

DRAMATIZATIONS OF AUTHORITY IN CHAUCER AND MAIDSTONE

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THESIS ABSTRACT

Dramatizations of Authority in Chaucer and Maidstone

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This thesis examines the connections between sovereignty, spectacle, and public ceremony in Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Knight's Tale* and Richard Maidstone's *Concordia facta inter regem et cives Londonie [The Reconciliation of the King and Citizens of London]*. I begin by looking at *The Knight's Tale* and *Concordia* to unveil the intricacies of public ceremony and spectacle as political tools for medieval rule. As spectacle of sovereign expenditure serves as a signifier of sovereignty, public ceremony serves as an occasion for displaying such politically motivated spectacle. However, within ceremony, such spectacle is not simply displayed, but becomes scripted into a collaborative performance and social drama. The signification of sovereign authority, then, is developed and complicated by the ceremonial social drama that aids the display. Therefore, the title of this thesis, *dramatizations of authority*, sets ahead two distinct though conjoined matters: (1) the aesthetic design in which authority is dramatized and (2) the authoritative power of the dramatizations themselves to determine political relations and the overall social reality. The more contemporary Georges Bataille, in his *The Accursed Share*, provides theoretical support to this examination while later historical facts encourage a reading of *The Knight's Tale* for its depiction and critique of

dramatizations of authority, specifically those during the reign of Richard II. Thus, after using *The Knight's Tale* and *Concordia* to understand the design of the royal entry ceremony in particular, I focus on the critical perspectives each text posits on the medieval custom. Ultimately, in *The Knight's Tale*, Chaucer mocks Richard II's dependence on public ceremony and spectacle as a tool for wielding power as well as the reverence and faith with which masses of citizens, like Maidstone, esteemed the royal entry ceremony. *The Knight's Tale* may be read as a warning to medieval (and contemporary) readers to be conscious and skeptical of the social influence that dramatizations of authority impact.

Introduction: Dramatizations of Authority in Medieval Culture and Literature

I speak in general of an aspect that is opposed to the servile and subordinate. Sovereignty . . . essentially belongs to *all men* who possess and have never entirely lost the value that is attributed to gods and “dignitaries”. [The latter] *display* that value with an ostentation that sometimes goes with a profound baseness . . . they *cheapen* it by displaying it.

-George Bataille

As Georges Bataille distinguishes above in his theoretical examination of sovereignty in *The Accursed Share*, sovereignty, the value, is an innate human experience that comes from within. However, throughout history, individuals and institutions have asserted the superiority of their sovereignty over multitudes through spectacular displays. As Lawrence Clopper, scholar of medieval spectacle, asserts, “Spectacles are statements of who and what individuals and institutions are” (123). The experiences of sovereignty, which Bataille explains as experiences of miracle, sanctity, and the present moment, of which every man is capable, at some point came to be signified predominately through material wealth; understandably so, because, as he claims, material wealth equals a more full experience of the present moment (198). Such is the experience afforded by the menu, produced for the installation feast of Archbishop Neville in 1456, which included 41,833 items of meat and poultry (Fletcher 21). The excessive menu functions as a display of sovereignty, of excessive (even wasteful), material wealth. Not only is the signification of authority costly, but also multi-leveled. While the menu called for thousands of chickens and geese, it only lists four hundred swans and peacocks because the latter were “more prized items reserved for the superior tables” (Fletcher 29). Therefore, the food dramatized the varying statuses of those invited to the feast. At the

same time, it dramatized the individuals invited to the feast as higher and more honorable than those among the multitude of spectators whom were often, when royal feasts were celebrated, “kept at bay with wooden barriers guarded by sergeants and ushers” (Fletcher 24). The silk and camel- hair cloths that lined the street upon which Queen Isabel entered Paris in 1389 in front of thousands of spectators (Fletcher 24) functioned politically in the same way as Archbishop Neville’s plethora of food. Such spectacles of sovereign expenditure are not unique to the late Middle Ages, but flourished distinctively throughout the specific period as a predominate technique for wielding political rule and maintaining the feudal hierarchy.

Public ceremony is a crucial element to this propagandistic operation of spectacular displays of sovereignty, as ceremony provides the *occasion* for such displays. A failed attempt on the part of Bishop Despenser in 1370 to publically signify a degree of authority he did not actually possess illuminates the relation between materialistic displays of authority and the occasion of public ceremony in which the displays occur. In *Powers of the Holy: Religion, Politics, and Gender in Late Medieval English Culture*, David Aers recounts Despenser’s demand that he be welcomed to the town of Lynn with a degree of honor greater than that “ordinarily done to his office” (155). He asked that the mace that normally preceded the town’s mayor be borne before him, the mace being an objective symbol of a higher level of authority than was his. Despenser upheld this demand despite warnings from both the mayor of Lynn and citizens themselves that this demand was unwise. Dismissing the warning and referring to the commons as “ribaldos”, Despenser approached the town gates preceded by one of his own men carrying the mace and deserted by all the residents of Lynn. When he reached the town gates, commoners

assaulted him at the gates with stones until Despenser was forced to accept the intervention of the king. The matter, *dramatizations of authority*, in this instance, and any instance of ceremony, includes both the power of public performance itself as well as the dramatic portrayal of authority the performance creates. Despenser wanted to dramatize his authority (by employing the mace) as equally high in honor as the mayor himself. The mace here embodies the same communicative authority held by the objective symbols of sovereignty initially noted. The mace, the excessive menu, and the silk and camel-hair cloths are external manifestations or objectifications of the abstract value of sovereignty. These manifestations produce a strategized dramatization of authority and the public ceremony occasions exposure of these dramatizations to the public. The town of Lynn violently refused to allow Despenser's desired dramatization because such a dramatization would reshape Despenser's political identity and his social relationship with Lynn accordingly—and this reshaping would be untrue. Not only historical records of late medieval public ceremonies, but also many imaginative works of literature that are products of the period illuminate both the significant role of the public ceremony as it provided the opportunities and sites for spectacles of sovereignty as well as the specific portrayals of authority produced by the strategically coordinated spectacles.

Late medieval authors of imaginative literature were attuned to the dramatic techniques employed in public ceremonies as strategies for wielding authority. They understood the operation of public ceremonies as “sites of social, political and religious strain” (Clopper 115) which, “dramatize[ed] tensions inherent in all hierarchical relationships” (Aers 186). England saw a drastic increase of ceremonial pageants both in number and complexity during the reign of Richard II (Kipling 6), the years in which

Chaucer, Gower, and Langland were writing. In particular, Book 1 of *Confessio Amantis* (1390) and *Piers Plowman* (1360-87) are deeply suspicious of the reliability of public performance and the spectacles that aid it. They are also anxious over the manipulative powers of public ceremony and its apparent effectiveness. Gower's *Apollonius of Tyre*, especially demonstrates the manifestation of personal experience into external, communal reality through public ceremony. Written slightly later, *The Book of Margery Kempe* (1436) can be read for a greater understanding of public performance in the medieval era as Kempe's public appearance repeatedly causes confusion and frustration because her clothes and behavior deviate from social expectations. The high frequency to which public performance was exploited as a tool for defining authority and wielding power reverberates throughout these authors' works and beyond. However, Chaucer's *The Knight's Tale* contains a most immediate criticism of the propagandistic operation between extravagant spectacles of sovereignty and public ceremony.

