the sounds of

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<sup>36</sup> In *Sound Curriculum* (New York: Routledge, 2018), Walter Gershon explicates, “...there has been growing interest from scholars in psychology, environmental studies, acoustics, and architecture on how sounds impact children in classrooms and schools. Although such studies often differ in their aims and methods, their examinations of the relationship between sound and education most often categorizes sounds as unwanted noise” (10). Of course, both Gershon and I understand and agree that urban noises and vocalized disruptions can be thought of as “unwanted sound” or distractions in the classroom, but “sound curriculum” is invested in reframing “talk, music, and sound as forms of knowledge” (16). It is this approach to sound and education that I align my thinking and argument with.

classrooms, of knowledge being constructed...of noises that combine to create a given sonic environment?<sup>37</sup> This question opens possibilities for reconsidering noise as valuable, wanted, and needed, particularly but not only in spaces of learning. Gershon coined the multifaceted term “sound curriculum” to describe, among other possibilities, the symbiotic relationship between sound in conjunction with learning, wherever and however the act of teaching and learning manifests.<sup>38</sup> In this sense, to approach education through a sonic curriculum is to recognize the complex, sonorous acts that occupy a broad spectrum of sounds within learning landscapes: listening, reading, writing, speaking, gesturing, signing, and instructing.

In light of Margery Kempe’s experiential praxis, we might add weeping to Gershon’s list of sonic learning expressions and teaching strategies. To this end, knowledge as a lived, bodily, sensory experience is essential when grappling with the messy, ugly, raucous of Kempe and “her classroom.” Thus, for Kempe, her devotion, agency, and teaching are expressed in the sounds she produces and carries within herself more so than her ability to command a following predicated on traditional biblical readings. What makes Kempe so radical, then, is that she is a female teacher who draws from her own experiences and expresses such experiences through the noisy rhetoric of her production.<sup>39</sup>

### **Ugly Crying: A Rhetoric of Bodily Distortion and Sonic Dissonance**

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>38</sup> Gershon argues, “In the West, sound is that which can be perceived, recognized, or apprehended aurally through one’s ears. Sound curriculum breaks these works’ original framing as ‘music’ or ‘talk’ and recognizes them as iterations of curricular explorations of sound” (Ibid., 11).

<sup>39</sup> I am not the first to read Kempe as a figure of knowledge. For readings that interpret Kempe as a leader, teacher or preacher, see: Rebecca Krug, *Margery Kempe and the Lonely Reader* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2017), 20; Genelle Gertz-Robinson, “Stepping into the Pulpit? Women’s Preaching in *The Book of Margery Kempe* and *The Examinations of Anne Askew*,” in *Early Tudor Women Writers*, ed. Elaine V. Beilin (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2009), 343–482; Laura Kalas, *Margery Kempe's Spiritual Medicine: Suffering, Transformation and the Life-course* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2020), 6; Laura Varnam, “Margery Kempe’s Encounters of the Heart,” in *Encountering the Book of Margery Kempe*, eds. Laura Kalas and Laura Varnam (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2021), 140-162.

Throughout her *Book*, Kempe expresses various forms and degrees of crying, ranging from quiet tears of contrition (I, 40; 135) to boisterous explosions of weeping (I, 41; 136). The uproar that Kempe draws to herself through the noisiness of her sobbing, paired with her discernible figure, seems to disrupt the reading of Kempe as a holy woman crying God-given tears more often than not.<sup>40</sup> To prove otherwise, the public demands that Kempe offer evidence they can see with their eyes. They want a divine sign that confirms such ugly forms of crying do come from God. However, when God meets these requests by pushing Kempe to perform his miracles in highly visual ways, Kempe is frequently dismissed as the “wrong” type of exemplum.

Under constant ridicule and scrutiny, Kempe publicly and internally expresses that she is crying against her own will. She insists to her public and readerly audiences that such noisy tears cannot be helped, though she often wishes they could be:

And yet sche myth not wepyn but whan God gaf it hir. And oftyntymes he gaf it so plentyuowsly that sche cowde not wythstonde it. But the mor that sche wolde a wythstonde it er put it away, the mor strongly it wrowt in hir sowle wyth so holy thowtys that sche schulde not sesyn. Sche schulde sobbyn and cryen ful lowde al ageyn hir wyl that many man and woman also wondryd on hir therefore. (I, 40; 135)

[And yet she could not weep except when God gave it to her, and often he gave it so abundantly that she could not withstand it. But the more she tried to withstand it or put it aside, the more strongly it worked in her soul with such holy thoughts that she could not stop. She would sob and cry very loudly, all against her will, so that many men, and women too, were amazed at her because of it]

Here, Kempe offers evidence of God that is publicly visible as can be seen through a complex sonic web that comingles sounds of disruption with devout worship: “Sche schulde sobbyn and cryen ful lowde al ageyn hir wyl” (I, 40; 135). Her audience can see and hear the intensity of her

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<sup>40</sup> In response to scholars that have questioned Kempe’s “mystical legitimacy,” in *Margery Kempe and Translations of the Flesh*, Lochrie has illuminated the ways in which Kempe’s *Book* draws upon the construct of female flesh as a cite of excess, rather than the body, to both destabilize the patriarchal discourses surrounding women and to offer her own access to Christ (6).

weeping and its loudness, but her noise does not offer more explanation than that. Kempe's noisy expressions only express their noise. Kempe, too, is accountable to this noise—or so she presents herself as such. The force of her noisy tears spills forth from her, as she describes her blubbing as something she tries to hold back but simply cannot: “But the mor that sche wolde a wythstonde it er put it away, the mor strongly it wrowt in hir sowle” (I, 40; 135). Thus, Kempe, like her audience, paints herself as an innocent bystander to this noisy performance.

Kempe's tears are often described as violent because they violate through sonic confrontation. In her accounts, Kempe describes this violence as double-sided, meaning it inflicts pain on her as well on those who encounter it:

And therfor, whan sche knew that sche schulde cryen, sche kept it in as long as sche mygth and dede al that sche cowed to withstond it er ellys to put it away til sche wex as blo as any leed, and evyr it schuld labowryn in hir mende mor and mor into the tyme that it broke owte. And, whan the body myth ne lengar enduryn the gostly labowr but was ovyr come wyth unspekabyl lofe that wrowt so fervently in the sowle, than fel sche down and cryed wondyr lowde. (I, 28; 105)

[And therefore, when she knew that she was going to cry, she held it in as long as she could, and did all that she could to withstand it or else suppress it, until she turned the colour of lead, and all the time it would be seething more and more in her mind until such time as it burst out. And when the body might no longer endure the spiritual effort, but was overcome with the unspeakable love that worked so fervently in her soul, then she fell down and cried astonishingly loud.]

This is not a passive description of quiet tears of contrition. Kempe's tears cause her great pain as they are forced through her body and out her mouth: “whan the body myth ne lengar enduryn the gostly labowr but was ovyr come...than fel sche down and cryed wondyr lowde.” This description presents loudness as something one hears and Kempe feels. Kempe emphasizes the sonic impact of this performance by presenting her body as a vehicle that is accountable for this painful expression. The body might attempt to “kept it in,” “withstond it,” and even “wex as blo

as any leed” from this labor, but the force of this noise simply “broke owte,” even against her own volition. Whether expressing or receiving these sonic utterances, its noise hurts the body.

In addition to the church miracle depicted in Chapter 9 (I, 9; 56), Kempe asserts that God utilizes various modes of communication and expression to instill his teachings in Margery, including his own sonic (I, 78; 225-6) and verbal expressions. As a result, the text shifts its focus from its preoccupation with transmitting God’s message into language to moments in which outsiders must witness Kempe’s embodied displays of weeping as a representation of her exchanges with God (I, 9; 56). This new presentation of Kempe’s teaching as a sonic experience echoes Cohen’s definition of noise as something physical, bodily, and yet distorted: “noise is the body, monster, materiality, the other, the sound of all those differences that seem to have been excluded but inhabit the heart of identity.”<sup>41</sup> This new form of tears makes Kempe’s outward performance into a delicate intertwining of physical and sonic qualities that result in a kind of “sonic somatic” embodiment of both spirit and experience.<sup>42</sup> Her body is an instrument of God, and so is her noise. Thus, with each unintelligible shriek, Kempe vocalizes her subjectivity as it manifests within the expression of God. As Cohen suggests, this kind of palpability of sonic noise is monstrous: it confronts, collides, snarls, and distorts. Kempe’s performance is undoubtedly monstrous in its ugliness, yet this is also how she comes to understand the performance of her embodied sonic experience.

Tear-stained scenes abound in Kempe’s *Book*, yet each episode is unique. The text presents scenes of weeping, crying, sobbing, and roaring in disparate ways that occur separately while at other times converging simultaneously. In Chapter 57, readers learn that God sends

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<sup>41</sup> See Cohen, “‘Kyte out yugilment’: an Introduction to Medieval Noise,” *Exemplaria* 16, no. 2 (2004): 267-276, at 269.

<sup>42</sup> I borrow this beautiful phrase from the title of Christof Migone’s book, *Sonic Somatic: Performances of the Unsound Body* (Los Angeles: Errant Bodies Press, 2012).

Kempe a “maner of crying [that she] enduryd the terme of ten yer” [manner of crying lasted for a period of ten years] (I, 57; 179). During this stretch of ten years, Kempe explains that “the mor sche besiid hir to kepyn hir fro cryng, the lowdar sche cryed, for it was not in hir powyr to take it ne levyn it but as God wolde send it” [And the more she tried to keep herself from crying, the louder she cried, for it was not in her power to take it or leave it, but as God would send it] (I, 57; 179). While, here, the text is explicit that Kempe is (graciously) at the mercy of the violent forms of “cryng” God sends her, she continues to express in other saturated forms—weeping, sobbing, roaring—during these ten years, too. In the twenty-two references to “sobbyng” in Part I of her *Book*, seven instances are described using the adjective “boistows,”<sup>43</sup> meaning “noisy” and “loud,” as well as “violent.”<sup>44</sup> This nuanced expression, “boistows sobbyng,” derives from Kempe’s performance of ugly crying. In this sense, the ugliness of her weeping, as she blubbers, spits, and writhes, alienates Kempe and makes her undeniably visible. We hear Kempe because we cannot look away, and we cannot look away because her noise is resounding in its dissonance. Significantly, these cataloged displays of ugly “sobbyng” depart from descriptions of pious “cryng,” for these “boistows” versions of drippy, wet expression are a performance that Kempe orchestrates by personifying the force of noise through the violence of her tears.

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<sup>43</sup> This is not meant to be an exhaustive list. Here, I showcase the complex uses, particularly between Parts I and II of Kempe’s *Book*, of the term “boystows.” References to “boystows sobbyng” can be found in Part I of her *Book* in Chapters 3, 17, 26, 29, 31, 33, and 44 as well as Part II of her *Book* in Chapters 45, 51, 60, 61, and 78. While the adjective “boystows” is only used to describe her “sobbyng” in Part I of her *Book* (as opposed to other variations of her emotive expressions), in Part II of her *Book*, the adjective “boystows” is not used restrictively with “sobbyng,” as one reference to “boystows wepyngys” can be found in Part II of her *Book* in Chapter 45 and another to “boystows wepyng” in Part II of her *Book* in Chapter 61. To further show the commingling qualities of Kempe’s interconnected yet, at times, disparate forms of emotive expression found in Part II of her *Book*, reference to “boistows sobbyngys, wepyngys, and lowed cryes” can be found in Chapter 60. Additionally, one noteworthy reference to “boistows wepyng and sobbyng and cryid”—that is, a reference in which the adjective “boistows” applies to three tearful expressions—can be found in Part II of her *Book* in Chapter 83.

<sup>44</sup> For additional definitions, consult the entry for “boistōus adj.” in the *Middle English Dictionary*. Online edition in Middle English Compendium. Ed. Frances McSparran, et al. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Library, 2000-2023. <<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/>>. Accessed 01 July 2023.

Recognition from her involuntary audience is essential to Kempe's performance. Anthony Bale emphasizes the importance not just of the execution of Kempe's public displays but also of the role of the audience as witnessed in these episodes: "In many medieval texts, crying only means something when other people see it."<sup>45</sup> In other words, Kempe is not only performing for herself. The aim is for others to internalize her experiential display—something her noise forcefully aids in. Kempe humanizes her performance, deepening her relatability, by showing this act hurts both viewer and actor: "Sche wept bittyrly, sche sobbyd boistowsly and cryed ful lowde and horybly that the pepil was oftyntymes aferd and gretly astoynd" (I, 33; 119). Through empathy, we are meant to feel each of these versions of her crying alongside her as she highlights how they spill forth forcefully from her own body, "bittyrly," "boistowsly," "horybly." This performance, so bodily, so visceral, is what helps to make her act frighteningly visible. Though she claims to be a vehicle for God, the body in sonorous pain makes us look, see our fragility, and listen. We are captive to this performance that is both recognizable in its most vulnerability and yet always other, always on display, anticipating an audience that will validate its performance of sonorous pain.

In one infamous scene, Kempe's tear-stained reputation proceeds her, as she travels to a monastery in Canterbury and is forced to flee as a result of the hateful threats used to describe her so-called heretical expressions: "'Thow schalt be brent, fals lollare. Her is a cartful of thornys redy for the and a tonne to bren the wyth'" ['You shall be burnt, you false Lollard! Here is a cartful of thorns ready for you, and a barrel to burn you with'] (I, 13; 64). Regardless of one's perception of Kempe, audiences cannot help but acknowledge and remember the force of

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<sup>45</sup> Anthony Bale, "Where Did Margery Kempe Cry?," in *Fluid Bodies and Bodily Fluids in Premodern Europe: Bodies, Blood, and Tears in Literature, Theology, and Art*, eds. Anne M. Scott and Michael David Barbezat (Leeds: ARC Humanities Press, 2019), 15-30, at 19.

Kempe's tears. Thus, Kempe's noisy and profound expressions are experienced as a presence even when Kempe's voice and body are unwanted. In this sense, Kempe meets the rhetorical violence of her onlookers with the violence of her noise.

### **Illegible Noise: A Sonic Praxis of Secrecy, Privacy and Subjectivity**

As both an author and central figure of her *Book*, Kempe draws strength from her ability to weep, write, translate, or obscure her noisy performances. In various moments, Kempe is confronted and commanded to explain why it is that she cries, yet rather than meeting such inquisitors with a verbal explanation, she presents herself as firm in the opacity of her noise (I, 67; 204; I, 46; 148; I, 52; 163). Rather than reading into these textual obscurities or forcing them to speak, Valerie Traub advocates for a reading approach that turns “toward [the] obstacles and limits...obliquely.”<sup>46</sup> Traub invites us to see what is there for what it is: a concealed presentation. By noticing what is there, we can see Kempe's resistance in its intended ambiguity: “It is hard to outline the contours of an opacity—it refers, after all, to a shadowy presence, with murky edges subject to fluctuating degrees of illumination.”<sup>47</sup> By doubling down on this non-transparency, Kempe extracts power from her noise by refusing to translate the discord of her weeping into linguistic registers. What makes Kempe's noise so combative, then, is not what is said but what her noises work to distort and conceal. Her point is noise. In this sense, noise gives Kempe a form of privacy not previously afforded her status as a woman, wife, and mother. Now, as a writer, Kempe can express her subjectivity because of the unintelligibility of her noise.

Outsiders are skeptical of Kempe in part because they cannot hear what she hears. However, Kempe herself can only sometimes make sense of what she hears (I, 89; 260). When

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<sup>46</sup> Valerie Traub, *Thinking Sex with the Early Moderns* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 31.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

she echoes the sounds she receives from the heavens in her expressions of weeping, shrieking, and sobbing, her body becomes a vehicle for extralinguistic expression. Before sending Kempe holy tears of contrition (I, 26; 96), Kempe describes the melodies she hears in her mind (I 36; 127), to which those around her angrily replied, “And thei that knew hir governawnce befortyme and now herd hir spekyn so mech of the blysse of hevyn seyde unto hir, ‘Why speke ye so of the myrth that is in hevyn; ye know it not and ye have not be ther no more than we’” [And those who knew of her behavior previously and now heard her talk so much of the bliss of heaven said to her, ‘Why do you talk so of the joy that is in heaven? You don’t know it, and you haven’t been there any more than we have’] (I, 3; 46). Kempe’s onlookers confirm that they are prejudiced against her based on what they witnessed in the past. The onlookers view their impressions of Kempe as being in conflict with the melodies of heaven Kempe now claims to hear. It is this perceived disconnect between a supposedly non-pious woman who now claims to listen to the voice of God that furthers their doubt surrounding Kempe’s sonic reception and expressions. Thus, it seems the proof the onlookers want is as much about seeing what they cannot as it is about the image of Kempe aligning with their imagining of a holy woman. In this regard, they create an impossibility in that Kempe cannot change how onlookers choose to perceive her, but she can certainly force them to hear her noisy retorts whether they want to or not. This is the intrusive nature of sound unwanted.

In Chapter 52, Margery Kempe comes face-to-face with a cruel archbishop who infamously confronts Kempe regarding her white clothing and virgin status (I, 52; 162).<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> One of the earlier references to Kempe as queer appears in Dinshaw’s work in which she argues that Kempe’s queerness materializes in her white clothing, as her clothing pokes at the Orthodox Christian belief that marriage is a sacrament that must be upheld while, simultaneously, always being tainted by the act of heterosexual sex. In this sense, Kempe is queer in her non-normative signification. Donned in white, mother of fourteen, Margery’s attire draws critical attention to the paradoxical categories and tensions that reside between woman/mother, woman/virgin, and marriage/bodily perfection. See Dinshaw, “Margery Kempe Answers Back,” 149.

Angered by the fact that a mother of fourteen is donning white clothes, the archbishop immediately proclaims that Kempe is a “fals heretyke” [false heretic] (I, 52; 162). This accusation is based upon acts of privileged and presumptuous reading, and the archbishop assumes correctly that Kempe cannot be both a virgin and a mother of fourteen. Yet, this archbishop, importantly, is not privy to the secrets concealed beneath her clothing, such as whether or not she is a virgin or even a mother. Thus, Kempe’s body, donned in white, acts as an “open secret” in that she blatantly defies the norms of her cultural context as voiced by the archbishop. Yet, she is forced to conceal such secrets under a veil that relays the most private part of a woman’s body: her virginity. Lochrie brilliantly tends to this tension between the body and its ability to both contain and reveal its secrets: “Secrecy structures the subject according to oppositions between private and public, inside and outside, subject and object, the secretive subject is less a resistant one than an ‘open secret’ caught in the very network that has excluded her in the first place.”<sup>49</sup> Thus, as public spectacle, mother and wife in white, Kempe parades the agency of her body while publicly defying its supposed secrets. Rather than buckling under the weight of her “open secret,” Kempe embraces the archbishops outing, for it is because of his insistence on the female body as a sight of secrecy that she can defy him so blatantly.

Though Kempe recognizes her body as an “open secret,” a fact she humbly portrays through her voiced concerns when Christ first asks her to wear white, what is not as coded and easy to read is the secrets concealed in her noise. Following the archbishop’s accusation, Kempe begins to sob, to which the archbishop sharply responds, ““Why wepist thou so, woman?”” [‘Why do you weep so, woman?’] (I, 52; 163]. Kempe, shielded by the protection of her covert tears, answers, ““Syr, ye schal welyn sum day that ye had wept as sor as I”” [‘Sir, you shall wish

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<sup>49</sup> Lochrie, *Covert Operations: The Medieval Uses of Secrecy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 2.

someday that you had wept as sorely as I'] (I, 52; 163). Here, Lochrie's words resound: "Secrecy always serves the dual purpose of constituting one set of knowledge, discourses, or social agents and disempowering others."<sup>50</sup> Kempe knows her noise is obscure, but she depends on the archbishop to confirm this secrecy. By inquiring as to what secrets her noises might suggest or conceal, the archbishop is disempowered. He cannot read her noises, but Kempe can. Given the opaque nature of noise as a mode of expression, Kempe possesses the knowledge to vocalize, interpret, and conceal as she fits. Together, intentionally and inadvertently, each validates the secrecy of Kempe's performance and, thus, the power of her noisy tears.

Dismayed by her assertiveness, the archbishop and several clerics test her knowledge of the Articles of Faith. Surprised by her ability to answer their questions, the clerics conclude: "We knowyn wel that sche can the Articles of the Feith, but we wil not suffyr hir to dwellyn among us, for the pepil hath gret feyth in hir dalyawnce, and peraventur sche myth pervertyn summe of hem" ["We know very well that she knows the Articles of Faith, but we will not allow her to dwell among us, because the people have great faith in her talk, and perhaps she might lead some of them astray"] (I, 52; 163). This passage reflects the fear that the archbishop and clerics feel towards Kempe. They are anxious that Kempe's white-donning figure, along with her knowledge of tears, has the power to siphon their church following. Kempe counters such exclusionary forms of authority by embodying and projecting her love for God to those around her through her visual and sonic displays of weeping, devotion, and selective explanation. Furthermore, the passage demonstrates the authority Kempe has garnered for herself through such displays, for she speaks and presents unabashedly and defiantly to the church figures of power, making it clear that she will not refrain from vocalizing her devotion to God.

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 6.

In Chapter 46, Kempe draws on her extralinguistic rhetoric of tears to intentionally disrupt comprehension, resulting in a conflict of powers between her newly founded sonic agency and more traditional modes of male authority. Kempe travels to Leicester, and on her journey, she enters a church and sees a crucifix. Upon seeing such a sight, “the Passyon of owr Lord entryd hir mende, wherthorw sche gan meltyn, and al to relentyn be terys of pyté and compassyown” [the Passion of our Lord entered her mind, after that she began to melt and utterly dissolve with tears of pity and compassion] (I, 46; 148). Here, Kempe provides the reader with a clear source for her tears—an authorial choice—before revealing how she responds to her onlookers. Following this quoted outburst, a man witnessing Kempe’s tears “toke hir be the sleve and seyde, ‘Damsel, why wepist thou so sor?’” [took her by the sleeve and said, ‘Women, why are you weeping so bitterly?’] (I, 46; 148). This man approaches Kempe, exuding a form of privilege that gives him the false impression that he is entitled to an explanation from Kempe as to why she is crying. Isabel Davis argues that the demanding men Kempe encounters throughout her *Book*, including those questioning her here, are conditioned to respond to Kempe in gender-saturated prescriptions.<sup>51</sup> While that may be the case, Kempe is not threatened or intimidated by this man because of the agency she can extract from her indecipherable tears. She merely replies, “‘Ser,’ sche seyde, ‘it is not yow to telle’” [‘Sir,’ she said, ‘it is not to be told to you’] (I, 46; 148). Kempe’s clipped retort models the power she garners from the sonic dissonance of tears.

