

Patterns in the Framing: *Patience* and *The Hours* of *Catherine of Cleves*

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Framing, both as an actual artistic method and as a topos, was widely used in the Middle Ages, both in secular art and in works bent upon religious instruction. For example, in *The House of Fame*, Geoffrey Chaucer describes Josephus on a pillar framed by bearing on his shoulders “[t]he fame [...] of the Jewerye” (lines 1430-1436, 365). Another, anonymous poem, *Pearl*, frames the narrative within the Holy City itself:

In a dramatic final move that ties mystical transport to daily collective ritual, the New Jerusalem in *Pearl* also takes the narrative *into* a church, as if the textual city were itself an invitation over a triumphal arch, a theophanic move that is furthered as well by Eucharistic echoes. Some readers have suggested that the poem unfolds in imitation of the Mass [...] The image of the Lamb, both symbol and enactment of the Eucharist, places the narrator, and reader as well, before the Eucharist, or more exactly within the performance of the Mass (Stanbury, *Introduction*, 9-10; italics in original).

Both these framing moments are accomplished via *enargeia*, the vivid word painting whose method is to “use words to yield so vivid a description that they—dare we say literally?—place the represented object before the reader’s (hearer’s) inner eye” (Krieger 14). *Enargeia* is a subset of ekphrasis, “the reproduction, through the medium of words, of sensuously perceptible *objects d’art*” (Krieger xiii). Ekphrastic descriptions, which, as Stanbury argues in the opening quote, can be used to create an “illusion of an existing object while actually moving freely to the intelligible realm beyond the senses” (Krieger 21), were widely used in the medieval period. In a time greatly concerned with explaining, and representing, the works of God to man, both were deployed to bring “together the courts of earth and heaven” (Riddy 153).

This union was achieved several ways: Heaven could be brought to earth via sensuous and involving description (for example, Hildegard of Bingen wrote works “as microcosms of heaven, paradises brought down to earth” [Watson 297]); the earthly viewer could be transported to heaven, as in the Stanbury quote on page 1; or the reader could be placed in a setting where God’s grace manifested on earth (“the two orders of being [...] brought together only by divine grace or, fictionally, poetic craft”, [Watson 298]). In the latter case, as Nicholas Watson observes about the *Pearl*-poet, the “[p]rocess of shaping [the poem ...] is an aesthetic equivalent of the sacraments” where “God has entered into a covenant with humans which enables them to do by grace (through participation in the sacraments) what they cannot do by effort” (306).

In his yen to create the conditions through which God’s grace could be manifest, the anonymous author known as the *Pearl*-poet (whose works include *Pearl*, *Patience*, and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*) was arguably driven by an “incarnational aesthetic” (Stanbury, *Body* 36) that both utilized physical form to create the conditions for the spirit in his art, and represented incarnation theology, the moment(s) when God becomes one with man, in a seamless topos.

In this paper, I will argue that this results in ekphrastic moments in which Jonah, “type and subfulfilment of Christ” (Andrew 20), figuratively meets W.J.T. Mitchell’s definition of “metapicture”—a picture that refers to itself. I will then explore actual metapictures in an illuminated prayer book that evinces a similar concern with aesthetically creating the conditions for God’s grace and is grounded in the same incarnational aesthetic. Both works of art seek unity between the courts of earth and heaven, but use “sharply contrasting ways of knowing and seeing” (Stanbury 10), the first leading us to visualize a prototype of Christ, Jonah, as a negative exemplum, and the second, through pictured representations, leading viewers to think of themselves as co-creators of God’s time and co-participants in God’s plan.

The *Pearl*-poet employed ekphrasis extensively, manifesting in his work what W.J.T. Mitchell has termed “ekphrastic hope”—“when the impossibility [of representing the physical through words] is overcome by image or metaphor” (152). And *in* doing it, he often uses framing devices. The *Pearl*-poet uses a multiplicity of such devices: the end returns to the beginning in both *Patience* and *Pearl*, as well as *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, making the poem a seamless circular frame. Characters are often embodied within a frame, such as Gawain’s armor in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. This framing is known as *mise-en-abîme*.

Patience: The Framing of Jonah

The *Pearl*-poet creates three instances of *enargeia* using metaphors that frame the protagonist of *Patience*, Jonah. As an Old Testament figure, Jonah is a “proof-text for the New Testament” (Sherwood 13), a prefiguration of the Christ figure. Rather than unite with a protagonist’s move to heaven, then, as we do in *Pearl*, where the narrator is “joined ritually to the Body of Christ” (Stanbury, *Body* 33), in *Patience* we watch his movement to a kind of hell. Then we see how he finds grace there; is redeemed; and finds refuge through and in God’s grace.

In the first of these framing moments, Jonah is swallowed by the whale. In fact, it is

A wylde walterande whale, as Wyrde then schaped,
That watz beten fro the abyme, bi that bot flotte,
And watz war of that wyghe that the water soghte,
And swyftely swenged hym to swepe, and his swolgh opened;
The folk yet halande his fete, the fysch hym tyd hentes;
Withouten towche of any tothe he tult in his throte.
Then he swengez and swayues to the se bothem,
Bi mony rokkez ful roghe and rydelande strondes,
Wyth the mon in his mawe malskred in drede
(lines 247-255, Andrew and Waldron 196*)

He is thus semi-consumed by a fish which is “a monstrous conglomerate of all the enemies, swallows and consumers of humankind” (Sherwood 17).