Through *The Knight's Tale*, Chaucer demonstrates the propagandistic operation of public ceremony as well as sovereign expenditure as a tool within that operation. Through this demonstration, he exposes the insincerity and corruption that underlies the dramatizations produced within the ceremonies; or, how that injustice and corruption is enabled, maintained, and furthered by the ceremonies. Chaucer proposes this view of ceremony in response to dramatizations of authority that occur particularly in the royal entry ceremony tradition. Chaucer's depiction of ceremony, cultural values, and values of governance in *The Knight's Tale* strongly parallel and mock the real-life public ceremony London hosted for Richard II in 1392. The tale also strongly parallels and mocks Richard Maidstone's contemporary Latin poem known as the *Concordia facta*

inter regem et cives Londonie [*The Reconciliation of the King and Citizens of London*], which is a propagandistic recording of the 1392 ceremony. While Gordon Kipling has extensively studied customs of the royal entry ceremony, no analysis has yet been published that examines *The Knight's Tale* as a response to the royal entry ceremony genre; or to Maidstone's *Concordia*; or to Richard II's habitual exploitation of ceremony in efforts to enforce his own tyranny. Maidstone's recording assists not only in understanding Chaucer's critique of ceremony, but also itself provides a generous demonstration of the operation of ceremony as a technology of medieval rule. Ultimately, while much historical research on late medieval public performance is available, a literary examination as an alternate approach offers a generous, dynamic understanding of cultural involvement with public performance and the notions of authority it mobilizes.

Depictions of Sovereign Expenditure, Spectacle, and Public Ceremony

From the very beginning of *The Knight's Tale* Chaucer establishes Athenian culture as fixated upon ceremony and places their sovereign, Duke Theseus, in the spotlight. In doing so, Chaucer begins his extensive exhibition of the political function of public ceremony from which extends his critique of Richard's obsession with ceremony. After the Knight introduces Theseus as the noble, worthy Duke of Athens, he begins describing Theseus' return home from his victorious conquest of Femenye. This homecoming is a celebration and triumphal march, but also pure public ceremony filled with "muchel glorie and greet solempnytee" (870). The celebration includes "melodye" (872) while Theseus rides with his "hoost in armes hym bisyde" (874). The scene and details here reveal how public ceremony spotlights Theseus' nobility and honor specifically. Theseus' reputation is secured by the supreme, chivalric image this ceremony attributes to him. Riding at the head of his army (874), Theseus is positioned as the spectacle, the most desirable focal point upon which to gaze, in the sight of the whole town. The imagery of Theseus "come almost unto the toun" (894) emphasizes the public, communal aspect of the event. The city is present to witness Theseus arriving home victorious from his most recent conquest, a public witness to empower his reputation. When Theseus performs as the spectacle in his homecoming and wedding ceremonies, his nobility (873, 998), chivalry (865, 878, 982), wisdom (865), gentleness (952), manliness (987), and most especially, his success as a conqueror (862, 866, 981, 998) are on display and thus confirmed. Indeed, the tale itself is an artifact of this public confirmation as the Knight's adoration for Theseus is a confirmation of Theseus' prowess reverberating through re-tellings initiated by public witnesses. When he scolds the crying

widows, Theseus himself makes clear that the purpose for his homecoming ceremony is to validate his honor publically, and woe to those who interfere with that aim: “What folk been ye, that at myn homcomynge / Perturben so my feste with crynge? / . . . Have ye so greet envye / Of myn honour, that thus compleyne and crye?” (905-08). While this remark rebukes the company of ladies for withholding praise from Theseus, it more importantly admits Theseus’ frustration with their behavior for stealing attention from him.

The Knight finds details regarding ceremony so important that he mentions them despite his all too- common protestations of constraining time. Through numerous instances of *occultatio*, the Knight not only frames Athens’ obsession with ceremony but also makes apparent the high and blind idolization with which he himself holds ceremonial demonstrations of militaristic, political power. Even though a description of the ceremony is “to long to heere” (875), the Knight cannot help sharing the few images of Theseus’ homecoming mentioned above like the “melodye”, “glorie”, “and hoost of armes”. The Knight even extends his *occultatio* by mentioning the “feste” (883) that was at Theseus and Hipolyta’s wedding. In yet another instance, the Knight denies that he will describe the Athenian wives’ funerary observances, but then continues to mention the “grete clamour and the waymentynge” performed (995) as well as the “grete honour / that Theseus, the noble conqueror,” (997-98) conferred upon the fallen warriors. The latter detail suggests that the Athenian funeral ceremony is important to the Knight only because Theseus himself pays honor to the fallen husbands. Therefore, the Knight’s recounting of the funeral ceremony contributes further to Chaucer’s depiction of public ceremony as a medium for political propaganda. For, the Knight is stricken with an

admiration for the conqueror that reflects the honor projected onto Theseus in each ceremony. The Knight's own perception of Theseus reveals the art of the public display whereby the strategic performance negotiates a spotlighted figure's social identity. While Theseus validates the kinsmen's honor, Theseus' reputation is also enhanced by his public performance of authority implied through his bestowment of the honor. The absence of any Athenian spectator challenging or rejecting the ceremonial practices exercised during Theseus homecoming, his wedding feast, or the funeral frames Athenian citizens as wholly compliant (consciously or not) with the political propaganda that unfolds before them in the events. Although the widows' weeping interrupts Theseus' homecoming and initially steals attention from him, their plea for Theseus' mercy is not a defiance of the ceremonial custom, but rather a strategic exploitation of public space and political visibility (elements of the public ceremony). Their interruption is spontaneous, unexpected, unplanned. Their plea requires Theseus to make performative choices while in the spotlight of his city. In this way, citizens themselves may also exercise power over the political figurehead whom the ceremony spotlights and celebrates. The coming discussion of *Concordia* considers the consequences of Theseus performative choices in response to the widows' plea. Overall, in just the first one-thousand lines of *The Knight's Tale*, the Knight foregrounds his and Athens' compliant and delighted take with the three public ceremonies he recounts while Chaucer foregrounds the timeless custom of public ceremony as a primary issue under investigation through his narrative.

