The Afterlife of the Medieval Dream Poem in the English Renaissance

Orysia Lonchyna Mack
Bristow, Virginia

MA, The Catholic University of America, 2003
BA, The Catholic University of America, 2001

A Dissertation presented to the Graduate Faculty
of the University of Virginia in Candidacy for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Department of English Language and Literature

University of Virginia
May, 2014

Contents

Abstract

"The Afterlife of the Medieval Dream Poem in the English Renaissance" revises the

history of the medieval dream poem by attending to its previously unexamined influence

on narrative poetry of the late-fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Against the common

account of the fifteenth century as a period of literary decay, this study argues that poets

after Chaucer employ the dream form not simply in imitation of their master but rather to

assert for themselves the same freedom to write imaginative fictions that Chaucer found

in the form. Integral to the medieval dream poem is the idea of a dream's double potential

to be transcendent or illusory. The first two chapters show how poets such as Henryson,

Dunbar, Douglas, and Skelton exploit this double potential to create highly imaginative

dream scenarios that simultaneously interrogate the value of poetic fictions and their own

status as authors. In the third chapter, examples from Sackville, Lodge, and Spenser show

how poetry of mourning from the sixteenth century draws directly upon precedents in

medieval dream poem, transforming the form in the process. Although the sixteenth

century supplies fewer examples of poems with a closed dream frame, the form continues

to be influential, providing evidence of poetic continuity across the period boundary

between the later middle ages and the Renaissance in England. These later poems tend to

take the form of waking visions and draw an explicit connection between fantastical

visionary experiences and poetic creativity by calling attention to the "thought" or

imagination of the speaker. The fourth chapter notes the significance of dream poetry as a

background for *The Faerie Queene* and offers readings of several key episodes of

Spenser's epic in light of this influence. In the Conclusion, additional examples from

Shakespeare, Jonson, and Milton reveal that Renaissance authors even as late as the

seventeenth century continue to see the form of the dream poem as an image of poetic

creativity.

Acknowledgments

I owe a debt of gratitude to the many people who have supported me over the course of this project. I am so thankful for all of the members of my committee, each of whom was integral to the development of the ideas and arguments I explore here. The direction of Gordon Braden was crucial: always astute but gracious in his comments, he invariably told me exactly what I needed to hear throughout the writing process. I am grateful to Elizabeth Fowler for all I have learned from her both in class and in many stimulating and challenging discussions outside of class time. I find her creativity and enthusiasm inspiring. Of course, without the courses I took from Tony Spearing, I would never have asked the first questions that eventually turned into this project: I can now only apologize for my copious citations of his prolific writing on the subject of medieval dream poetry.

I am humbled by the support I have received from the Department of English at UVA: one could not ask to be part of a finer community of scholars. Various Directors of Graduate Studies have assisted me over the years: here I single out Jennifer Wicke, for her enthusiastic support at the project's beginning, and Dan Kinney for his help negotiating logistics at the end. Suggestions from Jim Nohrnberg and Bruce Holsinger were enormously helpful in the early stages. Larry Bouchard of the Department of Religious Studies served as the outside reader: his comments at the defense led to some immediate clarifications and to ideas for future improvements. I would also be remiss not to mention my appreciation of the English Department of The Catholic University of America, where I first learned to read literature.

On the domestic front, the list of family members, friends, and babysitters who have helped me out and encouraged me over the years is very long. I am thankful to my parents and siblings for the hours spent with the boys so that I could keep up my writing, even when obstacles were numerous and daily.

Finally, the most profound thanks is reserved for my husband, Michael Mack, for his love and endless patience during this long process. This work is dedicated to him and to the three boys, Adam, Thomas, and Peter, who matter most to both of us.

Introduction

This study aims to show how the literary form of the medieval dream poem impacts poetic representation in the Renaissance. Rather than simply ending in the medieval period, the influence of the form extends well into the sixteenth century. Contrary to the narrative of literary decay in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries—a story that is outdated but still not fully displaced—this afterlife is not marked by the decline of the form. Rather, a reexamination of poems that employ this form reveals, in many cases, works that are attempting significant poetic innovations. In the sixteenth century, and even later, poets continue to draw on conventions of this popular medieval form both to invoke and to revise previous treatments of the perennial topics for dream poems, such as love, grief, mutability, and honor, using the medieval form to create transitions into new material. But later poets also take advantage of the form's self-referential preoccupations with authorship, fame, and the nature of poetry itself to explore their own questions about poetic originality and creativity, finding solutions in qualities intrinsic to the form.

Over the past two decades scholars have increasingly recognized the importance of pursuing literary studies across period boundaries. James Simpson's offering in the new Oxford English Literary History, *Reform and Cultural Revolution 1350-1547*, serves as a fine example of a recent influential study that takes as its subject the transition from late medieval to early modern in English literature.[1] Simpson's central argument explains

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[1] Brown contrasts Simpson's "single-authored" study held together by an "overarching schema," with David Wallace's "pluralist" approach in *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature* (*A Companion to Medieval English Literature and Culture c.*

literary work in this transitional period according to the changing political culture, as "in

the first half of the sixteenth century, a culture that simplified and centralized jurisdiction

aggressively displaced a culture of jurisdictional heterogeneity" (1). His chapters then

make specific arguments about literary modes across this cultural rupture. In light of this

organization around literary modes, a striking omission of this far-ranging study is its

failure to mention—or indeed even to index—the popular medieval poetic form of dream

poetry.[2] Instead, Simpson deals with Chaucer's dream poems in a chapter on the elegiac

mode and focuses his argument on showing "an Ovidian tradition of love poetry" that

bridges the period divide, "in which the unfulfilled lover turns away from public affairs"