The swallowing provides a type of frame for Jonah: as Yvonne Sherwood notes in her masterful study of the Jonah figure, *A Biblical Text and Its Afterlives*, he becomes encased, one of many who are often pictured within the frame of a whale’s jaws, frequently represented as Hell Mouth (Figures 1a, 1b, 2, 3a, and 7, following p. 148). Yet in *Patience*, he is not just encased by the whale. Through the encasement, he becomes one with the whale, and momentarily illegible as himself. The pronoun subtly pivots from performing as a clear reference either to Jonah only (“folk yet halande his fete”, line 252, where the sailors hold Jonah’s extremities) or the whale only (“his swolgh opened”, line 251), to Jonah and the whale, specifically and respectively (“he tult in his throte”, line 253). The pronouns are nearly as perilously contingent as the man and the whale, yet quite distinct. After this line, though, there are no more separate pronouns in the swallowing sequence. “Then he swengez and swayues” is ambiguous; both man and fish would be undulating—and, in fact, the very ambiguity implies that the man and fish are one. But in “Wyth the mon in his mawe malskred in drede”, Jonah is no longer fully a separate entity. His “within-ness” has won out, and, by implication, the encased becomes one with the encasing object—just as a framed art object or

encased figurine is part of the entire object, not just the discrete entity nested within the frame.

Jonah, then, is so enframed in the above sequence that he is superseded for a time. He is “[a]s mote in at a munster dor, so mukel wern his [the whale’s] chawlez” (line 268). This line contains the first reference to a cathedral, but not one where good dwells: the interior of the beast “stank as the deuel” and “sauoured as helle” (lines 274 and 275). However, in the second sequence, Jonah finds an internal rescue prior to his reissue from the whale, and in it, he is framed.

Jonah appeals to God’s grace (“to the Lede called” and “euer is God swete”, line 281 and 280, respectively), and in fact makes a type of confession of the very sins the reader has seen in *Patience*: he is “fol and fykel and falce of my hert” and “gulty of gyle” (lines 283 and 285). He pleads “Haf now mercy of thy man and his mysdedes/ And preue the lyghtly a Lorde in londe and in water” (line 287-288). Voila: “With that he hitte to a hyrne and helde hym therinne” (line 289). Jonah finds a niche in which to stand, and given the earlier description of the whale’s maw as a type of cathedral door, it is hard to miss the ekphrastic moment: he is described much as a figure framed by a niche on a cathedral door. With that, he embodies his typologies, prefiguration of Christ and Old Testament figure.

As in *Pearl*, where the transforming dream is triggered by “kynde of Kryst me comfort kened” (line 54), it is a knowledge of God’s grace (in this case, the Old Testament God)—and an overt admission of that knowledge—that brings about transformation. In Jonah’s case, his remembrance of “my ryche Lorde” (line 326) is the vehicle for the moment when the beast and man become close but separate pronouns again: the fish is bid by “oure Fader” (line 337) to “he hym sput spakly vpon spare drye” (line 338)—the pronouns nearly touching this time, but also separating in the direction of Jonah’s re-embodiment as a separate entity, after which “he brakez vp the buyrne as bede hym oure Lorde” (line 340). (This swallowing and regurgitation, of course, prefigures the Resurrection, when the risen will be embodied whole; the “Withouten towche of any tothe” (line 252) resists the quality of hell—which was thought to consist of bodies rent through eating, digesting, and devouring [Bynum 307].)

Since Jonah is, as theorists such as Myra Stokes have noted, a highly impatient figure who serves the reader as a negative exemplum of “suffrance” (356) via his “struggles against his divine commission” (Ackerman 234), he does not remain grateful to the rich Lord who redeems him from the whale’s belly for long. In the course of his travels and his quarrels with God regarding the Ninevites, he becomes a framed object once again, arguably this time within a sacred space rather than over its entrance.

The ivy has a long history as a symbol for Christ; Sherwood refers to it as “the *ricinus communis*/the gourd/the ivy/the vine/the *Palma Christi*” [57, italics in

original]). The woodbine that God causes to grow post-Nineveh is described in the Douay-Rheims version of the Old Testament (which is closer to the Vulgate used in the medieval period than the King James version), as a covering device. “[T]he Lord God prepared any ivy, and it came up over the head of Jonas, to be a shadow over his head, and to cover him” (Jonah 4:6). However, as the editors of the *Pearl*-poet’s manuscript tell us, “[t]o read [...] two versions of the story of Jonah side by side is to observe the poet [...] translating, expanding episodes, the modifying emphases” (Andrew 19). In the *enargeia*-laden hands of the *Pearl*-poet, the ivy becomes the framing house created by God.

[...] whyle God of His grace ded growe of that soyle
 The fayrest bynde hym abof that euer burne wyste. [...]
 Thenne wakened he wygh vnder wodbynde,
 Loked alofte on the lef that lyled grene;
 Such a lefsel of lof neuer lede hade,
 For hit watz brod at the bothem, boghted on lofte,
 Happed vpon ayther half, a hous as hit were
 (lines 443-450, Andrew 203)

The ivy here is almost a tree-house, and it frames Jonah, like his figuration in the cathedral door, as a figure enclosed by God’s grace, and this time delighting in God’s creation. He is “the gome so glad of his gay logge” (line 457). Since the biblical text of Jonah is “a gigantic and accommodating receptacle for Christ’s truth and Christ’s sufferings” (Sherwood 17), in the ivy sequence, we see prefigurations of Christ with Jonah as basking communicant of God’s grace. Jonah is a prefiguration surrounded by prefigurations. Figuratively, the ivy is (will be, in the person of Christ) the sheltering house of God. In this instance, however, the fact of its being constructed for Jonah, the “believer in an exclusive God” (Sherwood 22), renders it, for now, the Old Testament house. Thus it does not stay as is, but is eaten by a worm, which turns the ivy “brenne as a candel” (line 473). Jonah’s resultant “hatel anger and hot” (line 481) triggers his final angry interchange with God, which (at least in our edition) ends with the deity’s “For malyse is noight to mayntyne boute mercy withinne” (line 523), suggesting that God has, as A.C. Spearing believes, “*learned* patience in the course of the story” himself (301, italics in original).

