Chaucer’s Food Basket:
Food, Nature, Sex and Violence in *The Canterbury Tales*

Gerhardus David du Preez

Thesis presented in fulfilment of the requirements for Degree of Master of Arts in the Faculty Arts and Social Sciences at Stellenbosch University

Supervisor: Dr. Daniel Roux

March 2016
Declaration

By submitting this thesis electronically, I declare that the entirety of the work contained therein is my own, original work, that I am the sole author thereof (save to the extent explicitly otherwise stated), that reproduction and publication thereof by Stellenbosch University will not infringe any third party rights and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it for obtaining any qualification.

Date: March 2016
Acknowledgements:

As everybody knows, a project like this is written by an individual, but it is definitely not a solo project. There are many people involved - each in their own unique role.

First and foremost I want to thank my supervisor, Dr. Daniel Roux and the English Department of Stellenbosch University. Dr. Roux, thank you for your never-ending patience, advice and for always believing in me. You are the reason I pursued a postgraduate career in English Studies. My gratitude also goes to Prof. Gabrielle Knappe and Prof. Houswitchka from the Otto Frederich University of Bamberg for your stimulating conversations, advice and knowledge which aided in the research and conceptualisation of this thesis. The University of Stellenbosch’s Gerike Library is a fantastic working environment and I would like to thank the staff who is always friendly and very helpful.

The bursaries made available by the Stellenbosch Post-Graduate funding office is the main source for this project. I specifically want to thank two wonderful understanding and helping ladies, Melany Johnson and Chantelle Swartz. The National Arts Council of South Africa also contributed to my research and I am thankful for that.

The extent of my research would not have been as broad and as deep if it were not for a research exchange to the Otto Frederich University in Bamberg, Germany. I want to thank the Post-Graduate International Office for making the research exchange possible through administrative and financial aid. A special thanks to Huba Bosshoff for her assistance throughout the process. Dr. Andreas Weihe from the International Office of the Otto Frederich University of Bamberg; thank you for arranging an infra-structure that made my research in Bamberg financially comfortable.

I have two wonderful parents, Janita and Gert du Preez, who allowed me to be an individual from a very young age – to pursue whatever my imagination conjured up - to fly to the moon and back on a broomstick. This study was no different; for they supported this interest and topic. I used this as an opportunity to time-travel back to the 14th century, where I dwelled as a warlock with my beard and books. Dear Mom and Dad thank you for endless support in terms of encouragement as well financial assistance when necessary. My beloved Grandmother, Johanna Menge, always made sure that I have the appropriate attire for the centuries in which I wished to exist. Dankie Ouma vir al my gewade en jasse, maar ook vir dit wat dit verteenwoordig: die liefde en onvoorwaardelijke ondersteuning. My fellow dweller of the past and dear sister Janke du Preez, thank you for all your encouragement and enthusiasm when I talk to you about my research or when bouncing an idea of you. Your excitement recharged me to continue with the project in times of darkness and despair.
I am a rich man in terms of friendship and this project proved this if anything else. I want to thank Karel Frederik Bruwer, Dayne Elizabeth Nel and Wilma van Wyk for being comrades in my stride. They provided endless support in so many ways that as Chaucer usually say, ‘I cannot begin to describe it’.

Byron-Mahieu van der Linde, Rolene van Zyl, Sameul Gilg and Willem van Tonder, you are beings of wisdom with soothing and inspirational words.

Stephan Ebe and Eon Louw: you provided me with a safety net on numerous levels when I was in Europe for research and your support continued throughout the whole MA process.

I was always fed or nurtured with good food, wine and coffee by Elizabeth Rabie Eckley, Wimpie and Merike Heath and Anja Engelbrecht – your food and drink were not only biological sustenance, but moral as well.

Prof Hanneli (Yster) Nel thank you for being my second mother in South Africa and for your unconditional hospitality.

A special thank you to Catharina Roux who agreed to edit this thesis in a very short period of time and for doing an excellent job.

Since this thesis deals with food, I must mention two restaurants that supported me in different ways – from free meals and coffee to employment opportunities that aided a lot in financial and moral security. The Binnenhof Restaurant in Stellenbosch owned by the Murris family (Jean-Paul, Oom Jan and Tannie Lisbeth) acted as a hub from which I drew a substantial percentage of my income as well as a family-like support network. The Purple Fig Bistro in Grootfontein (Namibia) and all its staff, thank you for always having my coffee ready and providing an environment conducive to work in and a space that made me feel comfortable.

Lastly, despite my confusion on the subject, I want to thank my creator – or the universe – who placed me in the privileged position to have friends and a family that assisted me in completing this project. As Pliny the Elder puts it: “God is man helping man”.
ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the representation of food in Geoffrey Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales*. The food and food culture of a specific time and place disclose particular kinds of information about the social conditions and ideology prevalent in a given historical moment. The representation of food can thus be used as a lens to explore and analyse a whole spectrum of explicit or concealed discourses within a text. Robert Appelbaum talks about food as a literary interjection – when a writer consciously or unconsciously inserts a food or food culture in a text to gesture to an aspect of social or psychological reality. In this thesis, the exploration of gastronomy as a literary interjection is divided into three chapters that deal in turn with the idea of nature, questions around sex and sin, as well as violence in chivalry – all in relation to culinary culture. Food is used, in particular, to discuss the ways in which Chaucer manages to create the effect, in *The Canterbury Tales*, of characters who are split between private and public selves. The main texts that are used for this purpose are The Franklin’s Prologue, The Physician’s Prologue, The Prioress’ Prologue, The Nun’s Priest’s Tale and The Wife of Bath’s Prologue. Concepts and theories that are integral to this analysis include the notion of the Seven Deadly Sins, Micheal Bakhtin’s theory of carnival in *Rabelais and his World*, Edward Said’s *Orientalism* and numerous other publications on food history. I argue, ultimately, that the use of food in *The Canterbury Tales* challenges and overthrows certain dogmatic ideas and ideals within the Late Medieval Period.
ABSTRAK

Hierdie tesis ondersoek die voorstelling van kos in Geoffrey Chaucer se The Canterbury Tales. Kos en koskultuur van uit ‘n spesifieke plek en tyd het die mag om die ware kleure van die menslike toestand en psige uit ‘n bepaalde ideologie te onthul en te onthul. Die manifistasie van kos in ‘n teks kan dus gebruik word as lens om ‘n hele spektrum van diskoerse te ondersoek, bespeur en te analiseer. Roberbert Appelbaum verwys na kos as ‘n literêre insetsel wanneer ‘n skrywer/digter bewustelik of onbewustelik van kos of koskultuur gebruik maak om ‘n onderliggende diskoers weer te gee. Die bespeuring van gastronomie as ‘n literêre insetsel word in drie hoofstukke opgedeel wat handel oor natuur, seks en sonde asook die geweld in ridderskap. In die hoofstuk oor natuur, byvoorbeeld, kom die ware natuur van karakters navore weens die literêre funksionaliteit van kos in die volgende tekste: The Franklin’s Prologue; The Physician’s Prologue; The Prioress’ Prologue; The Nun’s Priest’s Tale en The Wife of Bath’s Prologue. In hierdie analises word daar konstant van konsepte en teorië gebruik gemaak as verwyssingspunte of lense vir die analises. Dit sluit onder andere die Sewe Sondes, Micheal Bakhtin se teorie oor Karnaval in Rabelais and his World, Edward Said se Orientalism en verskeie publikasies oor kosgeskiedenis in. Die argument lei dat die gebruik van kos in The Canterbury Tales die dogmatiese idees en ideale van die Laat Middeleeuse Periode omvergooi en uitdaag. Dit onthul die dubbel-bestaan in die karakterisering van Chaucer se karakters en bring na die oppervlak die ware natuur van die mensdom in ‘n tydperk waar religie en dogma menslike gedrag probeer beheer het.
Chapter 1: Introduction .......................................................................................................................... 1

1.1) Brief Introduction to the Study and its Relevance ....................................................................... 1
1.2) Contextualising the Medieval Period ........................................................................................... 3
1.3) Food in the Middle Ages ................................................................. 6
1.4) Contextualising Chaucer and The Canterbury Tales ................................................................. 8
1.5) Literature Review ......................................................................................................................... 10

Chaucer’s The Canterbury Tales .................................................................................................. 11
Medieval Writings on Diet, Food and Health: Antiquity and the Bible ........................................ 17
The Seven Deadly Sins ................................................................................................................... 21
Chivalry .......................................................................................................................................... 22
The Representation of Food in Five Medieval Texts ..................................................................... 26
Theory ........................................................................................................................................... 30

1.6) Chapter Outline ......................................................................................................................... 37

Chapter 2: Food and the Nature of the Body (and the Soul) ........................................................... 38

2.1 Nature and Gastronomic Balance in Body and Soul ................................................................. 38
2.2 Paradox of the Bodily and Spiritual Natures within Chaucer’s Portrayals of the Franklin and the
Physician ........................................................................................................................................... 40
The Franklin’s Portrait ................................................................................................................... 40
The Physician’s Portrait ................................................................................................................. 46
2.3 Revealing and Concealing True Natures through Food ............................................................ 54
The Nun’s Priest’s Tale .................................................................................................................. 55
The Prioresses’ Portrait ................................................................................................................. 60
The Wife of Bath’s Prologue ......................................................................................................... 63

Chapter 3: Exploring the Carnivalesque in Human Behaviour through the Intersection of the
Gastronomic and the Sexual ............................................................................................................. 65

3.1 Spices and Sex as a Trading Commodity in The Man of Law’s Tale ........................................... 68
3.2 The Intersection of Food and Sex in The Reeve’s Tale as a Revelation that Human Behaviour is
Inherently Sinful .............................................................................................................................. 76
3.3 Ultimate Characters of Carnival: The Cook and his Tale .......................................................... 83

Chapter 4: Unveiling the Violence of Chivalry through Food and the Grotesque ......................... 90

4.1) Meodo-setla oftēah: Food and Destruction ................................................................................. 94
4.1.1) Beowulf: Death and Destruction in Feasting ........................................................................ 95
4.1.2) Gargantua and Pantagruel: The Interdependent and Cyclical Relationship in Mendozaftela Oftēah ................................................................................................................................. 96
4.1.3) Food Culture and Violence in Le Mort d’Arthur: An Infinite Relationship of Tension between the Civil and the Bestial ........................................................................................................... 98
4.2) The Sublimation of the Grotesque in Chivalry through Food and Violence .............................. 99
4.3) Double Existence of Food and Violence in Chaucer’s Chivalry and the Eruption thereof through the Miller and his Tale.................................................................................................................. 106
Chapter 5: Conclusion ......................................................................................................................... 117
Bibliography ........................................................................................................................................ 123
Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1) Brief Introduction to the Study and its Relevance

This study aims to explore literary representations of food in order to trace the various debates that coalesce around the basic human need to eat. Food, or the consumption of food, can be read as a complex symbolic nexus between the physical and the cultural which challenges, unveils or reflects the various ideological positions at play in a particular text. By specifically focusing on Geoffrey Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales*, one can explore the various social layers that comprised late medieval society and influenced people’s behaviour. *The Canterbury Tales* is a text woven together by threads of narrative representing an intricate and complex medieval society in a way that traverses boundaries of class and occupation. Food allows one a particular interpretive lens through which to view and analyse these complexities. Bill Brown’s “Thing Theory” lends some understanding of the significance of a seemingly trivial thing such as descriptions of food in a text and of the role it plays in the human condition.

Food can be considered as a gastronomic “thing”, and as Bill Brown notes in his essay, things trade in a currency called history (13). The study of things allows us to come to grips with the human psyche as it responds to particular social and historical conditions because, following Brown, the human psyche is inherently directed towards the world of things (11). For Brown (12), there is no distinction between “subjects and objects, people and things”. Referencing Arjun Appadurai’s *The Social Life of Things: Commodities and Cultural Perspective*, Brown notes that “even though from a theoretical point of view human actors encode things with significance, from a methodological point of view it is the thing-in-motion that illuminate their human social context” (6). It is thus possible to look at the human condition from the singular vantage point of food as a thing that is determined by cultural frames and values that are intertwined with but also extend far beyond the obvious biological utility of sustenance.

At the simplest level, food holds historical significance which aids in the understanding of a particular past. In addition to its value in portraying the power and wealth flaunted at aristocratic banquets and feasts, food also offers a view of its humbler consumers’ stature on a personal, social, class and even religious level. This is particularly true for medieval times when the documentation of history and human behaviour was much more limited than today. Food plays a vital role in supporting the reconstruction and reimagining of the past via archaeological research into food and its preparation, helping historians to understand the past more accurately. From an archaeological perspective, Katheryn Twiss uses her article “We Are What We Eat” to explain the potency of the role of food in history and our understanding of the past and its societies:
Food is an unusually powerful symbol of identity because foodways involve both the performance of culturally expressive behaviours and the literal incorporation of a material symbol. Food acquisition or production, distribution, consumption, and discard practices are all intimately intertwined with ideological, political and economic realities. They also offer a wide range of group or self-identification. The cultural meaning of these activities is strengthened by the fact that they center around a symbol that is both highly malleable and extraordinarily potent. (2)

As food serves as a symbol in archaeology, so it does in literature. The representation of food can also be read as a symbol or literary artefact which reveals the entanglement of various realities in a text. Through its presentation in a text, food holds the power to add contextual depth and layers to a narrative. For instance, ginger on the medieval kitchen table in England suggests a household of privileged economic means. The head of the house possesses knowledge of trade and global structures which suggests cultural appropriation in his or her home. In this case, one finds, as Twiss notes, that the food described adds to the identity of the group or individual who consumes it. These extra dimensions which food adds to a text enable readers and scholars to read a narrative in an enhanced context where human behaviour is amplified by an artefact charged with its own discipline and meaning.

By focusing on food in Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales*, one can explore intricacies within the text that present themselves only through their gastronomic affiliations. In a modern-day secular world, food culture becomes a commodity and a lifestyle that reveals a certain social and economic position as well as global familiarity. However, in the medieval world food serves a purpose for body and soul. As Phyllis Bober notes in her book *Art, Culture and Cuisine – Ancient and Medieval Gastronomy*, food in the Middle Ages is a reconciliation of the classical tradition of concern for bodily health and dietetics with the ritual of dining in spiritual fellowship. It is the historical period with the strongest sense of duality in human affairs: “strength of custom set against the vitality of change” (193). In the Late Middle Ages (the time during which Chaucer wrote) also known as the Late Gothic International period, cultural manifestations such as architecture, fashion, literature, theatre and even food are described by Bober as “creative anachronism” (219). Food in particular becomes an artefact that is charged with the functions and expressions of numerous worlds in time – it still holds the symbolic value of orthodox religious tradition and philosophical thinking of the Early Middle Ages and the Classical period, but it is also charged with the grandeur and lavishness of a world on the brink of feudal disintegration that would eventually lead to the early stages of capitalism with which we in the 21st century can identify. Hence, by looking at the Late Medieval period instead of any other period when studying food, one is exposed to spiritual and bodily duality within human behaviour as well as to the intersection of various schools of thought as they developed over time. Before one can explore the medieval world however, one first needs to define it by contextualising it.
1.2) Contextualising the Medieval Period

The medieval period is defined by many scholars as the centuries between the fall of Rome and the late 14th or early 16th centuries. There are various markers which indicate the end of the middle ages for individual historians. Events often used by historians include Johannes Gutenberg’s invention of the printing press in 1445, the end of the Hundred Years War and the fall of Constantinople in 1453, the discovery of the Americas in 1492, the beginning of the Protestant Reformation in 1517, and the defeat of the Ottoman Turks in 1571 (The End of the Middle Ages). As observed, the various markers defining the end of the medieval period stretch over a period exceeding a century. Such fluctuations when it comes to marking the end of the period suggest that one should conceptualise the period in terms of thought and ideology rather than time and years. H.W.C. Davis elaborates on this point in the introductory chapter of his book Medieval Europe:

All divisions of history into periods are artificial in proportion as they are precise. In history there is, strictly speaking, no end and no beginning. Each event is the product of an infinite series of causes, the starting-point of an infinite series of effects. Language and thought, governments and manners, transform themselves by imperceptible degrees; with the result that every age is an age of transition, not fully intelligible unless regarded as the child of the past and the parent of the future. (7)

If one looks at a historic period from such an angle, it becomes problematic to set a date which determines the end of the medieval period. I would rather work with a set of ideas and ways of thinking in order to outline the historical period and its context.

Following Davis’ characterisation of a period as defined by its “parent” (past) and “child” (future), the medieval period can be described as the in-between period between the classical era, from specifically Aristotle to the Renaissance. The concept of the middle ages or medieval period was initially coined by Renaissance scholars arguing that “classical antiquity was followed by a period of cultural and economic backwardness which came to an end with Renaissance revival of the classical world providing a direct link to the classical period of the ancient Greeks and Romans” (The End of the Middle Ages, Online). This kind of argument produced the often used term “The Dark Ages”. In retrospect however, one finds the Middle Ages much more colourful and exciting than described by earlier scholars. Davis advances a much richer perception of the middle ages:

[W]e must judge [medieval nations] by their philosophy and law, by their poetry and architecture, by the examples that they afford to statesmanship and saintship. In these fields we shall not find that we are dealing with spasmodic and irreflective heroisms which illuminate a barbarous age. The highest medieval achievements are the fruit of deep reflection, of persevering and concentrated effort, of a self forgetting self in the service of humanity and God. In other words, they spring from the soil, and have ripened in the atmosphere, of a civilized society (9).
Considering Davis’ statement above in conjunction with his other comments on this historical period, one should discard the idea that the Middle Ages ended in the “rebirth” of classical thinking. The Middle Ages was rather to an extent the womb of certain philosophies and literature to come. Amidst the violence and disorder often associated with the Middle Ages, emerged thinkers such as St Augustine and Boethius. These philosophers were influenced by Classical thinkers such as Plato, and strove for self-enlightenment and emancipation from their worldly selves. One finds that the Middle Ages are not as “backward” and primitive as they are often popularly described, but rather a complex conglomeration of Classical and Christian thought.

Joan Cadden, in her discussion of the development of science, comments on the composition of religion and philosophy in the medieval intellectual landscape. In her book, *Meanings of Sex Differences in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science and Culture* she states that “[t]he medieval intellectual landscape was dominated by towering formations of the past” (11). It was constructed by, firstly, the Christian religion of the time, and secondly, the rhetoric of Classical thinkers. Cadden argues that the Christian thought that contributed to the intellectual climate of the time was founded primarily on Scripture and Patristic writings. The second component of this landscape was established by “antique authority” (11).

Despite its reliance on ancient ideas and ways of thinking, the medieval thought landscape was a self-generating and ongoing process of transmission, discovery and assimilation. To simply regard medieval thought as a derivative of ancient thinking is to misrepresent the dynamics and creativity of the period (Cadden 11). From a literary perspective, the Middle Ages experienced a “rebirth” in its own right. Stephan Coote suggests in *The Penguin Short History of English Literature* that a “twelfth-century renaissance” took place (13). The linguistic movement after the battle of Hastings in 1066 and the demise of Old English were accompanied by changes in the following three centuries’ literature, producing a significant effect on the spread and accumulation of literature. Unlike the God fearing and God punishing literature in Old English texts, the development of Middle English placed emphasis on the “humanity of Christ and the imagery of human passion” (Coote 12). This development of new ideas in Europe between 1050 and 1300 A.D. led to new ways of experiencing the world. Books and literacy played an essential role in this progress and resulted in a rebirth of learning and skill in communication:

> [S]cholars had to develop elaborate memory systems to preserve their knowledge, the expansion of religious institutions and the number of teachers who went with these, along with the increasing complexity of society itself, meant that books were becoming ever more essential to clerics and laypeople alike. The number of scribes increased, a fast cursive script was developed, while copying was often organised around a *pecia* system whereby teams of scribes would reproduce a text divided into sections. (Coote 13)

The accumulation and reproduction of knowledge in English literary history to which Coote refers can be observed in a Manuscript Illumination (Image 1) from continental Europe pre-dates Coote’s timeframe. The depiction does not only represent the importance of knowledge
and its reproduction, but also portrays the creative process which Cadden notes when discussing the merging of Christian rhetoric and ancient authority in medieval thought.

Image 1: *St Gregory*, from a Sacrament. Ms. Lat. 1141, National Library, Paris

In the above 9th century representation (Image 1) of St. Gregory, one can see a refreshing fusion of Christian rhetoric and ancient attitudes towards knowledge. St. Gregory is seated on a throne which evokes the image of an emperor. His halo suggests holiness and affords him a godly (or even Christ-like) quality. The scribes who are seated at his feet create the impression of a similarity between St Gregory and the ancient royals, and also portray the notion of writing and recording.

St Gregory holds a book in his left hand while the two scribes rummage in a chest of books. The books, being a prominent feature in this depiction, suggest knowledge – and knowledge in medieval times (especially the form of knowledge associated with Gregory the Great) is, as Cadden notes, also dual in discipline. Gregory the Great is renowned for his dialogues as well as the conceptualisation of the Seven Deadly Sins. The nature of his dialogues and the coining of the Seven Deadly Sins demonstrate that scholars and thinkers were not necessarily exclusively reliant on the voices of ancient authorities, but had the capacity for innovative thought. Echoing Coote’s “renaissance” in the depiction, the accessibility and handling of the books (i.e. knowledge) suggests, as stated by P. Francastel in his historic volume on painting, *The Middle Ages with 175 Plates*, that “power no longer belongs solely to the Incarnate Word but to learning itself” (42).
The composition and perspective organisation in this particular depiction also stands as testament to the creative innovation of the Middle Ages. The saint is portrayed as sitting behind a curtain while one of the scribes is stealing a look underneath it at the Holy Ghost. The dove symbolises the Holy Ghost, but is also the iconic creature associated with Gregory the Great throughout medieval art. For Francestel, this organisation of holiness and mortality together is unlike the perspective from which such subject matter is treated in earlier manuscripts (42). This indicates a progression or evolution of thought as early as the 9th century, annulling the idea of a static intellectual landscape during the “Dark Ages”. One finds that in thinking, art and literature, the medieval period is not simply a void in time, but is defined by unique ways of thinking, interaction with environment, religion and politics – it stands independent from its parent (the Classical age) and its child (the Renaissance). The era is distinguished by the way it braids the relatively new Christian religion into the ideas of the past in an innovative manner.

History, economy, art, ideas and thinking in the Middle Ages can also explored under the sub-categories of the Early Middle Ages, High Middle Ages and Late Middle Ages. The Early Middle Ages marks, among many other events, the rise of Islam and the so-called barbarian kingdoms. The High Middle Ages marks the Norman invasion in England as well as the beginning of the Crusades. The Late Middle Ages is associated with major historical events such as the fall of the Byzantium Empire as well as the great plague. Despite the numerous events and social trends which differentiate these periods from one another, they are all linked through the accumulation and safe-guarding of knowledge and the orthodoxy of the Church.

One of the products of medieval thinking, according to Coote, was a new appreciation by scholars of the complexities of society. Especially in the Late Middle Ages, poets such as Chaucer, and Chaucer particularly, reflect the intricacies present in medieval society. I return to this point later in the chapter.

1.3) Food in the Middle Ages

In Peter Hammond’s book *Food and Feasting in Medieval England*, he states that the food which medieval folk consumed was not that different from what we have today – it is just the preparation that was different. Diet was not particularly restricted and wealthy people had access to numerous kinds of food from various regions of the globe. Spices came from the Far East, dried fruits from the Mediterranean and fish (fresh and salted) from Iceland. Food was much spicier and sweeter in the middle ages and they often used sugar as a spice in their cooking (1). The whole notion of puritan cooking only developed in 16th century France, where in medieval England, grand cooking was subject to clashing and overpowering flavours. This was done to flaunt accessibility to various cultures and places in the world.

If one thinks of food in terms of globalisation and trade, it becomes clear that food was more than a biological necessity: it was also social representative of wealth, occupation and, as noted earlier, religious denomination and practice. It is thus important to take into account
not only food itself, but the whole process of gaining food, preparing it and the manner of eating.

In terms of wealth, food was one of the denominators that portrayed the economic situation of the consumer. For example, according to Hammond, the moderate poor would have enough food to survive on except in times of famine. Those in the countryside would have a piece of land on which they could grow vegetables and corn. Their diet consisted mostly of barley and oats which they used to cook porridges, make cereals and brew beer. Bread in the countryside was not that common because ovens, according to archaeological evidence, were quite scarce and country folk often made use of a communal oven or used that of the neighbour. Texts such as poems from the time also mention other foods eaten by peasants such as bacon, butter, onions, leeks, garlic and cheese (Hammond 28). One finds however, that none of these foods had specific written recipes; these were handed down orally and in practice.

The role of food in the lifestyle of the gentry on the other hand is the complete opposite. The gentry and royalty used food as statements of power, wealth and accessibility – thus, they worked according to strategic methods in order to present their food in the most appealing ways. Hammond notes that researching and writing on food when it comes to the minority (gentry) is much easier than research on the peasants and town folk, for the rich kept detailed accounts on their cooking and food management (63). John Russell’s *The Boke of Nurture* (1460 A.D.) reiterates the importance of food preparation and presentation when it comes to the upper classes of medieval England. It was initially written as an instruction manual for pages and squires to teach them proper etiquette and cooking skills when preparing a meal. Knowledge is one of the key requirements of a good page and squire – and Russell educates them on the finer details and dainties with regards to mead and drink. Russell lays much emphasis on the knowledge of wine, for example:

The namys of swete wynes y wold þat ye them knewe:

Vergnage, vernagelle, wyn Cute, pyment, Raspise, Muscadella of grew, 
Rompney of modon, Bastard, Tyre, Oþey, Torrentyn of Ebrew.

Greke, Malevesyn, Caprik, & Clarey wan it is newe. (117 – 120)

The names of the sweet wines are of such importance to Russell that he stipulates each and every one of them. The wines also represent globalisation as well as knowledge of various geographical places on the feasting table: Vergnage, for instance, was a very popular wine in London during the Middle Ages and came from Italy, Muscadella from France and Rompney from Greece. The consumption of these drinks represents a microcosm of medieval global culture and unique vintner craftsmanship which stands as a symbol of global knowledge and trade.

Food and the preparation thereof also held religious meanings. According to Maggie Black in her book *The Medieval Cookbook* (51), people in the Middle Ages who belonged to a religious order such as a cloister had very austere diets. Meals did not mean relaxation or a
chance for rest, but rather a time of contemplating biblical teachings which were read out aloud during meal times. Monks and Nuns were only allowed one main meal a day – one at noon and a light supper before sundown. Animal meat (except fish and some poultry) was not allowed to be eaten by monks unless they were sick or old. The recipes provided by Black for her section “Life in the Cloister” do not contain any red meat ingredients – only Haddock and Pike. However, in spite of such a spartan diet, it is interesting that some recipes contain spices such as pepper, cinnamon, cloves, ginger and sugar: the laws of gastronomic habit which were set by the Church did not always correspond with the recordings of food stock and purchases in the cloisters or households of religious authority.

Hammond notes that diets differed and were subject to various religious institutions over time. His research shows that practice in reality generally did not comply with the restrictions mentioned by Black. In the fifteenth century two priests who lived in Munden’s Chantry were on a very basic diet similar to that of the town folk and peasants. Meat was part of their staple diet (Hammond 63) – a food source which according to Black was not allowed by Church authorities. Their simple diet also included bread and, during Lent, mostly fish.

Wealth also had an influence on the diet and dietary restrictions of religious practitioners. In the thirteenth century, the Bishop of Westminster enjoyed a much more grandiose diet than the two priests of Munden’s Chantry or Black’s Nuns and Monks. The Bishop’s diet consisted of shellfish, milk, butter, cheese, wine, honey and fruit. He was not limited to mere produce from his own soil and could purchase a variety of foods. For example, during Lent the Bishop lightened the diet and bought figs, raisins, dates and almonds (Hammond 63-65) – once again fruits that needed to be imported from Mediterranean regions. The comparison between these two religious diets as researched by Hammond and the habits mentioned by Black, suggests that religion might have had an influence on diet – especially in times such as Lent. However, the pillars of diet (as construed from historic evidence) still rested on economic capability.

1.4) Contextualising Chaucer and The Canterbury Tales

Geoffrey Chaucer is a figure associated with the Late Medieval period. He was born more or less between 1337 and 1345 (sources vary) and died on the 25th of October 1400. What makes Chaucer such a unique author is his awareness of and familiarity with the various economic and class sections or fragments of the social populace in late medieval England, a circumstance created by the bubonic plague. F.R.H. Du Boulay writes in his article “The Historical Chaucer” that various roles and occupations were often filled by the same men due to the toll of the plague on the population. Historians are often surprised by how often they come across the same figures in various occupational records during the 1340s and 1400s (473), and Chaucer was one of these figures who assumed more than one role in society, thus exposing him to many facets of society.

Chaucer was born as the son of a wine merchant in London. At a young age he served as a Paige Boy in the household of Elizabeth Countess of Ulster, eventually joining the war in
France in 1359, where to his ill luck, he was taken prisoner. Edward III paid £16 for his ransom and a year or two later Chaucer must have entered royal service, according to A.W.Pollard (Online). In 1367 Edward III granted Chaucer a pension for his past and future services and in 1372 he was appointed Comptroller, in the Port of London, of the Custom and Subsidy of Wools, Hides and Woodfells and also of the Petty Custom (Pollard Online). Here he came into contact with various merchants and their tales; according to written records Chaucer also went to France, Genoa and Florence on diplomatic journeys. According to Du Boulay, however, Chaucer’s travels may even have exceeded the recorded number, as suggested by the knowledgeable manner in which he describes the travels of some of his characters in The Canterbury Tales. (473)

Chaucer’s personal history enabled him to write with keen social insight and to construct his various characters accurately against the social, occupational and religious stereotypes, as clearly evident in The Canterbury Tales. His social awareness facilitated his writing of what Paul Strohm calls his article “A Mixed Commonwealth Style” a polyphonic text. (556) Stylistic and generic variety is sustained in the text by the social variety of the various speakers. The text thus acquires a “multi-leveledness” in a literary sense, but also in the portrayal of the human spirit: it reveals or suggests the contradictions in the human spirit.

Chaucer’s writing also reveals traces of familiarity with other contemporary texts. His travels to Italy exposed him to authors such as Boccaccio, Petrarch, Dante, Boethius and Froissart. Cawley notes that many scholars speculate that Chaucer’s idea or concept of The Canterbury Tales is derived from Boccaccio’s Decameron (viii). The corresponding narrative structures between the two texts do support such speculation. However, Cawley (ix) also states that Chaucer had ample time to observe pilgrims form his house in Greenwich and that he himself undertook a pilgrimage to Canterbury in 1387 after the death of his wife – after which he started writing The Canterbury Tales. Whatever the inspiration for The Canterbury Tales was, it only reiterates how responsive Chaucer was to his immediate surroundings as well as to the literary world beyond England’s isles. His writing was, for example, also influenced by his predilection for French poetry, as is attested by his celebrated translation of Lorris’ The Romance of the Rose (Pollard Online).

Chaucer’s work stands in conversation with the work of other writers across cultures. This expands the complexity of his work and adds a “global” element to it and is one reason that many scholars read Chaucer as an early Renaissance writer. Despite such observations, I feel that one should still treat Chaucer as fundamentally a medieval author who acquired genuine literary skill during a specific time and in a specific ideological setting. The mere fact that his work shows corresponding similarities to it does not justify his work being read as early Italian Renaissance. Chaucer was still a product of medieval England and reflected on medieval lifestyles, habits and ways of thinking.

Cawley notes that Chaucer was very strategic when writing The Canterbury Tales. The text itself holds all the narrative genres practiced in the fourteenth century. Chaucer brings together all the social groups by giving them agency through specific literary genre: the Knight tells his tale in the form of chivalric romance; the Miller and Reeve makes use of
fabliau; the Man of Law, Clerk and Melibeus uses spiritual or moral allegory; the Franklin courtly lay; the Prioress the miracle of the Virgin; Sir Thopas literary satire; the Nun’s Priest beast fable; the Second Nun saintly life; and the Parson through sermon (ix). Such genres and various social representations suggest Chaucer to be a thinker with acute awareness and deliberate intention when it comes to writing.

This deliberate construction of social representation and genre suggests that cautious consideration was given to any given object or interjection which was inserted into the narrative. The same can be said of gastronomy. In Robert Appelbaum’s preface to his book *Aguecheek’s Beef, Blech’s Hiccup, and Other Gastronomic Interjections* he notes that writers often say something about food or food habits in their narratives. Their reason for doing this is not merely to present an accurate reflection of reality, but also to achieve something else: Appelbaum argues that “[t]he writer interjects something about food in order to score a point regarding something else, yet the interjection is, finally, about food too – about what we do with it, what we want from it, what it means” (xii). Appelbaum gives as examples that food can be used in order to suggest “virtue, valor, personal advancement, amusement, faith, truth, doctrine, honor [or] humiliation of an opponent” (xi). Appelbaum’s reading of the function of food in narratives can be applied to Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales* as well.

In line with Chaucer’s acquaintance with contemporary texts, genres and various social classes, he was also familiar with the different dishes and foods of the time. Richard II came into power in June 1377 – a lavish king with a great passion for victuals, whose court took food and feasting to a whole new level. Hollingshead, the chronicler, alleged that Richard II had two thousand cooks (Black 99). To this date, the first comprehensive cookery book that we know of was produced in English under Richard II, and its extravagant use of quantities of saffron and wine suggest great wealth and luxury (Black 98). Chaucer occupied a royal position under the reign of Richard II and was familiar with his court and it culinary revolution; he must have been acutely aware of the power and symbolism of food in the fourteenth century.

As noted earlier, Chaucer also started off his career as a page boy in the household of the Countess of Ulster. When considering Russell’s *Boke of Nurture*, Chaucer as a page boy must have had knowledge of the art and preparation of food and dining. Chaucer’s knowledge in the culinary field as well as his reference to the gastronomic delights enjoyed during the reign of a medieval “gourmand” king, enabled him to write with confidence on food – and not only food, as Appelbaum would suggest, but also on its secondary meanings, which he could use strategically in his narrative. Thus, exploring Chaucer’s use of food enables us to explore the layers and deliberations embedded in gastronomy in *The Canterbury Tales* more deeply.

1.5) Literature Review

In the Literature Review, I want to illuminate certain points regarding scholarly writing on Chaucer and food. Through numerous readings of Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales*, it becomes clear that the presence of food is mostly associated with physical and spiritual
defilement. I will discuss some of these readings when looking at *The Canterbury Tales*, especially the figure of the Monk, always bearing in mind the culinary.

In order to determine how to regulate spiritual and physical health, various Classical as well as and religious authorities were consulted, which, as noted earlier by Cadden, jointly make up the medieval intellectual landscape, part of which comprise reflection on the importance of diet. The disruption of spiritual and physical health will thus be determined by looking at *A Theory about Sin* by Orby Shiply.

Food stands at the intersection of literary and social themes that extend beyond the nature of the body and the soul. These intersections will be explored by looking at five medieval texts and the representation of food in their narrative. The Literature Review will conclude by looking at two theorists applicable to Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales*, the first of which is the theory of the Carnivalesque by Mikhail Bakhtin and the second *Orientalism* by Edward Said.

**Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales***

Geoffrey Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales* is as diverse in its reference to food as it is in its social characters. With Appelbaum’s statement in mind that food holds more literary value than the mere representation of an edible substance, Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales* presents numerous avenues for exploration. Various studies have been done on this subject, each with a unique approach.

Some scholars such as Maggie Black used the mention of food in *The Canterbury Tales* for historical reconstruction purposes. Black devoted a whole section of recipes in her cookery book, *The Medieval Cookbook*, to Chaucer’s characters in *The Canterbury Tales*. A medieval recipe for Golden Leeks and Onion found by Black is very similar to the dish of which Chaucer’s Summoner is so fond. (41). Black also notes that the historical recipe for Lombard Chicken Pasties must be very close to the food served on the Franklin’s sumptuous table. (47) *The Canterbury Tales* thus lends a social-historical contextualisation for Black in her understanding of medieval recipes and research on food.

Chaucer’s knowledge of his own time and his knowledge of history continuously guides the narrative of *The Canterbury Tales*. Such historical references and contextualisation will be mentioned when necessary throughout the thesis. Joseph Allen Bryant Jr. sets the Franklin’s diet against classical medical theorists such as Hippocrates and Galen in his article *The Diet of Chaucer’s Franklin*, thereby opening another avenue of considering food intake in terms of health and balance.

The article argues that the Franklin is a character who believes in the “practices of virtue and temperance” (319). Bryant also states that the description of the Franklin in *The General Prologue* leads us to believe that he manages his food resources with the same proficiency as he would the affairs of his county. The fact that the Franklin changes his diet along with the
seasons proves to Bryant that he is a character in harmony with nature. He is also in tune with the nature of his body. Due to his sanguine complexion, his humoral composition is made up of hot and moist elements, which according to Hippocrates inclines him to fatness. Thus, according to Bryant, the Franklin’s “sop in wyn” (Chaucer 334) is a natural balancing agent for his humoral composition as well as a dietary source of heat which is good for an old man. Wine is “hot and dry” and Galen praises it for its nourishment, heat and purgative qualities (Bryant 324). The Franklin’s diet, as analysed by Bryant, unveils a whole school of thinking with regards to diet, health and bodily nature founded by ancient thinkers such as Hippocrates and Galen.

Robert E. Nichols Jr. in his article “The Pardoner’s Ale and Cake” demonstrates the various interpretations of the “symbolical duality of food” (503). The couplet which concerns itself with food and drink in The Introduction to the Pardoner’s Tale has been the topic of many debates throughout the decades (Nichols 498):

But first,” quod he, “heere at this ale-stake
I wol bothe drynke, and eten of a cake.”

