

NOISY ISLES:
SOUNDS AND OTHERNESS IN MEDIEVAL AND EARLY MODERN ENGLISH
LITERATURE

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Dedication

In loving memory of my late husband, Ithi Sophonpanich (1983-2016)

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Writing is a solitary journey. This axiom is especially true in my case of writing this dissertation. Most of the work was completed far away from my cherished and loving academic community at the University of Hawai'i. Luckily, modern technologies make it possible to connect and make the loneliness more bearable. I consider myself one of the most fortunate persons to have a chance to know and work with Judith Kellogg. Without her stimulating conversations, her dedication to my work, and most importantly, her confidence that this task could be done, this dissertation would never have had a chance to see the light. She has been my advisor, my role model, and my inspiration to never give up and to become an academic. I owe a great debt to her teaching and guidance. She has read many versions of this dissertation with great care and attention for so many times that it is impossible to count. To her I offer my heartfelt gratitude and to say that I am grateful is quite an understatement.

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Abstract

This dissertation explores the representations of sounds in medieval and early modern English literature. Such representations reveal that despite the attempts of the English government to exert hegemony over other polities and peoples on the Atlantic archipelago as well as to centralize jurisdictional and political authority, diversity and heterogeneity still existed, persisted, and resisted. Many times such diversity and resistance have been manifested in sonic forms, such as war cries of the Irish, or the protesting noises of the peasants from the countryside. These sounds were considered as dissonance and disturbing to the harmonious state that the English government had attempted to construct and impose upon its subjects. This condition perpetuated several medieval and early modern English writers to code and castigate such disturbing sounds as meaningless and threatening noises, even though they always contained meanings for both the speakers and their intended audiences. In so doing, this study contends that even though sound has been long overlooked in literary studies due to the prioritization of vision and visual representations, sound is a powerful tool that humans utilize to unite, divide, colonize, and decolonize one another.

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Chapter 1

Introduction:

Hearing the Texts, Hearing History, Hearing Communities

Introduction

This dissertation is about sounds in literature and their roles in expressing and negotiating diversity and heterogeneity in the British Isles. At the center of its arguments are my own curiosity and fascination with sounds. Such inquisitiveness primarily stemmed from my interest in music as well as tonality found in Thai language, which is my native tongue. This language is a tonal language with five tones and multiple consonantal sounds. When I first learned music theory, I was immediately attracted to concepts such as tonal / atonal music as well as counterpoint. When I was later introduced to several foreign languages and started reading literature, I always wanted to know what each language or unfamiliar words sounded like. I often listened to each foreign word closely and let it echoed time and again in my mind. Likewise, when reading literary works, I always wondered what I would hear if I were to live in the world of a novel, a play, or a poem. To my younger self, sounds always came first. Grammar, semantics, narratives, characters and everything else were secondary.

When I first took an introduction to a medieval and early modern literature course, it was not surprising that I was fascinated by the representations of sounds so vivid and varied in those texts. Take William Langland's *Piers Plowman* or a group of William Shakespeare's plays for instance. In *Piers Plowman*, I noticed right away that these works were so alive with sounds. In the B text of *Piers Plowman*, for example, the dreamer-narrator Will begins his journey hoping to

“wente wide in this world wondres to *here*”¹ (Prologue 4, my italics). The “marvelous dream” leads Will to a vision of “a fair feeld ful of folk,” a landscape full of noises and voices. There are lawyers in silk gowns making speeches; cooks with their servants crying “Hote pies, hote! Goode gees and grys! Go we dyne, go we!” and inn-keepers bawling “Whit wyn of Oseye and wyn of Gascoinge,/ Of the Ryn and of the Rochel, the roost to defie!” (Prologue 226-230) In one of the most intriguing scenes of the story, the seven deadly sins all make noises appropriate to their character. Petronella and Lust cry out for God’s mercy. Envy speaks with anguished tones of all his jealousies. Anger growls. Greed mutters his confession. Sloth yawns and snores. Glutton laughs and calls for drink. At the end of the night, his guts rumble and he “blew his rounde ruwet at his rigge-bon ende” (B.5.353). From time to time the dreamer awakes to the sound of the church’s bells or he hears the bells ringing in his dream, signifying the end of a section in the text and the beginning of a new one.

Shakespeare’s plays are also imbued with sounds varied and vast. There are the whispering sounds of malicious rumors that Hamlet is the one blessed (or cursed?) with particularly acute ears to hear them all. Caliban in *The Tempest* dwells in an enchanted isle “full of noises,/ sounds, and sweet aires, that give delight and hurt not.” (3.2.138-143) These sounds come from the airy spirit Ariel, who makes them to set the atmosphere of the island prior to Prospero’s colonization. In plays about war such as *Coriolanus*, the noises of the battleground and of the people shouting in hunger reverberate against one another. They function to set the tone of the play that this is a story about wars and conflicts, not romantic love or personal quest for philosophy. In a tragedy such as *Macbeth*, the sounds that the audiences get to hear from

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all quotations of Langland’s *Piers Plowman* are from A.V.C. Schmidt’s critical edition of the B text (London: Dent, 1978). Quotations appear in text by Passus and line number of the Schmidt edition.

Scotland under Macbeth's tyrannical rule are neither laughter nor music. They are primarily strange and frightening sounds heard mostly at night. These include the owl screeching, the infants crying, strange wailing noise in the air and the noise of Lady Macbeth crying before her death, which reminds Macbeth once again of his fear and insecurity. In history plays involving several issues including the Welsh rebellion, the factional politics within England itself, and the strained father-son relationship between the young Prince Hal and King Henry, such as both parts of *Henry IV*, the audiences are introduced to the bawdy noise of Sir John Falstaff in the local alehouse and the English characters are faced with the incomprehensible Welsh music, poetry, and prophesy of the bilingual Owen Glendower.

As I 'listen' closely to these texts at these points, I hear myself asking a lot of questions. What do these sounds and their transcriptions mean? How did the authors understand these sounds? Why did they choose to associate a certain sound with this or that character? What are the larger cultural and social implications of the authors choosing a particular sound? How did contemporary readers and audiences understand them? What was the relationship between these sounds and their historical context? How far can the acoustic and sonic phenomena transcribed in these texts depict both the natural world and the human realm in their dynamic reality? What roles did they perform in society? Do humans from different cultures, genders, and classes hear things differently? What roles do sounds and hearing play in the construction of identities and communities?

These various questions have gradually solidified into this dissertation and can be separated into three elements. First, this dissertation is about the importance of hearing and of sounds. My argument is that scholars outside of the fields of musicology and media studies, especially literary scholars have focused on vision and on images within various texts at the

expense of sound as well as other sensorium. My aim is to demonstrate that by “hearing” the texts and focusing on the representations of sounds, one can gain new insights into both the texts themselves and the society that produced them.

Secondly, my approach is to “hear” these texts within their historical context. I try to situate each sound represented in the texts within the ideas, ideals, and material reality of its era. How were they understood at that time? How was each sound related to the momentous historical events that were taking place when the texts were written? How were they related to other important sounds of the period? How were they reinterpreted, imitated, or parodied? For example, I explore how the sounds of the idyllic, Edenic countryside (*locus amoenus*) influenced Gower’s representation of the sounds of rebellious peasants in *Vox clamantis*, and how John Gower’s works influence the sounds of the barnyard in Geoffrey Chaucer’s *Nun’s Priest’s Tale*. In particular, I locate these sounds within the broader power struggles of the British Isles between urban and rural areas, and between England and other political entities on the islands.

Thirdly, I want to explore the role of sounds, representation of sounds, and understanding of sounds in creating communities whether through inclusion or exclusion. I analyze the sounds associated with each landscape, for example, the tumultuous noises that the metamorphosed peasants make in John Gower’s *Vox Clamantis* and the boisterous barnyard in Geoffrey Chaucer’s *The Nun’s Priest’s Tale* both belong to and occur in the countryside (even though the former sounds have finally move to the city). What roles do these commotions play in representing the countryside as dangerous and threatening spaceduring the late medieval period? I also analyze the wordless sounds created by a group of characters, for example the war cries of the Irish in Edmund Spenser’s works, and delve into the political, social, and cultural

implications of such representation. What does it mean to label a certain sound as a unique trademark of an entire group of people?

These three main issues – hearing texts, hearing history, and hearing communities – are explored in four chapters across a time span of three centuries from the late thirteenth to the early seventeenth. I will review the existing literature and my approach to these three issues below, introducing several important keywords, before providing a brief summary of the four chapters that will follow this introduction.

Hearing Noises

Before proceeding with the three issues mentioned above, I would like to start my discussion with the curious absence of sound studies in the field of literature, and how my study will intervene such absence with the notion of noise. It should be noted that literary scholars have long been interested in the senses, yet most works tend to focus more on images, imagery, and visual culture than on any other senses. In the case of sounds, such neglect, especially on sounds as noises, is puzzling given their psychological and cultural power. Sounds are more powerful than commonly acknowledged. While I can easily close my eyes and ignore the sight before me, I cannot easily close my ears without the aid from high-tech appliances such as noise-cancelling headphones. It remains impossible nonetheless to be able to have an access to such devices in every given situations. There are always times that I have to endure certain sounds without any technological aid. Whatever I do, sounds will impinge on my conscious thoughts, irritating and making me feel powerless as long as I have to hear them.

Noise as the most powerful of sounds is then exceptional entity. Salomé Voegelin defines noise as “sound that excludes other sounds. Noise demands all the hearer’s attention and leaves

no room for other sounds that are present at the same time” (49). Voegelin writes of noise’s “imperial ability to distract” and their power to “colonize” one’s hearing. A noise does not need to be loud to have this ability (Voegelin 49). For example, a persistent soft thumping from my neighbor putting together a piece of furniture is a noise that can drown out the sounds of a movie I am watching, because it interrupts my attention that should be devoted mainly to the movie. It distracts my process of concentration and forces me to hear such sound even though I do not want to hear it due to my initial intention to watch the movie. Given this ability to overcome other sounds, noises are extremely powerful.

Not only are they considered powerful based on modern theories. Sounds were also seen as powerful in the tradition of Greco-Roman and Christian philosophy. From classical times, Western scholars have categorized human perception into a hierarchy of the five senses. Sight is usually identified as the most important, with hearing occupying a close second role. Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* begins with a statement affirming the centrality of knowledge to human lives and the role that senses play as the routes to knowledge. Sight is praised as the sense that is most delightful and useful to us (I.1). Aristotle’s *De sensu et sensibili* also begins with a praise for sight as the superior supplier of direct knowledge. Through sight, one learns to distinguish the shape, size, texture, color, movement, and number of all objects in the world. Hearing, however, takes precedence in the development of the intellect for it allows humans to conduct rational discourse with each other. Hearing is then an important source of indirect knowledge. Words themselves do not educate us in the way that sights do, but through interpreting the words, we may develop our intelligence and morality. For Aristotle, the importance of hearing for intellectual development is the reason why “the blind are more intelligent than the deaf and dumb” (I.1).

Aristotle's writings exercised enormous influence among medieval and early modern thinkers. Vincent of Beauvais, for example, followed Aristotle's hierarchy of the senses in his *Speculum Maius*, the main encyclopedia used during the Middle Ages. The twenty-fifth book of *Speculum Naturale*, the part of the *Speculum Maius* that summarized all the science and natural history known in Europe during the mid-thirteenth century, dealt with the five senses. Vincent considered each sense one by one in the order laid down by Aristotle: sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch. Sight and hearing are listed as the senses that belong to the soul. Smell occupies a middle ground, belonging to both the soul and the body. Taste and touch are seen as lowly senses, belonging to the body only (Vinge 69).

Aristotle's emphasis on the five senses as a source of knowledge also entered Christian thinking through the works of Philo Judaeus, a Jewish philosopher who united Jewish and classical thinking. His works were a major influence on the theology of the early Church fathers. Partly through these treatises, the five senses became a common theme within medieval didactic literature. In his explication of Genesis, Philo sees Adam as the Mind and Eve as the senses. The senses are subjected to alluring sights, sounds, tastes, fragrances, and touch; but the Mind can conquer the temptations of the senses through maintaining its grip on reason. The senses are, thus, also like the horses of a chariot. If they are well-controlled by the Mind, acting as the charioteer, then the senses can guard against temptations and lead the soul to salvation by keeping to a straight path (Vinge 24).

Likewise, Philo also explicates the Pentapolis, the five cities of the Sodomites, as the five senses because both are the "instruments of pleasures." Like Aristotle, Philo rates taste, smell, and touch as the most animal of the senses. They are associated with the lowly pleasures of food and fornication. Hearing, on the other hand, occupies an ambiguous place. Hearing, together with

sight, can lead humans to philosophy and religion. Nevertheless, the cities representing these four senses were ultimately destroyed by God's fire and brimstone. The only city that survived is sight because sight is not confined to mortal things but strives towards the contemplation of God (Vinge 24-25).

Alain de Lille, a twelfth-century French theologian and poet, who was renowned during his day as "doctor universalis," also follows Philo in his exegesis of the Bible. In *Anticlaudianus*, written in the early 1180s, the senses are seen as the routes to knowledge of God with hearing occupying a second place in a hierarchy of senses. Although not as important as sight, hearing is linked to the attainment of knowledge and virtue. In Alain's allegory, this is shown through the association of the second horse with Theology and Faith. The Lollards also stressed the importance of hearing in the fourteenth century. Followers of John Wycliffe frequently preached sermons enjoining their audiences to open their ears to the words of God (Woolgar 64-65). They cite passages from the Bible, such as Jesus's call in Luke 8:8 – "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear." Another popular passage was St Paul's call for missionaries to spread all over the earth and preach, for faith comes from *hearing* the words of God (Romans 10:17).

Hearing the Texts

Given that there are few works in literary studies that focus on the representation of sounds, this absence has allowed me to turn to other fields for the basis of my work. One of the most important concepts for my study is the concept soundscape. The seminal studies of this concept in the field of musicology are Richard Murray Schafer's *Soundscape: The Tuning of the World* (1997) and Barry Truax's *Acoustic Communication* (1984). Schafer and Truax have pointed out that outside of a scientific laboratory, humans never hear a particular sound in

isolation but as an element in a larger environment of sounds. It is thus more useful to think of sounds in terms of what Schafer calls a “soundscape” (7). At the simplest level, soundscape is the sonic equivalent of landscape. In the same way that landscape refers to the visible features of a certain area, a soundscape refers to sounds heard in a particular area. In a given locality, sounds present continuities over time and they always exist in combination with other sounds. Within such combination or sonic environment, certain sounds – the crashing waves, the screeching owls, the croaking frogs, the hustling cars – arise as the “keynote” sounds, which are the acoustic constants against which other sounds are heard and interpreted. Truax associates this situation with a figure/ground relationship in visual perception (21-22). It should be noted that in the process of hearing and making sense out of the soundscape, the listeners are never separate from their sonic environment. They also contribute to the making of each soundscape by projecting the sounds they make, consciously or otherwise into the environment – whistling, talking, singing, chewing, laughing, spitting, panting, even exhaling – at the same time that they listen for what the environment communicates to them. They then depend on such interaction. A soundscape therefore consists not simply of the sonic environment that the listener happens to hear but of the listener-in-the-environment (Truax 19-20, 57-58; Bruce Smith 44). Soundscape is the way in which humans struggle to make meanings and to represent the audible world. In this sense, soundscape bears much resemblance to landscape. Although the latter is categorized by the way of seeing instead of hearing, both imply particular sensibilities, the ways of experiencing and expressing feelings towards the external surroundings, natural or otherwise. Like landscape, soundscape is a “materialization of the external world,” a way by which sound is brought into discourse and into knowledge (Sullivan 2). It can then be argued that soundscape is relatively

ideological, for it simultaneously reflects and instantiates attitudes not only toward the sonic phenomena but also to the whole range of social phenomena that are indivisible from sounds.

For literary studies, one of the most important works is Bruce R. Smith's excellent *The Acoustic World of Early Modern England* (1999). This work attempts to reconstruct the auditory experience of early modern English people, primarily in London. Smith argues for a *history of listening*, pointing out that what we consciously hear and the way we interpret it are historically and culturally determined. People in the past not only had different sounds around them, but they also consciously listened for sounds that we ignore and interpreted them in a different way. While their ears physically functioned as ours do, their experience of sound was different because their auditory experience, their cultural milieu, and their psychology as well as mentality were different. He argues, for instance, that both cities and countryside in early modern England were much quieter than today. Sounds above 60 decibels were uncommon: a handful of natural sounds, such as storms and thunder; the cries of animals; and a few human-made sounds – shouting, bells, music in a confined space, and explosions caused by gunpowder (49-52, 56-79). Such sounds as there were, many of which today might be considered among the quieter sounds, would have been heard with greater intensity.

Emma Dillon utilizes a similar approach with greater theoretical depth. Dillon uses Bakhtin's notion of the carnivalesque world, a world that is "eternally unfinished, a world dying and being born at the same time." (*Rabelais and his World*, 181). Part of her monograph is based on "hearing" the sounds in Guillaume de Villeneuve's *Crieries de Paris*. The *Crieries* is the earliest known vernacular record of French street cries, written in the thirteenth century, describing the sounds a poor man hears as he walks through the markets of Paris from day to night. Using Bakhtin, Dillon draws a moral-economic message from these Parisian street cries.

The narrator is poor partly because so much food and drink is offered in the city day and night. He could have no hope of consuming any significant proportion of the wares that are offered. All types of dishes and beverages from the commonplace to the most luxurious are available and although these goods are all perishable, they are constantly replenished in an economy of surplus and excess.

While Smith and Dillon's aim is to reconstruct historically accurate soundscapes of London and Paris, my goal is slightly different. I aim to look at sounds and soundscapes within literary works. The emphasis is not on isolating these soundscapes from the text and describing them in detail. Instead, I intend to locate these sounds within the approach of Smith's history of listening. In particular, I am also influenced by Richard C. Rath's concept of soundways: "the paths, trajectories, transformations, mediations, practices, and techniques – in short, the ways – that people employ to interpret and express their attitudes and belief about sound". These soundways, according to Rath, "can readily be found in many types of documents, textual and otherwise" (2). They were utilized to construct and regulate social hierarchies and define and extend social and cultural authority. In 1688 on the English plantation of Jamaica, for instance, an African slave sang the words *Hoba Ognion* repeatedly, accompanied by homemade strings and percussion instruments. Each time he repeated the words, the rest of the African slaves would clap their hands and sing *Alla, Alla* in response. This pattern was integral to the foundation of collective awareness of African slaves as opposed to the English colonialists (Rath 8). The call and the response bound the singer together with the rest of the people even though clefs of ethnicity and language conspired to separate them.

I have given some examples of sounds in literature above: the cries of hawkers in the fair field full of folk in William Langland's *Piers Plowman* or the bawdy noises of Sir John Falstaff

in both *Henry IV* plays. Another example that illustrates the approach I intend to take for this dissertation is drawn from C.M. Woolgar's work. As he points out in his chapter "Sound and Hearing" in *The Senses in Late Medieval England*, the starting point for "hearing the texts" from the Middle Ages is to remember that moral associations of sound were very strong during that era. Sounds heard in every life were interpreted to carry certain religious connotations. The vanity of the cuckoo, crying its own names, the weeping of babies, a premonition of the miseries of humankind – these were sometimes matched from the pulpit by a positive delight in sound, for example in bird-song. A Lollard sermon associated the glutton to the bittern. "Sitting by the water, the bittern puts its bill to a reed, making a sound that can be heard all over the country; sitting on land away from the water and lifting its bill up to Heaven, it then makes no noise," describes Woolgar (68). Similarly, gluttons in the tavern put their mouths into their bowls until they are noisily drunk and raucous, but sitting in church by their confessor, far from the tavern, they are "dumb" (68). Cacophony, pure noise, senseless words – nonsense – were likened with the Devil and form a prominent characterization in late medieval religious texts and drama. Among the most notable are the sounds of great crack, thunder (also seen and heard in the first scene of *Macbeth*), and breaking wind (75-6). In the *Castle of Perseverance*, for instance, breaking wind might be combined with other diabolical sounds as the play's stage directions indicate:

And he þat schal pley Belyal loke þat he have gunnepowdyr
brennynge in pypys in hys handdys and in hys erys and in hys ars
whanne he gothe to batayl (qtd. in Woolgar 76).

Likewise, Chaucer's *Summoner's Tale* hinges entirely on the sound of Thomas breaking wind. As Chaucer puts it, this was no ordinary wind: "Ther nys no capul, drawynge in a cart, / That myghte have lete a fart of swich a soun" (2150-1). This diabolical noise was no ordinary wind in another sense. It symbolizes a multitude of problems of the Church in the fourteenth century. In other words, it is a sound best understood through its historical and cultural context.

It should be noted at this point that I realize any study of sounds might invoke confusion between sounds and language, orality (understood in such contexts as "the oral delivery of texts") and literacy ("the private reading of texts"). John M. Picker in *Victorian Soundscapes* (2003) has observed, "tradition has largely demanded allegiance to one of two camps concerning the value of sound in literary and linguistic study" (13). On the one hand, there are Walter Ong and his followers, who have theorized orality as natural, primal, communal, and a potent residue of an acoustic past all but decimated by the shift to print and visual culture. Put simply, according to Ong, orality gave way to literacy over the course of the medieval period. He sees two entities as mutually exclusive, which allow them to be placed in a relationship of evolution more than a mere transformation. On the other hand, there are those such as the poststructuralist Jacques Derrida, who "effectively banished voice and sound to the lower depths of much literary critical work by emphasizing the grammatological qualities of language, the sense that nothing is outside of or separable from its written text, over the phonocentric assumptions of those like Ong" (Picker 13).

I owe allegiance to neither of the two camps. My focus in this study is not on sounds with linguistic meanings. According to Priscian, a sixth-century scholar, there are four classes of *vox* (sounds): *vox inarticulata illiterata* (noises not resolvable into distinct phonemic units), *vox literata inarticulata* ("meaningless" animal sounds, which can nevertheless be represented by

letters), *vox articulata illiterata* (human sounds, like murmuring, which have meaning but have no phonetic units), and *vox articulata literata* (articulate speech and literary language) (qtd. in Travis 240). For the purpose of this dissertation, I focus primarily on sounds that are considered by the authors as *vox literata inarticulata*. Letters can represent such sounds, since they are part of literary texts. However, I mostly ignore their linguistic meanings, and concentrate on the emotional and cultural responses of the audiences of these sounds. For example, I do not focus on the exact meaning of the Irish war cry “hubbub.” I am only interested in English writers’ fear and fascination this particular sound in the context of the wars in Ireland during the late sixteenth century.

Hearing History, Hearing Communities

My examples of sounds that are considered to be associated with the Irish, Scottish, or Welsh hint at the importance of sounds within the British Isles and the significance of locating them within their historical contexts. A good place to begin is the problematic historiography of the Atlantic archipelago, which is essentially, according to J.G.A. Pocock, a group of islands of the North-West Atlantic stretching from the Channel Islands to the Shetlands, from the Wash to Galway Bay, with its ties to North America and down to the Caribbean (Kerrigan vii). It is notable that such a vast and diverse geographical zone has been exclusively and primarily represented by one distinct entity – the English. Jeffrey J. Cohen points out in this edited collection on cultural diversity on the British Isles that since the early medieval period, historians and writers had “the infuriating habit of using *Britannia* or even *totius Britanniae* as a synonym for *Anglia*” (*Cultural Diversity* 4). According to such Anglocentric historiography, Britain has become more or less one and the same with England. It almost seems that the “unceasing

interactions, shared experiences, and cultural interchanges among the peoples on these islands have been superseded by English's desire for power, unity, and uniformity – a united Britain under the English rule” (J.J. Cohen, *Cultural Diversity* 4). This Anglicized Britain presented a prospect of unity and simplicity in what was a divided world of ethnic disunions and competing hegemonies. Like many constructions of the communities around the world, the English desire for unity has found its expressions beyond historical treatises. It has been repetitively written and rewritten in several types of textual manifestations, including literary works, complaints, letters, plays, and psalters. This study seeks to uncover that such constructions of unity were based on insecurities and instabilities. Despite English attempts to offer the Anglocentric versions of stories and histories, it is obvious even from their own narratives that the much-desired unity has been constantly challenged. Britain is thereby never as stable, enduring, or discrete as the English make it out to be. In his monograph on hybridity and Monstrosity in medieval Britain, Jeffrey J. Cohen eloquently explains:

[When] communal identities are formulated upon the embrace of a single language, culture, and history, then variation and diversity can be difficult to discern. Yet heterogeneity and excluded differences often lurk, banished perhaps to dwell underground and out of sight, but surfacing irregularly and sometimes in surprising forms (1).

In this case, such heterogeneity has taken the sonic forms. To better explicate such manifestations, I find Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of *heteroglossia* which was introduced in his 1934 paper Слово в романе (*Slovo v romane*), published in English as “Discourse in the Novel” relatively useful. For Bakhtin, *heteroglossia* is a figurative concept: it refers to the way multiple registers of social speech are inscribed in texts. By reading and “listening” to the soundscapes of

late medieval and early modern England, it is possible to broaden this figurative concept with a physical and phenomenological application. We can ask not just whose voice or voices are transcribed in the text, but how those voices are transcribed or inscribed. Who are the transcribers, and for whom? This can help us to see beyond the known categories of difference influenced by Cartesian philosophy, which tend to focus more on visible distinctions such as dress, manners, skin colors, and civility.

By focusing on British *heteroglossia*, I hope to address the ways in which the English people have been trying to “make sense” from such surfacing of heterogeneity and differences. It should be noted that the utilization of the notion of making sense here is absolutely literal. It involves the explorations of how the English employ their senses beyond the visual to distinguish the differences among the inhabitants of the archipelago. The main reason for doing so is that it seems that the majority of the discussions of differences and identities are very much hostage to the eye. With few exceptions, popular writings as well as several academic works tend to treat differences – racial, cultural or otherwise – as an exclusively visual phenomenon. Take racial differences, for instance. Even though we know that “race” is a construct, an invented category that defies scientific verification, we still understand that construction as largely visual enterprise. “Color” is always seen more than heard or tasted.

Based on my fascination with heteroglossia within the Anglocentric yet diverse Atlantic archipelago, there are two aspects of the relationship between sounds and community formation that I would like to emphasize. On the one hand, a particular sound can be used to identify a group of people in the same way that a particular skin color or range of skin colors can be used to group individuals into a supposedly homogeneous, coherent categories. For example, it can give rise to the idea that all Asians are similar. Likewise, sounds can also be used to differentiate a

group of people. Taking an example from the present day, in his introduction to *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America*, Ronald Takaki recounts his experience of being perceived as “foreign” when a cab driver asked “with a strong southern drawl” how long Takaki had lived in the US since his English sounds “excellent” (4). Of course, the Asian markings of Takaki’s body define him as foreign despite any other signifier that would mark him as American. Yet his “excellent English” complicates his identity further. Lisa Linn Kanae also writes in *Sista Tongue* that her mother does not want any family member to speak pidgin, because it sounds so “stupid” that “you not going get one good job if you no can talk good English. People going tink you stupid” (14).

On the other hand, certain interpretations of sounds can also be an element that unifies a group of people into a sonic community. We hear things differently because different cultural and ideological frameworks shaped our experiences as listeners. The inclination for us as individuals to engage in each sonic environment depends on our different history with sounds, and the manners by which our sonic experiences have been cultivated according to the contexts in which we (as the listening subjects) were situated. In this sense, a soundscape, as Paul Rodaway defines it in *Sensuous Geographies*, is not merely “a state of being with respect to the sound in the environment or simply the depiction of the world in terms of sound” like a sound picture or landscape. It is more likely “an experiential process and an auditory engagement with the environment that continually changes with our ways of interactions” (86-7). Each soundscape thus helps each human subject to recognize his/ her place in relation to the surrounding environment. The embodied response between the listening subject and the environment represents a site of conjunction between the identity of the listening subject and the larger socio-cultural background. That is to say, we must therefore not only account for, but also emphasize

the specificity of a given soundscape, whereby meaning is always negotiated by the listening subject in a local context, comprised of an exchange between soundscape and listener. In this sense, by asking about Takaki's life history, the cab driver both marks Takaki as a foreigner living in the US *and* includes himself in a community of those who find "excellent" English and Asian features incongruent.

I use the term community as a heuristic tool that is broad enough to encompass the multiple groups in the British Isles who share some aspects of language, culture, ideas, and social standing. I do so while also being aware of the specter of the four "nations" of the British Isles – England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland. I am wary of using the term "nation," as there is a general consensus, underwritten by a variety of academic approaches in humanities and social sciences that nationalism is a modern, post-eighteenth century invention. As a result, the perceived 'modern' notions of racial otherness cannot be transferred naively into the 'pre' and even 'early' modern period. This is especially true if I were to follow scholars of the materialist and idealist schools. However, I also realize that aspects of nationhood and racial otherness did exist in the medieval and early modern eras. "Primordialist" scholars have argued for a gradual emergence of nation and national consciousness, allowing recognition of some aspects of nationalism in pre-modern eras. I trace some of the arguments on the subject below, pointing out some advantages of the primordialist argument.

Scholars of the modernist schools locate the emergence of nations and nationalism in particular political, economic, social, and technical developments. Ernest Gellner in *Thought and Change* (1964) and *Nation and Nationalism* (1983) argues that culture, before the advent of mercantilism and industrialism, was peripheral to economic life. The pre-modern elite and popular cultures stood at a wide remove from one another. Modernization however transformed

all this. The imperatives of commercial and industrial mobilization allowed the formulation of 'literate' employees. This resulted in the centralization of state power under forms of national consciousness, widely distributed through printed resources and other visual media. Culture thus became highly politicized, provoking the rise of self-conscious nationalisms. Gellner is by no means the only version of the materialist interpretation of nationalism. Eric Hobsbawm in *Nations and Nationalism since 1780* (1990) and Miroslav Hroch's *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe* (1985) have advanced more straightforwardly Marxist version of the development of nationalistic movement. Furthermore, Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983) has introduced another important variant into the materialist discourse. This particular treatise highlights the role of modern communications, including developments in print media and the ever-increasing intrusion into the peripheries of fiscal-military states, in the emergence of nationalisms.

The idealist interpretation, which focuses on how the development of nationalism intertwined with the changes in intellectual history, shares the similar chronologies of nationalism with the materialist, with the late eighteenth century identified as the significant watershed. Isaiah Berlin in *The Crooked Timber of Humanity: Chapters of Ideas* (1991) suggests that the emergence of nationalism is a by-product of the Counter-Enlightenment, a wave of particularist reaction led by Herder against the universal liberal ideals of the Enlightenment. Elie Kedourie's *Nationalism* (1985) also offers a parallel explanation by tracing the rise of nationalism specifically to late eighteenth- and early nineteenth century German philosophy, and particularly to the evolution within Kantian and post-Kantian circles of the values of autonomy and self-determination. However, there are other scholars such as Eugene Kamenka who focuses

more on the French Revolution as the spawning ground for nationalist doctrines of popular sovereignty (Kidd 3).

Despite their hegemony in the discourse of nationalism, these various interpretations of modernism are still opposed by ‘primordialists,’ notably led by Anthony Smith, who believes that the modernist approach has led to a neglect of significant continuities in the long-term evolution of national consciousness. Smith argues that even though the modern nation began to be actualized as late as the eighteenth century, national consciousness – the process by which the subjects of the nation become conscious of their national language, history, geography, and destiny – has long been realized and distributed. While Smith’s critical intervention has significantly challenged the modernists and has encouraged medievalists as well as early modernists to investigate the forms of nationhood from their studied periods, his claim that nations are not ‘invented’ but ‘realized’ has also been questioned by both medievalists and early modernists. Scholars such as Richard Helgerson, Andrew Hadfield, Claire McEachern, Willy Maley, David Baker, Jodi Mikalacki, and Philip Schwyzer have demonstrated that nations, England (their shared subject of inquiry) and all others, were not there to be ‘realized,’ but had rather to be invented or constructed, even written. It is this construction of racial and national identities that I am interested in exploring in this dissertation.

To sum up, I have argued that sounds are powerful stimuli for human beings. They are recognized as such by modern theorists as well as medieval and early modern philosophers. However, a lacuna exists in the field of literary studies with far fewer works on sounds in literature than on images and vision. In order to partially fill this gap, I have borrowed a broad range of theories from other disciplines. I have introduced the terms noises, soundscape, and soundways. I have also noted that these sounds must be heard and understood in their context.

Focusing on English literature, I have placed a special emphasis on the *heteroglossia* of the diverse yet Anglocentric British Isles. Lastly, I have argued that sounds should be more emphasized in the studies of the diversity and heterogeneity on the Atlantic archipelago because they are powerful tools in building and labeling communities.

Chapter Plans

I begin my analysis of heteroglossia and heterogeneity of sounds on the Atlantic archipelago with an exploration of the multiple soundscapes within the frameworks of the English themselves. In so doing, I hope to demonstrate that despite the long-time attempt of the English polity to exert its hegemony over other groups on the Isles, there is still no such thing as a unified, homogenous, and simple “English” soundscape. This is because England since the time of the Anglo-Saxons has always been a heterogenous place. Each local area has its own distinctive identity, memory, and culture. Differences and heterogeneity are evident everywhere in England and amongst the so-called English people from the medieval period to nowadays. Such heterogeneity has been partly expressed through the representations of many sonic environments in medieval English literature. My exploration begins with the representations of bird sounds in the natural world. These are by all means not the “realistic” and “scientific” representations of bird sounds found in today’s research in the field of ornithology. Medieval authors, on the other hand, utilized bird sounds to explore several complicated and human-related issues such as love, religion, and philosophy rather focusing on the sounds of the birds themselves. Yet the ways in which the writers focused on the audible world of birds provide a great opportunity to investigate how such various ways of representing avian sounds have uncovered the notions of heterogeneity, diversity, and ambivalence within the English society.