Striking similarities exist between Chaucer's description of Theseus' homecoming ceremony and Maidstone's account of the royal entry ceremony hosted by London for Richard II in 1392. Both ceremonies emulate the grandeur of royalty. While

the atmosphere during Theseus' arrival is uplifted with "melodye" (872), choruses of friars sing and greet Richard (173). The Knight's note, the "tempest at hir hoom-comynge," could refer to a literal storm, like the one that takes place during the homecoming in Boccaccio's *Teseida*, but because the detail occurs during one of the Knight's occultationes, and considering his occultationes only ever concern either ceremonial spectacle or battle—the detail more likely conveys the rousing spirits of the crowd and the energetic atmosphere. Maidstone's record suggests a similar welcoming uproar as he describes the mass of people that "rush" (66) from town to meet the king. The melody at Richard's ceremony too is "never still: the song, the roar, and shout" (171).

Richard is the primary spectacle from the very beginning of the ceremony as he processes with his noble company on horses to the city gates, just like Theseus during his celebratory return home from conquest. The pressure placed on Richard as the spotlighted figure is illuminated by Richard's encounter with a felon who, at one point, stops the king from processing forward through the city. Previously banished from the city, the felon "lays himself headlong before the horses' feet / And weeping begs for pardon, which the king then grants" (187-88). The actions of both Theseus' weeping widows and the felon include placing themselves at the feet of their sovereigns while obstructing the sovereigns' ability to process forward. The subordinates are in fact taking advantage of the public sphere in which their sovereign is cornered to increase the likelihood of receiving agreeable responses to their requests. After recounting the king's mercy on the felon, Maidstone continues, "So may the grace that he Richard has shown be shown to him"(190). This interaction and Maidstone's response to it clarifies the

pressure placed on the sovereign to act in a manner agreeable to his citizens' desires—for Richard's mercy upon the felon leads Maidstone to praise Richard himself. The crying widows offer Theseus the same challenge, or opportunity, to enhance his public performance by responding to them in a way that will please the spectating citizens, and upon pleasing them, Theseus's reputation will benefit. Theseus predicts the advancement of his reputation when he acclaims "He wolde doon so ferforthly his myght / Upon the tiraunt Creon hem to wreke / That al the peple of Grece sholde speke / How Creon was of Theseus yserved" (960-63). Theseus' actions are an exaggerated imitation of Richard's mercy. For, Theseus not only grants the widows mercy, but "doun from his courser sterte" (952) and "in his armes he hem alle up hente" (957). Furthermore, after declaring his oath to grant the widows' request, he dashes immediately off from his homecoming ceremony to fulfill that oath (965-66). Theseus' dashing off from his ceremony exaggerates farcically Richard's reverent performance—for no reader of Chaucer's could likely imagine producing such a costly and time-consuming ceremonial extravaganza for Richard only to have him turn around at the city gates for militaristic conquest instead.

As Richard approaches the city gates upon his horse the "noble companies pack close" (106) just like Theseus' "hoost in armes" (874) that ride close beside him. Georges Bataille's theoretical examination of sovereignty can be used to explain why both Theseus' and Richard's elitist groups strive to be physically close to their sovereigns during each ceremony. That is, the eminence radiating from the sovereign shines most brightly onto those nearest to him. Chaucer's detail about the "hoost in armes" (874) processing beside Theseus reflects Maidstone's record of the noble companies doing the same with Richard, and thus Chaucer captures the exchange of recognition that occurs

between the sovereign and his closest aristocracy while making public appearances together. Bataille explains how the possibility of traditional sovereignty depends to a degree on this public spatial positioning:

Ordinarily, the royal splendor does not radiate in solitude. The multitude's recognition, without which the king is nothing, implies a *recognition* of the greatest men, of those who might aspire on their own account to the recognition of others. But the king, who would not have absolute magnificence if he was not recognized by the greatest of men, must recognize the latter as such. (248)

This performative strategy of on the part of the aristocracy to appear close to Richard during the processions works to secure the class' elitism as well as Richard's own authority. The close proximity of both groups to each other validates both degrees of authority. Constant stress on processional order by social rank in both Chaucer and Maidstone's portrayals of ceremony foregrounds the political, operational nature of the public ceremony. During Richard's ceremony, the warden directs citizens to "Let all the clergy of the church proceed in front, / every order bear their crosses held before. / Let every city guild be quite distinct" (49-51). The instructions demonstrate the order in which "London's alderman, of noble rank" (72) lead and every guild follows "behind the nobles" (79). Not only does the procession spatially signify status, but also through costume. Maidstone repeats this fact numerous times: "Their suit proclaims that each on is quite separate" (80); "From each unknown prisoners to beloved by all of Athens, with the shift occurring the moment one's suit of clothes, his craft was clear to see" (95); and lastly,

They're dressed in robes of black, of purple, and of grey
 (Well dyed), of green and red and scarlet too,
 And bi-colored; the guilds are set apart by clothes
 And into companies as fitting to their trades. (164-67)

The costumes, with their colors and uniqueness, attribute a celebratory and honorary distinction to each guild, which overshadows the political agenda that benefits from the visibility of status. Maidstone echoes the positive fabrication of the political scheme in his claim that "They keep their proper place according to their state:/ Each one rejoices in its honor and rank" (162-3). Similarly, in *The Knight's Tale*, at Theseus' palace on the exciting morning of the tournament, "many a route" (2494) is ordered according to social status. Not only do lords upon horses (2495, 2501) then knights (2502) lead the procession, but the Knight offers five delines describing their regalia. The squires follow (2502), then horses themselves (2506), then armorers (2507). Closing the list are "Yemen on foote, and communes many oon" (2509). Just a few scenes later, Theseus and his closest begin leading the ordered procession to the arena. Theseus' closest company is socially ordered too: "Ful lik a lord this noble duc, gan ryde, / Thise two Thebans upon either syde, / And after rood the queene and Emelye. / And after that another compaignye / Of oon and oother, after hir degree" (2569-73). The time the Knight spends on recounting this order raises curiosity about Chaucer's reason for spending so many lines on the matter. Through such emphasis, both he and Maidstone call attention to the extreme value sovereignty places on visible signification of the social hierarchy; and the opportunity public ceremony creates for such display of social order. Chaucer appears to mock the exchange of sovereignty between a sovereign and his closest (which vitally validates both parties' authority at all) when Arcite and Palamon rise from being

unknown prisoners to beloved by all of Athens, with the shift occurring the moment Theseus claims them as his own knights and offers them his sponsorship

The Royal Entry Ceremony

Historically, the chronology of Chaucer's works, his career in the court, the dates of specific royal entry ceremonies, and the span of time in which the royal entry ceremony tradition was developing all support the likelihood that, in *The Knight's Tale*, Chaucer is specifically critiquing Richard's 1392 royal entry ceremony and London's compliance with it. Chaucer was already well established in service to the court when London hosted royal entry ceremonies for the coronations of Richard II (1377) and Anne of Bohemia (1382); consequently, scholarship today agrees that by 1380 Chaucer was likely to be constructing the tale of *Palamon and Arcite* (Cannon xxv). Although the time frame in which Chaucer is considered to have worked on a bulk of *The Canterbury Tales* is 1386 to 1389, evidence exists that suggests his translation of *Palamon and Arcite* into the *The Knight's Tale* would have occurred more near in time to the 1392 reconciliation ceremony. That is, Chaucer likely gained his knowledge for the description of the lists in *The Knight's Tale* from his duties as clerk of the king's works, which he held for King Richard from 1389-1390; one such duty included the building of an arena for the 1390 Smithfield tournaments (Cannon xx). The Smithfield tournaments were indeed an international and diplomatic endeavor in an effort, on Richard's part, to keep up with his French royal compeers (Carlson 7). Theseus appears to achieve a similarly international and diplomatic expense when he invites two hundred foreign knights to his tournament.

