

ASPECTS OF INDIVIDUALISM IN FOURTEENTH- AND FIFTEENTH-CENTURY
MEDIEVAL TEXTS

by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION: THE SITUATION AND THE PROBLEM.....1

2. FROM THE ELEVENTH TO THE THIRTEENTH CENTURY.....6

3. THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY (1300-1399).....18

 Channel Crossing: The Self as a Fool.....25

 During the Time of Chaucer: Thomas Usk’s Testament of Love.....32

4. THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY (1400-1499).....39

 The Front Runners: Hoccleve and Pisan.....39

 In the End: Villon and Malory49

5. THE CONTINUING TRADITION.....62

 Continuing Postmodernism and Medieval Roots.....67

REFERENCES70

ABSTRACT

Many scholars have noted the rise of the individual in medieval Europe. In spite of this claim however, many continue to maintain that there is a fundamental difference between the medieval, or pre-modern, and modern eras; in terms of the individual, this generates scholarship that posits the medieval individual as nothing more than a member of a group, not in fact an individual in modern terms. Nevertheless, the shifting dialectic concerning individualism reveals a similarity between medieval and contemporary conceptions of the individual. Although the modernist interpretation that the individual supersedes the group and erases historical, political, and religious subjection remains common, the postmodern individual focuses on a distrust of narratives that clarify existence. Similarly, the high and late Middle Ages manifest a strong suspicion of both individualism and communal hegemony. Despite the argument that medieval man was imbedded in the community and, therefore, distinguishable from modern man (the praiseworthy individual), a postmodern perspective emerges when one considers the contradictions and problematics of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century texts. This convergence centres around the idea that the medieval individual combined a both sense of self and a sense of being subject, indicated by the term subjectivity. Thus, by tracing this subjectivity in specific texts, the rise of a problematic individualism elucidates the similarities between contemporary and medieval individuation.

INTRODUCTION: THE SITUATION AND THE PROBLEM

Within the scholarly community, there is disagreement about what is meant by modern and medieval. Medievalists claim specialised knowledge of a unique period. From the perspective of Renaissance scholars, their era represents the beginning of the modern age. In recent scholarship, some scholars have tried to fuse the two views, suggesting that the medieval is modern, or more accurately that the modern is medieval. One particular issue that both sides cite as evidence for their claim is individualism, which in modern terms is the social theory that the individual is more important than the community. On the one hand, medieval scholars, such as Brian Stock and Colin Morris, cite separate instances of individuation—the process of separating or distinguishing the individual from the community—in order to assert the individual’s emergence in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. On the other hand, Renaissance scholars continue to declare that the individual was a product of that era. This dichotomising of man into modern and pre-modern does little to aid scholarship, reducing it instead to semantic arguments and ignoring the diversity or complexity of humanity. The increasingly problematic dialogue developing around this issue relies on theoretical terminology that is riddled with complicated semantic arguments. Before one can discuss the individual’s beginnings, certain questions and problems must be addressed. One necessary question to answer is: “What type of individual does one mean?” This is the fundamental issue, which scholars normally assume to be understood. However, since the individual fits into many distinct categories it is necessary to clarify what one means before proceeding.

During the period of theoretical and artistic expression known as modernism (1890-1945), the individual was perceived as a self, independent of history, capable of self-governing, progressing towards a state in which he was neither regulated nor oppressed. However, this intellectual conception of the world disintegrated in the years that followed WWI and WWII. Although significant scholarly debate has gone into both defining and avoiding a definition of postmodernism, it nonetheless follows modernism. In a lecture, “Modernity versus Postmodernity,” Jürgen Habermas claimed that three types of postmodern responses exist: the anti-modern, the pre-modern, and the postmodern. Each particular theoretical response possesses a different outlook towards the modern perceptions of narratives and, thereby, the individual. First, anti-modernists, such as Derrida and Foucault, agreed that history and all exterior influences collapsed into the individual, but they opposed the idea of progress because this also was a construction that occurred within individual experience. Second, the pre-modernists, such as Levi-Strauss, claimed that man was not progressing and instead was in decline, moving away from the very traits that made humanity rise to consciousness—the state of being aware of oneself.¹ The post-modern response, however, does not accept the metanarrative. It denies man’s ability to assume complete individualism, to ignore the community, or disregard the individual, confirming instead only the community’s autonomy. In this case, what develops is a negotiation between the individual as self and the individual as subject. Each must accept the other and negotiate the place they hold because the other exists. This negotiation is summarised in the term subjectivity. Although not the traditional usage, the term subjectivity is an effort on the part of

scholars, such as Peter Haidu, to communicate the individual's awareness of himself as unique while simultaneously belonging to a political, or some other, governing entity. Interestingly, this subjectivity—the negotiation between individuality (being an individual) and subject (being someone's subject)—characterises medieval texts.

Indeed, medieval texts increasingly offer examples of internality (or interiority) versus externality. While externality focuses morality on external deeds and actions, internality tries to evaluate thoughts, emotions, feelings, and intentions. This complex issue is directly related to subjectivity, for if the individual is important, his internality factors into ethics and if the community is the principal moral judge, only actions count. Thus, subjectivity appears in the issue of internality versus externality, fundamentally connecting and negotiating these two extremes. Daniel Poirion expounds upon this interrelation in medieval poetry:

Or la poésie lyrique, au Moyen Age, n'est ni une pure création personnelle, ni une simple qualité saisie dans un objet: c'est une activité, à la fois personnelle et collective, qui nous met en étroit rapport avec le milieu culturel et la vie sociale. Activité complexe, qui participe de la danse, du chant, de la méditation. Ouverte à la fois sur l'histoire officielle de l'époque et sur les secrets intimes d'individus, la communication poétique met en œuvre, en les disposant selon un ordre qui lui est propre, tous les degrés de la signification. (8)

(However, lyric poetry in the Middle Ages is not a pure personal creation, nor a simple quality seized in an object: It is a activity at once personal and collective, which puts us in close connection with the cultural milieu and social life of the period: a complex activity, which participates in dance, in song, in meditation. Open to both official history of the epoch and to the intimate secrets of individuals, poetic communication reveals by laying them out in an order which is appropriate to it, all degrees of significance.)

What is apparent in Poirion's observation is that subjectivity has long been recognised as a characteristic of the Middle Ages, although it has done little to destabilise the alterity between the medieval and modern and has rarely been discussed in these terms. By bringing the perceptions of the postmodern attitudes to the medieval text, the perceptions of medieval man appear profoundly similar to that of postmodernism. The emergence of a comparable sense of subjectivity presents a comparable problematic individualism. This individualism is not characterised by the supremacy of the individual, but the uneasy interrelation between self—the individual independent of community—and subject. Thus, one sees that the medieval man continually engages in his problematic individualism, his subjectivity, which by the Late Middle Ages becomes increasingly pronounced.

The developments of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century literature naturally were not without their precursors, who tilled the earth before it was sown. Much of the growth of medieval individualism can be traced back to the eleventh century, or even to Roman and Greek times. That a cultural revolution took place during the eleventh century, that some scholars ignore this revolution, and that the literature in the centuries immediately following it contains reactions—positive and negative—to this revolution are the suppositions of this thesis. In the first chapter, I outline briefly the beginning of problematic individualism in the literature of the West, the difference between it and older cultures, the cultural problems it raises, and turn finally to the *Roman de la Rose*—a highly problematic text—in order to illustrate the complex subjectivity at work in the piece. In the second chapter, I develop the issues of subjectivity as addressed within

several texts, omitting the texts of Chaucer and Machaut—both are the subject of countless scholarly studies. I turn to lesser-known authors' works, such as Usk's *Testament of Love* and the poems of Deschamps in order to show the evolving treatment of individualism in literature. The third chapter, methodologically similar to the second, concentrates on the fifteenth century, specifically the poetry of Christine de Pisan, Thomas Hoccleve, François Villon, and Thomas Malory. It further shows a problematic individual existing at the juncture of the Medieval and the Renaissance. The concluding chapter offers suggestions on how two sixteenth-century authors, Rabelais and Shakespeare, treat the developments of the medieval period. Although the scope of this study requires far more meticulous attention to a far wider range of texts than appears here, I hope to provide a starting point for such an examination by tracing the treatment of subjectivity or problematic individualism throughout the medieval era.

FROM THE ELEVENTH TO THE THIRTEENTH CENTURY

In *The Allegory of Love*, C.S. Lewis claims, “[t]here are few absolute beginnings in literary history, but there is endless transformation” (234). However, the eleventh century marks one such literary beginning for Western Europe: writing in the vernacular. Before this time, writing in Europe was almost exclusively in Latin or under Latin influence, a reflection of the Latinate culture of medieval Europe, which is the subject of constant study.² Nevertheless, the importance of the Latinisation of literature pales in comparison to that of the invention of vernacular poetry. In “History, Literature, and Medieval Textuality,” Brian Stock describes the great change that occurred:

The new relationship was not transitory: it was...a change of long duration, not only announcing the birth of European vernacular languages, but also giving rise to a group of problems...popular versus learned tradition, the issue of allegory...inner and outer meaning...division of langue and parole... (“History” 10)

The intimate connection between language, literature, and culture illuminates the importance of literature in the development of individual consciousness. Literature embodies all of these. Because the divisions within modern scholarship had not ossified, all aspects of culture intertwined, and as a result, this interweaving created “many intimate connections between them,” which, in turn, created problems (Curtius 207). Although this is not an original invention of the medieval era, the social interconnections found in literature are important when trying to expose subjectivity in the period.

Before the development of the individual, a different consciousness—a state of mental awareness—saturated literature. One finds examples in Old English and Old

French oral epics, for example *Beowulf* and *Chanson de Roland*. These songs describe feats and deeds by heroes. The specific attitudes that the heroes exude characterise what E.R. Dodds terms a ‘shame’ culture. In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Friedrich Nietzsche deftly describes morality in such culture: “During the longest epoch of human history (which is called the prehistoric age) an action’s value or lack of value was derived from its consequences; the action itself was taken as little into account as its origin” (32). In *The Greeks and the Irrational*, Dodds expounds upon such a consciousness, calling it ‘external consciousness,’ which regards the individual as part of a community rather than separate from it. In this type of culture, one’s conscience—the internal voice that determines right from wrong—values actions over motives because the community can not perceive motives. For example, Roland’s hubris—stemming from his refusal to blow his horn, Oliphant—precipitates the death of the entire rear guard, but saves the army, and Charlemagne ultimately praises Roland, regardless of the motivation. Dodds juxtaposes this to internal consciousness: “The distinction between the two situations is...[that] sin is a condition of the will, a disease of man’s inner consciousness, whereas pollution is the automatic consequence of an action, belongs to the world of external events, and operates with the same ruthless indifference to motive as a typhoid germ” (36). The scene in *Roland* involves actions, not internal debate. From a literary standpoint, a problem arises from this: the epics lack any literary means of displaying inner consciousness (the perception of an inner world of the individual). Such internality needed several cultural and literary developments before it could emerge.

On the cultural front, the initial step towards internality began with the validation of the individual. In *The Discovery of the Individual*, Colin Morris proposes that it is during the eleventh and twelfth centuries that the individual emerges:

There is a rapid rise in individualism and humanism in the years from about 1080 to 1150. Then, however, a peak was reached, which was followed by a progressive decline. Then, once more, the graph turned upwards, eventually to reach the new heights of the Italian Renaissance, which by the late fifteenth-century had transcended all previous humanistic achievement. (7)

A common element in scholarship that purports the emergence of the individual is the correlation to an innovation, in this instance vernacular writing.³ Juxtaposed with the ritualistic forms of orality, writing permits texts to resist authority by allowing an author to create an individual and maintain a conflict between that individual and the community. Before the individual's appearance, this was not possible. However, the individual, after his inception in vernacular writing, encounters immediate and continual social pressures, which makes him into subject. Medieval individuals were subject to the Church, first and foremost, and second to their political ruler, and despite the rapidity of change in power centres at times, subjection existed without fail.⁴ Thus, no form of modernist individualism could exist, although some scholars claim that the conditions for it did.

Taking a modernist conception of individualism, Colin Morris (36) claims that "the possibility of...discover[ing]...the individual" existed within the ideologies of medieval Christianity. By referencing the personal nature of Christianity, Morris articulates the idea that a Christian invited God to live inside him and imbue him with

qualities other than his sinful nature. The problem inherent in the medieval Church, however, was that it was a political and religious organisation. The ‘personal’ character of the religion accepted and acknowledged individualism, but the political body could not afford to allow it because of the need for unity in face of threats: external, such as the Islamic pressure in the East and Iberia, and internal, such as the Cathars. In order to establish a unified moral front that could resist such challenges, the Church dictated the moral code—both conscience and conduct—for its members and ignored the inherent individualism in Christian salvation, slowing individualism’s evolution.

Not only did the Church assert the value of particular actions, but it also did so without reservation.⁵ For, to medieval society, the Church was God’s city on earth. If the Church were wrong, God could remedy the problem in heaven; but in the earthly realm, the Church was the best possible administration. Thus, the individual subverted his will to the church, *ipso facto*. Despite these limitations, how did the individual burst onto the medieval stage in the eleventh and twelfth centuries? Although scholars claim that the individual was only part of the community in the Middle Ages, the medieval recognition of the individual was the first step towards enacting subjectivity. After detection, the individual must take responsibility for his decisions, and then, an internality can emerge.

