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Woven Words: A Semiology of Clothing in Medieval Texts.

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Woven words: A semiology of clothing in medieval texts

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The Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical Col., 1993
WOVEN WORDS:
A SEMIOLOGY OF CLOTHING IN MEDIEVAL TEXTS

A Dissertation

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requirements for the degree of
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in

The Department of English

by

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I thank first and foremost my Lord and Savior for giving me the vision and the stamina to finish this most awesome quest. I also very much appreciate the love and support of my wife, Kelly, who kept me from quitting during the turning points. And to Jesse Gellrich who helped me "prune" my ideas and my writing while always believing in me and giving me the confidence to take the next step, I offer my humble thanks. Thank you, Steve and Donna, for having a dream.
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ABSTRACT

Much criticism in Medieval studies has focused on Christian allegory and its dissemination through Middle English poetry. Using recent insights into the nature of allegory in its medieval context, this study offers a new means of understanding allegory as it appears in the work of Chaucer and the Pearl-poet. Which ideas of figurality actually informed the works of these poets? The investigation into the influence of medieval "textuality" on Chaucer and the Pearl-poet has overlooked the image of the "veil" in the Middle Ages. This study asserts that instead of being a "flat" image, the veil provides us with a palpable means of understanding the ways in which Christian sign theory treated allegory. Chapter One reviews the semiology of clothing in exegesis as it appears in the image of "the textualized body of Christ. It suggests that the origin of the vacillation between the perceived "presence and absence" of meaning in medieval allegory exists in the different readings of this body as both the revealer and "reveiler" of truth. The paradox of the Incarnational text provided the unstable foundation of medieval theories of "textuality," both religious and secular. Chapters Two and Three focus on The Clerk's Tale and Pearl to reveal how the poets who understood language to be simultaneously pre- and post-linguistic. In
the way they identified this fundamental tension within allegory, *Pearl* and *The Clerk's Tale* reveal through the semiology of clothing an appreciation for and keen awareness of the "problem" of allegory. The *Pearl*-poet questions the possibility of "uncovering" the spiritual *res* of allegory by demonstrating the endless reflexivity of the allegorical sign in the image of the *Pearl*-maiden. In *The Clerk's Tale*, Griselda's relationship to her garments asks us to reevaluate her role as the tale's unchanging *sentence*. The *Clerk's Tale* exposes how language creates and changes the reality it represents. Chaucer's poetics critique the quest for an absolute and divinely inspired correspondence between language and truth and find it lacking.
Much criticism in medieval studies has focused on Christian allegory and its dissemination through Middle English poetry. Using recent insights into the nature of allegory in its medieval context, this study offers a new means of understanding allegory as it appears in the work of Chaucer and the Pearl-poet. Ever since the publication of Preface to Chaucer, the extent to which the corpus of Chaucer was influenced by patristic exegesis has been of importance to Chaucerian studies. Following D. W. Robertson, critics have continually attempted to explain the extent to which Chaucer understood and affirmed the "textuality" of medieval exegesis, that is, its allegorical method for reading texts and the "truth" they signify. Using the same "exegetical" approach, critics of Middle English poetry have also looked at Pearl as an allegory conforming to the standards for reading and writing "figurative language" laid down by Augustine in De doctrina Christiana.  

While there can be no doubt that Chaucer and the Pearl-poet made use of Christian theories of allegory, recent studies in the nature of allegorical discourse in the Middle Ages raise questions about which ideas of figurality actually
informed the works of these poets. In the last two decades, several critics have reevaluated allegory and its place in medieval hermeneutics. Exemplifying this new approach to allegory, Maureen Quilligan has commented on the arbitrary modes of signification in allegorical discourse, calling allegory "the possibility of otherness, a polysemy, inherent in the very words on the page. Allegory, therefore, names the fact that language can signify many things at once."  

Another critic notes that allegory has two faces, one which "disturbs our standards of clarity and order" and another which creates new order out of that initial chaos of indeterminate meanings. Addressing medieval sign theory with insights derived from post-structuralism, Jesse Gellrich writes that allegory "has always asserted the truth about itself—that it is incapable of representing truth as it exists in its own esse."  

Medieval allegory, for Gellrich, anticipates the post-structural perception of the "sign" as what Vincent Leitch calls "the site of an ambivalent and problematic relation between referential and figural meaning."  

Brian Stock observes this same ambivalent structure in the way medieval "allegory, which initially gave rise to new understanding, also spawned alienation, that is, the feeling that the more one interpreted, the further one got from actualities."  

Using primarily the etymology and medieval definitions of "allegory" as "irony" or "other-speech" (alieniloquium) to
support their positions, these critics break with the view proposed by modern "exegetical" readers of medieval fiction that Christian allegory was merely a referential sign system. In arguing for their position, modern exegetes point to the fact that biblical interpreters of the Middle Ages did not represent allegory as an indeterminate sign system. Fixed on Christ as their origin and boundary of interpretation, Christian allegorists took Scripture to represent truth as it existed hidden beneath the "veil" of the Old Testament and the Incarnation. The "literal surface" of the veil of Scripture posed nothing more than an ancillary adornment to truth and a removable obstacle to revelation. The revisionists of medieval allegory, in contrast, "recast allegory as an organic coherence which consistently pays attention to the radical significance of the much dismissed literal surface," that is, its veil.7

II

The investigation into the influence of medieval "textuality" on Chaucer and the Pearl-poet, either by those affirming or denying allegory as merely a referential sign system, has overlooked a fundamental image of that "literal surface" in the Middle Ages, the veil. While all critics acknowledge the medieval use of the veil to represent writing and texts, critics including Peter Dronke, Ernst Curtius, Winthrop Wetherbee, Brian Stock and, most recently, Dolores
Frese have primarily focused on the medieval definition of the veil image as it appears in Christian exegesis.8 Focusing primarily on the distinction between integumentum and involucra as it was used by different exegetes throughout the Middle Ages, these critics do not treat the semiological complexity of the "veil" in its own right. Even those who read medieval allegory as an indeterminate sign system have referred to the veil image in very much the same terms as their medieval ancestors did, as a mere covering of the meaning of a text.

This study will assert that instead of being a "flat" image, the veil and, by extension, the semiology of clothing in Christian hermeneutics are elements in a complex sign system providing us with a palpable means of understanding the ways in which Christian sign theory treated allegory and its process of signification. Once we understand this semiology, we can better gauge the way in which Chaucer and the Pearl-poet understood allegory and made use of it in their poetry.

III

Recent criticism has argued for a new approach to the relationship between Christian sign theory and medieval fiction. "Medieval poetic fiction," Gellrich writes, "surely inherited models of textuality along with basic conceptions from the trivium about the ways that signs signify. Whether
or not fictional discourse carries out the prevailing commitment of the inherited structure to imitate past models and thus contribute to the stabilization of tradition cannot be affirmed as unilaterally as, for example, Singleton and Robertson once assumed.9 For this reason, Gellrich argues that "the customary view of medieval fiction as an affirmation of inherited linguistic and textual models needs to be renovated."10 Seeing the same need for a new reading of medieval "textuality", many critics have worked in the last ten years to redefine the ways in which medieval poetry "renovated" the textual traditions they received. Readers of medieval fiction such as R. A. Shoaf, Peggy Knapp, Edmund Reiss, and Judith Ferster have attempted to demonstrate the revisionary use of "textuality" in the works of Chaucer and the Pearl-poet.11 This study, however, will argue that far from revising the inherited forms of Christian allegory, these poets exploited and exposed its inherent nuances.

Because an exhaustive study of Chaucer and the Pearl-poet is outside the reach of this monograph, I have chosen to limit my study of allegory in the works of these poets to The Clerk's Tale and Pearl as "test cases" of my thesis. Allegories with a female and her clothing as a central image, these two poems give us an ideal starting point for examining the views of these poets on allegorical discourse. The following chapters will maintain that an analysis of these two elements is essential to understanding each poet's
inquiry into allegory. Focusing on the image of clothing in The Clerk’s Tale and Pearl, I will discuss how these poets tapped into the nature of allegory not to challenge but to embrace and affirm the paradox of Christian allegory in its original context, that is, the mystery of the Word made Flesh.

NOTES TO PROLOGUE

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Morton W. Bloomfield (Cambridge: Harvard University Press,

4Jesse Gellrich, "Deconstructing Allegory." in Genre 18
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CHAPTER I

The Textualized Body of Christ: A Semiology of Clothing in Medieval Exegesis

Before proceeding to my discussion on the influence of medieval Christian "textuality" on these two allegories about women and their garments, I must first review the semiology of clothing in exegesis. In this chapter, I will show that far from being a secondary adornment to divine truth, the "veil" of Scripture was involved in the process of creating that truth. Because "clothing" and books were interlaced in the exegetical representation of what I call "the textualized body of Christ," my inquiry will focus on the "textuality" of Christ in the Middle Ages to suggest that the origin of this vacillation between the perceived "presence and absence" of meaning in medieval allegory exists in the different readings of Christ's "textualized body" as both the revealer and "reveiler" of truth. I will also suggest that this vacillation within the single most important source of medieval sign theory, the "Word made Flesh", challenged the understanding of religious writers of the Middle Ages in their attempts to wrestle with the problem of meaning in their own texts.
It is appropriate to understand that for medieval interpreters Christ's "presence" in Scripture was regarded as a fact of writing; he was, as they said, a special sort of "text" written by the divine instead of a human hand. Using nouns and verbs associated with the act of writing and producing texts (tego, texo) to describe the Body of Christ, exegesis effectively interweaves the textual esse of the Incarnation with the images of texts and writing. Very early in the medieval tradition, Origen argues that the Corpus Christi and the corpus scripturarum, the written surface of Scripture, become one in the Incarnation:

Just as this spoken word cannot according to its own nature be touched or seen, but when written in a book and, so to speak, become bodily, then indeed is seen and touched, so too is it with the fleshless and bodiless Word of God; according to its divinity, it is neither seen nor written, but when it becomes flesh, it is seen and written.

For Origen, the very flesh of Christ is made up of woven words:

For just as he is cloaked by the flesh, so also is he clothed with the garment of these words, so that the
that is seen, but hidden within [the words], the spiritual sense is perceived.

Nam sicut ibi carnis, ita hic litterae velamine tegitur, ut littera quidem adspicitur tamquam caro, latens vero intrensisus spiritalis sensus tamquam divinitas sentiatur.³ [emphasis mine]

Through these statements, Origen "textualizes" the Body of Christ and likens His body to writing through the metaphor of clothing.

In Confessions X.42, Augustine specifically grounds the mediating function of the Incarnation in His flesh:

But "the mediator between God and man" must have something like to God and something like to men, lest being in both ways too much like men, he should be far from God; or lest being in both ways too much like God he should be far from men, and so not be a mediator.

Mediator autem inter Deum et homines (1 Tim.ii,5) oportebat ut haberet aliquid simile Deo, aliquid simile hominibus: ne in utroque hominibus simile, longe est a Deo; aut in utroque Deo similis, longe esset ab hominibus, atque ita mediator non esset.⁴

Without the nodal point of His skin, Christ cannot mediate between God and man. In fact, Satan, whom Augustine calls "the false mediator" cannot function in that role specifically because he is not clothed with mortal flesh ("ut quia carnis mortalite non tegitur"--emphasis mine).⁵ Therefore, Augustine reads the carnal cloak of the Incarnation as essential to its mediation of Scripture and the presence of the Divine on earth. In this way, the
mediating power of Christ rests in his physicality, His presence as both body and text.

When Hugh of St. Victor emphasizes the historical "letter" of the Bible, he does so to stress the relevance of the flesh of Christ in reading and interpreting Scripture. For Hugh, a student of Scripture must first understand the "literal sense" because it represents the historical presence of "the Word made Flesh" in the Old Testament:

...unless you know beforehand the nativity of Christ, his teaching, his suffering, his resurrection and Ascension, and all the other things which he did in the flesh and through the flesh, you will not be able to penetrate the mysteries of the old figures.

Nisi prius nativitatem Christi, praedicationem, passionem, resurrectionem atque ascensionem; et caetera, quae in carne per carnem gessit, agnoveris, veterum figurarum mysteria penetrare non valebis.6 [emphasis mine]

By the 14th century, Bersuire completes the explicit "writtenness" of Christ in an elaborate metaphor:

For Christ is a sort of book written into the skin of the virgin and into the womb of the glorious virgin by the fingers of the Holy Spirit. That Book was spoken in the disposition of the Father, written in the conception of the mother, exposited in the clarification of the nativity, corrected in the passion, erased in the flagellation, punctuated in the imprint of the wounds, adorned in the crucifixion above the pulpit, illuminated in the outpouring of blood, bound in the resurrection, and examined in the ascension.

Christus enim est quidam liber scriptus in pelle virginea, et in camera virginis gloriae digitis
scriptus sancti. Iste enim liber fuit cinctatus in Patris dispositione, scriptus in matris conceptione, expositus in navitatis manifestatione, correctus in passione, rasus in flagellatione, punctatus in vulnerum infixione, super pulpito politus in crucifixione; illuminatus in sanguinis effusione, et illigatus in resurrectione et disputatur in ascensione.7

From Origen to the 14th century, the textual body of Christ conflates the woven letter of Scripture with the flesh of Christ into the one mediating surface between God and his creation.

II

As the book of Scripture (liber praesentiae Dei),8 the Holy Verbum made flesh is used in medieval exegesis to stabilize human language, making possible the accurate preaching of the Gospel.9 To this end, the imaging of Christ in medieval exegesis as a "Book" highlights His authority to disclose and control the range of significations within his textual body; he is viewed as the ultimate source and boundary of interpretation, the exegete of Scripture.10

As begun by Paul in 2 Cor.III.13-16, the tradition of viewing the Incarnation as revelation figures Christ as the one who finally removes the occluding veil (velamen) of Moses from the Old Law of the Jews to expose the New Law of Charity given to us through the divine presence of Christ:
And not as Moses put a veil (velamen) upon his face that the children of Israel might not steadfastly look on the face of that which is removed. But their senses were made dull. For, until the present day, that selfsame veil, in the reading of the old testament, remaineth not taken away (Because in Christ it is made void). But even until this day, when Moses is read, the veil is upon their heart. But when they shall be converted to the Lord, the veil shall be taken away.

Et non sicut Moyses ponebat velamen super faciem suam, ut non intenderet filii Israel in faciem ejus, quae evacuaturs. Sed obtusi sunt sensum corum usque in hodiernum diem. Idipsum velamen in lectione Veteris testamenti manet non revelatum, quoniam in Christo evacuaturs. Sed usque in hodiernum diem cum legitur Moyses velamen est positum super cor eorum. Cum autem conversus fuerit ad Dominum, auferetur velamen. 11

[emphasis mine]

Origen later reinforces and elaborates this view of Christ the "unveiler":

The Splendor of Christ's advent has, therefore, by illuminating the Law of Moses with the brightness of the truth, withdrawn the veil which had covered the letter of the law and has disclosed, for every one who believes in him, all those 'good things' which lay concealed within.

Lumen igitur Moysi legi inhaerens quod velamine obtegebatur, adveniente Jesu Christi refusit, ablato velamine, et bonis quorum umbram habuit littera in notitiam sensitu prodeuntibus.12 [emphasis mine]

Being the darkness of the Old Law (obscuritas legis), the veil (velamen) of the Old Testament becomes the focal point of prophecy.13 According to Paul and Origen, once Christ removes the veil, he "makes void" the impediment to
understanding the divine and allows humanity to "strip the veil" from the face of God. 14

According to Origen, not only does the Incarnation eliminate the veil from the face of Moses and the Jewish heart; but the physical death of Christ also rends the veil of the sacred temple to reveal to plain sight the divine essence contained within the inner sanctum of the hidden chamber:

"And behold the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom" (Mt 27:51). As long as Jesus had not yet accepted death for the sake of us men, he remained "the expectation of the nations" (Gen 49:10) and the veil of the temple concealed the interior of the temple. That had to remain concealed until he, who alone was able to reveal it, made it manifest to those who desired to see it, so that through the death of Christ who destroyed the death of the believers, those who had been liberated from death, could look upon what was within the veil.

"Et ecce velum templi scissum est in duas partes a summo usque deorsum." Quandiu quidem Jesus non susceperat pro hominibus mortem, ipse exspectio gentium constitutus, velum templi interiora templi velabat: oportebat enim ea velari, donec ille qui solus ea poterat revelare, manifesta faceret ea videre volentibus, ut per mortem Christi Jesu destruentis credentium mortem, qui liberati fuerint a morte, possint aspicere quae sunt intra velum. 15 [emphasis mine]

The Glossa Ordinaria reinforces Origen’s readings in its interpretations of Matthew 27:51:

"And behold the veil of the temple." So that the ark of the covenant and the sacraments of the law appear which were veiled.
Et ecce velum templi. Ut arca testamenti et sacramenta legis quae tegebantur appareant ...

As argued by Hugh of St. Victor, revelation can occur, as in the Apocalypse, only after Christ breaks the seals on the hidden scroll concealing the divine mysteries of the Old Testament:

Who do you think could understand these things [in the Old Testament] before they were fulfilled? They were sealed, and none could loose their seals but the Lion of the tribe of Judah. There came, therefore, the Son of God, and he put on our nature, was born of the Virgin, was crucified, buried; he rose again, ascended to the skies, and by fulfilling the things which had been promised, he opened up what lay hidden ...

Quis putas haec, antequam compleverunt, intellegere poterat? Signata erant, et nemo poterat solvere signacula, nisi leo de tribu Juda. Veit ergo Filius Deo, et induit naturam nostram: natus est de Virgine, crucifixus, sepultus, resurrexit, ascendit ad caelos, et implendo quae promissa erant, aperuit quae latebant. [emphasis mine]

Implicit in this characterization of Christ the "exegete" is the paradoxical incompatibility of the liber praesentiae with the veils of writing and textuality.

III

Origen describes the corpus sacrae scripturae, its historical sense, as an outer covering and veil woven
together to contain the spiritual meanings ("indumentum quoddam et velamen spiritualium sensum texta sunt"—emphatic emphasis mine). In his discussion of Homer’s poetry, Augustine calls Homer a “weaver” of tales ("Nam et Homerus peritus texere tales fabellas ..."). Language for Hugh of St. Victor is “sewn” between two people ("Dialogus est collatio duorum vel plurium; Latini sermonem dicunt. Sermo autem dictus, quia seritur inter utrumque"—emphatic emphasis mine). As noted by Brian Stock, the medieval perception of a text as a woven garment developed etymologically from texo:

The verb texo, from which the antecedents of English, German, and Romance Language terms for a text are derived, meant to weave, to plait, or to interlace, and hence, in a subsidiary sense, to compose.

In what follows, I will suggest that Christian interpreters, emphasizing primarily the “unveiling” power of Christ in exegesis, reveal their distrust of the woven garment of writing, a distrust grounded in their view that all “human” texts owe their existence to disobedience against God.

After transgressing the Law of God by eating the fruit, Adam and Eve experience isolation from God, represented by their “sewing” of the fig leaves to cover their nakedness:

And the eyes of both of them were opened; and when they perceived themselves to be naked, they sewed together fig leaves and made themselves aprons. And when they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in paradise at the afternoon air. Adam and his wife hid themselves from the face of the Lord God amidst the trees of paradise.
And the Lord called to Adam and said to him "Where art thou?"