Kempe’s noise permits her not to have to answer to anyone. She does not have to justify or confirm the perceived cause of her tears. Kempe can deny the inquisitive man’s request because of the authority granted by her noise, which makes her the only figure who can disclose the cause of her tears as she wishes (I, 46; 148). However, Anne Clark Bartlett argues that the

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<sup>51</sup> Isabel Davis, “Men and Margery: Negotiating Medieval Patriarchy” in *A Companion to the Book of Margery Kempe*, eds. John H. Arnold and Katherine J. Lewis (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2004), 36.

drawback of the resistive nature of Kempe's noisy performance is that "her audience cannot receive the specific affective sensation that Margery feels. Her audience may perceive significations of affect but then must subject these signs to their interpretive grids (comprising their lexicon of emotional stimuli)."<sup>52</sup> While Bartlett seems to present Kempe's audiences' inability to "receive the specific affective sensation that Margery feels" as a limitation, I assert that this is precisely Kempe's desire, for it is because the public relies on her to interpret affectively or linguistically that she draws her agency. Thus, Kempe's power resides in the force of her tears, a force that can be experienced even when it cannot be articulated. As such, in response to the interrogative man, Kempe merely walks away, leaving him with nothing but the echoes of her tears and the discord of her noise (I, 46; 148).

With each display of weeping, the sound of Kempe's tears generates curiosity, speculation, frustration, and even hatred. In these unique encounters with her witnesses, Kempe chooses whether or not to disclose the cause of her tears. Because Kempe's *Book* is a written testimony of her experiences, the reader is often privy to the cause of Kempe's tears while her onlookers are met with pure sound (I, 35; 123, I, 44; 142, I, 85; 249, I, 7; 54, I, 58; 182). Such disparate representations of the same moments draw attention to the performative nature of Kempe's weepy scenes in that she is careful in orchestrating who to show what to whom:

Sche wept bittyrly, sche sobbyd boistowsly and cryed ful lowde and horybly that the pepil was oftyntymes aferd and gretly astoynd, demyng sche had ben vexyd wyth sum evyl spiryt, not levyng it was the werk of God but rathyr sum evyl spiryt, er a sodeyn sekenes, er ellys symulacyon and ypocrisy falsly feyned of hir owyn self. (I, 33; 119)

[She wept bitterly, she sobbed violently and cried out so loud and horribly that people were often afraid and greatly astonished, thinking she had been troubled with some evil spirit or a sudden illness—not believing it was the work of God, but rather some evil spirit, or a sudden illness, or else pretense and hypocrisy, something she put on deceitfully herself.]

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<sup>52</sup> Anne Clark Bartlett, "Reading it Personally: Robert Glück, Margery Kempe, and Language in Crisis," *Exemplaria*, 16, no. 2 (2004): 437-456, at 451.

Here, Kempe strategically reveals to readers what she refuses to explain to her public audience. Thus, given the opacity of her rhetoric of tears, Kempe can choose when to shed her cloak of secrecy and draw attention to the fact that she was the mastermind behind the performance this entire time, from the public stage to the writerly script. In this sense, Kempe models Lochrie's claim: "Secrecy is never a solitary activity."<sup>53</sup> Kempe has inadvertently included the reader in this construction of her secret in that we are given strategic access to its mechanics, which, in turn, both hides and reveals its secrecy. As such, the involuntary collaboration of this secret ultimately shows that even when Kempe's tears are concealed, the cause of her tears remains with her. Thus, Kempe garnered privacy from the concealment of her noisy performance and its strategic disclosure.

In addition to the power she garners from her expressions of noise, Kempe's authority is also generated from her careful consideration and translation of such sounds. In one exemplary scene in Chapter 41, Kempe attends a service with a German preacher (I, 41; 135). Frustrated that she cannot understand his teachings, Kempe grows sad and confides in the reader that she wants nothing more than to have spiritual understanding. Christ responds, "I schal preche the and teche the myselfe, for thi wyl and thy desyr is acceptabyl unto me" ["I shall preach to you and teach you myself, for your will and your desire are acceptable to me"] (I, 41; 135). Shortly after, Christ echoes teachings to Kempe, which she finds so moving that she begins to writhe, weep, and sob (I, 41; 135). Unsurprisingly, those around her are curious as to why she is suddenly in tears, which Kempe decides to explicate immediately, serving as a model for learning through the female experience:

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<sup>53</sup> Lochrie, *Covert Operations*, 4.

Than meche pepyl wonderyd upon hir, asking hir what sche eyed, to whom sche as a creatur al wowndyd wyth lofe and as reson had fayled, cryed wyth lowde voys, ‘The Passyon of Crist sleth me.’ (I, 41; 136)

[Then many people were amazed at her, asking her what was wrong with her; to which she, like a creature all wounded with love, and in whom reason had failed, cried with a loud voice: ‘The Passion of Christ slays me.’]

The readers, having access to Kempe’s inner thoughts and intimate exchanges with Christ that precede this moment, already know why she is so moved and crying. Hence, this display and explanation to the public only confirms what she chose to give the reader access to earlier in her *Book*.

In Chapter 44, Kempe walks the streets of Jerusalem shrieking and crying. Yet, she does not disclose the rhetorical meaning of her tears, which she can do given the covert nature of her noisy performances. As a result of the privacy afforded by her sonic expressions, those around her grow skeptical and even accuse her of being possessed (I, 33; 119).<sup>54</sup> Instead of responding with empty words in return, Kempe exhibits control over her sonic performance by selectively choosing when and to whom she will transmit the source of her tears:

And for the compassyon that sche had of owr Lordys Passyon sche cryed so wondyr lowde, and thei had nevyr herd hir cryen beforetyme, and it was the more merveyl onto hem. For sche had hir fyrst cry at Jerusalem, as is wretyn befor. And many seyde ther was nevyr seynt in hevyn that cryed so as sche dede, wherfor thei woldyn concludyn that sche had a devyl wythinne hir which cawsyd that crying. (I, 44; 142)

[Because of her compassion for our Lord’s Passion she cried so astonishingly loud, and as they had never heard her crying previously it was all the more amazing to them, for she had her first crying at Jerusalem, as it is written before. And many said there was never saint in heaven that cried as she did, and from that they concluded that she had a devil within her which caused that crying].

By choosing not to disclose the cause of her sonic expressions, Kempe models that the power to understand and reveal the source of her uncontrollable fits of tears remains with her. In contrast,

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 1-11.

Kempe demonstrates her authority as an author for her readers by naming the cause of her tears: “And for the compassyon that sche had of owr Lordys Passyon.” Such stark approaches to the same event showcase the agency that noise grants Kempe, as she can use its force to call attention to herself and conceal or divulge her source as she desires. As an author, Kempe invites her readers to bear witness to this particular moment in Jerusalem because it allows us to see not just her power to disrupt those around her or even her power to disclose later on in writing but how wise, controlled, and elevated she is compared to the foolish laymen who surround her: “thei woldyn concludyn that sche had a devyl wythinne hir which cawsyd that crying.” Such critiques encourage her readers to discredit her onlookers through her choice to unveil the “actual” cause of her tears in her *Book*. We know these onlookers misread Kempe’s expressions because Kempe narrates this event to us as such. Thus, Kempe creates a form of authority from and through her noise that resonates with her readers and, in turn, reifies her constructed *auctoritas* in her *Book*.<sup>55</sup>

While Kempe, at times, might present herself as able to disregard the public scrutiny she receives with seeming ease, in her *Book*, she reveals to her readers that she often confides in Christ that she feels harm may come to her or that she is drawing too much negative attention to herself (I, 15; 67-8). In one such instance, Kempe suggests there might be truth in the town’s gossip, and she fears that she has angered God because of this (I, 9; 56). Her portrayed premonition of God’s anger is confirmed shortly after when she sits in church and hears a “gret noyse and a dredful” [great and dreadful noise] (I, 9; 56). Upon hearing this noise, a large and

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<sup>55</sup> Tara Williams argues that both Margery Kempe and Julian of Norwich are two female figures involved with the production of texts couched within the male *auctoritas* of their times, a fact they are both acutely aware of. As such, Williams claims Julian and Margery steered away from the burgeoning term “womanhood,” and, instead, shifted to language such as “motherhood” or “femininity” as a way to have “clearer access to power” without all of the gendered stereotypes that the word “womanhood” carried. See Williams, *Inventing Womanhood: Gender and Language in the Later Middle English Writing* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2011), 115.

heavy beam falls on Kempe, resulting in a yelp, “Jhesu mercy” [‘Jesus, mercy’] (I, 9; 56). Following this episode, Kempe claims she immediately got up, walked away, and felt no pain, revealing God’s ambiguous form of forgiveness (I, 9; 56). Lochrie addresses the pain God inflicts and protects against in this scene, arguing: “Kempe’s roarings make known the Virgin’s sorrow and instill fear at the violence of God’s grace. If one reads Kempe’s great cries, one comes to know something of the Virgin’s sorrow and the text of that sorrow: the crucified body of Christ.”<sup>56</sup> Thus, God and Kempe rely upon a form of violence that gives, takes away, harms, and empowers in this text. In response to this accident, her community marvels at her health and claims it must be a miracle of God (I, 9; 56). After the views of the townspeople begin to shift, God’s spirit speaks to Kempe’s soul, “Than the spiryt of God seyde to hir sowle, ‘Helde this for a gret myracle, and, yf the pepyl wyl not levyn this, I schal werkyn meche mor’” [‘Take this for a great miracle, and if people will not believe this, I shall work a great many more’] (I, 9; 56). In this passage, according to her Book, God offers Margery credibility by orchestrating a sonic incident that encourages those around her to witness and understand that her relationship with God is authentic.

In addition to the power she garners from her expressions of noise, Kempe’s authority is also generated from her careful consideration and translation of such sounds. In one exemplary scene in Chapter 41, Kempe attends a service with a German preacher (I, 41; 135). Frustrated that she cannot understand his teachings, Kempe grows sad and confides in the reader that she wants nothing more than to have spiritual understanding. Christ responds, “I schal preche the and teche the myselfe, for thi wyl and thy desyr is acceptabyl unto me” [‘I shall preach to you and teach you myself, for your will and your desire are acceptable to me’] (I, 41; 135). Shortly

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<sup>56</sup> Lochrie, *Margery Kempe and Translations of the Flesh*, 193.

after, Christ echoes teachings to Kempe which she finds so moving that she begins to writhe, weep and sob (I, 41; 135). Unsurprisingly, those around her are curious as to why she is suddenly in tears, which Kempe decides to explicate immediately, serving as a model for learning through the female experience:

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[Then many people were amazed at her, asking her what was wrong with her; to which she, like a creature all wounded with love, and in whom reason had failed, cried with a loud voice: 'The Passion of Christ slays me.']

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Although the ruckus often remembers Margery Kempe of her tears, Kempe is also frequently on the receiving end of sound, for sweet melodies and divine echoes also fill the pages of her *Book* and her mind and contrast sharply with her own "boistous" weeping. One of the earliest sonic references within the text occurs in Chapter 3 when Kempe hears ethereal melodies while lying in bed beside her husband:

On a nygth, as this creatur lay in hir bedde wyth hir husband, sche herd a sownd of melodye so swet and delectable, hir thowt, as sche had ben in paradyse. And therwyth sche styrt owt of hir bedde and seyde, "Alas, that evyr I dede synne, it is ful mery in hevyn." Thys melody was so swete that it passyd alle the melodye that evyr myght be herd in this world wythowtyn ony comparyson, and caused this creatur whan sche herd ony myrth or melodye afterward for to have ful plentyuows and abundawnt teerys of hy devocyon wyth greet sobbyngys and syhyngys after the blysse of heven, not dredyng the schamys and the spytys of the wretchyd world. And evyr after this drawt sche had in hir mende the myrth and the melodye that was in heven, so mech that sche cowd not wyl restreyn hyrself fro the spekyng therof. For, wher sche was in ony cumpanye, sche wold sey oftyntyme, "It is ful mery in hevyn." (I, 3; 46)

[One night at this creature lay in bed with her husband, she heard a melodious sound so sweet and delectable she thought she had been in paradise. And immediately she jumped out of bed and said, ‘Alas that ever I sinned! It is full merry in heaven.’ This melody was so sweet that it surpassed all the songs that might be heard in this world, without any comparison, and it caused this creature when she afterwards heard any mirth or melody to shed very plentiful and abundant tears of high devotion, with great sobbings and sighings for the bliss of heaven, not fearing the shame and contempt of this wretched world. And ever after being drawn towards God in this way, she kept in mind the joy and the melody in heaven, so much so that she could not restrain herself from speaking of it. For when she was in company with any people, she would often say, ‘It is full merry in heaven!’]

After this reception of sound, Kempe’s life takes on a deeper meaning for which her *Book* is invested in recounting. Circling back to this sonic instance, it is essential to note that this first encounter with the divine occurs not through the instruction or guidance of God, as her later sonic experiences almost entirely are, but, rather, on Kempe’s own accord. In this early experience, it is Kempe who chooses to listen to the sounds she hears, interpret such sounds as heavenly, and explicate her experience into both sonic expressions and verbal vocalizations, as can be seen when she states, “‘It is ful mery in hevyn” [‘It is fully merry in heaven’] to others. Rather than acting purely as a vehicle for God, this passage allows readers to re-see Kempe’s relationship to sound as a relationship she fosters within herself and for herself at times.

Kempe expresses that her sonic relationship with God is as much about describing the sounds she receives as it is about enjoying the melodic expressions of God when he echoes sounds of “lityl bryd[s]” and the “voys of a dowe” to her. To that end, Kempe claims that “every day the terme of twenty-five yere” (I, 35; 124) she received sweet, desirable sounds, and she accepts these extralinguistic expressions as the sonic articulations of God. Kempe attributes divine meaning to pure sound while perceiving God as a figure transcending words. In this relationship with the divine, God is sound, and sound is God-like:

Thys creatur had divers tokenys in hir bodily heryng. On was a maner of sownde as it had ben a peyr of belwys blowyng in hir ere. Sche, beyng abasshed therof, was warnyd in hir sowle no fer to have for it was the sownd of the Holy Gost. And than owr Lord turnyd

that sownde into the voys of a dowe, and sithyn he turnyd it into the voys of a lityl bryd  
whch is callyd a redbrest that song ful merily oftyntymes in hir ryght ere. And than  
schuld sche evyrmor han gret grace aftyr that sche herd swech a tokyn. (I, 36; 127)

[This creature had various tokens in her hearing. One was a sound like a pair of bellows  
blowing in her ear. Being dismayed at this, she was warned in her soul to have no fear,  
for it was the sound of the Holy Ghost. And then our Lord turned that sound into the  
voice of a dove, and afterward, he turned it into the voice of a little bird called a  
redbreast, who often sang very merrily in her right ear. And then she would always have  
great grace after she heard such a token]

Here, Kempe receives sound as a “belwys blowyng in hir ere.” Though she cannot transmit this  
whisper of air she hears into language, she perceives the divine quality of this sound as it “turnyd  
it into the voys of a lityl bryd whch is callyd a redbrest that song ful merily.” The sweet sounds  
found in this passage starkly contrast to the violent roaring that Kempe transmits to others. When  
Kempe slows down and allows us to hear these birdsongs, the reader can truly comprehend how  
violent Kempe’s tearful episodes are. The “belwys blowing in hir ere” depicts a gentle fusion  
between air and object, whereas the violence of noise in the rest of her *Book* seems painful to  
those forced to listen. Thus, Kempe’s rhetoric of noise is noise. In contrast, God’s musings are  
more fluid in presentation, ranging from words to images to pleasant sound-saturated utterances.  
What Kempe reveals then is not her limitations but her intended performance. Her expressions  
are designed to be assaulted by force. God’s echoes of a “redbrest that song ful merily” here  
suggest that while not all of his sonic cadences are pleasing, they can be, and Margery enjoys  
these sonic delights.

For Kempe, to have contact with God is to accept that his sounds are holy, even though  
others cannot hear them or transmit the linguistic meaning of sonic descriptions such as “belwys  
blowing” or the “voys of a lityl bryd” (I, 36; 127). In this sense, sound is a perfect medium for  
the word of God, as his words are beyond language. Instead of comprehending this message,  
Kempe feels God’s sonic utterances as he transmits such sweet songs to her “bodily erys” (I, 35;

124): “On was a maner of sownde as it had ben a peyr of belwys blowyng in hir ere. Sche, beyng abashed therof, was warnyd in hir sowle no fer to have for it was the sownd of the Holy Gost” (I, 36; 127). Where words fail, the body can still feel and perceive with its senses. To access God through sound is to recognize the somatic power of the sonic and its ability to express that which is beyond human language. As Kempe demonstrates, understanding an expression as spiritually meaningful does not mean one must be able to convert or comprehend sweet sounds in language.

Kempe, the textual figure, offers her readers a retrospective explanation for her tears, tears that seem at points to be beyond her control, for such control, she claims, rests in the hands of God. However, in Kempe’s selective memories, she also captures the grand displays that she, herself, seems to add to the performance of her weeping. Thus, Kempe may state that she receives tears from God, but she, herself, takes part in the presentation of such tears, for it is her body, her voice, and her sonic expressions that transmit said tears in a highly sensorial manner. All representations of her tears, performance, and God’s role in this orchestration are selectively dictated in her *Book*. In this sense, the sonic exchange between God and Kempe is mutual or even a co-created one, regardless of Kempe’s insistent desire to attribute all divine experiences to God. Regardless, the sonic qualities of her expressions found at the text’s level highlight Kempe’s role in her performance of the tears she receives from God. God may or may not send her tears, but her boisterous, noisy presentation of such tears renders Kempe into a force of power.

Sound exposes the hypocrisy of those criticizing Kempe as much as it does faith’s importance and transformative power. Having faith means accepting all manifestations of God—sonic, verbal, mediated—even when such holy expressions spill forth from the most unlikely of individuals:

And thei alle that sche schewed hyr secretys unto seyde sche was mech bownde to loven ower Lord for the grace that he schewyd unto hyr and counseld hyr to folwyn hyr mevynggys and hyr steringgys and trustly belevyn it weren of the Holy Gost and of noon evyl spyryt. (I, Proem; 35)

[And those to whom she confided her secrets said she was much bound to love our Lord for the grace that he showed to her, and counselled her to follow her promptings and her stirrings, and trustingly believe they were of the Holy Ghost and of no evil spirit]

Here, the reader witnesses the mutual love between God and Kempe. Their partnership is built upon a reciprocated exchange of words, sounds, and feelings. Additionally, the passage demonstrates the individuality of the two within this co-created union, for it is often up to Kempe whom she “schewed hyr secretys.” Notably, in her *Book*, Kempe frequently uses the language of “secretys” and “hyr mevynggys and hyr steringgys” [her promptings and her stirrings] interchangeably. This slipperiness between these seemingly disparate words reveals not a disconnect but how language can fail to fully express divine love and Kempe’s own volition within this sonic partnership. Kempe’s body and utterances are both containers and expressors of her “secretys” and “hyr mevynggys and hyr steringgys.” Thus, in the sonic displays that move through her and from her, Kempe vocalizes what she cannot voice: her subjectivity and her reverence for God.

### **Noisy Experience: Sound as Teaching, Teaching as Sound**

When Kempe receives the word and direction of God regarding when to cry and how to cry, we, readers, can recall this moment and see the sonic exchange between God and Kempe as a mutual transference between aurality and orality. It is Kempe who foregrounds her relationship to God based upon her sonic comprehension, as she desires to listen that prompts her to respond to the repetition of such sounds with “abundawnt teerys of hy devocyon” [abundant tears of high devotion] and “greet sobbyngys and syhyngys” [great sobbings and sighings]. As a student of God, Kempe shows receipt of these divine messages with the sonic confirmation of “greet

sobbing and syhyngys” that contrasts sharply with her noisy, violent teachings. As a mediator, Kempe morphs from a sonic student to a teacher. As a teacher, Kempe’s extralinguistic utterance draws viewers so that she can embody, exemplify, and offer selective teachings through her noisy expressions.

Several scholars who read Kempe as a teacher-like figure or even a female preacher link her outward manifestations of devotion—weeping, crying, and shrieking—to the cultural phenomena of holy tears and the *imitatio Christi* tradition. In its simplified definition, Lochrie explicates *imitatio Christi* is to imitate Christ and to conform to his life and suffering. Still, she continues, how this imitation manifested was quite diverse and complex, including but not limited to: “fasting, self-flagellation...self-defilement...bodily effusions and elongations, stigmata, tears...seizures.”<sup>57</sup> Furthermore, *imitatio Christi* was an act, a “semiotics of suffering,” Lochrie states, that intersects the mind, flesh, and spirit.<sup>58</sup> For female mystics, *imitatio Christi* is anchored in the flesh’s corrupt, wet, and excessive confines. To that end, Lochrie argues, female imitations derive “from the fissured flesh [that] comes the female mystic’s language of suffering...”<sup>59</sup> In response, Lears builds on this understanding of the complexity of the female subject. Yoking Kempe’s subjectivity to her sonic performativity, Lears directs attention away from the physical body towards the sounds it produces. To this end, Lears asserts that Kempe is a theologian whose theology is predicated on the performance or imitation of tears. However, Lears continues, rather than thinking about this practice through the physical act of crying, she argues that we need to do so by accounting for the noise of Kempe’s weeping: “Kempe’s clamor is just as much a form of *imitatio Rollis* as her tears and suffering are an *imitatio Christi* and

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 36-7.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 47.

imitatio *Mariae*.”<sup>60</sup> It is this last approach to Kempe as a teacher from which my argument is in dialogue, for it is through sound that I argue Kempe embodies, experiences, and becomes a sonic teacher.