(Chaucer 321-322)

According to Nichols (498), scholars have interpreted this couplet as a break in the narrative which suggests that The Pardoner’s Tale is actually told by someone in the tavern rather than the Pardoner himself. However, I disagree, as do those who state that the pilgrims only took only a moment’s pause, but then continued with the Pardoner’s own Prologue and Tale. Nichols further notes that a particular scholar (whom he does not name) tries to establish an exact time for this episode by arguing that “bite on a cake means before breakfast”.

Nichols uses Chaucer’s mention of cake and ale to make three further literary observations. Firstly, he sees the food and drink as a structural link which unifies and assists in integrating the Introduction, Prologue and Tale. The cake and ale introduces the Tale, it links the tavern scenes between the actual pilgrimage and the meta-narrative told by the Pardoner and it serves as the ingredient or component which leads to the death of the three young lads at the end of the Tale. Secondly, the cake and ale are components of, and foreshadow, the “thematic delineation of food-and-drink gluttony” (498). Lastly Nichols uses another excerpt from The Pardoner’s Tale to suggest Chaucer’s religious awareness in his writing, and claims that a Eucharist motif underpins the mention of cake and ale:

Thise cookes, how they stampe, and streyne, and grynde,
And turnen substauncie into accident,
To fulfille al thy likerous talent!

(Chaucer 538-540)

The passage holds close similarities to Pope Innocent III’s discourse on gluttony in De Contemptu Mundi (from De Miseria Humane Conditionis) and editors have documented
Chaucer’s familiarity with the text. (Nichols 501). This emphasises Chaucer’s awareness of and reference to religious rhetoric in his writing and it is due to this deduction that Robinson (in Nichols 501-502) feels that Chaucer must have had the Eucharist in mind when using the ale and cake in the narrative.

By embedding a sermon in the speech of the Pardoner and his exemplum, the Tale introduces a level of irony to his portrayal. Nichols’ observations about the cake and ale reveal an awareness of how a figure from a religious order (such as the Pardoner) occupies two existences: one in an occupation paired with certain social and ethical ideals and another in a reality that is at best indifferent towards these ideals. Chaucer also uses food to explore this notion of dual existence in his introduction to the Monk and his Tale. Before turning to Chaucer’s Monk, it is worth mentioning some archaeological findings that relate to monks from medieval London, described by Martyn Whittock in his book A Brief History of Life in the Middle Ages.

Whittock states that because gluttony was seen as a Deadly Sin, episcopal visitations criticised and condemned monks for gluttony and eating the food intended for the poor. (107) This criticism increased in the late fourteenth century (overlapping with the time when Chaucer was working on The Canterbury Tales). Two sources substantiate and justify these claims. The first is the accounts of Westminster Abby which suggest that even when fasting, the monks consumed more than the nutritional average. The second was research done on 376 male (monk) skeletons from three London monasteries. It showed that monks, in contrast to the secular population, were five times more likely to develop obesity-related joint diseases. Such evidence reveals that the average monk from Chaucer’s time was quite fond of his food, despite supposedly leading a lifestyle of moderation and occasional abstinence.

Chaucer weaves these qualities into the Monk’s character from the moment he introduces him in The General Prologue. In the Monk’s portrait he is described as “ful fat” (Chaucer 200) and as enjoying “swynken” on his table. (Chaucer 186) In the Middle Ages, swan was a praised delicacy – a dish that recent studies have shown was frequently found in the diet of Richard III. Among other traits in his portrait, Chaucer’s Monk’s lavish lifestyle and non-monastic qualities are revealed merely by mentioning his diet. This gastronomic interjection as well as other features of gastronomy in the Monk’s Tale is analysed by Scott Norsworthy in his article “Hard Lords and Bad Food-Service in the Monk's Tale”. Norsworthy explores how various food properties as found in the narrative around the Monk reflects on his character – a character who in practice is alienated from his monastic pledge.

In The Monk’s Prologue, Harry Baily asks the monk whether he is a “sexteyn” or a “celerer” (Chaucer 2733). Norsworthy notes that both positions – a sacristan and a cellarer – are high administrative positions that deal with food in the Benedictine monasteries. The sacristan

---

1 “A recent bone chemistry analysis, conducted by the British Geological Survey and scientists from the University of Leicester, shows Richard III ate swan, crane, heron and egret, in addition to freshwater fish. The high-status meals were also washed down with copious amounts of wine” (Grenoble).
would be responsible for the spiritual food and drink of the congregation while the cellarer would deal in providing food of the community. (314, 318) Both these positions are associated with the character of the monk. The monk, in occupation, thus becomes more linked with food than with religious practice.

In theory, the occupational duties of a cellarer are to distribute food and drink to a congregation or community like a father to his children. Such a monk should be wise, sober and mature – rather than, lazy, tempestuous, proud, insulting and wasteful (Norsworthy, 317). Chaucer’s monk possesses the inverse of these qualities mentioned by Norsworthy, suggesting that he uses his position to access food and delicacies which make him fat. The monk’s mismanagement of his duties, which are pledged to God, becomes blasphemous as he abuses his role for his own gluttonous purposes. Norsworthy links this notion with the mention of Belshazzar in the Monk’s Tale. While feasting with his wives and concubines, Belshazzar calls out:

‘Gooth, bryngeth forth the vessels,’ quod he,

‘Whiche that my fader in his prosperitee
Out of the temple of Jerusalem biraft;
And to oure hye goddess thanke we
Of honour that oure eldres with us lafte.”

(Chaucer 2991-2995)

By using the sacred vessels from the temple of Jerusalem for his own indulgent feasting, Belshazzar degrades the sacredness of the objects which his father, Nebuchadnezzar, stole from the holy land. This narration is an extension of the monk himself who degrades his holy position for his own culinary indulgences.

According to Norsworthy, the spiritual obligations of the monk are also being critiqued by Chaucer. In the Monk’s Tale, Ugolino is locked in a tower with his three sons with no food or drink. After the youngest dies of hunger, Ugolino gnaws on his own arm out of remorse for the death of his youngest son. The remaining children consequently respond:

…Fader, do nat so, ellas!

But rather ete the flessh upon us two.

(Chaucer 3246 -3247)

Such an image evokes an inverse of a Christ figure, who offers his body to his disciples. This spiritual dimension adds another layer to Ugolino’s incapacity to provide his children with bread to sustain their lives. Norsworthy notes that Chaucer’s narration of Dante’s Ugolino in the Monk’s Tale is a representation of the monk’s role as a sacristan (325). Ugolino, as father figure, fails to feed his children with “breed” and keep them alive: similarly, the monk fails in
his duties as sacristan to feed his spiritual children and keep them alive spiritually. In a symbolic sense, the Monk as an Ugolino-like figure deviates from the example of Christ by not offering his own flesh as redeeming sustenance for his followers or congregants.

In this sense, Chaucer’s Monk fails in his religious duties as cellarer and sacristan. He thus does not comply with endorsed religious ideals despite the symbolism of the cloth which he wears. Susan Wallace makes similar observations in her 1977 Master's thesis *Diet in The General Prologue to The Canterbury Tales*. In her thesis, she focuses on ambiguous aspects in the Prologue that attend on the inclusion of specific details regarding food and drink in the portraits. (3) Close investigation, which includes the examination of other medieval authors, reveals that “the reference to diet was carefully chosen to support authorial judgement of the spiritual state of the character” (4). Following on this observation, Wallace further explores the impurities in the Monk’s soul that are suggested by the mention of his diet.

For instance, in her discussion of medieval moral literature, Wallace gives an account of St. Thomas Aquinas where he explains the significance of cooked swan – a roast which the Monk favours above all else: “The swan is bright in colour, and by aid of its long neck extracts its food from deep places on land and in water; it may denote those who seek earthly profit through an external brightness of virtue” (9). The swan which the Monk eats does not only represent impurity due its own diet and deceptive appearance, but it actually represents the Monk himself. Through his occupation, whether it is as cellarer or sacristan, he chooses to enrich himself in a gluttonous manner. Like the swan which he eats, he may be virtuous in appearance but he is impure in action. By simply conducting a close reading of the Monk’s diet in his portrait, one is immediately alerted to an ambiguity in his character and soul.

Wallace makes a similar observation when looking at the portrait of the Prioress. She is described as possessing small dogs which she feeds “With rosted flesh, milk and wastel-breed” (Chaucer 147). When considering Hammond’s remarks mentioned above, peasants sometimes did not even have the luxury to bake bread – and here we have a servant of the Lord (in other words a caregiver of the poor) who feeds her dogs fine white bread. Wallace (5) notes that the Prioress’ actions stand in stark contrast to the piety of the dairy woman found in The Nun-Priest’s Tale, who is also a devoted servant of the Lord. In a culinary sense, the Prioress is a woman who enjoys material luxury: as with the Monk, this is a defilement of her spiritual vocation. Both these characters are in a state of a spiritual and physical torpor due to their intemperance.

Wallace elaborates on her argument through reference to the painting *The Land of Cockaygne* (1517) by Peter Brueghel the Elder: a depiction of such torpor in the figures of a peasant, a scholar and a soldier.
This painting presents a land where food and food sources seem almost limitless. In the right centre of the painting, there is a cooked bird plated on a dish which seems not to have been touched and is awaiting consumption. Further to the right, a pig with a knife tied to it is roaming, apparently ready for slaughter. A prickly pear plant supplies the environment with delicate and exotic fruit. In the upper left corner of the painting one finds a roof topped with perfect pies – ready to be served to whoever desires them. These depictions suggest a land of abundance with no reservations when it comes to the supply and consumption of food. The “consumption culture” in The Land of Cockaygne can be analysed by looking at the scholar, soldier and peasant who spatially takes up the centre of the composition (See Image 2 above).

Brueghel depicts these three figures in a state of physical and spiritual torpor. The reason for this can be gleaned from their environment. As noted, the environment has food resources in abundance and these figures clearly show no temperance in such surroundings. The table above their heads shows evidence of eating and feasting which has already been taking place. The manner in which they left their bench suggests no caution or mannerly encounter with the food which they consumed: the amphorae are overturned, the dishes left dirty and food leftovers are scattered all around. This depiction contrasts completely with sanctioned etiquette of medieval times. According to Hammond, table manners were very important in the Middle Ages among the upper and peasant classes (103). Tidiness was also a very important aspect of table manners – to the point that bread was even cut into perfect squares (Hammond 109). The manners portrayed in The Land of Cockaygne completely overthrow the idealised ways of engaging with food as suggested by texts and records from the period.
This degradation of table manners and gastronomic temperance is found in all three major figures in Breughel’s composition. To my mind, these figures each depicts and represents a particular faction of society. The soldier in the red-orange costume holds the honour of the military and knights. The scholar to the right with the black book represents the literate population which includes monks, scribes and other non-military aristocrats. The peasant in the forefront lying with his back to the viewer is a representation of the working and lower classes. In Breughel’s painting, these different social groups all participate in gluttony and spiritual defilement. No social group or occupation is immune to the vices of food on spiritual and physical level. Chaucer’s characters, in their social diversity within The Canterbury Tales, are also subject to spiritual and physical defilement, judging by the way food is represented.

One needs to note that Chaucer’s characters are all on a pilgrimage, (except for the Cook) which in an ideal world should suggest that they are spiritual characters\(^2\). In order to understand this supposed spirituality, it helps to look at some of the religious and spiritual literature from the Middle Ages for context. As mentioned earlier, the intellectual landscape and everyday dogmatic ideology of the time were pillared on the voices of ancient authorities as well as religious texts. Ideas from both these categories need to be discussed in order to fully understand the spiritual ideal that informed pilgrimages such as the one described by Chaucer.

**Medieval Writings on Diet, Food and Health: Antiquity and the Bible**

From a classical perspective, diet is a medium to regulate health and balance in the body. For the authorities of Classical Antiquity, the body is an extension of the cosmos – a kind of microcosm which echoes the composition and structures of the universe. One of the very first philosophers who wrote about the intrinsic “balance” of the universe was Anaximander of Miletus (c.611-c.547 B.C.). Anaximander discusses the qualities of the universe which are later used in humoral theory by Hippocrates – hot, cold, dry and moist. For Anaximander, the earth provided qualities such as cold and moistness while the sky, sun, stars and moon provided heat and dryness. (Kreis online) These qualities should exist in a balanced composition in order for the universe to exist in a functional and harmonious way.

Hippocrates of Cos (c.460-c.377 B.C.) identifies these qualities in medical terms in the humoral composition of the human body. Lois Ayoub explains the humoral theory in his article “Old English wæta and the Medical Theory of the Humours”: the humours are the various fluids in the body: blood, yellow bile, black bile and phlegm. The medical belief was that “[a]n ideal balance of the humours was accordingly presumed to exist for each individual” (334). The four humours in the human body echo the four elements which are air, water, fire and earth. These elements keep nature in balance with afforded qualities – heat,

\(^2\) We know this is not the case, but this must be considered for a thorough understanding of the Chaucer’s literary techniques and commentary on his characters.
cold, aridity and moisture (333). Contrary to Anaximander, Hippocrates regards air as hot and moist, water as cold and moist, and fire as hot and dry, with earth holding the qualities of coldness and dryness. The humours echo these qualities seen in the elements: “blood – hot and moist; phlegm – cold and moist; yellow bile – hot and dry; black bile – cold and dry” (333).

Throughout classical medical thinking, balance in the body is attained through diet. Pliny the Elder (23-79 AD), the naturalist philosopher, suggests that diet is a key factor in man’s empowerment of the body. When Pliny discusses the “flower of mankind”, i.e. knowledge, he makes reference to a particular physician called Asclepiades. Asclepiades opposed the theory of humours and made use of diet rather than drugs in his therapy (Pliny the Elder 95). Diet can maintain and preserve the body if implemented with the focus on balance – the intake of food must be finely regulated for the body to exist and function at its prime. Pliny vividly emphasises the importance of balance with regards to diet when discussing lettuce and its digestive values. He states that no other food is as valuable when it comes to stimulating or diminishing appetite. However, the “amount taken is critical: too much loosens the bowels, and a moderate amount causes constipation” (225). Balance and temperance is thus of key importance for lettuce to attain optimal functionality within the body.

Plato takes the classical idea of balance and temperance and adds another dimension to it. He states that striving towards balance and temperance becomes a Virtue, a concept that gained much attention in Christian thinking as well as in medieval thinking in general. In Plato’s Meno (380 BCE), through a dialogue between Socrates, Meno, a slave of Meno and Anytus, Plato rhetorically argues the definition of virtue. Socrates puts the statement to Meno that good men and women “have the same virtues of temperance and justice” (Plato 3, emphasis added). Plato further affords a definition of virtue by stating that “Virtue is the desire of things honourable and the power of attaining them” (8). Virtue reflects the quality of the soul (Plato 21) and can only be achieved when desire is tempered. The striking term in this statement and one that will be a constant point of reference in this thesis is desire. Through the voice of Socrates, Plato notes that when evil (which is harmful to the body and spirit of the individual) is desired, it is the opposite of virtue. In classical medical and naturalist terms, certain amounts of food as well as certain foods can be harmful to the body. Plato argues that what is harmful (non-virtuous) for the body can have a harmful effect on the soul. From a Platonic perspective, the intake of food directly influences the virtue of the soul. These classical ideas are also evident in the Bible – and in fact played a significant role in the evolution of Christian doctrine.

The Wycliffe Bible, translated by John Wycliffe from Latin in 1384, is the closest we get to an authentic Bible in Middle English. This text was a contemporary religious text that had been completed when Chaucer started writing The Canterbury Tales. To my mind, it is thus appropriate to use this version of the Bible to explore medieval thinking when looking at Chaucer. The Wycliffe Bible suggests a very specific attitude towards food and eating:

God offers the earth to man by encouraging him to consume the seeds and fruits from the trees. He also offers all living beasts and birds from the heavens for man’s eating. From a
religious perspective, the earth belongs to man as an inexhaustible resource for food and drink. This offering evokes the environment portrayed Peter Breughel the Elder’s *The Land of Cockaygne*. Although this gift is almost unlimited (as also stipulated in Genesis 9: 3⁳), God still restricts the intake of food with certain regulations. In Proverbs 25:27, Wycliffe writes in the Middle English lexis that “it is not good to hym that etith myche hony”. Honey should not be consumed in excess, which points to a notion of moderation and temperance when it comes to food intake. There are numerous reasons why too much honey is not good for a person. Hence, despite the fact that the supply of honey is abundant, the onus rests on man to regulate his diet. According to Christian doctrine it is very important to follow a balanced diet, for this keeps the body in a healthy state.

From a health perspective, the regulation of certain diets in the Bible can be attributed to medical reasons. There are often references to nature and food as medical remedies – as found in Ezekiel 47:12, where the fruits of trees are used as food and their leaves for healing. In 1 Timothy 5:23, Paul the Apostle states “Nyle thou yit drinke watir, but vse a litil wyn, for thi stomac, and for thin ofte fallynge infirmytees” (Wycliffe). According to Paul, wine should be used instead of water to cure illnesses of the stomach.

The Platonic argument about the soul also comes into play in the Bible. God implements certain gastronomic restrictions not only for bodily health, but also for spiritual health. 1 Corinth 6:19-20 reads “Whether ye witen not, that youre membris ben the temple of the Hooli Goost, that is in you, whom ye han of God, and ye ben not youre owne? For ye ben bouyt with greet prijs. Glorifie ye, and bere ye God in youre bodi” (Wycliffe). The body is a temple which houses the Holy Ghost and thus needs to be kept as a glorified vessel. Health is thus very important – the body must be disease free and function accordingly. And, as mentioned before, one manner of achieving this is through a disciplined diet that benefits both flesh and soul, pointing to two spheres in human existence, creating a duality that can be governed by the mind. It is through food, too, that spiritual cleansing and an everlasting life is gained.

The Eucharist (Greek for Thanksgiving) is a sacrament that was commonly re-enacted during the middle ages (and still today in particular Christian traditions) in remembrance of the Last Supper where Jesus offered his body and blood symbolically through the breaking of bread and sharing of wine:

```
Therfor Jhesus seith to hem, Treuli, treuli, Y seie to you, but ye eten the fleisch of mannus sone, and drenken his blood, ye schulen not haue lijf in you. He that etith my fleisch, and drynkith my blood, hath euerlastynge lijf, and Y schal ayen reise hym in the laste dai. For my fleisch is veri mete, and my blood is very drynk. He that etith my fleisch, and drynkith my blood, dwellith in me, and Y in hym.

(John 6: 55-57 Wycliffe Bible)
```

³ “And al thing which is moued and lyueth schal be to you in to mete; Y have youe to you alle thingis as greene wortis”
By the eating the bread and drinking the wine, followers consume the body and blood of Christ which affords them the same godly qualities possessed by Christ, who rose from the dead and thus did not suffer eternal death. As Jesus states in John 6: 57, those who eat His flesh and drink His blood, dwell in Him and He in them. The symbolic unification of the two bodies is effected through gastronomic consumption: that is, food is invested with spiritual qualities and religious symbolic value. As in the theory of humours, where the qualities of food have an effect on the humoral structure and balance of those who consume it, Christianity associates diet with spiritual balance. Wallace’s analysis of Chaucer’s Monk’s diet is a case in point: the Monk participates in the impurity of the swan when eating it, because the religious stigma attached to the swan is transferred to its consumer.

The two dimensions of purity (physical and spiritual) are also discussed by St. Augustine of Hippo, providing insight into medieval thinking on these matters. Augustine represents what Cadden calls a bridge between antique voices (such as Cicero, Plato and Aristotle) and the doctrine of Biblical texts. In Book VII of Augustine’s Confessions, he turns to the “books of the Platonists” to understand the way of mankind “when the Word was made flesh and came to dwell among the men of this world” (Augustine 114). Here we observe the reconciliation of ancient and Biblical approaches to food in a single doctrine. Chaucer shows familiarity with the writings of St Augustine of Hippo and thus his rhetoric, mentioning the Saint by name – “Austyn” (Chaucer 187) – in the Monk’s Tale.

In Book X of his Confessions, Augustine identifies two selves in human existence: the inner self and the outer self. (212) The outer self is the body itself and its functions and desires. The inner self refers to the soul. Like the body, the soul can also suffer brokenness and illnesses in its spiritual existence. The responsibility to maintain health and balance in the body and soul thus rests on the mind and conduct of the individual self. It is important to keep both selves healthy, for, as Augustine suggests, the inner and the outer selves are interdependent.

Saint Augustine is clear on what the role of diet is for spiritual well-being. He states that when he loves his God, he does not love “the fragrance of flowers, perfumes, and spices; not manna or honey” (211). In Augustine’s rhetoric one finds that in order to be completely devoted to the soul, the body may not derive pleasure from the food on which it is dependent. Food, in this sense, can become a pleasure, for example like sexual desire, which may cause humankind to deviate from its spiritual focus. In Augustine’s arguments on temptation, he discusses food and sex as equally threatening to sound health in so far as they share a common characteristic in the theological rhetoric of the Middle Ages – they are linked to desire. The Classical idea of moderation and balance (advanced by, for instance, the Stoics) is thus reconceptualised in a Christian framework. In the asceticism of Christianity, medieval philosophers translate the notion of “care of the self” that characterised the thinking of antiquity into a doctrinal preoccupation with sacrifice and renunciation. It is against this background that one should read medieval thinking about the senses: the body and its physical needs are inherently sinful, the soul exists in an adversarial relationship to the body.

\[4\] John 1:14
The body must thus only be sustained and not indulged. In a Christian sense, “Life” obtains true and virtuous functionality if the focus is mainly on the spiritual and not the physical, whereas this distinction between the spiritual and the physical is much more mutable in Classical philosophy. In *The Care of the Self*, Michael Foucault is drawing on Galen’s writings and one finds that the distinction between the body and the soul is evident, as found in Christian writings, but he posits that the two concepts are intertwined. The soul and the body desire alike and one is not necessarily superior to the other (contrary to what one would find in the writings of St Augustine for instance). With reference to Athenaeus (on whom Stoic influence is considerable) Foucault states

“What adults need is a complete regimen of the soul and the body… to try and calm its impulses [hormai], and to achieve a condition in which our desires [prothumiai] do not exceed our own particular powers”. This regimen does not require that one institute a struggle of the soul against the body, nor even that one establish means by which the soul might defend itself from the body. Rather, it is a matter of the soul correcting itself in order to be able to guide the body according to a law of that which is the body itself. (134)

One finds in Classical thinking that the soul is guided in decision making by certain bodily laws. The soul should thus comply with the demands of the body if this would be beneficial for the body’s humoral balance and wellbeing. Hippocratic teachings for instance do not acknowledge a moral stance or structure when it comes to sexual intercourse (as found in Christian dogma i.e. chasteness, marriage and virginity), but rather encourage sexual intercourse for “it is excellent against the diseases due to the phlegm” (Foucault 118). Unlike St Augustine, who advises repression of “evil” desires for the benefit of the soul, Foucault studies Galen’s writings on desire and suggests that desire and pleasure is not just movements of the soul, but they are indeed the effects of natural pressures and sudden evacuations (108). The will of the body and the will of the soul are definitely blurred in Classical thinking – one does not hold any superiority over the other, for both need to strive for optimal functionality in order to achieve a thriving human existence.

In Christian asceticism the soul is definitely the superior entity within the body/soul make-up. St Augustine states, “my soul is the better part of me, for it animates the whole of my body” (213). On the spiritual level (thinking of the Eucharist), food symbolically cleanses the soul and reconciles man with God. Although rooted in classical ideas, the Christian approach to food is more complex (as noted in the above Biblical discussions) than the natural approach found in the writings of the Classical thinkers.

**The Seven Deadly Sins**

As noted above, in both antique and Biblical writings, certain actions related to food are harmful for body and soul – but how does one classify them as sinful, or against God’s will? In order to understand what medieval society regarded as sinful – especially in terms of food
and eating – one needs to turn to the sins labelled by Gregory the Great as the Seven Deadly Sins. In *The Theory about Sin* (1875), Orby Shipley categorises the Seven Deadly Sins into groups, which highlights the underlying similarities with one another.

Pride, Envy and Anger fall under the first category, “The Distorter of Love”. These sins are similar in the sense that the sinner loves ill or evil more than his neighbour (Shiply b). The second category is “The Defaulter in Love” and Sloth stands alone in this category – “the sin of omission, which selfishly feels the inordinate indisposition of soul towards the love of God, and all that flows from it” (Shipley b). The last category holds the sins Avarice, Gluttony and Lust. They are grouped in the categorisation “The Exceeder in Love” which is when one loves created things more than they ought to. These created things include money or money’s worth, food and drink as well as sensual gratification and enjoyment (Shipley b).

In Shipley’s explanations of these sins from this group, one finds that they are all subliminally joined by desire (b). When revisiting the arguments in Plato’s *Meno*, one recalls that it is desire which if not tempered causes that lack in virtue.

In Shipley’s analysis, one finds that all Seven Deadly Sins has several sub-actions which can be classified according to certain qualities as a particular sin. Since this thesis focuses on food, I will look only at Shipley’s discussion on Gluttony. Shipley notes that the sin of Gluttony is applicable to food as well as drink. (250) By making use of the writings of Saint Thomas Aquinas, Shipley further notes that there are five distinct temptations of Gluttony in everyday life: The first temptation has reference to time. It is when one shortens the time during meals through the anticipation of eating. Quality of food is the second temptation and one sins by wanting delicacies when it comes to eating. Seeking stimulants in food, such as sauces and seasoning, for sensual enjoyment of the palate is the third spiritual hindrance. The fourth temptation concerns quantity, when one eats or drinks more than nature demands. The last and fifth temptation is to eat with too much eagerness. By doing so, one offends the virtue of temperance. (269-272)

Shipley’s analysis was written in 1875, but some of his research and texts date back to the middle ages – such as the writings of Saint Thomas Aquinas which he used to define and elaborate on Gluttony. Thus, though written much later, one can use Shipley’s thinking on The Seven Deadly Sins (especially Gluttony) to detect sinful action from a religious perspective in medieval texts.

**Chivalry**

One cannot look at medieval literature without acknowledging and dissecting the concept of *chivalry*. As much as the Bible in medieval Europe was considered an ideal against which one should measure human behaviour in terms of morality, so was chivalry. Chaucer himself
was aware of the ideological concept’s importance in society. In fact, he commences *The Canterbury Tales* with a chivalric Romance, The Knight’s Tale, to serve as the ultimate model of human conduct. The Knight’s Tale serves as a measuring device for human interaction and moral values against which all other tales must be read. One will see later in the thesis how this functions. First, one might examine the theoretical framework of this idealistic concept by consulting Claude C.H. Williamson’s article “Chivalry” as well as that of Helmut Nickel, “The Art of Chivalry”.

Chivalry owes its name to the Latin word *caballus* (which means horse) or even *Ritter*, which translates to rider (Nickel 60). The word itself and its origin immediately evoke economic welfare. The fact that the linguistic emphasis is place on the horse rather than the human (knight), suggests that the knight was a “warrior wealthy enough to own a horse” (Nickel 60). Already one encounters a particular materialistic stance in society. Those who thrived under chivalry could materially afford to defend honour, maidens and kings. Chivalry thus has an exclusivity to it and according to its theorising is not a phenomenon of the masses but of the gentry.

The origins of chivalry go back to the fall of the Roman Empire in the 5th century. Nickel (60) describes it as a collaboration of “heavy-armoured [nomadic] horsemen with a disdain for toiling peasants and a dislike of manual labour” together with “the Germanic system of mutual loyalty between leaders and followers”. These cultural qualities were of course improved by whatever could be salvaged from Roman civilization (Nickel 60) and they were, as Williamson points out in his article “Chivalry” in *The Irish Monthly* 47.552, consecrated by the Church through its blessing. (331) The cross-cultural attributes were unified under the name of the church as a knight was knighted by the stroke of a sword with the words: “Serve Christi, sis miles, in nomine Patris, Filii, et Spiritus Sancti, Amen” (Williamson 334).

The vow that knights took on the cross set them to “embrace the duties and obligations, rather than the rights and privileges of knighthood” (Williamson 338). Williamson further explains that the two great duties included the exercising of arms, and a courteous and defending attitude towards women. The love of a lady (on a platonic level) meant the “reverent attachment to the whole of womanhood”. Military school refined a man in a life of hardship and added glory and honour to his status. He would use his training to defend the weak, the honour of ladies and his own honour. (338) Seen in this light, the rejuvenation of life and regeneration of honour would take place as a knight uses his military skill to defend and save the life or honour of a weaker subject.

In Chaucer’s The Knight’s Tale, one finds that a company of ladies dressed in black was weeping as Theseus returns from the Amazons to Athens, asking him to avenge their sorrow caused by the king Creon. When he first encountering them, Theseus responds to their weeping. A closer look at the text reveals that he is a knight true to the medieval ideal of chivalry:

…‘Have ye so greet envye
Of _myn honour_, that thus compleyne and cry?

Or who hath yow _mysboden_ or offended?

And telleth me if it may been _amended_,

And why that ye been clothed in blak.’

(Chaucer 907 – 911 _emphasis added_)

Theseus’ “chivalrie” (Chaucer 865) that has already been mentioned and praised in the seventh line, compactly and aptly summarises the traits and conventions of medieval chivalry. When encountering the weeping women, Theseus enquired whether or not _his_ honour is being envied or has caused the weeping. The honour of a knight is one of the corner stones of chivalry and must be defended at all costs. The consciousness of Theseus’ honour and the effects thereof is forever present in his handling of the world around him. In his speech, one can also see his concern for the honour of the women, as defending women’s honour is the responsibility of knights. Theseus enquires who _scorned_ the women by _offending_ them subsequently asks how the wrongs may be _amended_ and their honour restored. In a five line speech by Theseus, Chaucer interweaves the noble traits of chivalry, as mentioned by Williamson and Nickel – that is to be conscious of your own honour as a knight and to protect and defend the lives and honour of those weaker than yourself, particularly women.

In an ideal chivalrous world, should a knight be the cause of any harm towards women or their honour, he and his life is subject to judgment passed by a higher authority. This is evident in numerous medieval texts dealing with chivalry, as reflected for example in two texts depicting similar incidences in their narratives, namely Chaucer’s _The Wife of Bath’s Tale_ and the 12th century Arthurian Romance _Erec and Enide_ by French poet Chrétien de Troyes:

The Wife of Bath’s Tale is set in the “olde dayes of Kyng Arthour” (Chaucer 857) where a knight from the court of King Arthur rapes a maiden and thus robs her of her maidenhood – her honour. “By cours of lawe”, the knight should have lost his head (Chaucer 892), but the queen and other ladies beg the king for mercy, because the crime of disgracing a maiden is so great within the laws and conventions of chivalry that the penalty is the pain of death. King Arthur delivers the knight to the mercy of the queen after which she pardons him on condition that, within one year, he provides her with an answer to the question of what it is that women desire most. The knight’s life is in the hands of the queen; he loses ownership of it…

A similar instance occurs in de Troyes’ _Erec and Enide_. Queen Guinevere accompanies King Arthur while going on a hunt, but she remains far behind the rest of the party in the forest. Her maiden and Sir Erec keep her company. The Queen spotted another knight, who one later learns is called Yder, accompanied by a maiden of his own and a dwarf. Queen Guinevere sends her own maiden to summon Yder, only to have the dwarf strike the maiden
with his whip. The Queen’s response to this behaviour is that the “knight is most unchivalrous to allow a freak to strike such beautiful creature” (de Troyes 39, emphasis added). When Sir Erec is also instructed by the queen to summon the knight, he too is struck in the face by the dwarf. Due to these disgraces, Sir Erec vows to avenge his honour and that of the queen’s maiden. He pursues Sir Yder and after defeating him in battle, he says to his opponent:

[Y]ou allowed your dwarf to strike my lady’s maiden. It is a vile thing to strike a woman! … Because of this injury I must hate you, for you committed too great an offence. You must render yourself my prisoner, and immediately without delay go directly to my lady. (50)

Yder did go to Arthur’s court with his own maiden and the dwarf, throwing his own life as well as the dwarf and his maiden’s on the mercy of the queen. As in Chaucer’s The Wife of Bath’s Tale, the knight who wronged the maiden loses his own freedom and life and is placed at the mercy of the queen. The difference in these two narratives is the manner in which the maidens in the two tales are wronged: Chaucer’s maiden is raped while the maiden found in de Troyes is physically struck with a whip. The women’s honour is thus tarnished through physical (violent) force upon the body as well as sexual harm to the body.

Sexual honour is upheld through chastity which according to Conor McCarthy’s book Love, Sex and Marriage in the Middle Ages would be virginity, widowhood and marriage. (11) Should any of these aspects be disrupted or harmed, disgrace is brought to the subject and can only be avenged through battle (as seen in de Troyes) or at the cost of the perpetrator’s life (as found in Chaucer and de Troyes). One thus notes that in a medieval chivalrous world, echoing Biblical ideals, there is no room for adultery, rape or physical harm to women.

The Knight’s Tale as a chivalrous romance represents these values and is set as an epitome of moral conduct in terms of battle and the protection of honour. It suggests consciousness of an ideal that cannot in reality be upheld by humans, as seen in the tales that follow in Chaucer’s The Canterbury Tales. The degradation of chivalry and the double existence within medieval social behaviour is showcased as the tales following that of the Knight appears to stand in contrast to the virtues and ideals of chivalry. In fact, chivalry also has its own laws and regulations when it comes to the preparation and consumption of food, which are actually completely ignored. These insights and discussions will be presented when analysing the relevant texts and tales within the thesis.
The Representation of Food in Five Medieval Texts

Beowulf

Food and feasting is a theme evident from some of the earliest texts in English literature. In Beowulf, the epic poem thought to originate from the first half of the sixth century, food and feasting sets the backdrop for many narrative climaxes in the text. A space of festivity and gastronomic abundance is the mead-hall, the Heorot, that hosts both feasts and slaughters. In the text, the presence of food and feasting platforms and to an extent forecast the representation of violence. This theme can be explored in the text.

In lines 68–69 (Beowulf) Hrothgar gives orders for men to work on a mead hall which is to be “a wonder of the world forever” (70). This grandiose space, Heorot, is a space and setting of eating and feasting. The joyous festivities in Heorot are, however, threatened by the monster Grendel when he “hear[s] the din of the loud banquet” (88). The monster attacks the feasting hall sowing terror, destruction and death. The cruelties and destruction that Grendel unleashes take place during or just after the celebrations of a banquet. In Beowulf, the feasting setting is a space not only for pleasures, but also violence:

Time and again, when the goblets passed
and seasoned fighters got flushed with beer
they would pledge themselves to protect Heorot
and wait for Grendel with whetted swords.

But when dawn broke and day crept in
over each empty, blood-spattered bench,
the floor of the mead-hall where they feasted
would be slick with slaughter.

(480-487)

When Grendel takes over Heorot and “haunt[s] the glittering hall after dark” (167) young and old are hunted down by the monster. Beowulf the Geat hears about the distress of the Danish king and offer his assistance in restoring Heorot’s glory by freeing it from the monster Grendel. In order to allure Grendel to Heorot again for his defeat, a feast for the Danes and the Geats is once again held in Heorot:

…An attendant stood by
with a decorated pitcher, pouring bright
helpings of mead. And the minstrel sang,

filling Heorot with his head-clearing voice

(4950 – 498)

After the feast, Hrothgar leaves Heorot in Beowulf’s keeping where the Geats await Grendel’s attack and when Grendel does strike, the mead-hall once again becomes a space of violence and destruction. A Geat warrior perished at the hands of Grendel.

[Grendel] grabbed and mauled [the] man on his bench,

bit into his bone-lappings, bolted down his blood

and gorged on him in lumps, leaving the body

utterly lifeless, eaten up

hand and foot.

(740 – 744)

Beowulf injures the monster by severing “the whole of Grendel’s/shoulder and arm” (834 – 835). The monster leaves Heorot only to be killed by Beowulf later in the narrative.

The mead-hall in Beowulf displays an intertwining of the culinary and the violent. The space remains unchanged while continuous and varying images of beer (481) and mead (497) emerge, contrasting but also intersecting with the depictions of blood, death and destruction.

Malory’s Le Mort D’Arthur

In writings on the Arthurian legend, violence and death are also often intertwined with food and feasting. In Sir Thomas Malory’s Le Mort D’Arthur, one finds that a feast becomes an opportunity for revenge, death and eventually battle. In ‘The Book of Sir Launcest and Queen Gwynevere’, queen Gwynevere “provided a splendid banquet with many dainties, including apples especially for Sir Gawain, whose partiality for them was well known in the court” (Malory 451, emphasis added). Sir Pynel, whose cousin died at the hands of Sir Gawain, wanted to avenge him and so he poisoned the apples before the feast commenced. When the meat course was over however, it was Sir Patrise, “who feeling heated with the wine, first reached for an apple, ate it, and died” (451, emphasis added). As in Beowulf, the space which is supposed to house festivities and goodwill, turns to a space of “horror” (Malory 451). In the case of Malory’s narrative in ‘The Book of Sr Launcely and Queen Gwynevere’, it is not the space which becomes a stage for the horrific death of Sir Patrise, but it is the food itself which becomes the agent of horror.
Due to the shameful feast of queen Gwynevere, a “battle shall take place fifteen days from now in the meadow that lies outside Winchester. God defend the right; and if no knight come forward to champion the queen, she shall burn at the stake” (Malory 452). The repercussions of the apples in the narrative go beyond the death of Sir Patrise, threatening with a bloody battle, failing which the queen will lose her life in the flames at the stake. The apples become a gastronomic interjection associated with violence. It becomes the catalyst that drives the narrative with its sweetness and its poison, killing off characters and sparking a tournament which takes place at the end of the narrative. Food in this case is a catalyst for death.

