Elizabeth Fowler. *Literary Character: The Human Figure in Early English Writing*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003

Introduction

The Arguments of Person

Social Persons and Cognition

A medieval pilgrim to the shrine of St. Thomas Becket at Canterbury Cathedral might have bought there a souvenir badge to commemorate the ritual journey. She would have kept it on her person, pinned to a cloak or a hat, for instance. The Frontispiece shows a badge with a pin fastener; it was dug up near Billingsgate, London, is measured at 86 by 59 millimeters, and is thought to date from the same century as Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*.[1] Though the left arch and side do not survive, there remains a beautiful and complex image of a tonsured figure in robes kneeling before an ornamented table that supports a huge goblet. Behind him are several armored knights suspended in space, carrying shields and brandishing swords at the head of the central figure. Another tonsured figure is leaning wide-eyed from a ledge that hangs over the cup and bears a Calvary scene. At the bottom of the badge a ribbon of squares reads "† THOMAS."

If we set aside what we know about Thomas, we can see how the badge draws on at least three familiar kinds of scenes: a scene of liturgical worship, a scene of public execution, and a scene of clandestine murder. We may refer to this notion of scene by the useful rhetorical term *topos* (from

1. Michael Mitchiner, *Medieval Pilgrim and Secular Badges* (London: Hawkins, 1986), 49. Most of his collection, Mitchiner informs us, was dug up on the Thames foreshore by a group of metal detector enthusiasts who felicitously call themselves the "mudlarks" (7). Thomas's shrine appeared soon after his death in 1170 and was much visited until (and after) the abolition of pilgrimage shrines in the 1530s by Henry VIII.

the Greek for *place* and, metaphorically, *topic*), which in its range of reference includes not only images and scenes but also arguments, issues, and turns of phrase that are recognizably conventional. Any single use of a topos invites a reverberation of memory, so that we must collate and compare it with other remembered examples of the convention.[2] On the badge, the bodily attitude or pose of Thomas has an enormous cultural resonance that activates all three topoi. In the terms of the liturgical scene, we may see him kneel as a celebrant of the Christian mass; the monk may be a preacher and the knights the defilers of a sacred ritual. In the murder scene, he prays, and we perceive him as a victim caught in a pious moment; the monk is a surprised witness and the knights are criminals in an ambush. The terms of the execution scene invite us to see Thomas as the condemned criminal offering his neck in submission to the swords of his justicers, with their heraldry as their warrant and the monk as a goggle-eyed spectator. The three topoi activate entirely different sets of personae: Thomas is a *priest*, a *victim*, or a *criminal*; the monk is a *preacher*, a *witness*, or a *spectator*; the knights are *defilers*, *murderers*, or *agents of the law*.

Such representations I shall call *social persons*; they are the central topic of this book.[3] Social persons are models of the person, familiar concepts of social being that attain currency through common use. The viewer and reader rely on them as ways of understanding figural representation, whereas the artist relies on them as compositional tools or guides. Yet in an important sense they are not "there," not in the picture at all, but only in our minds and in the air of culture—phantoms of the cognitive process of perception. As conventional kinds of person, social persons are very much like literary genres, because they depend upon the recognition of convention. They are better regarded as cumulative and changing sets of

2. On topos as a collation, see Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 61–68. See V. A. Kolve, *Chaucer and the Imagery of Narrative: The First Five Canterbury Tales* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1984) for readings of poetic images collated with visual traditions. The concept of the literary topos came into importance in medieval studies with the publication of Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Pantheon, 1953).

3. I use the term "social person" (coined in an analogy to "legal person," which it includes) to describe something that social psychologists such as Gerard Duveen and Serge Moscovici would call a "social representation" of the person. Mine is a general term meant to indicate *a paradigmatic representation of personhood that has evolved historically among the institutions of social life*. My thinking about social person draws on ideas suggested by Marcel Mauss, "A Category of the Human Mind: The Notion of Person; The Notion of Self," trans. W. D. Halls, in *The Category of the Person: Anthropology, Philosophy, History*, ed. Michael Carrithers, Steven Collins, and Steven Lukes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 1–25. This essay was the Huxley Memorial Lecture of 1938, first printed as "Une Catégorie de l'Esprit Humain: La Notion de Personne, Celle de 'Moi,'" *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 68 (1938).

resemblances than as susceptible to definition by a list of features.[4] Social persons are sets of expectations built in the reader's mind by experience, and they are notions of what it is to be a person. The badge invokes its phantom social persons by its topoi, by the postures and array of its figures, by its use of letters, heraldry, and furniture, and by its allusions to history and ritual. The power of the image comes from the disposition of its human figures, a disposition that can call up such a crowd of ghosts. The image invites us to understanding by means of a process of sorting, collating, comparing, choosing, combining, and rejecting representations of the person.

The characters that inhabit fiction summon the same kind of specters by some of the same means; in demonstrating the importance of social persons in representation, this book offers a new method of analysis for the human figure in words. Our tools for the study of literary character are surprisingly primitive compared to those we have developed for, say, narrative, historical allusion, genre, rhetoric, iconography, plot, prosody, and other formal aspects of fiction. Previous studies of literary character have largely concerned the technical means authors employ to represent and shape forms of consciousness or subjectivity (e.g., E. M. Forster, Hélène Cixous, Dorrit Cohn, Martin Price, Katharine Maus), engineer plot (e.g., Vladimir Propp, Roland Barthes, James Phelan), propose ideas (e.g., D. W. Robertson, Kate Millett, Amélie Rorty), transmit literary genres and sources (Northrop Frye, Harold Bloom), or fuel the market for books (Deidre Lynch).[5] Critics have traced the histories of certain types and kinds

4. I should like here to affirm Stanley Cavell's perception of genre; he writes, "It will be natural in what follows, even irresistible, to speak of individual characteristics of a genre as 'features' of it; but the picture of an object with its properties is a bad one." He suggests that the important thing that is shared by members of a genre cannot be described by Ludwig Wittgenstein's notion of "family resemblance." Instead, he offers the idea that "the members of a genre share the inheritance of certain conditions, procedures and subjects and goals of composition, and that in primary art each member of such a genre represents a study of these conditions, something I think of as bearing the responsibility of the inheritance." Stanley Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness: The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 28–29.

5. E. M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1927); Hélène Cixous, "The Character of 'Character,'" trans. Keith Cohen, *New Literary History* 5 (1974): 383–402; Dorrit Cohn, *Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978); Martin Price, *Forms of Life: Character and Moral Imagination in the Novel* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983); Katharine Eisaman Maus, *Inwardness and Theater in the English Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, trans. Laurence Scott, 2d ed. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968); Roland Barthes, *S/Z, trans. Richard Miller* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974); James Phelan, *Reading People, Reading Plots: Character, Progression, and the Interpretation of Narrative* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989); D. W. Robertson, Jr., *A Preface to Chaucer: Studies in Medieval Perspectives* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962); Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics*

of literary character: the vice figure, the tragic hero, the penitent knight, the hard-boiled detective, and their familiar ilk.[6] Writers such as Warren Ginsberg, Susanne Wofford, John Watkins, and Andrew Galloway have added to our knowledge of form by showing how characters such as Achilles, Lucretia, Vergil, or Dido can be a kind of trope carrying intellectual history.[7] From all this work we know a great deal about source study, literary influence, and the interaction of genre and character. Yet rarely do theorists and critics acknowledge or attempt to explain how readers recognize these various techniques as figuration, how they integrate the scraplike details of characterization into coherent persons, or how authors exploit the powerful appeal figures make to readerly identification. These larger conditions of characterization will be among our concerns here.

Rarely too are theorists and critics able to treat character as a social form among others; we shall see that the theory of the social person will allow us to do so. Of course, scholarly writing on literary characters has been enriched by borrowings from the psychologies, moral philosophies, and medical theories of various periods, but we have lacked a method for coping appropriately with the differences between these modes of thought or even, oddly enough, with the differences between characters and living bodies. These differences have legal, aesthetic, moral, and mental consequences; they are not to be taken lightly. Perhaps this is why the twentieth century saw the decline of interest in the human figure in so many different fields. It is typical of the impoverished state of thought about characterization that even psychoanalytic theory has exiled characters. There are no characters in the writings of Jacques Lacan; figures like "Dora" disappeared together with the genre of the case study as the discourse developed in the years after Sigmund Freud. Literary scholars interested in psychological approaches to texts have followed suit, sometimes even excluding character as a potential location for psychoanalytic process. This book at-

(Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1970), Amélie Rorty, "Characters, Persons, Selves, Individuals," in *Mind in Action: Essays in the Philosophy of Mind* (Boston: Beacon, 1988), 78–98; Northrop Frye, *The Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957); Harold Bloom, *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1998); Deidre Lynch, *The Economy of Character: Novels, Market Culture, and the Business of Inner Meaning* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

6. E.g., Gordon Braden, *Renaissance Tragedy and the Senecan Tradition: Anger's Privilege* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), Andrea Hopkins, *The Sinful Knights: A Study of Middle English Penitential Romance* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990).