Most, if not all, of the onlookers that come into contact with Kempe question the source of her tears, and, in this sense, Kempe’s dramatic weeping does not read, even to church fathers, as part of a larger tradition or expression of devotional weeping. This statement rings true whether the viewer reacts positively or negatively to Kempe’s crying. Furthermore, Kempe was only ever linked to such a tradition, even when abroad, *after* she disclosed the cause of her tears, as is demonstrated by the “good friar”<sup>61</sup> who preached in St. James’ Chapel yard in Lynn (I, 62; 191-2). Following his sermon, the “good friar” questioned Kempe as to why she cried, and only after she explained herself did he inform Kempe about a tradition of women, including Mary of Oignies,<sup>62</sup> who expressed their devotion to God through gifts of weeping and roaring (I, 62; 191-2). For Jessica Rosenfeld, Kempe invokes Marie d’Oignies just this once because of her competitive spirit. She claims Kempe’s envy sparks jealousy that motivates her to mention and address female saints as a means to distinctly differentiate herself from them, demonstrating her own “strategic re-thinking of exemplarity.”<sup>63</sup> In response, I add that what undergirds Kempe’s

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<sup>60</sup> Lears, *World of Echo*, 64-5.

<sup>61</sup> In the manuscript (London, British Library, MS Additional 61823), an annotator wrote “nota contra Melton” next to the description of the “good friar.” In his modern translation, Wendeatt speculates that the annotator “names the friar as ‘Melton,’ perhaps identifying Margery’s enemy as the Franciscan preacher William Melton, although the authority of the note remains doubtful.” See, Wendeatt, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 322n1.

<sup>62</sup> Barbara H. Rosenwein explains that “Margery’s scribe rightly noted that the vita of Marie d’ Oignies (ca. 1177-1213) also chronicled the abundant tears of her priest, who had initially been put off by Marie’s sobs but was convinced of their validity by his own weeping. Further, the scribe reported reading other devotional materials, all of which valorized sobs, roars and cries. But was overcoming despair normative? Certainly, it was not unheard of. That is clear in the account of the wayward monk, whose emotional trajectory mirrored Margery’s own. But when Margery’s scribe sought arguments on behalf of his client, he did so in the realm of weeping, not despair.” See, Rosenwein, “Transmitting Despair by Manuscript and Print,” in *Crying in the Middle Ages: Tears of History*, ed. Elina Gertsman (New York: Routledge, 2012), 249-266.

<sup>63</sup> Jessica Rosenfeld, “Envy and Exemplarity in *The Book of Margery Kempe*,” *Exemplaria*, no. 1 (2014): 107.

insecurities is her awareness of her precarious station as a mother, wife, and single traveler, and, thus, she does not expect onlookers to situate her within a larger tradition of holy weeping, so she must insert herself into this tradition. As I have shown, Kempe strategically uses the sound of her weeping as a locus of disruption, creating recognition and an entry point for her into the society of holy women and the church. Consequently, through the sound of her tears, Kempe creates a sonic rhetoric that grants her the ability to reveal her story and teachings on her terms and in her manner. In this regard, I claim that Kempe functions as a sonic teacher. She utilizes the sound of her weeping to foster an agency that transcends the boundaries and limitations of her voice and status to teach about her love of God.

Kempe understands her role as a teacher through the vehicle of her sonic expressions. Sound provides Kempe with an agency that allows her to vocalize in spaces where her voice may otherwise be silenced, especially regarding her messages about God. Acts of devotion, emotion, and experiential teaching praxis conveyed through sound can transcend the barriers and limitations of language, voice, and facts of silencing. To this end, when Kempe is in Rome, she weeps boisterously. Though the women of Rome who witness Kempe's acts of crying do not share the same language as Kempe, they understand the passion and power of Kempe's performative weeping: "The good women, havynge compassyon of hir sorwe and gretly mervelyng of hir wepyng and of hir crying, meche the mor thei lovyd hir" [The good women, feeling sorry for her sorrows and astonished at her weeping and crying, loved her much the more] (I, 41; 136). The transcendent nature of her tears joins Kempe with these women and these women with Christ.<sup>64</sup> In this sense, Kempe's gentle sonority as suggested by her "sygnys"

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<sup>64</sup> Kathy Lavezzo offers an insightful interpretation of this scene, arguing that "the triangulation organization of Passion devotion displays, the circulation of identifications and desires between women in the *Book* depends on the presence (and frequently the exchange) of a masculine icon—Christ. The *imago Christi* serves in this structure of relations as the *medium* through which Margery enables both her imaginative and her actual bonding

creates a teaching ethos that extends beyond the limitations of words. These acts of expressing and receiving Kempe's sonic messaging move beyond the spoken word toward the infinite language of God that transcends any language that attempts to contain such displays of love by humanity.

In Chapter 67, a doctor sends for Kempe "to come and speke with hym" [to come and speak with him], and she "went to hym wyth wepyng terys to hys chambyr" [went to him in his chamber, weeping tears] (I, 67; 204). Kempe offers no other explanation or words to the doctor until he asks her explicitly the "skylle" [reason] for her tears. The doctor's desire for an explanation draws attention to the fact that he deems her actions and expressions as something that carry and conceal spiritual meaning:

Than the sayd doctowr sent for hir ther, he was to come and speke with hym, and sche wyth good wyl went to hym wyth wepyng terys to hys chambyr. The worthy and worschepful clerk dede hir drynkyn and made hir ryth good cher. Sithyn he ledde hir to an awter and askyd what was the skylle that sche cryed and wept so sor. Than sche teld hym many get cawsys of hir wepyng and yet sche teld him of no revelacyon. And he seyde sche was meeche bowndyn to lovyn owr Lord for the tokenys of lofe that he schewyd to hir in divers wysys. (I, 67; 204)

[Then the said doctor sent for her to come and speak with him where he was, and she very willingly went to him in his chamber, weeping tears. That worthy and estimable cleric gave her a drink and was very welcoming. Afterward, he led her to an altar and asked why she cried and wept so bitterly. Then she told him many significant causes of her weeping, and yet she told him of no revelation. And he said she was much obliged to love our Lord for the tokens of love that he showed her in various way.]

Here, the cleric who cannot look away meets such noise with curiosity. The doctor's desire to understand speaks to how Kempe draws onlookers in sonically, first, as Orlemanski argues in her "three-part crying plot."<sup>65</sup> As a result, Kempe's sonic displays—that is, her loud weeping—push

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with the Virgin Mother and other Christian women." See Lavezzo, "Sobs and Sighs Between Women: The Homoerotics of Compassion in *The Book of Margery Kempe*," in *Premodern Sexualities*, eds. Louise Fradenburg and Carla Freccero (New York: Routledge, 1996), 175-198, at 178.

<sup>65</sup> Orlemanski, "Margery's 'Noyse' and Distributed Expressivity," 131-36.

beyond the limitations of her voice and grant her an alternative form to express that which is both heard and acknowledged by the church and by those surrounding her. Upon witnessing and acknowledging her weeping, individuals, such as the cleric in the passage, are driven by curiosity—or, conversely, annoyance and even hatred—to ask her what her tears mean. Such a question positions Kempe as a teacher, as she is now the only one who can choose whether or not to transmit the divine message coded in her tears into comprehensible language. As the passage shows, Kempe often chooses not to disclose the source of her tears, as can be seen when Kempe selectively confides in the cleric: “many get cawsys of hir wepyng and yet sche told him of no revelacyon” [many great causes of her weeping, and yet she told him of no revelation]. Kempe’s restraint draws attention to the power of her visions as well as the fact that such visions are entirely her own—a point that makes both onlookers and readers dependent on Kempe and her *Book*. Thus, such agency allows her to occupy the roles of sonic disruptor and teacher, for her noisy performance grants her this opportunity.

In Chapter 72, an episode occurs in which Kempe bears witness to a “worschepful lady” [worthy lady] with a large entourage around her, and upon seeing such sights, she breaks down into tears (I, 72; 213). A priest overhears her crying and immediately grows angry at her, demanding an explanation, but Kempe meets him with a silence of refusal (I, 72; 213). Having seen the events that transpired between the priest and Kempe, the “worschepful lady” [worthy lady] takes Kempe aside and asks her if Kempe would share why she had been crying with her (I, 72; 213-4). Kempe “supposyng it was expedient for to do, telde hir in parcel of the cawse” [supposing it was fitting to do, told her in part of the cause] (I, 72; 214). Two noteworthy moments transpire during this episode. First, Kempe’s utilization of silence. Second, her decision to reveal the significance of her tears. In each of these scenarios, Kempe turns to a range of sonic

utterances that exist on a spectrum of sound to resist those that demand clarification from her. When confronted by the priest, Kempe chooses silence. When coaxed by the noblewoman, Kempe relies on the covert nature of her weeping to shroud the cause of her tears. In this sense, even though her onlookers—the priest and the noblewoman—may not be aware of what she is withholding, Kempe and her readers are aware of the agency her weeping affords and how selective she is with her words of disclosure. Ultimately, this quality of sound, that is, its opacity, grants Kempe the agency to directly respond or resist communication even when she occupies the role of experiential teacher.

Many claim that the bulk of Kempe's *Book* fixates on scenes of her weeping, but Kempe's crying episodes are more than mere descriptions of tears falling from her eyes. Kempe's weeping is a kind of physical performance rooted in noise. These shards of sound project from her mouth and, thus, her body, roping her physical presence into her sonic displays. In this sense, Kempe's sonic expressions appear initially to be a tangled web of body and sound. Laura Kalas claims that Kempe's teaching operates as a kind of "surrogacy hermeneutics" in which Kempe experiences bodily, intellectual, and emotional forms of mourning, pain, and suffering in her quest to know God.<sup>66</sup> In this sense, Kalas argues, Kempe's internal and external viewers can witness and vicariously experience the spiritual anguish and revival she goes through to, for, and from God.<sup>67</sup> Such claims resound in the fact that Kempe's figure yokes together the body and spirit, the audible and seemingly inaudible, and the divine experience with human experience: "Sumtyme sche herd wyth hir bodily erys sweche sowndys and melodiis that sche myth not wel heryn what a man seyde to hir in that tyme les he spoke the lowder"  
[Sometimes she heard with her bodily ears such sounds and melodies that she could not hear

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<sup>66</sup> Kalas, *Margery Kempe's Spiritual Medicine*, 6.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

what anyone said to her at that time unless he spoke louder] (I, 35; 124). Kempe's ability to perceive with her "bodily erys" [bodily ears] that which cannot be heard—that is, divine "sowndys and melodiis" [sounds and melodies]—turns unsound and sounded into a point of intersection, and at the center of these points is Kempe's unifying form.

The supposed divisions between the two realms—earthly and heavenly—break down even further as Kempe is temporarily unable to hear the words of living and speaking humans over the divine sounds that pulsate around her: "myth not wel heryn what a man seyde to hir in that tyme les he spoke the lowder" (I, 35; 124). Such an experience pushes readers to ask what it means to hear and what constitutes listening if sound disrupts hearing. Listening becomes a device for sounds that are seemingly impossible to hear. However, Kempe does not ask herself or her readers to choose or classify the various sounds she encounters. Instead, she allows the infinitudes of sound to persist, creating a bridge where many, including church fathers of her time, insist on harsh divides—between the body and spirit and sight and sound. In this regard, rather than sustaining an either/or division or creating a both/and divide, Kempe's willingness to experience the pervasive, multifaceted, and infinite qualities of sound allows for Kempe to be the figure that she is: solitary mother, wife, virgin, human, teacher, and God-like.

In the role of sonic teacher, Kempe invites audiences in through the undeniable ruckus of her tears. Then, she meets such external curiosity, amusement, and wonder with patience, piety, and the teachings of Christ. For Rebecca Krug, Kempe's role as a teacher depends upon her ability to connect with her physical and readerly audiences. Furthermore, Krug argues that her Book is a vehicle used to "find, sustain, and interact with fellow believers who were also looking to live lives of intense spiritual engagement."<sup>68</sup> In this sense, Kempe uses sound as an instrument

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<sup>68</sup> Krug, *Margery Kempe and the Lonely Reader*, 20.

to teach, regardless of whether she verbally explains her sonic displays of devotion. In one such example, Kempe visits the church of Saint Stephen's and collapses, weeps, and sobs uncontrollably (I, 60; 186). Those around her are quite perplexed and enthralled by her weeping. After service, priests invite her for a drink, and a woman asks her to share a meal, as each is encouraged by their feelings of amazement to know the woman who wept so (I, 60; 186). Those around her cannot help but be drawn to her expressions, and whether they choose to engage with Kempe as a student, it is clear her sonic performance is read as a site of experience and an instrument of learning.

Kempe's sonic teaching extends across multiple fronts, for she directs her teachings at varied audiences in varied forms. For example, as the scene at Saint Stephen's unfolds (I, 60; 186), the woman who offered to provide Kempe a meal begins to view Kempe's tears as a learning lesson for her devotion to God:

And thorw the beholdyng of that peté hir mende was al holy occupyed in the Passyon of owr Lord Jhesu Crist and in the compassyon of owr Lady, Seynt Mary, be wech sche was compellyd to cryyn ful lowde and wepyn ful sor, as thei sche schulde a deyde. Than cam to hir the ladys preste seying, 'Damsel, Jhesu is ded long sithyn.' Whan hir crying was cesyd, sche seyde to the preste, 'Sir, hys deth is as fresch to me as he had deyde this same day, and so me thynkyth it awt to be to yow and to alle Cristen pepil. We awt evyr to han mende of hys kendnes and evyr thynkyn of the dolful deth that he deyde for us.' Than the good lady, heryng her communicacyon, seyde, 'Ser, it is a good exampyl to me, and to other men also, the grace that God werkyth in hir sowle.' And so the good lady was hir avoket and answeyde for hir. (I, 60; 186-7)

[And through looking at that *pietà*, her mind was wholly occupied with the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ and with the compassion of our Lady, St. Mary, by which she was compelled to cry out very loudly and weep very bitterly, as though she would have died. Then the lady's priest came to her, saying, 'Woman, Jesus is long since dead.' When her crying had ceased, she said to the priest, 'Sir, his death is as fresh to me as if he had died this same day, and so, I think, it ought to be to you and to all Christian people. We ought always to remember his kindness and always think of the doleful death that he died for us.' Then the good lady, hearing what she had said, declared, 'Sir, it is a good example to me, and to other people also, the grace that God works in her soul.' And so the good lady was her advocate and answered for her.']

It is clear from the passage that the priest understands Kempe's tears as purposeful and that they even carry pious meaning, but he is quick to explain Kempe's authority away with dismissive language rather than accepting Kempe's tears as the model for devotion that they are: "'Woman, Jesus is long since dead'" (I, 60; 186). Upon luring the priest in through her tears, though, Kempe swiftly corrects the priest by explaining that not only are her tears appropriate but that all "alle Cristen pepil" [all Christian people] (I, 60; 187) should weep as she weeps. This assertion establishes Kempe as both vessel and teacher for God's words, which move through her body and pour out in sonic, affective displays. With this correction, Kempe embraces her authority as a sonic teacher, for she uses her body and tears as an instrument of experience to teach and even correct.

Although we are not given access to the priest's response, Kempe does provide another onlooker's, the woman's, reaction to the exchange between Kempe and the priest. Kempe moves the female onlooker and views Kempe's extralinguistic and linguistic expressions as a lesson for her and others to remember and practice (I, 60; 187). In this sense, Kempe's body, including its sonic utterances, is a mode of physical, embodied teaching. To this end, Laura Varnam asserts that Kempe becomes a teacher of experience for others by modeling her devotion as an "exemplary laywoman" to internal audiences, particularly women and her external readers, through "an emotional exchange that takes place in the heart."<sup>69</sup> Varnam's claim is reflected in the female onlooker's response to Kempe, as she becomes an "avocet" [advocate] for Kempe as a result of all she learns from her sonic teachings (I, 60; 187). As such, Kempe and her tears become an example, a lesson, and a form of teaching that derive from her ability to express through sound. Kempe's teachings demonstrate what it means to feel and hear a form of

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<sup>69</sup> Varnam, "'A booke of hyr felyngys,'" 140-1.

knowledge as a fully engaged, sensorial experience. In this sense, Kempe uses her body and voice as instruments for her sonic teaching, and this approach to didacticism reverberates throughout her *Book*, manifesting in thoughtful, strategic noise. This noise commands her pupils to listen.

### **Kempe's Resounding Teachings and a Turn to Song**

To consider Kempe's noisy performance as an instrument of teaching, I began this chapter by turning to Gershon's sonic curriculum theory, which posits that "sounds form educational systems of embodied meaning."<sup>70</sup> In this regard, Kempe's weeping, along with all the noisy disruptions it causes and attracts, moves beyond merely displaying what Kempe is feeling to an emotive mode of teaching and learning. As a result, the sound of Kempe's tears offers a cathartic release for Kempe and power for her experiential teaching praxis that carries spiritual meaning for her public and readerly audiences. In this sense, her *Book* operates as both a reflection and record of sound, whereas her public audiences encounter pure noise, which Kempe may or may not choose to provide a source. Regardless of her disclosure, in each circumstance, Kempe models her relationship to Christ and her role as a teacher of such messages. Kempe comes to know herself as a teacher through her sonic expressions. Ultimately, sound provides Kempe with an agency that allows her to vocalize in spaces where her voice may otherwise be silenced. To this end, Bale argues that Kempe's tears and her ability to travel go hand-in-hand, so Kempe's "sobbing is a traveling mode, a way of moving through space and laying claim to this space..."<sup>71</sup> In her noisy performance, Kempe carves out a literal and metaphorical space for herself by conveying her experiences of divine love. In turn, Kempe can offer sonic teachings to all open to hearing.

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<sup>70</sup> Gershon, *Sound Curriculum*, 42.

<sup>71</sup> Bale, "Where Did Margery Kempe Cry?," 12.

There is still much left to be done on the role of noise in Kempe's *Book*. Ultimately, all of the texts I have written thus far in this dissertation—*Troilus and Criseyde*, *Le Roman de Silence*, and *The Book of Margery Kempe*—speak to the recurring presence of complex sounds that undergird each of these narratives. Just as medieval audiences of the past would have encountered and engaged with these stories through sensorial interactions, it is essential that we, modern readers, also extend our ability to read beyond just what our eyes can comprehend. The medieval literary landscape is full of sonic echoes, tactile descriptors, and rhythmic poetics awaiting an audience experience. Thus, what lies ahead for medieval studies is a more diverse approach to reading, so reading becomes more than a solitary, reader-to-text act of engagement. If nothing else, Kempe has taught that to engage an audience is to allow individuals to access material first-hand through their own interpretation and sensorial experience. We, too, owe this to our students and our field of study.

From silence to laughter, laughter to weeping, and weeping to melody, I now turn to my final chapter on the sounds of song and melody in John Gower's "The Tale of Apollonius of Tyre" and the anonymous *Historia Apollonii Regis Tyri*. As I moved from chapter to chapter, this dissertation increased in decibels. While Kempe's *Book* shows how noise can offer a new form of authority to its wielders, "The Tale of Apollonius of Tyre" and *The Historia Apollonii Regis Tyri* demonstrate how song and melody can save one's life or at least hope to through its depiction in the story. Thus, each of my readings shows that the sonic spectrum offers its users a way beyond the limitations of their circumstances, whether those circumstances might inflict silencing, imprisonment, or even potential death. In this final chapter, I will demonstrate that, by attuning to texts with our thinking ears, we can glean the agency that silence, sound, noise, and melody now afford characters too quickly glossed as marginal or inarticulate. Such characters do

express. They express themselves in ways we cannot access with our eyes alone, but we can learn to recognize them by taking the role of sound seriously in each of these characters' textual soundscapes.

## Chapter Four

### The Orchestration of Voice and the Persistence of Song in Gower's "Apollonius of Tyre" and the *Historia Apollonii Regis Tyri*

His carminibus coepit modulata voce canere:

‘Per sordes gradior, sed sordis conscia non sum,  
Sicut rosa in spinis nescit compungi mucrone.  
Piratae me rapuerunt gladio ferientes iniquo.  
Lenoni nunc vendita numquam violavi pudorem.  
Ni fletus et lucri et lacrimae de amissis inessent,  
Nulla me melior, pater si nasset ubi essem.  
Regia sum genere et stirpe propagata *piorum*,  
Sed contemptum habeo et iubeor adeoque laetari!  
Fige modum lacrimis, curas resolve dolorum,  
Redde caelo oculos et ani mum ad sidera tolle!  
Aderit ille deus creator omnium et auctor;  
Non sinit hos fletus casso dolore relinqui!’ (HA.41; 160-61)<sup>1</sup>

[In a musical voice she began to sing this song: ‘I walk among corruption, but I am unaware of corruption, just as a rose among thorns is not pricked by their spines. Pirates abducted me, striking with wicked swords. Now I have been sold to a pimp, but I have never tarnished my honor. If it were not for weeping and grief and tears for my lost parents, if my father knew where I am, no woman would be better off than I. I am of royal birth, born of an honorable line, But I endure contempt, and am told besides to rejoice! Restrain your tears, put an end to your sorrows and cares, return your eyes to heaven, raise your heart to the stars! God the Creator and Maker of all things will help you: He does not allow these tears to be shed in useless grief!’]

This quoted passage from the late fifth-century Latin manuscript *Historia Apollonii Regis Tyri* (hereafter HA) exhibits the most tangled of textual features, the female voice. Though the reader is aware of the fiction of the story, the HA seems to utilize song and lyric as a way to create an illusion of a female voice that appears life-like in its presentation: “His carminibus coepit modulata voce canere” [In a musical voice she began to sing this song]. The alliterative details of this quote are melodic, and so are its slowed descriptions of Tarsia as a singer. Through

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<sup>1</sup> Citations refer to book and stanza numbers from the anonymous Latin prose *Historia Apollonii Regis Tyri* and are given parenthetically in the chapter. Additionally, I have provided page numbers following the semicolon in the citation for all Latin quotations and English translations, which are from Elizabeth Archibald, “Introduction to the *Historia Apollonii*,” in *Apollonius of Tyre: Medieval and Renaissance Themes and Variations* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1991).

these musical presentations, the reader can imagine what is not there: Tarsia’s song. When grappling with the seemingly hyper-reality of Tarsia’s constructed voice in the *HA*, Louise D’Arcens and Sif Ríkharrðsdóttir’s work on literary voice proves fruitful, for they interpret it as an “embodied yet fleeting phenomenon that leaves only traces of its existence as a memory, a textual remnant or as a transient sensation of aerial vibrations. It also shows how voice figures are a metaphor for the narrative voices inherent in the text and the authorial voices of the past...”<sup>2</sup> Thus, we might reduce the category of voice to its status as a literary device that its authors use. As such, the opening passage from the *HA* demonstrates a masterful puppeteering of this feature.