(121). Though his argument is certainly insightful, Simpson's approach does not

adequately account either for the phenomenon of the dream poem in its late fourteenth-

century flourishing, nor for its continued use as a form in the fifteenth and sixteenth

centuries.[3] Moreover, his analysis of dream poems does not give any attention to the

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1350-1500 3-5). The latter brings together contributions from multiple scholars to write
literary history in a self-consciously "collaborative" way, while still presenting a
"continuous narrative" (Wallace xi). Brown calls both studies "authoritative" but presents
their differing approaches as a conflict (3, 5). Spearing, on the other hand, points out that
both histories have seemed "conspicuously uninterested in the formal characteristics of
their subject matter, preferring to focus on its ideological content" (*Medieval
Autographies* 8).
[2] Lerer points out a similar omission with respect to the medieval lyric in Wallace's
Cambridge History, describing the problem as the exclusion of "a form of writing
dominated by a formalist criticism" ("The Endurance of Formalism" 9). The consequence
is that in this historicist project "medieval lyrics would seem written out of medieval
English literary history, as if lyrics themselves operated somehow outside of history" (10).
About Simpson, Lerer points to his preference for "discourses, such as 'tragic,' 'elegiac,'
or 'political,' rather than authors, genres, or themes" as evidence of "a historicist
enterprise that renders formalist close reading superfluous" (13n35). More bluntly,
Pearsall suggests that Simpson's "fundamentally political vision of literary history" leads
to distorting readings of "poems whose real energies lie elsewhere" ("Apotheosis" 34-5).
[3] He deals with *Pearl* and with Langland's *Piers Plowman* in separate chapters on
religious literature. *Pearl* is classified under "the biblical" as a mode, and from his

depiction of dream experience that, initially at least, defines the form. Even granting the necessary selectivity of all literary histories, the omission of the topic of dream poetry highlights the fact that the full story of this poetic form has never been told in a way that crosses over the period boundary.

Although much critical attention has been devoted to medieval English dream poems, studies focus mainly on those from the end of the fourteenth century, the period that gives us the flowering of the form, including Chaucer's four dream poems and such poems as *Pearl* and *Piers Plowman*. In these framed verse narratives a first-person narrator recounts falling asleep and experiencing a marvelous dream, and it is understandable that medievalists tend to center their attention on these most luminous examples. Though at times they extend their analysis into the fifteenth century or look ahead as far as Skelton's *Bowge of Court* or Douglas's *Palis of Honoure* at the beginning of the sixteenth, the period boundary becomes an impediment to further explorations.[4] Even with greater emphasis being given to works of the late middle ages, developments in dream poems of the fifteenth century tend to be addressed by scholars who take a specific interest in earlier medieval dream poetry, and who look ahead to the fifteenth century, rather than among scholars interested in the culture of the century more widely

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analysis one would be hard-pressed to find any generic connection between it and other dream poems: rather reductively, he reads this complex poem primarily as a series of biblical references.

[4] There has recently been an increasing amount of attention given to the writing and culture of the fifteenth century, as Simpson's and Wallace's histories bear out, with Wallace in particular seeking to "ease the bottleneck that has formed, in literary criticism and in curricular design, around late fourteenth-century England" (xii). On the other hand, Pearsall points out that Simpson's counter-intuitive thesis "amounts to a different way of regarding the writing of the two periods [late medieval and early modern], their boundaries reinstated" ("Apotheosis" 26).

or by early modernists.[5] Spearing's *Medieval Dream-Poetry*, which is still the starting point for most scholars on the topic, pushes the period boundary to the late fifteenth century with a final chapter on fifteenth-century English and Scottish poets. He looks across the period boundary in *Medieval to Renaissance*, though with a broader thematic focus there than just the dream poem.

One reason for this omission to date is the tendency of some scholars on the subject to see the dream poem solely as a medieval form: in this view, the dream poem of the fifteenth or sixteenth century is not examined because it does not exist. Russell, for example, ends his book-length study of *The English Dream Vision* by asserting the genre as "short-lived" (196), flowering only at the end of the fourteenth century. He discounts later poems altogether with respect to their place in the genre he describes. Likewise, Lynch's study of *The High Medieval Dream Vision* limits itself to an analysis of a particular subgenre of "philosophical visions" as represented by "Boethius, Alain de Lille, Jean de Meun, Dante, and John Gower" (4). She brackets even Chaucer and Langland as "later" than her set purpose, describing their efforts as representing "a self-

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[5] See, for instance, the collection of essays in *Form and Reform: Reading across the Fifteenth Century*, which specifically aims to provide a view of the fifteenth century that looks to the latter part of the century instead of stopping with Lydgate (Tonry 7): there is consequently a great emphasis in the volume on Skelton, but the emphasis is clearly on positioning his poetry with respect to the political and ecclesiastical cultures of his time. For all of the discussion of form in the introductory essay, the form of dream poetry goes largely uncommented upon: Simpson's essay on the *Bowge of Court*, to the extent that it examines the poem's form, is interested in placing the poem in "the traditions of classical and medieval satire" (186). Brown's *Companion to Medieval English Literature and Culture c. 1350-c. 1500* is a notable recent exception, offering Helen Phillips' wide-ranging survey of "Dream Poems." Other volumes that survey the fifteenth century but also contain scholarship on dream poetry include *The Long Fifteenth Century: Essays for Douglas Gray*, also with Helen Phillips as a contributor, and *Nation, Court and Culture*, with contributions by Julia Boffey and Helen Cooney. Julia Boffey's edition of *Fifteenth Century English Dream Visions* is an invaluable contribution, inviting further study of the topic.

