Sword in hand, the angel of the Lord “sketched seven ‘Ps’” upon the forehead of Dante Alighieri. The seven marks that Dante receives in Canto IX of *Purgatorio* symbolize the seven deadly sins of Catholicism and represent the permanent scars that non-repented sin can leave upon the purity of one’s soul. After carving the Ps, the angel of the Lord informs Dante that prior to entering Heaven he must be sure to “wash these scars” off of his face, since no soul can be in the presence of God without proper purgation of his mortal and sinful ways. Furthermore, the angel warns Dante that once he has crossed the threshold and entered Purgatory he must focus upon moving forward since “those who look behind return outside.” Again, the words of the angel are symbolic, revealing that in order to enter Heaven one must be solely dedicated to salvation, no longer yearning to return to a sinful lifestyle. With these words of warning in mind, Dante, with the aid of his guide, the legendary poet Virgil, leaves ante-Purgatory and begins his climb of divine purification that, if successful, will allow him entrance into *Paradiso*.

By the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the seven deadly sins—pride, envy, wrath, sloth, avarice, gluttony, and lust—were an established aspect of medieval popular belief. The seven deadly sins were a *topos* for medieval European literature, appearing as the foundational structure for the second book in Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, *Purgatorio* and also as focuses in Geoffrey Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales* and John Gower’s *Confessio Amantis*. Additionally, the seven deadly sins became one of the most important mechanisms for medieval preaching. The primary spiritual responsibility of

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2. The seven deadly sins that Dante refers to are pride, envy, wrath, sloth, avarice, gluttony, and lust. To see a complete map of the seven deadly sins and their ordering within Mount Purgatory see Dante, *Purgatorio*, lxviii-lxix. See Appendix 1 for a diagram of Dante’s Mount Purgatory as it appears within the Kirkpatrick translation.


medieval Catholic priests was to ensure that every baptized soul, and therefore every member of the Roman Catholic Church, was saved from eternal damnation in Hell. Preachers of the Middle Ages had to develop persuasive yet simplistic ways to preach the importance of living a virtuous life to a largely undereducated society, for which the seven deadly sins provided the perfect solution. Through analysis of medieval literature and medieval Catholic sermons, specifically those written or preached in the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries, it becomes clear that these two distinct and unique mediums had an equally influential role in developing and solidifying popular interpretations of the seven deadly sins during the Middle Ages, as exemplified through their concurrence that pride was the most spiritually dangerous of the seven deadly sins.

The historical study of the seven deadly sins in the English language began with Morton W. Bloomfield’s “The Origin of the Concept of the Seven Cardinal Sins” published in 1941. In this article, Bloomfield briefly acknowledges that “the Catholic teaching of the seven cardinal sins” was an important aspect of medieval popular belief. Bloomfield further argues that the concept of sins being “deadly” was rooted within a traditional Judeo-Christian philosophy that if one committed these sins and did not sincerely repent, then that individual’s soul would “die” and be exiled to Hell. While Bloomfield’s article provides little insight into the study of the seven deadly sins in Medieval Europe, it was essential in fostering his own interest in the seven deadly sins, which eventually culminated in his publication of The Seven Deadly Sins: An Introduction to the History of a Religious Concept, with Special Reference to Medieval English Literature. Within this colossal work, Bloomfield argues that “[m]edieval man was fascinated... by the sins... [and] he believed them” to be corporeal and real. According to Bloomfield, the individual’s strong belief in the reality of the seven deadly sins made them a quintessential aspect of medieval Catholic ideology. Finally, in devoting an entire chapter to the representation of the seven deadly sins in fourteenth-century literature, Bloomfield emphasizes the importance that the writings of Dante, Chaucer, and

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6 Many handbooks for medieval priests stressed that every action a priest took towards the members of his parish must be done to ensure the salvation of his parishioners. For an example see John Shinners, ed. “A Handbook for Parish Priests” in Medieval Popular Religion, 1000-1500: A Reader, 2nd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press 2009), 14-18.

7 Morton W. Bloomfield, “The Origin of the Concept of the Seven Cardinal Sins,” The Harvard Theological Review 40 (1941): 121-128. It is important to note that Bloomfield uses “cardinal” and “deadly” interchangeably when referring to the seven deadly sins within this article, see Bloomfield, “Origin of Seven Cardinal Sins,” 121. However, for consistency, this paper will always use the phrase “seven deadly sins” unless part of a quotation.

