

The Ages of Children:
An Examination and Contextualization of Youth in Medieval Literature

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A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English

Middle Tennessee State University

August 2024

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For my grandmothers
Virginia Mills, Patricia Clark, and Esther Jenkins

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am so grateful for the many people who have supported me on my educational journey. To my mother and father, thank you for all your support over the years and for teaching me that I could do anything I set my mind to. To my dear husband Gregory, thank you for the sacrifices you have made to support me through this. I could not have done this without you. To my entire family, thank you all for being so supportive. To my many mentors and professors throughout the years, I am deeply indebted to your teachings and guidance. In particular, I would like to thank Mr. and Mrs. Olson, Fr. Wulfstan Clough, Dr. Veronica Ent, and Dr. Todd Thompson, each of whom inspired me to reach new and higher achievements.

Special thanks are due to my dissertation committee. I am so grateful for Dr. Jennifer Marchant, who jumped in to help me without the slightest hesitation. Dr. Martha Hixon has been a true mentor and one of the most supportive professors that I have ever met. From her role as advisor for the Children's Literature Organization to her support as a reader, she has always held me to the highest standards, pushing me to do and be my best, while simultaneously showing me such kindness. I am so grateful for her guidance. Finally, for Dr. Rhonda McDaniel, thank you. Thank you for inspiring me and encouraging my love of everything medieval (especially with my early Old English translations). Thank you for never giving up on me, even when I was ready to give up on myself. Thank you for your wisdom, patience, and constant support. I do not know any words that can truly express how grateful I am for you. All I can say is that I will pay it forward.

ABSTRACT

There has been little scholarship addressing the characterization and understanding of children in medieval English literature, especially in conjuncture with medieval conceptions of the Ages of Man and with modern developmental schemes for growth. In an effort to fill this gap, I use both medieval and contemporary paradigms of human growth and development to analyze and contextualize infant, child, and young adult characters in selected Old and Middle English works. I use Aristotle's biological three-stages, Pythagoras's physiological four-stages, Bede's four-stages microcosm, Byrhtferth of Ramsey's aspects of men, Dante Alighieri's arch of ages, Augustine of Hippo's biblical six ages, Ptolemy's seven astrological ages, Jean Piaget's four operational stages, Erik Erikson's stages of psychosocial development, Lawrence Kohlberg's stages of moral reasoning, and Mary Helen Immodino-Yang and Kurt Fischer's theory of neuroconstructivism as the bases of analysis of these characters. After first establishing the consistencies among the stages of growth expressed in both medieval and contemporary paradigms of mental, physical, psychological, and moral growth, I then use these paradigms to situate and compare the characterizations of children and young adult characters in medieval English literature. The young characters in *Beowulf*, the *Dream of the Rood*, the "Christ I" lyric, one of Grimestone's lyrics, Geoffery Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, and the Pearl-poet's *Pearl*, illustrate both secular and religious characterizations of children (including the Christ Child), allowing me to draw conclusions about consistencies across time and region, while also pointing out important irregularities in representation. This study reveals that the authors of these various works, when they deviated from the medieval and modern paradigms in their depiction of children and young adults, did so with specific intentions.

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INTRODUCTION

For readers of contemporary literature, the age of the central characters is usually both important and easily discernible, based on contextual clues that are immediately discernible to the audience. The same can be said for literature of any period in relation to its audience: readers, listeners, or viewers recognize details that are familiar to them, helping them understand a character's characterization, including age expected qualities. However, when an audience reads a work outside of their familiar environment, those clues are not so easily discerned. For example, how old is Beowulf? By the end of the epic poem it is clear that he becomes an old man, but how old is Beowulf when he fights Grendel? Most modern readers of *Beowulf* likely do not think about this character's age or what that may suggest about his deeds and motivations. However, because this poem was written during the Middle Ages, Beowulf's stage of life (or his *Age*) provides a significant amount of context for the character's behavior, goals, influences, and values. This context would be readily understood by contemporary listeners and readers. Unfortunately, much of this context is ignored or forgotten in scholarship and readership. From Chaucer's child characters in the *Canterbury Tales* to Pearl – the *Age* of a child, or how that child deviates from their *Age*, is significant.

Children's role in society, how they are viewed, and society's expectations of children have all shifted throughout time and between cultures. These changes may occur because of scientific advancements, societal changes, or even shifts in cultural values. Written works, both historical and literary, are useful tools in discovering what these views are, as such evidence naturally incorporates changing cultural perspectives. A close look at medieval texts can help answer many questions about the cultural values and perspectives of children and young adults during the Middle Ages. To explore this idea, I pose a number of questions to the literature: How

are children represented in written works of this period? What responsibilities or expectations are connected to someone who is youthful in a text? What representations of youth are culturally negative or positive? Do any of the texts explore the capabilities of children and youth? These questions have not been adequately explored in scholarship for Old and Middle English literature. A thorough examination of the representation of infants, children, and young adults in Old and Middle English texts, with contextualization of the historical and cultural understandings of youth, demonstrates the youthful character's importance and the societal shifts taking place during this period.

This study focuses on the depictions of children and youth in medieval English texts. For my purposes, "depiction" encompasses the descriptions of these characters in both historical and literary texts, including their personal characteristics, actions, appearance, clothing, speech, and the character's overall importance to the story and overarching plot. Is the child a primary or secondary character? Is this character just a plot device? Through applying and examining the historical and cultural context, I explore: How are infants, children, and youths described, characterized, and framed (in comparison to adults within the same text or by the same author) in medieval English literature? How do these representations and cultural perceptions change between authors and over time? And what do these depictions suggest about the culture and its understanding of children, childhood, and adolescence?

Few works attempt to examine these youthful characters at all, let alone try to contextualize what these representations suggest about medieval attitudes towards children. There are, however, two books that explore similar topics similar to my focus. The closest analysis is Merridee Bailey's *Socializing the Child in Late Medieval England*.¹ Bailey does

¹ Merridee Bailey, *Socializing the Child in Late Medieval England c. 1400-1600*. (Suffolk: York Medieval Press, 2012).

closely examine medieval texts, exploring how the authors represent child characters and view children, yet while she claims to explore “how childhood was imagined by medieval writers and educators,”² she examines mostly didactic literature, and her focus extends to how these texts were presented to their audiences, including to medieval children. This present examination focuses on literature that was not necessarily written with the intention to teach, nor with a child-specific audience in mind. By looking beyond just the didactic texts, I hope to provide a more expansive examination and contextualization. The second closely related scholarship is Eve Salisbury’s *Chaucer and the Child*.³ She explores many of Geoffrey Chaucer’s texts and the ways children and childhood are represented and connected to his writing by examining the importance of youthful characters, childish dispositions, and child-like representations within Chaucer’s works. Salisbury defines the various Ages of Man (a medieval philosophy of human growth and development that I rely heavily upon in my analysis), in her introduction. However, she does not use these definitions to connect to or explain the cultural or historical significance of these youthful characters. Although both of these scholars introduce similar ideas and attempt to contextualize medieval works in some of the same frameworks that I also adopt, I expand on their analysis both within Chaucer’s works and beyond. Not only do I examine earlier English texts, as far back as *Beowulf* and the *Dream of the Rood*, but I also deepen the analysis begun by Baily and Salisbury and expand on the ideas that began in their books. By examining both secular and religious texts across the medieval period, and not focusing on one specific author or purpose for the writing, I am able to discover more general trends and implications about representations of children and childhood.

² Bailey, *Socializing*, 1

³ Eve Salisbury, *The New Middle Ages: Chaucer and the Child*. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 21.

The concepts and implications of the stages of growth and change for children and youth has been mostly neglected in medieval scholarship. Some studies have been done, however, referencing *Beowulf*. Both Norman Eliason and George Engelhardt have examined *Beowulf* as a growing and maturing character. Eliason directly points to *Beowulf*'s childhood as a plot device for his future,⁴ while Engelhardt emphasizes the importance of *Beowulf* as a story about a youth growing into old age.⁵ Neither of these scholars, however, examine what a child or youthful *Beowulf* represented for or about youth, how his representation connected to or differed from the cultural conceptions of growth, or how these stages of growth demonstrate anything of importance about *Beowulf* as a character.

Scholarship that focuses on the representation of children specifically with connections to medieval religious texts is even more barren. J. A. Burrow, who has written about the Ages of Man,⁶ also wrote an article about *Pearl*.⁷ He discusses how *Pearl* is like a "Consolation of Theology"⁸ while exploring the relationship between the dreamer and the child. He does not examine the *Pearl* child as a child, nor does he explore how this child connects to or subverts the culturally understood child characteristics which I seek to explore. Further, despite his ubiquity and cultural importance, there is very little scholarship on the Christ Child as a character in medieval literature. Even so, there are many books and articles discussing the historical presence of this character and the religious importance of the figure. How this child is represented, however, and how he is similar to or different from other children in medieval literary texts has not been widely explored or discussed. There are two notable books that approach similar ideas

⁴ Norman Eliason, "Beowulf's Inglorious Youth." *Studies in Philology* 73, no. 2 (Spring, 1979).

⁵ George Engelhardt "On the Sequence of Beowulf's GEOGOD." *Modern Language Notes* 68, no. 2 (1953).

⁶ J. A. Burrow *The Ages of Man: A Study in Medieval Writing and Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986).

⁷ J. A. Burrow "Pearl." *The Gawain Poet* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2001).

⁸ Burrow, "Pearl," 5

to this topic. One is the interdisciplinary collection of essays *The Christ Child in Medieval Culture*, which examines the importance of the Christ Child to medieval Christians. The authors of this collection seek to answer how “medieval persons understand the omnipresent figure of the Christ Child”⁹ by including examinations on how cultural practices, texts, images, and music depict the Christ Child. The editors, Mary Dzon and Theresa Kenny, (who also provide essays of their own) emphasize that “medieval people were fascinated with the Christ Child’s possession of divine power and knowledge, and his simultaneous subjection of himself to the conditions of human childhood.”¹⁰ With this in mind, the book explores themes of sacrifice, feminine spirituality, childhood development in connection to the Christ Child’s dual nature, and audience response. The second text, *The Quest for the Christ Child in the Later Middle Ages* by Mary Dzon, expands on the scholarship from the previous text. She focuses specifically on the High Middle Ages (11th – 13th centuries) and looks at the depictions of the Christ’s life before he began his public ministry, including his childhood and adolescence.¹¹ Theresa Kenny also approaches a similar topic, focusing on how the language used to describe the Christ Child impacts his presence in space and time in her book, *All Wonders in One Sight: The Christ Child Among Elizabethan and Stuart Poets*.¹² Her analysis approaches some of the topics I cover, but her research does not include literature from the Middle Ages. I expand on these works by looking specifically at how these Christ Child depictions relate to or differ from other child and childhood representations.

⁹ Mary Dzon and Theresa Kenny “Introduction: The Infancy of Scholarship on the Medieval Christ Child.” *The Christ Child in Medieval Culture: Alpha es et O!* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), xiii.

¹⁰ Dzon and Kenny, “Introduction,” xiv

¹¹ Mary Dzon *The Quest for the Christ Child in the Later Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017).

¹² Theresa Kenny *All Wonders in One Sight: The Christ Child Among Elizabethan and Stuart Poets* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2021).

Philippe Ariés

A few scholars have examined childhood (or the lack thereof as a medieval concept) during the Middle Ages. Amateur medieval historian and scientific archivist Philippe Ariés is perhaps one of the most infamous researchers in this field for his assertions in his book *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*, published in France in 1960. Although many of his claims have proven impactful, numerous scholars have debunked his claims, including Nicholas Orme. In *Medieval Children*, Orme directly addresses Ariés impact on childhood scholarship. He states, “Ariés views have been influential, especially among those who are not medieval historians. They mirror popular assumptions.”¹³ Orme then describes a number of scholars who have examined Ariés’s research. He notes that “none of the scholars...has found material to support the assertions of Ariés. All, in different ways, have rebutted them.” Specially, however, I would like to address one particular point that Ariés argues. Ariés states in his conclusion:

Nowadays our society depends, and knows that it depends, on the success of its educational system. It has a system of education, a concept of education, and awareness of its importance. New sciences such as psycho-analysis, pediatrics and psychology devote themselves to the problems of childhood, and their findings are transmitted to parents by way of a mass of popular literature. Our world is obsessed by the physical, moral and sexual problems of childhood.

This preoccupation was unknown to medieval civilization, because there was no problem for the Middle Ages: as soon as he had been weaned, or soon after, the child became the natural companion of the adult. The age groups of Neolithic times, the Hellenistic *paideia*, presupposed a difference and a transition between the world of children and that of adults, a transition made by means of an initiation or an education. Medieval civilization failed to perceive this difference and therefore lacked this concept of transition.¹⁴

¹³ Nicholas Orme. “Introduction.” *Medieval Children* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 5.

¹⁴ Philippe Ariés. “Conclusion.” *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*, trans. by Robert Baldick (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1962), 411-412.

This idea, that medieval society did not understand childhood as a separate category, let alone one of transition, is misguided and demonstrates a lack of understanding of medieval life and literature. Not only did medieval philosophers, clergy, and writers understand the various, and varying, stages of growth (including childhood), there are many very well documented paradigms for these various transitional periods of growth and development. Many of these sets were described as the Ages of Man. It is through these various Ages that I analyze and interpret the characterization of young characters in various medieval English literary texts.

To try to fill this overall dearth in scholarship, I approach this topic and answer the questions I outlined above by using a historical and close reading approach to my research, combined with insights from relevant children's literature scholarship. My goal is to situate my analysis within the cultural and historical context these texts were developed in. In order to do so, I examine and then contextualize the philosophical and cultural understandings of infancy, childhood, and youth for each of the texts that I cover, paying particular attention to family values and historical shifts in culture (e.g. early medieval warrior culture). I look carefully for any changes in this understanding across time both within the historical situation and within the primary source texts I examine. The consistencies and inconsistencies of child and youth representation illuminates the author's perspective of this group and period of life while also revealing the possible implications for any intended audiences.

The Ages of Man & Medieval Understandings of Growth

In the effort to situate my analysis within the medieval historical context I depend significantly upon the complex ideology of the Ages of Man as outlined in both classical and medieval sources. The various Ages of Man were used by medieval scholars, authors, and

educators to explain and teach human growth and development. Thus, these various schemes of development are the context that many contemporary readers are missing that medieval audiences would have. The Ages varied and changed both over time and amongst theorists, but, as J.A. Burrow and Elizabeth Sears suggest, there are four main subdivisions: biological (three ages), physiological (four ages), biblical (six ages), and the astrological (seven ages). Each of these subdivisions also explores moral development throughout a person's life through each stage. These stages, generally, correspond closely to contemporary studies and theories of mental and moral development; the similarities among ancient, medieval, and contemporary models of development are no coincidence. Contemporary psychologists and scientists have continued to frame and categorize what ancient and medieval scholars, historians, and theologians observed: people tend to develop in consistent, but distinct stages during their lifetime. How these stages are defined and how long they last vary by theorist. However, the general understanding of development is noticeably similar across time. Throughout this section, I will first explain the classical origins of the Ages scheme, then explain where and how that scheme appears in medieval texts.

Aristotle established biological Ages of Man. First, he described the three stages of life: vegetative (having the capacity to grow, develop, and reproduce, shared with plants), sensitive (having the capacity to feel and move, shared with beasts), and intellectual (the capacity to reason, only found in man).¹⁵ From this, he established the three Ages of Man, including growth, maturity, and decline. These Ages are similarly applied to people by the terminology of childhood or youth, adulthood or middle age, and old age—the Latin equivalents being *augmentum*, *status*, and *decrementum*.¹⁶ Youth was a time for energy and unpredictable

¹⁵ This paradigm is also referred to as the Chain of Being.

¹⁶ Salisbury, *Chaucer and the Child*, 21.

emotions, and the Latin *augmentum* directly suggests a period of growth. This growth similarly corresponded with a growing ability for moral reasoning. Middle age was the prime of a person's life and was filled with confidence, emotional control, and maximum mental and physical capabilities. This was the moral peak of a person's character. A period of *status* suggests a static condition, neither growing nor shrinking.¹⁷ Old age was characterized by cynicism and distrustfulness. *Decrementum*, as the root suggests, directly points to a decline or decrease in condition. The decline and association with growing bitterness also suggested a failing of moral fortitude. Childhood lasted the first thirty years of life. The next thirty years were maturity. Old Age started at age sixty.

The medieval Italian writer, Dante, refers to and uses Aristotle's three-stage version of the Ages of Man specifically in his *Il Convivio* IV. Dante divides a man's regular lifespan of seventy years into three: *adolescenza* (0-25), *gioventute* (25-45 [peak of life at age 35]), and *senettute* (45-70).¹⁸ Dante explains his stages and their associated years by claiming

If the highest point of our arc is in the thirty-fifth year, this age of life must have a descent and an ascent of equal duration; this ascent and descent are like the handle of a bow in which but little flexion is observed. It obtains, then, that maturity is completed in the forty-fifth year. Just as adolescence lasts for the first twenty-five years, ascending toward maturity, so the descent, that is, old age, last for the same number of years following maturity; and so old age concludes in the seventieth year.¹⁹

Dante expressly states that a person's thirty-fifth year was the zenith of their moral and physical potential. This is the peak of a person's moral and physical growth, no longer ascending and on the precipice of descending. Dante explains that the moral growth directly connects to and creates the physical beauty and prowess found in these years:

¹⁷ Salisbury, *Chaucer and the Child*, 22

¹⁸ Burrow, *The Ages of Man*, 10.

¹⁹ Dante Alighili. "Book IV, Chapter 24." *Dante's Il Convivio (The Banquet)*, trans. Richard H. Lansing. (New York: Garland Publishing, 1990), 218-219.

The noble nature in this age of life displays not only obedience, pleasantness, and shame, but also beauty and poise of body...for a great part of the operations of our soul must be effected by means of the organs of the body, and its effects them well when the body is well ordered and disposed in its parts. When it is well ordered and disposed it is then beautiful as a whole and in its parts; for the due order of our members accords a pleasure of an inexpressibly wonderful harmony, and their proper disposition, namely their health, confers upon them a color that is pleasant to behold. So to say that a noble nature brings beauty to its body and makes it lovely and poised is to say simply that it adorns it with the perfection of order. It is evident that along with the other things that have been discussed, this characteristic is necessary in the age of adolescence. These are the things which the noble soul (that is, the noble nature as a thing which is sown, as had been said, by divine providence), intends for it to have from the beginning.²⁰

In this, a thirty-five-year-old was as close to perfection (to God and God's likeness) as is possible on Earth. For Dante, this period of life is when humanity expresses their very best qualities. Dante also added a fourth and fifth stage to his initial three (as presented by Aristotle). He added *senior* as a final stage of life, indicating the ten years after the age of seventy that one may experience. He also added a period of growth before birth, suggesting the first stage of life occurs during the nine months in the womb. His focus with his paradigm was mostly on the moral growth of a person, not on the physiological or biological changes.

A slightly more complex system of viewing human development divided a life span into four stages. This model of human development was directly associated with physiological changes. Pythagoras, Horace, Bede, and Byrhtferth of Ramsey all refer to this four-stage scheme. This system "linked childhood (*pueritia*), youth (*adolescentia*), maturity (*iuventus*), and old age (*senectus*) to the four seasons, the four humors (blood, yellow bile, black bile, and phlegm), the four qualities of the four humors (hot, cold, moist, dry), the four elements (earth, air, fire, water)" and much more.²¹ Horace describes the four ages as "the 'child,' the 'beardless youth,' the 'mature man,' and the 'old man.'"²² Childhood was connected to the humor of blood and the

²⁰ Dante, *Il Convivio*, 224.

²¹ Salisbury, *Chaucer and the Child*, 23

²² Salisbury, *Chaucer and the Child*, 23

season of spring, youth was yellow bile²³ and summer, maturity was black choler and autumn, and old age was phlegm and winter. Notably, these connections were not strictly adhered to. Any person at any age could have an imbalance in one humor or another and be affected differently by the seasons. However, “the various humours will gain and lose strength, as Bede explains...each individual has a permanent temperament, his ‘natural complexion’, in which one of the humours will be stronger than the rest. Hence the medical authorities would have had no difficulty explaining why, for instance, old people did not all exhibit the predicted phlegmatic characteristics of sluggishness and forgetfulness.”²⁴ Burrow also notes that:

The theory of the four humours provided a powerful account of what in any particular case might be ascribed to the age-variable...it offered an immediate physiological explanation for age-characteristics in terms of known bodily fluids; and its account of the effects of these fluids (in Bede’s version, at least) matched observable facts about young and old so well that it might have been invented for the purpose—which, as a matter of fact, it was not.”²⁵

Thus, although this system of Ages of Man connected to one of the four parts of the various four-systems, a person may be influenced by any number of the parts at any given time. This system divides a person’s life into quarters. The first twenty years are designated for childhood, the next twenty were youth, from forty years to sixty years were maturity, and old age began at sixty years old. Byrhtferth’s description of the ages divides the ages as “*pueritia* (0-14), *adolescentia* (15-28), *iuventus* (29-48), and *senectus* (49-70 or 80).”²⁶

Medieval scholars, like Augustine of Hippo, also created their own versions of the Ages of Man, depending heavily on the various numbers and events presented in the Bible. Sears notes that there is no specific description of the ages within the Bible, but there are many “sequences

²³ Or red bile, as described by Bede in *The Reckoning of Time (De Temporum Ratione)*.

²⁴ Burrow, *Ages of Man*, 13.

²⁵ Burrow, *Ages of Man*, 13

²⁶ Burrow, *Ages of Man*, 17.

of events or groups of things: the seven days of creation, the six vessels at the Marriage of Cana, the five hours of the Parable of the Workers at the Vineyard, the four directions of the plan of the Heavenly Jerusalem, and the three vigils in the Parable of the Three Vigils” that were used in developing various stages of the life cycle.²⁷ Augustine, a notably influential Church father, developed a scheme for the stages of human development in which he folded together the stages of human growth, the six days of creation (with the seventh day occurring after death), and, the six ages of humanity.²⁸ Light was created on the first day; this, according to Augustine, corresponds with birth and infancy. All people are born “seeing the light of day.”²⁹ He sees that this worldly age began with Adam and continued until the flood: “our infancy too is sort of blotted out by a flood of oblivion.”³⁰ The second day, when the sky was created, follows the second age “as a kind of childhood.”³¹ Augustine connects the solid structures created between water with Noah’s ark and its journey. The second age ends with “the confusion of tongues inflicted on people who were building the tower.”³² This is notable as it marks a capability of language acquisition. Both the first and second age do not involve a significant spread of “the people of God, because childhood is not adapted to procreation any more than infancy.”³³ Thus, both childhood and infancy are both represented in the earliest days of biblical human history.

The third and fourth ages of Augustine’s scheme are adolescence and youth. It was during the third day of creation that the waters were shifted to make dry land and vegetation.

²⁷ Elizabeth Sears. “The Ages of Man and the Ages of World History.” *The Ages of Man: Medieval Interpretations of the Life Cycle* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 54.

²⁸ Augustine of Hippo. “Book I.” *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century: On Genesis: A Refutation of the Manichees*, trans. Edmund Hill and Matthew O’Connell, ed. John E. Rotelle (New York: New City Press, 2002), 62.

²⁹ Augustine of Hippo, “Book I,” 62.

³⁰ Augustine of Hippo, “Book I,” 62.

³¹ Augustine of Hippo, “Book I,” 62.

³² Augustine of Hippo, “Book I,” 63.

³³ Augustine of Hippo, “Book I,” 63.

Augustine states that this age is “like adolescence,” and begins with Abraham. He describes this age to be similar to adolescence in that:

All the nations, you see, are aptly signified by the name of sea, unstable in their errors and tossed about by the doctrinal futilities of idolatry as if by all the winds of heaven. So then from these futilities of the nations and the stormy waves of this world the people of God was separated through Abraham, like the earth when it appeared as dry land, thirsting, that is, for the heavenly showers of God’s commandments. This people by worshipping received the holy scriptures and prophecies.³⁴

This period of human turmoil in human history is, therefore, represented during an individual’s adolescence. The fourth day of creation was when the heavenly bodies were created (sun, moon, stars, etc.). Augustine notes that this age begins with David’s reign (following the “worst of Kings, Saul”).³⁵ He explains that:

This age resembles youth; and in very truth, among all the ages of man youth reigns as king, and is the solid adornment of them all. And that is why it is suitably compared with the fourth day, on which the heavenly bodies were made. . . What after all more manifestly signifies the splendors of kingship than the majesty of the sun? And the splendor of the moon indicates the people complying with the royal authority like the synagogue itself, and the stars represent its leaders, and all of them on the stable foundation of the kingdom, as in the solid structure of heaven.³⁶

It is this age that a person is at their peak, just as it was during this period that humankind was at its peak. In Augustine’s estimation, during both of these stages, and beyond, the people of God are growing in number, corresponding with the stages of human growth: it is during adolescence that procreation becomes possible.

The fifth and sixth ages of the world are noted as the stages of decline of humanity, following that of human aging. Birds and sea creatures were created on the fifth day. Augustine specifically states,

This age reaches as far as the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ; being the fifth age, it makes the long slope down from youth to old age; not yet old age, but no longer youth;

³⁴ Augustine of Hippo, “Book I,” 63.

³⁵ Augustine of Hippo, “Book I,” 63.

³⁶ Augustine of Hippo, “Book I,” 63-64.

the age of the older man...And in very truth that is how this age sloped down in decline from the muscular vigor of the kingdom, and was enfeebled in the Jewish people, in the way a man grows older from his youth.³⁷

As noted by Edmund Hill, the translator of *On Genesis*, there is no specific Latin word to describe this period of life. Augustine references the Greek term “*presbytes*” in addition to his earlier description to indicate the stage of middle age he is attempting to define.³⁸ He compares the creation of birds and sea creatures, and their proliferation, to the “Gentile nations” who “have an unsettled and unstable residence, like flying birds” and “also great whales there, that is, those great men who were able to dominate the stormy waves of the world rather than submit to the slavery of that captivity.”³⁹ Thus, the movements and general behavior of people during this period of history directly corresponds with the creation of flying and swimming creatures. The fifth age ends with the coming of Jesus Christ and “the multiplication of sins among the Jewish people, which so blinded them that they were even unable to recognize the Lord Jesus Christ.”⁴⁰ The following age is just like old age in that is unclear how long it will last. Starting with “the preaching of the gospel by our Lord Jesus Christ,” Augustine emphasizes that this age is the one of decline.⁴¹ He states that just like an old man, “that kingdom of flesh has been thoroughly worn down.”⁴² It is on the sixth day of creation that man is created and is given dominion over the earth and its creatures. To this, Augustine notes that a “*new man* (Eph. 4:24; Col 3:10) is born, who is already living according to the spirit.”⁴³ He emphasizes that the creation of man and woman directly corresponds to the connection between Christ and the Church. It is unclear when this age will end.

³⁷ Augustine of Hippo, “Book I,” 64.

³⁸ Augustine of Hippo, “Book I,” 64.

³⁹ Augustine of Hippo, “Book I,” 64.

⁴⁰ Augustine of Hippo, “Book I,” 64.

⁴¹ Augustine of Hippo, “Book I,” 64.

⁴² Augustine of Hippo, “Book I,” 64.

⁴³ Augustine of Hippo, “Book I,” 65. Emphasis kept.

Arguably, Augustine does include a seventh age for the seventh day. As Elizabeth Sears points out, Augustine does “not explicitly describe the seventh age in his *On Genesis Against the Manichees*, but he implied the existence of an individual as well as a communal Sabbath rest after the second coming.”⁴⁴ He states,

There is a sort of evening of this sixth day—and I hope to goodness it does not overtake us, provided that it hasn’t already begun, because it is the one about which the Lord says: *Do you suppose when the Son of Man comes he will find faith on the earth?* (Lk 18:8). After this evening there will be made morning when the Lord himself is going to come in glory. Then those who were told, *Be perfect, like your Father who is in heaven* (Mt 5:48), will take their rest with Christ from all their works. Such people, you see, do works that are “very good”; after such works indeed a rest is to be hoped for on the seventh day which has no evening.⁴⁵

The seventh day of creation is when God, satisfied with his work and creations, rested.

Therefore, it is during man’s afterlife that he too can rest and be satisfied with his life.

As I have demonstrated, Augustine traced the days of creation with each age of human history. This growth and its distinctive markers of development are witnessed, he argued, in the growth and development of individual humans. Thus, all aspects of life are seen in both the macrocosm of the world and history, as well as in the microcosm of an individual’s life. This, like the other schemes of the Ages of Man, are the basis for medieval understanding of growth and development, serving as the context for the various literary texts of the period including these Ages.

The last prominent perspective on Ages was Ptolemy’s seven Ages of Man theory. These seven Ages were directly connected to the planets’ and Moon’s (Diana’s) influence on the various phases of life and their corresponding humors. The stages and their influences are described as follows by Burrow:

⁴⁴ Sears, *Medieval Interpretations*, 57.

⁴⁵ Augustine of Hippo, “Book I,” 66.

In the first four years (infancy) the Moon produces in a human being ‘the changeability of its condition, and the imperfection and inarticulate state of its soul’; in the following ten years (childhood) Mercury ‘begins to articulate and fashion the intelligent and logical part of the soul’; in the third age, youth, which lasts eight years, Venus ‘implants an impulse towards the embrace of love’; in the following nineteen years, from twenty-two to forty-one, the Sun ‘implants in the soul at length the mastery and direction of its actions, desire for substance, glory, and position, and a change from playful, ingenuous error to seriousness, decorum, and ambition’; in the fifteen years from forty-one to fifty-six, Mars brings unhappiness and a desire to accomplish something before the end; the following twelve years, ruled over by Jupiter, bring thoughtfulness, dignity, and decorum, in place of the hectic activity of preceding years; and the last age, extending for an unspecified time period after sixty-eight, is the age of Saturn, when man cools and slows down, becoming ‘worn down with age, dispirited, weak, easily offended, and hard to please.’⁴⁶

Thus, the stages directly correlate to the length of time the planets and Moon move in the universe and how their movement directly influences a person’s growth.

With the seven ages, specifically, Burrow notes, “there is no reason to doubt that by the later fourteenth century persons of quality in France, and England, would have known something of the seven ages.”⁴⁷ There are multiple texts across medieval Europe that depict the seven Ages of Man. In France, Jean Froissart “devotes nearly one hundred lines...to a formal exposition of the seven ages and the corresponding planets in their Ptolemaic order.”⁴⁸ This poem is particularly important because it is written in the vernacular, allowing the text to be more widely accessed and understood. However, as Sears points out, most of these “divisional systems...were passed on in schools.”⁴⁹ Thus, they were mainly a system used as an educational tool for academics to interpret the world around them.

All four of these complex systems (biological with Aristotle and Dante; Physiological with Pythagoras, Horace, Bede, and Byrhtferth; biblical with Augustine; and the Astrological

⁴⁶ Burrow, *Ages of Man*, 37-38

⁴⁷ Burrow, *Ages of Man*, 41.

⁴⁸ Burrow, *Ages of Man*, 40.

⁴⁹ Sears, *Medieval Interpretations*, 6.

with Ptolemy and Froissart) of understanding human development and growth would be available to medieval authors. Sears points out that, even though many of these schemes were developed in antiquity, “the schemes tended to endure, the ordered vision of life they presented proving powerfully attractive.”⁵⁰ Additionally, she notes that the “schemes were associated with particular spheres of thought: natural philosophical works described different systems than did, say, exegetical tracts.”⁵¹

Many medieval authors and scholars expanded on these schemes and their ideas. An anonymous poem, “Of þe Seven Ages,” was written sometime in the early fifteenth century in Middle English. This short dialogue is organized by the expected seven stages but focused on the man’s journey through moral growth. As Burrow explains, “the ages are here characterized morally, rather than astrologically or medically.”⁵² The dialogue begins with the man speaking, then the angel and fiend each speak to him. The conversation-style of this poem serves to highlight the moral strengths and weaknesses of each stage of growth. For example, at the start of the poem, when man is at his youngest, he is immune to the fiend and his influence:

þe goode angel says to þe childe & awnswers.
 [Child:] Nakyd in to þis warlde borne am I.
 Angel: Loke Cristes *commawndements* þ^u keep forþi
 þe Fende says: When þ^u art a lytell more & more,
 þan sal þou lerne on my lore. ⁵³

The fiend is observing that his influence will increase more and more as the baby grows up and learns. The infant is safe as he remains ignorant, but as he grows into a boy and becomes more learned, he becomes more susceptible to the influences of sin. The infant, now child and then youth, begins to desire distractions:

⁵⁰ Sears, *Medieval Interpretations*, 3.

⁵¹ Sears, *Medieval Interpretations*, 3.

⁵² Burrow, *Ages of Man*, 47.

⁵³ R. H. Bowers “A Medieval Analogue to As You Like It II,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 3, no.2 (Spring 1952): 110.

þe Childe: I wil go play with my felowe.
 þe Angel: To goode vertews loke þou drawe.
 þe Fende: zonge saynt alde devell is ane alde sawe.
 [þe Angel:] Begyn not þat Iape to keep Gods lawe.

zouthe spekes to his selfe & says:
 With women me lyst both play & rage.
 Angel: To þi saule it is gret dammage.
 þe Fende: If þ^u be holy *in* þi zong age,
 þi sorow sal *in*creas & þi might swage.⁵⁴

The fiend encourages the child to play in overabundance and warns that youth will be sorry if he is “holy” in his youth. The fiend is emphasizing that feeling of “missing out” if the youth chooses to avoid sin. It claims that his sorrow, or regret, will increase while his strength will lessen. Thereafter, when the youth grows to an adult the man becomes distinctly confident.

Man spekes to hym self & says:
 Now I am *in* strenthe who dar to me say nay?
 Angel: þan hafe mynde of þine ending day.
 þ^e Fende: Whils þ^u art zong be Ioly & light
 With al ryall & ryche aray.
 When þou art old & fayles might
 þan is tyme to do foly away.
 Angel: Be war of þe fendes cownsell I þe say
 And of þine amendment make no delay.⁵⁵

The abundance of confidence in the man prompts the angel to warn him of his upcoming decline. The fiend pushes the man to take advantage of his strength while he still has it and to use this time to do all he can to get as much as he can (like money). The angel tries to remind the man that he should repent and correct his behavior as soon as possible.

The poem then explores the moral struggles of the mature adult, the crippled older man, and the last stages of life. Following the same established pattern, the Angel warns the man of what his follies will cause, while the fiend presses the moral choice. Overall, this treatment of the

⁵⁴ Bowers, “A Medieval Analogue,” 110.

⁵⁵ Bowers, “A Medieval Analogue,” 110.

stages of man emphasizes the medieval awareness of specific moral challenges that man faces at specific stages of his life, expanding on just the physical changes and the planetary influences by incorporating a Christian interpretation of moral development.

This awareness of moral growth and trials of aging is also found in the Scottish *Ratis Raving*. This text covers a variety of moral instruction, including explicitly referencing the seven Ages of Man and man's journey through each stage. The speaker in the text, Rate, "speaks about the influence of the planets upon men's dispositions...but he does not refer to them in his account of the ages. Here he emphasizes rather the exercise of reason and moral judgement...a discussion, in which Aristotelian biology and Hippocratic medical lore play a larger part than Ptolemaic astrology."⁵⁶ He explores each of the stages of man within the Aristotelian idea of the three stages of life, as previously described. Thus, the seven ages had grown beyond just a description of the influences on a person (the various heavenly bodies), but also a scheme to explain how various life stages corresponded with distinct moral struggles and growth. As with Dante's assessment, the very middle of a person's life was the prime of their moral existence in which they needed the least amount of support.

Contemporary Understandings of Mental and Moral Growth

The medieval understanding of mental and moral growth does not deviate in any significant way from contemporary studies or prominent theories. Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget, who "is regarded as the founding father of modern Western developmental psychology,"⁵⁷ developed a four-stage model of childhood development. His stages are the

⁵⁶ Burrow, *Ages of Man*, 49.

⁵⁷ Jamie Ward. "Chapter 16: The Developing Brain." *The Student's Guide to Cognitive Neuroscience*. (London: Psychology Press, 2010), 365.

Sensorimotor Stage (0-2 years), the Preoperational Stage (2-7 years), the Concrete-Operational Stage (7-11 years), and the Formal Operations Stage (11-adult). The Sensorimotor Stage is the earliest stage of development when the child is grasping concepts like object permanence, memory, and goal-directed activities. During the second stage, the Preoperational Stage, the child can tackle many goal-oriented tasks, so long as they are all associated with physical actions. This stage is also when children start understanding basic symbolic forms and therefore can begin understanding language. The third, Concrete-Operational, stage of development occurs when the child begins to recognize “the logical stability of the physical world, the realization that elements can be changed or transformed and still conserve many of their original characteristics, and the understanding that these changes can be reversed.”⁵⁸ Thus, the child can solve basic logical problems and can comprehend reversibility. Formal Operations, the final stage, occurs when the child (or young adult) can both understand and solve abstract problems logically. This is the stage in which children develop concerns for social issues and their own identity.

Piaget’s basic approach and theories have remained the standard for understanding childhood development, even though some aspects of his theories and model have are no longer accepted. For example, child psychologists now believe that children can show signs of logical reasoning well before his suggested ages. However, Piaget established that there is a specific connection between a child’s physical growth and their mental development, which is fundamental to all other contemporary schemes of growth.

Piaget’s structure aligns closely with a variety of medieval schemes. The three-stage and four-stage divisions both emphasize the significance of the early years of life as that person grows and develops, including in their abilities to understand the world around them. The seven-

⁵⁸ Anita Woolfolk. “Chapter 2: Cognitive Development and Language.” *Educational Psychology* (Merril: Merrill, 2010), 35.

stage scheme as developed by Ptolemy also has some connections. According to Ptolemy, infancy, or the stage influenced by the Moon, is described as “the imperfection and inarticulate state of [the child’s] soul.”⁵⁹ The inarticulate aspect is directly consistent with the Sensiomotor stage. Further, the Preoperational and Concrete-Operational correspond with the second of the seven-stages, where the influence of Mercury “begins to articulate and fashion the intelligent and logical part of the soul.”⁶⁰ Children, specifically in the Concrete-Operational stage, begin to understand basic logic and start to learn language, directly corresponding with this Mercurial stage. Formal Operations seem to fall within the fourth stage of the seven-stages. The Sun “implants in the soul at length the mastery and direction of its actions, desire for substance, glory, and position, and a change from playful, ingenuous error to seriousness, decorum, and ambition.”⁶¹ This description follows Formal Operations. A person becomes an individual with a specific identity during this stage. Further, they become concerned with worldly things, directly connecting to the influences of the Sun.

Piaget’s stages also coincide with Augustine’s description of his own childhood. In *Confessions*, Augustine describes his personal experiences with growth, sin, and self-awareness. He describes infancy as defined by the inability to speak,⁶² corresponding directly with Piaget’s Sensorimotor stage (before speech is possible). The Preoperational stage corresponds with Augustine’s description of early childhood. He questions how exactly an infant shifts into boyhood, but states directly that “I was no longer an infant who lacked the faculty of speech, but

⁵⁹ Burrow, *Ages of Man*, 37.

⁶⁰ Burrow, *Ages of Man*, 37.

⁶¹ Burrow, *Ages of Man*, 37.

⁶² Augustine of Hippo. *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century: The Confessions*, trans. by Maria Boulding, ed. by John Rotelle (New York: New City Press, 1997), 43-44. Later referred to as “*Confessions*”

a boy who could talk.”⁶³ He even further elaborates that this awareness of language and speech was not directly tied to specific formal instruction:

It was not that older people taught me by offering me words by way of formal instruction, as was the case soon afterward with reading. No, I taught myself...I grasped at words with my memory; when people called an object by some name, and while saying the word pointed to that thing, I watched and remembered that they used that sound when they wanted to indicate that thing...In this way I gradually built up a collection of words, observing them as they were used in their proper places in different sentences and hearing them frequently. I came to understand which things they signified, and by schooling my own mouth to utter them I declared my wishes by using the same signs.⁶⁴

This description is a clear explanation of what occurs during the Preoperational Stage when a child develops language skills and learns symbols.

The Concrete-Operational stage appears later in *Confessions* when Augustine describes a specific assignment when he was a child in school. He was to create a speech, from his own imagination and from Juno’s perspective, “expressing her anger and grief at being unable to repulse the Trojan king from Italy, but in words which [he] had never heard Juno use.”⁶⁵ In this, Augustine had to create and transform a concept, but preserve the original meaning and idea – aligning directly with the distinct characteristics of Concrete-Operational capabilities. The final stage, Formal Operations, may have occurred in a variety of points throughout Augustine’s retelling of his life (just as it can occur at any point throughout a person’s life). However, this moment seems evident as early as Augustine’s investigation of astrology. He follows logic to explore the astrologists’ likely accuracy (which he later notes as a coincidence).⁶⁶ If it did not directly occur when Augustine logically concluded the astrologist’s predictions accurate, it certainly occurred as he realized the flaws in his own logical deduction upon retelling this event.

⁶³Augustine, *Confessions*, 47.

⁶⁴Augustine, *Confessions*, 47- 48.

⁶⁵Augustine, *Confessions*, 57.

⁶⁶Augustine, *Confessions*, 95.

Contemporary scientists have built upon Piaget's model, assuming that there is a relationship between "environmental and genetic factors, with a mature cognitive system emerging out of transformations of earlier ones. Unlike Piaget's approach, the predetermined aspect of development is construed in terms of multiple brain-based constraints (developmental changes in synapse formation, myelination, etc.) rather than the less well-defined notion of predetermined 'stages.'"⁶⁷ This process is called neuroconstructivism. Thus, child development is now understood as directly correlating with significant changes in brain development (specifically with increases in the number of synapses and the amount of white matter).

Mary Helen Immordino-Yang and Kurt Fischer explore this relationship between brain development and skill development in children and young adults. They emphasize that the development of the synapses and other brain growth factors directly relate to the child engaging with challenges and learning activities. Through their study, Immordino-Yang and Fischer "created a dynamic model of cyclical growth that hypothesizes common developmental mechanisms behind development of skills and brain activity."⁶⁸ They highlight that

The discovery that many growth functions for brain and behavior show marked discontinuities has provided a powerful tool for establishing major developmental changes and for relating changes in brain and behavior. Brain characteristics such as myelinations, synaptic density, dendritic branching, brain mass, pruning of neurons and synapses, and brain electrical activity all change systematically with age during childhood. Simultaneously, children's actions, speech, problem solving, concepts, social interactions, and emotions likewise change systematically. The result is that growth in all these characteristics necessarily correlates globally, but the nonlinear characteristics of growth make it possible to demarcate when major changes occur and provide tools for relating changes in skills and brain activity⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Ward, "The Developing Brain," 366.