This is shown in the thirteenth-century text *The Owl and the Nightingale*, which two birds are arguing about the qualities of their songs. Such debate has shown that there is no single way of interpreting sounds and each bird inhabits in different soundscape. Then I also read Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Parlement of Foules*, which focuses on the inconclusive, fleeting, and ambivalent matters of love, nature, and polity. The chapter ends with the bleak winter worlds depicted in an Old English poem *The Seafarer* and the fourteenth-century *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, both of which reveal that it is dangerous for the English subjects to travel alone beyond the center of power. Whether it is the cold, icy seascape or the forest around the Welsh borderlands, the world out there is not quite safe when one is too far from the protection of their lord.

The next chapter connects with the end of the preceding chapter as it focuses on the terrifying noises of the countryside. It starts with an exploration of the ideal sounds in rural areas. While the rural-urban divide is one of the most common social and cultural cleavages in societies both past and present, in the Middle Ages an idyllic rural space is also associated with the Garden of Eden. Thus, it becomes a topos for many works of literature, a pleasant space referred to by scholars as *locus amoenus*. I explore various examples of *loci amoeni*, focusing in particular on the first chapter of John Gower's *Vox clamantis*. In doing so, I find that sounds were a vital aspect in setting a *locus amoenus* scene. Then the following parts of the chapter focus on Gower's *Vox clamantis* but looks at the flip side of sounds in the countryside. I based my analysis in this chapter on the significance of the Peasants' Revolt in 1381, which raises the specter of a less than idyllic countryside. I analyze the way Gower uses sounds to dehumanize the peasants. I situate these sounds within the context of medieval bestiary tradition and the use of animals as Christian allegories. I compare the sounds used by Gower to the sounds in the Book of Revelation to show how Gower constructs the association of chaos and disorder with the

rebels of 1381. I argue that Geoffrey Chaucer's *Nun's Priest's Tale* is written as a parody of *Vox clamantis*, shifting the sounds of the countryside from an apocalyptic to a comic mode. I end by returning to the idyllic countryside through the silent plowman in William Langland's *Piers Plowman* and the Luttrell Psalter.

Chapter four moves from the Peasants' Revolt of 1381 to another momentous event in British history: the English colonization of Ireland during the late sixteenth century. The Anglo-Irish conflict is one of the longest lasting and most intense divisions within the British Isles. Through a twin focus on the Irish war cries and the works of Edmund Spenser, I trace the depiction of the Irish war cries as a symbol of Irish barbarity and locate Spenser's works within a broader context of the division between the civil, pastoral paradise in England and the dense forests full of marauding bands of Irish bandits making blood-curdling sounds in Ireland.

I conclude this study with a reiteration that sounds matter in medieval and early modern period. They contributed significantly to the construction of subjectivities and communities. That is to say, sounds united. They divided. They brought people back together. They colonized. They decolonized. These multifaceted roles of sounds should also be studied alongside other sensory perceptions in the future studies.

Chapter 2

Lively Nature:

Listening to Birds from *The Owl and the Nightingale* to *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

Introduction: Bird Watching

I am an avid bird watcher. I was drawn to bird watching from a young age partly because of my interest in their songs as well as the diversity of the natural world. To my younger self, birds were the only animals capable of making something almost akin to music. Some “songs” I heard in their natural habitats were even better than human-made musical instruments. For someone who was drawn to both the sonic and the natural world, nothing was more enthralling than sitting quietly and listening to birdsongs in the wetlands or wooded areas where various kinds of birds lived. It was fascinating for me back then to learn how each bird, albeit of the same species, sang very differently. Every “song” they sang and other sounds they made also contained different meanings. My favorite bird, a chickadee, for instance, sang a simple and pure two or three notes song using a variety of “eee” sounds, such as “fee” or “bee.” When the bird was threatened, he / she would make “chicka-dee-dee” call with greater emphasis and many repetitions on the “dee” notes, hence the name “chickadee.” They also made what sounds like a bubbling noise when a lower-ranking bird (of the same species) came closer to the higher ranking one. Such variety of avian sounds later provoked me to pay attention to the diversity and heterogeneity of human world. This is particularly the case of the Atlantic archipelago in the medieval period, where diversity and heterogeneity abounded but was highly suppressed under the hegemonic power of the English polity. Such archipelagic diversity existed since time immemorial with the successive waves of various migrants moving in and out of the Isles,

ranging from the Celts, the Romans, the diverse Germanic peoples who came in the fifth century, to the various Scandinavian invaders and the Norman conquerors. When I started working on this study focusing on the diverse sonic world within England and beyond, however, my never receded interest in the avian sounds did lead me “off the beaten track” from texts usually employed in other scholarships on the archipelagic diversity such as the Anglo-Norman text *Fouke le Fitz Waryn*,² the Middle Welsh *Mabinogion*, or Gerald of Wales’ works on Ireland and Wales, to focus on medieval English literature featuring the sounds of birds. Before realizing it, I began writing a section on the thirteenth-century text *The Owl and the Nightingale* and Geoffrey Chaucer’s fourteenth-century work *The Parlement of Foules*. When the sections were completed, I found myself asking how could my analysis on the avian sounds related to the notion of sounds and heterogeneity of the Atlantic archipelago that I had been working on.

Then I recalled my first “birding” instructor. He was an American born Thai person who spent most of his life in the US and barely understood Thai language. I remembered how the threatening presence of language barrier between us was alleviated through our capability of *seeing* and thus identifying the same bird. Seeing more or less allowed us to achieve the convenience of knowledge through the distance and stability of the seen object. As Salomé Voegelin points out, seeing “always happens in a meta-position, away from the seen, however close” (xii). Such distance enables a detachment and objectivity that presents itself as truth. This visual “break” between humans and the birds in this situation had emboldened the

² According to Sarah Harlan-Haughey, studies of *Fouke* have flourished recently because its protagonist, Fouke, has been positioned as “a liminal denizen of the Welsh Marches” (102). The text is thus regarded as a narrative of borderlands and alterity. For further information, see Chapter 3 in her work, *The Ecology of the English Outlaw in Medieval Literature: From Fen to Greenwood* (London: Routledge, 2016) 101-142.

idea of structural certainty and that we could know and distinguish birds through our vision. Hearing, however, was another different story.

While it was not difficult to teach me to identify and describe the physical characteristics of different birds, it was much more problematic when it came to the notions of sounds and hearing. I discovered that our soundways differed drastically. Even though we were listening to the same sounds, what he heard was different from what I heard. Take a white-throated sparrow, for example, as a native speaker of tonal language and a music enthusiast, what I heard sounded very much similar to a simple, two notes song “jeep, jeep, jeep, ja, ja, ja,” with an emphasis on the first note. Yet my instructor described to me that he heard them singing “pure sweet Canada, Canada,” or “Poor Sam Peabody Peabody.” What was more disturbing for me was how he refused to acknowledge the musical notations since he had no interest in music theory like I did. Instead of helping us mediate the sensory experience of the said bird through the agree-upon categories as visuality did, such a sonic “break” in this sense suggested that although my instructor and I saw the same bird and shared the same sonic environment, we inhabited different soundscapes. We heard things differently because different cultural and ideological frameworks had shaped our experiences as listeners. The propensity for us as individuals to engage the sonic environment hinged upon our different history with sounds (American / Thai, musical / non-musical). Such remembrance finally brought me to come to terms with the sections on bird sounds that I have written. As Paul Rodaway explains, soundscape is an experiential and phenomenological process. It is not simply a passive state of being within the sonic environment but an active engagement with the sonic world that we are living in (86-87). Each soundscape thus helps each human to recognize his or her place in relation to the surrounding. As I was standing with my instructor in a suburban recreational park in Thailand, I, on one hand, felt as if

I was connected to other non-present (and perhaps imaginary) Thai birders because I thought that we might hear and recognize the same sounds, whereas my instructor was connected to his “birding” sonic community in the US. This situation became even more complicated considering that my instructor was ethnically a Thai person just like myself. From this short remembrance of that brief encounter in the park, there emerged several aspects of diversity and heterogeneity otherwise imperceptible if there was no sonic issue involved.

In the context of medieval England, although both *The Owl and the Nightingale* and *The Parlement of Foules* do not provide the medieval (and modern) audiences with the realistic representations of avian songs, calls, and other sounds they make during mating and nesting, they give me a great opportunity to explore the heterogeneity and diversity evident within the English polity itself. That being said, even though England has attempted for a long time to exert hegemony over other groups and polities on the Atlantic archipelago, difference and heterogeneity still exist everywhere including within the English realm. This is especially evident during the medieval period, in which political institutions and jurisdictional power had not yet been fully centralized. According to James Simpson, England before the sixteenth century was dominated by “a culture of jurisdictional heterogeneity” (1). Such culture allowed diversity and heterogeneity, not only in terms of jurisdictional but also political and cultural to flourish. The variation of topography also contributed to the thriving of heterogeneity. There was the “traditional distinction” between the cold and wet northern zone and the warmer and drier southern zone (Adrian 5). Within these zones the landscapes were varied. These included heath, moor, hills, coastal cliffs, fenland, woodland, vale, downland, and plains – which occurred “in complex patterns and in close proximity to one another” (ibid). Such diverse environments did affect “the settlement patterns and types of communities to which they gave rise” (ibid). It is not

surprising then that heterogeneity thrived well in medieval England. Of special relevance to my study is how such diversity affected the ways people hear their environments. Similar to the perplexing sonic experience I had with my “birding” instructor, there are many instances in medieval English literature in which characters are found to inhabit in the entirely different soundscapes. This can be seen in the thirteenth-century text *The Owl and the Nightingale*, which I am going to explore in the following section.

The Competing Soundscapes

As mentioned previously, soundscape always entails an interaction between the listening subject and the sonic environment. That being said, we must therefore not only account for, but also emphasize the specificity of a given soundscape, whereby meaning is always negotiated by an embodied presence in a local context, comprised of an exchange between soundscape and listener. Such a realization is not at all unique to the sonic world of the suburban park where I first saw a glimpse of this very notion. Several centuries earlier, in the natural world of medieval England, there were also active listening subjects wandering around, as William Langland puts it, “wide in this world wondres to *here*” (Prologue 4, my italic). Numerous sounds were heard and the meanings were constantly negotiated among listeners from different places, traditions, cultures, and ideologies. Of course, it is entirely possible that these listeners might not be physically present in the described landscape at the moments of their writings, and that they might only wish to evoke, for instance, the blissful summery or vernal valleys simply to follow the Old French poetic tradition of the *pastourelle* in which, typically, an aristocratic young man out in the countryside on a beautiful day encounters an attractive woman singing a simple song or weaving a garland of flowers, and almost always attempts to seduce her, which leads to

outcomes ranging from successful seduction to rape. Yet it is still intriguing that, regardless of which traditions they may have inherited or what ideologies they might be positioned themselves in, what makes these medieval English listeners particularly distinctive for me is the way in which they represent themselves as the narrator of their own stories. This can be seen from how they significantly evoke in their portrayals of the landscapes the way in which they *themselves* – as the conscious *I* subjects – are listening to the surroundings.

In the thirteenth century Middle English debate text *The Owl and the Nightingale*,³ for example, the *I* subject is presented from the very beginning of what the narrator considers to be a narrative of his retreat in a summery valley: “*Ich* was in one sumere dale,/ in one suþe diþele hale,” (1-2, my italic). Even though it is problematic for later readers to literally know whether this *I* is an inflection of a historically particularized individual or not, such deliberate utilization of the *I* subject still highlights that this is no one else but the specific *me* – the narrator – who *situates* himself there and is the *subject* of the sentence⁴. Again, it is problematic to accurately pinpoint the extent to which this very *I* is a sincere expression of the conscious being. As Roger Dragonetti puts it, such an invocation of the subject might not be different from other medieval

³ As Neil Cartlidge elaborates in the introduction to his Exeter edition of the text, *The Owl and the Nightingale* has “fascinated critics precisely because its origins are so mysterious” (xiii). It is relatively problematic to prescribe the exact authorship, the date and the provenance of the poem. Most suggestions point to the reign of Richard I (1189- 99) or, less probably, John (1199-1216) (Mann 149). Bennett and Smithers in *Early Middle English Verse and Prose* prefer the reign of Richard I (2). The first piece of evidence is the date of the two manuscripts of the poem, which N.R. Ker placed in the second half of the thirteenth century (*The Owl and the Nightingale Reproduced in Facsimile*, ix). The second is the referenceto “King Henri”, followed by the prayer “Jesus his soule do merci!”, at lines 1091-2. This implies naturally that King Henry II is dead, but Henry III has not yet come to the throne. As Hume has discussed and summarized in Kathryn Hume’s full-length study of the poem’s difficulties of interpretation in *The Owl and the Nightingale: The Poem and its Critics*, scholarly attempts to connect the poem more closely to any specific events of the late twelfth century are generally unconvincing (6-8, 67-83).

⁴ In most grammatical structures, sentences have subject: the subject matter or topic of paragraphs; the grammatical subject in a sentence – the “doer” who acts. A.C. Spearing, among others, has noted that at least since Plato’s *Phaedrus*, the common perception has been that language is essentially speech, used as a means of communication between a speaker and listeners, and that writing is no more than auxiliary technology developed to extend the range of speech (*Textual Subjectivity* 5).

utilizations of devices such as rhetorical forms (*exordium, argumentatio, conclusio*), the parameters of style (figure of speech, word choice), standard topics (such as images of nature in the introductory stanza), and versification (rhyme scheme and syllable count) in a sense that they similarly provide a ready-made, even formal structure within which the poet must channel the desire of his audiences to hear what they need to hear instead of freely expressing what the poet wishes to express (Dragonetti 550; Peraino 15). It is even possible in this case that such channeling may occur simply as a manifestation of an a priori system of the literary debate tradition.⁵ However, it should also be noted that theological writings from late antiquity, most notably *The Confessions* of St. Augustine, to the twelfth century, such as the *Meditations* by Hugo of St. Victor and Guigo I the Carthusian, and the *Ethics* of Abelard, increasingly highlight the *existence* of self as well as personal responsibility, and rely on a concept of subjectivity configured by individuality, introspection, intentionality, and coherence⁶. If we take such contemporary theological notions into account, when the narrator further recounts that “iherde ich holde grete tale/ an hule and one ni3tingale” (3-4), what is more crucial here is thus the way in which the *I* exists within the auditory landscape as an active, conscious listening subject, rather than whether it might be a realistic or sincere expression of the self or not.

⁵ While *The Owl and the Nightingale* might be the ‘oldest’ bird debate poem written in English, the bird debate tradition began much earlier as a cultural byproduct of the twelfth century “renaissance”. For further information on this tradition, see Neil Cartlidge’s introduction to his edition of the text (xiii-liv).

⁶ See Stock, “The Self and Literary Experience in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages.” Here, Stock argues that the importance of reading and writing to self-contemplation strengthened the idea of the self as autonomous and individual (842). In “Voice and Writing in Augustine and the Troubadour Lyric,” Stephen G. Nichols also states that in Augustine’s *Confessions* 11.27-28, “the performative subject becomes aware of itself as an autonomous consciousness through hearing its own voice raised in [psalm] recitation. This is, for Augustine, just the first step in an education which moves progressively toward the discovery of the transcendent ego, a necessary condition for conversion” (147).

According to the narrator, this “grete tale” between the owl and the nightingale sounds “stif & starc & strong,/ sum wile softe & lud among” (5-6) as they are arguing over the respective merits of their ways of life and attacking each other’s habits and activities in a most ferocious way. Debated topics include their personal appearances and other avian-related issues such as nesting, singing, flying, hygiene, and feeding patterns in their attempts to claim supremacy. Before recounting the entire argument, the narrator also includes the descriptions of the sounds made by these two distinctive birds. To him, the happy nightingale is singing in all sorts of different modes, and her songs definitely sound like:

[Of] harpe & pipe þan he nere:
bet þuʒte þat he were ishote
of harpe & pipe þan of þrote. (22-25)

What can this description tell us about the natural soundscape of thirteenth century England, where, according to the narrator, the nightingale’s songs can be heard from “ore waste þicke hegge/ imeind mid spire & grene segge” (17-18)? Before exploring an answer to this question (and, of course, the natural soundscape), it is worth noting that I am taking a radically different approach from Bruce R. Smith’s and C. M. Woolgar’s. In B. Smith’s work on early modern England and Woolgar’s work on late medieval England, their accounts of a soundscape begin with descriptions of contemporary architecture and landscape. Through their use of historical evidence, Smith (49-52) and Woolgar (65-69) attempt to reconstruct the acoustic environments of long-lost eras. They recover the soundscapes of the past through recreating the objective reality that they claimed previously existed. For example, Woolgar focuses on how sound reverberated in Gothic churches (66), and Smith emphasizes the way street noises penetrated London houses (59). They describe the loudest sounds of their eras (bells) and the

music of the age. Smith in particular highlights the noises and voices that one would have heard in early modern theaters (206-245).

Yet as Smith and Woolgar concurrently agree, listening to sounds and soundscapes is not a neutral, passive act. In the introduction to his book, Smith highlights the four dimensions of a sound: the creation of a sound as a physical act, as a sensory experience, as an act of communication, and as a political act (3-29). As a sensory experience, Smith emphasizes how we need to connect the *thereness* and *hereness* of sound. Sound exists both as an event that occurs outside us, for example as “the rumble of car passing by on the street, *and* as a sensory experience within ourselves” (8). Thus, sound, in this context, is not only a series of vibrations in the air caused by a certain action far away. It is not merely a physical phenomenon that we can describe through a reconstruction of physical materials. Smith argues that we need “a *psychology* of listening...a *cultural poetics* of listening...a *phenomenology* of listening” (8). In other words, we need to understand how sound is understood and interpreted by each individual. Yet such a discussion of the subjective nature of listening is surprisingly lacking from the rest of Smith’s work. While he describes the acoustic environment and the various sounds that one could have heard in early modern England in great detail, it is only in the last chapter that the subjectivity of listening is mentioned, when Smith briefly touches on the differences between the Plymouth colonists’ and Algonquian Native Americans’ cultures of hearing (287-89). Woolgar, on the other hand, does recognize the subjectivity of soundscapes, but he locates sounds and noises during the medieval era entirely within a Christian hermeneutic. The sound of bells could drive demons away (70-71), the noise of a fart was associated with the Devil (76), and those who are divinely blessed would hear melodies and songs of the angels (77-78). The problem with such an approach is that it supports the generalization that medieval culture and politics were completely

dominated by Christian doctrines and biblical exegesis. It fails to recognize the diverse ways in which noises and voices were heard and interpreted. Instead, it constructs a single, hegemonic, monolithic soundscape as prevalent throughout late medieval England. Such homogenous conceptualization significantly overlooks that there were individuals who belonged to different soundscapes than others in this period. Different groups of people belonged to different sonic communities. They had different sets of rules for interpreting sounds, for understanding the reasons behind the creation of sounds, and for comprehending how sounds relate to contemporary social structure. For a study of soundscape to be fruitful, one must go beyond acknowledging the existence of owls and nightingales in the medieval English countryside and beyond a single interpretation of the birdsongs to realize how numerous subjective soundscapes coexisted in the same place and time.

In this sense, by comparing the nightingale's sound to contemporary melodious musical instruments such as harp and pipe, it seems that the narrator of *The Owl and the Nightingale* has initially situated himself within a soundscape similar to those of several medieval poets, musicians, and lyricists who considered the nightingale to be a singer of beautiful songs and compared its sound to human music-making of various kinds. Within this sonic world, it is the image of what we might call the "natural nightingale" that is most evident. There are neither references to the Bible, nor are there any trace of its classical and renowned associations with the tragic and gruesome tale of Philomela and the murder of Itys.⁷ The poets are allowed to present

⁷ The story of Philomela has long been recognized as the dominant tradition of the nightingale in the late antiquity as well as the medieval period. Homer (*Odyssey*, 19, 518-24), Apollodorus (*Bibliotheca*, 3, c.14), Virgil (*Eclogue*, 6, 78-81, and *Georgics*, IV, 511-15), and Ovid (*Metamorphoses*, VI, 412-674) sang of the pain of the adulterous wrong done to the nightingale. Though there are several forms of the story, emphasizing the heavy sadness and death in many ways, the one known to the Middle Ages must be that of Ovid. In this version Tereus, king of Thrace, marries Progne, daughter of the king of Athens. From this union Itys, their son, is born. Progne persuades Tereus to bring Philomela, her sister, to Thrace for a visit. However, Tereus becomes engulfed in the flame of desire at his first

their admiration each time in the guise of an extemporaneous emotional response to the exceptional beauty of the nightingale's sound, poured forth in inexhaustible abundance from beneath her covering of leaves. It is likely that the listening subjects of this sonic community might have begun their ear training processes under Eugenius of Toledo in the seventh century. His poem *Vox, philomela, tua cantus edicere cogit* (d. 658) starts with the declaration that the voice of the nightingale is better than both the cithara (a stringed instrument) and *musica flabra* (music effected by blowing): "Vox, philomela, tua citharas in carmine vincit/ et superas miris musica flabra modis" ("Your voice is an instrument finer than a zither; more hauntingly than wind-music it plays") (qtd. in Leech 82).

Eugenius's poem was persuasive enough to have been imitated two centuries later by the anonymous lyricist of the widely copied Latin song *Aurea personet lira clara modulamina*. This song combines two principal themes: a natural description of the nightingale influenced by Pliny's portrayal of the bird in *Naturalis Historia* (X, xliii) and technical music theory. This text opens by bidding the listener to praise the bird both with the fifteenth-note lyre and *in voce organica*. Sarah Fuller and Jan Ziolkowski tend to be in agreement when they translate the latter manner of praise as "with well-tuned voice" (qtd. in Leach 82). However, an alternative interpretation is also possible. It should be noted that this song focuses on music theory, particularly that formulated by Boethius in his six-century treatise *De institutione musica* and

sight of Philomela. He brings her back to Thrace, then rapes, imprisons, and cut out her tongue so she remains silent of his crime. Philomela manages to inform Progne by weaving her plight into a tapestry which she contrives to smuggle out of the prison. Progne then rescues her sister, and they take revenge by killing Itys and serving him to Tereus at a feast. When their deed is revealed to Tereus, he chases them, until, just as he is about to catch the two sisters, all three are metamorphosed into birds – Tereus into a lapwing, Progne to a swallow, Philomela to a nightingale. There are other versions. In some the metamorphoses of the sisters are reversed, so that Philomela becomes the swallow, as in Dante, *Purgatorio* IX, 13-15 and XVII, 19-21. However, Ovid's version is so well-known that *Philomela* has become the common Latin noun for nightingale, superseding *luscinia*. See A. R. Chandler, "The Nightingale in Greek and Latin Poetry," *The Classical Journal*, XXX (1934), 78 ff, and Josepha E. Gellinek-Schellekens, *The Voice of the Nightingale in Middle English Poems and Bird Debates* (New York: Peter Lang, 1984).

Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae*. Their theory divides music into three species: *musica mundana*, cosmic or heavenly music, made by the rapid motions of celestial bodies, giving the proportions of the seasons and other subdivision of time. *Musica humana*, or "human music", is the uniting of the various parts of the soul and incorporeal reason with the body so that they work harmoniously as one. Only *musica instrumentalis*, or music of instruments, is something that can be classified as music and is clearly manifest as audible sound,⁸ whether it is created by blowing wind instruments (*musica organica*) or using the impulse of fingers on strings or percussions (*musica ritmica*), or by the natural instrument of voice (*musica harmonica*). Perceptibly influenced by such theory, it is possible that the lyricist mentions *voce organica* in an attempt to compare the nightingale's sound not only to the lyre but also to the notes of wind instruments (Leach 81-82).

What distinguishes *The Owl and the Nightingale* from other predecessors concerning the nightingale is that the narrator chooses to cease his description of the bird's sound at the very moment that he is comparing it to the melodious sounds of harp and pipe. It seems that the author disappears into the background and acts as an observer who reports the details of the birds' debate. The listening subject of the narrator is, thus, replaced with two listening subjects – the owl and the nightingale. It is quite obvious that each bird has his / her own soundscape. Each hears and interprets birdsongs in different ways. According to Catherine Belsey, medieval and early modern plays and poetry are different from those of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in the sense that the former do not always contain an expression of the "truth" within the represented world. The texts can be explicitly "interrogative." The paradoxes and multiple

⁸ Boethius clearly postulates human music as unheard but ever-present characteristic of the human being (Holsinger 13). As for *musica mundana*, scholars in antiquity are unsure whether it is manifest as audible sound or not. See Joscelyn Godwin, *Harmonies of Heaven and Earth* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1988).

viewpoints presented are central to the works themselves and are never resolved by the authors in favor of any single “truth” (96). Following such formulation, R. Barton Palmer has classified *The Owl and the Nightingale* as another text that fits within the interrogative category (307) and I will follow him in doing so.

In *The Owl and the Nightingale*, there is no single soundscape within the text. In other words, there is no “true” way of listening to the songs of the owl and the nightingale, even though the listening subjects – the narrator, the owl, and the nightingale – are all located within the same environment. Belsey’s approach allows us to shift our focus from finding the “truths” within the text. There is no need to ask which listening subject that the author prioritizes, or whether the owl and the nightingale represent specific human individuals. Her approach enables us to focus on the very existence of diverse sounds within the text and, in this case, the existence of multiple ways of hearing within the same environment. As the birds’ debate progresses, the owl seems to refuse to share the same soundscape with the human narrator, for she claims that her voice “is bold& no3t unorne/ ho is ilich one grete horne”, and to her, the nightingale’s song is inferior to her own, since it sounds just like “ilich one pipe,/ of one smale wode unripe;” and her chatter simply sounds like an “Irish prost” (317-322).

It is not surprising that the nightingale rejects the owl’s way of hearing. Despite her agony that she might lose this verbal battle, the bird reminds her opponent that in order to know who sings the better songs, it is more appropriate to listen to each of them within their natural environments:

"[H]ule" ho seide " wi dostu so?

þu singest a-winter wolawo!

þu singest so doþ hen a-snowe,

al þat ho singeþ hit is for wowe.

A-wintere þu singest wroþe & 3omere,

an eure þu art dumb a-sumere. (411-16)

From this passage, it is clear that the nightingale is an active listener of the natural world that she lives in. She vividly situates the owl within a specific landscape and soundscape. Not only does the owl sing in the winter like a hen in the snow, but also the owl, the hen, and the snow all signify misery, gloom, and sorrow. The nightingale goes on to stress that when heavy snow lies everywhere, all creatures are full of sorrow (430-31). Once spring comes, however, everything is transformed.

Ac ich alle blisse mid me bringe:

ech wiȝt is glad for mine þinge,

& blisseþ hit wanne ich cume,

& hiȝteþ aȝen mine kume.

Þe blostme ginneþ springe & sprede,

boþe ine tro & ek on mede.

Þe lilie mid hire faire wlite

wolcumeþ me, þat þu hit w[i]te,

bit me mid hire faire blo

þat ich shulle to hire flo.

Þe rose also mid hire rude,

þat cumeþ ut of þe þorne wode,

bit me þat ich shulle singe

vor hire luue one skentinge: (433-46)

For the nightingale, winter might signify despondency, but spring is full of joy, hope, and love. All creatures share such a joyful mood and the nightingale is firmly situated within this wider natural world. The nightingale sings in direct response to the requests of the blooming roses, and she sings to serenade all the creatures that have emerged from the gloomy winter. The nightingale thus locates herself within a specific relationship with both the seasons and other creatures. As the owl belongs to the winter, the nightingale belongs to the spring. As the owl is compared to the hen in the snow, so the nightingale is linked to the blooming roses and lilies. Once the season changes, however, the nightingale must disappear because, with the changing of the season, a new landscape appears with different noises and voices that signify a different mood (450-466).

By focusing on “hearing” this poem, the reader can discern these two competing soundscapes of the natural world throughout the text. The owl counters the nightingale’s arguments by hearing the soundscapes of the seasons differently. For the owl, winter is the time of joys and festivities as Christmas arrives and the owl joins in this season of good will by singing carols (473-86). In the depth of winter, the voice of the owl signifies her strength, character, and ability to comfort those affected by the cold weather (523-40). The owl hears summer as a time of lechery, wanton lust, and search for immediate gratification, and the nightingale’s song is characteristic of these lowly desires and abandonment of chastity (489-522). The arguments and counter-arguments continue until both birds fly off to ask for the judgment of Master Nicholas of Guildford at the end.

Thus far, I have argued that we need to “hear” a text while reading it. *The Owl and the Nightingale*, for example, contain descriptions of the natural *landscapes* in which the two birds live as well as the natural *soundscapes* of noises made by the two birds. However, these

soundscapes are not simply a collection of noises; they are created by the subjective interpretations of the noises and voices. By linking the sounds together, each interpretive soundscape forms an ordered sonic environment complete with its own worldview and philosophy. The nightingale hears the sounds of winter as the signifiers of woe and misery, while the sounds of spring signify a time of rebirth and bliss. The owl, on the other hand, hears the sounds of winter as signs of Christmastide and strength through adversity while summer is full of sounds of lust and debauchery. The subjective nature of soundscapes means that there are multiple possible interpretations of each sound, which are then located in different soundscapes. Since pre-modern literature often produced “interrogative” texts, full of paradoxes and conflicting viewpoints, one can often hear multiple soundscapes within a single text, as is the case with *The Owl and the Nightingale*.

Inconclusive Soundscapes

However, a soundscape can also be much more complex than being the simple competition between two beings inhabiting in different sonic world. The soundscapes in *The Owl and the Nightingale* are relatively simple as the overwhelming focus is on two types of sounds, those of the owl and the nightingale; but a soundscape can also be composed of different noises and voices that must be interpreted as a whole. The melody of the violin and the chords on the piano may each possess their own significance. When the two sounds are combined, they can also produce additional meanings and implications. In the same way, a natural soundscape may be composed of multiple birdsongs, the sound of a rushing river, and the sound of wind rustling leaves in the trees. Each sound may have its own meaning and all the sounds combined may also possess additional meanings.

Moreover, as soundscapes are inherently subjective, an individual may be located in multiple soundscapes and have multiple ways of interpreting each sound, just as it is possible to live a life within a multicultural environment. Individuals living in a multicultural society may hybridize the cultures into something new, an amalgamation of different ways of life. Alternatively, living in a multicultural environment may also entail living an inherently paradoxical and inconsistent state, forever being pushed and pulled by different values and beliefs. In the same way, it is also possible for the narrator or persona within a text to be confused and inconsistent as to how sounds should be interpreted. A soundscape can also be inconsistent and inconclusive.

These complex facets of soundscape are particularly evident in another work depicting lively birds, Geoffrey Chaucer's *Parlement of Foules*. This early work of Chaucer was probably written around the 1380s. In this dream vision, the narrator describes the focus of his text as his desire to understand love. At first, he tries to find an answer in Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis*. After spending the entire day reading the book, the narrator falls asleep and dreams of being guided by Scipio Africanus himself into an idealized garden. He then walks through the temple of Venus, witnessing a series of scenes allegorizing various aspects of love. Finally, the narrator observes Nature presiding over a "parliament of fowls," an assembly of birds on St Valentine's Day each wanting to choose their mate. After a whole day of argument, the parliament is finally dissolved and the narrator wakes up still puzzled by what love is. The only conclusion offered is the narrator's wish to read more books in an attempt to find a satisfactory answer.

To date, the overwhelming majority of critical effort on *The Parlement of Foules* has been focused on the apparent discordances between its parts and the paradoxical views on love offered within the poem (Benson 994). Bertrand Bronson once remarked that the *Parlement* is

“too nimble for criticism” (46) and Donald C. Baker wrote in his *Companion to Chaucer Studies* that he is “not at all sure what the *Parliament* is about” (362). The poem itself seems to have four separate parts that bear little connections with each other and the relationship between the noises and voices in each part is also not clear. The first part of the poem contains a summary of *Somnium Scipionis*, which focuses on the virtue of devoting oneself to “commune profyt” (47).

...sin erthe was so lyte,
And dissevable and ful of harde grace,
That he ne shulde hym in the world delyte. (64-66)

Instead, if “besyly thowwerche and wysse / To commune profit” (74-75), one could hope to enjoy life in “a blyful place” after death (48). On the other hand, “likerous folk, after that they ben dede, / Shul whirle aboute th’erthe alwey in peyne” (79-80). It is never clear whether the narrator thinks of love as the love of “commune profit” or the love of “likerous folk.”

With this emphasis on the “commune profit,” the first section of the poem focuses on the necessary strife to escape the narrow confines of the earth and to understand the breadth and complexity of the divine universe. Fittingly, the sounds described in this section are the universal sounds of the music of the spheres, and in this case the music seems to be clearly audible.

And after shewed he hym the nyne speres,
And after that the melodye herde he
That cometh of thilke speres thryes three,
That welle is of musyk and melodye
In this world here, and cause of armony. (59-63)

The first three lines are a short summary from *Somnium Scipionis*, but the last two are added by Chaucer and perhaps situate him in the soundscape of Augustine, Cassiodorus, and Isidore of

Seville. Philosophers and musical theorists in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages often thought of all rhythmic motions as music. Isidore, in particular, had written that “sine Musica nulla disciplina potest esse perfecta, nihil enim sine illa. Nam et ipse mundus quadam harmonia sonorum fertur esse compositus” (“without music there can be no perfect knowledge, for there is nothing without it. Even the universe itself is said to have been put together with a certain harmony of sounds”) (*Etymologiae*, Bk. 3, ch. 17, sect. 1). The movement of stars, the pulse of living beings, poetry, and dancing were all parts of the metaphysical soundscape that hints at a divine sonic order within a noisy but harmonious universe (Chamberlain 32-33). Within this soundscape, all the music and melody on earth are ultimately the results of the harmony of the heavenly bodies above.