One sees this individuation of experience factoring into the philosophy and literature of the period. The key philosophical development was intention, beginning with Gerard I, bishop of Arras-Cambrai. A letter dated 17 January 1025, concerning a heretical prosecution, shows Gerard’s exoneration of heretics based on intentions:

In fact, all three examples of invalidation—the bad priest, the unrepentant sinner, and the unwilling or uncomprehending child—were related to the same idea, the development of the inner moral conscience. In their view, one was personally responsible for one’s sins, even one’s intentions. (Stock, *Implications* 128)

Additional evidence of the emergence of intentions appears in the work of philosophers of the same period. Brian Stock shows how St. Bernard alters “the fundamental issue..[of] how we understand right and wrong, which, he argues, involves the word and the heart, not the mind”; for Bernard, the mind governs actions alone, and this is sometimes in “good faith” and at other times self-deceptive (*Implications* 431). The word, the spirit of God living in man, and man’s own heart (reflecting his motivations) determine the ethical value of an action. Morality, in this case, occurs internally through the agency of the Holy Spirit. The quality, good or bad, of an action ignores the outcome. The contradiction of social practice this produced stimulated much debate. The church claimed that actions manifested internal intent, and hence continued to judge acts. In contrast, other philosophers assert a morality of intentions, most notably Peter Abelard. His *Ethics*, or *Know Yourself*, laid out a theory of sin. Sin required intention—the wilful consent to the act.⁶ Thus, one sees the development of the individual and his interiority, internal conscience, becoming essential ideas in the philosophy of the High Middle Ages.

In addition to the ideology of establishing intention over action, Abelard’s literary technique supported the movement. Abelard certainly encountered intention, as most of the philosophers in the medieval period did, in Saint Augustine’s *Confessions*. As in Augustine’s autobiography, Abelard transfers “inward[...] [consciousness]...to the

narrator,” who seemingly holds an omniscient position in that he knows all the reasons motivating actions; he can speak the intentions when there is a need to communicate a tremor in thought or motivation (Stock, “The Self” 843). The narrator communicates the specific motivations and thoughts of the individual and, thereby, places his intentions on display. The assumption is that the individual on paper is an individual in life. This binds an individual and literary simulacrum that displays his actions and motivations through a narrator, moving subjectivity from a social to a literary world. Since this movement is supposedly honest and truthful, the self and the literary self are linked, bound to each other. This conjoining problematises identity when one takes lying into account. If intentions can be falsified in language and language represents the self, the literary image of self is by its very nature problematic, the perfect ground to express the aforementioned subjectivity. Citing this movement, Peter Haidu claims that, during the eleventh century, the individual—previously part of a societal amalgamation—enters into law with a new philosophy of the individual. Logically, the only manner of assuring that the individual was not false—that his intentions were pure—was to invest authority in that individual; this power was the main consequence of this linkage because it laid the foundation for individual experience to become an authority in literature and law.

Another development springing from this separation of the individual from community was the rise of *I*-narratives—a narrative which employs *I* as a speaking voice. Once the *I* could speak of its experience and feelings as authoritative, the intensity of negotiating one’s subjectivity increased. Indeed, the nascent subjectivity even appears in

literature which confirms the Church's supremacy over the individual. One example is the thirteenth century *Carmina Burana*:

In trutina mentis dubia
fluctuant contraria,
lascivus amor et pudicitia.

Sed eligo, quod video:
collum iugo prebeo,
Ad iugum tamen suave transeo (Morris 68)

(The trembling balance of the mind/ Is easily to opposites inclined,/ Love's lechery and modest chastity/ But I will choose what I see now,/ And so my neck I gladly bow/To take that most sweet yoke on me)

In the first two lines, the poet expresses the conflict that appears in the mind of the individual—an internality or inner conscience. Apparently, the mind vacillates easily between, presumably, evil and good. The individual's unique experience emerges. In the last three lines, the individual nevertheless submits to the 'sweet yoke' of the Church and bows to its will, which reflects that of God. The individual may feel the desire to go against the standard moral action, but in the end, he chooses the *status quo*, for to do otherwise brings uncertainty—the same uncertainty which 'the mind' experiences. Hence, in early autobiographical writing the individual's internal struggle appears, but the individual nonetheless remains subservient to the community to some degree, exploring his subjectivity.⁷ The negotiation can often be as subtle as it can be vicious.

In vernacular writings of the thirteenth century, internality rises to the fore, frequently through the allegorical mode. According to Lewis, allegory is the manner of representing personal struggle within oneself in an age where only actions matter in a social or cultural setting (*Allegory* 30). Indeed, Michel Zink says, "allegory has always

been a privileged means for describing and even for investigating the movements of the soul and of the inner life” (“Allegorical” 102). The problem of representing the inner life in allegory is that “the forces which confront each other within consciousness” are “independent of the subject” (Zink, “Allegorical” 105). In this early medieval allegory, because the internal struggle manifests externally, allegory represents the internal struggle—a confrontation of between the self and one’s position as a subject—in an acceptable manner. The ethical vision still regarded external actions as representative of inner morality, but for the first time, Abelard’s intentions are slightly detectable. Thus, allegory stages the unperceivable intentions, by abstracting this internality.

The most famous medieval allegory, the *Roman de la Rose*, exists in two parts; the first, written by Guillaume de Lorris, appears in the 1220s, the second, by Jean de Meun, between 1264 and 1274. Its complexity surfaces from its staging of the individual (and his interiority), his community, and his lover’s interiority. The dreamer leaves the city, the social world, and enters an orchard, where Abelard’s intentional morality exists. The poet possessed no method for illustrating internality, so he staged it in a dream. Outside the orchard, the exterior wall holds portraits of the external marks of internality: Hate, Crime, Low Class, Covetousness, Avarice, Envy, Sorrow, Old Age, Hypocrisy, and Poverty. One must remember that all sin is the same to God; thus, the portraits residing outside the orchard are for man’s, not God’s, benefit. Envy is not the interior struggle with Contentment; it is the manifestation of the internal failure of contentment. The exclusion of sin from the orchard critiques the epoch’s external morality. It proposes that better morality can be found in the garden of consciousness. At the doorway, Fame, the

external manifestation of the internal, dwells; unlike the flat and static portraits, Fame is living and malleable.

Inside the garden, the dreamer struggles to win his lady in a battle with her good and bad characteristics.⁸ While standard interpretations of the *Rose* concentrate on the dreamer's internality, the conflict between the lady's characteristics indicates that the dreamer also experiences his lady's internality, battling good and bad characteristics that try to control her. Inside his lady, Hope, Sweet Thoughts, Sweet Talk, Sweet Looks, and Fair Welcome vie against Dangier, Gossip, Shame, and Fear. Reason and Friend mediate the fray, representing of the proper role of thought and social order. The fountain of Narcissus at the centre marks the danger of falling in love with oneself—an eminent danger because it alienates one from social constructions. In this way, the *Rose* maintains the problematics of individualism by remembering the practical necessity of Reason and Friend in the world.

C.S. Lewis's discussion of the *Rose* stresses the allegorisation of love. For Lewis, the development of love, or personified love, is the profoundest development in western culture. Nevertheless, the movement to represent the experience of the world in an internal setting, the soul of the protagonist, is far more significant than a conception of love itself. In this respect, the *Rose* at times declares the individual conquers the state, specifically through the use of *je*—which destroys identity and plays at subjectivity (Haidu, *Subject* 220). Identity, for Haidu, is a socially constructed concept, which involves another's imposed perception of an individual, not the object's perception of himself. By transplanting the protagonist into an isolated setting, one see the individual's

perception of self. Thus, without an ‘other,’ “identity disappears” and individualism—without any communal restriction—is the only remaining thing (Haidu, *Subject* 220).⁹ This is tempered necessarily by the traits, which are good and evil; they have been dictated by the powers to which the individual is subject. Within himself, the individual carries these values. He cannot release them. Hence, the internal landscape of the *Rose* reflects the budding subjectivity in that not even in the deepest of dreams of imagination can the individual escape his status as subject.

While for the most part this chapter concentrated on French and Latin text, this movement is often associated with literature outside of France. Maurice Valency cites Chaucer—in many ways, a very French-English writer—Chrétien, and other writers in support of his claim that the *dolce stil* or the *stilnovisti* created the important internality seen in European poetry.¹⁰ While medieval Italian literature remains outside the scope of this thesis, Valency’s theory suggests that other scholars notice the same development elsewhere. From this point, subjectivity characterises much of the literature during the High Middle Ages, and the poets explore it, discovery many of its limitations and its freedoms.

¹ Individual consciousness, therefore, is a state in which the individual recognizes himself as an individual.

² For examples of scholarly studies on this process, read: Ernest Robert Curtius’s *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* and R.R. Bolgar’s *The Classical Heritage and Its Beneficiaries*.

³ In *Orality, Literacy, and Printing*, Walter J. Ong explores the cultural implications which writing in vernaculars brought with it. In addition to Ong’s research, Brian Stock’s *The Implications of Literacy* and M.T. Clancy’s *From Memory to Written Record: 1066-1350* offer further research on the manner in which vernacular writing affected transformations in various arenas.

⁴ The tiered structure of feudalism meant the individual was subject to several lords; however, the breakdown of the feudal structure in the later Middle Ages did not mean that he was free, political structure merely shifting form. Consequently, the medieval subject—with his new individualism—experienced the problematics of negotiating his position as self and subject.

⁵ “The Middle Ages,” Johan Huizinga (16) notes, “knew nothing of all those ideas which have rendered our sentiment of justice timid and hesitating: doubts as to the criminal’s responsibility; the conviction that society is...the accomplice of the individual; the desire to reform instead of inflicting pain; and, we may even add, the fear of judicial errors.”

⁶ Morris (75) astutely notes, “The attempt to make intention the foundation of an ethical theory is a striking instance of the contemporary movement away from external regulations towards an insight into individual character.” Extending this argument, Brian Stock says that in the period, “there was a widespread reaffirmation of ancient convictions about the separateness or distinctiveness of person as well as the belief that behaviour is chiefly influenced by an individual’s thoughts or feelings rather than by outside forces” (“The Self” 842).

⁷ In *The French Tradition and the Literature of Medieval England*, William Calin explicates the use of *I* in narrative patterns. For Calin, the *I* is a rhetorical tool, not a personal one. Thus, pseudo personal narratives exploit the authority invested in *I* in a purely stylistic manner. For a study of the *I* in lyric poetry, Michel Zink’s *Subjective in Literature* is an essential read.

⁸ It is interesting to note that the internality in the poem is two-fold: the dreamer’s and the lady’s.

⁹ The problematic structure is that the desire propels the dreamer towards the postulated object of his desire. Desire, the dreamer, and the space in which it all occurs are internal features; however, the object of “erotic” desire is actually external, an ‘other’ (Haidu, *Subject* 231).

¹⁰ Valency (210) says, “The *stilnovist* poetry has no landscape—it takes place in the depths of the poet’s soul.” The distinction of landscape specifically recalls to mind medieval romance: Chrétien de Troyes’ *Perceval*, *Prose Lancelot*, *Estoire del saint graal*, *Mort le roi Artu*, *Alliterative Morte Arthure*, and so forth. These texts, although concentrating at times on individuals, are stories of adventure in forests and tell of great battles. Valency (2) claims, “Apart from the troubadour poetry, there is, however, nothing to indicate that such a revolution took place.” The troubadour adventure poetry, which influences England greatly, merely reshapes old themes. On the other hand, Cavalcanti—a prominent member of the *dolce stil*—developed a new method for comprehending love. Influenced by Aquinas and Albertus Magnus, Cavalcanti created a “psychic conflict within the individual, involving the mutual relations of the yes, the mind, the soul, the heart, and the spiritual mechanism which bound these faculties together” (Valency 218). By removing the lovers from reality, the *dolce stil* made love and poetry an issue for the inner soul, internality, et cetera. Valency observes in the

dolce stil the same elements of internality, which present themselves in the *Romance de la Rose*.

THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY 1300-1399

Although some texts are written in English before the fourteenth century—for example, Layamon’s *Brut*—the alliterative movement ends the prevalence of the Anglo-Norman French literature on the island. During the previous centuries (1100-1350), while vernacular languages flourished on the continent, the domination of French left England under the oppression of a foreign tongue. Hence, the creation of an English literature in an English language was a move that engendered English pride; this pride was its most lasting characteristic. However, the movement inhabited a curious position, looking back pre-eleventh century in some respects, such as language, and, in others pressing forward to deal with the problems of the present, subjectivity. This problematic takes interesting forms in the alliterative texts.

