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Martin, Ellen Elizabeth

"BE PROCESSE OF TYME:" CHAUCER'S INVENTION OF POETRY IN THE
"BOOK OF THE DUCHESS"

City University of New York

PH.D. 1983

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"Be Processe of Tyme:"

Chaucer's Invention of Poetry in the Book of the Duchess

by

Ellen Elizabeth Martin

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty
in English in partial fulfillment of the require-
ments for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,
The City University of New York.

September 1983

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in English in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract

"Be Processe of Tyme:"

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Ellen Elizabeth Martin

Advisor: Professor Robert O. Payne

I consider several aspects of the Book of the Duchess to describe its poetic texture in a new way. Many critics see in its discontinuities signs of an apprentice genius. One appreciates it better if one avoids trying to align its images with particular themes and reads it instead as a myth of the invention of poetry. Its discontinuities offer images and narrations in a form as yet unshaped by thematic or psychological considerations, in which we discern the play of imagination as it occurs before significance has been attached to its ideas. I call the poem an inventio poetriae -- a rhetorical legend of the invention of poetry -- because it captures moments of thought prior to significance, in which poesis and the process of signifying actually occur.

Chapter One surveys the development of temporized love narrative prior to Chaucer, and Chapter Two looks at the association of melancholia, elegy, and image-making. Chapter Three considers the poem's symbolic texture in the light of modern and medieval theories of symbolism and interpretation. Chapter Four describes the rhetoric of the conversation in which the protagonists find consolation. Chapter Five traces the poem's influence to show how this radically inventive work continues to recreate the possibility of poetry for later writers.

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Few endeavors are so closeted and so utterly their own reward as a dissertation. Few can help, but to those few, much more than common thanks are due.

Louise Allen taught me to read. My mother introduced me to Chaucer. Ward Christlieb gave me Latin.

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For helping to weave and mend the fabric of everyday life, over many years, I owe special thanks to my sister Anne Moiseev, my friends Andrew B. Eisner and Andrea Schweitzer, and my therapist, Dr. Sandra Haber. Sine quibus non.

I thank the Fulbright Commission for the year 1977-1978 at Cambridge, and above all, I thank my father and mother, for all the books, and so much else as well.

Lee Erickson has been the Morpheus of this vision, unstintingly sharing his energy and insight, his passions and his books, and has marched companionably with me through many a long Tsaidan. To him, the love.

For Mama and Daddy

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Abbreviations

Editions of the works cited below will be found in the Bibliography.

AG	Lydgate, <u>The Assembly of Gods</u>
BC	Froissart, <u>Le Dit dou Bleu Chevalier</u>
BD	Chaucer, <u>The Book of the Duchess</u>
BK	Lydgate, <u>The Complaint of the Black Knight</u>
Buck	Sackville, <u>The Complaint of Henry Duke of Buckingham</u>
CA	Gower, <u>Confessio Amantis</u>
CI	Thomson, <u>The Castle of Indolence</u>
CL	Hawes, <u>The Conforte of Louers</u>
CM	Froissart, <u>La Cour de May</u>
Comp	Hoccleve, <u>Hoccleve's Complaint</u>
CP	Nevill, <u>The Castell of Pleasure</u>
CT	Chaucer, <u>The Canterbury Tales</u>
Daph	Spenser, <u>Daphnaida</u>
Dial	Hoccleve, <u>Dialogue with a Friend</u>
Dryden	Dryden, <u>The Flower and the Leaf, or The Lady in the Arbor: a Vision</u>
EA	Froissart, <u>L'Espinette Amoureuse</u>
EV	Hawes, <u>The Example of Virtue</u>
F	Ovid, <u>Fasti</u>
FA	Machaut, <u>Le Fonteinne Amoureuse</u>
Fables	Dryden, <u>Preface to Fables Ancient and Modern</u>
FL	anon., <u>The Flower and the Leaf</u>
Flour	Lydgate, <u>The Flour of Curtesye</u>
FQ	Spenser, <u>The Faerie Queene</u>
Hazlitt	Hazlitt, <u>Lectures on the English Poets</u>
HF	Chaucer, <u>The House of Fame</u>
JB	Machaut, <u>Le Jugement dou Roy de Behaingne</u>
JN	Machaut, <u>Le Jugement dou Roy de Navarre</u>
KQ	James I., <u>The Kingis Quair</u>
LD	Hoccleve, <u>Lerne to Die</u>
Meta	Ovid, <u>Metamorphoses</u>
CA	Froissart, <u>Li Orloge Amoureux</u>
OM	Ovide <u>Moralisé</u> , in verse
PA	Froissart, <u>Le Paradys d'Amours</u>
PF	Chaucer, <u>The Parliament of Fowls</u>
PL	Migne, <u>Patrologia Latina</u>
QD	Chartier, <u>Li Quatre Dames</u>
RF	Machaut, <u>Le Remede de Fortune</u>
RI	Wordsworth, <u>Resolution and Independence</u>
Robbins	Robbins, trans., <u>Roman de la Rose</u>
Romaunt	<u>The Romaunt of the Rose</u>
RP	Hoccleve, <u>The Regement of Princes</u>
RR	de Lorris and de Meun, <u>Le Roman de la Rose</u>
SM	anon., <u>Speculum Misericordie</u>
SP	Keats, <u>Sleep and Poetry</u>
TC	Chaucer, <u>Troilus and Criseyde</u>
Traité	Chartier, <u>Le Traité de l'Esperance</u>
Vergier	Machaut, <u>Le Dit dou Vergier</u>
Works	Chaucer, <u>The Poetical Works</u> , ed. Robinson

Chapter I. The Tradition of Love Poetry

The Book of the Duchess inherited a tradition of love poetry that temporized love. Ovid's Ars Amatoria gives the physical project:

Crede mihi, non est veneris properanda voluptas,
Sed sensim tarda prolicienda mora. (2.717-718)¹

In the Heroides, Chaucer finds the passionate poetry made available by the subject of lovers left unsatisfied through betrayal, exile, war, death, and the Hellespont. Hypermnestra must prove her love for Lynceus by sending him away. Phyllis finds herself helping Demophoön prepare his ships to leave her. And Laodamia's letter to Protesilaus (who died for being first to set foot on the Trojan shore) suggests the pleasures of a narrative broken by love, a love interrupted by narrative:

Quando erit, ut lecto mecum bene iunctus in uno
Militiae referas splendida facta tuae?
Quae mihi dum referes, quamvis audire iuvabit,
Multa tamen capies oscula, multa dabis;
Semper in his apte narrantia verba resistunt;
Promptior est dulci lingua referre mora. (13.117-122)²

This passage draws the parallel between amorous and narrative technique. Both delay their culminations, the longer to keep them in view, the more nearly to eat the cake and have it too. Their compatible formats also enable love and story-telling, from Ovid to Othello, frequently to turn into one another in the course of a shared development. This mutual fuelling of each other's delays and digressions enriches those tactics, lending the force of passion to narrative and the articulation of language to love.

Out of these two elements Ovid constructs the entire cosmos in the Metamorphoses, along with a pattern for passionate narrative that has spoken directly to virtually every age of poetry since. In the Metamorphoses Chaucer finds nymphs changing into trees and streams on the point of ravishment, youths changing into perennial flowers on the point of death, and narratives breaking into each other to make a mosaic of suspensions. Chaucer returns the favor by further breaking down what he borrows from Ovid. The description of the cave of Sleep is divided between the Book of the Duchess (153-177) and the House of Fame (66-76), each part serving as a different point of departure. In the story of Alcyone, the adventures of Ceyx and the transformation of Alcyone are fearlessly abbreviated to realize other intimations latent in the tale -- the adventures of Alcyone, and the transformation of the narrator, and below all, the cave of Sleep.

Saving further discussion of Ovid for later sections devoted to the passages in which Chaucer's borrowings occur, I wish to state here, by way of prologue, that Ovid's metamorphic narrative exemplifies just those phenomena of change, loss, and imaginative transformation that Chaucer is interested in for poetry. These are the experiences, and the patterns of experience, that he sees shape both life and poetry most deeply, that render poetry the repository of human quest and sorrow, and that invite poetry to intervene in the consolation and restoration of the heart.

1. Latin and Provençal

The notion that delayed delight affords a delight of its own descends to later poets through Latin lyricists like Petronius

Arbiter:

sed sic sic sine fine feriat
et tecum faceamus osculantes.
hic nullus labor est roborque nullus;
hoc iuvat, iuvat et diu iuvabit;
hoc non deficit incipitque semper.³

fas et iura sinunt veteres extendere amores;
fac cito quod coeptum est, non cito desinere.⁴

Around 1200 we find a poet affirming in Arundel MS. 384 that his desire exceeds all the satisfaction he can sustain:

Desiderio nimis officit,
dum vix gaudio pectus sufficit.⁵

The troubadours of Provence wrote the greatest variety of this joy in dissatisfaction that issued into the literature of courtly love.⁶ Their pride in their craft leads them to link the joys of loving and of writing poetry, so that for Peire d'Auvergne

Ab fina joia comenssa
Lo vers, qui bels motz assona.⁷

Rhyming fair words images the courting of fair lovers, and the poetry is part of the lover's waiting:

D'amor ai la sovinenssa
E.ls bels digz, ren plus no.m dona;
Mas per bona atendenssa
Esper c'alculs jois m'en veigna.⁸

For Arnaut Daniel there even comes a moment when his poetry measures the lady instead of the lady the poetry:

Ben es razos
 Doncas que mos chans senta,
 Quar es tan pros
 E de ric pretz manenta.⁹

The joy the troubadours derive from their poems and their loves is a joy which finds its fullest realization in desiring the lady and sending off the poem, not in the consummation they must often despair of. René Nelli's analysis of the troubadour love convention leads him to conclude

que pour les amants courtois l'amour est plutôt dans le désir, dans le joi du désir, que dans le joi de l'assouvissement . . . pour les troubadours classiques. . . le joi est bien l'amour antérieur à toute "réalisation", la joie contenue dans le désir . . . ce n'est pas la continence (au sens chrétien) qui spécifie l'amour provençal, mais plutôt l'idée que le désir doit être purifié . . . Mais qu'est-ce donc que purifier le désir, sinon en retarder le plus longtemps possible l'accomplissement pour le transformer en joi, en amour généreux.¹⁰

This "generous" love is a generalized form of the virtue of liberality required in the lover, a virtue which discourages possessiveness and, implicitly, possession, by the lover of the lady.

The most familiar version of this joy attained within the phase of desiring is Jaufré Rudel's amor da lonh, where distance adds a spatial image of the temporizing of courtly love:

que nulhs autres joys tan no.m play
 Cum jauzimens d'amors de lonh.¹¹

Qu'el cor joi d'autr'amor non a
 Mas d'aissella qu'ieu anc no vi;
 Ni per null joi aitan no ri
 E no sai quals bes m'en venra.¹²

This love for an unknown, and this disregard of conclusions, appear in other troubadours as the love for one beyond their very faculties

of desiring, a goal which guarantees that the poet-lover will continue in a state of desire, desire for a capacity for greater desire as well as for the lady. Thus Bernard de Ventadorn's lark attains joy when it has lived long enough at the threshold of its flight's limit to forget that the limit is a limit and be able to abandon itself to pure desiring:

Can vei la lauzeta mover
De joi sas alas contr.l rai,
Que s'oblid'e.s laissa chazer
Por la doussor c'al cor li vai,
Ai, tan grans enveya m'en ve
De cui qu'eu vey jauzion,
Meravilhas ai car desse
Lo cor de desirer no.m fon.¹³

For Jaufré Rudel, desire grows so much more quickly than attainment that it actually increases the distance between himself and his goal: the urgency of the desire makes it impossible for the lover to extract himself from its toils:

D'a quest'amor suy tan cochos
Que quant ieu vau ves lieys corren,
Vejaire m'es qu'a reversos
N'en torn, e que lay.s n'an fugen;
E mos cavals vai aitan len
A greu cug mais que.y atenha,
S'ilha no.s vol arretener.¹⁴

Arnaut Daniel goes so far as to fear that the sheer force of his desire will put the lady beyond his reach:

Tant l'am de cor e la queri
C'ab trop voler cug la.m toli --
S'om ren per ben amar pert!¹⁵

These affirmations of joy's being won without desire's being satisfied occur throughout the troubadour era. Raimbaut d'Orange, sums up the twelfth-century poets cited so far:

Per tal joi soi coindes e vans
 Qe main val neis
 Desirs q'ieu n'ai
 D'una qe anc no.m ac semblan,
 Pels sainz c'om q'er en Verzelai,
 D'autre joi c'om puesca jauzir.¹⁶

Aimeric de Peguilhan, who died c. 1230, picks up the same thought, and implies that the value of the sought-after object is determined more by how well it is desired than by its inherent worth:

Per qu'eu vuoiill mais ses consagr'enchaussar
 Que consequir so don non fos pagatz,
 Car mil d'autres val us bens desiratz.¹⁷

Guiraut Riquier may sum up for us the source of troubadour joi in a poem of 1259:

E pur manda.m suffrir, d'als no.m descarga,
 Quas ab suffrir n'aurai joy ses messonja.¹⁸

This love poetry that maintains its protagonists forever in a state of desire, and finds joy for them in that state, continues through the narratives of Chrétien de Troyes, full of detour and dialectical monologue, and the Roman de la Rose, where Idleness alone can make room in time for Guillaume to experience the personified deferrals that checker the garden and hedge the rose. But -- saving the Roman for later discussions of its particular contributions to the Book of the Duchess, I would like to turn now to the French lyrics of Froissart and Machaut that give Chaucer the immediate literary context for his poem.

2. Froissart

The Book of the Duchess is written, as Chaucer says, "be processe of tyme" (1331), and Chaucer develops the temporal themes and structures he finds in earlier poems and articulates them in this poem as being the very stuff of poetry. Froissart sets out the themes of poetic and amatory temporalizing, and Machaut integrates them into specifically poetic experience.

Chaucer begins the poem with Froissart's beginning of Le Paradys d'Amours:

Je sui de moi en grant mervelle
Comment tant vifs, car moult je velle.

Car ne voel la belle oublier
Pour quelle amour en ce travel
Je sui entres et tant je vel. (PA 1-2, 10-12)¹⁹

Compared to Froissart's compelling memories of his beloved beauty, Chaucer's narrator's excuse of insomnia seems insufficient, a too purely physiological account of his malady; compared to Froissart's concentration on his lady, this narrator's general carelessness seems more idiosyncratic than traditional, more confused than courtly:

I have gret wonder, be this lyght,
How that I lyve, for day ne nyght
I may nat slepe wel nygh noght;
I have so many an ydel thoght,
Purely for defaute of slep,
That, by my trouthe, I take no kep
Of nothing, how hyt cometh or gooth,
Ne me nys nothyng leef nor looth.
Al is ylyche good to me --
Joye or sorowe, wherso hyt be --
For I have felynge in nothyng,
But, as yt were, a mased thyng,
Always in poynt to falle a-down;
For sorwful ymagynacioun
Is always hooly in my mynde. (1-15)

For all this apparent lack of matter, however, Chaucer has given himself room to expand on his beginning as Froissart has not. The next verse paragraph (as printed in modern editions) recapitulates the wonder, unnaturalness, insomnia, idle thoughts, and fear of death, ending again on the emphasized point of the invasion of his mind by fantasies:

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.
 Suche fantasies ben in myn hede,
 So I not what is best to doo. (16-29)

These lines give more of an appearance of explanation than those preceding, and help us form an impression of the knot of symptoms he is suffering from, but compared to Froissart, who by this time in his poem has begun to call on Morpheus, Chaucer is still offering a narrator at a loss to explain his malady, and will continue to do so until that narrator is brought to discover Morpheus for himself in the romance he takes up to pass the night. The narrator's next lines simply propose to dismiss various explanations and possible remedies. He really "can not telle why / The sothe" (34-35). He believes he knows the physician who might have cured his melancholy, "but that is don" (40), and his explanation that he is sick because he has been sick for eight years (36-37) begs the question.

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 Al is ylyche good to me --
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his only conclusion is to begin again: "our first water is good to kepe" (43). This return, along with the recollection of Froissart and Chaucer's applications of it, makes the poem's third beginning -- four, if one counts the end of the beginning of Machaut's first complaint,²⁰ and even five, when Chaucer returns to Froissart's beginning in his invocation to Morpheus two hundred lines later.

Later, while borrowing good from Ovid, Chaucer recalls the strange name of Morpheus' son, Cyparissus (167) from Froissart's *Helinostair* (21-22), but when he returns to the narrator's invocation to Morpheus -- the continuation of the situation borrowed from Froissart -- he forgets it, and does not worry about it:

wold I give thille Morpheus,
or his goddess, shene Juno,
or som what elles, I be righte who . . . (242-244)

This air of inconsistency is compounded by a love of ornamentation, which, in light of the narrator's doubt about his circumstances, must appear as ornamentation largely for its own sake. While the lord in Machaut's *Le Fontaine Amoureuse* reiterates his prayer to Morpheus over several hundred lines (FA 172-220), and Froissart, here, explicitly prefers prayer to a price of beauty (FA 19-22), Chaucer finds the main matter of the passage in the game of concocting elaborate images of the featherbed and golden chamber his narrator promises to Morpheus (246-261). Therein, in repeating something, time is imagined as passing continuously and in a line, in ornamenting, one retraces a moment many times, changing it, but in order to retain it, as if it did not admit of being displaced, at

least in one's imagination. The amplification and opening up of one segment of time also describes Chaucer's multiple beginnings, and the entire Book of the Duchess may be read as the redescription in various metaphors -- insomnia, reading, hunting, conversing, loving -- of a single moment of prolonged anticipation (of what, we are not explicitly told).

This intense structural temporalizing is latent in the thematic concerns of many of Froissart's poems. I take up the later Froissart before Machaut because he is simpler, and provides through his personifications direct statements of the necessity for putting off one's emergence from desire. Even so positive a good as *Lece* (Joy) advises the lover in la Cour de May:

"Or", dist elle, "ayes patience,
Là gist d'amoureux la science." (529-530)²¹

In Le Paradys d'Amours the lover's instructress warns him against "fole hastiveté" (1369) and cautions him, "ne vous hast'e point" (1562),²² while the goddess of love advises him that a lover will receive unimagined bliss "quant il le voelt par temps attendre"²³ (424). In the courtly world, love is a question of how one waits for love, of how one hopes and fears, not of one's possessing. It is not surprising that a culture that defers love also has an **aesthetic of ornamentation.**

Froissart describes love in explicitly temporal terms in his allegory of Li Orloge Amoureux, in which a clock keeps time, and the lover loves, both by a system of interlocking mechanisms that balance and restrain each other. *Plaisance* 1147, for example, is

the cord stretched in tension between the main wheel, Vrai Desir (106), and its weight, Beauté (113). The implication is that pleasure would disappear if desire and the desired beauty collapsed together, that pleasure depends on the lover's being distanced from his beloved.

The entire operation of this first mechanism of Plaisance is set against a second composed of the wheel Attemprance (223) and its release mechanism Paours (235) that, far from releasing it freely, tempers and retards the swift operation of Desir.

Une roe seconde et adjoustée,
 Qui le retarde, et que le fait mouvoir
 Par ordenance et par mesure, voir
 Par la vertu dou foliot aussi,
 Qui continuellement le moet ensi,
 Une heure à destre et puis l'autre à senestre,
 Ne il ne doit ne poet à repos estre;
 Car par li est ceste roe gardée
 Et par vraie mesure retardée.

(OA 211-222)²⁴

Since the first wheel never runs slow, the moderation of it is always in effect a delaying action. The recurring notions of order and measure are set in a system of perpetual enclosed motion, where they function not as fixed standards but as moving regulators. The ambiguities and paradoxes of love appear in this temporal scheme as the continual to-and-fro pitching of the wheel's release mechanism (the foliot).²⁵

La Cour de May is one of several works that link dilatory love and poetry. Its occasion is the lady's departure and her parting instruction that her lover write verses to mark the time of her absence (191, 217-219). Writing is thus made a continuation of his devotion, and the authorized way of loving her from a distance

and over time. His lady, as promised (211), sends Douce Pensée in her wake, who, with Luce and Souvenir, helps him write a rondeau -- not about the lady, but about these three reminders of her. His love has entered a phase of indirection in which he creates fictions of rather than actually perceiving -- not the lady -- but his thoughts of her. The circumstances of composition emphasize its indirectness: he writes in solitude and in retreat. At first he fears the garden of Love affords him no removed place:

Quel appareil,
En tous deduis la nonpareil!
Trouveray je pour place eslire
D'estre à requoy, faire et escriptre
Les balades qu'Amours de bouche
M'a commandé?

(CM 1613-1618)²⁶

He must escape this jungle of pleasures in order to write about any special pleasure. Courtoisie, excusing her guest from satiety, indicates a chamber "là dessus" (1646), and his attendants promise that

Nous te lairons seulet icy
Soubz cest abril, pour faire ainsi
Qu'il plaist à Amours que tu faces.

(CM 1653-1655)²⁷

There, he says,

J'escriprai icy à couvert
Soubz cest abril où il fait quoy.
Ainsi m'assis seul à requoy.

(CM 1696-1698)²⁸

The collocation of withdrawal, secrecy, poetry, and love is complete. Love and poetry share the obliquity and covertness that allow them to be communicated, or to exist at all. From the troubadours' amor da lonh to Froissart's well-arranged personifications, the medieval poets realized that one loves an Other, and that otherness -- in the shapes of alienation, frustration, fear, despair, separation, age, and death -- colors the entire amorous experience. Further, the self-

reflection this kind of love leads to, and the intense meditation it requires to keep the absent one before one's mind, are mirrored in the bowers, glades, and chambers lovers retire to or are discovered in. Like the lush greenery of Froissart's lover's garden seat, the solitary oak in a dark forest by a bright glade under which the Knight sits, and the noisy chamber echoing with busy birds' songs the dreamer finds himself in, are visualizations of the brain of the individual lovers, reflecting and influencing their moods.

In La Cour de May, Froissart again particularly associates love and poetry with the otherness provided by time. There seems to be no doubt that the lady will return, but much about exactly when. Amours offers the lover poetry as a way of marking the passage of time:

Tu sejourneras
Ce moys ici, et si feras
Chascun jour balade nouvelle,
En esperant oïr nouvelle
De ta dame.

(CM 1311-1315)²⁹

Obviously, the only news he will hear of her is the news he writes himself. With the authority of commands from both Amours and the lady to write, both the poetry and the month of waiting it records become an essential and satisfying mode of loving. The lover regards this period warmly, as a "moys sur tous riche de joye" (1669).³⁰

The end of La Cour de May confirms the poet's continuing development of the skills of patience and the delights of delay, by sending us all back to its beginning to commence anew, not love, but our anticipation of love:

Et comme j'ay dit, sur l'erbette,
 Parée de mainte fleurette,
 Commençay en ceste maniere 31
 Ce jour ma balade premiere.

Amours makes clear the identification of this first ballad with the poem we have just read when he tells the lover that his daily poems shall be collectively titled La Cour de May at line 1321. The poem tells the story of its own beginnings, so that its origin is embedded in its duration, and its plot eternally confined to its beginning. The poem is a circle inscribed not in a moment of resolution but in the moment of desire preceding resolution. The poet has successfully evaded the notions of a defined beginning or end to love or his poem, to focus on the transitional stages that he regards as the essence of love.

3. Machaut

Machaut renders in the structures of his poems what Froissart expresses primarily in the descriptions and statements of his figures. In Le Fonteinne Amoureuse, Machaut like Froissart ties love to poetry by making the narrator the spokesman for the lover, who repeats the lover's own lament back to him, and dreams his dream with him, as if to insure it will be told after the lover wakes. Their relationship resembles the one Brownlee finds in the Dit dou Lyon, where "The poet-narrator is shown to be a kind of necessary interpreter" for "the lover who is not a poet."³² Brownlee in fact sees Machaut as developing a mutual exclusiveness between the experiencing lover and the expressing poet, especially in the Voir-Dit, where "Guillaume's consistent success as a poet seems to be contrasted with his inadequacy as a lover."³³ This either/or relation between loving and writing, in contrast to the lover-writer in many poems, is significant both as a precursor for Chaucer's narrative persona of the inexperienced scholar, and as indicative of the gap between feeling and expressing love. In the schedule of this aporia between knowing and speaking, love-affairs at crucial moments turn into poems, and poems on the point of committing their imagery to a meaning will return to the lover's incoherence or conventionality. Thus, for Machaut and his lady, "After their final separation, their continuing correspondence concerns the composition of the Voir-Dit as much as it does the love experience the Voir-Dit is meant to relate."³⁴ The love and the poem alternate as the continuations of each other's phase of desire. Each insures the inconclusiveness of the other.

In Le Dit dou Vergier Machaut presents his personifications in a series of dialectical confrontations expressive of love's complexity. Amor first explains to the poet the qualities that facilitate love's course: Voloir, Penser, Dous Plaisir, Loiauté, Celer, and Desir (613-614), and then its retarding factors: Dangier, Paour, Honte, Durté, Cruauté, and Doubtance de Mespresure (689-692). The dialectic begins with the presence among the encouraging emotions of the potentially retarding Celer. The poet then tells us that sharp Desir modulates into Dous Penser with the help of Espoirs and Souvenirs. (718). By this the lover's desire is not so much nourished as deflected by forces that redirect feeling from the present to the past or future. Further, in the figure of Dous Penser, Machaut seems to conflate the Penser and Dous Plaisir of his original list, thereby underlining the uncertainty of any distinction between the actual pleasure and the anticipating thought. These details of Machaut's presentation all increase its indirectness and ambiguity.

After discussing the second group of emotions, each of which discourages the lover (797-892), Machaut introduces a new set of seven counterforces, whom he calls "ces sis damoiselles" (399, my italics),³⁵ as if still thinking of his first list. The third list (the second list of love's helpers) ranges Grace against Dangier, Vitie against Cruautez, Franchise against Durté, Attemprance and Hardinesse both against Doubtance, and finally Loyauté and Celer against Honte and Paour (905-986). The confusion of emotions in love is shown by the way Amor see-saws back and forth between

helpers and hinderers, and then sets against the hinderers two groups of helpers between which he does not accurately distinguish. The amorous emotions themselves are more attitudes to a proposed love than feelings experienced during love. Desire passes through hope and remembrance, but not through present perception, and does so in order to become nothing more actual than thought. The lover does not conquer doubt so much as endure it, with hardiness, or evade it, by temperately refraining from making the advances that would occasion it. And he overcomes fear not by declaring his love but by dissimulating it, securing himself and his lady from all risk. All these manoeuvres are negative actions that occur outside the present experience of love as commonly understood. Whether these ambivalent emotions are not deeper, truer expressions of the passion is still a question.

To continue the dialectic, it is hesitation and discouragement that, by qualifying the lover's optimism and thus giving room to the lady's generosity, paradoxically mediate between the lovers. One person's confidence and another's acceptance do not simply meet head on, but work through a certain gray area of indecisive response. Machaut's arrangement of these feelings shows a nice respect for our need of a cushion against the shock of confessing our desires. If a lover fears the lady's rejection, he will be less afraid of his own longing because its expression is obscured by despair. If the lady fears to be taken in love, she will be less afraid of her own eagerness because she provisionally ascribes the lust to somebody else.

Fear and doubt are eminently useful in the economics of conscience. Thus the first group of personifications, reflecting the impulses of the lover, and the third group, speaking for the beloved's acceptance, enter into a relationship on the field of their struggle against the middle group of the forces of rejection. Doubt and delay are in a sense the very site of love. Thus, just as Froissart declares that "non paiement gist en vos douce attente" (OA 171),³⁶ so Machaut situates the lover as if permanently in a transitional state of deferred enjoyment where, for the sake of glorious expectation and unending endurance, he

Pour c'en doubance et en cremour
 Vueil ma douce dame obeir,
 Servir, celer, et sans partir
 Vivre en son amoureux dangier. (Vergier 1290-1293)³⁷

Distance, whether the emotional distance of Dangier or Paour, the spatial distance of voyages, or the temporal distance of not yet possessing or having already lost one's love, is the very element in which love is known.

The structure of the two Jugement poems also describes love's conflicting feelings. When Machaut debates whether betrayal by the beloved or the death of the beloved gives greater cause for grief, he gives both possible answers by writing two poems on the question. His first answer (betrayal), in Le Jugement dou Roy de behaingne, leads as if it were an extended prologue into the second answer (death), argued in Le Jugement dou Roy de Navarre. This second, but still not conclusive, poem maintains his indecisiveness by introducing the poet himself as the defender of the losing side, in a trial called

by a lady whom his first answer offended. While on the one hand Lavarre might be thought to express the poet's final opinion, on the other, the poet within the poem, calling himself Guillaume, stands by his first opinion until he is proven guilty by others. Even then, he is not punished for believing that betrayal causes greater grief than does death, but rather, being presumed wrong on that count from the start, he is accused of the fault of arguing his case at all, a fault of form rather than of content, and a fault which, when regarded as such, puts into question the whole project of expressing love at all. He is charged with showing no signs of repentance (3796), arguing against the sovereign lady Bonneurté (3818), and arguing badly:

Mais vous avez si mal prouvé. (JN 3985) 38

He has offended more in manner than in matter; yet, if one cannot misspeak oneself on love, how can one speak about it at all? Statements about love, an emotion that compromises our official and orderly selves, are either adequate and indirect, or direct but inadequate. The verse of love must in some way be perverse, and the remainder of the trial is full of instances where the examples adduced contradict the position supposedly taken by the speaker.

The ladies of the court object to the poet's method of arguing by stories, and in doing so undermine their own method, which is precisely the same:

Vous n'av z ci dit que paroles
qui sont aussi comme frivoles,
belles sont a conter a chambre,
mais elles ne contiennent membre
Dont pourfis vous peüst venir
Pour vostre prueve soustenir.

(JN 3989-3994) 39

Further, odd reversals and digressions occur in the examples. Attemprance cites the case of a woman who dies of grief when she hears that her lover is dead (1863 ff.). In reply, Guillaume analyzes not the grief-causing death of the lover but the lady-s sympathetic death. He says that death is a deliverance for her, so it represents a release from loneliness rather than her grief. Therefore, one cannot say that in dying she is grieving for her lover's death as she would have (presumably) for a betrayal. His argument is difficult to follow because he argues for the lesser significance of death in general by considering the special significance of a particular death.

He then takes the field by proposing that it is natural to forget the dead, but not to shake the memory of a betrayal. Pais counters with the tale of Dido (2095 ff.), who was so far from forgetting Aeneas as to kill herself for grief at losing him. But here Pais, to prove a secondary point about memory's tenacity, cites an example of grief caused by betrayal, not by death, thus illustrating Guillaume's position. The tendency of each side to contradict itself in side issues is neatly summarized when honnesté reminds the poet, in re the case of the Knight of Orleans (2215 ff.), that grief fades in time. Guillaume has just proposed and Pais rejected this very claim.⁴⁰

The network of contradiction becomes more complicated when Franchise introduces the secondary issue of whether men or women suffer most and are most loyal in love. This major digression

allows for examples adduced by one side for the second issue to prove the opposing side's view of the first. To show women's suffering, Franchise uses the stories of Ariadnes and Theseus and of Jason and Medea (2707 ff.). But these stories also demonstrate the grief caused by betrayal, and support Guillaume's position on the original issue.

Guillaume then tells how the lover of the Chastelainne de Vergi kills himself when he sees his lady dead (2836 ff.), thus simultaneously showing the extreme loyalty of men (his position on issue two) and the grief arising from the beloved's death (the ladies' position on issue one). Prudence then reverses the whole sense of the example by recalling, rather late in the game, that the Chastelainne dies because she is betrayed by her lover's indiscretion, and thus proves both her own point that men are less loyal and suffer less, and Guillaume's that betrayal is the source of greatest grief.

In the frailty of this nominal sort of argument we have a clear demonstration that poetry, or figurative or amorous language generally, does not contribute to logical proof. While this notion might seem a truism, our constant desire and search for unity and consistency in texts indicate that we have not fully admitted that a narrative poem builds on something other than logic. The romp through exempla by both poet and personifications in Navarre should alert us to the need for our continuously reconsidering just where the sense of a poem is coming from, for it does not originate in

some automatic authority stating themes or acting a character or upholding a tradition, nor in reason, much less a personified Raison.

The examples cease, although the circumspect Mesure offers still other interpretations of those that have been given, and Raison brings the trial proper to an end by proposing that the judges withdraw to the consistory (3727). We hear nothing of their final deliberations, and are left to note that even lucid reason retires to some removed, not quite conscious or communicable region of the mind in order to effect its final conclusions.

The oblique and unclear nature of thought also appears in the relationship between Congnoissance and Avis (3472 ff.). Avis is said to come from Congnoissance and Congnoissance from Avis, not both from an objective faculty superior to either "understanding" or "judgement." The withdrawal by Raison, the symbiosis of Congnoissance and Avis, and the habit of self-contradiction on everyone's part, suggest that love and poetry have less to do with consistency or demonstration than they do with fooling oneself into doing what one wanted to do but thought one should not, or saying something true but either unpopular or compromising.

Guillaume himself twice expresses a vague discomfort about the logic of the trial's proceedings, first when he tells Franchise that her stories (even when supporting his point) "le fait riens a nostre matiere" (2825)⁴¹, and again after they have all analyzed the tale of the Chastelaine de Vergi to bits:

Mais je vous requier, s'il vous plaist,
 Que nous abregons nostre plait,
 Car trop esloingnons la matiere
 qui melle a esté premiere.

(JN 3015-3018) 42

His later impression (3142, 3158) that they are all talking at once indicates that he perceives the court -- which his larger authorial self has created -- as a confusion. He himself shares in the ladies' speculative restlessness: first by putting himself on trial in his own poem, a move that insinuates irony into the basic fabric of the narrative; again when Doubtance queries him about his own lady (3100 ff.), so that we may read the personification as Guillaume's own doubt or apprehensiveness; and finally when Doubtance accuses him of using "diverse parole" (3111). In Old French "diverse" has a combined sense of changeability and perversity. Godefroy's dictionary defines the adjective as "singulier; bizarre; méchant, cruel, perverse," and the substantive as "caprice." The verb "diversifier" can mean "tourmenter" as well as "se diviser," and the noun "diverserie" serves for "inconstance" as well as "variation." The word in all its forms brings together both the negative and the positive connotations of both a spatial (perversion and division) and a temporal (inconstancy and variety) notion of diverseness. The charge of diversity of speech, then, may well be made against the entirety of a poem whose basic plot allies poetry with the punishment of the poet, and proof with inconsistency. And the word's complex of meanings also shows that the idea of change could not be clearly separated from betrayal or perversity -- a fact to be kept in mind when

reading any text where metamorphosis is the essential event.

The temporal aspect of diversity is latent in the variety and incompleteness of the opinions adopted by the poem's characters. Mesure's advice to divide arguments like a good rhetorician in order to reason them out (3617) is not only a commonplace of rhetoric but also the socially acceptable or logical form of Guillaume's "diverse parole." Both practices derive from a notion of language as a divider and orderer of thoughts, and these functions in turn describe language's tendency to defer meaning in the very act of trying to convey it accurately. Thus in the array of personifications through which he communicates the ideas and emotions of the lover, Machat presents in the shape of wholes the partial or provisional feelings arising from love. By bestowing on the parts of this experience the wholeness of the personifications' appearances, he can acknowledge each moment of a complex emotion, not just its ever-receding conclusion. The more fully attentive he is to each facet of feeling, the more he compromises the logic of his groupings -- a happy flaw.

He displays his own ambiguous position by assuming the place of both creator and character. He appeals, as a character, to external authorities for his opinions, and as an author creates those authorities -- the exempla chosen, the action of the court -- as a sort of artificial exterior within the poem. His double role makes a quasi-equivalence between the words of Guillaume and the

words of the whole poem, which in turn leaves the words of the other characters in a strange borderline position. They are both in excess of and contained within Guillaume's words, depending on whether one defines him as participant or maker of the whole. The shiftiness of their status reflects and accommodates the undercurrent of contradiction that runs through their speakers' arguments. As a conflation of a poem and a poem-within-a-poem, Lavarre allows its characters to speak both their own and another's words. The poet has superimposed the partial and the excessive.

Because of this, and because of the illogical argumentation, at no point do the speakers' words conform to their meanings. Machaut's ending the poem with the implied beginning of the future poems he is sentenced to write in atonement is a natural extension of this superimposition. The structural ambiguities make it difficult to tell where or when the poem ends: at the limits of Guillaume? or outside him, outside this poem, with the whole canon of Machaut? Does it end at line 4212 or when the assigned poems will? Does it begin in line one, or somewhere back in le Jugement dou Roy de Behaingne?

The ambiguity of the poem's boundaries also reflects the point that poetry is both the material of Guillaume's crime and his means of atonement (as it will be for Chaucer in the Legend of Good Women). On the one hand, poetry falsifies love; on the other, since love cannot be expressed in a manner both true and direct, it is poetry that can redeem its falsifications with still more fictions, with

the sheer variety of its fictions.

For both Froissart and Machaut, love is a matter of delaying consummation, and poetry of deferring meaning. Both disciplines seek to hover in the realm where the imagination still reigns over reality. The notion that poetry is inherently analogous to this kind of loving is implied when Froissart uses it as the pastime that measures the days until his lady's return in La Cour de May, when the "end" of his Paradys d'Amours marks the beginning of a new set of poems, and when Machaut's first Jugement leads to a second, which then tries the poet and sentences him to write still more poems in atonement for his others -- rather than forbid such a "bad" artist from practicing the craft any more. Both poets imply in the way they write that they believe one can catch a glimpse of joi or meaning only by retracing again and again the transitions of love, in its preliminaries or postponements, and the transitions of language, in tropes and figures, in a perpetual circulation between the complementary deficiencies of the two arts.

Lavarre ends, like the Parliament of Fowls, with a deluding set-piece that disguises inconclusiveness: the apparition of the personification of Bonneurté (4147 ff.). Both the exempla that precede her, and which contradict their speakers' positions, and the poems to be written by Guillaume, but which have not been yet, bespeak the partial character of language and feeling. Since we cannot sing or feel all that we mean or experience at once, we use dialectical forms like the trial to express at least the process and provisional stages

of our thinking. But between the contradictions and confusions of the trial and the promised poems of Guillaume rises Raison's evocation of *Bonneurte* in all her allegorical array, from her slip made of Franchise to her mantle revealing what it conceals. That a figure of franchise is dressed in a garment that simultaneously displays and hides it suggests the problematic nature of the truth of either things or words, especially those connected with beauty or desirability. And the complete and stable picture of *Bonneurte* is in fact a function of the digressive exemplars and unwritten poems before and after it.

She arises in the transition from the confused experience of the trial to the composition of it into art. In the first moment of making an effort to order an experience, the poet gives concrete form to the most vivid impressions. The images thus contrived have the clarity and decisiveness of fresh thoughts that have not yet been examined. These distilled images are soon arranged into the ambiguous, ironic, or mysterious structures of poetry, as the poet re-creates the array of experience. The difference is that the images formed in the initial move away from chaos, while patterned into another chaos, render it in terms that can be understood (in some way) by other people, and in a form that isolates the basic structures of experience from their attendant particular circumstances. In them the strangeness or inconsequence of reality stands revealed, stripped of the many contexts we devise for the sensible phantasmagoria. These clear, sharp images may not fix the meanings

of a fiction, but rather emblemize the presence of a working imagination. Only images separable from the context of either an experience or a poem can signal to us the pure phenomenal going-on of a process of thought.

The combination of the change from experience to emblem, and the change from emblem to text, attests to the participation in a scene of a human artificer. The change from experience to emblem alone would testify only to a premature imposition of order, and the change from emblem to text alone would indicate only the idiosyncratic work of a lunatic glosser; together, they are the track of an imagination that plays with both order and chaos, without having to commit itself to either, and retaining its independence of action.

Bonneurté is more consistent than experience, but less accurate or honest than the poetry Guillaume purposes to write. Midway between the maze of the immediate and the comprehension of the artificed, the personification of Bonneurté occupies a boundary between perception and reflection. That boundary, or the crossing of it in both directions, is imagination, that makes perception and reflection out of the reflections and perceptions that exist. In the exercise of its fictive powers, in, for example, the formulation of a splendid personification, the imagination comes into its true "bonneurté."

4. The Structure of Elegy in Chaucer

Chaucer sets such boundaries between first impressions and re-created disorder with exceptional frequency: 1 to the Book of the Duchess. They occur as the transitions from proposed scenes to irresolute modulations into other scenes, whose connections to the former are not at all obvious. Or they occur as peculiarities of genre or structure that defer meaning and thereby lengthen the span of loose imaginative activity on the frontier between idea and text.

The poem's genre is unusual in combining love-vision with elegy.⁴³ The thematic implication of the combination is that one loves what one has lost, or soon will have lost, or never had at all. Courtly customs side-track one into tangential pursuits like writing, talking, dressing, and dancing, so that by satisfying this stream of peripheral desires one maintains the supposedly central desire in a state of flexible and suggestible potentiality.

Further, the elegiac element subtracts from the vision its central truth, for in this case the lady is dead of whom the knight claims

That trouthe mynselfe, over al and al
Had chose bys latter principal
In hir, that was his resting place. (1003-1005)

The dream device is one of many frames that defer the poem's possible themes and shift its terminologies: the narrator's autobiography around Ovid and the dream, the tale of Aleyone around the cave of Morpheus, the use of the Ovidian tale and the autobiography as analogies and transitions to the dream, the dream's day morning

that breaks into a hunt that trails off to a dog that disappears down a sidepath that leads to a man in black who frames his own main point with lyrics, allegory, and more autobiography. Chaucer offers a succession of frames that is far more extensive and radical, and more abruptly presented, than the general structural ironies of *Lechaut* or *Lean de Leun*. Chaucer does not return to the lesser frames, which lapse, retroactively and by default, into passages of pure transition. All the frames seem to interrupt rather than mark the decorous closure of their predecessors, as if Chaucer were loath to close a scene, and prefers to break it off or modulate it into another scene. Thus reading and fantasizing, hunting and conversing, love and poetry, become metaphors for each other. Since scenes are not closed or completed, they become haunting recollections that last desire in the memory to match desire of the present or future.

The frames, moreover, are developed at much greater length before the night's story than after it, and the transitions leading into the forest are far more numerous than those leading out of it. The preparatory is favored over the conclusive by so much that when the poem falls rapidly back through (some of) its frames we feel it has unravelled rather than ended -- a little like a movie shot with very few frames in a minute. We are left with no sure or grounded perspective from which to point to a consolation closing the elegy, or a revelation culminating the vision. The action characteristic of each genre impinges on the resolution of the other. Death clouds the vision, while consolation evaporates in the strategies of debate

and rhetoric. But from the point of view of poetry rather than of theme or expectation, one may say that the poem's halting structures please us with a plenitude of desirable objects and the sheer grace of the transitions among them, and tantalizes us with perpetual desirability such as few love poems bestow on their readers as well as their protagonists.

On a closer scale, the speakers' idioms and the presentation of events, while avoiding either unvarying iteration or utter randomness, circle over and back through particular moments or feelings, in a sort of variation on an unknown theme that seems to expand inwardly the temporal dimension of experience. The Knight, for example, approaches White with insufficiently developed speeches at first, having "over-skippe" (1206) words and gone "styntyng" (1213) through his story. He learns a fuller style by the time of his second address, in which each expression seems successively more apt:

pure hertes wern so evne a payre,
 that never nas that oon contrayre
 o that other, for no woo.
 Forsothe, ylyche they suffred thoo
 Go blysse, and eke oo sorwe bothe;
 Ylyche they were bothe glad and wrothe;
 Al was us oon, withoute were. (1289-1295)

An initial statement of unity (1289-1291) is then analyzed into the different emotions the lovers share (1292-1294), and then restated in inverted form: as we were one, so "Al was us oon" (1295). The rather unlooked-for change from third to first person at the last line quoted also signals to us that the lovers' relationship is not one of undifferentiated identity but of harmony between individuals.

A similar passage of autobiography in the narrator's story proceeds on the same principal of variation:

I have so many an ydel thoght,
 Purely for defaute of slep,
 That, by my trouthe, I tak no kep
 Of nothing, how hyt cometh or gooth,
 Ne me nys nothyng leef nor looth.
 Al is ylyche good to me --
 Joye or sorowe, wherso hyt be --
 For I have felynge in nothing,
 But, as yt were, a mased thyng,
 Alway in poynt to falle a-down. (4-13)

His carelessness is described first as the result of insomnia (4-8), then as his customary state (9-11), and finally as the cause of his confusion (12-13). A noun, "ydel thoght," describing the effect, concludes in another noun, "felynge," describing the cause, and between these two points of momentary stasis comes the welter of verbs of being and adverbs of negation that present the actual state of his mind in a nervous and unnamed manner. As it changes from a result into a cause, this carelessness recedes into earlier moments of the narrator's psychic history, so that the repetition of his condition actually goes backward instead of staying at the same point in time. The receding into the past not only postpones the present, but also "stuffs" the time preceding with a variety of renditions or perceptions of a "single" phenomenon. This repetition-as-research structure the whole poem, so that while it stays the temporal progress of the story it adds to the ambiguities of the text and to our options and occasions for interpreting it.

These pausings in the text most often issue into digressions:

But men myght axe me why soo
 I may not sleepe, and what me is.
 But natheles, who aske this
 Leseth his asking trewely.
 Myselfen can not telle why
 The sothe; but trewly, as I gesse,
 I holde hit be a sicknesse
 That I have suffred this eight yeer,
 And yet my boote is never the ner;
 For there is phisicien but oon
 That may me hele; but that is don.
 Masse we over untill eft;
 That wil not be, not nede be left;
 Our first mater is good to kepe. (30-43)

The narrator's reflections on the reason for his insomnia seem at first to be a natural extension of his description of it, and we would probably not have felt he had changed the subject if he had not made a distinction between this passage and what he calls the "first matter." This unexpected distinction gives the succeeding passages the appearance of moving backwards in time to fill us in on the first matter from which it has been said to digress. Chaucer makes a special clearing in the poem with this gratuitous distinction. All the rest of the poem now takes place between the "first" and "second" matters, and may be read as a combined slow approach to and deferral of the second matter. That we have no clear indication of what these matters are is less important than the sense of suspension the text now gives us. Every incident becomes relative to others, and the primacy of any one incident becomes less determinable. The different narratives become figures for each other, a set of vehicles without an identifiable or stable tenor. The topic immediately broken off, the physician, is made both thoroughly

mysterious and permanently significant (even as undecipherable) by this technique of retrogression, which adds to its past while preventing its present and future.

In virtually every other transition or hinge in the poem some deferral by digression or retrogression is at work. The tale of Ceyx and Alcyone emerges from the narrator's reading of a book he describes as telling "Of quenes lives, and of kinges, / And many other thinges smale" (5b-59), merging the important and the trivial. The influential story is found casually enough "Among al this" (60), a triumph of serendipity over method. Chaucer's cultivation of extra transitional time also explains why he cuts the metamorphosis of Ceyx and Alcyone when he retells Ovid. Where the metamorphosis leads them into a dead-end of suspended animation, a chargelessness born of their now mythic, immortal, nonhuman nature, Chaucer's ending, by omitting the pagan without stating the Christian option, avoids committing them to any resolved afterlife. His notation that Alcyone dies "within the thridde morwe" (214) inverts and abbreviates the idea of the Christian resurrection, in which the soul rises, rather than dies, or, rather than "within," the third morning. Alcyone, in history and in this text, dies before we can count on one or another fate for her. All the energy of the impression of her death is thrown into the earlier moment -- of what she said, and did not say, and what Chaucer says instead.

Having made room to reflect on Alcyone's death in his own terms, the narrator blurs the moment with his inconclusive reconsideration of the penultimate moment of her life:

With that hir eyen up she casteth
 And saw noght. "Allas!" quod she for sorwe,
 And deyede within the thridde morwe.
 But what she sayede more in that swow,
 I may not telle yow as now;
 Hyt were to longe for to dwelle.
 My first mater I wil yow telle,
 Wherefore I have told this thyng
 Of Alcione and Seys the king. (212-220)

Having told us all we need to know in the first three lines of this passage, the narrator elaborates the "Alas" rather uneasily with an apology for omitting the rest of her speech. Without this apology, we would not have suspected Alcyone of having a great deal more to say at such a moment. Now, we must wonder about her words as much as we wonder about the identity of the departed physician. The purpose in cutting her words is further obscured by the narrator's taking as long to apologize for it as he would have to report them. Having created all this narrative space, and all this readerly expectation, the speaker jumps into the breach with a jeu d'esprit that may seem trivial but which we are over-ripe to attend to: the featherbed vow. This transition from Ovid into the narrator's dream builds on the tangential information that one can sleep with the help of Morpheus. The subsequent elaboration of the sleeping god and his cave redirects our interest to symbols of a more *primaeval* kind of thought than the intentionality of the obstinate Ceyx or the sanctioned prayers of Alcyone, now subversively revised in the narrator's playful vow.

In the dream the narrator's experience continues to be structured on the principles of delay and digression. The hunt, after lasting a "Longe tyme" (380), ends in "defaute" (384), the halt when the dogs are "checked by the loss of the scent."⁴⁴

Chaucer has used the same word "defaute" to describe the dreamer's insomnia, which suggests that not simply an absence of sleep but an interruption of it is plaguing the dreamer. His melancholy is a matter not of an empty head out of a distracted mind, and there is no absent thought so haunting as a thought once had and then lost. Here in the hunt, the "defaute" occurs when "The houndes had overshot" (383) the hart. They have not failed to catch his scent, but to pursue it, and they lose the quarry not by falling behind, but by not being sufficiently slow. The hunt now requires a retrogressive movement. It is within the moment of this backtracking that the narrator encounters the whelp, and retraces with it the path from overeagerness to restraint, as the dreamer tries to grab the dog and the dog runs away (395-396). Within the retrogression of both the hunt and his own pursuit of the dog, the dreamer enters the forest and meets the knight. Ultimately, when we hear their conversation cut off by the sounding of the horns signalling the end of the hunt for the day, we realize that the whole of their conversation has taken place within the duration of this sounding. The most interesting and significant things happen not when ideas are progressing, but when they are being reviewed and reflected on. In narrative terms, delay and return are agents of change, not repetition.

The Knight's emphasis on the slow and unexpected development of his love sustains the open-ended quality of his story to the last possible moment. The narrator's oft-remarked slowness to apprehend or say that he apprehends the degree of the Knight's loss appears more consonant with the general strategy of the poem. If we recognize how much transitions are cultivated, and how much the Knight himself, for example, dwells on the transitional phases of his love: his detailed account of his youth, his first sight of Luce, her character, his first approach and rejection, and his various romances, leaves only 23 lines (1256-1280) for his second and successful approach, and seventeen (1281-1297) for the picture of their mutual bliss. The need for a second approach, and the increasingly rapid shifts between speakers when in their final exchange (Luce and Knight must finally address the lady's death), heighten the narrative's pervasive reluctance to come to a climax.

The very arousal of love in the Knight occurs when his mind is blank -- "As a whit wal or a table" (780) -- and set on no object (776), and at a time of youth pre-eminently idle and empty:

For that tyme Youthe, my maistresse,
 Governed me in ydelnesse;
 For hyt was in my firste youthe,
 And thoo ful lytel good y couthe,
 For as my werkes were flytynge
 That tyme, and al my thocht varyinge. (797-802)

The ephemerality of his ideas and actions and interests at this time are what render him capable of responding to unusual and all but devastating beauty. Someone with more self than the Knight does not venture to put that self in jeopardy.

Love's foundations in both idleness and a sort of blissful ignorance are confirmed by the opening of the Roman de la Rose, where Incarnesse first admits the lover into the garden (519 ff.), and is associated with an emptyheadedness that generates the more ornamental arts in life:

Qu'ele n'auoit sousi ne esmai
De nule rien, fors seulement
De soi atorner noblement. (rh 572-574)

"Au a nule rien ie n'entens
Qu'a moi iouer e solacier,
Qu'a moi prier e trecier." (Rh 586-588)

The parallel between love and ornamentality, and the source of both in spare time, and the spare time of narration, appears in the knight's resort to composing songs in the face of love's enforced idleness and abstraction:

But, for to kepe me fro yadnesse,
Irewly I dide my besynesse
To make songes, as I best koude
And ofte tyme I song hea loudie,
And made songes thus a great del,
Although I koude not make so wel
Songes, he knewe the art al . . . (1155-1161)

As he drifts off into increasing protestations of his incompetency as a poet, we become convinced that with respect to idleness, they beg the question of it rather than forestalling it. The association throughout of ornament, inexpertness, peripherality, and retrogression with significance and wonder suggests that there is more to these apparently random phenomena than meets the ear, and that the narrative develops most richly by going in search of lost time, that offers the author more chance to exercise invention than

the insistent actuality of the present. And in contrast to fantasies of the future, the retracing of past moments gives less quarter to sheer evasion.

The Latin and Provençal poets establish in lyric form the connections among lack, desire, and poetry. Later French authors develop complex and ironic narrative structures that reflect the interplay between the desirability of an object and its inaccessibility. Machaut and Froissart give explicit expression to the temporal dimension of love, in both the deferral of pleasure and the pass-time of writing. Chaucer takes these themes and structures, reduces their circumstantial content to a minimum, replaces endings with retracings, makes each action lead to or figure another, and directs the interest of his story into those moments of transition where the imagination can be seen at work independent of thematic or formal considerations. By strenuously isolating imaginative action, Chaucer makes of it an object of desire for us. As love was learned in reading and writing for the protagonists, so for us the text is imbued with the force of passion and seduction.

Notes to Chapter 1.

Notes to pages 1-3

¹ Ovid, The Art of Love, ed. and trans. E. V. Rieu (Cambridge, Mass.: Heinemann, 1927), pp. 112-113: "Believe me, love's bliss must not be hastened, but gradually lured on by slow delay."

² Ovid, The Heroides and the Amores, ed. and trans. G. Showerman (London: Heinemann, 1921), pp. 100-102: "Then will it be mine to have you again close joined to me on the same couch, telling me your glorious deeds in the field? And while you are telling the , though it delight to hear, you will snatch many kisses none the less, and will give . . . and such . . . words of well-told tales meet ever with such stops as this; more ready for report is the tongue repressed by sweet delay."

³ Latin Lyrics, trans. E. V. Rieu (New York: Norton & Co., 1927), pp. 14-15: "but in eternal holiday, / Thus, thus lie still and kiss the hours away. / No weariness is here, no shakiness, / Here is, was, shall be, all delightfulness. / And here no end shall be, / but a beginning everlastingly" (Rieu's translation).

⁴ Rieu, p. 12: "Laws divine and human allow the drawing out of old loves; make the beginning quickly, but not so the ending" (my translation).

⁵ Rieu, p. 27: "Desire itself hinders me much, when the heart is hardly adequate to the joy" (my translation).

⁶ While it is unlikely that any troubadour exercised direct influence over Chaucer, it is known that Chaucer travelled in northern Spain in the service of the Black Prince in the spring of 1366, and possibly at other times. If, as Laugha speculates, Chaucer's safe-conduct papers for Savarre were to enable him to contact Gascon knights to dissuade them from supporting Henry of Trastámara's claim to Pedro the Cruel's Castilian throne, then it seems equally probable and demonstrable that Chaucer would have run across some cultured Spanish literati and at least some latter-day Spanish troubadour poets, or singers, or entertainers. See A. C. Laugha, "The background of Chaucer's mission to Spain," in Chaucer und Seine Zeit, ed. Arno Esch (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1900), pp. 55-69; Thomas May Garbarty, "Chaucer in Spain, 1366: Soldier of Fortune or Agent of the Crown?" ELM, 5 (1907), pp. 1-07; and Chaucer's life-records, ed. A. C. Laugha and C. C. Olson (Oxford, 1900), p. 4; and Alice E. Lasater, Spain to England (Jackson: Univ. Press of Mississippi, 1950), pp. 125-129.

⁷ Texts and translations of all the Provençal poems I cite are from An Anthology of Troubadour Lyric Poetry, ed. and trans. A. R. Cross (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1971). "Ab fina joia," in Cross, pp. 88-89: "With noble joy the poem begins which rimes fair words together."

⁸ Cross, pp. 88-89: "I am mindful of love and its fair speech, it gives me nothing more; but by patient waiting I hope that some joy of it may come to me."

⁹ Cross, pp. 182-183: "It is indeed right then that she should hear my songs, she is so worthy and with rich merit endowed."

¹⁰ René Nelli, L'Erotique des Troubadours (Toulouse: Privat, pp. 134, 173, 174: "that for courtly lovers love resides rather in desire, in the joy of desire, than in the joy of satiation. . . . for the classical troubadours . . . joy is indeed love before any "realization," joy contained within desire. . . . it is not continence (in the Christian sense) that specifies provençal love, but rather the idea that desire should be purified . . . But what is it to purify desire, if not to defer as long as possible its accomplishment in order to transform it into joy, into generous love?"

¹¹ Cross, pp. 34-35: "for no other joy pleases me so much as enjoyment of love from afar."

¹² Cross, pp. 34-35: for in the heart there's joy of no other love but of that one which I never saw; nor am I gladdened so much by any joy, yet I know not what good of it will come to me."

¹³ Cross, pp. 76-77: "When I see the lark beating with joy its wings against the ray of the sun until, oblivious, it swoons and drops for the sweetness which enters its heart, ah, such great envy takes me of whatever I see rejoicing, I marvel that on the instant my heart melts not with desire."

¹⁴ Cross, pp. 38-39: "For this love I am so eager that when I go running towards her, it seems to me that in retreat I turn from it and that she goes fleeting away; and my horse moves on so slowly that I scarce believe any more that I might reach her, unless she herself is willing to hold back."

Notes to pages 5-11

15 Press, pp. 184-185: "I love her nobly and long for her so much that, through great desire, I fear that I'll rob myself of her -- if one can lose something through loving well."

16 Press, pp. 118-119: "On account of such joy am I gay and light-headed that even the desire which I have of it from one who never showed me favour is worth more, by the saints one seeks at Vézelay, than any other joy in which one could rejoice."

17 Press, pp. 220-221: "Hence I'd rather chase without catching, than catch that with which I'd not be satisfied, because one good thing, desired, is worth a thousand others."

18 Press, pp. 310-311: "But it [love] bids me only to endure -- by naught else does it relieve me -- for by enduring will I have its joy, without falsehood."

19 "I marvel greatly at myself, and how I live, for I wake so much." "For I do not wish to forget the Beauty, for whose love I am entered into this travail, and wake so much."

20 See Robinson's note on lines 16-21, p. 774 of Works.

21 "'low,' she says, 'have patience, therein lies the science of the lover.'"

22 "Foolish haste." "Make no haste."

23 "When he is willing to wait for it in time."

24 "A second wheel is adjusted which retards it, and makes it move by order and measure, as well as by the operation of the foliot, which moves it continually, thus: at one moment to the right, and then at the next to the left, nor should it nor can it ever rest; for by it is this wheel regulated, and retarded by true measure."

25 G. J. Whitrow explains the foliot in The Nature of Time (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1973) better than the dictionaries do: "The crucial invention that made the mechanical clock possible was the 'verge' escapement (the word was probably derived from the Latin virga, meaning a rod or twig). This was an ingenious device in which a heavy bar, of 'foliot', pivoted near its centre, was pushed first one way and then the other by a toothed wheel driven by a weight suspended from a drum. The wheel advanced by the space of one tooth for each to-and-fro oscillation of the bar. . . . The toothed wheel, driven round by a weight, is prevented from 'running away' by two projections on the vertical rod or verge." (p. 72).

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- 26 "What a scene, in all delights unequalled! Will I find a place to choose for retirement, to compose and write down the ballades that Love commanded of me with his own mouth?"
- 27 "We will leave you alone here beneath this arbor, thus to perform what it pleases Love that you shall perform."
- 28 "I will write here, in this covered place, beneath this arbor, where it is fitting. Thus I sat down alone and aside."
- 29 "You will abide this month here, and here make each day a new ballade, while hoping to hear news of your lady."
- 30 "A month above all others rich in joy."
- 31 "And as I've said, upon the lawn, ornamented with many a little flower, I began in this way, on that day, my first ballade."
- 32 Kevin Brownlee, "Transformations of the Lyric 'Je': the Example of Guillaume de Machaut," in L'Esprit Créateur 18 (1978), pp. 5-18.
- 33 Brownlee, "Transformations."
- 34 Brownlee, "Transformations."
- 35 "These six maidens."
- 36 "My reward lies in your sweet attention and patience."
- 37 "For this, in doubt and in fear I wish to obey my sweet lady, to serve her, to hide my love, and without stint to live in her amorous danger."
- 38 "But you have argued so badly."
- 39 You have not spoken here anything but speeches that are like frivolities; they are fine to tell in the boudoir, but they contain nothing of which profit can come to you to support your argument."
- 40 Guillaume's next example is just as weak: a knight of Orleans, separated from his beloved, exchanges letters with her until she writes that she has gotten married, whereupon he retreats into the wilderness and becomes a sort of wild hermit in the tradition of Nebuchadnezzar and Yvain. The knight's extreme reaction invites charges of excess and bestiality. Guillaume cannot prove that the letter reporting the marriage was authentic, and excuses the knight's excess by the poetic strategy of personifying the knight's

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passion and saying that grief, not the knight, originated this madness (2688-2690).

Charity's response hangs on another verbal manoeuvre, a momentarily adroit but imperfect analogy: just as a sapling in becoming a tree loses its first name but gains in perfection, so the lady in marrying gains in perfection while losing the name of maiden, and the knight should rejoice in her perfection rather than lament her change. The analogy takes no account of the relationship between people, but considers the lady in isolation, and thus works from as limited a perspective as the knight's in the story.

⁴¹ "Have nothing to do with the issue before us."

⁴² "But I ask you, if it please you, that we abridge our plea, for we digress too far from the issue which was originally moved."

⁴³ See G. L. Kittredge, Chaucer and His Poetry (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1915), p. 54: "Here, for the first time, whether in French or English, we find the standard French conventions -- the love-vision, and the lover's lament -- turned to the uses of a personal elegy." C. L. Rosenthal notes a possible exception in "A Possible Source of Chaucer's Booke of the Duchesse -- Li Regret de Guillaume by Jehan de la Mote," ELN 48 (1933), pp. 511-514: "Both open with the plaint of a sleepless sufferer; each embodies a dream containing the elegiac lament; they are concluded by the awakening of the dreamer who hastens to reveal the vision to interested parties." The narrative voice is not so complex as in Chaucer, however, nor does the narrator participate so much in the vision, since the major portion of the Regret consists of separate laments by each of thirty personifications of the deceased's virtues. At one point the narrator incongruously becomes an accidental voyeur as he gazes at the lamenting ladies through a peephole in the wall of their locked chamber (292-296, 309-316). It is a little more like the eighteenth-century sensualist's minor adventure than the self-conscious vision of an artistic narrator as in Chaucer, where elegy comes to have something intrinsic to do with poetry. Li Regret Guillaume has been edited by A. Scheler (Louvain: Lefever, 1882).

⁴⁴ See Robinson's note on line 384, p. 775 of Works.

Chapter II. The Melancholy Imagination

Or call up him that left half told
 The story of Cambuscan bold,
 Of Camball, and of Algarsife,
 And who had Canace to wife,
 That own'd the vertuous Ring and Glass,
 And of the wondrous Hors of brass,
 On which the Tartar King did ride;
 And if ought els, great Bards beside,
 In sage and solemn tunes have sung,
 Of Turneys and of Trophies hung;
 Of Forests, and enchantments drear,
 Where more is meant then meets the ear.

(Milton, Il Penseroso, 109-120)

Even at the remove of three hundred years, Milton, in a poem on melancholy, associated Chaucer with unfinished stories and implied meanings, whose unending designs on and of our desires are rendered in the terms of the symbolic actions of romance. In this chapter, I would like to consider how the poetry of prolonged desire draws on the melancholy mind for the imagery that fuels it. It should be no accident that Chaucer's initial poem is spoken by a melancholic, for whom vision and elegy are coterminous.

1. Freud

Freud's essay on "Mourning and Melancholia"¹ offers an excellent beginning point for a discussion of melancholy in elegiac poetry. His account of it focuses on the faculties of imagination and love Chaucer is interested in, explains the symptoms as found in the Book of the Duchess, and is not, in fact, anachronistic. Freud offers a theory, not an example or rendering, of melancholy. There

is no question of influence here, but rather of finding what description of melancholy will best enable us to understand the melancholia of the dream-visions. Theory, abstract and fictive by nature, cannot be anachronistic. It may become obsolete, if a better theory is invented, but this potential for obsolescence shows that the most recent theory is more often than not the most helpful and comprehensive.

The compatibility of the psychological perspective and the historical tradition of the genre suggests that melancholy is more intrinsic to vision poetry than either the tradition or the psychology alone could have shown. Taken together, Freud's account and the texts enable one to theorize about the literature of vision as a literature of melancholy.

In particular, Freud's picture of the dynamic of melancholy adduces both the narcissism and the sense of loss repeatedly to be observed in the narrators of dream visions. The combination of loss and self-interest is seen in the melancholic's translation of an outward loss into an inward loss. Poets also, like the melancholics, translate the experiences of others into their own narratives. And the melancholics, by objectifying their feelings in psychic fictions, may learn that their losses need not determine their life.

The symptoms of melancholia as described by Freud are quite similar to the condition of both the narrator and the Knight in the Book of the Duchess:

The distinguishing mental features of melancholia are a profoundly painful dejection, abrogation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of all activity, and a lowering of the self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-revilings, and culminates in a delusional expectation of punishment.²

The patient represents his ego to us as worthless, incapable of any effort and morally despicable; he reproaches himself, vilifies himself and expects to be cast out and chastised.³

In the poem, the self-denigration is expressed by the Knight's excessive and artificial railings against Fortune, the narrator's tense secretiveness, and the extended lamentations of both about their conditions. The luxury of the rhetoric bestowed on these complaints indicates that more emotion is being expressed than may be accounted for by fate and fortune alone. To the degree that the laments are rhetorical, they are figurative with respect to the speakers. Fortune is the figure that allows the Knight to revile himself at a remove, and the Knight in turn affords the dreamer an opportunity to contemplate his own passionate misery as if objectively. In this regard the rhetorical laments function much as do the forgettings, mis-rememberings, and re-emphases that the modern melancholic constructs in the course of therapy. The different versions of his story for the Knight, and the reading and dreaming experiences for the narrator, are discourses that are controlled enough to avert direct confession, but also uncontrolled and autonomous enough to bring deep emotional concerns to the surface in unexpected ways. The independent discipline of words, mediating reality and fantasy, guarantees both significance of content and discretion of presentation.

Freud's melancholic is quite a talker too, showing not shame but apparently pleasure in revealing personal inadequacies:

the opposite trait of insistent talking about himself and pleasure in the consequent exposure of himself predominates in the melancholic.⁴

Freud theorizes that the melancholic feels no shame because the reviling ultimately has someone else as its object:

If one listens patiently to the many and various self-accusations of the melancholic, one cannot in the end avoid the impression that often the most violent of them are hardly at all applicable to the patient himself, but that with insignificant modifications they do fit someone else, some person whom the patient loves, has loved or ought to love. . . . the self-reproaches are reproaches against a loved object which have been shifted on to the patient's own ego.⁵

In the Knight's case, anger at White for dying becomes rhetorical anger at Fortune. Further, the Knight's remarking of how he mismanaged youth, song lyrics, and courtship, and his sense of his unworthiness, suggest that the person he blames for death is neither Fortune nor White but himself, for he is the one who has not yet learned to live. In the narrator's case, we cannot tell what the object is from which he has transferred his anger and grief. The narrator embodies the melancholic condition in an abstract, purely inwardly phenomenological, way.

The parallel between Freud and the melancholia of the poem is somewhat vexed here, because one finds it hard to believe that a deepseated ambivalence toward the beloved plays any part in the Knight's malady. If we set his experience with her in the context

of the tradition of courtly love, however, we can infer that the sweet tortures and tortured sweets of that love were his portion. He does, after all, invoke the usual string of contraries (599-615), and spends only eleven lines (1287-1297) describing their mutual bliss, as counterweighed by the long story of his unpolished youth and inauspicious courtship. The Knight has pitted against himself the whole situation of courtly love -- the necessary inadequacy of the lover, the inevitable dangier of the beloved -- to which he feels too bound and indebted for his hard-won (albeit negative) sense of self to criticize or abandon. The oft-cited remark about her never doing anything so unkind or excessive as sending lovers off to the conventional trials in foreign wastes may be too much a protestation:

He sende men into Walakye,
To Bruyse, and into Tartarye,
To Alysaundre, he into Turkye,
And byd hym faste anoon that he
Goo hoodles to the Drye Se
And come hom by the Carrenar. (1024-1029)

He almost sounds, with this exuberant list, as if he wishes he had been asked. And while the knight assures us White is not like the ladies of the convention, he often uses other symbols from it to describe her. Moreover, he can appeal to the conventional plots only to prove what his love is not. In making a show of asserting his love is not the exaggerated trial of tradition, he may lead one to wonder if he wishes it had been more like that, a more stunning affair, or to suspect on the other hand that it was too much so,

that his exaggeration makes a point rhetorically that he has been evading consciously -- that she might as well have sent him off to Mongolia, for all the ease she's given him. The negative idiom of the Knight's comparison between his love and the traditional love leaves space for much unwitting irony.

Assigning the Knight's intensity of feeling to his sense of powerlessness, betrayal, and loss rather than to simple adoration of White helps us see that the elegy is more for his selfhood than for her life, and that this is why it is so hard for him to get over it. With this perspective we can connect the impulse to vision to personal poverty, seeing elegy and vision as complementary rather than competing genres.

At the heart of melancholy for Freud is the terrible solitude of being able to criticize something or somebody else only in terms of criticizing oneself. He finds that all the symptoms of melancholy are those of normal grief except for the low regard for the self.⁶ Taking this difference as the index of melancholy's particular source, he theorizes that, when the melancholic has lost a loved person, the energy of their affection resorts, not to another person, or to memory, but to themselves:

the free libido was withdrawn into the ego and not directed to another object. It did not find application there, however, . . . but served simply to establish an identification of the ego with the abandoned object. Thus the shadow of the object fell upon the ego, so that the latter could henceforth be criticized by a special mental faculty like an object, like the forsaken object. In this way the loss of the object becomes transformed into a loss in the ego,

and the conflict between the ego and the loved person transformed into a cleavage between the criticizing faculty of the ego and the ego as altered by the identification.⁷

Insofar as the curing of melancholy would seem to involve the lightening of such inner critical faculties, we may see a therapeutic opportunity for such lightening in the subversions of authority characteristic of symbolic and comic texts and fiction-making -- a point discussed in the next chapter.

The inward or narcissistic character of melancholy is evident from the way the sufferer assimilates to himself all the ambivalence felt before towards the beloved:

The loss of a love-object constitutes an excellent opportunity for the ambivalence in love-relationships to make itself felt and come to the fore.⁸

This suggests to Freud that the melancholic's power of attachment to others, however sincere and faithful any particular attachment may be, is intrinsically weak. He refers to Otto Rank's observation that the passage from a fixed attachment to another person, to a thorough retreat of affect into the self when that person is lost,

seems to imply that the object-choice has been effected on a narcissistic basis, so that when obstacles arise in the way of the object-cathexis it can regress into narcissism.⁹

One cannot but admit that the youthful Knight's idleness, his mind like a blank slate, and his dedication to Love well before he had an object of love, mark him as focused on himself and rather lacking in externally supplied ideas. The purity and perfection

of the White he decides to love also suggest a sort of blank/blanche character that leaves him free to fantasize the details (and make himself vulnerable to quick delusion).

The narrator, while as dream-creator of the Knight he is possessed of a degree more of perspective and imagination, is narcissist enough to avoid revealing his dismal circumstances or private failures, preferring to concentrate on his state of mind in isolation from the things that might explain it. But he is, at least provisionally, redeemed by his fictive exercises: reading, dreaming, conversing, and his resolve to communicate the dream, all of which bespeak some willingness to construct objectivities. This practice in diversifying his perspective may eventually enable him to address without panic the particular objective reality that has been haunting him. Shifting from the narrator's biography to the poet's art, we may also notice that Chaucer's reticence about his speaker's situation makes room for the poem to mirror our losses as well as his.

Freud's theory also accounts for some of the more particular symptoms of melancholy appearing in the poem. For both narrator and Knight,

The picture of delusional belittling -- which is predominantly moral -- is completed by an overthrow, psychologically very remarkable, of that instinct which constrains every living thing to cling to life.¹⁰

The sufferer's intense self-deprecation ends in displaced suicides. Here, the Knight says he wishes he were dead (482, 506, 584, 686), and the narrator's extravagant amazement that he should still be alive after all he's been through argues a certain skepticism.

about life on his part as well (1-2, 16-20, 24, and his similar comments on the Knight's far-gone condition that establish a link between his and the Knight's inner states: 467-469). Insomnia, anorexia, and recklessness characterize both Knight and narrator. They are lovers without appetites. It is not their happiness that must be restored (the narrator who writes down his dream also feels worse the next day for his reading), but their desire.

This general carelessness marks the condition's intransigence. It is installed at the center of the self. Freud connects a refusal to eat with a rejection of the outside world that had offered us our first source of identification and which as children we tried to eat and incorporate in order to effect that identification.¹¹ If one has refused the world's contribution to one's sense of self, one feels compelled to cling all the more tenaciously to whatever narcissistically-determined objects of attention or interest one retains. This is what leads to insomnia, because one simply lies awake thinking about oneself, afraid one will cease to be if one ceases to do so, and unable to accept sleep's relaxation of concentration and connections:

The sleeplessness characteristic of melancholia evidently testifies to the inflexibility of the condition, the impossibility of effecting the general withdrawal of cathexes necessary for sleep. The complex of melancholia behaves like an open wound, drawing to itself cathectic energy from all sides (which we have called in the transference-neuroses "anti-cathexes") and draining the ego until it is utterly depleted; it proves easily able to withstand the ego's wish to sleep.¹²

The critical faculty works overtime in the melancholic as it both brings to bear on the self the despair felt over others, and confirms the narcissistic focus on self that all but defies that deprecation. Attached to but not loving itself, the melancholic self just cannot let itself off the hook.

Unless it invents new selves. Freud's theory of melancholy indicates that to win relief the sufferer must somehow re-attach interest and value to new objects. This is essentially a process of re-figuring objects and feelings, assigning them new meanings or giving them new symbols. The melancholics need to revise the poetry of their world. It is some sort of imaginative action that provides the way out of their narcissistic elegizing. The loss will not be supplied by therapy or fiction, but it will be recognized, and the elegy detached from narcissism, and made into a means of communicating with others.

The narrator-dreamer and the knight-singer -- both within the ultimate sanity of Chaucer -- demonstrate the fictive faculty to different degrees. To some extent it requires, but to an even larger extent it stimulates, some escape from the critical faculty that is wreaking havoc in the poor ego. Later we will consider how the witty Morpheus episode gives the narrator a chance to evade threatening issues like love and commitment, while practicing the solution to a lighter difficulty (insomnia), and gives the poet a chance to revise our critical expectations of what is emotionally consistent or significant in poetic form. In

his theory of melancholy, as in that of wit, Freud argues for the subject's need to circumvent an overactive critical faculty in order to accept ambivalent feelings. Ready criticism often just keeps one's attention fixed on a pre-conceived self-image or on the world's forms and respectabilities. In a psychological case, a patient has to restore each instance of repressed or redirected emotion to consciousness by talking. Language, midway between self and world, and determined by both inner content and outer form, is the accommodating site for the cure. Certain ways of saying things, and the effort of speaking at all, lead one eventually to feel then openly again.

In the poetic case presented by this vision, Chaucer shows how poetic language can cure melancholia. It offers symbolic symptoms that can be undone by interpretation, and thereby shows us that symptoms may be detected, confronted, and attenuated, in the scenarios created and recreated by language's motions -- and it is in the recreating phase that the artifice of the process is revealed as such, and the curative possibilities opened up. In its tropes and ornaments, in its entire artifice, poetry gives the mind new places in which to find meaning. From the vantage of these new places, the mind then turns and sees its existing realities are largely optional rather than determined. They can be "made" too. In its fictions and figurations the fearful self can be led to see that any particular obsession or defense could be foregone without taking the self along with it.

The imperfections of language, first in its inevitable distortion of experience, and second in its temporizing of meaning, complement the need of the melancholy mind to experiment with fictions of the self that are provisional rather than prescriptive, and to make this experiment over a certain period of time. For the melancholic ego must resolve its grief over again for each occasion of loss:

this presentation [of the beloved to the melancholic mind] is made up of innumerable single impressions (unconscious traces of them), so that this withdrawal of libido is not a process that can be accomplished in a moment, but must certainly be, like grief, one in which progress is slow and gradual. . . . in analyses it often becomes evident that first one, then another memory is activated and that the laments which are perpetually the same and wearisome in their monotony nevertheless each time take their rise in some different unconscious source.¹³

The amount of time it takes to cure an emotional illness is one of the marks of the illness as such. A certain feeling or view of self becomes a problem precisely when it becomes so ingrained that the psyche cannot adapt itself readily, resists all occasions of change, and chains itself to a past.

The therapeutic fictions of the melancholic, in order to prove to the sufferer the possibility of cure, must themselves bear the fault-lines of a self once divided against itself, and be the scar that signals, as a perfect restoration would not, the curing of a malady. In language, one has a medium that is in its finest forms time-consuming and imperfect, and thus well-suited to

expressing the sorrows of a mind struggling through myriad ambivalences and difficulties one by one. In language, the wearied mind can even take a sort of repose in finding a formal analogue to its own task. It is easier to be melancholic, as well as to cease being melancholic, in language than in any other medium.

One other thing Freud helps us to do is to distinguish the melancholia of literature from moral issues of sin. His distinction of melancholia from mourning on the basis of the involvement in the former of a loss felt as occurring in the self, helps us see that the sorrows of Petrarch and Chaucer, Hoccleve and Chartier, do not arise from moral or religious scruples or failings, but from difficulties in their own projects of humanism, and the desire for that possession of truth known as "authority" -- things necessary to some degree for poetry, but also dangerous to the person of the poet. In particular, the notion that excessive grief is the sin confessed and cured in the Book of the Duchess, so often subscribed to, may be seen to oversimplify and in fact ignore the personal dilemmas of the poets. What we find here is not an excess of grief, but a qualitatively more difficult and more deeply ingrained grief, misdirected against the grievers, not inviting our judgement upon them. The change in the Chaucerian symptomology from slothful sleepiness to insomnia further indicates that his melancholic belongs to the amorous-scholarly tradition, not the moral-medical tradition of melancholia.