8 Ibid., 121, 127.


10 Ibid., xiv.

11 Ibid., xiv.

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Gower, along with other writers, had in reinforcing the medieval Catholic’s belief that these seven “deadly” sins existed within the corporeal world.  

Siegfried Wenzel expanded upon Bloomfield’s analysis of the relationship between the seven deadly sins and medieval literature, focusing on how these authors interpreted the seven deadly sins and why authors incorporated them in their writings. In “Dante’s Rationale for the Seven Deadly Sins (“Purgatorio” XVII),” Wenzel analyzes the logic behind Dante’s structure of Purgatory. Wenzel specifically focuses on how Dante’s structure is based on the relationship between each of the seven deadly sins and the emotion of love. In “The Source of Chaucer’s Seven Deadly Sins,” Wenzel attempts to determine which version of William Peraldus’s *Summa de vittis et virtutibus* was used as the organizational model for the “Parson’s Tale,” one of the stories in *The Canterbury Tales*. Although brief, the analyses that Wenzel provides in his two articles contribute essential insights into the origins of the seven deadly sins in medieval European literature.

With the exception of several minor articles, the publication of “The Source of Chaucer’s Seven Deadly Sins” in 1974 marks the beginning of a several decades long absence of historical writings that analyze the seven deadly sins as a medieval popular belief. In fact, this scarcity of analyses and historical studies concerning the seven deadly sins does not end until 2007, with the publication of *The Seven Deadly Sins: From Communities to Individuals*. This collection of twelve critical essays analyzes the influence that the seven deadly sins had on medieval politics, economics, daily cultural practices and religious popular beliefs. The purpose of Richard Newhauser’s collection of essays is to explore “the medieval development of the seven deadly sins as... ethical ideas which experienced new and constantly changing definitions,”

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12 Ibid., 157-201.
14 Ibid., 530, 532.
15 Wenzel, “The Source of Chaucer’s Seven Deadly Sins,” *Traditio* 30 (1974): 351-378. William Peraldus was an influential thirteenth-century, Dominican theologian whose chief work was the *Summa de vittis et virtutibus*, a treatise that described and analyzed the seven chief vices and the opposing seven chief virtues. This text was essential not only in shaping the narrative of Chaucer’s “Parson’s Tale,” but also may have influenced Dante’s *Purgatorio*; Wenzel, “Dante’s Rationale,” 531-553.
16 One such example of these minor articles is Alan J. Fletcher’s “Performing the Seven Deadly Sins: How One Late-Medieval English Preacher Did It.” Fletcher’s analysis is only about only four pages long since most of the article is a reprint of the sermon he analyzed. Furthermore, while insightful to the rationale behind the style of preaching that late-medieval Catholic preachers used, Fletcher does not place the event in any historical context nor does he analyze the seven deadly sins as a popular belief in the Middle Ages. However, it should be acknowledged that Fletcher wrote his article for a journal of literature and English, not a journal of history. Alan J. Fletcher, “Preaching the Seven Deadly Sins: How One Late-Medieval English Preacher Did It” *Leeds Studies In English* 29 (1998): 89-108.
17 Richard Newhauser, ed. *The Seven Deadly Sins: From Communities to Individuals* (Boston: Brill, 2007).
thus reinforcing that the seven deadly sins played an essential role in influencing everyday medieval life.\textsuperscript{18}

However, what is perhaps one of the most obvious inadequacies in the historiography of the seven deadly sins is the absence of analyses focusing on medieval interpretations of the sin of pride. In fact, within the significant historical scholarship of the last forty years in this area, there was only one article published that centered its analysis on pride. In “Pride Goes Before the Fall: Social Change and the Vices in Latin Christendom,” Lester K. Little argues that a growth in relative wealth in the Middle Ages, both among members of the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church and members of its faithful, began an ideological transition with avarice replacing pride as the worst of the seven deadly sins.\textsuperscript{19} Little does not focus his analysis on the reasons pride was originally considered the most dangerous sin, but rather focuses on the evolution of medieval Catholic philosophy that allowed avarice to smoothly transition into the spot of deadliest sin. Even though Little’s article presents a unique perspective on medieval interpretations of pride, it is apparent that there is still a void within the historical study of the role of pride in medieval Europeans’ popular religious beliefs.