In terms of subjectivity, one of the anonymous texts, the *Alliterative Morte Arthure*, illustrates the problems the older ideal experienced in the present. Chronologically, the *Morte* falls during the middle of the fourteenth-century, but it is a pertinent starting point for investigating subjectivity and individualism because of its highly antiquated style. This style means that the *Morte* utilises older techniques and, hence, provides an excellent manner of examining the transition of subjectivity in English vernacular. Stylistically, the *Morte* typifies the alliterative movement, recalling the Anglo-Saxon poetics. For example, the alliteration in the first ten lines of *Beowulf*—“Scyld Scefing sceaþena,” “monegum mægþum meodosetla,” “feasceaft funden,” “weox under wolcnum weorðmyndum,” and “hronrade hyran” (Heaney 2)—is comparable to the prevalent alliteration in the *Morte*:

Swyftly with swerdes they swappen thereafte
 Swappez doun full sweperlye sweltande knyghtez
 That all swelltes one swarthe that they overswyngen;
 So many swey in swoghe, swounande att ones. (Krishna 80)

The alliteration supplants Old French poetic forms with an English one, revivifying national pride and problematising subjectivity by recalling an older form of morality where actions were all that mattered. The poet presents his nationalism straightforwardly, titling the knights “our men” (l. 1428) and “our folke” (l. 1441), but these English folk inhabit a feudalistic social structure—a Central Middle Ages ideology; nevertheless, the importance of male camaraderie, battle, and communal relations reflects a profoundly Anglo-Saxon world. Herein lies the difficulty: Anglo-Saxon poetry possesses a communal focus, neglecting the individual. Thus, the *Morte*’s perspective is heavily coloured by the linguistic conventions of Old English, reinforcing the state’s vantage point rather than disrupting it, and in this sense, it contrasts the subjectivity seen in, for example, the text of Chrétien de Troyes.¹

If the *Morte* is anti-romantic in focus, it is anti-epic in presentation. The vision of society is bleak, although many scholars differ on how to interpret this tragic ending.² The action’s locus, however, promotes a political downfall rather than a personal one. In “The Death of King Arthur and the Waning of the Feudal Age,” R. Howard Bloch posits a connection between the world pictured in *La Morte le roi Artu* and declining feudalism, specifically referencing the French state. The breakdown of society condemns the inadequacies of the culture portrayed: no heir to assume the throne, no power system outside of King, and so forth. This appears in the scope of the story: *La Morte le roi Artu* “begins in earthly splendor and spiritual plenitude...[and] ends in a curious

spectacle of chaos and decline” (Bloch 292). The same decline extends to the English *Morte*. Like *La Morte*, the *Morte* follows the same political disintegration. The grand scale—the world—descends into chaos because the knights cannot perform their duty when they are dead. In the end, Arthur has killed Mordred, who has usurped his throne and taken his wife. Gawain is dead, and Arthur is mortally wounded. No one remains to control the political realm. Hence, the act of destroying the King or his knight’s body corresponds to the declining political body.³

The physical gore surrounding bodily harm emphatically shows a knight’s inability to perform his duty:

he hott blode of þe hulke vnto þe hilde rynnez;
 Ewyn into inmette the gyaunt he hyttez,
 Iust to þe genitales and jaggede þam in sondre. (Krishna 71)

(The hot blood of the hulk unto the hilt runs;/ he hit the giant even to his entrails/
 just to the genitals and jagged them asunder.)

A few verses later, the poem continues:

Bothe þe guttez and the gorr guschez owte at ones,
 Pat all englaymez þe gresse one grounde þer he standez. (Krishna 71)

(Both the guts and the gore gushed out at once/ that all covered with the grease on
 the ground where he stood)

Brutal bodily destruction—in this instance the giant Arthur fights—does more than mirror the social destruction. Physical violence is violence against internal self.⁴ The two forms of violence are intertwined, inseparable. In this manner, the *Morte* enters, perhaps unwittingly, into a debate on subjectivity. The aforementioned political focus limits the individual’s role in the *Morte*, except in the capacity of the community, but the individual is necessary for the community. The two exist because of each other. Thus,

while the focus in the *Morte* is on the community, it does not alter the negotiation of an individual's two roles by centring on the political and social arena. A knight performs his duty because of who he is, not because the performance makes him a knight. Eliminating his ability to perform his duty, which runs in his blood, separates his internal self from external in a very disheartening manner. The individual still bargains as a subject, and by concentrating on the community effect, the poem does not annul this. In fact, the bodily violence arises in later texts, such as *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, where the perspective shifts towards the individual knight from the communal focus in the *Morte*.

By focusing on a single knight, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* reflects a French aesthetic taste and, additionally, brings the growth of individualism to the fore.⁵ Thus, it bridges the alliterative texts' older characteristics and the innovation of later writers. *Sir Gawain* refuses to overthrow the dichotomy promoted by the Church (what is good and evil), but it blissfully points to some of the issues it finds problematic, such as confession. Because of the concentration on a singular knight and the disruption of ritual practice, scholars detect a prototypical portrait of internality at work in *Sir Gawain*, i.e. that Gawain acts on his individual morality and performs his duty as subject poorly when he does not agree with it.⁶ This prototype is neither innovative—promoting individualism—nor ultraconservative, but a literary portrait exculpating the problematics arising from the subjectivity that the poet witnesses. In this respect, *Gawain* offers no solution to these problematics, simply a poignant example of the fourteenth-century treatment of them.⁷

The plot of the story begins at Arthur's court. The Green Knight arrives and asks to be beheaded, promising to reciprocate the deed in one year to whoever performs his request. Initially, Arthur takes up the task, but Gawain argues his way into the position, insisting that it is below Arthur's station. After being beheaded, the knight stands and demands Gawain come as he promised:

Loke, Gawan, þou be grayþe to go as þou hettez,
 And layte as lelly til þou me, lude, fynde,
 As þou hatz hette in þis halle, herande þise kny₃tes;
 To þe grene chapel þou chose, I charge þe, to fotte
 Such a dunt as þou hatz dalt—disserued þou habbez
 To be ₃ederly ₃olden on nw ₃eres morn. (Merwin 30-32)

(Look Gawain, thou be ready to go as thou promise / and seek as leally until thou find me/ even as thou has promised in this hall with the knights as hearers/ to the Green Chapel, thou come, I charge thee to come/ such a blow as thou has dealt, thou deserved to have/ to be promptly returned on new year's morn.)

The headless knight standing and speaking shocks the sensibility of everyone present.

Yet, the relationship of bodily damage coupled with internal/external relationships explains much of the reason behind the need for this depiction. By divorcing the Green Knight's head from his body, the poet—symbolically—separates intentions, lodged in thought, and action, in the body, placing the knight in the same situation that appears in the *Morte*. Nevertheless, the Green Knight continues to act, retrieving his head—rejoining it with the body. The poet, thus, comments on the inability to divorce internality from externality; for the poet, they are bound. The knight keeps his external action going only because he keeps his head, the locus of thought and intentions.

Without the head, he becomes like Arthur in the *Morte*, unable to function. Coordinating this does not force the poet to declare either the individual or the communal order

dominant. It merely highlights the points of conflict and convergence, such as when one tries to divorce internality and externality.

At the story proceeds, Gawain sets out as promised. Here, scholars argue that Gawain's journey into the wilderness is important because his leaving functions in the same manner that the lover's exit does in the *Rose*. The argument is that his adventure exits the social world and allows the internal man to reveal himself. However, nothing allegorically equitable to inner man appears in Gawain's adventure. Instead, the revelation of internal characteristics corresponds to external actions. Nothing reveals this more poignantly than his adultery when he tries to disrupt the coordination of internal and external. While staying at Bertilak de Hautdesert's castle, Gawain has kisses taken from him by Bertilak's wife, one for each day he has been there. The final day before departing, she offers Gawain her green girdle, which he accepts.

Accepting this as a symbol of his deed, Gawain departs the next day to meet the Green Knight, concealing it inside his manmade exterior shell—armour. In a strange turn of events, the Green Knight does not behead Gawain; instead, he gives him a scar. The final twist is that the Green Knight is Bertilak de Hautdesert and knows of Gawain's activities with his wife. In this instance, the sin passes from deed (his liaisons with the woman) to self (his knowledge that he acted badly) to external (the girdle). In *Readings in Medieval Poetry*, A.C. Spearing argues that "Something in himself led him to accept the girdle; he was not just trapped by a deception external to his own nature" (203). Initially, he commits the deed and feels internal guilt. As a result, he accepts the girdle as a symbol, an external point of reverence for his sin. After taking it, he tries to conceal it

where no one can see it. At this point, he falters. Ostensibly, only Gawain knows it is there, lucidly conjuring internality. If one takes only this moment, *Sir Gawain* seems to argue that internality and externality can be disparate. Yet, the poet exposes the true dichotomy at the Green Chapel. The revelation that Bertilak knows of the girdle breaks the separation of internality and externality, merging them. This signals the same idea that the Green Knight's inability to separate his head from his body did. Internality manifests externally. Some scholars claim that Bertilak had somehow discerned externally what Gawain had done, but whether or not this actually happened is pure speculation; the text explains Gawain's sudden transformation, displaying his woe:

Alle the blode of his brest blende in his face,
 Pat al he schrank for schome þat þe schalk talked. (Merwin 160)

(all the blood of his breast filled in his face/ That all he shrank for shame that he should talk.)

The philosophical treatment deepens in the final stanza of the poem:

For mon may hyden his harme, bot unhap ne may hit,
 For þer hit onez is tachched twynne wil hit never. (Merwin 170)

(For man may hide his harm but unhappy it makes him,/ For there once it is attached, twain it will never be.)

The *Gawain* poet prescribes the inseparability of inner and outer self. In the end, Gawain willingly wears his sin, bearing no shame. Sin is a natural part of the human condition, which must be remembered. If it were a shame, he would wish to forget or erase it. Henceforth, the *Gawain* poet provides an example of subjectivity in literature, exploring the problematic on several issues. Across the channel, French poets are expressing this subjectivity with different techniques.

Channel Crossing: The Self as a Fool

In French poetry, a crucial development happens during the fourteenth century. Poets discover ways in which to stage internality without action or allegory. This discovery manifests in the *ars nova* of Guillaume de Machaut. The techniques used, which produce the same effect as the physical mutilation in the English alliterative movement, receive copious amounts of criticism.⁸ In terms of subjectivity, Machaut's importance and influence rest on his lover's timidity, contradicting the performative nature of *fin amor*.⁹ For the poet Machaut, who lacks the bodily ability of a knight, aggrandising internal struggle by retreating to the expression of turmoil allows him to enact the courtship rituals of his society. Only in the poet's mind can the great deeds of love transpire. Hence, the *I* and internality in Machaut's lyrics provide new methods for staging subjectivity and create new problems by divorcing action and intent. This movement parallels that in the *Rose*, except the narrator delves into his own insecurity rather than confronting his lady's. Building on the foundation Machaut constructs, Eustache Deschamps takes internalisation and lampoons it, despite his progression of the poetic *I*. He is especially interesting because of his contempt for the individual, which reflects a disdain for its development.

In spite of this contempt, Deschamps writes groundbreaking poetry, manipulating personal interiority. The most striking aspect of Deschamps's work is his use of alternative or marginalized identity.¹⁰ In "Sui je, sui je, sui je belle?" and "Si j'en puis nullement finer," Deschamps's *Is* are feminine.¹¹ Clearly, the separation between the speaking subject and author relies on individuality in a rhetorical sense. Poetics in the

early Middle Ages required an ancient *auctour* to speak with power. The conception of *auctourship* is complex, but can be simplistically defined as an authority that provides veracity to a particular poem or fact.¹² Nevertheless, a new authority emerged with the rise of the individual: experience. The individual's experiences became an authority. Thus, an *I* could speak, referencing only its experience. Although the development that he uses appears in much of Machaut's work, Deschamps's use of experience seems to offer a different treatment of it than his teacher practises. While preserving the *I*'s authority rhetorically, he wishes to return to previous eras, often ridiculing and condemning the present.

In "Sui je, sui je, sui je belle?," the female *I*, believing that she is beautiful, speaks frivolously of her beauty. The foundation of this belief is her personal authority, underlining a major problem of individualism for Deschamps: its lack of an external reference. If the lady is beautiful because she thinks she is, she is also ugly if someone thinks she is. Thus, her inexorable focus on her external qualities tries to support her idea, but she seeks another confirmation:

J'ay draps de soye et tabis
 J'ay draps d'or et blanc et bis,
 J'ay mainte bonne chosette :
 Dictes moy se je sui belle. (Laurie 92)

(I've cloth of silk and of samite/ I've cloth of gold and brown and white./ I've got so many little things:/ tell me if I'm lovely.)¹³

Her subjective view deteriorates when it confronts objective reality. In order to be objectively beautiful, she requires confirmation from an 'other.' Hence, while buried in this problematic relation, she alternates between asking and commanding, staging her

own subjectivity. Through a simple poem on beauty, Deschamps underscores a problem with individualism: its moral flexibility. He indicates it subtly in the poem by the girl's inability to assert her beauty without someone to confirm it. In a similar manner, he questions how moral action can be evaluated without others to confirm. The individual, if he can act in a world of intentions, can feasibly do anything, and Deschamps fears this danger. His humorous relativity around this feminine *I* becomes more personal and political in his other poems.

The subject of "Si j'en puis nullement finer" is complicated and difficult. The feminine *I*, an older married woman, speaks about her philandering husband. The poetic *I* serves less to explore the psyche than to narrate her husband's transgressions, recounting his underhanded, lascivious behaviour. She responds angrily and condemns the love of her century: "qui fait tel raige/ En amours s'on lui rent tel gaige" (Laurie 178).¹⁴ The punishment, a cry for the blood of the guilty, ignores any internal justification. Another condemnation of love appears in "Onques amour ne fut sanz Jalousie." Deschamps examines a lover's emotions along with the problems this sentiment manifests:

Qui aime bien, il a pou de repos,
De son amour toudis perdre se doubte :
Il tremble, il frit, il n'a ne cuir ne os,
Cuer ne penser ou paour ne se bouste ;
Il crait, il plaint, il ne repose goute. (Laurie 186)

(The man who really loves has little peace ;/ his fear of losing love will never cease ;/ he trembles, he quivers; dread, he'll find,/ invades his skin, his bones, his heart, his mind;/ he is afraid, complains, he has no rest.)

