

CHANGING UNDERSTANDINGS OF GENTILITY:
STATUS, GENDER, AND SOCIAL OPPORTUNITY IN ENGLAND, C. 1400-1530

By

KRISTIN CANZANO PINYAN

A dissertation submitted to the

School of Graduate Studies

Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Graduate Program in History

Written under the direction of

James Masschaele

And approved by

New Brunswick, New Jersey

October 2017

©2017

Kristin Canzano Pinyan

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Changing Understandings of Gentility: Status, Gender, and Social Opportunity in England, c.

1400-1530

By KRISTIN CANZANO PINYAN

Dissertation Director:

James Masschaele

This dissertation addresses the problem of the gentry in late medieval England and how this problem led to a unique moment of social opportunity during the fifteenth century. Modern scholars have struggled to develop a comprehensive definition of the gentry as a social group because members of the gentry themselves had difficulty articulating their social position. The fourteenth-century English nobility's method of social closure through the hereditary summons to Parliament effectively divided the kingdom's aristocracy. Forced out of this elite group, the knights, esquires, and gentleman were left to develop their own separate group identity. In this they failed. Any sense of kinship among them, that together they formed a gentle community with its own culture, was disrupted by that culture's overlap into other groups. The continued use of the term "gentle" to refer to characteristics that were associated with all elite ranks of society made it impossible for the gentry to achieve any positive distinctions as a social group. Unable to define themselves, the gentle ranks found it difficult to exclude newcomers, increasing the range and diversity of individuals who could claim to be part of the group.

Texts on heraldry, conduct, hunting, hawking, and language indicate that multiple paths to gentility opened up during the fifteenth century in response to the gentry's failure at social closure. I argue that these texts demonstrate a contemporary recognition and acceptance of the

changes occurring during this period in criteria for evaluating social distinctions. The indeterminate characteristics of gentle status led to the commodification of gentility as authors, scribes, and printers recognized the demand for texts that could provide an entrée into elite lifestyles. While these texts purported to reach out to an audience of gentle readers, they also expanded opportunities for others to join the group, packaging gentle culture in a way that was easily accessible and convenient to the literate, wealthy commoners who were most likely to seek social elevation. Spurred by the gentry's inability to develop a distinctive and exhaustive set of membership criteria, the commodification of gentility provided a guide to social opportunities that these commoners could exploit.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

If a dissertation is meant to be the culmination of an education, this one has done its job. As this project came to its present conclusion, it drew together threads from all my past educational experiences. The bibliography includes books that I first read as an interested high school student. Material inspired by my undergraduate mentors at Georgetown University appears in several chapters. The section on yeomen incorporates articles that I first read for an undergraduate essay on the origins of Robin Hood overseen by Jo Ann Moran Cruz, whose own scholarship appears in the section on education. In revising sections on literacy and reading practices, I called upon readings from my first graduate course, taken as an undergraduate, with Penn Szittyá. Work done at Fordham University for Maryanne Kowaleski looms large throughout the project. Even more than that, I must credit her for shaping an enthusiastic but directionless master's student into a historian. To this day, hers is the standard to which I aspire in all my work. Finally, readings done for coursework and examinations at Rutgers University became relevant to the project at surprising moments.

I have had the opportunity of working with a phenomenal group of scholars at Rutgers, especially the members of my dissertation committee. Many thanks are owed to my advisor, James Masschaele, for allowing me the independence to pursue my project in whatever directions it took me, for good-natured but pointed criticism at crucial moments, and for patient prodding on several occasions when progress ground to a halt. Samantha Kelly not only taught me to be a more rigorous scholar, but how to translate that rigor into the classroom. My teaching benefited enormously from assisting her for two semesters, and many of my best lectures are based on hers to this day. Alastair Bellany opened the eyes of this stubbornly myopic late medievalist to the centuries after 1500. The foundation provided by his rigorous directed

readings course enabled this project to span the boundary between medieval and early modern and to gain better perspective about why the gentry matters. Rudolph Bell's no-nonsense attitude inside and outside the classroom has grounded me at important moments. His comment at the end of my proposal defense, that I had packed into it a lifetime's worth of projects, stuck with me and helped me shape this thesis into a more manageable package. I am also indebted to my other teachers at Rutgers for treating me as an interesting and valuable academic colleague, and then shaping me into one – especially Indrani Chatterjee, Nancy Hewitt, Allen Howard, Jennifer Jones, Phyllis Mack, and Jennifer Mittelstadt.

Research for this project would not have been possible without travel and research support from the Rutgers University History Department, the Graduate School-New Brunswick, and the Rutgers University-Newark History Department. Many penetrating questions and helpful suggestions were provided by the audiences for papers given at: the Binghamton University Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies; the International Congress on Medieval Studies at Western Michigan University; the Mid-Atlantic Conference on British Studies; the Midwest Conference on British Studies; the New College Conference on Medieval and Renaissance Studies; Seton Hall University; and the University of Toronto. Comments by Caroline Barron, Jennifer Da Silva, Amy Froide, Karen Gross, Barbara Hanawalt, and Clare Costley King'oo were particularly enlightening and have had an impact on the final product.

Throughout this process, I have had support from several wonderful communities of scholars – at Fordham, where I did my master's work; at the University of Notre Dame and the University of Toronto, where I attended summer programs; and of course, at Rutgers. I am grateful to all the members of my cohort in the history department for fellowship and support over the years, as well as colleagues in the inaugural class of the Pre-Doctoral Leadership

Development Institute, especially Elanor Arnold, Mark Duggan, Elisabeth Ettreim, Matt Friedman, Alix Genter, Molly Giblin, Michael Hill, Stephanie Jones-Rogers, Katharine Lee, Kathryn Mahaney, Alejandro Gomez-del-Moral, Martina Saltamacchia, Meagan Schenkelberg, and Arnout van der Meer. Particular thanks are owed to Stephen Allen, Danielle Bradley, Elizabeth Churchich, Annalise Kinkel DeVries, April Graham, and Dustin Neighly, who all read and commented on drafts of this project.

Finally, I would like to thank my family for their support. Thank you to all of my family members – my parents, brother, grandparents, and numerous in-laws – for bearing with me through this long process and especially from refraining for the past few years from asking too many questions about when I would be finished. (Feel free to ask now.) Over the past few years, I have enjoyed solidarity with my brother-in-law, Charles Pinyan, and niece, Katherine Conner, as they embarked on their own graduate educations, albeit in different fields. My parents, Nicholas and Jane Canzano, and my brother, Michael, have been unswerving in their encouragement since the beginning. It took a great deal of faith for this middle-class family to allow their daughter to devote her expensive private university education to an archaic-sounding subject; while they certainly raised questions, they never resisted, confident that I would succeed no matter what I chose to do. My parents' trust has shaped me into a strong, independent scholar and woman, and for that I am eternally grateful. Most of all, I would like to thank my husband, Jeff, who likewise did not flinch when I declared that after our wedding I was going back to graduate school and would be relying on him for financial support for the next several years (maybe he would have flinched if he knew how many it would be). Without his constant love, patience, and encouragement, this project would not have been started, let alone finished.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iv
Table of Contents	vii
Abbreviations	ix
Note on Middle English	x
Introduction	1
Why Was the English Gentry Socially Accessible?	4
Successful Social Closure: The Peerage	7
Failed Social Closure: The Gentry	9
Methodology	15
Chapter 1: Gentry Historiography: Seeking the Elusive Definition	20
Historiography of the Gentry: Political and Economic Factors	23
Gentlemen and Yeomen: Drawing the Line	33
Focus on Gentle Families	42
The Culture of Gentility	46
Social Closure and the Elusive Gentry	51
Chapter 2: Medieval Ideas of Gentility	56
The Late Medieval Social Order	57
Social Terminology: The Gentle Ranks	67
The Gentleman in the <i>Book of St Albans</i>	78
The Many Faces of the Fifteenth-Century Gentleman	86
Gentlemen of Ancestry	86
Gentlemen through Service	88
Gentlemen of Occupation	92
Gentleman of Character	99
The Elusive Gentlewoman	101
Sub-Gentle Categories	113
The Fluidity of Gentle Status	120
Chapter 3: Heralds, Heraldry and the Expansion of Armigerous Gentility	126
Heralds and Historians	128
Expansion of the Armigerous Ranks	133
From Heralds to Officers of Arms	139

Qualifications for a Coat of Arms.....	145
Discussions of Gentility in Heraldic Texts	157
Grants of Arms.....	161
Chapter 4: Teaching Gentility: Advice for Gentle Boys	178
The Study of Conduct Books.....	179
Conduct Books as a Source for Gentility.....	185
Gentility and the Governance of the Body	203
Chapter 5: Educating Girls in Gentility	230
Advice for Gentle Women in Conduct Poems for Others	231
The World of Elite Medieval Women	247
Education and Gentle Behavior	253
Alternative Advice Texts for Gentle Girls.....	269
Arundel 168: A Gentle Woman’s Conduct Book?	293
Chapter 6: Gentility and Language	303
The <i>Book of St Albans</i> and its Sources.....	304
An Audience for Gentility Treatises	321
The Language of Hunting and Hawking.....	329
The Gentility of “Proper Terms”	339
Ordering the Gentle World	350
Conclusion	361
Bibliography	366

ABBREVIATIONS

British Library	BL
Bodleian Library	Bodleian
<i>Book of St Albans</i>	<i>BSA</i>
Early English Text Society	EETS
The National Archives	TNA
National Library of Wales	NLW
<i>Oxford Dictionary of National Biography</i>	<i>DNB</i>
<i>Proceedings of the Modern Language Association</i>	<i>PMLA</i>

NOTE ON MIDDLE ENGLISH

Middle English spellings have been modernized for ease of understanding, though punctuation and capitalization have been left intact. Middle English words with no direct modern equivalents are defined in the footnotes. Spelling has not been altered, however, in the titles of Middle English texts.

Introduction

The fifteenth century was a time of profound change in Europe. Medieval kingdoms were transforming into early nation-states. Feudal ties were weakening in the face of growing national pride. In England, the practice of noblemen keeping large retinues of followers in their households was declining as the royal court became the nexus of political power; by the end of the century Henry VII had put in place the underpinnings of an increasingly assertive Tudor state. Power and wealth were no longer the exclusive purview of the nobility, but were beginning to be wielded by new ranks of professionals, from merchants and lawyers to bureaucrats and soldiers. The rise of these professionals, most of whom worked with the written word and promoted literacy within their families, expanded the reading public and sparked a greater demand for literature in the vernacular. The transition from manuscript to print greatly accelerated the rate of change. At the end of the century, as a new world was being discovered by Europeans across the Atlantic, Europe was transforming into a new world as well, as its people changed their perceptions about the world, rebuilt their institutions, and altered their political and economic relationships with one another.

In England, alongside these other transitions, and intimately intertwined with them, the fifteenth century was a period of social change, when the established view of the three orders of society was breaking down. The three orders of society – those who prayed, those who fought, and those who worked – were conceived of as interconnected and interdependent social groups, but not, at least at first, ranked against one another. While favored by writers well into the fourteenth century, the three orders model did not match the reality of medieval society, which had expanded in every direction. The peasantry had subdivided into tiers based on wealth and the legal status of their holdings. Townspeople, like merchants and craftsmen, and professionals, like

lawyers and doctors, did not fit easily into this system. Third orders blurred the boundaries between clergy and laity; likewise, the increased standards of living after the Black Death blurred the line between peasantry and nobility. The nobility was splitting into two tiers, with titled nobility at the top and the untitled lesser landholders known anachronistically as the gentry¹ below them. By the fifteenth century, as new social terms began to emerge to describe these individuals, the three interdependent orders were being revised into a vertical hierarchy which incorporate them. In the midst of this restructuring of the image of society, the English gentry was beginning to come together as a social group and stake its claim for a privileged place in that hierarchy.

The emergence of new social terminology was more prominent in England than elsewhere, but the makeup of the nobility in most areas of Europe was shifting and changing during the fifteenth century. In places like the Netherlands, Germany, France, Castile, and Scotland, there are similar signs of transformation within the ranks of the nobility, with the emergence of more highly gradated hierarchies, encompassing upwardly mobile military men, civil servants, merchants, and lawyers in various ways.² The English nobility was among the most open of these.³ In other areas, such as France and Castile, the possession of noble blood was tied to concrete privileges, such as exemption from taxation. Government officials kept track of who had a right to these exemptions and, therefore, who was noble. The situation in England was different: nobility came with no automatic privileges and, at the bottom end, it was difficult even for contemporaries to see who belonged to this group and who did not, and it proved

¹ See the beginning of Chapter 1 for a discussion of the suitability of this term.

² A comparative picture of the gentry and lesser nobility of the fifteenth century across Europe was painted by a 1984 colloquium held in Nottingham, some of the proceedings of which were published in Michael Jones, ed., *Gentry and Lesser Nobility in Late Medieval Europe* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1986). More information on the particular situations in these countries can be found in the essays in this volume.

³ For comparison, see Michael Crawford, *The Fight for Status and Privilege in Late Medieval and Early Modern Castile 1465-1598* (State College, PA: Penn State University Press, 2014).

impossible to seal the boundary. By the end of the fifteenth century, therefore, it was possible to enter its lesser orders in a variety of ways.

The availability of this social dynamism can be attributed to a number of factors. One was the development of a vernacular literary culture in England during the late fourteenth century. As poets like Geoffrey Chaucer and John Gower chose to write in Middle English instead of the formerly typical French and Latin, their work became accessible to a wider variety of readers. Michael Clanchy has demonstrated that the practice of royal record-keeping sparked an increased in literate activity throughout England in the centuries after the Norman Conquest.⁴ By the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the area of most rapid expansion was the English literacy of those outside of the ruling elite. New groups of men and women were able to gain access to what was previously a literary world that catered to society's elites. These new groups include merchants, bureaucrats and civil servants, scribes and artisans of the book trade, lawyers and justices, as well as their family members, alongside the existing readership of gentry and nobility.⁵ The book trade continued to expand in England through the fifteenth century, even more rapidly once printing was introduced by William Caxton in the 1470s, catering explicitly to this expanded audience.

Alongside this developing literate community was the tumultuous political landscape of fifteenth-century England. In the early decades of the century, the revival of the war with France allowed ambitious commoners and gentlemen to rub shoulders with men from established noble families in military camps, forming bonds of comradeship which often translated into ties of patronage on the home front. The courageous could win themselves a fortune on the battlefield by capturing enemy nobles and holding them for ransom or being gifted manors and farms in the

⁴ Michael Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993).

⁵ Lynn Arner, *Chaucer, Gower, and the Vernacular Rising* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2013), 2-5.

newly conquered territories by their approving commanders. There were also opportunities available back home in the growing royal bureaucracy that had expanded to manage the war. Although these opportunities dwindled as the English lost their territories in France in the period leading up to 1453, the factional fighting known as the Wars of the Roses broke out in England. New opportunities for advancement were available as different nobles fell in and out of power. An aspirant gentleman could enter the service of a great noble and potentially ride his coat-tails to greater power, influence and social standing.

At the juncture of these literary and political developments was the aspiring gentleman. He was open to new opportunities at the royal court and in the government, in noble affinities and growing cities. In order to achieve social advancement, however, he had to successfully assimilate into the common gentle culture that was fashionable in these places. Texts provided the key to accessing this culture. Romances and chivalric tales, conduct poems and advice manuals, treatises on hunting and hawking all provided information about the behaviors, habits, and activities of the gentry. Ambitious readers could and did use the cues in such texts as guides to teach them how to fit into gentle culture. Understanding the aspirations of their readers, some authors began to cater to their readers' desires even more explicitly. The resulting commodification of gentility was a direct response to the unique moment of social opportunity that existed in fifteenth-century England, and opened the door for gentility to be claimed by new categories of English men and women.

Why Was the English Gentry Socially Accessible?

If the medieval world operated the way its inhabitants wished it to, social mobility would have been impossible. The three orders of society were theorized as fixed, immovable, and

ordained by God.⁶ In practice, however, their social world was in a state of flux. What we see occurring in late medieval England is a series of social ranks attempting to coalesce into clearly defined social groups.⁷ Their efforts were halting, decentralized, and only partly successful. Late medieval social groups, the gentry in particular, had taken shape sufficiently to recognize the threat that social mobility posed to the exclusivity of their status, but not so well that they were able to mitigate that threat. As noted above, such social mobility did occur, though scholars have not yet determined definitively how frequently it did so. In the context of understanding the medieval gentry, these actual cases are less significant than the awareness of and anxiety produced by the possibility of social mobility. In order to protect themselves from the perceived threat posed by social climbing commoners, the medieval gentry attempted to employ strategies of social closure.

The theory of social closure is part of a model of social dynamics associated principally with the work of the sociologist Frank Parkin in the 1970s. Parkin attempted to construct a model of class formation that improved upon Max Weber's early twentieth-century theories. Parkin faulted Weber for associating class formation too exclusively with conflict between classes, imagining a society polarized between two social extremes. His own model is more nuanced, allowing for far more subtle gradations of class. Parkin argued that classes form through a process of social "closure," involving an attempt by groups to "stak[e] claims to resources" via "two distinct, reciprocal types of action:" namely, the powers of exclusion and solidarism.⁸

Exclusion is the process by which a higher class attempts to protect its resources by consciously

⁶ See Chapter 2, below.

⁷ It is tempting to use the word "class" here, but the concept of class is closely bound with Marxist ideas of social and economic conflict that are not at all relevant in the late medieval period. While they share some similarities, the embryonic social groups of the fifteenth century are fundamentally distinct from those of the nineteenth.

⁸ Frank Parkin, "Strategies of Social Closure in Class Formation" in *The Social Analysis of Class Structure* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1974), 4.

devising criteria of membership that exclude a certain population. This creates a clear line of division between two social groups, but does not serve to polarize them. The criteria of exclusion could take collective or individual forms, casting out undesirables as a group or one by one.⁹ A criterion such as noble ancestry would be a collective form of exclusion, while a certain score on a civil service examination would be an individual form. Solidarism, on the other hand, is when a lower group comes together in reaction to its exclusion. These groups attempt to usurp the resources being monopolized by a higher group.¹⁰ In Parkin's theory, both of these strategies – exclusion and solidarism – are active simultaneously as social groups form in relation to one another. In the case of late medieval England, this means that to argue that the gentry practiced strategies of social exclusion is necessarily to argue that the commoners experienced some level of solidarism. It is, unfortunately, beyond the scope of this project to identify this reactive process. This thesis will focus instead on the attempts at exclusion made by the medieval gentry and how they ultimately left open the possibility of social mobility, as commoners found ways of appropriating the resources the gentry attempted to protect. It will be left to later scholars to take up the question of solidarism.

Parkin sees collective exclusion as characteristic of pre-modern society, while modern societies are more likely to practice individual exclusion.¹¹ As I will argue in this dissertation, the exclusion strategies of the medieval gentry do not fall neatly into either category. The gentry practiced multiple strategies of exclusion. They sought to simultaneously emphasize the distinctiveness of their aristocratic birth as well as more individualized characteristics such as personal virtue and career achievement as they scrambled to locate some quality that would render them distinctive and defend their interests against socially ambitious commoners. By

⁹ *Ibid.*, 4-5.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 6.

stressing a variety of different criteria for membership – including arms-bearing, bodily conduct and distinctive vocabulary – the gentry ultimately failed to achieve closure, instead opening up multiple pathways to gentility for those who sought them. Modern historians’ inability to define the gentry has its root in the gentry’s own inability to define itself well enough to accomplish social closure.

Successful Social Closure: The Peerage

The English gentry owed its very existence to the peerage’s effective employment of social closure. While all levels of England’s nobility continued to share a common culture, in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries it divided into two strata with a more rigid, though not impermeable,¹² social boundary between them. As K. B. McFarlane has described, by the year 1500 the number of noble ranks had expanded (most notably the addition of the rank of duke in the fourteenth century to distinguish Edward III’s many sons) and they were increasingly heritable, lending greater stability to the highest levels of the elite.¹³ On top of that, during the same period, these magnates secured for themselves hereditary summonses to Parliament.¹⁴ In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Parliament was merely an occasional advisory body for the king, but during the fourteenth it developed into an established arm of government and had added legislative authority to its advisory powers. As Parliament’s range and influence expanded, it consolidated political power in the hands of the sixty or seventy lords invited to

¹² It was possible to cross the line between them through marriage, inheritance or promotion by the king. The first two of these methods involved replacing an existing magnate; only the third resulted in the expansion of the ranks of peers. Chris Given-Wilson, *The English Nobility in the Late Middle Ages* (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1987), 62-3.

¹³ K. B. McFarlane, *The Nobility of Later Medieval England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), 123.

¹⁴ Christine Carpenter, “England: The Nobility and the Gentry” in *Companion to Britain in the Late Middle Ages*, ed. S. J. Rigby (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 264.

attend.¹⁵ The Parliamentary peerage – those lords who warranted a hereditary summons – separated itself from those lesser figures who could only hope to be chosen to represent the Commons.¹⁶ This opened the door to several other exclusive privileges, including the right to trial by their peers and frequent, direct access to the king. The summons to Parliament also cultivated a sense of group cohesion among the peers, as they regularly gathered together.¹⁷ By the fifteenth century, the very title “lord,” which had originally been a generic honorific, had taken on a more specific meaning, referring to those peers who belonged to the burgeoning House of Lords.¹⁸ Increasingly, the term “noble” was used to refer exclusively to these peers, and “gentle” used to refer to those below, though the terms were still used interchangeably through the seventeenth century.¹⁹

The personal summons to Parliament acted as a supremely effective form of social closure, forming a barrier between the peerage and those below that could only be crossed with difficulty. The peerage and gentry shared a common gentle culture, but developed divergent political roles – Steve Rigby makes the distinction that they remained members of the same order, which served a social function, but became members of different estates, which serve a political function.²⁰ But while the peerage succeeded in setting itself apart by claiming a particular form of political power as its exclusive right, the gentry was left to grasp at whatever remnants of power remained. Unfortunately, in the Commons, they were unable to effectively

¹⁵ According to Given-Wilson, these lords are singled out for this honor by virtue of their roles as military commanders, advisors to the king, and their extensive landholding. This was accomplished by the year 1400. Given-Wilson, *English Nobility*, 1, 55-6.

¹⁶ Nigel Saul, *Knights and Esquires* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 6. S. M. Wright, *The Derbyshire Gentry in the Fifteenth Century* (Chesterfield: Derbyshire Record Society, 1983), 1-2.

¹⁷ Given-Wilson, *English Nobility*, 65. Carpenter, “England: The Nobility and the Gentry,” 266.

¹⁸ Christopher Dyer, *Standards of Living in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 15.

¹⁹ S. H. Rigby, *English Society in the Later Middle Ages: Class, Status and Gender* (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1995), 195.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 193.

limit this power to themselves, as certain commoners – particularly wealthy merchants and burgesses from the important towns of the realm – were also eligible to attend. For the gentry to follow suit and define itself as the group having access to political power through the Commons, it would necessarily expand to include just the sorts of ambitious, wealthy commoners its members felt threatened by and were trying to close out. While these upstarts remained members of their estate, the gentry sought to close off their social order, relying on various features of gentle culture shared with the peers of the realm to distinguish themselves from the common masses.

Failed Social Closure: The Gentry

Michael Bennett has argued that “the distinction between ‘gentle’ and ‘common’ was the crucial divide in county society” – and in the fourteenth century, the period Bennett covers, the English gentry was mostly to be found on small country estates with interests focused in their individual counties.²¹ Medieval people felt strongly about the existence of this divide – ostensibly, between the orders of “those who fought” and “those who worked” – yet they ultimately fell short of maintaining it. As commoners grew wealthier and had greater access to education and literacy, gentle and common culture increasingly overlapped. Gentle culture was shared with those higher on the social scale as well, making it a poor marker for a more limited social group. While the peerage regularly met in Parliament and even commoners convened with their peers in urban guilds and manorial courts, those aspiring to gentility had no formal group activities or functions around which their identity could solidify. They met and their culture circulated in a variety of environments - noble households, the royal court, battlefield camps,

²¹ Michael Bennett, *Community, Class and Careerism: Cheshire and Lancashire Society in the Age of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 31.

towns and cities (especially London) – but in all of these places they overlapped with other groups. The English gentry, in its stages of formation at the end of the Middle Ages, was unable to articulate what made it a distinctive and exclusive social group, and so failed to become one during this period.

The social psychologist John C. Turner has defined a social group as “two or more individuals who share a common social identification of themselves or, which is nearly the same thing, perceive themselves to be members of the same social category.”²² The key problem in the social formation of the late medieval English gentry is that it does not meet this requirement: few of those who modern historians now consider to belong to the gentry would have considered themselves members of the same social group at that time. The gentry was fractured into a series of very specific social gradations, as will be discussed in more depth in Chapter 2. While two knights might recognize one another as social equals, it was less likely that a knight would recognize an esquire or a gentleman as such. For this purpose, it is perhaps more helpful to think of medieval society as a pyramid rather than a ladder. Envisioning society as a ladder suggests that there is an equal slice of the population at each rung, which is not the case; a pyramid, which narrows at the top, more realistically expresses the limited social opportunities that exist at the elite end. Thus, one can imagine more solidarity at the bottom of this social pyramid than the top, where competition for enhanced status is necessarily fiercer. Because members of the gentry stood in a position of privilege on this social pyramid and wished to retain it, their best interest was served in excluding as many others as possible from their ranks. Because the mere gentleman held one of the lowest privileged positions, he felt increased anxiety over keeping it. In some ways, gentry identity formation occurred in the negative, focusing on developing criteria

²² John C. Turner, “Towards a Cognitive Redefinition of the Social Group,” in *Social Identity and Intergroup Relations*, ed. Henri Tajfel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 15.

that would keep others out, rather than allow ingroup members to identify with one another more fully.

Turner's work also describes what happens when a social group fails to develop along these lines: "Where the ingroup lacks positive distinctiveness, members will be motivated either to leave that group physically or dissociate themselves from it psychologically and aspire to membership of a higher status group or to adopt creative and/or competitive strategies to restore its positive distinctiveness."²³ This aptly describes the situation of the English gentry as it came together during the fifteenth century: forced out of the Parliamentary peerage which had formed above it, and faced with pressure from the rise of wealthy commoners through the burgeoning professions, each of these approaches was used by different segments of the gentry in an attempt to maintain their status.

Before proceeding, it should be noted that Turner's work deals with the measurable psychological reactions of individuals to small groups. He and other experimental social psychologists have tested these theories by assigning their subjects to work on a task with a handful of other individuals, and measured their reactions to ingroup and outgroup members at the conclusion of the work. For example, in an experiment conducted by Lise Jans, Tom Postmes and Karen I. Van der Zee, subjects' degrees of social identification were studied by dividing them into groups of four and asking them to design team t-shirts, which they would wear for the performance of a subsequent task.²⁴ A group of four in an experimental context seems a far cry away from a social group made up of hundreds or even thousands of individuals, yet their experiences can still be compared. These laboratory conditions are useful in uncovering a range of ways in which individuals might respond to group formation; in transferring these theories to

²³ *Ibid.*, 34.

²⁴ Lise Jans, Tom Postmes, and Karen I. Van der Zee, "Sharing Differences: The Inductive Route to Social Identity Formation" *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 48 (2012): 1146-7.

the real-world experience of an exponentially larger social group, it is likely that the entire range of responses will be represented. This is the case with the gentry: some responded to social pressure by attempting to align themselves with social superiors and enter into that Parliamentary peerage; others rejected the notion that their status group might contain anyone of inferior rank, even if that rank were commonly accepted as gentle; finally, a number of efforts were made to seek out some form of positive distinctiveness that might be used to exclude any newcomers. This last response will be the focus of the present study.

This search for positive distinctiveness was a rocky one. If the formation of the gentry happened less because they themselves chose to identify with one another and more because they were forced out of the peerage and, essentially, brought together by exclusion, then their identity was less a question of who they were than who they were not. Members of the gentry were not the parliamentary peerage. They were not laborers. They were not men of servile ancestry (or if they were, they were loath to admit it). These points were generally agreed upon, but still too broad to exclude upstart commoners. Some attempts were made to legislate social distinction: a 1445 statute asserted that knights of the shire – representatives elected to the Commons – should be “notable knights or such notable esquires or gentlemen by birth as could support a knight’s estate, and not men of yeoman standing.”²⁵ While this may have kept down the socially ambitious county yeomanry, all knights of the shire were still rubbing shoulders with the merchants and burgesses elected by the towns. Economic distinctions were also difficult to maintain, as poor gentlemen could have incomes as low as £5 *per annum* without losing their status, and wealthy merchants were capable of purchasing extensive landed estates to rival established noble families. Christine Carpenter has argued that landowning, manorial lordship and office-holding were key factors in the early formation of the medieval gentry; this may have

²⁵ Wright, *Derbyshire Gentry*, 112.

been true at the county level, but there were many who laid claim to gentility through other avenues, such as service in the royal government or the court, and membership in noble affinities or certain professions.²⁶ Social and cultural indicators, as will be discussed in later chapters, also came into play, but tended to be ineffective.

A modern reader might find it strange that these qualifications needed to be invented. In the pre-modern period, were the upper classes not distinguished from the lower by virtue of their birth or ancestry? Why was birth not a significant enough feature of gentility to accomplish social closure in late medieval England? Birth certainly continued to play a significant role in delineating the gentle ranks of society. As will be discussed in Chapter 3, most of the grants of arms written by heralds allude to the discovery of the recipient's gentle ancestors. The connection, or even the ancestors themselves, might be a fiction concocted by the herald, but the formality of finding such links to the past still had to be observed. The requirement of gentle birth never went away, but it could be swept under the rug if necessary. This was easy to do, because noble or gentle birth was not something that could be seen at a glance during the fifteenth century. Other characteristics needed to be emphasized as an outward display of that birth. Focusing on cultural and behavioral markers that were obvious at a glance, or during the course of a conversation, allows us to more quickly assess the social level of an unknown individual. Textual evidence indicates that medieval Englishmen wanted social rank to be readily apparent to such scrutiny, and that their reality often fell short of this ideal.²⁷ Also supporting these markers was the belief that only born gentlemen could behave gently – that an individual was naturally imbued at birth with the characteristics of his or her social rank – and any upstarts would quickly reveal themselves through the incompetence of their imitation.

²⁶ Christine Carpenter, *Locality and Polity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 35-95.

²⁷ A large range of texts including sumptuary laws, sermons, Parliamentary legislation, and literature express concerns about the easy recognition of social status.

Unfortunately, these beliefs were false; the characteristics promoted as distinctively gentle in the fifteenth century turned out to be easily imitable, contributing to the expansion, rather than the exclusivity, of the English gentry. By the sixteenth century, gentlemen came in many varieties. Sir Thomas Smith, the author of *De Republica Anglorum* (1583), describes its social system at length in the work, and concludes that “Gentlemen . . . be made good cheape in England.” He continues,

For whosoever studieth the laws of the realm, who studieth in the universities, who professeth liberal sciences, and to be short, who can live idly and without manual labour, and will bear the port, charge and countenance of a gentleman, he shall be called master, for that is the title which men give to esquires and other gentlemen, and shall be taken for a gentleman. . . . (and if need be) a king of Heralds shall also give him for money, arms newly made and invented, the title whereof shall pretend to have been found by the said Herald in perusing and viewing of old registers, where his ancestors in times past had been recorded to bear the same.²⁸

Smith’s cynicism must be taken with a grain of salt: a knight himself, he was at risk of losing some of his own status if it became too diluted with new blood. Yet this quote reveals that it was believed possible to achieve gentility through a little knowledge, polish, and proper behavior by the sixteenth century. With a little money, a supporting document could be added to the mix as well. In his study of the English nobility, G. E. Mingay refers to the sixteenth century as “an age of opportunity,” arguing that there were ample circumstances under which an ambitious person could gain status and rank during this period.²⁹ These circumstances were set up by the conditions of the fifteenth century. Because the gentry failed to develop a distinctive and exclusive definition of itself early in its formation, the door was opened to a wide variety of new members in subsequent periods. Thus, fifteenth-century political turmoil and the increasing commodification of gentility allowed for significant social mobility and change in the sixteenth century. What evolved into the English gentry was a motley jumble of social outliers: those who

²⁸ Thomas Smith, *De Republica Anglorum*, facsimile ed. (Meston, Yorkshire: The Scholar Press, Ltd, 1970), 27.

²⁹ G. E. Mingay, *The Gentry. The Rise and Fall of a Ruling Class* (London: Longmans, 1976), 40.

had fallen too far or risen too high to be considered as belonging to other, better-defined social groups. Impoverished or supernumerary sons of noble houses, government officials, wealthy merchants, educated lawyers and minor clerics, whether they recognized one another as ingroup members or not, were all lumped into the same social category at the opening of the early modern period, and would develop into what we know as the English gentry.

Methodology

McFarlane argued that “the medieval historian’s province ‘is rather [than traditional biography] the growth of social organization, of civilization, of ideas.’”³⁰ This is the root of my project, which examines several of the socio-cultural markers that were promoted as indicators of gentility in fifteenth-century England, how they were associated with a gentle lifestyle, and how they ultimately failed by becoming too publicly accessible to the wealthy, literate segment of the commonalty. The approach I have taken with this project differs from the classic gentry study. I have chosen not to address questions of income and land ownership. The reason for this is simple: there have been many such studies in the past, undertaking minute examinations of manorial and county records in order to reconstruct a picture of the social system of an individual county, but these have not brought historians any closer to a comprehensive definition of the late medieval gentry. I have instead approached the question from a different angle, examining the cultural qualifications for gentry membership – the more slippery, sometimes ambiguous qualities that one had to display in order to establish oneself as gentle. As many of the county studies have made clear, factors such as owning a manor (or several), having an annual income of at least £15 *per annum*, and holding significant county offices unequivocally identify an

³⁰ J. P. Cooper, “Introduction” in K. B. McFarlane, *The Nobility of Later Medieval England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), ix.

individual as belonging to the gentry. Yet a comprehensive definition of the gentry requires an understanding of the perceptions and ideologies that went along with its primary defining quality, gentility. These range from the standard of personal conduct to which gentle men and women were held to the bodies of knowledge associated with their rank. These cultural factors do not always correlate directly with wealth or property holding, and, while they have yet to be fully investigated by historians, contemporaries saw them as critical aspects of gentle status. This study seeks to remedy that deficiency. Approaching gentility from the perspective of culture also helps to understand the ambiguous cases. By exploring texts and documents that implicitly and explicitly discuss gentility, what it means, and how one might acquire it, this study sheds light on those individuals who were *mistakably* gentle – that is, who fall on the edges of the category and whose cases can more precisely illuminate the dividing line between gentle and common.

The first two chapters examine definitions. Chapter 1 surveys the existing literature on the late medieval gentry and its formation, exploring the range of ways in which individual scholars have defined the gentry. It is quickly evident that the definitions used, while in agreement about the higher end of the gentry, vary considerably in their treatment of the lower end. Scholars have not formed a consensus about where the dividing line between gentle and common was located – likely because the late medieval gentry had such difficulty defining it themselves. Chapter 2 looks at the terms medieval people used to designate members of the gentry and how they shifted over time. The primary focus is on the terms “gentleman” and “gentlewomen,” as these were used to designate the lowest gentle ranks, and were often vaguely applied. The term seems to have been used almost as a catch-all, applied to a variety of individuals whose status was ambiguously gentle, most frequently those who were immersed in the gentle culture circulating at the royal court, in noble households, and in the major towns and

cities. Chapter 3 looks at grants of arms by heralds, often looked at as unequivocal markers of gentility. These grants were issued more frequently and for a wider variety of reasons (not simply gentle ancestry) during the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, for reasons that have yet to be fully explained. The chapter explores the roles of heralds as gatekeepers of gentility, using their own judgment and the estimation of the community to judge an individual's worthiness. Herald's statements about why an individual deserved a grant of arms act as a barometer for the changes in what constituted gentility during the late Middle Ages in England.

The subsequent chapters focus on the cultural qualifications for gentility that were promoted during the fifteenth century. The attempts to define the gentry using these qualifications ultimately failed because they were not exclusive enough. Chapter 4 examines the collections of conduct poems that were extremely popular in England during the late fifteenth century. These poems and the manuscripts they are found in often explicitly link an individual's bodily conduct with gentility: to earn a gentle name, a boy is instructed to control his bodily movements and emissions in a variety of ways. If bodily control was intended to be an outward indicator of gentility, however, the popularity of the poems undermined its distinctiveness. These poems were frequently found in inexpensive texts, both manuscript and printed, that were accessible to a wide variety of consumers who could use their advice to mold themselves in the image of gentility, whether they had an ancestral claim to the status or not. The following chapter addresses the absence of such literature for the education of gentle girls – a surprising absence, considering the abundance of such material for boys. The chapter considers what literature might have filled this gap, from a handful of poems directed at bourgeois women, to an existing body of French literature for gentle daughters, to texts which were less practical and more moralistic. These literary tendencies suggest that social expectations of gentility were sharply gendered. The

final chapter examines another body of literature that was associated with gentility: manuals of hunting and hawking, lists of “proper terms” and shorter accompanying works. Apart from their explicit claims to convey gentle knowledge, these texts are linked together by their emphasis on language, an emphasis that is unique to English treatises of this type. This suggests a link between gentility and language – that the writers of these texts promoted the use of exclusive terminology as an indicator of gentry membership. Many of the very specific terms used are only found within the context of these texts from this period. Few entered regular usage; most appeared suddenly during the late fifteenth century and disappeared from use immediately. These texts and the language they used emerged out of a specific social need – defining the emergent gentry – and fell out of use after that need fell away. Ultimately, language, too, failed as a social marker because these texts were just as accessible to new literate audiences as the conduct poems discussed in earlier chapters. With the expansion of literacy and education as well as the increasing affordability of texts through the new medium of printing, attempts to define gentry distinctiveness through access to an exclusive textual culture were doomed to failure.

The attempts by the fifteenth-century English gentry to coalesce into a recognizable, Turnerian social group place them at the intersection of other important trends marking the shift between medieval and early modern: the de-feudalization of the noble classes, the centralization of the state, the rise of the professions, the increasing literacy of the English population, the transition from manuscript to print, and the subsequent development of a book culture. This project will demonstrate the ways that these factors contributed to the increase of social opportunity within the gentry during this period, and how the simultaneous commodification of

gentility in English textual culture provided the means for ambitious individuals to take advantage of that opportunity.

Chapter 1

Gentry Historiography: Seeking the Elusive Definition

The men and women of late medieval England cared deeply about social categories and how they individually fit into those categories. Yet in spite of their importance, the social categories devised by medieval people were frequently inconsistent and inadequate. Later antiquarians and historians, unable to fully understand medieval social systems on their own, have imposed their own categories on the period. In particular, social categories that developed in the early modern period and later tend to be reflected back upon the late medieval period (and sometimes earlier) in order to put the late medieval social world in terms modern people can understand. One such category is the gentry.

Medieval people had a concept of gentility, but not of a unified social group called the gentry.³¹ The Oxford English Dictionary dates the first use of the term to the early fourteenth century, but this usage merely denoted the practices and habits characteristic of those of gentle birth.³² The term does not occur in the sense of a social group until the late sixteenth century. Since medieval people as yet had no collective term for this group, scholars have reached forward into the early modern period for the term “gentry” and applied it to late medieval society. There has been some debate over whether such a group, labeled gentry or not, existed at all before the sixteenth century. Peter Coss has recently argued that the gentry’s origins were

³¹ The constituent elements of the early modern gentry certainly existed by the middle of the fifteenth century, but the gentry as a class was nascent at best.

³² The entry, dated to c. 1325, is from a poem written during the reign of Edward III, in which the line “That is now the gentry In chamber & eke [also] in hall” uses the term to refer to a current fashion among gentlefolk. Several other entries from the 1380s use the term to denote gentle rank (in Chaucer’s *Wife of Bath’s Tale*, “He will have pris* of his gentry for he was born of a gentle house.”) or the characteristics associated with a gentleman – essentially, good breeding (John Wyclif lamented that “Sometime curtesy & gentry was virtuous life & honest. but now it is turned in-to vanity & nicety;” in Chaucer’s *Legend of Good Women*, it is said of the lion that “Of his gentry, Him deigneth not to wreke** him on a fly;” and in Chaucer’s *Pardoner’s Tale* “gentry” is equated with “a manly deed”). *OED*, s. v. “gentry” (n.). **Pris* (n.): fame, renown, good reputation. *MED*, s. v. “pris” (n. 1), def. 9. ***Wreken* (v.): to take vengeance on. *MED*, s. v. “wreken” (v.), def. 3a.

much earlier, arguing for the “crystallization of a graded and relatively stable gentry” by the mid-fourteenth century. He sees the role the lesser nobility played in local governance as well as the shared culture of knighthood and chivalry as binding it together into a distinct gentry. He further argues that the development of different gradations of rank within the gentry provided it with the flexibility to deal with new groups such as lawyers and administrators.³³ Most scholars, however, have had more difficulty than Coss in putting a finger on what made the gentry a collective social group. One of the difficulties in doing so is that the makeup of this group shifted significantly across the late Middle Ages. While Coss is primarily focused on the knights and esquires who comprised the provincial gentry in the later fourteenth century, his definition becomes problematic in the changing world of the fifteenth century, when opportunities in royal administration, the clergy, and other professions broadened the range of people who could lay claim to gentility. As its members expanded, the criteria Coss proposes were no longer sufficient to unify the group. The lack of any contemporary term to encompass these ranks and occupations is a symptom of this disunity. The anxiety over status and its markers which troubled fifteenth-century English men and women stemmed from the instability of these categories.

Since late medieval people did not have a contemporary definition of the gentry, the precise meaning of the term is subject to the discretion of the scholars who employ it. All modern studies of the gentry seem to start with the author lamenting how difficult this group is to define and then coming up with a necessarily imperfect working definition (or, occasionally, avoiding this step entirely by assuming the audience understands the term).³⁴ The definitions,

³³ Peter Coss neatly rehashes this argument at the beginning of a recent work, though it dates to his 2003 *Origins of the English Gentry*. Peter Coss, *The Foundations of Gentry Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 1. See also: Coss, *Origins of the English Gentry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

³⁴Examples include: G. E. Mingay, *The Gentry. The Rise and Fall of a Ruling Class* (London: Longmans, 1976), 1-2; Susan Wright, *The Derbyshire Gentry in the Fifteenth Century* (Derbyshire Record Society vol. viii, 1983), 6-8; Eric Acheson, *A Gentry Community: Leicestershire in the Fifteenth Century c. 1422-1485* (Cambridge: Cambridge

when they are offered, are ultimately bound by the needs of the individual scholar and his or her project, focusing in on the bit of the gentry that applies to his or her primary inquiry.³⁵

Qualifications and cut-offs are devised to work with the available evidence (and understandably so), but frequently fall short of fully and accurately representing this important social group.³⁶

More often than not, scholars fall back on anachronistic early modern criteria for gentry membership.

The larger issue which drives this imprecision is the lack of any sustained *medieval* definition of who qualified as “gentle.” While late medieval England did not have a concept of “the gentry” as a cohesive social grouping below the nobility, its component parts – the ranks of knight, esquire, and gentleman – were well known. Yet even these prove difficult to define inclusively, morphing and shifting decade by decade – particularly after the 1413 Statute of Additions compelled social self-identification.³⁷ The deep concern expressed during this period with establishing a clearly defined social hierarchy – a vision of a perfectly ordered society in which everyone knew his place and kept to it – arose out of a reality fraught with social chaos. The medieval gentry, as a group, eludes definition because even its contemporaries did not understand it. The inconsistency of modern scholars in defining the gentry stems from this indefinability. The remainder of this chapter will address in greater detail how scholars have

University Press, 1992, 29-31. For a scholar who does not define the gentry at all, see: Colin Richmond, *John Hopton* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

³⁵ See, for example, Malcolm Mercer’s 2010 study, which examines the networks and decision-making of the gentry during the Wars of the Roses. While his study is titled *The Medieval Gentry*, Mercer chooses to focus on what he calls the “greater gentry,” since they were more likely to be active in political affairs and, therefore, directly involved in the conflict. It should be noted, as well, that although Mercer presents a sensitive and thorough discussion of the gentry as a social category, he ultimately falls back on Stubbs’ definition. Malcolm Mercer, *The Medieval Gentry* (London: Continuum, 2010), 11.

³⁶ Raluca Radulescu and Alison Truelove point out that the criteria most scholars alight on is socio-economic, ignoring the distinctive shared culture of the gentry (which is the focus of their study). Radulescu and Truelove, *Gentry Culture in Late Medieval England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 1.

³⁷ Christine Carpenter’s contribution to the *Companion to Britain in the Late Middle Ages* includes a brief but thorough description of these changes in terminology. Carpenter, “England: The Nobility and the Gentry” in *Companion to Britain in the Late Middle Ages*, ed. S. J. Rigby (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 264-5.

attempted to define the late medieval English gentry; the following chapter will take up the question of how medieval contemporaries saw these same categories.

Historiography of the Gentry: Political and Economic Factors

Modern scholars became interested in the medieval gentry as a result of the work of K. B. McFarlane. Through the middle of the twentieth century, most medieval historians were concerned with political and institutional history, and that political history generally focused on the king.³⁸ McFarlane was the first to contend that the political scene was more complex than the king and his actions – in order to fully understand what was going on, historians needed to look lower. McFarlane focused his attention on the English nobility in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, understanding that they and the affinities from which they drew their power had considerable influence over the politics of the realm. Those affinities were made up largely of gentry, bound to nobles by the monetary ties of bastard feudalism, a term that McFarlane coined.³⁹ Under McFarlane's influence, scholars began to understand the importance of studying the relationships between the crown, nobility and gentry to gain a fuller understanding of late medieval politics.

McFarlane was influenced to some degree by a contemporary group of historians engaged in investigating the gentry of a later period. As mentioned above, the term “gentry” as referring to a social group did exist by the end of the sixteenth century when it had become a major locus of political power. While McFarlane was working on the medieval nobility, early modern historians were debating the role of the gentry in the onset of the English Revolution.

³⁸Dating McFarlane's ideas is tricky because very little of his work was published during his lifetime. Most of his work on the nobility and gentry is contained in *The Nobility of Later Medieval England*, a collection including the 1953 Ford lectures which was published posthumously by some of his students. K. B. McFarlane, *The Nobility of Later Medieval England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973).

³⁹ McFarlane, “Bastard Feudalism” *Bulletin of the Institute for Historical Research* 20 (1947): 161-80.

The debate began with a 1941 article by R. H. Tawney, who suggested that during the century prior to the conflict the older class of landowners gave way before a new gentry class, which used the events of 1640 to consolidate its economic power.⁴⁰ In 1953, Hugh Trevor-Roper countered this, saying that it was actually the decline of the small and middling gentry landowners that facilitated the rise of those yeomen and gentry who had royal patronage.⁴¹ In 1961, J. H. Hexter challenged both of these theories, arguing that Tawney's focus on the declining lesser landowners and Trevor-Roper's on the rising court gentry actually neglected the critical group: the greater gentry landowners. During this period, the military control of the aristocracy over the gentry had collapsed, allowing the greater landowning gentry to emerge on its own as a bourgeois class, comparable to those which sparked the other revolutions of early modern Europe.⁴² The result of this debate was a massive onslaught of research into the early modern gentry between 1955 and 1970, focused primarily on studies of particular counties and families.⁴³ The historians who engaged in this research were primarily concerned with understanding the political influence of the gentry before the Revolution through an analysis of social and economic circumstances.

In addition to disagreeing on the role played by the gentry in early modern politics, the major players in this debate also diverge when it comes to defining the gentry. Tawney never does so at all, relying on florid description of its members rather than concise definition, and ultimately relying on the facetiousness of a sixteenth-century commentator: "Sir Thomas Smith had said that a gentleman is a man who spends his money like a gentleman. Of the theorists rash

⁴⁰ R. H. Tawney, "The Rise of the Gentry, 1558-1640" *Economic History Review* 11 (1941): 1-38.

⁴¹ H. R. Trevor-Roper, "The Gentry, 1540-1640" *Economic History Review* Supplement I (1953).

⁴² J. H. Hexter, "The Military Decline of the Aristocracy," in *Social Change and Revolution in England*, ed. Lawrence Stone (London: Longmans, 1965), 37, 41.

⁴³ This debate is discussed in Stone, *The Causes of the English Revolution 1529-1642* (London: Routledge, 1972), 26-9.

enough to attempt a definition, few succeeded in improving on that wise tautology.”⁴⁴ Witty as this remark is, it is hardly helpful. Trevor-Roper also sidesteps true definition, focusing on making a distinction between the country gentry – landlords ranking below the peerage – and the court gentry – men who shared a culture with the country gentry but earned their living as royal officials.⁴⁵ While he makes distinctions between its members, Trevor-Roper never defines the upper and lower boundaries of the gentry, even claiming that the distinction between the country gentry and peerage was arbitrary, since they shared a culture, interests and practices, only differing in the scale of their endeavors.⁴⁶

The inability of these influential early modern historians to provide an accurate and consistent definition of the gentry is significant because it left its mark on the medievalists who picked up the term and applied it to their own period. The English gentry formed so late in the Middle Ages – during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries – that most of its development cannot be characterized as medieval at all. Historically, it has been a subject of greater concern to early modernists. Those medievalists who have worked on the subject have looked to the more substantial early modern historiography for guidance and have adopted their models. As a consequence of this, medieval scholars of the gentry have frequently been drawn into early modern debates.

One of the most important such debates is that over the county community. Its existence in the seventeenth century was assiduously promoted by Alan Everitt and his fellows – the concept has been referred to disparagingly by a medievalist as the “hobbyhorse of several

⁴⁴Tawney, “Rise of the Gentry,” 4.

⁴⁵Trevor-Roper, “The Gentry,” 17.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 1, 6.

seventeenth-century scholars.”⁴⁷ Everitt argued that the continuity of many families in their counties and the restriction of newcomers into the group cultivated community feeling and shared political values among the early modern gentry.⁴⁸ He stressed that the county community was the primary focus of gentry political loyalties until the English Revolution (which he terms the “Great Rebellion”) established the authority of the nation-state.⁴⁹ Lawrence Stone and Jeanne C. Fawtier Stone similarly found that during the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries, “there was an intensification of this local patriotism and a growth of a strong sense of county community.”⁵⁰ While this may have been true during the aforementioned centuries, the preconditions these authors cite for this development (continuity and social closure) were not so strongly present in the late medieval period. The fifteenth century, in particular, was one of social turbulence and turmoil, largely due to frequent warfare. If there were such a county community in late medieval England, it could not have developed in the same way.

As late medievalists reflected early modern ideas about the gentry back onto their own period, the county community exerted a strong influence on the scope and content of the research questions they formulated.⁵¹ In fact, it was an extremely easy debate for medievalists to be sucked into: the county is a convenient unit of study in England, since that is the level upon which its archives are organized. Many early modern studies, spurred also by a belief that the county community was an important political body, were centered on individual counties.

⁴⁷C. E. Moreton, “A Social Gulf? The Upper and Lesser Gentry of Later Medieval England” *Journal of Medieval History* 17 (1991): 255. Everitt, in fact, declared that “In many respects, despite its ancient centralized government, the England of 1640 resembled a union of partially independent county-states or communities, each with its own distinct ethos and loyalty.” He goes on to contend that the Great Rebellion (as he terms it) was the catalyst for the unification of these disparate units. Alan Everitt, *The Community of Kent and the Great Rebellion* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1966), 13 and *passim*.

⁴⁸Mingay, *The Gentry*, 10.

⁴⁹Everitt, *Community of Kent*, 13-4.

⁵⁰Lawrence Stone and Jeanne C. Fawtier Stone, *An Open Elite? England 1540-1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 27.

⁵¹Christine Carpenter, “Gentry and Community in Medieval England” *Journal of British Studies* 33:4 (1994), 341.

Medievalists working on the gentry generally followed suit, often without questioning its appropriateness to their period.⁵²

There were some who did not take this concept for granted. These historians have entered wholeheartedly into the debate, justifying the county community's place in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries (and, on occasion, even earlier). Nigel Saul does so in his 1981 *Knights and Esquires*, a study of the gentry community in Gloucestershire. He argues that the county community developed as a way to respond to and resist increasing royal burdens. The fact that at the beginning of the fourteenth century, gentry could hold offices in multiple counties, but by the end of the century most men only held office in one is an indication of the community's development.⁵³ Michael Bennett also supports this idea in his 1983 monograph, *Community, Class and Careerism*, focused on the gentry and rising professional classes of Cheshire and Lancashire in the late fourteenth century. In his chapter devoted to the subject, Bennett explains how "the network of personal connections and collective responsibilities" of the gentry gave this community social and political meaning.⁵⁴ He suggests that two main characteristics of these particular counties – their isolation and connection to the royal court – made the concept of the county community particularly appropriate for them.⁵⁵

Those same characteristics, however, may serve to render this region anomalous; most historians dealing with other counties have found less conclusive evidence that such an entity

⁵²Some examples of such county studies include Katherine Naughton, "The Bedfordshire Gentry in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Century" (Leicester: Leicestershire University Occasional Publications, 1976); G. G. Astill, "The Medieval Gentry: A Study in Leicestershire Society, 1350-1399" (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Birmingham, 1977); A. J. Pollard, "The Richmondshire Community of Gentry During the Wars of the Roses" in C. Ross, ed., *Patronage, Pedigree and Power in Late Medieval England* (Stroud, Gloucester: Alan Sutton, 1979), 37-59; S. J. Payling, *Political Society in Lancastrian England: The Greater Gentry of Nottinghamshire* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991); Acheson, *A Gentry Community* (1992). Even Chris Given-Wilson's survey of the English elites during this period ends with a chapter entitled, "Political Society in Fourteenth-Century England." Chris Given-Wilson, *The English Nobility in the Late Middle Ages* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1987), 160-179.

⁵³Nigel Saul, *Knights and Esquires* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 168, 163.

⁵⁴Michael Bennett, *Community, Class and Careerism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 21.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, 328.

existed in the minds of the medieval gentry. Susan Wright, in her 1983 study of the gentry in fifteenth-century Derbyshire, took a more measured stance on the issue, arguing that there was not a county community at that time, although the gentry did act as a community in response to certain issues. This community was simply not defined by county lines.⁵⁶ In his 1991 work on the political community of Nottinghamshire, Simon Payling also takes this moderate stance, arguing that “from [his] evidence it is difficult to maintain the idea of a coherent county community, at least as far as the natural leaders of that community are concerned.”⁵⁷ In 1992, C. E. Moreton chimed in, arguing that such debates are fruitless pedantry – whether such a community existed is not truly important. What is important, however, is the intensely local purview of gentry society, which has been made evident throughout these debates.⁵⁸

Christine Carpenter has taken the more extreme position, denying the existence of any county community of importance. In both *Locality and Polity* (1992) and “Gentry and Community in Medieval England” (1994), she argues that gentry were tied to noble affinities, rather than the county community. In some cases, these affinities fell more or less along county lines, but in most they did not. Similarly, the interests of individual families did not stop at the county border. An examination of those families situated close to the borders shows how fabricated the idea of county community could be.⁵⁹ Rather than something with which local gentry strongly identified, Carpenter claims that the county community was something “imposed

⁵⁶ Wright, *Derbyshire Gentry*, 119, 146. Peter Coss agrees with this in passing in his article “Aspects of Cultural Diffusion in Medieval England: The Early Romances, Local Society, and Robin Hood” *Past and Present* 108 (1985), 47.

⁵⁷ Payling, *Political Society*, 217.

⁵⁸ C. E. Moreton, *The Townshends and Their World: Gentry, Law and Land in Norfolk c. 1450-1551* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 195-6.

⁵⁹ Christine Carpenter, *Locality and Polity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). Carpenter, “Gentry and Community,” 317-8.

from the outside,” the county courts being a vehicle for extending royal authority into all corners of the kingdom.⁶⁰

In the wake of Carpenter’s work, the county community lost some of its cachet among medievalists. While its political importance is still emphasized,⁶¹ there is wider recognition that the interests of gentry families were not always limited to a single county. There is also a growing sense that geography played a significant role in a county community’s formation – in peripheral counties it was likely to be a stronger facet of gentry identity than in those closer to London (which focused more on the royal court), so it is difficult to claim as a defining feature of the gentry as a whole.⁶² In his 2003 work, *Origins of the English Gentry*, Coss argued that one of “the defining characteristics of the gentry as a social formation” was that “it has a collective identity, and collective interests which necessitate the existence of some forum, or interlocking fora, for their articulation.”⁶³ The phrase “some forum, or interlocking fora” clearly alludes to the county community, but Coss’ more generic choice of language is an acknowledgement that this community is one of a number of areas in which gentry identity was demonstrated. In other words, being active in the county community could indicate an individual’s gentility, but it was not the only activity that could do so.

This preoccupation with the county community has had a strong impact on the way that medievalists understand and define the gentry. The emphasis on the county study, in particular, has compelled scholars to devise arbitrary cut-off points for membership in this group. Since many of these county studies are based on tax records, annual income is often used as a convenient dividing line between gentle and common. Income was used by contemporaries as

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, 376-7.

⁶¹ Mercer, *Medieval Gentry*, 22-3.

⁶² Mercer, for example, discusses how gentry in counties proximate to London were increasingly drawn into the royal affinity by the reign of Edward IV. *Ibid.*, 16.

⁶³ Coss, *Origins of the English Gentry*, 11.

well, but they varied - no consistent qualification for gentle status was ever determined. Modern efforts to establish income levels echo this inconsistency. One oft-cited cut-off was £40 *per annum*, which was the amount required for a knight's fee.⁶⁴ This number is a logical choice, since it was used in the fourteenth century as a way of taxing those esquires who could afford the honor of knighthood but sought to evade it, and a sufficient quantity of these records have survived. These men clearly formed the upper tier of the gentry, but what about its lower ranks? How was one to discern from tax records – which did not consistently include personal titles – which men were esquires and gentlemen and which were simply wealthy commoners? As might be expected, later boundaries were sometimes reflected back. A statement of a Garter King of Arms in 1530 declares that a gentleman must earn at least £10 *p.a.*,⁶⁵ and many historians have followed suit, using these same numbers as their cut-off points.⁶⁶ Some, like Wright and D. A. L. Morgan, also designate a “middle tier” of gentry who had at least £20 *p.a.* in rents and were politically active but did not meet the £40 *p.a.* requirement for knighthood.⁶⁷ Yet certain problems arise from this manner of definition. As Morgan points out, younger sons of the gentry were often endowed with as little as £2 *p.a.*⁶⁸ Some scholars extend the £10 *p.a.* minimum down to £5, but at these levels there is considerable risk of overlap with wealthy commoners.⁶⁹ Additionally, by the fifteenth century, the professionalization of certain sets of the gentry meant that landed rents were no longer necessarily their primary source of revenue. It is insufficient,

⁶⁴For example, see Bennett, *Community, Class and Careerism*, 83.

⁶⁵Wright, *Derbyshire Gentry*, 3. Nigel Saul, “Chaucer and Gentility” in Barbara Hanawalt, ed., *Chaucer's England* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1992), 49. S. H. Rigby, *English Society in the Later Middle Ages* (New York: St Martin's, 1995), 202.

⁶⁶Saul, *Knights and Esquires*, 18; Bennett, *Community, Class and Careerism*, 83; Christopher Dyer, *Standards of Living in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 18.

⁶⁷Wright, *Derbyshire Gentry*, 5. D. A. L. Morgan, “The Individual Style of the English Gentleman” in Michael Jones, ed., *Gentry and Lesser Nobility in Later Medieval Europe* (New York: St Martin's, 1986), 16.

⁶⁸Morgan, “Individual Style,” 21.

⁶⁹Bennett, *Community, Class and Careerism*, 83. Dyer, *Standards of Living*, 31. This issue is discussed in detail in Maurice Keen, *The Origins of the English Gentleman* (Stroud: Tempus, 2002), 109-10.

therefore, to use income alone to determine membership in the gentry. How these individuals spent their money was just as important, and this is far more difficult to discern from tax records alone.

This leads to the other major trend in gentry historiography taken from the early modern period: the distinction between “county gentry” and “parish gentry.”⁷⁰ Ostensibly, this was a solution to the problem of income. The country gentry were generally seen as those men who were active in county politics, as determined by whether they held county offices (depending upon the office, this could result in a fairly limited cross-section of gentle society).⁷¹ The parish gentry were seen as those landowners lesser in money and influence – often quite difficult to distinguish from substantial non-gentle landowners. A study focused on the county gentry did not need to worry about sorting out the lower levels of the group. If a family did not have the means to be active in county politics, it could be disregarded. Such families appeared less frequently in the records anyway. This method suited those studies focused on the county community and made their work far less complicated.

Several historians have undertaken this sort of research. Katherine Naughton’s 1976 work on the Bedfordshire gentry focused entirely on prominent knights in the county and the local offices which they held, disregarding those gentry who were not politically involved.⁷² By ignoring Bedfordshire’s esquires, a group that was growing in importance during the period

⁷⁰ The term “county gentry” is widely used by early modern historians going back to the 1960s. See, for example, Alan Everitt, “Social Mobility in Early Modern England” *Past and Present* 33 (1966): 56-73. The term “parish gentry” is trickier. In *The English Nobility in the Late Middle Ages*, Chris Given-Wilson attributes “parish gentry,” at least, to Peter Fleming in his “Charity, Faith, and the Gentry of Kent.” Given-Wilson, *English Nobility in the Late Middle Ages*, 71. While Fleming does define them, he seems to be presenting them as an established framework. His footnote is not illuminating. Peter Fleming, “Charity, Faith, and the Gentry of Kent” in *Property and Politics*, ed. A. J. Pollard (Stroud, Gloucestershire: Sutton, 1984), 36. Just two years later, in 1986, Stone describes these same categories as long-established. Stone and Stone, *An Open Elite?*, 7.

⁷¹ In Mercer’s study of the medieval gentry, he evaluates existing studies of gentle office-holding in several counties to show that individual offices were frequently passed among a limited circle of families. The pool of potential appointees to a critical position such as that of sheriff was so small, in fact, that individuals who abused their position were often reappointed shortly after for lack of other qualified candidates. Mercer, *Medieval Gentry*, 68-9.

⁷²Naughton, “The Bedfordshire Gentry,” *passim*.

encompassed by her study, Naughton skews the reader's perception of who the gentry in her county were.⁷³ J. R. Maddicott's article on county community and public opinion, published a few years later, likewise deals predominantly with office-holding gentry.⁷⁴ The county community as a locus of power is the implicit frame surrounding their work – these scholars take the lead from early modernists who also focused on local officeholders as the movers and shakers of the gentry.⁷⁵

The problem with such a method is that it distorts the characteristics of the gentry as a whole. While many, following MacFarlane, have argued that the interests of the gentry coincided with those of the nobility, this over-reliance on the political apparatus of the county may skew the consequent scholarship. By studying the gentry in relation to county offices, scholars may overestimate the importance of such institutions in gentry life.⁷⁶ In order to understand what drew the gentry together during this period, what caused them to eventually gel into a cohesive class, the characteristics which united those at its greater and lesser extremes must be understood. A focus on the county gentry alone, while far less problematic for the researcher, misrepresents the gentry as a whole.

Some historians have addressed this problem in resourceful ways. Wright's study of fifteenth-century Derbyshire includes any family which was distrained for knighthood or had a member holding county office between 1430 and 1509, or had an income of more than £5 p.a. in the tax returns between 1412 and 1524-7.⁷⁷ She eschews designating these families as county or parish gentry. This method is far more thorough than those described above and ensures that

⁷³ Gentlemen, as a social group, emerged after the period Naughton studies, so her inattention to this designation is justified.

⁷⁴J. R. Maddicott, "The County Community and the Making of Public Opinion in Fourteenth-Century England" *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 5thser, 28 (1978): 27-43.

⁷⁵Carpenter, "Gentry and Community," 344-5.

⁷⁶Moreton, "A Social Gulf?," 256.

⁷⁷Wright, *Derbyshire Gentry*, 4.

Wright will not miss any families that might be considered gentle (although it cannot account for the possibility of families falling out of the gentry during this period). Bennett also finds a way around gentry stratification by terming all men of gentle rank “gentlemen,” some of whom also happened to be knights and esquires. He contends that the distinctions within the gentry were not ultimately important – the crucial divide was that between gentle and common.⁷⁸ In this way, Wright and Bennett are more effective at presenting the gentry as a unified group with shared values and concerns. This is more in line with Lawrence Stone’s contention that “before the mid-seventeenth century the key division of society was between those who styled themselves gentlemen or above, and those who did not.” Only after that period would stratification within the gentry become meaningful.⁷⁹

Reliance on political and economic characteristics has been limiting for historians of the gentry, only shedding light on a certain segment of its membership. Yet there were individuals who could lay claim to gentility without holding office or owning significant property. In devising their cut-off points for studies of the gentry, many scholars acknowledge that some of these gentlemen would likely slip through the cracks. An understanding of these marginal figures, however, is essential to fully defining the late medieval gentry. It is what these individuals shared with those knights and esquires at the top that served to define them as a distinct social group.

Gentlemen and Yeomen: Drawing the Line

In the search for the bottom of the gentry, the rank of gentleman has increased in importance. This term had existed earlier in the Middle Ages, used to describe anyone of gentle

⁷⁸Bennett, *Community, Class and Careerism*, 30-1.

⁷⁹Stone and Stone, *An Open Elite?*, 8.

or noble status, but in the early fifteenth century it began to be used to describe a distinctive social rank below that of esquire. This rank is quite difficult to define in this period, nebulous in both its boundaries and criteria. Several scholars have undertaken the task of unraveling this term and those to whom it referred. In 1958, F. R. H. Du Boulay wrote a short piece for *The Listener* (a popular magazine publishing reprises of segments aired over BBC Radio) discussing the origins of the term “gentleman” as it came into use as a personal descriptor in the early fifteenth century and, perhaps responding to those who saw in the gentry the roots of the middle class, arguing that, socially at least, the gentry sought to imitate the nobility rather than to emerge as a separate group. He suggests that the division between gentle and common was the only one of real social importance during this period, with vestiges of this mindset surviving even to his own day.⁸⁰ Morgan took up the same topic in a 1986 article, discussing how the social designation “gentleman” was often self-assumed, and describing the sorts of men who most frequently assumed it. Although these men came from disparate career paths – the law, the military, business – they had begun to achieve a sense of group unity by the end of the fifteenth century (although he provides scant evidence to support such unity).⁸¹ Most recently, the problem of the gentleman has been taken up by Maurice Keen, in his 2002 *Origins of the English Gentleman*. He is primarily interested in how a coat of arms became the premier symbol of gentility, and how the right to bear arms was eventually extended to these gentlemen.⁸²

Much of the work on gentlemen has been prescriptive and theoretical, examining social terms and classifications, focusing on the language used to describe these individuals. The “mere gentleman” is generally poorly documented and tricky to pin down, rendering more specific, biographical study of individuals extremely challenging. Colin Richmond’s 1981 biography of

⁸⁰ F. R. H. Du Boulay, “The First English Gentlemen” *The Listener*, 30 October 1958, 689.

⁸¹ Morgan, “Individual Style,” 18-9.

⁸² Keen, *Origins of the English Gentleman*, 9-24 and *passim*.

John Hopton stands out as one of precious few examples of such research. Hopton's life is better documented than most, since he appears often in the famed letter collection of the Paston family. Using these and other documents, Richmond is able to present a fairly full account of one gentleman's life and business; even so, where the detail about his subject's life is sketchy, Richmond often resorts to educated guesses to fill in the blanks.⁸³ Even the best-documented gentleman is a shadowy figure.

Associated with the problem of the gentleman is the problem of those who presumably fell immediately below them: the franklins. The question of who these men were has beleaguered generations of scholars who have sought to understand Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. Several articles were written on the subject in the early twentieth century, taking for granted that the franklin was, as Chaucer presented him, a respected member of the gentry.⁸⁴ Rather than unraveling the social term, most of this work focused on establishing the identity of Chaucer's real-life model for the character.⁸⁵ More than half a century later, Saul took up this question again, challenging the assumptions of previous scholars. His 1983 article, "The Social Status of Chaucer's Franklin: A Reconsideration" offers a new perspective (and perhaps a conclusive answer to the question of the franklin), arguing that franklins did not, in fact, exist as a contemporary social category in the late fourteenth century; rather, Chaucer used an antiquated social designation for his parody of a gentry parvenu.⁸⁶ Perhaps if he had written a few decades later, Chaucer would have termed this man "gentleman," but lacking such a social designation in

⁸³ Richmond, *John Hopton*, *passim*.

⁸⁴ Gordon Hall Gerould considers him "the equivalent of the country squire of modern England;" K. H. Wood-Legh looks for the model for Chaucer's Franklin among the knights of the shire from the 1380s. Gerould, "The Social Status of Chaucer's Franklin" *PMLA* 41 (1926): 262-279 (quote on 265). John Mathew Manly, *Some New Light on Chaucer* (New York: H. Holt, 1926). Wood-Legh, "The Franklin" *The Review of English Studies* 4:14 (1928): 145-51.

⁸⁵ Manly suggests John Bussy. Wood-Legh, taking issue with Manly's methods, argues that there are far more eligible candidates than Manly takes into account. Wood-Legh settles on Stephen de Hales as the most likely candidate, since de Hales attended Parliament with Chaucer himself. Wood-Legh, "The Franklin," 150-1.

⁸⁶ Saul, "The Social Status of Chaucer's Franklin: A Reconsideration" *Medium Aevum* 52 (1983): 10-26.

his own time, he reached back into the past for a convenient substitute. This one writer's casual use of an anachronistic term as a means of social satire has contributed to the difficulty scholars have had in understanding the lowest limits of the gentry. While the question of the franklin may rest, scholars have still made little headway in delineating this important divide between gentle and common.

The yeomen – the highest-ranking commoners – present as many problems of definition as the lowest-ranking gentry. Yeomen as a social group have been shamefully neglected by historians – there is no medieval survey at all, forcing interested parties to rely on the thorough but dated monograph on early modern yeomen written by Mildred Campbell.⁸⁷ Campbell sees the social ranks of yeoman and gentleman as emerging at the beginning of the fifteenth century, out of the earlier group of free tenants who were called franklins (which she, not having the benefit of Saul's work on the subject, sees as a current social term even in the late fourteenth century). Those men who were well-off and had a claim of gentility through ancestry became gentlemen, and those of lesser birth who were obliged to work the land they owned became yeomen.⁸⁸ This emerged as the key distinction: a gentleman would not stoop to such manual labor. Yeomen are differentiated from the lesser husbandmen, who also might own their own lands, by an income of at least 40s *per annum*,⁸⁹ but these boundaries were not firm: Campbell points out that the distinction between wealthy yeoman and poor gentleman was a fine one, and

⁸⁷ Mildred Campbell, *The English Yeoman Under Elizabeth and the Early Stuarts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1942). A small pamphlet was later published on the subject by Albert J. Schmidt for the Folger Shakespeare Library's series on the social and cultural history of Tudor and Stuart England. Intended for a popular audience, the work romanticizes the English yeoman ("Had not the flower of French chivalry felt the sting of the arrows unleashed by his longbow at Crécy, Poitiers, and Agincourt?"), emphasizing his almost stubborn sense of pride and patriotism, and suggesting that these traits migrated over to New England with the early Puritan settlers and fixed themselves into the American psyche. Schmidt's text is largely a summary of Campbell's more comprehensive work (as Schmidt acknowledges in his "suggested reading" section), contributing little scholarly analysis of his own to the subject. Albert J. Schmidt, *The Yeoman in Tudor and Stuart England* (Washington, DC: Folger Books, 1961), 2, 28 and *passim*.

⁸⁸ Campbell, *The English Yeoman*, 391.

⁸⁹ She cites this figure with respect to the seventeenth-century yeoman, but having its roots in earlier discussions of social gradations, reaching back into the late medieval period. *Ibid.*, 29.

that intermarriage and common interest often linked gentlemen's and yeomen's families together.⁹⁰ While she does venture into the yeoman's origins, most of Campbell's work is focused on the late Tudor and early Stuart period in which the yeoman's position was firmly fixed within the social hierarchy. It is unlikely that all of her findings could be applied to the yeoman's medieval analogue.

The study of yeomen by medievalists seems to be limited to a few literary works in which yeoman characters make an appearance: Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* and the fifteenth-century Robin Hood ballads. Chaucer includes several yeomen in the *Canterbury Tales*, most notably the Knight's Yeoman and the Canon's Yeoman. Ever since Jill Mann's groundbreaking 1973 study, *Chaucer and Medieval Estates Satire*, much more attention has been paid to Chaucer's characterizations of individual social ranks and occupations.⁹¹ Once these portraits were understood as social satire, Chaucer's work became increasingly useful for the historian desirous of understanding the complexities of late medieval social gradations, yeomen among them.

The Canon's Yeoman is not described in the General Prologue (he and the Canon join the pilgrims later in their journey), so Chaucer's description of him is not as thorough as those of his other pilgrims, rendering any evaluation of the Canon's Yeoman's social position difficult. Most scholarship on his tale focuses on its discussion of alchemy and the involvement of the Canon and his Yeoman in its practice.⁹² In his 1987 article on the subject, Robert Cook attempts to put aside questions of alchemy and look at the character of the Canon's Yeoman. He determines that Chaucer presents the man as "a fair and honest and admirable fellow . . . his virtues and his

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 55-7.

⁹¹ Jill Mann, *Chaucer and Medieval Estates Satire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973).

⁹² For an example, see Joseph E. Grennen, "Chaucer's Characterization of the Canon and His Yeoman" *Journal of the History of Ideas* 25:2 (1964): 279-84.

common sense are grounded in the world of practical experience.”⁹³ Chaucer’s portrayal of this character as simple and practical may provide insight into the stereotypes of yeoman in his day, but it does not assist scholars in defining them. The Knight’s Yeoman, with a full description in the General Prologue, yields more fruitful material. William McColly uses this description to argue that the word “yeoman” is not being used as a social rank, but rather a service rank, as the Yeoman is in the Knight’s employ – perhaps as a forester, managing his master’s hunting grounds.⁹⁴ A more recent article by Kenneth Thompson confirms McColly’s conclusion, explaining how each item of the Yeoman’s equipment would have been necessary to him in his various duties in the Knight’s service, including his primary function as forester.⁹⁵ These characters seem to have more to say about the service rank of yeoman – whether as a yeoman of the household or of the forest – than about the social rank just below that of gentleman. It is probable that such a social rank did not clearly exist during Chaucer’s time.

The Robin Hood ballads provide a slightly later body of literature which has more to say about the social rank of yeoman. In fact, most scholarship on the medieval yeoman has centered on the character and audience of Robin Hood. In his groundbreaking 1958 article “The Origins of Robin Hood,” Rodney Hilton argues that the word yeoman in the ballads referred to “a peasant of free personal status” – not the wealthy peasant farmer of the early modern period nor the serving-man of the fourteenth century – and represented the aspirations of the ballads’ generally unfree audience.⁹⁶ Thus the ballads could provide some evidence about the emerging social rank of yeoman during this period. Yet the tide of scholarship turned away from this

⁹³ Robert Cook, “The Canon’s Yeoman and His Tale” *Chaucer Review* 22:1 (1987): 38.

⁹⁴ William B. McColly, “Chaucer’s Yeoman and the Rank of His Knight” *Chaucer Review* 20:1 (1985): 14-27.

⁹⁵ Kenneth Thompson, “Chaucer’s Warrior Bowman: The Roles and Equipment of the Knight’s Yeoman” *Chaucer Review* 40:4 (2006): 386-415.

⁹⁶ R. H. Hilton, “The Origins of Robin Hood” in Stephen Knight, ed., *Robin Hood: An Anthology of Scholarship and Criticism* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1999), 202-3.

perspective nearly immediately after Hilton wrote, focusing on Robin Hood's yeomen as representing a rank of service or office. In 1960, J. C. Holt asserted that the audience of the ballads was a lordly household. He argues that the themes of the ballads need not appeal to villeins – or even peasants – alone, but would have been appropriate for an audience of mixed social levels. His Robin Hood was a yeoman in service.⁹⁷ Richard Tardif, writing a few decades later, offered a new perspective, suggesting that the action of the ballads takes place between the forest and the town. Thus, the yeomen referred to in the ballads are urban craftsmen – those guildsmen who ranked below the masters. Tardif argues that the term yeoman is often used in the ballads to refer to various townsmen and that the audience of the ballads would have seen Robin Hood's band in the context of a yeoman fraternity (which were frequently found as off-shoots of late medieval craft guilds).⁹⁸

Richmond brought the focus back onto the social rank of yeoman in 1993. He argues that after 1400, the primary use of the term yeoman to refer to a service rank falls away in favor of the social rank; after about 1550, this group had become so gentrified that there was little practical difference between a yeoman and a gentleman. Between those years however, there existed a group of free tenants, who served no man but themselves, and did not yet aspire to greater rank.⁹⁹ Richmond's has become the generally-accepted view of the yeoman during this period, supported by A. J. Pollard in his 2004 book on Robin Hood.¹⁰⁰ His definition certainly paints a clearer picture than those of most scholars, and yet that picture is a relative one. The rank of yeoman can only be defined with respect to that of gentleman, indicating the close relationship between these two groups.

⁹⁷ J. C. Holt, "The Origins and Audience of the Ballads of Robin Hood" in Knight, *Robin Hood*, 211-32.

⁹⁸ Richard Tardif, "The 'Mystery' of Robin Hood: A New Social Context for the Texts" in Knight, *Robin Hood*, 345-62.

⁹⁹ Richmond, "An Outlaw and Some Peasants" in Knight, *Robin Hood*, 373-4.

¹⁰⁰ Pollard, *Imagining Robin Hood* (London: Routledge, 2004), 30.

It is quite surprising that the medieval historiography of yeomen is not more fully developed. This important group was just beginning to emerge during this period, just like the gentleman ranking just above them. The yeomen certainly deserve at least as much scholarly attention as the gentlemen have gotten. But scholars of social rank tend to be preoccupied with the higher ranks and the professions, and scholars of village society have focused on how individuals fit into their local communities, declining to make any generalizations about the social consciousness of those groups across English society. The yeomen have fallen through the cracks between these fields, and have yet to be brought back to the forefront and clearly understood. The diversity of opinion among scholars shows just how unstable the term “yeoman” was during the late medieval period. Each succeeding generation used the term to refer to different groups with their own individual connotations, and sometimes to more than one group at the same time. The one point of agreement in all of these scholarly definitions – and the point of most importance for this is that, at least before 1550, the yeoman was in no way gentle.

Land tenure has been cited as one of the inalienable features of gentility that yeomen categorically lacked. If lordship over men is considered the primary criterion for membership in the gentry, then determining a man’s rank is merely a matter of understanding his tenurial position. Yet those scholars who have worked on the expanding ranks of professional men in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century England have argued that such a criterion is untenable. Sylvia Thrupp takes up this question toward the end of her 1948 book *The Merchant Class of Medieval London*. As merchants grew wealthy and socially ambitious at the end of the Middle Ages, she argues that their ranks began to interlace with those of gentlemen. Thrupp spends an entire chapter discussing the tangled relationship between trade and gentility. Like any gentleman, a wealthy merchant had the leisure to acquire refined manners and adopt courtly habits, and the

income to purchase a fashionable wardrobe and to secure a good education for his sons and advantageous marriages for his daughters.¹⁰¹ Still, the idea that such merchants needed to settle themselves on country estates (and, ideally, abandon mercantile pursuits) infiltrates her work.¹⁰² This is based on the assumption, carried over from the early modern period, that labor was antithetical to gentility.¹⁰³ Jenny Kermode, in her work on the merchants of York, Beverly and Hull, downplays the desire of merchants to acquire the status of gentleman, using their infrequent acquisition of rural estates as her main evidence.¹⁰⁴ Likewise, in his recent biography of John Heritage, who he calls “a country merchant,” Christopher Dyer argues that the Heritage family and their associates could not be considered gentry because, though substantial landowners, they lacked manors over which they could hold court. While he acknowledges the Heritage’s wealth and reputation, he argues that they could have no claim to gentility without lordship.¹⁰⁵

A counter-position has gained traction in recent decades, however, suggesting that lordship was not a necessary feature of gentility at all. In the 1980s, a flurry of articles worked to refute this assumption as anachronistic. R. L. Storey takes up this challenge with respect to royal officials in his 1982 article “Gentleman-Bureaucrats,” in which he demonstrates that more and more royal officials, by virtue of their office alone, began to take up the title of gentleman over the course of the fifteenth century.¹⁰⁶ Bennett’s study of Lancashire and Cheshire as well as a

¹⁰¹ Sylvia Thrupp, *The Merchant Class of Medieval London* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1948).

¹⁰² Thrupp includes a long section discussing landed property, including estates, purchased by merchants. *Ibid.*, 118-30.

¹⁰³ In his 1986 *An Open Elite?*, a study of social mobility among the early modern gentry, Stone is comfortable using the possession of a country house of a certain size as his primary criterion of gentry membership. He does acknowledge that he is focused on the politically involved “country gentry” who would have had the means to own a seat substantial enough to have survived in the historical record. Stone and Stone, *An Open Elite?*, 10.

¹⁰⁴ Jenny Kermode, *Medieval Merchants* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 284-5.

¹⁰⁵ Christopher Dyer, *A Country Merchant, 1495-1520* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 40-1.

¹⁰⁶ The last sentence of Storey’s article reveals that his overarching concern is with understanding the English Reformation. He suggests that the increasing appointments of laymen, rather than clerics, as government officials was a contributing factor in the break with Rome. There were no clerics on Henry VIII’s council at the time of the Reformation. R. L. Storey, “Gentleman-Bureaucrats” in C. H. Hough, ed., *Profession, Vocation and Culture in Late Medieval England* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1982), 109.

later article on careerism confirm that men could achieve and maintain gentility through the professions alone – particularly through royal service.¹⁰⁷ Rosemary Horrox built upon this in a 1988 article “The Urban Gentry in the Fifteenth Century.” She focuses on how men were viewed and described by their contemporaries to argue that there could, in fact, be an urban gentry without manorial holdings in the countryside. To prove its existence, she defines gentry narrowly, focusing on provincial towns and excluding London and Westminster where the presence of the law courts and the royal administration could skew her results.¹⁰⁸ This idea was picked up by Carpenter in *Locality and Polity*, claiming it was possible to be gentle while merely participating in the world of lordship, urban or rural, although she calls such gentility “perilous.”¹⁰⁹ As these men moved up the ladder of society, they challenged the fundamental idea of what it meant to be gentle. By the late fifteenth century, these men had forged paths to gentility that circumvented lordship over men. The social flux that this created mystifies scholars as much as it did contemporaries. This proliferation of grey areas – whether between the professions and landowners, the upper gentry and the lower, the yeomen and franklins (whoever they were) and the gentlemen – is where the trouble lies.

Focus on Gentle Families

It is clear that the scholarly category “gentry” is a wide one indeed. Scholarship has proved unable to locate its limits. Criteria such as income level, political involvement, property ownership and occupation, while essential to the scholar attempting to sort the residents of a

¹⁰⁷ Bennett, *Community, Class and Careerism*. Bennett, “Careerism in Late Medieval England” in J. Rosenthal and C. Richmond, eds., *People, Politics and Community in the Later Middle Ages* (Stroud, Gloucester: Alan Sutton, 1987), 19-39.

¹⁰⁸ Rosemary Horrox, “The Urban Gentry in the Fifteenth Century” in J. A. F. Thomson, ed., *Towns and Townspeople in the Fifteenth Century* (Stroud, Gloucester: Alan Sutton, 1988), 22-3.

¹⁰⁹ Carpenter, *Locality and Polity*, 136.

county into social groupings, all fall short of establishing an inclusive definition of the gentry.

One way to get around these issues of definition and to develop a more comprehensive view of this group is to leave off culling a complete list of gentry from county-level records and to focus instead on the records of individual families who were generally acknowledged to be gentle.

Coss took this route in his 1974 study of the fifteenth-century cartulary of the knightly Langley family of the West Midlands. He used the family's charters as well as royal records to show how the Langley holdings were transferred across several generations at the end of the Middle Ages.¹¹⁰ Yet such economic documents alone do not provide a full picture of gentry life. A number of historians have found the substantial letter collections left by several fifteenth-century gentry families to be a more fruitful source. Most of the letters themselves have been published for the first time or republished in more accurate editions since the 1970s.¹¹¹ More recently, since printed versions of the letters have become widely available, there have been several monographs devoted to the experience of individual families.¹¹²

The majority of these works lack any sort of discussion of who the gentry were, assuming that the reader understands the category and the subjects fit into it. As Carpenter acknowledges in her recent republication of Charles Kingsford's edition of the Stonor letters, a scholar such as Kingsford can be absolved of any neglect on this count because the gentry was not well

¹¹⁰ Coss, *The Langley Family and its Cartulary* (Oxford: Dugdale Society, 1974).

¹¹¹ Norman Davis, ed., *Paston Letters and Papers of the Fifteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971); Alison Hanham, ed., *The Cely Letters 1472-1488* EETS no. 273 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975); Thomas Stapleton, ed., *The Plumpton Correspondence* (London: Camden Society, 1839; reprint, Stroud, Gloucestershire: Alan Sutton, 1990); Christine Carpenter, ed., *Kingsford's Stonor Letters and Papers 1290-1483* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Joan Kirby, ed., *The Plumpton Letters and Papers*, Camden Society 5th ser. no. 8 (London: Cambridge University Press for the Royal Historical Society, 1996); Christine Carpenter, ed., *The Armburgh Papers* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1998). More recently (c. 2010), an online resource containing transcripts and photographs of all these letters, including background and other supplementary materials, has been published by Adam Matthew Digital Publications under the title *Medieval Family Life*.

¹¹² Colin Richmond, *The Paston Family in the Fifteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Moreton, *The Townshends and Their World*; Elizabeth Noble, *The World of the Stonors* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2009). There are also some more specific studies: Richmond's biography of John Hopton, drawn from the Paston letters, and Joel Rosenthal's recent work on religious culture. Richmond, *John Hopton*. Joel Rosenthal, *Margaret Paston's Piety* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

understood at the time he was writing. He and other early editors of late medieval gentry letters lacked the social historical framework that has emerged since the late 1970s which could have helped situate their subjects.¹¹³ Some more recent contributions, however, lack this excuse. Richmond's biography of John Hopton, as well as his account of the fifteenth-century Paston family, also lack any introduction to his subjects' social context. Richmond adopts a very literary, almost conversational, tone in these works, perhaps hoping to engage his audience in the lives he details.¹¹⁴ Yet this accessibility could come at the expense of understanding, for Richmond assumes his readers already have a degree of familiarity with his characters and their context. An aside in the introduction to *John Hopton* suggests that Richmond's motive is primarily biographical and that he does not wish to make any generalizations about medieval society from the career of an individual who could be quite idiosyncratic.¹¹⁵ While this sounds reasonable, it seems to me that Richmond is trying to shirk the primary responsibility of the historian: the interpretation of past events for a wider audience. By simply presenting the lives of these individuals as-is, without contextualization, his books are serving an antiquarian purpose: preserving the past for later generations. While earlier historians of the gentry letters can be pardoned for their own lack of knowledge about the social context of their subjects, Richmond's neglect is more troubling. In some superficial ways, the lives of medieval people seem very accessible to the modern reader, but there are a number of fundamental differences that a modern audience cannot be expected to pick up on its own. An understanding of social position and the anxieties that went along with it is high on this list and should be adequately contextualized.

¹¹³ Carpenter, ed., *Kingsford's Stonor Letters and Papers*, 1.

¹¹⁴ Richmond, *John Hopton*. Richmond, *The Paston Family*.

¹¹⁵ Richmond states, "My having come across this particular fifteenth century gentleman (I nearly put this particular type of gentleman) has produced another peculiarity of the book he has led me to write." The parenthetical remark suggests that he does not wish to generalize about other men like Hopton. Richmond, *John Hopton*, xvi.

Several more recent works on the gentry letter collections have sought to correct these lapses and fill in the missing background material. In her new introduction to Kingsford's text, Carpenter strives to provide the contextualization that the older editions were missing, explaining how the study of the gentry had developed in the late twentieth century and how contemporary historians have come to understand it. She provides a similarly full discussion in her introduction to an edition of the papers of the Armburgh family of fifteenth-century Warwickshire.¹¹⁶ More recently, in *The World of the Stonors*, Elizabeth Noble has presented the first thorough scholarly analysis of that family's archive. In her introduction, she too gives a full rundown of gentry historiography and traces the tortuous history of the term as it has been applied to late medieval England.¹¹⁷

A final study by Coss has used the estate and household records of a single gentle family in order to understand the world they circulated in. While much of Coss' prior work attempts to understand the gentry as a whole, this monograph focuses on the Multons of Frampton and their relations in order to understand how a particular lineage maintained their gentility through the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. One of the topics it explores is the tendency of younger sons of gentle families to seek opportunities in the professions, veering away from the values of their landed ancestors and yet taking with them a sense of their own gentility, adapting it and changing it to fit into their new context, and sometimes losing it in the process.¹¹⁸ By exploring the fates of these individuals, Coss hopes to shed light on the flexibility of the boundaries of gentility, which could stretch themselves to accommodate such marginal figures.

This shift in scholarship toward outlining the full social context of these individuals and families is an important positive development. Rather than focusing on particular characteristics,

¹¹⁶ Carpenter, ed., *The Armburgh Papers*.

¹¹⁷ Noble, *World of the Stonors*, 1-14.

¹¹⁸ Coss, *Foundations of Gentry Life*, 4-5.

such as income and office-holding, these studies present well-rounded pictures of people who were acknowledged to be gentle. This approach allows for a more comprehensive understanding of what characteristics precipitated this acknowledgement: in other words, it helps us see all of the components of gentility. The major failing of these biographical studies is that most authors – with Coss being a significant exception – have failed to provide a deep analysis of their subjects’ social position and what factors contributed to it. While it is usually demonstrated that these people were seen as gentle by their contemporaries, there has been little investigation as to why.

The Culture of Gentility

Recent scholarship on the gentry has turned in a different direction, focusing on the cultural markers of gentility rather than its political and economic markers. This work focuses less on locating the gentry as a social group and more on highlighting those characteristics that would render an individual gentle in the eyes of his contemporaries. The most significant component of gentility that many of these studies have hit upon is the military culture shared by the ranks of the gentry. The medieval nobility was, at its core, a military class – the *bellatores* who fought to defend the rest of society. As the nobility’s lower tier, the gentry, too, had a culture infused with a warrior ideology. Most scholars agree that this ideology was not shared with the lower ranks of society, and thus can serve to delineate the gentry’s boundaries.

Since they originally served a military purpose, heraldic records have played a significant role in separating the gentle from the common. After all, this was the very role laid out for the sixteenth-century heraldic visitations, in which heralds were sent out to various parts of the realm to ensure that no one of inferior rank was bearing arms.¹¹⁹ Taking a cue from this tradition, Noël Denholm-Young relies upon lists of knights and esquires compiled by heralds in order to

¹¹⁹ Noël Denholm-Young, *The Country Gentry in the Fourteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 7.

determine the makeup of the fourteenth-century “country gentry,” which is the subject of his study.¹²⁰ He finds rolls of arms in particular, which list those armigerous men who assembled at particular tournaments or musters for battle, valuable in indicating just who their heraldic authors viewed as belonging to the gentle community, ultimately providing the most complete lists that survive of that community’s members.¹²¹

In his work on esquires and gentlemen, Keen looks to military records in order to understand their development as distinct segments of the gentry. He argues that the recognition of esquires as a separate gentle rank during the fourteenth century came out of their participation in warfare alongside the knights. Part of this process involves realigning the boundary between the gentle and non-gentle to include the esquires in the former group.¹²² Keen stresses that military participation and arms-bearing were in this way established as criteria for gentility. Keen again focuses on military criteria in his monograph *Origins of the English Gentleman*, the first study of length to single out the lowest rank of the gentry for detailed analysis. In this work, Keen looks at the ways in which coats of arms came to be a primary marker of gentle status among the gentle, extending down to the gentlemen by the middle of the fifteenth century. He notes that the function of coats of arms shifted around the same time from a military to a purely social marker.¹²³ As the military connotation of arms decreased in significance, so did the requirement of military service for membership among the gentle.

Other scholars have used non-heraldic sources to similarly argue for the centrality of military culture to the gentle. In describing the social system of late medieval England, Carpenter

¹²⁰ He uses a list of knights and esquires from 1324 as well as a slightly earlier Parliamentary Roll of Arms and the c. 1350 Powell’s Roll to compile a comprehensive picture of the rural gentry in the fourteenth century. *Ibid.*, 15-8.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 17-8.

¹²² Maurice Keen, “Heraldry and Hierarchy: Esquires and Gentlemen” in Jeffrey Denton, ed., *Orders and Hierarchies in Late Medieval Europe* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 100.

¹²³ In the process, however, he does acknowledge that the social function of arms was present from their earliest origins, though it was superseded by military connotations for a period because of its usefulness as a mark of identification on the battlefield. Keen, *Origins of the English Gentleman*, 159-62

notes that the aristocracy (encompassing both greater nobles and gentry) “was always a warrior elite.”¹²⁴ A recent monograph by Malcolm Mercer takes this idea as its starting point, evaluating the priorities of the leading gentry during the period of the Wars of the Roses, to determine how they made decisions about choosing sides, fighting, or not fighting during that conflict. Mercer follows earlier scholars, including Coss, in crediting participation in warfare alongside the nobility with influencing the formation of the gentry. Military training and experiences became one of the most significant bonds among the members of its ranks.¹²⁵ He sees the centrality of jousting and other feats of arms to gentle culture as well as the existence of funerary monuments depicting their subjects in armor (whether or not those subjects ever wore it) as a consequence of this.¹²⁶ Yet his conclusions show that when faced with the decision whether to take up arms during the course of the Wars of the Roses, few did; most leading gentry were concerned with maintaining local stability during this turbulent time over pursuing glory in the heat of battle. Torn between their responsibilities as local administrators of law and justice and their warrior ideals, most seem to have chosen the former.¹²⁷ The internecine struggles of the Wars of the Roses are not typical examples of medieval warfare, as the decision to go to war involved not merely personal risk but also the potential accusation of treason if one supported the wrong side; the work of Adrian Bell, Anne Curry, and their fellows on late medieval English muster rolls illustrates the importance of sub-knightly men-at-arms in the English armies in France during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, suggesting that in a more straightforward context, many did choose to embody the martial ideal of their estate.¹²⁸ Mercer’s conclusions nonetheless

¹²⁴ Carpenter, “England: Nobility and Gentry,” 263

¹²⁵ Mercer, *Medieval Gentry*, 35-6.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 38, 56.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 125-131.

¹²⁸ Adrian R. Bell, Anne Curry, Andy King, and David Simpkin, *The Soldier in Later Medieval England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 138.

demonstrate that a warrior ideology was not necessarily the primary defining characteristic of even the leading gentry by the second half of the fifteenth century.

Despite its vigorous proponents, the dominance of this warrior ideology in gentle culture has been challenged, most notably by Coss, who sees military activities and ideals as one of several distinct facets of gentle culture. He believes that the gentry did have a collective identity, but it did not revolve specifically around their identities as warriors; in fact, his recent work on the gentry's origins rebuts Keen's work directly, declaring that "coats of arms may have expressed gentle status, but they did not define it."¹²⁹ Coss evaluates the ways in which the gentry has been defined by scholars in the past – looking at issues of land tenure, income, and economic status as well as military involvement – and then turns them on their head, declaring: "Perhaps too much attention has been given to the problem of delineation of the gentry. Should we not ask, rather, what distinguishes a gentry as a social formation? What are its essential characteristics?"¹³⁰ This approach leads him to focus on the characteristics that drew the ranks of the gentry together and gave them purpose, but to avoid drawing any firm boundaries around them. Coss' gentry is based on the ownership of land, but this can be extended to include other types of property holding; its status is not derived from landlordship or service or association with a magnate, but is possessed innately; it is service-based, enforcing royal law and justice locally, yet using its position to extend its social dominance over the populace; it had some degree of collective identity and interests, as expressed in its shared cultural values.¹³¹ These criteria – not based on specific levels of income, types of land tenure, or degrees of office-holding – serve to outline a gentry whose core values and shared interests could shift and change according to the circumstances of their particular time. In fact, Coss sees both "porosity" and

¹²⁹ Coss, *Origins of the English Gentry*, 6.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 11.