To fully comprehend the importance that the sin of pride had in both literature and preaching during the Middle Ages, one must first understand how pride fit into medieval Europe’s conceptualization of the realm of Purgatory. Jacques Le Goff, author of \textit{The Birth of Purgatory}, argues that Purgatory’s creation in the late twelfth century was a critical change in Church doctrine because it not only “offer[ed] a second chance to attain eternal life” if one did not live a pure and holy life on Earth, but also promised that spiritual “immortality [could] be achieved in the life of a single individual.”\textsuperscript{20} Le Goff contends that the structure of Purgatory itself—specifically Dante’s influential depiction of Purgatory as a mountain emerging from the Earth’s surface—is symbolic of one’s soul “[e]merging from Hell,” by choosing spiritual penance and repentance over eternal damnation.\textsuperscript{21} Furthermore, Le Goff argues that “the mountain of Purgatory rises towards Heaven,” symbolizing the spiritual ascension one makes through the different levels of purgation required to reach Paradise.\textsuperscript{22}

It is not shocking that Le Goff agrees that Dante’s \textit{Purgatorio} is one of the essential texts that establishes both the placement and structure of Purgatory, especially since \textit{Purgatorio} was written less than a century after the official “birth” of the concept. The spiritual importance of Dante’s conceptualization of Purgatory is apparent from the first lines of the poem, where Dante describes Purgatory as “that second realm/where human spirits purge themselves from

\textsuperscript{18}Ibid., 1.
\textsuperscript{20} Le Goff, 5; Additionally, Le Goff argues that Purgatory was not recognized as an official religious realm in Catholic doctrine until “1170 at the earliest,” Le Goff, 135.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 335.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 335.
Once in Purgatory, Dante expresses confusion as to why he feels a weight lifted off of him as he moves up from one terrace to another, to which an angel explains that any soul that ascends through Purgatory "will feel no strain but only sheer delight." This statement from the angel of the Lord not only implies that the climb up Mount Purgatory becomes easier as one is purged of each deadly sin, but also creates a general principle that while the act of purgation maybe hard or painful, the overall experience of being freed from one's mortal sin is both pleasurable and joyous. Furthermore, this ideal that climbing Purgatory becomes easier with each terrace allows Dante to reinforce the idea that the worst and most dangerous sins to one's soul are those purged at the bottom of the mountain.

According to Dante's symbolic structure of Purgatory, pride is the worst of the seven deadly sins, and therefore, it is the first terrace that a soul must overcome in its journey to Heaven. In Canto XVII, Dante, through the voice of Virgil, proposes a complex explanation as to why pride is the deadliest sin. Virgil argues that love is "the seed of penalties your deeds deserve," thus stating that all sin arises from a misplaced "perversion of love." The reason that pride is the worst sin is because it is a "love of one's neighbour's harm" since "the prideful hope, by keeping all their neighbours down, that they'll excel." Through this explanation, Dante, both figuratively and literally, created a structure for the severity of the seven deadly sins that would remain popular throughout much of the Middle Ages.

While Dante's Purgatorio was one of the most influential texts in justifying pride's position at the bottom of Mount Purgatory, Dante did not create a new theological concept. In fact, Dante's description of pride contains a strong connection to Saint Thomas Aquinas's description in the Summa Theologica, in which Aquinas argues that pride is humanity's worst sin. Aquinas not only cites the Book of Ecclesiastes, which states that "[p]ride is the beginning of all sin," but goes on to explain why this biblical verse held validity in medieval Catholic society. According to Aquinas, "pride is the appetite for excellence in excess of right reason" that can lead one to "boast...of having what [another] has not." This excess of pride, Aquinas argues, leads man to turn away from God through a prideful "unwilling[ness] to be subjected to God.
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and His Rule." Since absence from God is defined as one of the worst punishments possible, Aquinas would have seen voluntary absence from God, through prideful acts, as the worst sin humans could commit.

Beyond Aquinas's argument that pride was the worst of the seven deadly sins, there is another fascinating theological rationale for Dante's placement of pride at the bottom terrace of Mount Purgatory: pride caused Lucifer to rebel against God and be cast into Hell. Dante states, as he leaves the terrace of the prideful, that inscribed into the side of Mount Purgatory was the image of "one nobler creature than all creatures else, thrown down in a flashing thunder fire from Heaven." In fact, this theological reference that the sin of pride caused Lucifer's fall from Heaven is also alluded to in another piece of medieval literature, the Confessio Amantis. In the first section of Gower's text, the priest, referred to as the "Confessor," explains that pride often takes the form of disobedience. The Confessor states that disobedience "never bows" to God "nor to His words of law," a statement invoking the image of the disobedient Lucifer refusing to submit to God's wishes and then being cast out from Heaven.