The interest in and intricacy of voicing in Chaucer's persona, here and in later poems, is another sign of the internal origins of the malady as well as of the poetry. How to diversify from oneself, without departing from oneself, but in order to find oneself, and how to divert one's attention from one set of things in order to not be diverted and distracted by another set, are paradoxes less easy of resolution than even habitual sins of self-indulgent grief. It is one thing to mourn a loss too much or too long; it is another to have mournfulness itself inscribed in one's heart and temperament. The initial great challenge is: how to start the cure from nothing, from a mind lacking virtually all perspective. Imagination, reading, dreaming, rhetoric, and poetry can effect the cure precisely because they are not less complicated or less problematic than the condition of the melancholic. So the Book of the Duchess, for example, offers little consistency, and little theme, because it is not intended to restore a mind to consistency or to an ideology. It is looking to free the speaker's mind from inauthentic clutching at the shadows of creeds, to enable his mind to diversify on its own power.

2. Medieval Melancholy

We should look now to some medieval texts concerning melancholy to see how it was described at the time and what its significance in literature was.

Several non-fictional treatises discuss melancholy. According to the Secreta secretorum, "ouer myche thoght" leads to "wakyng moche . . . grete drede, moche doutynge . . . goodis of fortune gretly to covete . . . or myschaunces to remembyr," and Bartholomaeus, in Trevisa's translation of his De Proprietatibus Rerum, returns to these same "besy thoughtes" or "besynes & grete thoughtes," as the principal cause and symptom of melancholy.¹⁴ (The difficulty in separating the causes from the symptoms of melancholy, and the way that its symptoms can be diverted to become its cures, suggest that the disease is, so to speak, a text of itself, since it exists only and essentially in its representations.)

Both these sources teach in brief what we will see Petrarch, for one, learn at length: that not thought itself, but thought directed exclusively towards ephemeral and external objects, is what brings on melancholy. To remove a little from these moralistic terms, one might say that anyone whose thoughts are fixed so that they cannot be changed, be forgotten, or start a speculation, will probably grow melancholic, for in that case one loses the capacity for thought itself, defined as the possibility of thinking new thoughts. Concern with things not of authentic interest to the self drive it to fret over itself because it cannot recognize itself in any of its thoughts.

In the two citations below, lack of speech, wakefulness, and aimlessness of both thought and action characterize melancholy. The mind is racing in a superficial way that engenders abrupt speech and disjointed thought rather than attentiveness free to concentrate or disengage as desired. In the absence of real interest, every thought becomes proof of the mind's inadequacy to its own aspirations. The melancholy described here is of a rhetorical kind, where inner loss is expressed in failures in thinking and speaking.

Est et ei sine clade dolor, sine nomine moeror,
 Intima sed cordis nubilus error habet.
 Hanc modo somnus habet, modo tarda silentia prensant,
 Ambulat et sterit, murmurat atque tacet.
 Somniat his oculis residens ignarus apertis,
 Nilque loquens sese dicere multa putat.
 Actus hebes, secessus iners, oblivio pigra
 Sunt, et nil fixum mente vel ore vehit. 15

The abrupt speech and movement, the inability really to pay attention to anything, and the discrepancy between the reality of the self (saying nothing, virtually asleep) and the perception of the self (saying much, wide awake), are symptoms easily seen in both Chaucer's speakers and Freud's cases. The malady's being a grief in the absence of any catastrophe and a mournfulness without a name particularly indicates that it is a disease in the self, "intima," and not arising from any outward cause. Like Chaucer's poem it is athenatic. Some lines from the Regimen Sanitatis Salerni give similar symptoms, with special notice of studies:

Restat adhuc tristis colerae substantia nigra,
 quae reddit pravos, pertristes, pauca loquentes.
 Hi vigilant studiis, nec mens est dedita somno.
 Servant propositum, sibi nil reputant fore tutum.
 Invictus et tristis, cupidus dextraeque tenacis,
 non expers fraudis, timidus, luteique coloris. 16

Another passage from the Salerno treatise characterizes melancholy as a privation of reason, as distinguished from *mania*, which is a privation of imagination. The implication is that the melancholic is if anything all too gifted with the imaginative faculty.¹⁷

Wenzel's study of The Sin of Sloth: Acedia in Medieval Thought and Literature¹⁸ provides a comprehensive outline of the passage from the medieval sin to the Renaissance temperament. Raban Maur's description of *acedia*'s origins and symptoms points to the fixation on worldly *visibilia* that infects the fancy of anyone too susceptible to distraction and desire:

Acedia . . . dum otiosus homo torpescit in desideriis carnalibus, nec in opere gaudet spirituali nec in salute animae suae laetatur, nec in adiutorio fraterni laboris hilarescit: sed tantum concupiscit et desiderat, otiose tractans, per omnia discurret. . . . De qua nascitur somnolentia, pigritia operis boni, instabilitas loci, pervagatio de loco in locum, tepiditas laborandi, taedium cordis, murmuratio et vaniloquia, quae utique a milite Christi vincitur per studium lectionis, per assiduitatem operis boni, per desiderium praemiorum futurae beatitudinis, per confessionem tentationis quam in mente habet, per stabilitatem loci et propositi sui, atque exercitium cumuslibet artis et laboris vel orationis, et vigiliarum instantiam: ut nunquam otiosus inveniatur servus Dei.¹⁹

Later Petrarch will find the source of his own melancholia in just such a reliance on and longing for commendation from the world and for commensurability between worldly riches and imaginative ones. Since such a commensurability does not obtain in this life, the sufferer from *acedia* cannot do anything but desire, and herein the melancholic lover resembles such a sinner, as another lover of the unattainable. The melancholic also shares in the lassitude, aimless wandering, and perverse eloquence, of *acedia*, all indications of a

soul undervaluing itself in the midst of a semblance of great activity, and all seen in the speakers in the Book of the Duchess.

Chaucer's narrator has never quite lost his right eloquence, as his refraining from outright complaint and his choice to read lets us know. That aspect is taken up in the Knight, whose complaints and hyperboles then give the narrator an occasion to exercise some of his melancholy by exercising his rhetoric and correcting that of the Knight. We have seen Raban Maur suggest that such rhetorical actions as reading, confession, and the practice of arts or prayer are the right remedies for acedia. Both acedia and melancholy are seen as manifesting themselves and being cured in a rhetorical realm, as diseases of speaking, in which a person cannot accept the gap between what one wants to be able to say and what one can say. Both the melancholic and the sinner either fall into the lassitude of utter conventionality, like the Knight in his songs, or frantically force multitudes of images, as we will see Petrarch do. The writers of dream-visions specifically addressing melancholy, notably Hoccleve and Chartier in addition to Chaucer, have found a middle way between dumb convention and fantastic imaginings. It consists in allowing the multitude of images to come, on the one hand, in reading, musing, dreaming, and wandering, while on the other hand not insisting that these images prove any absolute principle, refer to any one ideology, express consistently any one theme, or otherwise serve to confirm the mind in some specious control of experience. The uncertainty

if the images' meaning in this kind of dream-vision is a sign that the reader or narrator is invited to let go of some of the preconceptions that have imprisoned the defensive mind and kept the frightened psyche from reflecting on itself honestly. Once you can cease fearing to be not totally correct or comprehensive, or not accepted publicly or universally, or not even sure of who you are all the time, you are free to think in true independence, and with real comprehensiveness, rather than constructing a self-sabotaging solitude.

In the thirteenth century, Hugh of St. Victor's brief review of *acedia* continues the motifs seen in Raban Maur:

Tristitia est ex frustrato rebus contrariis roto
turbatae mentis anxietudo, et rei bonae bene gerendae
taedium. Ejus comites sunt desperatio, rancor, torpor,
timor, acidia, querela, pusillanimitas.

Acidia est ex nimia confusione animi nata tristitia
sive taedium, vel amaritudo animi nimia, qua
jucunditas spiritalis exstinguitur, et quodam
desperationis principio mens in seipsa subvertitur.²⁰

Again the initial lassitude and paralyzing anxiety is seen as arising from one's frustrations with the contrariety -- rationality speaking -- of experience. This leads to fearfulness for the self's strength and validity in the world, and that fearfulness binds the mind to search for sureness whose futility makes for ever new occasions of anxiety. Finally, from the unending possibilities for fear arises *acedia*, the disease of the thwarted mind that finds no path open to it but to turn upon itself. The difficulty of *acedia* is how to break this vicious circle of a mind both

frustrated and insistent. Whatever the mind's exclusive reliance on itself substitutes so inefficiently for -- the love of parents or patron, God or lady -- that too binding tie can only be loosed if the good things about change and mutability become clear to the imagination.

If the poets are right, it is the rhetoric of the indeterminate symbol, or diffuse, unprogrammatic, symbolism, the idiom of the dream-vision, that provides the way out. In it the mind can see all its images, both the uncontrolled image it fears and the fantasy image of its fondest desires, given room in a text where neither one destroys the other. Some qualification such as a dream-frame or interlocutor will then offer healthy competition with the reader's idiosyncratic perspective. The text presents not a hierarchy of thoughts but a sequence of images and ideas, realized, for example, in the Book of the Duchess, as a series of scenes that do not quite finish, but modulate into each other. While the emotional and symbolic plots develop coherently, they do not latch on to any one experience or set of characters or setting or theme that would then command the reader's attention as if it, not the mode of thinking suggested, were the important factor for the reader.

Kenzel notes two general developments: the secularization of the sin acedia, with authors resetting it in personal, emotional contexts, and the consequent extension of acedia to signify grief as well as sloth. Indolence expresses the sense of irremediability

one feels after a great loss. When Wenzel, then, finds that "by 1200, acedia comprised two essentially different vices, grief and indolence,"²¹ one should perhaps trust the insightful conflation of the poets more, and change "essentially different" to "causally related." Wenzel's own account of Dante's version of acedia in Purgatorio concentrates on the connection between this sin and loss. He observes the revealing assignment by Dante of the blessing for the mournful to those repenting of sloth in canto 19, and reflects that

Dante has here added a personal dimension to the theological and moral meaning which acedia bears in his cosmos, a personal dimension which implies that for Dante acedia or lento amore sprang from the loss of good. This experience agrees very well with Hugh of St. Victor's concatenation of the vices: "When all is lost . . . there is nothing from which man's miserable mind can derive joy, and thus it is dashed upon itself through tristitia."²²

Klibansky, Panofsky, and Saxl also derive Renaissance melancholy from various aspects of the medieval acedia in their broad study Saturn and Melancholy: Studies in the History of Natural Philosophy, Religion and Art.²³ They trace, for example, the influence of Tristesse in the Roman de la Rose on Chartier's Dame Merecoye in his Traité de l'Esperance.²⁴ They observe in particular that

the visionary dream, a very common device in medieval narrative poetry -- generally introduced by the narrator finding himself in rural solitude -- is now conjured up not by the writer's fatigue or sorrow, but by his "melancholy." Fifteenth-century poets fly to nature's bosom "pour oblier merencolie / et pour faire plus chiere lie."²⁵

In citing Chartier as an instance of the new Renaissance understanding of acedia's lethargy and despair, the authors forget that the French fifteenth-century Renaissance does not develop from either its own past or from the Italian fourteenth-century Renaissance without the example and continuation of the High Middle Ages that were the fourteenth century in England. That other Eden provided a meeting-place, at least in literature, for Renaissance Italy and medieval France to work together on the English imagination, a meeting that could not have occurred in the chronology of either of those two nations or eras alone.

Chaucer had already transformed the simpler fatigue and love-sorrow of Machaut and Froissart into the studious, introspective, self-conscious sense of loss and confusion besetting the dreamer of his visions. He intertwines the lover's and the scholar's melancholy. Moreover, this melancholic character then "took" in England as it did nowhere else. Pearsall observes of Hoccleve's Complaint, for example, that it

manages to communicate an ineradicable sense of personal reality, where we recognize that what Hoccleve is doing is take over Chaucer's habit of talking ironically about himself as a technique and precedent for talking truly about himself.²⁶

Chaucer has helped Hoccleve see that the irony one talks about and through is also a real irony inside Hoccleve's soul. Chaucer's poetic idiom makes possible new sensitivity to experience. In more general terms, the debt of the melancholic convention to poetic fictions is pointed out by Lyons, who also traces the

symptoms of sighing, pallor, anorexia, and insomnia in particular to the traditions of courtly love.²⁷

England offers the most continuous of all the traditions of melancholy, from the Wanderer to Burton's stupendous Anatomy. It is also conceivable that Chaucerian melancholy influenced the French Chartier, as discussed further on. I would suggest that both England and Chaucer made a formative contribution to the conventions and realities of melancholy, especially as associated with the imaginative mind.

Chaucer could do this primarily because he does not link the melancholy phenomena or their cure to a single cause, spiritual, physical, or psychological. By thus isolating the illness from its occasion, he focuses attention on the illness itself, and grants it independent significance. The question Chaucer can pose, then, is not Why is Love sad, or Why is Religion difficult, but What is it essentially to be in Sorrow and Difficulty, and further, What does that experience have to do with imagination and meaning? In view of this isolation of the phenomenon of melancholy, Chaucer's refusal to name as love melancholy a malady that closely resembles it does not argue that it is actually a religious melancholy being figuratively described. Sloth and acedia actually prevent the sinner from confessing and making penance, but in this poem, the idleness of the young Knight leads him to love, his despair issues in song and conversation, and the narrator's sorrowful indifference invites him to read Ovid, and thence to formulate his own vision of change.

3. Melancholy's Images

Why is it appropriate that the personal elegy of melancholy take the form of a vision? Where do the plentiful images of that vision come from?

In Froissart's lines, behind the opening of the Book of the Duchess, the word "merancoli" names the sad lover's fantasies as well as his psychological and physiological condition.

Car bien sachiez que par vellier
 Ne viennent souvent travellier
 Pensees et merancolies,
 Qui me sont ens on cuer lïes,
 Et pas ne les pues desliier;
 Car ne voel la belle oublier
 Pour quelle amour en ce travel
 Je sui entres et tant je vel. (PA 5-12)²⁸

Chaucer begins with the same symptoms, but leads then not to the lady but to the further symptom of indifference and confusion:

I have so many an ydel thoght,
 Purely for defaute of slep,
 That, by my trouthe, I take no kep
 Of nothing, how hyt cometh or gooth,
 Ne me nys nothyng leef nor looth. (4-8)

Froissart is passively visited by thoughts that "le viennent," while Chaucer's speaker declares, "I have so many." Chaucer's speaker works, Froissart's is worked upon. Froissart emphasizes that these thoughts are bound in his heart and that he cannot unbind them by forgetting the lady who informs them. Chaucer introduces instead the element of indifference, which paradoxically leads the narrator to more actively direct his thoughts.

Froissart links melancholy to the frustrated images that stand in for the lover's attaining his desires. As the treatises already cited suggest, desires which afford no true satisfaction (whether they are limited by the ephemerality of the world or the dangler of the lady) trap the mind into paying attention to unrealizable fancies that can only be images. It is the conjunction of desire and frustration that yields this persistent imagery. Chaucer's extension of this formula into indifference, however, implies that a certain nonchalance regarding both life's activities and the mind's images may allow those images to change and develop. The compulsive images can be modulated into poetic, recreative images, when the images themselves take on some autonomy -- and this is what happens when they are presented as a vision, where a more mythic and less circumstantial status is accorded them. The project of recording them also confers autonomy on images, since writing gives them into the keeping of the formal standards of the language, which are independent of the individual melancholic's solecisms.

Petrarch, whom one may regard as a point of confluence for the early Renaissance and the high Middle Ages, gives some clues to the sources of melancholic imagery in his De Secretis Conflictu Curarum Mearum, an intellectual fable envisioned as a dialogue between Petrarch and Augustine. Images become excessive when too many of their sensibilia occupy the spirit:

Conglobantur siquidem species innumere et imagines rerum visibilibus, que corporeis introgresse sensibus, postquam singulariter admissae sunt, catervatim in anine penetralibus densantur; eandem, nec ad id genitam nec tam multorum difformiumque capacem, pregravant atque confundunt. Hinc pestis illa fantasmatum vestros dicerpens laceransque cogitatus, meditationibusque clarificis, quibus ad unum solum summum que lumen ascenditur, iter obstruens varietate mortifera.²⁹

The crowded soul cannot function by its own lights in this situation, cannot even determine the nature or remedy of its disease.

Siquidem fantasmatis suis obrutus, multisque et variis ac secum sine pace pugnantibus curis anirus fragilis oppressus, cui primum occurrat, quam nutriet, quam perimat, quam repellat, examinare non potest.³⁰

The goal of the melancholic soul, then, according to this diagnosis, is to rediscover both its ability to meditate on noncorporeal things of its own interest, and, even prior to that, to be able to sense, amidst all the confusion, that it is sick, and in what way it is sick.

What Augustine erodes through his questions and exclamations is Petrarch's reliance on outward things, on the particulars of his life and the vicissitudes of fortune, in his initial attempts to explain himself. Augustine's refusal to accept these explanations reorients Petrarch's vision to inner sights that clog the spirit less.

Petrarch lists ill health, the death of loved ones, prison, exile, and poverty as the chief and basic human miseries.³¹ He rails against the fortune that has brought such things upon him,

seemingly expecting tangible rewards for his virtues and good deeds and intelligence. Augustine finally convinces him that in fact this impression of fortune's caprice derives from the inner mind's attitude:

quia qui miseriam suam cupit exuere, modo id vere
pleneque cupiat, nequit a tali desiderio frustrari.³²

nunc unum illud indignor, quod fieri quenquam vel
esse miserum suspicaris invitum.³³

The cure of Petrarch's melancholy, then, lies in the correction of his attention, and this means he must meditate, deeply and at length, on final values and on death. By doing this, he will put the things of the world into perspective, reduce the array of their claims, and relieve himself of his care for them.

He often protests Augustine's pursuit of his thoughts by questioning that tries to make him rethink his claims: "Torquendus tibi sum, antequam fatear."³⁴ He seems to try to seal his plight against the intervention of Augustine. Augustine, like the dreamer in the book of the Duchess, asks him to specify the causes of his sorrow, and receives initially petulant replies. Petrarch, like the Knight, seems to feel that only their sorrows' magnitude and their constant expression of it can accurately define them or give them meaning in the face of death. In both cases, however, the interrogation does bring them to think again to some degree.

Sentio enim me tuis monitis magna sollicitudinem
meorum parte liberatum.³⁵

The questions re-interest the sufferer in his state, and in

describing it to someone who refuses to take it for granted, Petrarch and the Knight revise their state. The similarity between the method of the dreamer -- who might be ignorant of the Knight's loss -- and that of Augustine -- who is certainly not ignorant of Petrarch's troubles -- indicates that the dreamer's method is viable whether he has or has not comprehended the Knight's allusions to White's death. Even when one has grasped the facts of a situation, one has not grasped the meaning or effect of it until one has adopted the stance of ignorance and gone over the ground with new and thorough attention.

The meditations on mortality that can reorient the melancholic must be of an intense and unforgettable quality for which simple words cannot suffice. Augustine instances the experience of those who prepare the dead for burial, and continues:

Hoc est igitur quod "satis alte descendere" dicebam, non dum forte consuetudinis causa mortem nominatis, dum "nil morte certius, nil hora mortis incertius" ceteraque huius generis usu quotidiani sermones iteratis. Pretervolant enim illa, non insident. ³⁶

Language and eloquence, Petrarch's -- and Augustine's -- dearest accomplishments, are quickly proven unreliable in this project.

Quam multa sunt autem in rerum natura, quibus nominandis proprie voces desunt; quam multa preterea que, quanquam suis vocabulis discernantur, tamen ad eorum dignitatem verbis amplectendam ante ullam experientiam sentis eloquentiam non pervenire mortalium. . . . Que est igitur vita eloquentia, tam angusta, tam fragilis, que nec cuncta complectitur et que ferit complexa non stringit? Greci vobis, vos vicissim Grecis, verborum penuriam soletis obicere. ³⁷

One major cause of Petrarch's melancholy, then, is that the

resources of language he has customarily used to solve other problems or expound other quandaries is itself depressingly inadequate. The more practiced one is in the arts of language, the more often one is brought to confront, through the failings of this pre-eminent system of symbols, the ultimate failure of all systems of signification to measure, much less exercise, the distresses of the human condition.

On the other hand, Petrarch convinces us of this through words, specifically through his Augustine's lengthy and vivid catalogue of old age and death.³⁸ While words may not satisfactorily measure what we want them to measure, they may reveal other realities to us if allowed to play out less tendentious programs of imagery. The mandate given to language by the melancholic who wishes to acknowledge or work out the humor's demons is that it be copious and various. Both Petrarch's three-day conversation with his conjured mentor, and the changing symbolic scenes of Chaucer's dream-vision, satisfy the mind's preliminary need for length and scope of discourse. They afford imagination the suggestiveness and evocativeness it can feed on. They show it afresh what it can do, illustrating the bare faculty of imagination with their variety: a variety, now, not of competing outward claims on the mind, but of words alone, free from special argument, and thereby conformable to the pure action of the mind.

Chaucer's narrator has a problem of will similar to Petrarch's. Initially, he says that "I take no kep / Of nothyng" (6-7) because

he has "so many an ydel thoght" (4). He feels he has no desire or purpose, no opinion or attention, because his brain is crowded, like Petrarch's soul, with those idle ideas that reflect only externals and distract him from his inner questions. This alienation from himself leaves him no alternative but to be idle and unfocused, and immobilizes him with a consequent sense of self-worthlessness. It is, however, significant that idle thoughts are associated already with numerous thoughts, as though lack of interest had not at least been supplied by an obsession. The syntax makes it impossible to tell which comes first, insomnia or idling:

I may nat slepe wel nygh noght
 I have so many an ydel thoght
 Purely for defaute of slep. (3-5)

Omitting the punctuation makes clear the uncertainty of whether the sentence is saying (a) that he has so many idle thoughts that he cannot get to sleep, or (b) that he has so many idle thoughts because he cannot get to sleep. Read figuratively, the confusion suggests that there is an enchânement between wakefulness and idleness. The lapse of personal determination occasions alertness as well as listlessness. Chaucer's obscuring of the sequence of causes confirms the impression that some condition of diffused attentiveness underlies both being awake and being idle.

Reading the tale of Alcyone seems to be what revives him:

I had be dolven everydel,
 And ded, ryght thurgh defaute of slep
 Yif I ne had red and take kep
 Of this tale next before. (222-225)

Somehow, one may infer, especially from the repetition of the phrase

from line 6, the story has redeemed the idle thoughts. He may have chosen the story over the more active and competitive pursuits of chess or backgammon in silent recognition of the passiveness and receptiveness of his attention at this moment. The story gives him something he can attend to because, while it organizes numerous thoughts into a narrative too meaningful to be idle, it does not challenge the narrator's own thoughts -- or not directly. He is amused, but his idleness is unimpaired. The story does not commit him or claim him. In a way, the story itself proposes a positive use for the narrator's passivity: it suggests that he could get to sleep by appealing like Alcyone to Juno and Morpheus, that is, by vesting authority in somebody or something other than his own resolute confusion. By extending of his authority over himself to these imagined deities, in a formal, self-conscious way in his featherbed vow, he can begin to perceive external reality as a source of self-knowledge rather than fixation, while the fictional status of the deities insures his continued independence. Fictions about feelings give him his first purchase on a vantage point that neither the interferences of unshaped reality nor his own meditations on himself could afford alone. And by giving this emotional story verbal form, in retelling it to us and then composing the vow to Morpheus, the narrator extends the vantage point of perspective to his newly hypothesized audience, thus broadening the sharing out of the soul's necessities.

The internalized loss of melancholia is the disease's intrinsic narcissism, and the difficulty the melancholic poets and narrators have in getting perspective on themselves is reflected in the narcissism at the heart of the courtly love convention, where virtually all the lovers are melancholics. In the Roman de la Rose, it is an encounter with Narcissus that leads Guillaume's youth to fall in love. C. S. Lewis emphasizes the sense in which the pool of Narcissus contains in its two crystals the eyes of the lady,³⁹ while James I. Wimsatt believes the pool indicates that the lover, by looking into it, "had discovered in the depths of his own eyes (the crystals) the broad range of attractive experiences available to him in this garden."⁴⁰ The poem itself simply makes clear the independent facts that Narcissus saw himself in the water, and that the dreamer sees the garden. But it should not require too much psychologizing to conclude from this crux in the allegory that we see ourselves in others, find our value and values in others, and yet see others from our own perspective -- in short, that any recognition of self or other emerges from a mutual dialectic.⁴¹

What is strange is that the dialectic enacted at the pool of Narcissus issues in love and sorrow:

Qu'il muse tant en la fontaine
 Qu'il aie son ombre de mainne,
 Si en fu morz a la parclouse.

(RR 1493-1495)⁴²

What do these two emotions have necessarily in common? The Knight can be our particular instance. Lewis has noted the recollection of Narcissus in the Knight's loving,⁴³ and we know that he is

sorrowing now for the loss of his lady. The love, the narcissism, and the sorrow are related by more than circumstance.

The Knight had come into contact with the idea of love at a time when he was "As a whit wal . . . redy to cacche" (780-781) any impression from the outside world, before he had fully formed an autonomous self. Under these circumstances had he

throghe plesaunce become her thral
With good wille, body, hert, and al. (767-768)

He thus first forms his character in an image drawn from outside himself, that of the courtly lover. Regardless of what historical reality this figure may or may not have had, and regardless of whether it was virtually from its inception as a fiction liable to and accompanied by parodies of itself, the presence of the courtly lover to the Knight's mind's eye is attested by the remarkable conventionality of the poem, remarkable especially for showing so clearly through the complications and deviations Chaucer brings to it. Chaucer may well be playing with the courtly lover, but he must have him present in propria persona and in earnest in order to play with him in game.

The Knight, then, founds his identity on an external image, a "glass of fashion" in which he can see, not himself, but the self he has chosen to project at the instance of tradition and of his own need for a feeling of identity. He then proceeds to fall in love with a particular lady in another moment of gazing into imperious mirrors, her eyes:

I ne tok
 No .maner counseyl but at hir lok
 And at myn herte. (839-841)

And that heart of his has capitulated to those eyes:

hir eyen
 So gladly, I trow, myn herte seyen,
 That purely tho myn owne thought
 Seyde hit were beter serve hir for nocht
 Than with another to be wel. (841-845)

The pairing in rhyme of the Knight's "own" thought with nought is wittingly used by Chaucer. It is an old principle of courtly love that compared to the lady the lover is as nothing, and that he derives all his worth and virtue from hers:

For every wight of hir manere
 Myght cacche ynogh, yif that he wolde,
 Yif he had eyen hir to beholde. (846-870)

An idea of charm and beauty, perhaps, but one which also guarantees the lover's failure, for he has only the capacity to turn towards the sun, but not to speak or shine. He tells us that in his confession of love, "many a word I over-skippe . . . sturtege in my tale" (1208, 1213). In the lady's presence he finds that she has usurped his self, so that the exchange had had hoped for cannot proceed. The lady becomes an object of dread as well as of love when her appropriation of his faculties becomes evident:

Bowynge to hir, I hent the bed;
 I durste nat ones loke her on,
 For wit, maner, and al was goon.
 I syde 'mercy!' and no more. (1216-1219)

Whatever he did manage to tell her must have been quite unoriginal, for he either cannot, or sees no reason to try to, remember it verbatim, and decides instead "To telle shortly al my speche" (1223)

to the narrator. It admits of swift summary, indeed, consisting largely of repetitions (herte-hertely, And swor - I swor, lady swete-never other lady) and a series of breathless "And"s (six in five lines, 1226-1230), that limp as rapidly as possible to the one impression that sticks vividly in his memory:

For youre is alle that ever ther ys
For evermore, myn herte swete! (1232-1233)

The Knight's self and all he sees has been emptied of any identity apart from that derived from a tyrannic relationship to the lady in which his heart, like his love, has become a name for her.

But in "another yere" (1258) his suit is successful. We may assume that in the interim the Knight has been acting out his devotion and acquiring and proving out his lady's virtues according to the courtly code. We may assume so, because he tells us nothing else about his conduct. The body of his speech to her on the occasion of his second approach he reports, as before, in indirect discourse, and no special reason for her favorable reception appears: "So whan my lady knew al this" (1268). It seems to have simply a matter of time. He has practiced the artes honestiamenti long enough to open a line of communication with White on the level of courtly behavior -- but not yet on any more personal basis. His welcome resembles his repulse in that both arise from his having given himself up to external images of his loving self: the difference being that at his first attempt he had not yet had enough time to assume all the requisite trappings of woe and rhetoric. His advance in the matter of rhetoric may be measured in part by the

absence of comment and annotation on this second speech: he seems to feel that it needs no justification. Perhaps, as well, the story of a rejection is always more interesting than that of a success. To be able to make capital out of a rejection by narrating it is the greater demonstration of the possibilities of happiness and cure.

But the Knight's woe does not disappear with the success of his courtship, for the lady dies, and her death exposes the Knight's dependence on her to the exclusion of his own capabilities. It is a fictional enactment of the continuous frustration of the Knight's desire, which springs from his having given his allegiance to a self-image instead of a self, so that the happiness only his courtly self can win does not belong to his inner self.

The lovers in their happiness still communicate on the level of a shared fiction, for the Knight as he is and the Knight the lady loves can never be the same. And so, with the emotional accuracy poetry affords, he loses her and proves the ultimate impossibility of communicating self to other, or even to oneself, in any direct or nonfictional way. She dies in the poetic history as a sign of the residual aporia in all relationships.

Perhaps only some such continued limited death keeps human relationships alive. I by no means wish to imply that the love of the Knight and White is less than wonderful. Rather, its history illustrates with the lucid plots of fiction the conditions of life. The lesson, perhaps, is that only by recognizing the little deaths,

the gaps between our inner and our projected selves, can we apprehend the depth and extent of those relationships' reliance on shared fictions, and, seeing that, see how we may communicate more intimately by recognizing as the frontiers of truth the points where fiction turns into silence, and where, after a moment, interpretation is invited. Lovers can only tell each other stories, but once they know they are telling stories, they can learn to interpret, and refine their art.

We should remember that the Knight's love history has not ended with White's death. He has rehearsed it all again in his song and his conversation with the dreamer. The text of the poem presents us with not only a history but also the narrating of it. The narration supplies the inadequacies of the history by affording the Knight a dramatic space in which to step back and see himself, his lady, and his love, in the clanks of their fiction. The narrative, as the clearest opportunity for the Knight's truth to be expressed, indicates that the fictionality of relationships requires not the erasure of fiction but the reduplicating and complicating of it, to multiply our perspectives and create in our minds the idea of the possibility for truth, an idea needed to complement the ephemeral announcements of particular truths, which rarely persuade on their own.

It is on the lines of some such analogy that many critics have already seen the entire dream, including the Knight's story, as a therapeutic occasion for the narrator to gain perspective on

his troubles and for Chaucer to console John of Gaunt, and we may assume the Knight's narration helps him as the dream helps the narrator. Why, then, is there so little comfort in the consolation? Quite simply, because the recognition of the fictiveness of the expression of one's self and one's relationships, and even the recognition of a negative outline of one's "real" self in the blanks of that fiction, confronts us with the fact that we cannot in our own person satisfy our desires, that we must be storied and metamorphosed to attain pleasure or significance, that our understanding of our frustrations does not constitute a satisfaction of our desires, that we want those things that never can belong to us.

Our selves, in constant need of fictions to operate on or with anything or anybody, will always be prematurely incapable of authentic action, except within the mode of the fictive. The solution to the inadequacy of speech is not silence, but increase of conversation. In the fun-house of dreams and debates, the perilous single mirror of Narcissus becomes a landscape of choice and possibility, where desire creates in imagination's works such goals and objects as will remove it from subservience to contingency, and be worthy of it, if they cannot appease it.

4. Hoccleve

The blanks of fictions that I have referred to, that occasion our recreations of our minds, are located primarily in the symbols, the extended transitional moments, and the conversational conflicts of the poem. To these the coming chapters are devoted. I would like first to look at two poets who treat this malady more explicitly than Chaucer does, and give us some indication of the context for Chaucer's poetic melancholy: Hoccleve and Chartier.

The recognition and adopting of fictions as the field in which one may become real and complete is not a solution without problems of its own. Either the effort or the persistence of the artifice precludes, at least for long stretches of time, real repose in one's relationships or self-knowledge. When inevitably one experiences a non-fictional loss, one feels incapable of re-writing one's imaginative biography all over again. The difficulties of the fictive construction of self are, first, that one must revise it constantly, and then, that one must revise it precisely when depleted by the change or loss that necessitates revision. Yet fiction is of use despite this. For some idea of how or why this should be, we can turn to the example of a poet whose tales of melancholy are also biographical -- Hoccleve. One cannot suppose of him, as one might be tempted to of Chaucer, that the benefits of artifice are just an artifice made by someone unacquainted with melancholy.

The Prologue to Hoccleve's Regement of Princes gives a symptomology of melancholy. It begins with two classic and significant

topics: the sleepless speaker in bed at a particular time and place, and the meditation on mutability:

At Chestre ynne, right fast be the stronde,
As I lay in my bed vp-on a nyght,
Thought me bereft of sleep with force and myght. (RP 5-7)

And whan I hadde rolled vp and doun
This worldes stormy wawes in my mynde . . . (RP 50-51)

Thoughtfulness is the villain: "þoght" is "my crewel fo" (RP 72), for Hoccleve does not just have thoughts, but has become "thoghty" (RP 80), and "þe þoghtful wight is vessel of turment" (RP 81). The "inly pensif" (RP 85) character of the melancholic suggests that relentless self-consciousness and a habit of constant reflection mar the melancholic's life.

Similar symptoms occur at the beginning of Hoccleve's Complaint:

and in the ende of novembar, vpon a nyght,
syghenge sore as I in my bed lay,
for this, and othar thoughts, whiche many a day
before I toke, sleape cam none in myne eye,
so vexyd me the thoughtfull maladye. (Comp 17-21)

As a result of this thoughtiness, the melancholic experiences grief too as a mode of being, not simply as a single emotion arising in response to a single occasion. Of the thoughtful wight, Hoccleve says that "þer nys no greef to him equipolent" (RP 82).

Hoccleve then describes the self-perpetuating condition of this humor:

For euere whil þat fretynge aduersarie
Myn herte made to hum tributarie,
In soukyng of þe fresschest of my blod,
To sorwe soule, me thoght it dide me good. [i.e. "sole"]
For þe nature of heuynesse is þis:
If it habounde gretly in a wight,
þe place eschewit he where as ioye is,
For ioye & he not mowe accorde a-ryght. (RP 88-95)

This commitment to fretful topics keeps the melancholic from attending to others and their discourse:

Whan to be boghtful whiȝt is tolde a tale,
 He heerip it as bogh he pennes were;
 Hys heuy thoghtes hym so plukke & hale
 Hyder and bedir, and hym greue & dere,
 þat hys ere auayle hym nat a pere;
 He vnderstondeþ no þing what men seye,
 So ben his wyttes fer gon hem to pleye. (RP 99-105)

The beggar whom the narrator meets in his subsequent wandering advises him to combat this self-enclosure by telling his story to others and asking for their help. We are all beggars, he points out, in an analogy between his own situation and the one he suggests for Hoccleve, for we must all depend at times and for certain things on what we now call "the kindness of strangers." We, like the beggar, keep alive in this way, and if Hoccleve refuses to communicate, he will be driven by his hurts into "som myschaunce" (RP 265).

Doob, in her discussion of Hoccleve in Nebuchadnezzar's Children: Conventions of Madness in Middle English Literature,¹⁴¹ remarks that confession is important, not for its place in official religion, but for its opening of the mind to contact with others, as a rhetorical and imaginative activity. The most effective confessions take the form of conversations, as with the beggar in the Prologue, which Doob parallels to the dream conversation in the Book of the Duchess.

According to the beggar, thought becomes dangerous when it is "busy" or distracted:

Be war of boght, for it is perillous;
 He þe streight wey to discomfort men ledeþ;
 His violence is ful outrageous;
 Vnwise is he þat besy boght ne dredeþ. (RP 267-270)

The idea of distraction points to the fine lines between disturbance of the mind leading to obsession or evasion, and diversity of interest betokening health and inner resources. The question by which to distinguish them may be: does a particular object of attention enable one to move back and forth between it and other topics, or just in circles around itself? The beggar detects the melancholic's tendency to exclusive inwardness:

Sone, swych thoghte lurkyng be with-ynne,
 þat hunteth after þi confusioun,
 Hy tyme it is to voyde & late hym twynne,
 And walke at large out of þi prisoun. (RP 274-277)

Thoughts should not be treated as the property of the mind, but as its companions, or as children ("twins") to be given their autonomy. The prison image suggests the narrator's mind is fixing on thoughts rather than entertaining them. The double meaning of "twynne" -- to separate from and to duplicate -- further implies the need for diversity in one's thoughts. The mind can amplify or "twin" itself only by departing from or "twinning" from itself. It is thorough consistency, not diversity or changeability, that destroys the mind by committing it to an obsession.

The ability of the mind to let go its control over thoughts is invoked several times by the word "play." Hoccleve says he is a melancholic, "So ben his wyttes fer gon him to pleye" (RP 105). His madness occurred when "the substaunce of my memory / wente to play as for a certayne space" (Comp 50-51). Hoccleve's expression for his madness as a going off to play hints at the potential for melancholy's being a fruitful phase for the mind to pass through

on the way to a freer arrangement of its concerns. Doob observes that "These poems -- and indeed the Series as a whole -- have as their central themes the usefulness of physical disorder for recalling men to spiritual sanity."⁴⁵

In the Complaint that initiates the series including the Dialogue and Lerne to Die, Hoccleve tells us that he once went mad for awhile, but recovered his wits five years ago on All Saints' Day. His friends, however, still mistrust him, and their disloyalty and misunderstanding afflict him with a new depression, not crazed, but melancholic. He overhears people talking about him, and does not know whether to force a cheerfulness that would be called manic, or keep to himself and be called strange. In this dilemma, he doubts his own identity and must consult a mirror to see if he looks as he thinks he does. He is caught between his knowledge of his own sanity and his compelling desire and need to convince others of it by arranging his behavior to fit their definitions.

The gap in comprehension troubles him greatly. As a "bukkysh" (Comp 123) man, he wishes the case to be articulated and understood explicitly. He has a scholar's drive to understand and make himself understood. But in his present case, he confronts the simple truth that most of the time we cannot both be and seem to be something:

ffreend, as to þat, he lyueth nat þat can
 Knowe how it standith with an other wight,
 So wel as him self. (Comp 477-479)

That I was hole they not ne deme kowlde. (Comp 289)

The melancholy arises largely from Hoccleve's taking others' opinions so seriously that he doubts himself. In a sort of

"socialized" melancholy, he internalizes the "lost Hoccleve" they insist on, even though he had felt recovered to himself.

He finds some consolation in a book he has borrowed from a friend, consisting of a dialogue between Reason and one Thomas: if the marginal identification of the speaker as Thomas Hoccleve is a reader's misconstruction, it still shows that this reader, and subsequent printers, assumed a parallel between the primary and the internal narrators, and that the fictions reported by a melancholic were expected to comment on the melancholic's own situation.

This othar day a lamentacion
of a wofull man in a boke I sye,
to whome wordes of consolation
Reason gave spekyng effectually;
and well easyd myn herte was ther-by;
for when I had a while in the boke red,
with the speche of Reason was I well fed. (Comp 309-315)

But he must return it without having read it over as much as he would like (Comp 372-375). This unfinished element in his reading suggests his own subsequent writing, in which he will elaborate on his own specific complaints, and search for more consolation. The immediate effect of his reading is to supersede the fictions of others with this independent one:

for evar sythen set have I the lesse
by the peoples ymagination. (Comp 379-380)

In the Dialogue with his friend that follows immediately, as yet another interruption/inspiration intervenes between the opening of the poem and the persona's beginning to compose his poem, Hoccleve's overconcern for accuracy and shared truth appears in his particular grievances. He rather surprisingly spends a great deal

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of time railing against coin-clippers and counterfeiters, right at the head of his list. He has assumed that truth depends upon a trustworthy coin:

but yf this stynkyng errowr be correcte,
that so myche of this land shall be infecte
therewith, that trewthe shall a-downe be throwe,
and that curssed falshed it overgrowe. (Dial 193-196)

He is anxious that the truth be made explicit through punishment of offenders against it:

O, this I drede alwey this heriethe me
many a sythe that punishment
none falle shall on this cursed meynye;
how trewe so be ther enditement. (Dial 176-179)

In bad coin, he finds, "trewthe is absent / but falshed is not fer" (Dial 119-120). Doob supposes that Hoccleve's madness was probably

A short but intense fit of depression . . . caused by
his inability to reconcile the claims of God . . . with
the desires of man for money and security.⁴⁶

Hoccleve's desire for all to be punished indicates his further obsession with "getting what one deserves" -- a kind of negative avarice. And his intense disapproval of others' desire for money may reflect the strength of his own somewhat disguised desire for security.

He next turns to his intention of translating Lerne to Die, which he has chosen partly because he feels that in reading it, other people will come to reflect more on themselves:

many an othar wight eke there-by shall
his consyence ful tenderly grope,
and withe hym selfe acompte, & reken of all. (Dial 219-221)

He is concerned that people be able "to make a iust and trewe

rekenyng" (Dial 230), as if their deeds were also coins that must be perfectly minted and counted to be valid. He has also chosen Lerne to Die, not entirely by himself,

but at the exitynge and monicion
of a devout man take I here on honde
this labowr and as I cane, wole I fonde
his reade, thwrghe gods grace, to parforme,
thowghe I be bare of intellecte and forms. (Dial 234-238)

As before, when he took to heart the aspersions of others, he here assumes that he is a cipher, of value only insofar as some outside influence positions, describes, or completes him. His dependence on others to validate him is a symptom of melancholy, and issues in two contradictory feelings: first, that he is nothing without others' good opinions, a penny made good or bad by their trust; and second, that he is something that others cannot or will not comprehend, a foreign currency they will not exchange. In both feelings, Hoccleve internalizes the gap between self and other as though it were a condition within himself, and his fault. He thus puts himself in the position of always either despairing of himself or resenting others.

In his literary work Hoccleve sees a way of objectifying himself, reifying himself, and enabling others to understand him aright. So when his friend advises against so strenuous a task, Hoccleve feels he is no friend at all for not believing he could complete the work, and feels as well that the friend is trying to take away his one path to reintegration. It is his imagination, not his sense, that he feels needs to be strengthened:

ffor feeble is my conceit, & dul & derk.

But as þat I seide eer and sooth it is,
My sclendre wit feeble I as sad and stable
As euere it was at any time or this. (Dial 364-367)

The friend believes that Hoccleve's madness was a melancholy brought on by overstudiousness, and rather harshly remarks that now "Thy conceit is nat worth a payndemayn" (Dial 383). Hoccleve maintains it "was causid of my long seeknesse" (Dial 426). He may be referring here either to some other, physical, illness precipitating his madness, or simply to the length of the madness or the reactions of his friends as precipitating his melancholy, but he does not (as Chaucer's narrator, with the same tautological explanation, does not) explain himself, does not make "an open shryfte" (Dial 83) at this point to justify himself:

That men kneew I had seeknesse is ynow,
Thogh they make of the cause no serchyng. (Dial 430-431)

This withdrawal from etiological detail, reflecting his despair of others' predetermined attitudes, indicates the point at which he will no longer reveal himself, whether to jeopardize or redeem:

To yow told haue I treewely the cause;
Now let vs stynten heer & make a pause. (Dial 433-434)

In this moment of dismissing discourse, when he creates a pause, his one hope for attention and just interpretation, Hoccleve testifies to the inner reality of himself that cannot be touched by the compromises of conversation or composition. It is the only case I have found so similar to that at the beginning of the Book of the Duchess, when Chaucer also suddenly refuses to tell the cause

of his narrator's illness. Hoccleve may have taken the notion of his "long seeknesse" as a vague phrase of evasion from Chaucer's eight-yeas' sickness. The similarity between the two poems on this point arises naturally from the two poets' both being engaged in a portrayal of melancholy that is more deep and thorough-going than love-melancholy, humor-melancholy, or scholar's-melancholy alone. Both eschew ascribing the disease to a particular circumstance external to the inner landscape of the subject. By brushing away other explanations, both invite us to consider the sense of loss itself, and the sense of loss within the self. Further, both send their speakers to reading and writing and conversing, to the making of fictions in language, to work out their difficulties.

In the Dialogue Hoccleve uses the presence of another not to fill his inner mind but to construct a field of fiction. He draws on the friend's ideas to realize his own projects, whether the friend approves or disapproves them. While the friend worries about melancholy arising from intense study for study's sake, rather like Petrarch's, Hoccleve begins to take a different approach to writing. He has acknowledged the difficulty of writing in the

Regement:

A writer mot thre thynges to hym knytte,
 And in tho may be no disseuerance;
 Mynde ee and hand non may fro othir flitte,
 But in hem mot be loynt contynuaunce.
 The mynd, al hoole with-outen variance,
 On þe ee and hand awaytē mot alway,
 And þei two eek on hym; it is no nay.

Who-so schal wrytē, may nat holde a tale
 With hym and hym ne syngē this ne that;
 But alle his wittes grete and smale
 Ther must appere, and holden hem ther-at,
 And syn he speke may, ne syngē nat,
 But bothē two he nedēs moot forbere:
 His labour to hym is the alengere.

These artificers, se I day be day,
 In þe hotteste of al her bysynesse,
 Talken and syngē, and make game and play
 And forth hir labour passith with gladnesse;
 But we laboure in traueillous stilnesse;
 We stowpe and stare vpon þe shepēs skyn,
 And keepē muste our song and wordēs in.

Wrytyng also doth grete annoyēs thre
 Of which ful fewē folkis taken heede
 Sauf we oure self; and þisē, lo, þre be:
 Stomak is on, whom stowpyng out of dreede
 Annoyeth soore, and to our bakkes neede
 Mot it be greuous; and þe thrid, our yen,
 Vp-on the whytē mochel for to dryen. (RP 995-1022)

It is all too familiar a picture of intense writing conceived of as a totally focused, single-minded, and unstinting task, driving writers to resent the easier, more social lives of others, even as they cling perversely to the "traueillous stilnesse" of their closeted theatre. Now in the Dialogue Hoccleve proposes a different approach to writing, with the decision to write in an episodic fashion:

Ffreend, I nat medle of matires grete;
 Ther-to nat strecche may myn intellect;
 I neuere yit was brent with studies hete;
 Let no man holde me ther-in suspect;
 If I lightly nat cacche may theeffect
 Of thyng in which laboure I me purpose,
 A dieu my studie anon my book I close.

By stirtes whan þat a fressh lust me takith,
 Wole I me bisye now and now a lyte;
 But whan þat my lust dullith and asslakith,
 I stynte wole and no lenger wryte;
 And pardee, freend þat may nat hyndre a myte,
 As þat it seemeth to my symple auys;
 Iugeth your self yee been prudent and wys. (Dial 498-511)

Here Hoccleve begins to envision studies pursued for their interest to his own mind rather than out of a compulsion to prove his mind to others. It is the friend who has the more rigorous idea of planning everything ahead of time:

Thow woost wel who shal an hous edifie,
 Gooth nat ther-to withoute auisament,
 If he be wys, for with his mental ye
 Ffirst is it seen pourposid cast & ment,
 How it shal wrought been elles al is shent.
 Certes, for the deffaute of good forsighte,
 Mis-tyden thynges pat wel tyde mighte. (Dial 638-644)

He is appealing to the old house-builder's analogy because he is concerned that Hoccleve write especially well for the noble patron he has chosen to address, the Duke of Gloucester. But Hoccleve is less cowed by state -- as he has seen others so negligent of the truth about himself -- and has a more eased and less moralistic picture of his intended writing and of his duty to his patron. He means to write by fits and starts, and not at all if it comes not easily enough. He seems to understand, even if he has not always been able to put it into practice, that thought is not one more of the commodities of the world, not a thing to be wilfully increased to a certain amount, or bound to a certain idea, but is rather a process that must be as free as possible to operate, and to continue to operate -- and this continuance necessitates change of object. Hoccleve seeks to keep himself free to rise above the tug-of-war between his refusal to fear melancholy any more, and his desire for security, or what Doob calls "The tension between the Christian injunction to be mad to the world and the secular desire for prosperity."⁴⁷ In writing, he will not insist that his

words have the spatial consistency of architecture, the tie to a given reality sought by the friend's diagnoses, or the reliability of good coin. Like the onset and cure and changes of his own illness, his writing occurs over time, and offers a picture piecemeal, making space for question and interpretation, discouraging premature judgment, but not intrinsically destroyed when misread at some point, and always saying more by suggestion than by statement of fact.

His writing is not regarded now as an expression of his single will. Rather, it is his interaction with his friend that gives Hoccleve the forum in which to develop his project. He still needs the friend's ideas, that outside influence like the suggestion he took from the elder to translate Lerne to Die. The friend suggests something in praise of women, to counteract the effect of Hoccleve's earlier Letter to Cupid. This bothers Hoccleve all over again, for he feels the work was not misogynistic at all (and he is in fact right, it is a translation of Christine de Pisan's Epistre au Dieu d'Amours). He is aghast at the magnitude of this misunderstanding, but determines to write yet once more for women, believing that by writing he shall in time be able to convince them of his true attitudes:

I am al othir to yow than yee weene;
By my wrytynge hath it, & shal be, seene. (Dial 811-812)

Paraphrased closely, what Hoccleve promises to show is not actually who he is, but that he is different from what he is thought to be. Words will not state truth so much as occasion reflection and attentiveness. His phrase is reminiscent of the Knight's:

"I have lost more than thou weneest." The Knight must also try to create extra space in his memory of White for the re-creation and confirmation of his love for her. Only things that are expressed as changes and process can continue to interest the variable mind of a large audience.

On the one hand, Hoccleve sees that writing liberates one to the perusal of others; on the other, he still resists the ineluctable distortions that occur in that perusal. For it remains inevitably true that the full convincing of the ladies lies with the ladies -- or whatever other readers one may have. And Hoccleve's established dependence on the opinions of others gives new motive and life to the traditional disclaimer:

But nathelees I lowly me submitte
 To your bonteas as fer as they han place
 In yow vn-to me, wrecche, it may wel sitte
 To axe pardoun thogh I nat trespace. (Dial 813-816)

He ends here with a clear affirmation that he himself is not at fault, but only his relationship on paper to his audience. Words do not so much join writer and reader in communication to the truth written about, as they provide still further occasions for the writer to non-represent, the reader to mis-understand, and both to disagree over, the truth. For Hoccleve's friend has not even read the Letter to Cupid all the way through (Dial 779-784). Yet, does any book of imagination admit of being read all the way through? Or does it present too many points of departure to allow the reader to stick at one "point"? The friend's partial preparation in no way disqualifies him from advising Hoccleve.

Hoccleve's pursuit of accuracy in representing truth, that is, himself, leads him to see again and again that truth evades representation, is susceptible only of being suggested, outlined, reacted to, or sought for. In short, truth in an ascertainable form must be truth skewed. The ways of knowing must always get in the way of the knowledge. It is to accuracy, demonstration, and completeness as goals in themselves that Hoccleve must learn to die.

In Learn to Die, the process of instruction by Wisdom illustrates how creating images and fictions can enable the speaker both to know and to make known to others some of the truth. It is in particular a confrontation with the reality of death that gives him to think about himself as a truth inextricably bound to loss. Hoccleve tells of a disciple who learns from lady Wisdom to meditate on death and to live as if in preparation for the day of death and the kind of afterlife one's earthly life will merit. The Judgement is like a final interpretation of a living text that up until its death cannot be considered as complete or clear at any point, but is rather a figure of its very self. The acquisition of wisdom must be largely the training in interpretive reading that poetry, for example, affords.

The lady Wisdom teaches the disciple by having him form an image of a dying man. No sooner does he do so than the man takes on individual characteristics -- youth, beauty, and an imperfect soul -- that would seem to arise from the disciple's own impression of death, and from the effort of imagining an idea of it, as something that robs one of this sort of beauty:

"Beholde now the liknesse and figure
 Of a man dyyng and talkyng with thee."
 The disciple, of þat speeche took good cure,
 And in his conceit bysyly soghte he,
 And ther-with-al considere he gan, & see
 In him self put the figure & liknesse
 Of a yong man of excellent fairnesse,

Whom deeth so ny ransakid had, & soght,
 þat he withynne a while sholde dye. (LD 85-93)

The conjuring of the image is conceived of as a search, as if to indicate that it is a resource of the mind rather than of experience, and that imaginative invention is a matter of thinking twice about an idea already in mind.

The visual and circumstantial details of the image are soon joined by a voice for the image, who now, as if the disciple had created an autonomous interlocutor, initiates a discourse of his own that is the principal source of edification for the disciple (LD 96-98). The image himself imagines a voice: "Avois horrible of deeth sownyng heere y" (LD 129), that gives a long speech of its own (LD 131-147). More and more discourses are added into the poem. At one point, the image turns back to the disciple and asks him, as Wisdom had, to form an image, this time of the soul in purgatory: "Caste in thyn herte as now thy soule were / In purgatorie" (LD 491-492). This new image issues into another voice, "a wrecchid vois thus to thee cryyng" (LD 497), and the disciple can converse with this one as with the "original" image of the dying man (LD 515f.). That image had emphasized to the disciple the need to meditate by conjuring sensible, palpable pictures:

This heuy plyt in which thou seest now me,
 Reuolue ofte in thy mynde & by me leere. (LD 591-592)

Euery da, haue of me deep remembrance;
 Into thyn herte let my wordes synke;
 The sorwe and angwissh & greuous penance
 Which thow haast seen in me considere & thynke
 That of peril thogh art ful my the brynke;
 Remembre on my doom for swich shal thyn be;
 Myn yistirday and this day vn-to thee. (LD 603-609)

The image is presented as partaking in the quality of both an image and an actuality. He is referred to as an image (LD 169, 337, 477, 553), while at the same time the disciple addresses him as a "friend" (LD 151, 467), conversationally asks him to "Heere me now" (LD 332), and in turn is asked by the image to pray for him, the image, as his old friends in life have not: "O good freend lat me nat thus pyne longe!" (LD 514). Yet the image still recognizes it is as an image that he exists for the disciple: "Let me be your ensauple and your mirour" (LD 295). Most moving of all these conflations and juxtapositions of truth and fiction, the image does indeed die:

"ffor a memorie leue y this sentence
 To thee and heere y die in thy presence." (LD 739-740)

We are not witnessing confusion on the part of the poet, but the process of what can often end in the formation of personifications, here presented as the way of thinking that creates personifications and other significant images. Within this quite thematic treatise on the ars moriendi, we find a surprisingly explicit presentation of the methods of thinking and instruction it requires. In this respect the work is about its own possibility, about the origination of images and the powers those images have once set in motion. The poem implies that we perceive intellectual

things through imagination and poesis, as we cannot from simple observation, experience, or deduction. By fictions we institute a diversity of voices in our minds, and they form a new set of perspectives, in which interrelationships between words and words displace or supply the distorted or impossible mirroring of meaning in words. It is this complex of perspectives that creates in our minds the sense of ideality and abstraction that we deem intellectual.

Further, in artficed form, these new voices and perspectives win our attention in a clear but still enticing manner, "Syn," as the source and this translation both acknowledge (in a bow to Aristotle's Metaphysics), "alle men naturelly desyre/ To konne" (LD 1-2). It is a matter of making up our minds to recognize our desire to know the truth, and the images help us seduce ourselves into satisfying a desire -- to know truth, to know one's self -- that to the civilized person seems perilous to truth or self as constructed in and for society, and seems to the thoughtful person perhaps entirely impossible.

The disciple is himself uncertain about the status of this conversation:

"This sighte of deeth so sore me astoneth,
 pat wite y can vnnethe in soothfastnesse,
 But am in doute wher the soothe wonneth,
 That is to meene if this be in liknesse
 Or in deede swich is my mazidnesse. (LD 750-754)

His bewilderment and momentary lapse of sure judgement serve the disciple well, however, in casting him upon the resources of his imagination, thus freeing him from the preconceptions that so often

inform our judgement. Doubt, and the absence for a moment of the lady Wisdom --

Aboute he torned him and thus seide he:
 "Wher art thou now o sapience eterne?" -- (LD 743-744)

move the disciple from the realm of fact to the realm of truth, from what can be ascertained (and is liable to verbal misrepresentation) to what must be continuously understood and interpreted (and is best presented in verbal form). From his cry of abandonment and doubt, the disciple has no choice but to assert by himself the need, and his resolve, to learn to die (LD 771-777). He has seen death in his image, felt it in the shape of Wisdom's absence, and under the pressure of this elegiac situation perceives the mutability of the world clearly and precisely. And from this perception he builds his own determination, not to ignore death, but to recreate it in his fictions, to inspect it in them, and in them to make that body of knowledge of life and death that he desires to know.

Lerne to Die not only has a metapoetic quality, in the unexpected genre of the ars moriendi, but also elucidates the importance of images in thinking about something like death that is a frequent topic for melancholics, and has no precise material form. The Hoccleve of the Prologue to the Regement of Princes, tossing and turning in his "thoughtful maladie," also begins from a consideration of mutability that is only resolved by conversation with the beggar and Hoccleve's own literary activity in composing the Regement. In the Dialogue, initiating the sequence of translations of which Lerne to Die is ne, Hoccleve again indicates his need for another

voice to converse, argue, and confer with. Lerne to Die, by its explicitly poetic process, shows how the motifs of the conversation and of the subsequent composition are, on the level of theme, emblems of the need for diversity of imagery, and, in themselves, autonomous images that can redirect the poet's attention from the stagnant, given images of the world's mutability to the mutable, changing images invented by the mind. These are the images that give us joy of our mind's own working in time that is greater than the sorrow and aggravation of death.

5. Chartier

Across the Channel, Alain Chartier writes different but equally explicit treatments of melancholy. His visions are more conventional and less autobiographical than Hoccleve's, and thus do not engage the questions of selfhood and truth so pressingly. But, especially in his prose treatise, Le Traité de l'Esperance, he narrates the interactions of rational and imaginative and emotional faculties leading into and then out of melancholy.

In his poetry, he relies on, rather than enlarging or analyzing, the vision tradition, and this secretary in the French royal household opposes melancholy as being an enemy of courtly, social virtues:

Fuyez donc Mirencolie
 Qui toute douleur pourchace
 Et Plaisance du tout chace;
 Qui la reçoit fait folie,
 Car Plaisance est plus jolie,
 Qui dueil et soussi enchace,
 Et n'est n'ingrate n'eschace,
 Ains a largesce se alie. (Lay de Plaisance 65-72)⁴⁸

In the comical and amiable Debat de Reveille Matin, where a lover wakes up a friend in the middle of the night to make him his tired and unwilling confidant, the friend observes with a practical air:

Nulli ne prent melencolie,
 De chose dont il ne lui chault.
 Se j'ay du mal, c'est ma folie;
 Ce ne lui fait ne froit ne chault.
 Mais au fort, qui plus bee hault,
 Il a plus fort a besoingnier;
 Par Messire Ode et par Machaut
 Se puet il assez tesmoingnier. (Matin 225-230)⁴⁹

Both the courtly narrator and the realist friend see the narcissism in love melancholy as rendering the sufferer worse than useless to

himself, and boring to society.

We find a closer portrait of the malady when it belongs to the narrator himself in the longer love vision Le Livre des Quatre Dames. While he avowedly goes out on the first day of Love's season "Pour oublier melencolie / Et pour faire chiere plus lie" ⁵⁰ (QD 1-2), he also lets us know that such solitary walks have been his custom, and therefore, as much the occasion as the cure for the mood: "Si alay tout seulet, ainsy/ Que l'ay de coustume" (QD 7-8).⁵¹ The mated birds he hears remind him of his own loneliness, and he no sooner arrives at the felicitous grove than he returns to his sorrowful frame of mind:

Maiz se de ce bien joyssioie,
Il ne duroit pas longuement.
Ains rentroie soubdainement
Ou penser ou premierement
J'estoie . . . (QD 111-115)⁵²

After voicing his complaint, he walks off in a wretched, reckless mood that succeeds in leading him from despair (QD 120) to desire, and the subsequent vision of four ladies, much as the track of Chaucer's heedless melancholic through the symbolic wilderness leads him to the Knight.

En une sente me vins rendre,
Longue et estroicte, ou l'erbe tendre
Croissoit tresdrue et un pou mendre
Que celle qui fut tout autour.
La me vint un acez seurprendre
De Desire qui me fist esprendre;
Et en alant sans garde prendre
Ne sans penser a mon retour,
Me trouvay loing en un destour.
La me fist Desire dur estour
Ne je ne savoie plus tour,
Quant vy de pres s'entrebaisier
Une pastoure et un pastour,

Et de loing yssir d'une tour
 Quatre dames en noble atour;
 Cela fist mon mal appaisier. (QD 149-164)⁵³

The narrow sidepath with its special grass, a little more delicate than that of the surrounding landscape, suggests the little path Chaucer's narrator turns into to find his forest vision. Like Chaucer, Chartier collocates detour and desire to raise a vision. He knows one must get off the beaten path to rediscover one's real imagination.

Each of the four ladies reports to him a different love plight by which to judge among their sorrows. The decision, here as in Machaut's Jugement poems, is never about who is happiest, but most miserable. It is as if melancholy were best alleviated by a homeopathic exercise: give the melancholic some other people's cases to study, and you may dispel the crippling narcissism of the illness. And the homeopathic exercise works not only by its content, but also by its poetic form. While the inadequacy of the words furnished matter for meditation on loss and frustration, the vision's communal, aesthetic form gives a kind of reality and completeness to the narrator's feelings, even without changing them, so that frustration once again assumes the energy and moment of desire. The trick is to revise, not so much one's emotions, as one's way of thinking about the thoughts they inspire. In Chartier's walk through the woods, song both confronts him with and eases his melancholy. First his joy in it is short-lived:

Et de chanter je m'efforçois,
 Mais se de ce bien joysoie,
 Il ne duroit pas longuement. (QD 110-112)⁵⁴

After he has made his complaint about this (QD 121-136), the sweet landscape returns with a gentler qualification of his mood, assuaging rather than countering, and solitude is allied with pleasure:

Ainsi mon cuer se guermentoît
 De la grant douleur qu'il sentoît
 En ce plaisant lieu solitaire,
 Ou un doulz ventelet ventoît,
 Si sery que on ne le sentoît
 Fors que l'erbete mieulz en flaire.
 La fut le gracieux repaire
 De ce que Nature puet faire
 De bel et joieux en esté.
 La n'avoit il riens a refaire
 De tout ce qui me pourroit plaire,
 Mais que ma dame y eust esté. (QD 137-148)⁵⁵

Chartier's vision's preamble picks up many of the motifs Chaucer (and others) had assigned to the malady: a solitary and self-absorbed narrator, odd paths, and artful birds. The two latter suggest some details in the Book of the Duchess. I have already remarked that like Chaucer Chartier evokes delicacy, remoteness, and fertility in a path that departs from the main way and puts him in the way of desire. The beauty of the birdsong is, in Chartier as in Chaucer, a beauty of art, of craft in diversity:

L'un chantoit, les autres doubloient
 De leurs gorgetes qui verboient
 Le chant que Nature a apris;
 Et puis l'un de l'autre s'embloient,
 Et point ne s'entrerressembloient;
 Tant en y ot qu'ils me sembloient
 Fors a estre en nombre compris. (QD 26-32)⁵⁶

The doubling of Nature's song develops into a motet where each bird takes a different melody. To this description Chartier adds the topos of innumerability, which could have been immediately suggested by Chaucer's allusion to Argus, especially in view of the probable debt to Chaucer for other landscape particulars.

In view of the similarities, the differences show more significance. Chartier has borrowed from all, in general, that Chaucer borrowed from, and likely from Chaucer as well. But to Chaucer alone remains, first, the refusal to specify the illness as arising from love, and second, the avoidance of moral reflections on the scene as by Chartier's narrator. The authority of Nature occurs constantly to his thoughts (QD 24, 28, 35, 74, 144). Unlike Chaucer's dreamer, he thinks of matrimonial felicity when he hears the sophisticated polyphony of the birds, and assigns the landscape's beauty to Nature's hand. It is as if Chartier had conflated the dream-invention of the Duchess with the formally more assured and satiric Parliament of Fowls.

Chartier reserves his closer consideration of melancholy for his prose Traité de l'Esperance, a little as if he did not quite trust the radical reviving of imagination melancholy asks, and did not want to put it into the practice of his poetry. He sees melancholy, or the state of mind precipitating it, as a mental disease arising from physical causes:

For the fowir sensuall vertues that be within man which we call sensetiffe, ymaginatiffe, estimatiffe and memoratiffe be bodily vertues which stretchen to euery parte of man, and thes may be hurte by to ofte or in to strong werkis which man labourith sorar thanne nede ys to acheve. (p.5)⁵⁷

This sort of overintensity is what Hoccleve seems to be escaping in his resolve to take up his new writing projects in an easy, ad hoc sort of way. But it is difficult for artists, who are in the business of translating images and meanings into each other, to avoid a disease based on the interconnection between the physical and the

mental conditions of a person. Melancholy is eminently suited to poetic presentation because it is naturally a set of physical items issuing into a mental state. By the same token, it is problematic to describe a literary account of melancholy with certainty about where the literal leaves off and the metaphorical begins. Since it is a disease of fictions, the fictions describing it are also under suspicion. To try to cure thought with thought seems at first a counterproductive effort:

this heuy and sorowfull thought . . . causith the nyghtes
to be to me full long and noyouse . . . my symple vnder-
standing, which [is] so ouircome and environed with dis-
pleasaunt frenesies that I can do nothing wherthrough I
may haue any conforte. Yet nat long agone the memory of
thingis passid, the vglines of the disposicions that be
nough present, and the horriblenes of perillis that be for
to come renewid ageyne my sorwfull grevis, my dull ymagina-
cions and my power fayled of seuirte. And so I aboode as
a mane confusid, the visage [wexith] blemeshid, the wittis
troubled and the bloode medlid in the body. (p. 4)

The irregular circulation recalls the Knight, and the confusion the mazed condition of Chaucer's narrator. Chartier's brain is occupied with a combination of "dull ymaginacions," "frenesies," and persistent images of griefs. Like Petrarch's, it is simultaneously dulled and overstuffed. Imagination, as the faculty that makes forceful to the mind things that do not exist, grows dulled when it dwells only on things of the status quo, that do exist. To these oppressive, space-consuming actualities, imagination is not called on to supply any of its own images, and, as Keats has it, "unbelief has not a space to breathe."

Chartier seems to pass through three phases of thought, presided over by three mental faculties, on his way to relief. He begins in frenzy, which seems to be a capacity to be endlessly distracted by any misfortune that comes to mind, and a corresponding inability even to pay attention for any length of time to a single one of one's misfortune's:

But this woman gave me such vnhappy drinckis which cast me in a frenesie and suche mysknowlage that the wise Vndirstonding, which at this neede conduyted me vnto the bedde where I lay and there he abode beside me as a man that had be from hymself or like as he had ben in a [litargie]. And aftirward I vndirstode that this olde woman was callid Malencolye, which troubleth mannes thought, dryeth the body, and bringith a man in langour and so to the deth. Aftir hir doctrine haue ben and oftintymes by the high wittis and the grette vndirstonding of persones and excellent men gretly troubled and made derke aftir the havnting or exercyse of to depe and diuerse thoughtis. (p. 5)

In the second phase, these abstract and scattered thoughts yield to a more focused attention to the melancholic's own ills, as indicated when Chartier forms personifications around his sorrows. His thoughts, while still deep and troubled, become less distracting because of the form given to them. With the formulation of personifications, Chartier begins to wrap the thoughts rather than be wrapped by them:

And as I lay thus I felt quake, remeve and opyn be parte that was in the myddis of my hede in the region of ymaginatyffe, which some men call fantasye. And at the same hour on the lefte parte, which was the derkest place of my bedde, presentid themself thre horrible semblaunces and figurys of women passing feerfull to loke vpon. (p. 6)

Given the confluence, in a vision of melancholy, of the mental processes and the making of a fiction about them, it is virtually

impossible to distinguish between particular thoughts in Chartier's mind that take on personified form, and the imaginative action thus performed. In any case, the change from frenzy to fantasy seems to be effected by the mind's having grown so languid and so parted from its understanding that it becomes susceptible not only to depression and distraction but also to a major rearrangement that enables it to think in a new way. Melancholy creates but also liberates distressing ideas from the middle of his head. Chartier's fantasy is shaken up, and opens up to the new kind of idea offered by the personifications. They come from the darkest corner of the chamber, and are passing fearful, but their clarity and comprehensibility enable the melancholic to look upon his ills rather than drown in their kaleidoscope. The personifications are the enablers of both analysis, by the way they divide the trouble into negotiable parts, and cure, by the way they create a forum of fictions in which the sufferer can take an active part in thinking, by engagin in conversation, so to speak, with distressing thoughts. With the advent of the personifications, Chartier need no longer equate his difficulties with himself.

In this allegory, what the personifications do is waken Understanding by the disturbance they make in the mind, somewhat as a strange or confusing symbol or event arouses one to interpret or reflect on it. Chartier's personifications

turned vp so doune my reson in suche wise that almost I was brought to the mate of a dedlye frenesye, having my life in suche an hate that I wischid to have be dedde. Seyng that, feble Natur, which was abated by malencolye and sorowe, beganne to tremble [and] quake ayeinst the horrible feere of dethe . . . through hir shaking and

betinge she awooke Vndirstondinge, which lay sleping
by me, and put so strongly vpon him that sodanly he vp-
sterre, his yghen but half opyn, and with tremblyng
wourdis he ganne to speke. (P. 19)

Because the personifications bring the distresses clearly before Chartier's mind, without emotional evasion, as distressing, they threaten the self and rouse it to reassert its integrating faculty of reasonable understanding. If they had been less impressive, or emotionally false, they would only have moved the understanding to make comfortable evasions. But instead they force a revision of values in Chartier's mind. And it is only such personifications, such poetic fictions, that have the power to convey the reality of his emotional state to him -- for the most reasonable statement of his difficulties, if it made no impression on his mind, would mean nothing even if it stated the truth.

Having passed from being distracted by misfortunes to having the fear of death put into him, the melancholic now finally finds something commanding on which to focus. The half-open eyes of the startled Understanding are reminiscent of the one-eyed waking of Morpheus when the messenger bids him take the vision of death to Alcyone. Both Understanding and Morpheus are required to deal with the ultimate reality of death, and the lethargy of both is disturbed by the task, but both rise to the occasion, beginning from similar states of semi-alertness. This absence of full awakening preserves the lightening of critical judgement that makes possible this access to the most troubling and threatening thought of death. Rhetorically, it inspires the "tremblyng wourdis" of fiction rather than reason's efficient glossings.

The actions of Understanding, in the third phase, come later, when the bitter poisons of melancholy have so troubled Chartier's mind that he

cowde nat imprynte his wourdis in my thought, nor by their semblaunce thei cowde nat wele be brought vnto my remembraunce, for my visage was turned and my fantasie fermely sette towarde thes three monstres vnto the tyme Vndirstondinge drowgh himself towarde þe parties of my mynde, and with a grette might for to shewe me a clerenesse of light he opened a litill wicket of which the boltis war waxen rousty with forgetfullness, through which entird evin forthwith thre ladys. (p. 20)

As in the Roman de la Rose, a tiny wicket gives onto a vast, but slowly assimilated, mental landscape. Understanding cannot grasp this new vision at first, but is later able to identify the three ladies as Faith, Hope, and Charity. The advantage of their personifications is that they can advance to the melancholic and work on the understanding even before they have been interpreted. Indeed, the task of interpreting them is the very process of cure. The mode of thought changes before the content does. And it is noteworthy with respect to the role of imagination in the recuperation that Faith offers the sufferer texts, signs, and symbols: a copy of the Pentateuch, "portrayed with diuerse signes and figurys ceryously entremeddled" (Traité p. 23), a New Testament which "a man myght clerely rede" (Traité p. 24), and finally a gold crown set with twelve flowers, which "betokene the xii articles of the feith" (Traité p. 24). Like the phases of Chartier's recovery, the three objects offered here sketch a passage from the dimly understood and heavily interpreted, through the more readily accessible instruction of revealed, imaged, grace, to the shining symbols

whose divine resonance is clear to the soul without further gloss.

Le Traité de l'Esperance, although a later work, is presented by Chartier as a work of youth: not the first flush of youth, spent in cheerful ditties and lyrics, but, in a revision of the Vergilian change from lesser to greater projects, a youth oppressed by sorrow:

And whanne I was in my flowres, for the aquitale of
my youth I wrote plesaunte dictees, and now must I
drawe me to other werkis with herte sorrowfull, out of
which may issewe no loye, but payne, feer, pouerte,
losse and doubte, that environeth all my thought.
Wherfor I may haue nothing but vndir their daungier
. . . the grette sorow that dureth so longe annoyeth
me in sucche wisse that in my yong age it makith me
to waxe olde and of leene natur and woll not lette me
lyve my ryght course. And so with trouble and sorow
I haue begonne this booke. (p. 4)

While his poetic practice may not equal Chaucer's evocation of melancholy and symbolic elegy, this prose work shows that Chartier understood and was interested in the interrelationship of fiction and melancholy. He sees that almost all good books are begun in sorrow, and the story of his reconciliation to this reality, so that it is no longer a matter for melancholy but a vindication and occasion for poesis, is the story of his imagination's progress. He sees the need to lose consciousness and to part from oneself, in order to give the mind access to new thought, as he does when he faints from melancholy and splits into his languishing self and his beleaguered Understanding. Understanding, thus freed from the melancholic, takes on and preserves the qualities of the youth that seem to have died:

And as a man vanischid or in a swowne I was take and
brought into the lodging of infirmite . . . Yet Vndir-
standing, the yong and wele-avised bachelor, folowyd
me somtyme nygh and somtyme ferre lyke as God geve me
the queyntaunce. (p. 5)

The variation in Understanding's distance from the melancholic is proof of its autonomy. The exquisitely realistic picture of a youth like a child playing about the path of a distracted guardian, who becomes in fact the guardian of the adult's brighter thoughts for the duration of the melancholy, brings home the inevitable alienation of the soul -- from itself and from God -- and the inevitable resource of our faculties. We cannot always feel them to be part of us, and they never tell the whole story, but they persist in going on telling the story, and in their continuance lies -- more powerful than completeness -- our sense of completeness.

The imagination really does effect expansions in our reason. In the phenomenon of personification, for example, is displayed the peripherality of things we often hold to be central: Reason, Desire, Virtue, Will, Truth, Beauty, Age. Personification is not just a detachment convenient for artistic representation before the days of psychoanalysis. The detachment and recondensation outside the subject of these faculties and attributes removes them from the inner self provisionally, so that an artist can use this method of allegorization to reach past or around the very abstractions drawn up. By this removal, the inner self becomes equally peripheral relative to the fictional persons. Alienation inside the person can be shown in the circumvention of the self's centrality, both by the act of personifying and by the fading of the remnant self

left behind. The displacement occurs within the self as well as among the self's parts. Without its accustomed authority or importance to itself, the self becomes peripheral to itself. It becomes its own frontier, always passing into or out of itself, in the guise of assorted personifications, but never coming to the middle of itself. Even so in Chartier, Understanding, now awake, now asleep, now half-awake, sometimes close by and sometimes far off, plays out the alterity of the self. It is all the more witty and significant that a personification of the faculty most commonly thought to unify the mind should be deployed for this purpose.

The movement of personifications around the subject they have been made from or for answers to the way the self is forever parting from and coming upon itself, in unexpected, unaccustomed forms. Symbolism's methods of isolation and ambivalence (discussed further in the next chapter) mirror the confusion of self that can often issue in melancholy but remains as well the road to understanding and pleasure. The same symbol can serve as both a symptom of melancholy and an object of mental refreshment. It is the place where muddled wits can, in Hoccleve's idiom, go play. Once away from routine lucubrations, they can turn, look back on that routine, and re-invent understanding. Analogously, the symptoms of melancholy are not just referents to other more real problems, but constitute in large part the very problem of the disease, conceived of as not simply a mistaken feeling but a mistaken mode of feeling. And so the symptoms, like symbols, can also be the correctives, if imagination rather than judgement alone is brought to bear on them.

If one lets the mind wander, it comes to visionary landscapes whose ambiguities restore the mind's life of sensation and interpretation independent of inculcated expectations. The self does not disintegrate in such wanderings, but halves and doubles itself, remaps its parts, refolds itself to have new sites of interaction with the world, and turns the frail element of identity into a resourceful alloy of possibility.

6. The Melancholy Narration

Ay, in the very temple of Delight
 Veil'd Melancholy has her sovran shrine,
 Though seen of none save him whose strenuous tongue
 Can burst Joy's grape against his palate fine;
 His soul shall taste the sadness of her might,
 And be among her cloudy trophies hunt.

(John Keats, Ode on Melancholy)

Keats gives us in lyric, almost immediate, form the paradox played out by the allegories and long walks of the medieval vision poets: that the heart's desire harbors equally joy and melancholy, and that they are distinguishable only by the sensations and fictions associated with them. Those fictions themselves return the reader to the paradox. As creatures of the imagination, moreover, fictions both are and are the commentary on melancholy. In his picture of the mind taking delight in the stories of melancholy trophies, Milton sees the comment on the malady. In his advice to burst Joy's grape and be hung among those trophies, Keats sees the mind in the midst of the malady. The teller of a tale of melancholy, whether about it or in cure of it, must play, or invent personages to play, both parts: the self submerged and the self looking at itself. The parallax set up by the subjective and the objective perspectives gives one the track of that play of and in the mind that is both the cause and cure of melancholy.

Petrarch, Hoccleve, and Chartier have in common with Chaucer not only their melancholy but also their fictive method of consoling themselves. They point the fictiveness of their narration by casting them in the form of dialogues, with sainted rhetoricians, beggars,

friends, personifications, and knights. Most scholars report that the dialogue device lends realism to the works, but in view of their frequent dream frames, symbolic landscapes, and tendency to lead to and from other stories, I think it more accurate to say that in these dialogues human conversation is assimilated to the visionary context. It is not the narrator who lends reality to the fictional figure, but the figure who bestows fictiveness on the narrator. Fiction-making helps the narrator immensely, whereas reality means nothing much to fictions.

The fictionalizing of the melancholic's discourse in the course of curing the malady is described in a modern instance by a psychoanalyst, Pierre Fédida, in his essay, "Le narrateur mis à mort par son récit."⁵⁸ In trying to make up someone else's fiction, or what will look like it, the poets set themselves the problem of "Comment raconter une histoire qui ne vous appartient pas?" (p. 48). Fédida describes the giving of one's own narrative role to another person in terms that illuminate both the relativity of the history and the using of fictions to capitalize on verbal scarcity, in the shapes of subjectivity, evasion, and ineffability. He speaks in terms of absence and desire: the coincidence, from Symposium on, of love and neediness, guarantees that both the psychic sorrow and the poetic triumph of the dream visions will be recognized in the terminology of Amor.