⁶⁸ Mary Helen Immordino-Yang, Kurt Fischer. "Chapter 4: Dynamic Development of Hemispheric biases in Three Cases: Cognitive/Hemispheric Cycles, Music, and Hemispherectomy." *Human Behavior, Learning, and the Developing Brain*, ed. by Donna Coch, Kurt Fischer, and Geraldine Dawson (New York: Guilford Press, 2007), 76.

⁶⁹ Immordino-Yang and Fischer, *Human Behavior*, 77.

Immordino-Yang and Fischer have found that a human's capacity for mental and physical advancement occurs in recognizable stages. This appears with measurable brain activity (and/or growth) and skill increases. The stages occur at notably the same time; a significant change in brain activity corresponds directly with an increase in capability. Immordino-Yang and Fischer argue that there are seven notable stages of this development. Specially, they state that

People develop through seven stages of increasing sophistication in their ability to coordinate view point, argument, and evidence. Adolescents and young adults showed spurts in their level of understanding with each new stage of reflective judgement, both in their reasoning at a specific stage and in their reasoning when all stages were combined. This kind of spurt-and-plateau pattern does not occur for all developing behaviors but is common in people's optimal performance—the most complex skills that they can control with contextual support in a given domain⁷⁰

The authors argue that (beyond the many changes that occur throughout infancy) the intervals occur roughly around the ages of four years, seven years, eleven years, fifteen years, twenty years, and then finally at twenty-five years old. This last stage, they note, needs more study. However, the timing corresponds with the last significant increase in both brain activity and skill development.

This contemporary study directly coincides with the medieval and classical schemes of the Ages of Man. The shifts in development occur nearly at the same prescribed ages of the seven ages and Augustine's six ages. Although the ages studied only include infants, children, youths, and young adults, the major increases in intellectual and physical capability are at notably similar ages (or intervals). Additionally, as seen with both the three ages and four Ages of Man, it is during the early years of life (0-30 and 0-20) in which a person grows, learns, and becomes more physically and intellectually capable.

⁷⁰ Immodino-Yang and Fischer, *Human Behavior*, 78.

Beyond Piaget's theory and neuroconstructivism, other psychologists have developed frameworks for understanding human growth. Erik Erikson's model describes eight stages of psychosocial development. The first stage, from birth to eighteen months, involves forming basic trust. In this stage, the child must form a bond with their caregiver or otherwise will form a sense of mistrust. The second stage, from eighteen months to three years, the child develops an awareness of themselves and learns to control their own bodies. From three years to six years old, the child becomes more assertive and learns how to take initiative while also handling potentials for guilty feelings. Starting during the first years of schooling, the fourth stage involves the child overcoming the sense of inferiority or incompetence. Thereafter, a child develops a sense of personal identity and may struggle with role confusion. This tends to occur during the young teen years. The sixth stage begins when the young adult becomes concerned with intimacy and fearful of isolation. Once the young adult matures and reaches middle adulthood, the seventh stage begins. During this stage, the adult desires a way to become generative (to parent or otherwise mentor younger people). The final stage occurs in late adulthood. This stage is defined by a struggle between despair and acceptance of one's life.⁷¹

There are clear connections between these eight stages and the seven stages described by Ptolemy. The stage of Mercury, with its emphasis on growing intelligence, corresponds with Erikson's third and fourth stages with the child learning to take initiative and how to overcome learning challenges in school. His sixth stage, with the concern of intimacy, clearly connects to Venus's influence. The seventh stage, with the need to be generative, connects with either Mars or the Sun (a need to accomplish something and ambition). The final stage for Erikson corresponds with Mars and Jupiter's influence. This stage is marked by the struggle to

⁷¹ Woolfolk, "Cognitive Development and Language," 83.

accomplish something before the end (and the subsequent despair), which directly connects to Mars's influence, as well as with the dignity and acceptance of the end of one's life, which describes Jupiter's influence exactly.

Another contemporary scheme of development was theorized by Lawrence Kohlberg. His three-level, six-stage system explores moral development specifically. His three levels are "(1) pre-conventional, where judgement is based solely on a person's own needs and perceptions; (2) conventional, where the expectations of society and law are taken into account; and (3) post-conventional, where judgements are based on abstract, more personal principles of justice that are not necessarily defined by society's laws."⁷² He believed that moral reasoning is directly related to both cognitive and emotional development. This general framework is logical – once a child can see beyond his own perspective, and is able to understand the perspective of another, he is able to make a more morally sound judgement of a situation. The specific stages under each level are described as follows:

Level 1: Pre-conventional Moral Reasoning (Judgement is based on personal needs and others' rules)

Stage 1: Punishment—obedience orientation; rules are obeyed to avoid punishment. A good or bad action is determined by its physical consequences.

Stage 2: Personal reward orientation; personal needs determine right and wrong. Favors are returned along the lines of 'you scratch my back, I'll scratch yours.'

Level 2: Conventional Moral Reasoning (Judgement is based on others' approval, family expectations, traditional values, the laws of society, and loyalty to country.)

Stage 3: Good boy-nice girl orientation; good means 'nice.' It is determined by what pleases, aids, and is approved by others.

Stage 4: Law and order orientation; laws are absolute, authority must be respected, and the social order maintained.

Level 3: Post-conventional Moral Reasoning

Stage 5: Social contract orientation; good is determined by socially agreed-upon standards of individual rights; this is a morality similar to the U.S. Constitution.

Stage 6: Universal ethical principle orientation; good and right are matters of individual conscience and involve abstract concepts of justice, human dignity, and equality.⁷³

⁷² Woolfolk, "Cognitive Development and Language," 98.

⁷³ Woolfolk, "Cognitive Development and Language," 98.

Kohlberg later questioned if stage 6 exists separately from stage 5, and, further if stage 6 was consistently reached by most individuals.

This general overview of one's moral development, as organized by cognitive growth, can similarly be connected to the moral growth described by *Ratis Raving* and Jean Froissart. The main difference between the contemporary and medieval descriptions of moral growth is the removal of specific religious terminology and imagery in the contemporary framework. Medieval writing and ideology cannot be understood separate from religion or religious ideas. However, contemporary theorists and scientists have still developed noticeably similar patterns of moral growth.

Ages for Analysis

Based on both contemporary developmental theory and the various medieval stages of growth, I have combined the schemes above to create a distillation of the stages of human life. Merging all of the major understood medieval schemes and contemporary paradigms of growth not only demonstrates their important similarities but will also together provide the necessary contextualization for examining representations of children and youth in medieval literary texts. This seven-stage scheme is built to combine all aspects of the previously described stages of growth while providing specific stage-names for easier reference throughout the dissertation. I will use this scheme to directly analyze specific medieval English works, but also reference the specific Ages of Man where appropriate.

The first stage is *infancy*. This occurs from birth up through roughly two years old. During this time, the baby is inarticulate, expressing his or her needs ineffectually. An infant is

also ignorant of moral quandaries (although prone to selfishness out of ignorance). This period of life is also forgotten as a person ages.

The second stage of life is *childhood*. This period of growth occurs from roughly two to eleven years old. During this period, a child learns symbols, acquires language skills, becomes familiar with very basic logic, and is focused on social needs. A child is focused on personal rewards and makes goals focused on obtaining benefits to themselves. Additionally, children are prone to prefer to play over work and desire to develop social bonds (friendships).

The third age is *adolescence*. This period is marked by the onset of puberty and the major changes occurring in and to their bodies. This age is filled with confusion of one's role and personal identity. However, it is also during this stage that abstract reasoning can begin to surface. Adolescents also tend to desire the approval of their peers.

The fourth age is *youth* or *young adulthood*. This is the last stage in which a person physically and mentally grows. The fourth stage occurs from roughly fifteen to about twenty-five years old. A youth is often preoccupied with intimate social relationships. However, they are growing more aware of larger, communal concerns, including how societal rules are established and followed.

The fifth age is that of *adulthood*. This is the peak time of development, both physically and mentally. A person's body and mind have completed growing and have not yet started declining. It is during this period that people develop a concern for what they are creating and leaving behind (a need for generativity in some way). This period is also when a person's identity is solidified. Further, what a person determines as "good" or "bad" tends to follow what is overall socially acceptable.

The sixth age starts the *decline* of a person. Starting around forty-five, an older adult is distinct in that they begin to grow more desperate to accomplish something before it is too late. Even so, this is also the age of decorum and thoughtfulness. This separates the sixth from the fifth stage in that the earlier years are filled with hectic activity. Moreover, it is also during this stage that physical capabilities tend to begin to decline.

The seventh and final stage is *senior*. Usually starting around sixty-five, this is when age truly begins to show physically. This is a time often filled with bitterness and is marked by an initial struggle with despair but cooling into an acceptance of one's life.

As the Ages of Man are so broadly present during the Middle Ages, I use this combined framework to analyze the child characters in specific texts of medieval literature by comparing them to the characteristics defined in each stage. Understanding these historical and philosophical ideas surrounding the concepts of a "child" and the growth of a person provides the context for analyzing the depictions of infant, child, and youthful characters in this dissertation. Whether a child character fits within, drastically differs from, or only partially connects to the stages of man indicates both how the author viewed children and how unlike or like the character is to a real child. This distinction, therefore, is useful in determining a "typical" or "atypical" child representation.

I also examine these texts through a child-centric lens. This critical perspective requires the careful examination of how the child characters interact with the literary world they inhabit. I specifically seek to find areas of agency, both when and where they appear within infants, children, and young adult characters. Agency, for my purposes, is the ability, or represented ability, for a character to exert influence over with their environment. This includes the ability to independently interact with the setting, other characters (including through speech), and

themselves (e.g. making decisions about their own actions). Following the approach children’s literary scholars such as Perry Nodelman, Richard Flynn, Marah Gubar, and Roberta Trites have explored and established, I will utilize a child-centric lens in examining these texts, noting when and how the featured child exhibits agency.

Within children’s literature scholarship, there is a debate surrounding child agency and how children are represented in texts. Scholars like Perry Nodelman argue that there is fundamental bias from adults when writing texts for and about children, as an adult author naturally will have a preconception of childhood.⁷⁴ Regardless of intentional or unintentional purpose, a text depicting any form of childhood will innately be biased. Further, Nodelman also claims that “there is the idea that people—especially, it seems, children—have a natural, inborn freedom to be and to act for themselves”; a description that I would classify as agency.⁷⁵ He explains that this agency is in defiance of social institutions and that, fundamentally, children cannot have agency in children’s literature. In response to these ideas, Richard Flynn argues that “children are not merely passive recipients of culture” but rather that they “learn to become active participants in that culture.”⁷⁶ Expanding on this, Flynn explains that agency for children “is not the same as saying they are free from the influence of culture or the influence of adults... ‘agency’ implies the ability to act, it is not synonymous with autonomy.”⁷⁷ Sara Schwebel further debates this issue by explaining childhood agency “did not or does not exist, but rather that evidence of this agency is particularly difficult to locate and particularly

⁷⁴ Perry Nodelman, *The Hidden Adult: Defining Children’s Literature* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2008), 148.

⁷⁵ Perry Nodelman, “The Hidden Child in *The Hidden Adult*.” *Jeunesse: Young People, Texts, Cultures* 8, no. 1 (Summer 2016), 266.

⁷⁶ Richard Flynn, “What Are We Talking about When We Talk about Agency?” *Jeunesse: Young People, Texts, Cultures* 8, no. 1 (Summer 2016): 256.

⁷⁷ Flynn, “Agency,” 256.

challenging to interpret.”⁷⁸ I use these ideas and similar a approach to my analysis of medieval English literature by examining how the adult authors write about and represent children and childhood. This concept is fundamental in forming a cohesive understanding of how medieval adult authors viewed children. All of the texts that I examine were written by adults. As Nodelman points out, this authorship means that any views, preconceptions, and values about children are fundamentally biased from the adult author’s perspective. Thus, by looking closely at this aspect of the youthful characters, combined with all the other contextualization, I am able to gauge the view of the children’s independence, sense of self, and how important these ideas were to medieval authors. This type of critical perspective both focuses my analysis directly on the youthful characters and provides additional support to my historical analysis.

Contents

For the sake of brevity and practicality, I have chosen to set a few purposeful boundaries for this project. I only include textual evidence in this analysis. This means that I do not analyze any artist renditions, scribal doodles, or any other drawings associated or not with the texts that I examine.⁷⁹ I hope to expand this work later to include such works and artistry. Specifically, I examine *Beowulf*, the Christ Child in medieval lyrics, Geoffrey Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*, and *Pearl*. I have chosen these texts because they are some of the most prominent texts from this period that include children and their growth. I also chose texts that span across the medieval period to try to highlight any changes in representation over this time.

⁷⁸ Sara Schwebel, “The Limits of Agency for Children’s Literature Scholars.” *Jeunesse: Young People, Texts, Cultures* 8, no. 1 (Summer 2016): 279.

⁷⁹ Unless I am directly responding to other scholars who use the manuscript illustrations to support their analysis.

The first chapter focuses on Beowulf and Wiglaf from *Beowulf*. I explore these characters as warriors, but also as youths. I suggest what was expected of youths during this warrior-period, emphasizing the importance of building a name for oneself as a young man. I also examine the growth shown within the text between Beowulf as a child into Beowulf as a young adult. I argue that this transition is fundamental to understanding the complex characterization of Beowulf.

The second chapter focuses on the descriptions of Christ and the Christ Child. I look closely at the *Dream of the Rood* and a specific lullaby from the Grimestone lyrics that depicts the Christ Child. Christ has a warrior-like nature in the Old English work, where his duality of nature (human and God, mortal and infinite, child and adult) is the main focus of the Middle English lyric.

The third chapter of the first section focuses on Geoffrey Chaucer's infant, child, and youth characters depicted in the *Canterbury Tales*. I explain how infants are used mainly as plot devices, the children who are mainly nameless and without agency, and the importance of children as emotional tools. I also examine how the young adult characters express themselves through dialogue and have both agency and importance to the overall story. I organize this examination by the Pilgrim and his or her *Tale*.

The fourth chapter focuses on the character of Pearl from the Pearl-poet's *Pearl* poem. I highlight how Pearl is an unusual case and does not fit the typical expectations of a "real" child – much like the Christ child and for similar reasons. She does this by instructing her father, even though she is just a child. I also highlight the significance of both Pearl and the Christ Child as religious children, and how their representations as children are unlike secular representations of similarly aged characters.

I end my dissertation with an overall assessment of my research. I use the evidence from the previous chapters to discuss the changes in perceptions of children and childhood throughout the Middle Ages, highlighting the important differences between young children and older youths, paying particular attention to the differences between secular and religious representations of youthful characters. I discuss the overarching implications of my findings and suggest avenues for future research.

Conclusion

This work explores the basis and original formation of child characters in medieval English literature by seeking answers to this work's primary questions and providing fundamental background on the shifting cultural perspectives of childhood and how childhood has been represented in writing. Understanding the shifts in how the youngest members of society are viewed and their purpose to and for society is a crucial element in understanding that society. Children and youths are part of the population that is typically forgotten and commonly not discussed (particularly in the scholarship of medieval literature). My work reveals the correlation between the age of the medieval child character and the agency (action and speech) and personality (characteristics and specific details) that such characters possess within a variety of Old and Middle English texts to illuminate the cultural values held by the authors and society at the time these texts were developed. This type of analysis demonstrates the consistent, divergent, and changing values of the authors.

This analysis illuminates medieval understandings of children, youth, and young adults by providing clarifying perspectives on how these characters are represented and what that meant for a medieval audience. This provides necessary context for a modern audience to read and

examine the role of children and youth in these Old and Middle English texts with clarity and confidence.

CHAPTER I: BEOWULF AS YOUTH

Beowulf has received significant scholarly attention for the last eighty years, thanks to the much-lauded lecture from J.R.R. Tolkien, “Beowulf: The Monsters and The Critics,”⁸⁰ originally published in 1936. Not only did Tolkien reinvigorate scholarly attention for the epic poem, but he helped popularize this heroic story. One of the major qualities of *Beowulf* that Tolkien notes is that it is neither entirely fictional, nor fully historical. Many scholars have focused on analyzing the real historical connections and references in the poem,⁸¹ while others have highlighted the mythical and supernatural details.⁸² However, as Roy Liuzza points out, “the separation of the poem into ‘mythical’ and ‘historical’ elements is a false dichotomy.”⁸³ The fantastic qualities of the text directly tie into the ideologies of culture, just as the real historical descriptions are woven into the larger mythical and monster-filled story. This interwoven quality of *Beowulf* opens up opportunities to examine Anglo-Saxon conceptions of life and growth, including their ideas of childhood and youth.

It is unclear exactly when and by whom *Beowulf* was composed. Various scholars have attempted to date the poem, but as only one manuscript *Beowulf* survives (and a damaged one at that), it is difficult to pin down an exact date. Most scholars do agree that the poem was at least copied down by two different scribes. The formation of their letters suggests that the text was likely, though not definitively, transcribed sometime between 1001 and 1010 A.D.⁸⁴ The historical events described in *Beowulf* do provide some suggestion as to the origin of the story

⁸⁰ J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Monsters and Critics and Other Essays*, ed. Christopher Tolkien (London: HarperCollins Publishing, 2006).

⁸¹ See examples like Norman E. Eliason’s “Wiglaf and Wægmundings” or Carol Parrish Jamison’s “Traffic of Women in Germanic Literature: The Role of the Peace Pledge in Marital Exchanges”

⁸² See examples like Peter Barker’s “Unferth’s Gift” and Susan Kim’s “As I Once Did with Grendel”

⁸³ R. M. Liuzza, “Introduction,” *Beowulf: Second Edition Facing Page Translation* (Peterborough: Broadview, 2013), 17.

⁸⁴ R.D. Fulk, Robert Bjork and John Niles, “Introduction.” *Klaeber’s Beowulf: And the Fight at Finnsburg*, Fourth Edition, eds. R. D. Fulk, Robert Bjork, and John Niles (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), xxvii.

and to the age of the main character, Beowulf. For example, as Howell Chickering points out, “The poem mentions...Hygelac of the Geats, was killed in a raid on the Frisians. This is one indisputable historical fact in the poem. It is corroborated by the historian Gregory of Tours (d. 594), who dates the death of Hygelac...as circa 521.”⁸⁵ Thus, there is a clear, and historically sound, date for Beowulf’s lord’s death. Expanding on this, in the first edition of *Beowulf*, Klaeber writes in his introduction that

Regarding Bēowulf the hero himself, the son of Ecgbēow and grandson of Hrēðel (373 ff.), -- the facts of his life, *if fitted into the chronological scheme here adopted*, would show the following sequence. He was born about the year 490. At the age of seven he was brought to the court of his grandfather Hrēðel and nurtured there with loving care (2428 ff.) [He was, however, considered slack and of little promise (2183 ff.).] [He distinguishes himself in fighting giants and sea-monsters, 418 ff. and in a swimming adventure with Breca, 506 ff.] He takes no part in the engagements with the swedes [*sic*] which culminate in the battle at Ravenswood. [In A.D. 510 he visits the Danes and delivers Hrōðgār from the plague of Grendel and his dam.] As a loyal thane he accompanies his uncle Hygelāc in his expedition against the Franks (A.D. 516), slays Dæghrefn (thus avenging Hygelāc’s death, it seems), and escapes home by swimming (2356 ff., 2501 ff.). Refusing Hygd’s offer of the throne, he acts as Heardrēd’s guardian during the latter’s minority (2369 ff.). After Heardrēd’s death in the fight with the Swedes (A.D. 528), he becomes king and soon supports Eadgils in his war on Onela, A.D. 530 (2389 ff.).⁸⁶

The sequence of events, as Klaeber describes here, roots Beowulf into documented historical events, and therefore, based on this dating and references to actual events, Beowulf must be roughly in his twenties when he visits Hrothgar and battles Grendel and his Mother. Thus, Beowulf is a young adult through the first two major battles of the poem. Knowing how old Beowulf is opens up an opportunity to directly analyze how his representation fits within or deviates from the expected characteristics of a person at his stage of life.

⁸⁵ Howell D. Chickering, Jr. “Backgrounds.” *Beowulf: A Dual-Language Edition*. (New York: Anchor Books, 2006), 521.

⁸⁶ Klaeber, “Introduction,” *Beowulf: And the Fight at Finnsburg*. (Lexington: D.C. Heath Co. Publishers, 1922), xiv. Emphasis, capitalization, and line references kept.

Slothful Childhood

Although he is not a child or adolescent during the events of *Beowulf*, there are multiple descriptions of Beowulf's childhood and early youth mentioned throughout the poem. At his youngest description, it is clear that Beowulf started training to fight very early. Beowulf was adopted by his grandfather, Hreðel at the age of seven:

‘Fela ic on giogoðe gūðrāesa ġenæs,
 orleġhwīla; ic þæt eall ġemon.
 Ic wæs syfanwintre þā meċ sin(c)a baldōr,
 frēawine folca æt mīnum fæder ġenam;
 hēold meċ ond hæfde Hrēðel cyning,
 ġeaf mē sinċ on symbēl, sibbe ġemunde;
 næs ic him tō life lādra ōwihte,
 beorn in burgum, þonne his bearna hwylċ,
 Herebeald on Hæðcyn oððe Hyġelāc mīn.⁸⁷

He was raised alongside his uncles and was well loved, treated just like Hrethel's own sons.

Additionally, as mentioned by Klaeber, Beowulf is described as a slothful child.

Hēan wæs lange,
 swā hyne Ġēata bearn ġōdne ne tealdon,
 nē hyne on medobenċe micles wyrðne
 (dry)hten *Wedera* ġedōn wolde;
 swyðe (wēn)don þæt hē slēac wære,
 æðeling unfrom.⁸⁸

This description of Beowulf as an unpromising, lazy child serves as a key foundation to

Beowulf's character. Beowulf becomes a powerful hero in his young adulthood; that he began

⁸⁷ *Klaeber's Beowulf: And the Fight at Finnsburg*, Fourth Edition. Edited by R. D. Fulk, Robert Bjork, and John Niles (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), lines 2426-2434.

I, in my childhood, escaped many storms of battles, [and] times of wars; I remember all that. I was seven-winters when the protector of treasures, friend-lord of the people, took me from my father; King Hrethel held and protected me, [he] gave me treasure and feast, [he] remembered the peace [treaty]; [while he] lived, I, a man in his fortress, was not [more] hateful to him [in] anything than as his sons, Herebeald and Hæthcyn [and] my own Hygelac.

⁸⁸ *Klaeber's Beowulf*, lines 2183b-2188a.

[Beowulf] was long despised, since the sons of the Geats considered him not good, the lord of the Weders would not render him worthy of the great meadbench; [because they] very much expected that he [Beowulf] was a slothful, feeble man.

his life as “despised” and believed to be “not good” suggests that he overcame this negative image of himself.

There is much debate over this short description of the hero’s childhood. George Engelhardt examines Beowulf as a growing and maturing character. He emphasizes the importance of *Beowulf* as a story about a youth growing into old age.⁸⁹ He suggests that this childhood weakness (and later reflective old age) is designed as an intentional narrative representation of the three stages of life: growth, maturity, and decrepitude. Yet, Beowulf’s old age does not match the weakness associated with the expected physical decline. Beowulf, after fifty years of reigning as king, is still able to battle a dragon. Arthur Brodeur, on the other hand, argues this reference to Beowulf’s feeble childhood is an inconsistency in the writing of Beowulf’s character. Brodeur explains that

The first inconsistency is equally easy to understand and to pardon: the narrator’s fondness for contrast misled him into attempting to enhance Beowulf’s heroism in young manhood by setting it off against an imagined sluggishness in youth. The flaw lies in the total absence of anything outside this single passage to support a tale of the hero’s early inactivity. It seems probable that a “male Cinderella” tradition had associated itself with the figure of Beowulf, and that the poet, knowing of it, made the mistake of using it. It is contradicted not only by Beowulf’s own reports of his youthful exploits, but also by his direct statement that he was loved and highly regarded in his childhood by King Hrethel.⁹⁰

Thus, Brodeur is suggesting that the narrator is intentionally highlighting the difference between Beowulf as a child and young adult to *incorrectly* follow an understood literary convention. Moreover, even though it is possible, I doubt that the inclusion of this slothful disposition in Beowulf’s childhood is just a literary device. If Beowulf was a “male Cinderella,” then there should be more evidence supporting the literary purpose for this technique.

⁸⁹ George Engelhardt, “On the Sequence of Beowulf’s GEOGOD.” *Modern Language Notes* 68, no. 2 (February 1953).

⁹⁰ Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur, “Anticipation, Contrast, and Irony.” *The Art of Beowulf* (Oakland: University of California Press, 1969), 238.

Brodeur's argument that the narrator misused a literary trope is debated by other scholars. Kemp Malone argues that this description of Beowulf was not misused, but rather intentionally placed to distinguish the character's three stages of development (somewhat similar to Englehardt's view). Malone claims that

The poet distinguishes three stages in development of young Beowulf. First we have the hero as a boy, reckless enough, full of the spirit of adventure, unaware of the moral purpose inherent in God's gift to him of great strength; during this stage, he seemed to the Geats a youth of the greatest promise. Secondly, the hero becomes aware of his obligations to God, and refuses to use his strength for anything trivial; he awaits God's call to high service in a great cause. During this stage he falls out of favor at home; his fellows, and even his lord, knowing as they do the greatness of his strength, cannot understand his refusal to use it in the rough and tumble of everyday life in the hall; they attribute his inactivity to sloth and want of spirit. Thirdly, the hero hears of Grendel and realizes that his call has come. He announces his purpose, and his fellow-Geats (or, at any rate, the wiser heads among them) are delighted to see the mighty man come out of his lethargy.⁹¹

Thus, according to Malone, Beowulf demonstrates the three stages of a Christian hero, only using his strength for a great divine cause. This idea is supported by the lines preceding the slothful description.

Swa b(eal)dode bearn Ecgðeowes,
 guma guð(um) cūð, gōdum dædum,
 drēah æfter dōme; nealles druncne slōg
 heorðgenēatas; næs him hrēoh sefa,
 ac hē mancynnes mæste cræfte
 ginfæstan gife, þe him God sealde,
 hēold hildedēor.⁹²

Malone emphasizes that Beowulf is described as refraining from physical altercations with drunken fellows. In doing so, Malone argues that Beowulf chooses to not use his strength for "trivial" purposes, which, in turn, is interpreted by the Geats as lazy behavior. This three stage

⁹¹ Kemp Malone, "Young Beowulf." *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 36, no. 1 (January 1937): 23.

⁹² *Klaeber's Beowulf*, lines 2177-2183a.

Thus, [the] son of Ecgtheow showed himself brave, known [as a] man of wars [and for] noble deeds, acted through judgement; [he] certainly did not strike [his] drunken hearth companions; nor did he [have a] violent heart, but he of mankind [was given an] ample gift, which God gave him, [of the] most strength [which] he held brave in battle.

scheme aligns with Beowulf's abilities, suggesting and highlighting his moral and mental maturity. However, Norman Eliason disagrees with both Malone and Brodeur. He argues that the other scholars are misreading the text and that the section describing a slothful youth should not be attributed to Beowulf, but rather to Hygelac. Eliason establishes an ambiguity to the grammar of the section and suggests that the context of Beowulf's and Hygelac's earlier descriptions point to this conclusion.⁹³ To Eliason, that the various victories of Beowulf are being contrasted to the failures of Hygelac and his connections to the wicked Heremod.

In my examination of this passage, I think it is more likely that the slothful behavior is in connection to Beowulf and his childhood. The word choice of the passage suggests that the descriptions of Beowulf are from two separate moments in time. The first is a reflection of his behavior as an adolescent, one who was brave and strong who was also kind to his companions.⁹⁴ The latter section is a reflection on Beowulf's reputation as a child.⁹⁵ "Hēon wæs lange" suggests that this conception of him was something of the past, before what was just described. Moreover, the final statement of this section, "Edwenden cwōm / tūrēadigum menn torna ġehwylces,"⁹⁶ states that his "torna" were reversed, reinforcing the description that began this section (that he has been loved and known for his strength for some time).

Establishing Beowulf as a child with faults and suggesting that he is feeble and unpromising sets up the hero as a character who grew out of weakness and into something spectacular. Both medieval and contemporary paradigms support this aspect of growth for Beowulf's development, matching his physical and mental development during his early years.

⁹³ Norman E. Eliason, "Beowulf's Inglorious Youth." *Studies in Philology* 76, no. 2 (Spring 1979): 104.

⁹⁴ *Klaeber's Beowulf*, lines 2177-2183a.

⁹⁵ *Klaeber's Beowulf*, lines 2183b-2188a.

⁹⁶ *Klaeber's Beowulf*, lines 2188b- 2189.

For [the] man blessed with glories (Beowulf) reversal came for each [of his] sufferings.

Specifically in Erikson’s Psychosocial scheme, Beowulf would fit perfectly into the fourth stage of industry versus inferiority (expected to occur between the ages of six and twelve). Beowulf needs to learn new skills or risk humiliation – being despised by his people. This desire seems to be reinforced by Beowulf’s many adolescent accomplishments and the swimming contest with Breca.

Headstrong Adolescence

In his later adolescence, Beowulf seems to be seeking vindication from the negative views of his slothful childhood. When Beowulf is explaining why he was encouraged to seek out Hrothgar, Beowulf states

þēoden Hrōðgār, þæt ic þē sōte,
forþan hīe mægenes cræft mīn[n]e cūþon;
selfe ofersāwon ðā ic searwum cwōm
fāh from fēondum, þær ic fife gēband,
yðde eotena cyn, ond on yðum slog
niceras nihtes, nearoþearfe drēah
wræc Wedeara nīð – wean āhsodon –
forgrand gramum;⁹⁷

The list of victories in this section serves both as an explanation for why he, of any of Hygelac’s thegns, was encouraged to go, but also as a resume for his capabilities. In this, it is clear that Beowulf is a confident and capable fighter, and has been for a while. This confidence, although not unfounded, when juxtaposed to the description of his childhood, suggests that Beowulf has not only overcome his feeble reputation, but has now proceeded confidently to approach mythical foes and battles. That Beowulf, only in his early twenties when he arrives on Hrothgar’s

⁹⁷ *Klaeber’s Beowulf*, lines 417-424.

Chief Hrothgar, I therefore sought you, because they [Beowulf’s people, the Geats] knew of my strength skill; they themselves oversaw that I came skilled decorated from [the] enemy, there I bound fifty, destroyed [a] family of giants, and slew water-monsters on [the] waves [at] night, [I] passed through [that] severe distress [and] avenged [the] Weder’s affliction – [they] sought trouble – [and I (in particular)] destroyed [the] hostile [ones].

shores, already has so many physical contests and conquests behind him suggests that he has been intentionally engaging in these violent challenges. This behavior could be demonstrative of a desire to test his own abilities, but also likely a method to disprove what his people thought of him. He has the self-confidence to overcome those expectations and disprove his family and friends. He defines his own, new identity with his impressive accomplishments. This effort to build a list of accomplishments matches the expectations found at adolescence in Erikson's paradigms of psychosocial development. By his teenage years, Beowulf should be working to develop his own identity through his work and gendered role. Anglo-Saxon adolescents, too, seem to be expected to develop an identity (fame) through their achievements in battle (work).

This list of achievements is challenged, however. Unferth, Hrothgar's spokesman of the hall, questions Beowulf's introduction and list of accomplishments. Unferth asks

‘Eart þu se Bēowulf, sē þe wið Breca n wunne
 on sīdne sǣ, ymb sund flite
 ðær gīt for wlence wada cunnedon
 on for dolgīlpe on dēop wæter
 aldrum nēþdon?⁹⁸

Unferth is asking whether or not this is the same Beowulf who made this dangerous mistake – so foolhardy a challenge that even he has heard of it. By bringing up the adolescent mishap, Unferth challenges Beowulf's capability to actually take on Grendel. In response, Beowulf describes the swimming contest in detail,⁹⁹ explaining just how dangerous and treacherous the actual event was. This serves two functions. First, Beowulf is given a chance to accept his mistake. Beowulf agrees that he was acting like a rash adolescent:

⁹⁸ *Klaeber's Beowulf*, lines 506-510a.

Are you the Beowulf, who struggled against Beca on [the] broad sea, [you both] competed by moving through the water where for your pride [you] tempted [the] water [and] because of fool-hardiness in deep water [you] endangered [your] lives?

⁹⁹ *Klaeber's Beowulf*, lines 530-582.

Wit þæt gecwādon cnihtwesende
 ond gebēotedon – wāron bēgen þā ġīt
 on ġeogoðfēore – þæt wit on ġarsecg ūt
 aldrum nēðdon, ond þæt ġeāfndon swā.¹⁰⁰

He states specifically that they were both just boys, emphasizing that it was a specific time in their youth, as if such behavior was expected and such mistakes should be blamed on their age. This does not mean that Beowulf approves of the choices he made during this time, but rather that he is distancing himself from the event, suggesting that he has matured since. Additionally, Unferth's questioning also allows Beowulf to elaborate on what incredible thing he accomplished while so young, making his accomplishment even more impressive.

The swimming contest itself suggests that Beowulf was acting irrationally (as the danger of the challenge was so apparent) and was more concerned about peer relationships and his identity than his own life and safety. That Beowulf accepts this physical challenge could be a sign of the expectations of an adolescent during this period or perhaps a response to knowing that his companions thought of him as feeble. Either way, Beowulf competed in a contest against Breca that endangered them both, accepting this challenge, and not thinking through the potential consequences. Based upon this, and appropriate for his age, Beowulf fits firmly into stage five of Erikson's Psychosocial development. His early teenage years match directly with the expected concerns with identity, relationships, and role-finding associated with stage five. It is unclear, however, how Beowulf fits into the astrological, Ptolemaic stages. During very early adolescence, Ptolemy notes that a child should be developing rationality. By fifteen, a youth should be focused on intimacy and finding a partner. Yet, Beowulf puts himself and his peers in danger, questioning his reasoning skills; he is also not described as seeking companionship.

¹⁰⁰ *Klaeber's Beowulf*, lines 535-538.

When [we were] boys we two agreed and vowed – we were both in that period of youth – that we two ventured out into [the] ocean [for] a long time, and carried that out in that manner.

Karl Wenterdorf points out that several scholars do not even believe that this swimming contest occurred. He explains that

By and large, critics have either altogether avoided dealing with the strangeness of the swimming exploit, or they have contented themselves with commenting that its exaggerated details raise questions as to its credibility. There seems to be general agreement, if only from silence, that the feat does not fall into the same category as the three epic combats with the monsters: it belongs not in the domain of pure mythology but among the historical materials that form the background for the major encounters. Yet it does not seem to harmonize with the other background materials. An adventure in which two youths spend seven days and nights swimming at sea is more than extraordinary, particularly since they are carrying heavy iron swords and wearing cumbersome coats of chain mail.¹⁰¹

As Tolkien argued, the separation of history and myth is impossible in *Beowulf*. If Beowulf was feeble in his childhood, and then experienced challenges in his adolescence that defined him as the hero of the main battles of the poem, this swimming contest serves as a demonstration of this character's growth from one stage to the next. The background provided by the narrator for Beowulf's childhood and adolescence shows that he was a recognizable child (consistently matching the expectations found in the Ages), and that he grew beyond the Age expectations and into an ideal Germanic hero in his young adulthood.

Mighty Youth

Beowulf is a young man through the majority of *Beowulf*. It is only just before the dragon is introduced that Beowulf is king for "fiftig wintr(a)."¹⁰² His characterizations as a youth is that of an ideal young warrior. Initially, Beowulf is introduced to listeners as he arrives on the shores near Heorot, leading his retainers and responding to Hrothgar's guard, as "Him se yldesta andswarode."¹⁰³ This line suggests that, of his men, Beowulf is the oldest among them. Although

¹⁰¹ Karl Wenterdorf, "Beowulf's Adventure with Breca." *Studies in Philology* 72, no. 2 (April 1975): 141.

¹⁰² *Klaeber's Beowulf*, line 2209. "fifty winters"

¹⁰³ *Klaeber's Beowulf*, line 258. "the eldest one answered"

potentially a literal description of Beowulf being the oldest among the group, this phrasing may also indicate a more symbolic meaning. “Yldesta,” in this case, may be more descriptive of Beowulf’s rank among his group. Klaeber even notes that this word can be translated as “chief.”¹⁰⁴ Introducing Beowulf as the leader of his group immediately separates him from the others and ascribes a number of qualities to his character: leadership has connotations of responsibility, capability, and maturity. This word choice could hint at Beowulf’s potential as a role model for his retainers.

Beowulf’s behavior towards various lords emphasizes his firm position as a young man and warrior, but also his agency. First, Beowulf was advised by his people to seek out Hrothgar and fight the monster plaguing Heorot.¹⁰⁵ That he was persuaded by his people suggests that Beowulf is still seeking the approval of his elders. It is highlighted in the text that Beowulf was only advised to help because of the successes and strength he had demonstrated through his other achievements. However, Hygelac, his lord, advised against it, telling Beowulf

iċ ðē lange bæd,
 þæt ðū þone wælgæst wihte ne grētte,
 lēte Sūð-Dene sylfe ġeweorðan
 gūðe wið Grendel.¹⁰⁶

As Hygelac advised against him leaving and fighting Grendel, Beowulf’s choice also demonstrates the agency that Beowulf had as a young adult. He could, and did, act against his lord’s wishes, acting on his own motivations and desires. The phrasing suggests that Beowulf made the choice to provide aid to the struggling king (Hrothgar) and had the agency to make that choice. That this behavior is not treated by the author as something negative, or even distinctly

¹⁰⁴ *Klaeber’s Beowulf*, line 367.

¹⁰⁵ *Klaeber’s Beowulf*, lines 415-420.

¹⁰⁶ *Klaeber’s Beowulf*, lines 1994-1997a.

I long urged that you [would] not approach in anyway that slaughter demon (Grendel), [and that you] allow [the] South-Danes [to] settle [the] war against Grendel themselves.

positive, suggests that Beowulf's agency in this situation was expected of young adults. He was not only allowed the freedom to choose how and what he battled, but was expected to make those choices for himself.

Coinciding with this agency, Beowulf also demonstrates self-sufficiency. Beowulf earned his own fame. The boast that describes all of his adolescent achievements is presented to Hrothgar (and listeners to the story) to emphasize Beowulf's independent victories, his incredible capabilities, and personal identity. Although he did bring men with him to Heorot, Beowulf is consistently described as fighting alone. In both his fight with Grendel and Grendel's Mother, Beowulf ultimately single-handedly defeats the mythical beasts, individually earning the honor for their deaths. In the fight with Grendel, Beowulf's retainers do move in and try to assist in the battle but prove ineffective. While Beowulf is wrestling with Grendel, destroying mead-benches and tumbling across the hall,

Þær ġenehost brægd
 eorl Bēowulfes ealde lafe,
 wolde frēadrihtnes feorh ealgian,
 mæres þēodnes, ðær hīe meah-ton swā.
 Hīe þæt ne wiston, þā hīe ġewin drugon,
 heardhicgende hildemeccgas,
 ond on healfa ġehwone hēawan þōhton,
 sāwle sēcan: þone synscaðan
 ænig ofer eorþan īrenna cyst,
 ġūðbilla nān, grētan nolde;
 ac hē sigewæpnum forsworen hæfde,
 ecga ġehwylcre.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁷ *Klaeber's Beowulf*, lines 794-805.

There [the] most abundant drew, earl of Beowulf, [their] old heirloom sword, [they] wished to protect the life of [their] liege-lord, glorious leader, there they desired to [do] so. They [did] not know this, when they fought the battle, [those] brave-minded warriors, and intended [to] hew on all sides; that hostile attacker [that] any of [the] best iron over [the] earth, not one attack of [a] war-sword could not [strike him]; fore he (Grendel) had made victory weapons useless by a spell, every one of [their] edges.

Thus, not only were his retainers ineffective against this mythical foe, they never could have been effective while using their weapons and armor. Because of this, it is Beowulf alone who ultimately takes Grendel down.¹⁰⁸ The narrator specifically notes that “Bēowulfe wearð / syndolh sweotol,”¹⁰⁹ emphasizing that it is Beowulf who earns the fame and honor for the fighting and does not need help to win the fights. This aspect of Beowulf’s representation suggests that young adults, at least ideally, were supposed to be self-sufficient and able to handle their own battles alone.

In his fight with Grendel’s Mother, Beowulf is entirely alone. He initially wields Unferth’s heirloom sword, Hrunting, suggesting that he is supported, if passively, by other warriors and equipment. However, the sword fails when Beowulf uses it. When Beowulf fights with the famous blade, “þæt se beadolēoma bītan nolde,”¹¹⁰ “sēo ecg ġeswāc,”¹¹¹ and “ðā wæs forma sīð / dēorum mādme, þæt his dōm ālæg.”¹¹² It is only by his own wits that Beowulf finds another sword and overcomes the monster.¹¹³ This consistency serves to emphasize Beowulf’s self-sufficiency. The warrior manages to independently win fights, even against mythical beasts.

Beowulf has agency, yet actively chooses to support and protect others, including those in power. He is an independent young man with his own distinct personality and desires.

Beowulf serves his lords, Hrothgar (while Beowulf was in his hall) and Hygelac (for his entire reign), but more importantly, he does so by his own choice. Both are shown to support him, just

¹⁰⁸ *Klaeber’s Beowulf*, lines 813-820.

¹⁰⁹ *Klaeber’s Beowulf*, lines 818b-819a.

Beowulf was granted (by fate) glory in battle.

¹¹⁰ *Klaeber’s Beowulf*, line 1523.

That the battle-flame would not bite

¹¹¹ *Klaeber’s Beowulf*, line 1524b.

The edge failed

¹¹² *Klaeber’s Beowulf*, lines 1527b-1528.

This was [the] first undertaking, fame of [the] precious treasure (Hrunting), that it’s power failed.

