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JOHN LYDGATE
AND THE TRADITION OF MEDIEVAL RHETORIC

by
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Introduction

A study of the poetry of John Lydgate in relation to the tradition of medieval rhetoric seems warranted on several counts. First, it has become increasingly clear that the dominant English poetic tradition up to the second half of the seventeenth century was firmly rooted in the principles and practices of the rhetorical organon that had gradually emerged from the remnants of classical oratory, was codified in the manuals of the school rhetoricians of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and expanded and modified by the Tudor theorists. Recent medieval and Renaissance studies have revealed how this system nourished, if it did not generate, the concept of the poem as an artifact whose structure, organization, and purpose were controlled by the great master-art of rhetoric. Much of the best work in contemporary Chaucer criticism, to take one specific example, has been the result of a renewed attentiveness to his "rhetorical poetic," that is, to principles of structure, explicated in the medieval rhetorical treatises, which are operative in his poetry; to explorations of poetic-aesthetic theory as a "key" to understanding the larger "inorganic possibilities" of his verse; and to the stylistics of Chaucer's verbal expression. Sensitive and illuminating works by Wolfgang Clemen and Charles Muscatine, by Ralph Baldwin, Robert Payne, Robert Jordan, and others have ably demonstrated how rich and subtle is the rhetorical

texture of Chaucer's poetry and how conscious he was of the aesthetic assumptions of medieval poetic theory and of the problems of its practice. But although this approach to Chaucer has proved both fruitful and stimulating, there has been no detailed account of how this same rhetorical tradition was operative in shaping the poetry of Chaucer's most important successor in the fifteenth century, John Lydgate. Commentary on Lydgate's poetic has been confined to either very specialized studies, to a few scattered remarks in articles, or to the introductions and notes to anthologized selections. Full-length studies, such as those by Walter Schirmer and Alain Renoir, make only passing references to the importance of rhetoric for a reading of Lydgate's poetry. Even Derek Pearsall's recent book, though it includes a number of valuable insights into Lydgate's poetic habits, provides a general survey of his entire literary career rather than a close reading of his major poems against a tradition of rhetoric. Moreover, Pearsall, I believe, underrates or misinterprets the rhetorical organization of several of these poems. Thus despite the fact that the revived interest in medieval rhetoric has done much to exonerate it from earlier charges of sterility and inferiority, Lydgate's poetry has only randomly been considered with reference to the rhetorical principles that ordered it. And the situation is all the more remarkable if we recall the nature of fifteenth century poetics and Lydgate's early reputation.

The fifteenth century witnessed extensive rhetorical experimentation in a large scale attempt to 'legitimize' the vernacular as a viable poetic medium by adorning it with the rhetorical devices codified in the handbooks on Latin poetry. If there is anything that both the English and Scottish Chaucerians had in common, it was their preoccupation with the art of poetry, with artifice and ornamentation; the new poetic mode was one that demanded the poem be curiously wrought. Chaucer, of course, was the great model and exemplar for this new school of 'makars.' Many years ago C.S. Lewis reminded us that while Chaucer's contemporaries admired him for his love poetry, they explicitly praised him as a lofty, philosophical poet and as a model of style, being for them much what Waller and Denham were for the Augustans. "Where we see a great comedian and a profound student of human character, they saw a master of noble sentiment and a source of poetic diction."¹ It is this other side of Chaucer, Chaucer the rhetorician, that has stimulated recent scholarship, more modern critics having done much to show that these early readers of Chaucer had a very good point and that it is often more profitable to see him as a learned and skillful rhetorician than as a genial storyteller. What has not been followed up, however, is the important fact that Lydgate enjoyed a reputation similar to that

of his great predecessor. Only now is Lydgate's work beginning to emerge from the shadow cast over it by comparison with the 'standard' Chaucer: the storyteller, the humorist, the social historian and creator of realistic characters in life's Human Comedy. Like Gower, Lydgate has had the unfortunate fate (at least since the nineteenth century) of appearing in this Chaucer's company; unfortunate, because such a perspective obscures Lydgate's own achievements in moving in a different direction from Chaucer and because in many respects Lydgate is closer as a poet to Gower than he is to Chaucer. The Fall of Princes, for example, seems to me to resemble the Confessio Amantis more than it does the Canterbury Tales. But most seriously this view ignores as irrelevant an impressive testimony to the same qualities in Lydgate that had made Chaucer an authority, a command of the art of rhetoric which entitled him to rank with the classical masters. Indeed the critical stereotype of Lydgate that still haunts the standard histories of literature which sees him as the clumsy, dull, and rather hopeless imitator of Chaucer would have surprised his early readers. In his own day his prestige as a poet was secure beyond a doubt, and for over three centuries after his death his name was linked with those of Gower and Chaucer as constituting the mainstream of English poetry. And unless we are willing to assert that poets and critics for three hundred years were unable to distinguish the chaff from

the grain, we should try to understand Lydgate's poetry as these readers did. They represent, I believe, those values we must still look for in Lydgate's work.

A brief selection from the many early allusions to Lydgate brings into focus those special virtues for which he was esteemed. Osbern Bokenam makes one of the earliest references to Lydgate when he excuses his own lack of eloquence by explaining, significantly in a rhetorical modesty topos, that he "dwellyd neuere with the fresh rethoryens/Gower Chaucers ner wyth lytgate."² Bokenam's "fresh" here may have both a chronological as well as a rhetorical meaning. The three poets not only are the first to write the new poetry, they also have perfected it (and hence are worthy models of imitation and invocation) with their fresh figures and ornaments. In either case another minor poet, George Ashby, combines more specifically both ideas in his commendation of these three fathers of English literature who are

Primier poetes of this nacion,
Embelysshing our englisshe tendure algate
First finders to our consolacion₃
Off fresshe, douce englisshe....³

Here "Primier" has a temporal significance while the "douce englisshe" is "fresshe" because it has been embellished with the new tropes and figures. At the turn of the century an anonymous poet mentions Lydgate, again in company with Gower and Chaucer, for his "crafte" in "makyng" ballads.⁴ Later Thomas Feylde distinguishes between Chaucer's books which are "pleasaunt and

meruayllous," Gower's moralities, "herde and delycyous," and Lydgate's works which are "fruytefull and sentencious," adding that whoever has read Lydgate "will hym call a famus rethorycye."⁵ Henry Bradshaw dedicates his book "Fyrst to maister Chaucer and Lydgate sentencious."⁶ Lydgate is praised as "a great Ornament of ye English Toung,"⁷ one who "adournyed our tong,"⁸ a ringer of the bell of rhetoric whose "swete sentence" resounds through Albion.⁹

What is particularly noteworthy in these allusions to Lydgate is that most of them refer to him as sharing with Gower and Chaucer the honor of refining the English vernacular, as a "first finder," as Denton Fox points out, of "the new and fashionable style of poetry: continental, learned, non-alliterative, and highly rhetorical."¹⁰ Again and again there is singled out for praise Lydgate's sententious rhetoric, his eloquence, his craft in the "makynge" of poetry. Appreciated and understood in this role as a great "rhetor," he received the tributes of admirers who thought him only slightly less, at times no less, exemplary than Chaucer. Eleanor Hammond calls attention to the fact that Benedict Burgh "makes no mention of the elder poet in his list of famous rhetoricians and terms Lydgate the flower and treasury of poetry."¹¹ And Dunbar, though reserving his highest praise for Chaucer as the "rose of rethoris all," is no less extravagant in citing Gower and Lydgate for similar

reasons:

O morall Gower, and Ludgate laureate,
 Your sugurit lippis and tongis aureate,
 Bene to oure eris cause of grete delyte;
 Your angel mouthis most mellifluate
 Our rude langage has clere illumynate,
 And faire our-gilt our speche, that imperfyte
 Stude, or your goldyn pennis schupe to wryte;
 This ile before was bare, and desolate,¹²
 Off rethorike, or lusty fresch endyte.

The highwater mark of praise for Lydgate, however, is to be found in Stephen Hawes's The Palace of Pleasure. Hawes repeats the customary tenor of these eulogies, remembering Chaucer and Gower as reformers of poetic diction and as authors of books on moral virtue, but both are overshadowed by "the most dulcet spryng/Of famous rethoryke," his master Lydgate who has versified the "depured rethoryke in English language."¹³ This kind of statement continued throughout the sixteenth century. In 1554 Robert Braham holds that Lydgate "may worthyly be numbered amongst those that have chefelye deserued of our tunge."¹⁴ Gabriel Harvey commended Lydgate and Chaucer for their astronomy, philosophy, and other parts of "profound or cunning art. Wherein few of their time were more exactly learned."¹⁵ Even into the eighteenth century Lydgate continued to hold his own, several men of letters preferring his works to Chaucer's. In 1764 Thomas Warton lauded him for his "considerable additions to those amplifications of our language, in which Chaucer, Gower, and Occleve led the way...he is the first of our writers whose style is clothed with that perspicuity in which the

English phraseology appears at this day to an English reader."¹⁶ And it is perhaps significant that one of the last writers who found Lydgate congenial to his taste before the reversal of his reputation in the nineteenth century was that other great rhetorician, Thomas Gray.

Like Chaucer and Gower then, Lydgate was long admired for his wisdom and eloquence, or in the vocabulary of the period, for his 'sentence' and 'rethoryk'--the twin foundations of medieval poetic theory. If these tributes may at times suggest the conventional formula, yet the very frequency with which they were repeated does not allow us to dismiss them as irrelevant.¹⁷ Moreover, these references honoring Lydgate for being among the first to bring the adornments of a complex and well-defined Latin rhetoric into the English vernacular give, in my opinion, a truer index to the kind of thing Lydgate was attempting in his poetry than do modern attitudes based on post-romantic and symbolist canons of taste. Little of what is meant today in discussions of a poem's imagery, its form and meaning, is relevant to the mode of figurative writing of a man like Lydgate trained in medieval rhetoric. Indeed rhetoric and poetry have become in the contemporary mind entirely different enterprises. As Pearsall observes, "in the way in which the word [poet] is widely used nowadays he is not a poet at all. What we expect of a poem is that its total meaning should be locally embodied, that the very texture of the poem's language and style

should be susceptible of the same kind of critical attention and should yield the same critical results as the whole poem. With Chaucer this is true, and with Gower too, but not with Lydgate...for he is the great example in our literature of the rhetorician."¹⁸ That seems to me to be a very valuable insight into both Lydgate's strength and weakness as a poet. It suggests that his poetry, like Jonson's, is a poetry of surfaces or rather that its surfaces are its core. He can be betrayed, by merely using the conventions of his craft instead of adapting them, into stiff and mechanical verses, and he will frequently fail, as do the other fifteenth century poets, not because he is too rhetorical but because there is often nothing to sustain the rhetorical display or because this manipulation of it becomes too clumsy or obvious. Conversely, he succeeds when he does not grind out his lines through a too facile handling of rhetorical schemes but subordinates and integrates them to his purpose, keeping the complexity unobtrusive, practicing the art of concealing the artful. The failure or success depends not upon the rhetoric qua system of rhetoric but upon the skill with which it is handled in individual poems. It is therefore unfair to submit Lydgate to critical strictures based on canons of rhetoric he did not profess. At least we are not entitled to suppose without investigation that a poetic based on the principles of amplification, digression, and rhetorical figuration is

antecedently inferior to a poetic that esteems brevity and organic structure. Rather, by taking the artes poeticae of the medieval rhetoricians as a priori neither good nor bad, but as an expression of what they thought poetry was and what it should do, that is, as a definition of the nature and function of poetry, I think it is possible to arrive at a more equitable reading of Lydgate's poetry.

Such an approach is also sanctioned by the plentiful evidence in Lydgate's poetry indicating that the whole theory of poetics was of great interest to him, for Lydgate is a poet who shows himself acutely aware of the practical implications of rhetorical doctrines for his poetry. In several of the Prologues to his major works he incorporates into his lines an explicit discussion of those aesthetic bases essential to the compositional strategy of his poem. In these Prologues, Lydgate attempts to do much the same thing Chaucer does in the Prologue to The Legend of Good Women, to provide a general discussion of poetic theory followed by a particular application of that theory to the problems of the poem, and like Chaucer he is concerned, in Payne's words, with "establishing a stance, a moral and aesthetic 'location' from which he can take adequately sure bearings to produce good poetry."¹⁹ Discussions of style, structure, and purpose, of the stance the translator takes in working from an authority as his source, a consideration

of language as the means of preserving and revivifying the truth of the past, the relation between his views on memory and his views on poetry, history, morality--these are the fundamental aesthetic principles Lydgate makes a part of his writings and which suggest, in my opinion, that it may be useful to examine medieval teachings on the art of poetry to see what help they can provide in understanding his work. His obvious knowledge of the precepts taught by the school rhetoricians makes it seem appropriate to discuss his practice in terms of such doctrines as he would have regarded as an essential part of his craft.

In the following pages I shall study the poetry of Lydgate in this fashion. After some preliminary discussion of the art of rhetoric as presented in the rather homogeneous body of school doctrine and of Lydgate's explicit considerations of his poetic craft, we shall be ready to examine some of his poems in detail. In these analyses I shall try to show what Lydgate's characteristic rhetorical patterns are like by looking at the "working texture of the verse"--narrative modes and verbal style. Receiving special emphasis will be The Siege of Thebes, The Fall of Princes, and three important courtly lyrics, The Floure of Curtesy, A Complaynt of the Lovers Lyfe, and the Temple of Glas. The Theban poem offers a fertile opportunity to study Lydgate's fashioning an extended philosophical romance out of the sources of its matière;

it is especially valuable for the light it casts on his use of various rhetorical devices to re-align his narrative materials with his interest in them, or as he might have put it, with the 'sentence' of his poem. The enormous collection of 'tragedies' freely translated in The Fall of Princes also provides an abundantly rich field for an investigation of several aspects of Lydgate's poetic: the relation of his English version to his French original, his use of the 'frame' device, the style, and the structure of several tales. The love lyrics, finally, are representative of Lydgate's work in a different poetic mode. Not bound to a text as severely as he is in The Siege of Thebes and The Fall of Princes, he here freely re-works the conventional motifs of the courtly lyric tradition, assimilating the lessons of his Chaucerian models. Lydgate's other major poem, the Troy-Book, will not be included for several reasons. First, to cover both it and The Fall of Princes would only result in a repetition of several major points. The Fall was chosen not only because it offers a greater variety of tales to work with but because it also allows us to examine on the small scale of the individual tragedies the questions of style and structure that are found in the Troy poem only on an enormous scale. And finally, Pearsall, we may add, has discussed the latter well and at length.

Throughout these analyses my purpose will be to

show how and where the rhetoric makes the poetry work. My aim will not be to argue that it is necessary to read the medieval artes poeticae as a preliminary to a true understanding of Lydgate's poetry, but more simply that they can give a modern reader the historical matrices within which the individual poems of John Lydgate can be approached for that understanding.

Footnotes to Introduction

¹C.S. Lewis, The Allegory of Love (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958; orig. pub. 1936), p. 162.

²Leuys of Seyntys (1443-47?) in Caroline Spurgeon, Five Hundred Years of Chaucer Criticism and Allusion 1357-1900, 2nd ed., 3 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1925), I, 46.

³Active policy of a Prince (c. 1470), Spurgeon, I, 54.

⁴Praise of the Mass (c. 1500), Spurgeon, I, 65.

⁵Here begynneth a lytel treatyse called the contrauerse bytwene a louer and a Jave lately compyled (1509), Spurgeon, I, 70.

⁶The Holy Lufe and History of Saynt Werburge (1513), Spurgeon, I, 71.

⁷Account of Lydgate (1450), Spurgeon, I, 53.

⁸John Rastell, Prologue to Terens in englysh (1520), Spurgeon, I, 73.

⁹Sir David Lindsay, The complaynte and testament of a Popiniay Which lyeth sore wounded and maye not dye (1530), Spurgeon, I, 77.

¹⁰Denton Fox, "Chaucer's Influence on Fifteenth-Century Poetry," Companion to Chaucer Studies, ed. Beryl Rowland (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 387.

¹¹English Verse between Chaucer and Surrey, ed. Eleanor Prescott Hammond (Durham: Duke University Press, 1927), p. 97.

¹²The Golden Targe (1503), Spurgeon, I, 66.

¹³The Pastime of Pleasure, ed. W.E. Mead, EETS, O.S., 173 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1927), 11. 1373 f. Compare also the fervent enthusiasm of Caxton's tribute to Lydgate as contrasted to his vague praise of Chaucer in Caxton's Book of Curtesye, ed. F.J. Furnivall, EETS, E.S., 3 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1868), pp. 34-40.

¹⁴The pistle to the reader (1555), Spurgeon, I, 93.

¹⁵MS notes, Spurgeon, I, 127.

¹⁶Thomas Warton, The History of English Poetry from the Close of the Eleventh to the Commencement of the Seventeenth Century (London, 1774-81), II, 52. Cited in Alain Renoir, The Poetry of John Lydgate (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), p. 5.

¹⁷Renoir, p. 3.

¹⁸Pearsall, Gower and Lydgate (London: Longmans, Green & Co. Ltd., 1969), p. 26.

¹⁹Robert O. Payne, The Key of Remembrance: A Study of Chaucer's Poetics (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), p. 63.

Chapter I

The Rhetorical Tradition of the Middle Ages

A. The Art of Poetry: Inventio

Medieval teachings on the art of poetry usually were given over to the explication and illustration of three large concepts: (1) dispositio, (2) amplificatio and abbreviatio, and (3) elocutio. This tripartite division was derived from several classical texts which became for the Middle Ages authorities on the subject of rhetoric. Specifically these included the Rhetorica Ad Herennium, long ascribed to Cicero, the De Inventione of Cicero, and to a lesser extent the Ars poetica of Horace. In studying the relationship between these classical progenitors and their medieval offspring what is most interesting are the modifications or changes in emphasis which were effected in the course of time upon the ancient patrimony and then systematized by the school rhetoricians of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries into the triple arrangement mentioned above. The classical Ciceronian exposition of rhetoric (and here I use Ciceronian to include the Ad Herennium) had rested, for example, not upon a division into three but into five departments, or as Lydgate calls them, the "fyve baneeres longyng to elloquence"-- Invention, Disposition, Elocution, Pronunciation, and Memory.¹ Missing from the reconstructed arrangement of

the medieval rhetoricians are Invention, Memory, and Pronunciation (or Delivery). The absence of the last two is easily explained, for both these divisions had received but brief treatment even in classical discussions, and they would have had little if any practical value in a program concerned almost exclusively with the style of literary Latin composition and not with the memorization and articulation of an oration. But the absence of invention is far more difficult to explain.² But before I trace the changes which the concept of invention underwent, let me anticipate my conclusions by summarizing what I think such an investigation will make clear about the nature of Lydgate's writing situation.

Inventiveness received scanty treatment in the rhetorical treatises because of the medieval conception of what poetry was. It was assumed that it was not so much the poet's business to concern himself with 'originality,' with his personal moods and private feelings, as it was to give due consideration to prescribed forms and genres, rules of composition and stylistic conventions. "Medieval criticism," writes Chaytor, "regarded creative work as a science; anyone who was willing to learn the complicated rules of the business could become a poet; the typical poet was a learned man who had the technique at his fingers' ends and not a rare and favoured person upon whom divine inspiration had descended."³ This attitude toward poetic invention is

clearly visible in the school treatises. The fact that the manuals began with a discussion of dispositio or arrangement of material indicates that the rhetoricians assumed that the poet would already have selected his 'matter' or would be retelling an existing story rather than inventing a new one. An orientation such as this affected both the kind of literature produced by professional poets as well as the attitude they took toward their material. As John Lawlor notes, "We can expect a certain solidity of content--which means that useful matter will be looked for in any work that goes beyond the lightness of mere lyric. The 'story' itself is in no way original: it comes from common stock, and part of its essential charm is its familiarity. The task of the writer will be--with due deference to his great predecessors--to re-set the familiar material, and, with ordinary luck, to bring out new aspects of its universal truth."⁴ In an age which exalted literary auctours and in which poetic themes and even forms are bound to be for this reason inherited ones, a precise knowledge of literary traditions, topoi, stylistic models and rhetorical devices became the first duty the poet was obliged to satisfy if he was to do justice to his task. For an author like Lydgate, whose major works are either translations and adaptations of already existent literary forms or novel rehandlings of traditional genres and themes, his task as poet is fundamentally of this order. A recognition of the medieval

remanieur's indifference to the invention of new subject matter and of the all-importance of style and poetical techniques is thus basic to a discussion of Lydgate's poetic achievement.

Some idea of how this thoroughly medieval concept of poetry came about can be gathered from a glance at the history of rhetoric during the period of transition from the classical world to that of the Christian era. The ancient world supported two opposed schools of thought on rhetoric which can be characterized in terms of their emphasis upon "content" or "form". As conceived by Plato and Aristotle, Cicero and Quintilian, rhetoric ought to be more concerned with content; the aim of the orator was primarily to persuade his audience concerning the truth of the issue at hand, and to this end a system of invention or "the devising of matter, true or plausible that would make the case convincing,"⁵ had been judged the most important area of the speaker's training and education. Unless rhetoric did concern itself with the search for truth in regard to the intellectual content of the message, it could easily decay into a knack or trick of stylistic display, a mere verbal skill without any real solid basis. Cicero's pronouncement at the beginning of the De Inventione that "wisdom without eloquence does too little for the good of the state, but that eloquence without wisdom is generally highly disadvantageous and is never helpful" had been a reminder that if rhetoric was

to avoid being an empty swirl of words, an attention to "matter" must be the orator's first concern. So conceived, the study of rhetoric became a cultural ideal. It was, as Albert Duhamel observes, a part of moral philosophy and was concerned ideally with the "discovery of and persuasion to right action...the erection of a system which made it possible to discover truth and then apply it to the people that they might thereby profit and act in a more intelligent manner."⁶

The Sophist, on the other hand, was more interested in "form," in words and expression. His art was distinguished by an ornate verbal display, his concern being to give effectiveness to the speaker and not with the triumph of his cause. The reasons for this development in Roman rhetoric were largely political. The collapse of the Republic no longer made it necessary for the public speaker to acquire the skills requisite to "discuss capably those matters which law and custom have fixed for the uses of citizenship."⁷ Deliberative and forensic oratory found little or no sustenance in the political climate of Imperial Rome as freedom of discussion in the forum ceased; instead they were reduced to the level of school exercises, controversiae and suasoriae, whose themes were only remotely connected with live issues. As a consequence the only kind of speaking that was cultivated was epideixis, the oratory of display, of the panegyric and encomium. Speakers no longer sought logical

arguments to persuade their audience of the truth of an issue but rather sententiae and colores, ornamented expressions of old truths in epigrammatic form, that would please their listeners. As Duhamel observes, under the Sophists "there was no longer any inventio or search after truth; there was only an elocutio or urge toward ornamentation."⁸

Duhamel's observation indicates that the divergent views on the function of rhetoric which flourished together during the first century of the Empire can be distinguished by the respective attitudes each took toward the idea of inventio. In the Aristotelian-Ciceronian scheme inventio held a special place. It was the system of invention to provide matter for the speaker that gave oratory a philosophical basis designed to forestall a dissociation of thought and expression, a degeneration into sheer formalism. It involved that activity upon which the entire rhetorical apparatus rested. To paraphrase Plato, it was that about which the orator is eloquent. But the Sophists, as Henry Osborn Taylor notes, selected subjects "in order to cultivate cleverness of expression," and they did not "bind the writer or speaker to pertinency to the matter in hand."⁹ The Ciceronian topics of invention, originally conceived as seats for arguments containing ideas of universal application and the sources of countless moral dicta intended to influence the character and mold the opinion of an audience, became

merely clichés, a conventional series of topics lacking content and stressing verbal ingenuity which could be used to deck out any kind of composition.¹⁰

Thus when rhetoric spread into all spheres of literature during the first century, when poetry became thoroughly rhetoricized, it was already a rhetoric preoccupied with form rather than with content. The dissociation between invention and elocution that had marked the history of oratory in the early years of the Empire carried over into the formalized studies of Roman education. Training in speaking and writing was based on the pedagogical declamatio. The declaimer, who could no longer hope to persuade his listeners to action, instead was taught to please them by his style. To develop this skill the student was directed to an extensive examination of prose writers and poets in preparation for his own written and spoken exercises. Techniques of imitation were taught as substitutes for rhetorical invention. As early as Horace's Ars poetica the question had been vigorously discussed whether a poet should attempt a theme of free invention or keep to the reworking of traditional material; Horace recommended the latter. And at the end of the first century Pliny the Younger advised that "from the imitation of the best writers you will learn their faculty of rhetorical invention."¹¹ In the period of decline which followed, rhetoric flourished by turning back to a study of what had already been achieved.

What had been first intended as a means to improve upon an earlier accomplishment by investing familiar themes with a new grace and beauty of style could and often did degenerate in less confident ages to slavish imitation. This principle of literary imitation, along with its looser version of "following" another author (sequi), played an essential part in the studies of late Latin literature and passed into medieval poetic theory through Seneca, Quintilian, and Pliny.¹² Throughout the schools of rhetoric, in Africa and Gaul and into the fifth and sixth centuries, education in grammar and literature continued to follow the tradition of the declamatores with its regard for literary allusions, a command of stylistic techniques, and a virtuosity in expanding conventional themes and topics.

It was in reaction against this historical situation that Augustine posited his concept of an eternal eloquence, a properly-oriented Christian eloquence distinguished from the worldly eloquence of the Sophists. To counter their preoccupation with elocutio Augustine attempted to restore the Ciceronian emphasis upon inventio by giving it a new application to the exegesis of Scripture or divine truth. Augustine's novel interpretation of the function of rhetoric was, of course, an appendage to his theological dialectic. For Augustine only those things which are eternal and immutable are to be enjoyed for themselves; everything else is to be used to get to the

permanent. Rhetoric--language and literature--must be used, therefore, to lead to the discovery of the eternal truth. Thus the Bible is the only book one can enjoy for itself. If one delights in works of profane literature, works without a divine source, for their own sake, for the story they tell or the language they use, one is improperly responding to them. Literature should use its attractive appearance to interest the reader in getting beneath the surface and in discovering its theme, its sententia, that will instruct him in the basic truths of life. For Augustine these truths were limited to the truths of Christianity, the truths of the Scriptures. The doctrina details, therefore, a system of persuasion in which the content is not various but unique and constant. The matter is God Himself as revealed in Scripture. But by placing rigid limits on what man could discover, Augustinian rhetoric had the almost paradoxical effect of circumscribing the role invention played in the system. As Payne points out:

So, the rhetoric which Augustine defines in Book IV of De doctrina is a system of persuasion which specifically does not involve the user in any choices about the content or direction of argument. Those are already determined--for Augustine, by the Scriptures alone, for later analysts (who have relaxed enough to consider poetry a legitimate extension of rhetoric, as Augustine did not) by Scripture plus tradition as corrected and illuminated by orthodox authority. Tradition itself--both as meaningful historical pattern or accurate literary constructs by previous observers and as workable analyses of means--becomes a pattern for imitation and

a substitute for the ancient "invention."¹³

Both developments we have been looking at, then, the Sophistic urge toward ornamentation and the Augustinian circumscription of the proper content of rhetoric, resulted in a diminution of inventio and, conversely, in an increased attention to and reliance upon a literary tradition. Of course, not every medieval narrative was a revision of an earlier work nor is it necessary to postulate that every poem has a moral or ethical signification or points to the caritas which informs it. My point is only to call attention to the peculiar writing situation Lydgate frequently found himself in as a poet. Baldwin has written that "the ancient lore of inventio kept rhetoric in contact with subject matter and with actual presentation," but rhetoric as understood by the medieval mind meant according to Baldwin, only "polishing, decorating, especially dilating what has already been expressed. It comes in after the real job is done; it has lost its ancient function of composing."¹⁴ Baldwin does not further explain what he means by "after the real job is done" or even how it is done, but if I understand him correctly, he is suggesting that the classical category of invention had come to mean either the manipulation of stylistic topoi or the discovery of viable matter that the poet might rework to suit his purpose. The finding (or selection) of subjects and themes as material for the poem became a pre-poem process, a preformal stage in the

composition of poetry, often in the shape of a prior source. As long as it was assumed that the poet is concerned with the affective moving of men to truth, the classical notion of invention survived, but for the most part poets and rhetoricians were talking about truths that were 'given.' Invention became a behind-the-scenes constant, an end rather than a process. In this new arrangement, Payne concludes, poetry was conceived as a "process of arousing favorable response to a fittingly dignified statement of pre-existent truths,"¹⁵ and the poet approached his writing situation with the task of expressing more effectively whatever truths he already possessed or whatever 'sentence' he had discovered in his subject.

Lydgate's task was not to create a totally novel or original piece but to work within well-defined generic and stylistic frames, to re-shape traditional themes and familiar stories, to combine or juxtapose, to shorten or develop his given material to form new wholes, new patterns. And inattentive though he may be to the creation of new matter, he might be expected to find in the old, the scripture veteris, new insights that he could work up through the ornaments of style to make them in their new expression rhetorically efficacious once again.¹⁶ Lydgate's poetry, at least the major pieces, is thoroughly imbued with this posture toward a 'tradition' of literature, not only in respect to the story material

which gives him the large frame for his poems, but in the smaller units--sub-frames--of the verse as well. His poetry thus exhibits to a greater degree than most the rhetorical (that is, the artificial, the traditional, the non-experiential) character Curtius has called attention to in medieval poetry: "Merely from the rhetorical character of medieval poetry, it follows that, in interpreting a poem, we must ask, not on what 'experience' it was based, but what theme the poet set himself to treat."¹⁷ Medieval poetic, then, with its conscious employment of the commonplaces, its assumption that the writer will often be working from prior sources or handling familiar material, and its emphasis upon the details of stylistic figuration was a poetic especially suited to Lydgate's stance since his strategic orientation toward his material is essentially renovative and mimetic.

We can perhaps better appreciate the nature of Lydgate's writing situation by turning for a moment to a different poet, a different attitude. When Wordsworth believed he was ready to compose his major poem, the great obstacle to his creativity he found lay in the inability to settle upon a form or theme. He writes:

Far better to have heard the name
Of zeal and just ambition, than to live
Baffled and plagued by a mind that every hour
Turns recreant to her task; takes heart again,
Then feels immediately some hollow thought
Hang like an interdict upon her hopes.
This is my lot; for either still I find
Some imperfection in the chosen theme,
Or see of absolute accomplishment

Much wanting, so much wanting, in myself,
 That I recoil and droop, and seek repose
 In listlessness from vain perplexity,
 Unprofitably travelling toward the grave,
 Like a false steward who hath much received
 And renders nothing back.

(The Prelude, Book I, 255-69)

Despite Lydgate's frequent use of the modesty topos, there is nothing in his approach toward writing like this romantic desperation to discover a subject that would rescue the writer from noncreativity. For Lydgate, unlike the later poet, the larger parts of his material came ready-made, prefabricated.¹⁸ The choice of both subject matter and matrix form would have generated prescribed rhetorical strategies for the medieval poet. The story of Troy, for instance, would have come to Lydgate already as part of a resonant literary tradition that had grown by accretion over the centuries. His matter, the retelling of this legendary cycle with its plots, characters, and sentiments, is not something original with Lydgate, but an inherent and inherited element of his poetry. A situation such as this must modify our critical attitude. Before we can pass judgment on Lydgate's use of his materials, we must first understand his special relation to his sources. Trouvere, C.S. Lewis reminds us in connection with a similar situation in Gower, is the name for a poet as well as maker.¹⁹ And D.S. Brewer's remarks on the analogous problem in Malory are here to the point. Of Malory's sources Brewer writes that he "has handled them, to be sure, in accordance

with his own strong feeling for form and moral content, but he is completely at their mercy. Unless they move him, he cannot move....When we look at Malory's work--or works--we are not looking at the work of one man, but perhaps of a dozen, far separated in time and space, occupation and outlook. Each writer built on what had been made before."²⁰ This very dependence on his sources, continues Brewer, may possibly account for effects in the Morte Darthur of which Malory is little more than the scribe.

Brewer's observations on Malory can, with a slight shift in perspective, be applied to Lydgate's problem. Even more than Malory Lydgate is very often cast in the role of scribe or transmitter. Having settled upon, or having been assigned, his subject matter, he shows himself consciously aware that his poetic function on one level involves the translatio studii, the chronological and linguistic transference of the 'matter' of his sources. In the Troy-Book, for example, he writes that his task was to follow Prince Henry's command:

Of hem of Troye in englysche to translate,
 The sege also and the destruccioun,
 Lyche as the latyn maketh mencion,
 For to compyle, and after Guydo make,
 So as I coude, and write it for his sake,
 By-cause he wolde that to hyghe and lowe
 The noble story openly wer knowe
 In our tonge, aboute in euery age,
 And y-written as wel in our langage
 As in latyn and in frensche it is;
 That of the story the trouth we nat mys
 No more than doth eche other nacioun;
 This was the fyn of his entencioun.²¹

His first responsibility is to the mythos, to the story, to hand it on as the great clerks in the past have done for whatever truth it may contain. It is not to invent a new version or even to substantially alter the old. A medieval reader of the story of Thebes or Troy wanted what Lewis calls "the established Model of the past: tinkered a little here and there but substantially the same. This was what was useful for conversation, for poets, for 'ensamples.'"²² This obligation to take as his point of departure 'such things as the writings tell us' was an integral part of Lydgate's poem, and we find him in the Prologues to his major works taking stock of his materials, commenting on his sources, establishing the frame of reference, the basic assumptions against which the story proper will be told.

An interesting and illuminating parallel to the position rhetorical invention held in the medieval artes poeticae is to be found in the ars praedicandi or the art of preaching. Like the medieval poet, the medieval preacher learned his craft through training in the traditional forms of ancient rhetoric; these taught him how to present the content of his sermon, adapted to the needs and reality of contemporary experiences, through conventional formalistic devices. The most important of these for the development of the sermon were the common-places which in ancient practice had been discussed under inventio. These topoi found their way into medieval

rhetoric through the Organon of Aristotle; the Topica, De Inventione, and De Oratore of Cicero; the Ars poetica of Horace; the Ad Herennium; and the Commentaries and De differentiis topicis of Boethius.²³

In classical rhetoric the commonplaces had been designed to aid the orator to find all that could be said about a subject. Cicero, for example, had written his Topica as a storehouse of material to which the speaker could go for the 'invention' of arguments. This involved an analytic process or review of the case to determine how the issue should be argued or to discover which are the available means of persuasion. In practice this review usually took the form of surveying headings or dialectical commonplaces the orator was trained to investigate that would first define the nature of the issue. Who, why, where, when, how, by what means were the questions to be asked, and the answers directed the orator to those 'regions' or 'seats for arguments' where information and material might be found (such as cause, time, place, manner, and means). But when rhetoric changed under the Empire, the character and function of the commonplaces changed. They not only became guides whose patterned use was extended to the development of any kind of spoken or written discourse, but their content was overlooked and an exaggerated emphasis placed on their stylistic manipulation. As a result of this development, Sister Lechner notes, in the many discussions of rhetoric throughout

the medieval period the commonplaces "were authorized for adornment and dilation in poetry, for amplification in preaching, and for elegance and distinction in letter writing."²⁴ Rhetorical invention for poet and preacher alike chiefly meant the use of the commonplaces for expanding ideas and for embellishing the style of the text.

The extant medieval manuals on the art of preaching reveal how important was this concept of the places of invention in the composition of sermon material. Caplan calls attention to the Aquinas Tractate which summarizes all sermon material under ten topics: God, the Devil, the Heavenly City, the Inferno, the world, the soul, the body, sin, penitence, and virtue. The medieval preacher, as Humbert de Romans (thirteenth century) attests, thus often found it more difficult to invent useful matter out of which to compose a sermon than to weave together a sermon from material already invented.²⁵ More interesting is the tractate by William of Auvergne, the De faciebus. Here William applies the dialectical commonplaces from Cicero and Quintilian quis, quibus, ubi, quando, quomodo, and quid to the explication of the Scriptural text which will be the basis for his sermon.²⁶ What is remarkable about William's inventional list is that John of Garland employs a similar method in his analysis of poetical invention of material. According to John, the poet can 'invent' or 'discover' material by asking ubi, quid, quale, ad quid, and qualiter. The answers will provide

him with his matter, his end and his means. The poet's task is to discover material--in the Latin classics or popular tales, in proverbia and florilegia, in openly historical accounts of persons or in the allegorical integumenta of poetic fables--that would provide him with situations, themes, 'ensamples' for whatever particular truth (sententia, sen, or 'sentence') he hoped to extract from his subject, a process carried out through amplification and the rhetorical colors. John's discussion makes it evident that for the poet as for the preacher, invention signified either the selection of texts and materials to re-work,²⁷ or the use of topics no longer conceived as seats for arguments but as a series of themes to be followed in the stylistic amplification of any subject.

Matthew of Vendôme's Ars Versificatoria clearly records how this transformation of the Ciceronian topics was effected. In his treatise, one of the earliest codifications by the school rhetoricians, Matthew attempted to transfer Cicero's theory of the attributes of persons and things to what he considered the primary function of the poet, the art of description. For Cicero these attributes are among the commonplaces appropriate to the confirmation part of the oration, those marshallings of proof which lend credit, authority, and support to the case. He lists, for example, eleven such attributes of persons: name, nature, manner of life, fortune, habit,

feeling, interests, purposes, achievements, accidents, speeches made. In addition, these personal attributes also form the basis of inventio in epideictic oratory where they are similarly used for praise or blame. Matthew made these attributes the central focus of the poem's business, an attitude which Spearing sees as one of the dominant characteristics of medieval poetry: "For the medieval rhetoricians, the pressure of narrative or argument had ceased to be important, and thus they advocated a constant turning aside from the main path of a work into descriptive digressions. For them, indeed, the art of poetry is above all an art of description: a poem is a peg on which descriptions are to be hung and the shape of the peg is of little importance."²⁸ In the course of time, then, the Ciceronian topics were 'frozen' into blocks of traditional material to be elaborated and decorated with the rhetorical figures. For all the school rhetoricians after Matthew, Cicero's inventional topics are analyzed under either elocutio or amplificatio, invention coming to mean primarily verbal invention or the search for verbal ingenuity.

B. Amplificatio and Abbreviatio

If working from material already committed to writing enjoined Lydgate to follow the essential arrangement of his sources, it nevertheless allowed him to make certain modifications--additions and subtractions--in

this received material. The handbooks on rhetoric had very little to say about dispositio or arrangement of material, and most of that dealt only with the guidelines for beginning and ending the work. The poet was therefore relatively free in regard to the larger parts of his composition; he could handle the body of his material in greater or less detail. As a result the form of the medieval poem is often imposed upon it from a mechanical rather than an organic point of view, built up either around numerical or allegorical schemes, the catalogue or the inventory.²⁹ Aside from the 'disposition' of material implied in the very nature of the work, however, there is not much in the dicta of Geoffrey of Vinsauf and John of Garland, the only authors of artes poeticae to treat of the conduct of narrative in the body of a work, that a poet could discover concerned expressly with organization or structure. In an age in which many narrative poems were not intended for a reading public, the feeling for literary form, inner coherence of structure, or unity of action was simply not one of the writer's larger concerns. And since inventio involved primarily the choice of a source or theme and dispositio the means of getting underway with it, far more important to the medieval author were the techniques of amplification and abbreviation. It was to these techniques that the major burden in the composition of poetry was shifted; the section dealing with them consequently received large and care-

fully organized treatment in the manuals of rhetoric. Let us begin with the more important of the two.

Medieval rhetoricians misunderstood the classical notion of amplification. In classical rhetoric the term referred to the elevation of treatment that important subjects were accorded, but for the medieval theorists amplificatio meant first of all lengthening the matter of a work by drawing it out, expanding the linear sequence by means of specific rhetorical devices. These might range from simple periphrasis and apostrophe to the more complex techniques of descriptio and digressio. The fact that several of these amplifying procedures were likewise dealt with when the ornaments of style were discussed indicates that amplificatio was in part another means for embellishing the poem or story by the enrichment of its stylistic texture. In fact the locus classicus for the treatment of most of these devices is Book IV of the Ad Herennium where they were presented either as figures of diction or figures of thought. This point, it seems to me, is worth making if only to remind ourselves that the medieval poet often sought stylistic solutions to structural problems. Medieval narrative, for example, often reveals patterns of symmetry based on descriptive parallelisms and antitheses, rhetorical contrasts, stresses on foreground versus background, and so on. There was, therefore, an intimate connection between principles of style and structure; entire poems were

organized around one or more of the techniques the rhetoricians listed under amplification. In Geoffrey's outline of them in his Poetria Nova, the first of these was known as expolitio and interpretatio. It consisted of saying the same thing in different terms or varying expression by a change of voice or of sentence structure. "Multiplice forma," Geoffrey advises, "Dissimuletur idem; varius sis et tamen idem."³⁰ The formal structure of an entire poem like The Fall of Princes which recounts multiple historical variations on one unifying theme may be interpreted as an extreme example of this habit of mind, expolitio writ large. For a more circumscribed example there is this stanza from the tale of Oedipus:

Bet is to deie than lyue in wrechidnesse,
 Bet is to deie than euer endure peyne,
 Bet is an eende than dedli heuynesse,
 Bet is to deie than euer in wo compleyne;
 And where-as myscheeff doth at folk disdeyne
 Bi woful constreynt off long contynuaunce,
 Bet is to deie than lyue in such greuaunce.
 (FP, I, 3795-3801)

Here the entire stanza is a variation on the one idea: it is better to die than to live in misery.

Periphrasis and comparison were also analyzed under amplificatio. The former was as much a stylistic device as it was a technique for drawing out the narrative, allowing for the heightening of poetic diction. "Longius ut sit opus ne ponas nomina rerum--To prolong the work you must avoid naming things by their names. Use other designations; reveal not a thing entirely but suggest it

by hints; nor let your words course through your subject but rather take a long and circuitous route around what you were going to say briefly."³¹ Curtius counts over a hundred and fifty periphrases in the Divine Comedy, Dante's favorite kind being geographical and astronomical periphrases.³² Chaucer's Franklin, a "burel man" who never learned rhetoric and must speak "bare and pleyn," sports with the pretentiousness of just such an astronomical periphrasis:

...the brighte sonne lost his hewe;
For th'orizonte hath reft the sonne his lyght,--
This is as much to say as it was nyght.-³³

Stylistic decorum or the treatment of matters requiring delicacy also account for the use of the periphrastic mode. Here, for instance, is a minor example of the way Lydgate can make periphrasis work; he is describing Medea's passionate longing for Jason to come to her chamber at night:

...sche was smete with a deuocioun
Of fresche Venus to holden a memorie
With hym allone in hir oratorie--
(TB, I, 3550-2)

This is not as ridiculous as it may sound if we recall first, the context, and then the elaborate parallels to Christianity the religion of Love offered to the medieval poet. In fact, several lines later Lydgate apologizes for being too dull to comprehend the "observaunce of swiche religious." But aside from this medieval commonplace, does the periphrasis make the lines work? I think

it does. In their context these lines capture a sense of the "idolatrous" love Medea feels for Jason and thus help to build her character and to provide sufficient motivation for Medea's subsequent behavior.

Perhaps the least important of the amplifying techniques was comparison or the use of simile. It appears only rarely in Lydgate's poetry. Even in his epics there is nothing at all comparable to the extended Virgilian (or Dantesque) simile. The school rhetoricians themselves did not favor the simile. Matthew of Vendôme held that it was permissible among the ancients but that modern poets should avoid its use. His condemnation was repeated by Evrard l'Allemand, and Geoffrey, who allowed them, preferred the similitude "per brevitatem," the abridged comparison, to the similitude "per collationem," the detailed parallel.³⁴ It is impossible to say whether these rhetorical precepts affected Lydgate's use of the simile, but the overwhelming majority of them fall into the category favored by Geoffrey, the abridged comparison. Fortune wounds "As a blynd archer with arwes sharpe grounde," blood gushes out "Lich a conduit" and is "lich purpil off colour," a garden is "Soote and fressh lich a paradys," warriors in their fury were "lik Tygres or lyouns," a maiden stands "stille as a lambre," and so on. Occasionally there are slightly longer comparisons. When he is excusing himself for having written the histories of so many wicked women, he explains that by comparison

the reputation of all virtuous ladies will only increase

Lik as whan cloudis ther blaknesse doun declyne,
 Phebus mor cleer doth with his bemys shyne.
 (FP, I, 6677-78)

And there is a touch of Chaucer's humor and common sense in Lydgate's assertion that there is no point in asking why Medea did not look out for her future now that Jason has abandoned her just "as a medicine/ Availleth nat, whan the seke is ded" (TB, I, 3626-27). But compared to the innumerable metaphors in his poetry, these few similes appear scanty indeed.

Apostrophe appears next among the devices of amplification, along with its peculiar rhetorical colors exclamatio, conduplicatio, subjectio, and dubitatio. Apostrophe for the ancient rhetoricians had signified the oratorical procedure of turning away from the judge to directly address one's adversary, but in the arts of poetry it had come to mean what the ancients called exclamatio, simply a passionate cry addressed to a person or thing used to intensify and reinforce the expression of emotion. Addresses of all kinds--to poets and patrons, to Christ, His mother, and the saints, to legendary beings and historical figures both living and dead, to the gods of antiquity, the Muses, the Three Fates, to personifications such as Death, Poverty, Discord, and Love, to inanimate objects such as the river Styx, to cities and countries--all are so frequent and conventional in Lydgate that no examples need be cited. The address to

Rome which closes Book II of The Fall, however, is a special use of apostrophe in Lydgate's poetry, repeating in stanza after stanza an address to the city in the form of an ubi sunt motif, ending in a refrain. The cumulative effect is overwhelming as Lydgate expands on his favorite subject, the image of Rome becoming an epitome for the mutability and transience of all things human:

Rome, remembre off thi fundacioun,
 And off what peeple thou tooke thi gynnynny:
 Thi bilydng gan off fals discencioun,
 Off slauntre, moordre & outraious robyng,
 Yevyng to vs a maner knowlechyng,--
 A fals begynnnyng, auctours determyne,
 Shal be processe come onto ruyne.

Wher be thyn Emperours, most souereyn off renoun?
 Kynges exiled for outraious lyuyng?
 This senatours, with worthi Scipioun?
 Poetis olde thi tryumphes rehersyng,
 Thi laureat knyhtis, most statli ther ridyng,
 Thyn aureat glorie, thy noblesse tenlumyne,
 Is be long processe brouht onto ruyne.
 (FP, II, 4460-73)

Like the descriptive frame, the apostrophe was used in a variety of contexts--serious, ironic, and mocking. More than any other technique of amplification it took on an autonomous character as a stylistic set piece, developing into the separate genre of the Complaint. Lydgate's A Complaint of the Lovers Lyf is a fine handling of this traditional mode, assimilating and synthesizing its several models into a tissue of literary topoi. But even throughout his longer poems there are significant examples of his proficiency with this technique--the Exclamation against Alcibiades' Death being a prominent

example. And Canace's Letter of Complaint is of particular importance for the light it casts on the different ways Gower and Lydgate handle their rhetorical poetic.

The fifth amplifying technique Geoffrey discusses is Prosopopoeia. In its various meanings prosopopoeia embraced both the general sense of ascribing speeches to persons dead or absent or to inanimate objects as well as the more restricted sense of personification. This more general meaning had a long history behind it, dating back to the school exercises (suasoriae) in the Roman schools of rhetoric where the student was trained to invent speeches or dialogue (sermocinatio) for either historical or fictitious characters to speak in imagined situations; as Faral observes, they provided "exercice excellent pour les poetes et les historiens qui ont a peindre des personnages."³⁵ The technique thus found a wide application in the literature of the Middle Ages. Even the monastic historians whose reconstruction of the past was usually limited, inserted into their chronicles for variety and interest rhetorical exhortations and addresses of political and military leaders and occasionally the dialogue between historical characters. Prosopopoeia in its special signification of personification was so widespread in medieval literature that it needs no comment here. Examples of its use can be found on almost every page in Lydgate.

Most important of all the rhetorical devices listed

under amplificatio, however, were descriptio and digressio. I have already mentioned description as a rhetorical topos for stylistic amplification. The rules for discovering subject matter for epideixis, based on the topics of invention, were developed and catalogued by the Roman Sophists and passed into the medieval artes poeticae as topics for description. Specifically the attributes of persons and things (argumenta a persona and argumenta a re) were made the occasion or springboard for detailed descriptions and formalized portraits within a conventional framework. Interludes detailing the locus amoenus, tournaments, castles, swords, rings, armor (or the arming of the warrior), catalogues of trees and gems, portraits of beautiful women, warriors, and rulers, descriptions of storms and pageants--these and other bravura effects are the patrimony of the unbroken rhetorical tradition from antiquity. In a courtly poetry which valued elaborate topical dilation, there was a tendency for these static, formalized non-narrative elements of the story to assume an autonomy of their own, "generating a meaning by their presence," in Muscatine's words, "without regard for their practical utility in the action."³⁶ Prominent was the detailed lexis, the verbal embellishment for which the abandonment of the narrative thrust was accepted and sanctioned. That is, the medieval poet often included idealized descriptions of both background and foreground material not for direct use in the dramatic action but

for their ulterior significance. This significance might range from the generally atmospheric to the more functional allegoric.³⁷ The Marriage of Oedipus, the thematic nucleus of Lydgate's Siege of Thebes, is a good illustration of this latter use of description; it constitutes the allegorical heart of the poem much as Chaucer uses the Hous of Fame or the three temples in The Knight's Tale as the core of his tales' meaning.

An examination of several of Lydgate's seasonal descriptions reveals his characteristic rhetorical pattern. The first is from The Siege of Thebes:

Whan brighte phebus passed was the ram
 Myd of Aprille and into bole cam,
 And Satourn old with his frosty face
 In virgyne taken had his place,
 Malencolik and slowgh of mocioun,
 And was also in thoposicioun
 Of lucina the mone moyst and pale,
 That may Shour fro heuene made avale;
 Whan Aurora was in the morowe red,
 And Iubiter in the Crabbes Hed
 Hath take his paleys and his mansioun;
 The lusty tyme and Ioly fressh Sesoun
 Whan that Flora the noble myghty quene,
 The soyl hath clad in newe tendre grene,
 with her floures crafty ymeynt,
 Braunch and bough with red and whit depeynt,
 Fletinge the bawme on hillis and on valys:
 The tyme in soth.... 38

A Complaynt of a Loveres Lyfe begins with this spring opening:

In May when Flora, the fresshe lusty quene,
 The soyle hath clad in grene, rede and white,
 And Phebus gan to shede his stremes shene
 Amyd the Bole wyth al the bemes bryght,
 And Lucifer to chace away the nyght
 Ayen the morow our orysont hath take
 To bydde lovers out of her slepe awake:

The lover rises and wanders "to fynde socour of my smert"
in the lovely park, full of bird-song and sunshine:

The dewe also lyk syluer in shynyng
Vpon the leues as eny bayme suete
Til fiery Tytan with hys persaunt hete
Had dried vp the lusty lycour nyw
Vpon the herbes in the grene mede,
And that the floures of mony dyuers hywe
Vpon her stalkes gunne for to sprede
And for to splayen out her leues on brede
Ageyn the sun golde-borned in hys spere
That down to hem cast hys bemes clere. 39

Again, the description of April and the Calends of May in
Book I of the Troy-Book begins with language strongly
reminiscent of Chaucer's opening to the Canterbury Tales:

Whan that the soote stormis of Aprille,
Vnto the rote ful lawe gun distille,
His lusty licour, with many holsom schour,
To reise the vertu up into the flour.
(TB,I, 3907-10)

Finally there are these three stanzas in rime royal from
a much larger sequence that treats the same topos in
Lydgate's Testament:

The honysoucle, the fresshe primerolles,
Ther leues splaye at Phebus vprysyng,
Thamerous foules with motytes and carolles,
Salue this sesoun euery morwenyng,
Whan Aurora hir licour distylllyng
Sent on herbes the perely dropis shene,
Of siluer dewes tenlumyne with the grene.