This metaphysical soundscape continues in the next section of the poem. Once the summary of *Somnium Scipionis* ends and the dream vision begins, Africanus appears to the narrator and leads him through a gate to a *locus amoenus* or a garden of paradise. Africanus disappears and, within this idealized garden, the narrator hears the birds singing “with voys of aungel in here armonye” (191). There is also extraordinary music:

Of instruments of strenges in acord
Herde I so pleye a ravyshyng swetnesse,
That God, that makere is of al and lord,
Ne herde nevere betere, as I gesse. (197-200)

Last of all there is the sound of a gentle breeze rustling the leaves on the trees in “[a]cordaunt to the foules song alofte.” (203)

David Chamberlain has noted that the sounds Chaucer describes – birdsong, music from string instruments, and wind – fits with the classification of sonorous music found in Isidore’s

Etymologiae and Vincent of Beauvais' *Speculum doctrinale*. Birdsong is a type of *harmonica*, the music of voices; the sound of the strings is a type of *organica*, produced by manmade instruments; and the sound of the wind is a type of *rhythmica*, produced by invisible instruments (43). However, we cannot be sure what the exact sources of Chaucer's *Parlement* are and what philosophical texts Chaucer had access to during his life. It is possible that Chaucer never read the *Etymologiae* and *Speculum doctrinale*. Nevertheless, the poet's stress on "armony" and "acord" of sounds in this idyllic garden does hint at a metaphysical soundscape that reflects the presence of God in nature. His careful, orderly descriptions of these sounds arguably put him in the same sonic community as Isidore and Vincent de Beauvais. Chaucer might not have read their works but he might have heard sounds the same way that they did.

Additionally, the description of angelic birdsongs in the idyllic garden also places Chaucer in the same sonic community as other authors of medieval romance. The *locus amoenus* is an integral part of the romance tradition and birdsongs are almost always present in these idyllic gardens. Such a garden is one of the primary ways that medieval authors described the natural landscape. For instance, in the midst of a siege, the author of the Alliterative *Morte Arthur* adds a *locus amoenus* scene. Arthur has sent some of his warriors on a foraging expedition to replenish his supplies, but these soldiers come upon a green meadow full of sweet-smelling flowers and suddenly discover the consolation of nature and God, away from misery and death in Arthur's war.

Thare vnbryills theis bolde and baytes þeire horses,
To þe grygyng of þe daye, þat byrdez gan synge,
Whylls the surs of þe sonne, þat sonde es of Cryste,
That solaces all synfull þat syghte has in erthe. (II. 2509-12).

Like Chaucer's angelic birdsong, the *Morte*-poet connects the sound of birds to the presence of a divine force within an idyllic natural soundscape and landscape.

In the next section, the poet describes the temple of Venus where there is a jarring, discordant note. Underneath one of the trees, the narrator finds Cupid standing with his bows and arrows. The garden of paradise is suddenly disrupted by allegories of love. What follows is a series of scenes featuring Adornment, Courtesy, Lust, Cunning, Priapus, and Venus, among others. This is a close adaptation of Boccaccio's *Teseida*, describing the visit of Palemone's personified Prayer to the temple of Venus. The only sound to be heard in and around the temple is the sound of the sighs "engendered with desyr / That maden every auter for to brenne" (248-49). The causes of these sighs are the sorrows that ultimately came from "the bittere goddesse Jelosye" (252).

Chamberlain, who emphasizes how *The Parlement of Foules* flows naturally from its opening section on the music of the spheres, argues that the scenes in and around the temple of Venus are the visions of hell. The three sections of the poem on the *locus amoenus*, the temple, and the parliament of fowls, then, signify heaven, hell, and earth respectively (45-46). If we follow Chamberlain's interpretation, the soundscape of *Parlement* contains three parts. The angelic birdsong, the sweet string music, and the wind rustling the leaves are associated with heaven, paradise, and perhaps the Garden of Eden. The silence outside the temple of Venus and the sound of hot and bitter sighs of jealousy within the temple are associated with hell and perhaps lecherous folk. The squabbling of birds and the calm voice of Lady Nature in the parliament of fowls are then associated with earth, where each individual has a choice whether to be a lover of "commune profit" or to be a "breker of the lawe."

Yet Chamberlain's view is not widely shared. As mentioned above, most scholars have been puzzled and fascinated by the discordances and dissonances within the *Parlement*. Most found no harmony and consistency within the poem. Henry Marshall Leicester, for example, sees the *Parlement* as a symptom of cultural disunity during the late medieval period. The proliferation of glosses and commentaries on classical and Christian texts meant that there were increasing controversies and contradictions over the central beliefs. Instead of illuminating God's divine order, each scholarly enterprise led humans further from clarity and closer to perpetual strife (19). After all, in the twelfth century, Peter Abelard had already addressed 158 theological questions with contradictory quotations from the Church Fathers in his work, *Sic et Non*. As Leicester puts it, in the *Parlement* "[i]nstead of seeing a single vision, we hear many voices" (19). In terms of soundscape, Leicester hears the earthly paradise "à la Dante" as a different sonic world from Cicero's music of the spheres. The soundscape of the *locus amoenus* may represent heaven, but heaven cannot exist on earth without collapsing into the hell of lecherous love. Paradise is too far removed from the everyday experience of fallen sinful humans, and the vision of an idyllic garden can only be a fleeting fantasy, a glimpse of the lost world (Leicester 20). From this view, there are then multiple, irreconcilable soundscapes in the *Parlement*. Instead of a divinely ordered sonic universe, there seems to be a discordant cacophony from the competing traditions of dream-vision, *locus amoenus*, romance, *demande d'amour*, and classical and Christian texts all struggling to be heard.

More recently, Kathleen Davis has also emphasized the failure of unity within the *Parlement*. Davis sees the *Parlement* as an attempt to construct an image of the English political community. However, the inherent problem within Chaucer's project is that he ends up finding a rupture in time necessary. The existence of a community in the *Parlement* entails connecting

transcendental, timeless philosophy with the everyday life of its members. The motion of the planets and the eternal idyllic garden without day or night need to be connected to Priapus with “hys sceptre in hys honde” (256) and sensual Venus, who is resting half-naked on a golden bed, waiting for the sun to set (161-8). In terms of soundscapes, it is likely to me that Chaucer might be asking, “How do we fit the sounds of jealous sighs within Boethius or Isidore’s categories of music?” Is it possible to have a soundscape that can contain and explain the music of the spheres, the angelic birdsongs, the hot sighs of jealousy, *and* the squabbling of various fowls?

The point of this discussion is not to resolve the long-standing debate on the conclusiveness and harmony or the lack of these qualities in Chaucer’s *Parlement*. As Josephine Bloomfield points out, the beauty and humor of Chaucer’s poetry depend on the fascinating questions he asks and not necessarily on whether he provides an answer (130-131). Following Paul Strohm’s *Social Chaucer*, Bloomfield argues that Chaucer wrote for an audience with some literary sophistication and knowledge of the major texts of both classical and vernacular scholars. The audience would then be familiar with the commentaries on major texts and the controversies over their interpretations. She then proposes that Chaucer to some extent satirizes the style of these commentaries. Thus, in this intellectual milieu, Chaucer presents us with numerous sounds that seem to fit in the same framework of understanding and, yet, there are also some jarring and discordant notes. The soundscapes of the *Parlement* may be particularly fascinating precisely because they hint at both unity and disunity within the medieval intellectual world. The text provides us with a fairly cohesive soundscape but also includes doubts and discordances, leaving the reader with intellectual puzzles for further pondering.

Such complex soundscapes can also be heard in the last section of the poem. The narrator walks back towards the idyllic garden and found the goddess Nature presiding over the

parliament of fowls. Order seems to have been restored and the narrator seems to be in the *locus amoenus* again. The goddess is noble and graceful just as she is described in Alan de Lille's *De Planctu Naturae*. Chaucer explicitly mentions Alan's text in line 316. The goddess is then described:

Nature, the vicaire of the almyghty Lord,
That hot, cold, hevy, lyght, moyst, and dreye
Hath knyght by evene noumbres of acord (379-81).

The medieval intellectual order has thus been restored. The reader simultaneously experiences the *auctoritas* of Christianity, medieval natural philosophy, and classical philosophy. God is present in this scene through his vicar, the goddess Nature. While the concept of Nature stretches back to Greek philosophy, the personification of Nature as a goddess who acts as the vicar of God and the link between heaven and earth only became prominent during the medieval period. The role of the goddess Nature became an important topic for the scholars associated with the school of Chartres, who were particularly concerned with combining the concept of nature in classical civilization with the Christian faith (Economou 53). Line 381 implies a worldview influenced by Pythagoreanism, a belief that all reality is connected through whole numbers and ratios, or "by evene noumbres of acord." Chamberlain even goes as far as to argue that *The Parlement* might have been composed in a Pythagorean manner. The seven lines of the rhyme royal stanza, for instance, may be connected to the seven tones of the spheres described by Cicero in *Somnium Scipionis*. The quatrain and tercet that make up the stanza may also be connected to the four Galenic humors that make up the body and the three Platonic faculties that make up the soul (Chamberlain 41, 55). *The Parlement*, therefore, might be successful in uniting the major texts and beliefs of the medieval scholars once more.

The social order seems to be restored in this section of the poem as well. Instead of the chaos in and around the temple of Venus, here the narrator sees birds everywhere as far as the eye could see and all of them perch and sit in an orderly manner with their own estate. The noble birds of prey perch on high. The worm-eating birds all perch slightly lower. The seed-eating birds sit on the green. The lowly waterfowls sit lowest in the dale. This sense of order is further strengthened by the catalogues of the birds and their characteristics that take up the whole of five stanzas. Nature herself also establishes the social and political order in this realm of birds with herself as the ruler through her “statut,” “governaunce,” and “ryghtful ordenaunce.”

Such order and harmony, however, do not last. Nature opens the proceeding of the parliament of fowls by calling on the royal eagle to choose first, who then makes a lengthy speech of four stanzas, declaring his love for the female eagle in courtly terms. His choice, however, is contested by two other male eagles of lesser rank, who make their own lengthy speeches arguing the case for their love. The narrator is clearly impressed by these speeches:

Of al my lyf, syn that day I was born,
So gentil ple in love or other thyng
Ne herde nevere no man me beforn (484-86).

However, Chaucer immediately subverts these noble declarations of love. The speeches have already lasted until “dounward went the sonne wonder faste” (490) and other birds are getting impatient for their chance to choose their mate. The social order breaks down and the poetic speeches are disrupted by cries of “Have don, and lat us wende!” (492). Even worse, the curse sentences cried out by the fowls become intelligible noises: the “Kek kek! kokkow! quek quek!” (499) of the goose, the cuckoo, and the duck. Only a few lines previously, the reader may be

enjoying the third male eagle's vow that "til that deth me sese / I wol ben heres, whether I wake or wynke" (481-82) and now the noises that the birds make are not even comprehensible.

Given the praise for the male eagle's speeches, the sounds of other birds may be used to contrast the noble nature of the eagles with the lowly nature of the others. After all, the parliament is still under the governance of Nature, who stops the squabbling with a command to "Hold youre tonges there!" (521). She decrees that each estate of fowl should give its own verdict on who should win the female eagle. However, although Nature's command seems to uphold the social order of fowls, peace does not last. What follows is not the orderly speeches of four birds according their rank. Each new proposal is answered by a challenge and a criticism. The speech of the royal eagle is interrupted by cries of the other two suitors for the question to be settled by battle. The "kakelynge" of the goose, who claims that "My wit is sharp" (565), is answered by the jest of the sparrow-hawk that the goose is a fool and should keep quiet rather than show her stupidity. The turtledove proposes that the suitors should serve the female eagle until their death. True love is about loyalty and it does not matter whether it is fulfilled. The duck does not agree and asks, "Who can a resoun fynde or wit in that?" (591) The noble eagle abandons his poetic language and calls the duck a "cherl" (596) who cannot understand what love is. The cuckoo then disagrees with the noble eagle and the merlin disagrees with the cuckoo.

Nature interrupts the avian squabbling and makes another lengthy speech. She asks the female eagle for her opinion and the royal bird asks for a year to consider her choice. Finally, each fowl is free to leave with his mate and there are two sounds they make as they depart.

But fyrst were chosen foules for to synge,

As yer by yer was alwey hir usaunce

To synge a roundel at here departynge,

To don Nature honour and plesaunce. (673-76)

The lyric of the roundel itself also emphasizes more singing:

Saynt Valentyn, that art ful hy on-lofte,

Thus syngen smale foules for thy sake:

Now welcome, somer, with thy sonne softe, (683-85)

The fowls also sing to celebrate their own love:

Sith ech of hem recovered hath hys make,

Ful blissful mowe they synge when they wake: (688-89)

In terms of soundscape, we seem to have come full circle. The sound of the birds singing in harmony and happiness recalls the angelic voice of the birds in the *locus amoenus* toward the beginning of *The Parlement*. It seems that natural order has been restored once more and it can also be read as an earthly reflection of the music of the spheres in the opening. The birds now sing together in a harmonious, intelligible voice. The discordant, argumentative noises have disappeared. The birds even seem to be affirming Anglo-French unity through singing a roundel:

The note, I trowe, imaked was in Fraunce,

The wordes were swiche as ye may heer fynde (677-78).

Yet once again, Chaucer presents us with an inconclusive soundscape with a jarring, discordant note. Amidst all this scene of happiness, the three eagle suitors and the female eagle still remain without their mate. This state of affairs leaves the reader wondering whether the four eagles could join in the harmonious sounds celebrating the season of mating at the end of the poem. As they have not yet mated, perhaps they do not sing the roundel, but if they do not join in the roundel, then the roundel might not truly signify a return to a divinely ordered, harmonious

universe. The listening subject himself wakes up from the dream still wondering what love is and chooses to read more books. The soundscape of his dream vision seems inconclusive indeed.

Threatening Soundscapes

In this last part of the chapter, I would like to explore another aspect of the sonic world found in medieval English literature. Indeed, if we only look at the two treatises that I have discussed, it seemed that the natural soundscape of medieval England, after the English had conquered almost the entire Atlantic archipelago and successfully established the longstanding English hegemony, the sonic environment sounded quite tame. There might be competing soundscapes between the owl and the nightingale. There may exist the discordant noises when the birds gather to choose their mates. Yet such competition and dissonances seem relatively minor to the point that they appear to leave the natural soundscapes of England with the pastoral settings where the listening subjects can wander around the pleasant wooded landscape, full of shaded valleys; listening attentively to singing or talking birds, learning about themselves or the craft of love in the process. The birds may be singing harmoniously, or they may be squabbling about the beauty of their songs or the meaning of love. However, the natural soundscapes seem to hint at a safe world where no deadly threats are present. One might encounter a strange temple of lust and desires, but one could always back track to the idyllic garden and enjoy the peace.

Unfortunately, this is not always the case with a sonic environment. Beyond the idyllic woodlands there are always chances that one might cross the boundary of the familiar into the untamable, incomprehensible wilderness. In late medieval England, the notion of wilderness constantly conjures up images of “vast expanses of untamed land which is either desolate or supports a web of plant life which in turn provides a habitation for unknown numbers and

species of animals” (Rudd 91). This notion is predominantly more a state of mind than an actual landscape. Wilderness as a geographical space can be demarcated, usually by defining the boundaries of owned and managed land,⁹ but the concept of wilderness is neither easily defined nor contained. Medieval wilderness in particular is “the place in which the unknowns can act as tangible forces, often embodied in beings that are not bound by human rules.”(Rudd 91) Codes of conduct, religious norms, and the established framework of human society therefore become meaningless in such places where “the wild things are” (Rudd 92). It can be said that a medieval wilderness refuses to recognize those social constructs by which we habitually seek to differentiate ourselves from the “other.” What we have learned from society tends to lose its meaning in the wilderness, as the latter has “posited itself as a sign to threaten the extinction of the very human signs” (Rudd 92). In such wild topographies where all the much-valued human reasons are no longer applicable, it is necessary for humans to reconstruct and re-negotiate their ways of knowing. Not so surprisingly, this often leads to the transformations of how we hear the environment. What listening subjects have learned from the familiar (i.e. cultivated) auditory world tends to convey different meanings that connote the state of being in an unfamiliar terrain. In the dark, mysterious, and unruly landscape, the avian sounds are no longer the sweet, pleasant songs of the spring meadows when love blooms. On the contrary, these songs might be heard as

⁹ According to landscape historian Oliver Rackham, wildwood (“primeval wilderness”) existed only 12,000 and 6,500 years ago and had been vanished from both the continental Europe and the British Isles by Mesolithic tree felling and burning, as well as Neolithic woodland management. What perceived by its contemporaries as “forests” were in fact islands of woodland surrounded by farmland or other land. In size they ranged up to two hundred acres. Each had a name and belonged to somebody (14-5). It should be also noted that these woodlands were themselves, in Corinne J. Saunders’ words, “strangely populous and mixed landscapes” (3). They had constantly played a significant economic role in the agrarian history of England, and simultaneously harboring the criminals or outlaws. These woodlands provided firewood and raw materials for building. Wild honey, fruits, and barks were valuable commodities. Peasants who pastured the pigs, woodcutters, and charcoal-burners could also be found pursuing their livelihood within the forest, while the same landscape also provided a shelter for the outlaws and for those seeking solitary or eremitic life (ibid).

sad, desolate sounds that serve as a reminder of the civilized world that the listening subjects have left behind.

In order to achieve a better understanding of being in the untamed soundscapes, let me move back in time from late medieval England to the icy seascape of the Anglo-Saxon period, where a solitary narrator recounts his exile experience vividly in the Old English poem known today as *The Seafarer*. Like several Middle English poets, in the beginning of the poem, this unnamed narrator also deliberately utilizes the *I* subject to describe what he claims to be the “soð-giedd” (true) account of his lonely expedition through the wintry seas. Of course, such a statement might be merely rhetorical and it is problematic for the audiences to know precisely if this assertion is literally true. What is intriguing however is that an attempt at interweaving what the narrator claims to be the “true” story of his “true” self is made at all. Such a manifestation of the narrator’s self-awareness is highlighted further as he continues to make an agonizing statement of his suffering: “hu *ic* geswinc-dagum / earfoð-hwile oft þrowade, / bitre breost-ceare gebiden hæbbe” (“How *I*, in days of tribulation, often endured a time of suffering, endured bitter sorrow in my heart”; 2-4 my italics).¹⁰ In order to make the experience of his “breost-ceare” known to the audiences, the narrator turns to describe the hostile natural world around him: “atol yþa gewealc” (“terrible tossing were the sea waves” 6). In so doing, he not only provides the audiences with the vivid visual depictions of the cold and stormy seas but also creates sounds of the natural environment that dramatically serve to emphasize his loneliness and sorrow. This soundscape of nostalgia begins in line 18, where the narrator accentuates his anguish by

¹⁰ Unless otherwise noted, all quotations in Old English are taken from *Eight Old English Poems*. Eds. John C. Pope and R.D. Fulk. Translations are my own.

contrasting the hostile sounds of the frozen sea with the happy noise of his fellow kinsmen.

There, wretched and sorrowful on the “is-cealdne sæ” (ice-cold sea), he hears nothing but:

..... butan hlimman sæ,
is-caldne wæg, hwilum ylfete song¹¹
Dyde ic me to gomene, ganotes hleoþor,
and hwilpan sweg fore hleahtor wera,
mæw singende fore medo-drince.
Stormas þær stan-clifu beotan, þær him stearn oncwæð
isig-feþera; full oft þæt earn bigeall,
urig-feþra; ne ænig hleomæga
fea-sceaftig ferhð frefran meahte. (18-26)

(“the roaring sea, the ice-cold wave, sometimes the wild swan’s song. The cry of the gannet was all my gladness, and the call of the curlew, in place of the laughter of men, the mewing gull, not the sweetness of mead-drink. There storms beat the stone cliffs, there the tern answered them, icy-feathered one; and often the eagle screamed overhead, dewy-winged one; no protecting kinsman could comfort the wretched in spirit.”)

To me, this is one of the most moving, emotional, and vibrant soundscape of the natural world ever found in the manuscripts of the Anglo-Saxon period. The narrator’s icy, stormy, desolate seascape is intensely defined through the sounds of sea-birds and waves. The sea-birds’ sounds, ranging from the wild’s swan song to the mewing gull, are heard and interpreted by the narrator as the sounds that have taken the place of the laughter and celebration of his kinsmen. It seems to the narrator that these sounds offer no consolation of the natural world. Quite the reverse, they threaten him and his remembrance of the community that he has left behind. These sounds refuse to let the narrator remember his community as a unified whole, but instead he only recalls fragments. All the laughter and revelries are scattered and replaced by the sounds of the

¹¹ Intriguingly, the editors differ in their punctuation of ll. 19-20, as it is not apparent whether the new sentence begins at *hwilum* or *dyde*. For further discussion on this particular topic, see Margaret E. Goldsmith, “The Seafarer and the Birds” in *The Review of English Studies*, New Series, Vol. 5 No. 19 (Jul. 1954), pp. 225-235.

wild seascape. Then, his acoustical trauma is intensified as he hears the sounds of the storms beating the stone cliffs, and no one answers them but the icy-feathered tern and the screeching, dewy-winged eagle. Contrary to how the nightingale in *The Owl and the Nightingale* claims that she belongs to one particular sonic community, these sounds of the sea-birds and the sea itself exist and interweave as a network that registers the narrator's sense of *not* belonging here in the icy sea or even in the transitory world, but to drift, to be out of place, and still to search for an eternal peace. The vast and ice-cold seascape has become the natural sounding board to all of his acoustic experiences. It is a space of hyperbolic sounding, an auditory range that brings together the intrinsic potentiality of sound to echo and expand while being interwoven with the narrator's internal struggle and hope.

Several hundred years later, in the county of Cheshire, which at that time was the northern embankment of the Welsh Marches, one of England's most strategic borderlands, an anonymous and seemingly well-educated poet composed what would be known later, according to John M. Bowers, as one of "the best Arthurian romance in the English language" (14) – i.e. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (*SGGK*).¹² This late fourteenth century alliterative romance has held readers spellbound with its formally sophisticated plot as well as its outstanding craftsmanship. As the story of *SGGK* begins, it seems to bear no resemblance at all to the narration of icy exile in *The Seafarer*. After the poem has established the noble antiquity of the Arthurian nation, what the audience witness next is neither crying sea birds nor the ice-cold sea, but the King's spectacular Christmas feast. This event is celebrated for "fiften dayes," (44) and

¹²*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is found in the sole manuscript: British Library MS Cotton Nero A.x, dated around 1400 on the basis of handwriting and style of illuminations (Bowers, xi). Similar to *The Seafarer*, there are no titles provided for the four poems contained in the Cotton manuscript. The editorial title of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* apparently comes from the encounter between the hero of the poem and his uncanny challenger.

its joviality is fully manifested in the forms of “tounayed” (41) among “þise gentyle kniȝtes” (42) as well as “þe court caroles” (43). In order to entertain the young and restless Arthur (“So bisied him his ȝonge blod and his brayn wylde.”; 89), there are always the voices of the courtiers recounting the stories of “sum auenturus þyng an vncouþe tale/ Of sum mayn meruayle, þat he myȝt trawe,/ Of alderes, of armes, of oþer auenturus,” (93-95) just to keep the king’s “wylde” brain amused. Then, the description moves on to elaborate on how the meal is served. Of course, this is by no means a simple, frugal fare. The guests at this feast enjoy elegant and extravagant dishes of various meats and choice delicacies on silver plates washed down by plenty of beer and wine. They are serenaded by martial music of trumpets, drums, and pipes that nourish their hearts while the food and drinks nourish (or pollute) their body (116-120). This is undoubtedly neither a natural nor a wild soundscape, but a sonic world of civility and festivity, full of carnivalesque entertainments and extravagant celebrations whose existence depends primarily on the competencies of the glorious King and his noble knights.

Nevertheless, this festive soundscape transforms swiftly upon the arrival of the mysterious Green Knight. According to the ecocritic¹³ Gillian Rudd, it is quite obvious that the poet is “at pains” to ensure that readers understand exactly how “green” this eerie figure is, from the hair on his head to the enameling on his stirrups as well as the color of his stallion (110). Even though his horse’s mane and tail are elegantly braided in a green and gold pattern recalling “Celtic design” (Arner 88), the gold still becomes a version of green expressed in precious metal

¹³This relatively new approach, according to Cheryl Glotfelty, is “the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment” (xviii). In this definition the “physical environment” denotes the natural world of living things and non-anthropogenic objects and locales (Bruckner and Brayton 3). For further information on the definition and praxis of ecocriticism, see Cheryl Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (eds), *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (Athens: 1996).

whose function is to bring out the greenness of everything else. The Green Knight also carries a holly branch as well as an axe. He is impeccably dressed in a costume decorated with birds and insects, which covers the green-skinned background of the Knight himself. Rudd proposes that such representation of this peculiar figure might suggest his relationship with the natural world, as his image invites us to regard the Green Knight as a part of tapestry, almost as if he himself is “the plant amongst which these birds and insects roost or live” (110). Corinne J. Saunders suggests in accordance with Rudd that the Knight’s green hue as well as his holly branch registers his connection with the natural and supernatural spheres, as green being both the color of the forest and of faery (148). His association with nature is also visible to Arthur and his courtiers when he marvelously retrieves his severed head and demands a rematch one year hence at his Green Chapel. Such disturbing ability to survive death reasserts the power of natural life forces and cycles. It can be said that the natural and supernatural worlds in *SGGK* are deeply intertwined. Such intertwinement is made visible through the presence of the Green Knight, who is an embodiment of the natural and supernatural worlds outside of the civilized court. His sudden entrance into the world of Camelot may be seen as the presence of a threatening force from such a world. As Rudd suggests, his appearance is petrifying because it hints at the distance humans have put between themselves and the rest of the natural world, to the extent that the simple processes of nature (such as the principle of new life returning after the dead of winter) have become imbued with an air of the supernatural. This happens as human culture and Christianity gradually divided the human “from the rest of nature, and as the rational, intellectual and scientific were progressively privileged more, the only space left for the untamed natural world has become that of the supernatural” (111).

The eerie arrival of such a threatening force suddenly transforms the delightful soundscape of Camelot. The revelry abruptly discontinues as all become astounded while they are staring at the Green Knight, waiting in wonder “what he worch schulde” (238). As a result, the entire court has fallen into a deep, “swoghe sylence” (243), as if all who are present have slipped into sleep. This silence, however, is not the total absence of sound but the beginning of listening. What the King and his knights hear from this green intruder is nonetheless neither an entertaining tale from afar nor pleasant Christmas carols, but a challenge to a beheading match. After Gawain accepts the challenge on Arthur’s behalf, the intruder states that Gawain must enter the Green Knight’s world, that of the wild forest beyond Camelot, in order to find the Green Chapel. As Gawain sets forth, armed against the outside world with the shield of the Pentangle, it is obvious to the readers that he is unwilling to take on this journey. This is also expressed in terms of sounds, as there is no more laughter to be heard in the court but many sorrows, sighs, and whispers from Gawain’s fellows expressing their concerns for his unknown fate. This element of sonic and emotional realism undercuts the romance chivalric ideal popularized since the twelfth century. It functions to foretell the audiences that forest in which Gawain is about to enter is not simply a landscape of adventure constructed for the questing knight, but a wild, unknown, and untamed natural world drastically different from the luxurious court he has to leave behind.

Unlike the paths that the wandering knights from several romances usually take, Gawain’s itinerary is remarkably detailed and realistic. His journey is reminiscently described, with specific topographical details first of “frythez and dounez” (695), then of North Wales, Anglesey, the “Holy Hede” and the wyldrenesse of Wyrle” (697-702). In their edition of the poems in the *Pearl* Manuscript, Malcolm Andrew and Ronald Waldron note that Gawain follows

the North Wales route on its journey along the coast of the Irish Sea and through the communities of Bangor, Conway, Abergele, Rhuddlan, and Flint (234)¹⁴. Due to such unusual geographical information, it is not surprising that there are substantial commentaries focused solely on this particular passage. These range from narrowly focused identification of the topographical features mentioned therein to broader considerations of the route's cultural and historical significance. Michael Bennett, for instance, compares Gawain's route to the itinerary played in Richard II's 1399 deposition (89). Patricia Clare Ingham, on the other hand, focuses on the connections between Gawain's journey and England's continuing imperial project in Wales. His route, according to Ingham, is somehow similar to Gerald of Wales' description of his usual itinerary, and it also bears some resemblance to the accounts of Henry II's 1135 colonizing invasion (116).

While the Welsh connection is particularly intriguing, what interests me most about Gawain's detailed journey is how "wild" these places are to him, despite the fact that there are names ascribed to them, suggesting the existence of human attempts to exert control over these places through the acts of naming. As Stuart Hall points out, human language can have the power to make the object, previously unknown and invisible because unattended, become visible due to the production and circulation of meaning (5). Places, plants, and animals become part of the

¹⁴ However, it is notable that the exact route of Gawain's journey has long been the subject of controversy, since very little is known about the main roadways between North Wales and England in the Middle Ages. Although the references to "þe Norþe Walez," "þe iles of Anglesay," and "þe wyldrenesse of Wyrle" are clear enough, there is much less conviction as to the significance of the phrase "þe fordez by þe forlondez", and the location of the "Holy Hede" is completely unidentified. Most critics and landscape historians tend to assume that the "Holy Hede" might be some already vanished geographical feature in the Dee estuary where Gawain crosses from the south to the north bank, and "þe fordez by þe forlondez" could be the spot where Gawain has crossed the Dee, even though the Dee is never literally mentioned. It could also be other geographical feature he encounters on his way out of Wales. It is also possible that the reference to "þe fordez by þe forlondez" is a reference to where and how Gawain crosses the rivers Conway and Clwyd on his way along the North Wales coast. For further detailed discussion on this fascinating topic, see J. Eadie, "Sir Gawain's Travels in North Wales" in *The Review of English Studies*. New Series, Vol. 34, No. 134 (May, 1983), pp. 191-195.

human socio-economic as well as cultural orders when they appear with names in our classificatory schemes. Naming places thus renders formerly unidentified and probably indefinite terrains known to us. It is, according to cultural geographer Yi-Fu Tuan, the “total force” that transforms nature into a human place (185). In this sense, the places Gawain rides through are not some mysterious, unknown, unidentified grounds that manage to escape humans’ signifying practice. They are not the nameless ice-cold sea of *The Seafarer* that could be any body of water around and about the Atlantic archipelago. Gawain travels through places whose names might be familiar to a late medieval audience and in circumstances that reflect historical reality. Still, familiarity does not breed comfort. Being in these places for Sir Gawain is being in wilderness where nights are long, the way is rough, the weather is getting colder, and the knight himself is increasingly exhausted and lonely. The wildwood is also teemed with fierce creatures such as “wormez” (“dragon,” 720), “wolues” (“wolves,” 720), “bullez” (“bulls,” 722), “berez” (“bears,” 722), “borez” (“boars,” 722), “etayne” (“giants,” 723), and “wodwos” (“wild men,” 721).

However, instead of providing the audiences with a detailed description of how Gawain fights his way through these opponents, the narrative simply states that he fights with them so fiercely (717) and then moves on to focus on the more realistic hardships of the icy winter in the Welsh borderlands, when “þe colde cler water fro þe cloudez schadde,/ And fres er hit falle myzt to þe fale erþe;” (727-8). Such natural conditions, according to Gawain (and probably the poet), are much “wors” than fighting with numerous monsters. The landscape here is not defined by a “grant deduit” (great delight) à *laforest aventureuse* (the forest of adventure) of the twelfth century Arthurian romances,¹⁵ but rather by the tough reality of the icy world more akin to the

¹⁵ For detailed discussion of the characteristics of such landscapes, see Corinne J. Saunders, “The Twelfth Century” in *The Forest of Medieval Romance: Avernus, Broceliande, Arden*. (London: D.S. Brewer, 1993), 44-94.

frozen seascape of *The Seafarer*. Like the latter, the hostility of the landscape is echoed through the hero's sense of hearing and seeing.

This sonic environment is no longer the courtly world of civility and revelry, but the wild, desolate, inhospitable, ice-cold natural soundscape where the cold stream runs clattering ("claterande" 731) from the crest. In order to battle with such natural hardships, Gawain tries to impose his human sounds and speech onto the hostile sonic world by praying with all his might that Mary may be his guide (737-9). However, as he makes his way further by a mountain in the next morning, Gawain is shown that his attempt is quite fruitless since the landscape is still cold, inhabitable, and "ferly watz wylde," (741). Like the narrator of *The Seafarer*, what Gawain hears as he is traversing through such surroundings are not the pleasant sounds of singing nightingales from the sonic world of blissful springtime, but the "vnbyþe" sounds of many birds seen "vpon bare twyges," (746). What distinguishes the sounds of these gloomy birds from those heard in *The Seafarer* is that the avian sounds Gawain hears in this wildwood are much less present than those in *The Seafarer*. Amongst the bare and tangled branches of the hazels and hawthorns, he only hears them "pitosly þer piped for pyne of þe colde" (747).

