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The fourteenth-century poem *Wynnere and Wastoure* (ca. 1352–70) is staged as a dream vision in which the narrator sees two opposing armies, led by the allegorical figures Wynnere and Wastoure, preparing for battle. Interrupting them, a king demands that the leaders of these groups explain their conflict so that he may resolve it. The rest of the text is thus staged as a debate between the personification Wynnere, who explains that he supports saving money and conserving possessions, and his enemy Wastoure, who presents his case for spending money and consuming possessions. Rather than ending with a straightforward judgment regarding these men's differences, *Wynnere and Wastoure* ultimately complicates the ethics of winning and wasting; by the poem's conclusion, readers are left with ambiguous and contradictory characterizations of these two men and lack a definitive judgment from the king regarding their antithetical financial beliefs.[1] Not only are the values of Wynnere's and Wastoure's actions ultimately incoherent, the poem's generic register itself remains elusive as it moves among a number of disparate modes of genre and constantly slips between universal and topical concerns.

1. In its one extant manuscript, *Wynnere and Wastoure* remains incomplete. The manuscript breaks off before the conclusion of the king's speech. Stephanie Trigg writes, "While it seems unlikely that there is much missing from the text, the king has been unable to offer more than a narrowly practical and temporary solution to the ethical problems raised by the debate" (see her introduction in Stephanie Trigg, ed., *Wynnere and Wastoure*, EETS, o.s., 297 [London, 1990], xlii). Further references cite this edition, and line numbers will be noted parenthetically.

Most of the scholarly work on this poem argues that these textual ambiguities are self-conscious and are meant to convey critical fourteenth-century anxieties.[2] Such analyses often focus on *Wynnere and Wastoure*'s opening lines, in which the narrator foregrounds issues of semantic instability. Complaining about his contemporary linguistic milieu, the narrator states, "For nowe alle es witt and wyles that we with delyn, / Wyse wordes and slee, and icheon wryeth othere" (For now everything we deal with is cunning and trickery, / Cunning and knowing words, each one obscuring the sense of the next) (lines 5–6). Maura Nolan concurs with several scholars as she argues that this opening grievance identifies both a linguistic and a political "crisis" in medieval England; she writes, "Ultimately, the prologue has a dual function, first to establish a sense of urgency and crisis. . . . The crisis is partly historical and partly literary, the medium both moral and political. In a sense the poet has chosen to define the crisis—historical and literary—as a crisis of interpretation. . . . In other words, interpretive strategies have collapsed."[3] The following essay agrees with Nolan's methodological approach to this poem as it similarly examines the relationship between semantic and social references in *Wynnere and Wastoure*. However, I question both Nolan's specific argument that "interpretative strategies have collapsed" and the more ubiquitous identification by scholars of an interpretive "crisis" in this poem. Although the prologue introduces the issue of hermeneutic obscurity, the rest of the poem does not, I argue, reveal anxiety regarding the occlusion of knowledge and certainly fails to demonstrate

2. Many critics claim that the poem registers an anxiety with the state of semiotic representation in fourteenth-century England. Trigg writes, "We find an excess of signification which seems almost to devalue the poem's key terms. . . . We should not be surprised, in this case, at the uncertainty and anxiety displayed by the poem and its representations of its two central figures, if it hesitates to crystallize a distinction whose implications are so profoundly disturbing" (Stephanie Trigg, "The Rhetoric of Excess in *Winner and Waster*," *Yearbook of Langland Studies* 3 [1989]: 105). D. Vance Smith writes, "The apparently conventional prelude to the dream makes more explicit the poem's conviction that it is the work of 'werke' itself, the work of practices of representation such as this poem, to render a welter of competing discourses and registers coherent" (D. Vance Smith, *Arts of Possession: The Middle English Household Imaginary* [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003], 81). Most recently, the title of Britton Harwood's article on *Wynnere and Wastoure* reveals his focus on anxieties in the text (Britton J. Harwood, "Anxious over Peasants: Textual Disorder in *Winner and Waster*," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 36 [2006]: 291–319). Thomas L. Reed is one of the only critics to argue that *Wynnere and Wastoure*'s ambiguity does not reveal an anxiety but rather represents a "recreational escape" from the laborious task of discernment that is necessary outside the bounds of what he terms this "ludic" poem. See Thomas L. Reed, *Middle English Debate Poetry and the Aesthetics of Irresolution* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1990), 260–93.

3. Maura B. Nolan, "'With Tresone Withinn': *Wynnere and Wastoure*, Chivalric Self-Representation, and the Law," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 26 (1996): 10.

the textual chaos and illegibility that a hyperbolized "collapse" of inter-
pretive strategies would produce.

An excavation of the various etymologies composing the narrator's
opening statement (lines 5–6, quoted above) reveals that the verb
"wryeth," which the poem's author uses to describe the contrivances of
language, derives from the Old English *wreon*, which means to "cover"
and often denotes the act of covering over or hiding in Middle En-
glish.[4] By painting a metaphorical picture of words physically covering
other words, this speaker identifies the power of language to obscure
meaning. Similar assessments appear in other texts long before this
speaker's pronouncement and often refer specifically to the figurative
power of language. Images such as the shell and kernel and the chaff
and grain, which were repeatedly used to describe allegorical narrative,
stress an inner and outer region of meaning predicated on an act of
covering.[5] The prevalence of such imagery in medieval literature sug-
gests that when the *Wynnere and Wastoure* author used the term "wryeth"
he knew of the term's associations with figurative speech.

However, if the semantic covering that this author denigrates is asso-
ciated with figuration, it is surprising that this author employs a well-
known literary metaphor to critique metaphorizing. This is even more
surprising when one considers that *Wynnere and Wastoure* is itself a person-
ification allegory composed of a string of extended metaphors. To top
it all off, verbal dexterity, the "wyse wordes and slee" that the prologue
supposedly decries, is one of the primary characteristics of the *dialogus*
genre that this author employs.[6] The poem's use of "covered" language
to censure "covered" language, combined with these other contradic-
tions, suggests that the obscure nature of language is not as upsetting to
the poem's author as modern scholars would have us believe.