This tyme of Ver is named of grenesse,
Tyme of ioye, of gladnesse, and disporte,
Tyme of growyng, chief moder of freshnesse,
Tyme of reioysyng, ordeyned for counforte,
Tyme whan tyme maketh his resorte
In geryshe Marche toward the Ariete,
Our Emyspery to gladen with his hete.

Whiche sesoun prikkes fressh corages,
Reioyseth bestes walking in ther pasture,
Causeth byrdes to syngen in ther cages,
Whan blood reneweth in euery creature,

Sum obseruance doynge to nature,
 Which is of ver called chief pryncesse,
 And vnder God ther worldly Emperesse. 40

Parallels to spring descriptions of this sort have been traced not only to Chaucer, but to Guido's Historia Troiae, Vincent of Beauvais' Speculum Naturale, Boccaccio's Ameto and Filocolo, and the Pervigilium Veneris.⁴¹ Lydgate's achievement in such passages lies not in the imitation of any single source but rather in the literary skill which blends together various fragments and stereotypes drawn from a number of sources. He is here reworking not Chaucer alone but the entire literary tradition of season-description in Latin, French, and Middle English behind Chaucer.

Rosemond Tuve has listed the characteristics of this topos: semi-scientific details (like the licour of April); stock rhetorical personifications like Zephyrus, Flora, and Natura; symbolic figures of the life-giving power of Nature or Venus or Spring; the courtly garden setting (as in Lydgate's Complaynt); zodiacal and astrological details from written and pictorial sources (such as the many references to the signs of the zodiac in the Prologue passage and the astrological terminology, "thoposicioun" and "his paleys and his mansioun"); and conventional descriptive details taken from a rhetorical tradition in Latin verse and the artistic tradition as it appeared in manuscript illuminations, sculpture, and other mediums.⁴² The passages cited make it obvious that Lydgate shows a

greater familiarity with the details of this continental background than does Chaucer in his opening reverdie; from them he weaves together their surface qualities-- images, phrases, and rhythms--re-arranging them into a static pictorial composition with a beauty of its own. When writing like this with the thrust of a rich and varied rhetorical idiom behind him, Lydgate shows how well the medieval poet could make use of what has gone before him instead of 'inventing.' The basis of much of Lydgate's best poetry is of this kind; it is rooted in a literary tradition that provides either the larger frame or the local details.

It is equally important to observe how these different passages are used in the context of the whole poem. The Prologue descriptio, for example, despite all its artifice and Chaucerian echoes, is essentially one dimensional. It lacks Chaucer's economy of design which makes the physical rebirth of nature the groundsong for a pilgrimage to and for spiritual regeneration. Its detail is primarily 'atmospheric.' Likewise the description of the locus amoenus in Lydgate's Complaynt ignores the significaciones of similar details in Chaucer's garden descriptions, but like the spring opening of Gower's Confessio Amantis the natural beauty of the park is identifiable with Nature and contrasts with the lover's disordered condition. The description of the spring is thus the part of the wholesome and restorative background

of the poem against which the Knight's love-complaint will be foregrounded.⁴³ A similar effect is achieved in the Troy-Book selection. The several descriptions of spring and natural beauty work in thematic counterpoint against the temporal foreground of human activity, the various treacheries and battles of Trojan history. Finally, in the Testament the extended seasonal description attains full allegorical significance: the season of Spring becomes the allegorical equivalent of childhood, and just as Spring sunshine changes to storms, so Death can overcome the child, a truth which prompts the speaker to remember his youthful exuberance and wildness with regret.

Closely related to the descriptive set piece was the digression. In fact, the elaborate description was only one form the digression might take. Two kinds were generally distinguished: those which were initiated by some hint or impulse in the story material (digressions from the subject-matter to something else outside it) and those which dropped one narrative thread to pick up a separate one (digressions within the subject-matter to another part of it). These last were as a rule clearly indicated in the text and reveal the poet's acquaintance with rhetorical terminology. For instance, in The Siege of Thebes we read:

But now most I make a digressioun
To telle shortly as in Sentement,
Of thilke knyght that Tydeus hath sent
Into Thebes....

(ST, 2466-69)

Vinaver has suggested that this application of the digressive principle may account for the peculiar narrative technique of the romances, the constant crossing and interrupting of a number of narrative threads.⁴⁴ More frequent in Lydgate, however, are digressions of the first kind, sections which interrupt the narrative for a number of purposes--moral exhortation, technical explanation, and the encyclopedic inclusion of an amazing array of various scraps and pieces of information of one kind or another. In the Troy-Book, for example, there are digressions on the origin of chess, the value of pi, the nature of classical drama, and the Trojan sewer system. The Fall of Princes includes an exclamation against dishonest officials, a learned compilation of inventors and their inventions, a chapter on rhetoric, a digression on clothes, on blasphemy and oaths, and on a water that makes thieves blind and an herb that makes people laugh themselves to death.

The inclusion of such 'extra-literary' material must be seen in relation to the character of medieval poetry. Since verse still was the medium for treating material for which we would normally use prose, poetry was expected to cover a much wider range of human needs and activities than it does now. In the fifteenth century, as Pearsall notes, "there were no 'unpoetic' subjects, and consequently we find poems in the Lydgate canon for which we should now consult a history book or encyclopedia, or

even a cookery-book or 'Family Doctor.'"⁴⁵ Not only was the content of these digressive moments in no sense, then, judged unpoetic or inappropriate according to fifteenth century standards of decorum, but the form itself had long been regarded as a special elegance. "Digressio similiter ampliatur et decoratur materiam," writes Geoffrey,⁴⁶ and as a result digressions were consciously cultivated in Lydgate's Latin and French stylistic models for his own poems. His audience probably relished such compliments to their culture and taste, and we should not forget that his early readers found his sententiousness, his philosophy and learning, to their liking. In the long poems the digressions probably had a practical value as well. They gave the reader or listener a chance to relax his attention to the story for a moment. In The Fall of Princes especially the digressions are strategically placed to avoid the monotony of having one tragic figure simply replaced by another and another.

Of greater interest to the modern reader are those digressions which are kept strictly functional, dramatically appropriate and central to the theme. It has been suggested, for example, that the digressions in The Siege of Thebes are not peripheral or irrelevant but integral to his purpose.⁴⁷ But the basis of Ayer's argument rests upon his assumption that Lydgate regarded his material not as fiction but as history, and that his purpose in writing was not so much to tell a story of any kind as it was to

teach some moral and political lessons by reference to what he regarded as ancient historical example. Thus the digressive mode which is inappropriate for fiction with its linear narrative sequence is right in keeping with the structure of a work whose aim was the presentation of didactic materials. It should be evident, however, from what has been said about 'sentence' and digression that there is no need for such an attempt at justification. The Siege of Thebes is a chivalric romance, based on a roman d'antiquité and influenced by the tradition of courtly romance. A distinguishing feature of such romances from the twelfth century on is the author's habit of expressing through a fabula or a historia a point of view of his own, what the French poets called the sen to distinguish it from the matiere. The events of Lydgate's matière, the narratio, are thus to be considered as giving occasion to the sen, that is, to a pattern which has meaning for him. Digression was one means by which Lydgate could comment on the narratio, to offer his insights into its meaning, to interpret and direct his reader's understanding of it. His commentary and his 'reaction' to the story constitute the burden of the poem. The interior meaning of the poem is to be extrapolated from the tension between the poet's material (here the story he found in his source) and his attitude toward it. Lydgate's divagations are not peripheral because they contain the 'sentence' which the narrative illustrates.

They are Lydgate's gloss upon his own text. As such they are inseparable from the story of Thebes since they underline what can be gathered from it, why it is worth remembering and telling. Or looked at from a different angle, the digressions carry through to a conclusion the theme at different loci in the story.

Abbreviation needs far less comment than amplification. Brevity in the narrative had been an ideal of style in antiquity, recommended by the author of the Ad Herennium, Cicero, Quintilian, and Horace; but in the Middle Ages, the original concept of brevity as a virtus narrationis had long since been obscured so that by the thirteenth century the essence of brevity was thought to lie in the use of particular verbal artifices.⁴⁸ John of Garland listed these constructions or figures of words in his Poetria: emphasis, asyndeton, verbum conversum in participium, ablatus absolutus, and articulus. All were means to help brevity by substituting shorter or more condensed sentence parts for looser or longer originals. Most of them, however, simply could not be applied to the syntax of the vernacular languages, and Lydgate's favorite abbreviatory topoi are therefore the rather simple ones of using the absolute construction and, more importantly, occupatio--not saying what one might say. This last may be introduced on a number of pretexts. Lydgate affirms he will cut short his story because he is not capable of writing about his subject

("Al this in soth descryven I ne can") or because it properly deserves separate and extended treatment ("Of alle this to gynne a newe tale/It were in soth a maner ydelnesse") or because this part of the narrative lies outside his original purpose. Thus the tale of Theseus' return to Athens after the destruction of Thebes will not be pursued because

At the gynnyng I took no mor on honde
 Be my promys, in conclusioun,
 But to reherce the destruccioun
 Of myghty Thebes shortly, and no more.
 (ST, 4604-7)

Finally, Lydgate will abridge the narrative structure by referring his reader to other books or authors where the subject receives full treatment. In The Fall of Princes, when he reaches the history of Troy, he even refers the reader to his own Troy-Book. All these 'evasions' of narratio, however, are given only after a brief summary or epitome of the omitted material has been given, a practice perhaps based on a hint in Geoffrey who recommended the poet handling material already in literary form to run quickly over the parts that predecessors have dwelt upon and then develop the parts they have neglected.

The importance of these techniques for a poet like Lydgate who frequently found himself working from prior sources cannot be underestimated, and it is no wonder that amplificatio in particular has been called Lydgate's characteristic mode of thought and expression.⁴⁹ They

provided the poet with the means to re-tell his story in expanded or contracted versions. Thus the rehandling or adapting of already existent material in no way stifled the creativity or imagination of the poet as seriously as the terms imitation, adaptation, or even translation might suggest.⁵⁰ Such an individual creation as Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde is the best evidence for the argument that amplification could be, as Pearsall observes, "broad, deep and creative, not narrow and pedantic as the categorisations of some of its teachers might suggest."⁵¹ And Chaytor's observation on the medieval remanieur's attitude toward his source provides a useful insight into what must have been typical of Lydgate's approach. The adapter, he points out, "was not constrained by models or systems, and independence or originality could enlarge and decorate any groundplan that had found general acceptance."⁵² That the medieval poet did work from a "groundplan" would not have been judged a handicap. It rather released him to do other things in his poem.

As long as the poet kept fairly close to the larger narrative sequence demanded by logic, history, a source, or whatever, he was free to embellish this sequence by adding or elaborating episodes, by digressing in descriptive, lyrical, or sententious passages. Or he could present only the "purum corpus materiae"⁵³ by reducing it, simplifying and dissolving it to its bare essentials. He could make the narrative move briskly in a plain and

bare style, or he could slow it down in order to linger over what he judged morally urgent, emotionally exciting, or just simply aesthetically pleasing. He might find in the sometimes simple, sometimes meaningless story of his given materials a new signification capable of moral interpretation and redirect it into a plausible and complex pattern of human behavior. The point is that amplification and abbreviation allowed for significant restatements of his matter, and whether the poet is concerned with cutting away what he believes no longer has rhetorical efficacy, or more likely, with elaborating and emphasizing what he finds there to move his readers, in either instance the over-all effect was to make the audience feel that they have been presented with a better story, more carefully worked, than would have been possible if he had simply served up his material unchanged.

C. Elocutio

Up to this point, the focus has been on those precepts of the school rhetoricians which would have provided Lydgate with the basic assumptions as poetic remanieur both required of him and allowed him to do. These, as we have seen, had to do with such primary compositional considerations as choice of source and theme, organization and structure, revision and re-alignment-- in brief, with keeping in workable balance the tension

engendered by the literary tradition and by his own departures from it. But by far the most significant place in the medieval handbooks on rhetoric was given over to the kinds of ordered language which carried out in detail the functions of amplificatio and abbreviatio. Payne writes of the position elocutio held in the rhetorical system:

Nearly always, the rhetorical theorists seem to assume that an author will be working from a prior source, and therefore what little they have to say about overall structure (dispositio) is concerned with ways of stripping out what is no longer efficacious (abbreviatio) and fitting in newly effective language (amplificatio). Poetry's business was to persuade, but to persuade through emotions roused by figures and images rather than through the rational convictions of logic. Hence, so the rhetorical theorists apparently reasoned, the proper business of poet and critic, and the distinguishing quality of the craft of poetry, is the artful ordering of words: style or diction, or in the rhetoricians' jargon, elocutio. 54

Style, then, became the means whereby the poet actually accomplished what he set out to do in his poem. Having chosen his source and theme and having determined how he will proceed, the poet's next task was to transmute this matter through the artful ordering of language into a shaped, articulated emblem of poetic labor. Poetry in large measure thus meant versified rhetoric, identical with the tropes and figures of style which taught the poet how to clothe areas of meaning with the words of the poem in accordance with preformed notions of the verbal qualities appropriate to each of its parts.⁵⁵

Analyses of style in the rhetorical treatises can be conveniently discussed under two headings: first, the theory of the three styles, and secondly, the ornaments of style. Medieval poetic theory distinguished three styles, the high, the middle, the low which were believed to correspond to the social dignity (and in some formulations, to the generic decorum) of the poem's subject matter. Both Geoffrey of Vinsauf and John of Garland make explicit the connection between the social rank of the poem's content and the verbal hierarchy of its form. Geoffrey writes: "Et tales recipiunt appellationes [styli] ratione personarum vel rerum de quibus fit tractatur. Quando enim de generalibus personis vel rebus tractatur, tunc est stylus grandifopuus; quando de humilibus, humilis; quando de mediocribus, mediocris." And John of Garland: "Item sunt tres styli secundum tres status hominum: pastorali vitae convenit stylus humilis, agricolis mediocris, gravis gravibus personis quae praesunt pastoribus et agricolis."⁵⁶ These rather elementary discriminations were, of course, modified by poets in working out in practice more sophisticated correlations between style and meaning than medieval theory attempted to encompass. Differences in stylistic levels or textures, for example, which violated generic or social decorum might be employed for complex literary effects and would thus have to be considered in relation to the poem's literary strategy. The medieval notion of stylistic

correspondence must therefore be broadened to mean a correspondence between kinds of style and areas of meaning determined by the poet's immediate purpose or theme.

Lydgate's ability or interest, however, in manipulating style for these more complex effects is limited. His scope is restricted, his performance, aside from the religious lyrics, is conventional. His poetic always remains literary--artful, correct, but restricted by the decorum of that art, incapable of capturing the complexity of imaginative human experience. Rare are the instances of what Muscatine calls the "mixed style" and its attendant effects: irony, perspective, relativity, humor, and complexity of vision.⁵⁷ Whatever stylistic effects are achieved in his poetry, they are not won by sudden shifts in tone or by a series of rhetorical contrasts sharply or abruptly juxtaposed with each other. Rather they are achievements worked out within a more conventional, one-dimensional range of possibilities--within a simple style suitable for plain historical reporting; within a 'pathetic' style with simple characterization, plain diction, and spare setting; within the high, courtly style: static, non-dramatic, descriptive, and didactic; or within the heavily ornate, aureate diction of the late religious poems.

A corollary of this theory of styles is the concept of the rhetorical figuration of language, the ornaments of style. The medieval rhetoricians distinguished two

types of rhetorical ornamentation: difficult ornament (difficultas ornata) based on the semantic deviation of language and simple ornament (ornata facilitas) based on syntactic deviation. Difficult ornament is characterized by the use of tropes, words or constructions that have a sense other than the literal meaning. The tropes are what today would be called figures of speech. Ten such difficult devices were codified in the manuals: metaphor, onomatopoeia, metonymy, synecdoche, periphrasis, and hyperbole are the most familiar; catachresis, pronominatio, hyperbaton, and permutatio (allegory) are the less familiar tropes. Easy ornaments, on the other hand, are marked by the employment of the rhetorical schemes of which two subdivisions were noted: the figures of words and the figures of thoughts. The figures of words are the rhetorical "colors" and are based on the arrangement or grammatical patternings of words across the poetic lines. Over thirty of these simple ornaments were listed in the handbooks. The colors Lydgate frequently uses include contentio (antithesis), repetitio (anaphora), exclamatio, sententia (proverbial material), occupatio, and interrogatio. The other kind of easy ornament consists of the figures of thought. Among the almost twenty listed by the school rhetoricians were the portrait (effictio), pro-sopopoeia and ethopopoeia, the exemplum, and descriptio. Even a quick glance at these catalogues will indicate that there is a good deal of overlapping between the devices

of easy and difficult ornamentation as well as between these techniques and the techniques for amplifying material. Indeed it is often difficult to determine the underlying principles operative in the classification of this material. Some attempt was made to see a connection between the tripartition of styles the rhetoricians distinguished and the various kinds of ornament. The weighty courtly style, for example, was generally thought appropriate for the use of difficult ornaments; but no rigid correspondence was maintained.

Lydgate's treatment of the tropes and figures, along with other features of his poetic style, will be discussed later in the context of specific poems. There is, however, another aspect of fifteenth century English style which might be mentioned here, the use of word pairs. They appear frequently in Lydgate's poetry. Jerome Mitchell has called attention to them in Hoccleve and has classified them into several types according to their position in the poetic line. Word pairs, Mitchell, points out, were a feature of both medieval prose and poetry, especially prose translations. In poetry they were essentially a means of amplification, often used mechanically to eke out lines with a minimum of effort. Yet they often conduce to the heightening of style, creating a sonorous and dignified verbal expression as well as allowing for a complete and exact expression of meaning. Thus like the traditional ornaments of style,

word pairs were a conventional means of literary embellishment, consciously employed and systematically worked out in a variety of ways with the idea of producing an ostentatious literary effect.⁵⁸ Examples of the device may be divided into the following groups, based on Mitchell's classification:

Type A₁. Two terms connected usually by "and" or "or" appear at the end of a verse.

And bi a maner of malis and disdeyne
(FP, IX, 2485)

To myn ondoynge and desolacioun
(FP, I, 3936)

To you and youres strecchen and atteyn
(ST, 3331)

Now syth that God thus highly list fufille
Of his knyght requeste and orisoun
(TB, I, 1786)

Type A₂. Two terms connected by "and" or "or" appear in positions other than the end of the verse.

Take and supprised he was with dronkenesse
(FP, VIII, 3293)

Thus they wer sworn and suryd euerichon
(ST, 4395)

Stoon and roche asonder gone riue
(TB, I, 1746)

In slauhtre & moordre set al his plesaunce
(FP, VI, 879)

Type B. Both terms have modifiers or other accompanying words.

Thou were whilom my blisse & al my trust
(FP, I, 6896)

Blak his weede & his habite also

(FP, VI, 869)

They closed hem in gold and in metal
(ST, 598)

Gret was the noyse and the pitous soun
(ST, 588)

Type C. The unbalanced word pair: one or more words
come between the first term and the coordinate conjunction.

Afftir that Creusa consumed was & brent
(FP, I, 2344)

For shame he fledde & parcel eek for dreede
(FP, I, 4452)

And or the flawme consumed was & spent
(FP, I, 2021)

Type D. The first term appears at the end of one
line and the second at the beginning of the next line.

Whereoff the kyng hadde ful gret plesaunce
And gret reioishyng in his opynyoun
(FP, I, 1991)

Off cruel houndis in haste for to be rent
And be deuoured for his mooder sake
(FP, I, 4038)

Saul ful offte gan Daid to enchace
And werrie thoruhout all his londis
(FP, II, 344)

Fel, proude & fers, deuoyde of pacience,
And vengable, who hym dide offence
(TB, II, 4671)

Combinations of one or more of these types may appear
in successive lines.

And in discence and fallyng off the stonys,
Off the werkmen ful many a man was ded,
And oppressid, ther bak Ibroke and bonys
(FP, I, 1177-79)

Thei stood also in daunger and in dreed
Off cruel beestis, tigres and leouns,
Off tusshi booris, who-so taketh heed,

And in gret feer off these fell dragouns,
 Thassaut off serpentis and off scorpiouns;
 For thilke beestis that toforn were mylde,
 Afftir ther synnyng ful rage wex and wilde.
 (FP, I, 715-721)

In summary, style is treated by the theorists primarily in terms of conventional figural ornamentation; in practice, however, it included all those other decorative devices not discussed by the rhetoricians but which were thought to increase the richness of the poet's diction: alliteration, word pairs (a special function of repetitio), rhyme, rhyme-schemes, and stanzaic patterns. The metaphors and images used by medieval poets in discussing style are alike in the conception of style as something decorative added to the poem's content. It is the mantle with which the poet clothes his subject matter, the embroidery applied to the bare garment. Or again, the techniques of verbal embellishment are described as the colors whereby the poet makes bright or gilds the material of his poem. Lydgate, for example, in passages affecting rhetorical modesty speaks frequently of his simple, sparse monochromatic style:

Al-be that I ne can the waye goon
 To swe the floures of his eloquence;
 Nor of peynting I haue noon excellence
 With sondry hewes noble, fresche and gay;
 So riche colours biggen I ne may;
 I mote procede with sable and with blake.
 (TB, II, 192-97)

Often more integral to the poet's purpose than this limited theory of verbal embroidery, however, is a recognition of what Payne calls the "truly re-creative

labor of style." Stylistic elaboration in this sense can be used to "radically alter not only the color but the pattern of the original."⁵⁹ The analyses of Chaucer's stylistic transformation of Boccaccio's story in Troilus and Criseyde by Muscatine and Payne (among others) provide, I think, clear evidence of how the techniques of elocutio can give to a familiar narrative a set of qualitative associations which make it possible for the poet to draw a fresh meaning out of the events of that narrative.⁶⁰ With Lydgate, generally a much more diffuse and more conventional narrative poet, the expression of an individual vision is achieved largely through cumulative stylistic effects rather than in local details which are often thin and bare. It is only in the elaboration of conventional topoi that Lydgate's narrative consistently attains the richness or concentration of expression which is one of his most characteristic achievements. Here, as is usual with Lydgate, the conventional or traditional frame, the traditional patterns of artifice are the source of many of his finest lines.

D. Conclusion

The discussion of medieval poetics in this first section has been purposely wide and necessarily general. In a sense I have worked backwards from the practical immediacy of Lydgate's writing situation to an exposition of what there was in the rhetorical tradition of the

Middle Ages to guide him, either by way of inherent restrictions in the subject matter of the poem, stylistic conventions and expectations, or by way of setting him free within this conventional material. Consequently, the focus has been more on theory than on practice, more on what the medieval might do in his poem than on what John Lydgate did in his poems. In such an approach there is, of course, the danger of oversimplifying something which is complex in its details and fraught with all kinds of problems. But it is important to anchor a discussion of Lydgate's poetry within a fairly consistent program of critical dicta, for the assumption I have been working on is that before Lydgate's poetry can be given a fresh reading, some understanding of the techniques and principles operative in shaping that poetry is essential. As a result I have concentrated on those areas of medieval poetic theory which I believe are most pertinent for just such a reading. The transformation of inventio, the few and rather simple remarks on dispositio, the importance of amplification and abbreviation, and the attention given to style--these have been the areas of medieval rhetoric under examination in so far as they have meaning for Lydgate's characteristic approach. Even this cursory and general review of the medieval poetic tradition has provided us, I think, with several valid conclusions concerning the kind of poetry to expect in Lydgate's work.

First, Lydgate's orientation toward the composition of poetry is in every sense of the word "bookish." His is a world of books, purely literary and non-experiential, which provides him with a series of conventional themes and subjects. Quite frequently books are the point of departure, the raison d'ê[^]tre of his own poems. The matter of much of his poetry is either material to be translated or to be adapted from prior sources already extant in literary form. Very little is 'invented,' original; his task as poet is often that of a recorder, a compiler, a transmitter of what has already been written. So much has been said by hostile critics about Lydgate's tediousness, his voluminousness that as a corrective it is not out of place here to remind ourselves of how large a percentage of his work is in the form of translation, often royally commissioned translation. Estimates of his poetic output are generally put at anywhere from 130,000 to 150,000 lines of verse, a truly staggering figure until it is remembered that only three of the poems undertaken at the bidding of his patrons (The Fall of Princes, the Troy-Book, and his translation of Guillaume de Deguileville's Pelerinage de l'Homme) total over 91,000 verses alone, and a good percentage of what remains could be shown to be translations, on request, out of the French or Latin of his sources. Much of his poetry, then, is a poetry of translation, and the proverbial prolixity is due in large measure to the bulky matter

he was asked to turn into English. How inimical to the creation of first-rate poetry such a burden may prove is evident from Chaucer's Legend of Good Women. The complaints that from time to time punctuate Lydgate's Fall of Princes show that he was not insensitive to the difficulty of forcing his muse to complete the assigned task.

A recognition of the intrinsic restrictions that lay upon his poetic office is thus the starting point for an appreciation of Lydgate's rhetorical approach. An image from another poetic translation, Gavin Douglas' translation of the Aeneid, illuminates the nature of this stance:

Quha is attachit ontill a staik, we se,
May go no ferthir bot wreit about that tre;
Rycht so am I to Virgillis text ybund. 61

The text of his source provides the poet with the large organizational frame that must be his guide and his support. It gives him his raw material, his substance--it takes the place of inventio.⁶² Whatever the poet's digressions from this received matter, his auctour is there to direct him back to the story. This attention to a text both as point of origin and terminus also circumscribes Lydgate's range. He does not reveal that multiplicity of interests whose intersections with one another give Chaucer's poetry its complexity and rich ambiguity. Lydgate's vision is persistently one-dimensional, devoid of that ironic double vision and tone

that have been taken as a key to Chaucer's poetry. Instead it is the realm of literature, the world of books that lends Lydgate's poetry its particular characteristics. Books are for him emblems of civilitas, storehouses of man's collective wisdom, the mode of man's remembrance of whatever is worthy of memorial, mirrors of the past valuable not only for the factual knowledge they contain of times long gone but also for the examples they provide for the present. Nothing in Lydgate's poetry is as evident as this acute sense of his (and mankind's) indebtedness to his auctours as well as the equally strong sense of continuity that links up the labor of great clerks in the past with his own labors in the present. This reverence for the record of the past, for books and writings, is, however, not a harbinger of Renaissance humanism; rather books are revered for their perpetuation of material in which can be read 'ensamples,' and as such are texts, like the Biblical texts, which the poet can use as springboards for moralistic complaint, political lessons, and religious exhortation. It was what the sensibility of his age wanted, a literature "sober, serious, unironic, preoccupied with moral, social and political issues."⁶³ It was this sententious wisdom, his 'moralitee' as much as his rhetoric that Lydgate's admirers valued in his poetry. And it is the kind of poetry that exactly describes the aim of poetry as defined by medieval rhetoric: the double validation of

truth by finding it in the past and making it live in the present.⁶⁴ But to be part of the transference of the past is to be faithful to it, to the historical truth as it was known, authoritatively recorded. Hence he will "folwen the traxis" of his source, "not purposyng to moche for to varie" or "to falsen his matere," but to stick to "myn auctour in substaunce and sentence."

This fundamental dependence upon a tradition not only characterizes the role Lydgate often takes in his most important poems, it is also the source of many of his best lines. His finest passages are those in which the familiar commonplaces and traditional themes are eloquently elaborated and exploited, whether they be the great themes of the Boethian world-view: the instability of worldly things, the mutability of Fame and Fortune, the falseness of earthly felicity and the inevitability of death; or the political admonitions against discord in the state and dissension among princes; the indignation at human duplicity which destroys the concord ideally existing among mankind; or the pathos of human suffering, especially among women, the weak and the innocent. His imagination is most fertile when he is reworking the themes of a rich literary convention, echoing a phrase here, a cadence there, weaving and elaborating his figures into a wrought, complex pattern of rhetorical tissues with an abstract, stylized eloquence of its own. Enough has been said here, I think,

about this rhetorical cast of his poetry. In later sections I shall turn to a more detailed examination of Lydgate's consistent and characteristic poetic achievements.

Footnotes to Chapter I

¹Lydgate's Fall of Princes, ed. Henry Bergen, 4 vols. EETS E.S. 121-124 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1918-1919; reprinted 1967). III, 763-764. All further references to this work are based upon this edition, abbreviated FP.

²Inventio is not completely missing from the rhetorical analyses. Geoffrey of Vinsauf has a very brief section on it in his Poetria Nova and John of Garland a larger discussion in his Poetria, but there had obviously been a decrease in the importance of this activity. Charles Sears Baldwin, Medieval Rhetoric and Poetic (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1928), pp. 191-2 finds its original function was barely recognized and often perverted. Payne, The Key Of Remembrance, p.43 speaks of it as practically disappearing from the rhetorical system, and Edmond Faral, Les Arts poétiques du XII et du XIII siècle: Recherches et documents sur la technique littéraire du Moyen Age (Paris: Libraire Honore Champion, 1924), pp. 55-98 in his investigation of rhetorical doctrine lists only the three headings I have mentioned.

³H.J. Chaytor, From Script to Print: An Introduction to Medieval Vernacular Literature (New York: October House Inc., 1967), p. 50.

⁴John Lawlor, Chaucer (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), p. 14

⁵Rhetorica Ad Herennium, tr. Harry Caplan (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954), p. 7.

⁶P. Albert Duhamel, "The Function of Rhetoric as Effective Expression," The Province of Rhetoric, ed. Joseph Schwartz and John A. Rycenga (New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1965), p. 48. Reprinted from Journal of the History of Ideas, X (June, 1949).

⁷Rhetorica Ad Herennium, p. 5.

⁸Duhamel, p. 46.

⁹Henry Osborn Taylor, The Classical Heritage of the Middle Ages (New York: F. Ungar Pub. Co., 1929), p. 37. Cited in Duhamel.

¹⁰Sister Joan Marie Lechner, Renaissance Concepts of the Commonplaces (New York: Pageant Press, 1962), p. 30.

Footnotes (cont'd)

¹¹Cited in Donald Lemen Clark, Rhetoric in Greco-Roman Education (New York: Columbia University Press, 1957), p. 171.

¹²Ernst Robert Curtius, European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages, tr. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harper & Row, 1953; orig. in German 1948), p. 497. Imitatio was usually distinguished as being either "higher" or "lower" imitation. Higher imitation involved the elaboration or general treatment of a theme based upon the handling of a similar theme by an earlier writer whereas lower imitation, the more common form, referred to the borrowing of words, phrases, or sentences from earlier writers.

¹³Payne, pp. 43, 44, 45-46.

¹⁴Baldwin, pp. 181-2.

¹⁵Payne, p. 46.

¹⁶Eugene Vinaver in his edition The Works of Thomas Malory, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), p. lxxx uses the term sen to define the theme or purpose of the work. The 'sentence' is "not part of a given matter, or a sense inherent in the story, but an idea brought in as it were from outside and expressed through the story, or the way in which the story has been remodelled by the poet to suit his purpose." This fresh meaning, he adds in a note, "may be added to it by the author or the remanieur." Chaucer, for example, tells the story of Lucrece as an example of those "goode women, maydenes and wyves,/That were trewe in lovyng al here lyves." Gower tells the same story in Book VII of the Confessio Amantis so that governors might learn "Hou it is good a king eschue/The lust of vice and vertu suie," and Lydgate tells it (twice) in The Fall of Princes as part of the story of Tarquin's "fall." For a fuller discussion of the significance of "sententia" in medieval poetic theory, see D.W. Robertson, "Historical Criticism," English Institute Essays 1950 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1951), pp. 3-31 and A Preface to Chaucer: Studies in Medieval Perspective (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963) under "sententia" in the index. Robertson uses the term in a rather restricted sense, to signify the doctrinal content or meaning of a text, the "fruit" of the allegory beneath the "chaff" of the narrative. There is no need, however, to limit the import of this word to only the allegorical signification of a text. The truth of a narrative may just as easily be in the sensus historicus or literalis as in the sensus

Footnotes (cont'd)

allegoricus. Cf. Charles Donahue, "Patristic Exegesis: Summation," Critical Approaches to Medieval Literature: Selected English Institute Essays 1958-1959 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), p. 76: "There is no evidence that he [the medieval expositor] regarded allegorical interpretation as having any necessary connection with the exposition of the sententia."

¹⁷Curtius, p. 158.

¹⁸Cf. Robert M. Jordan, Chaucer and the Shape of Creation: The Aesthetic Possibilities of Inorganic Structure (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), p. 43: "Undoubtedly medieval theorists entertained a notion of literary theory quite different from our own, and when medieval poets such as Alan of Lille and Dante discussed their art, they did so within the framework of assumptions made familiar in the mimetic tradition.... In literary theory in the late Middle Ages this mode of thought eventuates in the idea of a poem as an edifice composed of prefabricated parts."

¹⁹Lewis, p. 209.

²⁰D.S. Brewer, "the hoole booke," Middle English Survey, ed. Edward Vasta (University of Notre Dame Press, 1965), p. 235. Reprinted from Essays on Malory, ed. J.A.W. Bennett (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963).

²¹Lydgate's Troy-Book, ed. Henry Bergen, 4 vols. EETS, E.S., 97, 103, 106, 126 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1906-1920), I, 4. All further references to this work are based upon this edition, abbreviated TB.

²²Lewis, The Discarded Image: An Introduction to Medieval and Renaissance Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), p. 181.

²³Caplan, "Classical Rhetoric and the Medieval Theory of Preaching," Classical Philology, XXVIII (1933), 86.

²⁴Lechner, p. 49.

²⁵Caplan, "Rhetorical Invention in Some Medieval Tractates on Preaching," Speculum, II (1927), 290.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷For the fullest discussion of inventio as embrac-

Footnotes (cont'd)

ing the selection of materials, see Payne's chapter in The Key Of Remembrance on Chaucer's Prologue to The Legend of Good Women in which he discusses the implications of the God of Love's insistence that the poet "must know truth, must himself know how to select the right traditional means, must manage to do actually what he intended ideally." Dr. Johnson also speaks of Milton's inventive ability in terms of selection of material. Of Milton's power of invention he says, for example: "Milton was able to select from nature or from story, from ancient fable or from modern science, whatever could illustrate or adorn his thought."

²⁸A.C. Spearing, Criticism and Medieval Poetry (New York: Barnes & Noble, Inc., 1964), p. 55.

²⁹Pearsall, Gower and Lydgate, p. 27.

³⁰Faral, p. 204.

³¹Ibid. (Translation from Curtius, p. 277).

³²Curtius, p. 277.

³³The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, ed. F.N. Robinson, 2nd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1957), p. 135. All further references to Chaucer's work are based upon this edition.

³⁴Faral, p. 69.

³⁵Ibid., p. 72.

³⁶Charles Muscatine, Chaucer and the French Tradition: A Study in Style and Meaning (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957), p. 17.

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Lydgate's Siege of Thebes, ed. Axel Erdmann and E. Ekwall, 2 vols., EETS, E.S. 108, 120 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1911-1920; reprinted 1960), I, 1-2. All further references to this work are based upon this edition, abbreviated ST.

³⁹John Lydgate: Poems, ed. John Norton-Smith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), pp. 47-48.

⁴⁰The Minor Poems of John Lydgate, ed. Henry Noble MacCracken, 2 vols., EETS, E.S. 107, O.S. 192 (New York:

Footnotes (cont'd)

Oxford University Press, 1911-1933; reprinted 1961-2), I, 339-40.

⁴¹Rosamond Tuve, "Spring in Chaucer and Before Him," MLN, LII (1937), 9-16.

⁴²Ibid., 9-10.

⁴³Norton-Smith, p. 162.

⁴⁴The Works of Thomas Malory, pp. xlviii-li.

⁴⁵Pearsall, Gower and Lydgate, p. 25.

⁴⁶Faral, p. 274.

⁴⁷Robert W. Ayers, "Medieval History, Moral Purpose, and the Structure of Lydgate's Siege of Thebes," PMLA, LXXIII (1958), 463.

⁴⁸Curtius, pp. 487-494.

⁴⁹Pearsall, "The English Chaucerians," Chaucer and Chaucerians: Critical Studies in Middle English Literature, ed. D.S. Brewer (University of Alabama Press, 1966), p.212.

⁵⁰Flora Amos Ross, Early Theories of Translation (New York: Columbia University Press, 1920) points out that 'translation' might signify any of the various gradations between a close rendering and an individual creation: translation, compilation, epitome, adaptation, paraphrase, in short, transference.

⁵¹Pearsall, "The English Chaucerians," p. 213.

⁵²Chaytor, p. 3.

⁵³Faral, p. 277.

⁵⁴Payne, "Chaucer and the Art of Rhetoric," Companion to Chaucer Studies, p. 41.

⁵⁵Cf. Jordan, p. 42: "Geoffrey of Vinsauf makes explicit the medieval assumption that poetry is possessed of 'structure', that it is tangible and quantitatively measurable. His aim is to circumscribe the procedures of composition and enumerate its fixed elements. He treats these verbal components in the same manner that a builder would treat stone."

Footnotes (cont'd)

⁵⁶Faral, p. 87.

⁵⁷Muscatine, "The Canterbury Tales: Style of the Man and Style of the Work," Chaucer and Chaucerians, p. 106.

⁵⁸Jerome Mitchell, Thomas Hoccleve: A Study in Fifteenth Century Poetic (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1968), pp. 65-70.

⁵⁹Payne, The Key of Remembrance, p. 51.

⁶⁰See Muscatine, Chaucer and the French Tradition, pp. 125-42 and Payne, The Key of Remembrance, pp. 188-216.

⁶¹Selections from Gavin Douglas, ed. David F.C. Coldwell (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), p. 13.

⁶²Cf. the advice to a would-be translator by James VI of Scotland (James I of England) who may have had Douglas' phrase in mind: "Ze not onely essay not zour awn ingyne of inuentioun, bot be the phrasis, quhilk ze translate."

⁶³Pearsall, "The English Chaucerians," p. 201.

⁶⁴Payne, The Key of Remembrance, p. 175.

Chapter II

Lydgate on the Art of Poetry

A. Introduction

Like Chaucer, his great teacher and exemplar, Lydgate frequently introduces into his poems a discussion of the rhetorical principles which govern the making of his verse. These passages on the art of poetry are generally confined to the large Prologues to his historical narratives and less frequently to the smaller prologues to the individual books that make up these narratives; but Lydgate shows himself so conscious of his craft that it is not unusual to find references to matters rhetorical scattered all throughout his poetry. These references may range from a few brief sentences on his relationship to his source material or on considerations of style and purpose to lengthy expositions on poets and writing, rhetoric and literature. Taken together, these passages comprise a rather large corpus of critical statements and to judge by their numerous appearances in his poetry form an integral part of any examination of the rhetorical bases of Lydgate's poetry. The purpose of this section, then, will be to draw together those materials that define not only Lydgate's immediate stance in particular poems, but also those general aesthetic principles in his thinking within which these individual poems are rooted.

Several of Lydgate's key critical terms apparently are derived from Chaucer, although Lydgate sometimes uses them in a quite unChaucerian fashion. For example, Lydgate repeats over and over again the metaphor Chaucer had used in the introduction to The Parliament of Fowls to locate his poem in relation to the literary traditions of the past:

For out of old felde, as men seyth,
Cometh al this newe corn from yer to yere,
And out of olde bokes, in good feyth,
Cometh al this newe science that men lere.
(PF, 22-5)

The images of chaff and grain (or wheat, corn), branch and fruit, cortex and nucleus had all become part of the established critical vocabulary ever since they had appeared in the discussions of poetry and philosophy during the renaissance of the twelfth century when Bernard Silvester, John of Salisbury, Alain de Lille, and others used these images to signify the doctrinal content or higher meaning of a poem lying beneath the veil of fictive covering.¹ Although this meaning is still current in Chaucer and Lydgate, more frequently this pairing has for them a more general, non-allegorical significance. Thus in the passage from The Parliament Chaucer uses the related image of gathering new corn from old fields to represent his discovery of new material, new subjects for his poetry in "olde bokes," the literature of the past, prior writings which can be turned to use

within the context of his own fresh writings in the present. The tale of Scipio's Dream and Macrobius' Commentary, Le Roman de la Rose, Alain de Lille's De Planctu Naturae, the Teseida, and the Divine Comedy-- these are included in the kind of materials Chaucer found in old books and integrated to the thematic purposes of his own new creation. Lydgate uses a variant of this basic image in the Prologue to The Siege of Thebes. He commends his model Chaucer for keeping

in substaunce
 The sentence hool withoute variance,
 Voyding the Chaf sothly for to seyn,
 Enlumynyng the trewe piked greyn
 Be crafty writyng of his sawes swete.
 (ST, 53-7)

Lydgate, however, is here paying tribute to Chaucer's achievement in the Canterbury Tales not because Chaucer has managed to include or unify his source material within the circumference prescribed by his artistic theme but because he has excluded or winnowed what was unnecessary, irrelevant, or foreign to the ordering process which is the poem.²

The context of Lydgate's lines give his compliment a further interest. It can be explained on one level as appropriate in a poem that ostensibly purports to be another link in the series of tales told by Chaucer's pilgrims, now joined at Canterbury by the author "Daun John." But on another level the lines on Chaucer

can be read as a tribute to a fellow poet who solved successfully a problem in method soon to be faced by Lydgate in his telling the story of Thebes. As the recorder-historian of the wars at Thebes Lydgate had to chose and select those source materials and those events that make up the "true grain." The winnowing process is a problem of structure and organization facing every poet, but for a medieval poet composing an historical narrative and working from possibly more than one source, to decide what to include and what to void--in the language of the rhetoricians, what to amplify and what to abbreviate--becomes crucial.

Here in the Prologue to The Siege of Thebes the rhetorical problem implicit in the telling of the tale is only hinted at in Lydgate's compliment. There was no long-standing controversy over the "truth of the matter" connected with the Theban cycle as there was with the Troy legend. But in the Prologue to the Troy-Book one of the central areas Lydgate pays careful attention to is precisely the problem only peripheral to his task as narrator in the Thebes poem and that is the difficulty facing a translator with multiple versions of the same story. Lydgate begins to build toward his rejection of the fictitious fables of the Trojan matter told by Homer, Ovid, and Virgil by again distinguishing between what is chaff and what is grain:

Whyche tyme I gan the prolog to beholde
 Of Troye Boke, I-made be dayes olde,
 wher was remembrid, of auctours vs be-forn,
 Of the dede the verreie trewe corn,
 So as it fil seuerid from the chaf.
 (TB, 147-51)

That which has been written in the past can prove to be a fertile field for poets to plough but, Lydgate warns, every crop growing there is not equally valuable. If a poet is to plough in that field, he must take pains to reap only that with substance, the fruit, and let the other go. Since Lydgate judges Guido of Colonna the real authority on the history of Troy, it is Guido that Lydgate declares he will "folwe as nyghe as euer I may." Homer is rejected for being favorable to the Greek side, for having "transformed than the trouthe," Ovid for having "closyd Falshede with trouthe" to the confusion of his readers, and Virgil for being only "in party trewe of his writyng." Each of these classical authorities on the subject of Troy presents a false or distorted interpretation of the events of the past; each is in Lydgate's sense the chaff that must be kept separate from the true fruit by the poet intent upon recording an accurate, truthful historia.³ Not all "auctours us be-forn" will serve the poet's aim equally well, and here in the Prologue to his own tale of Troy Lydgate is careful to evaluate and select which means are best conducive to his ends. The Chaucerian ambiguity, the ironic awareness that for all

his good intentions the poet may choose wrongly is not present here as it is in the Prologue to The Legend of Good Women. Lydgate is supremely confident that he has in Guido chosen the right authority on which to base his translation--"in good feythe I trowe he hath no pere,/To rekne alle that write of this matere" (367-8). But confidence in his own powers is to be expected more in the epic poet than in the writer of a courtly love vision.

The most interesting use of this critical metaphor, however, occurs in Lydgate's discussion of rhetorical first principles in the General Prologue to The Fall of Princes where he comes closest to approximating its meaning in Chaucer's Parliament and yet still retains the concept of winnowing which he had given it in the two earlier historical epics. Lydgate begins by saying that Laurence de Premierfait translated Boccaccio's work from Latin to French in the year King John was brought prisoner to England:

In his prologe affermyng off resoun,
 Artificeres hauyng exercise
 May chaunge and turne bi good discrecioun
 Shappis, formys, and newli hem deuyse,
 Make and vnmake in many sondry wyse,
 As potteres, which to that craft entende,
 Breke and renewe ther vesselis to a-mende.

Thus men off craft may off due riht,
 That been inuentiff & han experience,
 Fantasien in ther inward siht
 Deuises newe thoruh ther excellence;
 Expert maistres han therto licence
 Fro good to bettir for to chaunge a thyng,
 And semblabli these clerkis in writyng,

Thyng that was maad of auctours hem beforne,
 Thei may off newe fynde and fantasie,
 Out of old chaff trie out ful cleene corn,
 Make it more fressh and lusti to the eie,
 Ther subtil witt and ther labour applie,
 With ther colours agreable off hewe,
 Make olde thynges for to seeme newe.
 (FP, Prologue, 8-28)

This is a fairly full statement of the principles of composition as defined by the aesthetics of the rhetoricians. Lydgate's translation, like that of Laurence, stems directly from a literary source: for Laurence it is the "book of Bochas," for Lydgate, Laurence's expanded French version. There is no question of 'inventing' or 'discovering' new versions or new and better stories. Lydgate's first obligation as poet is much the same as it was in his other translations-adaptations, to record in substance the "sentence hool" of his source, and further on in the Prologue he says precisely this: Duke Humphrey, his patron, "bad me I sholde in especially, / Folwyng myn auctour, writen as I fynde." As a consequence Lydgate will be particularly attentive to "the sentence off myn auctour saue" (443-448). But though confined to the limits set by his text, he is free within those limits to rework and modify the literary shape of the original in order to improve upon it. New insights ("ful cleene corn") may be gleaned from such a process, and a new poetic language may make the "old

thynges" more relevant and pleasing when presented anew through the "colours agreable off hewe." Again, in the "old chaff-new grain" motif there is implicit the manner in which the literature of the past was to be turned to profit in the present. The wisdom of the "old thynges" is to be recaptured not by simply transferring them from one age to another, for if history is conceived as a process, a movement in time, it is nevertheless a linear movement gradually unfolding, revealing a purpose objective and constant. The poet's task is to keep alive the wisdom of the past by revivifying it in the present, by appropriating for his own age what had been discovered to be true from generation to generation, and to confirm these truths by making them current, by revising, updating, assimilating them, by re-interpreting for his present audience their validity, their lessons, their 'uses.' In Lydgate's scheme the act of composition is performed by the poet as ideal translator. Translation is the act of re-creation, the decision to include this, strengthen that, abbreviate here, void completely there. It is this process which Lydgate says poets most delight in, and it is what is most proper to their office: "Be newe invencion thynges to transfourme" (FP, III, 3822).

The passage has an additional significance when we remember that "makyng" is Lydgate's term (as it is also Chaucer's) for the craft of poetry. For instance, in the

Troy-Book, when Lydgate fears the criticism of his patron Prince Henry, he says he dreads Henry

My makyng rude schal beholde & rede,
Whiche of colour ful nakyd is and bare.
(TB, II, 148-9)

And in another rich critical passage from the same section of that poem Lydgate again speaks of the art of poetry as a "makyng." Here he is complaining of his inability to write in Guido's style:

To sewe his stile in my translacioun,
Word by word, lyche the construccioun,
After the maner of gramariens,
Nor lyke the stile of rethoricyens,
I toke nat on me this story to translate;
For me to forther Clyo com to late,
That in swyche craft hath gret experience;
I leue the wordis and folwe the sentence.
And trouth of metre I sette also a-syde,
For of that arte I hadde as tho no guyde
Me to reducyn, whan I went a-wrong;
I toke non hede nouter of schort nor long,
But to the trouthe, and lefte coryouste
Bothe of makyng and of metre be,
Nat purposyng to moche for to varie,
Nor for to be dyuerse nor contrarie
Vn-to Guydo, as by discordaunce;
But me conforme fully in substaunce,
Only in menyng, to conclude al on,
Al-be that I ne can the wey goon
To swe the floures of his eloquence.
(TB, II, 173-193)

These lines repeat several of the critical concepts we have already looked at: Lydgate's aim to follow only the sentence of his author, the emphasis on the truth of his subject matter and on conforming "fully in substaunce" to Guido. These explanations of artistic intent are here proffered ostensibly to excuse his own lack of eloquence.

He cannot translate Guido's style since Clio has come too late to help him in that craft (Lydgate probably has in mind Chaucer's invocation to Clio in Book II of the Troilus: "To ryme wel this book"); and with a pun on Guido's name, he explains he had had no one to guide him in matters of style. Consequently he has "lefte coryouste," the intricate workmanship which Guido, "that coryous man" (TB, II, 170), had given to the story of Troy. Instead Lydgate has chosen to follow Guido's meaning, not his artifice ("floures of his eloquence"). The contrasts Lydgate draws here and elsewhere⁴ between his own lack of rhetorical skill and the artistic and technical excellence of his auctours is, of course, itself a rhetorical device, a modesty topos. The real import behind these lines is the distinction Lydgate makes between the poem's "sentence" and "sentement," between the content of the past and its form. He tells his readers that what they are getting is the story, more or less, as Guido told it, but do not expect Guido's language. That, as he humbly reminds them, is beyond his ability. In making his poem, then, Lydgate has exercised his freedom to clothe his sentence, the truth of the past, in his own language.⁵

In the Troy-Book this modest disclaimer of any verbal ability conceals the significance of poetry as a "makyng," but in the stanzas cited earlier from The Fall of Princes

it is the poet as maker or artificer who is emphasized. Lydgate begins with an image borrowed from Laurence: discreet artificers, like potters who break and renew their vessels to improve upon them, may change the shapes and forms of their creations, may "make and unmake in many sondry wyse" their artifacts. This principle is particularized and elaborated in the next stanzas. It is right that "men off craft" or "expert maistres" who are inventive and experienced can change something good to something better, and this applies likewise to "clerkis in writyng." They may take something made by authors before them and make it appear "fresh and lusti" through their rhetorical figurations. Interestingly, it is chiefly through the labor of style that Lydgate says poets can "Make old thynges for to seeme newe." The repetition and word-play on the verb make, beginning with a general statement, growing more particular in its reference to the craft of the poet, and concluding again on a general maxim, illustrates the very thing it is describing. Poetry is an art, the poet a wordsmith, and his poems should display that "coryouste," that quality of being well-wrought, polished and artificial, which was the desideratum of European poets working in their vernaculars throughout the Middle Ages and which, it is well to remember, was the cornerstone of Lydgate's achievement for his successors and imitators.