“adaptability” as defining characteristics of the gentry from its beginning; the borders of the social group remained flexible, able to absorb individuals from court and countryside, urban and county communities, leisured landowning and busy professional backgrounds. Because gentle identity was not immediately identifiable through these other characteristics, the late medieval gentry developed an “obsession with display,” intended to broadcast their status unequivocally.¹³²

In this way, a shared culture becomes one of the main adhesives binding the ranks of the gentle to one another. This is the approach taken by Raluca Radulescu and Alison Truelove in their introduction to a collection of essays on gentle culture. Radulescu and Truelove lay out a very broad definition of the gentry, taking into account “all of landed society below the peerage, from knights down to gentlemen, and including those aspirants to gentility who might under traditional socio-economic terms be excluded from the group.”¹³³ They do so by focusing on the cultural attitudes and values that were adopted by those who claimed to be gentle. This method embraces those in the grey area at the bottom of the gentry who aspired to be recognized as belonging to its ranks, for these individuals were the ones working hardest to project themselves as gentle. The criteria for gentility that they focused on can be seen as central to how it was understood by English society as a whole in the late medieval period. This leads Radulescu and Truelove to argue that “the culture of the gentry was pervaded by a sense of insecurity,” requiring individuals to constantly reinforce their gentility through conspicuous social display, whether to maintain their gentle status or to claim it for the first time.¹³⁴

These works on gentle culture produce a far more comprehensive picture of the late medieval gentry than can be gained by relying upon the economic and political criteria privileged

¹³² Coss, *Foundations of Gentry Life*, 3-4.

¹³³ Radulescu and Truelove, *Gentry Culture*, 1.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 14-5.

by most gentry studies. The down side is that this picture is necessarily fuzzy. It is easy to draw a dividing line at a particular level of income, declaring those above that level gentle and those below it common. It is not as easy to trace the possession of less tangible cultural characteristics, from a warrior ideology to proper bodily conduct. These limitations, therefore, have ensured that this shift toward the examination of cultural characteristics of gentility has not ended the debate over how the medieval gentry is to be defined.

Social Closure and the Elusive Gentry

The inability of scholars to reach any agreement about what constituted the lower limit of the gentry is unfortunate, because this was a critical division in late medieval English society – that between gentle and common. But it is unfair to blame scholarship for this failure; contemporaries failed to come up with an effective definition of the gentry as well. While “the gentry” as such did not exist in the fifteenth century, ranks of gentles did, and throughout this period they sought to harden their boundaries against upstarts – particularly wealthy commoners. The critical rank was that of gentleman. It was expected that an esquire with the requisite income of £40 *per annum* would take up knighthood (though many avoided it), but a wealthy merchant’s reinvention of himself as a gentleman was viewed with resentment and sometimes derision.¹³⁵

This resentment may have stemmed from the prevalence of downward mobility among gentlemen. Patrilineal inheritance practices meant that all but one son could expect to fall below

¹³⁵ On this point, Du Boulay cites Thomas Walsingham’s 1385 declaration that Michale de la Pole, Earl of Suffolk was “a man more suitable for trade than knighthood, as he had spent his life as a money merchant, not a soldier,” in recognition of the origin of the earl’s lineage in a merchant of Hull. Du Boulay, *An Age of Ambition* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1970), 66-8. A closer examination of the Latin (“vir plus aptus mercimoniis quam militiae, et qui trapezetis in pace consenuerat, non armatis in bello”), however, suggests that Walsingham may be commenting more on the earl’s aptitude than his social position. A more recent edition translates this passage: “a man more fitted for commerce than war. He had grown old among financiers in peace, not among soldiers in battle.” James G. Clark, ed., *The Chronica Maiora of Thomas Walsingham (1376-1422)*, trans. David Preest (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2005), 236. For the original Latin, see Thomas Walsingham, *Historia Anglicana, Vol. II AD 1381-1422*, ed. Henry Thomas Riley (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts, and Green, 1864), 141.

his father's standard of living. A knight or esquire's eldest son could look forward to being a knight or esquire in turn, but the second or third son often had to make his own way in the world.¹³⁶ Set up with a career in the church, the law or at court, he studied and worked shoulder-to-shoulder with the sons of commoners seeking social advancement. All he had to set himself apart was his inherited gentility: the son of a gentleman, an esquire, a knight or even an earl would always be a gentleman. But in order for this distinction to mean something, its exclusivity needed to be maintained. Faced with limited income, such a man would have sought to keep what little status remained to him by denying it to those he viewed as upstarts. In order to do so, he and his fellows employed various methods of social closure.

The reason that the top of the gentry is so well-defined is that the English nobility – the peers of the realm – were particularly adept at social closure. McFarlane was the first to note the increasing exclusivity of the peerage during the late medieval period; the greater lords established a supremacy over the knights that led to the formation of a separate gentry below the streamlined nobility.¹³⁷ This occurred because the right to be summoned to Parliament in the House of Lords became hereditary.¹³⁸ Thus a distinction was made between the parliamentary peerage and the knights, esquires and others who could still attend but only if elected to the Commons. These men, who previously would have been considered the lower nobility, were now stripped of that quality, which was confined to the peers. By the late fourteenth century, the English nobility becomes quite easy to define, with the right to a summons to Parliament as its primary qualification. Carpenter has argued that this summons to Parliament and the “special

¹³⁶ Thrupp mentions this when discussing the origins of London merchants, many of whom were first generation Londoners without significant property to connect them to their places of origin. She suggests that many of these men were younger sons left to make their own fortunes. Thrupp, *Merchant Class*, 211. Denholm-Young discusses the prospects available to sons of knights in the fourteenth century. Denholm-Young, *Country Gentry*, 5.

¹³⁷ McFarlane, *Nobility of Later Medieval England*, 268-78. Saul, *Knights and Esquires*, 6, 254-5.

¹³⁸ Wright, *Derbyshire Gentry*, 1-2. Given-Wilson, *The English Nobility*, 55-6. Dyer, *Standards of Living*, 15. Rigby, *English Society*, 195. Coss argues that this process began quite early in the fourteenth century. Coss, *Origins of the English Gentry*, 239-40.

relationship with the king” that went with it created a culture of service, both military and political, among the members of the peerage that bound them even more firmly together as a social group.¹³⁹

The medieval gentry, just as status-conscious as their betters, similarly tried to close out the wealthy and ambitious commoners attempting to rise at their expense. Unlike the peerage, however, the gentry were unable to find a single, clear identifying feature by which their ranks could be bounded. As the following chapters will discuss, various methods were tried – sumptuary law, criteria for office-holding and right to bear arms, to name a few – but none was ultimately successful. The gentry felt no class consciousness, and only a limited recognition that the three ranks – knight, esquire and gentleman – shared *something*. Scholars have been unable to pinpoint what that something was because the gentry themselves failed to do so concretely. This is what makes it so difficult to arrive at any definition of the gentlemen (or the yeomen below them, who lacked this something).

Rather than devise a series of requirements based on land tenure, income levels and other criteria that will inevitably fall short of being comprehensive, this study focuses on the single quality that was indisputably possessed by all gentlemen: gentility. Gentility is the characteristic that is harped upon in all definitions and descriptions of gentry – it is implicit in the very term used to describe the social group. While scholars exploring the historical record can often find very little practical difference between a yeoman and a gentleman, the distinction between the two would have been clearly evident to contemporaries: the gentleman was gentle, the yeoman was not. The possession or lack of gentility was the crux of the gentle-common divide. The lowliest gentleman was as gentle as the king himself, the grandest yeoman still as common as a beggar. In order to understand the lowest limits of the late medieval gentle society, then – to

¹³⁹ Carpenter, “England: Nobility and Gentry,” 266.

know what it meant to be a “mere gentleman” – one must understand what contemporaries meant when they described a man or woman as “gentle.”

In doing so, I take the cultural approach advocated by Coss, focusing on the features of gentle culture which were produced and consumed in the rich textual culture of the fifteenth century. This means that, rather than attempt to outline a concrete social group that can be labeled “the gentry,” this study explores the characteristics displayed by those who belonged or aspired to belong to gentle society. In pinning down those characteristics, I disagree with those scholars who argue that a warrior ideology was the central aspect of gentility. While the veneer of military culture remained entangled with gentility into the early modern period, by the late fifteenth century it was no longer necessary for an individual to actively participate in that culture in order to be considered gentle. Military function remained the most traditional pathway to gentle status, but other pathways had opened up by the middle of the fifteenth century which provided alternative, if not equivalent, routes to gentle status. Heraldry remained through the Tudor period and beyond as the last vestige of the militarily-based gentility. By extension, I see arms-bearing as a symbol of gentility, but not its source; those who bore arms were permitted to do so because they had effectively exhibited characteristics of gentility in some other way. As Keen argued, the meaning of arms-bearing shifted across the fifteenth-century – but I believe it did so because the meaning of gentility itself had shifted and expanded to include groups of individuals without martial connections.

Ultimately, the approach I am following here is one laid out by Coss at the beginning of his own attempt to define the gentry: “simply to equate gentry with gentility.” Yet in order to do so, it is necessary to uncover what gentility meant in England during the fifteenth century. The following chapters reveal that, like the membership of gentle society, the concept of gentility

shifted and changed as the century progressed, shaped by the changing interests of those who claimed it and, especially toward the end of the century, by the circulation of texts which purported to initiate readers into its nuances.

Ch 2: Medieval Ideas of Gentility

As the previous chapter has shown, a major challenge faced by any student of the medieval English gentry is understanding the range of social terminology used to describe it. Social terminology developed rapidly during the late Middle Ages – during the fifteenth century, in particular – as English society, recognizing that the popular theoretical ideal of the three orders did not reflect its reality, sought new ways of defining and categorizing its ranks. Because these social terms often overlap with occupational designations (such as the service positions within noble households), determining precisely when they came into use to refer to distinct social ranks can be problematic. Furthermore, late medieval English society was trilingual, producing documents in Latin and Anglo-Norman as well as Middle English, creating three times as many social terms to disentangle.¹ An even more significant linguistic problem lies in the term “gentle” itself, which was used to describe both a particular set of characteristics and a specific set of social ranks. Ultimately, all confusion over the identification of the gentry stems from the medieval inability to effectively separate these two meanings. This allowed a number of individuals and groups demonstrating gentle qualities to lay claim to gentle rank as well, opening up multiple paths to gentility by the end of the fifteenth century.

In order to illustrate these paths, this chapter will examine the views of social order and hierarchy that prevailed in late medieval England and how the ranks of the gentry fit into them. Then it will provide an overview of the development of social terms used to refer to the ranks of the gentry, with particular focus on the terms “gentleman” and “gentlewoman.” Finally, it will

¹ Some documents employed all three, switching among them with dizzying rapidity. An example is the heraldic manual found in Bodleian Library MS Eng. Misc. f. 36, dating from the early fifteenth century. This treatise begins in Middle English, but includes several Latin excerpts from other heraldic manuals with commentary in French discussing the finer points of arms-bearing. His use of all three languages in this treatise suggests not only the author’s personal facility with each of them, but also that he understood the potentially corrupting influence of translation on the meaning of the text. For heraldic purposes, as with legal, precision was imperative.

look at the social gradations immediately below the ranks of the gentle, with particular focus on the fluidity of gentle status at its lowest levels. In isolating these social terms and their uses, I will demonstrate how the gentlemen came to be recognized as a distinct social category during the fifteenth century and simultaneously expanded to include a wide range of individuals, both upwardly and downwardly mobile.

The Late Medieval Social Order

The three orders theory was a tidy conceptualization of society favored by medieval thinkers. It divided society into three mutually-dependent groups: the *oratores*, *bellatores*, and *laborares*. The *oratores* prayed for the souls of all, the *bellatores* fought for the defense of all, and the *laborares* worked for the maintenance of all. Georges Duby, in his seminal study of this theory, traces the idea of the three orders back to tenth-century Lotharingia, where it was articulated nearly simultaneously by two noble cousins, Adalbero and Gerard.² From its origins through the fifteenth century, these tripartite social divisions repeatedly appear in medieval texts, used by writers from Bernard of Clairvaux to William Langland as a benchmark of proper social organization.³ While high medieval preachers like Bernard very practically sought to adjust the three orders model to fit the changing makeup of medieval society, late medieval writers like Langland clung to the idea with a sense of nostalgic longing.⁴ For English writers, the three

² Georges Duby, *The Three Orders: Feudal Society Imagined*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 13-14.

³ Duby discusses the appearance of the concept of social *ordines* in the sermons of Bernard of Clairvaux, among others of his period. Bernard does extend the orders slightly, including merchants among the laymen in addition to knights and peasants, likely to appeal to the urban audience he addressed. Duby, *Three Orders*, 222-5. William Langland, *The Vision of Piers Plowman*, 2nd ed., ed. A. V. C. Schmidt (London: J. M. Dent, 1995), 7, Prologue, ll. 112-22.

⁴ Daniel Pigg emphasizes that Langland presents the “symbolic imaginings” of late medieval society, rather than a faithful depiction of real life. Daniel F. Pigg, “Imagining Feudalism in *Piers Plowman*” in *The Rusted Hauberk*, ed. Liam O. Purdon and Cindy L. Vitton (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1994), 31.

orders represented a harmonious past in which every man knew his place and cheerfully fulfilled its responsibilities.⁵

Yet the harmonious past represented by the three orders was a fictive one; as Bernard of Clairvaux's early adjustments to the theory acknowledged, medieval society never fit this model neatly. The late Middle Ages in England, in particular, saw the development of a more complex social structure, with significant grey areas between the boundaries of those traditional orders: the seemingly-unified nobility of previous eras had split into a tiered aristocracy: the titled nobility and the untitled lesser landholders later known as the gentry; townspeople, like merchants and craftsmen, and professionals, like lawyers and doctors, did not fit easily into this system; third orders blurred the boundaries between clergy and laity; the increased standard of living after the Black Death likewise blurred the line between the aristocracy and the common people. The *General Prologue* to the *Canterbury Tales* depicts the social system in this state of flux; while Geoffrey Chaucer includes representatives of the traditional three orders – the Knight, the Monk and the Plowman – he adds other characters who playfully challenge this conception.⁶ As noted in Chapter 1, Nigel Saul has argued that Chaucer's Franklin represents the new face of the late medieval gentry in Chaucer's time, in contrast with the old-fashioned and slightly stodgy warrior ethos of the crusading Knight.⁷ John Gower's *Vox Clamantis* (c. 1377) presents the three orders – the secular and regular clergy; the knightly class; peasants, laborers, and townsmen – but adds the ministers of the law as a fourth.⁸ Christine de Pizan also modifies the traditional social orders in her 1406-7 *Livre du corps de policie*, a text which circulated

⁵ The use of a masculine subject here is very conscious. As Shulamith Shahar points out, the traditional model of the three orders – or estates as they are also termed – excludes the functional roles of women. Shulamith Shahar, *The Fourth Estate: A History of Women in the Middle Ages*, revised edition (New York: Routledge, 2003), 1.

⁶ Christopher Dyer, *Standards of Living in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 16-7. S. H. Rigby, *English Society in the Later Middle Ages* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1995), 307-8.

⁷ Nigel Saul, "The Social Status of Chaucer's Franklin: A Reconsideration" *Medium Aevum* 52 (1983): 10-26.

⁸ Rigby, *English Society in the Later Middle Ages*, 182.

among the English nobility during the fifteenth century.⁹ Christine's concern is political society, which she divides into three estates: princes, nobles and knights, and the "universal people."¹⁰ Yet she further divides the "universal people" into three estates of their own, comprising the clergy, the burghers and merchants, and the "common people," including artisans and laborers.¹¹ This shows that Christine was sensitive to the increasing social complexity in her period and the need to make more nuanced distinctions between social categories. The descriptions presented by these authors demonstrate the efforts to which late medieval people went to retain some part of the traditional three orders model while simultaneously recognizing its inability to depict the complexity of contemporary society. The mutually-dependent orders had given way to a social organization that was increasingly hierarchical and minutely complex.¹²

In England, the introduction of new social categories and their corresponding terminology can be credited, in part, to the 1413 Statute of Additions, which required defendants

⁹ Christine de Pizan was a popular author in England. Her work may have come across the Channel through her patron, Margaret of Burgundy, who disseminated it to her sisters, one of whom was the wife of the Duke of Bedford. The Earl of Salisbury and Henry IV were both favorably impressed by Christine's work and attempted to lure her to the English court. (This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5, below.) The Middle English version of the *Livre du corps de policie*, found in the c. 1470 Cambridge University Library MS Kk.1.5, may have been translated by Anthony Woodville. It is likely that the French version of the text had been circulating among the English nobility prior to this date. One of the ten extant manuscript copies of the French version is an early fifteenth-century copy currently held by the British Library. In 1521, the Middle English text was published by London printer John Skot, which suggests the text was both popular and marketable by that time (although Christine's name was not attached to this particular published version). Charity Cannon Willard, "The Manuscript Tradition of the *Livres des Trois Vertus* and Christine de Pizan's Audience" *Journal of the History of Ideas* 27 (1966), 437-8. Christine de Pizan, *The Treasure of the City of Ladies or The Book of the Three Virtues*, revised ed., trans. Sarah Lawson (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), xviii. Diane Bornstein, ed., *The Middle English Translation of Christine de Pizan's Livre du corps de policie* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1977), 31-6. Edith Yenal, *Christine de Pizan: A Bibliography*, 2nd ed. (Metuchen and London: Scarecrow Press, 1989), 66. British Library, "Detailed Record for Harley 4410," *Online Catalogue of Illuminated Manuscripts* <<http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/record.asp?MSID=4579&CollID=8&NStart=4410>> (accessed March 18, 2014). Stephanie Downes, "Fashioning Christine de Pizan in Tudor Defences of Women" *Parergon* 23:1 (2006), 77. Cynthia J. Brown, "The Reconstruction of an Author in Print: Christine de Pizan in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries," in *Christine de Pizan and the Categories of Difference*, ed. Marilyn Desmond (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 228.

¹⁰ Christine de Pizan, *The Book of the Body Politic*, ed. Kate Langdon Forhan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 3.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 95. Susan J. Dudash, "Christine de Pizan and the 'Menu peuple'" *Speculum* 78:3 (2003), 791.

¹² David Crouch, *The Birth of Nobility* (Harlow: Pearson/Longman, 2005), 222-52.

in the royal courts to articulate their “Estate, Degree or Mystery.”¹³ The requirement that these individuals situate themselves socially and occupationally led to the proliferation of new status terminology which could more adequately capture the distinctions of rank and hierarchy that had come to preoccupy late medieval English society. Faced with the reality of this dizzying array of ranks and occupations, medieval writers grudgingly relinquished the three orders in favor of new conceptions of society that arranged these new social and occupational groups in new ways.

This shift can already be seen in a sermon delivered by John Stafford, bishop of Bath and Wells and Chancellor of England, to Henry VI and his parliament in 1433.¹⁴ While sermons *ad status* tended to present conservative pictures of society, Stafford reshuffles the traditional tripartite structure to incorporate contemporary realities. He preaches on Psalm 72, “Let the mountains bring forth peace to the people and the hills justice.” In unpacking this line, Stafford equates the mountains with the prelates, nobles, and magnates (*prelati, procures et magnates*) of the realm; the hills with the knights, esquires, and merchants (*milites, armigeri et mercatores*); and the people with the farmers, craftsmen, and common folk (*cultores, artifices et vulgares*).¹⁵ The theme of his sermon is in keeping with the occasion of a parliamentary opening. In deviating from the traditional *oratores/bellatores/laborares* model, he tailors his portrayal of society’s orders to his audience, depicting the two houses of Parliament – the clerics, nobles, and magnates in the House of Lords, and the knights, esquires, and merchants in the House of Commons – and those they ruled over. Stafford’s sermon, therefore, depicts the social order with respect to the

¹³ The original French of the statute reads: “soient faitz addicions de lour estat ou degree ou de mistere.” *Statutes of the Realm*, vol. 2 (London: Dawsons of Pall Mall, 1816; reprint, 1963), 171.

¹⁴ Alan J. Fletcher, ed., “‘The Unity of the State Exists in the Agreement of its Minds:’ A Fifteenth-Century Sermon on the Three Estates” *Leeds Studies in English*, n. s.: 22 (1991), 103-4.

¹⁵ Anne Curry, ed., “Henry VI: Parliament of July 1433, Text and Translation,” in *The Parliament Rolls of Medieval England*, ed. C. Given-Wilson et al. Internet version, <<http://www.sd-editions.com/PROME>> (Leicester: Scholarly Digital Editions, 2005) (accessed on 30 July 2017).

ruling classes as they were spread out before him. In doing so, he acknowledges the existence of new ranks, such as the esquires, and how they fit into the hierarchies of political society.

A more detailed example of social order from later in the century is *The Game and Playe of the Chesse*, a translation of Jacobus de Cessolis' thirteenth-century political treatise *Liber de moribus hominum et officiis nobilium ac popularium super ludo sacchorum* printed by William Caxton in 1474 and again in 1483. An explanation of how the game is played is relegated to the short fourth tract of the book. After laying out the history of the game and why it ought to be played, the bulk of the text uses the chessboard as an allegory to prescribe the morals and duties of different ranks of society.¹⁶ The second tract covers the king, queen, alphys (what we would know as the chessboard bishops, defined in the text as judges), knights, and rooks (defined as the vicars and legates of the king). While the hierarchy of these figures is not openly defined, it is implicit in the order in which the pieces are presented and discussed. The third tract deals with the pawns – the common people of the realm. Rather than being lumped together into a single entry as one might expect from earlier works on the social order, the treatise treats each pawn as representing a distinct group within the common folk: the first pawn signifies the laborers and workmen; the second pawn, the smiths; the third, the notaries, advocates, scriveners, and drapers; the fourth, the merchants and moneychangers; the fifth, physicians, spice dealers and apothecaries; the sixth, tavernkeepers, hostellers and victualers; the seventh, the keepers of towns, customs officials and toll collectors; and the eighth, “messengers, couriers, ribalds, and players of dice.”¹⁷ It is unclear whether these occupations, too, are meant to be ranked in order of appearance. The inclusion of sinful characters – “ribalds and players of dice” – at the end of the list suggests a ranking of sorts, but it seems odd to place laborers and workmen before more

¹⁶ William Caxton, ed., *The Game and Playe of the Chesse*, ed. Jenny Adams (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2009), 1-2.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 16.

lucrative occupations in law, finance, and public service which involved association with the elite ranks of society. While the ranking of these pawns is unclear, in explaining how their work contributes to the functioning of the larger political body, the text presents a much wider understanding of the common people and their responsibilities than the original three orders model, acknowledging the development of distinct professions and their contributions to society.¹⁸ The acknowledgement of less savory members of society in the final group suggests a desire for comprehensiveness. In the introduction to her recent critical edition of the text, Jenny Adams argues that Caxton's choice to translate and print this text with little emendation suggests that Jacobus' vision of "a diverse body politic" resonated with him.¹⁹ That he went on to print a second edition within a decade of the first suggests that it resonated with his audience as well. Although it was conceived of in thirteenth-century Genoa, the text presents the very complex social world that was familiar to Caxton's readers.

The chessboard format was a rather idiosyncratic presentation of the late medieval social world – by the end of the fifteenth century, it had become more common for writers to form the social order into a single, vertical hierarchy. This became the dominant social model in the early modern period.²⁰ Edmund Dudley's 1509 *The Tree of the Commonwealth* spins off from Christine de Pizan's ideas. Dudley was a lawyer and royal servant, who rose rapidly to power and wealth under Henry VII, serving as speaker of the House of Commons and a royal counselor. After Henry's death, Dudley took the fall for some of the king's unpopular policies and was

¹⁸ Jacobus' treatise is not completely detached from the three orders. The model is implicit in a passage from the second tract, describing the significance of the duties of a knight: "How should a plowman be sure [secure] in the field but if the knights made daily watch to keep them. For like as the glory of a king is upon his knights, so it is necessary to the knights that the merchants, crafty men, and common people be defended and kept. Therefore let the knights keep the people in such wise that they may enjoy peace, and get and gather the costs and expends of them both." *Ibid.*, 42.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.

²⁰ Keith Wrightson, "The Social Order of Early Modern England: Three Approaches" in *The World We Have Gained*, ed. Lloyd Bonfield, Richard M. Smith and Keith Wrightson (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 179-80.

arrested and thrown in the Tower by his enemies; it was there that he wrote his treatise, intended to advise Henry VIII on the proper management of his kingdom - and, perhaps, to restore Dudley to the new king's good graces (an unsuccessful venture, as he was beheaded in the next year).²¹ In *The Tree of the Commonwealth*, Dudley divides the realm into three social levels: the prince, the nobility and the commonalty. While Christine de Pizan focuses on the realm as a political body, Dudley's focus is primarily social.²² Within his three social levels, Dudley recognized a variety of ranks. His nobility consisted of "Dukes, Earls, Barons, knights, esquires, and other gentlemen by office or authority" and his commonalty consisted of merchants, craftsmen, artificers, franklins, graziers, tillers, and other generally the people of his realm."²³ In this description, Dudley essentially establishes a social hierarchy, stretching from the king down to his lowliest subjects. His presentation of the commonalty presents two parallel hierarchies – first the townsfolk (merchants, craftsmen and artificers) and then the rural dwellers (franklins, graziers, and tillers). A great deal of care is taken in using correct, current terminology for all ranks of society. His use of the new term "grazier," as will be discussed later in this chapter, demonstrates that he is attempting to present a very current view of society. It is clear that Dudley was far more aware of the social ranks in late medieval English society than most of his predecessors, and took the time to carefully differentiate between them in his text.

Another example of vertical hierarchy can be found in William Harrison's *Description of England*, written between 1577 and 1587. Harrison was a cleric from a London merchant family whose forays into historical writing brought him to the attention of Raphael Holinshed, who

²¹ S. J. Gunn, "Dudley, Edmund (c.1462–1510)," *DNB* <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/8147>> (accessed July 31, 2017).

²² Edmund Dudley, *The Tree of the Commonwealth* (1509), ed. D. M. Brodie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1948), vii.

²³ *Ibid.*, 44-5.

commissioned him to write his *Description* to accompany Holinshed's *Chronicles*.²⁴ While it was largely a geographic work, an entire chapter of the *Description* is dedicated to the "Degrees of People in the Commonwealth of England," in which Harrison presents English society as a clearly defined hierarchy divided into four groups:

We in England divide our people commonly into four sorts, as gentlemen, citizens or burgesses, yeomen, and artificers or laborers. Of gentlemen the first and chief (next the King) be the prince, dukes, marquises, earls, viscounts, and barons, and these are called gentlemen of the greater sort, or (as our common usage of speech is) lords and noblemen; and next unto them be knights, esquires, and, last of all, they that are simply called gentlemen; so that in effect our gentlemen are divided into their conditions, whereof in this chapter I will make particular rehearsal.²⁵

Like Dudley before him, Harrison seems far more concerned with establishing a clear hierarchy among the gentle ranks than among the commoners. Later in the chapter, in his more detailed descriptions of the individual "sorts" and ranks, he states that merchants are to be counted among the "citizens and burgesses," but apart from that his descriptions of these levels is brief.²⁶ He does note that yeomen "have a certain pre-eminence and more estimation than laborers and the common sort of artificers," suggesting that his presentation of the lower levels is still hierarchical despite the relative paucity of ranks delineated for this significant portion of the population.²⁷

An almost identical social hierarchy is presented by the prominent humanist scholar and political theorist Sir Thomas Smith in his *De Republica Anglorum*, circulated in manuscript from 1562 and published in 1583;²⁸ his "four sorts" deviate from Harrison's only in the elevation of the yeomanry to a status equal with citizens of towns ("burgesses" are left off entirely) and the division of artificers and laborers into separate levels. Smith's discussion of the ranks of the

²⁴ Glyn Parry, "Harrison, William (1535–1593)", *DNB* <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/12453>> (accessed 31 July 2017).

²⁵ William Harrison, *The Description of England*, ed. Georges Edelen (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1968), 94.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 115.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 117.

²⁸ Ian W. Archer, "Smith, Sir Thomas (1513–1577)", *DNB* <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/25906>> (accessed 31 July 2017).

nobility copies Harrison nearly word-for-word.²⁹ Smith devotes individual chapters of his work to discussing each of these social levels; the greater nobles are lumped together into one chapter, followed by chapters on knights, esquires, gentlemen, citizens and burgesses, yeomen and “the fourth sort of men which do not rule,” a category which is later revealed to include day laborers, non-landowning merchants, copyholders, and all manner of artificers and craftsmen. Since Smith’s aim is to describe the political community of the realm, he freely lumps these commoners together without any concern for their exact social position. He pays the most attention in his work to the in-between ranks – the lower nobility and the upper commonalty, which he devotes more space to than any other ranks. The greater attention paid to these ranks – particularly the rank of gentleman, to which he devotes two entire chapters, one of which defends the practice of making new gentlemen – suggests the existence of a profound social anxiety about them.³⁰ This anxiety was not new to the late sixteenth century – it represents a continuation of the trend that began with the Statute of Additions. The attention paid by Harrison and Smith to social categorization indicates that the anxiety caused by the expansion of social terminology and, in particular, the fluidity that existed at the boundary between the gentle and common ranks only intensified as the sixteenth century progressed.

While “gentleman” as a distinct social category does not appear in these hierarchies until the sixteenth century, the progression of social models outlined here indicates an increasing desire to distinguish between the multiplying ranks and occupations starting in the late fourteenth century. The nobility is no longer represented as a unified order of society. Chaucer cheekily fashions characters who reflect different segments of the lesser nobility. While lumping them into the same category, Christine de Pizan distinguishes nobles from knights. Caxton, too, sees

²⁹ Sir Thomas Smith, *De Republica Anglorum* (Meston, Yorkshire: The Scholar Press Limited, 1970), 20.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 26-29.

knights as a separate category within the body politic. By the sixteenth century, writers like Dudley, Harrison and Smith make minute social distinctions between the ranks of the nobility, who they see as unified by their shared gentle status. These writers share an understanding that their society was changing. Decade by decade, this order was being redefined. Each of these writers saw that and attempted to capture it, painting a secure, stable picture of the society in which they lived. In a way, the act of writing and organizing society was a way of creating stability for these writers in an unstable world. The existence of so many different social descriptions, however, calls their bluff, revealing the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries as a time of social flux, through which new ranks were emerging and carving out a place for themselves. The gentlemen were the foremost of these.

The remainder of this chapter explores the roots of this social anxiety in the expanding definitions of the term “gentleman” during the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. A close examination of the ways in which the term is used indicate that it was being applied to individuals with a much wider range of backgrounds by the end of this period: not just descendants of the hereditary nobility, but government office-holders, wealthy professionals and those who were simply able to embody the personal characteristics associated with gentility. The term “gentlewoman” follows the same trajectory with a slight lag. The exploration of how these social ranks expanded allows for a greater understanding of the social anxiety that existed during this period. As the door into the bottom levels of the gentry was opened wider and wider, those lucky enough to get inside were even more anxious to close it, to ensure that their new-found status retained its significance.

Social Terminology: The Gentle Ranks

“Gentleman” was often used as a catch-all term in late medieval England. As Saul has written, “gentleman” or its French and Latin forms “*Gentilhomme* or *generosus* had described the condition of birth of all those embraced by noble society.”³¹ The king was a gentleman as was the youngest son of the lowliest esquire in his kingdom. It was only during the fifteenth century that this term came to refer to a specific social rank at the lower limit of the gentry. In order to differentiate between these uses of the term, I will use “gentleman” to refer to the specific social rank and “gentle man” to refer to someone of generically gentle status. Because of the conflation of gentlemen and the other gentle ranks, it is necessary to understand the development of social terminology used to refer to them before delving into the specific meanings of “gentleman.”

Medieval people had no terms equivalent to the modern “gentry,” which assembles several ranks into a collective unit designating the lower portion of the aristocracy. The term only began to refer to the sense of the social class below the nobility in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.³² Prior to that, the terms “noble” and “gentle” were often used as synonymous to refer to society’s elite.³³ It was more common, however, for the gentle ranks to be referred to individually as knights, esquires, or gentlemen.³⁴ They were bound together by a collective adjective (“gentle”) rather than a collective noun (“gentry”). In his study of the Lancashire and Cheshire gentry of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, Michael Bennett uses the term “gentleman” to refer to all three of these ranks, highlighting their shared characteristics

³¹ Nigel Saul, *Knights and Esquires* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 16.

³² Before this period, the word was in use referring to the qualities associated with those of gentle birth, as in the fifteenth-century romance *Sir Bevis of Hampton*, “For thy gentry, thus cowardly let me not die.” *OED*, s. v. “gentry” (n), def. 1a-d, 2a.

³³ Saul has found that heralds used the terms interchangeably during the fifteenth century. Saul, *Knights and Esquires*, 29.

³⁴ Elizabeth Noble, *The World of the Stonors: A Gentry Society* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2009), 18.

over their relative hierarchy. He asserts that “the distinction between ‘gentle’ and ‘common’ was the crucial divide in county society” – a perspective that I share and have used to guide this study.³⁵ Unlike Bennett, however, who argues that the possession of landed estates set the gentry apart from their fellows, I argue that a landed estate was not a requirement for gentle status. In early descriptions of gentlemen, the possession of land and rights of lordship may have been implied – an unspoken precondition, perhaps – but as the fifteenth century drew to a close, it was possible for non-landowners to earn gentle status. Rather, the more ambiguous shared quality of gentility is what set this rank apart from its fellows – a fact which caused gentle men and women no little anxiety. Consequently, I will be using the terms “gentry” to refer collectively to all of those individuals who possessed this gentility, however it was arrived at or demonstrated. These individuals did not necessarily see themselves as forming a distinct social group. There was certainly no gentry class consciousness during the fifteenth century. Instead, there was an assortment of individuals who shared a particular quality – a quality which was reflected in their education, manners, and body of knowledge – and understood this quality as setting them above the masses of common folk. When I use the term “gentry” in this project, it encompasses these lower ranks of the gentle community - the knights, esquires, and gentlemen who, after being shut out of the parliamentary peerage, failed to distinguish themselves from the commons in any more specific way.

The rank of knight was the earliest of the gentle ranks to be established. Duby notes that the Latin form *miles* first came into use as a social designation in France in the eleventh century.³⁶ He argues that the term did not denote a specialized military function – this function had existed for several centuries already without the emergence of new language to describe it.

³⁵ Michael Bennett, *Community, Class and Careerism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 30-1.

³⁶ Georges Duby, *The Chivalrous Society*, trans. Cynthia Postan (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 159-61.

Instead, Duby argues that *miles* came into use to describe the subordinate position of vassals, emphasizing their submission and service to higher-ranking lords.³⁷ The sudden emergence of this term during the early eleventh century came as the *ban* – the power of dispensing justice and military command – was no longer given out by the king, but was assumed by nobles in their own right. There was a need to demarcate the lower limits of those whose social position allowed them such authority. Since the line was drawn just below the *milites*, a more precise term was necessary to indicate who they were.³⁸ The term *miles*, therefore, was from the beginning a term used to refer the vassals in the feudal hierarchy who were pledged to serve the interests of greater lords.

This pattern holds just as true in England as in France. As early as the Norman Conquest, when the French-style feudal knight developed out of the Anglo-Saxon *cnicht* (a serving retainer who had military responsibilities), use of the term was fraught with ambiguity. Feudal magnates used the term loosely, often lumping their sub-tenants, fighting men and other retainers (who modern scholars are inclined to view as separate groups) together as their “knights.”³⁹ David Crouch argues that, prior to the late twelfth century, the term “knight” indicated a particular social role, but that role did not necessarily carry with it elevated status. At that time, medieval writers did not see social groups as existing in a hierarchical structure. The three orders of society were seen as interdependent in a way that did not privilege any one. Yet some time

³⁷ The term *vassus* had been used for such men as well, but Duby argues that *miles* was seen as a more desirable alternative at a time when the educated community was purifying the Latin language of neologisms in an attempt to return it to its classical roots. Duby, *Chivalrous Society*, 163-4.

³⁸ Duby, *Chivalrous Society*, 168-9. Coss cautions that the equation of *miles* and *nobilis* did not occur with the same rapidity elsewhere in Europe as among the Mâconnais studied by Duby. Coss, *The Knight in Medieval England 1000-1400* (Stroud, Glouc.: Sutton Publishing, 1993), 6.

³⁹ Harvey cites an eleventh-century list of the “Knights of the Archbishop” of Canterbury as an example of this conflation. Sally Harvey, “The Knight and the Knight’s Fee in England” *Past and Present* 49 (1970), 10.

between 1170 and 1200, this shifted and, amid a more widespread emphasis on hierarchy, knights began to be recognized as belonging to the lower tier of the nobility.⁴⁰

The acquisition of landed estates may have been a significant factor in the establishment of the knight as a socially elevated figure. Crouch notes that, in England, a hierarchy began to develop that valued landed knights more highly than landless.⁴¹ The development of the “knight’s fee” – the amount of land required in order for the holder to be termed a knight – illustrates this as well. In the late twelfth century, prescriptive texts often cite five hides as the requisite amount, though Sally Harvey’s study of knight’s fees from the eleventh to thirteenth centuries indicates that the reality was messier.⁴² In the eleventh century, it was possible for as little as 1-2 hides to support a fighting knight, and many tenants reported holding only a fraction of a knight’s fee – hardly distinguishable from the holdings of commoners.⁴³ The term “knight,” in this case, became little more than a unit of measure, denoting how many fighting men had to be supported by a given holding. During this period, a variety of types of men, from professional fighters to upwardly mobile tenants to sons of nobility, were part of the catch-all category of knight. Contemporaries themselves distinguished between these different backgrounds using adjectival modifiers, indicating that they themselves found the term ambiguous as a social marker.⁴⁴ Only from the middle of the twelfth century, as the military demands on English knights rose due to the increasing warfare of the Angevins and the Crusades, improvements in military technology increased the expense of equipping a knight, and the emergence of a

⁴⁰ Crouch, *Birth of Nobility*, 243-8.

⁴¹ Crouch, *Birth of Nobility*, 247.

⁴² Harvey, “Knight and the Knight’s Fee,” 30.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 19-20.

⁴⁴ Harvey cites a variety of examples: in discussing the Norman Conquest, William of Poitiers distinguished between “middling noble knights” (*milites mediae nobiles*) and “common knights” (*milites gregarios*); and the author of the *Gesta Stephani* distinguishes knights variously as “common” (*gregarii*), “hired” (*stipendarii*), “finely-equipped,” “highly-equipped,” and “belted.” All of this indicates that the term “knight” (or the Latin *miles*) on its own was insufficient as an identifier. All sources quoted in Harvey, “Knight and the Knight’s Fee,” 28-9.

common culture promoted through chivalric literature, does Harvey argue that knighthood became the province of the wealthy.⁴⁵ This combination of factors developed the knight – the ambiguous and generic fighting man – into a specific social rank.

Dubbing, a ceremony which initiated a man into the rank of knight and its concomitant responsibilities, further set knights apart from the lower ranks of society. While there is controversy over its exact history, a simple version – merely presenting the new knight with the equipment necessary for performing his service – can be dated to the early twelfth century. By the end of the century, more elaborate ceremonies had developed which had strong religious elements alongside the political and military.⁴⁶ The performance of such a ritual, whether simple or elaborate, marked the moment when a man made the transition to this social rank. A twelfth-century French clergyman, Andrew the Chaplain, who wrote on the subject of social boundaries in his *Tractatus de amore*, indicated the dubbing ceremony could elevate a man of common status into the ranks of the nobility.⁴⁷ This was a moment that every knight could look back to – a “formalized ceremony of admission” to the rank that clearly differentiated knights from their social inferiors.⁴⁸

After it was firmly established as a social grade, the rank of knight was forcibly expanded by the crown through writs of distrain of knighthood, beginning in 1224 and extending through the fourteenth century. These writs required that any tenant holding a full knight’s fee immediately become a knight. In 1241, it was decided that lands yielding at least £20 *per annum* (later increased to £40) were the equivalent of a knight’s fee, expanding the number of qualifying

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 37-42.

⁴⁶ For details about the dubbing ceremony, see Maurice Keen, *Chivalry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 64-82. The timeline is more succinctly discussed in Coss, *Knight in Medieval England*, 52-3.

⁴⁷ Crouch, *Birth of Nobility*, 242-3.

⁴⁸ I have borrowed this phrase from Richard Barber. He suggests that was an important part of the common culture that elevated knights above mere mounted warriors and transformed them into a distinctive social group. Richard Barber, *The Knight and Chivalry*, rev. ed. (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1995), 27.

landowners.⁴⁹ The intention of distraint was to locate sufficient numbers of knights to serve as jurors on a grand assize – this was becoming a problem in the mid-thirteenth century when the number of knights was quite low⁵⁰ – but it additionally managed to clearly define the knights as a social rank. That these writs needed to be repeatedly issued indicates reluctance on the part of qualifying individuals to assume the responsibilities of knighthood, whether military or administrative, as knights were being called upon for an increasing number of services, including holding the offices of county government and representing their shires in parliament, by the fourteenth century.⁵¹ Around the year 1300, there were approximately 1100 knights in England, with incomes as low as £20-30 *per annum*; in the 1430s, the numbers of knights had diminished precipitously, but their incomes had risen to between £40 and £400 *p. a.* As their numbers had decreased, their economic importance had increased.⁵² By the middle of the fourteenth century, the diminishing ranks of the knights were bounded by an increasing body of esquires, many of whom qualified for knighthood but chose to eschew it. As the numbers of knights diminished, the status of these esquires rose, diminishing the social distinction that had existed between them.⁵³

The rank of esquire had risen out of the retainers of the knights. A series of muster returns from 1324 list those below the rank of knight variously as *valetti*, *armigeri*, and *scutiferi* in Latin, *esquiers* in French, and franklins or yeomen in English. Noël Denholm-Young, in analyzing this list, points out that “this is an undifferentiated class” at this point, whose various

⁴⁹ Michael R. Powicke, “Distraint of Knighthood and Military Obligation under Henry III” *Speculum* 25:4 (Oct., 1950): 457-60. Bennett, *Community, Class and Careerism*, 83.

⁵⁰ J. Quick, “The Number and Distribution of Knights in Thirteenth-Century England: The Evidence of the Grand Assize” in *Thirteenth Century England I*, ed. P. R. Coss and S. D. Lloyd (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1985), 114-5.

⁵¹ Saul, *Knights and Esquires*, 46.

⁵² Dyer, *Standards of Living*, 30-31.

⁵³ Chris Given-Wilson, *The English Nobility in the Late Middle Ages* (London: Routledge, 1987), 71.

constituents would later coalesce into a variety of gentle ranks.⁵⁴ Those called *armigeri* or *scutiferi* in Latin or *esquiers* in French – originally the knights’ retainers who would help them arm for battle – emerged as a rank of their own in the fourteenth century, as their military roles began to merge.⁵⁵ This is reflected in the 1363 sumptuary legislation, which pointedly differentiates between two types of esquire, those who were equal to the estate of knight and those who fell below it.⁵⁶ Maurice Keen argues that this was not the emergence of a newly conscious social group, but rather recognition by the king and his heralds of the status of an existing group. In other words, the esquires had always been there, but only in the middle of the fourteenth century were they recognized as belonging to the ranks of the gentle alongside the knights.⁵⁷ K. B. McFarlane maintained that downward mobility may have been at work here: those men who were eligible for, but chose not to take up, knighthood brought their inborn gentility downward into the ranks of the esquires.⁵⁸

Its pool of eligible local office-holders having diminished, the English Crown expanded its efforts at distraint, requiring anyone holding the equivalent of a knight’s fee to serve in administrative capacities. Around the 1470s, the number of English knights began to grow again; with the burdens of its position shared with the esquires, knighthood had regained its social desirability.⁵⁹ Knights of this period were less likely to be warriors than administrators: men who served as sheriff, justice of the peace, and knight of the shire, administered their estates and had a working knowledge of the law. Despite their diminishing military role, the rank still carried a military identity: many knights who had never seen a battlefield still chose to be depicted in full

⁵⁴ Noël Denholm-Young, *The Country Gentry in the Fourteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 16-9.

⁵⁵ Denholm-Young, *Country Gentry*, 2.

⁵⁶ Peter Coss, *The Origins of the English Gentry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 228-232.

⁵⁷ Maurice Keen, “Heraldry and Hierarchy: Esquires and Gentlemen,” in *Orders and Hierarchies in Late Medieval Europe*, ed. Jeffrey Denton (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 100.

⁵⁸ K. B. McFarlane, *The Nobility of Later Medieval England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), 15.

⁵⁹ Christine Carpenter, *Locality and Polity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 85-87.

armor on their tomb effigies.⁶⁰ Martial skills were an important aspect of the education of boys from across the noble and gentle ranks.⁶¹ Even with many not actively fulfilling a military role, Keen argues that military obligations were “primary and basic” to the identity of the medieval English knight.⁶²

While the knights and esquires emerged out of a military context and grew as social groups alongside one another, the gentlemen – at the bottom of those ranks generally accepted as gentle – had a more complicated origin. There is no clear occupational origin of the term, or its French or Latin equivalents, *gentilhomme* and *generosus*. These terms were used in a more general descriptive sense, referring to a man of noble birth. Herein lies the critical problem with the term. It derives from the Latin *genus*, meaning a race or family. Around 1200, the adjectival form *generosus*, meaning “gentle,” came into use in the context of falconry. R. E. Latham has first found the term used as a substantive adjective, referring to the title “gentleman,” in 1413.⁶³ While the Latin root *genus* is very generic, the Romance-language equivalents such as the Old French *gentil*, took on the sense of belonging to a *good* family.⁶⁴ This was also the primary meaning of *gentil* in Middle English from the mid-thirteenth century, when it was borrowed from the French and came to represent those who were well-born or noble and the qualities associated with them.⁶⁵ This marks a shift in meaning from the Latin, which was strictly about ancestry, and the Old French and Middle English versions, which broaden to include a specific ancestry and its

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 227.

⁶¹ Ruth Karras, *From Boys to Men: Formations of Masculinity in Later Medieval Europe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 28-9. Adrian R. Bell, Anne Curry, Andy King, and David Simpkin, *The Solider in Later Medieval England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 152.

⁶² Maurice Keen, *The Origins of the English Gentleman* (Stroud, Glouc.: Tempus, 2002), 15.

⁶³ Latham does not elaborate on how the term was used with respect to falconry. R. E. Latham, *Revised Medieval Latin Word List from British and Irish Sources* (London: British Academy, 1965), 210.

⁶⁴ *OED*, s. v. “gentle” (adj.).

⁶⁵ *MED*, s. v. “gentil” (adj.), defs. 1-3. *OED*, s. v. “gentle” (adj.), defs. 1 a-d, 2, 3.

characteristics. The noun form *gentilman* emerged around the same time to indicate a specific individual with these qualities.⁶⁶

Gentility was conceived of as a quality shared by all nobles, who therefore could all claim the title “gentleman,” just as in France all sons of noblemen were termed *gentilhommes*.⁶⁷ Up until the fourteenth century, this could mean any member of the nobility, all the way up to the king himself. Early in the fifteenth century, however, as the parliamentary peerage succeeded in closing themselves off into an exclusive social group, gentle was a term that came to be used more specifically for the bottom ranks of the aristocracy – the knights, esquires and gentlemen – who could no longer claim a greater distinction.

The use of the term “gentleman” to indicate rank begins in the context of a service rank, delineating certain household retainers of a lord who had elevated status but did not qualify as esquires. Saul has uncovered an example from 1319 in which a letter under the privy seal contains the phrase *pour gentil home* which is translated into Latin in the letters patent as *pro uno valletto*, indicating that, in the early fourteenth century at least, a *gentil home* was understood to be a lord’s retainer. By 1400, however, the typical rendering of *vallettus* in the English vernacular was yeoman, indicating a man of sub-gentle status.⁶⁸ The shifting translation of *vallettus* – a term that clearly indicates a service position – over the course of the fourteenth century is an indication of the shifting status of the gentleman during this period. It is unlikely that the occupation of *vallettus* changed significantly, so this tells us that, by the beginning of the fifteenth century, the term gentleman had risen in status until it could no longer be applied to someone holding the position of a valet.

⁶⁶ *MED*, s. v. “gentil-man” (n.), def. 1a.

⁶⁷ F. R. H. Du Boulay, “The First English Gentlemen” *The Listener* (30 October 1958): 687.

⁶⁸ Saul, *Knights and Esquires*, 6.

The watershed moment in the history of the gentleman is the passage of the Statute of Additions in 1413. As discussed in the previous section, this law, which required defendants in royal courts to identify their social or occupational position, prompted the proliferation of new social terminology. The social system had become increasingly complex; once individuals were forced to categorize themselves, a new vocabulary developed in order to encapsulate social distinctions that had previously been undifferentiated. After the Statute, the term “gentleman” begins to be applied as a social rank in a wide variety of English documents, presumably by those who could not claim membership in any higher rank. The first pardon roll issued during the reign of Henry V, for 1413-1414 – immediately after the Statute’s passage – provides few social descriptors for individuals; nonetheless, *chivaler* and *armiger* each appear several times, while *gentilman* does not. In the very next roll, for 1414-1417 – after the Statute had had time to take effect – the term *gentilman* appears about fifty times, and would increase in frequency afterward.⁶⁹ The appellation was often self-bestowed, as the Statute of Additions opened the door for defendants in the royal courts to invent a term to apply to their particular “estate, degree, or mystery,” and, since it was not accompanied by an office or specific political or military role, could be applied to a wide variety of people. J. B. Cooper attests that while “the courts by the late 15th-century had held knight and upwards were names of dignity, they recognize that the styles of esquire and gentleman could be conferred by holding offices, and that gentry by birth might be farmers, or husbandmen, or members of mysteries such as mercers.”⁷⁰ Individuals could lay claim to this slight degree of gentility for a variety of different reasons (which will be discussed further below), all of which entitled them to be called a gentleman.

⁶⁹ R. L. Storey, “Gentleman-Bureaucrats” in *Profession, Vocation and Culture in Late Medieval England*, ed. Cecil H. Clough (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1982), 94.

⁷⁰ J. B. Cooper, “Ideas of Gentility in Early Modern England,” in *Land, Men and Beliefs*, ed. G. E. Aylmer and J. S. Morrill (London: The Hambledon Press, 1983), 49.

Saul argues that, from the fifteenth century, the usage of the term is limited to a social position at the bottom level of the aristocracy, emphasizing that “An earl, for example, though *noble et gentil* in 1300, would have felt insulted if described as a ‘gentleman’ in 1415.”⁷¹ This statement, however, is a bit extreme. While the term had acquired a very specific social meaning by this time, the word “gentle” was still used in its adjectival form through the fifteenth century and beyond to denote a set of qualities shared by the entire aristocracy. Saul’s statement, however, indicates that the emergence of gentleman as a social rank muddied these waters, so that those who could lay claim to a more elevated rank might distance themselves from it. Yet this tendency was not universal. In the texts of the grants of arms which will be discussed in Chapter 3, for example, heralds use the term to refer to the community of the armigerous. This generic usage continues through the early modern period, where the term “gentleman” can be used to connote the behavioral qualities associated with the upper ranks of society. In a famous anecdote attributed to King James II, the king is asked by a woman to raise her (presumably uncouth) son to the rank of gentleman, and he replies, “Madam, I could make him a nobleman, but God almighty himself could not make him a gentleman.”⁷² There is such continuity between the way that the term is used in the fourteenth century and this example in the seventeenth that it would be quite surprising to find the usage had skipped the fifteenth altogether. While Saul’s assessment of the development of gentleman as a social rank is on point, he overstates the case with this remark. There were multiple definitions of gentleman functioning simultaneously in late medieval society, the narrow social rank and the broad behavioral assessment among them.

⁷¹ Saul, *Knights and Esquires*, 16.

⁷² This anecdote exists in several forms, typically attributed to James II, though Daniel Defoe claims it was Charles II. For our purposes, the exact king is immaterial, as the important feature here is the conception of gentility encapsulated in the statement. D. A. L. Morgan, “The Individual Style of the English Gentleman,” in *Gentry and Lesser Nobility in Late Medieval Europe*, ed. Michael Jones (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1986), 17.

The Gentleman in the *Book of St Albans*

When “gentleman” emerged as a social term near the beginning of the fifteenth century, it was not part of some top-level attempt by the English Crown to clearly define social categories. Instead, it emerged haphazardly, as a term specific individuals chose to apply to themselves when forced by the king’s courts to provide an identifying label. Thus, the term existed as a sort of catch-all. Unlike the esquires, who clearly grew out of those landowners who could afford to assume the duties of knighthood but wished to avoid its burdens, the gentlemen did not have a prescribed political, administrative or economic role. Rather, anyone who could lay claim to a modicum of gentility, however it was acquired, might call himself a gentleman, and contemporaries were well aware of this.

The existence of multiple definitions of, and multiple paths to, gentility during the late fifteenth century is confirmed by extensive passages on the subject in the 1486 *Book of St Albans*. The *BSA* is a collection of texts on hunting, hawking, heraldry and blazoning produced by the schoolmaster-printer of St Albans.⁷³ While this short-lived press focused primarily on printing standard educational texts in Latin,⁷⁴ the *BSA* was a very different sort of compilation, intended as an instruction manual in topics relevant to the life of a gentleman. The opening line of the initial treatise on hawking declares that it was written because “gentle men and honest persons have great delight in hawking,” and the subsequent treatise on hunting likewise “showeth to such gentle persons the manner of hunting for all manner of beasts.”⁷⁵ These lines indicate that a gentle audience was expected, but what did “gentle” mean in this context? The

⁷³ The *BSA* and the schoolmaster-printer will be discussed at greater length in Chapter 6, below.

⁷⁴ The St Albans press put out eight books from about 1479-1486: Augustinus Datus, *Super Eleganciis Tullianis*; Laurentius de Saona, *Rhetorica nuova*; ‘Albertus,’ *Liber modorum significandi*; Johannes Canonicus, *Quaestiones in Aristotelis Physica* and *Exempla sacrae scripturae*; the *Chronicles of England*; and the treatises of hunting, hawking and heraldry known as the *Book of St Albans*. Rachel Hands, ed., *English Hunting and Hawking in The Boke of St. Albans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), xvi.

⁷⁵ William Blades, ed., *The Book of St Albans* (London: Elliot Stock, 1901), ff. 1r, 28r. (This edition is unpaginated; I have treated it as if it were a manuscript, counting folios and numbering them accordingly.)

third treatise, a history and description of heraldic coat-armor known as the *Liber Armorum*, actually addresses this point, explaining the nature of gentility in considerable detail.

The *Liber Armorum* begins by instructing the reader “How Gentlemen shall be known from churls & how they first began.”⁷⁶ It declares that these conditions began with the sons of Adam and Eve. Cain was the first to be named a churl, for “A brother to slay his brother contrary to the law, where might be more ungentleness? By that did Cain become a churl and all his offspring after him by the cursing of god and his own father Adam.” Cain’s brother Seth, however, “was made a gentleman through his father’s and mother’s blessing,” and so his descendants after him.⁷⁷ From here, the text skips to the story of Noah, presumably to explain how there continued to be ungentleness in the world after God had wiped it out with the Flood. It declares that, of the sons of Noah, “In Cham ungentleness was found to his own father down to discover his privates and laugh his father to scorn.” So Noah called his three sons together and passed judgment upon them, dividing the world among them,⁷⁸ beginning with Cham:

Now to thee I give my curse wicked caitiff for ever. And I give to thee the north part of the world to draw thy habitation for there shall it be where sorrow and care, cold and mischief are, a churl thou shalt have in the third part of the world which shall be called Europe – that is to say, the country of churls.

Japheth ever hither my son – thou shall have my blessing dear. Instead of Seth, Adam’s son, I make thee a gentleman to the west part of the world and to the occident end where a wealth and grace shall be, there thy habitation shall be, to take that other third part of the world which shall be called Asia – that is to say, the country of gentlemen.

And Sem, my son, also a gentleman I thee make to multiply Abel’s blood that too wickedly was slain. The orient thou shall take that other third part of the world which shall be called Africa –

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 44v.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 44v.

⁷⁸ The division of the world among the sons of Noah is an extra-biblical tradition that goes back to the first century and the writings of Josephus. It was later taken up by such writers as Jerome, Isidore of Seville, Alcuin of York, and Rabanus Maurus. During the Middle Ages, there is little consistency in which region of the world each son was linked to. Benjamin Braude, “The Sons of Noah and the Construction of Ethnic and Geographical Identities in the Medieval and Early Modern Periods” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 54.1 (1997), 111-5.

that is to say, the country of temperateness.⁷⁹

Of the lineage of Japheth, the gentleman, “come Abraham, Moses, Aaron and the prophets and also the king of the right line of Mary, of whom that gentleman Jesus was born very god and man.”⁸⁰ After firmly connecting gentility with the lineage of Christ, the *Liber Armorum* changes direction, getting back to the main topic of heraldry by detailing the origins of coat-armor at the siege of Troy and the symbolism of its colors and gemstones.

While most medieval texts assume that the reader is familiar with gentility and therefore does not need a definition, the *Liber Armorum* is unique in providing an extensive explanation. The above-mentioned material establishes the Scriptural origins of gentleness and ungentleness (referred to as “churlishness” in the text). Interestingly, this origin does not lie in birth or ancestry but in personal conduct. Cain is labeled a churl by his murder of his brother, Cham by his intrusion upon and subsequent mocking of his father. It is these actions that cause their respective fathers to brand them “churls.” Only after Cain and Cham have earned this designation does it become a heritable trait, to be passed on to their progeny. The proper behavior of Seth, Japheth and Sem earns each of them the title “gentleman,” to be likewise passed down. Intriguingly, the only positive behavior that is explicitly stated is that of Japheth: he chided Cham for mocking their father. In the case of Seth and Sem, the reader is only told that their fathers designated them gentlemen. This suggests that they earned this status by refraining from doing anything wrong, rather than doing something right – the status of gentleman was not

⁷⁹ Blades, ed., *BSA*, 45r. It seems strange that a European author would label his own region of the world “the country of churls.” While the division of the world among the sons of Noah was a trope found in geographic writings, it is less common to see this linked with social groups and even less so with gentility. The twelfth-century theologian Honorius Augustodunensis described in his treatise *De imagine mundi* how Noah’s sons were the ancestors of various social categories: the sons of Shem were *liberi*, the sons of Japheth *milites*, and the sons of Ham *servi*. The author of the *Liber Armorum* follows this text in linking the origins of the social order with the sons of Noah, but the emphasis he places on virtue and conduct in determining that order is innovative. Duby, *Chivalrous Society*, 162.

⁸⁰ Blades, ed., *BSA*, 45r.

something they had to earn, but rather something they had to endeavor not to lose. None of these figures inherits gentle status. In fact, the sons of Adam had no one to inherit it from, for the text proclaims that “There was never gentleman nor churl ordained by kind but he had father and mother. Adam and Eve had neither father nor mother.”⁸¹ Only through the actions of their sons was the existence of gentlemen and churls established.⁸² This account mixes the adjectival quality of gentility with the status of the gentleman; through appropriately gentle behavior, these Scriptural figures earn an elevated status that can be passed on to their children.

The treatise goes back to the adjectival concept of gentility later in the treatise, when the author lists the “ix articles of gentleness:”

There be .ix. articles of gentleness and of them .v. be amorous and .iiii. sovereign. The .v. amorous gentlenesses been these: Lordly of countenance, Treatable in language, Wyse in his answer, Perfect in governance, and Cheerful to faithfulness. The .iiii. sovereign gentilnesses been these: Few oaths in swearing, Buxom to god’s bidding, Knowing his own birth in bearing, and to dread his sovereign to offend.⁸³

This passage specifically outlines the qualities associated with the moniker “gentle.” The assertion that a gentle man must be “perfect in governance” resonates with the stories of Cain and Cham, whose improper governance of their actions resulted in their condemnation as churls. Interestingly, only the last two of these nine articles mention any characteristics associated with the status of a gentleman as someone of gentle or noble ancestry, or in noble or royal service. The other seven articles describe gentle characteristics that might be cultivated or learned. In this way, the *Liber Armorum* presents a definition of “gentleman” that allows for the possibility of

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 44v.

⁸² It is interesting to consider the famous rallying cry of the English Peasants’ Revolt of 1381, “When Adam delved and Eve span / who was then the gentleman?” in the context of this history. It suggests that, in the time of Adam and Eve, social hierarchy did not exist – Adam and Eve labored for their own benefit, not that of an overlord. Though this statement is referring specifically to the noun form of gentleman indicating a status rank, that rank could not exist without the quality of gentleness, which the *Liber Armorum* describes as originating in Cain and Abel, the sons of Adam and Eve. I can only speculate whether the preachers who popularized this saying were aware of the origins of gentility as described in the *Liber Armorum* – it is unlikely, since this is, as far as I can tell, a unique use of the sons of Noah trope – but the two sources are nonetheless consistent with one another. Maurice Keen, *English Society in the Later Middle Ages 1348-1500* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 41.

⁸³ *Tretable* (adj.): reasonable, amenable. *MED*, s. v. “tretable” (adj.), def. 2. Blades, ed., *BSA*, 48r.

social mobility. According to its strictures, an ambitious commoner could project a lordly countenance, speak reasonably, counsel wisely, govern himself faultlessly, restrain his swearing, follow the Church's teaching, and find himself recognized as gentle. Likewise, the scion of a gentle house, failing to meet these standards, could discover that he was regarded by the community as a churl. Proper behavior and virtuous governance were necessary for anyone who wished to be regarded as gentle in the late fifteenth century.

The subsequent section on vices indicates that there were further expectations a gentleman – here the status is named directly – had to live up to. The text proceeds:

There be .ix. vices contrary to gentlemen of the which .v. be indeterminable and .iiii. determinable. The .v. indeterminable be these: one to be full of sloth in his works . an other to be full of boast in his manhood. The third to be full of cowardness to his enemy. The fourth to be full of lechery in his body. And the fifth to be full of drinking and drunkenly. There be .iiii. determinable; one is to revoke his own challenge. An other to slay his prisoner with his own hands. The third to void from his sovereign's banner in the field. And the fifth [*sic*] to tell his sovereign false tales.⁸⁴

These vices presume a little more action on the part of the gentleman. This title of honor is not for those who spend their days idly, full of drunkenness and lechery, taking advantage of their privileged position. Rather, the duties of a gentleman are implied. While the “articles of gentleness” suggest a series of traits that might readily be acquired, these vices presume a specific social position, aligning a gentleman's duties with older, feudal values. The gentleman is revealed to be a warrior, going to battle at the behest of his lord, forging bravely ahead into the ranks of the enemy, and treating any prisoners he takes with respect. Valor is required off of the battlefield as well, as he is expected to uphold any challenges he issues. Just like shrinking from the enemy in battle, revoking a challenge is a sign of cowardice, and cowardice seems to be the domain of churls. Reading this list of vices against the grain, a picture is painted of a gentleman

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 48r.

who is in a position of power, who avoids abusing his privileged social position and readily meets his feudal obligations.

The gentlemanly virtues and vices outlined in the *Liber Armorum* seem to come from different directions, presenting diverging ideas of what a gentleman should be. Some of the ideas seem a bit antiquated, as they reflect the gentleman's role as vassal in a feudal relationship – a role that did not apply during the fifteenth century to a man precariously hovering just above the status of commoner. They rather refer to someone of those more generic gentle qualities. A later section of the text, however, moves closer to the idea of gentleman as a social rank. The author of the *BSA* clearly lays out what he means by a gentleman, proclaiming:

Nine manner of gentlemen there been
 ¶ There is a Gentleman of Ancestry and of blood
 ¶ And there is a Gentleman of blood
 ¶ There is a Gentleman of Coatarmor : and these be iii One of the king's badge . An other of a lordship . And the third is of the killing of a Saracen
 ¶ And there is a gentleman untried
 ¶ And there is a gentleman Apocryphal
 ¶ And there is a gentleman Spiritual
 ¶ There is also a gentleman spiritual and temporal and all these been more plainly declared in this book.⁸⁵

Nine different ways to be a gentleman are described here. The wide variety of conceptions of gentility apparent in this list suggests that the author was again using the term in its most general, adjectival sense. The distinctions between a gentleman of ancestry and blood, and one of blood alone is not explained in the text,⁸⁶ but may correspond to different degrees of nobility – whether the individual is simply a possessor of gentle blood or has an ancient title to go along with it. The importance of this requirement for gentility is underlined by its placement as the first item on the

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, fol. 49v.

⁸⁶ The next paragraph simply begins: “There be .iiii. diverse manner of gentlemen. One is a gentleman of ancestry, which must needs be a gentleman of blood.” Then the text begins to explain the distinctions between the different gentlemen of coat armor. *Ibid.*, fol. 50r.

list. Subsequent manners of gentility, however, seem to waive the ancestry requirement and their backgrounds are described in greater detail.

A “gentleman of coatarmor of the king’s badge” is a man whose arms were “by a herald I-given.” If a man were given a lordship by the king, he would have the right to bear the arms of that lordship, assuming he did not already have arms of his own. The text actually specifies that this case refers to “a king giving a lordship to a yeoman,” who did not have an armigerous family. The last gentleman of coat armor mentioned specifically is a Christian yeoman who has defeated a Saracen knight and taken the defeated enemy’s arms as his own. The *Liber Armorum* is very specific about this manner of gentility, cautioning that it only applies to a Christian defeating a Saracen – if a Saracen defeated another Saracen, a Christian another Christian, or (heaven forbid) a Saracen defeated a Christian, none of the victors could rightfully bear the arms of the vanquished.⁸⁷

The four final manners of gentleman are more interesting for our purposes, because they present more realistic circumstances in which the definition of gentility was extending. A “gentleman spiritual” is defined as a “churl’s son” who has been made a priest: “and that is a spiritual gentleman to god and not of blood.” Here, gentility is conferred by office: any member of the clergy was necessarily gentle by virtue of his position. A “gentleman spiritual and temporal” is a cleric whose gentility is conferred by his ancestry as well as his position; the text confides that “Christ was a gentleman of his mother behalf and bore coatarmor of ancestry.”⁸⁸ Therefore, Christ was one of these gentlemen spiritual and temporal, since his gentility was

⁸⁷ One wonders how often these situations arose. Clearly, as discussed in Chapter 3, below, heralds were granting arms to individuals so there were “gentlemen of coatarmor of the king’s badge” around. But how often did a king grant a lordship to a yeoman, or did a Christian yeoman defeat a Saracen knight and assume his arms (especially in fifteenth-century England)? It is possible that the author was trying to be comprehensive here, and either imagining situations on his own, or importing them from an as-yet unidentified source text. *Ibid.*, fol. 50r.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 50r.

inherited from his mother's family as well as bestowed by his divinity. The gentility of clerics is, in the same way, a consequence of their intimacy with God.

Finally, the *Liber Armorum* mentions "gentlemen untried" and "gentleman Apocryphal." Both of these are forms of gentility that are bestowed by position. The text explains: "There be .ii. diverse Gentlemen made of grooms that be not gentlemen of coat armor neither of blood. One is called in arms a gentleman untried, that is to say made up among religious men as priors, Abbots or Bishops. That other is called in arms a gentle man apocryphal, that is to say made up and given to him the name and the livery of a gentleman."⁸⁹ The text does not elaborate further on what distinguishes a "gentleman untried" from a "gentleman spiritual," as discussed above. It is possible that the term "gentleman spiritual" covers ordained priests while the other refers to more minor clerics. The word "untried" (in the original Middle English, "untriall"), suggests a lack of military experience on the part of such a gentleman. Although the exact meaning of this term is left unclear, it is evident that this gentility is derived from some sort of clerical position. The same goes with the "gentleman apocryphal," a man who serves in a powerful lord's household or affinity. Gentleman of the household was originally a service rank without any implication of social status, but by the late fifteenth century, when the *BSA* was printed, such household positions were able to confer an elevated status upon those who held them. These final four manners of gentleman all indicate that it was possible to gain gentility from one's occupation or position – one of the new paths to gentility that opened during the fifteenth century.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 51v-52r.

The Many Faces of the Fifteenth-Century Gentleman

The *Liber Armorum* testifies to the variety of definitions of “gentleman” that existed simultaneously in the late fifteenth century. While the author seems to be presenting a broad conception of the category, incorporating all of the gentle ranks from its most illustrious nobles down to its nether regions, the variety of ways that he outlines for attaining gentility is illuminating. Using the list in the *Liber Armorum* as a starting point, this section will examine some of the main paths to gentility that existed in fifteenth-century England: ancestry, service, occupation, and character.

Gentlemen of Ancestry

Birth or ancestry seems to be an obvious criterion for gentility. The gentle ranks were, after all, the lower ranks of the nobility, so one might expect a gentleman to possess it. McFarlane proposed that the gentry emerged out of a process of downward mobility: “the gentry . . . did not so much rise (though some did) during the later middle ages as fall from the nobility which their ancestors had enjoyed.”⁹⁰ He argues that, by the late fifteenth century, the titled lords had succeeded in separating themselves from the mass of other gentles, “being referred to more and more often as a superior category of person.” The status of the knights, esquires, and gentlemen who could not claim such a title fell correspondingly.⁹¹ With little else to distinguish them from commoners, these men valorized their bloodlines.

Many medieval authors likewise saw birth as a paramount requirement. Keen presents the statement of the late fifteenth-century Burgundian knight Olivier de la Marche as typical on this question: “The gentleman is he who from old springs from gentlemen and gentlewomen, and

⁹⁰ McFarlane, *Nobility of Later Medieval England*, 275.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 275.

such men and their posterity by marriage are gentle.”⁹² Olivier’s words repackaged an idea that was prominent throughout Europe during the medieval period, from the twelfth-century English cleric John of Salisbury to the late thirteenth-century Spanish writer Ramon Lull to the fourteenth-century Italian jurist Bartolus.⁹³ In the fourteenth century, Henry of Grosmont, the Duke of Lancaster, likewise presented *gentillesse* as depending largely upon lineage. While gentility of character was important, gentle parents were essential in rendering a man truly gentle himself.⁹⁴ Birth was clearly understood to be an incontrovertible qualification for gentility – the source from which all gentle qualities originated. A man descended from gentle stock would have no difficulty assuming the rank of gentleman. The grants of arms issued by heralds, which will be discussed further in Chapter 3, confirm this view, as ancestry is the first thing heralds looked for when investigating an individual’s worthiness to bear arms.

During the course of the fifteenth century, however, the importance of birth as a criterion for the gentleman began to diminish. By putting it first on its list, the *BSA* suggests that gentlemen of ancestry were the most obvious and important sort. Later discussion, however, indicates that this criterion was not absolutely necessary, for descriptions of different sorts of gentlemen indicate they are open to those of common ancestry. In the case of a “gentleman spiritual,” this is quite explicit as the author of the *Liber Armorum* defines it as a churl’s son elevated to the rank via membership in the clergy. Those with gentle bloodlines were necessarily gentlemen; others could achieve the rank by different means, but had to work a bit harder to justify their assumption of the label. Gentle qualities have by this time become so conflated with gentleman as a rank that it is difficult to determine which is being used at any given time. Most

⁹² Quoted in Maurice Keen, *Chivalry*, 150.

⁹³ Keen, *Chivalry*, 148-51. Nigel Saul, “Chaucer and Gentility” in *Chaucer’s England*, ed. Barbara Hanawalt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992) 41-2.

⁹⁴ This is discussed in Henry’s devotional text, *Le Livre de Seyntz Medicines*. John Barnie, *War in Medieval English Society* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1974), 63.

of the *Liber Armorum*'s descriptions seem to focus on the generic usages of gentleman, but its juxtaposition with a "churl's son" suggests a more specific social usage, if not a specific rank. This conflation is only exacerbated in the other pathways to gentility that emerged at this time.

Gentlemen through Service

Service was a second pathway to gentility that emerged during the late Middle Ages. These servants are designated in the *BSA* as "gentlemen apocryphal." This was the first context in which the term "gentleman" came to indicate a specific rank – though, in this case, a rank specific to the noble household rather than society at large. Individuals serving in a noble household could acquire gentle status for themselves through their intimacy with the elite: Peter Coss has referred to this as "gentility by association."⁹⁵ It was not uncommon to find sons and daughters of knights or even local landed esquires engaged in service of other nobles, generally as personal body servants or household officers. This was one way that lords consolidated their influence over the neighborhood surrounding their estates and built ties of affinity.⁹⁶ Having high status servants also increased the stature of the lord himself.⁹⁷ The status of household servants is apparent in the thirteenth-century *Rule* written by Bishop Robert Grosseteste to advise the Countess of Lincoln on how to manage her household. Grosseteste advises her to "Order your knights and gentle men wear your livery," indicating that men of this status belonged to the countess' household.⁹⁸ While such offices were frequently given to men of status, it was also possible to work one's way up through the ranks of the household to attain such a position. In

⁹⁵ Peter Coss, *The Lady in Medieval England* (Stroud, Gloucs.: Sutton Publishing, 1998), 52.

⁹⁶ C. M. Woolgar, *The Great Household in Late Medieval England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 37.

⁹⁷ Keen, *Origins of the English Gentleman*, 113.

⁹⁸ The French reads: "Comaundez a vos chivalers e a vos gentis hommes ki vos robes pernent." Quoted in Coss, *Lady in Medieval England*, 52.

such cases, the gentility associated with the position would rub off on its holder.⁹⁹ In his monograph on English noble households, C. M. Woolgar asserts that “In the early years of the fourteenth century, there can have been very few who did not consider service in the great household a position of privilege.”¹⁰⁰ The prestige associated with these positions did not diminish through the end of the Middle Ages.

The most prestigious positions of all were serving in the royal household. Many of them used the designation “gentleman.” The *Black Book of the Household of Edward IV* includes four gentleman ushers of the chamber as well as the gentlemen attendants that other nobles and household officers were permitted to keep in their personal retinues: one for a baron, one for each banneret, one for the king’s secretary, etc.¹⁰¹ The Ordinance for 1478 on the household adds to this, allowing two gentlemen for a duke and duchess, two for an earl and countess, two for a bishop, two for a Lord Chamberlain, and so forth. This text also mentions gentlemen marshals and gentlewomen waiting on the queen.¹⁰² In addition to the service ranks that matched his social status, a gentleman could fill the position of esquire for the body or squire of the household, thus increasing his personal rank through the position he held. During the reign of Henry IV, Richard Hakedy was elevated to the position of king’s esquire because of his service as apothecary to the king and continued to use “esquire” as his status.¹⁰³ In fact, royal servants were often rewarded for their service via an elevation of their personal status. Thomas Norton of Bristol, another apothecary, was issued royal letters patent that elevated him to the rank of esquire.¹⁰⁴ In his *Boke of Nurture*, John Russell recognized that this sort of service conferred extra status upon the

⁹⁹ Keen *Origins of the English Gentleman*, 140.

¹⁰⁰ Woolgar, *Great Household*, 30.

¹⁰¹ A. R. Myers, ed., *The Household of Edward IV* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1959), 103, 110, 114.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 223-5.

¹⁰³ Sylvia Thrupp, *The Merchant Class of Medieval London* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1948), 269-70.

¹⁰⁴ Rosemary Horrox, “The Urban Gentry in the Fifteenth Century” in *Towns and Townspeople in the Fifteenth Century*, ed. J. A. F Thomson (Stroud, Gloucs.: Sutton, 1988), 24.

individual, advising the marshal of the household to treat any messenger sent by the king as one degree higher than his actual rank.¹⁰⁵ Cooper has found that by the late fifteenth century, royal courts frequently “recognize[d] that the styles of esquire and gentleman could be conferred by holding offices.”¹⁰⁶

Malcolm Mercer has argued that only a minority of gentry society engaged in this type of service, and most of those only did so for a short period of time. Opportunities for such service were not equally available in all parts of the kingdom and even where they were plentiful, many leading gentry did not take them up.¹⁰⁷ In describing their unwillingness to serve, Mercer notes that they “probably regarded public service as a double-edged sword,” and that for leading gentry, who already had status and power in their local communities, it was often viewed as an unnecessary risk.¹⁰⁸ This was particularly true during the period of the Wars of the Roses, around which Mercer centers his study. Mercer illustrates this risk through the story of Sir William Oldhall, a knight whose service to the Duke of York brought him elevated status and prestige – even getting him elected speaker of the commons in 1450 – but ultimately lost him everything through his attainder after the Battle of St Albans.¹⁰⁹ Certainly, a knight from an established family who already had manors and substantial wealth to his name risked much by throwing in his lot with a rebellious magnate. Yet the risks that made service seem unappealing to those whose social position was well-established provided greater opportunity for the socially ambitious – particularly those with little to lose. Serving in a noble affinity or at the royal court, even for a time, could provide access to patronage and positions that would allow for social

¹⁰⁵ F. J. Furnivall, ed., *The Babees Book*, EETS o. s. 32 (New York: Greenwood Press Publishers, 1868; reprint, Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2002), 191, ll. 1117-1126.

¹⁰⁶ Cooper, “Ideas of Gentility,” 49.

¹⁰⁷ Malcolm Mercer, *The Medieval Gentry* (London and New York: Continuum, 2012), 81-2.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 82.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 79-80.

elevation. Thomas Kemp of Wye, for example, was a landowner of unclear common status (likely a yeoman or husbandman) but through his service to Henry IV, alongside accumulating land and holding county offices, was able to set himself firmly among the landed gentry of Kent. His oldest son was recognized as Sir Thomas Kemp.¹¹⁰ His second son, John Kemp, was given a clerical education and, through service in the affinity of Archbishop Arundel, was fast-tracked through several positions in the church and the royal government, ultimately serving as a cardinal while Archbishop of York.¹¹¹ For these men, though the family's origins were humble, service brought increased wealth, career advancement, and ultimately elevation in status.

Mercer's observation about the temporary nature of service for those gentry who did opt to do it recalls the idea of life-cycle service described by Jeremy Goldberg for a very different class of servant. Goldberg's work examines the movement patterns of rural commoners in Yorkshire. He has found that young women tended to move into towns and suburbs during their teens and spend several years as domestic servants before marrying and starting their own families, typically in their mid-twenties. Domestic service, for these women, offered the opportunity to meet prospective marriage partners and earn money that might be put toward the establishment of a new household.¹¹² The practice of fostering gentle children in the households of social superiors creates a similar pattern. In both cases, these servants are put in positions where they can network with their social superiors, resulting in improved opportunities for their future lives, whether through beneficial marriage, career assistance, or other forms of patronage. While the type of service is very different – a page or gentleman-usher in a noble household

¹¹⁰ Jon-Mark Grussenmeyer, "The Kemps of Wye: A Dynasty of Lancastrian Servants." Paper presented at the 51st International Congress on Medieval Studies, Kalamazoo, MI, May 2016.

¹¹¹ Grussenmeyer, "The Kemps of Wye." R. G. Davies, "Kemp, John (1380/81–1454)," *DNB* <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/15328>> (accessed 5 Aug 2017).

¹¹² P. J. P. Goldberg, "Marriage, Migration, Servanthood and Life-Cycle in Yorkshire Towns of the Later Middle Ages: Some York Cause Papers Evidence" *Continuity and Change* 1:2 (1986): 141-69. Goldberg, *Women, Work, and Life Cycle in a Medieval Economy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992).

would not have perceived any kinship with a young girl who cooked and cleaned in the house of an urban tradesman – the pattern of sending young people out of their homes achieves the same end: increased opportunity for social advancement.

Gentleman of Occupation

A separate, but related, category of gentlemen encompassed those whose rank was due to their occupation. R. L. Storey has written about “gentlemen-bureaucrats,” those men whose service in the royal administration had conferred gentility upon them. In the 1420s, for example, the married clerks serving Henry VI began to regularly describe themselves as gentlemen. Storey notes that thirteen Exchequer clerks who were listed by other appellations in 1422 were described as gentlemen in subsequent years. Likewise a clerk of the Chancery, Thomas Haseley, was known as simply a clerk until 1430, when documents began referring to him as a gentleman. Storey believes that these men took up this designation solely on the basis of their “prominent official position.”¹¹³ In these cases, their close connection to the royal court conferred a degree of gentility onto these men. In some cases, gentility was bestowed onto royal servants more directly. A number of clerks were elevated in status during the reign of Henry VI: Simon Yerll, a clerk of the Exchequer, was made a gentleman; Robert Leversedge, a clerk in the Great Wardrobe, was described as *generosus* in his 1434 will; evidence from 1449 shows that Robert Walsham, an almonry clerk of the Chancery, was viewed as a gentleman.¹¹⁴ In one notable case of 1448, Henry ennobled and granted arms to Roger Keys and Nicholas Cloos for their role in the construction of his foundations at Eton and King’s College Cambridge.¹¹⁵

¹¹³ Storey, “Gentleman-Bureaucrats,” 99-100.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 99-100.

¹¹⁵ Keen, *Origins of the English Gentleman*, 114.

Gentry status could also be gained through a career in the military. While the rank of gentleman did not itself originate in a military context, the other gentle ranks did, and their military associations continued to cling to ideas of nobility and gentility. Military campaigns were still organized around the number of knights a particular lord could bring to the field. Even during the fifteenth century, as knights were increasingly serving in administrative capacities in their home counties and royal armies were relying more and more on men-at-arms, knighthood still had a military importance.¹¹⁶ It was not uncommon in this era to see men of common status rise through the ranks of the army by their own merit. Sir Robert Knolles seems to have begun his career as a bowman before being dubbed a knight in the late fourteenth century.¹¹⁷ Sir Bertin Entwistle likewise rose from a lowly man-at-arms in 1422, to the first among the men-at-arms in 1426, to knighthood by 1433, apparently on his own merits as a *solider*.¹¹⁸ Lesser ranks might be won through military service as well. Roger Jodrell's father was a modest Cheshire freeholder who increased his fortune through military service; his son used his career as a soldier to enter the retinue of Richard II and ultimately take up the title of esquire.¹¹⁹ Since the same ranks had military and social associations, those men promoted to knight and esquire on the battlefield carried those titles and their concomitant gentility with them when they returned home. Particularly during the first half of the fifteenth century when the war in France was going on, many men were needed to fill the roles of archer and man-at-arms. There was clearly a hierarchy among these positions, with men-at-arms slotted above archers in the military hierarchy. Adrian Bell and his colleagues note that the terms "gentle" and "esquire" were applied to men-at-arms, suggesting that service in this role required men to have a certain reasonably elevated social

¹¹⁶ Bell, *et. al.*, *Solider in Later Medieval England*, 55.

¹¹⁷ Bennett, *Community, Class, and Careerism*, 182. Bell, *et. al.*, *Soldier in Later Medieval England*, 69.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 77-9.

¹¹⁹ Bennett, *Community, Class, and Careerism*, 106.

status prior to taking up arms, or else that the military service itself was deemed to be socially uplifting.”¹²⁰ While it is still unclear whether a military career directly conferred gentility upon the men who pursued it, it is certain that it provided a degree of social opportunity for those who were adept at it. By gaining the rank of esquire or knight on the battlefield, a man could win himself a place in the gentle ranks.

Gentility was also frequently associated with some learned occupations. Primary among them was the law. A detailed knowledge of legal matters was useful to landowners, who frequently needed to navigate the courts to settle issues arising from inheritance as well as disputes with neighbors and tenants.¹²¹ It was also useful to those who sought positions in the royal administration.¹²² The 1475 *Book of Noblesse* laments that so many descendants of gentle families were wasting their time in the study of the law and presiding over the courts when they should be focused on feats of arms.¹²³ Though the book’s author disapproves, this indicates how widespread the practice of law had become among the fifteenth-century gentry. These individuals would not have agreed with the *Book of Noblesse*’s author that the practice of law was incompatible with gentility. Keen asserts that during the fifteenth century, professional legal knowledge began to carry with it some “social cachet.”¹²⁴ Coss refers to the gentry’s “colonization of the Inns of Court” during this period as legal knowledge became indispensable for effective estate administration.¹²⁵ The most famous example of a legal career that ended in

¹²⁰ Bell, *et. al.*, *Soldier in Later Medieval England*, 104.

¹²¹ Nicholas Orme, *From Childhood to Chivalry* (New York: Methuen, 1984), 71-2. Keen, *Origins of the English Gentleman*, 136-7. Peter Coss, *The Foundations of Gentry Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 215-6.

¹²² Christine Carpenter and Olivier Matteoni, “Offices and Officers” in *Government and Political Life in England and France, c. 1300-c. 1500*, ed. Christopher Fletcher, Jean-Phillippe Genet, and John Watts (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 83.

¹²³ John Gough Nichols, ed., *The Book of Noblesse* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1972); e-book, *Project Gutenberg* <<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/33953/33953-h/33953-h.htm>> (accessed 5 August 2017), 78.

¹²⁴ Keen, *Origins of the English Gentleman*, 136. Sylvia Thrupp, too, had previously noted that attorneys were starting to be viewed as gentlemen during the second half of the fifteenth century. Thrupp, *Merchant Class*, 242.

¹²⁵ Coss, *Foundations of Gentry Life*, 215.

gentle status is William Paston, the son of a peasant farmer who worked his way up to become one of the six justices serving on the Court of Common Pleas and set his sons up to be gentlemen.¹²⁶ Likewise John Heydon, an adversary of the Paston family, used the law as his springboard into the gentry in fifteenth-century Norfolk, despite his ancestors' origins as a humble bakers and husbandmen.¹²⁷ While a career in the law was not in itself enough to make one gentle, it could serve as a first step to increased status.

The idea that clerics were worthy of gentle status emerged during the middle of the fifteenth century. Similar to lawyers, men embarking upon clerical careers had to attain a certain level of education. Bennett argues that contemporaries would have seen clerical status less as a spiritual vocation than as a learned one.¹²⁸ An order of precedence in Russell's *Boke of Nurture* dictates that priests and other clerics were equivalent in rank and dignity to an esquire.¹²⁹ A parish priest's personal status and prestige was increased by possessing an ecclesiastical benefice and the concomitant responsibility to care for the souls of those residing within it. The tendency for younger sons of gentle rank to enter the Church and hold these positions likely contributed to this increase as well.¹³⁰ By the Tudor period, the gentility of clerics was well-accepted; letters patent issued by Henry VIII in 1530 discussing the duties of heralds indicate that arms ought to be granted to "spiritual persons of suitable degree."¹³¹

While military and learned occupations were generally deemed compatible with gentility, the relationship between gentle status and trade was fraught with complications. Sylvia Thrupp's

¹²⁶ Helen Castor, *Blood and Roses* (New York: HarperCollins, 2006), 19-35.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 69-70.

¹²⁸ Bennett, *Community, Class, and Careerism*, 147.

¹²⁹ Furnivall, ed., *Babees Book*, 188-9, l. 1065-72.

¹³⁰ Peter Heath, *English Parish Clergy on the Eve of the Reformation* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), 136-8.

¹³¹ Anthony Wagner, *The Records and Collections of the College of Arms* (London: Burkes Peerage, 1952), 56. The full text of the letter can be found in Wagner, *Heralds and Heraldry in the Middle Ages*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956), 9-10.

study of the medieval London merchant class demonstrates that gentlemen did not hesitate to engage in trade or any other money-making activity when the opportunity arose. Even such a wealthy knight as Sir John Fastolf had a side line exporting barley and malt. Having mercantile interests did not damage Fastolf's gentility, though they also did nothing to generate it.¹³² There certainly were merchants who rose to gentility during the fifteenth century, particularly in London and the wealthier towns, but their rise was due more to their wealth and ability to possess the cultural trappings of the gentle than to their profession itself. There were merchants who used their accumulated wealth to purchase estates and establish themselves as landed gentry.¹³³ The draper John Chertsey retired to an estate in Hertfordshire; the fishmonger John Peche acquired manors in four counties besides London and his descendants were of knightly status. While such purchases can be documented, it is more difficult to determine what level of resistance such newcomers to the gentry faced on a social level. The aforementioned gentlemen both had family connections that likely aided them in the transition: Chertsey's brother was Archbishop Sudbury and Peche had married an heiress who brought him much of his property.¹³⁴ It seems like the transition was not often achieved in the first generation.¹³⁵ In the mid-fourteenth century, the merchant financier John de Merington of Coventry, for example, purchased property for himself, served as justice of the peace and collector of royal subsidies for Warwickshire, and even had a special license for a private oratory at his manor – all signs of gentility. It was his son,

¹³² Thrupp, *Merchant Class*, 243-4. Coss, *Foundations of Gentry Life*, 266.

¹³³ It should be added that this desire was hardly universal. Many merchants focused on investing in commercial enterprises and developing their careers further rather than retiring from them. Coss, *Foundations of Gentry Life*, 270.

¹³⁴ Thrupp, *Merchant Class*, 281-2.

¹³⁵ Thrupp points out that a London citizen would have been unable to completely sever his ties to the city even while setting himself up as lord of a country manor. Citizenship was for life and it came with obligations, as did membership in livery companies, and any remaining property in the city had to be overseen. Being thus entangled in the affairs of the merchant class, it would have been difficult for any merchant to completely embrace the life of a country gentleman. Thrupp, *Merchant Class*, 279.

however, who earned the classification of esquire in the 1379 poll tax returns.¹³⁶ This may also explain why John Kebbyll moved from London to Sandwich – in London records he is identified as a stockfishmonger, but in Sandwich he seems to have set himself up as a gentleman.¹³⁷

Perhaps Kebbyll felt a change in society was necessary in order to effectively re-fashion himself a member of the gentry. For many, however, it would have seemed less desirable to leave the tight solidarity of the urban mercantile community for a new, potentially less welcoming milieu.¹³⁸

This picture is further complicated by intermarriage between the gentry and wealthy merchants. While the country gentry seem to have been too conscious of their own status to marry their daughters into the merchant class, they were less fastidious about their sons marrying merchants' daughters. Thrupp claims that “gentlemen were so unashamedly eager in their search for fat dowries, wherever they could sniff them out, that they may sometimes have aroused some caution and reluctance on the side of the merchant family.”¹³⁹ Despite this reluctance, she has determined that a significant number of merchant-class heiresses and widows married into the gentry. Matilda Fraunceys, the daughter of a fourteenth-century London alderman, married first a very wealthy London merchant, then a courtier of knightly rank, and finally the earl of Salisbury.¹⁴⁰ The dowries and inheritances accompanying women of the merchant class made them extremely attractive marriage partners. In these cases, rank was not seen as a barrier to marriage. While a merchant's daughter or widow did not bring any added status to her marriage

¹³⁶ As this is an early example, the term “gentleman” was not in active use during the lifetimes of either John or Thomas de Merington. If John had lived a century later, it is possible that he might have been recognized as a gentleman in his own right, since the term was used for men with far less wealth. Coss, *Foundations of Gentry Life*, 271-2.

¹³⁷ Thrupp, *Merchant Class*, 271.

¹³⁸ Christopher Dyer describes the merchants as a “self-conscious group” in his discussion of the world of John Heritage, a small-scale rural merchant and landowner in Warwickshire. Christopher Dyer, *A Country Merchant, 1495-1520* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 21.

¹³⁹ Thrupp, *Merchant Class*, 263-5.

¹⁴⁰ Thrupp, *Merchant Class*, 266.

with a man of gentle rank, her birth did not detract from his. A woman's status was far less consequential than that of a man, as will be discussed further later in the chapter. Her rank was dependent upon that of her father or husband, so as long as she could fulfill the responsibilities associated with her husband's position, it did not much matter where she came from. Marriage into the gentry made such a wife into a lady or gentlewoman and the connection with a gentle house might raise the prestige of her own family.

This brings us to the most significant factor blurring the line between merchants and the gentry: the increased contact between them, which resulted in the creation of a shared culture. Inter-marriage between gentle and merchant families facilitated this contact, as did several other factors. London merchants lived in the vicinity of great magnates, many of whom relocated their households to town houses when they were at court. Merchant fraternities invited government officials, often gentle or noble, to their banquets and even to become members.¹⁴¹ From the late fourteenth century, merchants in many counties served alongside knights and esquires in the commons. In 1376, the knights and merchants united during the Good Parliament to overthrow an unpopular court faction, forging a lasting political alliance between the two groups.¹⁴² Russell's *Boke of Nurture* does instruct a lord's marshal to seat "worshipful merchants" alongside esquires and gentleman at meals in the lord's hall.¹⁴³ Literary trends indicate that merchant families were reading the same sorts of texts as gentle readers, including romances and descriptions of court life alongside more practical texts in the miscellanies they commissioned.¹⁴⁴ Caxton saw this mixed group as the primary audience for his wares and worded his prologues to

¹⁴¹ Thrupp, *Merchant Class*, 256-7.

¹⁴² Coss, *Foundations of Gentry Life*, 278-9.

¹⁴³ Furnivall, ed., *Babees Book*, 187, l. 1037.

¹⁴⁴ N. F. Blake, "The Spread of Printing in English during the Fifteenth Century" *Gutenberg-Jahrbuch* 62 (1987), 33. Carol M. Meale and Julia Boffey "Gentlewomen's Reading" in *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain*, Vol. III 1400-1557, ed. Lotte Hellinga and J. B. Trapp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 527.

target them.¹⁴⁵ While the occupation of merchant was not gentle in itself, the development of a common culture among mercantile and gentry society created the potential for cross-over between these groups. The occupation of merchant, through the potential for great accumulations of wealth and interaction with gentle society, put a man in good position for social advancement, if he should desire it.

Gentleman of Character

The final category of gentleman is even more difficult to pin down than the others. Certain individuals seem to have been designated gentleman solely by reason of their character. Virtue was very closely tied to gentility in medieval thought. The *Liber Armorum*'s depiction of the Scriptural origins of gentility focuses on this, emphasizing that the correct behavior of Seth, Japheth and Sem is what rendered them gentlemen, and their descendants, who would presumably inherit their forebears' good qualities, would retain that rank. These two qualities were often presented as linked, yet there was a simultaneous understanding that virtue was ennobling on its own. While the virtues of Seth, Japheth and Sem were passed down to their lineages, these men were able to earn that rank for themselves. Nicholas Upton, who wrote on heraldry during the fifteenth century, saw gentility as something that could be acquired through reputation, something that is supported by some of the existing grants of arms that will be discussed in Chapter 3.¹⁴⁶

Notably absent from these paths to gentility is a discussion of land ownership and tenure. Power, wealth, and status in the Middle Ages were all tied to land ownership. Yet land tenure

¹⁴⁵ Tracy Adams, "'Noble, wyse and grete lords, gentilmen and marchauntes': Caxton's Prologues as Conduct Books for Merchants" *Parergon* 22:2 (2005): 53-76.

¹⁴⁶ Cooper, "Ideas of Gentility," 48-9.

tends to be a minor point in most discussions of the medieval gentleman and his status. More often, the conversation revolves around the factors discussed in this section: birth, service, and occupations. The term “gentleman” may have been in use in the countryside, but I suspect it was more frequently in use at court, in noble households, and in the cities. The greatest potential for social mobility seems to have been located in these environments. These were places that had increasing numbers of men with pretensions to increased status but without claim to a better gentle title – men who ultimately took up the moniker “gentleman” as an expression of their social level. One reason for this may be the lack of available land for purchase during the fifteenth century. Christine Carpenter has declared that social mobility was slowest in England during the fifteenth century, for at this time there was less new land becoming available for purchase, unlike the thirteenth century when marginal lands were being taken into cultivation. She sees land ownership as necessary for social mobility, so during the fifteenth century when no land was available, mobility must have slowed.¹⁴⁷ I disagree that this was the case. During the fifteenth century, the proliferation of paths to gentility that did not require land ownership suggests that the status had become divorced from its landed associations and was moving in a different direction. Social mobility was a distinct possibility during the fifteenth century, but it operated differently than Carpenter anticipated. The most important opportunities existed in the courts, in noble affinities, and in the cities – places where a bit of wealth, some polish, and good networking could open the doors to the power and privilege that were primarily accessed through land ownership in previous centuries. As gentility moved away from its association with landed nobility during this period, it instead became focused around the display of a particular set of

¹⁴⁷ Christine Carpenter, “England: The Nobility and the Gentry” in *Companion to Britain in the Late Middle Ages*, ed. S. J. Rigby (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 265-6.

characteristics, and those characteristics proved to be accessible to an increasing range of individuals, offering them the potential for social mobility.

This gets back to the multiple definitions of gentility itself, and the difficulty that even medieval people had in separating them from one another. Saul has emphasized that “gentility was viewed at the time as a quality, and accordingly was assessed in qualitative terms.”¹⁴⁸ In this section I have attempted to differentiate between gentleman as a status rank, and gentleman as a service or occupational rank, and the more generic gentle man, but the reality is that these individuals existed side-by-side in late medieval England. While it would be useful for modern scholars to be able to pin down a specific definition of gentleman as a status rank, contemporaries did not have a clear enough conception of it to do so. The terms “gentle” and “gentleman” were used loosely, to refer to a wide variety of people of certain ranks and occupations, united by a conception of greater-than-ordinary personal virtue. Conflation between the adjective indicating a set of characteristics and the noun indicating a specific social rank continued, and the blurring this caused prevented the establishment of “gentleman” as a clearly defined social rank. The medieval gentleman was not one kind of man, but many, as it remained a catch-all term for individuals who had something that set them above the common folk.