7. Susanne Wofford, *The Choice of Achilles: The Ideology of Figure in the Epic* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992); Andrew Galloway, "Chaucer's *Legend of Lucrece* and the Critique of Ideology in Fourteenth-Century England," *English Literary History* 60 (1993): 813–32; Warren Ginsberg, *The Cast of Character: The Representation of Personality in Ancient and Medieval Literature* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983); John Watkins, *The Specter of Dido: Spenser and Virgilian Epic* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).

tempts to revive our interest in the human figure in part by specifying the form of its relation to the history of the disciplines, so that figuration's manifold uses of models of the person drawn from other disciplines can be described and made accessible, thus, to heterogeneous kinds of analysis.

But not all persons are "models" or "representations." What is the relation between the human figure in words and the human figure in flesh? Fiction always asks us to believe in the meaningfulness of the identity between the two, even if it rarely specifies the nature of that identity. Literary scholarship itself speaks of characters as if they were real people and, just as frequently, warns us that they are not. Students often notice the apparent contradiction and make their teachers aware that we lack a theoretical account of the relation between the literary character and the human being. The following chapters begin to provide such an account by describing the habituation of the reader during the recognition of social persons (chapter 1), the intrinsic capacity of social persons simultaneously to refer to individual bodies and to personify social relations (chapter 2), the effects of historical and disciplinary discontinuities on figural art's ability to produce meaning (chapter 3), and the politics of the embeddedness of social persons in legal and constitutional locations (chapter 4). Throughout this book, I emphasize the strong arguments that representations of the person make about the intellectual, institutional, and political practices of social life.

I shall begin here with the examples of the Knight and the Prioress, familiar characters in Chaucer's General Prologue to *The Canterbury Tales*, in order to introduce a central feature of all characterization: that it makes meaning through reference to social persons. It will be important to demonstrate precisely how formal aspects of poetry produce our recognition of social persons.

On the badge, we recognize a human figure kneeling; in the General Prologue, we apprehend the Knight as a man riding when we notice repeated uses of the verb *riden* (to ride) and realize that posture and activity to be a synecdoche for his military adventures:

> A KNYGHT ther was, and that a worthy man,
> That fro the tyme that he first bigan
> To *riden* out, he loved chivalrie,
> Trouthe and honour, fredom and curteisie.
> Ful worthy was he in his lordes werre, *war*
> And therto hadde he *riden*, no man ferre, *farther*
> As wel in cristendom as in hethenesse,
> And evere honoured for his worthynesse;
> At Alisaundre he was whan it was wonne.
> Ful ofte tyme he hadde the bord bigonne *sat in honor*

Aboven alle nacions in Pruce;
In Lettow hadde he *reysed* and in Ruce, *ridden on raids*
No Cristen man so ofte of his degree.
In Gernade at the seege eek hadde he be
Of Algezir, and *riden* in Belmarye.[8]

The figure riding a horse invokes a number of social persons as it moves through the portrait: one is the *crusader*, a mainstay of, for example, chronicle, sermon, and manuscript illumination. The stark global landscape divided into "cristendom" and "hethenesse" suggests the early English romance and its fabulously belligerent protagonist, the *romance knight*; the catalog of heathen places that follows, as Jill Mann has shown, is a feature of the chanson de geste and puts us in mind of its somewhat different hero-knight, the *knight of the chanson de geste*.[9] Two social persons here, then, are drawn from literary tradition and conjured by landscape.

Both posture and landscape—figure and ground—can call up social persons and the discourses out of which they grow, social persons that jostle together with those provided by means of simple nomination in the first line of the portrait: *knight*, *man*. In the context of the catalog of persons that is the General Prologue, "knight" in line 43 must refer to a person of a certain social class or estate; "worthy man" is its own broadly construed social person, evoking a kind of masculinity. Neither should we neglect the ideological discourse encapsulated in the second couplet's description of the Knight's love for chivalry: his embrace of the ethical values of chivalry describes a particular kind of knighthood that reveres riding horses and fighting as heavily coded moral and spiritual practices. This ethos strives to fashion its adherents into its own social person that is yet another model of *knight* that can be distinguished from the others present here. Let us call him the *chivalric ideal*. In the course of the portrait, as we discover our man's extraordinary success, we may add to this crowd of social persons that of the *victor*:

At Lyeys was he and at Satalye,
Whan they were wonne, and in the Grete See
At many a noble armee hadde he be.
At mortal batailles hadde he been fiftene,

8. Lines 43–57; italics mine. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from Chaucer have been taken from *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson, 3d ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987). "Reysed," from Middle Dutch and Middle Low German, is another word for "to ride" that is a specialized term for raiding campaigns. *Middle English Dictionary*, s.v. "reisen."

9. Jill Mann, *Chaucer and Medieval Estates Satire: The Literature of Social Classes and the General Prologue to the "Canterbury Tales"* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 110–11.

And foughten for oure feith at Tramyssene
In lystes thries, and ay slayn his foo. *formal duels*
(58–63)

Here we come close to the *triumphator* of Roman equestrian statuary and civic procession, the social person that Theseus explicitly embodies in the opening procession of the Knight's Tale. From this pinnacle of description we both ascend and fall into the next four lines:

This ilke worthy knyght hadde been also
Somtyme with the lord of Palatye
Agayn another hethen in Turkye;
And everemoore he hadde a sovereyn prys.
(64–67)

In line 47, we discovered our man in the person of the *feudal retainer* through the evocation of relation in the phrase "his lordes werre"; throughout the catalogue of places nothing has moved us from the thought that the riding was in knight-service to a Christian lord fighting against heathen enemies or, possibly, in the mention of "Ruce," against Christian heretics. Our sense of his prowess mounts as we find his theater of war expanding to Turkey; however, with this expansion comes the new knowledge that he has fought beside "the lord of Palatye," a heathen warring against another heathen. This war in Turkey appears to have no Christian motive; nor are we told that he is there according to any feudal obligation. The lack of explanation and the idiomatic phrase "sovereyn prys" (which means he was "highly valued" in the non-economic sense of having a superb reputation, yet uses economic diction) raise the somewhat uncomfortable specter of the *mercenary soldier*, uncomfortable because it is incompatible with the motive inherent in the social person (if not every historical instance) of the *crusader*, who fights as a Christian religious practice.

We need not embrace the portrait as satire or severe critique, as Terry Jones and others have done, in order to perceive the character growing out of these evocations of quite different models of the person, for as readers we are engaged in a process of measuring the character by means of these social persons.[10] That the social person of the mercenary has been evoked in his portrait is a first-order judgment that admits, I think, of little con-

10. Terry Jones, *Chaucer's Knight: The Portrait of a Medieval Mercenary* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980). For a rebuttal of Jones that gives an account of aristocratic crusading in the fourteenth century, see Maurice Keen, "Chaucer's Knight, the English Aristocracy and the Crusade," in *English Court Culture in the Later Middle Ages*, ed. V. J. Scattergood and J. W. Sherborne (London: Duckworth, 1983), 45–61.

troversy. Whether the Knight's identity is that of a mercenary, however, is a second-order critical judgment and controversial. In assessing the role of the social person of the mercenary, it helps to compare this evocation to others, for example, that of the *mayde* in line 69:

> And though that he were worthy, he was wys,
> And of his port as meeke as is a mayde. *deportment*
> (68–69)

The social person of the *mayde* comes to us in the form of a simile. The Knight is attributed meekness, a quality (unlike worthiness or wisdom) inappropriate to the social person of a knight—not, I stress, necessarily inappropriate to knights, but inappropriate to the social person. Insofar as it means unaggressive, weak, soft, lowly, abject, submissive, docile, or pliant, "meeke" suggests the opposite of the hardy, upright, aggressive nature of a knight. The near-paradox of a meek knight might have resulted in a satire of the kind suitable for Terry Jones's illustrious non-Chaucerian productions. Here, of course, its potential for hilarity is mastered by the evocation of the *mayde*, and meekness becomes a virtue we may admire in a fighter. Although the Middle English word "mayde," by virtue of implying chastity, can refer to men, as a social person it is overwhelmingly female.[11] No critic has yet written a book arguing that the character is a woman, perhaps because the simile instructs us to measure our character against the mayde, and thus to take an attribute that *is* a virtue in the latter *as* a virtue in the former. But the poem does leave open the question whether the character is a *mayde*—at least until the next portrait where we meet his son in the person of the Squire.