B. Poetry and Remembrance

Far more fundamental than these few shreds picked up by Lydgate perhaps from Chaucer or perhaps from a common rhetorical background (and yet embracing them) is the attitude Lydgate shares with Chaucer on the importance of memory for his poetry. "For Chaucer poetry began and ended in remembrance," and the "key term in Chaucer's attempted synthesis of art, experience, and history is 'remembrance.'"⁶ So says Payne. But I think just as good a case could be made to show that Lydgate, too, places an extraordinary emphasis upon the value of memory for the poet. Indeed, to keep in memory what has happened in the past is in Lydgate's poetic an essential part of the writer's office; putting into remembrance the record of the past becomes his synonym for the act of poetry. An examination, however, of the many passages in his poetry where Lydgate explicitly comments on this aspect of his craft indicates that memory (perhaps Memory would be better) is a more complex concept, with broader applications, than its formal role in the composition of poetry may suggest. Memory is the ground of morality and the antidote of time and oblivion. It is fame and history, the source of wisdom which provides patterns for the present. It is the basis of all writing and literature, for books are but the "key of remembrance" and as such, the "old feeldes" from which new learning and fresh poetry

may spring. In its total meaning remembrance comes close to signifying the collective consciousness of a culture and of its values as these have evolved from the past, its traditions, its sensibility. Yet despite the complexity of the concept itself, Lydgate's explorations of its role in his poetry remain fairly simple and consistent. Again contrast with Chaucer is illuminating. Writing a different kind of poetry that allows for multiple narrative points of view, Chaucer can present a whole spectrum of attitudes on the interacting roles that books, tradition, and personal experience play in the creation of poetry, an approach which Lydgate's unilateral, bookish narratives obviate. Whatever he loses in diversity, however, he more than compensates for by the fullness of his statements on this aesthetic base of his poetry. What is more important is to see how Lydgate's major poems are grounded in the memory of the past, how they "begin and end" in remembrance. To grasp this relationship will clarify not only the double validation of truth which constituted a central tenet of Lydgate's poetic tradition but will also illumine the perspective in which he approached all his important poems.

A convenient place to begin is with Lydgate's statements in the Prologue to the Troy-Book that echo a well-known passage in Chaucer. He has been requested by Prince Henry to "remembre ageyn/The worthyne" and "the

provesse of olde chivalrie" (TB, Prologue, 76-8). But Time, Lydgate reminds his audience, would have darkened the fame of these noble men of the past and would have eclipsed their deeds of honor and glory were it not for writers. For it is these deeds of "grete worthynesse"

which clerkis in memorie
 Han trewly set thorough diligent labour,
 And enlumyned with many corious flour
 Of rethorik, to make vs comprehende
 The trouthe of al, as it was in kende;
 Besied hem and feythfully travaylled
 Agayn al that that age wolde assaylled,
 In her bokes every thyng I-set,
 And with the keye of remembraunce it schet,
 Which lasteth yet, and dureth euer in oon.
 (TB, Prologue, 216-25)

These lines look directly back to Chaucer's The Legend of Good Women:

Thanne mote we to bokes that we fynde,
 Thourgh whiche that olde thynges ben in mynde....
 And if that olde bokes weren aweye,
 Ylloren were of remembrance the keye.
 (G. 17-26)

Of special importance for both poets is the role assigned to the writings of clerks: to keep alive the truth of the past by putting it "in memorie," in books, "the keye of remembraunce." Payne mentions two important ways in which books are the key of remembrance. "First, and most obvious, for Chaucer and his contemporaries books were very nearly the sole source of historical knowledge, so that the past is inevitably the literary past," and secondly, books "have--whether rightly or wrongly--

selected and evaluated the past. To the extent to which 'olde bokes' have 'lad away the corn' rather than the chaff, they supply the remembrance with a history unified and significantly ordered."⁷ I have already had occasion to refer to a passage in the Troy-Book where the second of these meanings operates in determining the poet's position in regard to his sources: since Guido's account of the Trojan material is the truest and most accurate history ("the verreie trewe corn"), it is Guido's version he will put into remembrance in English. Lydgate's frequent stance as poet-translator, however, makes both senses in which books are understood as "keys of remembrance" a significant part of his aesthetic. In the Prologue to The Fall of Princes, for example, he will defend the authenticity of his source, the De Casibus, on the grounds that Boccaccio thought

To remembre no cronycle nor historie,
But tho that wern for ther merit notable,
Auctorised, famous and comendable.
(FP, Prologue, 152-4)

Consequently when Lydgate comes to record the thousand year period between Adam and Nimrod and finds nothing written in his source about it, he can only conclude that

Ther be no thyngis write in special,
Digne off memorie, nor spoke off neueradeel,
Which that be notable nor historial.
(FP, I, 1458-60)

Since Boccaccio's book has included only the best histories ("Auctorised, famous and comendable"), it can be thought to represent the true grain; and since there is no literary record of the interval between Adam and Nimrod, there must be no history (or nothing worthy of history, which is for Lydgate the same thing) for that period, nothing "digne off memorie," nothing "notable nor historial."

More characteristic of Lydgate's thought, at least more central to his poetic, was the vision of earthly mutability conjured up by the wrack of Time's great ruin. If little or nothing survives from the past, it is not that that period was barren of anything worthy of remembrance. Rather whatever was worth remembering has slipped forever out of man's memory through the process of years:

Alle thyng that is brouht foorth bi Nature,
 Bi long abidyng thei may hem nat assure;
 For olde thyngis deuourid men may see,
 Fer out off mynde, as thei neuer had be.

Who can or may remembre in any wise
 The glorious prowesse off these pryncis olde,
 Or the noblesse of philosophres wise,
 Or off poetis the feynyng to onfolde:
 Processe off yeris, allas! as I you tolde,
 Deuoured hath ther fame and ther noblesse,
 Derkid ther renoun bi foryetilnesse.

(FP, I, 1425-35)

Time "Ther memory hath dusked and ther mynde" (FP, I, 1444). It is against this backdrop of a past beyond recall

and the threat of Time's encroachments that Lydgate centers his poetry; from it his poems take direction and purpose. Living in this condition of temporal imperfection, man would have had little chance to shore up his gains and achievements against the deprivations of Time had not the memory of the past been solidified, made more durable in writing. It is through literature that the fame and honor of glorious heroes are preserved as we have seen from the section already cited from the Troy-Book. But it is not only this historical use which writing serves. It is the preserver of all knowledge:

For nere writers, al wer out of mynde,
 Nat story only, but of nature and kynde
 The trewe knowyng schulde haue gon to wrak,
 And from science our wittes put a-bak,
 Ne hadde our elderis cerched out and sought
 The sothefast pyth, to ympe it in oure thought,
 Of thinges passed, for-dirked of her hewe,
 But thorough writyng thei be refresched newe,
 Of oure auncetrys left to vs by-hynde.
 (TB, Prologue, 159-67)

The tremendous cultural significance attached here to writing in general, to books in particular is made the subject of the Prologue to Book IV of The Fall of Princes. Lydgate begins by asserting that the "frut of writyng set in cronicles olde" remains perpetually fresh and nourishing, but as he warms to his theme, it is clear that he has in mind not only histories but all that writing has rescued from the oblivion of time. Had it not been for writing, he points out, our faith would have

faded and grown dim, for writing is the means "that herto is remembrid" the lives of patriarchs and prophets, of apostles, martyrs, virgins, and Church Fathers--of Scripture itself. God has given man the gift of writing to overcome the dullness of his nature; only by it are "thynges passid, notable in substaunce" brought "to newe remembrance." Without writing Philosophy would have perished and also the Law, which enables men to enter into agreements and covenants with one another and to live in peace. He then calls the roll of what the diligence of clerks has preserved in their writings--and what a strange roll it is: the Epigrams of Prosper, the Tragedies of Seneca, the Strategems of Vegetius, and the Satires of Persius! Writing is also the way to win fame, "A name eternal," and Lydgate cites the examples of Virgil, Ovid, Petrarch (who won "a name/Perpetualli to been in remembrance"), Aesop, Juvenal, and Dante. Writing also "remembrid hath how Troye/Destroyed was." By it men learn of medicines and salves and how to cure great wounds and sicknesses. Indeed writing is the only means to offset man's tragic insufficiency and weakness as a creature of time:

Shortnesse of lyff and foryetilnesse,
 The wit of man dul & ay slidyng,
 Necligence and froward idilnesse,--
 Echon stepmooder to science and konnyng,
 That I dar seyn, nadde be writyng
 Onli ordeyned for our auauntages,
 Ded wer memorie & mynde of passid ages.
 (FP, IV, 148-54)

Such a perspective gives to poems like the Troy-Book, The Siege of Thebes, and the universal history of The Fall of Princes at least a theoretic gravity or dignity which a contemporary reader of these poems may not be ready to appreciate. Lydgate's telling of the Trojan cycle must not be seen as a medieval mishandling of the familiar classical story; that view would distort what Lydgate thought he was doing. And what he was doing was, theoretically at least, building a "memorial"--twice he uses this word in connection with his poem.⁸ His poem itself is to be a great memorial, a reconstruction not merely of a "string of episodes" but, as Schirmer points out, of a "historical work containing all the moral and political lessons which history was expected to teach... a richly embellished historical structure."⁹ The subject of his poem was one of those "thynges passid of notable substaunce," and his task was to bring it to "a newe remembrance." To record the story of Troy or Thebes, to retell the histories of the world's great personages was thus to engage in a kind of cultural solemnity, full of traditional associations and evocations. Bronson writes of the wondrous appeal and communal value these precious, old books and stories had for the medieval reader: "Just as Nestor, oldest among the living, was by virtue of his reach of memory revered as the wisest man, so a book that had survived for centuries stood, with the

force of ocular proof, as the physical witness--the residual actuality--of ancient life, speaking with an authority not subject to challenge by modern experience. Subtly, moreover, some of the wisdom of later generations had meanwhile accrued to it like a kind of patina, lending the sanction of testimonial responses now inseparable and essential."¹⁰ The historicity of Lydgate's materials, his sense of their pastness becomes an aspect of any aesthetic experience of these poems.

To conform (in T.S. Eliot's phrase) to this richly resonant tradition, however, requires of the poet an awareness both of his indebtedness or obligation to the tradition and of his freedom (also an obligation) to make it rhetorically efficacious all over again. If the remembrance is to be "a newe remembrance," it will involve for the poet a consideration of how precisely this renewal is to be accomplished. The mere fact of remembrance may be enough to perpetuate the "Frut of writyng," the wisdom of generations, but that is not enough for a practicing poet. Poetry's task was to persuade not logically, but emotionally, by figures and images, by "the artful ordering of words." The poetry is the articulation, the 'makyng,' and each new age will make the pattern over again. The story of Troy, for example, may begin with the remembrance of what was worth remembering, but it is a remembrance filtered through the sensibility of the

poet who finds new affinities in it and through his language which vitalizes them, makes them emotionally exigent for his audience. The story of Troy, then, is one

Whos story yit age hath nought diffaced,
 Nor cruel deth, with his mortal strokys;
 For maugre deth, ye may beholde in bokys
 The story fully rehersed new and newe,
 And freschely floure of colour and of hewe
 From day to day, quyk & no thyng feynt.
 For clerkys han this story so depeynt,
 That deth nor age, by no maner weye,
 The trouthe may not maken for to deye.

(TB, Prologue, 250-8)

The story is thus given a vitality, an immortality through the affective stylistic figuration of its transmitters. It is precisely for this reason that Lydgate had chosen Guido over other truthful historians of the Troy matter such as Cornelius the Roman, translator of Dares and Dictys. Not only is Guido a faithful recorder of past events, he also had

in writyng passyng excellence
 For he enlvmyneth by crafte & cadence
 This noble story with many fresche colour
 Of rethorik, and many riche flour
 Of eloquence to make it sownde bet
 He in the story hath ymped in and set.

(TB, Prologue, 361-6)

This same principle we have seen in The Fall of Princes where it was the "colours agreable off hewe" that

Out of old chaff trie out ful cleene corn,
 Make it more fressh and lusti to the eie.

In the Prologue to the Troy-Book (lines 156-220) Lydgate merges through another set of images the two ideas of writing or books as memorials against Time's erosion and verbal invention as the means by which these books themselves are kept fresh. Without "wrytyng nowe memorial" the serpent of age would have "Of thinges passed, for-dirked of her hewe," and death "y-dymmed" and "dirked" the brightness of heroes' fame which yet "schyneth" in report. Again "For-dirked age" would have slain the noble worthy fame of conquerors and "Fordymmed eke the lettris aureat" with "fretyng rust" had not clerks "enlumyned" them with "many corious flour Of rethorik." In the chiaroscuro that is man's history, even the gilded monuments must be restored, made fresh, their rust burnished off to make them shine again.

The task to "renveth alle thynges off old antiquite" (FP, VIII, 128) is not simply a matter of choice for the writer but rather his obligation and responsibility. This is the lesson of Petrarch's appearance to Boccaccio in Book VIII of The Fall of Princes. Having completed the first seven books of his work, Boccaccio finds himself "now fordullid be impotence of age" and declares he will give up the labor of finishing the last two books. Petrarch's spirit, however, lectures him on the vices of Idleness and warns his younger contemporary that

... he that can and ceseth for to write
 Notable exaamples of our predecessours,
 Of envie men wil hym atwite,
 That he in gardyns leet pershe the holsum flours
 In sondry caas that myhte do gret socours.
 (FP, VIII, 116-6)

Just as a fair image of a prince or person who is dead, Petrarch tells him, quickens the heart of a friend, so forgotten merits may be "putten in memorie" by the labor of poets and writers as examples "Vices teschewe, in vertu to be stable" (FP, VIII, 178).¹¹ Thus when Lydgate, at the same point in his translation of Boccaccio and now over sixty years old, discovers that the "Colours of rethorik to helpe me translate/Wer fadid away," he nevertheless resolves like Boccaccio to continue his work:

Thouh pallid age hath fordullid me,
 Tremblyng ioyntes let myn hand to write,
 And fro me take al the subtilite
 Of corious makyng in Inglissh to endite,--
 Yit in this labour treuli me taquite
 I shal proceede, as it is to me dewe,
 In thes too bookis Bochas for to sewe.
 (FP, VIII, 193-203)

Once more, let me emphasize the point that despite Lydgate's frequent disclaimers (as here) of his own poetical skill, he commonly links the rhetorical efficacy of poetry with the "colours of rethorik," that is, with stylistic figuration or simply 'eloquence.'

And for thou art enlumined with no floures
 Of rethorik, but with white & blak,
 Therefore thou most abide alle showres
 Of hem that sette on the a lak.
 (TB, Lenvoye, 100-3)

Indeed this is one of the most frequent senses in which he uses the term "rhetoric".

What is important about the use of the word "rhetoric" in this sense is Lydgate's belief that these stylistic techniques, "the subtilites of corious makyng in Inglissh to endite," are also to be recovered from the past. They, too, are part of the substance of memory.

Wrytyng of old, with lettres aureat,
Labour of poetis doth hihli magnefie.
(FP, IV, 106-7)

Lydgate gives this belief specific illustration in the Boccaccio-Petrarch episode. When Boccaccio first sees the spirit of Petrarch appear before him, he addresses Petrarch as his "maister" who has illumined all of Italy like a clear sun with his poetry:

for treuli in substaunce
Ye haue been lanterne, liht and direccioun
Ay to supporte myn occupacioun,

As in wrytyng bookis to compile,
Cheeff examplaire to my gret auantage,
To refourme the rudnesse of my stile
With aureat colours of your fressh langage.
(FP, VIII, 75-81)¹²

The individual debt expressed here by Boccaccio to his immediate predecessor is generalized to include the entire literary tradition in other passages of Lydgate's poetry. At the conclusion of The Fall of Princes, for instance, Lydgate offers his poem to an audience capable of judging its merits and faults against an implied standard of excellence:

Go kis the steppis of them that wer forthring,
 Laureat poetes, which hadde souereynte
 Of elloquence to supporte thy making,
 And pray all tho that shal this processe see,
 In thyn excuse, that thei list to bee
 Fauorable to lakke or to comende.
 (FP, IX, 3605-10)

Characteristically, he excuses himself and his black and white style. He has not been at Cithaeron nor on Mount Parnassus, but since he stood "lowe doun in the vale," he never was acquainted with Homer, Seneca, Virgil, Dares, Ovid, or Chaucer, a statement which probably means he never achieved their "golden style" (FP, IX, 3387-3407). Lydgate's lines are a fairly close imitation of Chaucer's address to his book at the end of the Troilus:

But litel book, no making thow n'envie,
 But subgit be to alle poeysse;
 And kis the steppes, where as thow seest pace
 Virgile, Ovide, Omer, Lucan, and Stace.
 (V, 1789-92)¹³

But behind the convention of this modesty topos is Lydgate's understanding of the literary past as an artistic norm. The writers Lydgate catalogues here are those "laureat poetes" whose eloquence gave support to his poem's 'making' (as Petrarch's light was always a support to Boccaccio's career), not necessarily as specific sources or stylistic norms but as representatives of a tradition of poetic excellence. "The literary past," as Payne explains, "is a significant whole, with a normative relationship to the individual poet's work."¹⁴

Like the antique poets, the "bella scuola," Dante and Virgil meet in Limbo, these writers are timeless authorities who had developed and perfected the art of poetry. From their writings the school rhetoricians had been able to abstract and codify a system of rhetorical principles.¹⁵

And yet with one of these poets, Chaucer, the relationship between Lydgate and the poetic past is more integral and specific. Chaucer stands in the same position to Lydgate as does Virgil to Dante or Petrarch to Boccaccio. He is that special poet, the lodestar of the language, whose techniques Lydgate knew intimately and often 'remembered'. Again and again Lydgate mines in Chaucer's quarry for a poetic apparatus ranging from verse forms and genres to particular lines, images, rhythms, phrases, and formulaic tags of all sorts.¹⁶ Lydgate's discussion of the art of poetry itself is, as we have seen, often couched in language adapted from Chaucer. His influence upon Lydgate, then, is both collective and individual. In theory he belongs to the ranks of those "laureat poetes" whose sovereignty of eloquence conjures up a standard of rhetorical excellence, abstract and normative. In practice it was his special "lettres aureat" with which Lydgate sought to "magnifie" his own style.¹⁷ Whichever way we choose to take the reference to Chaucer, the point is that both in theory and in

practice the techniques of "corious makyng" for Lydgate are to be retained by remembrance, not mechanically but as a viable and critical appreciation of what is best in the past.

C. Testimony

The authority which invested the books Lydgate worked from as his sources is interestingly illustrated in the lively exchange he recounts in Book IX of The Fall of Princes between Queen Brunhilde of France and Boccaccio, the compiler of histories. For his version Lydgate follows Laurence as closely as Laurence had followed Boccaccio, although in a considerably abridged form. As Lydgate tells the story, Brunhilde suddenly appears before Boccaccio and asks that she not be forgotten and left out of his history. Boccaccio blushes in embarrassment for his apparent oversight and feebly tries to excuse himself:

"I-wis," quod he, "afforn I haue nat rad
In no cronicle nor in no scripture
Of your woful froward auenture."

(FP, IX, 185-7)

Brunhilde volunteers to fill this gap in the historical record by telling her own story to Boccaccio. There is an uneasy moment as Boccaccio declares that he will probably not get a very accurate story since women are inclined to hide their vices and appear innocent, but he will not argue with her and says, tell me your story and I will

write it down. She doesn't get very far, however, before Boccaccio interrupts her. You were not first the wife of Sigibert as you say, he tells her, but of Chilperic.

"Cronicles seyn, what-euer ye expresse,
In this mateer wil bere with me witesse."
(FP, IX, 265-6)

Brunhilde replies that "Though summe bookis rehearse so & seyn," the report is "noun certeyn." She goes on to the details of her marriage and the birth of her son Clotaire who, she laments, was the cause of the death of many a person and of great dissension in France. Not so, Boccaccio breaks in. You were the chief cause of this strife, and he warns her: "Keep you mor cloos; in this mateer ye faille." Brunhilde grows impatient. After all, who is telling the story?

"Nat longe agon thou knew nat the maneer
Of my lyuyng but a small parcel;
Me seemeth now thou knowest euerideel,
So that ye may withoute lenger striff
Sitte as a iuge, that knowe se weel my lyff."
(FP, IX, 332-6)

Still undaunted she continues. Ten lines later the voice of historical accuracy is again heard. King Sigibert was murdered, Boccaccio declares, through your jealousy, not because of the fraternal discord to which you attribute it. This time even Brunhilde is amazed at Boccaccio's knowledge:

"Thou knowest the slauhtre of Sigibert the king,
Which was that wrouht, alas, be myn assent,--
How knowist thou it, that wer nat ther present?"
(FP, IX, 362-4)

But you are still all wrong, Brunhilde desperately tells him. It was not I but Queen Fredegond who was the real source of this jealousy. At this equivocation Boccaccio loses his patience. And how does he know Brunhilde is lying? "I haue rad," he says, "Record of auctours that prudent been & sad"! But Brunhilde is still persistent: you are turning these stories upside down, "Folwyng of malis thyn own oppynyoun," and despite what you say, I will go on as before. She does, for nine more lines. Then "'Nay', quod Bochas, 'it was al otherwise.'" Scarcely stopping to answer Boccaccio this time, Brunhilde hurries through to her lamentable conclusion, uninterrupted for the last 55 lines of her tragedy and then makes a quick exit.

Lydgate brings the Brunhilde episode to an end with a significant passage not found in his source. Boccaccio is made to reflect on her version of history which he declares is "suspect" and judges "but a fable." The only reason he put it down was that Brunhilde was very importunate and "did hym excite/With gret instaunce hir story for to wryte." There is, he concludes, no legitimate authority to give credence to her tale,

No verray grounde founde in bookes olde,
 But of confessioun that she hirsiluen tolde.
 (FP, IX, 524-5)

Obviously historians know even better than the characters

of their histories what is true and what is false. And although Boccaccio may have set Brunhilde up as a straw figure for his anti-feminist sentiments, the attitude toward literary authority presented dramatically in the tale illustrates the medieval reverence for authorities, for auctours. Boccaccio has read the record of "auctours that prudent been & sad." He bases his information on what the chronicles say. What does Brunhilde have to offer against this established tradition? Only her "confessioun that she hirsiluen tolde," and until further evidence comes to light to confirm her version, something a little less open to personal coloring, he will hold her story "suspect."

Lydgate's handling of the Brunhilde-Boccaccio episode throws light on another aspect of his rhetorical poetic. To confirm his 'sentence', in the older oratorical sense to prove his argument, the writer of the Middle Ages frequently assured his audience of the truth of his matter by referring to his source of information, an author or a work, for authentication. Instances of such verifying expressions have been pointed out in Lydgate's poetry and discussed under the heading of "stopgap expressions." These may take the form of adverbial expressions of time as well as assertions of truth and allusions to a source, but all have been regarded as stylistic weaknesses occasioned only by the poet's effort

to fill out the verse line.¹⁸ A quick glance at any page from his poetic translations will show that this view is generally valid. At the opening of The Siege of Thebes we find: "As writ myn auctour" (199), "But, as Bochas list to specifie" (213), "as Clerkes can reporte" (283), "lik in Story as it is compyled" (307), "as clerkes can you telle" (319), "in bookes as I rede" (335), "the story seith certeyn" (341), "the story can devyse" (361), "the story kan reherce" (427), "as I rede" (452), "in storie as is tolde" (535), "in story as I fynde" (614), "as bookes specifie" (761), and so on. It seems unlikely to justify these line fillers and conventional tags on artistic grounds, but one or two points about their place in Lydgate's poetry may give us a better understanding of their function. Perhaps they are not the "inanities" they have been called.¹⁹

First, figures of asseveration were recognized topoi, part of the rhetorical machinery inherited from antiquity where they had been classified under the heading of inartificial arguments or testimony. In his Topica, for example, Cicero discusses how testimony confirms belief if it proceeds from authority based on man's character, knowledge, experience, age, or occupation. The medieval handbooks do not specifically treat of testimony although the idea of a writer "following" auctours or "imitating" earlier writers was an ingrained habit of rhetorical

training. The Tudor theorists, however, offer full explanations of the value of testimony in the rhetorical program. Here, for instance, is Thomas Wilson on the testimony of wise men of old: such testimony may be defined as "sentences of the sage, which are brought to confirme any thing, either taken out of olde Aucthors, or els such as have been used in this common life. As the sentences of Noble men, the Lawes in any Realme, quicke sayinges, Proverbes, that either have been used heretofore, or bee now used. Histories of wise Philosophers, the judgements of learned men, the common opinion of the multitude, olde custome, ancient fashions, or any such-like."²⁰ The testimony of Authority was particularly appropriate in historical narratives, for the truths of history are proved not by reason or experience, but by Authority, by auctours. Thus Lydgate is not faced with the situation of the dreamer who must make credible his experience in an otherworld (as in Dante's vision of the state of souls after death or in Boccaccio's dream of those overthrown by Fortune), and consequently his figures of asseveration are not of the type to make the reader visualize what has been seen or felt in this otherworldly realm and thus confirm the truth of what has been experienced. Lydgate's major poems are at least one step removed from such experiences; his task is to win acceptance for the writings which embody them. The

testimony that is important for him is to the credibility of a book, not an experience. This ancient historical lore had been recorded and established by the "folk of dignè reverence" Chaucer saw in the House of Fame, the poet-historians "bearing up the fame" of past events and personages, and it is not unusual to find writers of 'historial' matters such as Geoffrey of Monmouth, Benoit de Sainte Maure, and perhaps even Chaucer invoking sources that very likely did not exist, so great was the attraction to the authority of tradition. Lydgate's poetry is thus studded with asseverations that are really reminders to the audience that he has closely followed a reliable source. How differently might a writer like Dante or Chaucer, freed from the restrictions of rendering an accurate version of recorded history inherent in Lydgate's 'translations,' have treated the Brunhilde story! Dante might have made the encounter with the shade of Brunhilde the occasion for presenting the true 'figural' reality of the woman's life seen sub specie aeternitatis whereas Chaucer might have reduced this grand and haughty Queen to a shrewish French housewife, a scold ready to vilify the simple narrator for omitting her story from his collection. Lydgate's humorous handling takes the edge off Boccaccio's original harshness, but for him the real Brunhilde still remains the literary Brunhilde, the representation of her by "auctours that prudent been & sad."

D. The Poem as Mirror

If poetry for Lydgate meant on the one hand the re-making or restoration of old memorials, on the other hand it meant the fashioning of clear mirrors. In fact the two concepts are frequently complementary in his discussions of poetry. His most typical method of working with the figure of the mirror is to make the image in the glass, its "content," take the shape of examples drawn from profane and sacred history or legend. These are designed to stand before the reader for the sake of his "remembrance." This lore of the past, recalled to memory from out of forgetfulness and seen as in a mirror, gives him the proper temporal perspective to discern a pattern (or a 'lesson') behind his own myopic existence. Thus the poem that keeps alive the memory of the past also mirrors the lesson which that image of truth has for the present. Because man can remember--remember either "how al the world shal faile" or that "Wher vertu regnyth, ther is felycite"--he can see, as in a mirror, what he is or what he should be, what the world is and what it is not. It is, then, Lydgate's quite conventional understanding of the function of the mirror as an instrument of moral instruction and improvement that brings it into a discussion of his poetic theory. And a quick glance at the multiple associations that were attached to this

metaphor in the Middle Ages will show just how central to his poetic is the idea of the poem as a mirror.

In the Middle Ages the term speculum or "mirror" was used as a title for a wide variety of works which for convenience's sake may be divided into two large classes.²¹ To the first division would belong such mirrors as the Marriage of Mercury and Philology of Martianus Capella; the Institutes of Cassiodorus; the Etymologies of Isidore; the several specula of Vincent of Beauvais: various summae; and Caxton's Mirroure of the World. This group was characterized by the inclusive and encyclopedic treatment of broad areas of knowledge. The other kind of literary mirror involved the presentation of ideals or exemplars of proper conduct (sometimes of improper), very often in the form of courtesy books and manuals of instruction. This category would include the many mirrors for princes such as Hoccleve's Regement and the analogous mirrors for all manner of folk: for lovers, knights, churchmen, women, and fools. Of course, to speak of only two classes of mirrors is to misrepresent the enormously fertile imagination of medieval authors who adapted the genre (if it can be called a genre) to a wide variety of literary shapes. Works that can properly be called mirrors might also be classified as moral treatises, satires, dream visions, complaints,

biographies, allegories, romances, religious manuals, and histories. The poems Lydgate specifically refers to as mirrors show this characteristic quality of easy assimilation: The Pilgrimage of Man is also an allegory, The Fall of Princes a dream vision, and the Troy-Book a romance. This last is also illustrative of the way both features of the literary mirror, the encyclopedic scheme of organization (the form) and the setting up of exemplars (the content), were often found together. The poem is not only an exhaustive handling of the Troy story from the founding of the city to the return and death of Ulysses, it was also probably intended by Lydgate as a Mirror for Princes. He speaks in the Prologue of obeying Prince Henry's request to make the translation because Henry

... hath desire sothly for to seyn,
 Of verray knyghthod to remembre ageyn
 The worthynes, yif I schal nat lye,
 And the prowesse of old chiualrie,
 By-cause he hath loye and gret deynte
 To rede in bokys of antiquite,
 To fyn only, vertu for to swe,
 Be example of hem, and also for to eschewe
 The cursyd vice of slouthe and ydelnesse.
 (TB, Prologue, 75-83)

Hence Lydgate will make of this old story, preserved from oblivion by the writings of great clerks,

... a merour only to oure mynde,
 To seen eche thing trewly as it was,
 More bryght and clere than in any glas.
 For ner her writyng nowe memorial,
 Dethe with his swerde schulde haue slayen al.
 (TB, Prologue, 168-72)

The mirror here has both a figurative and a literal sense: its double function is to show the world what it was and what it should become. The principal figures of the narrative, the Greek and Trojan heroes, are ostensibly set up as examples "of verray knighthod," worthy of emulation and remembrance.²²

The rich diversity of themes, styles, and subject matters found in the medieval specula is a good index of the multiple meanings that clustered around the mirror title and figure. Several of these have been traced to a common origin stemming from Augustine and writers associated with him where applications of the image first appear in rudimentary form. Sister Bradley summarizes the different kinds of mirrors specified or suggested in this Augustinian tradition:

(1) The mirror of the soul, in which the archetypal ideas are most properly imaged, preparing for the mirrors known as compendiums of knowledge and for mirrors of idealized virtue. (2) The mirror of the mind, where the shadow world of the senses may be reflected, giving a basis (along with the consideration of eternal truths) for the mirrors which warned of the transience of this world--a theme like that in the De Contemptu Mundi and "fall of princes" literature. (3) The mirror of the mind when it attends to religious truth; in this connection Holy Scripture is called a mirror, from which are drawn exemplars or paragons of holy living--either as biographies or as religious rules. These types have in common the injunction to judge changing appearances in the light of the archetypal ideas, to seek after ideal beauty and unchanging truth--in a word, to seek after wisdom.²³

The mirror, then, was primarily a didactic symbol in which are reflected images of wisdom and truth, and as such it became an instrument for moral improvement. This is the way Lydgate chiefly uses it. The many hagiographies Lydgate wrote for various patrons and occasions all present "exemplars or paragons of holy living" for reflection. He undertakes in The Legend of St. Petronilla, for example, "The parfite life to put in remembraunce" since the story of Petronilla reveals that

In Crystes lawe and stable in that feyth
 She was so groundyd, for short conclusion,
 Called the clere myrroure of all perfection.
 (11-13)

Again in another legend he calls upon St. Giles to aid him

To remembre, so as I can Endyte,
 Thy gloryour lyff, thy conversacyoun,
 Thorough al the world in euery regyoun
 Rad and rehersid, be examples ful notable,
 Lyk a merour of Contemplacyoun
 To ffolk that caste hem in vertu to be stable.
 (11-16)

Similarly, the Virgin Mary is the "myrroure of mekenes most prudent & wyse" and Christ the "cleer merour/Of trowthe, of love, of pes and vnyte."²⁴ In The Fall of Princes he reverses the angle of reflection. This poem, too, was designed as an encyclopedic Mirror for Princes, but its aim, as Bergen observes, was to "teach princes the virtue of wisdom and moderation by holding up to them the example of misfortunes provoked by egotism, pride, and inordinate ambition."²⁵ The images in the glass are thus

not patterns of heroic or religious virtue but examples that reveal the vain and transient nature of this world. The biographies Boccaccio had gathered out of the universal history of man are a mirror of how all the world shall fail:

The fall of nobles, with eueri circumstaunce,
 From ther lordshippes, dreedful and vnstable,
 How that thei fill to putte in remembraunce,
 Therein to shewe Fortunys variaunce,
 That othre myhte as in a merour see
 In worldly worshepe may be no surete.

(FP, Prologue, 51-6)

The illustrations from the past are not just exempla on the surface of the story; rather they represent the cumulative accretion of wisdom known to man, a wisdom not unlike that which the Bible calls "an unspotted mirror of the working of God and an effulgence of His goodness" (Wisdom VII, 26).²⁶ They contain the 'sentence' essential to and embedded in the divine narratio of mankind.

Like remembrance, the mirror finally involves an act of self-discovery. In the optics of the poem can be seen the epistemic relations between past and present, between what a man is and what he should be. The mirror thus acts as an antidote to moral confusion, the blindness or forgetfulness that distorts man's image of himself. In The Pilgrimage of Man Lydgate writes of a personified figure called Hagiography who assists in the education of the pilgrim by distinguishing between the false

Mirroure of Adulacyoun and the true Mirroure of Conscience. The one reflects a deceptive image of man because it is distorted by lies and flatteries whereas the other shows a clear reflection of man as he is, with all his faults and ugliness, but which nevertheless teaches him how he should amend his life.²⁷ Lydgate's poetic mirrors have much the same intention as the Mirroure of Conscience. They aim to effect a clear and balanced moral vision by making the wisdom of the past stand in a normative relationship to the present. Indeed this definition of the mirror's function comes close to Payne's description of the basic purpose and method of medieval aesthetics: "a process of manipulating language so that the wisdom evolved in the past will become available, applicable, and operative in the present."²⁸ In one rich stanza from The Fall Lydgate sums up his own thoroughly medieval understanding of what poetry is by rendering this general rhetorical principle into the particulars of the critical vocabulary available to him:

Olde exaumples off pryncis that ha fale,
 Ther remembraunce off newe brouht to mynde,
 May been a merour to estatis all,
 How thei in vertu shall remedies fynde
 Teschewe vices, off such as wer maad blynde,
 Fro sodeyn fallyng hemsiluen to preserue,
 Longe to contune and thank off God disserue.
 (FP, II, 22-8)

For Lydgate, the poetry of remembrance exercises a moral function by illuminating in its storial images the record

frequently associates the story of Amphion with the power of music, of 'fair langage' or eloquence. The fullest treatment given to the allegorization of this classical myth occurs at the opening to The Siege of Thebes, but before we turn to that poem, a review of Lydgate's other references to the Amphion myth will make clear the complex of ideas he attaches to it and thus will better prepare us for dealing with those details in the Thebes poem.²⁹

Near the very end of Lydgate's dream vision, the Temple of Glas, the narrator tells how Venus resolves the love-problem brought before her by the young man and woman by joining them together perpetually with the golden chain of love. To celebrate the accord of the lovers (and we might say, to reflect it in their music) Calliope and her sister Muses sing a song in honor of the goddess and her son Cupid:

And al at ones with notes loude and sharpe
 Thei did her honour and her reuerence,
 And Orpheus among hem with his harp
 Gan strengis touche with his diligence,
 And Amphion, that hathe such excellence
 Of musike, ay dide his bisynes
 To please and queme Venus the goddes.
 (Temple of Glas, 1306-12)³⁰

Orpheus and Amphion, John Hollander points out, were among those musical figures whose fables represented for the Middle Ages and the Renaissance the original and perfect union of music and poetry which had been thought to exist in the classical past. And although it was not until the

Renaissance that a fully developed image of a musico-poetic golden age was made possible, the classical myths of that past age treating of Orpheus, Amphion, Arion, the Sirens, Terpander, Marsyas, and others had frequently been allegorized in attempts to justify poetic and musical practices.³¹ Allusions to Amphion as both musician and poet (and rhetorician) are found in Lydgate and bear some looking at for the light they throw on his use of this myth. In the Temple of Glas the reference to Orpheus and Amphion is to their ability as musicians. In The Fall of Princes they are associated with both music and eloquence. For instance, when Lydgate tells the tale of Orpheus, son of Apollo and Calliope, he mentions that Mercury had given a harp to Orpheus who was

Famous in musik and in melodie,
 And ful notable also in eloquence...
 An harpe he hadde off Mercurius,
 With the which Erudice he wan.
 (FP, I, 5784-91)

The double aspect of Orpheus here as musician and poet is perhaps partially explained by the reference to Mercury who himself had been interpreted by medieval mythographers both as the god responsible for the invention of music and as the god of eloquence. In fact Mercury appears in The Fall in both guises. In Book II (2481-2) he is listed among other scientific inventors as the discoverer of the harp's melodies. Later he is referred to as the "cheef lord and patroun/ Off eloquence and off fair

spekyng" (II, 4544-5) or simply as the "god of elloquence" (VII, 532).³²

Like Orpheus, Amphion appears in Lydgate as a musical-poetic figure, and as with Orpheus he, too, is associated with the god of eloquence, Mercury. In a minor poem entitled "Misericordias Domini in Eternum Cantabo," the song sung at the building of Thebes is coupled with the song performed at Mercury's marriage. Lydgate begins this interesting poem by declaring that all songs should praise God:

Alle goostly songis & ympnes that be songe,
 Of Oold and newe remembrid in scripture,
 Hevenly symball or bellis that be ronge,
 To preyse the lord, by musyk or mesure,
 Fynal intent of euery creature
 Shulde resounne to Goddys hih preysing.
 (1-6)

He thus dedicates his own power of song to God. For as long as he shall live "Eternally his Mercies I shall syng," a line Lydgate uses as a refrain for each of the poem's twenty-four stanzas. The figure of David with his harp singing the Psalm "Misericordias domini" is singled out as Lydgate's ideal singer, and the rest of the poem is organized around two catalogues contrasting singers of "profane" song which the poet rejects and singers of "divine" song which he will emulate. He spurns, for example, martial songs, "songis of palmys transitorye" and "Laureat tryvmphes, proud and Imperial." He sets aside Virgil's song of Aeneas' conquest, Dictys the

Greek's song of Hercules and Jason, Dares' song of Hector's prowess, Lucan's song of Julius Caesar, the songs clerks sing and read of Alexander, Croesus, Hannibal, the great Scipio, Adrastus, and Agamemnon; the stories of Troy, the Golden Fleece, and Bellerophon, the "wooful dities of lamentacioun" sung at funerals and the comedies sung in small villages with "vncouth transmutacioun" all are rejected. Obviously Lydgate is here using the concept of song in its broadest sense to include a variety of lyrical and poetical creations. Finally, however, before enumerating those Biblical songs which he favors, he passes over the mythical songs of Circe and the Sirens as well as even the celestial song of the muses at Mercury's wedding to Philology and the miraculous song at the building of Thebes:

The Musis nyne sang the weddyng song
 Off Mercurye And Philologye.
 Thebes the Cite was reysed and maad strong
 By touch of harpe and sugryd melodye,
 As Oold Stace saide in his Poetrye.
 But what so evir they wroot in ther feynyng,
 Our lord Iesu to preise and magneffye
 Eternally his Mercies I shall syng.
 (73-80)

We have already seen how in the Temple of Glas Lydgate linked the singing of the Muses (there in honor of Venus and Cupid) with Amphion's general musical ability.³³ Only he and Orpheus, the singer par excellence, are named as joining in the performance in the Temple of Venus. Here in the "Misericordias Domini" it is not an

unspecified musical ability that is the focus of the poet, but the particular song of the muses at Mercury's wedding and the particular song of Amphion at the building of Thebes. Both songs, as is made explicit in The Siege of Thebes, have a common denominator in their association with Mercury. It is at his wedding to Philology that the muses sang their epithalamium, and it is Amphion's eloquence received as a gift from Mercury that drew the rocks and stones of Mount Cithaeron together to form the walls of Thebes.

This story of Amphion's song is given an allegorical interpretation twice in The Fall of Princes. The general practice of offering rationalized accounts of the classical myths had been one of Laurence de Premierfait's additions to his original text, Boccaccio's De Casibus. Curiously, however, the explanations Laurence drew upon were the ones Boccaccio himself had written, not in the De Casibus but in his other compendium of ancient materials, the Genealogia Deorum Gentilium. The two important references to Amphion in Lydgate's version, though deriving from Boccaccio, are not found in Laurence's text.³⁴ The first of these allusions appears in the long debate between Boccaccio and Fortune at the opening of Book VI in a passage on the power of music and language:

Philisophres of the goldene ages
 And poetes that fond out fressh ditees,
 As kyng Amphioun with his fair langages
 And with his harpyng made folk of lough degrees,
 As labores, tenhabite first cites;--
 And so bi musik and philosophie
 Gan first of comouns noble policie.

The cheef of musik is mellodie & accord;
 Welle of philosophie sprang out of prudence,
 Bi which too menys gan vnite & concord
 With politik vertu to haue ther assistence:
 Wise men to regne, subiectis do reuerence.
 And bi this ground, in stories men may see,
 Wer bilt the wallis of Thebes the cite.

Accord in musik causith the mellodie;
 Wher is discord, ther is dyuersite,
 And wher is pes is prudent policie
 In ech kyngdam and euery gret contre.
 (FP, VI, 337-54)

Lydgate repeats here the classical idea of the state as a musical concord. The song of Amphion which built the walls of Thebes becomes his image for the political ideal of peace and unity, and Amphion himself a culture hero who taught men how to live together in society.³⁵ In keeping with the musical metaphor the emphasis in the stanzas above is upon the "mellodie & accord" of Amphion's harping, but it is the idea of his "fair langages" as well that is developed throughout the rest of this section. Boccaccio tells Dame Fortune, for example, that before she interfered to bring men into discord

Peeplis of Grece, of Roome, & off Cartage,
 Next in Itaille, with many a regeoun,
 Wer inducid bi sweetnesse of langage
 To haue togidre ther conuersacioun,
 To beelde castellis & many roial toun.
 What caused this? - to telle in breeff the foorme,
 But eloquence rud peeplis to reffoorme.
 (FP, VI, 379-85)

Amphion, then, appears in these passages as a complex figure of harmony in its several senses, with the political sententia of the allegorized myth deriving from the concept of musical harmony. This in turn is part of 'eloquence' or 'song' in its widest application (as in the "Misericordias Domini"). The final apotheosis of Amphion, however, occurs later in Book VI where he becomes not the hero as musician or poet but the hero as rhetorician.

Lydgate's account of the "wofull fall" of Cicero in Book VI is made the occasion for a chapter on Rhetoric and Oratory. Translating from Laurence, Lydgate explains how rhetoric is a division of rational philosophy. He discusses the qualities necessary for a good orator and what he calls the "fyue baneeres longyng to elloquence," the classical categories of Invention, Disposition, Eloquence, Pronunciation, and Memory. Indeed the entire chapter is a digression on the ideal of eloquence. Only man has the power of speech, the ability to talk about the universe and to express his thoughts. Language also teaches man "in vertu to be stable" and to respect the holy church. This last use of language is distinguished as the "crafft of rethorik" which comes only by study and great diligence and which is quite different from a natural rhetoric learned in youth. To master this craft, the rhetorician must learn how to adapt his language to

suit a variety of subjects in many different ways. But no function of the rhetorician is more vital for society than that of bringing warring men to concord:

As bexauple, myn auctour doth record,
 Men sette at werre, in herte ferr assonder,
 The rethoricien to make hem for taccord
 Mut seeke weies & menys heer & yonder,
 Of old rancour tappese the boistous thonder,
 Be wise exaumpelis & prouerbis pertynent
 Tenduce the parties to been of oon assent.
 (FP, VI, 3452-8)

Just as the purple robes of a king inlaid with rubies, sapphires, emeralds, pearls, and precious gems give pleasure to man's sight, Lydgate concludes

So the langage of rethoriciens
 Is a glad obiect to mannys audience,
 With song mellodious of musiciens,
 Which doth gret counfort to euey hih presence.
 Bexauple as Amphioun, with song & elloquence
 Bilte the wallis of Thebes the cite,
 He hadde of rethorik so gret subtilite.

In his langage ther was so gret plesaunce,
 Fyndyng therbi so inli gret proffit,
 That al the contre kam to his obeissaunce,
 To heere hym speke thei hadde so gret delit;
 The peepel envirooun hadde such an appetit
 In his persone, in pes & in bataille:
 Heer men may seen what rethorik doth auaille!
 (FP, VI, 3487-3500)

The "song & elloquence" of Amphion are here seen as part of the larger art of rhetoric. Just as Amphion's song persuaded the scattered rocks to move and then harmonized them into the walls of the city, so the craft of the rhetorician orders the chaos of language, shaping it into an instrument of persuasion. And as the city

itself is an image of civitas, of the concord ideally existing among men, so the labors of the poet-musician-rhetorician teach and persuade men how to live in virtue and in peace.

All of these motifs appear at the beginning of The Siege of Thebes where, however, the story of Amphion's singing is not treated incidentally as an exemplum to illustrate the power of music or the function of rhetoric but is made an integral part of the poem's larger meaning. The harmony and accord which are the basis of the political 'lesson' contained in the legend of the city's establishment function as a sad and ironic backdrop against which "the venym and the violence/ Of strif, of werre, of contek, and debat" (ST, 4690-1) are told. This point will be discussed at greater length when I examine the Thebes poem, but for the moment it might be helpful just to see how full a treatment Lydgate gives to the Amphion myth at the outset of the poem.

As the narrator begins his tale of Thebes, he tells his fellow pilgrims that if they read their Boccaccio they will find it recorded

How this kyng thys prudent Amphyoun,
With the swetnesse and melodious soun
And armonye of his swete song
The Cyte bylt that whilom was so strong,
Be vertue only of the werbles sharpe
That he made in Mercuries harpe.

(ST, 201-6)

Just as in another poem it was Mercury's harp we saw that

enabled Orpheus to win back Eurydice, so here Amphion's greatest performance is likewise attributed to the music created by that instrument. It is, however, not the power of music as such that interests Lydgate but the 'sentence' lying beneath this "derke poysye." Boccaccio explains, he says, that the music of this most melodious harp signifies nothing but Amphion's "crafty speche":

... Mercurye god of Eloquence,
 Gaf, be the myght of heuenly influence,
 Vnto this kyng at His natiuite
 Thorgh glade aspectes, that he shulde be
 Most excellent be craft of Rethorik....
 Wher-by He made the contres envyroun
 To han such lust in his wordes swete,
 That were so plesaunt fauorable, and mete
 In her Eerys that shortly ther was noon
 Disobeysaunt with the kyng to goon,
 Wher so euere that hym list assigne.
 (ST, 215-33)

Lydgate uses this allegory as the departure for a sententious exposition on how a king should behave toward his subjects. A cheerful countenance, he says, is better than a frown, and kindness, humility, and love win the people's support better than a fierce and haughty disposition:

Wherfor me semeth mor is Fortunat
 Of Mercurye the soote sugred harpe
 Than Mars swerd whetted kene and sharpe,
 Mor accepted with asspectis goode
 Than is this god with his lokes woode.
 (ST, 272-6)

But the ensuing history of Thebes, as we shall see, is the story of a city-state fated to follow the way of Mars (a self-defeating "hihe prowessse") instead of the way of

Mercury (a "prudent policie" leading to peace).

The achievement of Amphion, his song and his music, is thus for Lydgate a mythic image for the power of eloquence. In this general aspect Amphion's skill entitles him to hold the highest place in music's pantheon with other famous poet-singers such as Orpheus and the muses. But as Amphion is essentially a more political figure than, say, Orpheus,³⁶ most of Lydgate's allusions to his story see it as an allegory teaching the value of rhetoric for the establishment and (more often) the preservation or restoration of political accord. Even in this circumscribed meaning, the Amphion legend is nevertheless intimately connected with Lydgate's views on poetry. Like Amphion, the poet shows (or reminds) men how to live. He sees with a clear and unified vision what others have forgotten or see only in distortion. The poem is thus both memorial and mirror and the poet's characteristic preoccupation is with its didactic uses. All literature and all history are sifted for the edifying fables (like that of Amphion) and moral exempla he can cull from them. Central to his theory of poetry is his belief that the poem should teach by offering examples of virtuous or vicious behavior; the chief labor of wise poets "is vicis to repreve/ With a maner couert symylitude" (FP, III, 3838-1). In theory at least Lydgate could maintain that the remembrance of such examples would have the desired

salutary effect:

Offte reedyng on bookis fructuous
 The hertis sholde off prudent pryncis perse,
 Synke in ther mynde & mak hem vertuuous
 Teschewe all thyng that is vicious.
 (FP, II, 114-7)

His poetry, then, like the song of Amphion would itself be an emblem of moral wisdom, enlightenment, and civilization.³⁷ Mercury was not only Amphion's lord, but as the god of eloquence, the special patron and saint of all instructors, writers, and scribes and closely associated with the teaching of Virtue, Peace, and Wisdom.³⁸ In the figure of the Theban king it is likely that Lydgate saw his own purpose as poet.

F. Conclusion

To have concluded by observing that Lydgate's ideas on the rhetorical first principles of his poetry are thoroughly conventional might have seemed unwarranted were it not for the studies of Lydgate by Schirmer and Renoir. These would see him as a "poet in transition," moving away from a medieval world view towards a humanism we usually regard as characteristic of the Renaissance. Renoir, for example, maintains that the practice of evaluating Lydgate by the same standards we apply to Chaucer and the Middle Ages is a mistake. To do Lydgate justice, he says, we must not read him "with the determination to find either Chaucer or the limp tail end

of the Middle Ages."³⁹ The survey of Lydgate's rhetorical system in the first chapter, however, and the review of his own statements on poetry here in the second section should show that this approach, however well-intentioned, is questionable. His attitude toward classical history, literature, and myth was as we have seen that of a moralist; these materials are chiefly valued as repositories of moral examples to be adapted to functional ends quite in accord with orthodox traditions of medieval rhetoric. Similarly the political and moral lessons of his speculum regale were commonplaces in his own day. Indeed Lydgate's understanding of what poetry is and how it should be used reveals a distinctly medieval habit of mind. What Renoir says about him and Chaucer may thus be true, not because Chaucer is medieval and Lydgate something else, but because Lydgate is not Chaucer. Surely Pearsall is correct to emphasize that Lydgate's value for us lies precisely in this, his being so perfectly representative of the Middle Ages. He defines for us "at great length, and in slow motion, the medieval mind at its characteristic work.... in all his writing he reasserts medieval traditions and habits of mind against Chaucer's free-ranging innovations. He throws into sharp relief not only Chaucer's greatness but also his differentness."⁴⁰ Like Gower with whom he shares a number of similar moral and political concerns

as well as a like notion of how to give them poetic articulation, Lydgate both caters to and helps create this solid and central tradition. It therefore little matters that our definitions of Chaucer's greatness and differentness would not be Lydgate's, for he had his own. When we do see Chaucer through Lydgate's eyes (and Pearsall only repeats what others have said before, that the fifteenth century's understanding of Chaucer was largely filtered through Lydgate's understanding of him), it is the Chaucer of the *Melibeus*, *The Parson's Tale*, and *The Clerk's Tale*. Here was literature of moral 'sentence' that continued to appeal to a taste for 'wholesome counsel and sage advice' for over two centuries after Chaucer's death.⁴¹

It is less important, perhaps, to recognize the essentially medieval quality of Lydgate's notion of poetry than to observe how he attempts to make rhetorically efficacious again images of truth and wisdom drawn from remembrance and made emotionally effective, morally exigent for the present. Put in these terms, there is no need to shift chronological perspectives to justify his poetic. It is likely that Lydgate would have responded to the invocation to Clio, eldest daughter of Zeus and Mnemosyne (or Memory) and the Muse of history, in which Auden acknowledges the dependence of man (and the poet) upon the past:

Clio,
Muse of Time, but for whose merciful silence
Only the first step would count and that
Would always be murder, whose kindness never
Is taken in, forgive our noises
And teach us our recollections.