Dante's Inferno

In The Divine Comedy Dante is taken to Inferno, Purgatory and Paradise by the Roman poet Virgil himself. During Dante’s encounter with Inferno, he finds that there are nine circles in hell, each defined by a particular sin or group of sins. Each circle is populated by historical figures who are guilty of some particular category of sin, with one of the earliest sins to be introduced by Virgil being the circle that is associated with the sin of food.

In Canto VI Dante and Virgil descend into the third circle of hell, the circle of gluttony. There they experience eternal and tremendous rain, hail and snow. Ciacco, a character trapped in this circle of hell, states that he is “battered by this rain”, “for the pernicious sin of gluttony” (30). Emphasis is placed on food consumption when the three-headed dog, Cerberus, who guards the third circle is depicted with “opened” “mouths”, “belly large” and showing “tusks” (29) as well as “gnaw[ing]” and “devour[ing]” his food (30). These physical attributes of Cerberus portray a grotesque representation of gluttony. The sin of excessive eating and drinking as defined by Shipley earlier in the chapter is afforded a monstrous quality also evoking images of violence and destruction. However, I want to look at another quality which is ascribed to gluttony, namely its relationship with lust.

From the old scriptures such as the organising of The Seven Deadly Sins by Gregory the Great, one finds that gluttony holds a very close relationship with lust. Dante follows the hierarchy of sin in his Inferno by positioning the circles which represent particular sins in the same order in which Gregory the Great categorised them in his writings. Before gluttony comes lust.

In Inferno’s Canto V Dante describes the second circle of hell where he encounters mythical characters and historic figures associated with lusty and sexual energy (the circle just before he descends to the circle of gluttony): “Semiramis”, “Cleopatra the voluptuous”, “Helen”, “Paris”, “Tristan” and “Dido” (26). In conversation with a character called Francesca, who ended up in the second circle of hell due to her adulterous relationship with Paolo, Dante learned that it was the “delight of Lancelot” (28) that caused the weeping and agony of the souls present. By mentioning Lancelot, Francesca evokes the canonical medieval tale of
adultery committed by queen Gwynevere and Sir Lancelot, an adultery between the queen and the knight that was so destructive that it brought down the legendary Camelot.

By positioning lust and gluttony consecutively in the domains of hell, Dante recognises that these two sins or actions as closely related to each other. One can once again rationalise this medieval link between lust and gluttony by identifying a lack of temperance when it comes to desire.

Boccaccio’s Decameron

The link between lust and gluttony through strategic positioning in medieval literature, bears repeating: in Boccaccio’s Decameron one finds in the very first story of day one that Ser Ciappelletto’s confessions to the Holy Father are also in an order which links food and sex closely. The father asks Ser Ciappelletto whether he has ever “committed the sin of lust with a woman” (26). After Ser Ciappelletto’s false confession, the father immediately asks if he had “displeased God by the sin of gluttony” (27). Ser Ciappelletto’s confessions are all mocking and untrue – however, the tale still echoes the implemented religious structures of the fourteenth century. Of the seven deadly sins, lust and gluttony are quite important since they are always mentioned and ranked top of the seven in classic medieval texts. It creates the impression that these two sins unleash a spiral effect into the depths of the other sins (as found in Dante’s Inferno). This spiral effect is unlocked because both food and sex suggest actions that require containment and temperance for physical and spiritual health. If this containment and temperance fail, physical and spiritual health are disrupted, thus opening other doorways to spiritual downfall which become easily manifested in the other deadly sins. Both Boccaccio and Dante (pre-Chaucer) illustrate the universality of the closeness between the sins of food and sex. As Chaucer reflects on medieval ideological truths and realities, these close relationships between food and sex are also weaved into the writings of the English poet.

Rabelais’ Gargantua and Pantagruel

Francios Rabelais wrote Gargantua and Pantagruel in the form of five novels. The narrative tells stories of the giant Gargantua and his son Pantagruel with divergent insights, from why the sea is salty, to how to cook a pear in red wine. Although the language is crude and vulgar, Rabelais’ writing was at times drawn from scholarly knowledge and canonical texts. In chapter thirteen of the first novel, Gargantua gives the Monk a banquet at which much conversation occurs. At the table, the guests discuss the manner in which food should be cooked: “When meat is red, that shows it’s undercooked, except for the lobster and crayfish, because they turn red when they’re cooked” (Rabelais 91). They also talk about the efficacy of rabbit legs as a cure for gout – the type of remedy found in humoral theory – however, according to Gargantua not even Aristotle will be able to answer the monk’s question about why a girl’s thighs are always nice and cool. At this point one finds classical rhetoric
presented in a mocking and humoristic manner. This is exactly what Rabelais does: he creates a crude and vulgar farce by degrading the official structures of philosophy, society and religion.

Mikhail Bakhtin’s development of the theory of the Carnivalesque will be elaborated on in the coming section of this thesis, after a further discussion of the banquet of Gargantua. When the Monk sits down at the banquet table, Gargantua tells the Monk “those robes are just a heavy weight on your shoulder. Take them off” (Rabelais 91). After the Monk mockingly protests that there is a whole chapter in the *statutis ordinis* which will disapprove, Gargantua leaves him in peace with the arrangement that he does take his “habit” off (91). The banquet table thus becomes a space where officialdom is challenged and where characters such as the Monk can take a break from his monastic role despite the fact that he is still wearing his robes. The actions of Rabelais’ monk reiterate the behaviour of Chaucer’s Monk who despite his monastic vows still enjoys indulging in the finer culinary aspects.

Theory

**Bahktin’s Carnivalesque and The Canterbury Tales**

In *Rabelais and his World*, Bakhtin stipulates in his introduction that there are two major manifestations within medieval festive and carnivalesque representations, namely folk culture humour and comic imagery. Bakhtin’s outline of these manifestations is important to consider when exploring food and feasts in medieval culture, since it provides a theoretical model for appraising human behaviour in the spheres of the carnivalesque and feasting. This is especially important when it comes to medieval humans’ relationship to food. Bakhtin divides folk culture humour into three sub-categories: *ritual spectacles*, *comic verbal compositions* and *various genres of Billingsgate* (5). These categories are examined in turn below. In Bakhtin’s discussions of comic imagery, he focusses on a variety of images of the grotesque. However, I will be only working with his arguments on *grotesque realism* because it is the theory most relevant to my study.

Folk Culture Humour

The first manifestation which Bahktin identifies in Rabelais is folk culture humour. According to Bakhtin, “folk festivities of the carnival type, the comic rites and cults, the clowns and fools, giants, dwarfs and jugglers [and] the vast and manifold literature of parody” (4) has the common style of folk culture humour in common, despite their variety. The first distinct form of folk culture humour is Ritual Spectacle. It is important to note that
the word ritual within this description allude to carnival ritual, which is based on laughter and completely free of religious rhetoric and dogma (Bakhtin 7).

The freedom from officialdom is based on laughter. Bakhtin argues that laughter frees carnival rituals from “all religious and ecclesiastic dogmatism, from all mysticism and piety. They are also completely deprived of the character of magic and prayer; they do not command nor do they ask for anything” (7). Laughter thus becomes a powerful weapon which deconstructs a hierarchy of class and religious order, thereby creating an almost blasphemous liminal space.

Laughter is present in the greater part of The Canterbury Tales. Chaucer is a tongue-in-cheek poet who makes use of irony, comic vision and satire. All of these literary devices evoke laughter and in the world of the characters, shatter their pretence and piety. The effect of Chaucer’s styles and humouristic intent in The Canterbury Tales, specifically as they are related to a supposed religious pilgrimage, echoes the intent of the parodia sacra – a humorous Christian orientated Latin literature that came into being and was tolerated and preserved by the Church and under the auspices of “Paschal laughter” or “Christmas laughter” (Bakhtin 14). Bakhtin argues that the scope of this particular literature is almost limitless, but it is also the most peculiar and least understood in all Medieval literature. These parodies are “animal, jesting, roguish, foolish; they deal with heroic deeds...epic heroes,...knightly tales” and different genres of the mock rhetoric such as carnivalesque debates, comic dialogues and euloges. (15) Carnivalesque humour is also reflected in the fabliaux. (15) All of these observations made by Bakhtin about the Sacred Parodies are found in Chaucer’s style and narration in The Canterbury Tales. As noted earlier, Cawley’s introduction to The Canterbury Tales claim that the text holds chivalric romance, fabliaux, satire and beastly fable, amongst others. Stylistically, Chaucer is very aware of laughter and the power thereof in his writing.

One of the devices that evokes laughter is speech – strategic use of language through the utterance of a character. Bakhtin mentions The Culture of Folk Humour as sub-manifestation of Folk Culture. This specifically focuses on the “medieval and Renaissance familiar speech in the market place” (15). As mentioned before by Bakhtin, a market place acquires a carnivalesque atmosphere: there is a “temporal suspension of all hierarchical distinctions and barriers among men” and this leads to new types of communication and forms of speech which is more relaxed. (15- 16) In such atmospheres, “abusive words are used affectionately and mutual mockery is permitted” (Bakhtin 16).

There are very particular functionalities embedded in such a use of abusive language. Bakhtin claims that abusive expression was used in a special genre of billingsgate. (16) The word billingsgate holds linguistic and contextual value for its purpose in the carnivalesque: in dictionaries it is expressed as foul, abusive, violent, vulgar and obscene – but it is also the name of the largest fish market in London on the North bank of the river Thames. It thus becomes a lexical manifestation where space, place and language intersect in a creative and cultural manner. The language used in such a genre had the functions of magic and
incantation – it had the power to mock deities and then revive it once more (Bakhtin 16). The use of ambivalent abusive language determines the speech of carnivalesque communication.

In *The Canterbury Tales* the characters’ language is at times mocking and abusive. The Miller and the Reeve make use of their tales to mock each other, casting each other as the victim in a tale of cuckolding. After *The Miller’s Tale*, the Reeve responds in his Prologue:

‘So theek,’ quod he, ‘ful wel koude I thee quite

With bleryng of a proud milleres ye,

If that me liste speke of ribaudye.

(Chaucer 3864-3866)

The conversational and reciprocal mocking between the characters in the presence of the other pilgrims, defines the company of the pilgrimage as a billingsgate atmosphere. The social diversity in the make-up of the company reveals the same dynamics as a market place – a space where the hierarchy of status, occupation and religious dogma are challenged and overthrown. Through humour and laughter in terms of speech, style and narrative, *The Canterbury Tales* does not only hold elements of the carnival, but the text itself becomes Carnivalesque.

In a space of carnival, food also surfaces most of the time. At feasts, *banquets* were held for the sake of laughter and accompanied by mysteries and soties (short satirical plays). A carnival atmosphere reigned for days when such rituals were present (Bakhtin 5). With the presence of food in carnival, human behaviour is usually challenged much more regarding its inhibitions and social constraints. The possibility of consuming food and drink without the restrictions of officialdom and formality stages an opportunity for humans to return to more primal and bestial behaviour when they eat or drink without heeding any religious and social structures. Such behaviour at the banquet tables steers one to recognise a duality within the world and human existence during periods where the carnival atmosphere is present. The theme of food and feasting is ever present in *The Canterbury Tales*. One finds that the host Harry Baily offers a free meal for the pilgrim who tells the best tale and that drink and taverns are introduced in the grand narrative of the text. From the starting point, food and drink are incorporated to bring an element of non-officialdom and duality into the narrative.

The carnival atmosphere offers “a completely different, nonofficial, extra-ecclesiastical and extrapolitical view of the world, of humankind and of human relations; they build a *second world and second life outside officialdom*” (Bakhtin 6). Bakhtin further states that “[i]f we fail to take into consideration this two-world condition, neither medieval culture consciousness, nor the culture of the Renaissance can be understood” (6). It is thus important to adopt a lens which immediately recognised dual human behaviour when reading Chaucer. There needs to be a constant separation between the official qualities of a character and the realistic representation of his/her behaviour. This distinction can be analysed by critically looking at the characters’ food, their drinking and their eating habits. If one thinks back on the Monk previously discussed, his supposed lifestyle according to the doctrine of St
Augustine is very different from the reality of his culinary practices. The character presents him as belonging to the world of officialdom, but then deconstructs it completely by describing carnivalesque behaviour such as the excessive food consumption and the savouring of delicacies such as swan. In the case of the Monk, there is no actual feast or carnival but the qualities and the function of the carnivalesque still surface. As noted earlier, the carnivalesque surfaces in the presence of laughter (which *The Canterbury Tales* does contain); however, it does not always occur in the presence of food or a feast, for that matter.

It is important to remember that an abundance of food in the form of a feasting banquet can be present in within the carnivalesque, but that the carnivalesque’s theoretical function is not necessarily present at a feast or banquet. Whenever a feast or banquet obtains official status, it loses the element of laughter and the ability to deconstruct as found in the carnivalesque. Bahktin explains, “the official feast asserted all that was stable, unchanging and perennial: the existing hierarchy, the existing religious, political and moral values, norms, and prohibitions” (9). This theory can be put to the test using an historic account of food presented at a banquet. In Robert Appelbaum’s *Aguecheek’s Beef, Belch’s Hiccup and Other Gastronomic Interjections*, he explores whether, in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, it is plausible that the leftovers from Hamlet’s father’s funeral could be used for his mother’s wedding. In this exploration Appelbaum cites Historian Christopher Daniell who re-created a surviving record of an early sixteenth century funeral banquet:

> On the day of the burial…bread and cheese were given to the poor men, and the priests and gentlemen were give lamb, veal, roasted mutton and two chickens in a dish. […] Dinner was a much more elaborate affair…The poor… received “umbils” (that is, offal) of beef, roasted veal in a dish and roasted pork. The richer people and priests had two courses. The first course was a potage of capons, mutton, geese and “custard”. The second course included a potage of broth, capons, lamb, pig, veal, roasted pigeons, baked rabbits, pheasants and gelie [either chicken or aspic]. A list of necessary spices was also included, including saffron, pepper, cloves, mace, sugar, raisins, currents, dates, ginger and almonds.

(18 – 19)

The differentiation between the “richer people and priests” and the “poor men” shows that in the official sphere of the feasts the class hierarchy or religious structures are not challenged or overthrown. As indicated by the outlines of the banquet, it is food that indicates this class and religious segregation. I do not assume that food was the only prominent feature to indicate class and religious hierarchy at the festive table, but it is definitely a prominent factor in such a cultural reconstruction. The disparity of foods allocated to the distinct economical classes serves as an indication of the difference in physical consumption at that time and place, as well as pointing to a segregation of life styles. The poor who only have cheese and bread on the burial day, in comparison to the meats served to the gentlemen and priests, highlights the idea of simple sustainability in comparison with more elaborate consumption. When the poor folk eventually do receive (mundane) meat on the second day’s dinner, the
richer folk are treated to luxurious spices such as saffron, pepper, cloves and ginger which reveals a meal transcending mere biological functionality.

Unlike the funeral and wedding feasts in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, food and its consumption in Chaucer can be read in the light of the carnivalesque. *The Canterbury Tales* reveals itself to be a text that in its nature deconstructs the officialdom of authority, religious dogma and social constructs. Food is thus charged with a function to define, deconstruct and degrade. In order to understand this functionality better, one needs to look at various actions and images associated with food and eating in Bakhtin’s discussion on Comic Imagery.

**Comic Imagery: Grotesque Realism**

In Rabelais’ work, Bakhtin identifies that the material body principle is the image of the human body related to food, drink, defecation and sex. Victor Hugo describes Rabelais as a poet of “the flesh” and “the belly” (Bahktin 17). Images of the material bodily principle in the work of Rabelais and other Renaissance writers such as Boccaccio, Shakespeare and Cervantes is known as grotesque realism (Bahktin 17). As noted before, I do not regard Chaucer as a distinctively Renaissance writer, but he was indeed influenced by Italian writers such as Boccaccio and thus his work does take on some these material bodily principles, which are important in the literary analysis of *The Canterbury Tales*.

All popular festive and utopian aspects in Rabelais’ writing, and thus his world, are embedded with the material body as a manifestation of grotesque realism. “The material bodily principle is a triumphant and festive principle, it is a banquet for all the world” (Bahktin 19, emphasis added). Bahktin further states that it is very important to note that at these banquets the essential principle of grotesque realism is degradation. Degradation is “the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract; it is a transfer to the material level, of the sphere of earth and body in their indissoluble unity” (Bahktin 19-20).

Comedy in the form of dialogue and performance also has this particular function of degradation. Bakhtin mentions a dialogue between the clown Morolf and Solomon, which was very popular in the Middle Ages: “Solomon's sententious pronouncements are contrasted to the flippant and debasing dictums of the clown, who brings the conversation down to a strongly emphasized level of food, drink, digestion and sexual life” (20). Parody within text, speech and performance joined with grotesque realism is what according to Bakhtin turns the subject into flesh. (20)

Degradation can also be explained as a process of movement (from up to down), especially when it comes to manifestations of the flesh, food and drink. In grotesque realism drawn from the literature of Rabelais, Bakhtin identifies a topography existing on an upwards and downwards scale. In the material body the upward would be resembled by the face and head while the downward scale would be the belly and genitals. Degradation in such a sense would then mean coming down to earth—the contact with the earth that swallows up and gives birth
Bahktin describes the earth as “an element that devours, swallows up (the grave, the whom) and at the same time an element of birth, of renascence (the material breasts)” (Bahktin 21). Degradation usually sinks to the lower stratum of the body – the life of the belly and genitals which according to Bahktin is an area of “defecation and copulation” but also “pregnancy and rebirth” (21). Movement is also important in artistic expression of the grotesque. Bahktin claims that when looking at grotesque ornaments in art, it is never static, but rather expresses inner movement where one form leads into another. (32)

Degradation brings the repressed qualities from the lower bodily stratum to the surface. It replaces the purity of the upper bodily stratum with the lurking and repressive aspects which it conceals. The lower bodily stratum, “the zone in which conception and new birth take place” (21), reveals another self (or existence) within a subject. With the role of degradation, grotesque realism concerns itself with double existences. The double existence affords qualities of creation and destruction within a subject – the two selves in the words of St. Augustine where one aims for spiritual enrichment and the other for bodily satisfaction.

The image of “life and death, excrement, and food” are all drawn together and tied in one grotesque knot” (Bahktin 163). Bahktin explains an aspect of this grotesque knot by remarking on Cervante’s character, Sancho’s, physical appearance. Sacho Panza (Panza translating to “belly”) is Don Quixote’s trusted companion and sidekick. Despite Sancho’s virtuous character traits (in context of the narrative), his bodily traits such as his chubby build and potbelly sets him on the “absolute lower level of grotesque realism” (22). The depth of Sancho’s character is acknowledged, but the gluttonous traits revealed by his build sheds light on his private individual nature with “a goal of egotistic lust and possession” (23 emphasis added). Bahktin states that in such a case there is a “peculiar crisis of splitting” when the images of bodily life leads a double existence. (22)

The grotesque also has the ability to portray images of simplistic value into representations of grandeur and excess. With reference to Cervantes’s Don Quixote, Bahktin steers grotesque realism away from the “gay principle of regeneration” (22) into carnivalesque images where kitchens and banquets are turned in to battlefields. Bahktin notes that in Cervantes’s images of “windmills (giants), inns (castles), flocks of rams and sheep (armies and knights), innkeepers (lord of the castle), prostitutes (noble Ladies) and so forth” kitchen utensils and shaving bowls turns into arms and helmets, and “wine into blood” (22). In such a manner, the grotesque intersects something as simplistic as the gastronomic with the violent and the absurd. This observation is very important when reading medieval and early Renaissance literature, for battles and victories are usually either preceded by or concluded with a banquet or feast. Grotesque realism in this regard expands the basic engagement with food into the spectacle of battle. Examples of this include Hereot in Beowulf, numerous feasts in Arthurian myth, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight and various Middle English chronicles.

The grotesque images broadened and deepened its dimensions drawing on the cycles of social and historic phenomena: “Their relation to changing time and their ambivalence become the means for the artistic and ideological expression of a mighty awareness of history and historic change” (Bahktin 25). The images thus become ambivalent and contradictory. This is
exactly the case in Chaucer’s constructions and expressions in *The Canterbury Tales*. The portraits of the characters and their tales become contradictory and ambivalent through their innuendo of a dual existence in their official lives and their actual lives. While in a classical sense grotesque images remain “ugly, monstrous and hideous” the later historical portrayals such as those found in Chaucer gain qualities of “copulation, pregnancy, birth, growth, old age, disintegration and dismemberment” (Bakhtin 25).

Though the grotesque illuminates the duality and ambivalence in the word, it is not separate from the rest of the world. It is not a closed or a completed unit. It outgrows itself and constantly transgresses its own limits. Bakhtin emphasises this notion in his argument by stating that the stress is on the body parts which are open for the world to enter or to emerge from: open mouth, genital organs, breasts, phallus, potbelly and nose. (26) “The body discloses its essence as a principle of growth which exceeds its own limits in copulation, pregnancy, child-birth, throes of death, eating, drinking and defecation” (Bahktin 26). The unfinished and open body becomes one with the world: “it is blended with the world, with animals, with objects...it is cosmic [and] represents the entire material bodily world in all its elements” (Bahktin 26).

In defining grotesque realism, Bakhtin always has his images underpinned by humour and the comic. All images of the grotesque have the function of evoking laughter. However, Bakhtin also mentions that Hegel has a different opinion that also needs to be entertained:

Hegel is only concerned with the archaic grotesque which he defines as the expression of the preclassic and prephilosophic condition of the spirit. Relying mostly on archaic Indian forms, Hegel defines grotesque by three traits: the fusion of different natural spheres, immeasurable and exaggerated dimensions, and the multiplication of different members and organs of the human body (hands, feet and eyes of Indian gods). Hegel completely ignores the role of the comic in the structure of the grotesque and indeed examines the grotesque quite independently from the comic.

(Bakhtin 44)

With this acknowledgement and the criteria supplied by Hegel, one can regard images or narrative portrayals isolated from the comic as a manifestation of the grotesque. However, such portrayals will not necessarily be associated with the carnivalesque since the notion of carnival can only be driven by laughter.

**Edward Said’s Orientalism**

Chaucer writes about the Orient in *The Canterbury Tales*. In *The Man of Law’s Tale* one encounters the Sultan and evil Sultaness in Syria. In *The Squire’s Tale* one meets the historic figure of Genghis Khan. From historic documents we know for a fact that Chaucer never travelled to the near or far East. He thus has no first-hand reference of the Orient. In Edward Said’s *Orientalism*, Said criticises writers who write on the Orient based on speculation and
secondary information. Said states that every writer on the Orient relies on some “precedent” or “previous knowledge” of the Orient and thus “speak[s] on its behalf” (20). By doing so a subjective, and at many times untrue, representation of the Orient is given to the readers.

Though Chaucer’s reference to the Orient is perhaps based on a precedent or some previous knowledge, he holds the Orient up as a carnivalesque mirror image of the duality and ambivalence of human behaviour that he recognises in his own context. According to Said, the Orient is a special place in Europe’s experience. In fact, “European culture gained its strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self” (Said 3). With such a relationship, the Orient represents Europe’s “Other” in terms of culture, religion and geography. It becomes what the West is not, bearing associations with despotism, splendour, cruelty and sensuality. (Said 4) Considering Chaucer’s strategic and stylised use of satire and irony, one also needs to entertain the idea that he deliberately uses a space with such connotations to bring across the “underground self” of the medieval Western society.

1.6) Chapter Outline

In the second chapter, spiritual and bodily natures and their relationship with gastronomic and dietary issues will be discussed by looking at the Portraits of the Franklin, the Physician, and the Prioress. The Nun Priest’s Tale will be looked at as well as the Wife of Bath’s Prologue.

Chapter three will focus on the intersection between sex and the gastronomic. By using this intersection as a lens when looking at The Man of Law’s Portrait and Tale, The Reeve’s Portrait and Tale as well as The Cook’s Portrait and Tale one finds that the carnivalesque is present in day to day human behaviour and not only in a space of carnival.

The last analytical chapter (Chapter four) will explore the double existence within chivalry by means of the grotesque. This will be conducted by looking at in the ways that the gastronomic and the violent intersect in Beowulf, Gargantua and Pantagruel as well as Le Mort d’Arthur. An exploration of the culinary within chivalry will follow after which these observations (and the observations found in the other medieval texts) will serve as points of reference to explore the double existence of violence and food in the historical as well as the literary contexts of The Knight’s Portrait, The Squire’s Portrait, The Miller’s Portrait and a small extract from The Miller’s Tale.

Chapter five is the concluding chapter.
2.1 Nature and Gastronomic Balance in Body and Soul

In medieval times, the term *nature* presented a complex conglomeration of meanings. The Anglo-Saxon lexical manifestation for nature is *gecynd* – which according to the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) has a far wider meaning than just the idea of the natural environment: *Gecynd* is a noun which suggests the natural order according to which society is structured; it places the individual in a specific social hierarchy, an order of things that contributes to the smooth running of society as well as working to the benefit of the individual. The word is also closely related to “kin”, adding another dimension to it — “of his own kind” or “by its own nature” (OED). Nature in the early middle ages was a concept which focused on the self and the relationship with one’s environment. This conceptual understanding of nature evolved further with the Norman invasion in 1066 A.D.

The Norman invasion brought a new language to the shores of England and through the mutual influence on each other a whole new lexicon developed, bringing the changes that led to the development of Middle English. From the French, the medieval English lexis adopted another lexical entity associated with nature – *natwre, natour, natvre, natur* and *nater* (OED), derived from the Latin word *nātūra* which means “birth, constitution, character, the genitals, the creative power governing the world, the physical world [and] the natural course of things” (OED). The various connotations of the word *nātūra* bring to light a whole network of meanings and ideas which are embedded in the lexical stem. The OED shows that the attributes associated with the Latin stem of the word remained and even expanded with the uses of the term *nature* in Middle English. These meanings include “the physical powers
of a person”, “semen”, “menstrual discharge”, “sexual desire” and “the vital functions of the human body as requiring sustenance, esp. nourishment” (emphasis added).

From the Anglo-Saxon gecynd and the Latin nātūra one finds that linguistically the medieval perception of nature refers to human existence itself in all its facets (such as functionality, health and ability), encompassing social as well as natural environments. This point can be explored from a cultural-historical viewpoint.

In his book *The Medieval Discovery of Nature*, Steven Epstein foregrounds the importance of the bodily self in medieval society’s perception of nature. He suggests that Nature was to medieval man, as seen in the use of the lexical entity mentioned earlier, “first and foremost themselves, their bodies, what they were, and what it meant to be [i]here” (xi). Epstein’s characterisation of medieval humanity suggests a sense of consciousness and self-evaluation. The main emphasis is on the maintenance of the body, rather than on the ecology that sustains the body. Humanity approaches the preservation of the body from an intellectual perspective, rather than from an instinctual one.

If medieval humanity’s conceptualisation of nature is concerned with the self and the relationships between the self and his/her surroundings, one needs to revisit the way in which people approached the issue of attaining an optimal existence. As noted in the Introduction, optimal existence can be obtained through a balanced body and soul, if one thinks in terms of Hippocrates, Plato, Augustine and Paul the apostle. This balance can be achieved through diet and temperance of desire. Thus, “nature” or the “natural state” of man’s body and soul is dependent on a healthy diet and healthy interaction with other people. Chaucer’s character construction challenges these medieval perceptions. He uses the consumption of food in various manners to break the interdependencies between the bodily and spiritual natures as well as revealing the true natures of the human body and spirit.

In the next two sections of this chapter, food as a literary interjection will be used to explore, challenge, reveal and analyse the various natures of the characters on the pilgrimage. In the first section the portrayals of the Franklin and the Physician will be used to challenge the interdependent relationship which, according to medieval church authorities, exists between the body and the soul. One finds that both these characters enjoy good bodily health by following the rhetoric of ancient and contemporary medical authorities, but fail to maintain a temperate and contained spiritual self. It will also be argued that Chaucer’s Franklin is a representative of the gentry and governing structures in general and that the discussion about food thus becomes a means of revealing the nature of the medieval English upper-class. In the third section of this chapter, it will be argued that the cock Chauntecleer from “The Nun’s Priest’s Tale” can be read as an allegorical representation of clerical authorities to show that, sadly, it is within the church itself that the consumption of food shows the interdependency of gluttony and greed; resulting in defilement of body and soul. The Prioress’ portrait will be discussed to illustrate how a description of eating can be used as a device to conceal true spiritual nature and character. Lastly, the Wife of Bath uses barley bread as an analogy in her sermon joyeux to justify her sexually promiscuous nature.
2.2 Paradox of the Bodily and Spiritual Natures within Chaucer’s Portrayals of the Franklin and the Physician

Chaucer writes with awareness of the relationship between diet and bodily and spiritual health. In the portraits of the Franklin and the Physician, Chaucer’s references to food in relation to the body and nature draws on the medical school of thought influenced by Hippocrates, Galen and other medical writers who were influential in the Middle Ages. The Franklin and Physician echo the voices of ancient authorities about healthy eating habits and both of them are physically healthy and well-formed. On the other hand, from a religious perspective, these two characters’ spiritual natures are defiled. Chaucer challenges the church doctrine which suggests that a parallel relationship exists between bodily and spiritual natures – as found in the Confessions of St Augustine as well as Biblical texts (i.e. 1 Corinth 6 as discussed in the Introduction).

The Franklin’s Portrait

Chaucer’s Franklin is of good health, due to his economic means. These deductions are made by the discussion of food and eating habits of the Franklin in the Franklin’s Portrait. In order to understand the culinary interjections that Chaucer inserts in the portrayal of the Franklin in terms of class and economic position, one must first determine the status of the Franklin. The Franklin’s portrait concludes with a specific mentioning of his association with the government and the gentry, which affords him particular economic and social status:

At sessiouns ther was he lord and sire;
Ful ofte tyme he was knyght of the shire.
An anlaas and a gipser al of silk
Heeng at his gridel, whit as morne milk.
A shirreve hadde he been, and a countour.

(Chaucer 355-359)

From the last few lines from the Franklin’s portrait in The General Prologue one notes that the Franklin is a wealthy man and a government representative. The white silk purse that hangs from his waist is a deliberate representation of his wealth. His Franklin’s status is also brought into his representation as he is a landowner who presides over justice and peace. The deliberate details that the Franklin is “knyght of the shire” (356), “shirreve” and “countour” (359) link the Franklin’s wealth to a very specific economic class. Cawley (Chaucer 11) argues that the choice of words suggests that the Franklin is not only an auditor, but also a
high administrative officer representing the royal authority in the county; in representing the King, he furthermore gives an indication of the lifestyles enjoyed by royalty and the upper echelons of the state and the Church. It is important to keep this in mind when looking at his diet: this clearly shows an affiliation with the crown and upper administrative gentry and thus to an extent becomes a representation of it.

As already briefly mentioned in the Introduction, Joseph Allen Bryant’s article, “The Diet of Chaucer’s Franklin” (1948), the Franklin’s portrait is explored in relation to the voices of medical authorities during and before the medieval period. According to Bryant, the Franklin complies with the regulations of ancient authorities in terms of diet and this proves beneficial to his health and bodily nature. The Franklin’s Portrait in The General Prologue portrays the Franklin as a hospitable man of a mature age with a “berd” as “[w]hit” as a “dayesye” (Chaucer 332) and a “sangwyn” “complexion” (Chaucer 333). The sanguine complexion also gives insight to the temperament of the Franklyn, mirroring the categories of humoral theory. The 13th century didactic poem, “Regimen sanitatis Salerni”, describes such a complexion as belonging to a “happy-go-lucky” temperament. It states that such a man is inclined to fatness, loves women, likes pleasant tales, mirth, music and is “prone to laughter” (Appelbaum 47). The Franklin is further defined by his culinary preferences – how he loved his “sop in wyn” (Chaucer 334) in the mornings. Because he has an ample and varied diet, the Franklin lives a happy and tranquil life in good health. Bryant points out that according to the Franklin’s physical description (the white beard) he must be well into his fifties, which was an advanced age in Chaucer’s time. Still, he has the physique and health to travel on a pilgrimage from London to Canterbury. (Bryant 318)

However, when it comes to his culinary habits the Franklin’s spiritual and religious life become questionable. Despite Bryant’s praise of the Franklin’s diet and the positive impact that it has on his bodily health, Chaucer (336) mentions that the Franklin is a son of Epicurus which evokes a whole other interpretation of the Franklin’s food habits. Epicurus advocated that pleasure and delights should be enjoyed in abundance and excess, totally contrary to the medieval worldview. Where philosophers such as Plato, Augustine and Biblical writings advise one to guard against abundance of pleasure and desire if the aim is spiritual health and inner tranquillity, Epicurus suggests the opposite. In a letter to Menoeceus, Epicurus shares his insights with regards to bodily heath, spiritual tranquillity and pleasure:

He who has a clear and certain understanding of these things will direct every preference and aversion toward securing health of body and tranquillity of mind, seeing that this is the sum and end of a blessed life. For the end of all our actions is to be free from pain and fear, and, when once we have attained all this, the tempest of the soul is laid; seeing that the living creature has no need to go in search of something that is lacking, nor to look for anything else by which the good of the soul and of the body will be fulfilled. When we are pained because of the absence of pleasure, then, and then only, do we feel the need of pleasure. Wherefore we call pleasure the alpha and omega of a blessed life.

(Epicurus Online, emphasis added)
The rhetoric and thought of a *blessed life* totally negate the basic tenets of spiritual and religious thinking in medieval life. Where Plato warns the reader in his *Meno* against the harm and destruction of desire which is not virtuous, Epicurus advocates embracing it. His apparent resistance to securing bodily health and tranquility of mind goes against the grain of religious dogma as found in 1 Corinthians 6: 19-20 where the body must be kept healthy in order to house a healthy soul. The strategic interjection of the name of Epicurus and thus his rhetoric in the Franklin’s portrait, will cause doubt about the Franklin’s purity of soul from a medieval dogmatic perspective. In fact, Chaucer states that the Franklin’s eating habits were for pure delight: [he] heeld opioun that pleyen delit/ Was verray felicitie parfit” (Chaucer 337-338). The balanced and regulated diet which keeps the Franklin’s sanguine complexion becomes an indulgence of pleasure and excess. The Franklin’s culinary habits introduce spiritual defilement through excess and desire in spite of his bodily health and balance. The Franklin’s alienation from religious ways when it comes to food is also to be seen in his securing and cultivation of food sources.

The Franklin keeps his fishponds and pens well stocked (349-350), however he also makes use of the seasons to maximise his food supply. Chaucer explicitly states that the Franklin’s food changes with the seasons:

> It snewed in his hous of mete and drynke,
> Of alle deyntees that men koude thynke.
> After the sondry sesons of the yeer,
> So changed his mete and his soper.

(Chaucer 345 - 348)

In the context of the description of the Franklin, Bryant argues that the Franklin did not have to store his food from one season to the next (for his ponds and pens are always full) and thus the rotation of diet was represented as a strategy for sustained abundance. By mentioning the change in “mete and his sope”, Chaucer introduces another ancient authority, however unorthodox, when it comes to the representation of food – Aristotle. Bryant states that the rotational diet was constructed in light of the *Secreta Secretorum*, a pseudoepigraphical letter from Aristotle to Alexander the Great, that was a popular text in the 14th century, and of which Chaucer must have been aware.

The *Secreta Secretorum* recommends that diet should change according to seasons: “In veer, diet in tempure, In heruste, hote metis and moisti, in wyntyr, gret diet hote and drye, In somer suttill diet, cold and moysty” (Bryant 320). The author of *Secreta Secretorum* recommends a different diet for each of the four seasons with the qualities of the diet in accordance with the conditions of the seasons. In spring (*veer*) the food which needs to be taken in should be moderate; a season with moderate conditions (not too hot and not too cold) requires moderate gastronomic sustenance. Autumn (*heruste*) and winter require diets with hot meats and dishes against the cold seasons. In winter, especially, the dishes must be hot but dry, in complete
contrast to a cold and wet season. Summer with its dry and hot climate requires food which is cold and moist. These suggestions make one think of a combination of Asclepiades’ therapy for health and balance through diet (as mentioned by Pliny) and Hippocrates’ logic on humours: a balance of the elements (hot, cold, dry and wet) attained through diet. One can maintain that the *Secreta Secretorum* brings the body and nature into balance and harmony through gastronomic intake. Chaucer’s Franklin therefore has a diet inspired by the notion of a natural sense of balance to achieve optimum health.

However, by aligning the Franklin with the philosophical tradition of Aristotle, Chaucer once again positions the Franklin in contrast to Platonic and Christian thinking. Medieval authorities were sceptical of Aristotle’s rationalism since it had a very prominent naturalistic quality to it, rather than a spiritual and metaphysical one. Despite the unorthodoxy of the Franklin’s ways, there was a philosophical truth in it in terms of balance and bodily health since his beard is white and his health is good. The question then arises: why does Chaucer create a character so much at variance with medieval orthodoxy and so “blessed” in Epicurean terms with health and prosperity, but then refers to him as “Seint Julian” (Chaucer 340)?