Chaucer lived during a rich, cultural development of the royal entry ceremony. While only a single pageant had graced the coronation ceremonies of Richard and Anne, London executed an unprecedented series of four pageants for the reconciliation ceremony, and as Kipling observes, "Before the close of the fourteenth century,

successive king and queens of England and of France are enjoying civic triumphs containing as many as ten pageants enacted by dozens of actors” (6). According to Kipling, the royal entry ceremony, also called a civic triumph, was an embellished ceremonial welcome of a sovereign into a city that included the decoration of the city streets, raised voices, singers and musicians, a procession of the sovereign throughout the city, and eventually pageants complete with technical sets, costumed actors, and props. Late medieval culture adapted the civic triumph from Roman antiquity, but by Chaucer’s time it’s purpose and design had evolved from its classical origin. Glynne Wickham has distinguished that while the idea behind the Roman civic triumph was military victory, the basis of the medieval Christian European triumph was the acknowledgment that the particular ruler in the cities’ midst is the sole representative chosen by God to act on His behalf as an arbiter of His justice. The ceremonial procession throughout the streets of the capital, as well as the pageants, are a means of extending “to a wider range of subjects than those privileged to attend the coronation service in the Cathedral” an acclamation of the king’s anointment as well as the belief in divine right itself (Kipling 8). During the royal entry ceremony, theocratic ideology would be manifested by theatrical activity that could be experienced. Chaucer and Maidstone’s texts demonstrate this concrete, sensorial manifestation of the theocratic thesis and the sovereign’s fulfillment of it through technologies of public ceremony. One example includes the technical sets that recall theatrical stage construction. London presents Richard with a series of these pageant sets that ground Richard’s authority in divine providence. For instance, Maidstone describes a “castle” (276) built in the central square, the “total structure and its tower hung from ropes . . . suspended in the air” (276-7). The castle is conceptually associated with heaven

by way of the young boy and girl costumed as angels standing within the tower. The children can be seen as representations of Richard and Anne. The dramatic action of the children's descent from the tower "enwrapped in clouds"—literally, as Maidstone explains there were no ladder or steps (286)—dramatizes Richard and Anne's divine origins or angelic guardianship over them. The children use props, a cup full of wine and two crowns, to develop the metaphor upon which the divine right is founded (Richard as Christ). The children present the gifts to Richard and Anne while the warden beseeches Richard to take the gifts that "would not be right for others" (307). The warden's line singles out Richard as the *one* who has been divinely chosen for kingship. This theatrical pageant communicates clearly the close relationship between God and the sovereign. The young angel actors illustrate Richard and Anne's angelic nature or the angelic protection they possess. The angels' placement physically higher in the pageant than any one else in the ceremony signifies Richard's higher spiritual authority and therefore political power. The mechanical clouds connect Richard's transitions between heaven and earth with Christ's ascension. Just as stained glass windows had been used as tools for teaching the life of Christ and the saints, this public ceremony teaches in a similarly visual, but also experiential way, about theocratic law. During this pageant, spectating citizens witness first-hand the divinity of their sovereign. During another pageant, in which the city gate is designed to resemble a desert landscape including "every kind of beast" (359), an actor costumed as John the Baptist points his finger at Richard and calls out, "Look, the Lamb of God" (372); at which point the spectating citizens ought to experience the same recognition of their sovereign. Most significantly, the procession of Richard "throughout the city at a gentle pace" (261) re-enacts Christ's procession to his crucifixion; therefore

encouraging all witnesses to experience Richard's Passion for London. Other theatrical elements enhance the experience of Richard's divine appointment, such as the "choruses of friars" (173), "choirs of angels" (321), and the "finery" (57) of each city square, by creating a celestial atmosphere within the city; citizens are persuaded to welcome Richard as heaven would welcome Christ, and therefore to experience Richard's body as a political temple of Christ's authority.

The Knight's Tale contains similar sensorial manifestations of Theseus' power, but Chaucer authorizes Theseus' political power with militaristic prowess rather than the spiritual superiority that authorizes Richard. In other words, theatrical displays externalize Theseus' military dictatorship just as they externalized Richard's theocracy. All three ceremonies present in the first one-thousand lines of *The Knight's Tale* are related to militarism: Theseus' homecoming from a victorious conquest in Femenye, his marriage to the Queen of the Amazons whom he conquered, and a funeral ceremony honoring fallen warriors. All of the ceremonies in the rest of the tale are similarly related to militarism: the tournament between Palamon and Arcite as well as the funeral procession honoring Arcite's knighthood. For the tournament, Theseus opens his city gates to hundreds of foreigners and puts them to pre-tournament competitions involving "What ladyes fairest been or best daunsynge, / Or which of hem kan dauncen best and synge, / Ne who moost felyngly speketh of love" (2201-03). The pre-game competitions are just one instance in which competition is stressed. The competitions also included who could speak most feelingly of "What haukes sitten on the perche above, / What houndes ligen on the floor adoun—" (2204-05). Here, the imagery of looming predators

increases the competitive atmosphere Theseus' guests, his noble company, and his host of knights must have been experiencing, or mainly that the reader ought to experience.

Militaristic rule in *The Knight's Tale* manifests also in costume and props, which the Knight spends sixty-four lines describing. Lycurgus, king of Thrace, rolls along in a chariot of gold (2138) with four white bulls (2139) and wears a coal black bearskin with bright, golden claws (2141-41) in place of a coat of arms. His head is helmeted with a golden wreath (2146) decorated with many bright, precious stones (2147), and around him trail more than twenty white wolfhounds (2148) collared in gold (2152). Emetrius the Great, king of India, is similarly costumed and equipped with props, all which externalize his militaristic power. Upon witnessing these concrete materials, spectators can comprehend the militarism by which these men rule. Their physical appearance manifests their militaristic ideology. This is true also for the temple Theseus builds for Mars and places within the arena. The temple is so grand and so meaningful to the Knight that he spends seventy-six lines describing it; this is thirty-eight lines more than he spends describing Venus' temple and fifty lines more than he spends describing Diane's temple. Nevertheless, all one-hundred and thirty four lines are description of pure sovereign expenditure. These lines do not include the thirty-six lines the knight spends describing the statues of the three deities, for they are impressive manifestations of sovereignty in and of themselves. Nevertheless, as the Knight describes the concrete, artistic displays in Mars' temple, he expresses personal comprehension of militaristic power through the sensorial material. For example: "the entree/ Was long and steit, and gastly for to see" (1983-84); "Ther saugh I . . . The open werre, with woundes all bibledde; / Contek, with bloody knyf and sharp manace" (1995-2002); and