Ultimately, Tarsia’s vocal presentation is always informed by the boundaries of fiction that birth it.<sup>3</sup> The question then becomes what “fiction” is and its “rules” are. Julie Orlemanski speaks to this complexity of fiction—how literary scholars understand it, its aim, and how we might grapple with the role of literary history in the supposed emergence of fiction.<sup>4</sup> To the latter point, Orlemanski challenges Catherine Gallagher’s assertion that fictionality came to be through the rise of the novel in the eighteenth century.<sup>5</sup> Orlemanski counters that medieval writings offer their versions of fiction as seen in the “plural conventions of suspending referential truth claims, and of commenting on that suspension.”<sup>6</sup> This open-ended approach to fiction can be seen in the Apollonius story, which has been written and rewritten by numerous early writers in the hope of translating a fictional account of experience through the animation of a female voice.

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<sup>2</sup> Sif Ríkharrðsdóttir and Louise D’Arcens, *Medieval Literary Voices: Embodiment, Materiality and Performance* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2022), [Muse.jhu.edu/book/111942](https://muse.jhu.edu/book/111942).

<sup>3</sup> In this chapter, I offer a comparative reading of the fifth-century Latin manuscript, the *HA*, in conjunction with John Gower’s fourteenth century version, “Apollonius of Tyre.” As such, I use the names “Tarsia” and “Thaise” when referring to Apollonius’ daughter as she is featured in these two texts. More specifically, I use “Tarisa” when referencing the *HA* and “Thaise” when I describe Gower’s “Apollonius,” for those are the names used for the female protagonist in each respective text.

<sup>4</sup> See Julie Orlemanski, “Who Has Fiction? Modernity, Fictionality, and the Middle Ages,” *New Literary History* 50, no. 2 (2019): 145-170.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 145-46.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

As Orlemanski continues, she carefully differentiates how fiction offers an account of the “unactual” that is removed from “lie and error.”<sup>7</sup> This distinction is made clear in Gower and the *HA* text’s grappling with the limitations of voice. These works dial into the “unactual” through the animation of a female voice, which offers a commentary on the restrictions of women’s voices in the real world. In this sense, Gower and the *HA* offer a story made possible by fiction that is not a “lie” nor an “error” but rather a device to expose truths, literary and actual. Thus, fiction is a mirror that explores versions of the lived world through a fantastical, textual space.

In response to the *HA*,<sup>8</sup> John Gower continues to wrestle with the inherited issue of female voice and its ethical representation by reimagining Thaise’s character in his fourteenth-century telling of the Apollonius story. In Gower’s “Apollonius of Tyre,” he addresses such quandaries by veering in the opposite direction of the *HA*, his primary source material. The female voice is often impeded or reduced in Gower’s account and is more often than not described as a ghost that is perceivable but inaccessible:

Whan sche hath understonden it,  
Sche goth hir doun, ther as he lay,  
Wher that sche harpeth many a lay  
And lich an angel sang withal;  
Bot he no more than the wal

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<sup>7</sup> Here, Orlemanski offers a working definition of “fiction” that includes the role of the “unactual” in this genre: “My attenuated definition maintains fiction’s distinction from lie and error but leaves unspecified what discourses fictionality is defined against; how its recognition is cued; and what its purposes, effects, and modes of presentation are...” (Ibid.).

<sup>8</sup> Although much disputed, R.F. Yeager argues that Gower’s “known sources for the ‘Tale of Apollonius’ are histories and exemplum collections: the *Hsitoria Apollonii regis Tyri*, *Secretum Secretorum*, Godfrey of Viterbo’s *Pantheon*, and the *Gesta Romanorum*. Although the *Historia Apollonii* has ancient roots and is often discussed alongside the so-called ‘Greek romances,’ there is no reason to believe that Gower would not have taken its title at face-value and considered it primarily a historical work. Very likely he held Godfrey’s book in a similar light, too. Intended to contain every form of knowledge, the *Pantheon* was encyclopedic in scope, and a frequent source of information for Gower. So were the *Secretum* and the *Gesta Romanorum*...” For further reading on Gower’s sources, see: Yeager, “The Riddle of ‘Apollonius’: ‘A Bok for King Richardes Sake’” in *Romance Rewritten: The Evolution of Middle English Romance (A Tribute to Helen Cooper)*, eds. Elizabeth Archibald, Megan Leitch, and Corinne Saunders (Suffolk: D. S. Brewer, 2018), 104.

Tok hiede of eny thing he herde. (CA VIII; 1668-73)<sup>9</sup>

Compared to the lengthy lyrics found in the HA, this scene initially may seem less enchanting regarding its presentation of Thaise and her constricted voice. Still, Gower's version highlights the moral dilemma of ethical representation in the text.<sup>10</sup> In *Covert Operations*, Karma Lochrie asserts, "It is Chaucer's characterization of John Gower as the 'moral Gower' that has dominated Gower (and Chaucer) scholarship and caused Gower's marginalization by comparison with Chaucer. This insistence on Gower's comparative morality relative to Chaucer is puzzling because *Confessio Amantis* is anything but moral."<sup>11</sup> However, Gower's retelling highlights the ethical, if not moral, burden of reanimating a voice that is somewhat out of the author's control, for the female characters found in Gower's "Apollonius" have long been cast in the larger

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<sup>9</sup> Citations refer to book and line numbers from Gower's *Confessio Amantis* and are given parenthetically in the chapter. All quotations are from John Gower, *The English Works of John Gower*, EETS, ed. G. C. Macaulay, vol. II (London: Oxford University Press, 1969).

<sup>10</sup> Geoffrey Chaucer may have disagreed on what lessons there were to be learned by way of the Apollonius story, as is characterized by Chaucer's Man of Law who declares that the Apollonius tale is "so horrible a tale for to rede" ("The Man of Law's Introduction, Prologue, Tale and Epilogue," in *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd ed., ed. Larry D. Benson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), 87-104). However, it is Chaucer who christened the "Apollonius" writer "moral Gower," a highly contended epithet that never came unstuck ("Troilus and Criseyde," in *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd ed., ed. Larry D. Benson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), 471-586). In "'Moral Gower' and Medieval Literary Theory," in *Gower's Confessio Amantis: Responses and Reassessments*, ed. A.J. Minnis (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1983), 50-78, Alastair Minnis explains that this moniker was meant as a "considerable compliment" from Chaucer, unlike the dogmatic, rigid impression "moral" often leaves on modern readers, including medievalists whom often use the label to further contrast Chaucer from Gower (50). When it comes to Gower's given nickname, Charles Runacres adds that one must consider the period in which Gower was writing, as there was a fixation in the late Middle Ages with ethical poetics, a concept and style Gower explores and deploys through the language of profit and delight in his *Confessio*; see Runacres, "Art and Ethics in the *Exempla* of *Confessio Amantis*," in *Gower's Confessio Amantis: Responses and Reassessments*, ed. A. J. Minnis (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1983), 106-134. By seeing the *Confessio* as a then-current product of its time, Runacres concludes that modern readers can glean the ways Gower's moral preoccupations would have been positively embraced and read as both enjoyable and instructional (106-134). For additional readings on ongoing comparisons between Chaucer and Gower, see: John M. Bowers "Rival Poets: Gower's *Confessio* and Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*," in *John Gower, Trilingual Poet: Language, Translation and Tradition*, eds. Elisabeth Dutton, John Hines, and Yeager (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2010); Larry Scanlon, "Gower, Lydgate, and Incest," in *John Gower: Others and the Self*, eds. Russell A. Peck and Yeager (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2017), 156-182, at 159.

<sup>11</sup> See Karma Lochrie, "Sodomy and Other Female Perversions," in *Covert Operations: The Medieval Uses of Secrecy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 177-228, at 205. For further readings on the role of morality in Gower's works and literary persona, see: Yeager, "'O Moral Gower': Chaucer's Dedication of *Troilus and Criseyde*," *The Chaucer Review* 19, no. 2 (1984): 87-99; John H. Fisher, *John Gower: Moral Philosopher and Friend of Chaucer* (New York: New York University Press, 1964), 1-20, 204-8.

Apollonius tradition.<sup>12</sup> Thus, Gower's telling and the *HA* offer a look at how each author grapples with the ethics of voice while still operating within the constraints of fictionality.

Gower cannot offer a female voice behind the sonic descriptions of angelic singing, for there is none. It is this fact that the *HA* invites us to forget, as Tarsia is described as singing her tale of woe. However, Tarsia can never truly "speak her story," for her character, traumas, and voice are all creations of the text. It is this fact that Gower's "Apollonius" asks us, readers, to confront as he attempts to reanimate this story by drawing on musical representation for its sonic features rather than its vocalized elements, such as lyric: "Wher that sche harpeth many a lay / And lich an angel sang withawl" (*CA* VIII; 1670-1). Here, Gower lingers on the sound of instruments playing and the singer's melody rather than the vocalized lyrics captured in the *HA*. Like the *HA*, Gower's references to the song entice readers to imagine the sounds of the described scene. Still, instead of luring us to hear the shallow promise of voice as the *HA* does, Gower's text allows readers to imagine the sound of the musical features present in his version. Gower's telling offers its reader something it can deliver: a thematically rich presentation of music in the tale by shifting the focus from descriptions of lyrics to the representation of music.

### **A Sonic Hermeneutics for the Apollonius Tradition**

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<sup>12</sup> The story of Apollonius captivated audiences of Late Antiquity, the Middle Ages, and the Early Modern period. To highlight its popularity, it is worth noting that there is an extant manuscript, Cod. Lat. 4, which features thirty-eight uncolored drawings of the nearly invariable plot alongside the written narrative. Further evidencing its acclaim, the Apollonius story survives in over one hundred and fourteen Latin manuscripts. In addition to the abundance of Latin copies, vernacular versions of the text were produced in and have survived from Denmark, Greece, Spain, and Bohemia. In regard to its English-literate audiences, Archibald, "Introduction to the *Historia Apollonii*," speculates that the story "must be the only fictional narrative to survive in Old, Middle and Modern English" (3). To that end, even the most famous of writers from the English literary canon, William Shakespeare, tried his hand at producing a dramatization of "the late, and much-admired play, called Pericles, Prince of Tyre," as the title-page aptly reads in the 1609 first quarto. For Cod. Lat. 4, see "Apollonius Pictus," National Széchényi Library, Accessed July 01, 2023, <https://www.oszk.hu/en/publications/apollonius-pictus>. For Shakespeare's *Pericles*, consult: "Shakespeare Quartos: *Pericles*," The British Library, Accessed July 11, 2023, <https://www.bl.uk/treasures/shakespeare/pericles.html>. For Archibald, read: "Introduction to the *Historia Apollonii*," 3.

If we, as readers, are to engage critically with the literary devices frequented in the Apollonius tradition, then we must ask why this narrative so often features a voice it cannot deliver and why said voice is usually accompanied by musical representation, such as song and lyric. Do songs and lyrics circumvent the limitations of female voicings in its fiction? For Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, music may evade the convolutedness of literary voice, but it is entrenched in the same conceptually laden system as language. To that end, Deleuze and Guattari highlight the (extra)linguistic colonizing effects of music/refrain, asserting, “*We call a refrain any aggregate of matters of expression that draws a territory and develops into territorial motifs and landscapes*. In the narrow sense, we speak of a refrain when an assemblage is sonorous or ‘dominated’ by sound—but why do we assign this apparent privilege to sound?”<sup>13</sup> The question at the end of this statement rightfully assumes a privilege in dominance (regardless of form). In the context of the Apollonius tradition, I read musical representation as capable in a way that literary voice is not, and arguably, Deleuze and Guattari’s linkage between the refrain and territory is where this agency of music stems. Music does not escape the conceptually laden registers of language. Still, it does offer the Apollonius writers an alternative way to carve out space or territory for a character whose fictional voice cannot do so.<sup>14</sup> As a result, I advocate for sonic hermeneutics in which we turn our “thinking ears”<sup>15</sup> to the text and listen carefully not to what is said but how it is being expressed. Though voice and musical representation are both semantical

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<sup>13</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, “1837: Of the Refrain,” in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 310-50, at 323.

<sup>14</sup> For further reading on the grammatical, formulaic and communicative similarities between language and music, see: David Lidov, *Is Language a Music?: Writings On Musical Form and Signification* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 1-14; Keiji Hirata, Satoshi Tojo, and Masatoshi Hamanaka, *Music, Mathematics and Language: The New Horizon of Computational Musicology Opened by Information Science* (Singapore: Springer Nature Singapore, 2022), 19-22; Kathleen Marie Higgins, *The Music Between Us: Is Music a Universal Language?* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2012); Michael A. Arbib, *Language, Music, and the Brain: A Mysterious Relationship* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2013).

<sup>15</sup> Anna Snaith, “Introduction,” in *Sound and Literature*, ed. Anna Snaith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 1-34, at 9.

constructions of the narrative, the Apollonius story seems to linger on descriptions of Thaise's/Tarsia's musical performances as a means to grant her character a temporary form of agency that is not possible through female voice alone.

Although Thaise's/Tarsia's violent story can never be undone, resolved, or corrected, how readers engage with this textual tradition can offer a form of ethics through reading. Caitlin Watt<sup>16</sup> calls for a new approach to stories of rape in Gower's *Confessio Amantis* by way of what she terms a "politics of listening." For C. Watt, the confessional frame of the *Confessio* offers the speaker a way to "address such traumas as sexual violence." It encourages the receiver of the story to practice "a more egalitarian ethics of listening."<sup>17</sup> However, not all experiences of sexual violence offer such opportunities for healing, as can be seen in the "Apollonius" story with Antiochus' daughter whose pleas for help are ignored, C. Watt contends. In this sense, the complexities of fiction are exposed, revealing how the story is a medium that can obscure and conceal depending on its author and the given narrative. This only becomes more complicated when a figure with removed experience narrates stories of trauma; such is the case with the larger Apollonius tradition. That is not to say that writers can only speak to their traumas in writing. Still, it certainly indicates that readers must be alert to a narrative that operates on an assumption of how female voice, trauma, and violence might be experienced beyond the page.

Instead of thinking of morals as "this/that" or "right/wrong" dichotomies, J. Allan Mitchell argues that morals are constantly evolving and are always in flux as morals are influenced by the cultural context of the reader coming into contact with a source.<sup>18</sup> Similarly,

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<sup>16</sup> Caitlin G. Watt, "The Speaking Wound: Gower's *Confessio Amantis* and the Ethics of Listening in the #MeToo Era," *Postmedieval: A Journal of Medieval Cultural Studies* 11 (2020): 272-281.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 273.

<sup>18</sup> J. Allan Mitchell, "Reading for the Moral: Controversies and Trajectories," in *Ethics and Exemplary Narrative in Chaucer and Gower* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2004), 8-21, at 20-1.

Elizabeth Allen argues that we must recognize the “contingency of moral choice” across Gower’s writings,<sup>19</sup> for morals and choice are frequently malleable and unstable. This unpredictability causes Allen to refer to Gower as a “muddier of moral waters.”<sup>20</sup> This muckiness is what leads Diane Watt to label Gower “amoral.”<sup>21</sup> Building upon Allen, D. Watt agrees that Gower places the onus of deciphering the text’s moral lesson on the reader—a maneuver that D. Watt ultimately concludes has the potential to place Gower “outside of his own ethical system.”<sup>22</sup> Ultimately, D. Watt posits that the *Confessio* is a text that cannot be contained in one singular reading or deduced from one moralistic lesson.<sup>23</sup> In response, Lochrie aims the scholarly desire to search for a moral reading of any kind in Gower’s *Confessio*,<sup>24</sup> for, Lochrie argues, this text consistently complicates and even unintentionally contradicts its morals.<sup>25</sup> As a result, Lochrie claims the text calls attention to the “perverse”<sup>26</sup> Middle Ages: “The bland moralizing that glosses over these blatant perversions of medieval gender and sexual ideology only calls attention to the problem.”<sup>27</sup> In this sense, reading for “morals” is not much more than a readerly projection of what one thinks a “moral” writer should be writing rather than directly addressing what is written. To this end, the consensus on Gower’s morality remains just as convoluted and

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<sup>19</sup> In “Chaucer Answers Gower: Constance and the Trouble with Reading,” *ELH* 64, no. 3 (1997): 627-55, Elizabeth Allen argues “Gower’s morality cannot be taken at face value...I believe that Gower’s moral poetry does not simply strive to legislate or ‘correcte’ human behavior, but seeks to engage his readers in the experience of conscious and deliberate moral choice” (627-8).

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 269.

<sup>21</sup> Diane Watt, *Amoral Gower: Language, Sex, and Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), xii.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, xiii.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>24</sup> Lochrie, *Covert Operations*, 223.

<sup>25</sup> Lochrie asserts: “Gower’s humorous intention, though, does not mitigate the serious implications of the *Confessio* in the areas of gender and sexuality. The confusion of natural categories throughout the work and the misfitting of theological categories of sins to the subject of courtly love point to problems in both, regardless of Gower’s intentions” (*Ibid.*, 223).

<sup>26</sup> Lochrie argues “Heterosexuality as a normative principle simply did not exist [in the Middle Ages]; fornication as a perversion that coexisted with sodomy and gender infractions did. In this area at least, nature seems to have created nothing but perversions” (*Ibid.*, 225).

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 223.

out of reach as a clear explanation for the “Apollonius” story and its positionality within the larger *Confessio*.

Like their respective authors, each text is flawed in its presentation of the female voice, for where the *HA* exaggerates this animation through song, Gower often edits to the point of erasure. However, directing attention to the sonic rather than vocal features found in both versions of this story creates new avenues for reading Tarsia’s/Thaise’s character. In the *HA* and Gower’s retelling, Thaise/Tarsia and her mother have musical talents, skills, and abilities. In addition to the pleasure their musical performances bring their listeners, they are depicted in both works as drawing security, freedom, and strength from the music they create. Thaise’s/Tarsia’s mother performs for Apollonius, sparking feelings of love and, later, the security of a marriage she desires. For Thaise/Tarsia, music becomes a tool that not only offers her emotional well-being but also a life-saving skill that prevents her from further abuse. As I will show in my reading, in Gower’s telling, Thaise’s musical prowess also benefits other women as she creates a community for learning for women. In this sense, these texts foster a sense of agency for Thaise/Tarsia and her mother from their musical abilities that resist misogyny, male *auctoritas*, and acts of revision.

The Apollonius canon is a musical construction in itself, as the pages of the text represent a harmony and, at times, a dissonance of authorial voices, echoed lyrics, and inherited musical references. In relation to the *HA* and Gower’s “Apollonius” stories, the complex collision between inherited voices and sonic references carried, translated, reimagined, and revised with each new interpretation of this story is apparent by reading these two versions comparatively. Gower’s telling attempts to undo the broken promise presented in the *HA*; that is, a promise of a female voice that the text and its author cannot deliver. Crucial to this statement is the role of

music in Tarsia's/Thaise's character. While each text draws on Tarsia's/Thaise's musical abilities, Gower's emphasis on the sonic qualities of Thaise's musical performance allows her character to transcend the confines of voice. The *HA*, in contrast, uses a female song as an instrument of voice, but when Tarsia's voice is silenced, so are her lyrics. Thus, the sonic representations in Gower's telling offer a palpable form of agency in the rhythm of its pages rather than in the fragile animation of voice.

### **From Past to Present: Musical Possibilities within the Apollonius Tradition**

Even though musical theory flourished in the Middle Ages, neither the *HA* nor Gower's "Apollonius" story has been approached as thematically musical or sonically rich texts. That is not to say that scholars have not turned attention to the importance of scenes of Thaise's/Tarsia's musical performances. Still, such readings have briefly tended to the fact of Thaise's/Tarsia's instrumental abilities rather than the sound of her singing or melodies. To that end, Silva Montiglio<sup>28</sup> and Elizabeth Archibald draw attention to the life-saving qualities of Thaise's/Tarsia's education, including her musical talents. Archibald argues that Thaise's/Tarsia's "liberal arts education" is what prevents her from being assaulted by men when she is unwillingly sold into prostitution.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, Archibald claims that Gower draws further attention to the significance of Thaise's education by having her character request to become a teacher for women.<sup>30</sup> After noting the importance of Tarsia's/Thaise's expertise in these two versions, Archibald briefly comments on the significance of Thaise's musical prowess: "Music is

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<sup>28</sup> For Silvia Montiglio, Gower's source material, the *HA*, is driven by themes of recognition. Thaise sings her life story, and upon hearing her song, Apollonius recognizes his daughter. According to Montiglio, the significance of the scene lies in the effect of the performance—i.e., the recognition. See Montiglio, "'Telling My Whole Life with His Words': Recognitions in *Apollonius of Tyre*," in *Love and Providence: Recognition in the Ancient Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 190-201.

<sup>29</sup> Allen, "Newfangled Readers in Gower's 'Apollonius of Tyre,'" *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 29 (2007): 419-64; Archibald, "'Deep clerks she dumbs': The Learned Heroine in *Apollonius of Tyre* and *Pericles*" *Comparative Drama* 22, no. 4 (Winter 1988-89): 289-303.

<sup>30</sup> Archibald, "'Deep clerks she dumbs,'" 292-94.

important: Gower's Thaise plays the harp to cheer up Apollonius when he arrives at Mitylene. But she also 'falleth with him into wordes' ..."<sup>31</sup> Ultimately, Archibald quickly glosses over why musical representation is so important in this text. I assert that it is because of the sonic representations of Thaise's musicality that the reader can see, hear, and understand her character even when pirates silence her voice, misconstrued by a jealous foster family, and removed upon marrying a man of her supposed choice.