4. "Wryeth" has also been identified with the Old English (OE) term *wregian* (to
accuse): see Thorlac Turville-Petre, *Alliterative Poetry of the Later Middle Ages: An Anthology*,
Routledge Medieval English Texts (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press,
1989), 41 n. 6. It may also be related to the OE *wrigian* (to twist). I find Trigg's derivation
of "wryeth" from the OE *wreon* to be the most convincing, however, given that the same
grammatical construction is provided in the poem at lines 302 and 386 (see Trigg, *Wyn-
nere and Wastoure*, 18 n. 6.) and because, as my ensuing discussions will discuss, the trope
of enclosing is repeated throughout the prologue.

5. See Stephen Medcalf, "Inner and Outer," in *The Later Middle Ages*, ed. Stephen Med-
calf (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1981), 81; Bernard Felix Huppé and D. W. Robertson,
Fruyt and Chaf: Studies in Chaucer's Allegories (Princeton University Press, 1963); and D. W.
Robertson, *A Preface to Chaucer: Studies in Medieval Perspectives* (Princeton University Press,
1962), 58, 71, 272.

6. Ralph Hanna's recent argument regarding this poem supports my contention that
the prologue's complaint cannot be wholly in earnest: "In *Winner . . .* debate poetry, *dialo-
gus*, applauds verbal dexterity ('wyse wordes and slee')" (Ralph Hanna, *London Literature,
1300–1380* [Cambridge University Press, 2005], 267).

In fact, reading *Wynnere and Wastoure* through the lens of fourteenth-century household finances and bureaucracy reveals that this poem may be advocating a stance in which the absence of transparent information is not a "crisis" but rather a deliberate strategy for monetary accumulation and financial security. This poem is not anxious about linguistic ambiguities; it depends on and commends them, responding to bureaucratic impulses in the fourteenth century not by exorcising ambiguities but by employing them. The poem explores how ambiguity may control knowledge about material possessions by keeping such information from prying eyes.

Since, at its most basic level, the poem exhibits an undeniable interest in the proper administration of material goods, it demands to be analyzed within the context of late medieval administration and bureaucracy. More specifically, *Wynnere and Wastoure* is concerned with the administration of household finances. The text invokes the concept of households twice (lines 212, 347), references the administrative term "katour" (line 491), and, more generally, models its two main allegorical characters on a commonplace administrative distinction in medieval households—the competing ideals of magnificence and providence.[7] In addition, recent work by Britton Harwood has revealed fascinating links between the references to William Shareshull and John Wingfield in *Wynnere and Wastoure.* Wingfield was the "leading administrator in the centralized management of all the [Black] prince's estates, responsible for collecting the king's revenue," while Shareshull too was intimately involved in the administration of monarchical revenues.[8] Their presence in this text contributes to the poem's sustained exploration of late medieval English bureaucracy.[9]

That *Wynnere and Wastoure* is interested in administrative endeavors is not surprising given the increasingly important role that bureaucracy played during this period. In particular, the epistemological aspects of bureaucratic systems became crucial to late medieval English kings. Although bureaucracy itself is a rather ambiguous term, one of the things that bureaucracy attempts to do is to organize knowledge. Data from different regions and populaces need to be standardized in order for them to be compared, analyzed, and utilized in any bureaucratic organization, and one of the goals of bureaucracy is thus to transform "what was a social hieroglyph into a legible and administratively more convenient format."[10]

7. David Starkey, "The Age of the Household: Politics, Society and the Arts, c. 1350–1550," in Medcalf, *Later Middle Ages,* 255–57.
8. Harwood, "Anxious over Peasants," 304–5.
9. Ibid., 304–10.
10. James C. Scott, *Seeing like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed,* Yale Agrarian Studies (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 3.

From standardized writs to standardized weights and measurements, from the increasing promulgation of generalized statutes to the bestowal of patronyms, thirteenth- and fourteenth-century kings worked to amass accurate knowledge regarding their holdings and the holdings of their subjects.[11] These attempts to standardize incongruent values from across the realm—be they values of places, people, or possessions—collectively suggest an expansion of the English monarchy's bureaucratic impulses.

Due to the historical events of the late medieval period, the fourteenth century was committed to generating bureaucratic knowledge primarily for financial reasons. Almost all royal administrative efforts during this period were involved in the collection and management of money.[12] David Herlihy outlines this causal relationship, stating, "The radical loss of population during the late Middle Ages did one service for historians. The governments of the epoch almost continuously engaged in exhausting wars and desperately searched for the resources to wage them. To meet their pressing fiscal needs, they took precise counts of their subjects and made exact assessments of their wealth. Communities were minutely scrutinized."[13] Given the drive to organize information in these administrative endeavors, it would appear that the ambiguous "wyse wordes and slee" that the *Wynnere and Wastoure* poet decries would be the bane of any fourteenth-century royal administrator intent on rendering information legible and transparent. How do we explain, then, that this poem, which is intent on exploring bureaucratic "best practices" for the household, is known for its unrelenting obscurity and inde-

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11. Through Exchequer records, the royal government was able to collect information not only from and about communities but from and about individual English subjects. See W. L. Warren, "The Myth of Norman Administrative Efficiency," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 34 (1983): 131. Britnell notes that "England was unusual in the Middle Ages for the extent to which the government attempted to enforce standard weights and measures" (R. H. Britnell, *The Commercialisation of English Society, 1000–1500*, 2nd ed. [Manchester University Press, 1996], 90). See, too, Witold Kula, *Measures and Men*, trans. R. Szreter (Princeton University Press, 1986), 114–19. Moreover, the statutory regulation of the market economy increased quantitatively and qualitatively after 1330. Both the number of actual laws and their scope widened (Britnell, *Commercialisation of English Society*, 173). Threats of imprisonment and enforced labor statutes transformed a justice that had previously been practiced at the individual manorial level into national legalese. See Anne Middleton, "Acts of Vagrancy: The C Version 'Autobiography' and the Statute of 1388," in *Written Work: Langland, Labor, and Authorship*, ed. Steven Justice and Kathryn Kerby-Fulton (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), 226–28. Finally, during the 1300s, the creation of surnames and heritable patronyms became more prevalent (Scott, *Seeing like a State*, 68).

12. Helen M. Jewell, *English Local Administration in the Middle Ages* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1972), 87.

13. David Herlihy, *Medieval Households* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 131.

terminacy? I suggest that *Wynnere and Wastoure*'s constitutive ambiguities serve partly to resist the clarity sought by bureaucratic surveillance.