The Elusive Gentlewoman

So far, this discussion has been almost exclusively about men and their opportunities for social advancement, but how did this anxiety over status and its surrounding vocabulary affect women? The term “gentlewoman” emerged slightly later than its partner “gentleman,” yet it is in many ways dependent upon the masculine term for its meaning. Throughout the Middle Ages, the social ranks of women were generally dependent upon the ranks of the men who were

¹⁴⁸ His italics. Saul, “Chaucer and Gentility,” 49.

responsible for them: a woman was granted her father's rank until her wedding day, when she acquired her husband's. She could not alter this rank in her own right through the same sort of social mobility that was available to a man. Rather, she was subordinate to her father and/or husband in all things, including her social position. Medieval women did not possess their own ranks; they were primarily vessels through which the family's rank could be transmitted. A daughter reflected her father's rank as a means for attracting a husband; a wife reflected her husband's in order to pass it on to her children. Gentility, therefore, had less meaning for gentle women themselves than it did for the men with whom they were associated.

This is reflected in the paucity of feminine equivalents to masculine social terms. The term "lady" could be used to refer to the wife of an esquire, a knight, or a baron.¹⁴⁹ An alternative to "lady" used from the early fourteenth century was "dame," deriving from the Latin *domina*, the feminine version of *dominus* or "lord." It also referred somewhat generically to women of noble or gentle rank.¹⁵⁰ The term "gentlewoman" emerged as a counterpart to "gentleman," but it was slower in taking on a social connotation, as this section describes.¹⁵¹ Social terminology for women developed as an afterthought, to correspond to existing masculine terms. Yet this does not mean that social status was meaningless for women. I have avoided using the term "status" to this point, preferring "rank," because there is a distinct difference between them when it comes to women. Social rank, meaning a specific social position with a

¹⁴⁹ Interestingly, the 1483 dictionary *Catholicon Anglicum* has an entry for "a Knyghte wyffe," which is equated with the Latin *militissa*, as "Knyghte" is equated above it with *miles*. In this case, it is eminently clear that the status accorded with this rank derives from the woman's husband. The Latin *militissa*, however, if presented on its own, is more ambiguous, and could easily be misinterpreted to mean a female knight. The *Catholicon Anglicum*, however, is very clear that it should not be so, and the usage of the term does not seem to have been widespread in any case. In the late sixteenth century, William Harrison states plainly that "howsoever one be dubbed or made knight, his wife is by and by called 'Madam' or 'Lady' so well as the baron's wife." Sidney J. H. Herrtage, ed., *Catholicon Anglicum* EETS o. s. 75 (London: Early English Text Society, 1881), 205. Harrison, *Description of England*, 103.

¹⁵⁰ *MED*, s. v. "dame" (n.), def. 1a, 2. 3a.

¹⁵¹ The feminine forms in Latin (*generosa*) and Old French (*gentilfemme*) likewise developed out of their companion masculine forms.

recognized title, was largely masculine, trickling down to a woman through her husband or father. Social status, however, in the more general sense denoting where a person falls in the hierarchy of society, was something women had to worry about. As individuals of the same rank could have slightly different status within that rank. Many medieval texts subtly differentiate between individuals in this way: Russell's *Boke of Nurture* contains a hierarchy that specifies several ranks that were equal to "a squire of honor," and then another group of ranks who could be placed at the esquires' table.¹⁵² These two different groups of esquires were equal in rank, but not in status. While women did not have much latitude in changing their ranks, they did have the ability to control their status within those ranks.

This interplay between gender and status is reflected in a lengthy discussion of seating precedence in Russell's *Boke of Nurture*. One section of the poem provides a template that a marshal might use when seating guests of various ranks at his lord's table. At the end of the order of precedence, he mentions a few problem cases, including how the marshal might handle "some knight [who] is wedded to a lady of royal blood / and a poor lady to blood royal, manful & mighty of mode." The poem asserts that "the lady of blood royal shall keep the state that she afore in stood / the lady of low blood & degree keep her lord's estate."¹⁵³ In this case, the lowly rank of the second lady was erased upon her marriage as she assumed that of her husband. And while the elevated rank to which the first lady was born was able to override her marital identity, it did so because it was the rank of her father. Her royal blood remained significant despite her marriage. This demonstrates how the social identity of a woman in the Middle Ages was linked to that of the men in her life; most women could only hope to achieve any degree of social mobility through the movements of those men.

¹⁵² Furnivall, ed., *Babees Book*, 188-9, ll. 1065-72.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 190, ll. 1089-1092.

The exception to this was any status that might be gained through a position in service. Just as social opportunities were available to men during the course of their service in noble households, so were they to women. However, there were far fewer such positions available. While a gentle man might serve his lord in a variety of capacities, a gentle woman could only serve as an attendant or companion of the lady of the house, or, perhaps, a nurse or governess to the lord's young children.¹⁵⁴ While these positions could convey elevated status upon gentle women, the limited availability of appropriate posts in noble households meant that few women were able to take advantage of such opportunities.

For most late medieval women, the most significant way they could influence their own personal social status was through cultivating a reputation for upstanding character and virtue. A woman's reputation was her most important asset, influencing not merely the way that she was perceived, but the way her male relatives were as well. A virtuous woman could increase the status of those relatives by reflecting upon their own positive attributes; an unruly, rebellious woman who refused to conform to the standards of her social rank could bring shame and dishonor upon her relatives, their inability to control her behavior acting as a signal of their unworthiness. Through her reputation, a woman could exert some agency in determining not her social rank, but her status, and the status of her relatives, within that rank.

In the late Middle Ages, the term "gentlewoman" had a variety of connotations which reflect the social opportunity available to a woman during this period. In the fourteenth century, the term was primarily used as a general sort of honorific. During the fifteenth-century, it took on more specific connotations, referring variously to a specific social rank and a service rank within

¹⁵⁴ For a discussion of the relative absence of women from high-status households in late medieval England, see Woolgar, *The Great Household*, 34-5. For the role of women attendants in raising and educating noble children, see Kim Phillips, *Medieval Maidens: Young Women and Gender in England, 1270-1540* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 74-5.

a noble household. Yet the honorific nature of the term was never entirely eliminated by the others – it was merely subordinated to these more specific purposes, yet remained an intrinsic part of the understanding of the term. A gentlewoman was not merely a woman of a certain social rank or position within a noble household – she was a woman who carried out her social or service role with an air of virtue and respectability. This connotation suggests that, while a late medieval woman was typically unable to alter her personal social rank, she did have the ability to manipulate her status within that rank.

The earliest usages of the term “gentlewoman” noted in the Middle English Dictionary seem to fall into the category of general honorifics. The term appears as a form of address in the thirteenth-century sermon *Hali Meidenhad*, the author referring to his listeners – likely a group of anchoresses – as “gentle women.”¹⁵⁵ This could also be the sense in which the late fourteenth-century B-text of *Piers Plowman* uses the term in describing the Virgin Mary – “Gentle woman though she were / Was a pure poor maid” – although Langland could just as easily be referring to her rank as a daughter of the house of David.¹⁵⁶ Chaucer’s *Second Nun’s Tale*, written a few years later, uses the term in an unequivocal statement of status, with Cecile proclaiming “I am a gentle woman born.”¹⁵⁷ The use of the word “born” in this sense indicates the hereditary nature of this status, although it is unclear whether a specific social rank was intended. While Oxford English Dictionary citations indicate that in the early thirteenth century, the term “gentle” may have been used to accord respect to the audience for their virtuous and ascetic lifestyle, by the

¹⁵⁵ MED, s. v. “gentil-womman” (n.). “Gentile wummon [vr. gentile wimmen]..þe nabbeð [have] hwerwið buggen [to establish, live, have lodging] ham brudgume [bridegroom] o nont ham & 3eoueð ham to þeowdon of an eðeluker mon.” F. J. Furnivall, ed., *Hali Meidenhad* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1922); *Corpus of Middle English Prose and Verse* <<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/c/me/HMaid/1:1?rgn=div1;view=fulltext>> (accessed on 15 November 2013), 10.

¹⁵⁶ OED, s. v. “gentlewoman” (n.), def. 2.

¹⁵⁷ Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales: Complete*, ed. Larry Benson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000), 250, l. 425.

end of the fourteenth century, the term was associated with an increasingly specific status and was less likely to be used in this general sense.¹⁵⁸

Just as with “gentleman,” in the fifteenth century more specific meanings of “gentlewoman” entered the lexicon. The earliest example of the term as a service rank – defined as “a female attendant upon a lady of rank” – cited by the Oxford English Dictionary is in a late fifteenth-century translation of Ralph Higden’s *Polychronicon*, in which “gentlewoman” is used to translate the Latin *domicilla*, a young female attendant.¹⁵⁹ Yet this usage actually dates quite a bit earlier. In an order of precedence from c. 1399, the section on female ranks is called “the Order for Ladies & Gentlewoman.” After the various ranks of noblewomen and gentry, all the way down to the “wives of all Knights’ eldest Sons & all Knights’ Daughters,” come the “Gentlewomen of the Queen’s Chamber.”¹⁶⁰ While these women presumably had to have some elevated personal rank in order to secure such a situation, they are ordered in this case by virtue of their service position, not their birth. And they are not in the lowest position, either, coming before the “wives of younger Sons of Bannerette and Bachelor Knights,” and then “the wives of [Squires] and auncient Gentles,” suggesting that their service position bestowed upon them an extra degree of status.¹⁶¹ In his will dating from 1438, Richard Dixton, esquire, bequeathed £20 to “a gentle woman called Ionet Hawys.” The placement of this bequest after similar gifts to “the yeomen of my lord’s chamber,” “the officers of my said lord’s hall, pantry, Cellar, Butlerie & Kitchen,” and “my said lord’s servants of his stable” suggests that Ionet, too, served in the

¹⁵⁸ *OED*, s. v. “gentle” (adj.), def. 1a, 3a.

¹⁵⁹ *OED*, s. v. “gentlewoman” (n.), def. 2.

¹⁶⁰ Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Ashmole 857, fols. 138-9.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, fol. 139. The missing word in the line has been completed with reference to a 1431 order of precedence found in the same manuscript which essentially replicates the same hierarchy. The line reads: “Then the wives of Squires & Gentlemen of aunciency.” A 1479 order of precedence repeats the same arrangement. *Ibid.*, fols. 144, 141-2.

household of Dixton's lord, as an attendant upon the lord's wife or daughters.¹⁶² Twenty years later, Agnes Paston wrote her daughter Elizabeth to tell her "to use herself to work readily as other gentlewomen do" for Lady Pole, in whose household Elizabeth resided.¹⁶³ The usage of the term to refer to a position in service in a noble household continued into the sixteenth century, as a 1502 indenture engaging Margaret Hextall as a gentlewoman attending to the children of the duke of Buckingham attests. While Hextall's duties were that of nurse and schoolmistress rather than attending on a noble lady, the title given her position was the same.¹⁶⁴ Similar to the term "gentleman" when it was used in the sense of a service rank, the suggestion is that a woman who was appointed to serve in a noble household was herself gentle, whether by birth or simply by the association of functioning in a gentle environment. Her position – whether as companion to a great lady or educator of noble children – required her to exhibit gentle manners and involve herself in gentle pastimes. Whatever her natal status, her environment imbued her with gentility and enhanced her personal status.

The use of the term "gentlewoman" to refer to a specific social rank seems to date from the middle of the fifteenth century. The 1440 *Promptorium Parvulorum Sive Clericorum*, an East Anglian English-to-Latin dictionary compiled by Geoffrey the Grammarian, equates the word "gentlewoman" with the Latin *generosa*, the feminine form of *generosus*, the term used to denote the social rank of gentleman.¹⁶⁵ Several other examples appear in the gentry letter collections. In 1454, John Paston I wrote a letter to his patron, the Earl of Oxford, begging him to have pity on Agnes Denyes, a gentlewoman married to one of the earl's retainers who had been cruelly

¹⁶² F. J. Furnivall, ed., *The Fifty Earliest English Wills in the Court of Probate, London, AD 1387-1439, with a Priest's of 1454*, EETS o. s. 78 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1882; reprint, 1964), 110.

¹⁶³ Orme, *From Childhood to Chivalry*, 58-9.

¹⁶⁴ Orme, *Education and Society in Medieval and Renaissance England* (London and Ronceverte: The Hambledon Press, 1989), 159-60.

¹⁶⁵ Albert Way, ed., *Promptorium Parvulorum Sive Clericorum* (London: Camden Society, 1865), 190.

imprisoned for a crime her husband had committed. It is clear that “gentlewoman” in this context refers to a social rank rather than a service rank because Paston reminds the earl that Agnes, with her personal wealth, could have married a gentleman, but instead chose the earl’s penniless retainer because of his intervention.¹⁶⁶ In this instance, it is quite clear that the term “gentlewoman” refers to Agnes’ social status, a status that was derived from her birth rather than her marriage. In a 1465 letter, Paston used the term in addressing his own wife, Margaret. In the course of a dispute between Paston and the Duke of Suffolk over several manors, Paston wrote to Margaret that since he could not be present, it was her duty to ride to those manors and ensure their loyalty, for “ye be a gentlewoman, and it is worship for you to comfort your tenants.”¹⁶⁷ This injunction not only affirms Margaret’s social rank, but shifts unto her the duties that went along with that rank. Margaret’s gender does not exempt her from the responsibilities of lordship – at least, in the absence of her husband. The letter gives the sense that Margaret’s rank supersedes her gender in this hour of urgent need. Reference to gentlewoman as a social rank is also found in the oaths of heralds recorded in a late fifteenth-century manuscript. Heralds are enjoined, “ye shall promise and swear to be secret and keep the secrets of knights, Squires ladies and Gentlewomen as a Confessor of Arms and not to discover them in no wise except it be

¹⁶⁶ Norman Davis, ed., *Paston Letters and Papers of the Fifteenth Century, Part I* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 80-1. Agnes Denyes was, apparently, a woman of some means, possessing property worth 500 marcs or more, according to John Paston’s letter. In the introduction to his edition of the Paston letters, James Gairdner recounts the complicated back story to this letter: When his poor retainer Thomas Denyes desired to marry Agnes, the Earl of Oxford deputed Paston to arrange the match, promising his own liberal patronage to the couple as an inducement to Agnes. After the marriage had taken place, Denyes was sued by an enemy, Walter Ingham. In order to get back at Ingham, Denyes forged a summons from the Earl, which got Ingham on the road to the Earl’s estate, where Denyes and his men ambushed him. Ingham was maimed for life in the ambush. Incensed at this unauthorized use of his name, the Earl ensured that Denyes was imprisoned without bail. Agnes, though uninvolved in the ambush and pregnant at the time, was imprisoned in a different location. Denyes wrote to Paston begging him to intercede with the Earl on his behalf and Paston graciously acceded, imploring the Earl in his letter to have mercy on this suffering woman, who was only involved in the affair because the Earl himself induced her to marry Denyes. James Gairdner, ed., *The Paston Letters, 1422-1509 AD* (Westminster: Archibald Constable and Co, 1901); *Medieval Family Life* database, Adams Matthew Digital (accessed on 19 October 2013), clix-clxii.

¹⁶⁷ Davis, ed., *Paston Letters and Papers*, Vol I, 133.

treason.”¹⁶⁸ The juxtaposition of these terms suggests a correlation between the ranks, with “ladies” equating with “knights” and “Gentlewomen” with “Squires.” That heralds were required to be of service to women as well as their armigerous husbands and fathers indicates that the heralds saw them as full participants in the affairs and duties of their rank.

In certain fifteenth-century references to “gentlewomen,” the use of the term seems more complicated, the straightforward social rank mixing with the earlier sense of an honorific title that recognized the woman’s personal virtue. This is the same sort of conflation between the noun and adjectival forms of gentleman as a masculine category. The letter collections of the Paston, Stonor, and Plumpton families contain a number of examples of this, most often in the context of marriage arrangements. In some letters, the prospective marriage partner is referred to as a “gentlewoman” without any embellishment upon her character or features: a letter from the Earl of Oxford to John Paston I dating from c. 1450 urges Paston to press the suit of his retainer, Thomas Denyes, on “a gentlewoman not far from you,” the unfortunate future Agnes Denyes.¹⁶⁹ Likewise, a 1474 letter from Thomas Stonor to his wife-hunting brother William reminds him “how greatly in conceit ye stand with a gentlewoman in London.”¹⁷⁰ These references could refer simply to the social position of these women, but other letters contain additional detail that suggests the term held further connotations.

A number of later letters describing potential marriage partners elaborate on their status as gentlewomen, citing additional areas of merit including wealth and personal virtue. In 1472, Thomas Mull wrote to Thomas Stonor informing him that “my Cosen Willyam hath been with a full goodly Gentlewoman, and communed with her after love’s lore.” Mull goes on to describe

¹⁶⁸ London, British Library, MS Stowe 668, fol. 42v.

¹⁶⁹ Davis, ed., *Paston Letters and Papers*, Vol II, 151-2.

¹⁷⁰ Christine Carpenter suggests that this could be a reference to William Stonor’s first wife, Elizabeth. Carpenter, ed., *Kingsford’s Stonor Letters and Papers 1290-1483* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 54, 148-9.

the status of the woman's ex-husband, the details of her inheritance from her father as well as her widow's portion, and ends with an assertion that "for certain she is well named, and of worshipful disposition."¹⁷¹ The term "goodly" could indicate either the fairness of the woman's countenance or her admirable qualities – or, perhaps, it encompassed both. The reference to her "worshipful disposition" is clearer, indicating this was a woman of admirable character and personality. Since the woman's name is not given in the course of the letter, the phrase "well named" might refer to the applicability of the term "gentlewoman" to a woman of her wealth and virtue. A similar description can be found in a 1496-7 letter from Edward Plumpton to Sir Robert Plumpton, asking Sir Robert to approve of his prospective wife. Edward describes her as "a gentlewoman, a widow of the age of XL years and more, and of good substance; first, she is goodly and beautiful, womanly and wise, as ever I knew any, none other dispraised: of a good stock and worshipful. Her name is Agnes."¹⁷² In a subsequent letter, he proclaims her "imbued with great grace and virtue" and "wise and goodly, and of great substance, and able for a better man than I am."¹⁷³ Edward Plumpton's description of Agnes highlights her wealth, personal appearance,¹⁷⁴ ancestry, and character. The construction of Plumpton's sentence suggests that all of these attributes are merely elaborations on Agnes' status as a gentlewoman, implying that they are all characteristics of her gentlewomanliness.¹⁷⁵ In these letters, when the term "gentlewoman" is used to refer to women who were under consideration as potential marriage partners, it is employed in such a way that ties the social position, virtue and suitability of the women together in one convenient verbal package. It is likely, therefore, that the aforementioned

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 211-2.

¹⁷² Thomas Stapleton, ed. *The Plumpton Correspondence* (London: Camden Society, 1839; reprint, Stroud, Gloucestershire: Alan Sutton, 1990), 123-4.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 124-5.

¹⁷⁴ Again, "goodly" might encompass elements of her character as well, but its connection to "beautiful" suggests it, too, refers to Agnes' appearance. *OED*, s. v. "goodly" (adj.), def. 1a.

¹⁷⁵ My reading of the sentence in this case is influenced by the editor's choice of punctuation.

letters which simply proclaim a prospective marriage partner as a “gentlewoman” assume that the reader will understand the term not merely as an indicator of status, but of admirable wealth, virtue and character as well.

The connection between gentlewomen, virtue, and respectability was co-opted by the silkwomen of London in their fifteenth-century petitions to the king to protect their trade from foreign competitors. In the 1455 petition, the silkwomen – who may have been the wives and daughters of mere artisans – describe themselves as “gentlewomen” repeatedly in an effort to establish the virtuous and dignified nature of their work.¹⁷⁶ The petition proclaims that

it is pleasing to God that all his creatures be set in virtuous occupation and labor according to their degrees, and convenient for those places where their abode is, to the nourishing of virtue, and eschewing of vices and idleness. And where upon the same crafts, before this time, many a worshipful woman within the said city have lived full honorably, and therewith many good households kept, and many gentlewomen and other in great number like as there now be more than a thousand, have be drawn under them in learning the same crafts and occupation full virtuously, unto the plesauce of God, whereby afterward they have grown to great worship.¹⁷⁷

Therefore, they argue that the king should assist “them that have occupied the same crafts, which be convenient, worshipful and according for gentlewomen, and other women of worship.”¹⁷⁸ The claim to gentility made by these women is an intriguing one, having little to do with ancestry or birth and, in fact, coming into conflict with the traditional dissociation of gentility and manual labor.¹⁷⁹ While there is evidence of a few daughters of the gentry being apprenticed to silkwomen, most were from middling artisan families.¹⁸⁰ The silkwomen do not call upon their own or their husbands’ wealth as support for their gentility. They rather insist that they are

¹⁷⁶ Stephanie Trigg, “‘Ye Louely Ladyes with youre Longe Fyngres’: The Silkwomen of Medieval London” *Studia Anglica Posnaniensia: International Review of English Studies* 38 (2002), 470-3.

¹⁷⁷ Anne Curry and Rosemary Horrox, eds., “Henry VI: Parliament of July 1455, Text and Translation,” in *The Parliament Rolls of Medieval England*, ed. C. Given-Wilson et al. Internet version, at <<http://www.sd-editions.com/PROME>>, accessed on 16 November 2013 (Scholarly Digital Editions, Leicester: 2005).

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁹ It is likely that the silkwomen’s pursuance of a commercial occupation was less significant, in this sense, than the fact that the occupation itself – silk embroidery – was traditionally seen as acceptable for women of gentle and noble status.

¹⁸⁰ Thrupp, *Merchant Class*, 215. Trigg, “‘Ye Louely Ladyes with youre Longe Fyngres,” 473-4.

women of worship and virtue – respectable women practicing a traditional and commendable trade. Their association of gentility with virtue and a good reputation is consistent with the picture of gentlewomen painted by the gentry letters discussed above, and evidence that the honorific connotation of the term remained strong during the fifteenth century.

This evidence clearly indicates that multiple meanings of gentility existed alongside one another. The late fifteenth-century Harleian ordinances – a set of guidelines for running a noble household – also acknowledge this. In a discussion of precedence at table, the ordinances rule that “gentlewomen of presence” ought to sit alongside the knights, while the chamberers and the lady’s gentlewomen should sit at the next table down.¹⁸¹ The term “gentlewomen of presence” is suggestive of social rank – women of sufficient personal status to be seated alongside the knights. The lady’s gentlewomen were, presumably, female attendants in a service position. The use of the term “gentlewomen” to refer to these two groups within the same document suggests that there were multiple late medieval understandings of the term in circulation at the same time, and potentially conflating with one another.

These multiple meanings suggest that a certain degree of social opportunity was available to women in fifteenth-century England. While most women were confined to the rank bestowed upon them by their male relatives, a limited number of women who had access to noble patrons could achieve a degree of social advancement through their own efforts in service as attendants in the households of those nobles. Even more significant, however, is the association between gentility and virtue in discussions of late medieval gentlewomen. This associations suggests that, while a woman did not generally control her own social rank, she was able to determine the *degree* of status she would hold within that rank through her personal conduct and reputation. In other words, a woman married to a gentleman would automatically be known as a gentlewomen.

¹⁸¹ Kim Phillips, *Medieval Maidens*, 117.

However, she had the agency to determine whether she would be known as a worthy or an unworthy gentlewoman. This reputation for virtue or vice would then influence her standing – and that of her husband or father – within the community.

Sub-Gentle Categories

In order to fully understand what made one gentle, it is also important to look at those ranks of society which were decidedly not. Many studies of the gentry begin by placing it matter-of-factly between the peerage and the yeomanry, with little to no explanation of what that yeomanry was.¹⁸² Above the yeomanry are some other social terms, such as grazier and franklin, that are typically understood as bumping up against the edge of the gentle ranks. This section will examine these terms in order to understand why these groups were not deemed to possess the qualities associated with gentility.

Like that of “gentleman,” “yeoman” was a social term that came into vogue after the 1413 Statute of Additions. It first came into use in a service context. The Middle English word, potentially derived from *yongman* or *yonger-man*, came into use during the fourteenth century as a translation for the Latin *valettus*. This was a household rank with military overtones – a servant of elevated status who had the training and equipment necessary to accompany his lord to war.¹⁸³ In horse inventories, *valettus* was used to refer to sub-knightly men-at-arms, similar to *scutifer*, the equivalent of esquire, though the terms were frequently employed in different types of documents. The social status of the *valettus* in the early fourteenth century seems more on par with the esquire, since many men-at-arms with this designation eventually became knights. As

¹⁸² See, for example: R. H. Tawney, “The Rise of the Gentry, 1558-1640” *Economic History Review* 11 (1941), 4. Susan Wright, *The Derbyshire Gentry in the Fifteenth Century* (Derbyshire Record Society vol. viii, 1983), 1. Mercer, *Medieval Gentry*, 11.

¹⁸³ *OED*, s. v. “yeoman” (n.), def. 1a. Richard Almond and A. J. Pollard, “The Yeomanry of Robin Hood and Social Terminology in Fifteenth-Century England” *Past and Present* 170 (2001), 52.

the century progressed, however, its status declined; in military contexts, the *valetti* served largely as archers, placing them beneath the esquires who served as men-at-arms and stripping the rank of any sense of gentility.¹⁸⁴ In the noble and royal household, however, the yeoman could still be a person of elevated status. John Crafford of Sandwich was described as an esquire in the records of the Cinque Ports while serving as yeoman of the crown, but lost that status when he relinquished the office.¹⁸⁵

Toward the end of the fourteenth century, the term “yeoman” came into use as a social category generally referring to a wealthy peasant landowner, though in doing so it lost some of its elevated status, falling to a place below gentleman and above husbandman on the social scale.¹⁸⁶ Denholm-Young notes that “a yeoman at court and a yeoman farmer . . . [were] hardly on the same social level,” indicating that, as with gentlemen, there were multiple meanings of the same term operating simultaneously.¹⁸⁷ Sir John Fortescue wrote that £5 was the expected annual income for a yeoman, but wealthier individuals could certainly be found.¹⁸⁸ In delineating the lower income limit of the gentleman in fifteenth-century Derbyshire, Susan Wright notes the difficulty of settling on a figure that does *not* overlap with substantial yeomen and merchants.¹⁸⁹ As is argued in the previous chapter, income levels are not always accurate assessments of social status; this is as true for the yeoman as the gentleman.

One of the significant difficulties in pinning down the criteria for yeoman status is that, unlike gentleman, it did not come with a confusing but convenient adjective indicating its essential qualities. While there are plenty of medieval texts that discuss ideas of gentility at

¹⁸⁴ Bell, *et. al.*, *Solider in Later Medieval England*, 150-2.

¹⁸⁵ Horrox, “Urban Gentry,” 29.

¹⁸⁶ *OED*, s. v. “yeoman” (n.), def. 3. Almond and Pollard, “Yeomanry of Robin Hood,” 52-3.

¹⁸⁷ Denholm-Young, *Country Gentry*, 26. Almond and Pollard, “Yeomanry of Robin Hood,” 53.

¹⁸⁸ Bell, *et. al.*, *Solider in Later Medieval England*, 261.

¹⁸⁹ Wright, *Derbyshire Gentry*, 5-6.

length, there are none discussing ideas of yeomanry, so it is much more difficult to tease out the yeoman's position and requisite accomplishments. A common but confusing conclusion is that yeomen fell below the rank of gentleman because the yeomen lacked gentility. Keen notes that "for all his wealth, a rich yeoman was not genteel; whereas the younger son of a gentleman, perhaps living on an annuity of £5-£6 charged on his elder brother's estate under his father's will, undoubtedly was."¹⁹⁰ No matter a yeoman's income, he was not considered worthy of representing his shire in Parliament.¹⁹¹ Yet while a yeoman lacked gentility, he did possess superior qualities to common landowners, such as husbandmen, who fell below him. He could not serve in Parliament, but he could vote in Parliamentary elections; he was not armigerous; he owned his own land, but did not possess a manor or rights of lordship.¹⁹² Early modern commentators such as Harrison see yeomen as men of relative wealth which qualified them to hold local positions as parish officers or jurors and who frequently aspired to gentility through their lifestyles.¹⁹³ Even during the fifteenth century, yeomen were encroaching upon the cultural preserves of the gentle. Michael Johnston notes that the Sherbrookes, a yeoman family from Derbyshire, commissioned manuscripts containing texts frequently associated with the gentry – romances like *Sir Isumbras* and *Sir Amadace*. Yet he argues that they do so not as consumers of their own culture, but as voyeurs into a lifestyle to which they aspired.¹⁹⁴ Gentry historians like Wright and Carpenter, who have done detailed studies of county records, confirm this perception. Wright sees the distinction between these social ranks as so blurred that she lumps them together as "gentlemen-yeomen" – a group of individuals with a certain level of wealth and

¹⁹⁰ Keen, *Origins of the English Gentleman*, 110.

¹⁹¹ Keen, "Heraldry and Hierarchy," 97.

¹⁹² Michael Johnston, *Romance and the Gentry in Late Medieval England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 149.

¹⁹³ Keith Wrightson, "Estates, Degrees and Sorts: Changing Perceptions of Society in Tudor and Stuart England" in Penelope Corfield, ed., *Language, History and Class*, ed. Penelope J. Corfield (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 41-2.

¹⁹⁴ Johnston, *Romance and the Gentry*, 149-54.

the potential of serving in county government, but who did not maintain this position across multiple generations.¹⁹⁵ Carpenter notes that certain individuals who were considered gentlemen in local records were described as yeomen or franklins in the king's courts.¹⁹⁶ The status of such marginal figures was not fixed, but was relative to the perception of those who classified them. Despite partaking somewhat in gentle culture, the wealthiest yeoman still had something preventing him from laying claim to a gentle title. F. R. H. Du Boulay has quipped that "the good yeoman is a gentleman in ore, whom the next age may see refined."¹⁹⁷ They have checked off some of the boxes on the list of criteria for gentility, but not enough for that gentility to be fully realized. As the following chapters will discuss, an aspiring gentleman had to perform his status correctly in the eyes of the world; it may be that the yeomen were performers who had not yet learned their lines.

This picture is complicated further by the franklin - an occasionally-used status term that seems to fall somewhere in between gentleman and yeoman. It is not a social term that is frequently used in the fifteenth century, so that when it does appear it presents scholars with a curious puzzle. A franklin is, essentially, a free tenant, but very early on in their history they seem to have had a more elevated status than other free tenants, perhaps no more than as respected members of the rural community. In an examination of twelfth-century manorial surveys, Rodney Hilton presents the *francolani* as "a small near-aristocratic group, socially close to the knights, and merging into them."¹⁹⁸ They pop up in the 1379 poll tax, which decrees that "franklins, sergeants and farmers of manors" had to pay 6s 8d or 3s 4d according to their means. Saul points out that this links the franklins "with esquires of lesser estate, who likewise paid 6s

¹⁹⁵ Wright, *Derbyshire Gentry*, 6.

¹⁹⁶ Carpenter, *Locality and Polity*, 75.

¹⁹⁷ Du Boulay, "First English Gentlemen," 688.

¹⁹⁸ Rodney Hilton, "Freedom and Villeinage in England" *Past and Present* 31 (1965), 8.

8d.”¹⁹⁹ As the gentle ranks expanded, the franklins seem to have been pushed further and further down the social ladder, from just below knights in the twelfth century, to the lower esquires in the fourteenth, to below the gentlemen at the beginning of the fifteenth. In a 1414 Staffordshire indictment discussed by Saul, an individual named John Jurdan is listed as both “fraunkeleyn” and “yoman.” Finally, the franklin makes a brief appearance in Fortescue’s *In Praise of the Laws of England*, written in the 1460s. When discussing the composition of juries under the English legal system, Fortescue mentions, “that in [England] no hamlet, however small, can be found in which there is no knight, esquire, or householder of the sort commonly called a franklin, well-off in possessions; nor numerous other free tenants, and many yeomen, sufficient in patrimony to make a jury.”²⁰⁰ In this list, the franklin represents the wealthiest of the free tenants, falling below the more obviously gentle members of the rural community. It is intriguing that gentlemen do not feature in this list at all.

In the previous sections, I have described the expansion of the term “gentleman” in the fifteenth century to include individuals from different walks of life: in the courts, in noble affinities, and in towns and cities. While more substantial research is necessary in order to confirm this, there does not seem to be an equivalent expansion in the use of the term in the countryside. Is it possible that “franklin” was essentially the rural equivalent of “gentleman?” As discussed above, the origins of “franklin” as a term designating social rank are associated with land tenure, indicating the franklin’s status as a free tenant. “Gentleman” is first used to indicate rank in a service context, while retaining a closely related adjectival sense indicating the possession of gentle qualities. While they originally referred to different groups, as social terminology proliferated during the fifteenth century along with the need to accurately and

¹⁹⁹ Saul, “Social Status of Chaucer’s Franklin,” 12.

²⁰⁰ Sir John Fortescue, *On the Laws and Governance of England*, ed. Shelley Lockwood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 43.

minutely label an individual's status, the two terms became conflated. The intermixing of the two groups may have exacerbated the confusion, as gentlemen-ushers from the royal court settled down on country estates and franklins sent their sons to noble households to acquire polish. Normal social movement was likely responsible for the opening-up of these venue-specific terms. When the ladder of social hierarchy was definitively hammered out during the sixteenth century, the franklins were appointed to a slot just outside the ranks of the gentle. Perhaps, living in the rural countryside, they were less successful than the urban elite, courtiers, and bureaucrats in acquiring those qualities and characteristics that had become associated with the gentlemen.

A final category that must be considered here is that of the grazier. The grazier, an important figure in the early modern countryside, is left out of most studies of the medieval gentry. The reason for this is that many such studies are focused on understanding the political community of the county, while the role of the grazier was an economic one. The term "grazier" came into use during the early sixteenth century to refer to those individuals whose primary function was pasturing cattle or, more frequently, sheep for market, though the practice existed through most of the fifteenth century.²⁰¹ While the Oxford English Dictionary dates the first reference to c. 1523, the term appears in Dudley's *Tree of the Commonwealth* in 1509. As discussed above, Dudley mentions graziers alongside franklins and tillers as rural members of the commonalty.²⁰² The graziers were an occupational, not a social, category that could incorporate the gentry, though it did not have to. Many gentlemen and yeomen converted their estates from tillage to pasturage during the fifteenth century, taking advantage of the depopulation caused by the plague;²⁰³ the Townshend family of Norfolk was among them, with

²⁰¹ *OED*, s. v. "grazier" (n.), def. 2a.

²⁰² Dudley, *Tree of the Commonwealth*, 44-5.

²⁰³ The process of enclosing common land to use as pasturage has been viewed as an assault by proto-capitalist gentry landowners on traditional village life. Studies of the fifteenth century countryside, however, like that of

the bulk of their income coming from sheep-farming.²⁰⁴ Yet the term is not only used to describe those devoting their land to grazing, but also those more actively involved in pasturing the animals; Dyer notes that a grazier could be “a merchant, gentleman, yeoman, or butcher.”²⁰⁵ Pasturing animals offered opportunities for peasants to increase their personal wealth, as the fifteenth-century gentry distanced themselves from direct involvement in their lands, frequently choosing to lease it to entrepreneurs.²⁰⁶ John Salbrygge used grazing as a stepping-stone to increased wealth and position, beginning as a humble husbandman, before serving as an agent and supporter of the Catesby family. His increased wealth and high-status associates may have helped him rise to an office-holder of the Holy Cross Guild at Stratford, of which he was an active member and recruiter throughout much of his life. This position in the guild indicates that his occupation helped Salbrygge become a respected, high-status figure in his community.²⁰⁷ It did not, however, gain him gentility. While grazing was an economic activity engaged in by some gentry, the occupation itself was not enough to confer gentility on those who were common.

The sub-gentle ranks of yeoman, franklin, and grazier demonstrate the stickiness of social terminology during the fifteenth century. During a period of flux in which old and new categories were competing for space in the social world, none of these terms had a clear definition or place in the social hierarchy. All three remained on the fringes of gentility, frequently associated with gentlemen and even, at times, used by them, but ultimately falling

Rodney Hilton, indicate that depopulation was already taking place. Enclosure was not the cause of depopulation, but rather an effect, as landowners looked to make better use of land that they lacked tenants to farm. Rodney H. Hilton, *The English Peasantry in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 162-5. Christopher Dyer, *An Age of Transition? Economy and Society in England in the Later Middle Ages* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), 194-7.

²⁰⁴ For a detailed account of the Townshends' grazing interests, see C. Moreton, *The Townshends and their World* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 162-90.

²⁰⁵ Dyer, *Country Merchant*, 146. Hilton, *English Peasantry*, 169.

²⁰⁶ Dyer, *Age of Transition*, 4.

²⁰⁷ Dyer, *Country Merchant*, 211-2.

short of embodying its qualities. That all three of these were rural categories is significant. Real social change – not simply tacking new labels onto existing groups – was taking place at court and in the towns and cities where a common gentle culture was developing and circulating, not in the countryside. The low-level landowners who were not involved in elite households or urban ceremonials were ill-placed to keep up with the changes in gentle behavior, language, and culture that were taking place during this century. When social hierarchies were solidified in the sixteenth century, these groups did not display gentle characteristics sufficiently to warrant inclusion. Yet social opportunity was still available to these groups, if they desired advancement. The texts that will be discussed in Chapters 4-6 explained these changes and taught the socially ambitious how to fashion themselves in the mold of gentlemen.

The Fluidity of Gentle Status

This complex issue of understanding the limits of these social categories becomes even more complicated with the awareness that even the most important of social divisions – between gentle and common – was permeable and mutable. For many at this level of society in the fifteenth century, status was not static. There are plenty of examples of upward social mobility in the late Middle Ages, particularly the fifteenth century, as ambitious or talented individuals managed to improve their social position. Several of these have been discussed earlier in this chapter. Examples of downward mobility likewise exist, though they are more difficult to trace, as individuals, often through financial misfortune, dropped to lower status levels. The most interesting cases, however, are those who appear in documents under different titles, straddling the line between social groups. These individuals seem to have chosen to adopt different status

markers for themselves at different times, shifting from common to gentle and back again as the occasion demanded.

Miri Rubin has written that “one might usefully think of identity as a set of overlapping circles.”²⁰⁸ Some individuals, particularly those in marginal positions, accumulate more circles than others. There are a number of examples of late medieval individuals choosing to be identified by both their gentle status and their profession. Rosemary Horrox, in her research into the urban gentry, has uncovered a number of these individuals. William Vescy of York was admitted to the franchise of the city as a gentleman in 1439, but described himself as a merchant in his 1477 will.²⁰⁹ Roger Thornton of Newcastle’s status as a gentleman was confirmed by his coat of arms, yet he likewise chose to be referred to as a merchant on his tomb.²¹⁰ Henry Wilton was admitted to the freedom of the city of Norwich as both a scrivener and a gentleman, and Robert Haridance was entered as a gentleman and a physician. A 1509 pardon lists Thomas Hall of Huntingdon as both gentleman and physician as well.²¹¹ Du Boulay raises an even more interesting case – that of one John Thanie of Fairford, junior who is described variously as husband, merchant, gentleman, woolman, and yeoman. He suggests that Thanie understood his status was ambiguous and sought “to pepper the legal target with shots in order to make certain that at least one of them hit the bull’s-eye.”²¹² Perhaps, but there is an alternative: Thanie could have fit *all* of these social and occupational roles at different times. The degree of difference between a gentleman and yeoman – the next status rank down - could be slight. Like Vescy, Thanie could have continued his occupation as merchant (specializing in wool, perhaps) while

²⁰⁸ Miri Rubin, “Identities” in *A Social History of England 1200-1500*, ed. Rosemary Horrox and W. Mark Ormrod (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 391.

²⁰⁹ Horrox, “Urban Gentry,” 42 n. 68.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 26.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, 30.

²¹² F. R. H. Du Boulay, *An Age of Ambition* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1970), 70.

retaining the status of a gentleman. As Du Boulay rightly states, the social categories in use during the fifteenth century were full of ambiguity, but that ambiguity engendered flexibility, so that an individual like Thanie could define himself in a variety of ways to suit different aspects of his career, rather than attempt to fit himself into a rigidly defined social role.

This fluidity is even more apparent when families are examined. In his study of careerists among the Cheshire and Lancashire gentry, Bennett has found a number of families whose interests walked the line between gentle and common:

The Fairfaxes and Ferribys from Yorkshire served in the retinues of northern magnates and in the royal administration, manned the church and followed the law, were involved in the wool trade, textiles and shipping. The Finchams of Fincham in Norfolk spawned a priest and a university graduate, and a fishmonger, a mercer and a silkwoman in London. The Lathoms of Lancashire were distant cousins of the Stanleys, later earls of Derby, whose household the [31] senior branch served in an honorary capacity. A younger branch of the Lathoms, established in the Cheshire towns of Congleton and Knutsford, prospered in trade, perhaps through the favor of their aristocratic kinsmen, and established sons in business in London, Denbigh and Pontefract. Their enterprises east of the Pennines were promoted by a clerical member of the family, who as a secretary to Archbishop Kemp was influential as well as well-beneficed in the archdiocese of York.²¹³

These families were property owners and had members who served in noble affinities, worked as royal bureaucrats, and pursued a variety of professions, promoting the interests of the family in a variety of ways. It is important to note that none of the professions pursued was on its own incompatible with gentility: these were high status tradesmen, clerics, and administrators whose occupations did not preclude their association with their gentle relations. The number of members in these professions, however, suggests the precarious gentility of the family as a whole. The Armburghs are another example of a fifteenth-century family on the margins of gentility. Robert Armburgh, the younger son, was a socially ambitious lawyer. While he was on the rise, his brother William, the heir to his family's property, seems to have sunk down, and was

²¹³ Bennett, *Community, Class and Careerism*, 31-2.

referred to as “husbandman” in several of the family’s documents.²¹⁴ The Baret family in Bury St Edmunds was another that had both landed and urban interests. John Baret I was a landed gentleman, living outside the town, while his brother John Baret II was a merchant within it. When John I died, his brother inherited the family property but chose to continue pursuing his mercantile career. His heir likewise remained based in Bury.²¹⁵ The varied interests of these families testify to the openness and flexibility of the lower gentle ranks.

While medieval writers tend to envision gentility as a fixed characteristic, something inherent within a person and demonstrated through their actions, the above evidence suggests the opposite. To be gentle was to fill a particular social role. That role was expanding as the perception of certain occupations, which had previously been viewed as common, changed. The above evidence indicates that “gentleman” was not a stable social category; the examples below suggest that it was not permanent, either. Gentility was a quality that could be attained temporarily under certain circumstances. While particular offices could confer gentle status on their holders, that status was presumably shed with the robes of office when those positions were relinquished. The most common offices which conferred gentility were positions in noble and royal households and in municipal government. As has been discussed, certain status ranks, such as gentleman and esquire, had parallel service ranks, and a gentleman attendant in a noble household was not required to be of gentle birth. Extra gentility was accorded to royal servants – though yeoman was not a gentle status rank, yeomen of the crown were considered gentle while serving in their offices.²¹⁶ While, for some, the boost in status these service ranks provided would eventually become permanent, this was not automatic or universal. In his examination of

²¹⁴ Christine Carpenter, ed., *The Armburgh Papers* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1998), 50.

²¹⁵ Horrox, “Urban Gentry,” 26.

²¹⁶ Keen qualifies that county offices did not confer this sort of status on their holders, since they were bestowed upon individuals in recognition of preexisting gentle status. Keen, *Origins of the English Gentleman*, 111-2, 139.

the Yearbooks of Henry VI, Storey uncovered a 1449 case in which a debtor claimed to have been a gentleman at the time of his debt, but to have become a merchant before the writ against him was issued. In making the argument that this loss of status was possible, the defendant pointed out that gentlemen of the noble and royal households would revert to yeoman status upon leaving their positions.²¹⁷ Likewise, yeomen of the crown like John Crafford of Sandwich, who was referred to as esquire while he held that position, lost status upon relinquishing it.²¹⁸ This belies the claim that gentility was something inherent in an individual, and shows that medieval society was more flexible, and perhaps more meritocratic, in its social distinctions than is otherwise apparent.

A late sixteenth-century text provides further insight into temporary gentility. In the *Accedens of Armorie* (1576), Gerard Legh writes about how a commoner could work his way up through the ranks of servants in a noble household, eventually attaining a position typically assigned to gentlemen. Legh understands, however, that the nature of this gentility is temporary. After describing the upward trajectory of this individual, he observes “But he is without badge or armorye of his own,” suggesting that the status this successful servant has gained requires another sort of confirmation in order to become permanent.²¹⁹ While there were a variety of ways one might qualify for the designation “gentleman” by the end of the fifteenth century, the more ways one qualified, the more permanent that rise in status would be.

It was as difficult for medieval contemporaries as it is for modern scholars to pinpoint what a gentleman was because it was simultaneously an adjective and a noun, a characteristic and a status, and that status could be either temporary or permanent. The conflation between

²¹⁷ Storey, “Gentleman-Bureaucrats,” 92.

²¹⁸ Horrox, “Urban Gentry,” 29.

²¹⁹ Quoted in Keen, *Origins of the English Gentleman*, 140.

these two concepts and the resulting ambiguities surrounding gentle status ultimately led to the expansion of the social category. These multiple meanings of gentility existed side by side during the fifteenth century, at a time of increased social fluidity. Unable to effectively separate the rank of gentleman from the generic gentle man, the gentry propped the door open for anyone who might lay claim to gentle characteristics to achieve gentle status, regardless of whether they had any ancestral right to it. The next several chapters will focus on those characteristics and how they were demonstrated, rounding out our understanding of what it took to be considered gentle in fifteenth-century England.

Chapter 3

Heralds, Heraldry, and the Expansion of Armigerous Gentility

Arms-bearing was the most secure indicator of gentle status in late medieval England. Every man of gentle status did not bear arms, but every man who bore arms was incontrovertibly of gentle status. Because of this, understanding how a man was deemed worthy of bearing arms can give us important insights into late medieval understandings of gentility, showing what qualities and accomplishments were necessary and desirable in those of gentle status. Examining grants of arms allows us to look at the boundary between gentle and common and how it might be crossed.

William Harrison's description of a gentleman in his *Description of England*, first published in 1577, illustrates the connection between coats of arms and gentility:

Whosoever studieth the laws of the realm, whoso abideth in the university giving his mind to his book, or professeth physic and the liberal sciences, or, beside his service in the room of a captain in the wars or good counsel given at home, whereby his commonwealth is benefited, can live without manual labor, and thereto is able and will bear the port, charge, and countenance of a gentleman, he shall for money have a coat and arm bestowed upon him by heralds . . . and thereunto being made so good cheap, be called master, which is the title that men give to esquires and gentlemen, and reputed for a gentleman ever after.¹

In the late sixteenth century, any man having pretensions to gentility could petition a herald and, if that herald found him to be worthy, purchase himself a coat of arms. There were a variety of ways in which he could demonstrate that he was eligible for this honor – Harrison cites expertise in law, university training, serving as a soldier or bureaucrat, or simply having the means to live a life of leisure. Yet these positions were not enough in themselves – it was the coat of arms that demonstrated to all and sundry that their possessor was truly a gentleman. The connection between coats of arms and gentle status goes back to their origin, marking the tabards of knights

¹ William Harrison, *The Description of England*, ed. Georges Edelen (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1968), 113-4.

and captains in battle and tournaments.² Coats of arms began as marks of military distinction, but, as the centuries progressed, became important social markers as well. Understanding how and why men³ were granted arms during the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries can provide important insight into the boundary between gentle and common – a boundary that shifted and altered considerably over the course of the period.

This chapter seeks to tease out the eligibility requirements for a coat of arms as they emerged and developed between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries, focusing on the period from about 1440-1530. This story involves a number of closely interwoven threads: the expansion of the armigerous ranks in late medieval English society; the development of the office of herald from a haphazard collection of individuals administering tournaments and battles to an organized body of officials responsible for the regulation and creation of coats of arms; how heraldic documents, from heralds' oaths to treatises on blazoning, explain the qualifications for coats of arms; and, finally, what the grants of arms issued by heralds and others say about the individuals to whom they were granted. These documents show that, by the fifteenth century, ideas about who could be eligible for coats of arms had changed dramatically from earlier antecedents, relinquishing the insistence that noble lineage alone conferred gentle status, and positing instead that it could be earned through a man's position, occupation or merely personal characteristics. The acknowledgement of multiple paths to gentility reflects the changing nature of the English gentry from the late medieval to the early modern period, particularly as efforts at social closure failed to maintain its exclusivity.

² Maurice Keen, *Chivalry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 125.

³ While women did display arms during the late Middle Ages, they generally were the arms of their fathers and husbands. Only one grant of arms that I have uncovered was issued to a woman, and it is from the very end of the period, in 1528. BL MS Harley 4900, fol. 23r.

Heralds and Historians

Heraldry has long been considered an antiquarian subject with limited scholarly application. Coats of arms have been used to identify family chapels and tombs, effigies and memorial brasses, books and manuscripts. They serve to assist genealogists in constructing lineages. But apart from identifying particular families and individuals – their original role, still applicable today – what use could these sources be to historians? Because of this perception, the historical study of heralds and heraldry has largely been left to the heralds themselves, whose profession required them to respect and value the past, hoarding old books and historical data.

The tradition of heralds as historians goes back to their official incorporation at the end of the Middle Ages. In March 1484, Richard III issued letters patent to the heralds, presenting them with a property at Coldharbour in London where they could formally meet with one another and store the documents that were so necessary to their offices.⁴ Unfortunately, after Richard was killed at Bosworth and Henry VII seized the throne, Henry cancelled all of Richard's grants and the heralds found themselves stripped of their property.⁵ Their books and papers were taken into safekeeping by John Writhe, Garter King of Arms, and, after his death in 1504, passed to his son and successor Thomas Wriothesley.⁶ They were later handed over to Roger Machado, Clarenceux King of Arms, when the officers of arms acquired for themselves a temporary home.⁷ Writhe and Wriothesley were ardent record-keepers in their own right, creating their own rolls of arms and record books with copies of important heraldic documents. A number of these, in

⁴ The document is reprinted in G. D. Squibb, ed., *Munimenta Heraldica* (London: The Harleian Society, 1985), 1-2, 17. The house was large enough that there was space for each king of arms to keep his personal library. Nigel Ramsay, "Richard III and the Office of Arms," in *The Yorkist Age*, ed. Hannes Kleineke and Christian Steer (Donington: Shaun Tyas and Richard III and Yorkist History Trust, 2013), 149.

⁵ Nigel Ramsay suggests that Henry acted maliciously, punishing the heralds for their association with his vanquished enemy. *Ibid.*, 151.

⁶ Wriothesley altered his surname because he simply disliked its sound, so, in his own words, he "augmented it with the high Sound of three Syllables." Quoted in Sir Anthony Wagner, *A Catalogue of English Mediaeval Rolls of Arms* (London, 1950), xvii.

⁷ Squibb, ed., *Munimenta Heraldica*, 2.

Writhe and Wriothesley's own hands, are presently held by the British Library.⁸ The documents and manuscripts that these men preserved and produced formed the nucleus of the archive that would sustain the work of the officers of arms for centuries.

This predisposition for keeping old records formed a bond between heralds and antiquarians. Whether actively recruited or drawn to the positions in their own right, many of the most well-known historians and antiquarians of early modern Britain were officers of arms. Their extensive knowledge of British history predisposed them for armorial work and by gathering such experts together, the College of Arms became an important center for antiquarian study as early as the end of the sixteenth century. William Camden, author of *Britannia*, the celebrated county-by-county description of Great Britain and Ireland, became Clarenceux King of Arms in 1597 by virtue of his scholarly reputation.⁹ Another noted early historian of England, William Dugdale, became an officer of arms early in his career, appointed Blanch Lyon Pursuivant in 1638 and progressing through three other heraldic offices before being appointed Garter King of Arms in 1677.¹⁰ Dugdale may have been, in part, responsible for the recruitment of his friend Elias Ashmole, the celebrated collector and antiquarian, who became interested in heraldry in the 1650s and was appointed Windsor Herald ten years later.¹¹

While subsequent centuries did not produce historians of such stature as a Camden, Dugdale or Ashmole, heralds continued to dabble in historical pursuits, publishing on a variety of topics, especially those related to their work. John Anstis the elder, an eighteenth-century

⁸ Among them BL MSS Additional 4101, 45133 and 46354.

⁹ Kings of Arms were typically promoted from within the ranks of the heralds, but Camden was appointed Clarenceux without having had any other heraldic experience. Presumably, it was his antiquarian reputation that inspired an acquaintance to recommend him for the position. Wyman H. Herendeen, "Camden, William (1551–1623)," *DNB* <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/4431>> (accessed July 17, 2013).

¹⁰ Graham Parry, "Dugdale, Sir William (1605–1686)," *DNB* <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/8186>> (accessed July 17, 2013).

¹¹ Michael Hunter, "Ashmole, Elias (1617–1692)," *DNB* <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/764>> (accessed July 17, 2013).

Garter, wrote extensively on the Orders of the Garter and of the Bath, and was responsible for the reinstitution of the latter in 1725.¹² Through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, heralds occasionally published articles and monographs related to their work, including editions of important heraldic texts;¹³ the most notable of these, both for his work as a herald and as a historian, is Sir Anthony Wagner. Wagner served as Portcullis Pursuivant and Richmond Herald before his elevation to Garter in 1961. In 1978, believing that an officer of arms was appointed for life, he “retired” to the post of Clarenceux which he held until his death in 1995. Wagner was the preeminent historian of heraldry and arms of the twentieth century, served as the general editor of the Society of Antiquaries’ *Dictionary of British Arms* for fifty-five years, and wrote extensively on heraldic topics, including the development of the offices of arms in the late Middle Ages, publishing up until a few years before his death.¹⁴ Wagner’s work is foundational to the study of medieval English heraldry, as his rigorous scholarship, access to the College of Arms’ collections, and personal knowledge of heraldic duties combined to afford him an unprecedented understanding of the subject.

Wagner’s work has provided the foundation for the academic historians who have worked on heraldic topics. Heraldry has traditionally been of most interest to scholars of chivalry, knighthood and warfare. The historian who has done the most to promote the study of heraldry in recent years is Maurice Keen, whose work on the conduct of warfare and chivalry

¹² Stuart Handley, “Anstis, John (1669–1744),” *DNB* <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/584>> (accessed July 17, 2013).

¹³ Examples include: Hugh Stanford London [Norfolk Herald], “Some Medieval Treatises on English Heraldry” *The Antiquaries Journal* xxxiii (1953): 169–183; Rodney Dennys, *The Heraldic Imagination* (London: Barrie and Jenkins Limited, 1975).

¹⁴ Wagner’s works include: *Heralds and Heraldry in the Middle Ages* (1939; 1956), *A Catalogue of Medieval English Rolls of Arms* (1950); *Heralds of England* (1967); *Pedigree and Progress* (1975); and *A Medieval Pageant: Writhe’s Garter Book* (1993). Adrian Ailes, “Wagner, Sir Anthony Richard (1908–1995),” *DNB* <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/57945>> (accessed July 17, 2013).

touched on heraldic topics.¹⁵ This work necessarily brought him into contact with Wagner, who provided the impetus for Keen's deeper consideration of heraldic issues in his 2003 *Origins of the English Gentleman*. In a letter to Keen (which is printed in the Appendix), Wagner declared that more work needed to be done on heraldry's transition from a wartime necessity to its association with the status of noble- or gentleman. As Keen says in his introduction to the work, this letter inspired him to begin to examine heraldry from the perspective of social and cultural history.¹⁶ He argues that the importance of arms as a status indicator rose in conjunction with the expansion of the ranks of the gentry to include more and more esquires and later gentlemen without any military pretensions during the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Almost simultaneously, esquires and gentlemen, as well as knights, began to be granted their own coats of arms.¹⁷ Heraldry began to lose its military associations at the same time as the gentry shed its identity as a military class. Keen's work shows the importance of heraldry as a tool for understanding the lower gentry during the late medieval period. Gentlemen sought coats of arms as indisputable symbols of their place in the gentle community. Since heralds were responsible for granting those arms by the late fifteenth century, their perspective on what it meant to be gentle was instrumental in forming and maintaining gentry identity.

Perhaps inspired by Keen's promotion of the subject, there has been an increase in scholarship on heralds and heraldry over the past fifteen years. An edited collection by Keen and Peter Coss, *Heraldry, Pageantry and Social Display in Medieval England* (2002), attempted to integrate the study of heraldic subjects and other visual representations with work on social

¹⁵ Maurice Keen, *The Laws of War in the Late Middle Ages* (London, 1965). *Idem*, *Chivalry*.

¹⁶ *Idem*, *Origins of the English Gentleman* (Stroud, Gloucestershire.: Tempus, 2003), 10-1, 166.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 162-5.

identity and order.¹⁸ Several articles in the collection focus on the use of heraldry in the display of lineage, elevated social status, and political affiliation.¹⁹ One of the authors of the aforementioned articles, Adrian Ailes, has published several articles on heralds, their organization, and their records, looking particularly at who was responsible for granting new coats of arms and how that changed over time.²⁰ Katie Stevenson has emerged as another scholar of heralds and heraldry, working on the development of knighthood as a status rank in Scotland, with a side emphasis on the contribution of heralds and heraldry to social organization and exclusion.²¹ Stevenson is also the editor of the most important recent contribution to the field, a collection of essays entitled *The Herald in Late Medieval Europe* (2009), comparing heraldic practices across the continent, from England and Germany to Poland and Scandinavia.²² An article by Jackson W. Armstrong presents the first clear, modern explanation of the development of the office of arms in England; another by Ailes examines Garter's rise to precedence among the Kings of Arms.²³ Nigel Ramsay has also shown recent interest in heraldic studies, publishing on the relationship between Richard III and the heralds and its impact on their development as an organized body.²⁴ The work of these, and other, scholars demonstrates the richness of heraldic

¹⁸ Peter Coss and Maurice Keen, eds., *Heraldry, Pageantry, and Social Display in Medieval England* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2002).

¹⁹ See, respectively, David Crouch, "The Historian, Lineage and Heraldry 1050-1250" in *Heraldry, Pageantry and Social Display*, ed. Coss and Keen, 17-38; Peter Coss, "Knighthood, Heraldry and Social Exclusion in Edwardian England" in *Heraldry, Pageantry and Social Display*, ed. Coss and Keen, 39-68; and Adrian Ailes, "Heraldry in Medieval England: Symbols of Politics and Propaganda" in *Heraldry, Pageantry and Social Display*, ed. Coss and Keen, 83-104.

²⁰ Ailes, "Medieval Grants of Arms: 1300-1461" MA Thesis, University of London, 1997. *Idem*, "The Creation of the Office of Garter King of Arms: A Postscript," *Coat of Arms* n. s. 12 (1998): 239-40. *Idem*, "Le developpement des 'visitations' de herauts en Angleterre et au Pays de Galles 1450-1600" *Revue du Nord* 88 (2006): 659-79. *Idem*, "Royal Grants of Arms in England before 1484" in *Soldiers, Noblemen, and Gentlemen*, ed. Peter Coss and Christopher Tyerman (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2009), 85-96. See also the works cited in notes 19, above, and 23, below.

²¹ Katie Stevenson, *Chivalry and Knighthood in Scotland, 1424-1513* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2006).

²² Stevenson, ed. *The Herald in Late Medieval Europe* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2009).

²³ Jackson W. Armstrong, "The Development of the Office of Arms in England, c. 1413-1485," in *The Herald in Late Medieval Europe*, ed. Stevenson, 9-28. Ailes, "Ancient Precedent or Tudor Fiction? Garter King of Arms and the Pronouncements of Thomas, Duke of Clarence," in *The Herald in Late Medieval Europe*, ed. Stevenson, 29-40.

²⁴ Ramsay, "Richard III and the Office of Arms," 142-163.

sources as evidence for medieval social organization, politics, and cultural practices. While these works serve to fill some important gaps, our understanding of late medieval heralds and how they operated remains incomplete. My goal in this chapter is to build upon the work of these scholars – Keen in particular – by demonstrating the value of heraldic records in understanding the meaning of gentility in late medieval England and how it could be constructed.

Expansion of the Armigerous Ranks

Although historians have traditionally neglected heraldic material in developing an understanding of the gentry, the work of Wagner and Keen demonstrates that these two histories are intertwined; a study of what it meant to be gentle in the late Middle Ages must consider what it took to be armigerous. Before this can be understood, however, the history of the expansion of the armigerous ranks, from knights alone in the thirteenth century to gentlemen in the fifteenth century, must be narrated.

As previously mentioned, arms were, at their origin, a military necessity – a way to quickly identify one’s friends from one’s foes in the heat of battle.²⁵ Noël Denholm-Young, in his work on heraldry during the thirteenth century, argues that during that early period “the use of armorial bearings was confined to the ‘strenuous’ knights, i.e. those who had seen or hoped to see military action, including warlike prelates . . . The armigerous class is a small one, for men did not ‘assume arms’ for decorative or social reasons. The armour was for defence and the heraldic coat an aid to recognition in the field.”²⁶ Denholm-Young makes it clear that displaying

²⁵ Keen notes that heraldry increased in importance as a tool of recognition after medieval warriors began encasing themselves in armor from head to foot. Keen, *Chivalry*, 125.

²⁶ Noël Denholm-Young, *History and Heraldry 1254-1310: A Study of the Historical Value of the Rolls of Arms* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), 1-2.

a coat of arms demonstrated that the bearer was willing and able to go into battle for his lord.²⁷ This idea is supported by a heraldic manual copied into Bodleian Library MS Ashmolean Rolls 4, a manuscript dating to the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century, which argues that the earlier practice of bearing “marks” came to be called bearing arms “in as much as worship was gotten with the might of man’s arms, and when a gentleman comith in to the field to fight for his king’s rights or for his own with the manly hands of worship with the force of might wherefore it is called the coat of arms.”²⁸ The coat of arms was, at its origin, a military distinction and it retained martial overtones even into the fifteenth century.

As the rules for arms-bearing were established, however, the door was opening for men without military pretensions to bear arms. Denholm-Young estimates that only a third of the county gentry were armigerous in the thirteenth century,²⁹ and he notes that the term *miles literatus* was being used as early as the mid-thirteenth century by the monastic chronicler Matthew Paris to distinguish a new class of knights who had not earned their position by their swords.³⁰ One of the men so termed by Paris was Paulinus Piper, one of the chief counselors of Henry III who had made his fortune through comital and royal service as an educated professional rather than a fighter.³¹ Men like Piper were uncommon in the middle of the thirteenth century, but less so later on.

During the fourteenth century, the use of arms extended from knights downward to the esquires below them. Esquires were often termed *armiger* or *scutifer* in Latin because they were originally the shield-bearers for the knights they assisted. Yet before 1350, their right to use heraldic seals of their own went unchallenged, and by 1370, rolls of arms displayed their arms

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 158.

²⁸ Bodleian MS Ashmolean Rolls 4.

²⁹ Denholm-Young, *History and Heraldry*, 158.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 2n.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 32-3.

alongside those of knights.³² Coss argues that this was a side-effect of the close contact between bannerets, knights, and esquires in a military context. As these men fought side-by-side, got to know one another personally, and developed a shared culture, the knights and bannerets failed to distinguish themselves significantly from the esquires. When esquires who served similar military roles to their knightly counterparts, lived as their neighbors, and shared the same political concerns began to lay claim to their own arms, there was little justification for stopping them – particularly when the first to do so were younger sons, nephews and cousins of knightly families.³³ Up until the late fourteenth and even the fifteenth century, heraldry could be used by the knights as a means of social exclusion, but things had changed by the turn of the fifteenth century as esquires gained access to this important symbol of status.

Arms began to spread to non-combatants as well: the fact that many heraldic manuals permit up to seven sons of an armigerous father to bear their own arms opened the door to other ranks and even professions, suggesting that while the origin of the arms was linked with warfare, by the fourteenth century military service was no longer the primary requirement to bear them.³⁴ During the later fourteenth century, as more men were knighted who lacked military training and it became acceptable for knights to buy their way out of military service, the military association of the coat of arms began to decline. At this time, even clerks and judges could earn the title

³² Nigel Saul, *Knights and Esquires: The Gloucestershire Gentry in the Fourteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 255. The coats of arms of esquires appear alongside those of knights in the lost roll of Sir Robert Laton of 1370. While a copy of this roll of arms is no longer in existence, it was described during the course of the 1385 Scrope vs. Grosvenor case in the Court of Chivalry, so we have a sense of its contents today. Denholm-Young, *History and Heraldry*, 23.

³³ Coss, “Knighthood, Heraldry and Social Exclusion,” 67-8.

³⁴ Denholm-Young, *History and Heraldry*, 5. An example of a heraldic treatise that allows this is BL MS Additional 34648 fol. 4r. The regulations for a king of arms given in BL MS Cotton Tiberius E viii, fol. 114v differs slightly, saying that “there ought in gentleman to use no difference passing the 6 brother without the advice and counsel of the king of arms of the said marches.” Presumably, the king of arms could give permission to bear arms to sons beyond the seventh, if he felt it was appropriate.

“king’s banneret” and the coat armor that went along with it.³⁵ While contemporary authors claimed that the mercantile profession was barred from bearing arms, Sylvia Thrupp notes that no medieval authority explicitly forbade them.³⁶

Christine Carpenter has asserted that by the early fifteenth century, arms had become an essential (primary, even) marker of gentility.³⁷ From the second quarter of the fifteenth century, even the arms of gentlemen might be found inscribed in rolls of arms. The term ‘gentleman’ itself dates from around this time, as a social term became necessary that might distinguish men of gentle ancestry who were not knights or esquires from the common masses.³⁸ Through the course of this century, military service was no longer considered a necessary prerequisite for arms-bearing. Several examples from the middle of the century show arms being granted to men of other occupations. In 1442, Humphrey, Earl of Stafford granted arms to Robert Whitgreave, a clerk of the Exchequer and a member of the earl’s affinity. K. B. McFarlane points out that while the grant describes Whitgreave as a “noble man . . . the highest rank Whitgreave ever attained to was that of esquire and sometimes he had to put up with being called mere gentleman.”³⁹ A few years later, in 1448, Henry VI granted arms to two bureaucrats, Roger Keys and Nicholas Cloos, for supervising his building works.⁴⁰ These were not military men, but lawyers and bureaucrats, yet the services they rendered in these capacities were considered sufficient for a grant of arms; the armigerous ranks had expanded to include those with professional, rather than military, backgrounds.

³⁵ Denholm-Young, *History and Heraldry*, 147.

³⁶ Sylvia Thrupp, *The Merchant Class of Medieval London 1300-1500* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1948), 250.

³⁷ Christine Carpenter, *Locality and Polity: A Study of Warwickshire Landed Society 1401-1499* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 92.

³⁸ Keen, *Origins of the English Gentleman*, 17.

³⁹ K. B. McFarlane, *The Nobility of Later Medieval England: The Ford Lectures for 1953 and Related Studies* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), 6-7.

⁴⁰ Keen, *Origins of the English Gentleman*, 114.

While these grants were likely given at the behest of the grantors, other individuals clearly sought to assume arms by seeking out the heralds who had the authority to grant them; the texts of grants of arms from the fifteenth century, which will be examined in detail later in this chapter, all make it clear that these grants were issued at the behest of the grantee. These men obviously saw themselves as eligible to bear arms and only needed a herald to confirm it.⁴¹ Such grants began to multiply during the late fifteenth century, indicating that bearing arms was seen as an essential attribute of gentle rank. As Keen puts it,

The clients of the heralds of the later fifteenth century were for the most part not military men, and valued coats, so the wording of the patents suggests, not as martial insignia but rather as demonstration of their equal footing with others their neighbours and associates who had established, ancestral rights to arms. Social aspiration was the driving force behind the multiplication of patents, the desire of rising men for recognition that their substance entitled them and their issue to acceptance as genteel.⁴²

As the qualifications for a coat of arms became looser – as will be discussed later – wealthy merchants, many of whom were well-versed in gentle culture and behavior, began to seek the honor. This issue is addressed as early as the 1450s, when the heraldic treatise in Strangways' Book was written. Richard Strangways, a lawyer of the Inner Temple, makes a distinction between true arms and what he calls marks "such as merchants use."⁴³ He explains that anyone might take up a mark for himself, but outside authority (that of a herald, lord or prince) was necessary in order to assume a coat of arms. He argues that mere merchants' marks were not permitted to have any metal in them, in order to distinguish them from proper arms.⁴⁴ Hugh Stanford London, who edited Strangways' text, argues that the author took a rather stringent view toward arms-bearing overall; his book claims that coat armor is what defined a man as a gentleman, so the illicit acquisition of coat armor by those of common status would certainly be

⁴¹ Saul, *Knights and Esquires*, 248-9.

⁴² Keen, *Origins of the English Gentleman*, 99.

⁴³ London, "Some Medieval Treatises," 174, 180.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 180-1.

unacceptable in his eyes.⁴⁵ Strangways, a purist, felt that the ranks of the armigerous had been diluted by lax eligibility requirements. But while he felt that merchants could not be accepted into these ranks, it was impossible to establish requirements that could exclude them while still incorporating the lesser gentlemen and the professional classes. Keen points out that it was not uncommon for the descendants of merchants to be granted hereditary arms even in the fifteenth century.⁴⁶

The sixteenth century saw the acceleration of this demilitarization and expansion of the armigerous ranks. Grants of arms made to gentlemen on the basis of their personal merits proliferate during the early decades. The dissolution of the monasteries beginning in 1536 created even more opportunity for the socially ambitious, as the kingdom was inundated with lordships and manors for purchase – something that had been extremely scarce in previous centuries. Keen asserts that this engendered a “scramble for grants of arms among would-be genteel new landowners.”⁴⁷ As the ranks of the landed increased, the ranks of the armigerous swelled along with them, to the point that some men argued that three generations of armigerous ancestors were required in order to claim gentle status.⁴⁸ Between the mid-sixteenth century and the start of the Civil War, arms were so easy to come by that the lower ranks of the gentry, which had expanded immensely, were debased. At this time, Lawrence Stone argues, “It was common knowledge that arms were easy to come by, and so the socially ambitious moved on to seek higher titles so as to distinguish themselves from the now contemptible ruck of armigerous gentry and esquires.”⁴⁹

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 180.

⁴⁶ Keen, *Origins of the English Gentleman*, 131.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 162.

⁴⁸ Lawrence Stone, *The Crisis of the Aristocracy, 1558-1641* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), 29.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 71. Arthur Ferguson pinpointed the year 1570 as the high point in “the rush of the upwardly mobile to obtain the coats of arms that had been made more than ever available to them.” Arthur B. Ferguson, *The Chivalric Tradition in Renaissance England* (Washington, DC: Folger Books, 1986), 67.

From Heralds to Officers of Arms

The transition of coats of arms from military insignia to increasingly sought-after marks of social prestige is mirrored by changes in the office of herald. In the thirteenth century, heralds are most often heard of in the context of battles, acting as intermediaries and messengers between combatants, identifying fighting men and noting their feats of valor in the field. Yet by the sixteenth century, heralds are more often found visiting country houses and parish churches and monitoring the use of heraldic insignia among the gentry in their assigned regions. The demilitarization of heraldic duties goes hand-in-hand with the expansion of arms to men without any military pretensions.

Heralds are not mentioned in English administrative records before the reign of Edward I, but it is clear that they came into existence at least a century before that. Wagner cites a number of French romances of the twelfth century in which heralds make an appearance, generally in the context of tournaments, which they organized and regulated.⁵⁰ Denholm-Young argues that these are the very duties that heralds would have performed in real life. Their role in making the arrangements for tournaments, including traveling the countryside to announce each event, organizing the competitors and refereeing the action, may have begun as early as 1194, when Richard I enacted much stricter control over these events, but was certainly in effect c. 1265, when the official rules for tournaments, the *Statutum Armorum*, were written down.⁵¹ The earliest heralds were likely retained by individuals – the king as well as individual barons of exceptional wealth. Henry Percy, for example, was known to keep a King of Arms in his

⁵⁰ These romances include *Le Tournoi de Chauvency*, *Le Roman de Rose*, *Le Romain du Castelain de Couci et de la dame de Fayel*, and *L'Histoire de Guillaume le Maréchal*. Wagner's book includes an appendix in which he provides each of the passages which deal with heralds in the original French. Anthony Wagner, *Heralds and Heraldry in the Middle Ages*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956), 25-31, 127-35.

⁵¹ Denholm-Young, *History and Heraldry*, 5.

personal retinue, and in 1337, Edmund Mortimer, Earl of the March, created John O'thelake as "le Rey Marchis."⁵²

Denholm-Young suggests that the office of herald in the thirteenth century actually developed out of the ranks of the minstrels.⁵³ There were not enough tournaments to occupy early heralds full time, so it is quite likely that the role of herald began as a sideline for minstrels. He notes that the household accounts from the reign of Edward I into the fourteenth century link heralds and minstrels together under the heading *Menestralli*. He has even found references to Kings of Minstrels who are called Kings of Heraldry in other documents, suggesting considerable cross-over between these professions.⁵⁴ By the end of the reign of Edward I, however, the office of King of Arms had broken away from its roots in the minstrelsy and focused on heraldic duties.⁵⁵ Kings of Arms used their expertise to recognize the participants in a tournament or battle, to assist the Marshals of England in organizing tournaments or military forces, and occasionally to compile a list of those present along with their arms for their patron's reference (several of these heraldic rolls are still in existence). They were also responsible for prohibiting unauthorized tournaments, acting as royal messengers, and assisting in the ceremonies surrounding the creation of new knights.⁵⁶ With these duties came a more settled and secure position for the heralds – no longer associated with the minstrelsy, they could concentrate on heraldic matters full-time.⁵⁷

⁵² *Ibid.*, 9, 93.

⁵³ The late thirteenth-century *Li Contes des Hiraus*, discussed by Wagner, also connects minstrels and heralds who, as Wagner points out, both "led that wandering life which bore such rich fruit in medieval life and letters." Wagner, *Heralds and Heraldry*, 30-1.

⁵⁴ Denholm-Young, *History and Heraldry*, 57.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 58.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 15, 54-5, 58.

⁵⁷ Keen, *Chivalry*, 136. More recent research, however, suggests that these duties may have lingered into the fourteenth century. Michael Livingston notes that a herald named Colins de Beaumont who was present at the Battle of Crécy refers to himself as a musician in his literary work on the subject, an Old French poem entitled "On the Crécy Dead." Livingston suggests this was a mortuary roll written shortly after the battle to commemorate the noble

Heralds' duties increased in importance during the reign of Edward III. During this period, the positions of pursuivant, herald and King of Arms came into being with differently defined duties.⁵⁸ Some of the specific posts that continue today came into existence: Clarenceux King of Arms, for example, was established as having jurisdiction over the southern territories of England. The name Clarenceux derives from the position's origin as private herald of the earls of Clare and later the dukes of Clarence. These private heralds had, by the 1330s, extended their jurisdiction far beyond the original Clare estates and acquired a national importance.⁵⁹ The office of Garter King of Arms was established by Henry V in early July 1415. Wagner notes that Henry V may have intended Garter to be the chief of all officers of arms, but he died before this was officially established. Any primacy that Garter had at this stage was derived from its first holder, William Bruges, whose experience (he had already held the posts of Chester Herald and Guyenne King of Arms) and long tenure in the position (1415-50), would have garnered the respect and deference of his colleagues. The debate over the powers and jurisdiction of Garter with respect to the other Kings of Arms (especially Clarenceux) continued into the 1530s.⁶⁰

It was likewise during the reign of Henry V that the first evidence of heralds attempting to organize as a group and coordinate their efforts appears. Up until this point, the heralds discussed acted as individuals, working in the service of lords or kings. Certainly, multiple heralds must have come together in the process of organizing major tournaments, but there is no

dead. The poem, as well as Colins' description of himself, neatly combines the roles of battlefield marshal, historian, and entertainer that characterized the heralds of earlier periods. Michael Livingston, "Colins of Beaumont: A Poet at the Battle of Crécy," paper presented at the 51st International Congress on Medieval Studies, Kalamazoo, MI, May 2016. For the poem itself, see Colins de Beaumont, "On the Crécy Dead," trans. Elizaveta Strakhov, in Michael Livingston and Kelly DeVries, eds., *The Battle of Crécy: A Casebook* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2016), 26-51.

⁵⁸ For linguistic simplicity, I will use the term "heralds" to refer to these men generally, rather than "officers of arms." Keen, *Chivalry*, 137.

⁵⁹ Denholm-Young, *History and Heraldry*, 107-9.

⁶⁰ Anthony Wagner, N. Barker and A. Payne, eds., *A Medieval Pageant: Writhe's Garter Book* (London: The Roxburghe Club, 1993), 5. For more information on the conflict over Garter's supremacy, see Wagner, *Heralds and Heraldry*, *passim*, especially 83-99.

indication that they saw themselves as a group. In 1417, Thomas of Lancaster, duke of Clarence and Constable of England, issued a series of guidelines for the heralds, establishing their relative precedence and defining their duties.⁶¹ He discusses the increasing eminence of pursuivants, heralds and Kings of Arms, instructing them to comport themselves honorably in all things, only visiting honest places and circulating in reputable company, avoiding any person or place that might tarnish their reputations.⁶² Additionally, and most importantly for our purposes, they were instructed to study and become knowledgeable in heraldic symbolism so that they might assign appropriate arms to those who were acceptable and commendable and worthy of preferment.⁶³ It is likely that heralds had been performing these duties already, but this authorization and, in fact, dictate of the Constable established the granting of arms firmly under heralds' jurisdiction.

Perhaps using the Constable's ordinances as a jumping-off point, the English heralds gathered together at Rouen in 1420/1 and established a series of "constitutions and ordinances" to be used in governing their "chapter" from that day forward. They established a common seal for all the heralds which was to be used by Garter in the name of all the officers, but to be kept alternatively by Clarenceux or Norroy, presumably as a check on Garter's power. The ordinances also lay out the process of promoting an officer from pursuivant to herald or herald to King of Arms, down to the amount of alms the newly instated officer was expected to give for the support of the chapter (in lieu of the previous custom, treating the chapter to a lavish dinner, which was deemed gluttonous and unnecessary). These alms would be used to maintain the

⁶¹ Saul, *Knights and Esquires*, 27.

⁶² A copy of this text in MS Ashmole 857 reads, "Et que chacun d'eulx courtoisement & reuerentement soy comporte" and "que chacu(n) Officier d'Armes use et hante honnestes places et bonne Compaignei . . . et sur tout riens de pleu ap(er)tene(n)t aucune villanye en p(re)sence du people." Bodleian MS Ashmole 857, fols. 32-3.

⁶³ The French reads: "Et en temps convenient q'uil s'applique a lire li ures de bon(n)es moeures eloquence croniques Actes et gestes d'honneur faicte d'Armes, et la propriete des coulours herbs et pierrs affin que par ce il puissent plus proprement et conveniement assigne Armes a Chacune person(n)e ainsi q'uil appertient si que p(our) I celle grace il *puissent esture plus acceptable et Commendables et Dignes d'auoir preferement* et approucher & venir a honneur sur paine." The italics are mine. *Ibid.*, fol. 33.

status of any officers of arms who might fall into poverty – a certain amount of wealth was clearly necessary to maintain the estate and dignity of a herald, as any other rank or position in medieval society.⁶⁴ These ordinances, combined with the mandates of the Constable discussed in the previous paragraph, indicate that not only were the heralds recognized by outsiders as a corporate body, but that they saw themselves as a unit and sought to improve their working relationships by setting down clear rules for the governance of their affairs. Through the remainder of the fifteenth century, the officers of arms became increasingly organized. By 1450, the oath taken by a King of Arms at his institution required that he know the noble- and gentlemen of his province, and their arms, and keep records of them to limit the possibility of falsified descents.⁶⁵ As mentioned earlier, the heralds were incorporated in letters patent issued by Richard III in 1484 and given a house at Coldharbour in London in which to keep their libraries and hold their meetings.⁶⁶ It is likely that Richard's stint as Constable of England, which had put him in charge of the heralds and their actions, had impressed him with their value.⁶⁷ Although Henry VII repealed these letters shortly after their issue, from this point onward the heralds acted as a corporate body; their order was not officially reestablished until 1555, when a charter was issued by Queen Mary and her husband, Philip of Spain, reinstituting the heralds as the College of Arms, under which they continue to operate to this day.

The increasing organization of the heralds can be linked to the increasing regulation of arms under Henry V. The king issued an edict in 1417 prohibiting unauthorized persons from displaying coats of arms. Only those whose ancestors were armigerous or who were granted arms by "some person having sufficient power for this purpose" could bear them. An exception,

⁶⁴ BL MS Additional 4101, fols. 71v-75r.

⁶⁵ Anthony Wagner, *The Records and Collections of the College of Arms* (London: Burkes Peerage, 1952), 7-8.

⁶⁶ The text of the letters patent is printed in both the original Latin and an English translation in Squibb, ed., *Munimenta Heraldica*, 16-7.

⁶⁷ Wagner, *Records and Collections*, 9. Ramsay, "Richard III and the Office of Arms," 151.

however, is made for those men who fought with the king at Agincourt – their valor in that battle had presumably proved their worth.⁶⁸ That the king decided to issue such an order is an indication of concern over the misuse of heraldic display. If anyone could simply take up their own arms, their meaning – both social and military – would be dissipated. The king understood the significance of bearing arms and sought, through this declaration, to monitor the practice for the first time. The establishment of the office of Garter King of Arms in 1417 and the subsequent definition of the hierarchy and duties of the officers of arms in that same year suggests that Henry was firm in his intention to resolve this issue: after this date, it became the duty of the heralds to determine the validity of existing coats of arms and to grant new ones when necessary.⁶⁹

By the sixteenth century (although Wagner has argued that there is even earlier evidence), Kings of Arms began making official visitations to their provinces to record the arms that gentlemen were using and to weed out any that had been assumed unlawfully.⁷⁰ The earliest writs authorizing heraldic visitations were issued under the Tudors, in 1498 and 1512. The text of these writs specifies that the kings of arms were being sent out to reform arms-bearing in their provinces; the 1512 writ proclaims that they were “to reform all false Armory and arms devised without authority, marks unlawfully made in escutcheons, which shield or escutcheon is the token of noblesse.”⁷¹ The implication is that arms were being abused and usurped by those who had no right to them; it became the responsibility of the heralds to set these matters straight. More powerful letters patent were issued by Henry VIII in 1530 to reinforce the practice.⁷² These

⁶⁸ A. R. Myers, ed., *English Historical Documents 1327-1485* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), 1117. Adrian Bell, et al., *The Soldier in Later Medieval England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 112-3.

⁶⁹ Saul, *Knights and Esquires*, 27-8.

⁷⁰ Wagner, *Heralds and Heraldry*, 106-20.

⁷¹ Squibb, ed., *Munimenta Heraldica*, 129.

⁷² The text of these documents is reprinted in Squibb, ed., *Munimenta Heraldica*, 9, 128-31.

letters patent establish that the kings of arms were additionally to grant arms to men, both clerical and lay, “of good honest Reputation,” giving royal sanction to the creation of new arms for categories of men (such as clerics) to whom they had not traditionally been granted.⁷³ From the sixteenth century onward, particularly by means of these heraldic visitations, heralds became the “gatekeepers of gentility,” so to speak, as they determined whether the individuals who petitioned them were worthy to bear arms and join the ranks of the gentle.

Qualifications for a Coat of Arms

While it is clear that granting new coats of arms had become one of the primary duties of heralds beginning in the fifteenth century, exactly how they judged the worthiness of aspiring gentlemen is difficult to discern. How was a herald to determine whether someone was eligible to bear arms? What criteria were used to evaluate these individuals? The answers to these questions were *always* subjective, up to the interpretation and judgment of the individual herald. Exactly how these judgments were made was not recorded; they were likely based upon information passed down within the heralds themselves, as mysteries of their trade, in a way. Yet a variety of texts, from the ordinances of their superiors, to oaths of office, to heraldic manuals, do provide small hints at how heralds came to these decisions.

While heralds had royal sanction to grant new coats of arms to worthy men, they received little advice from their superiors about how this ought to be done. As mentioned above, the ordinances of Thomas of Lancaster provide guidelines for heralds on a variety of aspects of their duties. In these, each herald is instructed “to apply himself to read the tales of good habits, eloquence, chronicles, Acts and *gestes* of honor, feats of Arms, and the properties of colors, herbs, and stones, in order that he could more properly and conveniently assign Arms to Each

⁷³ Squibb, ed., *Munimenta Heraldica*, 9.

person to whom it pertained.”⁷⁴ Clearly these books were intended to assist the herald in making his judgments. Perhaps the chronicles and tales of valorous men were meant to exemplify the values of the armigerous classes. This is suggested by another set of guidelines, issued more than half a century later by Richard III when he was Duke of Gloucester and Constable of England: “we straightly charge and command that all Acts of honor being done within the province of any of the said kings of Arms that the king of the province truly Register the same so that it may remain in perpetual memory.”⁷⁵ It was the solemn duty of the Kings of Arms to note and record individual feats of valor: even at the end of the fifteenth century, chivalric ideals remained strong. Yet Richard did not continue by urging the Kings of Arms to use this information in granting new arms to these valorous gentlemen. He only commands that neither heralds nor pursuivants were permitted to take it upon themselves to grant new arms; this was the prerogative of Kings of Arms alone.⁷⁶

There is one text – a set of regulations for officers of arms found in Bodleian Library MS Eng. misc. f. 36 – that provides a far more specific set of guidelines. The text is titled “De Gubernatione et Reformatione officiariorum Armorum.” This text is the ordinances of arms frequently attributed to Thomas, Duke of Clarence, brother of Henry V, who served as Seneschal of England and Constable of the Army. While Clarence certainly had authority over heralds, making payments to them and resolving their disputes in two letters of 1417, there is no evidence that he issued these ordinances. Wagner has identified them, instead, as the ordinances issued by Richard III when he held the office of Constable of England.⁷⁷ This text is far more

⁷⁴ For the French, see note 63, above. Bodleian MS Ashmole 857, fol. 33.

⁷⁵ BL MS Cotton Tiberius E viii, fol. 158r.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, fol. 158r-v.

⁷⁷ Ailes argues that these ordinances were attributed to Clarence by Thomas Wriothesley, who produced an altered version of them in 1523. While heralds were concerned with accurate record-keeping, in this case, the falsification of records would have benefited them, as Henry VIII was more likely to accept the pronouncements of the Lancastrian Clarence than the Yorkist Duke of Gloucester, and changing the attribution also gave the ordinances

straightforward than most when it comes to defining who is, and particularly who is not, eligible to bear arms. It states that “no dishonorable person, who either has labored disgracefully, or who has deserted the Catholic faith, or who has been found a rebel against our superior lord King, or who was of vile condition without having family” ought to be granted arms.⁷⁸ While this is unusually specific, it still presents a rather conservative view of who ought to be excluded from bearing arms. The working classes are, of course, excluded – leisure is an essential characteristic of any gentleman (fighting is not considered the same as the manual labor which the Latin verb “laborare” implies). Ancestry is equally important – an armigerous man’s ancestors must be noble, not servile. Finally, traitors and heretics are excluded due to the obvious defects in their character – a particularly important point during the throes of the Wars of the Roses.

This selection of who ought not be granted arms is followed by a description of a man who *ought* to receive them; this description is hazier, as is typical of most instructions to heralds. The men who deserve arms ought to be “upstanding and honest men girded with virtue who have wealth or property of two hundred pounds and freehold annual rents of at least ten pounds.”⁷⁹ This specification of an amount of property is unique – in no other set of instructions to heralds or heraldic treatise is property listed as a consideration, let alone a precise amount of property. As far as their written records go, heralds do not seem to have taken property or income into account when determining whether a man was eligible to bear arms.⁸⁰ Ten pounds *per annum* plus reserve wealth would render an individual quite comfortable – well above the income level

increased antiquity and, therefore, authority, preserving the autonomy of the heralds and, in particular, increasing the scope of Wriothesley’s own office. Ailes suggests that this was at the crux of the disagreement between Wriothesley and Thomas Benolt, Clarenceux King of Arms, in 1530. Ailes, “Ancient Precedent or Tudor Fiction?,” 32-9.

⁷⁸ The Latin reads: “Ut nemini p(er)sone Inhoneste (qui aut Infamia laboranerit Aut qui fidem Catholicam deseruerit Aut qui rebellis contra Regen n(ost)r(u)m sup(er)iore(m) d(omin)um inuentus fuerit Aut qui vilis Conditionis siue Sanguinis habitus fuerit) Confera(n)tur Armorum insignia.” Bodleian MS Eng. misc. f. 36, fol. 30v.

⁷⁹ The Latin reads: “viris probis / honestis virtutum iuncatoribus / et quibus abundat opes ducenta(rum) / librarum Vel possessiones prop(ri)e / et libere Ann(u)ali redditus decem / librarum sterlingorum ad min(us).” *Ibid.*, fol. 30v.

⁸⁰ Nigel Saul, “Chaucer and Gentility in *Chaucer’s England*, ed. Barbara Hanawalt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), 49.

of the average commoner – but not extremely wealthy. In fact, this is the very income level that several modern historians cite as the cut-off for belonging to the gentry.⁸¹ Additionally, a statement by Thomas Wriothesley, Garter, in 1530 declares that a gentleman must earn at least £10 p.a., perhaps based on this very ordinance.⁸² One can only assume that heralds did take income into account on a regular basis – there are no accounts of paupers bearing arms running about the late medieval English countryside – but this is the only document that spells it out so explicitly. Interestingly, these positive attributes include only a man’s character and wealth, saying nothing about his ancestry, which is the most typical qualification for arms-bearing. While those of servile ancestry who must work for their living are excluded, no other familial qualifications are given (unless the phrase “sine sanguinis habens” refers not merely to family, but to noble lineage). This is a curious omission for a text from the beginning of the fifteenth century, when the idea of armigerous gentility was still so firmly grounded in noble ancestry.

The oaths taken by pursuivants, heralds and Kings of Arms provide further information about the granting of arms. Unfortunately, it is difficult to assign a date to the text of the oaths, as the surviving copies are included in collections of heraldic texts and could easily have been written at an earlier date than their manuscripts. Wagner comments that the oath of the King of Arms that urged him to know every armigerous man in his province was in existence by about

⁸¹ These scholars include: Nigel Saul, *Knights and Esquires*, 18; Michael Bennett, *Community, Class and Careerism*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 83; Christopher Dyer, *Standards of Living in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 18. For more on modern historians’ definitions of the medieval gentry, see Chapter 1, above. The ordinance was also cited by Henry VIII in his 1530 letters patent on the duties of herald, which indicated that arms should be granted to “spiritual persons of suitable degree and to temporal persons who by their services are ‘increased or augmented to possessions and riches able to maintain the same,’ provided they are not of vile blood, nor rebels, nor heretics, but of good, honest reputation.” (This is Wagner’s partial paraphrase of the original document.) Wagner, *Records and Collections of the College of Arms*, 56.

⁸² Rigby, *English Society in the Later Middle Ages*, 202. Wriothesley’s emphasis on the contents of the ordinances in this case reinforces Ailes’ argument about his manipulation of them, showing the high value he placed on their instructions. See note 77, above.

1450;⁸³ other than this reference, we have only the dates of the manuscripts to go by. One copy of these oaths is included in British Library MS Stowe 668, a fifteenth-century heraldic collection that was later owned by Robert Glover, Somerset Herald under Elizabeth I. Another is included in British Library MS Cotton Tiberius E viii, a manuscript compiled in the sixteenth century. The texts are essentially the same, suggesting they were copies of the standard oaths used during this period.

In these oaths, heralds of all ranks are obliged to be discreet in their dealings. Pursuivants promise to be “ready to commend and loathe to blame.”⁸⁴ Heralds swear to “keep the secrets of knights, Squires, ladies and Gentlewomen as a Confessor of Arms and not to discover them in nowise except it be treason.”⁸⁵ The phrase “confessor of arms” is intriguing, suggesting that a herald’s dealings must be as sacrosanct as those of a priest in a confessional. Does this suggest that a herald’s scrutiny of a man or woman’s worth is likely to lay bare the defaults in their honor and reputations, or is it merely that heralds were in a position to see and hear much in their travels? A subsequent passage in the heralds’ oath suggests the latter: “Also ye shall promise and swear if ye be in any place where ye hear any language between party and party that been noble person which that is not worshipful, profitable nor virtuous, that ye keep your mouth close and report it not forth but to their worship and the best.” Furthermore, a herald who was party to a disagreement between gentleman and gentlewoman should not testify against them unless both parties agreed or the law compelled him.⁸⁶ Overall, the herald was expected to “be conversant and serviceable to all gentlemen and do their commandment and their worship of knighthood,

⁸³ Wagner, *Records and Collections of the College of Arms*, 7-8.

⁸⁴ BL MS Stowe 668, fol. 42v. BL MS Cotton Tiberius E viii, fol. 113r.

⁸⁵ BL MS Stowe 668, fol. 42v. BL MS Cotton Tiberius E viii, fol. 113r.

⁸⁶ BL MS Stowe 668, fol. 43r. BL MS Cotton Tiberius E viii, fol. 113r.

and excuse their worship by your good counsel.”⁸⁷ Subservience seems to be the general tenor of these oaths. Herald and pursuivants were expected to serve the noble ranks of society, to note and recognize their good deeds and turn a blind eye to their bad: as the pursuivant’s oath says, “be . . . ready to commend and loathe to blame.”⁸⁸

Subservience was not, however, required of Kings of Arms, who were given primary responsibility for monitoring the armigerous men of their provinces. They were, therefore, expected to be far more critical of these men. Kings of Arms, too, must swear to keep track of the worshipful deeds of the men in their provinces, holding on to the records of such deeds that they made as mere heralds. Likewise, they themselves ought to eschew “slandorous places and slanders, persons and reproaches.”⁸⁹ But the oath makes it clear that the primary duties of Kings of Arms focused on coats of arms: “you shall do your whole diligence to have the knowledge of all the noble men within your marches or province which should bear coats in the field in the service of our sovereign lord the king.”⁹⁰ The King of Arms should know every man of noble or gentle rank in his province, their lineage or pedigree, and the arms and crest that each one had the right to bear – and he should know these details not only of the living, but of the dead as well, for “he shall search all religious houses & there to have knowledge of their foundation and of the nobility that is buried within the said places.” He must monitor the coats of arms that noble- and gentleman in his province bore, making sure that no one displayed arms “that is not true armorie according to the law of arms,” whether an unacceptably blazoned coat, a feature inappropriate to the man’s rank, or employing an incorrect mark of difference. He must “search if any bear arms without authority” and forbid them to. In a section following the officers’ oaths,

⁸⁷ BL MS Stowe 668, fol. 42v. BL MS Cotton Tiberius E viii, fol. 113r.

⁸⁸ BL MS Stowe 668, fol. 42v. BL MS Cotton Tiberius E viii, fol. 113r.

⁸⁹ BL MS Stowe 668, fol. 44v. BL MS Cotton Tiberius E viii, fol. 114r.

⁹⁰ BL MS Stowe 668, fol. 44r. BL MS Cotton Tiberius E viii, fol. 113v.

regarding the authority kings of arms have within their respective provinces, MS Cotton Tiberius E viii says that “the said king in his province hath full power and authority by the king’s grant and by the virtue of his office to give confirmations to any gentleman being noble born and Ignorant of his arms or otherwise,” and “he hath authority to give arms to any person or persons being of ability to have arms by reason of office, authority, wisdom, substance, good manners, and governance.”⁹¹

The oath of a King of Arms does provide some guidelines regarding what sort of man ought to be considered worthy to bear arms. What is surprising about these guidelines is *how many* paths to gentility they seem to support. Obviously, a gentleman of noble birth would have a right to bear arms, even if he were so neglectful as to be ignorant of the arms of his ancestors. Yet the other reasons – office, authority, wisdom, substance, good manners and governance – seem to open arms-bearing to a wide variety of men. While it seems logical to extend the right to bear arms past those with noble ancestors to encompass men whose office, lordship or other position placed them on the same level, the last few terms suggest that a man’s personal qualities might be enough to earn a coat of arms. This is a departure from the earlier medieval idea that nobility was transmitted through lineage; it implies the possibility of social mobility in late medieval English society. A man who could accumulate sufficient wealth, or simply learn to behave himself and manage his affairs in a manner that befitted a gentleman, could have his innate gentility recognized through a grant of his very own arms.

