Slow Pilgrimage Ecopoetics[1]

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Abstract

Focusing on fourteenth-century medieval pilgrimage poems and wayfaring between them and more contemporary texts, this essay explores how the constitutive elements of slow pilgrimage ecopoetics oscillate between the designed and accidental, both on the literal and literary levels. While design seems integral to the concept of pilgrimage—traveling from one's home to a sacred shrine—in actuality pilgrims not infrequently strayed off the official path. Contingency, rather than randomness, acts as a dynamic agent affecting the meanderings of the pilgrim-walker.

The slow walking of pilgrims contributed to a slow ecopoetics: slow travail on the actual road; slow change in the vernacular tongue used to articulate pilgrimage poetry; slow spiritual transformation ideally catalyzed by the acts of pilgrimage, walking or reading; and measured reading itself as a form of slow pilgrimage.

Amendment as a concept and term recurs thematically in such texts, indicating material, spiritual, linguistic, and poetic changes. Actual paths trod upon by historical pilgrims modified over time. Such changes analogously parallel the literary realm, where competing versions of medieval pilgrimage poems were gradually amended and edited by their authors. Literary pilgrimage poems self-consciously commit themselves to promoting the vernacular. The ecopoetics of a specific living vernacular, a topopoetics, used by medieval pilgrimage writers sparks the spiritual change pilgrimage was meant to kindle.

Pilgrim readers undertook textual wayfaring, as do pilgrim-writers through variant texts modified by the poet himself. A strategy of slow ecopoetics authorizes the reader to co-perform the text, advancing alongside the writer to co-create the literary work, responsive to a heterogenous audience. As contingent tenants, not masters of design, of both environment and poetry, pilgrims—historical and literary—contribute to a kind of vibrant resiliency as epitomized by slow pilgrimage ecopoetics.

Keywords: Pilgrimage, vernacular, slow ecopoetics, slow walking, landscape, textscape, contingency, medieval poetry, topopoetics.

Resumen

Centrándose en los poemas medievales del siglo XIV relacionados con la peregrinación y alternando entre eso textos y otros más contemporáneos, este ensayo pretende explorar cómo los elementos constitutivos de la lenta ecopoética del peregrinaje oscilan entre lo diseñado y lo casual, tanto a nivel literal como literario. Mientras el diseño parece ser parte integral concepto de la peregrinación, o viajar desde el hogar a un santuario sagrado, en realidad los peregrinos frecuentemente se desviaban. La contingencia, en lugar de la casualidad, funciona como un agente dinámico que afecta a los desvíos del caminante-peregrino.

El lento andar de los peregrinos contribuyó a una lenta ecopoética: el lento ejercicio de seguir el camino; el lento cambio en la lengua vernácula que se empleaba para articular la poesía de la peregrinación; la lenta transformación espiritual provocada, idóneamente, por los actos de peregrinar, caminar, o leer; y la lectura mesurada en sí hecha como forma de un lento peregrinaje.

La enmienda se repite temáticamente en estos textos como concepto y término indicando cambios materiales, espirituales, lingüísticos, y poéticos—los caminos materiales modificados por los peregrinos históricos que los pisaban y seguían. Estas modificaciones corresponden de forma análoga al espectro

literario, donde algunas versiones rivales de los poemas medievales sobre la peregrinación eran enmendados y editados por sus autores. Los poemas literarios de peregrinación promueven conscientemente lo vernáculo. La ecopoética de una lengua vernácula viva, o la "topo-poética", usada por los autores medievales es lo que motiva el cambio espiritual que pretende provocar la peregrinación.

Los lectores-peregrinos emprendían un deambular textual tal como hacían los autores-peregrinos por medio de los textos variados que el propio poeta modificaba. Una de las estrategias de la ecopoética lenta es permitir que el lector coopere en la interpretación del texto, avanzando así junto al autor para crear una obra literaria que responda a un público heterogéneo. Como resultado del no ser maestros del diseño sino seres errantes y contingentes del medio ambiente y de la poesía, los peregrinos—históricos y literarios—contribuyen a la existencia de una adaptabilidad vibrante, como lo ejemplifica la lenta ecopoética de la peregrinación.[2]

Palabras clave: Peregrinación, vernáculo, lenta ecopoética, lento andar, paisaje, espacio textual, contingencia, poesía medieval, "topo-poética".

"And you should understand that at each of these steps there is a pause. For this reason it is a great pity and heart-break for the soul that it can only move so slowly, and experience so much pain, and it moves toward God so ponderously. It takes such tiny steps."
Blessed Angela of Foligno (1248-1309) (Petroff 255)

In describing her spiritual pilgrimage, the Blessed Angela of Foligno relates the interior pain she endures. She must sustain and suffer each small stride forward in her laborious endeavor. Her experience reflects the theological understanding of pilgrimage, a ritual adhering to the belief in spiritual amendment. Medieval Christians like Angela believed that contrition and confession for a sin could be satisfied in part through the arduous task of pilgrimage. The time-intensive commitment which Angela's inner trial demands corresponds to the travails of physical pilgrimage, which, as Christopher Howard points out, "represents a paradigmatic form of slow travel" (17; also Eade n. p.; Maddrell et al. 17, 152, 167; and Lois González 17). The materiality of place as well as the notion of pilgrimage as "slow travel" infuse the metaphor of life pilgrimage in medieval texts. At the same time, these texts can be read as meditations on pilgrimage and as an ecopoetic practice. As such they 1) enable us to recognize and foster connections between the human and more-than-human world; 2) allow us to make associations among landscape, poem, and language—all in the process of becoming; and 3) provoke links with more recent pilgrimage texts in a layered palimpsest. Wayfaring as it does between medieval and modern literary texts, this essay argues that pilgrimage ecopoetics teaches us to contingently respond to unexpected encounters.