Similarly, the poem's description of the Knight's behavior in Turkey asks us to consider his prowess as geographically wide and highly prized. It leaves aside (and open) the question whether he is a mercenary and, further, whether such an identity is incompatible with his other identities, and whether that therefore makes him vicious and false. The role of the social person of the mercenary in the portrait is circumscribed by the description of the extent of his reputation. In my judgment, we are not explicitly invited to wonder whether he is really a mercenary or a woman, though we may wish to; the appearance of these social persons is not the true revelation of identity that overturns all the previous ones. Instead, these models of the person appear as outlying marks on the map of his character, as radar signals from further away than the others, as coordinates in terms of which we may chart the Knight's own place. They partic-

11. *Middle English Dictionary*, s.v. "maiden," sense 2d.

ipate in carefully structured ways in the process of characterization, but they are not properly referred to as among the Knight's identities. I would put the mercenary—together with the mayde and the *speaker of "vileynye"* (which appears under negation in line 70)—in the category of social persons that do not qualify as full-blown identities of the character, despite the fact that they figure prominently in his characterization. My point here is that the difficulty we experience in sorting out the degree of attribution in each case causes us to feel a density in the character, no matter which judgment we make. Social persons are, by definition, simple and thin; positioned among a number of them, a character takes on complexity and weight. The process of reading begins with recognition and moves quickly to deliberation.

The most important turn in the course of the portrait is not the swerve to Turkey, but the change in register that comes with the lines I will quote again:

> And though that he were worthy, he was wys,
> And of his port as meeke as is a mayde.
> He nevere yet no vileynye ne sayde
> In al his lyf unto no maner wight. *person*
> He was a verray, parfit gentil knyght.
> But for to tellen yow of his array,
> His hors were goode, but he was nat gay.
> Of fustian he wered a gypon *coarse cloth, tunic*
> Al bismotered with his habergeon, *stained, coat of mail*
> For he was late ycome from his viage,
> And wente for to doon his pilgrymage.
> (68–78)

The central figure of the portrait, the man riding, we now view against the animating background of Christian penitential theology, together with its ritual actions, virtues, and grooming of the body. Whereas social space provided the main parameters of the first half of the portrait, here we move to another world, that of habitus and manners: comportment, speech, ideological code (gentillesse), dress, and practice. Habitus and its shorthand, clothing, as so often in fiction and life, send a signal to us, and in receiving that signal we recognize the social person of the *pilgrim*. Because the holy land was the primary destination for Christian pilgrims as well as for crusading knights, the figures of the *crusader* and the *pilgrim*, two men riding, were indeed pervasive (and sometimes even made identical) in medieval ethical deliberations on the relation of the Christian West to its Eastern neighbors. The crusader and the pilgrim are the two primary evocations of the portrait. The tension between these social persons is

high; they identify very different ideals, modes of dress, bodily practices, attitudes to others, places in the social fabric, experiences of the passions, postures before other cultures, uses of property, obligations, and even notions of time and space. That Chaucer is not the only medieval writer to bring these two social persons together takes none of this tension away; rather, we may see the power generated by such a catachrestic collocation in theologians such as St. Bernard of Clairvaux, who uses the two social persons together to make war nearly a sacrament, and in early romances such as *Sir Isumbras*, which find a spiritual process and basis for worldly property and power.[12]

The riding figure holds together the entire portrait, but it vacillates before us through many models of the person (I have counted at least thirteen distinct social persons in the portrait of the Knight). The process of vacillation itself develops the character—neither a crusader nor a pilgrim, alone, but something made of the alternation, like a flip-page book or a film that we perceive as integral, though it comes of many distinct still frames racing by our eyes. We experience Chaucer's Knight as if the many social persons that appear in his portrait were separate lenses of different distortion and each produced a flat image that combined with the others to construct the illusion of depth. These social persons are phantom templates by which we measure the Knight: they are in tension with one another and with our other senses of the character, and, as we apprehend him, we move out from the words to the social persons and back to the single described figure, in a kind of dialectical shuttle. With such mental acts of recognition and measuring, each of us locates the figure of the Knight in terms of whatever medieval and modern frameworks or maps of meaning comprise her or his learning. Insofar as we are readers, we welcome the richness of art that registers on such multiple sets of coordinates, and we embrace the opportunities art offers us for puzzling, for deliberation, and for judgment.[13]

The act of locating the character and reading its meaning against the co-

12. For Bernard, see Mann, *Chaucer and Medieval Estates Satire*, 108–9. For a consideration of the penance-oriented romance as a genre, see Hopkins, *The Sinful Knights*, especially 20–31.

13. The appreciation of multiplicity in art is surely one of the areas of deepest consensus in the aesthetics of the last century. From William Empson's ambiguity to Stephen Orgel's textual openness, literary critics have felt at home with undecidability. Openness is not an exclusively modern aesthetic value, of course, but in the pre-modern period it can look very different. I have already cited Carruthers' description of the topos as tool for an ethical process of thought. Warren Ginsberg uses Cicero's presentation of the rhetorical exercise "disputatio in utramque partem" (arguing an issue from both sides) to describe how Boccaccio and Chaucer represent personality in literary character in *The Cast of Character*, 98–133.

ordinates of social persons is a process of recognition and identification that moves in two directions.[14] We position the Knight on our maps of social meaning, and, in this same act, we are also positioning ourselves—responding in some way to an Althusserian "hail."[15] Figural representations draw us into their social landscapes: the act of cognition is the double act of finding our way around that social space and of finding ourselves there. Like other ritual experiences, reading "fashions" us, in Edmund Spenser's famous phrase.[16] Like other kinds of looking at images of people, I shall argue at length in chapter 1 that reading the human figure in words *habituates* us to social persons.

Because it is an activity designed to be repeated, we may aptly consider reading poetry a habitual practice, one that may produce the disposition of the student, the scholar, or the avid lay reader. According to Aristotle and his followers (I might mention Thomas Aquinas, Edmund Spenser, Marcel Mauss, and Pierre Bourdieu), such habits develop a durable disposition of the person that shapes character as well as the body.[17] By the term *habitus*, I shall refer to this shaped disposition of the body, brought about by frequent practices and functioning. Habitus, I shall argue, is a kind of glue that helps fit the body to the social person. We have glimpsed how the habitus of Chaucer's Knight is made up of his beliefs, actions, comportment, speech, expression, familiarity with and use of his possessions, his

14. On recognition as a constituent feature of image perception, see Michael Podro, chap. 1 in *Depiction* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998) and Kathy Eden, chaps. 1 and 3 in *Poetic and Legal Fiction in the Aristotelian Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986). For a political treatment of recognition, see Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism and "The Politics of Recognition": An Essay* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

15. For "hailing" and the notion of interpellation, see Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Towards an Investigation)," in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 127–88. Judith Butler addresses the paradoxes of this topic in chap. 4 in *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997).

16. Spenser gets his verb, ultimately, from Aristotle's notion of habituation; see the discussion in chapter 1.

17. Aristotle treats the process of habituation and its relation to the good state in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, ii.2. See also Aristotle, *The Categories of Interpretation*; Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologica*, 2.1.50–54 and *Commentary on the Nicomachean Ethics*; Peter Abelard, *Collationes*; Edmund Spenser's letter to Walter Ralegh; Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), *The Logic of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), or his essays in *Rethinking the Subject: An Anthology of Contemporary European Social Thought*, ed. James D. Faubion (Boulder: Westview, 1995); and Carruthers, *Book of Memory*, 180. Nicola Masciandaro has alerted me to the variety within this tradition; see especially Augustine's *Confessions* for a view of the durability of habit that is quite different from Aristotle's. Marcel Mauss, "Techniques of the Body," *Economy and Society* 2 (1973): 70–88 is a good introduction to the bodily shaping accomplished in the habitus.

dress. The habitus is the human being socialized—the shapeless, fleshy mass that has been licked into a bear cub by its mother, to use the traditional anecdote. The habitus is formed in part by the institutional contexts of our lives and in part by a psychological and aesthetic process of deliberate bodily postures and movements. We cultivate habits (including reading) in part as a process of identification with and against social persons, be it forced or voluntary, conscious or unconscious. We cultivate habitus as a mode of making ourselves understood in the social world; thus, too, habitus is cultivated in us by that world's understanding.