¹¹³ *Klaeber’s Beowulf*, lines 1550-1570.

as he helps them. This independence, in the context of providing protection, suggests that Beowulf is choosing to endanger himself to support others (both his friends and family and those outside of his “people”). In doing so, Beowulf is not only thinking at the third level of Kohlberg’s moral development paradigm, but is demonstrating level six of the Postconventional moral reasoning. Beowulf is not just acting on the socially accepted moral standards at this age, but rather he is acting on principles of equality: he helps his allies regardless of his leader’s discouragement and mythical dangers. That is not to suggest that Beowulf does not have specific loyalties, nor that he avoids battles with other people. What he is demonstrating is a clear, individual conscience choice of what is good and right, acting on those personal ethical principles consistently. This is a strong representation of the final stage of Kohlberg’s scheme.

In a similar way to independence, the warrior nature of youth seems to be a critically important characteristic for Beowulf. Each battle that Beowulf engages in is described in detail, emphasizing the physicality and brutality of the fights. In the confrontation with Grendel, the text includes a description of “him on eaxle wearð /syndolh sweotol, seonowe onsprungon,/ buston bānlocan. Bēowulfe wearð/ gūðhred ġyfeþe.”¹¹⁴ This violent act required a herculean amount of strength, so strong that the monstrosity’s body was torn with Beowulf’s own hands. In his fight with Grendel’s Mother, the text highlights how he “yrringa slōh,/ þæt hire wið hales heard grāpode,/ bānhringas bræc; bil eal ðurhwōd/ fæġne flæscho-man, hēo on flet ġefeh.”¹¹⁵ To cleave through bone in such a way is both horrifying and demonstrative of great skill: he cut right through her spine, breaking the very bone with the force of his strike. He did such a feat with a

¹¹⁴ *Klaeber’s Beowulf*, lines 816b-819a.

[an] unmistakable large wound appeared in his [Grendel’s] shoulder, [his] joint burst. Beowulf was granted glory in battle.

¹¹⁵ *Klaeber’s Beowulf*, lines 1565a-1568.

[he] struck angrily, so that hard [strike] seized her neck, broke her bone-rings; [the] sword entirely went through [the] doomed flesh-covering, she fell onto the floor.

magical weapon, the giant's sword. However, he was competent and capable of using this foreign weapon immediately.

Beowulf's combat capabilities are accentuated by his versatility as a youthful warrior. Beowulf fought Grendel without armor or weapons, while he had both in his fight with Grendel's Mother. Although this could be an example of Beowulf's growth as a warrior, it is more likely (especially as the fights occurred so close together) that both types of combat are included to demonstrate the variety of combat skills that Beowulf is capable of. Taylor Culbert argues, in addition, that the different fighting strategies are a demonstration of Beowulf's awareness of fairness in a fight. If he were to use a sword against Grendel, Culbert claims that "he would be taking unfair advantage of his enemy."¹¹⁶ Grendel did not have armor and did not use weapons. Beowulf was, therefore, matching his opponent and fighting without armor or weapons. Moreover, Culbert highlights that "as a result of his surprising decision" to fight without weapons, Beowulf "stands to gain extra credit for his feat: he wins the usual credit for slaying a monster and additional credit for vanquishing him, not in a conventional combat...but in an exceptional contest deliberately made equal."¹¹⁷ This choice to match such an overwhelming opponent, one who had devastated Heorot for years and no other warrior had been able to overcome, highlights Beowulf's honorable demeanor. The latter fight also emphasized the importance of resourcefulness in the young warrior. As described earlier, Beowulf's success only occurs because he found and used a giant's sword in Grendel's Mother's cave. Initially Beowulf was wielding Unferth's sword, given to him by Unferth before he dove down to the underwater cave.¹¹⁸ This weapon fails during the fight and Beowulf is nearly killed. Suddenly without a

¹¹⁶ Taylor Culbert, "The Narrative Functions of Beowulf's Swords." *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 59, no. 1 (January 1960): 14.

¹¹⁷ Culbert, "Beowulf's Swords," 15.

¹¹⁸ *Klaeber's Beowulf*, lines 1455-1464.

weapon to harm her, Beowulf is tackled. Were it not for his chain shirt, he would have died immediately.

Him on eaxle læg
brēostnet brōden; þæt ġebearh fēore,
wið ord ond wið ecge ingang forstōd.
Hæfde ðā forsīðod sunu Ecgþeowes
under ġynne grund, Ġēata cempa,
nemne him heaðobyrne helpe ġefremede,
herenet hearde¹¹⁹

Had Beowulf not seen or grabbed the giant’s weapon, it is unlikely that he would have survived the fight. Additionally, as Culbert also points out, Beowulf wields not just any sword, but a giant’s sword. Liuzza debates if this is a reference to the craftsmanship of what Anglo-Saxons understood as giants, or merely a reference to “highly praised weapons.”¹²⁰ Regardless, Beowulf finds and immediately wields this unfamiliar weapon. Just as “Hē ġefēng þā fetelhilt”¹²¹ Beowulf “yrringa slōh.”¹²² That he is able to wield a weapon foreign to him in a capable and effective way highlights Beowulf’s versatility as a fighter.

The efficiency and effectiveness of Beowulf in battles, especially in the ones described in such violent detail, emphasize Beowulf’s connection to the influence of the Sun, as described by Ptolemy’s Astrological stages. The Sun instills a drive in individuals to master themselves, in both physical and mental aspects of life. The Sun pushes people from playful and unserious

¹¹⁹ *Klaeber’s Beowulf*, lines 1547-1553a.

On his (Beowulf’s) shoulders lay, [the] mail-shirt interlock [such] that [it] defended [his] life, against [the] point and against [the] edge [it] withstood entrance (prevented the blade from cutting into him). Son of Ecgtheow would have perished under the wide ground, champion Geat, [were it not for his] war-coat [which] further protected [him], [that] strong war-shirt...among the war-gear [was a] victory-blessed sword, [an] ancient sword made by giants [with] strong edges.

¹²⁰ R. M. Liuzza. *Beowulf: Second Edition: Facing Page Translation*, Broadview Editions (Peterborough: Broadview, 2013), 149.

¹²¹ *Klaeber’s Beowulf*, line 1563.

He seized the linked hilt

¹²² *Klaeber’s Beowulf*, line 1565.

Angrily struck

choices to ambitious and decorous behaviors. This not only fits with everything describing Beowulf up to this point (his adolescent and unserious swimming contest to the violent, very serious fight with Grendel, for example), but also matches his age. The Sun's influences reach those as young as twenty-two. This is roughly the age Beowulf should be during these later battles. Even if he were a couple of years younger, Beowulf's behavior demonstrates a level of maturity typically found in those moving into young adulthood and out of adolescence.

Beyond his independence and warrior prowess, Beowulf's physicality is his most prominently described quality. Although the descriptions of his immense strength are likely part of boasting culture, his strength also appears crucial to his representation. Beowulf is consistently described as the strongest character with the strength of thirty men: "þæt hē þritiges/ manna mægen-cræft on his mundgripe/ heaþorōf hæbbe."¹²³ These early introductory lines about the character are reinforced throughout the poem. When Beowulf fights Grendel, for example, the narrator refers to him as "sē þe manna wæs mægene strengest / on þām dæge þysses lifes,"¹²⁴ and then describes Beowulf in comparison to all of the other people Grendel has fought.

Sōna þæt onfunde fyrena hyrde,
 þæt hē ne mētte middangeardes,
 eorþan scēata on elran men
 mundgripe māran.¹²⁵

Beowulf's strength seems otherworldly, indicative of his heroic qualities. He is not just strong for a man, but rather has the strength of thirty strong men.

This supernatural aspect of his character also appears in his swimming abilities. When following Grendel's Mother, Beowulf seems to be able to hold his breath for an unnatural

¹²³ *Klaeber's Beowulf*, lines 379b-381a. "That he has the strength of thirty men, brave in battle, in his hand-grip."

¹²⁴ *Klaeber's Beowulf*, lines 789-790. "He who was the strongest of might of men in those days of his life."

¹²⁵ *Klaeber's Beowulf*, lines 750-753a.

At once that keeper of wicked deeds (Grendel) found out, that he never met [on] middle-earth, in [any] region of earth another man [with a] greater hand-grip.

amount of time while underwater (he was swimming for about a day).¹²⁶ Likewise, such activity, swimming for so long, further emphasizes his physical strength. This is among many other feats of swimming, like wrestling with sea monsters, as discussed earlier.¹²⁷ The addition of these qualities to his immense strength suggest that Beowulf is not just any warrior, but a mythical hero – someone with abilities beyond what a human has. Much like the narrative of *Beowulf*, itself both historical and mythical, its hero also represents these same characteristics.

With all the characteristics combined (his independence, versatility in battle, physical might, and mature disposition), Beowulf does not fit squarely into a specific Age paradigm. That Beowulf is so physically capable in battle suggests that he is in the prime of his life. Dante would describe his physical prowess as the physical display of his noble, morally developed soul. This concept suggests that moral virtue manifests itself as physical beauty and power: also known as physiognomy. Additionally, he is at his best, as he can act and think his best. His outward power and heroic qualities represent the inward strength and fortitude of his character. Beyond connections to Dante, it seems that Beowulf is most influenced by red bile¹²⁸ (the second humor of the physiological four ages paradigm), suggesting that he is not yet an adult. Red bile increases a person's physical capabilities and makes them bold in their actions. Beowulf is *often* described as bold and brave. However, as described in the Astrological ages, Beowulf's strong desire for glory suggests that he is influenced by the Sun, as mentioned earlier. However, as the historical events only situate Beowulf roughly into his early twenties, that Venus is not the main influence on this hero, which would be more appropriate for his age, emphasizes his maturity

¹²⁶ *Klaeber's Beowulf*, line 1495b.

¹²⁷ *Klaeber's Beowulf*, line 417-424.

¹²⁸ I use red bile as it is described by Bede in *The Reckoning of Time (De Temporum Ratione)*. This stage and humor is otherwise known as yellow bile.

and not his youth. Beowulf is not seeking intimate relationships, but rather is focused on mastering himself. This suggests that he is perhaps more mature for his age.

If Beowulf's feats in battles are understood as representatives of his personal desire for fame, this maturity is somewhat contradicted as understood through Erikson's Psychosocial framework. Beowulf's need to build his name and fame would position him at stage five during this period of his life, which should (and did for Beowulf) occur during adolescence. His preoccupation with establishing his long-lived identity through his adventures and alliances suggests that he is likely in this stage. Alternatively, Beowulf's need for fame could be considered aspirational towards generativity. The only way for someone in this culture to live after their death was to accomplish such great feats that their life stories and deeds would be documented in song and sung across time. If Beowulf is motivated by this generative desire, and not by personal identity development, then Beowulf is again associated with the later stages of life than his physical years would suggest. As much of Beowulf's youthful characterization is rooted in positive reinforcement throughout the narrative (gifted and praised, including specific praise of his maturity¹²⁹), I believe that the connotations of Beowulf's youthful actions and motivations are all designed to emphasize his maturity and model the values of Anglo-Saxon in youth.

Names, Social Hierarchy, and Beowulf

One of the most important relationships that occurs in *Beowulf* is that between a lord, or "ring-giver," and his thegns, or warriors. The bond between a lord and a warrior was more important than that between family members. A lord was responsible for leading, protecting, and

¹²⁹ Klaeber's *Beowulf*, line 1843.

rewarding his thegns. He was therefore known for his successes, failures, and generosity. Thegns fought for their lords in this reciprocal relationship. What treasures the thegns secured in their quests were then given to their lords to redistribute. Who someone's father was or what famous warrior or king they were connected to was also important in Anglo-Saxon society. Many characters in *Beowulf*, for example, are specifically introduced and referenced by their relations. The introductions provided credibility (or lack thereof) for their presence and boasts. If a man's father or lord was well known as a particularly powerful warrior, his son or thegn would be expected to have the same qualities.

With regard to character introductions in *Beowulf*, names and how they relate to those characters are somewhat inconsistent. Beowulf's name is mentioned throughout the text, but he is mostly referred to as "the son of Ecgtheow." This naming convention differs from that of Hrothgar, who is typically referred to as Hrothgar, protector or king of the Scyldings. Curiously, Beowulf continues to be referenced as the son of Ecgtheow even when he is a king, suggesting that the descriptor does not relate to the age or fame of the character. From this, it seems that these naming techniques are more likely a poetic convention that serves the needs of alliteration rather than a distinction or description of age or title.

Even with all his incredible qualities, there is an important delineation between Beowulf the warrior and thegn and Beowulf the king. There is no question as to Beowulf's ambition to build his name, fight for his people, and defeat monsters (both human and mythical). However, this ambition does not extend to taking over the position of king. It is true that Beowulf leads his retainers at the beginning of the poem. However, not only does Beowulf never challenge a lord for his position of power, but when given two opportunities to take the position of lord (from

Hrothgar and from Hygd), Beowulf does not take them. Just after Beowulf kills Grendel, Hrothgar describes him as loved as one of his sons and suggests that he become his heir.

Nū ic, Beowulf, þec,
secg bet[e]sta, mē for sunu wylle
frēogan on ferhþe; heald forð tela
nīwe sibbe.¹³⁰

After Grendel's Mother's death, Beowulf delivers a speech to which Hrothgar responds by calling him wise for a young man¹³¹ and that there is no better choice than Beowulf to become king after Hygelac dies, skipping Hygelac's own children.¹³² This type of praise and suggestion are only ever given to Beowulf. Yet, Beowulf does not act or even vocally consent to such an idea. Even before Whealtheow discourages Hrothgar's idea that Beowulf be his heir by reminding Hrothgar of their sons,¹³³ Beowulf does not indicate in any way that he would have accepted the position. Moreover, after Beowulf defeated Grendel, and then Grendel's Mother, he does not move to take over Hrothgar's role or position among the Danes. Hrothgar is an aged king, and was clearly unable to defend against the dangers in his kingdom. That Beowulf could do so, and did do so, positions Beowulf as a powerful threat to the old king. Yet, Beowulf is no such threat. He never makes any move to challenge Hrothgar nor take on any power that was not directly given to him. When Hygelac dies, Hygd approaches and explains to Beowulf that her son may not be capable of ruling successfully:

þær him Hygd gebēad hord ond rīce,
bēagas ond bregostōl; bearne ne truwode,
þæt hē wið ælfylcūm ēþelstōlas
healdan cūðe, ðā wæs Hygelac dēad.¹³⁴

¹³⁰ *Klaeber's Beowulf*, lines 942b-950a.

Now I, Beowulf best of men, will love you in [my] heart like a son; hold well forth [in] new kinship.

¹³¹ *Klaeber's Beowulf*, line 1843

¹³² *Klaeber's Beowulf*, line 1851.

¹³³ *Klaeber's Beowulf*, lines 1175-1184.

¹³⁴ *Klaeber's Beowulf*, lines 2369-2372.

There Hygd offered [the] hoard and [the] kingdom to him (Beowulf), rings and [the] princely seat; [she] did not trust [her] son, that he could protect [the] national throne against foreign armies, now that Hygelac was dead.

Thus, Hygd was earnestly approaching Beowulf, fearful her child was not strong enough to protect their people and kingdom. In this fear, she offers Beowulf the throne. Yet, Beowulf refuses.

Nō ðȳ ær fēascafte findan meahton
 æt ðām æðelinge ænige ðinga,
 þæt hē Heardrēde hlāford wære,
 oððe þone cynedōm cīosan wolde ¹³⁵

Beowulf could not be convinced to take power from the rightful heir. Instead, Beowulf chose to support Heardred, protecting him and counseling him until his death.¹³⁶ It is only after Heardred's death, when it is Beowulf's rightful time to be king, that Beowulf finally becomes a king.¹³⁷ As youthful Beowulf is representative of an ideal young warrior, this behavior suggests that Anglo-Saxons valued ambition, but also patience and loyalty in their youths. Waiting for their time to rule and not overtaking their leaders was, as this characterization suggests, something highly valued.

All of this is not to say that Beowulf, as a young adult, remained static in his social position. When he first arrives at Heorot, Beowulf sits at the last seat, farthest from Hrothgar.¹³⁸ After both fights, with Grendel and Grendel's Mother, Beowulf is moved and now sits with Hrothgar's sons.

Hweaf þā bī bence, þær hyre byre wāron,
 Hrēðric ond Hrēðmund, ond hæleþa bearn,
 giogoð ætgedere; þær se gōða sæt,
 Bēowulf Gēat be þæm gebrōtrum twām ¹³⁹

¹³⁵ *Klaeber's Beowulf*, lines 2373-2376.

Yet they were not able to prevail upon [him], the destitute ones (the Geats without Hygelac), by any means at all from [the] prince, that he were lord [over] Heardred, or would choose [to rule] that kingdom.

¹³⁶ *Klaeber's Beowulf*, lines 2377-2390.

¹³⁷ *Klaeber's Beowulf*, lines 2200-2210.

¹³⁸ *Klaeber's Beowulf*, lines 620-624.

¹³⁹ *Klaeber's Beowulf*, lines 1188-1191.

She turned to [the] bench, where her boys were, Hrethric and Hrothmund, and sons of warriors, youths together; there the good man, Beowulf the Geat, [was there] between those two brothers.

This physical movement from the last bench to the bench with the princes is a demonstration of shifting social position. Thus, not only has Hrothgar described Beowulf as a person loved like one of his own sons, but Beowulf is considered so highly that he is physically and symbolically placed among Hrothgar's own children. Beowulf's social position and behavior suggest that he is establishing his social identity, just not overstepping the values of his people or his own personal ethics.

Reflective King

King Beowulf is characterized as notably more reflective than he was in his youth. Even though he is still surprisingly strong, “wæs sīo hond tō strong”¹⁴⁰ such that he broke every weapon he wielded, his duties and disposition are different. Older Beowulf reflects on his life and achievements while the narrator surrounds his statements with prophetic doom. Even in his last boast, Beowulf recites his accomplishments and grim fate. His desire to fight with the dragon is described with consistent negative foreboding of his doom.

Him wæs geōmor sefa,
wāfre ond wælfūs, wyrð ungemete nēah,
sē ðone gomelan grētan sceolde,
sēcean sāwle hord, sundur gedāelan
līf wið līce; nō þon lange wæs
feor æþelinges flæsce bewunden. ¹⁴¹

The negativity surrounding these statements is likely rooted in foreshadowing: the narrator is preparing the audience for the great hero's downfall. However, there may also be an additional

¹⁴⁰ *Klaeber's Beowulf*, line 2684.

his hand was too strong

¹⁴¹ *Klaeber's Beowulf*, lines 2419-2424.

His mind was sad, restless and eager for combat, fate [was] immeasurably near, [it] must greet that sorrowful one, [it] seeks [his] soul's hoard, to divide apart [his] life from [his] body; never for a long time was this spirit of the prince wrapped in flesh.

connotation of disapproval of Beowulf's actions from the narrator. With phrases such as "brēost innan wēoll / þēostrum gēponcum, swā him gēþywe ne wæs"¹⁴² and "Him wæs gēōmor sefa / wāfre ond wālfūs, wyrd ungemete nēah,"¹⁴³ the narrator seems to be pointing out that something is amiss in Beowulf's heart and mind. Beowulf feels that he must go on this last adventure and fight one more battle. Yet, the uneasy feelings could suggest that the older king knew that he should not have been fighting at all. Indeed, it was not Hrothgar himself who was expected to fight Grendel, nor Grendel's Mother. Instead, it was his thegns, his young warriors and ally warriors like Beowulf who fought the beasts. Similarly, it should be Beowulf's thegns who should fight the dragon. Yet, Beowulf insists on fighting this last battle, leading his men and then inevitably dying from the battle. Beowulf's and Wiglaf's presence are what successfully defeat the dragon, but at the cost of Beowulf's life and the stability of his kingdom.

These actions could suggest that king Beowulf is clinging to his youthful behaviors and not accepting his elder position, both of which are not encouraged by the narrator. Yet, Beowulf clearly accepts his imminent death. As he boasts "nīehstand sīðe,"¹⁴⁴ he says that "Ic eom on mōde from"¹⁴⁵ and

Nis þæt ēower sið,
 nē gemet mannes, nef(*ne*) mīn ānes,
 þæt hē wið āglæcean efoðo dæle,
 eorlscype efne. Ic mid elne sceall
 gold gēgangan, oððe gūð nimeð,
 feorhbealu frēcne, frēan ēowerne.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴² *Klaeber's Beowulf*, lines 2331b-2332.

[his] heart within welled [with] dark thoughts, which was not usual [for] him.

¹⁴³ *Klaeber's Beowulf*, lines 2419b-2420.

He was sad of mind, restless, and eager for combat, [his] fate was immeasurably near.

¹⁴⁴ *Klaeber's Beowulf*, line 2511.

[for the] last time

¹⁴⁵ *Klaeber's Beowulf*, line 2527b.

I am firm in mind.

¹⁴⁶ *Klaeber's Beowulf*, lines 2532b-2537.

Yet, this determination for one last battle suggests that he may be influenced by Mars, fifth in the Astrological stages, during this point in his life. Mars's influence implants a need to accomplish even more before he nears the end of his life. Especially as Mars is the god of war, his influence may be the push for a fight specifically. As Mars impacts those between the ages of forty-one and fifty-six (and Beowulf is at least in his seventies by this section of the poem), this connection to Mars suggests that he is acting less mature than his age: inappropriately so. Moreover, Beowulf may still be influenced by red bile, from the physiological four-stage paradigm, with his bold behavior and retained strength. However, black bile is also clearly impacting him with his gloomy outlook and set-in-his-ways behavior. Black bile causes firm habits and a serious, focused demeanor. This seems to describe King Beowulf perfectly. That Beowulf is not forgetful, sleepy, or weak also demonstrates that he is not influenced by phlegm – the expected humor for his years. This connection further reinforces Beowulf's retention of youthful traits and behaviors into his old age.

Within the contemporary paradigms, Beowulf seems to have grown into stage seven Erikson's Psychosocial Development. He is certainly acting in a way to support his people, supporting the next generation – at least in such a way that he knows and he has done before. It does not seem that Beowulf has reached the final stage eight for this scheme, however, where he should be, based on his years. Although Beowulf accepts his upcoming death, a key marker for the final stage in Erikson's system, this acceptance is also found within the fulfillment of one's own life. That Beowulf insists on and fights in one more final battle, and has uncharacteristically gloomy thoughts, suggests that he is not satisfied with his life. Based upon his behaviors and

This is not your time, none [of you have the] ability of man, except for me alone, he that shares [the] strength of [the] adversary, [and able to] perform [the] warrior-deed. I with courage still [will] get [the] gold, or [the] dangerous battle [will] take your lord [to his] death.

disposition, his placement in younger stages of Erikson's scheme suggests that King Beowulf is behaving in more youthful and inappropriately young ways for his years.

With regard to Beowulf's morality, the events described in *Beowulf* do not distinctly suggest a change in his judgement in any noticeable way. He is violent and uses his strength to hurt others, both monstrous and otherwise, but only when supporting his lord or defending his people. As noted throughout his youth, it seems that Beowulf follows Kohlberg's sixth stage of moral reasoning and is distinctly Post-Conventional. His ethics seem derived from the socially agreed upon moral standards of behavior, yet function beyond those restraints (as demonstrated with his choice to help Hrothgar against Hygelac's wishes). His bond to his lord is the strongest relationship that Beowulf has until he becomes the lord; his bond then changes to his people. It is his love for his people and desire for one last battle that leads Beowulf to his death. This willingness to sacrifice himself emphasizes his moral fortitude in Kohlberg's scheme.

Wiglaf & Beowulf's Retainers

Wiglaf is another prominent youth in *Beowulf*. He is one of King Beowulf's retainers and joins the aged lord on his mission to defeat the dragon. When Beowulf starts fighting the dragon, Wiglaf is introduced:

Nealles him on hēape handġesteallan,
 æðelinga bearn ymbe ġestōdon
 hildecystum, ac hȳ on holt bugon,
 ealdre burgan. Hiora in ānum wēoll
 sefa wið sorgum; sibb' æfre ne mæg
 wið onwendan þām ðe wēl þenceð.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁷ *Klaeber's Beowulf*, lines 2596-2601.

His hand-companion company, [the] sons of noblemen, [did] not stand around [with] battle-virtue, instead they turned aside to [the] forest [and] spared [their own] lives. [The] spirit boiled with [the] sorrow in one of them; kinship [is] never able in any way [to be] overturned [in] whoever fully considers.

The man who “boiled with sorrow” was Wiglaf: “Wīglāf wæs hāten, Wēoxstānes sunu.”¹⁴⁸ His comrades ran and retreated, leaving their lord to fight alone, and the narrator condemns them.¹⁴⁹ As R. M. Lumiansky suggests, “Young Wiglaf, in momentary confusion, joins the cowardly thanes in flight; but almost immediately he recollects his duty.”¹⁵⁰ As noted earlier, the relationship between a king and his thegns was stronger than the bonds of family. Abandoning Beowulf as he faces a dragon, currently alone, is unthinkable. Later, Wiglaf himself is the one who reprimands these young men: “þā wæs æt ðām ġeongan grim andswaru/ ēðbeġēte þām ðe ær his elne forlēas.”¹⁵¹ His speech follows this introduction, expressing how upset he was, the depth of failure they just committed, and the repercussions for their lack of valor.¹⁵²

Wiglaf’s choices, and his ability to make his own choices, emphasize his agency. That Wiglaf initially ran away and then chose to turn around and to stand with Beowulf when the others continued to run, demonstrates his personal agency and moral grounding. Wiglaf speaks to the other retainers in a reproachful, narratoritative way, demonstrating his own power and influence on the other retainers. Moreover, Wiglaf is described as “snotra,” or wise or prudent by the narrator.¹⁵³ This description is juxtaposed to a harsh condemnation of the remaining retainers.

The narrator states

Næs ðā lang tō ðon
 þæt ðā hildlatan holt ofġēfan,
 tȳdre trēowlogan tȳne ætsomne.
 ðā ne dorston ær dareðum lācan
 on hyra mandryhtnes miclan þearfe;

¹⁴⁸ *Klaeber’s Beowulf*, line 2602.

Wiglaf was [his] name, son of Weohstan

¹⁴⁹ *Klaeber’s Beowulf*, lines 2845b-2852a.

¹⁵⁰ R.M Lumiansky, “Wiglaf.” *College English* 14, no. 4 (January 1953): 203.

¹⁵¹ *Klaeber’s Beowulf*, lines 2860-2861.

then from that young [one] was [a] fierce answer [given to] those who easily lost their courage earlier

¹⁵² *Klaeber’s Beowulf*, lines 2864-2890.

¹⁵³ *Klaeber’s Beowulf*, line 3120.

ac h̄y scamiende scyldas b̄āran,
gūðgewādu, þ̄ær se gomela læg¹⁵⁴

The narrator is not only describing how horrible the men feel about their actions, but also actively condemning them for their behavior towards their lord. Additionally, when Wiglaf reprimands the others, he reinforces what the society values – loyalty to the lord. Additionally, by contrasting Wiglaf to the other retainers and calling him wise, the narrator seems to be characterizing Wiglaf as mature and perhaps even acting beyond the maturity expected of his years. He is set apart from the other warriors as the one who acted appropriately for both his age and role.

Wiglaf also demonstrates Postconventional morality, as described by Kohlberg. That here Wiglaf overcomes his own fears and, even though he initially retreated with his fellow retainers, goes back to support his lord, suggests he has a strong ethical foundation. These actions prove that his morality is based at least on cultural values, if not on more universal ideas. Since returning to Beowulf's side could be motivated by the social contract between Wiglaf and his lord, or by Wiglaf's independent belief in what is good and right, and in doing so, choosing to uphold Beowulf's dignity by not letting him fail and not letting the king fight alone.

With all of these positive qualities, it is clear that Wiglaf, like Beowulf, is serving as an example of culturally desired behavior for young adults. He is praised by the narrator, like Beowulf, and juxtaposed against negative and undesirable examples of other youthful or immature behavior.

¹⁵⁴ *Klaeber's Beowulf*, lines 2845b-2852.

Then [it] was not long after that [the] coward [ones] left [the] wood, ten weak oath-breakers together. [They] dared not fight [with] spears previously when their lord [was] in great distress; yet they ashamedly carry [their] shields, [and] battle-garments, [toward] where their old [lord] laid.

Conclusion

Beowulf is a complex epic poem with many historical and mythical characteristics. It is this combination that defines Beowulf the character. He is described as this fantastical hero with superhuman strength who fights monsters. However, he is also rooted in the real and historical with descriptions of his slothful childhood and participation of actual medieval battles. Thus, as a representation of youth for Anglo-Saxons, Beowulf is an example to be aspired to. He represents all that the Anglo-Saxon culture promoted: loyalty, dependability, and capability. His superhuman strength and power destroyed all foes, including monsters. Yet, even with such mythical qualities, Beowulf is generally characterized appropriately for his age (according to the various Ages schemes). It is only when he reaches his last battle, as an aged king, that Beowulf displays inappropriately youthful qualities. The one aspect of Beowulf that does not fit neatly into the Ages expectations throughout his life is his morality. Beowulf's ethical foundation is consistently matched to the higher and highest levels of moral development, suggesting that his moral maturity is that of someone older than himself. As he is represented as such a valiant hero, one that serves as a role model to be aspired to, this morality serves as the most prominent demonstration of what it means to be mature in Anglo-Saxon culture.

The other youthful characters throughout the poem demonstrate the responsibilities of young adults. Wiglaf's choice to return to his lord's side, even though he too was afraid, with the narrator's praise and Wiglaf's following reprimand of his fellow retainers, all together emphasizes the importance of loyalty and the expectation that each thegn should fight and be willing to die for their lord. Breca met Beowulf's challenge, even as an adolescent, and found his own victories. This behavior suggests that adolescents were expected to build their fame, challenging one another to bigger and harsher competitions to prove their worth.

As Nicholas Orme describes, Beowulf represents the epitome of a young noble:

From early times the narrative literature of the Middle Ages portrayed the ideal nobleman as the owner of many and various talents besides the ability to fight. The hero of *Beowulf* is equal to all occasions. He can arrive in a strange land and speak effectively to its king and his courtiers, behave properly in hall, lead his retainers successfully and rule well when he mounts the throne himself. He is not only brave but loyal, deferential, generous and wise.¹⁵⁵

Beowulf is an Anglo-Saxon hero. He is a man with every positive quality, representing what a young man ought to be.

¹⁵⁵ Nicholas Orme. *From Childhood to Chivalry: The Education of the English Kings and Aristocracy, 1066-1530*. (London: Methuen, 1984), 112.

CHAPTER II: THE CHRIST CHILD

The shift from Old English to Middle English texts included more than just changes in the language. When discussing aspects of medieval childhood, David Herlihy notes that “as civilization grew more complex, more critically based on learned skill” in western Europe between the early and late Middle Ages, “medieval society had to invest heavily in the training of the young.”¹⁵⁶ This educational shift in the medieval landscape, along with the changing economic, political, and societal structure, impacted the priorities and views of medieval families. Occupations were now requiring more skill-based training; education and literacy became a requirement for more and more people to be successful; and specialized, highly skilled trades were becoming more common and in demand. Alongside these secular developments, the spread of Christianity continued to influence medieval culture. A growing fixation on Christ and his infancy and youth became the focus of many writers throughout the medieval period in England. Where the early representations of the Christian savior resemble the Anglo-Saxon warriors, the later images and descriptions of Christ focus on his dual nature, connecting his birth and infancy with his young adulthood and death.

There is little doubt as to the prevalence and influence of Christianity on the medieval period. Everything from education and community gatherings to artwork and literature were driven by the Christian faith. Many literary texts were created in monasteries; religious centers were places of both learning and community gatherings, and Christian iconography and stories heavily influenced artwork and literature of the time. As Katy Wright-Bushman and Hannah Zdansky explain,

Reading medieval texts with attention to religious concerns has and continues to involve attending to these texts’ deeply and usually unequivocally religious contexts. Moreover,

¹⁵⁶ David Herlihy, “Domestic Roles and Family Sentiment in the Later Middle Ages.” *Medieval Households: Studies in Cultural History* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1985), 124.

reading medieval literary texts justly, whether or not the reader is professionally concerned with the intersection of religion and literature or within the field that calls that intersection its place of work, requires acknowledgement of and often engagement with deeply religious contexts. In the Middle Ages especially, religion and literature are historically imbricated such that both *must* be taken into account.¹⁵⁷

Explaining how children are represented in medieval literature necessitates this awareness and purposeful knowledge of the religious influence on the culture.

With the influence of Christianity intermixing with the changing medieval cultural values, the figure of Jesus, as he is represented in literature, also changes throughout the period. In the early Middle Ages, the Anglo-Saxon views of warrior valiance directly impact the description of Christ during the passion, while the interest in the dual nature of the infant-God leads to the later Middle Ages' focus on connecting the nativity and the passion. How Jesus is represented throughout the entire medieval period not only reveals the values of the culture and how interpretations of this Christian figure shifted over time, but they also highlight how these cultures understood youth and childhood, especially as they relate to religion and the unique position of the God-man figure of Jesus.

Warrior Savior and the Early Middle Ages

Beowulf was not the only warrior-hero who appeared in Old English literature. Christianity was brought to England at the end of the sixth century. It spread quickly, and the influences of Christian imagery and values are seen in texts as early as *Beowulf* (and earlier). The values of the early Germanic warrior culture of the Anglo-Saxons are interwoven with these Christian ideas in the poem *Dream of the Rood*. This poem, found in the Vercelli Book manuscript, is dated to about the tenth century. There is another partial version of the poem

¹⁵⁷ Katy Wright-Bushman and Hannah Zdansky, "Religion In/And/All Over Medieval Literature," *Religion & Literature* 46, no. 2/3 (2014): 58.

found on the Ruthwell Cross. This stone carved version is dated as early as the late seventh century. These two versions are directly connected. As Michael Swanton notes, “the essential literary identity of the two texts cannot be questioned; the verbal parallel is too close to be accounted for simply by the use of common material.”¹⁵⁸ This very early Old English poem serves as a strong example of Anglo-Saxon perspectives of Christ. For the sake of clarity, the specific text that I quote from is the Vercelli Book manuscript. The poem is written partially from the perspective of the cross, or rood, about the crucifixion of Christ. Christ faces his death like a warrior, fighting his final battle to save his people. Old English poetry often includes themes of battle and sacrifice.¹⁵⁹ Thus, a story like the passion, with a warrior dying for his people would be a familiar narrative in Old English poetry.

The themes and values of Christianity found in the *Dream of the Rood* have been a main area of criticism for the poem. Robert Burlin, for example, analyzes the impact of monasticism on the poem, exploring the connections between the Ruthwell Cross and the Vercelli manuscript. He concludes that the impact of Christian monasticism on Anglo-Saxon culture serves as the basis for examining the phrasing and characteristics in the poem.¹⁶⁰ Similarly, John Fleming analyzes the language and form of the text, asserting that the author of the poem was not only influenced by Christianity, but specifically by the monasticism practiced by the Anglo-Saxons.¹⁶¹ However, he also argues that, beyond this heavy influence of Christian themes and values, the story of the passion in the *Dream of the Rood* is written in a Germanic style and perspective. As Fleming explains:

¹⁵⁸ Michael Swanton, ed. *The Dream of the Rood* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1970), 39.

¹⁵⁹ *Beowulf*, *The Wanderer*, and *The Battle of Maldon* as some examples

¹⁶⁰ Robert Burlin, “The Ruthwell Cross, ‘The Dream of the Rood’ and the Vita Contemplativa.” *Studies in Philology* 65, no. 1 (January 1968): 42-43.

¹⁶¹ John Fleming, “‘The Dream of the Rood’ and Anglo-Saxon Monasticism.” *Traditio* 22 (1966): 44.

The religious meaning in *The Dream of the Rood* lies only thinly veiled beneath the surface of the Old English poetic diction which its author was obliged to use. It is a diction to some extent archeological and 'Germanic,' the language of the high style of Old English Christian poetry, which gives it its peculiar and often misleading heroic and Teutonic ring. This language has been thought to reflect the values of that kind of Germanic warrior society which Tacitus called the *comitatus*, still alive in the Anglo-Saxon poetic consciousness generations, indeed centuries after the Christianization of England...The language of the *comitatus* applies to all the characters in the poem: the Cross, Christ, the Dreamer himself. Most obviously the episode of the Crucifixion is a heroic drama in which Christ seems to be associated with the Germanic warrior.¹⁶²

He argues that, by using the language of Germanic poetry, the author creates connections between Anglo-Saxon culture and Christian imagery (if unintentionally). However, I do not believe that this style is "misleading," as Fleming suggests. The language in the *Dream of the Rood* naturally places Jesus into the role of a warrior, one who fights battles and earns glory. He becomes a warrior-hero who dies for his people for their salvation and protection, demonstrating the very values found in Anglo-Saxon culture. This characterization through the language serves both to represent Christ through Anglo-Saxon culture and therefore to make him and his experience more grounded and understandable to early medieval Christians.

Anthony Grasso furthers this idea, stating that "the poem is fascinating for the way in which it portrays Christ's dual nature in concrete images."¹⁶³ The dual nature of Christ appears more distinctly in the later middle ages, but Grasso claims that the framing of the poem is designed not only to promote personal reflection on the events of the passion, but also to put these larger conceptions into more concrete, "comprehensible terms" to understand Jesus's "mission" for humanity.¹⁶⁴ Grasso argues that this poem is developed out of complex traditions, but is made to be understood by the general community – thus arguing that the author is using

¹⁶² Fleming, "Anglo-Saxon Monasticism," 44.

¹⁶³ Rev. Anthony Grasso, "Theology and Structure in 'The Dream of the Rood.'" *Religion & Literature* 23, no.2 (Summer 1991): 23.

¹⁶⁴ Grasso, "Theology and Structure," 26.

Christ's dual nature to help audience understand the Christian savior. Furthering this idea, Sandra McEntire points out that, to Medieval Christian followers, the cross as a symbol was more than just the wood on which their deity was crucified. She argues that the cross was a "breastplate of devotion" and a "vehicle of salvation" to Christians during the early Middle Ages.¹⁶⁵ The cross demonstrated Jesus's strength to endure suffering for his love of humanity. This not only demonstrated God's love for his people, and the protection and salvation Christ gave to all of humanity through his sacrifice, but also demonstrated the resolve to uphold Christian values – both through internal strength and external resilience, all to try and follow Christ's example. As this poem, told partially through the perspective and with the voice of the cross during the events of the passion, is intended to inspire reflection, it seems that the *Dream of the Rood* is meant to be a poem for Christians to meditate and reflect on the events of the passion and of Christ's sacrifice.

The *Dream of the Rood* describes Christ in terminology associated with young warriors. As Macrae-Gibson states, "The Christ-figure appears as an active hero eagerly approaching battle."¹⁶⁶ Jesus is introduced as "þā geong hæleð (þæt wæs God ælmihtig)."¹⁶⁷ The word "geong hæleð" used here could translate to "young man," but also indicates a "warrior" specifically. Thus, Christ is introduced to the reader as a young fighter. The use of "geong" here emphasizes the young nature of Christ. He is not an aged warrior, nor is he described as experienced in battle. He is "geong." A few lines later, the poet uses another word for warrior. The cross says "Bifode ic þā mē se beorn ymbclypte."¹⁶⁸ As the cross trembles, he describes

¹⁶⁵ Sandra McEntire, "The Devotional Context of the Cross Before A. D. 1000." *Old English Literature: Critical Essays*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 397.

¹⁶⁶ O.D. Macrae-Gibson, "Christ the Victor-Vanquished in 'The Dream of the Rood.'" *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 70, no. 4 (1969): 668.

¹⁶⁷ Swanton, *Dream of the Rood*, line 39. The young warrior (that was almighty God)

¹⁶⁸ Swanton, *Dream of the Rood*, line 42a. I trembled when the warrior embraced me

Christ as “beorn,” which can translate again to “warrior,” man,” or “hero,” like “hæleð.” By using these specific terms, the poet is emphasizing the values found in young Anglo-Saxon men. Beowulf, for example, is also described as performing similar behaviors and expressing similar dispositions. He too is a “geong hæleð” and “beorn.”¹⁶⁹ Both terms are references to a masculine figure, a youthful man, someone who was a warrior. This connection is strengthened by both figures sacrificing themselves for their people. Although Beowulf did not sacrifice himself as a youth like Christ, Beowulf did battle many foes for his family and allies, even defeating a dragon in his old age to save his people from its fury.

Likewise, the poem frames the passion as a battle and Christ’s followers as fellow warriors. The cross describes the scene after Christ dies upon him:

Ālēdon hīe ðær limwērigne, gēstōdon him æt his līces hēafdum;
 behēoldon hīe ðær heofenes Dryhten, ond hē hine ðær hwīle reste,
 mēðe æfter ðām miclan gewinne. Ongunnon him þā moldærn wyrcan
 beornas on banan gēsyhðe¹⁷⁰

In this description, Christ’s followers carry him to a place of rest. In this process of building him a tomb, they are, like Christ himself, described as “beornas.” Thus, they are called warriors as they remain with Christ “mēðe æfter ðām miclan gewinne” or weary after the great battle. These companions are portrayed in the same language as Beowulf’s retainers:

æþeling boren,
 hār hilde[rinc] to Hrones Næsse.
 Him ðā gēgiredan Gēata lēode
 ād on eorðan unwaclīcne,
 helm[um] behongen, hildebordum,

¹⁶⁹ See lines 1024, 1299, 2260, 2433, and 2559 in *Beowulf*

¹⁷⁰ Swanton, *Dream of the Rood*, lines 63a-66b.

They, weary in limb, laid [him] there, stood themselves at the head of his corpse;
 They beheld there the Lord of heaven, and he rested himself there a while,
 Weary after the great battle. Warriors began to make him a sepulcher
 In the sight of the killers.

beorhtum byrnum, swā hē bēna wæs;
 ālēgdon ðā tōmiddles mārne þēoden
 hæleð hīofende, hlāford lēofne.¹⁷¹

The retainers are referred to as “hæleð,” just as Jesus was earlier in the poem. These warriors, like Christ’s followers, are grieving, weary, and lamenting the loss of their leader. Both groups build a funeral structure to honor their fallen lord.

Similarly, the humility of the cross in Christ’s presence also emphasizes his power.

Burlin states that,

With its selection as the instrument of the Crucifixion, this tone changes. What had been mere humiliation becomes, by association with the Creator, a plaintive yet triumphant humility. As the “retainer” of the geong hæleð, the Cross must stand fast in obedience and loyalty to its Lord.¹⁷²

The character of the cross speaks and acts as the most devoted and loyal retainer to the warrior and lord, Christ. Burlin continues, stating that “the retainer’s [the rood’s] reward for obedience to his Lord’s command is to suffer the same fate his Lord endures.”¹⁷³ For his obedience, the cross is nailed and wounded, just as Christ is. This, too, supports the values of the Anglo-Saxon culture. The retainers should remain strong with their lords to the death. When Beowulf’s retainers retreat and abandon him, they are reprimanded and shamed for their behavior.¹⁷⁴ The cross in the Dream of the Rood stands fast for Christ. By humanizing the cross and emphasizing his loyalty to Christ, the poet is highlighting this specific desired value of retainers.