Turning to several works written throughout Europe in the late Middle Ages, this essay moves between ecological and literary paths to explore the slow ecopoetics of pilgrimage. During the fourteenth century, the popularity of physical pilgrimage as a vernacular religious practice intersects with the proliferation of late medieval pilgrimage poetry. The years between Dante's *The Divine Comedy*, set during Holy Week in 1300, and Geoffrey Chaucer's death in 1400 witnessed the creation of numerous long poems that used pilgrimage as a structural, thematic, and metaphorical device. In *The*

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[2] Traducción: Margaret Dunaway

Divine Comedy, the Latin poet Virgil—whose own first-century BCE epic, *The Aeneid*, tells the story of a journey from Troy to Rome—guides Dante's pilgrim on an allegorical pilgrimage from the chilly depths of hell, one rising to purgatory and finally paradise. Chaucer's pilgrims in the frame of *The Canterbury Tales* head from Southwark on the bank of the Thames south of London toward the city of Canterbury, whose cathedral became a shrine after the murder of the Archbishop Thomas Becket in 1170. In Guillaume de Deguileville's *Le Pèlerinage de la vie humaine* [*The Pilgrimage of Human Life*], a dreamer imagines himself as a pilgrim, prone to missteps along the way. William Langland's *Piers Plowman* stretches pilgrimage from the microscopic life of the narrator Will to include Biblical history, governmental chaos, and legal ethics.

Apart from emphasizing the hardships of pilgrimage, all of these texts also evoke details of the more-than-human environment that the pilgrims encounter during their slow traveling. They can thus be used to argue that the connection between ecological exploration and environmental citizenship have intellectual origins extending back into the Middle Ages. The materiality of the spatial practice of pilgrimage—long exercised by devout religious of various faiths on paths trod upon by historical individuals—intersects with literary conjurations of such rituals. Understood within an ecocritical context, medieval pilgrimage literature, an inherently allegorical genre, can be read as an ecopoetics, that is, both a critical practice, meant to understand the intersection between the human and nonhuman, and a literary practice, giving voice to the nonhuman world. Jonathan Skinner describes ecopoetics, including "'slow poetry'" (Hume 755), as a restless "kind of boundary work, about networks and crossing" (Hume 760). Networks, crossing, and slowness constitute pilgrimage as a material ritual, which, like ecopoetics itself, lives "close to the ground" (Hume 765), even emerging out of and on the ground.

By self-consciously promoting living tongues undergoing continual change, slow pilgrimage ecopoetics addresses ritual experience together with ecological, spiritual, and poetic matters. As relatively concrete, localized, commonplace, and oftentimes place-specific, the mutable vernacular as a form of topopoetics was ideally suited to trigger an affective response in a wide audience. Texts and landscapes co-evolve interdependently. Giving vernacular voice to a shared physical and meditative pilgrimage experience, the text engages a continually evolving linguistic organism to record perceptions of the more-than-human world.

Design and randomness—the foci of this special issue—are both at play, albeit to differing degrees, in medieval pilgrimage poems. While design seems integral to the concept of pilgrimage—wayfaring from one's home to a sacred shrine—the temporality of walking is slow, responding to unexpected events. As Rebecca Solnit remarks in her book *Wanderlust: A History of Walking*, "[t]he random, the unscreened, allows you to find what you don't know you are looking for, and you don't know a place until it surprises you" (11). Despite what Solnit indicates here, the word "contingent"—stemming from the Latin *contigere*, meaning "to touch"—suggests a slower, more intimate way to describe the unexpected human and nonhuman encounters of pilgrimage and the

insights they inspire than the word "random," whose Germanic origin links it to movement "at speed" (*OED Online* n. p.).

The tension between design and contingency extends beyond the material and embodied realm. While design stems from methodical and deliberate ordering, it simultaneously suggests mastery in its articulation and outline. As with medieval pilgrimage paths, a certain type of design defines a route, sets a pace, and even prescribes a mode of progression. When it comes to medieval texts, design seems more linked to speeding up, whereas contingency aligns itself with slowing down. The speed at which modern transportation now allows us travel over and around the earth thus arguably has damaging consequences even beyond those of carbon emissions and noise pollution. Acceleration impels us to lose touch with the earth's cyclical rhythms, suggesting human actors can *control* earth's forces, an almost violent usurpation of power (Gersdorf 41, 45).

In contrast, medieval Christians like St. Francis urged the role of human interaction with nature as one of *stewardship* and *care*, concepts integrally based on deliberate forethought (design) and sensitive response (contingency). While pilgrims might strive to reach a shrine in time for festival feast days, hurrying to make it *on time*, in actuality many not infrequently wandered from the official path. As Jonathan Skinner points out, the ecopoetical translation of human and nonhuman encounter "doesn't take a linear path—it requires something other than a unitary voice" (Hume 761). Unlike design, this contingency slows things down, allowing for care time, nurturing "the unexpected changes, the events, that other than human creative agencies bring to happen" (Puig de la Bellacasa 214). Analogously, rejecting the domination implicit in following the well-designed path suggests a responsive, even responsible, way of interacting. By resisting appropriation of our *Umwelt*, we fulfill the role of what Michel Serres calls "tenancy" (86), a more ecologically-friendly mode of interaction with the world. In refusing to own the *Umwelt*, we resist possession of it, allowing it to act and develop freely.