If we take seriously the musical representations abundant in the Apollonius tradition, we must define what music means in a literary context. It is undeniable that neither the *HA* nor Gower's version includes musical notation, and though the *HA* includes lyrics, it is clear these songs were not meant to be performed. These facts are likely why the Apollonius tradition has not been approached in a musical capacity. However, for musicologist Nina Sun Eidsheim, the practice of associating "music to a singular sensory mode, aurality" is limiting at best.<sup>32</sup> To that end, Eidsheim argues for the value of broadening our definition of music to include not just sounded music but also the material aspect of engaging with music in whatever form it may take, auditory or otherwise:

I am unaware of any musical cultures whose music concepts do not include dealing in some way with notions of sound and silence. By denaturalizing these parameters—indeed, the idea that music deals in the currency of sound, silence, and chronological time—music can be investigated as nonstatic, not limited to the aural sense and dimension. Instead, we can intentionally investigate music as action, materially transmitted and propagated.<sup>33</sup>

Here, Eidsheim untangles music from its presumed sounded origin and performance and adds reception and even composition to the possibilities of musical possibility. This proposition is

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 294.

<sup>32</sup> Nina Sun Eidsheim, *Sensing Sound: Singing and Listening as Vibrational Practice* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), at 4.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 155.

radical in the field of musicology, and yet such theories are identifiable in the praxis of the Apollonius literary tradition. The *HA* and Gower's stories are textual objects that are not sounded objects in a traditional sense. Still, they feature abundant music, performance, and song representations that beg us to consider how these textual features differ from conventional modes of communication, such as voice. In this sense, the text can be both unsounded and musical in its representations of what we might redefine as "music."

Perhaps the most glaring difference between voice and musical representation is that which it communicates. Voice is a tool of communication, whereas the sonic, in its semantic form, expresses the sound for which it signifies. In this sense, voice is a text feature while sound is an extratextual component. As stated in earlier chapters, the reader takes part in bringing the sonic features of the text to life as they draw on their auditory catalog of sounds, so to speak, to imagine the strum of a guitar referenced in a story. While each reader might call to mind a different sound, the text can extend its pages and co-op the reader into this sound-meaning-making exchange. However, we do not have a catalog for that sound when we imagine a character's voice, such as Tarsia's vocalizations. So, the meaning-making circuit does not reach beyond the landscape of fiction. This does not make narratives about Tarsia's character more or less significant. Instead, these observations highlight the limitations of voice, the agency of sound, and the reader's role in this orchestration.

By reading the *HA* and Gower's "Apollonius" story as works invested in the thematization of music, we might then ask what these stories attempt to express through music's representation and why these expressions must be conveyed through such forms. While Gemma Moss claims that "in literature, music often stands in for what cannot be put into words,"<sup>34</sup> in

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<sup>34</sup> Gemma Moss, "Classical Music and Literature," in *Sound and Literature*, ed. Anna Snaith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 92-113, at 92.

actuality, I assert that music and language need not lie in tension with each other, for in literature and poetry, in particular, language and music intersect as each function as an expression of language. Musical references in literature are linguistic and signify the concepts that said references stand in for, hence why sonic references, including musical ones, work so well as alternatives to the convoluted signifier of fictional voice. Sound and voice ultimately lie on separate spectrums that share sonic qualities, such as audibility, tone, and pitch, but beyond that, one is not synonymous with the other. Because of these differences in use, possibility, and signification, sound, including music, can function as an alternative expression when voice fails, or the artifice of voice is questioned. In this sense, music is not a “stan[d] in for what cannot be put into words,” but, instead, music is an expression of words within a literary context. We must pay attention to what is said in dialogue and what is musically expressed in response to, in conjunction with, or in place of words.

For many medieval writers, such as Augustine, Thomas of Cantimpré, and Guillaume de Machaut, language was viewed as limiting and incapable of truly capturing the human experience, a subject matter often thought easier to express in music, Bruce Holsinger explains.<sup>35</sup> For Holsinger, this sentiment exemplifies the Christian belief that “human language [is] a fallen representational medium”<sup>36</sup> as well as medieval writers' tendencies to see music as an alternative mode to convey best “a kind of somatic and extralinguistic immediacy.”<sup>37</sup> Modern musicologist

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<sup>35</sup> Bruce Holsinger’s groundbreaking work *Music, Body and Desire in Medieval Culture* furthers what it means to encounter a musical object or being in image or writing and how we can learn to read such artifacts by arguing for an “embodied material” approach to medieval music (2). Ultimately, the question driving Holsinger’s work is, “What is it to ‘experience’ music?” (10). Holsinger answers this question by arguing that the human body is the locus of musical experience (2). See Holsinger, *Music, Body, and Desire in Medieval Culture: Hildegard of Bingen to Chaucer* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001).

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

Eidsheim echoes this sentiment by describing music as a form of vibration that can be experienced in the material body:

If sound and music have been reduced to static nouns, then vibration is a verb—regenerating its energy through material transmission and transduction within a continuous field...Moreover, our realization suggests that this shift moves musical inquiry away from the musical objects we study and toward an intrinsically human and material realm.<sup>38</sup>

Since I treat representations of music in this project as a kind of unsounded sound, I gravitate toward this understanding of music; that is, an understanding that accepts music as a type of sound but also uncouples music from its aural component by locating its frequencies in vibration. Furthermore, as Eidsheim affirms, these vibrations need not be anchored in a musical object, *per se*, but in a material form, such as the body or even the pages of a story. In this sense, I treat the Apollonius tradition as musical in that I read two versions laden with musical representations brought to life through the reader's engagement. It is because of the textual representations of music in these two Apollonius stories that the vibrational affect takes effect, pulsating from text to reader and back to text again.

Music, in its textual representation, can be considered a palpable tool that can offer ethics to counteract the inherent limitations of the story. No reader can “right” the fictionalized experiences of Tarsia/Thaise. However, what readers can do is take a more ethical approach to engage with her character and the Apollonius tradition by attuning their thinking ears to the sonic features of the text. In both the *HA* and Gower's telling, sonic references are textual features that do not create an illusion of meaning. Sound is a reference to its own palpable and experiential presentation in text. Even in its semantic representation, sound emanates from that which it is: vibrational pulsation. In the case of the Apollonius story, musical representation exudes from

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<sup>38</sup> Eidsheim, *Sensing Sound*, 156.

Thaise's/Tarsia's character each time the text describes her harmonious instrumental playing. Ultimately, the author writes these musical features into the text. By drawing attention to the sounds that derive from Thaise's/Tarsia's character's musical abilities, we, as readers, can begin to hear not the interpretation of the female voice but a form of musical expression that pulsates from the descriptions of her performances. Thus, I offer a comparative reading of these two Apollonius stories that are saturated in their rhythmic echoes, and, in turn, I aim to generate a more ethical approach to the *HA* and Gower's portrayal of female voice by way of Tarsia's/Thaise's sonic expressions.

### **A Reading: Musical Representation in Gower's "Apollonius of Tyre" and the *HA***

While there are seemingly endless versions of the Apollonius story, the basic plot remains the same across most retellings.<sup>39</sup> The story of Apollonius typically begins with a sorrowful account of a king, King Antiochus, who has just lost his wife. From there, the plot quickly darkens and describes King Antiochus as he forces himself on his daughter and repeatedly rapes her (*CA* VIII.288-297). King Antiochus prevents anyone from taking his daughter away from him by creating a seemingly unsolvable riddle for all of her potential suitors. If a potential suitor gets the riddle wrong, the suitor is beheaded. Apollonius hears of this deadly riddle and decides to set sail for Antioch in hopes of finally being the one to solve the riddle and marry the beautiful princess. Once Apollonius arrives, he seeks out King Antiochus, and, upon hearing the riddle, he immediately knows the answer but is afraid to voice said answer aloud, for he warns King Antiochus that the answer "toucheth al the privete / Betwen thin oghne childe and thee" (*CA* VIII.425-6). Out of fear of being exposed for assaulting his daughter, King Antiochus pretends

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<sup>39</sup> *Historia Apollonii Regis Tyri, Kynge Appolyn of Thyre, Geschichte des Königs Apollonius von Tyrus, Storia di Apollonio re di Tiro, Libro de Apolonio, La cronicque et hystoire de Appollin, roy de Thir*. Across time periods, regions and various languages, these titles highlight the immense popularity of the text known as "Apollonius of Tyre" or the *Story of Apollonius, King of Tyre* in Modern English. For further reading on the global popularity of the Apollonius story, see Archibald, "Introduction to the *Historia Apollonii*," 3.

he is a gracious host and grants Apollonius thirty days to reconsider his answer to the riddle. In turn, Apollonius flees.

After escaping from the wicked King, the story follows Apollonius across three decades as he travels from Tarsus to Pentapolis and back again before traveling from Tarsus to Mytilene, Mytilene to Ephesus and, finally, Ephesus to Tyre. During one of his many voyages, Apollonius learns that King Antiochus and his daughter were struck by lightning and died. Soon after hearing this, Apollonius weds another princess, and they have a daughter, Thaise. Apollonius, his new wife, and their newborn daughter, Thaise, take them to the sea, hoping to return to Tyre. Unfortunately, on their journey to Tyre, there is a large storm, and Apollonius' wife falls sick and suddenly dies. The crew is forced to throw her body overboard. Unbeknownst to Apollonius, his wife's body washes ashore in Ephesus and is discovered by a physician who brings her back to life (*CA* VIII.1151-1208).

After his wife dies, Apollonius is inconsolable and decides to place his daughter, Thaise, under the care of two supposed friends who claim they can offer her a better life in Tarsus. The foster family initially upholds their promise to educate and raise her well. Still, as Thaise grows older, the fostering couple, particularly the adoptive wife, grows jealous of the attention Thaise receives over their biological daughter and plots to have her killed (*CA* VIII.1357-1366). Thaise manages to escape the hired killer but soon after is caught by pirates and sold into prostitution. Meanwhile, due to a storm at sea, Apollonius is unexpectedly forced to dock in the very town where his daughter is sold into prostitution. Upon landing, the lord of Mytilene, Athenagoras, suggests Thaise be brought to cheer up Apollonius. Apollonius is increasingly irritated by Thaise's many attempts to make him happy, forcing her to stop by slapping her violently (*CA* VIII.1686-1694). In response to Apollonius' assault, Thaise begins to describe the sorrowful

circumstances that led her to that brothel. Apollonius recognizes the events in Thaise's story and realizes he is speaking to his daughter. Reunited, Apollonius and his daughter plan to leave Mytilene immediately, but before they do, Athenagoras, the lord of Mytilene, proposes to Thaise, and they marry before embarking (*CA* VIII.1768-1787). On their voyage, Apollonius has a vision that he should go to Ephesus instead of Tarsus, so they change courses, and Apollonius unexpectedly finds his wife alive. In the end, Apollonius is reunited with his wife and daughter, takes revenge on the supposed friends who mistreated his daughter, and resumes his role as King of Tyre (*CA* VIII.1912-1998).

Descriptions of musical sounds appear for the first time in the Apollonius story through the character of Tarsia's/Thaise's mother as she plays the lyre for Apollonius shortly after meeting him (*CA* VIII.759-66; *HA*.15-6; 126-29).<sup>40</sup> Although music does not function as a life-saving mode of expression for her in the ways that it does later on for her daughter, Tarsia/Thaise, it acts as a gateway to mutual love and, thus, marriage and security for her, highlighting how music in the Apollonius tradition is sonically impactful in ways female voice is limited:

Rex vero videos tantam bonitatem filiae suae valde gavisus est et ait ad eam: 'Nata dulcis, salvum habeas. lube tibi afferre lyram et aufer iuveni lacrimas et exilara ad convivium.' Puella vero iussit sibi afferri lyram. At ubi accepit, cum nimia dulcedine vocis chordarum sonos, melos cum voce miscebat. Omnes convivae coeperunt mirari dicentes: 'Non potest esse melius, non potest dulcius plus isto, quod audivimus!' (*HA*.16; 128-9)

[The king was delighted to see his daughter being so kind and said to her: 'Dear child, bless you. Send for your lyre, take away the young man's tears, and cheer him up for the feast.' The girl sent for her lyre. When she received it, she mingled the sound of the

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<sup>40</sup> Much like in the modern romance genre, Apollonius serendipitously meets the woman who will become his wife and Tarsia's/Thaise's mother. Upon being shipwrecked on the shores of Pentapolis, a poor, elderly man aids Apollonius and points him in the fateful direction of the city gates where he will befriend King Archistrates and fall in-love with his daughter, the princess (*CA* VIII.634-65; *HA*.12-4; 123-27). During a shared meal with King Archistrates and his daughter, Apollonius recounts his tale of mishap and woe at sea, and the King tells his daughter to get her lyre and play him a song to bring him cheer (*CA* VIII.759-66; *HA*.15-6; 126-29).

strings with her very sweet voice, tune with song. All the feasters began to marvel, and said: 'Nothing could be better, nothing could be sweeter than this which we have heard.')

Here, the princess proves to have musical talent of her own, and it is a talent that the reader is invited to sonically imagine through its description of “dulcedine vocis” [sweet voice] and “melos cum voce miscebat” [tune with song]. At this moment, the representations of music displayed in the scene reverberate from the page as female song and melody “cum nimia” [mingle]. This moment highlights the seductiveness of Tarsia’s song found within the *HA*, as it is easy to become entranced by the melodic nature of what appears to be “her song.” However, it is essential to note that her father instructs her to retrieve her instrument and play for her guest. In this sense, Tarsia’s voice is used as an instrument of the author and her father: “Rex vero videos tantam bonitatem filiae suae valde gavisus est et ait ad eam: ‘Nata dulcis, salvum habeas. lube tibi afferre lyram et aufer iuveni lacrimas et exhilara ad convivium’” [The king was delighted to see his daughter being so kind, and said to her: ‘Dear child, bless you. Send for your lyre, take away the young man's tears, and cheer him up for the feast’]. Though Tarsia is the one to sing, this moment between father and Tarsia reveals that even this musical performance was a command of her father’s. Thus, Tarsia’s song is as fragile as her voice.

Though the *HA* overwhelmingly fixates on Tarsia’s song and lyrics, there are moments within the text in which the narrative shifts focus from descriptions of Tarsia’s vocals to sonic references that linger on how her voice sounds. As Tarsia plays, the text slows down and holds its reader captive to Tarsia’s song. The text is asking us, readers, to listen: “cum nimia dulcedine vocis chordarum sonos, melos cum voce miscebat” [mingled sound of the strings with her very sweet voice, tune with song]. Like honey, these sonic references drip delectably. We feast with our ears, consuming this mixture of sound and music. If the pacing of this passage, from meandering to urgent to hypnotic, is not enough to draw the reader’s attention to this scene, the

text itself emphasizes the importance of listening through its pictured audience, “Omnes convivae coeperunt mirari” [All the feasters began to marvel]. “Omnes convivae” [all the feasters] could quite literally refer to the guests dining at the king’s palace, but the phrasing “Omnes convivae” could also refer to the audience who metaphorically feasts upon the honey-saturated sweetness of the melody they are consuming: “Non potest esse melius, non potest dulcius plus isto, quod audivimus!” [‘Nothing could be better, nothing could be sweeter than this which we have heard’]. Notably, when the HA emphasizes how Tarsia’s performance sounded, Tarsia’s lyrics are shown to be audible, as is implied by the pictured audience. Furthermore, the text’s account of the audience’s reaction captured here seems to anticipate its readerly audience as its readers are mirrored in “Omnes convivae” [all the feasters] of the passage who greedily consume the narrative’s sonic delights.

In Gower’s telling, Thaise also has an audience, but instead of merely showing onlookers gazing up at her, Gower orchestrates a competition between Thaise and Apollonius. In this version, Apollonius returns from Thaise’s performance with confidence that he can impress the princess even more with his musical talents than she did for him. Then, the text directs our attention to Apollonius’ musical performance:

He takth the harpe and in his wise  
He tempreth, and of such assise  
Singende he harpeth forth withal,  
That as a vois celestial  
Hem thoghte it souneth in here ere,  
As thogh that he an angel were.  
Thei gladen of his melodie. (*CA* VIII.777-82)

Readers are guided line by line through Apollonius’ musical performance, as he, first “takth the harpe” and then “he tempreth” followed by “he harpeth forth withal,” and, finally, he sings along with his musical instrument with “a vois celestial.” The level of musical intricacies here cannot

help but beg readerly audiences to witness Apollonius' performance—a stark contrast from the *HA* in which the text lingered on Thaise. While this passage is sonically rich, it is noteworthy that by removing the fixation of voice, Gower seems to overlook Thaise altogether. As such, I conclude that Gower's aim to redirect attention from Thaise's fragile voice—a literary tool that even her father has control over in the *HA*—ultimately results in an overcorrection that nearly eclipses Thaise in favor of descriptions of Apollonius' musical prowess.

One cannot begin to make sense of the presentation or larger purpose of the “Apollonius” story without weighing Gower's treatment of characterized women. In comparison to his “misogynistic”<sup>41</sup> representation of women in *Vox Clamantis* and *Mirour de l'Omme*, Gower's attitude toward women in the *Confessio Amantis* has often been regarded as much more “favorable” and the female characters “more complex and rounded.”<sup>42</sup> In contrast, A. S. G. Edwards claims that Gower generally marginalizes women by not giving them a voice to express their needs, desires, or experiences.<sup>43</sup> Gower's relationship with women becomes even muddier when discussing the “Apollonius” text, which has been compared to another tale that features a female protagonist who suffers immensely, Constance. Jeremy Dimmick<sup>44</sup> draws direct links between Gower's “Apollonius” tale, the figure of Constance, and the Constance group, a collection of late medieval romances that share at least one of the following tropes: “an incestuous proposition (usually from a father), mutilation (usually of the hands), flight (often by sea), brief happiness in marriage, false accusation, separation from husband and children, menial

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<sup>41</sup> Katherine J. Lewis, “Women and Power,” in *Historians on John Gower*, eds. Stephen H. Rigby and Siân Echard (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2019), 323-350, at 132-3.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 324; Misty Schieberle, “‘Thing Which a Man Mai Noght Areche’: Women and Counsel in Gower's *Confessio Amantis*,” *Chaucer Review* 42, no. 1 (2007): 91–109; D. Watt, “Gender and Sexuality in *Confessio Amantis*,” in *A Companion to Gower*, ed. Siân Echard (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2004), 197-214.

<sup>43</sup> A. S. G. Edwards, “Gower's Women in the *Confessio*,” *Mediaevalia* 16 (1993): 223-37.

<sup>44</sup> Jeremy Dimmick, “‘Redinge of Romance’ in Gower's *Confessio Amantis*,” in *Tradition and Transformation in Medieval Romance*, ed. Rosalind Field (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1999), 125-138, at 136.

employment, and a final recognition scene often accompanied by punishment of villains.”<sup>45</sup> In response to the sheer amount of thematic overlap between the Constance group and the traditional Apollonius plot, Archibald argues that it is crucial to recognize the “ancient and lasting connection”<sup>46</sup> between what she declares are “two classical precursors” and the Constance group, *Clementine Recognitions* and the *HA*. Archibald’s claim couches Gower’s later version of the story firmly within a tradition that stretches from late antiquity to the Middle Ages, demonstrating that Gower’s telling works to retain and repeat rather than subvert or challenge<sup>47</sup> the inherited plight of women and the “Incestuous Father folktale”<sup>48</sup> narrative that preceded him.

Similar to his source material, Gower also features an audience in his telling, but just as the earlier passage showed Gower’s sonic tending to Apollonius, so, too, is the audience depicted as being entranced by Apollonius’ musical capabilities: “Hem thoghte it souneth in here ere / As thogh that he an angel were / Thei gladen of his melodie.” Notably, the gaze of the text is mesmerized by Apollonius visually. Still, the scene encourages readers to listen to its musical representations, revealing Gower’s attentiveness to the musical richness found, though often overshadowed in his source material. This is a fiction Gower can manufacture, unlike the knottiness of voice, even male voice. Here, each sonic reference helps to animate Apollonius’ musical performance, and each description of its listening audience confirms the pleasure and palpability of music in this story.

Gower’s telling creates a sonic synergy across its pages and between its characters as Apollonius’ singing is described “as thogh that he an angel were” (*CA* VIII.782), a description

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<sup>45</sup> Archibald, “The Flight from Incest: Two Late Classical Precursors of the Constance Theme,” *The Chaucer Review* 20, no. 4 (1986): 259-272, at 259.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Convincingly, in *Covert Operations*, Lochrie posits, “For all its perversions, Gower’s text is not finally subversive...John Gower is on the side of order, unity, and social hierarchy” (224-5).

<sup>48</sup> Archibald, “The Flight from Incest,” 261.

that echoes the same sonic references used to narrate Thaise's melodious singing earlier in the text, "And lich an angel sang withal" (*CA VIII*; 1671). Using the word "angel" to relay each musical scene to the reader creates an echo between sonic scenes that yoke these two figures together, highlighting the fluidity of sound and music. Thaise and Apollonius undoubtedly have disparate positions within the story, as Apollonius is a male, noble character of power. In contrast, Thaise is a young woman who is betrayed, kidnapped, and abused. However, musical performances place each character on an equal footing, in which both can express themselves and be heard by the audiences they are performing for. Thus, when the reader encounters descriptions of angelic singing, the sound of the song persists rather than the limited and constructed "voice" of either character.

In most of the musical scenes found throughout Gower's telling, audience and music often go hand-in-hand, helping to create further an aural dimension that can be easily imagined within the text. As previously mentioned, when Apollonius plays the harp, those listening seem to enjoy what they hear, as they are described as "gladen of his melodie" (*CA VIII*. 777). Among the audience is Thaise/Tarsia's future mother, the princess, who also seems to enjoy Apollonius' musical performance. In addition to enjoying Apollonius' singing and instrumental playing, Apollonius' performance provides the princess with extralinguistic information about the musical stranger before her:

Thei gladen of his melodie,  
Bot most of all the compainie  
The kinges doghter, which it herde,  
And thoghte ek hou that he ansuerde,  
Whan that he was of hire opposed,  
Withinne hir herte hath wel supposed  
That he is of gret gentillesse. (*CA VIII*.777-89)

The scene functions not only as a moment of musical reception but also recognition that is dependent upon a kind of sonic reading in which the princess attunes her ears to interpret that which she hears: “The kinges doghter, which it herde, / And thoghte ek hou that he ansuerde,/ Whan that he was of hire opposed.” In this instance, the princess interprets the melody of his lyre as a message for his unspoken nobility by first recalling in her mind’s eye a scene in which Apollonius sat across from her and vaguely responded to questions about his identity. Then, she fills in the gaps in Apollonius’ recounted story with the suggestive sounds of his musical performance. Upon hearing Apollonius, from ear to eye, the princess realizes her intuition was correct: “Withinne hir herte hath wel supposed / That he is of gret gentillesse.” In this regard, Apollonius’ musical performance expresses more than he communicated with his words, and, in turn, the princess understands his concert as both extralinguistic and expressive. Music pulsates when words cannot be fully expressed. Even though Apollonius could not verbalize his story due to feelings of loss, shame, and grief, without speaking, the princess could comprehend what his sorrow kept him from uttering: his identity, story, and experiences of loss.

