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"If We Shadows Have Offended": Reflections of Social Attitudes Toward Reform in Late Medieval and Reformation Dream Visions

William A. Racicot

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“IF WE SHADOWS HAVE OFFENDED”:
REFLECTIONS OF SOCIAL ATTITUDES TOWARD REFORM
IN LATE MEDIEVAL AND REFORMATION DREAM VISIONS

A Dissertation

Submitted to the McAnulty Graduate School of Liberal Arts

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By

William A. Racicot

May 2010

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William A. Racicot

2010

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By

William A. Racicot

Approved March 23, 2010

Anne Brannen, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of English
(Committee Chair)

Bernard Beranek, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of English
(Committee Member)

Stuart M. Kurland, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of English
(Committee Member)

Christopher M. Duncan, Ph.D.
Dean, McNulty Graduate School
Professor of Political Science

Magali Cornier Michael, Ph.D.
Chair, English Department
Professor of English

ABSTRACT

"IF WE SHADOWS HAVE OFFENDED":
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Dissertation supervised by Anne Brannen, Ph.D.

14th-century dream visions feature intensely personal narrators with attitudes and desires, who agonize over difficult situations, who make errors in judgment. Deeply characterized narrators contribute thematically to these poems, which explore personal subjects like grief and faith. By the 16th century, the form had undergone a thematic transformation from personal narrative to political allegory, losing much of its potency. The narrators use the dream vision structure in order to beg authority figures to forgive the potentially offensive statements made in their work because it was only a dream. Many narrators are ciphers, the eyes and mouthpieces of a theme rather than characters with personalities and goals. They observe situations more than manipulating them. Their dreams focus more on social than personal critique. As British ideology shifted from an internally-oriented belief in patient endurance and a deep-seated belief in hierarchal structures, to a more externally-oriented commitment to Reformation, the function of the dream vision underwent a parallel shift from exploring internal, personal themes toward exploring external, social themes.

DEDICATION

In memoriam ACL

and

as always

for my mother.

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I. DREAM VISIONS AND REFORMATION HISTORY

Fourteenth-century dream visions such as those written by Langland and Chaucer feature intensely personal narrators, narrators with real attitudes and desires, narrators who agonize over difficult situations and choices and who sometimes make errors in judgment.¹ Using such deeply characterized narrators contributes thematically to these poems, which generally explore very personal subjects such as grief and faith. Middleton expresses the interaction well: "the voice, and the human story to which it testifies, rivals the pedagogical progress, which [. . .] forms the 'plot' as locus of meaning" (Middleton 110).

By the sixteenth century, the dream vision form had undergone a transformation from personal narrative to political allegory, losing much of its potency as a genre. The narrators beg the authorities to forgive any potentially offensive, seditious, or even treasonous statements they might make because after all it was only a dream. These narrators tend to observe situations more than they manipulate them. The thematic focus of their dreams leans more toward social than personal critique. Many of these narrators are essentially ciphers, the eyes and mouthpieces of a theme rather than people with personalities and goals. In a very real way, the function of the dream vision shifts from exploration of internal, personal themes toward exploration of external, social themes.

This is not to say that medieval dream visions feature no social critique. "The Vision

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1. Middleton argues of Ricardian public poetry (a category in which she includes "Piers Plowman") that "the 'voice' presented by these poets is offered not as the realization of an individual entity, but as the realization of the human condition" (Middleton 109). This is her method of negotiating the need to take the narrator's voice seriously without identifying it explicitly with the author's voice, not an effort to deny the individuation of the narrator himself. In fact, during her analysis she discusses the worldliness and impatience of Langland's narrator. That his voice in her opinion realizes "the human condition" supports my opinion that the lessons of self-modification and patience learned by the narrator are meant to be internalized by all of Langland's readers.

of *Piers Plowman*" identifies numerous social problems – corruption in the secular and religious hierarchies, both – but Langland at no point endorses the idea that a citizen has the right to rebel against or modify larger social structures that he knows reflect Heavenly equivalents. In fact, after the name *Piers Plowman* appears in the list of rebels at the Peasants' Revolt, Langland revises his text in ways that clarify any confusion about the rights of citizens: Even if the cat deserves a bell, it is not the place of mice to bell him.² Langland warns of corruption in the hierarchy not to rally his audience to social reform, but to warn them about potential pitfalls in their own journeys of faith.³

The transition in the attitudes of dream vision narrators toward social critique between the fourteenth century and the sixteenth is consistently parallel to an overall transition in social attitudes whose most visible barometer is the Reformation. As turmoil in the secular hierarchy and corruption in the religious hierarchy made it increasingly difficult to accept the great chain of being at face value, people began to question the extent to which social institutions were determined according to Heavenly models.

That is, if, as the Wars of the Roses and other secular upheavals made increasingly

2. Middleton has the following to say, discussing Langland and Gower: "Both are inveterate revisers, and in both cases their revisions seem largely dictated not by formal considerations, but by matters of social fact and currency." She goes on to say of Langland specifically that "the Rising of 1381 probably gave a great deal of urgency to his effort to mend ambiguities" (Middleton 98).

3. Middleton's argument that public poetry during this period addresses the entire community does not contradict the personal focus of the narrators of medieval dream visions. My argument related to what these poems communicate, not to whom they communicate it. That is, the message that one must revise one's own approach to grief advises the reader to focus inwardly, even if that message is available to the entire community. Middleton's argument discusses a Ricardian desire to perfect the community, and the poems she analyzes suggest that the proper way to achieve that is through proper behavior on the part of each individual in that community, not through rebellion or disobedience.

apparent, kings were chosen by men and not by God, perhaps criticizing the king was not sinful - even if it was potentially criminal. The Reformation made social change a potential component of faith rather than a betrayal of faith, weakening the connection between crime and sin. The king or bishop may be able to imprison you, or even kill you, but your soul is in the hands of God. If God hates an institution and you change it, you become an agent of God. In the right circumstances, social rebellion ceases to be sinful and becomes a responsibility of the faithful. Christians in this period believed that Earthly institutions and hierarchies *should* reflect divine models, but were less certain that they actually *did*. The dream visions of this period typically reflect a desire for perfection in social hierarchies while exposing their imperfection.

This dissertation explores the connection between the transition in narrative function of dream visions between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries and the equivalent transition in social attitudes toward faith and social critique in the larger English culture.

Historical Background

Medieval English ideology was profoundly influenced by belief in God's plan. In the medieval mind, the cosmos was organized according to a great chain of being in which Earthly institutions and hierarchies reflect divine analogues. Every individual was believed to contribute in some way to God's plan, so every person's *estaaat* – a term which encompasses social status and occupation, and which implies a particular nature, or *kynde*⁴ – was divinely

4. The issue of *kynde* is crucial to interpreting most of the texts analyzed in this dissertation. As faith in the great chain of being declines, words like "kind" and "unkind" cease to refer to a person's nature and instead come to describe a level of social pleasantness. "What a kind thing to do" now means simply that you did something nice, while in the Middle Ages it probably implied that you had behaved according to your proper nature and by extension according to God's plan. The old meaning persists in a residual way in

ordained. Christians at every level of society had the responsibility to fulfill their roles in God's plan as graciously as possible. Farmers and those who work the land in other ways naturally had a different role to play than noblemen and courtly figures,⁵ but at every level individuals were expected to treat their inferiors gently; for the upper orders, this responsibility is called *gentillesse* or *noblesse oblige*. Perhaps more importantly for this dissertation, at every level individuals should respond to their superiors with obedience and patient endurance. If obedience or duty led to suffering, the good Christian suffered, confident that Earthly suffering would be rewarded in the afterlife. According to Rigby,

even those clerical writers [. . .] who attacked the abuses of those landlords who mercilessly tallaged (taxed) their tenants, could only recommend the virtues of patient poverty to those who suffered . . .

(Rigby 28)

The medieval Christian should prefer Heavenly rewards to Earthly ones.

As God rules in Heaven, the pope rules Christendom and the king rules Britain. As the king rules Britain, the count rules the county, and the father rules his household. No matter how humble, every hierarchy was considered a microcosm of the divine hierarchy, so disobedience to the king or even to one's father might be construed as sinful. The line between crime and sin was fuzzy. Fish describes the medieval worldview as "a theory of history where all rebellions are one rebellion, all rebels the first rebel, and all authority divine authority" (Fish 2).

expressions like "unkind mother," which might be applied to a mother who, for example, burns her children with cigarettes – and even this expression is mostly superseded by the only slightly less rare expression "unnatural mother."

5. Rigby enumerates various ways medieval authors constructed social divisions and hierarchies, mentioning clergy, the military, workers and nobles, etc, and pointing out that in all of these cases, they attempted to establish a moral basis for a hierarchy (Rigby 26).

Consequently, although social mobility was not impossible, it was slow and rare.⁶ Similarly, although they too were initially slow and rare, dissent and rebellion were not impossible, as the Peasants' Revolt demonstrated; and as faith in the great chain of being gradually deteriorated over the following centuries, they became more common. In the fifteenth century, New World exploration increased both wealth (for the lucky and shrewd) and poverty (for the unlucky and foolish), not to mention contributing to economic inflation (Harbison 11). Between rising costs and the chaos of the Wars of the Roses, by the sixteenth century Britain was primed for social reform.

Applying to Britain an argument made by E. Harris Harbison about Europe in general helps explain the social climate that led up to Elizabethan ideology. After so many decades of civil war in England the population desired peace and continuity. When Henry VII defeated Richard III in 1485 and married Elizabeth of York, effectively ending the Wars of the Roses, it came as a great relief to the English people. The Tudor monarchs enjoyed increasing popular support, and were able to centralize power more effectively than medieval kings could. One early effect of this was increased bargaining power over the papacy, enabling Henry VII and Henry VIII (before his break with Rome) to name their own bishops, keeping much of the money due to the Church within the kingdom.

Since similar processes were taking place all over Europe, the papacy was often near

6. Rigby assesses the relationship between the medieval deference culture and the importance of increasing social mobility with its consequent social conflicts. He acknowledges the presence of the deference ideology by asserting its limitations: people still took advantage of advancement opportunities presented to them, and people who did so "determine the future of England's social and economic development" (Rigby 37). Some sources of social advancement were: the plague, which reduced the population providing opportunities for promotion; marrying an heiress; military promotion; wealth procured through commerce; and entry into an artisan trade. The more common of these opportunities usually did not provide particularly extreme increases in *estaa*t (Rigby 30).

bankruptcy. The pope attempted to extract funds from the upper levels of clergy through the practice of simony. Higher clergymen attempted to recoup this expense from the lower clergy. In the end, the money must come from working people, because only they have the means of production. The ultimate result of this process was an increase in the price of religious services and favors to the people at large. Another source of more general inflation was the new economic phenomenon of capitalism, which admittedly led to increased wealth for many, and a general increase in social mobility, but which also led to rising prices and a more visible lifestyle difference between the comfortable and the poor.

Although the Church was, by religious standards, never perfect, never without corruption,⁷ when prices were reasonable its imperfections were tolerated. However, with inflation due to multiple causes, the price of spiritual services ceased to be reasonable, and church corruption came under increasing scrutiny. The notoriety of Pope Alexander VI, for his misuse of church authority and resources and the misbehavior of his Borgia relatives, gave this new scrutiny an unprecedented edge. In Harbison's view, the people of Europe were ready for reform, and by the middle of the sixteenth century, England was "headed in the direction of a more intense patriotism and more extreme Protestantism" (Harbison 74).⁸

7. According to Lewis, "Reform of the Church, in some sense or other, was desired by innumerable laymen and many clergy of all parties" (Lewis OHEL 157).

8. O'Day provides a survey of historiography contemporary to the Reformation. She describes a skillful use of propaganda among Protestant historians of the period, and a perception that dynamic individuals (as opposed to social forces) drove the reformation process: "Monarchs, religious teachers and individuals of learning and pious life were portrayed as the moving forces of the English Reformation. The social, economic and geographic underpinnings went unrecognized" (O'Day 6). Belief in the dynamic power of Henry VIII, for example, combined with the rhetorical skill of contemporary historians and rhetors, must have been instrumental in the reform process. Subsequent chapters in her book survey and explore the debate among later historians, up to the twentieth century, regarding the extent to which the Reformation was caused by dynamic individuals or by more modest individuals like Thomas Cromwell, or by even more

This readiness for reform coincided with the Humanist movement toward increasingly secular educational practices, which emphasized a more independent style of thinking about the Bible and ancient texts. According to O'Day, "Humanist scholarship, with its rigorous emphasis upon precise translation, became the handmaiden of early English Protestant argument" (O'Day 7). Humanist educational emphasis on languages, combined with new technology in the form of the printing press, made conversation about reform-related ideas, such as those inaugurated by Luther and later formalized by Calvin, easier with each successive generation.

Through its interest in the secular, Humanism played a major role in an educational reform movement that contributed to the shift from the late medieval attitude that social critique provides opportunities for personal vigilance to the Reformation attitude that social critique should function as a call for social change. In his attempt to show the implications of Humanism, Denys Hay, comparing Italy and England, points out that in Italy legal faculty and legal thinking had higher standing than theology faculty and thinking, while in England at the same time, theology reigned. Since continental social trends come late to England, this suggests an impending transition away from the supremacy of theological thinking over social thinking. This transition had already begun in Scotland. Heiko Oberman's article "Fourteenth-Century Religious Thought" corroborates this idea, arguing that by the fourteenth century, it was no longer reasonable to apply purely theological intellectual techniques to understanding the world. Hay goes even further, pointing to the increasing interest in the Humanist education program among landowners and businessmen in England as a likely cause for an increase in lay administrators of estates and businesses.

abstract and uncontrollable social forces like economics and public perception.

This trend toward the secular continued into the fifteenth century. Bennett claims that the fifteenth century was not so barren a literary period as reputed; he considers more that the glory was gone. There was still plenty of balladry, for instance, in Scotland in particular. Nevertheless, the period was wracked by foreign and civil war - it was a very unsettled time to live. Although money was getting shorter, religious positions and patronage still enabled some people to write. The financial motivation may to a certain degree have hindered glory in the poetry of the period both by enabling lesser talents to work and by distracting those who may have been better.

Meanwhile, a reading public began to emerge. Manuscript collections began to circulate. Secular literature became more important. Verse writers of the period began to focus on rhetoric in Chaucer and other masters, misunderstanding rhetoric's function, making it an end rather than a tool. For example, many authors apologize for their inability to follow "the rules." Similar misuse of allegory characterizes much verse of the period.

DuBoulay traces this transition. The cultural changes that characterize the fifteenth century began in the late fourteenth with redistribution of wealth (and responses to that redistribution) due to the plague and the wars at home and in France. He considers fifteenth-century England self-consciously aristocratic, and suggests that people emulated (or believed they emulated) the lords. Lords gathered armed men to protect their interests during this time when ambition to the throne could result in local violence. It is likely that these agreements, relying as they did on money, increased the influence of economic concerns and decreased the influence of traditional ideas like the great chain of being. According to DuBoulay, the fifteenth century saw an increase in lawsuits. Legal courts were prone to bribery and violence, but were still respected. Trials for sorcery increased in secular

courts; these courts sensibly demanded evidence, again pointing to an increasing reliance on worldly, material supports for potentially abstract notions like justice and righteousness.

It was "an age of first-generation literates" (DuBoulay 144), so it is not reasonable to expect greatness – it would be better to wait for greatness in succeeding generations. The period was characterized by anxiety because of the plague and other events. During this period, religion meant both faith and good works. "Here in a few lines is the structure of medieval religion: the immediate consciousness of death, which comes like a thief in the night; the consciousness of sin and the need for mercy; the fear of an adverse judgment; the belief that mercy can be forthcoming through the redemption by Christ; and that the sinner may be enabled the more easily to achieve this by the help of the Blessed Virgin and also of other saints who are already known to be pleasing to God, and of those individual, entirely spiritual yet created beings known as angels. It is a mixture of fear, faith, good works and intercession" (DuBoulay 147).

According to DuBoulay, this changed radically by the sixteenth century, which dismantled cults of saints and eliminated reliance on works. The late Middle Ages saw an increase in private masses, resulting in the chantry system typical of this period. This speaks to Purgatorial beliefs also eliminated in the Reformation.

These historians and literary scholars all point to an increasing secularity as the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries gradually gave way to the sixteenth, as the notion of Reformation gained power. It is natural enough that this increase would be reflected in the poetry of the period.

The Dream Vision

The dream vision as practiced in the Middle Ages features a narrator, who relates the experience of a dream, usually in three parts: an initial waking period; a sleeping period during which the dream takes place; and a concluding period of wakefulness. Although the waking periods are sometimes more implied than actual, they are frequently of significant thematic usefulness. The initial waking period sometimes establishes the themes of the poem, perhaps a problem to be revealed, explored, or even resolved in the dream. The post-dream waking period can serve as a conclusion, perhaps offering the narrator the opportunity to recognize the revelations of the dream, and even resolve to act on new knowledge.⁹

The dream itself is generally allegorical to some degree, although attempts to create a one-to-one mapping of dream images or figures to real-world concepts and figures are not always fruitful. Much scholarly time has been wasted, for instance, in attempting to establish the precise allegorical significance of the whelp in Chaucer's "Book of the Duchess," when in all likelihood it is just a dog, useful because playing with a puppy can help a mourning person overcome grief. Robertson devotes a paragraph to explaining exactly why the identification of the black knight with John of Gaunt is problematic (Robertson 463). That is, although the dream is generally somewhat allegorical, some images may be literal - or as literal as an image

9. "Such poems begin and end with dreaming and waking, often in a pleasance, so that the intervening narrative section is presented as a dream or vision. It thus enjoys the freedoms of imaginative status and the advantages of a distancing perspective. The sometimes very elaborate frames may introduce the poet's professional concerns, or refer to specific literary contexts, like the tale of Ceyx and Alcyone in *The Book of the Duchess*. In this way analogies are brought in, which may be equivalent to those of interlace. More generally, the low-key frame serves to prepare the reader for the vision's heightened mood" (Fowler 10-11).

seen in a dream can be.

Indeed, a certain level of surreality or dream logic is often considered a feature of the dream vision form. Scenes may shift on an image or concept rather than a more conventional narrative element. To continue the example of Chaucer's "Duchess," the narrator dreams he is in bed, indoors, hears a hunting horn, and rides his horse out to join the hunt. At no point does he wonder how he came to be on his horse when he had previously been in his bed or what door he used to get outside.

Perhaps because the two genres share common ancestry, dream visions often feature romance motifs such as knights, castles, *reverdi*, and the courtly love tradition. In medieval dream visions these are used for thematic effect. In later dream visions, they are likely to be used simply because the author considers their inclusion a mandatory criterion of the form. The use of courtly love seems largely decorative in Lydgate's "Temple of Glass" for example.

Dream visions throughout the three periods of interest to this dissertation tend to select from a shared set of techniques to explore their themes. In addition to allegory and satire, dream visions often feature a *debat*, a sometimes contentious conversation between rivals. In medieval texts the *debat* often comes to an implied dialectical conclusion incorporating the strengths of both points of view, as is the case in "Wynnere and Wastoure", while in sixteenth-century dream visions it is usually clear either that one faction is right and the other wrong, or that the author has simply included a *debat* as a formal necessity. It is difficult to read Greene's "Quip for an Upstart Courtier," for example, and not conclude that Greene is on the side of Cloth Breeches.

A few early texts influence the dream vision form. One of the most important is Macrobius' commentary of Scipio's dream. Macrobius divides dreams into the following

categories:

- The nightmare, or *insomnium*, could be brought on by emotional conditions such as stress, or by physical conditions such as overeating. Virgil claimed that such dreams could also be sent by spirits.
- The apparition, or *visum*, is a real-seeming figure that appears to a dreamer in the moments between sleep and waking, which disappears upon full wakefulness.
- The enigmatic dream, or *somnium*, is "one that conceals with strange shapes and veils with ambiguity the true meaning to the information being offered, and requires an interpretation for its understanding" (Stahl 90). Macrobius subdivides enigmatic dreams, based on the events they depict, into the personal, alien, social, public, and universal varieties.
- The prophetic dream, or *visio*, is a dream that actually comes true.
- The oracular dream, or *oraculum*, is one in which an ancestor or revered figure appears to the dreamer and reveals what will or will not occur.

Of these categories, Macrobius asserts that the *insomnium* and the *visum* can be dismissed, as they have no prophetic significance. He considers the remaining categories of dream, the *somnium*, the *visio*, and the *oraculum*, all prophetically significant (Stahl 87-90).

However, Macrobius' dream theory does not end with these categories; he also describes the ancient image of twin gates through which dreams descend to the minds of men. True dreams come through the gate of horn, and false ones through the gate of ivory (Stahl 92). The issue of prophetic significance is easily conflated with truth. That is, a prophetically significant dream is surely a true dream, and a false dream is surely of no prophetic significance. The five categories themselves are not mutually exclusive or particularly consistent – consider the case of a pious king at war who overeats after a battle and retires suffering digestive distress, only to dream that Samson has appeared to him with ass' jawbone in hand and revealed that he will win the war as long as he does not shave his head. Such a dream, reflecting the king's daily concerns and likely brought on by poor digestion, would be easy to classify as *insomnium*; yet Samson is a revered figure, and his message relates to fate of a nation, so it might also be an *oraculum*. Does such a dream

descend to the pious king from the gate of horn or the gate of ivory?

In *The English Dream Vision*, Russell argues that the dream vision form takes thematic advantage of this ambiguity, of the inconsistencies and incompleteness of Macrobian dream theory. In practice, it is usually impossible to determine whether a dream is true or false. In medieval dream visions, this ambiguity creates a liminal space, between literal truth and falsehood, appropriate for discussions of abstract and emotional topics; in Renaissance dream visions, the likelihood that a dream was false enabled the use of the dream frame to function as a disclaimer, while the possibility that it was true meant that the images and events it described could still function as social commentary.

Although Macrobius' commentary provides inspiration and the very early "Dream of the Rood" is without doubt a poem set in dream form, it is the thirteenth century "Roman de la Rose" which serves as the primary model for the later dream visions of interest to the present project. The "Roman" depicts a dreaming man who encounters numerous allegorical figures in his attempts to get to the center of a beautiful garden to his goal, the rose. In *The Allegory of Love*, Lewis teaches us that each character in the garden is an aspect of the personality of a particular lady beloved of the narrator. The various responses of these figures to the narrator's appeals for admission to the garden represent internal conflict in the mind and soul of the lady, who desires the pleasures associated with love but fears the stigma associated with promiscuity. Here, allegory enables the narrator to explore the psychological, spiritual, and emotional conflicts, the motives that influence a beloved lady's romantic decision-making. This is intensely personal, limited not just to the internal process of a single person, the lady, but to the influence of that process on the narrator himself.¹⁰

10. Bachorski, taking a psychoanalytic approach, argues that in medieval literature the dream

The subjects of medieval dream vision are generally personal in this or similar ways. They explore issues of faith, love, grief, loyalty, etc. These subjects reflect belief in the concept of the great chain of being, which postulates that Earthly institutions and hierarchies are imperfect images of Heavenly equivalents. If social position is determined by God, the appropriate response to Earthly crisis is patience, personal exploration. Rewards for patience are forthcoming in Heaven.

By the sixteenth century, this faith had been severely shaken. The Wars of the Roses and the Protestant Reformation made it harder to believe that kings and bishops were selected by God, and at minimum emphasized the imperfection of Earthly hierarchies as an image of Heavenly ones. Reform had begun to replace patience as the expected response to difficulty. While in the fourteenth century dream visions presented social critique to warn the reader of spiritual pitfalls, in the sixteenth they present it was a rallying cry to expose and protest the flaws of authority figures and institutions themselves.

The narrators of the dream visions of this period are much less fully realized as characters. While Long Will, the narrator of "The Vision of Piers Plowman," is idiosyncratic and profoundly human, the narrator of Greene's "Quip for an Upstart Courtier" is largely a cipher. This is because the "Quip" explores problems external to its narrator: the potential social crises that could follow from wealthy peasants behaving above their stations. There is little motive to create a realistic person in this narrator, since in the end the subject of the poem is society itself.

freed up the unconscious and allows the narrator's repressed concerns to emerge. "The displacement of narration into the textual type of the dream suspends the narrator's self-control and the repressed creeps into the text." He goes on to tie the concerns of the individual narrator to "the collective repressions and obsessions of that epoch as they were manifested in the individual" (Bachorski 78).

The allegory of dreams in this period is much easier to decipher as well. Each image generally maps to a real-world concept, institution, figure, or group of figures. Indeed the images in these dream visions often feature names that reveal a real-world analogue. This is different from the medieval model: in "Pearl" for instance, the figure of Pearl corresponds not just to a beloved lost daughter, but also to a crisis of faith, and does not particularly reflect a literal pearl - even though the narrator identifies himself as a jeweler. In "Piers Plowman" Meed is not simply reward as her name would indicate. She is far too complex for that. On the other hand, in Greene's "Quip," each plant in the garden has a name that identifies its function, and many are explicitly explained in terms of their precise allegorical significance. Later in the poem, the conflict between the animate cloth breeches and velvet breeches more or less exactly corresponds to the conflict between the groups of people prone to wearing those garments: long-standing but poor gentry and the *nouveau-riche*, respectively. The narrator himself becomes involved to the extent that he sets up the court and the jury to try their case, but even this level of participation cannot make their problem his problem.

The problem of Greene's "Quip" is external to its narrator, reflecting the transition in the attitudes of authors toward social problems. In medieval dream visions, social critique is presented as a problem personal to the dreamer, and as a warning to the reader of a pitfall to avoid. In the wake of the Reformation, sixteenth-century dream visions describe social problems that are external to the dreamer, at minimum as complaints about corruption, and often as a call for reform.

The present dissertation is interested in the dream as a framing device, in the reasons that led authors to select the dream frame rather than some other.¹¹ At no point between the

11. Helen Phillips' article "Dream Poems" insists on considering all framed narratives in the

fourteenth and the sixteenth centuries, for example, is the dream framework necessary to justify the use of allegory or *debat*, although both of these techniques are common to the dream vision form. I seek to explore precisely what the dream frame brings to each text, whether that be a meta-space in which a man can speak to his deceased daughter, as in "Pearl," or a source of plausible deniability designed to stave off retribution from offended social superiors, as in "A Quip for an Upstart Courtier." Consequently, I will not be analyzing texts that are merely dream-like, such as the Divine Comedy, or Spenser's "Faerie Queene," because the dream frame is absent from those texts and therefore need not have any real effect on how we read them. The one exception to this is Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream*, which I include because it serves as an exemplar of what happens to the dream vision in the absence of a commitment to patience. Similarly, I will not be analyzing texts, such as Julian's "Shewings," which are intended as nonfictional. If the author has not selected the dream frame, but has instead had it forced upon her, the implications of that frame naturally differ.

