

‘FOR MY SYNNE AND FOR MY YONG
DELITE’: CHAUCER, THE *TALE OF BERYN*,
AND THE PROBLEM OF *ADOLESCENTIA*

In her 1987 study of Jaufré Rudel, Sarah Kay raises an interesting point about the medieval practice of continuing another author’s text. Drawing a parallel between this ‘intellectual activity’ and the modern ‘discipline of literary criticism’, Kay states that continuation is always at some level an interpretative procedure. Such exercises might ‘show the responses of thematic interpretation or formal analysis of a text, or of personal engagement with it [. . .] continuations might reasonably be expected to show a degree of commitment to their source text, appraise its quality or marketability, develop some aspect of its content’.¹ For the critic, this suggests that continuations may be approached as hermeneutic procedures in their own right. They may be treated as attempts to analyse or redress their base text, whether or not this intent is made explicit. One text in which these concerns are central is the Middle English *Tale of Beryn*.² While this is an arresting piece in its own right, it is given added interest by its connection to Chaucer. It is one of many fifteenth-century attempts to flesh out or complete the *Canterbury Tales*.³ As such, it may be considered a critical engagement with Chaucer’s text, following Kay’s proposals. The present article will attempt to read *Beryn* in these terms, demonstrating that the poem contains a complex and sensitive response to its predecessor’s work, similar to the ‘challenge to Chaucer’s prerogative’ that Ethan Knapp observes in Hoccleve’s output.⁴

Beryn itself was most likely written during the second decade of the fifteenth century.⁵ The precise identity of its author is unknown. Although a colophon attached to the piece gives the ‘nomen autoris’ as a ‘filius ecclesie Thome’, or ‘son of the church of Thomas’, the meaning of this statement is unclear. According to Frederick Furnivall, *Beryn*’s first modern editor, it places the writer in the Benedictine community at Canterbury Cathedral.⁶ This view has

An early version of this paper was given at the International Medieval Congress, University of Leeds, in 2005.

¹ Sarah Kay, ‘Continuation as Criticism: The Case of Jaufré Rudel’, *Medium Aevum*, 56 (1987), 46–64 (p. 46).

² ‘The *Canterbury Interlude* and the *Merchant’s Tale of Beryn*’, in *The ‘Canterbury Tales’: Fifteenth-Century Continuations and Additions*, ed. by John M. Bowers (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1992). Subsequent references to *Beryn* appear in parentheses in the text.

³ The edition of the *Canterbury Tales* used here is *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by Larry D. Benson and others, 3rd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 22–328. All references appear in parentheses in the text.

⁴ Ethan Knapp, *The Bureaucratic Muse: Thomas Hoccleve and the Literature of Late Medieval England* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001), p. 109.

⁵ Derek Pearsall, *Old and Middle English Poetry* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977), p. 298.

⁶ *The ‘Tale of Beryn’, with a ‘Prologue of the Merry Adventure of the Pardoner with a Tapster at Canterbury’*, ed. by F. J. Furnivall and W. G. Stone (London: Trübner, 1887), p. vii; Peter Brown, ‘Journey’s End: The Prologue to the *Tale of Beryn*’, in *Chaucer and Fifteenth-Century Poetry*, ed. by Julia Boffey and Janet Cowen (London: King’s College Centre for Late Antique and Medieval Studies, 1991), pp. 143–74 (pp. 148–50).

been taken up by Peter Brown, but is by no means secure: Mary Tamanini, for instance, suggests that the poet was attached to one of the Inns of Court, while Richard Firth Green makes him a rector at Winchelsea.⁷ At any rate, the source of the poem can be identified with greater certainty. Its substance is taken from the French *Roman de Berinus*, itself partly derived from the Indian *Sinbadnameh*.⁸ Two versions of the *Berinus* are known: a thirteenth-century metrical version, of which only a fragment is extant, and a fourteenth-century prose redaction of the earlier text.⁹ Nevertheless, the English *Beryn* is not a straightforward translation of the *Berinus*. Its author is highly selective in adapting his source. *Beryn* confines its borrowing to those episodes which involve the title character as a youth, showing particular interest in the period when he is 'age of eightene yeer or more' (l. 932). In other words, it is mainly concerned with his *adolescentia* as it is defined in most medieval schemata.¹⁰ The poem quietly discards Beryn's actions during adulthood, and makes no mention of his son Aigres, a major figure in the French text. These omissions are significant, and will be discussed fully in due course.