Footnotes to Chapter II

¹See, for example, the articles by R. P. McKeon, "Poetry and Philosophy in the Twelfth Century: The Renaissance of Rhetoric," MP, 43 (1946), 217-234; D. W. Robertson, "Some Medieval Literary Terminology, With Special Reference to Chrétien de Troyes," SP, 9 (1951), 669-692; and Richard H. Green, "Dante's 'Allegory of Poets' and the Medieval Theory of Poetic Fiction," CL, 9 (1957), 118-128.

²Cf. Caxton's statement on Chaucer's achievement in his Proem to the second edition of the Canterbury Tales (1484): Chaucer "made many bokes and treatyces of many a noble historye, as wel in metre as in ryme and prose, and them so craftyly made that he comprehended hys maters in short, quyck and hye sentences, eschewyng prolyxte, castyng away the chaf of superfluyte, and shewyng the pyked grayn of sentence uttered by crafty and sugred eloquence." Cited in Geoffrey Chaucer: A Critical Anthology, ed. J. A. Burrow (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1969), p. 45. The Man of Law uses the same metaphor to indicate he will narrate just those elements of the story which are essential to his purpose:

Me list not of the chaf, ne of the stree
 Maken so long a tale as of the corn.
 (CT, II, 701-2)

³On this point, see the interesting article by Paul Strohm, "Storie, Spelle, Geste, Romaunce, Tragedie: Generic Distinctions in the Middle English Troy Narratives," Speculum, XLVI (1971), 348-59. These terms, Strohm argues, reflect important critical criteria for understanding the form and purpose of the literary works themselves.

⁴In light of the numerous instances in Lydgate's poetry of this affectation of modesty, it is interesting to find him in another passage from The Fall of Princes defending a rude, unrheterical style with the same image we have been examining:

Yit ofte tyme it hath be felt & seyn
 Vnder huskes growyng on lond arable,
 Hath be founde & tried out good greyn;
 Vndir rude leuys, shakyng & unstable,
 Pullid fair fruyt, holsum & delectable,
 And semblably, wher rethorik hath failed,
 In blunt termys good counseil hath auailed.
 (FP, VI, 330-6)

Apparently Lydgate could draw a number of critical lessons from this crucial metaphor.

⁵Cf. Strohm's comment on Lydgate's Troy-Book: "his main motive was surely literary--to write history in English according to the decorums by which history should be written, to paint the substance of a venerable story in colours of his own choosing" (352). For a discussion of Chaucer's treatment of this aesthetic problem, with special emphasis on the Troilus, see Payne, The Key of Remembrance, pp. 73-82.

⁶Ibid., pp. 63, 72. In view of the significance that a recent editor of the Confessio Amantis sees in "remembrance" as a critical term in Gower's poetic and philosophic scheme, I have not attributed its appearance throughout Lydgate's poetry solely to Chaucer's influence. See John Gower: Confessio Amantis, ed. Russell A. Peck (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968), pp. xvi-xxix.

⁷Payne, The Key of Remembrance, p. 64.

⁸Troy-Book, Prologue, 120, 171. Cf. The Fall of Princes, Prologue, 64.

⁹Walter F. Schirmer, John Lydgate: A Study in the Culture of the XVth Century, trans. Ann E. Keep (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961), p. 44.

¹⁰Betrand H. Bronson, In Search of Chaucer (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1960), p. 73.

¹¹That Lydgate accepted the conventional view that poetry should serve this moral or didactic end can also be learned from numerous other passages in his writings. In the Prologue to Book III, in a passage that has no direct source in Boccaccio or Laurence, he clearly says of poets

Ther cheef labour is vicis to repreve...
 What-euer thei write, on vertu ay conclude...
 This thoffise of poetis that be wise.
 (FP, III, 38-44)

Cf. also Lydgate's Chapter in commendation of "vertuous business" in Book II. Here he declares he will

Tweyne maner folkis to putte in remembrance,
 Off vice and vertu, and sette a difference:
 The goode alway han set ther plesaunce
 In vertuouse labour to doon ther deligence;
 And vicious peeples in slouthe & negligence.

And the report off bothen is reserued,
 With laude or lak, as thei han disserued.
 (FP, II, 2346-52)

¹²Lydgate alters his French source by making Boccaccio speak first; these significant lines, therefore, are entirely his own. They recall Dante's first address to his poetic master and teacher, Virgil:

'Or se' tu quel Virgilio e quella fonte
 che spandi di parlar si largo fiume?
 rispuos' io lui con vergognosa fronte.
 'O delli altri poeti onore e lume,
 vagliami 'l lungo studio e 'l grande amore
 che m' ha fatti cercar lo tuo volume.
 Tu se' lo mio maestro e 'l mio autore;
 tu se' solo colui da cu' io tolsi
 lo bello stilo che m' ha fatto onore.'
 (Inferno, I, 79-87)

¹³For references to the long literary tradition behind the use of this topos, see Robinson's note on the Troilus passage, p. 837.

¹⁴Payne, The Key of Remembrance, p. 84.

¹⁵Cf. Dante's statement in the De vulgari eloquentia contrasting the regular poets (that is, the Latin poets) with those who write in the vernacular: "But these poets differ from the great poets, that is, the regular ones, for the language of the great poets was regulated by art, whereas these, as has been said, write at haphazard. It therefore happens that the more closely we copy the great poets, the more correct is the poetry we write; whence it behoves us, by devoting some trouble to the work of teaching, to emulate their poetic teaching." A Translation of the Latin Works of Dante Alighieri, tr. A. G. Ferrers Howell and Philip H. Wicksteed (New York: Greenwood Press, Publishers, 1969; orig. pub. 1904), pp. 77-8.

¹⁶For a full discussion of Lydgate's indebtedness to Chaucer with ample illustrations of specific borrowings, see Pearsall, John Lydgate (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1970), pp. 49-82.

¹⁷Schirmer, pp. 70-77 and Pearsall, John Lydgate, pp. 58-63 both point out that certain aspects of Lydgate's style--his syntax, meter, and aureate diction--result from his imitating peculiarities of Chaucer's verse which he took (mistakenly) to be typical instances of eloquent, correct poetry.

¹⁸Lydgate's Reson and Sensuallyte, ed. Ernst Sieper, EETS, E. S. 84 (London: Oxford University Press, 1901), I, 54-6; and his Pilgrimage of the Life of Man, ed. F. J. Furnivall and Katharine B. Locock, EETS, E. S. 92 (London: Oxford University Press, 1904), III, xlv-xlvii.

¹⁹Locock, p. xlvi.

²⁰Cited in Sister Miriam Joseph, Rhetoric in Shakespeare's Time: Literary Theory of Renaissance Europe (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1962; orig. pub. 1947 as part of the work Shakespeare's Use of the Arts of Language), pp. 309-10.

²¹The discussion of literary mirrors in this paragraph is based largely upon James I. Wimsatt, Allegory and Mirror: Tradition and Structure in Middle English Literature (New York: Western Publishing Company, Inc., 1970), pp. 28-31 and passim.

²²What in fact he does present is, as Pearsall points out in "The English Chaucerians," pp. 213-4, less a series of images of true knighthood than a series of exempla occasioned by the tale of lust, adultery, vengeance, treason, and murder for the moralist to build on.

²³Sister Ritamary Bradley, "Backgrounds of the Title Speculum in Mediaeval Literature," Speculum, XXX (1955), 105.

²⁴The Minor Poems of John Lydgate, I, 292, 247.

²⁵Bergen, The Fall of Princes, I, xi.

²⁶Cf. also the Epistle of St. James, i, 23-24 concerning the man who beheld his face in a mirror and went off forgetful of his state.

²⁷Lydgate's Pilgrimage of the Life of Man, 11. 22400-22518.

²⁸Payne, The Key of Remembrance, p. 89.

²⁹Although Lydgate's immediate source for his handling of the Amphion myth is Boccaccio's Genealogia Deorum Gentilium (V, 30), he could also have read the story in Ovid's Metamorphoses where there are several references to it (VI, 177ff., 224ff., 271ff., 402ff.; XV, 427); in Horace's Ars poetica, 394ff. where Amphion is already mentioned as an example of civility; and in Statius who alludes to his marvellous song three times

in the Thebald (I, 9ff.; VIII, 232; X, 873). There are also brief accounts in Dante (Inferno, XXXII, 11) and in Chaucer (Knt, 1546; MerchT, 1710-3; and MancT, 116-8).

³⁰Poems, ed. Norton-Smith, p. 109. Cf. Chaucer on the music at January and May's wedding:

Biforn hem stode instrumentz of swich soun
That Orpheus, ne of Thebes Amphioun,
Ne maden nevere swich a melodye.
(CT, IV (E), 1715-7)

³¹John Hollander, The Untuning of the Sky: Ideas of Music in English Poetry 1500-1700 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), pp. 14-5.

³²For a full discussion of medieval attitudes toward the classical myths, see Jean Seznec, The Survival of the Pagan Gods: The Mythological Tradition and Its Place in Renaissance Humanism and Art, trans. Barbara F. Sessions (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1953).

³³The association between Amphion and the muses had already been made by Dante. As he approaches the lower regions of Hell, he calls upon the muses to help him describe the horrible sights he sees as once they assisted Amphion:

ma quelle donne aiutino il mio verso
ch' aiutaro Anfione a chiuder Tebe.
(Inferno, XXXII, 10-1)

³⁴See Bergen's note, in his commentary on The Fall of Princes, IV, 143.

³⁵Again, though Mercury is not directly mentioned, Lydgate does link the idea that peace is a result of "prudent policie" with the god of eloquence in another passage from The Fall:

The same tyme in Brutis Albioun
Ther floured in soth noblesse of cheualrie,
Hihe prowesse and prudent pollicie;
Mars and Mercurie aboue ech nacioun
Gouerned that tyme Brutis Albioun.
(FP, IX, 3150-4)

Cf. also the analogous use of Arion as a poet-musician in Gower's Confessio Amantis, Prologue, 1056-69 where he shares with Amphion a similar political function.

³⁶See, for example, Hollander's comments on Marvell's use of the Amphion myth in his poem on Cromwell's establishment of the Commonwealth, "The First Anniversary of the Government under O.C.," pp. 304-6.

³⁷Cf. Lydgate's explanation of his task as given him by Prince Henry to translate the story of Troy:

... he wolde to hyghe and lowe
 The noble story openly wer knowe
 In our tonge, about in euery age,
 And y-writen as wel in our langage
 As in latyn and in frensche it is;
 That of the story the trouth we nat mys
 No more than doth eche other nacioun.

(TB, Prologue, 111-7)

There is in the phrases "In our tonge" and "in our langage" a patriotic awareness of the growing respectability of the English vernacular as a refined medium capable of great literature. But less obvious than this nationalistic impulse and balanced against it is the recognition that English is still something of a novice seeking the stature of Latin and French. Until the truth of this noble story is decked out in the garbs of the mother tongue, it is implied, there will be an incompleteness, a gap that is the mark of a "rude" or "lewd" people.

³⁸See Seznec under "Mercury" in the index.

³⁹Renoir, p. 142.

⁴⁰Pearsall, John Lydgate, p. 14.

⁴¹Pearsall makes the point about fifteenth century attitudes toward Chaucer in "The English Chaucerians," p. 203. The three tales singled out by Lydgate from the Canterbury collection are mentioned in the Prologue to The Fall of Princes, lines 344-50. For a few brief remarks on Chaucer's reputation as a source of moral doctrine, see the Burrow anthology, pp. 34-5.

Chapter III

Lydgate's Poetry: A Rhetorical Reading of Several Poems

A. Introduction

Some attention to Lydgate's actual use of rhetoric not only will sharpen our response to his poetry, it will also give us a clearer understanding of the way in which his verse is 'rhetorical.' It is rhetorical, of course, in the obvious sense, the sense which Thomas Feylde means when he says that whoever reads Lydgate "will hym call a famus rethorycyne."¹ What Feylde means is that Lydgate's diction is embellished, ornamented, or colored--in brief, decorated with the figures and schemes catalogued in the rhetoricians' manuals. Simple statistical inventories of his poems made to demonstrate this obvious aspect of Lydgate's rhetoric would be a relatively simple matter to compile but of little real use. Indeed Spearing has cogently argued the limited usefulness of this kind of approach for a reader of medieval literature: "What an acquaintance with the medieval ars poetica can do for us is to arouse a general attentiveness to the patternings of sound and syntax. It can sharpen the 'auditory imagination' and make us more aware of the elaborate echoing that goes on inside much medieval verse. But for the use, beyond the merely decorative, to which these intricacies of sound are put, we shall have to resort as

usual to our own critical judgment."²

Spearing's objection is fair enough as far as it goes. But as I have emphasized in my first two chapters, it is against a way of thinking about poetry, a tradition of rhetoric that Lydgate's work is to be read. Thus the real question, as Payne observes about the identical problem with Chaucer's poetry, is not whether the poet employs "occasional stylistic devices which the rhetoricians happen to have tabulated, but whether whole poems--good or even great poems--can be produced in the aesthetic tradition which the rhetorical manuals represent."³ Or to put the matter in a slightly different way, the important question is whether these poems can be profitably explicated in the critical terminology of the rhetorical manuals. It is in this larger sense that an investigation of the rhetoric of Lydgate's poetry is rewarding. We have been told, for example, that Lydgate's characteristic failures are failures at narrative. His method of narration according to Hammond is "rambling and verbose" and this "verbosity, when joined to a lack of structural sense, is disastrous; and Lydgate had little or no structural sense. He had no notion of the value of brevity, of selection among details.... Dulness of sense-perception on the one hand, the weight of stereotyped formula on the other, hold down Lydgate's feeling for nature just as they hold down his narrative progress."⁴

Even Pearsall, who gives a much more sympathetic reading of Lydgate in his full-length study, finds repeatedly (and correctly, I believe) that his best poetry is in non-narrative contexts--either set pieces in the midst of a narrative flow or separate, self-contained lyrics. And yet there is evidence in The Siege of Thebes to indicate that Lydgate was quite capable of sustaining a narratio in extenso. A careful analysis of the poem's rhetorical techniques--amplificatio, descriptio, and digressio in particular--will show how artfully Lydgate re-ordered the raw material of his sources, re-shaping them into a new creation.

Thus I shall begin this chapter with an examination of the narrative organization of The Siege of Thebes. From the Theban poem I shall turn to a consideration of the intermittent, discursive, and encyclopedic narrative format found in many of the tales of Lydgate's most famous poem, The Fall of Princes. This kind of narrative structure, I shall suggest, is not a true indication of Lydgate's narrative inability but quite likely a result of his attempt to write an elegant and instructive style, in accord with both theoretical precept and a tradition of literary models. Finally, a fresh reading of the courtly lyrics (The Floure of Curtesy, A Complaynt of a Lovers Lyfe, and the Temple of Glas) will provide further evidence of Lydgate's poetic skill. Far from being the

stylistically elaborate but essentially simple and formless poems several critics have found them, they reveal an underlying complexity of idea and a subtle dramatic coherence.

B. The Siege of Thebes

In composing The Siege of Thebes Lydgate might have done a number of things with the story as he found it. He might, for example, have simply turned his French originals⁵ into English verse, translating just what he found without adding or subtracting from his source material. He could also have chosen one or more episodes for expanded treatment while foreshortening the rest of the tale, much as Chaucer had done with the Troy material in the Troilus. He might have used the fall of Thebes as an exemplum to illustrate the consequences of a pagan belief or the retribution meted out by Fortune to those who live viciously. Or he might have treated the story as a full-blown epic, with complete rhetorical apparatus, as in his own version of the Troy story.

As it is, however, the details of the finished poem move it in a direction different from these alternatives. Much of the poem, for instance, is told in a sparse, rhetorically 'flat' narrative style. Indeed, placed alongside the companion poem on Troy which he had finished only a year or two earlier, The Siege of Thebes is

comparatively free from the rhetorical heightening and systematic amplification which had marked Lydgate's procedure in translating Guido's Historia Troiae.⁶ Furthermore, it is the whole history of Thebes Lydgate chose to recount, from the auspicious founding of the city by Amphion to its tragic destruction by war. The poem will therefore deal not with the private fortunes of any individual or group of individuals (as in the Troilus) but with the social, public issues of war and peace which affect the political destiny of the entire Theban nation. Nor does Lydgate reveal scarcely more than a trace or two of the belittling attitude taken in the French texts toward this pagan matter. Indeed Renoir has shown how careful Lydgate is to delete or to modify those details in the French which sneer at the 'payens corsed olde rites' of the story.⁷ For Lydgate all wars are a result of Lucifer's rebellion in heaven, and it is precisely because the lesson of Thebes still has a moral relevance and application for his audience that he is interested in it, a position hardly possible if the war was viewed as the result of pagan beliefs and error. In fact his purpose in toning down the anti-pagan attitude found in the French is to involve the reader in the sympathetic tragedy of Tydeus and the expedition against Thebes. Though we never get close to the major figures in anything like the way Chaucer brings us to know Troilus and Criseyde, and though

we are meant to condemn their behavior in conducting the war (Tydeus' youthful rashness in particular), our involvement, at least with several of them, is meant to be sympathetic. Much as Tydeus, given the intent of the work, deserves his fate, in the finished tale he also justifiably deserves Lydgate's portrait of him as an exemplar of knighthood.

Most important, however, since it explains in large measure these other aspects of the poem is the moral theme 'discovered' by Lydgate in his story and around which the poem is structured. In this respect Lydgate follows the usual practice of the romance writer: he has taken over his matter from a traditional and timeless story and given it his own sens, the particular individual pattern and contemporary moral appeal which he has decided is appropriate to the story. What this involves is a re-ordering on all levels of the poem's rhetoric, that is, all elements of the poem's composition are made subservient to a central nucleus which organizes the matter artistically. The fundamental force in the poem is the theme of the disastrous consequences of war, itself the result of a failure of rhetoric to make efficacious the "prudent policie" of peace. This motif, though static as a topic, develops, embodied in the narrative, from the opening "myth" of Amphion, the ideal king raising Thebes to the music of Mercury's harp to the final coda, the

death and burial of the Greek lords and the destruction of the city. Quite unlike his own technique in the Troy-Book where he treats the various narrative episodes as a series of topics for the display of rhetoric, for ornamentation and amplification, Lydgate's interest here lies rather in the moral-political-social lessons the events are designed to illumine. His interest, that is, is not in the incidents and characters for their own sake but in their relation to his moral view of the material. Thus his re-organization of his raw material, his abbreviations and amplifications, redirect the tale into a complex story with strong and deep moral and philosophical implications. Renoir defines this important effect of Lydgate's reworking of the French: "Lydgate...retells the tale with a specific moral purpose: he wishes not only to delight but especially to teach. He raises the tone to high seriousness, as he makes the moral lesson the central organizing element of the poem, to which he thus gives a unity non-existent in the French....they are separated by the immeasurable gap that lies between childish prose written to no lofty purpose and competent poetry composed with a philosophical intent."⁸ Instead of simply following the French versions of the story, which were basically redactions of a series of legendary events in a far-away land, Lydgate imposes on these essentially simple and essentially meaningless configurations of the romance

of adventure a meaningful pattern of human behavior capable of moral interpretation.

This emphasis upon the moral and social lessons implicit in the tale is therefore the single most important aspect of Lydgate's poem, for it determines the content, the structure, and the tone of his work to such an extent that it must have been constantly operative in the selection and disposition of his narrative materials. The didactic and illustrative aim of the narrative, for example, drives him in the direction of generalization. His 'historial' account of Thebes becomes generalized by virtue of the moral pattern discovered in it, and Lydgate thus makes his individual characters, by direct commentary on the action he narrates, into types or exemplars. Ayers has underscored the relation between the rhetorical content of Lydgate's characterizations and the narratio which sustains and gives substance to them:

When we come to consider Lydgate's characterizations, we find--not surprisingly--that none of them is in any sense remarkable for psychological insight. But this fact, too, is a function of the author's moral purpose. As he indicates by repeated suggestions to regard his characters as "mirrors" or as otherwise illustrative, the portraits are all conceived and are all used for illustrating lessons....Such didactic purpose does not demand, and indeed will generally not permit, particularity in the drawing of characters, for if their relevance as illustrative examples is to be clear, the emphasis in the portraits must be upon those features which relate them to those people who are being taught; if the purpose is to furnish guides to

conduct, that is, then the method of the portraiture must be generalized and typical.⁹

Character fixed and unchanging and given typical significance through details in keeping either with his status in the action or with the author's understanding of his function--this is the formula for descriptio presented by the rhetoricians and it is obviously the one Lydgate follows in The Siege of Thebes.

All the major figures in the poem are therefore functions of the plot which is central, and all are slanted in terms of Lydgate's evaluation of them. Oedipus the ruler remains the example of the proud and disdainful man we first see as a youth among his fellows:

This Edyppus among his pleying feeris
was in his port passyng ful of pride,
That non with hym myght in pees abide.
In hert he was so Inly Surquydows,
Malencolik and Contrarious,
Ful of despyt and of hegh disdeyn,
That no wight durste shortly hym with-seyn.
(ST, 468-74)

His son Ethiocles also obviously functions as another type of the bad king: both are great wrongdoers and both stand in opposition to the archetypal ideal king (Amphion) and the other 'merour' of kingly sapientia, the just and prudent Adrastus. Similarly Polymetus, Oedipus' other son, represents the example of the inglorious knight of ungentle and mean character while Tydeus, the poem's central figure, is all that a knight should be or we might say, all that the plot needs him to be. At his

first appearance in the story he is described by the narrator, in the conventional topics of rhetorical laus, as the model of knighthood, the embodiment of fortitudo and gentillesse:

ther cam a knyght ryding
 The worthiest in this world lyvyng,
 Curteys, lowly and right vertuous,
 As seith myn auctour, Called Tidyus,
 Eurous in Armes and manly in werkyng,
 Of his byrthe sone unto the kyng
 Of Calydonye a londe of gret renoun.
 (ST, 1263-9)

If we read Tydeus' character from the action in which he is involved we see him as an exiled prince, a courteous knight, a resolute fighter, a loyal ally, and champion of the expedition against Thebes. We are told he is young, worthy, gentle, famous, and brave. His actions are those of a passionate and impatient warrior whose abilities as a fighter are unrivalled but whose youthful rashness and imprudence in council ill-equip him to serve as advisor to King Adrastus. Yet despite these minor but important flaws in his character he remains for Lydgate's purpose the

most knyghtly forto se,
 That manly man that noble werreyour,
 As he that was of worthynesse flour,
 Maister and myrour by prouesse of his hond.
 (ST, 2620-3)

As Ayers points out about him, "His name rarely appears, in fact, without the addition of an approving modifier of a kind to make it apparent that he is a knightly

parallel to the kingly Adrastus, a foil and contrast to Polymetus, and the type of the ideal knight....Tydeus' character is such, then, as to make him worthy to bear the truth theme in the poem; so Lydgate employs him as the great exemplar of the power of truth, and as the major vehicle in the poem for the conveyance of its lessons."¹⁰

Even in describing his characters Lydgate as narrator-historian dissociates himself from any knowledge of them as persons, a method he perhaps learned from Chaucer for eliciting a proper attitude toward them from his audience. He repeatedly avows he knows them only in the story. Jocasta is called "Ful wommanly" because "the story seith certeyn" (341). And though he knows that King Laius was slain in a tournament, he doesn't know how ("the story writ not the maner") nor whether King Polybus had a wife ("I fynde not and therfor lat it goon"). Again, he can only report of Oedipus's grief after his horrible discovery ("And bokes seyn his eyen out he wepe"), and he scrupulously refrains from answering the question whether Polymetus and Tydeus slept after seeing the beautiful daughters of Adrastus "For it is not declared in my boke." If all these characters appear somewhat static and flat, therefore, they are designedly so. All are kept strictly serviceable to Lydgate's greater interest in the lesson the exemplary narrative is to illumine. There is never any question of our

becoming sidetracked into deep psychological or sentimental involvement with them as persons. Rather we are called upon to understand the principles they illustrate through their actions within the narrative framework.

Two further preliminary points are in order. First, because of the poem's bareness of texture those several passages where Lydgate does add to or modify his sources and heightens the poetry become crucial. This is the case with such sections as those dealing with the Amphion 'allegory', the wedding of Oedipus, the embassy of Tydeus, the funeral rites given the Argive lords at the end of the poem as well as the changes he makes in the formal descriptive frames setting forth the characters of Adrastus (1192-1205) and Amphiorax (2796-2818). In addition, the diffuse quality of the narrative makes for a story whose poetic effects are necessarily cumulative, extended in time, and resonating only as the tale moves along.¹¹ Chief among the rhetorical devices Lydgate uses to secure this resonance and to give meaning and shape to the unfolding story are a series of symmetrical parallelisms and antitheses¹² such as those that exist between the various character types but extending also to other levels of the poem as well. Indeed the entire structure and narrative development of the poem, it might be argued, proceed thematically, by this opposition ex contrario. The poem may be seen as an exposition of the necessity

for peace and love in the political-social community, but these virtues are expounded not as contemplative virtues but virtues physically and practically active in the ruler.¹³ Such virtuous activity may be opposed by vicious activity, kingly beneficence by violence, kindness by hatred, humility by arrogance, and so on. Thus in Part I we find opposed to the great benefactor of Thebes, King Amphion, the great malefactors Oedipus and his sons Ethiocles and Polymetus, the progeny of their father's hateful marriage. In Parts II and III a different set of moral opposites emerges. The Alliance formed by Adrastus, Polymetus, and Tydeus now represents the mission of truth against the "doubleness" of the usurper Ethiocles. When Ethiocles ignores Tydeus' discourse on the necessity for truth and the keeping of covenants in a king, the Argive knight vows war to prove that

For this the fyn falshede shal not availe,
Ageynes trouth in feeld to have batayle.
Wrong is croked bothen halt and lame.

(ST, 2077-9)

Yet as the Argive confederation prepares for the siege, the young and inexperienced war-lords ignore the wise counsel of the old seer Amphiorax who prophesies a disastrous outcome of the war and exhorts them instead to give up their plan to seek a solution by force of arms. Here the wisdom and prudence of age (Adrastus, Amphiorax) is set off against the folly and rashness of youth (Tydeus) which carry the day. The war, of course, ends

calamitously for all involved until a third force, Theseus of Athens, restores some semblance of moral order and equilibrium to the ravaged city.¹⁴

Both of these rhetorical techniques, the textural foregrounding of important material, and the contrasting of poetic elements, can be illustrated from Part I. This section of the poem, as we have seen, opens with the story of Amphion. In fact, in the first 140 lines Lydgate refers to this legendary figure six separate times; it is one of the crucial episodes in the poem which has no counterpart in Lydgate's immediate sources. Rather it is borrowed from Boccaccio's Genealogia and made to stand as the opening movement for the entire poem.¹⁵ It is obvious that Lydgate's interest in Amphion is as an illustrative example, for immediately after expounding the meaning of his myth, Lydgate declares that his purpose is not to chronicle how the line of Amphion ran from king to king by succession and he passes quickly over to the episode concerning the birth of Oedipus. He can, therefore, doubt the historical truth of Amphion's miracle as "a thyng of Poetes told,/ Neuere yseyn neither of yong nor old" (211-2) while at the same time he stresses the allegorical "pith and exposicioun" of "this derke poysye." Lydgate dwells on the higher truth contained in the myth for almost a hundred lines and it is easy to see why. The lesson of Amphion, offered in Ayers' words as "an example of the efficacy of love as opposed to the

ineffectuality of pride and violence,"¹⁶ serves as one of the moral poles where the forces converge in this story about love and hate, peace and war, accord and dissension. The interpretation of the allegory offered by Lydgate operates on several levels. First, the harp of Mercury and the song that raised the walls of Thebes signify "no thyng but the crafty speche" (226) of Amphion:

Wher-by He made the contres envyroun
 To han such lust in his wordes swete,
 That were so plesaunt, fauorable, and mete
 In her Eerys that shortly ther was noon
 Dis-obeysaunt with the kyng to goon,
 Wher so euere that hym list assigne.
 His cheer his port was outward so benygne,
 That thorgh his styryng and exortacioun
 With hym they went to bylde first this toun,
 And forsook ecch man his contre,
 Be on assent.... (ST, 228-38)

Having rationalized the myth as an allegory of the harmonizing power of rhetoric, Lydgate further uses the story as an occasion for the first of the many moralistic passages in the poem, here a digressio on the proper behavior of the ruler, any ruler:

Her may ye See how myche may avaylle
 The goodlihed and lownesse of a kyng,
 And specealy in cher and in spekyng,
 To his lyeges and to bern hym fayre
 In his apport and shewe hym debonayre,
 And nat to bene to straunge ne soleyn
 In contenance outward be disdeyn;
 Which causeth ofte, who that Can aduerte,
 Grete hatred in the puples herte.
 (ST, 244-52)

These details of correct kingly conduct will later be picked up and contradicted in the passages dealing with

Oedipus. Meanwhile, however, Lydgate follows this advice with several commonplaces on how the people support and sustain the estate of the king. Without them, the narrator observes, "Farwel lordshyp and domynacioun." Lydgate concludes this section on Amphion by summarizing the moral and political lessons of the tale while also introducing another set of polar opposites that anticipates the martial theme of the poem:

Wherfor me semeth mor is Fortunat
 Of Mercurye the soote sugred harpe
 Than Mars swerd whetted kene and sharpe,
 Mor accepted with asspectis goode
 Than is this god with his lokes woode.
 For humble speche with glad contenance
 May a prynce sothly mor avaunce
 Among his puple Hertes forto wyne
 Of inward loue which that wol not twynne,
 Than gold rychesse pride or tyranye,
 Outher disdeyne daunger or surquedye.
 For of lordes, as Clerkes can reporte,
 But that loue her crowne do supporte,
 The fyn ys nocht in conclusioun.
 I Take record of kyng Amphyoun,
 That bylte Thebes be his elloquence
 Mor than of Pride or of violence,
 Noble and riche that lik was nowher non.
(ST, 272-89)

As the poem develops, more and more incidents and characters will cluster around these thematic metonymies: the sweet harp of Mercury (rhetoric, love, peace, prudence, age, and experience) and the sharp sword of Mars (pride, violence, imprudence, the rash folly of youth that ignores wise counsel).

The first of these episodes is the section on Oedipus' birth and destiny. When Jocasta conceives

Oedipus, Laius consults the diviners to find out the child's fate. This they do by searching the heavenly mansions and by considering

Euery hour and constellacioun
 And eche aspecte and lookes ek dyuers,
 Which were good and which also pervers,
 Wher they were toward or ellys at debat,
 happy, welful or infortunat.

(ST, 382-6)

What they discover about Oedipus from these astrological signs bodes ill for Laius:

They founde saturn in the Scorpioun,
 Hevy-chered malencolik and loth,
 And woode Mars furious and wroth,
 holdyng his Sceptre in the Capricorn,
 The same houre whan this chyld was born,
 Venus deiecte and Contrarious
 And depressed in Mercuryes hous.

(ST, 388-94)

This passage, which is mostly Lydgate's free invention, not only looks backward to the birth of Amphion, born under the 'fortunate aspects' of Mercury's sign:

...Mercurye god of Eloquence
 yaf, be the myght of heuenly influence,
 Vnto this kyng at His natiuite
 Thorgh glade aspectes, that he shulde be
 Most excellent be craft of Rethorik,
 That in this world was non to hym lik.

(ST, 215-20)

it also looks forward to the description of Oedipus' character (rhetorical notatio) which is in antithetical relation to that of Amphion and to that of any good ruler:

This Eddyppus among his pleying feeris
 was in his port passyng ful of pride,
 That non with hym myght in pees abide.
 In hert he was so Inly Surquydows,
 Malencolik and Contrarious,

Ful of despyt and of hegh disdeyn,
 That no wight durste shortly hym with-seyn.
 (ST, 468-74)

Lydgate also strengthens the fatal link between Oedipus' pride and his downfall (that of Thebes, too) by saying that it was his arrogant and haughty behavior which prompted one of his companions finally to reveal that Oedipus was not the natural son of King Polybus (481-95). As a consequence of this revelation Oedipus leaves the court of Polybus and starts out for Thebes where the oracle of Apollo has told him his destiny lies. On the way back to his native city, he stops at a castle where a disorderly kind of tournament is in process. He enters the lists with those knights who seek to win a name through "hegh prowesse," but choosing "Rather a pley of werre than of pees" (575), he "cruelly" slays Laius his father when he meets with him in the press of battle. Thus pride and violence initiate the course of events that will eventually destroy the Theban nation.

The next major section of Part I, indeed of the entire poem, concerns the wedding of Oedipus and Jocasta. Not only does this passage contain the allegorical center of the story but it has also some of the best poetry.¹⁷ Lydgate prefaces his treatment of the marriage with a moral aside on the dangers of incest. It is against God's will "blood to touche blood." It leads to "gret confusioun" and is the "Grounde and roote of vnhap and

meschaunce,/ The fyn concludyng alway with vengeaunce"
 (791-2) as witness the record of King Herod. Therefore,
 every man--be he prince, lord, or king--should take as
 his example King Oedipus who, even though he was ignorant
 of his crime, was nevertheless punished and brought low.
 What, then, can be said of those who

...her errour knowe,
 And fro the knotte list not to abstene
 Of such spousale to god and man vnclene?
 (ST, 814-6)

This digression is followed by one of Lydgate's favorite rhetorical gambits. He will pass over this unpleasant part of the story (an example of rhetorical occupatio) because the marriage was "odious,/ Infortuned and vngracious" (821-2), but instead of abbreviating the narrative sequence, he offers a long descriptive catalogue of the allegorical/mythological guests and non-guests: those who were not there are contrasted with those who were. This inventory, I believe, is no decorative excrescence but a significant and integral part of the poem's theme. First, those who were not present:

For ymeneus was not ther present,
 Nor lucyna list not ther to shyne,
 Ne ther was none of the musys nyne
 By on accord to make melodye;
 For ther song not be heuenly Armonyne
 Neither Clyo nor Calyope,
 On of the sustren in nombre thries thre,
 As they dyde whan philolegye
 Ascendid vp hegh aboue the skye
 To be weddid this lady vertuouse
 Vnto hir lord the god mercurius;

As Marcian ynamed de Capelle,
 In his book of weddyng can you telle,
 Ther concludyng in this mariage
 The poete, that whilom was so sage,
 That this lady, called sapience,
 I-wedded was vnto eloquence;
 As it sat wel, by heuenly purueaunce,
 hem to be joyned be knot of Aliaunce.
 (ST, 826-44)

The traditional figures Hymen and Lucina are representations naturally associated with marriage. Their absence, therefore, gives allegorical expression to the unnaturalness of this marriage. More important, however, is the connection that Lydgate makes between the Muses not being present at Oedipus' wedding as they had been at the wedding of Mercury and Philology. Lydgate's use of imagery is very skillful here. We have already seen how he frequently associates the Muses, Clio and Calliope in particular, with harmony in love and music (and by extension with political harmony) as well as with Mercury and Amphion.¹⁸ Here the marriage of Oedipus and Jocasta stands in the same relation to the marriage of Mercury and Philology (Eloquence and Sapience¹⁹) as Oedipus stands to Amphion. They are moral inversions of each other. The figure of the knot, one of Lydgate's favorite images, usually betokens for him accord and permanence of union.²⁰ The "knot of Aliaunce" between Mercury and Philology is a true and natural love-knot that receives a heavenly sanction ("it sat wel, by heuenly purueaunce,/ hem to be ioyned"). It is literally a marriage made in heaven.

As such it is opposed by all those other marriage "knots" (844) odious to god and man alike. Lydgate could probably also count on his audience's knowing, without him mentioning it, that the seven liberal arts were the fruit of the Mercury-Philology marriage, for he next presents, as a kind of bridge passage to the longer description of the guests who did appear at Oedipus' marriage, a glance into the future and the "grete aduersite" born of this union:

For fynal eende of that solempnyte
 was sorowe and woo and destruccioun,
 Vtter ruyne of this Royal toun
 Ther may no man helpe it nor socoure,
 For a tyme in Ioye thogh they floure.
(ST, 848-52)

This direful anticipation of what will result from the marriage is followed by a list of the wedding guests who in essence are responsible for the prophesied outcome. The list is made up of figures from classical mythology and a long tradition of descriptive allegory; once again Boccaccio's Genealogia, not the French roman, is Lydgate's source. Significantly, the passage culminates in the central figure of Mars:

But at this weddyng, platly forto telle,
 was Cerberus Chief porter of helle,
 and herebus Fader to hatrede,
 was ther present with his hool kynrede,
 His wiff also with her browes blake,
 And her doghtren sorow forto make,
 hydous-chered and vggely forto see,
 Megera and Thesiphonee,
 Allecto ek with labour and envie,
 Drede and fraude and fals trecherie,

Tresoun pouerte Indigence, and nede,
 And cruel deth in his Rente Wede,
 Wrechednesse compleynt and ek Rage,
 Fer ful pale derknesse croked age,
 Cruel mars as eny Tygre wood,
 Brennyng Ire of vnkynde blood,
 Fraternal hate depe sett the rote,
 Saue only deth that ther nas no bote,
 Assuryd othes at the fyn vntrewe:
 All these folk weren at the weddyng newe,
 To make the towne desolat and bare,
 As the story after shal declare.
 (ST, 853-74)

The wedding of Oedipus thus constitutes the allegorical heart of the poem, mirroring in its images those moral polarities which define and illumine the poem's significatio. Whatever social ills and moral evils later attend the destruction of Thebes are contained in germinal form in this tableau representative of the spirit of hatred, discord, and meanness. They are, in Ayers' words, the "corollaries and consequences of Oedipus's unwittingly evil marriage."²¹

After the high point of the Oedipus-Jocasta marriage, Part I moves without interruption to its conclusion. The discovery of their horrible identities by the King and Queen is handled in a muted, anti-climactic fashion. Lydgate's purpose is not to make them into the tragic figures of classical legend nor into the sympathetic sufferers they appear as in the version of the story Lydgate tells in The Fall of Princes. Consequently there is little focus on this aspect of the narrative. Instead the first section draws to a close with our attention

turned toward the sons, Ethiocles and Polymetus. We are told how they held their aged father in "despit,/ And of disdeyn tok of hym no kepe" (1000-1). Finally they set upon Oedipus, mutilate him, and dishonor his corpse:

As his sones rebuke hym and dispise,
 Vpon a day in a certeyn place
 Out of his hede his eyen he gan race,
 And Cast at hem, he can non other bote,
 And of malice they trad hem vnder fote,
 Fully devoide both of loue and drede.
 And whan Edippus for meschief was thus dede,
 with-Inne a pytte made in the erthe lowe,
 Of cruelte his sones han hym throwe,
 Wers than serpent or eny tigre wood.
 (1004-13)

The moralizing passage that ends the first part cleverly incorporates the shameful behavior of Ethiocles and Polymetus into the larger thematic pattern of order/disorder and love/hatred that operates in the poem. The hatred of the sons for their father and their parricide are viewed as symptomatic on the private, domestic level of the public, social ills that have already begun to afflict the city. The warning Lydgate gives to those who fail to honor their father and mother, by underscoring just those virtues necessary to degree and social order, is actually a warning also of the final end of Ethiocles, Polymetus, and the city that is the object of their quarrel:

For who that is not to hem debonayr
 In spech, in port for to trete hem fair,
 Hem to obeye in honeste and drede,
 And to cherissh of what they han nede,
 I dar afferme exceptyng non astat,
 That he shall first be infortunat
 In alle his werk both on see and lond,

And of what thyng that he take on hond
 Fortune froward to hym and contrayre,
 Waast of his good, pleynly and appaire,
 Fynde plente of kontek werre, and striff,
 Vnhappy ende and shortnesse of liff,
 And graceless of what he hath to do,
 Hatrede of god and of man also.

(ST, 1025-38)

To see the Oedipus episode in this way, as containing, like the first movement of a symphony, the heart of the entire piece frees it, I believe, from its reputed isolation in the work. Pearsall, for example, who is usually an astute reader of Lydgate can mistake the uses to which Lydgate orders his rhetoric. He speaks of the "colossal irrelevance of the Oedipus-story as Lydgate tells it" and of "the factitious handling of the Oedipus story, with its ludicrously inapposite moralising." This he credits to the "gratuitously accumulative nature of medieval narrative, and the disintegration of classical myth."²² Such comments do an injustice to the poem on several counts. They assume, first of all, that Lydgate knew or should have known the classical version of the Oedipus cycle but failed to reproduce its grandeur in English. But to hold Lydgate responsible for the "disintegrated" account he does relate in The Siege of Thebes makes as little sense as to hold the author of Sir Orfeo similarly responsible for debasing that ancient coin, or Gower or Chaucer or any other medieval writer working with classical material. More serious, however, is Pearsall's charge that the Lydgate episode is ludicrous

or irrelevant, for it ignores a very basic aspect of the poem. As we have seen, an examination of the poem's structure indicates how deliberately and consistently Lydgate makes the 'rethoryk' of his poem serve the moral 'sentence' the history of Thebes is designed to 'enlumyn'. His version of the Oedipus episode, therefore, when viewed in relation to the poem's content and purpose, can be interpreted as establishing the moral axes along which the succeeding events of the story can be plotted.²³ Granted that the narrative is accumulative in nature, even that Lydgate's treatment of the Oedipus legend is "factitious" if we take that word to mean in context that he has adapted his source material to fit his rhetorical ends, it still does not follow that these incidents are arranged "gratuitously" nor that Lydgate's own comments on the story are "ludicrously inapposite." Inapposite to what? Rather it seems to me that it is precisely the way he does rework the story that makes it so integral to the rest of the poem, perfectly in keeping with the poem's lesson. The rhetorical evidence, at least,--the foregrounding through expansion of crucial material and the careful web of interlocking parallels and contrasts--would seem to warrant such a conclusion.

There is no need to go through the whole poem in this sort of detail. Enough perhaps has been said to give some idea of Lydgate's general concerns and techniques.

Of special interest, however, is what might be called a sub-theme of the poem, the failure of rhetoric to effect a peaceful resolution to the problem of war. It is a topic that would certainly have appealed to Lydgate for several reasons. He had already voiced his sentiments concerning the "prudent policie" of peace in the Epilogue to the Troy-Book (V, 3399-458) and The Siege of Thebes which followed shortly thereafter would have given him ample opportunity to develop his ideas on the subject. Moreover his interpretation of Amphion as an ideal of the poet-rhetorician would only have made the successive history of Thebes more fascinating as an historical example, especially if Lydgate saw himself, as some scholars have argued, as an Amphion-figure advising Henry V on his French policy. That function, after all, is for the rhetorician a primary one:

As bexauple, myn auctour doth record,
 Men sette at werre, in herte ferr assonder,
 The rethoricien to make hem for taccord
 Mut seeke weies & menys heer & yonder,
 Of old rancour tappese the boistous thonder,
 Be wise exaumpelis & prouerbis pertynent
 Tenduce the parties to been of oon assent.
 (FP, VI, 3452-8)

The Siege of Thebes thus might have been intended as one of the "weies & menys" with which Lydgate felt he could unobtrusively offer counsel to the king--with an exemplum on the disasters that follow the ignoring of wise and prudent counsel! His handling of the topic is, at any rate, one of the narrative threads that give the poem its

unified inner structure.

We can pick up the development of this topic at the beginning of Part II. This section opens with Ethiocles and Polymetus maneuvering for the Theban throne. Each brother so hates and envies the other that neither will agree to let the other reign. Finally the nobility of Thebes must take it upon themselves to "Shope a way to mak hem of accord,/ And to set hem in quyete and in pees" (1082-3). After the rival claims of both brothers are heard, these lords work diligently

By gret avis and ful high prudence,
 To setten hem in quyete and in Reste;
 Conselyng hem pleyndly for the beste,
 To leve her strif of wisdam and resoun,
 And condescende to some conclusioun
 Which to bothe myghte most availe.

(ST, 1106-11)

For a while the solution worked out by the good sense of the Theban council--to let each rule for alternate years--averts the outbreak of civil war.²⁴ The peace, however, is only temporary. When the year is up, Ethiocles, pressed by fear of an alliance against him, calls upon his allies and lords for advice. Three kinds of people, the narrator observes, were at the council:

Some in soth that feithful were and trewe,
 And some also that can change of newe,
 And other ek that be-tweyn
 Couertly koude vnder colour feyn.

(ST, 1717-20)

The faithful counselors advise Ethiocles to honor his oath and fulfill his agreement with Polymetus. Above everything

else, they say, "Trouthe shulde longe to a kyng" (1722). Ethiocles spurns their arguments and his refusal to hear the truth, Lydgate points out, caused the city to be destroyed.

Only for he nat by counsell wroght
Of hem that wern bothe trewe and wis.
(ST, 1780-1)

Instead Ethiocles listens to the false rhetoric of the flatterers who urge him to remember

...how he was a knyghte,
And to holde of force, more than of right....
This was the counsail platly and the Reed
Of such as liste nat to seyn the soth,
But falsly flater with her wordes smoth.
(ST, 1785-94)

This second council, then, undermines the peace and accord achieved by the first. It represents not so much a failure of rhetoric as it does the failure of the right kind of rhetoric. "Wordes smoth" have overcome the truth, wisdom has been dissociated from eloquence.

Meanwhile, during the year of Ethiocles' rule in Thebes, Polymetus journeys into exile. His wanderings take him to Argos where Adrastus is the king. Adrastus is presented as the pattern of the prudent and wise king loved by his people and concerned for their welfare. He is, in brief, what the sons of Oedipus are not:

A manly man riche and wonder sage,
And ronne was somdel into age....
And for his witt, in story as is kouth,
he chosen was in his tendre youth,
Of alle Arge to be crowned kyng,
Chief of alle Grece by record of writyng,
Not be dissent nor successioun,

But al only of fre eleccioun
 To holde of Arge the sceptre in his hond,
 As most worthy of all grekes lond,
 loued and drad for wisdam and Iustice.
 (ST, 1193-1205)

Adrastus demonstrates his good sense and practical wisdom on several occasions in Part II. When Polymetus churlishly refuses to allow a stranger (Tydeus) to share the porch of Adrastus' palace while seeking shelter from a night storm, the two knights are quick to anger and, "ful surquedous of pride" (1353), first joust, then attack each other with swords. It is Adrastus who, awakened by the noise, separates and disarms them, telling them

It was a Rage and gret folye
 So wilfully her lyves to Iupartē,
 with-oute Iuge her querel to departē,
 And specially in the derke nyght
 Whan neither myght of other han no sight,
 Charging hem vpon peyne of her lif
 To disseuer and styntyn of her strif.
 (ST, 1380-6)

Later in the story, "in ful prudent wise" (1446) he makes the two knights swear an oath of friendship and loyalty to one another, and then arranges a marriage for them with his daughters. Since he has no male heir, he proposes "lik a prudent man" (1567) that Tydeus and Polymetus have half his land while he is alive, and after that each shall have an equal division of his kingdom (the contrast with the Theban problem of succession is obvious). Finally, when Polymetus is debating whether to return to Thebes after the year is up, Adrastus wisely advises him (1835, 1844) not to go back himself lest he be trapped by

Ethiocles. When Tydeus bravely but foolishly volunteers to go alone in his friend's place, Adrastus again tries to persuade him not to venture on such a rash and needlessly dangerous undertaking. As events turn out, Tydeus is seriously wounded and just does manage to escape the ambush of fifty knights sent by Ethiocles to kill him.

Adrastus' conduct in the final section of the poem is likewise meant to illustrate his wise beneficence as a ruler. He calls a parliament to organize preparations for the war (2573-85), arranges lodging and food for men and horses, and pays his army generously and promptly:

For Adrastus prudently took hede,
 Ful lik a kyng touching her terme-day,
 That thei to-forn wer serued of her pay.
 He was so free hym list no thyng restreyn;
 And no man hadde cause to compleyn
 For hunger, thrust nor for Indygence.
 (ST, 2682-7)

Later he seeks the advice of his parliament concerning the conduct of the war (2794-2940), and when Lycurgus' son is accidentally killed by a serpent, it is Adrastus who consoles him "ful wisely with his prudent speech" (3411). He calls a war council to consider what should be done when the Argive army wishes to give up the siege after the disturbing death of Amphiorax. And it is he who sends the widows of the dead Greek lords to seek redress from Theseus (4514-6).

Thus the formal portrait of Adrastus, the tags the narrator uses to describe his actions, and those actions

themselves all are carefully designed to focus upon the king's wisdom and his prudence. In fact, Renoir has shown how Lydgate, while making no fundamental changes in the character of Adrastus, made an important change in emphasis by stressing these qualities which are but barely suggested in the French.²⁵ But whereas Renoir would see Adrastus as the illustration of the ideal of both sapientia et fortitudo, I think it is more accurate to distinguish between the two. The events of the story do not show Adrastus acting as a knight or warrior. He is always rather seen as the king of Argos or the commander-in-chief and organizer of the expedition against Thebes. Like Nestor or Latinus or Hrothgar, he is a model of kingly sapientia without the support of fortitudo.²⁶ This is unambiguously stated in the description of him by the narrator when we are told he "ronne was somdel into age" (1194) and even more clearly later that "he was old er the siege gan" (4613). The poem's representative of an ideal fortitudo, young, passionate, and quick, is Tydeus, who nevertheless is lacking in the developed sapientia of Adrastus.

These distinctions are necessary, I believe, if we are to follow with any certainty Lydgate's handling of the rhetoric theme in the crucial third and last division of the poem. The first two parts are relatively simple in their development and as we have seen deal with the

establishment of the moral graph on which the rest of the story will be plotted. The third section, however, is more complex. Having clearly charted the behavior of his major figures on this graph, Lydgate begins to reverse the positive and negative signs. For just as it was the false rhetoric of Ethiocles' flatterers which disrupted the accord of the agreement between him and his brother by urging a policy of "force" rather than of "right", here in the third section it is in the parallel councils of the Argive army that a true rhetoric fails to persuade to right action. The young war party led by the idealistic Tydeus, their fortitudo unchecked by wisdom and untempered by prudence, demands a course of "hegh prouesse." Tydeus, in particular, obstinately rejects the peace offers coming from Thebes and urges a relentless pursuance of the war. War and hatred, Lydgate suggests, for whatever self-righteous or self-deceiving reasons they are nurtured, are finally destructive of both the good and the evil, the right and the wrong. The poem, then, is no simplistic tale of black and white, and though it does not experientially explore the complexities of the story it does manage to give some idea of the limitations of language in mediating between moral truths and the proper human emotional response.