In his role as prototype of Christ, Jonah plays roles “both as a pattern and a warning” (Andrew 20), and is the vehicle for a transformation through *Patience*: “[a]s with the image of the rose, it is the development of the debate which generates the transformation” (Andrew 31). As Sherwood shows, gazing at Jonah causes us to “see double” (14); “Jonah is like Christ [...] Jonah in flight is a sign of the

incarnate Christ, who ‘abandons his house and country and becomes flesh’” (14-15, quoting St. Jerome). The sleeping Jonah resembles the sleeping Christ on the lake (15), in a “semiotic twinning of Jonah and Jesus” (Sherwood 15). He is thus a prototype of an incarnation figure as well; he does not literally embody both God and man, but prefigures the union of God and men, in the indwelling that will come to be.

In *Pearl*, as Stanbury points out, “the living body of the narrator is always present at the margins of the story, asleep or in a swoon” (*Introduction* 3). However, in *Patience*, by contrast, it is God—lord, interlocutor, sparring partner—who is always present at the margins of the action. The dangers Jonah “runs are revealed to be [...] part of God’s unceasing care for him” (Kirk 92). As Spearing notes, “it seems initially as though [...] only power and obedience were involved” (295), but given the contemporary audience’s knowledge of the incarnation narrative, a prefiguring of the incarnation forms on the horizon: “Jonah’s picture of a thoughtless tyrant is juxtaposed with the biblical God who deals with evil by suffering its worst himself” (Kirk 93). In this way, the story of Jonah is a prefiguration of the Christ story in two ways: first, it illustrates a “continuity between God’s creative and salvific roles” (Kirk 95), a continuity that hints at the coming incarnation. Second, it illustrates God’s role in human suffering, a role that will enlarge and gain depth in the incarnation. In *Patience*, God is shown as participating in the suffering of the world in order to save it (Kirk); the Ninevites repent and are spared God’s wrath.

In his prefigurations within the ivy, as noted earlier, Jonah is the prototype placed face to face with other prototypes. In this, he shares traits with the metapicture, the “self-referential image” (41) that W.J.T. Mitchell says “depict a picture-within-a-picture that is simply one among the many objects represented” (42). Jonah is the framed object inside the frame: “the picture that represents *itself*, creating a referential circle or *mise en abîme*” (Mitchell 56, italics in original).

Moreover, the framing of Jonah is necessary as we must see him; he does not *see* a vision (unlike the *Pearl* narrator), either figuratively or literally. And we in turn are invited to gaze upon him. The *Pearl*-poet does this in two ways: turning his protagonist into a framed word-painted object invites our gaze, and, via Jonah’s many outbursts and demonstrations of impatience, “the poem places readers exactly in a position of judge over Jonah” (Watson 310). Both these methods enforce almost a species of ocularity, in which we witness the exemplum but do not participate with it. As Nicholas Watson observes, the *Pearl*-poet seems to have some “indifference to interiority” (296).

Given the highly ekphrastic nature of the passages in *Patience* where Jonah is framed, one might expect actual paintings produced under broadly similar rubrics of uniting the courts of heaven and earth and the incarnational aesthetic to contain

similar messages and epistemologically similar ways of knowing and seeing. However, art works in many ways. J. T.W. Mitchell notes that illuminated books, common in the Middle Ages, contain “double-coding”; they are sites of the “suturing of discourse and representation” (69). Just such a book, *The Hours of Catherine of Cleves*, arguably uses framing and contestation of framing as a means to encourage viewers to think of themselves as participants with God in creating sacred time and in his ultimate plan.

The Hours of Catherine of Cleves: Framing and Contested Framing

The Hours of Catherine of Cleves (Plummer), “one of the richest and most complex manuscripts to have survived from the late middle ages” (Calkins 3), is replete with metapictures. In it, “pictorial representation displays itself for inspection rather than effacing itself in the service of transparent representation” (Mitchell 48). The preponderance of its 157 extant illuminations, 139 total, are framed quite as pictures in a museum are, with a represented wooden frame painted around the border of the pictured moment.

On the inside of this frame, a colored inner frame (usually rose or blue) is



featured in most of the illuminations, binding the illuminations even more tightly to pictured space. In this way, they can be seen as objects that, as J.T.W. Mitchell says of more contemporary artworks, “show themselves in order to *know* themselves: they stage the ‘self-knowledge’ of pictures” (Mitchell 48, italics original).