This can be read, on the one hand, as a manifestation of the poet's lack of interest in the natural surroundings. Such interpretation is in line with several monumental ecocritical readings proposing that the medieval literary works seem to be less interested in nature and more inclined to focus on human affairs. This approach appears in influential works such as *The Ecocriticism Reader*, which is tilted toward twentieth-century texts and contains only a single passing reference to Shakespeare, or *The Environmental Imagination*, in which Lawrence Buell takes Thoreau's *Walden* to be the starting point for ecologically conscious literature (Borlik 15). However, this might not be the cause for the scarcity of birds' sounds in *Sir Gawain and the*

Green Knight. The dearth of these sounds in this wilderness around the Welsh borderlands may register what the narrator perceives to be the condition of the deprived world of a winter around the Welsh Marches. This place, according to the narrator (and Gawain), is so cold and so inhabitable that even the birds can only pipe pitifully. There is no half- personification of the elements here – audible or visible -- to lend Gawain a shred of comfort, just winter weather with its falling sleets and clattering cold streams which are so far from animation that they freeze into icicles. Such conception aligns well with other medieval portrayals of the Welsh Marches, which Osbern fitz Richard has described as the “wastelands” where “woods have grown up...Nothing else” (qtd. in Bartlett, *England* 69). What the Gawain does not explicitly mention is that such condition of “waste” occurred in this border zone primarily because the Marches “bore many marks of war,” mostly between the Welsh and the English invaders since the Norman Conquest (ibid 69-70). Gerald of Wales also depicted such borderlands as “those lands that were...closest to the enemy, the so-called marches, which in truth could well take the name of ‘the land of Mars’ from the god of war” (qtd. in Lieberman 10-11). As a knight from another polity, such hostility and barrenness of both soundscape and landscape might serve as a reminder that Gawain is not quite welcomed here unless he has acquired some life skills and lessons. In terms of subjectivity, like the seafarer, these sights and sounds serve to remind Gawain how far away he is from the world he has left behind. It is a world represented, in Gillian Rudd’s elaboration, “both as real and as a reflection of Gawain’s state of mind, both as an individual who is projecting his feelings of agony onto the environment and as an everyman figure, whose woeful journey is taken to stand for the trial of life generally” (119).

It is in this bleak moment that Gawain tries to impose his human, Christianized, and English voice onto the untamed land again by praying that he wishes to hear the Mass. His

prayer is answered almost right away, as suddenly a castle seems to exist out of thin air. This mysterious appearance of the castle marks the temporary end of Gawain's travails in the desolate sonic environment of the Welsh borderlands. In desperation for warmth and for community, Gawain rushes into the castle without hesitation. Yet it should be noted that the presence of castle around this part of the Isles does not always suggest hospitality or cordiality. As Max Lieberman explicates, a large number of castles were built in the Welsh Marches after the Norman invasion primarily as strategic outposts and military strongholds against the Welsh raids (143). Robert Bartlett agrees that these castles were "indeed the most obvious symptom and symbol of the militarized nature of the border" (70). As a result, these castles usually resembled one another in appearance, for they were strongly defended "by a clay rampart, ditch and palisade, a pole-supported fighting platforms and possibly towers." These appeared to have been on the motte, "and a bridge leading up to it" (Lieberman 151). Some of such castles also functioned as residential places for Marcher lords, such as the one at Hen Domen Montgomery that was the residence of the de Bollers family (Lieberman 155). Likewise, in *SGGK*, the mysterious castle is a great stronghold well defended with a moat on a mound and a bridge leading into the castle:

Er he watz war in þe wod of a won in a mote,
 Abof a launde, on a lawe, loken vnder boʒez
 Of mony borelych bole aboute bi þe diches:
 A castel þe comlokest þat euer knyʒt aʒte,
 Pyched on a prayere, a park al aboute,
 With a pyked palays pyned ful þik,
 Þat vmbeteʒe mony tre mo þen two myle.

Pat holde on þat on syde þe habel auysed,
As hit schemered and schon þurȝ þe schyre okez;
Penne hatz he hendly of his helme, and heȝly he þonkez
Jesus and sayn Gilyan, þat gentyle ar boþe, (764-774)

As mentioned above, Gawain is too desolated for courtly setting, human community, and civilization to consider the possibility of danger that might be waiting for him within such a castle. Leaving the desolate environment behind, Gawain rushes across the bridge into the castle and eventually learns his important life lessons from the fateful encounter with Sir Bertilak / Green Knight, who is actually the castle's overlord. Such desire for courtly setting and community distinguishes Gawain from the desolate seafarer in the Old English poem. Even though the latter laments the loss of his community, he still remains in the ice-cold sea and inhabits the sonic world of crashing waves and crying seabirds instead of searching for a new meadhall with the familiar soundscape of laughter and revelry. The narrator of *The Seafarer* chooses this ascetic way of living far away from the transitory pleasure of earthly realms, in which warfares between competing kingdoms on the Isles can always change the fate of anyone involving in such a world. Gawain, on the contrary, does not consider the possibility that he might face diversity, difference, and even life-threatening situation because he is so keen to leave the desolate soundscape and landscape of the natural world and enter into the human realms, where competing hegemony never ceases and difference can be a matter of life and death.

In the next chapter, I continue to focus on the horrifying sonic condition that further unveils the diversity and heterogeneity of voices and noises within the realm of England. This time, such sonic world is not simply that of the distressed and intimidating winter wilderness. It is the tumultuous uproar from the countryside beyond the court and elite circles protesting

against the nobility and their political power to raise taxes after the Black Death. To the ears of the learned writers who were forced to be attentive to those loud dins, such sonic condition was menacing and horrifying enough to the extent that it threatens to turn the world upside down.

Chapter 3

The Noisy Countryside:

The 1381 Peasants' Revolt and the Sensory Dissonance

Introduction: A Quiet, Peaceful Place?

Whether in the past or the present, one of the most important social, economic, and cultural cleavages remains the rural-urban divide. The portrayals of Londoners and rural dwellers remain strikingly different no matter whether they were created in the fourteenth or twenty-first century. Taking John Gower's *Vox Clamantis* (hereafter *Vox*) as a starting point for my discussion, I intend to explore various representations of rural areas (hereafter used interchangeably with the "countryside"). I will focus in particular on the way authors from the late medieval England used descriptions of the senses to portray the countryside in their chosen mode, whether as a rural idyll or a rural apocalypse. Amongst another senses, what I find most baffling when it comes to the representations of the rural areas is *sound*, which can be traced using the ways several medieval authors describe the sensuous world of their countryside. It seems that to medieval writers, what stood out most for them regarding the rural areas is neither the visual nor olfactory, but the auditory. The audible world contributes significantly to the medieval construction of the rural ambience. One does not typically get to see the pasture or smell the scent of woodlands when he / she treads or ventures into the countryside but one usually hears something. Many a time, such hearing leads to the disintegration of their sensory perception, or, even worse, the disruption of the whole sensuous surrounding. I will begin my exploration with a brief literature survey on sound studies concerning the rural and urban areas in

the Middle Ages and the early modern era. Then I will proceed to discuss Gower's work and situating *Vox* in its literary and historical contexts.

Most recent sound studies focusing on medieval and early modern Europe tend to emphasize the sonic world of the cities and other urban areas. This should not be surprising given the material conditions of the cities themselves. Take London, for example. In the late medieval period it was already an international city, by far the largest urban conglomeration in the British Isles. It was relatively small compared with some continental, Middle Eastern, or Chinese cities, and was further decimated by the Black Death during the course of the fourteenth century. Yet it was at the heart of wide and spreading trade networks that stretched right across the known global travel routes. Within the British Isles, London merchants conducted business up and down the country. Internationally, traders traveled to and from the Low Countries, France, Italy, Bavaria, Constantinople, the Baltic ports, and beyond (Butterfield, *Familiar Enemy* 203). This condition continued well into the early modern period, as London remained a rapidly expanding pre-industrial metropolis. It was the principal center for banking, national commerce, and international trades. The Royal Exchange was founded in 1565 as a center of commerce for London's merchants, and gained royal patronage in 1571. The city also housed the seat of central government, which had hitherto accompanied the royal English court. As a result, London had grown into a large urban area from probably 80,000 in 1550 to over 700,000 inhabitants in 1750 (Wallace "Chaucer and the Absent City" 59-64). According to Barbara Hanawalt, the city did draw people from all over the country to be "servants, apprentices, lawyers, administrators, guildsmen, clergy, beggars, and poets" (xv). The building areas had also spread widely and continuously. It was then not at all unexpected that, according to the historical reconstructions of

modern scholars equipped with the so-called “ethnographic ear”,¹⁶ such as Bruce R. Smith, the city of London was always full of sonic activities (52). These included the church bells from several parishes ringing to summon people to service. Town criers, market voices, street peddlers shouting, the noises of public gathering places as well as non-vocal sounds – the rattling of carriages, the clopping of horses, the tap of hammers, and the hiss of forges – could be heard from various corners of the streets of this ever-growing metropolis. Furthermore, there were also sounds heard from several different speech communities. Their members were constantly conversing, singing, or bickering in their own languages and accents (52-71). The existence of such wide varieties of sounds makes the urban spaces much more compelling locales than the countryside for historicist studies focusing on sounds and hearing.

Apart from Smith’s exemplary attempt to recuperate the historical sonority of the city, the important scholarship includes Eric Wilson’s study on how early modern London was a *phenomenon* constructed and punctuated by the “ensemble” of everyday sonic activities found in the works of Thomas Dekker and Ben Jonson’s *Bartholomew Fair* (4). Beyond the confinement of the British Isles, Emma Dillon’s chapter in her book *The Sense of Sound* explores the ways in which people in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Paris construed their sonic environment (60). Niall Atkinson’s work on the soundscape of fourteenth- and early fifteenth-century Florence also offers the modern readers new ways of understanding the various sounds of this city. In so doing, Atkinson investigates both the official and transgressive sounds, such as the tolling of bells to the shouting of crowds, in order to exemplify how such sounds functioned to construct both the everyday life and the government of the city. For early modern Germany, Norbert Schindler has

¹⁶ The term “ethnographic ear” was first used by anthropologist James Clifford in the introduction to *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, ed. James Clifford and George E. Marcus (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986) 12.

elucidated how the nocturnal soundscape of the urban area was “colonized” by bands of unmarried male youth, emboldened by drink, whose belligerent “crowing” reverberated throughout the city (194-201). Lastly, in the late medieval city of Bruges, Reinhard Strohm’s study has provided a rich depiction of the urban sounds and music, ranging from bells to public criers to song and polyphony, implied by the frozen canvases of fifteenth-century painters (A. Fisher 7).

Putting the material conditions aside, the way in which modern scholars focus on the soundscapes of the pre- and early modern urban areas has interestingly reminded me of how the field of sound studies itself was established. In the pioneering work of the musician R. Murray Schafer, his definition of a soundscape as a sonic *environment* reflects his engagement with the environmental movements of the 1970s (Thompson 1). This becomes obvious as the author proceeds to emphasize his ecologically based concern about the “polluted” soundscapes caused by restless urban developments during that era (Schafer 181-202). Such concern leads Schafer to focus on the harmful effects of constant, inescapable urban and industrial sounds. It is not surprising then that his work substantially romanticizes the sounds of the natural world as well as the sounds of the countryside. Schafer contrasts the irritating sounds of the “continuous and asymmetrical rattle of brass-bound wheels over cobblestones” heard from many early modern urban areas with more pleasant sounds in the rural pastures. In the countryside, there existed the sounds of “shepherds [who] piped and sang to one another to while away the lonely hours,” creating “the delicate music,” which “forms perhaps the first and certainly the most persistent of the man-made sonic archetypes” (44). The only “noises” which might be capable of disturbing the serenity of the pre- and early modern countryside for Schafer were the noise of warfare and the “noise” of religion. Furthermore, such noises were mostly forced upon the rural community

by outside influences in order to disrupt the prelapsarian ways of living. Otherwise, the countryside was always a “tranquil” place where “the peasants and tribesmen” could “participate in a vast sharing of silence” (49-52).

Taking these studies together, it might seem that in terms of soundscapes, the European cities in the medieval and early modern period were lively and full of sounds, while the rural areas were more likely to be serene and quiet to the point that they are often either romanticized or overlooked by modern scholars. Compared to the urban areas of the same period, it is apparent to us that such perceived quietness and serenity of the countryside comes from the ways in which these areas were devoid of bustling activities: political, economic, and cultural. There were no streets alive with the commotion of people and a market clamorous with merchants. As Bruce Smith has suggested, the most distinctive “keynote”¹⁷ sounds of the early modern English countryside consisted of “wind in the trees, birds, domestic animals, and running water in the several streams” (74). Against the ground formed by these keynote sounds, several human-made “soundmarks” could also be heard in the countryside: the bells of parish churches, the creaks and rattles of the mill, and the typical sounds of the different kinds of human activities going on in the local alehouses (if any), manors, forests, meadows, fens, and fields. Certainly, some of these human-made sounds could be quite noisy, such as the alehouse singing and the music and dancing inspired by once-a-year festivals: May games, Whitsuntide ale, harvest-home, and Christmas Eve (B. Smith 80-81). However, it seems to modern sound scholars that none of these was as deleterious, irritating, or loud as the noises of the urban areas. Bruce Smith compares the ways in which early modern composers such as Richard Dering, Thomas Weelkes, Thomas Ravenscroft, and Orlando Gibbons attempted to transform London street cries into consort music

¹⁷ For further information on the term “keynote” and “soundmark,” see Schafer 9; B. Smith 74

for voices and viol and how Ravenscroft and Dering also tried to compose music out of the “day-in, day-out” sounds of country work. He concludes that the sounds of the country occupied “a different place from the sounds of the city,” since it was “full of music and environmental sound” as well as human speech (82).

Some questions still remain. Was this also the case for medieval and early modern writers? Was the countryside actually considered to be a quiet and serene space? Was the countryside really inhabited by merry folks and hardworking rural laborers? Was the landscape of the countryside primarily sonorized by festive music, buzzing meadows, lowing cows, and rattling mills to the contemporary ears? What did the countryside sound like to those who listened? Of course, the answers to these questions vary, as they depend not as much on material reality as on the matter of representation: who gets represented by whom? Whose ears are we talking about? Which parts of the countryside are we referring to?

Listening with Gower: *Vox clamantis* and the Medieval Countryside

In the case of late medieval England, the answers are likely to be more ambiguous. Such ambiguity became more apparent specifically after the Peasants’ Revolt of 1381, when high taxes, among other issues, drove a wide-ranging spectrum of rural society to rise up and oppose the governments. The rebels started wrecking havoc in Essex and Kent before marching to London and managed to ransack government buildings, kill royal officials, and force Richard II to comply with their demands to abolish serfdom. The rebellion was eventually crushed and its leaders were executed once the English government regrouped its armed forces to face the rebels.

Even though the Peasants' Revolt was defeated, the fact that the countryside once posed such a grievous threat to the English polity is crucial to understanding representations of rural areas in medieval literature. Contrary to modern sound scholars, to the ears of elite contemporary urban writers who represented the event, the rural environ was far from being quiet and peaceful. The rural inhabitants were definitely neither singing shepherds nor docile animals. Instead, the countryside was regarded as a boisterous space imbued with sounds that ceaselessly haunted their imaginations. As seen from many literary texts and chronicles written by such authors, these haunting sounds are neither those of the shepherd singing and piping nor the frogs croaking in the village ponds. They are in fact the *clamor horrendissimus* made by the country-dwellers, both the animals and their human counterparts. Such clamors are best exemplified in the first book of *Vox clamantis*, the early Anglo-Latin dream vision of John Gower, who had spent some of his time in the countryside as "a scion of a gentry family," (Hines, N. Cohen, and Roffey 24)¹⁸ and most of his adult life at his presumptive lodging in the priory of St. Mary Overie in Southwark, London. According to codicological evidence, the first book was added quite hurriedly after 1381, and after the completion of books II to VII (Hudson 409).¹⁹ Such a late addition allows Gower to incorporate his vision of the uprising into this encyclopedic political complaint by describing how the peasants are metamorphosed into various animals, and their sounds as well as manners are described vividly:

Quidam sternutant asinorum more ferino,

Mugitus quidam personuere boum;

¹⁸ It is still debatable when it comes to the exact location of Gower's estate in the countryside. His editor G.C. Macaulay suggested that the poet should be placed in a Gower family in Kent, a statement in which later scholars, John Hines, Nathalie Cohen, and Simon Roffey also agree (24).

¹⁹ For evidence see Macaulay's edition, vi.xxx-xxxii, and E.W. Stockton, *The Major Latin Works of John Gower* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1962) 11-15.

Quidam porcorum grunnius horridiores
Emittunt, que suo murmure terra tremit:
Frendet aper spumans, magnos facit atque tumultus,
Et quiritat verres auget et ipse sonos;
Latratusque ferus vrbis compresserat auras,
Dumque canum discors vox furibunda volat.
Vulpris egens vlulat, lupus et versutus in altum
Conclamat, que sous conuocat ipse pares;
Nec minus in sonitu concussit garrulous ancer
Aures, que subito fossa dolore pauent:
Bombizant vaspe, sonus est horrendus eorum,
Nullus et examen dinumerare potest:
Conclament pariter hirsuti more leonis,
Omeneque fit peius quod fuit ante malum. (1.799-814)

("Some bray in the wild manner of asses, some sound the bellow of cattle, some let out the horrid grunts of pigs, at which the earth trembles, the boar froths and makes great tumult, and the wild pigs cry out, increasing their noise; wild barking pressed on the air of the city, and the discordant voices of dogs, furious, filled the city. The hungry fox howls, and the wily wolf cries out on high and call together his partners. No less did the cackling gander strike the ear with its sound, and even the graves tremble with sudden anguish. Wasps buzz, and their sound is fearful, and no one

can count the swarm of them. Together they make a roar like a bristling lion, and everything that was previously bad becomes worse”).²⁰

What is this description all about? Given its historical context, this scene stands out as a depiction of a raucously apocalyptic world full of frenzied domestic and wild animals typically associated with the countryside. This hectic scene Gower represents here is his portrayal of the event now recognized as the Peasants’ Revolt of 1381 mentioned above. What I find quite intriguing about this vision is how it is primarily governed by the audible, not the visible or any other sensory perceptions. What makes these creatures terrifying for both the narrator and his audiences in this chapter is the cacophony of their noises, not their appearance or their odor. The poet is more than capable of utilizing various sound-related expressions to describe and classify the frantic animals and the different noises they make. As a result, what the audiences perceive here are numerous conceivable sounds – brayed, bellowed, grunted, screamed, yelled, cried, howled, buzzed, cackled, and roared – a hubba-hubba of earth-shattering noises that threatens to turn the world upside down. “Ecce rudis clangor, sonus altus, fedaque rixa,” (Behold the loud din, the wild clangor, the savage brawling,) exclaims the despaired and confounded narrator, “Vox ita terribilis non fuit vlla prius” (no voice was ever so terrible before) (1.815-6). Although each animal produces its own distinct sound, to the narrator all the sounds probably seem like the same type: a cacophony of savage noises. There are no detectable languages or meanings found within these uproars.

²⁰ Quotations are from G.C. Macaulay, ed., *The Complete Works of John Gower: the Latin Works*, vol. 4 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1902). Subsequent references will be in the text by book and line number. Translations throughout are modified versions of Eric W. Stockton’s translation of *Vox*; see Eric W. Stockton, *The Major Latin Works of John Gower* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1962).

This brings to the surface the works of medieval linguistic theorists, most notably Priscian's *Institutiones grammaticae*, which contains a chapter devoted to the phonetic, phonemic, and semantic properties of sound as *vox*. As already mentioned above, *vox* can be classified into four distinctive classes: *vox inarticulata illiterata* (noises not resolvable into distinct phonemic units), *vox literata inarticulata* ("meaningless" animal sounds, which can nevertheless be represented by letters), *vox articulata illiterata* (human sounds, like murmuring, which have meaning but have no phonetic units), and *vox articulata literata* (articulate speech and literary language). Following Priscian's theory, the noises the narrator hears are obviously *vox literata inarticulata*, which contain no intelligible meanings and were often condemned by medieval patristic writings as the distractions from the Word of God and were connected to other sinful behaviors, such as gluttony and fornication (Travis 240). Furthermore, the narrator is not reluctant to announce that the effect of such unintelligible clamors is of course earth-shattering – literally and metaphorically. This can be seen from the way in which the narrator describes how the "rocks resound with its rumbling and the air reverberates the sound of the horrible beasts." At the name of the Jay (*graculus* – a pun on the name of Wat Tyler, a leader of the revolt), "earth trembled" and "great nations" are "terrorized." These rampant beasts are the "unheard-of calamity" that "weighs upon the stupefied ears" (1.817, 823-4). From this scene, it seems that the world that the narrator knows has been entirely shaken by the cacophony of frenzied animals, the known dwellers of the countryside.

Thus, it seems that Gower's representation of the countryside stands in stark contrast with the ideas of modern scholars, such as Schafer, mentioned in the previous section. The historical link between Gower's *Vox* and the Peasants' Revolt is further reinforced by the way the narrator firmly situates the first book of *Vox* within the present-day of his writing. While other dream

visions tend to be less specific regarding temporality, Gower clearly states that his narrative occurs “quarto Ricardi regis in anno” (“in the fourth year of King Richard”). Yet the link to the Peasants’ Revolt of 1381 represents only one aspect of the relationship between *Vox* and the countryside. Gower’s fear of the rural rebels does not mean that he represents a tradition diametrically opposite to the environmentalism and pastoralism of scholars mentioned above. In the first chapter of *Vox*, similar to most medieval dream visions,²¹ the poet begins his account with a description of himself being in a sensuously pleasing landscape in June. From this description, the audiences are first introduced to what seems like Schafer’s rendition of the countryside: a beautiful *locus amoenus* (a pleasant place) where fragrant flowers are quietly blooming and birds are sweetly singing.

Part of my fascination with the use of sounds and other sensual descriptions to represent the countryside in Gower’s *Vox* springs from this very tension between the rural apocalypse of braying animals running amok and the rural idyll full of blooming flowers and singing birds. This central tension arguably makes Gower’s work unique and fitting as a starting point for exploring other representations of the countryside in medieval literature.

Locus Amoenus and the Harmony of the Senses

During Gower’s time, there also existed the tradition of idealizing the countryside or at least a non-urban area as a *locus amoenus*. For many medieval writers, a paradise on earth is associated with the prelapsarian Garden of Eden, a place far away from sins and temptations of the worldly urban areas, where one can live in close connection to God. A *locus amoenus*

²¹ For more information on place and landscape in medieval dream vision, see A.C. Spearing *Medieval Dream-Poetry* (Cambridge: CUP, 1976) 17-18.

usually described as a “lawn or open woodland with plentiful shade, warm breezes, blooming flowers, and birdsongs” (L. Howes 17). It is seen as a place of safety and refuge for either an individual who is seeking for philosophical answers from the divine or a band of people trying to escape from a certain dire situation. In order to illustrate the ideal beauty of the *locus amoenus*, medieval authors and artists alike usually provide their audiences with the depictions of landscape saturated with the sensorium. It is not a world containing only what can be seen, but also what can be heard, smelled, touched, even tasted. This is because in medieval aesthetic discourse, the pleasure experienced in aesthetic perception depends not exclusively on one but all of our sensations. Following Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas mentions in *Summa Theologiae* that our knowledge and apprehension of beauty begin in our utilization of several sensations altogether (Sevier 21). What is considered beautiful is what is pleasurable to all of our sensory perceptions: it must exist in due proportion and in harmony, because the senses “delight in things duly proportioned” (qtd. in Sevier 17). According to Aquinas, humans naturally appreciate proportion and harmony because we are creatures of the divine and the divine “is the cause of the harmony in things as ordered to himself, and in calling all things to himself” (Sevier 15).

Since harmony is often destabilized by discord, excess, or scarcity, our senses can also be similarly harmed. Aquinas conceives that both an overabundance and a deficiency in sensible objects can be offensive to human sensations (Sevier 17), such as music with a lack of sufficient pitch, a garden with too many colorful flowers, or a body soaked with overwhelming smell of perfume. Harmony (“*symphonia*”) is thus fundamental to medieval conceptualization of beauty. It is not surprising that most medieval depictions of the *locus amoenus* are multisensorial. They are not simply a portrayal of something visually pleasing or a representation of a purely pleasurable soundscape while excluding other modes of sensation. On the contrary, in such a

heavenly place, a narrator might find himself walking in a pleasant soundscape full of singing birds and murmuring streams; he may also encounter the materiality of touchable objects that he might be able to pick up and use to ponder questions about the divine. For example, in the midst of a siege, the author of the *Alliterative Morte Arthur* adds the *locus amoenus* scene. The soldiers sent by Arthur to search for supplies discover a green meadow full of sweet smelling flowers and suddenly find the consolation of nature and God, away from misery and death in Arthur's war.

Thare vnbryills theis bolde and baytes þeire horses,
To þe grygynge of þe daye, þat byrdez gan synge,
Whylls the surs of þe sonne, þat sonde es of Cryste,
That solaces all synfull þat syghte has in erthe. (II. 2509-12).

The *Morte*-poet thus connects the sound of birds to the presence of a divine force within an idyllic natural world saturated with many senses. Moreover, as a place of safety and refuge, a *locus amoenus* is often associated with the implicitly sexual healing and regenerative power of springtime and ripening fruits. Dante, for example, describes the Earthly Paradise in such terms: "Here is the Eternal Spring and every fruit /This is the nectar that the poets praise" (Purgatorio 28.143-4).

Returning to Gower's *locus amoenus*, what I find most interesting is how the sensory perceptions are even more emphasized than in several works of his contemporaries, as they dominate the rest of the first chapter of *Vox*. It seems to me that the poet works carefully to distinguish each sense from the other, but he does not adhere to any sensory perception in particular. In this *locus amoenus*, the narrator does not look for pure visual world or listen purely to birdsongs. This is because, to the narrator, various things in the landscape function harmoniously to inform and include one another, which in turns allow his sensory perceptions to

permeate and saturate each other. What he conceptualizes here is thus the ideal sensuous world where everything functions harmoniously. Visually, the narrator sees how “Surgit ab occasu noua lux, Aurora refulget / Orbis ab occidua parte; paritque diem;” (“A new light arose from its setting. Aurora shone / from the setting part of the world and brought forth the day” 1.5-6). This brings to life the fertile land – the greening plain filled with a thousand different garlands of flowers. As for tactile sensation, his body feels the gentle breezes that lift up the grass (1.40). Olfactorily, the narrator is careful to delineate between the gardens and the fields; the former are perfumed by the mingling of white lilies and red roses, the latter the purple violets, dewy roses, lilies, primroses, and each and every herb that medicine uses, such as balm, spice, and oil of myrrh (1.61-79). In auditory terms, if this countryside ever existed, it would become an ideal space for environmentalist scholars like Schafer who tend to value the soundscape of the rural and natural world. This is because the poet, as sensitive to the sensorium as he is, labors to describe how the season pours song into the birds – the cuckoos, the larks, the turtledoves, and the nightingales (1.91-102). Indeed, the narrator admits that the presence of a thousand singing birds can lead to them vying in competition. Yet to the ears of the poet “[L]is tamen ipsa pia fuit et discordia concors, / Dum meriti parilis fulsit vterque status” (The contention was mild, however, and the disharmony harmonious, for each group shone with like worth” 1.107-108). In this light, the possible discordance among songbirds is not threatening to either the narrator or the landscape. To him, this place is still a sensually-pleasing *locus amoenus* – a second paradise (“alter paradus,” 1.79).

Of course, Gower is not alone in his construction of a sensuous earthly paradise. Nevertheless, I previously mentioned that the sensorium in his *locus amoenus* is more emphasized and decorative than those of his English contemporaries. This is perceivable in many

dream visions in which their depictions of the *locus amoenus* are relatively shorter and contain fewer elaborate details than Gower's description in *Vox clamantis*. More importantly, most of these English delineations tend to be less involved with the sensorium than the one in Gower's *Vox*. It is obvious since the earlier works such as *Wynnere and Wastoure*,²² which offers the audiences only a few lines depicting the paradisaical "west country" where the narrator is wandering alone and eventually drifts off to sleep when the night has come. In terms of sensory perceptions, this work focuses primarily on the auditory by portraying only the sounds of birds singing and the noise of the "depe watir" (44) while ignoring the other senses.²³

As for works more contemporaneous with Gower's *Vox clamantis* such as *Pearl* and *Piers Plowman*, their introductory portions depicting the *locus amoenus* are still less sensuously involved than Gower's description. This is most detectable in *Piers Plowman*, which also begins

²² A.C. Spearing has noted that Israel Gollancz placed the date of this poem around 1352-3, which makes it one of the earliest poems of the Alliterative Revival, and is subsequently earlier than any of the English dream-poems he has so far considered (130).

²³ Als I went in the weste, wandrynge myn one,
 Bi a bonke of a bourne; bryghte was the sone
 Undir a worthiliche wodde by a wale medewe:
 Fele floures gan folde ther my fote steppede.
 I layde myn hede one ane hill ane hawthorne besyde;
 The tbrostills full tbroly they tbrepen togedire,
 Hipped up heghwalles fro heselis tyll othire,
 Bernacles with thayre billes one barkes thay rounge,
 The jay janglede one heghe, jarmede the foles.
 The bourne full bremly rane the bankes bytwene;
 So ruyde were the roughe stremys and raughten so heghe
 That it was neghande nyghte or I nappe myghte,
 For dyn of the depe watir and dadillyng of fewllys.
 Bot as I laye at the laste than lowked myn eghne,
 And I was swythe in a sweven sweped belyve. (32-46)

with a dreamer / narrator falling asleep in a blissful landscape.²⁴ Nonetheless, as A.C. Spearing points out, this landscape is “reduced to a mere sketch” (138) with only a brief portrayal of the scenery and more emphasis on how the dreamer dresses and walks around on the Malvern Hill. In the case of *Pearl*, the lack of sensuous details in its description of the *locus amoenus* is particularly interesting, since this work is remarkable for both the richness and sophistication. It is especially notable for the way the author develops the central image of the jewel and for its complementary beauty, complexity, and intricacy of form. Yet in the introductory part containing a beautiful garden where its dreamer / narrator bitterly laments the loss of a pearl, which has fallen into the earth, the poet’s highly stylized description focuses only briefly on the visual and the olfactory. Both work harmoniously. The latter is relatively more emphasized than the former, as the narrator mentions how “spyses” (“spice plants” 25) must be overgrown in the garden, as well as how he describes:

Gilofre, gyngure, and gromylyoun,
 And pyonys powdered ay bytwene.
 Yif hit was semly on to sene
 A fayr reflayr yet fro hit flot.
 Ther wonys that worthyly, I wot and wene,
 My precious perle wythouten spot. (43-48)

²⁴ However, it should be noted that the beginning of *Piers Plowman* also shares with that of *Vox clamantis* in a sense that it provides their audiences with certain specificity. In *Vox* we have temporal specificity as previously discussed. For *Piers Plowman*, such specificity is pronounced in term of spatial, since it clearly states that the dreamer / narrator is wandering on the “Malverne hilles” (B.5), which are a range of hills in the English counties of Worcestershire, Herefordshire and a small area of northern Gloucestershire, dominating the surrounding countryside and the towns and villages of the district of Malvern. For further discussion on the strategic importance of the Malvern Hills to the composition of *Piers Plowman*, see Larry Scanlon, “King, Commons, and Kind Wit: Langland’s National Vision” *Imagining a Medieval English Nation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004).

(“Gillyflower, ginger, and gromwell abound. And peonies scattered everywhere. This is lovely to look on. But fairer yet, and all unseen, was the fragrance that my senses sought; there I believe and know that my noble one lives, my precious pearl without a spot”).²⁵

How should we interpret Gower’s multisensorial description of his *locus amoenus*? One way is to look for literary influence. Gower’s obsession with the senses indeed separates him from many English dream visions, and puts him closer to the French literary tradition to which some of Geoffrey Chaucer’s dream poems also belong. This is not surprising due to the ways in which French culture was relatively dominant in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century England. Anglo-Norman was still widely used, especially in nunneries and the law, and for official documents such as civic and royal administrations, as well as parliamentary business. It also continued to flourish as a language for administration and literature, producing a substantial proportion of the texts written in England up to the late fourteenth century (H. Phillips 293). Gower himself wrote three French works: *Miroir de l’Omme* (c.1374-9), *Cinkante Ballades* (c.1399), and *Traité pour Essampler les Amants Marietz* (1397)

The most influential sensuous description of the *locus amoenus* in the French tradition²⁶ is probably the first part of the thirteenth-century dream vision *Le Roman de la Rose*, by Guillaume de Lorris. This first part is a beautifully written allegory recounting the experience of courtly love. William Calin points out that this part contains “a dream that contains a world” – within the

²⁵ Quotation is from Ad Putter and Myra Stokes, eds., *The Works of the Gawain Poet* (London: Penguin Books, 2014). Translation is mine.

²⁶ For the discussions on the influence of the *Roman de la Rose* on medieval English literature, see, for instance, William Calin, *The French Tradition and the Literature of Medieval England* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994); John Finlayson, “The *Roman de la Rose* and Chaucer’s Narrators.” *Chaucer Review* 24 (1989-90): 187-210; Charles Muscatine, *Chaucer and the French Tradition: A Study in Style and Meaning* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979); James Wimsatt, *Chaucer and His French Contemporaries: Natural Music in the Fourteenth Century* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991).

world is to be found “a wall, within the wall a garden, within the garden a fountain, and within the fountain circular crystals” (167). It is within this world that the audiences are introduced to one of the most decorous and sensuous *loci amoeni* depicted in vernacular literature. Even though this *locus amoenus* appears after the dreamer / narrator has already fallen asleep, senses are still crucial to how the narrator navigates his way through his learning about love. The sights, sounds, and touches are all interwoven and elegantly depicted. Visually, it is a paradisaical landscape in the amorous month of May, when leaves are green and the earth enriches itself with hundreds of colorful flowers. In auditory terms, there are happy nightingales, larks, and parrots singing sweetly and a murmuring river. As for tactile, the narrator’s body is greeted with clear, pure, and beautiful mild morning air. Such sensuous experience of the narrator continues for several hundred lines before he begins to notice the wall decorated with carved and painted allegorical figures. Similar to the dreamer / narrator in Gower’s *Vox*, the *Roman*’s narrator also compares this *locus amoenus* with the *paradis terrestre* (earthly paradise).