The belief that an excess of pride led Lucifer to fall from grace to damnation was not only popularized in medieval literature, like Purgatorio and the Confessio Amantis, but was also a popular theme in medieval Catholic sermons. John Dygon, a fifteenth century English theologian, wrote a collection of sermons concerning the feast days of the saints. In his sermon for The Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Dygon contrasts the virtuous and humble nature of Mary with that of Lucifer, "the highest angel...brighter than all the others," who was "severely punished for his pride." In fact, this use of Lucifer's fall from Heaven as a symbolic image for the punishment of the

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31 Dante, Purgatorio, 12.25-27; Bloomfield states that, according to medieval Catholic belief, "rebellion against God" in any form was considered the worst sin possible, thus coinciding with the fall of Lucifer from grace to damnation. Bloomfield, Seven Deadly Sins, 74-75.
32 Within the narrative structure of the Confessio Amantis, Gower positions himself as the naïve, uneducated love-stricken Christian who confesses his sins to the Confessor, his local priest. Interestingly, this structure parallels Purgatorio, where Dante places himself in the position of the naïve, uneducated student who is learning how to remain spiritually faithful from his guide, Virgil. Since Gower is writing in the late fourteenth century it is possible that he read and was influenced by Dante's Purgatorio, Gower, 9-13.
33 Gower, 1.1238-1239. Also, it is important to note that Little argues that Saint Augustine, in De Genesi ad litteram libri duodecim ("The Literal Meaning of Genesis"), claims that the vice of avarice is what led to Lucifer's fall since avarice is what festered his "love of power," Little, 20; Finally, Chaucer does acknowledge that "contumacye" or rebelliousness is one of the versions of pride that man must guard against, yet Chaucer never directly ties this type of pride to the fall of Lucifer in the "Parson's Tale"; see Chaucer, 10.402.

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prideful was so popular that it even appeared within sermons preached at Catholic convents and in one particular sermon preached at "the enclosure" of Alice Huntingfield, a Catholic nun. The preacher stated that God is more forgiving of humans than he ever was of "that glorious Lucifer, who at a mere breath of pride fell and will forever be a devil."³⁶ It is not surprising that, with Lucifer’s constant connection to the sin of pride, medieval preachers referred to Lucifer as the "Prince of Pride."³⁷ Medieval preachers simultaneously tapped into and reinforced an extremely popular belief concerning the dangers of committing the seven deadly sins—a point that was emphasized through the habitual connection of pride, the deadliest of sins, to the fallen angel Lucifer, the greatest of sinners.

However, medieval beliefs concerning pride were not only present through disobedience or rebellion. In fact, medieval authors and theologians understood that prideful action took a variety of different forms and explored these different variations of pride within their writings. Dante, usually one of the most descriptive of medieval authors concerning the specific attributes and manifestations of the seven deadly sins, explicitly mentions only two types of pride in *Purgatorio*: arrogance and vainglory.³⁸ Following suit, Gower and Chaucer formulated lists, much more detailed than Dante’s, of the various forms of pride. Gower, within his *Confessio Amantis*, lists five specific types of pride: hypocrisy, disobedience, presumption, boastfulness, and vainglory.³⁹ While this list is almost completely different from Dante’s, there are two essential similarities. First, in his description of presumption, Gower states that this type of pride leads a man to "think himself beyond compare," which transforms any man into an arrogant creature, thus connecting his understanding of presumption to Dante’s interpretation of arrogance. Additionally, Gower orders these five manifestations of pride from least severe to most severe, stating that vainglory is the worst embodiment of pride because anyone who has "the vice that is Vain Glory/Does not remember Purgatory."⁴⁰ Gower’s definition of vainglory as a sin that prevents one from remembering the road to Heaven directly coincides with Dante’s claim that pride in the form of vainglory prevents one from repenting his or her sin and obtaining divine salvation from God.⁴¹

However, it is Chaucer, in the "Parson’s Tale," who takes the broadest approach to organizing and classifying the various types of pride.⁴² Chaucer opens the "Parson’s Tale" by explaining that there are too many versions of