Wonderfully imaginative decorated margins create a resplendent backdrop whose myriad floral, geometric, and vernacular illustrations have somewhat stymied art historians: Peter Woodruff, in a brief article about No. 116, Adoration of the Magi, complains of “some considerable strain in attempting to locate a symbolic or iconographic

significance motivating border decoration and miniature” (1). However, the borders

are arguably the province of this world, representing throughout various flowers, plants, textile designs, daily activities (bread-baking, hunting, chicken-plucking), pretzels, coins, and other objects specifically in everyday use. Although few manifest figures who have “crossed social boundaries” (Camille 9) or participated in the carnivalesque, as both Madeline Caviness and Michael Camille describe in other Books of Hours, a number do “gloss” (Camille 10) or provide “supplementation and annotation” and “juxtaposition” (Camille 21) of the primary pictures. They show explicit imagery from the everyday glossing the Christian story, or creating clear analogues from common life.

In addition to displaying the self-referential qualities J.T.W. Mitchell would describe in the mid-1990s, however, illuminated Books of Hours, “the most popular devotional book of the later Middle Ages” (Plummer 9), played specific roles in the religious life of the period. As Nicholas Watson points out, medieval people expected “to live their lives in a cycle of venial sin, repentance and penance” (293), and prayer books played a crucial role in this cycle. More importantly, the “daily, weekly, and annual cycle of public prayer” (Plummer 9) created a form of God’s time on earth, with the prayer playing an active role in the creation of such time. The incarnational aesthetic was both viewed in the illuminations and enacted.

The Hours of Catherine of Cleves was likely constructed circa 1440 in Utrecht for the Duchess of Guelders, Catherine of Cleves (Plummer 8-9). It is therefore roughly a half-century later in time than *Patience*, which was likely written in the late fourteenth century (Andrew 15) and uses the alliterative style characteristic of western and northern Britain. It is thus well to keep in mind that Flemish art would be more advanced along the road of affective devotion, with its “emphasis on the inner life of intentions, feelings and thoughts” (Watson 296, describing the English variant) than our British *enargeia* example. However, broadly speaking, the trope of framing and the incarnational aesthetic were, to say the least, broad concerns in the period under discussion, and cross-comparison can be highly illustrative in this regard.

In fact, for our gloss on Catherine’s *Book of Hours*, we can take Madeline Caviness’s exemplary work on another medieval Book of Hours, that of Jeanne d’Evreux of France, which was likely done around 1324 (333). In her “decoding of the imagery” (333), Caviness notes that

scenes from sacred history [...] are elaborately framed and partially colored to set them apart from the other images and the Latin text pages. The effect is that of a series of icons or holy pictures removed from other orders of existence; the Betrayal and Crucifixion of Christ alone are unframed, and the latter is unique in occupying a whole page. [...] Second, the queen, twice represented as suppliant, is

depicted in another (time-)frame either outside and below the Gospel event or in an antechapel at the shrine [...] Third: uncolored and unframed figures involved in secular activities occupy the bas-de-pages and margins adjacent to images of sacred history (334).

Catherine's Hours are much like Jeanne's as described in this passage. They contain Gospel pictures whose framing figures them as other orders of existence. A certain number are unframed. Peter Woodruff, discussing No. 116, in which a Wise Man points beyond the frame he is encased in, posits that "pointing beyond the bordered space of the miniature, breaking its space [...points] out a seemingly natural relationship between the patron's life and the miniature" (2). Some illuminations display the patron as suppliant or participant. Finally, as noted, the margins frolic or tread in the secular world yet are often metaphorically contingent with the holy world.

However, if the framing itself, rather than interior elements, is used for categorization. A certain number of illuminations in *The Hours of Catherine of Cleves* are unframed; the composition of a certain number breaks the frame; a slightly higher number are framed in a way that contests the preponderant framing convention, in "arc of heaven" or other frames; and a higher number contain illustrations that break the inner frame. Do erased, broken, or contested frames, like those in Jeanne's Hours and Woodruff's commentary, indicate a transfer of God's time into man's, partaking of the incarnational aesthetic and of the suture of the courts of heaven and earth?

They do. The unframed pictures arguably deal with the creation of an intersection between God's time and man's time using various forms of intercession: the invoked Marian presence, prayer, and a certain mapping of heaven's elevated personages with earth's elevated personages. (We will term the latter the royal, governing, or ecclesiastical presences.) Illuminations in which the frame is broken by some compositional element deal with the intersection of God's time and man's time either stemming from and dependent upon the action of man, or coming to man. Those with contested frames concern God's presence and plan in the incarnational moment or God's time. Finally, those in which the inner frames are broken compositionally are meditations on the repeating trope of the intersection of God and man's time, the Bible and man's history.

Unframed Illuminations: Working on the Building

The unframed illuminations in *The Hours of Catherine of Cleves*, 6 interspersed among the total 157, are represented throughout as paintings of three-dimensional buildings, primarily sites where religious worship (specifically prayer to Mary) or royal decree is enacted. The first one (No. 1)† depicts Catherine of Cleves kneeling in front of the Virgin and Child in a chapel, “possibly Catherine’s own,” (Plummer†), “surmounted by flying buttresses, crenellations, [...] a statue” (Plummer). Mary is quite clearly an object of veneration, surrounded by a gold mandorla and so enclosed within the illuminated chapel that she seems not only a presence in it but



of it; she too resembles a figure within a niche of a cathedral, but this time splendidly colored. Catherine kneels with “an open book” (Plummer) and a banderole inscribed *O mater dei memento mei* issues quite specifically from the province of the book, to intersect with the interior of the chapel. Importantly, her body is in the border. Given this, Catherine is represented as royalty, but inhabiting space clearly demarcated from the holy space of Mary. Her flowing red clothing, however, does enter the chapel itself, and so do the lovely blue bookmarks of her (prayer?) book.