reflexive and 'tertiary' form of the philosophical vision" requiring further study, which she offers in *Chaucer's Philosophical Visions*. A view that already sees Chaucer's dream poems as "tertiary," however, can contribute little to an understanding of dream poems that follow in a self-reflexive way from Chaucer's own efforts, such as the Chaucerian poetry of the fifteenth century.[6] Such an attitude toward the dream vision beyond the fourteenth century is similar to C. S. Lewis's earlier view of the form that conflates it with love allegory and with the label "medieval." Lewis's treatment of the form, which tends to be dismissive of later examples of dream poetry, is revealing: he reacts with shock for example that Copley would offer a "Late Medieval…continued dream allegory" with *A Fig for Fortune* in 1596 (*English Literature in the Sixteenth Century* 464). He can only explain the poem as hopelessly out of date.[7] However, an understanding of the influence of the dream form on Book 1 of Spenser's *Faerie Queene* helps to explain Copley's choice in using the dream form for his recusant response to it. Such late poems attest by their existence that the "medieval" form maintained at least some currency, even two centuries beyond the form's main flourishing. The fact that such a seemingly anomalous example serves to "outrage all chronological schemes" for Lewis

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[6] The result can be seen in Lynch's recent article on Henryson's *Testament of Cresseid*, which I discuss in Chapter 1 below. Her view of vision poetry remains fundamentally attached to the idea of the dream poem as a philosophical quest found in *The High Medieval Dream Vision*, and therefore she reads later authors, whose focus has shifted significantly, primarily as a decline of the form. Spearing objects to her "somewhat technical" application of scholastic philosophy to Chaucer's dream poems; he suggests that Chaucer's "prime interest was in natural philosophy," hence his interest in dreams as "one of the most intriguing kinds of natural experience we have" ("Dream Poems" 164, 167).

[7] Lewis's tendency to dismiss poems as "Drab," though amusing (and no doubt sometimes justifiable), is one of the main reasons his literary history does not fully consider the question of the legacy of the medieval dream poem. In *The Allegory of Love* he is less flippant, although his overwhelming focus on the moral allegory of the poems in his study ultimately limits his readings of the poems as dreams.

reveals more about the inflexibility of his chronological scheme and his view of the dream form than about the poem itself (464).

Clearly, rigid periodization does not help to answer questions about the influence of the medieval dream poem in literary history. A simple denial of the form's significance into the Renaissance creates more problems than it solves. There is certainly no shortage of dream material in Renaissance works: from Mercutio's Queen Mab speech, to Britomart's dream in Isis Church, to Adam's and Eve's dreams in *Paradise Lost*, dreams are a regular feature in Renaissance verse. But to what extent that poetry draws on earlier forms of dream poetry goes largely undiscussed. There has never been an authoritative answer posited to the question of what happens to the form of the dream poem after the fifteenth century.[8] Scholarly unease around period boundaries, however, is not the only reason for this neglect. Another practical explanation lies in the great variety of uses for which the form is deployed in medieval English writing. Phillips' recent survey of medieval dream poems demonstrates the difficulty of gathering the various characteristic preoccupations of the form into a unitary coherent picture. Her piece, divided into subtitled sections such as "Social and Political Dream Poems," "Framing Devices and Fictions of Beginning," "Narratological Themes," "Books and the Dream," and so on, calls attention with its multiple points of focus to the form's variety. She observes this explicitly as well, stating that the form "commanded a [wide] spectrum of subjects and styles," including "topics as diverse as political theory (e.g. *Songe du*

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[8] Two studies devoted to Renaissance dreams are Garber's *Dream in Shakespeare* and Weidhorn's *Dreams in Seventeenth-Century English Literature* both of which glance upon the medieval form, but ultimately pass over it. Garber recognizes Chaucer's dream poems as literary precedents to Shakespeare, but she focuses on differences between the authors, calling attention to Chaucer's dreams as "the record of a single consciousness" in contrast with "the multiplicity of Shakespeare's dramatic technique" (12-13).

vergier, 1376-8), elegy (*Pearl*, c. 1400), royal celebration (*The Kingis Quair*, 1424),

heraldic and political topical allegory (Rothelay's late fourteenth-century 'Half in a

dreme'), a Latin treatise on the function of music (*Gregory's Garden*, c. 1280-1300), and

antifeminism (Mathéolus's *Liber lamentationum*, widely known through Le Fèvre's

French translation, c. 1372)" (375). As her list of examples attests, it was also a

"supranational and multilingual" form as practiced in medieval England (375). Unlike

those who look to a narrower definition of the form for clarity and "depth," to the

exclusion of numerous examples (Lynch, *High Medieval* 2), Phillips' approach

emphasizes the capaciousness of the form and is an acknowledgment of the diversity of

material that any scholar on the subject faces.[9]

The variety of topics addressed by the medieval form has not always been well

understood. There is a history of conflating the dream poem with love allegory that has

proved very hardy. Lewis presents an important narrative in *The Allegory of Love*, tracing

a tradition of love allegory arising from the influence of the *Roman de la Rose*, and the

influence of the French poem on English writing should not be underestimated.[10] That the

Roman de la Rose is also influential as a dream poem means that love allegory overlaps

frequently with dream poetry. At the same time, the recurring assumption of the past that

dream poetry and love allegory are one and the same has been contested, and the two

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[9] A similarly capacious understanding of the genre may be gathered from Boffey's
Introduction to her *Fifteenth Century English Dream Visions.*
[10] Brown has written that the mid-fourteenth-century "revival in French courtly poetry"
played some part in the flourishing of dream vision as a form in England, but "this
explanation would be restricted largely to Chaucer" ("On the Borders," 22-3). However,
see also Boffey, who cites the manuscript evidence for a continuing "interest in *Le
Roman de la Rose*" and other love visions and *dits* among English readers "well into the
sixteenth century" ("French Connections" 113).

should continue to be decoupled.[11] Current scholars who attend to the English dream

poem in its own right have begun to paint a more complex picture of the variety of

influences on the form. Studies such as Spearing's *Medieval Dream-Poetry* and Kruger's

Dreaming in the Middle Ages show the various sources—biblical, classical, patristic, and

medieval—from which medieval dream poems, including the *Roman de la Rose*, arise.