The second part of The Siege of Thebes had ended with an exclamation by the narrator forecasting the

destruction coming to Thebes as a consequence of Ethiocles' refusal to keep faith with his brother:

Lo her kalendys of aduersite,
 Sorowe vpon sorowe and destruccioun,
 First of the kyng and all the Regyoun;
 For lak oonly lik as I yow tolde,
 That biheestes trewly wern not holde:
 the Firste grounde and Roote of this Ruyne.
 (ST, 2544-9)

This anticipation of internecine calamity is followed in Part III with an appropriate opening apostrophe to the god of hatred and strife. The apostrophe serves as a reminder that the "doubleness" of Ethiocles and the angry pride of Polymetus are but the inevitable unravellings of a fate woven long before into the very fabric of Theban history. It was Mars, we should recall, who along with Saturn determined the astrological aspect at Oedipus' birth, and it was Mars who also appeared as the climactic figure among the wedding guests at Oedipus' marriage. Here, at the prelude to the final movement in the poem, Lydgate again introduces this force whose fatal influence has brought to the brink of ruin a city auspiciously founded by Amphion and Mercury:

O Cruel Mars ful of malencolye,
 And of thy kynde hoot combust, and drye...
 what was cause that thow were so wroth
 with hem of Thebes? thorgh whoos feruent Ire
 The Cite brent and was sette a-fyre,
 As bookes olde wel reherce konne,
 Of Cruel hate rooted and begvnne,
 And engendred, the story maketh mynde,
 Oonly of blood corrupt and vnkynde,
 Bynfeccioun called Orygynal,

Causing a strife dreadful and mortal,
 Of which the mischief thorgh al grece Ran.
 (ST, 2553-67)

This third section of the poem, although principally concerned with the actual military siege of Thebes, consists largely of a series of council-debates concerning the course of the war: should it be started, should it be broken off, can it be settled? The longest and certainly the most important of these meetings takes place in the Argive camp just prior to the commencement of hostilities. It is decided that now is an opportune moment to consult the advice of a great seer,

...on that was ful prudent and ryght wyce
 And circumspecte in his werkes alle,
 A worthy bisshop into age falle,
 And Called was, sothly by his name
 Amphiorax....

(ST, 2796-800)²⁷

Amphiorax is revered for his ability to read the heavenly signs and especially to see in them "the fynal dome of Contek & Werrys" (2818). He knows, therefore, the "gret meschief" and "gret damage" the war with Thebes will bring, including a vision of his own death, swallowed up by the earth. So when summoned to the Greek parliament he first attempts to hide himself and asks his wife to keep him secret. Eventually he is betrayed by her and brought before the Argive assemblage. The scene in the parliament is very well done. First we get the hopeful expectation of the Greeks who think to hear from Amphiorax of a successful campaign:

This hoore gray in his char syttng
 And they ful glade wern of his comyng,
 havyng a trust and ful opynyoun
 That, thorgh cause and occasioun
 Of his wisdam and his sapience
 And by vertue of his hegh presence,
 They shuld eschewe al aduersite
 Possible to falle as in her Iourne.
 (ST, 2879-86)

What they do hear is of course something quite different
 as the prophet summons up for them a vision of what war
 will mean for them:

her dysemol daies and her fatal houres,
 Her auenturys and her sharpe shoures,
 The froward soort and the vnhappy stoundys,
 The compleyntes of her dedly woundys,
 The woful wrath and the contrariouste
 Of felle Mars in his cruelte,
 And howe, by mene of his gery mood,
 Ther shal be shadde al the worthy blood
 Of the Grekes it may not be eschewed,
 If her purpos be execute and swed.
 (ST, 2893-902)

The narrative then breaks into direct discourse as
 Amphiorax simply and eloquently foretells his own fate:

"Ther is no more this shal be the fyn:
 The hegh noblesse shal drawe to decyne
 Of Grekes blood in meschief, sorowe, and woo:
 And with al this I my-silf also,
 As my fate hath a-forn disposyd,
 Depe in the grounde I shal be enclosed,
 And lokked up in the dirke vale
 of cruel deth." lo! this was the tale
 That the bisshope to Adrastus tolde.
 (ST, 2903-11)

Amphiorax tries urging Adrastus not to attack Thebes
 but his eloquence is to no purpose. Instead the Argive
 lords abuse him, calling him a liar and contriver of new
 prophecies, "An olde Dotard a coward, and aferde" (2928).
 They ignore his counsel and shout him down, especially

the soldiers

which of age were but tendre and grene,
 That han not hadde by martys Influence,
 Of the werre gret experience.
 (ST, 2938-40)

The failure of Amphiorax before the Greek assembly is the central episode of the last part of the poem, more important in its own way than anything that comes after it including the death of Tydeus and the levelling of Thebes. For like the wedding of Oedipus in Part I, it contains these other happenings latent within itself. And like the hub of a great wheel it sends its spokes out to all reaches of the poem. We find, again, for example the explicit contrast drawn between the way of "felle Mars", mistaken by the tender and young soldiers (among whom we must include Tydeus) as the way of "hegh noblesse", and the way of Amphiorax, the way of wisdom and "hegh prudence" (2967). Even Adrastus, as we shall see, cannot check the willfulness of Tydeus in continuing the war. Like Amphiorax he can advise and counsel, but his wisdom is unavailing as it gives way to a majority decision or bends before the forcefulness of a Tydeus.

Reinforcing this balance of opposites and to a large extent explaining it is the contrast Lydgate draws in a lengthy digression between youth and age. The young man is governed by his passions and "Taketh emprises of hasty wilfulness" (2957). The old, "prudent in al his gouernaunce" (2959), works discreetly by counsel and looks

ahead to see how things will turn out. The tragedy of the Theban expedition lies partly in the absence of any one person on either side who combines the virtues of both youth and age, sapientia et fortitudo (like Theseus, for example) or who is willing to let one complement the other (as Tydeus does not allow the wise experience of Adrastus or Amphiorax to restrain his proud bravery).²⁸ And finally, just as there is an unfortunate dissociation between Adrastus' sapientia and Tydeus' fortitudo, the Amphiorax episode carries this dissociation one step further. His true rhetoric, a joining of sapientia et eloquentia, likewise proves futile before the clamor of the Greek lords for war:

And wher that foly hath domynacioun,
 Wisdam is putte into subieccioun,
 lik as this byssshop, with al his hegh prudence,
 For cause he myghte haue no audience,
 All his wisdam and his profecye
 Of the Grekes was holden but folye.
 For thogh Plato and wise Socrates,
 Moral Senek and Diogenes,
 Albumasar and prudent Tholomee,
 And Tullius that hadde souereynte
 whylom in Rome as of elloquence:
 Thogh all thise, shortly in sentence,
 were a-lyve most konnyng and experte,
 And no man list her counsel to aduerte,
 Nor of her sawes forto taken hede,
 What myght availle and it cam to nede?
 For wher prudence can fynde no socour
 And prouidence haueth no favour,
 Farwel wisdam farwel discrecioun,
 For lakke only of supportacioun.

(ST, 2965-84)

Ideally the aim of the rhetorician is the 'discovery' of and the persuasion to right action; his function is the manipulation of language to make men's emotions serve their reason. Amphiorax has discovered the truth through astrological divination but he cannot persuade the Argive assembly efficaciously. The fault is not his, however, but that of his audience. In this situation neither eloquent language nor reason are reliable means of persuasion, and the intended effect falls short. Lydgate ascribes various names to explain the failure of rhetoric throughout the poem--Fortune or Fate, planetary influences, the willfulness of youth, the flattery, pride, hatred, or envy of individuals--but it is only at the end of the poem that he sets the problem within a traditional Christian framework.

One other related incident deserves mention before we turn to that conclusion. More than 3600 lines into the poem, the actual siege begins. Almost at once Ethiocles has second thoughts about the whole business and calls a council to advise him. Again he hears a variety of opinions:

And some gaf a ful blunt sentence,
 which hadde of werre non experience:
 Seyde it was best, and nat ben afferd,
 To trye his right manly with the Swerd.
 And some also that wer moor prudent,
 Spak vnto hym by good avisement.
 And list nat spare but their conceyte tolde
 how hit was best his couenant forto holde....
 Be nat founde variant fro the dede,
 For non hatred, rancour, neyther pryde.
 (ST, 3635-47)

Here once more we have the opposition of the naive war party and the more prudent peace party. This time, however, it is the aged Queen Jocasta who, in a kind of near soliloquy (3653-3708), persuades her son to settle the argument with his brother by letting Polymetus rule for a year. It is foolish, she says, to "putte a strif in martys Iugement/ For hard it is whan a Iuge is wood" (3662-3). Such a judgment often turns out unfavorably and many men will die before it is settled. Ethiocles gives in and agrees, with certain reservations, to let Polymetus sit on the throne of Thebes. Jocasta and her daughters go to Adrastus' camp to give the terms to Polymetus. Tydeus, however, refuses to accept Ethiocles' conditions and instead imperiously sets his own conditions for Ethiocles' abdication:

"And yif it falle that he wil nat so,
 Lat hym not wayte but only after werre.
 The hour is come we wil it not differre."
 (ST, 3801-3)

Amphiorax interrupts Tydeus, reminding him of his prophecy that all shall die if the war proceeds:

But thilke tyme for al his elloquence
 He had in soth but lytel audience.
 For wherso euer he ment good or ille,
 kyng Adrastus bad hym to be stille.
 (ST, 3811-4)

Shortly thereafter Jocasta desperately appeals directly to the king, beseeching

... only of his grace
 Some mene way wisly to purchase
 To make a pees atwene the brethren tweyn,

And the trete so prudently ordeyne,
 On either party that no blood be shed.
 (ST, 3935-9)

Jocasta's plea is correctly addressed to Adrastus as commander of the Greek forces, but the king again indicates his inability to work contrary to Tydeus and his supporters:

And this Adrastus avise and right sad,
 For Grekis party answer gaf anon
 That other ende shortly gete she non,
 lich as the lordis fully ben avisyd,
 Than Tydeus hathe aforn devisyd.
 (ST, 3940-4)

Ironically, the destructiveness of Tydeus' willful refusal to heed advice is made clear when the "hegh noblesse" which he so ardently seeks ignominiously claims his life. "He will not die," Renoir observes, "sword in hand, but ingloriously hit in the back by a bolt from a crossbow as he rides away from battle after a daring sally. Such is the end of unadvised valour."²⁹

Finally, with the armies of both sides decimated, the walls of Thebes once built by Amphion now beaten down, and the land around turned into a desert wilderness, the poem closes with a peroration on the evils of war:

lo! her the fyn of contek and debat.
 Lo! her the myght of Mars the froward sterre.
 Lo! what it is for-to gynne a werre.
 (ST, 4629-31)

The poetic texture here is derived from Chaucer's ending to the Troilus, this example of repetitio imitating the serious accent and striving for the same solemnity of effect as Chaucer's stanza (V, 1849-55).³⁰ But Lydgate

does not end the poem on this note, with a few simple commonplaces on the disadvantages of war though that is all he might be expected to make of the story. Rather, struggling after Chaucer, he moves beyond the tragedy of Thebes, the pitiful events of the story, to the illumination which that tragedy brings of another order. No explanation of the action of the poem, the seemingly inexorable movement of hate and pride, of violence and contempt for wise and true counsel, entirely satisfies us as we read the story. What is the cause, Lydgate had asked Mars, in the apostrophe at the opening of Part III, for the wrath he holds against Thebes, and this is just one of many pointers in the poem to a force or power that circumscribes the life of man and society.³¹ Now, in a backward glance at that movement, Lydgate extends and deepens its significance by transcending it. Much earlier in the story Adrastus had consoled King Lycurgus on the death of his son with a Boethian speech on the nature of the universe:

"And our lif her, who taketh hed ther-to,
 Is but an exile and a pilgrymage,
 Ful of torment and of bitter Rage,
 Lich a See rennyng to and fro,
 Swyng an ebbe whan the flood is do,
 Lytil space abidyng at the fulle....
 For in this world who so look a-right,
 Is non so gret of power nor of myght,
 Noon so riche shortly nor so bold
 But he mot dey outhere yong or old.
 And who in youthe passeth this passage,
 he is eskaped al the woode Rage,
 Al sorowe and trouble of this present lyff,

Replenished with contek werre and stryff,
 which seeld or neuere stont in Suerte.
 Wher-for best is, as semeth vnto me,
 No man gruche but, of hegh prudence,
 The sonde of goddis tak in pacience."
 (ST, 3418-23; 33-44)

This limited perception of the natural human world in its position in a supernatural universe is now corrected, not contradicted or cancelled, by a traditional Christian overview. The hate that gives rise to "dyvisions" and "strif," to "meschief" and "sorowe" is attributed to a primeval, cosmic "lak of love" (4680-8):

Hegh in heuene of Pryde and Surquedye,
 Lucyfer, fader of Envie,
 The olde Serpent, he levyathan,
 Was the first that euer werre gan....
 The whiche serpent hath the Cokkyl sowe
 Thorgh al erth of envye and debat,
 That vnnethys is ther non estat,
 with-oute stryf can lyve in charite.
 (ST, 4661-71)

We have, then, finally no impenetrable and meaninglessly chaotic world of human passion in The Siege of Thebes. The natural human world of social and civil order (the world of caritas), ideally prefigured in the archetypal myth of Amphion, will constantly be threatened, even destroyed from time to time--by "coveytise and fals Ambicioun", by "contek and debat"--in consequence of the inevitable collision between the "fader of Envie" and the "souereyn lord of pes" (4705).³² One casualty of that conflict is the corruption of language. The edenic-like beginning of Thebes, raised when rhetoric was perfect in its operation, is destroyed by Oedipus' sin and in that

'fall' language falls too.³³ In that fallen condition rhetoric is only an imperfect tool of man, its success continually undermined by both intrinsic and extrinsic factors such as the unreceptiveness of an audience already so emotionally prejudiced against the issue at hand as to forfeit any possibility of rational persuasion or "words smoth" that pervert the proper end of discourse by their false rhetoric.³⁴ But the final vision Lydgate gives us in the poem is with its Biblical echoes a vision of ultimate victory that leaps both forward to some unspecified golden age of the future and backward, through its poetic echoes, to the pristine bliss of Amphion's rule:

But the venym and the violence
 Of strif, of werre of kontek, and debat,
 That maketh londys bare and desolat,
 Shal be proscript and voyded out of place,
 And Martys swerd shal no more manace,
 Nor his spere greuous to sustene,
 Shal now no more whettyd be so kene,
 Nor he no more shal his hauberk shake.
 But loue and pees in hertys shal awake,
 And charite, both in length and brede,
 Of newe shal her bryghte beemys sprede
 Thorgh grace only in dyuers naciouns,
 Forto reforme a-twixe Regyouns
 Pees and quyet concord and vnyte.
 (ST, 4690-703)

My aim in this section on The Siege of Thebes has been to illustrate the rhetorical means--the selection of details and procedures, insofar as we can infer them from the structure of the poem--by which Lydgate transforms a simple, one-level narrative of exotic adventures into a

complex, carefully shaped philosophical tale. The key to the difference between the French and English versions is, as we have seen, that Lydgate re-emphasizes an old narrative in order to point out in it particular aspects of the truths it may exemplify.³⁵ As a consequence he either adds relevant material to the French for his own purposes or greatly expands and heightens details therein in order to weight them with thematic significance. These additions and amplifications are found chiefly in three agencies of effect: action, characterization, and authorial commentary. Thus to the basic plan taken over from the French, Lydgate transposes particulars which carry through the argumentum or sententia of the action on various poetic levels (astrological, allegorical, moral, political, etc.). The addition of the Amphion episode, for instance, not only gives the narrative a symmetry which is lacking in the French, it also gives allegorical representation to the thematic ideal of peace and civil accord as well as introducing the rhetoric theme for the first time. In this fashion both minor and major details are woven into the fabric of the poem until the whole has the texture of a tale finely spun of a number of interlocking threads. Similarly important are Lydgate's reworkings of his characters. He intrudes upon the action of the poem to remain constantly between the reader and his characters, objectifying and typifying their representativeness for

him. Of a slightly different sort are the modifications Lydgate effects in the portraits of Adrastus, Amphiorax, and Tydeus which, by toning down some details in the French and by developing others, bring them more firmly into line with the direction the narrative takes. Filling up the interstices of the poem, moreover, and functioning as a counterpoint to the story material is the series of extra-narrative blocks of commentary offered by the author which underscore the elements of the complex truth that the action and characters exemplify. These discourses, usually in the form of digressions, carry the burden of the poem at various loci throughout the plot: the sections on the proper behavior of kings, on the respect owed by children to their parents, on Truth, on youth and age, and most especially in the Epilogue on the direful consequences of civil discord.

Taken together, Lydgate's structural arrangements of the narrative, the bête noire of medieval poetics, are rather impressive, especially from a poet whose major fault, we have been told, is an inability to sustain a narrative momentum and pressure. Even Pearsall, who constantly reiterates his observation that the richness of Lydgate's poetry is characteristically a non-narrative richness, is rather surprised at his economy and his structuring in The Siege of Thebes: "it is possible to read the story as a story, which is what one is never

tempted to say of the Troy Book. There are even moments, such as Tydeus' embassy to Thebes, when the narrative has a sweep and authenticity quite compelling in its own right.³⁶ This ability to 'dispose' successfully a long narrative should caution us against a too quick condemnation of Lydgate's poetic skills. This is not to say that we can expect the same sense of architectonics in other poems as we have in The Siege of Thebes. But the kind of narrative structure we usually do find in his poetry--intermittent, discursive, encyclopedic--may be the result of a deliberate choice (a misguided one, by modern standards) to write what he considered to be an elegant, instructive, traditionally rhetorical poetry rather than a result of his inability to do otherwise. At least there was more in the aesthetic tradition represented by the manuals of rhetoric to offer him models of the latter sort, and whether or not this method appeals to us, it is likely that Lydgate carefully cultivated its level of feeling and tone, its style and structure. It is the method, as we shall see, of his greatest poem, The Fall of Princes, and it is to that poem that we now turn.

C. The Fall of Princes

A consideration of the rhetoric of The Fall of Princes falls naturally into three divisions: the structure, the stories, and the style.

Lydgate's Fall of Princes is a free translation of Laurence de Premierfait's second, much expanded version in French prose (1409) of Boccaccio's De casibus virorum illustrium (completed about 1358).³⁷ Although Lydgate seems to have known only Laurence's French version, the simple plan of the De casibus remains substantially the same in the English poem. The De casibus, as Henri Cochin suggests, might be called a history of Fortune, for it is a collection of tales describing the most memorable blows dealt by Fortune to the illustrious figures of mythology, legend, fable, and history, and written, as Boccaccio said in his Preface, to teach princes the virtue of wisdom and moderation by holding up to them the examples of misfortune provoked by egotism, pride, and excessive ambition.³⁸ The 'famous unfortunates,' beginning with Adam and Eve and continuing down to the capture and death of King John of France in the middle of the fourteenth century, pass before the author in a dream vision and each tells him the story of his downfall. The structure of the whole is organized from a mechanical rather than a dynamic point of view; it has been variously defined as a procession or pageant, a catalogue, an inventory, and a Dictionary of Tragic Biography. It is also a dream vision in which there appear, beside the principal figures of the tragedies, a number of allegorical personifications such as Fortune and Poverty, and at crucial moments in the

narrative, Boccaccio's literary mentors, Dante and Petrarch. Lastly, the De casibus is a Mirror for Princes, encyclopedic in its inclusiveness and in its tendency to annex tangential areas of information (set pieces such as the attack on women in Book II or the chapter on Rhetoric and its detractors in Book VI) and designed to inculcate the moral lessons attendant upon a reflection through example after example of this world's variance.

Lydgate retains the entire mechanical apparatus of Boccaccio's arrangement--the dream vision form, the encyclopedic procession of characters, and the concept of the work as a literary mirror--but whereas the dramatic quality of Boccaccio's narrative, its conciseness and well-orchestrated movement kept the Latin original from becoming sprawling, the enormous expansion of details Laurence had added to the piece (and which Lydgate for the most part dutifully translates) and Lydgate's own independent additions obviate whatever structural integrity the De casibus had.³⁹ These same devices in Lydgate's poem thus either lose whatever rhetorical design they had in the original⁴⁰ or are smothered beneath the weight of expanded material they had been forced to bear--for example, almost one-fourth of the poem's 36,345 lines is given over to sententious wisdom of one kind or another, to what was called 'doctrine' or 'lore': information and knowledge of a 'scientific' nature as well as religious and moral

passages. Some of these sections that punctuate the narrative, of course, are picked up from Boccaccio and Laurence, but many are Lydgate's own. Of special interest are the Envoys which Lydgate's patron, the Duke of Gloucester, had instructed him to add to each chapter, offering a remedy for Princes against "Fortunys variaunce." There are 64 of these Envoys in The Fall. Many of them are well-done as set pieces and contain some of the best poetry; they range from 21 to 238 lines in length and offer classic examples of Lydgate's own simple, moralistic view of poetry:

The onseur gladnesse, the ioie transitorie,
 Thunstable seurnesse, the transmutaciouns,
 The cloudi brihtnesse, the fals eclipsid glorie
 Off erthly pryncis which han possessiouns,
 Monarchies and dominaciouns --
 Ther sodeyn chaung declareth to vs all,
 Ther pompous sugre is meynt with bittir gall.

This blynde goddesse in hir consistorie,
 With hir plesaunce medlith discenciouns,
 Afftir tryumphes, conquest and victorie,
 Reueth fro pryncis ther sceptres & ther crouns,
 Troubleth the peepke with fals rebellious:
 Seeth bi these dukis, which from her wheel be fall,
 Al worldli sugre is meynt with bittir gall.

(FP, I, 4530-44)

There is, however, no attempt by Lydgate (as there had been none by Boccaccio or Laurence) to systematise the poem's moral teaching. "The assumption is made," as Pearsall observes, "that the misfortunes of the great provide a salutary lesson, and this for the most part is regarded as enough."⁴¹ Thus he is content to follow the flatly conventional, orthodox view of his subject and purpose:

The fall of nobles, with eueri circumstaunce,
 From ther lordshippes, dreedful and vnstable,
 How that thei fill to putte in remembraunce,
 Therin to shewe Fortunys variaunce,
 That othre myhte as in a merour see
 In worldly worshepe may be no surete.
 (FP, I, 51-6)

This may be weel callid a tragedie,
 Be discripcioun takyng auctorite;
 For tragedie, as poetes spesephie,
 Gynneth with ioie, eendith with aduersite;
 From hih estat men cast in low degre.
 (FP, V, 3118-22)

An enormous collection of tragedies with little sense of dramatic pacing, each a variation upon a single theme (in which human interest is in danger of surrendering to the inevitable 'fall' of the plot), and all used to illustrate an external and prescriptive morality--the effect upon the reader of such a poetic scheme can be deadly. Even a confirmed preacher like Gower came to know that too much moralizing "dulleth oft a mannes wit" and thus chose for his large collection of tales (the Confessio Amantis has 133 stories, 33,444 lines) the middle way to say what he had to say, by blending 'lore' with 'lust.' His solution to the problem of a collection of tales with a mechanical structure (dream vision, mirror for princes and lovers, organization of books around the Seven Deadly Sins) lies in his choice of the device of confession, itself a contrived artifice. It was nevertheless a felicitous choice, as C. S. Lewis has observed, because of the possibilities for variety and dramatic effects which it offered as well as for the lover's act

of self-discovery.⁴² This dramatic scheme, the continuing argument between Genius and Amans, gives the poem a vitality which Lydgate's collection of exemplary tales lacks. The talk of love and the tales of love are used by Gower to examine the whole range of man's moral behavior seen sub specie amantis, and so we rarely feel the morality of the poem is tagged on. The art of 'fyn lovyng,' as Pearsall aptly remarks, is for Gower not so very different from the art of fine living; the expository sections of the poem, the long moral disquisitions of Genius in particular can be seen as dramatically appropriate to the 'civilization of the heart' in which fine feeling, humane sensitivity, and gentillesse take over the role of conscience as the source of virtuous action.⁴³ Lydgate as narrator-commentator, however, standing in a sense outside the poem he tells and looking over Boccaccio's shoulder, is reduced somewhat to the position of Gower's Genius without having the stubborn and refractory Amans to play off against.⁴⁴ Consequently, many of the best effects of the Confessio--the wry humor of the exchanges between teacher and pupil and the touching scenes of the conclusion--are impossible given the way Lydgate chose to handle the Boccaccio-Laurence narrative.

Which is simply another way of saying that Lydgate did not see the kind of poetic structure he followed in The Fall as an artistic problem (as Chaucer had seen it

in the Monk's Tale) or having seen it, chose to ignore it because of the need to follow his Authority as bidden by Gloucester:

He bad me I sholde in especiall,
Folwyng myn auctour, writen as I fynde.
(FP, Prol. 443-4)

The Monk's Tale is particularly instructive of how the formal problems involved in a mechanical collection of tales within a non-narrative frame might be solved. The "ensamples trewe and olde" trotted out by the Monk are a piecemeal compilation, haphazardly arranged ("Have me excused of myn ignoraunce"), and varying greatly in length and literary merit. Without a prologue or a narrative frame to get the series underway or to provide some viable rationale for their recital the tragedies have a tell-as-you-go quality about them. The Monk has mentioned to the other pilgrims that he has a hundred such tales in his "celle" and apparently is on his way to telling them all when the Knight politely interrupts him. The Knight's objection is seemingly a simple-minded one, as simple as the Monk's definition of tragedy. It is more "gladsom," he says, to hear of comedies, "As whan a man hath been in povre estaat,/ And clymbeth up and wexeth fortunat" (CT, VII, 2775-6). Yet the author of the Knight's Tale is, I suspect, not protesting the literary form (tragedy) but the seemingly inexhaustible repertoire of tragic figures the Monk is prepared to parade before them in mechanical

fashion. His interruption, that is, is made more on diplomatic grounds than on literary ones. Indeed Chaucer's whole strategy here, as Pearsall observes, is a subtle one: "he includes the defect of form within the meaning of the tale by the dramatic attribution to the Monk, to whom such miscellaneous and patchwork erudition was appropriate."⁴⁵

That represents one solution or at least the solution Chaucer chose. But Bronson has plausibly conjectured what Chaucer might have done with these sketches of unlucky lives had he not chosen to include them within the larger framework of the Canterbury Tales. Some kind of frame, he believes, would have been necessary to give the stories artistic justification:

...there can be no doubt that the kind of frame which would first have suggested itself to Chaucer for such pieces, since frame there must be, would have been that of the dream-vision. The vision framework, in fact, was already before him in his working model, Boccaccio's De Casibus Virorum Illustrium. To be transported in dream to the dwelling-place of the goddess Fortuna, to observe her "wilfulhed," and thereby to be prompted to recount what befell some of her subjects, would have been standard procedure for the author of The House of Fame and The Legend of Good Women.⁴⁶

Such an approach, Bronson continues, might thus be seen as an attempt to solve the same kind of rhetorical problem he experimented with and abandoned in The Legend of Good Women: the working out of some sort of dynamics between the world of books and the world of dreams, so that the figures of each sphere might play their characteristic

roles: "How much of full-bodied reality, or natural verisimilitude, can be juxtaposed with how much fantasy? How much flattening and simplification of historical or legendary lives can still carry imaginative conviction? What are the means by which one can pass smoothly from one plane of reality to another, from timeless dream to recorded past and vice versa?"⁴⁷

There is nothing of either solution in Lydgate's poem. No effort is made, for example, to exploit the resources of the framing vision. Indeed the reader is scarcely aware most of the time that the poem is cast in the form of a dream at all. The tragic characters are introduced with the most perfunctory lead-ins:

Narcissus, Biblis, & Mirra, alle thre
 Tofor Bochas dede pitousli appeere,
 Ther infortunyes, ther infelicite
 To hym compleynyng with a dedli cheere.
 (FP, I, 5552-5)

Un-tofor Bochas, ful pitousli wepyng,
 For to declare his dedli heuvynesse,
 Cam Xerses next....
 (FP, III, 2206-8)

Some figures do not even have this kind of introduction, and many make no formal exit. The dream, it seems, is simply an artificial device for getting all these people in front of Boccaccio so that they might tell their stories.⁴⁸ And like Chaucer's Monk, Lydgate is content to present the two-dimensional world of books represented by his 'auctour Bochas.' Only once does Lydgate show himself aware of a rhetorical problem with the form of

his poem. At the beginning of Book II he admits that some people may think that he has told enough tragedies, and he repeats the same objection the Knight had made to the Monk:

The stori pitous, the processe lamentable,
 Void off ioie, al gladnesse and plesaunce,
 A thyng to greuous and to inportable,
 Where-as no merthe is medlid with greuaunce,
 Al upon compleynt standith thalliaunce,
 Most whan Fortune, who that hir cours weel knewe,
 Chaungith old ioie into sorwes new.

(FP, II, 15-21)

Lydgate's discussion here is more of a gesture than a real concern with a problem in aesthetics--we cannot imagine him breaking off his translation at this point and telling Gloucester enough has been enough--but his response is at least indicative of his attitude toward his text. He answers that some princes will profit from hearing only once of the fall of others, but the obdurate of heart must be worn down by a succession of examples churned out by the wheel of time. The analogy he uses to describe this long process is illustrative of Lydgate's whole approach: the stylistic synonymy of the stanza (perhaps with a word-play in the last line) reflects in brief the structural synonymy of the entire design:

The rounde dropis off the smothe reyn,
 Which that discende and fall from aloffte
 On stonys harde, at eye as it is seyn,
 Perceth ther hardnesse with ther fallyng offte,

Al-be in touchyng, water is but soffte;
 The Percyng causid be force nor puissance,
 But off fallyng be long continuance.

(FP, II, 106-12)

The rhetorical ideal in The Fall of Princes, structurally and stylistically, was obviously to be one of expansiveness as Lydgate had made clear in the General Prologue:

These ookis grete be nat doun ihewe
 First at a stroke, but bi long processe,
 Nor longe stories a woord may not expresse.
 (FP, Prol. 96-8)

The preceding discussion of Lydgate's handling of the structural shape of The Fall of Princes is undoubtedly much too harsh on him. Gower was not translating the Roman de la Rose as Lydgate was the De casibus. Again, if Lydgate had written the kind of poem Bronson envisions Chaucer as possibly writing, it would have been, needless to say, quite different from either Boccaccio's original or Laurence's expanded version; and it is unlikely that Lydgate would have used the occasion of a royally commissioned translation to undertake the massive re-organization required of a venture into the realm of the allegorical journey. Moreover, such a poem would also have required a participating narrator-dreamer, a change in perspective that in effect would have meant replacing the authority of Boccaccio with that of John Lydgate.⁴⁹ Lydgate, however, was not Chaucer and did not have Chaucer's literary independence. Neither strategy, in fact, is typical of Lydgate when he is not working on his own. His matter, the series of tragedies, is simply something there, something given. His rhetoric is not mounted to probe or question but to put on a performance

consonant with formal conventions--sonorous, evocative, and elaborate--in which he will find more than ample opportunity to state the appropriate comminatory codas and to offer information in keeping with his patron's tastes.⁵⁰ This, at least, is what the artes poeticae, directed not especially toward an understanding of literary values but primarily toward the mastery of a technical skill, would have taught him. Lydgate thus probably felt no need whatsoever to organize or re-organize The Fall. Its basic 'disposition' had already been determined by his source and this he is content to reproduce, not anxious to recreate. Its artificial structure was all the frame he required for his collection of stories. The shape of the frame itself was of little importance. It is to the stories, then, that we must look in order to observe, in the kind of patterns that his verse makes, the working of Lydgate's rhetoric at its most characteristic.

There are just under 300 'tragedies' in The Fall of Princes, totalling 27,827 lines or just over three-fourths the total for the poem, and ranging in length from micro histories of one stanza (like that of Adam and Eve in Chaucer's Monk's Tale) to the 658 line summary of the Thebes cycle (Book I). The greater part of these are paraphrases of the Premierfait translation. But not infrequently Lydgate will modify his source material in a

number of ways. He adds details to his tales which are his own independent contributions or which are borrowed from other sources. He omits material included in the French or realigns it. He interpolates whole episodes or even separate stories picked up elsewhere (Ovid's Metamorphoses is a favorite poetic quarry) into the narrative flow of the French text. He tells the same story Laurence tells but in a different version deriving from a different source than that which the French uses.⁵¹ And of course filling up the interstices are the frequent moral and sententious passages which Lydgate adds to those already present in the Latin and French. Hence the collection provides an abundantly rich field in which to examine Lydgate's methods of storytelling.

One of the first stories Lydgate tells is that of King Aetes of Colchis who appears before Bochas at the head of a "multitude ful pitousli wepyng" (I, 2181). Lydgate begins his tale with a few brief lines on Aetes' divine genealogy and his power as king of Colchis, and then moves directly to his matter. The misfortunes of Aetes began, Lydgate tells us, when Jason first entered his country. In two stanzas that read like a metrical argument for a narrative poem on the subject, Lydgate quickly summarizes the story of the Argonaut expedition. Now with the "kyng despoiled off his possessioun" and "in ful gret despair" (2203, 2207) we are given the

account of Jason's escape with Medea and her brother. With Aeetes in pursuit Medea devises "a remedy" that will deal Fortune's crushing blow to the King her father:

She took hir brothir & slouh hym cruely,
And hym dismembrid, as bookis make mynde,
And pecemeel in a feeld behynde

She gan hym caste, al bespreynt with blood,
Whereoff his fader whan he hadde a siht,
Ful pale off cheer, stille in the feeld he stood,
While she and Iason took hem onto fliht--.
(FP, I, 2217-23)

The scene is well done--the bloody members of the boy scattered about make a vivid contrast with the pale face of his father; the silence and stillness of the grief-struck Aeetes, the chase now ended, also are enhanced by the perfidious speed of Jason and Aeetes' daughter. Not even the narrator's saying what he has just poetically realized can ruin it:

I trowe that tyme the most woful wiht
That was a-lyue, whan he dede knowe
His child dismembrid and abroad Isowe!
(FP, I, 2224-6)

But then Lydgate does something which is quite typical of his handling of narrative in The Fall of Princes. The story of Aeetes leads him naturally into the Jason-Medea tale, and instead of ending here with the tragic image of the King of Colchis brought low, Lydgate will go on for another 160 lines with the Jason-Medea interlude, perhaps thinking it too good a story to leave out, before turning back to Aeetes. Only after we get the familiar details of Medea's sorcery against Pelias and

Jason's second wife, Creusa; the murder of her own children; her marriage to King Aegeus of Athens and her plot against her stepson Theseus; and her final "magical" reconciliation with Jason--only then does Lydgate tell us that Jason and Medea returned to Aeetes and

from his pouerte
 Brouht hym a-geyn into his roial see,
 And to his crowne bi force thei hym restore.
 (FP, I, 2398-400)

So the tragedy does not end 'tragically' after all! And Lydgate can only lamely conclude from his story, "Thus ay is sorwe medlid with gladnesse" (I, 2406).

The whole story as Lydgate tells it is characteristic of one kind of amplification he worked upon his sources. In Boccaccio the story of Aeetes is no story at all. The King is simply a group figure, one among the Concursus Infoelicium who quickly pass before the dreamer. The whole incident is told in two sentences, or seven lines of modern prose. No mention is made of Jason and Medea's later exploits. In Laurence's version, the story is expanded to seven sentences in 41 lines of prose. Three of these sentences (23 prose lines) are concerned directly with Aeetes while the next three short sentences (14 lines) briefly touch on Medea's later career. The last sentence in Laurence mentions the reconciliation of Jason and Medea as well as their return to Colchis but ends with these two driving Aeetes out of his kingdom: "par layde & force de

Iason comme dient aucuns Oetha fuytif et chasse fut remis en son royaulme."⁵² Lydgate, drawing heavily upon the Metamorphoses, expands this to 226 lines of verse. More importantly, this amplification of material destroys the original perspective: the story of Aeetes (64 lines) is submerged in the story of Jason and Medea (162 lines). The fine description of Aeetes "Ful pale off cheer"-- which has no counterpart in Boccaccio or Laurence--is not allowed to stand as the climax, as we might expect. The unity and tension of Aeetes' tragedy is vitiated by the appendage of the Jason-Medea story so that it loses all dramatic effect.

The same imbalance we saw in the story of Aeetes is even more visible in the tragedy of King Minos. What is 20 lines in Boccaccio and 79 lines in Laurence is expanded by Lydgate to 476 lines of verse in which the precepts of the rhetoricians can be seen operating at full blast.

Here is the analysis:

Story: Minos	2409-2471	63 lines	
Story: Nisus-Scylla	2472-2506	35	
Exclamation against "feyned falsenesse"	2507-2520		14 lines
Story: Nisus-Scylla	2521-2646	126	
Story: Minos	2647-2660	14	
Digression on Minotaur-Labyrinth	2661-2709		49
Comment on wives (Pasiphae)	2710-2716		7
Story: Minos	2717-2730	14	
Digression on Theseus	2731-2748		18
Story: Minos	2749-2765	17	

Digression on Ariadne	2766-2772		7 lines
Comment on constancy of women	2773-2779		7
Story: Minos	2780-2807	28 lines	
Story: Theseus	2808-2821	14	
Comment on women's ability to lie	2822-2828		7
Story: Theseus	2829-2837	9	
Comment on untruthful- ness of wives	2838-2849		12
Story: Theseus	2850-2872	23	
Conclusion (<u>per</u> <u>recapitulationem</u> <u>sententiae</u>)	2873-2884		12
		343	133

It works out to about thirteen lines of amplification to every thirty-four of narrative: a total of 133 lines out of the story's 476 is given over to non-narrative material of various kinds--exclamations, digressions, information, moral commentary, and even a kind of homely wisdom. For instance, in speaking of Minos' wife, Queen Pasiphae, and her infatuation with the Cretan bull, Lydgate makes this outrageous analogy (one wonders whether Lydgate was aware of the possible word-play in the second line):

Hawkes best preued, sumwhile a chek* can make,
Yit for o faute the foul is nat forsake.
(FP, I, 2715-6)

*chek: in hawking a false stoop, pursuit of the
wrong quarry

The main difference, of course, between Lydgate and his sources is that he dilutes the story by continually interrupting it. He not only greatly expands upon the French but also inserts into his poem from only hints in the

French text the entire Nisus-Scylla episode (175 lines) lifted with some confusion from the Metamorphoses. After nine stanzas he breaks into the Minos story (2472) with an account of Scylla's love for Minos (5 stanzas), adds a two-stanza exclamation against feminine deceitfulness (2507), completes the Nisus-Scylla interlude (2521-2646), and finally picks up the Minos story again (2647) only to interrupt it for digressive comments on the Minotaur and the Labyrinth (2661), on wives (2710), on Theseus (2731), on Ariadne (2766), and on the constancy of women (2773). The result is again that the 'primary narrative,' the story of Minos (a total of 136 lines) is swallowed up by the plethora of tangential detail supplied by Lydgate's leisurely garrulousness. Indeed the last 77 lines of the Cretan King's tragedy make no reference to him at all but are taken up with following through the threads of the Theseus-Phaedra-Hippolytus offshoot.⁵³ As Pearsall has observed of this very fundamental aspect of Lydgate's rhetorical repertory: "Amplification, in fact, is for Lydgate an ingrained habit of mind more than a technique. Comparison with his sources shows how consistently there operates in him a kind of total recall: each move forward disturbs an avalanche and, before further progress can be made, a mass of illustrations, examples, images and similes."⁵⁴

It would be wrong, however, to conclude from this statement that Lydgate's amplifications are nearly always

inartistic blots and without poetic merit although modern critics (Pearsall included) would find them inappropriate or ridiculous. It is true that Lydgate too often expands his material by reflex rather than by design, but the evidence of the instances in The Fall indicates that many of the good things Lydgate does in the poem come by way of amplification. In the Nisus-Scylla episodes, for example, there is variety in the manner of narration and many vivid touches:

Hir fadir hadde a fatal her that shon
 Brihtere than gold, in which he dede assure
 Manli to fihte a-geyn his mortal fon;
 For on his hede whil it dede endure,
 He sholde venquysshe bi manhod, & recure,
 And thoruh his knythod, to his ences off glory,
 In euery quarell wynnen the victory.

But whil hir fadir kyng Nisus lay & sleep,
 Vpon a nyht, parcel affor day,
 Ful secreli, or that he took keep,
 The her off gold this Scilla kit away.
 (FP, I, 2528-38)

Amplification or not, the lines succeed as poetry. Moreover, the entire interlude has a certain relevance to the material at hand--the Nisus-Scylla story, after all, is a tragedy too--and it is tempting to think Lydgate included it as a kind of Prologue to the central story of the grouping, the misfortunes of Minos, just as the Theseus-Phaedra-Hippolytus tale forms an Epilogue to it in a triptych-like symmetry. But to look for that kind of structural integrity here is to look for something that Lydgate was barely concerned with. The same kind of

textual stimulus--a name, an association--that prompted him to interweave the stories of Minos and Nisus-Scylla also prompted him to attach the sprawling Jason-Medea material to the simple tragedy of Aetes. The point is that the effect of amplification upon the 'disposition' of material can, from a modern structuralist's point of view, be devastating; but for a medieval poet trained in a formal rhetorical tradition the type of structure that results from frequent turnings aside from the story is not as important as the stylistic elaboration he gives the material. Indeed, it is more to the point to see Lydgate's narrative arrangements in The Fall of Princes as a function of the 'high style' as he understood it.⁵⁵

Let us take as another example of Lydgate's rhetorical narrative a story told both by him and Gower. The Tale of Narcissus in the Confessio Amantis runs for 92 lines (Book I, 2275-2366) while in The Fall of Princes it is slightly longer, 118 lines (Book I, 5559-5676). But the important difference between the two versions is not one of length but of poetic texture which in turn is determined by the different aims of the two poets. In Gower, Genius tells the story of Narcissus to Amans as an "ensample" against presumption, or excessive pride in love. In Lydgate, Narcissus himself appears before Bochas to relate his story. Where Gower views Narcissus primarily as an example of a kind of improper moral behavior, Lydgate

sees him first as a tragic figure. So though both poets are working from Ovid's account of Narcissus in the Metamorphoses (III, 344-510), their results are quite different.

Gower, for example, omits from Ovid's tale many of the details of the Roman's multi-layered, stylistically elaborate narrative: the names of Narcissus' parents and Tiresias' prophecy to them about the boy's fate; the prayer for vengeance by one of the youth's rejected lovers; the long love complaint of Narcissus to his own reflection in the pool; and the final image of Narcissus still gazing at his watery figure in the Stygian pool of the underworld. The major changes, however, are two: first, the omission of any reference to the nymph Echo whose love Narcissus peremptorily rejects, and secondly, the change in sex of the reflected image. In Ovid's version Narcissus woos the handsome boy he sees in the pool whereas Gower explicitly states that the boy's folly "made hem wene/ It were a womman that he syh" (CA, I, 2320-1). Gower thus ruthlessly abandons, or rather redirects, Ovid's treatment of the story in order to isolate its moral lesson. Genius begins therefore with the simple and direct statement that immediately fixes the moral coordinates of the story:

Ther was whilom a lordes Sone,
Which of his Pride a nyce wone
Hath cawht....

(CA, I, 2275-7)

Quickly this is explained to Amans as Narcissus' presumptuous resolve never to love a woman:

So hihe he sette himselve above
Of stature and of beaute bothe,
That him thoughte alle wommen lothe.
(CA, I, 2280-2)

Genius moves from this explanation directly to the description of the forest hunt, Narcissus' separation from his fellows, and his coming to a pool to quench his thirst:

...and as he caste his lok
Into the welle and hiede his tok,
He sih the like of his visage,
And wende there were an ymage
Of such a Nimphe as tho was faie,
Whereof that love his herte assaie
Began.... (CA, I, 2313-9)

Instead of the leisurely and richly detailed complaint of Ovid's boy, the suffering of Gower's young man is only described and that very briefly (CA, I, 2333-9). And instead of gradually pining away as in Ovid, Gower's Narcissus violently beats himself against a rock until he dies. Alongside Ovid's version, then, Gower's tale is artistically simple. The lush richness of Ovid, the full orchestration of his witty and ornamented rhetoric, is reduced by Gower to a brisk and almost prosaic sparsity. Yet at the same time he turns Ovid's story of frustrated love into a more meaningful one by investing the action of the story with a sense of moral responsibility which is absent in Ovid.

Lydgate, on the other hand, remains closer to his

Latin source in both content and texture. He begins as Ovid had begun, with an account of Tiresias' prophecy about the fate of Narcissus given in reply to his parents' question whether he would live to a ripe old age:

The goddis han prouydid hym a space
 To lyue in erthe, and so longe endure
 Til that he knowe & see his owne face.
 (FP, I, 5565-7)

He also follows Ovid in handling Echo's invisible pursuit of the proud hunter:

He herde hir weel, but he sauh hir nouht,
 Wheroff astonyd, he gan anon tenquere,
 As he that was amerueilid in his thouht....

 "Come neer," quod he, and began to calle,
 "Come ner," quod she, "my ioie & my plesaunce."
 He lokid aboute the rokkis alle
 And sauh nothyng beside nor in distaunce;
 But she abraide, declaryng hir greuance,
 And to hym seide, "myn owyn herte deere,
 Ne bat nat straunge, but late us duelle ifeere."
 (FP, I, 5594-5607)

Lydgate slightly alters Ovid's mythological machinery (which Gower significantly omits altogether). In Ovid, Echo is not the only lover Narcissus rebuffs, and another rejected youth prays to Nemesis that Narcissus one day may love so himself and never win his beloved's heart. For Lydgate, Narcissus' cruelty to Echo is sufficient offense to warrant retribution, not at the hands of the Goddess of Vengeance but from Venus and Cupid:

For al daunger displesith to Venus,
 And al disdeyn is lothsum to Cupide:
 For who to loue is contrarious,
 The God of Loue will quite hym on sum side,
 His dreedful arwis so mortali deuyde

To hurte & mayme all that be rechles,
 And in his seruise founde merciles.
 (FP, I, 5629-35)

The unnatural pride of Narcissus is not so important for Lydgate as it was for Gower, but as in Ovid, it is simply something there in the story that leads to Narcissus' death. This bringing low of Narcissus is all that Lydgate's poetic scheme demands of him and he thus can abbreviate what is not pertinent to it. No sooner does the cruel youth see an image reflected in the pool of water (Lydgate does not mention the sex of the reflection) than he tries to embrace it:

This Narcisus with a pitous compleynt
 Sterte into the welle & hymseluen dreynt.
 (FP, I, 5662-3)

The only moral he sees in the story is the one he has been making throughout the tragedies of the first book:

"Presumptuous pride causid al to gon to wrak" (5668).

Up to this point in the Narcissus tale, it might be argued that Lydgate's narrative skills are superior to Gower's: he has competently dramatized Narcissus' pride (the Echo scene) instead of just telling the reader about it; he provides in the prophecy of Tiresias and in the revenge-motive of Venus and Cupid reasons why the image in the pool has such a fatal attraction for Narcissus (Gower by contrast has only the briefest of explanations--Narcissus was 'beguiled' because of the "goddes pourveance," a rather ambiguous reason unless one knows

the original Latin version), and he has a sense of structure and pacing which Gower's briskness ignores. It is only when we come to the actual metamorphosis that comparison with Gower is less favorable to Lydgate. In Ovid the transformation of Narcissus into a flower is simply a marvel or wonder. When his sister naiads and dryads look for his body they find only a flower with white petals around a yellow center. In Gower, however, the change is viewed as an index to the pattern of moral responsibility he draws out of the tale:

Ther sprong anon par aventure
Of floures such a wonder syhte,
That men ensample take myhte
Upon the dedes which he dede,
As tho was sene in thilke stede;
For in the wynter freysshe and faire
The floures ben, which is contraire
To kynde, and so was the folie
Which fell of his Surquiderie.

(CA, I, 2350-8)

By making the unnatural blossoming of Narcissus' flower a perpetual reminder ("ensample") of his unnatural "folie," Gower makes the metamorphosis integral to the major theme of his poem, the control of "unkynde," immoderate love by reason. Lydgate, having successfully rendered the tragic "fall" of Narcissus, can make nothing of the final transformation. He can only add to the fact of Narcissus' metamorphosis the information that his flower was "A watir-lelie, which doth remedie/ In hote accessis, as bookis specifie" (FP, I, 5676-7). Lydgate's Tale of Narcissus is thus at once simpler yet richer at

almost every point than Gower's. Moreover, it has none of the imbalance of the Aeetes-Jason-Medea grouping nor none of the discursiveness of the Minos-Scilla-Theseus unit. The reasons for this different treatment are not difficult to understand. The Narcissus story has no 'epic' associations such as the Aeetes' tragedy has nor the many-storied complexity of the Minos tale. Without these attractions or opportunities for expansion and digression Lydgate shows himself quite capable of rendering his material with a sense of narrative structure and economy.

Yet the Narcissus tale shares with the other stories their tone, their level of feeling, their didactic preoccupations, and a rhetorical coloration which makes Gower's version by contrast seem neat and bare. All are part of the prevailing poetic of rhetorical sententiousness. Indeed it is Lydgate's stylistic concerns that often determine the shape of his narratives. A simple story like the Narcissus tragedy, which calls for little or no amplification,⁵⁶ is rendered by Lydgate's poetic richly but directly. The attachment of the Jason-Medea episode, on the other hand, as well as the many extra-narrative additions in the Minos tale might be viewed as part of Lydgate's aim to write a poetry that is at once polished, informative, and instructive. Here the stories provide opportunities to add his own comments on women's

constancy or duplicity, a bit of lore on Greek mythology, or even related tales too good to be left out. All are typical of the work's encyclopedism and stylistic level.