Although no law of the Church or state is broken (there is no sin or crime), the tangibility of ‘fear of loss’—an external circumstance—comes from the inner self; in spite of this internal fear, terrible physical symptoms arises from it. Therefore, internality cannot be trusted. After infecting him, internal love that is pure spreads because of the internal perversion—fear. Because no external reason for this perniciousness exists, Deschamps is obviously increasing the possible side-effects of internality. The only one who can escape the clutches of love seems to be:

Qui n’aime a droit, il est d’elle forclos,
De ce qu’il het en tel cas ne fait doute, (Laurie 186)

(Only the man without true love is free of her,/ what he dislikes gives no anxiety;)

This humorous observation cannot aid the lover. Instead, the comment creates a cultural critique of the monomania for love, crediting poetry with a grander scope than the lover’s sentiment. The denunciation of love stems from its internal poisoning of the external body. Thus, one discovers that it is not love, but internality he hates.

This detestation solidifies in Deschamps’s highly socio-political ballads, pleading or demanding that someone recognise what he sees. The response shows less internality and more of the social effect it has. It is a social criticism of what internality (although he uses it) is doing to the world. For him, the present is in a state of deterioration, due to a morality based on intentions. In “Que nulz prodoms ne doit taire le voir,” the comparative process underscores the distinctions:

L’en pugnisoit les maufaictours jadis
Et rendoit l’en partout vray jugement
Et Veritez qui vint de paradis
Blasmoit chascun qui ovrait laidement ;
Par ce vivoit le monde honnestement.

Mais nul ne fait fors l'autre decevoir,
Mentir, flater dont je dy vrayement
Que nulz prodoms ne doit taire le voir. (Laurie 76)

(Evildoers were punished in former times/ and honest judgments were rendered everywhere/ and Truth, which comes from heaven to us/ was used to condemn all those who did bad deeds./ This was the way the world lived decently;/ [but, no one is made to disappoint others], / and lies, and flattery, and I say this/ because no honest man should quash the truth.)

Deschamps envisions the past in a heavenly light. Centring his critique around internality, he sees that, in the past, deeds had a value; judgment was iron-clad, and God, thereby, rendered his justice on Earth. Internality ignites the possibility that the deeds and the intentions behind them differ. This, in turn, sparks debate about social mores. This problematised morality disgusts Deschamps. Good actions are never socially questioned. Thus, intention is nullified in these cases. Conversely, bad actions are always debated. In the case of a 'good' man committing a bad action, he willingly repents. Yet, a 'bad' man will utilise the doubt created by intention to avoid censure. Hence, Deschamps believes that internality aids only the wicked, changing the present into a time of lies and flattery. Moral pragmatism and the good of the state insist that the two, internality and externality, correspond. Morality possessed enough complexity without a dissimilarity between intention and action that inhibited judgement.

In subsequent stanzas, he expands the problem of chastisement:

Les mauves sont blasmez par leur mesdis
En l'escripture et ou viel testament
Et pour leurs maux les dampnent touz edis
Que l'en souloit garder estroictement.
Mais aujourd'hui verité taist et ment ;
Ce monde cy qui ne quiert que l'avoir.
Coupable en est qui telz maux ne reprant
Que nulz prodoms ne doit taire le voir. (Laurie 76)

(The wicked are condemned by their misdeeds/in both the Scripture and Old Testament,/ and edicts damn them for their acts;/ men used to strictly follow this in ages past./But truth today is silent; the lying world that is here below seeks only wealth./ A man is guilty if he's not opposed to [it]/ because no honest man should quash the truth.)

The rhetorical structure of the passage mimics the first stanza, adding *auctors*—the Old and New Testaments—in order to validate his position. At first, Deschamps's style models his lady's, who needed an 'other' to confirm her belief. However, in this positive situation, he reveals a characteristic of the age. Rather than commencing with an *auctor* in order to speak with power, he speaks with his own authority, and then uses *auctours* as support. This particular serviceability, while still making the *auctor* into a tool for support, does not use it as the authority that validates the claim, only as contributing evidence. It is a movement possible only if Deschamps is vested with his own authority to speak.

After nostalgically recalling the state of the world, he turns swiftly on the present, conjuring two potent images: Silence and Wealth. Wealth emphasises the present, ignoring the future that Christ promised and prophesied. Since wealth is temporary in terms of the individual, the seeking of wealth distracts one from considering the right course of action. Instead, one merely chooses the path most profitable to oneself.¹⁵ In this mode, money is the root of selfishness. Silence indicates continual internal action, thoughts, emotions, and feelings, and external inaction. This inactivity shows wilful deception or piety, and distinguishing the two is difficult.¹⁶ In this instance, truth's silence is negative. The 'truth' is that wicked deeds condemn men and ought to be combated. By negating the issue through internality, men deliberately avoid opposing the

deed's malignancy. Thus, internality damns men, rather than saving them, when it is used to excuse malicious deeds.

In "Toute chose est part tout mal ordenée," Deschamps revivifies the previous patterns:

Pourquoi? Pour ce que mainte creature
 Voy qu jour d'ui en paine et en tourment
 Ne je ne boy nul bon gouvernement
 Au bien commun ne en fait de justice;
 De la loy Dieu, de la foy est esclipce,
 Division et convoitise est née
 Entre pluseurs, orgueil et avarice:
 Toute chose est par tout mal ordonnée. (Laurie 182)

(Why so? the reason is that all I see today/ is the trouble of so many, the distress,/ and though I sought, I saw good government/ in neither state nor law, whichever way I went./ God's word and true religion are held in scorn,/ and faction and self-seeking have been born/ among the people; pride and avarice erupt:/ everything is totally corrupt.)

Opening on the troubling present, the stanza describes the distress of the world resulting from individuality, the impetus of factionalism and greed. This self-seeking would not be a problem if external standards of judgment existed, but without these external standards, individuals can act in a self-seeking manner without just reproach. Splintering of religious uniformity and economic continuity has destroyed the homogeneous nature of society, replacing it with a volatile state. This volatility is apparent in love, identity, and social arenas. Deschamps's disgust for it vilifies individuality for its potential to degrade society. Thus, he stands at a crossroads. From a cultural standpoint, he advocates a return to the unquestionable "external equals internal" relationship. From a literary standpoint, his uses of methodology and the *I* validate his ability to speak from

experience, pursuing developments that only reach fruition in the next century. By the end of the fourteenth century, these ideas migrate to England.

During the Time of Chaucer: Thomas Usk's *Testament of Love*

Geoffrey Chaucer's work did much to popularise English and establish it as a prestigious literary language, alongside French in terms of respectability.¹⁷ Many studies illustrate the importance of the influence of French literature upon Chaucer and later fourteenth-century English writers, including the influx of internality and individualism.¹⁸ Given the copious amount of scholarship on Chaucer, an exploration of individualism—if it is a characteristic of the age—necessitates the study of lesser authors working contemporaneously with Chaucer. Thomas Usk fits this mould, and his historically significant works fortunately provide examples of internality.

Testament of Love unfolds the story of a young man holding a conversation with 'love' in a prison cell. Initially, the protagonist waits alone, and Margaryte, embodied love, visits him. When his lady enters, the protagonist's uncertainty is felt:

...a maner of ferenesse crepeth in his herte not for harme but of goodly subjection...Right so with ferdeness myn herte was caught. And, I sodainly astonyed, there entred into the place...a lady...and trewly in the blustryng of her looke she yave gladnesse and comforte sodaynely to al my wyttes, and right so she dothe to every wyght that cometh in her presence. (63)

Immediately after the lady's appearance, the protagonist's questioning of her identity elucidates that love has merely taken a guise. This trapping allows her to accomplish her task: "...to put thee out of errours and make thee gladde by wayes of reason...Wherethrough I hope thou shalte lightly come to the grace that thou longe haste

desired of thylke jewel” (Usk 67). The protagonist’s joyous sentiment, corresponding to love’s arrival, indicates a specific philosophical outlook regarding love. Explicating this, C.S. Lewis says the union of Margaryte and love is tantamount to the unison between earthly and divine love. Thus, the purpose of love is to lead to God.

However, to accept this observation is to release the realistic underpinning of the story, asserting a non-realistic place for the setting. The emotion of love, earthly and divine, is lodged inside of man; hence, the *Testament* is a poem of internality, where a prison replaces the garden, and the protagonist confirms this interior setting by equating his lady and love. Nonetheless, while Usk maintains the staunchest realism in his story, he no longer creates adventures or pure allegories; instead, the realistic setting surreptitiously stages the soul, similar to the *Rose*.¹⁹ Usk plunges into the internal world without resorting to dream.²⁰ Considering the prevalence of dream narratives as a means for establishing interiority and the absence of it here, the fact that scholars neglect the allegory for interiority in favour of other aspects is not surprising. However, that Usk wrote the text without a dream indicates another particular belief about internality. It is not merely an element of fantasy and dream; it is present in the real world. Thus, he illustrates the presence of subjectivity because, if internality exists, then it must be negotiated. The narrator describes the presence of love and the emotion it creates.

If Usk creates literary innovations, he maintains the same subjectivity from the early texts. When discussing how Margaryte identifies his emotion, the protagonist (64) posits an external occasion, in spite of his interior setting: “by [his] wordes as by [his] chere what thought besyed [him] within.” In this instance, Usk tries to balance realism

and allegorical technique, returning to traditional philosophy and the traditional solution to accomplish this. For Usk, relinquishing subjectivity is impossible; it would place him in a debate for which he is unprepared: “Trewly, I leve in myn heart is writte of perdurable letters al the entencyons of lamentacion that nowe ben ynempned, for any maner disease outwarde in sobbyng maner sheweth sorrowful yexynge from within” (55). In his action, the emptying of his heart mimics the Church’s hegemony, by asserting a one-to-one relation between external action and internal intention. But, the interesting perspective is that he is in opposition to the Church or State; hence, while the relationship of intentions to actions adheres to Church dogma, he obviously defies his role as subject. He alone chooses what actions to perform, and he always follows his heart and mind, although they are fickle. All of the coordinated outward and inward sobbing cannot thwart the contradiction of his mind, which shifts between his dichotomies: “wytlesse, thoughtful, syghtlesse lokyng” (Usk 56). In fact, this problematic plays a central role in *Testament*.

A melancholic sense arises from the individualism Usk notes. He (68) bemoans individuality, which separated him from his community, saying, “For wo is him that is alone.” It is in this respect that his picture of internality differs from the *Rose*. The *Rose* lacked an ‘other’ and playfully celebrated this fact. The *Testament* has ‘other’(s). It negates them, justifying individuality and confirming the inability to escape it. In this sense, the prison opposes the garden, taking on a dark, desolate attitude that offers no hope of change. Usk accepts internality, although he obviously dislikes such problematics, specifically isolation (when one comes into contradictions with law). One

must follow one's consciences, nonetheless. Later, he joyously declares that he has never violated his conscience. Love, in a controversial manoeuvre, validates his position: "glory and fame is nat but wretched and fickle...glorie and fame in this worlde is nat but hyndrynge of glorye in tyme commynge" (Usk 113). The community evaluation stymies the individual quest for God, for the individual must answer for his actions alone. Usk, therefore, uses love as an intermediary between God and man. He thereby joylessly removes the agents subjecting the individual. One clearly recognises that Usk distinguishes through imprisonment that individualism as a way to God rather than a strike against the state. If the Church and State as political entities were correct in asserting their possession of the keys to heaven, he could never reach God. He is a criminal. However, he accepts this position:

I se wel thy soule is not al out of the amased coulde...For in a thoughtful soule (and namely such one as thou arte) wol not yet suche thynges synken. Come of, therefore, and let me sene thy hevy charge that I may the lyghtlyer for thy comforte purvey. (Usk 73)

Offering his problematic self to divine love, the protagonist relinquishes his self to God, balancing the uncertainty of his individualism with God's stability. This move mitigates Church censure against the moral issue, involving individual opposition to them.

Usk tries to explicate all of these ideas at the beginning and conclusion of the

Testament. Usk sets the stage for his drama:

And although this boke be lytel thankeworthy for the leudnesse in travaile, yet suche writynges exciten men to thilke thynges that ben necessarie...Forsothe the mostsoverayne and final perfection of man is in knowing of a soothe, withouten any entent disceyvable and in love of one very God that is inchaungeable; that is, to knowe and love his creatour. (49-50)

His *Testament* deals with problematic junctures, illustrating the individual's need to reach God in his own prison. Love becomes a method to enter community, God's community in heaven. Usk states his hope that every reader will understand this and reiterates at the end:

Also I praye that every man parfytly mowe knowe thorowe what intencion of herte this trefyse have I drawe. Howe was it that syghtful Manna in deserte to chyldren of Israel was spirytual meate. Bodily also it was, for mennes bodies it norissheth... Ryght so a jewel betokeneth a gemme, and that is a stone vertuouous or els a perle. Margarite, a woman betokeneth grace, lernyng, or wisdom of God, or els holy church. (Usk 304-305)

Love in its various forms—grace, learning, wisdom of God, or the holy Church—pushes man to God. The various forms prompt individualism, permitting personal redemptions—something Christianity originally promised.