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³⁸ Dante, *Purgatorio*, 11. 88-91
³⁹ Gower, 1.581-586, 1230-1234, 1877-1885, 2387-2403, 2671-2677.
⁴⁰Ibid., 1.2681-2682.
⁴² Chaucer died while working on *The Canterbury Tales* in 1400, only nine years after the composition date of the first known manuscript of *Confessio Amantis*. While it is impossible to speculate whether Chaucer knew of Gower’s work, it is probable that he would have been aware of Dante’s *Divine Comedy* and possibly used *Purgatorio* for a reference in crafting his own narrative concerning the seven deadly sins, Chaucer, xvi.
pride that can grow within the heart of man to create a complete, comprehensive list. Yet, Chaucer does recognize the importance of mentioning some of the most common versions of pride in "The Parson's Tale," such as arrogance, vainglory, disdain, strife, and rebelliousness. Perhaps the most unusual aspect of Chaucer's description of the versions of pride within "The Parson's Tale" is that he divides all the forms of pride into two distinct categories: pride "within the herte of man" and pride that is "withoute" or outside the heart of man. Chaucer makes a distinct point of stressing that external or material pride, as the "sinne of aornement or of apparaile" is just as bad, and in some cases may be worse than any of the traditional versions of pride that a man can commit, such as arrogance or vainglory.

Aquinas, in his *Summa Theologica*, states that there are four essential manifestations of pride that, at their essence, are types of arrogance and boastfulness. Through close examination of Aquinas’s list it is clear that Dante, Gower, and Chaucer’s overall interpretation of the essence of pride share a common theological base within Aquinas’s four classifications of pride. A man who exhibits pride when he “despises others and wishes to be singularly conspicuous,” represents Dante’s description of pride as misplaced love, where one loves the misfortune of another in order to promote self-love. Pride manifested in a man who “thinks he has from himself that which he has from God” parallels Gower’s definition of vainglory as the complete separation from God due to a “forgetting of Purgatory” and thus allowing one to believe he or she does not need God is his or her life. Finally, Aquinas’s version of pride as a man who “boast[s] of having what [another] has not,” directly ties to Chaucer’s description of external or material pride, where a man glorifies himself for what he has in his “worldly [estate],” especially if he has more than his neighbor.

Medieval authors and theologians clearly understood the importance of listing and classifying the different types of pride to help educate the average medieval Catholic on what actions were considered sinful and therefore, had to

43 "[N]o man kan owtey telle the nombre of the twigges, and of the harms that comen of pride;" Chaucer, 10.389.

44 The complete list is as follows “inobedience, avauntinge, ypocrisy, despit, arrogansce, impudence, swelling of herte, insolence, elacioun, inpacience, strif, contumacye, presumpciou, irreverence, pertinacye [and] veinegolrye.” In modern English this list reads as follows: disobedience, boastfulness, hypocrisy, disdain, arrogance, impudence, swelling of the heart, insolence, self-esteem, impatience, strife, rebelliousness, presumption, irreverence, obstinacy, and vainglory. Chaucer, 10.391; Additionally, for a detailed explanation of what each version of pride entails see Chaucer, 10.392-406.

45 Chaucer, 10. 410.

46 Ibid., 10.432.

47 The four types of pride that Pope Gregory IX codified and Aquinas defends are: “a man [who believes] he has from himself which he has from God,” a man who “believes that which he has received from [God in Heaven] to be due to his own merits,” a man who is in the habit of “boasting of having what [another] has not,” and finally, a man who “despises others and wishes to be singularly conspicuous,” Aquinas, *Summa Theologica: Treatise of the Cardinal Virtues*, 162.4.


49 Gower, 1.2682.

50 Chaucer, 10.405.

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be avoided. However, medieval authors, and especially medieval preachers, also used vivid and frightening imagery of the evil nature of pride and the ways that God punished the prideful to scare people into living a virtuous life. Excluding the previously discussed *topos* of Lucifer’s fall, one of the most common biblical stories used to deter people from pride was the destruction of the Tower of Babel. Dante, in *Purgatorio*, states that one of the images engraved in Mount Purgatory illustrating pride’s evil is the image of Nimrod watching his tower, the physical representation of his prideful wish to climb to Heaven, fall to the ground.\footnote{Dante, *Purgatorio* 12.34-36. This story tells of a king of Babylon, named Nimrod, who wishes to increase his glory and honor by building a tower that will reach Heaven. The story tells how God not only destroyed the tower but also scattered Nimrod’s subjects across the Earth to prevent them from attempting to rebuild the tower, *Genesis* 11.1-9 in *The Bible* (New York: American Bible Society, 1992).} The image of pride as a tower that will inevitably fall also occurs in a sermon based on the Gospel of Matthew.\footnote{Homer, *Sermon 2*.} In this sermon the preacher describes the sin of pride as a tower of “disobedience,” “boasting,” and “hypocrisy” that, through the “trumpets” of sincere confessions of the faithful, will eventually crumble into ruins just as the Tower of Babel did centuries before.\footnote{Ibid., 2.279-331.}