The most extreme example of Lydgate's rhetorical poetic in The Fall of Princes is undoubtedly the Tale of Macareus and Canace (I, 6833-7042). Interestingly, Boccaccio makes no mention of the two lovers, and although Laurence does include them in his expansion of the Latin, they are passed over in a few lines and without any reference to Canace's letter. For his version of the tale, then, it has been suggested that Lydgate drew his inspiration directly from Ovid's account in the Heroides (Book XI) and from his memories of Gower's story in the Confessio Amantis (III, 143-356).⁵⁷ Again comparison with Gower is illuminating. An analysis of the two English versions looks like this:

Gower: 143-157 Story
 158-160 Comment on the blind power of love
 161-278 Story
 279-306 Canace's Complaint
 307-336 Story
 337-356 Moral conclusion per
recapitulationem

Narrative: 163 lines Comment: 22 lines

Complaint: 28 lines

Lydgate: 6833-6884 Story
 6885-7021 Canace's Complaint
 7022-7042 Story
 7057-7070 Moral conclusion on pride and
 hasty vengeance (from Envoy

following the tale)

Narrative: 73 lines Comment: 14 lines

Complaint: 137 lines

Not only is Lydgate's Complaint of Canace almost twice as long as the rest of his tale, it is also nearly five times as long as Gower's. Once again the poetic field being ploughed by each poet accounts in large measure for the 'disposition' of the material. As with the Tale of Narcissus, Gower is interested in the moral relationships established in the tale, told by Genius as a warning against Melancholy, the first of the five servants of Wrath. Lydgate, on the other hand, at the first appearance of the unhappy pair, makes clear the manner in which he will treat the tale:

...thei gan ful pitousli compleyne,
That Fortune gan at hem so disdeyne,
Hyndryng ther fate be woful auenture
Touchyng ther loue, which was ageyn nature.
(FP, I, 6836-9)

Gower will therefore give over a good part of his tale (151-190) to a discussion of incest in which he explains that there is nothing naturally immoral about an incestuous marriage but that it is made wrong by the lex positiva of the Church.⁵⁸ By thus emphasizing the child-like innocence of Canace and Macareus, he not only heightens the pathos he wants the reader to feel for them, but more importantly he also focuses on their father's cruel (and more unnatural) vengeance which is the reason the story is told in the first place. When

King Eolus is informed of what his children have done,
Genius says that

Anon into malencolie,
As thogh it were a frensie,
He fell....
(III, 209-11)

And later Genius concludes:

Ha, who herde evere singe or rede
Of such a thing as that was do?
Bot he which ladde his wraththe so
Hath knowe of love bot a lite;
Bot for al that he was to wyte,
Thurgh his sodein malencolie
To do so gret a felonie.
(III, 329-35)

The discussion of incest, the epistle of Canace, the pathetic scene of her child "basking" in the warm blood of her dead mother are all there to exploit the emotional impact of Eolus' great "felonie."

Lydgate, in contrast, only incidentally touches on the problem of incest and tones down the horrible details concerning the death of the baby. Instead he realigns the material so that the reader's attention is directed to Canace. He sees the story, then, as almost all complaint. Many of the tales Lydgate relates in The Fall are in a sense 'complaints' against Fortune and seen from this perspective the Tale of Macareus and Canace contains the fullest realization of the complaint-potentiality of all the tragedies that are told. The lyric element, which in Gower comprises only a brief interlude in the movement of the narrative, is in Lydgate's version placed

in the foreground and figuratively heightened in order to express and explore through this kind of elaboration the tragic moment in Canace's life which the events of the story, handled briefly by Lydgate, have brought her to.

Placing the two Complaints themselves side by side reveals where Lydgate's strength lies. Both are designedly ornate, elaborate, but Gower's handling of the rhetorical stylization is less flexible and thus less felicitous than Lydgate's:

'O thou my sorwe and my gladnesse,
 O thou myn hele and my siknesse,
 O my wanhope and al my trust,
 O my desese and al my lust,
 O thou my wele, o thou my wo,
 O thou my frend, o thou my fo,
 O thou my love, o thou myn hate,
 For thee mot I be ded algate.'
 (CA, III, 279-86)

Although Gower was not incapable of the high style, his stories more often succeed, as C. S. Lewis has observed, because of his simple diction and his ability to keep the narrative moving. The plain style is Gower's characteristic narrative style and when he is not on the move but trying his hand at a more dense manner, the strain is apparent.⁵⁹ Lydgate, however, excels in handling set pieces and much of the best poetry in The Fall of Princes is to be found in such 'static' pieces: in the self-contained form of the Complaint (Canace's, Lucrece's); in the elaboration of favorite themes and commonplaces (his running joke against women); and in the moral Envoys (especially the brilliant

technical achievement of the Envoy on Rome). His most characteristic successes are successes within the familiar conventions of traditional literary models. Canace's Complaint releases what is best in him, a richness of expression appropriate to the convention of the complainte d'amour:

"Cause off my sorwe, roote off myn heuynesse,
That whilom were cheeff sours off my gladnesse,
Whan bothe our ioies be will were so disposid,
Vnder o keie our hertis to be enclosid.

Whilom thou were support and sekirnesse,
Cheeff reioisshyng off my worldli plesaunce;
But now thou art the ground off my siknesse,
Welle off wanhope, off my dedli penaunce,
Which haue off sorwe grettest habundaunce
That euer yit hadde any creature,
Which mut for loue the deth alas endure!

Thou were whilom my blisse & al my trust,
Souereyn confort my sorwes to appese,
Spryng and well off al myn hertis lust;
And now, alas, cheeff roote off my disese.
But yiff my deth myht do the any ese,
O brother myn, in remembraunce off tweyne,
Deth shal to me be plesaunce & no peyne.
(FP, I, 6885-902)

On the and me dependith the trespace
Touchyng our gilte and our gret offence;
But, wellaway, most angelik off face,
Our yonge child in his pur innocence
Shal ageyn riht suffre dethis violence,
Tendre off lymes, God wot, ful gilteles,
The goodli faire that lith heere specheles.

A mouth he hath, but woordis hath he noone,
Cannat compleyne, alas, for non outrage,
Nor gruchith nat, but lith heer al a-loone,
Stille as a lamb, most meek off his visage.
What herte off steel coude doon to hym damage,
Or suffre hym deie, beholdyng the maneer
And look bengne off his tweyne eyen cleer?
(FP, I, 6924-37)

Now farweel, brother, to me it doth suffise
 To deie allone for our bothe sake.
 And in my moste feithful humble wise,
 Onto my dethward thouth I tremble & quake,
 Off the for euere now my leue I take.
 And onys a yeer, forget nat, but take heed,
 Mi fatal day this lettre for to reed.

So shaltow han on me sum remembraunce,
 Mi name enprentid in thi kalender,
 Bi rehersaile off my dedli greuaunce;
 Were blak that day, & mak a doolful cheer.
 And whan thou comest & shalt approche neer
 Mi sepulture, I pray the nat disdeyne
 Vpon my graue summe teris for to reyne."
 (FP, I, 7008-21)

The letter borders on being naive and sentimental but the tone keeps it from falling over. The simplicity of Canace's selfless love for her brother, the pathetic concern of the mother (herself a child) for the vulnerability of her son, and her gentle requests not to be forgotten are all captured by the childlike tone of her complaint. At the same time Lydgate succeeds in rendering this simple innocence of character through a tissue of rhetorical artifice but without Gower's heavy-handedness. Instead we find in his metaphors a number of variations that subtly indicate Canace's emotional confusion and her ambivalent, paradoxical attitude toward her love:

Cause off my sorwe (6885)
 Souereyn confort my sorwes to appese (6897)
 ...roote off myn heuynesse (6885)
 Cheeff sours off my gladnesse (6886)
 ...cheeff roote off my disese (6899)
 ...welle off wanhope (6892)
 Spryng and well off al myn hertis lust (6898)

Indeed many of the best lines achieve their effect through

a traditional rhetorical artifice:

A mouth he hath, but woordis hath he noone....(6931)
 For in his pursuit he hath lefft behynde,
 In destruccioun off the, my child and me,
 Routh and al mercy and fadirli pite....(6956-8)
 Were blak that day & mak a doolful cheer....(7018)

Lydgate, we have been told, is not adept in handling narrative. His method has been attacked as "rambling and verbose" and is said to reveal "a contempt for narrative as such." His technique--of systematically stopping the action of the story or eliminating from it movement and development--is felt to contribute to the narrative failure of the whole. Yet within the individual stories of The Fall there are excellent tableaux whose scenic composition catches and freezes the moment of significant action within the tragic movement. For example, in the following stanza from a longer speech a series of contrastive statements is used by Lydgate to highlight the resolute heroism of Marcus Regulus, a prisoner of Carthage, as he speaks before the Senate, refusing to allow himself to be ransomed in return for the Carthaginian leaders held hostage by Rome:

"I am consumyd & wered in the werris;
 Fortune contrarie, I feeble to bere armure:
 Thei lusti fressh, ther name spredde ful ferr is,
 And in the feeld thei able to endure.
 I vnweldi, & lik a creature
 Mor semblabli to drawe hom to my graue,
 Than to be armyd this cite for to saue."
 (FP, V, 680-6)

More impressive is the stanza on the grief of the adulterous Queen Arsinoe for her dead lover:

To the erthe anon she fill adoun,
 To stonde upriht she myhte nat susteene,
 Ded, pale & wan, with many pitous soun
 Deth of Demetrius gan wofulli bemeene,
 Embracyng hym with al his woundis greene,
 And in hir armys, al-be that he lay ded,
 She kissid his mouth, cold, blew, & nothyng red.
 (FP, IV, 4053-9)

Or perhaps best of all is the picture of Queen Olympias as she proudly faces her death before a crowd of her accusers:

But wil ye seen a roial hih corage,
 How boldeli, delyuered fro prisoun
 She descendid, imperial of visage,
 With al hir maidnes aboute her enviroun,
 Hir enmyes present, wodere than leoun,
 Seyng hir stonde so statli of hir face.
 Whan thei wer proudest tareste hir & manace.

She was arraied of purpos for the nonys,
 As seith Bochas, in most statli wise;
 In riche purpil, gold & precious stonis,
 Lik an emperesse in the Grekissh guise.
 Hir list nat fleen, the stori doth devise,
 With cry nor noise passed nat hir boundis,
 Whan that hir blood doun railed from hir woundis.

She nat affraied in al hir mortal shoures;
 Void of al feere list nat bowe hir chyne,
 Make no praieer to hir tormentoures,
 Nor no tokne of corage femynyne.
 Vpriht she stode, list nat doun declyne,
 Gaff euidence, as it is comprehendid,
 Of what lyne & blood she was descendid.
 (FP, IV, 2521-41)

Each of these scenes is organized around a simple core, static and antithetic: old-young, weak-able, live-dead, up-down, the individual prisoner-the group of enemies, etc. Each is susceptible, that is, to Lydgate's typical contrastive amplification of detail. And yet it is in passages like these that the poetry most nearly approaches the potential tragic moment. His style, we

might conclude, may be the cause of Lydgate's greatest failings in The Fall of Princes but just as surely it is the cause of his greatest successes.

On at least two occasions Lydgate discusses his style at some length in The Fall of Princes. Both times he excuses himself for the unrhetorical quality of his poetry. In the General Prologue, for example, he writes:

And theih my stile nakid be and bare,
 In rethorik myn auctour for to sue,
 Yit fro the trouthe shal I nat remue,
 But on the substance bi good leiser abide,
 Afftir myn auctour lik as I may atteyne,
 And for my part sette eloquence aside.
 (FP, Prol. 229-34)

This is the rather conventional attitude we have seen Lydgate-as-translator taking in a number of earlier works. Indeed this use of the modesty topos is one of the most overworked of Lydgate's stylistic traits and as such tells us nothing about his actual practice. Later in the same Prologue, however, he more specifically explains his stylistic strategy in The Fall:

Al this conceyuyd, I gan my stile dresse,
 Thouhte I wolde in my mater proceede;
 And for the mater abraid on heynesse,
 Off fressh colours I took no maner heede,
 But my processe pleynli for to leede,
 As me sempte it was to me most meete
 To sette apart all rethoriques sueete.

Dites of murnyng and off compleynyng
 Nat appertene onto Calliope,
 Nor to the Muses, that on Parnaso synge,
 Which be remembrid in noumbre thries thre;
 And onto materes off aduersite,
 With ther sugred aureat licour
 Thei be nat willi for to doon faour;

But off disdeyn me setting ferr a-bak
 To hyndre me off that I wolde endite,
 Hauyng no colours but onli whit & blak,
 To the tragedies which that I shal write.
 (FP, Prol. 449-66)

The same idea is substantially repeated in the Epilogue to Book IX (3443-9): an unadorned style ("No rethoryques nor florysshynge delyctable") is appropriate to the tragic subject matter.

Though this may look at first like sound rhetorical precept, which stated that the choice of style is to be determined by the nature of the subject matter, it is in actuality just a more elaborate application of the affected modesty posture. For the style suited for tragedy was the stylus gravis or the high style.⁶⁰ The locus classicus for a discussion of the tragic/high style occurs in Book II of Dante's De vulgari eloquentia. Dante accepts the rhetoricians' distinction of the three styles, which he calls tragic, comic, and elegiac in place of gravis, mediocris, and humilis; he then asserts that the highest subjects should be sung in the highest style: "By tragedy we bring in (sic) the higher style, by comedy the lower style, by elegy we understand the style of the wretched.... We appear then to make use of the tragic style when the stateliness of the lines as well as the loftiness of the construction and the excellence of the words agree with the weight of the subject."⁶¹ He touches on the same subject again in the Letter to Can Grande when he is

distinguishing between comedy and tragedy: "They likewise differ in their mode of speech, tragedy being exalted and sublime, comedy lax and humble...."⁶²

This "exalted and sublime" style deemed fitting for tragedy and presumably the style of the Aeneid as well as the Pharsalia and Thebaid had come to mean for the medieval rhetorician the mannered high style: ornamented with the colors and tropes, marked by a complication of construction and the choice of a suitable vocabulary or poetic diction.⁶³ And though the thoroughgoing application of rhetorical subtleties that was possible in the Latin high style could not be achieved as easily in the vernaculars, poets working in French, Italian, and English could attain comparable stylistic effects with certain figures of repetition (anaphora, adnominatio, traductio, and repetitio), with apostrophe, antithesis, the more transferable tropes (onomatopoeia, metonymy, periphrasis, synecdoche, metaphor, allegory) and figures of thought (personification, exemplum, expolitio, notatio, simile, etc.). So whether we choose to call Lydgate's style a modified high style or a mixture of the high, courtly style with a diffuse but elegant middle style appropriate for entertainment and instruction, the important point is that both medieval literary theory and practice would have demanded some elevation of style in the manner recommended for the treatment of grave and serious matters.

We only have to turn to the actual poetry of The Fall to observe that far from being "nakid" and "bare" Lydgate's style is richly 'colored,' appropriately weighty.

Ther is delit, and heer is sorwe & care,
 Ther is ioie, and heer is heuynesse,
 Ther is plente, and heer is evel fare,
 Ther is helthe, and heer is gret siknesse,
 Heer trouble ay meynt with onseur gladnesse,
 Ther is ay blisse and eternal glorie,
 And heere no meerthe but fals & transitorie.
 (FP, I, 666-72)

The first line is an example of rhetorical contentio, the use of paired opposites or antitheses. Lydgate continues to use this structure throughout the stanza, making the same words ("Ther...heer") form the successive beginnings of almost all the seven lines, an example of repetitio or anaphora. And since the entire stanza repeats in various ways one same idea the lines are also illustrative of a third rhetorical color, interpretatio, or different ways of saying the same thing. This may sound highly artificial and pedantic (and indeed the stanza reveals the same heavy schematization we noticed in Gower's treatment of Canace's Complaint), but Lydgate was writing for an audience which valued ingenious artifice of this sort and our poet undoubtedly believed the use of these traditional devices gave his poetry the stateliness of design his subject matter called for. Leaving out, for the moment, a more detailed consideration of Lydgate's characteristic devices, some idea of the range and variety of this formally wrought style can be gained by quoting at random and at length from

all parts of The Fall of Princes.

O Fatal sustren, which span the lyues threede
 So short a terme; whi dide ye determyne
 To suffre hym brenne among the coles rede?
 Ye wer to hasti to breken and ontwyne
 His web of knihtehod, that thoruh the world dide shine,
 And caste of noblesse his bemys out most cleer;
 Alas, that euere he fill in your daungeer!
 (III, 3655-61)

apostrophe	<u>translatio</u> or metaphor ("web
<u>pronominatio</u> ("Fatal sustren")	of knihtehod")
word pair ("to breken and ontwyne")	rhetorical question

...this vengauce most terrible
 Doon upon Iewes for ther transgressioun,
 For ther demerites the punshyng most horrible.
 (VII, 1657-9)

commutatio (or chiasmus)

Twen the residue off this gret iourne
 And lital part theroff that was begunne,
 I stood chekmaat for feer whan I gan see
 In my weie how lital I hadde runne;
 Lik taman that failed day & sunne,
 And hadde no liht taccomplishe his viage,
 So ferr I stood a-bak in my passage.

The nyht cam on, dirked with ignoraunce,
 Mi witt was dull be cleernesse to discerne
 In rethorik for lak off suffisaunce,
 The torchis out, & queynt was the lanterne.
 (III, 50-60)

<u>diminutio</u> (self-disparagement)	<u>similitudo</u> (simile)
<u>alliteration</u>	<u>translatio</u> (metaphor)

A gallid hors, the sooth yff ye list see,
 Who touchith hym, boweth his bak for dreede;
 And who is knowe ontrewre in his cuntre,
 Shrynkith his hornis whan men speke of falsheede.
 (I, 6721-4)

sententia

Vpon a mounteyn thei togidre mette;
 The marcial pleyne was named Horestes,
 And most proudli ther wardis ther thei sette
 Al for the werre & nothyng for the pes.
 Wher Alisandre, in knihthod pereles,
 Al the Persiens batailed in his siht
 On Daries partie put vnto the fliht.
 (IV, 1814-20)

alliteration
contentio ("Al for the werre & nothyng for the pes")

Alliteration was not one of the rhetorical colors, but it is a device frequently used by Lydgate, as above, for decorative effect. Sometimes, however, it is there to give added weight to his meaning through emphasis, as in this example describing Nero's inordinate pride:

Made his mules be shod with siluer shoon
 Of surquedie, whan he sholde ride.
 (VII, 761-2)

Like Chaucer, Lydgate most frequently elevates or intensifies his poetry when it approaches the lyric note, such as in the formal invocation (Canace's Complaint) or the exclamatio (the apostrophe on Alcibiades' death cited earlier). Here is another carefully wrought example, the epitaph of Scipio Africanus:

"O peeple vnkynde, vnkynde ageyn resoun,
 My funerall ashes nor my bonis dede
 In thi wallis thou neuer shalt posseede.

In thyn vnkynde froward teritorie
 My bonys shal nat resten nor abide;
 But thyn vnkyndenesse to putten in memorie,
 The remembraunce shal be rad ful wide.
 Of thes lettres graue, on eueri side,
 Be report onli of this smal scripture,
 Which heer is set upon my sepulture.

Lo, heer the cause, be breef descripcioun,
 Set on my graue for a memoriall,
 Whi that my bonys out of Roome toun
 Been buried heer lowe vndir this wall,
 In exil holde my feeste funerall--
 Vnkyndenesse me droff from that cite,
 That wrouhte so moche for the comounte."
 (V, 1696-1712)

apostrophe ("O peep...")

commutatio (1696)

alliteration

word-pairs (e.g. "nat resten nor abide")

traductio (repetition of a word elsewhere for emphasis)

and adnominatio (repetition of the root of a word with a change in prefix or suffix)--thus the repetitions of "vnkynde," "vnkyndenesse" with a play on double meaning of the word (ungrateful, unnatural). Similarly, "bonys... bonis" and "graue...graue" (with different meanings).

Vois geyn Iherusalem crieth out on euery side!

Vois geyn the temple, ageyn the peep also,
 Vois ageyn husbondis, vois ageyn wyues:
 Wo to Iherusalem with a treble wo.
 (VII, 1638-41)

alliteration

repetitio

A kind of distant complexio ("Wo...wo")

For who sauh euer or radde off such a-nothir,
 To saue a straunger list to slen hir brothir?
 (I, 2232-3)

alliteration

rhetorical question

contentio

As might be expected, some of Lydgate's best work is to be found in the infinite variations he works upon the theme of mutability. Almost all readers of the poem, for example, have admired the technical brilliance of the Envoy on Rome--nineteen stanzas on only three rhymes--in which a tissue of rhetorical devices succeeds in conveying a

truly impressive moral vision. Less monumental but equally felicitous are the Epilogue on Cyrus:

Loo, heer th'exequies of this myhti kyng!
 Loo, heer the eende of his estat roiall!
 Ther wer no flawmys nor brondis cleer shynyng
 To brenne his bodi with fires funerall,
 Nor observaunces nor offrynges marciall,
 Nor tumbe of gold with stonys riche and fyne
 Was non ordeyned that day to make his shryne!....

Loo, heer of Cirus the fynal aventure,
 Which of al Asie was whilom emperour!
 Now lith he abject, withoute sepulture,
 Of hin ne low he fond no bet favour.
 Loo, heer the fyn of al worldli labour,
 Namli of tirantis, which list nat God to dreede,
 But se ther lust in slauhtre and blood to sheede!
 (II, 3921-41)

and the stanza, in the form of a rhetorical question, on the death of Marcus Manlius:

What myhte auaille his noblesse in bataile?
 Bies of gold, crownes of laureer?
 His riche platis or his vnkouth maile,
 His myhti sheeldis, that shon so briht & cleer?
 Or his tryumphes, songe ferr & neer,
 Or his victories for the cite wrouht?--
 In his gret myscheeff auailed hym riht nouht.
 (IV, 505-11)

Two conclusions about Lydgate's poetry made on the basis of the lines quoted above seem valid. For the most part the passages under examination are virtually self-contained blocks of poetry--the opening stanza of an Exclamation on Alcibiades' death, eleven lines taken from an even longer diminutio passage, four lines of sententious amplification, the seventeen line epitaph of Scipio, the excerpt from the Envoy on Cyrus, and another stanza on the mutability theme from the end of Manlius' tragedy. It is in these more static passages of lyricism

and sententiousness, where Lydgate is under no pressure to sustain a narrative current, that "the high style," in Pearsall's words, "with its elaborate diction and figuring, comes into its own...."⁶⁴ The second point is that Lydgate's poetry characteristically produces its effects over long stretches, in these instances in the stanza or stanza-groups. Individual fine lines can be culled from his verse, as Eleanor Hammond has attempted, but the diffuse and expansive nature of medieval poetry makes such an effort a comparatively fruitless one.⁶⁵ Even in the concentrated patternings of these set pieces, Lydgate's techniques to secure sonority and weight in The Fall of Princes (interpretatio, commutatio, contentio, alliteration, adnominatio, repetitio, exclamatio) are seen to best advantage only by extended quotation. His canvas is habitually a large canvas, his pace leisurely, and the local texture of his verse can only be felt when the whole pattern of it emerges.

What follows is meant to establish that in deviating from normal usage in the manner prescribed by rhetorical theory, Lydgate did not deviate from sense or subtlety in as consistent a fashion as his detractors would have us believe. "Drawled-out and incompact," Schick remarks, "are the first epithets which one would most readily apply to the style of the monk's productions. His sentences run on aimlessly, without definite stop, and it is often difficult to say where a particular idea

begins or ends. One certainly has the impression that the monk never knew himself, when he began a sentence, how the end of it would turn."⁶⁶ The argument about Lydgate's style is not that it is not rhetorical or too rhetorical but that features attendant upon its rhetorical quality--looseness of syntax, diffuseness of sense--forfeit the possibility of its being sensitive or subtle.

Interpretatio, as we have seen, is one of Lydgate's favorite techniques in The Fall of Princes, and like the word-pair which it somewhat resembles it was undoubtedly intended not only to decorate and amplify the verse but also to give it a certain solemnity of emphasis. Here is Lydgate's stanza from the Envoy to the tragedy of Adam and Eve:

Sodeyn departyng out off felicite
 Into miserie and mortal heynesse,
 Vnwar depryuyng of our prosperite,
 Chaung off gladnesse into wrechchidnesse,
 Long langwissnyng in wo and bittirnesse,
 Contynuel sorwe, dreed, dool and pestilence
 Were first brouht in bi inobediencie.

(I, 967-73)

The cadenced phrases of the first six lines, with their heavy, Latinate polysyllables accumulate--one wonders where the sentence is going--until the key to the sentence is released in the last line, even the last word. Such a top-heavy arrangement seems more than justified by the way it states the magnitude of the Original Sin, indeed of the entire poetic subject. All

other fallings from felicity of the poem are contained in germinal form in this the first tragedy, and the hugeness of the sin and the hugeness of the poet's task are suggested by the iterative cumulation of the word-order. The syntactical looseness is successfully plotted across the stanza until the final tightening at the climactic "inobedience." Some of Lydgate's achievement in the stanza can be attributed to his careful work within the rime-royal form which compels him, as C. S. Lewis has observed, to 'grow to a point.' "The slow building up and decoration, niche by niche, of a rhetorical structure brings out what is best in the poet."⁶⁷

God hath a thousand handis to chastise,
 A thousand dartis off punycioun,
 A thousand bowes maad in vncouth wise,
 A thousand arblastis bent in his dongoun,
 Ordeyned echon for castgacioun;
 But where he fynt meeknesse & repentaunce,
 Mercy is maistresse off his ordynaunce.
 (I, 1331-7)

Again, the use of interpretatio and repetitio in the stanza is impressive enough, giving the lines an almost psalm-like rhythm. But what is particularly well done is the word-play (adnominatio) upon "Ordeyned" and "ordynaunce." God ordains punishment, that is, He makes it His law, commands it or decrees it for those who are proud. He also devises it "in vncouth wise," mysteriously, unexpectedly, and the repetitive interpretatio makes clear the multiplicity of shapes this

punishment can assume. The images Lydgate uses, however, are images of warlike equipment--"dartis," "bowes," and "arblastis"--which are then picked up and echoed in "ordynaunce," both war gear and God's law. For those who are meek and repentant, God ordains mercy. In place of a wrathful God commanding punishment there is Mercy, "maistresse" of God's chastisement, that is, His law and His punishment.

At times the complicated rhetorical patterning is dramatically apt in a more subtle fashion. The lines describing the way deceit entraps the unwary build up through a series of twistings and turnings that syntactically enacts the snare the "fals doubilnesse" of Metius has disastrously prepared for him:

Deceit deceyueth and shal be deceyued,
 For be deceit who is deceyuable,
 Thoug his deceitis be nat out parceyued,
 To a deceyuour deceit is retournable;
 Fraude quit with fraude is guerdoun couenable:
 For who with fraude fraudulent is founde,
 To a diffraudere fraude will ay rebounde.
 (II, 4432-8)

In this patterning, sounds are as effective as meanings, so that deceit...deceyueth...deceyued...deceyuable...deceitis...deceyuour...deceit weaves the same net as Fraude...fraudulent...diffraudere...fraude. The net is woven by Deceit: the deceiver becomes the deceived.

A rhetorical 'coloring' of a different kind is lent to Lydgate's verse by his images, his similes and metaphors. Two image-clusters are of special interest:

those describing the figure or concept of Fortune and those which may be termed floral images. These latter appear so frequently in different contexts in The Fall that they must be seen as stock-in-trade resources of Lydgate's rhetorical storehouse. He uses these simple and conventional flower images--the rose and the lily are his favorites--as metaphorical analogues to whatever topic he is handling so that the resulting lines have a kind of homely sententiousness which is based on common natural phenomena. Characteristically these floral images appear at the end of the discussion as "clinchers." A few stanzas will illustrate the technique. Here is Lydgate arguing that it is not right to condemn all women because a few were at fault:

The white lelie nor the holsum rose,
 Nor violettis spred on bankis thikke,
 Ther suetnesse, wnich outward thei onclose,
 Is nat appeired with no weedis wikke;
 And thowh that breris, and many crokid stykke
 Growe in gardyns among the floures faire,
 Thei may the vertu off herbis nat appaire.
 (I, 6658-64)

The same image-cluster appears in a discussion of gentillesse that precedes the story of Agathocles, the low-born tyrant. One of the greatest misfortunes, Lydgate cautions, is when a low-born wretch is lifted to high estate. Such a natural churl, however, will always be found out:

The rose knowe be colour & suetnesse,
 And violettis for ther fressh tarage,
 The netle rouh for his fel sharpnesse,
 Thistlis, breeris prikyng bi gret outrage:

And thus considred the rote of ech lynage,
 Froward techchis been euer in cherlis founde,
 Wher vnto gentillesse ay vertu doth rebounde.
 (IV, 2696-2703)

Again, an analogy similar to these is placed in the mouth of Thyestes who explains to Bochas the deceit under the fair appearance of his brother Atreus:

Thouh that roses at mydsomer be ful soote,
 Yit vndirnethe is hid a ful sharp spyne;
 Summe fressh floures han a ful bittir roote,
 And lothsum gall can sugre eek vndermyne.
 (I, 3998-4001)

Just as we have seen Lydgate capable of extracting various critical lessons from the grain-chaff metaphor, so too with these floral images. Out of a mind richly stored with traditional commonplaces they are drawn to amplify familiar themes or to expound conventional ideas.

Lydgate's insights into the concept of Fortune and human motivation are, as Norton-Smith says, "inconsistent and eclectic."⁶⁸ At times the Goddess Fortuna appears in a fatalistic guise, a fickle and arbitrary destinal force. More often she is the retributive agent of God's justice or simply the name men give to the punishment of vice. It is not the philosophical concept of Fortune, however, that concerns us here but the poetic rendering of this powerful figure. On the one hand, the descriptions of Fortune in The Fall of Princes are quite traditional: their vocabulary, images, and symbols all are derived from a common rhetorical background. Yet into these conventionalised portraits Lydgate will frequently

interpolate other images and figures which are neither conventional nor bookish. Instead these stylistic embellishments are seemingly drawn from the realm of experience, the countryside and town--a rare thing in Lydgate. Both techniques can be illustrated from the long section on Fortune at the beginning of Book VI (the first three stanzas below are part of a description of the Goddess by Bochas, the last is Fortune's own explanation of her paradoxical nature):

Hir colours meynt of wollis mo than oon;
 Sumwhile eclipsed, sumwhile she shon briht.
 Dulle as an asse whan men hadde haste to gon,
 And as a swalwe gerissh of hir fliht,
 Tween slouh & swift; now crokid & now vpriht,
 Now as a crepil lowe coorbid doun,
 Now a duery and now a champioun.

Now a coward, durst nat come in pres,
 And sumwhile hardi as leoun;
 Now lik Ector, now dreedful Thersites,
 Now was she Cresus, now Agamenoun,
 Sardanapallus off condicioun;
 Now was she mannyssh, now was she femynyne,
 Now coude she reyne, now koude she falsli shyne.

Now a mermaide angelik off face,
 A tail behynde verray serpentyne,
 Now debonaire, now froward to do grace,
 Now as a lamb trettable & benigne,
 Now lik a wollf of nature to maligne,
 Now Sirenes to synge folk a-slepe
 Til Karibdis drowne hem in the deepe....

This hour I can shewe me merciabile,
 And sodenli I can be despitous;
 Now weelwillid, hastili vengable,
 Now sobre of cheer, now wood & furious,
 My play vnkouth, my maners meruelous
 Braid on the wynd; now glad & now I mourne;
 Lik a wedircok my face ech day I tourne.
 (VI, 49-70; 141-7)

Howard Patch, in his book on this deity in medieval literature, explains how the concept of Fortune's double nature--at times kindly, at other times malevolent--found descriptive representation through a series of more or less standard features expressive of her variable, dual character: her smile, her face, her garments (Lydgate mentions her robe of many colors), her symbols (the wheel, the moon), etc. "The lady Fortune," Patch writes, "is so changeable that her variations are to all intents and purposes instantaneous; hence most appropriately the rhetorical formula 'now--now' is often used in describing her activities. This device, or the conception which prompts it, naturally gives rise to considerable use of contrast, even without the particular formula."⁶⁹ The stanzas describing Fortune are, then, what we might expect from Lydgate's ingrained contrastive habit of thought--an accumulation of antithetic examples drawn from history, folklore, and myth to amplify his text (the entire opening section of Book VI is indeed much expanded from the French). This elaboration of conventional material in a typically 'literary' way is one of Lydgate's most readily recognizable stylistic habits, and thus his other images in the passage are all the more surprising: the sluggish ass beaten by the men who are in a hurry (51), the "gerissh" swallow (52), the cripple "lowe coorbid doun" (54), and the "wedircok" (147).⁷⁰ The reason for these details here perhaps is that Lydgate found in the

familiar patterns of conventionalised description the freedom to embroider his text with impressions of sights actually seen, a freedom which he rarely felt elsewhere.

Interestingly, such colloquial observations crop up elsewhere in the poem in the same context but in much shorter passages and without the traditional literary accoutrements. Of Fortune beginning to turn away from Theseus, for example, Lydgate writes: "Off his good fame she gan the fethres pulle" (I, 4421). The homely image reduces the illustrious hero to a common country bird and makes the mysterious and semi-divine workings of Fortune the simple act of feather-plucking.⁷¹ Less concrete but just as brief and pungent is the narrator's admonition, drawn from falconry, to proud princes:

Rekne up pryncis, for al ther hih noblesse
 Fortune koude recleyme hem to hir lure.
 (I, 2165-6)

Though more abstract than the previous example, the second line actually says more by implying more, especially in the ambiguous richness of the final "lure." A similar ambiguity is achieved in this next example by a subtle transference of meaning and association:

Fortune of kynde is so flaskisable,
 A monstrous beeste departed manyfold,
 A slidyng serpent, turnyng & vnstable,
 Slepир to gripe....
 (IV, 2871-4)

Not only does the repetition of consonant sounds tighten up the movement across the lines and emphasize the key words ("Fortune...flaskisable," "monstruous...manyfold," "slidyng serpent...vnstable...Slepir...gripe") but most successfully the physical meanings of the words used to describe the sinuous movement of the snake vibrate with moral meanings associated with Fortune: "slidyng," "turnyng" (her wheel?), "vnstable." Finally, the last example to be cited here will serve as a bridge passage to the next section. In this stanza we see Lydgate investing a conventional description of Fortune with a larger thematic significance through the implications which his images themselves suggest:

Whan that Fortune is fairest off her cheer
 Bi apparence, and most blandisshyng,
 Thanne is she falsest ech sesoun off the yeer,
 Hir sodeyn chaungis now vp now doun turnyng;
 The nyhtyngale in May doth fresshli syng,
 But a bakwynter can somer vndermyne
 And al his fresshnesse sodenli declyne.
 (I, 3116-22)

The first four lines are by the standard Lydgate, the Lydgate of the bookish commonplace; but in the final three lines the philosophical idea of Fortune is made concrete, visible. The "declyne" of the last line (and its terminal position is significant) is as much a principle of nature as it is a characteristic of Fortune's behavior: the undermining of summer's freshness by a sudden "bakwynter" becomes an exponent for the natural (and inevitable) instability of this world.

Lydgate's style achieves some of its most memorable effects in those passages where he joins the two image-clusters we have just looked at separately. In these sections the floral image is made a type of worldly mutability,⁷² giving the poetry an emotional tonality which suffuses the entire work. The note is struck early in the poem with the startlingly simple line, "Al worldli welthe shal fadyn as a rose" (I, 942). The variations Lydgate is capable of rendering on this commonplace idea support the conclusion that it is the rhetorical artifice of his poetry that often releases the best in him. Consider the following lines:

Noble Pryncis, in your prosperite,
 On sodeyn chaungis set your remembraunce,
 Freshnesse off flouris, off braunchis the beute
 Have ai on chaung a tremblyng attendaunce.
(III, 2199-2202)

The beauty of these lines lies in the way they join the multi-dimensional language to the rhetorical coloring--and yet retain the appearance of a surface artlessness. "Tremblyng" in the fourth line has the simple physical meaning of "quavering" or "shaking." But as in the Fortune-snake passage cited earlier, the physical meaning points to a moral one. "Tremblyng" can also be glossed both as "affected with fear or doubt" and "uncertain" or "unstable" (also used of leaves readily shaking in I, 4563). "Attendaunce" in the same line is also unusual. It appears here as one of the earliest instances of meaning "waiting for" or "expectation." The natural,

fearful but inevitable phenomenon is here uncharacteristically made the index or "ensample" (to be set in "remembraunce") that scores the moral lesson. This charging of the commonplace and the everyday with moral meaning is, moreover, neatly accomplished in the cadenced, alliterative phrasing of the commutatio (chiasmus) of the third line.

Several other stanzas of lyric excellence deserve to be cited.

This was the eende bi gret contrariouste
 Off Theseus, afftir his daies glade,
 Whan the fressh floures off old felicite,
 Fortune aduerse made hem for to fade;
 Ech thyng mut bowwe whan it is ouer-lade,
 Worshepis & honouris, whan thei brihstest shyne,
 With vnwar chaunges than rathest doun declyne.
 (I, 4523-9)

That al beute shal waste a-wey & fade
 Lik somer flours in ther most excellence,
 That growe on hillis & lowe doun in the shade:
 The rose, the lillie, whan thei be most glade,
 Vpon ther stalkis -- ther preef is alday seyn --
 Been beten doun with a stormy reyn.
 (V, 58-63)

Whi sholde men putte me in blame,
 To folwe the nature of my double play?
 With newe buddis doth nat ver the same,
 Whan premeroles appeere fressh & gay?--
 To-day thei shewe, to-morwe thei gon away;
 Somer afftir of flouris hath foisoun,
 Til Iun with yithes aftir mowe hem doun.
 (VI, 162-8)

In each of these stanzas the flowers become metaphorical analogies for the world's felicity. Their fading or loss is presented as a timeless image or axiom that is true of all existence. Each "declyne" thus has authority as proverb or generalization, yet in at least two of the stanzas we

are made to respond simultaneously to the living immediacy --"ther preef is alday seyn"--of the everyday. In the first stanza above the language is still fraught with literary associations; the abstract "fressh floures" we might say gain their effect as traditional images re-lived. The images of the next two stanzas, by contrast, are new creations. The language is neither over-worn nor over-familiar. The particular moment--the destruction of the flowers (not just any generalized flowers but those that grow "on hillis & lowe doun in the shade" and "premeroles") by the stormy rain or by the mowers with their scythes in June--is charged with omnitemporal significance. The floral imagery can thus be made to stand as a marker for the entire work; it both sets the tone of the poem as a whole and reinforces the didactic-aesthetic purpose of the work through the meaningful pattern that emerges from its details.

D. The Courtly Lyrics

The courtly lyrics occupy an important niche in the enormous canon of Lydgate's work and provide especially valuable materials for an investigation of his poetic. As a group they include several of his best and most significant poems. In particular, the three love poems which will be the focus of our attention in this section, The Floure of Curtesy, A Complaynt of a Loveres Lyfe

(later called The Complaint of the Black Knight), and the Temple of Glas not only demonstrate a formal rhetorical excellence but also reveal subtle and coherent thematic patterns which are integral to their 'disposition' of materials and which give these poems ironic effects not unlike those generally associated with Chaucer. The first of these poems' achievements, their fine display of 'rethoryk,' has been readily recognized and admired by recent Lydgate readers, but their 'sentence' has not received the attention I think it deserves. Indeed it seems to me that the very meaning of these poems has been more than a little misunderstood and their techniques misinterpreted. Since I disagree both in details and fundamentally with those critics who have written most extensively on the rhetoric of these poems, some idea of their attitudes toward these poems will serve to establish a point of departure for my own views.

Norton-Smith and Pearsall both speak highly of Lydgate's technical accomplishments in what is perhaps the most satisfying poem of the group, A Complaynt of a Lovers Lyfe. Although Norton-Smith judges the Knight's actual Complaint the weakest part of the poem ("an overlong exercise in certain rhetorical figures"), he nevertheless credits Lydgate for his handling of the 'frame' device (consisting of the descriptio loci and the closing prayer to Venus) which he calls "well-written and economical."⁷³

Pearsall is even more convinced of Lydgate's craftsmanship in this poem. Calling it "one of Lydgate's best," he enlarges upon Norton-Smith's praise of the opening description: "The whole seasons and landscape description at the beginning of the Black Knight is beautifully organised and polished, and demonstrates fully the formal and conceptual nature of such description in medieval poetry...." Even the Complaint proper has for Pearsall an abstract, non-experiential brilliance which is perfectly in keeping with the static, highly conventionalised stylistic patterns of the medieval love-lyric: "The formal love-complaint, with its high rhetorical tone, strong formal description, its opportunity for amplification by examples, and continual deflection into abstraction, is the perfect vehicle for the display of the skills of which he is master."⁷⁴

On the other hand, Norton-Smith and Pearsall are both in substantial agreement concerning the poem's shortcomings. Norton-Smith's primary objection seems to be that the poem lacks 'Chaucerian' ambiguity or complexity of idea: "Lydgate makes no attempt to criticize or modify the lover's state of mind or attitude.... No profound paradox in the nature of love is postulated by Lydgate. His Venus is perfectly respectable and reasonable. She does not belong to the wrong side of the moral world." Again: "Although Lydgate has realistically described the physical torment and mental anguish of the Knight, there

is no moral conflict presented.... Lydgate in this poem shows no interest in the sources of erotic psychology or the moral and metaphysical implications of the theme."⁷⁵ Pearsall's criticism is directed against what he might describe as the poem's fundamental absence of integritas. That is, Lydgate's description of the locus amoenus may be organized and polished, but "it lacks coherence with the poem of which it forms part, chiefly because Lydgate is not interested in larger allegorical structures." The love-complaint, moreover, no matter how well done, is valuable to the poet only as a 'theme' for amplification and decoration; it has no larger, functional relationship to the frame which surrounds it. And like Norton-Smith, Pearsall faults Lydgate's poem because it falls short of an ideal Chaucerian norm: "He copies Chaucer in providing a narrative frame for the Complaint, but it is a frame in the most literal sense, for it acts only to surround and define the Complaint, not to influence or penetrate it."⁷⁶ Thus both critics are alike in agreeing that though some parts of the poem are handled well (while differing on precisely what parts those are), there is unfortunately no inner coherence between these parts, no principle that artistically organizes the discrete surface materials. Consequently the poem remains, in Norton-Smith's phrase, "medieval polite verse," a workmanlike example of a "graceful versifying tradition"⁷⁷--nothing less but nothing more.

I have taken my excerpts only from Norton-Smith's and Pearsall's comments on A Complaynt of a Loveres Lyfe, but I think their observations on this one poem represent fairly the position taken toward the other two love poems in our group.⁷⁸ And though I believe this position to be mistaken, it is nevertheless important to examine it carefully because it raises fundamental questions about Lydgate's use of his rhetoric. I am not claiming for his poems anything comparable to the richness of Chaucer's House of Fame or Parliament of Fowls, but on the other hand, I do think he learned from Chaucer's example and that the poems written in the context of this Chaucerian tradition are somewhat more complex and substantial than these critics allow. Put simply, I believe Lydgate does show an interest in the metaphysical and moral implications of his theme. This he does by structuring each of the poems, in their different ways, around opposing attitudes toward love. Further, he includes within the narrative of each (usually in the frame) the norm or moral constant by which these various attitudes are to be judged. His strategy is made most visible, I think, in the "rhetorical iconography" within the Garden of Natura in A Complaynt of a Loveres Lyfe; here the general setting functions as one of the moral poles in the poem and thus indirectly offers a latent criticism of the Knight's courtly Complaint which is set in the foreground against it. But even in The

Floure of Curtesy, where the description of the locus amoenus is scarcely rendered in any detail, there is still discernible an implicit standard by which the lover's state of mind is to be judged: opposed to the dire condition of the lover, who bewails his lot in the parlance of courtly love,⁷⁹ a posture associated with both the goddesses Venus and Fortuna, there is the delight of the birds in choosing their mates on St. Valentine's day, an activity prompted by the goddess Natura. In the Temple of Glas the lines of demarcation between kinds of love are less clear. Indeed it is the figure of Venus herself in her several aspects (courtly goddess of love, planet, subvicaria of Natura, and representation of the musica mundana that knits up the universe) that is the real subject of the poem. Her temple (the frame) is, it seems, both an image for the variable and brittle felicity of earthly passion as well as the site of the heavenly Parnassus, signifying the harmony of a true and durable love. Thus at the core of each of these three lyrics, in one form or another, stand the great figures of Natura, Venus, and Fortuna.⁸⁰ By pairing them in dramatic and descriptive opposition Lydgate uses the traditional concepts of these figures thematically; that is, by drawing upon the philosophical and literary traditions behind the goddesses, he is able to explore, at least by implication and suggestion, the values of the universe which they represent.

We shall begin with The Floure of Curtesy, not because it was written first, but only because it is the shortest of the three.⁸¹ The poem opens before dawn on St. Valentine's day:

In Feuerier, whan the frosty moone,
 Was horned ful of Phebus firy lyght,
 And that she gan to reyse her streames sone,
 Saynt Valentyne, vpon thy blisful nyght
 Of dewetee, whan glad is euery wight,
 And foules chese, to voyde her olde sorowe,
 Eueryche his make, vpon the next morowe;

The same tyme, I herde a larke synge
 Ful lustely, agayne the morowe gray:
 (1-9)

This 'proem' is used not only to introduce the narrator in the first person, the establishment of whose presence is an important function of the exordium in poems of this kind, but more importantly it economically lays down the lines on which the whole work is to develop. The narrator's assertion that St. Valentine's is a day "whan glad is euery wight" will shortly be contradicted in the poem by the revelation of his own sorrow and pain. Moreover, his languishing will be directly linked to the subject mentioned in these early lines, the "free election" allowed the birds in choosing their love-mates. Thus even though only the last two of these nine lines carry the actual narrative, Lydgate uses the devices of amplification--the astronomical periphrasis and expolitio (repetition of the same idea in different terms) of the first seven lines--to convey to the reader what is

more important to him than the slight narrative frame, the themes and ideas which his poem is to develop.

The development of these ideas begins with the song of the lark, urging the birds to renew their allegiance to love:

"Awake, ye louers, out of your slombringe,
 This glade morowe, in al the haste ye may;
 Some obseruaunce dothe vnto this day,
 Your choyse ayen of herte to renewe,
 In confyrmynge for euer to be trewe.

And ye that be, of chosynge, at your large
 This lusty day, by custome of nature,
 Take vpon you the blisful holy charge
 To serue Loue, whyle your lyfe may dure,
 With herte, body, and al your besy cure,
 For euermore, as Venus and Cipride
 For you disposeth, and the god Cupyde.
 (10-21)

Several details here are significant. First, the song of the lark describes the feast of St. Valentine as "This glade morowe" (11) and "This lusty day" (16), emphasizing again what the opening periphrasis had suggested, that this is (or should be) an occasion of happiness and fulfillment for all lovers. Secondly, the song enlarges the scope of the poem by relating the theme of love to those forces which govern it. The birds who are still free to choose their mates are urged to take upon themselves the "blissful holy charge" of serving Love "by custome of nature," that is, as it is natural or as it is ordained by Natura (cf. "ordynaunce," 11. 23, 65). It is a "holy tyme" (98) not simply because it is the holy day of St. Valentine but because it is a day especially sacred

to Natura, "the vicaire of the almight Lord" whose duty it is to see that living things increase and multiply, thus partaking ultimately of the divine creativity. Her law is therefore a "blissful holy charge." Whatever dissonance the figures of Venus, Cipride, and Cupide introduce into this scheme is resolved, in part at least, by remembering that these powers had long been associated with Natura in a tradition extending from Boethius to Alain de Lille to Jean de Meun to Chaucer. In Alain's De Planctu Naturae, for example, Venus appears as Natura's subvicaria, the representation of legitimate sexual energy directed to its proper end, marriage and the begetting of offspring to propagate the species. Similarly both Cypris ("Cypride") and Cupid, the son of Venus and Hymen (himself the brother of Natura), are made "under-deputies" of Natura's office. As we shall see, however, it is not this Venus and Cupid who are responsible for the narrator's love-pangs but the Venus and Cupid of amour courtois. The narrator, however, confuses the goddess of courtly love convention with Natura, blaming the one for the misfortune caused by the other.⁸²

After the narrator-lover listens long to "this heuently comfortable songe,/ So agreable as by ermony" (31-2), he rises and goes to a grove to watch the birds choose their mates. Up to this point he has been an enthusiastic but uninvolved observer. Now, however, in the sixth stanza he admits to being "ful thursty in

languisshyng," a thirst which is probably to be associated with his love-longing,⁸³ for the following stanzas detail the pain of that longing. The lover sits "ful pitously" beneath a laurel tree "for anguysshe of my paynes kene,/ And for constraynte of my sighes sore" (43-4). Here he begins to complain of the "inwarde deedly smerte,/ That aye so sore craunpissed myn herte" (48-9) and of his "drery payne" (50). The contrast between the natural pleasure of love as envisioned in the lark's morning song of harmony and the pain of the narrator's love which alienates him from that happiness is obvious. Indeed, it is the sight of the birds, sitting about two by two on every tree--that is, the sight of Natura's creative power working in the world by love and law--which occasions the lover's complaint:

"Alas, what may this be,
That euery foule hath his lyberte
Frely to chose after his desyre
Eueryche his make thus, fro yere to yere?"

The sely wrenne, the tytemose also,
The lytel redbrest, haue free election
To flyen yfere and togyther go
Where as hem lyst, aboute enuyron,
As they of kynde haue inclynacion,
As Nature, emperesse and gyde,
Of euery thyng lyste to prouyde.

But man alone, alas, the harde stounde,
Ful cruelly, by kyndes ordynaunce,
Constrayned is, and by statute bounde,
And debarred from al suche plesaunce
What meneth this? What is this purueyaunce
Of God aboue, agayne al right of kynde,
Withoute cause, so narowe man to bynde?"
(53-70)

These lines clearly indicate the lover's moral confusion at this point, a confusion which Lydgate uses for dramatic and philosophical purposes. Far "from al helth and cure" (74), the narrator in his love-sickness has been led to this 'blasphemy' against Natura's office. He blames Natura, for example, for denying to man alone "free election" and for barring him of all her creatures from the pleasures in love natural and legitimate to all living things. His 'complaint' against Natura not only emphasizes his being out of tune with the mutual pleasures of her domain, it offers in addition an ironic inversion of Natura's Complaint in Alain's poem. In a famous passage from that work the goddess explains that "all things are by the law of their being held subject to my laws" and should therefore regularly obey her commands. But "from this general rule man alone is excluded by an abnormal exception....Other creations, on which I have bestowed the lesser gifts of my favor, throughout the rank of their activities are bound in willing subjection to the inviolability of my commands." All of creation performs in harmony the fixed duties of her law (cf. "dewetee," 1.5): the firmament, the stars, the planets, the air, the sea, and all the animals of the earth, including the "birds, which have been fashioned in various forms under my supervision and ordering." But man, "who exhausted the treasury of almost all my riches, tries to overthrow the natural impulses of nature, and arms against me the

violence of wicked lust....Man alone rejects the music of my harp, and raves under the lyre of frenzied Orpheus."⁸⁴ It is not necessary, of course, to see the lover of Lydgate's poem in the throes of a "wicked lust" in order to recognize the general similarity between the two passages. In one man accuses Natura of "cruelly" constraining him alone and binding him, paradoxically, to an 'unnatural' ordinance; in the other Natura laments that man alone is out of harmony with her divine plan, a breaker of her laws.