Resistance to monarchical administration is well attested to in documents of the late medieval period. Chronicles of this era, for example, indicate that English subjects often opposed bureaucratic surveying. The growing uniformity of these frequent fiscal, administrative, and judicial processes was one of the factors that widened and "generalized" the response of the ruled during this period and contributed to demonstrations like the 1381 revolt.[14] This resistance was partly due to the fact that the king and his administrators were not the only individuals interested in accounting for their possessions. The heads of individual households were equally intent on rendering their possessions legible. These households repeated and reflected the actions and organizational structures of the monarchical model. Standardized technologies such as the *comptus*, account books, and didactic texts on estate management, which all flourished during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, attest to this desire to control information at the household level.[15]

The Seneschaucy (ca. 1276), a management treatise instructing men just how to practice such administrative skills, states, for instance, "Le seygnur deit comaunder e ordiner ke cez acontes seyent oyz checun an, ne mie en un lyu mes par tuz les maners, kar la poet lem apertmenet saver sur la chose e entendre le pru e le damage."[16] Just like the king, individual lords conducted frequent, localized audits in order to better ascertain their precise financial standings. Similarly, *The Rules of Robert of Grosseteste* (ca. 1240) specifies that such localized information be conducted by "le plus sachaunz de fraunks homes e vileyns, distincteement en roulle issi."[17] Stressing that the surveys be enrolled "distincteement," the *Rules* reveals the importance of clarity and transparency to accounting endeavors.

14. R. H. Hilton, *Bond Men Made Free: Medieval Peasant Movements and the English Rising of 1381* (New York: Viking, 1973), 152.

15. Smith, *Arts of Possession*, 226 n. 23. The spread of account book usage during the late Middle Ages "makes the English household a place where the regularity of social life is observed, produced, and upheld as a principle" (ibid., 8). With the rise in these accounts came a concurrent increase in the circulation of didactic texts regarding estate management. These texts laid out standardized theories regarding the maintenance of possessions, emphasized generalized systems over observed particulars, and, from the thirteenth century onward, exhibited an increasingly rational attitude to the management and conduct of households.

16. "The lord ought to command and arrange that his accounts are audited every year, not at one centre, but on each manor, for there one can learn quickly the state of affairs and ascertain profit and loss" (Dorothea Oschinsky, *Walter of Henley and Other Treatises on Estate Management and Accounting* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1971], 292–93).

17. "The most loyal and the most knowledgeable among the freemen and villains and it ought then to be enrolled clearly in such a way" (ibid., 388–89).

At the same time that householders wanted to know how much they owned, however, monarchical taxes and other levies made it detrimental for them to allow others to know how much they owned. D. Vance Smith has investigated this issue of privacy in relationship to writs of distraint, which forced men to take on the title of knighthood if they possessed a certain financial status so that they could subsequently be taxed at a higher rate. Smith argues that the financial responsibilities that went along with knighthood may have rendered this honor unattractive in the fourteenth century: "It was prudent to conceal one's income from land in order to avoid being classified along with those who were eligible for knighthood. . . . Profits, while not intrinsically evil, could force one to assume a social position more elevated and prominent than might otherwise be desirable."[18] The men who were concealing their wealth from others were the same individuals who were adhering to the precepts enumerated in accounting treatises. At the same time that they were hiding their income, these men were enrolling information into their account books "distincteement" in order to ascertain and manage their possessions. In other words, while individual households worked to make their own possessions legible to themselves through standardization and accounting, some simultaneously strove to make their findings and calculations illegible to everyone else, especially the king's administrators.

Wynnere and Wastoure reflects the paradox that while householders actively sought legibility with regard to their own possessions, they simultaneously used obfuscation to keep from being assessed by the king. *Wynnere and Wastoure* ultimately illustrates that effective nonroyal household administration relies as much on illegibility as it does on clarity.

LANGUAGE, ENCLOSURE, AND OWNERSHIP

As discussed above, *Wynnere and Wastoure* first articulates its position on language with the trope of "covered" meanings. The poem further decries current linguistic fashions when, a few lines later, the narrator laments that there are currently only "Wyse wordes withinn þat wroghte were neuer, / Ne redde in no romance þat euer renke herde" (Wise words within that were never performed / Nor read in any romance, heard by any man) (lines 22–23). As outlined by the poem's introduction, then, one of society's current problems is the confined or covered location of language "withinn." Both of these initial references to language invoke spatial images of inner and outer realms and the boundaries that demarcate these opposing areas.

18. Smith, *Arts of Possession*, 29.

Such spatial images are not limited to descriptions of language. The prologue's references to interiority repeatedly describe topographical boundaries in addition to covered meanings. These representations of inner and outer spaces constitute one of the poem's most integrally important, although as yet overlooked, binaries. The trope of inner and outer spaces unites issues of "covered" language, "insider" bureaucratic knowledge, and bounded personal property within this text.

Wynnere and Wastoure immediately relates the abstract notion of linguistic interiors to more tangible geographical interiors by repeatedly using the same terms to describe both types of spaces. The poem begins, conventionally enough, with a nod to the founding history of the English society that it explores. Reaching all the way back to the Trojan War, the narrator compares classical civilization to contemporary society by recalling the period when "Bretayne was biggede [settled] and Bruyttus it aughte [conquered it] / Thurgh the takynge of Troye with tresone withinn" (lines 1–2). Much scholarly work has been done on this initial reference to treason in *Wynnere and Wastoure* and its historical connection to late medieval statutes on this crime.[19] Less attention has been paid to the subtle pleonasm that qualifies the poem's articulation of the Trojan sedition. Treason is, by definition, an inside job; the adjective "withinn" used to describe treason in *Wynnere and Wastoure* is thus semantically emphatic and conceptually provocative. The repetition of the concept of interiority in the prefatory material of this poem suggests that the grammatical redundancy of "withinn" in reference to treason is not a mere consequence of metrical necessity but a calculated attempt to stress the inward nature of this founding act.