The situation he found himself in was that of an analyst to whom a man had brought the narratives of his life -- narratives he had been busily formulating ever since his wife had left him five years before -- in hopes that the analyst would take over the role of narrator,

thus erasing the man's identity in his narratives as a lover, and would proceed to restore that identity by retelling the man's history for him, in a second edition validated by the imprimatur of an objective narrator. The man, in other words, wanted to share out with this analyst the imaginative work we have seen the poets performing with fictions.

Au moment où il était assis en face de moi, il ne pouvait plus être le narrateur et le narrateur était bien un autre, le dépossédant d'une histoire ou d'une femme qui pouvait ne pas être la sienne et dont il serait pourtant l'amant. . . . En ce moment-là, le narrateur -- telle la statue du commandeur -- menaçait de l'anéantir, lui qui, voyeur invisible, avait été le séducteur. [ellipsis in original]

Le narrateur exige qu'il lui rende sa femme! La femme appartient au narrateur et à lui seul. Il en est l'amant. Et celui qui s'était retiré -- l'homme venue me parler -- n'aurait pas pu croire que sa femme l'avait quitté.⁵⁹

In other words, the husband, abandoned, and unable to reassume his role as lover through narrating himself, asks the analyst to become the narrator. For, since it is the narrator who loses the beloved, the analyst-made-narrator will now assume the burden of lost love, and the husband will emerge as someone who has actively chosen to withdraw from the situation, and masterfully arranged for a new narrator. He is no longer the servant of the tale, but rather the cause of the tale in another. He is an author. The husband's proposed arrangement, however, does not change the narrator's ability to create self. If the analyst takes on the role of losing lover, he will also retain the role of maker -- and the erotic power of narration, as an action that creates desire in the narrated self and reshapes that self to unexpected forms, guarantees the ultimate amorous success of the narrator.

In the Book of the Duchess, we see the analogous phenomenon of a reticent narrator setting up another persona as a more "real" and "significant" narrator whose efforts will take the heat off the real "real" narrator and his lamentably absent meaning in life. Since poetry is in the business of fictions, however, the psychological neediness does not seem so pathetic in this strategy of the doubled narrator as it might in a live analysis. Even therapy, indeed, passes from memories to fictions, the only realm in which one can "remember" the reality of the past and cure those aged distortions and unhappinesses. "Le narrateur est amnésique et sa mémoire est ivre de narration"⁶⁰ -- Fédida's formulation expresses the way the fictions made in the present provide the true key to the otherwise unretrievable memories of the past. Poetic fictions may, in a way, be regarded as the therapeutic fictions and analyses afforded all of us, regardless of our particular circumstances, for the affliction that is merely the human condition.

Chaucer enriches the narrative role in that the dreamer, having made the Knight his narrator, now engages him in conversation, and becomes again a narrator on behalf of the Knight, and the new repository of the Knight's desire and affection that were "originally" the dreamer's. The Knight needs a narrator because his experience with and memories of White are almost entirely rhetorical and imaginative. Fédida confronts the inevitable fictionality of experience with a nice accidental pun on the object of the Knight's affections:

La passion -- lorsqu'elle est devenue blanche, indolore -- tient, peut-être, tout entière dans ces gestes qui étriquent la mémoire et la congédient peu à peu et qui ne sont certains que d'une géométrie d'angles refermés invariablement

sur le même point. A la fin, les gestes ont rendu tout récit dérisoire, comme si raconter devait être revivre ce qui, peut-être, ne fut jamais vécu. (*my italics*)⁶¹

But the analyst's despair is the poet's opportunity. The poet can console his personae, before the analyst can cure an individual, because poetry has the extra dimension of the reader. Chaucer knows that we will discover the sad historian's tactics and know them for the evasions and screens that they are. The poetic form, by adding a reader into the relationship between the first and the hired narrator, guarantees the acceptance of their story as a story. The poetic form provides from the start for the saving contingency the analyst Fédida construes: "Seule la lecture a le pouvoir d'être narrative."⁶² Only a reader can view, in a poem, the expanse of time the narrators experience as straight duration, without the benefit of the replications of time and "stuffing" of time by the implied significances of figured language. They themselves are those figures, for us.

It is for the poet to make clear to us in poems that the breaks in life are our chances to survive as well as the annihilation of one kind or moment of experience. They deploy the resources of narration and symbol to endow breaks and changes with meaning. But we must accept the breaks at the outset, in order to verify with our own mental experience of the text the recuperation that can take place amidst change and loss, and that transcends the so-called remedies for loss. In poetry, we can make some of the differences that make a difference to us, and see that discontinuities, not consistencies, are the sources of joy as well as sorrow. If we

assign a theme or meaning to a poem too quickly, we lose this opportunity.

Story-telling, then, is the art of the lost, and the exercise of imagining losses that have never occurred, or the loss of things that have never existed. In this exercise we provide against our mortality. It is the art of tracking and even inventing the dissolution of unified experience, be it the ready interpretation of a symbol, or the easy dismissal of a text that does not engage officially grand themes.

On the one hand, melancholy arises from a passive, self-sabotaging alienation from the world and one's experiences or feelings. On the other, as it heals melancholy issues into redrawn narrative structures and imagery that reflect and reinstitute alienation and loss. The closeness of the melancholic alienation from self and the curative or artistic formulation of loss is pointed to by an observation of Kracauer's:

Now melancholy as an inner disposition not only makes elegiac objects seem attractive but carries still another, more important implication: it favors self-estrangement, which on its part entails identification with all kinds of objects. The dejected individual is likely to lose himself in the incidental configuration of his environment, absorbing them with a disinterested intensity no longer determined by his previous preferences.⁶³

With the details of the world thus emptied of such meanings as the subject might have brought to them, a fresh field for symbolism and signification has been prepared. The white wall of the Knight's mind makes a white wall of the appearances in the world as well, ready to catch the print of whatever meaning requires harbor, but

suggesting no meaning ahead of time. The poetic assemblage of a set of phenomena available to nuance and idea represents to the mind the possibility for meaning. While the particular meanings to be assigned to the phenomena are arbitrary to a very large degree, the fact of meaningfulness is vividly affirmed by the mere existence of such an array of physical details that are unedited but relatable, and innumerable but individually identifiable. Simply to name them, even only to notice and distinguish them, initiates the processes of predication and interpretation. A panorama of details, present but not yet endowed with meanings, must reassure the melancholic mind of the continued opportunities for imagination to work with effect, and to make a difference.

Such a proto-significant panorama cannot be logical or organized by importance or convention, for this is the action that must be given to the mind to do. In appreciation of such a panorama, Arnheim prefaces his citation of Kracauer with the suggestion that

It takes the later refinement of fatigued cultures to become aware of, and interested in, the irrationality of minutely scanned surfaces: it takes the passive sensitivity of the unengaged spectator.⁶⁴

If there can be an unengaged spectator in literature, Chaucer comes closest to it, as a poet living and working on the very threshold of a new language for poetry and of his own career. He, like the melancholic, requires an as yet unsystematized field of detail in order to discover the inception of the assignment of meanings to these details, and the inception of symbolism, and of literature, conceived of as a discourse perceptibly exotic and marginal.

The fatigue Arnheim attributes to late cultures, which the fourteenth century in England is, is analogous to the fatigue of the melancholic who finds no satisfaction in any of the familiar ideas. Such fatigue may also be understood as an ignorance of the source of energy for beginning that characterizes the opening of a culture, which the fourteenth century in England also is. Whether they have already been lost, or have not yet been apprehended, power and the establishment of meaning will have the appearance of fatigue and chaos. But such are the conditions which harbor the origination of culture or meaning in their most inventive, least tyrannic, forms. (Critics appreciate this cultured chaos in their habit of calling the period of any art they like a rich, "transitional" period.) From the point of view of melancholy, the fatigue is the introjection of loss, and hopefully the acceptance and reformulation of loss. The fatigue and chaos are not to be evaded. It is Chaucer's art to be able to reconvene that disarray, even under the pressure of tradition, and his own desire to be understood.

Notes to Chapter II.

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¹ "Mourning and Melancholia," trans. Joan Riviere, in Sigmund Freud, Collected Papers, ed. Ernest Jones (New York: Basic Books, 1959), vol. 4, pp. 152-170.

² Freud, "Mourning," p. 153.

³ Freud, "Mourning," p. 155.

⁴ Freud, "Mourning," p. 157.

⁵ Freud, "Mourning," p. 158.

⁶ Freud, "Mourning," p. 153: "with one exception, the same traits are met with in grief. The fall in self-esteem is absent in grief; but otherwise the features are the same."

⁷ Freud, "Mourning," p. 159.

⁸ Freud, "Mourning," p. 161.

⁹ Freud, "Mourning," p. 159.

¹⁰ Freud, "Mourning," pp. 155-156.

¹¹ Freud, "Mourning," p. 160: "We have elsewhere described how object-choice develops from a preliminary stage of identification, the way in which the ego first adopts an object and the ambivalence in which this is expressed. The ego wishes to incorporate this object into itself, and the method by which it would do so, in this oral or cannibalistic stage, is by devouring it. Abraham is undoubtedly right in referring to this connection the refusal of nourishment met with in severe forms of melancholia."

¹² Freud, "Mourning," p. 163.

¹³ Freud, "Mourning," p. 167.

¹⁴ Cited by Penelope Doob, Nebuchadnezzar's Children: Conventions of Madness in Middle English Literature (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1974), p. 248.

¹⁵ Theodulf of Orleans, in Poesia latina medievale (Catania: 1907), p. 120; cited by R. Klibansky, E. Panofsky, and F. Saxl, in Saturn and Melancholy: Studies in the History of Natural Philosophy, Religion, and Art (London: Nelson, 1964), p. 78.

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- 16 Cited by R. Klibansky, E. Panofsky, and F. Saxl, in Saturn and Melancholy, p. 115.
- 17 Robinson cites the passage in his note to the Knight's Tale, line 1376, on p. 673 of his second edition: "Mania est infestio anterioris cellulae capitis cum privatione imaginationis. Melancholia est infectio mediae cellulae capitis cum privatione rationis."
- 18 Siegfried Wenzel, The Sin of Sloth: Acedia in Medieval Thought and Literature (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1967).
- 19 Raban Maur, "De Acedia," in De Ecclesiastica Disciplina (PL 112. 1253): "Acedia: when an unoccupied man grows sluggish in carnal desires, and neither rejoices in spiritual work, nor grows happy in the health of his soul, nor relishes assisting in brotherly labor: but only yearns and desires, and idly dragging about, rushes through everything. . . . From this are born somnolence, laziness in good work, unsettled situation, wandering from place to place, lack of commitment in work, listlessness of heart, and grumbling and boasting, which, at least by a soldier of Christ, are conquered by the study of scriptural readings, by assiduity in good work, by desire for the rewards of future blessedness, by confession of the temptations which one has in mind, by firmness in one's place and purpose, and by the exercise of whatever art and work or prayer, and perseverance in vigils: for a servant of God is never found idle."
- 20 Hugh of St. Victor, De Fructibus Carnis et Spiritus c. 7 (PL 176.1000-1001): "Sorrow is the anxiety of a mind disturbed because of the frustrating round of contrary things, and the disinclination for good things to be done well. Its accompaniments are despair, rancor, inertia, fearfulness, acedia, complaining, and weak spiritedness. . . . Acedia is sorrow or languor born of too much confusion of soul, or too much bitterness of soul, by which spiritual gaiety is extinguished, and the mind is turned in on itself with a certain inward grounding in despair."
- 21 Wenzel, p. 193.
- 22 Wenzel, p. 134.
- 23 Klibansky, Panofsky, and Saxl, Saturn and Melancholy, pp. 300-303.
- 24 Saturn and Melancholy, p. 221.
- 25 Saturn and Melancholy, pp. 219-220.
- 26 Derek Pearsall, Old English and Middle English Poetry (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977), p. 237.

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- 27 Bridget Cellert Lyons, Voices of Melancholy: Studies in Literary Treatments of Melancholy in Renaissance England (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1971), pp. 25-26.
- 28 "For well you know that by my waking thoughts and melancholies often come to work on me, which are bound in my heart, and I cannot unbind them; for I do not wish to forget the Beauty, for whose love I have entered into this travail, and wake so much."
- 29 Petrarch, De Secretario Conflictu Curarum Mearum, in Prose, ed. Enrico Carrara (Milan: Riccardo Ricciardi, 1955), pp. 64-66: "If indeed innumerable kinds and images of visible things, which enter by the corporeal senses, are accumulated, after they are admitted one by one, then in a mass they are crowded into the inmost reaches of the soul, and the soul, neither made for this, nor capable of accommodating so many different forms, they weigh down and confound. Hence this plague of phantasmata, plucking and tearing at your thoughts, clogging the path to clarifying meditation, by which the ascent to the one sole summit that is life is made, with lethal variety."
- 30 Petrarch, p. 66: "If indeed, curled under its phantasmata, the fragile spirit is oppressed in itself and without respite by competing cares, it is unable to consider which it ought to address first, which to nurse, which to destroy, and which to refute."
- 31 Petrarch, p. 30.
- 32 Petrarch, p. 30: "for whoever desires to put of their misery, if only they desire it truly and wholeheartedly, shall not be frustrated in such a wish."
- 33 Petrarch, p. 32: "Now I think this one point unworthy, that you suppose that one is or is made miserable against one's will."
- 34 Petrarch, p. 148: "I am tortured by you before I confess."
- 35 Petrarch, p. 130: "For I feel that I am freed by your warnings from the greater part of my worries."
- 36 Petrarch, p. 56: "This, therefore, is what I meant by 'descending deeply enough,' not speaking of death by chance in passing, for the sake of custom, nor yet iterating [common adages like] 'nothing more sure than death, more unsure than its hour,' and other speeches of this sort in common use. For they fly by, and do not settle."
- 37 Petrarch, p. 74: "How many things there are, moreover, in the nature of things, for whose proper naming words are lacking; how many more besides, of which, even though they are distinguished by their names, you still sense that the eloquence of mortals does not attain to comprehending their stature in words prior to any experi-

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ence. . . . What then is the life of eloquence, so limited, so fragile, that neither accommodates all things, nor focuses the things it complicates? The Greeks are forever charging you, and you in turn the Greeks, with poverty of words."

³⁸ Petrarch, pp. 54-56.

³⁹ C. S. Lewis, The Allegory of Love (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1936), p. 128.

⁴⁰ James I. Wimsatt, Allegory and Mirror: Tradition and Structure in Middle English Literature (New York: Pegasus, 1970), p. 69.

⁴¹ Frederick Goldin, in The Mirror of Narcissus in the Courtly Love Lyric (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1967), expounds in detail the way the poets redeem the narcissism of hopeless love by projecting its ideal onto another individual: "the courtly ideal and all the doctrines that define it have been translated into a visible form in the immediate image of the lady. The ideal is thereby equipped with a will and an intelligence, with a capacity for concern and judgment. The ideal is no longer remote, it can know us and love us. . . . Thus the idealization of the lady saves the lover from the thirst and despair of Narcissus, from the fate of loving what cannot live" (p. 92). The way out of the narcissistic lover's difficulty is "to love himself, not in an image, but as an image" (p. 47). It remains, however, essentially narcissistic, since the lover cannot accept the lady as a reality, but is perpetually translating her into his ideal of his virtues: "The moment when the courtly man realizes that the lady lacks the qualities he has cherished and is herself a reflection of the uncertainty he has sought to escape, and at the same time finds himself unable to withdraw his love, unwilling to destroy a relation from which, despite its illusory character, he has drawn real benefits -- that moment defines the meaning of the 'mirror lyrics' before us" (p. 37). There are points when one must wonder whether the male troubadours celebrated anything but themselves, and Goldin observes that their art is "official art, justifying a ruling class by the depiction of its ideal" (p. 81). The arrangement is more appealing and less suspect when poetry gives it a dynamic, phenomenological rendering, so that "Love draws the soul toward its ideal condition, which knowledge reveals; and it is this movement and relationship between the mind, its ideal, and the love that unites them which constitutes the one being."

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42 "The youth, / Enraptured, gazed upon the crystal spring / Until he fell in love with his own face; / And at the last he died for very woe" (Robbins, pp. 30-31).

43 Lewis, Allegory of Love, p. 128.

44 Doob, Chapter 5.

45 Doob, p. 226.

46 Doob, p. 226.

47 Doob, p. 220.

48 I cite from The Poetical Works of Alain Chartier, ed. J. C. Laidlaw (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1974): "Flee then Melancholy, which seeks every sorrow, and pursue Pleasure above all; who receives Melancholy commits folly, for Pleasure is prettier; who dispels grief and care, and is neither ungrateful nor stingy, thus allies himself to largesse."

49 "No one gets melancholy over something that does not matter to them. If I am miserable, that's my foolishness; it doesn't make anybody else hot or cold. But indeed, who aims more high, has much more he needs; he can witness it for himself by Monsier Otto and Machaut."

50 "To forget melancholy, and get a more cheerful face."

51 "Thus I went all alone, as I had done by custom."

52 "But if I took joy of this happiness, it did not last long. Thus I returned suddenly to the thought I'd been [wrapped] in at first."

53 "I turned off into a path, long and narrow, where the tender grass grew most lovely, and a little softer than that around it. Here there came to me a great surprise which taught me about Desire: while walking unguardedly, without thinking of my return, I found myself far off in a turning. There Desire assailed me harshly, and I knew no return way, when I saw close by a shepherdess and a shepherd kissing, and from afar, issuing from a tower, four ladies in noble attire; that disquieted me much."

54 "And I forced myself to sing, but if I took joy of that happiness, it did not last long."

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- 55 "Thus my heart, of the great sorrow it felt, healed itself in this pleasant, solitary spot, where a sweet breeze blew, so light one did not sense it, except that the lawn ruffled prettily. There was the gracious abode of all that Nature can do that is beautiful and joyous in summer. There was nothing to change there of all that could please me, except that my lady had been there."
- 56 "One sang, the others doubled, with their throats that warbled the song Nature had taught; and then one voice separated from the other, and they did not resemble each other a bit; there were so many that they seemed to me beyond being counted in numbers."
- 57 I cite from Fifteenth-Century English Translations of Alain Chartier's *Le Traité de L'Esperance* and *Le Quadrilogue Invectif*, ed. Margaret S. Blayney, EETS o.s. 270 (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1974).
- 58 Pierre Férida, "Le narrateur mis à mort par son récit," in L'absence (Paris: Gallimard, 1978), pp. 47-51.
- 59 Férida, p. 48: "At the moment when he was seated before me, he could no longer be the narrator, and the narrator was indeed another, dispossessing him of a story or of a woman that could no longer be his, and yet of whom he would still be the lover. . . . In that moment, the narrator -- like the statue of the Commendatore -- threatened to annihilate him, him who, invisible voyeur, had once been the seducer." "The narrator requires that he return his wife to him! The woman belongs to the narrator and to him alone. He is her lover. And he who had withdrawn himself -- the man who had come to talk to me -- would not have been able to believe that his wife had left him."
- 60 "The narrator is an amnesiac, and his memory is drunk with narration," Férida, p. 50.
- 61 Férida, p. 47: "Passion -- when it has become white, painless -- consists, perhaps, entirely in these gestures that curtail memory, and dismiss it little by little, and that are certain only of a geometry in the angles bent invariably on the same point. In the end, the gestures have made a mockery of all histories, as if to tell one's story should be to relive that which perhaps had never been lived."
- 62 Férida, p. 48: "Only reading has the power to be narrative."
- 63 Cited by Rudolf Arnheim, "Melancholy Unshaped," in Toward a Psychology of Art: collected essays (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1972), pp. 181-191; citation on p. 188.
- 64 Arnheim, p. 187.

Chapter III. The Symbolism of the book of the Duchess

1. Some Modern Theories

This endlessly elaborating poem
Displays the theory of poetry,
As the life of poetry. A more severe,

More harassing master would extemporize
Subtler, more urgent proof that the theory
Of poetry is the theory of life,

As it is, in the intricate evasions of as,
In things seen and unseen, created from nothingness,
The heavens, the hells, the worlds, the longed-for lands.

(Wallace Stevens, "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven,"
XXVIII, 10-19)

Much interesting work has been done over the past twenty or thirty years to revive in memory the speculative and aesthetic qualities of medieval literature rather than the authoritative and didactic traits so often ascribed to it. One thinks of Vinaver's essays on interlacing narrative, of Juntz's structural analyses of vocabulary, and of the revaluation of allegory by avant-garde critics like Ferguson and Strabel.¹ Nor is this post-structural life of medieval literature at odds with the documentary work inherent to its study, since for medieval texts, documentation is an activity of questioning as well as proof, and speculation is as much a restoration as an amplification. Hence the excitement generated by the work of a scholar like Gallez in its intimacy with the texts.²

But almost all this newer work has been done relative to a particular theme or sensibility that is regarded as proper to a

given text, or to medieval texts in general. In the Book of the Duchess, however, there do not determine the meaning of the words any more than, say, character, genre, or convention do. It is a particularly pure embodiment of poetic textuality, and as such gives conventional criticism relatively little to hang on to, not to mention appreciate, aside from the sheer phenomenal life of words. From traditional perspectives, therefore, the poem has seemed slight.

But if, as I propose, one accepts the inventing and investigating of poetry as a valid poetic project, then the Book of the Duchess appears not only bright, but luminous. In it Chaucer both restates and expands the received possibilities for symbolic discourse, and in so doing, writes a poem that is in part an example and in part a discussion of symbolic text. A thorough and open reading of it both re-establishes the poem's value, and illuminates the full range of symbolism's mechanisms and effects in the literature of the time. I will begin with a discussion of symbolism in general and in the fourteenth century, and will then go on to observations on the symbols of this poem.

Any discussion of fourteenth-century symbolism must clear a little space in the overgrowth of errors made by many important scholars who have overemphasized theme in their representations of medieval literature. Robertson's and Huppé's overemphasis of doctrinal themes is well-known, and will figure more specifically in my argument later.³ C. S. Lewis is perhaps the most influential

example of such scholars. His definition of both symbol and allegory credits their effect to an extra-linguistic and supernatural truth:

[Allegory] On the one hand you can start with an [immaterial fact,] such as the passions which you actually experience, and can then invent visibilia to express them.

[Symbolism] The attempt to read [that something else] through its sensible imitations, to see the archetype in the copy, is what I mean by symbolism or sacramentalism.⁴

Lewis' definitions invoke a distinction between this world and another invisible world that has always tacitly presumed the superior meaningfulness of the other world. In such a view, not only the concrete world but also the fictions that redescribe it are less significant than the invisible meanings to be associated with them. Yet is not the notion of invisibility itself an image? And is not the act of associating ideas a figure of speech?

Critics who privilege the invisible world must also, by Lewis' definition, prefer symbolism to allegory, since symbolism departs from the visible while allegory re-invents it.⁵ In distinguishing between symbol and allegory on the basis of whether an image is envisioned as derived from or referring to an invisible truth, Lewis is using a metaphor for image-making to define images. And the metaphor itself, of one realm's being a "copy" of "something else," is drawn from the literary action of recording and representing things on paper.⁶

Lewis' division of a mode of thought from its mode of expression, according to which he privileges symbolism as a mode of thought and relegates allegory to a mere mode of expression,⁷ is fallacious, and further indicates his reluctance to appreciate the independent value of fiction. This reluctance reinforces the hold certain meanings have on his reading, and prevents him from seeing that the primary work of symbols is to create new meaning. This they do by creating the possibility of meaning in our minds, an idea which leads us to desire and invent as well as to receive knowledge.

The occasion for desiring and inventing meaning is the distance we see between a referent and its symbol. Symbols distance their referents by being unlike them. This is a simple statement but crucial to defining the problems the look of the Duchess offers interpreters. A metaphor or simile in some ways resembles and in other ways differs from its tenor, but in both there is a sense of relatedness. At the same time, the tenor of a metaphor or simile is usually autonomous, and its existence is independent of the vehicle.

Symbols, however, abandon the categories of similarity and difference. The alliance of symbol and referent is not necessarily arbitrary -- a vestigial metaphor may often be detected in it -- but it is unpredictable. An important idea or object has many symbols, and most symbols can stand for several different and often unrelated things, either separately or simultaneously. A

metaphor must be occasioned by its tenor, but a symbol may appear in a text unannounced by and frequently without announcing its referent. Symbols usually stand in for things that resist the kind of description that makes metaphor and simile possible, and often for things that are or ought to be made difficult or impossible to comprehend. Because they are place-holders for unknowns and variables, symbols constitute a discourse where the methods of the signifiers, not the facts of the things signified, are the grounds for speech. One says, in symbols, whatever the symbols let one say, not only what one intends ahead of time to express. To the mind, and often to the feelings, symbolized things do not quite exist apart from the symbols.

Metaphor and simile, as means of communicating a particular point clearly and artistically, appear in medieval handbooks of rhetoric, while symbolism usually appears in discussions of exegetical allegory, as a code for those who either already know the meaning, or accept the tenor's ineffability and are therefore not asking to be persuaded of its specific content. A metaphor can differ from its tenor, but a symbol may simply differ, from what in particular we know not, informing us by its strangeness simply of this process of differing. It is in this disjunctive kind of symbol that Chaucer specializes in the Book of the Duchess.

Certain things in the poem seem symbolic by virtue of the abruptness with which they appear and disappear, indicating their detachment from the general progress of the narrative: the dis-

missed physician, the elusive figures in the hunt -- Octavian, the whelp, and the quarry -- and the extremely sudden shift at the end from the pronouncement of death to the ride home. Each distracts us and the dreamer from the current of predictable action by introducing seemingly gratuitous elements into a poem apparently fashioned after precedents. Certainly, if such images are not symbolic, they would seem to have little point.

There are several critical descriptions of the way symbolism works that help us understand this detached sort of image. Harry Berger's discussion of Spenser⁸ addresses the apparent gratuitousness of most symbols. He points to a principle of "conspicuous irrelevance"⁹ as a signal that a poet intends, by means of the "irrelevant" item, to pitch the narrative at a different angle and redefine what is relevant to it. In the Book of the Duchess, the playfulness of the whelp and the exasperation of the messenger to Morpheus disrupt the mood of the traditional dream-vision with gestures that are initially peripheral but whose import becomes clear after the reader has reflected a bit on the text.

Chaucer also uses an inverted form of this tactic, what one might call inconspicuous relevance, as when something clearly important is suppressed or underplayed. Such are the traditional theme of love neglected entirely in this poem's opening, and the obvious parallel between Alcyone and himself that the narrator never remarks upon. Such glaring lapses in signification also force the reader to interpret the text figuratively.

Freud has a similar appreciation for the small image that does not quite fit into the narratives of dreams. In these plots, the clearest, most sensible, narrative line constitutes a "cover" for suppressed thoughts, and the peripheral, incidental imagery of the narration carries the sense of those ideas.

In the course of the formation of a dream these essential elements, charged, as they are, with intense interest, may be treated as though they were of small value, and their place may be taken in the dream by other elements, of whose small value in the dream-thoughts there can be no question.¹⁰

This happens because dreams present distressing ideas and frustrated wishes in the disguise of an ostensible plot that, while voicing them, voices them in a virtually undetectable way, so as to smooth over the sense of distress and frustration. Only a careful and reflective analysis retrieves the significance of these revalued bits of dream, and the discovery of their unsuspected freight leads us to recognize the existence of discrete kinds or levels of thought in our minds. Because these differing lines of thought are to a large extent mutually exclusive, points of communication between them can only be established symbolically.

Among the thoughts that analysis brings to light are many which are relatively remote from the kernel of the dream and which look like artificial interpolations made for some particular purpose. That purpose is easy to divine. It is precisely they that constitute a connection, often a forced and far-fetched one, between the dream-content and the dream-thoughts.¹¹

A direct derivative of what occupies a dominating position in the dream-thoughts can often only be discovered precisely in some transitory element of the dream which is quite overshadowed by more powerful images.¹²

The symbols thus marking and eliding the boundary between competing lines of thought are formed by attaching the psychic interest of many deep, central concerns to one or a few accommodating details.

In the dream-work a psychical force is operating which on the one hand strips the elements which have a high psychical value of their intensity, and on the other hand, by means of overdetermination, creates from elements of low psychical value new values, which afterwards find their way into the dream-content. If that is so, a transference and displacement of psychical intensities occurs in the process of dream-formation, and it is as a result of these that the difference between the text of the dream-content and that of the dream-thoughts comes about.¹³

These artificially built-up symbols are signs not only that more is meant than meets the ear but also that something different is intended. But if a dream seeks usually to make the discrepancies unnoticeable and untroubling, a poem seeks more often to invite rather than evade our interpretation. Consequently, the incongruity of a literary symbol is commonly made explicit, and the texture of a symbolic poem appears far more ragged than the slick plot of a dream.

Set off from normative narrative, these "unlike" symbols have a discrete, isolated quality that can both confuse and brighten a text. Angus Fletcher's idea of the "kosmos" image affords a felicitous account of these symbols, which seem to combine distinctness of outline and quality with a certain obscurity of reference that in fact arises from the symbol's referring to or summarizing an entire psychic or ideological world.

The most striking sensuous quality of images in allegories is their "isolation" from each other. Allegorical painting and the emblematic poetry that takes after it display this very sharply. They present bits and pieces of allegorical "machinery," scales of justice, magic mirrors, crystal balls, signet rings, and the like. These devices are placed on the picture plane without any clear location in depth. Their relative sizes often violate perspective (they are often out of proportion), and at the same time they preserve their identities by being drawn with extremely sharp-etched outlines.¹⁴

Fletcher argues that this demarcated quality answers to the necessity of isolating the symbol from properties and associations it might have had as an everyday object in a realistic narrative, and which would interfere with its power to emblemize a force or idea outside itself.

By cutting off the object in question from any function other than its daemonic, magical function, the user manages to address his particular talisman with total concentration.¹⁵

This isolation of the symbolic images disrupts realistic context, and ultimately raises the basic question of whether a poetic program of indirect, isolated images is susceptible of rational critical argument.

The Book of the Duchess is certainly replete with images like this, although it would be difficult to call the poem as a whole an allegory. For while Chaucer may not have proceeded by either metaphor or sacramental symbols "to arouse vague quasi-religious feelings",¹⁶ and while he does proceed by symbols that resemble the allegorical kosmoi, he at no point indicates what hierarchy, ideology, or psychic world his symbols speak for.

But this brings us to Fletcher's initial caution "that we shall never lightly assume that clarity is an unclouded aim of most allegory."¹⁷ It is a trait of allegorical imagery, but not of the allegorical imagination. For the underlying reference of the images lies prior to the divisions into logical categories of rational thought. When they do appear in the midst of a rational discourse, which does not perceive as unified something that does not conform to its categories, these images seem to ambivalently picture competing, contradictory ideas. It is like the broad white light that a prism's analysis breaks into the disparate, bright colors of the spectrum.

Now the underlying idea that Chaucer indexes with his images is not a particular ideology or consciousness, but the very beginning of thought, a moment of mental initiative that makes possible in the first place particular ideologies and consciousnesses, along with their opposites. It is the most radical and prior ideation, rather than any one idea, that Chaucer wishes to give us a key to.

Robert Guette describes this kind of indeterminate symbolic reference as he finds it in medieval texts, and which he calls

symbolisme sans signifiante, c'est-à-dire symbolisme résidant dans le fait même de se poser le texte, comme une énigme. Sens caché, mais parfois sens littéral accompagné d'une possibilité de sens caché, sans plus.¹⁸

He poses a simple and important question: "oserions-nous affirmer que les lecteurs ont toujours pu attribuer au symbole une

'beneficence'?" and then posits the characteristically medieval readers who knew how to live with such symbolism:

des lecteurs attentifs, sensibles à cet art qui cherche l'essence des choses et des événements derrière la réalité apparente ne réussissaient pas toujours à la découvrir. En étaient-ils pour cela déconcertés et déçus? Je ne le crois pas. On a signalé maintes fois combien toute l'époque était étrangère au goût de l'exactitude pour les faits objectifs, combien elle se préoccupait peu d'exactitude mentale. Ne pouvait-elle apprécier dans un rayonnement mystique dont le sens précis lui échappait? Obscurité, merveilleux, incompréhensible et inexplicable se rencontrent.¹⁹

This symbolism in effect figures to the reader the operation of symbolism itself, conceived of as the way writers inform texts with the marvellous and the ineffable. Guiette further suggests the parallel between the reading of such images and the experience of sensual passion:

Le caractère mystérieux et merveilleux de ces ombres où soudain des traits symboliques connus (les nombres ou les couleurs, par exemple) brillaient furtivement, devait susciter comme une angoisse, une inquiétude et sans doute une curiosité délicate. On percevait le mystère et sans doute ne demandait-on pas qu'il se dissipât.²⁰

Like Guiette, Wolfgang Iser clarifies certain "problems" in medieval poetry by restoring them to the context of an aesthetic different from our own. In his congenial essay on the look of the Duchess,²¹ he is one of the few critics who appreciate rather than merely defending vaguely or explaining historically the style of this poem. He is sensitive to the poet's project of making poetry possible, and thus sees that the poet's and narrator's and night's "indeterminate usings"²² make room for interpretation by forestalling

the kind of blunt assertion of theme that closes off the mind from the restorative process of fiction-making.²³

It is the unlikeness in symbolism that gives the Book of the Duchess its air of glittering unreality, and the discontinuous, isolated nature of symbolic images that gives it that abruptness, inconsequentiality, and irresolve that so many critics have taken for the incoherence of a first attempt at poetry, or the sign of a genius unsuited for allegory.²⁴ And the poem possesses these qualities as if in excess because in the course of playing out love and loss it is analyzing the symbolic process itself.

The poem includes several symbolic passages: the May morning, the painted chamber walls, the hunt, the forest landscape, the chess allegory. These are not unusual motifs in a medieval poem, but Chaucer rediscovers their symbolic nature by making them seem strange again, dissociating them from the referents we might have assumed for them. In his description of May, he omits all mention (explicitly made in the sources)²⁵ of the traditional theme of love. In the ecphrasis on the dreamer's chamber walls, one work of art becomes the theme of another, and neither refers to any extra-aesthetic idea. The hunt loses its quarry, the path is a detour, and leads into the home of deities with a history of rape, the forest is composed of trimmed trees set at deliberate distances from each other, and the chess allegory is confused by the ambiguity of the term "fers". As we simultaneously are convinced by their vivid effect that these things do mean something, and are

baffled as to what they mean because they do not at first lead to anything we can recognize, or want to recognize, we tend to move our attention from the meanings of the symbols to the way they mean things.

Chaucer isolates the process of symbolizing by constantly absenting the symbols' referents. This symbolic process may be thought of as the transitional phase in a poet's work that is analogous to courtship in the lover's. In a way, we have in this poem a poet courting poetry as much as writing it, and Chaucer's repose in this transitional moment gives the poem its air of having dispersed coherent meaning. It enacts in itself the indeterminacy of meaning. Symbols turn into narratives that have symbols of their own, one symbol's meaning makes way for another's and is thus revealed to be not the meaning but yet another figure for it, and ultimately neither the symbolic nor the literal phase of meaning's expression endures. Only the symbolizing process seems to be literally intelligible, and conversely, only the meaningful seems to require -- because it is profound? because it is distressing?-- this temporizing by symbolism. As with love and poetry, the symbol and the referent endlessly turn into each other, and their succession constantly reorients, and thereby recreates, our interpretive expectations, suspicions, and desires.

The alienated quality of symbols complements Chaucer's zeroing in on the origination of poetry. He wishes to use language at the point before it conveys a meaning, when it is in the act of generating meaning. And figures of speech are precisely those locutions that arrest the mind and propose new avenues to meaning. Figurative language re-enacts the whole problem of signifying anything. The threshold of meaning occupies the same place and time as symbolic language.

Given Chaucer's suspension of specific meaning, we should conceive of his poetic intentionality as including his regard for resources of language and poetic form that are potentially larger than and only partially predictable by conscious thought. The poet knows perfectly well that language can signify things beyond an intended plan, and it would be presumptuous to think that a great poet would not be choosing language that could be counted on to say something a little more or other than what the conscious mind might formulate. For it is this possibility of meaning something different from what is indicated that is at the heart of literature, and gives the reader the difference between looking and reading. Chaucer's art is not primarily one of arranging figures for certain meanings, but of arranging figures in a way that enables them to mean as much as they can. His recurring transitions and deferrals, his narrative discontinuities and framing, are the settings by which he precipitates and isolates symbols. Through them, conventional motifs reacquire their power to create meaning.

2. Medieval Symbolism

A typical medieval discussion of symbolism usually comes under the heading of allegory in directions for exegesis, and a typical definition of allegory as the "*tropus quo aliud significatur quam dicitur*"²⁶ clearly states that a word's usual meanings do not resemble its allegorical referents. The absence of any necessary or natural similarity between literal and allegorical meanings makes allegorical interpretations to some degree arbitrary, and disturbs those who feel that allegory is an extended metaphor, a figure based on similarities, and who want to be able to follow a word along a clear line of reference to a determinable meaning. But Christian allegorists had to face the gap between sign and significance in their texts, not only because many of the mysteries signified were assumed to lie beyond human comprehension, but also because even those lines of allegorical reference thought to be instituted by God could not escape the ambiguities of their verbal medium.

In his essay "'Allegoria in factis' et 'Allegoria in verbis',"²⁷ Armand Strubel exposes the contradiction inherent in any distinction between instituted theologians' allegory and verbal poets' allegory. In the latter, a word's literal meaning also has a figurative meaning which then signifies a final referent, while in theologians' allegory the word's literal meaning refers to an object or event that signifies the final referent independently of verbal force or nuance. In the one a word figures a referent according to the

conventions -- an inexplicable licenses -- of poetic language, while in the other a literal referent stands for a further referent according to correspondences between them established by God. But to distinguish thus between the two allegories is ultimately to isolate what signs signify from the way they signify it, and from the fact that they are signs, and to oppose "le symbolisme extra-linguistique des référents au pur phénomène de signification, ce qui élude la question du sens 'figuré' inhérent au discours."²⁸ In other words, it is only language, as the medium of the very action of signifying, that can convey figurative meanings, and which by conveying them renders all meanings figurative to some degree. The divinely instituted theologians' allegory cannot appropriate to itself this essentially linguistic operation.

Medieval authors often portrayed human spiritual progress as itself depending on verbal comprehension. In one of his letters, Jerome links the quest for faith to instruction in reading, recalling the episode in Acts 8:27-40 where Philip converts the Ethiopian eunuch by showing him how to explicate a figurative passage in Scripture.²⁹ Augustine's is the archetypal conversion by text, made possible by Ambrose's figurative explications of Scripture in his sermons, and effected by the anonymous command floating across a garden wall: "Tolle, lege."³⁰

But language leads us simultaneously into spirituality and error. As Margaret Ferguson has shows,³¹ Augustine associates the Fall from grace with a fall into language. Like life after the

expulsion, language is a "regio dissimilitudinis," a land of unlikeness where no one can say what they mean and the towering Cherub of words excludes everyone from fully understanding the truth. If, then, we approach understanding only through the error that is language, we must undo that error by reading it erroneously, that is, by coaxing or wresting by means of allegory interpretations according to charity from the most unlikely passages in Scripture.

Servabitur ergo in locutionibus figuratis regula huius modi, ut tam diu versetur diligenti consideratione quod legitur, donec ad regnum caritatis interpretatio perducatur.³²

Any Scriptural text not read so as to illuminate Christian doctrine has been betrayed. Robertson makes much of this, using it to support his notion that all medieval art, not only Scripture, is either doctrinally instructive, or ironically doctrinally instructive, or bad. Augustine's exact idiom is that interpretations should contribute to or accord with the reign of charity. (This locating of the responsibility for charity in the reader, not the text, moves the grounds of interpretation away from authorial intention and away from history, to which Robertson professes a learned but unmedieval devotion.) But to say that words should contribute to or accord with charity is not to say that charity determines all these words' meanings.

The briefest consultation of a compendium like Raban Maur's Allegoriae in Sacram Scripturam³³ will show that virtually all

symbols were regarded as having significations both "in bono" and "in malo." Gregory, in his Moralia on Job, includes sets of contradictory readings in the course of his commentary, illustrating how they are not simply the product of comperdia like Raban Maur's, but should each be followed out in any rich, full meditation on Scripture. Two brief examples give the general idea:

In Scriptura sacra lectus, sive grabatus, sed stratum, aliquando voluptas carnis, aliquando repausatio in bonis operibus, aliquando requies temporalis accipitur.³⁴

In Scriptura enim sacra panis aliquando ipse Dominus, aliquando spiritualis gratia, aliquando divinae doctrinae eruditio, aliquando haereticorum praedicatio, aliquando subsidium vitae praesentis, aliquando jucunditas humanae delectationis accipitur.³⁵

These passages are also instances of Gregory's frequent use of the word "accipitur" as synonymous with "significat",³⁶ an idiom that expresses the readiness and ease with which medieval interpreters "accepted" as authorized readings a complex wealth of referents. In Gregory's discursive Moralia, the differing readings are not merely possible, but all simultaneously and equally relevant to the commentary at hand.

The discontinuities between words and meanings is not despaired of or striven against, but rather regarded as the occasion for depth of reading and richness of comprehension. Thus Augustine, for example, believes that the longer a reader has to search for a text's meaning, the more enjoyment and edification is derived from understanding,³⁷ and that God has instituted difficulties and differences among the various translations of Scripture in

order to encourage fruitful struggles with the text.³⁸ It is precisely the discontinuity in language that, once perceived, gives us to know that there is a realm of things beyond our customary perception.

In the De Utilitate Credendi Augustine extends this principle of difficulty or error into the reading of secular or pagan writers, affirming that such intrusive interpreting is not only the reader's duty, but in fact the essential and characteristic opportunity that the act of reading affords. After describing the two kinds of misreading by which one either accepts as true what a mistaken author also thought was true but is not, or accepts as true what a deceptive author knew to be false, Augustine comes to the third and happy misreading,

cum ex alieno scripto intelligitur aliquid veri,
cum hoc ille qui scripsit non intellexerit. In
quo genere non parum est utilitatis, imo si diligentius
consideres, totus legendi fructus est integer³⁹

The inadequacies of language require one to misread what one wishes to read fully. When a major theorist of exegesis says that the whole fruit of reading is realized when we read into texts meanings that their authors did not intend, the language of unlikeness has been established as the language of truth.

Like the felix culpa of the Fall, the errors of language seem to be necessary digressions on the way to truth. Thus in the "gymnastique intellectuelle"⁴⁰ of the De Magistro, Augustine and his son Adeodatus spend about two-thirds of their discussion

proving the erroneous notion that nothing can be taught without signs, as a prelude to their choral peroration on the failure of signs to teach anything at all.⁴¹ Words, then, are as necessary to spiritual ascent as they are inadequate. Its dissimilarities between word and referent make symbolism the mode of error par excellence, and we have seen that theological allegoria in factis cannot stand apart from the enriching and enabling errors of poetic allegoria in verbis.

It is facile to assume that interpreters' manipulations of texts to illustrate accepted meanings limits the texts' field of reference to a religious doctrine. That some medieval interpreters read for Christian meanings is an accident, albeit a large and important one, of history. The interesting point structurally is that these readers knew that meaning would often emerge only from a distortion of a given text. Further, we should remember that religious meaning constituted a much larger proportion of meaning generally then than now, so that a medieval reader applying doctrine to a text would not be limiting that text's reference as would a modern reader who sought salvation in the pages of Ulysses. Religious and secular writing then shared most of their idioms and fictions. Nor was the orthodox doctrine to which these texts were being conformed a very established body of belief in the fourteenth century. What did or did not constitute a contribution to the reign of charity was less certain when the nature of the Eucharist and the appropriateness of translating Scripture into English were unresolved issues.

arcia Colish describes how in the twelfth century, after a long period of subscribing to the general ancient subordination of poetry to rhetorical, logical, or theological aims, theorists began to look at poetry on its own terms.

In the numerous artes poeticae which now begin to appear, there is a marked tendency to move away from a didactic interpretation of poetry toward an almost preclusive stress on technique.⁴²

From close consideration of poetry's technique and mechanisms, they concluded that the mode of poetic language itself led the mind to apprehend truth. Pre-eminent among these theorists were those of the school of Chartres, "whose members in the twelfth century looked at poetry as a vehicle for philosophy."⁴³

This is something of a reassertion of Augustine's belief that language, despite or even because of its flaws, was an effective path to God's truth. Unlike Plato, Augustine believes that words can indicate to the mind knowledge it does not already possess, so that "the idea of cognition through speech"⁴⁴ informs all his thought. Further, the concept of God that Augustine brings to ancient philosophy greatly amplifies the ontological distance human language must, and therefore can, travel.

With the rise of medieval platonism, however, the realist view of truth inspired philosophers to look to the universals as the highest, surest ideas available to thought, and to grant them autonomy, a quasi-independence of God, at least for speculative purposes, that was later enhanced by the scholastic distinction

between what can be known by reason and what by faith. While the philosophers' revival of pagan thought helped revive appreciation for human arts, it also tended to collapse that symbolic complement of a perfect God and an imperfect language that had given such glorious scope for the imperfect to recognize and express the perfect. The idea that the partial can contrive an apprehension of the whole is perhaps the most humane of all ideas, but it was in fact somewhat lost sight of in the celebration of the ideas themselves. Poetry took a back seat to philosophy in the humanist ordering of the universe.

In Tolish's view, it took an emphatically Christian poet like Dante to reinstate the spacious, symbolic world where poetry and theology both stood above philosophy and the other forms of ratiocination, and resonated as equals across the distance between them.

He rejects the 'falsity of poetry' tradition, and its modification in the form of the theory of poetic veils which must be removed in order to acquire the nugget of doctrine within. For Dante the style of poetry is integrally related to its truth.⁴⁵

For Dante, the plausibility of representing spiritual truths in highly concrete, material, and temporal terms is a corollary of the latent Aristotelianism in the Augustinian sign theory, the doctrine of the Incarnation, and the typological method of allegory transposed from Scripture to Christian poetry.⁴⁶

Dante believes poetry encodes in its imperfect but suggestive form that desire for truth which is the real locus for understanding truth. Thus when he moves from the romance of La Vita Nuova to the philosophy of the Convivio, he

still tends to see a love relationship between himself and a lady, symbolic or otherwise, as the context in which he, and by extension the reader, acquires wisdom and virtue.⁴⁷

By his simultaneous faith in God and words, Dante retrieves the meaningfulness ascribed to words by Augustine. The words themselves, their sound and coloration, their syntax, their selection of semantic fields, were direct mental experiences, were ideas, were all of them logoi, and scriptural.

In the letter to Can Grande . . . [Dante] draws no distinction between the allegory of the poets and the allegory of the theologians, thereby assimilating to ⁴⁸ poetry the technique as well as the mission of theology.

It is natural and felicitous that Dante's new epic should take the form of a vision, since in that genre the realm of sensible images and the realm of words coincide. When a vision is created in words, words can be seen to be phenomena, that happen to be linguistic, and that signify truth in the same way objects placed by providence do. The wealth of words, in fact, exposes the figurativeness of all signification. The swift reactions of scholars at the time to the Commedia shows that

Although some modern scholars may have had trouble with the point, Dante's contemporaries and immediate successors clearly had little difficulty in accepting the theological poetic of the letter to Can Grande and in applying it to the Divine Comedy.⁴⁹

Dante overcame the conception of poetry as a shell over meaning that ornamented it, and invited us to look for it, but did not contribute to it. But for many medieval writers, this shell had never been the disposable gimmick it was sometimes later thought.

3. Putting

. . . and turned my steps
Tow'rd some far-distant wood, a figure quaint,
Tricked out in proud disguise of cast-off weeds.

(William Wordsworth, "Putting")

The picture of poetry as a complex of shells to be cracked and cast off to reveal the meat of meaning is a little fiction for denigrating poetry while seeming to appreciate it. Even Roccaccio, in his Genealogy of the Gentile Gods,⁵⁰ uses the desire to retrieve pagan poetry for the Christian audience as justification for seeing poetry as an integument without much power to enlighten or educate the reader.

Lernard Kupper exemplifies a simplistic understanding of the nut and shell figure common in modern criticism. He assumes the shell will be thrown away, even though this leads him, for example, into the absurdity of maintaining, despite his detailed appreciation of the verbal surface of Caedmon's Hymn, that

the letter of the Hymn for Bede could have meant only a shell to be cracked for the kernel of hidden meaning that alone would have given the poem the Christian beauty demanded by its angelic inspiration.⁵¹

Yet the ordering of the Hymn's topics, its opening with an injunction to praise God, the choice of theatically resonant epithets for God, and the clear paraphrase of the beginning of Genesis, all features of the literal level, are what establish the significance of the poem. The shell in this case refers directly to the kernel, but Kupper assumes that meaning lies only in what is hidden, and thus

incidentally relegates the praise of God to the role of a "here" shell, simply because it can be gotten from the literal level alone.

If Happé had pursued the idea that allusiveness generates meaning, that a certain obliquity and therefore the reader's interpretive effort are necessary to meaning, then he would have developed an interesting phenomenological theory of hermeneutics. But he accepts only those interpretations that fit orthodox religious doctrine -- which renders all the more perverse his rejection of the literal level of the Hymn, as if insisting that meanings not only be doctrinal, but also be found only in official commentary, not in the poetry.

Happé believes that "the truly beautiful comes not from the shell, but from gaining to the kernel after the labor of breaking the shell."² But in the Augustinian aesthetic of struggling with a text, it is the shells that perpetuate over time the occasions for interpretation, and prolong, and enable us to report, our meditations. Breaking the shell is like killing the goose who lays the golden egg. To break rather than traverse the shell is to reject the possibility for finding meaning that fiction offers.

In his discussion of the shell image in the Renaissance author Sir John Harington, Thomas Roche gives a lucid and helpful explanation that restores the value of the shell as a significant component of allegorical meaning. He begins with a detailed passage from Harington's introduction to his translation of Orlando Furioso:

First of all for the litterall sence (as it were the vtmost barke or ryme) they set downe in manner of an historie, the acts and notable exploits of some persons worthy memorie; then in the same fiction, as a second rine and somewhat more fine, as it were nearer to the pith and marrow, they place the Morall sence, profitable for the active life of man, approving vertuous actions and condemning the contrarie. Manye times also vnder the selfesame words they comprehend some true vnderstanding of naturall Philosophie, or sometimes of politike government, and now and then of diuinitie; and these same sences that comprehend so excellent knowledge we call the Allegorie, which Platarch defineth to be when one thing is told, and by that another is vnderstood. [Italics mine except for Platarch.]

The senses are contained (wrapped or comprehended) in the narrative, and by that do we come to understand the fuller significance of the text. Marington is talking about the way an Elizabethan discovered meaning in narrative poems, and for this purpose the metaphor of rind and pith is valid. He is not talking about the enjoyment of poetry, the pleasure of entering that golden world of narrative -- unless we are to visualize the Elizabethan reader surrounded by empty nutshells or orange peels. In general, critics have not been careful to observe that Marington and the other Renaissance writers who use this metaphor are not thinking of two separate and divided entities; the allegorical senses reveal themselves when one "gets into" the work. As soon as the critic begins to talk about poets telling stories on the allegorical level, he confuses the tenor and vehicle of this continued metaphor and misses the beauty and economy of the allegorical mode.⁵³

The notion of a rind and pith is itself a figure of allegory, a small allegory of allegory, and must therefore be understood not literally but figuratively. To describe allegory as a sequence from disposable shell to significant meaning is to take literally a figurative picture of a complex reading action. What is accurate to say about allegory defined this way should focus on the structure

of the arrangement. First, the pith and rind always occur together; second, the rind is actually several different rinds (Harrington does not specify any level of meaning as constituting the pith), and it is the assemblage of all these rinds, the coincidence of the "levels" of meaning, that make up the allegory: "and these same senses . . . we call the Allegorie."

In reading allegory, then, one does not progress from words to superficial meanings to deeper meanings. Rather, one enters the allegory as a whole, as a created cosmos that presents a whole varied world of meanings. After entering this world, it is the action of passing among the kinds of meanings that suggests to the reader that one discourse may figure another.

As he opens Book 21 of his Moralia on Job, Gregory advises us to keep the historical and spiritual senses of Scripture in balance, using neither one of them exclusively or inevitably. He takes the text as a fabric of interwoven kinds of discourse, separable for purposes of exegesis, inextricable for purposes of understanding, and each figurative (one must bear in mind that historical or experiential ideas may be presented figuratively as well as invisible ones). And he offers as one of his "proofs" of this picture of the text an allegory on the passage in Genesis 30 where Jacob makes his flocks fertile by setting varicolored branches before them. He diversifies the color by stripping the bark in some places (likened to figurative reading) and leaving it in others (likened to literal reading):

Ante considerationis enim nostrae oculos praecedentium
 patrum sententiae quasi virgae variae ponuntur. In
 quibus dum plerumque intellectum litterae fugimus,
 quasi corticem subtrahimus, et dum plerumque intellectum
 litterae sequimur, quasi corticem reservamus. Dumque
 ab ipsis cortex litterae subducitur, allegoriae candor
 interior demonstratur, et dum cortex relinquitur, ex-⁴⁴
 terioris intelligentiae virentia exempla monstrantur."

The sentences of the fathers give us the luster of an allegory when
 read apart from the sense of the letter, and flourishing examples
 of outward understanding when read according to the letter. In
 either case, allegory or example, the interpreted text educates us
 figuratively. And like the calves of Jacob's flocks, as Gregory
 allegorizes them, those who do good works take on the "double color"
 of the text as they read for both inward and outward indications of
 virtue:

et diversum colorem proles boni operis habeat, quia
 et nonnunquam subtracto litterae cortice, acutius
 interna considerat, et reservato nonnunquam historiae
 tegmine, bene se in exterioribus forat.⁵⁵

Satan also bears out Gregory's advice by offering a wide variety
 of figurative readings for objects in Scripture, including several
 interpretations of two words often used for "shell," testa and
cortex, that enrich rather than apologize for the notion of a
 fictive shell.

Testa est caro Christi, ut in Isaiis: "Aruit tanquam
 testa virtus mea," quod caro Christi per ignem passionis
 ad fortitudinem convalluit.

Testa, vigor distractionis, ut in Job: "Hi testa
 radebat saniens," quod vigore distractionis viri sancti
 fluxum illicitae delectationis abstergunt.⁵⁶

These readings of testa are essentially metaphorical, relying on

the parallel between the meanings and both the words and actions. Testa is taken in its common meaning of a shard of earthenware. In the passages cited, Job uses a shard to scrape off scabs, and the flesh of Christ is seen as gaining strength and blazing up in the trials of the passion, like a vessel to be fired in a furnace. Job's shard and Christ's flesh are active instruments in their spiritual refinement, not only shadows of the process. Shells with such import can hardly have been considered unimportant or expendable. The idea of the shell allegorized here is that it is an intrinsic part of the incarnation and of the consequent sanctification of the world.

Cortex est signaculum crucis, ut in Cantico: "Sicut cortex mali punicum ita genae tuae," quod ad imitationem crucis sancti se affligi permittunt. Per corticem delectationes, ut in Job: "Mandebant arborum cortices," id est, arabant exteriores visibilibus delectationes. Per corticem sensus historiales, ut in Genesi: "Detractis corticibus arbor apparuit," id est, sub-
notis historialibus sensibus decor spiritualis intel-
ligentiae innotuit. 57

The first reading of cortex also interprets the rind as flesh, but comes there by a less obvious analogy. It is a sort of poet's allegory in which the reference of the words is expanded to make the reading. Raban Maur has pictured the cheeks as being either consumed or bloodied by being flayed. He then compares the cheeks to pomegranates, not on the basis of their natural mutual similarities like color or roundness, but for this imagined appearance of affliction. The idea does not occur automatically, especially in the context of the Songs, where the beloved is usually likened

less dramatically to the Church. The artificed analogy is, however, the richer for the superimposition of the beautiful and the afflicted. The idea of the shell here is that of a living sacrifice, a physical action that is also the proof of spiritual strength.

The passage's next two readings of cortex, as superficial pleasures, are more like theologians' allegory, based on analogies constructed between the meaning and the actions narrated. Chewing bark, in Job, and stripping trees, in the Genesis story already used by Gregory, are actions much further from the interpretation (sensuous delight and historical reading) than were those in the two readings of testa, where the actions (firing virtue and scraping wounds) as well as the words suggest the interpretation (the soul's discipline in the world). These reverter readings of cortex are the more strongly allegorical because the exegete has isolated the words and the actions from their narrative context in order to make the interpretation. Where he had supplied actions to words in the first reading of cortex, he also supplies meanings to actions in the last two.

The use of both direct and indirect analogies indicates the range of invention available to interpreters, and thus the flexibility that the fictive shell introduces into a Scripture whose sacred authoritativeness might otherwise have rendered it rigid and dry. The commentators did not worry about the distance they had to go to derive a particular meaning from a particular image.

They feel equally free to use literal, metaphorical, and symbolic routes to their readings. Their religious theme, of course, is the given that largely affords them this freedom. But once they establish the various interpretive methods, those methods are seen to respond as well to the wealth and complexity of all texts.

either nux or nucleus, the words most commonly used for the inner seat or for the whole figure of allegory, appear in Raban Maur's Allegoriae, as if to hint that the notions of a deep truth and a complete, consistent text were not quite as interesting to the commentator as the exercise of interpretation and the evocation of meaning were. For a last foray of the nutting expedition, and an overview of the whole image, let us look at a sequence written by Adam of St. Victor. Composed in exposition on the Incarnation, it shows that the image is not that of one kernel with a fixed shell around it, but of at least two enclosing layers and a kernel with at least three significations of its own:

Contempleretur adhuc nucem,
 Nam prolata nux in lucem;
 Lucis est mysterium,
 Trinam gerens unionem;
 Tria confert: unctiorem,
 Lumen et aedulium.
 Lux est Christus, cortex nucis
 Circa carmen poena crucis.
 Testa, corpus ossium.
 Carne tecta deitas,
 Et Christi suavitas, ^{eg}
 Signatur per nucleum.

The "poena crucis" which the cortex signifies, and the "corpus ossium" which the shell signifies, are inalienable aspects of the Incarnation that the whole figure of Lux-Christus celebrates. The nucleus of the nut is reserved for the ideas of Christ's divinity and sweetness, but does not have a monopoly on the most significant idea of His mysterious compound essence, which it cannot signify by itself; only the composite "Lux est Christus." Further, the "poena crucis" of the cortex are said to be set "circa carnem," thus making the inner nutmeat analogous to the flesh surrounded by pain as well as to the "deitas" and "stabilitas" of the last line.

The flexibility with which the exegetes read the nutting image shows how great a source of meaningfulness all such fictive shells are. The theology of the Incarnation, the consequent sacralization of the world and history, and the sacredness of the Scripture that inspires exegesis, attest further to the fully mutual resonance between shells and nutmeats in the making of meanings.

4. The Interpretation of Symbolic Dreams

The dream element is a special source of confusion for interpreters of the Book of the Duchess. The poet creates an epistemological puzzle by setting the most realistic and defined experiences of the poem inside a dream, and in an age when a dream could not only be considered either meaningless or revelatory, but was also thought to give no indication of which category it belonged to. A. C. Spearing observes that, despite or because of such detailed classifications as those offered by Macrobius in his Commentary on the Somnium Scipionis, "there was almost never any way of telling from a dream itself which category, meaningful or insignificant, it belonged to."⁵⁹ And further, the dream-frame invites us to superimpose our way of understanding dreams on our way of poems. The rules for each are not quite the same, yet each seems called for, and thus points of inconsistency in our reading are assured by this double hermeneutic. On the one hand, dreams are a prime instance of a non-scriptural text to which medieval thinkers readily applied exegetical principles of interpretation. On the other, in the case of dreams interpretation was known to proceed without any guarantee of either the specific meanings or the general meaningfulness of a text. On the authority of John of Salisbury, Robert Holkot, and the poets themselves, dreams and dream-interpreting are even more enigmatic and problematic than poems and criticism.

When John of Salisbury transmits the complex classification of Macrobius, he comments:

quis nescit somniorum varias esse significaciones, quas et usus approbat, et maiorum confirmat auctoritas?⁶⁰

He finds in dreams, what exegetes see in Scripture as well, a variety of ways in which they convey their messages:

Res quoque interdum manifestius, interdum obscurius aperitur, et nunc se ipsa, nunc ille ingerit, nunc intirante alio declaratur.¹

This variety in ways of signifying is compounded by the variety of significations each dream element may have. He compares dreams' interpretations with symbolic visions, both conveying a multitude of meanings by a small number of signs:

Est itaque tam ad interpretationem somniorum, quam ad revelationem aenigratum et figuratum, solerter attendenda rerum significatio, quae tanto multiplicior est quam vocum, quanto ab operibus naturae, cetera vincuntur artificis imitantis naturam.²

The works of artifice can always outnumber the facts of nature, and for John of Salisbury, the interpretation of dreams, as well as the symbolic visions that are interpreted, is a created artifice. To interpret, one must use one's discretion and invention, since the dream confirms no one understanding of itself. He points out two conflicting methods of interpretation:

Interdum taken et per antithesin rerum, sequenda sunt veritatis vestigia Frequens taken et quasi regulare hoc est, ut a similibus ad similia recurrat interpretatio.³

But he gives no other rule than hindsight for determining which method applies to a particular case.

Robert Holkot is an author living just before Chaucer who also discusses both dream interpretation and Scriptural exegesis. In his beliefs about dreams he displays a large capacity for ambivalence and ambiguity. In one place he affirms of those dreams caused by excessive humor in the body that

Talia ergo somnia manifesta sunt significativa
futurarum infirmitatum frequenter.⁶⁴

But in another he shows that dreams cannot prophesy:

quod divinatio per somnia non sit possibilis:
quia divinatio importat certitudinem, sed certitudo
nulla potest haberi de aduentu futuro propter
somnia: ergo nihil est.⁶⁵

Holkot views inconsistency as a function of time when it occurs in a dream. He repeats the common opinion (noting that it is not always true) that

Dicitur enim vulgariter, quavis non sit semper
verum, quod recta interpretatio somni est, exponere
somnia per oppositum. . . . quod somni certi
debent ad contrarium sensum.⁶⁶

He then justifies this reversal on the grounds that dreams tend to present only pleasure, and defer only pain, and thus substitute present pleasure for present pain, and deferred pain for deferred pleasure. The events in a dream may therefore be temporally displaced versions of their opposites.

The radical uncertainty of dreams makes interpreting them perilous for several reasons, including

Secundo propter diversitatem significationis id somnia:
potest enim somnium aequivoce & aequaliter multa signi-
ficare: ideo homo applicans ad unum particulare statim
decipitur. Tertio, quia nonnulla somnia habent interpre-
tari per simile, & nonnulla per contrarium: in hoc
maxime difficile est discernere.

With an eye on these perils of interpretation, he ends both the lectiones that discuss dreams with the verse tag: "Somnia ne cures, nam fallant somnia plures,"⁶⁸ "May no mind to dreams, for most dreams fail." But the verb "cures," and the length at which Holkot pursues the details of dream classification, spending more time discussing the rare meaningful dreams than the common adventitious variety, suggest that this tag is also telling us, don't worry about dreams: they deceive us sufficiently often to make our interpretations a matter for our own discretion. Holkot approaches Augustine's principle that the rightness of an interpretation depends on its conformity to right beliefs and not to the text, except that dreams would seem to be open to a broader range of acceptable meanings even than Scripture. Indeed, the field of reference for dreams is so unshackled that our own minds and thoughts are bound to color the messages they convey, leaving only the insane who are unmindful of themselves as the vehicles of the most reliable -- but inaccessible -- dreams:

Natali vero dicuntur bene diuinentes: quia non sunt solliciti circa terrena, nec circa seipsos. Unde eorum somnia sunt valde certa, si aliquis ea sciret interpretari.⁶⁹

Like Augustine's acknowledgement of the element of the arbitrary in interpretation, Holkot's acknowledgement of the undecidable quality of dreams, coupled with his interest in interpreting them nonetheless, implies that he finds the artificiality of interpretation natural and acceptable.

In poetry, dreams were used as the vehicles of visions of the afterlife, as in Dante and Pearl and the spiritual travelogues of various monks, or of the religious life on earth, as in Langland. As frames, they set the scene for anatomy or spiritual reportage, for love, sacred or profane, was an experience that had to be set off from the ordinary and whose telling had to be qualified, if only to sustain its mystery. Dream frames establish a broad perspective on any narration, by qualifying the reality of the events while increasing their suggestiveness, and thus making the unreal the most significant. No assumption can be either accepted or disqualified completely. In a dream we come to every event before its significance has been either determined or dismissed. We are both open to meanings we might have dismissed, and called upon to question the bag of meanings we set out with, and to make more of our own initiative. The dreamframe helps place the reader in the moment of incipient thought that Chaucer is interested in.

Svetlana Todorov's theory of the fantastic can contribute to our understanding of a genre founded on the device of the dreamframe. He defines the genre of the fantastic by the hesitation that either reader or protagonist feels when trying to decide whether the strange events they witness are supernaturally caused, or simply natural but extremely unlikely. As long as the author does not commit the plot to either explanation, it belongs to the genre of the fantastic.⁷⁰ A self-conscious dream vision like the book of the Duchess uses the frame to confuse the ontological status of

all that happens in it, and thereby calls up the kind of interpretive hesitation Todorov describes. Both the fantastic and the dream vision may be seen as genres that play on precisely the impossibility of their being completely understood. In taking the great difficulty of decoding a text as their main action, both are by nature commentaries on fictive narration itself. Thus again this dreaming genre returns Chaucer to his concern about poetry as it exists prior to being comprehended.

Chaucer discusses the categories of dreams most explicitly in the House of Fame, in a passage drawn largely from Macrobius and the Roman de la Rose. His hearty protestations of ignorance amount to a satiric comment on the categories' futility.

God turne us every drem to goode!
 For hyt is wonder, be the roode,
 To wy wyt, what causeth swevenes
 Wyther on morwes or on evenes;
 And why th'effect folweth of somme,
 And of somme hit shal never come;
 Why that is an avisioun
 And this a revelacioun,
 Why this a drem, why that a sweven,
 And noght to every man lyche even;
 Why this a fantome, why these oracles,
 I not . . . (¶ 1-12)

The synonymy of several of the English terms for "dream" further breaks down the careful Latin classification.

In the Roman de la Rose, Nature's remarks on dreams suggest the variety of dream types, but all the types she mentions form around straightforward images of analogy, undisplaced by either the Freudian conscious and ego/super-ego or the Chaucerian play

of imagination. The dreams are either directly phrased wish-fulfillments -- lovers dream of lady, haters of violent revenge -- or the repetition in more vivid form of known emotions -- the despondent dream of gallows, the festive of amusements. Dreams are not seen as increasing or changing one's knowledge.⁷¹

In the most interesting section of her remarks, Nature reviews the wanderings into strange or wild scenes that dreams provoke:

Si rest bien souvent avenue,
Quant aucun sont pris e tenu
Par aucune grant maladie,
Si come il pert en frenesie,
Quant il n'ont gardes soufisanz,
Ou sont seul es osteus gisanz,
Qu'il saillent sus e puis cheminent,
E de tant cheminer ne finent
Qu'il treuvent queusque leus sauvages,
Ou prez, ou vignes, ou boschages,
E se laissent ileuc choeir. (RR 18327-18337)⁷²

Nature further associates these wandering dreams with mental as well as physical malaise:

Ou quant sont neïs en santé,
Veit l'en de ceus a grant plenté
Qui maintes feiz, senz ordenance,
Par naturel acoustumance,
De trop penser sont curieus,
Quant trop sont melancolieus,
Ou poereus outre mesure,
Qui mainte diverse figure
Se font pareir . . . (RR 18343-18351)⁷³

Ou qui, par grant devocion,
En trop grant contemplacion,
Font apareir en leur pensees
Les choses qu'il ont pourpensees,
E les cudent tout proprement
Voer defors apertement. (RR 18357-18362)⁷⁴

both the melancholic and the religious meditator are liable to such phenomena, but for both, "ce n'est fors trufles e mençonge" (183363).⁷⁵

With this conclusive statement Nature seems to wash away all the suggestiveness of the wandering minds she has pictured, even though their ramblings are so similar to Chaucer's dreamer's through the Forest in his melancholy that we look for some gloss on them in Nature's account:

de leur liz s'en sont meü,
E se chauceent neïs e vestent
E de tout leur harneis s'aprestent
Si con li sen comun someillent
E tuit li particulier veillent;
Prennent bourdons, prennent escharpes,
Ou peus, ou faucilles, ou sarpes,
E vont cheminant longes veies,
E ne se vent ou toutesveies;
E montent neïs es chevaus
E passent ainsinc monz e vaus
Par seches veies ou par fanges
Tant qu'il viennent en leus estranges,
E quant li sen comun s'esveillent,
Mout s'esbaissent e merveillent.

(RR 183306-320,
emphasis mine)⁷⁶

The gloss lies in the differences between the two Joe's' dreams.

Those tallied in the loural are not symbolic independently of the simplest repetitions of the dreamers' moods. The idea of wandering into strange, new places is not paradoxical -- indeed, Nature says that people often meet their death literally while engaged in such sleep-walking.⁷⁷ In the look of the Richesse, dreamers meet death figuratively, and thus live to tell a tale about it. The Chaucerian dream offers much that is not easily understood: symbols that do not make much sense logically, and things whose symbolic or realistic status is not clear. The wandering briefly evoked in

the Roman becomes the one constant of the experience in the book of the Duchess.

Some lines later in the Roman Nature expresses skepticism about the truth of dreams:

Ne ne revueil dire des songes
 S'il sont veir ou s'il sont mençonges;
 Se l'en les deit dou tout eslire,
 Ou s'il font dou tout a despire;
 Pour quei li un sont plus horrible,
 Plus bel li autre e plus paisible,
 Selonc leur aparicions
 En diverses complexions,
 E selonc les divers courages
 Des meurs divers e des aages;
 Ou se Deus par teus visions
 Enveie revelacions,
 Ou li malignes esperiz,
 Pour metre les genz es periz.
 De tout ce ne m'entremetrai,
 Mais a mon propos me retrai.

(RR 18499-18514)⁷⁸

This is closer to Chaucer's waiving of certainty. The skepticism of Nature is a reaction to the confused and multitudinous congeries of dream phenomena that in the House of Fame provokes the expletive, "God turne us every drem to goode!" (HF 1). But, like the narrator's breaking off from his non-diagnosis of himself to return to a supposed "first water" (43) in the Book of the Duchess, Nature's pointed return to her theme here involves the discontinuing of a fascinating subject and the taking up of a less suggestive one for the moment (namely, the influence of the stars, set forth with relatively little psychological concern).

While both Nature and the narrator in the House of Fame profess not to know about dreams, what Nature says she does not

know is whether they are true or false, while what the Chaucerian narrator says he does not know are their meanings and causes.⁷⁹

but whoso of these miracles
The causes knoweth bet then I,
Devyne he; for I certainly
He kan hem noght, he never thinke
To besily my wyt to swinke,
To knowe of hir signifiante
The gendres, neyther the distaunce
Of tymes of hem, ne the causes,
Or why this more then that cause is . . .

but why the cause is, noght wot I.

For I of noon opinion
Byl as now make mensyon . . . (MF 12-20, 52, 55-56)

In the Roman Nature laid out those causes as something she did know, so this point for uncertainty is Chaucer's idea, and his narrator refuses even to mention any opinion on the subject that he has heard. Chaucer's question is not the absolute truth or falsity of dreams, but their causes and interpretations. In the Book of the Duchess he says the dream is so wonderful that no one can interpret it; in the House of Fame he says his dream is so wonderful that its cause cannot be known. It is the imaginative action expressed or suggested by a dream, not its reality quotient, that attracts him.

When he comes to deal with their causes, he does not explain dreams rationally or realistically, but simply situates the cause in the act of the narrator's reading a book. By situating the dream cause in a mental and rhetorical landscape, Chaucer avoids

the thematic reconceptions usually inferring rational explanation. This pre-rational locating of the dream cause, the sheer observation of its elemental circumstances, enables us to truly invent the cause of dreaming in its startled original state. And that original cause is not one experience or idea, but the fact that the human mind acts in a displaced and rhetorical way. Its symbolizing modus operandi makes dreaming, like fiction-making, a natural form of that mind's expression. Chaucer's sense of this situation leads him, first, to set the cause of the poem in a dream, and then, to set the cause of the dream in a poem. It is the fiction-making that makes the truth, not the items thus labelled "truth."

Ultimately, this operation of the mind is itself known only and necessarily through itself, and so the very idea that the mind works fictively is part of the overall fictiveness of all understanding. Whatever the reality status of dreams, either empirical or artificial, they are regarded by the poets as intimations of truth insofar as they are interpreted well. Of all narrative forms, dreams most clearly call for the reader's participation. Chaucer, particularly in his first two dream-visions, puts a lion's share of emphasis on the work of reading as it must continue after the pages of the poem have all been turned. It is as if the text were conceived primarily as the site for interpretation and speculation, and that these actions more than the text's content are what draw us into a search for truth.

The artifice of a dream allows symbols to occur rationally in what might otherwise be a realistic narrative. In the vision narrative, the everyday and the sublime may occupy the same space at the same time. The reality conjured up offers a rarely used field of application for symbolic understanding, while the symbolism reinvests real life with powers of fresh signification.

In empirical dreams, symbols are made by such processes as condensation, overdetermination, transference, and displacement, as described by Freud. These are all ways of reassigning meaning to signs, and the motivation of these strategies is to evade the censorship of the ego and super-ego. An artifice dream could hardly be built out of the evasions of the evasions of one individual, but such a dream can very well be made for the purpose of evading more objective or universal censorships. While some political allegories are regarded as motivated by a need to circumvent official eyes, most symbolic work is eluding a less obviously oppressive authority, and its project of elusion cannot be immediately evident. For poets, there are rhetorical tyrannies that limit imagination: tyrannies of theme, of narrative continuity, and of total consistency. Readers tend to demand the themes of their current given society rather than the free action of the mind.

Thackeray's constant interest in the idea of authority suggests that he perceived this as a serious issue, from the perspectives both of distrust in imposed authority and of seeking to establish

his own voice in poetic tradition and in the English language. He often seems to disperse external authority, through, for example, the uncommon number of perspectives and layers of voice in his narratives, his frequent notation that he or his speaker is talking in game or between earnest and game, and his direct comments on authority. Says the Wife of Bath,

Experience, though noon auctoritee
Here in this world, is right ynoch for me. (Wife 1-2)

She also counters authority used by others with her own game:

And whan I saugh he wolde nevere fyne
To reden on this cursed book al nyght,
Al sodeynly thre leves have I plyght
Out of his book, right as he radde, and eke
I with my fest so took hys on the cheke
That in oore fyr he fill bakward adoun. (Wife 288-293)

So much for husband Wankye's erudition. In the Wife's Tale, of the knight and the loathly lady, she shows how a relinquishing of authority over oneself can lead to a richer life. It is a principle that reappears in the Franklin's Tale, where tolerance and yielded authority restore the hearts of all.

For o thyng, sires, sawfly dar I seye,
That freendes everych oother moot obeye,
If they wol longe holden compaignye.
Love wol nat been constreyned by maistrie.
Whan maistrie comth, the God of Love anon
Beteth his wynges, and farewell, he is gon!
Love is a thyng as any spirit free. (Frank 261-267)

If a group of people should have multiple authorities rather than a single one, then not only external authorities but one's own must be qualified. Thus Chaucer also seems to disperse his own

authority, splitting his voice into personae at variance with each other, creating inaccuracies like the tale "Iris" in the Book of the Duchess or the author Lollius in Troilus and Criseyde, framing his thoughts with a dream or occluding them with disclaimers, and even allowing one poem to break off at the very word "hactenowe" (MF 2152).

If we see Chaucer's main, over-riding project in poetry to be the discovery and description of its origins, then we can ascribe to him a great impulse to subversion without needing to find a culprit for him in the form of, say, the Church, politics, or his own psychological history. For in order to find and write at the beginning of language or imagination, one must depart from the unreflected patterns of everyday idiom, which have all but become simply mere objects of experience rather than a commentary on them. One must subvert given and authorized ideas in order for the mind to find itself alone with its faculties once more, and truly invent ideas, invent new themes and meanings, by the operation of its processes without a goal. The language of subversion must be largely symbolic, to signify things outside the current of rationality, but not derived like metaphors from given texts.

In the Book of the Duchess, both leading up to and then inside the dream, the imagery is symbolic in a way that subverts received understanding, since what is primarily being symbolized is the threshold of thought or reading. Not only this project

of describing and isolating initial thought, but also Chaucer's persistence in it, so that again and again he draws a border before meaning, and keeps us always on the exterior side of it, creates a kind of inner margin for the mind, a mode in which it need not -- indeed, cannot -- conform to any authority or reality.

7. An Inventio Poetricae

In searching out the beginning of poetic thought, Thacker has chosen to emphasize an aspect of literature that had not gone appreciated by his audience. The number of translations and redactions of familiar plots and characters in medieval literature lets us know that how one said things was at the time considered quite as important as what one said. But he has illuminated the workings of poetry itself in a more radical way in the look of the Duchess than is often seen so persistently, in such close detail, and in so short a scope. In this one poem he draws from the traditions of religious imagery, love imagery, romance motif, biblical and Ovidian myth, without adopting the referents of any of them -- God, Amors, or the tradition of narration. This is a very pure and abstract poem, that has as its only theme the discovery of itself. It is an inventio poetricae in that it consists of episodes isolating and developing the language of poetry and the incipience of poetic meaning, apart from theme.

What I am calling inventio poetricae does not depend on a new assembly or a new technique, as in the modern sense of the word "invention," and which would not necessarily remove the plot and images from theme, but involves instead, according to the medieval sense, a finding out or rearranging of the already existing material of words and grammar so as to generate meanings in a new way. In particular, the inventio poetricae generates meanings

independently of a theme stated or assumed prior to the text's composition. The project is to invent a figure, a rhythm, or a genre at a point prior to the assumption, by author or reader, that the item invented has been invented, and therefore has certain expectations or connotations assigned to it. The schooled figures, the expected rhythms, the announced or traditional themes, are all of the past, and while none the less beautiful for that, they are not the stuff of invention poetry, which offers what must at first hearing be remote or disproportionate figures, asymetric rhythms, and uncertain or indecorous genres. These baffle the mind, and thereby draw it back into the solvent where it begins to think. It must be a solvent in which there are no guarantors of meaning. In the carefully arranged absence of trusted connotations, we perceive strange signifiers as making new ideas available, unlikely rhythms as creating the passage of time, and mixed-up genres as making those possible. Not a brand-new technique applied to theme, but a dislocation in thought as it occurs, creates the sensation and the reality of new perspective in the mind.