¹⁷¹ *Klaeber’s Beowulf: And the Fight at Finnsburg*, Fourth Edition, eds. R. D. Fulk, Robert Bjork, and John Niles (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), lines 3135b – 3142.

[The] hero (Beowulf) was carried, grey warrior, toward the Whale Coast. Then [the] Geatish men readied [for] him [a] splendid funeral pyre on [the] earth [that was] draped [with] helms, battle-shields, [and] bright mail-shirts, just as he (Beowulf) had asked [for]; then [the] famous king [was] laid down in the midst (of the treasures), [the] warriors lamenting [their] beloved lord.

¹⁷² Burlin, “Vita Contemplativa,” 28.

¹⁷³ Burlin, “Vita Contemplativa,” 28.

¹⁷⁴ *Klaeber’s Beowulf*, lines 2845-2890.

Later in the poem, Christ is referenced as both the child of God and a son. The cross states that “On mē bearn Godes / þrōwode hwīle.”¹⁷⁵ “Bearn,” can be translated as “son” or “child.” Although this line is using another familiar term to reference Christ (the son of God), the use of “bearn” and this specific phrasing emphasizes Jesus’s characterization as a child of the Father. Further, near the end of the poem, the cross describes Jesus as “Se Sunu.”¹⁷⁶ The cross is viewing Christ as the son and child of God in these later moments. These references are similar to those made in *Beowulf*. The young hero is often referenced as “bearn Ecgþeowes” and “Sunu Ecgþeowes.”¹⁷⁷ Although this positioning does not necessarily indicate age or rank in either poem, the use of the same poetic structure for both characters suggests that they are similar in nature and characterization.

The *Dream of the Rood* is a powerful representation of the Christ character. The depiction of Christ in this Old English poem is that of a youthful sacrifice: he is emphasized as a young fighter, the son of God, and surrounded by fellow warriors,. These qualities and the specific terminology used for Christ’s representation is very similar to how Beowulf and his retainers are described in the Old English epic *Beowulf*. In connection to the larger framework of child and youth representation, Jesus in the *Dream of the Rood* is represented as heroic. There is little information about his character, beyond his willingness to sacrifice himself for all of mankind. The emphasis of the text is on his warrior-like nature and references to his position as a son. In many ways, Christ is like the heroic Beowulf, dying for his people and surrounded by loyal retainers. This connection is a demonstration of the values of the Anglo-Saxon culture

¹⁷⁵ Swanton, *Dream of the Rood*, lines 83b-84a. [The] child of God suffered for a while on me

¹⁷⁶ Swanton, *Dream of the Rood*, line 150a. The Son

¹⁷⁷ Examples found on lines 236, 529, 631, 957, 1383, 1473, etc. in *Beowulf*

through the story of the passion. Young men were fighters and heroic behavior was encouraged in their youth.

Jesus is represented in an atypical way through the lens of the Ages of Man. Although clearly a young man in the *Dream of the Rood*, Christ does not, however, demonstrate any signs of growth or growing, as expected in all of the developmental paradigms; he does not connect clearly to any seasons or humors, as found in the four-stages of physiological growth; nor does he demonstrate any influence from the planets, as established in the astrological stages. From the astrological scheme, Venus should be the main influence during this period, but there are no indications of Christ seeking out or even desiring an intimate partner. This sexual drive is also expected within Erikson's Psychosocial Development during young adulthood. If anything, the human-God nature and disposition of Jesus in this poem demonstrates an acceptance of one's life, found in the final stage of Erikson's model. This connection to the final stage, which typically occurs at the end of one's life in late adulthood and senior stages, suggests that Christ is extremely mature for his age. Moreover, Jesus's death, framed as a sacrifice for all of humankind, signals that he was at Kohlberg's final stage of moral development: universal ethical principle orientation. During this stage, the person conceives of right and morally correct behavior through abstract and universal concepts of justice. Sacrificing himself for humanity is a powerful representation of this stage, but does not match his age. However, this perfection of his ethical disposition does connect this version of Jesus to Dante's understanding of the physical manifestation of the noble soul and the perfection of the body and mind during the middle of one's life. Christ is perfect, both in mind and in body. As he is in his young adulthood (and according to Dante's scheme), this perfection is timed appropriately for his age.

Overall, Jesus is characterized as more mature than his age would suggest, as he demonstrates a depth of ethical and psychosocial maturity that does not match his age. This, and his connection to Dante's noble soul suggest an intentional characterization of this human-God figure as beyond the constraints of his age and mature beyond his human capabilities.

Advent Lyric

Another clear example of Christ-as-warrior in Old English poetry can be found in the first Advent lyric in the Exeter Book known as "Christ I." The Exeter Book was compiled by Bishop Leofric some time before the eleventh century. The book is a collection of poems that were originally donated to the Exeter Cathedral. "Christ I" is written in a thoughtful, repetitious manner, mainly describing Advent and theological ideas relevant to the event. It includes reflections on Mary, her struggles, Christ's incarnation, and praises for Christ's birth. This poem, like the *Dream of the Rood*, also uses Germanic terminology and phrases found throughout other Old English poetry. When explaining the context of this poem, Jackson Campbell observes that,

The Middle Ages carefully classified and codified the multiple meanings of Advent, and the liturgy often forces the hearer to think of the event on several levels at once. The ambiguity thus produced does not introduce confusion, but rather allows a fuller and more profound experience.¹⁷⁸

Thus, the poem seems intentionally written to encourage reflection and deeper contemplation on the concepts it describes. This intentional framework combined with the Germanic language creates a few distinct connections between Christ and Anglo-Saxon warrior culture.

Within the first stanza, Christ is referenced as a lord; specifically, he is the head of a great hall.

Wel þe geriseð

¹⁷⁸ Jackson Campbell, "Introduction." *Advent Lyrics of the Exeter Book*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959), 5.

þæt þu heafod sie healle mæsse
 ond gesomnige side weallas
 fæste gefoge, flint unbræcne,
 þæt geond eorðbyrg eall eagna gesihþe
 wundrien to worlde wuldres ealdor.¹⁷⁹

In this section of the first stanza, Christ is a mead-hall lord, one who works to bind people together under one great hall. This is reminiscent of other Anglo-Saxon lords, like Hrothgar and his famous hall, Heorot.¹⁸⁰ Both C. W. Kennedy and Campbell posit that the first stanza of this poem is designed to be an architecture metaphor.¹⁸¹ Although the theme of a large building is present, including commentary on fastening the walls, that is not the only level of meaning found within this poem. As layered meaning was an intentional part built into this poetry, it seems likely that the metaphor is deeper than architecture. The building references could also be representative of Christ building his Church – his following. His fastening is between people, not necessarily actual walls.

Near the end of “Christ I,” Christ is given a few Germanic titles. As Campbell notes, the poem “reaches the highest point of emotional intensity [at] number XI.”¹⁸² By the middle of stanza XI, angels sing

þu eart weoroda god,
 forþon þu gefyldest foldan ond rodoras,
 wigendra hleo, wuldres þines,
 helm alwihta.¹⁸³

¹⁷⁹ Jackson Campbell, “I.” *Advent Lyrics of the Exeter Book* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959), lines 3b-7.

[It] is well that you became head of the glorious hall and united [the] wide walls, joined [them] together tight, flint unbroken, so that throughout the earth all eyes [that] see wonder at [the] world, Lord of heaven.

¹⁸⁰ See lines 403, 475, 497, 593, 991, etc. in *Beowulf*

¹⁸¹ C. W. Kennedy. *The Earliest English Poetry*, (London: Routledge, 1943), 238. & Jackson Campbell, “Structure and Sources.” *Advent Lyrics of the Exeter Book*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959), 11-12.

¹⁸² Jackson Campbell, “Structure,” 10.

¹⁸³ Jackson Campbell, “XI.” *Advent Lyrics of the Exeter Book*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959), lines 30b-35b.

You are God [of] warriors, such that you have filled [the] earth and sky, shield [of] fighters, with your glory, helm [of] all creatures.

The beginning of this phrase references Christ as the God of “weordoda,” meaning the God of a band or company of warriors. This imagery is layered with titles for Jesus, such as “wigendra hleo” (shield of fighters) and “helm alwihta” (helm of all creatures). By describing Christ with these warrior titles of shields and helms, the author is directly representing this Christian figure through Anglo-Saxon warrior culture.

The Advent lyric’s representation of Christ does not contain enough detail about this Christian figure to accurately determine if he does or does not fit into the Ages of Man. He is clearly representative as rooted in Anglo-Saxon culture, as he is addressed as a lord and warrior. However, his actions, personality, and even morality are not explicitly detailed. Both the *Dream of the Rood* and “Christ I” demonstrate how Germanic language was used to describe Christ. Old English poetry represented Christ as a youthful warrior, fighting and sacrificing himself for his people. His followers are his retainers, and his position is described as a head of a great hall. Christ is described through familiar Anglo-Saxon details for their youth. This demonstrates both what characteristics Anglo-Saxons ascribed to their youth, and what details helped ground this Christian figure for early medieval Christians.

Cult of the Christ Child and the Late Middle Ages

One of the most notable changes in medieval Christian devotion came with the gradual increase in the interest in and study of the Christ Child: Jesus’s infancy through his childhood. The Christ Child became a significant focus of the medieval church, such that by the Late Middle Ages there was a notable “cult of the holy infant.”¹⁸⁴ As Mary Dzon points out, studying the Christ Child specifically may “seem to have only a limited capacity to shed light upon

¹⁸⁴ Herlihy, “Domestic Roles,” 125-126.

medieval childhood” because he is an “inherently theological character.”¹⁸⁵ However, she concludes that “studying the medieval Christ Child can give us some indication of how medieval adults thought of and treated children.”¹⁸⁶ Elisabeth Dutton disagrees. She argues that “Christ is always an exceptional child” and that the Christ Child should be used to “consider whether he is an exception that proves any rule.”¹⁸⁷ She suggests that any information derived from the study of the infant and child Jesus can only be interpreted as a special circumstance for the Christ Child’s representation, and not as an indication for how all children were treated and viewed. Dzon has responded to these specific claims of Dutton’s, agreeing that “medieval people perceived [the differences] between the boy Jesus and other children.”¹⁸⁸ However, she also argues that “matters concerning Jesus are not so clear-cut, since the Boy’s transcendence paradoxically allows him to act like an ordinary child without shame or serious censure...Jesus is ‘always an exceptional child’ strikes me as an oversimplification.”¹⁸⁹ I agree with Dzon’s overall conclusion. The Christ Child is an exception – the exceptional. He is unlike any other child, and he should be understood as unique. However, as he is written by medieval authors as a child, the natural biases of and for childhood are likely to manifest. They indicate Jesus is an infant by representing him with familiar attributes: crying, needing soothing, and needing tucked in a bed or cradle. Thus, in examining how he is represented, it must be understood that the Christ Child is not the main figure for representing childhood alone, and so must be studied in the context of other children. How medieval scholars, authors, and educators describe this special child directly reveals how they viewed their human-God savior. Moreover, these representations also provide

¹⁸⁵ Mary Dzon, “Introduction: Recovering Christ-Child Images.” *The Quest for the Christ Child in the Later Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), 14.

¹⁸⁶ Dzon, 14.

¹⁸⁷ Elisabeth Dutton. “Review: *The Christ Child in Medieval Culture: “Alpha es et O!”* *Speculum*, 89, no. 4 (October 2014): 1172-1173.

¹⁸⁸ Dzon, “Notes to Pages 13-15,” 261.

¹⁸⁹ Dzon, “Notes to Pages 13-15,” 261.

insight into how holiness can be present in a child – something that appears in other medieval texts.

During the early Middle Ages, as Dzon highlights, people tended to understand children in the Augustinian tradition. She explains that “thinkers in the Augustinian tradition tended to regard children pessimistically as the victims of original sin whose hope of moral improvement lay in the discipline afforded by adults.”¹⁹⁰ Examples of children’s behavior could include a child getting into trouble without recognizing the repercussions beforehand (pride), eating too many treats and becoming ill (gluttony), and stealing another child’s special toy (envy). Perspectives on children began to shift away from their sinful roots in the later Middle Ages. Authors began to view children in the same context as they viewed the child Christ, which included representations of innocent religious children.¹⁹¹ Dzon emphasizes that, as they were “more intrigued by the very nature of childhood, European Christians probably wondered more about the early stages of Jesus’ life than they had previously and were more disposed to imagine the Christ Child resembling the children they actually knew.”¹⁹² Thus, this shift created a connection between the Christ Child and a new, potentially more innocent, view of children and childhood.

The interest in the Christ Child led to a variety of texts and artwork featuring Jesus as an infant. Apocryphal legends and plays, for example, tried to make Jesus more human and understandable by elaborating on what his childhood and adolescence looked like – something that is not directly available in the Bible. Pamela Sheingorn argues that the reshaping of these apocryphal texts throughout the Middle Ages suggests a continual reshaping of the

¹⁹⁰ Dzon, “Chapter 3: Aquinas and the Apocryphal Christ Child in the Latter Middle Ages.” *The Quest for the Christ Child in the Later Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), 109

¹⁹¹ Pearl from *Pearl*, for example.

¹⁹² Dzon, “Chapter 3,” 109.

understanding of the Christ Child.¹⁹³ His age, characterization, and the changes of both represent the shifting conceptualizations of this Christian figure.

Attempts to better understand Christ were not just found in literature. One example of humanizing of Christ is seen in the Christian relic stored in the monastery of Saint-Médard de Soissons in northern France: a baby tooth of the Christ Child. William MacLehose posits how this tooth represents a change in how childhood was viewed during this period, arguing that “some of the strongest evidence for a renewed interest in childhood comes from one particular model or ideal example, prioritized above all other possible classical, contemporary, and biblical examples as a source of inspiration, innovation, and occasional imitation: the Christ Child.”¹⁹⁴ He emphasizes in his chapter that the representation of Jesus shifts from a distant patriarchal figure to a more loving and recognizably human Jesus. Having physical remains of something as human and mundane as baby teeth grounded this otherwise otherworldly figure. All humans have baby teeth, losing them as they grow into maturity. The existence of such a relic – that a medieval monastery would collect and keep safe a baby tooth as a relic, reinforces this movement to humanize Jesus. The tooth suggests that Christ not only had a true childhood, but also grew up and experienced the growing pains and challenges that accompany human growth and development, like losing baby teeth. Representing Jesus as a figure who experienced this growth both humanizes the holiness of Christ and glorifies the humanity of his existence. It is no small gesture for the Christian God to suffer, develop, and grow as one of his creations. That medieval Christians wrestled with understanding this indescribably complex figure, and

¹⁹³ Pamela Sheingorn, “Reshaping of the Childhood Miracles of Jesus.” *The Christ Child in Medieval Culture: Alpha Es Et O!* eds. Mary Dzon, and Theresa M. Kenney (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 254-292.

¹⁹⁴ William MacLehose, “The Holy Tooth: Dentition, Childhood Development, and the Cult of the Christ Child.” *The Christ Child in Medieval Culture: Alpha Es Et O!* eds. Mary Dzon, and Theresa M. Kenney (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 201.

attempted to frame him within concepts they could understand, is exactly why examining his characterization is so crucial to understanding medieval conceptions of children and childhood.

One of the most important aspects of the representation of the Christ Child is found in the duality of Christ's nature. Christ was both human and God. Mary Dzon and Theresa Kenney emphasize that

To medieval Christians, the Christ Child was the beginning and end of all things, the Alpha and Omega. In him, heaven and earth, eternity and time met. Believing that this child was in fact the Lord of the universe, medieval poets and artists strove to understand his unique place in their cosmos, and to praise him rightly. And yet, they also recognized that the same being was both God and man. Theologians and mystics pondered the union of humanity and divinity in the same person and its implications. Artists sought to represent the perspective of the boy who held the orb of the world in his hand and at the same time played with a child's ball.¹⁹⁵

This balance between the two natures can most commonly be seen in descriptions of the Incarnation and Passion. Often, texts and artwork include attempts to capture this duality within the Christ Child by representing Christ as an infant who will suffer and be sacrificed, or as a sacrifice who is youthful and innocent. One example of this can be seen in the medieval mass. Leah Marcus highlights that “the bread of the Eucharist is transformed between the very hands of the priest at Mass into a small living child, then slain and dismembered before the eyes of the congregation...the Mass is an actual re-sacrifice of the body and blood of Christ.”¹⁹⁶ Thus, every time the bread of the Eucharist¹⁹⁷ is transformed and consumed, the Christ Child is incarnated and sacrificed. It is not Christ represented as a young adult that is manifested in the Eucharist, but the infant child. She adds that “medieval writings, from early Latin tracts to late English

¹⁹⁵ Mary Dzon, and Theresa M. Kenney, “Introduction,” *The Christ Child in Medieval Culture: Alpha Es Et O!* eds. Mary Dzon, and Theresa M. Kenney (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), xiii.

¹⁹⁶ Leah Marcus, “The Christ Child as Sacrifice: A Medieval Tradition and the English Cycle Plays.” *The Christ Child in Medieval Culture: Alpha Es Et O!* eds. Mary Dzon, and Theresa M. Kenney (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 3.

¹⁹⁷ Although “communion” was not a term referring to the Eucharist during the Middle Ages, I use these two terms interchangeably as they both reference the same sacrament.

popularizations, persist in conflating the Incarnation and the Passion, in fusing the Babe of Bethlehem and the sacramental victim of Mass.”¹⁹⁸ Thus, this was a long-standing practice. Medieval Christians actively engaged in re-incarnating and sacrificing the infant Jesus each time they participated in communion.

This fusion of the incarnation and the passion appears in many texts, including both in lyrics and artwork. Elina Gertsman argues that

The images in which Christ displays or carries a small cross, holds scourge and reed, or is pierced or surrounded by five disembodied wounds conflate Christ’s infant vulnerability with his adult sacrifice, and therefore play with juxtapositions of innocent childhood and torturous death, visceral helplessness and harsh punishment, open defenselessness and signs of inflicted pain.¹⁹⁹

The duality of Christ is precisely what allows for authors to represent a more relatable and understandable version of the Christian savior. The child is a born human, but also the God of all. There are many lyrics written to and about the Christ Child that contain this same duality.²⁰⁰

Many of these songs are lullabies – short songs designed as if to sooth the infant Christ.

Franciscan priest, John of Grimestone, wrote a preaching book in 1371 that contained a number of lyrics, including a lullaby with a strong representation of the duality of nature in the Christ Child. This lyric, according to Kathleen Palti, is based on a secular lullaby that she names the Harley lullaby (as it is found in the Harley manuscript).²⁰¹ She bases her connections on the form and structure of each lyric: the later Grimestone version follows the same form and basic rhythm, but exchanges a generic soothing of any child for a version that addresses the Christ Child specifically and describes him as born to die, incarnated for the purpose of sacrifice.

¹⁹⁸ Marcus, “The Christ Child as Sacrifice,” 3.

¹⁹⁹ Elina Gertsman, “Signs of Death: The sacrificial Christ Child in Late-Medieval Art.” *The Christ Child in Medieval Culture: Alpha Es Et O!* eds. Mary Dzon, and Theresa M. Kenney (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 66.

²⁰⁰ See footnotes 57, 58, and 59 for specific examples.

²⁰¹ Kathleen Palti, “Singing Women: Lullabies and Caroles in Medieval England.” *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 110, no. 3 (July 2011): 366.

The lyric describes the child Jesus and bemoans the sorrowful future he will endure. It begins with a gentle opening with the singer seeming to be trying to soothe a child with a repetitious “l” sound.

Lullay, lullay litel child, child, reste þe a þrowe.
 Fro heyze hider art þu sent with us to wone lowe;
 Pore an litel art þu mad, unkut an unknowne,
 Pine an wo to suffren her for þhing þat was þin owe.
 Lullay, lullay litel child, sorwe mauth þu make,
 Pu art sent into þis werd as tu were forsake.²⁰²

The child is directly addressed as the poem opens. The singer is attempting to lull the character described as a “litel child” to rest for a time, suggesting that the child is restless and perhaps distressed and crying. The child is “Fro heyze,” suggesting that he was sent from heaven to here on earth, indicating that this must be the child Christ and highlighting the two aspects (heaven and earth) of his character. This confirmation of who the child is and the soothing “l” sounds immediately frames Christ as a crying, perhaps even inconsolable, infant. This singer is trying to sooth the baby, just as any caregiver would try to sooth a child. The singer continues by noting that the infant was made, “unkut and unknowne” which is reaffirmed in the final line of the stanza; both lines suggest that this child was left to face strife alone, as if abandoned. The lines in-between this are filled with the singer describing the pain and woe that the child will suffer for the “þing þat was þin owe” or humanity (that which God owns or created). The singer, thus, opens this lullaby with both an awareness for who he or she is singing to, but also the awareness of the hopelessness and helplessness of Christ in this moment of infancy. He can do nothing

²⁰²John of Grimestone, “Lyrics.” *A Book of Middle English*, Third Edition, eds. J. A. Burrow and Thorlac Turville-Petre (Maldon: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), lines 1-6.

Lullay, Lullay little child, child rest the a time.

From high hither (heaven) are you sent to dwell with us low (on earth);

Poor and little you are made, unrecognized and unknown,

Pain and woe to suffer here because [the] thing that was your own (mankind you created).

 Lullay, lullay little child, pain may you make,

 You are sent into this world as though [you] were forsaken (as if abandoned).

about his fate as an infant child or as the perfect God. He is destined to suffer and sacrifice himself for humanity. This idea is elaborated on in more specific detail in later stanzas.

Where the previous stanza introduces the Christ Child and his future fate, the second stanza emphasizes the misfortune that the child will endure.

Lullay, lullay litel grom, king of alle þingge.
 Wan I þenke of þi methchef, me listet wol litel singge;
 But caren I may for sorwe, ʒef love wer in myn herte,
 For swiche peines as þu salt drizen were nevere non so smerte.
 Lullay, lullay litel child, wel mauth þu criʒe,
 For þan þi bodi is bleyk an blak, sone after sal ben drize.²⁰³

The singer expresses such deep sadness for the infant, hardly wishing to even continuing singing as he describes the sorrows in store for this baby. The Christ Child is now described as a “litel grom” or little lad, even as he is still “king of alle þingge,” reinforcing the dual image of Christ’s figure. As the singer expresses his grief for the infant’s fate, he also wishes that his upcoming pains were not so painful. Then, with “wel mauth þu criʒe,” the singer seems to almost approve, or at least genuinely understand why this infant-God cries. By seeing the future he will endure, of course the infant should express distress. The helpless child will suffer the violence of the adult; for God, time is infinite, such that he experiences both moments simultaneously. The stanza ends with a description of the child’s “bleyk an blak” body. Although it will be an older Christ who actually suffers this pain, the singer says “For þan þi bodi is” specifically, connecting the current infant with his later deadly wounds with this present tense verb. The singer, although

²⁰³ John of Grimestone, “Lyrics,” lines 7-12.

Lullay, Lullay little lad, king of all things.

When I think of your misfortune, me listless will little sing (I no longer wish to sing);

But grieve I may for [your] sorrows, if love were in my heart,

For such pains as you shall suffer were never not so painful. (I wish you did not suffer such pain)

Lullay, lullay little child, well may you cry,

For your own body is pale and wan, soon after [it] shall be withered [in death].

grieving, seems to accept this fate for the child, imagining him as dead and withered, rather than as he is in the current moment as whole and safe.

This dark tone similarly starts the third stanza. Now without the “I” sounds, the singer begins to directly connect the Christ Child to the crucifixion on the cross.

Child, it is a weping dale þat þu art comen inne.
 Þi pore clutes it proven wel, þi bed mad in þe binne;
 Cold an hunger þu must þolen as þu were geten in senne,
 An after deyzen on þe tre for love of al mankenne.
 Lullay, lullay litel child, no wonder þou þu care,
 Þu art comen amonges hem þat þi detʒ sullen ʒare.²⁰⁴

The singer directly connects the imagery from the nativity to that of the passion. The first line rings with the sorrow surrounding the child’s upcoming death on the cross. Already there are tears for such upcoming event. The lack of the “lullay” for this stanza also reinforces the harsh reality of what will come. Such a painful future cannot be soothed in this moment. The emotional line is followed by imagery of “clutes” or swaddling clothes and the manger with “þi bed mad in þe binne.” This description matches the details surrounding the nativity. Following this, the singer describes a distinctly human aspect to the child’s life. The child will experience “Cold an hunger þu must þolen as þu were geten in senne.” This is a description of human suffering: feeling cold and hungry. As the singer points out, this suffering is caused by sin and being “geten in senne” and born human. Even though Christ himself was sinless, he was born into a world of sin, experiencing the repercussions of a fallen world as a human. Thereafter, the singer speaks directly of the events of the passion: “An after deyzen on þe tre for love of al mankenne” (and

²⁰⁴ John of Grimestone, “Lyrics,” lines 13-18.

Child, it is a weeping dale that you are coming into.
 Your poor swaddling clothes proved it well, your bed made in the bin (manger);
 Cold and hunger you must endure as you were begotten in sin,
 And after days on the tree (cross) for love of all mankind.
 Lullay, lullay little child, no wonder though you care,
 You are to come among those sullen [who] ready [for] your death.

after days on the cross for the love of all mankind). The singer is explaining that it is for his love of humanity that this child will suffer on the cross – that this infant is Christ. The final lines mention how the child has been born, or brought, into the presence of those that will harm him and are the cause of his death. This is a direct foreshadowing of Christ’s future, suggesting that there is no way to alter this fate.

The soothing “l” sound returns to the beginning of the fourth stanza, but the singer still continues to describe the suffering that the child will experience on the cross.

Lullay, lullay litel child, for sorwe mauth þu grete.
 Þe anguis þat þu suffren salth sal don þe blod to swete;
 Naked, bunden saltu ben an seiþen sore bete,
 No þing fre upon þi bodi of pine sal be lete.
 Lullai, lullay litel child, it is al for þi fo,
 Þe harde bond of love-longging þat þe hat bunden so.²⁰⁵

This stanza focuses more on the specifics of Christ’s suffering during the passion. The singer explains that he will be bound naked, sweat blood²⁰⁶ (or perhaps bleed from wounds in a way resembling such a visual description), and be tortured such that no part of his body will be without suffering and pain. The singer does, however, open and close this stanza with “litel child,” continuing to frame this violent description of pain and torture with soothing lulls to the infant – and reminding listeners of baby Jesus’s presence among the details of his later suffering. The singer ends this stanza with a mention of why such suffering will occur. First, he blames Christ’s “fo” or enemy, suggesting that “it is al for þi fo” – that it is all for your foe. Yet, he also

²⁰⁵ John of Grimestone, “Lyrics,” lines 19-24.

Lullay, Lullay little child, for sorrow may you weep.
 Your anguish that you suffer shall cause you to sweat blood;
 Naked, bound [you] shall be and afterwards beaten painfully,
 Nothing free upon your body of pain shall be prevented (no part of your body will be free of pain)
 Lullay, lullay little child, it is all because of your foe,
 The hard bond of love-longing that has bound you so.

²⁰⁶ This is likely connected to the story in Luke (22:44) when he describes Jesus sweating blood.

mentions that it is Christ's "love-longging" for humanity and that he is "bunden so" or that has bound him so firmly that keeps him on this inevitable path.

The poem's final stanza peaks with all the emotional language and descriptions of violence, starting with the singer pleading with the child.

Lullay, lullay litel child, litel child, þin ore!
 It is al for oure owen gilt þat þu art peined sore;
 But wolde we zet kinde be an liven after þi lore
 An leten senne for þi love, ne keptest þu no more.
 Lullay, lullay litel child, softe slep an faste;
 In sorwe endet everi love but þin at þe laste. Amen.²⁰⁷

This stanza explores ideas of Christ's impact and existence after his sacrifice. The first line repeats "litel child" then begs "þin ore." The singer is pleading for mercy from the infant Christ before him. This is immediately followed by the singer's awareness that all this suffering, everything he has described thus far, is because of humanity. The following two lines describe what would not trouble Christ any more. If only mankind would "zet kinde be an liven after þi lore/ An leten senne for þi love." The singer is wistfully stating that if only humanity behaved according to the nature they originally were formed to be like and loved and acted through Christ's teachings, then Christ would be free of his troubles. The lyric ends with the "lullay" structure once more, soothing the Christ Child one last time. The singer encourages the infant Christ to sleep well in this moment, before all the suffering that will come. The lyric ends with a recognition that everyone will die and all love will be end in sorrow except for Christ's love, which will be the last love.

²⁰⁷ John of Grimestone, "Lyrics," lines 25-30.

Lullay, Lullay little child, little child, I beg for (your mercy)
 It is all for our guilt that you are pained [and] sore;
 But were we to become natural (like the nature humanity was originally made to be) and live by your teachings
 And let [go of] sin for your love, not keep you no more. (and abandon sin for love of you, you would be no more troubled)

Lullay, lullay little child, soft and soundly asleep;
 In sorrow ends every love but yours at the last. Amen.

This lyric describes the passion and Christ's sacrifice, while still serving as a lullaby for the Christ Child. Combining these concepts serves to reinforce the duality of this figure (fusing the nativity and the passion, adulthood with infancy, and soothing "lulls" with cries of sorrow). As the original version of this lyric was a secular lullaby and lamented "the general miseries of human life"²⁰⁸ it is unsurprising that similar themes are still present in this song. Vincent Gillespie claims that

Existential anxiety is fueled by the uncertainties of life and the certainty of death. Three sorrowful Things haunted human consciousness: the inevitability of death, the uncertainty of its time, and the unknowability of the soul's fate after death – themes tellingly evoked in the Middle English period even in the briefest lyrics.²⁰⁹

This unsure fate and fear of death is flipped in the Grimestone lullaby. The singer knows when, how, and why the child will die. This does not remove the sorrow from the lyric, but rather serves as its reasoning. Thus, this religious version of a secular lullaby keeps the same basic form and tone, but changes its purpose and theme. The singer does not sing a song of the fear of death, but rather of the sorrow over the known suffering of the Christ Child and his fated death on the cross.

This treatment and representation of the Christ Child in the lullaby is not unique. Theresa Kenny examines nativity lyrics specifically, agreeing that

The image of Christ as a newborn who is wounded, dead, or consumed as the Eucharist evinces as belief in the power of the sung or written word to represent temporal or spatial distance as collapsed...it seeks to approximate the divine perspective of the Child himself, who sees all the future before him and always is what he will do; after all, his name is Jesus, savior.²¹⁰

²⁰⁸ John of Grimestone, "Lyrics," 266.

²⁰⁹ Vincent Gillespie, "Moral and Penitential Lyrics." *A Companion to the Middle English Lyric*, ed. Thomas Duncan (Rochester: Boydell & Brewer, 2005) 69.

²¹⁰ Theresa Kenny, "The Christ Child as Sacrifice: A Medieval Tradition and the English Cycle Plays." *The Christ Child in Medieval Culture: Alpha Es Et O!* eds. Mary Dzon, and Theresa M. Kenney (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 30.

Thus, the connection between the birth of Christ and his sacrifice collapses time and provides readers with a perspective as similar to Christ's perspective as possible. She argues that not only is there a connection between the Incarnation (Nativity) and Eucharist (Sacrament), but that this connection, is "the Christ Child making himself vulnerable to humanity no matter the era, no matter the place."²¹¹ This similarly applies to the Grimestone lyric. The infant Jesus is simultaneously crying as a child and suffering on the cross, present in both and all moments.

Many examples of this treatment of the Christ Child appeared throughout the late Middle Ages. There were a number of lullabies written to and about the Christ Child, all similar in content to Grimestone's lyric.²¹² Lyrics were also written about Mary and her lamenting of the loss of her son. These poems, or songs, often reference Jesus as he was a child, especially in connection to moments of the passion.²¹³ Additionally, there are a number of lyrics connecting the nativity and the passion.²¹⁴ The prevalence of these themes emphasizes the importance of this specific method of characterization of Christ. The passion and the nativity were used as narrative shorthand for duality of Christ's nature.

Throughout the late Middle Ages, Jesus is no longer the warrior who sacrifices himself, as seen in the *Dream of the Rood* and "Christ I.". Christ is now an infant-God who knows he will die on the cross when he cries as a baby. He is separated from other youth with his God-nature, yet humanized in specific, recognizable ways to better comprehend him. The infant Christ still cries and needs to be soothed with lullabies sung by his caregiver. Such a human interaction

²¹¹ Kenney, "The Christ Child as Sacrifice," 58.

²¹² Examples can be found from Carleton Brown's collections of *Religious Lyrics of the XIVth Century* (pg. 70, 80, and 83) and *Religious Lyrics of the XV Century* (pg. 3 and 7).

²¹³ Examples can be found from Carleton Brown's collections of *English Lyrics of the XIIIth Century* (pg. 83 and 85), *Religious Lyrics of the XIVth Century* (pg. 13), and *Religious Lyrics of the XV Century* (pg. 81).

²¹⁴ Examples can be found from Carleton Brown's collections of *English Lyrics of the XIIIth Century* (pg. 87) and *Religious Lyrics of the XIVth Century* (pg. 70, 75, and 80).

makes this perfect figure more understandable and grounded. Soothing the child Christ allows readers and singers of these lyrics to connect with Jesus and reflect on his complex life.

In the Ages of Man framework, the Christ Child found in the lyrics and lullabies of the late Middle Ages does not fit neatly into any specific stage of development, just as he did not fit in the Old English poetry representations as a young man. The collapse of time for this figure – of being an infant and youth-sacrifice at once – suggests there are no periods of growth or development for the Christ Child. Every paradigm expects some level of growth throughout infancy, childhood, and youth. As the Christ Child knows that he will sacrifice himself during the passion, there is no real indication of his growth psychologically or morally. In fact, the infant Christ's distinct and purposeful lack of changeability directly contradicts the expectations of infant behavior and characterization, as established through both the planetary stages and Piaget's stages of development. An infant's ability to comprehend the ethical concepts of sacrifice, let alone sacrificing himself for all of humanity, is beyond any of the early or even middle stages of mental and ethical growth. This, like the earlier warrior-version of Christ, is representative of the special understanding medieval authors had of the Christ Child. Although he is humanized as a crying infant, he remains the exceptional – Christ is beyond his *age*, years, and understanding. Thus, even in lullabies to the infant Christ, with the attempts to sooth the crying child (again, humanizing him and connecting him to a recognizable expression of infancy: needing comfort and soothing), medieval authors still represented the Christ Child as a figure that is outside of what is strictly human.

Conclusion

Jesus is a special figure in Medieval Literature. The characterization of this Christian savior is heavily influenced by the priorities and values of the culture and the specific medieval period in which he was depicted. During the early Middle Ages, Jesus was a warrior, a human-God fighting and sacrificing himself to save humanity. This emphasis on his warrior qualities demonstrates the values of the warrior culture of the Anglo-Saxons. The late Middle Ages, on the other hand, was fascinated by the concept of the Christ Child. This focus on the infant Christ, a human-God crying in a crib demonstrates the attempts to humanize Jesus to better understand him. Both characterizations of Christ do not fit easily into any of the Ages of Man, or in any of the age-appropriate stages of development. Both the young man and the infant Christ fit best into the most mature and ethically developed stages, if at all. This position and connection only serves to emphasize Christ's separation from the expectations of human growth. The figure of Jesus is perfect, yet he was still a child who needed to be soothed and comforted. This combination of humanizing, yet still separating Christ from the rest of humanity makes his representation demonstrative of both the complex understanding medieval authors had of this figure, but also displays their values and expectations of children and youth. Children needed to be soothed, where youth were expected to be warriors. Both to express who Christ was and to best understand him, medieval authors used humanizing language and details to describe Christ as he was an infant and young sacrifice.

CHAPTER III: CHAUCER'S CHILDREN

One of the more well-known authors of the Middle Ages who included and described children and young adult characters was Geoffrey Chaucer. His prolific writing career produced titles like *The Book of the Duchess*, *The Parliament of Fowls*, and *Troilus and Criseyde*. Perhaps his most popular work, the *Canterbury Tales*, was never finished. Inspired by Boccaccio's *Decameron*, Chaucer created this story of pilgrims traveling together and each sharing their own story. What makes this text so distinct is not just that it is a collection of individual stories, nor even that it is a collection of many genres. As Marion Turner highlights,

The *Canterbury Tales* does many different things, but its greatest achievement is to demonstrate the importance of reading each tale, or version of events, in conjunction with other tales, other versions, as Chaucer blends and juxtaposes sources, styles, and genres. In marked contrast to other contemporary tale collections, such as the *Decameron* or the *Confessio Amantis*, Chaucer makes this variation of perspective absolutely central to the text by presenting us with tale-tellers from widely different social backgrounds.²¹⁵

This unique form of storytelling with “authors” of tales from distinct social experiences and perspectives offers a special opportunity for character analysis. Each pilgrim Chaucer created is purposefully representative of a perspective Chaucer observed, some stereotype he knew, or a method of criticism of a particular situation or stereotype. Caroline Barron observes that “Chaucer must have known that thirty pilgrims from all over England were unlikely to have come together by chance...and that their joint pilgrimage to Canterbury was improbable.”²¹⁶ Yet, he put together this unlikely scenario with a distinctly “socially diverse group...created for his own poetic and narrative purposes.”²¹⁷ Paul Strohm explains that these characters are “drawn from the most dynamic fourteenth-century social strata, whose social and vocational conflicts

²¹⁵ Marion Turner, *Chaucer: A European Life*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 8.

²¹⁶ Caroline Barron, “Chaucer the Poet and Chaucer the Pilgrim.” In *Historians on Chaucer: The ‘General Prologue’ to the Canterbury Tales*, ed. Stephen Rigby (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 31.

²¹⁷ Barron, “Chaucer the Pilgrim,” 31-32.

will provide good possibilities for staging a diverse collection of tales.”²¹⁸ Based on these concepts, Chaucer purposefully built a narrative that allowed him to present, comment on, and criticize all levels and parts of society. Because of the unique nature of this text and the number of child and youth characters, the *Canterbury Tales* opens a unique opportunity to examine children and young adult representation through levels of society – both as described by the different pilgrims and through the various social backgrounds. I will examine the Squire pilgrim and his tale; Aurelius the squire from the “Franklin’s Tale;” Alison, Nicolas, and Absolon from the “Miller’s Tale;” the infant, Molly, John, and Alan from the “Reeve’s Tale;” the young knight from the “Wife of Bath’s Tale;” Constance and Mauricius from the “Man of Law’s Tale;” Griselda and her children in the “Clerk’s Tale;” and the “litel clergeon” from the “Prioress’s Tale.”

Of the many characters in the *Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer the Pilgrim, or Geoffrey²¹⁹ the poet serves a special role. By including a fictional self-insert, as Barron explains, Chaucer the poet opens opportunities for Chaucer the character to provide commentary separate from himself. She states that the “naivety of Geoffrey enables Chaucer the poet to describe the other pilgrims on two levels: their surface appearances as perceived by Geoffrey and the judgements of them implicitly hinted at by Chaucer the poet.”²²⁰ This unique perspective allows the pilgrims to be “viewed from several angles: as figures from estates satire, as ordinary people observed by contemporary commentator, and as they are perceived through the unseeing eyes of the pilgrim narrator who is cleverly manipulated by Chaucer the author.”²²¹ Thus, the multiple levels of

²¹⁸ Paul Strohm, *Social Chaucer* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 68.

²¹⁹ Commonly referred to as Chaucer the Pilgrim by scholars. I use Geoffrey in this dissertation to make a distinction between this self-insert character and Chaucer the author, who I refer to as Chaucer.

²²⁰ Barron, “Chaucer the Pilgrim,” 32.

²²¹ Barron, “Chaucer the Pilgrim,” 32.

meaning created by Chaucer for the *Canterbury Tales* provides a unique opportunity to examine his social commentary – especially in connection to youth and child representation. Further, as each character is rooted in one of the main estates of medieval social structure, their individual representations of children and childhood provide insights into how those outside of a particular social experience viewed this distinct group of people (at least inasmuch as Chaucer understood each of their perspectives on this topic). For example, the Prioress, as a member of the clergy, describes a young boy in a way that differs from how the Clerk describes a boy of the same age. With a stand-in character like Geoffrey in a complex narrative that is filled with social commentary, Chaucer the poet is free to make various observations and criticisms on social issues and about the pilgrims themselves – all without direct connection to himself.

With regard to this social commentary, Stephen Rigby points out that scholars of Chaucer tend to interpret the *Canterbury Tales* in roughly one of three ways: that Chaucer agreed with and is commenting upon traditional ideas of social inequality, that Chaucer viewed the real disparities of the era and challenged the conventional ideas of social inequality, or that Chaucer intentionally wrote his works to be ambiguous to allow his readers to make their own observations and criticisms on the social structure.²²² Thus, scholars do not agree on exactly how to interpret Chaucer's commentary on the estates. The *Canterbury Tales* can be interpreted as a fully satirical, critical voice of Chaucer, that challenges the major inequalities in medieval society. Yet, Chaucer could also only be hinting at these ideas, leaving his work intentionally ambiguous and not purposefully controversial. Jill Mann explains this complexity of the *Canterbury Tales* best in her conclusion:

Chaucer calls forth contradictory responses – a positive emotional or sensuous response, conflicting with an expectation that moral disapproval is called for – in order to make us

²²² Stephen Rigby, "Reading Chaucer: Literature, History, and Ideology." *Historians on Chaucer: The 'General Prologue' to the Canterbury Tales*, ed. Stephen Rigby (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 11.

feel the complexity of his characters. He makes us uncertain of the ‘facts’ that lie behind their social or professional façades. He uses a sense of past experience, discernible from present appearance, personality or behavior, to give us the conviction that his characters are not eternal abstractions but are affected by time. And he incorporates an awareness of their point of view – their reactions to the traditional attitudes towards their existence, their terminology and standards of judgement – which also gives us a strong sense of their independent life. Chaucer forces us to feel that we are dealing with real people because we cannot apply to them the absolute responses appropriate to the abstractions of moralistic satire²²³

The *Canterbury Tales* includes realistic, moralistic, and satirical representations of various people and social classes, thus, this complex text filled with social commentary and “varied” perspectives, allowing for a unique opportunity to explore childhood representation.