There were also Martes divisioun,
 The barbour, and the bocher, and the smyth,
 That forget sharpe swerdes on his styth.
 And al above, depeynted in a tour,
 Saugh I Conquest, sittynge in greet honour,
 With the sharpe swerd over his heed. (2024-29)

These images appear on a mural in Mars temple, but provide the same visual and emotional stimulation that the three-dimensional pageants in Richard's ceremony do. The arena itself may be considered like the stage displays that London creates for Richard. Indeed, Chaucer even refers to it as a "theatre" (1885). The grandeur of the arena which stands sixty rows above the ground (1890) and measures one full mile around (1887), in which mortal bloodshed is expected to occur, offers a similar sensorial experience of Theseus' militaristic rule.

Bataille's examination of sovereignty offers another lens through which to understand this sensorial manifestation of theocratic ideology and thus, the power of the ceremony as a medium of political communication. These displays identify the sovereign because he is the sole individual for whom the displays are produced. He is the recipient of the fruit of all workers' labor. Therefore, the external displays featured in the ceremonies distinguish the sovereign from the servile in economic terms; the servile being the one who works, out of necessity for the future, while the sovereign lives beyond utility, in the present moment rather than in consideration of duration (Bataille 198). The sovereign does not labor but "consumes rather the product of the others' labor" (ibid. 240-41). In other words, the ceremony itself can be understood in terms of the economic relations in which it is grounded: the ceremonial grandeur is funded and produced by the laboring city—it is itself a massive endeavor of labor—for the sake of a

sovereign experience for the sovereign, that is, an experience of unlimitedness for Richard. Bataille suggests that on the miraculous appearance of a king, man recognizes the king as the one individual who is “relieved of the heaviness that the world of utility imposes on us, of the tasks in which the world of objects mires down on us” (243), for, the appearance of a sovereign in a miraculous moment, like the moment of the ceremony produced by London, “is the ocean into which the streams of labor disappear . . . The sovereign spends festively for himself and for others alike that which the labor of all has accumulated” (240-41). The ceremony therefore communicates sovereignty by way of the economic relations involved in the ceremony itself. Thus, by way of these displays of sovereign expenditure, these economic relations manifest in the ceremony. Spectators, therefore, can have simultaneously, an economic experience, as well as a sensorial experience of sovereignty during a royal ceremony like that of Richard’s and Theseus’.

The wealth in the 1392 ceremony is produced by London for Richard, exhibiting the economic underpinnings of the political hierarchy under a sovereign as Bataille describes. The displays function as political strategies for communicating the authority of Richard himself; for, the costly welcome is evidence of the cities’ submission to the threatening expectations Richard imposes upon London; evidence of Richard’s escape from the world of utility as divine appointment permits him to sop the surplus, and more, of his people’s labor, to fund his own lifelong experience of sovereign, sacred, miraculous, limitlessness. The 1392 royal entry ceremony hosted by London for Richard emerged as a consequence of the constant conflict between the corporate body of the city of London and Richard, also known as the Metropolitan Crisis of 1392. Richard excessively requested loans from corporate funds for personal spending. When civic

merchants hesitated to yield to yet another request in 1391, Richard forced the city to submit and pay him off lavishly. Richard had imprisoned all city-elected officials, began moving all government business from London to York, fined the city 100,000 pounds, and immediately seized the city's entire income for the payment of that fine which Richard also dispensed for personal luxury. After reaching the city gate and receiving from the warden the city's keys and sword (148), Richard gives a slight acknowledgment of London's efforts to attain his forgiveness "The fine display you've shown is pleasing to me" (151), but he closes with a threatening reminder that he expects to be praised as the city would praise Christ himself: "But next I plan to see what London's doing now, / And if my people know how to accept their king" (151-53). Indeed, Richard expects complete submission of all the wealth the city can afford for the sake of providing himself with a worthy compilation of sovereign moments.

Lavish gifts bestowed to Richard that evince his sovereignty include two horses with purple and white cloths, crowns "finely fashioned out of gleaming brand new gold" (292), and two tablets of which "the cheapest material was gold" (387) and which were "finely dressed with gems" (388). Queen Anne's dress "which is overstrewn with gems" (124) provides the most persuasive evidence that Richard himself is aware of wealth as a signification of authority—he must appear richer than any other individual present to be perceived as the most powerful individual present. Maidstone is overcome with awe for Anne's dress as he continues, "From head to toe; there's nothing visible but gems!" As he elaborates even further, he foregrounds the impact of the material as spectacle: "Her head is overspread with every precious stone. / What shines upon her face and gleams upon her ears / Assaults the viewer's gaze, and leaves it wanting more" (124-29). The verb

assaults may register to readers as violent, and that her materials leave the viewer wanting more, registers as a tease or torture—both phrases therefore emphasize the gap in wealth between Anne and the viewer: she is so rich it could pain the poor masses to realize it. All of this excessive wealth attributed to Richard does not contradict his epiphany as Christ because he is imitating Christ coming in glory. London chooses this specific dramatization of Christ in order to please Richard and regain its liberties. Richard’s willful acceptance of this role that the ceremony thrusts” (Kipling 43) upon him, is in fulfillment of the spiritual exercise of *imitatio Christi*.

Originating in the example set by saints like Francis of Assisi, the practice of *imitatio christi*, or uniting oneself most intimately with Christ through imitation, was growing in popularity during the fourteenth century alongside the customized development of dramatic pageantry in civic triumphs (Kipling 6). Because Richard’s entry into London was dramatized as Christ’s *adventus* into the New Jerusalem, Richard’s participation in the ceremony was considered an imitation of the Savior. In addition to providing an experience of theocracy, the pageant spectacles also express a meaningful narrative that casts Richard into the role of Christ and London into the role of a New Jerusalem. The narrative unfolds as a social drama as the ceremony progresses. Pageant spectacles were all intricately coordinated, rather than solely evidence of an “infantile fascination with fripperies” (Carlson 7) designed merely to flatter the vanity of the king. The underlying social drama expressed through pageantry in the royal entry ceremony was most commonly the biblically- based *adventus* narrative. Kipling explains that the *adventus* narrative becomes the foundational informing idea within the royal entry ceremony because the liturgy had first envisioned Christ’s First and Second

comings into the world as the coming of a king into a city. This verbal metaphor manifests in visual imagery based upon St. John's Apocalyptic description of the New Jerusalem:

And I John saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice from the throne saying: Behold, the tabernacle of God with men, and he will dwell with them. And they shall be his people; and God himself with them shall be their God. (Apoc. 21:2-3)