Et aperti sunt oculi amborum cumque cognovissent se esse nudos; consuerunt folia ficus, et fecerunt sibi perizomata. Et cum audissent vocem Domini Dei deambulantis in paradiso ad auram post meridiem, abscondit se Adam et uxor ejus facie Domini Dei in medio ligni paradiso. Vocatique Dominus Deus Adam et dixit ei: Ubi es?" 22

Adam and Eve sewed together the fig leaves to hide their sin and, in doing so, forever separate their minds from the mind of God.23 These woven garments mark their transgression and bring into being the problems of human language and textuality. Like the sewn fig leaves, God's gift of skins (Gen.III.21: "Fecit quoque Dominus Deus Adae et uxori ejus, tunicas pelliceas; et induit eos") to cover their naked bodies also represents the birth of textuality into a world where mediation was once unnecessary. Original sin and the resulting isolation necessitate language and texts to mediate hereafter between God and humanity.24

As argued by Augustine, the fall and disgrace of Babel, results in the further deformation of written "signs" so that they are often at odds with the sententia they represent:

But because vibrations in the air soon pass away and remain no longer than they sound, signs of words have been constructed by means of letters. Thus words are shown to the eyes, not in themselves but through certain signs which stand for them. These signs could not be common to all peoples because of the sin of human dissension which arises when one people seize leadership for itself. A sign of this pride is the tower erected in the heavens deserved that not only their minds but also their voices should be dissonant.
For Augustine, writing promises to maintain the "presence" of its referent expressed in the vocalized word, a permanence of the oral sign. The promise for stability breaks down, however, due to the subversion of the written sign which can now only recreate the confusion and dissonance of Babel. Humanity's sin at Babel furthers the discord between words and things begun in Eden by distorting the one-to-one relationship between written signs and the things they signify. After Babel, representation is removed even further from the thing itself which, in turn, distorts beyond recovery the relationship between sign and referent that existed in Eden.

Also contained within this passage is the subtle suggestion that even the voices of humanity have been distorted by their involvement with written signs. After Eden and Babel, mediation through texts becomes paramount. The fall separated people from the mind of God, and the sin of Babel thrust mankind into the sin of confusion resulting from the oscillation between the authoritative presence of the oral and the representative absence of the textual.
Humanity's entrance into language represents their isolation from God and each other. Instead of living within the harmony of the unmediated Logos, people must settle for the imperfect mediation of the text.

Hostile to the woven letter of confusion and disobedience, Christ's role as the Incarnational text, for the exegetes, supersedes writing, excises the corpus scripturarum and manifests the divine ordo in its esse. Language becomes the mere ornament of truth, removed and isolated from the creation of meaning. According to these early readers of Christ's textual body, Christ presence as the reader of His own text sanctions the "institutional" reading of Scripture, stabilizing signification and traversing the linguistic otherness of allegory located in the veil. Though separated by many centuries, the medieval figuring of the textual Christ as the exegete of Scripture parallels what Derrida has called the Idea of the Book:

The idea of the book is the idea of a totality, finite or infinite, of the signifier; this totality of the signifier cannot be a totality, unless a totality constituted by the signified preexists it, supervises its inscriptions and its signs, and is independent of it in its ideality. The idea of the book, which always refers to a natural totality, is profoundly alien to the sense of writing. It is the encyclopedic protection of theology and of logocentricism against the disruption of writing, against its aphoristic energy ...

This logocentric Book and the "Book" of Christ created by the exegetes are one and the same, "pretextual,"
unaffected by writing, with the medium subordinated to the totalizing forces of the extralinguistic message. This subordination of writing in medieval hermeneutics influences every aspect of medieval Christian sign theory ranging from pedagogy to rhetoric.

IV

Recent insights into the indeterminacy of medieval sign theory, suggested above, situate the "problem" of meaning in hermeneutics within the opposition between "theories of allegory (allegoresis) and specific instances of allegorical discourse (allegoria)."27 As argued by Quilligan, the ironic structure of allegory "plays" with linguistic signification and, in so doing, threatens outright the project of interpretation, defined by her as the desire to create out of the indeterminate allegorical text a set of "one to one correspondences between insignificant narrative particulars and hidden thematic generalizations."28 Referring specifically to this "problem" of allegory in medieval exegesis, Gellrich writes that the raison d'être of Christian interpretation to this ironic distance is the reduction of Scriptural allegory to a coherent, unambiguous, text made to "fit" into the totalizing and organizing "myth" of the Logos.29 As argued by Gellrich, exegesis, like the Idea of
the Book, seeks the subordination of allegory to the uniformity and continuity of Christian doctrine.

As one who believed in the ineffable Word and the inability of language to express the essence of God, Augustine respects allegory as what Hugh of St. Victor would later call God's "secret hiding place." As a teacher of the faith, however, Augustine cannot allow misinterpretations of Biblical allegory to lead Christianity astray. The place of clothing imagery within this opposition deserves special attention because the "veil" marks the intersection of these antithetical views towards allegory. In what follows, I will focus on this image in De doctrina Christiana and the Confessions to describe how Augustinian hermeneutics, with its interest in marginalizing the written sign, appears to debase allegory, seeking its eradication from exegetical pedagogy. I have chosen to focus on these two works because they best exhibit his struggle to create a coherent system of interpretation which neatly fits together both allegory and allegoresis.

It is necessary at this point to review the role clothing imagery plays in establishing the "theoretical" relationship between the "veil" of allegory and the teaching of the faith. Viewing its clerical vestments as its emblem of divine inheritance, the medieval Church interlaces its authority to teach and regulate the faith with the vesture of Christ. The vestments (vestimenta) which represent the body
of Christ and Sacred Scripture, throughout the Middle Ages, also symbolize Holy Church (sancta Ecclesia). Through the mediation of clothing, the Church wraps itself within His cloak (both body and text) as its garment of spiritual authorization.

Augustine uses clothing imagery to assert the authority and unity of Church doctrine in Tractate 13 on the Gospel of John:

You are the bride; acknowledge the vesture of your bridegroom. for what vesture were lots cast? Ask the Gospel. See to whom you have been espoused; see from whom you receive pledges. Ask the Gospel. See what it says to you during the passion of the Lord. "There was a tunic" there; let us see what sort, "woven from the top." What does the tunic woven from the top signify except love? What does a tunic woven from the top signify except unity? ... The persecutors did not tear the vesture; Christians divide the Church.


Two later salient examples of this use of clothing imagery to signify the "divine" power of God within Christian allegoresis can be seen in the Glossa and in the writings of Bernard of Clairvaux. The Glossa Ordinaria entries for Mark 15.24, where the guards at the Crucifixion divide his garments into
four equal parts, points to the Church's dependence on Christ's textual garment:

"His garment." (Bede) The dividing of the vestment of Christ into four equal parts among the second number of soldiers represents the Church separated equally around the world, that is harmoniously divided.

(Jerome) The vestments of God by which his body is covered, that is the Church, were charged so that they are divided between the soldiers of the peoples and as a result, there are four ranks when there is one faith, that is joined together, written, preferred, and distinct.

"Vestimenta sua." (Beda.) Quadrapita vestis Christi secundum numerum militum, significat Ecclesiam quattuor partibus orbis aequaliter, id est concorditer distributam.

(Hier.) Vestimenta Domini mandata sunt quibus tegitur corpus ejus, quod est Ecclesia, quia dividuntur inter milites gentium ut sint quattuor ordinum cum sit una fides, id est conjugati, viduati, praepositi, separati. 33

Jerome's choice of viduati and praepositi enmesh the power of Christ with the vestments of the clergy. According to Du Cange, viduae referred to writers of the Church (Scriptores Ecclesiasticos) and praepositi referred to the high priests of a congregation (Antistites caeterique qui Ecclesiis praesunt).

In the Apologia (III.5), Bernard of Clairvaux interweaves the source of the Church and its authority with the tunics of Christ:

See you, Lord, whether this tunic is of your favored son. Recognize, omnipotent father, this tunic wrought with many threads which you made by your Christ, as the one given to the Apostles, and also the prophets, and
indeed the writers of the Gospels, and to the pastors and the Church doctors, and certainly to those on whom you have properly placed His wondrous decoration, certainly to the perfection of the ordainers, joining in the perfect man, in measure of the age of the plenitude of Christ.

Vide et tu, Domine, utrum haec sit tunica Filii tui dilecti. Recognosce, omnipotens Pater, eam quam fecisti Christo tuo polimitam, dando quidem, quosdam apostolos, quosdam autem prophetas, alios vero evangelistas, alios pastores et doctores, et cetera quae in eius ornatu mirifico decenter apposuisti, as consummationem utique sanctorum, occurentium in virum perfectum, in mesuram aetatis plenitudinis Christi.34

This untorn cloak represents the one unequivocal Christian faith which grounds Church authority and its infallible power to create a unified system of beliefs. Paralleling the exegete's appreciation for the liber praesentiae, Christ's textual garment of allegory purportedly imbues the Church with the "know how" to clarify the truth "woven" into the ambiguous letter of Scripture. As the Bride of Christ, the Church intermingles with both the corporeal and textual existence (his written flesh) of the Incarnation to maintain the integrity of that system of beliefs against misreading. The woven text of Christ used to stabilize hermeneutics and doctrine echoes the totality of the "Book" where the spiritual "inside" of the divine tunica demarcates the array of interpretations imposed on the "outside" texta. This appropriation of the woven text of allegory for the purposes of clarifying and validating doctrine invites comparison with how exegesis treats "writing" in general. The
"metaphor of writing" in exegesis, Gellrich notes, "does not get in the way of truth with its 'artificial inscription' but reveals divine wisdom like a brilliant mirror." In other words, writing is subordinated to its meaning as an ancillary adornment to truth. In exegesis, writing serves only as a medium for the divine, taking no part in its creation of meaning or its essence. This approach to writing finds its way into Augustine's presentation of the Logos in De doctrina Christiana as a word free from the natural deterioration of human signs which make them suspect:

How did He come except that "the Word was made flesh"? It is as when we speak. In order that what we are thinking may reach the mind of the listener through the fleshly ears, that which we have in mind is expressed in words and is called speech. But our thought is not transformed into sounds; it remains entire in itself and assumes the form of words by means of which it may reach the ears without suffering any deterioration in itself. In the same way the Word of God was made flesh without change that he might dwell among us.

Quomodo venit, nisi quod Verbum caro factum est, et habitavit in nobis (John. 1.14)? Sicuti cum loquimur, ut id quod animo gerimus, in audientis animum per aures carneas illabatur, sit sinus verbum quod corde gestamus, et locutio vocatur; nec tamen in eundem sonum cogitatio nostra convertitur, sed apud se manens integra, formam vocis qua se insinuet auribus, sine aliqua labe suae mutationis assumit: ita Verbu Dei non commutatum, caro tamen factum est, ut habitaret in nobis.

[emphasis mine]

Here Augustine defines and binds language (sonum . . . formam vocis) to the mystery of the Incarnation (Verbum Dei). According to Augustine, the Incarnational sign mediates the
incorporeal with the corporeal (animum per aures) and joins the temporal and the divine without the intrusion of one into the other. Writing, like allegory, is apparently made to "fit" into the divine ordo of Augustine's pedagogy, which places boundaries on the "meaning" of Scripture.

Paradoxically, however, Augustinian hermeneutics dismantles this harmonious union between allegory and pedagogy by ostensibly isolating and eliminating the "veil" of allegory (and, by extension, the authorizing garment of Christ) from his allegoresis. In the prologue of De doctrina Christiana (written around 397 AD), Augustine makes clear his intention to devote his handbook on Christian hermeneutics to the defense of the "one" faith against the subversion of "wicked" readings:

... he who receives the precepts we wish to teach will not need another through which, by itself, is unveiled that which is covered when he finds any obscurity in books, since he has certain rules like those used in reading in his understanding. But by following certain traces he may come to the hidden sense without any error, or at least he will not fall into the absurdity of wicked meanings.

... iste qui praecepta quae conamur tradere acceperit, cum in libris aliquid obscuritatis invenerit, quasdam regulas veluti litteras tenens intellectorem alium non requirat, per quem sibi quod opertum est retegatur; sed quibusda, vestigiis indagatis ad occultum sensum sine ullo errore ipse perveniat, aut certe in absurditam pravae sententiae non incidat. [emphasis mine]

This passage and others like it which describe exegesis as the removal of the "veil" are often used by modern scholars

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to demonstrate Augustine's description of the "literal sense" as humanity's carnal "veil" of skin which obstructs the eternal truth of Scripture. Nevertheless, the complex semiology of the "veil" as I have been describing it thus far, forces us to reconsider Augustine's disregard for this garment as merely an external impediment requiring removal. As the authorizing garment of church doctrine, the veil (texta tunica) should be valorized for its transmission of divine wisdom; yet instead of affirming allegory as the ground of allegoresis, this passage appears to call for the erasure of allegory from hermeneutics. Moreover, the correspondence of this excision of the veil with his desire to delimit interpretation to a rigid set of rules which will safeguard doctrine suggests a possible connection between his distrust of the ambiguous integument of allegory and his fear of heresy.

Augustine aims his observations and prescriptions on figural interpretation in De doctrina to protect doctrine against fragmentation caused by heretical "unveilings" of Scripture. As Brian Stock has noted, the particular danger of heresy was its claim to legitimacy on the authority of Holy Writ. This claim was supported by the opacity of biblical allegory which allowed any reader to insert new versions of the faith within its ironic distance between sign and referent. As long as obscure passages remained
obscure, misreadings ranging from the inconsistent to the blasphemous could mar the *regula fidei*.

With his concern over the abuse of the letter of Scripture, Augustine focused his most forceful attacks on heresies against the Manicheans. These men were dangerous to the faith, according to Augustine, because they had no respect for the relationship between the language of religion and its divine essence:

And so I fell in with certain men, doting in their pride, too carnal minded and glib of speech, in whose mouth were the snares of the devil and a very birdlime confected by mixing together the syllables of your name, and the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the name of the Paraclete, our comforter, the Holy Spirit. These names were never absent from their mouths, but were only the tongue's sound and clatter, while their hearts were empty of truth.

The Manicheans are a threat to the faith because they use only the "names" of the Holy Trinity while the substance of their words is absent. To paraphrase Shakespeare, they are full of sound and fury signifying nothing. They abuse the Word by using the effect of its power and not the truth of its message. For this reason, Augustine views the Manicheans, with their "splendid fantasies" (phantasmata splendida—
III.6.10) and "empty figments" (figmenta inania--III.6.10),
as more dangerous to the faith even than the figmenti
poeticorum (I.17.27) he learned in his youth:

How much better were the fables of the grammarians and
the poets than these booby traps [of the Manicheans].
... For I can turn verse and song into good food. Again,
although I sang of Medea flying aloft, I did not assert
that it was a fact .... But I did believe in those
fantasies. Woe! Woe! By what steps was I lead down into
the depths of hell, struggling and burning for want of
the truth.

Quanto enim meliores grammaticorum et poetarum fabellae
quam illa decipula! ... Nam uersum et carmen etiam ad
uera pulmenta transfero; uolantem autem Medeam etsi
cantabam, non adserebam ... illa autem credidi. Vae!
Vae! Quibus gradibus deductus in profunda inferi, quippe
laborans et aestuans inopia ueri ...47

Faustus, his Manichean teacher, is an obstacle to
Augustine's personal quest for divine truth in that his
"mentor" can so expertly "clothe" his language to his ideas,
making them appealing even though they lack substance:

Therefore, that greed of mine with which I had so long
awaited the man [Faustus], found delight in his lively
manner and feeling in disputation and with his language,
which was so appropriate and arose so easily to clothe
his thoughts.

Igitur auiditas mea, qua illum tanto tempore
expectauerum hominem, delectabatur quidem motu
affectuque disputantis et uerbis congruentibus atque ad
uestiendas sententias facile occurentibus. [emphasis
mine]

The ease with which Faustus controls the "clothing" of truth
initially impresses Augustine, himself a student of oratory;
but, in hindsight, Augustine condemns Manicheism for placing value on only the medium of the message, its "veil". The Manichean's abuse of the "covering" of thoughts makes them especially dangerous to the faith when they "assert that the New Testament writings were falsified by some unknown persons who wished to implant the law of the Jews in the Christian faith" ("cum dicerent scripturas noui testamenti falsatas fuisse a nescio quibus, qui Iudaeorum legem inserere christianae fidei uoluerunt..."). Disturbed by heresies founded in the ambiguity of the "veil" of Scripture, Augustine, as Sarah Spence has put it, sought to "bandage" the sacred writings of their many textual "wounds" by standardizing allegoresis. In Augustine's hands, exegesis purports to "heal" not only Scripture but also the faith by censoring heresy at its source, the "writtenness" of allegory. The written veil of allegory is marginalized in Augustinian hermeneutics to control its "freplay of significations" which threaten to undermine the integrity of the faith by creating the "space" for heresy.

In his attempt to protect the clarity and uniformity of doctrine, Augustine is forced to debase and marginalize the impact of allegory on pedagogy by predicating doctrine within the unequivocal authority of "extralinguistic" categories such as the New Law of Charity (caritas):

Therefore, when anyone knows the end of the commandments to be charity "from a pure heart, and a good conscience,
and an unfeigned faith," and has related all of his understanding of the Divine Scriptures to these three, he may approach the treatment of these books with security.

Quapropter, cum quisque cognoverit finem praecepti esse charitam "de puro corde, et conscientia bona, et fide non ficta", omnum intellectum divinarum Scripturarum ad ista tria relaturus, as tractationem in illorum librorum securus accedat.50

and

...a man who is supported by Faith, Hope and Charity, with an unshaken hold on them, does not need the Scriptures except for the instruction of others.

Homo itaque fide, spe et charitate subnixus, eaque inconcussa retinens, non indiget Scripturis nisi as alios instruendos. 51

The law of charity, Augustine's preemptive guarantee against interpretive "wandering," is found in the "rule of faith" (regula fidei) located in "the more open places of the Scriptures and in the authority of the Church" ("de scripturarum planioribus locis et Ecclesiae auctoritate percepit"—emphasis mine).52 These "open places" in Scripture provide the clarity with which to oppose the danger of obscurity, heresy and error. In these passages, Augustine marks the boundaries of true and false interpretations before the act of interpretation takes place. His exegetical pedagogy, in the language of modern criticism, establishes "pretextual" priorities, similar to the Idea of the Book, which tie, in De Man's words, the "authority of language ... to an extralinguistic referent or meaning, rather than in the intralinguistic resource of figures."53(emphasis mine).
Augustine protects the unity of Christian dogma by situating it completely under the definitive regulations of the Church. The Church and not the *texta tunica* ultimately guides his pupils away from the confusion of allegorical discourse toward the clarity of allegoresis. The only way for Augustine to traverse the "otherness" of allegory and guarantee the clarity of Christian pedagogy is to provide the "right way" of reading *figurae*.

Written between the completion of Books III and IV of *De doctrina*, Augustine's discussion of allegory in the *Confessions* further demonstrates the connections I have drawn between Augustine's desire to excise the garment of language from Scripture and the need to protect allegoresis from allegory. In Book XIII, Augustine calls God to "clear away" all barriers between his mind and the divine realm, to make manifest what was hidden since the time of Eden:

> Clear away from our eyes the cloud you have woven under them.
> ![](https://example.com)\textit{Disserena oculis nostris nubilum, quo subtextisti eos.\footnote{\textit{emphasis mine}}}

Described as the "Book of skin" stretched over the heavens, this barrier resembles the "textualized body of Christ" as the "woven" text of allegory. Augustine draws this comparison closer between allegorical obscurity and the "textual" cloud.
by equating the "dark figures of the clouds" (aenigmate nubium) with the "lattice of the flesh" (retia carnis) through which Christ's speaks to us. The cloud is the written flesh of Christ which, instead of clarifying truth, defers sight and hides the divine. Recognizing the ambivalent discourse of allegory in this cloud, we are once again drawn to consider this passage as a plea to cleanse allegoresis of the "writtenness" of allegory.