Two epistemological philosophies worked out in the Middle Ages, fideism and skepticism, complete belief and complete doubt, are the attitudes of mind that take the place of the normal thought processes -- reasoning, intuiting, sensing -- when those processes are stalled. When one cannot ascertain the truth of something, one simply believes (fideism) or does not believe (skepticism) it.

In this situation, one's thinking becomes thoroughly discretionary, and one is free to shift one's attention from the goal to the modality of one's mental action. For example, while the criterion of according with the reign of charity may seem to set up a content as a determiner of thought, in effect that absolute standard, being apparently external to many of the literal surfaces it is said to inform, calls on interpreters to create a congruence between text and meaning. The interpreters decide when that congruence does not exist and with what fiction or figure to establish it. In any given case, there is more than one way to force that congruence, and the interpreter cannot avoid inventing the path from the letter to the love.

The preceding centuries of philosophy, with their prosecuted discussion of intellect cognition, and despite their immediate emphasis on the capacities of rational thought, issue an invitation to poets to invent contrary to fact. As philosophical issues came to center on epistemological issues, the focus on mental process apart from mental objects allowed for an increasing separation of philosophy from theology. It thus forcefully renewed the project of discovering and describing the actions of the human mind, as actions, and as human. Moreover, this description could not actually be completed by a philosophy lacking the guarantee of theology, or by a theology removed from the bird's operations. These disciplines cannot obtain perspective on themselves within their own systems, which sought precisely

provable systems rather than interruptible ones. The central problem of making the description is how to acquire an objective vantage on an action, while exercising that action. The perspective on thought has to be created inside the scope of human thought, and the principal way of doing this is by creating fictions. Almost any fiction will diversify the mind of the fiction-maker enough for some phantasy of perspective to enter it. Out of all fictions, the one affording the greatest degree of perspective is the one that describes the beginning of the thought process to be thought about. In fictions of invention one attempts most clearly to step out of the mind and into a point prior to its complete operation. And one can achieve this perspective perhaps more easily in terms of time than of space, by stepping out of the present of the given and into the new past of the original. The surest way to avoid repeating something is to recreate it.

In symbolically recreating the mental possibilities of poetry, one also finds oneself recreating the gaps between the verbal and the true or between the real and the meaningful. And the power of the fiction suggests a flashiness in reality. All this leads to the linguistic elegy entailed in poetic invention. In the book of the Duchess Chaucer elevates the role of elegy in dream vision far above previous practice -- an emphasis shared with pastoral, which is the genre that would soon become the most important

fictive invention of fiction. Taking as its typical occasion the training of the poet, in the form of singing contests, requests for songs, or the relieving of a mood by song, pastoral is also in Classical and Renaissance traditions of poetic vocation the customary place for the author to begin. Both pastoral and dream vision the elegiac is essential. In both, the vocation of poetry leads to the realization of, and in part springs from the desire to accommodate and redress, the mortality of meaning in words, and ultimately the mortality of one's personal significance.

The radically elegiac character of the look of the Duchess lies in Chaucer's having to be looking for the matter and the form of poetry as he goes along. The progress of this search in the direction of the future rather than the past should not blind us to its elegiac nature. In the life of imagination, one can lose the future as well as the past (such as one can affect the past as well as the future). In looking for poetry, one looks for something one may not find, and which, if one does find it, will articulate the ephemerality of meaning. There is no essential meaning, or way of representing it, in the look of the Duchess. But, remembering again the resourcefulness of fiction, "that is not to say it has no essence, but merely lacks it."⁸⁰

Not being written earlier than thematically more defined works does not mean that this dream vision, any more than the Shepherd's Calendar or Lycidas, is a mechanical exercise in metaphysics. It must evoke and situate meaningfulness. This project, to each one,

silently turns all the trappings and illusions of meanings as commonly understood into expressions of the search for or possibility of unspecified meaningfulness. Given this withdrawal from meanings, the purpose of the poem becomes difficult to demonstrate. It is not enough, then, in writing visionary elegy, to lead a reader to suspect the positive existence of a meaning. Instead, the poet works to keep the reader and the poem within the moment prior to understanding. Any suspicion of an existing meaning charges too readily into settled interpretation.

To recreate a real sensation of new meaningfulness in the reader's imagination, then, the poet evokes, in addition to the suspicion of a meaning, doubt of meaning's existence. When one suspects something, one usually neglects to analyze it, but doubt teases the mind, makes it want to demonstrate the existence of its thoughts, and thus leads it to reflect and interpret. Just as suspicion is not affirmation, doubt is not denial, but both are states precipitating analysis and speculation. Until the seventeenth century, "to doubt" meant "to suspect" or "to believe" more often than it meant "to think untrue." The two senses are positive and negative moods of the same moment in thought: the initiation of speculation.

Thus the tantalizing intimations of significance that emerge and disappear throughout the poem, examples of both Lerner's "conscious irrelevance," encoding positive doubt, and Chaucer's "specialty, the obvious mistake, encoding negative doubt. Both the

suggestiveness of the former and the exaggeration or incongruousness of the latter jolt the brain with the surprise that starts up thought. Then "ten vers or twelve" (143) describes a song of eleven lines, when a horse appear in the bedroom, when the messengers of death diddle each other in the cave of Morpheus, when the speaker assumes familiarity with his patron, when the dreamer reflects having overheard the knight's song and does not seem to see his self in the story of Aloyse, and when the learned poet chooses to write lures for Albus, we are simply not being allowed to know what is going on. As composed of these two systems of (mis)representation, the Book of the Duchess consists of a little too much and not quite enough of a clue to meanings, alternately creating suspicion and doubt. These two apprehensions in tandem create in our minds the double fix of that tortious quid that we feel must be meaning.

At the beginning of the poem, the narrator, as far as we know, is not a poet. At its end, he has become one in order to write down his dream. How does this happen? The principal events between beginning and end are: his ambiguous contacts on himself, his reading of the Ovidian romance, his half-heralded prayer to the god of sleep, his dream, his awakening, and his decision to put the dream into rhyme. This is the order of the events' presentation to us, and one may detect in it a progression in rhetorical activity from focus on the self, through fictions about others, to the giving to others of a fiction about oneself.

We must also consider that the opening remarks of the narrator occur after the dream and his decision to write. The simple conclusion from this is that becoming a poet has not substantially mitigated his confusion about himself. Writing, indeed, seems to have shown him the impossibilities of expressing complete truth and feeling, and taught him that he will always have to be unsure about both his own skill and the honesty of his craft. He also says that, having read the story of Aleyone, "I ferde the worse al the worse / Astin, to the low on hir sorow" (99-100). That sorrow is the present in which he takes in the poem. He has not escaped sorrow, but discovered how to inform others of sorrow's sea in a poem -- as well, perhaps, as of learning's sorrows.

With respect to the intervening events, the dream is in the center formally, although the proportions of the poem are heavily weighted towards getting into the dream, with much less time spent getting out of it. On either side of the dream, we find the book of Ovid, first as read, later discovered lying open in the sleeper's hands when he awakes. Reading seems to induce his dream and his writing as much as any experience. It is immediately upon seeing the book that he decides to record the dream. The distraction of fiction seems to suggest a path to sanity.

On either side of the book, at the extremities of the poem, we find the narrator. His final words send us back to his begin-

ing: "I've finished my part of my dream, he says, and, implicitly, anybody who wants to read it can start over. The announcement that points to a second reading gives us to know the preparatory nature of the first perusal. Our first reading is to see how he learns it, our second will be to see what he has done. On the basis of the formal chiasm, poetry seems to arise from a vision, that arises from a reading, that arises from confusion. But again, the poetic work does not solve the confusion; it returns one to it, perhaps after articulating it in diffuse, linear form, and thus relieving the writer of the burden of undifferentiated feeling so incomprehensible as to induce wheeling madness ("For I have felt no joy, no sorrow" [11], the narrator assures us before he has spun out his tale).

If we look in more detail at the formal center of the central dream, we find landscape and birdsong at the beginning, and their more artificial counterparts of architecture and bell-song at the end; the faraway hunt at the beginning and the called hunt at the end; the elusive star and lost hear the beginning, and the knight's cryptic narrative leading up to the end. In these opening actions we see the theme of quest without and repeated in fleeing animals and linked to the artificial rhetoric of music and conversation that so richly prolong such quests. The fictive and the inconclusive united are the site for poetic invention.

Between the dreamer's quest and the knight's story, we find the brief, transitional, but literally central passage of the

all where flowers and leghorn dwell. It is a place of transition, literally and structurally, and the myth alluded to tells of two more transitions: the change in leghorn from lust to love, and the growth of flowers. When myth, landscape, and metaphor-phosis are known to be important to a poet, we need not hesitate to recognize the formal centrality and significance of this aesthetic locus alpestris.

Walcott has arranged the poem so that the linear, temporal order of reading is also the central point of an architectural, spatial reading: that is, at the "static" center of the poem. Blocks of narrative we find paths, borders and loose ends, metaphors, and the shifting world of dream. In all directions we turn into transitions. When the narrator runs against a point where he cannot tell us any more about himself without saying something definite, he looks into the chaos of his confused and incoherent: "My first water is good to be a" (20). Similarly, the almost end -- rather than clarity -- of the shift out of the dream helps keep us in the dream's disoriented sense of reference. Loose phrases, rhetorical holding, and the multiplication of phrases render all that seems to be a beginning or an ending into a transition.

The tale from Ovid shows the same structure. Its original metaphor-phosis is left out and reserved to inform the rest of the poem. At its extremities are the separation of wife and husband by poverty and death. Inside this single scene the wife's existence

about her husband's first and her later knowledge of his fate. Within this are her prayers for information and the vision she receives in answer to her prayers. In the center, we have the extension to orphans. Here, Euro initiates the action, orpheus completes it, and, centermost, the messenger couples their work. Again, a figure of transition occupies the central place, is flanked most closely by literary and rhetorical elements (the gods, the prayers, the vision), and is set in the broader contexts of confusion and elegy: loss of certainty, loss of life, and loss of the end of Ovid's poem.

Something about transitions, the , generates poetry. The true point of beginning for poetry (and, Chalcer would seem to imply, for such else) lies not in a generative idea or force, not in a determinable "point" at all, but in the passage from any one such to another. It is vericinalit de that prepares the truth, and fictions that bestow meaning and identity. That is true to the specific kind of literary in the book of the Euboeans with this elaboration of transitions and the re-invention of poetry in mind.

6. Kind of Imagery in the Book of the Duchess

Where the structure of a poem and its theme involve one sort of figure, that figure is unlikely to be used much in the text, since it would in fact be less figurative and more literal or "flat" than if it exemplified a kind of thought that was unusual in a given poem. In the Book of the Duchess, anaphora, the repetition of beginnings, is one of the things to be set forth and experienced, not one of the ways of doing so. The poem does not show much anaphora on the local scale, as do so many other rhetorical or august medieval poems, since the whole poem is structurally an anaphora, composed of one beginning after another in Chaucer's continuing description of the initiation of imagination.⁸¹

The most developed and recurring figures in the Book of the Duchess are two kinds of amplification, description and allusion. They prolong all the literal words with their elaborations and extensions, and themselves exemplify the inventive part of thinking being searched out. Amplification is the process of recasting a familiar thought or adding a new one to it, or redefining or originating meaning, and as such it is characteristic of the poem. Where the equally thematically appropriate anaphora, however, would mirror and summarize the poem's content and plot, amplifications diversify the content and splinter the plot.

Description is a way of amplifying without pointing explicitly outside the text as allusion does. It is important for Chaucer to show that his text itself suggests expansions and modulations on itself, that it in part generates differences within itself. Thus Chaucer looks to find something strange or even in traditional description, something that will not make sense yet although it might make syntax. Because he highlights the strange within the traditional, his descriptions often seem to ask "What's wrong with this picture?" Our interpretive resources and powers are then set in action, privileged and invited all the more as they are seemingly defied and evaded.

In his description of the group of ladies in which he first sees White, the Knight uses an exaggeration of conversational idiom and syntax that frays the text into a series of discontinued trains of thought, passing abruptly from one idea or word to another. First, he says, "hit stood" (804), and then "it happened" (805), with no narration in between. He mentions a particular day and place, but does not identify them: "on a day / Into a place" (804-806). This is the place

ther that I saw,
 Trevely, the fayrest compaigne
 Of ladyes that evere man with y^e
 Had seen togedres in oo place. (806-809)

The use of the preterite "saw" of "to see" conventionally confuses verbs of seeing and saying, so that one can wonder whether the knight has observed this or is just saying so. The abruptnesses of this learning give it vividness and particularity while avoiding specific detail or recalling.

After describing the fairness of the group of ladies he proceeds to the kind of rhetorical question that often opens a hyperbole:

Shal I clepe hyt hap or grace
That brought me there? (810-811)

But the referent he goes on to is not some greater beneficence but his old figure of mean Fortune: "Nay, but Fortune" (811). The fair harmony of the ladies seems unable to distract him for long from his obsession with the perversity of what he calls Fortune, "That ys to lyea ful comene, / The false trysteresse pervers!" (812-813). In line 814 he abandons this unsatisfactory figure of dissatisfaction for a direct expression of frustration at his own rhetorical limitations: "God wolde I koude clepe hir wers!" He persists in an exclusively subjective and rhetoricizing mode as he closes this intrusion of Fortune: "For now she worsheth me ful woo, / And I wol telle some shy woo" (815-816). His last line draws attention to a false shift from a threat to explanation, in which the explanation is actually indefinitely postponed, and would in any case have explained not his emotion but the figure he is using to express it.

His rhetoric is so far not getting him very far out of himself. Having exhausted one figure and run into the wall of explanation, the Knight turns back to the idea of his lady, who is presumably not like Fortune, but is also "lygh noon of the roste" (819). Her fairness is displayed in the hyperbole comparing her to the sun

brighter than all other stars -- and declaring his own earth to be
the strongest of all:

For I dar swere, withoute doute,
That as the soevere sonne bryght
Is fairer, clerer, and hath more lyght
Than any other planete in heven,
The moone, or the sterres seven,
For al the world so hadde she
Surmounted hem alle of beaute . . . (320-326)

Sun, planet, moon, star, all the world -- he presents her as the
cosmic symbol of all cosmic symbols. In lines 327 to 332 he lists
virtues and qualities belonging to her, and when he feels he has
run this kind of abstraction to its limit, returns to his formula
of breaking off discussion with a reflection on his own language:
"Shortly, what shal y more seye?" (330). "Shortly" is ally intro-
duces a summary, but here an apophysis.

The insufficiency of words is momentarily sustained in an
appeal to the ultimate validator: "My lord, and by his halwes
twelve" (331). Referring to the lady, the Knight continues to
isolate her without characterizing her. She is simply "myght as
himselve" (332). The next several lines alternate between the
appearance of explanation and the breaking up of causality.

She had so stedfast countenance
To noble port and reveraunce
And love that had wel herd my soone
Had capped me this soone
That she fill some in my thought
As helpe me lord so was yfought
So suddenly that I was toke
To waken counceyl but at hir lok
And at ym herte for-why his eyes
So gladly I trou ym herte seyes
That purely the sunnence thought
To be hit were. I praye my lord for sothe
That with another to be wel. (333-340)

I have eliminated many punctuation from this passage to help retrieve its original confusions. In lines 333 to 334 one is hard put to know whether to connect the "so" to the preceding lines, the following, both, or neither. They imply a causality that is not clearly realized. In line 335 another divine agent, the personification of Love, rises on the right from the impossibility of explanation -- the knight's personifications do not contribute to argument or action as do many traditional personifications, but instead indicate failures in rationality, not the pursuit of it through figures. Again in line 337 we do not see exactly where to attach the causality of "That." It is broken up first by the phrase "In my thought," which initially strikes one as being an adverbial phrase joined with what she is going to do. The causality is then broken up by the expletive "As helpe me god" that holds up further an already crumbled syntax. In the second half of line 338 we discover that "In my thought" is the place where she "was fraught." Now we have a plethora of causality to redress the sketchiness of earlier lines: "so was fraught / so suddenly, that I so tok."

The abrupt half-line by half-line pacing of this passage, creating opportunity after opportunity for interruption or reconsideration, counteracts explanation. At the same time, however, it images very nicely the abruptness with which the lady catches the knight's fancy and the real difficulty of the the who he then finds himself involved in. Her initial effect on him is to isolate

his first horror comes from his confusion and increased desire. In the rhythm of half-lines he can revise himself readily, so that a negative like "No answer counsel!" leads at first the exception "but at his lok" and then the positive "And at myn herte." The alternation of emphatic pronouns indicates both people's isolation: "wrought as hisselve -- my booke -- my thought -- his lok -- my herte -- his eyen -- myn herte -- surely . . . myn owne thought." The sense of isolation, and with it the impossibility of rational explanation, culminate in the idea that the lady is worthy of being served without reward: thus the "knight of fin'arours" finds his self in another who need not recognize him at all.

The reader who has followed the knight's speech is not going to be expecting either a realistic or an objective account, but a narrative and subjective one. The jerkiness of the mood and the speech suggests in syntax that the poem is a series of episodes that must be read as symbolic images even when they appear to be sequences of a narration. Feelings and persons, isolated from each other by their unlikeness, are also isolated from themselves by the way they yield to each other in a swarm of digressions, interruptions, and transferences. Each moment of the poem is alternately rich with the implication of something further and the evasion of something existing.

The episodic nature of the text also increases its inner freedom, giving it more space to vary in than has many a longer but more discursive work. If one thinks of the poem as a whole

in which each narrative break is a "figure or indentation," one might say it has a very high surface-to-volume ratio: so high, in fact, that one could imagine its volume as residing in the surfaces. When one begins to grant the poem's retainer-holes their full measure of reality and significance, they constitute a surface prior to volume, so to speak, a series of channels that occur before anything like real narration begins.

Because the poem operates mainly on the surfaces, on the margins of things' initial experience into thought, it balances between things' inner reality and their reality relative to other things. It describes neither absolute truths of the subject nor a class of relativistic ephemera, but the movement of things eddying between these two poles. The themes and motifs of the poem, then, have both an explicit realization in the text and an implied, invisible life not officially in the text. The latter may be compared to the place occupied in painting by the "negative" spaces of the space between "billboards," foregrounded objects, and in music by unexpected notes or unplayed, conventionalized notes modulated to, or elided by, rhythms. Just as such things are not emptiness or silence in these arts, so the explicit side of the poem's text is not white or inoperative. It is the domain of allusion, the kind of a plification that points outside a text, the place that above all invites one to dwell or discern finitely, to leave a trace, and to unfold their possibilities. In a poem that points so often and so colorfully outside itself, there is no

strict distinction between things inside and outside the text, or between meanings acceptable or not. It implies its own separate worlds.

Since many of the allusions in the Book of the Duchess are brief, it is necessary to consider at what length each one can be explicated. It is no accident that, no matter how casual a reference may be, if one follows it out one finds it offers some intelligence of the originating of poetry. These digressive loops to the text both depart and return. I will treat just one here, reserving consideration of the others to the next chapter.

The allusion in line 512 to "as calls up both pagan and Christian allusions.

Nor he had wel myght lost his wynde,
 Though he, that ben clepe god of wynde,
 Were for his sorwes never so wroth. (511-513)

The pagan god of "wind" or nature is also a type of Christ, as lightly suggested by the ascription to "god of wind". The allusion specifically does not invoke the power of a , but points to the inefficiency of that power in the present case. A limited reading could then interpret this as a rejection of the compelling authority of revelation, of Christianity, or of organized religion in general. But like an authorial paragatio this sort of negative allusion sets up a conflict between the fact of the allusion and the dismissal of the connotations invoked.

as himself reflects the interplay of power and disavowal, of the secretly acknowledged protection of "bound lines, art and rhyme,

... as a "mystery" and a "comprehensible whole":

He was supposed to preside over shepherds and flocks, and to delight in rural music; he was also regarded as the author of a sudden groundless terror; and in later times, from associations of his name with the all, everything, is an impersonation of Nature.⁸²

In the Metamorphoses, the story of Pan and Syrinx is the story that my tells to all Arcons, Pan's ward of a hundred eyes, to sleep, so as to recapture Io for a later. It is the story of a transformation from human to animal form. The passionate Syrinx inspires Pan, and the energy she has reserved for her yearning and exaltation of Diana, after her metamorphosis issue into the music of the reeds she turns into at the bank of a river, just as her flight from Pan seems about to fail. In the form of music, passion can be shared without being consumed. The sound of the pipes retains a "sonus tremens, simile quo querenti" (Met. 3.162), that conveys the awareness of the virgin's plight. At the same time, the music of that preserved virginity offers a sexual attraction and invention, and the reeds are said to create music with a "lute nova" (Met. 3.163) which might well attract a poet-read in the theorists of the Counter-Reformation. Ovid records the transformation -- of the passionate virgin into a reed, but the reification -- of a sexual history into a poetic object. It is the kind of ideal lyric myth of the origin of an elegiac but revealing art that Theocritus is conjuring.

It is noteworthy that a metafiction about the origin of a kind of music should have the name of "Syrinx" in its title.

the allusion of this guarding of sleep's locality can be related to the sleep over which the indecorous orpheus presides in the book of the Duchess. In both these sleeps the gods' property and privacy are exploited. Phil sets the origin of poetry beside Arctus, Chaucer beside orpheus. Both arrangements suggest that certain authorities must sleep in order that the imagination be viable.

Chaucer's music, moreover, is not only the plaintive cry of the needs but also the diognysiac music of pain, a kind of uncontrolled natural music in contrast to the composed lyre of Apollo. Chaucer keeps this disorderly music at hand to recover the legitimacy of poetry. While he never mentions the overruling god Apollo in this poem, he does make room for figures whose contributions to art are less authoritative: the mystics Cytharona (1160, 1163) and Orpheus (1162), one a historical pagan, the other a mythic figure of art and civilisation; and the love-torn Troilus (1160) and Phil (1162), one a chivalric pagan, the other from love, pure, and associated with his half-brother Ideal (who really invented music: Troilus' founded the arts of brass- and iron work, as told in *De laus 4:21-22*).

The allusion to Phil occurs at the end of the dreamer's meditation on the psychological condition of the Knight, at the point when the Knight is seen at his sickest, and the therapy of conversation is about to begin. It is also, for the narrator, the point at which he is about to arrive in a real relationship with a

The first of these is the fact that the
 method of selection of the material for the
 study is not random. The material is selected
 on the basis of its availability and its
 relevance to the study. This is a serious
 flaw in the method of selection of the material
 for the study. The second flaw is the fact
 that the material is not analyzed in a
 systematic manner. The material is analyzed
 in a haphazard manner and the results are
 not reported in a systematic manner. This is
 a serious flaw in the method of analysis of
 the material. The third flaw is the fact
 that the results are not reported in a
 systematic manner. The results are reported
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 not reported in a systematic manner. This is
 a serious flaw in the method of reporting
 the results.

The illustrated introduction and far-reaching allusions of the poem of the Highway give it a shared, difficult texture, marked by digression and delay. The narration consists of brief and often almost episodic, and the whole reading of the poem takes on a symbolic quality by virtue of the detached, isolatable, potentially self-sufficient scenes that make it up. Each time a scene or event breaks off, it is demarcated like a symbolic image, and likewise invites our queries and interpretations. The structuring of the poem is as symbolic as the individual images that appear in it.

Marcel's symbols do not frequently comprehend oppositions or contradictions, or do they symbolize built on what would be called contradictory verbal words. His symbolism, in order to explore the faultlines that provide for symbolism in narration, set potentially conflicting referents in to temporal schedules so as to trace the way in which the poem contradicts itself. Hence Flaubert's apparent objection for the Madame Bovary, since he casts the fictional authority Bovary in the role of a frustrated husband, while giving to the lost dreamer a host of hidden meanings and the dark night in the forest. The poem not only reveals the symbolic, but it further reveals all this is symbolic by presenting them as things rather than fixed identities. Through this is achieved in the title of referring to the same place. To read an analysis at the margins of things, their identities are seen as to be revealed as a logical, a matter of fact and

fiction rather than content and truth. Symbols are seen to create rather than be validated by meaning.

Two typical situations generate symbolism in this poem. In the humorous moment, authority is circumvented or undermined; in the rebeginnings, authority is averted or subjected to redefinition. Both sudden humor and the recycling of beginnings create faultlines in the text -- discontinuities, as distinct from either arbitrary changes of topic or discernible variations on a theme. Rather than simply repeating or departing entirely from the theme or tone of a preceding passage, the discontinuity reveals some paradox, or unsuspected complexity, to be derived from that theme or tone.

For example, the first major discontinuity in the poem comes when the narrator suddenly refers to a "first matter" (42) apparently different from the interrelated topics he has been discussing. The insomnia he then "ret[ur]ns" to discuss was only one of many things on his mind: nature and unnaturalness, pervasive fatigue, the human condition, melancholy. Nor does he stick with insomnia as a matter good to keep for more than two lines before proceeding on to the result: the fetching of the romance to read while enduring the night. The supplied discontinuity of the excessive articulation of a first matter that is not effectively distinguishable as such draws us into a little abyss where we must figure out just what the topics started before and after this line have to do with each other. In this case, we are led to suppose

a connection between bewildered, anxious insomnia and the initiation of the imaginative activity of reading: a connection given mythic form in the expedition to the cave of Orpheus, one of the poem's humorous discontinuities, with its jostling together of the fussy and the languid, the fanciful and the phlegmatic.

The discontinuities in the text, and the descriptions and allusions that spring from their edges, lead the text in and out of itself, now momentarily recognizable, now again taking on unexpected and unlikely nuances. So thorough is the pattern of departure from the narration that one cannot effectively distinguish between the standard and the deviant story. For the standard narrative seems often parodic of the traditions of dreaming, anorexic melancholics, and the deviations pregnant with relevant significance. The necessity for interpreting is so constant, unrelieved by any statement that seems literal or positive, that we find we are as deeply entwined in the fabrication of the text as the author or narrators. In these endless reverberations of figure against figure, the substance of language has been recreated, and no meaning confirmed. We cannot discern the literal from the symbolic, the realistic from the visionary, the text as it announces itself and the text as it departs from itself, the inside from the outside of an allusion or description. We see only that we are in transit, somewhere in between chaos and meaning, like the unnamed messenger from queenly Luno to sleepy Orpheus, or like the narrator himself, wandering

in a labyrinth of figuration, poised on the margins of one
image after another,

 a raised thing,
Always in point to fall a-down. (12-13)

7. The Symbols of the Book of the Duchess

Each symbol in the Book of the Duchess either alludes to or itself enacts the invention of poetry or its prerequisites: the qualification of received authority, the prolongation of transitions and the multiplication of faultlines in the narrative, and the rhetoricizing of experience, the elevation of fiction-making to a way of finding meaning. Before considering them in turn, I would like to emphasize that this agreement among the symbols, while it gives the text the degree of coherence that stands between it and incomprehensibility, does not establish or answer to a main theme in the poem. The referents they accord in are ways of inventing poetry, not possible contents for the poem. This modal force appears in part from the symbols' variety, and their often transient, fleeting, and ambiguous appearance in the story. They do not add up to anything other than themselves. In particular, Chaucer gives them an excessively symbolic quality -- so markedly abrupt and isolated, so often bearing unlikely nuances into a traditional genre -- a symbolic quality stated beyond the requirements for composing a symbolic text on some subject. This excess of symbolic quality over symbolic reference puts the operation of these symbols onto a modal level, and prevents them from forming into a thematic program. Each symbol, moreover, reformulates the inventing of poetry in terms of its individual reference, so that each comes upon the idea of inventing poetry

as if for the first time. Since there is no familiarity in the idea, it never becomes the thing other things are "about." It is, instead, inseparable from the atheratic "excess" signifying of particular symbols.

The Physician

And yet my boote is never the ner;
For there is phisicien but oon
That may me hele; but that is don. (38-40)

The physician is both isolated and complex. It is unique and remote: there is only one, and it is past (rather like the phoenix to which the Knight later compares the lady). It also traditionally refers to two different people: Christ and the beloved. The debate over which one of these it is meant to signify ultimately indicates that it is to some degree at least both. And it is not hard to see that the poetic richness would be diminished if Christ were envisioned without affection and passion, or if the beloved were perceived without any admixture of divinity or devotion. The sacred and the profane, grace and merit, comfort and desire, are comprehended in the figure of the physician, and may be felt as inextricable in it. In this respect the symbol acts rather as an artifice antithetical primal word, embodying an understanding of experience that is articulate but has not yet analyzed into separated parts all the different things it senses. The rational thought we develop later resists any return to this earlier vision of the world, where one can indeed have what one later calls two ideas in the same place at the same time. Chaucer's symbols are

designed in part to soothe and subvert this resistance. Like the physician, the symbolic text seeks to cure the imagination its troubles.

Chess

For me thoughte it beter play
Then play either at ches or tables. (50-51)

Chess is one of the Middle Ages' recurring emblems of love and battle. It also connotes the mysteriousness of the East, the erudition of the Arabs, the intricate relationships of love, and a taste for artful problem-solving. It is the lover's form of the Crusades. Yet this suggestive and seemingly appropriate image is blurred by a casual equation with backgammon -- "ches or tables" -- and has already been superseded by the "beter play" of reading. While the narrator definitely wants to play, he wants to play something serious, or at least, something whose rules are not given, whose sides are not drawn up against each other, and whose ending is open. The rating he may be looking for is not checkmating. The poverty of the image thus conceived appears later when the Knight pretends to have played a losing game of chess with cheating Fortune. The Knight's perception of his life as an adversary situation, with emphasis on the goodness or badness of what happens to him rather than on the way things happen, is something he must unlearn to regain his sanity. Later he refers to White's neck as "a round tour of joyre" (946) that may be meant to evoke the castle piece in chess. He must learn, however, that he is not

a Black Knight who can capture a White Castle in real life. The chess symbolism of the lovers' names is qualified by the narrator's preference for a book. The literary dimension of the game played in the poem is emphasized more strongly than it would have been if the chess motif had not been undermined in comparison to it.

The Book

Upon my bed I sat upright
 And bad oon reche me a book,
 A romaunce, and he it me tok
 To rede, and drive the night away. (L-49)

I will discuss the significance of the reading of a romance in the next chapter. It is important to note here that books themselves were rare and precious items in the Middle Ages, often very beautiful and desirable artifacts arousing both worldly and spiritual appreciation. Curtius has traced the sacredness of the book from Greece to the Renaissance;⁸⁴ in the Middle Ages, the Bible was the typic book that all others imitated, the book of nature was providence's empirical parallel to Scripture, and the martyrs were books inscribed by Christ in blood. To Curtius' notations one might add the frequency of a scene of presentation on the dedication page in medieval illustrated books, where the book is always tendered with great ceremony, usually from a kneeling author to a splendidly garbed patron. Books signified power. Similar attention was given books at the end of a work, through the envoy tradition that sends the poem as a messenger to lady, patron, or world. As time passes, the book increasingly becomes not only a vehicle for

other tenors -- the scripted saints, the library of nature -- but also the enabler of feeling and understanding in itself. Thus the envoy at the end of Proilus and Criseyde (TC 1.1786-1792) sends the book off to kiss the feet of ancient poets and to ask God to inspire him to write a comedy. It is more and more felt that books and fictions best give body and comprehensibility to the profoundest thoughts.

The Story of Alcyone

This bok we spak but of such thinges,
Of queenes lives, and of kinges,
And many other thinges smale. (57-59)

The image this particular book brings is that of the "thinnes smale" in Ovid's Metamorphoses. While the phrase seems to deflate the royal material of the fables, it also suggests the mosaic collection of items characteristic of symbolic texts. Hundreds of brief myths of change and transformation are frozen and captured in the Metamorphoses. It has an intense purity of theme and affect because of its exclusive focus on transformational totems: "This bok we spak but of such thinges." It may be this exclusiveness, and the allure of personal identities traced through alarming changes, that leads Chaucer to describe the work as a tale of queenes and kinges. There is something royal and powerful about a person sustaining metamorphosis, almost as if they are becoming simultaneously themselves and a symbol of themselves in their new shape.

It is hard to fix a metamorphosis, and harder to fix one at its inception. To do it, Chaucer exercises one tactic of exclusion and focus after another -- the neglect of "all this" (10) in the other stories, the abridging of Ceyx' role, the omission of the metamorphosis at the end. He pares all he can from each side of the torrent of visionary understanding that comes to Aloyone, both from the plot leading up to it and from the emotions aroused by it. He goes so far as to tell us that after this vision Aloyone sees nothing at all. He does not mean she saw nothing in the vision, or that the vision has no significant effect on her. He is just short-circuiting our press to a conclusion in order to round us up inside the visionary process again, where it begins and re-begins in the cave of Morpheus. We do not need to know what she thought about the vision. We need to find out where it came from. Chaucer emphasizes the epistemological challenge of the story, as Ten Brink noted:

In the treatment of Aloyone's conduct after the departure of Ceyx, Chaucer expands Ovid's account and modifies it in laying the chief weight upon the uncertainty in which the heroine continues.⁸⁵

When Ceyx' return is delayed, Aloyone implores Pluto for knowledge passively, and falls into a swoon "or she tooke kep" (120), that is, without exercising any critical control over what comes to her (a radical nonchalance reminiscent of the narrator's state: "I take no kep / Of nothing" [6-7]). What comes, of course, is the vision of Ceyx dead brought from the cave of Morpheus, a dream traced back for us all the way to the point of origin of all dreams.

Alcyone

Now for to spoken of his wif:--
 This lady, that was left at hom,
 Hath wonder that the king ne com
 Hom, for it was a longe terme.
 Anon her herte began to erme . . . (76-80)

Alcyone has been quite incorrectly interpreted by the revivers of exegesis as a key to understanding medieval texts. In Fruyt and Chaf: Studies in Chaucer's Allegories,⁸⁶ D. W. Robertson and Bernard Huppé's reading of her as a spiritual incompetent given to worldly sollicitudes and excessive grief, while it restores the allegorical character of the poem, ignores the main tradition of Alcyone's story and involves their argument in contradiction.

Virtually all commentators on the story in Ovid give a favorable impression of Alcyone, either by virtue of the interval of peace associated with the nesting period of the halcyon bird,⁸⁷ or for her conjugal devotion and for giving Ceyx advice -- not to travel by sea -- that he should have taken.⁸⁸ Thus Petrarch in the Trionfi d'Amore describes how

Quei duo che fece Amor compagni eterni,
 Alcione e Ceice, in riva al mare
 Far gli lor nidi al piu soavi verni. (II. 157-159)⁸⁹

And Boccaccio in the Genealogie Deorum Gentilium Libri states that in the matter of the sea voyage,

Verum Ceyx suo desiderio magis quam consilio aut
 beneplacito coniugis credens, conscensa navi iter
 arripuit.⁹⁰

Chaucer's text drives Robertson's and Huppé's reading into contradictions as they must take words literally or figuratively by convenience, not consistently, to make their argument. When

Alcyone "Saw noght" (213) they need a figurative reading of sight that makes her someone "who is blind to truth of this [spiritual] kind,"⁹¹ but when she asks Juno to "yeve me grace my lord to see" (111) they need a literal reading to make her someone "interested only in what she may see or hear and not in the intangible but nevertheless real virtues which Seys may have had."⁹² In an allegory that is also a vision, one would rather expect that any interplay between literal and figurative usage would redound to the credit of vivid sight and visualization, primary metaphors of its mode. An alliance between her feelings for her lord Ceyx and her allegorically supposed feelings for the Christian lord might also have seemed more natural.

For their reading Robertson and Huppé draw on Berchorius' account of Morpheus in his Ovidius Moralizatus.⁹³ This is borrowed in turn, as Berchorius tells us,⁹⁴ from Robert Holkot's moralization in his Commentarium in Libro Sapientiae,⁹⁵ "the most widely known interpretation of the story of Ceyx during Chaucer's maturity."⁹⁶ But it is not necessarily an interpretation of Alcyone. Holkot makes the sons of Sleep the bearers of dreams that cater to various worldly desires, and Robertson and Huppé do not hesitate to apply this unfavorable understanding of dreams to Alcyone's vision of Ceyx. But Holkot does not apply his evaluation of Morpheus to Alcyone, and in fact gives no particular moralization of her at all. He uses her story as a stepping stone to moral reflections and quotations from Aristotle and the Bible.

His commenting proceeds diachronically, but not cumulatively, and makes up a discontinuous encyclopaedia of readings and information, not an organically connected work.

In A Preface to Chaucer: Studies in Medieval Perspective, Robertson does demonstrate that in terms of character and plot late medieval art is unrealistic and inorganic, but he supplies it instead with a principle of "implicit thematic development."⁹⁷ Yet it is questionable whether one can apply even this standard of unity to an episodic compendium like Holkot's. One might further argue that this standard gives us wrong and unfruitful expectations for a poem like the Book of the Duchess, allowing us to believe too readily that its discontinuities are the result of the unsure rhetoric of an inexperienced apprentice poet rather than of that poet's understanding of the nonlogical workings of both dreams' and poetry's symbolic artifices.

While Holkot neglects to apply his analysis of Sleep to the story that occasions it, Chaucer uses the same story ostensibly to explain nothing more than why he decides to pray to Morpheus, leaving the thematic parallels between Alcyone and the narrator or the Knight unremarked. Both authors seem more interested in the temporal continuity of their work than in its thematic massing: meanings are continuously made available, but they are not necessarily "organized" or "developed." At the moment of composition Chaucer was probably thinking less of his characters' relationships than of how Alcyone's story could lead on to the

rest of the poem. The Ovidian collocation of love, sleep, and death delicately expresses the similarities all three bear to each other, and gives Chaucer the metaphorical grounds for casting the Knight's and narrator's despairs in the form of a dream. Further, the idea of love's culminating in a death perceived during sleep persuasively invites the reader to forego the rationalities of waking for the pleasures and insights of a more suggestible, less judgmental, frame of mind.

Berchorius, then, uses Holkot on Morpheus, but like Holkot does not apply the moralization of Morpheus to Alcyone. Instead, he offers an original and favorable reading of her:

Sic anima Christi uxor quando videt quod vir suus
 dei filius navem crucis ascendit ubi periclitatus
 et mortuus fuit; cum videt & considerat ipsum
 mortuum; debet se super eum in mari id est in
 amaritudine poenitentiae & confessionis per devo-
 tionem ponere; et cum eo facto ave in resurrectione;
 & ascensione simul renovari; & sic avis similitu-
 dinem induere; & per contemplationem ascendere &
 volare; ut sic sibi dicatur illud ps. In mari via
 tua et semitae tuae in aquis multis. ⁹⁸

The traditional alcyonic themes of peace and devotion find a fitting culmination in this picture of a spiritual bride perpetually seeking and imitating her savior.⁹⁹ This figure of the soul's capacity for loving a divine and absent good suits with the emerging desires of Knight and narrator for true love and self-knowledge far better than would a figure of grief's futility. Human emotion is never quite so useless in Chaucer. And his Alcyone, indeed, never faints out of lust or loss, but from

longing to know Ceyx' fate, not to change it:

Send me grace to slepe, and mete
In my slep som certeyn sweven
Wherthourgh that I may knowen even
Whether my lord be quyk or ded. (118-121)

Alcyone, unlike the obstinate Ceyx, seeks an understanding of rather than authority over events in the world. And the events in the poem come clearer for us if, like Alcyone, we accept the other than rational terms of the vision and its construction, and do not play Procrustes in our interpretations.

Juno

"A! mercy! swete lady dere!"
Quod she to Juno, hir goddesse,
"Helpe me out of thys distresse,
And yeve me grace my lord to se . . .

Send me grace to slepe, and mete . . .

. . . and thus the dede slep
Fell on hir, or she tooke kep,
Throgh Juno, that had herd hir bone,
That made hir to slepe sone. (108-130)

Alcyone and the dreamer experience a similar sequence of actions prior to their visions: they are reduced by grief and anxiety to an inability to think rationally, or sufficiently for their needs; they make a vow to a personal and less than absolute deity (although it may be noted that while Alcyone vows a sacrifice and herself to Juno -- "And hooly youres become I shal" [115] -- the narrator chooses to design "the alderbeste / Yifte" [246-247] for Morpheus, thereby demonstrating that he is more of an artificer); and they fall asleep. Between sleep and vision, Juno and her messenger specify the action.

Juno is sometimes identified as a goddess of passages, and Boccaccio notes that she is called the "Interducta" because

arbitrati sunt Junonem puellas nubenter et de
domibus parentum ad sponsores euntes per iter
ducere, et inde Interducta vocitata est. ¹⁰⁰

More generally, her presiding over marriages and births registers her as a figure of rites of passage.¹⁰¹ Boccaccio looks to Raban Maur for the connection between her assistance to brides and mothers and her association with transitions:

Rabanus autem dicit Junonem, quasi ianonem, id est
ianua pro purgationibus feminarum, eo quod quasi
portas matris natis pandat et nubentium maritis.¹⁰²

She is a gate to those she helps. Often thought of as favoring the established, placid values of stability, fidelity, and justice, she actually has in her hearth associations, a deeper connection with the processes of life, not only with the regulating institutions that later grow up around them.

The Messenger

Juno ryght anon
Called thus hir messenger
To doo hir erande, and he com ner. (132-134)

With the messenger's visit to Morpheus, Chaucer has at hand a signal emblem of the action of initiating new thought. The first messenger in the poem has appeared with the first play, and gives the narrator his romance to read:

Upon my bed I sat upright
And bad oon reche me a book,
A romaunce, and he it me tok
To rede, an drive the night away;
For me thoughte it beter play
Then play either at ches or tables. (46-51)

When Juno sends this messenger to Morpheus' cave, the unexpected colloquialism of her last phrase introduces the first note of lightness into the serious scene:

Goo now faste, and hye the blyve! (152)

The same idiomatic abruptness appears expansively in the messenger's encounter with Morpheus:

This messenger com fleyng faste
And cried, "O, ho! awake anon!"
Hit was for noght; there herde hym non.
"Awake!" quod he, "whoo ys lyth there?"
And blew his horn ryght in here eere,
And cried "Awaketh!" wonder hye.
This god of slep with hys oon y^e
Cast up, axed, "Who clepeth ther?" (178-185)

While bent on speed, the messenger is brought up short; while bent in sleep, Morpheus is aroused; and we, bent on seriousness, are amused. And the messenger takes forthright credit for the job:

"Hyt am I," quod this messenger. (186)

Amidst all the borrowing from Ovid and mythological naming, the messenger goes unnamed, oddly human, with the realistic but unprecedented masculine pronoun. The Iris of the rainbow becomes someone more like a busy deputy sheriff in a cloud of dust. In the traditional and mythic setting, this realistic human becomes figurative: of oddity, of a mistake in protocol, an irregularity in the Olympian chain of command. He is an apt embodiment of a bit of id barging in on the ego.

On his diplomatic missions Chaucer doubtless gained some acquaintance with messengers. He was early among the many poets and scholars serving as diplomats during the Renaissance¹⁰³ -- and

may have known some of the last of the cokini, or "kitchen knaves,"¹⁰⁴ who served as couriers from the mid-thirteenth century, when qualified messengers were scarce. According to Donald E. Queller, the official messenger or nuncius was regarded as "a much more courteous means of conveying a message than a mere letter"¹⁰⁵-- rather in contrast to the familiarity of Morpheus' awakener. Legally the nuncius was "a living letter"¹⁰⁶ who on the one hand fully represented the words that would have been written or spoken by the sender, and on the other had no further powers of his own. As a limpid vehicle of another's thought, he may be linked with the apprentice visionary or poet who must grow thoroughly suggestible to the imagination by emptying the mind of defenses. Like Morpheus bearing the body of Ceyx to Alcyone's bedroom, "the nuncius fully represented the person of his principal."¹⁰⁷ It is this capacity to assign the import of one being to the presence of another that makes the messenger's audience most parallel to the visionary who receives important meanings through tokens.

The humor of the messenger to Morpheus shows how the nunciary fullness of representation can qualify the authority implied behind it with a break in decorum. Once a person is regarded as the embodiment of a letter, they can become themselves a figure for a text as well as a text for their lord. Visions, and perhaps diplomacy, have an aesthetic of embodiment that confuses the orders of presence and representation. Their fictions are truths insofar

as they are necessary. Thus Ovid's "fidissima nuntia vocis" (Meta. XI. 518) becomes the disruptive imp of Juno in Chaucer.

The Cave of Morpheus

This messenger tok leve and wente
 Upon hys wey, and never ne stente
 Til he com to the derke valeye
 That stant betwixen roches tweye
 Ther never yet grew corn ne gras,
 Ne tre, ne [nothing] that ought was,
 Beste, ne man, ne noght elles,
 Save ther were a fewe welles
 Came rennyng fro the clyves adoun,
 That made a dedly slepyng soun,
 And ronnen down ryght by a cave
 That was under a rokke ygrave
 Amydde the valey, wonder depe. (153-165)

When the messenger reaches the dark valley, the only signs of animation he finds are the well-streams running down the cliffs. The landscape embodies the inertia that the dreamer has felt in his own mind. The gods of sleep inside the cave do nothing but sleep (169), and their downcast chins, with heads concealed (174-175), and their dark chamber (170) recall the benighted state of the sleepers. The single difference is made by those streams and their "dedly slepyng soun," a sound the Knight will also take as a point of departure for his narratives as he pronounces his rhymes with "a dedly sorwful soun" (462). His insensibility and dejection precede his story as they preceded the dreams of Alcyone, the narrator, and the sleeping gods. He "heng hys hed adoun" (461) and like Alcyone "saw me nought" (460) when the dreamer approaches. (He is also, like Ceyx, the one whose involvement with the world

has thus far kept him from learning vision: Ceyx' body is "ful pale and nothyng rody" [143], the Knight is "Ful pitous pale, and nothyng red" [470].)

The streams run "ryght by a cave" much as the messenger rousing Morpheus "blew his horn ryght in here eere" (182) and the vision of Ceyx came

Ryght even a quarter before day,
And stood ryght at hyr beddes fet,
And called hir ryght as she het. (198-200)

The pointing of these moments of contact shows that in the initiating of thought something unexpected or unwonted must interrupt the snoring of routine. These streams of water, element of change and baptism in whatever form they occur, are the cave's equivalent to Lethe and Eunoe, river that make death in the classical scheme a transition in the mind as well as of the body. The stream would also seem to be the agent that carved out the cave "under a rokke ygrave." Is it a "rokkey grave" as well? Rhyming with "cave" it could hardly have escaped the poet's notice as a possible pun. We may take this as a highlight of the equivalence between death and sleep that makes this episode into a sort of experiment with death for the narrator. In both the poem and the dream section the narrator finds the equation between death and sleep amounts to an equation between death and vision. This disrupted sleep is not a death of the body but a dying into mental life.

In the midst of life, death, and metamorphosis, one can hardly neglect sex, which the landscape distinctly suggests in

"a cave / That was under a rokke ygrave / Anydde the valey,
wonder depe." The slow wellstreams bespeak the quiet arousal of
passion. The grass has grown there, and man passed by, not "never,"
but "never yet." The lifelessness of the scene is in part the
quiescence of virginity, a landscape of a sexuality before the
moment when Flora and Zephyr arrive with their greenery and en-
gendering. As for the unstinting messenger, who is a male in no
other version of the story, his errand in this reading is to
penetrate this scene of secret delight, and work change there,
and be changed himself.

The landscape is also, more literarily, a recasting of the
pastoral scene of shepherds gathered in the shade to sing or pipe
beside a stream. Shade from the sun becomes deep darkness, vege-
tation is changed for an enclosure of bare rocks, and gods of
sleep rather than vigilant shepherds are lying about at ease.
The stream's frail song and the snoring contest, however, suggest
a parodic comparison. The rise of poetry in the individual mind
is more Chaucer's topic than its rise in the civilized community.
The gods' competition here is in snoring, not the exchange of
songs, a detail original with Chaucer:

They had good leyser for to route
To envye, who myghte slepe best. (172-173)

The verb "routen," meaning to snore, also meant "to roar, make a
loud noise," and "to be riotous." This is no mild snoozing,
but a roaring match. The connotation of disorderly behavior adds

to the dismantling of authority in the episode. The noun "rout," derived from Latin rupta, "broken, meant, among other things, "a disorderly, tumultuous, or disreputable crowd of persons" or a "riot, disturbance, stir, uproar . . . fuss, clamour, noise," and a "router" was "a lawless person, a robber, ruffian."¹⁰⁸ If the mightily snoring gods of sleep are routers, then it is not surprising that they are also the keepers of unruly dreams.

Morpheus

"Go bet," quod Juno, "to Morpheus,--
Thou knowest hym wel, the god of slep. (136-137)

In choosing an emblematic purveyor of vision, Chaucer elides any direct invocation of either the Christian God or a traditional muse, so that his fictive vehicle, Morpheus, can connote, if the reader wishes, both sources of inspiration which presented as themselves would have seemed contradictory. In Machaut's Fonteinne Amoureuse,¹⁰⁹ the lover believes that a dream from Morpheus would be a clear message to his lady of his love for her. Chaucer's narrator makes no mention at all of any context or specific message, amorous, religious, or literary, for his appeal to Morpheus, other than the relief of his own insomnia. What dreams may come is precisely not giving him pause. (It is an interesting sign of the narrator's unspoken desire for a dream that in praying for sleep, he addresses not Juno, who put Alcyone to sleep, but primarily Morpheus, the dream-bringer.) This reduction in context does not effect a reduction in Morpheus' significance. As elsewhere in the

poem, the isolating of a conventional event or emblem throws its symbolic character into relief. In this instance, the subsequent dream confirms the role of Morpheus as the bearer of visions whose clarity and richness inspire meditation and conversation in the dreamer. The shift in focus from context to the event itself also encourages us to consider the process of conveying mental messages more than the messages themselves.¹

Morpheus' significance appears most immediately in the narrator's address to him. That he finds himself, despite his orthodoxy and moodiness, attracted to the figure of Morpheus, argues his belief in the god's significance, not as an effective god, of which he has no hope, but as a meaningful emblem. The fiction of Morpheus provides the narrator with an approach to deep concerns that will not, however, deepen his melancholy with the severities of unadorned philosophy or asceticism.

In the double invocation to Book I of the House of Fame, while the Christian God, "that mover ys of al/ That is and was and ever shal" (HF 81-82), is asked to give all dreamers joy of their dreams (presumably in the understanding of them), the god Morpheus is selected to oversee the composition of this narrator's report of one such dream:

And to this god, that I of rede,
Pray I that he wol me spede
My sweven for to telle aryght,
Yf every drem stonde in his myght. (HF 77-80)

This more problematic task of composition is not a project really

in the purview of the God of things that are or certainly will be. This is a matter for imagination, belonging to the gods instituted by imagination, and these gods are designers or engineers, not guarantors of the principles or meanings they employ. As such they would delimit the range of fiction, even as it was being written, and thus prevent it from ever being truly a fiction.

Froissart's narrator in Li Paradys d'Amours finds consolation in the dreams and visions of Morpheus, and takes hope and comfort

De Morpheus le Dieu dormant
Par lequel tout li vrai amant
Sont conforté, et c'est raisons,
En songes et en visions. (PA 1718-1721)¹¹¹

And in another poem, L'Espinette Amoureuse, he even says that Morpheus' visions of his beloved lady have inspired him whether they were true or false: "toutes fois, soit fable ou voir, / Je li en doi grant gré savoir" (EA 3023-3024).¹¹² Again in Machaut's La Fonteinne Amoureuse, the narrator asks Morpheus to take his message to the lady in the expectation that she will confide things to Morpheus, speaker in fictions, that she would confide to nobody else in more verifiable circumstances or formats: "En Morpheus ara tant de franchise" (FA 867).¹¹³ Chaucer's Morpheus, trimmed of context and invoked for nothing more particular than sleep, distills the power of any fiction, of fiction itself, to console from the more circumstantial Morpheus of the French poems.

The Featherbed Chamber

Yif he wol make me slepe a lyte,
 Of down of pure dowves white
 I wil yive hym a fether-bed,
 Rayed with gold, and ryght wel cled
 In fyn blak satyn doutremer,
 And many a pilowe, and every ber
 Of cloth of Reynes, to slepe softes;
 Hym thar not nede to turnen ofte.
 And I wol yive hym al that falles
 To a chambre; and al hys halles
 I wol do peynte with pure gold
 And tapite hem ful many fold
 Of oo sute . . .

(249-261)

The lines describing Morpheus' bed in the Metamorphoses and the Ovide Moralisé (both prose and verse versions) are here reassigned from the objective third-person narrator to the person who does the dreaming, and from the description of Morpheus' chamber to the narrator's picture of its future state, thus emphasizing the extent to which the narrator is an author. He reshapes both the Ovidian and the French description of Morpheus' accoutrements.

With respect to Machaut's La Fonteinne Amoureuse, he omits a hat, specifies richness as gold, and realizes the soft bed as a pile of down and pillows. Machaut is more general and brief:

Avoit un lit trop riche et une couche.

Pour mieus dormir, un chapeau de pavaut
 Et un mol lit de plume de gerfaut
 Promés et dong.

(FA 604, 808-810)¹¹⁴

After his dream, Machaut's lover further promises a temple to the god:

Et l'image de Morpheus,
 Dont longuement me suis tells,
 Soutienment et par grant maistre
 Y sera, d'or fin entaillie,
 Sus un pilier de fin argent
 Bien esmaillié, par quoy la gent
 Avint memoire et ramentance
 De son scens et de sa puissance.

(FA 2571-2578)¹¹⁵

In the Book of the Duchess, this temple becomes the more comfortable boudoir furnished with "al that falles / To a chambre." The adjoining halls are to be painted with gilt and hung with tapestries rather than lined with stone pillars overlaid with enamel. Rather than fixing Morpheus as an image in a temple, the narrator constructs a scene of and for Morpheus, in which the god might actually work and sleep. The symbolic setting of metals, colors, doves, is made more sensibly impressive in being conflated with a heightened but still possible and eminently delectable bedroom. Chaucer takes the important attribution of "scens" and "puissance" to Morpheus and recasts it from generalization to realization.

The Chaucerian narrator's bed differs on similar lines from that in the Ovide Moralisé:

Ot un mol lit de riche atour,
Couvert d'un bel noir couvertour.
Le chalis ne fu pas de tramble,
Ains fu d'ebenus, ce me samble. (QM 113466-3469) 116

Chaucer expands on the details given conventionally here, and omits the hard ebony of Ovid and the thirteenth-century bed.

To some critics the promised bed suggests religious contemplation in the tradition of the exegesis on Songs, and to others a final frivolity in the tradition of the French dream vision. Chaucer's sensuous and expansive detail increases both the bed's symbolic and realistic relish. As complements, the spiritual and the sensible illuminate each other, and serve as fictions for each other. But Chaucer's intense detail makes it impossible to choose

either one as the sole grounds of the description. Rather, the description makes possible for imagination the realities of both spiritual and sensible meaningfulness. Sensual but not lascivious, fervent but not religious, it has symbolic potential, but not symbolic meanings in particular, and thus creates in our minds the idea and process of symbolizing itself.

In poetry, in any art of image-making, ornament and spirit are allied rather than exclusive. Brilliant ornament appears frequently in medieval art to impress and delight audiences. It generally signals the dignity, importance, and joy of an occasion. In the realm of the boudoir, Queen Philippa's lying-in bed, fitted with sheets of lawn and cloth of Reynes (see line 255), was upholstered in green velvet decorated with sea-sirens, bearing the arms of Hainault and of England worked in gold, and had a scarlet counterpane, furred and worked in gold and pearls.¹¹⁷ It is in the fourteenth century that soft fittings join the wood, inlay, and precious metal of earlier special beds, and fine textiles, and upholstering, with lots of hangings and coverlets, come into their own.¹¹⁸

Decorating royalty as a celebration and continuance of its power has its parallel in religion, not only in the wealth of church furnishings, but also in the interpretation of Biblical splendor. Thus the valuable and colorful pavements and hangings that festoon the feast of Ahasuerus, for example, in Esther 1:6, including beds of gold and silver, are taken as a visible expression of the spiritual virtues instituted by the Church. It is right to

ornament such a feast, according to the Glossa Ordinaria,

quia decor Ecclesiae, in sapientiae meditatione et in virtutum ascensione per carnis mortificationem et castitatem cum martyrii dignitate in doctrinam debet effulgere.¹¹⁹

This may seem an obvious point, but it may in part be our under-estimation of the virtues of ornament that leads us to dismiss the bed vowed to Morpheus as either ironic or frivolous.

Commenting, at one point, within a commentary on Ezekiel (and perhaps the Old Testament prophetic context gives him sterner thoughts), on the search "By night on my bed" for the beloved in Songs 3:1-2, Gregory declares this search must fail:

Sed quaerit illum, et non invenit, quia quamvis magno amore desiderat adhuc tamen ei non conceditur quem amat.¹²⁰

But elsewhere, during a commentary on John (and perhaps the New Testament gives him a fuller view of this life), he asserts that intimations of the sought-for beloved have been given and still are to be found through the exercise of some imagination:

dilectum namque in lectulo quaerimus, quando in praesentis vitae aliquantula requie Redemptoris nostri desiderio suspiramus. Per noctem quaerimus, quia etsi jam in illo mens vigilat, tamen adhuc oculus caligat. Sed qui dilectum suum non invenit, restat ut surgat, et civitatem circumeat, id est sanctam electorum Ecclesiam mente et inquisitione percurrat; per vicos eum et plateas quaerat, id est per angusta et lata gradientes aspiciat, ut si qua in eis valeat invenire ejus vestigia exquirat, quia sunt nonnulli, etiam vitae saecularis, qui imitandum aliquid habeant de actione virtutis. ¹²¹

In stern of cheerful mood, it remains true that there are such motions of the soul within this life, and that the divine spouse

is real whether found on earth or after death. And the vision of that reality comes to those who begin a search in bed at night, without waiting fussily for certainty or the light of their own reason.

Chaucer has taken us into the cave of Morpheus to show us how the vision process begins. The episode is a fable of the initiation of imaginative action, set in the framework of metamorphosis which Ovid had singled out as the basic form of life as imaginatively conceived, and as the basic form of the life of the imagination. Once in the cave, we find inanimate gods, sunk in a meditation without topic and without goal. Morpheus takes a most leisurely approach to even the executing of a command from Juno.

Anoon this god of slep abrayd
Out of hys slep, and gan to goon,
And dyde as he had bede hym doon;
Took up the dreynte body sone
And bar hyt forth to Alcione,
Hys wif the quene.

(192-197)

The expletive verbs and paratactic idiom give the action an air of lackadaisical obedience, while the errand has great intensity for Alcyone. The apparition, once arrived in her room, appears "right" at 3:00 a.m., "right" at the foot of her bed, and calls her "right" by name (198-201). The lounging freedom of Morpheus, person of the unconscious, parallels the captivation and alertness of the hitherto wakeful Alcyone.

The assignment of the vision's mechanism to Juno, the messenger, and Morpheus, is a way of describing how it occurs, and of drawing

attention to the importance of its having a particular mechanism: namely, an initial submission to an external authority, as when Alcyone vows herself to Juno or when the narrator commends himself to the romance and to the myth of Morpheus; then the qualification of that authority by an intermediary, as when Juno gives her command into the keeping of the messenger who subverts her dignity, or when the narrator's reading diverts him from serious thoughts with "things smale;" and finally, the bearing of images by an executor who has nothing to lose, Morpheus, who can thus represent to the subject person what they could not utter to themselves on their own authority.

To activate the imagination, one must first not care what one is thinking or not thinking, so as to become alert to whatever does come to mind, without dismissing any difficult or unpleasant idea as irreverent or irrelevant -- as the narrator does at first, dismissing the possibility of confiding in us and the figure of the physician he declares belongs to the past. In the person of Alcyone, Ovid's fiction affords the narrator an external example of supplication with whom he can sympathize but with whom he is not forced prematurely to identify. In fictional form he can entertain the idea of supplication without bringing his defenses to bear on it. Only in fiction can the shy and sly mind of the melancholic become an audience to itself, and as the imagination gains in freedom, the self gains time, gradually increasing its capacity to stay integrated throughout the metamorphic process of enlightenment and speculation.

The potential cure lies in the narrator's designing of a fiction which both narrates his problem and enables him to analyze it. Once he has entertained the fiction of Morpheus as a hypnopomp, illustrating the possibility of psychic travel and a new way of thought, he can formulate a fiction of his own without feeling he is jumping into an abyss beyond selfhood or identity. His care for Alcyone and interest in Morpheus indicate that he really wishes to try some mental experimentation. If the feather-bed vow seems frivolous, one must remember, not only the narrator's defensiveness preventing him from making a straight serious statement, but also the involvement of interruption and uncouthness in the creating of original fictions. It is his interruption of a customary tone that creates the narrator's authorial space, as is foreshadowed by his interruption of the narrative about Alcyone to tell us how badly her plight weighs on him even now, in which he refers to himself somewhat ambiguously as "I, which made this book" (96), confusing the distinction between the originating and the reading author.

The project of fiction-making helps us understand the status of the vow. It makes more sense to look for the actual virtue in this action, than to try to make out as a heterodox or deluded soul a man who says he has never known but one god, that he is playing a game in making a vow to another one, and that he doesn't even quite feel like doing that much. We should be able to tell the narrator is not naïve from the gentle humor of his lines, with

the sidelong glance of the qualification:

This shal he have,
Yf I wiste where were hys cave; (262-263)

and the coy vagueness about his reward for Juno:

and to Juno,
That ys hys goddessse, I shal soo do,
I trow that she shal holde hir payd. (267-269)

And in the age of the moralized Ovid, the narrator's Morpheus would be understood as a fiction as readily as Ovid's.

Sleep is the action figuring vision. The ability to sleep amounts to the ability to envision, to withdraw one's attention from something customary to something different, to recast old poems in stained glass, to formulate an alter ego, and further, to change a vision from raw experience to an artifice interpretable by others by writing it down. The poet may describe his entry into creating as either a deepening of attention -- "I had red thys tale wel, / And overloked hyt everydel" (231-232) -- or a release from fixated attention -- "And in my game I sayde" (238). The appeal to Morpheus is thus perceived in both ways, and new objects of interest supply the place of those relinquished by the narrator.

This simultaneous withdrawal and refixing of attention, the exchange in interests that makes sleep meaningful, appears as well in Gregory's more direct discussion of it in his commentary on visions of the night in Job 33:15. He offers two arrangements of his allegory, based on the opposition between inner and outer worlds. In the first, the sleeper withdraws attention from the world

as symbolized by waking activity:

Quid est quod per somnium nobis locutio divinitatis innotescet, nisi quod Dei secreta non cognoscimus, si in terrenis desideriis vigilemus? In somnio enim exteriores sensus dormiunt, et interiora cernuntur. Si ergo interna contemplare volumus, ab externa implicatione dormiamus.¹²²

vocem Dei quasi per somnium audiunt, dum in meditatione mentis a carnalibus motibus abstrahuntur.¹²³

In the second, the sleeper withdraws attention from the world as symbolized by the dark of night:

Nocturna enim visio apparere contemplatione mentis sub quibusdam imaginibus solet. In diurna autem luce certius cernimus, in nocturna vero visione cunctanter videmus. . . . Nox quippe est vita praesens, in qua quandiu sumus, per hoc quod interna conspiciamus, sub incerta imaginatione caligamus.¹²⁴

Night may be read as either respite from common sensibilities or as the obscuring of spiritual sensation, according to the particular allegory set up. In either case, night or day is rendered meaningful by the change-over in sensibilities it works. Not straight, simple reality, but a departure from it, and a change in the terms in which one thinks, introduces into our discourse the perspective -- on the topic and on the discourse itself -- that enables us to see that one thing may mean another. But one must have both the one thing and the other in order to take bearings on either. Thus it is the figure of speech for our language, and the fiction for our whole mind, that reformulate reality and set it beside itself, that create perspective on it and within it, that set up the parallax pointing our imagination towards stars as yet unknown.

The May Morning Landscape

Me thoghte thus: that hyt was May,
And in the dawyngye I lay . . . (291-292)

By virtue of long use and rich associations, the nature description that opens so many medieval poems has acquired a general symbolic power. When it appears as the context for people's longing after pilgrimages, in the Prologue to the Canterbury Tales, the spring setting emblemizes the best desires of humanity. In Pearl, it is described only to be superseded by the more spiritual landscape of gems and metals, offering an eternal artifice beyond the rhythms of nature, to which it is the foil. Or again, the description is used to evoke the power of life and the hope for love when juxtaposed with the plague passage in the Jugement du Roi de Navarre. It represents various aspects of natural beauty and powers, played off against contexts of death, spirituality, and love. Furthermore, its traditional place at the opening of poems makes it a signal that the author and protagonist are about to engage all these forces.

In setting his description inside the dream, for which so many lines of preparation have already been made, Chaucer gains a second beginning for his poem. This re-opening not only introduces another faultline into the narration, but also removes the nature description from its position as a context for action, and resets it as one of those actions. Chaucer thus highlights its symbolic nature by detaching it from its usual place. He also

isolates and delineates each of the elements in the landscape, restoring their separateness and strangeness in our eyes. And he draws our attention to the symbolic quality of the passage as a whole as well as in its parts by alternating it with passages that are clearly symbolic with other motifs, such as the emblematic stained glass that depicts the legends of Troy and the Rose, and the hunt, a narrative element symbolic of spiritual pilgrimages and amorous pursuits, and conducted with much ceremony.

Chaucer increases the sense of itemization and mosaic in the passage with proper names (the "Romaunce of the Rose" and the names of the Trojan heroes [326-334], Octavian [368], May [291], Tunis [310], Flora and Zephyr [402], and Argus [435]). The Roman de la Rose, by comparison, for all its personifications and allusions, has no proper names in the opening nature description (the main source for that in the Book of the Duchess) except for two place names, one personification, and the inevitable "May" (RR 112, 483, 693, 711, and 45, 47, 51, 70, 81). Chaucer introduces the allusiveness of the French poem's narrative into his passage of description.

The way Chaucer proportions his presentation of the elements of spring further highlights their symbolic character. He runs through all the bird topics that formed the basis of four passages in the Roman in a single passage (lines 295 to 320).¹²⁵ He pares down the generalization and repetition that characterize the older passage, omits its diffuse catalogue (RR 645-656), and strings together one by one the topics of the birds' harmoniousness,

the hyperbolic estimate of their value, the counting and cataloguing of them, and the comparison of them to angels. His editing gives him space for details that further particularize both the birds and the dreamer: they frighten him, they cluster on his roof tiles, they sing each in their own way, but with energy and concentration, and the chamber rings with their sound (296-301, 312-320).

On the level of content, he reduces the traditional evocations to their essential details, and on the level of form, he anthologizes motifs into one passage. The reduction in narrative quality exposes afresh the symbolic nature of the birds' song in its connections with the opening of day in the opening of the year, with heaven, and with love as devotion and as harmony. His method not only gives him rapidity without sacrificing amplitude, but also creates a sort of meta-song that presents the birds as motifs as well as experience.

This treatment of the opening image in the dream landscape reappears with the sequence of topics throughout it. The first installment presents the dawn and bird motifs. The succeeding section on the stained glass and fresco ends with a brief notice of the weather motif. After the hunt episode, the second large section of description gives us the grassy path, its flowers, the allusion to Flora and Zephyr, the idea of earth's competition with heaven, the idea of spring as a forgetting of winter, and then the foliage, trees, and animals, ending in the allusion to Argus. Each of these elements comes from a longer passage in the Roman.¹²⁶

Each is described once, and none of the descriptions overlap. Chaucer can rely on the conventionality of these elements to supply continuity to his succession. Meanwhile, by presenting them discretely and once each, he offers them as part of a plot's continuing experience in time that does not allow one to turn back in the landscape. One cannot retrace one's steps through it, for the space of spring has been set into time's succession. Chaucer's landscape is in action. The birds wake up the dreamer. A hunt rides over the fields. The glade is inhabited by Flora and Zephyr growing flowers, and is crowded with animals singing together. Argus tries to count them. Symbolic spaces are projected into the dimension of time. But at the same time that symbols are made to gallop in narrative, the narrative is splintered into symbolic tesserae by their discreteness and unrepeatability. Space is divided over time, and time is broken into quanta. The pervasive discontinuity of both dimensions in the poem effects the breakdown of all the actions and motifs, and of narration and symbolism themselves, into their elemental particles.

Since the iconography is fragmented, we cannot assume, say, an amorous or a spiritual situation for the scene. The tree and stream of classical pastoral landscape do not occur together here. The stream is in the cave of Morpheus. The trees are in the dream -- in place of water there, we have the changing course of heraclitan narration, resounding as it breaks over the fragments of symbols.

The Hunt

And as I lay thus, wonder lowde
 Me thoght I herde an hunte blowe
 T'assay hys horn, and for to knowe
 Whether hyt were clere or hors of soun.
 And I herde goyng, bothe up and doun,
 Men, hors, houndes, and other thyng;
 And al men speken of huntynge,
 How they wolde slee the hert with strengthe,
 And how the hert had, upon lengthe,
 So moche embosed, y not now what.

Anoon ryght, whan I herde that,
 How that they wolde on-huntynge goon,
 I was ryght glad, and up anoon
 Took my hors, and forth I wente
 Out of my chambre; I never stente
 Til I com to the feld withoute.

(344-359)

The hunt symbolizes processes -- search, flight, longing, puzzling -- rather than states or objects. As Marcelle Thiébaux puts it, "The hunt offers a narrative pattern of quest and conflict, with a denouement."¹²⁷ Chaucer frames the entire encounter between dreamer and Knight with a hunt, pointing the analogy between the hunt for the hart and the conversational search for the Knight's heart with a pun at the very end of their talk: "al was doon, / For that tyme, the hert-huntynge" (1312-1313). But he leaves out the denouement. The dreamer comes on the hunt just as the hunters think to take "with strengthe" the exhausted hart, but it is a confused moment, which he cannot describe -- "y not now what" -- and which never resolves itself. Before they can take it, the hart is overshot by the dogs (perhaps as overeager as their masters relying on strength rather than art) and steals off "a privy way" (382), having "rused" (381) its pursuers. Just before the

dreamer leaves the hunt, the herald "Blew a forloyn at the laste" (386), as a signal to end the hunt for this hart. Just before the dreamer and Knight begin to ride back to the castle of the hunting party, "They gan to strake forth" (1312), in answer to the horn signal. The conversation takes place within this moment of inconclusiveness. Neither hunt nor conversation leads to any meaning or consolation outside their own processes, outside, for example, the telling of stories by the dreamer and his Knight.

The hunt does, however, get the dreamer out of bed and out of his room, and sends him, who like the messenger "never stente" (154, 358), into the depths of imagination: now not the cave of Morpheus, but the forest of symbols and the memory of the Knight. In the hunt the dreamer prosecutes after leaving the main troop, he becomes his own messenger to himself.

In an age when few people hunt or need to, we can refresh our appreciation of it by considering some of the more fraught aspects of the hunt motif. Beryl Rowland sees a parallel between the hunt in the Book of the Duchess and the

angstvolle Traumfahrt of the nightmare, in which the helpless subject finds himself riding and ridden upon, hunter and hunted in a headlong chase ending in terrible punishment.¹²⁸

A variety of strange figures lead hapless victims to archaic hells throughout European legend, whose

nocturnal riders with their baying hounds are psychopomps, carrying souls away to the infernal regions.¹²⁹

Rowland notes the parallel in Chaucer's poem:

the sound of the horn arouses the narrator from his
bed and he immediately becomes a compulsive participant
in a swift ride from bedroom to field where he overtakes
the hunters. ¹³⁰

I would say that it is the birds who actually rouse the dreamer first, not the horn alone, and that he never becomes a full participant in the hunt, whose confusion and inconclusiveness outweigh any sense of compulsiveness about it. But Rowland's gothic reading does restore to us some sense of the gravity of hunting, and of its connection with death. Like the rider in the nightmare hunt, the Black Knight

is both the quarry when the Dreamer "stalked even unto
hys bak" (458) and the hunter in sombre pursuit of death
itself:

The pure deth ys so ful my foo
That I wolde deye, hyt wolde not soo;
For whan I folwe hyt, hit wol flee. (583-585)¹³¹

Finally, the embosed hart "becomes the suffering human heart," and the dreamer becomes the psychopomp leading his quarry to death.¹³²

This, however, is not a ride to experienced death but to a recognition of death, an admission of it into consciousness. The terror is mixed with humor in the struggle of the dreaming mind to imagine death to itself in a manner both vivid and tolerable. The dog is also a kind of psychopomp, to the dreamer, and so is the Knight, providing the alter ego through which the dreamer stalks his own inner anxieties. While this is not a nightmare, it articulates inner terror and difficulty the more clearly in the absence of ascertainable religious or romantic contexts. Because its hunt

offers no afterlife or lady's acceptance at its end, it keeps our attention focussed on the mortal fears it expresses. The ceremonies of the hunt, somewhat like the rites of religion, accumulate around a scene of death, distancing us from it at the same time that its elaboration expresses our deep involvement in it.

Formally, the hunt is the narrative of the press of time par excellence. It is an irreversible narrative of changing circumstances that nonetheless further one story with a succession of differing images. The dreamer's stop-and-start pursuit of path, whelp, and Knight, is comprehensible as a continuation of the hunting action, and the hunt itself as a continuation of the narrator's longing for sleep.

Chaucer's abbreviation of the tale of Alcyone may make more sense to us if we read it in light of the hunt pattern. The pacing of the story is abrupt, but its emotional tenor is not as bleak as many critics have felt that abruptness implies.¹³³ Emotionally the tale takes up where the poor insomniac leaves off, and in turn the prayer and dream of the narrator take up from the tale's yearning into vision. The feeling builds across shifting scenes and changing speakers. The effects are not lost, but assumed by succeeding voices or motifs.

As the story's focus moves from Ceyx through Alcyone to Morpheus we sense a gradual relinquishment of assertive power. Ceyx' obstinacy leads him to death, and is superseded in validity by the circumspection of Alcyone, who in turn seeks help from a power

greater than herself, Juno. Juno's obedient messenger brings the story to rest on Morpheus, purveyor of visions in the realm of sleep, where personal control is forsaken, and critical judgment most relaxed. The exercise of power is gradually replaced by exercises in imagination that are made possible by a yielding to suggestion rather than an assertion of one's own ideas. The abbreviation of Ceyx' role, the bewilderment and sudden death of Alcyone, and the time lavished on the cave of Morpheus, are largely explained by the poet's desire to revise our attitude to power.

The vision's effect is transferred instantaneously from Alcyone to the narrator. After reading of the myth, he re-interprets Morpheus' visionary powers as soporific ones, as if in need of a less stunning action to call up with his new rhetorical energy. That energy reaches a climax in the featherbed vow, which, occurring immediately after Alcyone's death, and attached to an object associated but not identified with her, would seem to be a defensive reaction to the troubling similarities between her story and the narrator's own situation. He adopts her gods nervously and jestingly, recasting her passion as rhetoric -- but a rhetoric too bright and surprising not to be suspected of carrying a great emotional weight. He has felt death and change in his reading, and they now invest his composition with energy beyond his meaning. The good-humored frivolity of the vow is a mood that can express as few can simultaneous wryness and hope.

At the end of the poem, the abrupt close of their conversation sends the emotional power of Knight and dreamer back into the writing of the poem, and the interpreting of it by readers. The whole poem is a hunting narrative, composed of passages that translate the emotions of preceding moments into the rhetoric of a present that is always figurative of the persisting residue of unvoiced feeling and meaning. This constant transference of import in the hunting narrative, as in the workings of dream-formation, heightens feeling and enlarges the scope of reference at the same time that it defers confrontation.

Octavian

"Syr, th'emperour Octovyen,"
 quod he, "and ys here faste by."
 "A Goddes half, in good tyme!" quod I. (368-370)

The leader of the hunt is Octavian, who by reputation combined great power with intelligence:

This Octavian, what bi rial power, what bi gret wit,
 sujetide the more part of the world in his tyme to hym.¹³⁴

The Chester Nativity, as cited here by G. R. Owst, further reports how the emperor acquiesces to the greater power of the Christ child, as shown to him in a vision:

In it [the Chester Nativity] "Sybyll the Sage", by means of a vision, foretells Christ's birth; and the wise Emperor, to whom she prophesies, at length himself offers sacrifice to the child "that schuld be gratty than he".¹³⁵

Octavian exemplifies the person who knows when to relinquish some of their power, as Ceyx refused and the dreamer is learning to do.

Octavian also had a reputation as a scholar and a patron, which invites the reader to both esteem the powers of art, and see that power should be tempered with understanding.

Augustus Octavianus, qui liberalibus studiis,
praesertim eloquentiae, in tantum incumbibat,
ut nullus neque in procinctu laberetur dies
quin legeret, scriberet, dictaret.¹³⁶

On the basis of his relationship to Vergil, he was taken as the model of the poet's patron, and is cited in various appeals for recognition and reward:

Tu duce Romano dux dignior Octaviano,
Sis mihi, quaeso, boni spes, ut fuit ille Maroni.¹³⁷

He embodies the spirit of generous condescension through which power is enlightened by being qualified, in a kind of incarnational grace passing from temporal lords to their subjects. The easy, unassertive generosity of Octavian, and the balance in him of civic and aesthetic concerns, gives him a peace of mind that the blindly ambitious never know, and to which the melancholic comes only with great initial trepidation. For John of Salisbury, not self-assertion, but such tranquillity, attained by restraint and by balanced, multiple perspectives, the product of a "composed" soul, is an index to the truth inherent in a person. And he uses Octavian as an example of his belief that

Personis quoque quibusdam veritas frequentius
illucescit, utpote compositum habentibus animum.¹³⁸

Chaucer in the Book of the Duchess presents Octavian as a power that excites from afar, remaining remote from the dreamer,

and leading a hunt that fails. Yet we do not feel that Octavian fails, any more than we feel the Knight or dreamer fails in not coming to a total resolution of their difficulties. Rather, Octavian represents the grandeur and intelligence that preside over quests -- venereal, amatory, psychological, exegetical -- rather than insisting on bringing them by force to a false conclusion.

While he exemplifies the human imitatio Christi in several respects, it is unlikely that he is intended to symbolize Christ, as argued by critics reading the name "Octavian" etymologically and equating the number eight with both the resurrection and the person of the resurrection.¹³⁹ Symbolism of the resurrection is appropriate enough in a poem telling of rebeginnings, but any clear symbolism of Christ would interfere with the range of suggestiveness Chaucer gives his images. The idea of Christ would in particular interfere with the independent importance of Vergil and scholarship, which Octavian more traditionally emblemizes. To read Octavian as Christ, one must at any rate be willing to accept as a symbol of Christ something that also symbolizes other things at the same time. The power Octavian suggests to the dreamer, as his expletive has it, is "A Goddes half."