The setting of *Beryn* is imperial Rome, although the text displays a predictably mangled view of ancient history. It claims that its events occurred in the reign of 'Philippus Augustinus', supposedly the successor of 'Constantyne the Third' and a contemporary of 'Scypio and Sichero' (ll. 786–87, 823). The story itself concerns Beryn, son of the wealthy senator Faunus. Beryn is a spoilt tearaway, his life entirely given over to excess and riot. His key vices are gambling, especially 'dise' and 'hazard', uncontrolled aggression, and associating with 'such maner company as shuld never thryve' (ll. 923–24, 1034–35). This dissolute lifestyle reaches its highest pitch on the night of his mother's death: Beryn remains at the dice-table as his mother lies dying, even punching the maidservant sent to bring him home. The death itself, however, is something of a moment of peripeteia. From this point onwards Beryn's life alters considerably. His father marries the shrewish Rame, who takes an instant dislike to the boy: 'all that ever she coude cast or bythynch | Was al ageyn Berinus' (ll. 1142–43). At her instigation Faunus refuses to fund Beryn's 'rebawdry' any longer. Beryn responds with typical fury, but eventually comes to recognize his former misconduct. At length he strikes a deal with his father, exchanging his 'heritage' for 'shippes fyve [. . .] ful of marchandise', which he will attempt to sell for profit abroad (ll. 1462–65). The experience, it is hoped, will teach him financial independence and result in a 'mending of his lyff' (l. 3809). The rest of the poem details his arrival at a city, labelled 'Falsetown' in some studies,

⁷ 'The *Tale of Beryn*: An Edition with Introductory Notes and Glossary', ed. by M. E. M. Tamanini (unpublished doctoral thesis, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan, 1970), pp. 40–48; Richard Firth Green, 'Legal Satire in *The Tale of Beryn*', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, 11 (1989), 43–62 (p. 62).

⁸ See W. A. Clouston, *Popular Tales and Fictions: Their Migrations and Transformations*, 2 vols (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1887), II, 325–32, 550–52.

⁹ *Berinus, roman en prose du XIV^e siècle*, ed. by Robert Boussat, 2 vols (Paris: Société des anciens textes français, 1931–33). See Urban Tigner Holmes, *A History of Old French Literature: From the Origins to 1300* (New York, Russell and Russell, 1962), p. 262; Douglas Kelly, 'Fortune and Narrative Proliferation in the *Berinus*', *Speculum*, 50 (1976), 6–22.

¹⁰ See Ruth Mazo Karras, *From Boys to Men: Formations of Masculinity in Late Medieval Europe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), pp. 12–19.

where the 'desseyvabill' inhabitants prey on unwary travellers.¹¹ Within a day Beryn is cheated out of his ships and his goods. He also becomes entangled in three lawsuits, accused of blinding one man, murdering another's father, and seducing and deserting a local woman. None the less, all is at length restored to Beryn with the help of Geffrey, a beggar who has learnt to manipulate the city's legal system. At the end of the poem Beryn not only makes a tidy return on his cargo, but attains the wisdom of adulthood. He is also ready to marry, an unambiguous sign of his new-found maturity.

A key feature of the poem, especially for the purpose of the present article, is its manuscript context. The one surviving text of *Beryn* is preserved in Northumberland MS 455 (c. 1450–75), where it is inserted into the *Canterbury Tales*.¹² The important thing to note here is that this is not simply a case of scribal opportunism, an example of a copyist attempting to fill out Chaucer's work with an unrelated piece. *Beryn* is not of the same order as the *Tale of Gamelyn*, Hoccleve's 'On the Blessed Virgin', or any of the other texts which were grafted into some manuscripts and early printed versions of the *Tales*.¹³ On the contrary, the poem is a deliberate and self-conscious attempt to supplement Chaucer's work. *Beryn* is preceded by a much-discussed Prologue which unambiguously attaches it to the *Tales*.¹⁴ This extends the frame-narrative along the lines indicated by Chaucer, recounting the pilgrims' arrival at Canterbury, their visit to Becket's shrine, their supper, and their departure.¹⁵ The actual *Tale of Beryn* is the first story of the return journey, told by the Merchant as the pilgrims head off for Southwark. While this Prologue may have been written slightly later than the rest of the work, there can be little doubt that the two sections were composed as parts of the same text. The colophon identifies the 'autor' and 'translator' as a single person, and *Beryn* itself 'maintains the pretence' that it is addressed 'to an audience of pilgrims': at one stage its narrator orders the listeners that 'beth behynde' to draw 'somwhat nere, thikker to a route | That my wordes mowe sounne to ech man aboute' (ll. 762–64).¹⁶ James Simpson has also speculated that the *Tale* might allude to Chaucer in the name it gives to Beryn's benefactor.¹⁷ Evidently the writer of *Beryn* intended his

¹¹ The name is Furnivall's, although it seems to rest on a misreading of the text: see *The 'Canterbury Tales': Fifteenth-Century Continuations and Additions*, p. 170.

¹² On the manuscript, see Linne R. Mooney and Lister M. Matheson, 'The Beryn Scribe and his Texts: Evidence for Multiple Copy Production of Manuscripts in Fifteenth-Century England', *Library*, 4 (2003), 347–70.

¹³ See Kathleen Forni, *The Chaucerian Apocrypha: A Counterfeit Canon* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001), pp. 171–90.