Gower’s sensuous *locus amoenus* in *Vox* is more or less influenced by the beautiful landscape depicted in *Le Roman de la Rose*. However, it must be noted that the places in the dream visions where these two narrators find themselves waking up are in fact entirely different worlds. In *Vox Clamantis*, the narrator simply discovers himself in the fields to gather flowers, before seeing the monstrous rural peasants. In *Le Roman de la Rose*, the dreamer / narrator wakes up into a courtly and aristocratic setting, which is modeled closely after the widespread classical *topos* of the *locus amoenus*. Critics such as John V. Fleming and Sylvia Huot agree that such a depiction aims to warn the audiences about the danger of physical desire and the narcissism typically associated with courtly love. Such forewarning is detectable from the way the poet makes the unstated danger more discernible by including a variety of decorous yet

obvious details: the siren's songs, the trees from the land of Mahoun, and the fountain of Narcissus. Such inclusion suggests that the author reorganizes conventional materials for an immediate didactic purpose (Fleming 60; Huot 11). I would add here that such purpose becomes more explicit because of the poet's effective emphasis on sensory perceptions.

Guillaume de Lorris' narrator initially finds himself in his own lodging. He just gets up from bed when he is lured from his place to the delightful yet dangerous *locus amoenus* because he is attracted by exceptionally beautiful birdsongs. His exploration of the landscape is also regulated by desire, however: not the desire for philosophical knowledge or spiritual salvation, but a sensual desire fuelled by the sounds, colors, and textures of the delightful landscape. Such formulation makes the poet's comparison of this *locus amoenus* to the *paradis terrestre* more explicit. To most medieval learned authors and audiences, the most renowned image of the latter was the Garden of Eden, the historical earthly paradise, which had long been imagined as an enclosed garden filled with natural abundance, lushness, and biodiversity, with an eternal and flourishing spring at the center (Fleming 56-57). For Guillaume's *Roman de la Rose*, the *locus amoenus* is compared to the biblical Earthly Paradise to remind the audiences of the inherent danger: both Eden and the landscape in *Le Roman* are characterized by abundant and diverse sensuous features, and calamities occur in both places. Adam plucks an apple and falls from grace. The dreamer is lured into the devious and narcissistic world of courtly love. He follows the birdsongs and murmuring streams into a walled garden and is let in by Idleness. Then the dreamer finds a rosebush near the Fountain of Narcissus. Before he can choose the flower, the God of Love shoots him with an arrow, so he falls hopelessly in love with one particular rose. What follows is the narrator's struggle with himself, with mortal enemies of love, with the craft of love itself, and with the narcissism associated with courtly love in general.

Another alternative to the interpretation of Gower's sensuous *locus amoenus* is to look closely at the text itself. It is interesting to note that his contemporary poet, Geoffrey Chaucer, famously refers to Gower in his direction included at the end of *Troilus and Criseyde*, as "moral Gower" and one of the intended audiences of his work. This reference has become one of the most renowned phrases used to characterize Gower and his oeuvres throughout the poet's entire critical history, a characterization that is either "a boon or a curse, depending on the tastes of the age which repeated it" (Echard 3). However, my intention is not to participate in the debate whether such Chaucerian reference is beneficial for Gower or not. What I propose here is that in addition to Gower's renowned moralistic stance, he should also be known as the "sensuous Gower," for ways in which sensory perceptions are much emphasized and richly foregrounded in his narratives. My supportive evidence for so calling is most vividly shown in his lavish description of the *locus amoenus* found in the introductory portion of *Vox clamantis*. It is notable that such lavishness is achievable due to the narrator's exercise of his sensations. Simply put, this *locus amoenus* is not a loftily abstract space that exists only through the exercise of the intellect or imagination. But it is indeed a place where its idyllic beauty can be seen, felt, smelled, and heard. Even though the way in which such a long, extravagant description is followed by the narrator's nightmarish vision of the metamorphosed vulgar poor has led many critics to chastise Gower's sensuous perception as an "awkward" narrative flaw, which might be the result of his hurried addition of the First Book after the 1381 Revolt. But I read this depiction quite differently: the poet's insertion of the description is intentional. It is there to set the scene for his nightmare. This is achievable due to how such a description functions to transfer the audiences into the discursive world of what Mary Carruthers called the "medieval aesthetic experience"

(*The Experience* 47). Then the poet turns such a world upside down by providing the audiences with an unusual encounter with the tumultuous peasants.

In many ways, Gower's sensuous description reads like what Mary Carruthers glosses in her work *The Experience of Beauty in the Middle Ages* as "an exercise in medieval aesthetic experience" (45). This exercise is drawn primarily from the concept of beauty as harmony mentioned above. Again, following Aquinas' Aristotelian formulation, humans experience their surroundings through their sensations (Sevier 17), which are the "affects" (*affectus*) that only exist as "a change within the body" (qtd. in Carruthers 45). These affects are not emotional responses to external stimuli. Instead, they are direct changes in the body that are caused by external objects, for example, sensations of warmth or coldness, or the bitter taste or the high-pitched sound. Each external object affects us with its sight, sound, smell, touch, and taste, creating sensations that are complexions, "folded together" from many ingredients. As stated previously, in this world of affects and sensations, beauty arises from a harmonious mixture of all the sensations, combining in due proportions so that there is no overabundance or inadequacy that might tax our sensory perceptions. An aesthetic experience therefore should be multi-sensory and whole. Carruthers also adds that it is "the multiplicity and variety of sensations received in their total complexity that is pleasurable – to divide them from one another is also to lessen, perhaps destroy their delightfulness." Sights, sounds, tastes, scent, and touches are perceived as "one integral whole, as *quaedam proportio, quaedam,*" which means both "particular" and "undivided" (47). That being said, an aesthetic experience is multisensorial, each distinctive sense being affected by a proportioned mixture of those stimuli that it can perceive. The mind receives these together in what was called the *sensus communis* or "common

sense”, and “fashions them into a mental construct from which concepts and memories can be made” (Carruthers 47).

In the introductory portion of *Vox clamantis*, the narrator’s experience of the *locus amoenus* is indeed multisensory: he is capable of seeing, hearing, smelling, and feeling the beauty of the landscape in its entirety. Each of his sense functions independently yet undividedly; each contributes to the narrator’s construction of this place as the delightful *locus amoenus* which causes him “to wander round” in his joy. To understand the purpose of such a lavish, sensuous description, we need to look at what follows the narrator’s experience of *locus amoenus*, which is the narrator’s nightmarish dream vision of “diverse lots of the vulgar poor wandering in numberless crowds,” whom “God’s curse...changing their forms...makes them into beasts”(l. 799-820) – domestic, barnyard beasts (asses, cattle, dogs) – who then become furiously wild and boisterous, refusing service and turning to destruction. The narrator then spends the next ten chapters describing how each group of the vulgar poor is metamorphosed into each kind of different animal. The beastly characteristics of each animal are clearly delineated to reflect what he perceives to be the dominant features of each rebel group. Dorothy Yamamoto suggests that such demarcations make this part of *Vox* similar to the highly popular texts²⁷ written in the genre of medieval bestiary. Clearly influenced by the classical *Physiologus*, the bestiary, or the “book of beasts” usually describes animals and uses such descriptions as a basis for an allegorical teaching. It is considered by modern scholars such as Yamamoto to be a

²⁷ According to Dorothy Yamamoto, the popularity and widespread of the bestiary is unquestionable: M.R. James, who studied nearly all the extant copies, described it as “one of the leading picture-books of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries”, ranking it with “the Psalter and the Apocalypse” (qtd. in Yamamoto 15). Over forty books of bestiary produced in England survive today, and many of these are illustrated with pictures of its animals, birds, fishes, and reptiles. The iconography associated with the bestiary was both widely dispersed and enduring. For further information, see Yamamoto, *The Boundaries of the Human in Medieval English Literature* (Oxford: OUP, 2000) 15-17.

“key text” for exploring how the medieval perspective on the relationships between humans and animals (15). In the case of *Vox*, however, the way in which Gower delineates their evil and frantic behaviors makes this part of his treatise read like a bestiary, in Yamamoto’s words, “gone horribly wrong” (234). One band, for instance, is transformed into oxen with bears’ feet and dragons’ tails, which refuse to be yoked to the plough and exhale deadly sulphurous fumes (1.241-280). Another group becomes asses who scorn to carry loads and claim the horses’ place for themselves. They despise the tail God gave them, considering it “vile.” These asses then metamorphose into monsters with long horns in the middle of their foreheads – horns that cut and slash and run with blood (1.191-230). Then another mob has turned into swine, and their ultimate wish is to tear up the arable pastures. All of these animals make terrible, clamorous noises. It is obvious from such description that, unlike the courtly world of Guillaume’s *Roman de la Rose*, there is nothing “courtly” to be found at all in this first book of Gower’s nightmarish vision, neither *fin d’amors* nor courtly lifestyle. How then are we to interpret the poet’s use of the sensuous *locus amoenus* in juxtaposition with the metamorphosis of the monstrous and noisy vulgar poor?

One way to interpret this is to castigate it as a weakness in Gower’s narration. Maria Wickert, for instance, notes its structural awkwardness whereby the author “obviously had difficulty padding out” the description of the entire spring day before falling asleep, because, according to her suggestion, “Gower did not wish to give up the traditional spring morning scheme [of courtly love allegories], but ... was obliged to place the dream at night” to fit the tradition of exegetical dream-visions. She also points out that the poet “manipulates historical account and allegorical interpretation in such a way that they never fully coincide ... the author leaps continuously from one manner of presentation to another” (qtd. in A. Galloway 288). In her

study of high medieval dream visions, Kathryn Lynch only mentions *Vox* to say that it shows how Gower employs the dream vision mode “mainly as an authenticating device, to secure for himself the authority of prophecy” (165). Steven Justice also agrees that the awkward formal features of *Vox* reveal Gower’s attempt to reclaim authority as the representative of the “common voice,” an effort he made just after the 1381 Rebellion fundamentally challenged the right of a learned author to make such a claim. Such an attempt therefore enables Gower to utilize a visionary mode, which Justice considers this utilization to be “manifestly contrived” (215). Nevertheless, such mode allows the poet to speak for England. The event was indeed “a threat” for Gower, but it also creates an opportunity for his voice to become, similar to John the Baptist, the *vox clamantis in deserto* – the prophetic voice of one’s crying in the wilderness, the voice that the king, his counselors, magnates, gentry, religious houses, higher clergy, scribes, civil servants, and other learned elites have to hear (213).

Justice’s assertion concerning Gower’s attempt to reclaim authority to speak for England and the people is indeed compelling; it is also possible that the inclusion of the *locus amoenus* in the introductory portion is the poet’s “awkward” narrative flaw. However, it is possible as well that such insertion might be intentional, and it functioned well to illuminate Gower’s purpose of adding this first book into *Vox*’s existing corpus. Such inclusion and the later juxtaposition with the depictions of frantic and raucous animals also reveal Gower’s remarkable creativity, as well as his masterful ability to negotiate between different literary traditions, i.e. dream vision and prophetic literature by selectively borrowing from each to construct his own purposeful narrative. Gower’s purpose, I argue, is to alert the upper echelons in his society to understand that the countryside is a treacherous territory, inhabited by the untamed, traitorous *rustici* and their animals. Such danger of the countryside is manifested in the form of sounds. It is therefore

necessary for the ruling classes to train their ears to detect signs of trouble – the murmur and noise from the countryside.

The Day of Mars Has Dawned

At this point, it is seen now that Gower's *Vox* is quite a noisy text. The main section of *Vox* is particularly full of raucous, boisterous noises of the peasant rebels of 1381 as animals. What are we to make of these noises? What do they mean? My aim for the rest of this chapter is to explore Gower's sounds of the countryside in the context of medieval cultural views of animals and the Apocalypse described in the Book of Revelation. I will also consider Chaucer's *Nun's Priest's Tale* as a parodic response to *Vox*. I conclude the chapter with the image of silent peasants as part of the countryside imagined as desirable by the medieval literate classes. These silent peasants can be found in texts such as Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* as well as the marginal illuminations in *The Luttrell Psalter*. Taken together, they contribute to the construction of agrarian workers who make neither the rebellious noises such as those in Gower's *Vox* nor the shambolic, chaotic noises found in Chaucer's *Nun's Priest's Tale*.

As noted earlier, the introductory part of *Vox* reads relatively like what Carruthers calls an exercise in "medieval aesthetic experience" (45), which focuses on the harmonious mixture of the multisensorium. In such discourse, our utilization of several sensations when faced with a harmonious environment leads human minds to understand beauty. However, in Gower's *Vox*, the sensuous *locus amoenus* does not lead the narrator to a purely aesthetic experience found in classical and medieval philosophical discussions. Instead, it leads him to his ultimate nightmare of the metamorphosed peasants running amok and assaulting his senses. It should be noted that the narrator himself does foretell this nightmare. As sensitive to the sensory world as he is, the

narrator provides the audiences with a signal of the systematic “shutting down” of his sensory perceptions. Such indication registers the ending of his exercise in “medieval aesthetic experience” as well as heralding the beginning of a (literally) new chapter, in which the world as he knows it will be turned upside down. The process of shutting down the senses and the closing of his aesthetic exercise begin with a signpost: “Omnia finis habet.” (“An end awaits all things.” (1.125). In this narrative, such an end comes as night falls:

...aderat sic vespere tandem
Cum solet occasus intitulare diem:
Illa quieta dies solitas compleuerat horas,
Dulcibus atque silent organa clausa notis:
Merserat in tenebris nox feruida lumina solis,
Et sopor ad lectum strinxerat ire virum: (1.125-130)

(“...Thus evening finally came, when the sunset claimed the day as its due. The quiet day had completed its customary hours and the tongues were silent, restrained from their sweet notes. Night had sunk in darkness the shining rays of the sun and sleep forced man to go to bed.”)

From this description, it is obvious that Gower’s depiction of nighttime contrasts drastically with that of the morning. The soft light of dawn has disappeared and with it there are no more sweet smells of any flower, no more breath of wind, birdsongs, or any stimulation of the senses. In the morning, the senses of the narrator are awakened and aroused by the wonders and beauty of the world. As dusk approaches, the narrator does not describe starlight or moonlight. There is no fragrance of nocturnal flowers. There are no sounds of night-loving animals. Instead, all the stimulations of the senses have disappeared; the senses themselves shut down. The aesthetic experience has also ended. Such representation of the night corresponds with medieval

conceptualization of the senses, in which, according to C. M. Woolgar, darkness was regarded as detrimental to sight. Before the advent of electricity, medieval thinkers observed that darkness made human vision more obscured and less keen. Such formulation was most perceivable during a transition to twilight, commonly known as time “between dog and wolf” (“inter canem et lupem”). Furthermore, Isidore de Seville also explicates that night was called *nox* because it was harmful to the eyes (“eo quod oculis noceat”) (qtd. in Woolgar 149). The creatures of the night such as wolves and owls were therefore associated with evil. Any nocturnal activity such as night journey or gathering could also stir suspicion. It seems that the night in medieval period was meant primarily for sleeping. Woolgar gives the example of Maurice de Wigewale, who postponed their return journey from his pilgrimage to Canterbury until the hours of daylight (Woolgar 149-153).

What fascinates me most, however, is that Gower’s attentiveness to the interplay between the day’s close and the shutting down of the senses cannot be found in other dream vision written during this period. In *Pearl* and *Piers Plowman*, both narrators fall asleep during daytime, while they can still see their beautiful surroundings. The narrator in Guillaume de Lorris’ *Le Roman de la Rose* simply states that “...couchier m’aloie / Une nuit si com je soloie, / Et me dormoie mout forment” (“I lay down one night, as usual, and slept very soundly” 23-25) without further elaboration. Chaucer’s account of the narrator’s nightly activities before falling asleep in the *Book of Duchess* is relatively more extended, but it focuses exclusively on his insomnia due to a “sickness” (36) that he has suffered for eight years. This resembles Jean Froissart’s early poem, the *Paradys D’Amours*, which also includes the narrator who suffers sleeplessness because he is tormented by love (Shibanoff 76). None of these accounts is as preoccupied with sensory perceptions as is that of Gower’s narrator in the first book of *Vox*. Indeed, the Chaucerian

description of his contemplative night in the *Book of Duchess* is considerably longer than those of his French counterparts. Yet it emphasizes on the interior of the narrator's mind and his melancholic sickness over the multisensorial description that can be found in the account of the "sensuous" Gower.

In Gower's *Vox*, as the narrator's sensory perceptions are shutting down at the day's close, similar to Chaucer's (and Froissart's) narrator in the *Book of Duchess*, he also suffers from insomnia but mainly due to inexplicable anxiety. As he laments how such sleeplessness has tormented his mind and body, it is detectable that the closing of his sensuous aesthetic experience has opened the path to other kinds of sensations. The narrator states that in the stillness of the night, "En coma sponte riget, tremit et caro, cordis et antrum / Soluitur, et sensus fertur ad instar aque;" ("my hair stood on end, and my flesh trembled, and the hollow of heart grew weak, and my sense was carried away like water" (1.145-146)). These new sensations occur because of his mysterious "anxiety" (Rigg and Moore 157). At dawn the narrator finally falls asleep and finds himself in a dream vision picking flowers in a field. Another signpost given here is how he states that the day he is dreaming about is Tuesday, which, according to Rigg and Moore, is "the day of Mars, the day of war" (157-158).

What happens next is quite intriguing. The narrator sees the peasant rabble turned by God's wrath into domestic or wild beasts – asses, oxen, swine, dogs, cats, foxes, fowls, midges, and frogs, in accordance with their characters. His narrative of the metamorphoses continues for a total of 1193 lines (165-1358) before proceeding to describe his personal fears, which drive him from where he is to hide in the woods. In such a prolonged and detailed account of the peasants' bodily transformation, it seems that the narrator's keen senses have subsided, as the world of aesthetic has entirely disappeared. Only the narrator's vision and hearing remain intact

for him to make sense of this distorted world. This is seen from how he only describes the physical appearances of the animals alongside the noises they make. The overwhelming monstrosity of these animals makes it impossible for this sensuous narrator to experience his surroundings aesthetically. It seems that the blooming field where he is about to collect flowers has vanished. There is no longer the *locus amoenus* to be sensuously appreciated, only the monstrous animals to be seen and heard. The sounds of singing birds so elaborately described in the first chapter are gone altogether, as the entire soundscape is overwhelmed by the cacophony of animals screaming. Moreover, to make the matter worse for someone as sensitive to the environment as Gower's narrator, he also witnesses how their leader, a Jay (or Jackdaw, cryptically alluded to as Wat Tyler) and John Ball are provoking these animals. They then assemble: "Watte vocat, cui Thomme venit, neque Symme retardat; / Bette que Gibbe simul Hykke venire iubent" ("Tom comes thereat when called by Wat, and Simon as forward we find; Bet and Gib order Hick to come at once" 1.783-784). By so doing, they are fully armed with rustic apparatuses: "Ascia, falx, fede quos roderat atra rubigo, / Gestantur, que suo cuspidе colla secant" ("They carry axe and scythe befouled with rust, whose jagged edge scores deep its bearer's neck" (1.855-856) and march to New Troy (London), sack the Savoy, and murder the sacred priest Helenus (i.e. Sudbury).

As the army of tumultuous animals draws closer to the city, one of the last remaining sensory perceptions of the narrator, the vision, has also subsided. This makes way for his foregrounding of the auditory. The visual (physical) representations of the animals have dissolved into mere noises. These noises, these *vox ita terribilis* are intensely recollected by the horror-struck narrator as the vicious force that invade and ransack New Troy while also brutally slaughtering the innocents. In the passages depicting the invasion of the city by these raucous

animals, the narrator's animosity toward the noises of the countryside is explicitly portrayed. The scene he recounts is not simply an army of angry peasants but a commotion of furious animal noises armed with agrarian tools, which the narrator renders in his verses: "Dum gemiunt solita voca frequenter yha" ("the asses cry 'heehaw,'" 1.190), and which make the entire scene become a cacophony of terror:

Quidam porcorum grunitus horridiores

Emittunt, que suo murmure terra tremit:

Frendet aper spumans, magnos facit atque tumultus.

Et quiritat verres auget et ipse sonos (1.801-804)

("Some give out horrible swinish grunts, and the earth trembles from their rumbling. The frothing wild boar makes a great tumult and the boar-pig cries out and adds to the noises.")

Such a description of the boisterous animals markedly contrasts with the narrator's aesthetic experience in his *locus amoenus*. At the time that he witnesses their approaching to New Troy, all of his formerly keen senses collapse and the beastly noises overwhelm his sensory perceptions. This section therefore concludes with my reiteration that Gower's inclusion of the extended description of the *locus amoenus* might be intentional, since it serves to reveal the narrator's preoccupation with sensory perceptions in relation to the formation of aesthetic experience, as well as to stand in harsh contrast to the horrendous noises of the rural rebels. In what follows, I focus on the narrator's pronounced hostility towards the *rustici* in the context of late fourteenth-century England. Reading the poem in such a context also leads to an exploration of how *Vox* had participated in the strain of apocalyptic discourse considered quite pervasive in late medieval English culture. Finally, it addresses the questions of how and why the dissensions

voiced from the countryside are regarded as noise, and how such noise is integral to the construction of the countryside and its dwellers as inferior to their urban counterpart.

Clamor horrendissimus: Representing the Rebels in Vox clamantis

I would like to begin this part with a question. Since the dissensions from the countryside were considered as noise in late medieval England, it is necessary at this point to give a little more consideration to the precise definition of noise. What actually is noise? I have to admit that when I first pondered this question, it seemed rather absurd to me. As Greg Hainge points out, after all “everyone knows what noise is,” especially when we hear it (3). Yet there is more to noise than meets the eye (or ear). In his section on noise in *Keywords in Sound*, David Novak rightly notes that sound studies in recent years have considered noise to be “a subject of deep fascination that cuts across disciplinary boundaries,” because it is “a crucial element of communicational and cultural networks, a hyperproductive quality of musical aesthetics, an excessive term of affective perception, and a key metaphor for the incommensurable paradoxes of modernity” (125). As Novak puts it, there are several attempts from across academic disciplines to delineate and categorize noise. For instance, the physicist defines noise as “a non-periodic *complex* sound...a sound that can be decomposed into a large number of sound waves all of different frequencies that...are not multiples of one basic frequency and which *do not therefore enter into harmonic relations with each other*” (Hainge 3, my italics). In classical theories of information, noise is regarded as the “shadow of *resistance* to a signal being passed between two points in a system, from a sender to a receiver” (Goddard, Halligan, and Hegarty 3, my italics). On a military front we are also confronted with what they call a “sonic warfare,” in which “noise” is used to instill *fear and dread* among the enemy, such as the event where the

Israeli air force used sonic booms²⁸ in the Gaza Strip. Its victims connected such experience with what they had experienced from a massive explosion. They reported, “broken windows, ear *pain*, nosebleeds, *anxiety attacks*, *sleeplessness*, *hypertension*” (S. Goodman xi, my italics).

From these definitions, noise is obviously perceived across disciplines as a certain kind of sound that is *complex* and *unable to enter into harmonic relations with others*. It also contains the ability to *resist* and is capable of causing *fear*, *dread*, as well as *anxiety attacks* among those who hear it. Scott Wilson further adds that in Western culture, noise is regarded as a source of more exasperation even than any visually offensive object (27). This is especially true when that noise comes from the unknown or the unpopular marginalized. Wilson provides an example of how Jacques-Alain Millers, the Parisian psychoanalyst, was severely disturbed by an Islamic neighbor’s music and prayers to the point that such noise evoked a racism previously dormant in him that “no rational understanding or liberalism can erase” (27). Judging from these perceptions, it seems unproblematic to deduce here that noise is the unwanted sound. It is usually loud and disruptive because it cannot exist in harmony with other sounds. It excludes more than includes. It causes confusion not clarification, since it resists any attempt to interpretation. It is also turbulent, chaotic, frightening, and injurious according to the victims of sonic booms in the Gaza Strip. Such conceptualization also seems to align well with Gower’s representation of the noises made by those transformed peasants: they are loud, confusing, terrifying, and harmful to those who hear. But is that what noise is really all about?

To explore noise more closely and critically in order to understand noises in Gower’s work, it is imperative to take the obsession with noise amongst the artists in the early 20th

²⁸ A sonic boom is the high-volume, deep-frequency sound associated with the shockwave of low flying fighting jets traveling faster than the speed of sound. For further information on this topic, see Steve Goodman, *Sonic Warfare: Sound, Affect, and the Ecology of Fear* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009)

century into consideration. As many sound scholars have noted, several kinds of noises are cherished and employed in modern artistic creations, ranging from music, theatrical productions, ballets, films, to installation arts.²⁹ Salomé Voegelin mentions that futurist artists such as Luigi Russolo “celebrated noise” (43). According to Voegelin, Russolo conceived that noises of modern technology so despicable to many hearers were in fact the “sounds of progress, liberation, and advancement of a people towards a better life” (43). Moreover, the example of Jacques-Alain Millers discovering his latent racism after hearing music and prayers from his Islamic neighbors, demonstrates two approaches to reading such an account. The first way is to conceptualize noise as nuisance and unwanted sound as previously discussed. Another way is to look at the situation from both sides. Indeed, Millers regarded the sounds as noise. However, similar to many minority groups in the Western world, it is possible that his neighbors may perceive such sounds as sacred music and prayers that function to bring their material lives closer to the divine. They also helped to accentuate and reinforce their Islamic identities in a secular country with overwhelming Christian populations (Voegelin 44-45).

Noise, in this sense, is not simply unwanted sound that must be eradicated. David Novak puts it so eloquently that noise actually stands for “subjectivities of difference that break from normative social contexts. It interpellates marginal subjects into circulation, giving name to their unintelligible discourses even as it holds apart unfamiliar ways of being” (130). In my reading of Gower’s *Vox*, I therefore delineate noise as the sonic event that disrupts, disturbs, and is unwanted in the world of medieval elite writers. It is disruptive and disturbing because it destabilizes and transforms the sensuously harmonious world of Gower’s narrator into a world

²⁹ For further studies on noise and modern arts, see Douglas Kahn, *Noise, Water, Meat: A History of Sound in the Arts* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001).

filled with confusion and dissonance. It is unwanted because, similar to the sounds of Islamic music and prayers abhorred by the Parisian psychoanalyst, it comes from the previously silenced and marginalized people, i.e. the rustic peasants. And there is not just *one* kind of noise but several. These many noises force the narrator to acknowledge their existences. They bring to fore the undesirable part of rural world that I am going to discuss in what follows.

Rustic imagery abounds in Gower's *Vox clamantis*. Again, it should be stated here before advancing my analysis that I have used the term "rustic" and "countryside" interchangeably and vaguely to denote the areas, peoples, and cultures outside of the urban spheres. Geographically speaking, the "countryside" in late medieval England usually encompassed the areas outside of London and other urban centers. These areas could be densely or sparsely populated. Most cultural activities and socio-economic developments were primarily driven more by local circumstances than by the influence of external urban centers. Such divergence allowed both the urbanites and rural inhabitants to define themselves in opposition with one another. David Wallace notes that even the term *country* (as in countryside) is based on a "recognition of difference: it derives from the Medieval Latin feminine adjective *contrata*, as in the term *contrata terra*, land "lying opposite, over against or facing" (127). In terms of material conditions and environments, Oliver Rackham has rightfully identified that the landscape of the medieval English countryside was not a pristine, untamed wilderness but "the product of centuries of interactions between human activities and the natural world of plants and animals" (14). About half of medieval England was cultivated land, such as fields and hedges. The rest was semi-natural, in a sense that the land was managed and exploited but not cultivated. This includes woodlot, wood pasture, heath, fen, moorland, semi-natural grassland, and wetlands. These semi-natural landscapes were not primeval wilderness but lands with cultural features,

such as woodlots with names and defined edges or fenced arable fields (13-31). However, such landscape management did not suggest that the rural economy depended exclusively upon agriculture. In fact, it typically was a mixture of farming, crafts or small industry, and trading, and the basic unit of production in this economy was the household, with family labor input supplemented with hired labors (Poos 11). As for the populations, the inhabitants of medieval English countryside were peoples of relatively diverse occupations – craftsmen, retailers, village doctors, ale-brewers, preachers, agrarian workers – as well as wild and domestic animals, both of which were also heavily controlled and managed.

As stated above, Gower's *Vox clamantis* is imbued with imagery drawn from what the poet considers fitting for the rural world. This includes wild and farm animals, rustic implements, and agricultural workers. Most of his rural references are negative. Some are relatively neutral. Few of them are more positive than others. Several of the negative references are accompanied by noises. This is most perceptible in the descriptions of the horrendous noises of peasants-turned-beasts previously discussed. The more neutral references are usually included in the narrator's descriptions of what he perceives to be the suitable tasks for each animal. Such allusions are nevertheless used primarily as foils to exaggerate how the rebels in such hideous beastly forms fail to perform their assigned duties. In this sense, most of the neutral references end up joining force with the negative allusions.³⁰ For instance, the asses are meant, according to the narrator, to carry sacks to the city while bending their backs under a heavy load. Yet such

³⁰ It should be noted that by using the word "neutral" here, I do not imply any moral or ethical judgment. By modern standard of animal ethics, even what Gower considers to be simply the "natural" tasks of these animals, thus neutral alluded to, are definitely considered violent, anthropocentric, and problematic. For a thorough discussion of the interconnections between animals and violence, see Karl Steele, *How to make a Human: Animals and Violence in the Middle Ages* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2011).

neutral recognition only exists to amplify the atrocious and raucous ways in which these rebels-turned-asses refuse to obey their human masters:

Elatos asinos subita nouitate rebelles
Vidi, nec frenis quis moderauit eos;
Viscera namque sua repleta furore leonum
Extiterant predas in repetendo suas.
Perdidit officium capitis sine lege capistrum,
Dum saltant asini cuncta per arua vagi;
Terruit en cunctos sua sternutacio ciues,
Dum geminant solita voce frequenter yha. (1.183-190)

(I saw rebellious asses carried away by sudden revolt, and no one checked them by bridle. For their vitals were filled with raging of lions in search of prey. The halter had no effect on their unruly heads, as the wandering asses jumped through all the fields. Indeed, their braying terrified all citizens, as they loudly redoubled their usual “hee haw” over and over.)

Writing the rebellious asses can be quite straightforward: they are uncontrollable; they run everywhere all over the field; they bray vociferously time and again. The unruly oxen, however, become more problematic to represent. This is due to the strong Christian connotations associated with oxen and their master, the plowman. According to Ordelle G. Hill, the plowman was at times seen in the Middle Ages “as a type of Old Testament prophet or “friend of God” (e.g. Abraham or Moses), as a New Testament apostle or preacher, or more generally as any type of spiritual virtue or Christian within the Church” (35). His primary apparatus, a plow, was also regarded as the cross. Such discourse argued that, similar to the plow, the cross is made of iron (representing either human’s heavy sinfulness or his lost divinity) and wood. Likewise, the plow

resembles the cross as it “roots up the weed (sin) as the ground (soul) is prepared for the good seed (gospel)” (35). In the Old Testament, Elisha was also a plowman before becoming a prophet, who “was historically a carpenter and could be associated with the making of plows.” Also, Christ, in finally taking charge of the cross that bore a physical likeness to the early plow, has become part of the plow to cultivate human’s souls (Hill 46). As a result, oxen, as one of the most significant working animals in agrarian economy, were also utilized in Christian allegory as the aides to the sustaining of the livelihood of the Church. In Passus XXI of *Piers Plowman C*, for example, a plowing scene is an allegory of the office of clergy, in which the soul is the field, the plowshare the preacher’s tongue, and the oxen the four Evangelists. Piers’ plowing team consists of four mighty beasts: Matthew, Mark, and Luke, while John was “most gentle of all” (262-266).

Such adulation towards the ox is undetected in the description of oxen in *Vox clamantis*. Indeed, it is difficult to determine whether Gower had known the Christian connotations associated with the ox. Yet his narrator acknowledges their gentle attributes: they are tamed and can be gently led by the horn to plow. These rebels-turned-oxen, however, have left the fields and refused to let the agrarian implements perform their tasks. Again, the narrator’s neutral recognition of the utility of each tool is paired up with his intense lament for the coming famine and his fear of the oxen. In addition to their disobedience, the narrator proceeds to portray the physical monstrosity of these oxen. These once docile animals no longer resemble oxen. Their physiology almost entirely takes monstrous forms: they have unnatural bears’ feet and dragons’ tails. They also exhale sulphurous flames from their cavernous mouths. Moreover, he cryptically states that “Bos leo, bos pardus, bos vrsus, set bouis ipsum / Constat naturam non meminisse suam.” (“The ox was a lion, the ox was a panther, the ox was a bear, but it was evident that the

ox did not remember its own nature” 1.293-294). This statement corresponds with Gower’s conceptualization of Nature also found in *Confessio Amantis*. Influenced by Neoplatonic thought transmitted from late antiquity to the Middle Age via epitomists, commentary writers, and authors such as Alan of Lille in *Complaint of Nature*, this work argues that while the natural order can be relatively problematic for humans, it functions perfectly in the world of the animals (H. White 183). Nature stands for moral orders out of which good (“natural”) behaviors among animals spring and according to which conflicts are naturally resolved. This is because animals do not need reason to govern their behavior as nature does it for them. Animals could even serve as exemplars of the naturalness of temperate desire since they mate only in season, and certain species pair for life (Leach 64). Such construction implies that if animals behave against their nature, the natural order would be disrupted. As the oxen forsake what is deemed natural to them, which is to serve humans by plowing the fields, their natural appearance also changes to amplify how unnatural it is for the oxen to refuse to plow. Consequently, the natural order is interrupted, and the narrator voices such disruption through his sorrowful prophecy: “Prodolor! O! dixi, cessabit cultus agrorum, / Quo michi temporibus est metuenda fames.” (“Alas! O!’ I cried. ‘Tillage of the fields will come to an end, so my times should be afraid of famine.’” (1.297-298)³¹

As Gower has it, “Per iuga, per colles, per devia queque locorum / Disruptis stabulis soluitur omne pecus: / Ex omni genere venit incola rusticitatis, / Maior et est subito quam seges

³¹ This statement in several ways makes the physical transformation of the oxen more “unnatural” and detrimental to the natural order than that of the asses. For the latter, their ultimate metamorphosis occurring after of the manifestation of rebellious behavior primarily serves to reflect the asses’ innate stupidity as they wish to enjoy lofty things, despite their lowly status. Such “madness” thus transforms them into monsters with long horns in the middle of their foreheads and longer tails than the lion. However, the asses’ bodily transformation poses no threats to the livelihood of the society and agrarian economy. They only make the narrator frozen with fear (1.211-240).

orta solo.” (“Since the stables were broken open, every beast was let free over the ridges, over the hills, and over the paths. The country-dwellers of every kind came and suddenly became taller than the corn crop risen from the soils” 1.511-514). These diverse dwellers of the countryside include the non-domesticated animals such as foxes and what the narrator perceives as loftier than other animals: a flock of birds. The presence of the former in such tumultuous rabble is not surprising, since the fox, according to medieval English philosopher John Trevisa, is “a stynkyng beste and corrupte” (ii.1263). Dorothy Yamamoto argues that such a hostile attitude towards the foxes in medieval treatises is entirely a characteristic of a society in which foxes were “continually meddling with human attempts at subsistence – breaking into farmyards and stealing precious chickens, ducks, geese, as well as their eggs. Such interaction is summarized in the image of women with their distaffs chasing the fox, which appear time and again in art and literature” (58). Apart from being stronger than usual, Gower’s representation of foxes is quite in line with other medieval renditions. What distinguishes his otherwise simply stronger foxes is how they act collectively to undermine “the network of affinities and antipathies between different species” (Yamamoto 60). Foxes were typically seen in medieval period as the archenemy of housedogs that guard their human master’s territories, but now the foxes and the dogs work together as a team to destabilize their surroundings. Such subversion of established order is also found in the flock of birds, which Gower regards as statelier than other animals, due to the medieval discourse that considered them as “the mirror of order within human society” (Yamamoto 36). Yet these birds now subvert such order by allowing the owl, formerly shunned by other birds, to fly beside them. The cock transforms into a raven, the gander a kite, and both try to feed off human corpses. In the narrator’s nightmarish vision, the avian

world no longer represents the ideal society – it has become horribly crazed and now reflects only chaos.

