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The Silence of Langland's Study*

Matter, Invisibility, Instruction

D. VANCE SMITH

... quam dum vestigat ratio, quasi somnia sentit . . .

—John of Salisbury

I

Material is handled in the Middle Ages, as it probably is today, in a deeply ambivalent way. Material includes a lot: the stuff of body, but also the content of things as abstract as narrative—the matter of rhetorical and poetic invention. Plotinus argues, in fact, that matter literally is nothing, because anything we can say about it, or predicate of it, is really something else—dimension, density, color—that exists independent of, or prior to, matter.¹

Even what we can say about matter is not matter. John of Salisbury, in his *Entheticus Maior*, an obscure text that Langland will use in the C version of *Piers Plowman*, puts it this way: matter [*hyle*], if you examine it,

is now any substance whatever, at another
time on the contrary the same thing is believed to be nothing;

* Although I was never a student of Anne Middleton's in the formal sense, I have learned more from her work about the intellectual possibilities for the study of Middle English than from almost anyone else. Even my nonmedievalist graduate students have found her work inspiring because of its attention to the consequences of literature, not just its arid reconstitution. This study of Dame Studie's social and intellectual complexity is in the spirit of her work, even if the matter falls short.

1. See Plotinus, *Ennead II*, tractate 4, trans. A. H. Armstrong, Loeb Classical Library, vol. 441 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966).

when reason investigates it, it senses it as dreams,
 and when you desire to lay hold of it, it soon hides like a fugitive.
 Even so the ear hears that sound is absent when it hears nothing,
 even so see darkness with your eyes by seeing nothing.

[Si specularis ilen, nunc est substantia quaevis,
 contra nunc eadem creditur esse nihil;
 quam dum vestigat ratio, quasi somnia sentit,
 dumque tenere cupis, mox fugitiva latet.
 Auris abesse sonum sic audit, dum nihil audit,
 sic oculis tenebras cerne videndo nihil.]²

The very matter, the content, of *Piers Plowman* behaves like this elusive *hyle*: now clear, now elusive, hiding when you most want to grasp it. John of Salisbury's beautiful phrase perfectly describes the poem's elusive matter, which emerges as if sensed only in a dream of reason.

There are important philosophical reasons, I would argue, why the poem and *hyle* operate in the same way: Langland's poem stakes a claim, on the formal level at least, to articulate what resists articulation. Its several parts, its multiple dreams, each aim for a totality that is broken and disrupted by the presence of the poem's other parts. It is a poem whose totality is made up of broken and thwarted totalities, ungraspable as a whole precisely because its formal perfection lies outside itself. In the same way that matter requires form to articulate what it is, *Piers Plowman* opens itself to myriad formal possibilities and interlocutors who aim to give the poem's matter voice and sight. Dame Studie, for instance, conceives of the poem's matter in this double sense, as both *hyle* and *hermeneia*. Like Will himself, she is conceived of as an ambivalent body, "lene of liche" (10.2)—enough to indicate embodied presence but slight enough to suggest that it is not *too* implicated in the materiality of the world. Her first speech angrily accuses Wit of wasting wisdom on fools, which she compares to throwing pearls before swine. In a shift of metaphorical register typical of the poem, Dame Studie parses this metaphor by saying that it actually refers to anyone who shows "by hir werkes" (10.13) that they would rather have "lond and lordshipe on er[th]e, / Or richesse or rentes" (10.14–15).³ In other words, the real matter of the

2. John of Salisbury, *Entheticus Maior*, in *John of Salisbury's Entheticus Maior and Minor*, ed. and trans. Jan van Laarhoven (Leiden: Brill, 1987), 1:167, lines 945–50.

3. William Langland, *Piers Plowman: The B Version*, ed. George Kane and E. Talbot Donaldson, rev. ed. (1975; London: Athlone Press, 1988). All subsequent citations of the B text will be to this edition.

poem is not material in any sense comprehended by material economies, yet it is expressed in terms of a commodity, "margery perles," that could be considered one of the focal points of a system of secular valuation. The line naming the pearls is interestingly disjointed, its alliterative elements made up of an embedded Latin phrase (*nolite mittere*), an interjection ("man") and a bilingual tautology ("margery perles"). Its semantically superfluous components give it a metrically necessary form, and replicate *in parvo* the metaphysical difficulty of what Dame Studie is urging. Indeed, to use a metaphor Dame Studie herself will shortly use, it is a line that shows how complexly, and how deeply, the writing of the poem (at least as Dame Studie imagines it) is implicated in the metaphors of weaving. This metaphor, I will argue, lies at the heart of the poem's formal imaginary and at the heart of Studie's embodiment as both a woman and one of the poem's important interlocutors.

II

The ancient association of weaving and writing reminds us that there is something about textiles that implicates texts. The limit case is Ovid's story of Philomela, who can only tell her sister Procne about the violence Tereus did to her by weaving a tapestry. It is a story of extraordinary violence, and a violence that extends to the story's silences, the cutting out of Philomela's tongue and the unexpressed identity of Philomela and Procne, both daughters taken from Pandion of Athens by Tereus, although one in marriage exchange and one by rape. That is what Ovid is silent about, and the silences of Procne and Philomela seem to locate both women not only outside speech, but also outside the regulation of an economy in which they are merely objects of another representational agenda. In the fourteenth century textiles remain women's work, and implicated more directly in economic figuration. Yet outside of narratives that happen to be written by men, there is not much that suggests that women drew as freely on textuality as they did on textiles, and representations of women and writing in narrative tend to emphasize the impossibility of women's writing and of a female economy. Writing, economy, and household all seem to be structured by a masculine homosociality.