As in the De doctrina, Augustine purportedly succeeds in his attempt to dominate and exclude the textual obscurity of Scripture by replacing the "written" legacy of allegory with the non-linguistic authority of God to help him expose "divinely sanctioned" readings:

I wish to interpret Scripture. I will speak out and I will have no fear. I will speak the truth under your inspiration as what you will me to interpret out of those words. For under the inspiration of none but you do I trust myself to speak the truth, for you are the truth. Therefore, that I may speak the truth, I will speak from you.

... et dicam, nec verebor. Verum enim dicam, te mihi inspirante, quod ex eis verbis voluisti ut dicerem. Neque enim alio praeter te inspirante credo me verum dicere, cum tu sis veritas ... Ergo ut veru, loquar, de tuo loquar. 56

That this passage appears in the chapter directly following his exegetical impulse to "clear away" the confusion surrounding the "figural" import of God's command to "increase and multiply" suggests a close relationship between
his fear of misreading "clouded" passages and his plea to be free of that barrier. Fearing that the Old Testament "veil" of this passage might "mean nothing," Augustine sets out to create out of this "figurative statement" (dicta figurata) an "allegory" of the "works of mercy" which corresponds in harmony with the regula fidei. Augustine's dependence on God's unmediated inspiration to guide his "unveiling" of this potentially void passage is a call for the exclusion of language from the "spiritual" authority of God as it exists in the sacred text. As with the "woven" cloud of allegory, Augustine distances himself from the "veil" of the Old Testament for fear that, without the pretextual assistance of God, he could become an agent of error. For this reason, Augustine speaks only under the pretextual authority and inspiration of God (de tuo loquar) and not out of the written sign, thus taking God as his muse and detaching himself entirely from the ambivalence of allegorical discourse.

This tension within Augustinian allegoresis as situated in clothing imagery demands that we reevaluate a passage familiar to those who have cited Augustine's desire to "circumcise" what he calls his "carnal imagination" from Christian hermeneutics:

... circumcise my lips, both my interior and exterior lips from all mistakes and lying. May your Scriptures be my chaste delight. May I never fall into error in my reading of them, May I never deceive others by misuse of them.
Circumcide ab omni temeritate omnique mendacio interiora et exteriora labia mea. Sint castae deliciae meae Scripturae tuae; nec fallar in eis, nec fallam ex eis.59

Medieval studies has for a long time used this passage to depict how Augustine conflates the desire for sin (desideriis pestilentiosis) with the unrestrained use of language.60 No reading of this passage, however, has yet examined the significance of Augustine's allusion to Isaiah 6 where the angel purifies Isaiah's lips to make him a "cleansed" prophet. The guiding presence of the book of Isaiah becomes clearer once we recall the medieval association of "lips" with preachers and orators of doctrine. Early on in the Church's history, Origen refers to the teachers of scripture as the "lips of Christ" (labia Christi).61 Even as late as Bersuere, the characterization remains intact ("Labia Ecclesia sunt praedicatores, vel etiam praedicatorium verba, quibus scilicet mediantibus lingua Dei Patris, Spiritus Sancti format utilia verba sua").62 That Augustine chooses to focus this prayer on his lips, calls attention to his desire to be a "circumcised" teacher of doctrine, free from the iniquity of heresy.63

A closer look at Isaiah, however, suggests that it is allegory itself which is being "circumcised" from Augustine's lips and preaching. Each of the two angels who stands above God in Isaiah's vision has six wings; two veil the face, two veil the feet ("duabus velabant faciem ejus et duabus
velabant pedes ejus"—emphasis mine) and two hold them aloft. As Alanus de Insulis later writes, these "veiled" Seraphim represent the "two testaments" ("duo testamenta sunt") with wings that represent the three ways of understanding scripture ("Si ergo seraphim sacram Scripturarum significat, tria paria alarum, tres sunt intellectus ejusdem Scripturae, historia, allegoria, tropologia ...†). The association between these wings and their "allegorical" significance is not lost on Augustine. This prayer for "circumcision" comes before a discussion over the problematic nature of his interpretations of the Old Testament. Since Moses is absent, Augustine cannot depend on his authoritative presence to expose the one specific meaning of the Old Testament. Augustine is aware that this lack of self-regulation within Scripture opens the possibility for heretical readings. When he asks God to "circumcise" his teachings not only from his carnality but also from the "veiling wings" of both testaments, Augustine is praying for a method of reading the figures of the Old Testament "cleansed" from the dangers of limitless significations made possible by the absence of a totalizing voice, the voice of its writer, Moses.

Written twenty-five years after the Confessions, the prescriptions on Christian oratory contained within Book IV of De doctrina Christiana are directed towards the creation of this "circumcised" preacher. Here, Augustine "converts"
rhetoric for Christian use by extracting its garment from the "slavery" of its pagan origins:

... all the teachings of the pagans contain not only the simulated and superstitious imaginings and grave burdens of unnecessary labor, which each one of us leaving the society of pagans under the leadership of Christ ought to abominate and avoid, but also liberal disciplines more suited to the uses of truth, and some most useful precepts concerning morals. ... When a Christian separates himself from their miserable society, he should take this treasure with him for the just use of teaching the gospel. And their clothing, which is made up of human institutions, ... should be siezed and and held to be converted to Christian uses.

... sic doctrinae omnes Gentilium non solum simulata et superstitiosa figmenta gravesque sarcinas supervacanei laboris habent, quae unusquisque nostrum duce Christo de societate Gentilium exiens, debet abominari atque devitare; sed etiam liberales disciplinas usui veritatis aptiores, et quaedam morum praecepta utilissima continent,... cum ab eorum misera societate sese animo seperat, debet ab eis auferre christianus ad usum justum praedicandi Evangelii. Vestem quoque illorum, id est, hominum quidem instituta, sed tamen accommodata atque habere licuerit in usum convertanda christianum.67

Christianity can confidently use rhetoric, Augustine argues, because it is a neutral garment having no inherent ties to erroneous pagan beliefs.68 The marginalization of rhetoric's pagan garment resonates with the division between allegoresis and its garment, allegory.

As with his handling of the texta tunica, Augustine maintains a distance between the faith and its mediating garment by diverting the authority of preaching to prelinguistic safeguards. Augustine continuously warns the
Christian rhetor to be wary of interlacing rhetoric with theology. "Nor should the teacher serve the words, but the words the teacher" ("nec doctor verbis serviat, sed verba doctori") is a consistent refrain in this preaching manual. To this end, Augustine instructs Christians to seek for the proper expression of the faith not within the garment of rhetoric but in the extralinguistic and "circumcising" presence of God:

When the hour in which he is to speak approaches, before he begins to preach, he should raise his thirsty soul to God in order that he may give forth what he shall drink, or pour out what shall fill him.

Ipsa hora jam ut dicat accedens, prius quam exserat linguam, ad Deum levet animam sitientem, ut eructet quod biberit, vel quod impleverit fundat.

Augustine faithfully rests the "good understanding" (bonae mentis) of Christian rhetoric within the directive inspiration of God "in whose 'hands are we and our words'(Wis.7.16)" ("in cujus manu sunt et nos et sermones nostri"). By placing oratory within the unmediated authority of God, Augustine aspires to convince his readers that they should view rhetoric and themselves as merely disinterested conduits for expression of what God will inspire them to utter and not as a vehicle for spiritual exploration of that inspiration:
But when the precepts (of rhetoric) are learned, they are to be applied to expressing those things which are understood than in the pursuit of understanding.

Sed haec pars cum discitur, magis ut proferamus ea quae intellecta sunt, quam ut intelligamus, adhibenda est. 73

Rhetoric, like the veil of allegory, is excised from spiritual instruction. For Augustine, rhetoric must remain distinct from theology, one being the exterior vessel of the other. Augustine divides divine truth from its mediation in the figures of rhetoric to prevent the letter from deforming the unambiguous explication of gospel. 74 Essentially opposed to one another in purpose, the vestem of rhetoric is situated outside of the quest for revelation and relegated to ornamentation as the "logocentric" conduit of truth.

The elimination of rhetoric from theology represents the fulfillment of Augustine's quest to "clear away" the occluding garment of allegory from both the reading and preaching of the gospel. His pedagogical interests lead him to accept the garments of allegory and rhetoric only insofar as they are, as Derrida writes, "preceded by a truth or a meaning already constituted by and within the element of the Logos." 75 That we can trace these ideas in the pedagogy of Hugh of St. Victor attests to the survival of this idea of a "circumcised" allegory. True to his characterization by critics of being the "second Augustine," Hugh of St Victor echoes several of Augustine's interpretive restrictions on the textual influence on meaning. 76 Like Augustine, Hugh
defines the nature of reading as the discovery of unmediated ideas determined for the pupil prior to his interaction with the text:

Let whoever comes to sacred reading for instruction first know what kind of fruit it yields. For nothing ought to be sought without a cause, nor does a thing which promises no usefulness attract our desires.

Quisquis ad divinam lectionem erudiendus accesserit, primum qualis sit fructus ejus cognoscat. Nil enim sine causa appeti debet, nec desideria trahit, quod utilitatem non promittet.77

This "fruit" fulfills the didactic uses of Scripture: "Twofold is the fruit of scared reading, because it either instructs the mind with knowledge or it adorns it with morals" ("Geminus est divinae lectionis frutus, quia mentem vel scientia erudit vel moribus ornat")78. Since the text is to be used to teach Christian values, its meaning must be clear and must always reinforce church doctrine.

Seeking primarily the "strengthening of the faith" through Christian education, Hugh, like Augustine, restricts the influence of allegory on interpretation and instruction.79 His invocation of the Church's "pre-textual" authority forces his readers to seek out meanings which will reinforce canonical doctrine and exclude any potential dissent caused by the elusive and equivocal nature of texts. If consent is not possible, Hugh prefers even silence to dialogue:
The doubtful things interpret in such a way that they may not be out of harmony. But those things that are obscure, elucidate if you can. But if you cannot penetrate to an understanding of them, pass over them so that you may not run into danger of error by presuming to attempt in what you are not equal to doing. Do not be contemptuous of such things, but rather be reverent toward them, for you have heard that it is written: "He made darkness his hiding place."

Not trusting his students to explore the hidden meanings in language, Hugh of St. Victor directs his pupil to remain mute on interpretations which may not be in "harmony" with Church doctrine. His pedagogical interests in transmitting "sanctioned" truth impel him to place limits on the intrusion of language on truth in Scripture. Both Augustine and Hugh of St. Victor divert attention from the obscurity of language and its meaning by relegating the mediating function of language to a status inferior to the preexistent and self-sufficient referent, a central impulse in logocentricism, as noted by Derrida:

... within this epoch [of the Logos in the Middle Ages], reading and writing, the production or interpretation of signs, the text in general as fabric of signs, allow themselves to be confined within secondariness. They are preceded by a truth, or a meaning already constituted by and within the element of the logos. Even when the
thing, the "referent," is not immediately related to the logos of a creator God where it began by being the spoken/thought sense, the signified has at any rate an immediate relationship with the logos in general (finite or infinite), and a mediated one with the signifier, that is to say with the exteriority of writing.\textsuperscript{82} [emphasis mine]

Logocentrism as reified in medieval theology positions the integument of Scripture exterior to meaning where the primary purpose of language is to guarantee a medium to the Logos, the divine essence. The letter is not allowed to supersede its spiritual referent because the unrestrained letter could distort the faith. Paradoxically, therefore, the "Book" of Christ is portrayed by the exegetes as both pre-linguistic and pre-textual, with no corpus scripturum. Instead, the liber praesentiae is used in exegesis to subordinate writing even to the point of its excision from the mediation of divine truth. This excision of allegorical discourse from the liber also implies its essential difference from "textuality." "All allegories are texts ...", Quilligan writes, "they are texts, first and last: webs of words woven in such a way as to call attention to themselves as texts."\textsuperscript{83} Marginalized to the "exteriority" of signification and meaning, the textuality of Christ's "Book" is silenced within exegesis to prevent the deformation of the Word within its multivalent and ironic veil.

The Incarnational text, within the perceived totality of the "Book," appears to possess none of the potential for
ambivalent or arbitrary signification. It does not point to its own distance from its referent, the Logos; it does not call into question its ability to present truth in its own esse. Totally referential and centered in the Logos, the Incarnational text takes its place within the divine ordo as the removable mediating surface of truth. The totality of this view of the Logos depends on the view that Christ came to stabilize language and restore language to its prelapsarian state and unmeditated condition. As we shall see below, however, medieval sources simultaneously portray Christ as one who "plays" with language and hides both himself (his spiritual esse) and his meaning within the woven "garment" of his body and words.

V

Although the "Book" of Christ and writing initially appear strictly oppositional in the exegetical formulation of allegory, neither one compromising the integrity of the other, this opposition breaks down once we examine how writing and "textuality" appear within the veiled and veiling presence of the Incarnational text in the New Testament. In contrast to medieval assumptions regarding the revelatory power of the Incarnation, the New Testament presents to us a Christ who "reveils" instead of reveals the divine message. As W. H. Kelber has said about Mark's...
gospel, the more the narrative struggles to overcome secrecy, the more it "reveils" itself in parabolic mystery. "Since Jesus' own words were often cryptic and subject to multiple interpretations," Robert Kiely writes, "it is difficult to conceive of a literature rooted in his language that would speak with a simple voice." This appreciation of the problem of meaning in the New Testament, however, is not, as might be expected, restricted to recent criticism. As I will argue, this problem finds its roots within the medieval tradition of viewing Christ as the "reveiler" and "weaver" of enigmatic and secretive signs, a characterization paradoxically joined in medieval exegesis to the description of Christ as the one who tears away the occluding veil of allegory.

For example, The Gospels associate the tales of Christ with the secretive and enigmatic powers of metaphor, as in the parables. In Mark IV.10-14, Christ uses parables to dislocate his audience's confidence in their ability to understand his language:

"He that hath ears to hear, let him hear." And when he was alone, the twelve that were with him asked him the parable: and he said to them: "to you is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God: but to them that are without, all things are done in parables. That seeing they may see and not perceive; and hearing, they may hear and not understand: lest at any time they should be converted and their sins forgiven them." And he saith unto them: "Are you ignorant of this parable? And how shall you know all parables?"
"Qui habet aures audiendi audiat." Et cum esset singularis, interrogaverunt eum hi qui cum eo erant duodecim, parabolam, Et dicebat eis; "Vobis datum est nosse mysterium regni Dei: illis autem, qui folis sunt in parabolis omnia fiunt. Ut videntes videant, et non videant: et audientes audiant, et non intelligant: nequando convertantur, et dimittantur ei peccata." Et iat illis; "Nescitis parabolam hanc et quomodo omnes parabolas cognoscetis." 86

The question begs to be asked how the words Jesus uses to describe the kingdom of heaven could be used by the exegetes to support their understanding of the liber praesentiae.87

Early in this tradition, Origen presents us with a Christ who intentionally covers up the meaning of his texts beneath a "veil" of confusion:

[Jesus] covered up the deeper mysteries of the faith in veiled speech.

... profundioris sacramenti fidem velato sermone contegeret.88 [emphasis mine]

In another place, Origen grounds our inability to uncover the true meaning in these "woven" signs and their alienating effect:

For just as "no one know's a man's thoughts except the spirit of the man which is in him," and " no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God" (1Cor 2: 11), so too, no one (except God) understands what has been spoken by Christ in similitudes and parables.

Quemadmodum enim "nemo hominum scit quae sunt homines, nisi spiritus hominis qui in ipso est", et "quae Dei sunt nemo cognovit; nisi Spiritus Dei;" ita quae
Christus in proverbiis et parabolis locutus est, post Deum nemo novit...

Clothing, as it represents Christ's words, obstructs plain sight of what de Lubac calls the "fact of Christ" from human perception when Origen suggests that these "veiled" words are impenetrable, a perpetual mystery trapped within the indeterminate veil of parabolic discourse. Instead of pointing to the "presence" of the Logos, the garment of Christ's words instead points to the obscurity of mediation, that is the possible "absence" of the divine referent.

According to Origen, this barrier between us and plain sight of Christ's message is further represented by the untorn inner veil of the temple which Christ would eventually cut at the moment of the crucifixion. It is as if Christ challenges his disciples with the tension between the simultaneous presence and absence of his divine message in the parables, because the full unveiling of God's truth has yet to occur:

And if we do not now see only "imperfectly" (1 Cor 13:10) but instead everything had already been made fully clear to the beloved disciples of Christ in the flesh, both veils, the outer and the inner, would have been torn. But now, since we are moving forward to the knowledge of new things, the outer veil is now torn "from the top to the bottom" so that "when the perfect comes" (1Cor 13:10) and everything else is revealed, then the second veil will also be removed so that we can see also what is hidden inside the second veil, namely the true ark of the covenant and the way it looks in reality, and so that we can see the cherubim and the
true mercy-seat and the place of the manna in its golden urn.

Et nisi ex parte cognosceremus, sed jam nunc manifestarentur omnia, adhuc in corpore constitutis dilectis Christi discipulis, utrumque velum fuerat conscindendum, id est quod a foris est et interius. Nunc autem quoniam ad scientiam rerum novarum producimur, ideo quod a foris quidem fuerat velum interim conscinditur a sursum usque deorsum, ut quando venerit quod perfectum est, et revelata fuerint caetera quae restabant, tunc auferetur etiam secundum velum, ut videamus etiam quae intra secundum velum sunt occultata, veram arcam testamenti, et sicut ipsa se habet natura, videamus cherubim, et propitiatorium verum, et repositionem mannae in aureo vase ...

The two veils act as two eyelids clouding our vision. Even though the Incarnation rends one veil, it leaves the other intact. Christ's parables shore up the second veil and prohibit plain sight until the second coming and the end of history and textuality, suggested by the rending of the "second" veil. Till then, believers and readers of Scripture must deal with imperfect sight of the divine through the "veil" of Christ's body.

Paralleling Origen's interpretation of this second veil, the semiology of clothing within Augustinian allegoresis traps him within an endless search for absolute referentiality within the folds of the polysemous and enigmatic word. In De doctrina Christiana, the semiology of clothing as written word defers sight of truth when Augustine discusses the problematic relationship between divine and human language:
Signs have become predominant among men for signifying whatever the mind conceives of they wish to communicate it to anyone. However, Our Lord gave a sign with the odor of the ointment with which his feet were anointed; and the taste of the sacrament of his body and blood signified what he wished; and when the woman was healed by touching the hem of his garment, something was signified.

Verba enim prorsus inter homines obtinuerunt principatum significandi quaecumque animo concipiuntur, si ea quisque proddere velit. Nam et odore unguenti Dominus, quo perfusi sunt pedes ejus, signum aliquod dedit (John. XXII,19,20); et cum mulier tangendo fimbriam vestimenti ejus, salva facta est, nonnihil significat (Matth. IX,21) ... . 92 [emphasis mine]

Augustine discusses two different orders of signification in this passage. The first involves Christ's defining and containing the meaning and reception of his own sign with his authoritative presence; he gives the sign. The second order involves a reader's interpretation of the garment of Christ (ie his text) and its power to mediate the power of God to humanity. As in Scripture, the power of the spirit does indeed travel through His textual garment to heal the impure woman; yet, curiously, Augustine offers no extended gloss on this passage. He merely passes it over with a general statement. This passage suggests that the garment opens the possibility for numerous interpretations and does not direct this polysemy into a totality. Christ's divine power is at once clear and obscure, present and absent. The garment gapes but closes up again at the very moment of plain sight. Augustine's elliptical gloss of the passage blurs the
"signified" Christ under His textual garment. It would appear then that, through the textual garment, indeterminacy is loosed within Augustine's exegesis.