¹⁴ Although John Bowers has redubbed *Beryn*'s Prologue 'the *Canterbury Interlude*', the older title has been retained here to emphasize the unity of the two pieces. See John M. Bowers, 'Controversy and Criticism: Lydgate's *Thebes* and the Prologue to *Beryn*', *Chaucer Yearbook*, 5 (1998), 91–115 (p. 92).

¹⁵ Commentary on the *Prologue* includes John M. Bowers, 'The *Tale of Beryn* and the *Siege of Thebes*: Alternative Ideas of the *Canterbury Tales*', in *Writing after Chaucer: Essential Readings in Chaucer and the Fifteenth Century*, ed. by Daniel J. Pinti (New York: Garland, 1998), pp. 201–25; Stephan Kohl, 'Chaucer's Pilgrims in Fifteenth-Century Literature', *Fifteenth-Century Studies*, 7 (1983), 221–36.

¹⁶ *The 'Canterbury Tales': Fifteenth-Century Continuations and Additions*, p. 167.

¹⁷ James Simpson, *Reform and Cultural Reformation, 1350–1547*, Oxford English Literary History, 2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 321.

work to take its place among Chaucer's 'tales of best sentence and moost solaas' (l. 798). Like Lydgate's *Siege of Thebes* after it, *Beryn* is a calculated addition to Chaucer's text.

When discussing *Beryn*'s relationship with the *Canterbury Tales*, most commentators have followed much the same path. The dominant assumption is that the poem must be treated as a simple emulation of Chaucer. Consequently, the majority of critics have dwelt on the cohesion between *Beryn* and Chaucer's own work, focusing on the continuities between the two authors. This position emerges with Furnivall, who recommends the poem on the basis that 'the Master's humour and lifelikeness [. . .] are well kept up'.¹⁸ The same approach is even more conspicuous in the work of E. J. Bashe. Bashe offers a curious, almost schoolmasterly appraisal of the *Beryn*-poet, discussing 'how well he kept up Chaucer's characters' and allocating his work a final 'percentage of consistency'.¹⁹ Although less openly expressed, the same idea is still present in later criticism. In the last three decades Karen Winstead has commended the poem for being 'on the whole Chaucerian in both spirit and accomplishment', while Brown, Bradley Darjes, and Thomas Rendall have concentrated on the poem's adherence to 'processes [. . .] initiated' in the *Canterbury Tales*.²⁰ A recent study by Stephanie Trigg sustains this trend, calling attention to *Beryn*'s 'natural continuation of the narrative position already established', and lack of 'rhetorical anxiety about its intervention'.²¹ For each of these writers, *Beryn*'s status as a continuation means that it must be regarded as a simple echo of Chaucer, reprising or perpetuating his material.

However, this critical outlook seems to overlook an important process at work in *Beryn*, which not only recalls Sarah Kay's comments on continuation in general, but moves them to the centre of consideration. Although critics tend to regard *Beryn* as a straightforward extension of its source text, the work does not only maintain the general direction of the *Canterbury Tales*. It is at least as concerned with contesting and overriding Chaucer as it is with continuing his work. While it maintains aspects of the *Tales*, it also offsets other tendencies present in the text. It might be said that such a result is inevitable, given the contradictory nature of the *Tales* itself: owing to its 'discontinuous form', in which 'breaks and contrasts' and 'variety and conflict' are central, extending a strand of Chaucer's text may well demand that rival currents are countered in the process.²² Nevertheless, the fact remains that *Beryn*, as Kay's model

¹⁸ *The Tale of Beryn*, p. vii.

¹⁹ E. J. Bashe, 'The Prologue to *The Tale of Beryn*', *Philological Quarterly*, 12 (1933), 1–16 (pp. 2, 11).

²⁰ Karen A. Winstead, 'The *Beryn*-Writer as a Reader of Chaucer', *Chaucer Review*, 22 (1988), 225–33 (p. 225); Brown, 'Journey's End', p. 148; Bradley Darjes and Thomas Rendall, 'A Fabliau in the Prologue to the *Tale of Beryn*', *Mediaeval Studies*, 47 (1985), 416–31 (p. 431).

²¹ Stephanie Trigg, *Congenial Souls: Reading Chaucer from Medieval to Postmodern*, Medieval Cultures Series, 30 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), p. 87.

²² William C. Johnson, 'The *Man of Law's Tale*: Aesthetics and Christianity in Chaucer', *Chaucer Review*, 16 (1982), 201–21 (p. 209); Penelope Curtis, 'Some Disincarnational Impulses in the *Canterbury Tales*', in *Medieval English Religious and Ethical Literature: Essays in Honour of G. H. Russell*, ed. by Gregory Kratzmann and James Simpson (Woodbridge: Brewer, 1986), pp. 128–45 (p. 129); C. David Benson, *Chaucer's Drama of Style: Poetic Variety and Contrast in the 'Canterbury Tales'* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), p. 21.

suggests, is an 'appraisal' and 'response' as much as a 'natural continuation', challenging some elements of Chaucer as it upholds others.