The homosociality of the written household is typically expressed in the transactions of Gawain and Bertilak in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Their compact to exchange winnings at the end of the day, a day in which the erotic and the feral impulses of the household are challenged and reck-

oned with, is articulated not just as the settling of accounts at the end of the day, but as the inscribing and recording of the diet, the journal, by clerks of different household departments (the departments of, I suppose we could call them, Venus and venerly). Those scenes are of course complicated by the poem's collapsing of that very household normativity, the possibility of its representation in the first place, into a libidinal circuit that is entangled with its economic circuit, consumptions that cannot be registered because they cannot be disposed of fully, a libidinal capital that remains unaccounted for, especially because of the inarticulate, one could even call it the unintelligible, body of Gawain in that poem.⁴ That is, the body of Gawain is unresolved precisely because it is a feminized body, one that the poem's technology can't account for, unless to posit the negation, the canceling out, of the desirable body with the exhausted body of Morgan le Faye. Yet there is still the unresolved matter of the plot's orchestration by the women who lurk behind the scenes, and whose activities turn out to be determinative but not intelligible—that is, they are directed toward what is unexamined in the household of Arthur, to “assay the surquidrie.”⁵ What I would argue for is not the same kind of inscriptive work clearly performed by male clerks, the quotidian accounting of consumption and the reckoning of accounts in the anonymous, formal voice of the household officer, but a relation to the writing of the household, to its regulation, that is both more invested in it and that collapses the formal horizon of household writing. Is writing what a man would normally write to write as a man, for one's writing to subject oneself to the clerical and masculine dominion of the symbolic law of the household? As Susan Bordo argues in her work on body-image, “To reshape one's body into a male body is not to put on male power and privilege. To feel autonomous and free while harnessing body and soul to an obsessive body-practice is to serve, not transform, a social order that limits female possibilities.”⁶ I am going to argue that women can write, and can represent the fourteenth-century household, in ways that don't necessarily imply a

4. See especially Carolyn Dinshaw, “A Kiss Is Just a Kiss: Heterosexuality and Its Consolations in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*,” *Diacritics* 24 (1994): 205–26; Geraldine Heng, “Feminine Knots and the Other *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*,” *PMLA* 106 (1991): 500–14; and Heng, “A Woman Wants: The Lady, *Gawain*, and the Forms of Seduction,” *Yale Journal of Criticism* 5 (1992): 101–34.

5. For useful discussions of the poem's work of registration as a circumscription of a masculinized space of appearance, see Carolyn Dinshaw, “‘Getting Medieval’: *Pulp Fiction*, *Gawain*, Foucault,” in *The Book and the Body*, ed. Dolores Warwick Frese and Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 116–63 (the material on *Gawain* does not appear in her reuse of this material in *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Post-Modern* [Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999]).

6. Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 179.

mere capitulation to or repetition of the dictates of the gendered formularies and masculine formations of the ideal magnate household.

By making equivocal or even secondary the masculinized household machinery of representation women show us its limits, the limits of writing and of representation itself. The fourteenth-century Middle English *Emaré*, which comes from the same sources as Chaucer's *Man of Law's Tale* and John Gower's story of Constance in the *Confessio Amantis*, is woven, almost literally, around a robe made from an extraordinary piece of cloth. The cloth was originally made by the "Emir's daughter 'of hethenes,'" and represents on it the stories of Floris and Blanche flour, Ydoyne and Amadas, Tristram and Isolde, and of the nameless woman who embroiders it, the daughter of an Emir in love with a Sultan's son. In one sense, then, this cloth is made out of the material of writing:

In that on korner made was
 Ydoyne and Amadas,
 Wyth love that was so trewe;
 For they loveden hem with honour,
 Portrayed they wer with trewe-love-flour,
 Of stones bright of hewe;
 Wyth carbunkull and safere,
 Kassydonys and onyx so clere
 Sette in golde newe,
 Deamondes and rubyes,
 And othur stones of mychyll pryse,
 And menstrellys with her glewe . . .
 In that othur corner was dyght
 Trystan and Isowde so bright,
 That seemly wer to se . . .
 In the thrydde korner, with gret honour,
 Was Florys and Dam Blawncheflour,
 As love was hem between . . .
 In the fowrthe korner was oon,
 Of Babylyne the Sowdan sonne,
 The Amerayles dowghtyr hym by.
 For hys sake the cloth was wrowght;
 She loved hym in hert and thougth,
 As testymoyeth thys storye.
 The fayr mayden her byforn
 Was portrayed an unykorn,

Wyth hys horn so hye;
 Flowres and bryddes on ylke a side,
 Wyth stones that wer sowght wyde,
 Stuffed wyth ymagerye.
 (*Emaré* lines 121–68⁷)

All of these stories, including the last, are stories of catastrophic or frustrated love, love that remains as yet unwritten—the robe represents the embroiderer at the point before which her love is fulfilled, at the limit of desire, that is, in its purest condition, the impossibility of its ever being fulfilled. *Emaré*, who inherits the cloth after it is made into a robe, is cast adrift on the ocean after she refuses to sleep with her father. It may be the fault of the robe, which makes her seem, as the poem says, “non erthely wommon” when she puts it on, and her father decides on the spot to marry her. Constance in the *Man of Law’s* tale spreads Christianity wherever she goes, but *Emaré* takes with her more tangible assets: her robe, but more important, her knowledge of sewing. It is clear, especially after the way the robe itself becomes a figure of writing, that *Emaré’s* knowledge of textiles, which the poem calls “werke,” includes “curtesye,” the weaving together of the other knowledges that “werke” includes: embroidery, war, ethical actions, worthy deeds. The one domain that “werke” doesn’t explicitly include is the “work” of the poem itself, unless it is implicated metaphorically.