Moving Slowly

"Walking is the best way to go more slowly than any other method that has ever been found." (Gros 2)

For the slow ecopoetics of pilgrimage and pilgrimage texts, a leisurely touch—physical on a path, linguistic through the tongue of everyday folk, emotional and intellectual between poem and reader—suggests mindful engagement. Just as pilgrimage ideally kindles spiritual and medical healing in the pilgrim, it sparks physical transformations in the landscape. A slow ecopoetics—slow to walk, slow to write, slow to read—versifies both gradual and sudden changes fashioned by pilgrimage on the material "living landscapes through which pilgrims travel" (Eppig 50). Over time, these spaces keenly respond to human and nonhuman interactions, from weathering to spontaneous soil augmentation through the shedding of leaves (Belloc 93-99). The material pilgrimage path modifies as dirt compacts and landscape incrementally alters.

Indeed, substantial ecological changes took place, transforming the landscape surrounding pilgrimage routes. King Edward I decreed highways be kept clear of brush and other vegetation where thieves could hide, so as to reduce the likelihood of crimes committed against pilgrims and other travelers (Bright 4-5). What is more, in England, clearances were at times extended from established roads into uncultivated land (Oram 314). The pilgrimage road itself was "a strategic point of interaction between human and environment" (Allen and Evans 26). Traveling through a specific landscape both changes that space through, for example, erosion, and transforms the traveler, who encounters unexpected and contingent human and more-than-human entities.

Slow pilgrimage as a processual ecopoetical practice thus manifests itself in four major ways: in the slow somatic travail on the road itself; in the slow change in the vernacular language of fourteenth-century pilgrimage poems; in the slow spiritual amendment pilgrimage is meant to catalyze; and in the act of slow reading as a form of textual wayfinding. Physical pilgrimage acts as one "conceptual domain to reason about another domain" (Pellizzoni 78)—that of the soul's amendment and improvement on its journey to inner healing. Pilgrimage

> was a strong experiential reminder that the unpredictability of human life is not adequately represented by a sedentary lifestyle. Travel over dusty countrysides, steep and slippery mountain passes, through woods, and over hills and valleys was a more accurate representation of human life. Different geography created awareness of the diverse landscapes of the soul, the rocks, sunlight, green growth, and the dust of emotional life. (Miles 169)

Human understanding of the environment eventually enters literary works through somatic interaction. Landscape influences textscape. Analogous to the physical pilgrimage, a literary pilgrimage engages the reader emotionally and spiritually as she undergoes, sees, and memorializes a pilgrimage of her own. Repeatedly using variants of the word *amendment*, poets evoke this religious concept in numerous ways, to indicate material transformation, spiritual growth, and poetic variation. The material practice of pilgrimage through slow walking and fortuitous encounters is also deeply intertwined with the ecopoetics of the vernacular, a persistently evolving language. Indeed, the language of slow pilgrimage poetry reflects the physical slowness of walking to a sacred shrine, the readers' laboring through the text, and the inevitable—often gradual— changes in the vernacular used by authors.

No matter the specific geographies the medieval pilgrims traverse in these texts—from Florence to the Midlands—walking represents and to a certain extent becomes a kind of reading—of landscape, of environment, and of neighboring ecology. As Alec Finlay observes referencing Frédéric Gros' *The Philosophy of Walking*, "the only way slower than walking is *looking*" (248). The pilgrim might be what Catrin Gersdorf dubs an "environmental phenomenologist" (44), decelerating into a measured promenade or amble. This slowness allows the human actor to pay attention to her surroundings—everything "mysterious, incongruous, and unexpected" (Gersdorf 44)— in ways that become environmentally suggestive. Seeping from fourteenth-century pilgrimage poems, a "'love of slow'" inculcates a "learned dependence…" (Northcott 232) on the environment. Pilgrimage, a "*time* dependent" (Northcott 223-24) phenomenology

of perceiving and interacting with the world, enables the pilgrim to focus not (just) on the arrival but also on the meander that takes her there. It is not simply the human creating the road (Allen and Evans 3); pilgrims and landscapes affect each other. Indeed, as Gros has argued, in walking slowly, the "body becomes steeped in the earth it treads. And thus, gradually, it stops being in the landscape: it *becomes* the landscape" (85).

Humans, then, are not the masters, but the vulnerable temporary occupants reliant on more-than-human surroundings. For example, the narrator of Chaucer's "Tale of Sir Thopas" marks and identifies each little aromatic plant, from the "lycorys and the cetewale,/ And many a clowe-gylofre,/ And notemuge to putte in ale" (VII.761-63; "licorice and the zedoary,/ And many a clove-gillyflower;/ And nutmeg to put in ale").[3] The resistance to speed helps the human actor pay attention to everything from path to little herbs, the vernacular language necessary to describe both, and even poetry itself. The slow pace of reading required by medieval pilgrimage poems can be considered a form of poetic wayfaring dependent not simply on design but also on the intimate randomness of contingency.

Material Pilgrimage Practice: Reading the Landscape through Slow Walking

> "[F]inding a pair of sticks/ that fit your stride/ and a walk." (Cockburn and Finlay 125)

One aspect of contingency lies in the unexpected juxtaposition of pilgrimage works from unlike periods. While not planned for through design, the palimpsest of layering disparate texts allows us to attend both to literary artefacts and the environs cultivating those works. While a contemporary Scottish poem and a non-European work dating from several centuries after the European Middle Ages may not seem likely matches, we can trace commonalities with our medieval pilgrimage poems. The recent tour around Scotland described in *The Road North* (2014) by Alec Finlay and Ken Cockburn parallels a journey recorded in the seventeenth century, *The Narrow Road to the Deep North* (1694). This Edo-era story of two Japanese travelers, the poet Bashō and his companion Sora, bridges the medieval and modern. Inspired by this influential writing, Finlay and Cockburn arguably use the earlier work as a blueprint, an official design as it were, to creatively spring into action and produce their own pilgrimage text. Contingent encounters and unexpected vistas along the way help shape their poem. Referring to more than just linguistic usage, the vernacular Cockburn and Finlay record extends to material practices (Minnis xi), such as lyrical evening strolls. Their vernacular pilgrimage veers into startling revelations sparked by sudden happenstance, such as the moon washed in the waves.