This point is brought into particular focus when *Beryn's* treatment of the Clerk is considered. The later writer aligns himself against this figure, to the extent that his own work seems to contest the stance he represents. One indication of this hostility is the fact that *Beryn* is attributed to the Merchant. As several critics have observed, one of the more subdued quarrels in the *Canterbury Tales* takes place between the Merchant and Clerk. Howell Chickering, for example, notes that the Merchant's Tale is from the outset framed as a riposte to the Clerk, its prologue echoing the Clerk's closing words in order to dispute them, 'shifting their tone' towards new meanings: 'we should hear *some* difference in that repetition, regardless of whether we hear the Merchant's tone as bitter or urbane'.²³ Jerome Mandel goes further, describing the figures as 'contrastive' narrators, who embody different attitudes towards storytelling and its relationship with reality. On the one hand the Clerk represents narrative as abstract and self-enclosed, asserting that his tale is merely 'a metaphor and not a literal prescription for human action'; on the other, the Merchant insists that his 'tale reflects the validity of his own experience' and has direct practical applications, discouraging others from being caught 'in the snare' of wedlock (iv. 1229).²⁴ As Mendel argues, there is an impassable distance between the Clerk and Merchant, as even the logic that underlies their stories is in direct disagreement. To borrow a phrase from Carl Lindahl, a clear 'discourse gap' separates the two figures, engaging them in 'narrative war'.²⁵

By attributing his own poem to the Merchant, the *Beryn*-poet seems to be latching on to his implicit opposition to the Clerk's discourse, and using it as a vehicle for his own concerns. It can be noted, for instance, that *Beryn's* prologue preserves the distinction Mendel describes, even seeking to exacerbate it. At one stage the poet caricatures the amorality of the Clerk, making him defend the Friar's 'falshede' and 'vice' on the basis that 'I it hold vertuouse and right commendabill | To have verry knowleche of thinges reprovabill' (ll. 254–55). This statement earns him a sarcastic rebuke from the Knight, who remarks, 'his wittes and eke his clergé [. . .] saveth honesty' (ll. 265–66). Correlatively, before the Merchant begins to recount *Beryn*, he is made to signal his distance from the Clerk's position. He vows to 'tell a tale [. . .] in ensaumpill to yewe [. . .] Allthoughe I cannat peynt my tale but tell as it is' (ll. 725–31). The Merchant chooses simple practicality over empty figuration, siding with 'ensaumpill' against abstraction. Even *Beryn* itself sustains this opposition, containing a couplet which further ridicules the Clerk: 'more opyn pryue þan mannys owne knowleche, | Men of lawe ne clerkis con nat tell ne teche' (ll. 3796–97). *Beryn's*

²³ Howell Chickering, 'Form and Interpretation in the *Envoy* to the Clerk's Tale', *Chaucer Review*, 29 (1995), 368–69.

²⁴ Jerome Mandel, *Geoffrey Chaucer: Building the Fragments of the 'Canterbury Tales'* (London: Associated University Presses, 1992), p. 39. See also Anne Middleton, 'Chaucer's "New Men"', in *Literature and Society: Selected Papers from the English Institute*, ed. by Edward W. Said (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), pp. 15–56 (pp. 45–46).

²⁵ Carl Lindahl, *Earnest Games: Folkloric Patterns in the 'Canterbury Tales'* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), p. 147.

attribution to the Merchant would seem to be a move against the Clerk, and a way of disputing the stance Chaucer attaches to him.

A further, more important repudiation of the Clerk may be witnessed in the poet's choice of material. The decision to use *Beryn* in the continuation can itself be seen as a manoeuvre against the figure. In some respects the poem looks like a rejoinder to the Clerk's own tale. The two texts certainly share several thematic concerns. Although Winstead compares the poem to the Merchant's Tale, and Green and James Landman consider it to be principally concerned with the law, there are persuasive parallels between *Beryn* and the story of Griselda and Walter.²⁶ As stated earlier, *Beryn*'s chief departure from its source material is the narrowness of its focus. Unlike the French *Berinus*, it restricts its account to the hero's adolescence. For most of the story *Beryn* is a wayward gallant, of 'age of eightene year'. As it progresses he steadily rises to maturity, his tribulations forcing responsibility onto him, until he learns 'howe he hym shuld govern' (l. 3961). It goes no further than this: *Beryn*'s development of wisdom and self-restraint is the climax of the piece. As Hélène Dauby writes, the overall point of the poem is that 'Beryn ends his adventures mature and reborn: his travels are an initiation'.²⁷ John Atkins also notes its special interest in 'the dangers to which youth is subject'.²⁸ The *Tale* is primarily a rite-of-passage narrative, detailing the exchange of wild youth for sober adulthood.