In *Emaré* sewing is an insistently gendered kind of representation, a kind of writing that opens the wilderness, whether it is Wales or a merchant’s household, to civilization, to the knowledge that comes with the presence of feminine “nurture.” Without that forceful gendering of representation, masculine desire in *Emaré*, as the story shows us, could not be expressed, forced out, articulated, precisely because that feminine inscription of desire is so philosophically pure as to be unintelligible. It is only when *Emaré’s* father acquires the robe, for instance, that he conceives an incestuous lust for her, a lust that is surprisingly legitimated by a papal intervention (233). That is, masculine desire can always be written even in its most unprecedented and horrifying forms, and it can be written *about*, committed to instruments that belong to a symbolic regime in which masculine desire can always be made regular by rewriting the conditions of regularity. But it is when *Emaré’s* father has this embroidered cloth made into a robe for *Emaré* as soon as he receives the papal bull, that his tangled and unpleasant desire becomes a

7. *Emaré*, in *The Middle English Breton Lays*, ed. Anne Laskaya and Eve Salisbury (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute, 1995).

bit clearer. Emaré appears to be, within the folds of the robe, "noon erthely woman," a love object no longer falling within seven degrees of consanguinity, no longer, for that matter, falling within any kind of customary or natural prohibition. Just why the robe has this effect we never learn, except that it tends to confound men generally, debilitating particularly the sense of sight. When they look at it they "myght hyt not se/ For glistering . . ." (99–100). It disturbs scopic regimes, of course, but it also shows us the limits of desire's scopos, its target. That is, desire has no limits, and what we see unfolding in the poem is, in the debilitating, unintelligible light of the robe, merely the desire for desire. In pure light, as Hegel says, nothing is seen; in pure desire, perhaps, nothing is desired.⁸ I do not want to suggest that the body, whether female or male, falls on the side of unintelligibility, the classic clerical stance toward it as contingent, mutable matter. But I am not suggesting, on the other hand, that it is caught within discourse, rendered, as Foucault put it, either useful or intelligible.⁹ What I would like to suggest is that the relation between the body and its economy is a relation that always rests on its limits, a relation that is made in the movement of an economy of making that, like the material in *Emaré*, never fully expresses what is being undone and what is being made.

We see, use, appreciate material because of its economies, whether it is the largest economy of all, the time that is marked by the ceaseless generation and corruption of material, or the much more specific, literal economy of production, value and exchange. Chretien de Troyes's *Yvain*, as Eugene Vance has argued, chronicles and critiques the emergence of a sophisticated market economy alongside the romance. A famous scene in which Yvain discovers three hundred hungry and badly dressed women weaving silk cloth while a sumptuously dressed lord and lady recline on beds of silk is, Vance suggests, "a thinly veiled criticism of labor in a nascent textile industry lying just to the west of Champagne [where Chretien was born and lived] in Flanders." But this moment is not just the primal scene of economic expropriation. There is a third person in it, a girl of sixteen, who is reading a romance aloud. As Vance argues, Chretien clearly wants us to associate this particular form of consumption with the material kind we see in that scene, and to make the connection between the exploited producers of textiles and the (presumably exploited) producer of this text, with Chretien himself. But that turn is a negation of the critique with which Chretien begins. It is not

8. G. W. F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature: Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences, Part II*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 89.

9. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1979), 136.

just that this beautiful girl's reading of a romance is a kind of exploitation because it demonstrates the danger that romances blind one to real material exploitations, even if they are right in front of you. Nor is it that this oblivion, for Chretien, is "threatening," Vance says, "because she and her audience can remain so wholly unconcerned with the marvels of romance (just as they are with the silken rug) as a product woven by a real but nameless human being with compelling desires of his own."¹⁰ The problem is that this critique itself negates the material, placing affective and intellectual labor on the same level as the exploitation of the body, and a body that is female. There are the three hundred women who work, hungry and cold, in conditions not remotely like Chretien's; but there is also the girl herself, whose alluring beauty is a sign of the desire and desirability of romances—she is both their consumer and its product. Yet she is not their producer any more than the desire she exhibits is her desire (if the God of Love were to see her, Chretien says, he would make her fall in love with no-one other than himself).¹¹ Chretien's economy, then, is very much an economy of writing, not surprisingly, but precisely as an economy of writing it is, even when it critiques the very expropriations that occur in formalized economies, inescapably masculinist.

III

I want to turn now to Dame Studie, not because she's a woman (even if an allegorical one) and women are associated with *materia*, but because I think she brings to a point a similar paradox about the entire poem *Piers Plowman*: it longs for, and anticipates, its own termination the more studiously it analyzes its preconditions. It is a poem that will matter most, to put it crudely, when it leaves its own inchoate, unformed matter behind. Perhaps only Anima oscillates so rapidly between materiality and abstraction and materiality, at one point telling Will "whiles I quykne the cors . . . Anima ich hatte" (15.23), at other points that she is *Racio* or a "spirit spechelees" when she leaves the body (15.28, 36). Although Studie is clearly a figure of learning—what she herself says tends to associate her with grammar schools and perhaps parts of the university curriculum—she is precisely embodied—lean and staring. If we didn't know that Will imagines himself this way, we would think of the Hippocratic face of death, a body almost with-

10. Eugene Vance, "Chrétien's *Yvain* and the Ideologies of Change and Exchange," *Yale French Studies* 70 (1986): 42–62.

11. Chrétien de Troyes, *Le Chevalier au lion (Yvain)*, in *Chrétien de Troyes: Romans*, ed. and trans. David F. Hult (Paris: Lettres Gothiques-Poches, 1994), lines 5371–73.

out its anima. And almost from the start what she says is literally material, using language drawn from the work of spinning: "Wisdom and wit now is noȝt wor[th] a [risshe]/ But it be carded with coueitise" (10.17–18). We veer not only into the world of incipient industrialism, but also into the world of women's work. Even in London carding was farmed out to women, and especially in Langland's Midlands it would have been done by women in the house.¹² In Claudian's Western Roman Empire carding was associated firmly enough with women that it could be used as an insult to masculinity: "If eunuchs shall give judgment and determine laws," Claudian wrote in his invective against the mores of the Eastern Empire *In Eutropium*, "then let men card wool and live like the Amazons, confusion and licence dispossessing the order of nature."¹³ What I want to consider is not entirely whether or not Dame Studie is a figure of learning, whether we mean by that partial learning or not.¹⁴ I want to examine why Dame Studie's environment disappears into the milieu of the school so easily, why readers of the poem seem to associate her important work exclusively with the space of appearance, with the schoolroom rather than the household.