The biggest contributors to the scholarship on children in Chaucer studies are Eve Salisbury, J. A. Burrow, and Derek Brewer. Salisbury explores Chaucer’s works by examining a few of the characteristics of some of the young characters, by analyzing the childishness or childlikeness of the characters and speakers in the Tales, and by highlighting the child “voice” that Chaucer may use in his writing.²²⁴ Burrow outlines the various ages of man and how varieties of medieval texts fit within these ideas or transcend the established schemes. He speaks to Chaucer’s writings on more than one occasion but does not specifically examine all of his texts through this lens.²²⁵ Brewer offers an insightful but brief overview of medieval ideas about childhood and how they manifest in or complicate Chaucer’s various works.²²⁶ All of these works discuss adolescents and their representation by Chaucer, but they do not address the complexities of the age of childhood and adolescence, the varying nature of these characters

²²³ Jill Mann, *Chaucer and Medieval Estates Satire: The Literature of Social Classes and the General Prologue to the Canterbury Tales*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 189.

²²⁴ Salisbury, Eve, *The New Middle Ages: Chaucer and the Child*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

²²⁵ Burrow, J. A., *The Ages of Man: A Study in Medieval Writing and Thought*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986).

²²⁶ Brewer, Derek, “Children in Chaucer.” In *Tradition and Innovation in Chaucer*. (London: Macmillan Press, 1982).

between works, and how children and adolescents are developed specifically in the *Canterbury Tales* – all three of which I explore.

I also examine how the children and youth in the *Canterbury Tales* are connected to the expectations established in the various Ages of Man. Even though the majority of Chaucer's youthful characters behave and are depicted in typical ways, some of these children and young adults are inconsistent with the Ages paradigms. This incongruity appears when these characters are associated with an ideal or used for specific narrative purposes.

The Pilgrim Squire & His Tale

The *Canterbury Tales* opens with the “General Prologue” that introduces each of the pilgrims, one of whom is a young squire. Typically, a squire was a person who served a knight in order to gain experience with fighting and horsemanship. Craig Taylor points out that “aristocratic boys...begin to learn to bear arms from the age of fourteen,²²⁷ receiving instruction in martial and equestrian skills and then serving as a squire in the retinue of a lord before being knighted.”²²⁸ Within the *Canterbury Tales*, the Squire is the son of the Knight pilgrim. It would be highly unusual for a son to serve his own father, according to Nicholas Orme.²²⁹ The connection between them, therefore, seems to serve as emphasis between their familial association. Taylor highlights that “the juxtaposition of the Squire and the Knight not only deepens the resonance between the courtly and the martial, but also draws attention to the powerful contrast between youth and experience.”²³⁰ He goes on to argue that the Knight is a

²²⁷ This age is between the stages of development. It occurs at the end of adolescence (which starts with the onset of puberty) and start of young adulthood (which begins at roughly fifteen years old).

²²⁸ Craig Taylor, “The Squire.” In *Historians on Chaucer: The ‘General Prologue’ to the Canterbury Tales*, ed. Stephen Rigby (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 64.

²²⁹ Nicholas Orme, *From Childhood to Chivalry: The Education of the English Kings and Aristocracy, 1066-1530*. (London: Methuen, 1984).

²³⁰ Taylor, “The Squire,” 63.

representation of “an extremely experienced and professional warrior” who fought in many battles, most of which were overseas. This experience is contrasted with the Squire who has only participated in local campaigns. Taylor posits that “this may suggest that Chaucer wished above all to emphasize the contrast the different stages of the life-cycle of an aristocratic male represented by the Squire and the Knight, with the latter having taken every opportunity to fight, to build a reputation and in the process to acquire great experience.”²³¹ In contrast, the Squire, for Taylor, serves as an example of a young, inexperienced and growing aristocratic youth who is in the process of becoming like his father, the Knight.

The Squire is the only speaker and pilgrim character who is explicitly described as a youth. He is introduced in the “General Prologue” as a young man “Of twenty yeer of age he was.”²³² If the Squire is about twenty,²³³ then he is a youth and expected to be focusing on developing intimate relationships in both the astrological paradigm and Erikson’s Psychosocial stages. Of the planetary influences, Venus is supposed to impact youth the most (from fifteen to twenty-two years old), drawing them toward intimacy and finding a partner. This same drive is expected through stage six of Erikson’s paradigm. By young adulthood (also starting around the year fifteen and ending during their mid-twenties), youths should be seeking intimacy in attempts to avoid feelings of isolation. This expectation is immediately met and supported when Geoffrey describes the Squire as a young lover, with emphasis on his fledgling and inexperienced nature:

With hym [the Knight] ther was his sone, a yong SQUIER,
 A lovyere and a lusty bachelor,[...]
 Of his stature he was of evene lengthe,
 And wonderly delyvere, and of greet strengthe.
 And he hadde been somtyme in chyvachie

²³¹ Taylor, “The Squire,” 74-75.

²³² Geoffrey Chaucer, “General Prologue.” In *The Riverside Chaucer*. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987), line 82.

²³³ Young adulthood is the last stage in which a person grows. Adulthood, notable for its lack of growth and lack of decline, occurs roughly between twenty-five and forty-five years old.

In Flaundres, in Artoys, and Pycardie,
 And born hym weel, as of so litel space,
 In hope to stonden in his lady grace.
 Embrouded was he, as it were a meede
 Al ful of fresshe floures, whyte and reede.
 Syngyng he was, or floytyng, al the day;
 He was as fressh as is the month of May. [...]
 He koude songes make and wel endite,
 Juste and eek daunce, and weel purteye and write.
 So hote he lovede that by nyghtertale
 He sleep namoore than dooth a nyghtyngale.
 Curteis he was, lowely, and servysable,
 And carf biforn his fader at the table.²³⁴

By the second line, Geoffrey describes this squire as “A lovyere and a lusty bachelor.” By using “lusty” and “lovvere,” Chaucer is emphasizing his romantic inclinations and connections to Venus’s influence. Taylor points out that the use of the term “bachelor” holds additional meaning. He notes that the word still held the same “modern sense” of an “unmarried” man, “but was also used for a young knight who was a novice in arms and followed the banner of someone else because he was either too young or did not have enough retainers to command his own contingent.”²³⁵ Thus, this term both denotes the Squire’s youthful rank as a novice and his unmarried state.

A few lines later, the Squire is described as hoping for favors from his lady because of his success in combat, something typical of courtly love. Mann even suggests that “the Squire’s devotion to love and to his lady seems appropriate to his youth and ‘lustiness’ – it is part of his ‘estate’ ...and thus takes on a *relative* validity.”²³⁶ The Squire’s desire-filled disposition was understood as a part of youth and commonly used especially when describing this specific group of young men. Further, the Squire has only fought “In Flaundres, in Artoys, and Pycardie,” in

²³⁴ Chaucer, “General Prologue,” lines 79-100.

²³⁵ Taylor, “The Squire,” 65.

²³⁶ Mann, *Medieval Estates Satire*, 117. Emphasis in original.

Belgium and Northern France, which are all fairly close to England. As Taylor noted earlier, these nearby campaigns are juxtaposed against the Squire's father's more far-flung battles and experiences – serving to emphasize the experience of one and the inexperience of the other. By this description, the Squire is further established as immature (as in not-yet-mature).

The physical description of the Squire also provides insights into his characterization. That he is described as agile and “of greet strengthe” suggests the effects of the red bile²³⁷ of the four seasonal stages of physiological development. Red bile impacts adolescence and young adulthood (starting as early as fifteen), influencing the bodies of those in these age groups to become more athletic – both increasing activity and physical capabilities. Additionally, of the colors described in this description of the Squire, Geoffrey mentions “whyte and reede” flowers “Embrouded” on his outfit. The reference to the color red suggests a potential correlation to the idea of red bile. The color white does not have any clear connections to this paradigm or other Ages but does appear again in connection to and within descriptions of youths in the *Canterbury Tales*. Perhaps it suggests a purity or innocence – or even wealth. One additional linking quality to the four-stage paradigm is found in the reference to the month of May. Geoffrey states that the Squire is “as fressh as is the month of May.” Within the four ages of physiological development, spring is the time of childhood, while summer is that of youth and young adulthood. That the Squire is on the verge of summer, young adulthood, which (based on the physiological four-stage schemes used by Bede) should start around the age of twenty-years, suggests that he is very close to the stage of young adulthood, but still immature and hanging onto childhood.

²³⁷ I use red bile as it is described by Bede in *The Reckoning of Time (De Temporum Ratione)*. Chaucer also references red bile in the “Nun’s Priest’s Tale” (“rede colera” line 2928), as Pertelote blames her husband’s dream and behavior of too much of this and other humors. This mention of red bile, specifically, establishes that Chaucer was also aware of this description for this Age. This stage or humor is otherwise known as yellow bile.

By including the Squire as one of the speakers, Chaucer demonstrates the agency that high ranking noble youths had during this period. Although notably hesitant in his recitation, the Squire is still given an opportunity to participate in this otherwise exclusively adult activity of storytelling (at least as demonstrated in the *Canterbury Tales*). The Squire tells his story with distinct pauses to express his hesitation, as seen near the beginning of part one when he comments “Yet seye I thi, as to commune entente:/ Thus muche amounteth al that evere he mente,/ If it so be that I have it in mynde”²³⁸ and near the end of that same part when he is describing how the magical horse worked when he indicates “Which is unknowe, algates unto me.”²³⁹ In these announcements, he is pausing in his story to admit his lack of knowledge – both showing humility and hesitation. He also often introduces what he is about to say before he states it. For example, in the second part of “The Squire’s Tale,” the Squire states, “And evere, whil that oon hir sorwe tolde,/ That oother weep as she to water wolde”²⁴⁰ before offering an elaborate and detailed description of bird’s story and Canacee crying. His brief introductions suggest an insecurity speaking to his audience. It is almost as if the Squire feels like he needs to make sure his audience knows what to expect before he even begins to tell the actual story.²⁴¹

The “Squire’s Tale” itself also provides some insights into this character. The Squire tells a confusing, unfinished story rooted in Oriental Romance and based on a number of sources.²⁴² The story begins in the same way as the “Knights Tale,” with a feast and a noble family, directly connecting him to his father. A guest arrives at this feast, offering magical gifts to the family. There is a flying brass horse, a ring of language comprehension, a sword that can both damage

²³⁸ Chaucer, “Squire’s Tale,” lines 107-119.

²³⁹ Chaucer, “Squire’s Tale,” line 246.

²⁴⁰ Chaucer, “Squire’s Tale,” lines 495-496.

²⁴¹ It is also possible that this behavior is his demonstration of proper humility and self-effacement, as befitting his station as a squire.

²⁴² Donald Baker, “Introduction,” In *A Variorum Edition of The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer Volume II: The Canterbury Tales Part Twelve: The Squire’s Tale* (University of Oklahoma Press, 1990), 56.

and heal, and a mirror that prevents someone from lying. After the gifts are distributed, the second part of the Squire's tale begins. Without a notable transition, he focuses on the daughter, Canace, who was given the magical ring. She encounters a peregrine falcon,²⁴³ and because of the ring, she can speak to and understand this animal. She learns of this bird's horrible fate: the female bird tells her of her cheating mate and how she suffers for trusting him. Women's fear and distrust of men and men's fickle nature is common in Oriental Romance.²⁴⁴ Before the Squire can fully begin the third part of his tale, the section ends. Whether Chaucer simply did not get the chance to finish this tale, or if he purposefully stopped it at that juncture is unclear.

The story's heavy use of reworked source material and lack of clear cohesion suggests that the Squire is struggling to arrange ideas in a specific order and follow a specific set of literary rules. This struggle places him firmly in the Concrete-Operational stage of development²⁴⁵ of Piaget's paradigm. The Squire clearly understands that the story elements can be transferred and attempts to follow some of the literary and narrative expectations. However, that he struggles to make smooth, direct connections between his ideas suggests that he has not yet reached Formal Operations, in which he should be able to perform abstract mental tasks, coordinating a number of variables simultaneously. This positioning emphasizes the Squire's immaturity. Formal operations can begin as early as eleven years old, and this association to adolescence or even childhood strongly suggests that the Squire is mentally immature. However, the story that the Squire tells and the content within, even as ill-focused as it is, does link the Squire to his expected age. The Tale includes intimate relationships, including despair at the loss

²⁴³ Chaucer, "Squire's Tale," line 428.

²⁴⁴ Haldeen Braddy, "The Genre of Chaucer's 'Squire's Tale.'" *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 41, no. 3 (1942): 279-280.

²⁴⁵ Typically found between the years of seven and eleven years old.

of such a bond (with the falcon's story).²⁴⁶ This ties the Squire back to Erikson's sixth stage of psychosocial development and Venus's influence from the Astrological ages.

The Squire's hesitation has significant impacts on his potential characterization. As Marie Neville states

At this moment in the drama of the Canterbury pilgrimage, the Squire's position is not enviable. He is the youngest member of the group, eager to please but professedly uncertain of his skill. The pilgrims who have preceded him have the advantage in age and experience. Not only has he felt the impact of Alice of Bath's vitality, assurance, and genius for self-expression, but also he has heard the perfect narrative art of a trained rhetorician, the Clerk, and has savored the terrible bitterness of the Merchant. Moreover these skillful story tellers are members of the bourgeoisie, while, after his father, the Squire is the only secular noble to be assigned a tale. Beyond his desire to acquit himself well, it is his wish to do credit to his caste. Closely linked to his motive is his natural wish at once to compliment and to surpass his father. When his tale was done, the Knight had received the approbation of all the pilgrims...It is the Squire's ambition to receive similar tribute—universal approbation and special commendation from the *gentils*.²⁴⁷

If his storytelling is understood as Neville describes, and he is driven by a need for approval of his elders to affirm his identity (particularly for his social class), then the Squire moves down into Erikson's fifth stage of psychosocial development. This earlier stage is demonstrated by forming one's identity through occupation, gender roles, and same age relationships. In combination with his desire for intimate relationships, it seems that the Squire is situated between Erikson's fifth and sixth stages (adolescence and young adulthood). For his years, this characterization suggests that the Squire is immature for his age, but growing into his expected role.

The ambiguity of whether or not the Squire is interrupted and unable to finish his tale opens up opportunities to understand the relationship of the young Squire to the characters belonging to other estates – specifically to the Franklin and Host. Immediately following the end

²⁴⁶ Chaucer, "The Squire's Tale," lines 428-631.

²⁴⁷ Marie Neville, "The Function of the 'Squire's Tale' in the Canterbury Scheme," *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 50, no. 2 (April 1951): 169.

of the “Squire’s Tale” there is a brief section with the Franklin and Host talking. Within these lines, the Franklin praises the Squire stating

In feith, Squier thow has thee wel yquit
 And gentilly, I preise wel thy wit,”
 Quod the Frankeleyn, “considerynge thy yowthe,
 So feelyngly thou spekest, sire, I allow the!
 As to my doom, ther is noon that is heere
 Of eloquence that shal be they peere,
 If that thou lyve [...]
 For of thy speche I have greet deyntee.
 I have a sone, and by the Trinitee,
 I hadde levere than twenty pound worth lond,
 Though it right now were fallen in myn hond,
 He were a man of swich discrecioun
 As that ye been! Fy on possessioun,
 But if a man be virtuous withal!
 I have my sone snybbed, and yet shal,
 For he to vertu listeth nat entende;
 But for to plee at dees, and to despende
 And lese al that he hath is his usage.
 And he hath levere talken with a page
 Than to commune with any gentil wight
 Where he myghte lerne gentillesse aright.²⁴⁸

If the Squire’s story is unfinished by Chaucer the poet, then such praise could sound genuine. The Franklin would be honestly wishing that his son was as talented and “gentil” as the Squire. However, if the “Squire’s Tale” is intentionally ended by Chaucer with this interruption, this exchange may be less kind. The Franklin could be tactfully praising the Squire as a way to mollify him as he actively prevents the wandering story from continuing. This latter understanding of the event is strengthened slightly by the Host following the Franklin’s speech with a request that he now tell a story. Fundamentally, if Chaucer intended for the Franklin to interrupt the Squire, he is either emphasizing the Squire’s failure to meet the expectations of the other pilgrims, or he is suggesting that the Franklin wishes to stop him from speaking (which

²⁴⁸ Chaucer, “Squire’s Tale,” lines 673-693.

could be for any number of reasons). Further, if he is interrupted, then the Squire's agency is removed from him by an adult – one from a non-gentle social class at that. Youth, and youthful blunders, then, were interruptible regardless of one's social class. The Franklin is still respectful and tactful, more so than any other interrupter in the entire *Canterbury Tales*. However, since the Squire's story is stopped short of completion, it seems that a youth, regardless of social status, could be interrupted without it being viewed as a social slight or with social repercussions.²⁴⁹

The Squire is a character on the verge of adulthood. He is described as young, hesitant, strong, lustful, and courteous. He has the agency of adults, with the ability to speak and tell a story. Yet that agency is in question due to the unpolished and unfinished nature of "The Squire's Tale." The descriptions of his various behaviors and defining characteristics suggest that he still has ties to adolescence (particularly with the comparison to the late spring and early summer description), his hesitation, his need for affirmation, and his inadequate attempts to follow a literary genre effectively) while also being firmly placed within young adulthood (with his lusty need for intimate relationships, physical prowess, and few experiences with battles). The Squire's position within the Ages overall suggests that he is acting as a slightly immature young adult. His behaviors are mainly associated with this age, but the younger correlations serve to highlight his general immaturity.

The Franklin's Tale

The "Franklin's Tale" provides a complex depiction of a noble youth, Aurelius, that derives, in part, from the unique social position of the storyteller. The Franklin's position within the estates has led many scholars to debate exactly what Chaucer is satirizing and/or praising

²⁴⁹ There is the possibility that it is because he is inappropriately interrupting the Squire that he does so with significant praise. The incompleteness of the *Tales* makes this section ambiguous and challenging to interpret.

through this character. As Mann notes, “franklins as a class do not figure in estates literature. The term itself is not a precise one, and from his presentation of the Franklin, it seems that Chaucer is using it as a way of linking together several of the offices of country administration.”²⁵⁰ Because the Franklin is accompanied by the Man of Law, Peter Coss claims that the Franklin’s social status is similar. The Franklin had accumulated wealth and served in a variety of moderately powerful positions such as a member of parliament, a justice, a sheriff, an auditor, a contour, and a vavasour.²⁵¹ Coss also notes that a few scholars use the *New English Dictionary*’s definition of a franklin to define this character’s position within the estates, which emphasizes that a franklin is “a freeholder; in the 14-th c. the designation of a class of landowners, of free but not noble birth, and ranking next below the gentry.”²⁵² However, most of the debate around the Franklin focuses on whether this character was designed by Chaucer as someone desiring to be of the gentle class (and therefore presents an over-the-top story of nobility to one-up the Squire), or if he is already a representative of this class and simply provides a non-satirical example of the expectations of this class in his story and overall behavior. Other scholars even suggest that the Franklin is completely unlike historical franklins (even though there is ambiguity), and thus question why Chaucer chose to represent him as he did.²⁵³

As described earlier, either the Franklin interrupts and tactfully praises the Squire to stop him from continuing his strange, longwinded, and overambitious story, or he is genuinely

²⁵⁰ Mann, *Medieval Estates Satire*, 152.

²⁵¹ Peter Coss, “The Franklin,” In *Historians on Chaucer: The ‘General Prologue’ to the Canterbury Tales*, ed. Stephen Rigby (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 228.

²⁵² Coss, “The Franklin,” 228.

²⁵³ See Stephen H Rigby, *Chaucer in Context: Society, Allegory and Gender* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996).

praising the youth for his recitation and truly bemoaning how his own son is not as talented and courteous as the Squire. According to Donald Baker,

In comparison with the other interruptions on the pilgrimage, the Franklin's is by far the most tactful and is itself a model of the *gentilesse* in which the Squire has shown himself to be lacking by subjecting his captive audience to such exquisite boredom; the Franklin, having with similar *gentilesse* borne the rudeness of the Host, then goes on to a true exemplum of that virtue.²⁵⁴

Thus, depending on which interpretation is followed, both the interruption and the story that the Franklin tells may suggest his feelings towards the Squire. The validity of both options seems to be the key to this complex interaction. It can be both and neither, allowing for a generous and skeptical reading simultaneously.

The Franklin professes in his "Prologue" that he is untrained and speaks plainly, however, his tale (like the Knight's) includes many classical references that suggest otherwise. He mentions the Greek gods, various ideas from astrology, specific historical events and figures, the spheres, and even directly references specific stories from Homer. Additionally, the Franklin also emphasizes that he is presenting a Breton Lay, commenting that

Thise olde gentil Britouns in hir dayes
Of diverse adventures maden layes,
Rymeyed in hir firste Briton tonge,
Whiche layes with hir instrumentz they songe²⁵⁵

Kathryn Lynch has pointed out that "there are problems and contradictions in categorizing the Franklin's Tale as a lay."²⁵⁶ She explains that it is "the variety of the genre, the preference in Chaucer for married rather than courtly adulterous love, the use of natural rather than fairy magic" plus the "metrical differences from the traditional lay" that make it clear that "The

²⁵⁴ Baker, "Introduction," 53.

²⁵⁵ Geoffrey Chaucer, "The Franklin's Prologue." In *The Riverside Chaucer*. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987), lines 709-712.

²⁵⁶ Kathryn L. Lynch. "East Meets West in Chaucer's Squire's and Franklin's Tales." *Speculum* 70, no. 3 (July 1995): 544.

Franklin's Tale" is an unusual, if entirely uncharacteristic for a type of lay.²⁵⁷ She continues by noting that "probably, Chaucer wanted to stress the *Breton* in Breton lay."²⁵⁸ Establishing a "ethnic origin" or "national or lineal connection" to a story was a common "convention in medieval historical romance" similar to invoking a muse.²⁵⁹ With his many references to specific landmarks and locations, the emphasis of the Breton location is clear. If this tale is read as a response to the inept and wandering tale of the Squire, and considering the Franklin's claim to be "unlearned," one might suggest that the Franklin is trying not only to define gentleness more directly, but also trying to establish a personal connection to Brittany and its historical prestige. He is invoking a historical narrative practice, one in which directly associates him with a specific region and corresponding narrative ethos.

"The Franklin's Tale" is a story about a young squire in love with a married woman. The story begins with elaborate expressions of love between Dorigen and her husband Arveragus. Arveragus is described as a noble and gentle knight who left his home to fight with King Arthur in many battles. Dorigen, his wife, remains at home while he is out fighting, causing her to long for her husband and to suffer severe loneliness. Eventually, while she is out with her friends, Dorigen encounters Aurelius, the youthful squire of the tale. The Franklin introduces Aurelius as having loved her for years, although privately. The squire approaches her and expresses his need to love her. She initially tells him that she must be faithful to her husband, but she eventually "in pley"²⁶⁰ tells him to remove all the rocks along the shore so that none are visible. If he accomplished this mission, she would love him. Grieved at such an impossible task, the young

²⁵⁷ Lynch, "East Meets West," 544.

²⁵⁸ Lynch, "East Meets West," 544.

²⁵⁹ Lynch, "East Meets West," 543.

²⁶⁰ Geoffrey Chaucer, "The Franklin's Tale." In *The Riverside Chaucer*. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987), line 988.

squire seeks help. He eventually makes a deal with a clerk and for a price, the clerk would perform the magic needed to hide the rocks just long enough to trick Dorigen. Aurelius goes to Dorigen and shows her the shore, proving he succeeded in completing her task. She immediately despairs, so she decides to kill herself. She admits all to her husband, Arveragus, upon his return and he firmly refuses to let her go through with her plan, telling her to sacrifice her body – as her oath must be upheld, no matter the cost to both of them. She agrees, and goes to meet Aurelius in tears and explains that she is only there on Arveragus’s command and would have otherwise killed herself. Seeing the generosity of the older knight, the young squire releases Dorigen from her oath, letting her return to her husband undefiled.

The only character directly described as a youth or as youthful is Aurelius. The squire is described as a secret lover:

Upon this daunce, amonges othere men,
 Daunced a squire biforn Dorigen,
 That fresher was and jolyer of array,
 As to my doom, than is the month of May.
 He syngeth , daunceth, passynge any man
 That is or was, if men sholde hym discryve,
 Oon of the beste farynge man on lyve;
 Yong, strong, right vertuous and riche, and wys,
 And wel biloved, and holden in greet prys.
 And shortly, if the sothe I tellen shall,
 Unwityng of this Dorigen at al,
 This lusty squier, servant to Venus,
 Which that ycleped was Aurelius,
 Hadde loved hire best of any creature
 Two yeer and moore, as was his aventure,
 But nevere dorste he tellen hir his grevaunce.²⁶¹

Aurelius’s description in this Tale is very similar to the description of the Squire on the “General Prologue.” Aurelius is directly associated to the month of May, again at the cusp of summer, positioning him at the end of childhood in the four seasonal stages of physiological development,

²⁶¹ Chaucer, “Franklin’s Tale,” lines 925-941.

and almost into young adulthood. He is also physically fit as influenced by the red bile of the second of the four physiological ages. Both squires are described in relation to their strength and physical capabilities. He is even directly connected to Venus, described as a servant of her influences in line 937. The term “servant” in this context suggests that the squire has been influenced to such a degree by Venus that he is acting out of the effects of this astrological influence alone, without his own thought or will. Regardless, this specific disposition is expected of a young adult, and thus demonstrates his age appropriately.

There are many elements of courtly love in this story that also influence the characterization of the squire. The love sickness expressed by Aurelius is quintessential to this literary theme. However, he inevitably fails at this love-game because he cheats. Aurelius seeks out and receives help with the rock challenge, even employing magic to accomplish the task. This cheating and willingness to deceive Dorigen suggests that Aurelius is only at Kohlberg’s second stage of Preconventional moral reasoning. That he is willing to lie for his own personal reward places him firmly in this stage – a stage associated with childhood. Yet, what is highlighted is the older knight’s generosity and nobility in response to the circumstances created by this lie. It is those two qualities of Arveragus that move the young lusty squire to do the “gentle” thing when confronted with Dorigen’s predicament; he chooses to forgive Dorigen of her oath, and to relinquish his claim on her. Aurelius moves “up” socially and morally, suggesting a new maturity to his character. Potentially, Aurelius’s willingness to give up on his “reward” could place him as high as stage five in Kohlberg’s stages of moral reasoning (expected of maturity). This choice is beyond the simple good-boy orientation and even beyond the law and order orientation found in stages three and four. The fifth stage is built on the socially agreed upon standards of what defines good and moral. Witnessing a display of such morality by

Arveragus inspires Aurelius to display this same socially accepted moral good. His willingness to give up his love-relationship separates him from Erikson's sixth stage of young adulthood, in which intimate relationships are most important. That Aurelius willingly gives up his "prize" intimate relationship suggests that the fear of isolation no longer compels him to act as he does. Moreover, this also suggests that Venus no longer holds such a strong influence on his character. The squire is no longer a "servant" to her influence.

Moreover, this tale's focus on gentle behavior could signal either of the Franklin's desire for this gentleness (which is potentially reinforced by his request for the other pilgrims to tell him who is more noble at the end of this tale), or it is a reprimand to the Squire, demonstrating how to tell a tale well. The Franklin's many "unlearned" assertions also complicate this idea. He could be expressing this ironically, (which, with his many references to the various Greek gods, etc. seems unlikely), or he could be honest and only know these references through his personal experiences. Coss argues that the

Franklin pretends to membership of a chivalric world to which he has no real claim. Steeped in traditional lore, he puts all the emphasis he can on a world of chivalric courtesy which he does not fully comprehend, a world which is somewhat at odds with the world which he actually inhabits. Satirical intent is revealed not only through the pilgrim's *foux pas* but also through the tonality of the text. The Franklin, so far from displaying social insecurity, has an air of social confidence, based on his interpersonal skills, his knowledge and his worldly success, and on his sense of belonging to the elite. He assumes parity with the members of the chivalric world...Pretension oozes from every pore.²⁶²

If this is the case, the Franklin could be critiquing the Squire with his own character of a squire.

As described earlier, Aurelius is initially described in the same way that Chaucer the poet describes the Squire in the "General Prologue." This correlation, Aurelius's foolish cheating escapades, then finally overcoming of such childish behavior, could all be commentary on the

²⁶² Coss, "The Franklin," 242-243.

pilgrim Squire's character. The combination of the "Squire's Tale" and the "Franklin's Tale" back-to-back suggests that at least some of the comparisons and critiques of chivalry are purposeful. Whether or not the Squire is interrupted by the Franklin does not change the juxtaposition of both of the pilgrims, their stories, and their story telling abilities.

The Miller's Tale

Where the Franklin's social position is ambiguous, the medieval miller has a consistently bad reputation. Although this type of character is also rare in estates satire, as Mann notes, satirizing the position in general was fairly common.²⁶³ According to Paul Freedman, the mill itself was an image used to indicate "oppression" with "millers generally, and Chaucer's Miller in particular...often assumed to be agents of the seigneurial system."²⁶⁴ These systems, and the position of the miller as the one who was wholly in charge of the milling of grain, worked in such a way as to uphold the social hierarchy. That a single miller could control the cost and quality of the milling process, with all the potential for corruption in such a situation, led to the position having a negative connotation.

Freedman also points out that the Miller is characterized in an unusual way in the *Canterbury Tales*. Freedman writes that "Knights are warlike while peasants are timid. This is not simply a reflection of the [formers]'s superior training and weapons but part of the essential differentiation of classes."²⁶⁵ As the Miller's tale directly follows the Knight's, this combination seems intended to emphasize the different between these two social classes. Yet, as Freedman

²⁶³ Mann, *Medieval Estates Satire*, 160-162.

²⁶⁴ Paul Freedman, "The Miller." *Historians on Chaucer: The 'General Prologue' to the Canterbury Tales*, ed. Stephen Rigby (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 371.

²⁶⁵ Freedman, "The Miller," 381. Edit correction from original text which mistakenly stated "former's."

also explains, the comparison of these two is more complex than just that of social strata. For Freedman, the

Miller's lechery is also somewhat distinct within the village setting. In literary works knights were portrayed as sexually eager and not just for the hard-to-get female protagonists of romance. There is an extensive literary genre, the *pasourelle*, devoted to their conquests of peasant girls...Peasant men have appetites for food, sleep, and other bodily functions that don't draw upon the imagination that love requires...[the Miller's] lust, along with his aggression, does distinguish him from the normal stereotype of a peasant.²⁶⁶

Thus, how Chaucer characterizes the Miller is unlike the expected stereotype of the figure.

Although unusual in his representation, how the Miller's depiction of young adulthood and the priorities of the youth in his tale suggests how medieval audiences understood this specific age group of people.

"The Miller's Tale" follows directly after the "Knight's Tale," with the Miller drunkenly asserting that he should tell his tale right then regardless of his drunken condition. His story is a *fabliau* about an older carpenter, named John, being fooled and cuckolded by his eighteen-year-old wife, Alison, and the antics of two young men eager to seduce her. Quickly falling in love with one another, Nicolas, a young clerk, and Alison try to trick John to allow them time alone. Nicolas pretends to suffer a great illness, telling John that he has had a vision from God. He convinces the carpenter that a flood is coming and that he must prepare. The night comes and all three of them climb into the tubs designed to save them from the rising flood waters. Once John falls asleep, both Nicolas and Alison sneak out of the barn and go into the house, sleeping together in John's bed. While all this is occurring, Absolon also falls for Alison. He attempts to court her by bringing various gifts and money. He is taken advantage of by Alison, who tells John of Absolon's doings even while leading him on. Absolon eventually comes to her, seeking

²⁶⁶ Freedman, "The Miller," 381-382.

some treat for his gifts, like a kiss. He is tricked into kissing her nether region. He returns again, and when he is tricked by Nicolas this time, Absolon uses a hot poker to poke the anus of the other suitor.

The young man who wins Alison's heart is Nicolas. Nicolas is introduced as a sly student: "This clerk was cleped hende Nicholas./ Of deerne love he koude and of solas;/ And therto he was sleigh and ful privee,/ And lyk a mayden meke for to see."²⁶⁷ He is skilled in seducing women and entertaining people.²⁶⁸ His cleverness and success with intimate relationships strongly implies that, through the seven stages of the Astrological Ages, he is influenced by the third stage of Venus and firmly in his young adult years. Lusting for this type of partnership is the main aspect of this stage and also of Erikson's sixth stage of Psychosocial Development. Additionally, the specific detail about his tools (and their lack of use within the tale), suggests that the clerk is not focused on his studies. The Miller explains that

His astrelabie, longynge for his art,
His augrym stones layen faire apart,
On Shelves couched at his beddes heed;
He presse ycovered with a faldyng reed.²⁶⁹

Although his various pieces of equipment for his education are detailed here, the clerk does not interact with these tools nor is he otherwise described as trying to master himself or his craft (both drives found in the next, mature, stage of life). Instead, he is entirely focused on developing love-relationships. He, like the squire of the "Franklin's Tale" and the pilgrim Squire, is eagerly chasing after intimate connections. Moreover, that his dresser is covered with a red cloth associates the clerk with the color red, and thus suggests red bile. Although his physical

²⁶⁷ Geoffrey Chaucer, "The Miller's Tale." In *The Riverside Chaucer* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987), lines 3199-3202.

²⁶⁸ He was described as seeking solas without sentence, meaning that he was seeking fun and entertainment instead of focusing on learning and education.

²⁶⁹ Chaucer, "Miller's Tale," lines 3208-3212.

traits are not specifically described, that both he and the pilgrim Squire are associated with this red color does not seem coincidental. Both young men are seeking love-relationships and neither has successfully mastered their craft.

The focus of all the men's attention in this story is on Alison. She is a young woman full of desire:

Fair was this younge wyf, and therewithal
 As any wezele hir body gent and smal.
 A ceynt she werede, barred al of silk,
 A barmclooth as whit as morne milk [...]
 And eek bihynde, on hir coler aboute,
 Of col-blak silk, withinne and eek without.
 The tapes of hir white voluper
 were of the same suyte of hir coler;
 Hir filet brood of silk, and set ful hye.
 And sikerly she hadde a likerous ye;
 Ful smale ypulled were hire browes tow,
 And tho were bent and blake as any sloo.
 She was ful moore blissful on to see
 Than is the newe pere-jonette tree,
 And softer than the wolle is of a wether. [...]
 In al this world, to seken up and oun,
 There nys no man so wys that koude thence
 So gay a popelote or swich a wenche. [...]
 But of hir song, it was as loude and yerne
 As any swalwe sittynge on a berne.
 Thereto she koude skippe and make game,
 As any kyde or calf folwyng his dame.
 Hir mouth was sweete as bragot or the meeth,
 Or hoord of apples leyd in hey or heeth.
 Wynsynge she was, as is a joly colt,
 Long as a mast, and upright as a bolt. [...]
 She was a prymerole, a piggesnye,
 For any lord to leggen in his bedde,
 Or yet for any good yeman to wedde.²⁷⁰

Most of the details in her description suggest that Alison is young and beautiful. She is a “younge wyf,” associated with young animals and blossoming plants, and described as shapely

²⁷⁰ Chaucer, “Miller’s Tale,” line 3233-3270.

and with good posture. Through her flirtatious glances and attractive disposition, she is associated with the third stage of the Astrological paradigm, under Venus's influence. Even married, "she hadde a likerous ye."²⁷¹ This description of flirting looks, and her later lustful actions with Nicolas, all strongly suggest that Alison is mainly driven by a desire for intimate relationships – and specifically relationships with those of her own age group. As noted, she is recently married, but to an old man and therefore is still seeking an intimate partner to fulfill her desires. The description of Alison also puts a significant emphasis on her body, its shapeliness, and how she is arrayed in black and white silks. The color white also appears with the pilgrim Squire, although he was described with the red and white flowers. The meaning of the white color is not wholly clear, other than perhaps a suggestion of purity.

The Miller also uses a variety of animal-based details to explain her personality. She is like a playful baby horse, a young calf, a weasel, and a singing bird. She is also like an early blossoming pear-tree and a primrose. The associations with young animals suggest that Alison is quite young, at least at heart. The blossoming plants emphasize her ties to spring, the season of childhood, and fertility. As viewed through the four-ages of man paradigm, each of these descriptions directly link Alison to the season of spring, and thus the age of childhood. Horses tend to be born and pear trees tend to blossom in spring. By describing her with such specific details, the Miller layers her description with these terms and connotations, suggesting that she is on the cusp of maturity, but not yet there. She is still full of young, growing energy, but approaching adulthood. The relationship between Alison and Absolon is also described with animals. The Miller describes them as "I dar wel seyn, if she hadde been a mous,/ And he a cat, he wolde hire hente anon."²⁷² This relationship suggests that Alison is perhaps a bit more

²⁷¹ Chaucer, "Miller's Tale," line 3242.

²⁷² Chaucer, "Miller's Tale," lines 3346-47.

innocent (or at least viewed by the Miller as such) than her counterpart, and that Absolon is a predator who views her as prey.

Overall, Alison is described as a young, very beautiful girl who is the object of desire of many men. She is connected to many of the expected Ages of Man. Her morality, and willingness to trick and cheat on her husband, places her in at the Preconventional level of moral reasoning (expected of early childhood). That she is focused on her personal rewards (found at stage two of Preconventional reasoning), and not even influenced by traditional or family values like loyalty, which are expected in Conventional moral reasoning and which emphasize her underdeveloped morality.

The other young man in the story is Absolon. The Miller introduces this young parish clerk “The which that was ycleped Absolon./ Crul was his heer, and as the gold is shoon...His rode was reed...In hoses rede.”²⁷³ With blonde curly hair and a red complexion, Absolon also wears red hose. The association with the color red, like with Nicolas and the Squire could suggest a link to red bile. However, as there are no physical feats described,²⁷⁴ as with Nicolas, there is little direct behavioral support for this connection. Absolon is also described as “A myrie child he was, so God me save./ Wel koude he laten blood, and clippe and shave,/ And maken a charter of lond of acquitaunce.”²⁷⁵ This description of his various jobs is juxtaposed to “myrie child.”²⁷⁶ It seems that this youth is distinctly young, but also experienced enough to have learned a number of occupations. Absolon’s “love-longynge”²⁷⁷ suggests the influence of Venus, and desire for intimate relationships. However, when he approaches Alison for the first time, it is

²⁷³ Chaucer, “Miller’s Tale,” lines 3312-3321.

²⁷⁴ Red bile is connected to physical prowess and feats of strength and agility.

²⁷⁵ Chaucer, “Miller’s Tale,” lines 3325-3327.

²⁷⁶ Chaucer, “Miller’s Tale,” lines 3325.

²⁷⁷ Chaucer, “Miller’s Tale,” lines 3349.

with “The moone, whan it was nyght, ful brighte shoon.”²⁷⁸ Thus, his advances towards Alison for an intimate relationship may suggest an affinity with the moon. In the Astrological paradigm, the moon is associated with the first four years of life. This, and the use of “child,” seem to be emphasizing Absolon’s childishness and lack of maturity. He clearly is influenced by Venus, as expected for a young adult striving for intimate relationships, but the Miller’s description of this character layers him with childish connotations. He, like Alison and Nicolas, displays an immature morality. He and Nicolas are actively courting a married woman, all to gain their own personal reward (an intimate relationship with Alison). This behavior and association emphasizes the immaturity of both young men.

The age gap between the married pair, John and Alison, is emphasized at the beginning of the tale. The Miller points out that the carpenter is a sixty-year-old man who married an eighteen-year-old woman and

Jelous he was, and heeld hire narwe in cage,
 For she was wylde and yong, and he was old
 And demed himself been lik a cokewold.
 He knew nat Catoun, for his wit was rude,
 That bad man sholde wedde his similitude.
 Men sholde wedden after hire estaat,
 For youthe and elde is often at debaat.
 Bit sith that he was fallen in the snare,
 He moste endure, as oother folk, his care.²⁷⁹

The Miller opines here that John should have known better than to marry an eighteen-year-old. John, the older and wiser mature adult, should have expected the wild and promiscuous behavior found in young adulthood. The Miller’s statements above both confirm the expectations in the Ages of Man paradigms for young adults and demonstrate that such expectations existed for medieval audiences. What happens to John, with all the hardship he experiences by the trickery

²⁷⁸ Chaucer, “Miller’s Tale,” line 3352.

²⁷⁹ Chaucer, “Miller’s Tale,” lines 3224-3232.

of the young adults, is thus explained and framed as his own fault and proves that not only are these young adults acting as expected for their ages, but that John is at fault and out of step with the expectations for his own age for expecting any different.

All three youths in “The Miller’s Tale” are realistic, troublemaking young adults. The descriptions of Alison and Absolon suggest that they are both a bit immature and new to this stage of development. With Alison’s strong connections to spring and Absolon’s “child” descriptions, both have connections childhood stages of development. However, that both are also eager to participate in youthful intimacy and shenanigans, suggesting that they are now in their early youth (with influences of Venus and clear signs of acting in stage six of the Psychosocial Development). Nicolas is distinctly more experienced but is in no way mature. His passionate search for an intimate relationship and his deceitful, selfish use of his own studies also directly connects him to the same young adult stage as the other two youths. Nicolas’s trickery of John and Absolon demonstrates a level of intelligence associated with Piaget’s Formal Operations, since he needs to understand abstract concepts to conceive of his complicated deception. Yet, his focus on his own satisfaction and personal rewards places him somewhere between stages two and three of Kohlberg’s moral reasoning (something he should have already grown out of). All three youths are associated with this childish morality. The Miller, thus, represents young adults as immature, love-obsessed, tricksters.

The Reeve’s Tale

The “Reeve’s Tale” includes similar young adult shenanigans as the “Miller’s Tale.” “Reeve” is a general term for a supervisor in medieval English culture. These often-elected roles were responsible for managing the community to meet the expectations of the lord and/or landowner. They were commonly responsible to both the people and to the lord. David Stone

explains that a reeve “was ultimately charged with the enumeration of rents due from manorial tenants, though his main responsibility was the day-to-day management of his lord’s demesne land, i.e. the part of the manor which had not been permanently leased out to peasant tenants and which lords could exploit as they wished.”²⁸⁰ Thus, the reeve was the person responsible for managing this multipurposed land; it was a middle-management type role between the lord and the peasants. With regard to the unique social positioning of the reeve, Stone emphasizes that “Chaucer was writing on the cusp of accelerating social and economic change, and this context is critical for our interpretation of the Reeve,” a character that represented social mobility.²⁸¹ Anyone could be elected to this position of authority. Chaucer’s Reeve is even described as being trained as a carpenter, only to now hold this managerial position.²⁸² The Reeve represents opportunity: opportunity for social movement, for responsibility, and for power.