Grappling with these ideas in the political environment was arduous, even when ignoring the literary difficulties. Nevertheless, Usk manoeuvres allegory into an external world, providing a new layer to the problematics of the individual. In the end, Usk continues the task of negotiating subjectivity—as do the *Gawain* poet and Deschamps. The problematics remain in spite of these efforts; nevertheless, the fifteenth-century enters the dialectic, proposing problems encountered in subjectivity while offering few—if any—solutions.

¹ This has led some scholars to call the *Morte* an anti-romance, because, according to Haidu (*Subject* 96), “the problematics of individual subjectivation...defines the moment of romance.” This appears in the absence of a *knight-errant* who journeys into the world to prove himself worthy of his lady's love. Thus, the questions of individual subjectivity involved in this adventure are absent as well.

² Some claim Arthur's internal flaws create the breakdown at the end of the poem. Others call the poem a tragedy in the vein of *Beowulf*, a shame culture breakdown with the fall of the King.

³ The inability of the body to maintain the historical practices of chivalry and love is a development Guillaume Machaut makes in France. The antecedent bodily destruction, seen in Gawain, indicates the breakdown was inherent in much of society, not a development of the courtly lyric.

⁴ In "Violence, Perspective, and Postmodern Historiography in *Raoul de Cambrai*", Peter Haidu explicates the association between an act of physical violence and an attack on a person's identity.

⁵ The Middle English dialect, North West Midland, limits the reading of the text to scholars, who possess some skill in Middle English.

⁶ Typically scholars interpret this journey to be one of Gawain proceeding into the natural world to find it already present within himself. "The great green horse," William F. Woods says, "and rider who invade Arthur's haven of polite cheer are icons of a world out-of-doors and a journey inward" (209). Woods advocates a vision of Gawain as a particular vision of medieval subjectivity. He cites Spearing, who says, "Gawain is a thoroughly self-conscious and articulated hero...[whose] self-consciousness is used at crucial points in the poem to throw a clear light upon his feelings and motives" (173). David Aers in *Community, Gender, and Individual Identity* proposes that the courtly world becomes a setting for internal individuality rather than a conglomeration of identities. These assertions compel Woods to see in *Sir Gawain* the "prototype of late-medieval individuality" (226). Confirming this theory, Anthony Law, in *Aspects of Subjectivity*, provides an analysis of *Sir Gawain* in his study of internality.

⁷ *Sir Gawain*, thus, differs from the *Morte* in its portraits of people. The *Morte* shows people with an incongruence between external and internal. *Sir Gawain* illustrates a singular person and his inability to separate external and internal.

⁸ Large studies on Machaut have been conducted, including William Calin's *A Poet at the Fountain: Essays on the Narrative Verse of Guillaume de Machaut* and Jacqueline Cerguilini's *'Un engin si subtil': Guillaume de Machaut et l'écriture au XIVe siècle*.

⁹ William Calin says, "Machaut helped launch in France and in England a mode of narrative that treated questions of *fin' amor*" and his influence is due to his "complex structural modulation of the I-narrative, in the creation of the inept, blundering lover as a hero, and in the realm of artistic self-consciousness" (198). Confirming this, Daniel Poirion (521) says, "Machaut and his disciples readily describe the timid lover, hesitant to declare himself". This appears in *Le Voir Dire*, where "...although the Narrator refers more than once to Tristan, Lancelot, and Arthur...he himself proves to be a magnificent coward" (Calin 220).

¹⁰ This methodology exerted a strong influence on Christine de Pizan's writing. She will use the *I* to explore marginalized sectors of society in a manner that Deschamps cannot.

¹¹ The *I* is not particularly liberating in that it possesses much of the typical medieval misogynist hegemony. It is however an important movement. Deschamps giving of a voice to a marginalized *I* prefigures Christine de Pisan celebration of this in her poetry.

¹² For more information on *auctorship*, see: Gwendolyn A. Morgan's *The Invention of False Medieval Authorities as a Literary Device in Popular Fiction* or Alastair Minnis's *Medieval Theory of Authorship*

¹³ All translations of the text are provided in the dual-language edition *Eustache Deschamps: Selected Poems*, translated by David Curzon and Jeffrey Fiskin.

¹⁴ Deschamps finds acquiescing to the conception of love's internality difficult. The derisive treatment of love precepts the style Malory will use in *Le Morte d'Arthur*.

¹⁵ Hoccleve takes much the same idea; only he displays it from poverty's perspective.

¹⁶ If by speaking one is about to sin, silence is the correct course of action.

¹⁷ William Calin, in the expansive study *The French Tradition and the Literature of Medieval England*, traces several specific influences and trends on Chaucer beginning in Anglo-Norman literature, passing through French continental literature, and ending in the late medieval English literature.

¹⁸ In treating Chaucerian individuality, Diane Stielstra's *The Portrayal of Consciousness in Medieval Romance* studies the particularly groundbreaking depiction of consciousness found in *Troilus and Criseyda*, specifically in the portrayal of Criseyda. Similarly, Lee Patterson in *Chaucer and the Subject of HI's story* explores the interaction of psychological inwardness and social character in the *Canterbury Tales*.

¹⁹ If one continues along Valency's analysis, the influence of Dante and the *dolce stil* clearly migrated to England through France.

²⁰ For a study of how Usk and other English writers develop allegory, see C.S. Lewis's *The Allegory of Love*.

THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY 1400-1499

In the years before the Renaissance spread to the North, subjectivity dominated texts. Naturally, the question of self and subject is complex, but the fifteenth century offers few examples of texts that try to resolve the complexities. Instead, the authors use literary individualism to explore the problems that develop around it. Its writers, heirs to the preceding century's practises, provide more pronounced interpretations of internality by citing the specific elements that made them different, which in turn enhances the emotional experience of the poems. The I-narrative continues to encapsulate internality, and the century's writers employ it in a personalised way: mixed gendering, pseudo-autobiography, the voice of Other, disruption of self, and selective ignorance. This personalisation creeps into the texts in place of older models, enlarging the problematics of individualism.

The Front Runners: Hoccleve and Pisan

In England, the works of Chaucer and Gower continue to influence the writers in the subsequent generation, including the professed followers of Chaucer: Thomas Hoccleve and John Lydgate. Hoccleve explores the melancholy that isolation from the community brings. Rather than offering this isolation as a progressive element as Usk did, he offers few absolute philosophical remedies to the problem. They simply exist. Instead, he spends his time investigating the various manifestations of internality and its consequences. As in Usk, the *I* tells a story, but the emphasis revolves around the importance of perspective: an *I*.¹ For Hoccleve, the I-narrative is rhetorical, a tool rather

than an authority. In other words, the *I* is not necessarily autobiographical simply because it offers personal information and speaks from first person perspective.² The *I*-narrative in Hoccleve's text is not historically factual but pseudo-autobiographical. The rise in popularity of this type of text offers proof that the individual was, in the very least, a popular literary topic. Thus, it possesses little exiguous personal identifiers, concerning itself with a specific social identity—an individual. This identity is superfluous if one knows it is an individual, because the personalised *I* enhances the melancholy central to Hoccleve.

At the debut of the *Regement of Princes*, Hoccleve provides this type of *I*-narrative, shaping his discourse before launching into his explanation of princely conduct. He embodies the conflicted self: "My tremlyng hert so grete gastenesse hadde/ That my spirites were of my lyfe sadde" (O'Donoghue 73). The trembling heart reflects an internal tremor, equivalent to sadness in his soul. The delineation between Hoccleve and Usk's melancholy is in their differing perspectives on the purposes of internality and love. Usk's internality was a positive development, leading to God. Hoccleve, although he does not necessarily contradict this, plunges into the morose. No saviour comes to him. Hence, he laments and does not celebrate the internality—which as one progresses towards the Renaissance seems to become more positively associated with isolation.³

The revolutionary quality of Hoccleve's *Regement* resides in its acknowledgment of the differences between internality and externality, imbuing this incongruence with a purpose. Hoccleve argues a good person would not waffle over his action, shifting away from Deschamps's contention of exteriority. Conviction and intention are the moral

standard of Hocceve. His claim is that inner self ought to equal external actions. Therefore, he forefronts individuality, although it might threaten the political or social worldview. For Hocceve, the moral problem is negotiating the fluctuations in internality. Hence, he skips validating individuality, accepting its inevitability, and proceeds to considering its effect—uncertainty. This is his problem. One sees it in the fact that a new apprehension burdens him: “And thus, unsekyr of my smale lyflode,/ Thought layde on me full many a hevy lode” (O’Donoghue 74). The heavy responsibility comes from the uprooting of social order that his individuality produces. Internal ethics negate social standards. These social standards have not yet recentred around the ideas of individualism, which means that the older political and social frameworks are worthless as moral guidelines. Thus, he reintroduces a discourse on how to run a proper government.⁴ As long as the world’s organisation remains antiquated, subjectivity will persist in conflict. In this respect, Hocceve proposes social and political change to ameliorate the problems.

Exploring this idea, he claims, “Thes worldes stormy wawes in my mynde,/ I sye well povert was exclusion/ Of all welfare reyngnyng in mankynde” (O’Donoghue 74). The allegorical picture of his mind differs from previous treatment; although some scholars have tried to illustrate how poverty and thinking of poverty differ, such as C.S. Lewis who claims that a distinction exists “between writing about one’s poverty and writing about the state of mind which reflection on one’s poverty produces” (*Allegory* 238), similarities between this poverty and other states—to which other writers refer—do exist. His mindset towards poverty parallels the mindset towards wealth seen in

Deschamps. Wealth demoralises the present through greed, a covetous desire. Although sympathetic people wish to excuse the covetousness of the poor, poverty breeds the exact same regard for the present—the love of now without regard to the future—and sin that greed does. Poverty differs from greed in that the process of reflecting on one’s state sometimes creates internal justification, believing his crime is not immoral. But, does this make the one socially justifiable? This is the problem Hoccleve considers in his mind.

Through language, he transmutes the interiority into reality, reversing the allegorical dream. Dreams come during sleep, hence the *Rose* uses dream to stage an interior world.⁵ Hoccleve inverts this, evoking insomnia as a means of capturing conflicted internality. The inability to enter the inner world breeds anxiety:

Thys vlke nyght, I walwed to and fro,
 Sekyng reste. But certeynly sche
 Apperyd not, for thought, my cruel fo,
 Hadde chased her and slepe away fro me. (O’Donoghue 75)

The relationship creates the gloomy attitude. One cannot gain clarity of mind because of thought; thus, he personifies thought, making it the antagonist. The *I* cannot sleep, i.e. dream, where the world would take on a transparent hue, allowing the *I* to recognise his problem clearly. By inhibiting this process, insomnia magnifies waffling, ambiguity, and uncertainty. This precipitates a negative view of internality: “Whoso that thoughty is, is wo-bygan...Full wo is hym that in suche thought is falle” (O’Donoghue 75). Thoughts that rapidly pass through his head, preventing sleep, are burdensome and depressing. However, the dominance of the negative aspects is seemingly mitigated by extensive thought. The sleepless nights sanction a concentrated study of his interiority’s ambiguity,

which leads to the production of his codes of princely conduct. Interiority is, therefore, a necessary problem.⁶

In *Thomas Hoccleve's Complaint*, he reworks this notion. The vision of the world seen by a mutable self is transient, ephemeral: "For freisshly broughte it to my remembraunce/ That stablenesse in this worlde is ther noon/ Ther is no thing but chaunge and variaunce" (O'Donoghue 19). The individuation renders perspective the centrepiece of poetry. Wealth, again, is central to this oscillation. Hoccleve's tone manifests rising interiority, highlighting the absurdity of exteriority. Like Usk, he lampoons the importance of wealth. Having already shown poverty negatively, his treatment of wealth equally disrupts externality, alternating between its lesser aspects and championing internal undulation.

The pinnacle of individualism remains problematic, revivifying insomnia:

Sighynge sore as I in my bed lay
For this and other thoughtis wiche many a day
Byforne I tooke, sleep cam noon in myn ye
So vexed me the thoughtful maladie. (O'Donoghue 19)

In this section, the *I* recalls a historical—albeit personal—time when this conflict did not manifest, differentiating the present from the past and intermingling introspection and reminiscence. Nonetheless, *I* cannot signal the moment of demarcation; the matter of importance is the present's possession of the problem:

My wit and I have bene of suche accord
As we were or the alteracioun
of it was. But, by my savacioun,
Sith that time have I be sore sette on fire
And lyved in greet turment and martire (O'Donoghue 20-21)

The ignition of ‘fire’ inside of the *I* captures internality’s duplicity perfectly.⁷ It is harmful, isolating the individual and robbing actions of their value, and helpful, allowing the individual to reach God:

But thus thow shuldist thinke in thin herte
 And seie: “To thee, lorde god, I have agilte
 So sore, I moot, for myn offensis, smerte
 As I am worthi. O lorde, I am spilte
 But thou to me thi mercy graunte wilte.
 I am ful sure; thou maist it not denie.
 Lorde, I me repente, and I the mercy crie. (O’Donoghue 30)

Hence, the purpose of individuality is moral action. Because this is only possible if man is good and can choose good, this appears to be an idealistic and humanist move.⁸ The disjunction between community and individual provides Hoccleve with his philosophical treatment—not solution—of interiority. The internal disruption of social order is an axiom of humanity for him; thus, rather than trying to cure this, he uses it, claiming vacillation of intent prepares the soul for God’s grace. The antidote for the internal split is a turn to God, in spite of the waffling. Hoccleve provides no stabilising element and, hence, the painful expression of the conflict. Nevertheless, his use of subjectivity without resolution, accepting the disruption as part of reality and not an equation to be solved, illustrates a problematic attitude from the community standpoint. The ethics of the community cannot surround problems; ethics need a standardised format.