This generative tension between official and vernacular mapping can also be seen through medieval pilgrimage. In his theories, Rob Nixon transfers the concept of the vernacular from linguistics to topography. He has pointed out the adverse effects that orchestrated, intentional, and designed landscapes can force on organic, unprocessed, and contingent ones, when, by analogy with the standardization of language, the "official

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[3] All Middle English Chaucer references come from the Benson edition, unless otherwise noted.

landscape is forcibly imposed on a vernacular one" (Nixon 17). Nixon indicts this imposition as socially and ecologically deleterious:

> A vernacular landscape is shaped by the affective, historically textured maps that communities have devised over generations, maps replete with names and routes, maps alive to significant ecological and surface geological features. A vernacular landscape, although neither monolithic nor undisputed, is integral to the socioenvironmental dynamics of community […]. By contrast, an official landscape […] is typically oblivious to such earlier maps; instead, it writes the land in a bureaucratic, externalizing, and extraction-driven manner that is often pitilessly instrumental. (17)

Nixon argues that "imposed official landscapes typically discount spiritualized vernacular landscapes" (13), ones which contingently develop. In the medieval context, vernacular paths springing up in response to religious ritual performance sometimes were in conflict with more conventionally bureaucratic perspectives on the land.

An example of this tension between vernacular and official landscapes can be found in two differing routes to Canterbury. Chaucer's pilgrims travel on the regulated passage of Watling Street, once a Celtic thoroughfare. The first-century CE Roman invasion of Britain imposed its official imprint on the landscape through paving this once vernacular route. Subsequent royal decrees reinforced the imposition of human design. While the passage from Southwark to Canterbury along the Roman Road did not eliminate a more southerly route, it was the product of official regulation and control. In contrast, the Pilgrims' Way along the Downs from Winchester to Canterbury emerged as a vernacular track, evolving gradually since well before the Middle Ages (Belloc 62). While the increasingly common practice of enclosure in England in the Norman period, a practice that only accelerated in the Tudor period, straightened out the natural tendency of the older road system to undulate, vernacular medieval roads tolerated, even encouraged, tarrying or loitering (Allen, "Road" 21). As opposed to being linear and teleological, the actual practice of pilgrimage consisted of contingent actions and reactions as with Chaucer's Wife of Bath, who practiced "wandrynge by the weye" (*The Canterbury Tales* I.467).

A subset within the chronotope of the road (Bakhtin 85, 98, 252), the pilgrimage road is one mode of spatial practice. What is more, the concept of "life as pilgrimage" as promulgated by the official medieval church and through literary texts encouraged human actors to see their own lives in terms of the metaphor of pilgrimage and to enact somatically the physical act of pilgrimage by walking to local and distant shrines. Pilgrimage poems not only *reflected* the historical reality of physical place. Such literature moved readers to undertake place pilgrimage themselves, thus, in turn, *shaping* material pilgrimage practice. Poetry literally altered landscapes where human and the nonhuman intersect. Walking on medieval roads marks the landscape (Allen and Evans 1), which can be viewed as "a palimpsest of human and nonhuman movements: a communally intersecting biography" (Tsing 237). Physical inscription parallels written narrative. At the time when many of the vernacular pilgrimage poems were composed, masses of pilgrims inscribed their marks on pathways to shrines; "human movement naturally leaves a trace," most readily witnessed on non-paved surfaces (Miles-Watson and Miles-Watson 330). The grinding down of the pilgrimage track, reflecting the

"slowness of flat ontology" (Yates 207), occurs over vast expanses of time, causing gradual yet inevitable erosion of terrain. The only reason we do not see dirt evolving is because its changes occur so slowly.

The sacred geography of pilgrimage intersects with dirt paths, built urban spaces, and hallowed shrines—all "socio-ecological landscapes" (Eppig 50). Chaucer's Parson, Dante's pilgrim narrator, and Langland's Will are grounded in "real" locations— the celestial Jerusalem, Florence, London. Dante lodges his fellow Florentines in various levels of the *Inferno*, his specific, local representatives for the generic pilgrim (Westphal xiv). Chaucer's Host comments on the close-lying towns of "Depeford" and "Grenewych" (I.3906-7), urging the telling of tales to pass the time. While medieval pilgrimage poems flag geographically identifiable places, the literary ways vary from the allegorical—hell to heaven (*The Divine Comedy*) or birth to death (*The Pilgrimage of Human Life*)—to the familiar—Southwark to Canterbury (*The Canterbury Tales*) or from the Malvern Hills to London (*Piers Plowman*). Literal or literary, a specific environment grounds each pilgrimage route.

Additionally, each writer's vernacular, location-dependent, varies. A singular linguistic environment, uniquely and contingently germinating within a specific *Umwelt* (Berroth n. p.) of land, culture, and space, emerges from the path plotted and designed cartographically. Chaucer's pilgrims pass "the Wateryng of Seint Thomas" (I.826), a brook close to London and specifically named to identify and distinguish it from other streams. The link with "Seint Thomas" suggests how the brook was an inevitable crossing for pilgrims on their way to Canterbury, a site dedicated to that saint's shocking murder and subsequent sacralization. Even within a particular political entity, like a nation, differing constituents utter varied words. Chaucer's London English, for example, deviates from Langland's West Midland origins. Each articulates a distinctive ideolect. As Sten Pultz Moslund suggests in his discussion of *topopoetics*, the