The Reeve is presented as a grumpy old man. In the “General Prologue” he is described as “a sclendre colerik man” – a thin, bad-tempered individual.²⁸³ As Paul Olson claims, the Reeve is characterized “as one of those pinched and rigorous souls whose physical condition indicated a tendency towards hasty vengeance.”²⁸⁴ Geoffrey writes that “Ther was noon auditour koude on him wyne.”²⁸⁵ That no auditor could “win” against him suggests that the Reeve’s numbers always appeared correct (not that they necessarily were correct). Olson suggests that, because of his aggressive nature, the Reeve “receives naïve thanks from his superiors and silent fear from his inferiors.”²⁸⁶ The inferiors, in Olson’s perspective, also included the auditors.

²⁸⁰ David Stone, “The Reeve.” In *Historians on Chaucer: The ‘General Prologue’ to the Canterbury Tales*, ed. Stephen Rigby (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 401.

²⁸¹ Stone, “The Reeve,” 417-419.

²⁸² Chaucer, “General Prologue,” line 614.

²⁸³ Chaucer, “General Prologue,” line 587.

²⁸⁴ Paul Olson, “The ‘Reeve’s Tale’: Chaucer’s ‘Measure for Measure,’” *Studies in Philology* 59, no.1 (January 1962): 2.

²⁸⁵ Chaucer, “General Prologue,” line 594.

²⁸⁶ Olson, “Measure for Measure,” 2.

When the Reeve begins his prologue, he takes the time to describe how he is aged. He reflects on the process of aging, stating that it might be similar to the ripening of the medlar fruit.²⁸⁷ This unusual analogy suggests that the Reeve has a unique perspective on aging: it is when one grows old (rotten), that one can finally become desirable. He then points out that old age comes with four “gleedes” or live coals.²⁸⁸ These embers are “Avauntyng, liyng, anger, coveitise” (boasting, lying, anger, and greed).²⁸⁹ In this, he is suggesting some of the downfalls of aging and the anticipated shortcomings of older people. In old age, people were expected to lie, express anger, be greedy and boast; specifically, as Olsen points out, “boasting which is unaccompanied by a real capacity to perform.”²⁹⁰ This description similarly leans into the “rotten” and soured imagery of the fruit.

The Reeve’s irritable nature is reinforced in the “Reeve’s Prologue.” The Reeve is described as angry with the Miller and his story. He is responding to the shameful events that occur to the carpenter in the “Miller’s Tale.” The Reeve seems to take this story and the misdeeds done to the carpenter as a personal insult. In describing the motivation for his story, both Geoffrey and the Reeve explain

By cause he was of carpenteris craft,
A litel ire is in his herte ylaft;
He gan to grucche, and blamed it a lite.
So theek, quod he, ful wel koude I thee quite
With bleryng of a proud milleres ye,
If that me liste speke of ribaudye.²⁹¹

Thus, the Reeve designs his tale as a retaliation against the Miller for his story.

²⁸⁷ This fruit is only edible after it has become rotten.

²⁸⁸ Geoffrey Chaucer, “The Reeve’s Prologue.” In *The Riverside Chaucer*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987), line 3883.

²⁸⁹ Chaucer, “Reeve’s Prologue,” line 3884.

²⁹⁰ Olson, “Measure for Measure,” 6.

²⁹¹ Chaucer, “Reeve’s Prologue,” lines 3861-3866.

The story that the Reeve tells is about cheaters and manipulative young people. He, like the Miller, uses rambunctious youths as a comedic foil against unwitting adults, while also including themes of theft and revenge. In the “Reeve’s Tale,” the miller, named Simkin in the “Reeve’s Tale,” has been stealing grain, and two college students (John and Alan) come by the mill to watch him work to keep him from stealing their grain. To distract them, Simkin lets their horse loose.²⁹² By the time John and Alan get their horse back, it is nightfall and Simkin has replaced some of their flour with bran. They then request shelter for the night at Simkin’s house, which he allows. Realizing they were hoodwinked with the contents of their flour sacks, the students come up with a plan to get revenge. Alan ends up sleeping with the miller’s daughter, while John manages to confuse Simkin’s wife into sleeping with him by moving the cradle and infant. In the chaos of the morning after, the miller’s wife ends up accidentally bashing her husband on the head while the students escape with their ground wheat.

The “The Reeve’s Tale” includes one younger child character: the miller’s infant. The baby is first described in the middle of his sister’s description as “Savyng a child that was of half yeer age;/ In cradel it lay and was a propre page.”²⁹³ The baby is not given any further description and remains in this cradle throughout the story. As noted earlier, the older adolescent, John, uses this baby to confuse Simkin’s wife. The baby does not cry or in anyway react to this movement. It is not otherwise described, does not have a name, nor does it have any other impact upon the story. Thus, the infant does not have any agency and is mostly a device used by the young man to accomplish his mischievous goal. The cradle is a prop used to set up a joke in this comedy. This lack of voice and identity of the infant follows the general understanding of

²⁹² As this horse runs off to a valley with “wilde mares” (4065), it is likely that this horse is a young stallion, serving as a metaphor (and perhaps foreshadowing) for the young clerks and their behavior in the tale.

²⁹³ Geoffrey Chaucer, “The Reeve’s Tale.” In *The Riverside Chaucer* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987), lines 3970-3973.

infancy. Burrow even mentions that the youngest years within the Seven Ages of Man specifically are known by their “imperfection and inarticulate state.”²⁹⁴ Without a name, independent engagement in the tale, or even a detailed description, the infant in the “Reeve’s Tale” is not treated as anything but a prop for the narrative.

“The Reeve’s Tale” includes three older youths: Molly, John, and Alan. Molly is the miller’s, Simkin’s, daughter. Molly is specifically described as being “Of twenty year.”²⁹⁵ She is described as a “wenche” on multiple occasions, which typically translates to a young woman of low birth. Molly’s physical description, like Alison’s from the “Miller’s Tale,” is given in detail in this text, emphasizing her shape, physical flaws, and potential beauty. Her looks are distinctly different from Alison’s, however. Where Alison is dressed in silks and outstandingly beautiful, Molly is unattractive “With Kamus nose” and “With buttokes brode.”²⁹⁶ Her body becomes an object of compensation in this text. After the two students, John and Alan, end up being tricked and losing some of their grain, Alan decides that he is due compensation:

For, John, seyde he, ‘als evere moot I thryve,
If that I may, yon wenche wil I swyve.
Som esement has lawe yshapen us,
For, John, ther is a lawe that says thus:
That gif a man in a point be agreved,
That in another he sal be releved.²⁹⁷

Thus, he argues that the “injury” for his loss of grain through Simkin’s theft can be healed by copulating with the Simkin’s daughter (a family member of the man who caused him injury).

Olson explains this way of thinking and “justice” by stating

When Simkin measures grain, he measures it as unjustly as he measures men. His punishment as a miller is to have the same measure of grain (a half bushel) exacted from

²⁹⁴ Burrow, *Ages of Man*, 37.

²⁹⁵ Geoffrey Chaucer. “The Reeve’s Tale.” In *The Riverside Chaucer* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987), lines 3969-3970.

²⁹⁶ Chaucer, “Reeves Tale,” lines 3974-3975.

²⁹⁷ Chaucer, “Reeve’s Tale,” lines 4177-4182.

him which he has exacted from the clerks but exacted in a more refined form; his punishment as a man is to have the same merciless “measure” of justice visited upon him which he has visited upon others; since his has been the greater will to evil, his is the greater price by far.²⁹⁸

As Alan approaches Molly to take his compensation, it seems that he may go so far as to rape her:

And up he rist, and by the wenche he crepte.
 This wenche lay upright and faste slepte,
 Til he so ny was, er she myghte espie,
 That it had been to late for to crie,
 And shortly for to seyn, they were aton.
 Now pley, Aleyn, for I wol speke of John.²⁹⁹

Especially with the added detail that she did not have time to cry out before they were together suggests that she did not and could not consent to Alan’s actions. Molly does not seem to have agency to act before Allen takes his vengeance on Simkin. However, if this moment is without Molly’s consent, that idea is challenged a few lines later in the tale when Molly seems to have developed a great love for Alan. She calls out when he goes to leave “‘Now, deere lemman,’ quod she, ‘go, far weel!/[...] And, good lemman, God thee save and keep!’”³⁰⁰ The Reeve suggests that by her calling him a dear lover and blessing him upon departure, Molly grew attached to Alan and was not harmed or upset by his advances. With this expression of her love, and positive engagement in intimate relationships, Molly seems influenced by Venus, as described in the seven stages of the Astrological Ages. She is more focused on her love-relationship than the impact of her romantic choices have on her family. This behavior matches the expected values in stage six of Erikson’s Psychosocial Development. She is not concerned about generativity or even peer relationships (that of the following and previous stages

²⁹⁸ Olson, “Measure for Measure,” 13.

²⁹⁹ Chaucer, “Reeve's Tale,” lines 4193-4198.

³⁰⁰ Chaucer, “Reeve's Tale,” lines 4240-4247.

respectively). Moreover, she focuses entirely on her intimate relationship, so much so that she betrays her father and reveals his lies to the clerks, which points to her expected positions in the schemes of Psychosocial Development and the Astrological ages. These are the stages in which the most important relationships and bonds are found through intimacy. However, as Molly values her own personal needs, and not her family's (father's) expectations, she is only at the second stage of Kohlberg's moral reasoning and not yet at the Conventional Level. Stage two in the Preconventional Moral reasoning is where a person is focused on personal rewards. The following stage is where family expectations and approval heavily impact moral reasoning. Typically, the Preconventional stage two occurs in early childhood, even before adolescence. This placement suggests that Molly is meant to be viewed as morally immature for her age, even while she is engaging in intimate relationships.

Both Alan and John are described as emotion-driven young students. Simkin, having successfully tricked them into chasing after the stallion (who ran "toward the fen, ther wilde mares renne"),³⁰¹ even relates the young men to children. He says "'Lo, wher he gooth! Ye, lat the children pleye./ They gete hymn nat so lightly, by my croun.'"³⁰² As they chase the horse, they look to Simkin like children playing. They are not wholly childish, however. John is smart enough to know the way to Simkin's house, even after running around for the horse. However, he is also foolish enough (at least as the Reeve describes) for him and Alan to both chase after the horse in the first place and fall for Simkin's trap.³⁰³ The clerks were at the mill to watch the Miller and force him to mill the grain honestly. By both leaving, they gave him the chance to lie and cheat. John also seems to be jealous of his companion, Alan, when the other seeks out

³⁰¹ Chaucer, "Reeve's Tale," line 4065.

³⁰² Chaucer, "Reeve's Tale," lines 4098-4099.

³⁰³ Chaucer, "Reeve's Tale," lines 4090-4099.

compensation from Simkin's daughter. Not to be outdone by his friend, John decides to get his own compensation, but with Simkin's wife. He ends up earning his compensation by tricking Simkin's wife into entering into the wrong bed in the dark:

And up he roos, and softely he wente
 Unto the cradel, and in his hand it hente,
 And baar it softe unto his beddes feet [...]
 And forth she gooth til she the cradel fond.
 She gropeth alwey forther with hir hond,
 And foond the bed, and thoghte noght but good,
 By cause that the cradel by it stood³⁰⁴

Thus, John moved the cradle just to confuse Simkin's wife. He is successful in tricking her and earning his own form of compensation for the lost grain. Both young men are clearly influenced by the powers of Venus to seek sexual intimacy. As noted earlier, this also appears in Erikson's Psychosocial development, and which is expected for youth. Although the students are not given a specific age, both of them are clearly old enough to focus on intimate relationships and to engage in sexual hijinks. University students could be as young as teenagers, and as old as in their thirties. From their behavior, and placement within the Ages of Man, it is likely that both are in their early twenties.

Agency is not equally distributed in "The Reeve's Tale." The young men demonstrate a distinct agency in the story. Upon hearing about the cheating miller, the two clerks decide to go visit him and ensure that he milled their grain honestly. Although they needed to ask permission to go on this trip, they planned and pursued this adventure entirely independently. Similarly, the men determine their own recompense for the slight against them, then seek out such payment independently. Molly's agency is a bit more complicated to ascertain. She does give up her

³⁰⁴ Chaucer, "Reeve's Tale," lines 4211-4224.

father's lies freely, suggesting that she can express herself and her own ideas. However, the way in which Alan claims his compensation from her diminishes her agency significantly.

Both young men are morally immature. Alan and John's demand for compensation and justice falls within Kohlberg's second stage of moral reasoning, just like Molly. All three are focused on personal rewards, with the young men having a "you cheat me, I cheat you" mentality. This type of reasoning firmly places the young clerks in the Preconventional level of the paradigm. Moreover, John's need for his peers to recognize his sexual achievements, and his insistence on not being seen as lesser than Alan, also directly links John to the fourth stage of Erikson's Psychosocial Development. His fear of inferiority and missing out on what his peer "achieves" is clear when John states that

this is a wikked jape;
 Now may I seyn that I is but an ape.
 Yet has my felawe somewhat for his harm;
 He has the milleris doghter in his arm.
 He autred hym, and has his nedes sped,
 And I lye as a draf-sak in my bed;
 And when this jape is tald another day,
 I sal been halde a daf, a cokenay!³⁰⁵

Based on Erikson's classification, John's desperation to have what his peer has directly associates him to this early stage of development typically found in adolescence (between six and twelve years old).³⁰⁶ Thus, all three young adults (but especially John) are characterized as morally immature.

The Reeve characterized the young adults in "The Reeve's Tale" in a way similar to those depicted by the Miller in "The Miller's Tale." Both groups of youths are described as morally immature, even though they possess the physical maturity to participate in sexual

³⁰⁵ Chaucer, "Reeve's Tale," lines 4200-4208.

³⁰⁶ "Adolescence" is the stage marked by the onset of puberty and occurs directly before young adulthood (starting at roughly fifteen years old).

activities. They behave in generally expected ways, only diverting from expectations with their morally childish behaviors. Thus, even in his anger at the Miller, the Reeve describes young adults in the same way that the Miller himself described them.

The Wife of Bath's Tale

The chaos of both the Miller's and Reeve's tales is not found in the "Wife of Bath's Tale." The Wife of Bath tells a story that is often described as a fairy tale.³⁰⁷ The Wife of Bath has been the subject of many scholarly debates with her prologue examined extensively, especially in conversations about gender roles and feminist studies. With regard to the Wife's social position, Mann points out that "women were recognized as a separate class in estates lists."³⁰⁸ This suggests that women were not positioned, or at least understood as individually positioned, in the same social hierarchy as men. This alone allows for a unique social position for the Wife of Bath to speak from. Mann points out that the Wife of Bath was a "comic caricature" of "anti-feminist satire."³⁰⁹ For Mann, however, she represents a "typical woman whose feminine weaknesses are her strength as an estates representative."³¹⁰ In attempts to explain the historical social position of the Wife of Bath, Ruth Mazo Karras argues that this character, the only secular woman pilgrim to tell a tale, was designed to "intervene in medieval debate for and against marriage (an by extension for and against women)," at least as understood through the context of "The General Prologue" and the "Wife of Bath's Prologue."³¹¹

³⁰⁷ Joseph Roppolo explores this basic assumption of the tale and fundamentally argues against this overgeneralization that many scholars make of this genre in his article "The Converted Knight in Chaucer's 'Wife of Bath's Tale.'" *College English* 12, no.5 (February 1951): 263-269.

³⁰⁸ Mann, *Medieval Estates Satire*, 121.

³⁰⁹ Mann, *Medieval Estates Satire*, 123.

³¹⁰ Mann, *Medieval Estates Satire*, 127.

³¹¹ Ruth Mazo Karras, "The Wife of Bath." In *Historians on Chaucer: The 'General Prologue' to the Canterbury Tales*, ed. Stephen Rigby (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 319.

The tale that the Wife tells, however, is also a distinctive and useful story that provides a unique perspective on a young man. The Wife is described as having had five husbands, plus additional company in her youth. Geoffrey also explains that “remedies of love she knew per chance,/ For she koude of that art the olde daunce.”³¹² Her experience with love and various intimate relationships provides a unique perspective on the youthful character of her tale.

“The Wife of Bath’s Tale” is about a knight from King Arthur’s court. He is described as “a lusty bachelor,”³¹³ much like the squires previously described. The specific use and reference to “bachelor,” as also seen with the pilgrim Squire, is a reference not only indicating that he is not married, but also suggesting that he is not yet well established enough as a knight to have his own men to lead. This detail suggests that this knight, in combination with his membership in King Arthur’s court, is a young adult and not yet an experienced knight. The knight sees a “mayde walkynge hym biforn,/ Of which mayde anon, maugree hir heed,/ By verray force, he rafte hir maydenhed.”³¹⁴ The young man rapes a young woman that he sees walking, and is accused and brought to the king to receive punishment. King Arthur sentences him to death, but Queen Guinevere intervenes. She sentences him to spend a year trying to discover the answer to what women want most, saying

“I grante thee lyf, if thou kanst tellen me
 What thing is it that women moost desiren.
 Be war, and keep thy nekke-boon from iren!
 And if thou kanst nat tellen it anon,
 Yet wol I yeve thee leve for to gon
 A twelf-month and a day, to seche and leere
 An answer suffisant in this mateere;
 and suretee wol I han, er that thou pace,
 Thy body for to yelden in this place.”³¹⁵

³¹² Chaucer, “General Prologue,” lines 475-476.

³¹³ Geoffrey Chaucer, “Wife of Bath’s Tale.” In *The Riverside Chaucer* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987), line 883.

³¹⁴ Chaucer, “Wife of Bath’s Tale,” lines 886-888.

³¹⁵ Chaucer, “Wife of Bath’s Tale,” lines 904-912.

If he does not return with the correct answer within a year, he will be killed as the King commanded.

The knight travels far, trying to find the answer. He eventually comes upon an old woman, whom he initially respectfully addresses as “my leeve mooder,”³¹⁶ and she offers to give him the answer if he does “The nexte thyng that I require thee.”³¹⁷ Kemp Malone describes this scene by highlighting the way the Wife of Bath characterizes the knight:

When the knight, toward the end of his year’s search, meets the hag, he is in a state close to despair. Nowhere does he find agreement on what women most desire; indeed, no two people in a given place give him the same answer to his question. From this thoroughgoing disagreement he concludes that he has not found the right answer, going on the principle that if an answer is right its rightness will be evident, once given, and all will agree. When he sees the lades dancing on the green he draws near them as a last hope; from them, in the eleventh hour, he may yet learn the answer he is seeking. But then they vanish, and only an old hag is left. She is his last hope. And she takes the initiative. She asks him what he seeks, he tells her, and she assures him that she knows the right answer.³¹⁸

Thus, desperate and with no other options, the knight agrees to her terms, and they return to Arthur’s court to complete the quest. The knight provides the correct answer: “Wommen desiren to have sovereynetee/ As wel over hir housbond as hir love,/ And for to been in maistrie hym above.”³¹⁹ The old wife states that she gave the knight that answer, and the answer is found to be true. Because of this, the knight is given his freedom and life, and is no longer sentence to death. She then asks the knight to marry her (the very next thing she asks of him). However, the knight hesitates to uphold his part of the deal now that he no longer is in danger. He does eventually marry the old woman (after begging her to ask anything else of him), only to then struggle to consummate the marriage. When she questions his hesitation, he explains that she is old and ugly

³¹⁶ Chaucer, “Wife of Bath’s Tale,” line 1005.

³¹⁷ Chaucer, “Wife of Bath’s Tale, lines” 1009-1010.

³¹⁸ Kemp Malone, “The Wife of Bath’s Tale,” *The Modern Language Review* 57, no.4 (October 1962): 484.

³¹⁹ Chaucer, “Wife of Bath’s Tale,” lines 1038-1040.

and any man would struggle like he does.³²⁰ She scolds him, explaining that beauty is found in virtue and that nobility is given by God.³²¹ Then she gives him the choice to either keep her as an old and dutiful wife, or have her change into a young, beautiful lady who may stray from him and entice other suiters.³²² He tells her that she should choose the option best for her – demonstrating that he has grown and learned through this experience by providing the correct answer. He is rewarded with her becoming the best of both, becoming both fair and good.³²³

This tale follows the moral development of a young knight. His personal desires and impulses force him onto a path of learning and growth. He learns to become not only respectful of women, but also deferential to their choices and perspectives. This growth follows Piaget's scheme, with the knight learning to see and understand other perspectives. He starts from the Preoperational stage (typically found in childhood), in which he acts impulsively. He then grows and moves all the way to Formal operations (which can occur any time after adolescence through adulthood), in which he is able to solve abstract problems and recognizes that other people may have a different perception than his own. The knight also demonstrates growth through Kohlberg's moral reasoning, with his focus shifting from an orientation focused on rewards, found at stage two and expected of children, all the way to understanding human equality, which is the final stage typically demonstrated in late adulthood. In the paradigm of the seven Astrological stages, the knight begins this tale horribly influenced by the most evil parts of Venus. His desire overwhelms him and he acts entirely out of lust and impulsiveness. However, he does grow into the age of the Sun throughout the tale, mastering himself and his impulses.

³²⁰ Chaucer, "Wife of Bath's Tale," lines 1099-1103.

³²¹ Chaucer, "Wife of Bath's Tale," lines 1106-1118.

³²² Chaucer, "Wife of Bath's Tale," lines 1219-1227

³²³ Chaucer, "Wife of Bath's Tale," lines 1228-1235.

The Wife of Bath seems to design her tale as an instructive moral tale. She presents a man committing a truly evil act, but through his trials and the wisdom of women, he overcomes this evil and grows into a better, more mature man. Joseph Roppolo explains that the “Wife of Bath’s Tale” “is not merely the account of an amazingly ugly woman who, by magic, becomes beautiful. It is also the story of the change which occurs in a selfish, proud, and morally blind knight who is taught to find beauty and worth in wisdom and purity.”³²⁴ The knight grows and learns, emphasizing his humanity and movement through the ages. This tale is hopeful, therefore, in that even one of the worst acts does not prevent someone from earning mercy and becoming a better person.

Malone argues, however, that, with the context of the “Wife of Bath’s Prologue” and her commentary on women and gender roles, that the knight is being manipulated, suggesting that this growth is not natural. He states that the knight is forced into “willing submission”³²⁵ through the manipulative interactions with the old woman. Thus, for Malone, the story is less about youth’s development and growth and more about gender roles and gendered issues of the period. I see no reason why this text cannot be for and accomplish both purposes. Yes, with the strong gender commentary of the Prologue setting up the following Tale, it follows that the Wife of Bath, and Chaucer the Poet, intended one to influence the reading of the other. However, that this character goes through expected and recognizable stages of moral and cognitive development is also not a coincidence. Chaucer, through the Wife of Bath, is expressing the growth of this young man with and through these recognizable stages to indicate the character’s immaturity (prioritizing personal rewards), growth (learning to see from another person’s perspective), and maturity (understanding equality).

³²⁴ Roppolo, “The Converted Knight,” 263.

³²⁵ Malone, “The Wife of Bath’s Tale,” 484.

The Man of Law's Tale

Much like the Reeve, the Man of Law is introduced as someone who is good at his job but has questionable morals. A man of law, or sergeant of law, is essentially a medieval lawyer who has reached the highest level in his profession. Anthony Musson points out that many scholars “have tended to view the description of the Sergeant in the ‘General Prologue’ as a fairly straightforward satirical portrait of a medieval lawyer, one in which admiration for his qualifications and professional skill is tempered by criticism of his ethics and morality.”³²⁶ Mann even points out that his description in the “General Prologue” is in line with a “lawyer’s stereotype” as seen with his purchase of land.³²⁷ However, Musson argues that the representation of the Sergeant is more complex and nuanced than a simple example of estates satire. He claims that “Chaucer uses the Sergeant as a legal ‘everyman’ to highlight conflicting attitudes towards the legal profession” and the portrait is therefore “more complex” than most acknowledge.³²⁸ I agree with this argument, especially as many of Chaucer’s character portraits are more complex and nuanced than they initially seem.

The “General Prologue” introduces the Man of Law as “war and wys” or prudent and wise.³²⁹ He owns a notably large amount of land and collects many “fees and robes.”³³⁰ This description emphasizes the Sergeant as highly qualified for his job and very wealthy. Geoffrey points out that that the Man of Law “semed bisier than he was,” suggesting that he was either extremely good at his job, such that he was extremely efficient, or that he did not work as much

³²⁶ Anthony Musson, “The Sergeant of Law.” In *Historians on Chaucer: The ‘General Prologue’ to the Canterbury Tales*, ed. Stephen Rigby (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 206.

³²⁷ Mann, *Medieval Estates Satire*, 87.

³²⁸ Musson, “The Sergeant of Law,” 225-226.

³²⁹ Chaucer, “General Prologue,” line 309.

³³⁰ Chaucer, “General Prologue,” line 317.

as he should.³³¹ It is clear that he accurately judged cases and could recite “every statut” from memory, offering credence towards the prior categorization.³³²

In the introduction to the Man of Law’s prologue and tale, the Man of Law debates on what story he wishes to tell. He goes through a variety of options, most of them involving women.³³³ However, within the prologue, the Man of Law praises the wealth of merchants and explains how the poor are unpleasant to deal with.³³⁴ This overt bias towards those with wealth suggests that the Man of Law values money and views people’s value based on their financial success. Within the social structure of the estates, this perspective is additionally problematic and brings into question the ethical disposition of the Man of Law. If his bias is this strong, then perhaps he is not impartially judging cases and, instead of being swayed in his judgement by truth, the Man of Law could be swayed by a person’s wealth.

The Man of Law tells a “pseudohagiography” about Constance, a beautiful daughter of a Roman Emperor.³³⁵ She marries and loses husbands through a variety of challenging ways, all demonstrating the evils that surround her. She does have a child with King Alla, who becomes her last husband. Both of her mothers-in-law directly intervene in her marriages. The first, only known as “The mooder of the Sowdan”³³⁶ or the “Sowdanesse,”³³⁷ convinces the advisors to the Sultan to betray him because of his conversion to Christianity (something he did only in efforts to be an effective suitor for Constance). The second mother-in-law, Donegild, intercepts and

³³¹ Chaucer, “General Prologue,” line 322.

³³² Chaucer, “General Prologue,” line 327.

³³³ Geoffrey Chaucer, “The Man of Law’s Prologue.” In *The Riverside Chaucer* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987), lines 53-89.

³³⁴ Chaucer, “Man of Law’s Prologue,” lines 103-126.

³³⁵ Beverly Boyd, “Introduction.” In *A Variorum Edition of the Works of Geoffrey Chaucer: Volume II the Canterbury Tales: Part Twenty: The Prioress’s Tale* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), 56.

³³⁶ Geoffrey Chaucer, “The Man of Law’s Tale.” In *The Riverside Chaucer* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987), lines 323.

³³⁷ Chaucer, “The Man of Law’s Tale,” line 368.

forges letters to convince Constance that King Alla will not accept their child, forcing Constance to flee the country. Eventually King Alla reunites with Constance, Constance reunites with her Roman family, and her son Mauricius becomes emperor when his grandfather dies.

The only child character in this tale is Constance's son, Mauricius. Mauricius is the only infant in *The Canterbury Tales* who is given a name. Even so, he does not speak or act independently at any point in this story. As noted before, Burrow describes the infant stage as a "imperfection and inarticulate" stage of development.³³⁸ However, Donegild uses the existence of this child to manipulate both King Alla and Constance into distrusting and misunderstanding one another. She writes letters suggesting that the child is devilish, just as Constance is inhuman.

The letter spak the queene delivered was
Of so horrible of feendly creature
That in the castel noon so hardy was
That any while dorste ther endure.
The mooder was an elf, by aventure
Ycomen, by charmes or by sorcerie,
And every wight hateth hir compaignye.³³⁹

The King, even as he is disheartened at such news, does not give up on the child. He prays for God to defend the child and to guide him in his actions.³⁴⁰ Donegild counterfeits the King's letter back to Constance, stating that both her and her son must leave on the same ship they arrived on, or be hung to their death.³⁴¹ By using the child's nature and suggesting that he is in-human, Donegild is using the child character in a similar way as how the infant was used in "The Reeve's Tale." Both tales only introduce these children as plot devices. They do not incorporate any significant details about the infants or provide any notable agency to the child. This treatment of young children and their use as tools of manipulation suggests that children were highly valued,

³³⁸ Burrow, *Ages of Man*, 37.

³³⁹ Chaucer, "The Man of Law's Tale," lines 750-755.

³⁴⁰ Chaucer, "The Man of Law's Tale," lines 760-767.

³⁴¹ Chaucer, "The Man of Law's Tale," lines 792-802.

but also viewed as objects for emotional blackmail (as people continue to do). Both the Man of Law and the Reeve use this same method of child representation.

This tale also includes a young adult, Constance. In general, “The Man of Law’s Tale” follows Constance as she experiences a variety of tragic events and challenges to her faith. This older youth is repeatedly described as a beauty and with a good nature throughout the tale. She is introduced as a “Yowthe, without grenehede or folye;/ To alle hire werkes vertu is hir gyde.”³⁴² She, unlike most of the other young adult characters in *The Canterbury Tales*, is distinctly not influenced by Venus. She is never swayed by lustful desires. When a young knight approaches her with his sexual desires (himself clearly driven by this third stage of the Astrological paradigm), demanding that she reciprocate his love, she rejects him and refuses to sin. Moreover, her virtue guides all her choices. She does not seek out intimate relationships, as her years suggest that she should. It was her father who initiated her first marriage, and King Alla who initiated the second. She does eventually have a child, and acts in a way to protect and support this next generation. When her and her child’s life is threatened through the letter exchange (counterfeited by Donegild), Constance does not hesitate to leave.

And Custance, with a deedly pale face,
The ferthe day toward hir ship she went
But natheless she taken in good entente
The wyl of Crist³⁴³

She then prays to God to protect her, giving herself and her son to God’s will. Mauricius is then described as

Hir litel child lay wepying in hir arm,
And knelynge, pitously to hym she seyde,
“Peese, litel sone, I wol do thee noon harm.”
With that hir coverchief of hir heed she breyde,
And over his litel eyen she it leyde,

³⁴² Chaucer, “The Man of Law’s Tale,” lines 163-165.

³⁴³ Chaucer, “The Man of Law’s Tale,” lines 822-825.

And in hir arm she lulleth it ful faste,
And into hevene hire eyen up she caste.³⁴⁴

She takes the time to sooth and calm her son before praying specifically to Mary. Constance begs Mary to take pity on her child, noting that as he has not yet had the time to sin.³⁴⁵ In this behavior, Constance demonstrates an acute concern for her child, and less of a concern for her own survival. This suggests that she is at stage seven of Erikson's Psychosocial Development. This stage is expected of mature adults. Thus, at this point in the Tale, she is associated with maturity. In many ways, Constance is a saint-type character who suffers many horrible events but remains virtuous and faithful regardless of her trials. She is both mature and morally sound. She behaves in ways that display her individual conscience: when everything and everyone seems against her, she remains true to her faith and kept her son safe. This behavior suggests that she is at stage six of Kohlberg's moral reasoning – the last and most complex stage typical of late adulthood. This is the first young adult in the *Canterbury Tales* who behaves this way. As the Man of Law is potentially morally corrupt, especially in relation to the influence of money, it is almost ironic that he presents an almost hagiographical morality tale.

Regardless, the "Man of Law's Tale" unexpectedly portrays a young adult who does not fit into the paradigms of the Ages of Man. This youth, instead of being characterized as lustful and in need of moral and cognitive growth like all of the previous young adults, displays a distinct and consistent maturity and fully developed morality. This is, also, the first young adult thus analyzed who assertively expresses the Christian faith. Constance could only marry another Christian, she is described as one of the "Cristen folk,"³⁴⁶ she prays openly multiple times, and,

³⁴⁴ Chaucer, "The Man of Law's Tale," lines 834-839.

³⁴⁵ Chaucer, "The Man of Law's Tale," lines 841-868.

³⁴⁶ Chaucer, "The Man of Law's Tale," line 386.

when she flees the country to save her son, she calls out to God, trusting “The wyl of Crist.”³⁴⁷ Constance is not blighted with the same lusty expectations as her counterparts and is rather represented as unique and pure through her faith. She is used as an example to demonstrate the virtue of constant faith.

The Clerk’s Tale

As noted with the numerous clerk characters thus far, a clerk is a university student. Clerks during Chaucer’s lifetime were experiencing a decrease in access to social advancement because of declining patronage and competition from educated laymen like Chaucer.³⁴⁸ Scholars debate on the characterization of the pilgrim Clerk in the *Canterbury Tales*, arguing that he could represent both the strengths of the position, but also the weaknesses. Charles Briggs explains that this “ambiguous status of the Clerk’s estate in modern scholarship mirrors a similar ambiguity in the time of Chaucer and in Chaucer’s treatment itself.”³⁴⁹ Although there is ambiguity in his representation of a clerk, there are some clear aspects to this position that Chaucer portrays consistently. Briggs points out that

Chaucer betrays no interest in the claims of either superior wisdom or aristocracy on the part of university clerks... He does, however, regard university clerks as a distinct social category, the members of which owe their status to their residence at university, their pursuit of studies, and the intellectual skills they acquire.³⁵⁰

This distinction can be seen with the Wife of Bath’s husband, Jankyn; with the “Reeve’s Tale” and its characters of John and Alan; in “Miller’s Tale” that has Nicholas and Absolon, among others. All of these clerks, including the pilgrim Clerk, display a certain wit – some with trickery,

³⁴⁷ Chaucer, “The Man of Law’s Tale,” line 825.

³⁴⁸ Charles Briggs, “The Clerk” In *Historians on Chaucer: The ‘General Prologue’ to the Canterbury Tales*, ed. Stephen Rigby (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 200.

³⁴⁹ Briggs, “The Clerk,” 189.

³⁵⁰ Briggs, “The Clerk,” 192-193.

and some with grand demonstrations of complex ideas. John, Alan, and Nicholas are all tricksters who devise underhanded ways to get their own rewards. The pilgrim Clerk, on the other hand, tells a distinctly long and narratively complex tale.

The Clerk is characterized in a traditionally academic way. The “General Prologue” describes the Clerk as someone who values books and philosophy over work, pay, and livelihood.³⁵¹ He is specifically described as

A CLERK ther was of Oxenford also,
 That unto logyk hadde longe ygo.
 As leene was his hors as is a rake,
 And he nas nat right fat, I undertake,
 But looked holwe, and therto sobrelly. [...]
 For hym was levere have at his beddes heed
 Twenty books, clad in blak or reed,
 Of Aristotle and his philosophie
 Than robes riche, or fithete, or gay sautrie.
 But al be that he was a philosophre,
 Yet hadde he but litel gold in cofre;
 But al that he myghte of his freendes hente,
 On books and on lernynge he it spente,
 And bisily gan for the soules preye
 Of hem that yaf hym wherewith to scoleye.
 Of studie took he moost cure and moost heede.
 Noght o word spak he moore than was neede³⁵²

He, unlike the Nicolas in “The Miller’s Tale,” surrounds himself with his educational tools and books, suggesting that he is genuinely occupied with learning. Geoffrey also explains that the clerk depends on friends and others for financial support. This was not uncommon for those in this position. As Mann notes, “the phrase ‘the eternal student’ aptly sums up our impression” of the Clerk.³⁵³ She adds that “the clerk’s poverty is a general characteristic which integrates a

³⁵¹ Chaucer, “General Prologue,” line 290-297.

³⁵² Chaucer, “General Prologue,” line 285-304.

³⁵³ Mann, *Medieval Estates Satire*, 74.

number of diverse features of estate stereotype. Its natural corollary, for example, is the dependence of the clerk on donations.”³⁵⁴ Briggs supports this idea, explaining that

The Clerk is typically characterized as a ‘poor scholar’. In the parlance of the medieval universities, this meant that, as Chaucer says, ‘he had geten hym no benefice’ (I:291)...the Clerk’s status as an ‘eternal student’ reflects the reality of precarious funding for studies and of constricted career opportunities for many arts graduates in the late fourteenth- and early fifteenth-century Oxford.³⁵⁵

Many clerks could not move beyond additional education or general teaching positions during this period and needed the support of peers and family members for their livelihood. When the Clerk begins to speak, he starts off his prologue with a discussion of the setting of the story and an explanation that the tale is from “Fraunceys Patrak,”³⁵⁶ the famous Italian scholar and poet. This emphasizes what the Clerk finds valuable – the location and ethos of his story.³⁵⁷

“The Clerk’s Tale” is a story of womanly obedience. The story begins with a Marquis, named Walter, who must choose his own bride. This young lord requests the hand of a poor but beautiful woman named Griselda and demands that she obey his every request with cheer. She consents to this request. After the newly married couple has their first child, the Marquis decides to test Griselda’s promise by taking the child away, insinuating that the girl is killed because the townspeople are upset at her birth. Griselda obeys him without complaint. He repeats the same test after they have had their second child as well. The boy is taken in the same aggressive way, with Griselda responding in the same patient way. The Marquis’s final test is to give Griselda a forged letter from the Pope that annuls their marriage and allows the Marquis to marry another. Griselda responds just as she has before and returns to her father’s home for a short period of

³⁵⁴ Mann, *Medieval Estates Satire*, 81.

³⁵⁵ Briggs, “The Clerk,” 199.

³⁵⁶ Geoffrey Chaucer, “The Clerk’s Prologue.” In *The Riverside Chaucer* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987), line 31.

³⁵⁷ This behavior is reminiscent of the Franklin and his call upon the regional location for his tale (i.e. Breton lay).

time. She is called back to the Marquis, who then asks if she is willing to serve and help the newly arrived young lady for the marriage ceremony. She agrees to do so, not recognizing that the young girl is actually her daughter. When Griselda still obeys the Marquis without protest, he reveals all of his tests to her and reunites Griselda with her children. They live happily until the Marquis's death, where their son then becomes ruler.

Of the child characters in "The Clerk's Tale," Griselda's two children do not overtly relate to the Ages of Man. When her daughter and son return to Saluces, her daughter is twelve years old, and her son is seven years old. Following the Astrological understanding of the ages of man, both children should fall under Mercury's influence. The children should be becoming logical and intelligent, and filled with both unpredictable emotions and energy. However, the children are presented with minimal detail. Griselda's daughter is described as wearing noble clothes and being a fresh maid:

In riche array, this mayden for to gyde,
Hir yonge brother ridyng hir besyde.

Arrayed was toward hir marriage
This fresshe mayde, ful of gemmes cleere;
Hir brother, which that seven yeer was of age,
Arrayed eek ful fressh in his manere.
And thus in greet nobles and with glad cheere,
Towards Saluce shapyng hir journey,
Fro day to day they ryden in hir wey.³⁵⁸

Although arrayed beautifully and with a noble appearance, Griselda worries that the young girl will be weaker in patience than herself and begs the marquis

"O thing biseke I yow, and warne also,
That ye ne prikke with no tormentyng
This tendre mayden, as ye han doon mo;
For she is fostred in hire norissyng
Moore tenderly, and, to my supposyng,

³⁵⁸ Geoffrey Chaucer, "The Clerk's Tale." In *The Riverside Chaucer* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987), lines 776-784.

As koude nat adversitee endure
 As koude a povre fostred creature.”³⁵⁹

This suggests that the girl’s highborn experiences as a child did not prepare her for the challenges that Griselda had faced with the marquis. She is still clearly an innocent young girl and not yet influenced by Venus. She does not even seem associated with Mercury’s influence as there are no details included in the story that demonstrate her logical development. She is described as guiding her brother on their trip (“this maiden for to gyde,/Hir yonge brother ridyng hir beside”),³⁶⁰ but beyond this action, there is no representation of her growth in reason or reasoning. As no other personal characteristics are really described, it is difficult to place her amidst various Ages. She was old enough to be a bride, but she is also still too young to be influenced by Venus.

Griselda’s son is mostly depicted as having great nobility, being adept with skills like horseback riding, and being the heir to the kingdom – all details that emphasize his preparation and training to become king. The text does indicate that his future reign would be peaceful and that he would be fortunate in marriage.³⁶¹ Much like his sister, it is hard to firmly pin down his personality without further description. He does not seem to be ruled by volatile emotions, but it is unclear whether or not he is appropriately sanguine in nature according to the four seasonal ages. As noted, these children do not act or speak and therefore cannot be easily assessed for cognitive or moral development. Neither child displays any agency – not acting in any independent way or voicing any personal opinions.

“The Clerk’s Tale” also includes Griselda’s children when they are infants. However, they are not described in any detail during this period. These babies are objects used by Walter to

³⁵⁹ Chaucer, “Clerk’s Tale,” lines 1037-1043.

³⁶⁰ Chaucer, “Clerk’s Tale,” lines 776-777.

³⁶¹ Chaucer, “Clerk’s Tale,” line 1135.

test Griselda's devotion and obedience to him. The children are threatened, but otherwise there are no notable details about them, including a lack of detail about either's reaction to being taken away from their mother. Griselda's daughter is taken away about a month after her birth, while her son is taken away after two years. Some emotional reaction to this separation is expected yet does not occur in the story. Brewer notes that "*The Clerk's Tale* of Patient Griselda is another in which the pathos of children is important, but here, even more than in the others, the children are artistically used to increase the torment of their mother and are not interesting in themselves."³⁶² In this statement, Brewer is pointing to the main point of infant and children representation. The details of the children are lacking because they themselves are not the focus of the work. They are, as seems consistent throughout the *Canterbury Tales* so far, used as plot devices and tools of manipulation for other characters. They are not otherwise detailed because they do not need to be to work in the narrative. A mother can be manipulated by their child – no matter the mother or child. That Griselda does not act in response to her children being taken away is intended to suggest that her patience is more powerful than this innate motherly quality – that she is acting outside of expectations. Walter would not use the children as tests of her patience if he did not expect her to fail and be moved by their loss.

Griselda is the main young adult in "The Clerk's Tale." Many scholars have examined this story by analyzing the Griselda specifically. Katarzyna Stadnik, for example, examines the motivation and identity of Griselda in "The Clerk's Tale." While looking closely at the language the Clerk uses and the voice he gives Griselda, Stadnik argues that Griselda consistently responds to her husband as a lord and not as an equal.³⁶³ Gerald Morgan argues, in contrast, that

³⁶² Brewer, *Traditions and Innovations*, 50.