Biblical stories were not the only source of images used to teach Catholics how to avoid the temptation of pride. Other common imagery used to convey the evils of pride was the symbolic representation of pride through the characteristics of different animals. For example, Dante, in the first book of the *Divine Comedy*, the *Inferno*, states that he saw three beasts, a leopard, a wolf, and a lion, prior to entering the dark forest, the medieval gateway to Hell. These three beasts were meant to represent lust, avarice, and pride, the three most dangerous and common sins.\footnote{Dante, *Inferno*, trans. Robin Kirkpatrick (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 2.31; Bloomfield further argues that this symbolism arises from a traditional classification established in *The Book of Jeremiah*, in which Jeremiah states that “the lion, the wolf, and the leopard will attack the sinful man,” Bloomfield, *Seven Deadly Sins*, 157; The complete Bible passage that Bloomfield references refers to the punishment that the sinful will receive, stating that “lions from the forest will kill them, wolves from the desert will tear them to pieces, and leopards will prowl through their towns.” *Jeremiah* 5.6.} Furthermore, the use of a lion to represent pride is a popular reference in medieval sermons, such as one written to accompany a reading from the Gospel of John. During this sermon the preacher explained that those who have turned towards the devil through the sin of vainglory have allowed the “lion of pride,” a false idol, to control their soul, thus preventing them from properly worshiping Christ and thus placing their soul on the spiritual road to damnation.\footnote{Homer, 8.260-262.}

Another animal that was often symbolic of the sin of pride within medieval sermons, but not found in the writings of Dante, Gower, or Chaucer, is the peacock. According to a sermon written for the Gospel of Matthew, a peacock represents pride because it believes its own beauty is above the beauty
of all other animals. In an anonymous sermon written for Ash Wednesday, peacocks were described as creatures that “strut in pride” out of “joy and delight in their beauty.” However, peacocks, much like humans, are inevitably forced to accept the reality that their beauty is not infallible, as seen in the shame peacocks feel when they see their “vile” and “black feet,” which causes these proud animals to walk away from their audience “humbly with a sad face,” shattering their prideful arrogance.

Another way medieval literature coincides with medieval sermons is in the ways that the prideful are punished. However, in analyzing these punishments, one must first understand the importance of the seven deadly sins as a tool to guide Catholics through the sacrament of Confession. Catholic Medieval tracts for hearing confessions often advised the priest to ask the individual receiving the sacrament if he or she committed any of the seven deadly sins and then distribute proper penance accordingly for each sin. The entire structure of Gower’s *Confessio Amantis* is based around the sacrament of Confession, with the narrative following the order of a confessional tract, and the confessor explaining the evils of each of the seven deadly sins to Gower, the repentant. However, the relationship between the Catholic tradition of Confession and the seven deadly sins in medieval literature is yet again exemplified through Dante’s *Purgatorio*. In the middle of Canto IX, prior to being engraved with the “seven Ps,” Dante climbs three steps, the colors of white marble, perse rock, and “fresh blood,” to reach the entrance of Purgatory. Le Goff argues that these three steps are supposed to mirror the three stages of confession: white symbolizing the sincerity and purity of the contrition, perse or purple representing the shame one feels while confessing his sins, and red mirroring the love that the newly absolved penitent receives from God. Thus Dante, much like Gower, implies that through a proper confession one can be purged of all seven deadly sins and allowed entrance into Heaven.