Dame Studie first appears in the poem as Wit's "wif," not an unaffiliated "public" woman like Meed (whose filiation is in every sense called into question, as a bastard, the daughter of Fals [2.24–25]). What this means is usually understood semi-allegorically, as if the ties of marriage were easier to understand than, and help to explain, the ties between *ingenium* and erudition. What strikes me about the passus, though, is how differently we might read this passus if Dame Studie's name were different, say Dame Stay-at-home. She has a surprising amount to say about households. She urges Will to cultivate the art of being a generous host, not to become "Homeliche at o[th]ere mennes houses and hatien hir owene" (10.96). She laments the general decline of the importance of the institution of the household, and of traditional practices within it:

12. See Marjorie Keniston McIntosh, *Working Women in English Society, 1300–1620* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 211–20.

13. Claudian, *Against Eutropius*, in *Claudian*, vol. 1, trans. Maurice Platnauer, Loeb Classical Library (London: Heinemann, 1922), 2.175.

14. For recent arguments that Dame Studie represents only the elementary level of instruction in the schools, see Christopher Cannon, "Langland's Ars Grammatica," *Yearbook of Langland Studies* 22 (2008): 1–25; and James Simpson, "The Role of Scientia in *Piers Plowman*," in *Medieval Religious and Ethical Literature: Essays in Honour of G. H. Russell*, ed. Gregory Kratzman and James Simpson (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1986), 49–65. Ralph Hanna has argued similarly that Imaginatif is constructed from basic elements of the trivium: "Langland's Ymaginatif: Images and the Limits of Poetry," in *Images, Idolatry, and Iconoclasm in Late Medieval England: Textuality and the Visual Image*, ed. Jeremy Dimmick, James Simpson, and Nicolette Zeeman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 81–94. But for an argument that Dame Studie actually draws on a wide range of sources beyond the schools, see Andrew Galloway, "*Piers Plowman* and the Schools," *Yearbook of Langland Studies* 6 (1992): 89–107.

“Elenge is þe halle, ech day in þe wike,
 Ther þe lord ne þe lady likeþ noȝt to sitte.
 Now haþ ech riche a rule to eten by hymselfe
 In a pryuee parlour for pouere mennes sake,
 Or in a chambre wiþ a chymenee, and leue þe chief halle
 That was maad for meles men to eten Inne,
 And al to spare to spille that spende shal anoþer.”
 (10.97–103)

She balances this pragmatic Aristotelian advice about economic circulation with specifically biblical injunctions about the operation of the hyper-economy of charity, choosing one passage that uses the household as both a literal and a spiritual arena of action. Quoting Theologie, Dame Studie says that we must do “good agein yuel” (10.204), by working for the good of everyone in general, and the good of the other members of the household of faith in particular: “*Dum tempus [est], operemur bonum ad omnes, maxime autem ad domesticos fidei*” (10.204a). And most ringingly Dame Studie endorses the lesson Tobit gives his son about the ethics of wealth management: “*Si tibi sit copia habundanter tribue; si autem exiguum, illud impertiri studi libenter*” ([If you have many riches, give generously; if you have only a little, be diligent to give willingly according to what you have] 10.89a).

The quotation from Tobit can be subordinated to the *textus* of the schools, because one of the standard texts was Matthew of Vendome’s versification of it, and so it would seem to confirm suspicions that Dame Studie does not know much beyond that curriculum. But in this context Dame Studie’s name takes on a meaning that is both more *and* less important than the sense that points us toward the *studium*: to “diligently practice” charity and largess, *studie libenter*.

So why does this larger environment, in which study subordinates not only rudimentary intellectual labor, but also affective and more advanced strands of intellectual labor, tend to disappear? It is partly because we tend to take the schools so seriously as a monolithic and normative structure, perhaps.¹⁵ In reconstructing the texts used in the schools, we may be tempted to treat them as a stable canon that took the same shape and produced the

15. See, for example, David Herlihy, *Medieval Households* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985); Christopher Woolgar, *The Great Household in Late Medieval England* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999); Elliott Kendall, *Lordship and Literature: John Gower and the Politics of the Great Household* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). For primary records of household finances, see Christopher Woolgar, *Household Accounts from Medieval England*, 2 vols., British Academy, *Records of Social and Economic History*, New Series 17–18 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991–92).

same knowledges wherever they were used. That assumption robs them of their vitality and creative force, in the same way traditional source criticism tempts us to think the real interest of a story lies in its strata of borrowings and influences. Even where the texts of the schools was determined precisely and repeated for every generation of students, we need to remember how much generative potential they possess, how exciting they could be, for each student encountering them for the first time. I would like to suggest that we should do that for the records of the household, as well. Historians have looked at the form of such records to reconstruct the normative practices of the medieval household in England, and to show the remarkable consistency of forms of household management and documentation.¹⁶ Perhaps because such practices need to be regular and repeatable, we tend not to imagine that they could embody deliberate initiative, especially when a woman might be responsible for the work of registration.

What would a real *Dame Studie* look like in the archive of the household? I'd like to offer one possibility, from the fragmentary muniments of a prominent fourteenth-century family. Four fourteenth-century fragments of accounts kept by the Catesbys of Northamptonshire for their estates survive, all written in the same hand.¹⁷ The earliest of these, written in 1380–81, is, like the rest of them, probably a receiver's roll, the counter-roll written by the official presiding over the yearly or term accounts for the manor or manors held by a household. It is the beginning of the roll, and starts, as formularies and treatises advise, with a title spelling out the function and extent of the roll. The title tells us that it covers Michaelmas through Pentecost of 1380–81, and that it is the "*Rotulus expensarum domus Johannis de Catesby*."¹⁸ That is exactly the formula one can find in every model book and in almost every other set of English accounts in the fourteenth century. But the title continues "*yconomie facte per uxorem eiusdem*," that is, "the roll of expenses of the house of John de Catesby *and* the 'economy' 'made by his wife.'"