Elsewhere in De doctrina, the disruptive force of writing asserts itself in Augustine's desire to free the regula fidei from language. First, he posits a nonlinguistic medium between God and doctrine; yet he consistently refers to the mediation of allegory as his primary source of the regula fidei. Both pre- and post-linguistic, the "rule of faith" becomes a central point of tension in Augustinian allegoresis between the dual nature of language to reveal and reveal. As Peggy Knapp has noted, this reassertion of indeterminacy in De doctrina Christiana results in an hermeneutics with "signs pointing not to a clear, readable, fixed discourse of a firm logocentrism but to the mixed, obscure, shifting nature of discourse in dialogue with its reader."93

Yet another example of Augustine's "staging of an appearance as disappearance," to borrow a phrase from Roland Barthes, occurs in the allusion to Isaiah 6 in the "circumcision" passage.94 Though Augustine hopes to emulate Isaiah as a "chaste" teacher with one divine voice, the ambiguous Old Testament passage frustrates his quest for a divinely inspired discourse free from the taint of confusion and ambiguity. After the angel purifies Isaiah's lips, God tells him to preach this message:
Listen carefully, you shall not understand.  
Look intently, you shall know nothing.

Audite audientes, et nolite intellegere,  
et videte visionem, et nolite cognoscere.95

Recognizable as the same words Jesus uses to justify the opacity of his parables, this "clear message" remains obscured even when passing through "circumcised" lips. The circumstances of Isaiah complicate the reduction of allegory to the role of ornamentation, or as Derrida puts it, the "exteriority of writing."96 Because the divine message is already wrapped within the texta tunica, allegoresis can never be free from its occluding garment. His attention to stemming off heresies contained within biblical allegory suggests that Augustine was aware of this problem even though he remains devoted to the quest for a "circumcised" pedagogy.

An even more salient example of the subverting effect of allegory on Augustinian hermeneutics appears in Book 13.15 of the Confessions where Augustine unwittingly reinforces the breakdown of the apocalyptic mission of the Incarnation by interlacing both the presence and absence of Christ's divine message in the cloak of writing:

Who except you, our God, has made for us a firmament of authority over us in the form of your divine Scriptures? For 'the heavens shall be folded together like a book' and now they are stretched over us like a skin. For your divine Scripture is of a more sublime authority, now that those mortal men, through whom you dispensed it to us have suffered this present death. You know, O Lord
you know, how you clothed men with skins when by sin, they became subject to death.

Aut quis, nisi tu, Deus noster, fecisti nobis firmamentum auctoritatis super nos in Scriptura tua divina? Caelum enim plicibatur ut liber (Isai. XXIV,4), et nunc pellis extenditur super nos (Psal. CIII,2). Sublimioris enim auctoritatis est tua divina Scriptura, cum jam obierunt istam mortem illi mortales, per quos eam dispensasti nobis. Et tu scis, Domine, tu scis quemadmodum pellibus indueris homines, cum peccato mortales fierint (Gen. III.21).

The Book folded over the heavens like a skin (vellus) is the body of Christ through which all people may be saved; but here the Book of Christ occludes and obscures the divine, the cloak of skin denies clarity of signification to humanity.98

"Super-celestial" beings, in contrast, can look upon and be edified by God's face directly. Their sinless and incorporeal state raises them above the need for mediation through the skin of the Book. They are

set above this firmament which you have made firm above the infirmity of a lower race where they might look upwards an know your mercy, telling in time of you who made all times.

... super hoc firmamentum ordinasti eos, quod firmasti super infirmitatem inferiorem populorum, ubi suspicerent et cognoscerent misericordiam tuam, temporaliter enuntiante te, qui fecisti tempora. 99

The angels encounter no mediating corpus scripturarum to obfuscate and isolate their minds from God. God is plain to them even as He was to Adam and Eve before the Fall, the sewing of the fig leaves, and the birth of the "woven" text.
The reassertion of the polysemy of allegory appears within Augustine's pedagogy because he cannot escape the fundamental paradox of Christian hermeneutics, that it is grounded not in the "pretextual" Idea of the Book but in the elusive corpus scripturarum of Christ's texta tunica.

The Great Glossa directly links, as Origen does above, the secretive effect of the Body of Christ with the act of weaving:

While the Lion is put to flight, it flees through the mountains, and by the knot which it has in the cave, it blots out its tracks, so that it cannot be found: in the same way, Christ fled through the mountains, that is he hid his divinity from the Jews, weaving his divinity with the flesh he accepted, so that he was not able to be recognized.

"Vicit Leo": Leo dum fugatur, per montes fugit, et nodo quem habet in cauda vestigia delet, ne inveniatur: its Christus fugit per montes, id est divinitas Judaeos latuit, assumpta carne divinitatem textit, ne posset agnosci. 100 [emphasis mine]

The Lion of Judah, the breaker of the seals, the bringer of revelation in Apocalypse is himself veiled from sight to "hide" his significance.

Bersuire envelopes the divine presence of Christ completely within the obscuring veil of his own textuality:

Nevertheless, this veil of obscurity is able to indicate well the human veil of Christ, by which it is clear that God wished to be veiled and to be concealed beneath the body in darkness.

Veruntamen illud velamen obscuritatis potest bene significare velamen humanitas Christi, quo scilicet Deus
Wrapped in the garment of language, Christ occludes His divine message through His textual nature. His words confuse his audience and open the possibility for misinterpretation and misunderstanding. He who came to reveal the will of God on earth actually succeeds in "reveiling" that will through His use of obscuring words. In contrast to the "unveiling" Christ of the Old Testament, the New Testament Christ described in exegesis resembles the deferring "text" he himself speaks. "Reading uncovers and confronts a language," as Vincent Leitch has noted "that vacillates uncontrollably between the promise of referential meaning and the rhetorical subversion of that promise. Truth is permanently threatened." The resulting play of signifiers in the woven words of the parables recreates not the totalizing presence of the Logos but the "lateral dance" of signification, a freeplay of interpretations which never achieves exposure of a signified to ground its meaning. Kiely claims that this paradox between the simultaneous promise of plain truth and the subversion of that promise is at the heart of religious discourse:

It is precisely the play of presence and absence, grace and sin, that shapes the language of Christian allegory.
This oscillation between presence and absence in the "writtenness" of Christ develops out of Christ's participation in language and the nature of texts to resist self-disclosure of meaning. The veil used by medieval exegesis as a sign-post of the divine acts instead as a barrier between people and God's truth which can never be fully removed or fully traversed. Instead of acting as a pathway to God and the Logos, the woven veil of Christ's textuality acts as a barrier to understanding and traps its readers in the self-referentiality of the written sign. Paradoxically, Scriptural language, in exegesis, is clothed at both ends of the signifying process; and even when the reader thinks he is on the inside of meaning, achieving sight of the signified, he remains looking at the mediation of the signifier. No longer merely the exteriority of meaning, Christ's textual body plays an important part in what Derrida calls the "play of presence and absence" inherent to writing.  

As argued by Peggy Knapp, this entanglement of Christ's divine message with the obscurity of texts and human language proves "there is no infallible, direct way through our mediated linguistic realm to God's unmediated domain; there is always some wandering by the way." Unlike the logocentric, pretextual liber praesentiae, Christ, like writing, "is a challenge to the very idea of structure." The paradox which medieval exegetes faced and reluctantly acknowledged in their representation of Christ as
both the revealer and reveiler of Scripture is that allegory is not extratheological, it is theology; nor is it merely the external veil of revelation, it is revelation. By claiming to inherit that indeterminate veil as its garment of authority, Christian hermeneutics could not, in the end, deny that within its allegoresis lay the very ambiguity of written signs it hoped to eliminate from doctrine. This absence of guaranteed referentiality within Christian pedagogy confronts the exegetical impulse to find the Logos wholly present in Scripture within the obscuring and occluding garment of written language. This garment presents medieval exegesis, instead, with an oscillation between the "presence and absence" of truth which is both seductive and frustrating. As Gellrich has suggested, allegoresis could not ultimately silence the contradictions and oppositions to different interpretations and an appreciation for diversity and ambiguity in biblical writing:

Although hermeneutic practice, in such works as the Glossa Ordinaria, told readers on the authority of tradition what to understand in the effort of foreclosing uncertainty and doubt, the style of Biblical writing presented them with the leaven of change. The Biblical challenge was controlled as long as it was absorbed within the metaphor of writing in medieval hermeneutics, but it could not be thoroughly suppressed. And where it is not, the opposition is catalyzed.\textsuperscript{109}
Christ's textual body is not the "veil" of a preexistent, pretextual Logos; it is the Logos as it appears in the corpus scripturarum, textual, physical, and temporal. The veil marks the "supplementarity" of allegory as more a "text" than the logocentric Idea of the Book. Even within the constraints of the Idea of the Book, the "writtenness" of allegory speaks through Christ's textualized body in its own inconclusive voice, defying closure and asserting its ironic structure in spite of attempts to close the gap. As the basis of allegory, the textualized body of Christ situates the central cause of equivocacy in allegorical discourse throughout the Middle Ages.

This paradox of the Incarnational text as I have described it thus far no doubt provided the unstable foundation of medieval theories of "textuality" and signification, both religious and secular. Our understanding of this "oscillation" allows us to read fourteenth century middle English poetics in a way that has not heretofore been possible. As we will see in what follows, The Clerk's Tale and Pearl present to us allegories where language is simultaneously pre- and post-linguistic. In what form did Christian hermeneutics find its way into these two allegories? Do signs behave in these works to unearth the polysemy present at their origin in the Holy Word? In the way they identified and dealt with this fundamental tension within language, Pearl
and The Clerk's Tale reveal through the semiology of clothing contained within them a keen awareness of the "problem" of understanding truth as both independent of and dependent on language for its meaning. How each of these works individually represent that problem will be dealt with in separate chapters below.

NOTES TO CHAPTER I

1De Principis IV.2.5 in PL XI translated by G. W. Butterworth in On First Principles (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1936). All further translations of this text will be from this translation. There may be some objection to my using Origen since he was an Eastern Church Father and not Western. Yet his importance to Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine and Hugh of St. Victor as an influential and prolific writer of scripture cannot be discounted. His ideas concerning the purpose for the Incarnation found their way, albeit somewhat altered, into the writings of later more influential and pervasive scriptural authorities, most notably Augustine who read and quoted Origen. For more on Origen's influence, see Charles Donahue, "Summation" in Critical Approaches to Medieval Literature: Selected Papers from the English Institute, 1958-1959. ed. with a foreward by Dorothy Bethurum (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960) 66; and Beryl Smalley, Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages, 3rd. ed. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983) 13-22. Also see R. P. C. Hanson, Allegory and Event: A Study in the Sources and Significance of Origen's Interpretation of Scripture (London, 1959).


3Homily on Leviticus. I.1. in PL XII: 405AB. Quoted and translated by Karen Jo Torjesen in Hermeneutical Procedure

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and Theological Method in Origen's Exegesis (Berlin, 1986) 110.


5Confessions. X.42.


9For a more extensive analysis of the Incarnation and its stabilizing force on language, see Peggy A. Knapp, "Wandryng by the Weye: On Alisoun and Augustine" and Laurie A. Finke, "Truth's Treasure: Allegory and Meaning in Piers Plowman." Both are in Medieval Texts and Contemporary Readers. ed. by Laurie Finke and Martin B. Shichtman (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987) 142-157 and 51-68, respectively. Also see Martha Colish, The Mirror of Language (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983) ix. "Middle Christians believed that Christ the word was God's perfect expression of himself to man. Having taken on a human nature and having expiated man's sin, Christ had restored man to God. Previously vitiated by sin, the human mind could now participate in the Incarnation by helping to spread the Word to the world. Medieval thinkers thus stressed verbal signs as the primary media of religious knowledge because they saw in Christ the Word the mediator between God and man . . . ." Also see Mark D. Jordan, "Words and Word: Incarnation and Signification in Augustine's De Doctrina Christiana," Augustinian Studies II (1980): 177-96. And V. S. Poythress,

1 For more on the history and significance of this image of Christ as the quintessential reader of Scripture, see Henri de Lubac, *The Sources of Revelation*, 106ff.

112 Cor.III,13-16. All Latin passages of Scripture are from the Latin Vulgate, and the English translations are from *The Holy Bible* (New York: Douay Bible House, 1943).

12De Principis IV,1,6. in PL XI: 363BC.

13See Rabanus Maurus, *Ennarationum In Epistulo II Ad Corinthianos*. XII.III. in PL CXII: 176BD. "Et non sicut Moyses ponebat velamen super faciem suam, ut non intenderent filii Israel in faciem ejus, quae evacuatur." Quoniam digni facti sumus per gratiam Dei videre gloriam Christi, idcirco "et non sicut Moyses," ait, "ponebat velamen super faciem suam, ne intuerentur filii Israel," ideo ponebat velamen, quoniam splendorem vultus ejus ferre non poterant causa pecati, quo sublato potestas daturae videndi gloriam Dei usque ad finem ejus, quia tam diu non revelatur, donec relictum legem convertantur ad gratiam fidei, et sic evacuatur; ascendente autem dignitate per fidem evacuatur indignitas. 'Sed obtusi sunt sensus corum usque in hodiernum diem.' Tandiu obtusos dicit, quandiu non credunt; quae obtusio infidelitatis cause obvenit, ideo conversis ad fidem acuitur acies mentis ut videant divini luminis splendorem. 'Idipsum velamen in lectione Veteris Testamenti manet non revelatum, quoniam in Christo evacuatur.' Obtusio, ait, haec in lectione Exodi manet, quandiu credunt, non enim revelatur nisi credant. In Christo enim evacuatur, hoc est, per fide, Christi auferetur velamen: amoto enim delicto incipient videre quod, obstante peccato, videre non poterant. 'Sed usque in hodiernum diem cum legitur Moyses velamen est posittum super cor eum.' Manifestum est, quia cum legitur haec para legis, sententia illorum recitatur qui sunt sub lege." (Greg.) [emphasis mine]

16 Glossa Ordinaria in PL CXIV: 176AB. My translation. Note the way this passage is alluded to by Augustine in the Confessions to describe the difference between the the temple of the Holy of Holies and the school of the grammarians in his youth: "true it is that curtains (vela) hang before the doors of the grammar schools, but they do not symbolize some honored mystery but rather a cloak of error (tegumentum erroris). Confessions XII.13.

17 Didascalicon, VI.vi.

18 Origen, de Principis. IV.2.8.

19 Confessions I.14.

20 Didascalicon IV.xvi. That this definition occurs in the chapter of the Didascalicon discussing "Some etymologies of things pertaining to reading" complicates the medieval distinction between the authority of oral discourse and the problem of interpreting written signs. Augustine also conflates the oral and the written when he refers to his instrument of writing about scripture as the "tongue of my pen" (lingua columnae) in Confessions XI.2.


22 Genesis III.7-9.

23 See Glossa Ordinaria for Genesis III.7-8 in PL CXIII.93.

24 Contained within the simultaneous birth of sin and textuality lies an interesting duplicity in the natures of both the fruit of sin and the skin of sin. The fruit [fructu] of the tree of knowledge plunges Adam and Eve into the grave, yet the fruit of the knowledge contained in Scripture which the exegetes draw out from the husk of the corpus scripturarum marks the path to salvation. The fruit then marks the punishment of death and the promise of salvation, the separation from God's mind and the means to regaining contact with that mind. In like manner, the "cloak of skin" which marks that punishment of death is also the same vehicle through which Christ as mediator can bring eternal life to mankind. This tension between life and death, sight and blindness within the fruit of reading and the skin of sin creates the dynamic oscillation present at
all times within language: the impulse to reify truth and to
occlude that same truth.

25De doctrina Christiana. II.iv.in PL XXXIV. Translated by
D. W. Robertson as On Christian Doctrine (Indianapolis:
Bobbs-Merrill, 1958.) All translations will be to this
edition unless otherwise indicated.

26Jacques Derrida, Of Grammatology. Translated by Gayatri
For a detailed analysis of the Idea of the Book in the
middle ages, see Jesse Gellrich. The Idea of the Book in the

27Jesse Gellrich, "Deconstructing Allegory" Genre 18

28Maureen Quilligan, The Language of Allegory: Defining the
Genre (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979) 32. For more
on Quilligan's analysis on allegory vs. allegoresis, see
"Allegory, Allegoresis, and the De allegorization of Language:
the Roman de la Rose, the De planctu naturae, and the
Parlement of Foulis" in Allegory, Myth and Symbol ed. by
Morton W. Bloomfield (Cambridge: Harvard University Press,

29Jesse Gellrich, The Idea of the Book in the Middle Ages
(Cornell, Cornell University Press,1 985) 130. "In the
determination to answer authoritatively and thoroughly the
questions and doubts, the gaps and lacunae of biblical
writing, exegesis carries out a function analogous with that
of myth, as argued in recent theory, to mediate
contradictions and uncertainties ... ." See also, Erich
Auerbach, Mimesis translated by Willard Trask (Princeton:

30Didascalicon VI.4.
The model is pervasive throughout the middle ages. Consider
the following examples of "veiled truth" in Scripture:

Alcuin, Commentaria in S. Ioannes Evangelium in PL C: 821C:
"...integumenta litterae grossiora, quae interiorem
intelligentiam spiritualis sensus quasi medullam cellabant."

Bernard of Clairvaux, In Cantica in PL CLXXXIII: 1008CD:
"Et secundum litteram istud. Nunc jam scrutemur ... spiritualam qui in ea tegitur intellectum."

Pseudo Dionysus, Celestial Hierarchy in PL CXXII: 1038C: Aliter nobis lucere divinum lumen, nisi varietate sacrorum velamentum circumvelatum. [emphasis mine]

31Allegoriae in Sacram Scripturarum in PL CXII: 1075B--1076C.


33Glosso Ordinaria in PL CXIV: 238AB.


35Jesse Gellrich, Idea of the Book in the Middle Ages, 39.

36De doctrina Christiana II.iv.

37For a similar discussion of this passage, see Laura Finke, "Truth's Treasure: ..." 53. "As the Logos becomes flesh through the mystery of the Incarnation, so, through the mysteries of allegory, divine truths are made accessible to human understanding; and as Christ's divine nature remains unchanged when he takes on human form, the divine truths conveyed through allegory remain unchanged when they are clothed in words". See also Philip Pulsiano, "Redeemed Language and the Ending of Troilus and Criseyde" in Sign Sentence Discourse ed. by Julian H. Wasserman and Lois Roney (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1989) 157-161.

38Robert Miller has noted this aspect of Christian pedagogy in Chaucer: Sources and Backgrounds (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977) 7. "The function of the authorities was to make possible the penetration of 'seductive coverings' which would otherwise distract the unaided mind of Adam's progeny."

39De doctrina Christiana, Prologue: 19-20.

Here, Augustine echoes the methods proposed by his teacher, Jerome. As described by Augustine, Jerome's divinely inspired reading strategy works to "pull away" the obstruction of truth caused by the misleading and potentially dangerous veil of the letter:

For he would draw aside the veil of mystery and spiritually lay open things that understood literally seemed to teach perversity.

...cum ea quae ad litteram perversitatem docere videbantur, remoto mystico velamento spiritualiter aperiret... [emphasis mine]

Because the "veil" of Scripture sometimes appears to teach lies (ad litteram perversitatem), Jerome and Augustine believe that a method must be formulated to strip away the distracting veil and its absence of truth.

Some prime examples of the extent to which Augustine feared the potential "evil" of language free from the authoritative control of the divine voice occur in the Confessions: "By these temptations are we tempted daily, Lord, without ceasing we are tempted. Our daily furnace is the human tongue." (Temptamur his temptationibus cotidie, domine, sine cessatione temptamur. Cotidiana fornax nostra es humana lingu.: X.XXVII.60) and "When they hear me speak about myself, how do they know if I speak the truth. ... But if they should hear about themselves from you, they cannot say, "The Lord lies!" (Et unde siunt, cum a me ipso de me ipso audiant, un uerum dicam, ... . Si autem a te audiant de se ipsis, non poterunt dicere: "mentitur dominus!": X.III.3)

Brian Stock, Implications of Literacy (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983) 88. "Heretics and reformers of course differed in their attitudes towards authority and the official church. But their uses of literacy were similar: in particular, both resorted to textual precedent for justifying deviations from what were considered to be merely customary or unwritten ecclesiastical norms."