The unresolved problematic self further develops in the writing of Christine de Pisan. In each of her texts, Christine operates in vague spaces in the subjectivity of the times, using her narrative to study self- versus imposed-identity. In this, she can use the community perceptions to rise in power and, then, attack them. Otherwise, her assault

would be ignored or discarded. The reason, of course, is her gender.⁹ Her self-textualisation utilises the *I* in a rhetorical sense and negotiates the boundaries of her gender. In her position as a professional writer, gender plays a significant role, but to concentrate only on her gender ignores her voicing of ‘other’ *I*’s, limiting any analysis in an exclusionary manner. Inspiration was a luxury which Christine could not afford, since she needed to write continually in order to assure her family’s survival. Thus, her continuous writing exploits marginalized *I* positions and ‘other’ *I*’s. Her authority (to write) capitalises on the authority of the *I*, rupturing the subjugation of gender in the process. However, by obviously breaking *I*’s power, she boldly navigates a precarious position.

The necessity of including her gender stems from the misogynist tenor of the Middle Ages, which dictated that women were subservient to men. This is not contradictory, because for Christine to enter the intellectual arena she needed some authority. She found it in the *I*, the personalised experience, and she flaunts this endorsement at the opening of her poems: “moi, Christine” and “Je, Christine.” While her gender augments the fissure, it merely echoes the social complications presented in other writers. As in Hoccleve, these *I*’s are personalised social constructions, rhetorically unfolded for authority. She includes her gender only when she desires to include it, possessing no power without the rhetorical-*I*, but under no obligation to make it feminine. Thus, she consistently problematises her tool, straying from typical manifestations and producing textual incongruities. This is a quintessential character of her *je*: confirming or opposing identity, asserting and rejecting femininity, and, thereby, disrupting

conceptions of subjection practised in her culture. She, however, did not always take this disjunctive position.

Christine accepted her marginalized position for a time, which underlines her acute awareness of her gender and its social limitations: “I relied more on the judgment of others than on what I myself felt and knew” (Blumenfeld-Kosinski 120). Her claim appears comparable to the subjectivity in the *Carmina Burana*. Nevertheless, the conclusion differentiates the two texts. The *Carmina* willingly submits to the Church, while Christine refuses. By placing her submission to other’s judgment in the past, she emphasises the fact that she follows her judgment at present. Thus, she revokes all cultural hegemony that she does not understand. She realises that this “Knowledge of reality is inadequate to counter the totalising negative judgment of culture’s dominant ideology” (Haidu, *Subject* 309). Nonetheless, she will combat it. If she wishes for freedom, she must earn it or manipulate the rules she knows. Because she was educated in the court, she knew of the poetic practises of the time; her acquaintance with these techniques, such as the *I*, provided Christine with the tool for combating the ‘totalising negative judgement.’ By proclaiming the *I*, Christine celebrates her individualism, rebels against misogynist dictums, and bolsters her gender.¹⁰

Christine’s problematisation of these issues is illustrated by her inversion of the *I*’s gender, such as in *Livre de la Mutacion de Fortune*:

I was the son of a noble and renowned
Man, who was called a philosopher. (Blumenfeld-Kosinski 91)

The rhetorical *I* immediately consumes the poet’s gender in its inscription; reintroducing gender forces it into the reader’s conscience.¹¹ Hence, Christine’s male gendered *I* is an

essential development of the dialectic of subjectivity during the Middle Ages. The *I* estranges the poet from the text, removing the *I*'s original authority from poetic practice. This *I* becomes purely mimetic in value, isolating the poet from the text and the text from the poet. Christine destroys the link between the poet and the earlier poetic *I*, permitting female entry into previously restricted scholarly arenas. Heretofore, females were typically isolated from particular types of writing because they were never allowed to experience anything except love and wooing. In place of this older power, Christine achieves power rhetorically, which highlights her gender as a poet. She thereby emphasises the importance of the feminine perspective in her poetry, an approach that she was the first to employ.

Christine's circumstances nonetheless necessitated certain frustrating tasks. She often wrote poems that displeased her in order to survive. In *Cent ballads d'amant et de dame*, Christine practices other/self narrative, encapsulating three specific identities: poet, lady, and lover. At the debut, the poet does not want to write the poem:

Although at the present time I had neither the
 Intention nor thought to write love poems—

 The command of a person who should be
 Agreeable to everyone I have undertaken to
 Write of a lover and his lady together... (Blumenfeld-Kosinski 217)

The poet's disenchantment with courtly love appears without any justification other than her wish to write on other subjects. However, the desire to write on other topics, masculine subjects, is a possibility, reinforced by the *I*'s separation from thought and internality. In this manner, the prologue destabilises the interlocutors in the remaining poems. They lose their power by not having experience on which to fall back; the poems

are a woman's fantasy.¹² Christine must therefore bridge this gap using rhetorical authority. Although these personae are isolated, the invasion of the poet's *I* into each ameliorates the problematics of the separation from experience. The disturbance aids the poems because the poet's *I* invades the other *I*'s. The poet's *I*, thereby, plays its interiority in the love and the lady, staging real intention in a false mimesis.

The love, in the poems, is weak; but the conflict over subjection is astute and central to individualism. The first love poem takes the perspective of the lover, a male voice:

I can no longer hide from you the great love
 ...I have carried within me for a long
 time, without saying anything or complaining. (Blumenfeld-Kosinski 220)

The lover's address is not problematic; there is no volatility, no insomnia, and no uncertainty. Nonetheless, the lover remembers these interior dialectics, indicating that internal conflict exists. This internality forces him to speak: "I am forced to speak—though I am in great/ fear—..." (Blumenfeld-Kosinski 220). In this, Christine's imitation of love's power oppresses the lover, yet the *mise en abyme* is sure, presenting no doubt at the moment. In these alterations of the *I*, Christine delves into problematics, indicating no intention of subjecting herself. Her refusal to be intellectually and literarily subject, her breaking of boundaries, serves as a *dénouement* for the medieval writer because it becomes increasingly difficult to declare late fifteenth century writers as medieval, in a pure sense.

In the End: Villon and Malory

Further developments are seen in the writing of the two infamous poet-criminals of the fifteenth-century: François Villon and Thomas Malory. Each writer takes a particular stance on subjectivity, choosing either the individual or the community as superior. On the northern side of the channel, Malory is trying to recapture what he perceives as a troubling loss for humanity after the death of Henry V: chivalric code. In France, Villon writes poetry about the dark, urban life of Paris. His brooding poetry incorporates many of the previous developments, increasingly playing with problematics of self. Although each writer possesses his own style, recalling courtly literature or propelling the *I* narrative into pure pessimism, both are bound in interiority and the problems therein.

In Villon's poetry, the self—conflicted over his internality—bursts from the page. A cyclical nature emerges in which he yields mockingly to the philosophical solutions offered by the thinkers of his day. The process of confirming and denying plays into the circularity of the era:

[the] coiling of the clock, [the] coiling of Fortune, the dance of death, the circle—that one thinks of in the lyric forms, in the rondeau in particular—haunts the thoughts and poetry of the fourteenth- and fifteenth-century in that it is a sign of ambiguity, movement and immobility all in time, saying time and space, the cosmos, God. (Cerquiglini, “nouveau” 279)¹³

This stylistic paradox mirrors that of the individual. The circle has no ability to produce binary opposition, relating points, instead, through arcs. This aids the characteristics of Villon's poetry: ambiguity, trickery, subversion, and chicanery. Thus, he “duplicates interiority...writing *je* founded on discontinuity...mak[ing] echoes in the tension in

which it works...tell[ing] his report to the memories in its passionate desire for leaving a trace” (Cerquiglini-Toulet 1).¹⁴ The ultimate goal of the trace is to immortalise his self, which influences his choice of genre: testaments —“a field for affirmation of the individual...a fiction of the self” (Cerquiglini-Toulet 5).¹⁵ Hence, Villon’s style preserves a highly individual self, perpetually unstable. His setting in an urban environment enhances the ties to the subjective dilemma.¹⁶

In the *Lais*, his sardonic and pessimistic attitude develops a gloomy individuality, distinguishing the fallacies of the precarious acceptance of its existence by those in power. The opening strophe establishes this project:

Qu’on doit ses euvres conseiller,
Comme Vegèce le racompte
(Saige Rommain, grant conseiller),
Qu’autrement on se mescompte... (Villon 18)

(That one ought to have counsel on one’s works / As Vegèce recounts himself/ (Wise Roman, great counsellor), / Or else one might miscalculate them...)

The *je* experiences a paradoxical circularity, trapped between old and new order.¹⁷ The act of confession was an integral part of the medieval European hegemony. In Villon’s ‘lip service’ to hegemony, he problematises the idea before its completion. The final line nullifies confession, rejecting it on the basis of individualism. Requiring counsel, or confession, signals a devaluation of the individual’s ability to judge his actions. This recalls Deschamps’s logic that interiority becomes unstable against objective reality. Following this, all individuals’ internality disintegrates, compromising counsel—since it only adds another invalidated subject. Alternatively, if individualism is valid, counsel

turns out to be superfluous; the individual has no need of others. Villon's manipulation of this problem is highlighted by the ellipses, lurking portentously at the end.

The punctuation does not simply preserve the rhyme scheme by eliding words. In this instance, the rhyme's end before the thought's conclusion illustrates an intentional stop; this was planned. Approaching a point of contradiction—one which would be heretical—Villon stops, never losing control of the poem. His disruption of his thought circumvents the dangerous situation of assaulting society's values directly, directing attention towards the antithesis and leaving it unspoken. His play with these ideals has consequences on both sides. Ultimately, he grudgingly accepts his subjection, making it as highly problematic and convoluted as possible with his individuality.

At later points, the *I* narrates his testament, releasing internal emotion in short precise phrasing: “much good it's done” (66), “Fat lot of good that does” (86), “(in my way)” (162), and “From where? The Marne” (166). These comments, asides almost, create the feel that Villon is painting his mind on the page. The stream-of-consciousness commentary disrupts the florid prose, pitting internality against rhetorical expression. In a macrocosm to microcosm relation, social destruction is echoed in linguistic interference, destroying uniformity on multiple levels. In *Balade Villon ou Ballade des contradictions*, Villon (244) cites various conflicts, using the play of words to construct internality's contradictions: “Nothing is sure to me, only the uncertain,/ Nothing obscure except what is all evident;/ No doubt did except in certain things.”¹⁸ The individual's isolation and hesitancy is the sole stability, forefronting nothing except problems:

(Je ne suys homme sans deffault
 Ne qu'aulture d'assier ne d'estain;
 Vivre aux humains est incertain
 Et après mort n'y a relaiz) – (Villon 22)

(I am not a man without defects/ no more than the next, of steel nor bronze;/ To live, to humans, is uncertain/ and after death there is no release)

He contrasts errors, waffling, and sin—the marks of humanity—with metals. This comparison is interesting because of metal use in the High Middle Ages. Metal was necessary and practical; it served a purpose. Thus, while the malleability of interiority juxtaposes the sturdiness of metal, a larger critique is the impracticality of internality that appears when one considers the problems in life.

Other authors note the tremor in the self, but Villon's (38) unique staging manipulates it in interesting ways:

L'entendement comme lié.
 Lors je sentis dame Memoire
 Reprendre et mettre en son aumoire
 Ses especes collateralles,
 Oppinative faulce et voire,
 Et aultres intellectualles,

(My mind being as it were unfree/ Then I sense Dame Memory/ Retrieve and put in her armoire/ The species collateral to her/ judgment false and true/ and other workings of intellect)

Curiously, Memory inhibits the internal faculties, stymieing judgement. The denial of judgment, good and bad, inverts the purpose of internalisation argued in previous authors.

Here, clarity is obscured; memory functions to stop idealised thought. In order to survive, ethics often had to be discarded in urban environments where starvation was prevalent. While one pondered the ethics of stealing, starvation could destroy him. In these circumstances, memory of the dangers could conceal ethics, which blinded the

person to morality. Villon does not condemn this movement, and in fact, he advocates this pragmatism over ethical idealism.

Villon, as a resident of the underbelly of Paris, lived a hard life. Passing some years in prison influenced his tone and attitude, especially considering the stark difference he perceived between his life and the lives of those in abbeys. If one wishes to live on Paris's streets, a moral conscience is negative. In *Le Grand Testament*, Villon (70) addresses moralists, who would pass judgment upon the vermin of Paris:

Povreté, chagrine, doulente,
Tousjours, despitueuse et rebelle,
Dit quelque parole cuisante—
S'elle n'ose, si le pense elle.

(Poverty, Chagrin, Sadness,/ Always, disputatious and rebellious,/ speak some cutting words—/ if they dare, if they think it)

He observes them holding their tongues, and since he knows they think in spite of their silence, he teases them. His ridicule focuses on internality. Caught between individuality (that desires to speak) and moral law (that holds their tongues), they willingly increase this conflict, according to Villon. The greater the emotion is, the more they desire to speak, the more they come into conflict with law. On the other hand, Villon (86) is not trapped; he freely ponders his life in the gutter, saying, “What remains to me? Shame and sin.”¹⁹ His actions do not matter because he moves in a world of pragmatic individualism, declaring “that all [his] maladies, [he has] forgotten” (Villon 86).²⁰ Memory, thus, is a tool for salvation—at least in this world. In the streets, death comes quickly to a man with a pristine and never forgetful conscience. Hence, Villon's internal conscience is not ideal, but realistic.