When examining the punishments for pride, one can yet again begin with Dante, who describes, in detail, the punishments of the prideful. Dante, after climbing to the first terrace, notices that each man being punished was “hunched up, less and more,/according to his load.” The loads that these men carried were in the form of stones placed around their “once-proud neck[s].” This punishment of carrying weights around one’s neck symbolically represents the humility that the prideful should have shown while alive, humility that they must forcefully experience in Purgatory. However, even though priests never issued this punishment to the prideful in worldly confessions, there is still a

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56 Ibid., 22.172-180.
57 “Ash Wednesday” in Wenzel, *Preaching in the Age of Chaucer*, 82-94.
58 “Ibid., 89.
60 Gower, 10-12.
62 Le Goff, 347.
64 Dante, *Purgatorio*, 11.52-57, 70-75.
strong symbolic similarity between Dante’s punishment for those on the first terrace of Purgatory and the punishments that medieval priests issued to prideful penitents on Earth.

Physical deprivation was one of the most common forms of penance issued to those repenting sins of pride. Medieval confessors often prescribed fasting, giving alms, or performing acts of symbolic humility as ways to absolve sinful acts of pride. In addition, pride against a superior was often given a minimum of forty days of penance, reflecting how medieval confessors saw rebellion against one’s earthly superior as an action that could lead one to spiritually rebel against one’s heavenly superior, God. However, perhaps the most unique quality of pride according to medieval confessors’ notes in these penance handbooks was that the sin of pride, even against another human, was one of the few sins that could completely divorce one from the Catholic Church and ensure that one’s soul spent an eternity in Hell.

One final, critical aspect regarding the sin of pride that is present within medieval literature and Medieval Catholic sermons is the belief that pride can only be defeated with the divine virtue of humility. Dante, shortly after arriving on the first terrace of Purgatory, sees that the prideful are all praying the “Our Father” in order to gain spiritual support necessary to atone for their prideful ways. The necessity of this spiritual guidance is revisited when Dante leaves the terrace of the prideful. An angel of the Lord calls out to Dante “Beati pauperes,” or “Blessed are the poor in spirit,” signifying that only through God’s grace and mercy can the prideful gain the humility necessary to ascend through Purgatory to Paradise. Chaucer agrees with Dante that “humilitie or mekenesse” are the two spiritual tools necessary to successfully overcome the sin of pride. Even Gower, through the use of an example of a wealthy and honorable king who voluntarily helped the poor in his kingdom, acknowledges humility to be the most important weapon in defeating the vice of pride.

This reliance upon the necessity of humility to obtain spiritual guidance from God, also stressed in medieval sermons through the point that one must follow “not the spirit of pride, but the spirit of the Lord,” reflects the belief that

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69 Dante, Purgatorio, 11.1-25; Within Dante’s version of this Lord’s Prayer, which has a more lyrical form since the prideful are singing it, there is a strong, overarching tone of submissiveness to God’s will, specifically when the prideful stress that human must be like angels and sacrifice their will to God, the only true way to be freed from the hold that sin and Satan have over them. Furthermore, Bloomfield agrees that not only for the sin of pride, but for all of the seven deadly sins, Dante’s primary tool for redemption of those in Purgatory is their faith in God; Bloomfield, Seven Deadly Sins, 158.
70 Dante, Purgatorio, 12.110.
71 Chaucer, 10.476-480.
72 Gower, 1.2048-2057.
in order to battle pride or any sin one must fully give themselves to the Lord. Catholic preachers often used concrete examples of humility, such as the actions of the Holy Family, as a model of the character traits necessary for medieval Catholics to avoid prideful actions. Catholic preachers drew parallels between Christ's humility and the actions the faithful should be taking to battle the deadly sin of pride. For example, a sermon written for Advent, a season that invoked a large numbers of confessions in preparation for the annual celebration of Christ's birth, represents Christ as a man who "humbly rode on an ass" into Jerusalem and did not demand preferential or royal treatment, even though he was the Son of God. Furthermore, Father John Felton of Oxford, in his sermons for Corpus Christi, invoked the image of Christ's body in the form of the Holy Eucharist as a physical representation of Christ's humility since the host is "small," which symbolically contrasts the allure of pride. Similarly, Franciscan Nicholas Philip, in his sermon for Christmas Eve, stressed that Christ battled pride by being born in a stable, thus being "born in meekness," and acknowledged that Mary, Christ's mother, by allowing herself to give birth to God's son in a humble barn, avoided "the stain of pride" that has the ultimate power to corrupt the soul of man.