The passage explains the biblical basis for the London's celestial decorations as it embodies the role of the New Jerusalem, and it also explicates further the fictionalized relationship between the theocratic sovereign and his people within the royal entry ceremony, which veils the economic reality that is less desirable to the lower classes: in imitation of Christ, the king enters into his people's *hearts* at the same time he enters into the physical city. Thus, Maidstone's portrayal of Richard as a type of Christ entering a celestial London—and London as morally at fault for hesitating to loan Richard more money and thus in need of forgiveness from her king, her “spouse” and “lord” (21)—is not a narrative of Maidstone's personal creativity but in fact the narrative and idealized political relationship the ceremony itself purported as reality. While the theatrical pageants, as sensorial experiences, serve to manifest the precept of divine right, they also function as symbolic imitations of Christ's *adventus* whereby Richard fills the role of Christ. The warden's use of the word “behold” in his first address to Richard signifies Richard's Christ-like entry into human hearts; “a spiritual *adventus* into a Jerusalem of the soul” (Kipling 26). At the city gates, the warden implores Richard: “Behold: your humble citizens, beneath your feet ” (138). With behold, the warden is entreating Richard

to embrace the city in his heart while he takes the sight of them in. Maidstone himself takes up the language of Christ's advent into human hearts to demonstrate the reverse of the relationship when he states, "all pulled back / So that the people could behold their kindly king" (106-7). In other words, spectators should take Richard into their hearts as they would Christ. Thus, the citizens' stake in praising Richard so magnificently is spiritual: their celebrated love for Richard is an imitation of their love for Christ.

The warden continues his speech, issuing claims about the internal state of the citizens as individuals. He proclaims to Richard:

Behold: your humble citizens, beneath your feet
 Surrender all they have and their own selves to you.
 With keys and sword the city gives up willingly:
 It comes all ready to surrender to your will.
 Suffused with tears within it, [the city] earnestly entreats
 The king to enter in his room in gentleness.
 Let him not rend or tear apart his realm's fair walls,
 For they are his, and all that still remains inside.
 Let not the bridegroom hate the room he's always loved; (139-46)

Emphasizing each individual's surrender to Richard as well as the city's shame as a whole connects the sub-theme of Richard's Christ-like entry into human hearts with the general *adventus* narrative. Referring to London as the "room", or bridal chamber, and Richard as the "bridegroom", also plays upon the general advent of Christ, the bridegroom, uniting with his bride, the church—the biblically based *sponsus / sponsa* metaphor. Therefore, this speech dramatizes not only the tale of London's sin against Richard and need of forgiveness, but also her marriage to Richard. Also through the

marriage metaphor, therefore, the city is able to negotiate political forgiveness from the king, asking him to forgive them spiritually as Christ so loves the church.

In light of this religious narrative, the tactical display of sovereign expenditure casts Richard into two different types of Christ-figures. The primary portrayal Richard embodies is Christ the King of Glory coming in majesty and judgment (Kipling 26). The numerous supplications and pleas for forgiveness accompanied by the lavish gifts and extravagant displays London produces for Richard's benefit enable this dramatization of authority. Thus, the religious social drama serves to justify the economic distribution of wealth as well as the political hierarchy maintained under Richard's rule. Richard is God's majesty on earth. Therefore, London is pressured spiritually to make this appear to be the reality. Remember London chooses to depict Richard in this authoritative character, the King of Glory coming in majesty and judgment as Christ did in his second coming—likely because this was the authoritative type that would most please Richard for it allows him to indulge most completely in his freedom from utility, his sovereignty. Indeed, it is the dramatization of authority that best manifests the economic distribution of wealth enforced under the respective theocracy. However, London also issues dramatizations of Richard's authority that more directly reflect Christ in his first coming in humility and redemption. This occurs when the actor playing John the Baptist points to Richard and cries out "Look, the lamb of God!" (372). The dramatic act recalls John 1:19, which describes John as the voice of one crying out in the desert "make straight the way of the Lord" who comes to save the world (Kipling 20). Here, Richard is cast as a self-sacrificing authority figure. He is here to save, and should thus be persuaded to have mercy on London. The two tablets Richard is given as gifts also steer him into

embodying a more merciful authoritative role. An image of Christ upon the cross is carved on the tablets (383) and Maidstone notes that they are “suited to an alter place” (381). Maidstone describes the tablets and summarizes “The total sequence showed the suffering of God” (386), confirming that this is a rare instance within the ceremony that London substitutes the advent of judgment with the advent of redemption, dramatizing Richard as a self-sacrificing, merciful, loving authority rather than a punishing one. By this strategic dramatization, London manipulates their sovereign into granting them forgiveness and restoring their liberties.

Chaucer's Critique

Although Chaucer's Athens is pagan, Theseus also emerges godlike through strategic, spectacular displays of wealth within his public ceremonies. Chaucer contrives displays of sovereign expenditure in *The Knight's Tale* that reflect those in Richard's ceremony, but he exaggerates them until they appear foolish. For example, Theseus commissions the building of the tournament arena measuring one full mile around, privatized by a wall of stone, and secured by an encircling moat which is so amazing it would be "negligent" of the Knight if he "foryete to tellen the dispence / Of Theseus, that gooth so bisily / To maken up the lystes royally" (1881-83). The arena stands sixty rows above the ground (1890) and is round "in manere of compas" (1889), which evokes the shape and expanse of the globe (Clopper 137). Theseus' commissioning the larger-than-life structure (in both physical size and economic expense) insinuates Theseus exercises his power with the same limitless freedom as the creator of the universe and his later actions suggest Theseus does indeed perceive himself to embody godlike power. Chaucer may in fact refer to the arena as a "theatre" (1885) to associate the action within the arena with the dramatic action, the imitation of real life, that occurs in the *theatrum* of late antiquity. Theater is an imitation of real life, rather than real life itself. The concept of the *theatrum* of late antiquity, which would constitute Chaucer's understanding of the word, would have meant a place for civic and royal spectacle (Clopper 120). Spectacle, or *spectacula*, and theater had been inextricable from each other then. Through the association, Chaucer leads his readers to anticipate social-defining spectacle to occur within the arena. In identifying the arena as a *theatrum*, a place for spectacle, Chaucer makes a connection between public ceremony and the fabrication of real life it enables

through spectacular theatrical dramatizations. Indeed, when Theseus rules that the competitors “shal nat dye” (2541) the battle within the arena becomes a mere imitation of battle. Theseus’ ruling exposes his attempt to control the outcome of the tournament, to control fate, which backfires when Saturn sends a fury to throw Arcite off his horse and to his death (2684). The power play here between Theseus and Saturn renders Theseus’ political power arbitrary, which may be read as a suggestion that Richard’s fiscal-sucking efforts to advance politically through public ceremony are also arbitrary. Chaucer is reminding readers that there are greater powers ruling the sovereigns. Saturn overrules Theseus’ authority, calling to attention the nullification of political authority in the midst of Fate, Fortune, and gods. In this light, Theseus’ and Richards’ extraneous efforts to advance their reputation and the expanse of their power appear foolish. Theseus himself verbally professes submission to the will of the “Firste Moevere” (298) that “Of man and woman seen we wel also / That nedes, in oon of thise termes two— / This is to seyn, in youthe or elles in age— / He moot be deed, the kyng as shal a age;” (3028-30). However, Theseus’ schemes to advance his power suggest he believes otherwise; he misunderstands the extent of his own power.