After piecing together Apollonius’ background and status from his musical prowess, the princess requests that he become her music tutor, a decision that will ultimately lead to musical lessons and amorous thoughts (*CA* VIII.805-33; *HA*.18; 130-31). During these lessons “of harpe, of citole, and of rote” (*CA* VIII.829), music proves to be a vehicle for love in terms of its catalytic function as well as its ability to convey sweet nothings that the princess cannot yet verbally express to Apollonius:

He tawhte hir til sche was certain  
Of harpe, of citole, and of rote,  
With many a tun and many a note  
Upon musique, upon mesure,  
And of hire harpe the temprure  
He tawhte hire ek, as he wel couthe.

Bot as men sein that frele is youthe,  
With leisir and continuance  
This mayde fell upon a chance,  
That love hath made him a querele. (*CA VIII.828-37*)

Gower's telling moves deliberately through each musical description, beginning with what instruments Apollonius taught the princess to play, "of harpe, of citole, and of rote," and ending with descriptions of Apollonius tuning the harp for her, "and of hire harpe the temprure." These details draw the reader in, inviting us to witness Apollonius' musical talents and abilities.

Additionally, such a scene allows readers access to the moments that led to the princess falling in love. Each skill suggests a passing of time, "upon musique, upon mesure," which, in turn, reveals how these two characters were joined together in musical procession. In many ways, Apollonius' display of teaching, "He tawhte hire ek, as he wel couthe," is as much a lesson on the process of learning how to be a skilled musician as it is on falling in love: be gentle, be generous, be in tune. As the passage nears its end, it is clear that this language of music works to veil the princess' romantic feelings: "This mayde fell upon a chance, / That love hath made him a querele." This musical exchange conveys what the princess cannot yet voice: her heart's desire.

The Apollonius story utilizes musical representation as a way to conceal its characters' feelings of distress as well as passion, a fact that the reader is privy to as we are given access to the narrative of Apollonius' tribulations and the princess' internal inflictions of love. In the *HA*, musical lessons might bring the princess and Apollonius together, but neither knows how the other feels until the princess verbally declares her love to her father:

'Patre carissime, quia cupis audire natae tuae desiderium: ilium vole coniugem et amo, patrimonio deceptum et naufragum, magistrum meum Apollonium; cui si non me tradideris, a praesenti perdes filiam!'" (*HA.22; 134-35*)

[ 'Dearest father, since you want to hear your child's desire: the man I want for my husband, the man I love, is the man who was cheated of his inheritance and shipwrecked,

my teacher Apollonius. If you will not give me to him, you will immediately lose your daughter!']

In this dramatic confession of love, the *HA* depicts the princess expressing her heart's desire for her father and proclaiming that her love will cost them their relationship if he does not honor her feelings. Notably, the scene also draws attention to how significant Apollonius' music lessons were for the princess and her romantic feelings as she refers to him as "magistrum meum" ['my teacher'] in this declaration. Thus, the *HA* offers what Gower refuses: a constructed voice for the princess and a reminder of the musical underpinnings of the text.

In contrast to the depiction of the princess' passionate assertion of love in the *HA*, in Gower's "Apollonius" story, when the princess reflects on her love for Apollonius, she grows red with embarrassment and then pale "for feere of wommannysse schame" (*CA* VIII.855).

Regarding these specific scenes, both portrayals of the princess are, ultimately, constructions of their authors. However, one text, the *HA*, ventriloquizes women through passion and voicing; whereas, Gower's "Apollonius" offers an oppressive form of gendered silence by concealing Thaise's feelings beneath "wommannysse schame." Gower seems to struggle to reanimate this version of Tarsia he inherited, but here, his revisions veer on erasure rather than empowerment. This suggests that when Gower moves away from the sonic descriptions that he links to Thaise's character and fixates on female voice, body, and emotions, such revisions tend to limit his female characters more than they support them. As a result, at this moment, Gower's "Apollonius" seems to displace the inconceivable work of the writer onto the female character he created.

As Gower's "Apollonius" story continues, so does the textual preoccupation with women's shame. In the narrative, readers are told, yet again, that it is because of some inherited shame within the princess' sex, "the schame which is in a Maide," that she cannot vocalize her feelings, "with speche dar nocht ben unloke." Thus, the text seems to insist that women have a

hand in preventing their voices from being heard as if they possess a metaphorical key to “unloke” their voice box (*CA* VIII. 895-5). Gower inserts such statements into the mouth of the princess herself, as she imagines what she would like to say to her father but ultimately cannot do so for “schame.” Since the reader is aware of the fiction of Thaise’s character, including her constructed “schame,” we can interpret this episode of oppressive silence as Gower’s own projected anxieties around the animation of female voice:

‘The schame which is in a Maide  
With speche dar noght ben unloke,  
Bot in writinge it mai be spoke;  
So wryte I to you, fader, thus:  
Bot if I have Appolinus,  
Of al this world, what so betyde,  
I wol non other man abide.’ (*CA* VIII. 894-900)

Gower’s discomfort with the ethical presentation of voice is apparent in this passage, for each time the princess seems to suggest that she does have a voice, the text backpedals and explains how such a voice must be quieted, shamed, or concealed from public eyes. First, the princess is ventriloquized to explain that she cannot express in “speche” that which she “dar noght” say for “schame...in a Maide.” Yet, even as the passage makes clear in these lines that the princess is regulated by her discomfort, the text offers another avenue for her to vocalize through, “writinge.” While the act of writing indeed allows the princess a new space and form to speak, “in writing it mai be spoke,” the framing of the passage, including its rhetoric of shame, seems to undercut the significance of the princess’s words to her father, “Of al this world, what so betide, / I wol non other man abide.” Such a statement is not nearly as palpable as the princess’ vocalized declaration in the *HA*, for, here, in Gower’s “Apollonius,” this admission seems like a secret that must be concealed by the privacy afforded by the letter rather than a celebration of women’s

words or agency. Thus, voice, whether spoken or written, is always slippery and muddled, a fact Gower seems aware of as he struggles to navigate how to make the princess speak.

In both Gower's telling and the *HA*, Tarsia/Thaise is depicted as a female character who survives horrific situations after horrific situations. Shortly after the princess and Apollonius are wed, Tarsia's/Thaise's mother unexpectedly dies, and tragedy and misfortune plague Apollonius and his daughter, Tarsia/Thaise, eventually leading to Tarsia/Thaise being captured by pirates (*CA* VIII.1406-15; *HA*.32; 146-47). As if matters could not be worse, the pirates sell Tarsia/Thaise to a brothel in which she is forced into prostitution and spends most of the day weeping. Much to the brothel-keeper's surprise, Tarsia/Thaise still makes a great deal of money, which she explains is a result of her rhetoric of tears, which spark a sense of curiosity and compassion in her viewers, allowing her to narrate her story to would-be clients (*HA*.35; 152-53). In this admission to the brothel keeper, the *HA* constructs a world in which Tarsia's tears are taken seriously, and she, in turn, can articulate her trauma to a listening audience that only pities her more after hearing her speak:

Statim earn villicus duxit in suum cubiculum et ait ad earn: 'Verum mihi die, Tarsia, adhuc virgo es?' Tarsia puella ait: 'Quamdiu vult deus, virgo sum.' Villicus ait: 'Uncle ergo his duobus diebus tantam pecuniam obtulisti?' Puella dixit: 'Lacrimis meis, exponens ad omnes universes casus meosj et illi dolentes miserentur virginitati meae.' (*HA*.35; 152-53)

[The overseer took her to his room at once and said to her: 'Tell me the truth, Tarsia, are you still a virgin?' The girl Tarsia said: 'For as long as God wishes, I am a virgin.' The overseer said: 'Then where did you get so much money in these two days?' The girl said: 'With my tears, I told all the men the whole story of my misfortunes, and they were upset and took pity on my virginity.']

What starts as an interrogation about virginity ends in Tarsia explaining the power of her vocalized experience. Thus, at this moment, it is not the cacophonous slurry of tears that confronts the brothel keeper or the reader but rather the seductive presentation of the female voice as Tarsia tells "the whole story of [her] misfortunes" to all who will eagerly listen.

Shifting the focus from Tarsia's rhetoric of tears found in the *HA* to Thaise's sorrow for "hire maidenhead" (*CA* VIII.1419) aligns with the moral code of Gower's telling. Gower cannot grant Thaise a voice in which she can talk her way out of her tribulations. To this end, the insisted agency of Tarsia's tears in the *HA* are all but erased in Gower's telling. The entire dialogue between the brothel-keeper and Thaise is removed and left in its place is Thaise's sorrow as well as God's salvation:

No wonder is thogh sche be wo:  
Clos in a chambre be hireselve,  
Ech after other ten or tuelve  
Of yonge men to hire in wente;  
Bot such a grace God hire sente,  
That for the sorwe which sche made  
Was none of hem which pouer hade  
To don hire eny vileinie. (*CA* VIII.1424-1431)

By stripping Thaise of her verbal exchange with the brothel-keeper, Gower's text lays bare just how vulnerable a position Thaise is in, as "Close in a chambre be hireselve, / Ech after other ten or tuelve / Of yonge men to hire in wente." Rather than presenting her voice as a vehicle for safety, Gower revises the story and writes that "such a grace God hire sente." In this version, the text explains that it is because of God that Thaise's "sorwe which she made / Was none of them which power hade." Thaise is as forlorn as Tarsia, but what shifts is who can rescue her from the dire situation. While it seems unlikely that Thaise/Tarsia could truly ever escape her circumstance unscathed, here, in Gower's telling, he presents not a hopeful imagining that Thaise could merely speak her way out of a violent situation but instead offers a portrayal of God as a spiritual agent that can assist Thaise in moments when her agency is nonexistent. Thus, in Gower's version, there is no voice at all. Instead, it is through God's actions that Thaise's "sorwe" becomes pronounced, stripping the "pouer" of those "yonge men" away.

Like her mother, the princess' daughter, Thaise/Tarsia, uses sonority as an enjoyment instrument that doubles as a tool that saves her life. Thus, the princess' and Thaise's/Tarsia's voices may always be a fiction of the text, but musical synergy palpitates between these figures through their shared stories (*CA VIII.1040-1056*). Following the weeping narrative scene found in the *HA*, Tarsia prevents further violation of her mind, body, and freedom while in the brothel by negotiating with the brothel keeper to use her musical talent to entertain the public in exchange for money (*HA.36; 154-55*). Tarsia commingles the rhythm of music with her knowledge of the liberal arts, yoking together two systems of expression, sound, and speech, that are so often viewed as disparate:

Puella respondit: 'Habeo auxilium studiorum liberalium, perfecte erudita sumj similiter et lyrae pulsu modulariter inlud.o. lube eras tina in frequenti loco poni scamna, et facundia serrnonis mei spectaculum praebeo; deinde plectro modulabor et hac arte ampliabo pecunias cotidie.' Quod cum fecisset villicus, tanta populi adclamatio tantusque amor civitatis circa eam excrebruit, ut et viri et feminae cotidie ei multa conferrent. Athenagoras autem princeps memoratam Tarsiam integrae virginitatis et generositatis ita eam custexliebat ac si unicam suam filiam, ita ut villico multa donaret et comrendaret eam. (*HA.36; 154-55*)

[Tarsia replied: 'I have the benefit of studying the liberal arts: I am fully educated. I can also play the lyre with a rhythmic beat. Have benches put up tomorrow in some crowded place, and I shall entertain with my eloquent talk.' Then I shall make music with a plectrum, and through this skill, I shall make more money every day.' The servant did this; so great was the people's applause and the citizens' love for her that both men and women gave her a lot of money every day. Tarsia became famous for her pure virginity and her noble nature, and Prince Athenagoras watched over her as if she were his only daughter, to the extent that he gave a lot of money to the overseer and entrusted her to him.]

The passage demonstrates Tarsia's sense of authority, which she derives from her education and musical talents. In response to this scene, Archibald focuses on Tarsia's/Thaise's rhetoric rather than lingering on why the music is so important in this text.<sup>49</sup> While I agree that education is significant to Thaise's ability to escape enslaved prostitution, rather than glossing over music's

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<sup>49</sup> Archibald, "Deep clerks she dumbs," 289-303.

role in that escape, I will primarily focus on it. Notably, the *HA* offers confirmation of Tarsia's reception as a musician: "...tanta populi adclamatio tantusque amor civitatis circa earn excrebruit, ut et viri et feminae cotidie ei multa conferrent" [so great was the people's applause, so great was the citizens' love for her, that both men and women gave her a lot of money every day]. Readers are told that Tarsia is so celebrated by her community, including Prince Athenagoras, that the overseer of the brothel "comrnendaret earn" [entrusted her to him]. In other words, the *HA* offers a narrative in which Tarsia can save herself from a dire situation because of her expertise and her voice, proving the power of Tarsia's intellectual and musical abilities.

While the *HA* depicts Tarsia as being able to display her capabilities in public performances to evade enslaved prostitution, so, too, does Thaise find a way out of her predicament, but in Gower's telling, Thaise does so through her request to tutor "honeste wommen" in private (*CA* VIII.1457) to protect her "maidenhede." Thus, Gower elects to animate Thaise's voice in a concealed space, revealing the spaces in which women's voices are permitted to be heard in this text:

'If so be that thi maister wolde  
That I his gold encesce scholde,  
It mai nocht falle be this weie:  
Bot soffre me to go mi weie  
Out of this hous wher I am inne,  
And I schal make him for to winne  
In some place ells of the toun,  
Be so it be religioun,  
Wher that honeste wommen duelle.' (*CA* VIII.1449-57)

Here, Gower builds the case that Thaise can "gold encesce" not by working as a prostitute against her will but by going "out of this house wher I am inne" and working in the safety and privacy of the spaces "reihoun...wommen duelle." Thus, she appeals to the brothel owner's monetary desires before concluding with her wishes, making her argument quite persuasive. To

that end, Thaise attests that if she wins, the master will, too: “And I schal make him for to winne.” While it is the brothel owner who will “winne” more “golde,” Thaise clearly states that it will be because of her doing, “I schal make him.” Although it is undeniable that Gower’s Thaise has far fewer speaking lines than the *HA*’s Tarsia, here, Gower deploys Thaise’s character with an incredibly persuasive speech that saves her from further enduring harm. Thus, Gower’s Thaise is rescued by God’s spiritual salvation and her intellect, for she draws upon her education to serve as a tutor for “honeste wommen.” In this regard, Gower strategically decides when and how to animate Thaise’s voice. Thaise does not perform or parade her knowledge. She seeks to be a tutor to “honeste wommen” in private. Unlike the large crowd featured in the *HA*, Thaise’s knowledge and vocality are only detectable by female learners who have access to these private spaces.

As the scene unfolds, Gower’s telling continually deviates from the *HA* in its revision of how Thaise’s teaching is presented. In Gower’s version, Thaise’s teaching is presented as a didactic form rather than a public performance or spectacle of entertainment. While both texts ultimately empower Tarsia/Thaise in their descriptions of her abilities, where these two texts depart is in the purpose of said skills. As previously shown, in the *HA*, Tarsia’s life-saving performances are just as theatrical as her animated voice in that such qualities are designed for entertainment and artifice. In response, Gower celebrates Thaise in a new way. The lengthy description of Thaise as a teacher lingers on what she knows and to whom she is sharing such information so that the scene functions as a quiet and private pedagogical moment between teacher and students:

Now comen tho that come wolde  
Of wommen in her lusty youthe,  
To hiere and se what thing sche couthe:  
Sche can the wisdom of a clerk,

Sche can of every lusti werk  
Which to a gentil woman longeth,  
And some of hem sche underfongeth  
To the citole and to the harpe,  
And whom it liketh for to carpe  
Proverbes and demandes slythe,  
An other such thei nevere syhe,  
Which that science so wel tawhte:  
Wherof sche grete giftes cawhte,  
That sche to Leonin hath wonne;  
And thus hire name is so begonne  
Of sondri thinges that sche techeth,  
That al the lond unto hir secheth  
Of yonge wommen for to liere. (*CA* VIII.1480-97)

In a rare literary moment, Gower offers his readers a glimpse into the world of women's education: "Sche can of every lusti werk / Which to a gentil woman longeth." In the passage, the reader may not have access to what Thaise says to her students, but Gower validates Thaise's expertise, even likening her abilities to "the wisdom of a clerk."

Descriptions of Thaise's teaching abilities are so diverse that it is clear just how well educated she is; from the "harpe" to "proverbes," Gower creates a female instructor that would rival any man of her time. Furthermore, Thaise's musical talents are displayed as part of her repertoire, validating her musical prowess and the importance of music for women's education. Because of Thaise's "grete giftes," the reader learns "that sche to Leonin hath wonne," meaning that she accomplished what she set out to do: bring gold to the brothel keeper and, in turn, freedom for herself. In a way, Gower's version eclipses the *HA*'s in terms of its delivery of female agency in that Thaise is not passed onto another man upon saving herself from the brothel as Tarsia is to prince Athenagoras. Gower's rendition is a win for all women.

Later, in both accounts, Thaise/Tarsia is brought onboard a ship to entertain Apollonius, a man neither she nor he knows is her father (*CA* VIII.1653-61; *HA*.40; 158-59). During their encounter, Thaise/Tarsia sings to Apollonius. In Gower's version of this scene, he removes the

lengthy lyrics quoted at the opening of this chapter from the *HA*<sup>50</sup>; by doing so, he shifts the focus from Tarsia’s voice and lyrical narrative to the sound of Thaise’s song:

Whan sche hath understonden it,  
Sche goth hir doun, ther as he lay,  
Wher that sche harpeth many a lay  
And lich an angel sang withal;  
Bot he no more than the wal  
Tok hiede of eny thing he herde. (*CA* VIII; 1668-73)

Gower maintains Thaise’s musicality in the scene, even when omitting the lyrics found in the *HA*, shedding light on the resistive quality of music and the diversity of female expression. What Gower and the *HA* share, as illuminated by this passage, is the musical component of the Apollonius tradition. It is in musical representation that these two textual versions touch. Like the *HA*, Gower draws attention to the musical quality of Thaise’s singing: “Wher that sche harpeth many a lay / And lich an angel sang withal.”<sup>51</sup> Such a description recalls an earlier

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<sup>50</sup> The reader may recall Tarsia’s quoted lyrics from the beginning of this chapter: “His carminibus coepit modulata voce canere: / 'Per sordes gradior, sed sordis conscia non sum, / Sicut rosa in spinis nescit compungi mucrone. / Piratae me rapuerunt gladio ferientes iniquo. / Lenoni nunc vendita numquam violavi pudorem. / Ni fletus et luci et lacrimae de amissis inessent, / Nulla me melior, pater si nasset ubi essem. / Regia sum genere et stirpe propagata *piorum*, / Sed contemptum habeo et iubeor adeoque laetari! / Fige modum lacrimis, curas resolve dolorum, / Redde caelo oculos et ani mum ad sidera tolle! / Aderit ille deus creator omnium et auctor; / Non sinit hos fletus casso dolore relinqui!’” (*HA*.41; 160-61). [In a musical voice she began to sing this song: 'I walk among corruption, but I am unaware of corruption, just as a rose among thorns is not pricked by their spines. Pirates abducted me, striking with wicked swords. Now I have been sold to a pimp, but I have never tarnished my honor. If it were not for weeping and grief and tears for my lost parents, if my father knew where I am, no woman would be better off than I. I am of royal birth, born of an honorable line, But I endure contempt, and am told besides to rejoice! Restrain your tears, put an end to your sorrows and cares, return your eyes to heaven, raise your heart to the stars! God the Creator and Maker of all things will help you: He does not allow these tears to be shed in useless grief!'].]

<sup>51</sup> In the mid-thirteenth-century and early fourteenth-century, Bartholomew of Messina and Pietro d’Abano helped bring Aristotelian philosophy to Western Europe through the translations of Aristotle’s works, including *De anima*, a work on hearing, sound production and reception as well as *De sensu et sensato*, a text that explores the psychology of sound perception (Burnett 69). With these translations came new approaches to medieval music theory, for Aristotelian philosophy “invests audition with cognitive value inasmuch as, like any one of our sensory organs, the ears enable us to perceive and appreciate reality as it is inscribed in the physical world” (Cazelles 4). One way in which Aristotle’s newly inherited philosophies shifted late medieval approaches to music can be seen in a music theory text from the early fourteenth-century, *Speculum musicae* (Bude 3). In *Speculum musicae*, Jacobus extends Boethius’ three musical categories by creating a fourth class of music, *musica celestis vel divina*, in which he imagined celestial bodies (akin to angels) as having the ability to sing and make song—a concept that Bude calls “radical” in that Jacobus took “the common claim that angelic song *could be heard*, and squar[ed] this with philosophy, which held the opposing view” (Bude 17). While it appears that Jacobus’ *Speculum musicae* was not circulated widely, what Jacobus’ new concept, *musica celestis vel divina*, evidences is the palpable influence

reference to Apollonius' musical performance in which Gower described the sound of his singing "as thogh that he an angel were" (CA VIII.782). Thus, Gower yokes these two figures together, Apollonius and his daughter, Thaise, through sonic reference before they even realize their blood relation. Even though Apollonius chooses to ignore Thaise's song, "Bot he no more than the wal / Tok hiede of eny thing he herde," the reader hears her angelic tune and recognizes such descriptions through the sonic echoes of the story. The reader's role proves essential to this text yet again, for Gower adds sonic signposts throughout this text, which careful readers are meant to recognize and spot moments of misrecognition and misreading by the characters.