In the end, I will demonstrate that transitions within the reasons authors select the dream frame between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries are parallel to transitions within the larger British ideology over the same time span. Medieval dream visions typically use a highly characterized narrator to explore some subject of deep personal interest to that narrator; they depict the narrator's introspection, and explore internal themes. Sixteenth-century dream visions use much less fully individuated narrators to explore subjects of interest to the author (as distinct from the narrator, who as a cipher generally has

same genre, offering little insight into the reasons a poet might select the dream frame as opposed to some other.

little invested), and explore external themes, themes of social rather than personal relevance. In the medieval dream vision, the lessons learned by the narrator reflect a commitment to patient endurance, advising readers to modify their own approaches to adversity rather than disobeying or attempting to change the authorities or institutions from which that adversity originates. Reformation dream visions, by contrast, treat patience at best as a source of temporal reward, and often attempt to make the reader *impatient* about some external social phenomenon. This transition reflects a general shift from belief in the great chain of being to belief in social reform.

II. THE PERSONAL NATURE OF 14TH CENTURY DREAM VISIONS

Medieval dream visions frequently feature fully-characterized narrators, whose dreams explore subjects of personal significance. They generally use the dream form to enhance discussion and exploration of the narrators' problems, and reflect an ideological commitment to patient endurance in the face of adversity. That is, over the course of the dream, the narrator learns or has the opportunity to learn how to handle a personal situation by modifying his own behavior or attitude toward that situation. In this way, medieval dream visions, like medieval ideology, are internally directed.

This chapter explores two major dream visions of the late fourteenth century, Chaucer's "Book of the Duchess" and the anonymous "Pearl," aiming to demonstrate that a complex narrator who demonstrates substantial individuality, a personal subject, sophisticated use of the dream format, and in general an inward thematic orientation are common features of the dream vision as a genre in the period.

"Pearl"

Like much medieval literature, the anonymous dream vision "Pearl" works on multiple levels. On the literal level, a jeweller falls asleep while looking for a lost pearl and dreams of a pearl maiden who provides comfort to him in the form of theological instruction. On one figurative level, the pearl and pearl maiden are metaphors for the jeweller's lost daughter, dead at two years old. The pearl image itself further recalls the biblical pearl of great price, reflecting the bereft jeweller narrator's crisis of faith in the face of grief and loss.

While all of these metaphoric and symbolic levels provide insight into the poem's

thematic project, on all levels the narrator is a realistic person (that is, realistic in medieval terms) with his own problems and idiosyncracies, his own mannerisms and desires, his own mistakes and opinions. For example, his vocation as a jeweller colors his diction.¹ The central metaphor of the poem – indeed its first word – is "pearl". In the first line he uses the word "paye" to indicate delight. Describing the beauty of the setting in the second line, he uses the words "gold" and "clere". Gold is of obvious interest to a jeweller, and clarity is one of the principle criteria by which gemstones are assessed. In the same line, the expression "clanly clos" ties the poem's setting to the setting of a gemstone in a ring, necklace, or other piece of jewelry. He goes on to use the expression "oute of oryente" (3) and the term "precios" (4). Metals such as gold and silver are called precious metals; rubies, pearls, and other gemstones are called precious stones. The Orient is famed for its pearls. All of these terms follow naturally from the narrator's vocation as a jeweller. All of them indicate a jeweller's natural interest in the quality, craftsmanship, and sale of jewelry.

This diction, as applied to the poem's setting, is not limited to the first few lines of the poem. He later uses similar jeweller's diction to describe the brightness and clarity of the cliffs he sees, describing them as "rych rokkez" (68) and referring to their "lyzt" (69) and their "glemande glory" (70), and he asserts that they "glent" (70). These are all terms describing the sheen of the cliffs. The jeweller assesses the landscape around him according to the same criteria by which he assesses the raw materials of his craft.

In fact he considers stones better than fabric:

For wern neuer webbez þat wy3ez weuen

1. Riddy discusses the narrator's jewelry-related diction in contrast to courtly diction (Riddy 145).

of half so dere adubmente

(71-72)

In this passage, the narrator compares woven fabric unfavorably to the cliffs, which are gem-like, indicating a jeweller's bias. Notice the use of the word "dere", which in addition to meaning "cherished" can also mean "expensive". And the word "adubmente", which becomes the hinge word for the second section of the poem, means "decoration". Both clothing and jewelry can be cherished, both can be expensive, and both can be used for decorative purposes. But the narrator considers jewelry superior.

The narrator's jewelry-related diction is not restricted to descriptions of the setting; he uses similar terminology in his description of the pearl maiden herself. Her robe is "blysannde whyt" (164) and "whyte as playn yuore" (178), and it "schone" (166) "as glysnande golde" (165). The narrator's vocation as a jeweller leads him to focus on the shine and color of the maiden. In keeping with the poem's central metaphor, the girl herself is discovered underwater, like a pearl, a direct comparison supported by use of the word "glysnande" or glistening, shining as though wet. This diction persists when the narrator thinks of his grievous loss. He compares burial in earth to placing a high-quality stone in a poor setting, referring to "hir color so clad in clot" (22), and he considers this damaging to the pearl: such a lowly setting "marrez a myry iuele" (23).

The narrator's jewelry-related diction reveals him as a realistic person, a fully developed character with an occupation, a person with a professional craftsman's world-view and focus. For instance, he prefers the lost pearl maiden to any other pearl:

Quere-so-euer I Iugged gemmez gaye,
I sette hyr sengeley in synglure

(7-8)

But an occupation alone can still be generic, and the narrator of "Pearl" is not just any jeweller.

He is a specific jeweller, with personal idiosyncracies, some of which trace to his trade, and some of which do not. For instance, it is not the landscape that is important to him, but his opinion of the landscape. He lavishly describes the brightness of the cliffs and the water and the city beyond the river, all of which play into his focus on the color, sheen, and clarity of the objects in his world; however he does not recognize the pearl maiden's location as indicative of death or afterlife:

Bot baysment get myn hert a brunt
I sez hyr in so strange a place,
Such a burre myzt make myn herte blunt
(174-176)

Instead of observing the cosmic significance of the place, he comments on the effect it has on him: it strikes a blow to his heart.

His self-centered attitude toward the setting is made clear when he tries, despite increasing peril, to enter the beautiful place across the river:

More and more, and zet wel mare,
My lyste to se þe broke by-3onde,
For if hit watz fayr þer I con fare,
Wel loueloker watz þe fyrre londe.
(145-148)

Bot woþez mo i-wysse ther ware,
Þe fyrre I stalked by þe stronde.
(151-152)

He wants to fare across the river not because he understands it to be Paradise, but because of its lavish beauty. This narrator is self-centered and a little bit shallow, like a real person.

The narrator of "Pearl" feels guilt. At the outset of the poem, proximate use of the

word "spot" to mean both "location" and "sin" suggests that in his mind he connects the place where he lost the pearl, the place where he falls asleep, with personal failure. His return to this place suggests he blames himself for the loss of the pearl. His own welfare increases his sorrow:

Ofte haf I wayted wyschande þat wele,
þat wont watz whyle deuoyde my wrange,
And heuen my happe and al my hele.
þat dotz bot þrych my herte þrange,
My breste in bale bot bolne and bele.

(14-18)

He feels guilt and sorrow for making himself feel better by thinking of his lost child. This is not the narrator's only sign of depression:

Ȝet thoȝt me neuer so swete a sange,
As styлле stounde let me to stele,
For-soþe þer fleten to me fele,
To þenke hir color so clad in clot

(19-22)

Here, he expresses a preference for silence over song, because silence is less likely to interfere with his thoughts about Pearl.

He even dwells on the wastefulness of his loss:

Flor and fryte may not be fede,
þer hit doun drof in moldez dunne,
For vch gresse mot grow of graynez dede,
No whete were ellez to wonez wonne;
So semly a sede moȝt fayly not,
þat spryngande spycez vp ne sponne,
Of þat precios perl wyth-outen spotte.

(29-36)

Unlike the wheat in John's Gospel,² Pearl sends up no good grain. The narrator considers

2. "Except a grain of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it

this wasteful, and takes no solace in the biblical passage to which he refers.

As Chaucer's narrators so frequently are, this narrator is – perhaps somewhat deliberately – obtuse, refusing to receive the conventional wisdom of the Gospel. A major motif of the poem involves the pearl maiden correcting his theological mistakes. For example, the narrator says to the Pearl maiden

Þy self in heuen ouer hyz þou heue,
To make þe quen that watz so 3onge.
(473-474)

Here, he doesn't understand when she reassures him that she can be queen in Heaven without supplanting Mary. How can one so young be placed over Mary, who has been queen in Heaven for so long? She reassures him that having died so young, she retained her innocence, that there are many queens in Heaven, none supplanting Mary, etc. He has trouble with these concepts.

Yet the narrator's personality is complex. His bias is toward the pearl maiden, even though he doubts her qualification to be a queen. When he asks her to "Rebuke me neuer with wordez felle" (367), he demonstrates that he cares about her opinion of and response to him, even if part of him cannot escape thinking of her as a toddler.

The narrator of "Pearl" expresses opinions and attitudes. He has interests and concerns. His profession influences both his speech patterns and his behavior: of course a man whose life revolves around precious gems would attempt to get as close as possible to a city built out of them! He is a realistic person, with aptitudes and weaknesses.³

bringeth forth much fruit" (John 12:24-25). Garbaty suggests "the grains only seem dead and withered" (722n).

3. Discussing the thirteenth-century romance "Galeran de Bretagne," Beston argues for a level of realism in the poem's characters, particularly the heroine Fresne, that exceeds the

The narrator's problem is very personal. Garbaty asserts that

...the *Pearl* shows the most intense poetic confession of grief, of loss, and of final spiritual hope that we find in an age known for its mystical fervor. Thus some readers see the poem as a consolation and the Pearl as representing salvation. According to most accepted interpretations, the narrator has lost a two-year-old daughter, his Pearl. His mood is yearningly sad, though not bitter.

(Garbaty 721).

The narrator does have a real stake in the poem's events. He is prone to outbursts such as "Allas! I leste hyr..." (9). He indicates the frequency and intensity and persistence of his yearning for his lost child, observing "Ofte haf I wayted wyschande" (14). He refers directly to his grief: "I dewyne for-dolked of luf daungere" (11). "Luf daungere," or love-longing, is heart-break. When he refers to the lost Pearl, he uses personal possessive pronouns, and the intensifier "priuy" – the Pearl was his very own, and he says so directly. He expresses personal grief:

My herte watz al with mysse remorde,
As wallande water gotz out of welle

(364-365)

Grief has turned his heart into a well of remorse. Indeed, his feeling for Pearl is so intense

conventional wisdom about medieval characterization. For example, "Fresne, even during the early days of her courtship, when Galeran invites sympathy for his love pains, points out that it is she and not he who bears the burden in their relationship because of her lower social rank—a most unusual assertion of self in a medieval heroine" (210). Although his thesis sets Fresne outside of period norms, it nevertheless demonstrates that realism is possible in medieval characterization, well before the late fourteenth century. Wimsatt, participating in a scholarly discussion involving scholars as prominent as C.S. Lewis, devotes an article to discussing the extent to which Chaucer's "Troilus and Criseyde" is realistic and therefore modern. Techniques of detailed characterization were available to well-read, skillful medieval authors, even if these techniques were not always put to use, and some authors of the period certainly did. Who can claim that the Wife of Bath is a flat character? The techniques of her characterization may involve allegorical imagery (gap-teeth indicating lustfulness, etc.), but she is certainly a fully individuated woman, not just some placeholder representing all strong women. My analysis in this dissertation provides ample evidence to support that a more-than-usually individuated narrator is a frequent and integral feature in medieval dream visions.

that the opportunity to speak to her makes his life worth living:

Wel watz me þat euer I watz bore,
To sware þat swete in perlez pyʒte!
(239-240)

For all his apparently desperate outbursts, by saying "I do me ay in his mysericorde" (366), the narrator demonstrates himself to be a man of faith. He places himself on the mercy of God, almost not daring to believe that doing so might ease his suffering. This is a well-rounded character, a man of faith in crisis, a jeweller who laments the unworthy setting of his finest pearl, a father bereft of his tiny daughter, an idiosyncratic speaker whose many experiences color his diction and his attitudes.

The poem makes the fact of his well-roundedness integral to its project. The repeating word in section V is "Iueler". Furthermore, although the poem's vehicle is about the lost pearl, and its tenor is theological, the actual argument is about the narrator's relationship to and opinions regarding the lost pearl, and how the theological points being made apply to the narrator. The narrator has "playned" (242) and "regretted" (243); he has experienced "much longeyng" (244); he is "pensyf" and "payred" and "for-payned" (246). He has not simply lost a prized gemstone: he is bereft, "ioylez" (252) and "twayned" (251), torn in half.

The narrator's personal point of view, his particular crisis, becomes the subject of the poem, which links his grief to a crisis of faith.⁴ His repetition of the word "spenned" indicates a connection in his mind between the posture used in prayer and the grave:

4. "The theme of Pearl is that of most elegies: the acceptance, through suffering and revelation, of death as a part of the universal plan" (Moorman 63).

Bifore þat spot my hond I spenned...

(49)

I playned my perle þat þer watz spenned...

(53)

In the first quotation, he depicts himself with his hands clasped as though in supplication or prayer, not a surprising posture for a man visiting the grave of his departed daughter. In the second quotation, the word "spenned" is repeated, this time to describe the earth clasped around his lost pearl, his Pearl, creating a thematic connection between prayerfulness or faith and the grave. Further confirmation of the narrator's crisis of faith comes when he asserts

Þa3 kynde of kryst me comfort kenned,
My wreched wylle in wo ay wra3te.

(55-56)

Here, he asserts that even the comfort he derives from the nature of Christ is insufficient, and he describes his will as wretched. Many of the narrator's observations and much of the dialogue explores his loss, his grief, and the effects of these things on his faith.

In fact, the poem explicitly develops a contrast between physical sight and spiritual sight, between eyesight and insight or faith. For instance, in the list of three mistakes the pearl maiden enumerates to the narrator, the first is that "þou trawez me in þis dene, / By cawse þou may with y3en me se" (295-296). Eyesight is explicitly untrustworthy, leading to error. Trusting to physical sight is especially troubled in the dream state, when the eyes are not even really open: the irony of this dream is that he isn't actually seeing her at all, in the physical sense. What wisdom he will derive from this encounter will be based on the sight of his mind, not the sight of his eyes. It is a theological mistake to rely on the physical senses; it is doubly so to do so when those senses are not even active.

To support the idea of eyesight as a potential source of error, the poem argues that the denizens of Heaven

On sunne ne mone had þay no nede;
þe self God watz her lompe lyzt,
þe lombur her lantyrne with-ouren drede;
þurȝ hym blýsned þe borȝ al bryȝt.

(1045-1048)

This passage makes clear that, since God himself is light, there is no need for light in Heaven, which complements the idea that mortal sight is untrustworthy, emphasizing the contrast between physical vision and the more trustworthy spiritual vision.

The poem emphasizes this contrast, by invoking St. John in its effort to gather up legitimacy for the vision it depicts:

As Iohan þe apostel hit syȝ with syȝt,
I syȝe þat cyty of gret renoun

(985-986)

Here the narrator compares his vision of the city to John's divinely-inspired vision.

Garbaty emphasizes the importance of "personal quality" in the poem:

His elegy is in the form of a dream vision, an allegory which shows him on the brink of Carlyle's "Everlasting Nay." Through a kind of lyric therapy, he brings himself, at the end, toward the "Everlasting Yea." This very personal quality in the poem involves the reader powerfully.

(Garbaty 712)

The subject of the poem is highly personal to the narrator, and this personal nature is fundamental to its overall project.⁵

5. St. John cites Aers as saying that "Piers Plowman includes an exploration of the divided will and the need to turn inward if the sources of salvation are to be encountered" (St. John 210).

Just as the realistic narrator is integral to the poem's thematic/consolatory function, the dream vision form itself is crucial, in large part due to the surreality and ambiguity of the dream state. The medieval European mindset allowed for the possibility that a dream might have prophetic significance, and medieval thinkers were highly influenced by the Macrobian paradigm for determining whether a given dream did have such significance. Macrobius' paradigm, though, lacks internal consistency. For example, it suggests that a head of state, dreaming of state matters, ought to pay attention to the dream; but it also suggests that a dream occurring after a large, rich meal is probably caused by gas, not by divine prophetic intervention. How, then, to interpret a monarch's dream of revolution, dreamt while napping after a large, spicy meal?⁶

This space for ambiguity in the interpretation of actual dreams extends to the medieval attitude toward fictional dreams such as those described in dream vision poems, although the contested significance is not necessarily prophetic. For example, in "Pearl," the narrator derives great comfort (and not a little theological instruction) from his dream, and he takes the dream seriously, as though it were divinely inspired. But his own description of the circumstances leaves open the possibility that it is an inhalant-induced hallucination:

I felle vpon þat floury fla3te,
Suche odour to my hernez schot;
I slode vpon a slepyng sla3te,
On þat precios perle with-ouen spot.

(58-61)

Here the narrator describes falling asleep among fragrant flowers, leaving open the possibility

6. Pressing this ambiguity to its logical extreme, in *The English Dream Vision*, Stephen Russell takes a deconstructive approach to the interpretation of dream vision poems, arguing that the form allows the poet the leeway to explicitly discuss one topic while implicitly exploring another, often communication or language itself.

that the flowers themselves induced both sleep and dream. Furthermore, Macrobius includes in his taxonomy of dreams the stress-induced dream: a dream so completely reflecting the stresses of the day is probably not of prophetic significance. Finally, there is no escaping the constructed nature of "Pearl." That is, no matter how often the narrator asserts this is a true dream, the reader is aware that it is fiction. The dream in "Pearl" is ambiguous.

The dream state itself is ambiguous, of course, and in "Pearl" this ambiguity enhances the discussion of the difference between sight and insight. The maiden scolds the jeweller for relying on his physical sense of sight at the expense of his inner vision, his faith; however, while dreaming, his physical sense of sight is disengaged. Only in a state where untrustworthy eyesight is suspended, replaced by spiritual vision, can the narrator see his dead child.

Similarly, the liminal dream state creates a space in which discussion can transcend the inadequacy of language to address topics like profound grief, faith, and other emotional or spiritual extremes. In several places, "Pearl" asserts this inadequacy. For instance, when describing the beauty of the birdsong he hears, the narrator asserts

Þat fryth þer fortwne forth me ferez,
Þe derþe þer-of for to deuyse
Nis no wy3 worþe þat tongue berez.
(98-100)

No man who bears a tongue is worthy to describe it; the emphasis on tongue and description suggests the limitation is one of language. Later, he postulates a level of gladness that cannot be described:

More of wele watz in þat wyse
Þen I cowþe tell þa3 I tom hade,
For vrþely herte my3t not suffyse

To the tenþe dole of þo gladnez glade;
(133-136)

No mortal has sufficient heart to describe such joy, regardless of how much time is allotted: mortal words are inadequate. Describing the pearl at the center of the maiden's array, he asserts that

I hope no tongue mozt endure
No sauerly saghe say of þat syzt,
So watz hit clene and cler and pure...
(225-227)

Again, it is so fine that language, tied as it is to the physical body, is not adequate to describe it. At one point, the narrator refrains from speech because he fears his voice will be insufficient to prevent the pearl maiden from leaving (181-188). In all of these cases, the narrator expresses the belief that human language, physical language, cannot be trusted. The ambiguity of the word "see," indicating sometimes physical vision and sometimes the more metaphysical insight, is a performative example of language's inadequacy.

The ambiguity of language complements the ambiguity of the dream state itself, creating an ethos for the poem in which the impossible is made possible. The narrator can see and interact with his dead child. Talking to her allows her the opportunity to clarify his theological errors, a most unlikely achievement for a two year old, even if she were alive. Talking to his daughter helps to alleviate the narrator's grief, and talking to her about the spiritual errors from which his near-despair arises helps even more. In these ways, the dream vision genre becomes integral to the poem's thematic project, integral to exploration of the narrator's very personal crisis.

In exploring the narrator's personal crisis, the poem never encourages disobedience or anger. Instead, it advises patience and self-modification in the face of spiritual adversity. In

the discussion of sight versus insight, the poem consistently comes down on the side of insight, for example. Sight is Earthly, mortal, where insight is Heavenly, divine. Because sight causes one to resent Earthly adversity, and insight enables one to see past that adversity to God's plan, the poem's theology consistently encourages changing one's attitudes rather than changing one's Earthly circumstances - that is, it advises using insight to "see" one's adversity as something spiritually useful.

For example, consider the circumstances of the lost pearl, the Pearl maiden: it/she is not truly lost or destroyed, but made perfect and permanent, put where it/she belongs, like a gem in a setting, jewelry in a jewelry box, a child in a playground. The maiden herself tells the narrator,

Sir, 3e haf your tale mysetente,
To say your perle is al awaye
Þat is in cofer so comly clente
As in þis gardyn gracious gaye,
Here-inne to lenge for euer and play,
Þer mys nee mornyng come neuer nere.
(257-262)

The pearl is put away in its coffer, she says, the child is playing forever in the garden, and grief can never approach her. People, natural things, are ephemeral and die and decay, but the jewelry box, the *casket*, death, makes them permanent.

... For þat þou lestez watz bot a rose,
Þat flowred and fayled as kynde hyt gef;
Now þur3 kynde of þe kyste þat hyt con close,
To a perle of prys hit is put in pref;
(269-272)

The daughter's death means that her essence will never decay, because death engenders permanence.

Throughout her advice to the narrator, the Pearl maiden never supports or encourages his negative or aggressive feelings. Her theological instruction consistently advises patience and self-modification. When the narrator questions divine judgment, the maiden chastises him; when he errs in his faith, she tells him the way to get back on track. She instructs him not to believe mortal senses, particularly sight, but instead to have faith in God's benevolence. When he has issues with the Pearl maiden being a queen,⁷ because she would have to surpass Mary to be queen in Heaven (425-428) and because she is far too young (470 ff), she corrects his error by relating the parable of the vineyard, in which newcomers receive equal pay despite their late arrival. Using a parable to provide theological instruction of course recalls Jesus, lending the maiden that much more apparent authority.

And the dream itself also teaches the waking narrator an important theological lesson about how to handle adversity: do not disobey Heavenly authority. In the dream, the narrator resolves to cross the river despite the injunction against doing so. The waking narrator considers his waking a banishment, deserved because of this disobedience:

"Now al be to þat pryncez paye."
 Me payed ful ille to be out-fleme
 So sodenly of þat fayre regioun,
 Fro alle þo syʒtez to quykez and queme.
 A longeyng heuy me stroke in swone,
 And rewfully þen I con to reme:

(1176-1181)

The regretful narrator has learned obedience, too late. His waking reference to the dream as a "ueray avysyoun" suggests that he has also finally learned to distinguish between sight and

7. Riddy discusses this issue in terms of the sumptuary laws, designed to help distinguish between different *estaats* based on what level of wealth individuals were permitted to display in their clothing and personal adornment (Riddy 143-144). Pearl is adorned quite sumptuously, bedecked with pearls, a fact the jeweller narrator cannot help but notice, and which must color his concern for her as she styles herself a queen.

insight, to recognize truth despite Earthly sensory distractions. "Pearl," in which the dream vision form is integral to exploration of a subject intimate and internal to a fully-characterized narrator, discourages disobedience to authority and advises patience in the face of adversity and pain.

Chaucer, "Book of the Duchess"

In this way, at least, "Pearl" is not unique among English dream vision poems of the late fourteenth century. The use of the dream format, and in particular the detailed persona of the dreaming narrator, to explore deeply personal internal themes was at that time characteristic of the genre. Another prominent example comes in Chaucer's "Book of the Duchess," which also features a fully-realized narrator with strong opinions, foibles, and personal problems that are ultimately explored and dissected within the dream format, a format that itself contributes to the exploration. Kiser refers to Chaucer's "narrator, whose relationship to the characters and events in the story he tells forms as much a part of the poem's significance as the subject matter he relates. [. . .] And the key to understanding the poem – like the key to many other Chaucerian works – resides in fully perceiving the attitudes this narrator has about himself and about the subjects in his poem" (Kiser 3).

The narrator in this poem, one of Chaucer's Geffreys, has personal interests and disinterests. He likes to read (47-49), and has clear opinions about the meanings of his readings, and he takes his reading experience personally. For example, he interrupts his description of the story of Ceyx and Alcyone, which he has been reading, to assert

Such sorowe this lady to her tok
That trewly I, that made this book,
Had pittee and such rowthe
To rede hir sorwe that, by my trowthe,

I ferde the worse al the morwe
Aftir to thenken on hir sorwe.

(95-100)

Here, by means of the parenthetical expression "that made this book," the narrator reminds us of his presence, slowing the pace of the narrative at the moment when he expresses sympathy for Alcyone's plight. This timing is important for two reasons: first, it emphasizes the importance of the narrator to proper interpretation of this poem, and second, it underlines the narrator's sympathy for Alcyone. He is a sensitive reader, and his repetition of the word *sorwe* draws an explicit parallel between himself and Alcyone.

Although a sensitive reader, this narrator is not especially sensitive to his actual companion. He rejects an offer to play chess (47) because he wishes to be left alone. Use of the pronoun *oon* to denote the servant who brings his book (and with whom he refuses to play chess) denies the servant even the most rudimentary identity.⁸ The narrator does not acknowledge the servant's personhood in any meaningful way.

He furthermore rejects the usefulness of discussing his illness:

But men myght axe me why soo
I may not slepe and what me is.
But natheles, who aske this
Leseth his asking trewely.
Myselven can not telle why
The sothe...

(30-35)

He does not know why he cannot sleep, and he puts no faith in anyone else's knowledge either. In fact, he believes his illness may be terminal, since "there is phisicien but oon / that

8. St. John, comparing Geoffrey to the Black Knight, suggests that the narrator is not really refined enough to pull off the genteel attitudes associated with courtly love. That is, Geoffrey is rather gruff and rude (St. John 23).

may me hele; but that is don" (39-40). What is the point of discussing an illness that cannot be cured? This narrator, at least at the beginning of the poem, is deeply antisocial, perhaps to the point of religious despair, since we must allow the possibility that the *oon phisicien* to whom he refers is Christ, which seems to suggest the narrator believes that even Jesus cannot heal him.

His antisocial behavior extends into other realms as well: He is not strictly trustworthy, even in his prayers. He promises Morpheus an elaborate, lavish feather bed "Yf I wiste where were his cave" (262). This is a shifty man who leaves himself a way out of obligations, even in his prayers. Despite his empathy when reading, he is rather self-centered.

Of course, a person suffering a mysterious illness for eight years, who finds that he can no longer even achieve the solace of sleep (3,5,22-23), might reasonably be expected to focus on himself and his own needs. His mysterious illness leads to his insomnia, which leads him to idle thoughts and in turn to emotional numbness:

I have so many an ydel thoght
Purely for defaute of slepe
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, whereso hyt be –
For I have felyng in nothyng
[...]
For sorwful ymaginatioun
Ys alway hooly in my mynde.