The discussion of Natura and free election in the Roman de la Rose further illumines the lover's blind unreasonableness. In the second part of the Roman, as in Alain's De Planctu, love is conceived as a natural phenomenon whose end is the propagation of the species. Hence Venus is called the friend (amie) of Natura. Yet as Aldo Scaglione observes in discussing this point, in spite of this practical justification for its social ends, love is intolerant of any social conventions which would impair its freedom. In La Vieille's advice to Bel Accueil the doctrine of procreation becomes a philosophy of promiscuity in which Natura is made the justification of women's liberty in love:

D'autre part, eus sont franchises nees;
 Lei les a condicionees,
 Qui les oste de leur franchises,
 Ou Nature les avait mises....
 Mais Nature ne peut mentir,
 Qui franchise li fait sentir;
 Car Horaces neis raconte,

Qui bien set que tel chose monte:
 Qui voudrait une fourche prendre
 Pour sei de Nature defendre,
 E la bouterait hors de sei,
 Revendrait ele, bien la sai.
 Toujourz Nature recourra,
 Ja pour abit ne demourra.
 Que vaut ce? Toute creature
 Veaut retourner a sa nature;
 Ja nou laira pour violence
 De force ne de couvenance.
 Ce deit mout Venus escuser
 Qu'el voulait de franchise user,
 E toutes dames qui se jeuent,
 Combien que mariage veuent,
 Car ce leur fait Nature faire,
 Qui les veaut a franchise traire.
 Trop est fort chose que Nature,
 El passe neis nourreture.
 (IV, 13875-8; 14017-38)⁸⁵

When this natural appetite is trammled up in artificial social restraints--in the conjugal bonds of marriage or the bonds of a monkish vow of chastity (these are the examples La Vieille gives)--then the individual will try to break away as a bird shut in a cage longs for the forest or a fish in a net struggles for the water. Natura, then, is not the arbitrary monarch the lover would have her. Rather she allows, even insists upon the principle of free election. The birds in The Floure of Curtesy, for example, are not enforced by her "ordynaunce" but freely accept it as conducive to the ideal of harmony and order. It is the lover, caught in the web of social conventions (in this instance the codes and rules of an 'unnatural' courtoisie), who turns the traditional concept of Natura's function on its head by complaining that man alone is constrained by "kyndes ordynaunce" and bound by her "statute."⁸⁶

The reason for the lover's confused attitude becomes clear in the following stanzas. It is true that he has lost his natural freedom, but it is a loss of freedom not effected by Natura but an enforced submission such as that suffered by Gower's Amans when his heart is pierced by Cupid's fiery dart. Significantly, it is Fortuna that the lover next blames for his "woful houre":

My wounde abydeth lyke a sursanure,
 For me Fortune so felly lyste dispose,
 My harme is hyd, that I dare not disclose.
 (75-7)

He explains his failure to win his lady's grace in terms of several stock-in-trade allegorical figures: Daunger, Malebouche, Enuye, and false Suspection. And though he can only see himself dying as a result of his forlorn state, he vows to the God of Love to remain constant in his lady's service. This God of Love, however, as the personifications seem to indicate, is not the Cupid the lark's song invokes, the son of Hymen and Venus, but the visionary, courtly figure the dreamer in the first half of the Roman de la Rose sees in the Garden of Dedit, the Cupid who inspires a love traditionally described in terms of chains, thralldom, servitude, and "constraint." Lydgate thus sets the lover's understanding of his situation within the context of a false courtly love, in the dominion of Fortuna. The submissive victim of Cupid's passion, he recognizes his alienation from Natura's world of order and bliss, but in his blindness he cannot per-

ceive the root of his "disaventure" (72).

The lover's eulogy to his lady (113-224) further heightens the irony implicit in the contrast between these polar figures, Natura and Venus-Fortuna. He praises her for precisely the attributes common to humanity which it is Natura's task to bestow as opposed to the worldly favors of Fortuna.⁸⁷ Indeed, the lover himself declares, "In her is naught that Nature can amende" (189), a line which by itself appears to be a commonplace among medieval authors for giving special attention to the beauty of women⁸⁸ but which in the context of the poem's ideas undoubtedly has a more functional meaning. The entire panegyric descriptio feminae, in fact, defines the narrator's dilemma: antagonistic toward Natura for what he considers an unjust, enforced submission, he is nevertheless a willing vassal of Natura's creature, bound not by "kyndes ordynaunce" but "sore knytte in loves firy cheyn."

The poem ends as it had begun, with the song of the birds (as had Chaucer's Parliament), this time in the form of a Ballade. The two songs, of almost identical length, thus frame the Complaint of the lover and the description of his lady, giving the poem a symmetry of design and at the same time establishing its thematic burden:⁸⁹

"With al my might and in my best entent,
With al the faythe that mighty God of kynde

Me yaue, syth he me soule and knowyng sent,
 I chese, and to this bonde euer I me bynde,
 To loue you best, whyle I haue lyfe and mynde."
 Thus herde I foules, in the dawenyng,
 Vpon the day of Saynte Valentyne synge.
 (246-52)

This song, with its echoes of the royal tercel's first speech in the Parliament and its insistence upon absolute loyalty in love, offers an admirable statement of the essence of amour courtois, indicating no doubt that there is no real antithesis between Venus and Natura. The ritual observances the lark urges the other birds to perform in honor of St. Valentine are still part of the whole creative process of Natura; their pledge of constancy is not substantially different from that which the lover vows to his lady. But whereas the lark's song promises that Natura's charge will lead to bliss, the narrator's passive self-absorbed love brings him only "deedly smerte" and "drery payne." Lydgate does not attempt to resolve this mystery; instead his poem renders it through a traditional iconography. The birds voluntarily bind themselves to one another at the inspiration of "Nature, emperesse and gyde" (62) and the "God of kynde" (247) while the narrator is thrall to the courtly God of Love, no longer a free man, his health and gladness governed by fickle Fortuna.

Lydgate's achievement in The Floure of Curtesy lies in the artful manner in which he organizes his material both to dramatize and expose an attitude toward love. Beneath the courtly idiom of the traditional Valentine com-

plaint, usually expressive of eternal and unrequited love,⁹⁰ the poem offers, by indirection and suggestion, its own implied judgment upon the basic situation of that conventional love-complex. What an examination of the poem's rhetorical structure makes clear, then, is that the proem and 'concluding Ballade are central to the poem's meaning. Certainly to ignore the frame and to see The Floure of Curtesy as all description as Pearsall does⁹¹ is to give the poem an emphasis that is misleading and one that slights Lydgate's very real craftsmanship.

A Complaynt of a Loveres Lyfe is organized around the same basic technique as The Floure of Curtesy--the juxtaposition of the realms of Natura and Venus-Fortuna--for similar dramatic and philosophical purposes, but in this longer poem the conflict is rendered through a wealth of rhetorical detail. In place of the slight Valentine scene in The Floure of Curtesy, with its "free election" of the birds and song of the lark, the Complaynt begins with one of the most beloved of medieval topoi, the description of an ideal landscape, the locus amoenus of classical poets, in the form of a garden and its adjacent parkland (22-98). Moreover, the role of the narrator-lover in The Floure of Curtesy is here split in two. The restless and moody narrator rises on a May morning and seeks release from his love-pain in Natura's park; there his health is restored by a drink of "holson" water from

"a litel welle," and wandering about the pleasure-grounds, he comes upon a knight in "an erber grene" and overhears his long complaint (218-574) against his ill-fortune in love. Unlike the similar situation in the Book of the Duchess, however, there is no interplay between the poet-narrator and lover-knight. Instead the poem ends (ironically, I think) with the narrator's prayer to Venus, asking that she reward the "trouthe" of the unfortunate knight. As even this brief summary of the narrative indicates, the poem is heavily indebted to Chaucer and to the entire tradition of French courtly verse that stands behind both poets. But although A Complaynt of a Loveres Lyfe is largely composed of a tissue of rhetorical commonplaces, it nevertheless demonstrates once again how skillfully Lydgate could re-order conventional details to create a poem of considerable substance and subtlety. He is in this poem no mechanical fiddler of well-worn, stock themes but an artist confidently in control of his materials.⁹²

A Complaynt of a Loveres Lyfe begins with a stylized, highly rhetorical nature-prelude characteristic of the love lyric and courtly allegory:

In May when Flora, the fresshe lusty quene,
 The soyle hath clad in grene, rede and white,
 And Phebus gan to shede his stremes shene
 Amyd the Bole wyth al the bemes bryght,
 And Lucifer to chace away the nyght
 Ayen the morow our orysont hath take
 To bydde lovers out of her slepe awake:

And hertys heuy for to recomforte

From dreryhed of heuy nyghtis sorowe,
 Nature bad hem rysen and disporte
 Ageyn the goodly, glade, greye morowe.
 And Hope also, with Seint Iohn to borowe,
 Bad in dispite of Daunger and Dispeyre
 For to take the holsom lusty eyre.
 (1-14)

As with the similar opening of The Floure of Curtesy, the seasonal-astronomical periphrasis of these lines is more than ornamental. Syntactically, the detail of the first nine lines, with their echoes of Boethius' De Consolatione, the Roman de la Rose, and the Troilus,⁹³ is made subordinate to the main clause of line ten: "Nature bad hem rysen and disporte." The key figure of Natura is thus significantly introduced into the poem amidst the morning beauty of her universe, a reflection of her orderly creation.⁹⁴ Moreover she appears as a beneficent and restorative influence for man, able to allay the "dreryhed of heuy nyghtis sorowe" through her "holsom lusty eyre." This aspect of Natura will later be realized more fully in the concrete details of her garden. Indeed, the word "holsom" (14) becomes an exponential index of her moral function in her garden realm. Here in the exordium the central conflict to be localized in that garden setting is already intimated. The pain of "heuy nyghtis sorowe" is linked with the effects of Daunger and Dispeyre upon the narrator, allegorical personifications in the retinue of Venus-Cupid-Fortuna.⁹⁵

The third stanza introduces the narrator. He appears in the guise of an unhappy lover, in need of the

"recomforte" Natura can offer him:

And wyth a sygh I gan for to abreyde
 Out of my slombre and sodeynly vp-stert
 As he, alas, that nygh for sorow deyde,
 My sekenes sat ay so nygh myn hert.
 But for to fynde socour of my smert,
 Or attelest sum relese of my peyn
 That me so sore halt in euery veyn,

I rose anon and thoght I wolde goon
 Vnto the wode to her the briddes sing....
 (15-23)

The portrait of the narrator as disappointed lover is a familiar posture in poems of this kind, and the language of the stanza is quite conventional in its description of his unhappy condition: "sygh," "sorow," "sekenes," "smert," "peyn," "sore"--details which will appear in even more extreme form in the descriptio of the knight. Lydgate, however, uses this traditional topos for a pervasive thematic purpose. Coming as it does right after the mention of Natura's 'wholesomeness,' this "sorow" appears unnatural, against nature. It can, if persisted in, end in death (17). Further, it is important that the narrator be introduced as suffering under the merciless power of love since the subsequent "cure" of his love-sickness by a drink of water from Natura's well represents in iconographic form the lesson of the entire poem.

The narrator walks along a river until he finds a little path. This leads him

Tovarde a parke enclosed with a wal
 In compas round; and by a gate smal

Whoso that wolde frely myghte goon
 Into this parke walled with grene stoon.
 (39-42)

Like Chaucer's Park in the Parliament of Fowls which is also "walled with grene stoon" (176-82), Lydgate's garden will be the setting for a similar treatment of opposed or paradoxical concepts of love.⁹⁶ His description of the locus amoenus within the walls gives the clue to its significatio. Everywhere the presence of Natura is felt:

The soyle was pleyn, smothe and wonder softe,
 Al ouersprad wyth tapites that Nature
 Had made herselfe....
 (50-2)

The eyre atempre and the smothe wynde
 Of Zepherus among the blosmes whyte
 So holsom was and norysshing be kynde....
 (57-9)

The garden, it seems, is the imago Naturae, the Park of Dame Nature, and as such the allegorical center of the poem. Pearsall's misunderstanding of this point leads him, I believe, to a wrong conclusion: "Lydgate's constant echoes of the Romance of the Rose remind us that what we are witnessing is the 'defusing' of allegory. The Romance had a walled park, but the specific allegorical significance of the wall was clear not only from what was outside and inside, but also from the 'wiket small' which was its only entrance guarded by Ydelnesse. Lydgate keeps the park and keeps the 'gate smal' but explicitly denies the allegorical sense of privilege by his next two lines:

Whoso that wolde frely myghte goon
 Into this parke walled with grene stoon."⁹⁷

Precisely! But this is not the Garden of Deduit with its elitist entrance requirements but the realm of Natura,⁹⁸ and the fact that anyone may freely enter Lydgate's natural garden is exactly the kind of "allegorical significance" he might expect his readers to recognize in emphasizing the different modes of entrance to this garden and to traditional Gardens of Love.⁹⁹

Lydgate includes among the features of his park a catalogue of trees:

I saw ther Daphene closed vndir rynde,
 Grene laurer and the holsom pyne,
 The myrre also that wepeth euer of kynde,
 The cedre high, vpryght as a lyne,
 The philbert eke that lowe doth enclyne
 Her bowes grene to the erthe doune
 Vnto her knyght icalled Demophoune.
 (64-70)

Tree lists are a familiar rhetorical topos of late antique and medieval literature and one in which both classical and biblical traditions met and mingled. Unlike the similar list in Chaucer's Parliament, Lydgate's formal catalogue follows an Ovidian rhetorical scheme. The change is significant, especially as it allows Lydgate to include several 'metamorphosed' trees in his list: Daphne-laurel, Myrrha-myrrh, Phyllis-filbert. As Norton-Smith observes, "Some of the exemplary figures which later are to form part of the Knight's proof of the harshness of Venus's law of love are here shown transformed into objects of pleasure and delight in the catalogue of trees."¹⁰⁰

The trees, then, carry forward on another iconographical level the central opposition between Natura and Venus (perhaps we should say one kind of Venus), for just as the drink from Natura's well will assuage the narrator's "cruel rage," so in similar fashion these famous lovers from classical legend are now part of Natura's healthy, ordered realm (the trees are planted in a "sute," that is, in uniform rows). They stand innocent among the other trees, all passion spent.¹⁰¹

The final and most important feature in the garden, however, is the little well the narrator discovers among the trees. The setting and description of Lydgate's well follows closely that in the Roman de la Rose, but the changes he makes in the images which he borrows from that poem invert the original signification:

The water so holsum and so vertuous
 Throgh myght of erbes grovyng ther beside:
 Nat lyche the welle wher as Narcisus
 Islayn was thro vengeaunce of Cupide,
 Wher so covertly he dide hide
 The greyn of deth vpon eche brynk
 That deth mot folow, who that euer drynke.

Ne lyche the pitte of the Pegace
 Vnder Parnaso wher poetys slept,
 Nor lyke the welle of pure chastite
 Which as Dyane with her nymphes kept
 When she naked into the water lept,
 That slow Atteon with his houndes felle
 Only for he cam so nygh the welle.

(85-98)

The negative comparisons, a variation of the rhetorical figure contrarium, are used to set this well apart from other legendary wells, each of which I think we are to understand is emblematic of an attitude toward love. The

first and third wells, those of Narcissus and Diana, both represent extreme forms of love:¹⁰² egocentric self-love and "pure chastite." Both, moreover, are dangerous and deadly. Narcissus fell into his well and drowned, slain by Cupid; and Acteon was torn apart by his own dogs at Diana's command. So much is clear. The difficulty lies with the second well, "the pitte of Pegace/ Vnder Parnaso wher poetys slept." From its middle position in the list we might surmise that it is to be associated with another kind of love, also dangerous, which lies somewhere between the two extreme forms represented by Narcissus and Diana. Indeed, as we shall see, Lydgate does link this other well with the courtly Venus and the type of love over which she rules as goddess. It too, then, represents a love ethic which is 'unnatural' and potentially deadly.¹⁰³

The "pitte of Pegace," Norton-Smith tells us, is a reference to the 'fons Pegaseus,' the Hippocrene, "a fountain in Boeotia sacred to the Muses, according to Late Antique and Medieval geography located on the Heliconian peak of Parnassus. It was fabled to have been created by a stroke of Pegasus's hoof...." Lydgate, in fact, mentions this very location in another poem, the Balade Sente to the Shirrefs Dynere where the mythological associations are clearer:

On Parnaso the lusty Muses nyne,
Citherra with hir sone nowe dwellis,
This sayson singe and their notes twyne

Of poetry besyd the cristal wellis;
(99-102)

Again, the notes of Norton-Smith on these lines are helpful. The "cristal wellis," he tells us, are the rivers¹⁰⁴ Helicon and Hippocrene on Mount Parnassus, sacred to the Muses. Information about Parnassus came to medieval poets from Servius' commentary on Virgil and Isidore's Etymologiae. Here are the relevant passages, first Servius commenting on Aeneid, X: "Parnassus mons est Thessaliae iuxta Boeotiam...qui in duo finditur iuga Citheronem Liberi et Heliconem Apollinis et Musarum. Ex quo fons manare dicitur quem Pegasi ungula protulisse fertur qui vocatur Hippocrene." Isidore repeats Servius' notes and then adds: "Hic [Mount Parnassus] in duo finditur iuga Ciria et Nisa."¹⁰⁵ What Norton-Smith does not mention is that there was apparently some confusion between the forms Cithero(u)n (Mount Cithaeron), Cirra or Cirrea (a town near Delphi and Mount Parnassus), and Citherra, Citheria, or Citherea (the epithet of Venus deriving from the island of Cythera).¹⁰⁶ It is this conflation of details that probably led Lydgate to associate "Citherra with hir sone" and the fountain or crystal well on Parnassus.¹⁰⁷

Once again, Pearsall's remarks on this whole episode seem particularly wide of the mark:

Lydgate, like the Romance, also has a well-spring, but deprives it of all its potent allegorical significance as the source and fountainhead of love (the eyes of the beloved) by declaring it to be 'nat lyche' the well of Narcissus, whereas

the fact that it is the well of Narcissus is the whole point of its presence in the Romance. The poet in Lydgate drinks from it, is much refreshed, and goes on his way. It might just as well be a real garden, with a real wall, and a real well. One sees how easily Lydgate is led along by his own fluency in imitation, until he realises that the vein is exhausted, that the well has nothing to do with the case, and promptly drops it.¹⁰⁸

Several of the assumptions here are misleading. Lydgate does not deprive his fountain of allegorical significance but invests it with a new one integral to the whole garden setting. It is 'nat lyche' the well of Narcissus in the Romance because this is not the Garden of the Rose. Indeed, the mythological associations of the three negated wells seem carefully chosen to rule them out as attractive well-springs of love. They are each in some way dangerous and unnatural. The well from which the poet does drink, we might say, has everything to do with the case. It is emblematic of the wholesome atmosphere of Natura's garden, an image for natural love as the other wells are images for distorted types of love.¹⁰⁹ Nor does Lydgate promptly drop it. Instead he details the effects the 'holsom' and 'vertuous' water has upon the narrator:

But this welle that I her reherse
 So holsom was that hyt wolde asuage
 Bollyn hertis and the venym perse
 Of pensifed with al the cruel rage
 And euermore refresshe the visage
 Of hem that were in eny werynesse
 Of gret labour or fallen in distresse.

And I that had through Daunger and Disdeyn
 So drye a thrust, thocht I wolde assay
 To tast a draghte of this welle, or tweyn,
 My bitter languor yf hyt myght alay,
 And on the banke anon dovne I lay
 And with myn hede into the welle araght
 And of the watir dranke a gode draght.

Wherof me thocht I was refressed wel
 Of the brynnyng that sate so nygh myn hert
 That verely anon I gan to fele
 An huge part relested of my smert
 And therwithalle anon vp I stert
 And thocht I wolde walken and se more
 Forth in the parke and in the holtys hore.
 (99-119)

These lines, which bring the proem to a climactic end, also bring us back to the beginning. The narrator's "sekenes" that "sat ay so nygh myn hert" (18) has been cured (at least temporarily) and he has found "sum relesse" of his "smert" (19) and "pain" (20). The thirst caused by Daunger and Disdeyn (106) also echoes the "dreryhed of heuy nyghtis sorowe" which the narrator had in the earlier section attributed to Daunger and Dispeyre (9,13).¹⁰ And, of course, the figure of Natura is present both at the beginning and end of this initial movement, first bidding unhappy lovers to rise and "disporte" themselves and then restoring one unhappy lover, the narrator, to health through the medicinal power of her well-water. Indeed Lydgate's strategy in this entire section is not unlike that of Chaucer in the Book of the Duchess, a poem which the Complaynt resembles in several details. In Chaucer's work the sleeplessness of the poet (perhaps caused by his disappointment in love) and the story of Ceyx and Alcione stand in the same fundamentally vital relation to the

dream encounter with "a man in blak" as the experiences of Lydgate's narrator in the Garden of Natura do in relation to his meeting with "a man/ In blake and white."¹¹¹ Each sequence establishes the frame of reference--the ideas and values--against which the 'poem proper' is to be set in the foreground. But whereas Chaucer's indirect approach to his theme hints at parallels later to be brought out in the lament on the death of Blanche, Lydgate's introduction serves as a contrastive focal point to the knight's complaint.

In immediate contrast to the pleasant atmosphere of the garden setting, the description of the knight, who is discovered by the narrator in a secluded part of the parkland (in "an erber grene"),¹¹² presents a stylized portrait of a man in the grips of the "lover's malady." He appears

...pale and wan
And wonder dedly also of his hiwe,
Of hurtes grene and fresshe woundes nyw.

And ouermore destreynd with sekenesse
Besyde (as thus he was) ful greuosly,
For vpon him he had an hote accesse
That day be day him shoke ful petously;
So that for constreynt of hys malady
And hertly wo, thus lyinge al alone,
Hyt was a deth for to her him grone.
(131-40)

The description repeats in more dangerous form the same symptoms that had afflicted the narrator. The knight is "destreynd with sekenesse." His "malady" is specifically defined as a "hote accesse" (a love fever). Much of this, again, is conventional, but as Robertson aptly reminds us,

"medieval literature developed a conventional language of narrative and descriptive motifs which were designed to communicate ideas." The behavior of lovers especially follows stereotyped rhetorical patterns for iconographic purposes, "to call attention to the philosophical significance of their actions...."¹¹³ What that significance may be in our poem becomes clearer as the narrator hides himself in order to find out

What was the cause of his dedely woo,
Or why that he so pitously gan crie
On hys fortune and on his eure also.
(149-51)

It is worthy of note, I think, that what the narrator first hears is the knight's plaint against "hys fortune" and "his eure." Fortuna, as we have seen, is in many ways the moral inversion of Natura, and the poem will make readily patent the connection between her "stormy wilful variaunce" and the "false doubleness" meted out to the knight by Venus and Cupid. His situation is all the more lamentable since he is "To speke of manhod oon the best on lyve" (158). In his infatuation, however, the knight has forgotten what a man should be. Instead he behaves as one who has abandoned reason for Fortuna:

...thoght and sekeness wer occasion
That he thus lay in lamentacion,
Gruffe on the grounde in place desolate,
Sole, by himself, awaped and amate.
(165-8)

Grovelling on the ground he has no interest in the beauties of Natura's domain or in the harmonies of her park. Instead he lies by himself, "awaped and amate," in his

love fantasy a captive of Fortuna.

The knight's Complaint (218-574) has rightly been praised by Pearsall for its display of Lydgate's rhetorical skills. Essentially a densely figured elaboration upon the theme of "Trouthe" and "Falsnes," it is a superb instance of the stylistic richness Lydgate was capable of achieving within a static set-piece such as the formal love-complaint. But it is not the elocutio of the Complaint that I wish to examine but its larger function in the poem. The best way to begin is by looking at the 'disposition' of the Complaint itself. It follows fairly closely the arrangement of materials known to medieval rhetoricians, deriving from Cicero:¹¹⁴

1. Exordium (introduction)	Lines 218-245
2. Narratio (explanation of background)	246-284
3. Partitio (preliminary outline)	omitted
4. Confirmatio (proof of the speaker's case)	combined 285-511
5. Refutatio (destruction of opponent's case)	(includes a catalogue of supporting exempla: "I take recorde of Palamides....")
6. Peroratio (concluding plea)	512-574

The knight first declares "the grounde of peynes alle" (224) and proceeds to explain why he is in this woeful condition ("Thus for my trouthe Daunger doth me sterue" [250]). The main part of his speech is given over to his charge that true lovers are unrewarded and false lovers

rewarded, a position which he supports with a catalogue of exemplary figures. Finally, he ends with a plea for mercy or at least for a recognition from the lady of his "trouthe" in service.

Within this formal scheme several details should be noted. First, the relationship between the knight and the lady is consistently enacted by the personifications of a 'courtly sophistic,' borrowed either from the Roman de la Rose and Chaucer or invented by Lydgate himself. Thus we find Daunger (250,497,634,649,673), Dispite (252,510), fals Envye (257), Wrathe (257), Enmyte (257), Male-bouche (260), Fals-Report (262), Mysbeleve (263,506), Fals-Suspecion (263,505), Falsnes (266), Cruelte (277), Disdeyn (279,503), Falshed (307,308), Lesynges (421), and fals-semblaunt (424). A few of these personifications had appeared earlier in the poem (Daunger, Dispeyre, Disdeyn), where they had been made responsible for the narrator's love pain. Now the knight quite explicitly attributes the activities of these treacherous and dangerous figures to Venus, Cupid, and Fortuna:

The whiche thyng I bye now al to dere,
 Thanked be Venus and the god Cupide,
 As hit is seen by myn oppressed chere
 And by his arowes that stiken in my side....
 O God of Loue vnto the I crie
 And to thy blinde double deyte
 Of this grete wrong thus I compleyn me,

And to thy stormy wilful variaunce
 Imeynt with chaunge and gret vnstablenesse:
 Now vp, now down, so rennyng is thy chaunce
 That the to trust may be no sikernesse,
 I wite hit no thing but thi doublenesse.

And who that is an archer and ys blynde
Marketh ne thing but sheteth by wenyng.

And for that he hath no discrecion
Withoute avise he let his arow goo,
For lak of syght and also of resoun,
In his shetyng hit happeth ofte soo
To hurt his frende rathir than his foo.
(435-8; 453-67)

The phrase "blinde double deyte" (Venus and Cupid) is interesting in this context, since it is Fortuna's traditional blindness, not Cupid's, that has been transferred to Venus.¹¹⁵ A somewhat similar transference occurs earlier in the knight's speech:

What menth this, what ys this wonder vre
Of purveance, yf I shal hit calle,
Of God of Love that fals hem so assure,
And trewe, alas, down of the whele be falle?
And yet in soth, this is the worst of alle:
That Falshed wrongfully of Trouth hath the name
And Trouth, ayenward, of Falshed bereth the
blame.

This blynde chaunce, this stormy aventure
In love hath moste his experience.
(302-10)

Here the image of Fortuna's fickleness, her wheel, is used in reference to Cupid's blind "purveance."

The knight's recognition of Love's unjust dispensation of favors and the unstable nature of his felicity prompts him to seek redress at one point from the "ryghtful God, that first the trouthe fonde" (269). This "Lorde of Trouth" (285) and the "God that art of Trouthe souereyn" (288) seems to be the Boethian antithesis of Fortuna. But such clarity of vision is short-lived. Instead the knight is shortly heard blaming the "God of kynde" (482) for the very qualities he has already attributed to Venus,

Cupid, and Fortuna:

The myghty goddes also of Nature
 That vnder God hath the gouernaunce
 Of worldly things committed to her cure,
 Disposed hath thro her wyse purveaunce
 To yive my lady so moch suffisaunce
 Of al vertues and therewithal purvyde
 To mordre trowth hath take Daunger to guyde.

For bounte, beaute, shape and semelyhed,
 Prudence, witte, passyngly fairenesse,
 Benigne port, glad chere with loulyhed,
 Of womanhed ryght plentevous largesse,
 Nature in her fully did empresse
 Whan she her wroght--and altherlast Dysdeyne
 To hinder Trowth she made her Chambreleyne,

When Mystryst also and Fals-Suspecion
 With Mysbeleve she made for to be
 Chefe of counseyle, to this conclusion,
 For to exile Routhe and eke Pite.
 (491-508) 116

Like the narrator in The Floure of Curtesy the knight reacts to Fortuna's treachery by holding Natura responsible for his suffering. The courtly personifications earlier viewed as part of Love's retinue are now interpreted as 'natural' qualities of the lady. Indeed by the end of his Complaint the knight again exhibits the perverse unreason denoted by the blind deities Cupid, Venus, and Fortuna as he desperately and passively awaits his "destanye fatal" at the hands of his lady.

The moral obfuscation of the knight is further indicated by his catalogue of exemplary lovers. Several of his "true" lovers are on the wrong side of the moral world. Figures such as Tristram, Pyramus, Achilles, and Hercules had appeared, for example, on the wall of Venus' Temple in Chaucer's Parliament where they had been part

of the allegorical tableau signifying selfish, illicit, or disastrous love.¹¹⁷ Similarly, in the Mars-Venus-Vulcan example it is Mars who is called the "worthy knyght," the "trewe man," and Vulcan who is the "foule cherle" (390-1).¹¹⁸ Indeed the list of "true lovers" demonstrates that the knight, even though his love may be honorable and chaste, is blind to the moral implications of his exemplars. In fact, the substance of his Complaint is only that he has not been successful in his suit:

Thus euer Love (alas and that is routhe)
His false legys furthereth what he may
And sleeth the trwe vngoodly, day be day.
(383-5)

Demophon, therefore, is cited as a false lover because by his "falshede" and "grete untrouthe" he had his lust "and al that myght delyte" (381-2), but Phoebus' passion for Daphne qualifies him as a true lover since "She lat him go and toke of him non hede" (364). Truth-Falseness thus becomes an index not of opposing or differing loves that lead to true or to false felicity but of success or failure within a Fortuna-dominated love-complex.

The Complaint ends with the knight moving off to a lodge where, we are told, it is his custom to abide, "Sole to compleyn of his peynes kene,/ Fro yer to yer vnder bowes grene" (587-8). The narrator, moved to pity by his "langwysshing for trouthe" (581), begins to write his "woful compleynte" word for word "to dysporte" (602) the hearts of lovers. But as he writes he is distracted

by the sight of the rising evening star:

And as I wrote me thoght I saw aferre
 Fer in the west lustely appere
 Esperus, the goodly bryghte sterre,
 So glad, so feire, so persaunt eke of chere:
 I mene Venus with her bemys clere
 That heuy hertis oonly to releve
 Is wont of custom for to shew at eve.
 (610-6)

The beauty of this crepuscular scene looks back to the dawn opening when

...hertys heuy for to recomforte
 From dreryhed of heuy nyghtis sorowe,
 Nature bad hem rysen and disporte
 Ageyn the goodly, glade, greye morowe.
 (8-11)

The similarity between the two scenes is probably intentional, for this Venus is not the 'mythological' goddess of amour courtois but the benevolent planet of love which casts its influence upon the earth, the 'astrological' Venus. The two Veneres are not always easy to distinguish in medieval poetry, for poets often described the planet in terms of the goddess. In Chaucer's Parliament, for example, the dreamer invokes Cytherea as "thou blisful lady swete,/ That with the fyrbrond dauntest whom the lest" (112-3), the firebrand being a symbol common to both goddess and planet. Similarly, Troilus first calls upon "Citherea the swete" as mother of love and then "Venus, the welwilly planete" (III,1255); and the narrator himself invokes the

...blisful light, of which the bemes clere
 Adorneth al the thridde hewene faire,
 O sonnes leef, o Joves doughter deere.
 (III,1-3)

Lydgate's narrator also blends astrology and mythology in addressing his prayer to "O glade sterre, O lady Venus myn" (639), but the image of Hesperus which prompts his prayer has a special aptness here. From classical times the planet was regarded not only as having a beneficent influence, but as Brewer observes, "as controlling the fertility of plants, beasts, and men."¹¹⁹ As part of a christianized cosmology this Venus has a function not unlike that of Natura. Both are forces belonging to God and represent the plenitude of His creativity, the cosmic love that binds the physical universe.¹²⁰ And since Venus is the agent of divine Providence, as astrologers taught, all 'impressions' (the word is Dante's) received from the stars are good because there is no capacity for love which does not reflect the divine capacity for love. What Lydgate's poem seems to be suggesting is that it is the ordering and harmonizing of this natural impulse or disposition to love that determines the soul's "sanity and perfection."¹²¹ The planetary allusion, then, has on a smaller scale the same thematic purpose as the Garden of Natura: it both establishes a frame of reference for what comes after it (in this instance, the narrator's address to Venus) and by reminding us of the influence the stars have upon mankind, it turns our attention once again to a consideration of the place of human love in God's cosmic plan.

The narrator's prayer to Venus (619-45) ends the poem

on a richly ambiguous note. Conjuring Venus "For that love thou haddest to Adon" (644) and

For that ioy thou haddest when thou ley
 With Mars thi knyght when Vulcanus yow founde
 And with a cheyne vnvisible yow bounde
 Tokedre both tweyne in the same while
 That al the court above celestial
 At your shame ganne laughe and smyle.
 (621-6)

the narrator asks Venus to show mercy to all lovers like the "trewe man that in the erber lay" (637):

O feire lady, wel-willy founde at al,
 Comfort to carefull, O goddesse immortal,
 Be helpyng now and do thy diligence
 To let the stremes of thin influence

Descende down in furthryng of the trouthe,
 Namely of hem that lye in sorow bounde;
 Shew now thy myght and on her wo haue routhe
 Er fals Daunger sle hem and confounde.
 (627-34)

Given the significance of the astronomical allusion at the beginning of his prayer, the narrator's request that the heavenly Venus, a symbol of divine love, might let her influence "Descende down in furthryng of the trouthe,/ Namely of hem that lye in sorow bounde" seems capable of more than one level of meaning. At its simplest it is a plea for success (mercy), a fairly standard feature of the love-complaint genre; but in the Boethian context of the poem's conclusion this earthly courtly love is gently set off against the love existing in the true "court above celestial," the difference between the two ultimately involving the difference between a true and false felicity. Thus having himself been "An huge part relested of my smert"

(116), the narrator's final prayer (a real prayer) is

That alle trew that be with Daunger shent
With mercie may, in reles of her peyn
Recured be er May come eft again.
(648-50)

And to petition Venus, this Venus, by referring to the Vulcan-Mars episode and the Adonis affair--all mythic figures that had been cited in the knight's roll-call (386-92)--seems precisely the kind of ironically humorous tactic Lydgate might have learned from Chaucer. And though the vision we are left with does not prompt the clear-sighted laughter of Troilus looking down upon the earth from his vantage point in the heavens, are we not at least invited, like the members of the celestial court, to "laughe and smyle"?

Lydgate's debt to his Chaucerian models for A Complaynt of a Loveres Lyfe is obvious on all levels of the poem, from his echoing of particular images and rhythms to the use he makes of certain well-worn topoi (such as making the 'scientific,' astronomical details resonate through the narrative action). Most important, however, of all the lessons Lydgate may have learned from Chaucer is the indirect and subtle manner of artistically fusing the discrete surface materials of a poetic tradition. What we find in the Complaynt, then, is no mechanical juxtaposition of familiar themes--May amoenitas, woodland Garden, mythic personifications, and a discussion of love--but rather an auspicious conjunction of rhetorically realized details that enriches poetic meaning.

The Temple of Glas is a much more ambitious poem than the two we have already looked at. Some idea of its formal and stylistic design may be gathered from an analysis of its structure:

Part I (1-530)

A. Proem	1-320	couplets
B. Complaint of the Lady to Venus	321-69	stanzas (rime royal) 1-7
C. Venus' Answer	377-453	stanzas 9-19
D. Lady's Reply	461-502	stanzas 21-26
E. Venus' Rejoinder	510-523	stanzas 28-29
F. Conclusion	524-530	stanza 30
-stanzas 8, 20, 27 are connective passages		

Part II (531-1392)

A. Proem (largely the Knight's pre-complaint complaint)	531-700	couplets
B. Complaint of the Knight to Venus	701-847	stanzas 1-21
C. Venus' Answer	852-931	stanzas 22-33
D. Bridge passage	932-969	couplets
E. Knight's Plea to the Lady	970-1039	stanzas 1-10
F. Lady's Reply to the Knight	1061-1102	stanzas 14-19
G. Venus' Address to the Lovers	1110-1277	stanzas 21-44
H. Ballade	1341-1361	stanzas 54-56
I. Conclusion	1362-1392	couplets
Envoy	1393-1403	couplets
-stanzas 11-13 (1040-1060), 20 (1103-1109), 45-53 (1278-1340) are connective passages		

Such an analysis makes clear not only the greater complexity of the poem but also what goes wrong with it. In

an attempt to amplify the basic narrative situation of the lovers so as to realize its emotional potential, Lydgate nearly brings the movement of the poem to a dead stop by turning it into almost all lyric and description (a possible reason why Chaucer broke off the Anelida and Arcite fragment). There are, for example, 841 lines of set speeches as opposed to 562 lines of connecting narrative, and much of this connective tissue is made up of other static pieces such as the descriptions of the Temple of Venus, the Lady, and the Knight. The sheer bulk of this material not only paralyzes the movement of the narrative, but the long speeches especially, in their densely figured and imagistic elaborateness, give away right at the beginning whatever emotional impact the whole narrative might have been expected to develop. Indeed, after the first speech of Venus (377-453) the happy outcome in store for the lovers unfolds according to the logic of a Foregone Conclusion.

What keeps the poem from breaking down into a series of inter-connected love complaints is the way in which Lydgate, by a variety of schematic and figurative devices --descriptio, invocatio, exemplum, etc.--amplifies different elements in the structure so as to thread through them a common motif, and one which will provide the moral and aesthetic resolution for the poem. He replaces the tension between Natura and Venus-Fortuna which characterizes The Floure of Curtesy and A Complaynt of a Loveres

Lyfe with a 'blurred,' more complex vision of human love in the Temple of Glas. On the one hand, the moral dangers implicit in amour courtois are made clearer here than in the other two poems (the central situation between the Lady and the Knight is potentially an adulterous one), and yet at the same time Lydgate seems to recognize their love as worth desiring, both ennobling for the lovers (especially the Knight) and in harmony with Natura's plan, a 'type' of the divine love which knits up the physical universe. In fact, all throughout the Temple of Glas Lydgate takes the contrastive points of view toward love rendered in The Floure of Curtesy and A Complaynt and translates them into ironic ambiguities. The Venus the Lady addresses in her first prayer, for example, seems more the ally of Natura than her enemy. The Lady points out to Venus that it is "Again al right, bothe of God and Kynd" (343) to be subjected to a husband she does not love-- the same argument from 'naturalism' that La Vieille uses for the "free election" of wives in the Roman de la Rose!¹²² In the opening description of Venus' Temple these ambiguities are worked into the very structure of the allegory. In the pleas of the Lady and Knight they remain matters of viewpoint, reflected principally through a juxtaposition of attitudes and topics. But it is through the figure of Venus herself, in her several aspects that Lydgate explores the love-complex of the poem. It is not always clear, for example, whether the Venus who is de-

picted in the Temple is the Venus invoked by the lovers, or whether the Venus who finally binds the two together within her golden chain is courtly personification, pagan deity, planet, subvicaria of God and Natura--or all of them. This means of handling ambiguity carries right through the poem, to the concluding Ballade sung by the Muses, Orpheus, and Amphion in honor of Venus and Cupid. On the simplest level of the poem this song seems to suggest a satisfactory resolution to the lovers' problem; but our impression of the ending is immediately complicated by Lydgate's deliberate ambiguity concerning the significatio of the narrator's special "auisioun." After he wakes from his dream, the narrator promises to write a "simple tretis" for his lady's entertainment until he has more time

Forto expoune my foreseid visioun,
 And tel in plein the significaunce,
 So as it cometh to my remembraunce,
 So that herafter my ladi may it loke.
 (1389-92)

The entire poem, then, may be thought of as a Mirror of Love and the ambivalence of the image reflected therein is part of the very theme of the work.

The Temple of Glas is too large a poem to examine in detail, but some idea of Lydgate's rhetorical strategy may be gathered from an analysis of several crucial passages. The place to begin is with the Temple itself, the description of which constitutes the 'frame' for the ensuing prayers that are offered within it.¹²³ The sleepless

narrator, "al desolate for constreint of my wo,/ The longe nyght waloing to and fro" (11-12), finally is taken by "a sodein dedeli slepe" and "Rauysshed in spirit" to

a temple of glas--
I nyste how, ful fer in wildirness--
That founded was: as bi liklynesse,
Not opon stele, but on a craggy roche,
Like ise ifore.

(16-20)

Several of these details (like the mid-winter December setting for the dream) look back to Chaucer's House of Fame, but Lydgate conflates the image from Book I of Venus' glass temple or "chirche" surrounded by a forbidding desert (here a "wildirness") with the image of the unstable foundation of Fame's Palace in Book III ("A roche of yse, and not of stel"). He thereby gives his own temple, "this grisli dredful place" (23), a new allegorical signification by making explicit what had only been suggested in Chaucer's poem, the connection between the two great divinities, Venus and Fortuna (Fame).¹²⁴ Together, the image cluster seems to denote the false splendor and insubstantiality of passion, and possibly through the association with Fortuna, the arbitrariness of success in love. The temple glass, however, is just one of the many ambivalent images of the poem. For medieval mythographers glass, in addition to suggesting the vanity (brittleness) of worldly goods, had also a spiritual significance, deriving from the description of the New Jerusalem in Apoc.21:18-21. Pierre Bersuire, for example, interprets the glass of that city as a symbol for the clarity of vision and purity of

condition in the heavenly Paradise or Church.¹²⁵ As we shall see, by the end of the poem Lydgate will have transformed Venus' temple whose "feble fundament" makes it the very image of fickle instability in love into a heavenly Parnassus where is celebrated the durable accord of the lovers:

Eternalli, bi bonde of assuraunce
The cnott is knytt which may not ben vnbound.
(1229-30)¹²⁶

The same indeterminacy noted in regard to the Temple's exterior continues with the painted figures on the walls inside. After the dreamer "hade long gone and sought" entrance to the temple, observing the circular shape of the structure and the sculpture wrought on its outside (details which, incidentally, give the effect of permanence and stability to the hall), he finds a wicket gate, and moving inside, sees

depeynt opon euere wal,
From est to west, ful many a faire image
Of sondri louers, lich as thei were of age
Isette in ordre, aftir thei were trwe.
(44-7)

Before individualizing the love-portraits the dreamer first observes them as a group, noticing that all of them are represented in various postures of supplication to Venus:

And, as me thought, I saughe somme sit and stonde,
And some kneling with billis in hir honde,
And some with compleint, woful and pitous,
With doleful chere to putten to Venus,
So as she sate fleting in the se.
(49-53)

As with the temple setting, the image of Venus that domin-

ates the tableau within is a borrowing from Chaucer, either from the House of Fame where the dreamer recognizes his surroundings as the Temple of Venus

for in portreyture
I sawgh anoon-ryght her figure
Naked fletinge in a see.
(HF, 131-3)

or from the description of the goddess in the Knight's Tale:

The statue of Venus, glorious for to see,
was naked fleting in the large see.
And from the navel down al covered was
With wawes grene, and bright as any glas.
(CT.A.1955-8)

Is this Botticellian figure Venus creatrix, the one "we could think of," in Bennett's estimation, "as a deputy of Natura," or is she the other, "vulgarly called the god of love" as Boccaccio distinguished her, the unlawful and lascivious Venus of mythographers such as Fulgentius whom Lydgate paraphrases in the Troy-Book:

And therefore Venus fleteth in a see,
To shewe the trouble, and aduersyteē
That is in loue, and in hir stormy lawe
Which is byset with many sturdy wawe.
(TB, II,2544-7)¹²⁷

Certainly many of the paintings the dreamer sees in the Temple are examples of "shipwrecked" loves or misdirected passions,¹²⁸ and the hall itself is filled with a miscellaneous throng of supplicants who make graphically clear the results of such desire as represented by the foam-born goddess: "sobbing teris," lamentations of "wo and pain," "ful pitous sounes," sighs, and complaints "sore with peping and with rage." They complain of all the possible frustra-

tions to which the lover is subject, including the by now familiar list of personified abstractions: Ielousie, Daunger, Disdain, fals suspecioun, and Riches:

Hou he with Tresour doth his besines
 To wynnen al, againes kynd and ryght,
 Wher trw louers haue noon force ne myght.
 (176-8)

The individual portraits of the lovers figured on the walls only underscore the ambiguous symbolism of the goddess. The gallery includes scenes representing such lovers as Dido and Penelope, Phyllis and Lucesse, Medea and Alceste, Palamon and Phoebus, Griselda and Isolde as well as Jupiter's rape of Europa, Vulcan catching Venus and Mars in his invisible net, and Mercury's wedding to Philology. Lists like this of famous lovers were a rhetorical commonplace and a favorite of both Chaucer and Lydgate,¹²⁹ but like other topoi we have seen Lydgate adapting, it was no rigid or mechanical convention. The painted figures are not a haphazard collection of names "evidence only of Lydgate's encyclopaedic tendencies,"¹³⁰ as Pearsall believes, but a meaningful merging and combining of various traditions. The chaste and lawful loves of a Griselda or Lucesse stand side by side with other lovers whose presence brings an awareness of the more equivocal aspects of earthly passion--Paris, Helen, Isolde, Tristram, Thisbe, and Dido come, via Chaucer's Parliament, from the fifth canto of Dante's Inferno. The Venus whose temple this is seems to be both the "honest and legitimate" subvicaria who smiles on marriage (Penelope, Alceste, Griselda, Pala-

mon, Mercury-Philology) and the goddess who incites to love paramour (Tristram-Isolde, Phyllis-Demophon, Phoebus-Daphne). Thus like the inscribed gateways to the Garden of Love in the Parliament these paintings provide not so much a contrast between kinds of love as a graphic emblem of the power of love and of the possibilities inherent in love itself. As such they provide a fitting backdrop for the love-dilemma of the Knight and Lady who 'hang in the balance.'

Especially interesting is the reference to the Vulcan-Venus-Mars triangle. Unlike the similar reference in A Complaynt of a Loveres Lyfe, there is nothing in Lydgate's words here that indicates what his view of Vulcan or Mars is: moral or immoral, ridiculous or respectable. In context the allusion remains uncommitted, neutral:

There saugh I also hou that Mars was take
Of Vulcanus, and with Venus found
And with the cheynes invisible bound.
(126-8)

Since the story had been regularly interpreted by medieval moralizers as a warning against inequality in marriage (Venus refusing to love the ugly Vulcan no matter how much he claimed her as his wife), these chains have a special function in our poem which also deals with a mal mariée and a love triangle. The image is first used by the Lady to explain her painful situation to Venus:

Mi worship sauf, I faile eleccioun:
Again al right, bothe of God and Kynd,
Ther to be knit vndir subieccion:
Fro whens ferre ar both witte and mynde,
Mi thought gothe forthe, mi bodi is behind,

For I am here and yonde my remembraunce;
 Atwixen two so hang I in balaunce....
 And thus I stond, departed euen on tweyn
 Of wille and dede ilaced in a chaine.
 (342-55)

Venus answers this prayer by promising to reward the Lady's patient suffering (like that of Dorigen, Griselda, and Penelope) by setting afire with her brand "him that ye cherissh nov so wel/ In honest maner withoute offencioun" (428-9). The Lady thanks Venus for her grace in 'converting' the Knight "Fulli to bene at my subieccioun/ Withoute chaunge or transmutacioun" (492-3), and the first part of the poem ends with Venus admonishing her devotee that no matter what adversity Fortuna may bring, she keep her heart

in oo degre
 To loue him best, for nothing that ye feine,
 Whom I haue bound so lowe vndir your cheine.
 (517-23)

The focus has been shifted from the Lady's loveless subjection to her husband to her dominance over the Knight. Such a shift in focus, as we shall see, represents only a partial solution to the love-dilemma of the poem, but it is important to watch how Lydgate integrates this stereotyped situation into his overall purpose. On the one hand we might observe that Venus' 'enchaining' of the Knight to the Lady can be regarded as accordant with Natura's own purpose, for Natura insists that true love be based on the principle of free election. "She will have," as Bennett puts it, "no forced marriages, no coupling, in

Langland's phrase, of a young wench with an 'old feble', leading as it does to the adultery and 'derne love' of the Merchant's Tale, and so to discord, the hindering of generation, and the restricting of Nature's fecundity."¹³¹

Thus among the supplicants to Venus in the Temple the dreamer had seen

maydens yung of age,
That pleined sore with peping and with rage
That thei were coupled, againes al nature,
With croked elde that mai not long endure
Forto perfourme the lust of loues plai:
For it ne sit not vnto fresshe May
Forto be coupled to oold Ianuari.

(179-85, my italics)

Similarly, another group had appeared in "gret rage," those that

were married in her tendir age
Withoute fredom of eleccioun,
Wher loue hath seld domynacioun,
For loue, at laarge and at liberte,
Would freli chese and not with such trete.¹³²

(210-14)

There is no evidence in the poem that the Lady's marriage was a forced one or that it was a January-May match. It is sufficient (and tactful) for Lydgate's purpose simply that the marriage be presented as a loveless one from the woman's viewpoint. At the same time, however, Venus' incitement of the Knight places him in the same 'unnatural' position as the Lady had been in, with the same loss of liberty. His first speech in Part II makes his attitude clear:

"Allas, what thing mai this be?
That nou am bound that whilom was so fre
And went at laarge at myn eleccioun,

Nou am I caught vnder subieccioun
 Forto bicomme a verre homagere
 To god of Loue, where that, er I come here
 Felt in myn hert right nought of loues peine:
 But nov of nwe within his fire cheyne
 I am enbraced, so that I mai not striue,
 To loue and serue whiles that I am on lyue
 The goodli fressh in the tempil yonder
 I saugh right nov--
 (567-78)

The similarity of situation is further indicated by the similar expressions used to describe the Knight's position:

Thus stand I euen bitwix life and deth
 To loue and serue while that I haue breth...
 Hanging in balaunce bitwix hope and drede
 Withoute comfort, remedie or rede.
 (625-6;641-2)

In his first formal plaint to Venus, however, the Knight resigns himself to his "maledie," recognizing it as ordained "Bi influence of your bemys clere" (718). He implores Venus, therefore, that she "Beth gracious and shapeth remedie" (721) for him, since his only desire is now to serve fully "That goodli fressh, so womanli of chere,/ Withoute chaunge, while I haue life and mynde" (731-2). Much of the remainder of his long prayer is thus given over to a description of "hir that is a quene of womanhed" (766), a description which in effect has the crucial function of making clear the reason why the Knight's "subieccioun" involves no real loss of liberty. At the end of his complaint the Knight, like the birds in The Floure of Curtesy, freely binds himself to the Lady (agrees to her "eleccioun") in recognition of her worth:

For hert, bodi, thought, life, lust and alle,
 With al my reson and alle my ful mynde,

And fiue wittes, of oon assent I bind
 To hir seruice withouten eny strife,
 And make hir princesse of my deth or life.
 (830-4)

The scene is now set for the final appearance of the chain image. The dreamer watches as Venus 'binds' both lovers "with a golden cheyne" (1106) to her law, commanding them honorably to "abide a litel space" until other already fated events occur (presumably the husband is to disappear from the scene):

That here mai be of al youre olde smertis
 A ful relese vndir ioy assured.
 And that oo lok be of youre bothe hertes
 Shet with my key of gold so wel depured,
 Oonli in signe that ye haue recured
 Youre hole desire here in this holi place,
 Within my temple, nou in the yere of grace.
 (1222-8)

To celebrate "this accord, bi gret solempnyte" (1300) Caliope and her sister Muses, as well as Orpheus and Amphion and all within the Temple sing a beautiful "ballade nwe" in honor of Venus:

'Fairest of sterres, that with youre persant light
 And with the cherisshing of youre stremes clere,
 Causen in loue hertes to be light
 Oonli thurugh shynyng of youre glade spere,
 Nou laude and pris, O Venus, ladi dere,
 Be to your name, that haue withoute synne
 This man fortunued his ladi forto wyne.