Chaucer captures more of the process of the habitus in his engaging portrait of the Prioress, who seems to see herself in terms of two social persons that are perhaps less compatible than the Knight's conqueror and pilgrim. Lexis is one of Chaucer's means of raising the two phantoms. Let us call them the *nun* and the *lady* and so assign them to their estates.[18] The two social persons share the cultivation of the practices of singing and speaking. Although we know that the practices are linked to different values and aims in the two persons, Chaucer stitches them together by choosing words that the reader can only just manage, with a bit of a stretch, to assimilate to both the nun and the lady:

> Ther was also a Nonne, a PRIORESSE,
> That of hir smylyng was ful symple and coy;
> Hire gretteste ooth was but by Seinte Loy;
> And she was cleped madame Eglentyne. *called*
> Ful weel she soong the service dyvyne,
> Entuned in hir nose ful semely;
> And Frenssh she spak ful faire and fetisly, *elegantly*
> After the scole of Stratford atte Bowe,
> For Frenssh of Parys was to hire unknowe.
> (118–26)

As most readers have noticed, simplicity, coyness, seemliness, fairness, and elegance are all bursting at the seams here, strained by their double use. Similarly, the topoi suggested by the two social persons refer to different settings and have their historical counterparts in different institutions. The lady of romance inhabits a courtly topos that has its counterpart in the aristocratic household. Prioresses, though, inspired the writing of an administrative literature that represents space liturgically in a way designed to govern the spiritual life of the convent. Though actual households and priories are barely recognizable in the conventions of the topoi, the two topoi have even less in common than do their institutional counterparts. The two worlds, despite their differences, are knit together in Chaucer's portrait by language and practices that can shift between them: charity, pity, and *amor* are ideals of both the nun and the lady, though they may suggest quite incompatible practices in each setting.[19] For example, the object of the lady's pity is likely to be the wooing courtier; the nun's pity, should it seek out the same object, would be scandalous indeed.

A topos and a corresponding social institution are stocked not only with indigenous social persons but also with a repertory of such valued and depreciated passions, actions, plots, and genres. Weeping is a valuable action, under certain conditions, in both court and convent. If those conditions do not obtain, weeping can become—as it threatens to do in the Prioress's portrait—comic, degraded, or vicious. Actions bind a character to a topos through the habitus appropriate to the social person; weeping binds the Prioress insecurely to both the habitus of the nun and the habitus of the lady. As the Prioress enacts her double process of identification, like the Knight she cultivates the bodily habits of her social persons—speaking, singing, weeping, and, especially, eating:

> At mete wel ytaught was she with alle; *dinner*
> She leet no morsel from hir 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 curteisie was set ful muchel hir lest. *pleasure*
> Hir over-lippe wyped she so clene
> That in hir coppe ther was no ferthyng sene *i.e., drop*
> Of grece, whan she dronken hadde hir draughte.
> Ful semely after hir mete she raughte. *reached*
> And sikerly she was of greet desport, *deportment*
> And ful plesaunt, and amyable of port, *bearing*
> And peyned hire to countrefete cheere *a countenance*
> Of court, and to been estatlich of manere,
> And to ben holden digne of reverence. *worthy*
> (127–41)

18. The long-recognized tension in the Prioress between the nun and the courtly lady was first articulated by John Livingston Lowes, *Convention and Revolt in Poetry* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1919), 60–67. Jill Mann's reading of the portrait places this tension within the rich traditions of estates satires and ideals. Mann stresses Chaucer's use throughout the portrait of "value-words" that "can be differently defined from different standpoints" (*Chaucer and Medieval Estates Satire*, 128–37); my stress upon the links among social person, habitus, language, value, and estate develops this early work of hers. For a reading of the Prioress's portrait as performing femininity, see Priscilla Martin, *Chaucer's Women: Nuns, Wives, and Amazons* (London: Macmillan, 1990), 30–35.

19. Here I repeat Jill Mann's point about diction in order to place it within the context of social persons and topoi.

The posture or sculptural attitude of the figure is again important as we are invited to see the Prioress at table. The image refers not only to the table she heads as the leader of a spiritual community under an ecclesiastical rule of life that places ritual eating and fasting at the center of its symbolic order, but also to the banquet table at which ladies are trained to show exquisitely mannered styles of eating in order to express class status and intelligence. Such training and grooming for table manners is undergone especially by young women who contemplate the marriage market.[20] The poem does not instruct us to view the Prioress's attention to manners as vicious or virtuous. Instead, it alerts us to the rift between her manners and the usual social purpose of such behavior.[21] The habitus fashions the body, by means of a plenitude of minor and major practices, so that it fits into a particular social person, institution, and set of present and future social bonds. A lack of fit between habitus and office provides common fodder for poets.

Social persons, as we shall see throughout this book, depend not only upon their contexts of topoi and institutions, but also upon their positions in networks of social relationships. The social person of the nun is not simply one of the many hats an individual might interchangeably wear. *Amor vincit*—love chains one to and triumphs over—very particular others.[22] Nuns and ladies bond with and sever themselves from entirely different classes of persons. A lady presents herself well for a lover; a nun abjures lovers for her god. A lady's generosity might well fall upon exotic domestic pets, but we expect the object of a nun's charity to be the suffering poor. Social persons come in configurations with others, not on their own.[23] This thesis is pursued by my second chapter, which explores the consequences of the human figure's ability to personify social bonds.

Each of the following chapters describes how, by referring to social persons, single characters are able to convey arguments about larger social structures. Characterization also has a special ability, through mobilizing social persons, to engage the reader with ideas, propositions, and ideologies. It is in good part due to our perceptions of social rules that remnants of the Prioress seem to obtrude beyond the margin when we see her through the lens of either social person. Despite the narrator's persistent appreciative use of the word "semely," it is difficult to assimilate the lavish spoiling of pets with meat and milk (146–47) into the social person of the nun or, conversely, to assimilate the vows of chastity and poverty into that of the lady. The ideological problems of fit have a fleshly expression in her description: the Prioress somehow seems to be a character whose animal body has not been properly shaped for the two persons—nun and lady—it aspires to occupy.

> Ful semyly hir wympul pynched was,
> Hir nose tretys, hir eyen greye as glas, *well formed*
> Hir mouth ful smal, and therto softe and reed.
> But sikerly she hadde a fair forheed;
> It was almoost a spanne brood, I trowe; *believe*
> For, hardily, she was nat undergrowe.
> Ful fetys was hir cloke, as I was war.
> Of smal coral aboute hire arm she bar
> A peire of bedes, gauded al with grene, *set, beaded*
> And theron heng a brooch of gold ful sheene,
> On which ther was first write a crowned A,
> And after *Amor vincit omnia*.
>
> (151–62)

The slight misfiring of the habits designed to fit the Prioress into two social persons becomes a surplus of body that culminates in her ornament, the beads and brooch. This stage prop, whether we classify it (according to social person) as a rosary or as jewelry, brings the potential conflict between her social persons to a propositional crux: the motto *Amor vincit omnia* suits both perfectly but unsettles us nonetheless. Like her hyperbolic forehead, *omnia* includes too much and provides the reader with a way of unraveling the smooth weave of dominant cultural understandings of women, to see how ideals contain internal contradictions that allow us to measure, choose, and alter them. Chaucer's interest in the social form of the human figure generates the plan of the General Prologue, where portraits identified primarily by their social persons make up a long sequence. It is notable that he brings these concepts of the person before us as simultaneously, in the terms canonized by E. M. Forster, "flat" and "round," as nearly allegorical in their reference to abstract categories and as individuated instances of mixed success in the acquisition of habitus and the accession to multiple social persons.[24] Chaucerian characterization makes espe-

20. As Lowes notes, Chaucer takes the description of the Prioress's table manners from the *Roman de la Rose* (*Convention and Revolt in Poetry*, 63).

21. As A. C. Spearing points out, the images of food-spilling Chaucer uses to describe what the Prioress's manners carefully avoid ("no morsel . . . no drope . . . no ferthyng," 128–34) give a disgusting picture of what might result from a break in her self-control (personal communication, 19 October 2000). The cultivation of habitus, though it is often largely unconscious, requires effort and can fail.

22. For *vincit* as "binds," see John M. Steadman, "The Prioress' Brooch and St. Leonard," *English Studies* 44 (1963): 350–53.

23. In this sense, social persons work in ways analogous to the discursive positions described by various theorists: for instance, consider Michel Foucault's "enunciative function," as defined in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon, 1972), 88–103.

24. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel*, chap. 4, "People (continued)."

cially explicit the position of human beings within the overlapping force fields of cultural institutions and their forms of personhood. The feeling of ideological strain that we experience in *Amor vincit omnia*, produced by the tensions among social persons as they are embodied in a single character, is an effect loved by all four of the authors I treat here, though they turn it to different uses. Pictorial or verbal, then, human figures make claims upon us through a process fraught with passions and arguments.

Of course characterization is complexly woven into many formal features of literature and not accomplished by verbal portraiture alone, for nearly all the details and structures of texts are capable of contributing to characterization. A list of the textual cues for social persons that we have seen interpreted in my examples to this point would include bodily posture and gesture, topos, title, nomination, attribution, built space, mapped space, landscape, allusion, ritual, ceremony, specialized lexis, genre, ethos, ideology, iconography, social relations and bonds, values, virtues and vices, ideals and rules, narratorial attitude and tone, metaphor and other tropes, simile and other figures of speech, habitus, representations of the passions, allusions to social institutions and historical events, and literary conventions of characterization. In the chapters that follow, we will add to this list of prominent devices that evoke social persons.

The Four Parts of the Argument: Habituation, Social Bonds, Historical Time, the Polity

The familiar meanings of the term "person" are many: the human understood as an individual human being, as a somebody (a personage), as body (as in "on his person"), as role (particularly in acting), as grammatical point of view (as in "first-person narration"), as uniquely or intimately distinguished (what is "personal" to us), as a mode of deity (the three-personed god), as a legal fiction (the corporation), as a theological construct (the soul), and as variations on these themes.[25] Language has numerous subtle ways of referring to the human, and we use all of these kinds of reference to signify social persons.

Let me further define my main term. It is important that my Chaucerian examples not restrict us to the view that the social person is merely a new term for occupation or role. If that were so, we would need no new term. Social persons are abstract figurations of the human; the term refers to all figurations that attain recognizable, conventional status through use. The

25. The *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2d ed., s.v. "person," cites definitions for all these meanings, plus the technical zoological term designating "each individual of a compound or 'colonial' organism, having a more or less independent life . . . a zooid."

category of the social person includes many kinds: for instance, "legal persons" such as the corporation, the crown, and the privy council make up an important subset of social persons. So do civic agents such as council, sheriff, and the City of London; corporate entities such as guild and university; economic persons such as alewife, merchant, and buyer, but also labor and market; kinship designations such as mother, family, and heir; races and ethnicities such as Moor, Scythian, and Briton; and literary persons such as senex amans, author, and allegorical personification.[26] Social persons provide a shorthand notation that gives us enormous leverage in reference. Indeed, literary characters are largely cobbled together out of allusions to a number of social persons. In this way, social persons are like genres: they are abstract conventions that never actually "appear" in any pure form, but are the implied referents by which characters are understood. They are the collective imaginative technology that allows language to make a literary character (as well as to make the figures familiar in other discourses and disciplines), but, like chisels, scaffolding, and plans that have left their marks on a monument but since disappeared, social persons must be inferred from their artifactual traces if characterization is to be understood.

The four chapters of this book develop ways of thinking about the human figure in words that open up both formal and historical topics specific to poetry and that, nonetheless, draw strongly on the history of law, theology, economics, and political philosophy. Let me return to the little pilgrim badge of the Frontispiece as I begin to explain how. In the pilgrim's badge, we can readily see how the different social persons invoked by the figure of Thomas carry radically different ascriptions of intention. These ascriptions shape our interpretation of the action and the character of Thomas. If he is a condemned criminal, we must consider his actions in the light of disobedience to the crown, and his bowing of his neck to the swords then becomes a penitent admission of guilt and a submission to fate. The juridical process of killing is designed, like the guillotine, to absorb intention entirely in process so that the ritual stroke is given not by a human being but by a legal fiction, an intentionless agent of the state. If Thomas is, in the second view, the victim of murderers, his innocent intentions are displayed in his pious attitude of prayer, and the murderers' intentions are the object of our scrutiny. If he is, in the third view, a celebrant priest, his action is ritualistic and to be interpreted in the light of

26. On the history of the author, see A. J. Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages* (London: Scolar Press, 1984) and Kevin Pask, *The Emergence of the English Author: Scripting the Life of the Poet in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

sacramental theology, which distributes intention among at least three persons: the priest's proper performance of the sacrament, God's grace, and the state of the receiving souls. The priest's interior state, theologians determined, is (within limits) irrelevant. The sacramental topos (like the topos of murder and unlike the topos of execution) shifts the weight of horror firmly away from the character of Thomas to crush the offending knights. These three alternative views of intention are all present in the image, though they are not equally weighted, of course, by its internal disposition. Rather, the disposition of the image invites the reader to measure the three constructions of intentionality against one another, even as it weights the evidence it provides.

Like the power of Chaucer's Pardoner's Prologue and Tale, which is the subject of the first chapter, the power of the badge depends not upon the correctness of the reader's choice but upon the process of his or her deliberation as the apparitions of social persons are considered according to the instruction of the details of the figure. My first chapter, "Character and the Habituation of the Reader: The Pardoner's Thought Experiment," investigates the habituation to social persons that may be accomplished through literary characterization.[27] In the Pardoner's case, that habituation concerns the experience of interior states, especially of intention. The conflicting social persons of the Pardoner—for example, the confessing sinner and simoniac minister—will serve to demonstrate the important role of social persons in the analysis of human intention. Like the classification of Thomas as a victim, which subjects the scene to a common law definition of how to construe intention in the case of murder, the classification of the Pardoner as a confessing sinner brings with it an entire intellectual discipline of intention: penitential practice and its codification in canon law. The classification of him as a simoniac minister brings with it a nearly reversed, though equally learned, construction of intentionality. I have already suggested that social persons serve Chaucer throughout *The Canterbury Tales* as ways of summoning complex configurations of meaning. In chapter 1, I consider the Pardoner frequently in the light of the Parson, who carries with him into the *Tales* a carefully elaborated index to the social persons that belong to the sacrament of penance. I also aim to describe how Chaucer's use of multiple intentional states within the form of characterization requires considerable technical innovation and makes important claims for poetry. In the Pardoner's Prologue and Tale, especially when paired with the Parson's Tale and the Retraction, Chaucer offers poetry as a third, new construction of intentionality and, with it, a new technology for producing interior experience.

27. A thought experiment is an exercise of reasoning and imagination, rather than of empirical research; it is undertaken, usually by theoretical physicists or philosophers, as a kind of test or proof. I use the phrase throughout this book as a good description of the deliberative exercise in which fiction invites us to engage.

Classifications like that of Thomas as victim and the Pardoner as a confessing sinner, together with their discursive contexts in common law and canon law, make clear not only how social persons shape our notions of intention and other interior states, but also how they organize our understanding of relations between people and distribute capacities among interlocked sets of persons. In the badge's pair of murderer and victim, common law notions of intention direct our focus to the murderer's action and volition. In the pair made up of justicer and criminal, our focus is shifted the other way—toward an assessment of Thomas's culpability. The second chapter, "Persons in the Creation of Social Bonds: Agency and Civil Death in *Piers Plowman*," considers this role of social persons in distributing capacities, agency, and roles across the population. The opening section of the fourteenth-century allegory *Piers Plowman* begins with a marriage plot concerning a female personification of the money economy; it ends instead with the surprising marriage of two male personifications of government. I argue that the allegory demonstrates the profoundly interdependent nature of social persons: they are not discretely individual, but fitted building blocks in the larger structure that is the polity. Social persons should be considered in light of their interdependence. "Baron" and "wife," for instance, are not intelligible except in a pair, and in that pair the two social persons juggle a complex division of labor. Langland, we shall see, depends on this binding function of the attribute of gender in the course of his political satire. The chapter explains that we do well to interpret even a single figure as the personification of a standpoint within larger configurations of social bonds. The implications of this axiom for the analysis of character are many. The primary role social persons play in the composition and interpretation of art is echoed and confirmed by their paramount role in the constitution of society. Social persons are instrumental in the process of fitting human beings into the positions offered by the polity and in the process of sorting and distributing people across the constitution. Thus, the history of social persons provides a record of the continual process of shaping the polity and making its parts fit together.