Heraldic manuals, whether treatises on blazoning, lists of heralds’ duties, or other texts, also provide some insight into what qualified one for a coat of arms. Since these can be dated more precisely than the heralds’ oaths discussed above, they give a more accurate sense of how these multiple paths to gentility developed between the fourteenth and the sixteenth century. A treatise

⁹¹ BL MS Cotton Tiberius E viii, fol. 114r. This section does not appear in BL MS Stowe 668.

on blazoning from the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century, from MS Ashmolean Rolls 4, asserts that “there ought no man bear a Coat of worship that is for to say a Coat of arms But he were a Gentleman of Birth known of an old stock.”⁹² This reinforces the traditional, conservative viewpoint that only a gentle man could bear a coat of arms, and that he did so on the basis of his noble ancestry. Another heraldic manual, dating from the reign of Henry V, in Bodleian MS Eng. misc. f. 36, lists the specific ranks of men who might bear a coat of arms in battle: “Emperors, Kings and princes, knights, esquires, and all noble and gentle men [who are] Combatants issued from noble Consanguinity,” once again asserting the importance of gentle birth in bearing arms.⁹³ Later in the same manuscript, an excerpt from a Latin heraldic text asserts that “he is called gentleman, who descends from noble lineage and stock.”⁹⁴ All of these quotes reinforce the idea that a man of noble or gentle ancestry always had the right to bear a coat of arms. Birth was the most commonly – and sometimes only – accepted route to armigerous gentility.

Yet another section of the same text acknowledges alternative paths. A French commentary on a section of this Latin heraldic text, which discusses how sons might bear their fathers’ arms with certain differences, asserts that if the king grants arms to a man who does not have gentle ancestors, he can be called gentle, but his issue should not, nor should they bear his arms.⁹⁵ This comment recognizes that a man might be able to achieve gentility for himself without noble ancestry, but this gentility could not be inherited by his children by means of his coat of arms. This seems to recognize the almost whimsical nature of the royal prerogative to

⁹² Bodleian MS Ashmolean Rolls 4.

⁹³ The French reads: “le3 / Emperours Roys et princes cheualiers escuyers et tous nobles et gentil3 homes Combatans yssus / de noble Consanguinite.” Bodleian MS Eng. misc. f. 36, fol. 4v.

⁹⁴ The Latin reads, “Et dicitur generosus, qui de nobili genere & p(ro)sapia descendit.” The passage goes on to emphasize the martial qualities of arms-bearing: “And it is called noble lineage not because of wealth or wisdom but only because of its bellicose energy in arms through which it first draws honor to itself.” (“Et dicitur nobile genus non propter divitias nec propter sapientiam sed solummodo propter suam bellicosam strenuitatem in Armis per quam sibi primo honor attraxit.”) Bodleian MS Eng. misc. f. 36, fol. 17r.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, fols. 15r-16r.

grant arms – the king could grant them as he wished, without regard for birth or circumstance (although, in reality, it seems unlikely that he would totally disregard these things). But he was certainly not bound by the same restrictions that the heralds were. Therefore, the understanding of this text is that these arms ought to be seen as a mark of royal favor – a mark that was not hereditary.

This remark seems contrary to the picture painted by a treatise on blazoning found in several fifteenth-century manuscripts that describes the ancient origins of coats of arms. The text situates the birth of coat armor before the walls of Troy:

As kings of heralds Recorden the beginning and ground of arms was first found at the great siege of noble Troy, both with in the city & with out, for the doughtiness of deeds that were showed & done of both parties, for as much as there were so many mighty knights of both sides that did so great acts of arms & none of them might well be known from other, the great lords of both parties by their discreet advice drew them together & accorded that every man that did a great act of arms should bear up on him a mark in token of his doughtiness, that the people might have the more knowledge of them. And if it so were that such a man had any children, it was ordained also that they should bear the same mark that their father did with diverse difference.⁹⁶

The text then goes on to discuss these marks of difference in detail, with small sketches of the marks beside their descriptions. Although these ancient marks of distinction were won by individual feats of prowess (similar, one might imagine, to the actions that would motivate a king to grant a man arms), they were still hereditary. These early coats of arms marked the prowess of an individual during his lifetime, and the memory of that prowess for his descendants. In this case, the gentility attained by these men was hereditary.

Although this is a description of arms-bearing in a mythic context, it still reflects contemporary perspectives. One of the Latin heraldic texts copied in Bodleian MS Eng. misc. f.

⁹⁶ BL MS Harley 2259, fol. 11r. Treatises in two other manuscripts tell essentially the same story, although for “great acts of arms” they substitute “points of worship.” Bodleian MS Ashmolean Rolls 4. BL MS Additional 34648, fols. 3v-4r.

36 agrees with this statement, claiming that “Whoever takes up arms is made gentle.”⁹⁷

Likewise, Strangeways’ Book, written c. 1455, stressed that gentility and coat armor went hand-in-hand.⁹⁸ Other sections of MS Eng. misc. f. 36 indicate the existence of several paths to armigerous gentility. A Middle English explanation of blazing notes that “merletts should only be given to them that be brought up in the king’s honors or prince that have no livelihood but only Their office.”⁹⁹ Here a specific heraldic bird is assigned to men without property, who were granted arms by a king or prince by virtue of their office. A few folios later, an excerpt from a Latin text proclaims that “Arms are given to Religious men not on account of their prowess, but on account of their honor and nobility, because it is honorable to possess arms as in the case of a doctor of laws for twenty years who can become a knight by the law of arms, not only on account of his prowess, but on account of his dignity.”¹⁰⁰ Here again an office, this time a religious position, is seen as conferring gentility upon its occupant. Nicholas Upton, too, in his *De Studio Militari*, allows that offices can confer gentility in this way, despite otherwise stressing the importance of ancestry.¹⁰¹ These passages seem to reflect a turning point in, or at least a differing opinion about, the nature of gentility. During the fifteenth century, the idea that a coat of arms and its concomitant gentility could be earned, and that earned gentility could still be hereditary, was already circulating.

By the time the *Book of St Albans* was printed in 1486, the legitimacy of earned gentility had become well-established. At the very end of its *Liber Armorum*, there is a lengthy discussion

⁹⁷ The Latin reads, “Et sic q(ui)lib(us) Accipieus Arma est Generosus factus.” Bodleian MS Eng. misc. f. 36, fol. 18r.

⁹⁸ J. P. Cooper, “Ideas of Gentility in Early Modern England” in *Land, Men and Beliefs*, ed. G. E. Aylmer and J. S. Morrill (London: The Hambledon Press, 1983), 47-8.

⁹⁹ Bodleian MS Eng. misc. f. 36, fol. 23r.

¹⁰⁰ The Latin reads: “Arma dantur Religiosis non p(ro)pter Strenuitatem . Sed p(ro)pter honore(m) Et ipsoru(m) nobilitatem Quia honorabile est Arma possidere ut doctor in legibus vigniti Annis per legem Armoru(m) fiet miles non tantu(m) propter eius strenuitatem Sed p(ro)pter eius dignitatem.” *Ibid.*, fol. 25v.

¹⁰¹ Cooper, “Ideas of Gentility,” 48.

of who might grant a man arms and the relative authority of different grantors. The text states that there are four ways to get a coat of arms: “The first manner of wise we have our own arms the which we bear of our father or of our mother or of our predecessors, the which manner of bearing is common and famous.”¹⁰² As usual, ancestry is the first and foremost of the ways one can come to bear arms. However, the text does not dwell on this, choosing to focus on the other ways – the ways in which one could earn arms for himself.

The methods of earning a coat of arms that the *Liber Armorum* describes are both more detailed and more unusual than are recorded in any other text. The second way a coat of arms might be earned is, predictably, in warfare – yet the feats of prowess the text deems necessary are quite specific:

The second manner we have arms by our merits as very plainly it appearith by the addition of th’arms of France to th’arms of England gotten by that most noble man, prince Edward the first-gotten son of king Edward the third that time king of England, after the taking of king John of France in the battle of Poitiers. The which certain addition were lawful and rightwisely done, and on the same manner of wise might a poor archer have take a prince or some noble lord & th’arms of that prisoner by him take so rightwisely, he may put to him and to his heirs.¹⁰³

While Edward III would doubtless take offense at the idea that his son won him the arms of France in battle (rather than inheriting them through his mother), this story serves to illustrate the idea that a coat of arms could be won in combat. In the story, the Black Prince wins the arms of France by capturing its king, and from then on has the right to impale those arms with his own. In the case of a man of less than gentle status, such as the poor archer¹⁰⁴ the text mentions,

¹⁰² All quotes from the *Book of St Albans* are reproduced from the facsimile edition prepared by William Blades. *The Book of St Albans*, edited by William Blades (London: Elliot Stock, 1901), fol. 87v.

¹⁰³ Blades, ed., *BSA*, fol. 88r.

¹⁰⁴ It should be noted that the social status of most archers seems to have been only just below the gentle to begin with. A recent comprehensive examination of military records coming out of the Medieval Soldier Project has demonstrated that the term *valettus* was frequently used with respect to archers, suggesting that the role was often filled by higher-status servants in noble households. In other contexts, the term “yeoman” is associated with archers, indicating a sub-gentle rank. Bell suggests, however, that such positions may have been filled by the younger sons and cousins of minor gentry as well, putting them right on the fringes of gentility. For such a man, the acquisition of arms on the battlefield would constitute a significant elevation in status, perhaps even stabilizing his claim to gentility. Bell, et al., *The Soldier in Later Medieval England*, 139-63.

capturing an armigerous man would give him the right to bear his prisoner's arms as his own, and his heirs after him in perpetuity. While the idea that arms could be won in the heat of battle is a commonplace one, the arms are typically granted after the battle in recognition of outstanding feats of valor. The idea that arms could be won in this way is unusual among heraldic texts. It does demonstrate, however, both the importance of military endeavors to arms-bearing, even toward the end of the fifteenth century, and also the idea that arms could be won through individual merit or prowess.

The third and fourth ways that the text claims a man could be given a coat of arms likewise stress the idea that these arms could be earned. "On the third manner of Wise we have arms the which we wear by the granting of a prince or of some other lords."¹⁰⁵ The text does not elaborate on the reasons why a prince or lord might grant someone arms – it is simply presented as their prerogative, not subject to question. One can only assume that a particular act of service must be done in order to be granted arms in this way (and this is affirmed by the examination of grants of arms later in this chapter). Finally, and most curiously, the text asserts that a man could claim arms for himself, on his own authority:

The fourth manner of which we have those arms the which we take on our own proper authority, as in these days openly we see how many poor men by their grace, favor, labor, or deserving as made nobles: Some by their prudence, Some by their manhood, some by their strength, some by their cunning, some by other virtues. And of these men many by their own authority have take arms to be borne to them and to their heirs of whom it needs not to here to rehearse the names. Never the less arms that be so taken they may lawfully and freely bear.¹⁰⁶

The text is, in fact, rather defensive about this manner of bearing arms, insisting on the veracity of this self-conferred honor. Still, the author acknowledges that these arms are not so great in honor as those which are earned by ancestry, won in battle or bestowed by a great lord or prince:

But yet they be not of so great dignity and authority as those arms the which are granted day by day by the authority of a prince or of a lord. Yet arms by a man's proper authority take, if an

¹⁰⁵ Blades, ed., *BSA*, fol. 88r.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, fol. 88r-v.

other man have not borne them afore, be of strength enough. And it is the opinion of many men that a herald of arms may give arms. But I say that if any such arms be borne by any herald given that those arms be of no more authority than those arms the which be take by a man's own authority.¹⁰⁷

The author of this text seems so bitter towards heralds in this passage, that one wonders if a herald had challenged the veracity of his own arms at some point!

While the assertion that a man could legitimately take up arms on his own authority seems to be a bit of a stretch, especially considering the increasing authority given to heralds to seek out such false coats of arms during the fifteenth century, this text recognizes that coats of arms could be earned. Even a man who took up arms on his own authority did so out of recognition that his personal characteristics – whether prudence, manhood, strength, cunning, or other virtues – were compatible with the values of other armigerous gentlemen. Furthermore, the text asserts that arms taken up for these reasons were not merely earned by the individual, but by his descendants in perpetuity, who had the right to inherit the same arms. This idea that arms – and the gentility they represented – could be earned was to become increasingly important through the sixteenth century, as will be discussed further in the next section.

Discussions of Gentility in Heraldic Texts

Heraldic manuals of all sorts also stress the close connection between gentility and coats of arms. The author of the treatise on blazoning in Bodleian MS Ashmolean Rolls 4, from the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century, takes umbrage at what he sees as the careless use of the term “men at arms” among his contemporaries. When observing a group of armed men riding, he says, too many people “say that yonder ride many men of arms. But it ought not to be said so for they may not were whether They all be Gentlemen of birth or none, But a man may . . . say

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, fol. 88v.

yonder riden a great people of armed men. For a man shall not be called a man of arms by his armor, But by his coat of worship That he Castyth on a bove his armor.”¹⁰⁸ The slightly later treatise in Bodleian MS Eng. misc. f. 36 supports this as well; at the beginning of a series of questions and answers concerning heraldic topics, under the heading “The Beginning of Gentleness,” it proclaims that a man’s “Arms are the origin of all gentleness.”¹⁰⁹ This seems to suggest that possession of a coat of arms elevates one to gentle rank, even without noble ancestors. Yet this is the same text that, further on, proclaims that a gentleman made by a king cannot pass on his arms to his issue; the gentleman born was still valued more highly than the gentleman made.

The *Book of St Albans’ Liber Armorum*, printed in 1486, offers a multifaceted view of gentility, describing nine different “manner of gentlemen.”¹¹⁰ As discussed in Chapter 2, this indicates that by the late fifteenth century, a variety of different paths to gentility were acknowledged as possible. These include noble ancestry, prowess in battle, elevation by the king, inheritance of lands that carried arms, clerical status, and service in a noble household. While heraldic manuals, by their nature concerned with martial matters, tend to focus on the martial side of gentility and arms-bearing, the *Liber Armorum* moves beyond it, exploring the ways in which noncombatants could lay claim to gentle status. The mention of “a gentleman untried,” in particular – presumably referring to one who is untried in battle – confirms this, indicating that even the heralds acknowledged that concern about gentility and arms-bearing had moved beyond the field of battle and into ordinary life. The long descriptions of the “nine manner of gentlemen” in the *Liber Armorum* indicate that heralds in the late fifteenth century saw a number of possible

¹⁰⁸ Bodleian MS Ashmolean Rolls 4.

¹⁰⁹ The French reads: “Le Comencement de Gentilnes . . . Et issint lez Armes Sonnt loriginal de tout gentilnes.” Bodleian MS Eng. misc. f. 36, fol. 14r.

¹¹⁰ Blades, ed., *BSA*, fol. 49v.

ways to acquire gentility, from inheritance and chivalric accomplishment to occupation and service position. The demotion of noble ancestry to just one of several paths to gentility marks a shift from the beginning of the century, when heraldic texts frequently described gentility (and the coat armor which was so often associated with it) as imparted by ancestry alone.

The ideas in the *Liber Armorum* appear to have become mainstream by the early sixteenth century, when it became increasingly common for a man to be granted arms for his own personal merits. That these ideas continued to resonate with their readers is demonstrated by British Library MS Harley 1952. This manuscript contains a heraldic text that is dated 1517, yet the information the text relates is copied word-for-word out of the *BSA*.¹¹¹ By the sixteenth century, the notion that gentility might be earned was well-accepted.

In fact, at the end of the century, Sir John Ferne's *A Blazon of Gentry* actually argues that earned gentility is preferable to inherited. In this text, first printed in 1586, Ferne traces the origin of nobility (the blanket term he uses for the quality that distinguishes gentlemen from commoners) to

some one abounding in many outward graces and parts above the rest, and the fame of his worthiness spread abroad, caused the multitude to yield an especial honor unto him, so that on such a one, were the eyes of many fixed, and he, for the virtues and worthy qualities known to all men to be in him, was chiefly honored, and thus at the first had nobleness her beginning.¹¹²

In fact, he argues that the root of the Latin word *nobilitas* lies in the verb *nosco*, "to know," because "A Gentleman or a Nobleman is he, (for I do wittingly confound these voices) which is known, and through the heroicall virtues of his life, talked of in every man's mouth."¹¹³ What these nobles and gentles ought to be known for, he explains later, is their personal virtue. He explains that nobleness can be divided into three categories: "nobleness of blood and ancestry;"

¹¹¹ BL MS Harley 1952, fol. 4r-v.

¹¹² John Ferne, *The Blazon of Gentry* (New York: De Capo Press, 1973), 6.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 6.

“nobleness achieved through the proper virtues, and merits of a man, tending to the benefit of his country,” and nobleness that is “mixed, for that it is compounded and made of both the former.”

Ferne lists these forms of nobleness in increasing order of importance: a man of virtue and merit is superior to a man of noble lineage, but having both is most desirable.¹¹⁴ This perspective, while developing naturally out of the increasing importance of earned gentility in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, was apparently a bit radical for its time, for Ferne saw fit to use the dialogue form of his work to further emphasize the point:

Torq. Doth your Heraldry prefer a new Gentleman, which by the industry of his virtues, hath obtained to be so called, before those of ancient blood?

Parad. Yea certes, as touching the very essential substance of nobleness: if your Gentleman of blood be without virtue, not showing forth desert or merit, befitting the place which he possesseth.

Torq. Should he then be accounted more worthy noble then the other, whose Gentry is confirmed by the succession of many ages? or is it reason that a newcomer, should disturb him from so ancient a possession, wherein his Ancestors have lived with fame; when as this son of the earth, come from an unknown generation, was in obscurity? I have heard, that the inheritance of the Ancestors Gentry, doth by the laws, no less appertain to the heir, then the heritage of his possessions.

Parad. That is true, the unworthy son of the ancient house, is suffered as I said to challenge the honor of his blood, although unworthily: notwithstanding, I hold as before, that such a person, which wanting the provocations of the domesticall examples of his Ancestors, being in obscure and base degree, and without liberal or honest education, and yet, hath through virtue, so much prevailed against the malignity of fortune, that his family, before hidden in the dust, and obscured with ignobility, should from thenceforth be named Noble, deserveth rather to be called truly Noble then the other”¹¹⁵

When the knight Torquatus questions the herald Paradinus, the latter responds by emphatically defending his position. Ancestral nobility means little to Paradinus if it is not accompanied by gentle virtues; he argues that the baseborn but virtuous man is, in fact, greater in gentility than the indolent blueblood. While the other participants in Ferne’s conversation do not necessarily agree with Paradinus’ views, his perspective is one that was embraced by some contemporary

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 18.

Englishmen, indicating just how far the concept of earned gentility had developed by the end the sixteenth century. While in the previous century, those rising into the gentle ranks had to prove themselves by demonstrating their virtues and good governance, Ferne seems to be turning the table, pressuring the ancestral gentry and nobility to prove themselves worthy of their elevated position.

The natural conclusion of this development is the complete separation of gentility from noble lineage. While it seems unlikely that this quality that served to so deeply define the English aristocracy during the late Middle Ages, serving to separate them from even the wealthiest commoners, should be totally disassociated from it, an anecdote from the reign of James II seems to indicate that this was in fact the case by the late seventeenth century. When a lady petitioned the king to make her son a gentleman, the king replied, “Madam, I could make him a nobleman, but God almighty himself could not make him a gentleman.”¹¹⁶ While James clearly intended to be witty at the expense of the lady’s son, this quip does indicate an understanding of gentility as a characteristic entirely separate from status or rank. While James could confer gentle rank whenever he chose, what he perceived as true gentility – the gentility that came from virtue and personal merit – had to be earned.

Grants of Arms

If the possession of a grant of arms marked one’s full acceptance into the gentry, then the texts of individual grants can provide insight into what qualities were perceived as gentle. As the above discussion of heralds’ manuals makes clear, there were a variety of reasons for which a man might be granted a coat of arms during this period. Heraldry was provided with rough guidelines for determining who was eligible, but ultimately the decision was left up to their

¹¹⁶ D. A. L. Morgan, “The Individual Style of the English Gentleman” in Michael Jones, ed., *Gentry and Lesser Nobility in Later Medieval Europe* (New York: St Martin’s, 1986), 17.

individual discretion. In this way, heralds can be considered the gatekeepers of gentility, effectively constructing the lower boundary of the gentry as they determined who made the cut and who did not.

In order to determine what criteria were used in making these decisions, I have performed a survey of the grants of arms in the collections of the Bodleian and British Libraries, supplemented by grants I have found in printed material and other archives. These archives were chosen because, in addition to their extensive collections of late medieval manuscripts, they each house the papers of prominent heralds – notably the manuscripts of Elias Ashmole at the Bodleian Library and John Writhe and Thomas Wriothesley at the British Library. Since these heralds habitually collected copies of grants of arms they came across in their travels, these manuscripts provide a strong foundation for this study. In all, I found fifty-eight grants of arms from the fourteenth through early sixteenth centuries in these archives.¹¹⁷

This sample of 58 grants includes a variety of different types. Only one of them might be considered an original, with the seal still attached.¹¹⁸ All other grants were copies, either from

¹¹⁷ The manuscripts consulted include: TNA MS C 61/133B [Bernard Angevin]; BL MSS Additional 5506 [John Hales], Additional 14295 [Edward Boughton; William Boughton; Edward Stokwode; William Swayne], Additional 48031A [A. B.], Additional Charter 16216 [Matthew Tristram], Additional Charter 74939 [Radulph Caldwell], Cotton Faustina E i [Edmond Mille], Harley 1172 [Thomas Aleyn; John Bangor; William Crooke; Thomas Hutton; Richard Pynfold; William Swayne], Harley 1359 [John Picton], Harley 1410 [John and Thomas Macworth], Harley 1507 [Thomas Andrew; John Bangor; John Barrett; Richard Blackwall; William Boughton; Louis Caerlion; William Crooke; William Gogh; William Greene; John de Kingston; John de Mandevill; John de Massy], Harley 2202 [William Poole], Harley 4900 [John Alfrey; Jane Doughte; Hugh Vaughan], Harley 7025 [Richard Andrews], Stowe 714 [Robert Castell; Robert Hoddesdon]; London, London Metropolitan Archives MS ACC/0351/006 [Thomas Aleyn]; Bodleian MSS Ashmole 834 [Giles Strangways], Ashmole 840 [Mighell Poynant], Ashmole 857 [Robert Braybrooke; John Codrington; John Fisher; Thomas Larder], Ashmole 858 [William Atwater; John Bruggford; John Kendall; Pierre Nerbonne; John Oxinden; Mighell Poynant; John Randolph; Robert Whitgreve]. All fifty-seven medieval grants of arms found in these manuscripts were included in the survey, with a cut-off date of 1530. Some manuscripts contained duplicate copies of grants found elsewhere. In addition, the medieval grants of arms found in the following print sources were included: William Camden, ed., *Remains Concerning Britain* (London: John Russell Smith, 1870; reprint, East Ardsley, Wakefield, Yorkshire: EP Publishing, 1973), 238-41 [William Moigne; Baldwin de Manoirs; William Criketot]; Frederick Arthur Crisp, ed., "Grant of Arms to Thomas Northland" *Fragmenta Genealogica* 10 (1904): 75 [Thomas Northland]; Willoughby A. Littledale, ed., *A Collection of Miscellaneous Grants of Arms* (London: J. Whitehead and Son, 1925-6), 2-3, 41-3, 53-4, 70, 194 [John Aleyn; Christopher Brown; William Bulmer; John Compton; Thomas and John Elyott; John and James Tallow].

¹¹⁸ TNA C 61/133B.

other manuscripts – generally heralds’ books – or printed editions. The fact that most of these texts are copies does not diminish their scholarly value – it is quite difficult to say what might count as an “original” grant of arms. I consider the abovementioned grant an original because of the presence of a wax seal affixed to the document by a loop of vellum. This was likely the presentation copy given to the recipient of the grant, in this case Ralph Caldwell. Very few such original grants of arms survive from the medieval period. Yet it was common for heralds to make copies of their work. At the time of an original grant, multiple copies might have been made to send to other parties with an interest in the grant’s information.¹¹⁹ At a later date, a confirmation of a grant might be produced to reaffirm the original, such as when an heir succeeded to his father’s right to bear arms.¹²⁰ A few of the grants included in this survey are actually confirmations, declaring that the individual named had a right to display the arms that had been borne by his ancestors.¹²¹ Although these are not new grants, they transfer the right to bear these arms to new individuals, and thus qualify to be included in this survey. Other copies were made by heralds in subsequent centuries. As mentioned above, heralds habitually copied any and all documents relating to their profession that crossed their paths; many of the grants of arms consulted are sixteenth- and seventeenth-century copies inscribed in manuscripts for the use of individual heralds. In some cases, the heralds making these copies sought to preserve even the

¹¹⁹ This may be the case with the 1508 grant to Mighell Poynant which is copied in Bodleian MS Ashmole 858, fol. 221r-v. This document is called an “exemplification” of arms, likely to provide a written proof along with a painted example of the arms to an outside party who needed the information – perhaps a royal official keeping track of the armigerous men in his county or province, perhaps a craftsman assigned to depict the arms on a commissioned piece who was unable to properly read the blazon.

¹²⁰ Confirmations of arms were not generally issued when there was a straightforward, father-to-son transmission, but rather when a more distant relative needed to reinforce his claim to inherit those arms. Adrian Ailes notes that the confirmation of arms issued by Richard II to Sir Otho de Maundell was issued because Sir Otho had lost the original grant given to his father. In this case, Ailes points out that the difficulty was not simply Sir Otho’s right to bear arms, but his right to bear a particular coat of arms that resembled that of the king. He notes that a number of surviving royal grants of arms were issued to allow individuals to mimic aspects of the royal arms in their own, as a mark of favor. Ailes, “Royal Grants of Arms in England before 1484,” 85-96.

¹²¹ These include the grants to John de Massy (BL MS Harley 1507, fol. 201r), to Robert Hoddesdon (BL MS Stowe 714, fol. 172), to John Codrington (Bodleian MS Ashmole 857, fol. 520), and John Randolph (Bodleian MS Ashmole 858, fols. 34-5).

script and abbreviations of the texts they replicated.¹²² In all of these cases, these grants were not copied casually – the copies were intended to serve in a variety of official capacities. Modern scholars, therefore, can have faith in the accuracy of the information they contain.

Grants of arms have been largely ignored by modern historians primarily because of their formulaic nature. While different writers had their own particular styles and turns of phrase, the basic formula is this: a statement of the issuer's authority; a description of the virtues of those of gentle rank; the introduction of the grantee; the reason why the grant is being given; the blazon of his arms; how those arms are to be legally transferred in the future; and, finally, the signature of the issuer and the date. By way of an example, here is a transcription of an exemplification of the arms of John Kendall of Leicestershire issued in 1443. An exemplification is a grant of arms that includes the blazon and, often, a painted miniature of the arms alongside. These were generally written for individuals who were inheriting arms from their relations, as proof of the new bearer's right to them. The text of the exemplification is as follows:

To all manner persons that this present writing shall see or hear humble recommendation by me Clarence King of Arms of the South march & Servant of Arms. It is so that many persons inured of noble courage purposing to exercise & use virtuous manners & conditions by the ability of which conditions through their noble conversation they shall now come with God's grace to the promotion of great honor. Of which persons aforesaid one in special being a circumspect & a full discrete person called John Kendall of the County of Leicester gentleman intending to all gentleness hath come to me the said Clarence King of Arms requiring & tenderly praying me for to search out for him the Arms of his Progenitors at request of which John considering the worshipful disposition of his person & of his ability in gentleness. I the said Clarence have labored & searched & found out the Arms of his progenitors, which been such that is to say of *gules 3 eagles of gold between a fess checked of gold and azure* the which Arms appertain now unto the said Clarence King of Arms approve & confirm the said Arms to the said John Kendall & to all the persons of his lineage that owe rightfully to bear them for evermore. Without letting gainsaying or impeachment of any person in any wise. In witness whereof I have done these present Letters to be witnessed & sealed there with the Seal of my Arms & put thereto my sign manual the 12th day of August the 21st year of the Reign of our Sovereign Lord King Harry the sixth.

Clarence

¹²² A fifteenth-century "writ out of the court of Chivalry" was copied in this fashion in BL MS Harley 1178, fol. 44r.

King of Arms¹²³

Overall, these grants tend to be very predictable, going through these same elements in their own language. Some, particularly the early grants, are short and to the point; others, notably the later grants by heralds like Thomas Wriothesley, are quite lengthy, describing the virtues and worthiness of the noble and gentle in poetic language: “Equity wills and Reason ordains that those men who are virtuous and of noble courage are by their merits and good renown numbered and not only their persons in this mortal life, so brief and transitory, but also all those who issue from their bodies . . .”¹²⁴ Whatever language is used, the most interesting element buried within these grants is the reason or reasons that they give for granting arms to the individuals in question. These reasons tend to be the least formulaic sections of the grant, changing in response to the differing circumstances of the recipients. That the rest of the text follows the above formula so closely makes it all the more significant that these reasons change, and their shift over time can help us understand the changing nature of gentility in late medieval England.

The dates of these grants are important in understanding this shift. Five of these grants of arms (8.6 percent) date from the fourteenth century, the earliest from 1334. Thirty-five (60.3 percent) were issued during the fifteenth-century. Of these, nine (15.5 percent) date from the first half and twenty-six (44.8 percent) date from the second half of the century. Seventeen grants (29.3 percent) date from the sixteenth century, prior to 1530 which is the end date for this study.¹²⁵ One grant (1.7 percent) is undated. It is notable that the frequency of grants appears to

¹²³ The name of the grant’s recipient is often underlined in these manuscripts. Whether that is the case in original grants or was merely done by copyists for ease of reference is unclear. Bodleian MS Ashmole 858, fol. 109.

¹²⁴ The translation is my own. The original French reads: “Equite veult et Raison ordonne queles hom(m)es vertuoux et de noble couraige soient par leurs merites et bonne renomée renumere3 et non pas seuleme(n)t leures p(er)sones em ceste vie mortelle tant brefne et transitoire mais apres Eulx ceulx qui de leures corps yssiront . . .” BL MS Harley 2022, fol. 70v.

¹²⁵ If this study were to be extended to include the entire sixteenth century, a large number of additional surviving grants of arms would doubtless be found, particularly as the dissolution of the monasteries enriched the ranks of the civil servants.

have increased in the mid-fifteenth century, at the very moment when social mobility was becoming a distinct possibility in English society. In understanding this trend, the dates of these documents are not as useful as the reigns within which they were granted: forty-nine of the fifty-eight grants (84.4 percent) were issued during the reigns of Henry VI, Edward IV, Henry VII and Henry VIII (see Table 1 below). It is likely that the political turmoil of these reigns – the Hundred Years’ War, the Wars of the Roses, the rise of the Tudor dynasty and their state-building efforts – created social opportunities for the fortunate and ambitious.

Table 1. Breakdown of Grants of Arms by Reign of Issue

Reign of Issue	Grants Issued (N)	Grants Issued (%)
Edward III	2	3.4
Richard II	3	5.2
Henry IV	1	1.7
Henry V	1	1.7
Henry VI	15	25.9
Edward IV	10	17.2
Henry VII	11	19.0
Henry VIII	13	22.4
Foreign grantor	1	1.7
Unknown grantor	1	1.7
Total	58	

The parties issuing grants of arms changed notably across this period. The vast majority of the grants examined here were issued by heralds: forty-seven out of fifty-eight (81.0 percent).

Table 2. Grants of Arms by Issuer

Issuer	Grants Issued (N)	Grants Issued (%)
Lord/Knight	7	12.0
King	4	6.9
Herald	47	81.0
Total	58	

Yet the raw numbers do not tell the whole story. While the grants issued personally by kings are scattered throughout the period – from Richard II to Henry VIII – all of the grants issued by

lords, knights or other private individuals, presumably to relatives or members of their affinities, are dated before 1442. After 1450, all but one of the grants were issued by heralds – the one exception being the grant by Henry VII to his servant Pierre Nerbonne who, if we presume his name indicates that he was a Frenchman, would not have fallen under the territorial jurisdiction of any of the English kings of arms.¹²⁶

These numbers show a very important moment in the history of heraldry – and of gentility. They show the development of the office of herald during this period: from refereeing tournaments and battle lines to becoming the true gatekeepers of gentility, determining which individuals were worthy of the right to bear arms and which were not. The right of lords or the king to issue these grants goes back to the military origin of armorial bearings, as a means by which commanders could be identified in battle. But as these grants lost their military associations during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, as they took on more of a prestigious social meaning, issuing them became the responsibility of an organized corporate body: the nexus of what would become the College of Arms.

Intertwined with the increased role of heralds in granting arms is a change in the reasons why arms were granted. While these grants are quite formulaic, as discussed above, they do generally explain the reason why an individual was deemed worthy to bear arms, and these reasons change over time. The reasons given can be easily divided into three categories: ancestry (“I . . . have labored & searched & found out the Arms of his progenitors”), service to a lord or king (“for the good service he hath done, and shall do to our Sovereign Lord and to the Worship of Knighthood”), and personal qualities (“he hath long Continued in virtue and in all his Actes

¹²⁶ Bodleian MS Ashmole 858, fol. 60. M. J. Sayer agrees that after the fifteenth century, grants of arms were only issued by the crown when the grantee was a foreigner. M. J. Sayer, *English Nobility: The Gentry, the Heralds and the Continental Context* (Norwich: Norfolk Heraldry Society, 1979), 5-6.

and demeanings hath well sadly and honorably guided & Governed himself’).¹²⁷ The distribution of these reasons is given in Table 3 below:

Table 3. Reasons for Granting Arms		
Reason Cited	Grants (N)	Grants (%)
Noble Ancestry	19	32.7
Service	5	8.6
Personal Qualities	24	41.4
No Reason Given	3	5.2
Multiple Reasons Given	7	12.1
Total	58	

The importance of these numbers will be addressed in a moment.

Noble ancestry was the earliest and most obvious reason for a grant of arms to be issued. Once arms were understood to be hereditary, a clear method had to be established by which to pass them down. When the individual who ought to inherit the arms was clear, the transmission of the arms was completed privately and does not appear in the historical record – heralds did not need to be involved in straightforward cases.¹²⁸ In the earliest grant of arms in our sample, however, this seems to be exactly what happened. The 1334 grant by the Guienne King of Arms (who was responsible for English territories in France) confirms the right of Thomas Andrew, as well as his brothers Raphe, Richard, William, James, and Andrew and all their heirs, to the arms carried by “his said father and other his predecessors.”¹²⁹ It seems unlikely that these men were

¹²⁷ Bodleian MS Ashmole 858, fol. 109, Bodleian MS Ashmole 857, fol. 520, and BL MS Harley 1507, fol. 214r.

¹²⁸ The sample of grants of arms used here is very likely skewed by these issues. It must be assumed that most individuals who bore arms in late medieval England did so by virtue of inheritance, and did not need any other qualities or accomplishments in order to have that right confirmed. Yet an individual from such an armigerous family would likely have been firm in his or her gentle status. When it comes to understanding the boundaries of gentility, the most interesting cases are those at the margins. Any new grant of arms, or confirmation of existing arms, that had to be issued indicates an individual whose claim to this marker of gentle status was in some way weak and needed to be bolstered by an outside authority. (There are cases of disputes over the use of a particular coat of arms, such as the famous Scrope-Grosvenor case brought before the Court of Chivalry in 1386, but these were rare and unusual incidents – such conflicts are unlikely to have been the reason for the majority of surviving grants. For more on the Scrope-Grosvenor case, see Denholm-Young, *The Country Gentry in the Fourteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 134-5.)

¹²⁹ BL MS Harley 1507, fol. 52r.

ignorant of the arms their father bore; a more probable reason for the grant was to smooth out issues of succession – perhaps, in this case, whether the arms could descend to all six sons, rather than just the eldest. Generally, heralds were only called in to confirm the arms of men of gentle ancestry who had a more remote right to bear them. This is the reason claimed for the exemplification of the arms of John Oxinden issued by a different Guienne King of Arms, John Wrexworth, in 1428. Wrexworth writes that “I the said Guienne King of Arms, at prayer, insistence & request of the said John, have made herein due search and found the right arms of the said John as their progenitors time out of mind have borne.”¹³⁰ This sort of formula turns up again and again in these grants – these Kings of Arms were called upon to search the records that were at their disposal for any reference to the arms of an individual’s noble ancestors and, when they were found, to confirm the descendant’s right to bear them.

There is, of course, some question as to the veracity of heralds’ statements in these matters. As bearing arms became an important aspect of gentility, and more and more individuals sought arms of their own, there was increasing pressure on heralds to falsify, or at least fudge, these matters. Noble progenitors could be simply invented, or specious relationships could be “discovered” between aspiring gentry and existing noble lineages; this sort of falsification was rarely done before the fifteenth century, from which there are several extant examples.¹³¹ The spurious genealogy produced by the Paston family in the fifteenth century when they were (rightfully) accused of coming from servile stock stresses the pressure aspiring gentles were under to document that they belonged.¹³² Unlike the Pastons, whose own records provide clues to the veracity of the slanders against them, it is not possible to know whether most of the “noble ancestors” touted by grants of arms were legitimate. Yet, for the sake of this study, it does not

¹³⁰ Bodleian MS Ashmole 858, fol. 64.

¹³¹ Denholm-Young, *History and Heraldry*, 6.

¹³² Keen, *Origins of the English Gentleman*, 21.

matter. It is enough to note that having noble ancestors automatically qualified one for a grant of arms.

Arms were also occasionally granted to individuals who had performed acts of exceptional service to a king. This service is typically military in nature, as in the dramatic case of John Codrington. The text of two separate documents survive regarding Codrington's arms, both issued by Roger Leighe, Clarenceux King of Arms, during the reign of Henry VI to confirm a grant that had been made about twenty years earlier. The first notes that "this present writing . . . confirm[s] to John Codrington of the Shire of Gloucester Gentleman, frank and free, for the good service he hath done, and shall do, to our Sovereign Lord, and to the Worship of Knighthood." The second document, copied below in the same manuscript, provides a little more detail: "the same John Codrington hath been armed in the aforesaid Arms in the Service of our Sovereign Lord King Henry the fifth in Battle."¹³³ Codrington won his arms at the king's own hand in the heat of battle – "to the Worship of Knighthood" indeed. The late date at which these confirmations were issued suggests that, after returning home at the completion of his service, his neighbors needed convincing that the arms he bore were indeed valid. Another such grant was given by Henry VI to Bernard Angevin, along with the lordships of Rauzan and Pujols, for his assistance during the war in France.¹³⁴ The lordships he was granted, and the arms that went along with them, indicate that his service had placed him high in the king's favor. Overall, only a small percentage of grants of arms were ever issued for acts of service. Presumably, it was always within the jurisdiction of the king or a high-ranking lord to grant arms to a retainer who

¹³³ Bodleian MS Ashmole 857, fols. 520-1.

¹³⁴ TNA MS C 61/133B. Angevin was a French bourgeois who made his fortune by double-dealing during the war – he served on Henry VI's council in Bordeaux, but signed the surrender of the city to France in 1451 and helped defend the city against the English in the next year. At the time of the grant, Angevin was still solidly on the side of the English. Alexandre Nicolaï and Edouard Feret, "Excursion a Rauzan" *Société Archéologique de Bordeaux* 20 (1895), 27.

performed an exceptionally valiant act, whether during wartime, as mentioned above, or in peacetime, in the case of the grant by Henry VII to Pierre Nerbonne.

The final reason that an individual might be granted arms was the recognition of his outstanding personal qualities. This is the most intriguing reason for the sake of our inquiry because the particular personal qualities that are mentioned in these grants must have been consistent with how a gentleman of the time was expected to conduct himself. These qualities could be phrased in a variety of ways; it seems as if each individual herald had his own way to say it. In a 1450 grant, John Smert, Garter, attests that Edmond Mille “has for long pursued feats of arms & as well in this as in other matters has carried himself valiantly, and honourably governed himself;” nine years later, he uses the very same language in a grant describing John Alfrey.¹³⁵ Wrexworth, the afore-mentioned Guienne, cites the “worshipful disposition of his person & ability in all gentleness” as the reason for his grant of arms to Thomas Aleyn in 1459; two years later, he uses the same language to describe William Swayne.¹³⁶ Overall, the language chosen seems to describe the recipient’s character in somewhat general terms, establishing him as an upstanding member of the community.

By the late fifteenth century, the language employed in this type of grant seems to have become standardized. A grant by Clarenceux King of Arms, to Thomas Larder early in the reign of Edward IV is the first to explain that Larder “hath long continued in virtue, & in all his Acts and demeanings hath well sadly & honorably guided & governed him.”¹³⁷ From this point onward, this is the language preferred by heralds in issuing grants of arms by virtue of a man’s

¹³⁵ BL MS Cotton Faustina E. i, fol. 12. Reproduced in Littledale, ed., 149.

¹³⁶ London Municipal Archives MS ACC/0351/006. BL MS Additional 14295, fol. 5v.

¹³⁷ This grant claims to have been issued by “Thomas, Clarenceux,” but its date is eight years too early for this to be Thomas Holme. In 1468, the position of Clarenceux was held by William Hawkeslowe. It is possible that the date of the manuscript, “the xijth / of February the vijth Yeare of the Reigne of our Sovereigne / Lord King Edward the fourth” is misleading. It may, in fact, refer not to 1467, but 1477 – seven years after Edward IV was reinstated as king. Bodleian MS Ashmole 857, 524-5.

personal qualities: Thomas Holme, Clarenceux uses this phrase in three more grants; John More, Norroy King of Arms, uses it in one; John Writhe, Garter, uses it in two; Roger Machado, Clarenceux, uses it in one; and Thomas Wriothesley, Garter, uses it in eleven grants, all issued in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.¹³⁸ None of these men issue grants due to personal qualities using any other language. As a man's personal qualities became a more commonly accepted reason for granting him arms, the heralds established a common formula to be used in the text of the grants.

Occasionally, a grantor lists multiple reasons why an individual deserves to bear arms. In these cases, one reason serves to reinforce the others, doubly stressing the recipient's gentility. In a 1416 grant given at Harfleur, Edward, Duke of York bestowed arms upon John Bruggford, esquire, for his personal "honor and valiance."¹³⁹ That this "honor and valiance" was related to Bruggford's participation in the Agincourt campaign is quite likely. Yet this can only be inferred from the date and location of the grant; the writer was content to list Bruggford's general attributes as the reason, rather than document any instances of specific bravery. A 1465 grant to Matthew Tristram by the Romerych King of Arms of the Holy Roman Empire is more straightforward, pointing out Tristram's "Benefit, & Verity True Probity & Piety," calling him "Honest & Vertuous," but also asserting his determination to "do with all diligence Willing &

¹³⁸ Thomas Holme, Clarenceux uses this phrase in three more grants; John More, Norroy King of Arms, uses it in one; John Writhe, Garter, uses it in two; Roger Machado, Clarenceux, uses it in one; and Thomas Wriothesley, Garter, uses it in eleven grants, all issued in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. Holme: Bodleian MS Ashmole 857, 523-4 [Fisher]; BL MS Harley 1507, fol. 214r [Gogh]; Crisp, ed., 75 [Northland]; More: BL MS Stowe 714, 173r [Castell]; Writhe: BL MS Harley 1507, fol. 190r [Caerlion]; BL MS Harley 4900, fol. 17v [Vaughan]; Machado: BL MS Harley 1172, fol. 3 [Pynfold]; Wriothesley: Harley 2202, fol. 70v [Poole]; Wriothesley and Young: BL MS Harley 1507, fol. 52r [Andrew]; Wriothesley and Wall: Littledale, ed., *Collection of Miscellaneous Grants*, Vol I, 42-3 [Bulmer]; Wriothesley and Benolt: BL MS Additional 14295, fol. 83r [Boughton]; BL MS Harley 1507, fol. 200v [Boughton]; Additional Charter 74939 [Caldwall]; Littledale, ed., *Collection of Miscellaneous Grants*, Vol I, 53-4 [Compton]; BL MS Harley 4900, fol. 23r [Doughte]; BL MS Additional 5506, fol. 109r-110r [Hales]; Littledale, ed., *Collection of Miscellaneous Grants*, Vol I, 114-5 [Hutton]; BL MS Additional 14295, 97r-v [Stockwode].

¹³⁹ The French reads: "pour honnoure et valliance ." Bodleian MS Ashmole 858, fol. 94. BL MS Harley 4900, fol. 16v.

obedient Service to our most Gracious Lord the Lord & Emperor Frederick and to the Holy Empire.”¹⁴⁰ In these cases, exceptional service *and* personal qualities are invoked to establish the gentility of the grants’ recipients. While the grant to Tristram was issued by a foreign body, it indicates that the importance of service in establishing gentility was understood elsewhere in Europe as well. In other cases, noble ancestry is called upon in addition to personal qualities. In a 1494 grant, Christopher Carlyle, Norroy, searched through his ancient books to establish that Richard Blackwall’s ancestors had been armigerous, but also notes “the virtue and substance of the said Richard Blackwall and his possession sufficient to maintain his heirs.”¹⁴¹ Likewise, in a 1520 grant to William Bulmer, Wriothesley mentions that Bulmer was the bastard son of a knight before asserting his virtuous behavior and governance.¹⁴² Perhaps Blackwall and Bulmer had such tenuous noble connections that their personal qualities had to be called upon to reinforce their claims to gentility (or their noble connections served to reinforce somewhat questionable assertions of virtue and respectability). Or perhaps the heralds issuing these grants simply saw evidence of more than one qualification for gentility. Whatever the reasons for these multiple claims to gentility, it is important to note that the same three areas are cited over and over again: noble ancestry, exceptional service and personal qualities.

Among the grants examined in this survey, the most common reason for a man to be granted arms was his personal qualities. These numbers become more significant when examined across time – in this case, across the reigns in which they were issued.

¹⁴⁰ BL MS Additional Charter 16216.

¹⁴¹ BL MS Harley 1507, fol. 176v.

¹⁴² BL MS Harley 1052, reproduced in Littledale, ed., 42-3.

Table 4: Reasons for Grants Distributed Over Time

Reign	Ancestry	Service	Personal Qualities	No Reason Given	Multiple Reasons Given	Total Grants Issued
Edward III	1	0	0	1	0	2
Richard II	1	1	0	1	0	3
Henry IV	1	0	0	0	0	1
Henry V	0	0	0	0	1	1
Henry VI	6	3	5	0	1	15
Edward IV	2	0	7	0	1	10
Henry VII	6	1	3	0	1	11
Henry VIII	2	0	9	0	2	13
Foreign Ruler	0	0	0	0	1	1
Undated	0	0	0	1	0	1

Note, in particular, the distribution of grants of arms given by virtue of the personal qualities of the recipients. None appear in our sample before the reign of Henry VI, but between Henry VI and Henry VIII, when our survey ends, these become the predominant reason for an individual to be granted arms. This is incredibly significant for our understanding of gentility during the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. While men of gentle ancestry always had the right to bear arms and were granted that right when they requested it, and exceptional acts were duly rewarded whenever they were performed, more and more often during this period men were being granted the right to bear arms for unexceptional reasons – not because they performed valiant acts of service during wartime or exhibited exceptional loyalty to their lords or kings, but because they embodied the essential characteristics of gentility in their personal lives. Gentility was becoming associated less with the status of one's ancestors and more with the way an individual lived his own life. While it is unlikely that ancestry, wealth and connections were ever entirely out of the picture, these conclusions suggest an unprecedented potential for social mobility during this

period – that anyone who conducted himself according to a particular code of behavior had a right to gentle rank.

This change in why a man might be granted arms appears to go hand-in-hand with the rise of the heralds as an organized body with sole jurisdiction over these grants. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, by the late fifteenth century the heralds had become the “gatekeepers of gentility,” traveling throughout the country and examining individual claims to arms in an attempt to reinforce the boundary between gentle and common.¹⁴³ While heralds’ acknowledgement of multiple paths to gentility – through personal characteristics and acts of service as well as noble ancestry – would be significant in itself, the language of the grants indicates that they did not simply rely upon their own perceptions of a man’s worth. The grants reveal that heralds often invoked the opinion of the community before determining to grant a man arms. In his grant to Robert Castell, More notes that he determined Castell’s worth “not only by Common Renown but also by my own knowledge & the report of many other credible & noble persons.” And not only did Castell govern himself well, but he “hath and is Right well accounted numbered accepted & Received into the number of the Company of other ancient gentle and noblemen.”¹⁴⁴ This is typical language that can be found in several other grants.¹⁴⁵ Paradoxically, in order to be counted as gentle, a man already had to be accepted into the gentle community. This indicates that receiving a coat of arms did not mark a man’s entrance into the ranks of the gentle, but rather confirmed it. It also underscores the importance of reputation to

¹⁴³ Wagner argues that there is evidence that heraldic visitations were conducted well before 1530, the date when Henry VIII was thought to have established the practice. Wagner, *Heralds and Heraldry*, 106-20.

¹⁴⁴ BL MS Stowe 714, fol. 173r.

¹⁴⁵ Other examples include: BL MSS Additional 14295, fol. 83r and fol. 97r-v [Edward Boughton and Edward Stockwode]; Harley 1507 fol. 185v-186r, 190r, 190r-v, 200v, 214r [John Barrett, Louis Caerlion, Mark Ogle of Eglingham, William Boughton, William Gogh].

gentility.¹⁴⁶ In evaluating a man's claim to bear arms, a herald inquired into his reputation among the local community; if he was well thought of and accepted into gentle company, there was little reason for the herald to question his claim.

What this means is that not only did the heralds accept the existence of multiple paths to gentility, but the gentle community did as well. This seems counterintuitive, considering the push toward social closure among the late medieval gentry. But while it seems unlikely that an individual upstart would, after making his fortune and showing evidence of personal virtue, be simply accepted into gentle society, one can imagine his son or grandson, after lingering on the fringes of gentility for a generation or so, earning his acceptance. A coat of arms did not make such a man gentle, but confirmed it for all time. It is tempting to read such a story into an individual grant of arms, seeing in it the culmination of a particular family's rise to gentility. Yet the opposite case is a possibility as well: a man's personal qualities standing as the last remaining indicator of the diluted gentility of his lineage. But whether upwardly or downwardly mobile, the qualifications for remaining above the lower boundary of the gentry were the same: a man had to have noble or gentle ancestors, ideally armigerous themselves; or he had to win his place through exceptional and loyal service to a lord or king; or, finally, he had to demonstrate through his virtuous conduct and the governance of his affairs that he belonged in gentle company.

By the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century, a wide variety of heraldic documents indicate the existence of multiple paths to gentility. Arms-bearing was no longer restricted to the ancestral knightly families, but had spread down through the ranks to the esquires and gentlemen. Coats of arms were not the exclusive property of fighting men, but had extended to

¹⁴⁶ Lawrence Stone cites reputation as a characteristic feature of the early modern period, demonstrating that the shift in qualifications for gentility is part of a larger social trend. Stone, *Crisis of the Aristocracy*, 42.

the professional classes, accessible to lawyers, bureaucrats and even clerics. By the end of this period, the primary requirement for a coat of arms seems to have been a reputation for personal virtue and the good governance of one's affairs. Falling in line with the values of gentility was enough to render one gentle in the eyes of the community, as well as the eyes of the heralds, and these values became increasingly vague as more livelihoods were deemed compatible with a gentle lifestyle. The next chapter will address more specifically the codes of behavior that were seen as gentle and how one might learn to embody them through the instruction of the many conduct texts that were circulating during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

Chapter 4

Teaching Gentility: Advice for Gentle Boys

The last two chapters have shown how perceptions of the type of lifestyles and livelihoods that might be recognized as gentle increased in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. The next three chapters will explore how an aspirant gentle man or woman might earn that recognition. Specifically, they will look at texts produced during the period that purported to teach English men and women the art of gentility. The existence of these texts indicates both that there was a market for such material, demonstrating a desire among the reading public to acquire gentility, and that gentility came to be seen as something that could be learned, rather than something that could be passed down only through an ancient bloodline.

This chapter focuses on collections of conduct poems that became extremely popular in England during the late fifteenth century. These poems, often directed at young boys, focus on teaching manners and proper behavior. In their original manuscripts, a number of conduct poems conclude with the injunction “Learn or Be Lewd.”¹ While the Middle English term *lewde* could refer to one who was illiterate or uneducated, it also carried a connotation of common status.² The implication is that one who did not internalize the teachings of these poems and put them into practice in his life would be seen as lesser in status, understanding, or perhaps both (for these concepts were quite closely connected). Such education was critically important to the

¹ A fragment of the *Lytylle Childrenes Lytil Boke* in British Library MS Harley 541 ends, “Explicit lerne or be lewde.” This is also written at the end of a version of the *Babees Book* and again after the *ABC of Aristotle* in British Library MS Harley 5086. In the copy of Russell’s *Boke of Nurture* in British Library MS Royal 17.D.xv, the young man being taught how to serve in a lord’s household claims that “I am as lewd as is a poppinjay.” Finally, Caxton’s *Book of Curtesye* says, “Who will not learn nedely* he must be lewd.” This could refer simultaneously to his unpolished manners and his ignorance of the matters in which he seeks instruction. F. J. Furnivall, ed., *Caxton’s Book of Curtesye*, EETS e. s. 3 (London: Oxford University Press, 1868; reprint, Millwood, NY: Kraus Reprint Co., 1973). *Nedely (adv.): eagerly, earnestly; necessarily, of necessity. Either connotation would work in this context. In the first sense, whoever will not learn eagerly must be lewd. In the second, whoever will not learn must necessarily be lewd. The placement of the adverb within the sentence implies that the first meaning is intended, but a medieval reader is likely to have seen both layers of meaning simultaneously. *MED*, s. v. “nedeli” (adv.), def. 1 and 2.

² *MED*, s. v. “leued” (adj.), def. 1 and 2.

demonstration of gentility in late medieval England. The grants of arms discussed in Chapter 3 indicate that gentility could be attained as a consequence of birth, personal accomplishment, or simply the recognition of individual virtue and good governance. For those who were not gentle by birth, recognition of their gentle qualities by the community was vitally important. While a man's office might be readily apparent in the livery or regalia he wore, his ancestry or inner virtues were not so easily perceived by those he encountered. Those qualities needed to be externalized in order to demonstrate his membership in the gentle community.

Manners, behavior, and personal conduct were essential features in the demonstration of status. The way a gentleman acted, spoke, and carried himself would broadcast his rank to one and all. This was true for his children as well. Since the inculcation of gentility in sons and daughters was crucial to any gentle, whether ancient or aspirant, conduct literature, the primary extant record of such teaching, is an important source for understanding what was meant by gentility in late medieval England. These poems not only provide specific behavioral advice, but also instill gentle values in their readers, serving to initiate children into the culture of gentility.

The Study of Conduct Books

Scholars and historians have been aware of conduct books for centuries, often sprinkling them through their work as colorful examples of the habits and behaviors of the past, yet there have been few thorough, analytical studies of the material. While other nineteenth-century antiquarians published English conduct poems, sometimes in conjunction with other sources concerning daily life,³ these poems truly made their entrance into the realm of scholarly inquiry

³ Early examples include Sir Frederick Madden, ed., *How the Goode Wif Thought Hir Doughter* (1838); J. O. Halliwell-Phillips, ed., *Boke of Curtasye, an English Poem of the Fourteenth Century* (1841); T. H. Turner, ed., *Manners and Household Expenses of England in the Thirteenth and Fifteenth Centuries* (1841); W. Carew Hazlitt, ed., *The Remains of Popular Poetry in England* (1864).

under the auspices of Frederick J. Furnivall, the prolific Victorian amateur scholar and social justice crusader. Furnivall's contemporary and medieval interests clearly intersected in these poems; he was a dedicated Christian Socialist who worked to bring education to the men of London's working classes.⁴ Furnivall's desire to understand the ways and thoughts of English men and women of the past was partially driven by a need to relate that past to his students, who he believed would benefit immensely from its lessons.⁵ When he founded the Early English Text Society in 1864, Furnivall brought his passion for the past to a wider audience. Conduct poems were clearly high on his list of publication priorities. He edited a volume of them in 1868, which was corrected, added to, and reprinted more than once under a variety of titles.⁶ After it was published, a fellow society member directed him to a manuscript copy of a conduct poem he had not seen before – an older version of Caxton's *Book of Curtesye* – so Furnivall immediately edited it and published an extra series volume with a facing-page comparison of the two.⁷ He also fervently entreated his fellow society members to unearth new texts on the topic that might

⁴ William Benzie, *Dr. F. J. Furnivall: A Victorian Scholar Adventurer* (Norman, OK: Pilgrim Books, 1983), 16-20; 41-70. Furnivall wanted to allow women to enroll in his classes at the London Working Men's College as well, but the founder of the school, John Frederick Denison Maurice, turned down the suggestion. *Ibid.*, 20; 56-7.

⁵ Furnivall expresses this sentiment in the prologue to *Caxton's Book of Curtesye*, in which he laments, "If the time wasted, almost, in Latin and Greek by so many middle-class boys, had been given to Milton and Shakespeare, Chaucer and Langland, with a fit amount of natural science, we should have been a nobler nation than we are. There is no more promising sign of the times than the increased attention paid to English in education now." Furnivall, ed., *Caxton*, ix. Benzie, *Dr. F. J. Furnivall*, 257-8.

⁶ I have found the text listed in various bibliographies as *Early English Meals and Manners*, *The Babees Book*, and *Meals and Manners in Olden Times*. Since all were listed as EETS O.S. 32, I had disregarded the differences in title. Johnathan Nicholls has written that *Early English Meals and Manners* was a later edition of *The Babees Book* published in 1931 with its contents greatly pared down. While *Early English Meals and Manners* contains the most significant, longer poems, a large number of shorter poems, including several in French and Latin, have been removed and the volume reorganized. Jonathan Nicholls, *The Matter of Courtesy* (Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 1985), 3n. (I cannot speak about *Manners and Meals in Olden Times* because I have not gotten my hands on a copy under that title – I can only comment that this same name appears on the first of two title pages in my reprint edition of *The Babees Book*, although it is not the title on the cover or binding.) The reissuing of these poems with additions and corrections is also referenced in Furnivall's rambling introduction to the volume. F. J. Furnivall, ed., *The Babees Book* EETS o. s. 32 (New York: Greenwood Press, 1868; reprint, Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2002).

⁷ In the introduction to the text, Furnivall notes that he was so excited at the find that he "drank seven cups of tea, and eat [*sic*] five or six large slices of bread and butter, in honour of the event." Furnivall, ed., *Caxton*, v.

be published in subsequent volumes.⁸ One of these volumes was eventually produced in 1914; in his introduction to the text simply entitled *A Fifteenth-Century Courtesy Book*, R. W. Chambers begins by noting that Furnivall had urged him to put together this volume “during his final illness” four years prior.⁹ Furnivall’s influence over the subject did not cease with his death, for G. G. Coulton reprinted his versions of *Stans puer ad mensam* and *How the Good Wijf Tauzte Hir Douztir* in *Social Life in Britain from the Conquest to the Reformation*, a collection of excerpts from primary sources that is one of the first attempts to create a whole picture of daily life and social relations during the Middle Ages.¹⁰ The accessibility of the EETS publications edited and energetically promoted by Furnivall have influenced all later study of the subject. Even today, most scholars are introduced to the topic via his editions, and the poems he collected remain central to discussions of late medieval English conduct literature.

The study of medieval conduct shifted from an antiquarian pastime to a more academic endeavor with the work of Norbert Elias, who established the theoretical underpinnings for the debates which have flourished in the field ever since. In 1939, Elias published *The Civilizing Process*, arguing that “civility” (and its offshoot “civilization”) emerged in Europe during the early sixteenth century,¹¹ as Europeans began to think more deeply about their standing in relation to others in the community and engage in deliberate self-fashioning to conform to newly emerging social norms. He uses conduct literature in order to demonstrate this self-fashioning, showing how Europeans became conscious of what others were thinking and learned how to

⁸ Furnivall, ed., *Babees Book*, lxviii and lxxiv.

⁹ R. W. Chambers, ed., *A Fifteenth-Century Courtesy Book* EETS o. s. 148 (London: Oxford University Press, 1914; reprint, 1962), 3.

¹⁰ G. G. Coulton, ed., *Social Life in Britain from the Conquest to the Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1918), 90-3, 446-51.

¹¹ In fact, he dates this moment very specifically to the year 1530 and the publication of Erasmus’ *De civilitate morum puerilium*, a text which he argues delineated standards of “outward bodily propriety” for the first time, and understanding it to be an expression of a person’s interior morality and virtue. Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, rev. ed., ed. Eric Dunning, Johan Goudsblom and Stephen Mennell, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 47-9.

manipulate it to conform themselves to the new standard of civility.¹² Elias has earned the indignation of many medievalists for his two-dimensional understanding of medieval literature and culture, and many subsequent works on conduct literature explicitly set themselves against his views.¹³

The analytical study of conduct books by scholars of medieval literature did not begin in earnest until the mid-1980s, with the publication of Jonathan Nicholls' *The Matter of Courtesy*. Nicholls' book analyzes the idea of courtesy as used by the *Gawain*-poet, and in order to do so, compares it to the ideas present in fourteenth and fifteenth century courtesy literature. Nicholls' introduction implies that his real focus is the work of the *Gawain*-poet, but he was dragged deeper into the study of courtesy literature by the severe lack of critical work available on it.¹⁴ In order to complete a comparative study of these works, Nicholls dedicates half of his volume to defining the genre, its audience, its reception, and its contemporary purpose. This work has proven to be an invaluable foundation for later scholars of these texts to build upon. Subsequent to Nicholls, several literary scholars, including Clare Sponsler and David Burnley, began to include conduct and other courtesy texts in their more general studies of late medieval

¹² Elias' work was slow to gain traction because of World War II's disruption to the scholarly community; only after it was translated into English and republished in 1969 did it have a significant impact on the field. For the discussion of medieval manners and their evolution into early modern civility, see Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, 45-182.

¹³ An example of this indignation can be found in a recent article by John Gillingham, in which he vents his spleen on Elias' views through a recently published monograph by early modernist Anna Bryson (*From Courtesy to Civility: Changing Codes of Conduct in Early Modern England* (1998)), who champions them in her work on conduct literature. Gillingham traces the roots of conduct literature back beyond the fifteenth century to show the deep roots of ideas of civility and gentle conduct across the medieval world. In concluding the article, he even suggests that early humanist writers like Erasmus deliberately suppressed ideas about manners and civility coming from the Middle Ages both by ignoring them and by echoing their ideas without attribution. John Gillingham, "From Civitas to Civility: Codes of Manners in Medieval and Early Modern England" *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th ser., 12 (2002), *passim*, especially 289.

¹⁴ Nicholls writes, "The scope and importance of medieval courtesy books has largely been ignored by scholars, and this has made necessary the first part of this study which consists of a discussion of their place in monastic communities, secular courts, and the schools, a discussion that also seeks to define the nature of the material presented in the texts." Nicholls, *The Matter of Courtesy*, 2.

literature.¹⁵ While a number of edited collections have since been published,¹⁶ there has been only one significant monograph on the subject since Nicholls: Merridee Bailey's *Socialising the Child in Late Medieval England c. 1400-1600*. Bailey uses conduct texts as the basis for her study of socialization in late medieval schools and households. Her book tries to access medieval views of childhood and how a social education was transmitted to children.¹⁷

Conduct texts have also been an attractive source for historians of women. In her 1983 monograph *The Lady in the Tower*, Diane Bornstein contrasts the masculine idealization of the noble lady in medieval literature with the more concrete details about women's lived experience which can be found in a range of courtesy literature, including conduct poems.¹⁸ Once Bornstein's work demonstrated the value of conduct texts in the study of actual women, subsequent scholars began using them to explore specific areas of women's lives. While the conduct texts written for women were substantially different from those written for men in fifteenth-century England, scholars have used them to explore similar topics, including bodily

¹⁵ Sponsler is one of those scholars who specifically addresses Elias in her work. She looks at conduct in the context of performance, and stresses that medieval readers of conduct texts used them to create their identities. She examines how these texts "school their readers in a self-created subjectivity, encouraging them to participate in their own construction as well-governed subjects." While Elias presents the bodily control taught by conduct texts as being about repression and submission, Sponsler sees them as a means of "opportunity and fulfillment." Clare Sponsler, *Drama and Resistance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), *passim* and 53. Burnley presents a brief section on conduct poems and how they fit into the larger body of courtly literature that his book is centered around defining. David Burnley, *Courtliness and Literature in Medieval England* (New York: Longman, 1998), 129-32.

¹⁶ A collection of essays edited by Kathleen Ashley and Robert Clark shows how conduct texts can help us move beyond elite male culture and achieve a greater understanding of men and women of other status groups. They also argue that the definition of conduct texts as established by Nicholls should be expanded to include a wider variety of texts to teach us even more about those neglected groups. Kathleen Ashley and Robert L. A. Clark, eds., *Medieval Conduct* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001). A collection edited by Mark Johnston brings together English translations of a variety of European conduct texts in order to present a comparative view of the genre across Latin Christendom. Scholarly commentary accompanies the translations of these texts. Mark D. Johnston, ed., *Medieval Conduct Literature* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009).

¹⁷ Merridee L. Bailey, *Socialising the Child in Late Medieval England c. 1400-1600* (York: York Medieval Press, 2012).

¹⁸ Diane Bornstein, *The Lady in the Tower* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1983).

comportment and control, identity formation, and education.¹⁹ Interest in instructional texts for women has expanded greatly since the year 2000 which has resulted in the publication of a number of editions and translations, making this literature available to a wider audience.²⁰

While they have not dealt with them in depth, historians of the English gentry have also frequently used conduct texts as supporting evidence for their arguments about the late medieval social world. Many scholars use the hierarchies and orders of precedence in conduct poems (particularly the extensive lists in John Russell's *Boke of Nurture*) to better understand late medieval social ranks.²¹ Some have used the poems dealing with serving in a noble household to explore the organization of such households and the status and duties of those who served in them.²² Only a few, including F. R. H Du Boulay and Peter Coss, have used these texts to gain a deeper understanding of gentility.²³ This is a significant oversight, for these texts – the poems

¹⁹ For bodily comportment, see: Cynthia Ho, "As Good as Her Word: Women's Language in The Knight of La Tour-Landry" in *The Rusted Hauberk: Feudal Ideals of Order and their Decline*, ed. Liam O. Purdon and Cindy L. Vitto, 99-120. (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1994); Kim Phillips, "Bodily Walls, Windows, and Doors: The Politics of Gesture in Late Fifteenth-Century English Books for Women" in *Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts in Late Medieval Britain*, ed. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, et. al. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000). For identity formation, see: Felicity Riddy, "Mother Knows Best: Reading Social Change in a Courtesy Text" *Speculum* 71 (1996): 66-86; Roberta L. Krueger, "Identity Begins at Home: Female Conduct and the Failure of Counsel in Le Menagier de Paris" *Essays in Medieval Studies* 22 (2005): 21-39. For education, see: Anna Dronzek, "Gendered Theories of Education in Fifteenth-Century Conduct Books" in *Medieval Conduct*, edited by Ashley and Clark (2001); Anne Marie De Gendt, *L'Art d'educuer les nobles damoiselles: Le Livre du Chevalier de la Tour Landry* (Paris: Honoré Champion Éditeur, 2003).

²⁰ Rebecca Barnhouse has published a recent edition of Caxton's translation of the *Book of the Knight of the Tower* that renders large excerpts of the text into modern English with accompanying explanation to make the book accessible to a modern audience. Barnhouse, *The Book of the Knight of the Tower: Manners for Young Medieval Women* (New York: Palgrave, 2006). Clare Sponsler, "The English How the Good Wif Taughte Hir Doghtir and How the Wise Man Taught His Sonne" in *Medieval Conduct Literature*, ed. Johnston, 285-304 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009). Gina L. Greco and Christine M. Rose, eds., *The Good Wife's Guide: Le Menagier de Paris: A Medieval Household Book* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009).

²¹ K. B. Macfarlane, *The Nobility of Later Medieval England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953), 8. J. B. Cooper, "Ideas of Gentility in Early Modern England," in *Land, Men and Beliefs*, ed. G. E. Aylmer and J. S. Morrill (London: The Hambledon Press, 1983), 48-9. Rosemary Horrox, "The Urban Gentry in the Fifteenth Century" in *Towns and Townspeople in the Fifteenth Century*, ed. J. A. F. Thomson, 22-44 (Stroud, Gloucs.: Sutton, 1988), 33. S. H. Rigby, *English Society in the Later Middle Ages* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1995), 192. Maurice Keen, *The Origins of the English Gentleman* (Stroud, Gloucs.: Tempus, 2002), 125.

²² P. W. Fleming, "Household Servants of the Yorkist and Early Tudor Gentry" in *Early Tudor England*, ed. Daniel Williams, 19-36 (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1989).

²³ F. R. H. Du Boulay, "The First English Gentlemen" *The Listener*, 30 October 1958, 689. Peter Coss, *The Lady in Medieval England* (Stroud, Gloucs.: Sutton, 1998), 54-5.

written for boys in particular – have a great deal to say about the topic. In this chapter, my goal is to bring more attention to conduct books as a source for the study of gentility. In doing so, I directly oppose the view of Elias and his followers that medieval people did not observe behavior closely or shape their own behavior according to communal standards.²⁴ The conduct books and poems that were so popular during the fifteenth century explicitly taught readers how to fashion themselves as gentle, so they paint a more explicit picture of what it meant to be gentle than any other contemporary texts.

Conduct Books as a Source for Gentility

Conduct texts are a genre of didactic literature, predominantly poetic, focusing on manners and bodily deportment. In the Middle Ages, these were referred to simply as books of courtesy or nurture, often without providing more specific titles.²⁵ The most easily recognized medieval English conduct poems are those texts gathered and published by Furnivall in his early EETS volume, *The Babees Book*.²⁶ While other similar poems have been uncovered, some published by other scholars, the body of literature published by Furnivall is still the most frequently utilized by medievalists – the titles and some of the dates he provides for each poem remain conventional. Furnivall does not attempt to define the genre of text he chose for his volume apart from the categorization inherent in his subtitle, texts dealing with “meals and manners.” Only in the last twenty or thirty years, when scholars began to take more than passing

²⁴ Elias, *Civilizing Process*, 68.

²⁵ Nicholls suggests that this indicates recognition on the part of contemporary scribes that these texts constituted their own particular genre. Nicholls, *The Matter of Courtesy*, 10-2.

²⁶ Furnivall's edition, while invaluable, is not without its problems. While his transcriptions of the poems are generally quite accurate, much of the punctuation found in his edition is added which can occasionally affect the meaning of a passage. But this is a minor issue compared to the confusion caused by the reissuing of the volume under several titles, as mentioned in footnote 6, above. Because of the confusion between editions (none of which seems to list a different volume number or date), I am including both page numbers and line numbers whenever I cite poems from Furnivall's text, so that the references can be more easily tracked down.

notice of these poems, has an attempt been made to classify the genre more precisely. In the introduction to their edited collection *Medieval Conduct*, Kathleen Ashley and Robert L. A. Clark outline the difference between conduct and courtesy literature (two terms which are quite often used interchangeably to refer to the same body of texts). In their eyes, conduct books are “written texts systematizing a society’s codes of behavior,” while courtesy books are those conduct books dealing specifically with the etiquette of the court.²⁷ Other scholars have viewed courtesy literature more broadly, taking in a wider variety of texts dealing with secular life, including mirrors for princes, books of advice from noble parents to their children, and even guides to courtly love.²⁸

Although many of the poems I discuss deal particularly with the etiquette of the court, I prefer to call them conduct texts, for my analysis focuses on those texts that provide specific instruction in external behavior and manners rather than internal religious or moral values. Geoffrey Chaucer, in his poem *Gentillesse*, makes a distinction between *curteisie*, which referred to external manners and accomplishments, and *gentillesse*, which referred to more fixed internal characteristics, such as morals and virtues.²⁹ While personal virtue was clearly important to attaining and maintaining gentility, it was *curteisie* that immediately signaled one’s status to onlookers. These conduct poems, which constitute real-world guides for behavior in particular

²⁷ Kathleen Ashley and Robert L. A. Clark, “Introduction: Medieval Conduct: Texts, Theories, Practices” in *Medieval Conduct* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), ix-x.

²⁸ This sort of definition is favored by Diane Bornstein in her monograph on courtesy literature for women. Nicholls uses the term “courtesy book” in his study of these texts, but acknowledges that he is defining the genre narrowly. He also points out that the term “courtesy” changes meaning during the Renaissance, which saw the emergence of “civility” as cities began to overtake courts as centers of culture. In this case, the broader term “conduct” would highlight the common threads in these texts. Anna Dronzek suggests a wider definition of conduct literature, but in order to narrow the field to a series of comparable texts, she concentrates on those texts focused on “secular daily life.” Bornstein, *The Lady in the Tower*, 11. Nicholls, *Matter of Courtesy*, 9-14. Dronzek, “Gendered Theories of Education,” 137-8.

²⁹ Burnley, *Courtliness and Literature*, 140-1.

environments, can give us insight into the behavioral expectations of those environments.³⁰

Therefore, any conduct poem which outlines standards of behavior in gentle company also provides information about the meaning of gentility. This makes an understanding of these poems essential to any discussion of late medieval gentility, shedding light on the expectations for how this social rank was to be performed.

Middle English conduct texts proliferated during the fifteenth century, particularly during the second half. Didactic writings were very common throughout Europe during the Middle Ages, going back to the writings of the ancient Romans and Church leaders.³¹ H. Roseamunde Parsons argues that the *Disticha Catonis*, a collection of aphorisms attributed to the third-century Roman Dionysius Cato, was the ultimate source for the Anglo-Norman courtesy poems, which were the direct precursors of the Middle English poems.³² On the religious side, these texts seem to have been influenced by monastic rules, which often contained extensive codes of conduct, particularly for mealtimes.³³ Most conduct poems spend a considerable amount of time discussing behavior at meals. As Roberta Krueger explains, “rituals governing the preparation, service, and consumption of food are fundamental to social cohesion” in any society; the emphasis conduct poems place on these rituals simply underlines their importance in late medieval European court society.³⁴ This particular variety of didactic text reached the height of

³⁰ Bornstein, *Lady in the Tower*, 13.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 15.

³² H. Roseamunde Parsons, “Anglo-Norman Books of Courtesy and Nurture,” *PMLA* 44 (1929): 390-1. The Roman precedent was important. Medieval society never lost respect for the Roman Empire and its culture, so the fact that Roman authors wrote such instructions for their sons would have lent the genre prestige, particularly in the later fifteenth century as humanism took hold in England.

³³ Nicholls, *Matter of Courtesy*, 21.

³⁴ Roberta Krueger, “Introduction: Teach Your Children Well: Medieval Conduct Guides for Youths” in *Medieval Conduct Literature*, edited by Mark D. Johnston (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), xv.

its popularity throughout Europe at the end of the Middle Ages, with dozens of such texts being produced and disseminated.³⁵

It is clear that courtesy texts of this sort appeared in Latin first, most likely during the twelfth century, and began to appear in vernacular languages throughout Europe beginning in the thirteenth.³⁶ Latin was the language of the church, read primarily by the clergy and the very well educated; when these texts began circulating in vernacular languages, they became accessible to a wider readership. In England, the above trend holds true, as Latin poems begin to appear in the middle of the twelfth century, and the earliest Anglo-Norman conduct poems date from the late thirteenth century and continue to appear through the fourteenth.³⁷ Anglo-Norman, an Anglicized version of the Norman French dialect, was the language of the noble classes; translating these poems into Anglo-Norman extended their reach, but it was still limited to the very elite circles. As this language began to decline in the later fourteenth century,³⁸ poems began to appear in Middle English, making them accessible to more levels of English society;³⁹ this may explain the proliferation of these texts during the middle of the fifteenth century.⁴⁰

The earliest manuscript of a conduct poem intended for a bourgeois readership, *The Good Wife Taught Her Daughter*, dates from c. 1350.⁴¹ *Urbanitatis* is the earliest Middle English poem

³⁵ Nicholas Orme, *From Childhood to Chivalry* (New York: Methuen, 1984), 134. Ashley and Clark, "Introduction," x.

³⁶ Nicholls, *Matter of Courtesy*, 2.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 45.

³⁸ Orme, *From Childhood to Chivalry*, 99.

³⁹ This is not to say that every Englishman (or woman) could read these poems – literacy was spreading by the late medieval period, but it was still very patchy and difficult for the modern scholar to accurately assess. Anecdotal evidence, however, suggests that a wide range of people had access to texts through reading circles (where one literate individual would read to a group) and oral dissemination. Steven Justice, *Writing and Rebellion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 31-5. Paul Strohm, "Writing and Reading," in *A Social History of England, 1200-1500*, ed. Rosemary Horrox and W. Mark Ormrod (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 464-6.

⁴⁰ For full details, including dates, on most extant conduct poems in any language found in English manuscripts, see Nicholls, *Matter of Courtesy*, Appendix B.

⁴¹ Tauno F. Mustanoja, ed., *The Good Wife Taught Her Daughter*, *Annales Academiae Scientiarum Fennicae*, BLXI, 2 (Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seuran, 1948), 126.

concerning gentle conduct, dates to the end of the fourteenth century.⁴² The bulk of the poems discussed in this chapter were composed over the course of the fifteenth century: John Lydgate's translation of *Stans puer ad mensam* (an earlier Latin poem), Russell's *Boke of Nurture*, *How the Wise Man Taught His Son*, *The Babees Book*, William Caxton's *Book of Curtasye*,⁴³ *The Lytyle Childrenes Lytil Boke*, the Pepys and Ashmole versions of *Stans puer ad mensam*, the Sloane *Book of Curtesye*, the *Young Children's Book*, *The Good Wyf Wold a Pylgremage*, and *The Thewis of Gud Women*.⁴⁴ Wynkyn de Worde's *Boke of Keruyng*, a slightly rewritten version of Russell's book, was published in 1517.⁴⁵ Furnivall published several poems that date from the sixteenth century which will not be considered here; they focus explicitly on the concerns of the urban schoolboy and not of the court. There is, however, one later poem that retains a courtly context: Hugh Rhodes' *Boke of Nurture*, published in 1577. Rhodes offers much of the same information as the earlier medieval poems, but with some expanded commentary. In several cases it serves to shed light on the reason for the prohibitions of the medieval texts, and in places

⁴² While there is an Anglo-Norman poem, *Urbain le Courtois*, that bears a similar title, *Urbanitatis* does not appear to be an English translation of the earlier text. Parsons, "Anglo-Norman Books," 452. Nicholls points out that 'urbanitatis' was used as a generic term for courtesy poems during this period. Nicholls, *Matter of Courtesy*, 70.

⁴³ Furnivall published Caxton's *Book of Curtesye* alongside similar poems found in Oriel College MS Ixxix and Balliol College MS 534, the commonplace book of Richard Hill. Since these poems are versions of the same text, I will only be citing Caxton's version (the most firmly dated) when they agree. (At the dawn of printing, both manuscript and printed texts were being produced alongside one another – the Oriel and Balliol poems are not necessarily older just because they are manuscript copies – in fact, it has been argued that Hill's text is a copy of Caxton's.) Where there is disagreement, I will cite the specific poem. Furnivall, ed., *Caxton*. For more on Hill's manuscript, see Bailey, *Socialising the Child*, 55-6.

⁴⁴ Lydgate's *Stans puer*, Russell's *Boke of Nurture* and *Wise Man* were likely written during the first half of the fifteenth century. *The Babees Book*, Caxton's *Book of Curtasye*, *The Lytyle Childrenes Lytil Boke*, the Pepys *Stans puer* and the Sloane *Book of Curtesye* came out of the middle of the century. The Ashmole *Stans puer*, the *Young Children's Book*, *The Good Wyfe Wold a Pylgremage*, and *The Thewis of Gud Women* date to the last part of the fifteenth century. Furnivall provides more exact dating than Nicholls, but does not provide any explanation as to how he arrived at them. Nicholls' dates, having the benefit of all the scholarship done on the poems and their manuscripts in the intervening century, are likely to be more accurate. All dates in this paragraph not attributed to others come from Nicholls, *Matter of Courtesy*, Appendix B. The dates for *Good Wyfe* and *Thewis* come from Mustanoja, ed., *Good Wife*, 134.

⁴⁵ Furnivall, ed., *Babees Book*, 261.

where entirely new information is presented, it shows how the audience and aims of the genre shifted over the course of a century.⁴⁶

It is significant that these poems flourished at a time when anxiety over status was increasing. The fifteenth century was a time of political strife and, at times, chaos in England – yet those moments of turmoil were also moments of opportunity for the socially ambitious. In the military camps of the Hundred Years War as well as the swollen noble retinues that marked the period of the Wars of the Roses, there were occasions for a man to advance his career and his status, particularly as the lands and positions held by gentles and nobles guilty of treason, in exile, or simply dead came available. It is no accident that, by the end of the century, Caxton was using the tantalizing language of social mobility to promote his conduct books.⁴⁷ His audience had seen the opportunities that existed and were keen to exploit them.

While Caxton's impact on the conduct book he published is clear, very few other poems have identifiable authors, editors, or compilers. Like a recipe or medical counsel, rather than a literary work, this sort of advice was passed on anonymously, meant to serve a practical purpose rather than show off authorial skill. Conduct poems were copied in bits and pieces, whether from other manuscripts or from memory, with parts added in or left out to suit the owner's needs.⁴⁸ In some ways, this increases the worth of these poems; they represent collective wisdom about conduct and gentility more than the opinion of any individual author. A few works have named authors of greater or lesser authenticity. The Latin text of *Stans puer ad mensam* is often

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁴⁷ Tracy Adams, "'Noble, wyse and grete lords, gentilmen and marchauntes': Caxton's Prologues as Conduct Books for Merchants" *Parergon* 22:2 (2005): 53-76.

⁴⁸ It is often quite difficult to determine which poems were original compositions and which adaptations of earlier works. In trying to disentangle the relationship between two such poems, one English and one French, Parsons declares: "if a French and an English writer both give you commonplace advice, such as not to drink too much, or play with your knife, or fill your spoon too full, it proves nothing, unless there is a striking resemblance, either in the wording or in the sequence of admonitions. There is no more likeness between our poems than is inevitable when different people are writing in different languages, at the same date, on the same subjects and for the same kind of person." Parsons, "Anglo-Norman Books," 431.

attributed to Robert Grossteste, who, among a great many other works, did write the *Household Statutes*, which are similar in tone.⁴⁹ The English verse translation of *Stans puer* is often attributed to Lydgate, as is the *Dietary* – not exactly a conduct book, but it does share some characteristics with the genre. Two poems have authors whose existence has not been unequivocally verified by scholars. Russell of the eponymous *Boke of Nurture* declares that he served as gentleman-usher and marshal to Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester.⁵⁰ The title page of Rhodes' *Boke of Nurture* refers to its compiler as "of the Kinges Chappell" and gives Devonshire as his place of origin.⁵¹ Since both men seem competent in their advice and accurate in describing noble households in their respective periods, there is no reason to doubt their claims of authorship except that there are no records that independently verify their existence.⁵² Apart from authors, the fingerprints of their printers are more evident in early printed editions of various poems, as they adapted the works to suit the market. Caxton's *Book of Curtesye* was different enough from extant manuscript copies of the poem to move Furnivall to publish it separately.⁵³ As for De Worde, Caxton's assistant and successor, Furnivall argues that his *Boke of Keruynge* was either adapted from Russell's poem or copied from a common source.⁵⁴ All the other poems are anonymous.⁵⁵

While the exact identities of most of these authors remains a mystery, one thing is quite clear from the poems: the original authors, like the purported Russell and Rhodes, would have

⁴⁹ Nicholls, *Matter of Courtesy*, 184, 193.

⁵⁰ Furnivall, ed., *Babees Book*, 115.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁵² Furnivall, in researching his extensive introductions to both poems, searched at length for both authors, whose claims he accepts at face value. He laments that he was unable to find any reference to Rhodes in the records of the Tudor court. He does not go into the same depth for Russell, but he does not challenge his existence, focusing the discussion around whether Russell was, in fact, the author of the entire poem. *Ibid.*, lxxv-lxxx, civ-cxi.

⁵³ Caxton's renown was also a consideration. Furnivall begins his preface, "no excuse can be needed for including in our Extra Series a reprint of a unique Caxton on a most interesting subject." Furnivall, ed., *Caxton*, v.

⁵⁴ Furnivall, ed., *Caxton*. Furnivall, ed., *Babees Book*, cxi.

⁵⁵ For a breakdown of most extant conduct poems, their dates, authors and modern printed editions, see Nicholls, *Matter of Courtesy*, Appendix B.

been men with experience in gentle environments, whether noble households, possibly as servants or managers of servants, or the court itself. Most poems express a familiarity with the rhythms and workings of the noble household that suggest some authority on the topic. The poems' popularity indicates the value of that authority. They were constantly repeated, revised, and presented in fragments in a great number of extant manuscripts. While these mutations cannot provide much information on the original authors apart from this authority, they do reveal a great deal about how popular these poems were and how widely valued was the advice they contained.

More certain than the authorship of the poems, but still problematic, is their audience. The majority of the late medieval poems are addressed to children⁵⁶ – often young boys serving as pages in noble households.⁵⁷ Russell's *Boke of Nurture*, the Sloane *Book of Curtasye*, all preclude versions of *Stans puer ad mensam*, De Worde's *Boke of Keruyng*e and Rhodes' *Boke of Nurture* all deal with the particular needs of the page boy, focusing on behavior at meals in the lord's hall, when delivering messages, and performing other household tasks. Other poems, such as the *Lytylle Childrenes Lytil Book* and its near-copy the *Young Children's Book*, direct their

⁵⁶ Nicholas Orme argues that most medieval texts dealing with education was only secondarily aimed at children, for medieval thinkers and writers lacked an educational consciousness that saw children as a separate group that needed a different style of education. Merridee Bailey's analysis of conduct poems reveals the opposite, that medieval thinkers were aware of different stages of childhood (corresponding to theories of the seven ages of man) and sought to tailor their content to those stages. Orme, *Education and Society in Medieval and Renaissance England* (London: The Hambledon Press, 1989), 156. Bailey, *Socialising the Child*, 47-50. This does not preclude the point, however, that these texts would have been just as valuable to adult readers who wanted to acquire the knowledge they contained.

⁵⁷ This is true of the older Anglo-Norman literature as well. Parsons, "Anglo-Norman Books," 383. These poems could also have been read by parents, tutors or others who were responsible for the education of young boys. The *Black Book of the Royal Household*, written in the 1470s, says that the master of henchmen ought to show his charges "'the schools of urbanity and nurture of England' and oversee their behavior at meals 'after the book of urbanity.'" Orme, *From Childhood to Chivalry*, 139-40. Since even gentry households had many servants – Malcolm Mercer cites anywhere between two and twenty for gentle families of varying ranks – there could be a number of boys requiring such instruction at any one time. Malcolm Mercer, *The Medieval Gentry* (London and New York: Continuum, 2010), 52. It was common for many, if not most, of these servants to be from gentle backgrounds. Bailey, *Socialising the Child*, 12.

advice toward children generally.⁵⁸ The *Babees Book* addresses young children as well, more specifically claiming to instruct those of the royal household:

Oh young Babies, whom blood Royal
With grace, Feature, and high ability
Hath enourmyd,⁵⁹ on you is that I call
To know this Book.⁶⁰

Other poems keep their target age group ambiguous: *How the Wise Man Taught His Son* speaks to “lordingis,” a general polite term, akin to “ladies and gentlemen” today; *Urbanitatis* addresses anyone who wishes to learn of nurture; and the *ABC of Aristotle* “Who so willeth to be wise, & worship desireth,” also not specifying whether those desirers be old or young.⁶¹ The information presented in these two poems, as well as their alphabetic and rhyming formats, suggest that they too were intended to serve as educational tools for young boys. The only Furnivall text to address a clearly adult audience is Bishop Grossteste’s *Household Statutes*, which instructs a lady about how to run her household. This text covers many of the same themes as the other household poems (like Russell and Rhodes), such as the duties and conduct of servants, but does so from a different perspective. It does not, therefore, rightfully belong in this study of conduct books, as it is rather an instructional manual for a lord or household manager.

The target gender is also easily gleaned from a perusal of the poems. While a great deal of their advice is applicable to women, nearly all of it is directed at a masculine audience.⁶²

Whether or not men are addressed directly (as in a handful of texts which address the reader as

⁵⁸ At the very end of the *Young Children’s Book*, the author states: “This book is made for children young / At the school that bide not long: / Soon it may be conyd* & had, / And make them good if they be bad.” Furnivall, ed., *Babees Book*, 25, ll. 147-50. **Connen* (v): to understand or to have mastery of. *MED*, s. v. “connen” (v.), def. 3 and 5.

⁵⁹ *Enourmen* (v): to decorate, ornament or embellish; to endow or exalt. *MED*, s. v. “enourmen” (v.), def. 2.

⁶⁰ Furnivall, ed., *Babees Book*, 1, ll. 15-8; 11 l. 1; 13 l. 1.

⁶¹ The *ABC of Aristotle* does not have a stated audience. The preface to the poem claims that its advice “is counsel for right many clerks & knights a thousand,” signaling its usefulness to an adult audience, however its alphabetical format suggests a younger audience. Barbara Hanawalt has suggested that it was meant as a mnemonic poem, using conduct advice in the course of teaching young children their alphabet. Barbara Hanawalt, conversation with the author, March 22, 2012. Furnivall, ed., *Babees Book*, 11, l. 4.

⁶² Orme calls this “the most notable absence from the courtesy books.” Orme, *From Childhood to Chivalry*, 139.

“son” rather than the more common “child”),⁶³ the content of the poems is specific to men’s concerns. Women did not serve as pages, ushers or other officers in noble households, so the correct performance of those duties was not relevant in their education. There are also smaller hints scattered among the poems. *Urbanitatis* instructs the reader to doff his cap and fall to one knee when he comes before a lord – a man’s obeisance rather than a woman’s.⁶⁴ The *Lytylle Childrenes Lytil Boke* claims that, if its instructions are followed, “Than men will say thereafter / That a gentleman was here.”⁶⁵ Rhodes’ *Boke of Nurture*, written significantly later than the other poems, discusses at length how to choose a wife.⁶⁶ These passages and others point to a presumed masculine readership. There were, however, three conduct poems that did address women: *The Good Wife Taught Her Daughter*, *The Good Wyf Wold a Pylgremage*, and the Middle Scots *The Thewis of Gud Women*. These poems contain similar content to those directed at men; they differ, however, in the status of their audience. All three are aimed at a bourgeois audience – girls who will grow up to be the wives of artisans and other middling townsmen; there are no Middle English poems of this type that address an audience of gentlewomen. This will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5

Most of the masculine poems, on the other hand, seem to have been directed at a gentle audience, though there is some ambiguity as to whether these boys were gentle by birth, by aspiration or simply needed to know how to get along in gentle company. The Sloane *Boke of Curtasye* acknowledges this, declaring: “If thou be gentleman, yeoman, or knave, / Thee needs

⁶³ *How the Wise Man Taught His Son*, the Lambeth *Stans puer ad mensam*, Russell’s *Boke of Nurture* all address the reader as “son” while Lydgate’s *Stans puer ad mensam*, *Urbanitatis*, *The Babees Book* and *The Lytylle Childrenes Lytil Boke* use “child.” It is interesting that most of the poems using “son” are slightly earlier in date than those using “child.” This may indicate that, over time, this advice was seen as useful in the education of both sexes.

⁶⁴ Furnivall, ed., *Babees Book*, 13, ll. 3-10.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 22, ll. 95-6.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 86-8, ll. 143-228.

nurture for to have.”⁶⁷ Russell’s *Boke of Nurture* names its gentle audience directly in its postscript: “Go forth little book, and lowly thou me commende / Unto all yong gentlemen / that lust to learn or entende.”⁶⁸ Most poems are not so explicit, rather suggesting that the advice they contain is necessary in cultivating gentility. The *Babees Book* declares that a boy must be quick when his lord gives him a commission, “for so ye shall ywys / In nurture get a gentle name full soon.” Later on, it has the same to say about not talking too much at mealtimes: “For so ywys ye shall a name deserve / Of gentleness and of good governance, / And in virtue always yourself advance.”⁶⁹ Similarly, the *Lytylle Childrenes Lytil Boke* claims that if the boy is appropriately deferential in taking leave of his lord, “Than men will say thereafter / That a gentleman was here.”⁷⁰

While the aim of these poems could certainly be to instruct boys of gentle birth in behavior appropriate to their natal status, the text does not make this clear. Instead, the text of the poems implies that a gentle name was something that one could earn, rather than inherit. By paying attention, learning the proper gestures and avoiding certain behaviors, these poems make it seem like anyone could cultivate the appearance of gentle rank. And what more did one need than the appearance of gentility? The previous chapter’s discussion of grants of arms suggests that, by the late fifteenth century, *seeming* to belong – leading a virtuous life and governing oneself well – was a significant determinant of status. One of the routes to a grant of arms, the premier hallmark of having made it into gentle society, only required that the recipient toe this line, fulfilling the surface requirements of gentility. These conduct poems were written during

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 299, ll. 3-4.

⁶⁸ *Entenden* (v): to grasp or understand. *MED*, s. v. “entenden” (v.), def. 3b. Furnivall, ed., *Babees Book*, 198, ll. 1235-6.

⁶⁹ *Ywys* or *iwis* (adv): surely, certainly. *MED*, s. v. “iwis” (adv.), def. 1. Furnivall, ed., *Babees Book*, 5, ll. 115-6; 8, ll. 187-9.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 22, ll. 95-6.

the same period in which most of those arms were granted. This was a world in which a large part of social mobility was walking the walk and talking the talk – the man who could fit in with gentle company would have the opportunities available to gentlemen offered to him as well. Russell, in his *Boke of Nurture*, confirms that, to some extent, perception could create reality. When relating the duties of the lord's marshal, he spends a long time discussing matters of precedence, which the marshal had to be familiar with since he was responsible for seating the lord's guests at meals. A detailed order of precedence is provided, explaining who might be seated with whom and discussing how to deal with difficult cases such as a disparity of rank between husband and wife. At the end of all this, the marshal is advised to judge any strangers, whose rank might be unclear, by their conduct:

Moreover take heed he must / to alien / comers strangers,
and to strangers of this land, resident dwellers,
and exalt them to honor / if they be of honest manners;
then all other after their degree / like as case requires.⁷¹

In such a case, conduct quite literally determined status.

Several scholars studying conduct literature have made the argument that it was intended as a tool for those who aspired to ascend the social ladder. Nicholls, in his study of medieval courtesy books, argues that, based on the quality of the extant manuscripts containing these texts, most of them were likely written for traders and merchants rather than for the children of gentle landowners.⁷² The manuscripts in which most conduct texts are found would have been relatively inexpensive – written on paper rather than costly vellum, with decorations consisting merely of red initial capitals rather than the elaborate illuminations that accompanied the most expensive manuscripts. Nicholl's theory of a bourgeois readership is also supported by the contents of manuscripts such as BL MS Egerton 1995, which contained conduct texts alongside information

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 191, ll. 1109-12.

⁷² Nicholls, *Matter of Courtesy*, 71.

about the city of London, its history, churches and trade regulations.⁷³ While it was rare for a merchant or trader to achieve the transition to gentility for himself, it was possible for his children to do so – the presence of conduct poems in manuscripts owned by the urban elite may have been meant for the edification of the next generation.⁷⁴ In her monograph *Drama and Resistance*, Sponsler argues that “part of the success of conduct books as commodities is in fact attributable precisely to their ability to *market* conduct.”⁷⁵ These poems banked on the assumption that they could be used by individuals who wanted to get ahead in life. They “sold readers a set of ideas about self-determination, self-construction, and self-performance” that could be used for concrete social advancement.⁷⁶ There are a number of instances in the poems themselves that support this view. *Urbanitatis* bluntly states the advantage that might be gained through proper conduct:

For good nurture will save thy state;
 Father & mother, whatever they be,
 Well is the child that may the:
 In hall, in chamber, or where thou gone,
 Nurture & good manners maketh man.⁷⁷

While social climbing seems to have been encouraged by these poems, this encouragement was tempered by a characteristically medieval respect for social hierarchy. There was a tension evident between learning proper manners in order to rise to the position that was one’s birthright and actually ascending the social ladder – a tension that accurately reflects the social upheaval experienced in the later fifteenth century, as wealthy merchants and

⁷³ British Library MS Egerton 1995 is a simple quarto on paper, dated to the fifteenth century. It is not a rich manuscript – its only adornment consists of red initial capitals and a shield scratched into the margin of the first text. It contains the *Lytylle Childrenes Lytil Boke* (fols.58v-60r) alongside the assize of bread and ale from the time of Henry III (fols. 80v-81v), a list of the names of the churches in the city of London (fols. 82r-86v) and a chronicle of London from 1189-1469 (fols. 113r-222v).