The Dog

A whelp, that fauned me as I stood,
 That hadde yfolowed, and koude no good.
 Hyt com and crepte to me as lowe
 Ryght as hyt hadde me yknowe,
 Helde doun hys hed and joyned hys eres,
 And leyde al smothe doun hys heres.
 I wolde have kaught hyt, and anoon
 Hyt fledde, and was fro me goon;
 And I hym folwed . . . (389-397)

Critics have usually attributed some emotional value to the dog who suddenly appears before the dreamer at the end of the hunt, and then disappears down a path that leads the dreamer to the glade.¹⁴⁰ The dog first fawns on the dreamer, but then dashes away when he tries to pick it up. This is sometimes imagined to create wistfulness in the dreamer, or else the dog is considered analogous to him in being abandoned by the hunt. But the only action the episode engenders is the dreamer's pursuit down the path, and subsequent discovery of the gathering of animals and the Knight. Any hint of deprivation is immediately supplanted by the idea that the dreamer has penetrated further into the mystery. By departing from the main course, he has found the animals that eluded the hunt. Similarly, the dog that eludes him shows that attempts to grasp another creature end in frustration. Like the tale of Alcyone, this encounter with the dog advises the relinquishment of aggressive power. The value of the dog lies not in holding it, but in following it.

Medieval literature uses dogs, and occasionally other animals, precisely as protagonists' guides on significant journeys:

The puppy belongs to a class of animals very familiar in medieval story: animals which flee before the hero and entice him to follow. Such an animal commonly serves as an emissary from a fairy mistress, and by its tactics it brings the hero to her, as it does in Marie de France's Graelent.¹⁴¹

Chaucer's exclusion of explicit thematic commitment precludes the simply amatory nature of such a messenger's errand. The dog here is an agent of pure transition. Rowland goes suggestively a bit further:

It is also possible that Chaucer was thinking of the dog in its ancient role of guide from this world to the next. . . . the Greeks . . . regarded it as the representative of Mercury, keeper of the boundary between life and death.¹⁴²

This reading need not depend on Rowland's context of nightmare hunts, which are not quite what we have in the Book of the Duchess, but arises naturally enough from the persistence and mysteriousness of Chaucer's hunt. A hunt with unknown quarry and unspecified emotional valence is most likely to refer simply to the archetypal hunt through time of life into death. All change resembles death, and this hunt of mortality suits well with a series of metamorphoses in an elegiac context.

Dogs also have a certain reputation for sagacity, which led to their being associated with Mercury by virtue of the link between sagacity and eloquence. Holkot cites Isidore to this effect:

Item ysidorus .8 Ethimologiarum c. vltimo dicit quod Mercurius pingebatur cum capite canino et canis est animal sagacissimum et Mercurius est deus eloquencie.¹⁴³

Associated with eloquence, the dog's wisdom could be extended to good preaching, as in Berchorius' analysis:

Dicamus igitur quod mystice Mercurius potest designare quem libet bonum praelatum: qui in primis debet habere caput canis inquantum scilicet custos gregis.¹⁴⁴

And a dog is the iconographic mascot of the great preacher, Dominic.¹⁴⁵

In the figure of the dog are united an emblem of ephemeral eloquence and a guide across frontiers of change. Meanings, like sensitive quarry, flit from us. Their evanescence creates the need and space for the hunt of rhetoric. That dogs are also in some texts symbols of lust, may indicate how the prosecution of a fruitful quest shares with lust both its longing and its impropriety, or deviation from the straight and narrow.

The Path

. . . and hyt forth wente
Down by a floury grene wente
Ful thikke of gras, ful softe and swete.
With floures fele, faire under fete,
And litel used, hyt semed thus. (397-401)

The path leads from the meeting with the dog, which offered an uncertain relationship, and the failure of a possessive impulse, to Flora and Zephyr, forgers of close relationship, and generators of life. It does this by turning off the course of the hunt, introducing a detour by way of pursuit. Like the route of symbolic language, the path is a dis-course, so to speak, that leads from the quotidian to the unlikely by leaving the common way.

It is said to be little used and lushly overgrown. This luxury and seclusion give it an air of diffuse, recumbent sexuality, although that theme as such remains unstated, and the archetypal image of the forested path is left to speak for itself. This sort of restraint is what enables Chaucer to recreate, in his text and in his reader, plain desire so elegantly. Both virginity and experience may be attributed to the path by implication.¹⁴⁶

And this innocent but sensual path is appropriately the residence of Flora and Zephyr, whose story repeats the alliance of true love and violent disruption.

Flora and Zephyr

For both Flora and Zephirus,
They two that make floures growe,
Had mad her dwellynge ther, I trowe. (402-404)

Theirs is a myth of relinquished power. Ovid tells the story in the Fasti. In a burst of aggressive desire, Zephyr pursues and rapes Flora. But he then shows love to his victim, and makes her queen of flowers, so that the spring season in which she began to wander becomes hers eternally.

ver erat, errabam: Zephyrus conspexit, abibam.
insequitur, fugio: fortior ille fuit,
et dederat fratri Boreas ius omne rapinae
ausus Erechthea praemia ferre domo.
vim tamen emendat dando mihi nomina nuptiae,
inque meo non est ulla querella toro.
vere fruor semper . . . (F 5.201-207)¹⁴⁷

The alternating flight and pursuit of this courtship, and the mutual qualification of the initial rape and the subsequent

happy marriage, accord with the simultaneous innocence and experience of the setting, and testify to the way acquiescence and metamorphosis can turn harsh finality into endless renewal. After the rape, Flora becomes the grower of spring flowers. As such, she assigns the various blossom forms that mark the metamorphoses of dying youths like Hyacinthus (F 5.223-228). She also presides over the transition from April to May:

incipis Aprili, transis in tempora Mai;
alter te fugiens, cum venit, alter habet.
cum tua sint cedantque tibi confinia mensum,
convenit in laudes ille vel ille tuas. (F 5.185-188)¹⁴⁸

As in the issuance of Zephyr's possession into the perpetual spring of flowers, or the yielding of one season in fullness to the beginning of another, a confluence of terminal and initial moments appears throughout the landscape of the dream: the failed hunt opening into the conversational explorations of Knight and dreamer, the evanescence of the dog that leaves the dreamer at the beginning of the path, and the path's conflation of the lush and the pristine. Beginnings and endings qualify or mingle with each other so as to turn each terminal point into a transition in which love, dream, and poetry articulate themselves.

Flora's games occur at the very opening of May, and are characterized by a sense of liberation derived from the erasure of possessiveness. They commemorate the restoration to common ownership of public grazing lands that had been appropriated by the rich for their overlarge herds (F 5.277-294). They celebrate this release

from tyranny with universal license and lust:

quaerere conabar, quare lascivia maior
his forest in ludis liberiorque locus,
sed mihi succurrit numen non esse severum
aptaque deliciis munera ferre deam.

scaena levis decet hanc; non est, mihi credite, non est
illa coturnatas inter habenda deas.
turba quidem cur hos celebret meretricia ludos,
non ex difficili causa petita subest.
non est de tetricis, non est de magna professis,
volt sua plebeio sacra patere choro,
et monet aetatis specie, dum floreat, uti.

(F 5.331-334, 347-353)¹⁴⁹

Once more, as with Morpheus, Chaucer has found a deity whose
sense of propriety has usefully and pleasingly lapsed.

Chaucer's version of the myth is condensed from that in the
Roman de la Rose, which expounds on the two gods' sharing of work
and power:

Zephirus e Flora sa fame,
Qui des fleurs est deesse e dame,
(Cist dui font les floretes naistre;
Fleurs ne quenoissent autre maistre,
Car par tout le monde semant
Les va cil e cele ensement,
E les fourment e les couleurent
Des couleurs don les fleurs eneurent
Puceles e vallez preisiez
De beaus chapelez renveisiez,
Pour l'amour des fins amoureux;
Car mout ont en grant amour eus)
De floretes leur estendaient
Les coutes pointes.

(RR 8411-8424)¹⁵⁰

The mutuality of their work is clear here, even to the point that
neither the sowing of the seeds nor the endowing of form is said
to be masculine work alone, as philosophical tradition would

commonly have had it.¹⁵¹ In an exposition of Ovid's picture of Flora's liberating influence, the allusion in the Roman leads to a vision of the golden age that rejects sexual, political, and economic tyranny:

Seur teus couches con je devise,
 Senz rapine e senz couveitise,
 S'entracolaient e baisaient
 Cil cui li jeu d'Amours plaisaient.
 Cil arbre vert par ces gaudines
 Leur paveillons e leur courtines
 De leur rains seur aus estendaient,
 Qui dou soleil les defendaient.
 La demenaient leur queroles,
 Leur jeux e leur oiseuses moles
 Les simples genz asseürees,
 De toutes cures escurées,
 Fors de mener jolietez
 Par leiaus amiabletez.
 N'encor n'avait fait rei ne prince
 Mesfaiz, qui l'autrui tost e pince.
 Trestuit pareil estre soulaient,
 Ne rien propre avoir ne voulaient;
 Bien savaient cele parole,
 Qui n'est mençongiere ne fole,
 Qu'onques amour e seignourie
 Ne s'entrefirent compaignie,
 Ne ne demourerent ensemble;
 Cil qui maistrie les dessemble. (RR 8431-8454)¹⁵²

The closing motto from Ovid -- "non bene conveniunt nec in una sede morantur / Maiestas et amor"¹⁵³ -- reappears in the Franklin's Tale,¹⁵⁴ whence Spenser borrows it for Britomart,¹⁵⁵ but in the Book of the Duchess Chaucer does not state these themes of harmony directly. He gives us the myth alone, withdrawing even from his own authority as story-teller to point or interpret it, and leaves the myth to speak largely for itself. In effect, he speaks poetry directly, in its elements, rather than the meanings it can convey. With

respect to the brevity of the allusion to Flora and Zephyr, one should note that the quantity of space or time, the number of lines devoted to a motif, is not the sole or even a primary index to that motif's relative significance in a poem that is composed of a continual succession of rapid allusions and condensed symbols. Every piece of the mosaic does and must participate in the poet's project in order to express it without the help of an overarching theme. Each bit re-enacts the metamorphoses effected by both human passion and symbolic language.

The Simile of Envy

For hit was, on to beholde,
 As thogh the erthe envye wolde
 To be gayer than the heven,
 To have moo floures, swich seven,
 As in the welken sterres bee. (405-409)

The comparison between the path and an earthly paradise that envies heaven also comes from the Golden Age section of the Roman. There, the passage is entirely within the allusion to Flora and Zephyr, and the feelings attributed to earth are competitiveness and pride:

Qu'il vous fust avis que la terre
 Au ciel d'estre meuz estelee,
 Tant iert pour ses fleurs revelee. (RR 8426-8428)¹⁵⁶

Chaucer separates the simile from the myth, keeping to his succession of isolatable images, and sharpens competition into envy, specifies "meuz" as "gayer," and adds the force of numerical precision to

the comparison. The image is more vivid, but also sharper. It seems to carry some of the dreamer's emotion as well as the scene's impression, and to express, with both the idea of envy and its sharpened diction and change of mood from the path, the dreamer's isolation and misery. It is he who envies heaven, perhaps for the ease and frankness supposed of heaven, who sees in the brilliant path that liveliness or openness he does not allow himself, and projects onto the path the envy he feels in place of appreciation. The hidden severity of the simile, if it seems unlikely, is picked up by the image of winter that follows.

The Image of Winter

Hyt had forgete the povertes
 That wynter, thorgh hys colde morwes,
 Had mad hyt suffre, and his sorwes,
 All was forgeten, and that was sene.
 For al the woode was waxen grene;
 Swetnesse of dew had mad hyt waxe. (410-415)

This passage draws on the opening of the Roman, where the pride the earth takes in her new robe of flowers surrounds the passing reference to winter:

Li bois recueurent lor uerdure,
 Qui sunt sec tant come yuer dure;
 La terre meismes s'orgueille
 Por la rosee qui la mueille,
 E oblie la poureté
 Ou ele a tot l'iuer esté;
 Lors deulent la terre si gobe
 Qu'el uelt auoir nouele robe. (RR 53-60)¹⁵⁷

In Chaucer, pride is set aside, and the forgotten suffering emphasized in the repetition of forgetting (lines 410, 413).

The fine detail of winter's sadness -- "hys colde morwes" -- makes winter an agent of sorrow, not just the time during which sorrow is felt, and steals the scene momentarily from the cheer of the landscape. The dreamer's fond pausing over the mildly verbose explanation of flowers and greening intimates the wistfulness of the pleasure he takes, as if from afar, in the lovely scene that brings older sorrow to his mind.

Rather than having the dreamer say directly that in the midst of spring he alone of all creatures feels lost and unloved, Chaucer sets these contrasting images into the description itself. Attributing his feelings to the scene, the dreamer avoids self-revelation and at the same time endows his language with increased expressive capacity. If he cannot yet imagine himself as happy, he can approach that possibility by describing a planet miraculously able to feel green joy after even the sorrow of winter. The poetic evocation of this landscape enlarges the narrator's imagination. Landscapes that in the Roman de la Rose, and most other poems of the tradition, illustrate a point or give context to a story, are themselves the point and the story here, important as the raw material of poetry and imagination that revives the dreamer. By formulating his sorrow into an image, he provides himself with another perspective, a sort of interior interlocutor, to play his feelings off. In creating a sorrowful earth, he gains a place in which to see the spring.

The Trees

And every tree stood by hymselfe
 Fro other wel ten foot or twelve.
 So grete trees, so huge of strengthe,
 Of fourty or fifty fadme lengthe,
 Clene withoute bowgh or stikke,
 With croppes brode, and eke as thikke--
 They were nat an ynche asonder--
 That hit was shadewe overal under. (419-426)

Chaucer realizes the symbolic potential of the trees in the forest by giving them symbolic quality in excess of symbolic meaning. This excess of symbolic quality in effect turns them into symbols of the process of symbolizing. The character of Chaucer's trees may be judged from a comparison with their source in the Roman de la Rose:

Li uns fu loing de l'autre asis
 Plus de .v. toises ou de sis;
 Mès mout furent grant e haut,
 E, por le bien garder de chaut,
 Furent si espès par deseure
 Que li solaus de nes une eure
 Ne puet a la terre descendre,
 Ne fere mal a l'erbe tendre. (RR 1367-1374)¹⁵⁸

Chaucer isolates the trees more, emphasizing their singleness -- "every tree," "by hymselfe" -- and doubling the numeration of the distance between them from five or six to ten or twelve units. He adds the details of their great height and their trunks' smoothness, which sharpen the impression we receive of spare, discrete, condensed presences.

The range of tree trunks is set off further by the dense foliage of their leaves, running horizontally across their tops like a border in a book of elaborate interlace design. The Book

of the Duchess omits the explanation of the purpose of the shade (to keep out the sun), concentrating more intensely on the texture of the branches, mentioning instead their absolute density -- "nat an ynche asonder" -- and the ubiquity of the shadow "overal under," and creating an image of complete and inviolable shade. The text offers this fully realized picture as significant in itself, without linking the shade to a natural, rational scheme involving the sun's heat and the comfort of forest dwellers.

The interwoven border of pure shade creates an artificial, symbolic space for the trees. The isolation of the shade from its rationale, and of the wood from the world, complement the isolation of the trees from each other. Chaucer's isolation and enclosure of his landscape's elements construct a symbolic space that draws interpretation while not referring to anything outside itself. Chaucer refreshes these conventional landscape motifs at a radical level by re-enacting the way in which they come to be symbolic.

The trees are isolated with respect to their neighboring text as well. Chaucer could have proceeded to catalogue the trees, as Guillaume does in the Roman (ll. 1352-1386), and as he does himself in the Parliament of Fowls (ll. 176-182). But instead he presents the trees without names or external associations. If they are related to anything, it is only to the two other lone trees belonging to the dreamer and the Knight in this poem. The tree the dreamer stands under to watch the hunt is seen, instantly evanescent, just as he leaves it: "I was go walked fro my tree" (387).

It may have been a hunting station, but all we really know of it is its particularity, its seeming to belong to the dreamer, and its situation at the edge of both hunt and forest. The Knight also appears beneath a tree he faces away from:

I was war of a man in blak,
That sat and had yturned his bak
To an ook, an huge tree. (445-447)

The accompaniment of so great and remarkable a piece of forest gives added distinction and allure to this mysterious figure.

The tree has emblemized for many peoples the center of the world. But Chaucer wants to decenter us a little: are these narrators' trees, important but turned away from, genial instructors affording a moment of sheltered perspective on the life of the hunt or forest, but which the two mourners must finally leave? Or do they harbor uncentral powers? Trees are often counted the doors to the underworld homes of elves or fairies, and it is -- or was -- common knowledge that "Fairy folks / Are in old oaks."¹⁵⁹ Tradition attributes distinctive characteristics to the trees themselves as well, as seen in a Somerset folksong that comments on different trees' reactions to the loss of their fellows:

Ellum do grieve,
Oak he do hate,
Willow do walk
If yew travels late.¹⁶⁰

That is, elms die of grief, oaks take revenge, and willows haunt belated travellers. According to this scheme, the perception of the Knight as grieving excessively would suit with an elm, but not

an oak. The Knight sitting beneath it has need of its strength, but already has too much of its vengefulness.

Overall, the role of most import for the Book of the Duchess is the tree as portal between this world and an other world. Much as Morpheus is an anti-authoritarian presence within the Olympian tradition, so the fairies harbored by trees are marginal deities, shadowy survivals of a dispersed animism, less organized and less ideological than the Christian Trinity or the Church that speaks for it. If the trees emblemize access to fairies, they introduce into landscapes -- and I would argue that Chaucer's impressively isolated trees introduce even into the conventional French landscape -- a concentrated border site where common thought can cross into the uncanny.

Borders are the places where meaning emerges in the traveller's perception of difference. The most stunning example of a tree at a border that articulates new meanings is the realistic, personified, jewel-encrusted crucifix in the Dream of the Rood. Like it, the dreamer's hunting tree is at the edge of a forest, and presides over his entry into the realm of an inner hunt. This hunt leads him finally to the alter ego Knight, sitting under another tree, whose echoing of the dreamer's tree signals the creation in this alter ego of a boundary inside the narrating self. The formulation of this inner frontier makes possible the dreamer's move from from melancholic to poetic imagining.

The Animals

And many an hert and many an hynde
 Was both before me and behynde.
 Of founes, sowres, bukkes, does
 Was ful the woode, and many roes,
 And many sqwirelles, that sete
 Ful high upon the trees and ete,
 And in hir maner made festes. (427-433)

As with the ranks of trees, the crowd of animals each to be perceived as individuals, "in hir maner," presents us with an assemblage of discrete images juxtaposed without regard for perspective or relationship, in accord with the symbolist's cultivation of small and separable images.

The list of animals appears as a simple complement to the range of trees in the Roman (ll. 1375-1382), but in Chaucer it takes on added significance from the context of the official hunt's failure to track them down. Chaucer omits, then, the Roman's rabbits, changes their athletic scampering into the squirrels' eating and festing -- which probably suggested singing and chattering -- and expands the French list of hunted animals from two to seven.¹⁶¹ The increased array of animals in Chaucer's image confirms our sense that while the main hunt "with strengthe" (351) fails, the dreamer's exploration by detour finds in the conversation with the Knight something better than anything he might have set out intending to capture.¹⁶²

Argus

Shortly, hyt was so ful of bestes,
 That thogh Argus, the noble countour,
 Sete to rekene in hys countour,
 And rekened with his figures ten--
 For by tho figures mowe al ken,
 Yf they ben drafty, rekene and noubre,
 And telle of every thing the noubre--
 Yet shoulde he fayle to rekene even
 The wondres me mette in my sweven. (434-442)

Chaucer highlights the ineffability of his dream with this teasing reference to the mathematician Albus, whose name, despite all good reason, puts us in mind of Argus, the guard set on Io by Juno, whom Mercury lulls to sleep with the story of Pan and Syrinx.

The ninth-century mathematician Mohammed ibn Musa Abn Djefar Al-Khwarizmi wrote the treatise whose translation, as the Algorithmi de Numero Indorum, introduced Arabic numerals into Europe. For Chaucer's interest in symbolism, it is useful to note, first, that this Arab's reputation rests not on his understanding of concepts but on his invention of a means for symbolizing them, and second, that Arabic numerals enjoyed something of a more fashionable and more mystical status than the old Roman numerals. According to W. W. Rouse Ball, whose A Short Account of the History of Mathematics I am relying on,

It was the fashion to use the Arabic symbols in ecclesiastical works; while their occurrence in all astronomical tables and their Oriental origin (which savoured of magic) secured their use in calendars intended for scientific purposes.¹⁶³

While Roman numerals continued to be used in trade and record-keeping well into the sixteenth century, the Arabic served the

abstruser and necessarily more symbolic studies of science and theology.

Methods of counting would also be of special interest to Chaucer -- whose commercial employment would have familiarized him with them on a practical level already -- because of their relationship to methods of narrating. "To count" could already mean in Middle English "to number," "to include in the reckoning," "to esteem," and "to tell, relate."¹⁶⁴ The act of enumerating things occupies a semantic field in common with the act of telling events. Each of these meanings of "to count" is also a major meaning of the Anglo-Saxon verbs "to reckon,"¹⁶⁵ and "to tell."¹⁶⁶ If numeration has primarily to do with the quantity of things, then in narration, quantity as presented over time, in actions such as quest and change, acquire significance, or quality as well as quantity. One can tell a telling story, recount something that counts for something, and reckon on something one reckons up. Old French "conte" (also "cunte," "comte," "compte") provides "to count" with the meanings of "a story" and "a numbering," and throws in for good measure (since it lacks the meaning of "to esteem") a pun on "conte" as the noble rank of Count.¹⁶⁷ Chaucer's "noble countour," then, may be perceived simultaneously as a nobleman, a raconteur, and a mathematician. The dense, schematic repetition of the words "countour," "rekene," "figures," and "noubre" lace up the passage in the complex of numbering/narrating

meanings, so that "mette" also suggests "to measure" as well as "to dream."¹⁶⁸ The idiomatic meaning is clearly "to dream," since it occurs as "me mette," but the arithmetic reference of the passage is dense enough to bring the expression into its pattern.

Before the dream, the narrator remarks that neither Joseph nor Macrobius could read or interpret this dream (280-289). Here, in the middle of it, he asserts that Argus could not count the marvels in it. The shift from a qualitative to a quantitative expression of value indicates a growing awareness that the technique of a symbolic, metamorphic narration, a counting off in time of the varied and changing representations of an emotional history and a poetic project, generates meaning even in the absence of supporting themes. The sheer construction of these "Harmonious numbers" shows that certain arrangements of phonetic and semantic quantity give sense to mere succession. For even in the realm of semantics, Chaucer is not so much adding new meanings as rearranging available meanings, giving a new geometry rather than new material, to his motifs.

The particular source for Argus is in the Roman, where the Duenna, describing her youth to Fair Welcome, says that the number of fights fought over her was greater than Argus could count (RR 12760 ff.) In this rather humorous analogy (the humor presumably being Chaucer's rather than the narrator's), the dreamer casts himself as the experienced, worldly woman whose episodes and images occasion fascination, competition, and amorous chagrin in

a multitude of readers looking to get hold of the key to the dream's interpretation. It is an oblique eroticization of the process of story-telling that may please the dreamer's unconscious and educate ours. The narration grows enumerative through its episodic nature, and gives the dreamer and us a method of endowing the chaos of temporal succession with form. And by being able to form time's mosaic, we feel we can assimilate and understand it without undue strain, and perhaps even contribute to it by artificing new forms for potential events. The combined senses of ease and mastery give us and the narrator great pleasure. There is a world that belongs to us as well as a world that challenges us. And so we love our fictions, and the dreamer secretly sees himself as the beloved of his readers. With regard to the dreamer as "noble countour," one may think, for a moment, of other old French meanings of "conte."

In the spirit of enumerating and entertaining possibilities, one must next turn to the possibility that "Argus" refers not only to the mathematician Albus but also to the Argus of myth. Chaucer's other references to this Argus (Knight's Tale 1390, Merchant's Tale 2111) indicate that he knew perfectly well that this was also the mythic guardian's name. If he picked up the variant spelling of Albus from a Roman manuscript, or thought the similarity in names was coincidence, he still did not use it in ignorance of its double reference. Further, the one hundred eyes of Argus link him to the numbering of Albus, and his being lulled asleep by Mercury's story-

telling links him with the ideas of narrative power and visionary sleep that pervade the Book of the Duchess. Finally, his situation as a guardian of authority undermined reminds us that Juno's authority has already been compromised in this poem by her quirky messenger to Morpheus. Chaucer's unexpository, episodic, presentation of symbols makes possible just the sort of compatibility of diverse readings that Argus seems to conflate here.

Working over the story of Argus in the Metamorphoses, Borchorius at one point allegorizes Argus as the princes and prelates commissioned by Juno as Church, and a little further on reads him as an "oculatissimus" devil luring Io as Soul into sin.¹⁶⁹ He is overcome by Mercury as either diabolical persuasion or Christ, according to the allegorical alignment taken. Mercury plays the devil again in Holkot, construed as "medius currens dyabolus qui circuit querens quem deuoret"¹⁷⁰ and lulls into sin Argus, here imagined as a "clericus litteratus" who does not keep a sufficiently assiduous watch over his conscience (Io) during his studies. In any case it is his association with the god of eloquence, for better or worse, that gives him import for the Book of the Duchess. His story affirms narration's power over the powers of the world, whether those powers are thought of as Church, sin, or scholarship. Narration's variety, temporal extension, and inexhaustibility enable it to overcome a hundred eyes at once of vigilant authority.

White

And goode faire White she het;
 That was my lady name ryght.
 She was bothe fair and bryght;
 She hadde not hir name wrong. (948-951)

The brightness of the lady White is associated with a goodness and fairness that make her seem remote and delicate as well as vivid. An essential thing always to remember about White is that she is dead, and that only her dying leads the Knight to meditate on her so fully. She emblemizes all those eminently desirable things that one cannot confront and appreciate at the same time.

The equivocal nature of whiteness emerges when we compare this description of the lady to an earlier figure of the Knight's concerning his own impressionability:

Paraunter I was therto most able,
 As a whit wal or a table,
 For hit ys redy to cacche and take
 Al that men wil theryn make,
 Whethir so men wil portreys or peynte,
 Be the werkes never so queynte. (779-784)

White color, then, can be passively blank as well as radiantly bright. This blankness invites antic and alien impressions, that suggest once again the inherent impropriety and unlikeliness of imagination. The black melancholy of the Knight calls for just such a lightening of his impacted seriousness, but the oddity of whiteness emerges unexpectedly amidst conventional connotations of purity and classical beauty. The lady White of the poem, and the historical lady Blanche of Lancaster, whose name is the French word for "white" and the English for "blank," offer not only the pure

white light of life and love, but also the cool, vague shimmer of ghosts visible only at night. The unbodied shining of the lady White is an after-image belonging to memory and imagination, not to sense, and telling us that she has faded into death, that the light we see is the trail of that final change. The effect for us and for the Knight resembles that given to a later hunter through a fairy forest, whose quarry metamorphoses, and sets him on a perpetual quest:

It had become a glimmering girl
 With apple blossom in her hair
 Who called me by my name and ran
 And faded through the brightening air.

(W. B. Yeats, "The Song of Wandering Aengus")

Lover's pallor could describe her as well as the Knight:

The blood was fled for pure drede
 Doun to hys herte . . .

. . . and that made al
 Hys hewe chaunge and wexe grene
 And pale. (490-498)

Elsewhere this color signals life and vigor: "For al the woode was waxed grene" (414). Green, like white, is connected with both verdant brightness and death-like pallor. It is a sign of Flora's engendering love for nature's plants, of jealousy in a fearful heart, and of a lover's anguished desire for an absent beloved. The diverse connotations of green and white express the intertwining of desire and death in love.

In the Knight's description of White one can see his choice of symbols move from the image of a radiant individual to that of

a remote, self-enclosed being. He begins with the torch that shines on all, and indeed this figure from the Roman admits of a degree of humor in the suggestion that the torch in question is rather free with its favors:

C'est la chandele en la lanterne:
 Qui mil en i alumerait,
 Ja meins de feu n'i trouverait.
 Chascuns set la similitude
 Se mout n'a l'entendement rude. (RR 7410-7414)¹⁷¹

Therto she koude so wel pleye,
 That she was lyk to torche bryght
 That every man may take of lyght
 Ynogh, and hyt hath never the lesse.
 Of maner and of comlynesse
 Ryght so ferde my lady dere;
 For every wight of hir manere
 Myght cacche ynogh, yif that he wolde,
 Yif he had eyen hir to beholde. (961-970)

The Lover's Friend in the Roman, speaking against the Guard of Fair Welcome, closes with an obvious enough notation on the figure itself, pointing out that only an unlettered "rude" reader will miss the rude nuance of the simile. Chaucer's Knight, by contrast, closes by drawing our attention to the lady herself. The suggestiveness of the figure floats the more freely through the passage for the Knight's chaste inability to pick up on it. While Chaucer does not impose such a racy meaning on us, he also, by floating it rather than attaching it to a speaker, makes it impossible for us to get rid of it with a rhetorical justification.

The mirror of the festival is a more unimpeachable image. It is less generous, although still offering to others a view of their best assembly virtues:

For I dar swere wel, yif that she
 Had among ten thousand be,
 She wolde have be, at the leste,
 A chef myrour of al the feste,
 Thogh they had stonden in a rowe,
 To mennes eyen that koude have knowe. (971-976)

The shift from radiance to reflection in a mirror signals a more introspective way of thinking about White, and about the lover's self reflected back to him by her public example. The lady as mirror of the lover's self is the basis for the good influence her radiance can have on him. This image also ends with a hint at the spectators' responsibility to try to be those "that koude have knowe," sensitive to beauty and goodness.

The next image that occurs to the Knight, the jewel whose absence makes a crown seem empty, is cooler, motionless rather than alive, expressed as absence rather than presence, and describes a kind of light more condensed than the torch's rays or the mirror's reflections.

For wher-so men had pleyd or waked,
 Me thoghte the felawsshyppe as naked
 Withouten hir, that sawgh I oones,
 As a corowne withoute stones. (977-980)

The crown's connection with human society through the idea of the sovereign it adorns is a hierarchical, exclusive relationship, inspiring more awe and distance than fellowship.

Finally the Knight arrives at the phoenix, symbol par excellence of solitude and uniqueness. The phoenix, like the other images, is a source of light, but this is the fire of immolation rather than illumination. The phoenix perpetuates itself without a mate --

a detail that indicates just how far from his desires the Knight has strayed in elaborating his description. Unlike the other images in this sequence, the phoenix is not drawn from experience: it has never been real, and has always been symbolic. It lives in the mind alone, existing truly only to the eye of the beholder:

Trewly she was, to myn yð,
The soleyne fenix of Arabye;
For ther livyth never but oon,
Ne swich as she ne knowe I noon. (981-984)

The gem and the phoenix also continue the motif of the spectator's sight, but focus on the Knight's eyes in particular. All groups are empty without her after he has seen her once (979), and she is the phoenix to his eye (981). The more intense the symbols become, the more purely symbolic, the more the imagination's eye comes into play, the more the spectator and the reader must bring their own minds' workings to bear on the image to be comprehended.

This progression of images suggests that the Knight conceives of White as an essentially symbolic lady. His inner cure and consolation will entail both his coming to see her less as a symbol, and also his learning how better to think symbolically, in order to use symbolic thought as a means of understanding rather than rationalizing the differing elements in his feeling. As he thinks of White less as a symbol, and thinks of her more by means of symbols, he will be led by imagination to a richer comprehension of who she was and what she means to him and how. The distances of love will become the subject of appreciation, wonder, and comedy, not only of resignation and fear.

The Book of the Duchess seeks out the moment between no thought and thought, or between one thought and a different one, that is a continuing occasion for metamorphosis in the text, and entails constant departures from previous ideas. Since the text reports something new, it cannot be consistent. It will seek instead to be accurately inconsistent, both reporting and eliciting imaginative action with the unlikeness, isolation, and polysemousness of its symbolic images.

According to fourteenth-century manuals on the subject, consistency must bow to inspiration in the composing of sermons.¹⁷² Any point that has impressed itself on the preacher's attention and would contribute to the edification of the listeners should be presented regardless of formal scheme. But sermons have a governing theme, while the assortment of shifting episodes and images in Chaucer's poem seem to have no higher theme to unify them. Its symbolism both renders mysteries in terms of precise details that do not quite coalesce, and turns clear, familiar images into mysteries by presenting them in a confused but ritualistic landscape which we can only assume must mean more than meets the eye. The gap between our vivid perception of symbols and our bewilderment over their significance impresses upon us the way that, while all narrative temporalizes the events it describes, symbolic narrative temporalizes our understanding of them as well.

It would seem that traditional criteria for good poetry, such as consistency and proportion, assume that the poetry is fairly readily understandable. Given, however, that some good poetry either verges on the undecipherable or suggests all too many meanings, these criteria should better be regarded simply as possible criteria for a good poem, not the test or substance of its significance. How then can we recognize good poetry if we do not wish to limit it? By the number of different criteria simultaneously satisfied? or the clarity with which criteria can be seen to be satisfied? the deftness with which a work establishes or dismantles criteria? the extent to which a work articulates relationships among criteria? or the idea of criteria itself? The formulation of these questions leads me to decide that poems are good not for having particular interpretations, but for having interpretability.

Puzzling things -- the undefined physician, the horse in the bedroom, the sudden dog, the turn in the path, the man in black -- create in reader and protagonist a hermeneutical desire beyond the desire for plot resolution. The strange and symbolic elements in the Book of the Duchess subtly replace our desire for an ending with a desire for comprehending, and this desire is far less likely to be satisfied completely. It keeps resolving into itself.

Poetic language is language that dwells on digressions from things as we experience them immediately. In tropes, allegories,

set-pieces, and allusions, poetry's pausing varies the scope of words' reference, and fills the scene with both potential significance and meanings elaborated so excessively that they begin to point like signs to other meanings. The variation in referential scope gives the verse symbolic and historical dimension: brief passages provide unexpected occasions for reflection. The devices of symbolic texts reinforce the hermeneutic desire, and bring the narrative itself into conformity with its subject: the temporalized indirection and changeability of all significant or signifying mental action. By generating meanings from within the process of representing them, symbolic language demonstrates the elemental action and power of the mind. This is why its stories seem so true without being real, and how it invites the reader's mind to further thought.

The images I have discussed offer the reader more opportunity than guidelines for thought. Octavian presents authority and failure. The landscape enacts nature's change and celebrates art's resource. The dog is both a friend and a stranger, both eloquent and dumb. Flora and Zephyr's myth tells of rape and love. Argus is an expert counter, a vigilant guard, and a sleeper. And Orpheus is so totally adept at forms that he is himself utterly ambiguous, consisting entirely of borrowed identities and unexercised authority. All these are images not of thoughts but of the passage among thoughts.

The Book of the Duchess is not, however, a texture without content. Rather, the poem's figures, by virtue of their number and variety, depict, and require us to exercise, symbolic thought, which proceeds by multiplying and varying the possible references of things. The poem is not simply a poem about poetry, then, but a poem about the initiating of poetry. So its content is not an idea, but the energetic illustration of how one generates ideas.

Chaucer has, in this poem, kept the content within its formative phase so rigorously that the need to organize it into a consistent presentation does not even arise. The process of beginning is the constant that recurs and is prolonged and is considered in a variety of guises throughout the plot. While Chaucer might be said not to get very far in his presentation of poetic process, he must certainly be said to go very deep into the initial aspect of it. And this initiation is the single essential to the "engine" of poetry. From any perspective of extrapoetic, thematic, order, the poem's focus on this moment will appear to have given rise to a chaos of undeveloped or unrelated ideas. But if we attend to and on that which Chaucer does give us repeatedly -- the action of invention -- we will come to the still turning point from which the poem continuously takes its impetus.

8. Morphic Comedy

Anglia terra ferox et fertilis angulus orbis
 Insula prediues qui toto vix eget orbe
 Et cuius totus indiget orbis ope
 Anglia plena iocis gens libera apta iocari
 Libera gens hec est cui libera lingua
 Sit lingua melior liberiorque manus.

(Bartholomaeus Anglicus, De Proprietatibus Rerum)¹⁷³

bise verses menen þat Inglonde is a strong lond and sterne
 and þe plenteuouseste corner of þe world, ful ryche a lond
 þat vneþe it nedep helpe of any lond, and eueryche oper
 lond nedep helpe of Ingelonde. Ingelonde is full of myrthe
 and of game and men ofte tymes able to myrthe and to game
 free men of herte and with tonge, but þe honde is more
 better and more free þan þe tonge.

(John Trevisa, On the Properties of Things)¹⁷⁴

According to Bartholomaeus' view of the natural properties of things, wealth and self-reliance express themselves in England in a ready freedom of tongue and hand. The humor and game of both Chaucer and his narrator may be regarded as issuing from, and to a great extent making possible, the resourcefulness of the one, in founding a poetic language, and of the other, in curing melancholy. Before leaving the discussion of symbolism in the Book of the Duchess, I would like to return briefly to Morpheus, for a consideration of the connection between symbolism and comedy.

Peter Haidu observes, in his essay on "Humor and the Aesthetics of Medieval Romance," that the severing of the more obvious links, or the multiplying of supposedly unique links, between sign and referent that characterizes symbolic texts, creates a natural space

for humor. Given "the absence of direct reference as the aesthetic basis of literature," Haidu deduces that

If literature is directly referential . . . then identification with the hero is a natural, expectable process. But if "characters" are presented, not as illusory persons, but as meaningful or signifying entities which are functional parts of a global and independent aesthetic system . . . then they are no longer potential vicarious substitutes for the reader's self. Laughter then can have a normal part in the reader-and-text system in which each term retains its own discrete identity and function.¹⁷⁵

We laugh, for example, at the infuriating or frustrating things that might happen to us, when they are presented as happening to others. Chaucer's narrator becomes able to make inroads on his melancholy, and take it more lightly, when his experience is reassigned to alter egos he can formally distinguish himself from: the romance heroine, the dreamer, and the Knight. This array of variants on a self both enriches the self by implication and gives it some representations that articulate its most excessive traits. One can take psychological exercise by shadow-boxing with these selves whose unusual clarity, and caricatured articulation of excesses, resemble the isolation, unlikeness, and marginal siting of symbolic images.

If we adjourn from medieval text to medieval reality, we find another confluence of comic and symbolic qualities in the figure of the fools who, by virtue of living on the margins of society (whether in excess of spirit or defect of reason), can see truths and voice critiques forbidden to ordinary citizens participating fully in the status quo. With special license to neglect common

bounds they are free to speak wittily, obscurely, and impolitically. Enid Welsford observes that

The vogue of the court-fool seems to have steadily increased during the fourteenth and to have culminated in the sixteenth and in the early seventeenth century.

For the development of the idea of the fool is one of the products of that uneasy time of transition, when the great medieval synthesis was shattered and the new order (if order it was) had not yet been established. ¹⁷⁶

When all feel that they or the things they might believe in are at the margins of real life, they recognize and assimilate this sense by institutionalizing the figure of subversion and contradiction that is the fool.

Apparently, the fools' humor appealed to people not only for making them laugh, but also for doing so particularly by revising and expanding those of their conscious, societal roles that were decorous but had become unsatisfying. Through humor people can regain some primitive exuberance without forfeiting community. The fools of the Middle Ages, then,

were particularly in request at those pageants and processions and mysteries by which the medieval burgher diversified his existence.¹⁷⁷

Welsford points out for example the enjoyment the emperor pictured in a French romance (*Robert le Diable*) takes in the intrinsically unenjoyable but imaginatively broadening melancholy of his fool:

For he was pleased with his folly,
His doings, and his melancholy,
Which caused him laughter and good cheer.¹⁷⁸

Welsford also remarks the alliance of humor and melancholy in the

marginal social status of the Irish jesters, who

for all their merriment tend to appear in pathetic or tragic circumstances. . . . they were classed among disreputable persons, and were sometimes regarded as outside the law.¹⁷⁹

These outlaws, however, were often the servants of rulers, who needed the observations of an uncensored advisor, and who welcomed the wit or humor that relieved these critiques as they were voiced.

The combination of marginality, knowledge, melancholy, and poetry, in a figure who remains, as well, either witty, or the cause of wit in others, reminds one of both the narrator and the Knight in the Book of the Duchess. Through loss and frustration, both are living on the outskirts of their normal existences, in deep forests, excluded from the hunt, in unnatural states of insomnia, hovering in nightfall or dawn. Their experience of loss and marginality gives them a close acquaintance with death and change. While at first their condition brings melancholy on them, both gradually temper that malady with fictions: their songs, dreams, rhetoricized remembrances, and most of all their conversation with each other. For the same conditions of isolation and alienation that precipitate melancholy characterize the symbolic fictions that draw the melancholic's attention off the self. One is often brought to wonder, in the odder passages of medieval art, whether melancholy is unexpressed fiction as well as introjected grief.

The essence of fiction-making is to take things out of reality and out of context so as to give them back to the imagination as objects of now freshly experimental thought. Whether imagination will return them to their earlier reality cannot be assured. Thus fictions inevitably subvert whatever current reality obtains, and often unnerve the imaginer, speculating on things previously taken for granted. The most original thought may thus often strike us as an unwarrantable gargoyle of the brain.

Humor enables one to put up with these grotesqueries and re-examinations. In a comic context, one may mock something without being committed to one's mockery, and think seriously without seeming to do so, even to oneself. The comic mode relieves the serious content of its tyranny over the emotions. The way we talk about something gives us perspective on it without denying its reality or rejecting its significance. The existence of rhetorical modes gives us the option of confronting certain fearsome or bothersome thoughts in the context of the ways our own minds work. We can thus circumvent the imposed authority of given reality, and be entertaining thoughts of ourselves while thinking about externalia. We have the double pleasure of thinking freely and thinking about ourselves. The pleasure we take in this exercise in turn outweighs the pain we may feel in re-examining either ourselves or the world. For the process of our minds is much more our essence than any particular thoughts that come and go through our minds. If we can exercise that process fully, we are

less vulnerable to the effects of any idea or realization. If I suddenly see I've been a fool, but can make comedy of it, wry or merry, I can then in the fictive perspective of the comedy see that while I've been a fool I am also, qua comedian, a creator and commentator of fools. The fiction prevents me from being defined, both because I make it as well as act in it, and because it revises reality. In my comedy I simultaneously delight and instruct myself, honoring the principle of docere et delectare.

Because of its clear subversiveness, comedy is the neatest illustration of the way a rhetorical or imaginative mode supersedes content in the creation of fictions. The comic mode thus seems to be the formal myth of fiction-making. Comedy is also the mode most directly dependent on our pleasure, and therefore is a model of the pleasure manifested more obliquely in other forms, and is particularly well-suited to amatory themes, where the loss or acquisition of pleasure is the main concern. With its inevitable break with decorum and control, comedy summarizes the nature of fictions.

The melancholic, who has internalized loss, in order to arrive at elegy, the celebration and assimilation of loss, must first learn, through comic exercise, how to negotiate with loss, how to make capital out of one's compromises with loss, by acquiring the power to recreate that loss on one's own initiative.

In the cave of Morpheus episode, we find not only a myth of the origins of poetry but also the handling of that myth with a

playfulness that points to the real origination of imaginative thought in the rearranging and subverting of received ideas. It is unexpectedly colloquial when Juno tells the messenger to "hve the blyve" (112), and comic when the messenger is brought up short by the intently sleeping deities, and then pounds the god insistently. A consistent narration of the encounter, whether by realistic persons or allegorical personifications, would have given us a theme, but not an independent perspective on theme. In Chaucer, the comedy produces inconsistency in the text and in our response to it, and ultimately expresses the inconsistencies inherent in our thought and in our alternately judgmental and satisfied feelings about our thought.

Jokes and fictions -- like the poem's analogous actions of dreaming, reading, praying, and conversing -- rearrange reality's elements into a pattern more conducive to pleasure than the given, diachronic flow of experience. But to make that pattern, one must first disorder the items of reality, and undo them from their empirical relationships. The moments in Morpheus' cave represent this scrambling of reality.

The scene offers the dreamer raw materials: the figure of a messenger who both executes and misrepresents authority's order, a picture of his own listlessness in the inanimate landscape, embodiments of relaxed thought, the idea of ad hoc deities, and a concrete image of fearful death. Each of these undermines

consistency and recommends change. Collectively, in effect, they suggest to the narrator his first consciously artistic act, the formulation of his featherbed vow. It is a passage of ceremony in which gods are nevertheless invoked haphazardly, promises made so colloquially as to sound like risqué bribes, and an unwonted taste for luxury indulged. It shows the combination of jest and earnest, experience and symbolism, that one would expect in a fiction that crystallizes the provisional chaos just described.

The use of a symbolic format to effect subversion, of the world or of one's habitual self, is natural to and characteristic of fiction generally, and also of humor as Freud has analyzed it.

According to Freud, the psychic purpose of humor is to release us from certain restrictions on our mental activity, such as the expectation of making sense, or of not insulting or even wishing to insult other people, or of suppressing our sexual thoughts. Thus in plays on words, the joke works by

focusing our psychical attitude upon the sound of the word instead of upon its meaning It may really be suspected that in doing so we are bringing about a great relief in psychical work and that when we make serious use of words we are obliged to hold ourselves back with a certain effort from this comfortable procedure.¹⁸⁰

This demand for making sense, at first made by others and then adopted as our own critical standard, is the first restriction our thinking meets and occasionally tries to circumvent. A child just beginning to learn language

puts words together without regard to the condition that they should make sense, in order to obtain from them the pleasurable effect of rhythm or rhyme. Little by little ;he is forbidden this enjoyment, till all that remains permitted to him are significant combinations of words. But when he is older attempts still emerge at disregarding the restrictions that have been learnt on the use of words.¹⁸¹

Chaucer's radical humor is in part his way of reverting to the earliest conditions of language to discover its powers independent of theme and meaning. Freud points to similar attempts at regression in academic circles:

With the cheerful nonsense of his Bierschwefel ["a ludicrous speech delivered at a beer party"--translator's note], for instance, the student tries to rescue his pleasure in freedom of thinking, of which he is being more and more deprived by the schooling of academic instruction. . . . when as a grown man he meets others in scientific congresses . . . after the meeting is over there comes the Kneipzeitung ["A comic set of minutes"--translator's note], which distorts the new discoveries into nonsense, and offers him a compensation for the fresh addition to his intellectual inhibition.¹⁸²

As academics struggling to formulate our digressive insights into rational discourse, we can appreciate that for the psyche

it is specially convenient to admit as valid methods of inference that are rejected by logic and . . . to put words or thoughts together without regard to the condition that they ought to make sense.¹⁸³

Then, at a certain age or in a certain mood, the critical faculty is too strong to be simply ignored by playing on words, some sort of "cover" meaning enters the joke. Freud calls this intermediate stage between nonsense play and wit a "jest," and

observes that

What distinguishes a jest from a joke is that the meaning of the sentence which escapes criticism need not be valuable or new or even good; it need merely be permissible to say the thing in this way.¹⁸⁴

The next strategy against the critical faculty in composing humor is actually to distract it with a witty joke. This becomes necessary -- and possible -- when,

If what a jest says possesses substance and value, it turns into a joke. A thought which would deserve our interest even if it were expressed in the most unpretentious form is now clothed in a form which must give us enjoyment on its own account.¹⁸⁵

That is, the form of the joke diverts our attention from the possibly disturbing or improper content. Freud gives his own best summary of how a joke based on such a thought (he terms it a "tendentious" joke) confuses our critical faculty in the midst of appealing to it:

a good joke makes, as it were, a total impression of enjoyment on us, without our being able to decide at once what share of the pleasure arises from its joking form and what share from its apt thought-content. We are constantly making mistakes in this apportionment. Sometimes we over-estimate the goodness of the joke on account of our admiration of the thought it contains, another time, on the contrary, we over-estimate the value of the thought on account of the enjoyment given us by its joking envelope. We do not know what is giving us enjoyment and what we are laughing at. This uncertainty in our judgement . . . may have provided the motive for the construction of jokes in the proper sense of the word. The thought seeks to wrap itself in a joke because in that way it recommends itself to our attention and can seem more significant and more valuable, but above all because this wrapping bribes our powers of criticism and confuses them. We are inclined to give the thought the benefit of what has pleased us in the form of the joke; and we are no longer inclined to find anything wrong that has given us enjoyment and so to spoil the source of a pleasure.¹⁸⁶

Rather than rationalizing Chaucer's comedy, by setting it in the service of a theme or an aesthetic based on one, critics confronting a jesting text should immediately, if provisionally, acquiesce to the humor's confusing of criticism. The project can only be done by being abandoned initially. Given time to sink in by this leap of faith, Chaucer's ideas as he gives them will turn out to be neither unmedieval nor tactless. The critical ghost once laid, "There ys nothyng myssayd nor do" (528).

After the critical faculty has been appeased by a minimal thought content in the joke, or rendered innocuous by being decoyed into making a mistaken judgment, then the various forbidden thoughts themselves are allowed into consciousness in the guise of jokes. Insult and obscenity are overlooked in the cleverness of their formulation. The joke's project of evading the critical faculty and the repression of hostile or sexual thoughts, in order to bring those thoughts to consciousness in an oblique way, is essentially the project of dreams as well, and the mechanisms of joke-construction overlap with those of dream-work. These mechanisms, finally, are those of symbolism generally.

Briefly, then, the undignified moment of Morpheus' awakening is the joke that opens up the unconscious to a messenger sent from Juno, whom one might describe as an advocate for emotional law and order. And the narrator's gentle frivolities in his vow to both Morpheus and Juno are vehicles that lighten as they express his awe and sorrow at the vision of death he has just seen. He has

told us at its beginning that the tale of Alcyone upset him: that upset does not evaporate, but issues into the rhetorical wild oats of his vow, whose baroque excesses of ornament pick up the unwonted vividness of emotion the story has given the narrator. His fluffy bed translates Ceyx' pelagic grave.

Our difficulty in seeing the points of these brief comedies may be explicated in terms of one of Freud's principles of dream-interpretation, namely, that the obvious, manifest content of a dream is usually a relatively unthreatening, uncompromising vehicle to which more distressing thoughts attach themselves marginally, like barnacles on the underside of a large rock in the sea. Conversely, the latent, peripheral pieces of a dream will usually be the more compromising and therefore more heavily disguised of its elements. To apply this arrangement to both the narrator's and our reactions to the story of Alcyone, we can compare the greater and the lesser concerns of each. The narrator is superficially worried about his symptom of insomnia, and therefore is struck first by the soporific effect of Morpheus' provisioning of dreams. But when it comes to the causes of his insomnia, he does not address the true parallel to his own situation: the plight of Alcyone. This deeper analogy is translated into the vow to Morpheus and the fabrication of the alter ego knight and his conversation with him.

Meanwhile, readers, ostensibly thinking about Chaucer's plot instead of themselves, see the thematic parallel between Alcyone and the narrator immediately. We are slow, however, to see the relevance

of Morpheus' benison of putting people to sleep. For as critics we may distrust the dismantling of logic in sleep. In this regard the myth of Morpheus may threaten the themes and readings and criteria we cling to in order to make sense of our literary, critical, and personal lives.

Humor is at heart confrontational, dreams diplomatic. As Freud describes them both, jokes probably offer a closer analogy with poetic composition than do dreams.

For jokes do not, like dreams, create compromises;
they do not evade the inhibition, but they insist on
maintaining play with words or with nonsense unaltered.¹⁸⁷

In pursuing the expression of certain ideas more fully, jokes partake more of the artistic activity of creating, rather than simply revising, its materials. They articulate the margins of the mind that dreams use as safe and obscure retreats. In humor, the sheer exercise of mental resource and agility overrides the repressive or critical tendencies to which dreams discreetly acquiesce.

A dream still remains a wish . . . a joke is developed play. Dreams . . . retain their connection with the major interests of life; . . . Jokes, on the other hand, seek to gain a small yield of pleasure from the mere activity, untrammelled by needs, of our mental apparatus. . . . Dreams serve predominantly for the avoidance of unpleasure, jokes for the attainment of pleasure; but all our mental activities converge in these two aims.¹⁸⁸

"And yet me lyst ryght evel to pleye" (239), the narrator protests. To adjust his reaction, we need only remember that at the poem's opening, he could feel "nothyng leef nor looth" (2). Here he is expressing the ambivalence and marginal commitment of anyone who is in fact seriously engaged with symbolic discourse.

Comedy and melancholy are both human conditions that express themselves in symbolic, fictive terms. They withdraw value or attention from common meaning to acquire special meaning for their new perspectives. Comedy works by artistic distortion to subvert assumptions. Melancholy attaches to the self all the mortalities of the world, and then judges the self by the artificially perfect world left behind. Comedy is said to cure melancholy, not because it operates in an intrinsically different way, but insofar as melancholy is less fruitful for the soul, less communicable, less liberating.

By internalizing loss the melancholic enters on a self-rejection that comedy can heal, by revealing the benefits of constructing real perspectives inside the self, rather than stubbornly borrowing the world's terms. Comedy does not splice the diversified self back together, but redeems it through changing one's attitude towards it. Comedy removes the factor of judgment from the reviewing of self. From the moment he plays despite himself, the narrator relaxes about himself, ceases to judge himself, and becomes able to invent fictions free enough really to instruct him freshly rather than confirm his hobbling fears. His initiation into the practice of fiction-making unfettered by goals or judgments enables the narrator to exchange one symbolic format for another, melancholy for comedy. His vision of pure symbolic process enables him, in a word, to change.

If metamorphosis tells of change, and articulates forms at their edges, then here, in this vision of visions, Morpheus is the dweller at the edges, who performs change. His silent comedy renders all reality as fiction. He is like a mirror that takes rays of light and reflects them as images. Chaucer presents him first without the light, as a pure potential of change. He opens one eye, he keeps another closed; his chamber is given neither to life or death; he is a deity that issues no commands. Then the messenger enters, Iris the rainbow in other versions, but here an unspecified, undispersed beam of light, that breaks when, and only when, it hits the surface of the sleepy god. For, the opposite of a black hold and its authoritative gravity, Morpheus accepts nothing into himself. He is an anti-melancholic who internalizes nothing, takes nothing on its own terms. His fracturing and scattering of all light as he portages his visions past the rapids of rationality is the laugh of symbols as they realign reference and divert understanding.

Notes to Chapter III.

Notes to pages 131-136

- 1 Eugene Vinaver, A la Recherche d'une Poétique Médiévale (Paris: Librairie Mizon, 1970); Paul Zumthor, Essai de Poétique Médiévale (Paris: Seuil, 1972); Margaret Ferguson, "Saint Augustine's Region of Unlikeness: The Crossing of Language and Exile," Georgia Review, 29 (1975), 842-864; Armand Strubel, "'Allegoria in factis' et 'Allegoria in verbis'," Poétique, 23 (1975), 342-357.
- 2 Beryl Smalley, The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages, second edition (Oxford: Blackwell, 1952), and English Friars and Antiquity in the Early Fourteenth Century (Oxford: Blackwell, 1960).
- 3 Their work on the Book of the Duchess appears in D. W. Robertson and Bernard F. Huppé, Fruyt and Chaf (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1963).
- 4 C. S. Lewis, The Allegory of Love: a Study in Medieval Tradition (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1936), pp. 44-45.
- 5 "I labour the antithesis because ardent but uncorrected lovers of medieval poetry are easily tempted to forget it. Not unnaturally they prefer symbol to allegory; and when an allegory pleases them, they are therefore anxious to pretend that it is not allegory but symbol" (Lewis, pp. 46-47).
- 6 "If our passions, being immaterial, can be copied by material inventions, then it is possible that our material world in its turn is the copy of an invisible world" (Lewis, p. 45).
- 7 "Symbolism is a mode of thought, but allegory is a mode of expression" (Lewis, p. 48).
- 8 Harry Berger, The Allegorical Temper: Vision and Reality in Book II of Spenser's Faerie Queene (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1957).
- 9 Berger, chs. v, vi, and vii.

Notes to pages 137-141

- 10 Sigmund Freud, The Interpretation of Dreams, trans. James Strachey (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), ch. 6, section B, p. 415. Freud also states this principle in Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious, trans. James Strachey (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), ch. 6, p. 220: "things that lie on the periphery of the dream-thoughts and are of minor importance occupy a central position and appear with great sensory intensity in the manifest dream, and vice versa. This gives the dream the appearance of being displaced in relation to the dream-thoughts, and this displacement is precisely what brings it about that the dream confronts waking mental life as something alien and incomprehensible."
- 11 Freud, Dreams, ch. 6, section B, p. 416.
- 12 Freud, Dreams, ch. 6, section C, p. 443.
- 13 Freud, Dreams, ch. 6, section B, p. 417.
- 14 Angus Fletcher, Allegory: the Theory of a Symbolic Mode (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1964), p. 87.
- 15 Fletcher, Allegory, p. 88.
- 16 Fletcher, Allegory, p. 145.
- 17 Fletcher, Allegory, p. 72.
- 18 Robert Guette, "Lecteur du Roman, Lecteur du Symbole," in Questions de Littérature (Romanica Candensia 8 [1960]), pp. 50-56: "symbolism without significance: that is, symbolism residing in the sheer act of posing the text to oneself as a riddle. A hidden sense, but often simply a literal sense accompanied by the possibility of a hidden sense -- nothing more."
- 19 Guette, "Symbolisme et 'Seneffiance' au Moyen Age," in Questions, pp. 33-49: "Dare we assert that readers have always been able to attribute to the symbol a significance?" "These attentive readers, sensitive to this art, that looks for the essence of things and the events behind apparent reality, did not always succeed in discovering it. Were they therefore disconcerted and disappointed? I think not. Critics have noted many times how much the whole era was a stranger to the taste for exactitude in objective facts, how little it was preoccupied with mental exactness. What could it appreciate in a mystic aura whose precise sense escaped it? The obscure, the marvellous, the incomprehensible, and the inexplicable intersect."

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20 "The mysterious and marvellous character of these shadows, where suddenly known symbolic traits (numbers or colors, for example) glimmer furtively, ought to arouse a sort of anguish, an inquietude, and doubtless a delicious curiosity. One perceived the mystery, and doubtless did not require that it dissipate." Guiette, "Symbolisme et 'Seneffiance'."

21 Wolfgang Clemen, Chaucer's Early Poetry, trans. C. A. M. Sym (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1964), chapter I, pp. 23-66.

22 Clemen, p. 28.

23 According to Clemen, Chaucer's restraint in the matter of theme creates in narrator and reader a "state of uncertainty, indeed of vague emptiness, [which] unconsciously evokes a mood of expectancy" (p. 28). It suggests to us that we be ready to interpret everything that comes along, while at the same time such thematic restraint forestalls a premature closure of the consolatory conversation. Chaucer's uncommitted language answers his need "to suggest that consolation was possible, without however putting this into words" (p. 47).

Clemen characterizes Chaucer's indirect idiom as a kind of ornamentation suggestive of the symbolic: "This love of the round-about approach, the ornamental protal to the actual house, is noticeable in all Chaucer's early poetry. . . . The liking for an indirect method of presentation, for shrouding the theme in exuberant ornament and disguise, corresponds to the gout des complications illustrated in the flamboyant style of late Gothic architecture" (pp. 29-30).

24 See, for example, Robinson's remarks in his introduction to the Book of the Duchess: "For allegory was really foreign to his genius, and he had to work slowly out of it to find the more natural expression of his later years" (Works, p. 267). But can a "natural" expression emerge from anything but the practice of the artificial? It is the eternal attraction and advantage of allegory that it is by definition "foreign" to anybody's genius. It is, quite literally, the mode whose alien expressions enable us to speculate as in a glass on ourselves and our notions of reality.

25 Thus Froissart, in the most obvious source for Chaucer's opening, tells us he suffers "Pour quelle amour" (PA 11). In the opening description of the Roman we read that May is the "tens enmoreus" (48), a time "Lors estuet loines genz entendre / A estre gais e amoureux" (78-79), and when "toute rien d'amer s'esfroie" (85).

26 Bede, De Schematibus et Tropis, 2.12 (FL 20.184): "the trope by which something different from what is said is signified."

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27 Armand Strubel, "'Allegoria in factis' et 'Allegoria in verbis'," Poétique 23 (1975), pp. 342-357: "

28 "The extra-linguistic symbolism of the referents to the pure phenomenon of signification, doing which evades the issue of a 'figured' sense inherent in discourse."

29 "Venit Philippus, ostendit ei Iesum qui clausus latebat in littera, et -- o mira doctoris virtus! -- eadem hora credit, baptizatus, fidelis et sanctus est ac magister de discipulo," Jerome, Lettres, 53.5 (Paris: Société d'Éditions Les Belles Lettres, 1953), III.14: "Philip came, showed him Jesus Who lay hidden in the letter, and -- oh wonderful power of the teacher!-- at that same hour he believed, was baptized, and from a student was made a faithful and holy teacher."

30 Augustine, Confessiones, 8.12.29: "Take up and read."

31 Margaret Ferguson, "Saint Augustine's Region of Unlikeness: The Crossing of Language and Exile," Georgia Review, 29 (1975), pp. 842-864.

32 Augustine, De Doctrina Christiana 3.15.23 (PL 34.74): "Therefore in the case of figured language a rule of this sort shall be observed, that what is read be turned over with close consideration until an interpretation favoring the reign of charity be educed."

33 PL 112.

34 Gregory, Moralium Libri XXIII, sive, Expositio in Librum 3. Job (PL 76.278), 23.24: "For in holy Scripture, 'lectus,' or 'grabatus,' or 'stratum,' is sometimes taken to signify fleshly sensualism, and other times a lull in good works, and still other times temporal repose."

35 Gregory, Moralia (PL 76.281), 23.25: "For in holy Scripture, 'panis' is sometimes taken to signify the Lord Himself, sometimes spiritual grace, sometimes learning in divine doctrine, and other times the preaching of heretics, or the maintenance of the present life, or the enjoyment of human pleasure."

36 See, for example, Gregory's Moralia, 17.29 (PL 76.29): "Possumus etiam columnas coeli et ipsas Ecclesias non inconvenienter accipere;" 18.46 (PL 76.81): "Quid enim per Indiam quae nigrum populum mittit, nisi hic mundus accipitur;" 18.52 (PL 76.88): "Quid Aethiopiam, nisi praesentem mundum accipimur?"

37 Augustine, De Doctrina Christiana, 2.6.8 (PL 34.39).

38 Augustine, De Doctrina Christiana, 2.15.22. (PL 34.46).

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- 39 Augustine, De utilitate Credendi, 4.10 (PL 42.72):
 "When some truth is understood from another's writing, when he who wrote would not have understood it. In which type [of misreading] there is no little usefulness, and indeed if you consider more closely, the whole fruit of reading is there complete."
- 40 H.-I. Marrou, St. Augustin et la fin de la culture antique (Paris, 1938), p. 305.
- 41 The turn of their argument occurs at paragraph 33 of a total of 46 (Augustine, The Teacher, trans. John H. S. Burleigh in Augustine: Earlier Writings [Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1953], pp. 62-101).
- 42 Marcia Colish, The Mirror of Language: a Study in the Medieval Theory of Knowledge (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1968), p. 233.
- 43 Colish, p. 233.
- 44 Colish, p. 19.
- 45 Colish, p. 315.
- 46 Colish, p. 338.
- 47 Colish, p. 255.
- 48 Colish, p. 284.
- 49 Colish, p. 287.
- 50 "Who but an Ignoramus would dare to say that poets purposely make their inventions void and empty, trusting in the superficial appearance of their tales to show their eloquence? . . . Then is any reader so muddled as not to see clearly that Vergil was a philosopher; or mad enough to think that he, with all his deep learning, would, merely for the sake of displaying his eloquence . . . have led the shepherd Aristeus into his mother Climene's presence in the depths of the earth, or brought Aeneas to see his father in Hades? Or can anyone believe he wrote such lines without some meaning or intention hidden beneath the superficial veil of myth?" Doccaccio on Poetry: being the Preface and the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Books of Doccaccio's Genealogia Deorum Gentilium, trans. Charles G. Osgood (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1930), 14.10, pp. 52-53.

Notes to pages 154-159

51 Bernard F. Huppé, Doctrine and Poetry: Augustine's Influence on Old English Poetry (New York: State Univ. of New York, 1959), p. 125.

52 Huppé, Doctrine and Poetry, p. 14.

53 Thomas Roche, Jr., The Kindly Flame: a Study of the Third and Fourth Books of Spenser's Faerie queene (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1964) pp. 5-6, citing Sir John Harington, Orlando Furioso (London: 1591), sig. 111v, repr. in G. Gregory Smith, Elizabethan Critical Essays (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1937), vol. 2, pp. 201-202.

54 Gregory, Moralia, 21.1 (PL 76.188): "The thoughts of the Fathers preceding us are put before the eyes of our consideration as varicolored boughs. When we flee the full understanding of the letter in them, it is as if we stripped off the bark, and when we follow the full understanding of the letter, it is as if we kept the bark. And when the bark of the letter is stripped away from them, the inner lustre of the allegory is shown, and when the bark is left on, flourishing examples of outward understanding are revealed."

55 Gregory, Moralia, 21.1: "and the offspring of good works have varying color, since sometimes, with the bark of the letter stripped off, one considers inner things more keenly, and other times, the fabric of history retained, one models oneself well in outward affairs."

56 Raban Maur, Allegoriae in Sacram Scripturam (PL 112.1066): "'Testa' is the flesh of Christ, as in the Psalms: 'My strength was dry like a shard,' because the flesh of Christ attained to fortitude through the fire of the passion.

"'Testa', vigor of exertion, as in Job: 'Who, healing, scraped [himself] with a shard,' because holy men turn away the flood of unlawful delight with the vigor of their mortifications."

57 Raban Maur, Allegoriae (PL 112.004): "'Cortex' is a token of the cross, as in Songs: 'Your cheeks are like the skins of pomegranates,' because the holy allow themselves to be afflicted in imitation of the cross. [Or,] by 'corticea' [is meant] pleasures, as in Job: 'They ate the barks of trees,' that is, they loved the external pleasures of visible things. [Or,] by 'corticea' [is meant] historical senses, as in Genesis: 'With the bark taken away, the tree appeared,' that is, with the historical senses removed, the spiritual beauty of understanding becomes known."

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58 Adam of St. Victor, Sequence III (PL 196.1430-1434):
 "Now let us contemplate the nut, for the nut is brought into the light; it is a mystery of light, conveying a trinal unity; it confers three things: oil, light, and nourishment. The nut is Christ, the outer shell of the nut are the sufferings of the cross around the flesh. The inner shell, the body of bones. By the kernel are signified deity covered with flesh and the sweetness of Christ."

59 A. C. Spearing, Medieval Dream-Poetry (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1976), p. 74.

60 John of Salisbury, Policraticus 2.14 (PL 199.428):
 "Who does not know that the meanings of dreams are various, as experience proves, and the authority of most confirms?"

61 John of Salisbury, Policraticus 2.15 (PL 199.430):
 "A thing also is shown sometimes more clearly and sometimes more obscurely, and now impresses itself upon the soul, and now is stated through the intimation of another object."

62 John of Salisbury, Policraticus 2.16 (PL 199.432):
 "As in the revealing of aenigmas and figures, so it is in the interpreting of dreams, the meaning of things is to be attended to most skillfully, since it is more manifold than the sign by so much as the works that are wrought by artifices imitating nature are than the works of nature."

63 John of Salisbury, Policraticus 2.16 (PL 199.432-433):
 "At times, nonetheless, the traces of truth are to be followed through the opposite of things Yet frequent, and as a regular rule, it is that interpretation reverts to [proceeding] from similar to similar things."

64 Robert Holkot, Commentarium in Libro Sapientiae, 18.202 (Basel, 1586): "Such dreams are clearly frequently significant of future illnesses."

65 Holkot, Sapientiae, 7.103: "for divination by dreams is not possible: for divination implies certainty, but no certainty about future events can be had through dreaming: therefore it is nothing."

66 Holkot, Sapientiae, 17.102: "For it is commonly said, although it is not always true, that the right interpretation of a dream is, to explain the dream by its opposite. . . . because dreams ought to be turned to their contrary sense."

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- 67 Holkot, Sapientiae, 18.202: "Second, because of the diversity of meanings in dreams: for a dream can signify equivocally and equally many things: and therefore a man appealing to one in particular is instantly deceived. Third, since many dreams have to be interpreted by similitude, and many by contrariety: and [the meaning] is difficult to discern in this case."
- 68 Holkot, Sapientiae, ending of 7.103 and 18.202.
- 69 Holkot, Sapientiae, 7.103: "Idiots are truly called good diviners: for they are solicitous neither of the world nor of themselves. Whence their dreams are definitely certain, if anyone knew how they should be interpreted."
- 70 Todorov describes the genre of the fantastic as enduring while the reader or protagonist hesitates between natural and supernatural explanations: "Celui qui perçoit l'événement doit opter pour l'une des deux solutions possibles: ou bien il s'agit d'une illusion des sens, d'un produit de l'imagination et les lois du monde restent alors ce qu'elles sont; ou bien l'événement a véritablement eu lieu, il est partie intégrante de la réalité, mais alors cette réalité est régie par des lois inconnues de nous. . . . Le fantastique occupe le temps de cette incertitude; des qu'on choisit l'une ou l'autre réponse, on quitte le fantastique pour entrer dans un genre voisin, l'étrange ou le merveilleux. Le fantastique, c'est l'hésitation éprouvée par un être qui ne connaît que les lois naturelles, face à un événement en apparence surnaturel" (Todorov, Introduction à la Littérature Fantastique [Paris: Seuil, 1970], p. 29).
- In a sense the Fantastic is a fable of interpreting, by virtue of its basis in the reader's hesitation and decision-making: "Ensuite, cette hésitation peut être ressentie également par un personnage; ainsi le rôle du lecteur est pour ainsi dire confié à un personnage et dans le même temps l'hésitation se trouve représentée, elle devient un des thèmes de l'oeuvre" (pp. 37-38).
- As in interpretation, conclusiveness and resolve put an end to the genre: "Le fantastique mène donc une vie pleine de dangers, et peut s'évanouir à tout instant" (p. 46).
- 71 See RR 18401-18514.
- 72 "Sometimes a frenzy seizes on a man / In illness; and, if he has lain alone / And is not guarded well, he may get up / And run away; nor does his wandering cease / Until he finds himself in some wild place -- / A meadow, vineyard, or a wood -- and there / He falls" (Robbins, p. 389).

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73 "One often sees even a healthy man / Who lives unwisely or whose native bent / Inclines him oft to meditate too much / Or to be melancholy or to fear / Unreasonably, who pictures to himself / Apparitions numerous and strange" (Robbins, pp. 389-390).

74 "Some will with great devotion meditate, / And too much meditation makes appear / Before them things of which they have but thought; / But they believe they see them openly" (Robbins, p. 390).

75 "This is but lying and deceit" (Robbins, p. 390).

76 "Many a man is so deceived by dreams / That, jumping from his bed, he dons his clothes / And shoes, and gathers all his other gear, / As if his common sense were still asleep / While all his other senses were awake. / He takes his staff and scrip or bill and bow / Or sickle and goes, traveling afar -- / He knows not where; may even mount a steed / And ride o'er hill and dale through dust and mire, / Arriving at some unfamiliar place; / And, when his common sense at last awakes, / He marvels and is very much amazed" (Robbins, p. 389).

77 See RR 18342: "Touz morz de freit e de mesaise."

78 "I will not say that dreams are true or false, / Or whether men should all reject or none, / Or why, when one may be most horrible, / Another's most agreeable and fair, / According as the apparitions come / In various complexions of the mind / Resulting from a difference of age / Or habit; nor shall I attempt to say / If God sends revelations by such dreams, / Or if the evil spirits by them try / To tempt men to their peril. None of this / Will I discuss, but to my theme return" (Robbins, p. 393).

79 Nature's skepticism would seem to be an ironic comment on the entire poem, the vision she herself occurs in, which the narrator opens with an assertion that he has "fiance / Que songes est sene-fiance / Des biens as genz e des anuiz" (RR 15-17): "trust that dreams signify blessings and misfortunes to people."

80 Woody Allen, "My Philosophy," in Getting Even (New York: Warner, 1972), pp. 28-29.

Notes to pages 183-210

81 Chaucer's borrowings from his sources are a neat indication of his preoccupation with beginnings. From Machaut's Jugement dou Roy de Behaingne he borrows steadily from lines 1-670, and after that only intermittently from lines 1072-1204. From Machaut's Remede de Fortune he borrows steadily from about lines 23-463 and then 681-1198, then only intermittently around lines 1467, 1629, and 1671-1683, and, finally, briefly at lines 4074-4075. From Froissart's Paradys d'Amours he borrows heavily from lines 1-31, then only from 216 and 1685-1723. The heaviest borrowing from the Roman de la Rose comes from the first 700 lines or so, with less dense borrowing around lines 1300-2000, 4300, and 7000-8000, and only spot borrowing after line 10,000. Single borrowings from the Jugement dou Roy de Navarre, the Lai de Confort, and the Dit du Vergier all occur within the first 200 lines of these poems.

82 Oxford English Dictionary, "Pan," sb².

83 Beryl Rowland, "'A Round Tour of Yvoyre'," Notes and Queries, x (1963), p. 9.

84 For his remarks on the symbolism of the book in the Middle Ages, see "The Book as Symbol," in European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages (New York: Pantheon Books for the Bollingen Foundation, 1953), ch. 16, sections 4-8.

85 Ten Brink, cited by E. F. Shannon in Chaucer and the Roman Poets (New York: Russell and Russell, 1964) p. 5.

86 D. W. Robertson, Jr., and Bernard F. Huppé, Fruyt and Chaf: Studies in Chaucer's Allegories (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1963).

87 See, for example, Ambrose, Hexaemeron 5.13 (PL 14.224), and Isidore of Seville, Etymologiae 12.7.25 (PL 82.462).

88 See, for example, Pseudo-Lucian, Halcyon (London: Heinemann, 1967), pp. 303-317; Lactantius, Argumenta Metamorphoseon Ovidii 11.10 (in Mythographi Latini, ed. T. Munckerus [Amsterdam, 1681], vol. 2, p. 269); and Berchorius, Reductorium Morale 15: Ovidius Moralizatus 11 (Utrecht: Instituut voor Latijn der Ryks-universiteit, 1962), p. 160.

89 "Those two whom Love made eternal companions, Alcyone and Ceyx, make their nests on the seashore in the mildest weather of earliest spring."

90 Boccaccio, Genealogie Deorum Gentilium Libri, XI.18: "Indeed, Ceyx persisted in the journey, the ship being readied, trusting rather in his own desire than in the counsel or benevolence of his wife."

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- 91 Robertson and Huppé, p. 36.
- 92 Robertson and Huppé, p. 39.
- 93 Petrus Berchorius, Reductorium Morale 15; Ovidius Moralizatus 11 (Utrecht: Instituut voor Latijn der Ryks-universiteit, 1962), pp. 161-162.
- 94 Berchorius, p. 162.
- 95 Holkot, Sapientiae, 17.192.
- 96 Robertson and Huppé, p. 40.
- 97 D. W. Robertson, Jr., A Preface to Chaucer: Studies in Medieval Perspective (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1962), p.283.
- 98 Berchorius, p. 161: "Thus when the soul, the bride of Christ, sees that her husband, the Son of God, ascends the ship [i.e., the mast] of the cross, where He endured His trial and died: she ought to set herself with him in the sea, that is, in the bitterness of penance and confession, out of devotion; and be with Him when He is made a bird in resurrection; and be renewed at the same time by ascension; and thus to put on the likeness of a bird; and to ascend and fly through contemplation, as it is said thus to the psalmist: Your way lies in the sea and your paths through manifold waters."
- 99 The peace and devotion of Alcyone are rendered in maternal terms, different from but confirming Berchorius' general understanding of her, in an anonymous English sermon: "But be þis alcheon I vndirstond Seynt Anne, þat as þis day brought forthe a birde, þat was Mary. þis Mary kept no company with synneful men to be drawn down depe, ne God suffred hur not to flete aboven with patriarches and prophetes; but he kepte hur drie and free from all maner of synne" (Middle English Sermons from Ms. Royal 18B.xxiii, ed. W. O. Ross, EETS o.s. 209 [London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1940], sermon 50, p. 328).
- 100 Boccaccio, De Genealogia Gentilium Deorum, ed. V. Romano (Bari: Laterza, 1951), 9.1, p. 438: "they thought Juno led maidens engaged to be married on their way from the homes of their parents to their spouses, and thence she is named "Interducta."
- 101 Boccaccio, Genealogie, 9.1, p. 437: "Preterea et parturientibus preesse volunt;" and p. 436: "Sic Martianus illam dicit nutrisse Mercurium."

Notes to pages 215-222

- 102 Boccaccio, Genealogie, 9.1, p. 440: "Raban moreover derives "Juno" from "ianonen" ["of doors"], that is, doors for the purgations of women, because she opens as it were the gates of a mother for the child and of a bride for the husband."
- 103 Donald E. Queller, The Office of Ambassador in the Middle Ages (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1967), p. 155.
- 104 Queller, p. 5.
- 105 Queller, p. 7.
- 106 Queller, p. 8. Thus Ovid calls Iris "fidissima nuntia vocis" (Meta. 11.518).
- 107 Queller, p. 25.
- 108 OED, "routen" v.² and v.³; "rout" sb.II.1.4; "router" sb.¹.
- 109 FA, 756-762:
- Mais s'en son cuer tient secretement close
De Morpheus la parole et enclose,
Et le matin,
Au resveillier, l'en souveigne et la glose
Et qu'elle dongne a chascun mot sa glose,
Certes, je tien que mon fait se repose
En dras de lin. (756-762)
- Froissart is another poet whose picture of Morpheus as a special comforter of lovers Chaucer is at pains to ignore:
- De Morpheus le Dieu dormant
Par lequel tout li vrai amant
Sont conforté, et c'est raisons,
En songes et en visions. (PA 1718-1721)
- 110 Gower tells the story of Alcyone in the Confessio Amantis to make a different kind of point: that dreams can be true:
- Bot forto schewe in evidence
That thei ful ofte sothe thinges
Betokne, I thenke in my wrytinges
To telle a tale therupon. (CA 2922-2925)

His different focus leads him, for example, to postpone informing us of Ceyx' drowning until the vision shows it, thus emphasizing' its truth-bearing function. He distinguishes visions of fruitful sleep from Sloth, the sin the Confessor is discussing here. Despite his more didactic purpose, Gower not only associates Morpheus with good sleep, but he also includes pleasure in the scene of vision:

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And thus full of delit
 Slep hath his hous; and of his couche
 Withinne his chambre if I schal touche,
 Of hebenus that slepi tree
 The bordes al aboute be,
 And for he scholde slepe softe,
 Upon a fethrebed alofte

He lith with many a pilwe of doun. (CA 3014-3021)

While Gower follows Ovid's description fairly continuously, he does include at least two details that are to be found previously only in the Book of the Duchess: the down pillows on the featherbed, and the difficulty Iris has in penetrating Morpheus' slumber (3029-30).