In order to answer such question, one first needs to explore what Saint Julian signifies in medieval context. The canonical writings of the Catholic Church assist in such an exploration: Saint Julian was the patron saint of hotel-keepers, travellers and boatmen. Before he built his own tavern in aid of travellers and the poor, St. Julian was born to noble blood and hence lived in a castle. One day in the woods a hart which he hunted told him that he would one day kill his mother and father. The prophecy was fulfilled when St. Julian killed his parents in the main bed chamber of his castle without knowing that they were his parents. To atone, he dedicated his life to helping others by running a tavern with his wife. His sins were forgiven when he once allowed a leper to sleep in his bed and gave him something to eat; it turned out that the leper was a messenger from God, sent to test him. (Saint Julian Online)

The name “Seint Julian” which Chaucer affords the Franklin, is charged with Catholic and Platonic rhetoric of virtue, charity and doing the will of God. Although sinful at first, St. Julian was cleansed from his sins once he performed a selfless deed such as offering a leper the charity of food and hospitality, even going to the extent of giving up his own bed for the man. The association between food and St. Julian is thus an association of virtuousness and good deeds. It is charged with humility and purity of soul and yet is the name given to the questionable Franklin. There is thus a significant resonance of spiritual presence in equating the Franklin and St Julian. However, keeping in mind Aristotle’s rationale, there is a gigantic difference on a spiritual level in the Franklin’s Epicurean approach to food and his naturalistic manner of acquiring it. Chaucer sets up two irreconcilable dogmas in the portrayal of one character.

The Franklin enjoys life gastronomically and healthwise in spite of his failure to follow the dogmatic constraints of religious supremacies. His longevity is due to his adherence to the laws of the medieval concept of nature: nature in the ecological and climatological sense (i.e.
produce and seasons) and nature in the bodily sense (i.e. humoral balance) – but not in the spiritual sense of the word. By following his Epicurean tendencies as well as the natural ways advocated by Aristotle in pursuit of foods for his pleasure, the Franklin still lives out his days as a wealthy, healthy man with a sanguine complexion. This stands in stark contrast to Chaucer’s reference to Saint Julian, who left his castle, led a simple life and humbly served those in need. In this way, Chaucer subverts the hold of dogmatic religion and spirituality: in the case of the Franklin the naturalistic proves advantageous to quality as well as quantity of life.

The introduction of Saint Julian in the Franklin’s portrait also suggests a double existence in terms of the character’s real life and what he represents in medieval society. This can be explored by further looking at the gastronomic references the text. The Franklin follows the naturalistic approach suggested by Aristotle, in tandem with his own advantaged position in society, which enables him to secure expensive and excellent food. Despite all that nature produces, certain foods were permitted only to people of certain rank and status. If one looks at the following lines from a historical perspective, it is clear that Chaucer’s Franklin is deliberately characterised as a wealthy man by the food that he eats. How one acquired food in medieval England was status-orientated and held value in terms of class:

Ful many a fat partrich hadde he in muwe

And many a breem and many a luce in stewe.

(Chaucer 349 – 350)

Keeping birds in pens and fish in ponds was the optimum manner of ensuring fresh food for the table. In the modern 21st century agricultural terms the Franklin’s methods of ensuring food may seem very obvious, but in 14th century London it was quite a novel concept. Hammond states that fish ponds were not common at all and only very few “lucky” farmers possessed their own ponds. Legislation and laws regulated and differentiated food consumption along class lines. In Hammond’s historical account of food acquisition in the Middle Ages, it is found that only the nobility was allowed to hunt. Peasants for example were not allowed to eat doves for it was considered to be a delicacy. Fish traps for fresh water fish were also regulated by law inland while salt water fish were to be purchased from the coastal industries. Hence, despite the grand supply from nature, fish became a food source which was only accessible to the rich and powerful of the population in Chaucer’s England.

By mentioning the way the Franklin acquired his fish and birds, his character as a wealthy and fairly powerful man is established. Contextually the Franklin can be considered as the gastronomically privileged, acting for his own gain only. Once again Chaucer’s simile of Saint Julian suggests a deliberate tension between the supposed Christian role of someone with such resources and the actuality of the Franklin’s ways. There is no mention of the Franklin using wealth and his abundant food supply for any charity (such as Saint Julian) but only for his own social elevation. As noted earlier, peasants were by law not allowed to eat doves; however it was a popular dish in the houses of the gentry. Significantly, just before
Chaucer started working on *The Canterbury Tales*, the Peasant’s Revolt of 1381 occurred, which among other reasons was spurred on by socio-economic tensions. The historical context vividly presents a viewpoint of the Franklin’s ample food privileges, in a land defined and ruled by a rigorous class system. Considering the Franklin’s association with the royal authorities and governing structures of medieval England, I find that the construction of his character may be a critique on the institutions themselves that hold up idealised dogmas in terms of religion and spirituality.

The food and the ways of acquiring it in the Franklin’s world gain universality when the gentry and governing structures of medieval England are considered. Chaucer’s description of a spicy sauce leads to further exploration of the Franklin and the gentry which he represents:

Wo was his cook but if his sauce were
Poynaunt and sharp, and ready al his geere

(351-352)

A piquant and sharp sauce is the result of flavouring agents present in the preparation thereof. In Peter Ackroyd’s modern translation written in free style, he interprets the medieval words of Chaucer’s gourmet culinary manifestations such as “green sauce”, “pepper sauce”, “mint sauce”, “sugar” and “ginger” (13). Though this translation might not be literally accurate, one may make use of the imagination and make deductions in the way that Ackroyd does. Through Chaucer’s verse, Ackroyd gives us the scope for seeing imaginative dishes, as one traces the medieval spice routes and their offerings on the 14th century tables of the gentry by his description “Poynaunt and sharp”. Hammond’s account of the 14th century gentry’s culinary customs supports Ackroyd’s imaginative reading in a historical respect. On spices used by the gentry, Hammond writes:

Spices such as *ginger*, cloves and cinnamon, saffron and mustard were also purchased. They did not need to buy very much *pepper* since ½ lb of *pepper cloves* formed part of their original endowment. *Spices always formed part of the diet of gentry* and magnate households, presumably because they liked the flavour that these gave to food.

(65 emphasis added)

Ackroyd’s translation is accurate in his speculation of pepper and ginger as noted by Hammond and, according to Maggie Black, sugar as well. In this respect, the Franklin, as with other gentry in the 14th century, uses spices imported from the East. He thus not only makes use of the produce of his immediate land through agricultural cultivation (in other words being directly dependent on the earth and nature), but also reaches far beyond the borders of medieval England by telling of a spicy and piquant sauce. The quotidian descriptions point to the increasingly *globalised* character of the late medieval world and early development of merchant capitalism.
In medieval terms, when the government, church and gentry trade in and consume the produce of non-believers or heretics, they engage in so-called spiritual defilement. In N.J.G. Pound’s book *An Economic History of Medieval Europe*, one finds that the trade patterns and routes all came in contact with non-Christian countries. Goods found their way from the ports of “Aegean, Asia Minor, Syria and Egypt” and the commerce was largely in the hands of “Syrians and Jews” (Pounds 341). One also finds that other spices and sugar were imported from India, but was relayed through Damascus. (Pounds 394) The foods which ended up on the tables of the gentry, such as the Franklin, were seen by some as impure, since it came from non-Christian origins such as the domains of Hinduism and Islam. If one thinks back to Wallace’s argument in Chapter 1 with regards to the Monk and his fondness for dishes of swan it is suggested that he ingests the impurity which the swan represents by consuming it and thus adopts the impurity himself, then the same argument can be made with regards to consuming spices and their heretical origins.

By specifically mentioning the piquant and spicy sauce, Chaucer affiliates the Franklin and those he represents with the East and “heretical” cultures. By buying food of non-Christian origin and by ingesting it, the governing powers of medieval England as well as the gentry adopt the qualities associated with the Orient and in Said’s term “the underground self”. The grandeur found in the Franklin’s diet echoes the “splendour” (Said 4) which the West identifies in the East. Through culinary habits, the gentry and government turn against the dogma of the church which opposes the ways of the East.

Through the portrayal of the Franklin by discussing food and equating him to Epicurus and Saint Julian simultaneously, Chaucer highlights the inconsistency between the natures of the body and the spirit in medieval gentry. He sublimates the double standards of the gentry and governing powers that advocate a particular way of thinking and living, but fail to adhere to it themselves. Ideologically, Chaucer also critiques dogmatic spiritual approach regarding food, for the Franklin is in good health despite his spiritual defilement. By the strategic mentioning of food and what it represents, Chaucer unveils the divide between the spiritual and physical nature of the medieval English upper-class.

**The Physician’s Portrait**

The medieval physician was regarded as ungodly by society. In Muriel Bowden’s *A Commentary on The General Prologue to The Canterbury Tales*, Robinson points out that physicians were largely regarded as agnostic since their medicine was largely reliant on Muslim teachings. (207) Thus, when looking at Chaucer’s Doctor of Physic, one must regard him as an unorthodox character in terms of religious and spiritual dogma. Chaucer himself states that his Physician shares the “heretical” qualities of the stereotypical medieval Physician as described by Robinson by stating that “[h]is studies were litel on the Bible” (438).
However, though the Physician’s studies are “little” on the Bible, he does make use of “magyk natureel” (416) when treating his patients. This natural magic suggests that the Physician uses the natural elements and nature to treat those in need. Chaucer praises his skill in terms of medicine and surgery in the opening lines of the Physician’s Portrait:

In al this world ne was ther noon hym lik,

To speke of physic and of surgery,

(412-413)

Scholars have argued that this praise of the Physician’s skill presents a satirical portrayal of the character. Considering the bold statement that Chaucer makes that there is no other like him, such a reading is very plausible; however, one can also argue that in the light of the Physician’s practices as they are described further on in the tale, Chaucer’s statement might not be so farfetched. The Physician is well versed in all the components of medieval medicine; he is aware of the role played by astrology and astronomy in his treatment of his patients.

For he was grounded in astronomye.

He kepte his pacient a ful greet deel

In houres by his magyk natureel.

Wel koude he fortune the ascendant

Of his ymages of his pacient.

(Chaucer 414 – 418)

In the Middle Ages astronomy, the precursor of today’s astrology, featured prominently in the approach to and treatment of the ill. Aristotle established the idea that the universe was made out of the four elements: fire, water, earth and air. This later influenced the medical philosophies of Hippocrates and Galen, who explained illness in terms of humours. The same qualities are reflected in the zodiac – the twelve signs each hold the four qualities of the universe. Thus according to the illness of the patient in terms of humours – choleric (hot and dry), melancholic (cold and dry), sanguine (hot and moist) and phlegmatic (cold and moist) – the predisposition to disease and the most propitious moment for the cure was influenced by the reigning zodiac and the elements which it represents. (Bowden 205) Chaucer’s Physician represents a schooled man in terms of understanding the universe and its relationships to the nature of the body. Once again, the fact that he abides by the teachings of ancient philosophers (such as Aristotle) rather than following the religious teachings of the church, marginalises him as character in an orthodox medieval society.

Chaucer’s description of the Physician does not stop at a mere mention of his devotion to the hours of the zodiac, but he also refers to the effigies and images made for a patient’s benefit –
see lines 417 and 418 in quotation above. Professor Curry in Bowden explains Chaucer’s references to science and philosophy in lines 417 and 418.

[I]t is believed that all material objects fashioned by man received the impress of the constellation reigning at their completion, and that this impress remained with an object until the object was destroyed; astrological images, if formed in the right way at the right moment, were thought to be especially imbued with the powers of the stars, and so, applied to the sick, could be used to strengthen and weaken respectively favourable or unfavourable celestial influences.

(Bowden 206)

This science, according to which Chaucer’s Physician practises, is noted by Curry to be “the very cream of all other sciences and of philosophy” (Bowden 206). The historical insight into the ways of the Physician justifies the praise that he receives from Chaucer in the opening lines of the Portrait, namely that there is none other like him and reinforces the idea that they might not necessarily be satirical. If Chaucer praises the Physician’s use of those astronomically determined methods in alignment with Aristotelian empirical rationality, he thus supports the unorthodoxy of the Physician and his scientific approach that stands in such assertive contrast to the reigning religious views of medieval times. In the Franklin’s portrait, an Epicurean diet promotes a healthy lifestyle and sanguine complexion, despite the views held by religious authorities. Similarly the “heretical” methods used by the Physician, against the rules of accepted dogma, still secure the wellbeing of patients to such an extent that Chaucer regards him the best in his profession. Once again the idealistic expectations and constraints in the thinking of the late 14th century authorities are challenged by a character that excels in his profession and promotes human life, even if it is “unbiblical” in the social context of the time.

The Physician’s knowledge exceeds that of “astronomy”, for Chaucer explicitly describes the Physician’s intimate knowledge of humours and of the way he uses such knowledge in his occupation.

He knew the cause of everich maladye.

Were it of hoot, or cold, or moyste, or drye,

And were they engendered, and of what humour.

(419-421)

From a medieval scientific point of view, the Physician is not unorthodox at all. On the contrary, he practises medicine and healing methods as suggested by the antique authorities on the subject of bodily nature. In order to explore his humoral healing methods aside from his astronomical techniques, one must first explore the source of the teachings from which he draws his knowledge. The composition of the Physician’s world and methods is anchored in the voices of various medical scholars. Chaucer states that the Physician is well acquainted with
… the olde Esclapius,
And Deyscorides, and eek Rufus,
Olde Ypocrates, Haly, and Gaylen,
Serapion, Razis, and Avycen,
Averrois, Damascien, and Constantyn,
Bernard, and Gatesden, and Glibertyn.

(429 – 434)

By reciting the names of the ancient and early modern medical scholars, Chaucer evokes a diversity of opinions on the subject. The use of these names echoes the largeness of the medieval field of medicine that did not comprise only one or two aspects, but encompassed a universe of methods, treatments and opinions. The landscape of antique authority as foundation for thinking in the Middle Ages is a multi-dimensional sphere with numerous possibilities to explore. In addition to the Physician’s skill in astronomy, Chaucer narrows down the avenues of exploration by providing a detail crucial to the practice of the Physician. The Physician believes in the method of measurable diet for himself and probably for his patients as well.

Of his diete measurable was he
For it was no superfluitee
But of greet norissyng and digestable

(435 – 437, emphasis added)

The measurability of diet as stated by Chaucer reinforces the notion of balance in the natural body. The mention of Galen in conjunction with the notion of balance in Chaucer’s recitation of medical scholars opens a door that emphasises the importance of diet in medieval medical thinking. Galen argues that the functioning of every organ is directly linked to a matter of balance, which he called a natural eucrasia – or (and) crasis, a good and happy temperament. The condition of eucrasia can be obtained by sleeping well, exercising, occasional copulation, regular intake of fluids and “above all eating well were the keys to maintaining a happy temperament” (Applebaum 39). The Physician’s knowledge of Galen and his attitude towards diet suggest the Physician to be a character that strives for a natural eucrasia and perhaps advocates the benefits of such a condition to his patients.

A balanced diet in Galenian terms cannot be discussed without reference to the medical authority Hippocrates, also mentioned by Chaucer in the Physician’s list of teachers. (431) Galen was strongly influenced by Hippocrates and their rhetoric and theories are vividly intertwined. Based on Hippocrates’ humoral theory, Galen ascribes virtues and vices (and in
a way power) to foodstuffs. In order to understand the regulation of diet or as Chaucer states, the measuring of diet, one needs to understand the power of food.

Food holds power in the form of its own composition which has an effect on the humoral composition of the body that takes it in. The balances between hot, cold, moist and dry in the humoral composition must not be disturbed in the body. Andrew Boorde, a physician in the early 16th century and influenced by Galen, gives an example of the power of food:

“Melancholy\(^5\) is cold and dry, therefor Melancholy men must refrain from fried meat [which gets dried out], and meat which is over slat [which is also dried out] And by contrast, “Choler\(^6\) is hot and dry; wherefore Choleric men must abstain from eating dry spices, and to refrain from drinking wine and eating choleric meat”…

(Appelbaum 48)

Boorde’s suggestion keeps perfect balance in the humours of the body through the intake of food. If a body is naturally dominated by the humour Black bile (cold and dry), which represents the element earth and the temperament Melancholy, one should not eat food which holds the same quality (dry) as the body, such as fried or salted meat. Introducing more “dryness” through food intake into a body, that is already dry in its composition, will cause a natural imbalance in the humoral composition. The same applies to the use of spices by Choleric men. Adding heat to an already naturally hot composition of humours will cause an excess of the quality and thus lead to a corrupted humoral balance. These imbalances, caused by foodstuff in unregulated diets, are the causes of discomfort and ill-health, according to Hippocrates and Galen. (Applebaum 48)

Hippocrates states that a human’s body is made up out of blood, phlegm, yellow bile and black bile and that is through these that he experiences pain or enjoys health. Humans experience optimal health when these elements are “duly proportioned to one another in respect of compounding, power, and bulk, and when they are perfectly mingled”. Hippocrates further argues that pain or distress occurs when one of these elements occur in isolation (in other words, are not mingled properly), in excess or defect. (Appelbaum 46)

Galen takes this notion of Hippocrates’ humoral composition and explains that food intake has a direct effect on the balances in the body and its health. He notes that,

From the moment [foods] touched against the tongue and the palate to the time they percolated in the belly; liquefied into the blood; underwent refinement in the liver, the veins, the heart, and other organs and tissues; became assimilated into the tissue or got excreted through the sweat, phlegm, urine, or feces; and either entered into the healthy life of the body or else went awry, causing discomfort and disease.

(Appelbaum 44)

\(^5\) In humoral theory Melancholy is the temperament which is associated with the element earth – also holding the qualities cold and dry.

\(^6\) Choler is the temperament associated with the element fire – being hot and dry.
The classical authorities Hippocrates and Galen lay out the scientific rationale behind diet and its effect on the body and health. Boorde works with exactly this science to make his suggestions regarding the intake of food. Chaucer's Physician is thus linked to humoral science and diet through his specific word choice “measurable diete” (435) along with references to Galen and Hippocrates in his list of intellectual authorities. Though the Physician is a marginalised character in terms of religious thinking, he does advocate bodily temperance in terms of diet. From a Platonic perspective this rhetoric of balance and temperance in diet is considered virtuous. In fact, the Physician in his heretical thinking and practices obey also the biblical command in 1 Corinth 6: 19-20 namely that the body should be kept in optimal health as a temple of God. The reasoning behind maintaining the health of the body is not solely for religious purposes, but its importance is underscored by the fact that is also a biblical injunction. In the “heresy” of the Physician he still manages to attain a realistic balance and temperance when it comes to food and the body. This highlights the inconsistencies between the proposed dogmatic realities advocated by the Church and the actualities present in medieval society.

Chaucer, however, turns the virtues inherent in the balance and temperance of the diet which one sees at first, upside down and taints it with the supposed heresy of the unorthodox Christian Physician. The Doctor of Physics’ knowledge of science in terms of measurable diet is taken one step further by mentioning the importance of digestion and nourishment. (Chaucer 437) One of the scholars listed by the Physician who wrote extensively on digestion in the 10th and 11th century, was the Arabic writer Avicenna. Avicenna represents the Muslim teachings mentioned by Robinson earlier in this section – and thus supports the medieval opinion of the Physician being ungodly. In spite of being ungodly, the ways of the Physician, and similarly the teaching of Epicurus, is advantageous to the health of the body of the Franklin. According to Avicenna “digestion is the root of life” (Appelbaum 49).

Digestion is a process very significant in the medieval doctrine of intake and discharge. Hippocrates notes that between the intake and discharge of food four natural functions of the body take place: attraction, retention, concoction (pre-modern term for digestion) and expulsion. (Appelbaum 49) Concoction is a function on its own, but it also joins all other functions in a holistic process which provides nutrients and in Avicenna’s words, “life” to the body. This notion can be better explained by ascribing these functions to various organs in the body. Thus concoction (digestion) is a function linked to the stomach. Galen and Thomas Vicary argue that the most important organ in the body is the stomach, due to the fact that it is key organ in digestion. (Appelbaum 49 - 50) The process of digestion is universal. As the medieval universe in Aristotelian terms encompasses the four elements (earth, fire, water and air) which in their co-existence make up the world, so does the body encompass various organs which make up a functional body in their co-existence. Galen states that the importance of the stomach is that it needs to desire sufficient meat for the whole body and that it also serves as the storage place for meat for the whole body. The importance of the stomach, however, does not make it the sole organ in the digestive process, but rather the whole body is seen as a digestive organ – “salutary nutrients underwent further digestion in the liver, the veins and other parts” (Appelbaum 50). Digestion is thus a root of life as
suggested by Avicenna – a theory and reality which becomes a cornerstone of healthy existence, but condemned by medieval authorities as heretical due to its Muslim origin.

In the words of Saint Augustine (from my Introductory Chapter), two selves can be identified in the existence of a human: the outer self (the body) and the inner self (the soul). Chaucer’s Physician maintains a healthy body or outer self by heeding the demands of temperance and balance by following a regulated and moderate diet. In such a light he succeeds in nourishing the nature of the body. Through temperance, the Physician also guards against gluttony, one of the seven deadly sins, by not giving in to the desire of food. Not succumbing to the desire of food, however, does not exempt him from desire at all. He fails in terms of balance, moderation and temperance when it comes to monetary matters, thereby failing to accept any responsibility for the inner self. Chaucer concludes the Physician’s portrait by revealing his love for money and wealth.

In sangwyn and in pers clad he was al,

Lyned with taffeta and with sandal;

And yet he was but esy of dispence;

He kepte that he wan in pestilence.

For gold in phisik is a cordial,

Therefore he lovede gold in special.

(Chaucer 439-444)

The description of the Physician’s attire in the first two lines, suggests economic prosperity. According to Margaret Hallissy’s *A Companion to Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer deliberately focuses his readers on the blue and red colours of the Physician’s clothes, for dyes were very expensive in the Middle Ages and thus bold status symbols. The further mentioning of fabrics like “taffeta and sandal” contribute to an understanding of the expense of his clothes. Despite the medieval suspicion about the religious morality of Physicians, Chaucer’s Physician is more elaborately dressed than required by his occupational ethics. Arderne, a physician from Chaucer’s time, wrote *Treatises of Fistula in Ano*, in which he suggests an ethical guideline for Physicians. In terms of diet, Chaucer’s Physician keeps to the guidelines suggested by Arderne – never be gluttonous by “using mesure in al thingis” (Bowden 208). However, Arderne also notes that a physician should be soberly dressed and “noght likkenyng himself in apparrayng…to mynistralles” (Bowden 209) – in other words in a plain manner, such as a professional clerk. Chaucer’s Physician, in his fine and expensive garments, thus presents a satirical comment on his materialistic nature.

This materialist nature is officially stated in the last two lines of his portrait: he loved gold so much, that it was it is his own form of medicine. Despite flaunting his affluence by his attire, the Physician nevertheless holds onto his money, which as Chaucer suggests in line 442, he gained from the “pestilence”. This observation reveals that the balance and temperance of
the Physician’s diet and which he prescribes for others, are for the mere material gain. Another detail in the Physician’s portrait which reveals such characteristics, is his relationship with the apothecaries:

The cause yknowe, and of his harm te roote,

Anon he yaf the sike man his boote.

Ful redy hadde he his apothecaries
To sende hym drogges and his letuaries,
For ech of hem made oother for to wynne—
Hir frendshipe nas nat newe to bigynne.

(Chaucer 423-428)

The Physician uses his skill and the knowledge gained from ancient authorities to diagnose and determine the “roote” of the patient’s illness. His skill, however, seems to benefit him more than it does the patient. The fact that Chaucer mentions the prescription of drugs and medicines from apothecaries, sheds light on the fact that the Physician was a participant in a transaction that was very common in the Middle Ages. Commenting on general medieval life, Gower, for instance, mentions that the Physician would prescribe a drug with the same value as a button, for which the apothecary would charge a fortune. In such cases, the Physician and the apothecary would share the gross mark-up obtained from the patient. (Bowden 207) After mentioning the involvement of the apothecary in the Physician’s treatments, Chaucer reiterates Gower’s observation by emphasising that each of the parties “wynne” in this business relationship which is not “newe to bigynne”.

In the character portrayal of the Physician, one finds that though he subscribes to gastronomical balance and temperance for the health of the natural body, the nature of the soul may still be corrupt. Augustine’s rhetoric in terms of a healthy “outer self” that constitutes a virtuous “inner self”, as does Biblical rhetoric concerning of diet and balance, are therefore challenged by the description of Chaucer’s Physician. The Physician is a character schooled in maintaining the well-being of the body’s nature and he himself is attentive to measurable diet. However, there is no temperance in his greed for money and his materialism. When looking at Gluttony and Greed and their definitions in Shipley’s study of the Seven Deadly Sins, one finds that both these sins stem from desire – gluttony as the desire for food and drink and greed as the desire for ever greater wealth. Despite the Physician’s containment of his desire in terms of food, he is controlled by his desire for gold. Such spiritual defilement is not surprising when considering the Robinson’s statement about the ungodliness of the Physician.

The medieval ideals in terms of diet and the nature of spirituality are overthrown by the realistic nature of Chaucer’s characters. As proposed in the Introductory Chapter, the Monk, in spite of his spiritual vocation, defiles his body with costly food without giving a thought to
containment of appetite, and shows a disregard for a healthy body that brings his spiritual nature into question. The Monk’s spiritual and religious stature (influenced by the writings of Saint Augustine as suggested by Chaucer in lines 187-188) is defiled by a non-virtuous diet. The Physician becomes the inverse of the Monk. His balanced and virtuous diet echoes the thinking of classical scholars, but the nature of his soul is publicly known to be unorthodox and prone to the sinful traits of materialism and greed. By showing differences in the character’ approach to the function of diet in determining the quality of their spiritual well-being or spiritual deficiency in medieval thinking, Chaucer critiques the importance of diet in spiritual wellbeing.

The supposed interdependent relationship between bodily nature and spiritual nature in terms of diet, as suggested by the Bible and Saint Augustine, are also overthrown by the construction of the Franklin’s Portrait as well as that of the Physician. Both characters are to an extent heretical figures, if viewed from a medieval religious perspective; however, even though their diets stand in direct contrast to each other, both enjoy good bodily health. The Franklin enjoys his diet as a pleasure to be indulged in, as proclaimed by Epicurus in his letter to Menoeceus. The Franklin’s spiritual defilement is due to excesses in lifestyle and food. The Physician on the other hand favours a conservative diet of measurability, but stands sinful in terms materialistic excess. The theoretical “formula” as advocated by Church authorities is being disproved by the bodily and spiritual natures of Chaucer’s Franklin and Physician through the diets which they follow.

2.3 Revealing and Concealing True Natures through Food

In the previous section one noted that despite the so-called heretical qualities of the Franklin and the Physician, both characters uphold a sense of bodily health in their nature. Neither of them pretends to possess spiritual purity. In this section of the chapter, food as a literary interjection will reveal or advocate the true nature of the characters. The Nun’s Priest’s Tale will be analysed to reveal the double existence of those affiliated with the church and how those individuals are often not only guilty of bodily defilement through food (as in the Portrait of the Monk), but also of spiritual defilement in the form of sexual desire. In the Prioress’ Portrait one finds that she makes use of food to hide her true spiritual nature in terms of desire – gluttony, lust and greed. Lastly, the Wife of Bath makes use of a gastronomic metaphor to advocate her own nature in terms of sex. Food thus takes on the role of concealing or revealing the true nature of Chaucer’s literary characters.
The Nun's Priest's Tale

As noted in the Introduction, the tales can be read as extensions of the characters as described in their portraits and as seen in the Franklin and Physician’s Portraits, this includes many of the culinary ways that reveal their true natures. This is however not the case in the Nun’s Priest’s Tale, since there is no elaborate Portrait of the Nun’s Priest in *The General Prologue*. Nevertheless, based on the similarities between the cock and the Nun’s Priest, one can assume that the cock Chaunticleer is a manifestation of the characteristics and qualities of the Nun’s Priest presented in the form of a fable. In the Epilogue to The Nun’s Priest's Tale one finds that the Harry Baily makes a direct comparison between the cock Chaunticleer and the Nun’s Priest:

This was a murie tale of Chauntecleer.

But by my trouthe, if though were seculer,

Thou woldest ben a trede-foul aright.

For if thou have corage as though have myght,

Thee were nede of hennes, as I wene,

Ya, moo than seven tymes seventene.

See, whiche braunes have this gentil preest,

So gret a nekke, and swich a large breest!

He loketh as a sperhauk with his yen;

Him nedeth nat his colour for to deyn

With brasile, ne with greyn of Portyngale.

(Chaucer 4246- 4256)

Harry Baily sets the Chauntecleer character as a standard to which he compares the Nun’s Priest. He states clearly that should the Nun’s Priest not have been in a religious vocation, he would be as the bird himself. The host even affords birdlike qualities to the Nun’s Priest by describing his “sparrow-eyed” appearance. (line 4254) Harry Baily describes the Nun’s Priest with the same flattery afforded to Chauntecleer in The Nun’s Priest’s Tale. The praise of his physical attributes such as his muscles, neck, chest and red hair match the description of the cock. The Nun’s Priest also emphasises the cock’s physicality in the tale. When introducing Chauntecleer, the Nun’s Priest mentions that Chauntecleer’s

…coomb was redder than fyn coral,

And batailed as it were a castle wal;
His bale was blak, and as the jet it shoon;
Lyk asure were his legges and his toon;
His nayles whitter than the lylye flour,
And lyk the burned gold was his colour.

(Chaucer 3656-3661)

Both characters in the narrative and meta-narrative are praised for their appearance. Colour and size play a significant role: Harry Baily notes that the Nun’s Priest’s chest, neck and muscles are great and large, while Chauntecleer’s jaunty comb resembles a castle. Red, black, white and burned gold are used to describe Chauntecleer, while the Nun’s Priest’s colouring is so vivid that he does not need any dyes to enhance it. The cock’s appearance in terms of size and colour affords him sexual “governaunce” (Chaucer 3663) over “Seven hennes for to doon al his pleasance” (Chaucer 3664). According to Harry Baily the Nun’s Priest, would also have need for “hennes”, should he be of a secular vocation. With such utterance, the Nun’s Priest is equated physically to the cock by colour and size, which also mirrors the sexuality of Chauntecleer in the man. These intersecting characteristics between the narrative of the cock and the Nun’s Priest Tale show a typical genre trait of the medieval beast fable. According to Brian Gastle in his chapter “The Beast Fable” in The Companion to Old and Middle English Literature, animals take on human characteristics to become a vehicle of moralistic and other satirical commentary on humans and society. (69)

Considering that the genre of The Nun’s Priest’s Tale is beast fable, one can argue that Chauntecleer as an animal is charged with qualities of The Nun’s Priest himself, who has authorial power over the narrative, and that the corresponding traits hold literary purpose. Thus even though one cannot say for certain that Chauntecleer is a bestial extension of the Nun’s Priest, one can deduct that he is an allegorical manifestation of what the Nun’s Priest, coming from a religious vocation, represents. Brian Stone suggests that the puritan widow with whom the narrative opens, functions allegorically as the Church. (72) If the widow is read as suggesting the church, then Chauntecleer, who lives on her yard, can be read as a figure associated with the church.

The gastronomic intersections in The Nun’s Priest’s Tale once again points to a defilement of spiritual character, as found in the Portrait of the Monk. The mise-en-scene of the tale is set by introducing a widow, a puritan in the culinary sense. Chaucer sets it very prominently that the widow is sustained by a simple diet based on pure necessity.

Hir diete was accordant to hir cote.
Repleccion ne made her nevere sik;
Attempree diete was al hir physik

(Chaucer 3633-3635)
The widow’s simple diet suggests she followed an organic diet untainted by additional spices and sauce: “Of poynaunt hir needed never a deal/ No deyntee morsel passed thurgh hir throte” (Chaucer 3631-3632). The widow consumes food solely for the purpose of functionality. Taste and texture do not play a role in the act of eating. It echoes Hippocrates’ and Galen’s opinions on humoral theory and a diet of necessity rather than indulgence, as also explained by Boorde earlier in the chapter. It becomes what Paz calls, in his article ‘Erotocism and Gastroscopy’, a “puritan” cuisine with no contrast of flavours and colours and thus devoid of any pleasure. As culinary enjoyment is restricted by the church and in religious writings, so is sex, when one considers Saint Augustine’s writings about bodily desires. The widow, who according to Stone represents the church, is also portrayed as subject to religious restriction of bodily pleasures such as sex.

Saint Augustine of Hippo’s *The Excellence of Widowhood* is a good indication of what the Church expected from a widow in the Middle Ages. It reads that “[t]he Church preferred widows to maintain chastity after the death of their spouses, but recognized that remarriage was permissible, given that the prohibition of marriage might lead, not to chastity, but to fornication or adultery” (McCarthy 35).

The early Church preferred widows to maintain chaste after the death of their spouses since the institution only recognises remarriage so that sex can take place nowhere else but in wedlock. This indicates that the church does recognise human desire and thus restricts it, for it cannot completely repress it. The widow in The Nun’s Priest’s Tale is an ideal model of what the Church expects from someone of her marital status. She abides by the Church’s initial preference stated in *The Excellence of Widowhood*, namely to remain chaste. She does not indulge in any “fornication or adultery”, for instead she “Syn thilke day that she was last a wyf/ In pacience ladde a ful simple lyf” (Chaucer 3622 -3623). In her simplicity she regains her celibacy and chastity in her spiritual and bodily natures. The old widow is without any sexual pursuer. Chaucer states that

\[
\text{[s]he foond hirself and eek hir doghtren two.}
\]

\[
\text{Thre large sows hadde she, and namo,}
\]

\[
\text{Three keen, and eek a sheep that highte Malle.}
\]

(Chaucer 3626- 3628)

In this description, there is no mention of a man or even a male figure. It is only later that the reader encounters the cock Chauntecleer. Once the narrative reaches the point where Chauntecleer is introduced, it takes a turn away from the widow into the life and dreams of the cock. The widow’s involvement in the beast fable is minimal; she and the description of her lifestyle function as the exposition of the fable itself and her presence only re-occurs at the end of the tale when she is pursuing the fox. The widow’s narrative function is thus to reflect the values and ideals of medieval church dogma, to which the cock Chauntecleer is juxtaposed – specifically in terms of food and sex. Octavio Paz’s observation when looking at Frouier’s argument on Harmony Sovereignty effectively comes into play here. Paz states
that “in civilized societies Religion legislates pleasure, especially those having to do with the table and the bed...but only to repress them and deflect them. By denying certain passions and incantations, Religion transforms them into furious obsessions and frenzies” (Paz 234 – 235 emphasis added). The puritan diet and sexual abstinence which the widow (as representative of the church) advocates in the narrative, echoes Paz’s observation with regards to the repression and deflection of the pleasures of the table and bed. These repressed desires manifest as a fixation on sex and excess in the cock Chauntecleer – a fable animal to which the qualities and characteristics of an associate of the church are ascribed, in the same way as to the Nun’s Priest. Chauntecleer’s attitude towards sex and diet is the absolute opposite to that of the widow and to an extent stands as a satirical inversion of her puritan ways.

Sexually Chauntecleer does not heed chastity in any form or way. One can argue that he is committed (or married) to the hen Pertelote for “she hath the herte in hoold/ Of Chauntecleer, loken in every lith” (Chaucer 3671-2). Despite his sexual commitment to Pertelote, Chauntecleer has “Sevne hennes for to doon al his plesaunce” (Chaucer 3663 emphasis added). Chauntecleer, due to his commitment to Pertelote, falls to the defilement of “fornication and adultery” as stated in St. Augustine’s writings. His sexual endeavours are not only out of wedlock, but become a farcical portrayal of excess – the frenzies and obsessions (in the words of Paz) that are repressed in the widow.

The gastronomic contrast is more defined in its comparison than the sexual contrast between the widow and Chauntecleer. The widow, being a dairywoman who does not allow a delightful pleasure pass her lips, is juxtaposed to the cock who over-eats so much that it may give him dreams, as suggested by Pertelote. Seventeen lines are devoted to the consequences of the cock’s gastronomic habits:

Swevenes engendren of relecciouns,
And ofte the fume and of complecciouns,
Whan humours been to habundant in a wight.
Certes this dreem, which ye han met to-nyght,
Cometh of greete superfluytee
Of your rede colera, pardee,
Which causeth folk to dreden in hir dremes
Of arwes, and of fyr with rede lemes,
Of rede beestes, that they wol hem byte,
Of contek, and of whelpes, grete and lyte;
Right as the humour of malencolie
Causeth ful many a man in sleep to crie
For feere of black beres, or boles blake,
Or elles blake develes wol him take.
Of othere humours koude I tellle also
That wreken many a man in sleep ful wo;
But I wol passe as lightly as I kan.

(Chaucer 3720-3736)

Pertelote suggests that Chauntecleer’s nightmare is due to a humoral imbalance caused by his “grete superfluytee”, a rationale that suggests that Chauntecleer’s diet is one of excess which affects the health and constitution of the body. Impurity of soul is thus linked to the impurity of the body. The parallel relationship between the abundance of sex and the abundance of food exists proportionality to the abstinence thereof in the lifestyle of the widow. The excess of food is emphasised by Chaucer via the humoral explanations given by the character Pertelote.

In Pertelote’s explanation of Chauntecleer’s dream, she mentions two possible humoral conditions due to the cock’s overeating: choler and melancholy. Choler, which is the quality of yellow-red bile, causes dreams of flames, beasts and dogs. The imagery of fire, beasts and dogs (especially when it comes to gluttony) reminds one of Dante’s Inferno. The images hold similar qualities to the circles of hell with flames and dog-like beasts such as Cerberus guarding the third circle of hell. The melancholy, which is a result of too much black bile, causes humans to cry in their sleep – making them see black bulls, black bears and black devils. These are also images of the underworld specifically gravitating to the use of the colour black. The result of Chauntecleer’s overeating, according to Pertelote, is the manifestation of the underworld and the ungodly – not only in his body but also in his metaphysical being, his soul; his diet shows his alienation from the purity and light of the church, as portrayed by the widow.