³⁶³ Katarzyna Stadnik, "Linguistic Modality and Female Identity in Chaucer's Clerk's Tale." *Studia Anglica Posnaniensia* 51, no. 2 (December 2016): 47-76.

Griselda is the personification of the virtues humility, obedience, and patience. He suggests that, unlike Sir Gawain in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Griselda's overt demonstration of these qualities, so much so that they subvert her motherly instincts, is a demonstration of human imperfection not restricting these virtues.³⁶⁴ Griselda is, therefore, a representation of perfect patience. Unlike Morgan, Shawn Normandin suggests that Chaucer's adaptation of the original source for this Tale included intentionally incorporating more enigmas, both in characterization and storytelling.³⁶⁵ Thus, he argues that the unclear morality of Griselda and her responses to the tests are intentionally confusing.

"The Clerk's Tale" is fundamentally about Griselda and her growth from a daughter to a wife and mother. Griselda is never described with a specific year indicating her age. However, it is clear that at the beginning of the Tale she is near enough to childhood to be considered a child: "But thogh this mayde tendre were of age,/ Yet in the brest of hire virginitee."³⁶⁶ She is also directly described as a "child": "With everich obeisaunce and diligence/ That child may doon to fadres reverence."³⁶⁷ Thus, her physical youthfulness is emphasized in the beginning of the story, just as her mental maturity is presented. The Marquis's approach to and view of Griselda is also important to her characterization. Griselda is something he grew attached to while he was "hunting":

Upon Grisilde, this povre creature,
 Ful ofte sithe this markys sette his ye
 As he on hunting rood paraventure;
 And whan it fil that he myghte hire espye
 He nought with wantown lookyng of folye
 His eyen caste on hire, but in sad wyse
 Upon hir chiere he wolde hym ofte avyse,

³⁶⁴ Gerald Morgan, "The Logic of the Clerk's Tale." *Modern Humanities Research Association* 104.1: 1-25.

³⁶⁵ Shawn Normandin, 2016. "'Non Intellegant': The Enigmas of the Clerk's Tale." *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 58, no.2 (Summer 2016): 189-223.

³⁶⁶ Chaucer, "Clerk's Tale," lines 218-219.

³⁶⁷ Chaucer, "The Clerk's Tale," lines 230-231.

Commendynge in his herte hir wommanhede,
 And eek hir vertu, passynge any wight
 Of so yong age, as wel in chiere as dede³⁶⁸

Thus, Griselda is an object of Walter's desire, but not of lustful desire. Regardless of her child-related descriptions, she must have been a young adult when she was married to the Marquis.

The Clerk describes Griselda as completely compliant to her husband. This was something that they agreed upon before their marriage. Her obedience to him is tested by her husband when he takes away their children and with the shame of a divorce and new marriage. According to Burrow, Chaucer actually "tones down" Griselda's virtue in the text, noting that the source for this tale is even more unrealistic than "The Clerk's Tale."³⁶⁹ He also notes that "the wonder of a mature and settled spirit in one so young is superseded by other wonders more powerful and puzzling."³⁷⁰ Thus, her placement and position within the ages is somewhat of an enigma. Through the Astrological ages, she clearly holds the virtue and innocence that appears before Venus influences adolescents. However, her maturity and decorum position her closer to the years around Jupiter's influence, expected of later maturity. She also does age throughout the tale, but her personality and her patience do not waver or change. She does not grow or become any different from the moment she is introduced to the moment the story ends. She does not exhibit sanguine or yellow bile dispositions of childhood and youth of the four-age system. She, therefore, seems to exist outside of these schemes. Griselda's morality is also somewhat of an enigma. Although she allows her children to be taken, and presumably killed, her moral fortitude is rooted in a contract with her husband and lord. This moral orientation is typically found in stage five of the Post Conventional moral reasoning, expected to occur in maturity – again,

³⁶⁸ Chaucer, "The Clerk's Tale", lines 323-341.

³⁶⁹ Burrow, *Ages of Man*, 122

³⁷⁰ Burrow, *Ages of Man*, 122

associating Griselda with the older stages of life. This difference in treatment of an adolescent suggests a purpose. Griselda could be demonstrating how she has overcome these various stages of growth because of the depth of her virtuous nature.

Like Constance from “The Man of Law’s Tale,” Griselda and her story seem to be designed to instruct the audience. Both young adults are described by their virtuous dispositions and outward beauty. They experience horrible events, but remain distinctly virtuous, refusing to act in sinful or otherwise unvirtuous way. As other scholars have noted, however, Griselda does not necessarily represent a desirable level of virtue. Geoffrey even notes after the Clerk finishes his tale that such behavior is impossible.³⁷¹ Yet, she is characterized as disconnected to the Ages of Man, with distinct maturity and moral fortitude.

The Prioress’s Tale

The Prioress is the only monastic representative of the pilgrims to include a child or young adult in their story. A prioress had a unique position in medieval society. According to Valerie Spear, “the medieval abbess or prioress stood out as an authority figure in a society which permitted such status to few other females.”³⁷² Spear explains that prioresses were “authorised by the church to administer a religious house,” although “she remained under the jurisdiction of male ecclesiastical figures.”³⁷³ Typically, these positions were elected by the nuns of the house. A prioress would keep or lose her position based on her ability successfully to meet the expectations of her house and supervising bishop. Importantly, as Spear notes, this relationship “expresses the transactional nature of the monastic superior’s role, given that the

³⁷¹ Chaucer, “The Clerk’s Tale,” lines 1212a-1212g.

³⁷² Valerie Spear, “The Meaning of Leadership in Medieval English Nunnery.” In *Leadership in Medieval English Nunneries* (New York: Boydell Press, 2005), 1.

³⁷³ Spear, “Medieval English Nunnery,” 2.

abbess or prioress was required to respond to the needs of the group just as the members responded to her initiatives”³⁷⁴ Katherine Lewis explains that Chaucer’s representation of the Prioress “is not just the traditional critique of the shortcomings of the female religious, but, more specifically, describes a rare and potentially troubling female ‘power broker’ in medieval society”³⁷⁵ She goes on to argue that, even though many scholars interpret the “General Prologue” Prioress as a satirical representation of the role, she believes that the Prioress is a more accurate portrayal “of late-medieval female monasticism.”³⁷⁶ The Prioress’s unique position and (from Geoffrey’s prospective) biases, influence how the child is represented.

With regard to “The Prioress’s Tale,” Dawn Colley argues that the tale itself gives an illusion of simplicity. She claims that the Prioress is actually urging her listeners to “forgo logic in favor of emotional reaction and blind acceptance.”³⁷⁷ Colley breaks down the differences between superficial behaviors and actual piety. On the other hand, Nancy Warren compares “The Prioress’s Tale” to *Pearl* by examining each story’s use of the sacraments. She highlights the importance of a feminine figure serving as the instructor for scripture and the sacraments.³⁷⁸ Lewis notes that there “is a general scholarly consensus that the Prioress is an inherently ambiguous figure, which in itself helps to explain the sheer range of opinion that she has generated.”³⁷⁹

³⁷⁴ Spear, “Medieval English Nunnery,” 2.

³⁷⁵ Katherine Lewis, “The Prioress and the Second Nun,” In *Historians on Chaucer: The ‘General Prologue’ to the Canterbury Tales*, ed. Stephen Rigby (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 94.

³⁷⁶ Lewis, “The Prioress,” 98.

³⁷⁷ Dawn Colley, “Creating a Martyr: Rhetoric, Chaucer’s ‘The Prioress’ Tale,’ and the Death of the ‘Litel Clergeon’.” *CEA Critic* 78, no. 3 (November 2016): 4.

³⁷⁸ Nancy Bradley Warren, “Sacraments, Gender, and Authority in the Prioress’s Prologue and Tale and Pearl.” *Christianity and Literature* 66, no.3 (June 2017): 385-403.

³⁷⁹ Lewis, “The Prioress,” 96.

In the “General Prologue” the Prioress is described as “symple and coy” or modest and quiet.³⁸⁰ She has been educated, as seen with her knowledge of the French language, but Geoffrey points out that “For Fenssh of Parys was to hire unknowe” suggesting that she was not unintelligent, but was unrefined and ignorant of her own lack of worldliness.³⁸¹ Further, it “peyned” the Prioress “to countrefete cheere/ Of court, and to ben estatlich of manere,/ And to holden digne of reverence.”³⁸² This suggests that the Prioress took efforts to meet the standards of behavior and noble conduct expected of her, but did not naturally exhibit these manners. The Prioress is also described as someone who would cry at the sight of her dogs being harmed.³⁸³ As this is included at all, it likely serves as an example of her emotional responses. As Lewis aptly observes, the Prioress is “neither a proper nun, nor a proper lady.”³⁸⁴ She is described as someone who does not fit her role, but who is desperately trying to appear as if she does.

“The Prioress’s Tale” is the best-known miracle of the Virgin story and an example of hagiography. These types of stories are unique in that they provide insight, as Thomas Head points out, into “the author and about who used the text—their ideals and practices, their concerns and aspirations—as it does about the saints who are their subjects.”³⁸⁵ Notably, in the prologue to her tale, the Prioress evokes Mary, mother of Jesus, to be her muse.³⁸⁶ Head notes that it was around “the twelfth and thirteenth centuries” when “collections of miracles associated with that very special female saint, the Virgin Mary, became a staple of both Latin and vernacular literatures.”³⁸⁷ Thus, her use of this invocation and tale were a part of a popular trend.

³⁸⁰ Chaucer, “General Prologue,” line 119.

³⁸¹ Chaucer, “General Prologue,” line 126.

³⁸² Chaucer, “General Prologue,” line 139-141.

³⁸³ Chaucer, “General Prologue,” line 146-150.

³⁸⁴ Lewis, “The Prioress,” 97.

³⁸⁵ Thomas Head, “Introduction.” *Medieval Hagiography: An Anthology* (New York: Routledge, 2001), xiii.

³⁸⁶ Geoffrey Chaucer, “The Prologue of the Prioress’s Tale.” In *The Riverside Chaucer* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987), lines 450-480.

³⁸⁷ Head, “Introduction,” xxi.

“The Prioress’s Tale” tells a story about a young boy who is seven years old. The Prioress introduces this child by describing the Christian school.

A litel scole of Cristen folk ther stood
 Doun at the ferther ende, in which ther were
 Children an heep, ycomen of Cristen blood,
 That learned in that scole yeer by yere
 Swich manere doctrine as men used there,
 This is to say, to syngen and to rede,
 As smale children doon in hire childhede.

Among this children was a wydwes son,
 A litel clergeon, seven yeer of age,
 That day by day to scole was his wone,
 And eek also, where as he saugh th’ymage
 Of Cristes mooder, hadde he in usage,
 As hym was taught, to knele adoun and seye
 His *Ave Marie*, as he goth by the weye.³⁸⁸

This boy opts to skip his grammar lessons to focus on memorizing a song that praises the Mother of Christ. While he sings this song every day, he gains the attention of the Jewish community and, according to the Prioress, they murder him for such annoyance.³⁸⁹ Because Mary blesses the boy with a seed upon his tongue, he is able to sing and speak even with his throat cut. It is only after the priests remove the seed that the boy finally dies peacefully.

This young boy is mostly associated with appropriate stages within the Ages of Man paradigms. The Prioress describes him again and again as a “litel child.”³⁹⁰ J. A. Burrow emphasizes the importance of the child’s age, noting that the schoolboy is

Just young enough for the Prioress to refer to him as ‘this innocent’ and to number him among the Holy Innocents; but he is also, as his eager conversation with an older schoolmate shows, on the point of becoming a real schoolboy. It is one of those critical moments of transition from one age to another, delicately rendered by Chaucer.³⁹¹

³⁸⁸ Geoffrey Chaucer, “The Prioress’s Tale.” In *The Riverside Chaucer* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987), lines 495-508.

³⁸⁹ Antisemitic sentiment in martyr stories like this was not unusual during this period.

³⁹⁰ Chaucer, “Prioress’s Tale,” lines 210-212: 516, 552, 596, 667, etc.

³⁹¹ Burrow, *Ages of Man*, 74.

That he is on the verge of change does link to the various ages and paradigms. He is not yet old enough to be impacted by Venus or be influenced by desires like lust. Additionally, the boy hears this song while at school, but cannot translate the Latin. He then seeks out an older student to explain and translate the song. This behavior, and his struggle with language learning, fits well with the Astrological paradigm for young childhood, firmly associates him with the age of seven. Derek Brewer also recognizes this element to the child character in “The Prioresses’ Tale,” suggesting that “by making him only seven, Chaucer increases the pathos, but also the realism, and he is extremely accurate about the child’s academic schooling...a boy of seven is more innocent than one of ten, more docile and eager to learn.”³⁹² Moreover, within the Astrological ages, the child is in the early stages of Mercury’s influence, building his intelligence and developing his logic. That he is capable of mental tasks, specifically with memorization, places him somewhere between Preoperational and Concrete-Operational. He can recite a song in a specific order, but does not yet understand its meaning.³⁹³ He is unbothered by asking another student for help,³⁹⁴ and therefore not expressing concerns with inferiority or his own incompetence. Because he asks for help in this way from a peer, the young schoolboy is likely within Erikson’s stage three of Psychosocial development. This is a whole stage below where his age should put him. The expression of this childlike behavior emphasizes his immature innocence. All of these stages are either appropriate for a seven-year-old, or associated with children who are a bit younger than the “litel clergeon.”

This character, notably also without a name, does demonstrate more personality than the previous child characters. The “litel clergeon” clearly has an individual motivation that sets him

³⁹² Brewer, *Traditions and Innovations*, 52.

³⁹³ Chaucer, “Prioress's Tale,” lines 521-524.

³⁹⁴ Chaucer, “Prioress's Tale,” lines 525-527.

apart from his other classmates. This expansion of his character, with his love of Mary, provides the reasoning for the miracle that occurs. The Prioresses' child character also has dialog. He speaks specifically about Mary's song and how important and beautiful he finds it.

“And is this song maked in reverence
Of Cristes mooder?” seyde this innocent.
“Now, certes, I wol do my diligence
To konne it al er Cristemasse be went.
Though that I for my prymer shal be shent
And shal be beten thries in an houre,
I wol it konne Oure Lady for to honoure!”³⁹⁵

He has his own voice and values. He asks if the song is truly about Christ's Mother, and because it is, it is so important to him that he even endeavors to learn by Christmas time even though that will mean he will be punished. This diversion from his schoolwork and explanation of his motivation, especially expressed in his own voice, emphasizes the importance and agency of this child, especially in comparison to the other children of his age group. He can speak and act of his own choice, where his fellows (both inside and outside of this particular tale) do not.

Lewis notes that “a vituperative and indignant tone permeates other interpretations of the Prioress...especially marked in some analysis of the relationship between her portrait in the ‘General Prologue’ and the anti-Semitic content of her tale, which is held to reveal the cruel, uncharitable bigotry lying behind her pleasing facade.”³⁹⁶ She adds that these “debates about the relative proportions of vice and virtue in the Prioress's make-up often discuss her conduct in relation to the social status which Chaucer ascribed to her.”³⁹⁷ These ideas and how the Prioress is described in the “General Prologue” in conversation with Colley's argument that the Prioress all urge the audience to “forgo logic in favor of emotional reaction and blind acceptance”³⁹⁸ and

³⁹⁵ Chaucer, “Prioress's Tale,” lines 537-543.

³⁹⁶ Lewis, “The Prioress,” 97.

³⁹⁷ Lewis, “The Prioress,” 97.

³⁹⁸ Colley, “Creating a Martyr,” 4.

suggest that the Prioress is a performer. If she is just a satirical character, performing her duties through a façade, then this tale is hollow, and the “litel clergeon” and his story are just tools used to support her image. This argument is supported by the popularity of both her evocation of Mary and the antisemitic sentiment. However, if the Prioress is a genuine example of a monastic woman who leads a religious community, then this tale becomes a didactic martyr story with a powerful religious message. The martyr child, regardless, demonstrates distinct and clear associations to the Ages of Man. Overall, he is positioned in the expected stages, and only associated with a few more childish (younger) levels. This characterization emphasizes the boy’s innocence and child-like disposition. He is distinctly and intentionally represented as pure and innocent.

Conclusion

Chaucer incorporates a variety of young adults, children, and infants into the *Canterbury Tales*. Even with such a variable “authorship” to each of these stories, there are some notable consistencies among his representation of this young group of people. Infants, for example, remain nameless in their tales unless and until they grow into childhood. Without names, these infants are consistently used as props for comedy, tools of manipulation, and objects that motivate characters to respond in specific ways. The use of the infants as tools for manipulation, however, especially against their mothers, does emphasize the expectation of women loving their children so dearly that they would be persuaded. Griselda’s lack of action to protect her children in “The Clerk’s Tale” is set up to be shocking and demonstrative of inhuman patience, emphasizing the value of infants, but also reinforcing their narrative function.

The children in the *Canterbury Tales* are not as consistently represented as the infants. Although these characters are typically presented with more details than their infant counterparts, as seen with descriptions about their clothes and activities, they still tend to lack any notable personality. The Prioresses' child character, however, diverges from the other younger child character representations. He is described as having a personal motivation and with dialogue. This suggests much more agency and individuality than all the other younger characters. Such purposeful description fits with his separate purpose. While the children in the "Clerk's Tale" are used as figures to both punish and reward Griselda, the Prioress's schoolboy is described in such a way to move her audience emotionally. To do so, the audience needs to understand his motivations, personality, and innocent disposition. Thus, in a way similar to infants and regardless of their connections or disconnections to the Ages of Man, children and adolescents are designed to emotionally manipulate either (or both) the audience or characters in the story.

The young adults in the *Canterbury Tales* seem to fit into one of two categories. The youths tend to be immature or adult-like. Young adults, for the most part, associate directly with the third stage of the seven Astrological ages and within the sixth stage of Erikson's Psychosocial Development. They desire intimate relationships, even so much as to behave immorally to achieve such relationships. Whether it is cheating Alison or John the clerk fearing to be found inferior to his friend, Alan, almost all the young adults described in the *Canterbury Tales* are lustful and immature. The only two characters that are outside of this characterization and do not connect to these schemes are Constance and Griselda. They both are immune to Venus's influences and remain virtuous throughout their stories. This separation occurs because they are not designed to be representative of real young adults. These women are set up (whether through the Man of Law, the Clerk, or Chaucer) to be unchangeable examples of virtuous

behavior. All young adults in the *Canterbury Tales*, excluding Griselda and Constance, also demonstrate a moral, and sometimes cognitive, immaturity. This emphasis on their childish dispositions, often coinciding with lust-filled escapades, often serves a comedic purpose. However, it is also, therefore, insightful. It seems that, much like young adults today, an immature young adult behaving like a love-struck fool is amusing to experienced older adults of the Middle Ages.

There are also consistencies in gender representation of the young adults. All the young adult women, for example, are objects of desire whether they return the interest or not. In every story, no matter their own actual beauty, background, or marital status, all of the young women are objects of at least one man's desire. This is not wholly surprising, as Mann points out that "women's sexual role is of great importance" in estate's satire.³⁹⁹ There are also consistencies among the male youths. Chaucer presents all of his young adult men as clerks, squires, or young knights. Thus, none of these young men are without a purpose or training of some kind. Moreover, all the men are heavily influenced by Venus and their lustful desires. This, along with their various other associations to the developmental schemes, emphasizes the consistent portrayal of young adult men. They are often witty and deceptive.

Overall, it seems that Chaucer intentionally created realistic, recognizable young adults in the *Canterbury Tales*. No matter the pilgrim, their social class, or their background, every storyteller describes the young adults, children, and infants in the same exact way except for the exceptionally holy ones. The infants and children were used as narrative tools to emotionally impact the audience (particularly with the "litel clergeon") and manipulate the adults in the stories, while the young adults actively created the comedy and drama in their tales. These young

³⁹⁹ Mann, *Medieval Estates Satire*, 121.

adults were consistently realistic in their descriptions, if only consistently described as immature in their morality. The only exceptions to this are Constance and Giselda: the representations of virtuous young adults. Much like with the Christ Child, these two young women are characterized as much more mature than their years would suggest. These unique characters are not intended to be recognizable as young adults, but rather serve as representations of the virtues they exemplified.

CHAPTER IV: THE HOLY CHILD PEARL

The Pearl-poet is one of the most talented English poets of the Middle Ages. With works such as *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, *Patience*, and of course, *Pearl*, the poet has expressed some of the most memorable, complex, and beautiful English poetry of the era. He has a particular talent to express genuine emotion, like grief, while layering his narratives with beautiful imagery. The artistry of *Pearl*, specifically, is only matched by its consolation and Christian-based instruction. This artistic, yet instructive poem is built using a variety of genres: by layering multiple types of writing, multiple layers of meaning are created. At its core, the poem is a didactic consolation. This educational solace is developed through the focus of the poem, a girl that scholars name “Pearl.” Pearl is the lost daughter of the narrator of the poem. As details are gradually revealed, the reader discovers that Pearl was about two years old when she died. This revelation of her age is juxtaposed to how Pearl is characterized and how she acts. She behaves and speaks like an adult teacher, serving as the religious instructor for her father; yet she physically remains the small infant-child that her father recognizes. In this complex representation, Pearl’s behavior, disposition, and her speech do not conform to any of the Ages of Man associated with infancy nor childhood. That she is atypical for a child, and acts as an infant teacher, suggests that her characterization is designed to stand out as separate from secular representations of children. The Pearl-poet purposefully designed this little teacher to defy readers’ expectations, using the unexpected characterization of Pearl and her teachings to demonstrate and reinforce the meaning and instruction of the poem.

Pearl is found in only one extant manuscript. That this manuscript survives today is astonishing. Jane Beal explains that

The existence of *Pearl* in a single manuscript, Cotton Nero A.x, is something of a miracle. There are no other copies of the poem known to be extant, and the one book in

which it appears survived a fire that broke out on October 23, 1731, at Ashurnham House, Westminster, where it was being temporarily stored with other Cotton manuscripts.⁴⁰⁰

This manuscript includes all four of the Pearl-poet's works: *Pearl*, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, *Cleanness*, and *Patience*. The manuscript includes a few illustrations before and occasionally after each poem, each sketch pertaining to the content of the nearby story. Based on the unique and consistent scribal writing, it is likely that this entire manuscript was written by the same scribe and dated to the late fourteenth century. Although regionally separate from Chaucer, this manuscript was written around the same time that he was writing.

Pearl itself is about grief, describing a father's dream-vision of his lost daughter. The poem begins with the Dreamer⁴⁰¹ expressing his grief for the loss of his Pearl.⁴⁰² He falls asleep and dreams of unearthly landscapes, exploring the terrain until he finds her, Pearl, standing across a river under a cliff. When he expresses his grief for her, she admonishes him for his fear of losing her again. They talk back and forth, her teaching him how to demonstrate true Christian faith and discipleship through various references to the Bible and theology and him with challenges to her claims and misunderstandings of her statements. At the end of the poem, she returns to the City of God, where the Dreamer cannot follow. He tries to cross the river to reach her, but as he tries, he is cast out of the dream vision and awakens. As he does, he finds himself lying across her grave, now a changed man. At the core of the poem are the ideas of grief, death, and faith in the midst of both of those challenges.

⁴⁰⁰ Jane Beal, *The Signifying Power of Pearl: Medieval Literary and Cultural Contexts for the Transformation of the Genre* (New York: Routledge, 2017).

⁴⁰¹ Also referenced as narrator and jeweler in various scholarship.

⁴⁰² This term meaning both the precious gem and serving as the child's name. Some scholars, like J. R. R. Tolkien, describe Pearl as Margaret: the name Margaret means Pearl in Ancient Greek.

The complexity of *Pearl* is such that even the genre of the poem is debated. Scholars such as Angela Carson claim that it is simply an elegy,⁴⁰³ while others, such as Wendell Stacy Johnson, argue that the poem is intended as an allegory.⁴⁰⁴ J. R. R. Tolkien even speaks to this debate,⁴⁰⁵ concluding that the poem is necessarily a combination of genres, while also serving as theological debate:

Without the elegiac basis and the sense of great personal loss which pervades it, *Pearl* would indeed be the mere theological treatise on a special point, which some critics have called it. But without the theological debate the grief would never have risen above the ground. Dramatically the debate represents a long process of thought and mental struggle, an experience as real as the first blind grief of bereavement.⁴⁰⁶

He explains that if the Dreamer were awakened from his dream before he could complete the learning experience as it is described in the poem, then he would not come away changed. He would still be anxious, grieving, and lost. It is the almost Socratic-like logical debate of theological ideas and the combination of poetic and elegiac qualities that work together to propel the narrative and purpose of the poem. *Pearl* works as this argumentative dialogue, with its core thesis about God's love, generosity, sacrifice, and how the faithful are consoled in all three.

Other scholars focus on the events of the poem, viewing them as examples of a religious journey. Heather Maring, for example, examines the various performative and verbal gift exchanges as a part of *Pearl*. Maring concludes that the poem is an "'interactive' form of consolation, where one may participate in rites that bind heaven and earth in orderly systems of obligation that mask the messy randomness of death."⁴⁰⁷ In this, Maring sees the consolation of

⁴⁰³ See Angela Carson's, "Aspects of Elegy in the Middle English 'Pearl.'" *Studies in Philology* 62, no.1 (January 1965).

⁴⁰⁴ See Wendell Stacy Johnson's, "The Imagery and Diction of the Pearl: Toward an Interpretation." *ELH* 20, no.3 (1953).

⁴⁰⁵ J. R. R. Tolkien, "Introduction: III Pearl." In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Pearl, and Sir Orfeo*. (New York: Ballantine Books, 1975), 8.

⁴⁰⁶ Tolkien, "Pearl," 15.

⁴⁰⁷ Heather Maring, "'Never the Less': Gift-Exchange and the Medieval Dream-Vision 'Pearl.'" *The Journal of Midwest Modern Language Association* 38, no.2 (Fall 2005): 11.

the poem as the purpose for the Dreamer's "journey." Similar to this idea, Stanton de Voren Hoffman argues that *Pearl* is designed to represent a "spiritual adventure, the journey of the soul as it goes forth seeking truth."⁴⁰⁸ He explains that the Dreamer is motivated by grief and his "journey" is guided from grief to consolation by his daughter.

The "journey" the Dreamer experiences is that of a dream-vision, a well-known genre in medieval literature. Lisa Bitel posits that "dream narratives show us how early medieval Europeans conceived of and experienced the supernatural, and how this affected the social structures and religious institutions they were erecting on the frontier of Christianity."⁴⁰⁹ Dream-visions provide a fictional landscape where authors can reflect and wrestle with theological ideas and issues. This same reflection occurs in *Pearl*. However, there seems to be a shift away from the Old English focus on the otherworldly aspects in the Middle English versions of dream-visions. *Pearl* seems to be more grounded in realism in comparison to early medieval dream-visions, such as the *Dream of the Rood*. In the older poem, a cross is personified as one of Christ's loyal retainers and speaks of its own suffering along with Christ's crucifixion. This more grounded quality of the Middle English poem is the basis of Cecillia Hatt's analysis. She explains that "the dream should be understood simply *as* a dream, subjected to craft and embellishment, but made up of what is already inside the narrator's head."⁴¹⁰ Hatt does not believe that the poem contains any intentional supernatural elements. She is arguing that this is not a poem about supernatural concepts, but a poem about human grief and the comfort found in grounded Christian teachings.

⁴⁰⁸ Stanton de Voren Hoffman, "The 'Pearl': Notes for an Interpretation." *Modern Philology* 58, no.2 (November 1960): 80.

⁴⁰⁹ Lisa Bitel, "In Visu Noctis": Dreams in European Hagiography and Histories, 450-900." *History of Religions* 31, no.1 (August 1991): 40.

⁴¹⁰ Cecelia Hatt, "Pearl, the Jewelers Dream." *God and the Gawain-Poet* (Rochester: Boydell & Brewer, 2015), 19.

In comparison to dream-visions found in Old English, like the *Dream of the Rood*, it does seem as though *Pearl* demonstrates more grounded imagery. Where the *Dream of the Rood* emphasizes the valiant warrior aspects of Christ, describing the passion as a battle, *Pearl* is a theological debate between a father and his daughter about grief. There are some supernatural elements included, of course, as Pearl herself is dead. The descriptions of heaven are also intended as “supernatural” – as descriptions of unrecognizable, unearthly details – intended to designate the space as distinctly not earth-like, but heavenly. However, the focus of the poem is on individual crisis and emotion and its uses of instructive dialogue, making this beautiful poem theologically didactic in a more immediate, grounded way than seen in earlier dream-visions.

Pearl: Young Adult or Infant?

How old Pearl is directly impacts how to interpret her characterization in relation to the Ages of Man. Although most scholars agree that Pearl is an infant or young child, both Jane Beal and Angela Carson claim that Pearl is a young adult maiden. In her attempts to “eliminat[e] the difficulties of transition between the jewel lost in the garden and the Pearl Maiden see in the vision,”⁴¹¹ Carson argues that

The theory that the Pearl died as a two-year-old child rests heavily on the statement that she has lived “not two ȝer *in* oure þede,” and it seems to me that for an understanding of the passage and, in fact, of the entire poem, these words must be taken at face value. Applied to a child who died at the age of two years, they are clumsy and inept; the poet is not saying that she has been “on earth” or “in the world” for two years; he says unequivocally that she has not lived two years in this land. A fair and possible conclusion to draw from the statement is that she came from another land.⁴¹²

Carson claims that the main indicator for exactly how old Pearl is does not refer to her age, but rather it refers to the years she has been in the physical geographical location or region that the

⁴¹¹ Carson, “Aspects of Elegy,” 27.

⁴¹² Carson, “Aspects of Elegy,” 19.

Dreamer is from. Her argument is rooted in the translation of the word “þede.” “Þede” can be translate as land, nation, region, realm, or kingdom. Her literal interpretation, therefore, is not implausible. However, this specific word choice likely has more to do with the rhyme scheme of the poem than the emphasis on the literal meaning of the word. The first line of this stanza ends with “dede.”⁴¹³ Two lines thereafter “þede” is introduced, followed by “Crede” and “spede,” both occurring two lines after the previous term, as would be expected according to the rhyme scheme of the poem.⁴¹⁴ Thus, it is much more likely that this specific word choice of “þede” is meant poetically and was chosen for its rhyming structure over a more literally accurate term. The word “þede” is a general description, but also effectively conveys “on earth,” which is preferable in light of other evidence in the text. As such, the poet highlights that the young girl was only on earth (rather than in heaven or otherwise) for two years.

Carson continues her argument by explaining:

If, as the Jeweller says, the Pearl died without having learned the Pater and Creed, it does not necessarily follow that she died as a child. It is true that children were taught these prayers, but it is also true that the learning of them would be requisite for a newly baptized adult. All that is implied in the poet’s statement is that before her death the Pearl had no time to learn to please God or to pray—at least to a degree sufficient to merit so great a reward...if she had lived only two years in the land, it is not impossible that a girl or young woman might have been baptized as an adult.⁴¹⁵

She argues here that the additional proof of Pearl’s young age, that she lacks knowledge of the Christian faith and was only recently baptised, do not directly serve as support for Pearl’s child-connections. Instead, Carson believes that these are just additional details serving to explain how Pearl is just a young lady from a foreign land. If this were the case, what reason would the poet

⁴¹³ “Pearl.” *The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript: Pearl, Cleanness, Patience, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, edited by Andrew, Malcolm and Ronald Waldon. (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2007), line 481. Later referred to as *Pearl*.

⁴¹⁴ *Pearl*, lines 483, 485, 487.

⁴¹⁵ Carson, “Aspects of Elegy,” 19-20.

have to emphasize these details? No other statements in the poem directly correspond to this idea of Pearl as a foreigner. It is much more likely that the purpose of these details is to juxtapose Pearl's infancy to her demonstrated wisdom. Her child-like presence is reinforced repeatedly throughout the poem, making it clear that Pearl is a young child. J. R. R. Tolkien identifies Pearl, the maiden, as a little girl. He explains that

The maiden of the vision accepts the identification [she responds to the Dreamer's calls to her by name], and herself refers to her death in stanza 64. In stanza 35 she says she was at that time very young, and the Dreamer himself in stanza 41 tells us that she was not yet two years old and had not yet learned her creed or prayers. The whole theological argument that follows assumes the infancy of the child when she left this world.⁴¹⁶

Tolkien's assertion that the framework set up in the poem directly supports and depends on the interpretation of Pearl as a child corresponds to the statements that Pearl makes about the generosity of God's love. Her retelling of the Parable of the Laborers⁴¹⁷ only makes sense if she is a child.⁴¹⁸

Similar to Carson,⁴¹⁹ Beal claims that Pearl's consistent descriptions of "youthfulness" are in relation to her spiritual naïveté rather than her literal age.⁴²⁰ She supports this by examining the various sections that directly refer to Pearl's age, concluding that "in each of the six passages usually given in support of the argument that the Pearl-Maiden is the Dreamer's two-year-old daughter, the textual evidence proves ambiguous."⁴²¹ Moreover, she contends that the term "nerre" could suggest that the two were closer than father and daughter in either "blood kinship or emotional intimacy or both."⁴²² Because of this reading, she suggests that the love and

⁴¹⁶ Tolkien, "Pearl," 9-10.

⁴¹⁷ *Pearl*, lines 505-587.

⁴¹⁸ Specifics about the terminology used in this section and other supporting details for Pearl's infancy are explained in detail later in this chapter.

⁴¹⁹ Beal uses Carson as a key source for her argument in her chapter discussing the "romantic" relationship between the Dreamer and Pearl.

⁴²⁰ Beal, *The Signifying Power*, 23.

⁴²¹ Beal, *The Signifying Power*, 25.

⁴²² Beal, *The Signifying Power*, 24.

grief expressed between Pearl and the Dreamer is “that between two lovers, rather than a blood kinship.”⁴²³ She concludes that the “relationship between the Dreamer and the Pearl-Maiden may be a courtly one,”⁴²⁴ and, among other details, the illustrations of the manuscript “position the bodies of the Dreamer and Maiden in relation to one another in a way that evokes the tension of male desire and female resistance typical of courtly love romances.”⁴²⁵

As Beal herself notes,⁴²⁶ this “courtly” use of language is also found in Marian devotion literature. The relationship with Mary in these devotions is not understood as a courtly love romance that leads to adultery, nor as a love-game – both of which Beal suggests are occurring between the Dreamer and Pearl. This use of courtly language alone, therefore, does not independently support Beal’s interpretation of *Pearl*. With regard to the illustrations in the manuscript, there are two pages that depict both characters.⁴²⁷ Both illustrations place a man in the lower left corner of the page and a feminine figure in the upper right corner of the page and include the river that runs between them. The man, present in all the illustrations, is clearly intended to represent the Dreamer. The feminine figure is dressed in all white and has golden hair, clearly signifying that she is supposed to be Pearl. Pearl is not definitively a child or woman in this image because both her age and size are unclear. If compared to the tree beside her, and it is assumed the perspective of the scene is equivalent to natural distance contraction, Pearl would be taller than the tree, and both she and the tree would be significantly larger than the man.

This bizarre sizing is not unusual for medieval art. According to Nicole Ruta, Alistair Burleigh, and Robert Pepperell, “before the discovery of linear perspective in Italy in the early

⁴²³ Beal, *The Signifying Power*, 24.

⁴²⁴ Beal, *The Signifying Power*, 25.

⁴²⁵ Beal, *The Signifying Power*, 26.

⁴²⁶ Beal, *The Signifying Power*, 30.

⁴²⁷ *Gawain Manuscript*, MS Cotton Nero A.x. (art.3): Digital Facsimile (University of Calgary Digital Collections, London, British Library).

15th century, European artists varied the size of figures in their compositions, often in a way that inverts the laws of optics and linear perspective.”⁴²⁸ They explain that there has been much debate about why medieval artists used this method of organizing visual space and examine the two major suggestions: “the standard ‘hierarchical scaling’ thesis, which claims that artists manipulated the relative sizes of characters following conventions about the status of figures” and “the ‘inner view’ thesis, according to which artists resized characters in their compositions to direct visual attention ‘inside’ the paintings towards the most prominent character in the scene and to emotionally engage the viewer by assuming the character’s point of view.”⁴²⁹ They conclude that the first theory, the “hierarchical scaling” thesis, is more consistent with medieval art. Thus, if this theory of hierarchical scaling is applied to these illustrations, Pearl’s size in the image is not intended to represent how large she physically is, but rather to demonstrate her higher and more important status within the narrative.

With these ideas in mind, the artist depicts both characters fully clothed and, although the man is reaching for Pearl in the first of the two pages, such a gesture does not clearly indicate any male desire or tension. The poem describes the Dreamer in grief over the loss of Pearl and his fear of losing her again.⁴³⁰ The arms outstretched suggest this complex emotion without any sexual or desirous connotations. If anything, that he is gesturing in a praying position (with his hands held together and lifted to his face) in the second of the two images suggests that the interaction between the two characters is a spiritual one.

⁴²⁸ Nicole Ruta, Alistair Burleigh, and Robert Pepperell, “Space and Scale in Medieval Painting Reflects Imagination and Perception.” *Gestalt Theory* 44, no.1-2 (August 2022): 61.

⁴²⁹ Ruta, Burleigh, and Pepperell, “Space and Scale,” 61.

⁴³⁰ *Pearl*, lines 235-376.

Moreover, contrary to Beal's assertions, the text is not ambiguous about Pearl's age. The Dreamer describes Pearl as a young child,⁴³¹ an infant,⁴³² and as I interpret the line, as living on earth for two years.⁴³³ These specific details are listed among numerous references to her young age and small stature throughout the text. Beal's suggestion that the relationship between the Dreamer and Pearl is that of lovers is unfounded. At no point does the poet directly suggest any detail that supports this understanding of their relationship. The poet describes Pearl as "me nerre þen aunte or nece"⁴³⁴ – that she was nearer, closer in familial relationship than an aunt or niece. This phrasing does not suggest that this was a romantic bond between the two characters. It is clearly a reference to an immediate familial relationship. Hatt agrees, directly arguing that, "I read *Pearl* as describing someone, actual or imaginary, grieving after the death of a little girl. The mourner is presented as if he were a father."⁴³⁵ She does note that "there is some ambiguity" in how the Dreamer "describes his relationship with the child."⁴³⁶ So, she recognizes that Dreamer's claim, "Ho watz me nerre þen aunte or nece,"⁴³⁷ does not directly indicate that Pearl is his daughter. However, with these statements, Hatt is both acknowledging the Dreamer's odd framing of their relationship, but nonetheless asserting that Pearl is still a child. Moreover, Tolkien also agrees, firmly believing that the Dreamer's sorrow directly points to his position as a father. He writes that

'She was more near akin to me than aunt or niece.' *Nerre* can in the language of the time only mean here "nearer in blood-relationship." In this sense it was normal and very frequent. And although it is true that 'nearer than aunt or niece' might, even so, refer to a sister, the disparity in age makes the assumption of this relationship far less probable. The depth of sorrow portrayed for a child so young belongs rather to parenthood.⁴³⁸

⁴³¹ *Pearl*, line 412.

⁴³² *Pearl*, line 162.

⁴³³ *Pearl*, line 483.

⁴³⁴ *Pearl*, line 233. She was [to] me nearer than aunt or niece.

⁴³⁵ Hatt, "The Jeweler's Dream," 17.

⁴³⁶ Hatt, "The Jeweler's Dream," 17.

⁴³⁷ *Pearl*, line 233. She was [to] me nearer than aunt or niece.

⁴³⁸ Tolkien, "Pearl," 10.

For Tolkien, the despair exhibited and the age disparity both reinforce the idea that the Dreamer is Pearl's father. The Dreamer's desperation and fear of losing Pearl resonates more with the depth of despair found in the unnatural experience felt by a parent losing a child than to lover or other family member.

In their various arguments Carson and Beal point out other young adult maidens in the works of other writers of the period are described in a similar way. One example of this occurs with Griselda in Geoffrey Chaucer's "Clerk's Tale." Griselda is described as a "tendre mayden"⁴³⁹ whereas Pearl is described separately as both "tender"⁴⁴⁰ and a "mayden."⁴⁴¹ Even so, the term "mayden" is a common word used in medieval literature that designated a character's virginity, not their age. If used in any connection to age, "mayden" only signifies the time before marriage. Thus, even if these characters are similarly described, it is not enough to prove that she is older. Tolkien recognizes that

It has been objected that the child as seen in Heaven is not like an infant of two in appearance, speech, or manners: she addresses her father formally as *sir*, and shows no filial affection for him. But this is an apparition of a spirit, a soul not yet reunited with its body after the resurrection, so that theories relevant to the form and age of the glorified and risen body do not concern us. And as an immortal spirit, the maiden's relations to the earthly man, the father of her body, are altered. She does not deny his fatherhood, and when she addresses him as *sir* she only uses the form of address that was customary for medieval children.

Tolkien claims that this spirit of Pearl is intentionally not infant-like in her behavior, words, or even in how she is dressed. That is not to say that Pearl is unrecognizable – the Dreamer recognizes her immediately. It is that Pearl does not behave in a way that is recognizably infant-like. Pearl is no longer a human infant on earth, but a bride of Christ in heaven. At no point does

⁴³⁹ Geoffrey Chaucer, "The Clerk's Tale," In *The Riverside Chaucer* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987), line 1039.

⁴⁴⁰ *Pearl*, line 412.

⁴⁴¹ *Pearl*, line 162.

she deny she is the Dreamer's daughter, and she addresses him with respectful "sirs" as she would be expected to. Thus, there is no strong evidence to support the claim that Pearl is older than an child.

As I have proved, that Pearl is an infant, and not a young adult, is much more likely and a more compelling argument. From the framework of the poem, the details of grief, and how Pearl addresses the Dreamer, all of the major aspects of the poem itself serve to support Pearl's infancy. Her demeanor is not that of an infant, but that does not mean that the poet intended for her to be anything but an infant. It is the maturity and wisdom given to an infant who died that makes the poem's teachings so effective. This "incongruity" that Carson and Beal try to "solve" is exactly the juxtaposition the author develops to reinforce the poem's consolation.