This primary illumination, which opens the Book of Hours, uses “a common device that operates by conflating contemporary life with that of ‘history’” (Woodruff 2). If it is in fact Catherine’s chapel, the moment of prayer causes Catherine and Mary to coexist in the same time and the same space. The illumination implies a special role for Catherine and her prayer via her female and royal role in creating incarnational time, and serve, as Jeanne’s Hours do, to construct the suppliant’s role in this cycle (Caviness 356). And the role is precisely what Peter Woodruff, writing about No. 116, observes: “What motivates the link between the everyday and the biblical scene on this

particular page is the act of prayer, which works across the historical divide that separates the margin from the biblical scene” (3).

In addition, importantly, the viewer is “in” the building (as far as the artist can render), not observing a moment in history (the “framed” moment). The unframed series thus serves as an ontological invitation (“you can be here”) rather than simply a reinforcement of the scopic regime. In that way, any viewer is invited to create time along with Catherine. Moreover, we witness holy time becoming something (potentially) created by the interiority represented by the book and private prayer.

The next two unframed illuminations, Nos. 8 and 10, take place in “vaulted” buildings (Plummer) as well. (Note: Plummer’s commentary on each illumination is on the facing page of the illumination, on unnumbered pages.) In them, the suppliant is absent, but Mary very present. They concern, respectively, the Marriage of the Virgin and the Annunciation to the Virgin. Showing the specific gender roles of Mary, her marriage and (impending, holy) pregnancy, is certainly part of a gender patterning in the Book of Hours. However, it is also arguably concerned more with the prefiguring of the incarnational moment: Mary appears visibly pregnant in the marriage scene. And in the Annunciation, the banderole is one of several scrolls, as the book Mary holds is one of several pictured books—symbols of interiority.

Unlike the Hours of Jeanne d’Evreux, the unframed moment in the Passion cycle in this book is not represented by the betrayal or crucifixion, but specifically by a moment in which Pilate plays a role. It is likely that he was chosen as a specifically “royal” or “governing” figure, reminding Catherine of the royal and governing role. In No. 20, Christ before Pilate, the latter washes his hands with the robed Christ before him in a “barrel-vaulted audience hall” (Plummer). This illumination also visibly encourages readers to think (a move of interiority) of the unfolding of incarnational history. Readers are admonished “Versinnet dat Ende” (“Think of the End”, Plummer) by an inscription along the back wall of the chamber where the painted figures stand. They are the only painted words in the vernacular. This imparts a contemporary turn to the picture, and to the thought beseeched.

In the next unframed illumination, Christ has already risen and then risen again. In No. 32, Trinity in an Apse, he has become one of the figured Trinity. Importantly, this too stresses the royalty of the transfigured Christ and of the Trinity. They are prepared for an audience; each holds their royal symbol (God is crowned and holds a golden orb, Jesus gives a benediction and shares a displayed book with the Holy Ghost, and the latter’s halo is surmounted by a dove). And the apse is superbly beautiful, “decorated with finials, gold banners, and a gold crescent” (Plummer).

The Marian emphasis of the unframed series returns with the next unframed illumination, No. 51, Pentecost. We are again in a very imaginative apse of a “strangely vaulted” (Plummer) church. Mary is the central figure, and it is she who has both accoutrements of Jesus and the Holy Ghost in the last unframed illumination have now been bestowed upon her: she is clearly reading a book, and the Holy Ghost’s dove has descended specifically to her head. There is thus a linkage with the female act of prayer, constructing Catherine’s religious life. Mary is also something of a royal or governing (in the sense of ecclesiastical) figure in this setting; she is in the precise center of the apse, surrounded by the praying apostles, who have just received red tongues of fire.

Breaking the Frame: Man’s Participation in God’s Time

Throughout *The Hours of Catherine of Cleves*, illuminations in which the composition breaks the frame in some way treat the intersection of God’s time and man’s time—an incarnational aesthetic trope—from the perspective and actions of man, both for good and for ill. There are eleven of these.

One set of three within this eleven continues the figure of a three-dimensional building, although it serves not as self-representations of buildings, but as a mode of frame-breaking. These three—No. 6, Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple; No. 18, Christ Before Caiaphas, and No. 19, Mocking of Christ—also continue the theme of Marian presence in the incarnational moment and the royal or governing role in the Passion.

No. 6 is clearly framed in the preponderant brown frame; however, on two sides it becomes something of a hybrid. The right and left sides are composed of a painted three-dimensional temple, while the upper and lower sides are within the usual frame. Despite the relative smallness of Mary—as a child, she is less than half the size of Joachim and Anne, who watch as she ascends the stairs—her role as future queen of heaven is emphasized. A majestic blue and gold peacock intersects the Temple’s entrance tower in the left margin; his colors are reminiscent of the blue gown and gold halo of the Virgin. He is presenting a natural noble plumage, much as she is. In addition, the towers of the temple form unobtrusive, but still existent, crosses, and break the frame completely, extending into the decorated margin. Finally, a window has been placed above her parents that stands as something of an ideogram (in the sense that Sarah Stanbury observes that the floating picture of the city, not a literal spatial depiction of one, is an ideogram of the heavenly city in medieval art, *Body* 31). Architecturally, in size or roof, it is not related to the contiguous temple, but sits in the sky, indicating symbolically that Mary and her forebears will open the heavenly world to their world, the world of the Temple.