Because of musical performance and vocality, Thaise and Apollonius are brought together in both the *HA* and Gower's telling. Though it is imperative to the plot that Apollonius recognize his daughter so they can be reunited, Apollonius initially fails to read his daughter sonically, and, in this sense, he misses the overarching reading lesson of Gower's text:

His heved wepende away he caste,  
And half in wraththe he bad hire go.  
Bot yit sche wolde noght do so,  
And in the derke forth sche goth,  
Til sche him toucheth, and he wroth,  
And after hire with his hond  
He smot: and thus whan sche him fond  
Desesed, courtaisly sche saide,  
"Avoi, mi lord, I am a Maide;  
And if ye wiste what I am,  
And out of what lignage I cam,  
Ye wolde noght be so salvage." (CA VIII.1688-1699)

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Aristotelian philosophy had on late medieval approaches to music and sound theories. See Charles Burnett, "Perceiving Sound in the Middle Ages," in *Hearing History: a Reader*, ed. Mark M. Smith (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2004), 69-84, at 69; Brigitte Cazelles, *Soundscape in Early French Literature* (Arizona: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Texts Studies in collaboration with Brepols, 2005), 4; Tekla Bude, *Sonic Bodies: Text, Music, and Silence in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2022), 14.

Shortly after Thaise asserts that Apollonius has mistreated her, Apollonius recognizes that Thaise is his daughter within her narrated defense (*CA* VIII.1739-47). While Gower edits most moments of Tarsia's voice out of his telling, here, Thaise is given a voice in response to Apollonius' abuse. Thus, Gower animates Thaise to respond to her mistreatment directly and explicitly. Thaise's retort proves successful, for in response to Apollonius' actions, he recognizes who the speaker is. In this sense, Gower shows not the privileging of voice but rather the range of expression in the text. Gower animates Thaise using both dialogue and music to construct Thaise's identity.

Throughout this story, the reader witnesses the importance of the listening audience, as the princess recognizes who Apollonius is during his concert, and Thaise/Tarsia saves herself because the audience validates her publicized knowledge and musical expertise. Even in the recognition scene between Thaise/Tarsia and Apollonius, the reader is invited to see the importance of reading sonically, as we are prompted to do so by tracing the echoes between the descriptions of Thaise's song and Apollonius's earlier melody. Thus, Gower's retelling requires a meticulous reader, as is anticipated by Apollonius's act of misreading, which would be apparent to a careful reader. This sentiment echoes David Lawton's claim that "The final boundary of literary voice is the role of the reader, whose work is to recognize and read it. The reader is the ear of the poem. To parody Paul, a voice comes by reading."<sup>52</sup> In other words, voice in literature is as much a feature of storytelling as it is an exercise for the reader regarding recognition and comprehension. Voice functions as a collaborative device and exchange between reader, writer, and text, and Gower's "Apollonius" makes this intertextual exchange essential to decoding the musical echoes found in its pages.

### **Outro: A Song that Fades but Never Truly Ends**

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<sup>52</sup> See David Lawton, "Voices in the World': Some Definitions of Voice" in *Voice in Later Medieval English Literature: Public Interiorities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 12-42, at 40.

Following the (mis)recognition scene, in less than a hundred lines, Apollonius marries Thaise to the lord of Mytilene, Athenagoras (CA VIII.1772-75), and after the ceremony, the three embark, and the reader hears nothing of Thaise after that. In this final moment, Thaise's voice is silenced, for the female voice is a feature of the text that can all too easily be erased, whether through intentional editing or consequential silencing scenes such as this one. I argue that Gower ceases Thaise's voice in this swift conclusion as a way to draw attention to the impossibility of voiced agency, unlike the *HA*, which concludes with a series of passionate speeches from Tarsia (*HA*.46; 169-171; *HA*.50; 175-177). Of course, that is not to say that either conclusion brings "justice" to the figure of Thaise/Tarsia, for one version ends with an exaggeration of the possibilities of voice, and the other ends in the act of violence followed by the fact of silencing. However, where voice falls short, attention to the sonic elements of Thaise's musical ability prevails, for music is essential to hear the melodies of its female characters in this literary tradition.

Music is a sonic agent that persists even as anxious editors attempt to remove the song lyrics of female performers. While Gower might be able to limit female lyric and voice, the fact that Thaise's musical acts remain allows the reader to link the performer to their music in the scene. In this sense, Thaise's voice can be traced from its echoed ghost form in Gower's text to its palpable, present lyrics in the *HA*. As readers, we must make this connection from reference to the song to its vocalizer, for only then can we see how music offers Thaise a form of sonic agency that cannot be erased.

Following the recognition scene in the *HA*, Tarsia continues to speak, having located a voice within the power of her music, song, and lyrics. Unlike in Gower's telling, as the *HA* nears

its conclusion, the brothel keeper that enslaved Tarsia is murdered, and the other women he forced into prostitution are given to Tarsia, who frees them with the agency of her voice:

Leno igni est traditus. Villicus vero eius cum universis puellis et facultatibus Tarsiae virgini traditur. Cui ait Tarsia: 'Redonavi tibi vitam, quia beneficia tuo virgo permansi.' Et donavit ei ducenta talenta auri et libertatem. Deinde cunctis puellis coram se praesentatis dixit: 'Quicquid de corpore vestro illi infausto contulistis ut habeatis vobis, illud redonavi, et quia mecum verumtamen servistis, ex hoc iam mecum liberae estote.' (*HA*.46; 170-71)

[The pimp was consigned to the flames. But his overseer, the girls, and all his wealth were handed over to the maiden Tarsia. She said to the overseer: 'I have given you your life because it was through your goodwill that I remained a virgin.' And she gave him two hundred talents of gold and his freedom. Then all the girls were brought before her, and she said to them: 'Whatever you earned for the accursed pimp with your bodies, I give it back to you to keep; and indeed, because you were slaves with me, you shall be free with me from now on.']

In Tarsia's second-to-last speaking scene, she uses her voice to forgive and be free. In pardoning the overseer of the brothel, Tarsia also voices the fact that she is still a virgin despite the horrific circumstances she endured. Following Tarsia's generosity, the quoted passage ends with an address to the other women of the brothel who have remained invisible until now. Tarsia uses her words to speak for those who remain unheard in this text, telling the formerly enslaved women that they are free from imprisonment. In this sense, the *HA* constructs what appears to be the most satisfying ending—one in which Tarsia is freed, empowered, and heard. It is precisely this conclusion that Gower omits, for though it resonates with my feminist wishes, I recognize the fantastical improbability of such a scene. The *HA* is genuinely a work of fiction.

The two final scenes in which Tarsia is featured in the *HA* are palpable in authority, whereas, in Gower's conclusion, Thaise remains but a ghost in a story that once contained her presence. As a result, Gower's "Apollonius" and his *Confessio* leave its audience with more questions than answers. Why did Gower choose to focus his final Book on the topic of incest

instead of lechery<sup>53</sup> or lust,<sup>54</sup> topics that would appear to be more relevant in a text-centered around a lover's confession? If readers are to accept Chaucer's epithet, that is, that Gower is a writer invested in teaching moral lessons, what is the reader meant to learn from an incest story? Lastly, what does the strategic placement<sup>55</sup> of the "Apollonius" story as the final story of the collection and the longest suggest? These are just some of the questions scholars have asked in response to including the "Apollonius" story in Gower's *Confessio Amantis*.<sup>56</sup> In an attempt to address these queries, Russell Peck, Elizabeth Porter, and Yeager similarly posit that the "Apollonius" tale functions as a moralistic analogy between incest as a crime against the family or the larger community or state and the figure of Apollonius, who models "ethical self-governance" or the individuals and king of said state.<sup>57</sup> Relatedly, Sebastian Sobocki, María

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<sup>53</sup> Scholars have had much to say about Gower's selected theme for Book VIII of his *Confessio*, Incest, as well as his choice for the last tale in the entire collection, the "Tale of Apollonius of Tyre." In *John Gower's Poetic: The Search for a New Arion* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1990), 215-20, prominent Gower scholar Yeager describes this strategic selection and placement of this final tale as an "exemplary summa" in that this story offers moral lessons on all sins featured in this Book and the Books before it (218). Later, in "Off the Grid for Forty Years: Bringing John Gower into the Classroom," *Pedagogy* 13, no. 2 (2013): 357-370, at 363, Yeager argues that the didacticisms found at the end of this "Apollonius" story should be considered alongside the *Confessio* as a whole, for to understand "the *raison d'être* of Gower's tales" (363) is to make sense of how all of the many moving pieces that make up the *Confessio* are in dialogue, a dialogue that not only includes the relationship between individual tales and all eight Books but also the characters of Amans and Genius, whose exchanges frame and intercede the entirety of the *Confessio*. In *Covert Operations*, Lochrie claims, "At the end of the *Confessio*, Genius substitutes incest for the usual seventh sin of Lechery, and he attempts to assert the unnaturalness of Antiochus's incestuous rape of his daughter as against the 'honest love' of Apollonius for his wife and child" (223). For further arguments on Gower's final thematic selection, see: Georgiana Donavin, "Taboo and Transgression in Gower's 'Apollonius of Tyre,'" in *Domestic Violence in Medieval Texts*, eds. Eve Salisbury, Donavin, and Merrall Llewelyn Price (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002), 94-121, at 94-5; Russell A. Peck, *Kingship & Common Profit in Gower's Confessio Amantis* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1978); Roger A. Ladd, "'To Hear an Old Man Sing': Apollonius, Pericles, and the Age of Gower," in *Studies in the Age of Gower: a Festschrift in Honour of R.F. Yeager*, ed. Susannah Mary Chewning (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2020), 189-202, at 191.

<sup>54</sup> In *Fathers and Daughters in Gower's Confessio Amantis: Authority, Family, State and Writing* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2000), María Bullón-Fernández explains, "According to Gower's organization of the *Confessio*, Book 8 should have dealt with the sin of *luxuria*; instead, it treats of a branch of this sin: incest" (45).

<sup>55</sup> In "John Gower: Reader, Editor, and Geometrician 'For Engelondes Sake,'" Peck explains Gower's uncommon and careful involvement in the production of his manuscripts. See Peck, "John Gower: Reader, Editor, and Geometrician 'For Engelondes Sake,'" in *John Gower: Manuscripts, Readers, Contexts*, ed. Malte Urban (Belgium: Brepols, 2009): 11-37.

<sup>56</sup> In "Gower, Lydgate, and Incest," Scanlon provides a brief overview of the "embarrassment" early scholars exhibited in response to the topic of Gower's eighth Book (156-7).

<sup>57</sup> Peck, *Kingship & Common Profit*, 161-84; Yeager, *John Gower's Poetic*, 216-7; Elizabeth Porter, "Gower's Ethical Microcosm and Political Macrocosm," in *Gower's Confessio Amantis: Responses and Reassessments*, ed. A. J. Minnis (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1983), 135-162.

Bullón-Fernández, and D. Watt argue that Gower offers a lesson on “political consent and baronial advice”<sup>58</sup> to the ruling king, King Richard II,<sup>59</sup> through the guise of a symbolic story on sexual violence and family.<sup>60</sup> Lochrie combines these symbolic readings of governance and rulership with the account of incest in the text by arguing for a reading in which the body and its engendering are taken seriously as a political landscape: “The idealization of feminine chastity as a metaphor for political authority and integrity...and the demonization of Venus and female desire all point to how gender ideology secures a range of social, political, and theological ideals.”<sup>61</sup> In other words, one need not seek an analogical reading of the political undertones within Gower’s *Confessio*, including the “Apollonius” story, because gender ultimately lies at the intersection of Gower’s overt and covert uses of incest in this final tale.

Gower elects to spend the final pages of his “Apollonius” story silencing, erasing, and “fixing” the canonical tradition brought forth by musicality: female agency. In the final lines of the story, Gower’s “Apollonius” deviates from the standard ending of this tale and offers an additional moral lesson in a last attempt at controlling readerly interpretation:

And in ensample as it is write,  
That alle lovers myhten wite  
How ate laste it schal be sene  
Of love what thei wolden mene.

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<sup>58</sup> Sebastian I. Sobecki, “Educating Richard: Incest, Marriage, and (Political) Consent in Gower’s ‘Tale of Apollonius,’” *Anglia: Zeitschrift Für Englische Philologie/Journal of English Philology* 125, no. 2: 205–16, at 206.

<sup>59</sup> Stephen H. Rigby explains, “The changes which Gower made to the Prologue and to the ending of the *Confessio Amantis*, along with Bolingbroke’s gift of a collar to Gower in 1393, have sometimes been understood as a sign that by this date the poet was becoming disillusioned with Richard II’s rule and that he had shifted his political allegiance towards Bolingbroke. However, this remains a controversial issue. On the one hand, even in the first ‘Ricardian’ recension of the text, a number of manuscripts of the *Confessio Amantis* conclude by addressing the work to Henry Bolingbroke, who was then earl of Derby. On the other, Gower is unlikely to have been radically alienated from Richard during this period, which was one of relative political peace between the king and his former opponents (although Richard was at odds with the city of London in 1392), and Bolingbroke would hardly have been an ‘alternative’ to Richard at this early date. See Rigby, “Gower’s Works,” in *Historians on John Gower*, eds. Stephen H. Rigby and Siân Echard (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2019), 121-138, at 132-3.

<sup>60</sup> Bullón-Fernández, *Fathers and Daughters*, 42-101; D. Watt, “Oedipus, Apollonius, and Richard II: Sex and Politics in Book 8 of John Gower’s *Confessio Amantis*,” *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 24 (2002): 180-208, at 185.

<sup>61</sup> Lochrie, *Covert Operations*, 224.

For se now on that other side,  
Antiochus with al his Pride,  
Which sette his love unkindely,  
His ende he hadde al sodeinly,  
Set agein kinde upon vengeance,  
And for his lust hath penance. (CA VIII.1999-2008)

In its final moral instruction, the narrator directs its message to “alle lovers,” a subject that brings Amans, Genius and the *Confessio*, as a whole, into the fictional folds of the Apollonius story. In case the reader has missed the moral messaging throughout the tale, the text makes clear that this is not an isolated story for entertainment. Instead, this is an exemplum<sup>62</sup> that Genius is using as a tool to instruct Amans on “honeste love.” One might wonder what lesson this tale may teach “lovers.” Still, one needs only identify the subjective language of intent to understand Gower’s messaging: “How ate laste it schal be sene / Of love what thei wolden mene.” As the passage continues, Antiochus, a character not mentioned since the very opening of the tale, is directly referred to as a figure to help teach Gower’s final lesson. The reader is told that Antiochus engaged in “love unkindely,” for his incestuous actions were “agein kinde.” In other words, Antiochus’ offense had little to do with love and much to do with his violation of nature. Although one might assume going “agein kinde” is a crime that one cannot undo, Gower meets immorality with his last and greatest moral model, forgiveness through the act of penance: “And for his lust hath his penance.”

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<sup>62</sup> In “*Apollonius of Tyre* in Vernacular Literature: Romance or Exemplum?,” *Groningen Colloquia on the Novel* 3 (1990): 123-37, Archibald raises the question of “if not romance, then what?” (125). To tackle her inquiry, Archibald investigates if the *HA* would be better suited as an exemplum. Ultimately, Archibald concludes that while the *HA* should not be considered an exemplum, later versions that sprung from this founding text, such as Gower’s “Apollonius” tale, should be read as stories with moral agendas (125-6). To that point, at the end of his confounding version, Gower concludes with a lesson for the reader. It is worth nothing that this instructional moment in the tale is an addition Gower makes in his retelling, for such a lesson does not appear in the *HA*; instead, the *HA* ends with the same conclusion that the provided plot summary did: Apollonius lives a long, happy life as king alongside his resurrected queen. It is after this traditional ending in the story that Gower proceeds to reinvoke Antiochus’ character as a cautionary figure to “lovers...of love what thei wolden mene” (CA VIII.2000, 2002). In response to Gower’s inserted lesson, Archibald attests that “[Gower’s ending] is the first version of the story in which there is such a summary at the end, and in which the story is presented explicitly as a moral exemplum, albeit in a style which owes much to romance conventions” (129).

With penance, the text comes to a close with what is meant to be read as an ethical resolution, which subsequently allows the text to function as an exemplum. Since the lesson of this exemplum seems to conclude with Antiochus, one might wonder where women fit into this moral tale. Notably, Gower's "Apollonius" story is the only tale in the entire *Confessio* that is followed with an additional lesson in the form of a confessional exchange, marking two significant interventions to this final tale: a moral lesson, which is added to the end of the story through the voice of the narrator, and a second, lengthier intervention in the form of "The Confessor's Final Counsel." In some way, it is no surprise that Gower's "Apollonius" story is followed with a confessional scene, for this final counseling session between Genius and Amans directly responds to the possibility of penance raised in the last line of "Apollonius." If Antiochus could be forgiven, perhaps penance is possible for all who seem to have missed the lesson, including the readerly double, Amans.

Alternatively, Allen reads the intended audience of the *Confessio* as female. Thus, this final lesson may include or be meant for women, a possibility conceivable through Genius' address, and yet, Allen adds, it is also through Gower's pen that such experimentations stop at the boundaries of the text: "It seems to me that Gower makes 'Apollonius' an imaginative experiment in cultivating an audience's autonomy to appropriate it to socially affirmative ends."<sup>63</sup> Allen's argument speaks to the ethical tensions I have attempted to show in this chapter. At each turn, Gower offers a story in which female audience, character, and voice are seemingly possible, yet in its end, such textual explorations cease. The female voice is ultimately coopted into the folds of male *auctoritas*. In this sense, this final confession lays bare what the *HA* attempts to conceal: the agency of the female voice, even in its constructed literary form, is not yet a

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<sup>63</sup> Allen, "Newfangled Readers," 464.

possibility in the finality of this textual tradition. This suggests that the female literary voice is limited by the ethics of the text, its author, and the cultural context of both. Thus, in its stated aim to offer penance for all, the *Confessio* buckles under its weight, reverting to a text that offers penance to even the most criminal men of power, Antiochus. However, where Gower's "Apollonius" story fails, it also makes good on its promise to offer that which it can: a text palpably rich in its musical representations that allow us to turn our thinking ears to its female characters in new ways.

In fiction, voice is always a construct of its literary landscape, crafted all too often by male pens and presented through ventriloquized female voices. The fictional limitations of voice sadly ring true to the condition of women in the real world. While not all people vocalize in the same ways,<sup>64</sup> It is accurate to say that to have a voice is to be human, yet to be heard and acknowledged within oppressive systems of power is an entirely separate fact. The *HA* insistently denies these truths in its presentation of othered voices. To that end, the *HA* offers a space in which unspeakable traumas are spoken about with ease and without consequence: "Ni fletus et lucri et lacrimae de amissis inessent, / Nulla me melior, pater si nasset ubi essem" [If it were not for weeping and grief and tears for my lost parents, if my father knew where I am, no woman would be better off than I] (*HA*.41; 160-61). Yet, this animation doubles upon itself, for just as one might find themselves transfixed by the sorrowful lyrics featured, one is reminded of the limitations of voice by reading this version of the Apollonius story comparatively in its canon.

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<sup>64</sup> This dissertation takes seriously all of the ways individuals and figures are able to vocalize, whether that be through voice, sounds, silence or music. However, the field of disability studies has shown that the forms, methods, and gestures that many neurodivergent and physically impaired individuals express through is more complex and varied than the alternative sonic expressions I draw attention to in this project. For readings that discuss medieval understandings of disability, see: Julie Singer, "Deafness: Reading Invisible Signs," in *A Cultural History of Disability* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2020), 2: 83-98; Jonathan Hsy, "Blind Advocacy: Blind Readers, Disability Theory, and Accessing John Gower," *Accessus* 1 (2013): 1-38.

By untangling the vocalized lyrics from the melody of the passages found in the *HA*, readers can begin to recognize not an illusion of voice but the very present and palpable expression of the song. Twelve of the thirteen lines from the epigraph to this chapter are preoccupied with the rhetoric of lyrics. Still, it is worth noting the musical framing of the passage, which reads, “His carminibus coepit modulata voce canere” [In a musical voice she began to sing this song] (*HA*.41; 160-61). It is understandable why such a statement can be all too easily glossed over, for the text encourages such a reading by lingering on its gritty lyrical narrative. To that end, the *HA* exploits violence against women in the sense that the passage draws readers in through a kind of traumatic tourism in which we are prompted to ogle Tarsia’s tragic tale in lyrical form imaginatively: “Piratae me rapuerunt gladio ferientes iniquo. / Lenoni nunc vendita numquam violavi pudorem” [Pirates abducted me, striking with wicked swords. Now I have been sold to a pimp, but I have never tarnished my honor] (*HA* 1; 160-61). Here, Robert Mills’s work on witnessing pain from the safe distance of a text to imagine violence and punishment comes readily to mind.<sup>65</sup> We are invited to stare. There is a lesson in witnessing the pain of others. Following this sung list of atrocities, Tarsia expresses the strength she drew to cope with such experiences: “Sed contemptum habeo et iubeor adeoque laetari! / Fige modum lacrimis, curas resolve dolorum, / Redde caelo oculos et ani mum ad sidera tolle!” [But I endure contempt, and am told besides to rejoice! Restrain your tears, put an end to your sorrows and cares, return your eyes to heaven, raise your heart to the stars!] (*HA*.41; 160-61). As Tarsia’s

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<sup>65</sup> Robert Mills raises the question of the purpose of pain and punishment as is frequently depicted in (medieval) writings: “It is perhaps stating the obvious to say that punishment is related to issues of power, but what were the modes of writing and speaking about punishment, of visualizing and imagining it, that made the exercising of power possible? One of the major premises of this book is that dominant power structures in medieval society were partly sustained through the deployment of representations of punishment and pain: these images possessed a strong ideological remit.” See Mills, “Introduction: Speculum of the Other Middle Ages,” in *Suspended Animation: Pain, Pleasure and Punishment in Medieval Culture* (London: Reaktion Books, 2005), 6-22, at 16.

lyrics quickly come to a close, she sings that she derives strength from the heavens, demonstrating, as Mills argues, the pleasures that can derive from scenes of violence.<sup>66</sup>

As the scene transitions from lyrical narrative to sonically rich descriptions, so, too, does the topic move from one of horror to one of jouissance. It is the melody of the music and the pleasantries of the singer's song that we are invited to imaginatively delight in: "His carminibus coepit modulata voce canere" [In a musical voice she began to sing this song] (*HA*.41; 160-61). It is this turn in how one approaches the text, that is, from very empty to textually palpable, that allows readers the ability to engage with this text anew, for in this passage lies a sonic description of the melody of a song that conjures a musicality that exceeds the entrapments of voice. Listening with our "thinking ears"<sup>67</sup> allows readers not to listen to what is not there but to hear the musicality that persists when the voice reaches its literary limits.