As the polity undergoes this process of continuous revision and remaking, the history of social persons is registered in the archeological traces of the centuries. Writing, because it richly employs figures of the human, gives us access to the temporal transience of social persons and to their double reach—their effects upon people's bodies (such as those detailed in chapter 1) and their effects upon people's bonds to others (such as those described in chapter 2). Having begun with Chaucer's Pardoner, my move-

ment directly from Langland's Mede to Skelton's Elynour permits me to carry through an increasingly complex analysis of how economic thought depends upon the semiotics of gender. This analysis illuminates how social persons are instrumental in shaping the relations among groups or classes of human beings. The third chapter, "The Temporality of Social Persons: Value in 'The Tunnyng of Elynour Rummynge,'" concerns a poem that reveals how theories of economic value silently depend upon particular representations of the person that, if altered, have devastating effects upon the theories.

Skelton deftly evokes topoi as various as those we saw in the pilgrim badge. He depicts the topos of the market that is the mainstay of early economic thought, but he replaces the figure of economic person—the social person indigenous to that topos—with one drawn from clerical antifeminism. The two social persons represent entirely opposite theories of value. Economic person is a productive laborer; antifeminist person, to coin a term for that familiar figure of vice, is an incontinent wife. Each discourse employs habitus to suggest the practices we should expect from economic actors, but these practices too are sharply opposed: production for the economists, consumption for the antifeminists. The comically degraded topos of the market portrayed by Elynour's ale selling, I shall argue, amounts to an ingenious critique of the money economy. As it is in the little pilgrim badge, so too, in the poem, the notion of what is valuable is inextricably linked to particular social persons.

Further, the critique embodied in Skelton's poem has been lost, because the social person of the garrulous, incontinent wife that grew out of clerical antifeminist discourse necessarily underwent a transformation in the Reformation as the English church changed. The meanings of the pilgrim badge are also subject to the changing institutional history that preceded and followed its creation. The popular understanding of Thomas's death as a martyrdom rather than a just execution reflects in part (and is in part caused by) the shifting relations of church and state that precipitated the incident. The positive or negative charge that characterization can carry is a crucial weapon in the arsenal of writers and artists as they make political arguments. Like the charges that swirl around Thomas's figure, the negative charge of clerical antifeminist portraits of women needs to be placed within both social and intellectual history if we are to understand its persistence.

Social persons and their topoi are associated not only with particular eras, but also with particular landscapes: a bishop with a cathedral and a see, a criminal with a territory and a scaffold, an earl with a shire and a seat. Yet what happens when the landscape changes under the person? What happens when a set of social persons is transported not into new

epochs, but new lands? Chapter 4, "Architectonic Person and the Grounds of the Polity in *The Faerie Queene*," considers some of the ways that social persons were altered and engineered by the English crown's attempts to solidify its control over sixteenth-century Ireland. I show how the relation between social persons and the nature of the polity, an important topic of early modern political philosophy and poetry, relies upon the criterion of *fit* to measure the justice of social relations throughout the polity. Literary character and the trope of personification, in particular, can test social arrangements against this criterion of justice. The chapter argues that contemporary legal strategies for creating and transforming social persons permeate Thomas Smith's constitutional philosophy and Edmund Spenser's poetics. The forms of the person we can trace among these related kinds of cultural production—legal history, poetry, and political philosophy—produced and were produced by the same historical events. The island of Ireland in the sixteenth century was full of people struggling over what social persons they would occupy, what the nature of their social relations would be, what kind of government they would answer to or participate in, what social landscape—what polity—would be the grounds of their dominion. The forms of person and the forms of space—geography and polity—are closely related in these records; both are felt intensely to be, as Smith and Spenser put it, mutable. The causes, the conditions, and the limits of that mutability of person and polity are a subject of jurisprudential and ethical importance both for sixteenth-century Europe and for us.

Consider again the example of the little badge. The interdependence of social person and place is clear: the figure of Thomas as a celebrant priest genuflects in a space we understand as before an altar; the murder victim falls in a dark place of ambush; the condemned criminal kneels upon a public scaffold in the place of his last repentance. Only the frame clarifies the place of the badge's scene by providing ornamental arches that indicate a cathedral roof. The protective, ominous arches hover scarcely a tiny hand's breadth above the heads of the figures. The badge thus contains a series of fictional spaces and constitutes part of a larger, moveable ritual of built space: a pilgrim obtained such a badge in Canterbury to mark a visit to the holy shrine. By wearing it, the pilgrim remained under the canopy of Ecclesia, within the corporate body of the church, even upon the journey home.

The badge's historical use may persuade us that the frame of the badge controls the meanings of the scene. That is, it unifies the tension between the three topoi by a pictorial frame that clearly represents church architecture (undoubtedly it was whole before the badge's left side was broken). However, there is another space that explodes out of the cathedral scene

like a footnote or a hypertext button. On the ledge that supports the monk in cantilever over the altar is a tiny carved Calvary scene. The ledge itself is either a pulpit, an altar retable that provides a hiding place, or a witness box—depending on the social persons that we ascribe to the monk. Three crosses and three hanging figures protrude from the ledge in reverse hieratic scale: they are smaller than Thomas's hands. The space of Calvary, so important a point on the church's historical map of the world, is here both an allusion and a simile. It argues about the scene by inviting us to compare its plot with the scene around it, making a martyrdom and *imitatio Christi* out of Thomas's fate. So too does the ground of the badge's frame, where the symbol of the cross and the six letters of Thomas's name appear. Like many contemporary stained glass windows and illuminations, the badge provides a verbal foundation for the meaning of images.

The badge is a miniature, wearable piece of architecture designed to establish someone's participation in social space. The fictional space of the badge makes an argument about the most pressing issue that faced the English constitution in the time stretching from the middle ages to the beginning of the modern era: the relation between ecclesiastical and royal dominion. English thought about the relative claims to dominion of church and crown often had recourse to the scene of the slain Thomas, which provided a kind of limit case or test of the extent of royal power. The retelling of this story in the particular case of the badge places us under the cathedral roof, in the social space controlled by the church, and argues that our deliberations should be controlled by the church's claims—that Thomas's death takes place in the church and therefore our deliberations should proceed within the context of ecclesiastical dominion. This kind of spatial and institutional persuasion is what I have in mind when I compare Spenser's Ireland to the badge (and this is what I will elaborate in my fourth chapter, when I will discuss dominion further in relation to Spenser). In the space of art, and in how that space measures up to the ghostly real and imagined spaces invoked by social persons and their topoi, we see artists struggle with the configurations of established social structures, remapping the world according to their own arguments.

Poetry, though it is seldom possible to pin it on one's breast, is similarly designed to establish one's participation in social space. I have chosen two episodes of *The Faerie Queene* that imagine the polity in terms of fictional landscapes anchored firmly in geography: the estuary downriver from London where the Medway runs into the Thames (IV.xi–xii) and the landscape around Spenser's castle, Kilcolman, in Munster, Ireland (*Two Cantos of Mutabilitie*). Each episode generates a global, even cosmic, geography that is wildly political and inventive; each also employs social persons to connect that geography to accounts of the constitution so

deeply in conflict that their jurisprudential drama takes on a tragic cast. The issue of dominion, that state of mixed person-and-polity, is brought before the reader with deliberative force that requires us to feel and think about our own existence in space as dangerously politically vexed. In the space of art, we become conscious of our own positions at the brink of the terrifying chasms between social spaces, spaces like polity and geography that claim to occupy the self-same place.

Social Persons among the Disciplines

In all, the chapters ahead take four issues that might normally be said to belong to philosophy (intention, agency, value, and dominion) and study them from a number of other points of view at once, but seldom in the contexts that we would now consider to be their natural habitat. My license for this peculiar behavior has been my interest in following questions when they lead out of their usual sphere of business. When one asks a philosophical question and looks for literary, legal, or economic answers, one risks fully satisfying the evidentiary requirements of no one. Yet directing such inappropriate questions is what my authors do so well. The four primary texts studied here contain extremely powerful characters, representations that have the capacity to cut across a vast number of cultural spheres and to assess the different models of person indigenous to each. Though today we treat these texts, produced between the mid-fourteenth century and the end of the sixteenth, as if they were written to further the literary canon, it is not at all clear that their authors understood themselves to be practicing the single discipline we call literature. What they do have in common is their profoundly figural quality: meaning develops in all four cases by means of an intense formal dependence on character. To take a question from one field and pose it to another is one of the special capacities of figural art and can, as I hope to show, enable a deep analysis of the forms of knowledge and of social life.