In No. 18, Christ Before Caiaphas, an ecclesiastical figure is pictured in the high priest, and the frame is broken by the rising of his lion-bedecked temple above the upper frame. This portion alone becomes three-dimensional, lending the illumination an almost clinical sense of being a cut-away view of the inside of the temple. This creates an almost “you are there” sense in the onlooker—and perhaps is intended to serve as a reminder of the malign actions of the (contemporary dress) court. No. 19, Mocking of Christ, is not a cut-away, but does continue the trope of architecture interrupting the frame. It also continues the ecclesiastical presence, as Caiaphas is present as an onlooker in the illumination. This time, the central dome of a building, directly above a hooded Christ, breaks the upper frame. The mockers, again, are in contemporary dress; the outstretched leg of one, in yellow, breaks the frame entirely, becoming the only extremity to extend into the initial capital of the text below (which makes room for him as no other capital does). The mockers thus break the frame of their time and enter the space of vernacular or everyday time represented by the margin. This is further underscored by the presence in the margin of a figure beating “a metal basin with a stick”; his composition is so similar to the four illuminated interior tormenters that John Plummer dubs him the “fifth tormenter”.



In two other illuminations, No. 17, Taking of Christ, and No. 22, Flagellation of Christ, viewers are also invited to consider the everyday human role in the Passion cycle. Both have conventional rectangular frames broken by an onlooker’s limb. In No. 17, a haloed Christ is shown surrounded by Judas, Peter, and soldiers. “Christ reaches down blindly to restore the ear of the bleeding soldier” (Plummer), whose foot, yellow cloak, and lantern nearly break the frame, and whose composition and color is reminiscent of the character who *does* extend into the illuminated capital in No. 19. The akimbo, yellow-clad arm of another, turbaned, character, looking directly at the viewer, breaks the

frame directly, extending slightly into the margin. The porousness of God and man's time is further underscored in this illumination by the existence, among beautifully painted marginal leaves, of a man holding a lantern similar to the one displayed by the bleeding soldier within the frame. John Plummer tells us that "such a figure often appears among the soldiers in scenes of Christ's arrest." In No. 22, the frame is transgressed by the "bundle of branches" (Plummer) of a flagellator on the right, while one of the left breaks only the inner frame. (John Plummer believes that "the straightness of his arm implies the stroke of whipping, rather than the punch of boxing" and that since he holds no instrument, he "has 'lost' his whip, perhaps because of the interference of the border.") Close to this near or thwarted break, however, a demon, whose glowing eyes and fang-studded mouth face the viewer directly, rises rampant in the margin.

The next four broken-frame illuminations, interspersed throughout the Book of Hours, deal not with the evil of man in the Passion cycle, as Nos. 17, 18, 19, and 22 do, but with the role of man helping to create God's time through prayer or a virtue. In No. 57, Piety: Lady Distributing Alms, and No. 58, Fear of the Lord, virtue or prayer is pictured and rewarded on earth; in No. 66, Ecclesiastical and Military Saints Adore God the Father and 67, Virgins Adoring God the Father, once-earthly beings who helped to create God's time have actually moved to God's court.

Piety, No. 57, figures virtue explicitly as the means to create God's time. In the illumination, piety is "interpreted as charity" (Plummer) via a picturing of a "fashionably dressed lady" (Plummer) giving alms. From the mouth of beggar issues a banderole, "Give alms, and all things are clean unto you," from Luke 11:41 (Plummer), which breaks the upper right frame. The lady "strongly resembles Catherine's portrait reproduced in no. 96, and even wears the same chatelaine" (Plummer), providing a link with No. 1. In this case, however, Catherine is creating holy time and piety through enactments with other human beings, not via prayer. The margin figuratively comments on an analogous event in holy time in modern dress. A woman, in the same spatial position as Catherine, "offers a dish of food or water to Christ" (Plummer), who is in prison and occupies the same spatial position as the beggars—a holy and earthly overlap.

A banderole also breaks the frame of No. 58, Fear of the Lord, which is something of a male version of No. 57. Three characters are pictured: a contemporary man ("possibly Arnold of Guelders, the husband of Catherine," Plummer) on the left; a demon on the right, and a rising and sword-punctured Christ. All three sport banderoles, but only Christ's breaks the frame, proclaiming the penultimate verse of Ecclesiastes: "Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man" (Bible 872). The margin contains a floating Latin inscription that "fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Plummer). In this,

the man prays, helping to create Christ's time and helping the pictured demon to lose the prosecution that Plummer rightly notes his stance implies.

Prayer or governing virtue has moved the next set of participants in God's time to God's world. In both No. 66, Ecclesiastical and Military Saints Adoring God the Father and No. 67, Virgins Adoring God the Father, God's banderole breaks the frame. In the first, he identifies the saints as "men who have battled worldliness"; in the second, he implores "Come to me all wisest virgins" (Plummer). Virtue and prayer are pictured as allowing human beings to enter temporal and spatial union with God.

One of the prime vehicles of the Passion cycle itself breaks the frame, in the tenth and eleventh illuminations of the frame-breaking category. In No. 87, Christ Standing on the Lowered Cross, a cross-beam breaks frame as a bleeding Christ stands upon it near the foot. Paradoxically, human actions that helped bring about the crucifixion have led to the victorious breaking of frame signified by the Cross;



all now have an avenue to the communal body through the sacraments. The margin contains "Christ in the Winepress" (Plummer), in which the wounded Christ fills a communion chalice with his blood. The page thus contains an explicit linking of his wounds with a means to sacramental means to grace, communion.