In addition to describing the interior origins of previous treasons, the *Wynnere and Wastoure* narrator forecasts conditions for the country's future. Enumerating a list of prophetic signs indicating the imminence of doomsday, he suggests that events such as high seas, mismatched marriages, and leveled walls will soon portend the last days and states,

Forthi [Therefore] sayde was a sawe [saying] of Salomon the wyse,
It hyeghte [hastens] harde appone honde, hope I no noþer [I expect nothing else]
When wawes [waves] waxen schall wilde and walles bene doun
And hares appon herthe-stones schall hurcle in hire fourme
[And hares shall crouch upon hearthstones for their lairs]

19. Israel Gollancz, ed., *A Good Short Debate between "Winner and Waster": An Alliterative Poem on Social and Economic Problems in England in the Year 1352, with Modern English Rendering* (London: Oxford University Press, 1920); Elizabeth Salter, "The Timeliness of *Wynnere and Wastoure*," *Medium Aevum* 47 (1978): 40–65; Jana Mathews, "The Case for Misprision in *Wynnere and Wastoure*," *Notes and Queries* 46 (1999): 317–21; Trigg, *Wynnere and Wastoure*, xxv–xxvi; Nolan, "With Tresone Withinn," 1–28.

And eke boyes of blode [spirited boys] with boste and with pryde
Schall wedde ladyes in londe and lede hem at will,
Thene dredfull domesdaye it draweth neghe [near] aftir.

(Lines 10–16)

Such apocalyptic omens are common in medieval literature, appearing in texts ranging from Langland's widely read *Piers Plowman* (ca. 1376–88) to Thomas of Erceldoune's more obscure *Prophecy* (ca. 1220–90). The first two omens are culled from a much-cited litany of fifteen signs predicting the imminence of doomsday.[20] The choice of *Wynnere and Wastoure*'s author to include only the two omens relating to razing or overstepping boundaries (the sea leaving its bounds and walls being toppled) once more exhibits a preoccupation with physical perimeters.

In addition to returning to the trope of bounded space, this reference to walls and the previous allusion to Trojan walls trespassed by means of treason suggest a narrative interest in theories of personal property. References to walls in other contexts are common in a variety of medieval texts. "The wall," explains one Chaucer critic, "was the bearer of a primary cultural charge. . . . By protecting their indwellers from attack and plunder, walls were the very condition of civilized life."[21] In his expansive study of private life, Georges Duby notes, "Building walls was a reflex of the medieval mind, born perhaps of profound feelings of insecurity."[22] By pairing the destruction of these architectural structures with such foreboding and unnatural events as flooding and marital mismatches, this opening remark in *Wynnere and Wastoure* suggests that the demolition of walled boundaries is a regrettable possibility. The poem thus invokes a common fear by alluding to the razing of walls and the threat to both individuals and possessions that this unbounded state would bring. In its introduction, then, this poem repeatedly focuses on interior spaces and, drawing on pervasive cultural associations regarding walled structures, relates these enclosed areas to the maintenance of both bodily and proprietary well-being.

The prologue to *Wynnere and Wastoure* ends with a final link that connects these issues of bounded space and personal property to theories of language. Complaining that young boys currently get the credit for

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20. William Heist, *The Fifteen Signs before Doomsday* (East Lansing: Michigan State College Press, 1952), 109–92.
21. Kathryn L. Lynch, "Partitioned Fictions: The Meaning and Importance of Walls in Chaucer's Poetry," in *Art and Context in Late Medieval English Narrative: Essays in Honor of Robert Worth Frank, Jr.*, ed. Robert R. Edwards (Rochester, NY: Brewer, 1994), 108.
22. Georges Duby, *A History of Private Life*, vol. 2, *Revelations of the Medieval World*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press/Belknap, 1988), 438.

other men's poetic inventions, the narrator cautions that a time is near when such false machinations will be revealed:

> Bot now a childe appon chere [face] withouwtten chyn-wedys [beard]
> Þat neuer wroghte [shaped] thurgh witt thies wordes togedire
> Fro he can [knows how to] jangle als a jaye and japes [jokes] telle
> He schall be lenede and louede and lett [esteemed] of a while
> Wele more þan þe man that made it hymseluen.
> Bot neuer þe lattere at the laste when ledys bene knawen;
> [But nevertheless, at the end, when men are revealed for what they are]
> Werke wittnesse will bere who wirche kane beste.
> [Work will bear witness to those who know how to work best].

(Lines 24–30)

Disagreement exists over the transcription of the word "lenede" in this attack (line 27). Stephanie Trigg convincingly argues that despite most editors' proclivity for transcribing this word as "leuede" (believed), "lenede is the more likely reading, with the sense 'listened to, attended to,' or even 'given permission, allowed (to read)' or 'rewarded.'"[23] The narrator's implication, a few lines later, that poetic invention is a form of "wirche" supports this final reading of "rewarded" and draws attention to the idea that authorial labor participates somehow in fourteenth-century financial systems. On the other hand, if the original transcription is correct, the narrator still will be rewarded, albeit in a less material manner, in that he will be believed. In either case, the speaker's complaint alludes to personal property as he anticipates the day when poetic work will be properly credited.

Collectively, Solomon's prophecies concerning walls and the narrator's allusions to identifiable poetic inventions imply a utopian vision of England in which landed property is clearly circumscribed by partitions and the intellectual property of poets is respected. In this version of future ownership, both forms of possession will be unassailable to the appropriations of others. By additionally indicating that all men will be "knawen" in this allusion to the Final Judgment, the narrator reminds his readers that he values the availability of information. The introduction to *Wynnere and Wastoure* thus articulates a wish for the walled-off partitioning of landed and intellectual property while simultaneously encouraging an almost communal model of knowledge in which data are transparent and readily available to all—in which men "bene knawen" and words are no longer ambiguous and held "withinn." In this version of the ideal future, property will be private and information public.

23. Trigg, *Wynnere and Wastoure*, 19 n. 27.

The discrepancy between the narrator's initial complaint regarding textual ambiguity and his eventual reliance on linguistic equivocation throughout the body of this poem encourages, of course, a reconsideration of what is stated in the prologue and what is enacted in the rest of the text. By poem's end, Wynnere, Wastoure, and the king model the importance of keeping information private in order to maintain private property. The text proves that a paradigm of public data and private property is untenable and ultimately reveals the necessary relationship between the maintenance of bounded private property and the restriction of information about this property.