There are several unusual things in that last clause. The first is that these accounts record what the roll calls an "economy," a word that does not, to my knowledge, appear in any English account formularies or in other household accounts. One of the most commonly copied sample accounts, for instance, is almost identical to the Catesby's, except for the word "economy": "*Rotulus expensarum domini Radulphi Comitis Staffordie de monibus bonis receptis et expen[sis] fact[um] per Johannem Brouleye Clericum*

16. See especially Woolgar, *Household Accounts*.

17. Kew, The National Archives [hereafter TNA], E 101/510/21 and E 101/511/15.

18. TNA E 101/510/21 mem. 1.

hospicii dicti Domini.”¹⁹ The word “economia” has a wide range of senses in the fourteenth century, but its only appearance in this specific context is in the title of one copy of Walter of Henley’s *Husbandry*, which refers to it as a “Carmen . . . quod vocatur Yconomia sive Housbundria.”²⁰ I know of no other uses of the word “yconomia” in this specific context, and in a place like the Catesby accounts it is an unusual and somewhat recondite word. It is possible that “yconomia” is simply a synonym for husbandry here, and that the title distinguishes between expenses for the house and for the farm. But the roll itself does not make that distinction: expenses for the two appear together with no discrimination made between the two sites of expenditure. Further, the account includes income from manorial rents, so it is not just an expense account. The expenses in the title would apply just to the expenditures of the *domus*, and “yconome” would modify “Rotulus” rather than “expensarum”: “Roll of the economy and expenses of the household of John Catesby.” I would argue that *yconomia* here means something broader than husbandry: the broader economic regulation of the entire household.²¹ At any rate, the roll itself records the broad economic activity of a large enterprise made up of several manors.

This record of the work of consumption and registration for a large household is subordinated under the name of John de Catesby, whose titular dominion also indicates that this is probably not a record of the expenses and the economy that his wife incurs or regulates. I think it means that his wife made the roll, not that she spent all the money. Later in this account she refers to wine bought for or consumed by “patre meo.”²² Her apparent work on this account is one example of a number of records written by her and John, both obviously highly literate and educated administrators of their own property. John was in fact a man of law, learned and sophisticated enough that his opponents in a lawsuit complained of the “subtiles et cautyles qe le dit Johan ad en la ley.”²³ A number of documents from this

19. London, British Library, MS Harley 4971, fol. 27.

20. See Dorothy Oschinski, ed., *Walter of Henley and Other Treatises on Estate Management and Accounting* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 40. The word in this sense appears in copies of Palladius’ *De re rustica* and most commonly refers to what Nicholas Oresme glosses elsewhere as the “art ou industrie de teles choses [appartenants a un hostel ou a une maison] bien ordonees et bien disposees.” Quoted in Claire Richter Sherman, *Imaging Aristotle: Verbal and Visual Representation in Fourteenth-Century France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 286.

21. A valuation, also in Latin, of Catesby manors from five years later than this account, in 1385, uses the term “husbondria” rather than “yconome”: J. R. Birrell, “The *Status Maneriorum* of John Catesby, 1385 and 1386,” in *Dugdale Society Miscellany I*, ed. R. Bearman, Publications of the Dugdale Society 31 (Oxford: Dugdale Society, 1977), 25.

22. TNA E 101/510/21 mem. 2.

23. Printed in J. B. Post, “Courts, Councils, and Arbitrators in the Ladbroke Manor Dispute,”

lawsuit survive, apparently in John's own hand—he refers to himself in the first person several times, and a petition in the same hand is clearly a draft.²⁴ John also kept *Status Maneriorum* accounts, which are unique examples for a small secular estate, and are another indication of the unusually strong documentary interests of his household.²⁵ The innovativeness of these accounts suggests that the Catesby household was unusually sophisticated in thinking about economic matters, and reached for unprecedented ways of representing them. But John's wife's involvement in administration and record-keeping is even more unusual. Her hand also appears in several documents from the lawsuit, including drafts of the final legal opinion, full narratives of the case, and a transcript of witness's statements from Coventry. She was apparently deeply involved in the case, not just John's amanuensis.²⁶

The assumption that administrative matters in the medieval household are run by, recorded by, and for the benefit of, the men in it runs deep. The historian and former archivist at the Public Records Office who edited the two *Status Maneriorum* accounts and the lawsuit documents, J. B. Post, says that the rolls of John's household expenses and the economy made by his wife are "headed with unintentional irony."²⁷ I suppose what he means is that "yconomie" suggests "economizing," and that, since this is a roll of expenses, John's wife has pretty much failed to economize. Even if this heading isn't ironic, and I don't think it is, it suggests that accounting does more than simply list anonymous expenditures and the various things you happen to have to use or to own. The distinction between "expenses" and "economy" suggests that an "economy" might be different from the business of recording what the household spends, that it is something like the unregistered, as-yet-unwritten business of dwelling in the household, the habits and practices that are recorded after the fact by the tallying of expenses and consumptions. This woman, the wife of John Catesby, makes the economy by living it before it is written. And unlike a mere clerk, she is implicated in the economy of the household directly and pervasively. The account is, in a real and immediate sense, the economy of her own life, the making not just of that economy but of the self that writes it. In a deeper, and materially more important sense, this woman does make the economy of the household. The wife of John de Catesby was Emma Cranford, who brought with

in *Medieval Legal Records Edited in Memory of C. A. F. Meekings*, ed. R. F. Hunnisett and J. B. Post (London: H. M. Stationery Office, 1978), 332.