In late medieval and early modern England, we find the most imaginative representations of the person in poetry and the law, discourses that encourage the rethinking of concepts of personhood by abstraction, formal innovation, and responsiveness to social crisis. The focus of this book is upon problems that occur in the endowment of the person with the attributes of intention, agency, value, and dominion. My four main texts address controversies about the representation of the person in marriage doctrine, economic thought, antifeminism, moral philosophy, and jurisprudence—all parts of the legal canon of late medieval and early modern thought. I have sought to explain how forms of the person incorporate and regulate social relations, and how, through competing social persons,

ideas and disciplines struggle for explanatory power. Such power is, I think, always the power to explain and establish authority over what is urgent and vexed in the experience of people at the time. A strong explanation is necessarily an action that changes human experience. It may well justify or incite action of less textual kinds, as the strong social analysis in *Piers Plowman* appears to have been important to the participants in the Rising of 1381.[28]

Both literary and legal representations of the person deliberate the language, standards, and concepts by which we understand social categories. Poetry has a pronounced tendency to use the allegorical function of language, which, as we shall see, enables it to bring together and assess many discursive models of the person despite their differing origins. Law has its own powerful conceptual habits, and all of the four main authors treated in this study draw strongly upon those special powers of legal representation. When characters appear in legal discourse, they are personifications of social relations. Law personifies social relations in order to perpetuate social structures, to facilitate judicial decision, to apply doctrines to particular people and so to naturalize judicial decision, or sometimes to avoid decision and dislodge an act from its conventional penalties. Legal terms such as "wife," "monk," "clerk," "bastard," "the reasonable man," and "feoffee" plainly do not refer to the natural bodies of particular human beings. It is not true that legal discourse simply makes its terms by abstracting our neighbors, our rulers, and us; the relations among social persons are paramount in such representations. Legal discourse also gives rights or accords agency to some things that are not human: for example, the crown, the church, guilds, cities, other corporate bodies, and even god (in trial by ordeal, god is asked to make a decision). These personified entities also stand for social relations rather than for particular people. The crown stands not for a particular Richard II, but for a particular set of institutional arrangements, for the set of relations between the particular Richard II and the particular people who are, for example, his councilors, his tenants, the City of Westminster, his subjects.

Legal conventions in the treatment of the person recognize this fictional quality. F. W. Maitland frequently uses the term "personification" while writing the history of the law of corporations, finding the origins of the process of legal personification called "incorporation" in the relation between medieval "persons" or parsons and their parsonages, the forms of universities and convents, and in kingship. He traces personification through English political theory as lawyers found ways of making distinc-

28. On this question, see Steven Justice, chap. 3 in *Writing and Rebellion: England in 1381* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

tions between forms of property and dominion associated with the crown.[29] Ernst Kantorowicz's influential *The King's Two Bodies*, a study in what his subtitle calls "mediaeval political theology," continues this line of inquiry, showing the theological origins of certain modes of personification in the English theory of kingship.[30] We might view the Christian trinity itself as an elaborately defined agency relation, separating a single god into three persons with complementary faculties; we should study debates about that relation together with the history of other controversies about social relations.

Three technical terms (legal persona, juridical person, and natural person) help to distinguish between levels of "incarnation" in the legal use of the term person. Legal persona is a position in a network of human relations, made "human." *Black's Law Dictionary* defines it and quotes a related legal maxim:

> **Persona.** Lat. In the civil law. Character, in virtue of which certain rights belong to a man and certain duties are imposed on him. Thus one man may unite many characters, (*personae,*) as, for example, the characters of father and son, of master and servant. . . .
> **Persona est homo cum statu quodam consideratus.** A person is a man considered with reference to a certain *status*.[31]

"Persona" is a term of reference for that kind of legal person that is openly acknowledged to be of a constructed nature, yet is grounded in so-called natural person. "A man" (natural person) has "a status" or "many characters" (personae, or what we might call roles). Persona, then, has a dual status that is both socially constructed and natural, as opposed to juridical person that in itself is wholly spiritual or disembodied.

"Juridical person" specifically indicates corporations, entities that in spite of a lack of human physiology are treated through a well-established legal fiction as having certain rights and responsibilities due to persons. "Natural person" means simply "human being," the term meant to get furthest away from legal fiction. In fact, the idea of the juridical person is not fully distinguished from the concept of the natural person in English law until the work of theorists such as the sixteenth-century law reporter Edmund Plowden.

The relational nature of social persons makes personification instru-

29. E.g., Frederick Pollock and Frederic William Maitland, *The History of English Law Before the Time of Edward I*, 2d ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1923), 1:486–526.

30. Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957).

31. *Black's Law Dictionary*, rev. 4th ed. (St. Paul, Minn.: West, 1968).

mental in the process of building social structure and distributing capacities and faculties across the culture. The legal persons "wife," "parson," "baron," "master," and "ward," for example, point to established models of affiliation in pre-modern English society, defined respectively in the legal "coverture" established by marriage, the forms of ecclesiastical corporations, and the feudal relations of tenure, of indenture, and of wardship. These relations, like many others, involved a specially structured agency in which the ability of one human being to act or intend was in many or all of its capacities transferred to another. The second person, by a kind of conceptual incorporation, stood for the first in a political and social sense: the husband for the wife, the baron for the tenant, the master for the indentured servant, the lord for the ward. The rights of one to the use of the labor, property, or body of the other, along with certain responsibilities toward him or her, were granted to some definite extent in all these cases. Those rights and responsibilities were passed on to the next occupant of the social person in the case of the lord who held tenants and wards, and to a lesser extent in the cases of husbands (children complicated matters) and of masters of indentured servants. In the Year Books of Henry VI it is stated that " 'the chapter is *covert* by the dean as the wife is *coverte* by her husband.' "[32] Marriage was a well-understood model that could be employed to explain other kinds of relations. Langland's king employs a parallel logic when he proposes, as we shall see in chapter 2, that the character Mede should be married to, and thus be *coverte* by, Conscience in order that the economy be *covert* by moral reason. Legal persons serve many purposes in juridical practice; they are the means of fitting people into the structures of the polity.

A catalog of a society's dominant forms of social person would describe not only its members, but also its constitutional shape, because the forms should fit one another and fit the institutional arrangements of the polity. Jurisprudence relies heavily on social persons: positive law accords legal person a privileged role as the gateway by which human beings come under legal control or jurisdiction. The paramount status of person in ancient Roman jurisprudence establishes the literary form of the western legal treatise, in which the "law of persons" constitutes the first major category and section. Such treatises conceive of law as primarily relating to persons rather than geographical regions, political territories, or religious institutions. Endowed with this centrality of person, Roman law became a primary source for the canon law of the medieval church and then for modern codifications of western customary law, reinforcing the predominant status of the concept of person in these canons of thought and practice. The primary form taken by the law's social persons is fundamental to the deep structure of our own political economy. Corporations qualify as legal persons, and can act, be imputed intentions, carry blame, and make contracts apart from their shareholders. Family law began only in the nineteenth century to imagine married women as endowed with rights attributed to the individual; for centuries in the West, the married couple had been treated by the law and tax systems as one person, incorporated in the husband, under the doctrine of "unity of person." (Marital *unity of person*, a complex social person crucial not only to law but to theology and political philosophy, will be discussed in chapters 2 and 4.) Social persons that have their origins in legal thought can be found exerting their power over many apparently unrelated areas of the culture.

32. Pollock and Maitland, *History of English Law*, 1:491.

The amount of legal history in this book raises a question about the nature and origin of social persons: are they a kind of rule in themselves? Are they inherently oppressive? They are, I would venture, inherently socializing. There is no social life without powerful representations of the human. Like language, social persons are quasi-consensual: if no one finds a representation of person convincing or meaningful, it fades away and never attains the paradigmatic, conventional status that qualifies a figure to be a social person. However, this consensual quality of social persons must not distract us from the fact that nobody ever chooses or even knows exactly what she is consenting to when she recognizes or accedes to a given social person. Still, to some certain extent, circumscribed by all kinds of material and immaterial conditions, it is hers to reinvent. The figure of a wife, for instance, has a predominantly practical existence—an existence in practice. It is not wrong to say that "a wife" is the sum of what everyone acts as if it is. Like genre, the social person is a custom honored most powerfully in a thousand breaches—a cognitive projection that helps explain specific connections between thought, language, and action, but that is never itself completely explained as thought, language, or action.