For Pertelote, the only way to cleanse the dreams and thus metaphysical being of Chauntecleer, is by getting rid of the impurity which he has ingested through his diet of excess by “taak[ing] som laxatfy” (Chaucer 3740). The laxative would purge the cock from “bothe of cholere and of malencolye” (Chaucer 3743); by removing the impure ingestion he would be cleansed from his humoral imbalance as well as his bad dreams. Pertelote notes that such laxatives can be found in “oure yeerd” (Chaucer 3748) and not in an “apothecarie” (Chaucer 3746). She herself will pick the herb which will serve as a laxative from the yard of the widow – a yard of puritan food which sustains the spiritual and bodily heath.

The food which grows in the widow’s yard (a representation of the church) has the power to reverse the ills of body and soul caused by the excessive intake of impure food caused – to an extent similarly to the Eucharist which has the power to reverse ills of the soul that are a
result of sin. Seen this way, the culinary ways of the widow reflect the expectations of religious authorities in the middle ages – habits of virtue and purity in body and soul. Considering the parallels between the Nun’s Priest and the cock and that the cock belongs to the widow and lives in her yard, one can argue that the cock represents not necessarily the Nun’s Priest himself, but perhaps a generalised figure representing the church. One finds that as in the Monk’s Portrait, the use of the food suggests inconsistencies with that of religious expectations. The idea of a double existence regarding the associates of the church is once again suggested by the nature of the cock and to an extent of the Nun’s Priest himself. The beast fable presents Chauntecleer’s dreams as allegorical manifestations of the ills associated with an imbalanced diet uncontrolled by temperance.

Other than the Franklin and the Physician with their secular approach to life, Chaucer’s Nun’s Priest (despite the absence of a portrait), reveals an allegorical representation of religious human behaviour, where excess, indulgence and gluttony persist in the lives of those close to the church, even in the same yard as the church itself.

The Prioresses’ Portrait

In Wallace’s thesis discussed in the Introduction, she briefly mentions the spiritual defilement in the Prioress’ portrait. Wallace draws on the of the Prioress feeding her dogs milk, roasted meat and fine bread, in stark contrast to the vows of simplicity (also regarding food) taken by nuns of the time. This section will focus on how the Prioress veils her excesses and her greedy living by pretending to be of a modest nature in all aspects of her life, also at the table. Food becomes a device of deception to conceal the nun’s tainted spiritual nature.

Before looking at the Prioress’ behaviour, one should first note that her figure suggests that not only her dogs eat delicate meals, but she as well. Chaucer notes The General Prologue that “she was nat undergrowe” (156). The textual evidence that the Prioress is “is not undergrowe” suggests that she is a large woman because of her lavish meals – in quantity and, judging from the dogs’ meals, also in quality. The Prioress’ stature and the way she feeds her dogs, already point in the direction of Shipley’s explanation of gluttony drawn from the writings of Saint Thomas of Aquinas, suggesting – excess of eating in terms of quality and quantity.

The Prioress, however, attempts to disguise her sinful eating habits with a performance of piousness and temperance. In The General Prologue Chaucer describes her eating habits.

At mete wel ytaught was she with alle:
She leet no morsel from her lippes falle,
Ne wette hir fyngres in hir sauce depe;
Wel koude she carie a morsel and wel kepe
That no drope ne fille upon hire brest.
In curtesie was set ful muchel hir lest.
Hir over-lippe she wyped she so clene
That in her coppe ther was no ferthyng sene
Of grece , whan she drunken hadde hir draughte.
Ful seemly after her mete she raughte.
And sikerly she was of greet disport,
And ful pleasaunt, and amiable of port.

(Chaucer 127 -138)

In this section of The General Prologue, it is very evident that Chaucer portrays the Prioress mockingly as a representative of virtue and temperance. Her manners echo the requirements according to Augustinian rhetoric in terms of the modesty of food and of its consumption. The Prioresses’ staged behaviour deliberately eliminates any notions that might indicate the presence of the sin of gluttony. As noted by Chaucer, the Prioress never dips her fingers too deep into the sauce for she would not want it to drip onto her breast. Her modesty when eating is also meant to ensure a perception of sexual modesty within a public space. The piety of her behaviour to avoid spilling on her breast draws attention to her sexuality as well – in fact, Chaucer’s physical description of the Prioress emphasises her farcical behaviour employed to hide her sexuality. The nun’s performance in terms of concealing her true gastronomic nature and of diverting attention from her sexuality, creates an image of the interdependent relationship between her sexuality and her supposedly dainty table-manners. She thus smothers evidence of the desire which jeopardises the opinion of her virtue and temperance, following the suggestions of Saint Augustine.

The Prioress’ way of eating also advocates physical cleanliness in terms of food consumption which should in turn suggest spiritual cleanliness. As seen in the quote above (lines 133 to 135), the Prioress wipes her mouth so clean after eating that there is no stain left on the cup from which she drinks. By wiping her mouth so clean, the Prioress completely eliminates all visible evidence of recent eating. Her meal thus purports a sense of mere functionality as she attempts to leave no traces of pleasure or delight.

As noted before, the quality of the food which the Prioress feeds her dogs, along with the stature of her figure, stands in stark contrast to her tempered table manners. Unlike the Franklin and the Physician, the Prioress is a self-proclaimed Christian by vocation and thus needs to maintain a semblance of a religious nature of purity in her physical and spiritual existence. Her true spiritual and physical natures are evidently tainted and impure, and her dainty eating habits are a desperate attempt to veil her alienation from religious expectations.
regarding food. Food and table-manners in this case earns itself a purpose of deception – another act which sets itself against Christian doctrine. As Galen notes that food is charged with virtues and vice which affect the body accordingly in terms of humour, so is food charged with deception in the manner that the Prioress uses it, to the detriment of her soul. The Prioress is not as modest and humble as one should expect of a nun and she uses food and eating in order to disguise it.

As a nun, the Prioress needs to echo her apparent modesty in manners in all aspects of her life, just as she attempts so farcically to do by her eating habits. Just as her physical build exposes her desire for food, so does her attire suggest wealth and sexuality. In her physical portrayal, one can see elements of wealth and economic stature.

Ful feytes was hir cloke, as I was war.
Of small coral aboute hire arm she bar
A peire of bededs, guaded all with grene,
And theron heng a brooch of gold ful shene,
On which ther was first write a crowned A,
And after Amor vincit Omnia.

(Chaucer 157 – 162)

As Chaucer purposely described her figure and physical appearance to the reader, so did he deliberately include the Prioress’ fondness for material goods in terms of attire. Fine clothes and jewellery were contrary to religious rule. (Stone 58) The design and fitting of her cloak is worth mentioning, as it shows a measure of attention-seeking. Good fabric was not cheap in the late middle ages and it is an indicator in terms of class and socio-economic value. In the same manner, the rosary which the Prioress takes on the pilgrimage also suggests economic worth, since it is made from choral and is green – it has an aesthetic functionality to it which exceeds its religious functionality. Lastly, Chaucer finds the golden brooch inscribed with A for Amor vincit Omnia worth mentioning. Stone discusses the various interpretations and contexts of this phrase: The Latin translates to Love Conquers All; which the Church took as referring to agape. But the phrase originally refers to eros, as initially coined by Virgil. (Stone 58) Though at first sight the Prioress wears the A-inscribed brooch flaunting spiritual loving-kindness, one should consider Chaucer’s knowledge of the Classics and that such an interjection is charged with ambiguity, as is the character herself. The initial eros-related interpretation thus influences meaning in the text, justifying the argument that Chaucer’s knowledge of Virgil’s phrase is a tongue-in-the-cheek insertion that points to the nun’s sexuality, just as the mentioning of her breast when discussing her table-manners. Through the description of the Prioress’ attire, attention is drawn to desire as well – her tainted spiritual nature can only be masked by the manner in which she consumes food.
The Wife of Bath's Prologue

If one revisits the medieval definition of nature as suggested by the OED, one finds that one of the definitions is sexual desire. The Wife of Bath uses gastronomic interjection in her sermon joyeux (The Wife of Bath’s Prologue) to bring across the validity of her nature. By equating herself to barley-bread and by the biblical reference to Christ’s using barley-bread to feed the masses, she employs the discussion of humble functionality to justify her sexual promiscuity. Food thus becomes a device of validation and affirmation of the character’s true nature:

Crist was mayde, and shapen as a man,
And many a seint, sith that the world began;
Yet lvyed they evere in parfit chastetee.
I nyl envye no virginitee.
Lat hem be breed of pured whete-seed,
And lat us wyves hoten barley-breed;
And yet with barley-bread, Mark telle kan,
Our Lord Jhesu refreshed many a man.

(Chaucer 139-148)

In the mentioning of bread, the wife juxtaposes the two forms of bread, equating the white bread to chastity and saintly purity and the brown bread to mortal functionality. The wife does not envy virginity or chastity, but on the contrary chooses to be equated to the more modest gastronomic offering, i.e. barley bread. In her mock sermon, her modesty resonates with the Jesus figure himself who physically handled the barley bread. This argument makes sense considering Chaucer’s strategic characterisation of the Prioress who enjoys, and feeds her dogs, fine white bread crumbs, so that her double existence is revealed by means of allusions to food and sex. Against this backdrop, the Wife of Bath’s honest embodiment of the medieval stereotype of a lascivious old widow, over-sexed, dangerously carnal and manipulative, is much more authentic than that of the religious characters that hide their true natures under façades of chastity and purity. This notion can be further explored by looking at the Biblical reference which the wife uses in her sermon.

The Wife of Bath states that despite the partiality to white bread, it was barley bread with which Jesus fed the crowds. The wife’s mention of the word barley is her own addition when referencing Mark for the effective construction of her argument: Mark 6:41 in the Wycliffe Bible reads that Jesus took “fyue looues, and twei fischis” to distribute among the people – with no reference to barley bread. The narrative in the Bible suggests no specific bread type; however the Wife of Bath adapts the bread in her own preaching to a kind of bread that
would feed a large number of people. Hammond states that in medieval England, “[m]uch barley was grown, sometimes more than wheat, because it was valuable as a source of ale as well as bread” (2). He further elaborates on the process used for brewing barley into beer and on the fact that bakers and brewers needed barley to produce food (Hammond 5). Unlike white bread with its more refined quality, barley served a more practical purpose in various manners.

The functionality of barley as noted in Hammond’s research holds an element of multiplicity in the medieval world: it has many uses as an ingredient of numerous medieval foods. As Mark as well the Wife of Bath mentions, it also holds an element of multiple meaning when Jesus provides bread to “many a man” with “fyue looues” of (barley) bread. The multi-functionality of barley bread is what the wife draws on for her argument in her sermon joyeux:

And of so parfit wys a wight ywroght?
Trusteth right wel, they were nat maad for noght.
Glose whoso wole, and seye bothe up and doun,
That they were maked for purgacioun
Of uryne, andoure bothe thynges smale
Were eek to knowe a female from male,
And for noon oother cause, - sey ye no?
The experience woot wel it is noght so.
So that clerkes be nat with me worthe,9
I sey this, that they maked ben for bothe,

(Chaucer 117-126)

As seen in the extract, according to the wife, as barley-bread has a number of functions pertaining to genitals. It is used to enhance sexual pleasure as well as urinal discharge. The Wife of Bath’s “instrument” (Chaucer 149) has purpose and is not an idealised part of the body. Unlike the virginity (white bread) of Christ or other Saints, The Wife of Bath’s vagina is like barley bread that can be used for baking (urinating), brewing (sexual distinction) and feeding large numbers of people (fornication). A prominent parallel emerges in the functionality of barley and sexual organs in the rhetoric of The Wife of Bath’s Prologue. Indeed, she uses the biblical incident of Jesus feeding the masses to justify her own promiscuity in serving “the masses” of men she has encountered in her life. In the same way that barley has more than one function (socially and economically), so it is in the sexual nature of The Wife of Bath.
The wife’s debate reinforces the meanings of the concept *nature* in the Middle English and Latin origins of the word, as seen at the beginning of this chapter. The Latin lexical entity *nātūra* holds the meaning *genitals* and the Middle English *nature* also has connotations of the Latin meaning: semen, menstrual discharge, sexual desire — but also, *nourishment*. Her approach to sexuality combined with her analogy of barley bread, illustrates the medieval concept of *nature*, or as that which is *natural*.

The Wife of Bath’s behaviour is further authenticated in that she does not only speak for herself, but that she refers to “us wyves” (Chaucer 144). The wife becomes a spokesperson for all wives and the true constitution of their nature. Chaucer’s comparison of barley and wives is largely representative of natural medieval domesticity. According to Hammond (6) it was mostly women who used barley for brewing and baking – either for consumption in the household or for selling. By using the metaphor of barley and white bread, the Wife of Bath’s Prologue redeems the sexual lifestyle of married women living in a world of religious ideas of purity and chastity. By describing the sexuality of married women in juxtaposition to the chastity of servants of the cloth, Chaucer advocates that although not so pure in essence, it deserves acknowledgement for its functionality and nature, rather than being censured as a negation from an idealistic religious lifestyle.

Chaucer’s use of bread in The Wife of Bath’s Prologue propounds the sexual functionality of the wife, and also sheds some light on the attitude of a certain section of the populace towards the medieval church. Considering the social history of the two bread types, the wife’s description of the white and barley breads leads to a critical interpretation when read in the context of certain social opinions (such as that of the wife) about the church. Chaucer critiques the church by means of the literary interjection of white bread. The Church with its self-proclaimed purity and righteousness has little meaning for the masses in terms of spiritual presence. The deliberate disassociation of Jesus from the ideal constitution of the white bread that represents church values instead of affording Him a humble association with barley-bread, implies that the church stands in isolation from Jesus and is thus also isolated from the foundation of Christianity. The church itself operates on double standards, just like its servants such as Monk, the Prioress and the Pardoner in *The Canterbury Tales*.

**Chapter 3: Exploring the Carnivalesque in Human Behaviour through the Intersection of the Gastronomic and the Sexual**

In the previous chapter, one already gets a glimpse of the relationship between gastronomy and sex in Chaucer’s work. In the description of the Prioress in the prologue, the nun’s
eating habits also aim at drawing attention away from her sexuality. One notes that from the Prioress’ perspective, modesty in eating habits suggests modesty in sexual nature. In the Wife of Bath’s sermon joyeux, the sexual and the culinary also intersect when she argues that her sexual nature holds the same functionality as barley bread. She also suggests a parallel relationship between food and sex. This link between gastronomy and sex is evident throughout various medieval literatures. The two actions or concepts intersect at various points and also reveal the hypocrisy that is concealed under the veil of Christian asceticism and religious dogma.

As stated in the Introduction, other literatures in close proximity to Chaucer’s lifetime also show an intersection of sex and food with sin. In Dante’s Inferno, one finds that these two sins are linked by setting the circles of gluttony and lust adjacent to each other – they are still two different sins in Inferno and the characters in the different circles find themselves there because they committed these sins separately. The differentiation between the sins is also very evident in the work of Boccaccio and the writings of Saint Augustine: the false confessions of Ser Ciappelletto in Boccaccio’s Decameron relate these actions in terms of sin by positioning the confession of gluttony and lust right after one another; in Saint Augustine’s Confessions (Book X), he states that he can only love God truly by not indulging in, amongst other things, “honey”, “spices”, “manna” and “limbs such as the body delights in” (211). In devotion to God, control over sex and food (and at times abstinence) is regarded as virtuous for it keeps temptation to sin at bay. But when the actions of eating and sex are not regulated, they become vices that make the devoted stray from the path of righteousness.

In the scriptures of the Bible, one finds that temptation is also the point where the culinary and sexual intersect. According to scholars of theology, the reason for the close co-existence of the first two sins is to be found in Genesis. The Wycliffe Bible (1382) reads: “Therfore the womman seiy that the tre was good, and swete to ete, and fair to the iyen, and delitable in bi holdyng; and sche took of the fruyt therof, and eet, and yaf to hir hosebande, and he eet” (Genesis 3:6). The woman (Eve) tempts her husband (Adam) to eat the fruit. The fruit itself is also interpreted as the sexual act. In the Creation myth of the Christian religion, a narrative that has also greatly influenced medieval literatures and reasoning, joins the sexual and the gastronomic in the act of temptation.

As found in the tale of Adam and Eve, temptation overthrows the set structures and norms of a social agreement (in this case between God and the humans He created). Desire can also be the cause for undermining or overthrowing authority and social structures; consider, for example, King David who undermines the laws of marriage and his religion to have his way with the woman Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11). In the presence of desire and temptation, officialdom is challenged and morality is overthrown. The intersection of sex and food is thus one of many combinations of human behaviour which challenges officialdom and authority. Such intersection can be analysed in what Bakhtin suggests to be the spirit of carnival in his Rabelais and his World. Bakhtin notes that the Carnivalesque gives a platform to a “second world and a second life outside officialdom” (6).
The second life outside officialdom is also a “second self” – a double existence in nature, as discussed in the previous chapter. As noted in the Introduction, The Canterbury Tales is a text of carnival due to the satire, irony and parodies that evoke laughter. Despite the various types of humour in the text, the element of carnival is present in the characters and not only in their narratives. If one thinks of the Miller, with his habits of drunkenness and crude language, who is juxtaposed to Knight, who presents the idealised portrayal of chivalry, it is evident that the carnival is reflected in the construction and interactions of the characters. The fact that all these dubious characters are on a pilgrimage, degrades the nature of the pilgrimage so that it becomes similar to what Bakhtin describes as Comedia Sacra – where the sacred is being parodied with humorous effect. The intersection between food and sex takes place within the ambit of the degradation of morality and religious doctrine, causing the sublimation of the second or “underground” (borrowed from Said) self. This chapter will focus on the characters’ spiritual natures in terms of the carnivalesque that occurs when the sexual and the gastronomic intersect.

In the first section, the character construction of the Man of Law will be discussed. His Portrait as well as his tale will be explored in terms of the character’s double existence. The Man of Law as a materialist will supply a platform to elaborate on medieval mercantilism, trade and the Orient. After these discussions, The Man of Law’s Tale can be analysed as a product of commodity and trade. The sexed body of Constance gains the same cultural and historic value as that of spices in the late Middle Ages, when the sexual and the culinary is viewed in the same light as trade and commodity. In such theorising, Constance becomes a figure of carnival and as such acts as the centre-piece of the Syrian feast, debasing her religious and saintly qualities. The double existence in the Man of Law’s character is transferred to the holy Constance, as her virtuous qualities lose their religious value and become mere reflections of desire.

The second and the third sections of the chapter are sequentially linked. In Fragment One of The Canterbury Tales, the chivalrous Knight’s tale, the Miller’s, the Reeve’s and the Cook’s Tale are presented in that order. The Knight’s Tale is set as an idealistic medieval Romance, followed by the moral and structural deterioration shown in the other three tales. The degradation and moral decay escalates in each sequential tale, concluding with the cook and his tale, which contains the ultimate characterisation of carnival.

In the second section the medieval Romance and the fabliau will be discussed in order to come to grips with the positioning of the Miller’s tale and the Reeve’s tale in a literary context. The intersection of the sexual and the gastronomic in the Miller’s tale will be briefly discussed in order to create a point of reference for the main discussion of the Reeve Oswald and his tale. The double existence in the Reeve’s characterisation will be established by looking at his Portrait and tale. The intersection between food (adulteration) and sex (adultery) highlights the spiritual corruption of the Reeve, as well as of the soul of humankind. This corruption manifests in some of the Deadly Sins and results in Chaucer’s carnivalesque challenge and subversion of religious and moral authority that is based on a rhetoric that isolates sin from human nature and conscious behaviour.
The third section of this chapter focuses on how the intersection between the sexual and the culinary establishes the ultimate characteristics of carnival by looking at Roger of Ware the Cook and Perkyn the Reveller. A brief introduction will be given on The Cook’s Tale by looking at the moral value of the text as well as the opinions of other scholars. Perkyn is an extension of Roger, the cook. The cook embodies the ultimate carnivalesque through gluttony and gastronomy while the Perkyn embodies it through sex and revelry. This will be explored by looking at the Cook’s Portrait, the Cook’s Prologue, his tale as well as the Manciple’s Prologue.

3.1 Spices and Sex as a Trading Commodity in The Man of Law’s Tale

In order to understand the complexities of The Man of Law’s Tale, one must not only keep in mind the definition of carnival, but also its function, especially in the atmosphere of The Canterbury Tales. The pilgrimage as a setting of the narrative becomes a liminal space where convention and morality are obliterated in a contained way. For Bakhtin and his rationale behind Rabelais and his World this is exactly what is needed for society to function – a space where bodily pressures can find release without affecting the social body. The pilgrimage as an exposition of The Canterbury Tales presents such a space and atmosphere of carnival. Bakhtin also emphasises that this space is very important when trying to understand the historic context of the Middle Ages: that “[i]f we fail to take into consideration this two-world condition, neither medieval culture consciousness, nor the culture of the Renaissance can be understood” (6). This is especially true for Chaucer’s Man of Law.

Chaucer constructs the Man of Law’s character with meticulous attention, thereby actively ensuring that there is no blurring between his own voice and the voice of his character– an effort which one does not see in his handling of the other pilgrims. In the Introduction of the Man of Law’s Tale, The Man of Law emphasises the differentiation between himself and the “Chaucer character”:

I kan right now no thrifty tale seyn
That Chaucer, thogh he kan but lewedly
On metres and on rymyng craftily,
Hath seyd hem in swich Englissh as he kan
Of olde tyme, as knoweth many a man

(Chaucer 46 – 50)

Despite the irony and tongue-in-cheek quality of these few lines, Chaucer as the author uses it to alienate the ideological representation of the Man of Law’s character from him as author (also present in the narrative as character). Chaucer deliberately constructs a character with
farcical elements (a character of parody) to get back at a Thomas Pynchbek who became Sergeant of the Law in 1377 and arrested Chaucer in 1388 for debt. (Stone 49) The Man of Law and his Tale is constructed with a transparent façade of religious and moral inclination only to reveal elements of the true nature of the character – a materialistic character with no regard for the poor, one who degrades spiritual virtues and dogmas.

At the first glance, the Man of Law seems to be a virtuous character versed in the scripture and his tale suggests him to be a celebratory character of the saintly life. In The Man of Law’s Portrait in the General Prologue, he is portrayed as an excellent and knowledgeable lawyer who is closely affiliated with the church. He is well versed in the law as well as the history of the law and “In terms hadde he caas and doomes alle/ That from the tyme of kyng William were falle” (Chaucer 323-324). He practises his knowledge “often” on sacred ground such as “the Parvys” (Chaucer 310). His vast scope of knowledge and close church affiliations make him an almost idealistic character in medieval society, where the supposed social cornerstones are Christian asceticism and church dogma.

The Man of Law’s Tale echoes exactly the same values as those in the portrait at first encounter. The tale’s heroine Constance is fortified by her faith as she encounters numerous catastrophic events during her journey. It is a narrative of faith and religious strength; Constance’s faith and the hand of God save her from death on a number of occasions. She survives an accumulative voyage of eight years on sea without any food or water. Divine winds are steering the vessel as she puts her faith in God and leaves Him in absolute control of her life. The Man of Law is thus further defined through his tale as a God-fearing character who respects, acknowledges and celebrates the dogma and rhetoric of the medieval Catholic Church.

Such a façade is shattered, however, when one takes a closer look at the text. When looking critically at The Man of Law, one finds that the idea of a double existence is evident in his character construction as well as in his tale. Ed Morgan, for instance, highlights inaccuracies in The Man of Law’s Tale, suggesting that the character himself may not be as knowledgeable as initially described in his Portrait. The Man of Law’s Biblical references that he interjects into the narrative of Constance are inconsistent with the original texts in the Bible. Morgan in his article “Orientalism and the Foreign Sovereign: Today I am the Man of Law” (735-736) notes that The Man of Law’s insertion: “Who saved Danyel in the horrible cave/ Ther every wight save he, maister and knave/ Was with the leon frete er he asterte?” (Chaucer 473-475) does not correspond to the original Biblical text. According to the Bible, Daniel was forced to confront the lion alone without “maister and knave”. Morgan further highlights another incident where the Man of Law compares Constance’s travel on the open sea from Syria to Britain to the narrative of Jonah and the whale. The Man of Law notes that

---

7 Scholars argue that line 326 in The Man of Law’s Portrait “Ther koude no wight pyne at his wryting” (emphasis added) is a direct pun on the sergeant’s name (Stone, 49).

8 The Parvys is the porch of St. Paul’s where lawyers met their clients for consultations.

9 Literally in the case where she was falsely accused by the knight for the murder of queen Hermengyld in the court of king Alla: “An hand hym smoot upon the nekke-bone/ That doun he fil astones as a stoon (Chaucer, 669-670).
the whale “Kept Jonas in the fishes mawe/Till he was sputed up at Nynyvee?” (Chaucer 486-487). Nineveh is described in the Bible as a city in Assyria three days inland from the port of Joffa and for Morgan this is exactly how Chaucer reveals the inconsistencies with regards to the knowledge of the Man of Law. The tale itself is also manipulated by the Man of Law to promote his idea of purity in a Christian light.

If one delves deeper in the narrative of the Man of Law’s Tale, one finds that it is based on the 1335 Anglo-Norman Chronicle of Nicholas Trivet. (Stone 49) However, details in the narrative are changed to portray Christians as almost sinless people next to the cruel Muslims from Syria and Pagans from the other geographical spaces that Constance encounters during her voyages at sea. For instance, Morgan elaborates that in the Anglo-Norman version of the narrative, the Northumbrian constable of the castle who comes down to inspect the wreck in which Constance is—and who steals the treasure from the ship (Chaucer 515) only helping her to shore when there is nothing left to find (Chaucer 521)—is in fact not only Saxon, but Christian as well. (739) The Man of Law’s version of the narrative omits that the constable is Christian and only mentions that the king and queen of Northumbria are “payens” (Chaucer 534). One finds that the narration of the tale is thus dogmatic and selective to suggest pseudo Christian moral structure. This double moral standard is very evident in the Man of Law himself.

One can further explore the double existence in the Man of Law by looking at his materialistic and capitalistic nature. He is a character of excess and this amplifies the division in his nature that is suggested by the subtle inconsistencies of his tale and his dogma, and Scriptural accuracy. In The Man of Law’s Prologue, he mocks poverty and is very unsympathetic towards it:

‘Bet is to dyen than have indigence’;

‘Thy selve neihebor wol thee despise.’

If thou be povre, farwl thy reverence!

Yet of the wise man take this sentence:

‘Alle the dayes of povre men been wikk.’

Be war, therefore, er thou come to that prikke!

(Chaucer 114 – 119)

Such an attitude to poverty verifies an inclination to excess and spoils. An “underground self” (as coined by Said as the role of the East in the narrative which will be dealt with later) comes forward when one takes a closer look at The Man of Law’s material inclinations – it goes completely against the tenets of the Christian religion and in fact, it offends God.
himself\textsuperscript{10}. The Man of Law’s attitude towards the poor indicates that he himself enjoys earthly riches and wealth. In the Middle Ages wealth and material prosperity is directly associated with trade and mercantilism.

When revisiting Pounds and his book *An Economic History of Medieval Europe*, one finds that the body of ideas known as mercantilism was aimed towards the abundance of goods and political power in the later Middle Ages. This pursuit took place without a careful consideration of implications (435). It was achieved by providing raw materials to the rural craftsman and then collecting the revenue obtained from the output. It resulted in a system where the craftsman worked for the merchant and the system lent itself to abuse. Pounds notes that this is the “earliest manifestation that resembles modern capitalism” (286) and that most merchants in medieval times were Syrians or Jews. (74) The church was against this manifestation, since it broke away from feudalism and was associated with usury. The pursuit of gain was considered against the laws of God and thus a sin (Medieval Merchant Culture).

Despite the fact that trade in the Middle Ages was the seed of an early form of capitalism with ideals contrary to those of the church, it also opened up the door to the East and what it represented. The relationship between medieval Europe existed in juxtaposition with the cultures of the East, as noted in the discussion of Orientalism (Literature Review, Chapter 1). To echo Said’s opinion, the Orient is the Other or the underground self of the Occident and it is a space of splendour, sensuality, cruelty and despotism. The East (from a medieval Western perspective) becomes the absolute inverse of the West – a place of carnival, and in Bakhtin’s words, a place of degradation. Through trade, the ideologies of the East infiltrate the West, degrading the religious and spiritual ideals of the church and substituting them with heretical, disruptive and materialistic values. Thus trade and mercantilism itself becomes charged with qualities of carnival.

The presence of merchants and trade functions as a cornerstone in the narrative of The Man of Law’s Tale. The tale itself, according to The Man of Law, is a tale which he heard from a merchant.

\begin{quote}
I were right now of tales desolaat, \\
Nere that a marchant, goon in many a yeere, \\
Me taught a tale, which that ye shall heere.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{10} There are many references in the Bible that state man should be kind and charitable towards the poor. Just to cite two such verses, Deuteronomy 15 verse 7 to 8 in the Wycliffe Bible states: “If oon of thi britheren that dwellen with ynne the yatis of thi citee, in the lond which thi Lord God schal yyue to thee, cometh to pouert, thou schalt not make hard thin herte, nether thou schalt `drawe to gydere the hond, but thou schalt opene it to the pore man, and thou schalt `yyue loone to which thou siest hym haue nede”. And should one fail to help the poor and mock them as done by The Man of Law, one offends God and shall be punished, according to Proverbs 7 verse 5: “He that dispisith a pore man, repreueth his maker; and he that is glad in the fallyng of another man, schal not be vnpunyschid”. 

71
The contextualisation of the tale in the text affords it qualities of diaspora and it becomes a commodity of trade itself. The saintly element of the tale is jeopardised due to the underpinning value of trade and carnival evident in it. The fact that the Man of Law learnt his tale from a merchant, illustrates his affiliation with mercantilism and trade. This illuminates him as an early version of a capitalist who strives for power and money. The religious piety is finally shattered by the interjection of food and sex in the Man of Law’s Tale where the saintly attributes of the holy Constance (an extension of the Man of Law) is debased to materialistic and worldly value.

The sexed body of Constance is described in proximity with spices as she is shipped from Rome to Syria. Constance becomes a commodity of trade. The tale immediately begins by introducing “honest and sober” merchants from Syria:

Of chapmen riche, and therto sadde and trewe,

That wyde-where senten hir spicerye,

Clothes of gold, and satyns riche of hewe.

(Chaucer 135 – 137)

Trade as a theme is already established right at beginning of the narrative, almost as an exposition, by introducing commodities such as spices, cloth of gold and satin. The merchants, who in medieval times scouted for commodities to trade, are then made familiar with Constance and “hir goodnesse as beautee/ Nas nevere swich another as shee” (Chaucer 158 – 159). Constance is marketed to the Syrian merchants. After they load their ships and return to Syria, they tell the Sultan about Constance. The Sultan and many of his subjects are then baptised as Christians in order to obtain access to Constance, after which the Sultan pays “certain gold” (Chaucer 242) to the Emperor of Rome for his daughter as “sufficient suretee” (Chaucer 243). This sequence of events reveals itself as a transaction, because there is an introduction of a product, negotiations and finally a payment is made. Constance, like spices, becomes a commodity which is traded from West to East. Constance’s sexed body gains power and grandeur by being intersected with the gastronomic such as spices.

Before continuing with the text analysis, one first needs to revisit Bakhtin’s theory of the Carnivalesque where intersection of the gastronomic and the sexual occurs. The intersection of food and sex exists in the light of grotesque realism and the material bodily principle, due to the fact that both actions open the body to the world. The actions of eating and fornication connect the body – via its orifices – with the (medieval) world. Grotesque realism is described by Bakhtin (32) as forms which are “interwoven” into each other by inner movement – “one form passing into the other”. This description in itself makes the link between food and sex evident. The opening of the mouth, insertion of food and the chewing...
of it holds a direct relation to the movement of the jaw and inner mouth as the food passes into it. The movement and transference of one form into another is echoed in sexual intercourse where penetration takes place between two bodies, whether there is transference and movement by only genitals, or orally as well. Both actions through their movements thus opens up the body and the body becomes joined with its exterior world – a character of the world if you will, subjugated by worldly desires and offerings and consequently alienated from the divine and the spiritual. The connection between spices and the body of Constance degrades the holy virtues associated with the character to mere materialistic values. One needs to explore the cultural-historical value of spices in the middle ages and what it represents before one can fully grasp the intersection of the spice trade with Constance’s nature.

Spices were a commodity of power in the middle ages. Historian Clifford A. Wright states that “between the eleventh and the sixteenth century, the spice trade was the source of fabulous wealth in the European countries bordering the Mediterranean” (35). This particular gastronomic diaspora was a prominent feature of the time in which Chaucer wrote The Canterbury Tales. Bober states that the showcasing of spices was an expression of a “cosmopolitan court and ecclesiastical culture that knew no national boundaries” (236). The international connections were seen as a form of power, and the power was even displayed as centre-pieces during the course of banquets. In the Nürnberg Germanische National-Museum a late gothic nef (dating from 1416) that belonged to Jean, the Duke of Berry, serves as a visual artefact which demonstrates the showcasing and flaunting of power through trade. The golden boat-vessel which held salt, spices and the powdered horn of a unicorn was displayed at banquets on a dresser with “gorgeous gold and silver plate and a trestle table laid with (we know) cloths in several layers” (Bober 227). The boat vessel, which in itself is a symbol for travel and trade, was not only sculpted in gold but was displayed among other gold and silver artefacts, thereby emphasising the power and wealth of mercantile capitalism in the medieval spice trade. It is a tangible artefact showing the glory and power that spices represented in the Middle Ages.

The body of Constance, intersected with the commodity of spice, is thus charged with the association of excess, abundance and power. The sexed body of Constance becomes a body of carnival. This is also echoed in the theories of Bahktin’s Carnivalesque. Bahktin associates pregnancy and birth with the lower-bodily stratum in his discussion of degradation. (21) Both these situations are associated with the female body, and thus the female body becomes a space of carnival. Chaucer’s handling of the saintly Constance invites elements of carnival through her sexuality as well as her association with spices through trade. This becomes clear in the text describing the feast in Syria.

At the feast, the excess and openness of the Orient in its Carnivalesque form is amplified as the body of Constance becomes the centrepiece of the feast, similar to the Duke of Berry’s nef that serves as the centre piece of the banquette table. Constance becomes a representation of power and trade paraded around during the festivities, which closely resemble a Roman feast:
Noght trowe I the triumpe of Julius,

Of which that Lucan maketh swich a boost,

Was roialler ne moore curius

Than was th’assemblee of this blissful hoost.

(Chaucer 400 - 4003)

The grandeur and excess of the feast cannot even compare to that of which Lucan boasts in his description of the festivities of Julius Caesar and when Constance is placed at the epicentre of the ostentatious event, her authority as holy and saintly figure is challenged.

The allusion to a Roman feast is a vital feature when exploring a text in terms of carnival. Due to Chaucer’s consistent mention of classical authors (like Lucan for instance), he must have been aware of the design and functions of the Roman feast. It is not uncommon for Medieval or Renaissance texts to contain elements of the Roman feast. For instance, according to Bakhtin, Rabelais’ *Garganuta and Pentagruel* presentstraditional system images of the Roman Saturnalia. (198-199) The Roman feast contains images of debasement and humiliation. It overthrows structural systems and degrades authority and spirituality – i.e. “the uncrowned king becomes a slave” (Bahktin 199). By making this comparison between the feast held for Constance and the Roman feast, Chaucer charges this particular occasion in The Man of Law’s Tale with qualities of debasement and humiliation. Constance as central “holy” figure is debased to nothing more than a material object devoid of any spiritual and upper-bodily stratum qualities. She becomes ready for consumption like the culinary dainties at the feast.

The encounter where food and sex simultaneously intersect in The Man of Law’s Tale is where the character Constance is presented as a virgin bride at the ceremonial feast upon her arrival. The dainties on the feasting tables and the sexed body of Constance are joined in desire (lust and gluttony). The Sultan welcomes his bride the lady Constance at the feast:

And to the feeste Cristen folk hem dresse

In general, ye, bothe younge and olde.

Heere may men feeste and roialtee biholde,

And dayntees mo than I kan yow devyse;

(Chaucer 416 – 419)
In the lines above, Chaucer does not work with the action of eating in its simplistic form, but rather with a space of grandeur that propagates and encourages eating (among other actions of the lower-bodily stratum). At the table of “dayntees” the “younge and old” do not only feed their appetites through their mouths, but also through their eyes and thoughts – the spectators at the feast are seduced by the food presented on the tables. Chaucer uses the terms “feest[ing]” and “bihold[ing]” separately which suggests two actions taking place at once. “Feest[ing]” refers to the consumption of the food presented, while “bihold[ing]” can be read as seduction/temptation or desire to consume the food that is presented in this carnivalesque manner. If these actions are amplified into a grotesque image of food, the action of eating becomes gluttonous and the action to desiring becomes (a culinary) lust.

Like the desire present in the beholding of food, so does the body of the lady Constance evoke a sexual desire:

In hire is heigh beautee, withoute pride,

Yowthe, withoute grenehede or foyle;

To alle hire werkes vertu is her gyde;

Humblesse hath slayn in hire al tiranny.

She is mirour of all courteisye;

Hir herte is verray chambre of hoolynesse,

Hir hand, ministre of fredam or almesse.

(Chaucer 162-168)

The Man of Law uses these virtues and degrades them to represent temptations of a sexual nature – a definite transition takes place where qualities of the upper-bodily stratum are degraded to primal objectification dictated by the lower-bodily stratum. Syria, where the marital feast takes place, thus becomes a space of the lower-bodily stratum dictated to only by desire and primal needs. From an uninformed Western perspective the East did not regard virtuous attributes (like those possessed by Constance) as sacred. Virginity (as in the case of Constance) was not considered holy but, on the contrary, seductive. Constance’s highly praised qualities become mere fragrances of desire for the Sultan, who

… hath caught so greet plesance

To han hir figure in his remembrance,

That all his lust and bisy cure
Was for to love her while his lyf may dure.