In some respects the Clerk's Tale follows the same course. It also details the reform of a problematic youth, in the form of Walter. As the poem opens, Walter is in much the same condition as *Beryn*. He is also 'a fair persone, and strong, and yong of age', with similar vices attendant on him: 'in delit he lyveth [. . .] on his lust present was al his thoght, | As for to hauke and hunte on every syde' (iv. 73, 68, 80–82). In Mark Miller's summary, Walter is 'a picture of freedom as wantonness, as the sheer unplanned enjoyment of being moved by whatever desires happen to arise'.²⁹ Again like *Beryn*, the wilful Walter undergoes a clear reformation at the end of the tale, living 'in heigh prosperitee [. . .] in concord and in reste' at its conclusion (iv. 1128–29). As Paul Taylor states, he is brought 'toward an acceptance of change in time', setting aside his youth in favour of maturity.³⁰ *Beryn* and Walter both become integrated into the adult world during the course of their narratives. Each renounces his former heedlessness and gains his manhood in the process.

But there are also radical departures between the two stories. This is a key point, as it is through these differences that the *Beryn*-poet comes to stage his critical engagement with Chaucer. By producing a text that is comparable to

²⁶ Winstead, 'Beryn-Writer as Reader', p. 228; Green, 'Legal Satire in *Beryn*'; James H Landman, 'Pleading, Pragmatism, and Permissible Hypocrisy: The "Colours" of the Legal Discourse in Late Medieval England', *New Medieval Literatures*, 4 (2001), 139–70.

²⁷ 'Beryn sort de ses aventures, mûri, régénéré: son parcours est initiatique' (Hélène Dauby, 'Violences physiques et violences morales dans *The Tale of Beryn*', *Cercles*, 6 (2003), 54–61 (p. 61)).

²⁸ J. W. H. Atkins, 'XIV. Metrical Romances, 1200–1500: II', in *The Cambridge History of English and American Literature*, ed. by A. W. Ward and others, 18 vols (New York: Putnam, 1907–21), 1: *From the Beginnings to the Cycles of Romance* (1907), pp. 335–56 (p. 344).

²⁹ Mark Miller, *Philosophical Chaucer: Love, Sex, and Agency in the 'Canterbury Tales'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 222.

³⁰ Paul Beekman Taylor, *Chaucer's Chain of Love* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1996), p. 53.

the Clerk's Tale, the later author is able to confront aspects of its content, challenging them and proposing alternatives. Although both texts approach youth as something that needs to be overcome, as a 'disorder' in Michel Pastoreau's phrase, the two vary from one another in their conception of adolescence, as well as the solutions they prescribe.³¹ In the case of the Clerk's Tale, the understanding of adolescence seems to be governed by the idea of formlessness. Derek Traversi, Claudio Violato, and Arthur Wiley have stressed that Chaucer tends to regard youth as 'a time of turbulence' which is 'unconsolidated, "flyttynge" and unstable', and the portrayal of Walter is largely consonant with this assessment.³² Walter's age is presented as a time of ontological absence, as a state prior to the assumption of a concrete identity. This is announced in the opening section of the Tale. Walter's youth is explicitly described as a state of shapeless fluctuation, in which 'dayes passe in sondry wyse' and 'ay fleeth the tyme' (iv. 117–19). It is also represented negatively, as though determined more by its absence than its possession of qualities. Such remarks as 'he considered noght | In tyme comynge', 'he nolde [. . .] wedde no wyf, for noght that may bifalle' and 'alle othere cures leet he slyde' show youth to be a lack of form rather than a time with firm attributes (iv. 78–84). Walter's youth is thus characterized as a state of flux and blankness, a period before the achievement of definite form.

It should be pointed out that such a view of adolescence is by no means uncommon in the Middle Ages. The studies of Goodich, Shahar, Weinstein, and Bell demonstrate that similar ideas pervade medieval culture.³³ Descriptions of the *aetates hominum* in encyclopaedic works, for instance, routinely put forward much the same conception. Isidore of Seville and Bartholomaeus Anglicus are in agreement that adolescence is marked by its lack of secure essence. In Isidore's remarks, 'adolescencia' is contrasted with the fixity and firmness of the age that follows it: '*iuventus*, the most robust of all ages'.³⁴ Similarly, Bartholomaeus characterizes 'the age of a young striplyng' as a time when 'hot humours' are continually 'stirring and mouing'. This apparently causes youths to 'mooue lightly, and be vnstedfast and vnstable'.³⁵ Once again, the lack of a settled shape is emphasized. The same association appears in iconography. Joel Rosenthal points out that the 'cardinal virtue' often associated with youth is 'hope', a prospective and potential quality rather than something more re-

³¹ Michel Pastoreau, 'Emblems of Youth: Young People in Medieval Imagery', in *A History of Young People in the West*, ed. by Giovanni Levi and Jean-Claude Schmitt, 2 vols (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 1: *Ancient and Medieval Rites of Passage*, trans. by Camille Naish, pp. 222–39 (p. 237).

³² Claudio Violato and Arthur J. Wiley, 'Images of Adolescence in English Literature: The Middle Ages to the Modern Period', *Adolescence*, 25 (1990), 253–65 (p. 263); Derek Traversi, *Chaucer: The Earlier Poetry. A Study in Poetic Development* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1987), p. 46.