Another instance of extravagant wealth in *The Knight’s Tale* involves a contestable waste of materials for the sake of Arcite’s funeral ceremony. First, Theseus decides to place Arcite’s sepulcher in the woods Theseus had initially found Arcite and Palamon fighting. His choice requires the destruction of the “swoote and grene” grove (2860). Chaucer ensures that Theseus alone is recognized as accountable for the destruction for he “leet comande anon to hakke and hewe ‘ The okes olde, and leye hem on a rewe / In colpons wel arrayed for to brenne” (2865-67). The pyre itself consists of a

variety of nineteen different trees (2920-23). Bataille's considerations aid an analysis of these textual details. In this occurrence, nature functions as the object, whose purpose is to serve the subject. In this case, the subject is humans. However, Chaucer foregrounds the men working for Theseus as objects, whose purpose is to produce a sovereign life for Theseus, as much as natural resources essentially and completely are for man. For, after Theseus gives the command for the reaping of the woods,

His officers with swifte feet they renne
 And ryde anon at his comandement.
 And after this, Theseus hath eysent
 After a berre, and it al overspradde
 With clooth of gold, the richeste that he hadde. (2868-71)

Simply, Theseus orders his men around to do his work. Furthermore, the stress on material wealth interspersed with Theseus dispatching men to various duties, associates the men more closely with objects, all of which are at Theseus' dispense. The relationship between Theseus and objects here invokes the economic dynamics upon which Richard's ceremony operates. Indeed, "Heigh labour and ful greet apparaillynge / Was at the service and the fyre-makyng" (2913-14). Therefore, Chaucer captures the dual display of wealth that Richard's ceremony exhibits wherein both materials and human labor attribute economic power to the sovereign and reinforce the political hierarchy. Chaucer develops Theseus' outrageous display of sovereign expenditure as partakers in the funeral procession toss numerous items into the burning pyre. Such materials include jewels (2945), a shield and spear (2947), parts of clothes (2948), and wine, milk and blood (2949). Chaucer expresses the wastefulness of this public spectacle through the Knight's emphasis on the burning of the pyre while the items are being thrown into it: "Whan that

the fyre was greet and brente faste” (2946) and “Into the fyre, that brente as it were wood” (2950). Sovereign expenditure is as wasteful as burning to ash the fruits of human labor. Chaucer communicates the significance of this passage further by issuing it as yet another occultatio. This scene supports the reading that Chaucer is attempting to capture the dramatization of limitless authority through public ceremony—and is exaggerating that political strategy to suggest its contestability.

Bataille posits that traditional sovereignty argues for itself by claiming that the sovereign “who upholds sovereign value against the object’s subordination” (239), meaning, against man’s fated, unending subordination to labor, “shares that value with all men” (239). Thus, if man’s labor protects the sovereign from the “misery of servitude” (Bataille 245), then man has made possible the sovereign’s transcendence into the “primacy of the present moment”(ibid. 240), and this is what supposedly matters. The sovereign’s capability to live in the present is a manifestation of a sacred, miraculous desire inherent in all men that is impossible. The sovereign is the presence of the impossible on earth. Ultimately, the miraculous and sacred sensation of subjectivity one experiences internally, is the same miraculous and sacred sensation one experiences on the appearance of a king (ibid. 243). According to Bataille’s theory, the ideology of sovereignty expects the subordinate classes to feel fulfilled by recognizing the sovereign’s power as a reflection of themselves; for their labor makes his transcendence possible, and his transcendence is simply a full and constant experience of the self-greatness they themselves have had glimpses of; these results supposedly offer laborers relief. Free, then, from underlying political motivations, this should be Maidstone’s answer to why he is so awe-struck by Richard; Richard’s appearance in splendor fills

spectators with the same excited sensation of worth each man feels existing in himself but that they can never transcend beyond the fate of labor enough to confirm. Because of this, the sovereign's presence becomes a sharing of the experience of sovereignty with his people. Richard's visit to London gives London a day to experience life beyond utility. The exhausting labor and expense the ceremony requires is hidden by the celebration of materialistic splendor that overshadows it. The external grandeur in which London has dressed itself for this day is a twenty-four hour external manifestation of every laborer's inherent sense of self-worth. For the duration of the ceremony, London can live in the present moment. Richard's visit is a sharing of his sovereign life, total miraculous and sacred experience of life with London. In this way, London considers itself honored to host this ceremony for Richard, rather than obligated; and voluntarily willing to host the ceremony for Richard, rather than desperately pressured.

The Knight's Tale is ultimately a response to this positive view of the ceremony as a generous, merciful act on Richard's part to willingly share his sovereignty with his people. Chaucer composes an explicit discrepancy between Theseus' personal motivations and his people's opinion of him. Because of the decisions Theseus makes public to Athens, Athens perceives him as a truly benevolent ruler, as a similarly saving authority as Richard is dramatized to be. When Theseus and his company find Palamon and Arcite fighting in the grove, Theseus determines, by Palamon's confession, that the cousins deserve death. In consideration of his queen and her ladies' cries, however, he reconsiders his condemnation. He performs compassion for the cousins as he claims "And therefore syn I knowe of loves peyne / And woot hou soore it kan a man distreyne" (1815-16). However, Theseus's acts of mercy mock the merciful Christ-figure Richard

plays in the royal entry ceremony as his act of compassion develops into a game that risks both cousins' lives and makes a trophy of his sister-in-law without considering her desire. Chaucer conveys Theseus' true feelings; he finds the cousins' misfortune funny and entertaining. For, it is "as heigh folye" (1798) that both cousins were free after being imprisoned only to find themselves back at his feet to die, and the "beste game of alle"(1806) is that Emily doesn't even know either of the cousins were fighting to die for her. Therefore, Theseus takes advantage of the cousins' willingness to die in the name of chivalry, for chivalric conquest is Theseus' primary source of entertainment. Remember also how he rushed off from his welcome home ceremony to conquer Thebes. In that instance too, Theseus' mistakes his own motivations for the benefit of the state, as uses the widows' request as an excuse to defeat Creon. The widows only asked for their husbands' bodies, but he only speaks "shortly" (985) to Creon before he slays him (987). The damage goes even farther than killing the Theban king, the necessity of which is itself doubtful; afterwards Theseus puts Creon's men to flight, takes the city by assault, and "rente adoun bothe wall and sparre and rafter" (990). The Knight then describes Theseus' men rummaging through a "taas" (1005) of slain Thebans. Theseus' actions are extremely destructive and unwarranted, which makes a farce of his great, compassionate performance his people witnessed at their city gates. Theseus' care for Palamon and Arcite is just as fake. For, upon finding the two cousins in the heap of slain Thebans, Theseus promptly orders them to dwell in prison perpetually (1022-24) and "he nolde no raunsoun" (1024). The harshness of this order reveals that Theseus only acts for his own sake. Not until the cousins offered Theseus the opportunity to entertain himself and advance his reputation did he begin to act thoughtfully toward them. Indeed, because