24. See Post, "Courts, Councils, and Arbitrators," 298.

25. See Birrell, "The *Status Maneriorum* of John Catesby," 18–19.

26. Post, "Courts, Councils, and Arbitrators," 299.

27. Post, "Courts, Councils, and Arbitrators," 299.

her to the marriage several of the manors that made up the Catesby's wealth, particularly the manor of Ashby St. Ledger, which became their principal residence.²⁸

That is yet another reason why the heading of that account wouldn't be ironic, because a lot of John Catesby's wealth was Emma's. Rather than drain the household accounts, she contributed substantially to them, at least by bringing manors with annual rents with her when she married John. But I would argue that she contributed to the household accounts in another substantial way. Emma probably kept accounts because of the manors that came with her, manors that established the Catesby family as one of the more important Northamptonshire families. John Catesby emerged after the marriage, at least according to charters, as an important ecclesiastical patron, making grants to a number of foundations. After John died in 1405, Emma's name, along with that of her sons John and Robert, appears almost as frequently. It is likely that Emma had been as interested in ecclesiastical endowments during her husband's life, but that her own interests and involvement are obscured by the nominal control of their property by her husband, indeed by the customary masculine control of the name of the household.²⁹

But the names that appear in Emma's own accounts show that it is she who controls the household in a direct and literal way. This 1380 receiver's account is the counter-roll, the register of account drawn up to reconcile and record the returns from all of the Catesby manors and the expenses for the household as a whole for that term. It is made in the form of an indenture, the other part of which was presumably held by the man who collected the manorial rents and presented them and the accounting to Emma, a man named here as William Capellanus, William the Chaplain. Emma's account also names him in the list of those receiving a stipend from the household, the large sum of 26 s. 8d. By comparison, the next largest stipend is 10s.

William is not just an itinerant cleric, who traveled around compiling accounts for large households; he has persistent and very close ties to the Catesby household. A fragment of an undated account, also in Emma's hand, lists the stipend paid to William as 20s., but also lists bread worth 16s 6d.

28. The Catesby family is best known for Emma's and John's great-grandson William Catesby, who is the Catesby in Shakespeare's *Richard III*, and for Robert Catesby, William's direct descendant, who instigated the Gunpowder Plot. The Catesby accounts are part of the muniments called into Chancery in the wake of the Plot.

29. There is no definitive study of the fourteenth-century Catesbys and Cranfords, but useful articles are N. W. Alcock, "The Catesbys in Coventry: A Medieval Estate and Its Archives," *Midland History* 15 (1990): 1–36; Post, "Courts, Councils, and Arbitrators"; Birrell, "The *Status Maneriorum* of John Catesby," 15–28.

"empto," bought for or consumed by, William "et sociis," his associates.³⁰ As his identification as "capellanus" suggests, William may have belonged at this point to one of several local ecclesiastical or monastic foundations, from the college church at Ashby St. Ledger itself to the alien priory of Everdon, about eight miles away, a church where a "William Haukyns" is listed together with two other chaplains on a charter of enfeoffment at the end of the century.³¹ It is possible that William and his socii are responsible for one of the most unusual features of the accounts that Emma records with him: they are written on paper, the only example I know of where paper is used this early in a private English household (this is in 1380). The watermark on the paper matches paper made in Rouen in the fourteenth century, and it may be that the alien priory at Everdon acquired the paper from the parent monastery in Normandy. Most of the surviving examples of the use of paper in fourteenth-century England come either from coastal towns and ports or from monasteries and colleges, where it is used, as at Merton College, exclusively for the keeping of accounts.

By the end of the century, William's work and his place in the stipendiary accounts of the Catesby household had been taken over by another man, William Brok. He first shows up on a receiver's roll written by Emma recording the receipt of manorial incomes, from 14 manors, excluding Ashby, totaling 841. 4s. 4d. It is sewn to a two-membrane account also written by Emma, which covers expenses for the year from Michaelmas 1392 to Michaelmas 1393. Written less systematically than Emma's other account from 1380, it may be the running record on which expenses were recorded as they were incurred. Its title, though, tells us that it is a comprehensive fiscal view of the household in every sense, from the *familia* to the *domus*. It does not describe itself, as the previous account does, in terms of documentary form, as a roll recording the expense and economy of John of Catesby's household. This one says "Expensum noui edificii & iconomie & aliorum necessarium facit [*sic*] per Emmam vxorem Johannis De Catesby," "the expense for the new building and the economy and other necessities made by Emma, the wife of John de Catesby." Not only is she named here in her own right, but this account gives us a further glimpse into the pedagogical edification of her household, also. As I have suggested, the household did not exactly lack for clerks when things needed to be written and accounts needed to be drawn up. It kept several in the household permanently: William Haukyn, William Brok (col-

30. "Empto" technically means "bought," but in many English account books of the period expenditures are a valuation of goods consumed in the household. See Woolgar, *Household Accounts from Medieval England*, 1:40.

31. Berkeley Castle Muniments C/2/2/14 (GC4127).

lector of manorial rents in 1390 and rector of nearby Barton Seagrave), and other unnamed clerks like William Capellanus's *socii*. So what is surprising is the entry for the teaching of young John Catesby in 1392/3, not at the local school, nor by the local schoolmaster, but by a woman named Margaret Islip, who was paid 6s 8d. "per doctrinam" of the 13-year-old "Johanne de Catesby."

She is not Dame Studie, nor was meant to be. But between them Emma and Margaret demonstrate the gravitational pull of the household precisely in the jurisdiction of study. Even further evidence of the study of texts in Emma's household is the set of brasses she probably commissioned for herself and her husband after he died in 1405 (she lived until at least 1414). Rather than the usual text "ici gyst" or "orate pro . . ." around the margins of the image, each brass quotes one half of a responsory from the second nocturne of the office of the dead: "Domine secundum actum meum noli me iudicare nichil dignum in conspectus tuo egi" continuing in the second scroll "Ideo deprecor maiestatem tuam ut tu deus deleas iniquitatem meam" ("Lord, do not judge me according to my deeds, for I have done nothing worthy in your sight" "therefore I pray your majesty that you, O God, will erase my iniquity"). As with quotations from *Piers Plowman*, we are left wondering who is speaking. Whose are "my" acts? "My" iniquities? What does it mean that Emma's brass is the one that makes the semi-syllogistic petition for the erasure of sins, and in such a perdurable form? And how much of the context of these words are we supposed to remember?