Studies in the etymological history of allegory as irony or "other speech" include Jesse Gellrich, "Deconstructing Allegory", 201; Jon Whitman, "From the Cosmographia to the Divine Comedy: An Allegorical Dilemma" in Allegory, Myth and Symbol, 63-86; and Maureen Quilligan, The Language of Allegory, 26.

Confessions, III. 6. 10.

Confessions, III. 6. 11.

Confessions, V. 11. 21.

Sarah Spence, Rhetorics of Reason and Desire: Vergil, Augustine, and the Troubadours (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1988) 99. "Augustine's reading technique is to bind the wound of an obscure scriptural passage with a similar bandage that Christ uses to heal men's wound's."

De doctrina Christiana, I.40.

De doctrina Christiana, I.39.

De doctrina Christiana, III.2

Paul de Man, Allegories of Reading (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979) 106.

Confessions, XIII.15.

Confessions, XIII.15.

Confessions, XIII.25.

Confessions, XIII.24. and XIII.25. The word Augustin uses for "allegory" is allegoria.

Confessions, VI.4.

Confessions, XI.2.
Confessions. IV.10. As Eugene Vance has stated of this passage, this plea for a chaste mouth with which to speak the words of God is wrought with sexual connotations:

In pleading with God to circumcise his lips so that he may gain the chaste pleasures (casta deliciae) of understanding God’s Text, Augustine is, on the one hand, comparing his tongue to his phallus, and on the other, comparing the hermeneutical performance to erotic love; the word deliciae commonly connotes voluptuousness as it is used by Augustine’s classical forbears.

Mervelous Signals: Poetics and Sign Theory in the Middle Ages (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986) 7. See also Cynthia Hahn, "Purification, sacred action and the vision of God: Viewing Medieval Narratives" Word and Image 5 (Jan-March, 1989) 75; and Gellrich, Idea of the Book, 117. According to Derrida, this view of writing as a destructive force on "the good" still permeates modern theories of the antagonism between the oral and written sign. "Writing, sensible matter and artificial exteriority: 'a clothing.' It has sometimes been contested that speech clothed thought. Husserl, Saussure, Lavelle have all questioned it. But has it ever been doubted that writing was the clothing of speech? For Saussure, it is even a garment of perversion and debauchery, a dress of corruption and disguise, a festival mask that must be exorcised, that is to say warded off, by the good word ... ." Of Grammatology, 35.

Commentary on the Song of Songs, scholion 4, 9 in PL 17, 272D as quoted in Hans Urs von Balthasar, Origen: Spirit and Fire #381.

Reductio Moralis. II.xv. "The lips of the Church are the preachers, or even the words of the preachers, by whose mediation the tongue of God the Father, and the Holy Spirit forms his useful words." My translation.

The connection between the circumcised lips and the "good" teachers of Scripture is supported by what Trimpi has noted regarding the Neoplatonist characterization of rhetoric as a mere instrument of expression. She argues that their reduction of rhetoric was aimed at "purifying" their ideas:

A third and most important reason for the Neoplatonic encouragement of formalism lies, perhaps, in the concept of purification. As one strips away the material components of composite things, he returns, form by purer form, to the
source of all form, the purity—undelimited itself by any form—of the One.


64 All Latin passages of Scripture are from the Latin Vulgate.

65 Alanus de Insulis, De Sex Alis Cherubim in PL CCX: 270A and 271A.

66 Confessions, XI.3.

67 De doctrina Christiana II.40. This image of speaking as a garment is echoed by Hugh of St. Victor's definition of a spoken dialogue (sermo) as a sewn garment in Didascalicon.IV.xvi.

A 'dialogue' is a conversation between two or among several persons; the Latins call it sermo. Sermo, or talk, moreover, is so called because it is interwoven among each of the speakers.

Dialogus est collatio duorum vel plurium; Latini sermonem dicunt. Sermo autem dictus, quia seritur inter utrumque.[emphasis mine]

68 See De doctrina Christiana. IV.2. See also De doctrina Christiana II.35: "There are, moreover, certain precepts for a more copious discourse which make up what are called the rules of eloquence, and these are very true, even though the may be used to make falsehoods persuasive. Since they can be used in connection with the true principles as well as the false, they are themselves not culpable ... ."

69 De doctrina Christiana, IV.28.

70 De doctrina Christiana, IV.15.

71 De doctrina Christiana, IV.30.

72 De doctrina Christiana, IV. 30.

73 De doctrina Christiana, II. 37.
This isolation of language from understanding for the sake of clarity resembles what Trimpi has noted regarding the Neoplatonic subordination of rhetoric to philosophy in the middle ages. "... Neoplatonic thinkers, in coping with the ancient rivalry between rhetoric and philosophy, tended to subordinate, rather than relate, rhetoric to philosophy. They tended to regard rhetoric as that pragmatic part of philosophy itself which gave public expression to its doctrines and urged its audience to accept them." Muse of One Mind, 87.


And as Winthrop Wetherbee has noted, in Hugh's "Didascalicon, he emulated, and at the same time elaborated upon, the de doctrina Christiana of Augustine." Platonism and Poetry in the Twelfth Century (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1972) 49.

Didascalicon, V.6.

Didascalicon, V.6.

Didascalicon, IV.1.

Didascalicon, VI.4.

See Gerald Bruns, "The Problem of Figuration in Antiquity" in Hermeneutics: Questions and Prospects ed. by Gary Shapiro and Alan Sica (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984) 159. "Augustine's method of determining the difference between the literal and the figurative rests not upon an unprejudiced analysis of the text but upon the application of the traditional Christian "rule of faith," whereby scriptural texts are to be taken as they stand when they are consistent with apostolic teachings and in another sense when they appear at odds with or indifferent to these teachings. The text is not to be taken as it is in itself but only as it has been appropriated and transmitted within a particular tradition of understanding."


Quilligan, Language of Allegory, 25.


Mark IV.10-14


de Lubac, Sources of Revelation, 168ff.

Sermon 138: in PL XVII: 1790AC. Translated in Origen: Spirit and Fire #430

de doctrina Christiana. II.iii.


Roland Barthes, The Pleasure of the Text translated by Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975) 10. "Is not the most erotic portion of a body where the garment gapes? In perversion (which is the realm of textual pleasure) there are no "erogenous zones" (a foolish expression, besides); it is the intermittence of skin flashing between two articles of clothing (trousers and sweater), between two edges (the open necked shirt, the glove and the sleeve); it is this flash itself which seduces, or rather: the staging of an appearance-as-disappearance."

For a more in-depth application of Barthes' erotic hermeneutics as related to exegesis, see Patricia Cox Miller, "'Pleasure of the text, text of Pleasure': Eros and Language in Origen's Commentary on the Song of Songs,"
On the oscillation between the presence and absence of Christ, see also, Augustine, Tractatus 50 in Joanni post init. Tomus 9. in PL XXXV: 1759-60: Christum parentes tui teneantur carne, tu tene corde; quoniam Christus absente etiam praesens est. [Your forefathers understood Christ by the flesh, you understand him by the heart; since Christ is both absent and present.] My translation.

Confessions XIII.15.

Glossa Ordinaria. Apocalypse. 5.5

Reptertorium Morale III.173E. My translation.

See Robert Kiely, 105ff.


Vincent Leitch, 190-197.


Derrida, Of Grammatology, 244.

Knapp, "Wandering by the Weye...," 150.

Terry Eagleton, Literary Theory (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983) 134.

"Perle Pyght": Allegory, Allegoresis, and the Origin of the Sign: A Semiology of Clothing in Pearl

The tension between allegory and allegoresis in medieval exegesis, as addressed in the last chapter, influenced theories of language throughout the Middle Ages. This influence was not restricted to religious writers. Secular poets of the Middle Ages also inherited and exploited the paradox of the "textualized body" of Christ as I have described it thus far. Through its treatment of clothing imagery, the poetics of the fourteenth century reveal the influence of this paradox. According to Edmund Reiss, this paradox is at the heart of fourteenth century theories of figurality: "although the poets' integumentum, or enigmatic mode of expression, could serve to attract audiences to the truth within their words, it did not necessarily offer immediate or universal understanding."¹ According to Reiss, this dynamic results directly out of an "ambivalence of human signs" as "simultaneously concealing and revealing" truth.² Rather than mimicking the exegetes' attempt to distance themselves and their pedagogy from the polysemy of allegory, the poets of the fourteenth century embraced that polysemy to
further their linguistic experimentation in the nature of truth and its mediation.

An example of this kind of experimentation occurs in *Pearl*, manifesting this dynamic perception toward allegorical discourse. As argued by Anne Schotter, the examination of language is a central interest in *Pearl*: "Language is a far more important theme of the *Pearl* than has generally been recognized." For Schotter, the *Pearl*-poet makes the "inadequacy of language in conveying the Divine an implicit theme of the poem." As I will discuss in more detail below, however, the *Pearl*-poet works in this poem not so much to reveal the inadequacy of language as to explore the inherent paradoxes of Christian allegory. Significant to the purpose of this study, the semiology of clothing provides a means of tracking this exploration into the tension between allegory and allegoresis manifested within medieval hermeneutics. Central to my treatment of this tension in the poem is the image of the *Pearl*-maiden herself as an allegorical text.

Critics have for a long time appreciated *Pearl* as an allegory with the image of the pearl at the center of the poem's meaning. Readings often focus on the pearl as an allegorical representation of one or more Christian values such as purity, grace, penitence, justice, etc. That the pearl represents allegory itself, however, has been generally overlooked. As I hope to prove, a reading of the *Pearl*-poet's interest in language should take into account how the
pearl points to itself as a sign, reflecting its own process of signification. The Pearl-poet directs our attention to allegory through his juxtaposition of the pearl and the maiden's vesture. In that joining, the Pearl-poet draws from Augustine's representation of pearls as spiritual truths hidden within the "garments" of allegory:

Pearls signify all spiritual things whatsoever that are worthy of being highly prized. And because these things lie hidden in secret, it is as though they were being drawn up from the deep; because they are found in the integuments of allegories, it is as though they were contained within shells that have been opened.

Margaritae autem, quaecumque spiritualia magnae aestimanda sunt; et quia in abdito latent, tanquam de profundo eruuntur, et allegoriae integumentis quasi apertis conchis inveniuntur.5 [emphasis mine]

The integumentes allegoriae of the "pearls" of wisdom in Scripture correspond to the vesture of pearls worn by the maiden. As many critics have noted, the Pearl-maiden's garments mark her as a sign to be interpreted not only by the dreamer but also by the reader of the poem. Recognizing the significance of this interlacing of the maiden and her "addubemente", critics have insisted that the maiden's garments signal her role as a "divine instructress," a self-revealing sign providing immediate understanding of universal truth.7 According to Wilt Schofield, the Pearl-maiden receives this role from a long standing literary tradition of medieval didactic poetry beginning with the Consolation of
Philosophy. The maiden is "an allegorical figure," he indicates, "as the various other beautiful ladies who before our author's [Pearl-poet] time had appeared in imagination to disconsolate poets for their counsel, comfort, and illumination--Philosophy, Nature, Reason, Holy Church, and their kind, the famous instructors of Boethius, Alain de Isle, the authors of the Romance of the Rose, Langland and other didactic writers." Robert Ackerman claims that clothing imagery is the primary indicator of this inherited role. "The magnificent raiment of Lady Philosophy", he writes, "is bequeathed to her successors along with her teaching techniques." While Ackerman has noted the legacy of Lady Philosophy's garments to her successors, he glosses over the important semiological connections between her apparel and her teachings which consolidate them essentially into one heirloom. Lady Philosophy's entrance into the Consolation of Philosophy makes the strongest connection between her garments and her teaching in that her clothing figures prominently in Boethius' first description of her:

Her clothing was made of the most delicate threads, and by the most exquisite workmanship; it had—as she afterwards told me—been woven by her own hands into an everlasting garment. (1.prose.1)

Vestes erant tenuissimis filis subtili artificio indissolubili materiae perfectae, quas, uti post eadem prodente cognoui, suis manibus ipsa texuerat. [emphasis mine]
These garments inscribed with the Pi and Omega ("Harum in extremo margine Pi Gracum, in supremo vero Omega legebatur intextum"—emphasis mine) emblematize Lady Philosophy's presence as a divine textus from which she will teach the disconsolate Boethius. The connections between her garments and the "textual" origin of her teachings is drawn even closer when Lady Philosophy uses her garments to "clear" Boethius' eyes as a means of preparing him for his lessons:

"He has forgotten himself for a moment. He will quickly remember as soon as he recognizes me. To bring you to your senses, I shall quickly wipe the dark cloud of mortal things from your eyes" Then she dried my tear filled eyes with a fold of her robe. (I.prose.2)

Sui paulisper oblitus est. Recordabitur facile, si quidem nos ante cognouerit; quod ut possit, paulisper lumina ejus mortalitum rerum nube caligantia tergamus. Haec dixit oculosque meos fletibus undantes contracta in rugam veste siccuit.

Boethius implies through this scene that Lady Philosophy's robe is essential to her task as cosmic pedagogue. The description of Lady Philosophy's robe and its significance to her function are not lost on the Pearl-poet. Even as he draws from Augustine's integumentes allegoriarum, the Pearl-poet borrows Lady Philosophy's vesture to adorn his own divine instructress. In contrast to her literary predecessor, the Pearl-maiden is not solely an allegorical figure of something beyond herself (e.g. Nature, Philosophy, Holy Church, etc.). Rather, the Pearl-maiden is the allegory of allegory: she is
Allegoria. Moreover, the Pearl-poet uses her as Allegoria to explore the process of allegory itself, its otherness, its polysemy and its reflexivity. To this end, the Pearl-poet presents the maiden as both referent and sign, interpreter and text, allegoresis and allegory.

Analogous to the garments of Lady Philosophy, with their inscribed Pi and Omega as her "textual" sources of divine knowledge, the Pearl-maiden's body is "inscribed" with the name of God. The most obvious intimation that the Pearl-maiden is a text written by the divine hand occurs when the maiden refers to herself as one of the 144,000 maidens of Christ who has received His divine "signature":

Wyth hym maydenegh an hundrethe thowsande,  
And fowre and forty thowsande mo.  
On alle her forhedege writen I fande  
The Lombe nome, hys Faderegh also.11

[With him were a hundred thousand maidens  
and forty-four thousand more.  
On all their foreheads was written, as I saw,  
the name of the Lamb and his father's also.] (869-972)

A written sign of the divine hand, the Pearl-maiden mediates the Name and Word of God; and like Holy Church in Christian hermeneutics, the Pearl-maiden derives her authority to teach subjects divine by calling attention to the garments "woven" for her by Christ:

"Quo formed the thy fayre fygure?  
That wroght thy wede, he watz ful wys."

...
"My makelegh Lambe that al may bete
... In hys blod he wesch my wede on dese,
... And pyght me in perlegh maskellegh."

["Whoever formed for you your fair figure and that fashioned your vesture, he was fully wise."
... "My spotless Lamb that will comfort all
... washed my clothes on a dais in his blood
... and adorned me in spotless pearls."](747-768)

In contrast to Lady Philosophy, who weaves her own garment of universal knowledge, the Pearl-maiden supersedes her literary predecessor and model by being the recipient of Christ's own vesture. Christ gives his cloak to support her presence as a divine sign. He is her "author," writing his knowledge into her body and her garments. Here, the relationship between Christ and his sign corresponds to the appropriate relationship between sign and referent in medieval exegesis, with the sign secondary to and dependent on its extralinguistic referent for its sententia.

The Pearl-maiden's signification of Christ is made possible, as with Scripture in exegesis, through her divine "textuality," a textuality which intimately interlaces her garments with her "pearls of wisdom", as the dreamer points out:

A juel to me then watz thys geste,
And iuelegh hyr gentyl sawegh.
[A jewel to me, then, was this guest,
and each gentle word was a jewel.](278-279)

The connection between the maiden's clothing and the divine origin of her message is further supported by the image of the singular pearl "woven" into the center of her vestments:

Pyght watz poyned and uche a hemme
At honde, that sydegh, that ouerture,
Wyth whyte perle and non other gemme,
And bornyste quyte watz hyr uesture
Bot a wonder perle wythouten wemme
Immyddegh hyr breste watz sette so sure;

[Adorned was every wristlet and hem,
at hands, at sides, at each aperture,
with pearls of white and no other gem,
and lustrously white was her vesture.
Besides, a wonderful pearl without peer
amid her breast was set to sure.](217-222)

This pearl "sette so sure" ostensibly presents the maiden as the unequivocal "token" of revelation, grounded in the divine origin of her words. No less than Christ "fixes" or "pyghts" the pearl's significance as allegory itself even as he provides her clothing. To emphasize the "fixity" of her signification, the word "pyghte", is used by the poet as the linking word in Fitt IV (181-240) where the maiden first appears. It is used here to reinforce the stability of both the sign of the pearl and the Fitt which describes it. This "pyghte" pearl, moreover, fixed and stable in its signification, is the singular sign of heaven which Christ himself uses to signify the celestial realm:
"This makellegh perle, that boght is dere,
The jouler gef fore alle hys god,
Is lyke the reme of heuennesse clere;
So sayde the Fader of foled and flode;
...
Lo, even imyddegh my breste hit stode.
My Lorde the Lombe,
...
He pyght hit there in token of pes."

["This spotless pearl that was bought at a dear price for which the jeweller gave all his goods, is like the realm of heaven clear. So said the Father of land and sea; ...
look, even amid my breast it stands. My lord the lamb ...
set it there in token of peace."](733-742)

The Pearl-maiden, as the mediatrix of extralinguistic truth, also behaves as religious guide, resembling Augustine's regulæ fidei, supervising and directing the understanding of the dreamer as he attempts to "read" her "pearls" of wisdom.13

As has been noted in criticism, the maiden consistently corrects the misstatements and misconceptions of the dreamer regarding his ideas about the after-life (eg: "Sir, ye haf your tale mystente"(257)). However, the maiden's directives, aimed at correcting the dreamer's "misreading" of heaven, do more than merely revise his thinking. To rehabilitate the dreamer's understanding of Scripture, she specifically concentrates her teaching on the relationship between Christ and His words:14
"I halde that iueler lyttel to prayse
That leue wel that he segh wyth yghe,
And much to blame and uncortayse
That leuegh our Lorde wolde make a lyghe.
..."Ghe setten hys wordeg ful westernays
That leue nothynk bot ghe hit seyghe."

"I hold that jeweller little to praise
who honors only what he sees with his eyes,
and much to blame and discourteous
who believes our Lord would tell a lie.
...
You perceive his words incorrectly
who believe nothing but what you see."(301-308)

The maiden, bearing striking parallels to Augustine's ideal Christian teacher, advises the dreamer on how to read the allegorical "pearls" of heaven, Scripture, and her discourse without error. Her goal is to lead him away from heresy, that is, calling Christ a liar.15 To guarantee the effectiveness of her role as teacher of a divine message, the maiden warns her pupil to control his own discourse when discussing topics divine:

"Thou ne woste in worlde quat on dot mene;
Thy worde byfore thy wytte con fle."

["You know not what in the world these things mean;
your words fly before your thoughts](293-294)

Behaving much like Augustine's "circumcised" preacher as I have described it above, the maiden presents language to the dreamer as secondary from thought, giving priority to the
signified rather than the signifier. Consistent with her preference here for things over signs, the maiden demands that her pupil construct his thoughts before adding the "integumentum" of language, lest he fall prey to the potential pitfalls of misinterpretation and heresy. Her pedagogy restrains the sign because of its inherent indeterminacy.