(Chaucer 186-189)

The Sultan's desire for Constance undercuts her virtuous qualities and it becomes a one-dimensional craving for “hir figure”. The holy Constance is inversed into an object of desire, paraded in a space of excess and temptation. Chaucer’s description of the East thus suggests a double standard in the perception of the character Constance. It brings out the “underground self” or “the Other” in a saintly being, even if it is only through perception.

Constance as a matter of fact becomes an extended representation of the Man of Law. At first, she is portrayed as a holy and saintly figure like the Man of Law who, according to the General Prologue, is a knowledgeable man well-versed in the Holy Scripture. Her saintliness and virtuous qualities are debased as her sexed body intersects with the gastronomic (spices), resulting in her translation into a commodity and an embodiment of trade. The Man of Law’s true character is also revealed as he becomes directly associated with trade, mercantile capitalism and monetary power. Through trade, both The Man of Law and Constance become characters acquainted with the East and through this they become characters of carnival, completely dissonant with the religious dogma of the time. Constance stays true to her faith on a technical basis but she does not have any power over the manipulation and trading of her body in the meta-narrative. The Man of Law on the other hand, is a character who claims to be of religious virtue but ends up driven by desire for power, excess and abundance. The double existence of The Man of Law is thus amplified through the interjection of gastronomic and sexual intersection.

3.2 The Intersection of Food and Sex in The Reeve's Tale as a Revelation that Human Behaviour is Inherently Sinful

In order to understand the nature of The Reeve’s Tale, one must understand its position and function in the holistic compilation of *The Canterbury Tales*. The Reeve’s Tale is a response to The Miller’s Tale, which in its own right holds a particular function in relation to the preceding Knight’s Tale. In order to clearly contextualise the Reeve’s Tale, we must first briefly examine the relationship between the Knight’s Tale and that of the Miller.

The Knight’s Tale is a chivalric Romance, a genre with very specific literary conventions, especially when it comes to the sexual nature of characters. Coote notes that the ‘Romance” originally meant “to compose” in the native tongue, French. (16 – 17) The composition gravitated towards showing respect for the church, warfare, and the noble side of love. The Romance in itself was to depict aristocratic medieval men and women inhabiting an idealised world. In such a convention of containment and composure, sexual urges were to be dignified and contained, specifically in terms of wedlock, virginity and chasteness. As derived from Biblical writings as well as from the rhetoric of St Augustine as mentioned in
the Introduction, sexual containment is as much a Christian (and Platonic) virtue as it is a chivalrous one and thus proved itself to be a dogmatic ideal in medieval society.

In The Knight’s Tale, the two cousins Paramon and Arcite both desire the heart (sexed body) of Emily. The tale is a noble quest in which each of the cousins tries to marry Emily – the successful suitor to be determined by combat. The sexed body of Emily is thus sacred and only available to the knight who wins the battle honourably. One finds that throughout the narrative the desire for Emily’s body is contained, composed and never disrupted. This follows the convention of the Romance with qualities of “refined appreciation of sexual love and courteous behaviour” (Coote 17). The emphasis is on the honour of the knights, which is considered to be superior to their bodily natures and desires. The upper-bodily stratum, in terms of actions, is the reigning stratum in this tale, presenting an idealised stance with regard to sexuality in the middle ages.

The first tale to be told on the pilgrimage to Canterbury is that of the Knight. Chaucer sets this idealised prototype as a backdrop of ideals to contrast the “romantic chivalrous” world to the deteriorating reality of his time. This is particularly evident in terms of sex. Next to The Knight’s Tale, Chaucer very strategically places The Miller’s Tale. Not only in content does it directly degrade The Knight’s Tale, but also in literary form, since it takes on the form of the fabliau – the opposite genre to the Romance in Middle English poetry. The fabliau is a “comic narrative which presents the grotesque and very physical world of the bourgeois, the peasant and the clerk (Coote 17, emphasis added). Marie Nelson and Richard Thomson refer to a fabliau as “A verse tale meant for laughter” in their chapter “The Fabliau” in the compilation A Companion to Old and Middle English Literature. (255) The fabliau in itself holds conventions of carnival in its function for it focuses on the physical world, the grotesque, and its aim is to evoke laughter. Chaucer thus challenges his own implementation of an idealised world and its conventions with a literary genre holding qualities that according to Bakhtin degrades and subverts officialdom, authority and religion.

Chaucer is the supreme English exponent of fabliau, according to Coote. (18) This is evident in the two tales following that of the knight, namely the Miller’s and the Reeve’s. Both follow the exact literary format of the fabliau, with their octosyllabic rhyming couplets. (Nelson and Thomson 257) The two tales hold the same function and are in conversation with one another; The Miller’s Tale is a town fabliau and the Reeve’s a country fabliau. (Stone 46) The sequencing of these two tales disrupts the ideal of the containment of human desire in The Knight’s Tale as they present escalating elements of carnival.

The intersection between food and sex in the three tales following The Knight’s Tale (Fragment 1 – The Miller’s, Reeve’s and Cook’s Tales) acts as an interjection in the narrative, presenting a soaring scale of disruption and carnival as well as of the moralistic decay in late medieval England. The honour and chastity that determine the actions of the characters Paramon, Arcite and Emily in The Knight’s Tale is challenged by a similar love triangle between Nicholas, Absalom and the married Alison. The Miller’s Tale as a fabliau degrades the sexual containment present in The Knight’s Tale, through the adultery taking place between Alison and Nicholas. The Miller’s Tale poses vices as a direct inverse to the
virtues present in The Knight’s Tale. The disruption of containment and manifestation of
carnival are also echoed in the culinary interjections in the tale.

Alison’s second suitor Absalom offers her a microcosmic feast in pursuit of her sexed body:

   He sente hire pyment, meeth, and spiced ale,
   And wafres, piping hoot out of the gleede

   (Chaucer 3378 -3379)

Absalom’s offerings are similar to the final dishes that were served the medieval festive
banquets. The “spiced ale” shares the characteristics of what is referred to as Ypocras (John
Russel) or a more modern term, Hippocras (Hammond). John Russel explains in a recipe in
his Boke of Nurture that Ypocras is a wine spiced with “Gynger, Synamone/ Graynis, Sugur/
Turnesole Pat is goodcolouryne” (123). It is served at the end of a meal with several kinds
of fruits and “wafers”, also found in Absalom’s offering. This kind of course was so popular,
that at the coronation feast of Richard III, it was served instead of the planned third course.
(Hammond 134)

The food itself holds elements of carnival due its excess and indulgence – the mention of the
spices, for instance, is charged with the lexicon of materialism and trade (as discussed in the
previous section). The offering of food intersects with Absolom’s sexual desire in his attempt
to commit adultery with Alison. The adulterous sex between Nicholas and Alison is also an
act of indulgence and is echoed by the decadence, flavouring and cultural context of the food
presented as offering. The intersection between food and sex serves as catalyst for the
disruption of order and containment. In The Reeve’s Tale one finds that the alignment of the
corruption of food and sex does not only disrupt the containment of the gastronomic and the
sexual, but also portrays the so called corruption of humans’ spiritual nature by blurring the
Seven Deadly Sins with human behaviour.

As noted before, in Dante’s Inferno for instance, one finds that sin is categorised as major
(evil) acts removed from human behaviour, and that certain characters end up in hell due to a
singular impure action or vice. For example, in the second circle of hell one finds that
Guinevere, Paris, Tristan, Helen of Troy and Dido are tormented in punishment for their
uncontained lust. The text thus suggests that their impurity is based on one singular vice
mentioned by Dante for there is no other sin or vice in these characters’ make-up to justify
their eternal suffering. The souls in Inferno are defined by one sin which concludes that there
is only one singular flaw (or act) in their human make-up that stands between them and
spiritual purity. Such representation is not in line with the writings of Saint Augustine, whose
whole life is a constant battle to suppress inherent sinful human behaviour in order to achieve
spiritual enlightenment. Dante’s Divine Comedy, like numerous other medieval texts,
propagates that the spiritual and bodily natures of humanity are two separate entities only
overlapping through conscious sinful acts.

Galen and Hippocrates on the other hand argue that what the medieval church considers
sinful is in fact naturally part of human existence. When it comes to sex, nature had to place
such a principle of a force in the body and the soul in order to ensure the species’ survival and continuation:

This ruse brings three elements into play. First, the organs that are given to all animals and are used for fertilization. Next, a capacity for pleasure that is extraordinary and “very keen”. Lastly the soul, the longing (epithumia) to make use of these organs – a marvellous, inexpressible (arrhēton) desire. (Foucault 106)

Desire is thus as much a part of human functionality as any other function that ensures the continuation and survival of the species. If one thinks of Shipley’s categorisation of sin, one finds that desire takes on many forms. Inherently, all desire in human behaviour is underpinned by the natural assurance of well-being of the individual; sexual desire for procreation, gastronomic for sustenance and economic to ensure a prosperous lifestyle. From the perspective of the classical thinkers that which is considered sin by medieval religious dogma, is inherent human behaviour. Sin based on desire is thus not the product of actions sprouting from the dark evil nature of human existence, but forms part of the social behaviour of humankind. In such a light, human behaviour in itself becomes carnivalesque – the constant frenzy to split what is actually singular into two separate natures in order to veil the so-called darker side (however natural) of human existence.

The two major sins in The Reeve’s Tale (sins of food and flesh) intersect at a point that suggests the inherent corruption of a human being’s soul. In the Reeve’s Tale two scholars, John and Alan from Cambridge, bring the miller Symkyn a sack of corn to be milled. Symkyn tricks the scholars by untying their horses and having them run off in pursuit, thereby leaving him alone during the milling process. The miller then substitutes half the flour with barley and makes his wife bake bread with the flour that he stole. When the scholars return from their horse chase, it is already dark and they ask for food and lodging. That night, they degraded the miller’s daughter and committed adultery with his wife. When Symkyn woke up in wrath, the scholars managed to escape, having stolen back the bread baked from their flour. Corruption is clearly a prominent theme in the narrative manifesting in the sexual and the handling of food, i.e. sins of the flesh – adultery, and sin of the food – adulteration11.

Adultery and adulteration are sins of the flesh and food with a shared etymological stem of religious and linguistic origin. Linguistically, both words were originally associated with “corruption” and “debasement” (OED). The corruption is not only in the food that is adulterated or the marriage vow that is violated, but it is also the corruption of the soul. One of the interpretations of the Middle French etymology of the word adulteration, is the “action

---

11 In Hammond’s Chapter on ‘Adulteration and Nutrition’ it is found that adulteration was quite common in medieval England’s food industry. Hammond mentions cases which are published in the City of London letter books, where bakers are punished for selling light weighted bread, or bread that has been baked with bad dough (82). Adulteration exceeds mere theft where bread is under weight and quantities disappear in terms of weight, but substitution of substandard substances to maintain weight also falls under the crime of adulteration. Hammond’s states that spices were often adulterated in the middle ages, where mustard may have been “mixed with wheat flour, pea flour and radish seeds” and “in the fourteenth century merchants in Angers were known to mix salt with sand or gravel” (89).
of drawing away from God” (OED). Referring to the thinking of St. Augustine again, once
the religious containment regarding food and sex is corrupted, one is drawn away from God
onto the path of sin. With food and sex as literary interjections drawing the characters onto
the path of sin, the presence of both food and sex juxtaposes The Reeve’s Tale to chivalrous
and religious ideals.

The intersection between food and sin and its association with corruption can be read as a
hyperbole for the corruption in the actions of all the pilgrims and characters in The Reeve’s
Tale that lead to this narratological manifestation. Events in the narrative and meta-narrative
of The Canterbury Tales leading up to the corruption of food and sex may seem casual at
first, but after taking a closer look, one finds that the Deadly Sins are engrained in casual
human interaction and behaviour.

The Reeve’s natural character make-up already suggests that corruption is natural in
humankind’s existence. He is a character of carnival, for his (natural) desire for materialism
lurks within his apparent ridged and calculated character. When readers are introduced to the
Reeve, Oswald, in his Portrait, he is described as a “sclender colerik man” (Chaucer 587).

Chaucer specifically categorises him by body size and humoral temperament, which affords
insight into his dietary habits. Oswald’s slenderness indicates culinary containment, unlike
the Prioress’s full figure that reveals her culinary indulgences. His categorisation as choleric
is juxtaposed with the Franklin’s sanguine complexion and humour. When looking at the
thirteenth century poem Regimen Santatis Salerni again, the choleric nature is described as
the inverse of the wine-and-women indulging sanguine temperament. Qualities usually
associated with the choleric temperament includes “violence”, “fierceness”, “ambition”,
“malice” and “[A] right bold speaker, and as bold a liar” (Appelbaum 48, emphasis added).
The natural temperament of the Reeve does suggest him to be inclined to
containment when it comes to the culinary, but also points to a general corruption in his spiritual nature. This
spiritual corruption is concealed by the meticulous way in which he conducts his profession,
thereby suggesting that he, too, is by nature duplicitous.

In the Reeve’s Portrait Oswald is twice associated with religious figures through similes that
compare hairstyle to that of a “preest” (Chaucer 590) and his manner of wearing his coat to
that of a “frere” (Chaucer 621). These associations with moral authorities are representative of the façade of accuracy, precision and honesty which he presents to his employers – he can
“kepe a greener and a bynne” (Chaucer 593) and even the livestock on the estate. (Chaucer
597 -598) The Reeve is indeed trusted by many as an honourable and deliberate man:

Was hoolly in this Reves governynge,
And by his covenant yaf the rekenynge,
Syn that his lord was twenty yeer of age.
Ther koude no man brynge hym in arrerage.

(Chaucer 599 – 602)
This opinion of the Reeve, however, shows up Oswald’s pretence in order to fulfil his *ambition* (borrowed from the description of the chloric elements) to “[f]ul riche he was astored pryvely” (Chaucer 609). He managed to accumulate his own wealth through deceitful cunning and scheming.

His lord wel koude he plesen subtilly,

To yeve and lene hym of his owne good,

And have a thank, and yet a cote and hood.

(Chaucer 610 -612)

The Reeve’s “auditour” (Chaucer 594) skills are for his own benefit only. His actions fall under the Deadly sin Avarice. It is also a sin underpinned by desire and categorised by Shipley (b) as “A Sin of Love Excessive”— the overarching category for Gluttony and Lust. In some of the other pilgrims, one could identify such corruption through their love of excessive culinary indulgence. The Reeve on the other hand, judging from his physicality and humoral temperament, seems to exercise a moderate lifestyle without excess and indulgence when it comes to food. Though he does not have a greed for good food like the sanguine Franklin, his choleric values such as *ambition, malice* and *lying*, are the disrupting components in his spiritual nature.

Lust is another sin present in the behaviour of the characters in The Reeve’s Tale as well as the genre of the text. The generic nature of The Reeve’s Tale, the fabliau, already holds a theme of sexual promiscuity and becomes a text carnival. One finds the emergence of Lust in the disruption of the sexual containment: Symkyn the miller is cuckolded by John and Alan alighted by the dishonouring of his daughter. The sex in the narrative is not a singular sin, but also acts as a form of vengeance for the cuckolding of the carpenter in The Miller’s Tale. As Oswald states in The Reeve’s Prologue “I shal quite anoon; /Right in his cheries termes wol I speke” (Chaucer 3916 -3917). The Reeve thus acts out of *malice* and revenge by continuing the theme of the adultery in his tale (and enhancing it) at the cost of the Miller. His revenge is so calculated that the “terms in which he speaks” even adopts the same literary form as The Miller’s Tale, the fabliau. The sexual interjection in the Reeve’s tale thus points to another Deadly Sin present in his characterisation; revenge is characterised by Shipley (b) as Anger under “Sins of Love Distorted”. One thus notes that the sexual interjection in the text can point out the manifestation of two sins.

The sin of Gluttony is also casually interwoven in the narrative of The Reeve’s Tale. After agreeing that the two scholars may spend the night, Symken sends his daughter to town to bring “ale and breed” and he “rosted hem a goos” (Chaucer 4137), after which

They soupen and they spoken, hem to solace,

And drynken evere strong ale ate beste.

Aboute mydnyght wente they to reste.
Wel hath this millere vernyssed his heed;
Ful pale he was for dronken, and nat reed.

(Chaucer 4146 – 4149)

The drunken Miller is at first a realistic reflection of the Miller pilgrim in the company on their way to Canterbury. He is described as a pale, wide nostrilled character so drunk that he can barely stay on his horse in the General Prologue, a point to be elaborated upon in the next chapter. In the progression of events in the narrative of the Reeve, the drunkenness (and thus gluttony) is a natural result of Symkyn’s hospitality – a virtuous quality associated with Saint Julian for instance as mentioned in the Franklin’s Portrait. The “soupen” and “dryken” that lead to the drunkenness of Symkyn are not actions that are committed, but forms part of habit and lifestyle that contributes to sustenance and functionality. Despite the fact that there is no containment involved when eating and drinking, it is not a behavioural manifestation that is an over-arching and defining trait within Symkyn’s character. On the contrary, it forms part of greater characterisation which according to Galen’s and Hippocrates’ definition of human nature and the soul, is not so unnatural.

It is after the gluttonous imbibement that Symkyn drops his guard and the two scholars gain courage to pursue their Lust – echoing the Parson’s sermon “After Glotonye thanne comth Lecherie, for thise two sinnes been so ny cosins that ofte tyme they wol nat departe” (Chaucer, 2317- 2318). Though Chaucer also categorises the Seven Deadly Sins in The Parson’s Tale, his arguing that Gluttony and Lust are not always “departing from one another” also blurs the differentiation between the sins. One finds that by intersecting the sins of food and sex (as he does in The Reeve’s Tale), Chaucer slips in the idea that sins are not singular acts but rather symptoms of an innate “corruption”.

Wrath and Avarice is also blurred with Gluttony, making it difficult to differentiate between them. This can be explored by looking at Symkyn as an extension of the Reeve. The deviousness of the Reeve’s character is reflected in Symkin in the way that the miller handles food. Symkyn commits adulteration when he states “[i]n stide of flour yet wol I yeve hem bren” (Chaucer 4053). The Reeve further describes Symkyn as “[a] theef he was for sothe of corn and mele/ And that a sly, and usaunt for to stele (Chaucer 3940-3941). This quality also creates duality in the values suggested by the text. First, it is part of Oswald’s revenge (Wrath) to put the Miller in such a bad light, echoing the statement in the Miller’s Portrait in The General Portrait; “Wel koude he stelen corn and tollen thries;/ And yet he hadde a thombe of gold, pardee” (562-563). However, the qualities that he embeds in Symkyn’s characterisation are the same qualities that are suggested to be held by the Reeve in his Portrait. Oswald is being described as a man of “sleighte” [cunning and trickery] and “covyne” [treachery] (Chaucer 604) in his Portrait. It is also mentioned, as noted earlier, that he could “kepe a grener and a bynne” (Chaucer 593). The text itself hints to the transference of Oswald’s characteristics to the character Symkyn. The name Symkyn in its meaning even echoes the similarity to the Reeve’s actions and nature mentioned in his Portrait: the medieval name Symken, according to Burrow and Turville-Petre’s third edition A Book of Middle
English, is “a diminutive of Simon” (332), after which Simony is named. Though Symkyn does not steal from the church, his name in itself has an underpinning meaning of desire and greed (Avarice).

The character’s concealed sins are presented to the reader in a carnivalesque manner for it evokes comic imagery and laughter. The two most prominent themes (around which the laughter and comic imagery revolve) within The Reeve’s Tale are the adulteration of flour (food) and violation (adultery) of chasteness in terms of virginity and marriage (sex). The text suggests degradation and debasement for it challenges the credibility of a spiritual nature being one of purity, only tainted by singular acts dictated by the bodily nature. This is due to the function and position of the tale in The Canterbury Tales. The Reeve’s tale as a fabliau does not only “quite” the Miller in “termes [of] speke”, but also degrades the chivalrous qualities present in the Romance told by the Knight. It is a continuation of the debasement following The Miller’s Tale, blurring sin into common human action and reaction and disrupting the containment and composure found in The Knight’s Tale. Though one should not take tales very seriously, it does point to the degraded moral system of Chaucer’s time or rather to a timeless human reality if one considers human nature from the perspective of the Classical thinkers. From a religious perspective on the other hand, the intersection between food and sex in The Reeve’s Tale brings a kind of moral debasement to light that exceeds mere adultery and adulteration. It points to the corruption of man’s spiritual nature and thus challenges the idealistic and religious models such as chivalry in medieval society.

3.3 Ultimate Characters of Carnival: The Cook and his Tale

The Cook’s Tale is the only unfinished tale in Chaucer’s The Canterbury Tales. This “unfinished state” is usually the primary focus according to scholars such as Olga Burakov in her article “Chaucer’s The Cook’s Tale”(2). When reading through articles, one notices that scholars often anticipate that the tale would have ended where the ungodly perpetrators in the narrative are brought to justice. They forecast a point in the narrative where Perkyn’s revelling comes to an end and where the central character has to pay penance for his lifestyle. In Constance B. Heiatt’s article “A Cook They Had With Hem For the Nones” she argues that “if we had a complete tale to examine, we would find that Perkyn got his comeuppance, one way or another” (204). Craig Bertolet mentions numerous revised manuscripts of The Canterbury Tales from the fifteenth century that had additional endings written to conclude The Cook’s Tale so that the Perkyn character serves the idea of judgement – in one in particular he is sentenced to death. This is to give the tale a moralistic closing stance, according to Bertolet (239) in his paper ”Wel bet is roten appul out of hoord: Chaucer's Cook, Commerce, and Civic Order”. What one can take from these readings and adaptations is that Perkyn the Reveller is a character that overthrows the set social structures of late medieval London. He presents no pretence or double existence in his character, but rather deliberately challenges and degrades any form of authority with which he is confronted. He becomes the ultimate character of carnival.
The essence of carnival is explained by Michael Holquist in the Prologue to Bakhtin’s *Rabelais and his World*. He states that carnival should not be confused with a temporary holiday, but that it is a continuation of images present in folklore. Bakhtin’s folk are blasphemous, cunning, coarse, dirty, rampantly physical, “reveling in oceans of strong drink, poods of sausage, and endless coupling of bodies” – it is not only an impediment to revolutionary change, but it becomes revolution itself. (xviii- xix) This is exactly what emerges in Chaucer’s *The Cook’s Tale*: Perkyn is a character representing all elements of carnival – gluttony, overindulgence of drink, sex, revelling and cunning. Because there is no judgement for Perkyn in the original text of *The Canterbury Tales*, he is a character left open and continuous in his nature without any restraint, and as carnival, he becomes revolution itself. I believe that the text should not be read or analysed taking into consideration any anticipated endings, for in its “incomplete stance”, it serves a very specific rhetorical function by means of its carnivalesque nature and strategic placement in *The Canterbury Tales* as a whole.

The Cook’s Tale is the last tale in the first section of *The Canterbury Tales* Fragment 1. As discussed earlier, Fragment 1 opens with the Knight’s Tale followed by the Miller’s and Reeve’s Tales and finally concludes with the Cook’s Tale. Themes such as adultery, cuckold and blasphemy which initially emerge in the Miller’s Tale as directly derogative responses to the Knight’s Tale, are exaggerated and blown up to their (almost) fullest extent in the Cook’s Tale – a point of no return. It degrades the value of chivalry present in the Knight’s Tale to its furthest opposite. The Cook’s Tale’s positioning in the text, being the last in the fragment opposing the Knight’s Tale in placement and rhetoric, becomes the direct opposite of the virtuous and moral stance.

The strategic positioning of the tale and its function hints towards classifying it as a fabliau. Despite the technicalities of genre, however, the tale itself becomes the inverse of Christian ideals in mind, space and action. This can be explored by looking at the intersection of food and sex in the narrative.

Perkyn the Revelour, the main character in the Cook’s Tale, is an extension of the cook himself, Roger of Ware. Hence, one needs to start with the Cook himself in order to conduct this analysis. In the Cook’s Portrait one finds that there is only one description which refers to him as a human, the rest praises his craft:

A Cook they hadde with hem for the nones
To boile the chickens with the marybones,
And poured-merchant tart and galyngele.
Wel koude he knowe the draughte of Londoun ale.
He koude rooste, and seethe, and broille, and frye,
Maken mortruex, and wel bake a pye.
But greet harm was it, as it thought me,
That on his shyne a normal hadde he.
For blankmanger, that made he with the beste.

(Chaucer 379 – 387)

The only attribute in the Cook’s Prologue that suggests a character trait of his, is lines 385 - 386: the description of the ulcer on his leg. The ulcer suggests a lack of personal hygiene and this immediately questions the culinary skill of making fancy dishes. (Hieatt 200) Bertolet argues that no matter how fine a cook Roger of Ware is, the erupting ulcer will always overshadow his reputation as a great cook and that the intersection between food and the sore calls to mind the sin of gluttony. (230) The only human element mentioned in the Cook’s Portrait is one with no guise, but a detail that evokes numerous negative interpretations and discussions. The Cook’s inner self is thus not concealed by any religious façade or spiritual pompousness, but is a character of carnival, depicted through his consumption and handling of food.

The very first time that the reader is introduced to the cook (line 379-381), Chaucer makes it clear that the cook is on the pilgrimage for business and not for religious reasons. He is merely on the journey to cook chicken with bone marrow and spicy “poured-merchant tart” for the company of pilgrims. At this point one must explore the function of the listing of foods and skills in the Cook’s Portrait. The flaunting of the cook’s ability to boil, fry, roast and bake a pie (lines 383-384) does not serve as a veil to cover his true nature in a spiritual sense, as found in many of the other characters on the pilgrimage. It serves more as an advertisement of sorts.

The Cook’s Portrait is a display of skill and craft rather a reflection of true character. Bertolet notes that the cook must have been hired by some Guildsman to enhance guild’s own prestige and that the work of the cook must have been good. (229) With the aid of some historic research on the dishes that are mentioned in the Cook’s Portrait, Hieatt notes that “blankmanger” and “mortreux” are sophisticated dishes found on aristocratic menus. (205) The historical background embedded in the manner of hiring the cook and the dishes presented in the General Prologue, shows Roger of Ware as an experienced and prestigious cook. The skills and qualities that typify his profession, however, do not compare to the disposition of moral degradation evident in his characterisation.

The Cook’s Prologue where Harry Baily “jests” with the Roger of Ware about the quality of his food is no reflection on the skills of the cook but rather reflects on dishonest and cunning elements in the Cook’s character. These elements degrade what is expected of him from society and his clients, and thus challenges the official value of his profession.

For many paste hastow laten blood,

And many a Jakke of Dovere hastow soold
That hath been twies hoot and twies coold.

Of many a pilgrim hastow Christes curs,
For of thy percelly yet they fare the wors,
That they han eten with thy stubble goos;
For in thy shoppe is many a flye loos.

(Chaucer 4346 – 4352)

Hieatt contextualises the words of Harry Baily, stating that the cook’s shop is equivalent to a modern fast-food or take-out shop, as the descriptions in the text focus specifically on the shop and not on his skills as cook. (201) It thus affords an insight to the daily routine of business as conducted by Robert of Ware: he sells his pasties without gravy (as it bled out), he reheats “Jakke of Doveres” which means they are far from fresh and uses parsley sauce to try and conceal bad goose fed on stubble. He takes shortcuts in the preparation of his food, then tricks customers into buying them. He does have the skill to cook on standard, but chooses to ignore his training for personal benefit. His lack in hygiene represented by the ulcer on his leg is also reiterated by the flies in his cook shop. Bertolet claims that the cook, by producing food of poor quality, is letting down his customers, his guild and his city due to his concern for profit and loss. (233)

Both Bertolet (233) and Hieatt (201) mention the city of London’s regulations of 1379, according to which no rabbit, geese or garbage (the garbage parts of geese or chickens) may be baked in a pie. Both scholars argue that Harry Baily’s accusations might be hinting that the Cook’s products and pies contravene the regulations of the 1379 Statue of Pastelers. Such a historical reading points out that Roger of Ware does not only cheat his customers, but also defies the authority of the state. Through the preparation of his food he deliberately sets up his own officialdom and in his personal space demolishes that of the state, thereby establishing himself as a character of carnival. His carnivalesque nature becomes more vivid when one focuses on his own consumption of food and drink.

Roger’s fondness of ale in the Cook’s Portrait is evident in the intended pun in line 382: “Wel koude he knowe the draughte of Londoun ale”. It immediately insinuates, as does the ulcer, that the Cook is glutton, a character of excess uncapable of any moderation. This intimation is established further in the text in The Manciple’s Prologue when the Cook can hardly stay on his horse:

For in good feith, they visage is ful pale,
Thyne eyen daswen eek, as that me thynkethe,
And wel I woot, they breeth ful soure stynketh:
That sheweth wel thou art nat wel disposed.
Of me, certeyn, thou shalt nat been yglosed.
See how he ganeth, lo! This dronken wight,
As though he wolde swolwe us anon right.
Hoold cloos thy mouth, man, by thy fader kyn!
The devel of helle sette his foot therin!
They cursed breeth infecte wole us alle.
Fy, stykkyng swyn! fy, foule moote thee falle!

(Chaucer, 29 – 40)

The gluttonous drinking leaves Roger of Ware in a disgusting state – his whole body begins to represent the disgust first identified through the ulcer on his leg, which foreshadows the condition of the cook because of his overindulgence in drink. As noted (lines 29 – 32), the cook’s eyes are dazed and his breath has a sour stink to it. He is not a good state and the pilgrims are well aware of it. From a Christian dogmatic perspective the physicality of the cook embodies the sickness of his behaviour; he is portrayed as a character of carnival because of his open and bold gluttonous consumption, his body and spirit becoming one with the world of indulgence and excess. He does not only hold elements of carnival, but his defiance of social and religious expectations (that the other pilgrims try to uphold), makes him a “revolution itself” in the ideological setting.

The cook’s carnivalesque nature can also be explored through his actions. Lines 33 to 39 are devoted to the description of the drunken cook’s yawn and the pilgrims’ attitude towards it. The wideness of the cook’s mouth is emphasised when he yawns by the rest of the company stating that he would swallow all of them. Through Bakhtin’s theory, this can be seen as a grotesque image. The notion of swallowing the world or its surroundings is a frequent image in Rabelais’ Gargantua and Pantagruel and is explained by Bakhtin as the material body exceeding its limits and joining cosmic elements with the material body. This is exactly what the cook’s actions represent. The drunken cook’s mouth causes a connection between the cosmos and the material body – through the intake of drink as well as the yawn. The yawn exaggerates the mouth as an orifice that unifies the body and world, which is further highlighted by creating the image of the fellow pilgrims being ingested into the material body of the cook by “swolweing” (Chaucer 36) them. The pilgrims object to this unification, through exclamations “Hoold cloos thy mouth” (Chaucer, 37) not to be “infecte[d]” (Chaucer 39) by the breath of the cook and thus becoming part of his material bodily world. The opening of the mouth taints all its surroundings and even joins abstract metaphysical figures with the material body, such as the “devel of helle” (Chaucer 38). There is no pseudo-enhancing of the cook’s character, for his actions openly reside in the lower-bodily stratum.

As the culinary interjection of London ale and the cook’s drunkenness portray him as the ultimate character of carnival, so does the sexual interjection in The Cook’s Tale aid in the
carnivalesque nature of Perkyn’s character construction. One is introduced to Perkyn the Reveller in the first few lines of the tale and already there is an immediate intersection between the gastronomic and the sexual, enhancing the spirit of carnival in the text and character:

Aprentys whilom dwelled in oure citee,
And of a craft of vitaillers was hee.
Gaillard he was as goldfinch in the shawe,
Broun as a berye, a proper short felawe,
With lokkes blake, ykembd ful fetisly.
Dauncen he koude so wel and jolily
That he was cleped Perkyn Revelour.
He was as ful of love and paramour
As is the hyve ful of hony sweete:

Wel was the wenche with hym myghte meete.

(Chaucer 4365 – 4374)

In the opening lines of The Cook’s Tale, the Perkyn character, as an apprentice in London, is already associated with food by his trade. Working for a victualler puts him a position of supplying as well as handling food through its distribution to ships and sailors. Just after his association with food is established, the narrative focuses on his physical attributes, making him a sexual object of desire. Despite his length, his dark skin and black locks render him a well-groomed and attractive fellow. Adding to his sexuality is his ability to dance well and jolly, earning him the name Perkyn the Reveller. It is in the last three lines of introducing Perkyn to the reader, that Chaucer intersects the gastronomic and the sexual. Perkyn is full of love-making as a hive is full of sweet honey. His sexuality is intersected with a sweet delicacy of his time by being compared with honey with the emphasis on the pleasure that it provides: however, one can also compare it with the multi-functionality of honey. In Melitta Weiss Adamson’s Food in Medieval Times she elaborates on the various functions of honey: it was used as a preservative, to sweeten dishes, add colour to food, adored for its medicinal properties and also used as the base of the alcoholic drink known as “mead” (27). Despite the fact that honey was more commonly used among the upper classes of medieval England, its diverse use in the culinary arts affords it the same quality in terms of functionality as barley bread, for instance, as noted by the Wife of Bath in her Prologue. Perkyn’s sexuality thus gains the multi-purpose element of being intended for the masses, as in the case of the Wife of Bath. The last line in the Perkyn’s introduction notes that lucky was the wenche that he might meet. The description of the possible sexual partner to-be is non-specific, but refers to any woman who may cross his path. His sexuality is thus open and infinite.
Through Perkyn’s sexuality, he is not bound to any order or officialdom, but is available to the masses – or the masses are available to him. Like the cook swallows up the world around him by yawning due to too much drink, so does Perkyn join his material body with the world around him by penetrating it with his sexual organs. The joining of his world with that of the masses through bodily orifices is echoed in his handling of food as an apprentice in the victualler’s shop. He prepares foods that are then supplied to the masses on ships or in harbours, food to be consumed by being eaten. By ingesting the food prepared by Perkyn, the material bodies of the sailors are unified with Perkyn’s – like the wenches who may be lucky enough to experience the penetration of Perkyn’s sexed body. By opening his body and the bodies of others, Perkyn becomes the absolute character of carnival.

Elements of carnival are present throughout the whole tale: “dys, roit and paramour” (Chaucer 4386) are basically what Perkyn’s life consists of. The actions “committed” by Perkyn are all actions that corrupt the structure and functionality of an established society. His gambling (dice) for instance is an action that detracts from the quality of a society. Susan Higgenbotham studied 15th century Parliamentary roles of England and notes in her paper “Plantagenets at Play: Medieval Gambling” that medieval English kings forbade commoners to play dice for it distracted them from practicing archery and developing skills needed to defend their country; furthermore, those who did not wish to offend God also refrained from playing gambling games. Perkyn’s other actions, excluding his sexual excursions, also challenge the structures of religion and officialdom. His boisterous sexual lifestyle merely serves to frame his carnivalesque nature more boldly. The tale opens and concludes with Perkyn’s sexuality. The last one hears or sees of Perkyn is when he joins his friend whose wife is a prostitute:

Anon he sente his bed and his array

Unto compeer of his owene sort,

That lovede dys, and revel, and disport,

And hadde a wyf that heeld for contenance

A shoppe, and swyved for hir sustenance.

(Chaucer 4418 - 4422)

Perkyn chooses as company people who are associated with gambling, revelry and debauchery, rather than fulfilling his obligations as apprentice at the victualler’s shop. Perkyn asked to be released from the apprenticeship “Upon a day, whan he his papir soughte” (Chaucer 4404) and thus consciously and actively chooses to exchange his “space” of honour for a “space” of dishonour among revellers and prostitutes. In Bakhtin’s words, “One might say the [he] builds [his] own world versus the official world, [his] own church versus the official church, [his] own state versus the official state” (88). Perkyn’s grotesque and obscene (for medieval readers/audience even more so) behaviour and lifestyle completely demolish the value systems of the time and place. In an Edenic sense he truly becomes the “roten appul” (Chaucer 4406) that brings officialdom and religious dogma to a fall.
Burakov analyses the cook and his tale through the lens of the Book of Genesis. Perkyn’s constant pursuit of pleasure to an extent “emulates the trajectory of Adam’s Fall”. A structural similarity exists between the forbidden tree of knowledge and the money which Perkyn steals from the cashbox, since the money enables him to “know” the dice, revelling and debauchery. (3-4) Burakov also notes the echoing of the Genesis fruit element and the proverb of the “roten appul” in the tale: both fruits hold a theme of decay and mortality. (4) The theme of decay and mortality can also be defined by Bakhtin’s rhetoric about the theme of degradation, for the fruit is representative of forces opposing officialdom and morality. By comparing the rotten apple in The Cook’s Tale with that of Genesis, it also becomes the ultimate point of intersection between the gastronomic and the sexual. For scholars, the forbidden fruit from the tree of knowledge is a metaphor for sex and due to this reading the forbidden fruit from Eden becomes the ultimate representation of common ground shared by the sexual and the gastronomical.

Roger the cook and his apprentice, the rotten apple, embodied by Perkyn in The Cook’s Tale, thus present an ultimate image of carnival. It is an image that holds both discourses about food and sex, and desire and temptation. The rotten apple brings the whole establishment of religion and morality into disregard. For Perkyn and the Cook, there is no punishment for their sins and excessive lifestyles, which translates to no restoration of a degraded social sphere. They are both definitive characters of carnival and together, unified in allegory, they represent the unofficial church/state in the late medieval society – fed by excessive gastronomic intake and sex.