Similar to previous writers, Villon considers the role of internality, recognising its impact in him. Although sin warrants death, God does not wish it, providing internality as a means to redemption:

Combien qu'en pechié soye mort,
Dieu vit, et sa misericorde,
Se conscience me remort,
Par sa grace pardon m'acorde. (Villon 58)

(How much then in sin I am dead,/ God lives, and my misery/ if my conscience wakes remorse in me/ Accords me pardon through His Grace)

Although, initially, his logic appears to follow Usk, Villon's interference with the idea occurs on several levels. He shows internality's disruption of externality and follows by disrupting internality; he enjoys posing and living problems. He continues to live sinfully, without recourse, and boldly asserts that only his conscience awakens the grace of God; his actions are not a moral issue. His internality, however, is by no means assured. He challenges it with 'Se' (if), questioning its reality. If it did work—as some said it did—he would be saved. All of this takes on a rhetorical play.²¹ Solving these problems does not interest Villon:

Je ne suis juge, ne commis
Pour pugnir n'assouldre meffait :
De tous suis le plus imparfait. (Villon 70)

(I'm not a judge, nor am I charged/ to punish or absolve misdeeds./ I'm the least perfect one of all.)

He raises his imperfection, his individual choice to oppose law, to the centre of the text, displaying it confidently. This problematic self is Villon's legacy, which he does not wish to perfect; this might alter his eternal presence. To this point, he makes the strongest stroke towards asserting individuality over community.

As was Villon, Sir Thomas Malory was a criminal, and yet the dubiousness of his character does not tarnish his literary achievement. In fact, the popularity of Caxton's printing of Malory, titled *Le Morte d'Arthur*, resists Eugène Vinaver's re-titling of the works, *The Works of Sir Thomas Malory*, in spite of its acumen, even in scholarly communities.²² Thus, continuity plays a substantial role in continuing scholarship, engaging mental faculties in an outdated practice. Hence, a recent turn from this vein of scholarship aids the study of Malory in other aspects, such as internality. Ironically, Malory's collection contains several manifestations of the growing problems relating to subjectivity, despite its dedication to an older, simpler tradition.

Le Morte resembles a typical 'romance': knights take adventures, individuals duel, and so forth. Adhering to the ideals of courtly love—with only minor deviations—provides Malory's stories with a nostalgic flavour. In fact, it is possible to argue that Malory's *Le Morte* exudes no problematic individualism. It acknowledges its backwards gaze, desiring to recapture May and, thereby, avoid the postmodern dilemma. This escapism is fictitious because, in Malory's idyllic past, he still negotiates this dialectic:

Therefore, lyke as May moneth flowryth and floryshyth in every mannes gardyne, so in lyke wyse lat every man of worship florysh hys herte in thys world: firste unto God, and nexte unto the joy of them that he promised hys feythe unto...But firste reserve the honoure to God, and secundely thy quarell must com of thy lady. And such love I calle vertuose love. (Vinaver 1119)

In Malory, the dichotomy of internal and external (garden and world) exists, but he advocates a traditional internality similar to *Sir Gawain*. This archaic relationship counteracts some developments. In "The Knight," love goes first to God and, only when God is loved, proceeds to earthly love. This explanation of love corresponds to

Hoccleve's treatment; yet, Villon's inversion of Usk's structure is a means of shedding uncertainty. Stability of human love reflects God's consistency. Thus, preserving love's proper order necessarily negates waffling interiority in favour of traditional lovers and ladies.

Malory confirms his superiority, reiterating the failures of his contemporaries:

But nowadayes men can nat love sevensnyght but they muste have all their desires. That love may nat endure by reson, for where they bethe sone accorded and hasty, heete sone keelyth. And right so faryth the love nowadayes, sone hote sone colde. Thys ys no stabylyté. But the olde love was nat so. (Vinaver 1119-20)

The instability is irksome, annihilating the 'stabylyté,' which courtly love maintained through performance. The threat of rising individualism, its disrupting presence, increases the problems of subjectivity because while the individual remains politically subservient, he also gets more frustrated by his compliance. If every emotion, feeling, and thought is followed with impunity, love cannot endure. Hence, Malory's critique of earlier writers rests on the avoidance of solutions. In contrast, he inscribes solutions throughout his text, hoping that his stories will inspire the rebirth of proper sentiment.

Manoeuvring against the trend of examining the present time in his century, Malory recaptures the idyllic past, displaying its desirable traits as best he can.²³ In "The Knight of the Cart," Mellyagaunte descends upon Guinevere and her knight to capture them. Rather than discussing the finer point of the moral issue, Guinevere races straight to the shame, "Traytoure knyght...Wolt thou shame thyself? Bethynke the how thou art a kyngis sonne and a knight of the Table Rounde...Thou shamyst all knyghthode and thyselffe and me" (Vinaver 1122). If we return to Dodds's distinction between shame

and guilt, Malory, here, astutely describes what he believes to be a culture of shame. Guilt is an interior emotion, a failure of will. Mellyagaunte possesses no failure of will. The crimes bear their own consequences; thus, guilt and sin never enter Guinevere's remarks. Instead, shame does. The action, not the intention, creates the problem. The picture of chivalry predates the influx of internality or its dominance. However, this common scholarly assertion disintegrates when Lancelot encounters the cart.

The story of the knight and his cart traditionally offers a treatment of interiority because the knight must choose how to conduct himself. In Chrétien de Troyes's *Le Chevalier de la Charrette*, Lancelot hesitates before getting onto the wagon. (Should a knight dishonour himself for a lady?) Guinevere hears of this hesitancy, this quiver in him, and punishes him for it. This rejection and subjection of the knight because of his internal conflict unfolds in Chrétien's tale. In Malory, the scene passes differently. Lancelot demands transportation to the castle, and after the driver refuses him, he "lepe to hym and gaff hym backwarde with hys gauntelet a reremayne, that he felle to the erthe starke dede" (Vinaver 1126). The second worker submits without contesting Sir Lancelot.

Two differences that appear to illustrate Malory's treatment of interiority are the conviction and judgment. First, the uncertainty of Lancelot disappears, removing the display of internal vacillation. Therefore, Malory wished to show that Lancelot's actions are staunchly certain and embody the ideal of stability. Second, his action is clearly not externally evaluated. After being refused, he kills the workman, who was following his duty. From an external ethic, Lancelot has killed a man, robbed a lord, stopped the

activities of a household, and so forth. His actions bring heavy consequences. However, Malory's avoidance stems from his treatment of the internality, not from his evasion of the topic. The stability is the first clue. In addition, Malory does not deny internality; he merely detests its oscillation. Thus, Malory paints Lancelot's justification based on his interior evaluation and displays it in such a manner that it appears to be stable. One cannot fail to note the problematics of this position; nevertheless, for Malory, this is more appealing than Villon's disruption.

Therefore, internality remains, despite conjecture against it. A psychological reading of the balcony scene between Guinivere and Lancelot also illustrates how this internality crept into Malory's work in spite of his best efforts:

Than sir Launcelot toke hys swerde in hys honed and prevaly wente to the place where he had spyed a ladder toforehande, and that he toke undir hys arme, and bare hit thorow the gardyne and sette hit up to the window. And anone the queen was there redy to mete hym. (Vinaver 1131)

Lancelot climbs the ladder to the queen, who is already waiting for him. His psychological placement below her reflects the tradition of courtly love. He rips the bars off her window—a show of his virility—and proceeds into her room to sleep with her. This display of strength is a necessary element to the story, a requisite task for entrance: “Than shall I prove my might...for youre love” (Vinaver 1131). Michel Zink (*Invention* 43) explains that poets produce credible love by illustrating that it is “impervious to the risks and happenstance of the external world.” In Malory's case, this meant Lancelot needed to perform an external feat. Thus, the episode conjures images from the courtly world; in addition, a psychological reading of the garden paints a dynamic individualism working within the scene as Lancelot passes through the garden to his lady.

The movement of the scene through the garden marks the movement through internality. In Malory's system, externality displays the internal. By moving Lancelot into and out of a garden, Malory mimics the act of contemplation, utilising older styles of illustration. In addition, Lancelot enters and exits the garden without a prolonged stay, returning to Malory's ideas about uncertainty. Lancelot's discovery of a ladder inside the garden is essential, indicating that the lover finds the tool to reach his lady inside himself. This tool allows him to perform the feat that will win his lady, and without it, he would fail. Hence, Malory requires—as Zink indicates—that Lancelot move into the external world, bringing his internal necessities to bear. Otherwise, internality is worthless.

Malory thereby exhibits internality, reflecting the movement towards an internalised conscience. In the midst of this growth and expansion of the individual, some paths did not work. Others created new methods. Culture accepted and rejected the developments in much the same manner. However, the development of subjectivity remains in all the texts. Its legacy trickles to the present. At the end of the medieval period—which I mark here—'modern' individuality (in the sense of modernist) had not yet appeared because of the attitude of subjectivity the medieval poets possessed. Nonetheless, the treatment of subjectivity in the medieval text parallels the treatment offered by postmodernist and postmodern theory as described by Habermas. Thus, the postmodern and the medieval provide excellent insights into each other's workings.

¹ The poetic conventions, which Calin believes come from the study of Old French literature, do not obliterate the personal quality of the narrative.

² William Calin (400) confirms, "The notion that Hoccleve's inner self gives rise to, and in some way creates, the poetic texts that recount the inner self is a tribute to the author's

skill at creating a fictional universe justifying itself through illusion of truth and authenticity.”

³ This is opposed to isolation in Old English texts, such as *The Wanderer*.

⁴ Although I know of no study thus far on the topic, an investigation of the rising popularity of political treatise addressed to King, Princes, et cetera, ought to reflect the internalisation appearing in this study because Prince’s not longer could merely act according to law (as the makers of law they could alter them to their advantage); instead, they had to learn to follow intentions rather than the law.

⁵ Even if that dream is recounted years later.

⁶ Hoccleve’s negotiation of this appears in the character of the Old Man. In this experience, man encountered the same problems as the narrator and, after years of toil, managed to overcome the difficulties internality presented. Thus, the narrator participates in a transitioning of knowledge through generations.

⁷ In *Le poète et le prince*, Poirion asserts the ability of fire to capture the problems of individualism. Fire’s duplicity reflects the nature of individuality.

⁸ The humanism of this move rests on the notion of man’s nature. The Christian faith’s idea of original sin meant that man’s evil nature prevented him from reaching God; hence, the need for Jesus. Humanism, on the other hand, supported man’s good nature. This is reflected in the idea that the individual internally finds God and does not need the Church’s dictation of morals.

⁹ Peter Haidu (*Subject*, 304) addresses these revolutionary qualities of her work, saying, “She stages the first translinguistic identitarian debate to attack patriarchal misogyny, aggressively rejecting the ideological devalorization of women and providing women with a counterideology.”

¹⁰ Many of the complex arguments in the *Querrelle de la Rose* can be understood from this perspective.

¹¹ It has been suggested that the humorous appropriation of masculinity concludes her transformation through various stages, in which she sheds her femininity (Cerquiglini, “Stranger” 169). The point, however, is that Christine distances herself from the *I* in order to write about various ideas rather than the typically accepted female topics, such as mystical experience. Nevertheless, I do not wish to misrepresent Madame Cerquiglini’s comments about Christine. Madame Cerquiglini makes a psychological argument about the writer herself, equating her with the stranger; I merely wish to explain that the rhetorical effect of the *I* does not impose her gender, and her use of it in a disruptive manner confirms the postmodern problematics of being subject and interrupting this subjectivity simultaneously.

¹² Machaut’s inept lover and Deschamps’s feminine *I* never declare their fabrication in the poem in which they speak. The move appears to be something new, although whether Christine invents this or not I am unsure.

¹³ Translated from the French, which reads: “Roue de l’horloge, roue de la Fortune, danse de la Mort, le cercle—qu’on pense aux formes lyriques, au rondeau en particulier—hante la pensée et la poésie des XIV^e et XV^e siècles en ce qu’il est signe d’ambiguïté, mouvement et immobilité tout à la fois, disant le temps et l’espace, le cosmos, Dieu.”

¹⁴ Translated from the French, which reads: “met en abîme son type d’écriture, écriture en je fondée sur le discontinu, il fait echo aux tensions qui la traversent, il dit son rapport à la mémoire dans ce désir passionné de laisser une trace.”

¹⁵ Translated from the French, which reads: “un champ d’affirmation de l’individu...une fiction de soi.”

¹⁶ The influence of city on the growth of Europe after the twelfth-century is widely acknowledged. George Duby addresses the issue in *The Early Growth of the European Economy* (1973). Likewise, Herni Pirenne studies city in his seminal study *Medieval Cities: The Origin and the Rivival of Trade* (1927).

¹⁷ The poet’s identity is cemented as François Villon, although one could argue for pseudo-autobiographical writing.

¹⁸ Translated from the French, which reads: “Riens ne m’est seur que la chose incertaine,/ Obscur fors ce qui eset tout evident; / Doubte ne fais fors en chose certaine.” The choice of phrasing parallels Descartes’ future quandary: everything is doubtful.