Additionally, many Catholic preachers often related the battle between humility and pride to that of a spiritual battle between Christ and Lucifer. Christ is described as a warrior who "took the sword of the word of God" and used it to "flatten the mountain of pride with his humility." In fact, it was often preached that only Christ's humility could successfully defeat pride because pride was not only the sin that caused Lucifer to fall into Hell, but also the first sin of humanity, which led Adam and Eve to be banished from the Garden of Eden. Another anonymous medieval preacher argued that Satan's greatest weapon against humanity was his "lance of pride," which could pierce the spiritual armor of any Catholic. The only way to battle Satan was for Catholics to believe in Christ's teachings and seek protection behind Christ's "shield of faith," the only defense from the allure of pride.

Finally, medieval preachers often used the story of Christ's crucifixion to teach the faithful how to resist the temptation of pride with humility. On Good Friday, the day commemorating Christ's crucifixion, it was common to hear sermons from Catholic priests that focused on the humble sufferings of Christ. In fact, the most creative members of the clergy often used Christ's suffering as a cautionary tale in which the seven wounds of Christ mirrored the

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73 Master Frisky, "Academic Sermon/Lecture" in Wenzel, Preaching in the Age of Chaucer, 308.
74 "Advent" in Wenzel, Preaching the Age of Chaucer, 60-61.
75 John Felton, "Easter or Corpus Christi" in Wenzel, Preaching the Age of Chaucer, 138.
76 Nicholas Philip, "Christmas Eve" in Wenzel, Preaching the Age of Chaucer, 65, 70-71; Dante states that one of the purest forms of humility can be seen in Mary's simple "Ave" or "Yes" to the archangel Gabriel when he asked Mary is she would give birth to God's only son. Dante, Purgatorio, 10.34-39.
77 "Ash Wednesday" in Wenzel, Preaching the Age of Chaucer, 86.
78 Homer, 14.90-138.
79 Ibid., 5.104-108.
80 Ibid., 6.148-164
seven deadly sins. In this analogy, Christ, who wears the crown or “garland of thornes,” symbolizes the pain that the actions of the prideful cause their fellow humans. By humbly wearing the crown prior to, and during, his crucifixion, Christ not only symbolically battles and defeats pride, but also sets an example for all Catholics through his humble actions. However, there is also a cruel irony in this voluntary suffering to which Christ subjects himself. Holly Johnson, author of “‘Hard Bed of the Cross’: Good Friday Preaching and the Seven Deadly Sins,” astutely observes that “Christ’s torments [act as] remedies for sin” thus freeing sinners from “the punishment... [they] justly deserve.” More importantly, Johnson acknowledges that Christ, through his willingness to suffer to save humanity, not only represents perfect humility, but also, “becomes both [the] victim and [the] antidote” for pride and all of the seven deadly sins, thus inherently making Christ the ideal role model of all medieval Catholics who are trying to overcome the temptation of pride.

Medieval Catholics clearly believed that pride came before the fall. However, this was not a metaphorical fall, but rather a very real, spiritual descent into Hell, destined for the unrepentant prideful. Popular literature and Catholic sermons from the Middle Ages tapped into, as well as reinforced, this genuine belief that pride was the most spiritually damning of all the deadly sins. Medieval literature, such as the writings of Dante, Chaucer, and Gower, more often than not, supplemented and reinforced the spiritual messages preached in many medieval Catholic sermons, thus reflecting the popularity of the belief in the corporality of the seven deadly sins. These writings and sermons often offered a guide to medieval Catholics on how to avoid pride through prayer, spiritual devotion, and humility. Above all, these popular and religious texts offered the possibility of spiritual salvation. The prideful, along with any who committed one of the seven deadly sins, if truly repentant, could obtain forgiveness through divine purgation. Though difficult, climbing Mount Purgatory and being absolved from the “seven Ps” to ensure entrance into Heaven was a much more appealing afterlife than succumbing wholeheartedly to a life of sin and vice that would only end in spiritual death and an eternity in Hell.

81 “Good Friday” in Wenzel, Preaching in the Age of Chaucer, 108.
82 Holly Johnson, “‘The Hard Bed of the Cross’: Good Friday Preaching and the Seven Deadly Sins” in Newhauser, The Seven Deadly Sins, 129-144.
83 Ibid., 130-133, 143.
Appendix I: A Diagram of Dante’s Purgatory as depicted in *Purgatorio*  

Russell L. Weber graduated Summa Cum Laude with a B.A. in United States History in 2011 from San Francisco State University and is currently working towards obtaining a Master of Arts in United States History at SF State. Russell’s research interests include the influence of the classics on the formation of early American ideology and American republicanism as well as the influence of comic books on 20th century intellectual and cultural history.