Boffey points out that in the Middle English alliterative tradition the form of dream

vision "accommodated a range of purposes" including the "social and political

commentary" of *Piers Plowman* (*Fifteenth-Century English Dream Visions* 5).[12] Without

downplaying the importance of love as a theme in dream poetry or the importance of *Le

Roman de la Rose* as an influence (Boffey 3-4), scholars have made important strides in

exploring the flourishing of the dream form in England as a phenomenon worthy of

attention in itself.

The problem with interpreting dream poems solely as love allegories arises when

critics assume, hastily in many cases of such interpretation, that the *Roman de la Rose* or

the poems of Chaucer offer a generic template that subsequent authors merely repeat.

There is, first of all, much variety of theme and tone already in Chaucer's dream

poems—as any Chaucer scholar would quickly point out—and even those of Chaucer's

dream poems that most clearly draw on the *Roman de la Rose* cannot themselves be

characterized as straightforward love allegories. *The Parliament of Fowls* plays a

delightful game merging love allegory with a raucous beast fable and social allegory and

[11] Against the idea of "dream visions as primarily a category of love poems emanating
from the French tradition of the *Roman de la Rose,*" Davidoff offers the quantitative
analysis that of the poems she considered for her study of medieval dream vision "not
more than one third have courtly love as the primary theme of their cores" (73). Her
study is acknowledged to be quite comprehensive (see Lynch's review 644).
[12] See also Phillips, "Dream Poems" 375-77.

ends with indecision. The dream in *The Book of the Duchess* hints at allegorical
significance while presenting the particular mourning of a grieving character in dialogue
with an interlocutor. In his dream poems, which are foundational to the English and
Scottish dream poems that follow them, Chaucer creatively reworks the literary traditions
he inherits, including that of love allegory. By the late fifteenth and early sixteenth
centuries, poems that show the influence of love allegory are by no means bound to a
static set of conventions or to a predetermined resolution.

      With this variety in its expressions, there is an understandable uncertainty for
scholars about the categorization of the form. Phillips calls attention to the dream poem
as one of a number of related forms in the larger category of medieval framed
narratives.[13] She argues that the "genre's dominance is all the greater if we consider as
one genre (as we should) dream poems together with other texts, related types of *dits
amoureux*, where the narrator enters the core material through similar framing devices:
through entry into a garden or temple, through overhearing events, or waking out of sleep
and wandering forth into a landscape" ("Dream Poems" 375). In positioning the medieval
genre this way, she follows Davidoff, whose study of medieval framing fictions argues
for the widespread use of similar "framing fiction + core" construction in various kinds
of poems—*chansons d'aventure*, dream visions, debates, religious poems, and others
(61). For Davidoff the "frame + core" structure of these narratives and lyrics creates a
"before/after relationship" and is used by poets to show "a movement from need to
fulfillment" in a stable "narrative pattern" that can be seen repeatedly (61-2). Davidoff's
study is very thorough in showing the pervasiveness of this pattern, although she groups

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[13] See her "Dream Poems," as well as "Frames and Narrators in Chaucerian Poetry."

together the simplest examples with more ambitious literary works in an approach that tends to oversimplify works that threaten to complicate the basic pattern. Phillips formulates a more subtle explanation of the relation between frame and core when she states that the "Chaucerian framed narrative habitually exploits tensions—contrasts and parallels—between frame and core. It is a genre with almost built-in creative tensions: between lyric and narrative, between narrator-self and others, and (a particular favourite with Chaucerian poets) between the reader's sense of the concrete, physical book or page and our abstract experience of fiction" ("Frames and Narrators" 77-8). Spearing in particular calls attention to the writtenness of these poems in his most recent work in *Textual Subjectivity* and in *Medieval Autographies*. In the latter, he argues that autography can be understood as a medieval "supergenre" (5-6), and he sees English "dream poems and prologues," as "an important branch" of it (19-20). As a category of writing that "consists of extended, non-lyrical, fictional writings in and of the first person," autography as he describes it also includes the French *dit*, a form that predates and influences the development of the dream form in England (1, 6-7). How his analysis of homodiegetic medieval narratives might extend into analysis of early modern texts has yet to be seen, if studies attempt to broach the topic across the period divide.