Critics have generated many different arguments regarding what Wynnere's and Wastoure's opposing views represent. A binary that has failed to garner critical attention, however, is Wynnere's apparent support of enclosed property and Wastoure's contradictory advocacy of unbound chattels. This becomes apparent as Wynnere's quixotic reminiscences are placed alongside Wastoure's more realistic predictions in the poem. Wynnere evokes a time of overabundance of livestock, a period when men could hunt deer only to let them go and catch them again at a later point—"To lache [catch] and to late goo, to lightten þaire hertis" (line 406). This Edenic world is one in which nothing is consumed but is maintained in a static state for perpetually renewing pleasure. Wastoure chooses to cast his eyes forward and describes a world with finite resources. In his own version of carpe diem, Wastoure thus urges,

> Take þe coppe as it comes, þe case as it falles,
> For whoso lyfe may lengeste lympes to feche [lives the longest gets to fetch]
> Woodd þat he waste schall to warmen his helys [heels]
> Ferrere þan his fadir dide by fyvetene myle.

> (Lines 448–51)

Unlike Wynnere's unchanging and overstocked doe-filled woodlands, these forests will themselves be diminished with the passing of time, forcing men to travel further in order to meet their needs for firewood. In all, Wynnere tries to arrest time as he hearkens back to a golden age of self-replenishing goods, while Wastoure appears more realistic and thus more rational in his description of a world in which people use up material objects over time.

The implications of Wynnere's and Wastoure's opposed attitudes regarding objects such as deer and firewood become apparent when one considers the roles of such viewpoints in the composition of two very different systems of social organization—one that views wealth as a treasure and one that views wealth as a tool. Tracing the development of these differing models, Lester Little predicates the transition from a "wealth-as-treasure" econ-

omy to a "wealth-as-tool" economy on the bounded or unbounded state of wealth. Little notes, "It is of considerable interest that the last known buried treasure hoards of eastern and northern Europe date from the 1060s, and that about the same time in those same regions, the minting of coins began."[24] This move from burying wealth and hermetically sealing it off from consumption to generating coins for exchange and trade signals an important shift in social organization. It appears that Wynnere, with his vision of never-ending deer, espouses an economy in which wealth remains unconsumed, like treasure. On the other hand, by envisioning his descendants traveling great distances in order to collect and use firewood, Wastoure participates in an economic mentality that views wealth as consumed and circulated.

Even more strikingly, and yet more subtly, Wynnere himself is described as closed up within a confined space, whereas Wastoure travels freely around the countryside. Wastoure at one point remarks that Wynnere does not know the plight of poor men because Wynnere does not get out much, and he assures his rival that "if thou wydwhare [far and wide] scholde walke and waytten the sothe [observe the truth] / Thou scholdeste reme for rewthe [weep for pity], in siche ryfe [numbers] ben the pore" (lines 257–58). Wynnere, on the other hand, exclaims, "Loo! this wrechide Wastoure that wydewhare [far and wide] is knawenn" (line 326). Wynnere and Wastoure are antithetically itinerant and confined, thus reiterating their respective associations with interior and exterior spaces.

Wynnere complains, "I gedir, I glene and he lattys goo sone, / I pryke and I pryne [stitch] and he the purse opynes" (lines 231–32). Using verbs like "pryke" and "pryne," which are both used to describe the act of sewing, Wynnere contrasts the action of sewing a purse shut with Wastoure's attempts to open it up. Wastoure presents a different view on enclosure as he denigrates the act of hoarding: "When Cristes peple hath parte hym payes [it pleases him] alle the better / Then here [More than if goods here] ben hodirde and hidde and happede in cofers" (lines 297–298). Repeatedly, Wynnere appears to support the maintenance of perimeters, whereas Wastoure encourages circulating goods outside the confines of constrictive spaces.

Written as a debate, *Wynnere and Wastoure* ostensibly works to construct some kind of resolution between these two disparate views on the treatment of possessions. Conflicting interpretations of the poem attest that this resolution is fairly ambiguous.[25] Just as the poem never explic-

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24. Lester K. Little, *Religious Poverty and the Profit Economy in Medieval Europe* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1978), 8.

25. Nicholas Jacobs, for instance, argues that this is a conclusive debate in which the narrator eventually supports Wastoure's argument. See Nicolas Jacobs, "The Typology of

itly reveals whether winning or wasting is better, so too does it fail to judge overtly in favor of circulating people and possessions inside or outside boundaries. It is this failure that reveals the true argument of the work; by establishing the binary between outside and inside as reflected in these two major allegorical characters and by focusing on their disagreement about whether to traverse the lines constitutive of interior and exterior spaces, the narrator insists on the very existence of a dividing line that separates inside from outside.

The crossing of boundaries and the attention to boundaries it evokes occur throughout the poem. Britton Harwood has recently pointed out that the poem quickly and repeatedly articulates "undecidability . . . between exterior and interior" and cites multiple examples of such vacillations:

> On the one hand, the opposing armies have come from elsewhere: the messenger tells them, "ȝe knowe noughte this kythe ne the kynge ryche" (134). On the other these same armies get redescribed as "ledis [men] of this londe" (152). . . . The messenger, an actor in what the narrator observes, took over description of the armies as if he stood outside the action, only to revert later to actor (195). And the dreaming narrator sees the king call for wine, once everyone has mounted to the royal pavilion, and then goes inside the action to join them all in drinking.[26]

The line between inside and outside gets crossed again and again. Such perimeters carve the poem itself into multiple subsections. The body of the text is divided into "fits," and the entire dreamscape is doubly locked in by perimeters as the narrator not only "lowked" (line 45) his eyes in sleep but, once dreaming, saw the entire action of his dream take place in a space that is "loken by a lawe" (enclosed by earthworks) (line 49).

This focus on boundaries reveals *Wynnere and Wastoure*'s support of private property; the disagreement over crossing or not crossing boundaries reveals that Wynnere and Wastoure do agree on one thing—demarcated property. The characters' disagreement ultimately reveals their belief in maintaining their individually held goods. Lois Roney has suggested that both Wynnere and Wastoure continuously describe a single, national unit of goods in their respective orations. Roney cites Wyn-

Debate and the Interpretation of *Wynnere and Wastoure*," *Review of English Studies* 36 (1985): 481–500. Thomas Bestul, on the other hand, argues that neither Wynnere nor Wastoure is meant to "win" the debate, as each represents a fallacious argument. See Thomas Bestul, *Satire and Allegory in "Wynnere and Wastoure"* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1974), 1–121. Thomas L. Reed, meanwhile, argues that while the debate is ultimately unresolved, the effect is not wholly pernicious, and he suggests that the irresolution in this poem categorizes the text in the more lighthearted category of "recreational" literature. See Reed, *Middle English Debate Poetry*, 261–93.