The maiden's interest in exposing "naked" truth and in isolating truth from its mediation would seem to point her presence as a sign which will eventually give way to its extralinguistic origin (in this case, Christ) at the moment of revelation. What we find, however, is that the sign never gives way to its referent. In fact, if anything, the sign appears to create its referent. As I will argue, the maiden as Allegoria does not, in the end, accomplish her task of exposing the origin of Christian signs. Instead, the figuraiity of the maiden calls our attention to how the origin of signs is itself a sign, endlessly reflecting its own process of signification and not an existent, extralinguistic rea in the physical or transcendental order. The maiden shifts away from her "logocentric" control of language at the very moment she is to fulfill her promise of exposing the originating site of her signification, celestial Jerusalem.
In the words of exegesis, she sets about "stripping away the veil" of the letter to bring the dreamer and heaven into unmediated contact:

"If I this mote the shal unhyde, 
Bow up towarde thys bornegh heued, "

[If I should reveal this city to you 
go up toward this stream's head](973-974)

In the same moment she prepares to reveal "naked" heaven to the dreamer, the maiden positions herself as a self-revealing text making clear the unequivocal "meaning" of its message under the authority of God. Even as the Pearl-maiden desires to expose "naked" truth, however, allegory dislocates the stability of her "presence" as a divine sign when the mediating function of the maiden and her "pearls" breaks down. Instead of providing him with a vision free of the distractions of language, her message remains trapped within the folds of its mediating garments; instead of bringing the dreamer into an unmediated relationship with the divine, she leaves him trapped on his side of the river, isolated by allegory.16

The problem of signification originates in her allegorical garb. The semiology of clothing which envelops the Pearl-maiden paradoxically associates her not only with the unchanging truth which her body and clothing signify but also the tendency of allegory to conceal even as it reveals.
Her garments associate her role as mediatrix equally with both the spiritual message and its literal medium, neither one superseding the other. As Allegoria, the Pearl-maiden is an "integument," a "mediatrix," depending upon her vesture to signify her message. The poet emphasizes these integumentes allegoriae in his description of the maiden to call our attention to her as a "woven" sign:

Al blysande whyt watz hir beau biys
Upon at sydegh, and bounden bene
Wyth the myryeste margaryse, at my deuyse
That euer I segh yet with myn eye;

[All glowing white was her excellent cloak open at the sides and bound beautifully with the smoothest pearls that, in my opinion, I had ever seen](197-200)

AND

A mayden of menske, ful debonere;
Blysande whyt watz hyr bleaunt.

[A very gentle maiden of dignity with her attire of glowing white](162-163)

AND

That gracious gay wythouten galle, ...
Ryse vp in hir araye ryalle
A precious piece in perle pyght ...
Hir cortel of self sute scheme
Wyth precios perle al umbepyghte.

[That gracious girl without blemish ...
rose up in her royal array, a precious garment adorned with pearls. ...}
Her kirtle was of the same glowing patterns
all adorned with precious pearls

The poet highlights the maiden's garments to point out the inherent tension between her desire to reveal the cosmos and her inability to "strip" the heavens "naked." Herself a literal sign, she can only lead the dreamer to more signs. By using the same garments to mark both her divine origin and her participation in the equivocality of allegory, the poet situates the maiden's integumentes allegoriaorum as the site of his exploration in the paradoxical nature of eschatological discourse. A salient example of this tension appears in the allusion to Lady Philosophy's garments.

Purportedly an allusion which should reinforce the Pearl-maiden's authority as a divine instructress, the "textual" vesture of Lady Philosophy, upon closer examination, is far from pristine and coherent:

The robe had been torn, however, by the hands of violent men, who had ripped away what they could. (I. prose.1)

Eandem tamen uestem uiolentorum quorundam sciderant manus et particulas quas quisque potuit abstulerant.

Later, Lady Philosophy explains how these "gaps" in her attire came to be. They were once intact when she and Socrates were allies at the inception of philosophy, but later schools tore at her, destroying the unity of her vestments:
Afterwards, the inept schools of Epicureans, Stoics, and others, each seeking its own interests, tried to steal the inheritance of Socrates and to possess me (in spite of my protests and struggle) ... They tore this robe which I had woven with my own hands ... . And since among them were to be seen certain signs of my outward bearing, others ill-advised did think they wore my livery; thus were many of them undone by the errors of the herd of the uninitiated.

(I.prose 3)

Cuius heriditatem cum deinceps Epicureum uulgus ac Soticum ceterique pro sua quisque parte raptum ire molirentur meque reclamantem renitentem que uelut in partem preadae traherent, uestem quam meis texuarum manibus disciderunt... . In quibus quoniam nostri habitus uestigia uidebantur, meos esse familiares imprudentia rate nonnullos eorum profanae multitudinis errore preuertit.

The impact of this deformation of the original, singular "heirloom" of Socrates into individual and incomplete shreds manifests itself in the garments of the maiden. The Pearl-poet exploits the implication of these rips and tears within Lady Philosophy's "woven" teachings when he dresses his own divine instructress in the vesture of Lady Rhetoric.

Though her garments are supposedly "cleansed" by the blood of Christ, corresponding to Augustine's recuperation of the vesture of pagan rhetoric, the maiden never completely escapes her ties to rhetoric and "fallen" language. At several points in the poem, the maiden is described in terms of her "colour."

hir color so clad in clot

[her color so clad in clay](22)
And

Her depe colour yet wonted non
Of precios perle in profyl pyghte

[Her deep color was not diminished in comparison with her adornment of precious pearls](215-216)

Later, the dreamer compares her divine "color" to the painting of Pygmalion and the writing of Aristotle:

"Thy beaute' com neuer of nature;
Pymalion paynted neuer thy vis,
Ne Arystotel nawther by hys lettrure
Of carped the kynde ese properte'gh .
Thy colour passegh the flour-de-lys"

["Your beauty cannot come from nature;
Pygmalion never could have painted your visage,
nor could Aristotle, in his writings,
ever speak of such perfect properties.
Your color surpasses the fleur-de-lis"](749-753)

The "color" of the maiden mirrors the image of Lady Rhetoric. As described in great detail by Martianus Capella, the clothing of Lady Rhetoric reveals her to be as much of a literary predecessor of the maiden as Lady Philosophy:

But while the crowd of gods terrestrial was thus disconcerted, behold a woman of loftiest stature and great assurance, with countenance of radiant splendour, made her solemn entry. Helmeted and crowned with royal majesty, she held ready for defense or for attack weapons that gleamed with the flash of lightning. Beneath her armor the vesture draped Romanwise about her shoulders glittered with various light of all figure, all schemata; and she was cinctured with most precious colores for jewels. (Bk V. 426-27.)
Because she can never strip herself free from her "textuality," she is unable to produce a vision free from that textuality. According to Wesley Trimpi, "color" in Scriptural exegesis refers only to the literal meaning of the text:

Not only for Lactantius is color synonymous with velamen, figura, figmentum, and figuratio, but in Scriptural exegesis it is metaphorically associated with the literal meaning of a text—be that historical or figurative—as distinct from its allegorical meanings. Through such comparisons as St Gregory's of a text with a painting where the literal meaning corresponds to the superficial colors and the allegorical truth to the "things" themselves which are drawn, the ancient usage of color is passed on to widely varied literary contexts in the Middle Ages and Renaissance.

Furthermore, Charles Sears Baldwin has observed that rhetoric in this context, refers primarily to the "ornamentation" of language and not to its substance:

Rhetoric is not operative as composition [for Alain de Lille in The Anticlaudianus], but only as style after the fact. Her gifts to the soul are only colores, decor, clausula.
The maiden's "color", an "integumental" echo of Lady Rhetoric, implicates her words equally in "literal" as well as spiritual modes of signification, requiring us to qualify her ability to unveil successfully the essence of heaven. The maiden's garments do not merely "ornament" truth. Her "textual" garments embody both her discourse and her message. The signs of her discourse point as much to their literal surface as to their spiritual referent. It can even be said that her garments create the truth she signifies. This reading of the maiden's vesture requires us to examine the "truth" she presents to the dreamer. Before proceeding further into this question, however, it is appropriate to review the Pearl-poet's use of clothing imagery to question "truth" represented by a "divine" sign in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight.

In Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, the green girdle has often been seen by critics as an image the Pearl-poet used to question the stability of "divine" Pentangle. In that poem our attention is fixed on the girdle as a sign to be read and understood. Positioned in opposition to what Geraldine Heng calls the "fixed and stable identity" of the Pentangle. The girdle, as Ralph Hanna writes, "is anything but delimited in
its potential signification. The Pentangle, in contrast, is "taught" to its readers by the authoritative voice of the narrator: "I am intent yow to telle, thof tary byt me schulde" (624); and even though this sign represents several things at once, the Pentangle's significance and relevance is delimited by one voice. Owned by the Green Knight and given to Gawain by the Lady, the "luf-lace" takes on as many meanings as the people who come into contact with it. According to R. A. Shoaf, "the green girdle precipitates a surfeit of words for signifying" and is the most "critical" sign in the poem because it "always occasions the crisis of interpretation." The eventual victory of the equivocal girdle over the "perfect" sign of the Pentangle marks the dominance of the "woven" sign and the "crisis" of interpretation over the confidence in a sign which can be delimited through authorial control. Arguing for this position, Heng writes, "with the substitution of an imperfect knot, the Lady's lace, for the pentangle, a signifier is produced that situates identity as more tenuous and incomplete--a fragile, uncertain prospect that is always on the verge of unraveling and reconstituting in infinitely varied sequences of possibility."

In the same way, the semiology of clothing in Pearl inquires not only into the maiden's status as Allegoria but also into the status of the celestial vision and the dream itself as unambiguous "signs" of divine truth. The vision of
celestial Jerusalem, of which Christ is the center, originates in "textuality." The dreamer receives the vision of Jerusalem as the maiden in "speche spelle"(793). Her discourse, moreover, is limited to "representing" Christ only in metaphorical terms. From the beginning of the vision to its abrupt conclusion, the maiden describes Christ only as "the lombe" without sin. Never does she represent Christ in his esse. Furthermore, the semiology of clothing as it envelops the representation of Christ in the vision continually reminds us that we are subject to a vision "woven" from texts, never achieving the extralinguistic essence of divinity. The garments of the Lamb appear to the dreamer as if they are made of pearls: "As prayed perle his wede wasse"(1112). Pearls, as allegorical signs, fail in this instance to mediate Christ's cloak because that same cloak is representation itself. The Pearl-poet's awareness of this implication in associating Christ with clothing is further supported by the poet's linguistic play on the word "dresse" during the maiden's discussion of Christ's parables:24

"For al is trawthe that he [Christ] con dresse, And he may do nothynk but ryght. As Mathew melegh in your messe In sothful gospel of God almyght, In sample he can ful graythely gesse, And lyknegh hit [the pearl] to heuen lyghte."

[For all is truth that he [Christ] speaks and he may do nothing other than what is right.}
As Matthew says in your mass
in the truthful gospel of God almighty,

He likens it [the pearl] to the heaven of light
in a skillfully said parable. (495-500)

This implicit reference to clothing imagery invites comparison with the medieval description of Christ as the secretive "reveiler" of his parables that I have described thus far. It is not unlikely that the Pearl-poet, in this word play, is pointing to the problem of "textuality" in both Christ and his concealing garments. Christ, the origin of signs, does not remain separate from the signs he grounds. He is himself constituted by signs, by integumentes allegioriarum.

The dreamer seems aware of the endless reflexivity of the sign even as he tries to describe Christ's garments. The garments are such a marvel to him that he cannot remember "that euer I herde of speche spent" (1132). Hoping to use language to bring himself into contact with Christ, he is left only with His sign. It is not mere coincidence that this is the moment at which the maiden leaves the dreamer to be with the other maidens and Christ. Since the maiden is a sign, the dreamer realizes at this point the limits of Christ's integumentes allegioriarum, making him aware of his isolation from the divine and inciting his headlong rush into the river to reunite with God (1147-50).
As with the vesture of Christ, pearls mark the challenge allegory presents to the dreamer's desire to "know" the divine in itself. Access to the divine city is accomplished through allegory. The gates which guard the entrance into Jerusalem and God are made of "a maragarye, / a parfyt perle that neuer fategh" (1037-38). These "allegorical" gateways to the divine, though never locked (1065), are only open to the supercelestial and the sinless. This paradox of the simultaneously open and closed pathways to Christ, like the garments of the maiden, is tied to the "textuality" of the pearl. On each of these pearly gates in written "in scrypture a name con plye/ of Israel barnegh" (1039-40). The relationship between the supercelestial and Christ, moreover, is described in terms of language and "color": "As lyk to hymself of lote and hwe;/ For never lesyng ne tale untrwe/ Ne touched her tonge for no dysstresse"(896-948). Their acceptance of Christ's "tonge" and "hwe" allows the "unspotted" to pass through the "textual" gates. The incongruity of using "textualized" images to represent the "unmediated" relationship of the supercelestial with "the Word" creates problems for the dreamer as he attempts to grasp the significance of the vision.

The dreamer experiences such a paradox when he tries to "see" in the vision:
Of sunne ne none hadde thay need;  
The self God watz her lombe-lyght,  
...  
Thurgh woghe and won my lokyng yede,  
For soyled cler noght lette no lyght.  
The hyghe trone ther moght ye hede  
Wythall the apparaylmente umbepyghte

[Of sun or noon they had no need  
since God himself was their lamplight.  
...  
Through wall and city, my vision passed,  
and because of the transparency, nothing obstructed any  
light  
You could see the high throne there  
with all the adorned apparel.]

(1045-52)

Everything but the throne is transparent. The "apparel" placed on the throne conceals even as it reveals the "center" of all truth. Furthermore, the "textuality" of the throne is derived from John, who is given credit by the dreamer for describing the throne and its apparel in "termeghtyghte"(1053). The dynamic between revelation and "reveilation" originating in the throne appears once again in the representation of the river. The river represents the flow of God's grace from his throne throughout the universe, yet it is the same river which remains a barrier between the dreamer and God. Moreover, we are told by the maiden that it is God himself that has forbidden him from traversing the river:

That schene sayde: "That God wyl scylde;  
Thou may not enter wythinne hys tor"

[That maiden said: "God will not allow that  
you should enter within his city.]

(965-66),25
That the vision fails to bring the dreamer into unmediated contact with celestial Jerusalem is primarily suggested by his failure to cross the river and his response to that failure:

I raxled, and fel in gret affray,
And, sykyng, to myself, I sayd,
"Now al be to that Prynce paye."
Me payed ful ille to be outfleme
So sodsnly of that fayre regioun,
...
A longeyng heuy me strok in swone,
And rewfully thenne I con to reme.

[I stretched and fell into great dismay and sighing to myself, I said,
"Now all shall be to that Prince's liking though I am displeased to be outcast so suddenly out of that fair place.
...
Deep longing struck me into a swoon and ruefully then I began to lament.]

(1174-1181) [emphasis mine]

At the end of the poem, after his intense contact with Allegoria, the dreamer is in essentially the same state of mind he was at the beginning, isolated, afraid, angry, and struck into a "swone" which might start the process all over again. He even goes on to actually doubt the reality of what he has just seen:

If hit be ueray and soth sermoun
...
So wel is me in thys doel-doungoun
If the dream was real, then he will make due in this life, but his doubt is pronounced and unchanged by the vision of celestial Jerusalem. As observed by Theodore Bogdanos, "The dreamer fails in his unitive attempt. He is excluded from the self-sufficient transcendent diagram in which he yearned to become a permanent image. The symbol rejects him."26

The semiology of clothing within the poem forces us to reconsider the significance of the dreamer's isolation. Given that the pearl and the maiden are both signs of allegorical discourse, it stands to reason that the dreamer is bemoaning the need for mediation between God and his creation when the dreamer tells the maiden, "And quen we were departed, we wern at one"(378). As I have previously suggested, the sewing of the fig leaves (perizomata consuerunt) by Adam and Eve after the fall marked the entrance of texts and signs into the world where they were once unnecessary. Earlier, the poem implies that it is the separation between himself and the pearl's figural significance which causes him distress: "For uch gresse mot grom of graynegh dede;/ Ho whete were ellegh to wonegh wonne"(31-32). Paralleling the death of the maiden which incites the dream and his divine instruction, the "dead seed" of the Pearl-maiden leads the dreamer to the "whete" of
celestial Jerusalem, inviting comparison with the exegetical representation of interpretation as dividing the "spiritual fruit" from the "dead chaff" of Scripture.

Through the plight of the dreamer and the allusions to medieval hermeneutics, the poet makes his subject matter the problem of interpretation itself. His interest is in examining the condition and consequences surrounding any quest to approach the "lost" meaning of the "dead sign." For this reason, the dream culminates in his attempt to cross the river and come into unmediated contact with Christ, the original sign. The dreamer himself refers to the place beyond the river as "Paradise" (137). At the end of the poem, after he has been, like Adam, expelled from paradise, the dreamer turns once again to allegory as a consolation to his outcast state:

For I haf founden hym [Christ], both day and na te,
... 
That in the forme of bred and wyn 
The preste vus schewegh vch a daye.

[For I have found him [Christ], both day and night 
... 
in the form of the bread and wine 
that is shown to use each day by the priest.
(1203-1210)

However, the quest for the origin of signs "uncovers" only another sign because the origin in this poem is itself a sign. There is a striking parallel between the endless reflexivity of the sign presented here by the Pearl-poet and
the post-structuralist appreciation for "writing" (écriture) as the origin of its own signification: "What is this writing? ... Fundamentally, writing exceeds, precedes, and comprehends language. It serves as a ground of language rather than as a belated secondary elaboration. Écriture is not a vehicle for already constituted units, but the mode of production that constitutes such units."27 Just as Lady Philosophía comes to Boethius, Allegoria comes to console the dreamer. The dreamer's renewed dependence on allegory in light of his post-lapserian condition invites comparison with what Alexandre Leupin has noted about rhetoric's response to the failure of human signs. "The fault of language", he argues, "is ... radically different according to the point of view adopted: in theology, the ineffable constitutes the insurmountable limit of human speech; in rhetoric, it is obliterated by a jubilant renumeration that turns lack into another one of its metaphors and gives birth to an infinite multitude of vagabonding words always fated to impropriety."28 Though Leupin is referring to a different form of poetics in the Middle Ages, what he calls barbolexis, the point carries. The dreamer enters the endless supplementarity of signs as a means of consoling his sense of loss.

Allegory, reified most clearly in the image of the Pearl-maiden, becomes paramount in the dreamer's attempt to reconcile himself with his post-lapserian condition. The
dependence of the dreamer on the allegorical sign fails, however, because the pearl and the maiden who wear it are not self-revealing signs appropriate to their task of representing extralinguistic truth. Like the indeterminate "veil" of allegory in medieval exegesis, the maiden's integumentes allegoriarum remain an insurmountable barrier throughout the poem, isolating the dreamer from understanding the "naked truth" of heaven. As with the tension between allegory and allegoresis in Christian pedagogy, the subtextus between the dreamer and the divine is situated within the "woven" mediation of the Word.

As with the "textualized body" of Christ in medieval hermeneutics, the nodal point between the divine and the dreamer is an image made of words, a textus both woven and spoken. Nevertheless, that textual image is fraught with inconsistencies. The parallels between the indeterminate sign of Christ and the maiden are reinforced by several important intersections between Christ and the maiden. It is Christ who "pyghts" the pearl, giving the maiden her authorizing garments (742,768). He also authorizes her presentation of the vision (967-968). As if to emphasize the parallels, the Pearl-poet uses clothing imagery to implicate the entire dream itself in the indeterminacy of signification. Of the pearls which adorn his dreamscape, the dreamer states,

For wern neuer webbe that wyghe weuen
Of half so dere addubemente
Paradoxically, the vision that was to allay the dreamer's sorrow by demonstrating his close relationship with Christ in fact makes him aware of his insurmountable separation from the divine.