³³ See Chapter 6 of Michael E. Goodich, *From Birth to Old Age: The Human Life Cycle in Medieval Thought, 1250–1350* (New York: University Press of America, 1989); Donald Weinstein and Rudolph M. Bell, *Saints and Society: The Two Worlds of Western Christendom, 1000–1700* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), p. 244; Shulamith Shahar, *Childhood in the Middle Ages* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 202.

³⁴ Isidore, *Etymologiae*, xi. 2. 4–5, ed. by W. M. Lindsay, *Scriptorum Classicorum Bibliotheca Oxoniensis*, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1911).

³⁵ Bartholomaeus Anglicus, *De proprietatibus rerum*, newly corrected, enlarged and amended, trans. by John Trevisa (London: Thomas East, 1582), fols 70^v, 73^r (STC 1538).

alized.³⁶ Youth is again merely preliminary, with no substance of its own. As Deborah Youngs states, medieval adolescence was usually seen as 'a period of formation and transformation', purely a 'developmental stage' or 'liminal position'.³⁷

There are important implications of this view, which have a particular bearing on the Clerk's Tale. Firstly, adolescence must be absolutely abandoned for the individual to progress. Since youth possesses no definite qualities of its own, being simply 'changeable and fickle [. . .] like sick people's attacks of hunger', nothing constructive may emerge until it has been left behind.³⁸ As the famous passage in the Pauline epistles makes plain, to 'become a man' one must 'put away the things of a child', setting aside the previous state entirely.³⁹ Walter follows much this course. When he does undergo his reformation, it involves the full abandonment of his 'grene youthe' (iv. 120). Carolyn Collette stresses that his development takes the form of 'an ability to exercise prudent restraint and to see through apparent reality'.⁴⁰ His testing of Griselde is the chief manifestation of this new sensibility: his 'assayes' demonstrate a desire to search beyond the immediate and obvious, as he seeks out the inner virtue of his 'povre' wife. In terms of his development from youth to manhood, this is far more than a simple exchange of one attitude for another. It is a full reversal of his previous tendency to rest 'al his thoght [. . .] on his lust present', an inversion of former recklessness (iv. 80). Rather than remaining a figure 'who capriciously cultivates the wish of the moment', Walter begins to favour the hidden and the eventual.⁴¹ The chief index of his maturity is therefore an outright annulment of his previous habits. His adulthood demands the complete extinction of his youth, replacing it with its exact opposite. For Chaucer, maturity involves a clear departure from adolescence, the 'vnstedfast' period in which nothing may safely develop.

Yet despite its unilateral refutation of youth, this view is also an indulgent and tolerant one. It suggests that no action need be taken against the adolescent himself. Although youth may be problematic, it is also self-defeating, and will automatically overcome itself. The adolescent will inevitably advance into some other form, since changeability and instability are his overriding characteristics. Accordingly, Walter seems to reach his state of 'prosperitee' without outside interference. His eventual reform occurs more or less independently. In fact there is a notable lack of challenge from those around him: his subjects do not resist his conduct at any point, even 'commendynge [. . .] the markys governaunce' at the height of his ostensible cruelty (iv. 994). The only reproach he does receive concerns his lack of 'spousaille or wedlok', rather than his behaviour or outlook specifically (iv. 115). The point seems to be that only

³⁶ Joel T. Rosenthal, *Old Age in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), p. 183.

³⁷ Deborah Youngs, *The Life-Cycle in Western Europe, c. 1300–c. 1500* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), pp. 97, 120.

³⁸ Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 1389^{a–b}, trans. by W. Rhys Roberts (New York: Modern Library, 1954), p. 84.

³⁹ 1 Corinthians 13. 11 (Douay–Rheims translation).

⁴⁰ Carolyn P. Collette, *Species, Phantasms, and Images: Vision and Medieval Psychology in the 'Canterbury Tales'* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), p. 71.

⁴¹ Alcuin Blamires, *Chaucer, Ethics, and Gender* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 174.

patience is needed to cure the adolescent, since youth will inevitably shift into adulthood, as its flux must give way to solidity. In a story which valorizes forbearance to an almost superhuman degree, the same belief in 'vertuous suffraunce' is extended to adolescence (iv. 1162).