Throughout history, we continually make, dispute, and re-make social persons in the course of our cognitive and practical organization of the world. What does a society personify and endow with agency and intention? What personifications can produce value or claim dominion? The category of person does not include all human beings, nor does it consist only of human beings. Remembering that debates on the law of slavery consider whether a slave is "person" or "property" reveals how much can be at stake in such definitions.[33] One might assume that the individualism

33. Orlando Patterson's work shows how slavery is a relation that constructs the person "owner/master" as much as it constructs the human object of that ownership (e.g., *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982]). See

so strongly underwritten by contemporary culture solves this kind of problem easily, but controversies over the legal and medical technologies of birth, abortion, intelligence, death, and murder prove that the definition of the person cannot be regarded as simple, natural, or settled in any age, no matter how individualist its culture. Neither are our ideas about corporate persons more stable: political groups from the level of the voting district to the continent are painfully difficult to define with a clear sense of just principles. Individualism suggests that endowing as many biological organisms as possible with the gift of independent humanity is just, but it is not always sufficient or desirable to recognize as persons all the individuals who need to be protected by the sphere of rights and immunities that humanity should confer. Daily life, both private and public, is full of such dilemmas. Power and stewardship must be gained, conferred, limited, transferred; trade and collaboration must be encouraged and made just; participation in the polity as well as protected retreat and dissent must be fully possible; independence and responsibility must be equally full. All of these ideals and paradoxes present themselves to us continually. The arguments of person—the arguments made by particular social persons as well as those that are made about them—are at the heart of such questions of social justice. This book is an attempt to raise our level of expertise in assessing figures of the human by offering formal tools for use across disciplines and historical periods.

The Aims of This Book

I wish to extend the range of our formal and historical treatment of character. "Character" is the literary representation of person, and we should understand it as comparable to the representations of person in other spheres of cultural practice. In other words, "character" is to literary discourse what "economic person" is to economics, what "legal person" is to the law, what a "Christian soul" is to theology, what the "female nude" is to painting: each is a dominant model of person that has grown out of a social practice—a practice that has its own institutions, behaviors, artifacts, motives, social effects, audiences, and intellectual issues.

In this book I propose that "character" is how literature expresses the human figure in its social form. Literature is not the only verbal art; all

also Patricia Williams, "On Being the Object of Property," in *The Alchemy of Race and Rights* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 216–36. Post-colonial theory posits a similar dual construct; see Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1967); and Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983).

discursive practices, including the sciences, use some of the resources of fiction and personification to shape their own representations of the person. This is why formal literary analysis is a powerful tool for understanding the process of figuration when it occurs in any disciplinary context. Conversely, our literary acts of understanding the human figure in words continually involve us in placing characters against the background of social persons drawn from the entire palette of the disciplines. Genre helps us understand what a particular sonnet is doing; similarly, social persons help us understand a particular human figure as making certain kinds of alterations against a background of conventions, a background as wide as the entire culture.

Together with this broadened view of what character is, this book proposes that we treat the details of all such forms of representing the person with a strengthened literary attention. It will already be apparent from the pages on legal persons that this book, under the influence of F. W. Maitland and others, considerably expands the sense and capacities of the rhetorical term "personification." The marks of historical and political life are etched upon fictional characters by their uses of social persons and become accessible through an analysis that is able to treat the complex structure of those marks. The nature of social persons of all kinds is, as we shall see in chapter 2, inherently allegorical: social persons personify positions in the network of social structures. This quality makes them susceptible to what literary theorists call "allegoresis," and this book will propose a method (especially in chapter 2) and a theory (especially in chapter 4) of figural meaning that has personification at its core.

My analysis depends upon and extends previous thought about allegory and personification. Like other scholarship, mine offers an historical warrant in authors like Edmund Spenser and John Harington. Unlike literary theories that have grown out of biblical exegesis, mine does not preselect contexts for the poem's "levels" of meaning. Instead it requires us to trace the specific verbal cues of the poetry, thus satisfying what we might call the "Alpers criterion" after Paul Alpers' eloquent call to tie interpretation firmly to the textual details of Spenserian allegory.[34] On the other hand (of rhetorical analysis), unlike Maureen Quilligan's careful account of allegory as arising out of specific language (in the extension of puns), Rosemund Tuve's account of it as arising out of specific iconography (in conventional images), or R. W. Frank's account of it as arising out of specific names (in kinds of personification), my account allows us confidently to

34. Paul J. Alpers, *The Poetry of "The Faerie Queene"* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967).

interpret a broad range of the literary, social, and institutional references of the form, placing them in history.[35] Like Quilligan and Stephen Knapp, I hope to revive the interest of critics and historians of post-1800 culture in forms of personification.[36] Further, in my exposition of the habituation to social forms achieved by characterization, I intend to provide a fuller account of the consequences of readerly cognition and experience than those put forward by C. S. Lewis, Angus Fletcher, Rosemund Tuve, D. W. Robertson, Morton Bloomfield, Paul de Man, and Mary Carruthers.[37]

Of course, this book might have been a history of characterization or charted literary characterization in relation to the history of dominant social persons. Here and there, fascinating trails of literary history have intersected with the present book's trajectory and have been difficult to resist. It has seemed to me, however, that working out some of the formal, theoretical, and methodological problems that attend representations of the person is a condition of our ability to write the histories of literary

35. Maureen Quilligan, *The Language of Allegory: Defining the Genre* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979); Rosemund Tuve, *Allegorical Imagery: Some Mediaeval Books and Their Posterity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966); Robert Worth Frank, Jr., "The Art of Reading Medieval Personification Allegory," *English Literary History* 20 (1953): 237–50.

36. Steven Knapp, *Personification and the Sublime: Milton to Coleridge* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985).

37. C. S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936); Angus Fletcher, *Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1964); Tuve, *Allegorical Imagery*; Robertson, Jr., *A Preface to Chaucer*; Morton W. Bloomfield, "Allegory as Interpretation," *New Literary History* 3 (1972): 301–17; Paul de Man, "The Rhetoric of Temporality," in *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*, 2d ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 187–228; Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory* and *The Craft of Thought: Meditation, Rhetoric, and the Making of Images, 400–1200* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). Other influential accounts of allegory include Erich Auerbach, "Figura" [1944], trans. Ralph Manheim, in *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 11–76; Thomas P. Roche, Jr., *The Kindly Flame: A Study of the Third and Fourth Books of Spenser's "Faerie Queene"* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), 5–15; Elizabeth Salter and Derek Pearsall, introduction to *Piers Plowman*, ed. Salter and Pearsall, York Medieval Texts (London: Edward Arnold, 1967), 3–28; Michael Murrin, *The Veil of Allegory: Some Notes Toward a Theory of Allegorical Rhetoric in the English Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969); Stephen A. Barney, *Allegories of History, Allegories of Love* (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1979); Jon Whitman, *Allegory: The Dynamics of an Ancient and Medieval Technique* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987); Theresa M. Kelley, *Reinventing Allegory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). Important corrections to the recovery of historical practices of allegoresis are made by Mary Carruthers, who urges us to see the levels of biblical exegesis as referring to steps in an ethical process of reading rather than a set of propositions (*The Book of Memory*). Gordon Teskey calls such a focus on readerly practice "allegorical aesthesis" in his excellent brief introduction to the history and theory of allegory in *The Spenser Encyclopedia*, ed. A. C. Hamilton (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 16–22, developed in his *Allegory and Violence* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996).

characterization and of other forms of person. I have, therefore, resisted the temptation to follow not only the story of medieval forms of fictional character as they led into modern kinds, but also the similar stories of sexual persons, legal persons, economic persons, and racial persons. All of these topics appear frequently in the chapters ahead and will, I hope, encourage other scholars to consult again those histories that have been written and to write new histories with new ways of working in mind. This book is a book of theory and method, soaked in the historical details that will test and demonstrate its principles. I have tried to bridle the book's impulses to historical narrative so that I could provide myself and others with a better theoretical foundation for producing such narratives. I have attempted, for similar reasons, to handle carefully the book's explorations of philosophical materials. I intend to clarify and explicate the process of deliberation that is embodied in human figures, not merely to enact that process or, worse, to resolve it.

For it is the process of deliberation that is paramount here. These chapters show how, as we begin to experience words, images, emotions, and ideas according to the instructions of the text, the authors invite us to undertake figuration as a species of philosophical thought experiment. This is not only a literary experience but a political one. In the experiment of deliberation, we consider what seems good from the position of each social person, always in conjunction with justice as it is exemplified by an entire system of social life. Rather in the way that the *demande d'amour* leads us to deliberate about the amusing situations hypothesized in romance, all fiction puts its readers in the position of evaluating the social persons that fashion its characters. By means of character, fiction tests the forms, both ethical and political, of social life. This cognitive, moral process, I submit, gives fiction its literary shape, its ethical habituation, and its political force.