⁷⁴ Sylvia Thrupp, *The Merchant Class of Medieval London* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1948), 279-87.

⁷⁵ Sponsler, *Drama and Resistance*, 54-5. Her italics.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 56.

⁷⁷ *The* (v.): thrive, flourish, prosper. *MED*, s. v. “then” (v.), def. 1a. Furnivall, ed., *Babees Book*, 14, ll. 30-4.

professionals increasingly competed with struggling gentry for status and power. Caxton's *Book of Curtesye* provides its fictitious audience, a young boy called "little John," with an anti-model, "unthrift Ruskyn gallant." John is warned:

But beware of unthrift Ruskyn gallant
Counterfeiter of unconning courtesy
His tacchis been infected with villainy
Vngyrte. unblessed. Serving at table
Me seemeth him a servant nothing able

Winter and summer to his sovereign
Capron hardy / no bonnet lyste to avail
For every word / giving his master twain
Auauntparler / in every man's tale
.....
But yet sir gallant when ye shall bow or kneel
He goeth by compass round as doth a whale

Braced so straight / that he may not ply
But gatherith it / by manner of a windlass
And he ought wrench a side / or a little wry

.....
Let gallant go / I mean reckless ruskyn
Take heed my child to such as be cunning
So shall ye best worship conquer & win.⁷⁸

Ruskyn tries to imitate gentle manners, but he makes a muddle of things: not giving his lord proper respect, talking too much, and wearing absurd fashions that impede his movement. As Mark Addison Amos has observed, the implication is that Ruskyn, who is not gentle by birth, can only attain an overblown, counterfeit gentility, whereas John, who is gently born, only needs

⁷⁸ *Unthrift* (n.): a person of no account, an unworthy person, a wastrel. *Conning* (ppl.): having refinement of character or conduct; *Tache* (n): a characteristic, habit, feature of someone's disposition; *ungyrte*: may be referring to the lack of a *gyrtelle* or *kirtel* (n), an outer garment - the implication is that Ruskyn is in some sort of disarray; *Capron* (n): a hooded cape; *Hardy* (adj.): tightly closed or clasped; The precise origin of *lyste* is unclear here. The sense of the phrase is that Ruskyn lacks a cap to doff to his lord, but the only adverbial sense that fits is *leste*, which means least or to the least extent. Other noun forms of the word *list* refer to the ability to hear or likes and desires, and noun forms of *liste* refer to dexterity and skill or borders. None of these senses seems to fit what the poet is saying here. *Auauntparlet*: this likely comes from the French, loosely meaning "to speak before or in front of." *Avaunt* also appears in Middle English as a noun meaning a boast or and an adverb meaning forward or ahead of. The sense is that Ruskyn interrupts others or speaks out of turn, with perhaps the added sense of doing so boastfully or arrogantly. The *MED*, s. v. "unthrift" (n.), def. d; "conning" (ppl.), def. 4; "tache" (n. (3)), def. 1; "kirtel" (n.), def. 1; "caperoun" (n.), def. a; "harde" (adv.), def. 1a; "leste" (adv.), def. 1; "list" (n. (1)), def. 1; "list" (n. (2)), def. 1; "liste" (n. (1)), def. 1; "liste" (n. (2)), def. 1; "avaunt" (n.), def. 1; "avaunt" (adv.), def. 1. Furnivall, ed., *Caxton*, 45-9.

to learn courtesy to refine his natural gifts.⁷⁹ The author of the poem heaps scorn on Ruskyn's presumption, implying that common blood cannot be improved even while providing the means to improve it (since manners are more visible as a sign of status than ancestry).

A few other poems also seem hesitant about social movement. All versions of *Stans puer ad mensam* contain warnings about seating oneself appropriately at table: "Sit thou in that place that thou art assigned to; / Press not too high in no manner wise."⁸⁰ *Urbanitatis* gives similar advice:

Into the hall when thou dost wende
Among the gentles good & hende,
Press thou not up too high for no thing,
Nor for thy high blood, nor for thy cunning⁸¹

It is possible, of course, that these admonishments are about modesty and humility more than a caution against social climbing. By encouraging the reader to be content with the place assigned him, the poems discourage pride and arrogance; they simply stress that the reader should sit in his rightful place. There is no mention of whether that place is merited by birth or personal achievement. Presumably (as is the case of the grants of arms discussed in Chapter 3) the door is open for both.

One further claim has been made about the audience of these poems. In his monograph *Courtliness and Literature in Medieval England*, Burnley proposes that the role of books of courtesy (and other similar works such as manuals on hunting) in medieval society was to serve as a window onto the lives of the rich and powerful. He argues that these texts had little practical

⁷⁹ Mark Addison Amos, "'For Manners Make Man': Bourdieu, de Certeau, and the Common Appropriation of Noble Manners in the Book of Courtesy," in Ashley and Clark, *Medieval Conduct*, 43-4.

⁸⁰ This text is from the poem titled by Furnivall *The Book of Curteisie that is clepid Stans puer ad mensam* (Lambeth MS 853). The text of Lydgate's translation of *Stans puer ad mensam* (British Library MS Harley 2251) is: "Sit in that place thou art assigned to; / Press not too high in no manner wise." Furnivall, ed., *Babees Book*, 29, ll. 24-5; 28, ll. 24-5.

⁸¹ *Wenden* (v): to walk, make one's way; *hende* (adj): having the approved courtly or knightly qualities, polite and refined. *MED*, s. v. "wenden" (v.), def. 1 and 2a; "hende" (adj.), def. 1. Furnivall, ed., *Babees Book*, 13, ll. 23-6.

value as instructional guides, and extant manuscripts do not seem to have experienced the wear and tear one would expect if they were used as reference works. Instead, he argues that readers of such poems used them for voyeuristic purposes, to get a glimpse of how the nobly and gently born lived, making an analogy between courtesy texts and modern magazines like *The Field*, *Country Life*, *The Lady*, and *The Tatler*.⁸² Burnley does have a point about the impractical presentation of some of this information, yet books like Russell's *Boke of Nurture* contain a great deal of specific instruction in household tasks. If these texts were not meant to be kept on hand as reference guides, and seem to be too long for effective memorization, what good were they? Still, I find it difficult to accept the voyeuristic explanation. These poems do not have a glamorous, *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous* feel – in fact, much of the advice is rather *un-*glamorous. While readers of Russell's text might find it exciting to learn who would be seated with whom at a banquet in a lord's hall, the instructions directed at pages – warning them not to scratch at lice, pick their noses, or cast “stinking of breath on your sovereign” – are far less alluring.⁸³ Most of the poems of this type contain the latter sort of advice.

The significant number of surviving manuscripts indicates that plenty of people were reading these poems. These poems are just as readily found scrawled onto flyleaves and in margins as carefully inscribed in composed manuscript collections. The same poems may appear under several titles, or left untitled, or turn up in a few fragmented stanzas cribbed into available blank space.⁸⁴ The erratic transmission of these programs suggests, as mentioned above, that the importance of their advice rose above any authorial or literary claims – the gist of the message, if

⁸² Burnley, *Courtliness and Literature*, 135.

⁸³ Furnivall, ed., *Babees Book*, 134-6, ll. 279-80, 301-2.

⁸⁴ For example, in the late fifteenth-century Heege MS (Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, MS Advocates 19.3.1), the empty space at the end of the booklets containing two romances, *Sir Gowther* and *Sir Amadas* are each filled by a conduct poem: *Urbanitatis* and *The Little Children's Book* respectively. Philippa Hardman, “Compiling the Nation: Fifteenth-Century Miscellany Manuscripts,” in *Nation, Court, and Culture*, ed. H. Cooney (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2001), 65-6.

not its form, was read, repeated orally and jotted down for better memory because it was so necessary to its audience. An individual poem such as Lydgate's translation of *Stans puer* survives in fifty copies from the early fourteenth through the mid-sixteenth centuries, testifying to its continuing relevance throughout this period as well as its popularity.⁸⁵ Most manuscripts that contain conduct poems feature several, perhaps valuing the cumulative wisdom of the poems more than any individual text. British Library MS Harley 541 contains the *Lytylle Childrenes Lytil Boke* and the *ABC of Aristotle* as well as an untitled dietary, alongside several songs, lists of the Mayors and Sheriffs of London, and a list of "proper terms."⁸⁶ The small narrow folio of Bodleian MS Ashmole 61 contains versions of *Stans puer*, *How the Good Wife Taught Her Daughter*, and *How the Wise Man Taught His Son* along with its collection of romances and hymns.⁸⁷ Lambeth MS 853 also contains a great deal of religious literature alongside the *ABC of Aristotle*, *Stans puer*, Lydgate's *Dietary*, and *How the Wise Man Taught His Son*. Late medieval scribes and readers found this advice so necessary and important that it was repeated over and over again, even within the same manuscript.

At the very moment when these texts were increasing in popularity, the printing industry in England was in its birth throes; the story of the two becomes intertwined. Caxton had begun printing English translations of popular Continental texts in Bruges c. 1469, returning to England and setting up his press in London in 1476.⁸⁸ While manuscripts and the earliest printed texts had been produced for a noble audience, Caxton, as Kim Phillips has pointed out, "had some inkling of which way the wind was blowing," and began to market his works to a wider audience, even

⁸⁵ Amos, "For Manners Make Man," 34-5.

⁸⁶ Lists of "proper terms" and their ramifications for gentility will be discussed in Chapter 6, below.

⁸⁷ Kathryn Kerby-Fulton sees this manuscript as a collection of romances put together for a merchant family, but she sees the conduct texts and prayers as constituting a "children's corner" at the beginning of the collection. Kerby-Fulton, Maidie Hilmo and Linda Olson, *Opening Up Middle English Manuscripts: A Literary and Visual Approach* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012), 110-2.

⁸⁸ N. F. Blake, *Caxton and His World* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1969), 46-63.

while explicitly claiming a noble readership in his prologues.⁸⁹ Caxton began to turn more of his focus to printing original Middle English works, rather than translating foreign texts, to suit the tastes and desires of his newfound audience. In 1477, Caxton printed Lydgate's translation of *Stans puer ad mensam*. In the same year, he printed his *Book of Curtesye*, a longer conduct poem with far less emphasis on the niceties of serving at table than *Stans puer*. In the prologue to the *Book of Curtesye*, Caxton explicitly addresses an audience of "great lords gentlemen & merchants," suggesting that it was expected to appeal to an audience outside of the court. The slight redirection in subject matter would serve to suit such an audience.⁹⁰ The atmosphere of social opportunity in the late fifteenth century gave ambitious men a real hope of elevating themselves and their families; by printing these poems, thus increasing their circulation and affordability, Caxton provided these individuals with the tools to facilitate such social advancement.⁹¹ The popularity of the conduct texts he, and others after him, printed was proportionate to the social need those texts filled.

Whoever their readers, the advice provided by these poems would teach them how to behave like gentlemen. Whether or not that behavior could be successfully appropriated by one who was not of gentle birth, the very existence of these poems provided him with the opportunity to try. The emphasis of the poems themselves on gentle behavior, worthiness and earning a good name reveals that teaching gentility was their primary goal. The children – or, more specifically, the sons – of the nobility, gentry and those aspiring to join them could turn to these texts as educational tools, teaching them the outward behavior that went along with their social position, whether earned or desired.

⁸⁹ Phillips, "Bodily Walls, Windows, and Doors," 197-8.

⁹⁰ Amos, "For Manners Make Man," 25-8.

⁹¹ Adams, "Noble, wyse and grete lordes, gentilmen and marchauntes," 53-76.

Gentility and Governance of the Body

Most of the surviving conduct poems focus on providing boys with precise instructions about how to behave in a gentle environment. Whether the boy was of high birth or low did not matter: in the context of the lord's hall, at mealtimes in particular, a certain standard of behavior was required of everyone. Any boy who wished to advance himself – even earn himself a gentle reputation – would be wise to adhere to it. Sponsler argues that what made these poems so successful was “the way that they conflated external control with individual desire.” The reader was not admonished to behave a certain way for fear of punishment or reprisal; rather, he was encouraged to do so in order to advance himself. Thus, the poems urge the reader to internalize this conduct, viewing it as a means to self-improvement rather than an imposition by outsiders, and therefore, as a source of empowerment.⁹²

While every poem does not provide exactly the same collection of advice, there is considerable thematic overlap among them. The most important areas were: control of one's body; cleanliness (whether of the boy's own person or his table setting); deference; and general politeness. These qualities are in line with those that Burnley argues were essential to a medieval English courtier: “personal skills such as eloquence and affability,” “an awareness of formalities and procedures of the court” and “refinement of behavior.”⁹³

Before delving into specifics, a brief word must be said about the context in which these boys were learning to behave gently.⁹⁴ It was common practice in medieval England for families of high rank to send their children to other noble households to be fostered and educated. Even royal children would not spend many years under their parents' roofs; they would be provided with their own households at a young age, with guardians and governors to take charge of their

⁹² Sponsler, *Drama and Resistance*, 68-71.

⁹³ Burnley, *Courtliness and Literature*, 57.

⁹⁴ For a more detailed discussion of the education of gentle children in late medieval England, see Chapter 5, below.

education. While noble and gentle mothers may have had a role in the early education of their children – teaching them their letters and their prayers – most of their children’s education would be left to others.⁹⁵ Those children being fostered in other homes were not there simply to learn and play – they were expected to serve their new lord or lady and form networks of friendship and patronage that could serve to advance them in the future.

Service is the element that most of these conduct poems focus on – in particular, the service of a page boy or henchman to his lord.⁹⁶ Medieval society valued this sort of hierarchy; it was seen as ennobling to humble oneself in service to one’s social superiors, whether a page boy offering a cup to a squire or a duke ritually carving meat for the plate of the king. The importance of such service in character formation is detailed in the 1532-3 *Order of Knighthood*, which argues that a knight’s son should “be first a servant, And that he be subject before he be lord, for else he should not know the noblesse of his lordship when he should be knight.” It is also important that his service should be done in the household of another knight:

that [he] should learn to carve at table, to serve to arm & make ready a knight, in like case as a man that will learn for to be a tailor or a carpenter, must have a tailor or a carpenter to his master. And in like manner all noblemen which loveth the order of knighthood and will become knight it behooveth them first to have one that is a knight to their master, for as it is an inconvenient thing that a tailor should learn to sew of a carpenter, so is it an unmete thing that the esquire should learn the noblesse of the order of knighthood of any other man than of a knight.⁹⁷

The author frames this in terms of career training: the young boy needs to learn from someone of his future rank in order to understand the duties and dignity of the position. While this text

⁹⁵ Nicholas Orme, *Medieval Schools* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 68.

⁹⁶ The medieval term “henchman” referred to male servants, generally young boys, of high rank with largely ceremonial duties. There are scattered references to henchmen in the royal and noble households and even the retinue of the Lord Mayor of London during the fourteenth century. By the fifteenth-century, henchmen had a permanent position in the royal household, with the king and queen and even the prince of Wales each maintaining a handful in their own retinues. Nicholas Orme argues that “the emergence of the henchmen was accompanied by the appearance of permanent masters to teach them.” While elite households often hired tutors and schoolmasters when there were young children needing instruction, the establishment of a permanent group of young boys required these households to hire schoolmasters on a more permanent basis. Orme, *From Childhood to Chivalry*, 51-3.

⁹⁷ *Unmete* (adj): unfit or unworthy. *MED*, s. v. “unmete” (adj.), def. 2a. National Archives SP 9/31/2, fols. 9r-v.

presents a sixteenth-century romanticization of chivalric knighthood, rather than treating the social rank, the underlying ideas about job training and service hold true for the fifteenth century.

Much of the service discussed in conduct texts revolved around the rituals of dining. As mentioned above, mealtime rituals were central to the social life of most pre-modern cultures.⁹⁸ Meals in the household of an English lord were opportunities for the entire household to come together and socialize, forming vertical bonds of loyalty with the lord and any high-ranking visitors and horizontal bonds of friendship with other vassals and servants. It was crucial, then, for the page to understand how to properly perform his duties and behave himself while under the eyes of the entire household. At no other point in the day would these boys be subject to the scrutiny of so many. The importance of meals in the lord's hall and the pressures that came with them explains why conduct poems focus so much attention on table manners. These poems provide a crash course in correct behavior for young boys living away from their own homes, whose future success rests on their ability to make a good impression in their youth.

The most heavily stressed element of gentle conduct in these poems was the control of one's body. From head to toe, the gentle boy (or common boy in gentle company) was expected to have control over the movements and emissions of his body: what he looked at, what he said and how he spoke, what and how he ate, how he moved. Even involuntary bodily functions like sneezes and farts were to be reined in at particular times and in particular places. The poems themselves are very loosely organized around the order of the meal – sitting down with one's companions, serving the food, eating, cleaning up, and taking leave. The specific admonitions do not come in any particular order, seemingly rehearsed as they occurred to the authors of each

⁹⁸ Ruth Karras, in her study of masculinity in late medieval England, points out the centrality of the feast in medieval chivalric culture, citing the prevalence of eating and feasting in medieval romance literature as evidence. Ruth Mazo Karras, *From Boys to Men: Formations of Masculinity in Later Medieval Europe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 45.

individual poem. The same advice might be repeated in multiple contexts within the same poem. In order to make thematic sense of this advice, I have organized it according to the parts of the body to which it refers, beginning at the head and traveling downward.

Starting from the top of the head, the boy's gaze should be under his control. The gaze comes up frequently across these conduct poems in two very consistent ways. The first admonishes the boy not to stare about him. The Sloane *Boke of Curtasye* instructs: "Gaze not on walls with thine eye, / Far ne nigh, low ne high," and Caxton's *Book of Curtesye*, "Cast not your eye aside in other place / For that is a token of wanton inconstance."⁹⁹ These instructions are generally given in the context of standing before the lord, and are often preceded or followed by directing the reader to look a man (often specified as the lord) in the face when speaking with him. Lydgate's translation of *Stans puer* commands, "Who speaketh to thee in any manner place, / Rudely cast not thine eye a-down, / But with a sad cheer look him in the face."¹⁰⁰ There is a connection between a forthright gaze and honesty – a quality often linked with gentility – a connection which survives to the present day.

The next physical feature the reader is advised to control is his mouth. The boy is frequently instructed to moderate his hunger. He must wait courteously until he is properly served and grace is said before beginning to eat, "Lest men say thou art hunger-beaten, / Or else a glutton that all men wyten."¹⁰¹ Gluttony is to be avoided at all costs, in all its forms. Several poems counsel the reader to take small bites: the Lambeth *Stans puer* advises "To embrace thy

⁹⁹ Furnivall reads "Py neghe" as "thine eye." Furnivall, ed., *Babees Book*, 309, ll. 322-3. Furnivall, ed., *Caxton*, 13, ll. 101-2.

¹⁰⁰ Furnivall, ed., *Babees Book*, 26, ll. 15-7. This advice is repeated by Caxton's *Book of Curtesye*. Furnivall, ed., *Caxton*, 13, ll. 99-100.

¹⁰¹ *Wyten* (v): to reproach, lay blame on, impute. *MED*, s. v. "witen" (v. (3)), def. 1. The quote is from the Sloane *Boke of Curtasye*, which cautions against eating before one is properly served. The *Lytylle Childrenes Lytil Boke* mentions waiting until grace has been said. Furnivall, ed., *Babees Book*, 16, ll. 11-2; 300, ll. 43-6.

jaws with bread, it is not due.”¹⁰² This is an echo of recommendations found in contemporary health advice, such as Lydgate’s *Diatorie*.¹⁰³ A bit further on, *Stans puer* chides: “the best morsels, – have this in remembrance, – / Wholly always thyself to take do not apply.”¹⁰⁴ Greedily hoarding all the best pieces is another form of gluttony; the boy should have the courtesy to offer them to others, as the *Babees Book* suggests.¹⁰⁵ Finally, the boy is urged to eat neatly, not making a mess of his place setting nor fouling the common serving dishes; the *Babees Book* instructs:

Cut with your knife your bread, and break it not;
A clean Trencher before you eke ye lay,
And when your potage to you shall be brought,
Take your spoons, and soup by no way,
And in your dish leave not your spoon, I pray,
Nor on the board leaning be ye not seen,
But from embrowyng the clothe ye keep clean.¹⁰⁶

The emphasis is on moderation and unobtrusiveness. All of these instructions are aimed at making the boy an agreeable dining companion – not a mean feat, considering the age group these poems are oriented toward. One can imagine the ruckus a group of preteen boys could cause at their lord’s table without such tuition. By governing his hunger and minding his manners, a boy would make the meal more pleasant for everyone, earning himself a gentle name in the process. There is good reason to associate table manners and restrained appetite with gentility, as the *Babees Book* points out. In one stanza on the subject, the poem admonishes,

Cut not your meat eke as it were Field men,
That to their meat have such an appetite
That they ne rekke in what wise, where ne when,
Nor how ungoodly they on their meat twyte;
But, sweet children, have always your delight
In courtesy, and in very gentleness,

¹⁰² Furnivall, ed., *Babees Book*, 29, l. 31. Other references to stuffing one’s mouth can be found on p. 6, ll. 151-3; 18, ll. 36-7; 28, ll. 31-3; 301, ll. 57-8.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 54, 56, ll. 12, 36-7.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 29, ll. 45-6.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 7, ll. 169-75.

¹⁰⁶ *Eke* (n): also, in addition. *MED*, s. v. “eke” (n.), def. c. Furnivall, ed., *Babees Book*, 6, ll. 141-7.

And at your might eschew boisterousness.¹⁰⁷

The *Boke of Curtasye*'s caution about waiting for the appropriate time to eat "Lest men say thou art hunger-beaten" is in the same vein.¹⁰⁸ The implication is that table manners would necessarily separate the gentle from the common, since a common laborer coming in from the fields would ravenously tuck into his food, caring little about appearance or politeness. Caxton's *Book of Curtesye* even labels such ravenousness "uncourteous appetite."¹⁰⁹ Eating slowly and maintaining the proper etiquette at table was a clear indicator of gentle status.

The boy was also expected to control his speech during meals. Most of these poems contain general admonishments about not talking too much or too loudly. The *Babees Book* advises, "Answer, And speak, when men speak to you;" but goes on to warn, "many words been right Tedious / To ylke wise man that shall give audience."¹¹⁰ Caxton's *Book of Curtesye* cautions, "Annoy ye no man presente nor absente / But speak ye few."¹¹¹ In her work on the gendered nature of speech, Sandy Bardsley argues that men were expected to walk a middle path with their speech: both excessive silence and excessive loquacity might be seen as effeminate. A boy who wished to cultivate a strongly masculine identity needed to learn to operate on that middle ground.¹¹² Russell advises against loud speech or laughter while serving at table.¹¹³ The boy was expected to restrain his speech and other utterances in order to demonstrate his gentility:

And from Jangling your tongue always conserve,
For so ywys ye shall a name deserve
Of gentleness and of good governance,

¹⁰⁷ *Rekke* (v): to care, heed; *twiten* (v) to whittle, hew or hack at. *MED*, s. v. "recchen" (v. (2)), def. 1; "thwiten" (v.), def. a. Furnivall, ed., *Babees Book*, 7, ll. 176-82.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 300, l. 45.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 19, l. 177.

¹¹⁰ *Ylke* (pron): designating a person already mentioned ("the same wise man"). *MED*, s. v. "ilke" (pron), def. 2. Furnivall, ed., *Babees Book*, 6, l. 154; 3, ll. 75-6.

¹¹¹ Furnivall, ed., *Caxton*, 19, ll. 170-1.

¹¹² For more on men's speech, see Sandy Bardsley, *Venomous Tongues: Speech and Gender in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 90-105.

¹¹³ Furnivall, ed., *Babees Book*, 135, ll. 290-1.

And in virtue always yourself advance.¹¹⁴

While the medieval poems do not speak to the other benefits of silence, Rhodes' *Boke of Nurture* suggests that a silent boy can learn from the words of others: "A man that sayeth little shall perceive / by the speech of another."¹¹⁵ Several poems warn against interruption when another man is speaking,¹¹⁶ and *Urbanitatis* also advises the boy to hold his tongue while in the presence of ladies.¹¹⁷ Laughter in his lord's presence is also singled out as undesirable in several poems.¹¹⁸ This is, as the Lambeth *Stans puer* warns, so "that by no wanton laughing thou do no offence / before thy sovereign while he is in presence."¹¹⁹ Laughter has several pitfalls; besides making the boy appear a frivolous rather than a serious servant of the lord, it could also be misconstrued as mocking one's betters. A boy laughing at a companion's whispered joke could be misread as mocking the lord himself. Joking is a tricky business – inside jokes are not funny to outsiders and any joke's purpose might be misconstrued. The boy who avoids laughter, whispers, and jokes altogether is more likely to meet his lord's approval.

The importance of proper speech is underlined by the specificity of the poems' prohibitions. Not only the frequency and volume of the boy's speech must be guarded, but also the content. Swearing and ribaldry are, of course, to be avoided, as advised by *Stans puer* and Rhodes' *Boke of Nurture*.¹²⁰ Bishop Grossteste's *Household Statutes* advise the lord not to tolerate any grumbling from his servants.¹²¹ Russell likewise instructs the boy against

¹¹⁴ *Janglen* (v): to chatter, gossip. *MED*, s. v. "jangle" (v.), def. 1a. This stanza is from the *Babees Book*. Furnivall, ed., *Babees Book*, 8, ll. 186-9.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, ll. 105-6.

¹¹⁶ This advice is found in both versions of *Stans puer*, *Urbanitatis*, and Caxton's *Book of Curtesye*. Furnivall, ed., *Babees Book*, 15, ll. 89-92; 30, ll. 69-70; 31, ll. 69-70. Furnivall, ed., *Caxton*, 29, ll. 274-80.

¹¹⁷ Furnivall, ed., *Babees Book*, 15, ll. 73-6.

¹¹⁸ This occurs in Russell's *Boke of Nurture*, the *Babees Book*, the *Lyttle Childrenes Lytil Boke* and Rhodes' *Boke of Nurture*. *Ibid.*, 135, ll. 290-1; 8, l. 195; 20, ll. 57-8; 81, ll. 377-80.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 27, ll. 20-1.

¹²⁰ Given their audience, it is surprising that this comes up in so few of the poems! *Ibid.*, 28, l. 44; 29, l. 44; 21, ll. 75-6; 84, l. 78.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 330.

complaining or backbiting.¹²² Backbiting is a recurring theme; whatever the boy says at table should not be hurtful to others.¹²³ The Sloane *Boke of Curtasye* chides, “Ne tell thou never at board no tale / To harm or shame thy fellow in sale.”¹²⁴ Later, it also warns against speaking dishonestly of women.¹²⁵ The *Babees Book* instructs its readers not to tell false tales of any sort, but rather “Let ay your cheer be lowly, blithe, and hale.”¹²⁶ A text Furnivall refers to as *Stanzas and Couplets of Counsel*, a very brief poem from a late fifteenth-century manuscript, asserts that “It is the property of A gentleman / To say the best that he can.”¹²⁷ The *Young Children’s Book* agrees, saying “Be glad of All men well to say.”¹²⁸ There was a sociopolitical reason for a gentleman to guard his speech: providing counsel was one of the duties a vassal was expected to provide his lord. Raluca Radulescu points out that this may have been a factor behind the emphasis on appropriate speech in conduct literature.¹²⁹ When the lord might take action on his words, it behooved a gentleman to choose them cautiously. A young man with a reputation for controlled, thoughtful speech was likely to be listened to more carefully, and this could lead to social advancement.

What the boy says of others is rightfully important, for it will influence what others say of him in return. Controlling one’s speech was so essential that there was at least one mid-fifteenth-century poem, *Whate-ever thow sey, avyse thee welle!*, that was wholly devoted to

¹²² *Ibid.*, 134, ll. 274-5.

¹²³ Caxton’s *Book of Curtesye* argues that backbiters should be turned away from the table. Furnivall, ed., *Caxton*, 19, ll. 162-8.

¹²⁴ Furnivall, ed., *Babees Book* 302, ll. 101-2.

¹²⁵ *Sale* (n): the main hall of a castle or mansion. *MED*, s. v. “sale” (n. (1)), def. a. Furnivall, ed., *Babees Book*, 306-7, ll. 259-62.

¹²⁶ Ay (adv): always. *MED*, s. v. “ai” (adv.), def. 1 and 2. Furnivall, ed., *Babees Book*, 4, ll. 99-101.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 322, ll. 18-9.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 23, l. 100.

¹²⁹ Raluca Radulescu, “Literature” in *Gentry Culture in Late Medieval England*, ed. Radulescu and Alison Truelove, 100-18 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 111.

verbal infractions and their consequences.¹³⁰ Caxton's *Book of Curtesye* gives the conditions the boy must observe when speaking:

Advise you well what ye say, & in what place
Of whom & to whom in your mind compass
How ye shall speak & when take good heed
This counseleth the wise man without dread.¹³¹

The occasional oath or inappropriately bawdy tale might be forgiven, but slander of one's fellows or, even worse, one's betters was clearly a serious offense. *How the Wise Man Taught His Son*, a poem oriented toward a more bourgeois audience, explains the consequences of hasty speech:

And son, where that ever thou go,
Be not too tale-wise by no way,
Thine own tongue may be thy foe;
Therefore beware what thou dost say,
Where, & to whom, by any way,
Take good heed if thou do say ought,
For thou might say a word to-day
That vii years after may be for-thought.¹³²

A word uttered recklessly can have long-ranging consequences, for people are slow to forget slights against them. This clarifies why these poems spend so much time warning the boy against improper speech; the ramifications of a verbal slip-up could be greater and longer-ranging than most of the other listed infractions.

Moving out from the face, the boy was expected to control his gesture and posture – the disposition of his head and limbs. When speaking to his lord, the boy should stand up straight; the same goes when serving at table, as the Sloane *Boke of Curtasye* advises: “Let not the post be-come thy staff.”¹³³ He should not twist his head about, gawking at his surroundings.¹³⁴

¹³⁰ Furnivall, ed., *Babees Book*, 356-8.

¹³¹ Furnivall, ed., *Caxton*, 17, ll. 144-7.

¹³² Furnivall, ed., *Babees Book*, 49, ll. 25-32.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 308, l. 325.

¹³⁴ From Russell's *Boke of Nurture* and the Sloane *Boke of Curtasye*. *Ibid.*, 135, l. 285; 309, l. 336.

Several poems stress that, when speaking with someone, the boy should not be fidgeting with his hands and feet.¹³⁵ At table, he should refrain from playing with his knife or other utensils.¹³⁶ When speaking during a meal, he ought not gesture (lest, presumably, he knock over a cup or serving vessel).¹³⁷ He should always refrain from scratching his crotch in company, as Russell's *Boke of Nurture* stresses: "put not your hands in your hosen your codware for to claw / nor picking, nor trifling ne shrukkyng as though ye would saw."¹³⁸ Not only would this be unpleasant for his companions to watch, but such scratching during meals would render the boy's hands unclean. *Urbanitatis* acknowledges that such restraint is not an easy feat for a young boy: "Foot & hand thou keep full still / From clawing or tripping, it is skill."¹³⁹ Scratching is a natural urge common to all men and women; learning to suppress and control such urges was essential to gentle behavior. Haste, too, must be controlled. Both versions of *Stans puer* advise the boy to "walk demurely by street in the town" and Caxton's *Book of Curtesye* directs, "Go forth your way demenyng your voyage / In sober wise."¹⁴⁰ Again, his slowness and restraint would serve to emphasize his leisure. Bodily stillness – the result of the boy training his body to suppress its natural urges – would immediately signal the boy's gentility.

¹³⁵ These include the Lambeth *Stans puer*, Russell's *Boke of Nurture*, *Urbanitatis*, the *Babees Book*, Caxton's *Book of Curtesye*, and Rhodes' *Boke of Nurture* (which mentions it on multiple occasions). *Ibid.*, 27, ll. 7-11; 136, l. 299; 13, ll. 17-8; 6, l. 150; 74, ll. 145-56; 78, ll. 253-6. Furnivall, ed., *Caxton*, 13, ll. 106-12.

¹³⁶ Both versions of *Stans puer* caution against playing with one's knife. The *Babees Book* warns against playing with things in general: "handle ye no thing." The *Young Children's Book* mentions utensils specifically, and Caxton's *Book of Curtesye* stresses that the boy should not wave his knife around his face. Furnivall, ed., *Babees Book*, 30, ll. 54-6; 31, ll. 54-6; 4, l. 84; 25, l. 145. Furnivall, ed., *Caxton*, 21, l. 192.

¹³⁷ The Lambeth *Stans puer* advises, "With thy fingers mark not thy tale." Furnivall, ed., *Babees Book*, 31, l. 71.

¹³⁸ *Shrukken* (v): to move about, fidget, jiggle. *MED*, s. v. "shruggen" (v.), def. a. Furnivall, ed., *Babees Book*, 135, ll. 286-7.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 13, ll. 17-8.

¹⁴⁰ *Demeining* (ger): bearing, demeanor, conduct. *MED*, s. v. "demeining" (ger.), def. 2. This is repeated in the Lambeth *Stans puer*. Furnivall, ed., *Babees Book*, 26, l. 18; 27, l. 18. Furnivall, ed., *Caxton*, 9, ll. 68-9.

Finally, the boy must control his bodily functions – whether they are voluntary or involuntary. As mentioned above, scratching was to be avoided when in company.¹⁴¹ So was picking one’s nose or teeth.¹⁴² Russell’s *Boke of Nurture* cautions against runny noses as well: “pick not your nose ne that it be dropping with no pearls clear, / Sniff nor snitynge it too loud lest your sovereign it hear.”¹⁴³ These were matters that ought to be taken care of privately, with the proper instruments. Noses should be blown, rather than picked, but there was a right and a wrong way to go about this as well. The *Young Children’s Book* chides, “Wipe not thy nose nor thy nostrils, / Then men will say thou come of churls.”¹⁴⁴ *Urbanitatis* warns the page boy not to wipe his nose on the towel he is using for serving.¹⁴⁵ The Sloane *Boke of Curtasye* instructs the reader where to discreetly dispose of the remains:

If thy nose thou cleanse, as may befall,
Look thy hand thou cleanse, as withe-all,
Prively with skirt do it away,
Other else through thy tippet that is so gay.¹⁴⁶

While this would not be appropriate today, there were no handkerchiefs in the fifteenth century, so wiping any nasal effusions in an unobtrusive area of one’s own attire was deemed more polite than fouling the common table cloth or napery. A century later, Rhodes’ *Boke of Nurture* advises against blowing one’s nose at all, and particularly not looking at what comes out of it afterward.¹⁴⁷ Another voluntary bodily function that must be restrained is spitting. *Urbanitatis* advises against spitting; Russell’s *Boke of Nurture* agrees and adds “with your mouth ye use

¹⁴¹ Other texts mentioning scratching are the both versions of *Stans puer*, the Sloane *Boke of Curtasye*, the *Babees Book*, the *Young Children’s Book* and Rhodes’ *Boke of Nurture*. Furnivall, ed., *Babees Book*, 26, l. 14; 27, ll. 13-4; 309, ll. 329-30; 4, l. 81; 25, ll. 139-40; 77, ll. 241-2; 80, l. 333.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 26, l. 12; 27, l. 12; 28, l. 42; 29, l. 42; 134, ll. 283-4; 301, ll. 89-94; 308, ll. 327-8. Furnivall, ed., *Caxton*, 27, l. 248.

¹⁴³ *Sniten* (v): to blow one’s nose. *MED*, s. v. “sniten” (v.), def. a. Furnivall, ed., *Babees Book*, 134, ll. 283-4.

¹⁴⁴ Churls were the opposite of gentlemen. See the discussion of the *BSA* in Chapter 2, above. *Ibid.*, 25, ll. 141-2.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 14, ll. 52-3.

¹⁴⁶ *Tippet* (n): a long, ornamental piece of cloth attached to the shoulders or hood. *MED*, s. v. “tippet” (n.), def. 1. Furnivall, ed., *Babees Book*, 301, ll. 89-29.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 80, ll. 335-6.

neither to squirt, nor spout.”¹⁴⁸ The Sloane *Boke of Curtasye* and *Lytylle Childrenes Lytil Boke* caution not to spit at the table, while the *Young Children’s Book* simply advises that one ought to watch where one spits.¹⁴⁹ The idea was to keep one’s excretions as far from other people as possible, so as not to offend.

Involuntary bodily functions are also addressed. A number of poems caution against burping; Russell’s *Boke of Nurture* instructs the reader not to cough or hiccup as well: with your breast sigh, nor cough nor breathe, your sovereign before; / be yoxing, ne bolkyng ne groaning, never the more.”¹⁵⁰ There should be no obtrusive noises coming from the boy that might draw negative attention to his presence. Other poems are more lenient, acknowledging that sneezes, coughs, burps and farts cannot necessarily be helped; they ought, however, to be adequately suppressed or shielded. In another stanza, Russell advises his reader not “too loud ye retch,” suggesting that retching itself might be unavoidable, but it should at least be suppressed.¹⁵¹ Similarly, *Urbanitatis* acknowledges the inevitability of farts, but cautions the reader to “Be privy of voidance” and do so as quietly as possible.¹⁵² The gist of all this and all similar poems is that the boy must learn to control all of his bodily parts and their functions as tightly as possible. Gentle behavior is marked by such control.

The next major facet of gentility addressed by these poems is cleanliness and its close companion, order. Elias argues that European elites separated themselves from the lower classes “through an emphasis on bodily purity and the notion of a self-contained, ‘clean’ – especially in

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 13, ll. 19-20; 134, l. 271; 135, l. 293.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 301, ll. 85-6; 303, ll. 133-6; 18, ll. 43-4; 21, ll. 115-8.

¹⁵⁰ *Yoxen* (v): to hiccup, gulp, belch; *bolken* (v): to belch, retch, vomit. *MED*, s. v. “yexen” (v.), def. a; s. v. “bolken” (v.), def. 1a. Furnivall, ed., *Babees Book*, 18, ll. 47-8; 135, ll. 297-8.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 134, l. 271.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 13, l. 20. Caxton’s *Book of Curtesye* likewise warns, “Beware also no breath from you rebound / Up ne down lest ye were shameful found.” Furnivall, ed., *Caxton*, 21, ll. 202-3.

regard to bodily orifices – and controlled individual subject.”¹⁵³ Cleanliness and order are another way of exerting control – this time, not just over the self but over one’s environment. The poems suggest that this sort of control was central to a gentle lifestyle. Everything must be in its place, whether on one’s person or at the table. The cleanliness and order of the home is also important, but is little touched on in the medieval conduct poems because it is not part of the public duties of the page boy or henchman. Bishop Grossteste’s *Household Statutes* mentions ensuring that one’s servants are attired neatly and appropriately, but this is advice aimed at a lord; in this case, the lord’s servants reflect upon him, so their attire is part of his business.¹⁵⁴

The boy’s main responsibility was to ensure that he himself was neatly and properly attired each morning. Several of the poems, particularly those specifically targeted at household servants, mention keeping one’s clothes clean and neat as important. Russell says that the boy should be “Cleanly clad, his clothes not all to-rent.”¹⁵⁵ A century later, Rhodes says that a man ought to be as clean in speech as he is in his dress, implying a high standard for both.¹⁵⁶ Apart from clothing, most of the attention paid to personal cleanliness focuses on the hands. The boy must have clean hands, particularly if he is serving at table or eating in company. The *Lytylle Childrenes Lytil Boke* chides, “Look thine hands be washed clean, / That no filth on thy nails be seen.”¹⁵⁷ The *Sloane Boke of Curtasye* echoes, “Look thy nails be clean in blythe, / Lest thy fellow loathe there-with.”¹⁵⁸ The same poem also cautions against petting animals while eating,

¹⁵³ Elias quoted in Sponsler, *Drama and Resistance*, 50.

¹⁵⁴ Furnivall, ed., *Babees Book*, 329. Wynkyn de Worde’s *Boke of Keruyng* likewise notes that a man who holds the office of chamberlain ought to be clean and well-attired. *Ibid.*, 282.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 176, l. 864.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 96, ll. 521-4.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 16, ll. 9-10.

¹⁵⁸ *Blithe* (n): joy, bliss, favor, mercy, or, “in intensive phrases of vague meaning: in ~; with ~.” *MED*, s. v. “blithe” (n. (2)), def. a-b. The latter sense of intensification seems most fitting here: perhaps analogous to the modern English idiom “in spades.” Furnivall, ed., *Babees Book*, 300, ll. 47-8. Both versions of *Stans puer*, Russell’s *Boke of Nurture*, the *Sloane Boke of Curtasye*, *Urbanitatis*, the *Babees Book*, Wynkyn de Worde’s *Boke of Keruyng* and

as does the *Young Children's Book*: "Make thou neither cat ne hound / Thy fellow at the table round."¹⁵⁹ Similarly, *Stans puer* instructs the boy to "Keep clean thy lips from flesh & fish" so as not to sully the cup when he drinks.¹⁶⁰ The cleanliness of the boy's hands and mouth at meals was of great interest to his dining companions, for they would be choosing their food from the same dishes and drinking from the same vessels as he. In modern society, having clean hands during meals is considered a common courtesy; in the fifteenth-century, such consideration was not common in any of its senses, but rather a hallmark of gentility. The *Young Children's Book* makes this connection directly, saying "Keep clean thy fingers, lips, & chin, / For so thou may thy worship win."¹⁶¹

Along with his own person, the boy should be careful around the food and drink laid out at the table. Dirty knives are mentioned nearly as often as dirty hands in these poems.¹⁶² Medieval guests were expected to bring their own knives to the table – the same knives that would be used for a wide range of ordinary tasks throughout the day. An unclean knife would foul a common dish just as readily as unclean hands. This is, no doubt, why Russell mentions the two in tandem: "Son, thy knife must be bright, fair, & clean, / and thy hands fair washed, it would the well be seen."¹⁶³ As long as one's knife was clean, it was permissible to dip it into the common dishes. *Stans puer* advises the boy to take salt with his knife, rather than dipping his meat directly into the cellar, which the *Babees Book* and Caxton's *Book of Curtesye* caution against.¹⁶⁴ The *Young Children's Book* warns the reader never to return meat to the communal

Rhodes' *Boke of Nurture* also instruct the boy to have clean hands and nails. *Ibid.*, 28, ll. 22-3; 29, ll. 22-3; 134, l. 270; 137, l. 317; 309, l. 343; 14, ll. 39-41; 6, ll. 156-7; 271; 73, ll. 79-80; 76, ll. 171-2.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 301, ll. 87-8; 302, ll. 105-8; 25, ll. 143-4.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 29, l. 34.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 23, ll. 107-8.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 31, l. 58; 137, l. 317

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 137, ll. 317-8.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 30, ll. 64-6; 31, ll. 64-6; 7, ll. 159-61. Furnivall, ed., *Caxton*, 23, ll. 211-3.

dish.¹⁶⁵ He is also counseled by the Sloane *Boke of Curtasye*, “Ne blow not on thy drink ne meat, / Neither for cold, neither for heat.”¹⁶⁶ Just as he might dirty the salt cellar with meat drippings, the boy could foul others’ food with his very breath. Again, the texts stress the boy’s control over his body and its emissions, demonstrating his status through his restraint.

Additionally, the reader is instructed to keep his place setting neat when eating. Meat should be carved neatly, without leaving any crumbs (the *Young Children’s Book* and Rhodes’ *Boke of Nurture* advise that one’s knife should be sharp, as well as clean, for this very purpose).¹⁶⁷ The trencher, too, ought to be kept neat – it should be clean when placed on the table, as the *Babees Book* instructs, and should not be sullied with unnecessary crumbs and leavings during the meal itself, as Caxton’s *Book of Curtesye* and *Stans puer* teach.¹⁶⁸ The Lambeth *Stans puer* admonishes, “Defile not the napery by no recklessness,” and Russell warns about the table as well: “enbreme not your table for than ye do not right.”¹⁶⁹ Such sloppiness is often brought about through haste, and a gentleman, a man of leisure, has no need to eat hastily. In order to keep his place setting clean, the boy is warned to chew with his mouth closed (“When thou eatest, gape not too wide / That thy mouth be seen on each a side”); in addition to being displeasing to his fellows, such a habit could cause food to drop out, sullying the table.¹⁷⁰ Likewise, his spoon ought not be overfilled: Lydgate’s *Stans puer* says, “Fill not thy spoon, lest

¹⁶⁵ Furnivall, ed., *Babees Book*, 23, ll. 129-30.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 302, ll. 111-2.

¹⁶⁷ The instruction not to leave crumbs is from the *Lytylle Childrenes Lytil Boke*. *Ibid.*, 20, ll. 63-8; 23, ll. 119-23; 76, ll. 181-4.

¹⁶⁸ Rhodes mentions a specific vessel, the “voyder,” which is to be used for table rubbish. Furnivall, ed., *Caxton*, 29, ll. 269-73. Furnivall, ed., *Babees Book*, 6, l. 142; 28, l. 48; 29, l. 48; 79, ll. 293-6.

¹⁶⁹ *Embreuen* (v): to stain, soil, dirty. *MED*, s. v. “embreuen” (v.), def. a. Like Russell, Lydgate’s translation uses the word *enbreme* rather than *defoule*. *Urbanitatis* also advises the boy to keep the cloth clean. Furnivall, ed., *Babees Book*, 28, l. 39; 29, l. 40; 138, l. 331; 14, ll. 51-8.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 20, ll. 65-6. Caxton’s *Book of Curtesye* echoes this advice. Furnivall, ed., *Caxton*, 25, ll. 239-45.

in the carriage / It went beside, which were not commendable.”¹⁷¹ This cleanliness should extend through the end of the meal; the *Babees Book* instructs,

When that so is that end shall come of meat,
Your knives clean, where they ought to be,
Look ye put up; and hold eke ye your seat
While ye have washed, for so will honesty.¹⁷²

Rhodes’ *Boke of Nurture* also mentions the cloth being cleared, but his wording suggests that the reader is not the one who does it.¹⁷³ Still, it is evident that the meal is not over until cleanliness and order is returned to the table and those around it. Those who had the leisure to be so fastidious with their appearance and at their meals would stand apart from the common sort, marking themselves as gentle.

A third aspect of gentility touched on by these poems is deference to social superiors. Medieval society considered hierarchy to be a natural phenomenon, created by God; learning and respecting one’s place in society was an important part of adolescent socialization at all levels of society.¹⁷⁴ Service was not exclusively a low-status occupation; for the elite, it was a way of reinforcing the bonds of vertical hierarchy.¹⁷⁵ As has already been mentioned, both versions of *Stans puer* as well as *Urbanitatis* warn against seating oneself above one’s station at table. A number of other poems address this issue as well - raising a man up was the job of the lord or his marshal, not the man himself.¹⁷⁶ Even when standing before one’s lord, the *Babees Book* advises “That if ye see come In any person / Better than ye, that ye go back anon / And give him

¹⁷¹ Furnivall, ed., *Babees Book*, 30, ll. 59-60.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 8, ll. 190-3.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 81, ll. 353-4.

¹⁷⁴ Thrupp, *Merchant Class of Medieval London*, 164-5. Shulamith Shahar, *Childhood in the Middle Ages* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 167.

¹⁷⁵ Fleming, “Household Servants,” 26. Barbara Hanawalt, *Growing Up in Medieval London* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 179.

¹⁷⁶ Furnivall, ed., *Babees Book*, 28, ll. 24-5; 29, ll. 24-5; 13, ll. 23-6; 309, ll. 345-8; 21, ll. 91-2.

place.”¹⁷⁷ When walking, the Sloane *Boke of Curtasye* suggests walking behind one’s superiors and even giving way before equals, to demonstrate humility.¹⁷⁸ Even in the attainment of a higher station, humility was an important quality, and that same humility ought to be in evidence in one’s interactions with those of higher rank. *Urbanitatis* urges, “To the next degree look thou wisely / To do hem Reverence by and by.”¹⁷⁹ That reverence was not constrained to seating plans or processions – the same poem later suggests that

If thou sit by a worthier man
Then thyself thou art one,
Suffer him first to touch the meat
Ere thy self any there-of get;
To the best morsel thou may not strike
Though thou never so well it like.¹⁸⁰

Likewise, the *Lytylle Childrenes Lytil Boke* instructs the reader to “Let the more worthy than thou / Wash be-fore thee.”¹⁸¹ Deferential courtesy requires restraint; the boy must remember his place in all things, whether sitting, walking, eating or washing. By doing so, he can show off his manners and gentle breeding, and hope to please his betters through them.

Several poems highlight other aspects of deference, ranging from general politeness to gratitude to proper bowing. The Sloane *Boke of Curtasye* explains what bows are necessary upon entering the hall. Bowing to the lord is not mentioned – perhaps it is assumed – but the boy is instructed,

Within the hall set on either side,
Sit other gentlemen as falls that tide;
Incline thee fair to them also,
First to the right hand thou shall go,
Sitthen to the left hand thine eye thou cast;

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 4, ll. 88-90.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 275-84.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 14, ll. 35-6.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 14, ll. 45-50. Caxton’s *Book of Curtesye* suggests the same course of action. Furnivall, ed., *Caxton*, 23, ll. 218-24.

¹⁸¹ Furnivall, ed., *Babees Book*, 22, ll. 85-6.

To him thou bow without wrast.¹⁸²

The yeomen in the room are not to be bowed to, but simply acknowledged as the boy is led to his own proper place. The *Babees Book* and *Young Children's Book* instruct that the boy should bow to his lord or other superiors when they address him. Rhodes mentions bowing to the lord upon leaving the table at the conclusion of a meal.¹⁸³ The *Lytylle Childrenes Lytil Boke* combines bowing with gratitude in its instructions for a gentle leave-taking:

But take thy leave of the head lowly,
And thank him with thine heart highly,
And all the gentles together in-same,
And bear thee so thou have no blame;
Then men will say thereafter
That a gentleman was here.¹⁸⁴

Thanking is also mentioned in both the *Babees Book* and *Young Children's Book*; when the reader is praised by his betters, he should demonstrate his gratitude.¹⁸⁵

Deference, in its general and specific forms, is addressed in a number of other ways across these poems. A number of them contain admonitions for the boy to reverence his sovereign, his betters and even strangers whose rank is unknown (erring on the side of caution).¹⁸⁶ Apart from the topics already mentioned – behavior at table, bowing and gratitude – there is less consistency in the particular advice each poem offers. When coming into the lord's presence, the *Babees Book* declares that the boy must greet him properly ("Say first, 'god speed'"); *Urbanitatis* does not mention greeting, but instructs the boy to doff his cap, bend his knee and look the lord in the face when addressed.¹⁸⁷ The *Lytylle Childrenes Lytil Boke* warns

¹⁸² *Sitthen* (adv): afterward, subsequently; *wraste* (n): a wrenching or twisting motion. *MED*, s. v. "sitthen" (adv.), def. a; "wreste" (n.), def. 1a. Furnivall, ed., *Babees Book*, 299-300, ll. 21-7.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 81, ll. 365-6.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 22, ll. 91-6.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 4, ll. 103-5; 21, ll. 71-3.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 14, ll. 35-8; 28, l. 53; 29, l. 53; 63; 96, ll. 529-32.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 3, l. 59; 13, ll. 3-16.

not to sit until the lord bids and to wait to eat or drink until the lord is done.¹⁸⁸ The *Young Children's Book* reiterates the advice about sitting, and explains how to properly drink out of the lord's cup, if it is offered.¹⁸⁹ The *Babees Book* and Rhodes' *Boke of Nurture* explain about the lord's cup as well.¹⁹⁰ Distance must certainly be kept in maintaining distinctions in rank. *Urbanitatis* explains how the boy must walk behind a worthier man – "Let thy Right shoulder follow his back."¹⁹¹ The Sloane *Boke of Curtasye* bids the reader not to fight, bet, or play games with the lord, while Rhodes' *Boke of Nurture* simply bids him not to be free with his betters.¹⁹²

The poems also touch upon the issue of politeness, or simply neighborliness, towards one's equals and inferiors. Some of the opportunities to be courteous and polite to one's lord or social superiors can equally be extended to others. The *Young Children's Book* asserts that the reader should greet anyone he encounters with a polite "good morn" and proclaim "god be here" upon entering any house. It also urges the reader to be satisfied with what food he is offered and praise it at the conclusion of the meal: "For be it good or be it bad, / In good worth it must be had."¹⁹³ While this poem is extremely similar to the *Lytylle Childrenes Lytil Boke*, the latter has little to say about courtesy not offered to one's lord. The *Young Children's Book*, which was written slightly later, seems to be less exclusively oriented toward a courtly audience, possibly suggesting an audience extending to townsmen for whom neighborly manners were more important than courtly ones. The Sloane *Boke of Curtasye* offers advice on conduct while traveling; the reader is urged to chat with his travel companions and, when sharing a bed, ask his

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 16, ll. 13-4; 20, ll. 69-72.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 21, ll. 89-92; 25, ll. 133-8.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 5-6, ll. 120-35; 79, ll. 301-8.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 15, l. 85.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 305-6, ll. 225-30; 84, ll. 93-6.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 17, ll. 19-20; 21, l. 86; 23, ll. 103-4, 112-4. Caxton's *Book of Curtesye* also urges greeting passersby. Furnivall, ed., *Caxton*, 9, ll. 57-63.

fellow which side of the bed he would prefer.¹⁹⁴ Both versions of *Stans puer* stress that proper leave ought to be taken of any companion; Lydgate's version reads, "Part withe thy fellow, for that is courtesy."¹⁹⁵ As with most subjects, the sixteenth-century Rhodes' *Boke of Nurture* offers more extensive advice than the medieval poems, encouraging the boy to reserve food for any fellows who are away at mealtimes, extend hospitality to visiting friends, and to be courteous to any strangers seated near him at table.¹⁹⁶

Advice on how to be neighborly turns up in most of the poems, though it is rarely stressed as emphatically as more courtly topics like deference, table manners and bodily comportment. The specific advice that appears most often is a caution against strife. Lambeth's *Stans puer* states, "Beware that at the meat thou begin no strife," the Sloane *Boke of Curtasye*, "From strife and bate draw thee on length," and the *Lytylle Childrenes Lytil Boke*, "In no company begin thou no strife."¹⁹⁷ Even the *Diatorie*, a poem focused on health and well-being, chimes in against strife with one's lord, fellows and subjects, counseling the reader "To live in peace, and get thee a good name."¹⁹⁸ The more bourgeois-oriented *How the Wise Man Taught His Son* advises against any strife either with one's wife or because of her.¹⁹⁹ The *Young Children's Book* advises the reader to love his neighbor, and a few poems reiterate the biblical counsel to do unto others as you would have others do unto you.²⁰⁰ The number of times this appears suggests strongly that one could not earn a gentle name by causing trouble – gentility was about smoothing things over and keeping peace in one's social interactions. A true gentleman would seek peace, not strife.

¹⁹⁴ Furnivall, ed., *Babees Book*, 307-8, ll. 293-302.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 28, l. 47.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 77, ll. 225-8; 102, ll. 729-32, 741-4.

¹⁹⁷ *Bate* (n): discord. *MED*, s. v. "bate" (n. (1)), def. a. Furnivall, ed., *Babees Book*, 29, l. 41; 304, l. 188; 18, l. 40.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 58, ll. 51-6.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 50-1, ll. 89-112.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 19, ll. 51-4. "Do unto others" advice appears in the Sloane *Boke of Curtasye* and Rhodes' *Boke of Nurture*. *Ibid.*, 304, ll. 175-8; 91, ll. 351-2.

Other aspects of politeness and neighborliness, compatible with avoiding strife, are mentioned in some poems. Several make mention of being generally cheerful, sociable or agreeable. Twice, Russell's *Boke of Nurture* urges the reader to "be glad of cheer" and the Sloane *Boke of Curtasye* stresses greeting one's fellows and answering their inquiries gladly.²⁰¹ The *Young Children's Book* advises, "Be loath to grieve, & lief to please."²⁰² In a sense, a gentleman greases the wheels of all social interaction, lavishing pleasantries on everyone and avoiding friction at all costs. In the quest of such sociability and agreeability, the Sloane *Boke of Curtasye*, the *Young Children's Book* and Rhodes' *Boke of Nurture* all stress the importance of keeping one's word; the same three poems also advise minding one's own business.²⁰³ As Burnley points out when he discusses these poems, one of their purposes is "to ostensibly teach their readers how to flourish as members of a large household."²⁰⁴ In order for such a household to function properly, as Bishop Grossteste stresses in his *Household Statutes*, its members must get along – or at least pretend to.

Apart from the four main areas of focus – bodily control, cleanliness, deference and politeness – a few lesser themes appear. A number of poems address the qualities of a good servant, for the benefit of the reader with a position in a noble household. Specific characteristics such as obedience, discretion, speed, knowledge and trustworthiness are touched on.²⁰⁵ Piety is also an important feature. Several poems stress the importance of prayer and other religious

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 134, l. 268; 176, l. 868; 306, ll. 251-8.

²⁰² *Lief* (adv): willing. *MED*, s. v. "lief" (adv.), def. 4a. Furnivall, ed., *Babees Book*, 21, l. 81.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 305, ll. 201-4, 213-4; 19, ll. 47-51; 92, ll. 353-6; 98, ll. 601-4; 306, ll. 231-2; 19, ll. 55-6; 97, ll. 537-8.

²⁰⁴ Burnley, *Courtliness and Literature*, 129.

²⁰⁵ Obedience shows up in the *Babees Book*. Furnivall, ed., *Babees Book*, 4, ll. 96-8. Discretion is addressed in *Urbanitatis*, the *Babees Book*, and Caxton's *Book of Curtesye*. *Ibid.*, 15, l. 78; 5, ll. 106-12. Furnivall, ed., *Caxton*, 15, ll. 134-5. Speedy service (or admonitions against laziness) is mentioned in both versions of *Stans puer*, the *Babees Book*, Rhodes' *Boke of Nurture* and Caxton's *Book of Curtesye*. Furnivall, ed., *Babees Book*, 30, ll. 61-3; 31, ll. 61-3; 5, ll. 113-6, 129-33; 84, l. 79; 90, ll. 299-300. Furnivall, ed., *Caxton*, 13, ll. 113-6. Rhodes also stresses being quick to learn one's duties and being trustworthy. Furnivall, ed., *Babees Book*, 66-70; 81, ll. 81-4; 85, ll. 101-4.

obligations, such as attendance at Mass.²⁰⁶ Charity, repentance and fear of God are also declared to be desirable.²⁰⁷ Finally, virtuous behavior is emphasized. Several poems discuss the value of moderation, whether in appetite, conduct or even fashion (*How the Wise Man Taught His Son* chides “Be not newfangled in no wise” and the *Dietarium* advises at least eschewing trendy fashions in old age).²⁰⁸ Honesty is harped on in several poems as well, whether imploring the reader to be honest in word and deed or chiding him not to be lying or deceitful; *How the Wise Man Taught His Son* declares that the poem’s goal is “To make me true and steadfast.”²⁰⁹ A few more issues are sporadically addressed through these poems: be kind and not oppressive to inferiors such as servants or wives; be humble rather than proud; be meek, especially as a child; be active and busy, not idle; and avoid vice, like gambling, drinking and lechery, and those susceptible to it.²¹⁰ These virtues are expressed in far more generic terms than the specific behavioral injunctions found throughout most of these poems.

²⁰⁶ Prayer is mentioned in the *Diatorie*, *How the Wise Man Taught His Son*, the *Sloane Boke of Curtasye*, the *Young Children’s Book*, and Rhodes’ *Boke of Nurture*. Furnivall, ed., *Babees Book*, 56, ll. 43-4; 58, l. 68; 48, ll. 18-24; 303, ll. 141-54; 305, ll. 201-4; 17, ll. 11-5; 17-8, ll. 23-30; 73, ll. 63-8; 74, ll. 109-12; 81, ll. 355-60. Attendance at Mass is discussed in the *Sloane Boke of Curtasye*, the *Young Children’s Book* and Rhodes’ *Boke of Nurture*. In addition to advising attendance, Sloane explains at length what the reader ought to do during Mass. *Ibid.*, 304, ll. 159-70; 17, ll. 16-9; 64; 74, ll. 117-20.

²⁰⁷ Charity is mentioned in the *Diatorie*, *How the Wise Man Taught His Son*, the *Lytylle Childrenes Lytil Boke*, the *Young Children’s Book*, and Rhodes’ *Boke of Nurture*. *Ibid.*, 56, ll. 45-6; 58, l. 60; 16, ll. 15-8; 19, l. 57; 100, ll. 654-6. Repentance comes up in *How the Wise Man Taught His Son*. *Ibid.*, 52, l. 137. The insignificance of worldly good is also addressed in that poem, and also in Rhodes’ *Boke of Nurture*. *Ibid.*, 52, ll. 129-44; 72, l. 54. Fear of God is also mentioned in Rhodes. *Ibid.*, 72, ll. 53-4.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 51, ll. 115-20. The Latin text of the *Dietarium* reads, *Dum iuuenis fueris, monstra te elegantem; / Cum cedit senectus, ut sapiens cohibe mentem*: while you are young, allow yourself to be elegant, but when old age strikes, restrain yourself as a wise man. *Ibid.*, 59, ll. 55-6. Other poems addressing moderation are both versions of *Stans puer*, Russell’s *Boke of Nurture*, Rhodes’ *Boke of Nurture* and Caxton’s *Book of Curtesye*. *Ibid.*, 30, ll. 72-8; 31, ll. 72-8; 124, ll. 107-8; 78-9, ll. 273-80; 82, ll. 41-52; 90, ll. 313-6; 94, ll. 451-2; 97, l. 562. Furnivall, ed., *Caxton*, 15, ll. 125-6.

²⁰⁹ Furnivall, ed., *Babees Book*, 48, l. 5-6. Other poems referencing truth or honesty are Bishop Grossteste’s *Household Statutes*, the *Dietarium*, Russell’s *Boke of Nurture*, the *Young Children’s Book* and Rhodes’ *Boke of Nurture*. *Ibid.*, 328; 59, l. 54; 135, l. 292; 19, ll. 39-44; 21, ll. 75-6, 79-80, 87-8, 93; 82, ll. 53-6; 91, ll. 333-4; 96, ll. 527-8; 98, ll. 589-90; 100, ll. 657-60; 105.

²¹⁰ For kindness, see the *Diatorie*, *How the Wise Man Taught His Son*, the *Young Children’s Book*, and Rhodes’ *Boke of Nurture*. *Ibid.*, 56, l. 35; 50, ll. 73-88; 19, l. 60; 92, ll. 369-72; 93, ll. 421-4; 96, ll. 509-12. For humility, see the *Young Children’s Book* and Rhodes’ *Boke of Nurture*. *Ibid.*, 21, ll. 61-2; 72, ll. 55-6; 82, l. 7, 17-20; 93, ll. 417-20; 95, ll. 477-8, 489-92. For meekness, see the *Diatorie*, *How the Wise Man Taught His Son*, the *Sloane Boke of Curtasye*, and Rhodes’ *Boke of Nurture*. *Ibid.*, 54, l. 5; 48, l. 11; 52, ll. 121-8; 308, ll. 311-2; 90, ll. 293-4; 98, ll.

Virtues (and the corresponding vices), however, are most often found in a different sort of poem. The conduct poems discussed above are focused on specific advice about what to do and what not to do. Poems that urge the reader to adhere to more general virtues tend to be of a different sort. These were quite common in medieval society – basic morality was taught to children in schools alongside grammar – but do not often concern themselves with issues of status or fall into the category of conduct literature (and so, for the most part, they are not discussed here).²¹¹ The two notable exceptions – poems giving specific conduct advice but also emphasizing more general virtues and pious behavior – are *How the Wise Man Taught His Son* and the *Young Children's Book*. It is interesting that both of these poems also have more bourgeois leanings. *How the Wise Man Taught His Son* does not seem to have come out of a courtly context at all. Other than addressing “lordings,” the ambiguous nature of which term has been discussed above, the poem does not make any mention of noblemen or gentlemen or the officers serving a noble household. Unlike any of the other poems discussed here, it makes mention of office-holding (counseling the reader to avoid it at all costs) and serving on inquests.²¹² While inquests are present in both urban and rural environments, the rest of the poem's content suggests that its teachings are meant for an urban context, for the use of merchants or prosperous artisans. A townsman of good reputation might expect to be recommended for a guild or civic office at some point in his career. Whereas other poems focus

585-6. On the issue of meekness in socialization and its gendered implications, see Bailey, *Socialization of Children*, 18-21. For busyness and avoidance of sloth and idleness, see the *Diatorie*, *How the Wise Man Taught His Son*, Bishop Grossteste's *Household Statutes*, and Rhodes' *Boke of Nurture*. *Ibid.*, 56, l. 28; 49, ll. 33-40; 328; 72, ll. 57-62; 82, ll. 25-6; 83, ll. 29-32; 90, ll. 299-304; 94, ll. 450; 106. Finally, on the avoidance of vice, see the *Diatorie*, *How the Wise Man Taught His Son*, Bishop Grossteste's *Household Statutes*, Russell's *Boke of Nurture*, Rhodes' *Boke of Nurture*, and Caxton's *Book of Curtesye*. *Ibid.*, 54, l. 13; 56, ll. 29-32; 50, ll. 57-64; 328-9; 135, l. 292; 64; 91, l. 336. Furnivall, ed., *Caxton*, 31, ll. 295-301.

²¹¹ Thrupp argues that the teaching of morality and of social roles was often interlinked, both in the household and in more formal school settings. I am not suggesting here that poems focusing on conduct have no moral overtones, but rather that they emphasize that proper behavior is indicative of one's status, rather than one's interior virtue. Thrupp, *Merchant Class of Medieval London*, 164.

²¹² Furnivall, ed., *Babees Book*, 49, ll. 41-56.

on a courtly culture of deference, *How the Wise Man Taught His Son* spends more time stressing the importance of getting along with everyone, advice more appropriate in a bourgeois context where social divisions were not so formalized.

The *Young Children's Book* seems to have a similar audience in mind. As has already been mentioned, it is so similar in content to the *Lytylle Childrenes Lytil Boke* that Furnivall chose to publish them side-by-side. The *Young Children's Book* is one of those poems that most frequently turn up in the above discussion of virtuous behavior. While much of its advice is an echo of the earlier *Lytylle Childrenes Lytil Boke*, there are a number of points on which it diverges. There is much more emphasis on general politeness – greeting passersby in the street, offering a benediction upon entering a house, being satisfied with the hospitality offered by others.²¹³ The earlier poem has nothing to say on such matters. While the *Lytylle Childrenes Lytil Boke* simply instructs the reader to avoid strife, the *Young Children's Book* adds a couplet about loving one's neighbor.²¹⁴ The later poem also instructs the reader to mind his own business ("Uncalled go thou to no counsel; / That belongs to thee, with that thou meddle").²¹⁵ These themes are similar to those stressed by *How the Wise Man Taught His Son*, and seem attuned to getting along with one's neighbors and fellows in an urban context, rather than a noble household.

The additional emphases added to this later poem suggest that the audience of conduct poems was changing during this period and the poems themselves were adapting to fit their new readership. While these poems still expressed the courtly ideals of their predecessors, they were beginning to adapt them to the concerns of their wider audience. Phillips points out that, while ambitious parents sought to appropriate noble, courtly culture for themselves, they "brought a

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 17, ll. 19-20; 21, ll. 85-6; 23, ll. 103-4, 112-4.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 18, l. 40; 19, ll. 51-4. The *Young Children's Book* includes a couplet about avoiding strife as well, but it is in a different location than in the earlier poem. *Ibid.*, 23, ll. 98-9.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 19, ll. 55-6.

strong sense of bourgeois respectability into play” when it came to instructing their children.²¹⁶ This is consistent with the injection of instruction in the virtues, like meekness, humility and moderation, into conduct poems which would normally gloss over such subjects.²¹⁷ As bourgeois readers began taking an interest in this material, it was shaped to correspond with bourgeois sensibilities, its situations and examples shifting from a courtly to an urban context. This was not an abrupt change – these were still ambitious individuals who were hoping to fashion themselves and their heirs to suit a courtly environment. Yet as they engaged in this self-fashioning, some of their old values piggybacked onto the new, subtly shifting their outlook and the texts that asserted it. Therefore, a different kind of gentility is conveyed by poems of different dates. While earlier texts like *Urbanitatis*, *Stans puer* and Russell’s *Boke of Nurture* focus on the formation of a gentle servant and his education in his duties, later poems like the *Young Children’s Book* shift their focus away from the court, if only slightly, and deal with other aspects of a young man’s life. In Tudor poems such as Rhodes’ *Boke of Nurture*, coming a century later, the merging of the two viewpoints culminates; Rhodes explains how to control one’s behavior in a courtly context, including when serving at table, but does so in an unabashedly moralizing manner.

So, what do these poems ultimately teach their readers about gentility? Self-control seems to be the preeminent theme. The gentleman must be able to control his body, its expressions, sounds and movements; he must control the cleanliness of his person and his environment to the best of his ability; he must have control over his place in the social hierarchy, understanding to whom he must defer, when and how; finally, he must have control over his social interactions, maintaining a veneer of politeness and affability no matter his true feelings

²¹⁶ This is noted by Kim Phillips in her discussion of women and gesture in late medieval English conduct poems. Phillips, “Bodily Walls, Windows and Doors,” 197-8.

²¹⁷ Sponsler’s article on eating discusses how moderation was part of a bourgeois model of consumption in the late Middle Ages. Sponsler, “Eating Lessons: Lydgate’s ‘Dietary’ and Consumer Conduct” in Ashley and Clark, *Medieval Conduct*, 18.

toward those he encounters. As mentioned at the beginning of this section, the motive for such control is important to consider. None of these poems warns their readers to follow this advice out of fear – whether of physical punishment or material loss. What is to be gained or lost by such control is entirely social – by controlling himself the boy would demonstrate that he belonged in gentle society, and by failing to control he would demonstrate that he did not. Sponsler’s argument is that the reader is “willing[ly] conscript[ed]” into such behavior, the prize of social advancement luring him to engage in self-regulation.²¹⁸ Using specific behavioral advice, conduct poems instruct, admonish, and guide their readers through this process of self-realization – in this case, culminating in acceptance into gentle society.

Conduct poems were an important vehicle for instructing readers in the behavioral norms for their respective social positions. Therefore, they can provide a great deal of information about what those norms were – in the case of the majority of poems discussed in this chapter, those were the norms of gentility. Reading these texts would teach young boys what it meant to be gentle at the end of the Middle Ages. Judging by the advice in the poems, gentility was largely external, made evident by the bearing and cleanliness of the body, actions, and attitudes toward other individuals (showing deference to betters and cordiality to equals and inferiors). A gentleman was one who behaved gently. Such external conduct was thought to indicate one’s internal state, including hereditary social position. It was not, as some texts argued, something that could be usurped – yet at the same time, other texts would disagree (*Urbanitatis* claims that “Nurture & good manners maketh man”).²¹⁹ During the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, the manners and behaviors associated with gentle status were gradually being appropriated by

²¹⁸ Sponsler, *Drama and Resistance*, 53.

²¹⁹ Furnivall, ed., *Babees Book*, 14, l.34.

the sub-gentle ranks, commodified in manuscript and print texts for their eager consumption. While Elias has argued that this type of civility and concern for the opinions of others was an early modern phenomenon, beginning only in the sixteenth century, the evidence presented in this chapter demonstrates that deliberate self-fashioning to conform to behavioral norms was already occurring in the fifteenth. The authors, scribes, and printers of these poems expected an audience of socially ambitious readers and encouraged them to adopt these behaviors in order to cultivate a gentle reputation. In the late Middle Ages, Elias' civility was not a common trait; it was a set of behavioral norms that was used by the elite to recognize its members, and increasingly, was being used by outsiders in order to make the case for their own upward mobility.

Chapter 5

Educating Girls in Gentility

The last chapter established that the conduct texts which were so popular in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries existed to instruct young boys in how to behave like a gentleman. These texts were written at a time of heightened social opportunity, providing advice which could be used to train boys born to gentle status, but which could also be co-opted by ambitious commoners who hoped for social advancement. The matter of a young boy's status was, to a degree, in his own hands: his behavior would determine whether he was accepted by his peers. For those aspiring to greater rank, learning to conduct themselves properly in important social situations could serve as an entrée into gentle society.

There are no equivalent conduct texts for the instruction of gentle girls. This, at first, seems peculiar considering the popularity of the genre. A closer examination of the content and nature of the advice literature of the period, however, indicates that this was due to differences in situation. A girl's social status was not within her control; a medieval woman did not have independent social status if she had a father or husband, as Chapter 2 discusses.¹ Her status was tied to that of the most significant man in her life. This means that her status was far more difficult for her to change, except by attaching herself to a man of higher rank. As a gentle daughter and wife, her social world was also more narrowly circumscribed than that of men of her rank; gentle women spent more of their time in the domestic sphere of the household, while a

¹ A possible exception to this would be singlewomen, who never married. While singlewomen accounted for ten to twenty percent of the population of Europe in the medieval and early modern periods, they were less likely to be found among the social and economic elite, who tended to marry their daughters off early to forge political alliances. For the purposes of this study, however, the category is irrelevant. Contemporary visions of social and gender hierarchies – including those embedded in advice texts – assumed that a woman would remain under a man's control during her life. While singlewomen did exist in a variety of contexts, theirs was not a social role that girls were being trained for. Judith M. Bennett and Amy Froide, "A Singular Past" in *Singlewomen in the European Past, 1250-1800*, ed. Bennett and Froide, 1-37 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 2, 6. Maryanne Kowaleski, "Singlewomen in Medieval and Early Modern Europe: The Demographic Perspective" in *Singlewomen in the European Past*, ed. Bennett and Froide, 44-5, 60.

gentle man was more often out in the world, requiring him to perform his rank properly before a larger, public audience.

This reveals that gentle status required one set of behaviors from men and another from women, as reflected by the differing forms of literature that emerged to instruct them. This chapter argues that the nature of gentle socialization, whether it took place in a classroom (formal or informal) or through reading instructive literature, was gendered. Gentle boys were in the public eye from an early age, and were therefore under a great deal of pressure to perform their status correctly in order to win the approval and patronage of their social superiors. Their education focused on proper action, providing them with much more specific advice about how to fill their eventual social role. Gentle girls were more often educated in private, away from the public eye. Their education focused on the development of virtue that they might grow to become respectable wives and mothers in accordance with their rank. There is less direct instruction on behavior and action because girls were subject to public scrutiny less frequently. Since the sort of virtue prized in gentle women was little different from that being taught to women of other ranks or even men, there was no need for a specific body of literature dedicated to their instruction. Gentle men, on the other hand, needed assistance in navigating an increasingly complex social world in which they had to fight for their status and its privileges.

Advice for Gentle Women in Conduct Poems for Others

Women and their concerns are not completely absent from the sort of conduct poems discussed in the previous chapter. Gentle girls would have been able to find a degree of guidance as to their behavior by reading poems directed at audiences of men and also of lower-status women. A short study of gentlewomen's reading habits by Carole Meale and Julia Boffey

indicates that women of this rank typically read a wide range of material – indeed, they read the same books as their fathers and brothers, husbands and sons, barring only very technical works such as university textbooks, law books, and academic medical works.² It is, therefore, reasonable to assume that gentlewomen seeking advice in how to conduct themselves looked to the works written for their brothers, absorbing from them the same ideas about bodily control and respect for hierarchy.

While these poems were concerned specifically with the conduct of boys, they do contain scattered references to women, some of which suggest how a gentle woman was expected to comport herself. Both the *Lytylle Childrenes Lytil Boke* and the *Young Children's Book* contain more profitable references to women and gentility. Both poems begin with a short passage on the heavenly origins of courtesy. But while this quality came from God, it was transmitted to women. Both poems cite two instances where courtesy was made manifest in the world: the Annunciation (“When Gabriel our lady greeted”) and the Visitation (“And Elizabeth with Mary met”).³ Neither poem elaborates, so it is possible, in the first instance, that courtesy was introduced by the archangel Gabriel in his gentle manner of greeting the Virgin. Yet the second instance is a greeting exchanged between two women (albeit special, blessed women). There is some implication that courtesy, and the gentility it produces, is, at its origin, feminine. Dissenters might argue that this is not sufficient evidence – that the Virgin Mary can hardly be seen as representative of all women. She is a special case, in particular because of her supernatural, superhuman qualities (an earthly woman could hardly aspire to a virgin mother, though some, notably the English mystic and autobiographer Margery Kempe, certainly tried). Yet if the

² Carole M. Meale and Julia Boffey, “Gentlewomen’s Reading,” in *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain, Vol. III 1400-1557*, ed. Lotte Hellinga and J. B. Trapp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 526-40.

³ Furnivall, ed., *The Babees Book*, EETS o. s. 32 (New York: Greenwood Press, 1868; reprint, Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2002), 16, ll. 3-8; 17 ll. 5-10.

authors of these poems wanted to make a statement about courtesy deriving from divinity, there were other examples they could have used. Why not Christ himself? Was there not courtesy in his exchanges with the Apostles, with sinners, with his persecutors? The choice of Mary (and, to a lesser extent, Elizabeth) seems to indicate a gendered understanding of courtesy – that it was somehow bound to femininity.

While the Virgin Mary presents an admirable model for gentle girls to follow, her silent example is not equivalent to the conduct advice offered to gentle boys in these poems. Many other medieval texts lay out saints and holy figures – sometimes even secular ones – as models for men and women to follow. But my concern here is those poems that deal explicitly with conduct advice and link behavior with gentility. The only place this sort of advice appears in these poems directed at women is in four lines of the Sloane *Boke of Curtasye*. In the book's second section, discussing general politeness and proper behavior, the reader is advised to have respect for women and never speak ill of them, "For all we been of women born."⁴ The next four lines turn to women themselves:

Also a wife be, fall of right
To worship her husband both day and night,
To his bidding be obedient,
And him to serve with-out offence.⁵

While women are not addressed directly – these lines lack the imperatives characteristic in most lines of the poem – the lines address some womanly qualities. A wife must be obedient to her husband, always giving him respect (the word "worship" is used more in the medieval sense of "reverence" than the more modern sense of slavish devotion). While it is in accord with the earlier lines stressing familial hierarchy – children subordinate to parents, wives subordinate to husbands – it still seems striking that the author chose to address the matter in this way. Rather

⁴ *Ibid.*, 306-7, ll. 259-66.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 307, ll. 267-70.

than instructing husbands to control their wives, it takes the wife's perspective, instructing her on her proper place. No explicit mention is made of gentility, but within the context of the whole poem, which instructs the reader in how to behave in gentle company, the connection is understood.

Hugh Rhodes' *Book of Nurture*, written nearly a century after the rest, during the reign of Elizabeth, offers much more information on the ideal deportment of a gentlewoman. Rhodes includes an eighty-five-line section instructing gentlemen how to choose a proper wife. He advises turning away from beauty and focusing on women with "honest qualities and gentle."⁶ Such wives serve to advance the good name of their husbands. Rhodes goes on to describe the stress and anxiety an imprudent choice could cause a man. Rhodes elaborates further, listing the particular qualities he associates with an honest and gentle woman: humility, patience, faith, love, charity, trustworthiness, cleanliness. He insists that such good qualities are not often found in a woman who is fair, so beauty is to be avoided at all costs. He also advises the older man against marriage to a young, pretty woman – such a match could only end in disaster.⁷ Overall, the passage provides a rich description of what a gentleman ought to look for in his wife: a virtuous woman who could serve to enhance his prospects, rather than a pretty troublemaker who might diminish them.

Why does Rhodes give so much attention to the qualities of women when the earlier poems largely ignore them? The Sloane *Boke of Curtasye*'s four lines about wifely obedience hardly bear comparison to Rhodes' full picture. Rhodes may have focused on marriage because his work was aimed at an older target audience (he claims to write for "Men, servants, and

⁶ *Ibid.*, 86, l. 149.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 86-8, ll. 143-228.

Children”⁸), rather than the pre-teen boys who were the stated audience of most medieval conduct poems, for whom marriage was not yet an important concern. But this cannot be the whole picture, for some medieval poems spoke to older audiences – the Sloane *Boke of Curtasye* specifically addressed the conduct of marriage partners. The real answer is likely to do with the rapidly increasing anxiety about status during the Tudor period. While status and conduct were important during the fifteenth century, by the end of the sixteenth, they were absolutely crucial to a man’s success in navigating the Tudor court and bureaucracy.⁹ The consequences of a misstep had magnified as opportunities for advancement (and competition for them) had increased. Since Rhodes’ poem was printed, it was accessible to an even wider audience of individuals seeking to gain status by acquiring, or simply imitating, gentle ways. While the same concerns existed during the fifteenth century, by the time Rhodes was writing, these increased pressures made it necessary to discuss them in far more explicit terms, resulting in a poem of much greater length than those of his medieval predecessors.

Apart from their intended audience, it is likely that many medieval conduct poems neglected to discuss women because they were not a significant part of the world that the poems discussed. Most focus on the services a boy might perform in a lord’s household, particularly at mealtimes. Evidence within the poems suggests that women were, at best, only minimally present in these environments. Bishop Grossteste’s *Household Statutes*, instructing a secular lady as to how her servants ought to behave, expressly forbids wives to be present at her table, suggesting a predominantly male environment.¹⁰ The Sloane *Boke of Curtasye* mentions the usher presenting a towel to the lord *and* his lady at the end of a meal, but the presence of the lady

⁸ The title page of Rhodes’ text proclaims it as: “The book of Nurture, or School of good manners: for men, Servants, and children, with Stans puer ad mensam. Newly corrected, very necessary for all youth and children.” *Ibid.*, 61.

⁹ David Cressy, *Education in Tudor and Stuart England* (London: Edward Arnold, 1975), 4-5.

¹⁰ It does not specify whether the lady of the house is included in this instruction. Furnivall, ed., *Babees Book*, 329.

of the house should not be taken as representative of a larger female attendance.¹¹ Supporting this portrait of the lord's hall as a predominantly masculine social environment is the order of precedence in John Russell's *Boke of Nurture*. Despite the impressive level of detail that Russell provides, women are nearly absent from his seating chart. After listing over fifty ranks and occupations, at the very end of his list, Russell mentions that gentlewomen and lords' nurses are to sit at the squires' table.¹² He does not mention queens or princesses, duchesses or ladies – just these two, somewhat lowly (considering the rest of his list), ranks. It may be that the wives of those listed were expected to be present – that these were unmarried gentlewomen and nurses serving in the household who had to be situated according to their own rank – but it does seem strange that, for all Russell's careful explanation, women do not have a larger presence. When discussing which ranks merit a food taster, Russell does include queens among the list.¹³ In this case, he could be discussing a general rule, not restricted to occasions when these ranks dined together. However, women show up at table later, in his discussion of difficult cases. If a lady of royal blood were married to a knight of lesser birth, she would be seated according to her own status; in the opposite case, the wife would be accorded the status of her husband. The father and mother of a Pope or cardinal, however, should not expect to be seated on the level of their illustrious offspring.¹⁴ In these cases, it is clear that there is a place for ladies at the lord's table. This is also suggested in the *Lytylle Childrenes Lytil Boke* when boys are warned to leave the table quietly, and to “jangle neither with Jack ne Jill.”¹⁵ But while it is possible this is a reference to women – girls, even – dining close at hand to the page boys, this is the only such reference in

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 326, ll. 815-8.

¹² *Ibid.*, 187, ll. 1006-1040. Gentlewomen and lords' nurses are mentioned in line 1039.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 196, ll. 1195-8.

¹⁴ The poem suggests that status can be shared among marriage partners, with the higher rank winning out, but it apparently does not extend backward up the family tree. *Ibid.*, 190, ll. 1089-1104.

¹⁵ Unlike almost every other line in the poem, this reference is not echoed by the *Young Children's Book*. *Ibid.*, 22, l. 90.

any poem. It is just as likely that this phrase was chosen for the sake of the rhyme, so it cannot be taken as conclusive evidence in and of itself.

These references to women are so scarce in conduct poems, some of which are otherwise remarkably thorough (especially John Russell's *Boke of Nurture*), that it seems difficult to believe that there was a strong feminine presence in this environment. If women were present on a regular basis, one might expect the poems to contain more information about them – perhaps advising teenage servants against showing off in front of them. Instead, it seems that the lord's table was a masculine meeting place, a place to socialize and network, where most women were either not welcome or not interested in participating, except, of course, during times of special celebration. Secondary literature on this subject seems to support the idea of a masculine table. Studies of English noble households by Kate Mertes and C. M. Woolgar agree that the inhabitants of noble households of England were largely male. Woolgar notes that even the household of Eleanor of Castile, the wife of Edward I, was more than ninety percent masculine.¹⁶ Ruth Karras argues that women were peripheral to the world inhabited by young men in noble service.¹⁷ This was the case in gentry households as well. Accounts from the fourteenth-century Le Strange family indicate that women did not visit or travel as much as men – most visitors were men traveling without their wives.¹⁸ Ffiona Swabey's work on the household books of Dame Alice de Bryene confirms that, even at the table of a widowed lady, women did not have a strong presence. For the single year for which data is available, 1412-3, fewer than 9 percent of the named dinner guests were women, and often these were wives accompanying their husbands.

¹⁶ Kate Mertes, *The English Noble Household 1250-1600* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), 8. C. M. Woolgar, *The Great Household in Late Medieval England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 8.

¹⁷ Ruth Mazo Karras, *From Boys to Men: Formations of Masculinity in Later Medieval Europe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 29.

¹⁸ It is interesting to note that women might travel separately from their husbands as well – the records note that Lord and Lady Lovel visited the Le Stranges on separate occasions. Peter Coss, *The Foundations of Gentry Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 70.

Most of Dame Alice's dinner guests were visiting on business, many of them servants from her other manors, supporting the idea that the hall was a masculine space – Dame Alice herself was there to fulfill the masculine role of head of the household in the absence of a husband.¹⁹

Woolgar's examination of higher-status households supports this, finding very few female servants apart from the attendants and companions of the lady of the house, although he does not discuss the frequency of female dinner guests.²⁰ *Urbanitatis* suggests that ladies' domain was rather the private chamber, in which serving boys were instructed to be quiet and particularly well-mannered.²¹ Many of the main activities of the lord and his family were shifting from the great hall to private chambers during the fifteenth century.²² If ladies generally dined in private with their female attendants, the table manners that were so necessary to boys of gentle birth from the moment they set foot in the lord's hall were not so critical for their sisters, who were sheltered from the public gaze. While these chambers cannot rightly be construed as completely private – they were still public spaces where important household rituals were performed and visitors met with – they still afforded the ladies of the house a degree of shelter that most men, particularly serving men, in the household lacked.

Wherever they dined, it is clear that gentle girls would not find gender-specific advice on table manners in the poems directed at boys. Strangely, the absence of corresponding conduct literature for women of this rank did not extend to those lower down the social ladder. A few

¹⁹ Ffiona Swabey, *Medieval Gentlewoman* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 112, 115-31.

²⁰ Woolgar, *Great Household*, 34-5. Coss notes that the adult members of gentry families would have had one or two body servants of their own. – likely two per lady, a damsel and a maid. This is borne out in his description of the 1347-8 Le Strange household, in which lived two married couples, with each wife possessing two female servants. Coss, *Foundations of Gentry Life*, 56-7. Still, the number of such female servants was still bound to be limited. While it was possible for a gentry family to have several daughters, it was unlikely for many of them to remain in the household as adults. Daughters of the gentry were married at early ages and typically removed from their natal households at that time. To envision situation in which there were enough adult daughters in the household to even out the distribution of servants borders on the absurd.

²¹ Furnivall, ed., *Babees Book*, 15, ll. 72-6.

²² For information on changing household layouts, see Woolgar, *Great Household*, 46-82.

quite popular poems circulated pertaining to the behavior of bourgeois women: *The Good Wife Taught Her Daughter*, *The Good Wyf Wold a Pylgremage*, and *The Thewis of Gud Women*.²³ The first poem is written, as the title implies, as the advice given by a goodwife to her daughter. At the end of the poem, the narrator proclaims, “Now have I taught thee, daughter, so did my mother me.”²⁴ Felicity Riddy points out that this frame is clearly fabricated – a girl living at home with her mother would receive her instructions orally, rather than from a text.²⁵ *The Good Wyf Wold a Pylgremage* gives a more convincing rationale for its existence, purporting to be instructions left for a young daughter when her mother went off on pilgrimage.²⁶ Travel in the Middle Ages was fraught with difficulty and return was never a guarantee – many pilgrims made their wills and other such final preparations before departing – so it is reasonable to believe that a sensible mother might leave such instructions for her young child. *The Thewis of Gud Women* is framed more generally, without claiming any personal relationships. Clare Sponsler claims that the true authors of these poems were more likely to be clerics, based on the amount of time each spends discussing church-going and religious activities. Whether the advice found in these poems is truly maternal or just paternalistic, it does speak to “the details of prosperous middle-class life in or near a town, suggesting an intended audience located in a similar social and geographic milieu.”²⁷ And these poems were clearly popular in just such an environment. Five

²³ An edition of all three of these poems was published by Tauno Mustanoja. Tauno F. Mustanoja, ed., *The Good Wife Taught Her Daughter, Annales Academiae Scientiarum Fennicae*, BLXI, 2 (Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seuran, 1948)

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 170, l. 157.

²⁵ Felicity Riddy, “Mother Knows Best: Reading Social Change in a Courtesy Text,” *Speculum* 71 (1997): 71.

²⁶ Mustanoja, ed., *Good Wife*, 173, ll. 1-6.

²⁷ Claire Sponsler, “The English How the Good Wiif Taughte Hir Doughtir and How the Wise Man Taught His Sonne,” in *Medieval Conduct Literature*, ed. Johnston, 287.

manuscripts of *The Good Wife Taught Her Daughter* survive today dating as early as 1350; it was known in London during the fifteenth century and continued to be printed in the sixteenth.²⁸

The content of these poems does not differ widely from poems for a gentle audience. The poems for bourgeois women lay out the same sort of advice discussed above. The Huntington manuscript of *How The Good Wife Taught Her Daughter* proclaims,

Sweet of speech shall thou be, glad, of mild mood,
True in word and in deed, in life and soul good.
Keep thee from sin, from villainy, and shame,
And look that thou bear thee so well that men say thee no blame.
Good name fele winneth,
*My leue child.*²⁹

The Lambeth manuscript version of the same poem goes on,

And when thou goest in the way, go thou not too fast,
Brandish not with thine head, thy shoulders thou ne cast;
Have thou not too many words; to swear be thou not lief,
For all such manners come to an evil preef:
For he that catcheth to him an evil name,
It is to him a foul fame,
*My leue child.*³⁰

The topics that come up in these two stanzas – controlling one’s speech, being agreeable and honest, avoiding sin and vice, controlling speed and gesture – all appear in poems for gentle boys. Not only do the same sorts of instructions – specific behavioral injunctions – appear in these poems for bourgeois girls, but some of the self-same advice is repeated. Diane Bornstein, in writing about these poems, claims that “The ideal of behavior set forth for the middle-class girl equals in modesty the one set forth for the lady.”³¹ In many ways, girls of these different ranks were held to the same standard. Therefore, just as a gentle girl could glean instruction in manners and morals from her brother’s conduct poems, she could do the same with those poems

²⁸ Peter Coss, *The Lady in Medieval England 1000-1500* (Stroud, Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing, 1998), 54-5. Riddy, “Mother Knows Best,” 69.

²⁹ *Fele* (adv.): greatly, in high degree; *Leue* (adj.): dear, beloved. *MED*, s. v. “fele” (adv.), def. 1a; “lef” (adj.), def. 1a. Huntington Library MS HM 128. Mustanoja, ed., *Good Wife*, 161, ll. 32-7.

³⁰ *Preef* (n.): trouble, difficulty, hardship. *MED*, s. v. “presse” (n.), def. 5a. Furnivall, ed., *Babees Book*, 39, ll. 60-6.

³¹ Diane Bornstein, *The Lady in the Tower* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1983), 64.

directed at her bourgeois sisters – and it might be even more relevant, since it was tailored to her sex, if not her rank.

There is clearly a great deal of common ground among all of these poems. This has led Peter Coss to object to the very classification of these poems as “bourgeois.” He argues that the poems essentially promoted the same values as those labeled “gentle” and even circulated among the same audience. He points out that the earliest manuscript copy of *The Good Wife Taught Her Daughter* is found alongside the Anglo-Norman *Urbain le Courtois*, that a fifteenth-century manuscript of the poem was circulating in rural Warwickshire (outside of a bourgeois context), and that the manuscript owned by a London mercer contained courtly lyrics as well.³² But while Coss’ evidence shows that these poems appealed to an audience bridging these social groups, this is not relevant to my discussion. What is important here is that the *authors* of these poems were actively targeting different audiences and tailoring their advice to their readers’ daily lives. The many poems directed at young boys give the authors’ perspectives on gentle manners and values, while the three directed at girls give the authors’ views on bourgeois manners and values. When it comes to understanding the concept of gentility (and bourgeois, as it is held in opposition to what is gentle), what the authors of these poems thought about the respective social groups they wrote to is more important. Just as it was possible for a gentle girl to pick up some behavioral advice from poems for gentle boys, she could do so from poems for girls of lesser rank. There was certainly some similarity in situation: girls in both cases were being trained to become wives and mothers. The desire for a woman to be virtuous was held in common by these ranks. But when it comes to being socialized into her rank, a gentle girl was not provided with the same specific advice as a gentle boy or a bourgeois girl.

³² Coss, *Lady in Medieval England*, 54-5.

With that in mind, and despite the common ground they share with those poems discussed in the previous section, there is a strong bourgeois element to those poems directed at women. Riddy makes this argument in her 1996 article, “Mother Knows Best: Reading Social Change in a Courtesy Text,” in which she declares that *How the Good Wife Taught Her Daughter* reveals a “bourgeois ethos,” relating to “the burgesses, the citizens or the freemen of urban society, the people who enjoyed privileges in relation to trade, the law, and the tenure of property.” And while these groups may be considered distinctive, she argues that “that they had in common the attitudes toward the socialization of the young” that appear in the poem.³³ She declares that the household is central to this bourgeois ideology, in which the housewife’s “domesticity is represented as a prime virtue and she herself as the repository and maintainer of bourgeois values.”³⁴ The poem sets work, a bourgeois value, in opposition to leisure, a characteristic of the gentry – although, she admits that “there is clearly some ambivalence here: you may want your daughter to become one, if someone else is going to support her; you do not want to have to support her yourself.”³⁵ Riddy ultimately suggests that this poem may not have been intended to supplant a mother’s advice for her young daughters; instead, it may have been used by women who were household managers to teach the young girls who had been entrusted to their care, whether as wards or servants.³⁶ In this sense, these poems supported social mobility in the same way as the conduct poems for boys – in this case, aiming to raising these lower-status girls up to bourgeois standards, rather than instruct the daughters of wealthy merchants and artisans, for whom there were likely more lofty aspirations.

³³ Riddy, “Mother Knows Best,” 67.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 67-8.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 77-8.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 83.

Work, as Riddy notes, is a key value in these bourgeois poems. The urban housewife had many responsibilities; *The Good Wife Taught Her Daughter* counsels, “Daughter, if thou wilt be a wife, / Look wisely that thou work.”³⁷ In another section, it says, “Housewifely thou shalt go on the work day iwis, / Pride, rest, & idleness, maketh un-thriftiness.”³⁸ The wife plays an important role in household income, serving as its manager and, in an artisan context, that household includes a workshop; when her husband is away, the wife managed his workers in addition to her usual duties. The poem weighs in on this duty as well:

And wisely govern thou thine house and thy meyne:
Too bitter ne too bonour with him that thou ne be,
But look well what is most needs to [be] done,
And set thy meyne thereto both ratheli & soon,
For ready is at need
A forn done deed,
My leue child.

And if thy husband be from home, let not thy meyne go idle,
But look well who doth much either little,
And he that well doth, thou (re)quite him well his while,
And he that doth other, serve him as the vile
A forn done deed
Will another speed
My leue child.³⁹

The housewife must keep herself busy and the rest of the household on task. She must be able to manage not only her children and young servants, but the men and boys employed by her husband. As Sponsler points out, the housewife’s self-discipline is defined in material terms – her thrift and diligence could advance the fortunes of her household.⁴⁰

³⁷ Furnivall, ed., *Babees Book*, 36, ll. 7-8.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 43, 153-4.