In sum, Chaucer's view of adolescence, in itself highly conventional, might be reduced to two basic features. Firstly, it is a point before the adoption of real identity, with no concrete traits of its own; secondly, it will give way to maturity automatically, since it is by its very nature restless. The *Beryn*-poet, however, takes issue with both of these ideas. In his portrayal of Beryn he seems to offer a new conception of adolescence altogether. In the first place, Beryn's 'mending' cannot be described as a total one. Unlike Walter, Beryn does not replace his previous mode of living with something entirely new. Despite a dramatic renunciation of his previous life before setting sail, as he prays for 'help and grace, | For my mysdede and foly', his teenage behaviour is not completely discarded (ll. 1361–62). No sooner has he arrived at the port than he is gambling once again, this time playing chess with one of the burghers, with his ships as a stake. As Jenny Adams writes, he has simply taken to chess 'instead of dice', merely exchanging one game for another.⁴² He has not undergone a radical conversion at all: although he has gained a 'will for to lern good', traces of his dissolute life remain (l. 2319). But what is most important here is that these same traces are instrumental in his ultimate salvation. Although he continues to misbehave, his 'mysdede' actually allows him to prosper, and to gain maturity through financial autonomy. For example, his tendency to associate with low company leads to his friendship with Geoffrey, an unprepossessing 'Master Rogue'.⁴³ When Beryn first meets Geoffrey, he is ostensibly a crippled beggar 'oppon a stilt under his kne': however, he proves indispensable in the city's law courts, systematically outwitting Beryn's accusers (l. 2381). Beryn's habit of keeping 'such maner company as shuld never thryve' enables him to defeat the suits against him. Along the same lines, his stubborn refusal to listen to others, his inclination to 'never sese for aught that men hym seyde', also proves beneficial to him (l. 916). It allows him to place his faith in Geoffrey despite his crewmen's protests. In fact, there are even marked similarities between Beryn's appetite for gambling and the entire expedition itself, which brings him 'dobill good that he had tofore' (l. 3875).

The point seems to be that the adolescent vices which Beryn practises are not simply to be abolished and transcended. Instead, they are to be directed towards different ends. By the end of the poem there is no doubt that Beryn is full of 'vertu and benevolence', even though his behaviour has not altered to any great extent. For the *Beryn*-poet, reforming adolescence does not take place at the level of the individual, but at the level of the objects of their actions. Youth is not an innately unproductive time that must be swept aside, but a mass of potential that must be adapted and directed towards proper ends. Adolescence is not to be abandoned, but modified. This is not only significant in its own

⁴² Jenny Adams, *Power Play: The Literature and Politics of Chess in the Late Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), p. 116.

⁴³ Velma Bourgeois Richmond, *Chaucer as Children's Literature: Retellings from the Victorian and Edwardian Eras* (Jefferson, NC, and London: McFarland, 2004), p. 108.

right, but it suggests a different conception of youth from that presented by Chaucer. Far from being a void, youthfulness is understood as a set of positive characteristics. Compared with the Clerk's Walter, Beryn's youth is much less a time of vague becoming, and more a period with definite energies. In short, *Beryn* conceives adolescence as an age with its own firm identity, not simply as an absence of form or a prelude to it.

The other aspect of Chaucer's view of youth is also countered by his successor. For the *Beryn*-poet, patience is insufficient as a remedy for adolescence. From the first Beryn's wanton behaviour and his aggression are presented as something that concerns his entire community. Whereas Walter is left to his own devices, Beryn's lack of restraint is directly challenged by those around him. At one stage his unruliness causes 'all the pepill that dwelled in the town | Of Beryns wildnes gon speke and eke rounne' (ll. 1075–76). He is also subject to several 'pleyntes that were grete' (l. 933). The narrator even attacks Beryn's parents for failing to pay attention to these grievances, or else 'ful lite theron beleve': 'Faunus made amendes and put hem in quyete | So was the fader cause the sone was so wild' (ll. 919, 935–36). Eventually, his family is subject to official intrusion, after petitions are made to the Emperor, the 'Senatoures all', and even 'the Seven Sages' (l. 1099). Beryn's misbehaviour is emphatically a public rather than a private concern. Outside intervention is presented as perfectly valid in this case, while disregarding such assistance is nothing short of criminal. The *Beryn*-poet holds that the community at large should be involved in curbing the problems presented by youths. The fact that adolescence is a positive essence with definite powers means that it must be actively checked, not passively ignored.

Ultimately, it appears that the *Beryn*-poet regards adolescence with a greater degree of apprehension than Chaucer. His belief that youth is a tangible force rather than a time of mere shapelessness leads him to view it as a material threat. It is something that must be directly controlled, a cause for concern rather than a passing nuisance. These views might well underlie his desire to revisit this particular aspect of the *Canterbury Tales*. Chaucer's indulgent view is for the later poet unacceptable, as too much is at stake to give youth free rein and simply wait for it to reform itself. Such an outlook also adds a further dimension to *Beryn*'s evident hostility to the Clerk. If *Beryn* does see itself as confronting a real social problem, then it already opposes the Clerk's conceptual and playful view of narrative, as well as his actual depiction of youth. In short, although it is by no means the only or even the primary objective of the text, there does seem to be a clear contentious element in *Beryn*. It carries out Kay's 'engagement' with the earlier work, seeking to redress Chaucer's position on the young, replacing it with an alternative which it regards as preferable. *Beryn* is an interpretation of Chaucer or a response to him, questioning his work rather than simply aiming to replicate it.