> vocabulary of a text is affected by, or sometimes produced by, the environment of its setting […]. [A] topopoetics within a language like English will be particularly sensitive to the presencing of place through the untranslatability of local varieties of English, or englishes […]. (Moslund 35)

Within topopoetics which adhere to a unique landscape, toponyms—sensitive to the decay of the native ecology—matter. A contemporary poem, Cockburn and Finlay's *The Road North*, moving to and fro as it does between the Scottish present and Japanese past, features striking parallels with medieval pilgrimage models. Like them, it is rooted in the vernacular of place through dialectical idiosyncrasies and a precise and local lexicon. The exact utilization of a distinctive vocabulary parallels the specialized glossary of medieval pilgrimage poets, embedded in a particular setting and locale. For Finlay, "place-awareness" becomes a key means to revealing "a hidden history" (179) of irreplaceable sites. Similarly, Chaucer's *General Prologue* references "shires" (I.15), a uniquely English division of the land stemming from Old English. Rooted in the pilgrimage "langscape" of English, Chaucer utters a topospecific "landguage" (Moslund 39).

The genre of medieval pilgrimage poetry both describes and affects the depiction of the nonhuman world. As Astrid Bracke remarks in relation to yet another contemporary text, Graham Swift's *Waterland* (1983), the "meandering stories and relatively slow pace" stem from the "oozing and meandering nature of one its most important nonhuman characters: the river Ouse" (227). I see a parallel here to the pilgrimage path in pilgrimage ecopoetics. Doubly shaping the extratextual world through its combination of physical description and textual creativity, pilgrimage poetry, as environmental poetry, intimately entwines with the landscape that the pilgrim passes through and becomes part of. As Nancy Easterlin points out, "an understanding of humans as wayfinders suggests a complex and dynamic interest on the part of humans in the environment, the surround itself is complex and dynamic and is frequently in a state of change […]" (261).

In medieval poetry, characters observe the interaction, even the mutual shaping, of human and more-than-human actors. The Host in *The Canterbury Tales* knows the time by noticing how "the shadwe of every tree" is as long as his own body (II.7). At the start of *Piers Plowman*, Will, exhausted from traveling—"wery [of]wandred"—goes to rest "[u]nder a brood bank by a bournes syde" (*Prologue* 7-8; "weary of wandering [...] At the bottom of a broad bank by a brook's side").[4] The brook's soporific babblings mesmerize Will. Lulled to sleep, he wakes intermittently for the rest of the long poem. Contingent encounters, such as Will's encounter with the brook, can include man-made objects. In *The Canterbury Tales*, the sudden appearance of an "alestake" (VI.321), a garland-bedecked pole indicating the presence of a tavern, sparks the impromptu suggestion of his fellow pilgrim, the Pardoner, to eat and drink in the "Introduction to the Pardoner's Tale."

Walking in pilgrimage poems occurs at a lingering pace, allowing for contingent meetings between human actors. Dante's pilgrim suddenly meets his mentor, Brunetto Latini, in the circle of hell reserved for sodomites. Swooning at the suffering of Paolo and Francesca, swirling in the buffeting winds of the second circle, Dante's pilgrim is clearly affected emotionally on his hazardous journey. Geoffrey the pilgrim in *The Canterbury Tales* "accidently" ("by aventure," I.25; see Mann xxvi-xxx) falls into the company of pilgrims at a hostelry in Southwark. In *Piers Plowman*, the allegorized figure of Hunger rises up against lazy laborers who have disregarded their duty to cultivate the land's soil and, in turn, neglected to tend to their own souls. Deguileville's hapless pilgrim must choose which path to take—that of the honest laboring peasant or of a pretty girl playing with a ball. These unexpected moments halt the pilgrim, interrupting the design that propels both pilgrim and text design forward. Unlike hasty impetus, inertia sparks reflection upon one's position in the mesh of one's surroundings.

One of the slower and more disturbing of Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, "The Clerk's Tale" is rooted in the landscape of Italy. The Clerk acknowledges how the original poet (Petrarch) invokes

> Pemond and of Saluces the contree,

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[4] All Middle English references to *Piers Plowman* come from the Schmidt edition; Modern English translations are taken from the Robertson and Shepherd edition.

> And speketh of Apennyn, the hilles hye,
> That been the boundes of West Lumbardye,
> And of Mount Vesulus in special,
> Where as the Poo out of welle smal
> Taketh his firste spryngyng and his sours,
> That estward ay encresseth in his cours
> To Emele-ward, to Ferrare, and Venyse. (IV.44-51)
>
> [Piedmont and the country of Saluces,
> And speaks of the Apennines, the high hills,
> That are the boundaries of West Lombardy,
> And of Mount Vesulus in particular,
> Where the Po out of a small well
> Takes its first springing and its source,
> That eastward ever increases in its course
> Toward Emelia, to Ferrara, and Venice.][5]

The specific topological and geographical features place the story in a particular environment, in this case, the Po Valley. The nobleman Walter transplants the peasant Griselde, figured as a "flour" ("flower"; *Canterbury Tales* IV.919). Plucking her from her father's humble cottage, Walter dresses her in rich clothes (see IV.385) to make her his proper wife. After years of resiliently enduring her husband's cruelty—falsely making her believe their children have been killed by his orders, etc.—she finally warns him not to inflict the same cruelty on his next wife. Her protest transmutes the vicious brutality she has endured into a—seemingly—happy ending. The reader has, along with Griselda, endured Walter's achingly slow and disturbing machinations for twelve years. This protraction of the tale's plot reflects the deliberate pace of a physical pilgrimage—slow, often agonising, and set within a specific ecological biome.