Pearl as a Child

Much of the confusion about Pearl's age is likely caused by the un-childlike conduct of this infant-child. Pearl does not behave or speak in a child-like manner, nor does she exhibit the mental capacity or morality expected of a two-year-old child. Instead, Pearl is described as behaving like a mature, intelligent, and instructive adult. Pearl is a teacher in this poem. Because she is so unusual, it is not surprising for modern readers to misunderstand this characterization of her. Yet, that she is not recognizably infantile, and is instead behaving like a mature adult, is exactly what the poet intended for this representation of a precious teacher and resonates with the distinctive illustrations of Pearl in the manuscript as described earlier.

When Pearl is first introduced, she is just a memory. The Dreamer explains that "Ne proued I neuer her precious pere"⁴⁴² and "Of þat pryuy perle withouten spot."⁴⁴³ Immediately the

⁴⁴² *Pearl*, line 4. I never discovered her precious peer (her equal).

⁴⁴³ *Pearl*, line 12. Of that special pearl without spot.

Dreamer (and poet) are emphasizing that Pearl is entirely unique and so pure that she is spotless. In his grief, he worries if the earth itself is tainting her spotlessness.⁴⁴⁴ This is the first indication that Pearl is dead, buried beside the Dreamer as he reflects on his loss. Moreover, this is also indicative of the multifaceted meaning of the poem. Literally, the earth will “dirty” the precious gem; but figuratively, the Dreamer worries that the earth will mar and stain his precious and pure child (he is worrying about the decay that occurs after death). This conception of what might be happening to his Pearl demonstrates the Dreamer’s flawed view of death, highlighting his lack of recognition of Christ’s sacrifice and impact for those who die. This lack of faith and understanding serves as the main source of debate and instruction in the poem.

After he falls asleep, and his dream begins, the Dreamer describes the heavenly landscape around him, including fantastic details of the plants and wildlife. When he spots Pearl in this heavenly land, he notes that at the foot of the crystal cliff,

Per sete a faunt,
 A mayden of menske, ful debonere;
 Blysnande whyt watz hyr bleaunt;
 I knew hyr wel, I hade sen hyr ere.
 As glysnande golde þat man con schere,
 So schon þat schene anvnder schore.
 On lenghe I loked to hyr þere;
 Pe lenger, I knew hyr more and more.⁴⁴⁵

Immediately she is described as a “faunt,” which translates to either an infant or very young child. By establishing Pearl as a “faunt,” the Pearl-poet immediately sets up specific expectations for how Pearl will act and what she may be able to accomplish. As an infant-child, she is

⁴⁴⁴ *Pearl*, lines 22-24.

⁴⁴⁵ *Pearl*, lines 162-168. There sat an infant (or young child), a maiden of courtesy, most gracious; gleaming white was her silk clothing; I knew her well, I had seen her before. As glistening gold that man can cut (gold leaf), so shone that fair [one] at the foot of the cliff shore. At length I looked at her there; the longer [I looked], I knew her more and more.

expected to not have fully developed speech,⁴⁴⁶ that she would mimic others rather than developing and expressing her own logical thoughts,⁴⁴⁷ that she would be demonstrating rapid physical and mental growth,⁴⁴⁸ and that her moral reasoning would be at the lowest, most underdeveloped stages of the PreConventional level.⁴⁴⁹ These characteristics should be clear in how Pearl is represented. Yet, none of these qualities are associated with this child. The details about the “faunt’s” appearance are followed by the term “mayden,” which, in this context, is not an indication of age but virginity.⁴⁵⁰ Pearl’s beauty, in hues of white and gold, is used to emphasize her purity and innocence. The Dreamer recognizes Pearl, and the more he looks at her the more he remembers her. This recognition suggests that Pearl must look just like she did before she died – that she has not been physically altered or changed in any significant way. Pearl still looks like a two-year-old.

Thereafter, Pearl’s size and attire are described in detail. She was:

Pat gracious gay withouten galle,
 So smolpe, so smal, so seme slyzt,
 Rysez vp in hir araye ryalle,
 A precios pyece in periez pyzt⁴⁵¹

The Dreamer uses the phrase “so smal, so seme slyzt,” emphasizing how small and slight she is. This also reinforces the idea of her infancy. She is physically small, just as an infant-child is expected to be. Pearl is adorned in “araye ryalle” or royal array and decorated with precious pearls. Thus, she is not only named Pearl, but covered with the same pure white precious gems.

⁴⁴⁶ As understood through the first ages of the Astrological Stages of Development and Piaget’s Psychological Development associated with infants.

⁴⁴⁷ As described in the second stage of the Astrological and Piaget’s paradigms, both associated with childhood.

⁴⁴⁸ This is expected for infants and children in all Ages of Man, but especially of the Physiological Four-Stages.

⁴⁴⁹ This stage of Kohlberg’s Moral Reasoning is expected of infants and children, and is seen with the fear of punishment obedience orientation and the personal reward orientation.

⁴⁵⁰ This description of a person was mainly used to emphasize their purity and virtuous nature.

⁴⁵¹ *Pearl*, lines 189-192. That gracious lovely [one] without flaw, so smooth, so small, so seemingly slight, rose up in her royal array, a precious one decorated in pearls.

Each part of her clothing is then described as meticulously covered in pearls. She is dressed in only white and gold colors with her gold hair shining brightly over her shoulders: both emphasizing her pale white face.⁴⁵² The colors, just like before, emphasize Pearl's associations with beauty and purity. Then, the Dreamer focuses on the stone placed at the center of Pearl's heart:

Bot a wonder perle withouten wemme
 Inmyddez hyr breste watz sette so sure;
 A mannez dom mozt dryȝly demme
 Er mynde mozt malte in hit measure.⁴⁵³

Thus, a pearl, so large and spotless that it is beyond comprehension, is positioned directly over Pearl's heart. Yet again, two layers of meaning can be drawn from these details. She is literally wearing a royal outfit, signifying her royal position in heaven; likewise, figuratively, these pearls and clothes all represent the purity and preciousness of Pearl's soul. The spotless pearl upon her chest suggests an incomprehensible purity and perfectness. Later in the poem, Pearl explains that the pearl over her heart

“This makellez perle þat boȝt is dere,
 Þe joueler gef fore alle hys god,
 Is lyke þe reme of heueness clere—
 So sayde þe Fader of folde and flode—
 For hit is wemlez, clene, and clere,
 And endelez rounde, and blyþe of mode,
 And commune to all þat ryȝtwys were.
 Lo, euen inmyddez my breste hit stode:
 My Lorde þe Lombe, þat schede Hys blode,
 He pyȝt hit þere in token of pes.
 I rede þe forsake þe worlde wode
 And porchace þy perle maskelles.”⁴⁵⁴

⁴⁵² *Pearl*, lines 193-216.

⁴⁵³ *Pearl*, lines 221-224. But a wonderful pearl without blemish was set in the middle of her breast so firmly; a man's judgement might be utterly baffled before his mind might take in its measure.

⁴⁵⁴ *Pearl*, lines 738-744. This peerless pearl that is bought dearly, [that for which] the jeweler gave all his goods, is like the realm of bright heaven – so said the Father of [the] earth and sea – for it is spotless, pure and bright, and endlessly round, and lovely of character, and common to all that right-wise were (that stayed virtuous). Lo, even in [the] middle of my breast it stood: my Lord the Lamb, that shed his blood, he fastened it there as [a] token of peace. I advise you to forsake the mad world and purchase your flawless pearl.

The Pearl is as pure and endless as heaven itself. In a note about the text, Malcolm Andrew and Ronald Waldron point out that “the pearl’s shape is thus seen to symbolize the perfection and infiniteness of heaven. It may be argued that the poem itself, with its meticulously proportioned construction, imitates this formal perfection.”⁴⁵⁵ The Pearl-maiden explains that it was Christ who placed this perfect pearl over her chest. She then encourages the Dreamer to do everything he can to “purchase” his own pearl as well.

This entire introduction to Pearl’s character is designed to establish her significance and innocence. She is royally arrayed in countless pearls, wearing gold and white silks, and presented as a vision of beauty. She is so beautiful with such a fair complexion that the Dreamer is shocked to see her:

The more I frayste hyr fayre face,
 Her figure fyn quen I had fonte,
 Suche gladande glory con to me glace
 As lyttel byfore þerto watz wonte.
 To calle hyr lyste con me enchance,
 Bot baysment gef myn hert a brunt.
 I se3 hyr in so strange a place—
 Such a burre my3t make myn herte blunt.
 Þenne verrez ho vp her fayre front,
 Hyr vysayge whyt as playn yuore:
 Pat stonge myn hert ful stray atount
 And euer þe lenger, þe more and more.⁴⁵⁶

The Dreamer is surprised that Pearl is dressed in such queenly attire and with a face as “whyt as playn yuore,” or as white as polished ivory, and out in the wilderness. He sees this infant-child,

⁴⁵⁵ Malcom Andrew and Andrew Waldron, “Pearl: Notes,” *The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript: Pearl, Cleanness, Patience, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, edited by Andrew, Malcolm and Ronald Waldon (Exeter:University of Exeter Press, 2007,)88. Later referred to as Pearl: Notes.

⁴⁵⁶ *Pearl*, lines 169-180. The more I scrutinized her fair face, when I had noted her fine figure, such gladdening glory began to glide to me as had been but little wont to do before. A desire to call to her began to urge me, but confusion gave my heart a blow. I saw her in so strange a place – such a blow might make my heart stunned. Then raised she up her fair forehead, her face white as polished ivory: that stung my heart [in] bewildered astoundment and ever the longer, the more the more.

adorned as she is, alone in this bizarre, unearthly and wild environment. As Pearl has not spoken or acted yet, it is entirely understandable for him to be surprised to see such an incongruent sight: that of an infant adorned in royal pearls standing out in the wilderness.

After this description, Pearl begins to interact with the Dreamer and defy all Age associated expectations.⁴⁵⁷ She approaches the Dreamer on her own, and then bows to him “in wommon lore.”⁴⁵⁸ This line immediately signals that Pearl is acting in an unusual way. For the Dreamer (and poet) to call attention to Pearl acting in a woman’s fashion, or with a woman’s wisdom, would be unnecessary if she were a young adult. The author’s description of Pearl’s behavior seems to be intentionally used to signal to the reader that the child is behaving in an unchildlike way. This is reinforced by the poet, as it is after this introduction that Pearl becomes an unyielding teacher. As the Dreamer explains his grief to her, expressing how he has missed her dearly, she immediately reprimands him for thinking she was entirely gone.⁴⁵⁹ She reminds him of Jesus’s sacrifice for humanity, teaching him through this and other Biblical references that he should not grieve as he is, but have faith and solace in God.⁴⁶⁰

Not long after the first reprimands and lessons, Pearl is described as “ful 3ong” or very young, while simultaneously being described as a queen and Christ’s bride.⁴⁶¹ The Dreamer challenges her claim, noting both that it should be Mary, mother of Christ who is Queen of Heaven⁴⁶² and that Pearl is too young to be a queen. He states “Þyself in heuen ouer hy3 þou heue, / To make þe quen þat watz so 3onge.”⁴⁶³ This emphasis on how she is “so 3onge” further

⁴⁵⁷ It is at this point in his description of Pearl that the Dreamer indicates that he is related to her. *Pearl*, 65: 233. “Ho watz me nerre þen aunte or nece.” She was [to] me nearer than aunt or niece.

⁴⁵⁸ *Pearl*, line 236 In woman’s wisdom (also “fashion” or “counsel”)

⁴⁵⁹ *Pearl*, lines 235-276.

⁴⁶⁰ *Pearl* lines 253-264 and 289-312.

⁴⁶¹ *Pearl*, lines 409-420.

⁴⁶² *Pearl*, lines 421-432.

⁴⁶³ *Pearl*, lines 473-474. “You raise yourself over high in heaven, to make [yourself] that was so young the queen.”

reinforces that Pearl is just a young child, and explains the Dreamer's disbelief at her position in heaven. It is here that Pearl explains that God's generosity is endless, and that her infancy (and the associated purity and innocence) only increases her chances at such a royal position. She first acknowledges Queen Mary's unique supremacy over all the queens of heaven,⁴⁶⁴ then teaches the Dreamer of God's limitless generosity, as demonstrated through the Parable of the Laborers.⁴⁶⁵ It is amidst this exchange that the Dreamer states specifically that Pearl "lyfed not two ȝer in oure þede."⁴⁶⁶ Moreover, it is at the end of this exchange that Pearl explains how she came into heaven: "Wheþer welnygh now I con bygynne— /In euentyde into þe vyne I come— /Fyrst of my hyre my Lorde con mynne."⁴⁶⁷ She explains that she is rewarded first and paid in full, while the others who "toke more tom" or spent more time on earth have not yet been rewarded.⁴⁶⁸ It is during the evening hour that the children who are baptized right before their death arrive in heaven (yet again, here is confirmation of Pearl's early age). She says "In euentyde into þe vyne I come," directly claiming her place among these infants baptized at the evening hour.

When the Dreamer challenges Pearl's position as queen yet again, Pearl points out that the older someone is, the more likely it is that they have turned away from God. She explains

Pou sayz þat I þat com to late
 Am not worþy so gret fere.
 Where wysteȝ þou euer any bourne abate
 Euer so holy in hys prayere
 Þat he ne forfeȝed by sumkyn gate
 Þe mede sumtyme of heuenez clere?
 And ay þe alder þay were,

⁴⁶⁴ *Pearl*, lines 450-456.

⁴⁶⁵ *Pearl*, lines 505-587.

⁴⁶⁶ *Pearl*, line 483. You lived not two years in our land (on earth).

⁴⁶⁷ *Pearl*, lines 581-583. Even though I began just now – in eveningtime into the vineyard I came – first of my wages my lord did remember."

⁴⁶⁸ *Pearl*, lines 585-588. Took more time.

þay laften ryȝt and wroȝten woghe.⁴⁶⁹

As soon as children are born, Pearl explains, “In þe water of babtem þay dyssente.”⁴⁷⁰ It is at this point, when they are baptized and cleansed of their original sin, that then “arne þay boroȝt into þe vyne,” they are brought to God’s kingdom.⁴⁷¹ Thus, Pearl is doubly reinforced as a child herself, her innocence and purity directly explaining how and why she is in her royal position.

Of the many lessons Pearl teaches, she also demonstrates a sound understanding of logic. When explaining how innocents are rewarded in heaven, Pearl sets up a premise and uses it to logically build her own conclusion. She explains that

“Grace innogh þe mon may haue
 þat synnez þenne new, ȝif hym repent,
 Bot with sorȝ and syt he mot hit craue,
 And byde þe payne þerto is bent.
 Bot Resoun, of ryȝt þat con not raue,
 Saez euermore þe innosent;
 Hit is a dom þat neuer God gaue
 þat euer þe gyltlez schulde be schente.
 Þe gylytyf may contryssyoun hente
 And be þurȝ mercy to grace þryȝt;
 Bot he to gyle þat neuer glente
 As inoscente is saf and ryȝte.”⁴⁷²

As Andrew and Waldron explain, Pearl uses “God...as a quasi-personification of reasoning.”⁴⁷³

She establishes a premise, explaining that the established law is that a sinner can repent and suffer the consequences of their sin to receive mercy and forgiveness from God. Then she

⁴⁶⁹ *Pearl*, lines 613-624. You say that I who came too late am not worthy [of] such great dignity. Where [have] you known any [one who] ever remained ever so holy in his prayers that he never forfeited by some-kind of way the reward of bright heaven [at] some-time? And always the older they were they forsook right and wrought wrong.

⁴⁷⁰ *Pearl*, line 627.

⁴⁷¹ *Pearl*, line 628.

⁴⁷² *Pearl*, lines 661-672. Grace enough the man may have, then that sins anew, if he repents, but with sorrow and grief he must implore it and bide the pain [that] thereto is set (suffer the repercussions). But reason, that cannot stray way from justice, saves evermore the innocent; it is a judgement that God never gave that ever the guiltless should be punished. The guilty may find contrition and be through mercy to grace brought; but he that never turns aside to deceit as [an] innocent is safe and right.

⁴⁷³ *Pearl*: Notes, 85.

reaches a logical conclusion based on that premise. She states that there is no rule explicitly specified by God about punishing the sinless. She then concludes, independently, that those who are sinless are due all the same favors and gifts as those given forgiveness, without the need of suffering or repentance. Further, she explains that no one could enter heaven unless they were innocent, like a child. She states “Hys ryche no wy3 my3t wynne / Bot he com þyder ry3t as a chylde, / Oþer ellez neuermore come þerinne.”⁴⁷⁴ Thus, unless someone is as pure of heart and sinless as a child – as Pearl is – they are not able to get into heaven. Because of her purity (baptized and too young to sin), she was crowned by Christ and spiritually wed to him. She explains that she is not alone in this – but among many other brides of Christ.⁴⁷⁵ Pearl is one of one hundred and forty thousand peer-queens, a reference to the very same brides that John the Revelator saw in his vision of the Apocalypse.

Pearl continues to teach the Dreamer, explaining the City of God and referring to various important religious events like the Passion and the Apocalypse. As the Dreamer is led up the stream by Pearl, he sees a vision of the City of God – one that matches exactly what John the Revelator described. It is as the Dreamer is describing what he sees, that he spots Pearl once more. This time she is among her peer-queens. The entire procession of these special queens are dressed in the same fashion as Pearl is initially described: in hues of gold and white, decorated in pearls, and with a spotless pearl at the center of their chests.⁴⁷⁶ When he sees Pearl, the Dreamer says

þen sa3 I þer my lyttel queen
 þat I wende had standen by me in sclade.
 Lorde, much of mirþe watz þat ho made

⁴⁷⁴ *Pearl*, lines 721-732. His kingdom [in] no way might [be] won unless one comes thither innocent as a child, otherwise [can one] nevermore come therein.

⁴⁷⁵ *Pearl*, lines 781-792.

⁴⁷⁶ *Pearl*, lines 1093-1104.

Among her ferez þat watz so quyt!⁴⁷⁷

Pearl is again described as little, referring to her small size. As he watches her from the other side of the river, recognizing that she is no longer next to him, he sees that she is joyful among her fellow queens. Ignoring her warning that he is not allowed to follow her to the Kingdom of Heaven, the Dreamer tries to cross the river to get to. He is then forcibly ejected from the dream-vision by the Prince of Heaven. Upon his awakening, the Dreamer is no longer the same despairing man he was at the start of the poem. Even though he has lost Pearl for a second time, he is joyous for Pearl and her place in God's kingdom. He even recognizes that he should have always trusted and obeyed God instead of giving in to despair. This shift in the Dreamer's understanding and demeanor demonstrates that Pearl's teachings throughout the dream-vision were effective.

For much of the poem, Pearl instructs the Dreamer on religious matters. As Hatt states, "the teaching that the poet gives to the maiden is all entirely scriptural and orthodox, without anything that could be attributed even to a pious fancy, in which *Pearl* is very different from the Purgatory dream-visions."⁴⁷⁸ Thus, she is designed as a perfectly orthodox instructor, unlike other, more fanciful, religious instructors found in other texts. This conventional religious instruction is being delivered by a child. The jarring disconnection between what is expected of the two-year-old and what is presented as a wise and measured teacher is a purposeful characterization by the Pearl-poet. The juxtaposition is the point he is trying to emphasize. After Pearl dies, she becomes knowledgeable and versed in God and God's teachings. This changes her from an ignorant infant (one who did not have time to learn the Lord's prayers) into one that

⁴⁷⁷ *Pearl*, lines 1147-1150. Then I saw there my little queen that I believed had stood by me in [the] valley. Lord, much of mirth was that she made among her companions, she was so lively.

⁴⁷⁸ Hatt, "The Jeweler's Dream," 43.

acts and speaks like a mature and wise adult. She is one of Christ's treasured brides (and thusly adorned) and serves as God's instructor to her father. Pearl even explains specifically that it was Christ who adorned her for her purity and her virginity:

“He gef me myȝt and als bewté;
In Hys blod He wesch my wede on dese,
And coronde clene in vergynté,
And pyȝt me in perlez maskellez.”⁴⁷⁹

It is Christ who cleanses Pearl, strengthening and perfecting her. Christ washing her clothes with his blood symbolizes Pearl's soul being washed clean of sin and flaws.

The effect this little teacher has on her father is also important. As Holly Crocker points out, “the Dreamer accepts the maiden's elevation; more importantly, he seeks to become like her through his own redemption.”⁴⁸⁰ This is the message of the poem. The father's acceptance of Pearl's teaching and his spiritual and emotional growth through her instruction is demonstrative of the intended didacticism and theological instruction inherent in the poem itself.

Pearl is not like other representations of infant-children in medieval English literature. She does not fit directly into any Ages of Man paradigm – at least of those associated with infancy and childhood. Thus, scholars such as those discussed earlier want to see her as the adult she is presenting as, rather than the child the Dreamer says she is. She does not demonstrate growth (either physically or mentally), and thus does not adhere to any of the defined characteristics associated with infancy and childhood in any of the developmental systems discussed in this dissertation. She is introduced to the reader as wise and knowledgeable, speaking well in contrast to the inarticulate and illogical, imitative behavior expected in Piaget's

⁴⁷⁹ *Pearl*, lines 765-768. “He gave me might and also beauty; in His blood He washed my clothing on the dais, and crowned [me] clean in Virginitie, and arrayed me in flawless pearls.”

⁴⁸⁰ Holly A. Crocker, “The Matter of feminine Virtue in *Pearl*.” *Medieval Literature: Criticism and Debates*, edited by Holly Crocker and Vance Smith (New York: Routledge, 2014), 146.

and Erikson's developmental schemes for infants and children. Pearl speaks and responds in a logical way to the Dreamer. She does not just mimic – not even to just repeat Biblical stories verbatim. She instead genuinely engages the Dreamer in a logical debate and conversation. Moreover, she is not shown to be fearful of punishment or to be driven by physical consequences, nor is she motivated by personal rewards. She does explain that she has already received rewards from Christ, but these gifts are not demonstrated to directly motivate Pearl in her actions or speech. Thus, she is not associated to Kohlberg's Preconventional Moral Reasoning, expected of her age. Of the Astrological stages associated with the youngest years, she is the opposite of the imperfect state of being associated with the Moon and well beyond the beginning attempts at formulating logical parts of her soul, which is associated with Mercury and childhood.

The only potential connection to the expectations of infancy in the various Ages schemes is found with Pearl's lively nature at the very end of the poem, when she is in the City of God and no longer acting as her father's teacher. In this one moment she is mirthful and joyous, potentially tying her to the humor of blood; blood is the first humor of the four-stage paradigm, as used by Bede, of Physiological growth. In this paradigm, blood influences people to be joyous and cheerful and is expected to be the main influence to children and infants. Beyond this, however, Pearl does not match the other paradigms' expectations for infancy, nor does she match this description at any other point in the poem.

Pearl, instead, demonstrates a depth of wisdom and compassion for the Dreamer that is only slightly recognizable at the highest levels of maturity and morality. First, she has fully accepted her life in heaven. Pearl describes her bliss and joy in her perfected role and makes

many references to her happy existence with the Lamb of God.⁴⁸¹ This joy is also demonstrated through her mirth at the end of the poem. Such contentment with one's existence is found in the latest stages of Erikson's Psychosocial Development, typically only demonstrated in the last years of the senior stage. Similarly, as understood through Christian theology, Pearl's moral instruction of the Dreamer is equivalent to universal abstract concepts of human dignity and equality, as when she teaches the Dreamer that all Christians will be rewarded equally regardless of the length of their devotion to Christ. This places her at the sixth and final stage of Post-Conventional moral reasoning, the final and most mature level of Kohlberg's paradigm. Within the Astrological stages, it seems that Pearl is most connected to Jupiter, behaving with thoughtful dignity and decorum. She is described as royally arrayed and behaving with distinguished decorum. Pearl is never unmannerly and, as Tolkien highlighted, she uses the respectful term "sir" to address the Dreamer, even when she is chiding him for his misunderstandings. This stage is associated with the height of moral and mental maturity. Thus, as far as Pearl exhibits the characteristics of any age, she is associated with the very best of humanity – the stages in which humans are as perfect as possible.

This characterization of Pearl is unlike other infants and children found in other medieval texts, such as the *Canterbury Tales* and *Beowulf*. She is not like Beowulf in his childhood, when he was lazy and thought of as unpromising, nor is she like the infant in the "Reeve's Tale" used as a prop for a prank, or the children of the "Clerk's Tale," both used to test their mother's patience and devotion to their father. Pearl is not just a narrative device used to manipulate characters or emotions, nor does she act as the motivator for the Dreamer's growth. Instead, the Dreamer is motivated through Pearl's instruction, and it is her presence and then second removal

⁴⁸¹ *Pearl*, lines 577-588; 89-90, 107: 740, 757-768, 1129.

that serves to demonstrate his growth. Moreover, Pearl has a voice, a personality, a purpose, and authority. She is described in more specific detail, beyond just her clothing or location in the physical space of the scene. As noted, she serves as a teacher – one who teaches her adult father.

Based on this unique depiction of this child character, Pearl seems to be purposefully represented as an infant who is perfected beyond her own humanity. She, now a cleansed version of herself in heaven, is no longer bound to a human body or mortal plane – she is no longer directly impacted by flaws, sins, or any other negative aspects of the fallen world. This typical representation is crucial to the argument established in the poem. Pearl represents the very best of humanity, giving both her father and the readers hope and consolation in the face of death and the grief that accompanies it by providing an example of the joy and perfection found in Christ's love and sacrifice. Pearl's perfected state is demonstrative of Christ's endless generosity. Pearl not only teaches the Dreamer about this concept, but also represents the idea herself.

Pearl as Christ-Like

In many ways, the representation of Pearl mimics aspects of the representation of Christ – seen in both the *Dream of the Rood* and as the Christ Child through the various lullabies of the later Middle Ages. A. D. Horgan observes,

It is interesting...to compare *The Dream of the Rood* with the much later Middle English poem *Pearl*. Either work is centrally concerned with the theme of resurrection to glory; both are in the form of a dream-vision in which a figure of authority expounds a theology of salvation. In either, moreover, there appears to be reference to the Assumption of the Virgin at a significant point. But the most interesting point of comparison is in the matter of technique, for both poems the theme is unfolded through the gradual revelation of the significance of a central symbol, in one case the pearl and in the other the Cross. The pearl and the Cross, moreover, are apparently variant forms of the same thing, the σφραγίς, or seal of the God's elect.⁴⁸²

⁴⁸² A. D. Horgan, "'The Dream of the Rood' and Christian Tradition." *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 79, no.1 (1978), 18.

Thus, in both poems, a personified object (rood or pearl) serves as the expositor for theological knowledge. This expositor serves as the major symbol for the theme each poem emphasizes: the rood emphasizes the sacrifice and suffering of Christ, while the pearl emphasizes the purity and perfection of heaven (or a human soul when cleansed by God).

With regard to the representation of the Christ Child in the Grimestone lyric, there are significantly more similarities between Christ and Pearl than those found in the *Dream of the Rood*. Both Pearl and the Christ Child demonstrate a cognitive and moral development well beyond their years of life would suggest. In the singer's imagination, the Christ Child already knows he will experience the passion later in his life. For the singer, Christ is crying because of the suffering he will endure as an adult. Similarly, Pearl knows of biblical teachings and can speak clearly and effectively about them even though she did not have the time on earth to learn of them. Both characterizations associate these special infants with maturity and moral development beyond their years. They both connect to the highest levels of morality in Kohlberg's paradigm and the most mature levels in all other developmental schemes. The Christ Child knows that he will sacrifice himself for all humanity, yet he is still born human. Pearl, on the other hand, explains theologically rooted morality to the Dreamer, demonstrating that she herself already understands and believes in these concepts. Both works describe Christ's sacrifice for humanity while bemoaning original sin – providing similar messaging across distinctly different genres.

However, what seems to separate these two representations from other representations of infants and children is that they are both representations of perfection. The Christ Child is both God and God's son, both human and God – as perfect as a human can be; whereas Pearl is a perfected soul of a deceased child. They are not intended to demonstrate the expected stages of

human development or the distinct stages of any of the Ages of Man – which is exactly why they are not characterized as such. Both the Christ Child and Pearl are demonstrative of perfection as far as the Ages of Man can indicate.

Conclusion

Pearl is a beautiful and complex poem designed to console those experiencing grief. It is an amalgamation of many genres, touching on the despair at the loss of someone close to the Dreamer, while also filled with layered symbolic and theological meaning. Hatt explains that

Pearl is a psychologically profound and understanding portrait of how grief operates alongside an instructed and energetic Christian faith...The content of the jeweller's reading and listening has all gone into his dream, and the Dreamer's continual backslidings are a realistic representation of the way that grief and longing keep asserting themselves.⁴⁸³

She claims that the poem not only supports the expressions of Christian faith, but also represents realistic human emotion and expression of emotion. This realism contrasted to the perfection of Pearl, a wise infant teacher, is precisely what makes Pearl so effective as a consoling figure. Her wisdom, moral maturity, and royally decorated attire all reinforce how perfect she now is. It is this juxtaposition and seeing the perfection of Pearl that relieves the Dreamer of his grief and reinforces the theological consolation of the biblical teachings. The infant Pearl gains meaning by being an infant. She demonstrates how even a two-year-old child is loved and cleansed by Christ in heaven, becoming perfected and rewarded as a queen. She personally demonstrates this perfection, giving her teachings weight and significance.

⁴⁸³ Hatt, "The Jeweler's Dream," 44.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation began with a question: is Beowulf an adult? For the majority of the poem, the answer is not yet. Not only is Beowulf definitively a youth, but his characterization and connections (and disconnections) to the various paradigms of the Ages of Man explain both how the Anglo-Saxon culture viewed childhood and youth and how they represented their youth in literature. From this initial analysis, I have explored medieval representations of children and young adults within the framework set out by the classical, medieval, and contemporary paradigms of growth and development, analyzing *Beowulf*, the *Dream of the Rood*, “Christ I,” the Grimestone lyric, the *Canterbury Tales*, and *Pearl* within this context. Analysis of these works has uncovered several consistent qualities associated with childhood and youth, as well as key irregularities in their representation in medieval English literature.

From the narrow selection of texts chosen for this project, it seems that whether a work was written in Old or Middle English may correlate with differences in the primary characterization of children and young adults. Old English works (at least as seen in “Christ I,” *Beowulf*, and the *Dream of the Rood*) tend to describe young characters through their associations with warrior culture. Warrior prowess and physical might are idealized in these youth. The young adult Beowulf is the mightiest and bravest hero who not only fights the enemies of his tribe, but also the horrible monsters that plague humanity. He does not show any interest in intimate relationships as he is expected to within the Ages of Man paradigms (and as demonstrated by young adult characters written in Middle English). Instead, he is described by his abilities to fight in different ways (with and without weapons) and against different enemies. Similarly, the Passion is described like a battle in the *Dream of the Rood*, with Christ fighting as a warrior. The narrating cross serves as Christ’s retainer, suffering alongside him during the

crucifixion. This characterization of Christ is reinforced in “Christ I.” Christ is labeled by the author as the shield of fighters and the helm of all creatures.⁴⁸⁴ These details emphasize the warrior-like qualities of this Christian figure. There does not seem to be any intention by the authors to describe Christ in a way that fits within the Ages of Man schemes. They do not aim to make Christ appear or behave in ways that align with the understood schemes of growth and development for young adults. For both Beowulf and Christ, it seems the goal of the authors is to highlight the exceptional warrior-related qualities of both young men. That they are presented this way suggests that Germanic culture valued these aspects in their youthful men and used these descriptions to highlight how these characters were exceptional.

As evidenced by the numerous characters in the *Canterbury Tales* and the Christ Child from the Grimestone lyric, not only is there more representation of this young age group during the later Middle Ages, but there seems to be a consistent inclusion of their emotional and vulnerable qualities. Many of the young adults from the *Canterbury Tales* are love-struck, focusing on developing and engaging in intimate relationships. The Pilgrim Squire is described by Geoffrey as a lusty bachelor who was seeking favors from a lady.⁴⁸⁵ The squire from the “Franklin’s Tale” and the clerks from both the “Reeve’s Tale” and the “Miller’s Tale” all sought after sexual relationships, including immoral courtships with married women (or, in Alan’s case, with the Miller’s daughter). Outside of Chaucer’s work, even the Christ Child is described through his expression of emotion. This Christian figure is described as crying and in need of soothing.

⁴⁸⁴ Campbell, Jackson. *Advent Lyrics of the Exeter Book* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959), lines 34a and 35b.

⁴⁸⁵ Geoffrey Chaucer. “General Prologue.” In *The Riverside Chaucer*. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987), 24: 80 and 86.

Despite these seemingly distinct differences between Old and Middle English works, there are some consistencies in child and youth representations across the period. Young adults almost always fit well into the various stages of man appropriate for their ages, especially in relation to their focus on and desire for intimate relationships. Although Beowulf lacks this interest in intimate relationships, he still connects to the physical prowess and boldness expected of young adults, especially with the influence of red bile (among other paradigms). Beyond these Age connections, there is one exception to this age-associated representation: their morality. As noted earlier, the many young adults in the *Canterbury Tales* seek out immoral love-relationships and focus on gaining personal rewards. They ignore the larger impacts of their choices, especially as they relate to their families. From these descriptions, young adults seem to be represented as morally immature. Many narratives use this moral immaturity as their comedic basis. The “Miller’s Tale,” for example, sets up a number of comedic scenes relating to infidelity. One event involved Alison promising Absolon a kiss, only for her to lean out of the window, causing Absolon to kiss her backend instead. The humorous quality of the immature behaviors in these characters is not unexpected – it is not treated like something unusual or abnormal; simultaneously, the narrative humor must also suggest that audiences and authors knew that youths are capable of more morally appropriate behavior (as seen in the Pilgrim Squire and the Franklin’s squire, Aurelius). The comedy would not work otherwise. Conversely, Beowulf demonstrates higher levels of moral growth. His individual decision to help another tribe (Hrothgar and the Danes), especially as he does so against the wishes of his own lord, emphasizes Beowulf’s moral fortitude and willingness to do what is good and right. His moral choices associate him with maturity and emphasize his idealized representation.

Throughout the works in this dissertation, the majority of children and infants are not detailed enough in their descriptions to fit within the Ages of Man paradigms. They are instead only mentioned in connection with their use within the story (often without names). Their presence in the *Canterbury Tales* does seem consistently associated with attempts to emotionally manipulate other characters. For example, the infant from the “Reeve’s Tale” is used to manipulate the miller’s wife. The infant and his crib are moved from the miller’s bed to John’s bed by the young clerk. This new placement of the child confuses the miller’s wife, and she assumes that the crib and her infant are still next to her bed. Instead of climbing back into bed with her husband, she accidentally climbs into bed with John and sleeps with him. This confusion was all orchestrated by using an unnamed, silent, infant. Similarly, the infants from the “Clerk’s Tale” are used to deceive and test Griselda. Both of her children are taken away and then brought back unknown and unrecognized years later during Walter’s tests. In doing so, he was trying to manipulate Griselda into failing his tests. Beowulf’s childhood and the characterization of Beowulf the child, although similarly lacking details, works differently than that of the children in the *Canterbury Tales*. One of the very few details provided about Beowulf the child is the label of “slothful.”⁴⁸⁶ This label potentially serves as Beowulf’s motivation to make a name for himself and become such an incredible warrior – overcoming this early lack of promise. All of these examples of children and infants lack any detailed descriptions of their individual personalities or independent actions.

That these children and infants do not directly demonstrate distinct personalities, agency, or motivations is in a way, realistic. Infancy and childhood are a period of rapid growth and change. The identities of the children are yet to be formed or expressed. What is more likely,

⁴⁸⁶ *Klaeber’s Beowulf: And the Fight at Finnsburg*, Fourth Edition. Edited by R. D. Fulk, Robert Bjork, and John Niles. (University of Toronto Press, 2008), 74: 2187b.

however, is that these young characters are not intended to be fully accurate representations of children and infants. Instead, they are used in the stories as a tool or method to draw out emotion or a specific behavior from other characters. The infant and child characters are intended to be used for various purposes, but do not themselves actively seek to have the effect or influence that they are used for. Moreover, that they are consistently used as tools of manipulation also suggests that the youngest members of society actually held some influence and importance to families and audiences, especially as they are used so consistently as shorthand for causing distress to other, older characters.

One unusual case of child representation is found with the “litel clergeon” in the “Prioress’s Tale.” This seven-year-old child is described in detail (more so than any other child character in this analysis), yet, is also used as a tool of manipulation. This young character is described as a devoted child in love with a song about Mary. He does not know Latin yet, so he does not understand the song itself. However, when he learns that the song is about Mary, he devotes himself to learning it by Christmas. His devotion grants him a gift from Mary, allowing him to sing this song about her after his murder. His lack of language knowledge and excited behavior directly aligns with various paradigms associated with seven-year-olds. If the Prioress and her show of religious expertise is just a performance, as Dawn Colley suggests,⁴⁸⁷ then she (and in turn, Chaucer) is using the “litel clergeon” and his more detailed and child-accurate representation to attempt to manipulate the audience emotionally. The tragic nature of the story mixed with the details provided about the child serve as tools to support the Prioress’s façade.

There are a few characterizations of children and youth that serve as exceptions to these otherwise consistent representations. When a youth or child is used to represent an ideal or

⁴⁸⁷ Dawn Colley, "Creating a Martyr: Rhetoric, Chaucer's 'The Prioress' Tale,' and the Death of the 'Litel Clergeon'." In *CEA Critic* 78, no. 3 (November 2016).

virtue, they do not fall within the expectations of any of the paradigmatic characteristics associated with their age. Instead, the behaviors of these special characters often fall within the stages with the highest moral development and most mature growth or not at all. These characterizations often align with Christian ideology and expressions of Christian virtues. One example of such a character would be Griselda from the “Clerk’s Tale.” Griselda is almost inhuman with her demonstration of patience amidst her husband’s tests. No matter how she is tested and what loss or humiliation she experiences, she still remains fully obedient to her husband, fulfilling the promise she made to him when he asked her to marry him. Constance from the “Man of Law’s Tale” also fits into this exceptional category. She remained consistent and unwavering in her devotion to God regardless of the peril and tragedy she experienced. She lost her home, lost both of her husbands, lost her memory, and almost lost her son. Yet, through all of this, Constance remained true and faithful to God, praying often to him and Mary for support through her suffering. Finally, Pearl from *Pearl* represents the virtue of purity. This infant teacher of God’s laws and generosity died at such a young age that she could not have sinned. She was baptized while she was alive and, when welcomed into heaven, she was cleansed by Christ himself. Her adornments and wisdom both demonstrate her virtue and how one is rewarded in heaven by God. None of these characters are represented as behaving appropriately for their age because they are intended to be representations of idealized or otherworldly qualities. They are often super-human – acting in a way that is unlike a normal person (of their age or otherwise), exemplifying all the best qualities of humanity. All of these special characters are intentionally unrecognizable as children and young adults because they are not intended to represent the characteristics (and flaws) found in childhood and youth.

In some ways, Beowulf almost falls into this virtuous category. He does have some connections to his Age with his physical might and extensive connections to red bile. He is, however, an idealized warrior, representing the strengths and values of Anglo-Saxon culture. He is superhuman with the strength of thirty men in his hand. Yet, he is not clearly a representation of a Christian virtue. He is much closer to a realistic representation of a young adult warrior than Pearl is to an infant.

The Christ Child of the Grimestone lyric is the exception to all the consistencies in the representation of children. He does not fit into any of the Ages of Man schemes, nor does he (as he is characterized in the poem) directly represent a Christian virtue. The character of the Christ Child, rather, serves as an object of theological musing. The infant in this lullaby is not meant to be a representation of just a child, nor is he meant to be a representation of a specific ideal. The singer uses him to consider the complex nature of the Incarnation. The infant is described with Christ's dual nature – he is both God and man with details that emphasize both his human and divine qualities. This dual nature of Christ is exactly what the singer is trying to reconcile. That Christ is the exception to child representation is not unexpected.

Medieval authors and audiences understood that children and youth underwent specific, consistent stages of development, in much the same way that contemporary psychologists and readers do. Physical, emotional, mental, and moral growth happens in predictable patterns. Medieval English authors used this predictability in a variety of ways. They created characters who conformed to expected patterns of growth. Likewise, they also created children and youth characters that distinctly did not conform to expectations by exhibiting uncharacteristic maturity, using this deviation to highlight an ideal or virtue. Conversely, these writers also created

immature or lazy versions of youth and children for comedic effect. Finally, they also developed a method to explore the dual nature of Christ.

There are a number of areas that could be expanded upon from this initial analysis. First, a deeper examination into the changes in warrior culture is needed. How does Beowulf's characterization compare to that of Arthur's, Gareth's, or even Galahad's from Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*? Similarly, exploring more of the Pearl-poet's work – specifically, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* – could serve as a method to better understand warrior-like connections to young adults. This poem includes descriptions of Arthur's young court, including the young knight Gawain. He and the other young knights could serve as effective comparisons to Malory's work and Beowulf's characterization. Another likely area of expansion would be to examine the larger body of Middle English secular and religious lyrics. How else is the Christ Child represented in these songs? How does his characterization compare to secular children in similar lullabies? Additionally, a detailed examination of medieval artwork could also illuminate much of the analysis throughout this dissertation. How medieval artists represented these characters in paintings and manuscript illustrations, and how they connect with or deviate from the Ages of Man paradigms, could be a valuable extension of this work. Finally, Chaucer's works overall could be examined more thoroughly. Not only could a more inclusive examination be done on the *Canterbury Tales* (including analyses of the adults and their associations with the Ages of Man paradigms), but also a more inclusive analysis of all of Chaucer's works to examine all of his child and young adult characters could provide additional insight into both the author's and the medieval culture's conceptions of childhood.

Understanding humanity's growth and shifts in viewing the younger and youngest members of society, and their place within society, is a crucial element in understanding that

society. Children and youths are part of the population that is typically forgotten and commonly not discussed (particularly in the scholarship of medieval literature). My analysis here has been but a step the journey to amend this lacuna by uncovering the correlations between the ages of the medieval child and young adult characters and the agency (action and speech) and personality (characteristics and specific details) that such characters possess, illuminating some of the potential cultural values held by the authors and society at the time these texts were developed. Through the Ages of Man paradigms, I have been able to demonstrate the consistent, divergent, and changing values of the authors' understanding of children and childhood. I have provided clarifying context for how these characters are represented and what that meant for a medieval audience. This dissertation is just the beginning of the effort to provide the necessary context for a contemporary audience to read and examine the role of children and youth in these Old and Middle English texts with clarity and confidence, demonstrating that some of these medieval conceptions are not so different from our own.

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