What is clear, however, is the importance of acknowledging at the outset the easily blurred category boundaries involved in asserting the dream poem as a form of its own: Phillips warns that "dream poem" as a term, "although established in modern critical parlance, is a misleading critical term if applied too rigidly" or without reference to the "wide genre of framed narratives" (375). Similarly, Spearing notes that the French *dit* is a form with "fuzzy medieval boundaries," and that "generic terms have often had a

narrower and more precise sense imposed on them by modern scholars than they possessed in medieval usage" (*Medieval Autographies* 54). Indeed, Spearing starts his *Medieval Dream-Poetry* with a defense of the dream-poem as a category of its own: he acknowledges that it is "unlikely…to be possible to establish the dream-poem as a *completely* 'distinct literary kind'; but this is not to say that the dream-framework was merely a gratuitous or optional component of a wide range of kinds of medieval literature" (3). Spearing asserts the form as having a standing of its own on the basis of his observation that "authors of medieval dream-poems themselves seem to have been conscious of writing within a distinct literary tradition": thus, Guillaume de Lorris cites Macrobius in the prologue to the *Roman de la Rose*, and Chaucer names Macrobius, Alain de Lille, and Joseph of Egypt, among others, to create backgrounds of literary and biblical dreamers in the prologues to his dream poems (3-4). Although the term is not found in medieval usage, then, the dream poem as a form used by medieval poets is not simply a modern invention. Even Davidoff, despite her placement of the dream vision in the larger category of framing fictions, vigorously asserts the dream vision as a form of its own and "homogeneous enough to constitute a single literary type" (73). On the other hand, Donaldson, noting the variety of topics taken up by the form, describes it as "not so much a genre to which certain poems belong and conform as merely a sum of poems written under the pretense of being dreams but having little else in common except a dreamer-narrator" (Rev. of *Medieval Dream-Poetry* 192). This observation, put forward musingly and informally in a review article, rightly draws attention to the somewhat uneven expressions of the form. The fiction of a dream retold in the first person is remarkably unstable as an organizing generic principle: in theory at least, the options are

limitless for the content of a poem's dream core because of the open-ended nature of dreaming as a phenomenon. On the other hand, in their frames dream poems do conform themselves to conventions that they have in common with other poems. Dream frames are often remarkably similar in their construction: beginning with a seasonal description, they locate a dreamer in a bedchamber or walking out of doors, reading or contemplating, after which he falls asleep and experiences the remarkable dream that is retold by the poem after the dreamer awakens. The conformity of poems to such a predictable pattern, in fact, been held against the form by critics who object to the machinery of the dream frame as artificial. Of course, this artificial pattern should be no more problematic to literary scholars than any other poetic form with a strong generic pattern that poets adhere to with creative variation. But in the absence of a strong, single and cohesive definition for dream poetry, I argue that the form is better studied through the coherent patterns that arise out of the various uses that poets have found for the form.

The dream poem as a form is simultaneously discernible as a type and highly variable, and this malleability contributes to its endurance. As Phillips puts it, in describing the persistence of "Chaucerian structures," and "especially the framed narrative," well into the sixteenth century, "above all…it must surely have been [these genres'] formal potentialities which excited writers" by encouraging "combinatorial inventiveness" ("Frames and Narrators" 75-7).[14] In addition to placing the dream poem as a form within a larger supergenre—whether that of framed narrative or of autography— scholars also observe the form frequently in combination with, or containing, other forms, such as inset lyrics or various species of complaint, lament, debate, and even legal

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[14] She is one of the few to point out the continuity of these Chaucerian forms into the "late sixteenth century" (75).

argument.[15] The precise relationship of dream poems to vision literature in particular is a

debated topic, with a division in current scholarship between the terms "dream vision"

and "dream poem" for the medieval form. While they are sometimes used

interchangeably, the former emphasizes the visionary, philosophical, and "august" origins

and associations of the form, in which the dream is seen as granting privileged access to a

transcendent realm (Phillips, "Dream Poems" 374; see Lynch, *High Medieval* 1-4). The

latter term emphasizes the dream experience itself and a critical predisposition to view

dreaming in more naturalistic terms (Spearing, "Dream Poems" 163-7). In this study I

accept the term "dream poem" as the one currently in use and the more neutral of the two

terms: "dream vision" carries within itself the presupposition that what the dream

contains *is* in fact a vision, which is simply not true in all cases and represents a critical

rush to judgment in cases where the nature and status of the dream is ambiguous and

should be treated as an open question.[16] Kruger, for instance, describes most medieval

dream poems as purposefully exploiting the tension between heavenly and earthly

perspectives (*Dreaming in the Middle Ages* 130): these poems often hint at but do not

guarantee transcendence through dreams.

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[15] Huot's *From Song to Book* explores the interesting connections between medieval lyric
and narrative.

[16] At the same time, "dream poem" begins to fail as a term in cases where the form
purposefully varies from a closed dream frame: Dante's *Divine Comedy* clearly offers a
vision rather than a dream, although scholars often want to speak of it alongside dream
poetry. There are also instances where the poet himself indicates that what occurs is a
dream vision: Spenser describes Britomart's dream in Isis church as a "wondrous vision,"
and that heroine is unequivocally asleep (5.7.12.8). In such cases, there is no reason to
avoid "dream vision" as a term.

     The term "dream vision" is more accurate from an Augustinian perspective, but
only because Augustine focuses on "locating the dream in its relation to other kinds of
human 'vision'" (Kruger 36; see 35-43 for his discussion of Augustine's view of dreams
in *De Genesi* XII). "Dream vision" in modern critical parlance tends not to convey this
more complex understanding of vision, however.

With this project, I argue that the variety and malleability of the dream form makes it adaptable not only across topics but across periods as well. A forward glance to Wordsworth's dream in Book 5 of *The Prelude,* or to *Alice in Wonderland*, reveals that, in the broadest sense, fictional dream narratives obviously continue to be written in later periods, the dream form adapting to the literary conditions of different periods. My purpose here is to show how this transition occurs as the medieval dream poem is taken up by the Renaissance. Among the claims that current scholars make about the medieval dream poem, the most interesting reveal the innovative qualities of these poems, in narrative techniques and attitudes about poetic composition—and, more generally, about the value of fictional writing. By exploring more or less overtly the topic of poetic creativity, these medieval poems lead into Renaissance explorations of poetic creativity. Even as the medieval dream form undergoes changes in the hands of Renaissance poets, it continues to exert an influence upon their poetic choices. But these medieval examples should not be viewed merely as precedents to later ideas: rather, they contribute a significant chapter to the history of poetic creativity.