³⁹ *Bonour* (adj): good-natured, kind, meek; *Meyne* (n): household servants; *Ratheli* (adv): quickly, readily; *Forn* (adv): formerly, previously. *Vile* in this sense is most likely derived from the noun *Vilein*, a term originally referring to an unfree tenant, but later extending to anyone of low or common birth, and can also bear the derogatory sense of “one who lacks the manners of a gentleman, a boor; a scoundrel, a rascal.” *MED*, s. v. “bonaire” (adj.); “meine” (n.), 1a; “ratheli” (adv.), def. a; “forn” (adv.), def. 1a; “vilein” (n.). Furnivall, ed., *Babees Book*, 41, ll. 102-15.

⁴⁰ Clare Sponsler, *Drama and Resistance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 58.

These poems advise the female reader to lead a no-nonsense lifestyle in pursuit of economic success. She is instructed not to lounge about at wrestling matches or cock-fights “As it were a strumpet or a giggelot,” but to stay at home and work in order to increase her household’s wealth.⁴¹ The Emmanuel College manuscript of the poem proclaims,

Go thou not to town, as it were a gase,
From house to house to seek the mase;
Ne went thou not to market thy burel to sell,
Ne go thou not to tavern thy worship to fell.
That tavern haunted
*Is thrift forsaken.*⁴²

The Good Wyf Wold a Pylgremage agrees that the girl should not be found running from house to house and adds, “If thou will no husband have, but wear thy maiden crown, / Run not about in every play, nor to tavern in town.”⁴³ Sponsler argues that these poems seek to restrict women’s movement, keeping them to the household as much as possible.⁴⁴ This idea would hold true for a gentlewoman as well – she would be expected to spend much of her time at home, away from temptation to vice. There is a distinct difference between the two ranks, however. While a gentlewoman would have no need to be wandering the marketplace at all, nor wandering between houses in the town, this was part of the duties of a townswoman. She would have need of visiting the marketplace, whether to buy household supplies or to sell her husband’s goods (in which case, the front of her home could easily be a part of “the marketplace”). Her responsibilities would bring her into contact with these situations on a daily basis, resulting in a greater likelihood that she might succumb to temptation.

⁴¹ *Giggelot* (n): a loose woman, harlot. *MED*, s. v. “giggelot” (n.), def. a. Furnivall, ed., *Babees Book*, 40, ll. 81-4.

⁴² *Gase* (n): a frivolous person; *Mase* (n.): idle diversion; *Burel* (n): a kind of coarse woolen cloth. *MED*, s. v. “gase” (n.); “mase” (n.), def. c; “burel” (n (1)), def. 1a. Mustanoja, ed., *Good Wife*, 160, ll. 46-51.

⁴³ Mustanoja, ed., *Good Wife*, 173, l. 8; 175, ll. 67-8.

⁴⁴ Sponsler, *Drama and Resistance*, 63.

Finally, the poems' bourgeois leanings become clear in their insistence that their readers *not* be like gentle ladies. Both *The Good Wife Taught Her Daughter* and *The Good Wyf Wold a Pylgremage* repeat this advice. The former warns,

With rich robes and garlands, and such thing,
Ne counterfeit no ladies, as thy lord were a king.
With such as he may thee find payed shalt thou be,
That he lose not his manhood for the love of thee.
Overdone pride
Maketh naked side,
My leue child.⁴⁵

And the latter,

Show not thyself too proud, passing thy estate,
To make men look after thee and ask, "Who is that?"
A gentle woman, or a callot, / men will deem thou art.
Wear no other array this week then thou mayst wear allgatt.
With an O and an I, men will say this
"Be wyne hope men may see where the tavern is."⁴⁶

The bourgeois girl is advised not to get above her station. Imagining herself a lady will only earn her scorn among those who know her to be of lesser rank. Besides meriting disdain, such pretensions would cost the bourgeois household a great deal of money it could not afford. The conspicuous consumption of the gentry was not valued by merchants or prosperous artisans; as Sponsler notes, "correct consumption" is the order of the day for the bourgeois.⁴⁷

This advice, urging bourgeois daughters not to get above themselves, echoes that of the boys' poems, like the Lambeth *Stans puer*'s warning to "Press not too high in no manner wise."⁴⁸ In fact, there is a great deal of correspondence between these sets of poems, as has been mentioned above. Sponsler points out that *How the Good Wife Taught Her Daughter* focuses on issues of bodily control, especially of the mouth (i.e. speech). The bourgeois woman is expected

⁴⁵ *Païen* (v): to satisfy, content. *MED*, s. v. "païen" (v.), def. 1a. This stanza is from the Huntington Library version of the poem. Mustanoja, ed., *Good Wife*, 165, ll. 106-12.

⁴⁶ *Callot* (n): a foolish woman, poss. a harlot; *Allgatt* (adv): at all times; *Wyne* (n.): hope, expectation. *MED*, s. v. "callot" (n.); "wene" (n.), def. b; "al-gates" (adv.), def. 2. Mustanoja, ed., *Good Wife*, 173, ll. 13-8.

⁴⁷ Sponsler, *Drama and Resistance*, 58.

⁴⁸ Furnivall, ed., *Babees Book*, 29, l. 25.

to control her movements, keeping herself out of trouble and being tempted toward vice. She contrasts this with the values presented in *How the Wise Man Taught His Son*, which she argues does not address bodily control at all; instead of his body, the Wise Man teaches his son to govern his goods.⁴⁹ It seems strange to think that the instructions given to a gentle boy and a bourgeois girl would line up so well, and those given to a bourgeois boy would diverge from both. Yet, upon closer inspection, the roles of gentle boy and bourgeois girl have some striking similarities. Both these groups need to subordinate themselves to others – the bourgeois girl to her husband, the gentle boy to his lord. The bourgeois boy in *How the Wise Man Taught His Son* is being groomed for a career as an independent craftsman with his own workshop – in that capacity, he would have more need of governing his goods well than his person. While gender certainly governs some aspects of the advice given in these poems, it is not the ultimate determining factor in what advice is given – that is, rather, the relative position of the audience – whether subordinate or superior.

Gentle women were also expected to subordinate themselves – so this still does not answer the question of why they were not provided with tailored conduct advice. In this case, I see the division as having more to do with the environments they inhabited. Conduct poems for gentle boys emphasized proper behavior in the lord's hall. Conduct poems for bourgeois girls emphasized proper behavior while traveling through the town. In both cases, the individual's conduct was on display before a large group of people, including contacts who might contribute to their social advancement, in service and perhaps in marriage. Gentle girls, however, occupied a more restricted environment, in which their conduct was displayed before a limited number of people at a time. The different milieus inhabited by these genders and ranks influenced how they were socialized and educated, and prepared them for the environments in which they would live

⁴⁹ Sponsler, *Drama and Resistance*, 61-3.

their adult lives. Gentle girls were not provided with specific conduct advice because their social constraints permitted them to learn more slowly.

The World of Elite Medieval Women

The lives of medieval men and women had varying degrees of publicity; this publicity is at the root of differing ideas of gentility for men and women. The concept of public and private spheres and women's ability to move between them has been implicit in the historiography of women in the Middle Ages since its inception. Early medievalists tended to focus on elite women – the queens and abbesses who appeared in the histories and chronicles.⁵⁰ These were women of power and influence - the study of their lives went along with medievalists' focus on political and institutional history through the early twentieth century.⁵¹ These women wielded masculine power and authority; their status offered them the opportunity to transcend the traditional confines of their sex and stand on equal footing with powerful men.⁵² In fact, these powerful female actors diverged so sharply from traditional ideas of a woman's place that nineteenth-century writers tended to pair them with powerful male actors in order to justify their prominent roles: thus Heloise was subordinated to Abelard, Eleanor of Aquitaine to Louis VII and Henry II, and Joan of Arc to the Dauphin. The achievements of the women were seen as

⁵⁰ For a discussion of the waxing and waning of interest in women in medieval French historiography, see Susan Mosher Stuard, "Fashion's Captives: Medieval Women in French Historiography," in *Women in Medieval History and Historiography*, ed. Stuard (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987), 59-80.

⁵¹ A notable exception to this is Eileen Power. She wrote about ladies and nuns as well, but she also discussed working women and townswomen. In her posthumously published *Medieval Women*, there is an entire chapter on "the working women of town and country" while one of the six biographies she presents in *Medieval People* is of the wife of the Ménagier de Paris, a fourteenth-century bourgeois householder. Eileen Power, *Medieval Women*, ed. M. M. Postan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975). *Idem*, *Medieval People* (New York: HarperCollins, 1963).

⁵² Work on early medieval women, in particular, focused on the achievements of the great abbesses and queens mentioned in the chronicles. For example, JoAnn McNamara and Suzanne Wemple's work shows how an abbess' perceived sanctity could give her power and authority comparable to a queen's. An example of this is McNamara and Wemple, "Sanctity and Power: The Dual Pursuit of Early Medieval Women" in *Becoming Visible: Women in European History*, 1st ed., ed. Renate Bridenthal and Claudia Koonz (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1977).

secondary to and deriving from the power and authority of the men with whom they associated.⁵³ Even when it was credited to them, women's power to act in the public sphere, which was perceived as a masculine space, was limited to a small cadre of elite or simply extraordinary women in certain times and places.

When the *Annales* school and Marxism brought social history into vogue, the focus of many medievalists shifted to the disenfranchised and powerless. This opened the door for the consideration of women outside the elite. The study of peasants and the social and economic systems operating in villages brought a greater focus on women and their activities. Judith Bennett's *Women in the Medieval English Countryside*, the seminal work on late medieval peasant women, argues that even at the lower end of the social spectrum, the theory of a masculine public and feminine private sphere holds true. In the villages she examined, the sexual division of labor transcended rank, limiting the prospects of women in all but the most extraordinary cases.⁵⁴ Bennett's pessimistic assessment of women's lives sparked a response from Caroline Barron in her work on medieval London widows, who she saw as experiencing a "golden age" in the later Middle Ages, when legal provisions gave them access to masculine authority as heads of households and workshops and even members of craft guilds.⁵⁵ Barron's work shows that some women did have the opportunity to act in the masculine public sphere, but Bennett's evidence tempers her conclusions, making it clear that the circumstances Barron discusses did not apply to the majority of women in the medieval world.⁵⁶

⁵³ Stuard, "Fashion's Captives," 62-3.

⁵⁴ Judith Bennett, *Women in the Medieval English Countryside: Gender and Household in Brigstock before the Plague* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 6, 184.

⁵⁵ Caroline Barron, "The 'Golden Age' of Women in Medieval London" *Reading Medieval Studies* 15 (1989): 34-58.

⁵⁶ Bennett's subsequent work reinforced the point that women were subordinated throughout the Middle Ages. *Ale, Beer and Brewsters* discusses the marginalization of women's work, showing that, even though opportunities were open to women in the medieval brewing industry, as brewers made gains in status and income women were increasingly pushed out of the field. In her latest book, *History Matters*, she continues to pursue her point about

While scholars agreed that medieval women's activities across social categories were typically limited to the private, domestic sphere, some began to see their role within that private sphere, particularly with respect to family, as enabling women to wield power and authority in a characteristically feminine way. In the 1970s, the focus of this research was on the ways that elite women used their domestic and familial influence to exercise public political authority.⁵⁷ Much importance was laid on the role of the queen mother within her family and kingdom. More recently, however, the theme of women's power has been expanded to include other sorts of power and influence, and the understanding of the home as constituting a feminine, private space has been challenged. Women's private, domestic authority began to appear more valuable as more historians started to unravel the history and structure of medieval households and understand that they fulfilled public as well as private functions. Peasant men valued the economic contributions their wives made to the household, whether by laboring in the fields, tending to household needs, or maintaining side businesses (brewing, baking, raising chickens, spinning yarn) for extra money.⁵⁸ In urban settings, wives were so important to craft households that marriage was a part of a man's transition to masterhood; his wife was expected to make contributions to the workshop as well as the household, managing journeymen and apprentices as

women's subordination to men and their relative distance from public power, arguing that women's status with respect to men has not changed throughout history and that today's feminists need to return to using historical study as a means to amend the false perception of women's equality that currently exists, retarding the progress of the feminist movement. Bennett, *Ale Beer and Brewsters in England: Women's Work in a Changing World, 1300 to 1600* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998). *Idem*, *History Matters Patriarchy and the Challenge of Feminism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006).

⁵⁷ Both McNamara and Wemple's 1973 article (revised for a 1988 anthology) and Pauline Stafford's 1978 article argue that women could use family relationships to obtain political influence, in the former case through the disposal of property and in the latter as guardians of royal sons. McNamara and Wemple, "The Power of Women Through the Family in Medieval Europe, 500-1100," in *Women and Power in the Middle Ages*, ed. Mary Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1988), 81-101. Pauline Stafford, "Sons and Mothers: Family Politics in the Early Middle Ages," in *Medieval Women*, ed. Derek Baker (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978), 79-100.

⁵⁸ R. H. Hilton, *The English Peasantry in the Later Middle Ages* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 95-110. Barbara A. Hanawalt, "Peasant Women's Contribution to the Home Economy in Late Medieval England," in *Women and Work in Pre-Industrial Europe*, ed. Barbara Hanawalt (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1986), 3-20. S. H. Rigby, *English Society in the Later Middle Ages: Class, Status and Gender* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1995), 255-6.

well as her own servants and running the business when her husband was absent or occupied.⁵⁹ Noblewomen, too, ran their husbands' estates while they were away, collecting rents, managing tenant farmers and making decisions in manorial courts.⁶⁰ At times a woman's authority could extend definitively into the public sphere (e. g. when a noblewoman sat in judgment in a manorial court), but it generally remained within the confines of the household.

Gentry women have, for the most part, been overlooked by scholars working on gender in the Middle Ages. Standing outside the most privileged, powerful ranks of the nobility, whose women occasionally had the opportunity to wield a public authority equivalent to that of a man, and yet set above the laboring peasant and urban craft households in which women seem to have achieved a fairly high level of domestic authority and equality, gentry women have not piqued the interest of many scholars. In many cases, gentry women are lumped together with other women of the nobility.⁶¹ I believe, however, that their circumstances were distinctive enough that they merit separate treatment, combining the interests and duties of the elite with a level of anxiety concerning status and situation that peers were unlikely to experience. Women are, of course, present in every study that has been done of gentry communities and often play an important role as the means through which political and economic alliances were forged between families. Whether assuring horizontal ties within the county community or vertical ties in the furtherance of ambition, these women were key players in assuring their family's prospects. And yet, in these studies of gentry alliances, the women themselves appear as little more than objects, passed from one party to another to seal a bargain. The world of these ladies and gentlewomen, in both the public and private spheres, has been neglected.

⁵⁹ Power, *Medieval Women*, 5. Heather Swanson, *Medieval Artisans: An Urban Class in Late Medieval England* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 1-8. Rigby, *English Society*, 271-5.

⁶⁰ Rigby, *English Society*, 268-9.

⁶¹ For an example of this, see Steve Rigby, who mentions Margaret Paston as an example when discussing the circumstances of noblewomen. *Ibid.*, 268.

Only in the last twenty years has any attempt been made to understand the lives and experience of individual women of the gentry. Most of these studies have relied upon the extensive collections of letters that survive for a handful of fifteenth-century families: the Pastons, Stonors, Plumpton, and, to a lesser extent, the Armburghs.⁶² Since women were the senders and recipients of many of these letters, any study of the letter collections has a great deal to say about them, particularly about strong personalities like Agnes and Margaret Paston. Joel Rosenthal has recently published a study called *Margaret Paston's Piety*, focusing on the religious dimension of that lady's many letters.⁶³ One other study of a medieval gentlewoman, Swabey's monograph on Dame Alice de Bryene, has relied on a smaller collection of letters as well as that lady's household accounts to provide a rather full picture of the lifestyle of a gentle widow.⁶⁴ These studies have only been possible because of the chance survival of particularly rich archives relating to these ladies. Most women of the medieval gentry did not leave extensive caches of records behind them, or if they did, they do not survive. A more roundabout route is required for understanding of their lives.

The study of young medieval women is another area that has been neglected. Medieval childhood has only been extensively studied since the 1980s, much of it in response to Philippe Ariès' 1962 study, *Centuries of Childhood*, which asserted that medieval parent-child

⁶² Editions of the letters and papers of these families, along with some commentary, can be found in: Norman Davis, ed., *Paston Letters and Papers of the Fifteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971); Stapleton, Thomas, ed. *The Plumpton Correspondence*, rev. ed. (London: Camden Society, 1839; reprint, Stroud, Gloucestershire: Alan Sutton, 1990); Christine Carpenter, ed., *Kingsford's Stonor Letters and Papers 1290-1483* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Joan Kirby, ed., *The Plumpton Letters and Papers*, Camden Society 5th ser. no. 8 (London: Cambridge University Press for the Royal Historical Society, 1996); Christine Carpenter, ed., *The Armburgh Papers* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1998). More recently (c. 2010), an online resource containing transcripts and photographs of all these letters, including background and other supplementary materials, has been published by Adam Matthew Digital Publications under the title *Medieval Family Life*. In addition, several monographs have been published on the experiences of these families: Colin Richmond, *The Paston Family in the Fifteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Elizabeth Noble, *The World of the Stonors: A Gentry Society* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2009).

⁶³ Joel Rosenthal, *Margaret Paston's Piety* (New York: Palgrave, 2010).

⁶⁴ Fiona Swabey, *Medieval Gentlewoman*.

relationships lacked affection, with parents distancing themselves from their children in response to the high rate of child mortality during the period.⁶⁵ One notable opponent to Ariès has been Barbara Hanawalt, whose *The Ties That Bound* is a thorough study of family life among late medieval English peasants, illustrating the affective bonds not merely between parents and children, but all members of the household.⁶⁶ Around the same time, Nicholas Orme published his monograph *From Childhood to Chivalry*, examining the experience and education of royal and noble youths.⁶⁷ As in Orme's work, much of the focus on elite youths, however, has been on the education and training of boys. Only one recent monograph, Kim Phillips' *Medieval Maidens*, uses a wide range of sources to reconstruct the experience of young gentle women.⁶⁸

The study of conduct texts has the potential to fill in these gaps in scholarship, illuminating the lives and experience of young women, and young gentlewomen in particular. These texts can give insight into the ways in which young women of gentle status were taught and how they were expected to behave as they grew and matured. Yet the instruction that they were given was less specific than what was written for their brothers, focusing on internal character and virtue rather than external actions and duties. Both the expectations of behavior, and the ways in which they were transmitted, were clearly gendered. Yet the differences between the conduct texts written for bourgeois girls and such texts as might have been used to instruct gentle girls suggest that gender was not the only factor at work. Behavioral expectations were

⁶⁵ Philippe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood*, trans. Robert Baldick (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1962).

⁶⁶ Barbara Hanawalt, *The Ties That Bound* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986). This was later followed by another monograph that used the depositions concerning accidental death from the London coroners' rolls as a resource for understanding medieval children's lives and activities. *Idem*, *Growing Up in Medieval London* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

⁶⁷ Nicholas Orme, *From Childhood to Chivalry* (New York: Methuen, 1984). Orme's later works all focus on the subjects of children and education as well. *Idem*, *Medieval Children* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001). *Idem*, *Medieval Schools* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).

⁶⁸ Kim Phillips, *Medieval Maidens: Young Women and Gender in England, 1270-1540* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 114.

informed as much by status as by gender: texts for gentle girls can be found at the intersection between the ideals of gentility and femininity.

Exactly how those expectations were passed on to gentle girls is not clear. Most studies of medieval education, including Orme's extensive work, concentrate on the education of boys. This often took place in relatively public institutions – the royal court, noble households, monasteries, established grammar schools – which left a written record of their existence. As the next section will show, the education of gentle girls took place in less formal and often private spaces and was less likely to be documented. The segregation of the educations of sons and daughters of the English gentry – the sons learning under the scrutiny of the public sphere while the daughters' learning took place in relative private and seclusion – can help explain why the texts written to educate them took such different forms.

Education and Gentle Behavior

In his work on medieval English education, Orme uses two well-known literary examples to highlight the different educational philosophies in place for gentle boys and girls. He compares Geoffrey Chaucer's portrait of the Squire in the *General Prologue* to the *Canterbury Tales* to Virginia, the fourteen-year-old daughter of a knight in the *Physician's Tale*. Chaucer describes the Squire with a list of accomplishments, extolling his ability to sing and to ride, to dance and to carve. Yet his description of Virginia eschews specific accomplishments in order to focus on her character, stressing her humility, silence, modesty and industry.⁶⁹ The gendered set of standards Orme describes was not unique to Chaucer; late medieval educational materials expected specific accomplishments of gentle boys and more general character traits – or virtues –

⁶⁹ The example is fully developed in his 1981 article "Chaucer and Education" and later summarized in a monograph. Nicholas Orme, "Chaucer and Education" *The Chaucer Review* 16:1 (Summer, 1981), 38-59. *Idem*, *From Childhood to Chivalry*, 85-6.

of gentle girls. Material for boys does not ignore developing their character, but it is a secondary focus at best; material for girls is not so even-handed, refraining from instructing in specific accomplishments at all.

Why were the expectations for boys and girls of the same status group so different? Part of the answer lies in where and how they were educated. Medieval ideas about education were largely dictated by their ideas about gender. The training of boys and girls was tailored to suit their ultimate social and occupational needs. For boys, that entailed some sort of career path, whether that was in bureaucracy, law, the church or lordship; for girls, the options were more limited, consisting primarily of marriage or the convent. In some ways, boys' career paths were clearer than girls': a boy being given to the church would be trained for the church while a boy destined to inherit several manors would be taught estate management and how to occupy his place in the local hierarchy. The appropriate training for a girl intended for marriage, however, was less clear, if the marriage was not yet arranged. Daughters could be used in several ways to enhance a family's social status: a girl might be married to a social equal to reaffirm horizontal bonds, to a superior to further social ambitions, or to a wealthy inferior to prop up the family's finances.⁷⁰ A girl of the lesser gentry might end up married to a busy merchant ensconced in business affairs, a bureaucrat entrenched in the politics and intrigues of the court, or a small country landlord embedded in the politics of his county. Each of these positions would require a different skill set; in order that she might be prepared for whatever her future might hold, a girl of the late medieval gentry would require a broader education than her brother. Rather than

⁷⁰ Phillips gives several examples of daughters being sent to serve social superiors in order to secure specific favors or patronage for their families. Phillips, *Medieval Maidens*, 114.

learning specific skills and accomplishments, she needed a more general set of precepts that could adapt to whatever life she was ultimately given to lead.⁷¹

The word “education” brings to mind formal schoolrooms with instruction provided by trained teachers in traditional subjects like “reading, writing and ‘rithmetic.” Classrooms such as these existed in the late Middle Ages, although the subject matter was slightly different, focusing on Latin grammar and religious instruction. Yet this book learning was only a small part of a child’s educational experience. Learning begins the moment a child is born, as he or she begins to understand the surrounding world. Basic motor skills need to be learned, as do language, personal care, domestic and occupational tasks, and social skills. This sort of education, focusing on the upbringing of a child and his or her integration into society, is often termed “nurture” by medieval writers. Some of the conduct texts discussed in Chapter 4 are examples of how a child might be instructed in “nurture.”⁷² Many of these skills were, and still are, taught informally, through interaction with family and household.

There is some debate about whether more formal subjects were also taught to young children in the home. Scholars who have focused on Latin learning and the universities, such as William Courtenay, have taken a rather pessimistic view of elementary education (and the educational options open to women and girls); the haphazard teaching of early literacy is

⁷¹ Orme argues the opposite: that boys needed to have the flexibility to follow a variety of career paths while a girl needed to have the same skills whether she was to be a secular lady or a nun. Of course, masculine career paths required a more general base, with specialized knowledge to be acquired later on as required. His point about girls, however, does not necessarily apply here. While a noble girl could be assured of marrying a nobleman, girls of lesser gentry families were in more insecure positions. Such a girl could end up married to a merchant or wealthy artisan – a role that would require a different skill set than if she became the lady of a country estate. Orme, *From Childhood to Chivalry*, 39-40.

⁷² While the word “nurture,” in modern English, is generally used as a verb, the Middle English word was also a noun which referred to the instruction given to a young child, often more specifically referring to training in manners and social skills. *MED*, s. v. “norture” (n.), def. 2-3.

generally beneath their notice.⁷³ Yet more recent scholarship has presented a rosier picture, suggesting that basic literacy in the vernacular, and possibly even in Latin, was taught to boys and girls of means in their own homes from an early age. Michael Clanchy even suggests that their mothers were the ones doing the teaching. He pulls examples from across the Middle Ages of elite mothers providing instruction in basic literacy.⁷⁴ The popularity of images of St Anne teaching the Virgin Mary to read in the later Middle Ages suggests this image was relevant to the lives of those who commissioned depictions of it.⁷⁵ Clanchy believes that, by about 1500, many people across Europe – not merely elites – had attained some level of literate knowledge through this sort of informal, familial instruction, particularly once printing made cheap prayer booklets widely available.⁷⁶ If the family was wealthy enough to afford a mistress of the nursery, she would perform the educational role of the mother.⁷⁷ In less wealthy households, where parents had not the time or, perhaps, the ability to perform an educational role, parish or chantry priests may have filled in and provided basic instruction.⁷⁸

A medieval child's formal education was slated to start by the age of seven – generally seen as the age of reason – but he or she was expected to have begun some sort of learning even

⁷³ Caroline Barron, "The Education and Training of Girls in Fifteenth-Century England," in D. E. S. Dunn, ed., *Courts, Counties and the Capital in the Later Middle Ages* (Stroud, Gloucs.: Sutton Publishing, 1996), 140. For an example of this, see William Courtenay, *Schools and Scholars in Fourteenth-Century England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 13-4.

⁷⁴ Among those he mentions are Alfred the Great's mother teaching him to read Latin words without understanding them in the ninth century, Guibert of Nogent's mother showing him the shapes of his letters in the mid-eleventh century, and the mother of Princess Claude of France teaching her using a primer in the early sixteenth century. Michael Clanchy, "Did Mothers Teach Their Children to Read?" in Conrad Leyser and Lesley Smith, eds., *Motherhood, Religion and Society in Medieval Europe, 400-1400* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2011), 131-9.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 139. For more on this iconography, see Pamela Sheingorn, *Interpreting Cultural Symbols: St. Anne in Late Medieval Society* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1990).

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 152.

⁷⁷ Orme, *From Childhood to Chivalry*, 26-8. Orme, *Education and Society in Medieval and Renaissance England* (London and Ronceverte: The Hambledon Press, 1989), 159-60. Phillips' monograph on young medieval women includes a section about the role of these *magistrae* in noble nurseries and schoolrooms. Phillips, *Medieval Maidens*, 74-5.

⁷⁸ Jo Ann Hoepfner Moran, *The Growth of English Schooling* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 80.

earlier.⁷⁹ Henry VI was cared for and instructed by a female mistress before being turned over to a male tutor at the age of six and a half.⁸⁰ A number of early sixteenth-century school ordinances indicate that the students should enter already literate in English – it can be assumed that this standard practice extended back into the previous century. John Colet, who endowed the chantry school of St Paul’s in 1518, insisted that boys enter the school already literate in English; the boys Colet’s school catered to were called by John Stow “poor men’s children,” which implies that even low status boys had access to a basic literate education by this time.⁸¹ In his 1531 treatise on the education of aristocratic youths, *The Boke Named the Governor*, Sir Thomas Elyot likewise says that children must be given a head start in learning literacy at home.⁸² Girls were not left out of this early instruction. As mentioned above, a letter to Sir William Plumpton from 1463 states that the four-year-old Margaret Plumpton “speaketh prattely and french, and hath near hand learned her psalter.”⁸³ After the age of seven, boys and girls could expect to proceed

⁷⁹ Shahar argues that children would be taught at home before being sent to school at age seven, but she credits fathers or private tutors with filling that function, with no mention of mothers. Shulamith Shahar, *Childhood in the Middle Ages* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 105.

⁸⁰ Orme, *From Childhood to Chivalry*, 17.

⁸¹ The ordinances of the Manchester Grammar School, from 1524, desires literacy from entering students as well, although it makes a provision for students who needed further elementary instruction to be taught by one of the older scholars until they were ready for the Latin grammar taught by the schoolmaster. Excerpts from these documents can be found in Cressy, ed., *Education in Tudor and Stuart England*, 49, 72-3. Stow’s comment leads one to wonder what he and Colet would have considered “poor.” At the very least, it can be assumed that these were boys who otherwise could not afford to be educated in a Latin grammar school. John Stow, *A Survey of London*, ed. Henry Morley (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1890), 136. J. B. Trapp, however, refers to such requirements as elitist, suggesting that such access was not so widespread. Trapp, “Literacy, Books, and Readers” in *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain, Vol. III 1400-1557*, ed. Lotte Hellinga and J. B. Trapp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 33.

⁸² In fact, Elyot contradicts the wisdom of the ancients in advising this educational strategy. He argues that, while ancient authors argue children should not be taught to read before the age of seven, “those writers were either Greeks or Latins among whom all doctrine and sciences were in their maternal tongues, by reason whereof they saved all that long time which at this days is spent in understanding perfectly the Greek or Latin. Wherefore it requireth now a longer time to the understanding of both. Therefore that infelicity of our time and country compelleth us to encroach somewhat upon the years of children, and specially of noblemen, that they may sooner attain to wisdom and gravity.” Since English children’s native speech put them at a disadvantage in learning these prestigious languages, starting early was a necessity. Sir Thomas Elyot, *The Boke Named the Governor* [1531] ed. John M. Major (New York: Teachers College Press, 1969), 66.

⁸³ *Prattely* (adj.): cunningly, cleverly, or handsomely. *MED*, s. v. “pratili” (adv.). Stapleton, ed., *The Plumpton Correspondence*, 8.

down different educational pathways; in general, the boys would be sent to learn from men and the girls from women.⁸⁴

The next stage of a young gentle's education might take place in one of several different environments. Some children might simply stay at home, continuing the education begun by their parents under the guidance of a hired tutor.⁸⁵ Some children were sent to grammar schools, monasteries or convents for formal education. Others were sent to live in the household of some social superior, who could be anyone from a local relative or godparent to the king himself. This was a defining characteristic of the English elite during the fifteenth century, but more unusual in the rest of Europe.⁸⁶ Educational theorists of the late Middle Ages, such as William Worcester and Sir John Fortescue, believed that sending a child away from home was beneficial to his or her development. Parents might be inclined to spoil their children where foster parents, schoolmasters or other supervisors would not.⁸⁷ Despite this advice, many girls were educated at home, learning their duties alongside their mothers. Each of these environments would provide its students with a slightly different type of education, preparing them for different lifestyles and career paths.

Once a gentle boy reached the age of seven, he might be placed under the guidance of a tutor or schoolmaster. For those families who could not afford to keep their own or felt their sons ought to be educated away from home, the local monastery was a popular choice. As early as the beginning of the thirteenth century, monasteries were overseeing secular schools supporting as

⁸⁴ This is described by Christine de Pizan in her 1407 *Livre du corps de policie* in a chapter on the education of the children of princes. She states that when a prince's son was old enough, "he ought to be separated from the women who have cared for him and his care ought to be entrusted principally to one older knight of great authority." Christine de Pizan, *The Book of the Body Politic*, ed. Kate Langdon Forhan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 8. Orme, *Education and Society*, 160. Shahar, *Childhood*, 174.

⁸⁵ Shahar, *Childhood*, 220-1. Moran, *Growth of English Schooling*, 69-70.

⁸⁶ Merridee Bailey, *Socialising the Child in Late Medieval England c. 1400-1600* (York: York Medieval Press, 2012), 2-3.

⁸⁷ Orme, *Education and Society*, 162-3.

many as forty students at a time. The monks could provide an advanced curriculum, including Latin grammar and even Greek in the schools attached to the larger, more prestigious abbeys. Once humanist texts spread to England from the Continent, rhetorical skills began to take a prominent place in the curriculum: “these texts conveyed to monastic readers the culture of the secular schoolroom even before they established such schoolrooms for themselves.”⁸⁸ The education received in a monastery equipped its students for a variety of different careers. A late fourteenth-century annalist at St Albans Abbey bragged that its students went on to successful careers in both church and state. After about five years of this monastic curriculum, the boys would be prepared for university entrance, if they desired.⁸⁹ James Clark argues that most students “were never destined for the monastery but returned to a preordained place in gentry, noble or even courtly society” once their education was complete, but the schools seem to have accepted those of lower status as well, as testified by the merchants and craftsmen of St Albans who professed to be alumni of the monastery school.⁹⁰

Nunneries also had a role in educating the children of the gentry and nobility.⁹¹ In the eleventh and twelfth centuries, they stood as refuges for noble daughters, whether waiting for marriage or preparing for the religious life. In later centuries, however, daughters of lower status families – from the gentry and merchant classes on down to daughters of tradesmen and yeomen

⁸⁸The Reformation and the dissolution of the monasteries have often been viewed as providing the stimulus for the spread of education in early modern England, but James Clark argues that medieval monastic institutions had, rather, played a major role in preserving and propagating learning in the preceding centuries. James G. Clark, “Monasteries and Secular Education in Late Medieval England” in *Monasteries and Society in the British Isles in the Later Middle Ages*, ed. Janet Burton and Karen Stöber (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2008), 149-51.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 149-51.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 156.

⁹¹ For evidence of the schools run by medieval nunneries, particularly in the diocese of York, see Moran, *Growth of English Schooling*, 112-6.

– came under their tutelage as well.⁹² Most nunneries took in only a handful of students – far fewer than their monastic counterparts – but many houses seem to have done so – more than half in the fourteenth-century York diocese, according to Eileen Power’s projections. Before the fifteenth century, this may have been the only way for a young girl to receive a literate education outside her home.⁹³ This education consisted of religious instruction, reading, deportment, and some needlework; more fashionable houses might have instructed their charges in French and fine embroidery as well. Orme suggests that Chaucer’s description of his Prioress demonstrates the sorts of accomplishments a convent education could provide.⁹⁴ Phillips, however, argues that these institutions should not be viewed as medieval finishing schools, because pupils did not stay long enough to truly master any skills. She claims that their contribution “better bears the label ‘child care’” than education.⁹⁵ What small instruction was given would serve to instill in girls the “valued feminine qualities of piety, modesty and chastity,” thus preparing them for their future role in society.⁹⁶ A girl’s presence at a nunnery might serve to reaffirm her family’s ties to the institution, which may have been founded by her ancestors, and also provide her with useful social contacts, with education as a secondary consideration.⁹⁷ Some boys were educated in nunneries as well, although bishops were often uncomfortable with their presence. Most nunneries were forbidden from teaching boys above a certain age, ranging from five to as high as twelve, depending on the stringency of the commanding bishop. Most girls left between the ages

⁹² Dorothy Gardiner gives a list of examples of non-noble pupils (and novices) in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century nunneries. Dorothy Gardiner, *English Girlhood at School* (London: Oxford University Press, 1929), 130. Phillips, *Medieval Maidens*, 75.

⁹³ Moran, *Growth of English Schooling*, 115.

⁹⁴ Orme, *From Childhood to Chivalry*, 63-4. Gardiner, *English Girlhood*, 133-6.

⁹⁵ Phillips, *Medieval Maidens*, 76.

⁹⁶ Phillips, *Medieval Maidens*, 76.

⁹⁷ Shahar, *Childhood*, 220. Clark, “Monasteries and Secular Education,” 163.

of ten and fourteen, once they were of an age to board out in noble households.⁹⁸ Some stayed until they were ready to be married;⁹⁹ others remained to dedicate themselves to the religious life. Bishops worried that these students would distract the nuns from their spiritual calling, but, despite their concerns, the popularity of nunneries as educational institutions did not wane until the Reformation: even in 1536, the king's commissioners found "thirty or forty gentlemen's children and students" at Polesworth Abbey. After all, the keeping of these children provided the nuns with an attractive and steady income.¹⁰⁰

Secular grammar schools began to appear from the middle of the fourteenth century.¹⁰¹ The term "secular" here merely indicates that they were not directly connected with religious institutions (such as monastic or cathedral schools) – no medieval school was ever entirely free of ecclesiastical supervision: in London, any new school required the bishop's approval before it could accept students.¹⁰² The schoolmasters ranged from rectors and parish priests looking for a little extra income to secular humanist scholars – sometimes even women.¹⁰³ The majority of grammar schools were established as day schools within cities, although some boarding schools existed as well. While the boarding schools attracted a more fashionable clientele, gentle boys were sometimes found in the urban day schools as well, alongside the sons of merchants and

⁹⁸ Orme, *From Childhood to Chivalry*, 65. Phillips, *Medieval Maidens*, 76. While the girls were generally taught by the nuns themselves, outside tutors may have been brought in for the more advanced pupils among the boys. Gardiner, *English Girlhood*, 136-8.

⁹⁹ Shahar, *Childhood*, 220.

¹⁰⁰ Orme provides a lengthy list of noble and gentle persons who received an education in English nunneries. Orme, *From Childhood to Chivalry*, 63-5. Gardiner, *English Girlhood*, 129. Michael Van Cleave Alexander, *The Growth of English Education, 1348-1648* (University Park, PA, The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1990), 56-7.

¹⁰¹ In his sourcebook on the subject, Cressy includes a lengthy discussion of the history of secular grammar schools in medieval and early modern England. Cressy, ed., *Education in Tudor and Stuart England*, 3-6.

¹⁰² Sylvia Thrupp, *The Merchant Class of Medieval London* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1948), 155-6. For a discussion of how these schools may have arisen and how they became regulated, see Nicholas Orme, *Medieval Schools*, 61-3.

¹⁰³ Orme, *Medieval Schools*, 63. In the 1390s, John Catesby hired a schoolmistress to teach his daughter in their home. Woolgar, *Great Household*, 101-3. Barron, "Education and Training of Girls," 147-8.

tradesmen.¹⁰⁴ Sylvia Thrupp argues that many merchant families wanted their sons to receive an education comparable to that of gentry boys – courtly learning as well as what was necessary to succeed in business.¹⁰⁵ The curriculums of the grammar schools reflected this desire, stressing Latin grammar and recitation, but also to “[bring] up children in good manners and literature,” according to Colet, founder of St Paul’s School, in 1518.¹⁰⁶ The conduct texts directed at a bourgeois audience, with greater stress on virtuous and moralistic living, such as *How the Wise Man Taught His Son* and the *Young Children’s Book*, may have been written for use in such a grammar school.¹⁰⁷ These schools primarily catered to boys, but sometimes daughters of merchants and tradesmen were admitted as well, like eight-year-old Elizabeth Garrard who attended William Barbour’s school in fifteenth-century London.¹⁰⁸ While there are some records of gentry daughters being under the tutelage of schoolmasters or mistresses, it is more likely that they attended the lesser, more informal dame schools or even cathedral song schools than the more elevated and prestigious Latin grammar schools.¹⁰⁹

More often than boys, many girls were simply educated at home. For a girl, the best place to learn proper “nurture” was often at her mother’s side.¹¹⁰ The spectrum of education necessary for a gentle girl to take her place in society, or even advance herself, was narrowing during the

¹⁰⁴ Woolgar provides several examples of specific gentry sons attending grammar schools from the mid-fourteenth to mid-fifteenth centuries. Woolgar, *Great Household*, 101-2. Orme, *From Childhood to Chivalry*, 73.

¹⁰⁵ The children of poorer families were less likely to attend because of the expense and because their labor was required at home. Thrupp, *Merchant Class*, 158-60.

¹⁰⁶ Quoted in Cressy, ed., *Education in Tudor and Stuart England*, 47.

¹⁰⁷ See the discussion in Chapter 4, above. Thrupp also discusses merchants’ desire that their sons be educated in good morals. Thrupp, *Merchant Class*, 164.

¹⁰⁸ Because references to girls in grammar schools are few and far between, there has been some debate over whether this practice was widespread. Barron argues that it was on the basis of a Parliamentary statute of 1406 which insisted that the sons and daughters of those with landed income of at least 20 shillings be able to be sent to towns for apprenticeships and schooling. She contends that the statute would not mention daughters at all if educating and apprenticing girls were not a widespread practice. Still, it is more likely that these girls were being sent to the more informal dame schools for elementary education, rather than the more elevated grammar schools. Barron, “Education and Training of Girls,” 139-40, 142, 147-8.

¹⁰⁹ Moran discusses the presence of girls at some of these other, less formal and more specialized, schools. Moran, *Growth of English Schooling*, 69-70.

¹¹⁰ Phillips, *Medieval Maidens*, 61-2.

fifteenth century. While French had been the primary language of the English aristocracy between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries, its popularity was on the wane in the fifteenth.¹¹¹ Knowledge of English literature and some Latin prayers was sufficient for even the social climber from this point on.¹¹² Families that could afford it hired tutors or governesses to instruct their daughters at home, like Gilbert, Lord Talbot did for his daughter Anne from 1402-11. Besides reading and languages, they instructed Anne in the keeping of household accounts to prepare her for running her own household as a married woman.¹¹³ Overall, though, these were not subjects that exceeded the teaching capabilities of most gentle mothers, who would provide it in lieu of a tutor in less wealthy households. Some of the extant books from this period support this type of teaching: Patricia Cullum and Jeremy Goldberg argue that Margaret Blackburn, the wife of a wealthy merchant in early fifteenth-century York, taught her daughters to read and pray using the Bolton Hours.¹¹⁴ If this sort of practical, household instruction was the norm for most gentle girls, it makes sense that no conduct literature was written for them. In most cases, gentility was passed from mother or hired tutor to daughter in a more informal manner that did not require textual backup. The oral nature of this transmission is acknowledged in the conduct texts for women that did begin to appear in the sixteenth century, such as Richard Hyrd's 1529

¹¹¹ Douglas Kibbee, in an extensive study of French language usage in England, notes that French lingered on in government, the church, and even personal correspondence into the fifteenth century, though it had been supplanted by Middle English as a literary language. He notes that, while the use of French among the nobility and gentry was in decline, it continued to be important among the merchant classes, who used the language in their trade dealings with the Continent. Douglas Kibbee, *For to Speke Frenche Trewely* (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1991), 73-4.

¹¹² Phillips, *Medieval Maidens*, 66.

¹¹³ Mertes, *English Noble Household*, 174.

¹¹⁴ Patricia Cullum and Jeremy Goldberg, "How Margaret Blackburn Taught Her Daughters: Reading Devotional Instruction in a Book of Hours" in *Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts in Late Medieval Britain. Essays for Felicity Riddy*, ed. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000).

translation of Juan Vives' *The Instruction of a Christian Woman*, which acknowledges the maternal role in instructing daughters.¹¹⁵

A noble household was the most prestigious place that a young gentle could be sent to be educated. Here, a boy could enhance his family's connections and earn patronage for his future career. Many scions of the gentry, including Chaucer, owed their rise to prominence to a progression through the hierarchy of a noble or royal household.¹¹⁶ This training would involve both education and service. Little is known about the educational experience in small households, where the tutelage was likely to be less formal and not appear in any written records. More information is available about the largest noble households, for which records, including financial accounts, survive, and particularly the royal household, which served as a model for all others in the realm.¹¹⁷ These households would have contained an assortment of boys of various ages in need of some education, particularly after the institution of henchmen in the fifteenth century.¹¹⁸ Even a relatively small household, like Hugh Luttrell's at the beginning of the fifteenth century, might employ a schoolmaster to teach its own offspring, fostered children, and any henchmen.¹¹⁹ Children of lesser status may have been left out of these household schoolrooms.¹²⁰ The exact details of the curriculum are largely unknown, but the educational programmes laid out in mirrors for princes provide a foundation for speculation: formal teachers might instruct boys in reading, languages, religious precepts, social conduct and courtly

¹¹⁵ This is how most "popular female culture" was transmitted, according to Shahar. In most cases, little is known about the traditions and songs that women sang among themselves because it was not seen as important enough to write down. Shahar, *Childhood*, 175. Orme, *From Childhood to Chivalry*, 106. Phillips, *Medieval Maidens*, 73.

¹¹⁶ Orme, *Medieval Children*, 315. Shahar, *Childhood*, 217.

¹¹⁷ Mertes, *English Noble Household*, 170. For a longer discussion of the placement of boys in the royal household, see Orme, *From Childhood to Chivalry*, 49-50, 57.

¹¹⁸ Nicholas Orme argues that the collection of children in these households would resemble a large nuclear family with children of diverse ages and abilities more than a modern classroom. Orme, *From Childhood to Chivalry*, 29.

¹¹⁹ Mertes, *English Noble Household*, 172.

¹²⁰ Orme, *Medieval Children*, 315.

accomplishments like chess-playing and hunting.¹²¹ This seems to have been the case in the 1460s, when Fortescue wrote: “The king’s household is the chief academy for the nobility of England. It provides schooling in athletics, moral integrity and good manners, through which the kingdom flourishes, acquires honour and is protected against invaders.”¹²² In the early sixteenth century, the Duke of Buckingham’s wardrobe accounts list equipment purchased for the education of children, from books on grammar and courtesy to armor and weaponry.¹²³ Conduct texts may have emerged as educational tools for these household schoolrooms, although Kate Mertes suggests that courtly manners were more likely to be absorbed by watching and imitating others.¹²⁴

Since the noble household was a predominantly masculine environment, it is unlikely that most girls would have been included in these household classrooms.¹²⁵ The opportunity was open to the daughters of the house, although in wealthier households they might be taught privately by a separate tutor or mistress, as discussed above. In fact, far fewer girls than boys were sent to be fostered in other households. This was most frequently done with the daughters of great lords, betrothed at a young age and sent to their future husbands’ households for their upbringing.¹²⁶ Daughters of the lesser nobility, gentry, and even the ranks of wealthy professionals could find positions as attendants and companions of higher-status ladies once they

¹²¹ Orme, *From Childhood to Chivalry*, 20. Karras, *From Boys to Men*, 30. For a detailed discussion of mirrors of princes and education, see Orme, *From Childhood to Chivalry*, 88-103. Malcolm Mercer also mentions the employment of a knightly master in larger households to provide boys with the military training necessary for their future lives. Malcolm Mercer, *The Medieval Gentry* (London and New York: Continuum, 2010), 37.

¹²² Fortescue quoted in Orme, *Education and Society*, 153.

¹²³ Mertes, *English Noble Household*, 172.

¹²⁴ Mark Addison Amos, “‘For Manners Make Man’: Bourdieu, de Certeau, and the Common Appropriation of Noble Manners in the Book of Courtesy,” in *Medieval Conduct*, ed. Kathleen Ashley and Robert L. A. Clark (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 32. Mertes, *English Noble Household*, 170.

¹²⁵ Karras, *From Boys to Men*, 29.

¹²⁶ Shahar, *Childhood in the Middle Ages*, 220-1.

reached the age of twelve.¹²⁷ This became increasingly common in the second half of the fifteenth century, although there were always fewer positions available for gentle girls than boys. In 1420-1, the household of Elizabeth Berkeley, Countess of Warwick, consisted of nine female servants (six gentlewomen and three women of the chamber) and twenty-nine male servants. Three of those gentlewomen were the wives of her husband's retainers, leaving even fewer positions open to young women competing for the countess' patronage.¹²⁸ Gentry households could play host to young women as well, in a pinch: Margaret Paston took on Agnes Loveday as a gentlewoman when a better position could not be found for the girl.¹²⁹ These young gentlewomen of the household would develop skills in courtly disciplines such as manners, music, and reading as they worked at entertaining their mistress and tending to her bodily needs.¹³⁰ Instruction in some of these accomplishments, such as singing, dancing, and playing instruments, was given to boys and girls together. Girls additionally learned the arts of tapestry and embroidery; whether a girl was a princess or a merchant's daughter, developing skill in needlework was encouraged as a defense against idleness.¹³¹ Thus education and work went hand in hand in the lady's chamber, as girls served their mistress by learning skills that would benefit them once they were married.¹³²

Most of the educational activity taking place in the household was informal in nature – more like on-the-job training. Just as girls developed life skills by serving their mistress, boys

¹²⁷ Phillips, *Medieval Maidens*, 130.

¹²⁸ Jennifer C. Ward, *English Noblewomen in the Later Middle Ages* (New York: Longman, 1992), 52-4.

¹²⁹ Orme, *From Childhood to Chivalry*, 58-9.

¹³⁰ Young women may have played a role in caring for children in the nursery as well. These girls did not do strenuous work such as fetching and carrying, serving food or sending messages – the lady would have male servants to perform these tasks. Phillips provides a lengthy discussion of the evidence of the duties performed by ladies-in-waiting in her monograph. Phillips, *Medieval Maidens*, 113-8. Gardiner, *English Girlhood*, 125-6.

¹³¹ Orme, *Education and Society*, 173. Gardiner's book provides a list of examples of medieval noble and gentlewomen who were avid needlewomen. Gardiner, *English Girlhood*, 102-3.

¹³² While noble maidens' service has traditionally been viewed as a form of education, Phillips argues that their service was seen by contemporaries as work, just as noble boys' service was. Phillips, *Medieval Maidens*, 110-1.

developed useful career skills and connections as they fulfilled their own duties. The various departments of the noble household trained young boys, beginning at around seven to ten years of age, for careers within their ranks – boys of humble background might work in the kitchens or stables, while those of more exalted birth would become pages or henchmen, performing mild and often ceremonial duties for the household.¹³³ The royal household, from the fourteenth century onward, also employed children as singers and altar servers in the chapel (a practice which was quickly imitated in noble households, such as that of the Dukes of Stafford).¹³⁴ Some of these boys would go on to study at King's Hall in Cambridge once their service was concluded, presumably setting them up for careers in the church. By the late fifteenth century, there were at least fifty boys serving and being educated in the royal household alone.¹³⁵ While his equestrian training would have begun earlier, from the age of twelve a noble or gentle boy would begin his training as a knight, adding martial exercises to his educational regime.¹³⁶ Other types of practical training may have been given as well: as teenagers, Humphrey and Henry Stafford served as estate agents for their father.¹³⁷ It is unclear whether foster children were entrusted with similar responsibilities so early, but those who sought a career in service could expect to perform similar duties as they advanced.

While social skills and behaviors could be learned from conduct texts taught in formal classrooms, it is likely that most children learned these on the fly, by imitating those around them and being reprimanded for bad manners. Mertes argues that “learning to survive as servants and among their peers” would prepare the scions of the gentry and nobility to become heads of their

¹³³ Shahar, *Childhood*, 210. Mertes, *English Noble Household*, 30-1.

¹³⁴ Mertes, *English Noble Household*, 172. Orme, *From Childhood to Chivalry*, 49.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 49. Woolgar, *Great Household*, 102.

¹³⁶ Shahar, *Childhood*, 210.

¹³⁷ Mertes, *English Noble Household*, 172.

own households someday.¹³⁸ Peter Fleming suggests that such service also functioned to reinforce a child's understanding of hierarchy; household duties such as serving at table were "partly symbolic – emphasizing the child's subordination to the head of the household – and partly educational, since by waiting at table the child learnt etiquette and the basics of household management."¹³⁹ There was also a religious element to service: the imitation of Christ, who was believed to have served his parents until beginning his ministry at the age of thirty.¹⁴⁰ Household service, then, was educative in a number of ways, instructing children in specific household duties, more general household management, moral behavior and their rightful place in the social hierarchy (which was determined by age and gender as much as by natal status).

Although there were a number of different arenas in which a gentle (or aspiring gentle) child could be instructed, the gendered nature of medieval education holds true across all of them. A boy's education was akin to a long job interview or an internship – in most cases, he received it at the hands of his future employers or patrons. The boy was on stage from the moment his education began, requiring him to learn quickly in order to earn a good reputation. In contrast, girls learned in more private circumstances, where they had the leisure to learn more slowly. This applied to learning the conduct and behavior proper to their status just as much as occupational skills – and conduct may have been the more important of the two, since this had more bearing on a child's acceptance and esteem among his or her social peers. The conduct texts which were available for boys reflect their need for rapid acquisition of these skills, presenting short lists of the "do's and don't's" of conduct in gentle company. The texts which passed conduct knowledge on to gentle girls, which will be discussed in the next section, present

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 175.

¹³⁹ P. W. Fleming, "Household Servants of the Yorkist and Early Tudor Gentry" in *Early Tudor England*, ed. D. Williams (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1989), 26.

¹⁴⁰ Woolgar, *Great Household*, 101.

their information quite differently, relying on the abstract discussion of virtues or presenting *exempla* for their readers to imitate. The reader is often left to interpret on her own how to apply a text's lessons to her own life. Even when these texts are explicit in their advice, they are all quite lengthy, upholding the idea that a gentle girl, educated in a low-pressure environment, was able to learn proper conduct at a more leisurely pace than a gentle boy.

Alternative Advice Texts for Gentle Girls

As the beginning of this chapter discussed, the sort of conduct texts which were written in England to serve the needs of gentle boys did not exist for gentle girls. The bourgeois *The Good Wife Taught Her Daughter* and *The Good Wyf Wold a Pylgremage* could fill this gap to some extent, but discussed a number of activities that would have been inapplicable to the gentle girl, such as traveling around town, selling goods in the marketplace and visiting the tavern. In the only detailed scholarly treatment of the absence of conduct texts for gentle girls – consisting of a mere two paragraphs – Orme suggests that noble and gentle girls would have used the conduct texts written for boys: “After all, noble and gentle girls needed to learn table manners like those of their brothers, and some of them took part in hunting of a less exacting kind.” He argues that Lydgate, in his translation of *Stans puer*, uses gender-neutral words for the child (*puer*) and the sovereign (*dominus*), suggesting that “he was trying to extend the poem’s appeal to both sexes.”¹⁴¹ While I concede that a gentle girl could learn some manners by reading the poems written for boys, she would run up against the same difficulties as she would with the bourgeois poems: the advice is being given for a context in which she would not find herself. A gentle girl did not serve anyone at table. There is little evidence of gentle girls, whether living in their own homes or serving in socially-superior households, appearing at these male-dominated tables at

¹⁴¹ Orme, *Medieval Children*, 279-81.

all. The conduct poems themselves hardly mention women's presence in the noble or gentle household – a presence that household accounts indicate was minimal at the best of times. While any of these texts – for bourgeois girls or for gentle boys – could impart some lessons in conduct to the gentle female reader, none of them were tailor-made to suit her particular circumstances and lifestyle. Anything she read would have to be tempered by some sort of outside information on her own social situation.

The absence of equivalent texts makes it easy to dismiss the transmission of gentility to girls as something that happened orally and informally. As the previous section discusses, many gentle girls must have been taught at home, following the example of their mothers as they went about their household duties. Yet, considering the increasingly literate culture of the petty elite in fifteenth-century England, it would be surprising to find that girls were expected to receive the entirety of their education orally. There is Continental evidence that girls read such texts: in the *Livre des Trois Vertus*, Christine de Pizan describes a programme for the education of young noble ladies that includes reading books “dealing with good behavior.”¹⁴² The Chevalier de La Tour Landry expected his daughters to read not only the book he wrote for them, but others as well.¹⁴³ It is more likely that educative texts for girls did exist in England, but took different forms than those for boys.¹⁴⁴ Gentle boys who were thrown into the public eye when they

¹⁴² Christine de Pizan, *The Treasure of the City of Ladies or The Book of the Three Virtues*, rev. ed., trans. Sarah Lawson (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 43.

¹⁴³ Rebecca Barnhouse points out, however, that the Chevalier had more liberal ideas about female education than many of his readers and has to work to justify his opinions. Rebecca Barnhouse, *The Book of the Knight of the Tower: Manners for Young Medieval Women* (New York: Palgrave, 2006), 106.

¹⁴⁴ There is always the possibility that these texts simply did not survive. Suzanne Hull notes that books written for women were less likely to be bound into elaborate, luxury editions. She suggests that so few copies of these books survive because they were printed on cheaper materials and “worn out with practical use.” This argument is not entirely satisfactory, however, since many of the conduct poems written for men were produced in cheap editions and yet they do survive. Hull also raises the possibility that works for women were seen as less worthy of preservation, but I think this unlikely, as the nature of advice for women tends to be so general that it could easily be applied to subsequent generations, rendering an older advice text repeatedly useful. The conduct poems instructing boys in how to serve in the lord's hall, which did survive, were no longer useful after the fifteenth century when large noble establishments declined in favor of a smaller retinue in the vicinity of the royal court. Suzanne Hull,

entered the household service of a greater lord required quick, practical guides to proper conduct in order to establish a good reputation for themselves from the very beginning. Gentle girls, whose education and training took place in more private arenas, did not require a rapid-fire training manual; girls could afford to learn gentle behavior through slow, careful study of models and *exempla*.

Despite their absence in England, many normative texts for women were written in Continental Europe during the last centuries of the Middle Ages, and most of them were directed at what Anne Marie de Gendt calls “un public d’appartenance sociale élevée: femmes nobles ou grandes bourgeoises.” She argues that the modes of behavior for women of all social groups were so similar that readers of lower ranks could easily adapt the manners of noblewomen or the wealthy bourgeois to their own experiences.¹⁴⁵ It is quite likely that English women did so as well; the gentle culture of the English court was, after all, borrowed largely from the model of the French court. An English woman who wanted to learn gentle manners could not go wrong by consulting French conduct texts. The *Livre du Chevalier de la Tour Landry* and the *Ménagier de Paris*, both written in the late fourteenth century, and Christine de Pizan’s *Livre des Cité des Dames* and *Livre des Trois Vertues* from the early fifteenth are frequently brought up in discussions of the education of girls in this period. Roberta Krueger argues that these texts “participate[d] in the proliferation of didactic texts that circulate within noble families and, increasingly, in bourgeois households, in the wake of Charles V’s program of didactic translation in the vernacular.”¹⁴⁶ French literature was very popular at the English royal court from the end

Chaste, Silent and Obedient: English Books for Women 1475-1640 (San Marino, CA: Huntington Library, 1982), 16.

¹⁴⁵ Anne Marie de Gendt has written a short overview of the genre in her monograph on the *Livre du Chevalier de la Tour Landry*. Anne Marie de Gendt, *L’art d’éduquer les nobles damoiselles: le Livre du Chevalier de la Tour Landry* (Paris: Honoré Champion Éditeur, 2003), 10-2.

¹⁴⁶ Roberta Krueger “Identity Begins at Home: Female Conduct and the Failure of Counsel in *Le Ménagier de Paris*”, *Essays in Medieval Studies* 22 (2005), 22.

of the fourteenth century;¹⁴⁷ once these texts arrived and were translated, they became accessible to lower ranks of readers as well – readers who used their advice to learn proper behavior for women of gentle rank.

The *Livre du Chevalier de la Tour Landry* was written in 1372 by a French knight for the education of his three daughters. In the text, he claims to have written a similar book for the instruction of his sons, but no trace of this work has survived. The book written for his daughters, however, was very popular across late medieval Europe, surviving in more than twenty French manuscript copies with printed editions appearing from 1514.¹⁴⁸ It was translated into German and published in 1493 by Marquart von Stein, to be used as an instructional tool for his two daughters. It made its way across the Channel during the reign of Henry VI when it was translated into English by an anonymous author, surviving in a single incomplete manuscript.¹⁴⁹ It was translated again by William Caxton and printed in 1484 as the *Book of the Knight of the Tower* “by the request and desire of a noble lady which hath brought forth many noble and fair daughters.”¹⁵⁰ The text was never reprinted, suggesting that it was not an enormous success for Caxton, but it was referenced by Fitzherbert in his 1534 *Book of Husbandry*, which suggests that

¹⁴⁷ David Burnley argues that this popularity “was a reflection of the prestige of contemporary France rather than the evolution of a native Anglo-Norman literary tradition.” French literary culture had flowered earlier, but it became more highly regarded in England only under Richard II during a lull in the conflict between the two nations. David Burnley, *Courtliness and Literature in Medieval England* (New York: Longman, 1998), 124.

¹⁴⁸ In its English edition, the Chevalier’s claim reads, “And therefore I have made ii books, one for my sons, an other for my daughters, forto learn them to read.” Thomas Wright, ed., *The Book of the Knight of La Tour-Landry*, EETS o. s. 33 (London: N. Trübner & Co., 1868), xii, 4. Orme states that the *Livre* “was the first book of its kind to spread widely over western Europe.” Orme, *From Childhood to Chivalry*, 108. It was, perhaps, written at a time when the instruction of girls was a growing concern throughout western Europe. De Gendt discusses the French manuscripts, editions and reception in detail. De Gendt, *L’art d’éduquer*, 48-50.

¹⁴⁹ The English translation can be found in BL MS Harley 1764. Copies of the text in its original French can also be found in English manuscripts such as BL MS Royal 19.C.vii, in which it is found alongside Chaucer’s *Tale of Melibee* and the story of Griselda.

¹⁵⁰ Bornstein, *Lady in the Tower*, 49. Orme, *From Childhood to Chivalry*, 107-8. This ‘noble lady’ has been identified as Elizabeth Woodville, who was living in the sanctuary of Westminster Abbey at the time and could easily have come into contact with Caxton, who had set up his press nearby. Blake suggests that the translation of the text was more likely Caxton’s own idea, dedicating it obliquely to Elizabeth Woodville in order to increase its prestige and marketability. N. F. Blake, *William Caxton and English Literary Culture* (London: The Hambledon Press, 1991), 30-1. For more detail on the manuscript transmission of this text, see De Gendt, *L’art d’éduquer*, 48-52.

it was known by the generation of readers that interests us here.¹⁵¹ The fact that the Chevalier's book for his sons did not survive to achieve such popularity is perhaps indicative of the greater need that existed for didactic literature for girls of this rank.

The *Book of the Knight of the Tower*¹⁵² instructs the reader in virtue and vice through a long series of stories, mostly derived from written sources including Scripture, saints' lives, and historical chronicles – many of which were borrowed directly from the treatise *Le Miroir des Bonnes Femmes*, written by a thirteenth-century Franciscan friar.¹⁵³ The first thirty-six chapters provide stories of generally unnamed ladies and gentlemen reinforcing the value of particular virtues, such as the lady who saved from a rapist by the appearance of the souls of the dead for whom she habitually prayed.¹⁵⁴ Chapters XXXVII and XXXVIII address the Knight's daughters, the former ('Of Bad Examples') warning them away from a list of flaws and vices and the latter ('Of Good Examples') offering a list of virtues to seek in their place. The next chapter begins a long series of stories of Biblical women, their behavior assessed by the Knight's opening and closing remarks. After rehearsing at length the virtues of the Virgin Mary, there are several more chapters relating generic tales after which begins an eleven-chapter debate between the Knight of the Tower and his late wife in which he supports the value of courtly love while she upholds a woman's obligation to chastity. After a handful of other tales, the text concludes with a rewriting of the teachings of Cato to his son.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵¹ Orme, *Medieval Children*, 279. De Gendt, *L'art d'éduquer*, 50.

¹⁵² Since this chapter is concerned with the advice in the *Livre* which appealed to English readers, the English translation of the text will be used in all examples.

¹⁵³ Orme, *From Childhood to Chivalry*, 108. De Gendt, *L'art d'éduquer*, 15-6, 39-48.

¹⁵⁴ Wright, ed., *The Book of the Knight of La Tour-Landry*, 7.

¹⁵⁵ The *Disticha Catonis* was written in the third century, purportedly by Cato for the instruction of his son. It was a popular text in schoolrooms from the late Roman Empire to the late Middle Ages and beyond. Sometimes known as the *Distiches of Cato*, this was an extremely popular text in late medieval England, often quoted and excerpted in other works. Perhaps because of the popularity of the work, the name Cato was often attached to unaffiliated didactic texts. Jonathan Nicholls, *The Matter of Courtesy. Medieval Courtesy Books and the Gawain Poet* (Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 1985), 63-5.

The Chevalier professes to have written his text specifically for the instruction of his own daughters, though a handful of statements within the text imply that he anticipated a wider audience as well.¹⁵⁶ In the Prologue, the Chevalier proclaims that he began the book “for to teach my daughters,” but by Chapter XXI he expands this to include “none other women but to mine proper daughters and servants of my house.”¹⁵⁷ This is still a modest expectation – as the head of a noble household (particularly one which lacked an adult mistress), the Chevalier would have had a responsibility to educate the servants, gentle and otherwise, under his patronage. In most of his stories, the expected audience is expressed when he addresses them directly, with a phrase like “and therefore, good daughters” and a restatement of the moral of the preceding tale.¹⁵⁸ Yet as the scope of the project expanded, it seems his audience did as well. Chapter LXXIV eschews the direct address to his daughters, instead stressing that “by this example all good women ought to be ware and advised” and in Chapter XCII, “here is a good example unto *every* good woman.”¹⁵⁹ The Chevalier tacitly acknowledges a wider audience through the voice of his wife, who humbly protests that her advice is meant to instruct no one but her own daughters;¹⁶⁰ this false humility, a common trope among medieval authors, suggests he intended his *Livre* to circulate outside his immediate household. Furthermore, De Gendt argues that the Chevalier’s use of the third person in the prologue, rather than addressing his daughters directly with the second person “vous,” is another tacit acknowledgement of a wider audience.¹⁶¹ It is not clear whether he anticipated the extent of his text’s circulation and popularity; even if he had, it is

¹⁵⁶ De Gendt argues that the Chevalier probably had a larger audience in mind. De Gendt, *L’art d’éduquer*, 9.

¹⁵⁷ Wright, ed., *The Book of the Knight of La Tour-Landry*, 3, 31-2.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 17 and *passim*.

¹⁵⁹ The emphasis is mine. *Ibid.*, 97, 120.

¹⁶⁰ “For my intention and will is not to ordain upon none ladies ne damsels, but if it be upon my own daughters, of whom I have the chastisement and charge. For every good lady or damsel, if God be pleased, shall govern and keep them self well to their worship and honor, without I, that am of little wit and little knowing, entremete* me thereof.” *Ibid.*, 184. **Entremete* (v.): to undertake. *MED*, s. v. “entermeten” (v.), def. 2.

¹⁶¹ De Gendt, *L’art d’éduquer*, 63-4.

unlikely that he envisioned it being used to educate young women in foreign lands with different social structures and expectations than he was familiar with in late fourteenth-century France. The fact that his work did spread to other realms, however, and achieve popularity there, suggests that the Chevalier's teachings were applicable in a variety of social milieux.

The prologue appended to the text by Caxton can provide a better understanding of what an English audience was expected to get from the Chevalier's book. Caxton used his prologues as promotional tools, to pitch his texts to a particular audience.¹⁶² An examination of the prologue of *The Book of the Knight of the Tower* reveals not only who the printer believed would be interested in the text but also what he expected these readers to get out of it. As previously mentioned, Caxton dedicates the book to a noble lady with several daughters to instruct, who expressed a desire to see the book in English that it might "the better be understood of all such as shall read or hear it." Caxton proclaims that "this book is necessary to every gentlewoman of what estate she be" and "advise[s] every gentleman or woman having such children & desiring them to be virtuously brought forth to get and have this book to the end that they may learn." The text could instruct these young gentlewomen "to behave them self virtuously as well in their virginity as in their wedlock & widowhood" through its rehearsal of "many virtuous good enseyngmentis & learnings by evident histories of authority & good examples."¹⁶³

Caxton's image of the reader of this text goes beyond the daughters of the knight who wrote it or the noble lady who purportedly commissioned it, stretching to include any young woman who had a claim to gentility. This extends, of course, from his desire to expand the market for this text, but it also indicates the group to which he believed the text would appeal – just as conduct poems about meals in a lord's hall could serve to polish the manners of a boy

¹⁶² Blake, *William Caxton and English Literary Culture*, 200.

¹⁶³ *Enseyngmentis* (n.): teachings, from the French "enseignements." W. J. B. Crotch, ed., *The Prologues and Epilogues of William Caxton*, EETS o. s. 176 (London: Oxford University Press, 1928), 86-7.

aspiring to gentility, so could a text like *The Book of the Knight of the Tower* inculcate in a young girl the virtues and values appropriate to gentle rank. Just like the aforementioned boy, this girl was not necessarily born to this rank. Tracy Adams argues that Caxton used the prologues of many of his works to specifically market them to London merchants, many of whom were interested in upward social mobility and would have identified as “gentlemen.” Caxton used his prologues to teach these merchants “the art of reading originally aristocratic works.”¹⁶⁴ His use of the term “gentleman” makes a claim for a certain type of reader, suggesting a discriminating readership, rather than a specific social group.¹⁶⁵ The prologue to *The Book of the Knight of the Tower* does just this by hinting at how the book’s teachings could be used by *any* reader to assimilate gentle behavior and asserting that “all the gentlewomen now living & hereafter to come or shall be are bound to give laud praising & thankings to the author of this book and also to the lady that caused me to translate it & to pray for her long life & welfare” out of their gratitude for the essential instruction the text provides.

The instruction that all these women should be grateful for focuses on moral advice. From the injunction to love and praise God in Chapter II to the admonishment against falsehood in the story of Cathonnet in Chapter CXLVIII, the attainment of virtue has primacy of place throughout the text. This is revealed as his philosophy of education in Chapter XC (‘How Children Ought to be Sent to School’). After reporting the story of Delbora, a girl whose education led her to become a prophetess, the Chevalier states: “And by this good example that young women, maidens, should be put unto school to learn virtuous things of the scripture, wherethrough they may the better see and know their sauement, and to dwell and for to eschew

¹⁶⁴ Tracy Adams, “‘Noble, wyse and grete lordes, gentilmen and marchauntes’: Caxton’s Prologues as Conduct Books for Merchants” *Parergon* 22:2 (2005): 56, 67 and *passim*.

¹⁶⁵ Blake, *William Caxton and English Literary Culture*, 29.

all that is evil in manner, as did the good lady Delbora.”¹⁶⁶ Later, after a few more short tales, he says it again:

And therefore this is a good example to put young children unto the school, and to make them books of wisdom and of science, and books of virtue and profitable examples, whereby they may see the sauement of the soul and of the body by the examples of good living of the holy fathers before us, and of other worldly vanities.

He concludes by arguing that literacy is a necessity for all women, for it enables them to read these edifying tales for themselves.¹⁶⁷ The salvation of his or her soul was, of course, the ultimate goal of every medieval individual, so it ought to be the focus of all education. The Chevalier’s stress on the virtues throughout his text is the means by which he hopes his daughters will attain their eternal salvation.

The secondary focus of the Chevalier’s text is women’s subordination to men, particularly their husbands and fathers. His book reads as quite misogynistic to the modern reader, going so far as to blame rape on women’s vanity rather than men’s lust;¹⁶⁸ however his words are in line with medieval ideas about women’s place in the social and domestic hierarchy. Just as women ought to be obedient to God by virtuously upholding his commandments, they must also be obedient and submissive to the men in their lives, who outrank them socially. Chapter CXIV praises a “gentle woman . . . of worthy lineage” who loved and honored her husband although he “was ungoodly, and right unlikely to have so fair a lady.”¹⁶⁹ The Chevalier

¹⁶⁶ *Sauuement* (n.): spiritual salvation. *MED*, s. v. “savement” (n.), def. b. Wright, ed., *The Book of the Knight of La Tour-Landry*, 117.

¹⁶⁷ The term ‘science’ in the above quote is meant in the general sense of ‘knowledge’ or ‘wisdom,’ rather than the specific modern sense of a scientific discipline. *Ibid.*, 118.

¹⁶⁸ The most striking instance of this is in the story of David and Bathsheba. The Chevalier describes how David beheld her at her window combing her hair and lusted after her, which led him to rape her and kill her husband. At the end of the tale, the moral he provides castigates Bathsheba’s vanity as the instigator of all this sin: “and all this mischief came by the pride that Bersabee had of her heart. Therefore a woman ought not to be proud of any beauty that she hath and show her self only to please the world.” *Ibid.*, 99. There is another place in the book, however, during the Chevalier’s rehearsal of the “follies” of Eve, where David is blamed for this episode: “And so you may see that this sin comith of the lewd looking, of the which I would you knew the example of king David, that for a lewd look that he cast on Barsaba, Vri’s wife, he fell into adultery and fornication with her.” *Ibid.*, 57.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 154.

stresses that although her husband was an unworthy man, it was still the lady's duty to honor and respect him as her lord and master. Other tales, like Chapter XVIII, condemn women who publicly chide their husbands, upsetting the domestic hierarchy. The Chevalier advocates a wife's gentle criticism of her husband in private, but does not countenance disobedience in public under any circumstances.¹⁷⁰ Chapter XIX emphasizes this wifely duty in the story of three merchants who make a wager to see which of them has the most obedient wife. The first two merchants ask their wives to leap into a washbasin and, when the wives question their commands, proceed to beat them. The third merchant asks his wife, in French, to put the salt cellar on the table ("sele sus table") – presumably, he is preparing to bid her leap in the basin as well. However, she mishears his words as a command to leap onto the tabletop ("seyle sus table"), which she immediately obeys. Once the misunderstanding is cleared up, the first two merchants concede that the third has the most obedient wife, and "she was greatly praised for her obedience to her husband."¹⁷¹ Through this and many other stories, the Chevalier demonstrates the importance of a woman knowing and sticking to her place, which is always subordinate to the men in her life. Note that the Chevalier considers the example of merchants' wives in this story to be appropriate for his own daughters – the shared experience of women as submissive wives is meant to trump any differences in status in this particular context.¹⁷²

Gentility is another important, although sometimes unspoken, theme in the Chevalier's text. While he does not directly address an audience of gentle ladies (apart from his own daughters), the code of behavior that he describes is for ladies and gentlewomen. Throughout his text, he emphasizes that his examples and advice are geared toward this social group. Most of the instances of the word 'gentle' in *The Book of the Knight of the Tower* appear in the context of a

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 25-6.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 26-7.

¹⁷² Barnhouse, *Book of the Knight of the Tower*, 92.

social rank. The Chevalier refers to a “gentle woman that was wedded to a squire” in Chapter XVII, “a gentle woman” who could confirm his tale in Chapter XX, and “ladies and gentle women” whose hair was “washed in wine and in other things forto make the hair of color other wise than God made it” in Chapter LIII.¹⁷³ Since his daughters will grow up to be ladies and gentlewomen themselves, that is the social group from which the Chevalier draws his stories and examples.

When the Chevalier is not using ‘gentle’ as a social term, he uses it as a characteristic, explicitly describing what a young woman must do to earn the designation. This usage occurs rarely throughout the text – on a mere nine occasions, out of more than thirty uses of the word ‘gentle’ – but these are important occasions, since they reveal the Chevalier’s own understanding of what constituted gentility in a woman. Like the conduct poems for boys discussed in the previous chapter, the Chevalier links gentility with self-control, stating that while poor men chastise their wives with “fear and strokes,” “a gentle woman should chastise hem self with fairness.”¹⁷⁴ Her ability to control herself is her own responsibility. Along the same lines, the Chevalier warns that “a gentle woman should have no wrath in hem,” being able to control her own emotions.¹⁷⁵ She should also be charitable, particularly to orphans, and “gladly of her gentle nature nourish the young” who have been abandoned, taking control of their nurture and training as well.¹⁷⁶

The term ‘gentle’ arises several times in the context of controlling a woman’s speech. Cynthia Ho has examined this as a major theme in the Chevalier’s text, arguing that the text is “a conduct book for a woman’s tongue, because the honor of both herself and her family hangs on

¹⁷³ Wright, ed., *The Book of the Knight of La Tour-Landry*, 23, 29, 70.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 28.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 112.

her beneficial or harmful language.”¹⁷⁷ She sees the use and misuse of language as the primary theme of the Chevalier’s exempla. It is natural, therefore, that the topic of women’s speech should be linked with the Chevalier’s ideas about gentility. Early in the text, he provides a description of the ideal gentle women: “all gentlewomen and noble maidens comen of good kin ought to be goodly, meek, well tached, ferme in estate, behaving and manners, *little soft and easy in speech, and in answer courteous & gentle*, and not light in looking.”¹⁷⁸ This list puts a great deal of emphasis on a woman’s speech (just like the story that precedes it).¹⁷⁹ The idea of a woman being “in answer courteous & gentle” is a strong theme in Chapters XCVI (‘Of meekness in women’) and XCVII (‘Of Queen Esther’). The story of Queen Esther reinforces the Chevalier’s point that “it is . . . good thinge that may be in a woman to be in a little speech, and not to answer unto her husband in wrath, for a gentle heart is evermore dreadful other to do or to say any thing that might displease unto him when she ought to love worship and dread.”¹⁸⁰ Angry, spiteful speech in a woman is always a negative quality, particularly when it is to her husband to whom she ought to subordinate herself.

Restraint from backtalk is clearly an ideal womanly quality, but the Chevalier explicitly connects it with gentility as well. In Chapter XCVI, he supports his discussion of the need for meekness in women with the example of the greyhound:

And it is a myschaunt thing for any gentle woman, either to strive or to chide in any manner, as I shall show you example by the property of some beasts, as you may see by these cur dogs; of

¹⁷⁷ Cynthia Ho, “As Good as Her Word: Women’s Language in The Knight of La Tour-Landry,” in *The Rusted Hauberk: Feudal Ideals of Order and their Decline*, ed. Liam O. Purdon and Cindy L. Vitto (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1994), 100-1.

¹⁷⁸ Emphasis mine. *Tache* (n): a characteristic, habit, feature of someone’s disposition; *Ferme* (adj.): first. *MED*, s. v. “tache” (n. (3)); “ferme” (adj.). Wright, ed., *The Book of the Knight of La Tour-Landry*, 18.

¹⁷⁹ The tale in Chapter XIII comes from the Chevalier’s own experience, describing his meeting with a noble lady his father wanted him to wed. The Chevalier found her too frivolous and familiar in her speech and ultimately decided not to marry her because of it. *Ibid.*, 18.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 128.

their nature they groan and bark evermore, but gentle greyhounds do not so. And so ought it to be of gentle men and gentle women.¹⁸¹

While the modern reader might be perplexed by use of the greyhound in this context, a medieval audience would have recognized the breed as a hunting dog that was prized by the nobility. The greyhounds' behavior – in this case, silence – corresponds to their elevated social position with respect to other dogs; through this short analogy, the Chevalier seeks to demonstrate how certain behaviors serve to distinguish gentle men and women, too, from common folk. Whether in man (more specifically, *woman*) or beast, meekness of manner is seen as a natural outgrowth of gentility: “out of a gentle heart should never come villainous word ne deed, for by chiding is known the gentle from the villainous.”¹⁸²

There is a single occasion on which the Chevalier links the term ‘gentle’ with a negative example, in describing the vice of a foolish lady. In Chapter CXX, he tells of a knight's daughter who attempted to impress her suitor by wearing thin, fashionable clothing despite the winter weather. When the knight arrived, he “beheld the color of her all dead and pale” with the chill, while her younger sister, more substantially attired, was in “color fresh and ruddy as a rose.” The knight changed his mind, deciding to marry the younger sister instead. Once they were married, he saw the elder sister more appropriately dressed and realized that she was, in fact, the more beautiful of the two. The knight's new wife explained her sister's folly to her husband thus:

my sister thought well that you should come forto fiance her as for your wife, and forto make her gentle, and small, and fair bodied, she clothed her in a simple cote hardye, not doubled, and it was cold winter, and great frost, and great wind, and that permuueded her color.¹⁸³

Here, the term “gentle” suggests that the elder daughter's clothing was fashionable. This is, perhaps, not in itself a negative, but the fact that the woman chooses fashion over practicality on

¹⁸¹ *Myschaunt* (adj.): unfortunate, unbecoming. *MED*, s. v. “mischaunt” (adj.). *Ibid.*, 126.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 127.

¹⁸³ *Permuueded* (v.): to change completely. *MED*, s. v. “permuen” (v.). *Ibid.*, 167.

a cold winter day reveals her to be foolish. It is not gentle clothing itself that the tale scorns, but rather the pursuit of fashion and vanity above all things. Apart from this example, the Chevalier is consistent with linking gentility with the virtues that he touts throughout his text. In fact, on one occasion, he makes this link explicit, claiming that “who so is a gentle nature desirith naturally gentleness and things virtuous.”¹⁸⁴ For the Chevalier, a gentle lady should be, by her very nature, a virtuous lady.

It might seem that a collection of stories such as this one could easily shift into the realm of entertainment, rather than education; however, the Chevalier works hard to ensure the educational value of his text. He does not simply relate tale after tale, but frequently inserts his voice into the text, delineating for his daughters what moral lesson they ought to take away from each episode. These moralizing supplements do not allow the audience any leeway in interpreting the tales; the Chevalier is the one who determines whether a lady has been wise or foolish, virtuous or wicked. De Gendt comments that the Chevalier provides didactic explanations even when the message of the tale itself is unequivocal.¹⁸⁵ There is some leeway, however, in how the readers might apply these lessons, which are not always specific, to their own lives. This use of *exempla*, while a very popular didactic mode in the late Middle Ages, is very different from the advice found in boys’ conduct texts, which provide a list of “do’s and don’t’s.”¹⁸⁶ The only place where a conduct poem for boys takes this approach is in Caxton’s *Book of Curtesye* with its condemnation of “unthrift Ruskyn gallant.”¹⁸⁷ Ruskyn is meant to be a negative example for the readers of Caxton’s text: he behaves in all the wrong ways. The reader is expected to presume, from what Ruskyn does wrong, what the correct behavior would be in

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 160.

¹⁸⁵ De Gendt, *L’art d’éduquer*, 133.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁸⁷ See discussion in Ch 4. F. J. Furnivall, ed., *Caxton’s Book of Curtesye*, EETS e. s. 3 (London: Oxford University Press, 1868; reprint, Millwood, NY: Kraus Reprint Co., 1973), 45-9.

each circumstance. This analysis is made easier by the advice related in the rest of the poem, which tells the reader more specifically how he must behave. The Chevalier's text, with its many exempla, is not often so explicit. Instead of a short list of behavioral injunctions, the Chevalier provides two hundred pages of tales with commentary. This presumes that his readers are not in a hurry to learn the code of behavior that he promotes, but have the leisure to absorb it over time, applying concepts from his tales to the relevant areas of their lives. This fits in with the models of women's education discussed above, which tend to take place in private, secluded arenas without the immediate pressure to perform to which gentle boys were subject.

The work of Christine de Pizan was also useful in the instruction and formation of young women. Christine a widowed and impoverished noblewoman in France who began writing to support herself.¹⁸⁸ Her works were geared toward the culture and tastes of the French royal court, yet their instructions and advice were transferable to other contexts. The work she is best known for today, *Le Livre des Cité des Dames*, was written in 1404 and quickly followed it with a companion piece, *Le Livre des Trois Vertus*, also known as *Le Trésor de la Cité des Dames*, in the next year, dedicating it to Margaret of Burgundy, the young fiancée of the French dauphin.¹⁸⁹ Christine's work was circulating at the English court not long after it was written: Alice, Duchess of Suffolk, who had a personal copy of *Le Livre des Cité des Dames*.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁸ Christine de Pizan, *The Treasure of the City of Ladies*, xv-xvi.

¹⁸⁹ Christine de Pizan, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, trans. Earl Jeffrey Richards (New York: Persea Books, 1982), xxv. Roberta Krueger, "Chascune selon son estat: Women's Education and Social Class in the Conduct Books of Christine de Pizan and Anne de France" *Papers on French Seventeenth Century Literature* 24: 46 (1997), 21. Christine de Pizan, *The Treasure of the City of Ladies*, xviii.

¹⁹⁰ Charity Cannon Willard, "A Fifteenth-Century View of Women's Role in Medieval Society: Christine de Pizan's *Livre des Trois Vertus*" in *The Role of Women in the Middle Ages*, ed. Rosmarie Thee Morewedge (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1975), 114. While there is no documentary evidence linking them to the text, a number of manuscript copies of the *Livre des Trois Vertus* can be found in locations associated with Margaret's sisters, one of whom married the Duke of Bedford (and Regent of France) during the second quarter of the fifteenth century. Charity Cannon Willard, "The Manuscript Tradition of the *Livres des Trois Vertus* and Christine de Pizan's Audience" *Journal of the History of Ideas* 27 (1966), 437-8. Gardiner, *English Girlhood*, 99-100.

The fact that Christine's work circulated so widely is not surprising. She was a professional writer, supporting herself and her family by her literary output. For this reason alone, it can be assumed that she hoped for the wide distribution of all her works. But her intentions for her work do not need to be presumed, for Christine wrote about them herself at the conclusion of the *Livre des Trois Vertus*:

And therefore I . . . thought to myself that I would distribute many copies of this work throughout the world whatever the cost, and it would be presented in various places to queens, princesses and great ladies, so that it might be more honoured and exalted, for it is worthy of it, and it might be spread among other women. This idea would ensure its being issued and circulated in all countries. As it is in the French tongue and as that language is more common throughout the world than any other, this work will not remain useless and forgotten. It will endure in many copies all over the world without falling into disuse, and many valiant ladies and women of authority will see and hear it now and in time to come.¹⁹¹

Christine is not shy about relating her high opinion of her work (of course, this is cloaked in a trope of false humility, for she claims to have written this book at the behest and in the voices of the Ladies Reason, Rectitude and Justice). Since she expresses this desire for its dissemination, and presented it to a well-connected noble patroness, it is not surprising that her work did end up in the hands of ladies on foreign shores.

The *Livre des Cité des Dames* presents stories pulled from Scripture, history, legend, and hagiography to demonstrate the virtue of women as a sex. It cannot be construed as a conduct text, though there is a short section at the end in which Christine outlines her thoughts on how those virtues should apply to real women.¹⁹² The themes she stresses are similar to those of the Chevalier: attainment of virtue and subordination to one's husband. The difference is that the Chevalier is far more explicit, using his many interjections into the text to explain how his readers – particularly his own daughters – should apply these concepts to their lives. Apart from these few concluding paragraphs, Christine does not stop to give guidance to her readers. The

¹⁹¹ Christine de Pizan, *The Treasure of the City of Ladies*, 167-8.

¹⁹² Christine de Pizan, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, 254-5.

discussion of women's virtue in the text remains cloaked in allegory, as a conversation between Christine and her three personified virtues, and does not attempt to ground itself in real women's lives.

A different approach is taken in the *Livre des Trois Vertus* which delineates standards of conduct for women of every social rank and marital status, from the princess to the prostitute, the young virgin to the elderly widow. Age is also an important consideration for Christine: she explains how an elderly widow, for example, should conduct herself differently from a young one.¹⁹³ While Christine demonstrates what Sarah Lawson calls "a medieval penchant for all-inclusiveness,"¹⁹⁴ the bulk of her text is geared toward women of higher rank, with the first of three parts for "noble princesses," the second for noble- and gentlewomen of less elite status, and the third for various ranks of commoners, beginning with the wives of wealthy merchants and townsmen and ending with common laborers. Charity Cannon Willard argues that the stress on "princesses" was likely due to the dedication of the text to the young Margaret of Burgundy – one of the text's primary purposes was to instruct this particular princess in her eventual duties. In that sense, it can be seen as belonging to the mirrors of princes genre of conduct text.¹⁹⁵ Christine defines the term "princess" somewhat broadly, including empresses, queens, duchesses, and countesses among them – perhaps seeking to include Margaret's peers among her readership.¹⁹⁶ She defines the second part of the text as relating to the lives of "ladies and maidens and ordinary women, both those who dwell at the courts of princesses . . . and those who live on their own lands in castles, manors, walled towns and fortified cities."¹⁹⁷ Between the first two sections, three-quarters of the text is devoted to the description of gentle conduct. Even

¹⁹³ Christine de Pizan, *The Treasure of the City of Ladies*, 140-4.

¹⁹⁴ Sarah Lawson, "Introduction," in *ibid.*, xxi.

¹⁹⁵ Willard, "A Fifteenth-Century View," 99-100.

¹⁹⁶ Christine de Pizan, *The Treasure of the City of Ladies*, 109.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 87.

though Christine describes some of the royal servants addressed in part two as “ordinary women,” they required the same training as the country baroness or chatelaine because they moved in gentle company. Although Christine does not use the term, much of her book is devoted to gentle conduct.

Her advice to each of these categories of women is very specific. There are certainly some preachy passages harping on the cultivation of individual virtues, but they are generally grounded in the very real details of women’s lives. Early in the text she describes how a high-born princess might succumb to certain temptations, setting the scene in vivid detail:

When a princess or high-born lady wakes up in the morning, she sees herself lying luxuriously in her bed between soft sheets, surrounded by rich accoutrements and everything for bodily comfort, and ladies-in-waiting around her focusing all their attention on her and seeing that she lacks for nothing, ready to run to her if she gives the least sigh or if she breathes a word, their knees flexed to administer any service to her and obey all her commands.¹⁹⁸

The conduct advice she provides is just as specific. In a section on how the elderly chaperone of a young married woman should comport herself, Christine discusses the older woman’s behavior if a man should make improper advances toward her charge, if those advances should be accepted, and even provides a letter of resignation that the chaperone might use if forced to choose between maintaining her lady’s privacy and upholding the family’s honor.¹⁹⁹ And in the section dedicated to the country baroness, Christine offers minute advice on the day-to-day administration of the lady’s estate, including recommendations like: “She will set her young lads to cutting wood for heating the manor house or clearing fallow fields, but if the weather is too inclement she will have them thresh in the barn.”²⁰⁰ While the *Livre des Cité des Dames* offers models for the female readers to follow, the *Livre des Trois Vertus* quite plainly spells out how that advice might be applied to their daily lives.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 65-85.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 114.

The primary focus of Christine's advice in the latter text is the maintenance of hierarchy and order, whether social (behaving in accordance with one's rank), domestic (submission to one's husband), or natural (having respect for the elderly). While modern scholars often consider the *Livre des Cité des Dames* as an expression of feminism that would not seem out of place in the women's movements of the twentieth century, the *Livre des Trois Vertus* demonstrates Christine's inherent conservatism. While she lauds the great capabilities of women in the former work, she uses the latter to insist that these capabilities be used only within their proper place in the social hierarchy.²⁰¹ Wives are instructed to honor and respect their husbands in all things, whether or not they receive love and respect in return:

Suppose that the husband, of whatever class he may be, has extremely perverse and rude behavior. Suppose he is unloving towards his wife or strays into a love affair with some other woman. If the wife cannot remedy the situation, she must put up with all this and dissimulate wisely, pretending that she does not notice it and that she truly does not know anything about it.²⁰²

Christine believes that it is a wife's duty to uphold her end of the marital bargain, regardless of whether her husband holds up his; each must answer for their own conduct independently. Likewise, a servant – in this particular case, a lady-in-waiting – is obliged to love and faithfully serve her mistress, regardless of that mistress' behavior: "If you ask, 'But truly, if my master or mistress is a bad person or doesn't treat me very well, am I still obliged to love her?' We answer you, 'Yes, certainly.'"²⁰³ The young are enjoined to respect their elders, and older women are expected to guide the conduct of any young ones in their care.²⁰⁴

Honor is the primary reward a woman will earn by maintaining her proper place in these various hierarchies. Christine is not a fan of social posturing – she quite often speaks

²⁰¹ Willard, "A Fifteenth-Century View," 116.

²⁰² This is given in the first part of the text, containing Christine's advice to noble princesses, but even later on, when addressing women of more humble status, she refers them back to this same chapter, suggesting that a wife's duty to her husband is the same regardless of social rank. Christine de Pizan, *The Treasure of the City of Ladies*, 38.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 89.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 65-85, 150-3.

disparagingly of those ladies who attempt to step above their station, particularly with respect to clothing. She laments that “in the old days duchesses dared not wear the gowns of queens, nor countesses those of duchesses, nor ordinary ladies those of countesses, nor young women those of older ladies. But nowadays those rules are in disarray and women wear anything, for no one keeps to the rules in gowns or head-dresses.”²⁰⁵ In another section she explains that this is “indubitably a thing contrary to good public order, in which, in any country, if it is well regulated everything ought to be within limits.”²⁰⁶ While a great lady who humbles herself is to be commended, the lady who grasps at what is not hers earns only ridicule.²⁰⁷ She goes into great detail describing the excesses of a particular Parisian grocer’s wife at her lying-in, her chamber replete with sumptuous cloths and jewels that would be more appropriate at the court of the queen of France. Christine concludes that “such a circumstance is not in the right order of things and comes from presumption and not from good sense, for those men and women who do these things acquire from them not esteem but contempt.”²⁰⁸ A woman is also advised not to scorn her husband if he was born to a lower rank than she: Christine cites particularly the daughters of gentlemen who are married to rich burgesses or merchants and “through a lack of sense and a great deal of pride . . . regard their husbands as peasants compared to them.”²⁰⁹ She advises that, by humbling themselves and respecting their husbands whatever their rank, these women will earn greater honor for themselves. Over and over again, Christine’s stress is on keeping things in the proper order. The woman who is successful in keeping to her place, fulfilling her own social and marital role to the best of her ability, brings her honor and esteem.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 115.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 132.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 5, 254-5.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 138.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 120.

Christine devotes an entire chapter to the importance of honor and the role of proper conduct in achieving it. While this is a rather lengthy passage, its importance to our purpose makes it worth reproducing here:

For this reason the wise princess will say to herself, 'Above all earthly things, there is nothing that is so becoming to noble people [as] honour. But what things,' she will ask, 'are necessary for genuine honour?'

'Certainly, properly speaking, it is not worldly riches, at least if they are used according to the common custom of the world; indeed, to be more precise, they are quite the least important thing that goes to perfect one's honour.'

'And what things therefore are more suitable?'

'In truth they are good manners and behaviour.'

'And what is the use of these good manners and behavior?'

'They perfect the noble person and cause her to be well regarded. And that is the absolutely perfect honour, for there is no doubt at all that whatever qualities may be in a prince or in a princess or any other person, if he does not lead a life by which he acquires praise, honour and a good reputation by doing good, he entirely lacks honour, although he may be led to think he has it by the flattery of his cronies, for true honour must be without reproach.'

'And how should the great lady love this honour?'

'Certainly more than her life, for she ought to lose it sooner than her honour. There is a good reason for this, for whoever dies is well saved, but whoever is dishonoured is reproached dead and alive forever for as long as there is any memory of her. Oh, what a very great treasure a princess or any other lady has who possesses an honourable reputation! Certainly there is nothing so great in this world that she could have and nothing she should so much love to accumulate, for ordinary treasure is only useful when it is around her person, but that of a good name serves her both near and far, and raises her honour throughout the land. A lady's good reputation is like a great odour from the body of some creature that spreads abroad throughout the world in such a way that all people may smell it. In just this way by the odour of the good reputation, which everywhere flows out from a good person, all people can have a scent of a good example.'²¹⁰

A lady's honour is her most important asset, something that can benefit not only her own life but the lives of those who will admire and imitate her, and good manners are the means by which she may perfect this essential quality. This is, perhaps, why Christine spends so much effort denouncing the doctrine of courtly love, which she argues can only result in a woman's dishonor. She claims that, while men will argue that the noble deeds that they do in their ladies' names serve to honor those ladies, they do far more to promote the men and their careers. On the lady's end, the courtly love relationship only opens her up to suggestions of infidelity and unchastity,

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 28-9.

whether or not any improper advances were made. For a woman, the ultimate result of a love affair can only be dishonor, so such relationships must be avoided at all costs.²¹¹

Overall, the advice Christine provides for gentle girls in the *Livre des Trois Vertus* is very specific – far more so than at the end of the *Livre des Cité des Dames*. And where the Chevalier provides moral *exempla* with instructive commentary, in this text Christine simply lays out how different classes of women ought to conduct themselves in certain, often very specific, situations. In some ways, the *Livre des Trois Vertus* is very similar to the English conduct texts written for gentle boys. A young female reader could flip to the chapters that applied to her rank and learn exactly how she should act. Yet there is a significant difference in length between these works: while a gentle boy could consult a poem of a few dozen lines for conduct advice, Christine's *Livre* is one hundred sixty-eight pages in its most recent English translation. Not all of the information in these pages is presented plainly – often Christine surrounds her direct behavioral admonitions with lengthy sermonizing, requiring the reader to sift through each paragraph to get at the nugget of practical information concealed within. The *Livre des Trois Vertus*, like the *Livre des Cité des Dames*, is a work that is meant to be read and contemplated over a long period of time, not a quick-and-dirty reference guide like the English conduct poems for boys.

There is one French text that does offer a similar sort of instruction to the English texts for gentle boys: known as *Le Ménagier de Paris*, this late fourteenth-century text (c. 1394) purports to have been written by an elderly husband to instruct his teenage wife in her household duties.²¹² This treatise was divided into three parts: the first imparting the same sort of religious and moral advice as the Chevalier and Christine de Pizan; the second providing a practical

²¹¹ Christine's impassioned plea to young ladies to avoid the pitfalls of courtly love come in the voice of an elderly servant writing a letter of caution to her young mistress. Later in the text, Christine warns women of lesser rank against love affairs as well. *Ibid.*, 78-85, 134.