Theseus forgets about Palamon when he frees Arcite, and because he only frees Arcite to satisfy the request of their mutual friend, Theseus' apparent care for the cousins must be interpreted as insincere. Both the funeral ceremony honoring Arcite and the tournament disseminate knowledge of Theseus' power thus advancing his reputation, and these undeniable benefits undermine the benevolence Athens attributes to Theseus. When Theseus proclaims the terms of the tournament challenge which he forces upon the cousins', the Knight hesitates, being at a loss of words to describe, how amazing Theseus' graciousness is:

Who jouthe telle, or who kouthe it endite,
 The joye that is maked in the place
 Whan Theseus hath doon so fiar a grace?
 But down on knees wente every maner wight,
 And thonked hm with al hir herte and myght. (1870-5)

The reverence and appreciation Theseus' people dote upon him may be read as a direct mockery of the adoration which Richard receives from London in the 1392 ceremony as well as from Maidstone through *Concordia*. For, just as Maidstone prays that God may show the same mercy to Richard that he had shown to the felon, Theseus' people pray, "God save swich a lord, that is so good!" (2564) after Theseus announces no bloodshed will occur in the arena. Theseus' decision that the battle should be an imitation of battle only is also self-serving, as he "Considered that it were destruccioun / To gentil blood to fighten in the gyse / Of mortal bataille now in this emprise" (2537-39). In other words, Theseus does not want to authorize the spilling of *noble* blood. Now Chaucer's reference to the arena as a theater should be even more persuasive evidence that Chaucer conceptualizes the 1392 ceremony as an imitation, or fabrication, of the drama it purports

as reality. Richard is not a genuine imitator of Christ, just as Theseus' decisions are not genuinely for the benefit of others. Theseus mocks Richard's misuse of his sovereignty, which Jean Bodin's concept of the 'exception' helps to explain.

Carl Schmidt, in his *Political Theology*, characterizes the 'exception' as a case of "extreme peril, a danger to the existence of the state" (6) and which is "not codified in the existing legal order" (6) so that the 'exception' makes clear who the sovereign is because he decides whether there is an extreme emergency as well as what must be done to eliminate it. When the people threaten Richard's sovereignty by refusing his request for a loan, he misconstrues the threat to his power as an exception that threatens the state. It *was* in the interest of the state for civic merchants to refuse Richard the loan. Therefore, enforcing an 'exception' in that moment, as Richard does, is an abuse of his power. His choosing his personal interest over the interest of the state is an act of illegitimate tyranny. Most important to this argument, Richard achieves this change to a totalitarian state *through the public ceremony* recounted in Maidstone's poem. Richard uses public ceremony as a technology for disseminating knowledge of and consent for his temporal omnipotence.

Conclusion: Chaucer's Warning

Public space is a volatile moment for social identity, on both an individual and communal level simultaneously. Ceremony is a system that operates on this unstable ground, the volatile moment, and its function is *for* identity. The medieval royal entry ceremony negotiates an identity for the city as a whole, and for each participant, just as the Olympic ceremonies in the modern world negotiate individual and national identities as well as an amorphous apparition of a global identity. The pieces that make up the ceremony system include any external aspect that, usually in coordination with additional external aspects, communicates an idea about an identity, in an effort to steer opinions into digesting said idea about said identity, but could also, unintentionally, cause opinions to form in the opposite direction. And the system itself is unstable; for, public space exists in the present moment, which is the territory of spontaneity. Any individual present at a ceremony can interrupt the coordination of the ceremonial aspects. This surprise could also cause opinions to form in a direction for which the coordinators of the ceremonial aspects hadn't planned or hoped. The ceremony produces diction and spectacle; which produces narrative and meaning; from which opinions about identity arise, disappear, and shift; which impact reputations. The system of ceremony is *for* reputations, social identities. The ceremony puts forth to spectating and participating targets one view of identity in an effort to achieve an extending reputation. But in putting forth one view, the ceremony veils others. Bataille explains:

The king and his officials stand in the midst of a sacred world like a dazzling façade that shelters diverse competing interests, some of which are unavowed, others unavowable. Gazing at this façade, we can experience the miraculous fulguration of

the moment, but the squalid reality of the order of things is what the light prevents one from seeing. 251

Chaucer understood this systematic operation wherein all the technical pieces are postured to guide opinions in a straight shot, to directly hit and stick firmly in a perception of a sovereign's identity that is beneficial to the coordinators of those pieces. By depicting Athens as uncritical of Theseus' actions, he suggests that common spectators, like those in the crowd in the 1392 ceremony, are too easily deceived by the spectacle that specifically functions to distract and deceive them. *The Knight's Tale* is an argument for the manipulative powers of public ceremony. Through his portrayal of the relation between Athens' ceremonial culture, its social hierarchy, and its government values, Chaucer exposes the fabrication of identity and reality that ceremony enables. At the same time, he mocks the particular identity and reality that Richard's 1392 ceremony purports through its technical pieces. Chaucer never provides certain proof that Theseus is actual aware of his brutal tyranny, therefore his ultimate portrayal is that of a bully—a fearsome, physically powerful figure who lacks wise judgment, self-awareness, and self-esteem. Theseus' power is solely self-serving and corrupt, rather than beneficial to the individuals of his state about whom he falsely claims to care, and his power is also completely temporal. This reality and identity is the 'squalid reality of the order of things' that the 1392 ceremony veils. Although, Theseus' militaristic power may be harsh humor directed towards Richard's effeminacy considering his three predecessors, known as the "Plantagenet myth", epitomized chivalric knighthood (Aers 153).

If someone asked Chaucer if he is criticizing Richard in *The Knight's Tale*, he might have responded with the defense that he was writing about Italy. Having traveled

to Tuscany, he would have seen the totalitarian rule of the Viscontis. Aided by the tale's setting in Classical Greece, cognitive dissonance may have led late medieval readers to respond: 'we do things much more constitutionally now'. Similarly, modern readers might think governance today is more reasonable and democratic, but images from the opening Olympic ceremony in Sochi and the enormous sums of money spend on political campaigns exposes our own obsession with spectacular displays of superiority today. In truth, the technology for expression of authority really hasn't changed much since the medieval era. Public ceremony may always serve to obtrusively communicate knowledge of power into the public conscious.

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