Finally, No. 37, Trinity With Dove and Infant Christ, at first looks as if only the inner frame is broken by God's crown and halo. However, when one examines the illumination and margin closely, the instrument with which Christ redeemed man, the cross, breaks the frame and projects into the everyday margin. It is almost as if the cross atop God's crown was feathered in gold as the artistic equivalent of a whisper in a lovely illumination in which blessing rays,

the Christ child with the cross, and the Holy Spirit fly to man's earth under God's benediction.

The Contested Frame: God's Arc of Heaven

The Hours of Catherine of Cleves contains 12 framed illuminations in which the frame is not the customary rectangle or square. This variant implies a contestation of the frame, or a moving beyond it. These contain moments picturing the uniting of God and man in a way that incorporates God's specific presence or purview.

Nine of these 12 contain "arc of heaven" frames (Plummer) or some variant of them, an arc implying or picturing the presence of God growing out of the rectangular frame. They are No. 12, Adoration of the Child; No. 26, Crucifixion; No. 29, Lamentation and Anointing; No. 40, Trinity Adored; No. 61, All Saints Before God the Father; No. 64, Apostles and Prophets Adoring God the Father; No. 89, Eve and the Virgin; No. 90, the Tree of Jesse, and No. 131, Lapidation of Saint Stephen.

In the first of these, No. 12, the arc of heaven is only implied; it is actually more reminiscent of a square of heaven growing from the frame. Mary, Joseph, and the Child are pictured, with a schematized Bethlehem as holy city in the background. An angel hovers overhead, but still within the same frame as the holy family; the higher square contains a gold sun and the rays of heaven emanating from it. In No. 26, however, the arc of heaven has grown to an arc, and it is inhabited by a quite specific human God, directly over the crucified Christ, crowned and surrounded by angels, who raises his hand in benediction. (Intriguingly, Plummer notes that "[t]he unusual symmetry of Christ's body confronts us directly, serving to identify Him with the stable form of His cross.") In the next, however, No. 29, the arc is much more subdued, and the space is occupied only slightly by the inscription on the top of Christ's cross, as his body is removed.

In No. 40, Trinity Adored, God and man's history has moved on: Christ is not on earth, with God (or his presence) alone in the arc. Instead, the trinity appear in what John Plummer terms "the throne-of-grace." God holds a small crucified Christ and the Holy Ghost, pictured as a dove, is between them; all three are receiving prayers from "eight kneeling religious and lay figures" below the arc (Plummer).

No. 61, All Saints Before God the Father, is unusual in that it contains an arc of heaven enclosed within another frame, but the arc encasing God's banderole breaks the enclosing frame. The banderole "speak of God's legacy and support for the saints" (Plummer); the border between the two frames contain "a row of nine flaming angels appearing in blue clouds" (Plummer). Again, this illumination foregrounds God rather than Christ and emphasizes his role vis-à-vis exceptionally

virtuous humans. Intriguingly, what appears to be a stabbed mouse, with a very realistically rendered knife, appears on the floor below the floating God—perhaps an abrupt reference in everyday form to the spear-wounded Christ?

No. 64, *Apostles and Prophets Adoring God the Father*, is similar to No. 61, except that the arc of heaven frame encompasses the head of a floating God and his banderole, containing the message “I am alpha and omega, God and man” (Plummer). In this case again, God, rather than the Christ figure, proclaims the incarnation. As in 61, he is surrounding by banderole-issuing groups.

In the next two, the progression of God to man is recapped using a tree as central figure within the genealogical line. No. 89 portrays Eve and the Virgin Mary; the figure in the arc of heaven is a cherub bearing a banderole that proclaims “Eve authoress of sin; Mary authoress of merit” (Plummer). A flowering tree, from which Eve is about to pluck an apple, stands in the middle and a haloed Mary with child stands on the right. As Plummer notes, “[f]rom Isaiah’s mention of Jesse’s root [...] and from the genealogies of Christ given in the Gospels, the Middle Ages created a family tree [...] continuing through Christ’s ancestors, and concluding with the Virgin and her Son.” In No. 90, *Tree of Jesse*, the tree grows quite literally from Jesse’s breast and the arc of heaven contains foliage and the top of the Virgin’s halo; she is seated at the top of the tree ringed round with various forebears. As Plummer notes, Christ is not pictured.

He is pictured in the final arc of heaven, though, and he occupies the arc. In it, he blesses the falling St. Stephen, the only individual saint displayed in an arc of heaven frame. The message conveys the analogic relationship of Christ to humanity; he blesses and watches over saints as God in the earlier illuminations watched and issued benedictions over him.

The final three illuminations in which the frame is contested do not contain arcs of heaven, but do deal in some way with God’s participation in man’s time. The first is No. 4, *the Meeting at the Golden Gate*. Intriguingly, it is the only illumination whose frame replicates a compositional element, the golden gate itself. It betrays the concern of the Book of Hours with lineage and royalty, for Jesus’s grandparents, Joachim and Anne, are portrayed standing before the gate that symbolically represents the beginning of the cycle that will eventuate in God’s becoming man. The entire scene is presided over by a ideogram of Jerusalem in the top part of the composition; Joachim and Anne are thus presided over, in a manner of speaking, by the holy city as an analogue for God.