The reading for which this is the responsory seems so apt in this case, when the responsory is used to frame the bodies of husband and wife, that it must have been part of the commemorative scheme as it was originally imagined. It is a reading from Book 19 of Job (verses 20–27): "Have pity on me, have pity on me, O you my friends, for the hand of God has touched me! Why do you, like God, pursue me? Why are you not satisfied with my flesh? Oh that my words were written! Oh that they were inscribed in a book! Oh that with an iron pen and lead they were graven in the rock forever!" It seems more haunting to have to remember these words while we look at words that are graven forever, and to realize that all that is left is the petition, the cry for grace.

IV

All that *Piers Plowman* leaves us with, too, is a cry for grace at the end, an inarticulate and inchoate cry that is unanswered. This ending beyond

the capacity of the poem's considerable linguistic resources reiterates the paradox of the figure of Studie, whose very being is pervaded by something preverbal or even below the threshold of speech. A look from her silences Wit; she says a lot about the futility of study, and in the B version comes within hailing range of the rug-pulling garrulousness of Chaucer's Manciple. Which is to say that she undercuts what she urges, an appropriate, well-mannered respect in the face of superior knowledge; not a *recte loquendi*, but a *recte tacendi*. Unlike grammar, however, the urging of *recte loquendi* can't have positive rules; it can't merely be the opposite of suitable discourse or the choice of precisely the right solecism. So what rules does *recte tacendi* follow? Here in this passus it is, as it should be, the rules constraining what is not in front of us: the body. Wit falls silent when Dame Studie gives him a look; Will knows because of Wit's gestures that he, but not Wit, may speak.

Similarly, Imaginatyf tells Will he ought to fall silent in the face of knowledge: "you would have been a philosopher if you had remained silent; I have often regretted speaking, but never regretted staying silent" ("*Philosophus esses si tacuisses; & alibi: Locutum me aliquando penituit, tacuisse nunquam*" [C 13.224a / B 11.416a]). Imaginatyf is quoting here from Boethius and Cato's distichs, texts straight from the schools, and we have to wonder, as Ralph Hanna has urged us to do, what exactly Imaginatyf means by being philosophical, because his orbit is so constrained by the authorities not of advanced speculation but of elementary instruction.

Dame Studie, in comparison, ranges across the field of knowledge, from elementary grammar to arcane subjects. She first gives us a list of authorities—"Aristotle and o[th]ere mo to argue" (10.179) and emphasizes in particular the "Logyk" she has taught Scripture (10.176). This brief and specialized curriculum sounds suspiciously like the curriculum that John of Salisbury says is swamping the traditional curriculum of the schools: the new kind of scholar, he says sardonically, "praises Aristotle alone, he scorns Cicero . . . logic alone pleases [*logica sola placet*]."³² Yet Studie next describes her role as a very traditional pedagogue, beating grammar into students with a birch (10.177–78), and finally as the founder of necromantic sciences, "folk to deceyve" (10.215). Her epistemic domain, in other words, stretches from the basic discipline of linguistic rectitude, grammar, to the deceptive arts of alchemy and geomancy. "Study" itself is an unstable and ambiguous practice, the pursuit of which does not guarantee the truth of things. Nor does it encompass a stable disciplinary orbit. Her examples and objects of cri-

32. John of Salisbury, *Entheticus Maior*, 113.

tique extend far beyond the classroom, shaped as much by the court and the household as by the schoolroom.

The C text revision of the poem in fact deletes a reference to that metonym of the entire elementary curriculum, the *Disticha Catonis*, or what Studie in the B text disparagingly calls the “Catons kennyng” of clerks (10.194). Indeed, in the B text Studie cites as an example of the deficiency of that kind of knowledge a distich that seemingly endorses deception, the beguiling of art with art. The site of knowledge in the C text, in other words, rests less securely on the already destabilized foundation of the classical curriculum. Knowledge and rectitude are impeached at least as strongly by the demands of the household. Scattered throughout Studie’s discourse are references to animal husbandry (don’t cast pearls before swine who already have “hawes at wille” [B 10.10]), the eleemosynary obligations of the table in a wealthy household to the beggars at its gate (B 10.58), and the talk that follows the minstrels at a meal when they are “stille” (B 10.52). More protractedly Studie complains about the deformation of the traditional household by new practices:

Elong is the halle, ech day in the wike,
 Ther the lord ne the lady liketh noght to sitte.
 Now hath ech riche a rule—to eten by hymselfe
 In a pryvee parlor for povere mennes sake,
 Or in a chamber with a chymenee, and leve the chief halle
 That was maad for meles, men to eten inne,
 And al to spare to spille that spende shal another.
 (B 10.96–102)

This complaint is Studie’s most specific and pointed, and suggests the importance to her of the household as a site of both misrule and of potential rectitude. Even the excision of this passage in the C text underscores this importance. Replacing the entire passage, and a subsequent criticism of the idle theological speculation that goes on over the banquet table, is a more abstract but global critique of household practices: lords only want, says Dame Studie, to hear how they might “leest goed spene” (C 11.75) and the only wit that matters is what “of wynnynge sounne” (C 11.77). The focus of critique, in other words, moves from the kinds of comportment that enable charity to the governing principle of household economics, of “wynnynge.”