111 "From Morpheus, the sleeping God, by whom all true lovers are comforted, for sure, in dreams and visions." Morpheus engineers visions that console when reality will not, in accord with Freud's conception of dreams as wish-fulfillments achieved when unconscious desires circumvent the censorship of ego, super-ego, and, here, the Dangier of the lady as well:

Car en dormant je me conseille,
 Ce m'est vis, au dieu Morpheus,
 Qui mes besongnes, qu'on toueille,
 Remet assés bellement sus,
 Car avoir me fait ris et jus
 De ma dame et pluisours depors,
 Dont en veillant sui moult ensus;
 Je n'ai nul bien, se je ne dors.

(Ballade 33.9-16)

See also the communication between sleeping, parted lovers through the offices of Morpheus and Iris in Froissart's Le Joli Buisson de Jonece, 2136-2144, for which this narrator as well promises Morpheus a gift (2207-2209).

112 "I ought to render great thanks to him for it, at all times, be it fiction or truth."

113 "In Morpheus she will frankly confide."

114 "He had a most rich bed, and a couch." "To sleep better, I promise and give him a hat with a peacock feather and a soft bed of falcon feathers."

115 "And the statue of Morpheus, on whom I have long relied, will be there, grand and by a great master, sculpted in fine gold, on a pillar of fine silver, well-enameled, by which people will remember his importance and his power."

116 "He had a soft bed with rich ornament, covered with a beautiful black coverlet. The frame was not of aspen, but of ebony, so I saw."

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117 Cecil and Margery Gray, The Bed, or the Clinophile's Vade Mecum (London: Nicholson and Watson, 1946), p. 52.

118 Lt.-Col. Dervieu, "Le Lit et le Berceau au Moyen Age," Bulletin Monumental, nos. 5-6 (1912), p. 396: "Au XIV^e siècle, l'aspect de ce meuble se modifie sensiblement. Les bois de lit prennent moins d'importance et son presque entièrement recouverts d'étoffes ou de draperies flottantes."

119 Strabo, Glossa Ordinaria (PL 113.741): "because the beauty of the Church, in the meditations of wisdom and in the ascent of virtues through mortification of the flesh and chastity with the dignity of martyrs, ought to shine forth in doctrine."

120 Gregory, Homiliarum in Ezechielem Libri II, homily II.7 (PL 76.1020): "But he sought him, and did not find him, for although he desired with a great love nonetheless he whom he loved was not allowed him."

121 Gregory, Homiliarum in Evangelia Libri II, homily 25 (PL 76.1190): "for we seek the beloved in bed, when in this present life we sigh for a little of the repose of our Redeemer. We seek through the night, for, even though our mind wakes now in this night, nevertheless the eye is dark. But whoever does not find his beloved, stirs and rises, and goes about the city, that is, runs through the holy Church of the saints with his mind and wondering; through quarters and streets he shall seek him, that is, through narrow and wide paths shall he look, to see whether he may find in them the traces he values, for they are several, even in this secular life, that have something to be imitated with the action of virtue."

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122 Gregory, Moralia, c. 20 (PL 76.273): "What does it mean that the speech of divinity is made known to us through a dream, unless that we do not know the secrets of God, if we waken to earthly desires? For in dream the external senses sleep, and inner senses are discerned. If therefore we wish to contemplate inward things, we ought to fall asleep to external influence."

123 Gregory, Moralia, c.20 (PL 76.274): "they hear the voice of God as if in a dream, while they are abstracted from carnal sensations in the meditation of the mind."

124 Gregory, Moralia, c. 20 (PL 76.274): "For nocturnal vision customarily appears to the contemplation of the mind under certain images. While in daylight we discern more certainly, in nocturnal vision truly we see more completely. . . . Night, indeed, is this present life, and so long as we are in it, we are in darkness, because we regard inward things under an incertain imagining."

125 The source passages in the Roman are 49-146, 490-508, 645-700, 713-733, 1349-1444.

126 The number of lines for each motif in each poem are:

BD 398-400 path & flowers	3 lines	22 lines	RR 1417-1438
402-404 Flora & Zephyr	3 lines	12 lines	8411-8422
405-409 earth & heaven	5 lines	8 lines	8423-8430
410-413 forgetting winter	4 lines	2 lines	61-62
416-433 trees & animals	18 lines	57 lines	1352-1408
434-442 Argus	9 lines	7 lines	12790-12796

127 Marcelle Thiebaux, The Stag of Love: The Chase in Medieval Literature (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1967), p. 49.

128 Beryl Rowland, Blind Beasts: Chaucer's Animal World (Kent State Univ. Press, 1971), p. 130.

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- 129 Rowland, Beasts, p. 131.
- 130 Rowland, Beasts, p. 133.
- 131 Rowland, Beasts, p. 134.
- 132 Rowland, Beasts, p. 135.
- 133 Few readers really react so unilaterally to Alcyone's story as Thiébaux, for example, suggests: "by sweeping away their mythic natures and moving transfiguration, Chaucer gives us only the unalleviated spectacle of their human wretchedness, which they acknowledge to each other in Alcyone's dream." This reading ignores the place of her story in the narrator's mind.
- 134 Chester Nativity, cited by G. R. Owst, Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England, second edition (London: Blackwell, 1961), pp. 498-499.
- 135 Owst, p. 499.
- 136 Giraldus Cambrensis, De Instructione Principis Libri III (London: Impensis Societatis, 1846), p. 5: "Augustus Octavian, applied himself so much to liberal studies, especially eloquence, that not a day slipped by, not even on the battlefield, when he did not read, write, and dictate."
- 137 Guillaume de Pouille, Gesta Roberti Wiscardi, cited by Bezzola, Les Origines et la Formation de la Littérature Courtoise en Occident: 500-1200 (Paris: Librairie Champion, 1963), vol. 3, p. 491 (see also pp. 29, 79, 182).
- 138 John of Salisbury, Polycraticus 2.16 (PL 199.433): "The truth shines forth most often by [the example of] certain persons, insofar as they have a composite soul."
- 139 See Russell A. Peck, "Theme and Number in Chaucer's Book of the Duchess," in Silent Poetry: Essays in Numerological Analysis, ed. Alastair Fowler (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970), p. 100.
- 140 Seryl Rowland argues against such sentimentality in Beasts, pp. 161-162.
- 141 Kemp Malone, Chapters on Chaucer (Baltimore: 1951), p. 33.

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- 142 Rowland, Beasts, p. 163.
- 143 Holkot, Sapientiae, lectio 141: "Likewise Isidore says at the end of the eighth chapter of the Etymologies says that Mercury is depicted with a canine head for the dog is the most sagacious animal and Mercury is the god of eloquence."
- 144 Berchorius, De Formis Figurisque Deorum, cited (without any printed reference) by Patrick J. Gallacher, Love, the Word, and Mercury: a Reading of John Gower's Confessio Amantis (Albuquerque: Univ. of New Mexico Press, 1975), p. 177.
- 145 See Gertrude Grace Sill, A Handbook of Symbols in Christian Art (New York: MacMillan, 1975), p. 183.
- 146 The Roman offers a quite similar landscape at lines 1417-1430 of the English translation, describing "grass, as thicke yset / And softe as any veluet," "the sote grene gras / As fayre, as thicke, as myster was," and the plenitude of flowers -- but there is no path. Guillaume's dreamer is more concerned with gates he can see lead into a garden, while Chaucer's confronts the problems of transitions in and of themselves: how to pass through gardens.
- 147 "'Twas spring, and I was roaming; Zephyr caught sight of me; I retired; he pursued and I fled; but he was the stronger, and Boreas had given his brother full right of rape by daring to carry off the prize from the house of Erechtheus. However, he made amends for his violence by giving me the name of bride, and in my marriage-bed I have naught to complain of. I enjoy perpetual spring," trans. James George Frazer (London: Heinemann, 1931), p. 275.
- 148 "Thou dost begin in April and passest into the time of May; the one month claims thee as it flies, the other as it comes. Since the borders of the months are thine and appertain to thee, either of the two is a fitting time to sing thy praises," trans. Frazer, p. 275.
- 149 "I was about to ask why these games are marked by greater wantonness and broader jests; but it occurred to me that the divinity is not strait-laced, and that the gifts she brings lend themselves to delights. . . . A rakish stage fits Flora well;

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she is not, believe me she is not, to be counted among your buskined goddesses. The reason why a crowd of drabs frequents these games is not hard to discover. She is none of your glum, none of your high-flown ones; she wishes her rites to be open to the common herd; and she warns us to use life's flower, while it still blooms" (Frazer, pp. 285-287).

150 "Then Zephyrus and Flora, his fair wife, / The goddess and the lady of the flowers, / Enlarged the little buds of opening blooms . . . 'Tis from these two the blossoms take their birth; / They recognize no other parentage, / For he and she together sow the seeds / Throughout the earth, and give the flowers form / And all the hues with which they are made fair -- / The blossoms prized by maidens and young men / Delighting in fair chaplets made for love -- / And very fine and great their true love is" (Robbins, p. 170; there is an ellipsis in this translation because he does not follow here the same ordering of lines as in the French text I cite).

151 Together Flora and Juno momentarily reclaim the privilege of giving birth without a mate, as Flora helps Juno bear Mars without Jupiter in retaliation for his having borne Minerva without her (see Fasti 5.229-260).

152 "Upon such beds as I've described to you, / Free from all thought of harlotry or rape, / Those who were pleased to play the game of love / With kisses and embraces would unite. / In groves the verdant trees stretched out their limbs, / Protecting thus the lovers from the sun / With curtains and pavilions made of leaves. / There carried on their play and caroling / And lazy pleasantries this folk secure, / Void of all care except to lead their lives / In frank and joyous amiability. / Not yet had king or prince brought despotism / To pinch and rob the folk. All equals were. / Nor yet for private property they strove. / Well did they know this saying is no lie / Or foolishness: 'There's no companionship / 'Twixt Love and Seignory.' Whom Love unites / Either's supremacy will quickly separate" (Robbins, p. 171).

153 Meta. 2.846-847: "Sovereignty and Love do not suit well, nor remain in one place together."

154 Love wol nat been constreyned by maistrye.
Whan maistrie comth, the God of Love anon
Beteth his wynges, and farewel, he is gon!
Love is a thyng as any spirit free. (FKlT. 764-767)

155 Ne may loue be compeld by maisterie:
For soone as maisterie comes, sweet loue anone
Taketh his nimble wings, and soone away is gone. (FQ 3.1.25)

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156 "You had thought / That earth had into competition gone /
With heaven to see which should be better starred" (Robbins, p. 170).

157 "When forest trees / Achieve fresh verdure, though they dry
have been / While winter yet endured, when prideful Earth, /
Forgetting all her winter poverty / Now that again she bathes
herself in dew, / Exults to have a new-spun, gorgeous dress"
(Robbins, p. 4).

158 "Each from its neighbor distant fathoms five / Or six, and
yet the branches were so long / And high that for defense against
the heat / They knit together at the tops and kept / The sun from
shining through upon the ground / And injuring the tender, growing
grass" (Robbins, p. 28).

159 K. M. Briggs, The Faeries in English Tradition and Literature
(Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1967), p. 83.

160 Briggs, p. 83.

161 El uergier ot dains e cheuriaus,
[E mout] grant plante d'escuriaus,
Qui par ces arbres grauissoient;
Conins i auoit, qui issoient
Toute lor hors de lor tesnieres
En plus de quarante manieres
Aloient entr'aus tornoiant
Sor l'erbe fresche uerdoiant. (RR 1375-1382)

"Roebuck and deer rambed about the lawns, And many a squirrel
climbed from tree to tree; / From out their burrows rabbits freely
ran, / Of which there were not less than thirty kinds / That
tourneyed on the dewy, verdant grass" (Robbins, p. 28).

162 /The legend of St. Eustace, who was converted in the
course of a long digression on horseback from a failed hunt in
the forest, upon meeting with a stag with a crucifix between
its antlers, offers a parallel to Chaucer's hunt away from the
hunt. Pisanello (d. 1455?) has a beautiful depiction of the
encounter, painted in 1436, whose style is not unlike that of
Chaucer's symbolic narrative's. Gold studs ornament horse and
rider in the middle of the dark scene. Finely delineated but
unrelated pointers and greyhounds of various sizes cluster

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around them. Rabbits, swans (with no water), bears, and deer inhabit the wide marginal portion of the canvass, some dark and almost undetectable, some picked out with unnatural luminousness. The marginal animals are all of a size, regardless of their mutual proportions in reality. In this assemblage of unreal and isolatable symbolic images, the crucifix at the stag's antlers seems strangely unsurprising, as though it had projected a visionary order onto common objects.

- 163 W. W. Rouse Ball, A Short Account of the History of Mathematics, fourth edition (New York: Dover, 1960, rept. of London: 1908), p. 186. His remarks on Albus are on pp. 156-158.
- 164 Oxford English Dictionary, "Count," v.I.
- 165 OED, "Reckon," v.I.
- 166 OED, "Tell," v.I,II,III.
- 167 Altfranzösisches Wörterbuch, "conter" vb.
- 168 Middle English Dictionary, "mēten," v.1.1 "to measure," v.1.4 "to judge;" "mēten," v.3.1,2 "to dream;" v.5 "to design."
- 169 "Argus signat mundi principes et prelatos qui sunt a Iunone i. populus christianum commendatur . . . Vel dic quod Argus est diabolus oculatissimus et subtilis que Yo mutata in vacca i. animas peccatrices in sue dominio detornet," excerpt from an unedited ms. by F. Ghisalberti, "L'Ovidius Moralizatus di Pierre Bersuire," Studi Romani 23 (1933), p. 105.
- 170 Holkot, Sapientiae, lectio 37: "a devil rushing in the middle way who circulates seeking whom to devour."
- 171 "One candle in a lantern can give light / To many men and yet have plenty left. / This simile is clear to all but fools" (Robbins, p 151).
- 172 See Thomas Waleys, De Modo Componendi Sermones, in Th.-M. Charland, Artes Praedicandi: contributions à l'histoire de la rhétorique au moyen âge (Paris and Ottawa: 1936), c.4, p. pp. 355-356, who regards digression as an essential part of the preaching art, and justifies it in part by an analogy to the practice of poets: "Quod enim si in medio sermonis occurrat praedicatori, occasione alicujus dicti ab ipso, aliquid unde populus posset ad devotionem moveri, quod, licet videatur incidens extra thema, tamen plus prodesse poterit populo quam illud quod dicere intendebat prosequendo thema et se infra limites thematis

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coarctando, numquid in hoc casu praedicator debet omittere id quod magis expedit aedificationi proximi, ut se teneat infra limites thematis sui? Credere vel hoc dicere non solum esset vanum sed etiam profanum, cum super omnia in omnibus sermonibus honor Dei et utilitas proximi intendatur. Nec in tali declinare a themate est ab arte praedicandi recedere; immo est artem praedicandi certissime observare."

Si enim poetae, non obstante quod ars metrificandi observet certum numerum syllabarum et tempora, quandoque, ut sententia sit pulchrior et plenior, licet ad numerum syllabarum addere, nec tamen reputatur contra artem poeticam agere sed potius secundum artem, quare non magis licebit praedicatori, in casu praemisso, aliquantulum extra thema disgrederi? Nec tamen judicabitur facere contra artem praedicandi, cum hoc sit summa praedicandi scientia: populum ad aedificationem et boni operationem inducere.

173 Bartholomaeus Anglicus, De Proprietatibus Rerum, 15.14.

174 John Trevisa, On the Properties of Things (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1975), vol. 2, p. 734.

175 Peter Haidu, "Humor and the Aesthetics of Medieval Romance," Romantic Review 64 (1973), p. 67. It is worth noting, for the intrinsic connection between comedy and symbolic texts, that Haidu's picture of the medieval romance shows the disruption and circumvention of assumptions that characterize both comedy and symbolism: "For the texts are characterized by basic, crucial and repeated discontinuities. . . . linear sequence is not only interrupted and disguised; it contains surprising inconsistencies and self-contradictions which are unresolvable on the narrative level. . . . such narrative 'faults' (in the geological sense now) can be interpreted as intentional, functional manoeuvres whose purpose is to arouse lectorial awareness, curiosity and speculation. They are a basic kind of 'defamiliarization' whose point is to demand interpretation" (p. 56).

176 Enid Welsford, The Fool: His Social and Literary History (London: Faber and Faber, 1935), pp. 115-116, 221.

177 Welsford, p. 121.

178 Welsford, p. 125, citing Robert le Diable.

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179 Welsford, p.109. The Irish fools are part of a tradition of ancient Celtic clairvoyants, like Merlin, "who have usually received their supernatural powers in dreams, and prophesy in a state of ecstasy as if inspired by a spirit" (p. 105). If one goes far enough back, or deep enough down, visionary, poet, and fool are one, and Chaucer's mixed poetimysticocomedy is psychologically legitimate. Welsford notes similarities between our antique clairvoyants and the Islamic "knowers," possessed by djinns, who uttered their wisdom in rhymed prose "which later developed into regular metre but continued to be used in its original form by the kāhins (soothsayers) as a means to induce hypnosis" (p. 80).

180 Freud, Jokes, pp. 167-168.

181 Freud, Jokes, p. 174.

182 Freud, Jokes, p. 176.

183 Freud, Jokes, p. 174.

184 Freud, Jokes, p. 179.

185 Freud, Jokes, p. 181.

186 Freud, Jokes, p. 182.

187 Freud, Jokes, p. 230.

188 Freud, Jokes, p. 238.

Chapter IV. The Rhetoric of Imagination

1. Medieval Treatises on Poetry

It Must Be Abstract
It Must Change
It Must Give Pleasure

(Wallace Stevens, section titles, Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction)

In the search for poetry, rhetoric must also be found, as the means by which emotion and experience, as well as ideas, are rendered in terms of language, and by which language in turn acquires a social and empirical garment. To a large extent, rhetoric makes language into an experience.

It would be best to note from the start that one thing rhetoricity does for a literary work is limit its didactic element. By the same token that in rhetoric one is trying to persuade someone of something, one is also putting that something at the service of the speaker's desire to persuade, and the listener's to believe. The most admirable message cannot succeed without the rhetorical satisfaction of these emotions. No matter how much the conversational or psychological nature of the Book of the Duchess calls to mind confession or manuals of penance, it remains a far more intrinsically social fiction, both in the narrator's relationship to his Knight and in the poem's to its audience, and a far less teleologically determined structure, than any doctrinal exercise.

We find a better key to the methods of the poem in the medieval arts of rhetoric, most of which were primarily concerned with poetry. A consideration of them shows that the techniques they advise share

share basic aims and assumptions with the techniques adopted by Chaucer.

The reappearance of Aristotle's texts in the mid-twelfth century introduced into the categories of thought that of argument based on opinion or probability rather than on absolute logical demonstrations. This, according to James J. Murphy,¹ laid the grounds for grammatical treatises that were not simply descriptive of correct language, but also prescriptive of possible language for the use of poets and rhetoricians. This possible language, furthermore, was perceived as a deviation from normal language for the purpose of increased interest and effectiveness.²

Murphy notes that the grammarians, far more than the rhetoricians, expounded the vast, detailed, body of the tropes and figures that represent this deviation.³ This may have been because the rhetoricians had a greater commitment to proper resolutions of the moral questions inherent in persuading with crafted language, whereas the grammarians largely took language on its own terms. Murphy credits them with "a more analytical frame of mind, which is less prone to accept authority."⁴ This analytical tendency, of course, comes in great part from the exercise of scrutinizing the distinctions made in and by means of language: language bestows the skills by which it is discussed.

This development among the users of language may be paralleled with other developments founded on reading Aristotle among philosophers and theologians in the thirteenth century. While Thomas Aquinas and Siger of Brabant did not, ultimately, reject the

authority of the Church, they did appreciate the need to pursue philosophical thought on its own terms before assimilating it into Christian doctrine. As the grammarians experimented with language independent of logic, so the Aristotelians meditated on philosophy independent of authority.⁵ It is interesting to note that the grammatical renovation preceded the philosophical one by some fifty years. The reading of the new texts led first to a revision of reading and texts themselves, and a little later to the revision of their ideas.

Murphy proposes that the preceptive grammars were made possible by "twelfth-century re-examinations of the nature of language"⁶ that considered the elective and deviant elements in artistic language. Fuelled by the Aristotelian texts, enabled by the rise of dialectic -- and inspired by what poetic texts? -- the new research of speculative grammar arose. The question now was not only what is grammatical, but what is grammar, and how does grammar work? Wherein consist the various ways of meaning? Questions are posed not only of the content but also of the mode.

The scholastic notion of understanding or apprehending responded to the delicacy, and even to the ultimate mystery, of the relationships between thinking subject and perceived object that constitute the field of meaningfulness. The theory of active and passive intellects, a notion inherited from Aristotle via Averroes, gives due place to both vectors of this relationship. The active mode of signifying is exercised by words that are signifying qualities.

and the passive mode of signifying is exercised by the mind that is acknowledging the qualities as they are signified by words. Qualities may thus be understood both as autonomous objects to be somehow conveyed by words, and as fictive objects constituted by and in words. Both the ideal and relativistic pictures of meaningfulness are comprehended in the positing of these tandem modes of signifying.⁷

In this double perspective, truth is "the relation of a being to itself in the two modes, that of the real thing and that of the thing as understood,"⁸ and an idea is the relationship between two things recognized by the active intellect, "the appearance of the thing in the mind," that "has only a phenomenal being, not a real one."⁹ While a truth may actually exist, the idea by which we apprehend it is a creature of our minds' format. And the truth itself, to be true, must have a conformity of its "real" self to itself as it is understood by ideas.

More than any other single issue, the question of cognition had been shaping philosophical development for some hundred years before Chaucer, and Ockham had focussed on cognition's verbal manifestation in his nominalist view of philosophy. For him, universals did not exist outside the mind's formulation of them, nor did the activity of abstraction that effects the formulation.

The universal is something purely intra-mental, the concomitant of the intuitional realization of the individual thing. A given thing, a dog or rose, evokes in the human mind a mental "sign" (signum naturale) which is the same in all men each race of men then gives to this sign a verbal sign . . . which recalls that image to our mind. . . . The universal . . . is a kind of mental artefact (et est quoddam fictivum).¹⁰

The advantage of poetry, coming into the problem at this point, where philosophy -- or Ockham, at least -- has proven that metaphysics, as the science of what is, does not necessarily exist, is that poetry operates precisely within the metamorphic existence of the mind's images. A text does not lead us to an irresolvable gap between autonomous and constituted reality, but holds in solution as many and as different realities and modes of understanding them as you like. A text is the place and time-span in which the difference between, for example, the two modes of intellect, is articulated in their common and simultaneous practice in the idea-making of poesis. For the human consciousness, the text is the presenter and virtual creator of the two modes, the truth actively being conveyed in words as well as the truth passively being understood by the mind. While it may not engage questions of existence philosophically, that is, rationally and abstractedly, a text does serve as a mutual frontier, between ways of thought or proposed sites of reality, in which both actual and potential intellect, or both external and internal reality, articulate themselves in relation to each other.

The art that formulates the texts fills the gap in creative energy left when the absolute creator becomes undemonstrable, whether through lack of faith or by limit of method. We may not be able to fully intuit or prove the existence of an eternal creative principle, but we witness in poetic texts the real endlessness, and therein the image of the eternality, of the project of investigating such a principle. The created text has a temporal extension and

a modal flexibility that make it a microcosm of both history and the process of the epistemological debate. In this textual image of the conditions under which reality is known, we have the assurance that there is no deadline we must meet in answering our questions, that we will always have a site for both our hypotheses and our doubts, and that, in short, the answers we seek are themselves products of inquiry over time, and do not disappear when faultily expressed.

Given the philosophers' interest in the ways of thinking and the reality of mental process, it is not surprising to find that they have been preceded by formal treatises describing poetic language and form. These treatises also preceded the major texts that best illustrate their principles, such as the Roman de la Rose. Their meditations on language's mechanisms issued in both philosophical and practical applications -- an indication of the elemental quality of the treatises' topic. Geoffroi de Vinsauf, in particular, was a major theoretical author, an Englishman, and known to Chaucer. Attendance to his ideas of poetry sheds some light on the endeavors of the Book of the Duchess.

Faral has remarked the virtually total neglect by Vinsauf and his colleagues of how poets should compose the middle of their works.¹¹ This is not so actual an omission as might seem. First, since the poets were usually taking their plots from older stories, the ways of beginning and ending did concern them most compositionally. Second, if one takes the artes poetriae as theories of poetry, then one does not expect them to tell poets how to order

an entire work in detail. Rather, one expects to learn how to recognize a poem as such, which the theoretical treatises teach by describing the boundaries of the work, and the general character of the language within them. More essentially, a theory will propose to the practitioner the modes of thought that will generate the desired work. What kind of idea, considered from what kind of perspective, and written in what kind of idiom, will lead to poetry? The message of the artes, then, is that, if you want to write something that will be a poem, you should begin by thinking about beginnings, endings, and tropes -- which return words to the frontiers of signifying by displacing their customary meanings.

Since these are the topics most of the artes poetriae suggest that the would-be poet ponder, they indicate to us that the problem of writing poetry was seen as the problem of initiating the work: setting it apart, making one's reader conscious of its difference from ordinary discourse, and ornamenting it throughout so as to maintain its freshness and newness. Both initiation and ornamentation are seen as occasions for rearranging and renewing a theme or plot. At its limits, a poem is always a contiguous continuation of other poems. Its differentness always emerges within the context of poetic tradition and discipline, not as a failure to conform to reality -- our view of which language itself has informed.

But the substantive similarity of beginnings and ornaments is even subtler. The freshness and impressiveness of a poem arises from the way its words redefine each other's semantic boundaries.

A figure of speech opens a new path between a word and a meaning. And the poet must figure out how at the outset to nudge or jolt us into reading words figuratively. Vinsauf's suggestions to begin with an example or a proverb are not as simplistic as they might sound. He is here enjoining us to begin by thinking about general notions in a focussed way. An example or proverb does not so much declare a truth as give us a sample embodiment of an idea, that invites our meditation on it but also provides field for speculation about it. Vinsauf's recommendations for ending recapitulate those for beginning, suggesting that in writing or reading a poem one has not so much progressed from point A to point B as one has journeyed around within a theme, at large, and somewhat indeterminately, to see things not ordinarily seen on a guided tour down the main highway. One may see the really flexible perspective on themes this advice advocates in Chaucer's practice. A great many of his individual poems and Tales begin with a "sentence," original, well-known, or paraphrased, so that the narrative develops from and off the announced theme, not up to it. Beginning with an example or proverb encourages the elaboration and diversification of an idea, not the documenting of it as a fixed, "true," theme. The sentence that may close the narrative, needless to say, is usually not the one the poet started from.

Vinsauf's other main suggestion for beginnings, to use artificial rather than natural order, also draws our attention to an uncommon presentation that signals a poetic text, and invites us

to expect the other-than-logical, non-consecutive paths of poetic imagining. Set down in the midst of a plot, we know immediately that we have taken up a text that is not building discursively or exhaustively, but cumulatively and implicitly. The device of in medias res also alerts us to the presence of a thematic focus that may not coincide with temporal development. It may also set up a moment of déjà vu in the text, at the point when the chronological narrative catches up to the events that opened the poem formally. Such a moment can make it seem as if the whole poem up to that point has been an expansion of that moment, making a balloon in time.

Vinsauf, then, tries to arrange for a beginning that will engage writer and reader in a way of thinking that is thematic but not committed or too logical, free-floating but not disordered, and and complementary to the unusual character of the language being employed. His instructions on ornament tend to the same effects. Ornamentation, like artificial order, is characterized as violating the usual syntactic or semantic placement of words. In ornament, words are made guests, aliens, and pilgrims.

Ut res ergo sibi pretiosum sumat amictum,
 Si vetus est verbum, sis physicus et veteranum
 Redde novum. Noli semper concedere verbo
 In proprio residere loco: residentia talis
 Dedecus est ipsi verbo; loca propria vitet
 Et peregrinetur alibi sedemque placentem
 Fundet in alterius fundo: sit ibi novus hospes.
 Et placeat novitate sua. Si conficis istud
 Antidotum, verbi facies juvenescere vultum.¹²

--quae fit in occulto, nullo venit indice signo;
 Non venit in vultu proprio, sed dissimulato,
 Et quasi non sit ibi collatio, sed nova quaedam
 Insita mirifice transsumptio, res ubi caute
 Sic sedet in serie quasi sit de themata nata:
 Sumpta tamen res est aliunde, sed esse videtur
 Inde; foris res est, nec ibi comparet; et intus
 Et foris, hic et ibi, procul et prope: distat et astat.¹³

Denarius iste colorum
 Verba colorat ea gravitate, quod est alieno,
 Non proprio, vox sumpta modo. Genus omnibus unum;
 Scilicet improprius vocum status et peregrina
 Sumptio verborum.¹⁴

By dislocating words from their common referents, tropes and figures cloud and confuse meaning, so that thought must depart from its customary paths, and entertain a variety of strange and incompletely comprehended ideas in order to approach meaning.

Si sit homo de quo fit sermo, transferor ad rem
 Expressae similem; quae sit sua propria vestis
 In simili casu cum videro, mutuor illam
 Et mihi de veste veteri transformo novellam.¹⁵

Longius ut sit opus, ne ponas nomina rerum:
 Pone notas alias; nec plane detege, sed rem
 Innue per notulas.¹⁶

The boundary between one meaning and another is violated by this concealing and crossing of the signifiers' routes to meanings. But the boundaries are violated to be redrawn, not destroyed, and, in being redrawn, to be articulated by discrepancy when they can hardly be articulated directly.

By playing with semantic boundaries, and thereby illustrating the very existence of a boundary between customary and unlooked-for meanings, the poet gives us the impression that in reading the poem we are travelling along some frontier between what we are used to

thinking and what we have never thought. Kept on this border line, so as to be made conscious of our thinking, we are loosed by the sensation of frontier from that customary thought, and approach the unknown.

Vinsauf's compositional concern for beginnings and endings, to the apparent exclusion of middles, may also reflect the notion that a poem is a series of beginnings and endings, or frames and transitions, and has no convenient center of repose for the mind being coaxed into enjoying being continually reoriented. Vinsauf in effect gives advice about the middles in the section on ornament. And that advice is to keep the poem and our minds shifting and speculative, through ornament's effects of surprise, expansion, and dislocation of reference. It is commonly felt that amplification attracts him and the poets more than does abbreviation,¹⁷ but Vinsauf's final counsel on them is to use both in alternation, making what is long short and what is short long, put just that barely:

Sed laeto si vis gaudere triumpho,
quod minus est supple, quod plus abrade, quod hirtum
Come, quod obscurum declara, quod vitiosum
Emenda. Curis istis sunt omnia sana.¹⁸

Chaucer echoes this advice when in Troilus and Criseyde he invites us "To encesse or maken dymynucioun / Of my langage" (3.1335-1336). One either extends the implications of a motif by amplifying it, or by abbreviating a motif re-mystify what has been expounded elsewhere. Poetic language thus always offers more or less than its ostensible subject or meaning. It creates new fields for thought by adding to or relinquishing an idea. Amplification is more obviously an

enhancement of meaning, but, for example, when Chaucer cuts down Ceyx' role from Ovid's version of his story, he is not only indicating that Alcyone is his main character, but also suggesting that Ceyx' presumptive authoritativeness does not bear imitation. Because either amplification or abbreviation can enrich a motif's significance, both must be used as variations on each other, from passage to passage, or from text to text, doing what has not been done, and undoing what has been done often. Each image should be changed in quality to be made significant. These changes Vinsauf describes as the cure -- "istis curis" -- that makes whole -- "omnia sana" -- meanings that had previously languished in unredeemed literality. The wholeness of these cured words is paradoxically achieved by curtailing or expanding them. Wholeness of meaning would seem to be a function not of direct and accurate representation but of the potential for our reflection and interpretation created by figurative renderings.

Finally, the effect of this whole process on the poet is one of "happy triumph." The semantic alienation that leads to significance is also a source of pleasure. Compared to clearly conveyed meanings, strange ones have more savor:

quando tuum proprium transsumis, plus sapit istud
Quod venit ex proprio.¹⁹

Structura propinqua
Declarat levius sensum; sed plus sedet auri.²⁰
Plusque saporis habet moderata remotio vocum.

The sort of verbal dereglement du sens effected by figures and ornaments gladdens the ear with unexpected pleasure:

Quando venit tali sententia culta paratu,
 Ille sonus vocum laetam dulcescit ad aurem,
 Et fricat interius nova delectatio mentem.²¹

Pleasure is associated with novelty. By rearranging meaning or the derivation of it, we provide ourselves with fresh opportunities to understand and discover things, to exercise in new applications our aptest ways of "mastering" experience. This kind of pleasure explains the importance of memory in rhetoric, even apart from proper recitation. It is on the memory that novelty has its impact, with the disruption of tradition and expectation. Absorbing strange things, memory becomes a compilation of both the sum of knowledge and the undoing of it. Alone among the faculties, memory accepts the objects of its attention without necessarily shaping them to the categories of, say, reason or pure fantasy. Memory is a harbor of intellectual frissons unavailable to more heavily censoring faculties: "Cellula quae meminit est cellula deliciarum."²² Once entrusted to memory, delights may ever be recalled. And the indirect conveyance of meaning accords more with the advice following that line, that memory should be stretched and shaped and drawn on, as by a variety of thoughts, not burdened, as by fixated ideas: "vult illa benigne / Tractari, non male premi."²³

Vinsauf's advice, in sum, is that the poet must continually be drawing our attention to poetic quality and to the difference it makes in our ways of reading and to its call for interpretation. In particular, the poet is to highlight the verse by rearranging and redrawing the paths from signs to meaning: by abbreviating, ampli-

fying, obscuring, expounding, beginning at the middle, beginning with a conclusion, and describing one thing in terms of another. Poetry changes whatever it touches, to establish in the interstices of disrupted habits of thought the possibility of further meaning.

And this program of reorientation gives pleasure. Where modern readers speak of interest and effectiveness -- rather dry terms with undertones of moral propriety and advertising technique -- the medieval theorists speak of delectatio mentis. The mind enjoys, because it is allured into doing what it does best (think) as if it were an amorous rendez-vous. The poet pleases the mind by alerting it to differences, both in objects of thought and in its own workings, that invite new mental activity.

In persuading the reader's mind to exercise, the poet begins to persuade the whole reader, by self-example, to feel and speak with the openness contrived for the mind. The lasting aim of the poet is to bring another person to think as they had never thought before, and to know that they can do this without losing identity. To convey this sense of imaginative freedom, the poet makes the most powerful verbal seduction possible.

The Book of the Duchess realizes Vinsauf's advice on both small and large scales, in both figures of speech and narrative pattern. That pattern has a high rate of discontinuity that keeps the reader right on the borders and lines of dislocation that Vinsauf imagines in the rearranged field of signs and meanings.

Rather than develop one character's story through a succession of events, or one theme's implications through various examples, this poem tells the story of a character whose search for love and self and truth and health requires that he in turn tell the stories of several people, like and unlike himself. Because the narrative takes the shape of many things seen through many modulations, the only real constant for the reading mind to focus on is the system of modulations itself, the continual displacement or relocation of meanings. Chaucer is indebted to Vinsauf for his theoretical articulation of the poetic mission of bending and breaking semantic and semiotic fields, for no other poet had yet taken his advice so radically.

When the practice of poetry had "caught up" to theory, poets began to write their own treatises. I have already touched on Dante, who in his letter to Can Grande attributes as much reality to words as to things and ideas, and Boccaccio, whose justification of fiction as integument does rather less for the theory of poetry. A contemporary of Chaucer's, the French poet Eustace Deschamps, also wrote a brief Art de Dictier (precisely dated by the author's hand on 25 November 1392).²⁴ It merits notice because it addresses lyric poetry specifically, and from the perspective of a time and place even closer to Chaucer's than Boccaccio's is.

In his treatise Deschamps, after detailing the seven liberal arts' subjects and benefits, situates poetry under the heading of music, partly because that pairing reflects the performance practice

of his day, and partly, perhaps, on the example of Augustine, who discusses recitation and verbal music in his De Musica. His description is marked by several discrepancies between the recipes for and the samples given of lyrics, and by the imperfect rubrication in the latter part of the Art, where lyric genre is defined sometimes by content, sometimes by style, and sometimes by form. The lesson here may be that Deschamps viewed certain aesthetic forms as partly constituting certain meanings. These occasional difficulties in his text, in any case, point to his theoretical purpose. His detailing is not meant to give instructions for concocting ballades such that any bloke could follow them. That would go contrary to his belief that lyric poetry was a natural music, a recital of a verbal composition performed without notation. For, unlike artificial music, which was any vocal or instrumental composition performed following a notation, natural music could not be invented without innate genius or "engin."²⁵ Rather, he is telling us how to think about lyric poetry, what elements we are to consider in the making or appreciating of it. All the enumerations of kinds, stanzas, syllables in lines, sounds in syllables, rhymes, lengths, and quantities, indicate the terms in which the lyric poet thinks when composing. The imperfect correspondence of prose description and lyric example clarifies the treatise's concern with the idea of poetry behind its execution.

Readers distracted by Chaucer's telling us that the black Knight sings a song of ten or twelve lines, and then repeating to us a song of eleven lines, might bear in mind Deschamps' illusory contradic-

tions. Chaucer can say of an eleven-line song that it is ten or twelve lines long, not only because these numbers are better words in rhymed English octosyllable, but also because they do not compromise the approximated theoretical limits of the Knight's stanza. And planting this sort of minor discrepancy is obviously an effective way of drawing readers' attention to the formal details of poetry.

But most important is the place Deschamps gives to pleasure as a component and goal of poetry. Music in general he regards as the seventh day of rest, so to speak, that refreshes people after their work and in preparation for their work in the other six arts:

par sa melodie delectable les cuers et esperis de ceuls
qui aux diz ars, par pensée, ymaginaison et labours de
bras estoient traveilliez, pesans et ennuiez, sont
medicinez et recreez, et plus habeles apres a estudier
et labourer aux autres .vi. ars dessus nommez.²⁶

Natural music in particular, "une musique de boucher en proferant paroules metrificées,"²⁷ occurs in or creates an amorous ambience:

ceste musique naturele se face de volunté amoureuse
a la louenge des dames.²⁸

It is heard in private places, where groups and instruments would disturb a tête-à-tête:

les diz des chansons se puent souventefoiz recorder
en plusieurs lieux ou ilz sont moult volentiers ois,
ou le chant de la musique artificiele n'aroit pas
tousjours lieu, comme entre seigneurs et dames estans
a leur privé et secretement, ou la musique naturele
se puet dire et recorder par un homme seul, de bouche,²⁹

or, as befits an art that helps lovers and melancholics alike:

lire aucun livre de ces choses plaisans devant un
malade, et autres cas semblables.³⁰

These private recitations comfort the sick and further the lover, addressing in both cases the inward orientation of the mind at a time of frustration and vulnerability. The lyric takes up the sense of self for someone with but a feeble hold on it, and preserves it in the voice of art until lover or melancholic have regained their own speech. Its passage into art may even enrich the voice, and enable the lyricists to reclaim it by giving it objective reality and communicable form. Even so with Chaucer's narrator, whose intimate, idiosyncratic, and extended reportage to us is more reminiscent of Deschamps' little recitals in the boudoirs of the feverish than of the brisker personalities in Machaut and Froissart. Chaucer is the first poet to realize in an intimate, lyric form Vinsauf's vision of a poetry that re-invents signification, and the first to splice together as equals profane and verbal pleasures.

2. Narrator's Progress

"Where there is leisure for fiction there is little grief."

(Johnson dismissing "Lycidas" in Lives of the English Poets)

In the first fifteen lines of the Book of the Duchess, the narrator orders the symptoms of his melancholy into a sequence from insomnia through indifference to imagination:

I. I may nat slepe	line 3	
defaute of slep	5	insomnia
ydel thoght	4	
I take no kep	6	
Of nothing	7	
nothyng leef nor looth	8	indifference
glyche good to me	9	
wherso hyt be	10	
I have felynge in nothyng	11	
a mased thyng	12	
sorwful ymagynacioun	14	imagination
hooly in my mynde	15	

He then repeats the sequence, intermixing the theme of melancholy, over the next 24 lines:

agaynes kynde	16	unnaturalness
nature wolde nat suffyse	18	
Withoute slep	21	insomnia
in sorwe	21	melancholy
I ne may . . . Slep	22-23	insomnia
thus melancolye	23	melancholy
And drede I have	24	
Defaute of slep	25	insomnia
and hevynesse	25	melancholy
sleyn my spirit of quyknesse	26	
lost al lustyhede	27	indifference
Suche fantasies be in myn hede	28	imagination

The emphasis on insomnia occurs naturally enough in the opening of a dream vision, but then, to effect the transition from emptiness to imagination, Chaucer fixes on indifference above all the other

symptoms of melancholy. The moment of indifference comprehends that suspension of customary rational judgment that enables the mind to entertain irregular thoughts. It is seen in the withdrawal of the mind from conscious thought in formulating a joke,³¹ and in the alleviation of critical tendencies that become oppressive in melancholy. The same negligence that brings sorrowful imagination and unwonted fantasies into the narrator's head also, eventually, invites him to read and to dream up his own fantasy.

The protection that indifference affords his laboring mind also, in the shape of rhetorical reticence, supports his dialogue with us. He avoids speaking of himself directly:

But men myght axe me why soo
I may not sleepe, and what me is.
But natheles, who aske this
Leseth his asking trewely. (30-33)

After thus refusing conversation, he maintains he has done so simply because he does not know the answer himself:

Myselven can not telle why
The sothe. (34-35)

The expression "The sothe" hovers nicely between being a casual expletive and being the substantive object of "telle," as if to say that he does not know the truth. Having assured himself that he need not confront us on the subject of himself, and having remarked the probably untruth of any answer he could propose, he feels free to propose one as follows:

but trewly, as I gesse,
I holde hit be a sicknesse
That I have suffered this eight year. (35-37)

Given the variety of fillers at his disposal, Chaucer need not be suspected of selecting the "I gesse" at random. It suggests both considered deliberation and hapless hazarding, and complements the combination of emphasis and qualification seen throughout the "sooth"s and "truly"s of this passage. The complex articulation of varying mental methods far exceeds the information conveyed, since in fact the narrator has simply told us he thinks he's sick because of a sickness -- a tautology he seems almost to recognize: "And yet my boote is never the ner" (38). He then repeats this movement from a bit of proffered speculation to a swift closing off of the question:

For there is phisicien but oon
That may me hele; but that is don. (39-40)

From here he returns to the "first mater" (43), the description of symptoms from which he has not in fact departed.

As he begins again, he leaves a coy and partial confession for the retelling of a romance. The Ovidian tale, like the dream that follows, constitutes the fiction through which he can make his confession without embarrassment. One might see in this a forerunner of the Renaissance and Restoration theatrical convention of a melancholic's entering with a book, as if not only to indicate an overstudious character, but also, as here, to plant a signal of the fictiveness of all that passes.

In the introduction to the romance, the motifs of indifference and imagination mingle again. After the initial insomnia (44-45) the narrator summons the romance "To rede, and drive the night away" (49).

The phrase "drive away" implies his desire to dispel his melancholy as well as to just get through the night. The phrase gives the idea of "passing the time" some urgency, as if an effective pastime entailed some mental effort of power sufficient to displace the relentless and unbidden images of melancholy. As a beginning, the reading of the romance, rather than a more energetic fiction exercise like chess, allows the narrator to be serious without making himself prematurely responsible for everything he says or does, and thus entangling himself again in the tired earnestness lacking all perspective characteristic of melancholy. Through the story, images come to him indifferently, since they are someone else's, but not randomly, since they are artful. In the story he finds a way of bringing meaningfulness into his thoughts without inviting either compulsion or rationalization as well.

The stories in this romance have been put into verse to make them more readable and memorable:

That clerkes had in olde tyme,
And other poets, put in rime
To rede, and for to be in minde. (53-55)

The narrator conceives of both clerks and poets as versifiers, and characterizes their rhyming as having preserved the stories with the help of rhetoric. Their technique helps convey serious ideas: "To rede" can mean both "to read" and "for counsel." Both kinds of writers share in "poetic" devices and "clerkly" seriousness.

The narrator then supposes that people were meant to read these stories "While men loved the lawe of kinde" (56). The view

suggests a happy continuity from genial works of the past that are assimilable to modern religion, to the well-read narrator acquainted with "Pan, that men clepe god of kynde" (512). He thinks of Pan when he reports ;how the Knight's heaviness of mind unnaturally cuts off the circulation of the blood, which has rushed to the heart out of sympathy of kind for its faintness:

For wel hyt feled the herte had harm --
 To wite eke why hyt was adrad
 By kynde, and for to make hyt glad. (492-494)

This little tale of the blood stirring in kind with the suffering heart establishes the dreamer's active sympathy for the Knight. By the end of the passage he is telling us what is inside the Knight's mind even though he hasn't technically been there yet.

The historical moment of the romance, then, appeals to the dreamer not only for its law of kind, but for the artistic form, sympathetic rather than didactic, that brings that law into effective being, which itself constitutes a sort of kindness of the imagination as it makes others aware of each other. In particular, the era the narrator describes has regard for the impression rhyme makes on the mind, for rhyme's service to imagination and its furtherance of the communal history established by texts. On a microscopic level, rhyme is the poetic figure of sympathy and continuation.

It is the romance, and specifically Morpheus' powers in vision, that strike the narrator as a "wonder thing" (61), not any Roman stoic or Christian advice on mourning, and he first finds a way

of entering into the spirit of fiction-making through a recollection of literary tradition. Both natural law and verse law invite the beleaguered and lonely narrator to participate in human history. His assurance that his dream excels the famous visions of tradition in intricacy and abstruseness is a signal of how his recollection of tradition fuels his leap into image-making. This dependence of fellow-feeling on fictions is natural, given the often irremediable isolation of one mind from another. What we love in other people is so often, after all, what we want and desire rather than what we have or know, that our most real and sympathetic affections must often be grounded in our imaginations' hypotheses about who we and others are.

Through a moment of restless indifference, the narrator gains access to new worlds of images. He must detach his attention from the habitual topics of his lucubrations in order to take new interest in the ideas of others -- both Ovid's, and the tradition of the human community. Chaucer provides for this necessary phase of detachment and indifference with the many discontinuities of his narrative.

The poem's narration proceeds by amplifying the emotional story in terms of different plots and settings. Surface discontinuity exposes the inner bewilderment of the protagonists, at the same time that it tells a unified story of emotional history. I have already described how, in the hunting mode of narrative, the emotion of the narrator provides both a theme and a form of narration.

as the dreamer alternately stalks and turns away from self-knowledge, telling now his own story, and now someone else's when the going gets rough in his own.

The single most abrupt transition in the poem, highlighted by the poet's clear departure from his well-known source, is that from Alcyone's story to the narrator's decision to pray to Juno and Morpheus for sleep. In Ovid, Alcyone's grief is attenuated and transformed through her shared metamorphosis with Ceyx. In Chaucer, it is taken up by the narrator's own melancholy. With the notation that "she sayede more in that swow" (215) Chaucer transfers the moment of emotional climax from the accommodating metamorphosis (which he cuts entirely) to the moment just before any resolution of her grief. This is the moment whose self-redeeming and creative resources would like to ascertain. Having used her story to get his narrative up to this moment of liminal vision as it occurs in Alcyone's life, the poet hurries back to his narrator's concerns: "My first matere I wil yow telle, / Wherefore I have told this thyng" (219-220). Now, perhaps, he will tell about this problem with increased ease, having gotten over the hard admission of grief with a fiction, which not only mirrors his emotion but also gives him something other than his main concern to say he's sad about:

I ferde the worse al the morwe
Aftir, to thenken on hir sorwe. (99-100)

He can take keep of Alcyone's story as he could not take keep of

anything at all in line six, and his reanimation occurs during the process of reading:

For thus moche dar I saye wel,
 I had be dolven everydel,
 And ded, ryght thurgh defaute of slep
 Yif I ne had red and take kep
 Of this tale next before.
 And I wol telle yow wherfore;
 For I ne myghte, for bote ne bale,
 Slepe, or I had red thys tale
 Of this dreynte Seys the kyng,
 And of the goddes of slepyng.
 Whan I had red thys tale wel,
 And overloked hyt everydel,
 Me thoghte wonder yf hit were so;
 For I had never herd speke, or tho,
 Of noo goddes that koude make
 Men to slepe, ne for to wake;
 For I ne knew never god but oon. (221-237)

He could not sleep before he had read, and then when he had read it, he looked it over thoroughly, and began to wonder "yf hit were so" -- not, I think, seriously asking himself whether Morpheus existed in reality, but rather, entertaining a new and imaginative idea for the first time, as a creature of imagination whose reality or irreality was of little moment. Reading a has brought him something strange, that invites him both to reflect on the story, and to wonder what it implies for him. The narrator says he is refreshed by reading the tale of drowned Ceyx and the gods: Alcyone he leaves out, for he has imagined himself in her place, and taken Ceyx as the object of a grief he shares in, and the gods as the hypothesis of its remedy. By inserting himself into the story of somebody else he acquires a fresh vantage on grief, through adopting circumstances whose strangeness enables them to insinuate themselves into his mind

before he can raise the objections of custom or security against them.

To free himself from the judgmental, competitive picture of the world that presumably ripened him for melancholy, the narrator needs to simultaneously clear his mind entirely and introduce fresh images into it. Narrative breaks are one source of space; another lies in Chaucer's images of vista and opening: the windows, Morpheus' cave and the golden hall promised to Morpheus, the extensive forest and the remote path leading through it, the upreaching trees whose leaves make a private heaven, and the clearing in which the Knight first appears. All these fill the dreamer's mind not so much with positive imagery as with images of places where he can imagine new images.

It is because such images and narrative breaks succeed each other almost continuously that we recognize the pattern of open-endedness transformation for itself, apart from specific themes or plots. The sea of change also maintains the dreamer in a state of apprehension rather than comprehension. He must not only follow the hunt, but the path leading away from it, and the digressions of the Knight that lead away from that. Only by beginning over and over again can he recognize and be grounded in the kind of receptive indifference that frees his mind. For he is in search not of a single goal, but an escape from goals, and needs to exchange his false independence, in which he determines what he will allow to happen to him, to a capacity to respond to whatever

happens.

By the same token, after he reads, he does not simply make a partial confession of his feelings, but goes on to compose a vow to Juno and Morpheus, his speeches to the Knight, and finally the record of the whole dream. Each composition, each change in the terms of the narration, is the occasion for both a further evasion of direct confrontation and a renewed call to initiate fresh thought. The sum of the two actions, evasion and initiation, is not that the dreamer either loses sight of or closes right in on his thoughts, but rather that he delves more and more deeply into the very process of his thinking.

3. Dreamer's Journey

The narrator's introduction to the dream ends with allusions to the biblical Joseph (280-283) and classical Macrobius (284-289). The older dreams are mentioned simply as being excelled by this one in richness and mystery, and seem less important for any substantive relevance than for giving Chaucer a full set of dreams to overgo, and for authorizing his narrator as a student of dreams. It is the process of his own vision, not the content of famous dreams, that fascinates him, as indicated by the narrator's repeated notice of the fact that he is dreaming (211, 293, 298, 345, 353). Inside the dream he builds up a rhetorical perspective with three blocks of introductory description: the account of the birds' singing, the sight of the Troy and Roman de la Rose stories depicted on the walls and windows, and the hunt, which is reported primarily as an auditory experience (346-350, 354).

Chaucer takes the main aspects of the birdsong, which are presented singly in numerous different places in the Roman, and condenses them into one passage.³² This more encyclopaedic gathering together of the song's aspects points up the topical character of the motif. The elements he selects from the Roman are hyperbolic praise, the song's uniqueness, the analogy with a religious service, the variety of registers among the voices and their harmony, the song's sweet and joyful mood, and the efforts the birds expend. But only Chaucer brings all these together in

one passage so as to suggest the connections between the quality of the song and the birds' rhetorical skill. He avoids prescribing either amorous or spiritual happiness as the key to pleasure in singing. As in his opening borrowings from Froissart, he omits the specification of love as the theme of the birds that the Roman does make (RR 78-83, 495, 703). He also reduces the analogies to religious music -- the Roman adduces it four times in describing the birds (RR 661, 662, 701, 492) -- and also leaves aside the gladdening effect of the song on the dreamer, who in the Roman walks out for the express purpose of listening to it and says he is constantly cheered by it (RR 95-96, 487-488). Chaucer ascribes no such purposiveness to his dreamer, and does not seek to divorce song from melancholy. Instead, in the Book of the Duchess, the merriment of song culminates in the craft of song. Already in the translation of the Roman (and these lines occur in fragment A, almost certainly Chaucer's), the one clearly poetic characterization of the birdsong is significantly amplified from the French:

A chanter furent ententif
 Li oiselet, qui aprentif
 Ne furent pas ne non sachant. (RR 675-677)

Ententyfe weren for to synge
 These byrdes, that not vnkonnynge
 Were of her crafte, and aprentyse,
 Out of songe subtyl and wyse. (Romaunt 685-688)

The French poem offers no equivalent to the subtlety and wisdom of Chaucer's singers, and he adds the idea of craft to the song.

The song does not particularly gladden the dreamer, but it does wake him up: to new thoughts, one might say. His melancholy fancies need not be forgotten, but may be recast. He seems to be expected to follow the birds' lead in giving art to his thoughts. The birds line the roof of his chamber and make it ring with their music. They surround him as they awaken him, they awaken him into their song, and make of his house a resounding surface tying the dreamer's mind, his senses, and the singers all together.

The adjectives describing the song interconnect to draw a continuum between its sound and its rhetorical character. It arrives with "noyse and swetnesse" (297), continues "swete" and "mery" (307, 309, 315), with the "mete" (316) quality of the birds' harmonization and the "crafty notes" they "fynde" (319) added to the combination of sweet sound and merry mood to indicate its artfulness. "Find" was commonly applied to the invention or fresh composition of rhetorical discourse.³³

The qualities accompanying the song's sweetness are, in order, its loudness (297), its merriment (309), and its harmonic propriety (316). Where sweetness in the Roman named a general atmosphere of tranquil and temperate nature, here Chaucer gradually involves sweetness with emotion and artifice, which are themselves inextricable:

For ther was noon of hem that feyned
To synge, for ech of hem hym peyned
To fynde out mery crafty notes. (317-319)

Merriest here is not the dreamer's in hearing the song, but the

calculated effect given to the song by the efforts of the singers. Abstractly, the song's effect is merriment, but both the birds and the dreamer here are exhilarated by the process of making merriment, not of experiencing it. Chaucer separates the dreamer's hearing of the song from the emotional reaction one might expect him to have to it. In this way Chaucer makes room in time for the dreamer to change the way he reacts to things. At the same time, by isolating the sheer practice of art, Chaucer suggests that song has some power to effect that change. The song of the birds, a mirror of Chaucer's poetry, stands between the dreamer and his particular feelings, draws out the span between the dreamer's perceptions and his reactions to them, and suggests that art may beneficially supplement his established, melancholy way of feeling.

More art occupies the borders between the chamber and the landscape, between, one might say, the private thoughts of the dreamer and his outward readings in experience. The story of Troy is set in the windows and that of the Roman on the walls. In the Roman, the temperate weather outside culminates the French dreamer's pleasure at washing in a clear stream paved with ornamental gravel.³⁴ In Chaucer, the context for the good weather is not nature but the dreamer's meditation on these two masterworks of epic and romance. These texts, like the tales rhymed by clerks under the law of kind, offer him a picture of human tradition in art and give him a joy he did not quite feel in listening to the birds:

And sooth to seyn, my chambre was
 Ful wel depeynted, and with glas
 Were al the wyndowes wel yglased,
 Ful clere, and nat an hooole ycrased,
 That to beholde hyt was gret joye. (321-325)

The craft of the workmanship is as important as the material it presents. It is this human finesse that inspires the dreamer.

The salvation of tradition, of course, lies in continuing to expand on texts, not in enshrining them. From the sun-blessed epic of clarity set in quasi-ecclesiastical glass, we go to the romance of complexity, set on an opaque wall, more like words on a page than visualized events. If the old epics, including the Bible that usually provided the matter for glass windows, were sources of archetypal plots, names, and themes, the new romances, with their intertwining plots and dramatic interior monologues, analyze and expand on select moments in those precedents. The representation of the Roman here has more finesse than clarity, with a pun on rhetorical "colors" and an interpretive gloss accompanying the pictorial text:

And alle the walles with coloures fyne
 Were peynted, bothe text and glose,
 Of al the Romaunce of the Rose. (332-334)

The windows of the old epic were shut (335), perhaps implying that current artistic ambition had turned to romance writing. Chaucer offers a literary history in little, passing from the epic-in-the-window that mediates between private and outward scenes, to the romance-on-walls that mediates, within the bounds of the chamber, between private scene and commentary on it. As presented to the

dreamer, the literary tradition has moved to ever closer analyses in ever more reflective genres of the processes of the human mind. In the case of the Roman in fresco, the mediation between text and gloss lies entirely within the realm of human artifice.

This immersion in literary tradition distills a simple statement of one romance image: weather that is not a particular, empirical weather, but the tempered climate of a motif, to which all adventures may come:

And eke the welken was so fair,
 Blew, bryght, clere was the ayr,
 And ful attempre for sothe hyt was;
 For nother to cold nor hoot yt nas,
 Ne in the welken was no clowde. (340-344)

Such limpidity, of course, cannot last. The hunting scene that follows epitomizes the idea of a difficult or lengthy action with an elusive goal. It introduces the most rapidly shifting series of scenes in the poem, both in its own turns, with its headlong ride and laborious backtracking, and in the long digression it leads the dreamer to take. With the motif of the hunt, Chaucer can continue to insert beginnings through the "middle" and "end" of the poem. The hunt motif gives special shape to temporal duration. In it, extension in time is not sheer continuation, but occasion for change. The complex trail of the hunt in this poem introduces succession and vicissitude into the narrative, and Chaucer uses the hunt as a narrative symbol that renders all events in terms of transformation or transition.

To review briefly. The allusions to famed dream interpreters in scripture and classical literature establish the place of this vision in a hermeneutic tradition. Like them, we are meant to interpret the dream we read. The birdsong passage adds to this literary interest the ideas that beauty is achieved by the craft of art and that this art gives joy. The decorations of the chamber specify the classical and vernacular traditions that have prepared for this new dream, largely by focusing on gradually more inward aspects of fiction. From the description of spring weather in the Roman de la Rose Chaucer selects one image from tradition that lends itself to clear, uncomplicated, presentation, and uses this as a sort of point of comparison from which to launch his own complex vision, initially in the form of a hunt, a narrative of metamorphosis.

The narrator at the beginning of the poem succeeds in keeping his real thoughts a secret. In the course of his encounters with literature, we can observe him in his reactions to fictions. Reading Ovid brings him back into touch with sorrow and with human traditions of art. The birdsong and pictured narratives make explicit the connection between poetry and joy. In the hunt, now, the dreamer revives his own sense of pleasure.

This happens because the hunt fiction provides an image of the dreamer's questing for sleep, understanding, love, and consolation. Regardless of any of these hunts' outcomes, the dreamer finds in the hunt pattern an analogy to his own mental processes that

affirms their reality objectively and with formal coherence. And the melancholic takes more and healthier pleasure in seeing that mind may be assimilated to art than in constricting art to express the status quo of one mind. From inside his room, only hearing the hunt nearby, he already grows excited at the prospect of joining in:

Anoon ryght, whan I herde that,
 How that they wolde on huntynge goon,
 I was ryght glad, and up anoon
 Took my hors, and forth I wente
 Out of my chambre; I never stente
 Til I com to the feld withoute. (354-359)

With two "right"s and two "anon"s, in his enthusiasm he dreams the horse right into his room, and ascribes to himself the speed of Juno's messenger, who had "never ne stente/ Til he com to the derke valeye" (154-155). In the dream, the dark valley of hidden thoughts, the dreamer's enclosed chamber, becomes a daylight field he can explore, and a place where he can find and contrive symbols for his mind that will return its freedom to it.

He catches up with the hunt near the edge of the forest, where the riders have presumably slowed up after their dash over the fields. The hunt proceeds in fits and starts: a fast ride to towards the forest (363), a pause for conversation between dreamer and dog-leader (365-370), a quick ride up to the forest's edge (371), the activity of the pursuit (372-380), and finally an abrupt halt, when the hart is suddenly declared to have eluded the dogs, told in a deliberate, redundant, stalling passage of explanation:

This hert rused, and staal away
 Fro alle the houndes a privy way.
 The houndes had overshote hym alle,
 And were on a defaute yfalle.
 Therwyth the hunte wonder faste
 Blew a forloyn at the laste. (381-386)

Stalled by the dogs' error and the narrator's explanation, the hunt then jolts to an end with the unexpected "fast" horn signal. The alternation between fast and slow, or sudden and lengthy, action, makes the hunt seem always to be starting up again, and always "progressing" with jerky motions. It not only suspends the dreamer's narration, it is also itself a broken narrative.

Once the hounds overshoot the quarry, the hunt can only be recuperated by some slower, less tendentious action such as the dreamer performs on his wander through the forest and in his conversation with the Knight. The concentration of the tree occurrences of the "last-fast" rhyme in this poem into this passage (363-364, 379-380, 385-386) reinforces the idea that haste makes waste, that in the hunt for the heart the last shall be first, and that the discovery of poetry lies in the consideration of words and ideas as they are before they are thematically organized.

For the dreamer, the high point of the hunt comes at its beginning, when he learns that Octavian is presiding. "A Goddes half" he exclaims, as if indeed to say that the emperor is half-divine, the wondrous nephew of the Caesar stellified at the end of the Metamorphoses. The awe and dignity surrounding Octavian, his evocation of both Roman and romance tradition, and his association

with literary patronage and taste, could provide a goal or authority figure for the dreamer. But his allure is qualified by the brevity and remoteness of his image. He is present only as a name, an embodied allusion that fuels the dreamer's fancy without prematurely sating it, or setting up Octavian as the key to the dream's or hunt's significance. The odd encounters that follow draw the dreamer into other paths than that of fealty to lord or ideal. The dreamer has still to invent his own perspective. In fact, the emperor's brightness really appear to us only in the dreamer's startled reaction to the mention of him, in that brief "conversation" between the dreamer and his imagination's idea of Octavian, and this process of conversation with images of his own devising must be continued on a wider field with the Knight.

The dreamer's next encounter, with the dog he meets after wandering off from his vantage point on the hunt, chastens his tendency to wish for authority and control over life or thought. The dog, strayed from the hunting pack, is friendly, but runs off the moment the dreamer makes a move to pick it up. It acts "as hyt hadde me yknowe" (392), and yet refuses to get acquainted with him. The dreamer, who like the dog has become a "stray" from the hunt and from social existence, has put himself in the way of meeting friendly strangers and strange friends, encountering whom seems only to send him off on further journeys (unlike, one is tempted to add, the Knight, who, we will discover, has never been sent on any of the traditional trial-journeys by his beloved).

The extroverted, stimulating, hunt, although it falters in its overeagerness, suggests momentarily the serendipitous wandering that the dreamer takes up after leaving the hunt. The hunt has changed the quality of the dreamer's private action, from fixated brooding to a quest through strange images into a dark forest of symbols. The dreamer takes over where Octavian leaves off.

The dog, appearing as the dreamer turns into the forest, and disappearing when he has been turned towards the clearing, seems to be his guide through the transition from determinate to speculative modes of action.

A varied series of changing image-encounters prevents the dreamer from forming too firm an attachment to any one figure. The trail remains a reflection of his own thoughts, from his devotion to a remote authority figure, through his frustrated spark of friendliness with the dog, to his delight in the bower of Flora and Zephyr, exemplars of unpossessive love. One can also describe this sequence modally, as passing from history, the given traditions the emperor presides over, through a brief, challenging brush with the multivalent, elusive symbol of the dog, to the mythic world of Flora and Zephyr, a world that originates explanations of reality. Each phase offers successively more scope to human imagination.

At the path's end, the narrator finds a gathering of all kinds of deer (427-430). The game that had eluded the hunters now reveals to the unintended dreamer their spontaneous, inventive song, as they all "in air manner made festes" (430). Like them, the

dreamer begins his fest here, in the shape of his artful interview with the Knight, and celebrates the animals with a boast about the imaginative achievement of his dream, and a glee previously accorded only to Morpheus and Octavian:

Shortly, hyt was so ful of bestes,
That thogh Argus, the noble countour,
Sete to rekene in hys countour, ...

Yet shoulde he fayle to rekene even
The wondres mette in my sweven. (434-442)

And when these figures of "harts" fade away, they reveal the Knight, who explicitly sets a human heart before us and the dreamer.

In contrast to the obscure and narcissistic concerns of the melancholic, the Knight is an authentic quarry. He will vary his rhetorical tactics as much as Chaucer has varied the landscape for the dreamer. The vagaries of the forest have taught the dreamer to relinquish the goal of conclusiveness and the attempt to control experience. He has practiced enough patience to engage the Knight in a conversation sufficiently gradual and tentative to afford both speakers a full exploration of their own and each other's minds. The dreamer's travels have given him the material on which to build an image of another person. In this achievement of imagination, the dreamer's thoughts and feelings find their being and liveliness.

4. The Search in Words for Truth

. . . directly he was alone on the mound under the oak tree, the seconds began to round and fill until it seemed as if they would never fall. They filled themselves, moreover, with the strangest variety of objects. For not only did he find himself confronted by problems which have puzzled the wisest of men, such as What is love? What friendship? What truth? but directly he came to think about them, his whole past, which seemed to him of extreme length and variety, rushed into the falling second, swelled it a dozen times its natural size, coloured it a thousand tints, and filled it with all the odds and ends in the universe.

(Virginia Woolf, Orlando, chapter two)

The Black Knight finds the self and love and truth he thinks he has lost by exercising a language that resembles the thoughts of Woolf's *Orlando* in revealing and recreating with its changing narrations the unexpected variety of his past, and its presence in his imagination. Both the figures of rhetorical language and the interventions of his audience supply the Knight's speech with variety and strangeness. As figures of alterity and distance, language and audience restore to his thought in imaginative form the things of the past, which were never known so fully at the time of their experiencing as they are now in the time of their recreation. It is the interference of figures of speech and the dreamer that forces the Knight to revise experience. As Kittredge has remarked of the dreamer:

The knight has sought solitude, but a child has stormed his fortress, a grown-up child, who speaks the language of the knight's own world. And the knight talks to the Dreamer in transparent riddles, playing with his own sorrow.³⁵

Chaucer's gift to us is his demonstration, in this and other

poetic situations -- in the variability of his narrative voice, in the diversity of the objects of his affection and interest, in the charm and confusion he claims for his persona, in his trial of genres and lexis and meter, in his constant appeal to irony, ambivalence, and amusement, in his faithful recourse to the precedents and figurations that language and literature make available -- his demonstration that the greatest truths, greatest loves, and greatest visions come to us within the realm of language. It is not for him a case of nihilistically admitting that the universe must be dumped into a relativistic hell of mere words, but a case of discovering that if one persists in attending to words, hearing, recording, and composing words, one will indeed eventually inherit as much truth and wisdom as one might ever have supposed existed outside words. Chaucer is a faithful husband to the mortal condition brought to life in the mutabilities of words, whether plotted in terms of lust, love, or spirituality. One might take for the emblematic Chaucerian plot the loving of Criseyde: like the husband of words, Troilus finds heaven in pursuing a doomed and creaturely love. It is this love that lands him in the stars: "Swich fyn had, lo, this Troilus for love" (my italics).³⁶

The Book of the Duchess offers the true elegiac consolation of reifying loss rather than repealing it, and entrusting it to the mind and imagination rather than eliding it, repressing it, and denying the significance of loss -- which may well be considered the signal occasion in which significance is formed. Inside the varied forms

of social, rhetorical language, with its artifices, songs, allusions, allegories, descriptions, and conversations, the Knight finds the love and truth he thought he had lost with lady White, and the narrator finds interest, renewal, and repose in the plenitude of life.

The first thing we know about the Knight's language is that the poem he makes, the one overheard by the dreamer, is made "with a dedly sorwful soun" (462). This seems to indicate neither the ethical persuasion of Aristotelian rhetoric, nor the utterance of truth sought by the Platonic, but a strictly lyrical chanson with only that audience that the composing itself leads him to imagine. It is "a compleynte to hymselfe" (464), for the Knight as yet knows no other, larger mode of compositions, and relies on a brief and highly conventional form.

His poetic range is related to his personal exhaustion:

Whan he had mad thus his complaynte,
Hys sorwful hert gan faste faynte. (487-488)

He does not actually sing it, but only recites: "He sayd a lay" (471). The rime riche of the next lines, which sounds thin in English, also indicates the poverty of his song, "A maner song, . . . withoute song" (471-472). Upon hearing it, the dreamer feels that

Hit was gret wonder that Nature
Myght suffre any creature
To have such sorwe, and be not ded. (467-469)

These lines, expressing pity, also establish the parallel between the narrator and the object of his compassion, by recalling the opening of the poem:

I have gret wonder, be this lyght,
How that I lyve . . .

For nature wolde nat suffyse
To noon erthly creature
Nat longe tyme to endure
Withoute slep and be in sorwe. (1-2, 18-21_

And the dreamer, despite the song's unremarkability, has no trouble remembering it (473-474). We are led to expect to find in the Knight the lost lamenter we have already met -- and hitherto been eluded by -- in the person of the narrator.

But even before these parallels remind us of his impoverishment, we are sent back to the cave of Morpheus by the Knight's "dedly sorwful soun" (462). Beside that cave, in a lifeless landscape, a few springs running off some cliffs "made a dedly slepyng soun" (162). Chaucer implies by this echo that the Knight's language and song, like that of the reading narrator, has its springs in a Morpheic cave of deep, inner relinquishments, of control, of intention, of expectation. If his first song from this nadir seems flat and uninspired, we should recall that the lack of inspiration comes of his giving up his (pretense of) authority over life, that only he has ceased to "inspire" his experience with deluded significance, thus leaving room for other things to assist him in time. His little song, pathetically pure, captures his language "between inspirations," although its utter conventionality bespeaks the nourishment of literary tradition, and its superficially public form invites the dreamer's inspired underinterpretation. It has at least one line of heart-drawing projection: "Allas, deth, what ayleth the" (481).

But for the moment, the Knight has descended to a state of unshaped sensibility in which he experiences unauthorized feelings, of despair and anger and ambivalence, in virtually undisplaced form. He is in more direct contact with these emotions than he has ever been before, and they disorient his courtly, acculturated self. This is, however, the stuff dreams can be made on, and he is ripe for the conversation's Morphic gifts.

The Knight does not know the true nature of his sorrow, but directs it wholly on himself. He perceives the loss of the lady as a loss of self: "My suffisaunce, my lust, my lyf" (1038). This identifies him as melancholic, and implies that he had not fully known her for herself in life, and that only losing her has brought him to recognize her. It is very much to his own alter ego that he says,

Thow wost ful lytel what thow menest;
I have lost more than thow wenest. (1305-1306)

His narrative is thus largely a re-envisioning of White, an acquisition of a true knowledge of loss that only loss itself can bring about.

This narrative reveals to him a fruitful relinquishing of control in the shape of the death of expectation. Espoirs is the virtue of love that must never be abandonned, which is to say, it must never be satisfied, and never attached permanently to one thing, but felt for itself apart from defined objects. The joy of possession is not to be counted on, and if received, acknowledged as a gift of grace, not an accomplishment by the self. You are not rewarded because your courtship is correct, but because you are

lucky. The abandoning of egoistic delusion is not only a goal of the religious contemptus mundi, but also an understanding that a possessive attitude towards even a spiritual goal is wrong, or futile. Beyond contemptus mundi lies a contemptus habendi. Poetry eventually helps the Knight move from the poverty of thinking he has had something to the poverty of knowing he did not.

His value appears in his relationship with the dreamer. The Knight is the last of the series of figures and emblems encountered by the dreamer in the course of his walk from chamber to glade. Flora and fauna have claimed his attention on every side,

But forth they romed ryght wonder faste
Doun the woode; so at the laste
I was war of a man in blak. (443-445)

The gradual focusing on the Knight resembles the process by which a modern dream reporter addresses first the elements more easily recalled and later the more important -- and therefore more disguised -- pieces of the dream fiction, and suggests that the Knight will summarize the narrator's most significant thinking.

And what the Knight says is primarily a matter of how he says it. When he tells us of the origin of his love, he appeals to traditional personifications of the love machinery and submits his first lyric to our consideration. When he laments the loss of the beloved, he uses first an allegory of chess, and then a graceful arrangement of the topos of two hearts living as one. His final narration is an account of his development as a poet and rhetorician in his courtship of White. His speech is conceived not as a rant

but as a rhetorical exposition of the truth of his feelings, and this project is as evident in his premature insistence on the absoluteness of his emotions as in his more measured perceptions toward the end of the poem.

For the Knight, his passion and the search for truth are coincident. He punctuates his tale with explicit directives for himself to pursue his matter in depth and keep to the important points:

And I wol telle sone why so. (816)

But wherfore that y telle my tale? (1034)

But wherfore that I telle thee? (1088)

The increasing note of doubt sounding through these determinations suggests, of course, that truth in proof is giving way to truth in fiction. Most significant, he introduces the ostensible center of his affection, the lady White, as the residence of truth:

Therof she had so moche hyr del --
And I dar seyn and swere hyt wel --
That Trouthe hymself, over al and al
Had chose hys maner principal
In hir, that was his restyng place. (1001-1005)

This vision of the ideal coming to repose in its exemplar, rather than the other way around, will prove important for the Knight's shift from a somewhat platonizing to a more accommodating and rhetorical understanding of truth. In his study of Gower's Confessio Amantis, Patrick Gallacher shows that, traditionally,

Speech is incomplete and without "trouthe," which derives from and leads ultimately to God, and is best exemplified by a virtuous woman. Because of her synecdochal participation in this process, woman is figurally identified with "trouthe".³⁷

Truth's representation in a woman, however, suggests that even if it is derived from God, it does not really exist until it is desired (we might remember how Petrarch's Augustine told him that it is the person who truly desires a good who gets it). The Knight discovers, and Chaucer suggests, that truth is incomplete without the social art of speech.

The identification of a woman with the truth is usually made by the reader more explicitly than by the poet or lover as in this poem. Wimsatt notes, for example, that while the *Poetria Nova* takes up only physical elements in its directions for describing a beautiful woman, Chaucer includes White's moral traits as well:

This easy gliding from physical description to character ("moral") description, then back to the physical, was in accord neither with the examples provided by the rhetoricians nor with the practice of Guillaume de Machaut in the poems which provided Chaucer's sources.³⁸

Wimsatt, however, then argues that Chaucer has by this and other emphases on White's virtue apotheosized her as a type of the Virgin Mary. I would suggest that the truth residing in her is shown to be a rhetorical truth, a truth brought to light by exercises in human eloquence in response to human desire, rather than a revealed truth of divine origin only. For the Knight's difficulty is precisely that White has not left him any stable or absolute object for love or faith after her death. He must retrieve her just because she is not divinely guaranteed, and he is able to retrieve her by speaking about her to someone else, and then re-creating the effect she had on people. No religious or philosophical

orthodoxy provides a new focus for the Knight's devotion, but rather his own story-telling and description finally enables him to say, "He thynketh I se hir ever moo" (913), and "I nil foryete hir never moo" (1125).

Moreover, the center of White's virtue is not absolute or isolated good, but a goodness one can recognize, because it comes of White's own understanding of reason, and because that reason is realized socially:

And reson gladly she understood;
 Hyt folowed wel she koude good.
 She used gladly to do wel;
 These were hir maners everydel. (1011-1014)

"Gladly" -- she takes pleasure in doing good and thinking well.

In the center³⁹ of the Knight's description of her we learn that she has a rhetoric based on this reason that also issues into both pleasure and ethical good:

And which a goodly, softe speche
 Had that swete, my lyves leche!
 So frendly, and so wel ygrounded,
 Up al resoun so wel yfounded,
 And so trefable to alle goode
 That I dar swere wel by the roode,
 Of eloquence was never founde
 So swete a sownynge facounde,
 Ne trewer tonged, ne skorned lasse,
 Ne bet koude hele -- that, by the masse
 I durste swere, thogh the pope hit songe,
 That ther nas never yet through hir tonge
 Man ne woman gretly harmed;
 As for her ther was al harm hyd --
 Ne lasse flaterynge in hir word,
 That purely hir symple record
 Was founde as trewe as any bond,
 Or trouthe of any mannes bond. (919-936)

Her truth in speech is opposed to social vices like scorn and flattery. It is friendly as well as reasonable -- thus she did "So goodly speke and so frendly" (852) -- and its goodness has the effect of healing. Her honesty is so constant that she never has to swear an oath to mark some of her speeches as more absolutely true than others. She does not protest for truth. Nor, on the other hand, does she read any dishonesty into the discourse of others "By half word ne by countenance" (1022) that overnice listeners can always find in another's words. She listens as honestly as she speaks. Her language is honest without adhering relentlessly to impossible standards of logic or proof without respect to occasion and intention. Her speech acknowledges *interpretation* as a natural part of language.

Her speech is "so trefable to alle goode" (923) that it gives her an air of pleasure and grace in the performance of virtue. The Knight discusses her goodness in terms of her "debonairte" (986), of which she had as much or more than Esther (987). The combination of mild address and moral intelligence in White is exemplified by Esther, the quietly resolute intercessor for her people to a fearfully tyrannic husband:

and so will I go in unto the king, which is not
according to the law: and if I perish, I perish.⁴⁰

In Peter Riga's versification of the Bible (referred to in line 1169), Chaucer would have found a picture of a quite defiant Esther:

From pudor! hic hostis in regis dedecus, ipsum
hec retuens, Esther vult violare decus.⁴¹

Like Esther, White derives her sense of right from kindness rather than established authority. Her social presence resembles the "treftable" man the dreamer finds in the Knight (533), who "made hyt nouthur tough ne queynthe" (531) to talk to him for the sake of some idea of decorum.

In part this description of her speech translates a passage from Machaut's Remède de Fortune:

Et sa gracieuse parole,
 Qui n'estoit diverse ne fole,
 Estrange ne mal ordenée,
 Hauteinne, mais bien affrenée,
 Cueillie a point et de saison,
 Fondée seur toute raison,
 Tant plaisant et douce a oïr,
 Que chascun faisoit resjoïr. (RF 217-224)

The point of Machaut's description is the good "doctrine" (353-356) the lady teaches the lover through her speech:

De ce m'estoit maïstresse bonne
 Qui m'aprenoit a bonne escole. (RF 268-269)⁴²

Chaucer takes from this the graciousness, modesty, softness, and reasonableness, but passes over the orderliness and schooled decorum emphasized by Machaut, and expands the joyousness more in the direction of social benevolence than individual instruction. The qualities new with Chaucer's description are friendliness and truthfulness. Conversability rather than logic is the grounds of her instruction.