(4-15).

He believes his uncontrollable thoughts lead to insomnia, and this has made him feel numb. In modern parlance, he is profoundly depressed.

The good news for the narrator of Chaucer's "Book of the Duchess" is that he is

deluded about the nature of his illness. It is clear that he believes his sorrow is caused by his insomnia and its attendant symptoms. He says so explicitly:

Defaute of slep and hevynesse
Hath sleyn my spirit of quyknesse
That I have lost al lustyhede.
Such fantasies ben in myn hede
So I not what is best to doo.

(25-29)

I holde hit be a sicknesse
That I have suffred this eight yeer.

(36-37)

The parallels between the narrator and Alcyone acknowledge that grief leads to insomnia, though, not the reverse. For example, Alcyone is described as "forweped and forwaked" (126), suggesting that her grief has caused her wakefulness. The narrator's diction and his sympathy indicate that he sees the parallels between Alcyone's situation and his own; he just refuses to admit that his grief causes his insomnia rather than vice versa.

During the dreaming portion of the poem, the narrator's interactions with and parallels to the Black Knight also demonstrate that his insomnia and its attendant symptoms are caused by his sorrow. Repeated and echoing language draws links between the knight's problems and the narrators. The knight's assertion that "al were to me ylyche good" echoes the narrator's assertion that "al is yliche good to me" (9). The narrator observes of the knight that

Hit was gret wonder that Nature
Myght suffre any creature
To have such sorwe and be not ded

(467-469)

which is a direct reflection of his self-assessment that

... nature wolde nat suffyse
To noon ertly creature
Nat longe tyme to endure
Withoute slep and be in sorwe

(18-21)

The knight's use of chess as the major conceit to describe his interactions with Fortune / Love and his desire to quit playing chess⁹ (618-619, 652-664) recall the narrator's own refusal to play chess (51). Both men assert the philosophical position that there is no point taking action in the face of a doomed enterprise: the narrator says "That wil not be mot nede be left" (42), while the knight says "For that ys doon ys not to come" (708). Finally, the knight's reference to "my lyves leche!" (920) in reference to the object of his grief recalls the narrator's "oon phisicien." The narrator has dreamed for himself a knight whose situation and problems directly reflect his own, and that knight explicitly includes insomnia in his list of the symptom of his grief:

To derke is turned al my lyght,
My wyt ys foly, my day ys nyght,
My love ys hate, my slep wakyng,
My myrthe and meles ys fastyng,
My countenaunce ys nycete
And al abaved, where so I be;
My pees in pledyng and in werre

(609-615)

The narrator has every reason to believe that his insomnia is a symptom of grief, but at least at the poem's beginning he insists the reverse, that insomnia has caused his grief.¹⁰ This

9. For a full analysis of the implications of chess on "The Book of the Duchess" see Connolly.

10. This awkward intellectual perversity is characteristic of Chaucer's first-person narrators. It is difficult to forget the lavish backhanded praise the narrator of the "Canterbury Tales" pays to each pilgrim. Consider the very perfect gentle knight, for example, who

narrator has personal interests and disinterests, good and bad personality characteristics, and a proneness to deep self-delusion. This is a fully-characterized person, and he has a problem.

The dream portion of the poem explores the narrator's personal problem by enabling him to have the increasingly social interactions he requires in order to face his grief, while remaining alone as he desires. When people dream they are alone. They may experience illusory contact within the dream, but the alone-ness remains. A troubled person might find solitude a healing, meditative state. A person in a state of self-pitying isolation, a person who deliberately rejects the potentially healing contacts of others in order to wallow, rejects healing. By using the dream form, Chaucer is able to breach the dreamer's destructive isolation while allowing him to remain alone. By dreaming, the dreamer participates in illusory discussions; that is, he talks it out – without sacrificing the alone-ness he has chosen. The dream moves him from isolation to solitude.

In addition to solitude, and of course love, Chaucer's "Book of the Duchess" concerns the notion of an entity's nature or *kynde*. According to nature, and by extension God's plan, every creature has a proper place and a proper behavior. Each human furthermore has an *estaaat* or social function. The clerk behaves one way, the blacksmith another, and all according to *kynde*.¹¹

The state of isolation is specifically linked with *unkyndenness*, or the failure to behave according to *kynde*. The first hint of this connection comes during the dreamer's initial

participated in numerous battles (all of them disastrous), sailed on privateer (that is pirate) ships, and won all of his jousts (by killing his opponents). The deliberately obtuse narrator, a common Chaucerian conceit, is at work in his "Book of the Duchess" as well.

11. St. John makes the important observation that Geoffrey is the Black Knight's social inferior, which constrains their interactions (St. John 29). The issue of *estaaat* is crucial.

discussion of his insomnia:

And wel you woot, agaynes kynde
Hit were to luyven in this wyse,
For nature wolde nat suffyse
To noon ertly creature
Nat longe tyme to endure
Withoute slep and be in sorwe.

(16-21)

Although the dreamer means to link *unkyndenes* to sleeplessness, his ultimate conclusion of "sorwe" points to the more specific association of his anguish to unnatural, antisocial behavior. This association of isolation and *unkyndenes* recurs in the poem: The dreamer observes of the black knight that

. . . he had wel nygh lost hys mynde
Thogh Pan, that men clepeth god of Kynde
Wer for hys sorwes never so wroth.

(511-513)

Not only does the dreamer recognize the knight's isolation as destructive, he also, by contrasting the knight with Pan, suggests that the behavior is unnatural. Earlier, the dreamer questions whether

. . . Nature
Myght suffer any creature
To have such sorwe and not be ded

(467-469)

again invoking nature.

Of course, the dreamer himself is the first *unkynde* person to appear in the poem. He chooses the isolated activity of reading over playing "ches or tables" (51). He has already at this point asserted his indifference to events (6-8), and this indifference suggests that his state is not meditative, not healing. He is in isolation, not solitude. The narrator's focus on

insomnia instead of sorrow, the symptom instead of the disease, provides further evidence of his isolation (again, as opposed to solitude, which I mean to indicate a constructive meditative state). His attempt to correct the problem is an attempt to sleep, not to deal with his anguish: "so whan I saw I might not slepe..." (44).

What he does when he cannot sleep is read a romance, a story

Of Quenes lives, and of kynges,
And many other thinges smale.

(58-59)

For the purposes of the "Duchess," *smale* implies gracefulness and simplicity. The dreamer hopes to have a non-intrusive moment of isolation.

In fact, the story provides a gentle beginning to the dreamer's transition from isolation to solitude, because Alcyone's circumstances parallel his own, providing a sort of interaction between reader and text. She is alone because her husband is at sea (77); her alone-ness becomes a problem, rendering her life "hertely sorowful" (85). Although her initial response is to use her social resources by sending messengers "bothe eest and west" to find her missing love, these resources fail (89), and she falls into a destructive mental state: "I nil never ete breed" (92). She no longer trusts the assistance of other people, so she prays for a dream-borne solution to her woes (108-121).

Praying to Juno, goddess of marriage and protector of wives, suggests that Alcyone feels her marriage has been breached, that there is *unkyndeness* afoot. Alcyone thinks that information will help her, and Juno agrees, invoking the divine bureaucracy: Alcyone will learn, through a dream, whether Ceys lives (133ff). The dream can provide healing, and bureaucracy implies a place for each individual, reinforcing both social interaction and *kyndeness*. The messenger bears his message, and Morpheus follows Juno's instructions, each

according to his *estaat*, reinforcing the connection between dreams, appropriate participation in society, and healing.

In Alcyone's dream, the re-animate Ceys delivers a speech (202-210), which encourages her to leave off her destructive sorrow, because it contains no solutions. He tells her rather abruptly that he is dead and will never see her again. He wishes her well. The problem? The potentially healing knowledge of her death comes in a way that is not gentle, not *smale*. Alcyone misinterprets the instruction to "Let be your sorful lyf" (202), and dies.¹² She has technically fulfilled this part of his request. She cannot bear, however, to break her isolation and bury him – a process that would involve dealing with people when she would rather be alone to wallow.

In spite of the fact that Alcyone dies without being healed, the dreamer takes heart from the tale, not because of the potential healing properties of dreaming but because there is a god who can make men sleep. He again misinterprets his problem, but he seems to have achieved a partial recovery: the thought of sleep cheers him. His continued misunderstanding of the problem, and the fact that sleep is isolated, both attest that the improvement of his condition is minor.

The dreamer's belief that none of the world's best dream interpreters could read his dream speaks to his continued rejection of the potential community, and to his *unkyndenes*. This opinion is a form of pride, a refusal of his proper *estaat*. Not Joseph, nor Macrobius could possibly understand his problems (278-289). The dreamer's isolation persists into the

12. Taylor compares Chaucer's treatment of Ceyx and Alcyone to Ovid's treatment, identifying in Chaucer's Alcyone a level of grief that amounts to spiritual sloth: "So extreme is Alcyone's grief that she fails to act even for the eternal well-being of the one she most loves" (Taylor 41).

dream's beginning.

Yet the dreamer is hopeful of a cure: he is dreaming, therefore he is sleeping. According to his understanding of the problem, he is better. The opening of this dream in May is not merely formulaic: it is a hopeful sign on the dreamer's part. The time devoted to birdsong is also formulaic, but again not merely so: the dreamer's focus on the *armonye* of the song (313) suggests that he accepts the notion of cooperation among individuals as a useful or desirable thing. The birds are a successful, happy community, in which each individual behaves according to *kynde*.

Of course, the birds are outside, and the dreamer is inside. He makes a point to describe the windows as "ful clere, and nat an hole ycrased" (324). There are no holes to the outside. Furthermore, all of the windows "were shette echon" (335), reinforcing the isolation of the dreamer. Another detail suggesting the dreamer's continued discomfort with society, here represented by things outdoors, is his nudity. He cannot be expected to go outside if he is naked.

The figures painted on the chapel walls of famous lovers suggest the importance of love and relationships to the poem and to the dreamer. That they are all failed – even disastrous – lovers suggests that the dreamer's budding focus on love is as yet insufficient to his healing. Still, the dream signs are positive: he is interested in love, he enjoys the potentially intrusive birdsong on the merits of its *armonye*, and he enjoys the sensory intrusion of sunlight into his indoor sanctuary (336-343). The transition to solitude has begun.

The sound of hunting horns leads the dreamer to go outside,¹³ a further step in his transition from isolation to solitude. Without leaving the room or even dressing, he mounts his horse and rides to the hunt. The presence of the horse indoors, using the dream realism that Heiatt discusses, juxtaposes outside and inside, creating a *smale* transition for the dreamer. Without really giving up the indoors, associated with isolation, he goes outdoors, associated with community and cooperation.

The hunt is led by "th'emperour Octovyen" (368), a figure who has sparked some literary controversy. Octovyen's identity can provide thematic insight into the poem. For example, Carson discusses a figure from the Mabinogion who is associated with chess pieces (Larry Benson 969n), an association satisfying because the "Duchess" links chess to social interaction and by extension healing. However, most writers believe this is Augustus Caesar,¹⁴ who defeated the *unkynde* Antony and Cleopatra. The hunt, then, is led by a historical champion of proportionate love, the defeater of *unkyndenness*. Naturally, the hunt seeks the hart, a pun available in Middle English as well as modern. A cooperative endeavor, the hunt represents a significant step in the recovery of the dreamer.

His instinct toward alone-ness remains, but now he seeks solitude, not isolation. In the hunt, each participant has a specific post, which allows cooperation with minimal

13. Anne Brannen, in an unpublished thesis, discusses at length the common movement in dream visions into increasingly sacred locations. Such locations might arguably grow in healing potential as well. For instance, the dreamer's movement from the separating chapel of tragic lovers to the hunt allows him to interact with others in a way more concrete than his reading, yet less concrete than his subsequent conversation with the knight.

14. Julius Caesar has an affair with Cleopatra, then he dies at the hands of his constituents. Mark Antony falls in love with Cleopatra and they marry. Julius' step-son Augustus battles the *unkynde* couple, who love disproportionately as well as against nature, and he defeats them ("Antony").

interaction. When the endeavor seems to fail, the dreamer leaves his post, but he leaves the hunt to play with the puppy (395-397), an emotionally constructive activity. Of course, it would be better if he were playing with a person, but still he is beginning to heal. His numbness and refusal to interact are dimming.

He appreciates the beauty of a garden, and identifies the value of the interaction between Zephyrus and Flora in creating the place (402). The wood floods with beasts, which does not cause the dreamer to hide or seek isolation (426-434). To emphasize the sheer number of beasts, the dreamer invokes Argus, a lonely counter (435-443). His isolated counting efforts are doomed, because they are non-cooperative.¹⁵

By the time he sees the Black Knight, the dreamer has successfully made the transition (at least within the dream) from isolation to solitude. He feels pain for the knight (713). He recognizes the knight's desire to be alone:

I stalked even unto his bak
And there I stood as still as ought.
(458-459)

Yet he recognizes that this isolation is unhealthy: "What ayleth hym to sitten her?" (449). Only after recognizing the knight's aloneness as isolation does the dreamer interrupt him (500-502). The list of failed lovers the dreamer recites recalls the paintings in his chapel, but now they are in perspective:

But there is no man alive her

15. This is an echo of the sentiment that "no one can interpret my dream" but context here allows more emphasis on the marvels of the dream being the reason, where the earlier instance suggests that the dreamer despairs of outside assistance. This is important because the dreamer's despair is lessening; he is making progress toward more productive ways of handling grief.

Wolde for a fers make thys woo!
(740-741)

As the dreamer recognizes, the knight is isolated. Consider his introduction:

I was war of a man in blak,
That sat and had yturned his bak
To an ook, an huge tree.
(445-447)

Some critics suggest this is John of Gaunt, others assert he is the alter-ego of the dreamer.¹⁶ What really matters is that he wears black, the color of mourning, and that he takes shelter from company behind a tree: he is hiding, having turned his back on the cooperative endeavor of the hunt. His black clothes, in addition to suggesting funeral garb, contrast with the bright colors of the garden, emphasizing his isolation from the beauty that surrounds him.

Several references suggest the Black Knight's isolation. He sings to himself, not sharing his song. The song is "without noote, without song" (472). Tunelessness recalls by contrast the earlier birdsong at the chapel, a song associated with *armonye*, with cooperation and healing. The long description of his malady (488-499) focuses on internal processes, recalling the inside/outside opposition from the chapel. When greeted by the dreamer, the knight ignores him, focusing instead on his interior self-pity (502-510). He explicitly rejects the communal efforts of the hunt: "Y do no fors therof" (542).

When the dreamer suggests the constructive properties of talking about problems,¹⁷

16. Larry Benson (970n) discusses "the knight/Gaunt identification" and identifies those who argue for and against. See Robertson for the alter-ego solution.

17. "It is typically the function of the element of dialogue in medieval allegory to enable the poet and his readers to face and control the daemonic force represented in the pure 'visionary' or mythic experience" (Piehler 5n).

the knight refuses, saying "No man may my sorwe glade" (563), reminding the reader of the dreamer's earlier despair of help and his rejection of dream interpreters. This parallel grows stronger with the list of legendary soothers and healers who cannot help the knight: Orpheus, Daedalus, Hyppocrates, Galen (568-572).

The knight's situation mirrors the dreamer's in other ways as well. He describes himself as "al naked" (577), recalling the dreamer's entrance to the dream. Nudity is associated in the dream with bereavement and antisocial behavior. The knight complains that his "slep" is "wakyng" (611). Insomnia is associated with grief. As the dreamer had refused to play chess, the knight regrets playing (618, 652-664). Chess is associated with companionship, and rejection of that companionship suggests isolation. His reference to the lost love as "my lyves leche" (920) suggests a thematic connection to the dreamer's earlier assertion that "there is phisicien but oon" (39), a sentiment elaborated by the knight's belief that even the planets cannot help him (693-705). His statement that "that is doon ys not to come" (708) echoes the dreamer's assertion that "that wil not be mot nede be left" (42). The knight even feels the same numbness of which the dreamer originally complained: "For nothyng I leve hyt noght" (691).

The knight's isolation continues where the dreamer's left off. His distrust of Fortune (with whom he has played chess, a game he regrets) leads him to compare her to "fylthe over-ystrawed with floures" (629). Flowers also bring up the association with Zephyrus and Flora and their cooperative flower garden, a garden which the dreamer appreciates, but which the knight rejects through his language and his black clothing. Yet the knight does not blame Fortune for his situation; he blames himself. If he had studied with Pythagoras, he might have been able to play chess better (665-690).

Eventually, the knight rejoins the hunt (1314-1320). His healing will be accomplished, or at least enabled, by his interactions with the dreamer. Even after his lengthy rejection of discussion with the dreamer, the knight exclaims "Allas! And I wol tel the" (598). He decides, as though despite himself, to talk it out. Later, the decision is more concrete: "Blythely quod he; com sytte adoun" (749). Here the Black Knight responds favorably to the dreamer's second iteration of the request to hear what's wrong. Discussion has begun to help the knight, as the hunting earlier helped the dreamer: each is more social for his interactions.

The knight puts conditions on the agreement to talk: he is still paranoid about other people intruding on his waning isolation. Yet the condition is that the dreamer must listen (750-757), not an unreasonable request, nor a surprising one from a person already established as distrusting others.

One way the discussion helps the knight is through his incremental repetitions of the problem. The dreamer's inability to understand precisely why the knight is upset forces the latter to repeat in increasing detail and with decreasing embellishment the fact of his love's demise. He must do so each time the dreamer interrupts, because of the dreamer's apparent stupidity.¹⁸ After one such instance, for example, the knight is able to sum up that his love was the finest love available (1042-1051), a more constructive focus on the positive aspects of the lover. In the end, the dreamer's persistent denseness inspires the knight to announce explicitly the beloved's death (1309), after which the knight rejoins the hunt, which suggests that he too has successfully made the transition from isolation to solitude (1330-1333).

18. If the dreamer is not stupid (and his stupidity is well prepared for throughout the poem with his continual misinterpretations), then he is crafty in the ways of emotional healing. In either case, the discussion between the knight and the dreamer is useful to both.

The interactions that help the knight help the dreamer as well. After he awakens, the dreamer might justifiably dismiss the dream as meaningless. Macrobius allows for dreams inspired by gas, for example.¹⁹ Yet instead, the dreamer determines to write the dream down. Literature is already associated with emotional healing through the romancy of Alcyone. Furthermore, the dreamer's writing indicates a cooperative focus, a focus on audience where previously he had looked for privacy. Finally, the act of writing is not idle. The dreamer is well enough now to work for the healing of others.

That Chaucer chose to couch his consolatory poem in dream vision form, then, ought not to be surprising. The dream, by creating a *smale* transition between isolation and solitude, allows the antisocial focus of the bereft to turn constructively cooperative. The act of reading, a sort of dream, works similarly. Reading is a solitary pursuit, yet one that incorporates the absent author – a *smale* way to interact constructively with others without actually encountering them.

In fact, the dream format is an integral part of the process of exploring the narrator's particular, very personal problem. By developing the narrator so fully as a character, Chaucer has enhanced the ability of the poem to explore that problem: the dreamer's denseness forces the knight to incrementally repeat his own problem, which is of course parallel to the dreamer's. The narrator can participate without really participating, as well; dream surreality provides for transitions that enable social interaction to increase gradually, which is necessary for the narrator, who might otherwise reject any interaction at all. The dreamer's nudity is

19. Insomnia, or dreams caused by medical or internal conditions, "may be caused by mental or physical distress, or anxiety about the future: the patient experiences in dreams vexations similar to those that disturb him during the day." Such dreams are of "no prophetic significance" (Heiatt 28).

associated with sleep (293) and with vulnerability to grief (577), thus creating a link between the dream state and emotional vulnerability, making the dream itself an integral part of the healing process.

Even in its generic features, the dream vision enhances discussion and exploration of the dreamer's grief and healing. Dream visions quite often include a *debat*, which in the form of conversation with the Black Knight provides an avenue for conversation that the narrator sorely needs but that he rejects in his grief. Furthermore, the dream vision genre provides a framework for allegorical explorations: For example, the chapel is illuminated with images of disproportionate love; the whelp has been associated with healing and medicine (Robertson and Huppe); and of course the hunt is a hunt for the hart.

It remains to demonstrate that the poem advises patience and self modification rather than disobedience to authority in the face of adverse circumstances. The main subject of "The Book of the Duchess," that is grief, being so personal and emotional, so abstract, does not especially lend itself to the issue of obedience to authority. However, the narrator explicitly advises patience when he asserts that "That wil not be mot nede be left" (42), and the Black Knight echoes this advice when he says "For that ys doon ys not to come" (708). In circumstances beyond your control, accept your lot.

That the dreamer appears to leave behind a hunt in progress could be troubling – particularly given the presence of Octovien – except that his departure has ameliorating circumstances. According to Savage, hunting music is a crucial part of training new hounds:

First and foremost, it is a well-known fact that unless some sort of reward meat be given hounds that have successfully run down their quarry, the discipline of the pack will disintegrate; second, it is absolutely necessary to teach hounds to recognize the notes of the horn and the voice of the huntsman. If they were made to keep silence

until they heard a particular blast and a well-known voice, and afterwards rewarded for baying, an essential part of their training had been given.

(Savage 39)

If a hound strays after a *forloyne*, its training must be corrected. That is, someone should bring it back to the hunt, must lead it back to proper behavior as part of its training; following the whelp might be the correct action for the hunter, particularly after a *forloyne* has been sounded.

The *forloyne* could also indicate that a hunter is lost:

But the music of the hunting-horn was not solely for the training and discipline of the hounds, but for the guidance of the hunters as well. If, as might easily happen, a hunter were lost, the note of the forlonge (Fr. fort loin) upon his bugle indicated his unhappy state, and brought from his more fortunate companions the answering note of the perfit (parfait). If he were out of sight of pack and huntsman, and were fortunate enough to "view," he could bring the pack up to the line by blowing the notes appropriate to the "view." On the return from the hunt, the intermittent blowing of the prise informed the denizens of the castle of the successful day and helped to bring in gentlemen who had been lost, either through their horses' fault or their own.

(Savage 39)

In this case, according to the conventions of hunting, the dreamer may be forgiven for leaving his post to follow an errant hound, and also for spending time with the Black Knight, who might for all the dreamer knows be the lost hunter. And leaving hunting etiquette behind for the moment, romance convention supports the dreamer's decision to follow the hound and also his subsequent stop to engage the Black Knight in *debat*: one must follow *aventure*²⁰ and here *aventure* clearly leads the dreamer from the hunt.

20. For a more detailed discussion of *aventure*, see my discussion in Chapter 4 of Skelton's "Bouge of Court."

"The Book of the Duchess" provides few opportunities for disobedience, and depicts errant behavior only when etiquette and convention allow. Both the Black Knight and the narrator explicitly advise patience in the face of adversity. Like "Pearl" this is a poem with a highly developed narrator, a character with a personal problem, and the dream format of the poem is used integrally to explore that problem. Like "Pearl," "The Book of the Duchess" leaves no room for disobedience to authority. When the hunting horn sounds, the dreamer joins the hunt. He leaves only when circumstances make doing so appropriate, and his obedience is crucial to the process of overcoming his grief.

Chaucer's "Book of the Duchess" and the anonymous "Pearl" both reflect fourteenth-century generic features of the dream vision form, since both poems depict realistic narrators with personally relevant concerns, and since both poems use the dream itself as an integral part of exploring those concerns. Furthermore, these generic features reflect fourteenth-century ideological ideals, emphasizing patient endurance and self modification over social reform, rebellion, and disobedience to authority. Unlike the Reformation, in which sin and crime are newly separate and disobedience to unjust laws can be respected, the late medieval mindset calls for individual Christians to fulfill the obligations of their *estaat*, no matter whether those obligations are pleasant, and reap a Heavenly reward for their patience.

III. SOCIAL CRITIQUE & PATIENT ENDURANCE IN 14TH CENTURY DREAM VISIONS

Some fourteenth century dream visions are more socially conscious than others, and some even make social commentary a fundamental thematic element. "The Vision of William Concerning Piers the Plowman" for example makes world-description a primary goal, and the description is frequently unflattering. "Wynnere and Wastoure," probably written around the middle of the century, directly addresses a contemporary debate about the proper use of wealth and about the *estaaat*-inherent responsibilities of the high-borne to the rest of society.

Yet even these more social themes are presented with an interior, spiritual orientation.¹ That is, although these poems offer political and social critique, sometimes even images of corrupt institutions, the critique is presented so that individual readers will be able to avoid being themselves corrupted. These texts do not encourage readers to take external action by rebellion or reformation; instead they encourage readers to exercise patience and self-modification. If you can avoid the wicked bishop without abdicating the duties of your *estaaat*, do so. If you cannot, then you must treat him with the respect he is due and obey his instructions. Consequent suffering will be rewarded in Heaven.

The poems discussed in this chapter have been selected in particular to highlight the medieval approach to adversity. In "Piers Plowman" and "Wynnere and Wastoure," social critique is much more prominent than in Chaucer's "Book of the Duchess" or the anonymous "Pearl." Consequently, it is more significant to demonstrate that "Piers

1. "It is certainly true that medieval economic thought is almost exclusively concerned with morality rather than with expediency: this (to us) paradoxical phenomenon of an entirely other-worldly economic theory is only to be expected given the priorities of the age" (Jacobs 486-487).

Plowman" and "Wynner and Wastoure" recommend patient sufferance and faith in a Heavenly reward in the face of religious and political corruption.

Langland, "The Vision of William Concerning Piers the Plowman"

"Piers Plowman" is a complex, intricate, difficult text to grapple with.² Although it is tempting in this sort of analysis to identify a single, unifying reading of the text at hand, I believe doing so with "Piers Plowman" would be an act of interpretive violence.³ At minimum, "Piers Plowman" comprises three or even four texts, depending on how one understands the relationship between the Z text and the A, B, and C texts. Details and events differ from text to text, often in ways that should lead readers to interpret each text as having potentially different themes from the others. For example, Langland's revisions often reassign statements of critique from one character to another, from the narrator to allegorical figures, for instance, naturally affecting how one understands those statements.

Furthermore, composition of the various texts spanned decades of Langland's life and decades of world events, and differences between them suggest revision based at least in part on Langland's response to a changing world. Allen contends that the A text is a revision of the Z text, made to enhance a particular theme, suggesting that Langland's revisions from Z to A are based on what Langland read while revising. The revisions from A to B, he

2. See Kelly for another detailed, systematic analysis of the complexities involved in reading "Piers Plowman."

3. Zeeman briefly surveys one such interpretation: "Most readers who have seen the poem in terms of Wil's psychological and spiritual development have tended to understand his 'progress' exclusively in positive terms, as a persuasive and disciplinary process leading to the acquisition of understanding, virtue and sublimated desire. Wil's repeated failures have often been seen as regrettable and to some degree expendable digressions prior to reform. But this narrative, with its 'incremental repetitions', may be more complex . . ." (Zeeman 4). To support the complexity, she cites Salter, who discusses the implications of Will's failures more objectively.

speculates, would have been based on Langland's subsequent readings, and a more complex understanding of himself: "When he worked on the B-text, he appears to have acquired, or gained access to, more books. But he continued to read in the same way, we must suppose, because the allegorical energy of his poetry does not change. If anything, it intensifies."