In this chapter, I have shown how the *HA* and Gower's retelling have treated musical representation in their respective texts. While the *HA* often uses lyrics to engage in the animation of Tarsia's voice, Gower responds to his source material by offering sonic descriptions that are removed from what the text cannot truly provide: Thaise's voice. I read these two texts together, for doing so illuminates the textual tangling of ethics, representation, and voice in each author's telling. Undoubtedly, each writer is aware of their inability to capture a female voice in fiction, so music proves to be an identifiable and present alternative. Thus, I conclude that these two versions of the Apollonius story should be read thematically for their musical presentations, for

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<sup>66</sup> Mills asserts that "pleasure, in its various guises, was central to the medieval penal imaginary and how this accounts, at least in part, for the excessive presence of violence. This visual excess frequently possessed a normative function, of course. In secular contexts, it operated to buttress state power and social distinction or to procure voyeuristic pleasure in the humiliation of others; in religious contexts, it effected the transfiguration – the making sublime – of death, suffering and self-sacrifice. But sometimes, just sometimes, it also provided spaces in which to work through more subversive possibilities: empathy with, and opposition to, the pain of the punished, fantasies of resistance and empowerment, even forms of eroticism that transgress accepted norms" (*Ibid.*, 17).

<sup>67</sup> Snaith, "Introduction," 9.

to do so is to read Thaise's/Tarsia's character anew. No longer an empty signifier of the female voice, Thaise's/Tarsia's musical performances can be read as detectable and persistent. In imagining Thaise's/Tarsia's melodies, the song's sound can be heard, even in the face of oppressive editing practices. This is the most feminist reading one can make of a textual tradition that offers so little room for women to express themselves.

## Epilogue

The voice of a text is the fabric of its fiction. However, this literary device is limited to the story in which it is featured. Readers can certainly imagine what a character's voice may sound like, but to do so is to engage in the fantasy of fiction—that is, in co-creating a world that does not exist. However, we can recall a sonic reference to a nightingale twittering because birdsong pulsates from the text to the reader's sensory recollection and then back to its semantic representation on the page. Thus, sonic representations are features of the text that are activated in part through the reader's engagement with the fiction of the text and in part by their external reality. Sonic reference, then, occupies a hyperreal position in that it is both linguistic and yet perceivable in a sonic imagining. In this sense, there is a call and response between the sonic reference and the reader. This sonic exchange escapes the short-circuiting of voice.

This project aimed to slow down and dial in those representations of sound that run parallel to voice in my archive. As a result, I examined sound in text as a sonic representation rather than approaching the text as a sonic object. While the latter is typically preoccupied with musical notation, lyric, or other markers of musical performance, this project turned inward, examining the effects of sonic expression in its semantic representation on the page. At its locus, this is a project invested in the significance of sonic affect rather than aural possibility. I turn one final time to sound theorist Walter Gershon who reminds that sonic resounds “not only in our ears but also as something that is felt,”<sup>1</sup> and it is this precise affective quality of sound in all of its myriad representations that I drew on in my sonic hermeneutics. More specifically, this reading approach asserted that the relationship between reader and story activates the perception

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<sup>1</sup> Walter Gershon, “Vibrational Affect: Sound Theory and Practice in Qualitative Research,” *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies* 13, no. 4 (2013): 257-262, at 258.

of sound and its affective qualities as each is distanced from the other by the limitations of language and yet joined together by the sensorial sonic references on the page.

By reading sonic references as a feature of text that can be utilized, I argued that authors strategically invoke sonic representations to animate marginal characters through alternative modes that express. Of course, sound cannot communicate as voice can. Still, in the stories I examine, sonic references offer an extralinguistic form of utterance for marginalized characters that circumvents the limitations of voice. In the context of this project, such limitations are informed by positionality, perception, agency, and trauma. The figures of Criseyde, Merlin, Silence, Margery Kempe, and Tarsia/Thaise all share marginal status in their respective texts, and in this sense, their voices prove futile against the systems of oppression they are couched. However, alongside their failed attempts to be heard, I have shown how their authors draw on sonic references as avenues to agency, albeit temporarily.

By thinking of the text as a locus of sensorial possibility, representations of sound within the text become palpable. As such, Criseyde's sonically vacant dream scene demands not to be read as something "more than" silent in repose. Merlin's laughter is no longer the nonsensical sonic shards of a madman. His sonic dissonance resounds within the queer possibility of Silence's silent gender presentation. Margery Kempe's shrieking can be interpreted as a complex, extralinguistic combatant in the rhetorical war of dominance. All of the stories and characters I have read in this dissertation—Criseyde, Merlin, Silence, Kempe, and Tarsia/Thaise—represent both the unspoken or the unspeakable but the alternatively sonic and diversely expressive. In response to dominant systems that insist on wielding language as a tool to oppress, my archive demonstrates that marginalized characters can retort with expressions of silence, laughter, weeping, and song even when voice is impossible.

Throughout this dissertation, I have drawn attention not to a hierarchy of speech, sound, and silence but to how sonic representations occur alongside speech acts, placing the two modes of expression in a rich dialogue. This interchange of sound and speech necessitated the term “sonic expressions,” a phrase I used throughout this project to describe sound descriptors used as extralinguistic utterances. By taking these sonic expressions seriously, we allow for the affective nature of sound in our reader's experience of the story. In the case of the characters I examine, the sounds of silence, laughter, weeping, and songs I invite us to imagine are disruptive, discomfiting, and jarring. We, as readers, both perceive and receive the affective nature of the sonic, textual dissonance by reading into the disruptions on the page. As a result, this sonic hermeneutics allows us to recall characters that had previously been thrust into the margins of the story. Now, they take up text semantically, centrally, and sonically. Thus, it is sonic reference—that is, the semantic representation of sound on the page—that allows its readers to comprehend the expressions of marginalized characters more fully.

Though the stories I examined in this dissertation are medieval literary works, the issues of agency, positionality, and power in these texts still ring true. This dissertation came to be during the Trump era—a time of terror, exhaustion, and defeat for so many. In a way, I see this dissertation as a vehicle for responsive rage, both audible and silent. Although the Trump years were filled with the noise of tyranny, one must not forget the seemingly bottomless depths of silence from those that splintered, no, shattered, against the oppressive weight of what some so lovingly refer to as “Trump’s legacy.” This dissertation, though devoted to the strength and resistance that the sonic spectrum can afford, must acknowledge the feelings of shame, fear, and trauma that often lie beneath veils of violent forms of silence and vocalization. The twenty-first century is nothing short of a container for this weaponized spectrum of sound. From the silent

match piles of timber once recognizable as the Amazon rainforest to the choked cries of George Floyd as he lay pinned to the ground, gasping for air and humanity in a racist void—the sonic, in its most monstrous form, abound. Thus, this project bears witness to those who have been brutalized, subjugated, and even murdered by heinous acts shrouded in silence or perpetuated against voices ignored. To that end, I must emphasize that “Sonic Interventions” does not offer narratives of pain to be safely viewed at a removed distance and then forgotten. No, this is not a catalog of trauma tourism. Instead, this dissertation pays tribute to the expressed and unspeakable wounds and responds with the most resounding rallying cries.

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## **ACADEMIC POSITIONS**

*Goshen College*

Visiting Assistant Professor of English (Fall 2023-Spring 2025)  
First-year Writing Coordinator (Fall 2024-Spring 2025)

*Indiana University, Bloomington*

Visiting Lecturer of English (Fall 2022-Spring 2023)  
Associate Instructor (Fall 2017-Spring 2022)

*Franklin College*

Lecturer of English (Spring 2022 Appointment)

*DePauw University*

Summer English Immersion Institute Instructor (Summer 2022 Appointment)

## **EDUCATION**

*Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana, August 2024*

Ph.D. in English with a concentration in Literature

Ph.D. minor in Medieval Studies

*Magna Cum Laude*

Dissertation: "Sonic Interventions: Silence, Sound and Melody in Medieval Literature"

*Mills College, Oakland, California, May 2016*

M.A. in English, *Summa Cum Laude*, May 2016

*San Francisco State University, San Francisco, California, May 2014*

B.A. in English, *Cum Laude*, May 2014

## **ACADEMIC CERTIFICATES**

Inclusive Teaching: Supporting All Students in the College Classroom Certificate, Columbia University Virtual EdX Program, June 2022

Graduate Area Certificate in Medieval Studies, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana, May 2019

Certificate of Achievement: California State University (CSU) General Education Breadth, Diablo Valley Community College, Pleasant Hill, California, May 2012

## **PUBLICATIONS**

### **REFEREED ARTICLES**

"An Echoed Exchange: Silence, Merlin and Their Sonic Resistance in *Le Roman de*

*Silence.*” *Arthuriana*. (Forthcoming, Spring 2025).

“Dying, Death and the Afterlife: Non-Gendered Teachings from Beyond the Grave.”  
*Essays in Medieval Studies* 35 (2021): 59-78.

“Becoming Jane Somers: Constructing Authorship, Genre and Age in *The Diary of a Good Neighbour*.” *Doris Lessing Studies* 34 (2016): 27-31.

#### OPEN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCE

“Humanities 101: Embodied Spaces.” *Humanities in Class Digital Library*, National Humanities Center, 2022.

#### BOOK REVIEW

Review of Anna Alberni, Antonio Calvia, and Maria Sofia Lannutti, eds., *Polyphonic Voices* (SISMEL 2022). In *Comitatus* 55 (2024).

#### AWARDS, GRANTS, AND HONORS

##### NATIONAL

Donald R. Howard Travel Scholarship, The New Chaucer Society, July 2022.

Sherry L. Reames Graduate Student Travel Award for Hagiographical Studies,  
Hagiography Society, January 2019.

Doris Lessing Graduate Student Award for her essay “The (De)fetishization of the Aged Body: Clothing, Use Value, and Invisibility in Doris Lessing’s *The Diary of a Good Neighbour*,” Doris Lessing Society, March 2016.

##### INSTITUTIONAL

Mininger Grant, Goshen College, May 2024.

Carnegie Graduate Travel Award, Indiana University Bloomington, March 2022.

Ruth Normal Halls Graduate Fellowship, Indiana University Bloomington, Fall 2021.

Graduate Student Travel Award, Indiana University Bloomington, March 2021.

Louise McNutt Fellowship, Indiana University Bloomington, Spring 2021.

Carnegie Graduate Travel Award, Indiana University Bloomington, March 2020.

Graduate and Professional Student Government Travel Award, Indiana University  
Bloomington, March 2020.

Carnegie Graduate Travel Award, Indiana University Bloomington, February 2019.

Graduate Student Travel Award, Indiana University Bloomington, January 2019.

Culbertson First-year Composition Teaching Award, Indiana University Bloomington, April 2018.

Graduate Student Travel Award, Indiana University Bloomington, January 2018.

Ardella Mills Prize for Best Graduate Critical Essay, Mills College, April 2015.

## **PAPERS AND PRESENTATIONS**

### **INVITED LECTURES**

Invited speaker for Faculty Scholars Series, “The Sound of Teaching, Teaching Sound: Sonic Education in *The Book of Margery Kempe*,” Goshen College, Goshen, Indiana, September 2023.

Invited presenter for Digital Writing Panel, “Successful Academic Writing Practices,” for Sarah Pedzinski’s Introduction to Fiction course, Fall 2021.

Invited speaker for Wertheim Lecture Roundtable, “Unmaking Motherhood: Gil’s Rewriting of *The Second Shepherds’ Play*,” Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana, December 2019.

### **WORKSHOP PRESENTATIONS**

Presenter for First-year Orientation Reading Workshop, “Reading the College Text,” Goshen College, Goshen, Indiana, August 2023 and 2024.

Invited speaker for the Center for Innovative Teaching and Learning (CITL) “Unspoken Expectations and Student Success: Revealing the Hidden Curriculum,” Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana, February 2023.

Developer and presenter for “Avenues of Funding in Graduate School: Awards, Grants and Fellowships that Bolster Graduate Students’ Pockets and CVs,” Indiana University, Department of English, February 2022.

### **CONFERENCE PAPERS**

“Aurality: Listening to Criseyde’s Politics of Silence in Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde*,” 23<sup>rd</sup> Biennial Congress of the New Chaucer Society, Pasadena, California, July 2024.

“A Response to Crisis: Sonic Rebuttals to Exclusionary Speech in *The Book of Margery Kempe*,” International Medieval Congress, University of Leeds, Leeds, United Kingdom, July 2024.

“Commingle Sounds of Silence and Laughter: *Le Roman de Silence*’s Raucous Disruption,” 59th International Congress on Medieval Studies, Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, Michigan, May 2024.

- “Between Silence and Laughter: *Le Roman de Silence*’s Melody of Sonic Disruption,” 2023 MLA Annual Convention, San Francisco, California, January 2023.
- “‘It is not yow to telle’: Reinterpreting the Sounds of Margery Kempe’s Tears,” 22<sup>nd</sup> Biennial Congress of the New Chaucer Society, Durham University, Durham, United Kingdom, July 2022.
- “Between the Borders of Silence and Silenced: Decoding Political Acts of Sonic Reticence in Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde*,” International Medieval Congress, University of Leeds, Leeds, United Kingdom, July 2022.
- “Criseyde’s Politics of Silence in Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde*,” Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, Michigan, May 2022.
- “The Privilege of History and Hero Making in *Beowulf*,” International Medieval Congress, University of Leeds, Leeds, United Kingdom, July 2021.
- “Prayers as Teachings: Female Lessons Beyond the Grave,” International Medieval Congress, University of Leeds, Leeds, United Kingdom, July 2020.
- “Listening for Women’s Voices in the *Libro de Apolonio*,” *Diálogos XVII* Graduate Student Conference, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana, February 2020.
- “Signs of the Past: Gendered Bodies and Teachings in ‘A Disputacioun Betwyx þe Body and Wormes’ and *Pearl*,” The 37<sup>th</sup> Annual Illinois Medieval Association Conference, Saint Mary’s College, South Bend, Indiana, February 2020.
- “Death as Transformational Future in Julian of Norwich,” roundtable participant, The 54<sup>th</sup> International Congress on Medieval Studies, Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, Michigan, May 2019.
- “‘It is not yow to telle’: Reinterpreting the Sounds of Margery Kempe’s Tears,” The 54<sup>th</sup> International Congress on Medieval Studies, Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, Michigan, May 2019.
- “A History of Their Own: Reconstructing Ottoman Imperial Harem Narratives,” The 45<sup>th</sup> Annual Sewanee Medieval Colloquium, The University of the South, Sewanee, Tennessee, April 2019.
- “Imagined Pasts: Reconstructing Ottoman Harem Narratives,” The 18<sup>th</sup> Vagantes Conference on Medieval Studies, University of Toronto, Toronto, Canada, March 2019.
- “The Sound of Resistance: Interpreting Female Voicings of Trauma in *Troilus and Criseyde*,” The 30<sup>th</sup> Annual Medieval Studies Symposium, Indiana University Bloomington, Bloomington, Indiana, April 2018.

“Between Women: Interpreting the Interplay of Sounds and Silences in *Troilus and Criseyde*,” The 35<sup>th</sup> Annual Illinois Medieval Association Conference, Loyola University of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois, February 2018.

“Conditions of the Female Gaze: Regulating Masculine and Feminine Desire in *Bisclavret*,” The 50<sup>th</sup> Medieval Association of the Pacific Conference, University of California, Davis, California, March 2016.

### **SESSION ORGANIZED AND CHAIRED**

“Early Literary Works: Gendered Perspectives on Loss and Death,” Session Organizer and Chair, 25<sup>th</sup> Annual Academic Symposium, Goshen College, Goshen, Indiana, Spring 2024.

### **COURSES TAUGHT**

#### **100-LEVEL COURSES:**

*English LA 101: Celebrity Culture in Modern America (Special Topics)*  
Spring 2022 [2 sections; 20 students each]  
Franklin College

*English W170: The Devil Made Me Do It (Special Topics)*  
Fall 2018 [20 students], Spring 2019 [2 sections; 21 and 9 students]  
Indiana University

*Core 100: Identity, Culture and Community*  
Fall 2024 [25 students]  
Goshen College

*Core 110: Academic Voice (3 credit section)*  
Fall 2023 [22 students], Spring 2024 [22 students]  
Goshen College

*Core 110: Academic Voice (4 credit section)*  
Fall 2024 [15 students]  
Goshen College

*English W131: Analytical Reading, Writing, and Inquiry*  
Fall 2017 [22 students], Spring 2018 [22 students], Spring 2020 [22 students]  
Indiana University

*Online English W131: Analytical Reading, Writing, and Inquiry*  
Fall 2020 [22 students], Fall 2022 [2 sections; 23 students each]  
Indiana University, Online

#### **200-LEVEL COURSES:**

*English 204/Communication 204: Expository Writing*  
Spring 2024 [23 students]  
Goshen College

*English W231: Professional Writing Skills*  
Fall 2019 [24 students], Spring 2023 [2 sections; 25 students each]  
Indiana University

*English 201/Global Studies 241: World Literature*  
Spring 2024 [21 students]  
Goshen College

*English 213: Shakespeare and Film*  
Fall 2023 [16 students]  
Goshen College

*English 212: Banned Books*  
Fall 2024 [34 students]  
Goshen College

*English L204: Introduction to Fiction*  
Fall 2022 [2 sections; 25 students each]  
Indiana University

*Online English L204: Introduction to Fiction*  
Fall 2022 [25 students]  
Indiana University, Online

300-LEVEL COURSES:

*English 307: Diverse Voices in American Literature*  
Fall 2024 [6 students]  
Goshen College

*English 326: History of Literature in English I: to 1800*  
Fall 2023 [16 students]  
Goshen College

*English 327: History of Literature in English II: 1800 to Present*  
Spring 2024 [9 students]  
Goshen College

SUMMER INTENSIVE COURSES:

*Summer English Immersion Institute*  
Summer 2022 [10 students]  
DePauw University

This academic and cultural program is geared toward incoming international students at DePauw University. During the three-week intensive course, students work on college-level reading, writing, and speaking skills. In addition to developing academic skill sets, instructors introduce English Institute participants to the United States and local community through excursions and activities inside and outside the classroom.

*Groups Program English W131: Analytical Reading, Writing, and Inquiry*  
Summer 2021 [8 students]

Indiana University

This course is designed to consolidate a 16-week semester of building reading, writing, and inquiry skills into one intensive 6-week summer experience for the Groups Scholars Program.

The Groups Scholars Program was created to increase college attendance among first-generation, underrepresented students at Indiana University. The program provides academic, financial, and social support to help students attain a bachelor's degree at Indiana University.

## **VOLUNTEER TEACHING**

*Volunteer Prison Instructor, Indiana Prison Writers Workshop (IPWW)*  
Spring 2023 [8 students]

Edinburgh Correctional Facility

This non-accredited workshop gives students a foundation in creative writing through weekly writing prompts based on literature read and discussed in class. We discuss and analyze published works from various genres and past workshop students' stories. As part of students' homework, working drafts of new stories are brought to class to share and submit for instructor feedback. Upon completing the workshop, students have a portfolio of revised stories.

## **GUEST TEACHING**

Lecture on *Never Let Me Go* for Dr. Elizabeth Maffetone's Literature and the Moral Imagination course, Xavier University, Spring 2022.

Lecture on "Seasons of Glass and Iron" and "When We Dead Awaken" for Dr. Elizabeth Maffetone's Introduction to Fiction course, Indiana University, Bloomington, Fall 2020 and Spring 2021.

## **TEACHING INSTITUTE ATTENDED**

"Meaningful Teaching and Learning in the Humanities Classroom." National Humanities Center, Graduate Student Residency Program, July 2022. Indiana University English Department and College of Arts and Sciences Nominee and Fully Funded Attendee.

## **ACADEMIC SERVICE**

UNIVERSITY AND COLLEGE

- Faculty Representative and Preliminary Advisor at New Student Orientation, Goshen College, Summer 2024.
- Faculty Reviewer of Goshen College Academic Scholarships Essays, Spring 2024.
- Coordinated Community Response Team (CCRT): Sexual Assault Prevention, Education and Advocacy Group, Goshen College, 2023-2024, 2024-2025.
- Committee on DEI: Gender and Sexuality Working Group, Goshen College, 2023-2024, 2024-2025.
- Graduate and Professional Student Government (GPSG) Sustainability Committee, Indiana University, 2021-2022.
- Graduate and Professional Student Government (GPSG) Travel and Research Awards Committee, Indiana University, Spring 2021.
- Host for the Medieval Academy of America Conference, IU Medieval Studies Institute, Indiana University, Spring 2021.
- Graduate Academic Fairness Committee, Indiana University, 2019-2021.

#### **DEPARTMENTAL**

- Graduate and Professional Student Government (GPSG) Representative, Indiana University, 2021-2022.
- Career and Funding Resource Coordinator, Indiana University, 2021-2022.
- Career and Funding Newsletter Writer and Editor, Indiana University, 2021-2022.
- Book Sale Associate, Indiana University, 2021-2022.
- Graduate Student Mentor, Indiana University, 2018-2019, 2021-2022.

#### **RELEVANT WORK EXPERIENCE**

- Exam Proctor and On-Site Interpreter, Alliance Business Solutions, 2015-2017.
- Teaching Assistant, Diablo Valley Community College, Fall 2012-Spring 2017.
- English Tutor, Diablo Valley College, 2011-2017.

#### **RELEVANT CERTIFICATE**

- Certificate of Completion: Self-Guided Foundational Safe Zone Training, The Safe Zone Project, December 2023

#### **TECHNOLOGY**

- Canvas LMS: Full Professional Efficiency
- Moodle LMS: Full Professional Efficiency
- Microsoft Office: Full Professional Efficiency
- Google Drive: Full Professional Efficiency
- Virtual Communication Skills (Zoom, Slack): Full Professional Efficiency
- E-mail Communication (Outlook, Gmail): Full Professional Efficiency

#### **LANGUAGES**

- Latin: Reading Proficiency
- Old English: Reading Proficiency
- Middle English: Advanced Proficiency
- Modern French: Reading Proficiency