Spearing has recently argued that "the poetic of the dream experience" provided Chaucer and his contemporaries "a compositional freedom unusual in their culture," which emphasized "retelling" and "[valued] the authority of old stories" ("Dream Poems" 168; see also *Medieval Autographies* 122-27).[17] Chaucer may have chosen to compose dream poems in part to resist writing along predetermined plot lines—to some extent in

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[17] A prominent example of this value can be seen in Henryson's *Testament of Cresseid*, when the narrator describes finding an "uther quair" containing a story of Cresseid that rivals Chaucer's (61), and although he does not know if the tale is "authroreist or fenyiet of the new" (66), he proceeds to retell it. Thus, in telling his original tale, Henryson frames it as a retold story, but with the pose of uncertainty about whether it is old or new.

imitation of the process of dreaming itself, in which, of course, one does not know in advance how one's dream will turn out (168-9). Others have also emphasized how the form of the dream frees the poet to write more imaginative fiction: it can provide "a point of entry into a representational mode (sometimes allegorical) which is less restrictive than the conventions of realist narrative," but it also can allow the poet to "disavow responsibility" while exploiting the ambiguity inherent to dreams—potentially authoritative and profound, or deceptive and false (Brown, "On the Borders" 25). Boffey's description of Chaucer's dream poems as primarily "literary experiments with dreams" is an apt one, placing the emphasis on what is most significant about the poems: their literary experimentation (*Fifteenth-Century English Dream Visions* 2).[18]

It is this Chaucerian development of the dream poem as an experimental form that I pursue into the Renaissance. Though Langland's *Piers Plowman* is no less experimental or influential, its influence is arguably of a different nature: the religious, social, and political themes that dominate the poem's imaginative landscape also dominate the poems that follow from it.[19] The influence of Langland on Spenser has been recognized by Anderson, who identifies *Piers Plowman* as Spenser's "model of a Christian allegory in narrative verse that is at once encyclopedic, exploratory, satiric, and visionary"

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[18] See Edwards, *The Dream of Chaucer*, for a study of the dream poems that focuses on literary experimentation. See Brown ("On the Borders of English Dream Visions" in *Reading Dreams*) for a view that emphasizes the importance of the dream experience in these poems, and particularly the boundary between dreaming and waking, representing a "state of altered consciousness" (37).

[19] Such a perspective can be found in Barr, who has written about a "Piers Plowman Tradition" in the later middle ages (*Signes and Sothe: Language in the Piers Plowman Tradition*) and offered a well-regarded edition of poems that make up this tradition (*The Piers Plowman Tradition*).

(*"Langland"* 425).[20] Langland's use of the dream form is certainly not incompatible with

the observations about dream poetry with which my study is concerned: the poem's

dream form is clearly integral to its content, with the multiple dreams and awakenings in

the poem creating a great freedom of composition, not only for imaginative allegorical

writing, but for the layering and interweaving of different levels of allegorical

significance. However, recognizing that further study would be needed to integrate

Langland fully into this project, I have chosen to focus on the self-consciously literary

themes of the Chaucerian dream poem.

Poets after Chaucer, in deliberately choosing the form of the dream poem, may

have been attempting to access a similar compositional freedom for themselves that they

recognized in their precursor, even as they encountered the difficulty inherent to any poet

deploying a generic tradition: when handling poetic precedents within a genre, every poet

must strike a balance between imitation and originality. The dream form is in a unique

position to be simultaneously traditional and innovative. This is, in fact, the language

often used by critics about late medieval poets: Bawcutt and Gray both use the pairing of

"indebtedness and originality" to describe the work of Gavin Douglas, for example

(Gray, "Gavin Douglas" 151-52; Bawcutt, *Gavin Douglas* 40-41). But rather than simply

attributing these qualities to the poets themselves, or to their specific works, it is more

useful to see how these qualities are inherent to the form in which they write at the close

of the fifteenth century. Because of the familiarity of the conventions used for framing

the dream with a prologue and scene of awakening, the form is susceptible to the

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[20] See also her full-length study *The Growth of a Personal Voice: 'Piers Plowman' and 'The Faerie Queene.'* Miskimin in *The Renaissance Chaucer* touches on Langland's influence in the period (30-1) and on Spenser (267).

accusation of being formulaic and imitative: certainly the more artificial genres can be painfully mechanical when executed by lesser talents. On the other hand, all genres carry with them the sets of expectations they either adhere to or flout, with varying degrees of subtlety. The benefit for the poet of the dream frame—whether conventional or varying from convention—is that it creates the space in which the dream takes place, and with the dream comes the expectation, not only of originality, but that something marvelous or wonderful will be told: inherent to the form is the idea that the dream must be worth retelling.[21] Chaucer models this singularity: *The Book of the Duchess* describes, for instance,

> …so ynly swete a sweven,
>
> So wonderful that never yit
>
> Y trowe no man had the wyt
>
> To konne wel my sweven rede;
>
> (275-9)[22]

Thus, despite the recognizable elements recurring in dream poems, these poems continue to make claims for their own singularity, or to conceal that singularity behind rhetorical expressions of modesty. In either case, such claims are not easily dismissed, for they are tied to the poet-dreamers who make them, and it is difficult to discount an experience as personal—and at least potentially meaningful—as a dream.