²¹² Krueger, "Identity Begins at Home," 22.

manual on the management of a wealthy Parisian household touching on cooking, cleaning, gardening and the hiring and management of servants; and the third, which was never completed, discussing the leisure activities of elite, including hawking, parlour games and astrology.²¹³ The specific detail that the *Ménagier* provides about his wife's expected conduct and duties parallels the instruction English gentle boys received in the conduct poems discussed in the previous chapter. Unfortunately, this exceptionally rich text cannot be considered a source for the transmission of gentility to girls in England for two reasons. *Le Ménagier de Paris* is a bourgeois text, discussing the maintenance of an urban household. Despite his wealth, he does not seem to aspire to greater rank, cautioning his wife not to stray outside her own social circle. Even the leisure activities he discusses, while imitating those of elite courtly society, do so in moderation – as Bornstein points out, the *Ménagier* stays within his social boundaries even here, since “hunting with the hawk was less expensive than other forms of the chase and was popular among wealthy members of the bourgeoisie.”²¹⁴ Secondly, and even more importantly, no manuscript of the *Ménagier* circulated in England. In fact, even in France only four manuscripts survive, suggesting that it was not a particularly popular text even in its own context.²¹⁵ The *Ménagier* has immense scholarly value as a snapshot of an idealized bourgeois household in fourteenth-century Paris, but its content should not be discussed in the context of English education. While the Chevalier and Christine de Pizan also wrote for a French audience, and therefore were not intended to reflect English social norms, the fact that their works circulated in England (if only in

²¹³ Bornstein, *Lady in the Tower*, 53-9.

²¹⁴ Bornstein, *Lady in the Tower*, 58.

²¹⁵ Three of the surviving copies were produced during the fifteenth century. There is also a sixteenth-century paper manuscript version. Gina Greco and Christine Rose, the most recent editors of the text, argue that the fact that this was produced as a manuscript rather than a printed book suggests that it was produced at the behest of a single patron but was not felt to have wider marketability. Gina L. Greco and Christine M. Rose, eds., *The Good Wife's Guide: Le Ménagier de Paris: A Medieval Household Book* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2009), 2-3.

a limited way) indicates that their advice was relevant to an English audience in a way that the *Ménagier*'s was not.

I have focused on these French texts because they are the closest texts to providing conduct advice specific to girls of gentle rank that would have circulated in England during the late Middle Ages. Yet much of the advice they imparted was of such a general nature that it opens the door for the consideration of many other kinds of texts which may similarly have been used for instructive purposes. If the feminine model of gentility was submission to social and domestic hierarchies and living in accordance with Christian morality and virtue, any number of normative texts could fall into this category – not as conduct texts per se, but as instruction in the practice of gentility. How different, for example, is the sermonizing of Christine de Pizan against the temptations that might ensnare a young princess from the exhortations of Jesus against the seven deadly sins or from the paraphrase of the vanity portion of the Book of Ecclesiastes – both text found alongside conduct poems in Bodleian Library MS Ashmole 61?²¹⁶ If the conduct advice that was given to gentle girls during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries was so general, the range of texts which could be construed as instructing them in their social and domestic role is vast indeed.

²¹⁶ Ashmole 61 is a lengthy manuscript from the time of Henry VII containing many texts. While it does contain several romances, most of the texts are religious or moral in nature. Toward the beginning of the manuscript are a father's moral instructions to his son (beginning "Lordings and ye will hear"), a mother's instructions to her daughter (beginning "Listen and lythe* a little space"), a version of *Stans puer ad mensam* and Dame Courtesy's moral instructions (beginning: "Who so ever will thrive or the** / Must virtues learn and courteous be"). Among the many religious contents, several have a potential instructive purpose: the aforementioned exhortations of Jesus against the seven deadly sins and the vanities section of the Book of Ecclesiastes, two versions of a lay on the commandments, the seven penitential psalms, and the poem *The Pricke of Conscience* (often ascribed to Richard Rolle). Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Ashmole 61. **Lithe* (v): to listen, be attentive; ***The* (v.): thrive, flourish, prosper. *MED*, s. v. "lithen" (v. (3)), def. a; "then" (v.), def. 1a.

Arundel 168: A Gentle Woman's Conduct Book?

It seems that, unlike men, women who wished to be accepted in gentle society had to acquire the necessary skills piecemeal, gleaning broader concepts from a variety of lengthy texts, rather than having a quick list of specific behavioral injunctions written down for them. As discussed above, these precepts could be found in a variety of texts. In a sense, there were almost too many ways for a gentle girl or woman to learn what was required of her – how was one to whittle down this surfeit into something more manageable? I would like to argue that one manuscript, British Library MS Arundel 168, endeavors to do exactly that – to gather a selection of texts that, together, could provide a girl or woman with the tools she needed to succeed in gentle society.

Though a large folio manuscript, Arundel 168 is unassuming. This was something to be read at home, rather than carried around for reference. Its grandeur, however, ends with its size. The text is written in a single hand in two neat columns throughout, with between forty and forty-six lines per column; the words are not crammed together to make the most of the space, but they certainly do not waste any. The decoration is also suggestive of economy – the first page includes larger initial capitals painted in red and blue. The first initial capital of the manuscript is the largest, taking up two entire lines (the other capitals spill slightly over the edges of a single line), with a crudely drawn face inside the initial C (perhaps representing Christ, whose name that letter begins?) and some faint scroll-work in the margin. This scant adornment ends abruptly – from the second column of the first folio through the end of the manuscript, spaces are left, but the initial capitals were never drawn in. The whole picture is of controlled luxury: whoever commissioned this work was well-off enough to hire a professional scribe to complete a bespoke manuscript, but balked at the cost (or the wastefulness?) of excessive adornment. While such a

manuscript was always a luxury, this particular example is not overly luxurious. Overall, it is suggestive of a client of comfortable, but not substantial, means.

Arundel 168 contains eleven distinct texts: an abecedarius (by stanza) prayer to the Virgin Mary, in eight-line stanzas; the legend of St Christine, in eight-line stanzas; the legend of St Dorothy, in eight-line stanzas; two short prayers to St Dorothy; the Latin text of Cato's morals, interspersed with Middle English poetic commentary in eight-line stanzas; seven seven-line stanzas on the virtues: (prudence, justice, temperance, discretion, reason, pleasance²¹⁷ and good will, courtesy and nurture); a short section of Lydgate's *Dietary*; Capgrave's legend of St Katherine, in seven-line stanzas; a short prayer to St Katherine in prose; and an incomplete version of Lydgate's life of the Virgin Mary. With the exception of the prayers to St Dorothy and parts of Cato's morals, all of the texts are in English, and nearly all are poetic. The manuscript shows a remarkable consistency across the texts – the same hand, the same two-column format, a predominance of English verse throughout – which is suggestive of a compiler with a single purpose. This is not a miscellaneous collection of texts that were gathered over time – the texts in Arundel 168 were chosen deliberately and commissioned to form a coherent whole.

I believe that Arundel 168 was designed to instruct a girl or young woman in gentle conduct. The choice of texts is consistent with the instructive literature discussed above – the themes include general behavioral precepts (not exclusive to a particular social rank or occasion), an emphasis on the virtues, and models of good behavior to be imitated. While none of the advice is specifically targeted to gentlewomen, the choice of *exempla* – Saints Christine, Dorothy, Katherine and the Virgin Mary – suggests this manuscript was meant for a female readership. These holy women provide appropriate models of virtuous behavior for a young girl to aspire to. This is similar to the format chosen by the Chevalier de La Tour Landry, omitting

²¹⁷ *Pleasaunce* (n): pleasure, joy, happiness. *MED*, s. v. "pleasaunce" (n. (1)), def. 3a.

his negative examples. It also follows the educative model described by Christine de Pizan in the *Livre des Trois Vertus*: “A young girl should also especially venerate Our Lady, St Catherine, and all virgins, and if she can read, eagerly read their biographies.”²¹⁸ After reading the lives of these holy women, the reader was meant to perceive their virtues and imitate them herself.

Several elements of the manuscript itself point to its genesis as a teaching text. Nearly every text in the manuscript is written in poetic stanzas, with an ABAB rhyme scheme. The rhythm of the poetry, though not always well executed, would have served as an *aide memoire*, with extra reinforcement from the end rhymes. Furthermore, there is some reinforcement from the texts themselves. The initial prayer to the Virgin is explicitly a teaching text – the abecedarius stanzas intended to teach the reader the letters of the alphabet. The text itself reveals this intent at its outset:

Christ god me speed now in my little treatise
And give me grace so for to learn
My ABC that I may have a release
Of my sins & that I may so yearn
It can to save me from the inferno²¹⁹

This poem aims to teach the reader her ABCs by means of a prayer which served to spiritually amplify that very learning. Presumably, once the budding reader had mastered the initial prayer, she would move on to the other texts in the manuscript, acquiring knowledge of gentle and virtuous behavior as she learned this essential skill.

Several of the texts in this manuscript are explicit in their promotion of the virtues. The prayer to the Virgin exhorts:

Help me lowly lady somewhat to endyte
And send me English to your pleasaunce
That as by my writing I may me so quyte
Of my sins that I may have allegeaunce
And in virtues so me always to enhance

²¹⁸ Christine de Pizan, *The Treasure of the City of Ladies*, 146.

²¹⁹ British Library, MS Arundel 168, fol. 1r.

That my soul be sithe when my body is on bier
 Thereof I you beseech my heart's lady dear²²⁰

The phrase “by my writing” suggests that this is the personal exhortation of the author of the poem,²²¹ but any reader passing over the phrase would mutter the same prayer, asking the same virtues for herself.²²² The poetic commentary on Cato's morals asserts that its mission is to teach the “virtuous governance” that has been forgotten by so many:

When I me advertise in my remembrance
 And how fele folk err greuously
 In the way of virtuous governance,
 I have supposed in myself that I
 Ought to support and counsel prudently
 Them to be glorious in living
 And how they shall themselves to honor bring

 Therefore my leef I shall teach thee
 Harken me well remain and thee gyse
 How thy soul inward shall acquainted be
 With thewes good and virtue in all wise
 Bede and conceyue for he is to despise
 That readeth ay and wote not what it meant
 Such reading is not but wind misspent.²²³

The *vitae* in the text do not neglect to emphasize the virtues either. Among the exemplary qualities of St Christine, for example, her virtuous nature is particularly highlighted: “Such grace of God for sooth had she / To flee all vice and wekes wild / And fully proposed her to be / God's own servant and maid unsoiled.”²²⁴ And then, of course, there are the “seven stanzas on the

²²⁰ *Endyte* (v.): to write or compose; *Pleasaunce* (n): pleasure, joy, happiness; *Quyte* (v.): expiate, make amends for; *Allegeaunce* (n.): mitigation, relief; *Sithe* (v.): to travel, journey (in this case, to heaven); *Bede* (v.): beg, demand, wish; *Conceyue* (v.): take in, observe, notice. *MED*, s. v. “enditen” (v.), def. 1; “pleasaunce” (n. (1)), def. 3a; “quiten” (v.), def. 1e; “allegeaunce” (n.), def. 1; “sithen” (v. (2)); “beden” (v.), 6; “conceiven” (v.), defs. 3, 5. BL MS Arundel 168, fol. 1r.

²²¹ The author seems to have been named John Maron, for the end of the prayer reads: “So pray for John Maron & also for me [presumably referring to the reader] / That our souls be safe.” *Ibid.*, fol. 1v.

²²² Even at the end of the Middle Ages, much reading was still done aloud, or at least by silently forming the words with one's lips. This would serve to blur the distinctions between reading the text of a prayer and the act of praying. Paul Saenger, “Silent Reading: Its Impact on Late Medieval Script and Society” *Viator* 13 (1982): 379-80, 397-8.

²²³ *Fele* (adj.): deceitful, false, wicked; *Leef* (n.): beloved, dear; *Gyse* (v.): prepare oneself; *Thewes* (n.): habits, manners, conduct; *Wote* (v.): knew; *Ay* (adv.): always. *MED*, s. v. “fel” (adj.), def. 1; “lef” (n. (2)), def. 1a; “gisen” (v.), def. 1b; “theu” (n. (1)), def. 1, 3; “witen” (v. (1)), def. 1; “ai” (adv.), def. 1 BL MS Arundel 168, fol. 7r.

²²⁴ *Wekes* (n.): dwellings, areas. *MED*, s. v. “wike” (n.). BL MS Arundel 168, fol. 2r.

virtues,” each promoting the importance of an individual quality, from prudence to justice to discretion. The primacy of the virtues was emphasized to the reader of Arundel 168 at every turn of the page.

Gentility as such is not an explicit theme of this manuscript, although it promotes the same generic conduct advice as the French texts discussed in the previous section. It does come up, however, in the stanza on “courtesy and nurture:” “This good lady called courtesy / And her sister which named is nurture / By thy office belong to gentry.”²²⁵ Since all of these didactic texts can be collected into the category of “nurture,” presumably they all instruct their readers in gentility. As was discussed in Chapter 4, one of the defining aspects of gentility in the poems for boys is control: control of one’s body, of one’s emotions, of one’s baser instincts. Living one’s life in accordance with the virtues would require such control: restraining the urge to sin or to overthrow the social order and keeping the soul on the path to salvation.

Arundel 168 has many of the hallmarks of a manuscript intended to provide instruction to a girl who was gentle or had pretensions to gentility. It is more difficult to locate potential conduct texts for gentle girls than those for boys because they are less direct, providing general guidelines of behavior more often than specific admonitions. When the understanding of what constitutes conduct advice is expanded, it becomes apparent that there were many texts from which girls could garner an understanding of gentility and its behavioral expectations. Yet it must be stressed that these texts were, ultimately, supplemental. A girl’s primary training was undocumented, as it took place informally under the tutelage of her mother or mistress. The dearth of information on girls’ formal education (as compared with what is available for boys) makes sense if the majority of their learning was, in fact, informal. Most of the conduct texts that do exist tend to support this explanation. *The Good Wyf Wold a Pylgremage* was written to

²²⁵ BL MS Arundel 168, fol. 14r.

instruct a daughter during her mother's long absence – possibly forever, if a pilgrimage to the Holy Land was intended, which was a long and arduous journey from which return was not a guarantee. The *Ménagier*'s text, too, is meant for a girl in unusual circumstances; his wife was an orphan, without a mother to provide her basic education, so her elderly husband takes this responsibility upon himself and writes a treatise to assist her.²²⁶ The Chevalier de la Tour Landry did the same for his three daughters whose mother was long dead; his text even provides them with their mothers' voice in the sections where he relates his late wife's beliefs and hopes for her daughters' future.²²⁷ These texts attest that a girl was meant to rely upon her mother (or a surrogate mother-figure, like step-mother or the mistress of the noble household that she served) as the primary source of her education, and only upon written texts when her mother was unavailable. Otherwise, written texts like Christine de Pizan's *Livre des Trois Vertus* or the contents of Arundel 168 simply served to supplement and reinforce her mother's teachings.

The ways in which young gentle boys and girls were educated, teaching them to behave consistently with their status, can explain why a certain specific sort of text was not written for gentle girls in England before the sixteenth century. There is a clear connection between the educational needs of each gender and the format of advice provided for them. Gentle boys were, essentially, on stage during their educational process, competing for future careers and patronage from an early age. They had to learn quickly and get things right from the beginning in order to establish and preserve their reputations. This necessitated a more straightforward, specific style of advice. Gentle girls, on the other hand, were more likely to be educated in a more secluded

²²⁶ Bornstein, *Lady in the Tower*, 43.

²²⁷ The Chevalier mentions his wife several times, but the most comprehensive rehearsal of his wife's opinions comes in their debate over courtly love, in chapters CXXII to CXXXIII. Wright, ed., *The Book of the Knight of La Tour-Landry*, 171-86.

setting, where they could be afforded some leeway to make mistakes. Thus, girls were taught more loosely, provided with models to imitate. Girls were provided with morals and virtues and left to determine how to transfer them into manners and behavior on their own; boys were given instruction in manners and behavior, the morals and virtues left to develop from them later on.

A modern man applying for a job expects, the majority of the time, to be interviewed by strangers. Since the interviewers do not know about his past, he is able to present his best self to them, highlighting his highest achievements and accomplishments rather than the rocky road he took to get to them. This process did not exist in late medieval England. Most boys were pointed down an occupational path at a young age.²²⁸ A boy sent to a noble household to earn patronage and carve out a future position for himself was under enormous pressure, particularly in the period of great social opportunity that existed during the fifteenth century. His learning, taking place simultaneously with his service, necessarily did so in a public forum, where all of his errors and missteps would be within view of those he sought to impress. He was in the spotlight from the very first day he arrived. The content of conduct texts bears this out: so many of the instructions given to page boys focus on their behavior while serving at table in the lord's hall. This was an extremely high-pressure environment for a young boy seeking advancement – he was surrounded by the entire household, including his social and occupational superiors. If he behaved in an inappropriate manner – wagging his head about, talking and laughing loudly, scratching himself, sneezing on his companions' food – it was within view of everyone. When the time came for him to secure a position, these indiscretions might be remembered, tarnishing his reputation. This is why the conduct poems for boys in noble households emphasize earning

²²⁸ This is not meant to imply that a boy's occupational path was permanent and immutable. The point is that the location and manner of educational training would suit a boy for a career in a particular arena, such as business, law, lordship, noble or royal service, or the church. While a boy educated in a grammar school or monastery could certainly find himself in noble service in the future, a boy sent to a noble household at a young age would have an advantage in securing himself such a position.

“a gentle name full soon;” it was easy for a youthful carelessness to damage an adult reputation.²²⁹

Boys who received their education in a schoolroom, rather than a household, had a more sequestered experience. They made their mistakes in the presence of their fellows and the schoolmaster, out of the public eye. When they embarked upon their future careers as artisans, merchants or even gentlemen, their schoolboy failings were left behind them, in the secluded schoolroom. Whether that schoolroom was in a monastery, attached to a cathedral complex or some sort of secular educational institution, the experience would be the same. Of course, this educational experience was not completely confidential: a boy would still make his missteps in the presence of his peers. These boys would grow up to be his partners, guild brothers, and neighbors. Yet failing in front of one’s peers is perhaps not as serious as doing so under the eyes of one’s superiors and future employers. A boy sequestered in a schoolroom was not under the same pressure to perform perfectly as one serving in a noble household, hoping to impress his future patron. The conduct texts directed at this group bear this out: poems for a bourgeois audience like *How the Wise Man Taught His Son* and the *Young Children’s Book* tend to mix general moral guidelines with specific behavioral advice. This approach was appropriate for those boys reading the poems in the lower-pressure environment of the schoolroom, rather than those actually attempting to function in the courtly environment many of the poems describe.

Most girls were educated under very different conditions. Whether a girl was educated at home by her mother or a private tutor, in a convent or schoolroom, or in a noble household under the supervision of a noble lady, she was not in the spotlight.²³⁰ If she behaved immodestly,

²²⁹ Furnivall, ed., *The Babees Book*, 5, ll. 115-6.

²³⁰ Phillips argues that the “circumscribed existence” of these unmarried damsels might explain their predilection for courtly romances in which maidens took on an active, even adventurous role. These texts allowed them to escape the dullness of their day-to-day experience. Phillips, *Medieval Maidens*, 118-9.

lacking the appropriate maidenly virtues, few had the opportunity to see. Respectively, she might be witnessed by her tutor and immediate family; her schoolmaster or mistress and fellow students; her lady mistress and fellow gentlewomen. The arenas in which most girls learned how to embody their gentility were smaller, more private, screened off from the wider world, where any blunders could be easily concealed. At the same time, the stakes were lower for a girl than for her brothers: in most cases, she sought marriage, rather than employment, and securing a good match was only partially dependent upon her character. Wealth and family connections were other considerations. While a girl might decrease her currency on the marriage market through recurring inappropriate behavior, occasional errors and indiscretions, if they managed to become public, might still be overlooked. Girls were simply not under pressure to behave as well as quickly as boys, particularly those boys in service in noble households during the fifteenth century.

Gentle girls, therefore, did not need the sort of conduct advice that gentle boys did. Gentle girls did not need a quick, down-and-dirty guide describing how to put on a good face in front of a hall full of critics; they could afford a more leisurely learning process. Instead, the conduct texts directed at girls discussed morality, detailing the virtues and vices, and providing models of good and bad behavior. In *The Book of the Knight of the Tower*, the anecdotes are clearly labeled: this is a good woman and this is a bad woman. How a girl could become a good woman, demonstrating her virtue and goodness through her behavior, is only rarely articulated – she is left to figure it out for herself based on the accumulated examples. As a gentle girl read a manuscript like Arundel 168, she would glean an understanding of virtue from the models of Saints Christine, Dorothy and Katherine, and from the invocations of Cato. Once she shaped those virtues within herself, she presumably would understand how to behave correctly

according to her status. The high-pressure environment of the noble household simply did not allow boys to follow the same course – they were to behave properly first, and hope the virtues came after. It is less, therefore, that the historical record has left a gap in conduct advice for gentle girls, than that boys of the same rank had very specific needs that generic conduct and advice texts were simply unable to address. The existing literature was sufficient for the needs of gentle women, but the changing social environment of the later Middle Ages required something more for the training of gentle men.

Chapter 6

Gentility and Language

In 1486, a small and short-lived English press printed a text later known as the *Book of St Albans*. At first glance, it appears to be a characteristic late medieval miscellany. Its contents – treatises on hunting, hawking, and heraldic blazoning, a book on arms-bearing, and a variety of shorter texts – initially seem to be an assorted jumble. Yet further investigation of these contents reveals an important theme running through them: gentility.¹ Like the conduct poems discussed in the previous chapters, these texts provide a young or socially ambitious man or woman with the tools necessary to circulate effectively in gentle society. While conduct poems focus on teaching civility and bodily comportment, the texts compiled in the *Book of St. Albans* (hereafter referred to as *BSA*) focus on imparting the basics of gentle culture. These are the topics that would have been discussed at table in the lord's hall while following the instructions in manners laid out in the conduct poems. The selection of topics is not haphazard, for several other important themes run through them: all of these texts are preoccupied with language and order. In this chapter, I will analyze the seemingly-disparate material in the *BSA* to argue that this preoccupation with order was a symptom of the social anxiety that existed during the late fifteenth century. The distinctive vocabulary employed in these leisure activities was an attempt by the gentle to increase their exclusivity, providing an easy way to distinguish the established ingroup from the socially ambitious outgroup. Ultimately, the appearance of the *BSA*, a printed work in English disseminating these texts, served to undermine this purpose, making gentility a commodity to be consumed by an expanding segment of society. By explaining the origins of the

¹ E. F. Jacob seems to be the first to have labeled the *BSA* in this way. Jacob, "The Book of St Albans" *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 28 (1944): 103.

BSA, its audience, and the significance of its emphases on language and order, the instability of the boundary between gentle and common at this moment of social opportunity will be revealed.

The *Book of St Albans* and its Sources

The *BSA* is an incunable of eighty-nine folios containing the aforementioned texts on hunting, hawking, arms-bearing, and heraldic blazoning that was printed in 1486. The colophon, a printer's mark of a double cross and globe containing a shield blazoned with a St Andrew's cross with the words "Sanctus albanus" beneath, provide the only identification of the printer.² This printer seems to be the key figure in compiling the *BSA*, which does not have a single manuscript source. Few of its texts exist in the same form in other places and there is no extant manuscript which contains an identical collection of texts. The *BSA* is a unique development created by its printer to serve a particular market. The decisions made by that printer in choosing these particular texts and printing them in English to be available for a wide audience can provide us with information on the social trends he saw unfolding around him.

The printer of the *BSA* is an elusive figure. He ran a small press that produced eight books over the course of about six years (c. 1479 to 1486), six in Latin – an edition of Augustinus Datus, *Libellus super Tullianis elegantis*; a reprint of William Caxton's edition of Laurentius Guglielmus de Saona, *Nova rhetorica*; Thomas de Erfordia, *De modo significandi*; Nicholas of Hanapis, *Exempla sacrae scripturae*; Johannes Canonicus, *Quaestiones in Aristotelis Physica*; and Antonius Andreae, *Scripta super logica* – and two in English – the *Chronicles of England* and the collection that came to be known as the *Book of St Albans*.³ He did not sign his

² William Blades, ed., *The Book of St Albans* (London: Elliot Stock, 1901), f. 89r. William Roberts, *Printers' Marks: A Chapter in the History of Typography* (London: G. Bell, 1893), 54-6.

³ James Moran, "The Book of St Albans" *The Coat of Arms* 8 (1964): 49. Rachel Hands, ed., *English Hunting and Hawking in The Boke of St Albans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), xvi. Norman F. Blake, "The Spread of

works, except for the Datus edition which contains the colophon “Impressum fuit opus hoc apud Sanctum Albanum.”⁴ Slightly more of his identity is revealed by a colophon added by Wynkyn de Worde when he republished the *Chronicles of England* in 1515: “Here endeth this present chronicle of England with the fruit of times; compiled in a book and also imprinted by one sometime schoolmaster of Saint Albans, on whose soul God have mercy.”⁵ Based on this reference, he has often been referred to as the “schoolmaster-printer” of St Albans.

There has been some debate over what de Worde’s colophon means. The straightforward assumption is that this printer was himself a schoolmaster who took up printing in order to serve the market for educational texts in the town of St Albans, which was home to a wealthy Benedictine abbey with an almonry school.⁶ Ready access to printed texts would have been useful to the students of such a school, and all six of the press’ Latin works are educational in nature. These include a series of excerpts modeling Latin composition, a set of lectures on rhetoric, two works on logic, a Biblical commentary, and a commentary on Aristotle’s *Physica*.⁷ Yet these contents were too academic to serve the purposes of a school such as St Albans – these are works that were likely to have been studied by fifteenth-century students pursuing a higher-level education at university. The demand for such books in the vicinity of St Albans would have been limited. Norman Blake contributes the decline of the St Albans press to the absence of just such a ready market for its books, or a useful trade route to one, in the immediate vicinity. The

Printing in England during the Fifteenth Century” *Gutenberg-Jahrbuch* 62 (1987): 29. L. A. J. R. Houwen, “Print into Manuscript: A Manuscript Copy of Part of the *Boke of St. Albans* (1486)” in *Boeken in de late Middeleeuwen*, ed. Jos. M. M. Hermans and Klaas van der Hoek (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1994), 41. Lotte Hellinga notes that the Schoolmaster Printer is the only printer in Europe to publish Antonius Andreae’s works on logic. Hellinga, *William Caxton and Early Printing in England* (London: The British Library, 2010), 91-7.

⁴ Hands, ed., *English Hunting and Hawking*, xvi.

⁵ Moran, “Book of St Albans,” 49.

⁶ For discussion of the St Albans almonry school, see James G. Clark, “Monasteries and Secular Education in Late Medieval England” in *Monasteries and Society in the British Isles in the Later Middle Ages*, ed. Jane Burton and Karen Stöber (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2008), 151-6.

⁷ Hellinga, *William Caxton and Early Printing*, 91-6.

number of copies the press could sell would have been extremely limited without a significant university nearby. It is notable that, even with a ready market near at hand, the contemporary Oxford press of Theodoricus de Rood was just as short-lived.⁸

An alternative theory about the St Albans printer was proposed in the mid-twentieth century, when Lawrence Tanner suggested that the schoolmaster may have been Otwel Fulle, or Fuller, master of scholars at the Almonry of Westminster, who lived within the precincts of Westminster Abbey. In the Abbey precincts there was a house known as “St Alban’s,” located hard by Caxton’s print shop. Tanner concedes, however, that there is no evidence that Fulle actually lived in the St Albans house himself, though he was certainly nearby.⁹ The idea that the schoolmaster-printer (though not necessarily identified with Fulle) operated within Westminster Abbey’s precincts was taken up and expanded by James Moran. Moran found that the technique used by this printer was not particularly good, casting doubt on the idea that his was a full-time, professional operation.¹⁰ Furthermore, Moran recognized that the schoolmaster-printer used types that closely resemble some used by Caxton. Using this evidence, and the fact that there is no evidence of such a printer existing in the town of St Albans, he bolstered Tanner’s theory of a schoolmaster-printer at Westminster near Caxton’s workshop. The brevity of his press’ existence indicates he was someone who dabbled in printing for a time, borrowing Caxton’s equipment to

⁸ Blake, “Spread of Printing,” 26-30. Roberts, *Printers’ Marks*, 54. James G. Clark, “The Regular Clergy” in *A Companion to the Early Book in Britain 1476-1558*, ed. Vincent Gillespie and Susan Powell (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2014), 195.

⁹ Lawrence E. Tanner, “William Caxton’s Houses at Westminster” *The Library*, 5th ser., 12 (1957): 160-1.

¹⁰ I have found conflicting views among scholars on this point. Hellinga contests Moran’s words in her more recent study of early English printed texts, arguing that the schoolmaster-printer’s Latin works were “all expertly typeset and printed.” I am more inclined to trust Hellinga on this point, as she served for many years as Deputy Keeper at the British Library and is recognized as one of the world’s foremost authorities on fifteenth-century books. L. A. J. R. Houwen’s work on the *BSA* may provide an explanation for this disagreement. He notes that “The text is set in what appears to be a reduced version of Caxton’s no. 2, while the headings are set in a larger type, which is indistinguishable from Caxton’s no. 3, but is clearly based on a poor casting.” It was, perhaps, this poorly-cast type that led Moran to malign the schoolmaster-printer’s work. Hellinga, *William Caxton and Early Printing*, 95. Houwen, “Print into Manuscript,” 43.

test the waters, rather than a full-time professional printer.¹¹ While this is a tantalizing theory and does explain the connections between St Albans' and Caxton's presses, it has generally not been accepted, or even discussed, by more recent scholars of early English printing.¹²

Whoever this printer was, operating in St Albans or in Westminster, the publication of the *BSA* and the *Chronicles of England* represented a significant change in direction for his press. His six Latin works were all published between 1479 and 1481, with a five-year hiatus before the two English texts. As described above, the Latin texts were appropriate for an academic audience, but the vernacular texts were quite different - the sorts of works that a well-off English family would enjoy having in their library. The knowledge they provided could be used socially, not just academically. A similar change in direction was taken by De Rood in Oxford at exactly the same time: after producing academic texts for its entire previous history, it printed a popular vernacular work, John Mirk's *Liber Festivalis*, in 1486. Blake suggests the same explanation for the way these printers deviated from their original product lines: without a reliable market for their academic works and desperately reaching for some way to remain solvent, these printers looked to the success of Caxton's press in Westminster and attempted to imitate it. From the beginning, Caxton's business model was to print texts in the vernacular for an elite audience (often translations of popular and socially-desirable continental texts).¹³ Like De Rood in

¹¹ James Moran, "The Book of St Albans and the Schoolmaster Printer" *The Black Art* 2 (1963-1964): 117-124. Moran, "Book of St Albans," 48-53. In her edition of the hunting and hawking texts in the *BSA*, Rachel Hands casts doubt on this hypothesis, agreeing that "There is no real evidence that his press was in any way connected with the Abbey," but adding "nor is there any certain connection with Caxton's press at Westminster." Hands, ed., *English Hunting and Hawking*, xv.

¹² Blake, "The Spread of Printing," 28-30. C. Paul Christianson, "The Rise of London's Book Trade," in *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain, Vol. III 1400-1557*, ed. Lotte Hellinga and J. B. Trapp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 136. Karen Gross, "Hunting, Heraldry and the Fall in the Book of St Albans" *Viator* 38 (2007): 192. Hellinga, *William Caxton and Early Printing*, 91.

¹³ Blake, "The Spread of Printing," 28-32. In a recent paper, Colin Davey noted that while Caxton frequently claimed a serendipitous reason for printing certain works (a book was handed to him, a certain patron asked for a translation, etc.), historians are convinced that he had a more calculated business plan. Colin Davey, "'To my hande cam a lytyl booke': William Caxton's Study, Trading Books, and the Mercantile Construction of Knowledge" paper presented at the 51st International Congress on Medieval Studies, Kalamazoo, MI, May 2016.

Oxford, the St Albans schoolmaster-printer seems to have made a last-ditch attempt to enter this same market just before his press succumbed to financial failure. Unfortunately for the schoolmaster-printer, the revision of his business model was too little too late; and the press faded from existence after printing the *BSA* in 1486.

The circumstances of its compilation and printing render the *BSA* all the more interesting to scholars of the late medieval gentry. The *BSA* was made up of four main texts – a treatise on hawking, a treatise on hunting (sometimes known as the *Boke of huntynge*), the *Liber Armorum*, and a treatise on blazoning – as well as several shorter ones – a hierarchy of hawks, descriptions of beasts of venery, explanations of how to choose a good hound and a good horse, moral advice, a list of proper terms,¹⁴ and lists of all the shires, bishoprics and provinces of England. While it was not uncommon to find hunting and hawking treatises packaged together with several of the shorter texts, the combination of these with two heraldic treatises was innovative. No extant manuscript or printed text from the fifteenth century other than the *BSA* pairs these items together.¹⁵ The circumstances of the press indicate that this was not a haphazard compilation. The *BSA* was a desperate bid by a failing printer to turn around his business. He chose these texts because he saw them as particularly appealing to his new target audience, the gentry and wealthy, socially-ambitious commoners – the same group with which Caxton was having such success. While it was not enough to keep the press afloat, the schoolmaster-printer's choice of texts proved to be apt. Among the extant copies of the first edition of the *BSA*, several are

¹⁴ These lists are variously called “proper terms,” “collective nouns,” “nouns of multitude,” and “terms of venery,” among other things. In his popular work on the subject, James Lipton notes the irony that the “enthusiastic philologists” who spent their time developing these minutely specific terms never bothered to come up with a consistent terminology for them. James Lipton, *An Exaltation of Larks: The Ultimate Edition* (New York: Penguin Books, 1993), 5.

¹⁵ Hands has suggested, based on a change in signatures between the first and second parts of the book, that the printer “hoped to be able sometimes to sell the two halves separately, to readers of more restricted interests.” She also notes that the introductions to the hunting treatise and the second heraldic treatise refer to the texts that precede them, but there is nothing in the prologue of the *Liber Armorum* to link it with the first portion of the book. Rachel Hands, “Juliana Berners and the *Book of St Albans*” *The Review of English Studies* 18:72 (Nov. 1967): 374.

annotated and well-worn. At least one unique text was copied into manuscript when the book was out of print.¹⁶ In 1496, de Worde reprinted the *BSA* for the first time, and it was reprinted over twenty more times over the next two centuries.¹⁷ The combination of texts in the *BSA* may not have served its printer's needs, but they clearly served the needs of the book's audience.

In choosing these texts, the schoolmaster-printer was tapping into an important and popular literary trend. An increasing number of texts circulated in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries to teach gentlemen – young and old, prospective and established – this body of knowledge that was essential to demonstrating their status. In his article on the subject for the *Cambridge History of the Book in Britain*, George Keiser refers to these as “practical books for the gentleman.” He describes miscellanies comprised of manuals of hunting and hawking, human and equestrian medicine, cookery, planting and grafting as containing information that would be important to the daily lives and practices of the landed gentry.¹⁸ With the rise of printing in the late fifteenth century, dozens of these texts were printed in multiple editions, often as individual pamphlets that customers could bind together – either on their own or combined with religious texts, romances or other texts that piqued their interest – into their own customized printed books.¹⁹ Keiser implies that these miscellanies contained the details of a common culture shared by the English gentle classes.

This common culture was first expressed in manuscript miscellanies. A number of the manuscripts that contain copies of the conduct texts discussed in the previous chapters position

¹⁶ Houwen, “Print into Manuscript,” 42.

¹⁷ Wynkyn de Worde's reprint included the addition of an early fifteenth-century treatise on fishing which was attributed to the same author as the *BSA*'s treatises. Jacob, “Book of St Albans,” 114-5. Moran, “Book of St Albans,” 48-9. Hands, ed., *English Hunting and Hawking*, xiii; xxi. Richard Grassby, “The Decline of Falconry in Early Modern England” *Past and Present* 157 (1997): 39-40. David Scott-Macnab, *A Sporting Lexicon of the Fifteenth Century* (Oxford: The Society for the Study of Medieval Languages and Literature, 2003), 1.

¹⁸ George R. Keiser, “Practical Books for the Gentleman” in *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain, Vol. III 1400-1557*, ed. Lotte Hellinga and J. B. Trapp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 470-94.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 488.

them alongside other texts purporting to provide instruction in topics necessary to young gentlemen. British Library MS Harley 5086 contains the *Babees Book*, the *ABC of Aristotle* and a *Dietary* alongside the hunting treatise *The Master of Game* and a veterinary tract, describing the care of horses.²⁰ British Library MS Stowe 982 contains the *Book of Keruying* and *Stans puer ad mensam* alongside another veterinary tract, entitled “The boke of kepyng of horses.” British Library MS Egerton 1995 contains the *Lytylle Childrenes Lytil Boke* as well as two different lists of proper terms, the first entitled “propertheyes that longythe to a younge gentylle man” and the second “terms of venery.” These three fifteenth-century manuscripts seem to have been made for patrons of differing income levels, but they all share an interest in texts discussing gentility.²¹ Examples like these indicate that knowledge of hunting and hawking and the language pertaining to them were essential aspects of the education of a young (or aspiring) gentle. In fact, an explicit connection exists between the table manners discussed in previous chapters and knowledge of the hunt. In *The Hound and the Hawk*, John Cummins points out that “The hunt is a social occasion; it is preceded and followed by good food and jollity, with plentiful wine for aristocrats and employed huntsmen alike,” suggesting that the concerns in these texts are linked even more closely than they outwardly appear, and all aimed at coaching the reader in the culture of gentility.²² This remained important through the transition to printed texts; the second edition of Caxton’s *Book of Curtasye* included a list of collective nouns and, of course, the *BSA* jumped

²⁰ Harley 5086 is also interesting in that it contains a drawing of fortune’s wheel – the only illustration in the manuscript. Was this meant as a caution to a socially ambitious owner? BL MS Harley 5086, f. 129.

²¹ Egerton 1995 is not a particularly fancy manuscript, written in a plain hand with no adornment other than red ink for the initial capitals. The conduct poem and lists of proper terms are accompanied by several texts relating to London: a list of London churches, the assize of bread and ale from the time of Henry III, and a long chronicle of London. It was perhaps produced for a wealthy Londoner with pretensions to gentility. Harley 5086 was likely produced for a patron who was already gentle, though of modest means, given its interest in courtly behavior and activities. The entire manuscript is written in the same decorative hand. The single illumination, a large drawing of fortune’s wheel, suggests an interest in social mobility, for better or worse. Peter Coss has discussed the prevalence of veterinary texts in manuscripts of the period, citing the importance of horses in the lives of men of status. The care of those horses – or, at least, instructing servants in that care – was an important part of the life of any gentleman. Coss, *The Foundations of Gentry Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 73.

²² John Cummins, *The Hound and the Hawk* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1988), 6.

away from courtesy literature to focus on matters of language and terminology in gentle pursuits.²³

In assembling the *BSA*, the schoolmaster-printer drew from an existing body of texts on these topics that appear together in a number of similar manuscripts. A myth has developed regarding their authorship, springing forth from the colophon at the end of the book of hunting, which reads: “Explicit Dame Julyans Barnes in her book of hunting.”²⁴ This is the only reference to a named author in the book, but as the *BSA* became more popular and disseminated more widely, the authorship of the whole book was soon attributed to this mysterious Barnes.²⁵ The historian William Burton (1575-1646) provided more information, explaining that “lady Juliana Berners,” born c. 1388, was actually daughter of Sir James Berners of Essex and prioress of Sopwell Nunnery near St Albans.²⁶ While there is no supporting evidence to bolster these claims, subsequent scholars were quick to perpetuate the biography of Dame Juliana. William Blades, the late-nineteenth-century editor of the *BSA*, presents an early scholarly dismissal of what he calls her “sham biography.”²⁷ Most modern scholars likewise reject the story of the prioress, and have gone back to attributing only a small part of the *BSA*’s contents to the authorship of the otherwise anonymous lady named in the colophon, Dame Julyans Barnes.²⁸ Ultimately, I believe that too much emphasis has been placed on the tantalizing possibility of a prolific late medieval authoress, which has drawn scholarly focus away from the influence of the schoolmaster-printer

²³ Scott-Macnab, *A Sporting Lexicon*, 63.

²⁴ Blades, ed., *BSA*, f. 39r.

²⁵ Wynkyn de Worde certainly perpetuated the idea of her authorship in his reprinted edition of 1496. *Ibid.*, 8.

²⁶ Scott-Macnab, *A Sporting Lexicon*, 1-2. Barry Collett, ed., *Late Medieval Englishwomen: Julian of Norwich, Marjorie Kempe and Juliana Berners* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), xiv.

²⁷ Blades, ed., *BSA*, 10.

²⁸ Rachel Hands, “Juliana Berners,” 373-86. Scott-Macnab, *A Sporting Lexicon*, 2-3. Julia Boffey, “Berners, Juliana (fl. 1460)”, *DNB* <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/2255>> (accessed 13 Feb 2016). A different perspective is presented by Barry Collett, who is more inclined to believe in the possibility of a female author for these hunting and hawking treatises despite inconclusive evidence of her existence. He presents the case in the introduction to his work, acknowledging the scant references to her authorship, but still includes Berners and her purported writings in his collection of the works of late medieval Englishwomen. Collett, ed., *Late Medieval Englishwomen*, xiv-xv.

himself, who deserves more credit for the form in which these texts were printed. None of these texts were copied as-is, but were shaped and adapted to suit the schoolmaster-printer's target audience. Most cannot be found in earlier manuscripts or attributed to other authors.²⁹ Caxton often gets credit for his translation and adaptation of the texts he chose to print; the schoolmaster-printer deserves the same for editing and compiling the *BSA*.

The first text in the compilation is the treatise on hawking, which is a unique treatise compiled from existing works on the subject. E. F. Jacob suggested it was an "elaboration" on a fourteenth-century hawking treatise that can be found in BL MS Harley 2340, known as *Prince Edward's Book*.³⁰ A few years later, Shirley Leggatt added BL MS Sloane 3488 as a potential source. Her close reading of several passages of the *BSA*'s treatise indicates that it drew on both Harley 2340 and Sloane 3488, another fifteenth-century manuscript containing what Hands calls "a short, confused, and corrupt treatise" of *Prince Edward's Book*. Leggatt argues that the Sloane version provided more up-to-date hawking technique than the original.³¹ Apart from *Prince Edward's Book*, Rachel Hands has added a twelfth-century Latin work authored by "Dancus Rex" to the list of sources. There is not a direct connection between the two, but the *Dancus* was an extremely influential hawking text across medieval Europe, which was frequently recycled for use in other texts (*Prince Edward's Book* among them). Hands sees material in the *BSA*'s treatise

²⁹ In her edition of these treatises, Hands notes that the authorship of these treatises cannot be identified, but credits the schoolmaster-printer with only the introductions to each text and, tentatively, section headings. Her brief treatment of this subject does not provide further insight into the thought process behind this claim. In the absence of other evidence, I am more willing to give credit to the editorial influence of the schoolmaster-printer in piecing these treatises together from other sources, even if he did not write any part of them himself. The very popularity of these texts in the decades after the *BSA*'s publication suggests that he did his job well. Hands, ed., *English Hunting and Hawking*, xiv-xv.

³⁰ Which Prince Edward is referred to is a matter of some debate. While the Harley version of the text is written in a mid-fifteenth century hand, Jacob suggests that the material is older by a century or so. Jacob, "Book of St Albans," 104. For more on the origins and dating of *Prince Edward's Book*, see Hands, ed., *English Hunting and Hawking*, xxviii.

³¹ In her article, Leggatt provides an edition of Sloane 3488's short hawking treatise. Shirley Leggatt, "The *Book of St Albans* and the Origins of its Treatise on Hawking" *Studia neophilologica* 22 (1950): 135-145. Hands, ed., *English Hunting and Hawking*, xxv.

which was likely drawn from an intermediary text derived from the *Dancus*.³² Whoever compiled the *BSA*'s treatise was recycling popular, established lore into a new text. This is less a handbook on hawking written by someone knowledgeable in the subject than a distillation of existing knowledge.

The *BSA*'s hunting treatise, the main work credited to Juliana Berners, is similarly a compilation. It is related to several popular late medieval hunting texts. Jacob argues that the *BSA*'s hunting treatise draws from two sources. The first is the early fourteenth-century Anglo-Norman *Art de Venerie* by William Twiti or Twici, a huntsman to Edward II. This short prose treatise with advice on hunting various beasts takes a question-and-answer format, focusing on issues of technique and terminology. The other is the *Master of Game*, compiled by Edward, duke of York (grandson to Edward III) c. 1406-1413, which is largely a translation of the late fourteenth-century French *Livre de Chasse* by Gaston Phébus. Jacob goes so far as to suggest that the compiler of the *BSA*'s treatise used BL MS Cotton Vespasian B.xii – a manuscript which contains back-to-back versions of the *Art de Venerie* and the *Master of Game* – in designing this compilation.³³ More recent scholarship has turned away from this, arguing that the *BSA* treatise was based on a text elsewhere referred to as *Tristram*, a late fourteenth- or early fifteenth-century English poem. *Tristram* was presumably a well-known hunting treatise, for it was referred to by Sir Thomas Malory.³⁴ Hands has uncovered two other fifteenth-century manuscript versions of this text, but the three versions are different enough in organization and length that their relationship to one another cannot be determined. In its version of the *Tristram* text, she notes that the *BSA* seems to conflate two distinct works: one section framed as a dame teaching her

³² *Ibid.*, xxx-xxxii.

³³ Jacob, "Book of St Albans," 105. William Perry Marvin, *Hunting Law and Ritual in Medieval English Literature* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2006), 114-5.

³⁴ Nicholas Orme, "Medieval Hunting: Fact and Fancy" in *Chaucer's England*, ed. Barbara Hanawalt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), 138

child and the other, somewhat more technical, section in the form of an instructional dialogue between a hunting master and his man.³⁵ This second section is heavily influenced by the *Art de Venerie*.³⁶ As with the treatise on hawking, what is notable is that there is no direct source text for the hunting treatise in the *BSA*, so it, too, may have been compiled from these sources by the schoolmaster-printer expressly for publication.

In his work on medieval hunting, Richard Almond argues that hunting was a universal pastime in the Middle Ages, practiced by men and women of every social level and occupation.³⁷ These hunting and hawking treatises, however, deal specifically with hunting as a courtly pastime. They focus on the ritual aspects of these activities, their specialized language, and the most prestigious birds and beasts of the chase. While common folk trapped rabbits and pursued other small game, the primary elite activity was hunting *par force des chiens*: on horseback, using a pack of dogs to run the deer to exhaustion before the hunters rushed in for the kill, at risk to their personal safety. This type of hunt was an intellectual game as much as a physical one, as hunters pursued the zig-zagging deer through woods and across streams, calculating the perfect moment when, cornered and exhausted, the deer was ready to be taken down.³⁸ Medieval nobles found this such an exhilarating form of hunting that access to deer was limited to the social elite; sequestered in royal forests and hunting parks, they could only be hunted by the landowner and those to whom he gave permission.³⁹ Those who were discovered poaching deer faced severe penalties.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, Roger Manning argues that this sort of poaching was practiced by both

³⁵ Hands, ed., *English Hunting and Hawking*, xxxii-xxxvi.

³⁶ Orme, "Medieval Hunting," 138-9.

³⁷ Richard Almond, *Medieval Hunting*, rev. ed. (Stroud, Glouc.: The History Press, 2011), 5, 8, and *passim*.

³⁸ A detailed description of the action of the *par force* hunt can be found in Almond, *Medieval Hunting*, 73-6.

³⁹ For a discussion of English game laws, see Marvin, *Hunting Law and Ritual*, 172. For information on deer parks and enclosures, see Susan Lasdun, *The English Park*. (London: Vendome Press, 1991).

⁴⁰ For a discussion of the Forest Laws and penalties for poaching in England, see Almond, *Medieval Hunting*, 136-40.

gentry and commoners living in the countryside, from youth into adulthood.⁴¹ While the medieval Englishman, regardless of social status, may have had experience in bringing down deer, legally or not, the highly ritualized practices and obscure technical language of the hunt which are the focus of these treatises were a distinctly elite aspect of the experience.⁴²

A number of shorter texts related to hunting and hawking appear in the *BSA* as well, suggesting the schoolmaster-printer drew from an existing body of texts on these topics that appear together in a number of similar manuscripts. In her article, “Juliana Berners and the *Boke of St Albans*,” Hands argues that the compilers of this book and these manuscripts likely drew their material from the same source, which has become known as the *J. B. Treatise* in honor of its purported author.⁴³ Fragments of this material can be found in more than twenty-five other manuscripts, some noted by Hands and others identified more recently by David Scott-Macnab in his monograph, *A Sporting Lexicon of the Fifteenth Century*.⁴⁴ He builds upon Hands’ work, arguing that this eclectic collection of texts – including lists of proper terms (which he simply calls “collective nouns”), carving terms, catalogues of game animals, characteristics of a good greyhound, and a manual of hawks’ diseases and their remedies – was intended to introduce the reader to the leisure activities of the upper classes.⁴⁵ He acknowledges that there is insufficient information in these treatises to teach the reader how to hunt or hawk himself, but their focus on

⁴¹ Roger B. Manning, “Poaching as a Symbolic Substitute for War in Tudor and Early Stuart England” *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 22:2 (1992): 188.

⁴² In her work on the subject, Anne Rooney claims somewhat condescendingly that “only the noble hunt really warranted the name.” Anne Rooney, *Hunting in Middle English Literature* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 1993), 2. Karen Gross notes the interconnection between gentility and hunting ritual: “to hunt in disregard of the language and ritual is to debase the gentle pursuit, to poach churlishly.” Gross, “Hunting, Heraldry and the Fall,” 214.

⁴³ Rachel Hands, “Juliana Berners and *The Boke of St Albans*,” *The Review of English Studies* n.s. 18 (1967): 373-86.

⁴⁴ Scott-Macnab lists what he considers to be the major and minor manuscript sources of this J. B. material on p. 8, and then provides a descriptive catalogue of those manuscripts, taking care to describe each manuscript’s J. B. contents and their relationship to other extant versions. Scott-Macnab, *A Sporting Lexicon*, 8-66.

⁴⁵ For a list of the purported “J. B.” elements, see Scott-Macnab, *A Sporting Lexicon*, 7.

language and terms would ensure that the reader could, at least, talk about them convincingly.⁴⁶

That this focus on language and appearance was useful is attested by the number of times these various texts were copied, revised and rewritten – both Hands and Scott-Macnab cite a number of occasions where *J. B.* material was added to a manuscript to fill up blank space at the end of a quire (in one case, overshooting the mark and requiring another gathering of leaves to be added for its completion!).⁴⁷ The implication of the somewhat haphazard transmission of these texts is that the information they contained was seen as important and useful by a wide range of readers.

While the work done by Hands and Scott-Macnab in identifying these texts and tracing them to their extinct manuscript source is undeniably important, I believe their conclusions about the purpose of this group of texts are limited. Scott-Macnab, in particular, restricts himself by defining the *J. B. Treatise* as a collection of hunting and hawking texts. His study mentions a group of other texts that often occur in connection with *J. B.* material – so often, in fact, that he is forced to consider some of them (the moralizing “precepts in –ly,” “Four things to dread,” the properties of a good horse, and a list of types of wine) as belonging to the *J. B. Treatise* proper, though his analysis of them is limited.⁴⁸ A larger problem, however, is that he avoids working with manuscripts that contain only one of the *J. B.* elements. Since he views these elements, as Hands had proposed, as a family of texts, originating in this purported treatise (for the entire collection of *J. B.* texts that he discusses does not appear altogether in any single extant manuscript), he cannot entirely see past his identification of it as a hunting and hawking

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 86-9.

⁴⁷ In Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Digby 196, a short list of collectives was added to the bottom of a page in the middle of a chronology of English kings, which picks up on the following page. Caxton appended some *J. B.* elements to the end of his printing of John Lydgate’s *The Hors, the Shepe and the Ghoos*; Wynkyn de Worde did the same with a set of carving terms, added to his *Boke of Keruyng*. In Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson C 158, some *J. B.* material was copied in a fifteenth-century hand onto the endleaf of a fourteenth-century manuscript. London, British Library, MS Royal 17.D.IV is the manuscript where the scribe underestimated the length of his filler text. *Ibid.*, 14, 24-5, 53, 62, 64.

⁴⁸ These appear in his list of *J. B.* elements on p. 7.

collection.⁴⁹ Yet if this definition of the contents of Scott-Macnab's *J. B. Treatise* is broadened, it becomes apparent that all of these texts exist to instruct the reader in the lifestyle and leisure activities of gentlemen – a sort of required reading for anyone who had pretensions to gentility at the end of the Middle Ages. Hunting and hawking were indeed a large part of this lifestyle, but they were not the only part.

What separates Scott-Macnab's understanding of these texts from Keiser's is that he recognizes the impracticality of these "practical" texts – in other words, that these treatises which purport to instruct the reader in skills such as hunting and hawking actually provide inconsistent surveys of their subjects. An uninformed individual reading such a text would be hard pressed to participate in these activities without further instruction. These texts are not effective how-to manuals. Instead, they are manuals focused on initiating the reader into the technical language of these pastimes. While, after reading such a manual, a previously-uninformed individual would fare poorly if brought along on a hunt, he would be equipped to knowledgeably enter into a conversation about hunting. Likewise, the related manuals on blazoning, though developed primarily for heralds, cannot in themselves teach one to perform a herald's duties. Rather, these manuals instruct the reader in how to recognize the elements of coats of arms and to be able to identify them by their proper terms. While these manuals are necessarily different, their strong focus on language and terminology makes it clear that they are peddling a lifestyle, rather than transferable skills.

These heraldic texts have so far been left out of this discussion, though they make up half the contents of the *BSA*. These two treatises, the *Liber Armorum* and a more technical treatise on blazoning, are sometimes omitted from discussions of the *BSA*'s texts because they do not at first glance fit in with the themes of the *J. B.* contents which have preoccupied the book's scholars.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 8 n1.

The *BSA* is the only fifteenth-century miscellany to contain *J. B.* material alongside heraldic texts. The manuscripts that contain heraldic treatises do not generally overlap with the other texts purveying knowledge of gentle culture.⁵⁰ Many of the surviving heraldic treatises are in very small books with limited other contents, almost always related to heralds and their duties. For example, BL MS Additional 28549, from the late fifteenth century, is a small book about the size of a modern paperback which contains a treatise on heraldic colors as well as ordinances and instructions for some of the ceremonies a herald would participate in, including the Statues of the Order of the Garter.⁵¹ BL MS Additional 34648 and Bodleian MS Eng. Misc. f.36, both also dating from the fifteenth century, each contain only a single heraldic treatise and are small enough to be slipped into a pocket.⁵² These manuscripts and the others like them seem to have been produced for the use of individual heralds, most likely to be used for personal reference as they traveled around in the performance of their duties. In this context, treatises on heraldry were far more practical than the other texts discussed in this chapter – a herald could, in fact, learn how to properly blazon or to organize bouts at a tournament just by reading them.

The *BSA* is a significant exception to the idea that heraldic treatises always served as practical texts, written for the use of professional heralds. Its path-breaking inclusion of technical heraldic treatises in a collection of texts concerning gentility indicates the link between these seemingly disparate materials. The first section, the *Liber Armorum*, is a fascinating compilation outlining the history of coat armor and the qualities pertaining to the gentlemen who carry it. While many armorial tracts begin with a foray into heraldic history, most trace the history of coat armor back to the legendary siege of Troy. The *Liber Armorum* is unique in that it instead traces

⁵⁰ This point is also discussed by Karen Gross in her article on the contents of the *Book of St Albans*. She notes only two other manuscripts combining hunting and hawking with heraldic materials, and one seems to have been a collection of pamphlets haphazardly bound together. Gross, "Hunting, Heraldry and the Fall," 197.

⁵¹ BL MS Additional 28549.

⁵² BL MS Additional 34648. Bodleian MS Eng. misc. f.36.

the history of gentility to its Scriptural origins in the story of Cain and Abel.⁵³ This treatise, which has been discussed extensively in Chapter 3, clearly relates to the hunting and hawking texts in that it describes a certain standard to which the gentle (here equated with the armigerous) ought to be held. Just as it behooves a gentleman to understand and be able to use the proper terminology surrounding his sport and leisure activities, he ought to know about and exemplify the virtues that go along with his social position. Gentility in this text is a moral standard as much as a social one. The inclusion of the treatise on blazoning is more surprising, since these are almost exclusively found in the context of heralds' personal reference manuals, as mentioned above. While these manuscripts were produced for the needs and taste of the specific individuals who commissioned them, the *BSA* was a printed, and therefore commercial, text. The schoolmaster-printer chose to put these particular materials together because he felt they would sell; sufficient popular demand for this information existed to make such a manuscript marketable. The subsequent history of the *BSA* and its many reprintings indicates that his judgement on this matter was sound. By combining the *J. B.* material with these heraldic treatises, the *BSA* presents its readers with a handbook on gentility, including information on a variety of gentle skills and knowledge.

It is, therefore, significant that the *Liber Armorum* does not appear in any other manuscript or incunable before it was printed in the *BSA*. There is no attribution of the treatise to an outside author, so it may have been put together specifically for publication in the *BSA*.⁵⁴ The only other manuscript in which the *Liber Armorum* appears is British Library MS Harley 6149, a

⁵³ Gross, "Hunting, Heraldry, and the Fall," 208-10.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 193.

compilation of heraldic and chivalric material dated to 1494.⁵⁵ The treatise's contents include material recycled from the ideas on heraldry expressed by Nicholas Upton in his 1440 *De studio militari*, though this was not its only source.⁵⁶ Jackson Armstrong has suggested that the *Liber Armorum* was a translation and reconfiguration of Upton's treatise for the popular market.⁵⁷ The treatise on blazoning, too, is largely a translation of Upton's work.⁵⁸ Upton was a cleric and lawyer who served Thomas Montagu, earl of Salisbury in France. Among his other clerical and bureaucratic services, he assisted Salisbury in a heraldic capacity, for he issued a coat of arms to one gentleman in the earl's service. He wrote *De studio militari*, a treatise on heraldry and warfare, c. 1440, dedicating it to Humphrey, duke of Gloucester.⁵⁹ Upton's work was likely influenced by the Continental heraldic treatises he came in contact with during his service in France.⁶⁰ *De studio militari* was a popular and influential heraldic text in the late fifteenth century. It was translated into Middle English around the year 1500 by John Blount. It was first printed in 1654 by Sir Edward Bysshe, who used six separate manuscript copies – two of his own and four borrowed from acquaintances – in putting together his translation. Numerous copies of both Upton's text and Blount's translation, both whole and in excerpt, are still extant.⁶¹ The

⁵⁵ Houwen makes an extended comparison between the two texts to argue that Harley 6149 is a direct manuscript copy of the BSA's *Liber Armorum* based on dialectal features as well as scribal omissions and additions. Houwen, "Print into Manuscript," 41-52.

⁵⁶ Francis Pierpont Barnard, ed. *The Essential Portions of Nicholas Upton's De Studio Militari* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1931). Hugh Stanford London, "Some Medieval Treatises on English Heraldry" *The Antiquaries Journal* xxxiii (1953): 169. Moran, "Book of St Albans," 48.

⁵⁷ Jackson W. Armstrong, "The Development of the Office of Arms in England, c. 1413-1485" in *The Herald in Late Medieval Europe*, ed. Katie Stevenson (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2009), 14.

⁵⁸ Jacob, "Book of St Albans," 113-4.

⁵⁹ Brown and Walker give a date of 1447 for Upton's treatise, but the more recent work by Armstrong dates the text to c. 1440. The book's dedicatee, Humphrey, duke of Gloucester, died in February 1447, so an earlier date is far more likely. Andrew Brown and Craig Walker, 'Upton, Nicholas (c.1400–1457)', *DNB* <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/28011>> (accessed 13 Feb 2016). Armstrong, "Development of the Office of Arms," 13.

⁶⁰ Rodney Dennys, *The Heraldic Imagination* (London: Barrie and Jenkins Ltd, 1975), 76.

⁶¹ Barnard, ed., xiii. Examples of manuscripts containing Upton's text include BL MS Additional 30946, ff. 2r-78r and BL MS Cotton Nero C iii, ff. 4r-74r. For a full listing of extant manuscripts, see C. G. Walker, "An Edition with Introduction and Commentary of John Blount's English Translation of Nicholas Upton's *De Studio Militari*," unpublished D.Phil thesis, 2 vols., University of Oxford, 1998.

existence of multiple translations of Upton's material into English during the late fifteenth century (the *BSA*'s and Blount's) indicates a sudden increase in interest in heraldry and arms at this time. These manuals for heralds were being read more frequently by laymen whose need for the technical knowledge contained in these treatises was social rather than professional. By packaging these treatises together with hunting and hawking texts, the schoolmaster-printer tapped into this trend, perceiving the importance of heraldic symbols to gentle culture and making them a significant element in his handbook for the aspiring gentleman.

An Audience for Gentility Treatises

When the schoolmaster-printer of St Albans required a project with sufficient popularity to keep his press financially solvent, he alighted on a series of texts that would appeal to a gentle audience. At a time when gentle society was attempting to distinguish itself from other social strata and wealthy professionals were interested in breaking into its ranks, a book instructing the reader in aspects of gentle culture was bound to be popular and successful. Recent scholarship has indicated that not only were gentlefolk reading such texts in England, but they were "actively engaging with the texts that they obtained."⁶² As they instructed readers in the standards of gentility, these texts served to adjust and define those standards in the minds of their readers. Evidence within the texts themselves acknowledges that they were tailored to an audience that was anxious to demonstrate its status through the exercise of this knowledge.

Ample evidence within these texts indicates that their authors were writing to a gentle audience. There are repeated assertions of the relevance of this information to gentlemen – at times young gentlemen specifically. A list of proper terms from Bodleian MS Rawlinson D 328 – the earliest such list, dating from c. 1430-50 – bears the heading "A Little book of doctrine for

⁶² Malcolm Mercer, *The Medieval Gentry* (London and New York: Continuum, 2010), 45-6.

young gentle men,” revealing that this was the audience envisioned for these texts from the beginning.⁶³ Likewise, a list of “terms of venery” in Egerton 1995 begins “For a young gentle man to know / the terms of venery and the craft with / the 4 beasts of venery.”⁶⁴ The same manuscript also includes an expanded heading to its list of proper terms, denoting a stronger sense of its offerings as specifically gentle knowledge: “Note ye the properties / that longeth to a young gentle / man to have knowing of such / things that longeth unto him / that he fail not in his proper terms that longeth unto him / as it shall follow herein / writing.”⁶⁵ The repetition of the phrase “longeth unto him” suggests that this language is an essential part of the identity of this young gentleman. Without them, he does not fully realize his status. A rhyming couplet at the end of the list of proper terms in Harley 2340 emphasizes this further: “Let cats scratch churls with sorrow iwis / Learn or be lewd – I tell thee this.”⁶⁶ This tagline also appears appended to a number of conduct texts, as discussed in Chapter 4, reinforcing the link between them. Instruction in bodily conduct and proper use of language were equally essential in demonstrating one’s gentle status. In his discussions of a group of similar miscellanies, Keiser notes that these practical books were made for families who were “representative of, and must have been sympathetic with, upwardly aspiring gentry.”⁶⁷

A few of these texts present even more inclusive views of their audiences. The introduction to the book of hawking in the *Book of St Albans* begins: “In so much that gentle men and honest persons have great delight in hawking and desire to have the manner to take hawks . .

⁶³ This text is reprinted in Hope Emily Allen, ed., “The Fifteenth-Century ‘Associations of Beasts, of Birds, and of Men:’ The Earliest Text with ‘Language for Carvers’” *PMLA* 51:2 (Jun. 1936), 603.

⁶⁴ BL MS Egerton 1995, f. 63r.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, f. 55v. Scott-Macnab points out that this heading is unique among the versions of the text he has examined. Scott-Macnab, *A Sporting Lexicon*, 18.

⁶⁶ BL MS Harley 2340, reproduced in Scott-Macnab, *A Sporting Lexicon*, 123, ll. 242-4. The Middle English “iwis” means “surely,” “certainly,” or “indeed.” *MED*, s. v. “iwis” (adv.), def. 1.

⁶⁷ In particular, he is referencing two late fifteenth-century collections, Cambridge University Library MS Ll.1.18 and Yale, Beinecke Library, MS 163, which contain treatises on hunting, heraldry, and cookery. Keiser, “Practical Books,” 480.

. Therefore, this book following in a due form shows very knowledge of such pleasure to gentle men and persons disposed to see it.” The addition of “honest persons” to “gentle men” presents an expanded audience, perhaps intended to encompass those individuals on the cusp of gentility with pretensions of upward mobility. Since this was a printed text intended for sale on the open market, inviting an expanded audience was a shrewd business move more than a social statement; Caxton demonstrated the same sort of social inclusiveness in his introductions to many of the texts he printed.⁶⁸ Yet the manuscript text of “The Mastery of Game” in Harley 5086 also presents a diverse readership, the author addressing himself “to all manner folk of what estate or condition that they be.”⁶⁹ While this text was written by Edward Plantagenet for the future Henry V, he clearly foresaw a wider audience than the young prince and his circle.⁷⁰ He presents hunting and hawking to this expanded audience as a tonic against idleness. Once again, that implies an audience of upwardly mobile commoners – a group with sufficient wealth and privilege to make the vice of idleness a possibility. While it was in a printer’s best interest to solicit wide readership, the acknowledgement of a wider audience in the text of this treatise indicates that the prospect of social mobility – and that these texts would be useful tools in its accomplishment - was accepted among the authors and printers who produced them.

⁶⁸ The prologue to Caxton’s *The Mirror of the World* (1481) claims he printed it at the request of a London alderman who hoped to present it to Lord Hastings, the king’s chamberlain, suggesting the text was suitable to an audience across those social ranges. In the prologue to *The Golden Legend* (1483), he says he translated the work “at the request of certain lords, ladies and gentlemen.” Likewise, he claims that “many noble and diverse gentlemen of this realm of England” entreated him to print his *King Arthur* (1485). He claims his *Fayttes of Armes* (1489) is for “every gentleman born to arms and all manner men of war, captains, soldiers, victualers, and all other.” Finally, Caxton’s prologue to *Eneydos* (1490) proclaims that “this book is not for every rude and uncunning man to see, but to clerks and very gentlemen that understand gentleness and science.” Caxton pitched the story of each work in its prologue in a way that would attract readers from a range of social levels, particularly the socially ambitious. W. J. B. Crotch, ed., *The Prologues and Epilogues of William Caxton*, EETS o. s. 176 (London: Oxford University Press, 1928), 56-8, 71, 92, 103, 109.

⁶⁹ In particular, he exhorts them to use this knowledge of hunting and hawking to help them avoid idleness. BL MS Harley 5086, f. 8r.

⁷⁰ Keiser, “Practical Books,” 480.

One of the frequent contentions about instructional texts such as those in the *BSA* is that they were intended for a young audience. The implications of this with respect to conduct poems has been discussed in Chapter 4. David Burnley, in his examination of courtly literature, sees different types of texts as targeted toward particular age groups: “If the courtesy books were often for children and court servants, manuals on the courtly sport of hunting were for young adults, more elevated servants, and gentlemen.”⁷¹ I disagree, however, that the audience for these two groups of texts would be so disparate. The often abecedarius and sing-songy nature of conduct texts as well as their penchant for rather basic sorts of advice do suggest a youthful, or at least inexperienced, audience. The texts themselves often declare their readers to be little children.⁷² Yet, as has been discussed in previous chapters, the advice in them would prove just as useful for anyone attempting to move in gentle circles, including the court servants Burnley mentions. While the manuals of hunting and hawking, having fewer of these nursery-rhyme qualities, seem more mature to a modern audience, they contain content that would have been useful to the same groups of people: young gentles as well as those aspiring to that status. Physical activity was an important element of medieval aristocratic education, and it seems that even children occasionally took part in hunting and hawking alongside their elders.⁷³ This is supported by Thomas Starkey’s 1553 “Dialogue between Cardinal Pole and Thomas Lupset,” which criticizes “the education of the nobility, who we see customably brought up in hunting and hawking, dicing and carding, eating and drinking and, in conclusion, in all vain pleasure, pastime and vanity.”⁷⁴ These “vain pleasures” were engaged in by old and young alike. It is important to

⁷¹ David Burnley, *Courtliness and Literature in Medieval England* (New York: Longman, 1998), 132.

⁷² The *Babees Book*, the *Lytylle Childrens Lytil Boke*, and the *Young Children’s Book*, but *Stans puer ad mensam* also begins by addressing “My dear child.” F. J. Furnivall, ed., *The Babees Book* EETS o. s. 32 (New York: Greenwood Press, 1868; reprint, Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2002), 1, 16, 17, 275.

⁷³ Nicholas Orme, *Education and Society in Medieval and Renaissance England* (London and Roceverte: Hambledon Press, 1989), 173.

⁷⁴ Quoted in David Cressy, ed., *Education in Tudor and Stuart England* (London: Edward Arnold, 1975), 16.

remember that the medieval penchant for wordplay and the widespread use of rhyme came out of a culture that was still largely oral in its mentality, so these factors should not automatically mark a text as being for a juvenile readership. The attributions of these texts to “young gentlemen” is a signal of the basic nature of the information that they convey. The usefulness of the content would have superseded any childish features for an aspirant gentleman who needed an introduction to these aspects of gentle culture.

Due to the usefulness of their material to a diverse audience, it is quite likely that these sorts of texts were compiled into manuscripts and printed books intended for family libraries. In addition to appealing to both young and old, these texts would have been useful for both men and women. While their absence from hunting and hawking manuals has led many modern scholars to largely dismiss or downplay women’s participating in these leisure activities, the more careful research done by scholars such as Amanda Richardson indicates that women did indeed participate, and in more strenuous capacities than the scholarship generally accepts.⁷⁵ Richardson’s work indicates that elite women during the late medieval and early modern period did hunt and hawk. She credits several French-born English queens with bringing the Continental tradition of women’s participation in the hunt into greater popularity in England.⁷⁶ There is evidence of queens and other noblewomen owning hunting dogs and, especially, hawks for their own personal leisure. Richardson even suggests that private hunting parks may have been created

⁷⁵ One common claim was that women did not participate in the more vigorous and, thus, more honorable *par force* hunting. For scholarship that downplays the role of women in these activities, see: Orme, “Medieval Hunting,” 147; Cummins, *Hound and the Hawk*, 8. In noting that women did participate actively in hawking, Robin Oggins contrasts this with their exclusion from *par force* hunting. Oggins, *The Kings and their Hawks* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004). Several scholars emphasize the connection between hunting and war – a hunting that medieval writers also noted – thus relegating it to the domain of men: Marcelle Thiébaux, “The Mediaeval Chase” *Speculum* 42:2 (1967): 261; Manning, “Poaching as a Symbolic Substitute,” 185-6. For a debunking of these claims, see Amanda Richardson, “‘Riding Like Alexander, Hunting Like Diana:’ Gendered Aspects of the Medieval Hunt and its Landscape Settings in England and France” *Gender and History* 24:2 (2012): 253-270.

⁷⁶ Richardson, “Riding Like Alexander,” 259.

with the privacy needs of noblewomen in mind.⁷⁷ That women flew hawks and falcons is more commonly accepted by scholars. Noblewomen were often portrayed carrying hawks in manuscripts and on their personal seals.⁷⁸ Household accounts show that they kept dogs and birds and servants to attend them.⁷⁹ The question remains as to whether this extended to women of lower social levels.⁸⁰ Would a gentlewoman or a merchant's wife, reading the treatises in the *BSA* to acquire the polish of gentility, have participated in these elite sports herself? The presence of instructions on how to train and maintain hawks in the *Ménagier de Paris*, a text purportedly written by a Parisian householder for the instruction of his young wife, suggests that they did.⁸¹ Richardson's article, an initial foray into evidence concerning women, hunting, and hawking, does not venture so far down the social scale. More work is necessary in order to definitively determine the extent of gentle women's involvement. The general acceptance of Dame Juliana Berners as the author of the *BSA*'s hunting, and later hawking and fishing, treatises, suggests that the late fifteenth-century audience of the book (as well as audiences of later centuries) accepted these subjects as within the scope of a woman's knowledge. Certainly, whether they participated in hunting and hawking or not, knowledge of the details of these activities would serve the interests of women, as well as men, by demonstrating their familiarity with gentle culture.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 260.

⁷⁸ Robin S. Oggins, "Falconry and Medieval Social Status" *Medievalia* 12 (1989): 44. Eleanor Standley, "Ladies Hunting: A Late Medieval Decorated Mirror Case from Shapwick, Somerset" *The Antiquaries Journal* 88 (2008): 201. Coss, *Foundations of Gentry Life*, 253. Oggins notes, however, that "love of falconry comes to be seen as one of the innate characteristics of noble blood," so it is possible that the image of a lady holding a hawk or falcon was not intended to mean she literally participated in these activities, but to demonstrate her high status. Oggins, "Falconry and Medieval Social Status," 45.

⁷⁹ The late fourteenth-century queen Eleanor of Castile kept a staff of huntsmen and keepers of hounds. The household book of Isabella of France indicates that she kept hawks and hounds. Richardson, "Riding Like Alexander," 263-4. In the mid-fourteenth century expense accounts of the Multons of Frampton, a gentry family, an item lists the expense of feeding Lady Anne de Multon's greyhounds. Coss, *Foundations of Gentry Life*, 31.

⁸⁰ Coss stresses that hunting and hawking were not gendered activities, and that the gentry would hunt when they had the opportunity, but apart from that of Lady Anne de Multon in the previous footnote, examples are difficult to come by. *Ibid.*, 253-4.

⁸¹ Oggins, "Falconry and Medieval Social Status," 46.

One factor that allowed these gentility texts to become available to the widest possible audience was the choice to disseminate them in English. Hunting and hawking treatises as well as heraldic manuals were traditionally written in French, the language of the aristocracy in England since the days of the Norman Conquest. The choice to write and print hunting and hawking treatises in English, and to focus on their technical English vocabulary, is representative of a significant change occurring in English society. By the second half of the fourteenth century, French was falling out of use in aristocratic circles.⁸² A 1362 statute of Parliament decreed that French should no longer be the language of government and the law, for not enough people understood it.⁸³ Emphasis on the English language only increased in response to Henry V's efforts to cultivate an English national identity distinct from that of his French adversaries in the Hundred Years War.⁸⁴ More and more manuscripts were being produced for a reading public that had no need of the language of the court and desired to consume texts written in the common tongue. Imported French texts were still read, but English was read more frequently by a greater range of social levels, so nearly all native writers had shifted to it by the late fourteenth century (John Gower is a notable exception).⁸⁵ By the 1470s, half of the laymen in London were literate in English, and rates were rising throughout the country.⁸⁶ Printing only accelerated this trend toward the use of English – seventy-two percent of printed texts in England were in the

⁸² Coss, *The Foundations of Gentry Life*, 227-8.

⁸³ The statute, however, was written in French. Douglas Kibbee notes that this is typical of the contradictions that abound around this language shift. While he says that French was “artificially maintained” as the realm’s official language, it was still firmly situated within those niches. By 1384, however, French seems to have dropped more fully out of favor. Douglas Kibbee *For to Speke Frenche Trewely* (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1991), 58-9.

⁸⁴ John H. Fisher, “A Language Policy for Lancastrian England” *PMLA* 107:5 (Oct. 1992): 1168-1180. There were some inconsistencies in this policy, for Henry also developed a French identity for himself after he had effectively conquered that nation after the signing of the Treaty of Troyes in 1420. Jonathan Good has recently pointed out that Henry did not live long enough for the inconsistencies in the identities he cultivated to become problematic. Jonathan Good, “For God, Harry, and Saint George? Agincourt and the ‘National’ Saint,” paper presented at the 50th International Congress on Medieval Studies, Kalamazoo, MI, May 2015.

⁸⁵ Kibbee, *For to Speke Frenche Trewely*, 70.

⁸⁶ J. B. Trapp, “Literacy, Books, and Readers” in *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain*, Vol. III 1400-1557, ed. Lotte Hellinga and J. B. Trapp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 39.

vernacular, a higher percentage than anywhere else in Europe.⁸⁷ Choosing to write and print these texts in English was deliberately engaging that audience in their subject matter.

The popularity of these texts supports the idea of a wide-ranging potential audience; the rapidity with which such volumes were produced suggests a voracious readership. As mentioned above, only ten years after the *BSA*, containing manuals of hunting, hawking and heraldic blazoning, was produced, de Worde chose to expand its material and print his own version.⁸⁸ Caxton included similar texts in his 1477-8 edition of John Lydgate's *The Hors, the Shepe and the Ghoos*, which would be reprinted four times before 1500.⁸⁹ A significant number of printed editions of these practical texts survive, and Keiser has argued that, based on the long spans of time between printed editions of some texts, there were likely many more editions printed than the extant evidence reveals.⁹⁰

Some of the manuscripts that contain these texts provide precise information about the nature of their readers. Scott-Macnab connects his *J. B.* manuscripts with a number of individuals and families, painting a picture of an extended circle of readership for such texts. Of the four manuscripts which were compiled or commissioned by specific individuals, one was a member of the landed gentry (John Whittocksmead, a Wiltshire MP), but the other three were on the fringes of gentle society: a mayor of London (William Gregory); a schoolmaster (Walter Pollard); and a clergyman (John Benet).⁹¹ Keiser describes similar sorts of owners for the manuscripts he discusses: a cleric serving gentle families (Thomas Ponteshyde); a cleric and common lawyer (William Booth) who brought a number of relations along on his coattails as he

⁸⁷ Lotte Hellinga credits this to the significant influence William Caxton's choices had on the development of the printing industry in England. She notes that "the closest rival was the Czech language, with thirty-two out of fifty-five titles printed in Czech in the relevant area." Hellinga, *William Caxton and Early Printing*, 111.

⁸⁸ Keiser, "Practical Books," 470.

⁸⁹ Scott-Macnab, *A Sporting Lexicon*, 24.

⁹⁰ Keiser, "Practical Books," 489.

⁹¹ Scott-Macnab, *A Sporting Lexicon*, 88.

rose to the archbishopric of York; and a provincial landowner (Henry Pauncefoot).⁹² All of these examples are consistent with Scott-Macnab's conclusion that

information of this sort would have been invaluable to prosperous urbanites new to the countryside, aspiring landholders of any background, and upwardly-mobile clergymen eager to be acquainted with the 'gentle' but arcane phraseology of the traditional aristocracy. The milieu in which the *J.B. Treatise* circulated was full of such people, and I strongly suspect that it was among them that the treatise achieved its greatest popularity.⁹³

The assorted group of people interested in this sort of information – the concerns of a gentleman – also explains why these texts are present in so many forms, in so many different manuscripts.

The materials Scott-Macnab refers to as the *J. B.* texts are, essentially, a corpus of texts that were used for this purpose. They were not written or compiled as a group; they never appear together in a manuscript. They simply existed as a body of materials that could be drawn upon to teach the art of gentle living. The existence of so many categories of individuals on the cusp of gentility during the fifteenth century – merchants with country estates, wealthy lawyers, upwardly-mobile courtiers and bureaucrats, clergymen and educators – as well as children born into gentle families who needed such instruction, made these texts extremely marketable. The schoolmaster-printer sought to tap into this audience when he put together the *BSA*.

The Language of Hunting and Hawking

Language had been an important social marker in England since the time of the Conquest, when French was introduced as the exclusive language of the aristocracy. Over the next several centuries, English society was trilingual, the culture of each of its traditional three orders operating in a different language: Latin for the clergy, Anglo-Norman French for the aristocracy and Middle English for the common folk. By the middle of the fourteenth century,

⁹² Keiser, "Practical Books," 476-7, 478-9, 482.

⁹³ Scott-Macnab, *A Sporting Lexicon*, 88-9.

French was losing its status as an aristocratic language as it began to fall out of favor. In the next century, French language training was no longer seen as a necessary aspect of a gentle's education.⁹⁴ In the absence of separate languages, another sort of linguistic marker developed to separate the gentle from the common, centering around the use of specific terminology. Burnley argues that "the language of the gentleman was to be identified with terms drawn from his presumed leisure interests: knowledge of the correct language to use in describing a horse, a greyhound or a hawk."⁹⁵ This conforms with a view promulgated by Malory that, "a knowledge of hunting alone could enable 'all men of worship [to] discover a gentleman from a yeoman and a yeoman from a villain.'"⁹⁶ Once spoken language ceased to separate gentle from common, using the proper terminology, particularly for aristocratic leisure activities, became increasingly important in identifying one's social position.

Many extant fifteenth-century manuscripts, including many of the texts that make up the aforementioned *J. B. Treatise*, contain texts that concentrate on relaying the appropriate terminology for very specific situations. Hunting manuals in particular advocate the use of proper language. This is a peculiarity of English treatises, as Anne Rooney has noted; Continental books of venery – especially the French – are far more comprehensive in addressing the practicalities of the sport. From the earliest examples, however, English manuals devote more space to the intricacies of terminology.⁹⁷ Even Edward Plantagenet's *Master of Game*, largely a

⁹⁴ There were some exceptions, of course. Even in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, training in French was an integral part of a legal education. Merchants, who did a great deal of trading with Flanders and Gascony, likewise found it important to know French. Kibbee, *For to Speke Frenche Trewely*, 74. It still had cache as a social accomplishment, as well, though it was no longer pursued as widely. In a 1463 letter to Sir William Plumptre, Bryan Roucliffe reports that Plumptre's granddaughter "speketh prettily and French and hath near hand learned her psalter," suggesting that the skill was still seen as valuable in certain circles. Thomas Stapleton, ed. *The Plumptre Correspondence* (London: Camden Society, 1839; reprint, Stroud, Gloucestershire: Alan Sutton, 1990), 8.

⁹⁵ Burnley, *Courtliness and Literature*, 106.

⁹⁶ Philippa C. Maddern, "Social Mobility" in *A Social History of England*, ed. Rosemary Horrox and W. Mark Ormrod (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 30.

⁹⁷ Rooney, *Hunting in Middle English Literature*, 7.

translation of Gaston Phébus' *Livre de Chasse*, eliminates some of the practical material on lower forms of hunting (the less gentle art of snaring game, rather than the socially elevated hunting *par force des chiens*) in favor of more expounding on terminology.⁹⁸ The overall trend suggests that, while all of these treatises viewed hunting as an art,⁹⁹ the Continental works saw it as a practical skill while the English saw it as a social grace: as Rooney described it, "The French manuals could teach a man how to hunt; the English manuals taught huntsmen how to appear gentlemen."¹⁰⁰

The manuals in the *Book of St Albans* can illustrate this, as they focus on terminology to different degrees. The hawking treatise, which opens the book, is the more practical of the two, devoting approximately two thirds of its contents to practical, skill-based knowledge and one third to language. The middle portion of this text primarily deals with information about how to hawk while the beginning and end of the text fluctuates between this information and instruction in the terminology related to hawking.¹⁰¹ "How your hawk puttithover" is a typical language-focused section: "An hawk puttithover when she removeth the meat from her gorge in to her bowels. And thus ye shall know it when she puttithover she traversith with her body and specially with the neck: as a Crane coot or an other bird."¹⁰² It should be noted, however, that a significant proportion of the material I have categorized as skill-based is incidental to the leisure activity of hawking; a great deal of it concerns husbandry, with special emphasis on remedies for the various ailments that a hawk might suffer. The section quoted above, for example, is a matter for the caretaker of a hawk, relating to the hawk's digestive well-being. It is not essential information for a person intending to fly that hawk. In fact, it provides little insight into the

⁹⁸ Marvin, *Hunting Law and Ritual*, 97.

⁹⁹ For a discussion of hunting as the *ars venandi*, see Marvin, *Hunting Law and Ritual*, 97-105.

¹⁰⁰ Rooney, *Hunting in Middle English Literature*, 7.

¹⁰¹ Blades, ed., *BSA*, ff. 1r-27r.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, f. 6r.

hawk's health. The passage does not describe whether it is beneficial or detrimental for the hawk to "puttithover;" the reader is just told how to identify this state. The focus is how to properly discuss the state of the hawk's health.

The hunting treatise, which follows the hawking treatise and a brief hierarchy of hawks (these will be discussed later in this chapter), is far more balanced, devoting roughly equal space to information about the skill and language of hunting. The two are tightly interwoven throughout the entire treatise, with information about language often preceding information about hunting skills.¹⁰³ The first several folios of the hunting treatise deal strictly with terminology, first delineating the "beasts of venery" from the "beasts of the chase." It then focuses on harts, listing the terms for harts of different ages and explaining how to describe the head of the hart (focusing on the antlers). Next the collective nouns for beasts of the chase are listed, and then how to identify a little, middle, and great herd of deer.¹⁰⁴ Some more practical skills enter the text when the proper methods for breaking a roe and a boar are described. Even these passages have their limitations, paying more attention to the proper rewarding of the hounds than to preparing the kill itself. It does describe the proper trussing of the roe for transport:

The Roe shall be herdeled by venery I weene
The . ii . further legs the head laid be tween
And take one ender leg up I you pray
And that other further leg right as I you say
Upon the other further leg both ye him put
And with that other further leg up ye him knit
On this manner thus when ye have wrought
All whole to the kitchen then it shall be brought.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, ff. 28r-39r.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, ff. 28r-29r.

¹⁰⁵ "Weene," in this sense, is being used as a parenthetical reference ("as I suppose"). *MED*, s. v. "wenen" (v. (2)), def. 1. Blades, ed., *BSA*, ff. 29v.

This passage underlines how difficult it is to describe such actions in writing. An ignorant reader can gain a sense of what is going on here, but is unlikely to be able to successfully perform the skill just from reading the text. Some observation is still necessary.

As the above examples reveal, neither text provides the sort of how-to instructions that a modern reader might expect from a practical guide. There are no step-by-step instructions explaining how to go about hunting or hawking. Instead, the practical information provided tends to be episodic. The hawking treatise begins at the beginning: after delineating “The manner to speak of hawks from an egg to they be able to be taken,” it then instructs the reader in the taking of hawks from the wild.¹⁰⁶ It then goes into the feeding and medical care of hawks, explaining the terms given to different portions of a bird’s anatomy. Yet the next section seems to skip an important part of the process, explaining how to reclaim a hawk once cast, without ever having mentioned how to cast it in the first place.¹⁰⁷ It is this sort of deficiency that leads me to conclude that this treatise does not effectively transmit all the information an individual would need in order to hawk him- or herself. It is, rather, a guide to help the reader remember the pertinent details of what he or she has already learned or witnessed elsewhere. This purpose becomes even more evident upon examining the hunting treatise, which seems more like a guidebook for the interested observer than a practical manual. This text begins with what beasts are normally hunted and how to refer to beasts of different ages and in differently-sized groups, before skipping to how they are broken down after the kill and how the hounds are rewarded.¹⁰⁸ The action of the hunt itself is not mentioned. This trend continues through the rest of the text, which elucidates some of the nuances of the hunt, such as what gives the hounds their endurance and how the hare differs from other beasts of the hunt. While this information might help an observer

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, ff. 1r.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, ff. 2r-9r.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, ff. 28r-30v.

understand the hunt better, it does not enable him to participate. What the reader of these treatises would take away is an understanding of the *language* of hunting and hawking – the technical vocabulary used to discuss and describe the action. These treatises did not serve the practical purpose of instructing in the skills of these activities, but rather the social purpose of instructing in the language that surrounds them.

The idea of language as a marker of social identity is a topic which has been explored by social scientists from a variety of disciplines, most significantly psychology and linguistics. Social psychologists studying group identity have determined that language is one of the most important characteristics in distinguishing ethnic and national groups. Individuals are more likely to closely identify with others who speak their native language, even over other important considerations such as cultural background and geographic origin.¹⁰⁹ Language is used by members of such groups to indicate group membership and to develop stronger ties with other group members. In the case of the late medieval English gentry, we are considering a social, rather than an ethnic or national, group, and the terminology is at issue, rather than a different tongue. Still, the same principles seem to apply. Celia Katzinger and Jenny Mandelbaum have examined this question from an interdisciplinary perspective, combining approaches from social psychology, sociology, and communications, and found that through speakers' choice of terminology, they "are oriented to their own identities and to the identities of others."¹¹⁰ Through analyses of transcriptions of phone conversations between callers and help-line employees, Katzinger and Madelbaum demonstrated that the help-line employees chose to use or not use specialized vocabulary depending upon their perception of the caller's expertise. Callers who

¹⁰⁹ Itesh Sachdev and Richard Y. Bourhis, "Language and Social Identification" in *Social Identity Theory: Constructive and Critical Advances*, ed. Dominic Abrams and Michael A. Hogg (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1990), 216.

¹¹⁰ Celia Katzinger and Jenny Mandelbaum, "Word Selection and Social Identities in Talk-in-Interaction" *Communication Monographs* 80:2 (2013): 176.

employed the specialized vocabulary of group members were answered in equally specialized terms, while those who seemed ignorant of them were addressed more plainly. In this way, the authors demonstrate that specialized vocabulary, or its absence, is used as an indicator of group membership.¹¹¹

Coming at the subject from a different angle, sociolinguists have come to the same conclusions. Social groups, in particular, tend to develop their own distinctive speech patterns that serve to identify ingroup members. In his study of language and class, A. D. Edwards points out that patterns of speech can serve in a positive or negative capacity, betraying an individual's social origins (if he or she wanted them hidden) or boldly proclaiming a more desirable aspect of his or her social identity. By employing the particular rules of terminology and usage that belongs to a speech community, the speaker can claim membership in that community.¹¹² This is something that most of us do all of the time and quite unconsciously (like the modulation of terminology to the identities of those we converse with, as mentioned above). The linguist Edward Sapir noted that "The extraordinary importance of minute linguistic differences for the symbolisation of psychologically real as contrasted to politically or sociologically official groups is intuitively felt by most people. 'He talks like (one of) us' is equivalent to saying, 'He is one of us'."¹¹³ It is also clear that many people use language for this purpose. Language variants preferred by high-status speakers tend to be used by all members of the community when they are making an effort to speak carefully or formally. This speech-shifting indicates that certain forms of language have a generally accepted prestige value. By demonstrating his or her ability

¹¹¹ In the context of their experiment, there is no case of specialized vocabulary being used in order to purposefully exclude someone seen as an out-group member. This is consonant with the position of these help-line employees, whose role was to educate callers regardless of the group they might be classified into. The basic point being demonstrated, however, is that specialized language can define group membership. Katzinger and Mandelbaum, "Word Selection and Social Identities," 176-198.

¹¹² A. D. Edwards, *Language in Culture and Class* (London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd, 1976), 14.

¹¹³ Edward Sapir, *Selected Writings of Edward Sapir in Language, Culture and Personality*, ed. D. Mandelbaum (University of California Press, 1949), 16; cited in Edwards, *Language in Culture and Class*, 23.

to master a high-status variant – and not lapsing into low-status patterns of speech – an individual can make a claim to membership within that status community.¹¹⁴

Choice of vocabulary and terminology is one way that this membership could be demonstrated. “Argot” and “jargon” are terms that are used to refer to this sort of group-specific language choice, but neither of these terms seems to match up with the language used by the fifteenth-century gentry. Argot refers to a language specifically used (often by criminal groups) to prevent others’ comprehension of their conversations;¹¹⁵ while this sort of language might be useful for social exclusion, my impression of the proper terms and other gentry vocabulary is not that it is meant to be incomprehensible – just exclusive. Jargon is most often used for technical terminology revolving around a particular profession or industry.¹¹⁶ While this does apply to the hunting and hawking terms prevalent during the fifteenth century, I believe that these terms were being used for broader, less technical reasons. There does not seem to be a more appropriate term for specialized vocabulary and terminology that is meant to serve as a social marker (ironically). Perhaps this indicates the unusual nature of what the fifteenth-century English gentry was doing in attempting to appropriate technical jargon as an indicator of status. As the effort to make this language exclusive ultimately fails, it is not surprising that no other social groups follow the same course of action.

These hunting and hawking treatises must be interpreted as texts deigned to teach their readers how to speak about these activities, rather than simply perform them. This is information that is, perhaps, more easily transmitted in writing (at least, for a literate audience) than in

¹¹⁴ Gregory R. Guy, “Language, Social Class, and Status” in *The Cambridge Handbook of Sociolinguistics*, ed. Rajend Mesthrie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 171-3.

¹¹⁵ Edwards, *Language in Culture and Class*, 24-5.

¹¹⁶ On jargon, Edward states that “All ‘learned professions’ have terms for which Standard English provides no equivalents or only vague ones, and which therefore make possible condensed and unambiguous communication between fellow-professionals. Such terms also keep laymen at a respectful, or at least uncomprehending, distance and so enhance the majesty and the mystery.” *Ibid.*, 25.

person, where it is subject to the vagaries of vision, hearing and comprehension. While a rider in the woods may not automatically grasp why a fellow huntsman identified a particular group of deer as a “middle herd,” a perusal of the hunting treatise in the *Book of St Albans* would make the nuances of the terminology explicit:

.xx. is a little herd though it be of hinds
 And .xl. is a middle herd to call him be kinds
 And .lxxx. is a great herd call ye him so
 Be it hart be it hind buck or else doe¹¹⁷

The terms referring to the age of a hart are just as precise.

Note here the age of a hart
 And for to speak of the hart if ye will it learn
 Ye shall him a . Calf . call at the first year
 The second year a . Booket . so shall ye him call
 The third year a . Spaia[r]d . learneth thus all
 The fourth year a . Stag . call him by any way
 The fifth year a . great Stag . your dame bid you say
 The vi . year call ye him an . hart .
 Doeth so my child while ye been in quart [?]¹¹⁸

One can imagine the difficulties a novice hunter might face in picking these terms up on the fly as he rode through the woods with the rest of a hunting party. With only a fleeting glimpse of the animal in question, how might one tease out the difference between a calf and a booket? Reading a treatise such as the one in the *Book of St Albans* would provide the novice hunter with a clear, precise, relatively accessible guide to the language used on the hunt, and having a solid understanding of this language had important social uses. This resource would allow such a reader to speak competently about the hunt after it had ended, or join in conversations about hunts in which he or she had not participated. In this way, the practicalities of hunting and

¹¹⁷ Blades, ed., *BSA*, ff. 29r.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, ff. 28v. I have yet to discover the Middle English meaning of “quart.” The only entry in the *Middle English Dictionary* for this spelling means “a crossbow or a siege engine firing large arrows,” which seems unlikely in this context. It seems to mean something along the lines of “while you are involved in the hunt,” but no other reasonable spelling variation of the word aligns with this sense. *MED*, s. v. “quart.”

hawking, while addressed to some degree in these treatises, may have been less valuable to the late medieval reader than the terminology that was increasingly their focus.

These were already elite activities, engaged in by the leisured classes of medieval society. While they seem to have quite a practical purpose – supplying meat for a lord’s table –Rooney points out that financing the elaborate ritual of the hunt would have cost more than the value of the game the hunters brought in.¹¹⁹ Medieval aristocrats did not go hunting or hawking out of necessity, but for their own enjoyment, and consuming the results of their efforts was part of that enjoyment. Apart from the thrill of the chase, the contents of the manuals suggest that the labor involved in the hunt was not part of that enjoyment. Rooney points out that while Continental manuals provide detailed instructions in practical aspects of hunting and hawking, English manuals eschew this in favor of “the peripheral, social details of language, ritual procedure, horn music and hunting cries.” Rooney uses this information to argue that these treatises were intended to help the huntsmen (who already knew the more practical information) blend into the gentle company they served.¹²⁰ I agree, but would extend the audience even further. These English treatises seem to provide what we might today consider a cocktail party knowledge of hunting and hawking – enough to allow one to participate creditably in conversations about these activities, though not enough to engage in them personally. This degree of knowledge would have been useful to any upwardly mobile commoner who, without ever having hunted or hawked himself, could use this knowledge to circulate more comfortably in gentle company. Rooney argues that, in medieval literature, references to the hunting prowess of a courtly hero are often a synecdoche for his nobility. Medieval readers understood proficiency in hunting to represent a whole host of noble qualities and accomplishments. The proliferation of language instruction in

¹¹⁹ Rooney, *Hunting in Middle English Literature*, 2.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 7.

these texts implies that this was true in real life as well – an understanding of the language of hunting and hawking could mark a flesh-and-blood medieval Englishman as belonging to the ranks of the gentle.¹²¹ This examination of the hunting and hawking treatises of the *BSA* confirms that the social circumstance of the hunt was more important to the English gentility than the act of hunting or hawking; therefore understanding the often very specific terminology associated with them was enough to mark an individual a member of the ranks of those who engaged in these activities.