¹⁹ Translated from the French, which reads: “Que m’en rest’ il? Honte et pechié.”

²⁰ Translated from the French, which reads: “Que tous mes maux je n’oublisse.”

²¹ Here, Villon creates a tavern scene, which appears in Shakespeare’s *Henry IV, Part 1* and *Part 2*, where Falstaff rhetorically manufactures absurdity.

²² The reason Vinaver proposed a title change rested on the unity of the piece. The discovery of a manuscript, predating Caxton’s original printing, indicated that the stories, which Caxton published together, were written separately. Thus, the continuation of titling it *Le Morte d’Arthur* pejoratively enforces a continuity on it. The merits of this title are debatable.

²³ In *The Subjectivity of Literature*, Michel Zink explains that the shift of literature from the past to present vision characterises the rise in subjectivity. Unlike the *chanson de geste*, genres, such as the *dit*, expressed a personal experience of the present and of future experiences. The story of past deeds is not lost, but supplanted in importance.

THE CONTINUING TRADITION

In the medieval era, the conflict of subjectivity shifted as the individual became more important to the ideologies of the waning age. After noting this rise, asserting the origins of individualism in the Renaissance is problematic. However, many scholars continue to make this claim. In *Die Kultur der Renaissance in Italien*, Jakob Burckhardt (98) advocates the view that individualism is only a product of the Renaissance:

In the Middle Ages both sides of human consciousness...lay dreaming or half awake beneath a common veil...Man was conscious of himself only as a member of a race, people, party, family, or corporation—only through some general category. In Italy this veil first melted into air; an objective treatment of the state and of all the things of this world became possible...man became a spiritual individual and recognized himself as such...

Although Burckhardt's observations on the influence of the Italian political environment are astute, he takes what is seemingly a Renaissance perspective. In many aspects, the Renaissance begins the early modern era.¹ In the Renaissance, people for the first time perceived themselves as separated from history, from the dark ages, and trying to connect with an ancient past. However, the Renaissance owed more than simply its political, social, and cultural foundation to the Middle Ages. In a developmental study of literature, the advancements of the Renaissance are not spontaneous. Yet, in terms of the literary individual, the poets of the Renaissance build on medieval conceptions, and by briefly examining two authors, Shakespeare and Rabelais, this becomes quiet clear.

In the sixteenth century, François Rabelais exemplifies the need of interiority, which validates individualism. In *La vie de Gargantua et de Pantagruel*, Rabelais chronicles the life and education of two giants: a father, Gargantua, and a son,

Pantagruel. Each giant is educated in the classics. However, Rabelais shifts this theme in book III, staging several conversations between Pantagruel and his friend Panurge. The two discuss philosophy, education, marriage, and many other cultural topics. Rabelais establishes a dichotomy: on the one hand, Pantagruel, who understands the world, and on the other, Panurge, who seems to lack knowledge.

The book begins at the moment that Pantagruel begins governing Dipsodie. In an imprudent move, “he assigned to Panurge the Lairdship of Salmygondin,” one of the richest provinces (Rabelais 262). Once in command, Panurge “in less than fourteen days...wasted and dilapidated all...” (Rabelais 263). The actions of the wasteful spendthrift are underlined by the fact that he did not spend his earnings in the ‘right way,’ such as building churches and acting on behalf of the community. Interestingly, the responsibility of the individual to the community—the very existence of a ‘correct’ method of conducting oneself—problematizes the individuality Rabelais asserts. Nevertheless, he does not address this. For Rabelais, this failure is a fault of Panurge, because the external manifestation of his blemish destroyed the country. Wishing to improve himself, Panurge undertakes an education at Pantagruel’s hands; however, his inability to absorb the arguments indicates a need for self-discovery in education. Thus, Rabelais communicates not only the importance, but the necessity, of self-learning.

On a basic level, Panurge’s misconceptions appear in his praise of debtors and borrowers, which juxtaposes with Pantagruel’s abhorrence of them. When the questions turn to marriage, Panurge says, “I would be loth to act anything therein without your counsel had thereto” (Rabelais 284). Here, returning to Villon’s *Lais* is prudent. Panurge

seeks counsel for his actions, which Villon declared was the right thing to do before destabilising the conception of counsel. The cultural value shift—from the medieval to the Renaissance—appears in Pantagruel’s response, “It is my judgment also...” (Rabelais 284-85). Rabelais, thus, highlights the idea that judgments in his culture are the individual’s evaluations. Neither one nor the other can be more correct. Hence, each man must learn to make the decisions for himself. Rabelais stages this activity between the two friends. Pantagruel’s advice changes with the addition of more information: “...I advise you to it...Then do not marry...Marry then, in God’s name” (Rabelais 285). In this, he embodies the individual perspective, shifting his decision to fit the circumstance instead of emphasising an objective reality.

Nevertheless, certain ideologies illustrate that Rabelais is an heir of the medieval epoch. His attitude seems to undermine the balance of individual self and subject seen in Europe during the previous centuries. This notably arises in his advice to dream:

...let us bend our course another way...[in] a good ancient and authentic fashion, answered Pantagruel; it is by dreams. For in dreaming, such circumstances and conditions being thereto adhibited, as are clearly enough described by Hippocrates...by Plato, Plotin, Iamblicus...and others, the soul doth oftentimes foresee what is to come. (Rabelais 296)

The turn towards dreams in order to clarify a decision was working beneath Hoccleve’s insomnia. In this instance, Rabelais asserts that this practice came from the ancients, and that is unquestionable.² However, he shapes the dialectic in such a manner that the dream works of the Middle Ages are overlooked and ignored. In this instance, Rabelais disregards years of medieval practise, distancing himself from them, because of his disdain for the cultural hegemony that asserted any dominance over the individual.

Undoubtedly, the subjectivity of the medieval era operated without the cultural acceptance of individualism, which Rabelais notes in the Renaissance. In this respect, the Renaissance certainly fictionalises a more modernist self—independent of history. But, the individual always negotiates his community, asserting his freedom to choose and decide for himself against laws, morals, and others hegemonic practises that would oppress him.

In the work of William Shakespeare, the same internality surfaces. In *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*, Harold Bloom deifies him as the creator of humanity for his development of psychological and literary consciousness, especially in Falstaff and Hamlet. Nevertheless, *Henry V* can be seen dealing with the same problematic individualism appearing in medieval texts. The King tries to decide if his subjects have individual choice or if he is responsible for their decisions. Thus, Shakespeare's "genius" could be said to lie in creativity and synthesis of earlier subjectivity in such a manner that he highlighted issues important to the Renaissance sensibility.

Henry V deals with the Hundred-Years' War, including the battle of Agincourt. On the eve of the battle, King Henry disguises himself in order to walk and talk among his men. Using this masquerade, he enters into a discussion with two of his subjects, William and Bates:

Bates. He hath not told his thought to the king?

King. No, nor it is not meet he should. For though I speak it to you, I think the king is but a man, as I am... Therefore, when he sees reason of fears, as we do, his fears, out of doubt, be of the same relish as ours are. Yet in reason no man should possess him with any appearance of fear, lest he, by showing it, should dishearten his army. (IV.i. 99-112)

In this speech, King Henry juxtaposes externality and internality. The problem for him is inherent on kingly ceremony, which he bemoans later in his soliloquy. Nevertheless, this internality and its separation from externality are the same conflicts appearing in Usk, Hoccleve, Christine, Villon, Malory, and other medieval writers. The fact that the King undergoes the problem of subjectivity underlines its continuation from the medieval to the Renaissance. Therefore, the presence of the conflict still centres on his and their individuality.

As the scene unfolds, Shakespeare falls into the argument of internality's importance:

Bates. ...For we know enough if we know we are the King's subjects. If his cause be wrong, our obedience to the King wipes the crime of it out of us.

Williams. ...Now if these men do not die well, it will be a black matter for the King that led them to it—who to disobey were against all proportion of subjection.

King. So, if a son that is by his father sent about merchandise do sinfully miscarry upon the sea, the imputation of his wickedness, by your rule, should be imposed upon his father that sent him... Every subject's duty is the King's, but every subject's soul is his own. Therefore should every soldier in the wars do as every sick man in his bed: wash every mote out of his conscience. (IV.i. 128-176)

In this scene, the unfolding of the arguments made in King Henry's monologue defends the notion that responsibility rests on each individual. Shakespeare denounces moral oppression in favour of individualism. Thus, he affirms the shifting of subjectivity with all the problems it entailed. These complicated problems appear in the King's soliloquy:

King. Upon the king!
 ‘Let us our lives, our souls, our debts, our care-full wives,
 Our children, and our sins lay on the King.’
 We must bear all. O, hard condition,
 Twin-born with greatness: subject to the breath
 Of every fool, whose sense no more can feel
 But his own wringing. What infinite heartsease
 Must kings neglect that private men enjoy? (IV.i. 227-234)

These lines expose the Renaissance perception of the medieval era. The King ultimately decides that he is responsible for his peasant, which to Shakespeare’s audience was not acceptable. Nonetheless, the King also deals with his individual responsibility because he is bound to act accordingly as King of England. Thus, while the peasants are freed of responsibility, the King is burdened by the same system. It is an incredible problem, and Shakespeare did not invent this, nor did the Middle Ages.

Continuing Postmodernism and Medieval Roots

The individual who emerges in the medieval epoch shares the problem of subjectivity with the postmodern individual in contemporary culture. Although the individuation experienced in the eleventh and twelfth centuries is not as integrated into social and culture norms as is the individual in the sixteenth century, his presence indicates that the individual—a being conscious of himself and morally responsible for his own actions—is not a product of the Renaissance. From the early debates in which individuation occurred to the romances that focused on an individual knight, the individual—not as a part of the group, but as himself—becomes a part of the medieval social framework. What is interesting about the medieval individual is his affinity with the postmodern, which has been highlighted in this study. The responses to the

individual take the various shapes that Habermas noted in the postmodern response to the modern. In *Sir Gawain*, individuality and community collide in an irreconcilable quagmire. In this space, the poet presents the difficulties of dealing with both the older tradition and the modern invention of the individual. Highlighting a different response, Deschamps's poetry and Malory's *La Morte* propose a return to a period before the individual's emergence, revivifying a more idyllic time before the individual became so strong an influence that it created a disjointed morality. Some poets, such as Usk, try to modernise the individual, placing him on a path of progress and seeing his problematic as pain with a purpose. However, other poets combine this differently. For example, François Villon reveals all problems through the veil of his individuality, a movement creating the closest similarity to anti-modernism as described by Habermas. Thus, one sees the various forms in which medieval poets deal with individuality

Although the complicated negotiation of subjectivity often takes on distinct perspectives, the very presence of it indicates this act of ubiquitous grappling is not a unique to any one period. Before this individuation, medieval man was a member of society only; after it, he was trapped between social norms and a consciousness of himself that necessitated extreme negotiation. However, he did not invent this alone; he used Roman and Greek texts to influence his development. Nevertheless, in his arbitration of subjectivity, he enacts something close to the postmodern dialectic. Scholars such as Umberto Eco and Peter Haidu claim a connection between medieval man and contemporary man. Indeed, an analysis of the postmodern subject reveals a resemblance to the medieval subject. Both are individuals negotiating a difficult and

necessary subjectivity. The continuum of the dialectic is undeniable. Thus, alterity between modern ‘same’ and medieval ‘other’ breaks apart; this fictitious difference offers no solutions, leaving the individual—medieval or modern—in a quandary where he takes what he can of his individualism, while nonetheless subjecting himself automatically to the yoke of some other power. In the end, the study of the negotiation of the individual in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century texts reveals that he is similar to the concept of the postmodern individual in many aspects, most notably in his distrust of metanarratives in the face of individuality.

¹ Sundry reasons exist for making the declaration that the modern man appeared in the Renaissance: groundbreaking inventions, political restructuring, a culture explosion in the classics, et cetera. In *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change*, Eisenstein suggests that the printing press was responsible for the profound changes. The profundity of her scholarship often receives reluctant praise because of the direct equation she makes—due most assuredly to the postmodern anxiety about binaries. However, Eisenstein’s belief deserves some attention here, since she does extend her argument to arts and literature—an problematic effort. She explains, “Before the fifteenth century, even artists’ self-portraits were deprived of individuality” (Eisenstein 132). This lack of individuality in painting corresponds to scribal culture, while “the characteristic individuality of Renaissance masterpieces...is probably related to the new possibility of preserving by duplication...” (Eisenstein 136). The assertion that the individuality of the sixteenth-century was made possible by printing interrupts the continuum of artistic and culture development. Although Eisenstein correctly emphasizes the importance of printing, her placement of printing at the head of all cultural developments is incorrect. The weakness of the argument appears most clearly in the individuality of portraits. An excellent example rests in the work of Jan van Eyck. Some of van Eyck’s works, such as *Portrait of Tymotheos*, clearly contain the stylized generalities that make a portrait. In other portraits, van Eyck exudes individuality. The portrait of *Cardinal Nicolas* (c.1435) shows a individual cardinal. The wrinkles around his face and eyes are not stylistic; they are realistic—individual to the cardinal. Thus, the individuality in portrait was not linked to printing.

² For a study tracing the specific development of dream and its use to display interiority with relation to time, see Michel Zink’s *The Subjectivity of Literature*.

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