26. Harwood, "Anxious over Peasants," 299.

nere's outburst, "This wikkede weryed [accursed] thefe that Wastoure
men calles, / That if he life may longe this lande will he stroye" (lines
242–43), and argues that his reference to "this lande" alludes to a unitary
stock of goods shared between the personifications.[27] When Wynnere
and Wastoure's language is historically contextualized and considered
in terms of these men's social standing, such language proves to be
empty rhetoric. A couple of lines later, for example, Wynnere reveals
what he means by the rather undefined territory of "this lande" as he
defines exactly what property is being destroyed. Admonishing his
debate partner, Wynnere employs a personal pronoun to further specify
exactly what type of destruction he is so concerned about, as he fumes,
"With thi sturte [violent behavior] and thi stryffe thou stroyeste vp my
gudes" (line 265). It would seem, then, that the initial concern Wynnere
reveals for the nation's property actually conceals solicitude for his own
possessions; the subterfuge achieved by Wynnere's generalized com-
plaint is ultimately revealed by the increasing specificity of his claims.

Moreover, his language is strikingly similar to concerns voiced in four-
teenth-century labor legislation. These multiple statutes, promulgated
after the Black Death, appeal to the good of the commons while they
speak to the concerns of the upper levels of English society. One statute,
for example, sounds similar to Wynnere's attack, as it attempts to control
poor vagrants by deceptively claiming that they cause "great impoverish-
ment, destruction, and ruin of the commons."[28] Wastoure echoes such
laws even more consistently as he refers to goods with a first-person
plural pronoun. He remarks, for example, "With oure festes and oure
fare we feden the pore" (line 295). Wastoure's references to landed
wealth and conspicuous sartorial displays place him firmly in the upper
echelons of English society and align him even more firmly with the self-
interested "royal we" of the labor statutes.[29] Wynnere and Wastoure's
rhetoric conceals a concern for sequestered property.

MISSING METRICS: MISINFORMATION IN
WYNNERE AND WASTOURE

In almost all of the passages cited above, the establishment or crossing of
boundaries relates in some way to the acquisition of knowledge. When
Wynnere and Wastoure bring up their differing itinerant tendencies, for
instance, knowledge is at stake: Wynnere does not comprehend the sever-

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27. Lois Roney, "*Winner and Waster*'s 'Wyse Wordes': Teaching Economics and Nation-
alism in Fourteenth-Century England," *Speculum* 69 (1994): 1085.
28. R. B. Dobson, *The Peasants' Revolt of 1381* (London: Macmillan, 1970), 73.
29. Roney, "Wyse Wordes," 1095.

ity of poverty in the realm because he remains inside, and Wastoure is "knawenn" far and wide because he moves around outdoors. In addition, Wastoure's alliterative verbs pertaining to sewing shut his purse—"hordide," "hidde," and "happede"—all connote epistemological concealing.[30] As these examples reveal and as the reiteration of words such as "knewe," "knawen," "ken," "wete," and "teche" throughout *Wynnere and Wastoure* suggest, the acquisition and provision of knowledge is a recurrent theme and focus of this poem. This text may thus not only be "intellectually didactic" in its attempts to impart knowledge but may also self-referentially be about knowledge and the various methods of acquiring it.[31] The narrator ends his prologue by alluding to the accessibility of information at the Last Judgment and reminds readers that this momentous event will reveal data so that "ledys bene knawen," suggesting that his utopian vision is one filled with accessible information. The rest of the poem interrogates this desire for accessibility, however, as the narrator's dream depicts a community in which data are actually covered up and not readily available. This allows for the maintenance of bounded property that the poem supports. Indeed, scanning *Wynnere and Wastoure* for instances of the verb "to know" reveals an intriguing trend by which the dissemination of information and the acquisition of knowledge is often delayed or even thwarted.

This first occurs as the narrator takes stock of his dream's landscape and, after noting both Wynnere's and Wastoure's armies, perceives a decorated tent on a hill and a knight in the valley underneath. The description of these two takes up approximately twenty-five lines as the narrator first outlines the coins and lettering adorning the structure he sees and then launches into a detailed description of the knight stationed below. Elucidating this man's accoutrements, the speaker presents what amounts to the soldier's heraldry and, immediately after doing so, appears to return his gaze back to the royal pavilion as he asserts, "And by þe cabane I knew the knyghte that I see" (line 83). Smith's analysis of this scene and its connection to heraldic symbolism focuses mainly on this tent and its references to Edward III's Order of the Garter. Smith states, "The currency of the heraldic sign in this poem . . . is expressed in

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30. "Hiden" is defined as "To keep (a fact, a condition, an action) secret" (Hans Kurath, Sherman M. Kuhn, and Robert E. Lewis, eds., *Middle English Dictionary* [Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1952], s.v. "hiden," 3a). "Horden" figuratively signifies concealing the truth about sin (ibid., s.v. "horden," 1b). Similarly, in the Towneley *Second Shepherd's Play*, two pastors comment about hiding the truth regarding identities: "Me thoght he was lapt in a wolfe skyn / So are many hapt now namely within" (*Second Shepherd's Play*, lines 368–69, in *Medieval Drama: An Anthology*, ed. Greg Walker [Oxford: Blackwell, 1990], 49).

31. Roney, "Wyse Wordes," 1072.

terms that guarantee its widest possible circulation, a sign that is physically imposing and topically remote yet instantly intelligible."[32] However, there appears to be a delay in the decipherment of these various heraldic signs. Not only does it take some twenty lines for the narrator to identify the pavilion's iconography and utter his declaration of recognition, but his pronouncement regarding the knight's identity seems oddly displaced as it references not the knight himself but rather the cabin sitting far up on the hill. Instead of being an instantaneous example of comprehension, this passage relates a relatively protracted and confusing path to knowledge acquisition. In turn, this narrative postponement of recognition suggests that the symbols constitutive of such insignia are not transparently legible.

A more blatant example of misplaced recognition occurs when the king sends his herald to speak to the armies he sees spread before him, in order to put a stop to their impending battle. Relaying the king's wishes to Wynnere and Wastoure, the herald informs the men that it is a breach of law to bear arms against each other. He then excuses them for their trespass by stating, "Bot sen ʒe knowe noghte this kythe [country] ne the kynge ryche, / He will forgiffe ʒow this gilt of his grace one [through his grace alone]" (lines 134–35). Initially, it appears that Wynnere and Wastoure lack the pertinent knowledge to live according to this country's laws based on their status as foreigners. Eventually, however, it becomes clear that it is actually the king who lacks integral knowledge as Wynnere and Wastoure correct his assumptions and respond to the messenger: "Wele knowe we the kyng, he clothes vs bothe / And hase vs fosterde and fedde this fyve and twenty wyntere" (lines 205–6). This mention of their fostered status, which referred specifically to the maintenance of household servants and the king's provision of food and clothing, indicates that both Wynnere and Wastoure are members of the king's domestic unit. Rather than being outsiders, then, these two men affirm that they are householders of the king.