Langland's understanding of himself must, as it does for every human, have evolved as he moved through various stages of his life. If Allen is right that "Langland read to discover a description of himself; as he found it, he wrote it down" then it follows that the themes of his interest must shift with age and as reading and experience modify his self-understanding (Allen 259).

The details of Langland's revisions seem almost to discourage interpretation in any case. His addition of the cat-belling episode seems specifically designed to rebuke the interpretation that led the rebelling workers to write the name Piers Plowman in the list of participants at the Peasants' Revolt, for instance. Furthermore, the episodes involving DoWel, DoBet, and DoBest call for a level of self-analysis that, combined with the ambiguity between sleep and wakefulness (which increases with each text), suggests a need to keep an open mind about the nature of our experience, both of reading "Piers Plowman" and of living in the world.

Instead of seeking to provide an overarching theory of "Piers Plowman" designed to tie up every detail and nuance of the text with a single carefully expressed theme, this chapter will attempt to establish, connect, and interpret individual motifs and themes in the context of a text that grows more confusing, not less, with each reading, and to assess the extent to which these localized motifs and themes support the overall argument of the present dissertation, that even politically contentious dream visions of this period recommend patient

endurance in the face of corruption rather than recommending disobedience and reform.

Despite or perhaps as a function of its complexity, "Piers Plowman" features a complex narrator. Long Will extends far beyond a simple auditor and viewer of dream events; he is a sophisticated person, and the details of his personality affect the way one interprets the poem. For example, he is an educated man. Many passages demonstrate that he possesses knowledge of the bible and theology. For instance, he asserts:

Ich parceued of the power - that peter hadde to kepe,
To bynden and vnbynden - as the boke telleth,
(C-I:128-129)

Here he observes the authority of St. Peter as Christ's handpicked leader of the Christian faithful, based on biblical lore. Will knows the bible and commentary well enough to recognize when someone deliberately misinterprets lore or doctrine for personal gain:

Ich fond ther frerus - alle the four ordres,
Prechyng the peple - for profit of the wombe,
An glosyng the godspel - as hem good lykede;
For couetise of copis - contraried some doctors.
(C-I:56-69)

According to his own assessment, the narrator of "Piers Plowman" is educated about religion.

He is also familiar with the law. Discussing C-XIII:61-62,⁴ Skeat asserts that

This is one of the frequent allusions which shew that William was familiar with legal matters. The reference is to the legal condition of "villeins" ...

(Skeat, Volume 2, 168).

In particular, he demonstrates an understanding of the different mercantile privileges that

4. This passage also reinforces the importance of obedience to the social hierarchy: "For may no cherl a chartre make - ne hus catel selle / With-oute leue of the lorde - no lawe wolde hit graunte."

adhere, based on *estaat*, to different individuals.

This narrator is getting older, and he faces the attending discomforts and disappointments of middle age with humor. Ymaginitif tells him that "Ich have yfolwed the in faith - more than fourty wynter," indicating that Will is over forty years old. He himself asserts that he has difficulty stooping over a workbench for long and is too weak to wield a sickle (C-VI:23-25). He assigns his difficulty stooping to his height, but one must speculate that he could stoop longer at 19 years old than at more-than-forty. His explanation contains more than a hint of denial, suggesting discomfort with getting old. In fact, later in the text, in an intensely human, very funny moment, he complains explicitly:

And Elde hastede after hym - and ouer my hefde 3eode,
And made me balled by-fore - and bar on the croune;
So harde he 3eode ouer myn hefde - hit wol be sene euere.
'Syre vuel-ytauhg Elde,' quath ich 'vnhende go with the!
Suththe whanne was the hey wey - ouer menne hefdes?
Haddest thow be hende,' quath ich 'thow woldest haue asked leue!
(C-XXIII:183-188)

Will is going bald, and he blames Elde for not asking permission. He faces aging with humorous complaint.⁵

Perhaps he uses humor to mask real insecurity. After all, he is insecure about other things. For example, when after a discussion condemning wealth and praising poverty he says

Ac leueth nouht, 3e lewede men - that ich lacke richesse,
Thauh ich preise pouerte thus - and preue hit by ensample
Worthier, as by Holywrit and wise philosophers
(C-XIV:26-28)

5. Part of the humor of this passage comes from the way Langland plays with the allegory. Faced with an allegorical figure representing old age, a lesser author might be accused of triviality for a complaint about gray hair and balding. In Langland's hands, this scene adds humor without sacrificing gravity. The narrator is real enough that readers can identify their own anxieties about aging with his.

Here he puns on the word *lacke*, which could mean "condemn" or "lack". Perhaps he intends to reassure us that he does not condemn wealth outright. Given the context, though, this passage contains more than a hint of defensiveness about his own financial status: He is concerned listeners will believe that rather than true piety, sour grapes about his own weak finances lead him to praise poverty over wealth.

Later, he is concerned that he may have digressed or overstated his point against lying:

A lytel ich ouerlep - for lesynges sake,
That ich ne segge as ich seih - suying my teme! --
(C-XXI:360-361)

This is a worthy fear, since he is deeply opinionated. For example, in the B text, Will himself asserts that, while the cardinal virtues can open the gates of Heaven, the cardinals themselves cannot (B-Prologue:103-111).⁶ At one point, he asserts that the bishop is not worth his ears because his seal is used to defraud parishioners (C-I:76-77). He expresses strong opinions about how lesser clergy, in particular anchors and hermits, should behave as well. He offers a positive example:

. . . As ances and eremites - that holden hem in hure cellys,
Couetyng no3t in contrees - to carien a-boute
For no lykerouse lyflode - hure lykame to plese.
(C-I:30-32)

Anchors and hermits should remain in their cells, and should not wander around pursuing bodily pleasures. And he offers a contrasting negative depiction as well:

Pylgrimis and palmers - ply3ten hem to-gederes,
To seche seint Iame - and seyntyys of Rome,

6. In the C text, this assertion is assigned to the allegorical figure Conscience (C-I:131-138). This revision emphasizes that it is not truly Will's place to criticize his religious superiors.

Wenten forth in hure way - with meny vn-wyse tales,
And hauen leue to lye al hure lyf-time.
Eremytes on an hep with hokede staues,
Wenten to Walsyngham - and hure wenches after;
Grete lobies and longe - that loth were to swynke,
Clothed hem in copis to be knowe fro othere,
And made hem-selue eremytes - hure eise to haue.

(C-I:47-55)

He not only points out the pursuit of bodily pleasure, in the form of wenches and reluctance to labor, but also highlights the irony of hermits and anchors, conventionally solitary figures, travelling in groups at all, depicting them as appearing in a heap. He feels that some people work too hard and that some are lazy (C-I:22-24). And his opinions are not restricted to the present situation: he has opinions about the future as well. He predicts dire consequences if the church continues to tolerate corrupt shriving (C-I:62-65), for instance.

At one point Ymaginitif accuses him of talking too much, of stating his opinion when he should listen instead (C-XIV:222-231). He goes so far as to compare Will to Adam, who loses Paradise because he asked too many questions instead of simply accepting the advice of his wise advisors. Ymaginitif's criticism is not entirely surprising, given how opinionated Will is. Such a person will not sit back and observe, so it is natural that he should miss certain details. For example, when the king summons Meed, Will himself points out that he does not know who leads her in:

. . . ac ich say nat hym that ladde hure.

(C-IV:128)

The A and B texts both specify that sergeants lead her in, so this revision specifically inserts an observational lapse on Will's part. Later, Will points out his uncertainty about a criminal's fate:

What by-fel of this felon - ich can nouht faire shewe
(C-VII:326)

The narrator does not notice everything, because people in general do not notice everything. Long Will is a person, with a person's opinions, lapses, strengths, and weaknesses.

In fact, another of Langland's seemingly minor revisions also emphasizes the narrator's personhood. In the A and B texts, Holy Church calls him "Son" (I:5 in both texts), which establishes his role and his position as a member of the church family. In the C text, Holy Church calls him "Wille" (II:5). Granting him a name emphasizes his individuality and reinforces his personhood.

Long Will is a complex person, and like most people, he has both opinions and personal concerns. He describes himself as wearing the clothing of a corrupt hermit (C-I:2-3), and although this detail enables numerous interpretations, it starts a pattern of details that illustrates Will's concern about laziness and corruption within the Church hierarchy. Perhaps at the time his dreams begin, Will actually is a corrupt hermit, whose dreams offer advice about how to find the road to his own subsequent redemption and about spiritual pitfalls that threaten travellers along that road. The early description of Will's life could provide support for this reading:

Lines 1 - 108 are peculiar to the C-text, and are of great interest, being to some extent autobiographical. Here William tells us of his life in Cornhill, where he lived, clothed like a loller, with his wife Kit and his daughter Calote (mentioned in Pass. xxi. 473), yet not much liked by the lollers and hermits around him. He then describes his own laziness in amusing terms.

(Skeat, Vol. 2, 60)

Skeat further describes the etymology of the word "loller", which in practice is used to

suggest both laziness and association with the Wycliffites (Vol. 2, 60). Will's confessed laziness feeds the idea that he may once himself have been a lazy clergyman.

But his unpopularity among the other lollers could also suggest that he was not like them. Perhaps he is in disguise, attempting to expose their excesses and misbehavior. Whatever the reason for his sartorial choices, his concern involves laziness and pride, both among clergy and among lay people, and the issue of confession as a spiritual tool is a prominent motif within the text. If he has been a heretical and lazy hermit, the dream itself can be seen in part as a confession. For instance, not only does he describe his own laziness in the passage cited above, but he actually depicts himself falling asleep in church on two separate occasions. Even if he simply expresses concern about the potential for heresy and laziness in people, the dream offers several mentions of confession as a potential step on the road to redemption. However we attempt to frame the narrator's occupation and project, "Piers Plowman" explores among its many subjects Will's concern with corruption in the clergy. The poem offers numerous descriptions and critiques of such corruption, ranging from bribery and simony to leaving behind parishioners to work for the king's exchequer.

And the dream format itself is integral to that exploration. To begin with, the poem discusses the significance of dreams explicitly. Will notes that his contemporaries in the clergy and Cato both dismiss dreams, and then he cites the biblical stories of Daniel and Joseph and asserts that he himself was moved by these stories to study the significance of dreams (C-X:297ff). While he allows the possibility that dreams as a category are meaningless, he nevertheless places "Piers Plowman" in a tradition of dreams that provide crucial advice, depicted in no less important a source than the bible.

Dream interpreters such as Daniel and Joseph are necessary in the bible, because the

depicted dreams tend to be allegorical, so it is no surprise that Will's vision also makes use of fairly complex and difficult-to-interpret allegory. In fact, Langland's revisions suggest a deliberate attempt to increase the complexity and richness of the allegory with each new version of the text. Remember the dream paradigm laid out by Macrobius, in which the *somnium*, one form of significant dream, requires an outside interpreter. The example Macrobius provides is Pharaoh's dream, which Joseph correctly interprets to predict famine. It is likely that for Langland the more complicated the allegory became, the more seriously it would be taken. It is certain that each revision increases the difficulty of the allegory. For instance, the C text introduces the allegorical figure of Conscience to say things (C-I:125-138) that the B text assigns to Long Will's narrative voice (B-Prologue:97-111). These assertions are not present in the A text at all. The overall trend in the revision process is toward increasing reliance on allegory, and the allegory gets increasingly complex.

The significance of certain allegorical figures shifts over the course of the poem, granting increasing sophistication to the allegory. For example, Kind Wit, which is early depicted as a useful innate capacity, by which the peasants develop crucial handicrafts and technologies, on which Christians can call for guidance, is later criticized as inadequate given the state of the temporal world, unless tutored by priests (C-XV:50-53). The poem does not contradict itself, but it does acknowledge a more sophisticated truth: one's innate common sense is better than nothing, but to truly maximize one's spiritual safety in a world of ever-growing spiritual peril requires the advice of the Church. Another way "Piers Plowman" reflects the complexity of the spiritual landscape involves assigning multiple names to the same allegorical figure. *Liberum-Arbitrium* has various names depending on the

circumstances:

And the whyle ich quyke the cors - cald am ich *Anima*;
And whenne ich wilne other wolde - *Animus* ich hyhte,
And for that ich can and knowe - cald ich am "mannys Thouht;"
And whan ich make mone to god - *Memoria* ich hatte;
And when ich deme domes - and do as treuthe techeth,
Then is *Racio* my ryhte name - "Reson" in Englissh;
An when ich fele that folke telleth - my furste name is *Sensus*,
And that is witte and wisdomes - he welle of alle craftes . . .

(C-XVII:183ff)

The list goes on, making clear that *Liberum-Arbitrium* is different in different contexts and circumstances. Life presents many different situations, each of which calls for wise assessment and reasoned decision-making. Giving the capacity that enables those things a different name in each circumstance emphasizes the ability of the world to throw curve balls. It also calls into question the notion of identity, a world-simplifying abstraction that most people take for granted, but which may be unreliable.

The circumstances under which *Liberum-Arbitrium* is called *Sensus* suggest that this is also the figure earlier called Kind Wit, although that name is not explicitly included in the list. Both Kind Wit and *Sensus* are described as the origin of crafts, however, possibly suggesting that both names refer to the same "person" or possibly suggesting that the origin of crafts is more complicated than previously described. Either way, the allegory is rich, enabling multiple and sophisticated interpretations of the motifs and events depicted.

This allegorical complexity is also reflected in the sophisticated use of traditional motifs. In particular, consider the pageant of the seven deadly sins, which conventionally involves the allegorical figures of Lust, Wrath, etc. in a simple parade, depicting their miens, their clothing, and their retinues. In "Piers Plowman" each of these figures is depicted travelling specifically to confession, a fascinating and humorous complication of the tradition,

which provides another instance of the importance of confession and reconciliation to the overall complex of the poem's goals. The confession of Lust is particularly humorous, addressed as it is to the Virgin Mary:

‘Lady, to thy leue sone - lowte for me nouthe,
That he haue pyte on me putour - of hus pure grace and mercy . . .’
(C-VII:171-172)

Lust goes on to promise Mary that he will mend his ways by limiting his Saturday eating to a single meal and drink "bote with the douke" (C-VII:174), not much of a curtailment of his lecherous lifestyle. He goes on to confess in detail that borders on bragging about his sexual exploits, explaining the techniques he has used to seduce women, sometimes by song, sometimes by sorcery, careful to point out that "Ich lay by the louelokeste - and loued them neuere after" (C-VII:192). Under the best of circumstances, Lust's confession is self-serving; addressing it to the Virgin makes it ridiculous. He does not assert regret at any point, and his request for forgiveness goes unanswered. Lust is not shriven at this confession, because it is not enough to ask for forgiveness; one must actually repent as well. The humor of the episode makes it memorable, emphasizing for readers the complexity of the sacrament by introducing unusual elements to the traditional pageant of sins.

The Gluttony episode (C-VII:350-441) also features an unusual level of detail and unexpected turns of event. Gluttony gets distracted on the way to mass; he goes to a bar, where he loiters for a while with unemployed workmen and slumming aristocrats. They wager and tell jokes and belch, and eat and drink. Gluttony gets too drunk to walk, and vomits on Clement the Cobbler. Ultimately he sleeps through the mass at which he was supposed to confess. Gluttony at least has the grace to feel ashamed when his wife informs him what he has done. Introducing the bar and the wife and Clement the Cobbler to a

humorous pageant of the seven deadly sins humanizes the events so that readers can more easily see comparison to their own lifestyles. Again, by increasing the complexity of the motif, Langland increases its effectiveness.

Even the issue of sleep is made complicated and difficult to establish in "Piers Plowman." On various occasions, Long Will encounters and converses with allegorical figures after waking up, but without first falling back to sleep. For example, he wakes at C-V:196 and without first falling asleep talks to Reason (C-VI:121ff); soon thereafter it becomes clear that Conscience is also present (C-VI:89ff). Will talks to Ymaginitif while awake (C-XIV:221ff), and they discuss other allegorical figures. After waking up another time (C-XIX:180), Will goes in search of *Liberum Arbitrium*, and eventually runs into Abraham (C-XIX:184). He awakens at C-XXII:484, and his wakefulness is reinforced a few lines later at C-XXIII:1; three lines later, he encounters Need (C-XXIII:4).

When the apparently waking Will asks passersby about Do-Wel (C-XI:2-5), a pair of friars claim to know him (C-XI:18-19). It is possible that he doesn't really wake up before these encounters, but instead dreams that he has awakened. In the latter case at least, it is possible that he does wake up but that the friars understand Do-Wel as a metaphor rather than an entity. It is also possible that, in "Piers Plowman," allegorical figures actually populate the waking landscape. All of these possibilities work together to render the reader, not to mention the dreamer, unable to distinguish between the waking world and the allegorical dream landscape. In "Piers Plowman," dreaming enables an ambiguity about the relationship between allegory and reality by casting doubt on reality itself. Once one is dreaming, how can one ever be sure one has awakened? How can one be certain ever to have slept in the first place?

In fact, the narrator occasionally wakes up without first falling asleep. He does so without comment at C-XIV:216 and C-XX:332. He also does so at C-XVI:1, and has a conversation with Ymaginitif; however, in this example, he later identifies the conversation as a dream (C-XVI:17), which emphasizes how difficult it is to distinguish between wakefulness and sleep. This ambiguity even extends to geography. In one case, Will falls asleep in Church (C-VI:108), and awakens on Malverne Hills (C-X:293).

By creating this ambiguity between the dream state and the waking state, Langland allows allegory to pervade both realms. The increasing complexity he engenders with each revision coordinates with the increasing complexity of distinguishing between reality and the surreality of dreaming, as is appropriate, given the increasingly complex process of remaining virtuous in a corrupt and lazy world. In fact, among its many themes, "Piers Plowman" ultimately advises living life as though it were an allegorical dream in which any person one encounters might, as Piers Plowman does, stand in for Christ himself, a world in which one might unexpectedly find oneself having a debate with Abraham.

Living in such a world involves being prepared for unexpected transitions and events, such as are found in dreams. For instance, the first dream of Piers Plowman, which focuses on a pilgrimage to the house of Truth, ends before the pilgrims arrive at that house (C-X:351). In another example, Ymaginitif actually *vanishes* at C-XV:217.

Will himself addresses the relationship between waking and dreaming, in some ways preferring the dream state. He worries that asleep he understands Do-Wel but awake he will not (C-XIV:218-219). If you can't be sure whether you are asleep or awake, this problem dissolves: live life as though you are dreaming, because then you can be certain you

understand Do-Wel. Later, Will again assesses the relative value of dreaming and waking:

Many man hath hus Ioye here - for alle here wele dedes,
And lordes and ladyes ben callid - for leodes that they haue,
And slepit, as hit semeth - and somere euere hem foleweth;
Whan deth a-waketh hem of here wele - that were here so ryche,
Than aren hit poure thynges - in purgatorie other in helle!

(C-XVI:305-309)

Here he connects life with dreaming and death with waking, suggesting at the same time that people who seek their Heavenly rewards on Earth (while dreaming) will suffer after death (when they awaken in the afterlife). Again, it is better to live the dream/life with virtue and patience.

By creating a complex allegory that extends between the dream state and the waking state, indeed that takes advantage of the ambiguity between those states, Langland effectively yokes the dream format to explore his evident interest in how to avoid spiritual pitfalls such as corruption and laziness.⁷ "Piers Plowman" is, whatever else it might be, a poem in which a realistic narrator with individual problems and interests has dreams that explore those problems and interests, both through the events of the dream and through the dream format itself.

"Piers Plowman" is much more political than "Pearl" or Chaucer's "Book of the Duchess," however. It offers numerous examples of social critique; indeed, one might consider social critique to be among its main motifs. Nevertheless, these instances of critique do not apologize for or encourage disobedience to authority. For example, early in the poem Conscience offers warnings, in Latin, to the king (C-I:152-157). The first line of the Latin

7. Dreaming by its very nature involves sleeping, which underlines the issue of laziness in particular, and by extension the issue of Lollardy.

warning suggests that the king might not always be the king (Skeat, Vol. 2., 15). The warnings thus carry the weight of a threat. In the B text, an angel of God delivers these lines, which reinforces divine authority over the king. Changing the speaker to Conscience in the C text eliminates the explicit limitation of this authority to divinity. That is, the B text implies that divine authority can remove the king from power; the C text implies to the king the possibility that his subjects might some day depose him.

It is crucial that this warning is not presented by a member of the people, and it is equally crucial that it be presented "in Latin, since common people ought not to be told how to justify themselves; all who could not understand Latin or French had best suffer and serve" (Skeat, Vol. 2., 15). The audience for this Latin warning in the C text includes only the king and clergy. The B text explicitly excludes commoners from the audience (B-Prologue:128). The revision makes the warning itself stronger, because it is larger in scope, especially given the change in the warning's explicit and implicit audience. Both versions eliminate permission for commoners to disobey the king.

For another example, in the "Belling the Cat" episode, the cat is unpredictable and capricious, and he pushes the mice and rats around (C-I:168-170). The rodents discuss putting a bell on him, and they even have a belled collar made, but none of them is brave enough to put it on the cat (C-I:192-194); the law of *kynde* establishes that it is not in the nature of commoners to rule themselves, let alone rule their rulers.⁸ One wise,

8. Nicolette Zeeman discusses *kynde*, particularly within "Piers Plowman," as a state of lack: "In *Piers Plowman* *kynde* is associated with various forms of 'being without': it alludes to states of denial, neediness, insecurity, risk, sin – and the suffering associated with them; it can also denote being unburdened by certain earthly and spiritual 'goods'; but in all these cases, even that of sin, *kynde* is defined in terms of lack – patient endurance of which may bring the most extreme spiritual rewards" (Zeeman 3). In this, she follows Pearsall, who discusses poverty and suffering as a mode of spiritual purification in his article "Poverty

Latin-speaking mouse quotes Solomon:

Ue terre ubi puer est rex: Salamon
(C-I:206)

He suggests that a capricious, interfering king is better than a boy king, hinting at the consequences of impatiently removing the king from power. The attribution to Solomon also reinforces the importance of the royal hierarchy in particular, and of authority figures generally. This same wise mouse indicates that mice and rats are not equipped to rule themselves (C-I:215), making yet another argument based on *kynde* and *estaat* that the rodents ought to exercise patient endurance rather than rebellion or disobedience. Although this episode does highlight the ephemerality of kings and the *ability* of the commons to eliminate a bad king, it actively discourages them from *effecting* royal ephemerality, from actively eliminating the king.

Even in the absence of explicit social critique, "Piers Plowman" discourages disobedience, demanding obedience to authority. For example, the story of Lucifer, chief among those who disobey, explicitly links disobedience to pride (C-I:107ff). Later in the poem, when presented with a corrupt friar, Will offers to take him to task for hypocrisy (C-XVI:92-94), but Patience says "let be" (94) and asserts that in time the friar will suffer. This could almost be interpreted as an implicit apology for the friar's corruption, especially when Patience instructs Will to ask the friar about Do-Wel, Do-Bet, and Do-Best. The instruction to wait is a demand for patience, and the instruction to ask about Do-Wel and company suggests that even a corrupt friar can offer wisdom. Here, Patience is more concerned about Will's impatience than about the evident corruption in the clergy. Despite

and Poor People in Piers Plowman" (Zeeman 2).

his instructions, Will accuses the friar of hypocrisy (C-XVI:111), disobeying Patience (C-XVI:115-116). Conscience instructs Patience to shut Will up, reinforcing that disobedience is anathema to good conscience. That is, a man in good conscience ought to be patient and ought not to disobey.

In another incident, Ymaginitif reinforces the role of the Church and the importance of obedience. He points out that Kind Wit is not sufficient for salvation unless tutored by priests, for instance (C-XV:50-53). He explicitly forbids despising clergymen:

Forthy ich consille alle creatures - no clerk to dispise . . .
(C-XV:64)

Finally, he reinforces how much we as Christians owe to the Church and how much we depend upon it:

For Cleregie is Cristes vikery - to confort and to curen;
Both lered and lewed were lost - yf cleregie ne were.
(C-XV:70-71)

This emphasizes that the church hierarchy is divinely ordained, specifying that even learned men would be lost without clergy, indicting pride of education. This passage makes clear that it is not acceptable to disregard the church hierarchy, either by dismissing the opinions of clergy or by disobeying their instructions.

Instead of rebellion or even disobedience, the poem advocates faith in the form of self-modification and patient participation at one's ordained position in the social hierarchy, one's *estaat*.⁹ It explicitly admires patience by making reference to Job and Abraham in their

9. The poem's commitment to *estaat* can be seen in the Meed episode, when the king offers to pillory Lyere. David Benson, after pointing out imposture as a form of lying, surveys a number of cases when imposters pretending to be noblemen, heirs, clergy, etc. received the pillory as punishment (David Benson 39-40). In this way, "Piers Plowman" implies that fraud, particularly in its aspect of pretending to an *estaat* that is not one's own, should

times of distress:

Lo, how pacience in here pouerte - these patriarkes releued . . .
(C-XIV:21)

Patience himself exhorts the benefits of patience:

For, by hym that me made! - myȝt neuer pouerte,
Miseise, ne myschief - ne man with hus tonge
Tene the eny tyme - and thow take Pacience,
And bere hit in thy bosom - abowte wher thou wendest,
In the corner of a cart-whel - with a crowe croune.
Shal neuer burne be abaissed - that hath this a-boute,
Neither hete ne hail - ne helle pouke hym greue,
Neither fuyr, nother flod - ne be a-fered of enemye;
(C-XVI:158-165)

Patience protects one from the pains associated with poverty, illness, and human mischief. It protects one from the fear and grief caused by the threat of meteorological events and goblins from hell. Notice that the passage does not claim these misfortunes will not happen: patience protects you from the pain and grief associated with these misfortunes. The essence of patience is modifying how one interprets misfortune. God has a plan, and his plan sometimes requires bad things to happen. Patience means modifying your attitude toward misfortune to include faith that it is part of God's plan, and that you will be rewarded in the afterlife for patient suffering.

Consider the lessons of Holy Church. In the A text and the B text, Holy Church says she taught Long Will his faith. In the C text, she instead says she made him free. Freedom is crucial, but it comes from the Church, and is itself a form of faith. Holy Church instructs Will to watch and understand Meed's entourage and situation, but warns him to

. . . kep the fro hem alle

be subject to criminal punishment and humiliation.

That louyeth hure lordsheps - lasse other more.

(C-III:47-48)

Here Will must understand the corrupt motivations of the people around him, particularly in the aristocracy (hence the reference to "hure lordsheps"), but he must not get close enough to be infected by those corrupt motivations. He must not engage or criticize these people directly. He must not be disrespectful to them, but he also must not emulate them.