Analysis of this illumination can also benefit from Camille’s work on margins. The illumination is surrounded by marginal figures: a hunter with a bow; a hunter with a horn; a blue winged demon; and a fox with a bleeding bird, the Christ symbol. The trajectory of the hunter’s arrow, however, if followed as Michael Camille does with some medieval illuminations [Camille 20-21], directly

penetrates the center of one of two “fanciful vase-like forms” [Plummer] atop the gate. There is clear phallic imagery, as Caviness notes of margin play [349], especially as the vessels and Anne are “dressed” in the same colors, blue in the center and red on the top. However, as she is the mothering vessel [of the vessel of the incarnation, in a nested relation], the arrow aimed at the vase’s center may also be designed to prefigure the wounds in Christ’s side, especially given the proximity to the wounded bird. The arrow hits what will be in the interior of the vessel.

No. 35, Trinity Enthroned, presents the trinity in an arc of heaven alone, unmediated by any other framing device; the bottom of the arc is the floor of the picture. The notion of framing is both pressured and contained by its globe-like expansion.

No. 49, Last Judgement, combines arcs and rectangles; the risen Christ is in a frame within a frame, and the outer frame is broken by circles containing the “symbols of the Evangelists” (Plummer). God’s frame is both broken and brought to earth by the evangelists, each of whom is shown either literally writing or carrying scrolls. Interestingly, his frame is not broken in No. 65, God the Father and the Four Evangelist Symbols; the scrolls only serve to identify Mathew, Mark, Luke, and John.

The Breaking of the Inner Frame: Reiterations of God and Man’s Time

Forty of the 157 illuminations break the inner frame, a partial sundering notable in a book of illuminations in which proportion and harmony are exceedingly exact, and in which many elements of the composition rest precisely on the frame, as in (for example) Nos. 69, 86, and 106. Primarily, they serve as meditations on the repeating trope of the intersection of God and man’s time, the Bible and man’s history. In this, they play a pedagogical role, bearing frequent reiterations of the intersection of God and man’s time and providing a frequent role for objects that are recipients or bearers of grace (or both) to perform as frame-breakers.

The first of these, intriguingly, implies a shared space for the worshipper and the worshipped via an analogic relationship between the lineage of Catherine and Christ. In No. 2, the Annunciation to Joachim, an angel’s wing breaks the inner frame, and so does the crest of Jean le Bon, King of France, whom Plummer identifies as one of Catherine’s forebears. Thus objects in something of an analogous relationship, associated with divine and human lineage, respectively, break the inner frame.

Many also break the frame using particular objects thought to be invested with metonymic power. In Nos. 31, 36, 41, 46, 68, 83, 94, 101, 116, 126, and 131, garb of some sort breaks the frame (often a cloak, but frequently shoes and sometimes hats). In many others, a halo or crown of God breaks the inner frame

(Nos. 16, 26, 40, 106, 13, and 136). And in many, a banderole is the frame-breaking object (Nos. 72, 73, 78, and 97).

One of the most intriguing implies a porousness between God and man by showing frame-breaking *from* the vernacular world rather than to it. In No. 34, God the Son, a marginal angel's violin breaks through the outer frame *from* the margin. This frame-breaking in reverse, accomplished by a beautifully rendered craft object, implies a role for art in the world as grace's messenger.

Finally, in one of these the figure of Catherine enters again. In No. 96, Crucifixion with God the Father, the Virgin, a Patron-Saint, and Catherine of Cleves, we recapitulate to and extend upon Catherine's participation in the creation of holy time seen in No. 1. The same motif of intercession makes its appearance, but at one remove. Instead of praying in front of the Virgin, Catherine's banderole asks the Virgin explicitly "to pray for her" (Plummer). The patron-saint, who frames the figure of Catherine compositionally and touches her shoulder, does not speak; the implication is that he is providing support and encouragement for her intercessory prayer. Her intercessory prayer is mirrored, intriguingly, both by the Virgin and the Son: Mary asks Jesus to "be gracious" to Catherine, and he in turn requests "His Father to spare Catherine" (Plummer) This roundel of intercession ends with God issuing a banderole that proclaims "Your prayer has been heard with favor" (Plummer).

The figure recapitulates the cultural project of the Book of Hours in miniature: a cycle of intercessory prayer encircling upon itself, in which a specific royal suppliant is encouraged to identify with Gospel figures and analogously reproduce holy time under an incarnational aesthetic. Catherine's prayer is figuratively nested within Mary, who is nested in Jesus, who is nested in God ... and so on. The interior frame is broken on the bottom by a three-legged stool (signifying the Trinity, perhaps) with a half-open (prayer?) book on it. It represents the incarnational aesthetic perfectly, both in the beauty replicating God's grace, and in the creation of an indwelling link between God and man. And in being such an inviting and explicit picture, it encourages viewers to incorporate this link within their interior life. One could return to Peter Woodruff's previously cited comments: "the link between the everyday and the biblical scene [...] is the act of prayer" (3) in a linked or nested chain. One could almost call this nesting "framing."

Framing thus serves as method and topos, both in enargeia and in actual painting, in the Middle Ages, in artistic endeavors to unite the worlds on earth and above. In the works discussed, framing creates the conditions for metapictures, pictures that point to themselves as artworks, despite the very different roles each work plays: the poem giving us a negative example that obedient subjects can

employ as reverse patterning, and the illuminations telling viewers that they participate in the creation of holy time.

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*Note: When transcribing from *Patience*, I have followed Sarah Stanbury's description, at the end of *Pearl: Introduction*, of the METS guidelines. Thorns are written as *th*, and yoghs have been transcribed according to which letter of *g*, *gh*, *y*, or *s* is closest to the modern spelling.

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†Note: The illuminations and specific commentary post the introduction in *The Hours of Catherine of Cleves* do not have page numbers. Therefore, the illuminations are referred to by number and the commentary understood to be in the facing page of the illumination.

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