This tension between the maiden's presence as both unequivocal and ambiguous sign parallels the tension between the Pentangle and the girdle in Sir Gawain. The maiden simultaneously represents the divine sign and the human fabrication of that sign. The Pearl-poet questions the validity of human signs while at the same time presenting us with the "dream" of a sign which might provide divine guidance during our "crises" of interpretation. Neither the "Letter" nor the "Spirit" is preeminent at the end of Pearl; the oscillation between unequivocality and indeterminacy remains open.

While it is true that medieval Christian exegetes were aware of this oscillation in allegory, their fear of heresy would not allow them the luxury to "play" with the signification of Scripture. Though they understood the paradox contained within the integumentes allegoriaum, they felt it necessary to close the oscillation between the "presence" and "absence" of the sign in their pedagogy of the faith. The Pearl-poet, unrestricted by concerns over heresy,
is free to embrace fully the "problem" of allegory, and
demonstrates that freedom by simultaneously presenting the
dream of an allegoresis which can bring humanity across the
"barrier" of ambiguous signs while demonstrating through the
semiology of clothing that the success of such a quest for a
"naked text" is problematic at best. Since his primary intent
is to explore language, the Pearl-poet does not attempt to
excise allegory from Christian pedagogy. In acknowledging
that the source of allegoresis is the ambiguity of the
allegorical sign and not a divine referent, the Pearl-poet
rejuvenates Christian allegory at its source, exposing its
origins to be the polysemous and polyvalent textualized body
of Christ. This open-ended perspective of the Pearl-poet, as
we will see in the next chapter, was shared by his
contemporary, Chaucer, who expanded the examination of
"signification" in his poetry well beyond the conflict
between allegory and allegoresis. Chaucer presents us with a
poetics that challenges the core exegetical premise that
truth is self-contained, immutable, and pre-linguistic.

NOTES TO CHAPTER II

1Edmund Reiss, "Ambiguous Signs and Authorial Deceptions in
Fourteenth-Century Fictions" in Sign Sentence Discourse:
Language in Medieval Thought and Literature, eds. Julian
Wasserman and Lois Roney (Syracuse: Syracuse University
2Edmund Reiss, 115.


4Anne Schotter, "Vernacular...", 23.


6Augustine, *De Sermone Domini in Monte* in PL 34: 1300. as translated by Denis J. Kavanagh, O. S. A. in *Saint Augustine: Commentary on the Lord's Sermon on the Mount with Seventeen Related Sermons* as part of the series *The Fathers of the Church* ed. by R. J. Deferrari (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1951) 177.


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19 Charles Sears Baldwin, *Medieval Rhetoric and Poetic (to 1400)* (Gloucester: Peter Smith, 1959) 175.


25For a more detailed discussion of the paradoxical nature of the river, see Wendell Stacy Johnson, "The Imagery and Diction of The Pearl: Toward an Interpretation." English Literary History 20 (1953): 40-41


In the last chapter, we saw that while Christian pedagogues aspired to a "redeemed" discourse to codify the regula fidei and purge heresy, poets of the fourteenth century, did not feel the moral imperative to keep language "clean." The response of these poets to the "fall" of language, therefore, was markedly different from that of the theologians. These poets felt no need to redeem their discourse because they did not measure its fault against God's eternal Word. In the fourteenth century, writes Edmund Reiss, "writers were less interested in restating moral and religious commonplaces than in investigating the possibilities and limitations of language."¹ This disparity between theological and poetic views of language informed the Middle Ages with two opposing traditions. "Clearly, rhetoric and theology give the medieval writer a double and contradictory legacy of linguistic fault;" writes Alexandre Leupin, "in rhetoric, the faultiness of language is no longer a general or incontrovertible rule of human speech (as in the case of theology, where language fails to express God), but a
localized transgression into various figures and an authoritative tradition. In other words, literature's flaw is grounded in the poet's own authority and not in any sort of transcendence external to it.\(^2\) This resting on the author's authority places a new emphasis on the interlacing of truth and "fallen" discourse. Whereas Christian exegetes, with their collective eye fixed on the Logos, sought to extract divine truth from language, poets of the fourteenth century set about examining, questioning, and challenging the very idea that "truth" could be exhumed, unchanged and complete, from the "dead" letter. Jesse Gellrich has noted the difference in that medieval "fiction asserts its difference [from the theological perception of language] by inviting our challenge, by presenting us with a demand for criticism and for theories about our criticism that test and question the ways we signify meaning."\(^3\) As we saw in the last chapter, the Pearl-poet questioned the possibility of "uncovering" the spiritual rea of allegory by demonstrating the endless reflexivity of the allegorical sign, even at its origin.

Like the Pearl-poet, Chaucer has been consistently viewed as a poet who challenges the way we look at the problem of meaning and signification. Judith Ferster has noted that throughout his writings "Chaucer attempts in several ways to keep readers from confusing the text with their interpretations of it."\(^4\) His "entente", according to Ferster, is to show his audience that its understanding of
language and its interpretations of meaning are, at best, "problematic." This reading of Chaucer's "entente" is corroborated by Robert Jordan who writes, "Chaucer's poetry exhibits many forms of ambivalence about "truth" and considerable self-consciousness and anxiety about its own validity as an instrument of truth."

The Canterbury Tales have especially been seen as a challenge to readers and their attempts to understand the "fruity" contained within its "chaffe" of language. The pilgrims, as R. W. Hanning has remarked, "misquote, quote out of context, misinterpret, vulgarize, and generally abuse textual 'auctoritee.'" Concerning the ways in which Chaucer calls our attention to the pilgrims' inability to control language, Stewart Justman writes that the Canterbury Tales abound with "mock signs, false exemplifications, and allegory that fails." Missing from the text is Augustine's quest for a pristine medium for divine intelligence. Language in the Canterbury Tales points more to the problems of signification than to the possibility of what the God of Love in the Prologue to the Legend of Good Women calls the "pleyn" or "naked text," a discourse paralleling Augustine's "circumcised" text as I have described it above. Given Chaucer's interest in interpretation and truth, it is likely that he, like the Pearl-poet, inherited and used the metaphor of clothing from Christian hermeneutics to express his inquiry into the signifying process of allegorical language.
According to Peggy Knapp, *The Clerk's Tale* is one of Chaucer's most forceful expressions of the problematic intersection between language and its sentence in the *Canterbury Tales*. "In *The Clerk's Tale,*" she writes, "the problem of distinguishing literal from allegorical meanings, and its message for and about women, cannot be evaded."¹¹ She goes on to argue that "*The Clerk's Tale* forces us to consider whether allegorical interpretation was such an ingrained medieval practice that even secular texts would normally be taken to be coded for layers of meaning beyond their literal or historical sense, and whether irony toward the standard procedures of allegory was possible."¹²

However, although the metaphor of clothing as a representation of language is commonplace in various texts from the Biblical tradition as well as in the Middle English *Pearl*, no reading has yet explored it in the corpus of Chaucer. Nevertheless, he understood the symbolic association of representation to clothing, and he expanded the semiological properties of clothing to include the text. The most obvious instance is the "*The Tale of Philomela*" in the *Legend of Good Women*. Here, Chaucer interlaces the activities of weaving a garment and writing a story:

```
This woful lady lerned hadde in youthe
So that she werken and embroude couthe,
and weven in hire stol the radevore
As it of wemen hath be woned yore.
...
She coude eek rede and wel ynow endyte,
```
Another representation of language as a garment occurs in 

_Boece_ where Lady Philosophy says that she will "weve to the 
[Boethius] resouns yknyt by ordre"(_Boece_ IV.prosa.6). In the 

_House of Fame_, words are "clothed red or blak" (HF. 1078). In 

_the Canterbury Tales_, the Clerk's books are similarly "clad 
in blak or reed" (A.294). The secret letters Damian writes to 

May in the "Merchant's Tale" are hidden in "a purs of sylk, 
heng on his sherte" (E.1883) which she tears into "cloutes" 

(E.1953) to guarantee their secrecy. Language, for Chaucer, 
is repeatedly aligned with weaved objects, what R. Howard 

Bloch has called in reference to the clothing imagery present 
in the French fabliau as the "textile text." In the 

interest of analyzing Chaucer's exploration into allegory via 
clothing imagery, I have chosen to focus my study on _The 

Clerk's Tale_, an allegory filled with clothing imagery. I 
will argue that an analysis of clothing imagery in _The 

Clerk's Tale_ shows not only the "textuality" which Chaucer 

inherited from Christian exegesis, but also what use he made 
of it.
II

Considered by Alfred David to be the best tale of "moralitee and holynesse" promised in the General Prologue, The Clerk's Tale has been most often read as an allegory with Walter as God and Griselda as the soul of patience and constancy.14 Other critics, however, argue that Chaucer never intended to present Walter as a God image. Their reading points to The Clerk's Tale as less an allegory than an exemplum, still representing Griselda as the steadfast and faithful servant of God. Recently, some critics have moved away from both unveiling allegorical symbolism and reading the tale as an exemplum. These critics have, instead, concentrated on how the problem of language and its resistance to authorial control is central to the questions raised by this "moral tale." "From his [the Clerk's] injudicious apostrophes and from his confusing appeals to the reader's sympathy," Warren Ginsberg claims, "the Clerk himself does not fully understand the tale he tells."15 My departure from these approaches is to suggest that the tale, with its origins in allegory, is an "integumental" fiction which, like Pearl, uses clothing imagery to explore the endless reflexivity of language. I will argue that the Clerk's failure to understand his sentence marks his resistance to acknowledge the dependence of meaning on its garment of representation. Like Augustine, the Clerk is confronted with the uncontrollable polysemy of language and
tries to discard it in order to protect his sentence from being misunderstood. As we will see in more detail below, Griselda's relationship to her garments parallels the relationship between the Pearl-maiden and her garments in that it asks us to reevaluate Griselda's purported role as the tale's unchanging sentence. As a means of establishing the Clerk's initial understanding of language and sentence, I would like to turn now to the linguistic battle within the text between himself and the Wife of Bath.

Attempting to fill the gap in the "relatively unexplored" relationship between the Clerk and the Wife, John Alford writes that the "conflict between the Wife and the Clerk is not personal but historical. It is rooted in the recurrent tension between two modes of discourse, rhetorical and philosophical." As he has remarked, this tension between the Wife and the Clerk is represented by the stark contrast in their respective garments. In the General Prologue, the Wife's abundant use of garments is described in great detail:

Hir coverchiefs ful fyne weren of ground;
I dorste swere they weyeden ten pound
...
Hir hosen weren of fyn scarlet reed,
Ful streite yteyd, and shoes ful moyste and newe.
...
Ywympled wel, and on hir heed an hat
As brood as is a bokeler or a targe;
A foot-mantel aboute hir hipes large
And on hir feet a paire of spores sharp. (A. 453-473)
The Wife's garments, writes Alford, mark her as "Dame Rhetoric herself." In arguing for this position, Alford emphasizes that her occupation, weaving, further ties her to rhetoric in that it was "the stock metaphor for rhetorical activity (to weave a poem, to spin a yarn; Latin texere, to weave, to compose)." More than analogizing the Wife with rhetoric, the allusion to the vesture of Lady Rhetoric points to the Wife, as it did with the Pearl-maiden, as the literal surface of the integumental sign. Moreover, the Wife's overflowing vesture implies that she is a sign out of control, unrestrained, excessive, and exaggerated.

The Clerk, in contrast to the pretentious vestments of the Wife, wears a threadbare "courtepy" (A. 290), a sign of his linguistic discretion. Calling him "Logic Personified," Alford argues that the Clerk stands in direct contrast to the Wife's abuse of language, exposing her folly and putting her and rhetoric in their properly subservient position to logic and "resoun" (E. 25). This characterization fits the description of the Clerk in the General Prologue as one who "Noght a word spak he more thanne was neede/ And that was seyde in forme and reverence/ And short and quyk and full of hy sentence" (A. 304-307). Note that the description of the Clerk's relationship to his use of language is described as one of mastery. He speaks no more or less than is required. In many respects, he is not unlike a seamstress, fitting the garment of language faithfully to his sentence. We are led to
expect, then, from this Clerk a tale in which language is subordinate to and mastered by his will. Alford's analysis, however, rests in the assumption that Chaucer means to support the Clerk's "mastery" of rhetoric in his own tale. If, as Alford suggests, Chaucer uses this debate between the Clerk (Logic) and the Wife (Rhetoric) to assert the power of logic over rhetoric, then why the deference in the Envoy to the Wife and the potential arbitrariness of discourse which she represents?

For whiche heere, for the Wyves love of Bathe
Whos lyf and al hire secte God maynteyne
In heigh maistrie, and elles were it scathe --
I wol with lusty herte, fressh and grene,
Seyn yow a song to glade yow, I wene;
And lat us stynyte of ernestful mater.
Herkeneth my song that seith in this matter...

We lat no clerk have cause or diligence
To write of yow a storie of swich mervaille
As of Grisildis pacient and kynde...
(E.1170-1187)

To answer this question, we must turn once again to the Wife and the relationship between her clothing and her discourse.

The Wife's struggle to be the master of her text is linked to her desire to wear whatever garments she chooses. For example, in response to Paul's edict that "In habit maad with chastitee and shame/ Ye wommen shul apparraille yow,' quod he, 'And noght in tresse heer and gay peree,/ As perles, ne with gold, clothes riche"(D.342-345), the Wife denies Paul's authority over her apparel: "After thy text, ne after

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This quest for self-determination in dress parallels her desire to speak in her own voice, a voice directed specifically at undermining the "auctoritates" of the clerks and their texts about "wikked wives" (D.685). Furthermore, her claim that "if wommen hadde writen stories, / As clerkes han withinne hire oratories, / They wolde han writen of men more wikkednesse / Than al the mark of Adam may redresse" (D.693-696) confidently asserts the power of rhetoric to transform "truth" and identity. Implicit in the Wife's condemnation of the texts which have defined her gender is her awareness that the ability to "redresse" one's reputation is equated in the above statement with the power to "write" one's own identity by altering its metaphorical "garments." Her desire to be sovereign of both her clothing and her discourse corresponds to her quest for self-definition and self-determination. As an integumental sign, she weaves her own identifying vesture, changing her value according to her desire. Her garments are part of the text with which she defines her esse. Taking control of her own metaphorical presence in direct opposition to those "authoritative" texts which would define and "redresse" her, the Wife becomes, in the words of Peggy Knapp, "a figure for the garrulous, incorrigible, inexplicable text, always wanderyng by the waye, always escaping from any centralizing authority that attempts to take over her story." 21
For the Clerk, who would be master of "rethorike sweete," the Wife's presence as the unrestrained surface of language invites chaos and the deformation of signs in a way similar to how allegory invited the potential for heresy in Christian dogma. Her assertion that she can "redresse" the relationship between men and women simply by writing a new text threatens outright the integrity of the Clerk's ideas about the relationship between language and its sentence. In opposition to the Clerk's "logical" view of sentence as that which precedes and determines its garment of representation, the Wife implies that truth is constructed by language and not by an antecedent ontology. The tale of Griselda, therefore, should be seen not only as a response to the Wife concerning the question of sovereignty in marriage, but also an attempt to "clothe" the Wife again in the iconographic garments which relegate her and her discourse to a position of subservience beneath his "logocentricism." His move to reassert power over the Wife as Dame Rhetoric is represented by his control of Griselda, herself a "spinner"(E.223), and her garments. Presenting Griselda to the Wife as what Kittredge has called "the complete antithesis of the Wife of Bath,"22 the Clerk hopes to show his mastery over "sophyme." It appears from this analysis of The Clerk's Tale that, in contrast to Mary Carruthers' assessment that the Clerk "emphasizes works and not words," the Clerk is primarily
interested in words and their correct use. He expresses this interest in the clothing imagery of his tale.

Seen as either a symbol of Griselda's change in social degree, a representation of the emotional development in the relationship between herself and Walter, and even as a sign for the outer appearance which hides Griselda's true worth from society, vestments in The Clerk's Tale have been interpreted as a detail which Chaucer used and expanded from Petrarch's version. All of these interpretations, though they offer valuable insights into the sentence of poem, overlook how the semiology of clothing challenges and ultimately undermines the core idea that there even is a sentence to this tale. The focus of Chaucer's exploration into the nature of truth in language appears when he conflates Griselda's clothing with metaphor. This connection becomes explicit when the Clerk refers to Griselda's change of clothing as her being "translated":

And for that no thyng of hir olde geere
She sholde brynge into his hous, he bad
That wommen sholde dispoillen hire right theere;
...
Fro foot to heed they clothed han al newe.
...
A corone on hire heed they han ydressed,
And set hire ful of nowches grete and smale.
Of hire aray what sholde I make a tale?
Unnethe the peple hir knew for hire fairnesse
When she translated was in swich richesse. (E. 372-385)
[emphasis mine]
The magical power of these new garments to change her estate invites comparison with the power attributed to metaphor throughout the Middle Ages to "translate" ideas into new words. Early in the Middle Ages, Augustine, following his classical models, refers to the "figurative words" in Scripture as verborum translatorum. Writing one century before Chaucer, Geoffrey of Vinsauf writes into his treatise on medieval poetics, the Poetria Nova, the medieval tradition of figuring the coat as representation and representation as a coat. The idea of "translating" ideas into poetic language by means of adding linguistic "garments" appears early in Poetria Nova:

... let a noble sentiment be graced by a noble expression, lest a well-born matron blush to be dressed in shabby garments.

... Dives honeretur sententia divite verbo, Me rubeat matrona potens in paupere panno. (I.A.758-9)28

This method teaches the correct use of metaphor. If it is a man about whom I speak, I will speak in terms of something similar to this subject. When I see what is its proper garment in a similar case, I will draw upon it and make a new garment from the old.

Instruit iste modus transsumere verba decenter. Si sit homo de quo fit sermo, transferor ad rem Expressae similem; quae sit sua propria vestis In simili casu cum videro, mutuo illam Et mihi de veste veteri transformo novellam. (IV.B.770-74)
In accordance with the previously unappreciated relationship
I am drawing between The Clerk's Tale and the Poetria Nova,
there is a striking similarity between the Clerk's
description of the "translation" of Griselda and Geoffrey of
Vinsauf's advice on how to use metaphor to "clothe" a woman
in beautiful language:

If you wish to add the apparel to the form (of the
woman) already depicted:
Let the golden hair be bound at the back. Let a circlet
of gold enhance the whiteness of the forehead; let the
face appear adorned in natural color. Let a star-bearing
necklace encircle the milk-white neck. Let the border of
the tunic gleam with linen, and the wool cloak burn with
gold. The girdle conceals the waist, with gems shining
all around. ... In these fair garments, art strives with
matter. Neither hand nor mind can add to this array. ... 

Formae jam pictae si vis appingere cultum,
Nexilis a tergo coma compta recomplicet aurum;
Irradiet frontis candori circulus auri;
Se nudet facies proprio vestitia colore;
Lactea stelliferum praecingat colla monile;
Instita candescat bysso, chlamis ardeat auro;
Zona tegat medium, radiantis undique gemmis;
... certent in veste serena
Ars cum materia. Nihil addere cultibus illis
Aut manus aut animus possit. (III.A.605-616)

Given the knowledge Chaucer had of Geoffrey of Vinsauf's
writing on rhetoric and metaphor, it is likely that Chaucer
uses Griselda's change of clothes to examine the Clerk's
perception of metaphor as merely an adornment of unalterable
truth.