For a final scene that advocates self-modification and patient endurance, consider the speech in which Grace asserts that Antichrist will corrupt the world at its highest levels (C-XXII:219-226). In this speech, Grace states the intention to distribute weapons to the faithful for "whanne Antecrist 3ou assaileth" (226), not for when you assail Antichrist. These are intellectual weapons such as wit and handicrafts and faith. The implication is that you should not go after the wicked bishops and noblemen. Instead, when such figures come after you, use your intellectual gifts (faith, wit, etc) to protect yourself. Do not disobey or take steps to eliminate the corruption from the hierarchy; instead, modify how you think to avoid becoming corrupt yourself.

These are only a few of the incidents and examples within the extraordinarily complex "Piers Plowman" that demonstrate a commitment to patience in the form of obedience and self modification. The poem presents numerous examples of corruption within the social and religious hierarchies, but in no case does it offer permission to ignore or modify that hierarchy. Instead it demands obedience when necessary, suggesting intellectual tools by which an individual can exercise patience in the face of spiritual adversity, as Job and Abraham do, to increase faith in God's plan and Heavenly reward.

"Wynnere and Wastoure"

So far, the poems I have analyzed represent the pinnacle of late fourteenth century craftsmanship. Chaucer's "Book of the Duchess," Langland's "Piers Plowman," and the anonymous "Pearl" take full advantage of the dream vision format, making the dream itself a part of the exploration of a theme of personal interest to a fully-rendered narrator, all the while reflecting an ideology that links civil and spiritual disobedience, that insists on the usefulness and importance of Earthly hierarchies as reflections of the divine hierarchy, that demands behavior according to *kynde* and obedience according to *estaat*, and that calls upon individuals to modify themselves rather than the institutions that organize their lives. Reflections of this inwardly-directed ideology are present, though, even in poems that do not benefit from the fine artistry of authors like these.

In his book attempting to establish the characteristics of a "Ricardian" poetic, Burrow primarily analyzes Chaucer, Langland, Gower, and the Pearl poet, excluding a number of poems due to a perceived lack of quality:

Some of the poets are simply not good enough to make any contribution to the main creative effort of their time.

(Burrow 10)

He also excludes poems because they cannot be reliably dated to the Ricardian period, or for other reasons. He has not included a full analysis of the anonymous "Wynnere and Wastoure,"¹⁰ but this could be due to the possibility that the poem dates too early. Ginsberg places the *terminus a quo* at 1352 (Ginsberg 3).¹¹ Burrow does cite the poem in several places, however, generally as a counter-example demonstrating what makes one of his chosen poets

10. Spelled "Winner and Waster" in his text

11. Stillwell presents a strong argument for dating the poem to the reign of Edward III.

excellent.¹² He does not consider that "Wynnere and Wastoure" is of sufficiently high quality to analyze in depth.

Perhaps it is unfair to compare this poem to "Pearl" or the other highly-acclaimed works of the period. The weaknesses of "Wynnere and Wastoure" need not be described in detail for the present purpose; in brief, the narrator of this poem benefits from little in the way of character development,¹³ and the dream framework does not add to the poem's critique of the labor issues of its time. The poem uses other poetic conventions without really understanding them, either. Its reference to Brutus and Troy, conventional in history and epic but less so in extant romance or dream vision, goes nowhere (1-2); the narrator's invitations to drink beer at the end of each Fitt are distracting; and his complaint that noisy birds and other natural sounds prevent him from sleeping (37-44), clearly meant as his take on *reverdie*, seems downright counterproductive to the goal of presenting a dream vision.¹⁴ It is unclear why the author of this poem chose the dream vision at all, unless because the genre

12. Burrow 24, 26, 33, 58

13. Turville-Petre is more generous about the individuation of the narrator: ". . . he is only inferentially identified in the prologue. He does not say that he is the 'westren wy' who fears to send his son southwards, but we may infer that his point of view is the same; he is only by implication 'the man that made it hymself' who has been replaced by the chinweedless child. We are in no doubt that he is the one who perceives the sad state of the world and who will use poetry to express the truth about it; he is the prophet, inheritor of the wisdom of Solomon, who has the visionary experience recounted in his dream-poem" (Turville-Petre 26). While I am not certain I agree with him, his generosity only serves to strengthen my thesis that a deeply characterized narrator is integral to the fourteenth century dream vision.

14. One must consider the possibility that Chaucer's "Book of the Duchess" predates "Wynnere and Wastoure" and that this poet is simply imitating the insomnia of Chaucer's narrator. However, the insomnia in "Duchess" adds substantially to the overall exploration of that poem's theme. This does not seem to be the case in "Wynnere and Wastoure" - at least not beyond a general sense that the world is getting very noisy and complicated.

had become fashionable.¹⁵

Nevertheless, the poem's extensive inclusion of social critique makes it an appropriate selection for the present study. The remainder of this chapter will assess the extent to which "Wynnere and Wastoure," a poem that like "Piers Plowman" takes tackling contemporary social issues as a major theme, despite its relative lack of polish nevertheless reinforces the importance of participating with patient endurance, according to one's *estaat*, in the social hierarchy. Jacobs argues persuasively that, although the *debat* in "Wynnere and Wastoure" is probably intended to be dialectical, the narrator's sympathies lie with Wastoure, who seems to represent a fading rural, feudal economy, threatened by the increasing wealth and power of Wynnere's faction, the mercantile middle class, whose attitudes tend more toward acquisitiveness than generosity (Jacobs). Owley might disagree, given his argument that Wynnere's rhetorical strategy links the trumpets mentioned in Mathew 6:2 to the erupting bowels of Wastoure's feasting henchmen (Owley 202-203). In any case, both scholars tie the issue of economics to morality.¹⁶

In the wake of the plague outbreak from 1348 to 1349, laborers found they could increase their wages by breaking their contracts and moving to higher paying positions (Ginsberg 3). "Wynnere and Wastoure" criticizes this practice both directly and indirectly. In the poem's opening lines, the narrator laments that young people have begun to seek adventure rather than to fulfill their filial obligations by taking care of aging parents (7-9).

15. James argues that most of the characteristics of the alleged weakness of "Wynnere and Wastoure" are in fact deliberate choices on the poet's part, designed to undercut various literary conventions, creating a parodic tone that he believes enhances the poem's ability to critique English culture.

16. Owley's tie to morality is obvious here. For Jacobs', see Jacobs' 486-487, which I cite earlier in this chapter.

He criticizes young people who disobey their parents, who seek better opportunities than are provided by the obligations of their *estaat*. This is parallel to laborers who leave behind their contractual obligations to find higher wages working for other employers.

This adventuring, troubling as it was to the holders of the broken contracts, appears to have enabled many of these young people to earn sufficient wealth to marry above their *estaat*,¹⁷ and the narrator indicts this as well:

And eke boyes of blode with bost and with pryde,
Schall wedde ladyes in londe and lede hem at will,
Thene dredfull Domesdaye it draweth neghe aftir.

(14-16)

According to the narrator, breaking contracts to increase income leads to the breakdown of marriage, and ultimately to the end of the world.

In an effort to restore stable labor practices, Chief Justice William Sharesull worked to pass two extremely unpopular laws, The Statute of Treasons and The Statute of Laborers (Ginsberg 3). In the dream portion of "Wynnere and Wastoure," Wastoure mentions Sharesull explicitly (317). In the relevant passage, Wastoure asserts that Wynnere, his brother Wanhope, and all those who accused Wastoure of disturbing the peace should drown, that they should be condemned as committing deadly sins by a jury and by Aristotle and Augustine (312-314). The appeal to the authority of revered historical figures underlines the overall importance of *estaat*, and of obedience to authority.

17. This early critique of using wealth to arrange disproportionate marriages, presented briefly, represents a medieval example of a theme that becomes much more prominent in later texts. Notice that in "Wynnere and Wastoure" the consequence is "Domesday." Renaissance texts like Greene's "Quip for an Upstart Courtier" tie marrying upwards to decay in the social fabric, that is to worldly consequences as compared to the cosmic consequence predicted here. As the centuries progress, focus shifts toward increasing secularity.

Wastoure's denial suggests that even he considers disturbing the peace a serious charge:

. . . alle schente were those schalkes and Scharshull itwiste,
That saide I prikkede with powere his pese to distourbe!
(317-318)

In particular he denies riding at arms to disturb *Shareshull's* peace. The issue of riding makes this a question of *estaat* as well as a question of law: the circumstances under which a man was allowed to gather an armed force and ride into action were specifically delineated by law, and even within the law such behavior would be allowed only to men of very high position. Wastoure may dislike Shareshull with great intensesness, but he recognizes that as his legal superior, Shareshull must be obeyed, and he is shocked by the accusation that he has transgressed his *estaat*.

Wynnere is also very concerned with issues of *estaat*:

Loo! this wrechide Wastoure, that wydewhare es knawenn,
Ne es nothir kaysser, ne kyng, ne knyghte that the folowes,
Barone, ne bachelere, ny beryn that thou loveste,
Bot foure felawes or fyve, that the fayth owthe;
And he schall dighte them to dyne with dayntethes so many
That iche a wy in this werlde may wepyn for sorowe.
(326-331)

Here Wynnere attacks Wastoure's rank, claiming that he invites his friends, men who owe allegiance to the king (according to the poem's argument the audience of this debate), to banquets that accustom them to delicacies not appropriate for their own ranks. The implication is that by throwing lavish feasts, Wastoure interferes with the divinely approved hierarchy by seducing the loyalties of the king's men to his own allegiance.

The issue of banqueting is prominent throughout the poem, representing a larger

concern about the proper use of money. Wynnere believes that one must conserve and save money to be used for the greatest impact at some later date, and he represents Wastoure as a famous spendthrift who will single-handedly destroy the social hierarchy with his wasteful liberality. Wastoure believes that money does no good unless it is spent, and that one has the responsibility to use surplus money to feed the people who cannot adequately feed themselves. He represents Wynnere as an unsympathetic miser who knowingly and deliberately allows the less fortunate to starve while he lavishly decorates the cathedral. It is unclear which side the poem comes down on, perhaps because it is unfinished, but more likely because this ambiguity is part of the poem's thematic assertion that each position has its place.

Stillwell reads the factions in terms of social class. Wynnere, with his commitment to cautious husbanding of resources, represents the middle class, while Wastoure, with his belief that money and resources must be expended to improve the lot of every citizen, represents the old nobility (Stillwell 242). With these identifications, it is difficult to decide which faction is the more conservative. Wynnere is certainly the fiscal conservative, but his faction, with its increasing wealth and power, is the one changing the face of England. Wastoure's approach to wealth on the other hand is fiscally liberal, but harkens back to the Anglo-Saxon gifting ethic, in which one of the warlord's roles is to distribute wealth to the people, and consequently represents the faction of tradition. Certainly identifying the factions in this way emphasizes the issue of *estaat*, and the anxiety, expressed earlier in the poem, about marriage between classes, with its potential to bring about the end times, reinforces that emphasis.

Each contender accuses the other of betraying his *estaat*: Wastoure argues that the

responsibilities of wealth and membership in the ruling class include care of those lower on the social ladder, and that Wynnere betrays this responsibility by hoarding his money. Wynnere argues that the responsibilities of wealth and membership in the ruling class include planning for future disasters, and that Wastoure has betrayed this responsibility by spending his money foolishly, creating the very poverty he claims he is trying to alleviate by throwing lavish feasts.¹⁸ "Wynnere and Wastoure" is a poem deeply concerned about the effect of increasing wealth on the traditional hierarchy of *estaats*.

The issue of rhetorical debate is also crucial, here. Not only is *debat* a prominent structuring device in this poem,¹⁹ the narrator also condemns the growing fashion he perceives of trying to appear witty rather than truly being intelligent:

Bot now a childe appon chere, withowtten chyn-wedys,
That never wroghte thurgh witt thies wordes togedire,
Fro he can jangle als a jaye and japes telle,
He schall be levede and lovede and lett of a while
Wele more than the man that made it hymselven.

(24-28)

Even the participants in the argument express suspicion of the language of debate. Wynnere speaks dismissively of sophistical language, describing Wastoure's assertion that he has not

18. Jacobs provides a survey of several rival dialectical interpretations of the poem: Speirs argues that both spending and saving are necessary in a healthy economy; Bestul argues that both prodigality and avarice are equally sinful; Oiji finds "moral ambivalence" on both sides (Jacobs 485).

19. "Wynnere and Wastoure" could be said to have more in common with "The Owl and the Nightingale" or "The Debate Between the Body and Soul" than with "Pearl." While the dream frame seems almost an afterthought and the surreality characteristic of the dream vision genre is absent here, "Wynnere and Wastoure" like the other *debat* poems does depict an argument between two parties, whose positions have effectively equal merit, in an attempt to explore through a dialectic process the implications of a larger issue about which they disagree. For a brief comparison between the king in "Wynnere and Wastoure" and Nicholas of Guilford in "The Owl and the Nightingale," see Jacobs (Jacobs 486).

disturbed the peace as "spedles speche" (325), that is, speech without content. Wastoure similarly tells Wynnere that his "wordes are hye" (246), asserting that Wynnere is deliberately using elevated language in an effort to exaggerate the importance of trivial statements. The narrator ties this suspicion of rhetorical language to the growing chaos he sees in the world, chaos he attributes to tension in the labor force causing a breakdown in the great chain of being, but he ends the passage in which he expresses this anxiety by reaffirming his faith:

Bot, never-the-lattere, at the laste when ledys bene knawen,
Werke wittnesse will bere who wirche kane beste.

(29-30)

He is explicitly discussing language, of course, arguing that once readers/audiences look to a poet's substance, they will recognize good use of language over bad. This passage can be generalized, though – and in fact invites such generalization by its use of the word *wirche* – to encompass the overall labor issue. In this way, the narrator ties irresponsible use of words to irresponsible behavior among laborers, an issue he has already tied to *estaat*.

For all its critique of the responsibilities attendant to one's position in the social hierarchy, the poem's very structure insists that moral behavior requires one to behave according to one's *estaat*. The *debat* in "Wynnere and Wastoure" features two figures, each of whom criticizes the other for betrayals of *estaat*, each of whom expresses hesitation about the very nature of argumentative language, which elevates common ideas above their appropriate metaphorical *estaat*. Despite all of this, indeed despite the more direct issue that each of these figures comes backed by military forces, they are both subordinate to the king. Ultimately, after the *debat* has broken down under the strain of rhetorical language, Wastoure says

Now kan I carpe no more; bot, Sir Kyng, by thi trouthe,
Deme us where we duell schall: me thynke the day hyes.

(452-453)

The debaters in the end submit themselves to the king's authority. This is not the first time they have done so, either. They are debating before the king at the king's insistence, to prevent outright military action. As Salter points out, the rival factions are interested in aggression only against each other, not against the king (Salter "Timeliness" 41).

No doubt both men take comfort in this evidence that the political hierarchy is intact. Certainly the narrator seeks such evidence. When he enumerates Wynnere's forces, after his list of all of the monastic factions present, he observes

. . . I say als me thynkes,
That hede es of holy kirke I hope he be there,
Al ferse to the fighte with the folke that he ledis.
(146-147)

He is concerned about the chaos that could be caused by an uprising of monks without the pope's leadership, saying "I hope he be there."²⁰

"Wynnere and Wastoure" both in the expressed attitudes of the narrator and the debating contenders and in its structure insists that the social hierarchy be obeyed, even when such obedience is unpleasant and frightening. Wynnere and Wastoure do not instruct the king regarding which of them will reside in the kingdom; they seek his instructions on the matter, resolved to accept his decision with patience. This patience-oriented attitude toward dealing with adversity pervades dream vision poems of the late fourteenth century, not just the highly polished examples, but also those, like "Wynnere and Wastoure," that do not benefit from the talents of a great poet. In all of these cases, one is advised not to disobey authority when faced with corruption or pain, but to change one's attitude toward the

20. Stillwell discusses the implications of placing the friars within Wynnere's army as related to the wealth of the clergy. Havelly discusses the details of the Dominican banner in particular as exaggerating elements of Dominican iconography already celebrated in their history.

problem and persist in patient obedience, confident of a Heavenly reward.

"Wynnerre and Wastoure" and "The Vision of William Concerning Piers the Plowman" both feature narrators whose opinions relate to the overall themes developed, although the skill with which this is achieved is admittedly greater in Langland's poem. Both poems discuss social problems and predict potentially dire consequences. Both offer explicit criticism of authority. However neither of these poems legitimizes disobedience, and neither poem encourages readers to take action upon third party institutions. The thematic orientation of these two poems, political as it is in each case, is nevertheless directed inwardly: readers are encouraged to be aware of problems in the social hierarchy, but they are not granted permission to revise or even abdicate that hierarchy. Instead, they must look inward, modify their own behavior, in order to avoid becoming themselves corrupted.

IV. THE 15TH CENTURY – DREAM VISIONS IN TRANSITION

Dream visions of the fifteenth century such as those written by Skelton and Lydgate retain many of the qualities I've associated with earlier dream visions such as Chaucer's "Book of the Duchess," Langland's "Piers Plowman," and the anonymous "Pearl;" however, they also rely heavily on perceived formal conventions without always incorporating those conventions thematically, and they use less sophisticated allegory characterized by one-to-one mappings from abstraction to cliché. Perhaps these are signs of decay in the dream vision form, but perhaps they come instead as part of a nascent generic transformation.¹

I believe that during the fifteenth century, the dream vision genre began changing to accommodate new themes. That is, as the British became more focused on social change and less on patient endurance, British dream visions began to explore themes indicating awareness of and anxiety about how they organized their culture and about how they fit into that culture. Torti, for example, refers to the ability of Skelton's dream vision to explore "the transposition of individual inner conflict and social evils into an allegorical world" (Torti 53). She postulates in the dream vision of this period a fusion of the personal and the social, the internal and the external.

Without completely abandoning its interest in personal subjects, that is, dream vision

1. Based on her survey of several recent books, Nolan observes a general trend, particularly among recent historicist scholars, away from the previous understanding of the fifteenth century as either a wasteland between Chaucer and Shakespeare or at best somehow a decayed version of the fourteenth century. She suggests instead that scholars since the 1990s have generally agreed that the fifteenth century is a crucial time during which occurred many literary and historical events without which we cannot hope to understand the Renaissance; furthermore, she asserts, recent scholarship suggests that figures like Lydgate reward the sort of exhaustive study previously reserved for authors like Chaucer.

usage changed to facilitate critique of the new level of secularity in British thinking, the suspicion that temporal hierarchies may not be divinely ordained, and the weakening commitment to patient endurance as a means to handle personal trials. Douglas Gray describes a fifteenth-century Christianity

in which the saints and their shrines, with their relics and miracles, were part of the spiritual landscape of late medieval England. Some aspects of this were already being questioned in this period and were to be challenged even more robustly by the Protestant Reformers.

(Gray 56)

Gray further claims that the fifteenth century was "a period of turbulence rather than of total anarchy, and the rule of law survived" (Gray 41). During the fifteenth century, the Wars of the Roses made it increasingly difficult for individual citizens to accept that kings were divinely appointed. In 1399, Henry of Lancaster toppled Richard II from the British throne, inaugurating a century characterized by violent succession between monarchs (Best 30). Henry VII finally resolved these conflicts by marrying Elizabeth of York (Best 44), and the prince who would one day be Henry VIII was no doubt raised with a keen sense of why a good king must establish a smooth succession and at least a suspicion that smooth successions are established by men. Certainly, the adult King Henry VIII took the pursuit of a male heir into his own hands. These issues, as well as rising prices, corruption within the hierarchy of the Roman Church, and the social change caused by the growing power of the merchant class, led to increasing wariness about the great chain of being. The suspicion that patient endurance might not suffice emerges in various ways within the dream visions of the fifteenth century.

A new level of secularity² makes it harder to assign labels like "religious" and

2. According to Rigby, "From the late fourteenth century, the educational, literacy, and

"political" to these dream visions, since they betray widespread hesitation about the origins and the proper nature of mundane hierarchies, about the extent to which these reflect the divine hierarchy, and indeed about how the individual ought to participate in British culture.³ In general, although the dreams of this period retain some of the personal qualities of their medieval models, they show early signs of the transition toward reform-oriented external themes, away from an internally-oriented attitude expressing the need to avoid social and spiritual pitfalls. During this century, the transition was not yet complete; however it was beginning. The poems I address in this chapter germinate the seeds of transition: they retain faith in the great chain of being, but sometimes express doubt or anxiety about it, displaying subtle signs of its decline.

Lydgate, "The Temple of Glass"

Lydgate is numbered among the fifteenth-century poets called "Chaucerians" due to their generally-self-avowed inheritance of what they perceived to be Chaucer's project. In the past, scholars have accused these poets, and Lydgate in particular, of being extremely derivative, of repeating received figures rather than offering any real insight or innovation within their subject matter.⁴ This accusation is not entirely fair. Lydgate may not be a

administration skills which had traditionally been the monopoly of clerics were increasingly provided by lay administrators – even to monasteries and episcopal households" (Rigby 32).

3. Douglas Gray describes, during this period, "a literature fascinated by the problems of the individual, but which also constantly implies the importance of coteries and in-groups both inside literary works and in the world which produced them."
4. Bennett in particular devotes pages to enumerating Lydgate's failings, even going so far as to contradict other critics who defend him (Bennett 142-146). In his 1984 survey of Lydgate scholarship, Edwards mentions Ritson as an example of another older scholar characterizing Lydgate as "a particularly arid stretch of desert between the hanging gardens of Chaucer and the manicured lawns of Wyatt and Surrey" (Edwards 29). Edwards goes on to offer a detailed survey of then-recent scholarship that treats Lydgate

virtuoso: his work is overly formulaic, he relies heavily on images and motifs from Chaucer, and his prose is rather wordy and stiff. Nevertheless, he was a pioneer, helping to refashion British allegory and traditional medieval motifs, enabling them to explore an unprecedented anxiety about a suddenly plausible secular world-view and its effect on British society.

In his dream vision "The Temple of Glass," Lydgate's narrator awakens to view images of tragic lovers, much as Chaucer's narrator does in "The Book of the Duchess." He finds himself near a temple reminiscent of the house of Fame in Chaucer's "House of Fame." Upon entering the temple, he witnesses a law court headed by Venus, in which a gentleman and a lady present their suits for love. This is derived from the medieval tradition of courtly love; however, the lawsuit setting is something of a departure.⁵ In earlier romances this tradition more often focuses on the consequences of courtly love for individual knights,⁶ where here it seems more deliberately archetypal. "The Temple of Glass" owes a great debt to Chaucer, but this does not counteract Lydgate's actual achievement.

more respectfully.

More recently, Strohm discusses Lydgate as participating in what he calls a poetic of complicity, identifying Lydgate as part of a poetic movement designed to align poetry with the king's interests; such a movement would shy away from themes that question authority, would favor convention over innovation.

5. Even in Chaucer's prologue to "The Legend of Good Women," we must use the word "court" in its sense of proximity to the king rather than in its sense as a place where lawsuits are pursued. Geoffrey's crime against love and women is a given – this is no trial; Chaucer must atone, not prove his innocence or justify his behavior.

Mitchell provides a useful survey of scholarship discussing the scholarly movement away from considering Lydgate inferior: "Lydgate has long been regarded as a dull court publicist and propagandist, but lately critics have come to recognize that his corpus serves no single ideology and, in James Simpson's words 'is riven by distinct, often exclusive, generic and discursive commitments'" (Mitchell 56). Bianco goes so far as to claim that Lydgate "came out of the shadow of both Bury and Chaucer to provide the most important poetry of the fifteenth century" (Bianco 60).

6. Chretien's "Knight of the Grail" comes to mind. Perceval spends too long staring at drops of blood in the snow because they remind him of his beloved, demonstrating tension

At times Lydgate's heavy reliance on received literature – in motifs, devices, and perceptions of the dream vision's generic features – opens him to criticism. To choose among many possible examples, because Chaucer's narrators claim to be insecure and foolish, Lydgate's must do so as well (43); because he is not the craftsman that Chaucer is, however, Lydgate does not make particular use of the narrator's incompetence. He simply considers the incompetent narrator a required convention of the form. Comparing Lydgate's narrator to Chaucer's, Russell asserts that "Chaucer's character embodies what Lydgate's only describes: Lydgate's opening strains to include all of the salient diagnostic details at the expense of a credible patient, while Chaucer, fully in touch with his form, simply allows his dreamer to take shape on his page" (Russell *English* 199).

Lydgate is a better writer than the author of "Wynnere and Wastoure," though, despite their shared reliance on convention, and his narrator does develop somewhat. Although he never achieves the level of personality of Chaucer's or Langland's narrators, Lydgate's narrator has one very prominent characteristic: he is sensitive. When he enters the temple, he treads softly (42), so as not to disturb the events and people therein. Confronted with conventional images of tragic lovers, he expresses sympathy:

Ellas that ever it shoulde falle
That swete sugre coupled shoulde be with galle!
(191-192)

The narrator's romantic sensitivity is reinforced at the end of the poem, when he awakens to lament that he has never known one so lovely as to occupy his full romantic attention the way the lovers in his dream do for one another (1390-1397). His sympathy for the lovers goes deep: he even questions why God makes some men suffer so much in love:

between rival obligations to love and to the chivalric code.

Why wil God doon so gret a cruwelte
To any man, or to his creature,
To maken him so myche wo endure
For hir, parcas, when he shal in no wyse
Rejoyse never, but so forthe as unwyse
Ledin his lyf, tyl that he be grave,
For he ne durst of hir no mercy crave?

(234-240)

He turns what might have been a purely formulaic aspect of the courtly love tradition – that lovers must suffer as though ill unto death – into an expression of the narrator’s sympathy for the plight of lovers. Here Lydgate takes advantage of the courtly love tradition, tying its motifs and concerns to the concerns of his narrator. This is similar in kind at least to the interaction of narrator and theme in earlier dream visions,⁷ even if it differs in degree: Lydgate here has taken advantage of the form by linking the conventions of courtly love to a personal subject of interest to his narrator.

This latter passage also demonstrates the narrator’s – and by extension the poet’s – willingness to question God. In "Pearl," whenever the narrator asks such questions, the Pearl maiden immediately corrects his theological error. In this poem, however, the implicit critique of God’s plan is allowed to stand, both indicating the narrator’s sensitivity to the emotions of his fellow men, and exemplifying the beginning of an ideological shift in English dream vision poetry away from the extreme commitment to patient suffering – away from the belief that temporal institutions and hierarchies reflect divine ones.

Although Lydgate’s narrator is less fully realized than Chaucer’s, this is not because

7. Davidoff argues that Lydgate’s narrator interacts with the dream frame through diction and imagery related to the contrast between light and darkness. Her focus of detail differs from mine, but we agree in general that paying attention to the concerns of the narrator, particularly as those concerns about the dream frame, provides useful insight into the poem’s themes.