When we are told that her wit is "enclyned to alle goode" (991), that goodness is explicated in human terms:

So hool enclyned to alle goode,
 That al hir wyt was set, by the rode,
 Withouten walyce, upon gladnesse. (991-993)

It is "gladly" that she understands reason (1011) and does good (1013). Here her wit is so inclined to the good that it is entirely set upon the glad. As the Knight demonstrates her goodness by her verbal kindness and by her pleasure in right thinking, the radix bonorum for all this aesthetically pleasing goodness emerges as the value called gladness. The philosophical notion that people naturally take greatest pleasure in the good is an old one, but the English word "gladnesse" suggests something more personal, more humorous, and more artistic than the moral pleasure usually thought to come of being good. The special pleasure brought by gladness lies in the working of goodness in the realm of rhetoric, conversation, and poetry. Here the good, the true, and the pleasurable combine in the expression of fine thoughts in fine language. The Knight has come very close to saying that the good comes from the eloquent. One feels it, without being able to prove it directly, because one sees that once the lady has added gladness to goodness, goodness without an aesthetic dimension no longer seems sufficient to the meaning of the term.

5. Interlude on Gladness

"Glad" was a more precise word in Middle English than it is now. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, "The original sense of the word is apparently found in OHG glat smooth," and in Old English the cognate ancestor "glaed" means "bright" as well as "joyous." The Bosworth-Toller dictionary gives "shining" or "bright" as the oldest meaning of the Anglo-Saxon word, while in figurative usage it acquires the range of meaning from cheerful to mild, gracious, and "lordly." Context specifies this quality as the generosity shown by a king to his loyal subject. Wealtheow tells Beowulf to "Bēo wið Gēatas glaed, geofena gemyndig," and says of "glaedne Hrōþulf" that "hē ðā geogoðe wile / ārum healdan."⁴³ And the OED also cites the Alfred translation of Gregory's Pastoral Letters: "Sanctus Paulus cwad aette ðone gladan giefan . . . God lufode,"⁴⁴ where "gladan giefan" translates the Latin "hilarem datorem."

The link between gladness and brightness and generosity persists into Middle English. We find it along with smooth whiteness, shining gold, and the memorializing power of song in the Harley Lyrics:

A wayle whyt ase whalles bon,
A grein in golde þat godly shon,
hire gladshipe nes neuer gon,
whil y may glewe.⁴⁵

By this time the most common meanings of gladness express a particular realization of brightness in some sort of figurative radiance. From the bright sun it is a short, but significant, step to bright eyes expressing social cheer and good humor, and especially the

generosity shown in the beloved's face.⁴⁶ In both social and private situations, faces and bearing can dispense a sun-like warmth, most often in the shape of entertainments. The Anglo-Saxon gift-giver reappears as the bringer of song, stories, jokes, games, and good news.⁴⁷ Several citations in the Middle English Dictionary imply a causal relationship between gladness and song:

Euer-more heo beoð glad & singeð þurh hreows mure.
(a1250, "Cristes milde moder" 54)

Ho was þe gladur uor þe rise,
& song a uerle cunne wise.
(c1250, Owl and Nightingale 19)

A swete longinge . . . þat is of luewe newe . . .
gladhet al my song.
(a1300, "When y se blosmes" 7)

Thei loyeden ful out with musickis and gladnessys
seuene dayes.
(a1382, Wycliffe Bible, 3 Esd. 4.63)

Whanne I wolde with hire glade,
And of hire love songes make.
(a1393, Confessio Amantis 1.2738)⁴⁸

Lydgate explicitly links gladness to rhetorical skill when in the Siege of Troy he advises us to

Lok on the booke that Iohn Bochas made
Whilom of women with rethorikes glade.⁴⁹

A special quality of this expressive joy is that it rises as if unbidden from a natural generosity, as signalled by the frequent element of "willingness" in the various definitions, particularly of "gladly." Plants are glad when they are "fertile" or "luxuriant," and people bring gladness in the form of invigorating, glad medicines, or comfort generally.⁵⁰ Gladness as the expression of exuberant generosity in gifts, medicines, features, and words accords with the

Book of the Duchess' goals of consolation in conversation and poetry, and recreate the cures the physician-lover's medicine might have supplied. A citation for "gladness" from Trevisa's translation of De Proprietatibus Rerum could serve as a gloss on the traditional dream opening that underlies Chaucer's poem:

Presence of þe day comfortiþ and gladiþ briddis &
foules of fligt, for in springe of þe day þe briddis
ben ioyful and singiþ.⁵¹

It is the light and warmth of a generous nature, solar or human, that makes things glad; and we know they are glad by their singing, "*Car chantars est nez de leŕce*" (RF 423).

In the Romaunt of the Rose,⁵² we find gladness ascribed to the eyes or face (862, 936, 1217, 2981), and used in expressions of willingness to speak or listen (5182, 6690, 7513). Harkening back to the Anglo-Saxon gift-giver, the glad face is made emblematic of the lover's free generosity:

For men that yefte holde more dere
That yeuen is with gladsome chere. (Romaunt 2383-2384)

The ideal of expressiveness, whether conceived of as generosity, brightness, or conversation, appears most fully in song, as when the birds, silent throughout the winter,

Ben in Maye, for the sonne bright,
So gladde, that they shewe in syngyng
That in her herte is suche lykyng,
That they mote syngen and ben lyght. (Romaunt 74-77)

Or again,

Ful blysfyl was the accordaunce
Of swete, pytous songe they made,
For al this worlde it might glade. (Romaunt 496-498)

Here, where the French had said that the world should take joy

in the song -- "Toz li mons s'en doit esioir" (RR 486) -- the English reverses the action and points the power of song: "For al this worlde it might glade."

Finally, a figure of personified Gladness itself dwells in the garden. Dame Gladnesse is the lief-love of Sir Myrthe and the companion of the God of Love (see Romaunt 877-878). She walks between them, suggesting that she inspires both playful mirth and intense love. She especially presides over song and dance, which unite the playful and the serious:

These folke, of whiche I tel you so,
Vpon a karole wenten tho.
A lady karoled hem that hyght
Gladnesse, the blysfyl and the lyght;
Wel coulde she synge and lustely,
None halfe so wel and semely,
And make in songe suche refraynyng.
It sate her wonder wel to synge;
Her voyce ful clere was ans ful swete.
She was not rude ne vnmete,
But couthe ynough of suche doying
As longeth vnto karollyng;
For she was wonte in euery place
To syngen first, folke to solace;
For syngyng most she gaue her to;
Ne crafte had she so lefe to do.

(Romaunt 743-758; the
underlined phrases are
not in the French)

Her laughing eyes and blonde complexion, and her first appearance in a round-dance, remind us of lady White; her role suggests the muse-like office of White in inspiring music in and chastening the conversation of the Knight.

In the Tales "gladly" often appears in the formula for agreeing to tell one's story,⁵³ and also characterizes teaching and reading.

Prudence quotes Seneca to the effect that the wise person "shal gladly techen the science that he kan withouten presumpcion or pride,"⁵⁴ and Chaucer says of the Clerk that

Sownynge in moral vertu was his speche,
And gladly wolde he lerne and gladly teche.⁵⁵

The Wife of Bath's pedantic fourth husband

hadde a book that gladly, nyght and day,
For his disport he wolde rede alway.⁵⁶

Whether for instruction or amusement, apt words gladden us. They enlighten -- illuminate and lighten -- the virtues by affording us an ease and elegance of expression that reminds us that virtues come from the human imagination, from our own envisioning of life as a matter of desire and choice as well as necessity. To believe, with the old woman of the Wife's Tale, in such a thing as "glad poverte"⁵⁷ is essentially an act of the imagination, as emblemized by her metamorphosis from loathly to lovely lady, in response to the knight's decision to keep his vow and live rather than reject her.

The imagination gladness is linked to is not just fancy, but among the higher faculties of the mind. In the Consolation of Philosophy, when the Lady in isolating the greatest good has derived renown from reverence, from power, from self-sufficiency, she crowns them all with a sort of spiritual emotion of gladness:

This thyng thanne, . . . that ne hath nede of no
foreyn thyng, and that may don alle thynges by his
strengthis, and that is noble and honourable, nys
nat that a myry thyng and a joyful? . . . Thanne
mote we graunten, . . . that this thing be ful of
gladnesse, if the forseide thynges ben sothe; and
certes also mote we graunten that suffisaunce,

power, noblesse, reverence, and gladnesse be oonly
diverse by names, but hir substaunce hath no diversite.⁵⁸

Gladness is an aspect of spiritual strength that does not differ in essence from its other virtues and blessings. It is indeed the sign of their culmination, the emotion in which one knows and expresses their strength.

It is important that Chaucer concludes the list of virtue's names with its emotional manifestation, and further that he links such gladness so often to language. The muses are "sustres glade" in Anelida and Arcite (16). The feast Dido gives Aeneas in the Legend of Good Women is full "Of instruments, of song, and of gladnesse" (1101). When Troilus' ardor seems to have made him insensible to the outside world, Pandarus asks if he has become like an ass into whose mind "no melodie / May sinken gym to gladen" (TC 1.733-734). With Criseyde, Pandarus pursues his suggestive conversation with interpolations of "many wordes glade, / And frendly tales" (TC 2.148-149); to continue their delicate scandal without breaking it, "Tho fillen they in other tales glade" (TC 2.498). The unspoken excess of feeling in this conversation issues in stories and games that are glad because they are fraught with a secret truth that glimmers around edges.

Criseyde proposes to herself that she may conduct a similarly nuanced intercourse with Troilus by letting their unresolved passion ride in the margin of plays and fictions that adorn otherwise acknowledged and public virtues:

Al were it nat to doone,
 To graunte hym love, ye, for his worthynesse,
 It were honour, with pley and with gladnesse,
 In honestee with swich a lord to deele. (TC 2.703-706)

Hoping for both honor and love, Criseyde sees gladness as both celebrating virtue and implying passion. In Chaucer's description of the conversation between Pandarus and Criseyde, a pun on "glad" -- the adjective "joyous" and the noun "clearing" -- realizes the complement of hidden light and luminous suggestion in the decorations of a discourse:

So after this, with many wordes glade,
 And frendly tales, and with merie chiere,
 Of this and that they pleide, and gonnen wade
 In many an unkouth glad and dep matere,
 As frendes doon what thei ben mette yfere. (TC 2.148-152)

Gladness brings a moral import to beauty and merrymaking on the one hand, and on the other introduces aesthetic pleasure into generosity and graciousness.⁵⁹ This alliance between moral and aesthetic conceptions does not simply use the beautiful to symbolize the good, but sees both as proceeding from an essence of gladness. For Chaucer, gladness is the overflowing of spirit and imagination into actions that are both splendid and humane.

Thus in describing White's goodness, the Knight returns repeatedly to her social presence. He first sees her in company, dancing a round dance. Her speech is "frendly" (852, 921); her "glad-eye" is a mean between mercy (867) and play (875), and between sincerity (869) and modesty (874). She holds good people in brotherly love (892) and uses her influence for them (893-894), never scorning or flattering people verbally (927-937). She performs all her good

works with a readiness that bespeaks gladness. To describe her pre-eminence in society the Knight uses metaphors of shining and reflected light that show the radiance of her goodness:

she was lyk to torche bryght
That every man may take of lyght
Ynogh, and hyt hath never the lesse. (963-965)

A chef myrour of al the feste. (974)

The glow of goodness beautifies and educates the beholder. As a courtly beloved, White reflects to the Knight his ideals of grace, virtue, and beauty. He finds the reality of this ideal in the mediations by the lady: her fictive mirroring that recreates goodness in experience. Her social embodiment of their ideals make them available to the Knight and to all who look on her. It is the glad expression of goodness that educates the beholder, who then takes on beauty along with virtue.

This thoroughly synoptic vision of moral and aesthetic value, deriving both from an essential gladness that is the emotional and aesthetic expression of one's awareness of these values, is the truth the Knight seeks, and finds and loses in White, and retrieves in conversation. This vision does not arise from moral certainty or aesthetic purity, but emerges in the continual reformulation and re-enactment of truth in company. For moral truth, one's heart must not only be good, but a source of goodness in others; for aesthetic truth, one's bearing must not only have politeness and decorum, but be a moving, singing, conversing form that radiates beauty over time.

6. Lover's Rhetoric

To survive the loss of his beautiful teacher, the Knight must find gladness in himself, to recreate her in his imagination. In terms of courtly love, he must change his narcissistic projection and adoration of ideals into a social expression of the realities of his life. He must, that is, learn language, the "other art or letre" (788) he neglected when he first apprenticed himself to love. And in discovering the usefulness of words he had once considered inadequate, the Knight also finds that sorrow need not ruin him, but may refine and enlarge his feeling.

In his early devotion to love, "al my werkes were flyttynge" (801) -- undirected, evanescent, without aesthetic form. He was all faith and no works, and lacked all discernment: "Al were to me ylyche good" (803). His loving has neither an object nor an expression; he finds the first in White and the second in his gradual appropriation and authentication of rhetoric. At first he describes his relationship to love in the usual metaphors of servitude: he is a "tributarye" (765) and "thral" (767) to love "As to my lord" (770). He borrows the simile of his mind's being as receptive "As a whit wai or a table" (780) from the Remède de Fortune, but unlike Machaut's lover, who is immediately inspired with a love-object, and whose mind is turned instantly "vers ma dame" (RF 54), the Knight is left to love on uninformed for "longe, and many a yer" (775). The expansion of this preliminary phase of love makes room

both for the deficiencies of this loving to appear, and for the Knight to make his own contribution to the sensation. While limited, this feeling acquires value in being partly originated by the Knight, who needs a great deal of practice in originating anything at all. If he had loved, and loved White, simultaneously, he would never have had occasion to examine love and his own mind in themselves. As it is, he has made this initial commitment to love with the gladness of one who takes pleasure in an action for its own sake:

And throgh plesaunce become his thral
Wyth good wille, body, hert, and al. (767-768)

These are precisely the terms in which Alcyone offers herself to Juno in line 116, on the verge of her vision of her husband. Similarly, the Knight in giving his heart freely acquires increased susceptibility to the real delight of his vision of his lady. By the same token that he has few ideas of his own, he is open to more ideas than are those who are too selective too soon. The tabula rasa of his mind takes the imprint of

Al that men wil theryn make,
Whethir so men wil portreie or peynte,
Be the werkes never so queynte. (782-784)

The exercise of rhetoric finally enables the Knight to assimilate the most "queynte" thing of all: the loss of the beloved that estranges him from himself, and the retrieval of his ability to love even in absence. Through the agency of rhetoric, the retrieval of the capacity to love coincides with the retrieval of the Knight's faculty of imagination.

In the realm of rhetoric, confronting the audiences of his own confusion and the confusing dreamer, the Knight learns that White is not "The soleyne fenix of Arabye; / For ther livyth never but oon" (982-983). In making up his own narratives, he finds the fecundity of words that shape and expand experience. One cannot say everything at once, as originally projected, but one can say it all in the course of time, and rhetoric may be defined from one point of view as being precisely the kind of language that points to the temporalizations of words. The Knight's courtship of White is largely the story of his mastery of language over time, a process we see continuing even and especially after her death.

At first she awes him -- or his feeling for her awes him -- so much that "Ne telle hir durste I nat my thoght" (1186). But knowing that not telling her is really a disservice to love, and that he will die of silence as surely as he will die of rejection (1188), he finally succumbs to the "wo" of "this debat" (1192) and decides that mercy could not be absent from her virtues:

In hope of that, my tale I tolde
With sorwe, as that I never sholde. (1199-1200)

Speaking reifies sorrow before relieving it. It embodies the lover's sense of being divided against himself in debate, as one who "argued with his owne thoght" (504), before it reconciles him to the compromises of experience.

It initially seems to be a mistake to have spoken when he could only be "styntyng in my tale" (1213),

For many a worde I over-skippte
 In my tale, for pure fere
 Lest my wordes myssset were. (1208-1210)

He realizes that to establish any relationship to the surpassing
 Other he loves, he needs good rhetoric. Some failure of speech,
 however, is the lot of any lover. In the Romaunt the God of Love
 tells the dreamer that, as a lover, he will find himself unable to
 speak in her presence:

Thou shalt eke thynke thou dyddest folye,
 That thou were her so faste bye,
 And durste not auntere the to say
 Some thyng, er thou came away. (Romaunt 2493-2496)

Or he will be able to speak only in a halting, disordered, and
 forgetful manner:

But worde and wytte, with chere ful pale,
 Shal wante for to tel thy tale;
 And if thou mayste so fer forthe wynne,
 That thou reson durste begynne,
 And woldest sayne thre thynges or mo,
 Thou shalte ful scarsly sayne the two. (Romaunt 2529-2534)

One cannot make all one's points at once, but only begin to make
 them from different places again and again. Only false lovers can
 express themselves fully, since their feelings are so empty that
 words suffice for them immediately:

Though thou bethynke the neuer so wele,
 Thou shalt foryete yet somele,
 But -- if thou deale with trecherye;
 For false louers mowe al folye
 Sayne, what hem luste, withouten drede;
 They be so double in her falshede;
 For they in herte can thynke o thyng
 And sayne another, in her spekyng. (Romaunt 2535-2542)

False lovers enact an allegorical way of speaking in themselves,
 using words to contradict their actual feelings. True lovers

make the allegory within language, using words that contradict customary semantic expectations in order to say what they feel. Lovers' words are always figurative, standing for either more or less, or other, than what they say. The most important phrases will be uttered "as that I never sholde" -- as something one should not have said, as a betrayal and an impropriety. How then does the Knight in honor come to speak at all?

When "at the laste" (1221) he comes to himself after seeing her, and finds that "myn hert was come ageyn" (1222), he begins to speak "With hool herte" (1224). He seems to take some encouragement from the objective reality his few words have given to his resolve. But the whole heart takes time to develop, and his first speech simply does not work. She rejects him, and even seems to the Knight to have "acounted nat a stree / Of al my tale" (1237-1238). Here, however, she simply joins in the idiom of the Knight himself, who had realized earlier in telling his tale to us that attempts to outwit Fortune are "nat worth a stree" (671), and of Socrates, who "ne counted nat three strees" (718) of Fortune's vagaries. It is a nice instance of the opening expressions of narrative's preparing for later ones, even if those are earlier events chronologically. Telling the story revises it. The Knight's newly won understanding of Fortune enables him to see what White thought of it.

She seems to know that one story is not the whole story. She is not going to count on something she hears only once, like the random, singularities of Fortune, without benefit of time and

repetition. This simple need for time, and the ultimate sufficiency of time in developing, telling, and hearing a story, accounts for White's later accepting essentially the same story from the Knight for no other reason, so far as we know, than that a year or so has passed:

So hit befel, another yere,
I thoughte ones I wolde fonde
To do hir knowe and understonde
My woo; and she wel understod. (1258-1261)

The word "fonde" here suggests the temporal process of search involved in formulating a speech or fiction, such as the dreamer had decided to "fynde" (536) to explore the Knight's mind. Whether he understood the Knight's song at the time or not, he knew he would need time to comprehend it fully.

This sense that aging and continuance bring rhetoric to fruition explains why, even when the fate of White has been literally reported, the "hert-hyntyng" is declared to be done only "For that tyme" (1313). The temporizing assures that the readers' understanding of the conversation will not become too facile, based as it might be on a faulty assumption that the whole heart required for rhetoric guarantees that any single expression will represent it with a whole speech or in a whole interpretation. The wholeness of character involved in love or speech should be understood as a continuing hypothesis, fuelled by the changing analogies of fictions, rather than as a fixed entity. Its hypothetical nature will vitiate it only for those who do not appreciate that even the most basic moral principles emerge only in

the course of experience, and cannot determine each new event's significance ahead of time. The dreamer thus says he wants to "Have more knowynge of hys thoght" (538), recognizing that the Knight's real thought, while being expressed in his recitation, can be comprehended only in the course of a conversation. The dreamer has already seen that the Knight has "argued with his owne thoght" (504), and that this manifold of thought will only be unfolded in time.

7. "Another Wight:" Allusions, Allegories, Interruptions

John Lawlor has remarked that

If the capital problem of the novelist is to achieve and sustain an intimacy of effect with his solitary reader, the task of the oral narrator can be precisely the opposite -- to win a measure of distance from the small, known audience, to express deepening concern, troubled awareness of impending events, or final exaltation.⁶⁰

The need for and role of distance in language must be a central concern in any extended elegy devoted to the experience and understanding of loss. Rhetorical distance reflects the emptiness or inadequacy that loss gives us to feel. The Knight in the book of the Duchess resorts to rhetorical devices at first as a cover or defense. Gradually, through the rhetorical exercise itself he finds new ways of perceiving his grief, and his rhetoric becomes, not less artificial, but more authentic in its artifice, and comes increasingly to concern itself with artifice per se. Devices that once allowed him to escape narration express, by the very course of detour they lead his acts of signification into, the loss he narrates. The most extensive "figure" the Knight routes his meanings through is the dreamer. It is through his refusal to take the Knight's lyric literally that we also share in sensing the "impending" of events before they happen. His underinterpretation of the song drives the Knight into figured speech, and relocates our understanding of the Knight's situation in the future, so that we attend to his mind's vicissitudes rather than to the particular circumstance they are reacting to.

At first, the Knight "argued with his owne thoght, / And in hys wyt disputed faste" (504-505), so intently that he does not hear the dreamer address him, "For he had wel nygh lost hys mynde" (511). Their first exchange is the dreamer's greeting, "nothyng lowde" (518), and the Knight's apology for his abstraction. Each then in turn insists that the other has not offended him (522-528). The apology in which their conversation begins emblemizes that relinquishment of claims on the world which enables one to enlarge one's perspective.

The Knight's generosity impresses the dreamer:

Loo! how goodly spak thys knyght,
As hit had be another wyght;
He made hyt nouter tough ne queynte. (529-531)

The Knight's well-spokenness consists in two things: his ability to speak as if he were somebody else, and his thereby making it easy for the dreamer to address him. While this gracious persona is a commonplace of polite rhetoric, Chaucer puts it in a somewhat metaphysical way -- "As hit had be another wyght" -- that makes it freshly remarkable. As often, this poem seems to re-originate and speculate about its conventions. Here the implication is that the Knight will indeed become a different man in working through his grief, and must assume a different, or variable, identity in order to express it verbally. The alter ego relationship between him and the narrator is an underlying indication that mourners recover life by diversifying their self-image.

At first the Knight does not use speech to show his grief, but to make a show of ease. The facade gives space to tact, since it

indifferently lets the Knight attend to, neglect, or attend to while seeming to neglect, the narrator's remarks. He almost makes offense impossible, did not the formality that preserves dignity extend its protection to apt expressions of exasperation.

The dreamer senses the implicit invitation in this noncommittal graciousness, finding him "so treftable" (533) that he pursues his address. His wish to "fynde a tale" (536) that will induce the Knight to speak suggests that he hopes to discover a whole story, the Knight's overall sensibility, as well as his particular thoughts. We can therefore expect him to query the Knight at length, whether we think he has or has not grasped the specific loss at hand. He opens with the trivial but suggestive observation that the hangers have lost the quarry and may be starting other game. The Knight admits he doesn't care, he's not thinking about that, and on this slim negative revelation the dreamer hangs an artful combination of oblique address, personal remarks, and formal offers of help:

But, sir, oo thyng wol ye here?
Me thynketh in gret sorwe I yow see. (546-547)

I wolde, as wys God helpe me soo,
Amende hyt, yif I kan or may. (550-551)

For, by my trouthe, to make yow nool,
I wol do al my power hool. (553-554)

Paraunter hyt may ese youre herte,
That semeth ful sek under your syde. (556-557)

In no other dream vision does a narrator pay such close and careful attention, with so much variation on the formal and the intimate, as the dreamer does to the Knight. He virtually begins finding

finding the Knight's story for him with these intertwined choices of idiom. The mix of reiteration and qualification makes the dreamer's offer one that must be replied to at therapeutic length. And in replying the Knight too will be looking for a tale, something evocative and rhetorical rather than informative, that expresses the sensation as well as the fact of loss.

The Knight's rhetorical temper appears in the disjunction between what he says -- "Graunte mercy, goode frend" (560) -- and what the dreamer understands him as implying -- "As who sayth, 'Nay, that wol not be'" (559). The Knight continues to look "asyde" (558) at the dreamer by turning to allusions as soon as he reaches an emotional peak:

me ys wo that I was born!
 May noght make my sorwes slyde,
 Nought al the remedyes of Ovyde,
 Ne Orpheus, god of melodye,
 Ne Dedalus with his playes slye;
 Ne hele me may no phisicien,
 Noght Ypocras, ne Galyen;
 Me ys wo that I lyve houres twelve. (566-573)

All three inventors are circumventers of nature: Ovid with his sophisticated poetry, Orpheus with his supernatural lyric, and Daedalus with his labyrinth and wings. And all fail, not only for the Knight but also in their own lives: Ovid was exiled, Orpheus lost Eurydice, and Daedalus lost his son. In home, spouse, and child, they lose the central figure that had made sense of their lives and fuelled their art, and all had the legend of their art built upon that loss.

The failings of medieval physicians as well must have been obvious to a sensible eye of the time. The point of the allusion to Hippocrates and Galen is that authority will not serve any better in medicine than in rhetoric to assuage grief. He has yet to learn the value of expressing that experience.

In lines 566 and 573 the Knight has pronounced the topos of despairing that he lives, and in lines 574 to 576, that of identifying himself with sorrow -- a topos to which he returns in lines 595 to 597 with a concise intensity that Spenser will remember.⁶¹ That these are rhetorical commonplaces does not indicate that they are thoughtlessly uttered, but that the Knight has begun, simply by talking, to find a different way of re-presenting himself. In speaking to another he engages the imperfections of language rather than trying to exhaust expression. We will see him work through a succession of rhetorical strategies, not from one unrelenting peak of premature sentiment to another.

The identification of himself with sorrow expands into an analysis of his existence in terms of contraries:

My lyf, my lustes, be me loothe,
For al welfare and I be wroothe. (581-582)

The contraries culminate in the most powerful statement of the alliance between death and desire thus far:

The pure deth ys so ful my foo
That I wolde deye, hyt wolde not soo;
For whan I folwe hyt, hit wol flee;
I wolde have nym, hyt nyl nat me. (583-586)

He is alluding to Revelations 9.6:

And in those days shall men seek death, and shall
not find it; and shall desire to die, and death
shall flee from them.

This is the moment when, after the half-hour's silence in heaven, and before the seventh angel presents the bitter prophetic book to the visionary that will signal the unravelling of God's mysteries, the fifth angel sounds his trumpet and brings on the plague of locusts who torment men for five months rather than killing them straightaway. Rhetorically, then, it describes the time after the fall into language, and before any release from language, when only language seems an appropriate mirror and companion for our imperfect experiences.

With the impetus of this allusion the Knight momentarily advances from representing his grief as if death were its subject (as in line 583) to expressing the emotion he is actually feeling:

This ys my payne wythoute red,
Alway deyng and be not ded. (587-588)

He feels himself caught in an unresolved transition between life and death, between total love and total loss.

Before he goes so far as to make himself the subject of his sentences, the Knight averts the provident ending of history by changing from Biblical to classical allusion. Having kept up a rhetorical texture, he can afford an allusional figure more parallel to himself:

Cesiphus, that lyeth in helle,
May not of more sorwe telle. (589-590)

Sisyphus emblemizes the kind of suffering that is always prolonged just at the point of relief. The Knight's melancholy causes him

to circle over and over his grief, while his rhetorical approaches to expression will lead him to circle over grief in different ways, exploring and considering it self-consciously rather than flatly internalizing it. The original context of the allusion is Metamorphoses 10, where Tantalus, Ixion, and Sisyphus are mentioned immediately before Orpheus loses Eurydice. A knowledgeable reader or listener might well think of Orpheus at this point, whose hopes were dashed like Sisyphus' at the last moment, and whose defeat at the frontier of hell, between the emotional realities of the underworld and the utterance of them in the outer world, confirms the need to change one's rhetorical strategies when verging on a revelation: both to avert and to indicate the imminence of that revelation.

To "wiste al" (591) of the Knight's sorrow is only a hypothetical possibility, and he can only invoke, in lines 591 to 594 (negatively), as he had in line 575, the receptive listener who, if such existed, would have been a fiend if not pitying his state. Like the narrator affected by the story of Alcyone (96-100), such listeners are willing to be less themselves in order to hear the speech of another.

Having imagined them, however, the Knight enters his first attempt at narrative, by way of a second, long, catalogue of paradoxes, a trope that reflects the disjunction between the Knight's feelings and his speeches:

My song is turned to pleyynyge,
 And al my laughtre to wepynge,
 My glade thoghtes to hevynesse, (599-601)

and so on, through line 617. This then issues into a description of Fortune as a contradiction between expectation and catastrophe. The rhetorical tradition of describing Fortune fuels the Knight with a copious subject, and he draws enough rhetorical energy from running through it to burst into the direct discourse of the conversation between himself and Fortune (657-660) at the end of their chess game, the first real narrative in his speech (652-661). The game results in the victory of Fortune over the lady, the Knight's fers captured in death. Like the king who is captured but not killed by checkmate, the Knight lives on, a left-over survivor of the game. Its end, affording no real finality, sends the Knight into another excursion into allusion in his search for meaning. Fortune, he says, is a cleverer player

Than Athalus, that made the game
 First of the ches, so was hys name. (663-664)

The syntax of the relative clause, overly inverted even for Middle English, and the formal redundancy of the last phrase, signal the Knight's defensive use of language here. It is significant that he is nevertheless continuing his interest in inventors of arts.

His hectic frame of mind leads him to wish rather vaguely and emptily that he

had bones or twyes
 Ykoud and knowe the jeupardyes
 That kowde the Grek Pithagores! (665-667)

The iteration of "bones or twyes" and "Ykoud and knowe" and "koude,"

set beside the elegant polysyllabics "jeopardyes" and "Pithagores," suggests the inadequacy of his formulations thus far in the face of the magnitude of his suffering. But as Athalus builds on the earlier allusions to inventors, so Pythagoras supplies the Knight with the subject of a later allusion to him as the inventor of song (1167). And the brief chess narrative, with its plays described as "jeopardyes" -- perils or difficulties -- and its "craftier" (662) player, prepares the way for a narration of love as an art fraught with danger. We remember the game when the Knight tells us, "I ches love to my firste craft" (791).

He soon disabuses himself of the notions that having played better chess at one or two points would have gotten him another fate (671-672). He pretends then briefly that he can understand White's death rationally:

Myself I wolde have do the same,
Before God, hadde I ben as she [Fortune];
She oghte the more excused be. (676-678)

But this experimental rationalization is soon revealed to be unreal. He returns to the idea that life is not worth living, clinging to it as the most accurate description of what he feels:

For nothyng I leve hyt noght,
But lyve and deye ryght in this thoght. (691-692)

For the moment, the idea of death and the sensations of mortality alone make sense of the Knight's deep despondency. By staying with the idea, and elaborating it in different expressions and allusions, the Knight learns more about himself. When he first mentions death, it is to accuse it of avoiding him, and allude

to Sisyphus (583-590). Now, death is an idea to be dwelt on and considered. The Knight's phrase, "lyve and deye ryght in this thoght," is reminiscent of Machaut's resolve in the last line of Le Dit dou Vergier to "vivre en son amoureux dangier." Both decisions commit the lovers to dwelling in a twilight zone between total frustration and total satisfaction, where perhaps only fictions, in the absence of stateable circumstances, make sense. On the field of rhetoric the Knight can admit the finality of death and still seek the afterword of understanding. For rhetoric rearranges the feeling about an event, rather than attempting absolute statements of the event.

The Knight is passing through a time when he feels he is nothing, primarily because he has lost the emblem of his ideals. Without White, he feels, "ther leveth no gladnesse / May glade me of my distresse" (701-702). And without an ontological grounding in her representation of abstract Gladness, the Knight concludes that "I have lost suffisance" (703). Because his self now lacks this substantiation, he can take "no plesance" (704) in anything: his capacity to enjoy depends on the realization in the lady of his values and categories. He is in desperate need of a symbolism that will endow his life with meaning and reality. And the pleasure he cannot take seems to be the single greatest index of this crisis of being. For, he says, if "I have no plesance, / Than may I say I have ryght noght" (704-705). What gives meaning and what gives pleasure coalesce in his idea of the essence of selfhood. Being able to contribute to what sense the world makes is the Knight's

mainspring of joy. White had been the mediator between his ideals and his experiences. In her absence, he must find a new symbolism to convey a relationship between himself and phenomena. Since he finds nothing in himself, he raids the world of others' fictions first, with his allusions and traditional allegory. His nadir of self esteem or self awareness, for lack of "suffisance" and "plesance," concludes in an allusion to Tantalus:

Allas! than am I overcome!
For that ys doon ys not to come.
I have more sorowe than Tantale. (707-709)

The Knight's sense of the irretrievability of the past is reflected in the continued and absolute frustration of Tantalus, in a pool he cannot drink from, gazing at grapes he cannot eat, rather as the Knight is haunted by memories of sustenance from which he can draw no nourishment. Sisyphus is punished by frustration in his effort to roll the rock to the top of a hill; Tantalus cannot even move from his station deep in the pool, and is frustrated in the elemental appetites of thirst and hunger. The Knight has found the most accurate image of both the depth of his feeling and the lingering meditation he makes upon it.

At this point the dreamer replies. Insofar as the Knight is the dreamer's alter ego, their dialogue can be construed as another, more extended, device of digression. Indeed, the narrator tells us he speaks to the Knight at this moment because he cannot listen on in silence without tempering the affecting story with the grace-note of fellow's reply:

Unnethe myght y lenger dwelle,
 Hyt dyde myn herte so moche woo. (712-713)

The addition of the dreamer's rhetoric to the Knight's impoverished imagination begins to reconstruct the latter's connection to the world and turn his allusions into original narrations.

The dreamer's initial rhetoric is of a piece with the Knight's, opening with an appeal to traditional lore in his plea that the Knight recognize his creatural limitations, and an allusion to Socrates drawn from the Roman de la Rose, at the point where Reason advises the lover to take her for his lady (RR 5847-5856). After the Knight assures him that "I kan not soo" (720), the dreamer continues with further allusions, introduced by the remark that, regardless of whether he really cannot follow the advice, the Knight should not say so (722). The dreamer prefers inventive language, even if artificial, to language that is accurate but flat. He himself responds to the Knight's despair by launching into a long series of allusions to Biblical and classical suicides.

The examples of Medea, Phyllis, and Dido follow (726-734), and may also be found together in the Roman, in the Duenna's remarks to Fair Welcome to the effect that any woman who entrusts her security to being loved by one man is a fool (RR 13173-13280); another implicit piece of advice for the Knight, this time to unfix and vary his objects of thought. The story of Echo (735) is also told near the opening of the Roman (RR 1439 ff.), and that of Samson briefly by the Jealous Husband and at more length by Genius (RR 9203-9206, 10627 ff.), the point in each case being the treachery

of women rather than the evil of suicide. The context implied by these stories from the Roman is that mortal love is a perilous business and should not be counted on for an unchanging bliss.

In the example of Samson, both poets make Delilah the motivation of the suicide as well as of the seduction, rewriting the story to make their points. But such wayward appropriations of exemplars is not a sign of carelessness, nor of a failure to understand an original text, but an illustration of the basic workings of allusion. Like analogies, they are always imperfect. They are the way out of one story and into another, not quite in either story, more the borderline between them where the process of narration, of imaginatively and even wilfully making up sense out of things, may be seen taking place. In the case of Samson, the allusion's confounding of the two main points of the legend, the surrender to Delilah and the destruction of himself and the temple of Dagon, suggests that love for another person does require a kind of death: not annihilation "with a piler," perhaps (739), but a metamorphosis of the self that devotion to another makes possible.

Taken together, the dreamer's allusions argue for a self independent of contingency and habit, and this theme finds its rhetorical counterpart in the way poets use allusions by partly neglecting an original context in order to enlarge their own.

The dreamer seems to neglect certain levels of the Knight's speech as well, when he proceeds to take his chess allegory

literally:

But ther is no man alyve her
 Wolde for a fers make this woo! (740-741)

These lines answer their own objection to the Knight's grief: this woe is not in fact being made for a fers. Another intensity resides in the "her" and "this," that modify the universality of the statement, and invite the Knight to reconsider himself in light of the compliment of having something better expected of him: nobody in this conversation acts like that. The dreamer is telling the Knight that he is living in the wrong set of words. If grief, like truth, is experienced and known in the mediations of rhetoric, then are not other reactions than his present one also available? Does one not have a choice of nuance in one's passions?

We may return for a moment here to the aging critical question of whether the dreamer is in earnest or in game when he seems to take the Knight literally. Morse argues reasonably that at this point in the poem the dreamer cannot be as informed by history as either we or an audience of the time would be, and that therefore the question is thoroughly academic.⁶² And French has suggested that the conventionality of the song the dreamer overhears would make it impossible for him to deduce the Knight's own experience from it.⁶³ In view of the rhetorical character of the conversation so far, it would seem that Chaucer has planted an appropriate ambiguity at the intersection of the literal and the figurative. Whether the dreamer is being strategic or innocent is a question turning on the relationship between the real and the rhetorical

that has been implied all along. The impossibility of proving one answer or another by demonstration (although one might feel one had laid the issue with common sense) should suggest their interdependence. Further, the Knight's personal understanding of his grief, of White's character, of love, and of his imaginative resources would not develop fully if he were not given space to play out those resources in the form of rhetoric. Indeed, it is only by "misinterpreting" what the Knight says that the dreamer at length elicits what the Knight has needed and partly intended to say.

The Knight attempts to set him straight:

Thou wost ful lytel what thou menest;
I have lost more than thou wenest. (743-744)

Most people when misunderstood say, "You don't know what I mean." When the Knight say, "You don't know what you mean -- you don't know what you're saying," he implicates the listener in his own speech, thus deepening the rhetoricity of the conversation. His own statements are seen as partly dependent on the good intentions and understanding of the dreamer: "to intend" or "to project" is another nuance of "menen" in Middle English. Further, the verb can also mean "to mourn" or "to lament,"⁶⁴ a meaning that orients the word's significance to the specific action of this poem, and which may lightly suggest the elegiac nature of all attempts to mean what we say.

The intensity with which both speakers enter into this longer discussion may be judged, first, from the dreamer's request

that the Knight reveal "al hooly" (746), and, in a somewhat journalistically complete way, "In what wyse, how, why, and wherfore" (747) he has grown so unhappy, and then from the Knight's demand that the dreamer attend to the story "hooly, with al thy wyt" (751). They get the truth by bargaining for it. It exists because they have agreed it shall, in an exchange as energetic as it may seem compromising:

"Yis, syr." "Swere thy trouthe therto."
 "Gladly." "Do thanne holde hereto!"
 "I shal ryght blythely, so God me save,
 Hooly, with al the wit I have,
 Here yow, as wel as I kan." (753-757)

The dreamer's glad and blithe feeling reminds us that he is bringing his own expectations of pleasure to the recital. The relativity of truth appears in the Knight's need for the dreamer's attention in the first place, and in the closing phrase of the dreamer: "as wel as I kan." The individual attention required by the Knight both limits and makes possible his discourse. He no sooner commands an audience, than he finds he cannot get rid of it.

He runs into this audience and truth's relativity again when he climaxes his description of White by acknowledging that she was his life to him and "I hooly hires" (1041). The dreamer says he "trows" him well and cannot imagine how the Knight could have chosen better. Even in dismissed form the category of any "better" incenses the Knight: "'Bet? ne ne wyght so wel,' quod he" (1045). From his narrow perspective he protests too much. When the dreamer reassures him that "Y trow nyt" (1046), the Knight

demands still other terms: "'Nay, leve hyt wel!'" (1047) -- as if, by inventing a difference between "trowing" and "leving" he can invent an extralinguistic, absolute form of attention. Yet in all this he betrays the supremacy of the limited relationship between speaker and listener over the objectivity he seeks. For he cares too much for his listener's reaction. His very irritability with it intimates that he needs it, needs the perspective and challenge and verification of somebody else.

The dreamer rises to the occasion of the Knight's frantic feeling with a pointed suggestion of the relativity of White's beauty.

"I leve yow wel, that trewely
Yow thoughte that she was the beste,
And to beholde the alderfayreste,
Whoso had loked hir with your eyen." (1048-1051)

This shocking suggestion, one which his own dependence on his private vision of her and his solicitude for the dreamer's confirmation have already implied, sends the Knight into another tailspin of allusion:

Thogh I had had al the beaute
That ever had Alcipyades,
And al the strengthe of Ercules,
And therto had the worthynesse
Of Alysaunder. and al the rychesse
That ever was in Babyloyne,

-- with a harried trill on "Babylon" --

In Cartage, or in Iacedoyne,
Or in Rome, or in Nynyve; --

followed by a footnoted allusion within an allusion --

And therto also hardy be
 As was Ector, so have I joye,
 That Achilles slough at Troye --
 And therefore was he slayn alsoo
 In a temple, for bothe twoo
 Were slayne, he and Antylegyus,
 And so seyth Dares Frygius,
 For love of Polixena --
 Or ben as wis as Mynerva,
 I wolde ever, withoute drede,
 Have loved hir, for I moste nede. (1056-1074)

The length and complexity of this suspended description of himself by comparison to exemplars defeats the Knight's intention to convince us of his love's absoluteness. The longer he invokes these models, and the more details of their stories he gives, the more he shows us his own limited nature, and distracts us from his theme to his method (or apparent lack of it).

His turn from a careful description of the perfect White to an unravelled description of his imperfect self when challenged by the dreamer entangles him in confused statements that he cannot countenance himself for long. He falls out of his allusions into a hasty brush with the truth of the matter:

I wolde ever, withoute drede,
 Have loved hir, for I moste nede.
 'Nede!' may, trewly, I gabbe now;
 Noght 'nede,' and I wol tellen how,
 For of good wille myn herte hyt wolde. (1073-1077)

He recoils from the thought of loving under necessity rather than for White herself, in accord with the principle of courtly love whereby "to love hir I was holde / As for the fairest and the beste" (1078-1079) -- although the element of necessity enters here too, "I was holde." In the end, he still admits the contribution of his own heart's "good wille" to his description of her.

There follows another set of allusions describing White, one from Greek and one from Latin literature, with the latter footnoted like the reference to Dares Phrygius in line 1070, but less digressively:

She was as good, so have I reste,
As ever was Penelopee of Grece,
Or as the noble wife Lucrece,
That was the beste -- he telleth thus,
The Romain, Tytus Lyvyus --
She was as good, and nothyng lyk,
Thogh hir stories be autentyk. (1080-1086)

The literariness here is accompanied by something new in the Knight's speech. In the entire description of White, he had used only two allusions, to the phoenix (982) and to Esther (987), fairly unproblematic figures of uniqueness and resolution. But in these allusions he acknowledges the possibility of using more problematic exemplars to describe her. Penelope was the champion of constancy, but lived for twenty years alone to earn the title. Lucretia exemplifies the chaste wife, but was raped and killed herself to do so. On the one hand, the Knight is not afraid to introduce into his image of White figures of love whose absolute devotion punishes them. On the other, he recognizes for the first time the way allusions work by only partly resembling the main figure: White was "as good," but "nothyng lyk."⁶⁵ In such allusions the Knight stores passion that he is not willing to commit to a central narrative. The endurance and sacrifice of these two women for love actually resemble the Knight's situation more than the lady's. In the subsequent account of the beginning of his love, the Knight allows more of the neediness and imperfection of his heart:

I was ryght yong, soth to say,
And ful gret nede I hadde to lerne. (1090-1091)

But as my wyt koude best suffise,
After my yonge childly wyt,
Withoute drede, I besette hyt
To love hir in my beste wyse. (1094-1097)

This admission of imperfection suggests the possibility of improvement as well, hitherto unremembered:

So mochel hyt amended me
That, whan I saugh hir first a-morwe,
I was warished of al my sorwe
Of al day after, til hyt were eve. (1102-1105)

He reverses the narrator's reaction to the story of Alcyone ("I ferde the worse al the morwe / Aftir, to thenken on hir sorwe" [99-100]), but in either case the central lesson is the power of fictions to change our dispositions: for a time, "til hyt were eve." The imagination works continuously, not once and for all, to redeem experience. By seeing himself, for the first time in the poem, as a changing, not a static character, the Knight comes into closer contact with his feelings than he ever did when he was busy proclaiming their rigidity.

While he has relocated White's beauty in his own feelings, the Knight can still be baffled by the dreamer's "cavalier" attitude towards these feelings. Such as he over-reacted to the idea of something "bet" in line 1045, the Knight responds to a light touch from the dreamer here with renewed protestations and another excursion into allusion:

"Now, by my trouthe, sir!" quod I,
"We thynketh ye have such a chaunce
As shryfte wythoute repentaunce."
"Repentaunce! nay, fy!" quod he,

"Shulde y now repente me
 To love? Nay, certes, than were I wel
 Wers than was Achitofel,
 Or Anthenor, so have I joye,
 The traytor that betrayes Troye,
 Or the false Genelloun,
 He that purchased the tresoun
 Of Rowland and of Olyver. (1112-1123)

The examples this time, however, are representatives of the three primary literatures: Achitophel from the Bible, Antenor from the epic of Troy, and Roland and Oliver from vernacular epic. The absence of romance implicitly situates the Knight himself at the beginning of that tradition. As many critics have suggested, the Knight's affirmation of his inability to forget White (1125) marks a turning point in his attitude towards his loss. The more he can speak of her, as he has just done at length, the more he can re-create her quality and character in memory. The formation and use of memory are rhetorical arts, and it is appropriate that in being able to remember his lady skilfully the Knight associates himself with the great epics that memorialized the signal actions in human history and created their fame. And, as with the use of more problematic allusions for White, the Knight here describes himself by contrast to treacherous characters who could compromise our picture of the Knight's utter purity of feeling.

His initial over-reaction subsides and changes in the course of the allusions. The posers of these literary figures confirms the validity of his imaginative vision of the lady. He now treats his feelings, as well as White, less as facts than as recreative fictions. Having exchanged the realm of fact for that of sub-

jective imagination, his reaction to the dreamer's challenge of his feelings leads him not to a contradiction but to a memory.

In these three exchanges with the dreamer, the Knight reacts to his qualifications by resorting to various rhetorical postures: a demand for truth and attention (750 ff.), an insistence upon the absoluteness of his lady's beauty (1045 ff.), and upon the absoluteness of his devotion (1115 ff.) And in each instance the absoluteness is tempered by the allusions the Knight uses. The focus also shifts from the listeners to the lady to the Knight himself, closer to the speaker himself with each exchange. The exigencies of conversation, and the digressive ease introduced by the allusions (despite their being first adduced as proofs), gradually enable the Knight to talk about himself and the reality he is facing with more imagination and less defensiveness.

Their final exchange recapitulates the first, but without the sense of protestation or insistence. When the dreamer returns to the theme of wholeness in speech -- "For Goddes love, telle me al" (1143) -- the Knight replies simply, "Before God . . . and I shal" (1144). His penultimate allusion is specifically to the inventors of song, Tubal and Pythagoras (1160-1170), when telling how, unlike the feeble recitalist we first saw, he used

To make songes, as I best koude,
And ofte tyme I song hem loude;
And made songes thus a gret del. (1157-1159)

His pleasure in singing is amplified rather than depressed by his description of the greater founders of the art, which offers more detail than any of the preceding allusions:

Although I koude not make so wel
 Songes, ne knewe the art al,
 As koude lamekes sone Tubal,
 That found out first the art of songe;
 For as hys brothres hamers ronge
 Upon hys anvelt up and down,
 Therof he took the firste soun, --
 But Grekes seyn Pictagoras,
 That he the firste fynder was
 Of the art, Aurora telleth so, --
 But therof no fors, of hem two. (1160-1170)

The Knight again offers a literary footnote, citing Riga's Aurora as the authority for Pythagoras, and has embraced erudition sufficiently not to be bothered by the presence of two candidates for the inventor of song. As he has found in his revival through conversation, it takes two to invent the imagination in any case. The main thing is that they have reminded him of the process of putting feelings into art, and of the pleasure he has derived from doing so:

Algates songes thus I made
 Of my felynge, myn herte to glade. (1171-1172)

The final allusion is the Knight's comparison of himself to Cassandra when he is rejected by White:

Allas! that day
 The sorowe I suffred, and the woo
 That trewly Cassandra, that soo
 Bewayled the destruccioun
 Of Troye and of Ilyoun,
 Had never swich sorwe as I thoo. (1244-1249)

Characterized here as a mourner like him rather than a prophet, Cassandra is certainly a figure illustrating the greater truth of words than of appearances. Her fated neglect suggests that this greater truth in words is all too often programmatically ignored.

But it will not be, at last, by the Knight. A final section of narrative leads to the last exchange, in which the Knight admits

White's death explicitly (1309). The Knight's description of his and White's mutual bliss leads him to a point of full emotion outside direct expression -- and he sagaciously, now, does not attempt it: "we lyved ful many a yere / So wel, I kan nat telle how" (1296-1297). He has already given the dreamer enough information to ask directly about the lady's state (1298). For the first time, the Knight's response is neither narration or song, allegory or allusion, but silence:

"Sir," quod I, "where is she now?"
 "Now?" quod he, and stynte anon. (1298-1299)

She is in the silence shaped by two questioners reacting to each other, turning each other's "now"s almost immediately into narration. With the absenting of all external ideas, their rhetoric now comes only from the poem itself, in interior allusions:

Therwith he wax as ded as stoon,	as cold as ston (123)
And seyde, "Allas, that I was bore!	allas! that I was born!
That was the los that here-before	(686)
I tolde the that I hadde lorn.	cf. ll. 744, 1138

(1300-1303)

For the first time, the Knight explicates his own words:

Gethenke how I seyde here-beforn,
 'Thow wost ful lytel what thow menest;
 I have lost more than thow wenest' --
 God wot, allas! ryght that was sne! 1304-1307

The dreamer, not stopping short of total clarity, asks for one more specification (1308), and the Knight replies simply "She ys ded!" (1309). Now it is time for the dreamer to protest "Nay!" (1309). With this word Chaucer carefully preserves the emotional current of the whole story. The passion of the Knight, tempered and reshaped

by rhetoric, flows into the heart of the dreamer. And the dreamer's "May" is his own first impassioned expression of the grief he has felt in waking life. As mutual fictions, the Knight with his audience and the dreamer with his alter ego, the speakers have set their thoughts into art, and indelibly inscribed the trail of their feelings, and of their very hesitations and ambivalences, in the changing and various work of rhetoric that alone can receive the full print of reality.

The Knight has finally allowed himself to feel his grief, and with his own permission to do so, can speak it, and have earned the oath "Yis, be my trouthe!" (1309). The dreamer utters a brief rhetorical question and names the new emotion: "Is that youre los? Be God, hyt ys routhe!" (1310). After this, dream and poem unravel quickly:

And with that word ryght anoon
They gan to strake forth; al was doon,
For that tyme, the hert-huntyng. (1311-1313)

Remembering lines 385 to 386 ("Therwyth the hunte wonder faste / Blew a forloyn at the laste"), we realize that all this has taken place within the moment of the signal for ending the hunt. The thread of narration has been unwound through allusions and interruptions looping around a compacted grief, not through a story that actually has a lot happening in the "main" plot. The accommodating imperfections of language have been recognized in the Knight's rhetoric, and his own truth allowed to rise in the margins of fictive words. The hart steals away, and the Knight's heart keeps from breaking, but both have been seen and known in the pursuit.

Notes to Chapter IV

Notes to pages 311-320

- ¹ James J. Murphy, Rhetoric in the Middle Ages: A History of Rhetorical Theory from Saint Augustine to the Renaissance (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1974), p. 143.
- ² Murphy, pp. 187, 191.
- ³ Murphy, p. 187.
- ⁴ Murphy, p. 187.
- ⁵ A clear, detailed survey of medieval Aristotelianism is given by Fernand Van Steenberghen, Aristotle in the West: the Origins of Latin Aristotelianism, trans. Leonard Johnston, second ed. (Louvain: Nauwelaerts Publishing House, 1970). See, for example, the discussion on pp. 164, 185.
- ⁶ Murphy, p. 142.
- ⁷ R. H. Robins, Ancient and Medieval Grammatical Theory in Europe (London, 1951), pp. 81-82, cited by Murphy, pp. 155-156.
- ⁸ David Knowles, The Evolution of Medieval Thought (London: Longmans, 1962), p. 316, italics mine.
- ⁹ Knowles, p. 316, italics mine.
- ¹⁰ Knowles, p. 332.
- ¹¹ Edmond Faral, Les arts poétiques du XII^e et du XIII^e siècles (Paris, 1924), p. 55.
- ¹² Geoffroi de Vinsauf, Poetria Nova, ed. in Faral, pp. 197-262, ll. 756-764: "That the subject, therefore, may take to itself the most precious garment, if the word is old, be the physician, and render the old new. Do not always allow a word to reside in its proper place: such residence is a dishonor to that word; may it shun proper places, and wander elsewhere and found in the grounds of another a pleasing seat: here shall it be a new guest, and it shall please with its newness. If you make up this antidote, you shall make the word's face to grow young again."
- ¹³ Vinsauf, 247-255: "What is made in secret, arrives with no signal; it comes not with its own face, but disguised, and as if there were not a simile here, but a certain new and wondrously inborn metaphor, where a thing thus carefully sits in a passage as if it were born from the

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themes: while it is taken from elsewhere, yet it seems taken from within; it is of the outside, but does not appear there; both within and without, here and there, afar and near, it stands apart and close by."

14 Vinsauf, 960-964: "This decade of colors, colors words with such weight, because it is a voicing adopted in a strange, not proper, measure. One manner for all; namely, an improper assignment of the voices, and an import wandering on a pilgrimage for the words."

15 Vinsauf, 766-769: "If it be a man about whom the passage is made -- I transfer something similar to what is expressed; in a similar case, when I see what is its proper garment, I borrow that, and change to a fresh from my former garment."

16 Vinsauf, 229-231: "That the work may be longer, do not set down the names of things; set down other tokens; do not reveal a thing plainly either, but signal it through these little tokens."

17 Murphy, p. 178.

18 Vinsauf, 1757-1760: "If you wish to enjoy a happy triumph, supplement the less and curtail the more, polish what is rough, clarify what is obscure, correct what is vicious. With these cures all things are made healthy."

19 Vinsauf, 796-797: "When you metaphorize your original subject, that has more savor, because it comes from outside that subject."

20 Vinsauf, 1058-1060: "A close figure declares the sense more easily; but a moderate distancing of voicing dwells more in the ear and has more savor."

21 Vinsauf, 949-951: "When a thought prepared with such ornament arrives, the sound of its voices comes sweet to the happy ear, and a new inward pleasure strokes the mind."

22 Vinsauf, 1972: "The brain cell that remembers things is the cell of delights."

23 Vinsauf, 1974-1975: "It wishes to be kindly extended, not ill oppressed."

24 Eustache Deschamps, L'Art de Dictier, ed. G. Raynaud, in Ceuvres completes de Eustache Deschamps (Paris: EATF, 1891), vol. 7, pp. 266-292.

Notes to pages 326-342

- 25 Deschamps, p. 291, for the term "engin;" pp. 269-271 for the distinction between natural and artificial music.
- 26 Deschamps, p. 269: "By its delectable melody the hearts and spirits of those who have been worked, weighed down, and troubled by thought, imagination, and physical laborexercised in these arts, are cured and restored, and more able afterwards to study and work at the other six arts named above."
- 27 Deschamps, p. 271: "a vocal music made in pronouncing metrical phrases."
- 28 Deschamps, p. 271: "this natural music arises from amorous intention to the praise of ladies."
- 29 Deschamps, p. 272: "these songs can often be performed in several places where they are most willingly heard, and where the songs of artificial music would not always be in place, as, between lords and ladies in private and secretly, where natural music can be pronounced and performed by a single man's voice."
- 30 Deschamps, p. 272: "to read some books of these pleasing songs before a sick person, and in other similar cases."
- 31 See Freud, The Interpretation of Dreams, Chapter 6, "The Relation of Jokes to Dreams and to the Unconscious," for the hypothesis that "in the formation of a joke one drops a train of thought for a moment and that it then suddenly emerges from the unconscious as a joke" (p. 225).
- 32 See the discussion of the birdsong motif in section 7 of Chapter II above, pp. 234-235.
- 33 "Finden" in Middle English often means in particular to invent or devise a musical or rhetorical figure or composition, or to found or establish the rules for such an art, as in the Prologue to the Tales 736, the Summoner's Tale 1920, the Parson's Tale 532, TC 3.1357, the Legend of Good Women, Prologue G 271, and, in BD, 319 and 506. For "finder" as an inventor or founder, see BD 1167, TC 2.844, and the variant reading of line 1 of "Gentillesse." See also the YED, "finden," v. 21a, 23a.
- 34 Chaucer draws on RR for the scene's light and clarity. The dreamer's joy in the Jewelled riverbed becomes pleasure in humanly artificed ornamental walls in BD. RR 116-125: "Si m'abelissoit e seoit / A regarder le leu plaisant. / De l'eue clere reluisant, / Non dis refreschie laue; / Si ui tot couert e paue / Le fonz de l'eue de graueille. / La prairie grant e bele / Tresqu'au pie de l'eue bastoit. / Clere e serie e dette estoit / La matinee e atempree." Underlined words do not appear in the Romaunt. Where the French doubles almost synonymous verbs 116, 117, 120, the English doubles

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and varies more the nouns and adjectives, giving more detail:

And wonder gladde was I to se
 That lusty place, and that ryuere;
 And with that water that ran so clere
 My face I wysse. Tho sawe I wele
 The botome ypaueu euerydale
 With grauel, ful of stones shene.
 The medowes softe, sote and grene,
 Beet right on the watersyde.
 Ful clere was than the morowe tyde,
 And ful attempre, out of drede. (Romaunt 122-131)

Underlined words have no equivalent in the French. The English gives more detail to the riverbed and meadow, creating image and feeling from the physical picture, where the French pays more attention to generalized notions of good weather, stating the viewer's reactions more than eliciting them.

35 G. L. Kittredge, Chaucer and His Poetry (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1915), p. 70.

36 For the reading of this line, and a fresh interpretation of the ending of *Troilus and Criseyde*, see Peter Dronke in Medium Aevum 33 (1964).

37 Gallacher, Love, the Word, and Mercury, p. 105.

38 J. I. Wimsatt, "The Apotheosis of Blanche in The Book of the Duchess," JEGP 66 (1967), p. 28.

39 The Knight's description of White may be organized as follows:

actions	7 lines	(848-854)
physical traits	11 lines	(855-865)
virtues	29 lines	(866-894)
physical traits	24 lines	(895-918)
speech	20 lines	(919-938)
physical traits	22 lines	(939-960)
social virtues	14 lines	(961-984)
moral virtues	30 lines	(985-1014)
actions	19 lines	(1015-1033)

The numerical center of the description would be line 941. There are 71 lines before and 105 lines after the paragraph on speech. The virtues of speech are less conventional in such a description than are the other virtues included here, and are conceivable as both moral and physical virtue, or as mediating between them; hence I separate it out in its own place. While one could argue the

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spatial centrality of speech in the description, sequence in time is more important than architectural order in this poem. (The system of frames, for example, is shifted forward by the detailed development of their opening and the abruptness of their closing.) In this instance, one can read speech as the catalyst for transforming physical beauty into ethical good, as the description of mainly physical traits precedes the section on her speech, and the description of mainly moral traits follows it.

40 Esther 4.16

41 Petrus de Riga, Aurora, in PL 212.30C: "Oh decent modesty! not even fearing this criminal lapse from courtesy in an alien kingdom, Esther is willing to violate decorum."

42 "And her gracious speech, which was neither perverse nor foolish, uncouth or ill-ordered, or proud, but well restrained, edited to the point and seasonably, founded entirely on reason, so pleasing and sweet to hear that it made everyone rejoice." "She was of this [art] a good mistress to me, who taught me in a good school."

43 Beowulf, ed. Fr. Klaeber, third edition (Lexington: D.C. Heath, 1950), l.1173: "Be generous with the Geats, mindful of the sea;" and 1181-1182: "glad Hrothulf . . . will rule over the young warriors with honors and benefits."

44 Pastoral Letters, xlv.322, cited in OED under "glad" adj. 2.

45 The Harley Lyrics, ed. G. L. Brook, fourth edition (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 1968), no. 9, ll. 1-2, 5-6.

46 See MED on "glad" adj.3. Pearl describes the maiden's and the Lamb's radiance in terms of gladness of face or eye (Pearl 169-172, 1143-1144).

47 MED, "glad" adj. 1c, 4a; "gladsom" 2; "gladen" v. 1 b/c.

48 See also CA 1.2784: "With such gladnesse I daunce and skippe," cited in MED.

49 Lydgate, Siege of Troy, 3202-3203, cited in MED.

50 MED, "gladly" 2a; "glad" adj. 1b, 2d, 4e; "gladen" v.1a, 1 b/a, 1 b/b.

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- 51 Trevisa, De Proprietatibus Rerum, 126 a/a, cited in MED
- 52 In the Romaunt "glad" and its forms usually translate forms of "volentiers" (expressing willingness to do things or to listen to a story or piece of advice), "esjoir" (modern "réjouir"), or "leesce" (modern "joie" or "réjouissance").
- 53 Prioress' Tale 1642, Tale of Melibee 936, Franklin's Prologue 703, Wife of Bath's Prologue 188, Introduction to Pardoner's Tale 326.
- 54 Tale of Melibee 1070.
- 55 General Prologue 307-308.
- 56 Wife of Bath's Prologue 669-670.
- 57 Wife of Bath's Tale 1183.
- 58 Boece, III. Prosa 9, line 70 ff.
- 59 Thus William Dunbar: "Be mirry and glaid, honest and vertewous," poem xxiii.1 of the STS edition (1893), poem 73 of W. M. Mackenzie's edition (London: Faber and Faber, 1970) of Dunbar's Poems.
- 60 John Lawlor, "The Earlier Poems," in Chaucer and Chaucerians, ed. D.S. Brewer (University, Alabama: Univ. of Alabama Press, 1966), pp. 41-42.
- 61 FQ 2.9.43 (in conjunction with 2.9.42, a passage highly reminiscent of BD 544-557).
- 62 Ruth Morse, "Understanding the Man in Black," ChRev 15 (1981), pp. 204-208.
- 63 W. H. French, "The Man in Black's Lyric," JEGP 56 (1957) pp. 231-241.
- 64 See the Romaunt, "My great vnease ful ofte I mene" (2596), translating RR 2464: "Souuent me plaing e me demente." Cf. YED "mēnen" v.2.
- 65 In the RR Penelope and Lucretia are cited, along with mention of Titus Livius as their source, as examples of women oppressed by men like the Jealous Husband (8605-8612). The Knight is certainly possessive, if not cruel.

Chapter V. The Book of the Duchess for Later Poets

When in the chronicle of wasted time
 I see descriptions of the fairest wights,
 And beauty making beautiful old rhyme
 In praise of ladies dead and lovely knights;
 Then, in the blazon of sweet beauty's best,
 Of hand, of foot, of lip, of eye, of brow,
 I see their antique pen would have expressed
 Even such a beauty as you master now.
 So all their praises are but prophecies
 Of this our time, all you prefiguring,
 And, for they looked but with divining eyes,
 They had not still enough your worth to sing;
 For we, which now behold these present days,
 Have eyes to wonder, but lack tongues to praise.

(Shakespeare, Sonnet 106)

Shakespeare's sonnet is replete with intimations of the visionary romance of the Book of the Duchess. While, however tempted by the circumstances in line 4, we cannot show any verbal reminiscence of the older poem, we can feel how an elegiac understanding of romance idiom informs the conception of the sonnet. The Book of the Duchess is the first poem in English or French to conflate love vision and elegy, and while vision is ultimately superseded by pastoral, the collocation of desire, death, and poetry is the very stuff of renaissance lyric. Even poets who imbibe little of this vision, Lydgate or Hawes, say, look to this poem's particular situation, the self-conscious melancholy narrator wandering through strange scenes and encountering a mourner, as the natural and essential point of departure for a poem. Chaucer has created the opening for poetry, in the steadfastly inconclusive, experimental, changing, and fictive structure and method of this poem. It is the archetypal beginning, its caves and paths and

stories teaching later poets to seek their impetus in the disorder and loss where imagination works. Troilus and Criseyde and the Canterbury Tales are read; but the dream visions are more often alluded to, and the Book of the Duchess most clearly imitated and most completely remembered. For it offers a myth of the beginning of Everypoem.

I will consider its influence by reviewing several particular poems: first some by near contemporaries, Froissart, Lydgate, James I, and the author of the Flower and the Leaf, then some early sixteenth-century pieces by Hawes, Sackville, and the author of the Speculum Misericordie, culminating in Spenser's splendid debts to Chaucer, and closing with readings of works by Dryden, Thomson, Keats, and Wordsworth that show the poem's influence at its furthest reach. As detailed reminiscences, common in early imitations, fall away with the passage of time, the perduring relevance to imaginative work of the skeletal situation of the Book of the Duchess emerges, first in the more dramatic style of the Renaissance, later in the more private lyrics of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

1. Froissart, Lydgate, the Flower and the Leaf, James I.

Froissart, Le Bleu Chevalier.

Several details in this poem strongly imply that Froissart had the Book of the Duchess in mind when writing Le Dit dou Bleu Chevalier. The narrator, without planning to, comes upon a knight dressed in one color (blue here, perhaps for truth and loyalty), who sings, wanders over to sit beneath a tree, and then breaks into lament. This precise gathering of the motifs of color, song, tree, and lament does not appear in any other vision I have read except Chaucer's. The narrator of Froissart's poem also resembles Chaucer's in his susceptibility to the sorrows of others because of his own melancholy. When the knight sighs to him,

En ce regart pris je si grant pité
 Qu'il me souvint
 Dou temps passé, dont changier me convint. (BC 191-193)¹

Smaller points of shared imagery include the mention of Socrates (BC 252, 411) and Ovid (BC 254).

The differences between the two poems appear highlighted in the context of the overall influence. Froissart steps back from and points to his poem's situation more explicitly than does Chaucer, who does little more than set it before us in all its pristine confusion. After the opening sententia of Froissart's first four lines, and their hint of unpredictability and mystery, he immediately specifies how his experience has illustrated these qualities:

On cherche bien ce qu'on ne poet trouver,
 Si troeve l'en souvent sans demander
 Ce qu'on ne cuide veoir ne rencontrer.
 Pour moi le di.
 Car il n'avint, n'a pas grant temps, ensi,

Que sans cerchier je trouvai devant mi
 Une aventure, onques tele ne vi
 En mon vivant.

(BC 1-8) ²

The adventure is soon seen to be his meeting with the knight, so that little time is spent in creating a sense of adventure in the reader. And since the adventure replaces the dream device, the poem lacks the layering and blurring of boundaries between reality and fiction.

Still, Froissart is being distinctly less direct in this poem than is his wont. The rest of the action consists primarily of wild and abrupt oscillations in the knight's moods. Feeling shimmers here as it rarely does in conventional love allegories. The knight moves from grief to joy and from joy to grief with only the slimmest of apparent causes.

Lorsqu'assis fu, si laissa joie et chant
 Tout à un fais,
 E commença à faire grans regès.

(BC 43-45)

Ne sçai de quoi adont il li souvint,
 Mès en son coer si grant joie revint.

(BC 54-55)

De ses dolours toutes là li souvint,
 Et après ce, un confort li revint,
 Qui son meschief
 Le fist passer et oublier son grief.

(BC 150-153) ³

He shifts like this no fewer than ten times from grief to joy or from joy to grief. The net implication is that there is not much to choose between the two. The joy and sorrow of the knight would seem to be the two manifestations of an "antithetical ur-emotion" commonly known as love and fraught with deep ambivalences. The knight even seems to feel that both joy and sorrow are emotions that one ought to feel as if by duty:

Mès je doi plus penser à mes anuis,
Que je ne doi parler de mes deduis. (BC 78-79)

Après plours et regrés,
Doit on chanter chançons et virelais
Pour oublier
Ce qu'as amans voelt Fortune envoyer;
Trop est diverse . . . (BC 130-134)⁴

The vagaries of his emotions may be brought together under the notion of diversity or digressiveness of feeling. The narrator says one should sing to forget what Fortune sends to lovers, because that fated feeling "Trop est diverse." The alternations in feeling become simultaneous feelings:

Là où le plus le cuidois en degois,
Plain de solas et de tous esbanois,
Son coer devint si mas et si destrois
Qu'il le convint
Seoir sur l'erbe, et là un temps se tint. (BC 145-149)⁵

"Esbanois" is from the verb "esbanoier," defined by Godefroi as "divertir," that word connoting in Old French both amusement and perversity. The heart full of consolation and diversion soon grows constrained under such satiety, and weakens until the knight must rest from his rejoicing, forever to be puzzled by the change:

"Pourquodensi une heure en esbanoi, / L'autre en dolour" (BC 203-204).⁶

Both the narrator's adventure and the knight's feelings occur in wandering and digression. The similarities between them suggests that, on the one hand, the knight's emotional wandering continues the narrator's adventuring, and on the other that the aventure has some emotional significance. The implication is that the deepest feelings are the most ambivalent, and the most lasting ones those whose expressions change. Given this, a person in search of true feeling must not insist on any one as highest or deepest. Here

we may recall that the knight seems to feel equally duty-bound to feel despondency and to sing joyfully. The swift alternations he experiences seem to express the forcefulness of the emotions more than an insistence on self-centered moodiness, and his final counsel to the narrator is to love and serve "tous jours de coer appert" ? (EC 450). Open to all emotion, one does justice to the heart's repertoire.

Froissart ends the poem with a dramatized envoy in which the knight asks the narrator to write down his adventure. He also asks that the narrator's adventure be told, and that the story be broadcast to as wide an audience as possible -- in part so as to have the best chance of reaching the lady's ears, but in part also because the knight has seen the value of entrusting oneself to an outside agent of composition, be it Fortune's course for lovers, the traditional forms of songs, the narrator's conversation, or the mind of an audience.

While Froissart's work almost always uses and refers to a certain degree of literary self-consciousness or self-reference, in this poem the lover actually learns through and initiates literary work as a virtually redemptive action. In however less complex and less developed a form, this adventure seems to have drawn on the Book of the Duchess' interest in the imagination's actions in and of themselves, their origin in unorganized or undecided states of mind, and their to redeem sorrow. This as well as the similarity in plot bespeaks Chaucer's influence.

Lydgate, The Complaint of the Black Knight

This poem, also called Complaint of a Lover's Life, draws on the Book of the Duchess for its initial situation, and is Lydgate's own first known poem of length.⁸ Pearsall notes that

It is a mosaic of Chaucerian themes and phrases, particularly heavily indebted to the Book of the Duchess, for the frame-story of the poet unhappy in love and for the device of the overheard complaint.⁹

Lydgate, like Pearsall, assumes that love and love alone is at the back of the narrator's melancholy, but the major differences between this work and Chaucer's more mysterious text lie in the relationship between narrator and knight and the texture of the poetic language.

The narrator's reaction to seeing the knight is to withdraw:

Wherof astonied, my fote I gan withdrawe. (BK 141)

And gan anon so softly as I coude
Among the bussches priuely me shroude. (BK 146-147)

He does not come forward to help, and does not enter into any rhetorical or personal relationship with the knight beyond that of a voyeur who is repeating for us what he has overheard:

With al my myght I leyde an ere to
Euery word to marke what he sayde
Out of his swogh among as he abreyde. (BK 152-154)

The parallels between his despondency and the knight's are left for the genre and the audience to draw -- an audience and a genre which for this particular situation had been created by Chaucer. Without knowing the Book of the Duchess, one would find little resonance in the Complaint. The separateness of the narrator and the knight prevents much speculation on the working of the former's imagination

in creating the latter. The insomnia, prayer, and sleep that are prototypes and preludes of imagination for Chaucer's narrator do not appear in this poem until the very end, where they function rather as reactions than initiations. In a way, what Lydgate has given us here is the reading of an ovidian tale (with Chaucer for his Ovid) and the subsequent prayer, but not any poetic work of his own following upon them.

As a result of this lack of speakers' interaction, the knight never departs from a very abstract way of lamenting. He speaks largely in terms of exempla and personification, and when he says something directly about himself or love, it is at an impenetrably general level.

In this less challenging situation, the narrator's actions come more easily. The difficult entries into the gardens of the Roman de la Rose and the Parliament of Fowls are changed for a more democratic gate:

and by a gate smal
Whoso that wolde frely myghte goon
Into this parke walled with grene stoon. (BK 40-42)

The efforts of initiation have given way to an easy following in the footsteps of earlier lovers. The well of Narcissus is specifically excluded (27), as is the pool of Diana that Acteon saw to his misfortune (34), as being too inimical to the narrator's desire for cure:

But this welle that I her reherse
So holson was that hyt wolde aswage
Bollyn hertis and the venym perse
Of pensified. (BK 39-42)

The ease and unambiguity of the narrator's actions are reflected in the clarity of the images. Lydgate tends to choose images of a hard, metallic quality. He uses mythic names to adorn a scene rather than to bring into a scene other stories. He states each element of the dream vision idiom equally, diluting the effect of his images both by his evenhandedness and by doublets that repeat without developing an idea (BK 37, 59, 85, 129-131, 220). No real lapse into bewilderment or fatigue interrupts the steady stream of known significant epithets coming to the narrator's mind. As a result, we never see how they arise. Unlike most of Chaucer's poetry, where the language's degrees of formality, realism, figuration, and pacing vary continually, Lydgate offers, in Pearsall's phrase, "a template of a poem."¹⁰

Matching this uniformity of imagery, there is in the thought as well an insistence on definiteness, in the shape of an over-emphasis on truth similar to the fretfulness Hoccleve first displays over the unreliability of coinage and the world in his prologue to the Regiment of Princes. Lydgate's knight feels his lady's disdain, the calumnies of others, and the damage it has all done to his self-esteem and worth, are capable of compromising his truth (in the sense of either his loyalty or his honesty and self-consistency).¹¹ After reading the Book of the Duchess, one may suppose that in fact a flexible understanding of truth, or rather an understanding that truth is flexible, that it is, for example, the daughter of time and often the creation of rhetoric, allows more things to mean more. But Lydgate's knight equates truth with consistency, especially

conceived of as due reward in the world for due service from oneself:

For euer sithe that the world began,
Whoso lyste loke and in storie rede,
He shal ay fynde that the trewe man
Was put abake, wheras the falshede
Ifurthered was: for Love taketh non hede
To sle the trwe and hath of hem no charge,
Whereas the fals goth frely at her large. (BK 323-329)

He does not take Fortune's hint. He does not see that the unreliability of life gives room to fiction and imagination, and that without such discrepancies between action and reaction, nothing would have to mean anything in the first place.

The narrator's poetic project is to write down the knight's complaint verbatim, without any interpolation from his own fancy. He thus does not even ask us to increase or diminish his language. His own prayer to Venus is that she "Descende down in furthrying of the trouthe" (BK 631), "For to socour . . ./The trewe man that in the erber lay" (BK 636-637).

In regard to the Book of the Duchess, the Complaint of the Black Knight demonstrates that while Chaucer cannot inspire all poets, he has devised the narrative motifs that seem as intrinsic to poetry as measured lines in the eyes of all versifiers.

Lydgate, The Flour of Courtesye.

In this slightly later poem Lydgate is a better steward of his inheritance. Both this and the Complaint owe so much to the Book of the Duchess for motif, and so little to Chaucer for poetry, that one suspects they would not have gotten off the ground at all without that supply of situation from the earlier work. And this

predicament is one of the things bothering Lydgate in the Flour of Courtesye.

It is a poem about a dawn that brings sorrow to both his love and his literary life. He laments that he has entered upon a love "Where I am never lykly for to spede" (FC 79), and laments as well the new and lesser dawn of the age of poetry that begins from the death of Chaucer:

Chaucer is deed, that hadde suche a name
Of fair making, that was, withoute wene,
Fairest in our tonge, as the laurer grene.

We may assaye for to counterfete
His gaye style, but it wil not be;
The welle is drye, with the licour swete,
Both of Clio and of Caliope. (FC 236-242)

He is doing the poetic thing, however, in reconciling himself to his amorous frustration by posing himself a problem to solve on a literary level, namely how to continue poetry after Chaucer. And having lamented the passing of the man, Lydgate is brought round by a reminiscence of the poetry in the shape of "the licour swete" distilled from the Prologue to the Canterbury Tales (IT 3-5). His own words on the page affirm the living influence of the master whose death they mourn, and the elegy, as in the Book of the Duchess, becomes a visionary elegy.

Having been able, through his elegy for Chaucer, to step back from his immediate sense of inadequacy and view his place in a continuing tradition, Lydgate proceeds to an eleventh-hour rescue. The lines immediately following the lament for Chaucer announce Lydgate's intention to write, and a "Salade simple" follows, poetry issuing out of its own account of its own death with Chaucer.

The turning point for Lydgate's realization of his poetic resources comes, as we might now expect, during his apology for his poetic poverty in lines 176 to 189. Two different approaches to praising the lady hinge around this passage. Before it he has described her virtues in fairly straightforward language comparing her to such natural objects and familiar symbols as the sun, the morning star, the ruby, and the rose (FC 113-123). His interrupting reflections on his poetic difficulties, like his lament for Chaucer, redirect the poem to the poetic effort itself. The praise of the lady after the apology proceeds by comparing her to legendary and literary women, almost all of whom are to be found in Chaucer's work.¹² The shift occurs as if Lydgate has taken literally his conventional remark that in his lady "is naught that Nature can amende" (189), and turned instead to literature as a better resource.

As part of his growing consciousness of poetic trial, Lydgate's apologies for his inadequacies take on more significance. Despite the despair and dismay they express, their concern for artifice refreshes the poet and gives him resolve and purpose:

Al-though so be that I can not ryme
 Nor curiously by no crafte endyte,
 Yet lever I have, that she putte the wyte
 In unconning than in negligence,
 That-ever I saye of her excellence. (FC 101-105)

And though that I, for very ignoraunce,
 Ne may discryve her vertues by and by,
 Yet on this day, for a remembraunce,
 Only supported under her mercy,
 With quaking hondes, I shal ful humbly
 To her hynesse, my rudenes for to quyte,
 A litel balade here bineth endyte. (FC 225-231)

By taking the lady as an audience, Lydgate creates a rhetorical

rather than an absolute standard for poetry, a relaxing of his project that, if it does not make his poetry great, enables him to write it in the first place. Having admitted imperfection into his scheme of things, he is free, as he nicely puts it, to "suppryse in my herte" (FC 232) whatever emotion or expression may suggest itself. Once accepted, his apologies give him an image from rhetoric itself for the transition from frustration to composition. There is even a place for falling short in true rhetoric.