According to Geoffrey of Vinsauf, that which is clothed
and arrayed in varying garments and not the clothing itself
is the "meaning" of a poem. Like Augustine, Geoffrey of Vinsauf posits a rhetorical process which follows from the assumption that ideas are prelinguistic, unaffected and unaltered by their external integument:

Let a certain order predetermine from what point the pen should start on its course, and where the outermost limits shall be fixed. Prudently ponder the entire work within the breast, and let it be in the breast before it is in the mouth. When in the recesses of the mind order has arranged the matter, let the art of poetry come to clothe the matter with words.

... Certus praelimitet ordo
Unde praearripiat cursum stylus, at ibi Gades
Figat. Opus totum prudens in pectoris arcem
Contrahe, sitque prius in pectore quam sit in ore.
Mentis in arcano cum rem digesserit ordo,
Materiam verbis veniat vestire poesis.(I.A.58-61)

Meaning and its mediation, for Geoffrey of Vinsauf, are distinct entities, with the mediation of language secondary and dependent on the referent for its shape and color. Furthermore, in a passage echoing Augustine's description of the textual impediment to revelation as a "cloud," Geoffrey of Vinsauf purportedly resolves for himself the problem of the obscuring garment of language by representing figural language as a "clear cloud":

A certain decoration of style and a certain kind of gravity are present in the above forms [of metaphor], which arise when the subject does not appear publicly with its face unveiled, nor does its own but rather an alien expression serve it; and thus, as it were, it covers itself with a cloud -- but a clear cloud.
Praescriptis formis quaedam pictura coloris
Et quiddam gravitatis inest, quae nascitur inde
Quod res in medium facie non prodit aperta,
Nec sua vox deservit eit, sed vox aliena,
Et sic se quasi nube tegit, sub nube serena. (IV.B.1051-1055)

Predetermined, prelinguistic, and unambiguous, metaphor (translatio) for Geoffrey of Vinsauf remains under the complete control of the author as he tailors it to his subject, totally subservient to his will in “dressing” up his meaning in effective and appropriate figural “garments.”

Turning to The Clerk’s Tale, we find several parallels between Geoffrey of Vinsauf’s treatise on figural language and the Clerk’s story about obedience. As that which is clothed and arrayed according to her author’s will, Griselda stands as the tale’s sentence, its purportedly immutable source of meaning. That the Clerk is aware of his status as the “dresser” of his sentence is suggested in the prologue to his tale. The Clerk, in telling this tale, answers Harry Bailey’s call to “Tell us som murie thyng of aventures/ Youre termes, youre colours, and your figures/ Keep hem in stoor til so be that ye endite/...Speketh sophyme at this tyme we yow preye/ That we may understonde what ye seye” (E. 15-20).

Harry Bailey asks the Clerk to “dress” up a story in rhetorical figures, and the Clerk obliges his Host by “translating” an allegory composed of “rethorike sweete” (E. 32) by Petrarch.
In "translating" Griselda's clothes, the Clerk assumes authorial control over Griselda's figural appearance. The Clerk adds and removes her clothing where it fits the sentence of his tale. In this, he replicates Geoffrey of Vinsauf's advice on amplifying a subject for full rhetorical effect:

If you are amplifying, take this as your first step: although the statement may be simple, do not let it come hampered by having only one garment, but let it vary its clothing and change its raiment.

Si facis amplum, hoc primo procede gradu:
Sententia cum sit unica, non uno veniat contenta paratu,
Sed variet vestes et mutatoria sumat...(III.A.220-22)

It should be noted at this point that the Clerk, like Geoffrey of Vinsauf, assumes in his redressing of the tale's sentence (Griselda) that it is immutable, unchanged and unobscured by the "clear cloud" of figures and colors he uses to ornament it. In control of his sentence, adequately attired but unchanged by the figures of rhetoric imposed upon it, the Clerk asserts that in spite of his alterations of her external vesture and estate, she will remain stable and true to his image of her. In addition to presenting his sentence as prelinguistic, stable in its signification, and unaffected by its "translation" into the "garments" of language, the Clerk calls attention to the positive effects of Griselda's new garments. In her new clothes, she is like the "pyght perle" of the Pearl-maiden, "yset in heigh bountee/ And so
discreet and fair of eloquence" (E.409-410). This newfound "eloquence" achieved through her new garments also allows Griselda to "redresse" her world from one of discord to harmony:

The commune profit koude she redresse
Ther nas discord, rancour, ne hevynesse
In al that land, that she ne koude apese,
And wisely brynge hem alle in reste and ese. (E.431-434)

Using the same word the Wife uses to describe her desire to control reality through language, the Clerk points to Griselda's "re-dressing" of reality as the proper way to change reality through language, with the sign subservient to its referent. He answers the Wife's lack of restraint by presenting the Edenic potential of this ideal relationship between language and "truth." With the correct interlacing of sentence and metaphor, Griselda brings peace to her world, motivating her people to see her as a divine messenger, similar to the Pearl-maiden:

So wise and rype wordes hadde she,
And juggements of so gret equitee,
That she frome hevene sent was, as men wende,
People to save and every wrong t'mende. (E.438-441)

For the Clerk, when sentence is dressed correctly by an author who carefully unites his sentence with garments appropriate to it, it can work miracles and change the world for the better. The Clerk, then, seeks control over both his
sentence and its metaphorical "attire" to educate the pilgrims by means of his integumental tale.

If the Clerk desires, like Augustine and Geoffrey of Vinsauf, to be the master of his sentence and its figural vestments, he appears to lose control of his message even as he alters its figural integument. Viewing the Clerk's Tale as an exemplum subverted by what she calls "trope irony," Peggy Knapp argues that the Clerk is surprised and disturbed by the outcome of his tale-telling.30 "One reading of his difficult-to-interpret tale," she writes, "is to see in it his own suspicion that he allowed the religious duty of intellectual rigor to nourish a personal desire for certainty, and now chafes at the frustration of not finding that certainty in the tale he had designed to demonstrate it."31 Like the Pearl-maiden whose power to reveal truth breaks down at the moment of promised revelation, the Clerk loses authority over his sentence after he apparently delivers the definitive gloss and "naked" truth of his tale.

Paraphrasing the authoritative voice of his source, Petrarch, the Clerk presents his interpretation of Griselda and her sufferings:

And herkeneth what this auctour seith therefore.
This storie is seyd, nat for that wyves sholde
Polwen Grisilde as in humylitee,
For it were inportable, though they wolde;
but for that every wight, in his degree,
Sholde be constant in adversitee
As was Grisilde; therfore Petrak writeth
This storie, which with heigh stile enditeth.(E.1142-28)
Petrarch's gloss, "translated" through the Clerk, offers a plausible interpretation of the tale of Griselda; however, the Clerk's reversal of this interpretation in his parting song, whether in earnest or not, asks us to question if the Clerk believes at the end of his tale what he supposed at the beginning, that he can be the "Walter" of his tale. As Griselda herself reveals, clothing and authority are related in the tale. She tells Walter that her acceptance of his clothing signified her subservience to his will:

"For when I lefte at hoom al my clothynge,  
When I first cam to yow, sight so," quod she,  
"Lefte I my wyl and al my liberte,  
And took youre clothynge ..." (E.654-657)

For the Clerk to remain in control of the garments of his sentence is to be the one who gives and takes Griselda's clothing. According to the principles put forth by Geoffrey of Vinsauf and echoed by the Clerk, the sentence of the original tale should have remained intact in spite of its "translation." However, what the Clerk realizes in the process of telling his tale is that his "undressing" and "redressing" of Griselda in fact changes her essence and, in turn, the sentence of Petrarch's original Griselda. He does not prop Griselda up as an example for the pilgrims to follow because he realizes that the Griselda of his translation no longer supports Petrarch's authoritative interpretation.
The suggestion that the Clerk loses his mastery over the sentence of his tale occurs when neither Walter nor the Clerk but Griselda, a "spinner," chooses the garments she shall wear. When Walter turns her out, she relinquishes the rich array of his estate and asks to wear a "smok" (E. 895) in lieu of her dowry, her "wrecched clothes" (E. 850). And when she returns home, she refuses her father's attempt to place on her once again "hire olde coote" (E. 913):

And with hire oolde coote, as it myghte be
He covered hire, ful sorwefully wopynge.
But on hire body myghte he it nat brynge,
For rude was the clooth, and moore of age
By dayes fele that at hire mariage. (E. 913-917)

Like the Wife of Bath, Griselda decides for herself which garments are appropriate to her condition, asserting her independence from all those who would "redresse" her identity. That she now rejects her old garments implies that her essence, the immutable sentence of this tale, has changed. No longer independent of metaphor, she is changed by the figural garments of rhetoric, made into something different in the same way that Chaucer's Griselda is different from Petrarch's. Furthermore, her last garment of reward, the "clothe of gold" (E. 1117), is given to her not by Walter or by the Clerk, but by the ladies in waiting, implying the sovereignty of women, which the Wife wants most. Paradoxically, this paragon of logic and linguistic...
manipulation loses control of Griselda, his sentence, and his metaphorical figures.

It would appear from this analysis that the Clerk's deference to the Wife in the Envoy is more than a mock tribute. Through the course of telling his story, the Clerk reverses his initial claim of mastery over rhetoric and the Wife because he comes to understand that sentence is not prelinguistic, fully formed in the mind, organized and contained within the ordo of his "resoun." Instead, he grudgingly admits that his rhetoric and, consequently, his sentence can escape his control, that any "translation" of an idea into the mediating garment of language necessarily alters its esse. For this reason, he releases the Wife from the tyranny of clerk's stories: "Ne lat no clerk have cause or diligence/ To write of yow a storie of swich merveille/ As of Grisildis pacient and kynde." The Envoy is not a reversal by the Clerk, but a natural conclusion to his realization that rhetoric, far from being subservient to a prelinguistic reality, takes part in the creation and alteration of that ordo. The frustration attributed to the Clerk by Peggy Knapp at the end of his tale originates in his reluctant acceptance that his dominance over meaning and mediation is an illusion exposed by the tale-telling process. Griselda, the sign of integumental fiction, forces the Clerk to reassess his assumptions about "truth" in metaphor. This once confident Clerk now appreciates that even one such as he who prides

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himself on being a master of his discourse must defer to the possibility that language, like the Wife and Griselda, is beyond his authorial control and understanding. The Clerk's involvement with language undermines his authority and compromises his status as an "auctoritee." Instead of being an example of linguistic propriety and continence, in contrast to the Wife, the Clerk becomes yet another example in the *Canterbury Tales* of a speaker coming to terms with the elusive sign, another wanderer by the way.

The semiology of clothing discussed here in relation to the debate between the Clerk and the Wife reinforces the position of those critics who note a conflictual relationship between The Clerk and his tale. Furthermore, this reading of the clothing imagery in this debate between Logic and Rhetoric is supported by Gellrich's position that Chaucer uses language as a means of interpretation rather than as a "container of information with an 'inside' and an 'outside.'" Language challenges the Clerk's prideful desire to present his sentence as isolated from its garments. As the elusive center of this tale, Griselda becomes her outside, changing with each of her garments until sentence and solaas become indistinguishable. This multiplicity of signification, in turn, opens up the range of meanings in the tale. Griselda's ever changing status as sentence reinforces Chaucer's view, as put forth by Marshall Leicester, that "language itself (because it is a medium, not meaning itself)
both defers our access to final meaning and inscribes its own ability to keep generating new meanings endlessly into the gap it creates; and this can be a matter for uneasiness. Chaucer, unlike the medieval exegetes, is not interested in returning language to its prelapsarian state where sign and referent coexisted in their proper relationship. Instead, Chaucer seeks to expose how language creates and changes the reality it represents. Augustine wants to put the genie back in the bottle and arranges his rhetorical pedagogy to accomplish that purpose by attempting to excise language from meaning. Geoffrey of Vinsauf echoes this philosophy in his pedagogy, but Chaucer, in The Clerk's Tale, calls that division into question because he is aware of how language, like Griselda's clothing, escapes the control of its author and opens a space for interpretation. The tale does not shut down debate and offer a definitive "gloss" or "translation;" rather, the "textile text" of the Clerk's tale exposes the fact that language refutes authoritative closure and the "naked text" in favor of a "crabbed eloquence" (like the Wife's) with multiple garments and significations. Chaucer calls for a revision of the medieval concept of sentence as prelinguistic, fully-formed prior to its metaphorical vestments. Chaucer's inquiry into the validity of integumental fiction as a vehicle to truth one step removed from Christian allegory dislocates the core beliefs of medieval hermeneutics and asks us to revise the initial
assumption that truth is somehow independent of its mediation. Chaucer's poetics critique the quest for an absolute and divinely inspired correspondence between language and truth and find it lacking. As David Aers has observed, Chaucer's "poetry constantly blocks off allegedly transcendental certainty beyond discourse and beyond the boundaries of a specific social world." Chaucer seeks not the redemption of a "pure discourse" which can manipulate and control the mediating garment of language; instead, he accepts the challenge of language and its garment represented by the Wife and Griselda. Griselda and the Wife, both wandering and "weyving" by the way, come to tell us about our relation to truth in that their discourse both "weaves" and wavers from it. In so doing, these "wives" better represent the oscillation between the revelation and concealment of truth in language than the Clerk who attempts to tailor language to his "sentence." The Wife, with all her spiritual and metaphorical ambivalence, ends up being challenged but not silenced because, even so, she speaks with the voice of Chaucer's "wandryng" text.
NOTES TO CHAPTER III


5Ferster, Chaucer on Interpretation, 55.


10Prologue to the Legend of Good Women (PLGW), G 254, 86 respectively. For more on the importance of this characterization of the "naked text" in PLGW, see Jesse Gellrich, Idea of the Book, 202-247.


12Knapp, "Griselda...," 130.


18 Alford, "The Wife of Bath," 120.


21 Peggy Knapp, Wanderying by the Weye (157). See also, R. W. Hanning, "'I Shal Finde it in a Maner Glose': Versions of Textual Harassment in Medieval Literature" in Medieval Texts and Contemporary Readers. 27-50. "The Wife is lost in a world of words of which she is also a constituent. She exists as a literary creation of men, a system of texts and glosses which she repeatedly attacks but always ends up confirming... ."

48.


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25 For more on this relation, see especially Eugene Vance, "Chaucer, Spencer, and the Ideology of Translation." Canadian Review of Comparative Literature 8 (1981): 217-238. According to Vance translatio meant above all a rhetorical term meaning 'metaphor', metaphor as an interpretive act made necessary when a proper term is lacking or when one wishes to ornament one's discourse.


27 For more on the historical relationship between metaphor and clothing in the middle ages, see R. Howard Bloch, Scandal of the Fabliaux, 24ff.


29 For a very different reading of the Poetria Nova, see Alexandre Leupin's Chapter on Geoffrey of Vinsauf in his Barbolexis.


31 Knapp, "Knowing the Tropes," 341.


EPILOGUE

In the preceding chapters, I have attempted to demonstrate a new approach to reading the "veil" of medieval allegory as a means of renovating our reading of that "textuality" and its influence on Pearl and The Clerk's Tale. I have been suggesting that the semiology of clothing expands our understanding of medieval allegory as a complex and ambiguous sign system. The basis of both religious and secular sign theory throughout the Middle Ages, Christian allegory sowed the seeds which later bloomed into the examinations into the nature of allegory in Pearl and The Clerk's Tale.

In chapter one, we saw how medieval Christian allegory was born out of the mystery of the "textualized body of Christ." This original site, however, did not provide Christian exegetes with a fixed point of departure for their reading of Scripture. Instead, the woven texture of Christ's Scriptural corpus, in constant oscillation between the revelation and "reveilation" or truth, opened a space for innumerable interpretations and potential heresies. Left with no solid rock on which to build their dogma and faced with both the freedom and fear of multiplied meanings in God's Word, men like Augustine sought to protect the faith from its own elusive center by restricting the polysemy of
allegory within the prelinguistic idealities of their singular, easily identifiable and defensible Christian pedagogy. Nevertheless, the exegetes failed to suppress the disruptive force of allegory in their teaching. They had hoped to make allegory the foundation of allegoresis as a means of both justifying and controlling their interpretations; but, in doing so, Christian exegetes built their teaching on shifting sand, vulnerable to the close inspection of later writers whose interests in language would later expose the ruptures and paradoxes of Christian allegoresis. The Pearl-poet and Chaucer were two such writers. With their eyes fixed on discovering the "nature" of language and its signification and not the protection of Christian dogma, these poets brought their creative powers to bear on allegory.

The Pearl-poet, unlike Chaucer, is decidedly a Christian poet. Pearl has as its central theme the problem of viewing allegory as a conduit to the truths of the divine realm. And while Pearl does not deny the existence of an eternal and immutable referent, nevertheless, he questions the possibility of ever attaining knowledge of that referent through human signs, even allegorical signs which were supposed to be the way God spoke to his creation in Scripture. In fact, the poem gives us allegory as a sign system endlessly reflecting its own process of signification. The maiden as Allegoria calls our attention to this Christian
poet's simultaneous desire for and rejection of the possibility of an uncomplicated medium to God. In this way at least, he behaves much like Augustine, both attracted and thwarted by the promise of allegory. But unlike Augustine, who by his faith would leap over the chasm of his doubts about language, the Pearl-poet brings us to the "shore" of divine knowledge only to leave us stranded there. He reveals his profound appreciation of the problems inherent in allegorical discourse as the simultaneous "revealer" and "reveiler" of the divine. Embracing allegory on its own terms, the Pearl-poet challenges and ultimately abandons the referential promise of allegory, leaving his readers to ponder their outcast state in the sublunary world of "fallen" signs.

In The Clerk's Tale, Chaucer takes his exploration of the "problem" of allegory even further in his representation of language as inseparable from its referent. Using the relationship between the Clerk and Griselda, his sentence, Chaucer takes on core medieval ideas about language, presenting a different paradigm for allegorical discourse where sign and sentence interact, each irrevocably changing the other. Unlike the Pearl-poet, who at least supposes that there is a divine origin to signs even though it is hopelessly enfolded within its mediating garment beyond human perception, Chaucer proposes the possibility that the idea of an immutable and prelinguistic sentence which awaits the
adornment of language is problematic. By presenting us in The Clerk's Tale a sentence which changes its "identity" with each new vesture while at the same time suggesting that sentence, like Griselda, is independent of its author, Chaucer exposes what Augustine and other Christian pedagogues hoped to repress, that allegory and its semiology of clothing interlaced the message and its medium to the point where one could hardly be distinguished from the other.

What I have attempted to demonstrate in this study is that far from revising or resisting the textuality they inherzited, both the Pearl-poet and Chaucer individually rediscovered and reaffirmed allegory in its original context, prior to the structure and system the exegetes put upon it. Beyond the control of human understanding, allegory is allowed by these poets the opportunity to speak in its own voice via the images of the Pearl-maiden and Griselda. They represent two faces of Allegoria as each poet understood her. She is attractive yet hopelessly elusive, beyond even their futile attempts to understand and even represent her fully. We are left then with two poets who respected her and all her paradoxes. Unafraid of heretical readings of their own texts, these poets release the power of allegory to its fullest extent and peer at it as if they were children in wonder at the mystery of their own reflection, seeing and yet not seeing themselves within its signification.
VITA

Fernando Figueroa grew up in New Orleans, Louisiana where he attended Jesuit High School and Loyola University. He then attended Louisiana State University and received his Masters and Doctorate in English from that austere institution. His reasons for studying the Middle Ages go back to his childhood where he would daydream about one day owning a pipe and tweed jacket. Never to be outdone by his Physician brother, Fernando decided to be a doctor of something and he might as well be a doctor of something he enjoyed.

You may now find him lecturing at a small college in Louisiana or driving his white Corolla in uptown New Orleans reciting the General Prologue to the Canterbury Tales. He is very fond of Oreo cookies and Fig Newtons and loves the Springtime in Audobon Park.
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Approved:

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