Lydgate is incompetent. In fact, Russell's argument about why "The Temple of Glass" does not live up to the standard set by Chaucer relies on Lydgate's extreme competence and familiarity with the dream vision form:

The real problem with the Lydgate dreamer is thus his meticulousness: with a stunning vocabulary and nicely measured phrases, he declares in stark, objective, clinical terms that he is beset to the point of distraction. The point of the "dreamer's distress" is, again, to waken suspicions as to his credibility and visionary fitness: this dreamer sounds, his assertions notwithstanding, just fine, nothing like the haggard Geoffrey, blessing himself and rambling about the uncertainty of dreams. Lydgate studied the form so well that he missed its point.

(Russell *English* 199-200)

Even one of Lydgate's critics is forced to acknowledge his skill.

Russell's interpretation that Lydgate's competence makes him miss the point of the dream vision form is reasonable, but not inevitable: it is possible instead that the functions and conventions of the form are simply shifting. That is, perhaps Lydgate could understand perfectly the point of the dream vision form as practiced by his great predecessors, while deliberately and consciously modifying that form for what he considers more timely use in his own generation. For example, in identifying the lady as Katherine, the widow of Henry V and dowager mother of Henry VI, Mitchell ties "The Temple of Glass" to anxiety about royal succession, and doing so explores explicit legal limitations placed on Katherine's sexual expression. In this interpretation, the dream vision provides a distancing frame for potentially controversial subject matter.

Certainly Lydgate is able to identify features of the genre as practiced in the fourteenth century. "The Temple of Glass" contains numerous such features, including, as Russell cites in *The English Dream Vision*, the incompetent narrator. It also includes a set of

murals depicting tragic lovers reminiscent of those in "The Book of the Duchess" and the "Roman de la Rose." Love is the featured subject of the dream in Lydgate's poem, which reflects those two poems as well, although the narrator is not himself a participant in the love relationship it explores. The expectation that the gentleman should be entirely at the mercy of the lady, the presence of Venus as a judge hearing erotic suits, and the prominence of Cupid as the ultimate divine authority are courtly love commonplaces. "The Temple of Glass" demonstrates Lydgate to have been a keen observer of generic conventions, and a poet willing to combine genres to create new effects,⁸ helping redefine the dream vision at a time when that genre was in flux.

In his discussion of the precise ways that Lydgate differs from Chaucer even while emulating him, Russell hints at the direction of that flux:

Because the "dreamer's distress" here is indistinguishable from reasonable and laudable political diatribe, the passage does not separate the dreamer from the readers as do the mysterious ailments of Long Will, the jeweller, or the various Geffreys: because it is specified *and righteous*, the distress actually unifies the dreamer and the reader.

(Russell *English* 198)

That is, in Lydgate's hands, the dream vision genre is shifting from deeply personal subjects such as grief and faith toward more external social subjects such as politics. A less fully characterized narrator allows readers to place themselves in the narrator's position, becoming more involved in the critique. As decades pass, the use of the narrator for self expression is giving way to its use as a rallying cry.

8. Bianco discusses the possibility that many of the ways "The Temple of Glass" deviates from medieval dream vision norms can be traced to a direct influence from the *dit amoureux* tradition, further supporting my assertion that Lydgate is adept at fusing genres to create new effects.

This transition is not yet complete in the fifteenth century. Lydgate's narrator still does have some small personal stake in the events of the poem, as suggested by his comment concluding the poem:

. . . I made gret lamentacioun,
Bycause I hade never in my lyf aforne
Seyne noon so feyre, sith tyme that I was borne,
For love of whame, so as I kan endyte,
I pourpost here to maken and to wryte.

(1395-1399)

He offers little detail about himself, and barely participates in the events of the dream at all, but the situation the lovers present moves him deeply. The narrator's sympathy for courtly lovers emphasizes the poem's overall thematic concern with the place of individuals within the traditional hierarchy: he regrets that expected modes of participation within that hierarchy must lead to suffering. He regrets the need for patience in the face of adversity.

The poem's approach to traditional views of the social hierarchy reveals a similar transition. Like the fourteenth-century dream visions discussed previously, "The Temple of Glass" insists on the importance of hierarchy in social interactions - indeed, because Lydgate's work is less subtle than Chaucer's or Langland's, his poem may insist on such a structure more stringently than these earlier poems do. The narrator, tip-toeing into the temple so as not to disturb anyone, has a strong sense of his subordinate place. The dream itself takes place in a courtroom, embodying the centrality of *estaaat* to the poem. The invocation opening the lover's complaint distinguishes explicitly between the muses and the furies (973-980), suggesting a semi-divine division of labor that reinforces the importance of playing the appropriate role in one's life. The speeches the narrator overhears largely involve the extent of obedience one individual owes to another or to the gods. Hierarchy and *estaaat*

are crucial here.

However, the details of the hierarchy upon which the poem insists differ from the expected order, which places God and Christ at its pinnacle, then the king and pope, then noblemen and clergy, and finally individual citizens and parishioners. In "The Temple of Glass" the ultimate authority is Eros (1005-1013), then Venus, and then the beloved lady - at the bottom, the lover himself. This order is nominally appropriate to the conventions of courtly love, but that tradition is more generally associated with romance than with dream vision.

These genres are related, since both effectively descend from the "Roman de la Rose," but (at least in the fourteenth century) they differ in function. While Ricardian dream poetry tends to explore personal psychological issues, romance (at least before 1400) tends to explore the implications of conflicts between rival ethical systems: The knight must decide whether to be a good vassal or a good husband, as in Chretien's "Eric and Enide," or he must learn how to negotiate the apparently contradictory requirements of being both a good knight and a good lover, as in his "Knight of the Cart."

To make the point here more explicit: this aspect of the courtly love tradition, which could potentially subvert the social hierarchy we associate with the great chain of being in the fourteenth century, is more often associated with the romance form; that form explores the conflict between the rival loyalties of the lover and the knight. In incorporating this romance convention into his dream vision, Lydgate follows Chaucer's prologue to "The Legend of Good Women," which attempts to unite Geoffrey's rival loyalties to Love, more particularly women, and to poetic truth. However, unlike Chaucer's usage, the presence of this convention in Lydgate's dream vision indicates a fifteenth-century convergence of the

personal and the social, the internal and the external, characteristic of the transition I am describing in these poems, away from the great chain of being. In a romance, the two hierarchies of Eros and the king (or Eros and the pope, etc) are placed side by side for comparison, but in "The Temple of Glass" the erotic hierarchy has completely supplanted these more conservative hierarchies.⁹

It should come as no surprise then, that Lydgate's dream vision shows a similar transition within its approach to patient suffering. The relevant passage is worth quoting at length:

For whyte is whitter if hit be sette by blacke,
And swoot is swetter affter bitternesse,
And falsnesse is dryve and put abacke
Wher trouthe is rooted withouten doblenesse.
Withowte preef may not be sikurnesse
Of love nor hate, and therfore of you two
Shal love be more sith hit is bought with wo,

As every thing is hade more in deyntee
And more of pryce whanne hit be dere abought,
And eek that love stant more is surtee
That longe toforne with peyne, woo and thought
Conquerid is when hit is first sought.
For every conqueste hathe his excellence
In his poursuyt as he fyndeth resistance.

Right so to you more swoote and agreable
Shal love be founde, I do you playnly sure,
Withoute gruchching that ye wer sufferable
So lowe, so meeke paciently t'endure,

9. The "Roman de la Rose" also allows the Love hierarchy to supplant the traditional Christian one, and it too does so in a way reminiscent of romance: it facilitates exploring the rival expectations that love places on the lady, who equally desires to maintain her reputation and morals and to experience love; it does the same for the narrator, who wants both to attain the rose and to treat it respectfully. In both cases, one of the competing impulses being explored is the moral impulse toward chastity; in practice, the "Roman de la Rose" allows the Love hierarchy to supplant the Christian one, in part to explore Christian morality.

That al at onyes I shal nowe do my cure
For nowe and every youre hertis so to fynde
That nought but dethe the knott shal unbynde.

(1270-1290)

The first thing to notice in this passage is that individuals are still called upon to modify their own attitudes toward suffering, in this case because good things feel better by contrast to bad ones. Just as bitterness makes sweet things taste sweeter, and as white things appear whiter when placed near black ones, the pleasures of love are greater by contrast to the pain of waiting for love's reciprocation. The passage does not recommend giving up on love or modifying the structures that love involves; the lovers are instructed explicitly to endure meekly and with patience, a traditional expectation.

However, the nature of the promised reward for patience differs from tradition. The lovers are told that they will be glad of their suffering because of how good the cure will feel. This promise is unmedieval, not because of its sense that love is its own reward, but in its focus on temporal pleasure. This idea reinforces an earlier instance in the poem:

For in abyding of woo and al affraye
Who that can suffre is founden remedye,
And for the best ful offt is made delaye
Or men ben helid of hir maladye.

(1109-1112)

Both of these passages hint at an Earthly reward for patience. This is a subtle but crucial departure from the fourteenth-century attitude toward suffering: in "Pearl," for instance, the reward for suffering is said to come in Heaven.

Furthermore, the poem hints that patient endurance may not suffice. Consider the postulant gentleman's comment:

What wonder that thoughe I be with dred

Inly oppressed for to asken grace
Of hir that is qwene of wommanhed?
For wel I wot that in so heghe a place
It wil not ben; therfore I over pace,
And take lowly what woo I endure
Til ye of pitee me take into youre cure.

(784-790)

Here, patient endurance does not seem like a viable strategy, because if the gentleman does nothing but suffer, the lady will not know he loves her, and he can reap no reward. Thus the need to take action to heal love's wounds replaces the expectation of true patient suffering.

Indeed, the lover, who has replaced the divine and political hierarchies with an erotic hierarchy whose Earthly branch is headed by the lady instead of the king or pope, places conditions on his patience:

That I ne rechche thoughe ye do me dye
So you list first to here what I seye.

(1002-1003)

The gentleman asserts the requirement that the lady must listen to his prayer. In the traditional formulation, postulants do not place demands on the king - perhaps it is his nature to hear the suits of the people, perhaps it is even his responsibility. Nevertheless, although it may be expected that an empowered authority figure listen, and although it may be resented if he does not, for a subordinate to make this sort of demand upon him would in the earlier period be considered a grave contravention of *estaat*. Yet here we have the postulant gentleman demanding that the lady, his avowed superior, must listen to him.

It is critical at this point to re-emphasize that although the poem reveals parallel shifts in its development and use of the narrator, its approach to hierarchy, and its attitude toward patient suffering, these shifts are not yet complete. Eliminating God, the actual king, and the actual pope from these hierarchies and replacing them with pagan, mythical

divinities and a human lady, humanizes the relevant hierarchy, but does not replace the idea of hierarchy. That is, although the gentleman insists the lady must listen to his pleas, he is still required to obey her if she rejects those pleas. Furthermore, although the poem places demands on the lady, it does not explicitly place demands on the king. In this way, "The Temple of Glass" looks forward to later usage of the dream vision frame as a distancing technique, a source of disclaimer. In Lydgate, the transition from patient suffering to reform, from internal themes to external ones, is in progress rather than complete.

Skelton, "The Bouge of Court"

Skelton was royal tutor to the prince who would be crowned Henry VIII. Later in his life he took holy orders and remained in contact with his former student, now king, acquiring the title *Orator Regis*; so it is no surprise that his poetry reflects a certain conservative outlook toward the political and religious hierarchies.¹⁰ In fact, Skelton seems to have been devoutly true to his belief in the great chain of being, and "during his last years [...] became involved in the public condemnation of religious heresy" (Boffey 232).

Nevertheless, even conservative Skelton¹¹ could not ignore the evidence of changing

10. "If Skelton is approached, as he should be, through Chaucer, Gower, and Lydgate, and not through Spenser, Keats, and Tennyson, he will be seen for what he is – the last and peculiarly brilliant representative of a great tradition, before the Renaissance brought with it the flood of foreign influences that has resulted in the neglect of our earlier poets, and the underestimation of our great medieval culture – which in fact, the new age was already doing its best to stamp out" (Henderson xx).

11. Historically, Skelton is considered rather a maverick; by "conservative" I refer only to a set characteristics evident in his poetry indicating his belief that temporal hierarchies ought to reflect divine ones. According to Griffiths, "in *The Bouge of Court* [. . .] instruction is shown to rest in the challenge to the reader: to be wary, to read, to interpret, and to take nothing, least of all the commonplace, on trust" (Griffiths 12). Griffiths's interpretation accords with mine in asserting that Skelton's dream vision expects readers to modify their own behavior and approach to the world.

times and attitudes around him, or the causes of change.¹² Late in his career, for instance, he wrote "a number of satires which addressed the growing influence of Cardinal Wolsey" (Boffey 232), and he became extremely critical of corruption within the Catholic hierarchy; however, he never abandoned his faith that mortal hierarchies must reflect the divine one.¹³

Instead, his work acknowledges and then deliberately turns away from the mounting evidence that one's *estaaat* might be an accident or, worse, determined by a conspiracy among the human empowered.¹⁴ In his dream vision "The Bouge of Court," for example, Skelton writes a biting satire of the seeming randomness by which courtly success accrues, and the ill-behavior of courtiers seeking to manipulate this randomness, but his solution to these problems is not to reform the courtly system: it is to abandon ship – quite literally, if the events of a dream can be called literal.

Since Skelton is a conservative author near the end of the transitional fifteenth century, his poems naturally reflect an ideology in transition as well. His dream vision, "The

12. Despite his old-fashioned religious position and his ties to the crown, Skelton comes to represent poetic freedom for later poets like Spenser. In part he achieves this through manipulation of his laureateship and ambivalent images of poetic authority: "Skelton acquires poetic authority through a contradictory strategy of self-presentation: he simultaneously authorizes and debunks the power of the poet in society" (Cheney 221).

13. Appert enumerates various ways Skelton seeks to critique abuses of power, by contrast to his rival, Andreas, whom she characterizes as "the king's poet" (Appert 118). That Skelton critiques bad rulers does not contradict his commitment to the notion that temporal institutions and authorities should reflect divine ones; rather, his attempts to point out ways in which contemporary authority figures fail to do so is evidence of that commitment.

14. Stanley Fish considers that Skelton conceived of the world as radically unified, with the political and ecclesiastical hierarchies reflections of the divine hierarchy; consequently, he considered disobedience to legitimate temporal authorities morally equivalent to heresy. Over the course of his career, he was forced to recognize that temporal institutions were corrupt and in some sense would not or could not conform to divine models, but instead of losing faith or turning to Protestantism, according to the medieval model he turned increasingly away from evidence and toward faith. He came to equate poetry with prophecy, a divine gift and mandate.

Bouge of Court," explores an issue of interest to its narrator, like his fourteenth century models do. However, his narrator is less fully developed than the narrators in those poems, and his use of allegory is coarser. The dream frame itself contributes little of thematic interest to the overall composition, and instead provides plausible deniability for the author.

The narrator in "The Bouge of Court" has more personality than Lydgate's narrator in "The Temple of Glass," but less than Geoffrey or Long Will or the jeweller from "Pearl." Like Lydgate, Skelton adopts the conceit of the incompetent narrator: inspired by the great examples of the past, Skelton's narrator

. . . was sore moved to aforce the same
But Ignorance full soone dyde me dyscure
And shewed that in this arte I was not sure
(17-19)

He is concerned that his own ignorance holds him back from a place among the "poetes olde" (9).

Unlike Lydgate, Skelton acknowledges his narrator's incompetence as a conceit by undermining it slightly. During his description of his own ignorance, the narrator protests that he has "knowen suche er this" (25), asserting his experience and knowlege. And of course, his sense of ignorance comes from his knowlege of the great poets to whom he compares himself. That is to say, this narrator is not so much incompetent as he is humble, perhaps even insecure.

Skelton furthermore puts this device to use as part of a syndrome of character flaws that all relate to fear. That is, by asserting anxiety about his own competence, the narrator invokes the issue of anxiety in a more general way. He brings anxiety and fear up in other ways throughout the poem as well. The most visible example, of course, comes in the

narrator's name. Lewis sums it up, saying "His name, which is *Drede*, gives the keynote to the whole dream" (Lewis OHEL 135). Although in this way the narrator's fearfulness is more told than shown, he does behave in some instances as though worried. He uses the language of anxiety, for example:

I dare not speke; I promysed to be dome.
(229)

Here, the narrator shows himself to be trustworthy, of course, but note the reason for his tact: He does not *dare* to betray a confidence. Drede is afraid to speak out of school. Boffey discusses the narrator's fearfulness, saying that Drede's fears "take on different aspects as the poem proceeds, comprehending both the paranoia induced by the competition for advancement and the trepidation facing the poet who feels it his moral responsibility to reveal unwelcome truths" (Boffey 233). According to Fish, "his fears are at once physical and verbal, symptomatic of a lack of confidence so enervating that it paralyzes" (Fish 61).

In addition to his dread, or perhaps as a component of it, this narrator has a strong sense of morality and modesty, established during his conversation with Ignorance at the beginning of the poem and reinforced later, when he is explicitly embarrassed by the off-color anecdotes Ryott tells:

What sholde I tell more of his rebaudry?
I was ashamed so to here hym prate:
He had no pleasure but in harlotrye.
(372-374)

All in all, we seem to be looking at a simple man, humble and easily embarrassed, afraid to assert himself too fully.

We may also be looking at the sort of man who falls asleep in the

tavern (33-35).¹⁵ Skelton has gone out of his way with this detail to avoid generic cliché.¹⁶ Drede does not fall asleep in an idyllic landscape, as do the narrators of most other dream visions, listening to the sounds of birdsong or crickets, etc. Instead he falls asleep at the harbor, in an inn.

Nevertheless, although on the whole characterization is more asserted than demonstrated, Skelton's visible project in "Bouge of Court" does not require a fully-rendered narrator. Giving the narrator an allegorical name makes the allegory more personal, helping to tie the poem's theme to its structure, even while it undermines the well-roundedness of the character.¹⁷ In fact, Fish suggests that "he carefully neutralizes his own personality, becomes the *vir bonus*, righteous, moral, and uninteresting, lest we become distracted from his (and he hopes our) castigation of vice by our interest in him" (Fish 77). The name *Drede* and the narrator's waking conversation with the allegorical figure Ignorance together suggest that, in Skelton's view, the allegory can be used outside the dream frame. In this way, Skelton follows Langland's example. Both authors write highly allegorical poems in a dream format, and both authors take steps to make the reader understand that the dream frame is not required for the use of allegory. The question then arises: why use a dream frame at all?

Skelton's project is not as sophisticated as Langland's. Skelton does not seem to be arguing that dream reality and waking reality are (or at least should be treated as though)

15. "It is typical of Skelton that when he introduces his traditional medieval dream allegory, instead of falling asleep in a bower surrounded by spring flowers and to the sound of blissful birds he should drop off in a pub at Harwich" (Henderson xiii).

16. He deviates from convention, also, in placing his dream vision in September, when cycles are in decline. Traditionally, these poems are set in the spring.

17. Skelton's "Bouge of Court" is similar to Lydgate's "Temple of Glass" in this way: both use relatively weak characterization of the narrator to structurally enhance the exploration of their themes.

indistinguishable. Instead, Skelton uses the dream as a sort of disclaimer. Referring to the poem itself, Drede says

I wolde therwith no man were myscontente;
Besechyng you that shall it see or rede,
In every poynte to be indyfferente,
Syth all in substaunce of slumbryng doth procede.
(534-536)

Drede's final assertion of anxiety in "The Bouge of Court" comes in this expression of worry that he may have said something to offend his readers.

Drede's anxiety makes perfect sense, given the likelihood of a courtly readership and the fact that the main target of the social commentary in "Bouge of Court" is the spiritual barrenness of courtly life and courtiers. Drede interacts with seven figures on the ship – Favell, Harvey Hafter, Suspecte, Dysdayne, Dyssymuler, Ryotte, and Subtylte – none of them wholesome, all of them representing some particular untrustworthy aspect of the hypothetical courtier.¹⁸ Favell is a flatterer, Harvey Hafter a thief, Dyssymuler is two-faced. Favell the flatterer even warns Drede that "here be dyverse to you that be unkynde" (161), emphasizing the unwholesomeness of the crowd.¹⁹

By using the word "unkynde," Favell also addresses the issue of *kynde* in that passage. In the fourteenth century, *kyndenness* suggested behavior according to one's nature and *estaat*. "Bouge of Court" demonstrates a shift in the meaning of "unkynde" to something closer to

18. In this sense, Skelton follows what Lewis identifies as the model set in the "Roman de la Rose," in which each allegorical figure the narrator encounters represents some aspect of the lady's troubled psyche.

19. That there are seven figures recalls the pageant of the seven deadly sins, reinforcing the wickedness to be found at court. Skura refers to them as "seven deadly courtiers" (Skura 28). If Skelton is indeed making such a reference – as Torti also hints (Torti 60) – then the secularity of his "sins" is quite innovative, evidence of greater secularity in his interests than in, for example, Langland's.

its modern meaning. Favell makes the following untrustworthy oath:

For by that Lorde that bought dere all mankynde,
I can not flater . . .

(163-164)

Favell is by nature a flatterer. When he uses the term "unkynde" he means "being mean" rather than "behaving against nature." An example of what he refers to comes in Favell's next conversation, this one with Suspecte (elsewhere called Suspicyon):

'In fayth,' quod Suspecte, 'Spake Drede no worde of me?
Why? Why than? Wylte thou lete mene to speke?'
'He sayth he can not well accorde with the.'
'Twyst,' quod Suspecte, 'goo playe; him I ne reke!'

(183-186)

He immediately assumes Drede has spread gossip about him; when Favell denies it, Suspecte accuses him of dominating the conversation. Suspicyon, manifesting suspicious behavior, is not at all *unkynde* in the medieval sense of that word: he behaves in perfect accordance with *kynde*. However, when told Drede dislikes him, he grows rather rude, considering the expletive "Twyst," his abrupt dismissal of Favell, and his disavowall of Drede. Suspecte here is obnoxious, but he does not behave against his nature. In fact, in general Favell's warning that the other figures on the ship are *unkynde* is honest only in the sense that they are unlikely to be nice. They will behave according to their nature, though: Favell will flatter, Suspecte will be suspicious, and Dyssymuler will dissimulate. Russell states it explicitly: "the only character who manifestly contradicts his identity as a personification is Drede, who stupidly forsakes his name²⁰ in favor of the story he has to tell" (Russell "Skelton" 9); every other allegorical

20. Russell here defines the word drede to indicate caution rather than anxiety. I agree with him that, by boarding the Bouge of Court, Drede has behaved incautiously. Nevertheless, caution is in this poem a symptom of anxiety; however we define "drede", the name acts to support the motif of fear throughout the poem. Russell himself refers to the nightmare

personage behaves according to his or her nature.

If each of the seven villains represents an aspect of the hypothetical courtier, Favell's false oath allegorically suggests that courtiers are untrustworthy, even when swearing oaths. It also sets the traditional hierarchy with Christ at its head for comparison beside the Fortune-headed hierarchy of the Bouge of Court. Drede feels regret for the loss of a social order in which honesty was part of the courtly *kynde*. According to Boffey,

Drede's aspirations to poetic truth are mocked by the empty songs of Harvey Hafter, and one by one the characters he meets make statements (often about truth and 'plain' speaking, as at lines 235, 311, and 463) which belie their actions.

(Boffey 233)

On the whole, the poem criticizes courtiers for insincerity and for hypocrisy in calling for plain speech while exercising rhetorical aureation.²¹

Boffey ties this insincerity to an increasingly worldly attitude at court:

The satire in BC turns in part around the way in which the 'favor' and 'grace' bestowed here have material rather than spiritual connotations.

(Boffey 233)

The initial description of the ship bears this out. It is "goodly of sayle" (36), not necessarily morally good; it has "takelyng ryche" and "hye apparayle" (38), indicating wealth but making no assertion of spiritual goodness or even safety. "Pearl" ties lavish gem-related descriptions to moral superiority, but "Bouge of Court" makes no such connection. This ship is wealthy

qualities of Drede's dream (Russell "Skelton" 1).

21. "The dreamer's dread of lacking a true poet's cunning and ability to 'cloak' a truth is transformed, within the dream, into a vision of despicable courtiers who can cloak the truth but whose distortions the dreamer disdains as much as the courtiers disdain him" (Skura 29). Griffiths goes a step further, saying that "*The Bouge* disconcertingly calls into question the validity of the distinction between poetic and courtly feigning" (Griffiths 60).

and lavish. The descriptive language offers no reassurance that it is also wholesome.²²

The ship's motto, "Garder le fortune que est mauelz et bone," is similarly ambiguous. It could instruct the reader to preserve luck or to beware of luck. It asserts that fortune is both good and bad. Its focus on luck calls the divine plan into question in its relation to courtly life. The nature of fortune is crucial. At one point "she promysed to us all she wolde be kynde" (124). We know she will not smile on everyone. Is it in her nature to lie? Or is mutability in her nature, making this statement true? The former possibility makes Fortune explicitly inimical. The latter possibility is subtler, but still implies Fortune is a villain. Consider Spenser's "Faerie Queene" in which Duessa and Archimago are both shape-shifters, in which the most troubled cantos are known as "Mutabilitie Cantos." At the time of "Bouge of Court" we are moving into a period in which mutability is equivalent to villainy. In part, this is because when Fortune reigns, *kynde* becomes ambiguous.

Futhermore, the motto is written in French.

This may seem a trivial thing to say, but in this case the use of French language indicates untrustworthiness. The British mistrust of the French is longstanding. It is no coincidence, for example, that Lancelot (who seduces the queen both in Chretien's "Knight of the Cart" and in Malory's "Morte Darthur") is French. Skelton was himself born around a decade after the Hundred Years War, so anti-French sentiment must have been a feature of his childhood much as anti-German sentiment was a feature of Allied discourse after World War II. One particular sequence in the Hundred Years War, interesting because of its implications of French untrustworthiness, occurred in 1420: Henry V married the French

22. Later, in Spenser's "Faerie Queene," riches will be completely suspect; the medieval allegorical meaning of wealth will be gone. For Skelton, that change in meaning is well on its way.

princess and forced the French king to recognize him as heir to the French throne. In 1422, Henry V died, and the French refused to accept Henry VI as their monarch. This failure to abide by their agreement reinforced a longstanding British prejudice about the honesty of the French.

The gem that Desyre gives to Drede to help him succeed is also French: *bone aventure* (98), and it is equally inconstant. Here, this term indicates good luck, but luck is not always good. Good or bad, luck is what determines success at court:

‘Alas,’ quod I, ‘how myghte I have here sure?’
‘In fayth,’ quod she, ‘by Bone Aventure.’

(118-119)

The inclusion of the French word *bone* clarifies that *bone aventure* is a French term and therefore not to be trusted. It also helps to distinguish this use of *aventure* from its use in Middle English romances and dream visions. In Middle English texts, *aventure* is a required aspect of the knight’s code of ethics; it is internal, a part of the knight’s identity.