Chapter 4: Unveiling the Violence of Chivalry through Food and the Grotesque

In the medieval world, the concept of violence took on many dimensions and variations. When one looks at the Anglo-Saxon lexis, one finds that there are numerous words which, as individual lexical entities, denote what would in modern language merely be referred to as violence or violent. Some of these words contain the stem “dēaþ” (death) for example “dēaþcwalu” (deadly pain or plague death by violence) or “dēaþcwælæm” (death by violent slaughter). These words imply death in a violent manner, where the Anglo-Saxon words with the stem “nied” are more abstract and refer to a form of conduct without a determinate
outcome. Such examples include “niedmægen” (force violence) and “niedsynn” (a sin of violence); historical-linguistic records reflect the intimate relationship that people had with death and violence in Europe and medieval England.

In his book, *The Better Angels of Our Nature: A History of Violence and Humanity*, Steven Pinker uses statistics from various research and court cases throughout the ages to graph the incidents of violence that occurred in medieval Europe in order to make a comparison with present day violence. The rate dropped from 110 cases per 100,000 people (14th century Oxford) to one homicide per 100,000 people in 20th century London. (Pinker 72) These statistics suggest that violence, terror and death were common occurrences in the lives of people in medieval times, and that a desensitized familiarity with violence was embedded in the collective psyche.

Visual testimonials present a shocking picture of the brutality of everyday life in the middle ages. The fifteenth century manuscript *Das Mittelalterliche Hausbuch* (Image 3), as used by Pinker, provides a snapshot of medieval lifestyle and the manifestations of violence within it. As Saturn, Capricorn and Aquarius reign in the sky, humankind disembowels, tortures and kills below. Right at the bottom of the depiction, a peasant is shown cutting into a horse’s abdomen and removing its intestines and visceral matter, seemingly unaware of the pig sniffing at his buttocks. In the mouth of the cave, there is a woman in stocks, while a heavily chained woman sits next to her. Between the hills a man is being led to his execution; there is already a body hanging from the gallows. A broken body on a wheel of torture is being scavenged by the crows. Pinker notes that the gallows and the wheel of torture form part of the trees and bushes on the hills and thus becomes a backdrop for the figures in the depiction. (79)
Just as violence is vividly notable in medieval visuals, so do medieval literary forms accommodate and reflect the proximity of risk and violence in society. In Dante’s *Inferno*, the seventh circle of Hell is the sphere of violence. However, violence does not stand by itself as one singular entity such as Lust (circle two) or Gluttony (circle three), but is represented in numerous forms in Cantos XII to XVII. In Canto XI, Virgil reveals these forms of violence to Dante in three categories:

All the first circle of the Violent is;
But since may be used against three persons,
In three rounds ‘tis divided and constructed
To God, to ourselves, and to our neighbour can we
Use force; I say on them and their things,
As thou shalt hear the reason manifest.

(28 – 33)

Violence can be committed against another, the self and God. In the Cantos that follow, Dante portrays violence through murder (XII), suicide (XIII), blasphemy (XIV), sodomy (XV) and (XVI), and usury (XVII). In Dante, violence becomes an intricate concept in which various themes and behaviours are interwoven. In a way it becomes an underpinning theme that appears in various guises, especially when one considers the images such as the river of blood, the horrid forest, the Minotaur and the Harpies used by Dante when depicting the seventh circle of hell.

This preoccupation with violence finds expression also in the representation of the culinary. The relationship between food, feasting and violence is at times simple and in other cases very complex, reflecting an intricate relationship between various aspects of medieval life, virtues, vices and behaviour in one world.

Inspired by the linear progression of Dante’s Inferno, I will explore Beowulf, Rabelais’ Gargantua and Pantagruel (though the latter does not derive from the medieval period, it is preoccupied with medieval cosmology) and Sir Thomas Malory’s le’More d’Arthur to determine the relationship between food and violence in the first section of this chapter. The Anglo-Saxon lexical conjunction “meodo-setla oftēah” will serve as a starting premise for my argument and Bakhtin’s more modern theory of the grotesque will aid in this literary excavation.

In the second section, the close link between food and violence can be used to unveil the double existence found in medieval chivalric society, which, on analysis, will lead to an understanding of the emergence of the dramatized body. Medieval King Henry VIII as a historic figure will be used in order to further examine the theory of double existence in chivalry and the dramatized body.

Section three will focus on Chaucer’s portrayal of chivalry and the histories presented in the text. The portrait of the Knight as well as of the Squire in The General Prologue will be analysed in the light of chivalry as an ideal which promotes honour, virtue and goodwill. Contradictions in the text point to the ambiguity present in an idealised concept such as chivalry. The history and the quest for spices (gourmandising food) which is embedded in the Knight’s Portrait will reveal that Chaucer’s construction of chivalry is a tongue-in-the-cheek depiction. With this knowledge in mind, the Portrait of the Miller and certain parts of his tale
can be read as a grotesque eruption of the actualities regarding food and violence in medieval chivalry.

4.1) Meodo-setla oftēah: Food and Destruction

A dialectical relationship exists between food and violence: the one exists within the other. Throughout *Beowulf*, the intersections of violence and the culinary are established through the poet’s choice of words. In line 5, when praising the worth and glory of the warrior king Shield Sheafson, the reader is already introduced to the Anglo-Saxon words “meodo-setla oftēah”. The verbatim translation of the words is *mead-bench tore* — a table or bench for eating purposes and the action of tearing apart. Shield Sheafson is honoured for destroying the mead bench and the king’s greatness is equated to the conjunction of these two words in verse. The word “meodo-setla” conjures up a table set with food — a *homely* microcosmic sphere where the body is fed and revitalised in the company of fellow kinsmen. The strategic positioning of the word “oftēah” next to the *homely* image shatters it by evoking destruction. “Oftēah” takes place in order to claim “meodo-setla” in a metonymical sense. The “meodo-setla” becomes a metonym for that which the earth within its political boundaries offers the populace for their harvests, dinner table and quality of life. Thus in many cases, such as the Viking invasions in Brittany as well as the Norman Conquest, the reason for political “oftēah” is the improvement and expansion of the conqueror’s “meodo-setla”. The “meodo-setla” also becomes a vulnerable target in the execution of “oftēah”. In *Beowulf*, king Shield Sheafson is a man who is capable of destroying the platform from which his enemy eats. This makes sense when considering medieval war tactics such as castle sieges and the cutting off of food supply. When the Visigoths successfully sacked Rome in 410AD, it was starvation that forced the Senate to surrender. The “meodo-setla” is the platform which holds together and feeds a society, and once it is shattered, so are the forces that sustain it.

Though the “oftēah” is an attack on the “meodo-setla”, the microcosmic sphere of the “meodo-setla” encompasses its own “oftēah” which is crucial for it to exist. The mead-bench cannot assert its function if the action of tearing is not involved — whether it is the cutting of meat, breaking of bread or the tearing and breaking of cabbage for cooking soup. This function is essential and must take place for the “meodo-setla” to achieve its goal.

A dialectical relationship surfaces between the “meodo-setla” and “oftēah” as they exist within one another. This is a simplified relationship that opens up numerous dimensions in the medieval scope of literature where the paths of violence and destruction meet with culinary expressions and representations in various narratives. The Carnivalesque amplifies this relationship, for in grotesque realism and banquet images, the gastronomic and the violent stand in absolute synergy with one another.

At the beginning at this chapter, we saw that the concept of violence was closely related to death in the Middle Ages and that these concepts were almost indistinguishable from one
another in the Old English lexis. Bakhtin argues that the concept “to die” holds, among other variations, “to swallow” or “to eat”. This link holds a special relation to the underworld. To “die” is to be transferred to the underworld which is associated with the lower-bodily stratum – the same ‘destination’ for food that has been swallowed or eaten (301). In other words, the banquet hall with its mead tables leads to an inevitable transference to the lower-bodily stratum literally translating to death. This notion is specifically evident in *Beowulf’s* mead hall, Heorot.

4.1.1) Beowulf: Death and Destruction in Feasting

Heorot is a microcosmic representation of the medieval world. It is a space of laughter, creation and festivities, but also a space of violence and destruction. The walls of Heorot witness the transference of life to the lower-bodily stratum (and underworld). When the monster Grendel attacks the mead hall, he comes across a scene which had recently been merry, where soldiers had been eating and drinking (transferring food and drink to lower-bodily stratum):

So, after nightfall, Grendel set out
For the lofty house, to see how the Ring-Danes
were setting into it after their drink,
and there he came upon them, a company of the best
asleep from their feasting, insensible to pain
and human sorrow.

*(Beowulf 115-120)*

What attracts Grendel to the Heorot is the “harp being struck” (89), “the clear song of a skilled poet” (90) at the “loud banquet” (88). It is a space of carnival – of joyous music, *drink* (117) and *feasting* (119). Within the hall, we find images of gluttony and the grotesque. As *Beowulf* himself reports to Hygelac: “In my whole life/ I have never seen mead enjoyed more/ in any hall on earth” (2014 - 2016). The concept of the “meodo-setla” takes on a very boisterous and even grotesque form here where its usage exceeds functionality and reaches a point of indulgence, a state of being ruled by the lower-bodily stratum.

After the nightfall of feasting and merriment, the lofty house is exposed to another form of carnival: the dismemberment, death and “oftēah” of bodies. Those who feast are feasted on. As Grendel enters the mead hall,

He saw many men in the mansion, sleeping,
A ranked company of kinsmen and warriors quartered together...[and]
...before morning
he would rip life from limb and devour them,
feed on their flesh

(728 – 733)

For Grendel, Heorot becomes a banquet table. His actions of devouring and gulping in the mead-hall echo the actions of the soldiers and the men who feasted on the carcases of slaughtered animals. Flesh is severed (“oftēah”) from a body and feasted upon. Victims and enemy (the Danes and Grendel) perform actions of violence in order to eat. The act of eating is in itself destructive, whether it is the flesh of an animal or a human that is being feasted upon. Flesh is torn and destroyed by human and monster for the purpose of nourishment and sustenance. The reciprocal relationship between the “meodo-setla” and “oftēah” is materialised in Heorot when Grendel enters the hall of feasting; he becomes a bodily manifestation of the destruction and violence present in humans’ consumption of food. It represents what Bakhtin explains as the body transgressing its own limits by swallowing, devouring and rendering the world apart. The body is enriched and grows at the world’s expense. (281)

4.1.2) Gargantua and Pantagruel: The Interdependent and Cyclical Relationship in Meodo-setla Oftēah

The violence and destruction present in the act of eating also opens up the body to the world. The body “is blended with the world, with animals, with objects...it is cosmic [and] represents the entire material bodily world in all its elements” (Bahktin 26). The slaughtered body of an animal and the eating body of a human are both open and unfinished and thus become one with the world within the cosmos and entirety of the material body of the world. As both the actions of eating and slaughtering (or tearing) open up bodily worlds to one another, the actions become interdependent. In medieval cosmology, the one cannot exist without the other.

The relationship between the “meodo-setla” and the “oftēah” places them as elements in an interdependent universe, since both concepts open up the body and unite it with the world, the world being the earth from which food is reaped. The body intersects with the world at what Bakhtin describes as degradation. Degradation is the coming down to earth, the contact with the earth as an element that swallows up and gives birth at the same time. To degrade is to bury, to sow and to kill simultaneously, on order to bring forth something more and better (21, emphasis added).
Through degradation, the body interacts with the world – it sows, buries and kills. Through the sowing, burying and killing (the coming down to earth), birth is given to new life and sustenance which then becomes food to be swallowed and defecated back to the earth. Bakhtin blurs creation and destruction when discussing the earth in his theorising of degradation. The earth is the “grave” and the “womb” and thus the body reaps from it as well as disposing into it. (21) The relationship becomes cyclical and gains a cosmological characteristic where the interdependence between the body and the world is so bonded that the two concepts become inseparable from one another. This can be seen in Rabelais’ first book of *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, where Gargamelle, Gargantua’s mother, went into labour because of a sequence of events involving the open body joined with the world:

Her ass fell out, one afternoon, on the third day of February, from having eaten too much fatty beef tripe – tripe from oxen fattened both in the stall and also by grazing in the meadows where the grass is so rich that it had to be mown twice a year. And in fact they had killed three hundred and sixty-four thousand and fourteen of these fat oxen, to be salted on Shrove Tuesday, so that in the springtime they’d have plenty of good pressed beef and, before they really sat themselves down and started to eat, they could have a little ritual in celebration of meat salting – which would make it easier to enjoy their wine.

(Rabelais 15)

If one looks at the chronology of the actions described by Rabelais, the first action would involve the rich growing grass, which needed to be mowed twice a year. The grass becomes the gastronomic starting point in the sequence of events that follow. For the cattle it becomes the “meodo-setla” which they tear with their mouths to eat and to get fat. These actions of ripping and chewing the grass is the first image of an open body which then, according to Bakhtin’s theory, would become part of the world. On the next level of the food chain, the “three hundred and sixty-four thousand and fourteen of these fat oxen” become the victims of the mead-benches as their flesh are torn and dismembered when slaughtered, thereby opening up the body in an act that joins it to the world. The cycle is continued when humans eat the “salted beef” and “enjoy their wine”. Through degradation the body (human and animal) is sustained and destroyed, bringing forth new life, such as the birth of Gargangtua through Gargemelle’s ear.

Gargamelle’s labour in the narrative also points out that the “meodo-setla ofēah” cycle can appear in a distorted form when it is taking place in a carnivalesque atmosphere. Orifices are not being used for their proper purposes: the effect of the grotesque emerges when conjoining functions and organs that are normally separated. This notion points to something inherently grotesque and decidedly unhomely about the homeliness of food in medieval literature and the feasting is haunted by the violence it seeks to sublimate. Furthermore, in the case of *Beowulf* it is also the feasting of the “meodo-setla” in Heorot that attracted the monster Grendel who then dismembered and slaughtered the Danes in the mead-hall. The opening and destruction of the mead (cooked bodies of animals) by the Danes, initiates the opening and destruction of their own bodies.
4.1.3) Food Culture and Violence in Le Mort d’Arthur: An Infinite Relationship of Tension between the Civil and the Bestial

In Sir Thomas Malory’s Le Mort d’Arthur, we find how eating at a civilized banquet joins not only those who participate in the feast to their immediate world, but also to a robust world greater than their microcosmic temporality in the moment. In Malory’s first part of the book, “The Tale of King Arthur”, where he tells the tale of Torre and Pillenore, a banquet serves as a spring-board for the very unusual narrative that follows. The sorcerer Merlin introduces not only the feast attendees, but also the readers to an “unusual event” (43):

[A] white hart galloped into the hall, pursued by a white brachet and thirty pairs of black hounds. The brachet kept snapping at the hart’s haunches, and finally succeeded in tearing off a piece of flesh. The hart made a tremendous leap, and in doing so, overturned a knight who was sitting at one of the side tables. The knight jumped up, seized the brachet, and made off with her.

(Malory 43)

As discussed earlier in relation to Beowulf, the dialectical relationship between “meodo-setla” and “oftēah” also surfaces in this text. The “unusual event” is actually not that unusual, considering that the hunting of animals is a phenomenon well known to medieval people, whether gentry or peasant. I think Merlin’s choice of words refers to the integration of a civil world of table manners and structure with a natural world which has not been carved by humanity. Bakhtin’s modern language supplies a vocabulary to help us understand Merlin’s forecast.

As seen in the excerpt from Malory, medieval civility’s feasting space is infiltrated by the source of its food. Nature and the violent quest for food in nature appear in the same space as the banquet table. The hart’s infiltration into the banqueting hall of king Arthur while hunted by the hounds, and the tearing of flesh from its body, becomes a simulated example of that which needed to take place for the court to feast. The continuity of the cyclical relationship between “meodo-setla” and “oftēah”, as discussed above with reference to Gargantua’s birth in Rabelais’ Gargantua and Pantagruel, takes on a parallel realisation within one spatial temporality. The linear sequence of gaining food, preparing it and lastly eating it, is obstructed by Malory’s image of a hart being hunted and attacked in a hall of feasting and eating. Hunting and eating are not chronological individual actions when overlapping in one confined space, but their intersection combines them in a singular world. Echoing Bakhtin, the opening of the hart’s flesh and the opening of the knight’s mouths join them in a world where the culinary and the violent are indistinguishable. “Meodo-setla” and “oftēah” in such a manner lose their parallel relationship to an infinite unity in a greater cosmological structure.
The infinite unity blurs the civil and the bestial as “medieval human” uses violence to sustain himself/herself gastronomically, drawing from his environment and the elements. Medieval history shows that “medieval human” has also used his/her fellow human for sustenance. In Jonothan Phillips’ *Holy Warriors: A Modern History of the Crusades*, he tells that in the depths of winter in November 1098 A.D. during the first Crusade, the crusaders besieged the town of Ma’arrat an Nu’man. Primary source Fulcher of Chartres reports:

[O]ur men suffered from excess hunger. I shudder to say that many of our men, terribly tormented by madness of starvation, cut pieces of flesh from the buttocks of Saracens lying there dead. These pieces they cooked and ate, savagely devouring the flesh while it was insufficiently roasted.

(Phillips 21)

The actions of the crusaders prove that “medieval human” does not completely emancipate himself from the life cycles of nature, a possibility articulated by 1486 Renaissance philosopher Giovanni Pico. In his *Oratio on the Dignity of Man* Pico argues that instead of man being a self-enclosed unity, he is exercising supreme power over creatures and “brutes” (9). The material realities of the medieval word make the philosophical promise of Pico and other later humanist philosophers seem very remote at best. The brutality and animalistic quality is highlighted in the context of the crusades, as they “savagely devoured the flesh while it was insufficiently roasted”.

Considering the evolution of recipes: even when one looks at medieval recipes such as the method described by Bober (271) for roasting a wild baby boar for “15 to 20 minutes in an oven preheated to 500 degrees”, food preparation (and culinary innovation) is one of the distinguishing traits of the human species. Thus by feasting not only on human flesh, but also “insufficiently roasted” flesh, the distinction becomes less prominent. Although this might be a survival mechanism caused by madness induced by starvation, there is a preoccupation in medieval literature with our close proximity to the “barbarity” of the animal world, a kind of anxiety about the flimsiness of civilized mores and an awareness of the violence and depravity that constantly threaten to break through the social fabric. This anxiety often results in the grotesque, which to my mind is the underlying core in various literatures from the so-called Dark Ages and thus evident in the narrative of Malory’s *Le Mort d’Arthur*.

### 4.2) The Sublimation of the Grotesque in Chivalry through Food and Violence

In the previous section, it was established that within culinary practice lurks the violent in human behaviour. In the Middle Ages the primal desires (such as sex, eating and violence) of humanity were contained through the cultural phenomenon of chivalry. As noted in the previous chapter, The Knight’s Tale as a chivalrous Romance represents exactly this. As discussed in the introduction, in the light of chivalry, a knight uses his skill and training
obtained in military training only in order to defend the weak, women, and his country. Thus, the violence executed by a knight is a supposed “selfless” violence for the greater good. As protector of civility, the violence becomes honourable and removed from the barbarity of the bestial or natural world. As violence gains its honour through chivalry, so does food.

The culinary culture of knights echoes their effort in spirit to maintain life and order. The hand which wields the sword also sets the table. Before being knighted, a knight served as a page or a squire. In such a position, he had to wait at his master’s table and be educated in duties such as carving a joint and selecting the right wine for the table. The household duties were supervised by the lady of the castle and her older daughters. Maggie Black also mentions that these household tasks involved cooking and table laying. The knights-to-be were trained in dietary nutrition as well. A course at a meal or banquet is supposed to be designed to aid with digestion and contribute to the health of those feasting at the table. John Russel’s *The Boke of Nurture*, for instance, served as a guide to train pages and squires in various culinary crafts.

Russell writes that a youth asked him to teach him “[t]he office of buttiler, sir, trewly pantere or chamburlayne/ The connynge of a kervere, specially / of þat y wold lerne fayne” (41-42). *The Boke of Nurture* is pillared on training the student in these four skills; to be a butler, a panter, a chamberlain and a carver. For the offices of a butler and a panter, Russell advises his student to “haue iij. knyffes” (50) – one knife “Þe loves to choppe, another them for to pare” (51) and the third knife must be “sharpe & kene to smothe Ƿe trenchers and square” (52). The student is further bid to serve his sovereign bread that is “newe & able” (53). Salt must be served “whyte, farye and drye” (57) in a “shelle be made of yvery” (58). The responsibility of the linen is also bestowed upon the student. He must “loke Ƿat [his] napery be soote & also feyre & clene, / bordclothe, towelle d & napkin, foldyn alle bydene” (61-62).

The cutlery is also very important and is in the care of the page or squire. The table knives must be “bright y-pullished” (63) and the spoones “fayre y-wasche” (64). In every way the student must be able to prepare for a banquet.

After teaching the student the use of the necessary equipment, Russell discusses wine and the courses on the menu. The student needs to “haue tarrers two a more & lasse for wyne” (65) and “wyne canels accordynge to Þe tarrers, of box fetice & fyne” (66). Seasonal fruits should be served strategically as the serving of courses is important as it aids digestion of the meal:

- Fygges, reysons, almandes, dates, buttur, chese, nottus, apples & pere,
- Composets & confites, chare de quynces, white and green gyngere;
- and ffør aftur questyons, or Þy lord sytte of hym Þow know & enquire.
- Serve fastynge plommys, damsons, cherries and grapis to plese;
- aftur mete peeres, nottys, strawberries wyneberies and hardchese,
- also blawnderelles, pepyny, careaway in comfyte, Compostes are like to Þese.
Russell educates the student in what to set on the table for a lord or sovereign. One finds the table already set before the meal with figs, raisins, nuts, dates, apples, pears and cheese. Delicate spices such as ginger is also proudly offered with sweet quince preserve. As the lord takes his seat the squire should serve berries of various sorts to the lord. There is a health rationale behind Russell’s instruction that berries must be served during the “mete” and that other fruits and cheese must be served after the “mete”. Russell explains the health consequences of the table servings suggested. Hard cheese is good for keeping the bowels open. (85-86) If cream, strawberries and raspberries are consumed without the hard cheese at the end of the meal, it may change the “astate” of man. (83) The state of a man is very important to Russell – a balance needs to be kept gastronomically. “Milk, crayme, and cruddles…Pey close a mannes stomak” (93-94), hence, Russell insists that hard cheese is eaten afterwards. (95) A food which might be the cause of an ill humour to the body, should be replaced by foods which restore a good humour.

The knowledge of the perceived nutritional value of various foods equip squires, pages and eventually knights to be aware of the way that certain foods affect the body. This knowledge was very important in the middle ages, for human lives were constantly caught in battle between good and ill humours. Originating from Greek medicine, throughout Anglo-Saxon England up until the Renaissance, humoral theory was the conceptual framework for medical explanations and treatments. Lois Ayoub briefly explains;

the four humours – blood, phlegm, yellow bile and black bile – were thought to exist in balance within the body. Unnatural excess of any excess of any of these humours was believed to cause illness, so early physicians concentrated on preventing humoral imbalance, for example by regulating diet, and on restoring lost humoral balance through such remedies as phlebotomy and purges. (332)

By being educated in the medieval health rationality of diet, knights were partly their own physicians in the sense that they had to keep a certain balance in their consumption of food. Medieval medical writings endorse such qualities in an individual. Robert Appelbaum introduces “our friend” and “enemy of beef eating” Gugliemo Grataroli; an Italian philosopher of the 16th century who was influenced by Hippocrates, and who wrote extensively on diet and health. At one point in his writings he compares the Physician to “minister of Art and the deputy of Nature”, which Appelbaum equates to a “military man”, as he should defend life against disease and plague. (38) Probably versed in the work of Grataroli, Andrew Boorde further argues that “there is no man nor woman the which have any respect to them self that can be a better Physician for their own safeguard, than their own self can be” (Appelbaum 40). At this point, one finds that knights and men and women in general are their own “military men” against the evils which attack the body. They should use gastronomy to defend the body against plague and disease as a knight uses the sword to defend their honour, their country and the weak.
One finds a close relationship between the defence of honour and preservation of life in knighthood and the preservation of health in the prescribed diet of the knight’s culinary culture. However, a double morality is present in the nature of chivalry. Their chivalrous deeds and constructed diets are veils for merciless terror and reprehensible gluttony. It is the overlapping of two worlds in one – their parameters blurred by the intersection of “meodosetla” and “oftēah”. Critics suggest that Cervantes’ Don Quixote is in fact a mockery of medieval chivalry, which enables the sublimation of terror and gluttony. We find that both the maintenance of honour and the ritualisation of food consumption repress the destructive realities that underlie virtuous lifestyles. The reality of chivalry is far removed from the idealised preoccupation that manifested itself in medieval narratives. Through food and violence, the chivalrous knight betrays his honour in terms of his religion, his defence of human life and the health of his own body.

In 1348, when Edward III instituted the Order of the Garter, chivalry was withdrawn from the official protection of the church, thereby bringing to light its true colours. Williamson explains the impact of this Order:

The Order had no other aim than to contribute to the splendour of the sovereigns. In the fourteenth century the so-called knights made their vows not in chapels or churches, but in a banqueting hall, and the aspirants took their vow, not on the cross, but on some emblematic bird or talisman. (332-333)

The religious depreciation of chivalry was detrimental to the quality of spiritual depth and regeneration of life as was induced by the church. There is no oath of rejuvenation in the actions taken. Instead, the chivalrous lifestyle succumbs to a carnivalesque spirit whose sole purpose is to consume excessively in banquet halls and kill vigorously on battle fields, all in the name of an empty noble cause. A notion of egotistic lust and possession takes precedence when the higher aspects of regeneration and rejuvenation are absent.

Despite chivalry’s remoteness from the church after 1348, it still held connotations of nobility and to an extent righteousness. Steven Pinker states that the word chivalrous on its own, regardless of whether it is executed under oath of the church or of own accord “deserves a second look”. Pinker states that tales set in the 6th century, but written between the 11th and 13th centuries (even before Edward III’s Order of the Garter was implemented), reveal that the knightly way of life was forgotten. (21) He quotes medievalist Richard Kaeuper who tallies the numbers of extreme violence from the 13th century romance Lancelot – a chivalrous archetype:

Limiting ourselves to quantifiable instances, at least eight skulls are split (some to the eyes, some to the teeth, some to the chin), eight unhorsed men are deliberately crushed by the hooves of the victor’s war-horse (so that they faint in agony, repeatedly), five decapitations take place, two entire shoulders are hewn away, three hands are cut off, three arms are severed at various lengths, one knight is thrown into a blazing fire and two knights are catapulted to sudden death. A woman is painfully bound in iron bands by a knight; one is kept for years in a tub of boiling water by
God, one is narrowly missed by a hurled lance. Women are frequently abducted and we hear at one point of forty rapes… (21)

The battles and violence as discussed by Kaeuper are usually a result of either defending or destroying someone’s honour. Dismemberment of the body was a common exchange for a bruised ego or a shamed lady in the Middle Ages. This notion is also very prominent in Malory’s 15th century Le Mort D’Arthur and de Troyes’ 12th century Arthurian Romances where knights constantly avenge each other’s honour or that of a lady. In this respect, we find that honour is an egotistical lust and that cavaliers would risk death to possess it. The violent reality combined with the noble intent translates into what Bakhtin calls a double existence of the kind we find disclosed in Cervante’s Don Quixote.

The double existence in this case is the egotistical lust for possession, sublimated by the idea of chivalry. This applies to Bakhtin’s idea of grotesque realism through the idea of the grotesque body – a body mutilated and dismembered. A body becomes a grotesque when bodily drama takes place. (317) Bodily drama includes actions of “eating, drinking, defecation […] copulation, pregnancy [and] dismemberment” (317) and a body engaging in these acts becomes a dramatized body, where the body exceeds its own limits in order to acquire for the self and thus becomes one with the world. The dismemberment found in the knights’ violent acts serve to join them with their universe in a way that is analogous to their ceremonial festivities in the banqueting halls. The opening of the body, whether through eating, drinking, copulation or dismemberment (i.e. decapitation, splitting of skulls or even raping), joins the body with the outer world. By dramatizing the body, the “beginning and the end of life [are] closely linked and intertwined” (317).

As eating and drinking in excess are also actions forming part of the dramatized body and degradation, they involve the lower bodily stratum and their manifestation stands in contrast to the proposed culinary etiquette (as suggested by Russell, Grataroli and Boorde). It reveals the double morality in the knightly attitude towards health, diet and balance. Luigi Cornaro, an Italian 15th century writer and dietician, observes the gluttonous consumption of food and the disregard of health in European court feastings:

Canst thou not know that intemperance kills every year amongst thy people as great a number as would perish during the time of a most dreadful pestilence, or by the sword or fire of many bloody wars! And these truly immoral banquets of thine, now so commonly of the custom, – feasts so great and intolerable that the tables are never found large enough to accommodate the innumerable dishes set up upon them… – must we not brand them as so many destructive battles!”

(Appelbaum 41, emphasis added)

The banquets are, according to Cornaro, immoral for they do not comply with the moral duty of balance with regards to health prerequisites. The health of the self and the body as a holy
temple (as found in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 and Ephesians 5:29)\textsuperscript{12} is compromised and to an extent destroyed. As specifically mentioned in Ephesians 5:29, the body should be nourished and fostered and is not to be jeopardised in any way. In a sense the whole execution of the banquet feast defies the rationale of the chivalrous code of eating.

Cornaro’s quote also holds the same images of horror found in Kaeuper’s compilation of violent acts from Arthurian Romance Lancelot. Images of the sword, bloody wars and destructive battles (Cornaro) holds the same grotesque element of violence in the depiction of skulls being split, shoulders hewed and hands being chopped off (Kaeupe). Grotesque eating and drinking in chivalrous courts as an attack on health is an extension of violent attacks of knights on the lives of fellow countrymen. The oath of preservation of life is substituted by the destruction thereof. Food in this respect holds as much terror as the sword and can be misused in the battle of health.

I think it is important to look at a case study of such misuse and the devastating effect thereof on a medieval knight. As the sword by hand of a knight upsets the balance of society or a kingdom in the Middle Ages, so can it upset a humoral balance in his health. Henry VIII\textsuperscript{13}, the Tudor king reigning at the dusk of late medieval England and the dawn of the country’s renaissance, is a knight who indulged in the excessive consumption of food, thus upsetting the intricate balance of health within his body.

In the king’s old age, he was attacked by fevers, ulcers and gout which physicians from his time as well as modern scholars blame on his weight. Biographer J.J. Scarisbrick notes that within the last eighteen months of Henry’s life, he was “a man of huge girth, eating and drinking prodigiously” (626). His great weight caused him pain and as he

was to be carried about indoors in a chair and hauled upstairs by machinery, he would still heave his vast, pain-racked body into a saddle to indulge his love for riding and show himself to his people (Scarisbrick 626).

His urge to still present himself to his people, riding his horse, enforces the chivalrous image of a knight on his noble steed. It reiterates the romantic idea of a demi-god who is the protector of the people and loved by all. It also emphasizes the pseudo-manifestation of chivalric behaviour that points to the double existence present in their society. His lack of balanced conduct regarding culinary and health matters manifests physically and obstructs the realisation of the romanticised chivalrous man. The king is thus afforded a dramatized

\textsuperscript{11} Wycliffe Bible (1384) Corinthians 6:19-20: Whether ye witen not, that youre membris ben the temple of the Holy Goost, that is in you, whom ye han of God, and ye ben not youre owne? For ye ben bouyt with greet prijs. Glorifie ye, and bere ye God in youre bodi.

\textsuperscript{12} Ephesians 5:29: For no man hatide euere his owne fleisch, but nurischith and fostrith it, as Crist doith the chirche

\textsuperscript{13} A king was trained as a knight and had exactly the same schooling with regards to warfare, battle, culinary etiquette and the conduct of humours through diet (Williamson, 332).
body and his interaction with food and drink become a depiction of grotesque realism, sublimated by his chivalrous status.

The dramatized body (in health and in physical size) is reflected in the kitchens which upheld his lifestyle of eating and drinking. Architectural history points out that the “biggest work of 1529 was the construction of the kitchens” (Thurley 28). The kitchens were designed to feed up to 600 people twice a day. The layout included a fish court, a buttery, boiling house, wine cellars and rooms which could accommodate six great fires for roasting spits. The kitchens also showed off the glamour and splendour of Henry’s wealth and power (as a manifestation of egotistic lust and possession) through the dishes served. In a Palace guide to Hampton Court Palace Dolman, Edwards, Groom and Mentonville elaborates on the splendour of Henry’s banquets:

The variety of food available at the court was staggering. Today we worry about the environmental costs of flying in unseasonal produce; in Tudor times ‘food miles’ were a sign of status. The more exotic and distant the ingredient, the better. Royal diners enjoyed exotic citrus fruit, almonds and olive oil from the Mediterranean. Dishes were sweetened with sugar from Iraqi, and seasoned with pepper and many other spices from Africa and India, and ginger all the way from China. (33)

The food served at the Tudor court was rich and opulent, reminding one of the feasting tables in The Man of Law’s Tale. The placement and description of the food on the banqueting tables follow strict conventions, as do the reasoning and protocol associated with its serving. The banquet table in itself opposes the code of chivalry, for it propagates egotistic lust for possession and thus becomes a tangible artefact of the double existence within chivalry. It is also a device which destroys the body and inflicts bodily drama upon its partakers.

From a position of familiarity with the lifestyles of Henry VIII’s court, Thomas Elyot writes in his Castle of Helthe (1539) against the immoderate consumption of food, due to the violent effect thereof:

[I]t may see to all men, that have reason, what abuse there is here in this realm in continual gormandizing, and daily defying [dining] on sundry meats at one meal, the spirit of gluttony triumphing among us on his glorious chariot, called welfare, driving us afore him like prisoners into his dungeon of surfeit, where we are tormented with catarrhs, fevers, gouts, pleurisies, fretting of guts, and many other sicknesses, and finally cruelly put to death by them, oftentimes in youth, or in the most pleasant time of our life, when we most gladly live.

(Appelbaum 41)

Elyot acknowledges the grandeur of gormandising in its glorious exhibit and the pleasures it affords the consumers. The culinary pleasures cause pain and even lead to death, as in the case of Henry VIII. Henry failed himself as a gastronomic physician and his own “Castel of
Health” was conquered due to this lack of defence. The king’s own lust for the display of power and wealth on the banquet table crippled his body and also his code of chivalry.

Both Henry VIII and Edward III (who instigated the Order of the Garter) succumb to the culinary sirens which sing from the banquet table. Edward III betrayed his pledge to God and the church as a knight and king for the feastings offered in the banquet halls. By annulling the role of the church in their chivalrous cause, all blood spilled by their hands was for their own gain and accord. Henry VIII betrayed his own body and health for the decadences and flavours offered in the mead hall of Hampton Court Palace and by doing such caused great destruction to his own flesh and “astate”. Both kings stand representative of the medieval figure of chivalry and both demonstrate the underlying violence exposed by the act of eating and feasting.

4.3) Double Existence of Food and Violence in Chaucer’s Chivalry and the Eruption thereof through the Miller and his Tale

The Portrait of the Knight is a flagship portrayal of medieval chivalry. Chaucer describes him as a “worthy man” (43) fighting for “[t]routhe and honour, freedom and curteisie” (46). The knight has fought in his “lوردes were” (47) and has ridden into lands “no man ferre” (48) – “in cristendon as in hethenesse” (49). Everywhere he went, he was “honoured for his worthinesse” (50). The Knight is described as a pioneer who truly upholds honour, truth, freedom and dignity everywhere goes. He was present “[a]t Alisaundra…when it was wonne” (51). His religious expeditions included quests to Prussia, Russia, Lithuania and the Mediterranean – and everywhere he went, “[n]o Cristen man so ofte as his degree” (55). The Knight is a virtuous knight who uses arms and battle to “foughten for our feith” (62) and “lystes thrice, and ay slain his foo” (63).

As seen in Chaucer’s introduction of the Knight, the Knight is firstly and foremostly a servant of Christ and the church. His honour, dignity and worth are explicit virtues within the Christian faith. The Knight is the epitome of chivalry and specifically represents what Williamson terms the “duties and obligations, rather than the rights and privileges of knighthood” (338). His expeditions to various cross-continental destinations are in the name of Christ. His presence at various cities such as Alexandra (51), “Lyeys” [Ayash] and “Satalye” [Satalia] (58) when it was won, points to the Crusades in which he had taken part. Chaucer’s writing suggests a religious agenda in the chivalrous quests.

Chaucer’s Knight is also a humble knight, for in his “array” (73) he shows modesty;

His horse were goode, but he was nat gay.

Of fustian he wered a gypon

Al bismotered with his habergeon, (74-76)
The Knight had the means to afford a horse, which puts him in a specific economic position. This statement already echoes the linguistic origin of the term chivalry – *callabus* – which is the Latin word for horse. Despite his means, he does not flaunt his wealth by flamboyant attire. His tunic is of fustian, “a course material of cotton and flax, all spotted with rust from his coat and mail” (Cawley 3). This unimpressive attire undercuts the Knight’s portrayal as a nobleman. In a way, the Knight echoes a Christ figure, being of noble blood and possessing a culture of grandeur, but choosing to be attired in the humble garb of a peasant or working class citizen. This aspect of the Knight’s character in Chaucer’s depiction is what Nickel and Williamson would regard as the flower of chivalry, especially what it stood for when directly aligned with the church before the Order of the Garter in 1348. The portrayal of the Knight thus far in The General Prologue is an embodiment of the noblest god-fearing traits of chivalry that were romanticized during and after the Middle Ages.