As this incident suggests, the poem's king himself does not possess the tools necessary for identifying his own householders, let alone his own subjects. It appears that he has not successfully rendered his people, places, and things "legible" by means of the standardization outlined earlier in this essay. Paired with the heraldic symbols that are meant to identify men instantaneously—but do not—these moments of misrecognition suggest that the king of England has not instituted a form of public knowledge that is readily legible to all.

This absence is historically paralleled in the various administrative promulgations generated throughout this period that attempted but failed to establish widespread and intelligible systems of identification. The *Statuta*

32. Smith, *Arts of Possession*, 85.

de victu et vestitu (1363) serves as a prime example of legalese that attempted to regulate the economy by controlling the use of inanimate signs and by delimiting the range of their meanings. In one of its sections, the statute attempts to standardize merchandise as it encourages goldsmiths to use quality materials and voices its intention to ensure that the craft does so: "And every Master Goldsmith shall have a Mark [*marche*] by himself, and the same Mark shall be known by them which shall be assigned by the King to survey their Work and Allay: And that the said Goldsmiths set not their Mark upon their Works till the said Surveyors have made their Assay, as shall be ordained by the King and his Council; and after the Assay made, the Surveyors shall set the King's Mark, and after the Goldsmith his Mark, for which he will answer."[33] The primary meaning of the word "mark" in Middle English was "that which marks a boundary or limit; a boundary stone, etc." It is fitting then, that this same term was employed in statutes like the one above to denote signs that sat at the inside/outside boundary of merchandisable goods and that served as exterior, visible signs of their interior and intrinsic quality. The *Middle English Dictionary* defines such marks as "the trademark of a craftsman or tradesman set on products, merchandise, and the like for purposes of identification and guarantee of quality; the stamp certifying official approval as regards the weight or measurement of merchandise."[34] They are thus intended to be a universal metric, administered by the king, by which all buyers may readily identify the quantity and quality of their potential purchases.

In *Wynnere and Wastoure*, however, such marks do not succeed in fulfilling this role. In his description of Wynnere's and Wastoure's armies, the king's herald notes the presence of merchants on Wynnere's side and remarks on the banners these men hold:

> And othere synes [signs] I seghe sett appon lofte [up high],
> Some wittnesse of wolle [depict wool] and some of wyne tounnes [wine casks],
> Some of merchandes merkes so many and so thikke
> That I ne wote [could not know] in my witt for alle this werlde riche
> Whatt segge [man] vnder the sonne can the sowme rekken.

(Lines 188–92)

Smith reads these marks as the heraldic-like signs that merchants used to represent themselves.[35] In addition to being self-chosen signifiers, marks could also be externally imposed signals of quality and value, as the refer-

33. *The Statutes of the Realm* (London: Dawsons, 1963), 380.
34. Kurath, Kuhn, and Lewis, *Middle English Dictionary*, s.v. "mark," 1b, 5a.
35. Smith also admits, "A few merchants' arms clearly are heraldic, but most are linked semiotically to the marks that merchants use to stamp their merchandise, or to impress seals" (Smith, *Arts of Possession*, 94).

ences to "marches" in the statute above suggests. As one historian notes, "In addition to proclaiming the ownership of goods, the mark came to stand for the integrity of the merchant and quality of his goods."[36] The statute requires that merchandise comply with established standards of weight and measurement; the marks demanded by this law signal numerical concerns and are reckoned in a computational sense. The speaker in *Wynnere and Wastoure* alludes to such commercial marks when he states that he has attempted to "rekken" them. He implies, however, that administrative attempts to regulate these marks are unsuccessful. Slipping into the trope of inexpressibility and insisting that no man can "reckon" these signs, the messenger indicates that the abundance of such marks ultimately renders them both uncountable and unnarratable: "That I ne wote [could not know] in my witt for alle this werlde riche / Whatt segge [man] vnder the sonne can the sowme rekken" (lines 191–92).

The poem simply reports these cognitive delays without evaluating or analyzing them. They are presented in a straightforward manner without any hint of anxiety or concern regarding their appearance in this poem. Rather than presenting such misinterpretations as worrisome events, the narrator reports them as tropes and everyday occurrences. Despite the fact that it decries textual occlusion in its preface, the poem allows semiotic uncertainty to occur repeatedly and without comment in the text's body.

This poem thus differs from other late medieval texts in that it does not emphasize the ill effects of semiotic ambiguity. Langland, for example, who may very well have read *Wynnere and Wastoure*'s references to winning and wasting before or while he wrote *Piers Plowman*, is thoroughly concerned with the legibility of people, places, and things as he ponders deeply the stability of various identifying markers.[37] *Wynnere and Wastoure* exhibits none of these concerns as its narrative unfolds and disproves the claim that the poem depicts and decries interpretive crises. Instead, it ultimately it shows that such semiotic uncertainty may have positive results.

This point is driven home when one considers that this poem may describe the household of the king himself. Historical records indicate that when the monarch's personal household information was at stake, knowledge about it was privatized. An examination of the royal household accounts, for instance, reveals that these documents were intended

36. F. A. Girling, *English Merchants' Marks: A Field Survey of Marks Made by Merchants and Tradesmen in England between 1400 and 1700* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), 9.