'Willi planet, O Esperus, so bright,
 That woful hertes can appese and stere,
 And euer ar redi thurugh your grace and myght
 To help al tho that bie loue so dere,
 And haue power hertis to set on fire,
 Honor to yow of all that bene hereinne,
 That haue this man his ladi made to wyne.

'O myghti goddess, daister after nyght,
 Glading the morov whan ye done appere,
 To voide derknes thurugh fresshnes of your sight,

Oonli with twinkeling of youre plesaunt chere,
 To yov we thank, louers that ben here,
 That se this man--and neuer forto twyn--
 Fortuned haue his ladi forto wyne.'
 (1341-61)

The celestial Venus here invoked is, as we have seen, the Venus associated with chaste and natural love, with Venus verticordia. Her golden chain, which ties the lovers' knot, is thus undoubtedly meant by Lydgate to suggest that "faire cheyne of love" which is the subject of Duke Theseus' speech in the Knight's Tale (CT.A.2987-3016) and Troilus' song at the end of Book III (1774-71). As such it is a symbol of universal matrimony, both of the love "that governeth erthe and see, and hath also commandement to the hevене" as well as of the love which on a micro-cosmic level "halt togidres peples joyned with an holy boond, and knytteth sacrement of mariages of chaste loves."¹³³ If our poem does not end as the Knight's Tale does, with a ceremony that "highte matrimoigne or mariage," it does end with the free and mutual "accord"¹³⁴ of the lovers. "GrovnDED opon honeste" (870) and without taint of "jalousie," their love qualifies as Boethius' "chaste bond," harmonious with the order of the universe.¹³⁵ What is especially important to note, however, is that Lydgate's image of Venus' golden knot functions as no simple solution to the love-problem in the poem; rather its effect is achieved by a careful accretion of meanings from various contexts within the narrative including the literal chains of Vulcan's net, the chain in which the

Lady is held (positive law or marriage), the fiery chain of desire in which she holds the Knight (a steel chain, as Venus says in line 1120), and the golden chain of love throughout an ordered universe.

The musical coda to the dream likewise offers a fitting moral and aesthetic conclusion. The "armony" of the Muses' song (1304) and the "heuenli melodie" (1362) of the Ballade both are images of that "mundana musica," the term usually used to describe the concord which governs the elements, the seasons, and the stars but occasionally attributed to the activity of the heavenly Venus. Bernard Silvestris, for example, calls the celestial Venus "mundana musica" to distinguish her from the earthly goddess: "We read that there are two Venuses, a legitimate goddess and a goddess of lechery. We say that the legitimate Venus is 'mundana musica,' that is, the equal proportion of worldly things, which some call 'Astrea' and others 'natural justice.' For she is in the elements, in the stars, in times, in animate things. But the shameful Venus, the goddess of sensuality, we call concupiscence of the flesh, which is the mother of all fornication."¹³⁶ As the principle of harmony and order the Venus within whose temple the lovers are knit "Eternalli, bi bonde of assuraunce" (1229) will eventually ("in time") resolve the mal mariée of the Lady but without violating the matrimonial bond which mirrors her golden law of love. Her Temple itself finally appears not as the earthly palace

Chaucer shows us in the Knight's Tale with a "garden" and the porter "Idleness" next "al the mount of Citheroun," but as a heavenly Parnassus where the Muses, Orpheus, and Amphion weave a song of praise in honor of an eternal and true affection.

What Lydgate seems to have attempted in the Temple of Glas was a poem that would reflect the paradoxical and ambivalent nature of love. On every level of the poem we can look, therefore, and find evidence of Lydgate's informing purpose--in the description of the Temple itself, in the catalogue of wall paintings, in the use of the chain image, and most especially, in the character of Venus herself. The various invocations to the goddess, for example, are sufficient to establish the oblique and ironic context of her presence in the poem:

O ladi Venus, modir of Cupide
 That al this world hast in gouernaunce
 And hertes high that hauteyn ben of pride
 Enclynyst mekeli to thin obeissaunce,
 Causer of ioie, relese of penaunce,
 And with thi stremes canst eueri thing discerne
 Thurugh heuenli fire of loue that is eterne.
 (321-7)

Heighest of high, quene and emperice,
 Goddes of Loue, of goode yit the best,
 That thurugh your beaute withouten eny vice
 Whilom conquered the appel at the fest
 That Iubiter thurugh his hygh request
 To al the goddesse aboue celestial
 Made in his paleis most imperial:
 (461-7)

Redresse of sorow, O Citheria,
 That with the stremes of thi plesaunt hete
 Gladest the contre of al Cirrea
 Where thou hast chosen thi paleis and thi sete,

Whos bright bemes ben wasshen and oft wete
 In the riuer of Elicon the well:
 (701-6)

O goodli planet, O ladi Venus bright,
 That ye youre sone of his deite
 (Cupid I mene) that with his dredful myght
 And with his brond that is so clere of lighte
 Hir herte so to fire and to mark
 As ye me whilom brente with a spark.
 (835-40)

For she it is that bindeth and can constreyne
 Hertes in oon, this fortunate planete,
 And can relesen louers of her peyne,
 To turne fulli hir bittir into swete.
 Nou blisful goddes, doun fro thi sterri sete,
 Vs to fortune caste your stremes shene,
 Like as ye cnow that we trouthe mene.
 (1096-1102)

Venus is both the deity whose brand seems still to signify the traditional meaning of sexual passion (we are told of this "firy bronde" in Reson and Sensuallyte "Hoc fingunt poete propter ardorem libidinis" [1578ff.]) yet concerning the Knight she promises the Lady that she will "b'aspectes of my benygne face,/ Make him t'eschewe euere synne and vice" (449-50). What is especially impressive, then, about Lydgate's handling of the poem's rhetorical detail is his facility in weaving through the structure on various levels a common thread which finally provides at least a temporary equilibrium or point of balance for the moral-aesthetic ambivalencies of the work, a balance which in retrospect is seen to constitute the formal basis of the whole poem--this from a poet who, we have been told again and again, has little or no structural sense.

Footnotes to Chapter III

¹Spurgeon, I, 70.

²Spearing, p. 66.

³Payne, The Key of Remembrance, p. 18.

⁴Hammond, English Verse, pp. 153, 80, 96.

⁵It is generally agreed among scholars that Lydgate's source for The Siege of Thebes was a prose redaction of the Roman de Thèbes. Those who have worked most closely with the text, Erdmann and Ekwall (the editors of the poem for the EETS), and Renoir believe that the nearest immediate source extant was the Roman de Edipus, though on a few occasions Lydgate seems to have borrowed details from another redaction, the Ystoire de Thèbes. Pearsall, in pursuing his anti-Renoir line, takes the extreme position that in the "absence of a known source," it is difficult to credit Lydgate for any of the improvements in the narrative he made in working from the Roman de Thèbes as the editors of the text and Renoir claim. Nevertheless, in referring to Lydgate's French sources in this dissertation I am assuming that we may consider the Roman de Edipus--with the few details from the Ystoire de Thèbes--as the original of The Siege of Thebes. For a thorough discussion of the whole problem, see the notes to the EETS edition (II, 6-10), Renoir's long footnote on p. 161 of his study, and the articles referred to there. Pearsall's remarks are found on p. 153 of his book, John Lydgate.

⁶For examples of Lydgate's rhetorical economy, see Pearsall, John Lydgate, p. 154.

⁷Renoir, pp. 121-6. Renoir, however, cites these modifications as an indication of Lydgate's growing 'humanistic' attitude toward classical antiquity, a position I do not believe is valid. The changes Lydgate does make in his characterizations, as I explain, are made for rhetorical purposes.

⁸Ibid., pp. 134, 119.

⁹Ayers, 471-2. Although I do not agree with Ayers' central thesis concerning the reasons for the kind of narrative structure in the poem, I do think his article is still the best available on The Siege of Thebes in its understanding of the poem's details, and I am indebted to a number of his insights throughout my discussion.

¹⁰Ibid., 473.

¹¹Spearing, pp. 16-18 sees this diffuseness as typical of medieval narrative, deriving from its origin in an oral tradition of presentation.

¹²Although the school rhetoricians had no special name for the kind of rhetorical contrasts we have in the poem, both Cicero and Boethius speak of a topos or common-place called locus ex oppositis which might lend itself to the 'topical' structure and development of a narrative such as in The Siege of Thebes. See Cicero, De Inventione, I, xxiv.34-xxviii.43 and Boethius, De differentiis topicis, ii-iv.

¹³Several readers of the poem have pointed out how conspicuous is the amount of advice the poem offers concerning the conduct of royalty. Renoir, for example, counts twenty-two instances of advice to the ruler, or 555 lines out of 4716. He remarks: "Because the most immediate problem facing England during the first quarter of the fifteenth century was the war with France, the story of the war between Thebes and Argos not only offered countless opportunities for pointedly relevant advice on the conduct of royalty in time of war, but would also be fashioned into an over-sized exemplum to be foisted upon the dashing and reckless young King who had led the English at Agincourt....Thus in 1420-1, Lydgate's concern with the conduct of princes had already grown strong enough to prove possibly instrumental in the selection of his subject-matter" (pp. 112-3). See also Ayers, 467-8.

¹⁴It is worthwhile to observe also that in the jargon of the rhetoricians the rise of a hero or nation was a special topos called an effectio while their fall was termed a corruptio. In these terms the action of The Siege of Thebes may be said to consist of the major effectio--the rise of Thebes--as well as the secondary rise of Tydeus as hero. Both are then balanced against the fall of the city and the hero, Thebes and Tydeus.

¹⁵The chronological sequence that results in the poem from the addition of the Amphion material is not simply an attempt to follow the ordo naturalis proper for the historical subject matter. Rather the symmetry given the entire structure (see footnote 14) by the Amphion beginning (nothing of which is in the Roman de Edipus or Ystoire de Thebes) carries with it tonal and thematic significance as well.

¹⁶Ayers, 469.

¹⁷Renoir, p. 5 has called attention to Thomas Young's opinion (1754) that Lydgate's account of the marriage of

Oedipus was something "Chaucer cannot surpass."

¹⁸Chapter II, pages 117-22 above.

¹⁹It is to the point, I think, to mention that the "joining" of wisdom or sapience and eloquence was a rhetorical ideal well-known to the later Middle Ages, not only through Martianus Capella's allegory but through a variety of sources: Cicero, Augustine, Rabanus Maurus, Bernard Silvestris, John of Salisbury, and a host of other writers. See, for example, Robertson's introduction to his translation of Augustine's On Christian Doctrine (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1958), pp. ix-xxi and his Preface to Chaucer, pp. 340-6. The poem under discussion is particularly interesting in this regard since its action involves the failure of this ideal in the persons of Adrastus (wisdom) and Amphiorax (eloquence) to find a peaceful settlement to the war issue.

²⁰Cf. Renoir, "The Binding Knot: Three Uses of One Image in Lydgate's Poetry," Neophilologus, XLI (1957), 202-4. Although Renoir just mentions Lydgate's use of the image in The Siege of Thebes as a metaphor for marriage and does not discuss its function there, his central point about its use is valid for the Thebes poem as well: "Despite frequent occurrences, however, the image does not grow stale, for Lydgate handles it with so masterly a hand that it always fits the context in which it appears, both emphasizing its tone and impressing its lesson upon the reader" (202).

²¹Ayers, 469. Many years after The Siege of Thebes had been written, Lydgate retold part of the Oedipus episode in The Fall of Princes where we find quite a different, more sympathetic treatment of Oedipus. Yet even here it is still the unfortunate marriage that Lydgate singled out as the pre-eminent cause of the ruin of Thebes:

Thus for ther ire and fals discencioun,
 Alle the lordis and al the cheualrie
 Were slayn off Grece and also off the toun,
 And roote off all, myn auctour list nat lie,
 Was fals alliaunce and fraternal envie;
 And cheef ground, with al the surplusage,
 Who serche a-riht was onkyndli mariage.
 (FP, I, 3746-52)

²²Pearsall, John Lydgate, pp. 151, 153-4.

²³Ayers explains the "inordinate emphasis" upon the events, including the Oedipus section, which lead up to the actual siege--almost two-thirds of the poem--as necessary to Lydgate's plan for "delineating the moral pre-

conditions from which the war followed in disastrous consequence" (471).

²⁴The Siege of Thebes has often been called a companion piece to Chaucer's Knight's Tale because its content deals with the events at Thebes prior to Theseus' intervention, the point where Chaucer's poem begins. It is likely, however, that Lydgate saw in the rival political claims of Ethiocles and Polymetus for the throne an interesting parallel to the rival amatory claims of Palamon and Arcite for the object of their desire, the fair Emily.

²⁵Renoir, The Poetry of John Lydgate, p. 128.

²⁶For the best discussion of the thematic possibilities of the sapientia et fortitudo topos in a narrative work, see R.E. Kaske, "Sapientia et Fortitudo as the Controlling Theme of Beowulf," SP, LV (1958), 423-57.

²⁷For Lydgate's reworking of Amphiorax' character, see Renoir, The Poetry of John Lydgate, pp. 123-6.

²⁸Cf. Lydgate's comment on the peaceful reign of Macedonia:

This Macedonye, as be old writyngis,
Whilom was had in ful gret reuerence,
Because onli it floured in too thynges,
Bothe in knihthod & souereyn sapience;
Mars ther bi manhod, Pallas be prudence:
And whil thes tweyne hadde gouernaunce,
Of al weelfare thei hadde suffisaunce.
(FP, V, 1163-9)

See also the portrait of Epaminondas (FP, III, 4600ff) where a similar point is made.

²⁹Renoir, The Poetry of John Lydgate, p. 130.

³⁰Lydgate ends the poem in two of the ways recommended by the school rhetoricians, per epilogum, that is, per recapitulationem sententiae, by summing up the 'sentence' or moral of the whole combined with the praise of God. The ending, however, probably owes less to rhetorical precept than to imitation of Chaucer: his closing prayer beginning "And he that is both on and two and thre,/ Ek thre in on and souereyn lord of pes...." (4704-5) looks to both Chaucer (Troilus V, 1863-9) and Dante (Paradiso, XIV, 28-30). Lydgate knew the end of Troilus and Criseyde quite well, but he may have had it especially in mind at the close of The Siege of Thebes since Cassandra's interpretation of Troilus' dream (V, 1450-1533) included a summary of the Thebaid of Statius.

³¹Cf. 272,397,434,887,978,1248,1572-3,1977,etc.

³²Cf. the contemporary statement on the city as an imago mundi with its interesting parallels to Lydgate's poem in Mircea Eliade, The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion, tr. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1959; orig. in French 1957), pp. 47-8: "Since 'our world' is a cosmos, any attack from without threatens to turn it into chaos. And as 'our world' was founded by imitating the paradigmatic work of the gods, the cosmogony, so the enemies who attack it are assimilated to the enemies of the gods, the demons, and especially to the archdemon, the primordial dragon conquered by the gods at the beginning of time. An attack on 'our world' is equivalent to an act of revenge by the mythical dragon, who rebels against the work of the gods, the cosmos, and struggles to annihilate it. 'Our' enemies belong to the power of chaos. Any destruction of a city is equivalent to a retrogression to chaos. Any victory over the attackers reiterates the paradigmatic victory of the gods over the dragon (that is, over chaos)" (author's italics).

³³I am thinking of Milton's lines in Paradise Lost where Sin prophesies:

Till I in Man residing through the Race,
His thoughts, his looks, words, actions all infect.
(X, 607-8)

Arnold Williams, The Common Expositor (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1948), p. 228 summarizes the commentators on Genesis: "In the beginning man was given a perfect language to go with the perfect nature in which he was created. Then, as a result of sin, this perfect language was, like human nature, corrupted." It is quite likely Lydgate saw some such parallel in the story of Thebes.

³⁴Cf. Peck's note on Gower: "Since Christ himself is God's Word, the Second Person being the expression of the First Person, abuse of language is a sin against Truth. Gower follows the Platonic-Aristotelian tradition in which truth (not simply persuasion) is a fundamental requisite of Rhetoric. Words used for persuasion, regardless of truth, are false rhetoric." Confessio Amantis, p. 516.

³⁵Cf. Payne on the Troilus, pp. 177-88.

³⁶Pearsall, John Lydgate, p. 155.

³⁷For Lydgate's sources see Part IV of Bergen's edition of The Fall which has generous selections from both the Latin and French.

³⁸Cited in Bergen, I, x-xi.

³⁹The blame for the destruction of Boccaccio's carefully arranged perspective must be laid to Laurence's treatment. For the most part Lydgate's structural additions only carried further those already made or suggested by Laurence. For a brief account of the similarities and difference of the three works, see Hammond, English Verse, pp. 150-5 and Pearsall, John Lydgate, pp. 230-3. For revealing comments on Lydgate's abbreviations of his source, which serve as a corrective to the impression that Lydgate did nothing but add to the French, see Herbert G. Wright, Boccaccio in England from Chaucer to Tennyson (London: The Athlone Press, 1957), pp. 17-8.

⁴⁰On Lydgate's use of the dream-vision form, see pp. 191-5 and footnote 48 below.

⁴¹Pearsall, John Lydgate, p. 241.

⁴²Lewis, The Allegory of Love, pp. 199-201. See also Peck, Confessio Amantis, p. xiv.

⁴³Pearsall, Gower and Lydgate, pp. 12, 17.

⁴⁴Lydgate does attempt to enliven the narrative at several points. To vary the series of narratives, for example, he retains Boccaccio's device of the dispute: between Atreus and Thyestes (I), Fortune and Poverty (III), Boccaccio and Brunhilde (IX). He likewise uses the original set-pieces (or his substitutions for them) and his own Envoys to maintain some sense of narrative rhythm. More original are two other techniques: first, his running jokes against women which "with their humour and elementary irony" Pearsall judges "amongst Lydgate's happier achievements" (John Lydgate, p. 237); and secondly, his dramatization of the difficulties of his task: his thanks to Gloucester for his "bounteous largesse," then his repeated plea for help, his tiredness as he grows old and his resolve to finish despite the lack of assistance, and finally his difficulty in translating "Frenssh uncouth compendiously compyled." All of these strategies, however, are incidental in their effect upon the overall structure, not integral to it as in Gower's device of the confession.

⁴⁵Pearsall, John Lydgate, p. 247.

⁴⁶Bronson, In Search of Chaucer, pp. 98-9.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, p. 99.

⁴⁸Cf. Louis Brewer Hall on the rhetorical strategy of the dream-vision in Boccaccio's original design: "This

use of a vision framework enables Boccaccio to keep the general order of historical time, yet still permits him to enliven the presentation with continual motion and variety. The framework also allowed him to present two or more of the personages involved in a single historical event. We have the stories of Priam and Agamemnon, of Gaius Marius, Pompey, and Anthony. It is a fundamental idea [sic] of The Fates of Illustrious Men that all rulers, conqueror and conquered, meet the same end, and the vision framework made this novel point of view seem natural." Giovanni Boccaccio, The Fates of Illustrious Men, tr. and abridged Louis Brewer Hall (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1965), p. xiii.

⁴⁹On Boccaccio as an Authority for the later Middle Ages, see Wright, pp. 3-4. It is interesting to note that Laurence had told his version as a first-person narrator. See Hammond, English Verse, p. 154.

⁵⁰Hammond has shown how Lydgate on several occasions worked up material which Gloucester provided him or which he found in Gloucester's library. The section 'On the Governance of Princes' in Book II, which replaces a much harsher passage in the original, was probably taken from a copy of John of Salisbury's Policraticus in Humphrey's library. For other examples, see Hammond, English Verse, p. 93.

⁵¹For Lydgate's handling of his sources, see Bergen's notes in Part IV of the EETS edition of The Fall. A particularly interesting example of Lydgate's technique is afforded by the story of Lucrece. He tells her tragedy twice (II, 932-1148 and III, 1002-1344). The second version follows the 'traditional' account of the story as it appears in Livy, Ovid, Jean de Meun, Gower, Chaucer, Boccaccio, and Laurence. The first version, however, is based on a 'Declamation' by Coluccio Salutati which Gloucester owned and which he ordered Lydgate to use.

⁵²Bergen, IV, 148.

⁵³There was some impetus in the French for tracing out the Theseus-Phaedra-Hippolytus material. Laurence does summarize Theseus' involvement with Ariadne and Phaedra, but the passage is much expanded by Lydgate.

⁵⁴Pearsall, Gower and Lydgate, p. 28. Cf. also Hammond, English Verse, p. 80.

⁵⁵For Lydgate and the high style, see below p. 219ff.

⁵⁶Such a judgment, of course, will depend on various factors in the particular story itself (or their absence) and its position in relation to the other stories in the

collection.

⁵⁷For Lydgate's sources, see Hammond, English Verse, pp. 164-6; Bergen, IV, 170-1; and Renoir, The Poetry of John Lydgate, p. 22.

⁵⁸The Works of John Gower, ed. G.C. Macaulay, 4 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1901), II, 493.

⁵⁹Lewis, The Allegory of Love, pp. 201-9.

⁶⁰For the medieval understanding of the term tragedy, see F.N. Robinson's note to line 1933 of The Monk's Tale in his edition of Chaucer.

⁶¹The Latin Works of Dante Alighieri, pp. 78-9.

⁶²Ibid., p. 349.

⁶³For the transformation of the classical sublime (elevated but not necessarily rhetorical) into the medieval high style (decorative and ornate) see Auerbach, Literary Language and Its Public in Late Latin Antiquity and in the Middle Ages, tr. Ralph Manheim (New York: Pantheon Books, 1965; orig. in German 1958), pp. 190-201. Taking the Aeneid as his example of the true high style in antiquity, Auerbach argues that this style was lost in the ascendancy of sophistic rhetoric during the first century of the Empire and only "reborn" in Dante. The ornamented high style of medieval Latin, deriving from sophistic's elaborate epideictic style, continued in the vernaculars but in a less flamboyant manner. Indeed the conventional high style of the courtly roman is actually what Auerbach says antiquity would have called the middle style, elegant and pleasing. Definitions and labels, however, need not be insisted on too severely since even in the classical period there were no rigid boundaries between the three major stylistic divisions. For further discussion of the medieval theory of styles, see the remarks (which contain references to late articles by Curtius and Auerbach) of Claes Schaar, The Golden Mirror: Studies in Chaucer's Descriptive Technique and Its Literary Background (Lund: C.W.K. Gleerup, 1967), pp. 493-504.

⁶⁴Pearsall, John Lydgate, p. 248.

⁶⁵Hammond, English Verse, pp. 81-2.

⁶⁶Lydgate's Temple of Glass, ed. Josef Schick, EETS, E.S. 60 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1891), p. cxxxiv. See also Hammond's remarks on Lydgate's style in English Verse, pp. 153-4.

⁶⁷Lewis, The Allegory of Love, p. 240. Cf. IV, 1723-9; I, 2255-61.

⁶⁸Norton-Smith, Lydgate, p. 127.

⁶⁹Howard R. Patch, The Goddess Fortuna in Medieval Literature (New York: Octagon Books, 1967; orig. pub. 1927), p. 55.

⁷⁰By way of contrast, cf. the number of such 'familiar' images in Chaucer's poetry. See, for example, Muscatine's remarks on this feature of Chaucer's style in his essay, "The Canterbury Tales: Style of the Man and Style of the Work," in Chaucer and Chaucerians, pp. 90-3.

⁷¹The image of Fortune pulling one's feathers seems to have been proverbial. Cf. the similar lines:

Than can Fortune, the fals enchaunteresse,
Off wilfulnesse, and fond occasioun
A-geyn this Cadmus, & maad his renoun dulle,
And off his kynrede, bi fals collusioun,
She gan a-wey the brihrest fethres pulle.
(FP, I, 2058-62)

And whan his glorie was most cleer of liht,
And his noblesse shon hiest atte fulle,
Fortune gan thoruh hir chaungable myht
Of his prosperite the fethres for to pulle.
(FP, IV, 1065-8)

Lydgate may have borrowed the image from the Troilus where Chaucer makes the fall of Troy an emblem of the same mutability he epitomizes in Troilus' love:

Fortune....
Gan pulle away the fetheres brighte of Troie
Fro day to day, til they be bare of joie.
(V, 1541-7)

Even this colloquial image may have been an extension of the traditional concept of Fortune as trapper-of-birds. Cf. Patch: "Similarly, Fortune catches men on limed twigs, or snares them as if they were birds. They flutter about in the air until attracted by the luring branches, and then they are stuck in the lime; or she entices and entraps them. Once having captured men, she puts her bridle on them and thenceforth they are subject to her sway" (pp. 82-3).

⁷²For the flower as a type of worldly mutability, see Norton-Smith, Lydgate, p. 138.

⁷³Ibid., p. 162.

⁷⁴Pearsall, John Lydgate, pp. 93,97.

⁷⁵Norton-Smith, Lydgate, pp. 161-2.

⁷⁶Pearsall, John Lydgate, pp. 91,93.

⁷⁷Norton-Smith, Lydgate, p. 162.

⁷⁸Norton-Smith does not discuss The Flooure of Curtesy. His comments on the Temple of Glas can be found in his notes to the poem, pp. 176-9 of his anthology. For Pearsall's remarks on The Flooure of Curtesy and the Temple of Glas, see John Lydgate, pp. 97-115.

⁷⁹Courtly love is a vague and somewhat misleading term. I use it basically to describe what Chaucer calls 'fyn lovyng.' Though this love may be honest and chaste, Lydgate, like Chaucer, was certainly aware of its darker implications. For readings on my use of the term, see the articles by Brewer on Chaucer, "Love and Marriage in Chaucer's Poetry," MLR, 49 (1954), 461-4; "Natural Love in 'The Parlement of Foules,'" EC, 5 (1955), 407-13; also the article by Gervase Matthew, "Marriage and Amour Courtois in Late Fourteenth Century England," in Essays Presented to Charles Williams, ed. C.S. Lewis (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1947), pp. 128-35; and Robertson's chapters on the different types of medieval love, A Preface to Chaucer, pp. 391-463.

⁸⁰On the philosophical and literary traditions associated with these figures, see Patch, The Goddess Fortuna; E.C. Knowlton, "The Goddess Nature in Early Periods," JEGP, XIX (1920), 224-53; "Nature in Middle English," JEGP, XX (1921), 186-207; "Nature in Old French," MP, XX (1922), 309-29; "Nature in Early German," JEGP, XXIV (1925), 409-12; J.A.W. Bennett, The Parlement of Foules: An Interpretation (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957); Aldo Scaglione, Nature and Love in the Late Middle Ages (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963); and Barbara Bartholomew, Fortuna and Natura: A Reading of Three Chaucer Narratives (London: Mouton & Co., 1966).

⁸¹It is impossible to date with any accuracy the composition of these pieces. Both Norton-Smith and Pearsall are forced to make their guesses on the dates solely on the closeness of these poems' debt to Chaucerian models. Norton-Smith, Lydgate, p. 161 thus assigns them to a period between 1398-1412 while Pearsall, John Lydgate, p. 84 offers 1420 as the latest possible terminal point.

⁸²For comments on the two Venuses, see Bennett, pp. 93-100 and Robertson, Preface, pp. 124ff. Bennett's remarks on these lines seem especially unfair to Lydgate: "As this poem refers to St. Valentine's Day we should probably treat the phrase 'by custome of nature' (l.16)

as a reference to the goddess; but Lydgate (who a few lines later can speak of Venus and Cypride as different divinities) was perhaps not very clear, and not very much concerned, about the force of the words" (p. 211).

⁸³A similar thirst is felt by the lover in A Complaynt of a Loveres Lyfe where its meaning is made clear:

And I that had throug Daunger and Disdeyn
So drye a thrust, thoght I wolde assay
To tast a draghte of this welle....
(106-8)

Cf. also Robertson's comments on Troilus' love-thirst (I, 406) in A Preface, pp. 477-8.

⁸⁴Alain de Lille's The Complaint of Nature, tr. Douglas M. Moffat (New York: H. Holt and Company, 1908), p. 58. Another interesting parallel to the situation in Lydgate's poem is that in the Valentine poem of Oton de Grandson, Le Songe Saint Valentin. In this poem, a dream-vision, the dreamer witnesses an assembly of birds choosing their mates on St. Valentine's day and then, when the birds have all flown away, marvels at the ease with which the birds, in contrast to men, are able to chose as they please. In Grandson's poem, however, the difference between the love of the birds and the love of men is not one of kind but of degree. For bird and man "Amour est chouse naturelle" (340), but the demands of love upon men are greater than those upon the birds and success consequently more difficult. Moreover, Grandson does not make the narrator's reflections the focal point for an examination of the values of fine amour.

⁸⁵Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, Le Roman de la Rose, ed. Ernest Langlois, 5 vols. (Paris: Librairie Ancienne Edouard Champion, 1914-24), IV, pp. 39,45. Scaglione's comments are to be found in Nature and Love, pp. 38-9. Again, it is not necessary to see Natura as La Vieille sees her, the enemy of chastity and continence; indeed in Alain both Chastity and Hymen play important roles in Natura's scheme and it is this understanding of the goddess (via Chaucer) that Lydgate has in mind.

⁸⁶Cf. the use of these terms in Chaucer's Parliament where Natura says:

Ye knowe wel how, seynt Valentynys day,
By myn statute, & thorw myn gouernaunce,
Ye come for to cheese--and fle youre wey--
Youre makis, as I prike yow with plesaunce;
But natheles, myn ryghtful ordenaunce
May I nat lete for al this world to wynne,
That he that most is worthi shal begynne.
(386-92)

⁸⁷Patch, pp. 63-66.

⁸⁸On the use of this topos in medieval literature, see Robinson's note on line 9 of the Physician's Tale.

⁸⁹For a different view of Lydgate's ballade-envoy, see Arthur K. Moore, "Chaucer's Use of Lyric as an Ornament of Style," CL, III (1951), 45-6. Moore, after examining Chaucer's use of interpolated lyric, states that in the fifteenth century only Lydgate "seems to have made extensive use of the artifice," but "he obviously failed to understand its dramatic use." Thus of the three ballade-envoys which occur in Lydgate's works, including the one in The Floure of Curtesy, "not one is noteworthy."

⁹⁰Cf. Chaucer's Complaint of Mars and the Complaynt D'Amours. For comments on the Valentine tradition, see Brewer, The Parlement of Foulys (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, Ltd., 1960), pp. 3-7. Also of importance is John Stevens, Music and Poetry in the Early Tudor Court (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1961) who has called attention to the significance of the social milieu behind the courtly lyric as it existed at the English court between Chaucer and Wyatt, including the seasonal 'revel' at St. Valentine's Day. Stevens points out that much of this poetry was simply vers de societe, part of the ritual of the "game of love." Needless to say, I believe Lydgate here is playing the game "in earnest."

⁹¹Pearsall, John Lydgate, pp. 97-103.

⁹²One of the most distressing aspects of Pearsall's study, I find, is the frequent use he makes of machine terminology to describe Lydgate's poetic habits. For example: "Lydgate's mind, like a computer, operates thus on a binary system, which provides not only his philosophy but also his psychology" (p. 113).

⁹³Norton-Smith, Lydgate, p. 163.

⁹⁴Cf. Pearsall's comment, John Lydgate, p. 86: "Nature is not being imitated, but re-created, in the context of a formal tradition which lays stress not only on the beauty (decorum) of Nature but also on the ordered inevitability of its processes and on its usefulness." Pearsall's emphasis, however, is on the rhetorical surface of these lines whereas I am stressing the thematic import the lines carry.

⁹⁵For the iconology, see Erwin Panofsky, Studies in Iconology: Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1962; orig. pub. 1939), pp. 109-13. Cf. also a similar use of Natura or Kynde in

Chaucer's Book of the Duchess:

And wel ye woot, agaynes kynde
Hyt were to lyven in thys wyse;
For nature wolde nat suffyse
To noon erthly creature
Nat longe tyme to endure
Withoute slep and be in sorwe.
 And I ne may, ne nyght ne morwe,
 Slepe, and thus melancolye
 And drede I have for to dye
 Defaute of slep and hevynesse
 Hath sleyn my spirit of quyknesse
 That I have lost al lustyhede.
 (16-27; italics mine)

⁹⁶ Lydgate reverses the order of Chaucer's focal points. Instead of passing from a vision of Venus' Temple to the "hil of floures" on which is set "this noble goddesse Nature" (302-3). Lydgate begins with a description of Natura's beauties and moves to the "erber grene" for the Knight's courtly complaint.

⁹⁷ Pearsall, John Lydgate, p. 91.

⁹⁸ Lydgate may have had in mind Alain's description of the curative atmosphere of Natura's grove in the Anti-claudianus, I, iii.

⁹⁹ Norton-Smith sees Lydgate's park as "identifiable with Chaucer's idea of Nature" and as representing "whole-some, ordered nature," but he also denies its allegorical meaning: "The visit to a park and the description of the locus amoenus draws on Chaucer's Parlement, but Lydgate openly rejects that poem's significaciones, insisting that this is really not dream" (Lydgate, p. 162). For a more balanced view of pleasure parks, see Bennett's observations, Parlement, pp. 62-3.

¹⁰⁰ Norton-Smith, Lydgate, p. 164.

¹⁰¹ The transformed lovers are similar to those figures of the dead heroes which appear in the Hall of Natura that stands on a mountaintop in Alain's Anticlaudianus:

Hippolitus, once shamed and subdued
 By Venus' reins, rejoices, whilst she mourns
 That the disgrace is now obliterate....
 Once scorched by love, broken by Venus' power,
 Paris now fights against her.
 (I, 150-1; 179-80; Bennett's trans.)

Lydgate's reference to the Greek myths is also similar to the following lines from Marvell's "The Garden":

When we have run our Passions heat,
 Love hither makes his best retreat.
 The Gods, that mortal Beauty chase,
 Still in a Tree did end their race.
 Apollo hunted Daphne so,
 Only that she might Laurel grow.
 (25-30)

¹⁰²Cf. Scaglione, p. 34.

¹⁰³The narrator had already associated the idea of death with his sorrow in love (17), and the Knight, a more serious lover, continually joins the two ideas throughout his Complaint. See, for example, ll. 293, 318, 341, 357, 370, etc.

¹⁰⁴Or fountains, as his note on the 'fons Pegaseus' makes clear. Cf. also Robinson's note on line 581 of the House of Fame for the sources on regarding the Helicon as a fountain or spring.

¹⁰⁵Norton-Smith's notes are on pp. 126, 167.

¹⁰⁶Two other passages are worthy of note. In the Temple of Glas the Knight prays to Venus:

'Redresse of sorow, O Citheria,
 That with the stremes of thi plesaunt hete
 Gladest the contre of all Cirrea
 Where thou hast chosen thi paleis and thi sete,
 Whos bright bemes ben wasshen and oft wete
 In the riuier of Elicon the well.'
 (701-6)

The Temple of Venus here placed at Cirra, an invention which Norton-Smith tells us (p. 188) is Lydgate's own (but see CT.A.1936-7), is referred to again in A Seying of the Nightingale, but this time it is set on Mount Citheron:

"And suche as beon for loue lanwysshing,
 Cherisshe hem, lady, for truwe affeccyoun,
 Support and help hem with thy might to bring
 In-to thy Castell, set in Cytheron,
 On dyamaundis sette is the dungeoun,
 Frette with Rubyes and Emerawdes grene,
 Nowe herke my song, that art of love the
 qweene."
 (29-35)

¹⁰⁷For the geography, see Francis P. Magoun, Jr., "Chaucer's Ancient and Biblical World," Mediaeval Studies, XV (1953), p. 114. See also Robinson's notes on lines 15-20 of Chaucer's Anelida and his glossary of proper names under Cirra, Citherea, and Cithero(u)n.

¹⁰⁸Pearsall, John Lydgate, p. 91.

¹⁰⁹It should be noted that in Reson and Sensuallyte (Lydgate's incomplete translation of the French Les Echecs Amoureux) the description of the Garden of Pleasure includes a fresh spring with "holsom lycour clere" similar in function to that which appears in what I have called the Garden of Natura:

Ther be ful freshe welle springis,
That with her holsom lycour clere
Ouerspredden the herbere,
The Rotys, greynes, and the sedes,
And the smothe softe medes,
Fletyng with bawme sanatyf
Of kynde most restoratyf,
That yf ther wer in any londe
A man ybrent with louys bronde,
Or with his dredful arwe woundyd,
Yf he wer ewrous to be soundyd,
This place wer most convenient
Vn-to his amendement.
(5180-92)

For the tradition of the garden as moral image, see P.M. Kean, The Pearl: An Interpretation (New York: Barnes & Noble, Inc., 1967), pp. 35-46; Robertson, "The Doctrine of Charity in Medieval Literary Gardens: A Topical Approach Through Symbolism and Allegory," Speculum, XXVI (1951), 24-49 (slightly revised in A Preface, pp. 91 ff.); and Nicolai von Kreisler, "The Locus Amoenus and Eschatological Lore in the Parliament of Fowls 204-10," PQ, L (1971), 16-22.

¹¹⁰Daunger and Disdayn appear on one of the columns at the entrance to Chaucer's park in the Parliament (136).

¹¹¹Cf. Norton-Smith: "The water of the well alters the poet's health in the same way that the sleep into which Chaucer falls in the Book of the Duchess restores the poet-dreamer's health and vitality" (Lydgate, p. 164). Norton-Smith, however, does not make the structural comparison I have made. In fact, as we have seen, he sees no real connection between the locus amoenus frame and the Complaint that follows.

¹¹²On the appearance of the "erber" within the precincts of Natura's park, cf. Bennett's comment on Chaucer's Parliament: "Is it fanciful to see in this shading of one scene into another the suggestion that the realms of Nature and Love march together, that however different their climates may be, no sharp impenetrable boundary divides them?" (Parlement, p. 116). On the specialized meanings of "erber" in late medieval poetry, see C.A. Luttrell, "Pearl: Symbolism in a Garden Setting," Neo-

Natura is the presiding figure and the evening scene where Hesperus appears burning in the sky is further strengthened by the fact that it is Venus as propitious morning star (Lucifer) that shines in the sky at the very beginning of the poem:

And Lucifer to chace away the nyght
 Ayen the morow our orysont hath take
 To bydde lovers out of her slepe awake.
 (5-7)

Cf. also the Complaint of Mars (1-14) and Purgatorio, I, 19-20:

Lo bel pianeta che d'amar conforta
 faceva tutto rider l'oriënte.

¹²¹Cf. Sinclair's statement on Dante's allusion to "la bella Ciprigna" in Paradiso, VIII, 2: "For the planet to which Dante has now risen is quite other than the wanton goddess to whom the old world did honour with sacrifice and votive cry, honouring, too, even her mother and her son. From her this planet takes merely il vocabol-- as if to say, only the sound of its name. Here is no 'mad love', but love as the soul's sanity and perfection. The first thing that Dante saw in the sky when he reached the shore of Purgatory before dawn had been the 'fair planet that prompts to love, making all the east to smile'; and the whole ascent of the mountain had been the setting of love in order in his soul" (pp. 127-8). Dante's Paradiso, tr. and ed. John D. Sinclair (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961). For additional comments on Dante's use of Venus, see Robert Hollander, Allegory in Dante's Commedia (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), pp. 150, 219. For Dante and Chaucer on Venus, see Bennett, Parlement, pp. 56-7.

¹²²See pp. 248-50, 271 above. We might point out once again that to support her argument La Vieille cites the Mars-Venus-Vulcan story.

¹²³For the sources of rhetorical ecphrasis in descriptions of temples honoring the goddess of love, see Bennett, Chaucer's 'Book of fame': An Exposition of 'The house of fame' (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), pp. 10ff.

¹²⁴Cf. HF, I, 119-20; 128-39; 480-91; III, 1113-35. For evidence that Chaucer's whole conception of the goddess of Fame and her abode was influenced by descriptions of Fortuna and her house (as in the Anticlaudianus), see Bennett's chapter on 'Fortuna's Sister' in Chaucer's 'Book of fame', pp. 146-64. Also, in The Fall of Princes Lydgate describes Fortune's temple in the same images he uses here to describe Venus':

Fortune's fauours be made--who loke wele--
Of brotill glasse, rather than of stele.
(V, 588-9)

And again in referring to Fortune:

Whos temple is maad of glas & nat off steel;
(IV, 1053)

¹²⁵Cited in B.G. Koonce, Chaucer and the Tradition of Fame: Symbolism in the House of Fame (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), p. 100. Although I think Koonce's reading of the House of Fame is misguided, his comments on the temple of Venus provide a convenient summary of materials on the ambiguous nature of those elements (the glass, the two Venuses, her doves, etc.) which are important for understanding the vision of love in Lydgate's Temple.

¹²⁶For a different interpretation of the allegory here, see Norton-Smith, Lydgate, pp. 177-8. Pearsall's comment on this passage is: "The significance of this temple is not so much that it is made of glass and founded on ice. These are simply details that Lydgate has picked up from Chaucer's description of the House of Fame for their decorative effect; as symbols of instability they are irrelevant to this poem, which deals with constancy in love" (John Lydgate, p. 106).

¹²⁷Bennett's comment, Parlement, p. 97, is meant to distinguish between the portraits of the two Venuses which appear in the Knight's Tale (where she is the "deputy of Nature") and the Parlement (where she typifies "sexual gratification"). Boccaccio briefly distinguishes the two goddesses in his Genealogia Deorum, III, xxiii; in his Notes (Chiose) to the Teseida he devotes several pages to the allegorical meaning of the details of his portrait of Venus in the text. Cf. also Pierre Bersuire's remarks on the sea-born Venus (cited in Bennett, Chaucer's 'Book of fame,' p. 17): "Est nuda quia vix homo eam celat vixque potest esse qui appareat. Et in mari, id est delitiarum opulencia vult natate...Venus etiam in mari fingitur genita pro eo quod luxuria ab opulencia et a delitiarum fluxibus non recedit;; unde nudam meretricem videtur colloqui scriptura: Esa 23 (vv. 10 and 16): transi terram tuam quasi flumen, filia maris; et sequitur: Sume citharam, circui civitatem, meretrix oblivioni tradita, etc." The image is further rendered oblique, as Bennett reminds us, since the astrological Venus is sometimes represented nude or by the foam-born goddess. See Bennett's Chaucer's 'Book of fame,' pp. 17-8 and Parlement, p. 147, n.1. For further remarks, cf. Robertson, A Preface, pp. 370-2.

¹²⁸Two of the portraits (Jupiter's ravishment of Europa and Phoebus' pursuit of Daphne) are cited, for

example, in Reson and Sensuallyte where they are specifically referred to as instances of how Venus deceives all with "fals delytys temporal" (3256-79). Also, several of the other figures in the Temple of Venus (Dido, Medea, Pyramus-Thisbe, Procne-Tereus, and Phyllis) are cited by Diana as examples of amour folle that Love's folk suffer in the Garden of Pleasure (4240ff).

¹²⁹See, for example, Bennett, Parlement, pp. 107ff. on the use of this topos in medieval literature.

¹³⁰Pearsall, John Lydgate, p. 106.

¹³¹Bennett, Parlement, pp. 143-4.

¹³²See C.S. Lewis' sympathetic remarks on these sections of Lydgate's poem, Allegory of Love, pp. 241-2. Lewis believes that on these occasions Lydgate "rises to true poetry."

¹³³Boethius' Consolation of Philosophy, II, m.8 (Chaucer's translation). For the main sources of Lydgate's "golden chain" image, see Norton-Smith, "Lydgate's Metaphors," ES, XLII (1961), 90-3.

¹³⁴Cf. the use of the word in the Franklin's Tale:

But atte laste she, for his worthynesse,
 And namely for his meke obeysaunce,
 Hath swich a pitee caught of his penaunce
 That pryvely she fil of his accord
 To take hym for hir housbonde and hir lord,
 Of swich lordshipe as men han over hir wyves.
 And for to lede the moore in blisse hir lyves,
 Of his free wyl he swoor hire as a knyght
 That nevere in al his lyf he, day ne nyght,
 Ne sholde upon hym take no maistrie
 Agayn hir wyl, ne kithe hire jalousie,
 But hire obeye, and folwe hir wyl in al,
 As any love to his lady shal,
 Save that the name of soveraynetee,
 That wolde he have for shame of his degree.
 (738-52)

¹³⁵Cf. Norton-Smith in "Lydgate's Metaphors," 93: "What Venus offers the lovers in the Temple of Glas is a resolution which must not contradict the matrimonial bond. The lovers must respect the prior legal claim of earthly marriage since their own celestial, golden law of love is its prototype." See also Robertson's remarks, A Preface, p. 375 on marriage as a principle of order, an image of well-ordered hierarchy in the individual and society, and adultery as what Chaucer's Parson describes as an "up-so-down" condition in a hierarchy.

¹³⁶Cited in Robertson, A Preface, p. 126. Professor Robertson has collected a number of other references to the ancient tradition that associates love with harmony, especially with the music that governs the universe (pp. 122-9). On natural justice, cf. Temple of Glas, ll. 1327-33.

Conclusion

In the preceding chapters I have tried to show what an examination of the rhetorical bases of Lydgate's poetic might bring to a reading of his poetry. Such an examination was worth making, I have argued, for several reasons: first, because this critical approach has proved both illuminating and rewarding when applied to Chaucer, Lydgate's poetic 'lodestar' and model; secondly, because Lydgate's contemporaries and successors saw him chiefly as a "rethorycne," a "first finder" of a new and fashionable (i.e. rhetorical) mode in poetry; and thirdly, because there is plentiful evidence in his poetry itself to indicate that Lydgate knew and was interested in the precepts taught by the school rhetoricians. Further, my assumption throughout has been that an acquaintance with these teachings on the art of poetry (Chapter I) and with Lydgate's own discussions of his craft (Chapter II) would provide a useful introduction to a fresh reading of several of his major poems (Chapter III).

As a result I have concentrated on those areas of medieval poetic doctrine which I believe are most pertinent for just such a reading: the transformation of inven-
tio, the importance of the techniques of amplification as an element of structure and style, the concept of the topoi or commonplaces, and the attention given to eleutie or "the re-creative labor of style." Likewise in discussing Lydgate's statements on the rhetorical first principles

governing his individual poems, I have emphasized those ideas which define most clearly his own purpose as poet. Thus I have traced the intimate relationship between his simple and conventional views on the moral function of poetry and his views on the poem as memorial and mirror. Both metaphors are basic to his poetic program, bringing together questions of theory, purpose, and actual practice. The poet is society's rememberer who sees with a clear vision images of wisdom and truth reflected in the history and literature of the past. Like Amphion he orders chaos (the chaos of language) and with his re-creation teaches men how to live in love and peace, not hate, by offering in his poem emblems, like the song of Amphion itself, of moral, social, and political accord.

The most important part of my investigation, however, has been the analyses of the third part. These have established that although the arts of poetry had little to say about dispositio or organization, Lydgate's art is not so loose and formless as many critics have thought. Indeed, his best work reveals a coherence of form that is achieved through a variety of rhetorical techniques. A close attention to Lydgate's reorganization of the rhetoric of his raw material in The Siege of Thebes, for example, indicates how artfully he transforms the naive, one-level narrative of his source into a carefully shaped philosophical tale. Instead of merely following the French versions of his matière, which were basically

redactions of a series of legendary events in a far-away land, Lydgate imposes on these essentially simple and essentially meaningless configurations of the romantic adventure a pattern of human behavior capable of moral interpretation. Evidence of his structural sense is especially visible in the addition, amplification, or free invention of episodes which carry through the argumentum or sens of the action on various poetic levels (astrological, allegorical, moral, and political). The sections dealing with the Amphion myth, the wedding of Oedipus, the embassy of Tydeus, the character portraits of Adrastus and Amphiorax, the council scenes in Thebes and the Argive camp, the several digressive passages on the proper behavior of kings, on the respect owed by children to their parents, on Truth, on youth and age, and most especially the Epilogue on the direful consequences of civil discord --all are proof of Lydgate's ability to give meaning and shape to an unfolding, continuous story through a judicious selection of rhetorical techniques.

Similarly, several genuine critical points can be made concerning Lydgate's courtly love poems from an analysis of his 'disposition' of materials. In departing from the usual view of these poems, which would see them as stylistically elaborate but lacking in unity and complexity of idea, I have stressed their underlying dramatic and thematic coherence. We have seen how each of the poems follows the same basic structural pattern; in each the

core of the poem, the complaint proper, is set off against a 'frame' which penetrates and influences it. In The Floure of Curtesy and A Complaynt of a Lovers Lyfe the structural opposition between frame and core is reinforced by the dramatic and philosophical opposition between love according to Natura and love according to Venus and Fortuna. In the Temple of Glas, on the other hand, it is the ambivalent, paradoxical nature of love itself which is the subject of the poem. That subject is realized most visibly through the various aspects of the Venus figure as she appears throughout the poem, but it extends to other areas of the poem as well (the wall paintings and chain imagery, for example) until the final Ballade sung in honor of the celestial Venus. This image of the "mundana musica" of the universe, like the knitting of the lovers in Venus' golden chain, represents a restoration of Boethian order and love, resolving, at least temporarily, the moral and aesthetic ambiguities of the poem. Each poem, then, gives ample evidence of Lydgate's ability to re-invest certain well-worn themes with poetic meaning. Each poem fuses the familiar surface details of the love lyric--the courtly idiom and conventional settings (Valentine's Day, a woodland Garden in May, a dream journey to an allegorical 'house')--into a new, artistic whole.

The Theban poem and the courtly love poems thus are representative of Lydgate's skill with two types of poetic structure: 1) an inclusive single narrative in

which he retells and redecorates an "old storye," unframed and continuous; and 2) a combinative structure in which various elements are juxtaposed to enrich poetic meaning.¹ With a third type, the framed collection of tales, Lydgate is less successful. Either he did not see the type of poetic structure he followed in The Fall of Princes as an artistic problem (as Chaucer had seen it in the Monk's Tale and The Legend of Good Women) or having seen it, chose to ignore it because of the need to follow his Authority as bidden by his patron Gloucester. At any rate it is clear that he fails to exploit the resources of the original dream vision in any significant way. Instead he is content to reproduce in English the mechanical and artificial form (procession, pageant, catalogue) as he found it determined for him in his French source. More important for an examination of Lydgate's rhetoric in The Fall, however, are the individual stories and the style. With regard to the former I have suggested that their shape and tone, their level of feeling, their didactic preoccupations and stylistic coloration are often determined by Lydgate's aim to write a poetry that is at once polished, informative, and morally instructive. A simple story like the Narcissus tragedy, which calls for little or no amplification, is rendered by Lydgate's poetic richly but economically. The attachment of the Jason-Medea episode, on the other hand, to Aetes' tragedy or the many extra-narrative additions to the Minos tale

can be seen as a function of the work's encyclopedism and 'high style' as Lydgate understood it. Finally, through an analysis of various passages throughout The Fall Lydgate's style itself is judged capable of sensitivity and subtlety, both in its ability to catch and freeze the moment of significant action within the tragic movement and to give the poetry an emotional tonality which suffuses the work (as in his use of floral imagery as a symbol of worldly mutability). It is through these traditional resources of rhetorical artifice that what is best in Lydgate's poetry is often released.

Footnote to Conclusion

¹The terms are Payne's, The Key of Remembrance, p. 115. It scarcely matters that in his Prologue to the poem Lydgate offers The Siege of Thebes as an addition to the framed collection of Canterbury Tales. The terms are further useful in showing us how much more varied and complex are Chaucer's combinations than Lydgate's, poems like the Book of the Duchess or Parliament of Fowls following some version of the books-dream-experience formula.

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