To the narrator’s horror, these monstrous country-dwellers assemble together and demolish the world around them. After their multitude has ransacked and destroyed everything on their path, they march to New Troy. As they are drawing close, their monstrous appearances and frantic behaviors have dissolved into mere noises. This is evident from how the narrator ceases to describe their physicality, but only their noises echoing in his ears. Out of these noises, however, one voice is most distinct and is therefore most threatening: the voice of Wat Tyler, one of the leaders who faced and negotiated with Richard II and the mayor of London on 15 June before he was attacked and killed at Smithfield. Gower illustrates Tyler’s voice by renaming him “Graculus,” connoting a jackdaw, which was conceived in medieval period as a loquacious bird that is capable of mimicking human speech but not reason (Longo 375). Tyler’s unreasonable voice is precarious because it is more communicable than other frantic noises heard from the transformed peasants. Gower’s narrator recounts how Tyler-as-a-jackdaw “urges the masses to bring about their own court and system of justice, presenting him as a literal rabble-rouser” (Longo 375). At this point, it seems that the narrator has retreated from his formulating of the grotesque beast fables laden with monstrosity and metamorphosis. Pamela L. Longo suggests that this is caused by Tyler’s effect upon the mob, so the narrator starts using several terms associated with humans to describe the peasants: *vulgus*, *plebs*, and *populi*. A new word, *turba* (commotion) is also introduced to the poem to connote the voice of Tyler (375) as well as the noises of *rustici*:

Singular *turba* silet, notat et sibi verba loquentis,

...Vocibus ambiguis deceptam prebuilt aurem

Vulgus et in finem nulla futura videt.
Exaltatus enim cum sic de plebe fuisset,
Ad se confestim traxerat omne solum:
Nam sine consilio cum plebs sibi colla dedisset,
Conuocat hic populum iussaue verba dedit.
...Vocis in excessu reliquos sic commouet omnes
Graculus, et mentes plebis ad arma trahit;
Stultaque pars populi que sit sua curia nescit,
Que tamen ipse iubet iura vigoris habent.

(1.701, 703-708, 711-714; emphasis added)

(The whole mob was silent, noted the speaker's words...the rabble lent a deceived ear to fickle talk and it saw none of the future things that would result. For when thus he'd been praised by common folk, straightway he drew all of the land to himself. Indeed, when the people had unadvisedly given themselves into servitude, he called the populace together and gave orders...Jackdaw stirred up all the others with his outrageous shouting, and he drew the common peoples' minds toward war; the stupid part of the people knew not what its court might be, but he ordered them to adopt the laws of force.)

Despite the narrator's utilization of terms associated with the people to describe the multitude, to his ear, the sounds they make are definitely not a *vox populi vox dei*, which is the traditional political adage highlighting the power of the people. Tyler's unreasonable words function to lure the multitude into a delusional state. Longo suggests that his voice was so affective to the mob that it upends the *lex regia*, which is "an authorization either of popular sovereignty or absolutism based on the people's transferal of power to their sovereign" (376). In

so doing, the rebels refuse to follow the standard royal law whereby what satisfies the ruler has the force of law (“quod principi placuit, legis habet vigorem” qtd. in Longo 376). Instead, they follow the laws of force that are sustained through Tyler’s unceasing incitement, and they manifest such power through their raucous noises. The narrator also adds that when Tyler says kill, the people frantically kill, and their sounds were like the clamor of the sea (“Est maris vt sonitus”; 1.722). Nevertheless, it should be noted that the sounds the narrator proceeds to describe – “mugitus” (bellowing), “grunnitus” (grunting), “latratus” (barking), are still the sounds of rustic animals, not *vox articulata literata*, which belong exclusively to rational humans. David Aers points out that the narrator’s obsession with the monstrous transformations and the noises of rustic animals serves as a strategy to dehumanize the rebel as completely as possible, so that any claims instigated by them should be interpreted only as nonsensical and idiotic (441). This is obvious as the narrator refuses to acknowledge any verbal quality found inscribed within these noises, with the exception of the speeches of Tyler and John Ball. For the most part, the narrator chooses to recollect pure noise – the senseless, bestial noises joined with anarchic violence.

The Rustic Apocalypse and Gower as Prophet

While such rustic, beastly noises might be castigated as irrational, they contain considerable power because they reverberate in the air (“reuerberat” (1.817). Such echoing commotion markedly contrasts with the silence of New Troy, the name that Gower gives to London. The city’s powerlessness is easily recognized from the absence of sounds or any other devices that can overpower the rebellion’s noises. It is possible that such silence might allude to inaction, which Gower has encapsulated by calling the city New Troy. Longo proposes that in so

calling London by the name that dated back to Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*, Gower has foretold the city's impending doom and "promise as a replacement for its fallen counterpart" (376). It naturally reminds the audiences of the ultimate destruction of Troy by its own "weak defenses" (376). As the narrative progresses, however, the poet provides the audiences with the possibility of recovery for New Troy. Such a prospect emerges in the narration of the rebellion as a prophetic dream. *Vox* gradually realizes the narrator's authority to speak as prophet – to turn the tragedy of this boisterous event into an opportunity for healing – by calling upon audiences to discern their own culpability. This is manifested when the narrator climbs aboard a ship filled with nobles, and immediately finds himself in the midst of a storm. The poet spends over a hundred lines describing the tempest, many of which are drawn from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* XI (Longo 377). Throughout the storm, the narrator and the nobles pray to God for relief from the gust; at last Wat Tyler is killed, and with this sacrifice God is appeased. As a second Brutus, the descendant of Trojan exiles, the narrator reaches the shore of the island of Brut and is devastated to learn that he has arrived at a war-torn land. A "vox celi" (celestial voice) intervenes and tells him to accept that his place of refuge is an inharmonious island, and it commands the narrator not to waste time feeling sorrow, but rather to write down everything he has seen in his dream. The narrator then concludes the first book of *Vox clamantis* by announcing that the peasants are once again in chains, and by vowing to record the events of his nightmarish vision so that "every man of the future will find a moral" ("in quibus exemplum quisque futurus habet!" 1:2144).

The presence of such a celestial voice definitely secures the narrator's status as a divinely ordained prophet. It also corresponds well with the title of the poem, which is a direct invocation of John the Baptist, the *vox clamantis in deserto*. It also agrees with how the narrator fashions

himself in the prologue in an encrypted signature aligning his identity with the exiled author of the biblical Apocalypse:

Scribentis nomen si queras, ecce loquela
Sub tribus implicita versibus inde latet.
Primos sume pedes Godefridi desque Iohanni,
Principiumque sui Wallia iungat eis:
Ter caput amittens det cetera membra...
Insula quem Pathmos suscepit in Apocalipsi
Cuius ego nomen gesto, gubernet opus. (1.Prol.19-23, 57-58)

(“If you should ask the name of the writer, look, the word lies hidden and entangled within three verses about it. Take the first feet from “Godfrey” and add them to “John,” and let “Wales” join its initial to them. Leaving off its head, let “Ter” furnish the other parts...May the one whom the Isle of Patmos received in the Apocalypse, and whose name I bear, guide this work.”)

As Longo has it, the visionary voice of John the Baptist that is founded upon Isaiah 40:1-9 and 57:14, functions as “a mouthpiece for God who speaks to the heart of Jerusalem and removes the stumbling blocks from a wayward people” (362). She also convincingly argues that the biblical paradigm becomes the chief element of the poem’s layered voices, since it provides the poet with “an exemplar of the oral immediacy of a voice crying out and the textual gravity of ancient scripture that anticipates impending doom”. The Baptist analogue also offers “a model for denouncing contemporary Herods as well as for preaching general repentance through the implicit authority of divine intervention” (362). At this point, I would like to add as well that such an invocation, especially when read along with his dream vision, functions to allow his work to participate in the popular strain of apocalyptic writings.

Since the apocalyptic has many names and faces, some definitions of terms might be helpful. In her study of medieval apocalyptic writings, Marjorie Reeves explains that the “apocalyptic” connotes the disclosure of “hidden divine purpose in history, to which common usage has added the dimension of imminent crisis” (3). Since the early medieval period, apocalyptic thoughts were relative widespread, especially during the times of hardships and transformations. Kathryn Kirby-Fulton suggests that such popularity was initially fueled by St. Augustine, who “bequeathed the Middle Ages” with a vital perspective that the apex of history had been already achieved in the coming of Christ. This viewpoint incited many to “perceive the time process as decaying, a world grown old whose only significance lay in the miracle of new growth in Christ happening in its moribund carcass” (4). There is much cynicism inherent in such a strain of thought to the point that it seemed unachievable for Christians who subscribed to these ideologies to improve the conditions of this decaying world. During the twelfth century, however, this doomed viewpoint began to change. There emerged new discourse showing an attempt to understand history in terms of its eventual end by prophesying a complex pattern of events that will occur before the End of History. Such discourse often borrows and appropriates imagery as well as messages and meanings from biblical eschatology to speak to their present audiences. Similar to the Book of Revelation, it usually invokes the frightening imagery of the End of the World as we know it, and such imagery primarily functions to warn the audiences to “be attentive to their prophetic voices, otherwise the divine indignation would soon spill over into apocalyptic wrath if their voices continue to be ignored” (Kirby-Fulton 1). Mostly, the authors aimed to activate clerical, political, or societal reforms. Many of these treatises were both “very realistic, and in certain ways, very reactionary in their treatment of the present time” (Kirby-Fulton 5).

As apocalyptic writing, Gower's *Vox* certainly contains several allusions to the end of the world while also propagating his reformist agendas. One of the most striking examples of such allusions is his description of noises. In many ways, such noises serve as a constant reminder of those found in preceding apocalyptic treatises. According to James L. Resseguie, the Book of Revelation, the most renowned prototype of apocalyptic writing, is the "noisiest" book in the New Testament (20). The book is seemingly an endless performance of almost all the raucous noises known to humans before the advent of modern, noisy technology, complete with blaring trumpets and rolling thunderclaps. Similes and metaphors liken the event of the Apocalypse with loud trumpets (1:10; 4:1), rushing waters (1:15; 14:2; 19:6), and the roar of thunder (6:1; 14:2; 19:6). Momentous incidents seem to require a loud, mighty, or great voice. For instance, the search for someone to open the scroll is announced by an angel "with a loud voice" (5:2); a loud voice from the temple announces the end (16:17); Babylon's doom is shouted to the world by an angel "with a mighty voice" (18:2); a loud voice announces God's dwelling among humans (21:3). The souls under the altar raise loud voices to ask how long they must wait (6:10). In addition to these great or loud voices used to announce momentous declarations, there are also several descriptions of raucous noises that the author employed to illustrate the event of the Apocalypse. These sonic dissonances include the sound of locusts' wings that is likened to the deafening noise of chariots and horses rushing into battle (9:9); a mighty angel's shout is like a roaring lion (10:3); piercing angelic voices shout stage directions and commands (7:2; 11:12); the throne rumbles and belches out thunder (4:5); flying eagles screech "woe, woe, woe" (8:13); boisterous choirs sing earsplitting praises (5:12; 7:10; 19:1). Some choirs require several similes to capture their exuberance: "and I heard a voice from heaven like the sound of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder" (14:2).

Resseguie indicates that all these earsplitting sounds, blaring musical instruments, and endless noises are utilized to call the hearer to attention. The aim is to “train the hearer to listen to the commotion in heaven or to what the Spirit is saying and to ignore the din of this world” (21). This can be seen from the theme of the Apocalypse, which is a constant call for attentive, careful hearing. “Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches” (2:7; 11, 17, 29); “Blessed are those who hear and who keep what is written in the book” (1:3). And nowhere is attentive hearing more apposite than when the end encroaches on the present. “Come out of Babylon, my people, so that you do not take part in her sins” (18:4). I would also add here that the noises are there due to the nature of the incidents happening in the Revelation. These are indeed what occur in the cataclysmic end of the world before the Last Judgment. The Apocalypse for the narrator of the Revelation is not simply a divine revelation of symbolic visions of history, journeys through the heavens, or some combination of the two as those described in the visionary literature of the Classical era (Himmelfarb 1). On the contrary, the Book of the Revelation constitutes an exception to those visionary works by depicting events that disrupt, transfigure, and dominate the existing earthly polities. Similar to warfare so large that it might lead to the cataclysmic end of the world, the violent end of the world in the Revelation is inevitably accompanied by noises, which serve to amplify the disruption, destruction, and transfiguration of the world we knew before.

Indeed, Gower’s narrator does not directly appropriate his imagery of noises from the Revelation in the same fashion that he borrows assorted verses from Ovid. Yet his *Vox clamantis* is also a noisy representation of the event that disrupts the natural order and threatens to end his world. As a result, the narrator’s portrayal of such an event is also full of raucous noises no less powerful than the noises of the Revelation. Moreover, in addition to being his strategy to

dehumanize the rebels by ridding them of their ability to articulate as mentioned above, these noises also function to warn the audiences to become more attentive to the signs of time and to take action against any “unnatural” as well as unethical behaviors. One of the most palpable and intolerable behaviors is the rebellion against servitude orchestrated by those who work (or who were born to serve). What makes it even worse is how the noises that herald chaos and destruction are not represented as a one-time occurrence. Even though the rebellious peasants are now in chains and their noises are effectively quelled, they are still governed by Satan and would seize the first chance to bring the noble class to destruction (2100). Hence, the rebellion and its monstrous noises may yet return again if those who control do not pay enough attention.

Gower’s account thus serves as a grim reminder that the apocalyptic time may always be waiting around the corner, and all members of the society, especially those of the upper stratum, must remain on constant alert. It is crucial for them to practice their ear to detect any sign of trouble, in other words, *any* noise from the countryside. Even the softest of murmurs and indistinct whisperings can never be ignored because the country-dwellers cannot be trusted. Any noise must be dealt with in an urgent, timely manner.

However, there is something more than a biblical prophetic and cautionary apocalyptic vision at work in the poem’s critique. My lingering questions after all are: why does Gower’s narrator, speaking as the current prophet for late fourteenth-century England, find the need to identify the noises of the countryside as apocalyptic noises? Why is the countryside seen as a place of treachery and chaos? And why must the countryside be silenced? These questions will be tackled in the last section. After all, Gower’s specific characterization of the apocalypse differs markedly in details from the Revelation of St John. While the Revelation combines the general noises supposedly heard at the end of the world with supernatural sounds from heaven

and hell, Gower's apocalypse bears the features of a specific location on earth and that location is the countryside.

“So Hydous was the Noyse”: Chaucer, Gower, and 1381

History saturates Gower's apocalyptic voice in *Vox clamantis*. The author clearly states himself in the Prologue of the first book that in this work he intends to “describere qualiter seruiles rustici impetuose contra ingenuos et nobiles regni insurrexerunt” (“to describe how the lowly peasants violently revolted against the free-born men and nobles of the kingdom” 1.Prol.Rubric). Since he further clarifies that this insurrection takes place in the reign of King Richard, the event Gower aims to describe cannot be mistaken for any other village resistances but the Peasants' Revolt of 1381. The immediate cause of the Rebellion was the imposition of a poll tax by the royal government. Resistance against the tax began in May 1381. Rebels from Kent and Essex marched on London in June. This again confirms Gower's claim to historicity as his narrator clearly states that what happens in his account takes place in June. The most dramatic phase of the event – the execution of Archbishop Simon Sudbury, the burning of John of Gaunt's Savoy palace, the invasion of the Tower of London, and the death of Wat Tyler at Smithfield – occurred on and around the Feast of Corpus Christi (Freedman 260).

As an urban-dweller, an affluent landowner, and investor in the wool trade, Gower's recollection of the Rebellion inevitably exhibits the humorless “typical view of a thoughtful middle-class conservative toward the peasants” (Stockton 20). Even though he believed in equality of all humans before God, he had no doubt that there were certain roles in society that humans were born into and should always adhere to (Freedman 223-224). The peasants therefore must work on the lands to feed humanity, even though they themselves should restrict their diets

to only simple food, not wines and roasts. To transgress such roles is to revolt against the natural order, which can ultimately lead to the apocalyptic outcome. Such conceptualization informs Gower's representation of the Rebellion. Using apocalyptic framework, Gower's sensuous narrator vividly represents this insurrection as savagely rustic and raucous, as he witnesses the rebels transform into cacophonous, untamed, and unreasonable ("que racione carent" 1.782) animals carrying agrarian implements before they storm New Troy. Derek Pearsall calls such intense recollection "the most powerful and sustained account of the Peasants' Revolt" (qtd. in Salisbury 79).

It should be noted that Gower is not alone in his attempt to connect the 1381 Rebellion with the noises of rustic animals and the apocalyptic tradition. Geoffrey Chaucer, one of his most renowned contemporaries, also writes a barnyard fox chase scene that puts the narrator in mind of the commotion of murderous and rebellious peasants in the *Nun's Priest's Tale*. His description of the fox chase scene is so animated and essential to our understanding of the implication of rural noises that I quote him at length:

This sely wydwe and eek hir doghtres two
Herden thise hennes crie and maken wo
And out at dores stirten they anon,
And syen the fox toward the grove gon,
And bar upon his bak the cok away,
And cryden, "Out! Harrow! And weylaway!
Ha! ha! the fox!" and after hym they ran,
And eek with staves many another man.
Colle our dogge, and Talbot and Gerland,

And Malkyn, with a dystaf in hir hand;
 Ran cow and calf, and eek the verray hogges,
 So fered for the berkyng of the dogges
 And shoutyng of the men and wommen eeke
 They ronne so hem thoughte hire herte breeke.
 They yollenden as feendes doon in helle;
 The dokes cryden as men wolde them quelle;
 The gees for feere flowen over the trees;
 Out of the hyve came the swarm of bees.
 So hydous was the noyse – a benedictee! –
 Certes, he Jakke Straw and his meynee
 Ne made nevere shoutes half so shrille
 Whan that they wolden any Flemyng kille,
 As thilke day was maad upon the fox.
 Of bras they broughten bemes, and of box,
 Of horn, of boon, in whiche they blewe and powped,
 And therewithal they skriked and they howped.
 It semed as that hevene sholde falle. (VII.3374-3401)

This passage has shown that Chaucer is so attentive to sounds that he can go on for several lines to depict the acoustic of his imaginary settings. It is not surprising that Peter W. Travis has described this scene as a “*sonic* tour-de-force. Its auditory pleasures are so wildly extravagant that in reading it one experiences something approximating *jouissance*” (239 emphases in original). This is because this scene contains all sounds possible: *vox*

inarticulata literata (this one is most obviously depicted – the commotion of barnyard animals and the fox itself), *vox articulata illiterata* (as in the widow and her daughter shouting “weylaway!”), *vox articulata literata* (how both can finally ascribe the source of the upheaval to “the fox!”), and *vox inarticulata illiterata* (noises irresolvable into distinct phonetic units) that he leaves it to the audiences’ wildest imagination. In many ways, the description of such commotion resembles Gower’s detailed depiction and categorization of the diverse bestial noises. Similar to Gower, Chaucer is careful to utilize different words to associate each sound with each different being. As a result, a wide variety of barnyard sounds can be found here, as Travis laconically puts it, “barked, blown, screamed, yelled, grunted, buzzed, skrieked, hooped, even pooped” (248). All of these sounds combine into one boisterous apocalyptic event that seems as if “hevene sholde falle” (VII. 3401).

It has long been acknowledged that *The Nun’s Priest’s Tale* is a parody in many ways. From this scene and other aspects of characterizations, Steven Justice suggests that the object of Chaucerian parody in this poem is Gower (208). Such an argument is informed by Ian Bishop’s comment, which notes that Chaucer’s fox chase imitates more than Gower’s animal noises: the catalogue of names in the *Nun’s Priest’s Tale* echoes a similar catalogue in *Vox*. The latter, a piece of virtuoso contempt, features common English names such as Gibbe, Hykke, Geffe, Colle, Grigge, and so on. The purpose of such naming, according to Justice, is to display the hopelessly “undiscursive” character of those who made the revolt. This means that Gower incorporates the insistently vernacular names of the *rustici* into a Latin poetic register where they do not belong. Furthermore, while Bishop regards the fox chase reference to *Vox* as “merely incidental parody” (qtd. in Justice 214), Justice insists that it is indeed intentional. Gower’s sensuous narrator, according to Justice, takes an avian form in Chauntecleer, the oversexed and prideful chicken

who also has a terrifying nightmare of noisy beasts. The barnyard commotion likewise exists to mock Gower's nightmarish vision of the Revolt, as Chaucer has transformed the allegorical and prophetic vision of Gower into a literal barnyard melodrama and turns Gower's authoritative *Vox* into Chauntecleer's prideful *voys*. Moreover, to make his parody more explicit to "the small group who knew, and maybe participated in, the literary politics of Ricardian England," Chaucer also teases Gower through his humorous naming of the dogs that chase the fox ("Colle oure dogge, and Talbot and Gerlond" [3383]). As Justice has explained, a "Talbot" was a hunting hound, also known as a "gower"; and it appears on the Gower coats of arms. "Colle," is taken directly from Gower's catalogue of vernacular names, and Chaucer makes him "oure dogge" mainly because Colle's companion in *Vox* is "Geffe", a reference that Chaucer, according to Justice, "seems delighted to pretend is to himself". It can be said then that this dog-naming line "winks and nudges and nods," serving to highlight the pleasure of Chaucer's full-blown parody (218).

Justice's argument is bold but persuasive enough. At the very least, I am convinced that Chaucer's barnyard scene does refer to the first book of Gower's *Vox*. His allusion to "Jakke Straw and his meynee" further registers that this work contains a similar historical reference as Gower's dream vision. Put simply, Chaucer hints that his *Tale* addresses the same issue as does *Vox*, which is the noise of and from the countryside. What I find quite intriguing about Chaucer's representation of the rural noise, probably more than Chaucer's humorous naming of the dogs, is the location of his barnyard commotion. While Gower's *Vox* emphasizes that the rebels with their bestial noises have moved from the countryside to the city, Chaucer's raucous and "apocalyptic" fox chase takes place exactly in the countryside itself. His *Tale* even contains several references to what medieval audiences would expect when it comes to the portrayal of

rural life. There is a modest cottage of a “povre wydwe” (2812) standing near “a grove, stondyng in a dale” (2823). As a poor widow, she also acts, dresses, and eats accordingly:

This wydwe, of which I telle yow my tale,
Syn thilke day that she was last a wyf
In patience ladde a ful symple lyf,
For litel was hir catel and hir rente.
By housbondrie of swich as God hire sente
She foond hirsself and eek hir doghtren two.
Thre large sowes hadde she, and namo,
Three keen, and eek a sheep that highte Malle.
Ful sooty was hire bour and eek hir halle,
In which she eet ful many a sklendre meel.
Of poynaunt sauce hir neded never a deel.
No deyntee morsel passed thurgh hir throte;
Hir diete was accordant to hir cote.
Repleccioun ne made hire nevere sik;
Attempree diete was al hir phisik,
And exercise, and hertes suffisaunce.
The goute lette hire nothyng for to daunce,
N’apoplexie shente nat hir heed.
No wyn ne drank she, neither whit ne reed;
Hir bord was served moost with whit and blak –
Milk and broun breed, in which she foond no lak,

Seynd bacoun, and somtyme an ey or tweye,

For she was, as it were, a maner deye. (2824-2846)

At a glance, this long description of the diet and lifestyle of the widow seems to provide the audiences with an exemplar of humble rural life. The widow indeed lives in a tiny cottage, has a very small income, and only a few disposable goods. However, it seems that she attempts to make the best out of her situation: she tries to support herself in reduced circumstance, she maintains her barnyard quite effectively by enclosing it with sticks and a dry ditch (2847-2848), she plants herbs in the barnyard (2963-2966), and she even keeps bees (3391). Such details can definitely lead readers to perceive the widow's rural world as an example of the virtues of Christian patience, humility, and contentment with simple life. This last notion of simple, happy living even invokes the Classical tradition of pastoral writings, most renowned in Virgil's *Eclogues*, in which the simple life of shepherds and their bucolic environment are celebrated as peaceful, picturesque, and simple – in order to function as an antithesis of the unruly and corrupted city with its plethora of problems, conflicts, and tensions. However, despite Edmund Spenser's later attempt to cast Chaucer as his master in the writing of *The Shepheardes Calender*, Chaucer's narrator, the Nun's Priest, is not at all interested in exploring the pastoral potential of the bucolic environment. On the contrary, his countryside is a space inhabited by figures such as the devious fox and the ostentatious, oversexed, and grandiose cockerel. When it is fated for these characters to meet, what ensues is treachery (the fox befriends Chauntecleer, tricks him to sing, and snatches him while the cockerel is singing with neck outstretched and eyes closed) and boisterous upheaval.

It is crucial that the poet locates the sounds and noises of barnyard commotion right in the countryside and never moves any of them to the city as does Gower. Such location tells the

audiences that it is not necessary for the noises of the countryside to make their way to London in order to be heard or become threatening. In fact, the countryside is itself a raucous place and a source of many noises. Such noises are produced by the treacherous, pompous, gullible, and untrustworthy country-dwellers. Being human also does not save one from becoming a noisemaker, as it is obvious from the fox chase scene that both barnyard animals and rural people, the modest widow included, are equally capable of making the apocalyptic noises. In a sense, such characteristic noises of the countryside mark the boundary of an acoustic field, what Bruce Smith (following anthropologist Steven Feld) calls an “acoustemology,” which is a sort of cultural location within and constituted by particular sounds (48). And the acoustemology of this particular rendition of the countryside, so to speak, is graphically marked by apocalyptic noises.

Contrary to the serene soundscape that I explored in the beginning of the chapter, there are no running stream, croaking frogs, lowing cows to be heard and classified as the “keynote” sounds of this countryside. The “soundmark,” or the human-made sounds distinctive to particular places are also absent. There are neither parish bells ringing nor mills creaking and rattling. When humans finally make sounds, what the audiences hear from them are primarily noise and yelling. Interestingly, such noisy representation of the countryside agrees with the contemporary chronicles. Both sources state that the loud clamor of the 1381 Revolt began in the countryside before its presence was felt (or heard) in the city. According to the Westminster chronicle, the “[i]gnobilis turba rusticorum” from Essex and Kent gather together, and the Kentish rebels run through their country destroying many manors and beheading people (qtd. in Strohm 36). Furthermore, Chaucer’s representation of the boisterous barnyard also coincides with the sentiment of the period, which did not consider the countryside as a benign pastoral space. The country-dwellers were also not *Virgilian* singing shepherds. It is thus not surprising, according to

David Wallace, that the late medieval English countryside, unlike the *locus amoenus* found in the enclosed garden, was not a place where Chaucer's "nerve-racked courtiers and urbanites go to ease their minds" (253). There is an edge of raucous violence to fields, forests, and villages in the late fourteenth century.

Why the Plowman Refused to Sing

In political communities with homogenizing pressure or competing power, differences always possess disturbing and disrupting effects. At times, such effects are regarded as threatening not only to the political stability but also our sensory perceptions. In late medieval England, one of the most disturbing differences was the existence of the peasants who had acquired a reputation for assertiveness in the period leading up to revolt. This is evident from the flourishing and circulation of both the actual and literary complaint against servitude. Additionally, there also emerged a tradition of what Katherine C. Little aptly calls "writing rural labor," which shares little with the rural world of Arcadia described in Virgil's *Eclogues*. The medieval tradition of writing rural labor, however, is concerned first and foremost with labor itself, not leisure, recreation, singing, wooing, nor idyllic landscape (Little 16). Many representations of labor also contain complaints. Such complaints at times can include radical implications. This can be seen in William Langland's *Piers Plowman*, in which the potential radicalism lies in the fact that it locates the spiritual labor of reform in the "actual" rural laborer, instead of in the clergy and the nobility (who are only the figurative laborers).

These peasant complaints and the literature of rural labor significantly emerged after Black Death of 1348 and 1349 that radically diminished the rural population. Paul Freedman indicates in his study of medieval representation of peasants that such conditions had altered

economic and social relationships as it allowed the wage-laborers to improve their standard of living, for villagers to challenge their customary status, and for more substantial agriculturalists to improve the conditions on which they rented land and to accumulate holdings. These new opportunities encouraged increasing self-confidence and determination among the agrarian workers. For landlords, however, the continuously rising wages and falling prices for agricultural products had seriously threatened their socio-economic status. As a result, they attempted to control their remaining tenants by limiting wage increases, restricting freedom of movement, and levying exactions that could be claimed from servile tenants. Not only were peasants' anticipation thus thwarted, but in many instances their social condition was also lowered as lords either imposed servitude on those previously considered free or coerced those who had been allowed to escape supervision. Between 1350 and 1381, those who departed from tenancies illegally were more rigorously pursued, prohibitions on serfs' acquiring of free lands were enforced, and court perquisites and other jurisdictional privileges were increased. Lords also attempted to restrain upward pressure on wages by enlisting the aid of the state. Such an attempt was materialized in the issuance of the Ordinance of Laborers (1349) and the Statute of Laborers (1351), both of which required the able-bodied to accept work and prohibited wages from surpassing their pre-plague levels. While this legislation was often manipulated and evaded, it was also actively enforced and widely resented (Freedman 262). Furthermore, on top of this new legislation, unprecedentedly heavy taxes were imposed during the 1370s. These included novel forms, both in the parish tax of 1371 and in the poll taxes that culminated in the third one of 1380. At first, according to David Aers, the rural communities responded to such taxation with tax evasion, but when the governing classes became more vigorous in their methods of collecting, i.e. sending in more collectors, establishing special commissioners and justices to

impose their will, non-violent local resistance was transformed into a broad popular coalition directed against those who sought to impose these extractions at both local and national levels (433).

Such resistance and resentment did not simply address the legislation and taxation. There were several instances where the peasants also raised the radical questions of freedom and servitude. As Freedman explicates, opposition to arbitrary treatment in the fourteenth century is evident in the petition of the villagers of Albury in Hertfordshire to Parliament in 1321-1322 over seizures and imprisonment perpetuated by their lords. In 1381, according to Thomas Walshingham's report on John Ball's renowned sermon to the peasants assembled at Blackheath on the day of Corpus Christi, Ball argued on the basis of a proverb about Adam and Eve that all were created equal by nature. Servitude had been introduced against God's will, by the wickedness of humans, thus not because of some primordial, divinely punished trespass (264):

Whan Adam delf, and Eve span,
Wo was thanne a gentilman?

Continuansque sermonem inceptum, nitebatur, per verba proverbii quod pro themate sumpserat, introducere et probare, ab initio omnes pares creatos a natura, servitutem per injustam oppressionem nequam hominum introductam, contra Dei voluntatem; quia, si Deo placuisset servos creasse, utique in principio mundi constituisset quis servus, quisve dominus, futurus fuisset. (*Historia Anglicana*, ii. 32-3)

("Continuing the sermon, he attempted, using the words of the proverb that was his theme, to introduce and to prove that all were created equal by nature from the beginning, servitude being a wicked introduction through the unjust oppression of men against the will of God: because, if

God had wished to create serfs, undoubtedly at the beginning he would have decreed who was to be a serf and who was a lord.”)

The peasants’ articulations of such discourse undoubtedly posed a great danger to order and hierarchy. They represented for writers such as Gower and others an unsolicited attempt from the peasants to transgress what was considered the “natural” order as well as to disturb the already damaged society after the Black Death. To the ears of many learned writers, it is not surprising then that they regarded such articulations, even before they were much amplified in the 1381 Revolt, as noise. This can be seen from the way in which, by 1340s, chroniclers began to use the word *clamour* to denote several complaints or widespread complaints made by rural people (Scase 43). It is possible that such metaphorical use of noise in relation to political oppressions and conflicts was drawn from the longstanding dialectic between order and disorder produced in classical tracks such as Cicero’s seminal work *De Re Plubica* and Augustine’s *De Civitate Dei*. For Cicero, the political state is analogous to a musical body wherein a pleasing consonance is produced by maintaining fit intervals between highest, lowest, and middle tones and highest, lowest, and middle classes. However, Cicero also recognizes that there are always dissonances within this ordered harmony of authority and obedience between citizens. In fact, such “dissimilar sounds” are quite endemic in the sonic city and, in order to achieve an aesthetically pleasing harmony, some agreements need to be arrived at among the sources of dissonance (Travis 203).