Taking its time, each section of *Piers Plowman* is called a *Passus*, Latin for step, as though readers walk along with the narrator Will. Langland draws out a wild kaleidoscope with snippets from Abraham's suffering to Christ's crucifixion, and even looks forward to the Apocalypse. All this is embedded in the unremarkable life of the commoner Will, a late fourteenth-century Englishman. Aging from randy—"yeep" ["yeasty" (XI.18)]—youth to impotent old man over the course of thousands of lines of alliterative verse, Will bears witness to all aspects of the world, including animals who mate more reasonably than humans (XI.327-372). The poem slowly takes the reader along on a pilgrimage from the creation of Adam and Eve through Judeo-Christian history. The deliberate and designed pattern of physical pilgrimage infiltrates the action, matter, and plot of this pilgrimage poem with its contingent meanderings provoked by bizarre dreams and puzzling allegorical manifestations. Pilgrims (historical and imagined), fictive tales, and more-than-human entities, like the path itself, work together, as we, to speak with Finlay again, "enter a landscape through the arch of language" (18). Each mutable textscape parallels physical landscape, with slow physical pilgrimage shaping slow poetics.

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[5] Translation from https://sites.fas.harvard.edu/~chaucer/teachslf/clkpr-par.htm. Accessed February 26, 2019.

The Ecopoetics of "Landguage": A Living and Resilient Vernacular

> "[F]inding a language/ in which you feel/ at home." (Cockburn and Finlay 127)

In the Middle Ages, Latin functions within an official, ecclesiastical, and orchestrated linguistic landscape, while the vernacular persists as organic, resistant, and insistent, "significantly [extending] the verbal range" of medieval pilgrimage poetry (Ramazani 17). Within this model, Latin acts as a language of design, while the vernacular, a resilient and responsive tongue, adapting to survive, vibrantly sprouts from contingency. Just as the dirt pilgrimage path alters due to countless footsteps, unplanned changes in languages occur over time. Language endures because it changes, suggesting resilience. After meeting Nimrod deep in the *Inferno* (XXXI.67-69),[6] Virgil tells Dante's pilgrim that a single language cannot suffice (*Inferno* XXXI.76-81). Adam reveals how his tongue became extinct even before Nimrod, informing the pilgrim that "never/ has any thing produced by human reason/ been everlasting […] Such change must be:/ the ways that mortals take are as the leaves/ upon a branch—one comes, another goes" (*Paradise* XXVI.126-138). No human construct can last—not even a linguistic one. But by remaining mutable and adaptable, it can endure in ever new forms. Imagined by Dante as "leaves/ upon a branch," that is, as ephemeral organs helping vascular plants to thrive, the spoken vernacular both reflects and spurs a change in the relationship with the authority of written language.

As it modifies, the vernacular is uniquely suited to express the physical, environmental, and spiritual dimensions of pilgrimage. Vibrant living languages spoken by diverse classes of people stand in opposition to Latin, the official language of authority that carries cultural capital in the late Middle Ages. Dante's *The Divine Comedy* establishes the vernacular precedent for pilgrimage poetry in the fourteenth century. Enhancing its status for poetic and learned discourse, Dante suggests that this vernacular possibly exists "as it were, in exile, on a pilgrimage, among the humble and throughout the Italian peninsula: 'our illustrious vernacular wanders like a stranger and finds hospitality in lowly refuges'" (Dante, *De vulgari eloquentia* I, xviii, 3, qtd in Ascoli 60). Meandering along with the pilgrim, the vernacular never crystallizes into one singular, permanent form. Vernaculars continue to modify, suggesting endurance through variation.

The vernacular proves an ideal means to link the pilgrim reader with the poetic text. Guillaume de Deguileville's goal, he proclaims, is to help *every* reader-pilgrim to complete the spiritual journey of the text. He thus emphasizes all classes and genders in the opening poem of *Le Pèlerinage de la vie humaine*, addressing "men and women, rich and poor, wise and foolish, kings and queens" (de Deguileville 3). His narrator further asserts:

> This vision concerns the mighty and the humble, without exception. I have put it all in [French], so that laymen can understand it. Everyone can learn from it which path to take

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[6] All citations come from Dante Alighieri as translated by Allen Mandelbaum, unless otherwise noted.

and which to leave and abandon. This is something very necessary to those who are pilgrims in this wild world. (de Deguileville 3)[7]

His text must be in the vernacular so layfolk can have access to it. Insomuch as each reader differs, responses to the text are contingent on gender, class, and education. Pilgrimage poetics insist on a vernacularity that accommodates these differences and contingencies. Langland, whose Midlands English differs from that of Chaucer's London English, conjures up a world ranging from the bowels of hell to Christ's passion in Jerusalem. Yet, like Chaucer's poem, *Piers Plowman* remains quintessentially English, with drunken pub-goers and a dysfunctional Parliament. When the humble Everyman named Haukyn requests that Patience explain what Poverty is, Patience's response includes a long Latin quote (XIV.276) that Haukyn cannot understand.

> "I kan noght construe al this," quod Haukyn, "ye moste kenne me this on Englissh."
> "In Englissh," quod Pacience, "it is wel hard, wel to expounen,
> Ac somdeel I shal seyen it, by so thow understonde." (XIV.277-279)
>
> ["I can't construe this," Hawkin told him, "you must translate it into English."
> "All this in English," said Patience, "is very hard to expound,
> But I shall explain some of it, so you may understand."]

After Haukyn asks for an explication in English, he receives one, leading to a scene of contrition, one catalyzed through the vernacular. This use of the vernacular—and by extension, vernacular poetry, capable of amending even the humblest of souls—is necessary, his scene suggests, so that the imagination and devotion of potentially everyone could be affected (Bale 126, note 7).