The other important site of critique in Studie’s discourse is the law court. We already know that the law court is a bad place from the opening passus of the poem, over which Fals, Wrong, and Lady Meed preside. And that is

ostensibly the reason Langland steers us away from this impasse by beginning the C version of the Studie passus with a quotation that leaves us in no doubt about the bad faith implicit in such eloquence. The B text's general complaint at the start of the Studie passus concerns anyone who "can construe deceits and conspire wronges . . . and . . . lette þe truthe" (10.19–20). In the C text the complaint is precisely focused on the law: whoever can do all this *and* "coveite" will be "cleped into consayle" (C 11.18). This refinement, if we can call it that, is underpinned by a new quotation in the C text: "*Qui sapiunt nugas & crim[ina] lege vocantur; / Qui recte sapient lex iubet ire foras*" ("Those who know about trifles and slander are called in by the law; those who are truly wise the law commands to go out/ to go forth" [C 11.18a–18b]). The source of this quotation is part of the play of intellectual reference, and of sites of knowledge, in this passus. It comes from one of John of Salisbury's lesser works, the *Entheticus Maior*, in a section that has extraordinary resonance for *Piers*, concerning the scandals, vanities and *nugae* of the court, and of lawyers in particular.³³ The following section concerns the obligations of households to extend hospitality, and these two sections on the depredations of English culture are preceded by a long analysis of the failures of contemporary education to appreciate the *auctores*, part of which I have already quoted. Indeed, the whole of the *Entheticus Maior*, which spans John of Salisbury's own career from a student in Paris to a member of the curia at Canterbury, with its fluid associations of social, political, and academic sites of interest, is startlingly like Dame Studie's discourse, and if the evidence did not suggest that Langland came across the *Entheticus Maior* late in the career of the poem, it would appear to be a specifically literary antecedent.³⁴ My point is that Studie steps out of the schoolroom and

33. The *Entheticus Maior*, also known as the *Entheticus de Dogmate Philosophorum*, survives in three complete medieval copies, one of them produced at St. Albans and owned by Richard de Bury. There are at least three extracts or digests of it, and they appear with John of Salisbury's better-known works, the *Policraticus* or the *Metalogicon*. The *Entheticus Minor*, also called the *Entheticus in Policraticum*, usually appears as an introductory poem with the *Policraticus*. It is largely an extract of Part Three of the *Entheticus Maior*, which concerns court and curia. See Laarhoven, 1:25–35, 71–75.

34. Its ramshackle, stop-and-start structure contains a remarkably large range of topics and modes, including a discussion about grammar and morality, grace, causality, fortune, the classics, philosophy, the order of the sciences, and scripture in the first 450 lines; a meandering description of classical philosophers; and a satirical portrait of English institutions under King Stephen (mostly) that reads much like passus 3 and 4 of the B text, which also includes a complaint about the danger of a country that has a youthful king (lines 1464–65). One of the three surviving manuscripts of the *Entheticus* is contained in a miscellany of texts about the kinds of knowledge that Studie mentions: Cambridge, University Library, MS Mm ii 18, a fourteenth-century compilation that includes, among others, a text of the *Consolation of Philosophy*, texts on algebra, strategy, geometry, astronomy, epigrams attributed to Martial, and excerpts from Macrobius's *Saturnalia*, Ovid, Gospel commentaries, Gerald of Wales's *Topographia Hiberniae*, and John of Salisbury's *Metalogicon*. Miscellanies like this are

the household in the C-Text to quote from a relatively arcane philosophical text—indeed, one about the difficulties of philosophical speech—to suggest that the site of *recte loquendi* lies not there, nor in the court, nor in the household, but simply “foras,” “outside.”

It is here, I think, that the passage’s importance for an understanding of Langland’s literary imaginary comes into focus. Studie’s discourse is a systematic exposure of the tractability, indeed the unsettling contingency, of traditional kinds of literary and intellectual matter. To step outside them is not to discard them altogether, but to take their practices to new sites of knowledge, especially the baffling one Studie calls love. This movement is the inverse of one that Chaucer makes in his career, according to Anne Middleton, in taking the forms of decorous ‘luf-talkyng,’ in her words, “*out of court*” in the *Canterbury Tales*.³⁵ Langland’s, or Studie’s, calling out of court of the truly wise in order to pursue the science of love would seem to thwart the very purpose of study itself, to acquire and use technical practices in a circumscribed domain. And yet these practices are no longer sufficient, even when used as a means to critique their importance, as with the distich whose ultimate point is not to heed the advice of distichs. In other words, the passage also concerns the problem that Langland voices so sharply in the C text autobiographical passage about the practice and form that will legitimate—or more precisely *not deligitimate*—the poem. Its quest for true wisdom calls it forth on the way to love, yet places it outside the secure domain of traditional discursive practices.

Like the narrators in the *Canterbury Tales* whom Middleton refers to as “new men,” defined by their “literary conduct, rather than objective social status,” Studie gives traditional forms of knowledge and narration a new ethical purpose.³⁶ Indeed, her B text discourse initially imagines these forms of knowledge as recalcitrantly embodied, “Plato,” “Aristotle,” a spanking Grammar, or as objects insistently materialized, like a book or a “forcere” full of “fibiches” (B 10.211). In cutting out what was starting to become an encyclopedic catalogue of the kinds of matter that could be objects of study, Langland takes Studie out of the anti-intellectual impasse in which she finds herself in the B text, and indeed out of the impasse in which a woman is seen to be caught within highly tractable matter. It is not so much that Langland’s silence in the C text about how to classify improper knowledge

probably what Studie has in mind when she talks about the various disciplines she teaches—measurement, theology, astronomy, and geometry (B 10.179–207).

35. Anne Middleton, “Chaucer’s ‘New Men’ and the Good of Literature in the *Canterbury Tales*,” in *Literature and Society*, ed. Edward Said (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), 40.

36. Middleton, “Chaucer’s ‘New Men’ and the Good of Literature,” 16.

encourages us to look ahead to further forms of knowing—to Clergie, to Scripture, etc. It is that the silences *of and in* the space of appearance—the court, the schoolroom, the household—are where we find love, the only possible response to theology, or at least where we know we are no longer being deluded by mere art.