By self-conscious reflection on his art during composition, Lydgate changes The Flour of Curtesye from the name of a lady (FC 147) into the title of a poem. He relieves his longing by translating it into the temporal art of poetry, which can prolong one last glimmer of hope or aspiration, even if on the verge of dismissal, into a sustained and satisfying work. The dependence of Lydgate's poetic energy on moments of resignation to imminent failure, whether in the shape of his own rhetorical ineptness or of Chaucer's death, sets his work in the tradition of poetry that lingers over those pre-dawn moments of despair and alienation that mark a transition from black night to clear day. Lydgate investigating his art before it can signify what he wishes it to provides us with a more interesting work than has Lydgate affirming a character's emotions in the Complaint.

The Flower and the Leaf.

The opening situation of the Flower and the Leaf includes several points that indicate a vivid memory of the Book of the Duchess. The seasonal, astrological opening (FL 1-14), drawn off the General Prologue, is not overladen with proper names and the aureation that many later poets perceive as imitation, but which is really inflation. The influence of Chaucer over this poet is truly in spirit as well as in details.

The poet, for example, does not give a reason for her insomnia: "Why that I ne might / Rest, I ne wist" (FL 18-19). She follows this with a nice moment of parodic dismissal of the customary melancholic desperation:

for there nas erthly wight,
As I suppose, had more hertes ese
Than I, for I n'ad siknesse nor dise. (FL 19-21)

Chaucer, one feels, would have appreciated this variation on a theme that he too had skewed (in his case, diverted it from the traditional amorous etiology), for it is an imitation of mode, not only of motif.

The Book of the Duchess' sequence is then taken up: the narrator's wonder, the song of the birds, and a path through the woods (FL 22-23, 27, 43-44). They are not extended into Chaucer's long and artful courtship with narration, nor do they lead to a dream. The whole progression from insomnia to path is accomplished in a mere five stanzas.

What is taken up most in atmosphere from Chaucer's poem seems to be the remoteness, a sense that things physically nearby have not been fully fathomed. Among the birds, the narrator listens especially

for the nightingale she has not heard yet, but does not tell us now whether she finally distinguishes its voice (FL 39-42). The unfinished search for the nightingale modulates into the pursuit of the little path which, like Chaucer's, "gretly had not used be" (FL 44). She amplifies its disorganized quality:

For it forgrowen was with gras and weede,
That wel unneth a wight ther might it see. (FL 45-46)

This poet, while not performing as deep a meditation on passion, metamorphosis, and language as Chaucer was, evokes an atmosphere of strangeness, unsureness, and indirection not unlike that of his poem. She understands that poetry must make itself possible before one can announce it in the heavily made-up diction of aureation. The path and the arbor it leads to differ in detail from Chaucer's path and glade. This path is more overgrown and uninhabited by myth, this arbor a cultivated landscape rather than a forest scene. But the symbolic quality is still to be seen in the isolation and clarity of the images: the roughness of the path, then contrasted with the freshly cut turf blocks furnishing the arbor, their neat, cropped grass like trimmed green wool (FL 53), the encircling hedge well-groomed and demarcating the arbor, and the measured plantings "Plain as a bord, of on height" FL 59. The distinctness of the scene and the mysteriousness of the action in combination create that startling of the imagination Chaucer cultivates.

The poet's individual images show a similar tendency to illuminate an impression by the fresh use of a single word: "ful of statly riche stonës set" FL 150, "With voices swete entuned and so small" FL 180, or "to behold, it was a worldly sight" FL 296.

These usages are synaesthetic, fusing visual and aural images, or describing particular objects seen with adjectives drawn from the world or ambience surrounding them, in a metonymically transferred epithet. She also appeals to the sense of smell more than most poets ever do (FL 84, 111, 313), heightening the visionary and pleasurable quality of her adventure with this most remote, most indefinable, yet most alluring and telling of the senses.

Like Chaucer she can vary her tone. The poem's overall ease of rhythm allows realistic personal comment to enliven without vitiating the formal, traditional narration: "for in right ill aray / She was, with storm and hete I you behight" (FL 395-396). When the scorched Flower ladies take cover in the leaves, they perform an action that is quite realistic within the context of the overall figure governing them:

But I not how, it happed sodainly,
As, about noon, the sonne so fervently
Wex hoot, that al the prety tender floures
Had lost the beaute of hir fresh colouris,

For-shronk with hete; the ladies eek to-brent,
That they ne wist where they hem might bestow.
The knightes swelt, for lak of shade my shent;
And after that, within a litel throw,
The wind began so sturdily to blow,
That down goth al the floures everichon
So that in al the mede there left not on,

Save suche as socoured were, among the leves,
Pro every storme, that might hem assail,
Growing under hegges and thikke greves. (FL 354-367)

The inexplicability, the suddenness, the narrative ease ("about noon," "a litel throw"), the conflation of real flowers, real people, and people figured as flowers, precision amidst confusion

(the "to-brent" ladies trying to "bestow" themselves somewhere, the "sturdily" blowing wind), and the change in mood at the very end of the passage ("Save suche as socoured were"), are all imaginative reshapings of experience that create a new place for poetry in an apt and vivid scene that is still changeable and undeciphered.

The poet maintains the images' freshness with some temporal delays. She introduces the goldfinch (FL 89 ff.) and his song before we finally hear the nightingale (FL 99-100), and defers assigning the goldfinch to the party of the Flower and the nightingale to the party of the Leaf until their playful "joust" on the windy meadow (FL 435-448).

The long-awaited song of the nightingale is set off by both the delay in hearing it and the astonishment it causes in the narrator. Its sudden advent puts an end to customary perception, and changes the narrator's whole sense of where she is when she hears it:

So sodainly, that, as it were a sot,
I stood astonied; so was I with the song
Through wvished, that, until late and long
Ne wist I in what place I was, ne where;
And ay, ne thought, she song even by myn ere. (FL 101-105)

Near and yet far; almost an inner voice, almost a double of the narrator, but not quite comprehensible; neither wholly merged nor quite distinguishable from oneself; a quasi-spiritual annunciation without a clear message. The narrator by patience and attentiveness finally determines that the nightingale is singing from a certain laurel that is also both far and near: "On the further syde,

even right by me" (FL 110). At this point of intense delight, the auditory-poetic images of the birdsong and the laurel modulate into an ecstasy of perfume from the laurel,

That gave so passing a delicious smel
According to the eglantere ful wel.

Wherof I had so inly greet plesyr
That, as me thought, I surely ravished was
Into Paradyse, where my desyr
Was for to be, and no ferther to passe. (FL 111-116)

To the traditional motif of birdsongs and heavenly sound ("the voice to angels most was lyk" [133]), she has added the narrator's response of ravishment recalling St. Paul's being taken up into the third heaven. The narrator is brought to a halt in a condition of perfect uncertainty, therefore perfect attentiveness, and consequent perfect pleasure. This completely open apprehension, the mental faculties alerted but not rushing for conclusions, makes the space for vision, a break in the narration that in effect invites the complexion of the experience itself to change. As one narrative is stayed, the whole experience being described is, not stopped, but passed under review, and seen to be becoming something new. What this experience is the poet does not immediately specify, preferring to let as many visionary phenomena as possible accumulate before explanation. She gives us to notice a change, and to experience changeability, before arriving at an understanding of it all with the gloss that identifies the parties of Flower and Leaf, their presiding goddesses Diana and Flora, their birds the nightingale and goldfinch. Any earlier presentation of these alignments would have made the magical Procession a dry working through of a scheme

rather than an action occurring in imagination. By her focus on imaginative processes and symbolic landscapes and undeciphered scenes, the poet creates a sense of discovering a new world, an autonomous, "cosmic" fiction, "a world of ladies" (FL 137) whose endlessly significant setting seems to create the vision of itself.¹³

James I, The Kingis Quair.

In this vision by King James I of Scotland, the most original and poetically pleasing of the works by the Scottish Chaucerians, we find the melancholy narrator's history revealed to us in a series of transitional moments. These transitions initially take the form of the delays required in service to love (KQ 740, 845) and occurring in the actual circumstances of the King's youth, when at the age of twelve, while being taken to France for a safer education, he was captured and kept under varying degrees of arrest in England for seventeen years. Both the real and the fictional suspensions of action afford him in the poem occasions for imaginative thought.

At the poem's opening we find him lying between sleep and waking, "New partit out of slepe a lyte tofore" (KQ 3), when he is visited by thoughts "of many diuerse thing" (KQ 10). The neither-here-nor-there quality of the first moments of reluctant consciousness is reflected in the elusiveness, reminiscent of the mood of the Book of the Duchess' opening, of his thought's matter. He thinks "Of this and that -- can I nocht say quharfore" (KQ 10-11).

He takes the same relief for waking confusion as Chaucer's narrator had for mazed insomnia: reading. He stays his turning mind with a narration -- the visionary interview of another prisoner, Boethius -- interpolated into his life, and underlines the tactic by noting that he ends up reading longer than he had intended:

(thogh I in purpose at my boke
To borowe a slepe at thilke tyme began),
Or euer I stent, my best was more to loke
Vpon the writing. (KQ 29-32)

The example of the Book of the Duchess may have led James to turn his account of Boethius into a rather supposititious break in the narrative, resembling the break Chaucer makes at the end of the non-account of the narrator's illness. Despite his sympathy with the Boethius, James terms it a digression:

Therefore I lat him pas, and in my tong
Procede I will agayn to my sentence
Of my mater, and leue all incidence. (KQ 47-49)

But the incident of Boethius has comprised all the matter and sentence thus far in evidence. He has not in fact revealed what he has been thinking about, he may not even know himself, and the jumps in his narration indicate the invisible energy of unspoken thoughts at work.

His excursion into Boethius has, however, supplied him with new ideas. Where before he had felt only the mutability of his thoughts, he now has thoughts about mutability:

The longe night beholding (as I saide),
My eyen gan to smert for studying.
My buke I schet and at my hede it laide,
And down I lay bot ony taryng,
This mater newe in my mynd rolling:
That is to seyne -- how that eche estate,
As Fortune lykith, shal be translated. (KQ 50-56)

He finally outwatches the night, and takes the first sound of dawn as a change into which fictive thought can insinuate itself:

Forwakit and forwalowit, thus musing,
 Wery forlyin, I lestnyt sodaynlye,
 And sone I herd the bell to matyns ryng
 And vp I rase, no langer wald I lyd.
 Bot now (how trow ye) suich a fantasye
 Fell me to mind that ay me thoght the bell
 Said to me: "tell on, man, quhat thee befell." (KQ 71-77)

His restless sorrows have led him into a state like that of Alcyone, "forweped and forwaked" (BD 126), on the eve of her vision. His spirits are dulled, while his faculties are overly alert, so that when he listens "sodaynlye" -- tensely, expectantly -- he is bound to hear something, and in the absence of empirical interests, his mind devises fictional ones.

The next stanza catches that combination of confusion and subtlety that marks the dawning of self-consciousness:

Thoght I tho to myself: "quhat may this be?
 This is myn awin ymagynacioun,
 It is no lyf that spekis vnto me,
 It is a bell -- or that impressioun
 Of my thoght causith this illusioun
 That dooth me think so nycely in this wise."
 And so befell as I schall you devise. (KQ 78-83)

Once the words of the bell have been acknowledged as fictional by his mind, he can no longer assume that even the bell itself is real. It could all be a "dream." In this moment, when the narrator is filled with a nice apprehension of the incipience of thought, when his reflection on his thought suggests that at its beginning it could be as unreal as real, James turns possibility into vision: "And so befell as I schall you devise." The confluence of uncontrolled befalling and artful devising is such stuff

as dream visions are made of: on the one hand, a foregoing of censorship, and on the other, a willingness to make something of unbidden images:

Determyt furth therwith in myn entent,
 Sen I thus haue ymagynit of this soun
 (And in my tyme more ink and paper spent
 To lyte effect), I tuke conclusioun
 Sum newe thing to write. (KQ 85-89)

The importance of imaginative work is indicated as well by the progression from moral to poetic concerns in the ship motif, from insecure life compared to "the schip that sailith stereles" (KQ 101), and the weak individual's "doutfull hert" (KQ 113) guiding a "feble bote" (KQ 114) with "empti saile" (KQ 117), to James' definition of all these terms by his poetic project and his difficulties with invention:

The rokkis clepe I the prolixitee
 Of doublinesse that doith my wittis pall:
 The lak of wynd is the deficultee
 In enditing of this lytill trecty small:
 The bote I clepe the mater hole of all:
 My wit, vnto the saile that now I wynd
 To seke conning, though I bot lytill fynd. (KQ 120-126)

For James, as for Chaucer, poetry is a culmination of experience, not a reflection of it, so that he passes from a picture of his life to a project of poetry in this image, and goes on to consider the faculties enabling the poet, calling on the muses to "In this processe my wilsum wittis gye" (KQ 131).

The poem's plot re-enacts the passage from settings of transition to imaginative action. The sea-voyage, capture, and imprisonment of the poet-narrator lodge in his life the faultlines that impel him to think in terms of perspective and figuration. As a

prisoner he is made to live in alienation from the smooth tenor of his expected life. To think of home or self now, he must think imaginatively. Dawn is the temporal image, and the window he leans out of the architectural image, of this translation of reality into fiction in his life:

My custom was on mornis for to ryse
Airly as day: O happy exercise,
By thee come I to loye out of turment! (KQ 200-202)

Fortirit of my thoght, and wo-begone,
And to the wyndow gan I walk in hye
To se the world and the folk that went forby. (KQ 206-208)

The narrated adventure begins as the poem began, with the narrator solitary, thoughtful, and looking elsewhere for informing images, like a melancholic on the mend:

Quhen as I lay in bed allone waking,
New partit out of slepe a lyte tofore,
Fell me to mynd of many diuerse thing --
Of this and that -- can I noght say quharfore,
Bot slepe for craft in erth myght I no more.
For quhich, as tho, coude I no better wyle
Bot toke a boke to rede apon a quhile. (KQ 8-14)

Bewailing in my chamber thus allone,
Despeired of all loye and remedye,
Fortirit of my thoght, and wo-begone,
And to the wyndow gan I walk in hye
To se the world and folk that went forby.
As for the tyme, though I of mirthis fude
Myght haue no more, to luke it did me gude. (KQ 204-210)

Like Chaucer's narrator, he will play with other stories even though he feels no mirth. What he sees is the walled and embowered garden where first the nightingale and then the lady appear. Like the birds of the Roman tradition, the nightingale sings an angelic service composed of "the ypnis consecrat / Of Iufis vse" (KQ 227-228). The song inspires the narrator to query the metaphysics and episte-

mology of love, somewhat in the spirit of Troilus (TE 1.400-420), but with a clearer Scots skepticism:

'Quhat lyf is this, that makis birdis dote?
 Quhat may this be, how cummyth it of ought?
 Quhat nedith it to be so dere ybought?
 It is nothing, trowe I, bot feynit chere,
 And that men list to counterfeten chere.' (KQ 248-252)

But the counterfeiting has its effect in leading him to entertain new notions of experience:

Eft wald I think, 'O Lord, quhat may this be,
 That Lufe is of so noble myght and kynde,
 Lufing his folk? and suich prosperitee,
 Is it of him, as we in bukis fynd?
 May he oure hertes setten and vnbynd?
 Hath he vpon oure hertis suich maistrye?
 Or all this is bot feynyt fantasye? (KQ 253-259)

James hypothesizes a realm of fiction that colors, reduplicates, and in part re-creates real life. On first seeing the lady while in this frame of mind, his usual wits are "ouercom with plesance and delyte" (KQ 283). His hypothesis of love's kingdom of delight has enabled him to sense it in his own life, since this is the sort of pleasure that exists equally well in potential as in actuality.

He notes several times that he achieves this sight of the lady "Onely throu latting of myn eyen fall" (YQ 284, see also 274, 267) -- from the limit of speculation, one might say, to the abandonment of personal ambition. He hovers over the window border between his prison and the lady's garden:

And in my hede I drewe ryght hastily,
 And eft-sones I lent it forth ageyne. (YQ 288-289)

His mental, visual, and physical hoverings gradually erode the distinctions between fact and desire, circumstance and art. His

life becomes symbolic. A moment of indecision becomes a moment of metamorphosis, signalling the everpresent capacity of one thing to become another:

Quhen I a lytill thrawe had maid my moon,
 Bewailling myn infortune and my chance,
 Vnknowing how or quhat was best to doon,
 So ferr I fallyng into lufis dance,
 That sodeynly my wit, my contenance,
 My hert, my will, my nature and my mynd,
 Was changit clene ryght in anothir kynd. (KQ 309-315)

Upon this follow his prayer to Venus (as Chaucer's narrator prays to Morpheus after having his imagination rearranged). He successfully urges the nightingale to sing, a song of art that the lover says will counter the bird's melancholy, which he has related to sloth in music:

Quhat is the cause of thy malancolye
 That thou no more list maken melodye?
 Sluggart, for schame! lo here thy goldin hour
 That worth were hale all thy lyvis laboure! (KQ 403-406)

We may recall that Raban Maur cited rhetorical exercise as one of the antidotes for acedia.¹⁴ The narrator takes his own advice as he makes up lyrics for the bird's song:

And to the notis of the philomene
 Quhilkis sche sang, the ditee there I maid. (KQ 428-429)

The departure of the lady from the garden precipitates a lengthy composition of lament (KQ 463-497) as he supplies her absence with art. His persistence in these modulations between fiction and reality is such that he falls asleep right on the windowledge that has been the site for his transformations, and even in sleep his mind's condition continues to vary:

to the colde stone my hede on wrye
 I laid, and lent amaisit verily,
 Half sleping and half suoun in suich a wise;
 And quhat I met I will you now deuise:

We thoght that thus all sodeynly a lyght
 In at the window come quhare that I lent. (KQ 508-513)

In the course of the poem, the images that come to mind, and the mind's own actions, come closer together. Flan descriptive biography is interrupted by apparitions of the lady that seem to arise from the prisoner's love poetry. Several prayers and songs and unusual mental states call up further images, and in the dream, James actively contrives a well-artificed progress in personifications. Finally, in an unbidden response from the outside world to his private vision, a turtledove alights at the window after the dream bearing a spontaneous covenant of gillyflowers. He has asked for a token to reassure himself of the dream's validity, and by moving over to the window, his frontier of fiction, he seems to precipitate this sign from nature. It carries, of course, a sign from art -- a flower inscribed in gold -- that attests to the vision's power in reality:

In hye vnto the wyndow gan I walk,
 Moving within my spirit of this sight,
 Quhare, sodeynly, a turtur quhite as calk
 So evinly vpon my hand gan light,
 And vnto me sene turnyt hir full ryght,
 Of quham the onere in hir birdis apert
 Gave me in hert kalendis of confort.

This fair bird ryght in hir bill gan hold
 Of red liofflis with thair stalkis grene
 A faire branche, quhare writtin was with gold
 On euery list, with branchis bryght and schene,
 In compas fair, full plesandly to sene,
 A plane sentence, quon as I can deuise
 And name in mynd, said ryght on this wise:

"Awak, awake, I bring, lufar, I bring
 The newis glad that blisfull ben and sure
 Of thy confort. Now lauch and play and syng,
 That art besid so glad an auenture --
 For in the hevyn decretit is the cure."
 And vnto me the flouris fair present,
 With wyngis spred hir wayis furth sche went. (KQ 1233-1253)

Very little happens to him in reality during the time narrated in poem and dream. He refers to pleasure and good fortune in love without describing any specific action or event. We never know any fact except that he saw her walking in the garden, that he assumes she as well as he was cheered by the nightingale's song, that he had a vision and a waking token of goddesses helping him in love, and that he has loved blissfully ever since. Whether he has married her, or been made known to her in any way, or freed from prison, or just feels lucky, we do not know. The whole effect of delight transpires within the realm of fiction.

I refer here not to a simplistic notion that thinking makes things so, but to the idea that thinking makes the self, makes what the self is capable of experiencing. And the kind of thinking James engages in is not the philosophy or rationality for which Minerva says he has little aptitude anyway (KQ 1040-1043), but the less predictable or consistent work of imagining. Love sends him in his vision to Thought, who sends him back to Fortune -- in recognition, not rejection, of the mutability that brings all occasions to the imaginative mind. Minerva herself advises him so:

'All thing has tyme', thus sais Ecclesiaste,
 And wele is him that his tyme wel abit.
 Abyde thy tyme, for he that can bot waste
 Can nocht of nap, the wise man it writ;
 And oft gud fortune flourish with gude wit. (KQ 325-326)

The one recurring action the lover takes throughout the poem is waiting, whether by force of imprisonment, or by choice, as in his cultivation of the fine arts of napping and looking out the window. By waiting without specific expectations James invites inspirations, and bids the unbidden. He comes to experience life as a set of narrations that are figures of each other, all equally fictive and equally real. The displacement of common-sense reality into strange hybrid modes of perception is reflected in the narrated circumstances: in prison, he is exiled from home, and in love, he is puzzled by his own feelings. The cultivation of transitions and non-committal states of mind, and the discovery in such moments and moods of the springs of imaginative process, mark this poem's resonance with the Book of the Duchess.¹⁵ Drawing on all of Chaucer for imagery and idiom, the Kingis Quair owes to that one poem its essential project: the inventing of imagination by a melancholic who interrogates himself by means of vision.

2. The Early Renaissance and Spenser

This is not the place for an explanation of the presence of a "drab" age in English literature, but for pointing to one of the silver linings in its "gleterynges glemys & Clowdis gray" (SM 3). In the development of a poetic idiom for didactic works in the vernacular, and in the rise of more dramatic presentations of character, melancholic narrators and interlocutors go on talking. The conversation between depleted souls provides the essential situation for the re-invention of poetry. This archetypal format for poetry helps sustain its practice until the recovery of its inspiration. And in Spenser we see more clearly how it contributed to that recovery.

Speculum Misericordie.

This anonymous fifteenth-century poem begins with motifs common to many dream visions, and strikes a chaucerian note with the addition of the narrator's sickness:

To sporte mee on soo feyr a day
I hadde greet will wt owten wene
Byck syndell bee forne hadde I bene
And was coveryngge of my care
Too gone amongis thee grevis grene
By dessyre was rekell thee wase. (SM 7-12)

He hikes into a forest, "Though I were very" (SM 15), like Chaucer's unwilling player with Morpheus, and finds, as Chaucer's dreamer does, a plenitude of animals gathered there:

Plente of deere cheer was presentte
Of hert hynde Bucke and doo
Cravches weren burgenede on every bentte
amongis hem ran reyn deer & roe. (SM 17-20)

The narrator overhears a solitary youth singing of love:

A yong man by hym self alle aloone
A song of love I herde hym syngge. (SM 28-29)

Unlike the Black Knight, this youth is attired in "silver stodies" (SM 32), mounted on "A comly Covrceer" (SM 36), and is far from feeling melancholy: "Hym leste to make no manere moone" (SM 30).

But into this cheerful picture a grisly accident intrudes, unlike the usual gentility of the convention, but precipitating a physical and psychological crisis of some interest:

Hee made his hors fore to goo faste
And in alle his greete Iolytee
His hors stumblede atte thee laste
And to thee Eerthe a doun fell hee
And in his fallyngge his ribbis to barste
And his heed hit fell ageynst a tree
A Careful crye vp hee caste
And seyde alas that woo is mee
In to his brayn a man myghtte see
His necke was lopen owt off lyht
Swovne I sawe hym sithys three
His hors ran foorht in to thee fryht. (SM 37-48)

The significant result of this picture of pride going before a fall is that now "In to his brayn a man myghtte see." For the next stanzas give the youth's lament (his accident has returned him to the tradition's conventions), and his recognition that his good fortune has been brittle, that death may overtake even him, and cause him to review his sinful life. Both he and we now take a closer look at his mind.

The narrator is moved to help him (87-88), but neither he nor the youth can do much. In the Book of the Duchess the dreamer's melancholy still permits him to help the Knight, but here, the absence of a dream frame and the physical force of their ailments

prevent the youth and the narrator from rising above these immediate circumstances by conversation or fiction: "I may schewe my self no solas" (SM 55) says the youth, and the narrator sighs "but I was syke and myghtte evell goo" (SM 88). They do not add to or complicate the fiction the poet has already contrived for them.

It is the poet, then, who brings in the redeeming fiction of the sudden apparition, "doun froo an hill a myle mee froo" (SM 90) of Discrecio, with seven virgins representing the seven virtues. The more formal confession of the youth to these personifications replaces the conversation between narrator and sufferer that relieves the minds of both in Chaucer. The presiding figure of Discrecio, and the idea that we are seeing into the youth's brain, hopefully figuratively as well as literally, adds a minimal psychological dimension. The solution by religious ritual is not entirely satisfying in a framework of poetic possibility, but the thorough severity of the poem to some extent justifies this gravity. Its final lines are exceedingly abrupt and final in a dream vision:

In to thyne handys my sowle I comende
And wth that word hee yaf vp the goost.

we are not even returned to the narrator after the youth's death. Only the soul's extremities concern this poet, preferably realized in a dramatic way. While admitting that they are discussed in a somewhat unimaginative way, the setting and situation are not without interest. Neither the simplicity of the fiction nor the heaviness of the theme need prevent us from observing

the forceful splicing of the wonderful forest and fine weather that revive the weakened narrator, and the grim accident and final death of the youth who makes his adventure. The poet clearly feels that the exposition of important ideas requires a mental adventure with a striking fiction. And one finds in the poet's retention of the traditional vision opening a commitment to poetic convention that implies that certain situations, certain special fictions, are still felt to engender imaginative work as if by definition.

Hawes, The Example of Vertu.

Hawes' poem, one of his first, owes something to the opening of the Speculum Misericordie, and despite its modified aureation does not depart from the direct observation of nature brought into poetry by Chaucer -- from whom, as the supposed author of the Assembly of Ladies, Hawes probably thought he was borrowing these lines:

In Septembre in fallynge of the lefe
 Whan phebus made his declynacyon
 And all the whete gadred was in the snefe
 By radyaunt hete and operacyon
 Whan the vyrgyn had full domyracyon
 And Dyane entred was one degre
 Into the sygne of Iemyne. EV 29-35

Compare lines 1 to 3 of the Assembly: "In Septembre, at the falling of the leef, / The fressh sesoun was al-togider doon, / And of the corn was gadered in the sheef." From this evocation of astrology, poetic diction, and fertility, he moves to another Chaucerian vignette, that of the narrator, naked in bed, sleeping

a slothful, melancholic sleep, who is visited by Morpheus:

In a slombrynge slepe with slouth opprest
 As I in my naked bedde was leyd
 Thynkyng all nyght to take my rest
 Morpheus to me than made abreyd
 And in my dreame he thought he sayd
 Come walke with me in a medowe amorous
 Depeynted with floures that be delycyous. (EV 43-49)

The delicate elaboration of sorrow and confusion, and the layering of fictions are absent. Morpheus comes directly to the narrator, who is simply described as oppressed. It may be that the chaucerian setting had come to be somewhat taken for granted as the natural and obvious situation for the visions of melancholics.

Morpheus escorts the narrator to a landscape reminiscent of the vision tradition, and at one point seems to be wittingly "overgoing" Chaucer:

I walked with hym into a place
 Where that there grue many a fayre floure
 With Ioye replete and full of solace
 And the trees dystyllynge redolent lycoure
More sweter fer than the Aprell shour. (EV 50-54, my
 italics)

That the vision is ultimately of the lady Dyscrecyon, and that she asks the dreamer to eschew "All wyldness" (EV 62) if he will be guided by her, indicate Hawes' material difference from Chaucer. Like the author of the Speculum Misericordie, he takes a darker, more serious view of the human mind. The enduring aptness of the older vision opening still bespeaks Chaucer's contribution, however, to the possibility of poetry about the mind. However earnest they become, the earliest humanist poets begin from the old game.

Hawes spends a great deal of time in the pastime of pleasure discussing the combinations of fable and truth in early poetry. Perhaps some of his expository energy arises from his smaller capacity to take the pairing for granted or to realize it in his own work naturally. At the beginning of The Conforte of Louers, he seems a little hard-pressed to comprehend the intermeddling of the feigned and the meaningful:

Harde is to construe poetycall scryptures
They are so faynet & made sentencyously. (CL 3-4)

This poem itself has a doubled structure of a narrative "reality" and a narrative "fiction:" first the narrator's waking melancholy and walk out to the fields (CL 32-37), then his fall into sleep and a dream-walk into dream-fields described in the same terms as before (CL 60-63). The greater degree of fictionality in this poem, as compared with The Example of Vertu, is especially witnessed by the way Hawes seems to read older poems as prophetic of his own real love:

Two thynges me conforte ever in pryncypall
The fyrst be bokes made in antyquyte
By Gower and Chauncers poetes rethorycall
And Lydgate eke by good auctoryte
Makyng mencyon of the felycyte
Of my lady and me by dame fortunes chaunce
To mete togyders by wonderfull ordynaunce. (CL 281-287)

William Nevill, The Pastell of Pleasure.

Nevill's allegory of a mental action -- the expression of desire -- begins with the melancholy narrator's reading of Ovid's "bokes of transformacyon" (CL 2). As the cave of Morpheus and

the sorrows of Alcyone started the narrator's musing in the Book of the Duchess, so for this narrator's melancholy,

this amorous study of Cupyde and Phebus
Was cause therof which coude not be denyed. (CP 871-872)

Much as Phoebus' passion for Daphne ultimately creates the laurel, the narrator's melancholy renders his distress as images, and although he resolves at the end to eschew studying so late and thus avoid melancholy, his loyalty to his desire, expressed in the concluding motto, suggests that he derives an essential pleasure from retracing this inconclusive emotion in imaginative form.

The vision begins when the narrator falls into the sleep of melancholy (marked by sloth, one translation of acedia):

Thus a slepe I fell by a sodayne chaunce
Whan I lacked lyght alone without comforte
My sore study with slouthe dyde me enhance. (CP 61-63)

The effect of sloth is not moral laziness or negligence but a cessation of conscious observation that invites thoughts unbidden and perhaps unwanted to appear to the mind:

Myn eyes were heuy my tonge without dysporte
Caused many fantasyes to me to resorte
My hert was moche musynge my mynde was varyaunt
So I was troubled with thir vngracyous sorte
That my herte & mynde to slouthe shortly dyde graunt
About the which whyles I was atendaunt
Sodaynly came Morpheus . . . (CP 64-70)

Sloth in the mind is a matter of not ordering or properly editing one's ideas, so that thinking becomes "musing" and "varying." The sloth of the "atendaunt" narrator involves both the waiting delay and the alert waiting implied in the French "attendre." While his attention is stayed on these errant fantasies, Morpheus arrives to

guide him into the possibilities of dream. Thus the state of sloth assumes a valuable aspect as a state of mind in which new things may be learned, seen, and felt. To lose control over habitual thoughts is not to cease thinking responsibly, but to think responsively, and to enter upon mental aventure:

Sodaynly came Morpheus & at a brayde
Not affrayd but lyke a man ryght valyaunt. (CP 70-71)

Morpheus tells the narrator how Desire, set on serving Beauty and Love, is caught between his devotion and his wish to be free from torment. Desire has now reached a pitch where he must express himself to Beauty, and Morpheus is taking the narrator to witness this event. Here is the dream as a clear wish fulfillment, with Morpheus leading the dreamer to watch Desire speak out.

Moreover, the project requires the dreamer's cooperation. This is no chaos of fantasy, but a rigorous exercise in a mental realm with its own logic and exigencies. Morpheus can only perform his mission "So ye supporte me alwaye when I nede" (CP 96). The idea that Morpheus needs the dreamer's support to witness Desire's broadcast is a vivid and original notation by Nevill of the complex interrelation of dreamers and their gods. The Desire that Morpheus is concerned about is in part the dreamer's, but the dreamer is re-created in both figures: the Desire of his desires, and the Morpheus of his imaginative capacity and ability to acknowledge these desires. But no matter how many personae are made for the dreamer, there is always enough of him left over to compose the bewildered, skeptical character of the Dreamer, who alone can

narrate what his parts enact with a sense of the plot's mystery and irrationality and wonder.

The allegory proper displays the significance of imagination and rhetoric for feeling. Inside the Castle of Pleasure, Morpheus wanders off to speak with Fantasy. Kindness then escorts the dreamer up to Fantasy, so that imagination is envisioned as an activity of kind, that is, natural, humane, and necessary. Fantasy in turn takes him to Eloquence, in whose company the dreamer overhears Fantasy's request to Beauty to let Desire approach. The imagining speech of Fantasy mediates the empirical realities of perceived Beauty and the desired action. The mechanisms of both Fantasy and Eloquence are needed to relay Desire's message, to make desire known to consciousness (who ordinarily admits nothing). In the course of the presentation of Desire to Beauty, Disdain and Pity debate, but their arguments are resolved by the appearance of Credence, here a creative faculty working through images, as indicated by its being summoned by Fantasy. At this point Beauty accepts Desire, and in the final uproar of rejoicing Morpheus disappears and the dreamer awakes. Desire accepted, the need for the care of Morpheus and obedience of the dreamer are no longer needed. The inhibition, fear, sorrow -- whatever it was -- that at first required this caution, has been overcome through the mediating narration of the personifications. The dreamer's story of desire has been told, both truthfully and acceptably, in the rhetoric of the combined forces of liberated Fantasy and schooled Eloquence.

While Nevill's verse is uneven, and his allegory somewhat overcrowded, "a last relic of the Lydgate-Hawes allegorical love-vision tradition,"¹⁶ the extra characterization of the narrator, with his sloth and melancholy and his Ovid, gives point and authenticity to the explorations of mental activity that follow in the allegory. This detail of the speaker, especially the Metamorphoses he reads, along with the lively development of Morpheus, suggest strongly that Nevill had read the Book of the Duchess with some interest and understanding. The real interest of the frame testifies to a concern with poetic process that the poet was not quite able to realize in his central narrative.

Thomas Sackville, The Complaint of Henry Duke of Buckingham

Sackville's piece affords us a good view of the vision tradition midway between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Certain expressions come straight out of Chaucer: "stil as ani stone" or "small kepe toke he" (stanza 54). We recognize the motifs of the narrator meditating on mutability and visited by melancholy. The figure of Melancholy herself, however, takes on the individuality of the Knight, and becomes far more dramatic than her more emblematic predecessors:

in black all clad there fell before my face
a pitous wight that woe had all forwast
furth from her eien the cristall teares out brast
and sighing sore her handes she wrang and fold
tare all her heare that ruth was to behold. (Buck st. 11)

Her bodie small forwitherd and forspente
as is the stalke that somers drought opprest. (Buck st. 12)

her forceles handes together oft she smote
with dolfull shrekes that eckowede in the skie. (Buck st. 13)

Likewise the figure of the lamented Duke himself assumes the "suits of woe" more dramatically, rather than visiting or being visited by a personification of sorrow. In stanzas 77 through 79 he appears wringing his hands, rending his black cloak, flailing or claspings his arms, tearing his hair, sighing, and stuttering in his speech. He sums up in himself the total experience of melancholy that the narrator and Knight in Chaucer share out between them, less dramatically, but more therapeutically.

In the farewell at the poem's end, after the last formal stanza (191), the poet refers specifically to the visionary melancholic that inspired him, saying that

not his most pitous plaint that sure wold perce
the hardest hart that can be thought or sed
of the black knight for dolour welny ded,

can match the sorrow witnessed in this work. Even if he is referring to what we now know as Lydgate's Complaint of the Black Knight,¹⁷ Sackville himself would have known it for Chaucer's -- he also refers in the next lines to the apocryphal Lamentation of Mary Magdalene and to Troilus and Criseyde -- and would most likely have read both Lydgate's poem and the Book of the Duchess, and borrowed from what he perceived as a Chaucerian entirety.

Spenser, Daphnaida.

It is Spenser, after all, who realizes the generative power of the Book of the Duchess, by developing its atmosphere of transitions and indeterminacy, rather than using its opening as a Preface

to a relatively dissimilar narrative.

In their essay, "The Other Side of the Garden: an interpretive comparison of Chaucer's Book of the Duchess and Spenser's Daphnaida,"¹⁸ Duncan Harris and Nancy L. Steffen distinguish the two elegies by the ways they use their traditions. Chaucer's poem is said to present the full complement of the conflicting feelings of courtly love, while Spenser's sets out the single emotion of excessive grief, for which readers must supply the antidote from their knowledge of pastoral elegy:

Chaucer works within the conventions of the dream-vision and the language of courtly love to establish a context of emotional possibilities whereby grief may be ordered and exorcised . . . Spenser in Daphnaida uses the familiar conventions of the pastoral to create a polarity of happiness and despair.

. . . Whereas Chaucer's variety of tone and event places any particular circumstance or feeling in a wider context, Spenser's poem demands that the reader bring to Daphnaida the alternative possibilities which can put Alcyon's radical grief in perspective.¹⁹

But one should not let this difference in format drive a wedge between the poems. Harris and Steffen use their observations to solve

the problem of how two works so similar can differ so extensively in the procedure used and the effect achieved in rapping the garden's darker ground.²⁰

I would suggest that Daphnaida is a more direct outgrowth of the procedures and effects Spenser found in the Book of the Duchess, and that by focussing on one moment of loss he amplifies rather than departs from his precedent. Daphnaida's tessera-like picture of mourning, the need for readers to supply the rest of the picture,

and the inability of the narrator to console the griever, all point to a quality of the Book of the Duchess often overlooked: its radical open-endedness.

Spenser would not have said that Chaucer's poem "concludes with the 'hert-huntyng'," ²¹ but would have noted the qualification of the hunters' return: "al was doon, / For that tyme, the hert-huntyng" (1312-1313, italics mine). Nor would he have found a reassuring rounding off in the return to

the real world of Lancaster and Richmond . . .
mirrored by the awakening of the Dreamer to the world
of his bed, his book, and his determination to tell
his dream. ²²

He would, I believe, have laid more emphasis on Chaucer's presenting the real world in terms of puns -- "long castel" (1318) for Lancaster and "ryche hil" (1319) for Richmond -- and have seen in the dreamer's determination not a proof of restoration but the structural device of ending a poem by beginning it all over again.

The completeness and variety of the Book of the Duchess' emotional texture do not so much relieve or reduce grief as restore the psychic strength of the speakers, enabling them to express and endure and understand grief. Chaucer's message, such as it is, is not that grief can be resolved, but that a sense of loss lies at the heart of every moment of love and expressiveness, death and elegy affording the clearest experiential and poetic occasions for telling this truth. Spenser's decision to expand the lyric rather than the narrative elements of the earlier poem, and to distill its essential sense of loss and inconclusiveness, suggest that this is how he read the poem.

The poem's occasions are similar: Chaucer writes for John of Gaunt on the death of Gaunt's first wife, Blanche, and Spenser for Sir Arthur Gorges on the death of his wife Lady Douglas Howard. Both women die young.²³ Both husbands are the poets' patrons and social superiors, but both poets represent them as men in black, distraught and despondent, met in the woods rather than the decorous court. Spenser names his mourner Alcyon after the heroine of the Ovidian tale that Chaucer's narrator reads. (I have already discussed the fallacies involved with reading Chaucer's Alcyone as a figure of excessive grieving.)

Norman Berlin summarizes the poems' similarities of plot. Both narrators have "a troubled mind" for reasons unspecified.

Each of the narrators meets a man in black, describes the man, asks why the man is sad. Both men in black . . . at first refuse to tell their woeful tales. When they do, each tells a kind of riddle: a losing game of chess with Fortune in Chaucer and a lost white lion in Spenser. Each then admits that he is sad because of the death of a wife; each describes his love. Both men rail against Fortune. And finally, both poems end abruptly.²⁴

Daphnaida differs from its predecessor primarily in its dark tone, unlike the spring season and current of comedy in Chaucer, and in omitting the framing devices of the narrator's reading, the dream, and the dream hunt.²⁵ Berlin, echoing most critics' reactions to the poems, regards these differences as failures in Daphnaida:

Whereas in Spenser the man in black appeared in a black world, in Chaucer he appears in a golden world where even the shadows are clean. . . . Spenser takes Chaucer's man in black grotesque. . . . The loss of the lioness gives Spenser and Alcyon the opportunity to chastise Fortune, an albor goddess in the Elizabethan age.

Chaucer . . . can have his knight play chess with her, and in this game of chess a queen is lost. . . . Chaucer's method is more dramatic and more direct than Spenser's. He is able to give action to an essentially philosophic belief. . . . Whereas Chaucer was able to demonstrate the effect of death by revealing the joy of life, Spenser must dwell upon death to achieve his effect.²⁶

Berlin's privileging of the dramatic over the lyric is a matter of temperament rather than authentic evaluation. Further, one could argue that Spenser's *Alcyon* makes a more dramatic appearance than the *Knight*, and should remember that the action in the Book of the Duchess is rhetorical. To derive any "philosophic belief" from Chaucer's vision is to neglect its overriding concerns with the phenomenology of poetic process.

Any comparison that favors Chaucer's poem only at the expense of Spenser's is misleading. To say that the Book of the Duchess is a better, more complicated poem than Daphnaida, and leave it at that, implies that Spenser has not really taken much of value from Chaucer, and ignores the greater poetry of which Daphnaida is one harbinger. An unreflective comparison also allows critics to revert to narrow standards of taste and consistency that are inappropriate to inventive poets of metamorphosis. Daphnaida is criticized for cultivating one mood excessively, while the Book of the Duchess is criticized for varying its moods.

Most errors in reading these poems arise from the assumption that they were meant to instruct the bereaved in the proper ways of grief and consolation. Chaucer's comic and Spenser's indulgent moments cannot harmonize with such didactic expectations. What

both do present is the idea that loss -- in the shapes of illusion, repression, frustration, rejection, death, and death-wishes -- is a condition of love and poetry alike. I am tempted to say that elegy is simply the poet's poetry, a metapoetic genre for those who feel the loss and lapse dwelling at the heart of the obscure and mediated relationships among poetry, truth, and love.

What Spenser has done with Chaucer is to extend the moment and expression of loss. Spenser reads the earlier poem as an open-ended representation of the long transition from one substantial joy to another, disregarding the termini in favor of the phase of desire and grief. To truly borrow from Chaucer's poem is to add to that intermediate phase, to prolong it, and this Spenser does by emphasizing the lyric portion of the narrative, and by characterizing the loss of love as a profoundly distracting and shattering occasion that leaves the lover at loose ends, beside himself, so to speak (both mourners are to some extent alter egos of their narrators), and permanently disconnected from others and from self. Loss is revealed as the basic condition of Aloyon's life.

Narrative condensation enables Spenser to open up superficially conclusive moments from the earlier poem to further development. Where the revelatory "She ys ded!" (1309) comes only 26 lines from the end of Chaucer's poem, Spenser's mourner explicates his allegory of loss immediately: "The signing sore, Daphne, thou knewest (quoth he) / She now is dead" (Daph 183-184). We see Spenser's poem almost die, as Chaucer's might seem to die, on the affirmation of the lady's

death: "She now is dead; ne more endured to say: / But fell to ground for great extremitie" (Daph 184-185). But the efforts of the narrator revive the griever, who "breaking foorth at last" (Daph 196) gives us a lament of 49 stanzas. By reducing the time spent in narrative and increasing that for lyric, Spenser gives us, in effect, the words of Chaucer's Alcyone "in that swow" (215) of extreme grief which the earlier poet decided he "may not telle yow as now; / Hyt were to longe for to dwelle" (216-217). Spenser has extended both the short lyric sung by the Knight and the very last moments of Alcyone's life and of the conversation between Knight and narrator. The admission of death is not the end but the beginning of the poem.

None of these expansions implies that Chaucer's poem has not temporized as much as possible. Rather, Spenser's opening up of seemingly final moments in his predecessor's poem reveals their intrinsic inconclusiveness, and Daphnaida reads the Book of the Duchess as a poem full of and ending with implicit rebeginnings. Spenser adds other motifs of renewal, notably the child the dying lady leaves behind her: "My yong Ambrosia, in lieu of mee/ Loue her: so shall our loue for ever last" (Daph 200-201). And as long as love, so long shall grief and wandering last, as Alcyon affirms that

Yet whylest I in this wretched vale doo stay,
My wearie feete shall ever wandring be,
That still I may be readie on my way,
When as her messenger doth come for me:
He will I rest my feete for feeblenesse,
He will I rest my limmes for frailtie,
He will I rest mine eyes for beaunesse.

Daph 196-202²⁷

Spenser shows the griever as being in permanent transit; this and his disappearance at the end of the poem confirm the inconclusiveness of Chaucer's remark that the hart-hunting was done "For that tyme" (1313). One of the most direct borrowings singles out the theme of endless transitoriness: Chaucer's Knight says his pain is to be "Alway deyng and be not ded" (588), and Spenser's Alcyon compares himself to the mutable world "That dying liues, and liuing still does dye. / So doo I liue, so doo I daylie die" (Daph 434-435).

Spenser is serving poetry as well as one poem in his continuation. His Alcyon asks other "true Louers" to "Helpe me to wayle my miserable case" (Daph 505-511) and "my fellow Shepheards" to "Lament my lot" (Daph 519-525). And throughout he enlists in his refrain the help of his listener: "Weep Shepheard, weep, to make my vndersong." Thus poem gives rise to poem, as mortal parents to mortal children, and these series of ephemera are infinitely drawn out as poets resurrect each other's elegies.

That Spenser reads mutability as a major theme of Chaucer's poem also appears from the malaise he assigns to his narrator. Without specifying the substance of his preoccupation any more than does Chaucer's dreamer, the narrator intimates that it arises from the world's instability:

There came vnto my minde a troublous thought,
Which dayly dooth my weaker wit possesse,
He lets it rest, vntill it forth haue brought
Her long borne infant, fruit of beaui nesse,
Which she conceived hath through meditation
Of this worlds vainnesse and lifes wretchednesse,
That yet my soule it deepeley doth emapssion. Daph 32-35

A pregnant wit must be a heavy wit, and loss occasions the most fruitful meditation. Like the mortal daughter Ambrosia (the beautiful food whom the gods consume, and Gorges' child's real name), the narrator's incomplete thoughts are infants he must leave behind. Whether the Infant is this poem is hard to say, but whatever mental action it is, it has not yet been, and because of the world's vicissitude never will be, fully delivered. Both the mourner and the poem wander off wrapped in their frustrations:

But without taking leaue, he foorth did goe
 With staggring pace and dismall lookes dismay,
 As if that death he in the face had seene;
 Or hellish hags had met vpon the way:
 But what of him became I cannot weene. (Daph 563-567)

Both poets repeat such evanescent endings elsewhere:

Atte laste y saugh a man,
 Which that y nevene nat ne kan;
 But he semed for to be
 A man of gret auctoritee. (HF 2155-2158)

Then was that whole assembly quite dismist,
 And Natur's selfe did vanish, whither no man wist. (FQ 7.7.59)

In Daphnaida, the man in black eschews one detour, the narrator's invitation to rest in his house, only to pursue another. Perhaps, in describing and lamenting his lady, and in talking to another poet, or at least talking as a poet, he has indeed been looking death in the face, the death that beloved ladies and poetry deal to all certainty.

Spenser unfolds apparently closed moments in the book of the Duchess, not to complete them, but to repeat in his own poem the pattern of temporization he finds in his precedent. His Alcyon is Chaucer's Knight become a poet whose songs are interminable:

And there is sad Alcyon bent to mourne,
 Though fit to frame an euerlasting dittie,
 Whose gentle spright for Daphnes death doth tourn
 Sweet layes of loue to endlesse plaints of pittie.

(Colin Clovts Come Home Again, 384-387)

Although Gorges may in Spenser's eyes have foregone a larger career as an epic poet, he can still write elegies that are "endlesse" as his ditty would have been "euerlasting." Nor should we underestimate his briefer genre, for poetry is made of such losses to metamorphosis as Daphne exemplifies, and she herself was the first loss known by the god of poetry. The great project of Apollo's followers is thereafter to pursue beauty relentlessly and to prolong that penultimate moment of desire and grief just before the god loses his nymph and the narrator loses consciousness.

Spenser, The Faerie Queene 1.1.39-44.

A briefer borrowing from the Book of the Duchess shows in little this same concern to draw out an already transitional passage in his predecessor. In the first canto of Book I of the Faerie Queene, Archimago sends a messenger to Morpheus for a dream to deceive Redcrosse about Una's purity. Spenser draws on the expedition of Iris to the cave of Sleep for a dream to let Alcyone know that Oeyx has drowned. The story may have been most well known in Ovid's version in Metamorphoses 11, but when Chaucer retells it he makes changes in it that Spenser's account reflects.

Ovid's Iris is clearly a woman, but both Chaucer and Spenser make their messenger an unnamed male. Some verbal parallels also suggest that Spenser had Chaucer's text in mind as he wrote:

That, by my trouthe, I take no kep
Of nothing, how hyt cometh or gooth. (6-7)

And vnto Morpheus comes, whom drowned deepe
In drowsie fit he findes: of nothing he takes keepe.

(FQ 1.1.40)

a few welles
Came rennyng from the clyves adoun,
That made a dedly slepyng soun. (160-162)

Mixt with a murmuring winde, much like the sowne
Of swarming Bees, did cast him in a swowne.

(FQ 1.1.41)

Ovid attributes the sleep-inducing power of the stream to its being Lethe more than to the nature of its sound, while neither Chaucer or Spenser identifies the river apart from that sound.

In Ovid, Iris goes to Sleep, who then sends one of his sons, Morpheus, to enact the dream. In Chaucer and Spenser, Morpheus is both the god of Sleep and the engineer of dreams, although Spenser's Morpheus sends the dream back with Archimag's messenger (FQ 1.1.44) while Chaucer's performs the dream himself (195 ff.). This further change allows Spenser to maintain Morpheus in that drowsy twilight state in which we first find him in Chaucer.

Chaucer's Morpheus requires a great deal of pushing and shoving to wake up, with a note of comedy unsounded in Ovid, and although he does execute Juno's command seems reluctant to recognize the messenger's presence:

This messenger com fleyng faste
And cried, "O, ho! awake anon!"
Hit was for noght; there herde hym non.
"Awake!" quod he, "whoo ys lyth there?"
And blew his horn ryght in here eere,
And cried "Awaketh!" wonder nyȝ.
This god of sleep with wys don yȝ
Fast up, axed, "who slepeth ther?"

108-135

No other version -- Ovid's, the verse or prose Ovide Moralisé, Machaut's La Fonteinne Amoureuse, Froissart's Li Paradys d'Amours -- gives us this abrupt episode of humor and grumpiness in the middle of the pathetic story of Alcyone. Spenser borrows the episode and its mood from Chaucer, and then further extends Morpheus' half-awake state by letting him send the dream by messenger instead of performing it, and by increasing from three to four the attempts the messenger must make on Morpheus to rouse him (counting the attempts in Chaucer by the number of the messenger's speeches):

- 1 The messenger approaching to him spake,
But his wast wordes returnd to him in vaine;
So sound he slept, that nought mought him awake.
- 2 Then rudely he him thrust, and pusht with paine,
Whereat he gan to stretch: but he againe
- 3 Shooke him so hard, that forced him to speake.
As one then in a dreame, whose dryer braine
Is tost with troubled sights and fancies weake,
He mumbled soft, but would not all his silence breake.
- 4 The Sprite then gan more boldly him to wake,
And threatned vnto him the dreaded name
Of Hecate: whereat he gan to quake,
And lifting vp his lumpish head, with blame
Halfe angry asked him, for what he came. (Pg 1.1.42-43)

The later Morpheus, what with his stretching, dreaming, mumbling, and grouching, takes much longer to wake up to perform much less. As soon as he has delivered a "diuerse dreame" to the messenger, he collapses again and his "sences all were straight benumbed and starke" (Pg 1.1.44). And Chaucer's eight octosyllables are made thirteen pentameter lines and one alexandrine in Spenser.

Spenser's own additions reinforce his project of extension. Ovid tells us there are no doors in the house of sleep, lest hinges' breaking disturb the sleepers (Meta 11.608-609), and that there are

no watchmen or watchdots to make noise (Meta 11.598-599, 609).

Chaucer mentions neither doors or watches; Spenser includes both, with a glance at Vergil's gates of horn and ivory:

Whose double gates he findeth locked fast,
The one faire fram'd of burnisht Yuory,
The other all with siluer ouercast;
And wakefull dogges before them farre do lye,
Watching to banish Care their enemy. (EQ 1.1.40)

With his double gates and set of guards, Spenser emphasizes the manifold threshold of sleep, as if to suggest the stages through which one must pass to enter or emerge from it.

To similar effect he adds three stages to the delivery of the dream. Where in Ovid and Chaucer Morpheus takes the dream directly to Alcyone, in Spenser he gives it to Archimago's messenger (1.1.44), who then takes it to the sorcerer (1.1.44), who combines it with the false Una he himself has crafted (1.1.45) before sending the compound dream and phantom to Redcrosse (1.1.46-47).

These added stages prolong the dream's route to the sleeper's mind, and suggest the complexity of dreaming. With Archimago's addition of his phantom Una the dream becomes overdetermined: two authorities, Morpheus and Archimago, have shaped it. One dream is conveying both the neutral fantasies of Morpheus' "diuerse dreame" and the unacceptable lusts Archimago hopes to raise in Redcrosse. By insisting even more than Chaucer does on maintaining the transitional and morally ambiguous qualities of the dream, Spenser is able to characterize the unconscious mind as one that does not distinguish between good and evil, truth and illusion. His introduction of further phases in the making of the dream is a manifes-

tation of the inner frontiers of the mind, dwelling halfway between the chaos of undifferentiated ideas and the displacements and disguises the more watchful sectors of the conscious mind use to accommodate standards of integrity and propriety.

Archimago's dream for Redcrosse ultimately fails as a dream for the same reason that it succeeds as a nightmare: the apparent identity of Una and the phantom allows for no displacement of his lustful thoughts that would allow Redcrosse to tolerate them in a dream. Forced into too close an acquaintance with an unacceptable portion of his unconscious, he wakes up, with both more self-knowledge and more fright (EQ 1.1.49). For the rest of the night, and for the rest of his search for Una, this "troublous dreame" will "freshly tosse his braine" (EQ 1.1.55). He will exercise his virtues and exorcise his vices on a level of unconscious motivation, an unconscious whose existence is reflected in the suddenness with which trials ambush the knight, and in the liminality of the places where his mind develops. Orgoglio's prison lies underneath the ground of conscious perception of the world, the Mount of Contemplation lies at an extreme of human awareness, and the kingdom of Una's parents is the forgotten first landscape of humanity, the threshold of history. Spenser has extended and explored the long transition between the unknown and the known mind, and the ambiguities that transition harbors, that Chaucer first introduced into his retelling of Iris' descent into the cave of Sleep.

3. Dryden and Some Romantic Writers

Dryden, Fables Ancient and Modern.

Both Ovid and Chaucer were great spinners of tales, and Dryden, more in need of action than conceit, entered happily into their webs. In the Preface to Fables Ancient and Modern, his account of translating Ovid gives the impression of a reader's pleasure in wandering from one story to another, deciding each in turn to be a favorite:

From translating the First of Homer's Iliads, . . . I proceeded to the Translation of the Twelfth Book of Ovid's Metamorphoses, because it contains, among other Things, the Causes, the Beginning, and Ending, of the Trojan War: Here I ought in reason to have stopp'd; but the Speeches of Ajax and Ulysses lying next in my way, I could not balk 'em. When I had compass'd them, I was so taken with the former Part of the Fifteenth Book, . . . that I enjoy'd my self the pleasing Task of rendring it into English. And now I found, by the Number of my Verses, that they began to swell into a little Volume; which gave me an Occasion of looking backward on some Beauties of my Author, in his former Books: There occur'd to me the Hunting of the Board, Cinyras and Myrrha, the good-natur'd story of Eaucis and Philemon, with the rest . . .

(Fables, 1444-1445)

He then tells us he turned to Chaucer on perceiving his likeness to Ovid. He does not specify the similarity, so one may infer that Chaucer's narrative variety allured him as had Ovid's intertwined metamorphoses. Later in the essay, in describing Chaucer's wealth of characterizations, Dryden concludes, with a certain excitement:

But enough of this: There is such a Variety of Lane springing up before me, that I am distracted in my Choice, and know not which to follow. (Fables, 1455)

Chaucer and Ovid seem to bring out what is most charming and most given over to poetry's pleasures in Dryden.

Dryden of course admired Chaucer for his decorum, by which he means generally the ability to voice a character dramatically and appropriately with apt words and deeds. Where Dryden dislikes Ovid's tendency to be "tickling you to laugh" (Fables, 1451) at some grave moment, he praises Chaucer for rejecting "such Boyisms . . . as below the Dignity of the Subject" (Fables, 1451) in Arcite's death speech. He happily accuses Chaucer of writing without "the Turn of Words" (Fables, 1451), supposing that "Passions are serious, and will admit no playing" (Fables, 1452). Chaucer has taste:

He is a perpetual Fountain of good Sense; learn'd in all Sciences; and therefore speaks properly on all Subjects; As he knew what to say, so he knows also when to leave off; . . . One of our late great Poets [Cowley] is sunk in his Reputation, because he cou'd never forgive any Conceit which came in his way; but swept like a Drag-net, great and small. (Fables, 1452)

This picture of a sensible and decourous Chaucer is limited. I have discuss discussed how his oddities and humorousness enhance and make possible his poetry, his significance, and his very imagination. But in what he calls decorum, Dryden has hit on another essential:

Chaucer follow'd Nature every where; but was never so bold to go beyond her. (Fables, 1452)

In remarking this, Dryden pays tribute to Chaucer's refusal to take any supernatural or superhuman ideal or divinity as a source or guarantor of truth. He sees that Chaucer gives us, not God, but God's plenty. Chaucer gives him to appreciate that it is only in the sublunary realm that real poetic decorum can be practiced, including that variety and variability by which tropes, personas, and narrations fascinate and arouse the imagination. It is clear

that Dryden enjoyed having his choice distracted by the variety of game Chaucer started for him. And if, given this titillation, Dryden takes his pleasure by way of translating him into a distinctly unvisionary Restoration idiom, it is a sincere and energetic pleasure nevertheless.

It does signify that one of his best choices for translation was not in fact by Chaucer. The Flower and the Leaf affords Dryden space for his own art by setting out the conventions, charms, and ambience of the spring vision, without so much seriousness or complexity as to weigh down his own invention or burden him with too many differences between his genius and Chaucer's. In comparison to the Book of the Duchess, the Flower's lack of elegiac concern and of the strange poet-persona of Chaucer's authentic visions in particular leave Dryden free to enjoy and work with his own sensibility, to reshape the material without undue violence either to its deeper concerns or to his own ideas of poetry. In the less complicated tone and action of the Flower and the Leaf, the later poet could appreciate the verbal freedom, the originality and ease, of Chaucer, without all those liberties taken with a serious theme that might have dismayed him in the Book of the Duchess.

His primary revision, apart from modernizing the language, is to increase explicit moral content and distinguish fancy from fact. He makes very clear that this vision is only that, explaining it by denominating it a "fairy" experience: the "Fairy Feet" of line 55 and the "Fairy Place" of line 141 are both additions to the

original, as is the following discourse by the Presenter:

To this the Dame reply'd, Fair Daughter know
That what you saw, was all a Fairy Show;
And all those airy Shapes you now behold
Were humane Bodies once, and cloath'd with earthly Mold;
Our Souls not yet prepar'd for upper Light,
Till Doomsday wander in the Shades of Night. (Dryden 480-85)

While such latter-day fancies may afford Dryden a proto-Gothic pleasure, and intimate in their elaborate way the transitoriness of fictions, they do take the wind out of the sails for readers coming later, and would have, too, for readers living earlier. The same effect comes of Dryden's more pointed moralization. When the poet ends her tree catalogue with an idiomatic trailing-off -- "And many mo, which I had not in mind" (FL 273) -- Dryden must give it a closure of meaningfulness:

Or Branches for their mistique Emblems took,
Of Palm, of Lawrel, or of Cerrial Oak. (Dryden 283-284)

After the cavalcade passes by, the older poet says she

Thought that I would assay, in some manere,
To know fully the trouth of thir matere,
And what they were that rood so plesantly. (FL 452-454)

But where she wants to know who they are and what they are about, Dryden wants to know specifically what they mean:

This when I saw, Inquisitive to know
The secret Moral of the Mystique Show,
I started from my Shade in hope to find
Some Nymph to satisfy my longing Mind. (Dryden 459-462)

Passing over the last tacked-on word of this passage, however, we see how Dryden follows the Flower's conventions into an accidental pleasure. Again, after the Presenter's interpretation, he thanks her for revealing "The secret meaning of this moral Show" (Dryden 509).

The assignment of epithets is helpful: if the moral is mainly in the show, then the meaning must usually be kept a secret. And he does allow that, in addition to pleasure, "mystique Truth" is "in Fables first convey'd" (Dryden 601). While he seems always less willing than the poets he remakes to take a flight of fancy or of unjustified pleasure, his justifications usually do entail some pleasure, and his earthly rambles open onto adventure. And he takes advantage of the unthreatening style and affable social traffic of this Chaucerian piece, not only to moralize its pleasure, but also to give morality into the keeping of poetic fictions, where decorum may stand in the same place and the same time with deception and delight.

James Thomson, The Castle of Indolence, 1.43-48.

Thomson's Spenserian Castle of Indolence includes a passage on the Morpheus Spenser borrows from Chaucer, and is a good, brief, index to how people were reading Chaucerian material in the mid-eighteenth century. Rather than immersing himself in a cave of Sleep, a region of total drowsiness and dreaminess, Thomson sets it in contrast to a storm raging outside: "Whence sweeter grew our sleep secure in rassy hall" II 1-3. He seems, even in the midst of his adventure, more committed to the cozy than the imaginary. The dreams are pastels:

And nither Morpheus sent his kindest dreams,
Raising a world of gayer tinct and grace . . .

Not Titian's pencil e'er could so array,
To fleece with clouds the pure ethereal space;
He could it e'er such melting forms display. II 1-4.

When Thomson looks at dreams, he sees melting forms, rather than the formulations of melting of which Ovid, Chaucer, and Spenser were adepts. The reference to Titian suggests an imagination more oriented to the precision and perceptibility of drawing, and to the differences between art and nature, and the conception of art as an imitation of nature, than the more visionary perspectives of the earlier poets.

Where Chaucer creates the symbolic landscape in which meanings become possible, but does not engage himself for any particular meaning, Thomson will not engage himself even for that landscape. Like Dryden, he distinguishes the imagined realm clearly from reality, setting it apart by calling it a fairy land -- which would soon seem so remote as to be "forlorn" to Keats, in the Ode to a Nightingale, and which Thomson does not regard as a real part of experience:

No, fair illusions! artful phantoms, no!
My muse will not attempt your fairy land:
She has no colors that like you can glow;
To catch your vivid scenes too gross her hand. (CI 1.45)

For Chaucer, the lack of objective reality in such a landscape was supplied by the rhetorical reality bestowed upon it by tradition and symbolic method. One can see that such power of fictions to contribute to reality disturb Thomson a little:

But sure it is, was ne'er a subtler band
Than these same guileful angel-seeming sprights,
Who thus in dreams voluptuous, soft, and bland,
Poured all the Arabian heaven upon our nights,
And blest them oft besides with more refined delights.

They were, in sooth, a most enchanting train,
Even feigning virtue; skilful to unite
With evil good, and strew with pleasure pain.

But for those fiends, whom blood and broils delight
 Who hurl the wretch, as if to hell outright,
 Down down black gulfs, where sullen waters sleep;
 Or hold him clambering all the fearful night
 On beetling cliffs, or pent in ruins deep;
 They, till due time should serve, were bid far hence to keep.

(CI 1.45-46)

The dreams visiting these sleepers are either soothing or infernal, less ambiguous than Chaucer's, less ambivalent than Spenser's. Calling the height of dreaming pleasures "more refined delights," Thomson seems a little afraid to be rich. One feels that Spenser and Chaucer provide a superficial format for poetry that helps poets like Thomson of lesser imagination do the most they can in spite of themselves. Precisely where they are least understood, their contribution is most clearly needed and seen.

William Hazlitt, Lectures on the English Poets, and Leigh Hunt, A Few Thoughts on Sleep.

Hazlitt's second lecture was devoted to Chaucer and Spenser. In it, he betrays an inheritance from Dryden of regarding Chaucer as a correct poet, and an oversimplified impression of his language that leads him to say, for example, that

His metaphors, which are few, are not for ornament, but use, and as like as possible to the things themselves. Hazlitt, 32.

he excelled in both styles, and could pass at will 'from grave to gay, from lively to serene'; but he never confounded the two styles together. Hazlitt, 32)

Such under-readings of Chaucer's symbolic and ironic texts may have arisen from the tendency of later ages to see simplicity in the Middle Ages of which they knew so little. And Hazlitt probably

read Chaucer, along with lesser poets' works attributed to him, either in modernizations, or with inexperienced notions of Middle English, so that in either case he would have a smoothed-out text. But of Chaucer's overall imagination he has a clearer idea. He senses Chaucer's lack of tyranny or tendentiousness:

He does not affect to show his power over the reader's mind, but the power which his subject has over his. (Hazlitt, 22)

Here the romantic "seer's" imagination, subject to the plays of the sub
the sublime like an Aeolian harp, touches the visionary imagination of Chaucer. Hazlitt has some appreciation of the special chaos characterizing the poetry of invention:

His muse . . . like a stammerer, or a dumb person, that has just found the use of speech, crowds many things together with eager haste, with anxious pauses, and fond repetitions to prevent mistake. (Hazlitt, 22)

And his comments on the Pardoner's Tale show that he does not look on Chaucer simply as a user of naive English, but of original English:

The moral impression of Death is essentially visionary; its reality is in the mind's eye. Words are here the only things; and things, physical forms, the mere mockeries of the understanding. (Hazlitt, 23)

In approaching Chaucer from a more visionary perspective, Hazlitt is moving away from Dryden's appreciation of Chaucer's plot and style, and back to a new version of Spenser's appreciation of his imaginative originality.

In this originality lies the true force of Chaucer's renowned powers of observation, for in fact he creates what he sees. To this

faculty of envisioning a fictive reality of words rather than an observed reality in words Leigh Hunt responds in reading Chaucer's description of the cave of Sleep:

nothing can have a more deep and sullen effect
than his cliffs and cold running waters. It
seems as real as an actual solitude, or some
quaint old picture in a book of travels in
Tartary." (Hunt, 182)

Chaucer has indeed blanketed reality in writing descriptions that are as real as both an actuality and a picture. Hunt allows the fact and the fiction to mingle in the poet's vision. His combination of solitary melancholy and quaint travelogue reproduces Chaucer's combination of grief and curiosity. Both these romantic essayists bring to Chaucer a renewed susceptibility to the power of fiction that makes more of Chaucer's imagination available to them, even as the history of language was carrying them further away from opportunities to imitate him.

Keats, Sonnet on the Flower and the Leaf, and Sleep and Poetry.

When an age devoted consciously to rationality yielded to one devoted to new searches for imagination, poets found more in Chaucer to adopt than depart from. Keats is moved by the Flower and the Leaf "assumed at one time to be Chaucer's," to write a sonnet celebrating "the wandering melody" and "white simplicity" by which the poet creates a place in which imagination may make a pause in life's current:

This pleasant tale is like a little copse:
The homied lines so freshly interlace
To keep the reader in so sweet a place,
So that he here and there full-hearted stops. Sonnet 1-4

For the duration of his reading, Keats asserts, he is no longer "athirst for glory," but "Could at this moment be content to lie" on the grass and be heard only by the birds. He thinks of this piece again when writing Sleep and Poetry, a nocturnal review of poetic history as it has fed his own imagination. Life he calls "The reading of an ever-changing Tale" (SP 91), recalling the long influence of works like the Metamorphoses and Chaucer's "wandering melody." Poetry he defines as "might half slumb'ring on its own right arm" (SP 237), voicing his appreciation of poetic restraint in ideology and polemic, and of poetry in quest of its own originary powers prior to theme and meaning. As the epigraph to this meditation, he quotes the narrator's opening affirmation of her "hertis ese" (FL 20). Keats seems to envision poetry as a place and time in which feeling and imagination may play at will over events and ideas, creating a whole and healthy mind, that fears no change or invention.

Wordsworth, Resolution and Independence.

To more readers than the parodic Lewis Carroll has this intermittent dialogue between the anxious poet and the ancient leech-gatherer seemed overwrought as a source of inspiration. But if one sees the situation of the dream vision as Chaucer re-invents it behind Wordsworth's narrative, it acquires new resonance and seems more proportionate. Wordsworth opens the poem, composed in Chaucerian rhyme royal -- with final alexandrine from Spenser -- with a deceptively naturalistic invocation of the symbolic morning landscape, the rigorous night just passed, the bright sun, the birds, woods, and sounding streams:

There was a roaring in the wind all night;
 The rain came heavily and fell in floods;
 But now the sun is rising calm and bright;
 The birds are singing in the distant woods;
 Over his own sweet voice the Stock-dove broods;
 The Jay makes answer as the Magpie chatters;
 And all the air is filled with pleasant noise of waters.

(RI 1-7)

At first the scene banishes from his mind the memories and mundanities that are "so van and melancholy" (RI 21). But, lingering at this point of emptied thought, he finds himself visited by sorrowful meditations: "And fears and fancies thick upon me came; / Dim sadness -- and blind thoughts, I knew not, nor could name" (RI 27-28). When he abandons the pains he knows, at first only the pain of the unknown takes their place. Like the medieval vision narrator, he falls into brooding on mutability, and on things he cannot or does not want to foresee: "But there may come another day to me -- / Solitude, pain of heart, distress, and poverty" (RI 34-35). At the culmination of his reflections, and with the old motifs of uncertainty about how it happens, of imagery precipitated by continuance in meditation, and of the presence of an other unaware of oneself, the poet suddenly sees an aged Man with whom he might commune:

Now, whether it were by peculiar grace,
 A leading from above, a something given,
 Yet it befel that, in this lonely place,
 Then I with these inward thoughts had striven,
 Beside a pool bare to the eye of heaven
 I saw a Man before he awares:
 The oldest man he seemed that ever wore grey hairs. (RI 50-56)

The hint of vision and heaven in "A leading from above," and the "lonely place" set apart by and for imagination, combine into a scenic symbol of a vivid, isolated, unlikely site for new perception, the "pool bare to the eye of heaven," which the old Man reads like a

book (RI 81). Like Chaucer's dreamer before the Black Knight, Wordsworth takes "a stranger's privilege" (RI 82) and engages the Man in conversation. And like the dreamer, he repeats his query about the Man's occupation even though it is answered the first time (compare lines 88 and 118-119). During their first exchange, the poet is struck by the unexpected apprehension that the Leech-gatherer is an alter ego who holds the answer to his questions about his own life:

The old Man still stood talking by my side;
But now his voice to me was like a stream
Scarce heard; nor word from word could I divide;
And the whole body of the Man did seem
Like one whom I had met within a dream;
Or like a man from some far region sent,
To give me human strength, by apt admonishment. (RI 106-112)

The realization that he is conversing with an emblem of his own human condition momentarily overwhelms and frightens him, and "My former thoughts returned" (RI 113). But he can still repeat his question, and recapture the interview's resonance in a calmer state. The sequence from the narrator's distress to the reassuring continuance of the old Man's words is repeated once more:

While he was talking thus, the lonely place,
The old Man's shape, and speech -- all troubled me.
While I these thoughts within my self pursued,
He, having made a pause, the same discourse renewed. (RI 127-133)

and when he ended,
I could have laughed myself to scorn to find
In that decrepit Man so firm a mind. (RI 136-138)

The decrepit Man in whom he discovers this resourcefulness is himself and humankind as well as the Leech-gatherer. As in the Book of the Duchess, a conversation between a melancholy narrator and an envisioned alter ego continues by means of pauses and re-beginnings that reshape time and reinforce the questing self's faith in persistence. If one

recognizes the inventio poetriae behind this poem, one gains access to a clearer knowledge of the problems this narrator faces: melancholy, self-doubt, the necessity for loss and elegy, failing invention. The power of the unlikely interview makes sense in light of the symbolic landscape and conversational vision set out in the Book of the Duchess.

In the absence of specific recollections of that poem, one must assume Wordsworth came to this clear restatement of the dream vision motifs and methods through overall reading in Chaucer and Spenser. This does not alter the Book of the Duchess' signal contribution to making possible poetry and the fictive re-creation of time, self, and desire. Chaucer's initial vision invented that process in English. We can trace it direct in Lydgate, Hoccleve, and Spenser. That its indirect influence should prove of such long life attests even more to the power and aptness of its plot for poetry. While Troilus and Criseyde and the Canterbury Tales are read by more people, the Book of the Duchess has been rewritten by more poets. Thus, in his latter-day homage to Chaucer, Longfellow names the later works, but recreates the vision of the first:

An old man in a lodge within a park;
The chamber walls depicted all around
With portraictures of huntsman, hawk, and hound,
And the hurt deer. He listeneth to the lark,
Whose song comes with the sunshine through the dark
Of painted glass in leaden lattice bound;
He listeneth and he laugheth at the sound,
Then writeth in a book like any clerk.
He is the poet of the dawn, who wrote
The Canterbury Tales, and his old age
Made beautiful with song; and as I read
I hear the crowing cock, I hear the note
Of lark and linnet, and from every page
Rise scenes of ploughed field or flowery mead.

Notes to Chapter V.

Notes to pages 409-414

- 1 "Of this action I took such great pity that it reminded me of the past, from which it was well I should change."
- 2 "One often looks for what one cannot find, and often finds without asking that which one did not think to see or meet. I speak of myself. For just so it happened to me, not long ago, that without seeking to I found an adventure before me such as I had never seen in my life."
- 3 "When he was seated, he left off joy and song, all at once, and began to make a great complaint." "I did not know what had reminded him of it, but a great joy returned to his heart." "Everything there reminds him of his sorrows, and yet after this, some comfort returns to him, which makes him neglect his misfortunes and forget his grief."
- 4 "But I ought to think more of my miseries than speak of my delights." "After tears and complaints, one should sing songs and virelays, to forget what Fortune wishes to send to the lover; for it is so perverse."
- 5 "There where he thought himself most in delight, full of solace and of all amusement, his heart grew so lifeless and constrained that he had to sit down on the grass, and there he remained for awhile."
- 6 "Why, like this, one now in pleasure, the next in sorrow?"
- 7 "Always with open heart."

Notes to pages 415-436

- ⁸ See Walter F. Schirrer, John Lydgate: a Study in the Culture of the XVth Century, trans. Ann E. Keep (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1961), p. 31.
- ⁹ Derek Pearsall, John Lydgate (Charlottesville: Univ. Press of Virginia, 1970), p. 84.
- ¹⁰ Pearsall, Lydgate, p. 95.
- ¹¹ For emphasis on "truth" see also lines 243-244, 246-250, 257-273, 281-282, 288-308, 580-581, 620, 653, 665, 669, 672.
- ¹² The ladies are Polyxena, Helen, Dorigen, Cleopatra, Antigone, Esther, Judith, Alcestis, Martia Cato, Griselda, Ariadne, Lucretia, Penelope, Phyllis, Hipsiphilee, Canace, Dido, and Medea (FC 190-217). Only Martia Cato seems to receive not at least a mention in Chaucer.
- ¹³ Lewis' assumption that since the author is a woman the poem shows "a ladylike ignorance of the heights and depths" (Allegory of Love, p. 248), and its descriptions follow "what interests her, selecting rather by temperament than by art" (p. 249), is an exercise in mistaking material for mode. The description here is very good, even better of the landscape than of the clothes, and it is written by a woman. Since Lewis does not like to think of this situation, he pronounces the description itself less good because its matter is drawn from the feminine world. It is all an immense fallacy -- especially since men's clothes were as colorful as women's in the fourteenth century -- and we do not need to condone it or forgive Lewis. We may agree with the poet that the Goldfinch, the male singer, is aptly assigned to the frail party of the Flower, for his egotism perhaps, while the female Nightingale is rightfully the mascot of the party of the Leaf, for her circumspection, patience, and vision.
- ¹⁴ See page 61 above.
- ¹⁵ Verbal parallels between the two poems may be seen in these lines:
- | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|-------------|-------|-----|-------|------|-----|------|-------|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| ED | 10-12 | ED | 10-12 | ED | 14 | ED | 13 | ED | 11 | ED | 12 |
| 9 | 10-12 | 34 | 10-12 | 14 | 29 | 33 | 29 | 41 | 17 | 47 | 11 |
| 29 | 311 | 125 | 71 | 213 | 49 | 272 | 10-12 | 272 | 532 | 289 | 266 |
| 603ff422ff. | 709 | 484 | 660 | 1176 | 434 | 1078 | | | | | |

Notes to pages 437-451

- 16 Derek Pearsall, Old English and Middle English Poetry (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977), p. 271.
- 17 See the editor's comment in The Complaint of Henry Duke of Buckingham; including the Induction, or Thomas Sackville's Contribution to the Mirror for Magistrates, ed. Marguerite Hearsey (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1936), note 121.
- 18 Duncan Harris and Nancy L. Steffen, "The Other Side of the Garden: an interpretive comparison of Chaucer's Book of the Duchess and Spenser's Daphnaida," Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies 8 (1978), pp. 17-36.
- 19 Harris and Steffen, pp. 26-27.
- 20 Harris and Steffen, p. 17.
- 21 Harris and Steffen, p. 22.
- 22 Harris and Steffen, p. 22.
- 23 Blanche of Lancaster married Gaunt in 1359 and died nine or ten years later. (It has so far proven impossible to discover the date of her birth, but if Gaunt was 19 when he married her, it is likely she was younger than that at the time, and therefore under 30 when she died.) Arthur Gorges and Douglas Howard married, apparently for love and to the displeasure of her father, in 1524, when she was 12 and he was 27, and Lady Douglas died at 18 in 1590 (see H. Sandison's introduction to Gorges' Poems [Oxford: 1953]).
- 24 Norman Berlin, "Chaucer's Book of the Duchess and Spenser's Daphnaida: a Contrast," ELN 38 (1966), pp. 282-289. See also T. W. Adair, "Spenser's Daphnaida and Chaucer's Book of the Duchess," EMLA 1968, pp. 263-281, for another listing of the poets' similarities.
- 25 Chaucer recenters his poem as much with his complex of frames as does Spenser with Aloyon's extended lament. Harris and Steffen point out that "Spenser reserves less than one tenth of the poem . . . for a rehearsal of Aloyon's happiness with Daphne; in the Duchess, Chaucer devotes considerably more than one third of the poem to the story of the Knight's Love" (p. 21). But the Knight's tale is one of calvete, awkwardness, and frustration until the last forty of his over five hundred lines of narrative.
- 26 Berlin, "Chaucer's Book of the Duchess."

Notes to pages 452-473

²⁷ See also lines 167-168, 372, and 465-467.

²⁸ Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, "Chaucer," from A Book of Sonnets, in The Works of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, ed. Samuel Longfellow (New York: Houghton Mifflin, c. 1886; repr. New York: AMS Press, 1966), vol. 3, p. 200.

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