The vernacular eludes concrete design which crystallizes into one single, permanent form. Tim William Machan, in his exploration of Middle English, carves out a sociolinguistic model to argue for the vernacular language as an ecology (9), characterizing "the relations between a speech community's linguistic repertoire […] and social practices" (Machan 10). As applied analogously to language, the metaphor of ecology suggests that the living, dynamic vernacular constitutes a fertile means for understanding a specific place. Words, palimpsests of historical variation, suggest environmental dynamism: "[A] name opened/ to reveal the hidden/ seed of its meaning" (Cockburn and Finlay 115). When we unearth the etymology of our vernacular tongues, we perceive past iterations of signifiers and, through extension, their future development, should the language thrive. The ideal language in which to express our life's peregrinations is the vernacular, a linguistically dynamic actor and "living organism with its own agency" (Hsy, *Trading Tongues* 57; see 25). Vernacular speakers respond to others, not in a hermetic vacuum, but in a living linguistic biosphere, attested to in medieval pilgrimage poems.

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[7] Unless otherwise noted, all citations come from Guillaume de Deguileville as translated by Eugene Clasby.

Textual Wayfaring: Slow Walking through Pilgrimage Poems

"[A] walk is a path for two." (Finlay 96)

The design of a pilgrimage route responds to unexpected geological features, such as steep inclines or bubbling brooks. Over time, it may subtly alter direction in contingent response to factors like wind abrasion or flooding, storm debris, or diseased vegetation. Pilgrimage poems similarly show evidence of continuous, subtle change. Pilgrimage practice influences poetic practice. Just as walking in traditional pilgrimage "involves slow organic movement through a landscape" (Northcott 215), the literary pilgrim ambles through slow poetry, catalyzing transformation to affect a spiritual cure. While walking carves a path in the dirt and gravel, writing inscribes poetic lines, pondered over and, if necessary, later revised and amended. Initially a product of the poet's design, the verse of medieval pilgrimage poems was edited—slowly—over time. Deguileville himself amends *Le Pèlerinage de la vie humaine* (1330s), with a reworked iteration appearing in 1355 (see Clasby xv). At the end of the fourteenth century, Langland edits *Piers Plowman* over twenty years, resulting in the A-, B-, C-, and even -Z versions (Robertson and Shepherd xi). With *The Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer aims at a prolonged poem so huge, it remains incomplete and in fragments—discrete chunks.

While ultimately amendment must end with the poet's death, the extant variations of a poem suggest a vibrant diversity of possibility. Ecopoetics consists not merely of a final product, the poem or prose work by an author. As Jonathan Skinner points out, "one important aspect of eco-poetics entails what happens off the page, in terms of where the work is sited and performed, as well as what methods of composition, or decomposition, precede and follow the poem—the [...] collaboration that the work takes up and generates" (Hume 760). A key concept for slow pilgrimage ecopoetics, literal amendment can be seen in the evolving literary artefact of the pilgrimage poem itself, since post-Dantean poems exist in multiple versions. Just as roads have detours, medieval pilgrimage literature remains unfinished, fragmentary, or multiple.

Vernacularity and amendment remain central to more recent pilgrimage writings, unexpectedly, surprisingly, and contingently linked to medieval pilgrimage poems. Earlier in this essay, Bashō's writing was seen as a design for a twenty-first century Scottish work. Bashō also exercised influence over the Beats, such as Jack Kerouac, whose American icon *On the Road* (1957) gives us an instance of the modern embrace, interpretation, and appropriation of the medieval. Just as Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* includes parodies of Northern dialect in "The Reeve's Tale," Kerouac's prose replicates the jaunty rhythms of American patter. David J. Alworth argues that "Kerouac turned to the open road in order to reimagine sociality" (82), which requires the glue of the vernacular. Despite the seductive legend of a spontaneously produced text, Kerouac amended his work considerably, from its initial gestation in 1948 until its publication in 1957. In the unpublished autograph manuscript travel diary dating from 1948-49 (*On*

the Road notebook), Kerouac imagines the novel as a quest tale, thinking of pilgrimage during its gestation. Concerning this early version of the novel, he writes,

> The hero is a man in his late 20's who has lived a lot, and who ends up in a jail, thinking, finally, that he needs to "seek an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away," in the words of Bunyan [author of *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678)]. (*On the Road* notebook, March 25, 1949; see Christy 26)

Four days after this journal entry, Kerouac writes, "*Pilgrimage* […]. My interest in the 'beat': it must be because they're not only poor, but *homeless* […]. Their lives have an exterior air of pilgrimage (wandering + impoverished)[…]" (*On the Road* notebook, Tues. March 29, 1949). Kerouac mentions Chaucer in a letter (June 28, 1949) to Elbert Lenrow: "In Chaucer, by the way, 'bone' is PRAYER" (Kerouac, *Selected Letters* 207). In *On the Road*, Sal Paradise, whose name alone evokes Dante, describes his journeys as a "pilgrimage" (Kerouac 139, 303). Though Chaucer was, in the end, but a minor influence on Kerouac, the parallels between the two authors expose how elements characteristic of pilgrimage literature—endorsement of the vernacular and amendment—persist well into the modern period, in a generic resilience of language, process, and form.

Kerouac's iconic novel, influenced both through contingent encounters with authors such as Chaucer and edited by design, serves as a recent example of pilgrimage poetics committed to amendment. The ever-evolving state of land on which physical pilgrimage was imprinted becomes reflected in the ever-evolving state of the pilgrimage poem, obsessively walked over (metaphorically) by the pilgrim poet. Different versions attest to the writer's desire to continue to adapt a work for new audiences. Envisioning collaboration, vernacular pilgrimage poets in the Middle Ages invite—even insist—on the reader's involvement[8] to improve on or amend the text. In John Mandeville's fourteenth-century pilgrimage text, *The Book of Marvels and Travels*, the narrator declares concerning his readers: "'Y make hem [them] partyners' (2850-53)" (qtd in Cohen 159). The very meaning of the text lies in its *variance* among recipients. As Jan-Dirk Müller argues in relation to Deguileville's work, "no author […] controls the shape of his texts once they are distributed" (148). The poet's design—while reworked through amendment—contingently responds to each individual pilgrim-reader. The pilgrim-walker through her physical ordeal, the pilgrim-writer through his creative act, and the pilgrim-reader through her act of reading show committed persistence.