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[21] Davidoff makes clear that dreams poems are only one kind of framed fiction; still, a framed narrative with a dream at the center conveys a particular set of expectations with respect to the originality of the experience described.

[22] See also *House of Fame* (59-65), *Parliament of Fowls* (113-16). All references are to Benson's *The Riverside Chaucer.*

This intrinsic singularity, which the dream form claims for itself, grants medieval poets access to an idea of poetic creativity that they do not often otherwise show confidence in claiming and can be viewed as a bridge into Renaissance ideas of poetic creativity, anticipating Sidney's formulation of the poet "freely ranging only within the zodiac of his own wit" (216).[23] It is worth noting that although Sidney does not name dream poetry specifically in his taxonomy of poetic kinds in his apology, the medieval form is present at the climax of his oration's lyrical opening. He describes the work of the poet using the image of the *locus amoenus*, a central convention of the medieval dream form, as it was to be also in the gardens of Renaissance epic. Granting to the poet the freedom of "another nature," Sidney writes:

> Nature never set forth the earth in so rich tapestry as divers poets have done: neither with so pleasant rivers, fruitful trees, sweet-smelling flowers, nor whatsoever else may make the too much loved earth more lovely; her world is brazen, the poets only deliver a golden. (216)

Sidney describes the loveliness of Nature's "brazen" world with a plain-style list of "pleasant rivers, fruitful trees, and sweet-smelling flowers" in order to advance the idea of a "golden" world of poetry as surpassing her. But his cluster of plain images already resonates with poetic significance: Sidney's description of brazen nature is calculated to recall the aureate descriptions of Nature's "rich tapestry" delivered by "the poets," and it is precisely the image used so often to depict nature in dream poems. It might even suggest the aureate style of fifteenth-century poetry.

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[23] All references to Sidney's *Defence of Poesy* are from Duncan-Jones' edition.

The dream poem, then, serves as an interesting point of connection between the medieval and Renaissance periods. There is an increasing awareness among scholars that more rigorous comparative study across the period divide would better our grasp of the continuities and differences that matter for the study of the literatures of both periods. In his article, "A Whisper in the Ear of Early Modernists," Aers cogently called attention to the omission of evidence from the medieval period by early modernists such as Barker, Dollimore, Belsey, and Greenblatt, in claiming the beginning of the "history of the subject" for their own period. He argues that in order to be able to prove that a "change" has taken place, it is necessary to define "precisely that against which it is being alleged the changes are identifiable" (186). Although more recent Renaissance scholarship, such as Maus's *Inwardness and Theater in the English Renaissance*, has critiqued and improved upon the claims of the above, it is still relatively rare for Renaissance studies, on the history of subjectivity or other topics, to consider medieval precedents to consequential effect. There is, now, a growing body of work on Chaucer and the Renaissance, and the most valuable studies have benefitted from attention given in recent years to Renaissance editions of Chaucer, uncovering the roles of his early editors, Caxton, Thynne, Stow, and Speght, in creating the Chaucer who was available to Renaissance readers.[24] The consequences of these inroads have yet to be fully developed.

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[24] A useful recent survey of the "early modern construction of Chaucer as an English *auctor*" may be found in the first half of Teramura's article "The Anxiety of *Auctoritas*" (546-562). Older studies on Chaucer and the Renaissance include Miskimin's *Renaissance Chaucer*, who stresses Chaucer's influence on Spenser's idea of his own authorship. Donaldson's *The Swan at the Well* and Thompson's *Shakespeare's Chaucer*, examine more specifically Chaucer's influence on Shakespeare. Krier's *Refiguring Chaucer in the Renaissance* is a more recent collection aiming to contribute in the wider field of Chaucer and Renaissance studies, with essays on a range of topics that cross the period boundary.

More precisely focused on the topic of dreaming, Peter Brown's *Reading Dreams: The Interpretation of Dreams from Chaucer to Shakespeare* is an edited collection of essays addressing the subject of dreams in poetry across the two periods. Despite the more specific subject matter in this edition, however, Renaissance dreams are still mostly discussed in isolation, bracketed from the subject of the medieval dream poem by the individual scholar's specialization, and perhaps too by the forward-looking bias contained in the term "early modern." Only Aers and Lynch contribute articles attempting to bridge the period divide, and these articles are limited in scope. Aers reflects on "forms of power and the roles of gender" as they manifest in literary depictions of dream interpretation, between dreamers and their interlocutors in Milton and Chaucer: he recognizes at the outset that his reflections are "marginal" to the body of scholarship on dream poetry, though they could be expanded upon (84). Lynch's article is quite limited, focusing specifically on Chaucer's influence on Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Another recent study of Renaissance dreams, Lewin's 2002 Yale dissertation, "Wailing Eloquence: Sleep and Dreams in Early Modern English Literature," also falls neatly along one side of the period divide. Lewin notices and catalogs, as she puts it in her abstract, "the great variety of ways in which sleep and dreaming are represented in poems written in sixteenth and seventeenth-century England, and how its philosophical texts approach the matter of dream interpretation." She notes, perceptively, that early modern poetic dreams

> draw our attention to the relationship between the imaginative faculty's
> production of ontologically demanding fictional entities and the origins of
> poetic invention. When considered alongside the parallel history of

oneirocriticism and early modern philosophy, dream poetry provides a

persuasive account [of] the interconnectedness of science and literature

with respect to one of the major challenges of the Renaissance: the

epistemological status of imaginative experience. (7)

Although thorough in her examination of Renaissance oneirocriticism and in the

philosophical questions raised by poetic dreams in the Renaissance, Lewin's study never

specifically addresses the question of continuity or change from the medieval dream

poem, a formal consideration that is fundamental to an understanding of how literary

dreams in the Renaissance differ from earlier artistic representations. There remains a gap

in an examination that prioritizes texts on the interpretation of dreams over literary

precedent—not that the former is irrelevant, but that the latter needs to be accounted for

as well, for the "imaginative experience" to be thoroughly understood.