It seems to me that the ears of the learned writers in late fourteenth century England have fully internalized the hierarchical auditory politics of classical thinkers. In their period, the prime source of dissonances was the assertive and aggressive dwellers of the countryside. Literally and metaphorically, these inhabitants were the *noise*, the *clamor horrendisimus*, which disrupted and

threatened to bring the English polity to the apocalyptic end. Therefore, what these writers could do to silence the noise, which thereby would save the existing hierarchy and sabotage any new attempt of the peasants to raise a new clamor, was to produce and construct the images and discourse propagating and confirming the validity of old order, in which the peasant was born to quietly serve, not to voice their unsolicited opinions or issue complaints against servitude. One of the most widely recognized of such images is Chaucer's Plowman, who is introduced in the *General Prologue of The Canterbury Tales* as a man well qualified in pulling dung-carts. He is not a sluggish "wastour" or an aggressive protestor such as Wat Tyler or Jack Straw. On the contrary, the poet states that he is a "trewe swynkere." He works hard, lives in peace, as well as sustains his love of God and neighbors (529-540). In many ways, such idealized portrayal is calculatedly political, as the emphases are no accident. The Plowman lives "in pees and parfit charitee" (532) instead of making noises and breaking the politico-social harmony. He nurtures no smoldering resentment (533-535). He is so far from being assertive about wage raise that he will even work "withouten hire" (536-538). His tithes also "payde he ful faire and wel" both in labor and produce, so he is a most obedient subject in his payment of taxes (539-540).

A final point for this chapter is an observation that we never get to hear anything from this peasant. The poet gives him no tale to "quite" with other taletellers. There were also absolutely no utterances to be heard from him. The Plowman always remains (mysteriously) quiet throughout the journey. While it is certainly possible that the Plowman never receives a tale because the poet's initial composition plan could not be effectively implemented, the Plowman's silence somehow reminds me of other famous images of the peasants found in the Luttrell Psalter. These illuminations appear in the sequence of eight scenes depicting peasant labors: winter plowing (fol. 170r.); sowing and harrowing (fols. 170v.-171r); breaking clods and

weeding (fols 171v.-172r.); reaping the next summer's harvest (fols 172v.-173r.); and carting it away (fol. 173v.) (Camille 180). Similar to Chaucerian representation of the Plowman, in these illuminations, the peasants are constantly working on the land. Yet none of these images features them singing, conversing, or yelling. Michael Camille also notes that despite Bartholomaeus Anglicus' description that a plowman "typically urges his cattle with whistling and songs, the peasants in the Luttrell Psalter always have their mouths closed and turned down slightly" (209). These images, I argue, represent the discursive attempt of those who ruled to silence the "noises" of the peasants and to exert control over the countryside.

Sounds, disruptive noises, and the absence of both permeate a wide variety of medieval texts about the countryside. Gower, fearful of the 1381 Peasants' Revolt, depicts a world full of crazed and terrifying beasts bellowing a cacophony of noises that mimic the apocalyptic noises in the Book of Revelation. Chaucer, on the other hand, parodies Gower's work and/or the chroniclers of fourteenth-century London, by turning a barnyard into a raucous, chaotic, comical soundscape. Underlying these representations of sounds in the countryside is an assumption that the best type of countryside is a silent one, where pious plowmen and docile oxen dutifully work the fields. Medieval writers used different strategies to mark the countryside out as a foreign community through their use of sounds. The countryside may be threatening, anarchic, or peaceful, but it is never a part of the same sonic, political, and cultural community as the urban areas.

Chapter 4

The Irish Hubbub:

Colonial Hearing in Spenser's Ireland

Introduction: Hearing Ireland

Despite the ambitions of the English crown and government to centralize jurisdiction³² and unite the entire archipelago under English hegemony,³³ in the sixteenth century, the British Isles were still full of various noises. The Reformation brought new acoustic conditions to communal worship and private devotional practices.³⁴ The protesting noises from the English countryside were still boisterous, perhaps even more so due to depopulation and dearth resulting from drastic enclosures of the common lands as well as systematic wetlands drainages.³⁵ The cities also became noisier from growing industries and new foreign and rural immigrants.³⁶ Among these, one of the noisiest places in the British Isles to the early modern English ears was Ireland, which had moved from being an almost forgotten “distant border province” (Ellis 86), to a colony in revolt at the center of Elizabethan attention (Palmer 8). The noises of Ireland, especially those in the works of Edmund Spenser, form the central topic of this chapter.

Hubbub: A Menacing Sound from Scythia

In the early modern era, renewed interest in Irish matters was caused by English perception of an urgent need to utilize undeveloped (or underdeveloped) places as a way of

³² See James Simpson, *Reform and Cultural Revolution* (Oxford: OUP, 2004).

³³ See Andrew Hadfield, *Shakespeare, Spenser, and the Matter of Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave: Early Modern Literature in History, 2003).

³⁴ See Matthew Milner, *The Senses and the English Reformation* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011).

³⁵ See Roger B. Manning, *Village Revolts: Social Protest and Popular Disturbances in England, 1509-1604* (Oxford: OUP, 1988).

³⁶ See Bruce R. Smith 52-71.

providing for a growing population after a series of bubonic plague outbreaks. As England was looking for new lands to work on, the seemingly “empty” landscapes of the Irish countryside came into view quite early (Hiltner 160). Such a perspective had provoked several aristocratic figures as well as authors to write tracts supporting the English colonization of Ireland. Sir Thomas Smith, for instance, had promoted his project for an Irish plantation as a solution for English domestic ills, specifically, “overpopulation and the problem of younger sons without hereditary land entitlements, after the dissolution of the English monasteries” (Jardine 66). As a result, Ireland during this period “witnessed an influx of a vast number of speculators, civil servants, settlers, aristocrats, and military personnel who attempted to settle there, as they were attracted by the chance of career, lands, and status otherwise unobtainable in England” (Hadfield, *Shakespeare, Spenser* 2). This group became known as the “New” English to distinguish them from the “Old” English, who were the Anglo-Norman colonists and adventurers who came to colonize parts of Ireland in the wake of the Norman invasion during the twelfth century.

Such renewed involvement in Ireland did not, by itself, turn the country into one of the noisiest places in the British Isles to the English ears. What made Ireland audible throughout the sixteenth century was the fact that the Irish landscape was not an empty *terra nullius*, and those who lived there fiercely resisted the attempts of the New English colonizers who wished to impose law, order, as well as English language and culture upon them. Such ceaseless resistance and rebellion of the Irish turned the country into a highly militarized zone characterized by war rather than peace. In the 1590s, the revolt of Hugh O’Neill, which rapidly developed into the Nine Years’ War (1594-1603), provided the most serious threat to the English Crown since the War of the Roses. The general fear was that the triumph of “the Catholic Irish, aided by Spanish and papal forces, would prove decisive in the religious conflict being fought in Europe, leading

to the destruction of both Protestantism and the hegemonic power of England within the British Isles” (Hadfield, *Shakespeare, Spenser 2*). As Ireland was characterized primarily by ravaging and incessant warfare, it is not surprising that one of the country’s most renowned traits among the English was the Irish battle cry. This can be seen from the way in which the word “hubbub,” which had been utilized to categorize the Irish language, people, and the entire country throughout the early modern period, was derived from what the English heard from the Irish war cry “ub! ub!” or “-abo!” (T. Ward 766). This term was later used in a more generalized sense to connote other wild or uncivilized noise. It should be noted nevertheless that even when it was being applied to other cultures and situations, the word tended to keep its Irish associations, as if this notion of Irishness could function as a model for connoting other kinds of boisterousness and barbarity. For example, *The Fardle of Facions* (1555), which is a translation of Johann Boemus’ *Omnium gentium mores, leges & ritus* (1520) by William Waterman, describes the “Icthiophagai” in Africa as expressing their joyfulness during the festive dinner with their “manner of singyng full vntuned.” As they later take communal trips to drink at the river, they are also “shouting as they go with an Yrish hubbub” (qtd. in T. Ward 766). By 1667, at a time when the word still retained its Irish association, John Milton, quite intriguingly, used it in his *Paradise Lost* to depict both the “universal hubbub wilde / Of stunning sounds and voices all confus’d” (2.951-952) of the devils in hell as well as the “hubbub strange” (12.60) heard from the collapse of the Tower of Babel, which is depicted as the epitome of linguistic confusion. Eric B. Song suggests that Milton intentionally employed this term with “the Irish context in mind, since it carries a profound implication that Ireland is indeed a fallen place full of irrational disorder: fragmentary, inexplicable, and perverse.” In this sense, England’s role in Ireland is in the paradoxically tyrannical but necessary mode of postlapsarian dominion (76).

For the more direct references to the noise of early modern Ireland, several English writers had attempted to explicate their sonic experience with the Irish hubbub. Barnaby Rich, for instance, had devoted an entire tract to such noise. According to Rich, the hubbub had originally been used as an alarm, “that when any Rebel or Theeues came to doe any robbery in the Countrey, they should then raise the Crie (which they call the *Hubbub*) therby to giue notice to the Inhabitants” (1).³⁷ Apart from Rich’s treatise, one of the most renowned English accounts discussing the hubbub is Edmund Spenser’s *A View of the Present State of Ireland* (hereafter *View*), which is structured as a dialogue between an English interlocutor Eudoxus and an Irish colonist Irenius. As Bruce Avery has observed, Eudoxus “represents the voice of the home authority to Irenius’ colonial administrator” (263). Concerning the Irish hubbub, Irenius describes the Irish people as having the “manner of raising the cry in their conflicts, and at other troublesome times of uproare” (59). He also adds that such manner was inherited from the Scythians; therefore it is

very natural Scythian, as you may have read in Diodorus Siculus and in Herotodus, describing the maner of the Scythians and Parthians comming to give the charge at battles: at the which it is said, that they came running with a terrible yell as if heaven and earth would have gone together which is the very image of the Irish hubbub (59).

Like the rustic noises that John Gower heard in the course of the 1381 Rebellion, this Irish “hubbub,” according to Spenser’s Irenius, is powerfully raucous to the point that it seems to shatter heaven and earth. The way Irenius represents this noise also resembles Gower’s narrator’s

³⁷*The Irish Hubbub, or the English Hue and Cry* (1617), S.T.C. 20989. A selection is reprinted in Hadfield and McVeagh, eds., *Strangers to That Land*.

depiction of the noise of rebellious peasants: both are heard as pure noises that contain neither decipherable language nor meaning. In the case of the 1381 Peasants' Revolt, I have discussed in the previous chapter that it is necessary for Gower and other English chroniclers to erase any trace of articulate verbal performance on the part of the rebels so they might replace it with their own interpretations of the event. Similarly, for the English representations of the Irish hubbub, it seems that the writers attempted to rid the Irish war cry of any meaning therein. Patricia Palmer has noted that "there is nothing casual" about downgrading words into cries and "transforming the meanings of another language into babble: the barbarian has never been heard to speak but to mumble: *bar, bar, bar.*" There can be no doubt, according to Palmer, that what the English called "cries" or "hubbub" are in fact "utterances fully shaped in language." Simply put, the "hubbub" and other forms of battle cries are never wordless. However, these words are in Irish, which was a "foreign language" that the Elizabethans "never attempted to learn" (65). They subsequently responded to their lack of understanding by classifying such sound as meaningless noise: the "terrible" hubbub heard from the troublesome events.

However, I would add that Spenser's representation of the Irish hubbub contains something wickedly different from Gower's description of the rebels' bestial noises. While the latter emphasizes that such noises are unnatural to the world of late medieval England because they come from metamorphosed (hence unnatural) bodies, Irenius states that the hubbub is indeed "verye naturall" to the Irish, since they are the descendants of the "Scythians," the blood-drinking and cannibalistic barbarians represented by Herodotus as the antithesis of Greek civilization. Richard McCabe has suggested in his seminal study *Spenser's Monstrous Regiment* that Spenser took the idea that the Irish were the descendants of the Scythians from the Irish source itself – the eleventh-century *Lebor Gabala Erenn*, or "Book of the Taking of

Ireland,” which is an elaborate pseudo-historiographical compilation deeply indebted in structure and methodology to “such authorities as Eusebius, Osorius, and Isidore of Seville” (144). This treatise claims that the Milesians, who were the alleged forebears of the Irish, did originate in Scythia. For the early modern Gaelic mythographers, Scythia was an “aptly exotic point of origin, a mysterious place on the vanishing point of the known world, famous not just for the martial quality of its people, namely ‘bravery’ and ‘valor,’ but also of the civility of its people” (McCabe, *Spenser* 145). It was from Scythia, according to the early modern Celtic apologist Seathrún Céitinn (known in English as Geoffrey Keating) that “other countries used to receive institutes and laws and ordinances” (qtd. in McCabe, *Spenser* 147). For Spenser, however, the connotations of Scythia were entirely different. Writing in an intense colonial situation, Spenser seized only upon the detail that the Irish were of Scythian origin. Then the author turned to Herodotus and other classical sources to find evidence to refute the Irish claim that they were descended from such a noble lineage. His attempts provided a satisfying result, as Herodotus represented Scythia as “the cultural antithesis of the Athenian ‘polis’ and proceeded to describe it by employing a process of systematic differentiation” (147). Scythia, in this sense, was different from Athens in every way imaginable. It was located in “the *eschatia*, a wild frontier beyond the pale of Greek civilization; its lands were unenclosed and its inhabitants nomadic” (McCabe 147). Following such sources, it is not surprising for Spenser to assert that since the Irish are of Scythian origin, they are also irredeemably barbaric and inherently “salvage”. According to Spenser’s Irenius, such savagery is manifested in many forms, and one of the most notorious expressions of such Irish savagery is their making of the earth-shattering battle cries.

Unlike Gower’s narrator in *Vox clamantis*, what Spenser achieved in the *View* is not simply to *erase* the Irish voice and *replace* it with meaningless noise. What Spenser

accomplished is to successfully *translate* the Irish historiography that seeks to establish a claim to ancestral nobility for the Irish people. By doing so, Spenser in turn textually *transformed* the Irish natives into a subordinate ethnic group. It should be noted that such practice of translating texts and cultures of the colonized by the colonizer had been quite pervasive and common in colonial societies. As Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi have pointed out, colonialism and translation constantly went hand in hand. In most colonial situations, translation was “a one-way process, with texts of the colonized being translated into European languages for European consumptions, rather than as part of a reciprocal process of exchange” (3, 5). Such translation always reduced and transformed the native language and culture into accessible objects for imperial intervention. This can be seen from many nineteenth-century English translations of Arabic or Indian literature in which the foreign texts were cut, edited, and published with extensive anthropological footnotes. In this way, according to Bassnett and Trivedi, the subordinate position of the individual text and culture that had led to its translation in the first place was established through specific textual practices. For example, in the note to his popular translation of *The Thousand and One Nights*, Edward Lane mentions that the Arabs were far more gullible than educated European readers and did not make the same clear distinction between the real and the imagined. Likewise, Edward Fitzgerald, the nineteenth-century translator of *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*, also accuses the Persians of artistic ineptitude and suggests that their poetry can become art only when translated into English (Bassnett and Trivedi 6).

In the case of Spenser’s *View*, his translation of the Irish historiography is not a literal translation. It is obvious that he had carefully thought about how to seize the information from the Irish text and manipulate it to serve his own colonial purpose. Such purpose was to construct

Ireland and the Irish people, language, and culture as wild, hostile, and “salvage” in order to justify English policy to subdue Irish savagery and replace it with English civility. Again, like his act of translation, Spenser’s construction of the “wilde” Ireland bears much resemblance to other European representations of the colonized during the nineteenth-century. Several postcolonial scholars have long criticized the tendency of the colonizers to depict the colonized as barbarous and inferior. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Franz Fanon describes the colonial space as “a world cut in two” (38). According to Fanon, the colonial world “is a Manichean world. It is not enough for the settler to delimit physically, that is to say with the help of the army and the police force, the place of the native. As if to show the totalitarian character of colonial exploitation the settler paints the native as a sort of quintessence evil” (41). Abdul JanMohamed has picked up on Fanon’s analysis of colonial Manicheism and has developed from it a theory of “colonialist literary representation,” which argues “the dominant model of power- and interest-relations in all colonial societies is the Manichean opposition between the putative superiority of the European and the supposed inferiority of the native” (82). Such structure of colonial “othering” in turns produces the central feature of “the colonialist cognitive framework” and “colonialist literary representation” which is “the Manichean allegory,” in which a binary and implacable discursive opposition between the colonizer and the colonized is produced.

England and the “Shepherds Nation”

The perceived savagery of early modern Ireland and the Irish people was constantly set in opposition with the English conception of “civility.” Much of the latter was constructed by contrasting practices that English commentators found uncivil or barbaric. In the case of Ireland and its inhabitants, it is discernible that the early modern English settlers found the entire sonic

world of Ireland to be barbarous, menacing, and antithetical to English civility. Such juxtaposition between the civil “self” and the savage “other” is vividly portrayed in Spenser’s pastoral poem, *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe*, in which his poetic persona Colin Clout, who previously appears in *The Shepheardes Calender*, has straightforwardly set the raucous Irish world in opposition with the idyllic England:

Both heauen and heauenly graces do much more
(Quoth he) abound in that same land, then this.
For there all happie peace and plenteous store
Conspire in one to make contented blisse:
No wayling there nor wretchednesse is heard,
No bloodie issues nor no leprosies,
No griesly famine, nor no raging sward
No nightly bodrags nor no hue and cries;
The shepheardes there abroad may safely lies,
On hills and downes, withouten dread or daunger: (308-317)

In this poem, Spenser represents Colin as an inhabitant of Ireland who lives and works in the Irish countryside, which he refers to as “the shepherds nation” (17). Such representation corresponds with Spenser’s life situation in which his secretarial duties under the patronage of Arthur, Lord Grey de Wilton had allowed him to acquire and dispose of properties in mid- and south-eastern Ireland, in Counties Dublin, Wexford, and Kildare. He held various administrative posts there and, from 1584 on, in the southern province of Munster. By September of 1588, Spenser came to own Kilcolman Castle in northern County Cork in Munster. His involvement in the establishment and maintenance of the Munster plantation has been well recognized. That

being said, it is even possible that Spenser witnessed Lord Grey's strategy of "indiscriminate slaughter and destruction of properties across five counties of southwest Munster in order to subdue native resistance and rebellion" (Connolly 175). Spenser's portrayal of himself as the shepherd Colin Clout in the Irish countryside thus identifies him not only with his role as the New English "planter" in the Munster plantation, but with his own sense of being isolated and separated from England as well.

Such situation is well depicted in this poem, in which Ireland (Colin's alleged home) and the "shepherd's" community (alluding to other New English colonizers) are represented as being separated from England. After having a conversation with "The Shepherd of the Ocean" (his fellow planter Sir Walter Raleigh), Colin decides to visit Elizabethan England ("Cynthia's land" 288). When he returns to his "shepherd's nation" from his journey to the metropole, Cuddy, one of the shepherds, asks Colin to describe his experience. In his response to Cuddy, Spenser's poetic *alter ego* lavishly extols rural England as an ideal pastoral landscape in contrast to the Irish countryside where "the shepherd's nation" has to live. As seen from the passage above, his juxtaposition between social conditions in England and Ireland reveals that Colin perceives Ireland to be a perilous place for the shepherds to thrive. While the poem does not hold that England is entirely perfect, for the court is besmirched and Colin finds himself unable to cope with its competitive nastiness, it still suggests that England could readily be made into an ideal pastoral world if people put sufficient efforts to make it so. In Ireland, however, it is perilous for the shepherds (i.e. the New English settlers and colonizers at the Munster plantation) to live peacefully, so that while it is rural it is definitely not idyllic, nor can it be imagined as such. Of special relevance is how Spenser represents many of the perceived dangers in the Irish countryside in sonic forms. This is evident from the way Colin uses several sonic references

when he compares the happiness of England with the precarious world of Ireland: “No wayling...nor wretchednesse is heard, /.../ No nightly bodrags, nor no hue and cries” (312-315). McCabe explains that “bodrags” is a verbal noun that appears to be a corruption of the Gaelic term, “buaidred” or “buaidre,” meaning “disturbance or uproar” (176). According to this passage, it seems that his juxtaposition reveals how JanMohamed’s notion of the “Manichean allegory” had been powerfully at work in the Anglo-Irish colonialist construction of the Irish soundscape. For Colin, the Irish soundscape is far from being quiet or melodious, as it is an acoustic field marked by woes, noises, and cries. Such a miserable and raucous sonic world contrasts sharply with the “happie place” of rural England where civility and the authority of centralized jurisdiction stretches forth relatively efficiently.

However, in sixteenth-century Ireland, the boundary between the civil English “self” and the barbarous Irish “other” was always porous. As Andrew Murphy proposes, even though it may be feasible to “trace a profound desire for Manichean order within Anglo-Irish colonialist writing generally,” the attempted deployment of what JanMohamed isolates as the “typical binary oppositions that have served historically as the basis for colonialist analysis (“white / black, good / evil, superiority / inferiority, civilization / savagery” and so on) tends to be disrupted” in the Irish context (29). The cause of such disruption remains debatable among scholars. For example, Murphy states that this disruption is due to Irish proximity to England (5), and McCabe mentions the ethnic complexity of the Irish situation (“Ireland” 62). McCabe notes that the inhabitants of Ireland cannot be simply divided into “two clear-cut categories” of the English and the Irish. In fact, many of the descendants of Ireland’s first Norman colonizers, who were known in the sixteenth century as the “Old” English, had assimilated to Gaelic society to such an extent that the “New” English colonists such as Spenser could barely distinguish them

from the progenies of native Irish stock (“Ireland” 62). In any case, it should be noted that the Manichean theory of colonialist discourse has been considerably challenged in recent years. Benedict Anderson, for instance, argues that straightforward divisions between cultures simply do not happen. Even the representation of the “native” is fraught with difficulty:

For the native is, like colonial and creole, a white-on-black negative. The nativeness of natives is always unmoored, its real significance hybrid and oxymoronic. It appears when Moors, heathens, Mohammedans, savages, Hindoos, and so forth are becoming obsolete, that is, not only when, in the proximity of real print-encounters, substantial numbers of Vietnamese read, write, and perhaps speak French but also when Czechs do the same with German and Jews with Hungarian. Nationalism’s purities (and thus also cleansings) are set to emerge from exactly this hybridity (“Exodus” 314-327).

In a similar vein, Robert Young has contrasted Edward Said’s classic formulation of a totalized binary colonial system with the “Derridean account that draws attention to the ways in which totalizations never succeed in producing a perfect structure of inclusions and exclusions, with results that the unassimilable elements determine (and disallow) any totality which seeks to constitute itself as a totality by excluding them” (137). Amongst other critics, Homi Bhabha has been one of the leading voices of such criticism. In his *Location of Culture*, Bhabha attempts to provide a more complex model of colonial stereotyping, emphasizing the psychoanalytic component of Fanon’s theorizing and taking account of poststructuralist theories of discourse. Indeed, Bhabha clearly recognizes the force of colonialist discourse, observing that “the objective” of such discourse “is to construe the colonized as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origins, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration

and instruction” (70). At the same time, however, he cautions against an overly simplified or schematic view of the mechanism of colonial stereotyping, arguing that stereotyping is not “the setting up of false image which becomes the scapegoat of discriminatory practices.” It is a “much more *ambivalent* text of projection and interjection, metaphoric and metonymic strategies, displacement, over-determination, guilt, aggressivity; the masking and splitting of ‘official’ and phantasmatic knowledges to construct the positionalities and oppositionalities of racial discourse” (81-82; my emphasis). For Bhabha, there is a certain profound “ambivalence” at the core of all colonialist construction. The colonial stereotype is “a complex, ambivalent, contradictory mode of representation, as anxious as it is assertive” (70).

The advent of such criticism has provoked many critics to conceptualize Spenser’s status as a colonialist poet writing in exile. As an English Protestant writing in war-ravaged Catholic Ireland, Spenser, according to Kenneth Gross, became an “unofficial, unpatronized, and often disapproved prophet of Elizabeth’s empire, while also helping to administer one of her government’s most unstable and often ill-conceived colonial policies” (79). The complexity of such situation might help account for his apparent ambivalence toward English colonial activities in Ireland. Such ambivalence can be seen in the way Spenser constructed the *View* as a dialogue that stages his ambivalence, self-consciously exploring the tensions between humanism and colonialism. This dialogue alternates between two opposed positions: one that seeks to impose a permanent peace upon Ireland through radical and violent means, and one that seeks to remember an Ireland whose ongoing ruin marks the volatility and uncertainty inherent in all political structures. However, as Rebeca Helfer has claimed, such dialogue “takes place less between the two interlocutors than within the space of Irenius’s shifting and contradictory views, and ultimately between the text and the audience” (247). Through Irenius, Spenser promotes

England's complete subjugation of Ireland. At the same time, whether wittingly or not, Spenser also exposes the ideological illegitimacy, indeed the impossibility, of such endeavor. This is seen when Irenius defends Grey's "heroicke spirite" against those "evill tonges" which "backbite and slaunder him" (162). Irenius also provides an eyewitness account of the disastrous Munster famine, largely occasioned by Grey's policies. The grim details of such account eventually reveal Spenser's unresolved frustration towards Grey's utilization of merciless measures to subdue the Irish rebellion (McCabe "Ireland" 70).

Sweet and Pleasant Music: Enchanting Sounds in Ireland

In the case of sounds, there is a central problem with a simple, reductivist dichotomy of the "civil" English sounds and the raucous Irish noise. The problem is that English representations of the Irish soundscape are not constantly dominated by the "salvage" or woeful noises. This ambiguity has a precedence stretching back to the medieval period. Gerald of Wales wrote his *Topographia Hibernica* (c.1187) as a celebration of the history of Gerald's own family intervention in Ireland. It had since become the foundational document of an extended tradition of writing on Ireland. Gerald mentions that the Irish people are "wild and inhospitable people. They live on beasts only, and live like beasts" (101). Yet, in the subsequent chapter, he moved on to note that to him, the Irish seem to be incomparably more skilled in music than any people that he has seen:

The movement is not, as in the British instrument to which we are accustomed, slow and easy, but rather quick and lively, while at the same time the melody is sweet and pleasant. It is remarkable how, in spite of the great speed of the fingers, the musical proportion is maintained. The melody is kept perfect and full with

unimpaired art through everything – through quivering measures and the involved use of several instruments – with a rapidity that charms, a rhythmic pattern that is varied, and a concord achieved through elements discordant (103).

In the sixteenth century, such mention of the musicality of the Irish acoustic world can be found in Canto 12 of Book 2 in Spenser's allegorical epic *The Faerie Queene*. Even though the setting of this poem is obviously the Faeryland, an allegorical world of chivalric adventure where most of the actions occur, Stephen Greenblatt has convincingly asserted, Ireland "pervades the poem" of *Faerie Queene*(186). Following Greenblatt's important insight, critics such as Andrew Hadfield, Richard McCabe, Willy Maley, Nicholas Canny, Joan Fitzpatrick, and Thomas Herron claim that *The Faerie Queene* is indeed an imperial epic recounting the English experience of subduing, colonizing, and reforming the Catholic and "salvage" Ireland. McCabe has pointed out that the Irish context of *The Faerie Queene* is signaled from the beginning by the inclusion of dedicatory sonnets to Lord Arthur Grey, the former Lord Deputy; Sir John Norris, Lord President of Munster; the Earl of Ormond, foremost of the Old English peers; and Sir Walter Raleigh, Spenser's fellow planter ("Ireland" 64). Moreover, in his dedicatory sonnet to Grey, Spenser also refers to his epic poem as the "wilde fruit" bred in "salvage soyl", which is the product of a "faire...land" that is "far from Parnasso mount" (sonnet to Grey). Such reference suggests that Spenser considered his poem to be a colonial epic that offers moral lessons to the early modern English audience on how to become a civil colonialist "gentleman" in the land full of hostile natives. In so doing, the wild and perilous landscape of Ireland ("Faeryland") is needed as a testing ground for the noble knights and virtuous ladies. From the satyrs of Book 1 to the savages of Book 6, the work is populated by "wild, ill-natured, sub-races," (McCabe "Ireland" 62) "lawless people...that never used to live by plough nor spade, / But fed on spoile and booty"

(7.10.39). Such a description corresponds with how the early modern English writers perceived the Irish. As S.J. Connolly claims, most New English planters and commentators were well aware that the Gaelic economy depended primarily on livestock, and not the plough and spade of agriculture (18). It is thus likely that *The Faerie Queene* is a colonial epic, describing Spenser's and his fellow planters' experiences in colonizing Ireland. Herron also notes that it catalogues "woes and hope for onward progress" of the Protestant New English gentlemen in Ireland: the so-called "adventurers" who discovered a lucrative and precarious prospect in fertile soil in the command of their famous queen, Elizabeth I (2). Spenser allegorizes Elizabeth as "Gloriana," or the Faery Queene, a dreamy ideal who holds court and sends her knights to manage and tame all the perceivable savagery of the Faeryland. All the six books and the fragmentary seventh of the epic as well as many of Spenser's later works focus on such a narrative of adventurous conquest and remain fixated on the colonization of the Irish land and polity as an appropriate subject for verse.

Even though several wild and subhuman inhabitants populate the Faeryland, there is still melodious music to be heard from the sonic environment of this treacherous world. In Canto 12 of Book 2, which is the book devoted to the virtue of Temperance, the knight Guyon has traveled with his aged guide, the Palmer, to the island where the Bower of Bliss is situated. After their tempestuous journey in the wild sea, Guyon reaches the island, and finds the Bower of Bliss to be a pleasant place full of sensory delights. Approaching the Bower, the knight sees "No gate, but like one, being goodly dight / With boughes and braunches, which did broad dilate / Their clasping armes, in wanton wreathings intricate" (2.12.53). Once he enters the Bower, Guyon is able to resist the sensual temptations of the place until he sees "two naked Damzelles.../ which therein bathing" (2.12.63). While he is looking lustfully at them and Palmer is warning him to be

more mindful of his task as well as of the devious environment, both of them suddenly hear “a most melodious sound, / Of all that mote delight a daintie eare” (2.12.70). Like the music Gerald of Wales mentioned in his *Topographia Hibernica*, the sound Guyon and the Palmer hear is more melodious than any other sounds they have previously heard, for it is:

Such as attonce might not on living ground,
Save in Paradise, be heard elsewhere:
Right hard it was, for wight, which did it heare,
To read, what manner musicke that mote bee:
For all that pleasing is to living eare,
Was there consorted in one harmonee,
Birdes, voices, instruments, windes, waters, all agree.

What can such beautiful harmony signify in the “wilde” and “salvage” allegorical landscape of Ireland? Like the representations of the hubbub and noise, the depiction of such “harmonee” can also be seen to emerge from the history of colonial interactions between the English and the Irish. These interactions exhibited both outright demonization and colonial ambivalences, since such exchanges involved bloodstained confrontations as well as acculturation and intermarriage. In this sense, while the hubbub registers both the English experience with the tumultuous Irish “uproare” and the colonialist attempt to castigate the Irish as “salvage” people, the melodious soundscape of the Bower of Bliss functions to accentuate Spenser’s colonial fear of miscegenation and degeneration. This is seen from how the narrative reveals that the “harmonee” of the Bower does not emerge from the natural world. Rather, it is derived from the witchcraft of Acrasia, a Circe-like figure whose magical power has long

enchanted this place. Such truth is discovered when Guyon and the Palmer follow the sound and finally have their encounter with Acrasia:

There, whence that Musick seemed heard to bee,
Was the faire Witch her selfe now solacing,
With a new Lover, whom through sorcere
And witchcraft, she from farre did thether bring:
There she had him now laid a slombering,
Whilst round about them pleasauntly did sing
Many faire Ladies, and lascivious boyes,
That ever mixt their song with light licentious toyes. (2.12.72)

Colonial anxieties are quite evident in this passage. Spenser's representation of such, in Lord Arthur Grey's words, "sensuall libertie" (qtd. in McCabe 136) has shown that women in the colonies (and in this case more likely to be Irish, following Greenblatt's formulation) are particularly dangerous enemies because they use their sexuality to corrupt men who would otherwise be virtuous and faithful. In this last Canto of the book devoting to Temperance, it is Guyon's obligation to destroy the Bower of Bliss. Yet the sights and sounds of the Bower constantly distract the young knight, for they are comely enough to make Guyon oblivious to his task. According to the Palmer, such oblivion is detrimentally dangerous, because it might lead Guyon to give in to the lustful temptations put before him by Acrasia. This is what happened to those "barely bearded" youths of noble birth who have been enchanted by the lures of sight and sound set before them by the witch, and their predicament is exemplified by the latest victim – "some goodly swayne of honourable place" (2.12.79) – who had succumbed to the "liquid joye" proffered by the enticing witch:

His warlike armes, the idle instruments
Of sleeping praise, were hong upon a tree,
And his brave shield, full of old monuments,
Was fowly ra'st, that none the signes might see;
Ne for them, ne for honour cared hee,
Ne ought, that did to his advancement tend,
But in lewd loves, and wastfull luxuree,
His dayes, his goods, his bodie he did spend:
O horrible enchantment, that him so did blend. (2.12.80)

The sexual enslavement of the English makes them forgetful of their civility. Likewise, in his 1612 writing, Sir John Davies seemed to agree with Spenser as he complained of how the English colonists “became degenerate and metamorphosed...like those who had drunke from *Circes* cuppe, and were turned into very Beasts: and yet tooke such pleasure in their beastly manner of life” (qtd. in McCabe, *Spenser* 136). Spenser’s fable of Acrasia highlights such enslavement again by concluding the episode with the swinish Gryll who “chooseth, with vile difference, / to be a beast” (2.12.87), as did so many of the Anglo-Hiberno families castigated in the *View* for being “much degenerate from their first natures” (67). Richard McCabe points out that for Spenser, cultural difference is “vile difference and a matter of moral choice” (136). In these cases, what is at fault is not quite the country but the colonists themselves, “as it is the nature of all men to love liberty, so they become Libertines and fall to all licentiousness of the Irish” (144). It is thus crucial then for the colonizers to be able to see beyond the temptations of Gaelic wealth, song, and beauty in order to realize the dangers of miscegenation and degeneration that lurk within. Or better yet, as Spenser suggests in the end of the Canto, what

they should do with such alluring beauty is to ultimately destroy it, transforming “those pleasant bowres and Pallace braue” into “the fowlest place” imaginable by ruining and defacing, burning and erasing all that dangerous beauty (2.12.83).