37. See, e.g., Middleton, "Acts of Vagrancy," 317. For an argument supporting the relationship between *Piers Plowman* and *Wynnere and Wastoure*, including questions of dating, see David Lawton, "The Unity of Middle English Alliterative Poetry," *Speculum* 58 (1983): 80–81. Hanna similarly argues for a relationship between these two texts (Hanna, *London Literature*, 259–64).

to be secret; few such records remain. This reflects, in part, the "strong feeling that the king's business was essentially secret."[38] There was, of course, resistance to such privacy by the Commons; between 1330 and 1370, Westminster worked to document and publish official acts in both official and unofficial forms, with the aim of making the king more strictly accountable to the rule of the law. Later, *Richard the Redeless* (ca. 1400) refers to a "secret" parliament and may have been reflecting the king's decision to have Parliament meet "far from the center of bureaucratic administration in Westminster" when he convened the 1398 parliament in Shrewsbury.[39] This literary reference illustrates the idealized transparency associated with bureaucracy and the lengths to which even the king would go to avoid such openness when it came to the dissemination of certain information. It appears that privacy played an integral, albeit contradictory, role in the bureaucratic standardization of knowledge when the institution of the household was involved. Everyone wanted to count possessions for administrative purposes, but nobody wanted to be counted as part of the administrative process.

At the end of the poem, the king attempts to resolve the argument presented to him by physically separating Wynnere and Wastoure. He orders Wynnere to reside overseas with the pope and commands that Wastoure retire to the London neighborhood of Cheapside. Further delineating Wastoure's duties in the city, the king explicitly instructs him:

Where any petit beryn [insignificant man] þurgh þe burgh [city] passe.
Teche hym to þe tauerne till he tayte worthe [becomes merry],
Doo him drynke al nyȝte þat he dry be at morow,
Sythen ken hym to þe crete [Then show him Cretan wine] to comforth his vaynes,
Brynge hym to Bred Strete, bikken [beckon] þi fynger,
. . . .
Bot late hym paye or he passe [before he goes], and pik [rob] hym so clene
þat fynd a peny in his purse and put owte his eghe.
[That if anyone find a penny in his purse, let him be damned]
When þat [he] es dronken and don, duell þer no lenger,
Bot teche hym owt of the townn to trotte aftir more.

<div align="right">(Lines 476–80, 485–89)</div>

This relatively short passage contains a remarkably high density of references to the dissemination of information as it repeatedly plays with words such as "teche" (which primarily means "to instruct") and "ken"

38. T. F. Tout, *Chapters in the Administrative History of Mediaeval England: The Wardrobe, the Chamber and the Small Seals*, 6 vols. (New York: Longmans Green, 1920–33), 1:35.

39. Kathryn Kerby-Fulton and Steven Justice, "Langlandian Reading Circles and the Civil Service in London and Dublin, 1380–1427," *New Medieval Literatures* 1 (1998): 78–80.

(which also has associations with "knowing" and "knowledge"). This repetition suggests that the physical act of directing or leading that Wastoure is meant to do overlaps with the act of instructing.

In actuality, however, this order entreats Wastoure to obfuscate information rather than to clarify it, as it clearly calls on him to fleece unsuspecting victims. Moreover, these directives contradict a highly influential decretal of canon law entitled *Placuit*. *Placuit* originated in 884 as a capitulary and appeared in a number of intermediate collections before passing into Gregory IX's thirteenth-century *Decretals*.[40] In its final version, *Placuit* calls on priests to "admonish people to be hospitable and not sell dearer to those who pass through (*non carius vendant transeuntibus*) than they sell for in the market; otherwise, transients should report to a priest so that, by his order, they sell to them with kindness."[41] As one of the integral sources cited in arguments regarding the contentious issue of the just price throughout the Middle Ages, this decretal was repeated in various legal texts and documents and was itself far from obscure. Despite its notoriety, however, the king blatantly appears to violate the decree when he instructs Wastoure to target men who "thurgh the burgh passe." The king's intended victims appear to be the very transients that *Placuit* aims to protect. He concludes his directive by telling Wastoure to lead such men out of the city after charging them inflated prices. These allusions to passing through and leading out collectively suggest that the duped men will all be outsiders to London. Thus the monarch, as depicted in *Wynnere and Wastoure*, not only depends on the interior/exterior dyad to solve his problems but actually employs the obfuscation rendered feasible by this physical opposition for fiscal advantage.[42]

Indeed, the title characters' assigned posts, antithetically inside and outside England, appear to be the temporary solution to the debate that constitutes this text. Wynnere is instructed to cross the watery boundaries of England's perimeter, as the king states, "Wende, Wynnere, þi waye ouer the wale stremys [swift streams], / Passe forthe by Paris to þe pope of Rome" (lines 460–61). Meanwhile, as discussed above, Wastoure is directed

40. For more on the history of *Placuit* and its inclusion in the *Decretals*, see Odd Langhom, *The Merchant in the Confessional: Trade and Price in the Pre-Reformation Penitential Handbooks* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 57.

41. Ibid. See also Odd Langholm, *Economics in the Medieval Schools: Wealth, Exchange, Value, Money and Usury according to the Paris Theological Tradition, 1200–1350* (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 136.

42. This act is itself obscured by the ambiguous language of this passage as it provides the instructions, "Late hym paye or he passe, and pik hym so clene" (line 485). The agency of this financial action becomes obscured with the verb "late" (translated as "allow" or "let") since it is ultimately unclear whether travelers are willingly allowed to pay or unwillingly "picked" clean of their cash (thanks to David Aers for pointing out the ambiguity of this passage).

to the inner workings of London, "into the Chepe," where he is instructed to wait inside a chamber for further instructions. The king is ultimately "practical and self-serving" in his decision to send Wynnere to the pope and Wastoure to Cheapside as he garners additional income from both separated characters.[43] In all, the king depends on boundaries that ensure that information remains isolated.

As a whole, then, *Wynnere and Wastoure* suggests that the prologue's call for a transparency akin to that established in the Final Judgment may not be true goal of this text. Instead, it illustrates how households, even the king's household, depend on the obstruction of information, which is predicated on inner and outer spheres. At the same time, the poem suggests that this fact itself must be concealed with a rhetoric that extols the freedom of information. Prior to relegating his subjects to inside and outside positions, the king informs Wastoure, "þe more þou wastis þi wele [waste your wealth], þe better þe Wynnere lykes [Wynnere likes you]" (line 495). This concluding aphorism, itself part of the "final judgment" of the text, may be *Wynnere and Wastoure*'s most blatant example of words that "cover." The previous debate has unequivocally illustrated that the more Wastoure wastes, the more Wynnere dislikes him, since the poem dramatizes the intractable hatred they have for each other. The king's adage seems to obscure this fact; it appears to cover up what has actually transpired in the poem. Language may appear to break down the boundaries that separate Wynnere and Wastoure, but in reality the king must rely on boundaries that separate both inner and outer regions of space and information.

43. Nolan, "With Tresone Withinn," 20.