The Gentility of “Proper Terms”

If gentle status was indeed marked by a technical vocabulary, knowledge of which designated an individual as an in-group member, this makes sense of another category of text often found in juxtaposition to manuals of hunting, hawking, and heraldry as well as conduct texts. These texts are lists of proper terms¹²² or collective nouns, explaining how to properly identify a group of birds or beasts or even humans in different social or occupational categories. Some of these terms were likely useful for hunting and hawking (and some overlap the material presented in hunting or hawking manuals), while others (particularly the human terms) are somewhat tongue-in-cheek, poking fun at human foibles. Their introductions often link the use of these terms with late medieval ideas about gentility. These lists lay out what Hope Emily Allen has called the “artificial vocabulary current in the fifteenth century.” She speculates that these lists contain what developed into standard hunting and hawking terminology in the

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 97-8.

¹²² This name was coined by John Hodgkin in his seminal early article analyzing these lists. I will be referring to them either as “proper terms” or “collective nouns.” While “collective nouns” is a clear grammatical explanation of what they are, I believe that “proper terms” gives off the connotation of appropriateness and rightness, demonstrating the mastery of the individual who used them – this term is more in line with the aims of those who put together these lists. John Hodgkin, ed., “Proper Terms” *Transactions of the Philological Society*, supplement (1907-10): 1-187.

Elizabethan period as well as carving terms, “company terms” and “perhaps also the terms of heraldry.”¹²³ If Allen’s explanation sounds confused, it is because these texts are confusing to the modern reader. They do include quite a wide assortment of terminology in a manner that is difficult to categorize (not unlike the late medieval miscellany itself). All of this vocabulary, however, serves the same purpose as the terms laid out in the aforementioned manuals: to create an exclusive way of speaking that could identify an individual as a member of a particular social group.

The progression of terms in the “Properties that belongyth to a young gentleman” from Egerton 1995 can illustrate this. The text begins by outlining some useful advice on choosing a greyhound before diving into a list of “terms of venery.”¹²⁴ These terms begin as one might expect given this heading, by laying out the collective nouns for a number of beasts and birds of prey:

A herd of harts
herd of Deer¹²⁵
herd of Swans
herd of Cranes
herd of Curlews

An eye of pheasants
Covey of Partridges

A Bevy of Ladies
Bevy of Quails
Bevy of Roes
Siege of Bitterns
Siege of herons
Siege unto a Castle

¹²³ Allen, ed., “Fifteenth-Century Associations,” 602.

¹²⁴ For the curious, a good greyhound “must be headed like a snake / y-necked like a drake / y-breasted like a lion / y-sided like an onion / y-footed like a cat / y-tailed like a rat. Then is the greyhound well y-shaped.” In many manuscripts, the properties of the greyhound is presented as a separate text, but in Egerton 1995 it is lumped together with the proper terms and presented as if the two make up a single text. BL MS Egerton 1995, f. 55v.

¹²⁵ In several places in this manuscript, the scribe used a very large, rubricated initial capital “A” to serve as the first word of a series of lines. I have here used indentation to indicate places where the “A” is assumed to serve for an entire stanza of items.

A spring of Teals
 A flush of mallards
 A Deceit of lapwings
 A monster of Peacocks¹²⁶

Like much of the material found in hunting and hawking manuals, this list seems to be directed at initiating the reader into the complex vocabulary that had developed around these activities by the fifteenth century. Slipped among them, however, are terms that do not refer to prey at all. Presumably they are added in to demonstrate that similar words are being employed for different nouns: a “bevy” is the proper term for a group of ladies as well as a group of quails or roes; the term siege can be applied to a group of bitterns or herons just as it can to the military blockade of a castle.¹²⁷ Further down the list, this theory is reinforced as a “host of men” is paired with a “host of sparrows.”¹²⁸ Even further on, a “Rout of knights” and a “Rout of Gentle men” are paired with a “Rout of wild wolves.”¹²⁹

Yet not all of the terms included in these lists can be explained in this way. Immediately following the host of men and sparrows, in the midst of a long stanza¹³⁰ predominantly concerned with groups of birds, comes a “fellowship of yeomen.”¹³¹ This term is curiously isolated on the list. No other fellowships are mentioned in this stanza, nor are there any other human terms apart from the aforementioned “host of men.” It is possible the list’s compiler inserted it here to emphasize that there are other terms used to refer to more specific groups of

¹²⁶ BL MS Egerton 1995, ff. 55v-56r.

¹²⁷ Interestingly, the castle is a rare inanimate object on the list; according to Scott-Macnab, it only appears in this particular manuscript. Scott-Macnab, *A Sporting Lexicon*, 228.

¹²⁸ BL MS Egerton 1995, f. 56r.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, f. 56v.

¹³⁰ The arrangement of these terms in individual manuscripts is idiosyncratic. Lincoln’s Inn MS Hale 148 and the *Book of St Albans* crowd all of the terms together, arranging them with no line breaks. The NLW MS Brogyntyn II.1 divides the list into neat five-line stanzas. As can be seen above, Egerton 1995 divides the terms into irregular groupings. I am, somewhat loosely, designating the groupings in both the latter examples as “stanzas.” Scott-Macnab, *A Sporting Lexicon*, 126. Blades, ed., *BSA*, ff. 42r-43r. NLW MS Brogyntyn II.1, ff. 184r-192r. BL MS Egerton 1995, ff. 55v-58r.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, f. 56r.

men, yet it is the only example of this for many lines. Much further down, the list deviates from its purported “terms of venery” to focus instead on just such groups of men:

- A Pontifical of Priests
 - State of Princes
 - Dignity of Canons
 - Trough of Barons
 - Charge of Curates
 - Prudence of vicars
 - Discretion of Priests
 - Doctrine of Doctors
- A Converting of Preachers
 - Sedent of Judges¹³²
 - Eloquence of lawyers
 - Damning of Jurors
- A[n] Execution of Officers
 - Diligence of messengers
- A Faith of merchants
 - Obedience of servants
 - Provision of stewards
 - Seat of ushers
- A carve of Pantlers
 - Draught of Butlers
 - Temperance of Cooks
 - Safeguard of Porters
- A Stalk of fosters
 - Blast of hunters
 - Threatening of Courtiers
 - Laughter of Hostlers
- A Promise of Tapsters
 - Glossing of Taverners
 - Lying of Pardoners¹³³

At this point, the purpose of the list has obviously changed. Scott-Macnab attests that the other manuscript versions follow the same trajectory, with a “focus initially on game animals before broadening out to embrace a range of other categories.” He suggests that these lists had their

¹³² This may be a corruption of “sentence,” which is the term used in most other manuscripts. However, if the Latin term *sedent* were intended here, it would also be appropriate, referring to judges sitting in judgment. For a comparison of the different forms used, see Scott-Macnab, *A Sporting Lexicon*, 240.

¹³³ BL MS Egerton 1995, f. 57r-v.

origins in a shorter, more serious-minded list from a “sporting manual,” but broke away to form their own genre as their content expanded to include more humorous items.¹³⁴ For example, one late fifteenth-century manuscript he examines, Lincoln’s Inn MS Hale 148, presents the list with relatively few human additions. The “bevy of ladies” and “rout of knights” are included, as are a “host of men” and “a gagging of women.” Only after listing “a skulk of foxes” does the compiler stray off into human territory once again:

A skulk of friars
An abominable sight of monks
A superfluity of nuns
A state of priests
A dignity of canons¹³⁵

The remaining thirteen lines of the text return to groups of animals. Overall, of the fifty terms given in the Hale 148 version, nine refer to humans, as opposed to thirty-four out of the 105 terms in Egerton 1995.¹³⁶ While they focus on presenting the same core groups of terms organized in roughly the same way, the variation within individual manuscripts is considerable. With its terminology more focused on prey animals, the list presented in Hale 148 is closer to Scott-Macnab’s sporting manual *ur*-version of the text, while that in Egerton 1995 seems to be more of a playful derivative. The list presented in the *Book of St Albans* is longer and more playful still, listing 165 separate terms, eighty of which refer to humans. Indeed, it seems the compiler of the list in the *BSA* –the longest such list by far – has attempted to include every human profession in his list, with a clever collective noun for each. It should be noted that all three manuscripts, as well as every other manuscript containing a list of collective nouns, are dated to the late fifteenth century (Allen has suggested c. 1470 for Egerton 1995, based on the

¹³⁴ Scott-Macnab, *A Sporting Lexicon*, 84. A similar opinion is expressed by Rachel Hands, who sees the earliest lists as comprising prey animals, then moving on to other animals, and finally to the more “fanciful constructions” denoting groups of humans. Rachel Hands, “The Names of All Manner of Hawks, and to Whom They Belong” *Notes and Queries*, n.s. 18 (March, 1971), 86-7.

¹³⁵ Scott-Macnab, *A Sporting Lexicon*, 126.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 126. BL MS Egerton 1995, ff. 55v-57v.

contents of its chronicle of London, and the *BSA* was printed in 1486), so this must be considered a parallel development rather than change over time.¹³⁷ At the same time that individuals found it useful to compile lists of serious, technical hunting and hawking terminology, they found it useful, or at least enjoyable, to riff off of those lists, creating less functional versions of the same texts.

These more playful entries suggest that, at a certain point, the practical, instructional nature of these lists of hunting and hawking terminology evolved into a courtly game. Scott-Macnab likens the invention of these terms to a “19th-century parlour game,” adding that the invention of witty collective nouns has “remained popular into modern times, with artists and writers assembling new versions, or even inventing contemporary additions of their own.”¹³⁸ The lists certainly read like a game, but one can only speculate whether they were the product of a jovial (even inebriated) gathering later put into writing or simply the fancies of a bored scribe attempting to amuse himself. How likely is it that the contents of the lists in various manuscript versions were brought together and compared? Perhaps less so than that the results of this game circulated orally and were gathered together into lists haphazardly. Inaccuracies of memory would certainly account for the changes in list organization between different versions.

The collective nouns are infused with some moral overtones as well as playful ones. The authors of these terms crafted them to not only exemplify the various professions and ranks, but also to critique them. Coinings such as a “scrape of barbers,” a “draught of butlers,” or a “lash of carters” are neutral plays on the duties of these professions.¹³⁹ Others are simply puns, such as a

¹³⁷ More precise dating of these manuscripts might indicate a more nuanced view of the evolution of these lists. For a discussion and description of Hale 148, see Scott-Macnab, *A Sporting Lexicon*, 21-2. For the dating of Egerton 1995, see Allen, ed., “Fifteenth-Century Associations,” 602. In her 1962 article which provides an edition of several of these lists, Rachel Corner [later Rachel Hands?] mentions that all such lists date to the late fifteenth century. Rachel Corner, ed., “More Fifteenth-Century ‘Terms of Association’” *Review of English Studies* n.s. 13 (1962), 230.

¹³⁸ Scott-Macnab, *A Sporting Lexicon*, 263.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 225, 227, 228.

“doctrine of doctors.”¹⁴⁰ Yet many entries are much more judgmental, casting aspersions against a particular type of person or profession. The “fighting of beggars,” “drunkship of cobblers,” cowardness of curs,” “neverthriving of jugglers,” “malpertinence of peddlers,” “poverty of pipers,” and “folly of ribalds” are all somewhat scornful in their construction, providing a warning to the reader about these undesirable traits.¹⁴¹ Others entries are critical of how professionals go about their business: the “hastiness of cooks” appears in two versions of the list, while the “lying of pardoners” and “untruth/nontruth of summoners” seem to have been standard constructions.¹⁴² Since cooks were more often referred to as a “temperance,” one wonders if the compilers of the alternative list had a bone to pick concerning some poorly cooked food. The inclusion of pardoners and summoners in a negative light is more understandable in light of the latent anticlericalism that pervaded England in the fifteenth century;¹⁴³ most lists also include an “abominable sight of monks” and a “superfluity of nuns,” suggesting a more general disapproval of the religious (though other clerics are referenced without rancor).¹⁴⁴ Misogyny, too, makes an appearance in several terms. The “scolding of kempsters,” “impatience of wives,” and “gagging/babbling of gossips” present a degree of criticism that is not levied against men. While individual occupations are lampooned, there are no proper terms that treat the entirety of the masculine sex in such a dismissive fashion.¹⁴⁵ Finally, some ethnic tensions are revealed with the inclusion of “a disworship of Scots” in several manuscripts.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 232.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 226, 229, 232, 240, 247, 248, 249, 250.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 230, 246, 253.

¹⁴³ For an overview of this topic and further bibliography, see Matthew Groom, “England: Piety, Heresy, and Anticlericalism” in *A Companion to Britain in the Later Middle Ages*, ed. S. H. Rigby (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 381-395.

¹⁴⁴ Scott-Macnab, *A Sporting Lexicon*, 244-5.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 236, 240, 257.

¹⁴⁶ This is an interesting addition, since it arises from a possible misreading. Following Scott-Macnab’s concordance of these terms, “a disworship of Scots” is contained in three manuscripts (the mid-15th c Yale University Library, MS Beinecke 163; the late 15th c National Library of Scotland, Advocates Library, MS 19.3.1; and the 1486 *Book of*

A great deal of attention is given to outlining the negative qualities of these collectives; there are far fewer references that can be seen as explicitly positive. National Library of Wales MS Brogyntyn II.1 mentions “a good advice of burgesses;” the *BSA* rather self-interestedly includes “a worship of writers.”¹⁴⁷ Professions are praised with the common collectives a “temperance of cooks” and a “diligence of messengers.”¹⁴⁸ The priorities of the listmakers are perhaps revealed in the common “promise of tapsters.”¹⁴⁹ Overall, the lists contain far more terms with negative connotations than positive ones, which is a clue to their recreational purpose. These coinings were predominantly created for the amusement of readers. Humor is more often found in the negative than the positive; as humans, we gather enjoyment from poking fun at our deficiencies, mistakes and missteps rather than our successes. Allen points out that the differences between the various manuscript copies of these terms and the dearth of explanatory headings to indicate authorial intention “suggests a policy of leaving the interpretation to the individual. Yet some satire is certain: the question is only of degree.”¹⁵⁰

Different editions of the list clearly have their own unique tones. As mentioned above, Hale 148 is more businesslike in its presentation of primarily hunting and hawking terms without much deviation. The *BSA*, with its very long list, is far more playful. Its long list of creative occupational collectives, and its positioning of “a disworship of Scots” at the tail end of that list,

St Albans). A fourth instead lists “a disworship of sots” (the second half of the 15th c Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson D 328). Six manuscripts, however, include the phrase “a disworship of stots,” which the *MED* defines as bullocks, steers or plow horses (the c. 1450 Columbia University, Butler Library, MS Plimpton 307; the c. 1450-71 Dublin, Trinity College Library, MS 516; the c. 1470 National Library of Wales, MS Brogyntyn II.1; John Lydgate’s *The Hors, the Shepe and the Ghoos*, printed by Caxton c. 1476-7; Caxton’s *Book of Courtesy*, c. 1477-8; the late 15th c Cambridge, Magdalen College, MS Pepys 1047). Based on the similarity of the words, “a disworship of stots” seems to be the original entry, with the other four manuscripts diverging through (possibly purposeful) misreading of the word in their exemplars. Scott-Macnab, *A Sporting Lexicon*, 250, 252-3. *MED*, s. v. “stot” (n.), def. 1., ed., *BSA*, f. 43r.

¹⁴⁷ NLW MS Brogyntyn II.1, f. 186v. Blades, ed., *BSA*, f. 43r.

¹⁴⁸ Scott-Macnab, *A Sporting Lexicon*, 230, 244.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 255.

¹⁵⁰ Allen, ed., “Fifteenth-Century Associations,” 606.

almost as a punch line, suggests that entertainment was a stronger priority for its compiler.¹⁵¹

The compiler of BL MS Harley 541 (possibly a cleric himself?) seems to have taken issue with the anticlerical trend of the entries and sought to combat it with his own alterations. In this list, the “abominable sight” of monks becomes a “devoutness” and the “superfluity” of nuns becomes a “holiness.”¹⁵² Finally, there are the previously discussed moral overtones of some of the more negative entries in the list, perhaps to warn the reader of shady practices or to help guide him in the governance of his own affairs. While the lists were substantially the same, the slight differences they display suggest a number of different authorial intentions. It is possible that the more widely variant lists were presenting vocabulary that reflected membership in different sub-groups.

The core of each list was always the hunting and hawking terms, as is evident from the few headings that do appear. Egerton 1995 introduces its list as “terms of venery” and the *BSA* as “The companies of beasts and fowls.”¹⁵³ Despite the playfulness of the occupational entries, many of the terms more specific to hunting and hawking were seriously employed, as can be inferred from their continued use. Even today, the correct term for a group of quails is a “bevy” and for crows is a “murder.” That phrases like “a superfluity of nuns” and “an eloquence of lawyers” failed to catch on in ordinary conversation suggests that the medieval and early modern readers of these texts understood their dual purpose. What begins as an educational list of terminology related to particular activities transforms partway through into an amusing and creative exercise, enjoyed for its humor but not taken too seriously. Yet, serious or not, the

¹⁵¹ Blades, ed., *BSA*, f. 43r. This is not the only manuscript to place the Scots in this position: the Wagstaff Miscellany does as well. Beinecke Library MS 163, f. 186r. These may be what Allen was referring to when she claimed that “By shifts of order different scribes brought different humorous endings.” Allen, ed., “Fifteenth-Century Associations,” 606.

¹⁵² Scott-Macnab, *A Sporting Lexicon*, 244-5. BL MS Harley 541, f. 225r.

¹⁵³ BL MS Egerton 1995, f. 55r. Blades, ed., *BSA*, 42r.

importance of such terms is underlined by the frequency with which they are found in manuscript versions. Knowledge of these terms, whether for practical use or as in-jokes, would demonstrate an individual's membership in the in-group that created them.

The limited lifespan of the majority of these terms reinforces the idea that they were created to fulfill a specific social need. I investigated the 105 proper terms from the list in Egerton 1995 to determine when each of them entered English usage and when they fell out.¹⁵⁴ Eliminating duplicates, since some terms are used to refer to multiple types of things (a group of ladies, a group of quails, and a group of roes all might be addressed as a "bevy"), brought the number of collective nouns to be researched to eighty-five. Of these eighty-five, thirteen were in use before the fifteenth century and most of these continued to be used afterward. These terms, such as a "swarm of bees" and a "brood of hens," generally refer to familiar animals that most people (medieval people, at least) would encounter and deal with in their daily lives.¹⁵⁵ The bulk of the terms in the list – sixty-five in all – seem to originate during the fifteenth century – and the majority of those – fifty-six terms – came from the second half of that century.¹⁵⁶ Ten terms do not appear in the sense of collective nouns at all, suggesting that they, too, were limited in their use to the fifteenth century, perhaps appearing exclusively in the list in Egerton 1995.¹⁵⁷ Out of the sixty-five which date to the fifteenth century, forty-three were not used after 1500. These

¹⁵⁴ Unless otherwise noted, all terms are drawn from the list in Egerton 1995 and all contemporary definitions are derived from the *OED* and *MED*.

¹⁵⁵ Terms that predate the fifteenth century include: bevy of ladies/quails/roes; covey of partridges; flight of doves/swallows/goshawks; herd of harts/deer/swans/cranes/curlows/harlots; brood of hens; drove of hares/cattle; flock of sheep; harness of horses; leash of greyhounds; nest of rabbits/fawns; pipe of chickens; stood of mares; swarm of bees; trip of goats/hares; rout of knights/gentlemen/wild wolves/burgesses.

¹⁵⁶ In most of these cases, the lists these proper terms can be found in cannot be dated precisely themselves. The dating is based upon the composition of individual manuscripts and is therefore necessarily a bit rough. The dates 1450 and 1475 appear frequently, suggesting that the compilers of the *OED* and *MED* were rounding to the quarter century.

¹⁵⁷ Proper terms that have no entry in either the *OED* or *MED*: chattering of choughs (daws); flush of mallards; burden of mules; couple of spaniels; rage of colts/maidens; shrewdness of apes; sight of greys/coneys/monks; sowse of lionesses; stalyn of old horses; doctrine of doctors; fellowship of yeomen; provision of stewards; seat of ushers; sedent of judges.

dictionary entries only contain references from lists of proper terms, suggesting that they were used exclusively in this type of linguistic game.¹⁵⁸ Four terms are listed as being in use through the seventeenth century, but since the only later reference is the *Academy of Armorie*, a heraldic dictionary compiled by Randle Holme that made a deliberate effort to collect archaic terminology, it is unlikely that they remained in the general lexicon.¹⁵⁹ Five terms continued to be used in a specialized capacity, appearing in lists of technical hunting and hawking terminology from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.¹⁶⁰ Finally, ten terms that emerged during the fifteenth century entered the general lexicon. While terms such as a “murder of crows” and a “pride of lions” seem to have been invented in the context of these lists of proper terms, they caught on and have continued to be used into the present day.¹⁶¹

The brief lifespan of most of these collective nouns, and their presence almost exclusively in collections of proper terms and technical hunting and hawking vocabulary, reinforces their importance as a marker of social identity. These lists of terms served a specific purpose during the second half of the fifteenth century, a period of intense social anxiety, and had limited application outside of that context. The proper use of these terms, whether as

¹⁵⁸ Terms that do not exist outside lists of proper terms: Building of rooks; congregation of plovers; covert of coots; deceit of lapwings; exaltation of larks; fall of woodcocks; host of men/sparrows/hawks of tower; monster of peacocks; tiding of pies (magpies); unkindness of ravens; watch of nightingales; cloudyr of cats; husk of hares; leap of leopards; pass of asses; blast of hunters; carve of pantlers; charge of curates; converting of preachers; damning of jurors; dignity of canons; diligence of messengers; discretion of priests; draught of butlers; eloquence of lawyers; execution of officers; faith of merchants; glossing of taverners; laughter of ostlers; lying of pardoners; obedience of servants; pontifical of priests; promise of tapsters; prudence of vicars; safeguard of porters; stalk of foresters; state of princes; temperance of cooks; threat of courtiers; truth of barons.

¹⁵⁹ Terms described as archaic: chirm of goldfinches; dissimulation of all small birds; singular of boars; sloth of bears.

¹⁶⁰ Terms that remained in use only in a sporting context: eye of pheasants; siege of bitterns/herons; spring of teals; walk of snipes; brace of hounds; sounder of wild swine.

¹⁶¹ Terms that entered general usage: murder of crows; murmuration of starlings; berry of coneys (this was only used by naturalists until the 17th c, when it entered general usage); business of ferrets; drift of tame swine; earth of foxes; gaggle of geese/women; kennel of raycchys (hunting hounds); labor of moles; litter of whelps; pride of lions. Lipton notes that the French term “lyons orgeuilleux” predates the earliest English reference to a “pride of lions” in Egerton 1995. Lipton, *Exaltation of Larks*, 20. He is possibly referring to a passage in Gaston Phoebus, cited in Hodgkin, ed., “Proper Terms,” 101. For “raycchys,” see *MED* s. v. “racch(e)” (n.).

linguistic jokes or in ordinary conversation, served to mark an individual as belonging to gentle society. Once they outlived their usefulness (in all likelihood, when their publication made these terms accessible to a wider range of people, nullifying their exclusivity), these terms fell out of usage except in the most technical of contexts (most frequently, in hunting and hawking compendia). Several of the terms that have entered the modern lexicon also experienced a lapse in usage, falling out of use after the fifteenth century only to be picked up once again in the nineteenth or twentieth.¹⁶² Today, these collective nouns and the linguistic games they inspire have become popular once again, and a quick internet search reveals dozens of books enumerating them for the enjoyment of children and adults. That lists of proper terms have captured modern imaginations is less significant to this study than the lapse in their usage during the early modern period. Today these lists serve an intellectual or recreational purpose; for a limited period after they were devised in the fifteenth century, they served as a means of social exclusion. For a limited time during the fifteenth century, having knowledge of the intricacies of gentle leisure activities, whether hunting, hawking, or the witty invention of new terms, allowed English men and women to demonstrate their personal gentility.

Ordering the Gentle World

Subsumed within their focus on technical vocabulary, the texts of the *J. B. Treatise* and those associated with it implicitly instruct their readers in order as well. Lists of collective nouns, whether playful or serious, emphasize that every creature, human or animal, has its proper place in the world and a proper term by which it might be referred to. Ideas about order are also contained in hierarchies of hawks, which present the parallel organizations of the human and

¹⁶² Terms that experienced a gap in usage between the fifteenth and nineteenth/twentieth centuries: murmuration of starlings; business of ferrets; labor of moles; pride of lions. In most cases, it seems as if these terms were recovered as archaisms but later entered the lexicon in earnest.

avian worlds. Finally, heraldic treatises – rarely found alongside these other texts until the *BSA* – also provide readers with a framework through which to understand the social organization of the world.

The lists of proper terms discussed above attempt to organize the world based on the characteristics of the creatures that are named. Scott-Macnab argues that listmakers sought to cull out the essential features in some of their labelings. The examples he cites – “a pride of lions,” “a leap of leopards, a sloth of bears, a shrewdness of apes” – all reduce the creatures they describe to their most prominent characteristic.¹⁶³ The often-playful human occupational terms exhibit the same sort of stereotyping. A “school of clerks” derives from the academic education necessary for the occupation; a “blast of hunters” references the sound of the horn that accompanies the hunt.¹⁶⁴ The moralizing overtones, both positive and negative, of many collective nouns, such as the “neverthriving of jugglers” or “diligence of messengers” discussed above, further divide the world into black and white categories.¹⁶⁵ At times, the organization of the lists themselves exhibits a tendency toward ordering; the list in the Wagstaff Miscellany segregates the animal and human terms, listing the animals first and, only after the sole line break in the list, moving on to groups of humans – a tacit acknowledgement by the scribe as to the distinctiveness of the two sections of the text and of the two sorts of creatures being categorized.¹⁶⁶

Alongside an understanding of how to properly label the birds and beasts one might encounter, these texts also present their readers with how they might be stratified. As has already been discussed, medieval people were anxious that every individual should fit into his or her

¹⁶³ Scott-Macnab, *A Sporting Lexicon*, 263.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 229, 239.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 240, 244.

¹⁶⁶ Beinecke MS 163, f. 185v.

divinely ordained position in the social hierarchy. They believed that this was what kept the world running smoothly and properly. In these hunting and hawking manuals, it is apparent that this anxiety over hierarchy extended into the animal kingdom as well. Certain birds and beasts were considered more noble than others. The beginning of the hunting treatise in the *BSA* lays out the four beasts of venery (the hart, hare, boar, and wolf) and four beasts of the chase (buck, doe, fox, marten and roe). The former are the more prestigious beasts, often pursued in noble hunts. The latter could also be hunted by gentlemen, but were less respected as sport. After presenting these categories, the *BSA* continues, “And ye shall my dear child other beasts all / Where so ye them find Rascal ye shall them call / In firth or in fell : or in forest I you tell.”¹⁶⁷ These other beasts – called “rascal” here, but in other treatises variously labeled “folly” or “vermin” – might be appropriate quarry for commoners to trap and eat, but they were considered beneath the notice of the noble hunter.¹⁶⁸ In this way the beasts of the forest were roughly aligned with different strata of society.

A number of English hawking manuals take the stratification of fauna a bit farther, mapping the hierarchy of birds onto that of men. At the tail end of the hawking manual in the *BSA* is a list of hawks that might be appropriately used by an emperor, king, prince, duke, earl, baron, knight, squire, lady, young man, a yeoman, a poor man, a priest, and a holy-water clerk.¹⁶⁹ A similar list, presenting the same information in slightly different language, is found at the end of the “terms of venery” in Egerton 1995 and another in Harley 2340. The latter is notable for adding “a kestrel for a knave” to the end of the list.¹⁷⁰ Michael Johnston has pointed out that the *BSA* list presents a very current picture of social divisions at the time of its publication,

¹⁶⁷ Blades, ed., *BSA*, ff. 28r-v.

¹⁶⁸ For a more detailed discussion of hunting beasts and their status, see Almond, *Medieval Hunting*, 61-72.

¹⁶⁹ Blades, ed., *BSA*, ff. 26v-27r.

¹⁷⁰ BL MS Egerton 1995, f. 64r-v; BL MS Harley 2340, cited in Rachel Hands, “The Names of All Manner of Hawks,” 85.

suggesting that variation among the lists may be due to the awareness of their authors/compiler of emerging social trends.¹⁷¹ Scott-Macnab cites this hierarchy as appearing in a further ten manuscripts with some minor variation among them.¹⁷² While not a long text, he considers it to be one of the core *J. B.* texts.¹⁷³

The purpose of this list cannot simply be to teach the reader the names of various hawks. An alternative version that Scott-Macnab includes among his *J. B.* material, which only appears in one manuscript, is a much simpler list of hawks' names.¹⁷⁴ Since most manuscripts prefer the longer version, pairing each hawk with a human social rank, those pairings must be key to the text's meaning. In his discussion of the hierarchy of hawks, Cummins declares that "to a working falconer, much of this list would appear as pretty fair nonsense."¹⁷⁵ Realistically, many of the birds on the list would be used by men of a variety of social classes, depending on availability, season, and the prey being pursued; other birds, such as the eagle, could be trained to hawk but were used rarely; for still others, such as the vulture and milan, there is no indication that they were ever used for the sport.¹⁷⁶ Furthermore, several birds appear more than once on the list, under different names. Hands argues that the list is not particularly thoughtful in pairing birds with their respective human handlers: size and wingspan seem to be the primary criteria, rather than ability, character, or worth. Larger birds could take on heavier game, so perhaps this is the

¹⁷¹ Michael Johnston, *Romance and the Gentry in Late Medieval England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 3-4.

¹⁷² NLW MS Brogyntyn II.1; Cambridge, Magdalene College, MS Pepys 1047; London, British Library, MSS Harley 2340 and Royal 17.D.iv; London, College of Arms, MS Arundel 58; London, Kensington Palace, Duke of Gloucester MS 45; London, Lincoln's Inn Library, MS Hale 148; London, Lambeth Palace Library, MS 306; Oxford, Bodleian Library, MSS Digby 196 and Rawlinson C 158. Scott-Macnab, *A Sporting Lexicon*, 74.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁷⁴ This brief text, as presented in BL MS Harley 541, describes the hawks of an emperor before listing: "A goshawk / A tercel / A sparrowhawk / A musket / A hay de mew." A "hay de mew" is a "hedge-mewer," a hawk that has molted in the wild. Quoted in *Ibid.*, 132.

¹⁷⁵ Cummins, *Hound and the Hawk*, 188.

¹⁷⁶ Hands notes that eagles were used more frequently and successfully in the East than the West. For a discussion of the milan and its identification, see note 4 on the same page. Hands, "Names of All Manner of Hawks," 86.

association the author intended.¹⁷⁷ This hierarchy differs from the shorter and simpler list of hawk types which only includes five birds, all of which were commonly hunted. Most scholars agree that this text, like the lists of collective nouns discussed above, was not intended to be taken as serious advice for falconers.¹⁷⁸ Cummins differs from Hands, however, in suggesting the character of each bird may have played a role: for example, he cites the pairing of the musket and holy-water clerk in the *BSA* as an example of the author's playfulness: this notoriously finicky bird eats as little as a fasting cleric.¹⁷⁹

Just like the main hawking treatise does not provide its reader with practical instructions in how to hawk, this section of the text was not intended to provide a practical manual on the proper dispersal of birds to a hawking party. Instead, it provides its readers with a reminder about social hierarchy. While it was unlikely that a prince would literally ride out with an eagle on his arm, the equation of prince with eagle was intended to emphasize the nobility and dignity of both man and bird. Cummins cites an anecdote from Bandello's *Novellino* underlining this point. In the story, the Emperor Frederick sends his prized falcon after some prey, but it kills an eagle instead. Despite the bird's immense value to him, the emperor has the bird "ceremonially beheaded 'because it had killed its lord.'"¹⁸⁰ The story is meant to stress the importance of hierarchy. The bird's conduct could not be excused because of the nature of his crime – an upsetting of the divinely-ordained social order, which the medieval world saw as sacrosanct (whether human or avian).

The list used the analogy of the avian world to help the reader understand the world's order. Like the collective nouns discussed above, this may also be another example of

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 85-6.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 87. Cummins, *Hound and the Hawk*, 188.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 189.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

specialized knowledge that marked one as belonging in gentle company. Yet this specialized knowledge had some real-world applications that stretched beyond its esoteric pairings. By illustrating this hierarchy of hawks that existed in parallel with men, the idea of the hierarchical and ordered structure of the world would be underlined in its readers' minds. Like the emphasis on terminology in the hunting and hawking manuals, the inclusion of such hierarchical lists of hawks is a peculiarly English phenomenon. Karen Gross describes these English manuals as having a "hyper-awareness of class distinctions" that is far less pronounced, if present at all, in Continental treatises.¹⁸¹

Heraldic treatises also deserve a mention in the context of this collective knowledge base shared by medieval gentlemen. Although it was unlikely that many gentlemen would have occasion to blazon a new coat of arms, the information discussed by heralds in their manuals was still useful, for arms were a part of life for the gentle classes. As discussed in Chapter 3, possessing a coat of arms was a very significant marker of gentle status. It represented an official sanction of one's social position. While it was possible to act the part of a gentleman without one, being granted arms by a herald was an incontrovertible acknowledgement that the bearer belonged in gentle society.¹⁸² An accusation such as that leveled at the Paston family, that their ancestors were not truly gentle,¹⁸³ could not hold water against the armigerous. But even for those who were not fortunate enough to possess arms of their own, it was important for anyone in gentle society to have a basic knowledge of heraldry, in order to be able to identify the arms of the other gentlemen, esquires, knights, lords and so on they encountered. An understanding of

¹⁸¹ Gross, "Hunting, Heraldry and the Fall," 206-7.

¹⁸² Herald's even phrased their grants in this way. For example, the 1481 grant of arms to William Gogh by Thomas Solune, Clarenceux, proclaims: "he hath deserved & is right worthy he and his posterity to be in all places of Worship, admitted, renowned, accounted, numbered, accepted and received into ye number and Company of other Ancient Gentle and noble men perpetually from henceforth . . ." BL MS Harley 1507, f. 214r.

¹⁸³ For a discussion of this accusation against the Pastons, see Helen Castor, *Blood and Roses* (New York: HarperCollins, 2006) 63-8.

blazoning could allow a gentleman to properly describe the coats of arms he saw on a daily basis on other men's livery, in church windows and on tombs.

Just like much of hunting and hawking treatises that precede it, the *BSA*'s treatise on blazoning focuses largely on language and terminology. The text begins by summarizing the topics that had been covered in the first half of the treatise: "how gentlemen began and how the law of arms was first ordained and how many colors there be in coatarmors and the difference of coatarmory with many other things that here need not be rehearsed." The author goes on to describe some of the many floral and faunal signs used in the blazoning of arms, but apologizes that to "reherce [them] . . . was too long a tarrying nor I can not do it."¹⁸⁴ Instead, he offers instruction on the more abstract symbols often found on coatarmor: variously formed crosses (listed first for "the cross is the most worthy sign among all signs in arms"),¹⁸⁵ arms quartered or parted in different fashions, stripes and chevrons in all forms and directions, a few other assorted signs, and marks of heraldic difference.¹⁸⁶

The symbols are described in detail and accompanied by colored escutcheons. A typical example is the description of arms displaying a bend (diagonal stripe):

Now I intend to speak of bends in arms as here. [escutcheon in margin]
Other while there is borne in arms a bend as is found in diverse arms of certain noble gentleman as here now it shall beshewith. And ye must know that it is called a bend the which begins at the right corner or the borne of the shield and descendeth to the left side of the same shield to the difference of fissures or of little staves of the which it shall be spoken after. And of him that has these arms ye shall say thus as follows. First in Latin. ¶ Portat unam bendam de rubio in campo aureo. Gallice sic. ¶ Il part dor ung bende de gwlez. Anglice sic. ¶ He beth gold and a bend of goules.¹⁸⁷

Between the description and the accompanying picture, readers of this text would emerge with a thorough understanding of common armorial symbols and the technical terms used to describe

¹⁸⁴ Blades, ed., *BSA*, f. 56r.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, f. 56r.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, ff. 56r-87r.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, ff. 72r-v.

them. The inclusion of blazoning in three languages – Latin, French and English – is typical of the rest of the text, indicating the importance of being able to converse in the language of arms in any context. By the end of the fifteenth century, when the *BSA* was published, it was far less likely that a reader would be called upon to converse about arms in Latin, but the Latin terms were still used in certain written documents. And while French was no longer the primary language of the English court, it was the language typically used in heraldry. A significant number of grants of arms from the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century (including all those issued by Thomas Wriothesley) were in French, and even those in English tended to switch to French for the official blazon.

Like the hierarchies of hawks described above, the heraldic treatises in the *Book of St Albans* serve an additional purpose for the reader: instructions in how to navigate his or her proper social role. In her analysis of the contents of the *BSA*, Gross notes the importance the *Liber Armorum* places on this universal order, outlining the orders of angels alongside the orders of precious stones and of men. She observes that other treatises on blazoning often begin by tracing the Classical origins of coat armor and of heralds, generally back to the Trojan War. The *Liber Armorum*, however, offers a stark departure from this, tracing instead the history of gentility – the quality that coat armor represents – back to the sons of Adam.¹⁸⁸ This focus on Scriptural authorities over Classical ones, and gentility's place in the world over the history of coat armor, emphasizes this divinely-ordained order. These texts ensure that the gentleman (or aspirant gentleman) is equipped with the knowledge and skills to successfully identify and occupy his place in the world.

¹⁸⁸ Gross, "Hunting, Heraldry and the Fall," 208.

The contents of the *Book of St Albans* exemplify the social anxiety that existed in England during the late fifteenth century. Its treatises on hawking, hunting, and heraldry are bound together by their focus on providing gentlemen and aspiring gentlemen with the skills they needed in order to effectively embody their social position and fulfill its expectations. These texts suggest that correct employment of the technical vocabularies associated with hunting and hawking, the proper terms to use when referencing groups of animals or humans, and the language of blazoning could mark an individual as belonging to the in-group of the gentle. The emphasis on hierarchy and order that suffuses many of these texts ensured that even the socially aspirant understood the limitations of their newly found social position. While the term “gentle” could be applied to many, from the king on down through the peers to the “mere gentlemen,” the readers of texts offering instruction in gentle culture likely fell at the lower end of the spectrum. While they had entered the wider world of the English aristocracy, it was still important that they understood their place within it. The emphasis on hierarchy and order in these texts may have been subtly offering this message to their readers.

The texts discussed in this chapter collectively transmit what can be described as a social knowledge, which needed to be reinforced by more practical experience in the world. The hunting and hawking treatises do not adequately explain how to go about hunting or hawking – rather, they provide their readers with the equipment to be comfortable in an environment in which hunting and hawking might be discussed. The lists of proper terms inculcate the reader in the witty banter that could accompany these courtly entertainments. The treatise on heraldic blazoning enable the reader to properly identify and discuss coats of arms. This is the knowledge that a scion of the gentry would have begun to learn from childhood, which raises the question, why was it written down?

In the fifteenth century, as the traditional gentry felt itself under threat from an influx of newly wealthy and professional commoners, the use of technical language was one more way that they attempted to differentiate themselves from this mass. The in-group of the gentry could be defined as those who could speak a certain way, using specific terms, about their leisure activities. As gentle culture rapidly became more and more esoteric (think of the increasingly lengthy and complicated lists of proper terms that evolved over the course of a half century), it became difficult to remember. These texts act as mnemonic aids for the body of gentle knowledge that was less hands-on. One might learn how to hunt or hawk through the experience of doing it, but the complex series of terms that developed surrounding these activities had to be remembered. Texts such as the lists of proper terms and manuals of hunting and hawking provide a crib sheet for this knowledge, preserving the information that simply needed to be remembered (recipes for veterinary remedies, lists of terms and their definitions), while leaving out the practical, experiential side of these activities. Ownership of these texts would enable a gentleman to stay up-to-date with this terminology and to be able to effectively broadcast his social position through the use of it.

Unfortunately, just as was the case with the conduct literature discussed in Chapter 4, the very act of putting this knowledge into writing made it more accessible to exactly the groups that were being excluded. The wealthy and socially aspirant commoner could easily commission a manuscript containing this information to instruct himself in how to speak like a gentle. Once the *Book of St Albans* was published in 1486, this information began to circulate even more widely and inexpensively. The attempt by the gentry to define themselves as a group through the transmission of a common culture and the language surrounding it ultimately failed because that knowledge could not be rendered inaccessible to the lower ranks of society. As printers caught

on to the appeal of such socially-elevating material and printed it more frequently, the segment of society who shared the language of gentle culture widened, and the gentry was ultimately rendered less distinctive than ever.

Conclusion

As I have argued throughout this thesis, the late medieval gentry formed a nebulous social category. Modern scholars have struggled to develop a comprehensive definition of the group because members of the gentry themselves had difficulty articulating their social position. In the late fourteenth century, the English nobility's method of social closure through the hereditary summons to Parliament effectively divided the kingdom's aristocracy. Forced out of this elite group, the knights, esquires, and gentleman were left to develop their own separate group identity. In this they failed. As the vertical ladder of social hierarchy solidified in the social imagination, each of these ranks was tied up in establishing its own position. Any sense of kinship among them, that together they formed a gentle community with its own culture, was disrupted by that culture's overlap into other groups. What did the knights have in common with the gentlemen than they did not with the earls? The continued use of the term "gentle" to refer to characteristics that were associated with all elite ranks of society, from gentleman up to the king himself, made it impossible for the gentry to achieve any positive distinctions as a social group. Gentility was a characteristic shared by many. It was not, in itself, sufficient to establish the fifteenth-century gentry as a Turnerian social group. Unable to define themselves, the gentle ranks found it difficult to exclude newcomers, increasing the range and diversity of individuals who could claim to be part of the group.

Heraldic texts provide evidence of the multiple paths to gentility that opened in response to the gentry's failure at social closure. Grants of arms indicate that a man could prove his right to be recognized as a part of gentle society through the status of his ancestors, through outstanding acts of service, or simply through his manifestation of the personal qualities associated with gentility. Treatises on gentility such as that found in the *Liber Armorum* in the

Book of Saint Albans describe multiple types of gentlemen and demonstrate that contemporaries recognized and accepted that the criteria for evaluating social distinctions had changed significantly in the recent past.

The indeterminate characteristics of gentle status led to the commodification of gentility as authors, scribes, and printers recognized the demand for texts that could provide an entrée into elite lifestyles. Advice manuals and conduct poems directed at young gentles taught the basic rules for behaving in accordance with their status. While different types of advice were offered to boys and girls, indicating that standards of conduct changed with respect to gender and environment, the texts make it clear that this advice was tied to the proper performance of one's social position. Treatises on hunting and hawking described the pastimes of the gentle, allowing lower ranks a window onto activities that they were unlikely to have experienced in person. The lists of terms relating to these and other gentle activities ensured that readers could converse on these topics with accuracy and panache. While these texts purported to reach out to an audience of gentle readers, they also expanded opportunities for others to join the group, packaging gentle culture in a way that was easily accessible and convenient to the literate, wealthy commoners who were most likely to seek social elevation. The commodification of gentility provided a guide to social opportunities that even commoners could exploit.

Numerous historians have cited the divide between gentle and common as the most important in medieval society.¹ The previous chapters have demonstrated that, during the fifteenth century, this divide could be crossed in a number of ways. The social and political circumstances of the century provided the opportunity and the existence of a commodified gentle culture packaged in readily available texts instructing their readers in gentle behaviors, activities,

¹ F. R. H. Du Boulay, *An Age of Ambition* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1970), 69-70. Michael Bennett, *Community, Class and Careerism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 31. Lawrence Stone and Jeanne C. Fawtier Stone, *An Open Elite? England 1540-1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 8.

and lifestyle, and providing the means for elevating an individual's social status. So was this social elevation realized? Did the merchants, lawyers, bureaucrats, and small-scale landowners of fifteenth-century England succeed in crossing this divide and establishing themselves as gentlemen or better? That depends on how success is defined. In *An Open Elite?*, Lawrence and Jeanne Stone measure success at mobility into the English elite during the early modern period as the ability to maintain an elevated social position over several successive generations. This definition leads them to the conclusion that such mobility was not often achieved, since many of the families they trace had failures in the male line, dying out before such long-term success could be documented.² Short-term success is easier to document. In reading through studies of the gentry and their social inferiors, I have come across dozens of references to individuals who personally crossed the divide between gentle and common, their newfound gentle status recognized by record-keepers and peers. Whether this constitutes successful social mobility is a matter for debate. More work needs to be done on individual cases of mobility in order to make a more decisive statement. What this study has demonstrated is that, regardless of the number of people who successfully achieved it, the fifteenth-century was a time of increased opportunities for social mobility into the ranks of the English gentry.

Coda

The continued existence of multiple paths to gentility into the early modern period – paths that did not necessarily begin with gentle ancestry – can be underlined by a few offhand remarks. The first is a comment made by George Puttenham in his *Art of English Poesie* (1589). In Book I, Chapter XXXI of his text, Puttenham outlines the history of the great English writers, explaining that the use of English for literary texts did not go back beyond the reign of Edward

² Stone and Stone, *An Open Elite?*, 283-9.

III, “so as beyond that time there is little or nothing worth commendation to be found written in this art.” As for the first great writers in English, he states, “those of the first age were Chaucer and Gower both of them as I suppose Knights.”³ There is no elaboration – the text simply continues by listing the names of other English writers. What is notable about this statement is Puttenham’s assertion that, based on literary aptitude alone, Chaucer and Gower must have been knights. There is no discussion of their birth; rather, their education and talents are enough to establish their gentle status in Puttenham’s mind.

The dissociation between gentility and noble lineage seems only to have continued to grow through the early modern period. The second remark, in an anecdote from the reign of James II, illustrates this further. When a lady petitioned the king to make her son a gentleman, the king replied, “Madam, I could make him a nobleman, but God almighty himself could not make him a gentleman.”⁴ While James clearly intended to be witty at the expense of the lady’s son, this quip also indicates an understanding of gentility as a characteristic entirely separate from status or rank. Whether this anecdote has its roots in truth or not, it reveals how gentility had come to be understood during his reign. The king could confer gentle rank whenever he chose, but what was perceived as true gentility – the gentility that came from virtue and personal merit – had to be earned. These remarks show a culmination of the opening of gentle society discussed in this thesis. The gentry’s inability to develop a distinctive and exclusive set of membership criteria opened the floodgates and allowed for socially-ambitious individuals to claim gentility in a variety of ways. Ultimately, the early modern period saw gentility as a

³ George Puttenham, *The Art of English Poesie* (London: 1589). *Early English Books Online*. Web. 25 October 2016. <http://gateway.proquest.com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&res_id=xri:eebo&rft_id=xri:eebo:image:11025:27>, 48.

⁴ D. A. L. Morgan, “The Individual Style of the English Gentleman” in Michael Jones, ed., *Gentry and Lesser Nobility in Later Medieval Europe* (New York: St Martin’s, 1986), 17.

characteristic that always flirted with, but could be entirely distinct from, the circumstances of one's birth.

Bibliography

Manuscript Sources

Aberystwyth

National Library of Wales

Brogyntyn II.1 [accessed electronically at < <http://www.llgc.org.uk/en/discover/digital-gallery/manuscripts/the-middle-ages/a-middle-english-miscellany/> >]

Kew

The National Archives

C 61/133B

SP 9/31/2

London

British Library

Additional 4101

Additional 5506

Additional 14295

Additional 28549

Additional 34648

Additional 45133

Additional 46354

Additional 48031A

Additional Charter 16216

Additional Charter 74939

Arundel 168

Cotton Faustina E i

Cotton Tiberius E viii

Egerton 1995

Harley 541

Harley 1172

Harley 1178

Harley 1359

Harley 1410

Harley 1507

Harley 1764

Harley 1952

Harley 2202

Harley 2259

Harley 2340

Harley 4900

Harley 5086

Harley 7025

Royal 17.D.xv

Stowe 668

Stowe 714

London Metropolitan Archives
ACC/0351/006

New Haven

Yale University, Beinecke Library

MS 163 [accessed electronically at < <http://brbl-dl.library.yale.edu/vufind/Record/3432728>>]

Oxford

Bodleian Library

Ashmole 61

Ashmole 834

Ashmole 840

Ashmole 857

Ashmole 858

Ashmolean Rolls 4

Eng. misc. f. 36

Published Primary Sources

Allen, Hope Emily, ed. "The Fifteenth-Century 'Associations of Beasts, of Birds, and of Men:' The Earliest Text with 'Language for Carvers'" *PMLA* 51:2 (Jun. 1936): 602-6.

Barnard, Francis Pierpont, ed. *The Essential Portions of Nicholas Upton's De Studio Militari Before 1446*, translated by John Blount. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1931.

Blades, William, ed. *The Book of St Albans*. London: Elliot Stock, 1901.

Bornstein, Diane, ed. *The Middle English Translation of Christine de Pisan's Livre du corps de policie*. Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1977.

Camden, William, ed. *Remains Concerning Britain*. London: John Russell Smith, 1870; reprint, East Ardsley, Wakefield, Yorkshire: EP Publishing, 1973.

Carpenter, Christine, ed. *The Armburgh Papers: The Brokholes Inheritance in Warwickshire, Hertfordshire and Essex c. 1417-c. 1453*. Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1998.

_____, ed. *Kingsford's Stonor Letters and Papers 1290-1483*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Caxton, William. *The Game and Playe of the Chesse*. Edited by Jenny Adams. Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2009.

Chambers, R. W., ed. *A Fifteenth-Century Courtesy Book*. EETS o. s. 148. London: Oxford University Press, 1914, reprint 1962.

Chaucer, Geoffrey. *The Canterbury Tales: Complete*. Edited by Larry Benson. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000.

Clark, James G., ed., *The Chronica Maiora of Thomas Walsingham (1376-1422)*. Translated by David Preest. Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2005.

Colins de Beaumont, "On the Crécy Dead." Translated by Elizaveta Strakhov. In *The Battle of Crécy: A Casebook*, edited by Michael Livingston and Kelly DeVries, 26-51. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2016.

Collett, Barry, ed. *Late Medieval Englishwomen: Julian of Norwich, Marjorie Kempe and Juliana Berners*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006.

- Corner, Rachel, ed. "More Fifteenth-Century 'Terms of Association.'" *Review of English Studies* n.s. 13 (1962): 229-244.
- Coulton, G. G., ed. *Social Life in Britain from the Conquest to the Reformation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1918.
- Cressy, David., ed. *Education in Tudor and Stuart England*. London: Edward Arnold, 1975.
- Crisp, Frederick Arthur. "Grant of Arms to Thomas Northland." *Fragmenta Genealogica* 10 (1904): 75.
- Crotch, W. J. B, ed. *The Prologues and Epilogues of William Caxton*. Early English Text Society, o.s., 176. London: Oxford University Press, 1928.
- Curry, Anne, ed. "Henry VI: Parliament of July 1433, Text and Translation," in in *The Parliament Rolls of Medieval England*, ed. C. Given-Wilson et al. Internet version, at <<http://www.sd-editions.com/PROME>>, accessed on 30 July 2017. Scholarly Digital Editions, Leicester: 2005.
- Curry, Anne and Rosemary Horrox, eds. "Henry VI: Parliament of July 1455, Text and Translation," in *The Parliament Rolls of Medieval England*, ed. C. Given-Wilson et al. Internet version, at <<http://www.sd-editions.com/PROME>>, accessed on 16 November 2013. Scholarly Digital Editions, Leicester: 2005.
- Davis, Norman, ed. *Paston Letters and Papers of the Fifteenth Century*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971-6.
- De Pizan, Christine. *The Book of the Body Politic*. Edited and translated by Kate Langdon Forhan. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.
- _____. *The Book of the City of Ladies*. Translated by Earl Jeffrey Richards. New York: Persea Books, 1982.
- _____. *The Treasure of the City of Ladies*. Revised ed. Translated by Sarah Lawson. New York: Penguin Books, 2003.
- Dudley, Edmund. *The Tree of the Commonweath (1509)*, edited by D. M. Brodie. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1948.
- Elyot, Thomas. *The Boke Named the Governor*. Edited by John M. Major. Classics in Education 40. New York: Teachers College Press, 1969.
- Ferne, John. *The Blazon of Gentrie The English Experience: Its Record in Early Printed Books Published in Facsimile*. No. 513. New York: De Capo Press, 1973.
- Fletcher, Alan J., ed. "'The Unity of the State Exists in the Agreement of its Minds:' A Fifteenth-Century Sermon on the Three Estates." *Leeds Studies in English*, n. s.: 22 (1991): 103-37.
- Fortescue, John. *On the Laws and Governance of England*. Edited by Shelley Lockwood. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
- Furnivall, F. J., ed. *The Babees Book*. EETS o.s. 32. New York: Greenwood Press, 1868. Reprint, Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2002.
- _____, ed. *Caxton's Book of Curtesye*. EETS e.s. 3. London: Oxford University Press, 1868. Reprint, Millwood, NY: Kraus Reprint Co., 1973.
- _____, ed. *The Fifty Earliest English Wills in the Court of Probate, London. AD 1387-1439, with a Priest's of 1454*. EETS o.s. 78. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1882; reprint, 1964.
- _____, ed. *Hali Meidenhad*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1922. *Corpus of Middle English Prose and Verse*. Web. 15 November 2103. <<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/c/me/HMaid/1:1?rgn=div1;view=fulltext>>.
- Gairdner, James, ed. *The Paston Letters, 1422-1509 AD*. Volume III. London: Bowes, 1875.

- _____, ed. *The Paston Letters, 1422-1509 AD*. Westminster: Archibald Constable and Co, 1901. Reproduced in *Medieval Family Life* database, Adams Mathew Digital Ltd., 2010.
- Greco, Gina L. and Christine M. Rose, eds. *The Good Wife's Guide: Le Ménagier de Paris: A Medieval Household Book*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2009.
- Hands, Rachel, ed. *English Hunting and Hawking in The Boke of St. Albans: A Facsimile Edition of Sigs. A2-f8 of The Boke of St. Albans (1486)*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975.
- Hanham, Alison, ed. *The Cely Letters, 1472-1488*. EETS o.s. 273. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975.
- Harrison, William. *The Description of England*. Edited by Georges Edelen. Ithaca: Cornell University Press for the Folger Shakespeare Library, 1968.
- Herrtage, Sidney J. H., ed. *Catholicon Anglicum: An English-Latin Wordbook, Dated 1483*. EETS o. s. 75. London: Early English Text Society, 1881.
- Hodgkin, John, ed. "Proper Terms: An Attempt at a Rational Explanation of the Meaning of the Collection of Phrases in 'The Book of St. Albans,' 1486, Entitled 'Compaynys of beestys and fowlys,' and Similar Lists." *Transactions of the Philological Society*, supplement (1907-10): 1-187.
- Johnston, Mark D., ed. *Medieval Conduct Literature: An Anthology of Vernacular Guides to Behaviour for Youths, with English Translations*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009.
- Kirby, Joan, ed. *The Plumpton Letters and Papers*. Camden Society, 5th ser. 8. London: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- Langland, William. *The Vision of Piers Plowman*, 2nd ed. Edited by A. V. C. Schmidt. London: J. M. Dent, 1995.
- Leggatt, Shirley. "The Book of St Albans and the Origins of its Treatise on Hawking" *Studia neophilologica* 22 (1950): 135-145.
- Littledale, Willoughby A., ed. *A Collection of Miscellaneous Grants of Arms*. 2 vols. Harleian Society Publications Vol. 76-7. London: J. Whitehead and Son, 1925-6.
- Mustanoja, Tauno F., ed. *The Good Wife Taught Her Daughter*. Annales Academiae Scientiarum Fennicae, BLXI, 2. Helsinki: Suomalainen Kirjallisuuden Seuran, 1948.
- Myers, A. R., ed. *English Historical Documents 1327-1485*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1969.
- _____, ed. *The Household of Edward IV: The Black Book and the Ordinance of 1478*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1959.
- Nichols, John Gough, ed. *The Book of Noblesse*. New York: Burt Franklin, 1972. *Project Gutenberg*. Web. 5 August 2017. <<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/33953/33953-h/33953-h.htm>>.
- Parsons, H. Roseamond. "Anglo-Norman Books of Courtesy and Nurture." *PMLA* 44:2 (1929): 383-455.
- Puttenham, George. *The Art of English Poesie*. London: n. p., 1589. *Early English Books Online*. Web. 25 October 2016. <http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&res_id=xri:eebo&rft_id=xri:eebo:image:11025:27>.
- Scott-Macnab, David. *A Sporting Lexicon of the Fifteenth Century: The J. B. Treatise*. Oxford: The Society for the Study of Medieval Languages and Literature, 2003.
- Smith, Sir Thomas. *De Republica Anglorum*. Meston, Yorkshire: The Scholar Press Limited,

1970.

- Sponsler, Clare. "The English How the Good Wijf Taughte Hir Doghtir and How the Wise Man Taught His Sonne." In *Medieval Conduct Literature*, edited by Johnston, 285-304. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009.
- Squibb, G. D., ed., *Munimenta Heraldica: 1484-1984*. Harleian Society Publications n. s. 4. London: The Harleian Society, 1985.
- Stapleton, Thomas, ed. *The Plumpton Correspondence*. London: Camden Society, 1839. Reprint, with an introduction by Keith Dockray. Stroud, Gloucestershire: Alan Sutton, 1990.
- Statutes of the Realm*, Vol. 2. London: Dawsons of Pall Mall, 1816; 1963.
- Stow, John. *A Survery of London, Contayning the Originall, Antiquity, Increase, Moderne Estate, and Description of that Citie, written in the year 1598*. Edited by Henry Morley. London: George Routledge and Sons, 1890.
- Wagner, Anthony R., Ann Payne, and Nicholas Barker, eds., *A Medieval Pageant: Writhe's Garter Book: The Ceremony of the Bath and the Earldom of Salisbury Roll*. London: Roxburghe Club, 1993.
- Walsingham, Thomas. *Historia Anglicana, Vol II AD 1381-1422*. Edited by Henry Thomas Riley. London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts, and Green, 1864.
- Way, Albert, ed., *Promptorium Parvulorum Sive Clericorum*. London: Camden Society, 1865.
- Wright, Thomas, ed. *The Book of the Knight of La Tour-Landry*. EETS, o.s., 33. London: N. Trübner & Co., 1868.

Secondary Sources

- Acheson, Eric. *A Gentry Community: Leicestershire in the Fifteenth Century c. 1422-1485*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.
- Adams, Tracy. "Noble, wyse and grete lords, gentilmen and marchauntes': Caxton's Prologues as Conduct Books for Merchants." *Parergon* 22:2 (2000): 53-76.
- Ailes, Adrian. "Ancient Precedent or Tudor Fiction? Garter King of Arms and the Pronouncements of Thomas, Duke of Clarence." In *The Herald in Late Medieval Europe*, edited by Katie Stevenson, 29-40. Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2009.
- _____. "The Creation of the Office of Garter King of Arms: A Postscript," *Coat of Arms* n. s. 12 (1998): 239-40.
- _____. "Le developpement des 'visitations' de herauts en Angleterre et au Pays de Galles 1450-1600" *Revue du Nord* 88 (2006): 659-79.
- _____. "Heraldry in Medieval England: Symbols of Politics and Propaganda." In *Heraldry, Pageantry and Social Display in Medieval England*, edited by Peter Coss and Maurice Keen, 83-104. Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2002.
- _____. "Medieval Grants of Arms 1300-1461," unpublished MA thesis, University of London, 1997.
- _____. "Royal Grants of Arms in England before 1484." In *Soldiers, Nobles, and Gentleman*, edited by Peter Coss and Christopher Tyerman, 85-96. Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2009.
- _____. "Wagner, Sir Anthony Richard (1908-1995)." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edition, January 2011. Web. 17 July 2013. <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/57945>>.
- Alexander, Michael Van Cleave. *The Growth of English Education, 1348-1648: A Social and Cultural History*. University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1990.

- Almond, Richard. *Medieval Hunting*. Revised ed. Stroud, Gloucestershire: The History Press, 2011.
- Almond, Richard and A. J. Pollard. "The Yeomanry of Robin Hood and Social Terminology in Fifteenth-Century England." *Past and Present* 170 (2001): 52-77.
- Amos, Mark Addison. "'For Manners Make Man': Bourdieu, de Certeau, and the Common Appropriation of Noble Manners in the Book of Courtesy." In *Medieval Conduct*, edited by Ashley and Clark, 23-48. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001.
- Archer, Ian W. "Smith, Sir Thomas (1513–1577)." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edition, January 2008. Web. 31 July 2017. <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/25906>>.
- Ariès, Philippe. *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*. Translated by Robert Baldick. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1962.
- Armstrong, Jackson W. "The Development of the Office of Arms in England, c. 1413-1485." In *The Herald in Late Medieval Europe*, edited by Katie Stevenson, 9-28. Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2009.
- Arner, Lynn. *Chaucer, Gower, and the Vernacular Rising: Poetry and the Problem of the Populace after 1381*. University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2013.
- Ashley, Kathleen and Robert L. A. Clark, eds. *Medieval Conduct*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001.
- Astill, G. G. "The Medieval Gentry: A Study in Leicestershire Society, 1350-1399." PhD diss., University of Birmingham, 1977.
- Bailey, Merridee L. *Socialising the Child in Late Medieval England c. 1400-1600*. York: York Medieval Press, 2012.
- Barber, Richard. *The Knight and Chivalry*. Revised ed. Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1995.
- Bardsley, Sandy. *Venomous Tongues: Speech and Gender in Late Medieval England*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006.
- Barnie, John. *War in Medieval English Society: Social Values in the Hundred Years War 1337-99*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1974.
- Barnhouse, Rebecca. *The Book of the Knight of the Tower: Manners for Young Medieval Women*. New York: Palgrave, 2006.
- Barron, Caroline. "The Education and Training of Girls in Fifteenth-Century England." In *Courts, Counties and the Capital in the Later Middle Ages*, edited by D. E. S. Dunn, 139-153. Stroud, Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing, 1996.
- _____. "The 'Golden Age' of Women in Medieval London." *Reading Medieval Studies* 15 (1989): 34-58.
- Bell, Adrian R., Anne Curry, Andy King, and David Simpkin. *The Soldier in Later Medieval England*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.
- Bennett, Judith. *Ale, Beer and Brewsters in England: Women's Work in a Changing World, 1300 to 1600*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.
- _____. *History Matters: Patriarchy and the Challenge of Feminism*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006.
- _____. *Women in the Medieval English Countryside: Gender and Household in Brigstock Before the Plague*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987.
- Bennett, Judith and Amy M. Froide, "A Singular Past." In *Singlewomen in the European Past, 1250-1800*, edited by Bennett and Froide, 1-37. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999.

- Bennett, Michael. "Careerism in Late Medieval England." In *People, Politics and Community in the Late Middle Ages*, edited by Joel Rosenthal and Colin Richmond, 19-39. Gloucester: Alan Sutton, 1987.
- _____. *Community, Class and Careerism: Cheshire and Lancashire Society in the Age of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.
- Benzie, William. *Dr. F. J. Furnivall: A Victorian Scholar Adventurer*. Norman, OK: Pilgrim Books, 1983.
- Blake, Norman. *F. Caxton and His World*. London: Andre Deutsch, 1969.
- _____. "The Spread of Printing in English during the Fifteenth Century." *Gutenberg-Jahrbuch* 62 (1987): 26-36.
- _____. *William Caxton and English Literary Culture*. London: The Hambledon Press, 1991.
- Boffey, Julia. "Berners, Juliana (fl. 1460)." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004. Web. 13 February 2016. <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/2255>>.
- Bornstein, Diane. *The Lady in the Tower: Medieval Courtesy Literature for Women*. Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1983.
- Braude, Benjamin. "The Sons of Noah and the Construction of Ethnic and Geographical Identities in the Medieval and Early Modern Periods." *The William and Mary Quarterly* 54.1 (1997): 103-142.
- British Library, "Detailed Record for Harley 4410." Online Catalogue of Illuminated Manuscripts <<http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/record.asp?MSID=4579&CollID=8&NStart=4410>> (accessed March 18, 2014).
- Brown, Andrew and Craig Walker. "Upton, Nicholas (c.1400–1457)." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004. Web. 13 February 2016. <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/28011>>.
- Brown, Cynthia J. "The Reconstruction of an Author in Print: Christine de Pizan in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries." In *Christine de Pizan and the Categories of Difference*, edited by Marilyn Desmond, 215-235. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998.
- Burnley, David. *Courtliness and Literature in Medieval England*. New York: Longman, 1998.
- Campbell, Mildred. *The English Yeoman under Elizabeth and the Early Stuarts*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1942.
- Carpenter, Christine. "England: The Nobility and the Gentry." In *Companion to Britain in the Late Middle Ages*, edited by S. J. Rigby, 261-282. Oxford: Blackwell, 2003.
- _____. "Gentry and Community in Medieval England." *Journal of British Studies* 33:4 (1994): 340-80.
- _____. *Locality and Polity: A Study of Warwickshire Landed Society, 1401-1499*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.
- Carpenter, Christine and Olivier Matteoni. "Offices and Officers." In *Government and Political Life in England and France, c. 1300-c. 1500*, edited by Christopher Fletcher, Jean-Philippe Genet, and John Watts, 78-115. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.
- Castor, Helen. *Blood and Roses: One Family's Struggle and Triumph during England's Tumultuous Wars of the Roses*. New York: HarperCollins, 2006.
- Christianson, C. Paul. "The Rise of London's Book Trade." In *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain, Volume III 1400-1557*, edited by Lotte Hellinga and J. B. Trapp, 128-147. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.
- Clanchy, Michael. "Did Mothers Teach Their Children to Read?" In *Motherhood, Religion, and*

- Society in Medieval Europe, 400-1400*, edited by Conrad Leyser and Lesley Smith, 129-153. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011.
- _____. *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066-1307*. Second edition. Oxford: Blackwell, 1993.
- Clark, James G. "Monasteries and Secular Education in Late Medieval England." In *Monasteries and Society in the British Isles in the Later Middle Ages*, edited by Janet Burton and Karen Stöber, 145-167. Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2008.
- _____. "The Regular Clergy." In *A Companion to the Early Book in Britain 1476-1558*, edited by Vincent Gillespie and Susan Powell, 176-206. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2014.
- Cook, Robert. "The Canon's Yeoman and His Tale." *The Chaucer Review* 22:1 (1987): 28-40.
- Cooper, J. P. "Ideas of Gentility in Early Modern England." In *Land, Men and Beliefs: Studies in Early-Modern History*, edited by G. E. Aylmer and J. S. Morrill, 43-77. London: The Hambledon Press, 1983.
- Courtenay, William. *Schools and Scholars in Fourteenth-Century England*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987.
- Coss, Peter. "Aspects of Cultural Diffusion in Medieval England: The Early Romances, Local Society and Robin Hood." *Past and Present* 108 (1985): 35-79.
- _____. *The Foundations of Gentry Life: The Multons of Frampton and Their World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.
- _____. "Knighthood, Heraldry and Social Exclusion in Edwardian England." In *Heraldry, Pageantry and Social Display in Medieval England*, edited by Peter Coss and Maurice Keen, 39-68. Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2002.
- _____. *The Knight in Medieval England 1000-1400*. Stroud, Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing, 1993.
- _____. *The Lady in Medieval England 1000-1500*. Stroud, Gloucestershire.: Sutton Publishing, 1998.
- _____. *The Langley Family and its Cartulary: A Study in Late Medieval Gentry*. Dugdale Society Occasional Papers 22. Oxford: Dugdale Society, 1974.
- _____. *Origins of the English Gentry*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.
- Coss, Peter and Maurice Keen, eds. *Heraldry, Pageantry and Social Display in Medieval England*. Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2002.
- Crawford, Michael. *The Fight for Status and Privilege in Late Medieval and Early Modern Castile 1465-1598*. State College, PA: Penn State University Press, 2014.
- Crouch, David. *The Birth of Nobility: Constructing Aristocracy in England and France 900-1300*. Harlow: Pearson/Longman, 2005.
- _____. "The Historian, Lineage and Heraldry 1050-1250." In *Heraldry, Pageantry and Social Display in Medieval England*, edited by Peter Coss and Maurice Keen, 17-38. Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2002.
- Cullum, Patricia and Jeremy Goldberg. "How Margaret Blackburn Taught Her Daughters: Reading Devotional Instruction in a Book of Hours." In *Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts in Late Medieval Britain. Essays for Felicity Riddy*, edited by Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, 217-236. Turnhout: Brepols, 2000.
- Cummins, John. *The Hound and the Hawk: The Art of Medieval Hunting*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1988.
- Davey, Colin. "'To my hande cam a lytyl booke': William Caxton's Study, Trading Books, and

- the Mercantile Construction of Knowledge." Paper presented at the 51st International Congress on Medieval Studies, Kalamazoo, MI, May 2016.
- Davies, R. G. "Kemp, John (1380/81–1454)." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edition, May 2011. Web. 5 August 2017. <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/15328>>.
- De Gendt, Anne Marie. *L'art d'éduquer les nobles damoiselles: Le Livre du Chevalier de la Tour Landry*. Paris: Honoré Champion, 2003.
- Denholm-Young, Noël. *The Country Gentry in the Fourteenth Century*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969.
- _____. *History and Heraldry 1254-1310: A Study of the Historical Value of the Rolls of Arms*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965.
- Dennys, Rodney. *The Heraldic Imagination*. London: Barrie and Jenkins Limited, 1975.
- Downes, Stephanie. "Fashioning Christine de Pizan in Tudor Defences of Women." *Parergon* 23:1 (2006): 71-92.
- Dronzek, Anna. "Gendered Theories of Education in Fifteenth-Century Conduct Books." In *Medieval Conduct*, edited by Ashley and Clark, 135-59. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001.
- Du Boulay, F. R. H. *An Age of Ambition: English Society in the Late Middle Ages*. London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, Ltd., 1970.
- _____. "The First English Gentlemen." *The Listener* (30 October 1958): 687-9.
- Duby, Georges. *The Chivalrous Society*. Translated by Cynthia Postan. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977.
- _____. *The Three Orders: Feudal Society Imagined*. Translated by Arthur Goldhammer. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978.
- Dudash, Susan J. "Christine de Pizan and the 'Menu people.'" *Speculum* 78:3 (2003): 788-831.
- Dyer, Christopher. *An Age of Transition? Economy and Society in England in the Later Middle Ages*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005.
- _____. *A Country Merchant, 1495-1520: Trading and Farming at the End of the Middle Ages*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.
- _____. *Standards of Living in the Later Middle Ages: Social Change in England c. 1200-1520*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.
- Edwards, A. D. *Language in Culture and Class: The Sociology of Language and Education*. London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd, 1976.
- Elias, Norbert. *The Civilizing Process*. Rev. ed. Edited by Eric Dunning, Johan Goudsblom and Stephen Mennell. Translated by Edmund Jephcott. Oxford: Blackwell, 2000.
- Everitt, Alan. *The Community of Kent and the Great Rebellion: 1640-1660*. Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1966.
- _____. "Social Mobility in Early Modern England" *Past and Present* 33 (1966): 56-73.
- Ferguson, Arthur B. *The Chivalric Tradition in Renaissance England*. Washington, DC: Folger Books, 1986.
- Fisher, John. "A Language Policy for Lancastrian England." *PMLA* 107:5 (1992): 1168-1180.
- Fleming, Peter. "Charity, Faith, and the Gentry of Kent." In *Property and Politics: Essays in Late Medieval English History*, edited by A. J. Pollard, 36-58. Stroud, Gloucestershire: Sutton, 1984.
- _____. "Household Servants of the Yorkist and Early Tudor Gentry." In *Early Tudor England*, edited by Daniel Williams, 19-36. Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1989.

- Gardiner, Dorothy. *English Girlhood at School: A Study of Women's Education Through Twelve Centuries*. London: Humphrey Milford, 1929.
- Gerould, Gordon Hall. "The Social Status of Chaucer's Franklin." *PMLA* 41:2 (1926): 262-279.
- Gillingham, John. "From Civilitas to Civility: Codes of Manners in Medieval and Early Modern England" *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th ser., 12 (2002): 267-89.
- Given-Wilson, Chris. *The English Nobility in the Late Middle Ages: The Fourteenth-Century Political Community*. London and New York: Routledge, 1987.
- Goldberg, P. J. P. "Marriage, Migration, Servanthood and Life-Cycle in Yorkshire Towns of the Later Middle Ages: Some York Cause Paper Evidence." *Continuity and Change* 1:2 (1986): 141-69.
- _____. *Women, Work, and Life Cycle in a Medieval Economy: Women in York and Yorkshire c. 1300-1520*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992.
- Good, Jonathan. "For God, Harry, and Saint George? Agincourt and the 'National' Saint." Paper presented at the 50th International Congress on Medieval Studies, Kalamazoo, MI, May 2015.
- Grassby, Richard. "The Decline of Falconry in Early Modern England" *Past and Present* 157 (1997): 37-62.
- Grennen, Joseph E. "Chaucer's Characterization of the Canon and His Yeoman." *Journal of the History of Ideas* 25:2 (1964): 279-284.
- Groom, Matthew. "England: Piety, Heresy, and Anti-Clericalism." In *A Companion to Britain in the Later Middle Ages*, edited by S. H. Rigby, 381-395. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003.
- Gross, Karen. "Hunting, Heraldry and the Fall in the Book of St Albans." *Viator* 38 (2007): 191-215.
- Grussenmeyer, Jon-Mark. "The Kemps of Wye: A Dynasty of Lancastrian Servants." Paper presented at the 51st International Congress on Medieval Studies, Kalamazoo, MI, May 2016.
- Gunn, S. J. "Dudley, Edmund (c.1462–1510)." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edition, May 2010. Web. 31 July 2017. <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/8147>>.
- Guy, Gregory R. "Language, Social Class, and Status." In *The Cambridge Handbook of Sociolinguistics*, ed. Rajend Mesthrie, 159-185. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.
- Hanawalt, Barbara. *Growing Up in Medieval London: The Experience of Childhood in History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993.
- _____. "Peasant Women's Contribution to the Home Economy in Late Medieval England." In *Women and Work in Pre-Industrial Europe*, edited by Barbara Hanawalt, 3-20. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1986.
- _____. *The Ties that Bind: Peasant Families in Medieval England*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986.
- Handley, Stuart. "Anstis, John (1669–1744)." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edition, January 2008. Web. 17 July 2013. <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/584>>.
- Hands, Rachel. "Juliana Berners and *The Boke of St. Albans*." *Review of English Studies*, n.s. 18:72 (1967): 373-386.
- _____. "The Names of All Manner of Hawks, and to Whom They Belong." *Notes and*

- Queries* n.s. 18 (March, 1971): 85-88.
- Hardman, Philippa. "Compiling the Nation: Fifteenth-Century Miscellany Manuscripts." In *Nation, Court and Culture: New Essays on Fifteenth-Century English Poetry*, ed. H Cooney, 50-69. Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000.
- Harvey, Sally. "The Knight and Knight's Fee in England." *Past and Present* 49 (1970): 3-43.
- Heath, Peter. *English Parish Clergy on the Eve of the Reformation*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969.
- Hellinga, Lotte. *William Caxton and Early Printing in England*. London: The British Library, 2010.
- Herendeen, Wyman H. "Camden, William (1551-1623)." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edition, January 2008. Web. 17 July 2013. <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/4431>>.
- Hexter, J. H. "The Military Decline of the Aristocracy." In *Social Change and Revolution in England*, edited by Lawrence Stone, 33-45. London: Longmans, 1965.
- Hilton, Rodney H. *The English Peasantry in the Later Middle Ages: The Ford Lectures for 1973 and Related Studies*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975.
- _____. "Freedom and Villeinage in England." *Past and Present* 31 (1965): 3-19.
- _____. "The Origins of Robin Hood." In *Robin Hood: An Anthology of Scholarship and Criticism*, edited by Stephen Knight, 197-210. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1999. Originally published in *Past and Present* 14 (1958): 30-44.
- Ho, Cynthia. "As Good as Her Word: Women's Language in *The Knight of the Tour d'Landry*." In *The Rusted Hauberk: Feudal Ideals of Order and Their Decline*, edited by Liam O. Purdon and Cindy L. Vitto, 99-120. Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1994.
- Holt, J. C. "The Origins and Audience of the Ballads of Robin Hood." In *Robin Hood: An Anthology of Scholarship and Criticism*, edited by Stephen Knight, 211-232. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1999. Originally published in *Past and Present* 18 (1960): 89-110.
- Horrox, Rosemary. "The Urban Gentry in the Fifteenth Century." In *Towns and Townspeople in the Fifteenth Century*, edited by J. A. F. Thomson, 22-44. Stroud, Gloucestershire: Alan Sutton, 1988.
- Houwen, L. A. J. R. "Print into Manuscript: A Manuscript Copy of Part of the *Boke of St. Albans* (1486)." In *Boeken in de late Middeleeuwen*, edited by Jos. M. M. Hermans and Klaas van der Hoek, 41-52. Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1994.
- Hull, Suzanne. *Chaste, Silent, and Obedient: English Books for Women 1475-1640*. San Marino, CA: Huntington Library, 1982.
- Hunter, Michael. "Ashmole, Elias (1617-1692)." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edition, May 2006. Web. 17 July 2013. <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/764>>.
- Jacob, E. F. "The Book of St Albans." *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 28 (1944): 99-118.
- Jans, Lise, Tom Postmes, and Karen I. Van der Zee. "Sharing Differences: The Inductive Route to Social Identity Formation" *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 48 (2012): 1145-1149.
- Johnston, Michael. *Romance and the Gentry in Late Medieval England*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.
- Jones, Michael, ed. *Gentry and Lesser Nobility in Late Medieval Europe*. New York: St Martin's Press, 1986.
- Justice, Steven. *Writing and Rebellion: England in 1381*. Berkeley: University of California

- Press, 1994.
- Karras, Ruth Mazo. *From Boys to Men: Formations of Masculinity in Later Medieval Europe*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003.
- Katzinger, Celia and Jenny Mandelbaum. "Word Selection and Social Identities in Talk-in-Interaction" *Communication Monographs* 80:2 (2013): 176-198.
- Keen, Maurice. *Chivalry*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984.
- _____. *English Society in the Later Middle Ages 1348-1500*. London: Penguin Books, 1990.
- _____. "Heraldry and Hierarchy: Esquires and Gentlemen." In *Orders and Hierarchies in Late Medieval Europe*, edited by Jeffrey Denton, 94-108. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999.
- _____. *The Laws of War in the Late Middle Ages*. London: Routledge and K. Paul, 1965.
- _____. *The Origins of the English Gentleman: Heraldry, Chivalry and Gentility in Medieval England c. 1300-c. 1500*. Stroud, Gloucestershire: Tempus, 2002.
- Keiser, George R. "Practical Books for the Gentleman." In *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain, Volume III: 1400-1557*, edited by Lotte Hellinga and J. B. Trapp, 470-494. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.
- Kerby-Fulton, Kathryn, Maidie Hilmo and Linda Olson. *Opening Up Middle English Manuscripts: A Literary and Visual Approach*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012.
- Kermode, Jenny. *Medieval Merchants: York, Beverly and Hull in the Later Middle Ages*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- Kibbee, Douglas. *For to Speke Frenche Trewely: The French Language in England, 1000-1600: Its Status, Description, and Instruction*. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1991.
- Knight, Stephen. *Robin Hood: An Anthology of Scholarship and Criticism*. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1999.
- Kowaleski, Maryanne. "Singlewomen in Medieval and Early Modern Europe: The Demographic Perspective." In *Singlewomen in the European Past*, edited by Bennett and Froide, 38-81. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999.
- Krueger, Roberta L. "Chascune selon son estat: Women's Education and Social Class in the Conduct Books of Christine de Pizan and Anne de France." *Papers on French Seventeenth Century Literature* 24:46 (1997): 19-34.
- _____. "Identity Begins at Home: Female Conduct and the Failure of Counsel in *Le Ménagier de Paris*." *Essays in Medieval Studies* 22 (2005): 21-39.
- _____. "Introduction: Teach Your Children Well: Medieval Conduct Guides for Youths." In *Medieval Conduct Literature*, edited by Johnston, ix-2. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009.
- Lasdun, Susan. *The English Park: Royal, Public, Private*. London: Vendome Press, 1991.
- Latham, R. E. *Revised Medieval Latin Word List from British and Irish Sources*. London: British Academy, 1965.
- Lipton, James. *An Exaltation of Larks: The Ultimate Edition*. New York: Penguin Books, 1993.
- Livingston, Michael. "Colins of Beaumont: A Poet at the Battle of Crécy." Paper presented at the 51st International Congress on Medieval Studies, Kalamazoo, MI, May 2016.
- London, Hugh Stanford. "Some Medieval Treatises on English Heraldry." *The Antiquaries Journal* xxxiii (1953): 169-183.
- Maddern, Philippa C. "Social Mobility." In *A Social History of England 1200-1500*, edited by

- Rosemary Horrox and W. Mark Ormrod, 113-133. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.
- Maddicott, J. R. "The County Community and the Making of Public Opinion in Fourteenth-Century England." *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th ser. 28 (1978): 27-43.
- Manly, John Mathew. *Some New Light on Chaucer: Lectures Delivered at the Lowell Institute*. New York: H. Holt and Company, 1926.
- Mann, Jill. *Chaucer and Medieval Estates Satire: The Literature of Social Classes and the General Prologue to the Canterbury Tales*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973.
- Manning, Roger B. "Poaching as a Symbolic Substitute for War in Tudor and Early Stuart England" *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 22:2 (1992): 185-210.
- Marvin, William Perry. *Hunting Law and Ritual in Medieval English Literature*. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2006.
- McColly, William. "Chaucer's Yeoman and the Rank of His Knight." *The Chaucer Review* 20:1 (1985): 14-27.
- McFarlane, K. B. "Bastard Feudalism" *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research* 20 (1947): 161-80.
- _____. *The Nobility of Later Medieval England: The Ford Lectures for 1953 and Related Studies*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973.
- McNamara, JoAnn and Suzanne Wemple. "The Power of Women Through the Family in Medieval Europe, 500-1100." *Feminist Studies* 1 (1973): 126-142. Reprint, *Women and Power in the Middle Ages*, edited by Mary Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski, 83-101. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1988.
- _____. "Sanctity and Power: The Dual Pursuit of Early Medieval Women." In *Becoming Visible: Women in European History*, 1st ed. Edited by Renate Bridenthal and Claudia Koonz, 90-118. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977.
- Meale, Carole M. and Julia Boffey. "Gentlewomen's Reading." In *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain, Vol. III 1400-1557*, edited by Lotte Hellinga and J. B. Trapp, 526-40. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.
- Mercer, Malcolm. *The Medieval Gentry: Power, Leadership and Choice during the Wars of the Roses*. London and New York: Continuum, 2010.
- Mertes, Kate. *The English Noble Household 1250-1600: Good Governance and Politic Rule*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988.
- Mingay, G. E. *The Gentry: The Rise and Fall of a Ruling Class*. London and New York: Longman, 1976.
- Moran, James. "The Book of St Albans." *The Coat of Arms* 8 (1964): 48-53.
- _____. "The Book of St Albans and the Schoolmaster Printer." *The Black Art* 2 (1963-1964): 117-124.
- Moran, Jo Ann Hoepfner. *The Growth of English Schooling, 1340-1548: Learning, Literacy and Laicization in Pre-Reformation York Diocese*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985.
- Moreton, C. E. "A Social Gulf? The Upper and Lesser Gentry of Later Medieval England." *Journal of Medieval History* 17 (1991): 255-262.
- _____. *The Townshends and Their World: Gentry, Law, and Land in Norfolk c. 1450-1551*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992.
- Morgan, D. A. L. "The Individual Style of the English Gentleman." In *Gentry and Lesser*

- Nobility in Late Medieval Europe*, edited by Michael Jones, 15-35. New York: St Martin's Press, 1986.
- Naughton, Katherine. "The Gentry of Bedfordshire in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries." Leicester: Leicestershire University Occasional Publications, 1976.
- Nicolaï, Alexandre and Edouard Feret. "Excursion a Rauzan" *Société Archéologique de Bordeaux* 20 (1895): 15-32.
- Nicholls, Jonathan. *The Matter of Courtesy: Medieval Courtesy Books and the Gawain-Poet*. Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 1985.
- Noble, Elizabeth. *The World of the Stonors: A Gentry Society*. Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2009.
- Oggins, Robin S. "Falconry and Medieval Social Status" *Medievalia* 12 (1989): 43-55.
- _____. *The Kings and their Hawks: Falconry in Medieval England*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004.
- Orme, Nicholas. "Chaucer and Education." *The Chaucer Review* 16:1 (1981): 38-59.
- _____. *Education and Society in Medieval and Renaissance England*. London and Ronceverte: The Hambledon Press, 1989.
- _____. *From Childhood to Chivalry: The Education of the English Kings and Aristocracy 1066-1530*. London and New York: Methuen, 1984.
- _____. *Medieval Children*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001.
- _____. "Medieval Hunting: Fact and Fancy." In *Chaucer's England: Literature in Historical Context*, edited by Barbara Hanawalt, 133-153. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992.
- _____. *Medieval Schools*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006.
- Parkin, Frank. "Strategies of Social Closure in Class Formation." In *The Social Analysis of Class Structure*, edited by Frank Parkin, 1-18. London: Tavistock Publications, 1974.
- Parry, Glyn. "Harrison, William (1535–1593)." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004. Web. 31 July 2017. <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/12453>>.
- Parry, Graham. "Dugdale, Sir William (1605–1686)." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edition, October 2009. Web. 17 July 2013. <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/8186>>.
- Payling, S. J. *Political Society in Lancastrian England: The Greater Gentry of Nottinghamshire*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991.
- Phillips, Kim. "Bodily Walls, Windows and Doors: The Politics of Gesture in Late Fifteenth-Century English Books for Women." In *Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts in Late Medieval Britain*, edited by Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, et. al., 185-198. Turnhout: Brepols, 2000.
- _____. *Medieval Maidens: Young Women and Gender in England, 1270-1540*. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2003.
- Pigg, Daniel F. "Imagining Feudalism in *Piers Plowman*: Attempts to Restore an Order." In *The Rusted Hauberk: Feudal Ideas of Order and their Decline*, edited by Liam O. Purdon and Cindy L. Vitto, 29-46. Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1994.
- Pollard, A. J. *Imagining Robin Hood: The Late-Medieval Stories in Historical Context*. London and New York: Routledge, 2004.
- _____. "The Richmondshire Community of Gentry During the Wars of the Roses." In

- Patronage, Pedigree and Power in Later Medieval England*, edited by Charles Ross, 37-59. Stroud, Gloucestershire: Alan Sutton, 1979.
- Power, Eileen. *Medieval People*. New York: HarperPerennial, 1963.
- _____. *Medieval Women*, ed. M. M. Postan. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975.
- Powicke, Michael R. "Distrainment of Knighthood and Military Obligation under Henry III" *Speculum* 25:4 (October 1950): 457-470.
- Quick, J. "The Number and Distribution of Knights in Thirteenth-Century England: The Evidence of the Grand Assize." In *Thirteenth Century England I*, edited by P. R. Coss and S. D. Lloyd, 114-23. Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1985.
- Radulescu, Raluca. "Literature." In *Gentry Culture in Late Medieval England*, edited by Radulescu and Truelove, 100-18. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005.
- Radulescu, Raluca and Alison Truelove, eds. *Gentry Culture in Late Medieval England*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005.
- Ramsay, Nigel. "Richard III and the Office of Arms." In *The Yorkist Age: Proceedings of the 2011 Harlaxton Symposium*, edited by Hannes Kleineke and Christian Steer, 142-163. Donington: Shaun Tyas and Richard III and Yorkist History Trust, 2013.
- Richardson, Amanda. "'Riding Like Alexander, Hunting Like Diana': Gendered Aspects of the Medieval Hunt and its Landscape Settings in England and France" *Gender and History* 24:2 (2012): 253-270.
- Richmond, Colin. *John Hopton: A Fifteenth Century Suffolk Gentleman*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981.
- _____. "An Outlaw and Some Peasants: The Possible Significance of Robin Hood." In *Robin Hood: An Anthology of Scholarship and Criticism*, edited by Stephen Knight, 363-376. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1999. Originally published in *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 37 (1993): 90-101.
- _____. *The Paston Family in the Fifteenth Century: The First Phase*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.
- Riddy, Felicity. "Mother Knows Best: Reading Social Change in a Courtesy Text." *Speculum* 71:1 (1996): 66-86.
- Rigby, S. H. *English Society in the Later Middle Ages: Class, Status and Gender*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995.
- Roberts, William. *Printers' Marks: A Chapter in the History of Typography*. London: G. Bell, 1893.
- Rooney, Anne. *Hunting in Middle English Literature*. Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1993.
- Rosenthal, Joel T. *Margaret Paston's Piety*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.
- Rubin, Miri. "Identities." In *A Social History of England 1200-1500*, edited by Rosemary Horrox and W. Mark Ormrod, 383-412. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.
- Sachdev, Itesh and Richard Y. Bourhis. "Language and Social Identification." In *Social Identity Theory: Constructive and Critical Advances*, edited by Dominic Abrams and Michael A. Hogg, 211-229. New York: Springer-Verlag, 1990.
- Saenger, Paul. "Silent Reading: Its Impact on Late Medieval Script and Society" *Viator* 13 (1982): 367-414.
- Saul, Nigel. "Chaucer and Gentility." In *Chaucer's England: Literature in Historical Context*, edited by Barbara Hanawalt, 41-55. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992.
- _____. *Knights and Esquires: The Gloucestershire Gentry in the Fourteenth Century*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981.

- _____. "The Social Status of Chaucer's Franklin: A Reconsideration." *Medium aevum* 52 (1983): 10-26.
- Sayer, M. J. *English Nobility: The Gentry, the Heralds and the Continental Context*. Norwich: Norfolk Heraldry Society, 1979.
- Schmidt, Albert J. *The Yeoman in Tudor and Stuart England*. Washington, DC: The Folger Shakespeare Library, 1961.
- Shahar, Shulamith. *Childhood in the Middle Ages*. New York: Routledge, 1990.
- _____. *The Fourth Estate: A History of Women in the Middle Ages*. Revised ed. London: Routledge, 2003.
- Sheingorn, Pamela. *Interpreting Cultural Symbols: St. Anne in Late Medieval Society*. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1990.
- Sponsler, Claire. *Drama and Resistance: Bodies, Goods and Theatricality in Late Medieval England*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997.
- _____. "Eating Lessons Lydgate's 'Dietary' and Consumer Conduct." In *Medieval Conduct*, edited by Ashley and Clark, 1-22. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001.
- Stafford, Pauline. "Sons and Mothers: Family Politics in the Early Middle Ages." In *Medieval Women*, edited by Derek Baker, 79-100. Oxford: Blackwell, 1978.
- Standley, Eleanor. "Ladies Hunting: A Late Medieval Decorated Mirror Case from Shapwick, Somerset" *The Antiquaries Journal* 88 (2008): 198-206.
- Stevenson, Katie. *Chivalry and Knighthood in Scotland, 1424-1513*. Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2006.
- _____. ed. *The Herald in Late Medieval Europe*. Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2009.
- Stone, Lawrence. *The Causes of the English Revolution 1529-1642*. London and New York: Routledge, 1972.
- _____. *The Crisis of the Aristocracy, 1558-1641*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965.
- _____, ed. *Social Change and Revolution in England 1540-1640*. London: Longmans, 1965.
- Stone, Lawrence and Jeanne C. Fawtier Stone. *An Open Elite? England 1540-1800*. Abridged edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986.
- Storey, R. L. "Gentleman-Bureaucrats." In *Profession, Vocation and Culture in Late Medieval England: Essays Dedicated to the Memory of A. R. Myers*, edited by Cecil H. Clough, 90-129. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1982.
- Strohm, Paul. "Writing and Reading." In *A Social History of England*, ed. Horrox and Ormrod, 454-72. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.
- Stuard, Susan Mosher. "Fashion's Captives: Medieval Women in French Historiography." In *Women in Medieval History and Historiography*, edited by Susan Mosher Stuard, 59-80. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987.
- Swabey, Fiona. *Medieval Gentlewoman: Life in a Gentry Household in the Later Middle Ages*. New York: Routledge, 1999.
- Swanson, Heather. *Medieval Artisans: An Urban Class in Late Medieval England*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989.
- Tanner, Lawrence E. "William Caxton's Houses at Westminster." *The Library*, 5th series, 12 (1957): 153-166.
- Tardif, Richard. "The 'Mistery' of Robin Hood: A New Social Context for the Texts." In *Robin Hood: An Anthology of Scholarship and Criticism*, edited by Stephen Knight, 345-362. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1999. Originally published in *Word and Worlds: Studies in the*

- Social Role of Verbal Culture*, edited by S. Knight and S. J. Mukherjee. Sydney: Sydney Association for Studies in Society and Culture, 1983.
- Tawney, R. H. "The Rise of the Gentry, 1558-1640." *The Economic History Review* 11:1 (1941): 1-38.
- Thiébaux, Marcelle. "The Mediaeval Chase" *Speculum* 42:2 (1967): 260-274.
- Thompson, Kenneth. "Chaucer's Warrior Bowman: The Roles and Equipment of the Knight's Yeoman." *The Chaucer Review* 40:4 (2006): 386-415.
- Thrupp, Sylvia. *The Merchant Class of Medieval London 1300-1500*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1948.
- Trevor-Roper, H. R. "The Gentry, 1540-1640." *The Economic History Review* supplement. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953.
- Trapp, J. B. "Literacy, Books, and Readers." In *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain Volume III 1400-1557*, edited by Lotte Hellinga and J. B. Trapp, 31-44. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.
- Trigg, Stephanie. "'Ye Louely Ladyes with Youre Longe Fyngres': The Silkwomen of Medieval London" *Studia Anglica Posnaniensia: International Review of English Studies* 38 (2002): 469-484.
- Turner, John C. "Towards a Cognitive Redefinition of the Social Group." In *Social Identity and Intergroup Relations*, ed. Henri Tajfel, 15-40. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982.
- Wagner, Anthony R. *A Catalogue of English Mediaeval Rolls of Arms*. London: Society of Antiquaries, 1950.
- _____. *Heralds and Heraldry in the Middle Ages: An Inquiry into the Growth and Armorial Function of Heralds*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956.
- _____. *Heralds of England: A History of the Office and College of Arms*. London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1967.
- _____. *Pedigree and Progress: Essays in the Genealogical Interpretation of History*. London and Chichester: Phillimore and Co., Ltd., 1975.
- _____. *The Records and Collections of the College of Arms*. London: Burkes Peerage, 1952.
- Walker, C. G. "An Edition with Introduction and Commentary of John Blount's English Translation of Nicholas Upton's *De Studio Militari*," unpublished D.Phil thesis, 2 vols., University of Oxford, 1998.
- Ward, Jennifer C. *English Noblewomen in the Later Middle Ages*. London and New York: Longman, 1992.
- Willard, Charity Cannon. "A Fifteenth-Century View of Women's Role in Medieval Society: Christine de Pizan's *Livre des Trois Vertus*." In *The Role of Women in the Middle Ages*, edited by Rosmarie Thee Morewedge, 90-120. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1975.
- _____. "The Manuscript Tradition of the *Livre Des Trois Vertus* and Christine de Pizan's Audience." *Journal of the History of Ideas* 27:3 (1966): 433-444.
- Wood-Legh, K. H. "The Franklin." *The Review of English Studies* 4:14 (1928): 145-151.
- Woolgar, C. M. *The Great Household in Late Medieval England*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999.
- Wright, Susan M. *The Derbyshire Gentry in the Fifteenth Century*. Derbyshire Record Society 8. Chesterfield: Derbyshire Record Society, 1983.
- Wrightson, Keith. "Estates, Degrees, and Sorts: Changing Perceptions of Society in Tudor and

Stuart England.” In *Language, History, and Class*, edited by Penelope J. Corfield, 30-52. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991.

. “The Social Order of Early Modern England: Three Approaches.” In *The World We Have Gained: Histories of Population and Social Structure*, edited by Lloyd Bonfield, Richard M. Smith and Keith Wrightson, 177-202. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986.

Yenal, Edith. *Christine de Pizan: A Bibliography*. 2nd ed. Metuchen and London: Scarecrow Press, 1989.