One prominent example demonstrating the cruciality of *aventure* to the chivalric code occurs in "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight," when King Arthur refuses to allow the banquet to proceed until some *aventure* manifests:

And also anoþer manere meued him eke,
þat he þur nobelay had nomen, he wolde neuer ete
Vpon such a dere day, er hym deuised were
Of sum auenturus þyng an vncouþe tale,
Of sum mayn meruayle, þat myȝte trawe,
Of alderes, of armes, of oþer auenturus,
Oþer sum segg hym bi-soȝt of sum siker knyȝt,
To ioyne wyth hym in iustyng in ioparde to lay,
Lede lif for lyf, leue vchon oþer,
As fortune wolde fulsun hom þe fayrer to haue.

(90-99).

This passage makes two explicit references to *aventure* and one to fortune. *Aventure* here is the random occurrence of a marvel, and Arthur insists upon the delay "þur nobelay" or through his noble spirit, suggesting the importance of *aventure* to the knightly class in particular. He is directed to the delay by a "manere" or custom. It is the custom for knights to give *aventure* a place of prominence. Eventually, the green knight – the *aventure* they have been awaiting – attempts to shame the knights (309), as though refusal to follow the *aventure* were a form of cowardice. As part of the knightly code in medieval romance, following *aventure* provides a way for a knight to gauge his bravery and honor – that is, to moderate his own behavior.

In "Bouge of Court" *bone aventure* is required as part of an outcome, as a form of currency; it is externally imposed. Compare this use of *aventure* to Geoffrey's decision to follow the whelp in "The Book of the Duchess." In both cases, one must follow the *aventure*, but somehow in Chaucer it seems more reputable. In fact, in "Bouge of Court" the chivalric code itself is somewhat decayed.²³ Disdayne, for instance, says

But, no force, I shall ones mete with the;
Come whan it wyll, oppose the I shall,
Whatsomever aventure therof fall.

(334-336)

Here, *aventure* is almost a dare, and Dysdayne uses the old chivalric code to falsely justify his hostility.

The courtly approach to hierarchies comes into critical focus in more general ways as well. The ship itself is owned by "a lady of estate / Whose name is Dame Saunce-Pere"

23. Torti considers the ways Chaucerian material morphs in Skelton's hands "the sign of a crisis of values and of the impossibility of presenting this crisis in traditional language" (Torti 52). It is reasonable to extend Torti's observation more generally to Skelton's idiosyncratic use of received material.

(50-51), raising the issue of *estaat* explicitly in use of the word "estate" and implicitly in the allegorical significance of the lady's name: she is without peer. Given her French name, she (and by extension the courtly life over whose hierarchy she presides) is not to be trusted. For another example:

Her chyef gentywoman, Daunger by her name,
Gave me a taunt, and sayde I was to blame
To be so pette to prese so proudly uppe."

(69-71)

At first glance, words like "chyef", "gentywoman", and "pette" suggest a traditional view of the importance of hierarchy to social order.²⁴ Hierarchy and *estaat* are emphasized both in the text and in Daunger's dialogue. But Daunger allegorically represents standoffishness, relegating this traditional attitude to cranks. Desyre contradicts Daunger almost immediately, saying

Broder, be of good chere,
Abasshe you not, but hardely be bolde,
Avaunce your selfe . . .

(86-88)

Who spareth to speke, in fayth, he spareth to spede.

(91)

Desyre undermines traditional approaches to *estaat* in a couple of ways in these passages. For starters, she contradicts Daunger (the "chyef gentywoman") suggesting a contravention of the hierarchy. Furthermore, the substance of her advice suggests that, as in Lydgate's "Temple of Glass," it is necessary to demand what you want. Traditionally, the great chain of being, with its implications of divine providence, meant that you got what you were supposed

24. Griffiths' *John Skelton and Poetic Authority* explores in detail exactly how Skelton tries to negotiate the tensions between the authority of the court and poetic authority.

to get, what you should have according to the divine plan. In the fifteenth-century dream vision, it is apparently necessary to take action to secure what you want. Either ambition is an approved characteristic (a far cry from the earlier expectation for patient suffering), or these poets fear that public faith in divine providence is in decay, or more probably both.

Dysdayne's conversation also reflects some weakening of the traditional medieval views regarding *estaat*:

It is greate scorne to see such a hayne
As thow arte, one that cam but yesterdaye,
With us olde servauntes such maysters to playe.

(327-329)

This speech emphasizes the importance of *estaat*, but ties it to seniority rather than to *kynde*.

Simple word choice provides additional evidence that "The Bouge of Court" expresses anxiety about the breakdown in the court's faith in the value of hierarchal rule. Consider the identity, or lack thereof, of the person who barks out the order to be still and listen:

. . . anone one cryed 'Cese!
Sharpely commaundyng eche man holde hys pece.

(46-47)

The pronoun "one" obfuscates the identity of the person in practical command here, and this person is not identified later. This anonymity creates the impression that authority is not tied to *estaat* on this ship. Furthermore, the word "royall" receives fairly casual use in the expression "royal chere" (249), which calls to mind the initial material-oriented descriptions of the ship, rather than the potential for royalty to be divinely dictated.

The court is the general target of the satire in this poem, and the meat of the critique is that the court has become inappropriately worldly, abandoning its proper faith in

the great chain of being, abdicating its responsibility as a mortal hierarchy to reflect the divine one. Skelton retains his faith in this responsibility, and expresses anxiety about its absence in the upper echelons of his community. It is no surprise, then, that he seeks to distance himself from the potentially libellous ramifications of his critique: his target includes many powerful people. The dream frame, rather than providing a context in which allegory makes sense, is here used to disclaim responsibility. Medieval theology and dream theory suggest that a dreamer cannot be held accountable for sins performed while dreaming.²⁵ The ambiguity of the dream state here provides Skelton a layer of political protection that would be absent in an allegory framed some other way, or one without frame.

This use of the dream frame as disclaimer is the biggest indication of transition toward the externally oriented dream visions of the Reformation. Other indications of this transition in fifteenth-century dream visions include the expression of anxiety about the possibility that mortal hierarchies might not reflect divine ones, and breakdowns in the relationship between *estaa*t and *kynde* and actual authority. These indications come through no coincidence at the same time as a shift, perhaps even decay, in the dream vision genre itself.

25. Weidhorn presents a thorough survey of medieval dream theorists and theologians. He mentions that Tertullian considers dream acts amoral and St. John Chrysostom claims they are "of no consequence" (76). Although St. Gregory the Great considers dreaming a weakened, vulnerable state, he limits the ability to sin in dreams to those dreams that fulfill all stages of sin. Augustine focuses on the source of potentially sinful dreams as demonic influence, concluding that in such a dream the demon is culpable, not the dreamer (15). St Thomas Aquinas argues that although a person "does have antecedent responsibility if the dream was incurred by waking thoughts, or consequent responsibility if he approves, on waking, the evil acts of the dream," he "cannot be held accountable for the dream itself (79).

V. THE 16TH CENTURY - DREAMS AS DISCLAIMER

A brief survey of sixteenth-century events and issues will help shed light on the relationship between dream vision poetry of the period and social attitudes toward reform. For the first half of the century, Henry VIII "presided over a great increase in prosperity, at a time when much of Europe was in religious and political turmoil" (Best 47). When he broke with Rome, making himself head of the English Church, he opened up royal authority to critique. After all, self-appointment naturally carried less authority than appointment by a separate religious authority. Furthermore, by placing the heads of state and church in a single entity, Henry refashioned the balance between the religious and political systems in England:

In medieval England, as in the rest of Christendom, church and state had been considered co-ordinate and complementary authorities, no matter how confusing the conflicts and compromises between the two powers might be. Spiritual jurisdiction had belonged to the pope and the clergy, temporal jurisdiction to the king and his representatives. It was hard to draw the line in practice, but in theory there was a clear sharp difference between the two powers. Now the king was "Supreme Head of the Church of England." What did this mean? Had the state absorbed the church? Had Henry stepped into the pope's shoes so far as one nation was concerned (without of course claiming the power of a priest to administer sacraments)? The answer was a tentative yes, but no clear answer was ever given.

(Harbison 71)

Many medieval romances explore the implications of conflicting duties created by parallel codes of behavior – duty to church versus state in Chretien's "Knight of the Grail," duty to lady versus liege in his "Knight of the Cart" or the anonymous "Sir Orfeo," etc. – and during the Reformation, Henry VIII made the religious-political conflict internal and inherent in the role of king, creating (or at least reinforcing) uncertainty about numerous social institutions previously considered reflections of divine equivalents.

For example, Henry's pursuit for an heir, which motivated his break from Rome and

which involved the execution of two wives, interfered with social codes relevant to ladies and created an institutional instability within the state of marriage – was it eternal or ephemeral? The issue of marriage is naturally prominent within the literature of the period, including dream visions, and part of its prominence can be traced not only to shifting marital structures, but also to a changing economy. In the decades leading up to the sixteenth century, New World exploration created new trade routes and economic opportunities. This contributed to the wealth of some commoners, whose ambitions led them to seek titles for their sons and daughters by arranging marriages with less-well-off courtiers. Concerns about marriage and the misuse of wealth rise to prominence in the sixteenth-century mind, appearing as major motifs in dream visions written during this period.

Literary critique of government and the church hierarchy takes on a new character during the sixteenth century, reflecting a new extreme in the ideological transition toward a suspicion that mortal hierarchies might not be made in the image of the divine hierarchy after all, even if they *should* be. The dissipating traditional doctrine left in its wake an attitude that, where mortal hierarchies fail to reflect Heavenly ones, they should be reformed to perfect that reflection. In this way, the expectation of patient endurance faded, so that the good Christian was the one who strove to improve institutions rather than the one who simply accepted them as part of God's plan.

This increased expectation of social critique, coinciding with the presence of unusually dominant monarchs such as Henry VIII and Elizabeth I led to the perception, reflected in the literature of the period, that some source of plausible deniability was necessary to distance authors from their potentially controversial assertions about authority figures and powerful institutions. The far less effective but nevertheless frightening reign of

Mary, whose strident efforts to enforce Catholicism led to the epithet "Bloody Mary," exacerbated this perception. The invention of the printing press increased the likelihood that potentially hostile audiences might read and be offended by critical or satirical texts, potentially leading to persecution or even prosecution of their authors. The dream vision provided a natural distancing strategy for authors of social critique in this frightening literary landscape. Dream visions depicting monarchs, for example, or even depicting Queen Elizabeth explicitly, create a symbolic linkage between the fictional, depicted monarch and the actual one, while at the same time enabling the author to dismiss any offense taken by the authorities on the basis that it was just a dream (Hackett 45).

In the dream visions of the sixteenth century, both major transitions traced in this dissertation are complete. The narrators, which in the fourteenth century were often realistically drawn individuals with a personal stake in the themes of the dream visions they narrate, have by the end of the sixteenth century become ciphers designed to enable exploration of social critique – or even disappeared entirely. Parallel to this transition, the themes explored in these texts shift their orientation from internal to external; instead of depicting a narrator learning to cope with a personal problem, allowing readers to take the narrator's new-found wisdom indirectly unto themselves, in the sixteenth century dream visions typically explore themes of social critique with the intent of gathering support for a particular social attitude. That is, instead of urging readers to modify their own approach to the world, these later dream visions urge readers to agree that the world itself requires modification.

In practice, the medieval function of dreams, which made the dream vision form so effective in the late fourteenth century, was completely supplanted by the use of dreams as a

disclaimer in the sixteenth. As the centuries progressed, the dream visions got worse and worse, until very few major authors opted to use the dream frame at all. A small number of dream visions were produced by Henry Chettle, Thomas Churchyard, and Robert Greene, and one anonymous dream vision appears in "The Phoenix Nest," a collection of poems published in 1593. None of these is particularly good, largely because Lydgate's daring experiments with the form failed in the hands of those who came after him: the reformist social climate of the late sixteenth century undermined the emotional and spiritual power the medieval dream vision had been able to command in the fourteenth century.

Greene, "A Quip for an Upstart Courtier"

In 1936, in "The Allegory of Love," C.S. Lewis taught the scholarly world how to read medieval personification allegory by explaining that each individual the dreamer encounters in the "Roman de la Rose" represents some aspect of the lady's conflicted persona. Following his example, we may interpret that Greene's "Quip for an Upstart Courtier" describes the conflict between different aspects of *England's* persona. That is, the medieval "Roman" discusses a very personal subject, while the Renaissance "Quip" discusses a very social subject.

Greene's narrator is a cipher. He differs in this way from Geoffrey and Long Will. He has almost no independent opinions about the images and events he witnesses in the dream; at his most complex, he expresses only his own objectivity. More often, his actions and interventions in the dream serve only to enable further exploration of an allegory of little personal importance to him. Greene's narrator has no stated occupation. Unlike Geoffrey and Long Will, and even Skelton's Drede, whose name serves almost to undermine his

personhood, Greene's narrator has no name.¹ In Greene's narrator, the shift from medieval person to Reformation cipher is complete.

Even the form of the "Quip" reflects this shift. In a medieval dream vision, the opening wakeful section of the poem is often used to establish the narrator's persona and personal concerns, which in turn offer some insight into the overall theme of the vision. In Greene's "Quip" the narrator uses this section to set the date, and then falls right to sleep. His method of date-setting is admittedly idiosyncratic: he establishes that the dream happens in spring when the "Cukoulds querifter beganne to bewray Aprill Gentlemen." This reversal of traditional *reverdie* could suggest a narrator who has been unlucky in love, especially given that he has been "folitarie feeking to follace my felfe" (B1 recto). However, the dream offers little follow-up to issues of love, and its attention to fidelity is limited at best and never personal to the narrator.

For example, in the allegorical herb garden, the narrator steps in to gather some unspecified flower (B2 verso). The flower's identity should offer some hint as to the narrator's goals, to who he is; since the flower has no identity, apparently he is no one. Even the action of attempting to pick flowers is used primarily as a way to further the allegory rather than as a way to offer insight about the narrator himself. Instead of picking the flower, he becomes distracted when he sees the herb Bachelorhood, which makes women weep after 40 weeks. Similarly, when the narrator asks about the value and virtue of an herb, he offers no personal opinion of the explanation (B2 recto). His question is designed to reveal

1. Indeed, very few people in this text have names. Many are identified by their occupations, and despite any disclaimers to the contrary most of these figures represent all practitioners of their respective occupations. In one instance, the country man is given the name "Sir John" in a way reminiscent of our own use of "Average Joe." That is, we are not dealing with a named individual, and the very name selected works against his individuality.

information about the herb, not about his own interests. Furthermore, when the narrator refers to wanton women like lamiae (B2 verso), he is not moved by them; he simply observes, where a more realistic man, a man suffering heartbreak, might reasonably have an opinion on the subject.

These incidents hint at Greene's concern about the state of English marriage. The herb Bachelorhood here indicates a sexually active status among men who refuse to marry, which naturally results in unplanned pregnancies among the allegedly wanton women on whom they prey. These women are certainly either unmarried, or married to other men, thus compounding a neglect of marriage that is troubling to Greene, if not to the narrator. The allegory points to marriage as a potential subject for the "Quip," but the narrator does not seem personally invested in this subject.

He does attempt to gather hearts-ease as his first real action in the dream, but the impersonal significance of this is revealed almost immediately:

I learned that none can weare it, bee they kings, but fuch as defire no
more then they are borne to, nor have their wifhes above their
fortunes.

(B1 recto)

While gathering hearts-ease might in Langland's hands have offered some sense of the narrator's own uneasy heart, might have tied this event to the opening anti-reverdie, in Greene's hand it serves instead as a transition between the narrator's vague heartache and the true theme of the text, that ambition beyond *estaat* causes distress. The narrator's almost completely absent persona, his personal problems, are the theme of neither the dream nor the overall "Quip."

The narrator's initial action in the courtroom scene, stepping between the contenders

Cloth Breeches and Velvet Breeches to prevent violence (C1 verso), again reveals nothing much about the narrator himself, but paves the way for the courtroom episode itself; by replacing violence with *debat*, the narrator's action serves to provide an opportunity to explain the allegory rather than to explore his personal stake in the story. It is telling that both parties, previously opinionated to the verge of fisticuffs, are willing to accept the narrator as their judge. He has no opinion of his own on the subject that comprises the rest of the episode. A natural consequence of the narrator's relative lack of persona is his impartiality. That is, making the narrator a cipher in "Quip for an Upstart Courtier" is actually an integral thematic element of the text. The narrator's primary role is to provide opportunities for objective exploration of an allegory of little interest to himself. Because he has no personal opinions, his opinions cannot interfere with the overall theme of the "Quip," a project of interest to the author, but not particularly important to the narrator.

That overall theme revolves around the relationship between marriage and nobility, both in the political sense of that word and in its behavioral sense. That is, "Quip for an Upstart Courtier" explores the link between noble behavior and noble position and indicts the misuse of marriage as damaging that link. This theme necessarily involves exploring *estaa*t and hierarchy in general, and the issue of upstarts, people behaving beyond the privileges of their *estaa*t, specifically.² One briefly discussed category of upstarts explored early in the text involves women. In the herb garden, the narrator observes that urinating on nettles makes women "waspish and peevish" (B3 recto).³ They behave above their proper

2. Dimmick explicitly places "A Quip for an Upstart Courtier" in a Chaucerian tradition of estates satire (Dimmick 472).

3. Nettles themselves are a useful herb, which can be brewed into an iron-rich tea reputed to cleanse the blood, explaining why they are depicted growing in an herb garden. Greene's main focus for this episode, however, seems much more on the stinging properties of the

station. One presumes that, in Greene's view, a woman properly subservient to her husband would not void her bladder on useful medicinal herbs in the public garden. The allegory establishes female pushiness as a transgression equivalent to public urination. Being an upstart here is an embarrassing and unsanitary attack on the traditional hierarchy.

The "Quip" is more widely concerned about the overall English approach to hierarchy, as well. For example, consider the Parson, who asks the narrator what person is fit to examine him. He asks for the authority of the narrator's unofficial courtroom, and then accepts the project as legitimate (G2 recto). This event is interesting for two reasons: First, it establishes the question of *estaa*t and authority explicitly. Second, by accepting the mock trial as legitimate, the parson acknowledges the authority of this makeshift court to pass judgments; in reality, of course, it has no such authority. Clearly the parson has less respect for the legal hierarchy than his words imply.

Since a prominent and powerful part of the English hierarchy involves courtly gentlemen, "Quip for an Upstart Courtier" explores the the issue of *gentillesse*. Before the "Quip" even officially begins, Greene's dedications suggest the prominence of this issue. In his dedication to the readers, he addresses "gentle gentlemen," refers to "auntient Gentility," and toasts "the Gentleman Readers health" (A4 recto). His repetition and manipulation of the word "gentle" reinforces Greene's bias for a particular mode of courtly behavior, a bias not shared by his narrator. In his dedication to Thomas Burnabie, Greene praises his patron for virtues he sees absent in other courtiers (A3 verso).⁴ Medieval dream visions are constructed

nettle plant than on its medicinal properties. It would be quite painful for a woman to squat over a nettle bush; no wonder such women become "waspish and peevish." No doubt anyone would be nettled by that experience.

4. "Quip" is Greene's version of an estates satire against the 'new men,' ostensibly those like Gabriel Harvey's rope-maker father but perhaps also cordwainers-turned-innkeepers, like

such that they advise the narrator how to act, and readers can take a lesson from his education. In effect, in these two dedications, Greene announces that his story advises other people how to act; it is unimportant whether the narrator learns this lesson. Miller corroborates the idea that Greene considers external modifications to be the appropriate response to social problems rather than modification of one's personal approach to those problems. He suggests that deletions in the "Quip" indicate Greene's desire, brought on by deathbed repentance, to prepare spiritually for death. Particular deletions are intended to reduce controversy and specificity. "When Greene had the opportunity to see his tract through another printing, he determined to make his work completely inoffensive" (Miller 280). Even during his deathbed repentance, Greene opted to modify his text rather than his own beliefs or behaviors. Kumaran, discussing a change in the tone of Greene's poems around 1590, refers to Greene's "self-consciousness as a moralistic writer for whom the didacticism of repentance has become a weapon of dry satire" (Kumaran 246).⁵ That is, in his late works, the "Quip" among them, Greene uses moralistic techniques to explore external, social subjects.

The primary agents in the dream express anxiety about the legal and religious

Greene's own newly rich father. In contrast to such money-conscious and fashion-conscious men, Greene holds up the honest, down-to-earth feudal manners of the ancient Gentry. Burnaby, Greene implies, is one of the latter" (Skura 214).

5. Kumaran assigns responsibility for this change to Greene's participation in the Marprelate controversy: "In just more than a year, Martin [Marprelate] injected a new sense of freedom into the language of the pamphlet and had energized Elizabethan prose satire. Seen in this perspective, in 1589 and 1590 Greene must have been a man whose complacency as a writer was deeply shaken. The fact that the authorities, who were notoriously suspicious of popular pamphlets, would go so far as to recruit a team of popular writers to counter Martin must have been, to Greene, a testament to Martin's potency as a pamphleteer. Greene may have been a part of the anti-Martinist team, but as a writer he must have been conscious, even envious, of the superiority of Martin as a pamphleteer" (Kumaran 245). Thus we see external events influencing Greene to explore increasingly external subjects.

hierarchies. For example, Cloth Breeches declares that the Informer cannot be a member of the jury, even though "he is a most necessary member in the common-wealth, and is highlye to the Princes aduantage for the benefite of pennall statutes and other abuses, whereof he giueth special intelligence" (E3 recto). His reason involves the Informer's complicity with the court itself, which he accuses of corruption:

he learned in the rowle all thofe mens names, and that they were
menne of indifferent wealth: now meanes hee to goe abroad and
search them out and arrest them, and thoughte they know not
wherein, or for what cause they bee troubled, yet rather then they
wyll come uppe to London and spende their money, they wyll bestow
some odd Angell vpon maister Informer, and so fitte at home in quiet.
But suppose some bee so stubborn as to stand tryall, yet can this
cunning knaue declare a *Tam quam* against them, so that though they
be cleared, yet can they have no recompence at all, for that he dooth it
in the Courtes behalfe

(E3 recto & verso)

Not only does the Informer prey on men of modest wealth, who might reasonably be expected to pay a fine rather than bother with court proceedings, he does so under the aegis of a court system that allows it. Here Cloth Breeches accuses both the law court and the Informer, demonstrating his distrust of the legal hierarchy. This is especially significant, given that Cloth Breeches is the more conservative participant in the "Quip" and might reasonably be expected to stand by tradition, to support the legal system. His mistrust suggests that the Informer's corruption is somehow related to more recent changes in the legal hierarchy. In particular, he seems upset by bribery, by the use of wealth to circumvent the law. The "Quip" was published during a period in which commoners had a good chance of being wealthier than noblemen, so the traditional tie between wealth and *gentillesse* has been weakened. Consider the herb Thrift (B2 recto), which older men gather up and present to younger people, who squander it. Misuse of wealth is an important motif in the "Quip for

an Upstart Courtier." One generation becomes wealthy through careful work and investment and uses this wealth to marry into the gentry; the next generation, the *nouveau riche* satirized in the figure of Velvet Breeches, attempts to redefine gentle behavior in terms of conspicuous consumption rather than virtue, in terms of what they have rather than what they are.

Greene himself ties misuse of wealth to *estaaat* in his dedication to the readers:

. . . the foppe forgets like the Affe that a mule was his father.

(A4 recto)

Foppery requires stylish clothing, wealth. Greene calls the fop an ass, which is already insulting, but the insult is much more specific than that. By specifying the mule as the fop's father, Greene assigns foppery to the children of workers. That is, he calls the wealthy (upstart) children of commoners asses because of their foppish behavior. Furthermore, notice that the generational assignment is inverted: In reality, a mule is the offspring of an ass, not vice versa. The complete accusation goes something like this: the upstart sons of wealthy commoners have turned the social hierarchy upside-down by behaving like asses with their undeserved money.

Inversions are wicked in the "Quip." Consider the Collier's accusation against the Ropemaker:

How can hee be honeft, whose mother I geffe was a witche. For I haue heard them fay, that witches fay their prayers backward.

(E4 recto)

Here again, the wickedness is tied to generational issues. Inverted behavior is a sign of witchcraft, and both inversion and wickedness are inheritable.

The Collier is not the only person in the "Quip" concerned about wickedness or using magic-related diction. Cloth Breeches calls the Vintner a necromancer, for instance

(G2 recto). The overall interest in wickedness as it abuts religion is no surprise, in a time when Calvinism was gaining ground and Puritans were becoming increasingly troublesome.

Cloth Breeches also asks the Vicar if he is a Puritan

or some fellow that rayfeth up new scifmes and herefies amongft your people?

(G2 verso)

The conservative Cloth Breeches naturally feels antipathy toward rabble-rousers and those who seek to change the status quo. Puritans are an extreme example of this, with their rejection of formal priesthood and episcopacy.

Velvet Breeches, on the other hand, is comfortable with Calvinism, at least in a limited way. When he dismisses the Sergeant from the jury, he calls him a reprobate:

. . . oh the reprobate is the Ufurers executioner to bring fuche Gentlemen to Limbo as hee hat overthrowne with his base brocage and bad commodities.

(E1 verso)

"Reprobate" is a Calvinist buzz word; Calvinism differentiates between the Elect, who are saved, and the Reprobate, who are not. Velvet Breeches ties reprobation specifically to usury, which suggests that he too is concerned about the misuse of money. Both the secular and religious hierarchies are called into question.

For example, in the herb garden, the narrator sees

proud peacocks as ouer haftilie out runne their fortunes at laft to speedily, fall to repentance, and yet some of them smild and faid Rue was called herbe grace, which though they fcornd in their youth, they might weare in their age, and it was neuer too late to faye Miserere.

(B2 recto)

Here ostentatious displays of religious piety are named hypocrisy, a way to retain some

semblance of dignity by denouncing a lifestyle that the former "proud peacock" can no longer afford due to his own youthful unthrift. Here Greene implies that holy roller religious reformers are just embittered upstarts who failed at court.

Cloth Breeches later denounces the Summoner, a prominent part of the religious organization. He allows that Chaucer's denunciation of the Summoner was adequate, but does go on to claim that he allows wealthy men to buy their way out of trouble while poor men hang. Again, the concern involves the ill effects of wealth on justice, on proper functioning of the Church. Here again the conservative participant expresses discomfort with corruption in the church hierarchy, and corruption is related to a surplus of money among those who misuse it.

At one point, Cloth Breeches relates the stories of Adam and Eve and of Noah's family:

I will not forget the old wiues logicke, When Adam delvd and Eue span, who was then a Gentleman? but I tell thee after the genreall floode that there was no more men vpon the earth but Noe and his three fonnes, and that Cham had wickedly difcovered his fathers secrets then grew the diuifion of eftates thus: The church was figured in Sem, Gentilitie in Iapheth and labour and drudgerie in Cham: Sem being Chaft and holy, Iapheth learned and valiaunt, Cham churlifh & feruile, yet did not the curfe extend fo far vpon Cham, nor the bleffing vpon Iapheth, but if the one altered his nature, & became indued with learning or valour he might be a gentleman, or if the other degenerated from his autient vertues hee might bea heald a pefaunt, wherevpon Noe inferred that gentilitie grew not onely by propagation of nature, but by perfection of qualities.