This raises the question of exactly why the *Beryn*-poet felt it necessary to contest this aspect of Chaucer's text. After all, the poet is not only opposing Chaucer specifically, but breaking with the dominant view of adolescence in medieval culture. While the reasons for his discontent cannot be established with absolute certainty, one possible solution does present itself. The period

between Chaucer's death and the composition of *Beryn* is notable for the enactment of *De heretico comburendo* (1401) and the *Constitutiones* (1409), two sets of 'repressive measures' designed to curb the spread of Lollardy.⁴⁴ *Beryn* itself was therefore written during 'the time when loyalties had to be declared', when orthodoxy and Wycliffism were becoming progressively more polarized, as the heresy was aggressively prosecuted.⁴⁵ This 'atmosphere of Lollard and anti-Lollard propaganda' perhaps accounts for the *Beryn*-poet's attitude towards youth.⁴⁶ As a number of scholars have made clear, efforts to stem the heresy were often indirectly focused on the young, as education became a key issue for both the Wycliffites and their opponents.⁴⁷ In particular, centres of learning were vigorously targeted by the ecclesiastical authorities, reflecting the fact that the heresy was 'in origin learned, indeed academic'.⁴⁸ The fifth and eleventh articles of Arundel's *Constitutiones*, for instance, are concerned exclusively with the training of the young: the fifth spells out what a schoolmaster may teach 'to the boys under his instruction', while the eleventh promises 'monthly enquiries' at Oxford.⁴⁹ In the words of Rosenthal, 'the birth of Lollardy' had made clear 'the need to control the educational system and those men who could use it'.⁵⁰ The schools and universities alike were regarded 'as real and potential sites for the dissemination of false doctrine'.⁵¹

This cautious attitude towards schooling might well be the root of the *Beryn*-poet's disquiet over adolescence. As other fifteenth-century sources make clear, concern for the education of the young can easily translate into a suspicion of the young themselves. A clear example of this line of thought may be found in the work of Walter Kennedy.⁵² Kennedy's otherwise conventional complaint over 'bittir yowth' is notable for turning 'Lollerdry' into one of the exemplary vices of the young. Kennedy not only makes heresy a specific danger of youthfulness, but likens youth itself to 'þe see of Lollerdry': for him being 'yung into þis world' means that 'þe schip of faip tempestous wind and rane | Dryvis in'.⁵³

⁴⁴ Kantik Ghosh, *The Wycliffite Heresy: Authority and the Interpretation of Texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 20.

⁴⁵ Anne Hudson, *Premature Reformation: Wycliffite Texts and Lollard History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), p. 408.

⁴⁶ Carolyn Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), p. 115. On the response to Lollardy in *Beryn* itself, see Bowers, 'Controversy and Criticism', p. 107.

⁴⁷ See Rita Copeland, *Pedagogy, Intellectuals, and Dissent in the Later Middle Ages: Lollardy and Ideas of Learning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Nicholas Orme, *English Schools in the Middle Ages* (London: Methuen, 1973).

⁴⁸ Anne Hudson, "'Laicus litteratus': The Paradox of Lollardy", in *Heresy and Literacy: 1000–1530*, ed. by Peter Biller and Anne Hudson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 222–36 (p. 232).

⁴⁹ *Consiliae Magnae Britanniae et Hiberniae*, ed. by David Wilkins, 3 vols (London: Gosling, 1737), III, 314–17.

⁵⁰ Joel T. Rosenthal, 'English Medieval Education since 1970', *History of Education Quarterly*, 22 (1982), 499–511 (p. 504).

⁵¹ Ann W. Astell, *Chaucer and the Universe of Learning* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), p. 46.

⁵² On the similarities between anti-Lollard legislation in England and Scotland, see Jenny Wormald, *Court, Kirk, and Community: Scotland, 1470–1625* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981), p. 91.

⁵³ 'Praise of Aige', ll. 27–31, in *The Poems of Walter Kennedy*, ed. by J. Schipper, Denkschriften

This identification implies that fear of the young and fear of heresy are one and the same: each is directly comparable to the other. For Kennedy at least, adolescence has become a source of anxiety because of its assumed proximity to Lollardy. Conceiving schools as potentially corrupting makes the young themselves appear especially corruptible.

Similar ideas might well underpin the *Beryn*-poet's understanding of the adolescent. Youth may be given a more concrete form in the poem because a greater sense of urgency and unease surrounds it than in previous decades. The poem's belief that adolescence is an actual force, rather than a time of vague nothingness, could well be an effect of the scrutiny the young were placed under after 1409, as education underwent a greater degree of surveillance. At the very least *Beryn*'s insistence that adolescents should be controlled by their communities recalls the statutes drawn up by Arundel, and is perhaps a tacit validation of such measures. In short, this amusing story conceals a quiet alarm about adolescence, as new suspicions govern its outlook. These compel its author to reject and override certain aspects of his literary model, causing him to engage critically with Chaucer.

UNIVERSITY OF LEICESTER

BEN PARSONS

der kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften, philosophisch-historische Classe (Vienna: Gerold, 1902), pp. 15–17 (p. 16).