Amendment, a contingent act, suggests resilient co-evolution, the ability to flourish both through resistance and gradual change. In Langland's *Piers Plowman*, amendment, which appears dozens of times in the text itself as word and concept, remains an unfinished process. The allegorical personifications of Contrition, Confession, and Satisfaction teach how to scrub away filth from Haukyn's coat, an allegory for his soul. Dye this coat, he is told, with good will and "Goddes grace to amende the" (XIV.20) ["God's-Grace-To-Amend-Yourself"]. The dirty Haukyn stands for every fallen soul, each one of us, as witnesses to as well as co-pilgrims on this journey. The good work of the poem is realized if it succeeds in affecting Haukyn—and us. We each have a role in that amendment, spiritual and poetic. At the end of his poem,

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[8] See Moslund 38 on more contemporary works.

Deguileville asks for the reader's/listener's aid: "If I have not dreamed this dream well, I pray that it be corrected by those who can dream better or who can make it better" (185-86). His readers as literary pilgrims perform poetic penance through interpretation. This co-writing functions as a penitential exercise by the reader, just as the writing of the poem does for the poet. Asking the reader to correct the work demonstrates how amendment of a poetic text remains no mere theme, but in fact emerges as an agenda for the active participation, even collaboration, of the reader with the writer. Through their own multiplicity—the multiplicity Deguileville explicitly evokes in his initial address to his readers as noted before—readers contribute to the diversity and resilience of the unfinished, ever-amending poem itself.

The dynamic interchange among author-text-reader creates an animated network. In ecological terms, an organism evolves within a specific biosphere to prosper; in literary terms, poems modify and adjust by interacting contingently with other organisms—in this case, readers. In fact, one might say, only readers' interaction with a poem enlivens the written text. This environment of the literary work exerts agency with and against the reader (see Bastian 106-7), who co-writes his or her own slow poetic journey. The strategy of slow poetics authorizes the reader to co-perform the text, making author, reader, and text all kin, "shar[ing] equal status as co-participants" (Hsy, "Queer environments" 299). Though these medieval pilgrimage poems emerge in landscapes—literal and literary—from hundreds of years ago, they remind us that bearing close attention to this poetry becomes synonymous with the slow attention we need to pay to our ecological home. Such works, teaching us to scrupulously focus on our surroundings, enable us to become ethical actors who share the world with fellow humans and more-than-human entities.

"As you walk, you make your own road"

<div align="right">Antonio Machado, "Traveler, your footprints" (n. p.)</div>

Taking a long view of ecopoetical practice allows us to consider how poetry from the distant past can suggest fresh ways to deepen our appreciation of early ecopoets, help us understand contemporary literary works, and texture our endeavors into the future. By promoting slowness, medieval pilgrimage poems can help supplement contemporary eco-theory and eco-literature. Precisely by its very alterity, medieval poetry promises alternative ways to get off the beaten track, so to speak, of ecopoetics. In pilgrimage literature, authors in the Middle Ages anticipated a responsive engagement with the world, an engagement that depended on slowness as a pace that answers to contingency, shapes ethical design, and cultivates ecological agency. Rather than constituting a reading of mastery, the pilgrim-reader's "flashes of understanding" in "the active work of reading" only "come by chance, or by accident" (Bastian 107). As living beings, we constantly have to adapt to continually modifying political, social, cultural, and environmental contexts. As tenants of the language we voice, our adaptations and amendments sustain the vitality of speech.

Walking and reading emerge through time slowly. We make our way around stones, clamber up hillsides, and forge streams, just as we contemplate words, savoring them on our tongue or looking them up in glossaries. The pilgrim poet's slow verse cures spiritual restlessness, forcing readers to decelerate and make "[themselves] at home" in the world (Bergmann and Sager 1). Continually dynamic, pilgrimage poems—literary works of slow process, indeterminacy, and contingent openness—correspond to an understanding of the world according to which "[h]uman beings live in the world, not on it" (Ingold 333). Pilgrimage poems, sanctuaries of linguistic diversity and development, much like nature preserves reserved to foster and protect biodiversity, enact radical resilience (Haraway 162) by encouraging us to think about and revise human-nature relations. Understood as vibrant actants open to amendment, "not merely as inert objects but as things with dynamic agency" (Hsy, "Queer environments" 298), pilgrimage poems, sparking contingent readings and responses, continue to thrive along with the receptive reader, adapting and open to amendment and change. Just as the historical pilgrim presses ahead, the pilgrim reader advances alongside the writer, co-creating a resilient literary work.

While design can gesture toward action and suggest goals, contingent response alerts us to our supple and reciprocal interaction *with*—not over—our world. Allowing for welcoming and caring hospitality—even tenderness (Solnit 21)— on the part of the reader, contingency vibrantly textures and thickens the design of physical and literary slow pilgrimage. Like the attentive walker, the slow reader adjusts her pace to her breath, becoming aware of the poetic space into which she is integrated. Slow pilgrimage ecopoetics represents a dynamic model for how we should perceive and approach our contemporary world—through mindful attention to our fellow human and nonhuman actors, by acting and responding with deliberate pace, and by acknowledging our participation in the ecological home in which we all—human and more-than-human—are embedded.

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