(C recto)

This passage is crucial, not only as one more example of Greene's concern with religion as a subject, but also because of its implications with regard to the traditional doctrine of the great chain of being. Cloth Breeches uses the story of Noah to assert that personal qualities

define nobility. The great chain of being asserts the inverse, that nobility causes noble personal qualities. In the Middle Ages, a nobleman behaving ignobly was considered *unkynde*; he behaved against nature. With the Reformation decay of this doctrine, even the conservative man must now acknowledge that nobility does not guarantee good behavior, so it becomes more imperative for him to reserve nobility for those who behave well.

Despite Cloth Breeches' hesitation with regard to Puritans, he too participates in a limited way in Calvinist ideology, particularly when Calvinism offers guidelines for good behavior. He asserts that actions and image are not the same as virtue, for example. He praises honesty and hard work, and indicts vanity and idleness. Many of his examples are biblical, and he expresses concern about idolatry (C3 recto). In these ways, he praises the Calvinist image of election, which is inherent, invisible, and not susceptible of influence through the bribery of good works. The true elect does not perform good works to influence election, but because he is naturally drawn to doing good works. By taking a stand against the regenerative value of good works, Cloth Breeches identifies himself as Protestant, or at least Protestant-sympathetic: the misuse of good works to evade eternal responsibility for one's sins was a major Protestant complaint against Catholicism.

During a period when the Protestant religion is fully established under Queen Elizabeth, Greene seems comfortable with Calvinist diction ("reprobate," etc.) and critique of the religious hierarchy. His denunciation of the Summoner lacks the disclaimer that only wicked summoners are blameworthy, not summoners in general; this disclaimer does accompany the rejections of the Lawyer and the Sergeant, both described in the same passage. However, Greene is not comfortable with religious extremism. Although the "Quip" is themed against upstarts (and the accompanying unnecessary social upheavals), "Sir John"

and Cloth Breeches both denounce Puritans. When Cloth Breeches challenges whether Sir John is "not some puritan," Sir John says:

A plague on them all [. . .] for the world was neuer in quiet, devotion, neighbourhood nor hospitalie neuer flourished in this land since such upstart boies and fhittle witted fooles becam of the minifterie, such I mean as *Greenwood Martin, Barrow, Wiggington*, and such rakehells, I cannot tell they preach fayth, fayth, and fay that doing of almes is papiftrie, but they have taught so long *Fides solam iustificat*, that they have preached good works quite out of our parish, a poore man shall as soone breake his neck as his fast at a rich man's dore.

(G2 verso)

Both men are angry about changes in English culture,⁶ hesitant about religious and political upheaval, which is natural considering the period of religious and political chaos from which England had only just begun to emerge. Sir John in particular is concerned about the intermingling of the religious and political worlds, given his characterization of Puritans in the ministry as "rakehells."⁷ Still, both men are willing to denounce religious extremism, and Sir John, whose name serves to make him more rather than less generic, who stands for the archetypal country vicar, denounces several authority figures explicitly and by name. Both men are willing, that is, to suggest that other people modify their behavior rather than seek ways to modify their own, and the quintessential vicar is openly disrespectful of his social superiors. In the 1380s, these attitudes and assertions would have been moderated by an ideological commitment to the great chain of being, a commitment that was fast

6. In his OHEL volume, Lewis describes "A Quip for an Upstart Courtier" as "one of those laments for a vanished age of kindness and simplicity which men have made at all times, perhaps with as much reason as those who at most times have praised the new order" (Lewis OHEL 404).

7. Greene's "Quip for an Upstart Coutier" is part of the Marprelate controversy, in which established wits responded scathingly to Puritan attacks, penned under the pseudonym Martin Marprelate, on the established Church of England. The first printing of the "Quip" includes a direct attack on the Harvey brothers, participants on the Puritan side of the controversy (Greene front note).

disappearing. Even Greene, who seems to miss it very much, does not reflect a commitment to patient endurance in his "Quip."

When Greene specifies the target and substance of his satire in the dedication to Burnaby, details suggest that earthly hierarchies do not reflect divine ones. His indictments increase in scope, starting with courtiers, moving through the city and up to the country itself. He considers that corruption in these fields has led to the decay of Christian virtues such as hospitality, neighborhood, conscience, and charity (A3 recto). The narrator reinforces the wide scope of the "Quip" when he introduces the Lawyer to the situation: He says they intend to determine

whether Clothbreeches or Veluetbreeches are of more worth, and
which of them hat the best title to be resident in England.

(E1 recto)

That is, he intends to determine whether the nobility in England displays *gentillesse*, good behavior, thrift, and charity, or whether it displays ostentatious, self-serving, socially destructive expressions of wealth. The entire trial scene between Cloth Breeches and Velvet Breeches seeks to explore how gentlemen and ladies of quality ought to behave, suggesting by its presence and prominence in the "Quip" that the answer is not trivial. People are already defining nobility by wealth, and Greene clearly objects.⁸ The narrator of course remains impartial, which is necessary to his role as judge in the trial.

In his opening argument against Velvet Breeches, Cloth Breeches opines that English culture is changing in undesirable ways, saying that "The worlde was not fo A principio" (D1

8. "The *Quip* is marked by a striking – indeed strident – social and political concern for traditional Englishness" (Dimmick 472). By "Englishness" here, Dimmick refers to Greene's characterization of Velvet Breeches as coming out of Italy. The contrast between the ill behavior of the Italianate Velvet Breeches and the traditionally English Cloth Breeches makes clear that Greene favors Englishness.

recto). He goes on to blame social decay on the behavior of upstarts, of the unthrifty sons of commoners who became wealthy and bought their sons titles through upward marriages:

. . . for when veluet was worne but in kings caps, then confcience was not a broome man in Kent street but a Courtier, then the farmer was content his sonne should hold the plough, and liue as he had doone before: Beggars then feared no aspire, and the higher fortes scorned to enuie. Now euery lowt muft haue his sonne a Courtroll, and those dunghill drudges waxe so proud, that they will prefume to weare on their feet, what kings haue worne on their heads. A clownes sonne muft be clapt in a veluet pantophle, and a veluet breech, though the presumptuous affe be drown'd in the Mercers booke, and make a conuey of al his lands to the ufurer for commodities: yea the fop muft goe like a gallant for a while, although at laft in his age he beg. But indeede, fuch yoong youths when the Broker hath bleft them with faint Needams croffe, fall then to priuy lifts & cofenages, and when their credit is vtterly crackt, they practife fome bad fhрифte, and fo come to a shameful ende.

(D1 recto)

The beginning of this passage laments that people are no longer content with their divinely-appointed lot. Surplus wealth has caused the potential for social mobility, and naturally the lower orders aspire to the higher orders. Cloth Breeches explicitly blames the loss of widespread belief in the great chain of being on the misuse of wealth, initially by those who purchase status above their *estaa*t, and subsequently by those who neglect *noblesse oblige* in favor of conspicuous consumption. They wear as boots and breeches a fabric once reserved for the head of the king, another inversion of tradition, this one almost anatomical. Cloth Breeches considers such inversions wicked. Finally, he predicts dire and widespread consequences of Velvet Breeches' ostentatious use of wealth, asserting that overspending will lead to debt, then bankruptcy, and ultimately crime.

Cloth Breeches is not wrong about Velvet Breeches' ostentatious behavior, either.

Even the cipher narrator describes him in lavish terms:

As these breeches were exceeding sumptuous to the eye, so were they passing pompous in their gestures, for they trowted vp and downe the Vallye as proudelye as though they had there appointed to act some desperate combat.

(B3 verso)

The sumptuousness of the clothing reflects the haughty attitude, an attitude of pride, but also one of desperation, which calls to the narrator's mind the potential for violence. Given this depiction by a person whose objectivity even Velvet Breeches accepts, Cloth Breeches is not far off in his prediction that the need to fund an inappropriately lavish lifestyle might ultimately lead to crime. Even on their good behavior, these upstarts are prone to "churlish illiberalitie" (B1 verso).

Velvet Breeches agrees that times have changed, but expresses less chagrin about it. He argues that "yea by me the cheefest part of the realme is gouerned" (C2 verso). In practice, he agrees with Cloth Breeches that times have changed. He disagrees only in his judgment regarding the change. Agreement between these contenders suggests that Greene himself believes the majority of those in power regard wealth and nobility as interchangeable. The "Quip" itself acknowledges this situation, and judges it harshly. Cloth Breeches' dire prediction suggests so, as does his rejection of the Lawyer from the jury, in which he asserts about lawyers that "beggering their clients they purchase to themfelues whole lordships" (E1 verso). Again, the conservative contender asserts that misuse of wealth to subvert the social order leads to economic mayhem. In his earlier prediction, he suggests that the upstart will come to a shameful end; here he strengthens the point by making explicit the harm the upstart does others on the way.

He furthermore identifies upstarts explicitly with the children of those who marry

above their station. For instance, he accuses the Tanner of selling unfinished leather to earn extra money so he can marry his son to a lady and his daughter to a gentleman. Here we see the misuse of wealth to subvert the hierarchy directly; not only does the Tanner cheat his customers, but also the social system at large, and the resulting offspring will be asses, and come to a shameful end.

But Greene does not argue against all social mobility. In the herb garden, the herb Time suggests an appropriate means and pace of advancement:

. . .the Courtiers comort, Time: an herb that many fumble on and yet ouerflip, whose ranke favor and thicke leaues, have this peculiar propertie, to make a snaile if he taste of the fappe as fwift as a swallow, yet ioyned with this preiudice, that if he clime to haftilie, he fals to fuddenly. Methought I saw divers yong courtiers tread upon it with difdain, but as they paf away, an Adder lurking there bit them by the heeles that they wept.

(B1 verso)

As here depicted, social advancement itself is perfectly natural – it is all right to advance gradually, at the correct pace, but one must not attempt to force instant advancement, say by swindling your customers and using the extra money to marry a gentlewoman. This idea departs from the more traditional notion that serfs are born to servitude as part of the divine plan, that nobles are born to nobility to serve God's purpose, that mortals should not aspire above their *estaaat*. Notice that young courtiers pass it over, while peasants use it to advance beyond their place. The herb Time offers social advancement as a reward for patience, and patience is regrettably rare at this time. That said, traditionally the reward for patience comes in Heaven, and here the reward is earthly, another departure from traditional medieval ideology.

Greene's "Quip for an Upstart Courtier" postulates that English high society has

become corrupt, primarily as a consequence of the actions of wealthy commoners who misuse their money by cheating their customers to marry into the gentry. In doing so, they cause social mayhem, replacing traditional notions of *noblesse oblige* with prideful ostentation and conspicuous consumption. Their children attempt to maintain an expensive lifestyle that leads initially to debt and ultimately to criminal behavior so they might pay off usurers. In Greene's age, when people have ceased believing in the great chain of being, *estaaat* has been divorced from *kynde*, and Christian virtue has been replaced by ambition, envy, and greed in both courtly circles and among wealthy commoners as well.

Given the broad and influential target of this allegorical satire, it is no surprise that Greene feels the need to distance himself from potential reprisals. He expresses this anxiety directly in his dedication to Burnabie:

Knowing I should bee bitten by manye fithens I had touchte manye,
and therefore neede some woorthie Patrone under whose winges I
might shroud my felfe from goodman find-fault. . .

(A3 recto)

Greene has identified Burnabie as his patron, specifically because he believes Burnabie might protect him from reprisal by those his "Quip" critiques.

His primary distancing technique is the disclaimer. When people are rejected from the jury, Greene often disclaims that he intends only corrupt members of the relevant profession, not all members. This is the case for the Lawyer (E1 verso), the Sergeant (E2 recto), and the Informer (E3 recto).

The text contains numerous such explicit disclaimers, but it also offers one much subtler distancing technique, the dream frame itself. Since Greene feels no compunction against using allegorical techniques outside this frame – consider, in the dedication to

Burnabie, the protective wings of his patron and the name "goodman find-fault" representing those who might object to criticism – he clearly does not believe that the dream is necessary for allegory. Instead, he has selected this frame as a way to evade prosecution:

. . . suppose the worst, that hee should be frowned at, and that such occupations as he hath vpon conscience discarded from the Iury, should commence an action of vnkindnesse against him, heele proue it note to hold plea, because al the debate was but a dreame.

(A4 verso)

This passage from the dedication to the readers leaves little doubt about Greene's motivation for using the dream frame. He uses the expression "an action of vnkyndnesse" to mean reprisal. He could be suggesting a *kynde* for the "gentle gentleman" – that is, that true gentlemen do not litigate unfairly. Given his assumption that a disclaimer is required, it is more likely either that he assumes his targets will not behave according to *kynde* or that he uses the term *vnkynde* simply to mean "not nice." All of these possibilities suggest decay in the traditional values linking *estaat* to *kynde*.

Greene's narrator, who serves as little more than a means to elaborate the allegory, also emphasizes the disclamatory function of the dream frame when he introduces the herb garden scene:

Infinite were the flowers beside that beautified the vale, that to know their name and operations I needed some curious herball, but I passe them ouer as needlesse, with the vision of their vertues was but a dreame, and therefore I with noman to hold any discourse herein authentically. . .

(B3 recto)

Not only does the allegory not require a dream frame, here the narrator claims explicitly that the dream frame weakens the impact of the allegory. Specifically, he dismisses the need for the allegory's gentle target to object to its criticism.

Greene's "Quip for an Upstart Courtier" reflects the parallel transitions I have been describing: Where medieval dream visions typically use a realistic narrator whose personal concerns are integral to the overall theme of the dream, Greene's "Quip" features a cipher narrator whose very lack of realistic persona serves to advance the allegory. Furthermore, the narrator's lack of emotional depth serves to help distance readers from critique. Where medieval dream visions typically explore personal subjects such as faith, love, and grief, ultimately reinforcing the ideal of patient endurance, self-modification, and belief in the great chain of being, Greene's "Quip" explores a wide-scoped subject, the nature of English society, pointing out social failings rather than personal ones. With the transition from realistic narrator to cipher narrator comes a parallel transition from personal subject to social subject. "A Quip for an Upstart Courtier" expresses only marginal interest in patient endurance, and none in self-modification. While medieval dream visions typically explore internal, personal subjects, the subject of Greene's dream vision is external and socially directed.

What Became of the Dream Vision

By the late sixteenth century, the quality of dream visions had reached an unprecedented low.⁹ Most major authors had stopped using the dream frame, and aside from

9. Critics have suggested that this decline began in the fifteenth century. Lewis, for instance, has very little positive to say about Lydgate, and Fish notes that Skelton's "Bouge of Court" "tends toward the mechanical" (Fish 56), and further asserts that in Skelton's hands dream vision "becomes conventional as the form so hardens that the standard solution to the problem it was created to solve – the nature of authority – is built into it" (Fish 57). Lynch identifies the fourteenth century as the end of what she calls "The Age of the Dream Vision" (Lynch 1).

Of Greene, the sixteenth century's main practitioner of dream visions, Melnikoff and Gieskes have the following to say: "Of the few book-length studies of Greene since his death in 1592, all are apologist in tenor, compelled to admit that Greene lacked literary

one or two highlights in the seventeenth century – Bunyan’s “Pilgrim’s Progress” comes to mind – it would take Victorian medievalism to restore the genre to some semblance of its former power. Even the great Victorian dream visions such as Lewis Carroll’s novels about Alice, Baum’s about Dorothy in Oz, and Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol* leave open the possibility that the events are real, only hinting that the narrator might be dreaming. For example, when Scrooge says to Marley “There’s more of gravy than of grave about you” (Dickens 12), he refers to the *insomnium*, caused by digestive distress, as a way to ameliorate his fear that he might be seeing real ghosts. Before Victorian medievalism was able to redeem the genre, dreams as a motif were subject to trivializing, if any, use. Herrick’s poem “The Vine,” for instance, describes an erotic dream, culminating in the unsubtle assertion of the narrator’s erection rather than coming to any more substantial thematic conclusions. Conversely, Spenser’s “Faerie Queene” uses many techniques and motifs common to the dream vision form but eliminates the dream frame in favor of its Fairyland setting.

Over the course of the sixteenth century, as the Reformation became more established, dream visions more and more often used the dream frame to evade responsibility for controversial statements rather than to facilitate discussion of internal emotional issues, and few authors chose the form. In the new spiritual climate, which lacked real commitment to piety or to the link between *estata* and *kynde*, the genre had lost its former potency.¹⁰

ability; that he was a popular writer primarily driven to ensure that his audience was ‘pleased’ (to borrow Cuthbert Burbie’s term); that he was often a money-driven hack” (Melnikoff 3). They go on to reconsider Greene as a professional writer participating in the new economy, which naturally makes him look somewhat better. Hack or professional, Greene’s works are still considered of less literary success than the analogous works of his fourteenth-century predecessors, due in large part to social change in Britain.

10. Michael St. John devotes his book, *Chaucer’s Dream Visions: Courtliness and Individual Identity*, to exploring “how the dream device enables the soul and its courtly context to be

Weidhorn points out that by the seventeenth century, very few major authors were writing dream visions:

After flourishing in the Middle Ages, the extended narrative set within the frame of a dream became a minor genre in the English Renaissance. Except for three works in the seventeenth century – by Drummond, Donne, and Bunyan – which were, significantly enough, in prose, the genre no longer served as a vehicle for memorable expression by major poets. Instead, deliberately archaizing lesser poets like Drummond (as poet), Cowley, and Henry More were attracted to it.

(Weidhorn 70)

Coming late in the sixteenth century, "A Midsummer Night's Dream" is contemporary to the generic waning Weidhorn identifies, in fact an exemplar of it, representing a suspicion of dreams and their ambivalent value, and, in its theatrical absence of narrator, the final eradication of the individualized narrator. In the absence of a narrator, any themes, critique, and advice cannot be directed at the narrator in the medieval style; the audience cannot put the lessons learned by a narrator to use in their own lives. The dramatic form demands that the audience accept responsibility for learning these lessons, or failing to learn them, directly.

Similarly, the discussion of dreaming within the play marks a new extreme in the shift of thematic orientation from internal to external topics. In the fourteenth century, dream vision poems tended to explore personal themes and advise patience in the face of adversity, even social adversity, confident that the patient individual would receive Heavenly rewards for cooperating graciously in God's plan; over the course of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, dream visions explore less and less personal themes, moving from grief and faith in "Pearl" toward the ill effects of corruption among authority figures and the

examined" (St. John 2). By the sixteenth century, it had ceased to so enable.

misuse of marriage on Britain as a whole in "A Quip for an Upstart Courtier." In *A Midsummer Night's Dream* characters use the dream in a couple ways: as a metaphor for unreality or ephemerality, as in Hippolyta's assertion that the remaining time until her wedding will go by as though a dream; or in an effort to distrust their waking experiences, because dreams are a cousin of fancy, as per Oberon's instructions to Puck regarding the lovers in the wood. Where medieval dream visions could be used as a source of insight, Shakespeare asserts that dreams are at best popularly considered false, and at worst used cynically to deceive.

In Renaissance Britain, it was accepted by most theologians and natural philosophers that in the dream state reason was suspended, and thus also the will, both superseded by fancy. When assuring Helena of his love, caused by a potion imposed on him in his sleep, Lysander says:

The will of man is by his reason sway'd;
And reason says you are the worthier maid.
Things growing are not ripe until their season,
So I, being young, till now ripe not to reason;
And touching now the point of human skill,
Reason becomes the marshall to my will,
And leads me to your eyes where I o'erlook
Love's stories written in Love's richest book.

(II.ii.115-122)

His discussion of the relationship between reason and will in this context is ironic. He intends to use the general understanding about the relationship between reason and the will to mean that his love for Helena is real, while his previous love for Hermia, by contrast the result of fancy, was more like a dream. The contrast being made is between real things, things controlled by reason and will, and false things, things (like dreams) controlled by fancy. The focus on reason and will enables the dismissal of dreams as fanciful and unreal. As

the audience, we know that, however sound his use of dream theory, Lysander has reached the wrong conclusion: his true love is Hermia.

Even this systematic reasoning is mere rationalization in the context of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, because in this play actual dreams can provide real insight, if only social constructions surrounding them would not interfere. Hermia's dream of the serpent on her breast, which clearly reveals Lysander's actual defection from her love, is a true dream, a *somnium*, requiring only an honest interpreter to reveal the truth.

That Lysander's situation is caused by events imposed on him in his sleep by supernatural forces only broadens the comparison to untrustworthy dreams. In the 17th century, Milton depicts Satan whispering a false dream into Eve's ear. Dreams imposed by spirits are not considered the responsibility of the dreamer. This is true in "Paradise Lost," and more to the point, it is true in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. For example, despite the displacement of their affection and the harshness of their treatment of Hermia in the woods, Oberon calls Lysander and Demetrius "faithful lovers" (III.i.91). Supernatural interference absolves the mortals of culpability.¹¹

Similarly, when Titania announces her love for the transformed Bottom, he replies

Methinks, mistress, you should have little reason for that. And yet, to say the truth, reason and love keep little company together now-a-days. The more the pity . . .

(III.i.141-145)

Bottom's focus on the issue of reason again reinforces the comparison to dream theory.

While he does not explicitly say "Milady, you are dreaming," he does offer the absence of

11. This is consistent with Macrobian dream theory, which identifies the spirit-inspired dream as *insomnium*, a nightmare of no significance.

active reason as an out for her. Bottom's comments make the absence of reason a source of plausible deniability. If reason's absence can excuse a transgression, then tying the transgression to dream serves to disclaim it as well.

It is not so simple, though. Theseus' final comment in his amazement is "How easy is a bush suppos'd a bear!" (V.i.22). It is easy to misapprehend, and the officially dismissive attitude toward dreams and fancy is not accepted universally or without doubt. For example, Bottom says he has had a dream, and dismisses it repeatedly as not worth relating, but he still resolves to have Quince present it in ballad form:

I have had a dream, past the wit of man to say what dream it was.
Man is but an ass, if he go about t'expound this dream. Methought I
was – there is no man can tell what. Methought I was, and
methought I had – but man is but a patch'd fool, if he will offer to say
what methought I had. The eye of man hath not heard, the ear of
man hath not seen, man's hand is not able to taste, his tongue to
conceive, nor his heart to report, what my dream was. I will get Peter
Quince to write a ballet of this dream. It shall be called "Bottom's
Dream" because it hath no bottom. . .

(IV.i.205ff)

Bottom's resolution to have Quince balladize his dream undermines his ambivalence about it. The official word regarding dreams in this play makes them trivial, ephemeral, and largely irrelevant to daily life; however, deep down Bottom is not sure. He does lip service to the conventional wisdom, covering himself against reprisal by dismissing the dream, just in case it was real. One doesn't spread embarrassing rumors about the queen of the fairies without taking precautions, and Bottom's uncertainty about dreams provides him the plausible deniability he feels he needs.

Bottom's experience is not the only real experience dismissed as a dream in this play. Oberon instructs Puck to mislead all of the forest-bound mortals to believe that their actual

misadventures at fairy hands are only dreams. Furthermore, Puck's final address directly to the audience reinforces the alleged dream as disclaimer, asking detractors to dismiss the very real play as only a dream.

A Midsummer Night's Dream explores the issue of disclaimer through the dream motif. Puck learns Oberon's lesson about dreaming very well. His final speech, directly to the audience, invites us to view the play as a dream, explicitly to allay any offense we might take.

If we shadows have offended,
Think but this and all is mended,
That you have but slumb'ed here,
While these visions did appear.
And this weak and idle theme,
No more yielding than a dream,
Gentles, do not reprehend.
If you pardon, we will mend.
And, as I am an honest Puck,
If we have unearned luck
Now to scape the serpent's tongue,
We will make amends ere long;
Else the Puck a liar call.
So, good night unto you all.
Give me your hands, if we be friends,
And Robin shall restore amends.

(V.i.423-438)

Puck clearly invites us to dismiss our waking experience of the play as a dream. His explicit reference to dreaming claims that dreams yield nothing of importance (428). He addresses us, those who might be angered, as "Gentles," which recalls Greene's repetition and manipulation of the word in the prologues to "A Quip for an Upstart Courtier." Notice especially that the second half of Puck's speech is couched in the conditional mode: the spirits "will make amends" (434) as Puck is "an honest Puck," (431) and "Robin shall restore amends" (438) but only "if we be friends" (437). In practice, Puck has demonstrated himself to be no friend of mortals. Consider this couplet, delivered during his attempt to blame

Oberon:

And so far am I glad it so did sort,
As this their jangling I esteem a sport.

(III.ii.352-353)

Oberon is indeed partially to blame for the lovers' problems in the forest, but Puck is equally responsible. Never forget that Puck considers the trouble he has caused mortals a source of entertainment. No one told him to give Bottom the head of an ass. He is not an honest Puck. I the Puck a liar call.

In any case, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* scarcely seems to require the sort of elaborate disclaimer provided by Puck's final invitation to dismiss the entire play as a dream. Although Oberon's behavior toward mortals might be considered frivolous, he is never malicious. His instruction that Puck enchant Demetrius to love Helena might look like mischief, but he does so to redress the wrong he perceives Demetrius has done her. The ensuing hyjinx results from Puck's error, which in turn results from Oberon's vague description of Demetrius. If the critique here is that rulers should not remain so aloof from their subjects, Oberon errs while attempting to correct his failing. The ruling class of Elizabethan Britain have no real reason here to take offense.

In practice, Shakespeare has made as much commentary on the dream itself as on the behavior of the Elizabethan courtly class. He abandons the medieval function of the dream as a framing device designed to create a personal liminal space significant to a narrator – after all, there is no narrator. Furthermore, the play makes fun of the dream's Renaissance use as a source of disclaimer.

A Midsummer Night's Dream critiques the cynical use of dreams – which could in the absence of such cynicism be a source of truth – to evade responsibility. It is an exemplar of

what has become of the dream vision form in the new social and spiritual landscape. In the absence of real faith that temporal institutions reflect divine models, and lacking a true commitment to patient endurance, the dream vision has lost its potency as a genre to explore interior, personal themes. In this play, Shakespeare observes that loss.

As British social attitudes toward hardship shifted from a commitment to patient endurance to a desire for reform, dream vision narrators became less fully realized, and dream vision themes became less personal. Between the fourteenth century and the sixteenth, British attitudes toward reform moved from an internal to an external orientation, and this movement happened in parallel to an analogous shift in the dream vision genre. At a historical moment during which the Protestant Reformation was largely complete, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, notes the absurd extreme the dream vision had reached by eliminating the narrator completely and ridiculing the dream frame as irresponsible, where in the hands of the "Pearl" poet and other fourteenth century practitioners, it was a means to highlight the importance of personal responsibility on the part of the individual Christian.

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