Such violent destruction is what I will focus on in the next sections of this chapter. In what follows, I will explore Spenser’s depictions of the Irish noise in the *View* and *The Faerie Queene*, as well as the works of other early modern English writers, namely Barnaby Rich and John Derricke. I am particularly interested in exploring how such portrayals illustrate Spenser’s colonialist agenda of using ruthless violence to eradicate the entire Irish culture. As a renowned pastoral poet, what Spenser wished to transpose onto the Irish landscape as well as soundscape in lieu of Irish customs and culture is a world of pastoral ideals. In most early modern English pastoral writings, such a world is usually depicted as an idyllic and blissful countryside, in which its soundscape is melodiously sonorized by the singing and piping of the musically gifted shepherds. However, such a colonial project is intrinsically problematic. Any attempt to impose the image and vocabulary of a pastoral idyll onto a foreign land must deal with the cold, hard truth that such image and vocabulary never fit well with the nature of the land in question. No matter how hard Spenser and other colonizers had tried, they could never hear the piping and singing of the shepherds in Ireland. After all, the sounds they seek to hear are alien to the country. Moreover, the harder they try to transform Ireland into a pastoral idyll through ruthless violence, the further away they are from achieving their aims. Not only do the shepherds remain silent, but violence also ends up begetting violence. All they hear are the aggressive battle cries and the sounds of destruction. One of the sites of such destruction was Spenser’s own castle at Kilcolman, which was burned down by a native Irish force in 1598. Spenser died the next year as an exile in London.

Silencing the “Salvage” Noise

In my survey above, I have focused primarily on *how* Spenser came up with his representation of the Irish hubbub in the *View*. He translates the Irish claim to noble ancestry into an evidence for Irish barbarity and in turn Spenser uses his translation to transform the Irish into a subordinate ethnic group. For this section, I seek to explore several vexing questions: what can such representations tell us about the colonial conditions in Ireland? What was Spenser’s purpose apart from writing back at the Irish claim to nobility? What roles did such depictions play in Spenser’s formulation of his colonialist agendas? To answer such questions, it is crucial to note that Spenser’s *View* is not simply a treatise juxtaposing Irish savagery with English civility or a text recounting the author’s experience in Ireland. On the contrary, it is what Laura O’Connor calls the “blueprint” for securing the English domination in Ireland (3). This “blueprint” combines Spenser’s ethnographic writing of Ireland with an exhaustively detailed proposal for the country’s permanent military and colonial occupation by the New English settlers.

In order to secure English domination of Ireland, Spenser proposes in his *View* that it is necessary for his intended audience to understand the sources of the Irish crisis. Such sources, according to Spenser’s *Irenius*, are composed of those specific Irish customs that seem most to propagate the civil disorder and the perceived wilderness of the Irish countryside. It is notable that several of the customs discussed in this work involve the issue of seeing. It seems for Spenser that what is hidden from the sight in Ireland is more problematic than what can be seen easily. This is discernible from *Irenius*’ explication of the Irish practice of transhumance, which is the herdsmen’s way of letting their cattle wander almost wild during the summer months to graze on the otherwise unusable grounds of hills and “waste-places.” Large camps are often set

up in such areas, far from the “civilities” of village or town. What Irenius objects to is that the camps, or “Bollies,” tend to attract to such wild places great number of “outlaw or loose people,” who would otherwise starve or be arrested, but who can there feed, clothe, and conceal themselves. This notion of concealing also applies to Irenius’ complaint on how the Irish people continue to wear “mantles and long glibs, which is a thick curled bush of hair hanging down over their eyes, and monstrously disguising them, which are both very bad and hurtful” (56). What Irenius finds most disturbing about the mantles is how such costumes allow thieves, outlaws, and all “wandering women” to live freely outside of established area, since they can make of the mantle a home in all seasons – a tent, a bed, or a mask. Under it the Irish man “covereth himself from the wrath of heaven, from the offence of the earth, and from the sight of men” (57). As for the glibs, “besides their savage brutishness and loathly filthiness...they are as fit maskes as a mantle is for a thief. For whensoever he hath run himselfe into that perill of law, that he will not be knowne, he either cutteth off his glibbe quite, by which he becommenth nothing like himselfe, or pulleth it so low downe over his eyes, that it is very hard to discern his thievish countenance” (59). It can be said then that the mantles and glibs are a shared covering for political transgression and tools of human deception. They bestow the Irish with a power of disguise that is permanently embedded in Irish customs, and in the end they are the very embodiment of a furtive, energetic force that continues to resist the reforming work of the English colonizers.

Furthermore, it seems to Spenser that Irish attempts to conceal themselves from the prosecuting eyes of the English are facilitated by the Irish landscape. It should be noted that when Spenser came to Ireland in the sixteenth century, most of the English countryside had been heavily managed, cultivated, and transformed to support a growing population and market economy. Roughly half of England was thoroughly and systematically cultivated. The remainder

was semi-natural vegetation – land managed, manipulated, and utilized but not methodically cultivated. Wetlands, for instance, were largely drained for agricultural activities (Rackham 13-29). Ireland, on the other hand, was the country divided into two distinctive sections. There was the English Ireland, which consisted of a compact eastern region stretching from County Louth in the north through Meath and Dublin into County Kildare. From there a precariously narrow land corridor, squeezed between the Gaelic Irish of the Wicklow Mountains and those of the midlands, ran south through County Carlow into County Wexford. To the west lay a zone that is less intensively cultivated but still significantly English. They are the counties of Killkenny and Tipperary. Under the Anglo-Norman rule, these areas were referred to as “the Pale”. According to Laura O’Connor, this term was derived from the Latin *palus*, meaning a stake or a fence. In medieval Ireland, it came to signify “the ramparts separating the English-speaking colonial garrison from the native population, or, from a Gaelic perspective, the boundary dividing the *Galltacht* from the *Gaeltacht*” (the non-Gaelic speaking “foreigners” from the Gaelic-speaking community) (O’Connor xiv). This area was characterized by both the existence of cities and towns as well as regions of relatively advanced agricultural practices, based on a systematic combination of tillage and livestock.

The rest of the country was Gaelic Ireland, which, in S.J. Connolly’s elaborated portrayal, appeared to the scrutinizing eyes of the New English colonizers as “an empty and impoverished wasteland” (16). The population of the entire island in 1500 was approximately around 750,000, compared to a peak of 1 million before the damages of the Black Death in late medieval period. Although no figures are available, it is likely that the majority of the population lived in the more intensely cultivated regions of English settlement, while in the Gaelic lordships scarcer numbers lived dispersed across a wooded area, undrained marshes, and randomly cultivated landscape.

There were neither cities nor towns, not even English-style villages. Most chiefs and other prominent figures lived in fortified clustered dwellings ringed by up to 200 houses, for example in the area surrounding the residence of the local bishop at Rosscarbery, County Cork. However, following Connelly's research, a more typical example would be "a group twenty houses surrounding a castle, such as those found in the ruins of County Cork" (17). Generally, these residential abodes were "plain rectangular structures, four or five stories in height, their walls broken only in narrow windows and by a wide variety of loopholes and similar defensive openings" (Connolly 17). More commonly, houses in Gaelic Ireland were modest one-roomed lodgings that housed animals as well as people. Building materials of such dwellings varied. In some areas stone was used for parts of the walls, while in other areas sods, clay, wattle, or other timber were utilized. In addition to houses and monasteries, other signs of human intervention upon the landscape were the ditches used to mark boundaries, which existed across most of the countryside territorial divisions. This evidence shows that long-established and organized settlements were relatively few when compared with the huge amount of land remaining in or close to the natural state. For instance, in the midlands of the lordship of Ely O'Carroll, it has been estimated that only one-fifth of the total area was considered as profitable land. Much of the remainder would have been woodlands; in most cases forest, in others thick scrub. Other areas consisted of largely untouched bog and undrained marshland (Connolly 16-30).

When Spenser came to Ireland in August of 1580, his reputation was already established as one of the great English pastoral poets. In 1579 he inaugurated his literary career by publishing *The Shepheardes Calender*, a collection of twelve pastoral eclogues that has been known ever since as the "first set of English pastorals in the European tradition" (Alpers 83). Central to *The Shepheardes Calender* is his poetic persona Colin Clout, who is represented as a

young shepherd incessantly mourning his unrequited love for Rosalind. Like the Virgilian pastoral characters Tityrus and Meliboeus, Colin is an apt musician. He is found playing oaten pipe and singing along with his fellow shepherds – Hobbinol, Piers, Willye, and Cuddy, amongst others. Their musical performances along with the poet’s representation of the melodious sounds from the natural world (e.g. singing birds and flowing streams) both work to sonorize the landscape of the countryside, which in turn make the rural environment unmistakably idyllic. When Spenser went to Ireland as Secretary to Lord Grey de Wilton, the poet also brought with him the pastoral framework that had since become a lens through which he viewed the largely rural Irish landscape. However, much to Spenser’s consternation, the actual “pastoral” (socio-economically speaking) conditions in Gaelic Ireland had perpetually resisted Spenser’s attempt to map his imported image of the idyllic pastoral world onto it. This too involved the notion of seeing and the lack thereof, since the majority of Ireland was covered with woodlands as well as undrained marshes and bogs. For Spenser, such conditions provided protection for the Irish rebels and so presented a logistical nightmare for the New English colonizers.

The Invisible Threats: Mantles, Glib, and Bagpipes

In the *View*, therefore, Irenius proposes the clearing up of the Irish woodlands. He also relates the Irish rural landscape to the Irish custom of wearing mantles, because both offer refuge and are ideal disguises: the rebels use the mantle “when he still flyeth from his foe, and lurketh in the thicke woods and strait passages, waiting for advantages, it is his bed...For the wood is his house against all weathers, and his mantle is his couch to sleep in” (57). The “whole tracke” of the Irish rural landscape, likewise, is “mountanous and woody” (127). The rebels and outlaws have used such wilderness as their perfect refuge after their sinful acts of “spoyling and robbing”

(99). In order to rid Ireland of such problems, Irenius then argues for “the Cuttinge downe and openinge of all places thorough wodes so that a wide waye of the space of C. [a hundred] yardes mighte be laide open in every of them for the safetie of travellers which use often in such perillous places to be Robbed and sometimes murdered” (224). He also mentions that such conditions did exist in England during the reign of King Alfred, when the English landscape was still covered with dense wildwoods: “it is manifest by report of the Chronicles, and auncient writers, that [England] was greatly infested with robbers and out-lawes, which, lurking in the woods and fast places” with “every corner having a Robin Hood in it, that kept the woods, the spolyed all passengers and inhabitants, as Ireland now hath” (136). Such statement implies that it is necessary for the New English colonists to lay Ireland and the Irish open to the “view” of the English in order to subjugate the natives and establish the Irish governance: “for the Irishmen I assure youe feares the government no longer then he is within sighte or reache” (189).

Nevertheless, Irenius moves from his discussion of the mantles and glib to the third aspect of Irish customs. He cautions his audience that English attempts to clear Ireland of things unseen might be thwarted by what they would hear from the Irish. Should the English colonists find themselves in conflict with the Irish natives, what they would hear is certainly the Irish noise, since the Irish people are well known for their “manner of raising the cry in conflicts, and at other troublesome times of uproar” (59). It seems for Irenius that such noise is the only undertaking that the Irish never make an effort to hide, as they are often found “running with a terrible yell and hubbub, as if heaven and earth would have gone together” (59). To the ears of the pastoral poet who had constructed an image of idyllic countryside sonorized by the melodious sounds of the shepherds’ oaten pipes, what Spenser hears from the Irish rural world instead of those shepherds’ songs is the yelling noise of the Irish being aggravated by the

accompaniment of bagpipes. This instrument was represented in most English writings on Ireland during this period as a “threatening instrument associated with theft, rapine, and licentiousness” (Canny 29). In Book 3 of *The Faerie Queene*, for example, while Malbecco, Paridell, and Trompart find themselves “amid the thickest woodes,” they are drawn to the satyrs’ dance with Hellenore by a “noyse of many bagpipes shrill, / and shrieking hubbubs.” Such noise “all the forest did with horroure fill: / That dreadfull sound the bosters hart did thrill” (3.10.43). Similarly in Book 6, when Serena gets lost in the dense woods and is abducted, stripped, almost raped, and is prepared as a victim of a cannibalistic sacrifice by the “salvages,” the climax of the scene is announced and accentuated by the clamor of indigenous music and barbarous shouting:

Tho when as all things readie were aright,
The Damzell was before the altar set,
Being alreadie dead with fearefull right.
To whom the Priest with naked armes full net
Approaching nigh, and murderous knife well whet,
Gan mutter close a certain secret charme,
With other diuelish ceremonies met:
Which doen he gan aloft t’advance his arme,
Whereat they shouted all, and made a loud alarme.

Then gan the bagpipes and the hornes to shrill,
And shrieke aloud, that with the peoples voyce
Confused, did all the ayre with terror fill,
And made the wood to tremble at the noyce:

The whyles she wayld, the more they did rejoyce (6.8.45-46)

Such images of the wild woodlands or marshlands haunted by the savages that one cannot see from afar, yet suddenly come up out of nowhere with their yelling noise and raucous bagpipes, did indeed haunt the imaginations of the New English colonizers. Such images formed part of John Derricke's *Image of Irelande, with a Discoverie of Woodkarne* (1581), which is a series of illustrative woodcuts created to praise the deputyship of Henry Sidney, one of Elizabeth's more successful Irish Viceroy's. In his *Spenser's Monstrous Regiment: Elizabethan Ireland and the Poetics of Difference*, Richard McCabe provides us with his detailed analysis of the woodcuts. That being said, through his visualization of images of the wild Irish and their boisterous noise, Derricke presents a narrative of English triumphalism in which Irish barbarism deserves to be defeated and abolished. He describes the Irish woodkerns (an Anglicized form of *ceithearnach*, meaning footsoldier) as akin to the "Bedlam folke," because they "bewaile" and howl senselessly: "Bohbowe now crie the knaues, / and lullalowe the karne" (64,67). His first woodcut also features "the Gaelic lord as living in a mountainous, woody terrain with no buildings or cultivated field insight" (McCabe, *Spenser* 66). He seems to emerge from the woods, accompanied by a woodkern who "gripes" an axe "fast with his murd'ring hand" (qtd. in McCabe, *Spenser* 66) while offering his master a long dart or spear

The second plate illustrates their "subsequent attack on a "civil" settlement and the accompanying verse instructs the audience to read the image counter-clockwise thereby conveying the graphic impression of an outrage in progress" (McCabe, *Spenser* 66). To the left of the picture, a band of the kerns emerges from the forest led by a bagpiper, which is a detail that may recall the sixth book of the *Faerie Queene* when "salvages" prepare to slaughter Serena. In the foreground to the right, the kerns are seen burning the settlers' cottage while the ill-fated

owners throw up their hands in horror. In the center at the back, the spoil is driven into the forest and the cycle of destruction is complete.

To the English ears, there was something more menacing about such noise than its perceived boisterousness. Even though Patricia Palmer has asserted that the English degraded the Irish battle cry by classifying it as meaningless noise, such classification is not a simple act of degradation but it shows that the English may have accepted that the Irish noise contains considerable power. As David Novak argues, noise stands for “subjectivities of difference that break from normative social contexts. It interpellates marginal subjects into circulation, giving name to their unintelligible discourses even as it holds apart unfamiliar ways of being” (130). In the violence of English colonization of Ireland, noise became a powerful tool of the Irish in the resistance to the English imposition of their order and culture. In the *View*, Irenius implies that what makes the Irish noise most threatening to him apart from its violent confusion is the way it functions to unite dissenting Irish people. Almost like the public rites, such noise is represented as a communal act. It is not uttered by a discontented individual, but is made collectively by the Irish groups or troops: “they came running with a terrible yell...which is the very image of the Irish hubbub, which their kerne use at their first encounter” (59). It should be noted that the English had recognized the communal power of the Irish noise since the medieval period. According to Thomas Ward, *The Calendar of the Justiciary Rolls* (1308-1314) recounts an episode in which a band of robbers frightened the inhabitants of Hughstown, County Kildare. The report mentions that the bandits: “shouted in a loud voice, Fennok abo, Fennok abo, which is the war cry of the O Totheles, and by this cry of malice made all the men and women of the town fly out of their houses” (qtd. in T. Ward 768). As the *View* illustrates, the cry is associated with an act of collective aggression; however, it is also noted that the Irish can also use it collectively

as their defensive tactic. For example, Barnaby Rich writes that a “hubbub” could be raised to alert other villagers, “that they might combine and gather themselues together in maine strength, eyther to recouer any prey that the theeues or Rebels had taken, or at least to make resistance, in their owne defence” (1). In addition to drawing attention to disorders, Fynes Morrison also notes that by participating in the making of such noise, the Irish are capable of establishing an acoustic sense of communal power by taking the sound “one from anothers mouthe till they putt whole towne in tumult” (qtd. in T. Ward 769).

Thomas Ward also adds that the noise’s ability to unite people together could be imagined as having an almost necromantic and talismanic property (769). William Camden writes that the Irish “cary about them Amulets, they recite certain praiers, and in joyning battaile they crie as loud as possible they can *Pharroh*” (qtd. in T. Ward 769). He further explains that if one of the Irish fails to cry “as loud as the rest”, he “shal have this accident befall unto him, sodainlie to bee taken up from the ground and carried, as it were, flying in the air...into a certaine vaile in Kerry” (qtd. in T. Ward 769). For Camden, sounding together was not just a powerful expression of solidarity: the crying of *Pharroh* (“barritu” in Camden’s original Latin version) was endowed with a magical property, acoustically binding together those who cried it, and dismissing those who remained silent (T. Ward 769). Elsewhere, Camden describes the mythical valley where the silent soldier is carried to as a place “where he eateth grasse, lappeth water, knoweth not in what state he is, good or bad, hath some use of reason, but not of speech” (qtd. in T. Ward 769). It seemed ironic for the English colonizers that the Irish solders’ failure to participate in the boisterous yelling not only alienates them from his peers, but also from rational discourse itself.

Apart from the battle cry, Irenius further cautions his audience that there are “other sorts of cries also used among the Irish, which savour greatly of the Scythian barbarism.” Like the battle cry, this sound is regarded as also communal, for it is “their lamentations at their buryals, with dispairefull outcryes and immoderate waylings” (61). Such practice is known in Gaelic as *caoineadh* or ritual laments (O’Connor 4). Again, in the *View*, Irenius’ description of such sound does not refer to an individual expression of grief and bereavement, as he represents such “outcryes” and “waylings” as the Irish public act, as a crucial part of their funeral that somehow resembles that of the Pagans and Infidels, who “had no faith nor hope of salvation” (61). More explanation on this sonic practice can be found in Rich’s treatise, in which he elucidates that “upon the buriall of their dead”, it is customary for the Irish “to hire a company of women...for some small recompence given them”. These hired women would then “follow the corps, and furnish out the cry...with such howling and barbarous outcryes.” According to Rich, the intensity of such “brutish kinde of lamentation” is so pronounced that he considers it to be monstrously non-human. Instead of sounding similar to human cries, the Irish sound of lamentation bears much resemblance to “the howling of doggs, to the croaking of Ravens, and the shrieking of Owles, fitter for Infidels and Barbarians, then to bee in use and custome among Christians.” (85)

To the English, these sounds served to register the Irish as political enemies for their rebellion against colonization, as well as religious enemies for their non-conformity to Protestantism. What, then, could the English colonizers do to suppress Irish utilizations of such communal noises? Similar to his suggestion on the clearing of the Irish woodlands, in the case of the Irish noise, Irenius is also eager to suggest that it is crucial for the English to annihilate such sonic practices from the Irish acoustic world. This must be done along with the eradications of other Irish customs, including mantle-wearing and maintaining glibs, because they all serve to

cement kinship and solidarity among the Irish, as well as to aid rebellion and oppose civilized life. By annihilation, Irenius implies that it can be achieved by criminalizing such practices and replacing them with the English customs so as to “enfeeble” the social cohesion and ancestral awareness they foster (72). Eudoxus also agrees, citing Aristotle, who recorded that when Cyrus overcame the Lydians, who “were a warlike nation”, the former changed the “apparell and musick” of the conquered so that they could “bring them to a more peaceable life” (72). According to Eudoxus, instead of “their short warlike coat,” the Lydians are “cloathed” in “long garments like women.” Likewise, instead of their “warlike musick,” they are appointed to “curtaine lascivious layes, and loose jigs, by which in short space their mindes were so mollified and abated, that they forgot their former fierceness, and became more tender and effeminate” (73). Eudoxus’ reference reveals that, to him, music and clothing are integral to the formation of collective identity. However, Irenius eventually argues that outlawing such practices might not be sufficient for the English to subdue the Irish people, since the Irish are so savage and resistant to the spread of civil order and the imposition of English common laws (92). It is thus recommended, according to Irenius, that only the most drastic of solutions can be used to suppress the Irish as well as their manipulations of such communal apparatuses. Eudoxus is initially shocked by Irenius’ proposals, most notably at the moment when Irenius tries to persuade him that only the use of “the sword” can effect change: “for all those evils must first be cut away with a strong hand before any good can be planted” (93). Ultimately, Eudoxus accedes to Irenius’ superior logic based on his experience in Ireland, and accepts that only ruthless violence will “bring all things to that quietnesse that you [Irenius] said” (133).

A Pastoral Ireland?

Irenius' violent solutions entail the need to exterminate a majority of the Irish, to relocate those remaining, and to transform all Ireland into the rented property of the English settlers. Such solutions have been largely drawn from Lord Grey's policies, which Spenser not only witnessed and participated in the administration of such martial law but also actively defended in the *View*. Greenblatt summarizes these policies as "the burning of mean hovels and crops with the deliberate intention of starving the inhabitants, forced relocations of peoples, the manipulation of treason charges so as to facilitate the seizure of lands, the needless repetition of acts of military 'justice' calculated to intimidate and break the spirit" (186). Following Grey's policies, Irenius insists that a huge English army of 11,000 men should be placed in garrisons constructed throughout Ireland and an ultimatum would be issued demanding the surrender of all Irish rebels. When a suitable period of time has elapsed, the armies would complete the final conquest of Ireland, defeating the remaining rebels. Part of this process would be the destruction of all fertile land and all goods and cattle, even those of the Irish who had already surrendered, in order to prevent the surviving rebels from using them for sustenance. Irenius evaluates that war and the subsequent famine would take about a year. Peace would be maintained by the transplantation of many of those who had submitted to different provinces of Ireland (rebels from Ulster and Leinster will change places). These would be given lands run by English landlords (95-133). According to Irenius, such ruthless violence is the only means by which the "countrey of warre" such as Ireland can be transformed into a country of peace and quiet (133). What the English would attain from such transformation is the ability to fully exploit the unrealized fecundity of Irish landscape as well as natural resources. Irenius has mentioned that despite the savagery of the Irish and the dense woodlands, Ireland "is yet a most beautifull and sweet countrey as any is under heaven, being stored throughout with many goodly rivers, replenished with all sorts of fish

most abundantly...besides the soyle it selfe most fertile, fit to yeeld all kinde of fruit that shall be committed thereunto” (27). Also, the Irish countryside “is a great soyle of cattle, and very fit for breed: as for corne it is nothing naturall, save onely for barly and oates, and some places for rye” (127).

Such exploitation of the Irish fertile land registers the conversion of Ireland into a new agrarian haven for English planters and settlers. With better (read: English) stewardship, it is possible for the English to finally impose their pastoral ideals upon the landscape and claim it as their own. In terms of the sonic environment, this means that the Irish noise will be replaced by the melodious sounds of the English pastoral setting. Such imagined situation is seen in *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe*, in which Spenser clearly depicts that Colin and the natural world of the “shepheardes nation” share a deep relationship. At the beginning of the poem Hobbinol tells Colin that the shepherds have greatly missed him, as well as the natural world that has greatly suffered in his absence:

Whilist thou wast hence, all dead in dole did lie:
The woods were heard to waile full many a sythe,
And all their birds with silence to complaine:
The fields with faded flowers did seem to mourne,
And all their flocks from feeding to refraine:
The running waters wept for thy returne,.
And all their fish with languour did lament: (22-28)

Now that Colin has returned, the shepherds consider themselves to be “blessed and so blythe” and the natural world has sprung to new life: “But now both woods and fields, and floods revive, / Sith thou art come, their cause of meriment, / that us late dead, hast made againe alive” (29-31).

What makes Colin's existence integral to the sonority and the livelihood of the "shepherd nation" is his music, which is renowned for its "pleasing sound yshrilled far about" (61). As Joan Fitzpatrick has noted, this is the ideal pastoral world that Spenser wished to actualize in rural Ireland (26), and he was eager to urge the English government that it was necessary to use ruthless violence to subjugate the rebellious Irish and the wild landscape in order to attain the ideal.

However, as mentioned above, Ireland was not an empty *terra nullius* resplendent with the promise of a recovered Eden, but rather a war-torn landscape imbued with the long history of colonial violence. This land was also peopled by native Irish and Old English colonists whose way of life occasioned curiosity or disgust but never admiration from the New English colonizers. Most importantly, as Simon Schama has cautioned us, the sonic world of the pastoral itself is not all about the sounds of the shepherds singing and piping. According to Schama, this is because Arcadia, the mythical setting of classical and early modern pastoral writings, is initially depicted as a place dominated not by the happy shepherds but by its presiding divinity, Pan, and his followers (526). As legend has it, Pan's life is filled with wrongful copulations and sexual violence. In terms of the sonic world, Arcadia is haunted by the sound of Pan's pipes, the syrinx. According to Schama, he can use "its woodland and wilderness melodies to bewitch the hearer into states of pan-ic or pan-demonium" (527). However, when the Greek lyric poet Theocritus in the third century B.C. began to write his version of pastoral, melodious piping and endless song contests among happy shepherds replaced the wild notes of Pan's syrinx. Later on, Virgil, who further constructed the image of pastoral as the return to the Golden Age where the soil produces fruit and grain without tillage, appropriated such depiction. By the time Spenser came to invent his English version of pastoral in *The Shepheardes Calender*, the original

depiction of Arcadia had become unrecognizably altered, and Arcadia was known among early modern pastoral writers not for its wildness and disturbing music but for the “sweetness of the ayre” and for the “well-tempered mindes of the people” (Schama 531). Nevertheless, Pan has never been forgotten. There is also an instance in the third book of *The Faerie Queene* when the beautiful Hellenore dances to the wild music of the satyrs to the point that she almost forgets herself. Most importantly, such alteration of the tradition still cannot erase the raucous and violent origin of the pastoral.

Taking the history of colonial violence in Ireland and the boisterous foundation of the pastoral together, it is not quite surprising then that Spenser’s colonial aspiration to transform Ireland into pastoral haven remained futile, and the only sounds that one might hear out of such attempt are not the sounds of the happy shepherd singing and piping, but the sounds of the miserable cries of the Irish, which, according to Irenius’ alleged “eyewitness” account, sound similar to “ghosts crying out of their graves” (101).

Chapter 5

Conclusion: Sounds Matter

Sounds matter in the medieval and early modern period – literally, metaphorically, historically, and communally. They matter as tools for arranging, affirming, and mediating various forms of social organization and hierarchy. They matter because they were an integral to human understanding and making sense of the external world from the early medieval period to these days.

I set off on my journey through this dissertation with three goals: to argue for the importance of listening to texts, listening to history, and listening to communities. Through the analyses of the desolate sonic world of wintry forest and seascape far away from the center of power found in *The Seafarer* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the varied avian sounds in late medieval England, the sounds of *loci amoeni*, Gower's rampaging animals, Chaucer's raucous barnyard, Irish war cries, reed pipes, bagpipes. I hope I have demonstrated that listening to texts allow us to hear aspects of various texts that have hitherto remained relatively neglected. "Hearing" a text may sound odd but I believe it provides a new and fruitful way to gain insight into literature. However, I would like to suggest in the conclusion that "hearing" alone might not be sufficient in our re-readings of medieval and early modern literature. It might be useful to go deeper and read "sensuously" and "experientially," staying in tune with all the sensorial stimulations embedded in the texts.

I must add at this point that historical contexts are vital to reading and listening to any text. We need to be aware of the medieval philosophical and cultural discourses regarding love and music in order to understand *The Owl and the Nightingale* as well as *The Parlement of*

Foules. The Peasants' Rebellion of 1381 is also integral to our understanding of the raucous animals in Gower's *Vox clamantis* and Chaucer's *Nun's Priest's Tale*. Likewise, we need to recognize that Spenser's shepherds live in the world of Anglo-Irish conflicts, and we need to think about the origin of the Arcadia when the English attempted to impose such images onto the Irish countryside. These momentous moments in English history were reflected in English literature, and moreover, authors often tried to make sense of the evolving social cleavages in these conflicts through their useage of sounds. Pleasant sounds were used to mark places and people associated with the elites, London, and England. Raucous, discordant, terrifying or alluring noises were associated with the "other" who threatened the English dominance of the Atlantic archipelago.

Moreover, while we listen to texts and keep in mind the historical context, I would also argue that another important dimension is to be aware of how sounds can include, exclude, and label certain groups, forming communities of "us" as well as communities of "them." Gower's description of the sounds of the peasants labels them as a community of non-humans who have rebelled against their duty, turning themselves into unnatural, terrifying beasts. By doing so, Gower also labels his voice as *vox clamantis in deserto* – a voice of the prophet crying out of the wilderness to lead the community of the English elites towards a path out of the rural apocalypse and back to the *locus amoenus* of silent obedient peasants.

Lastly, it is discernible that my study does involve a long range of time-span, from the "medieval" world of the thirteenth and fourteenth century to the "early modern" period of the seventeenth century. Such explorations of the sonic world have more or less problematized the troubled and increasingly porous borders between the medieval and the early modern era. While there is nothing surprising about questioning the boundaries between periods, my approach in

this dissertation is different from what the medievalists David Aers and Lee Patterson have achieved in their separate but equally sharp criticisms of traditional periodization.³⁸ In both of their works, Aers and Patterson criticize mainly the cultural materialists, attacking their ‘presentist’ orientation and their use of an imagined monolithic “medieval” as a foil for their conceptualization of the early modern period as the beginning of a “modern, urban, commercial economy” (Davis 1) as well as the birthplace of subjectivity and individualism. Such criticism holds certain validity especially for medievalists in the discourse of periodization. Yet it tends to polemicize the two periods and their critics rather than to explicate the boundaries.

To this end, I seek not to attack any schools of criticism but to listen closely to the soundscapes of the past. I discover from such listening is that there is more continuity between the two periods than the imagined ruptures. What connects them together is the way in which sounds were utilized in both periods by various peoples on the Atlantic archipelago as critical tools to unite and divide people, to make sense out of the diverse and heterogenous world, and to negotiate one’s place as well as identity in the ever-changing sound- and landscapes of medieval and early modern British Isles. Despite the existence of traditional boundaries in which historians and literary critics have employed to divide the medieval from the “Renaissance” or the “early modern,” such as the Reformation, the myth of national redemption at the hands of the Tudors, the Marxian account of the transition from feudalism to capitalism, and the emerging concept of the “individual,” it seems that sounds were still integral to the constructions of human differences. In such cases, noise is the most effective categorization. To classify certain sounds as noise in both periods was an ideological work that always involved socio-political and

³⁸ Lee Patterson, “On the Margin: Postmodernism, Ironic History, and Medieval Studies,” *Speculum* 65 (1990): 87-108

cultural processes. That being said, the early modern has been constructed in negotiation with the medieval, and such formulation cannot easily be mapped through parochial periodization. As evident in the cases of noise, there might be more continuities than those of real or imagined caesura. After all, when Alain Corbin laments in his renowned *Village Bells* that “how are we to understand a world where we have lost,” (xviii) I have to say that I only partially agree. Indeed, our acoustic environments might have changed. We might no longer hear the bells ringing anymore. Yet, all the prejudices and categories of difference constructed through sounds and hearing that we have, probably purposefully, inherited from our ancestors are still very much alive to be heard. Maybe the world we thought we have lost might be closer to us – or more similar with our contemporary world than we have imagined.

One way to think of sounds in literary texts is to think of motion picture and television. In films and television programs, sound effects have become so commonplace that we often take them for granted. Yet the concept that there are certain sounds associated with ghosts, or love scenes, or the appearance of a hero is worth thinking about. Sound effects in films and literary texts have the same functions. In both contexts, they convey detailed psycho-cultural messages, telling the audiences what they should be afraid of and what they should be excited about. By influencing our moods and attitudes, such psycho-cultural messages also have political implications, especially when combined with other sensorial information. If we should be excited about the sounds of the hero or the spectral presence of ghost, what do they look like? Are they also described by the ways they smell? These are questions that I believe are valuable bases for further research in medieval, early modern, as well as modernist literature.

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