The Knight is not the only representative of his family as he is accompanied by “his sone, a yong Squier” (Chaucer 79). The two of them together give a holistic portrayal of nobility as the Squire is in training to become a knight. It is thus important to look at the Squire when exploring chivalry in *The Canterbury Tales*. The Squire’s depiction eludes the virtuous and most humble chivalry present in the Portrait of the Knight. His Portrait adds a materialistic value to chivalry.

The Squire, unlike the Knight, is a

A lovyere and a lusty bachelor,

With lokkes crueller as they were leyd in presse.

Of twenty yeer of age he was, I gesse.

Of his stature he was of evene lenghte,

And wonderly deliyvere, and of greet strength. (80 – 84)

Despite the humble attire of the Knight himself, one finds that the romanticised idea of a handsome knight in the portrayal of chivalry is also advocated by Chaucer; the young knight-to-be is a virile young man, lovely and lusty. Curly locks adorn him naturally as if they were pressed by a curl-iron. The young Squire is approximately twenty years of age, tall, and of great strength. In comparison to his father, he does not have a great history and any extent of battles and crusades behind him, only cavalry raids to “Flaunders”, “Artoys” and “Pycardie” (86). He represents the more charming, cultured and finer aspects of knighthood. I would say the Squire represents rather the chivalrous lover than the warrior, incorporating an element of vanity. The humility of the Knight that was essentially portrayed as chivalry is compromised by the material inclination of the Squire. Chaucer elaborates further on the materialistic traits of chivalry in the Squire’s Portrait:

Embrouded was he, as it were a meede

Al ful of fresshe floures, whyte and reede.
Syngynge he was, or floytynge, al the day;
He was as fressh as is the month of May.
Short was his gowne, with sleves longe and wyde.
Wel koude he sitte on hors and faire ryde.
He koude songes make and wel endite,
Juste and eek daunce, and weel purtreye and write.
So hoote he lovede that by nyghtertale.
He sleep namoore than dooth a nyghtyngale.
Curteis he was, lowely, and servysable, (89-99)

In this depiction, the Squire represents the opposite of the Knight. Firstly, with regards to attire (lines 89 and 90): the young Squire’s tunic was embroidered with fresh red and white flowers, as if picked from a meadow. This colourful and aesthetic portrayal of attire stands in stark contrast to that of his father, who wears a tunic of fustian. Chaucer further elaborates on his attire in line 93 stating that he wore a short gown with long sleeves. This description suggests economic stature as the flaunting of fabric in medieval times was an explicit display of wealth and stature. The mere clothing described in portraying the Squire, already illustrates a sense of devotion to the self and personal gain. The description is also feminising: in fact a courtly lady might be described in just this way in a chivalric Romance. Chivalry thus gains a dainty quality which detracts from the humility of the initial portrayal of chivalry in the representation of the Knight.

The Squire also represents the cultured and educated dimension of chivalry as well as of the gentry in general. He possesses skills such as singing (94), dancing and writing poetry (95) which elicit the conclusion that he comes from a fine and educated background. This trait is very important in the world of chivalry, for it distinguishes the nobleman from the masses. He is portrayed in a social position that requires culturally enriching fashions such as education, the arts and even culinary innovation and grandeur.

Considering the privileges of the nobility as discussed above, the Squire is an extension of the Knight and what he represents in medieval England. As an elaboration of chivalry, the Squire’s depiction adds a flipside to the coin of chivalry. With the two portraits of chivalry (the Knight and the Squire) in The General Prologue, one finds that Chaucer discloses ambiguity in the chivalric code. The Knight is represented as a true servant of Christ in his quests, while the Squire iterates a more flamboyant, and conspicuous portrayal of chivalry. The last line of Chaucer’s portrayal of chivalry in The General Prologue draws both characters back to the culinary:

And carf biforn his fader at the table. (100)
Despite the fact that the Squire is the Knight’s son (line 79), it is only in line 100 that a sense of unity (or interaction) between the Knight and the Squire is revealed. This unity and interaction is staged at the mead table (meodo-setla) where the son carves (oftēah) the meat for his father. The line does not only join the culinary with violence, but also echoes the training and sophistication of chivalrous men with regards to the culinary. The Squire’s office of carving for the Knight in Chaucer’s writing reflects the etiquette stipulated by Russell in *The Boke of Nurture*. With Russell’s etiquette, comes training and knowledge of different food types and their relationship with health and humours. Chaucer’s depictions of chivalry, in its humility and its pretentiousness, show a strong relationship between the gastronomic and the knightly.

A closer analysis of the text bears out that the fusion at the mead table illustrates the culinary double existence evident in chivalry. When taking a closer look at the Knight’s Portrait in The General Prologue, one finds that the Knight himself takes on the double existence of egotistic lust and materialism that reflect the violent and the gastronomic – even in the absence of comparison with the Squire.

By placing the text in conversation with its own historic context, the Portrait of the Knight becomes a palimpsestic window onto 14th century actualities and the realities of chivalry. When revisiting the religious rhetoric of the Knight’s description in lines 51 to 58, one sees that Chaucer’s geographical references sketch a completely different picture of the servant of Christ encountered in the first description. Phillips (286) suggests that Chaucer was acquainted with Sir Richard Waldegrave, a knight who participated in a trio of crusading enterprises, namely Turkey (1361), Prussia (1363) and Egypt (1365). The Crusades which Waldegrave undertook are exactly the Crusades which are mentioned by Chaucer in the General Prologue in lines 51, 54 and 58. Chaucer very consciously embeds the history in oxymora of idealisation. The idealised construction of the Knight in The General Prologue and his endeavours to be a servant of the faith, do not reconcile with the ego-driven quests of the knights in search of ports and welcoming prosperous trade routes, as suggested by history.

According to Phillips (287), the crusade to Alexandria in 1365 (as mentioned by Chaucer) was sparked when the prosperity and economic value of the Mamluk port of Alexandria was realised by the West. Pope Urban V advocated this Crusade: however, no crowned head form the west took part, except English and French noblemen. The Crusade was led by King Peter I of Cyprus, a man who had his steward imprisoned for not providing him with oil for his asparagus. (Phillips 289) Peter I’s action places emphasis on the gourmandizing culinary attitude of the king who led this Crusade. Immediately history annuls the God-pleasing virtuousness of the participants and instead reveals an egotistic lust and desire for possession (as Bahktin would put it) and as Phillips notes, reputation. The participants of the Alexandria Crusade were aware of the port’s importance with regards to trade routes.

One of the main commodities which were traded among these routes was spices. Historian Fernand Braudel in Clifford Wright states that this particular trade between the eleventh and the sixteenth centuries among European and some of the Mediterranean countries was a “spice orgy” (35). One port of such trade mentioned by Wright is the port Mamluk – the
initial incentive for the 1365 Crusade to Alexandria led by Peter I of Cyprus and mentioned by Chaucer when introducing the Knight. Wright notes that merchants in Alexandria sold an increasing amount of spices to the upper and middle classes of Europe during the 14th and 15th century. (35) This high demand caused price increases during this time, for spices including “cinnamon, saffron, pepper, ginger, cloves, nutmeg, mace and coriander” (Wright 36, emphasis added) — spices that are vividly present in recipes from Chaucer’s time.

In food historian Maggie Black’s historical cookbook, one finds a whole section of recipes from the time of Chaucer. In the majority of these recipes, the spices mentioned are required for specific dishes. One particular recipe in Black’s selection is instructions on how to cook Golden Leeks and Onions. A serving, as noted by Chaucer in The General Prologue, that is enjoyed by the Summoner: “Wel loved he garleek, oynons and eek lekes” (634). The dish includes a “Good pinch each of white pepper, cinnamon and cloves” and it should be coloured with saffron. (Black 41) Four of the eight spices mentioned by Wright are present in a dish contemporary to Chaucer and even mentioned in his writing. In another recipe for Civey of Hare (a rabbit stew), also contemporary to Chaucer, cloves, mace and ginger is required in its preparation. (Black 43) This recipe reveals two more spices that correspond with the commodities traded at Mamluk in Alexandria. Nutmeg is also added to the list from a recipe for Braised Spring Greens. (Black 39)

All the spices mentioned by Wright, except coriander, are found in Black’s dishes with which Chaucer might have come in contact. I am not suggesting that the main rationale behind the 1365 Crusade was the spice trade, but the facts suggest that the crusaders were not oblivious to the prosperous trade in and the culinary worth of this commodity. As a result, violence was not absent in the pursuit of culinary grandeur. Chaucer’s Knight presents these qualities in the historical context of his portrayal. In this portrayal one finds an execution of “oftēah” for a grander “meodo-setla”. Jo Van Steenbergen’s article “The Alexandrian Crusade (1365) and the Mamlūk Sources: Reassessment of the Kitāb Al-Ilmām of an-Nuwayrī al-Iskandarānī (D. A.D. 1372)” mentions the eye-witness An-Nuwayrī recalling that “the crusaders kept killing, violating, robbing and sacking from Friday-evening until Saturday” (127, emphasis added).

Explored in terms of the text’s historical content, the violence and the gastronomic chivalry shown in The General Prologue, contribute to an impression of double existence as suggested in the narrative. Chaucer deliberately sets up the double existence of grotesque realism in the constructions of his tales, specifically with regards to chivalry. In The Knight’s Tale, one finds a perfect construction of chivalry with regards to courtly love, honour and virtue — all the traits which one associates with the upper bodily stratum as stipulated by Bahktin. At face value, Chaucer succeeds in portraying the idealised notion of medieval chivalry. As noted in the previous chapter, Chaucer totally subverts the virtuousness in the characterisation of chivalry in the succeeding fabliau The Miller’s Tale. Just as The Miller’s Tale challenges and overthrows the containment of sex and chastity described in the chivalrous Romance, so it does when it comes to the containment of violence. The Miller and his tale are a grotesque representation of courtly love, food and violence.
Having discussed the representation of chivalry by looking at the portraits of the Knight and the Squire in The General Prologue, one can read Chaucer’s portrait of the Miller as a direct inverse since the two tales have been deliberately set up next to each other. In The Miller’s Prologue, we find that The Miller’s Tale is crafted as a direct intervention to be placed strategically and deliberately right after The Knight’s Tale. After the Knight finished his tale, all participants in the pilgrimage, young and old, “seyde it was a noble storie” (3111). The Host wanted to continue this rhetoric of virtue and honour by asking the monk, “Now telleth ye, sir Monk, if that ye konne, / Somewhat to quite with the Knyghtes tale” (3118 – 3119). The nature of The Knight’s Tale is similar to those of the works of Dante, Boethius, and Boccaccio’s occasional virtuous tales – where classical myth is intertwined with Christian religion and virtues. Chaucer, however, obstructs the flow of such an elevated register by introducing the grotesque Miller:

The Miller, that for dronken was all pale,

So that unneth upon his hors he sat,

He nolde avalen neither hood ne hat,

Ne abyde no man for his courtiesie,

But in Pilates voys he gan to crie,

And swoor, ‘By armes, and by blood and bones,

I kan a noble tale for the nones,

With which I wol now quite the Knyghtes tale.’ (3120 – 3127)

The Miller interrupts the rhetoric of virtue and culinary etiquette and interjects into this flow an image of gluttony, drunkenness and blasphemy. The “astate” of the Miller, as Russell would put it, is an “all pale” “astate” due to the excessive consumption of ale. It overthrows the notion of health and balance as seen in a knight’s composition and attitude towards diet. In fact, it literally cripples the essence of chivalry in the flow of narration as the Miller cannot even sit properly on his horse – a crucial requirement in attaining chivalric status. Furthermore, no sign of courtesy is evident in the Miller since he refuses to take off his hat. Such behaviour stands in stark contrast to the depiction of the Knight and the Squire as a metonym of chivalry, where courtesy and respect are of upmost importance to the honour of chivalrous men. Finally, Chaucer completes this interruption of chivalrous rhetoric by challenging the religious righteousness of chivalrous behaviour. He has the Miller speaking in the voice of Pontius Pilate, the “innocent” man who ordered the execution of Jesus Christ. The Miller shows a total lack of respect for Christian values and beliefs and henceforth swears by the blood and bones of Christ in a very blasphemous manner. This is echoed in The Miller’s Tale where Nicholas claims an epiphany from God in his strategy to commit adultery with Alison, the carpenter’s wife. Knowing that the Miller’s values and rhetoric completely undercut the nature of chivalrous ideals and tale telling, the character insists that his blasphemous tale will “quite with the Knyghtes tale” (3127).
If Chaucer has created the implication that The Miller’s Tale is a reflection of the Knight’s, then the structuring principle of *The Canterbury Tales* signals the double existence of the medieval concept of chivalry. Determining this in the nature of the tales, one can thus also look at the Portrait of the Miller in The General Prologue as the flipside of chivalry including aspects of the lower-bodily stratum in Chaucer’s construction of the narrative.

The Millere was a stout carl for the nones;
Ful byg he was brawn, and eek of bones.
That proved wel, for over al ther he cam,
At wrastlynge he wolde have alwey the ram.
He was short-sholdred, brood, a thikke knarre,
Ther was no dore that he nolde hevve of hare,
Or breke it with the rennygn with his heed.
His berd was sowe or any fox as reed,
And therto brood as thought as were a spade.
Upon the cop right of his nose he hade
A wert, and theron stood a toft of heyrs,
Reed as the brustles of a sowes erys;
His nothirles blake were and wyde.
A swerd and bokeler by his syde.
His mouth was greet and as a greet forneys.
He was janglere and a goliardeys,
And that was moost of sinne and harlotries.
Wel koude he stelen corn and tollen thries;
And yet he hadde a thombe of gold, pardee.
A whit cote a blew hood wered he.
A baggapipe wel koude he blowe and swone,
And therwithal he broghte us out of towne.   (545- 566)

I want to re-emphasise the fact that The Miller’s Tale and the nature of his character is interjected with descriptions showing an excess of ale consumption – it is through the
gluttonous consumption of food and drink that the underlying colours of chivalry is revealed. This is the initial cause of the narrative’s shift in nature (and register) from the upper bodily stratum found in The Knight’s Tale to the lower bodily stratum found in the Miller’s. Evidence of this shift is found in the physical characterisation of the Miller. The facial orifices of the Miller are emphasized in a grotesque manner; his nose is accentuated by a wart with hairs on it; the hairs on the wart on the nose are compared to those found on a pig’s ears. His nostrils are described as “blake” and “wide” and his mouth as great as a “forney” (Middle English for cauldron).

The fact that the Miller’s mouth is equated to a large cooking pot, reiterates the sense of food and the gluttonous consumption thereof. The description of the mouth as great also suggests it to be an active and significant part of the human body, bringing bodily physicality to the cause of the Miller’s drunkenness and incapability to keep a composed posture. It is also the source from which his ribald story emanates. One finds that the excess which is entering through the mouth is the starting point of all “meodo-setla oftēah” chain reactions to follow – as found in Rabelais’ narrative when Gargamelle went into labour after eating too much beef tripe.

Due to the excess consumption of mead and ale through the mouth, the wide and “blake” nostrils indicates a corrupt “astate”. Throughout modern and medieval medicine, it is evident that paleness in the nose and mouth area indicates problem with regards to kidney and liver health. The pale nostrils are thus a physical manifestation of the imbalanced diet and drink of the Miller. The exposure of the orifices and their voluntary openings together with the intake of food and drink makes the Miller’s body a dramatized body. This portrayal of the Miller is a literary embodiment of Bakhtin’s dramatized body where the body is joined with the world and also evokes Cornaro’s warning against the warfare of gluttonous consumption of food and drink.

The portrayal of the Miller holds diminutive representations which one can associate with chivalry. In the portrait of the Miller, one finds that he is introduced with a small sword and shield by his side. (line 558) These are miniature versions of artefacts found in the possession of medieval knights – offices of battle, violence and destruction. Physically, the Miller also had traits of a figure inflicting violence and destruction which would be an advantage in a battle such as the one mentioned in the Knight’s portrait. As seen in lines 546 to 551, the Miller is a brawny, heavily-boned figure with a thick and broad neck that equips him well to knock every door form its hinges. He is always game for a wrestling match, especially if the reward is a ram. These attributes afford a bestial portrayal of the Miller. Yet these are same requirements that a crusading knight might need when he is going into battle for the conquest of Alexandra.

The robustness of the Miller and the ambiguity of chivalry are amplified by the bagpipes which he is playing. In the Squire’s Portrait, he is praised for his song, dance and poetry. In line 98 in The General Prologue, he is even compared with a nightingale which in the Middle Ages was considered a creature of melodious song and tune. In the portrayal of the Miller who represents the hidden true characteristics of chivalry, the bagpipes portray the
barbaric ear and the sense of culture associated with the sound. In addition to the robust sound however, there is an interesting association with bagpipes stretching from the near-ancient to the modern world.

In an article by Edward A. Block, “Chaucer’s Millers and Their Bagpipes”, one finds that the bagpipe was quite integrated in various social functionalities in the year 1380. It was used in church services, royal parades and so on. However, Block emphasises that the bagpipe is symbolically also an instrument of “gluttony and lechery” in medieval literature. (241) It makes perfect sense that the Miller should therefore be portrayed playing the bagpipe – especially when one considers his physical attributes which frames him as a grotesque figure. To my mind, historically, one can add another dimension to a picture representing a bagpipe: an aspect of violence.

If the Miller is such a brawny, thick-necked character, winning wrestling matches and being depicted with a sword and shield, then it is not farfetched to incorporate the historical value of violence and warfare by means of the bagpipe with which he is depicted. From the first description of a bagpipe known to scholars, it has been associated with violence. Block gives an account of how the bagpipe came to England:

Only in the first century A.D. does this instrument emerge clearly into view when we find it appearing on a coin of Nero, who (according to Suetonius and his Greek contemporary, Dio Chrysostom) himself performed upon it. Writing some four centuries later, Procopius mentions that the bagpipe was used by the imperial Roman army and on the basis of the bronze figure of a bagpiper which was unearthed in the eighteenth century beneath the old Roman castle at Richborough, Kent, it has been plausibly suggested that the bagpipe was introduced into England by Roman soldiers. (239)

One finds that the bagpipe was introduced to the English by the Romans as an artefact which is associated with conquering. For the medieval Englishman, conquering is an act of chivalry. Richard the Lionheart led the third Crusade to seize the holy city of Jerusalem, a chivalrous enterprise that was seen as highly praiseworthy in the eyes of God. Being an instrument associated with such chivalry, the bagpipe gains a meaning beyond the way it was used by the Romans, in that it was also used to induce fear and anxiety into the hearts of the opposition in British warfare. David Greene notes in his article “The Irish War-Cry” that the Elizabethan court poet, Spencer, also associates the sound of bagpipes with a battle cry:

They heard a noyse of many bagpipes shrill

and shrieking hububs them approaching nere

(Spencer in Greene 168)

Despite the military contribution that the bagpipe makes to chivalry, its connotations also holds a double existence with respect to chivalry. The Block excerpt sheds light on this connotation. As noted by Block, the first time that the instrument emerged visually in history, it was played by the emperor Nero. Nero is a historical figure so brutal and violent that Saint
Augustine himself referred to Nero as the Antichrist. The emperor had his own mother cut open so that he could see the womb from which he had come, after which he left her to bleed to death. Such brutality holds no connation with military and political strategies, but rather reveals the medieval inhabitant’s greater exposure to violence as echoed by Pinker. With such association, one can observe that the bagpipes used by Chaucer’s Miller enhances not only gluttony and lechery as also suggested by Block, but the underlying element of violence and brutality which according to Chaucer is embedded in the Miller’s character. The Miller’s depiction with the bagpipes reaffirms the brutality that is present, if underplayed, in the Knight’s Portrait, considering his Crusade to Alexandria: the Portrait of the Miller is an interjection that brings to light the veiled cruelty and gluttony of medieval chivalry.

The portrait of the Miller conjoined with his tale, also reveals an intersection of food and violence in a grotesque manner. Absolon takes a red hot iron poker to shove into Nicholas’ ers – an act which is violent in the sense of pain as well as the destruction of flesh.

And therwith spak this clerk, this Absolon,

‘Spek, sweete byrd, I not not where thou art.’

This Nicholas anon leet fle a fart,

As greet as is had been a thunder-dent,

That with the strook he was almoost yblent;

And he was redy with his iren hoot,

And Nicholas amydde the ers he smoot,

Of gooth and skyn the hande-brede aboute,

The hoote kultourn brende so his toute.

And for the smert he wende for to dye. (3804 – 3814)

In the excerpt we have a scenario where Nicholas’ anus is penetrated by a hot iron poker wielded by Absolon. Nicholas farts and in such an action opens up his body and joins it with the world. When Absolon shoves the hot iron poker up Nicholas’ ers the world enters Nicholas’ body. Nicholas’ body thus becomes a dramatized body in more than one sense. Firstly out of own accord where he voluntarily farts and secondly, where an external object enters his body. Within the light of Bahktin’s dramatized body, Nicholas and the Miller join the consumption of food and the execution of violence in the underlying traits sublimated in the chivalric code.

One can draw a comparison between the dramatized bodies of the Miller himself and that of Nicholas, the character in his tale. Both succumb to grotesque actions, but the one takes the path of eating while the other is subjected to violence. Firstly, the body of Nicholas becomes a dramatized body in the same manner as the body of the Miller becomes a dramatized body;
as the Miller opens his orifices (such as his mouth) to the size of a cauldron, so does Nicholas open his anus to the world by farting. The second parallel exists in the penetration of external objects into the body. Both bodies are joined to world by receiving (with or without consent) objects from the outer world into the bodily vessel. The Miller injects his body with excess of food and drink from the outer world while Nicholas is injected with the matter and heat of hot iron, an external object has a destructive effect on the body. Both these acts which result in the dramatized body, cause pain to the body onto which the eating and violence is inflicted.

In the case of Nicholas, the violent penetration of the hot poker causes so much pain for Nicholas that he thinks he is dying (Chaucer 3814). The equation of death within this violent act holds significant historical value. This pain which has the potential of leading to death and the cause for its infliction were not only constructed by Chaucer for mere humorous effect. Although the narrative is satirical and comic, this incidence hints towards violent narrative well known to Chaucer and his contemporaries. In The Brut Chronicles (estimated origin 1272), narratives exist with reference to a form of murder where a piece of metal is inserted into the rectum. Such tales were repeated in the 14th and 15th centuries and also used as bases to fabricate the alleged death of king Edward II in 1327 (Mortimer 1180). Even if the narrative in The Miller’s Tale is not nearly as violent as those found in the early Brut Chronicles, the mere hint of similarities suggest that such knowledge of malicious violence is present in the construction of the narrative.

This knowledge does not necessarily have an effect on the literary face value of this particular action performed by Absolon in The Miller’s Tale, but it does speak of the intensity and psychology of the ideology in and from which Chaucer wrote The Canterbury Tales. As noted earlier, the death of Edward II holds allegations which involve similar actions to those found in The Miller’s Tale. The king was killed in such a grotesque manner by and among noble (chivalrous) men. Ian Mortimer states in his article “The Death of Edward II in Berkeley Castle” that in the past “Historians generally have not changed their opinion, maintaining that it is almost certain that Edward II was murdered in Berkeley Castle in September 1327, and that the order to kill him was issued by Roger Mortimer, later 1st Earl of March” (1175). Later historians such as Ivan Mortimer state that the tale of Edward II’s brutal death was fabricated by Roger Mortimer (1st Earl of March) for propaganda purposes and that that Edward II died in captivity only in 1330, due to natural causes. Irrespective of this, the debate reinforces the ambiguity of violence present in chivalry. Whether the brutal action was executed to assure the demise of Edward II or whether it was only propagated in order to deceive, the fact remains that chivalrous minds conjured up such brutalities in thought and in action. Even if directly unstated by Chaucer, the violence found in The Miller’s Tale is a sublimation of the cruelty and horrors into what is became known as medieval chivalry.

14 The reason I refer to it as malicious violence is that violence can also take place on a platonic level and even in a dignified manner. Such examples can for instance be found in The Knight’s Tale between Palamon and Arcite where violence (in the form of battle) takes place for the sake of courtly love, honour and dignity.
Chapter 5: Conclusion

Food, as a historical gastronomic artefact, offers valuable insight to the intertwining of economic, political and ideological realities in archaeological exploration. It is a symbol of identity and cultural expression, as noted by Twiss in her article “We Are What We Eat”. As a literary interjection, it also unravels the construction of characters and human behaviour, illuminating something about humanity’s underlying nature and the social and psychological basis for human conduct. This thesis advanced this point by exploring various characters’ interaction with food in a specific medieval setting, where the dominant belief was that diet needs to be moderated in order to achieve optimal bodily and spiritual purity and function. The Bible and classical authorities suggest a moderate diet, for idealistically speaking, a healthy body constitutes a healthy soul. The thesis makes use of Bakhtin’s notion of the Carnivalesque in its exploration of food in Chaucer’s The Canterbury Tales to show how ideas about food can help to disclose the façades of piety in terms of characterisation by challenging, revealing, concealing, proclaiming and blurring the dogmatic ideological ideals in relation to true human existence in late medieval times. This is achieved by looking at the intersection of the gastronomic with the nature of various characters, and socially and historically located ideas about sex and violence.
Chaucer’s insertion of food challenges the religious and dogmatic notion of the interdependent relationship between diet, bodily and spiritual health. The Franklin for instance upholds a lifestyle associated with Epicurus – from an orthodox Christian perspective a heretical lifestyle promoting bodily pleasures and culinary excess. His spiritual nature is thus to be considered at odds with religious and moral expectations. The Franklin’s health, considering his age, is however to be applauded. He is of sanguine complexion and is the character in *The Canterbury Tales* whose health is mostly praised. Judging by his posture, the Reeve, Oswald, on the other hand seems to be maintaining a moderate diet, but is specifically mentioned as being choleric in temperament. The classic argument, in terms of moderation of diet and optimal physical health, is thus challenged by Chaucer, as is evident when we take a closer look at the dietary behaviour and the physical natures of his characters.

The true spiritual natures of characters and their relationship with the culinary are also in conflict with the idealised alignment between diet and the spiritual. The Physician is versed in the classic theory of health and diet as advised by Hippocrates and Galen. In fact, he uses diet as a method of healing when treating the ill. Maintaining a moderate diet himself, he seems an exemplary embodiment of religious and classical authoritative dogma about bodily balance and gastronomic restraint. His spiritual nature however takes on the stereotypical nature of a physician in the Middle Ages: he is consumed by greed and makes use of cunning ways to extort patients being treated by him. By using astronomy and “natural magic”, Chaucer’s Physician also follows methods of healing contradictory to what was considered acceptable by the church and society in medieval times. In terms of diet and balance, no coherence exists between his spiritual and bodily natures. This character construction contests the dogmatic rhetoric concerning diet and spiritual health in the time of Chaucer.

In the Nun’s Priest Tale and in the Prioress’ Portrait food also reveals that culinary desire and consumption is not in line with dogmatic ideals governing bodily desires. The Nun’s Priest’s character Chauntecleer the cock is considered an allegorical representation of vocations associated with the church. However, the cock’s uncontained behaviour when it comes to eating causes him melancholy and choler, resulting in a humoral imbalance that causes him to dream of creatures associated with the underworld. His gastronomic behaviour literally joins him with the underworld in a spiritual sense. Chauntecleer’s humoral balance can only be restored by a herb that serves as a laxative – the gastronomic thus has the power to corrupt as well as heal the “aestate” spiritually and bodily. The Prioress also falls in the trap of spiritual defilement despite her devotion to her religion. One finds that she commits gluttony in more than one form; firstly through quantity as suggested by her large figure and secondly through quantity when one considers the fact that she feeds her dogs fine bread, milk and roasted meat. Despite the fact that the Prioress seems to comply with the dogmatic restrictions of dietary containment, she tries to conceal her true nature through her handling of food, through her pious and dainty table manners. One finds that Chaucer sets up the culinary interaction of characters associated with the church to portray a more realistic interaction with the gastronomic rather than an idealistic façade. Chaucer’s Prioress and Chantecleer are literary manifestations of the archaeological findings (as discussed by Whittock) based on the examination of the 376 monks’ skeletons from three different London
monasteries – they consumed much more than the nutritional average and as in the case of Chanticleer, showed five times more probability of having developed obesity related diseases.

Chaucer’s gastronomic interjections give us a realistic glimpse into actual human behaviour in the late fourteenth century. As found in the case of the Prioress and the Nun’s Priest, it strips characters from their clothes of officialdom and reveal the true double existence in their natures. Gastronomic interjections also affirm characters and their lifestyles in terms of character, as found in the case of the Wife of Bath. She associates herself with barley bread in her *sermon joyeux* in Prologue to her tale. By equating her sexuality to barley bread she proclaims it as a functional attribute available to the masses. The culinary thus not only attains the value of revelation and concealing, but also of proclamation.

The intersection of the gastronomic and the sexual opens a complete new avenue of discussion. Comparing the gastronomic interjections with the sexual reveals that human behaviour is not compartmentalised into good or bad behaviours, but rather that carnival and sin are characteristics present in human existence. Bakhtin’s theory on carnival serves as a meta-language for exploring this in *The Canterbury Tales*. One finds that the dualism in spiritual-bodily natures fades into a single practice present in human existence. This constitutes both virtues and vices in one singular being. In the Man of Law’s Tale, one finds that the Oriental feast in Syria translates the saintly Constance into a sexed body and in doing so, amplifies the contradicting within the Man of Law himself. The excess present at the feast and the fact that Constance serves as the centrepiece of the feast are both manifestations of the capitalistic greed and lust for excess present in the Man of Law’s character construction. The Man of Law, at first seen as a righteous and learned man with supposedly similar virtues to his character Constance, reveals his true nature by his association with mercantilism and trade, just like Constance’s virtues are degraded to bodily desire when she is translated into a commodity of trade. Through excess and bodily desire described at the feast, carnival overthrows the moral structures and dogmatic ideals symbolised by Constance and consequently enhance the greed and quality of intemperance the Man of Law’s character.

The boundaries between social and religious, spiritual and bodily, the sinful and righteous spheres are blurred by Chaucer. The Reeve blurs the line between human behaviour and sin, where parameters become less evident and human actions are revealed as inherently sinful, according to religious perspective. The Reeve Oswald seems to be a character who manages to comply with dietary containment, as substantiated by his slender physique and choleric temperament. He also at first seems to be a rational man who can be trusted with the book-keeping of others. His portrait, however, reveals that he is materialistically inclined and thus uses his auditing skills for personal gain. This depicts a double existence because while he follows a puritan diet, he actually leads a sinful lifestyle. The intersection between adultery and adulteration in the Reeve’s Tale, indicates that human behaviour is inherently sinful and that sinful behaviour cannot be categorised in individual separate body-and-soul compartments.
As a country fabliau, the Reeve’s Tale presents a literary genre that by its existence already challenges the ideals of honourable life as found in the preceding chivalrous Romance of The Knight’s Tale. One finds that the two prominent themes are that of adultery (cuckolding in response to the Miller’s Tale) and adulteration (the corruption of food for personal gain). These two concepts are sinful in themselves; but they also link human behaviour in the narrative to the Deadly Sins. The cuckolding is an act of Lust and thereby corrupts chastity within marriage as well as the concept of virginity. It also brings forth the act of revenge, for the cuckolding takes place in order to “quit” the humiliation of the carpenter that manifests in the Miller’s Tale. Shipley categorises revenge under the sin of Anger, instigated by the Reeve’s Pride, while Avarice is present in the adulteration of the grain. One thus finds that the Seven Deadly Sins do not take form in bold acts that stand in isolation from one another and are associated with individual characters as found in the Dante’s Inferno. Chaucer blends the sins into human behaviour so that it becomes integrated in everyday lifestyle.

In the discussion of the Cook and his Tale, when exploring the sexual and the gastronomic in relation with one another, one finds that Roger of Ware and Perkyn the Reveller are typical characters of Carnival where religion and officialdom are completely annulled. The Cook represents a lifestyle associated with the lower-bodily stratum through food while Perkyn does exactly the same through sex. Roger of Ware, the Cook, is trained in sophisticated culinary crafts, however his handling of food is unhygienic and unorthodox – he tricks his customers with the quality of food he sells them and his produce does not comply with state and city regulations. Through his handling of food he overthrows the officialdom and authority of the city. Roger himself knows the best ale in London through gluttonous consumption thereof – he cannot sit properly on his horse due to his drunkenness. His gluttony is portrayed in a grotesque representation of his mouth as he metaphorically almost swallows the rest of the company while yawning. His actions are those of a lifestyle associated with the carnivalesque. The reader is aware form the start that Roger of Ware only accompanies the pilgrimage for professional reasons and shows no religious affiliation as noted when being introduced into the narrative.

Perkyn the Reveller shares the same nature of Carnival with the Cook, but he overthrows authoritative and religious containment through sex. Working at a victualler’s shop, his handling of food (distributing it to sailors) intersects with his sexuality. Perkyn’s sexual ability is described as being sweet as honey and delightful to any wench he might encounter. The gastronomic interjection of honey as a food, suggests the quality of his sexuality, but also its diversity and availability. As honey, it becomes consumable by any woman who wants it and thus degrades any social or religious authority that preaches sexual containment and chastity. Perkyn the Reveller creates his own church, his own state and own set of regulations and rules by consciously exchanging his honourable apprenticeship for a life of debauchery among thieves and prostitutes. He is the “roten appul” that in an Edenic sense brings divine, pure and idealistic social order (as laid out by Christian dogma) to a fall. Roger of Ware and Perkyn the Reveller combined is representative of ultimate Carnival, disrupting and recreating a social structure. The gastronomic interjections and the handling of food intersecting with the sexual through carnival become revolutionary. It represents
behaviour that stands in absolute contrast to the dogmatic ideals of a certain ideology. Human behaviour takes on a primal approach that defies external structures and containment.

The Carnivalesque also takes place in actions of violence and destruction. Through violence and destruction, the body is opened up and joined with the world. The same principle applies when eating – the opening of the mouth and the ingestion of food joins the body with the world. This intersection presents as a literary manifestation in *Beowulf* where king Shield Sheafson is praised by the Anglo-Saxon lexical conjunction “meodo-setla oftfēha” for his ability to destroy mead benches. The relationship between food and destruction takes on many forms. One finds that the one exists within the other, that there is a cyclical interdependence between the two concepts and that an infinite relationship exists between the civil and the bestial through the intersection of food and violence.

A medieval phenomenon that holds idealised values and principles, amongst others the containment of gastronomic intake and violence, is chivalry. An exploration of the culinary within a chivalric lifestyle reveals that food is to be consumed to benefit bodily health. A knight is his own personal physician by manipulating the intake of food for optimal humoral balance and consistency. There is a parallel relationship between the containment of diet and the containment of violence, which is only to be used for the benefit and protection of the self, the weak and one’s country. These ideals are undermined by excess, greed and egotistical lust. The true violence and gluttony present in chivalrous acts are sublimated into banquets of etiquette and containment. Analysing Chaucer’s Knight, Squire, the Miller and a section of his Tale through a historic lens reveal this.

Chaucer portrays chivalry through the Knight as well as the Knight’s son, the Squire. At first the Knight’s modest attire seems to comply with the ideals of chivalry, however the Squire’s lavish attire and pressed locks contradict this. When taking a closer look at the historical background of the Crusades undertaken by the Knight, one finds that the attacks were launched on geographical locations with significant value in terms of the spice trade (a food resource of great economic importance) like the port of Mamluk in Alexandria. The monetary benefits to those who control such spaces and spice routes show that the violence executed in the name of Christ is for personal gain and egotistical lust. The Knight’s Portrait stands as testimony for chivalry’s double morality regarding modesty and restraint in food consumption as well as in violence.

As The Miller’s Tale stands as a fabliau that degrades the virtues and ideals in the Knight’s Tale, one can read the Miller’s characterisation as the underpinning reality of an excess of food and violence present in chivalry. The Miller is described as a rough character with the strength to beat a ram at wrestling. His very build and strength suggests him to be familiar with the implementation of violence. The bagpipes that he carries with him are also charged with the historical allusion to warfare and battle. In the Miller’s Tale, the hot iron poker that is shoved by Absalom into Nicholas’ ers references a method of murder recorded in *The Brut Chronicles* and thus suggest him to have knowledge of violent methods of inflicting pain and death. These violent attributes intersect with the dietary habits of the Miller.
The Miller is portrayed as a drunk and his bodily orifices are portrayed in a grotesque manner. His mouth that is the orifice through which the excess of food and drink enters is described as a cauldron. The excess of ale has a violent effect on his health and humoral balance, for he is being described as having a corrupt “astate” that one can see in his black and wide nostrils. The violence suggested by his characterisation is evident in his physicality and health – the violence that he inflicts upon himself through diet. The Miller’s dramatized body echoes the dramatized body of Nicholas being penetrated by the hot iron poker – both bodies are joined with the world by the infliction of violence; the Miller through gastronomic intake and Nicholas by violent anal penetration.

Violence and gastronomy permeate the Miller and his Tale. These qualities represent the underlying truth of chivalry. Though Chaucer’s Knight and the rhetoric of chivalry in the Knight’s Tale seem truthful and ideal at face value, his strategic placement of the Miller’s Tale degrades the discourse of selfless virtue and honour. This translates chivalry into a lifestyle of egotistic lust and excess. A closer look at Chaucer’s Knight, Squire and Miller, however, explodes this idealised social concept to reveal the truthful actuality of “chivalrous” human behaviour.

Using gastronomy as a literary interjection, one finds that it is a starting point to numerous explorations and analyses. Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales* poses that food reveals, conceals, erupts, sublimates, brings together and challenges discourse within a text. It gives insight to characterisation as well as historical, social and geographical context of the narrative. In literature it functions, as in archaeology, as a symbol of expression, identity and ideology.
Bibliography


“Saint Julian”. *Catholic Online*. 19 September 2014. Online