In contrast with Lewin, Phillips downplays the importance of texts on dream

interpretation for literary analysis, commenting that medieval dream poems "show

surprisingly little interest in dream theory," and that references to theories of dream

interpretation within them are more ornamental than fundamental to an understanding of

this body of poetry, which is best understood through its "extraordinary formal potential

and virtuosity" and its interest in "the mysterious structures of writing and reading"

("Dream Poems" 384-5).[25] In making this point, she draws a distinction between dream

poems as a genre and "dreams within romances," that is, dream episodes within longer

narratives, which are more likely to be of "prophetic, symbolic, or psychological import"

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[25] While I agree that these seem to be the more fundamental preoccupations of the
medieval form, I prefer Kruger's more balanced approach to dream theory and fiction
(*Dreaming* 123-4); see below for discussion.

(385). Such a hard and fast distinction is not one that holds up in the Renaissance use of the medieval dream poem. Spenser draws upon both dream poetry and romance for the dreams in his eclectic Renaissance epic: in doing so, he synthesizes the different approaches to dreams represented by these different genres, but also holds different types of dream episodes alongside each other for comparison and contrast. Not every instance of dreaming in Renaissance poetry is indebted to medieval precedents, but identifying those that are greatly enhances our understanding and appreciation of them.

Indispensible to this understanding, and to my project generally, is the work done by Kruger in his *Dreaming in the Middle Ages*, and a summary of the main points he outlines is necessary here, as foundational to my study. Kruger models a useful balance between philosophical and popular oneirocriticism and literary analysis, and his work with primary sources is of great scholarly value. His work on ideas of dreaming demonstrates that the epistemological challenge that dreams represent is not solely a Renaissance preoccupation, even though, as Lewin shows, Renaissance authors take a particular interest in exploring and dramatizing this challenge. Kruger examines late-antique and early Christian discussions of the origins and causes of dreams that were influential both on medieval dream theory and on dream poetry.

Many of these early discussions—found in Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Lucretius, and others—center on whether dreams are externally motivated or arise out of an internal physical or psychological cause (Kruger 18). One position, represented by Aristotle, treats dreams as "essentially internal phenomena, caused by the interaction of psychology (sense perception, imagination) and physiology (the movement and purification of blood attendant upon the processes of eating and digestion)," and downplays the possibility of

divine revelation through dreams (18). In contrast, "an opposite extreme" is seen in

"Synesius of Cyrene (*c.* 370-414) [who] treated dreams as essentially revelatory" (18). In

this view, the "internal state of the individual" can inhibit or allow for the revelatory

nature of dreaming to be properly perceived (19). This distinction between externally and

internally motivated dreams is at its core

> a consideration of the relations between divinity and humanity. Dreams
>
> may be insignificant, arising purely from internal human process; if,
>
> however, they are meaningful and revelatory, they provide evidence of
>
> gods who meddle in mundane affairs. (18)

Kruger concludes that neither of the extremes represented by Aristotle and Synesius

reflects a dominant position in the middle ages:[26] rather, "in the period foundational for

medieval ideas about the dream—the fourth and fifth centuries of the Christian era—

discussions of dreams…tended to occupy a middle ground," either treating dreams as a

"balance" of human and divine origination, or offering schemas by which "under

different sets of circumstances, both divine (externally-inspired) and mundane

(internally-stimulated) dreams can occur" (19). Examples of the latter include

Macrobius's *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio* and Calcidius's *Commentary on

Plato's Timaeus*. Furthermore, among externally caused dreams, patristic writers also

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[26] He does argue for the increasing dominance of the Aristotelian position in the later
middle ages, as in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries "the dissemination of
Aristotelian material led to a greater and greater emphasis on the somatic and
psychological causes of dreaming" (89; see also 119ff.). But Kruger elaborates the
literary consequences of this development more fully in "Medical and Moral Authority":
see discussion in Chapter 1 below.

begin to distinguish between "demonically- and angelically-stimulated dreams" (Kruger 45), creating an additional double potential within an already double understanding.[27]

These late-antique discussions are the basis for Kruger's focus on the "middleness" and "doubleness" of dreams as they are understood in the middle ages. Kruger gives several examples of early medieval dream poems in which "angelically-inspired dreams" (128) stand alongside "anti-revelations" or "demonic temptations," as in the Old English *Guthlac A* (126), or alongside "physically-motivated" dreams such as Strabo's "De quodam somnio ad Erluinum," which arises out of a "digestive disorder" (128). He contrasts this latter dream, which evokes a revelatory dream before its decisive downward turn, with Strabo's longer *Visio Wettini*, in which the account of a long, didactic, and divinely-inspired dream is prefaced by a deceptive vision of demons (126). To Kruger these "extreme types of dream vision set the limits of the literary genre" (124). They also demonstrate the "double potential" of dreaming depicted in combination within literary dreams. Strabo's use of dreaming shows that "Already in the ninth century…the divine and mundane dreams of theoretical discussion could both be put to literary use" alongside one another, with "earthly visions…often suggest[ing] at least the *potential* for heavenward movement" (128). At the same time, "movement toward an understanding of

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[27] Kruger discusses dream theory in late antiquity in Chapter 2 of his study, and in Chapter 3 turns to patristic treatises on dreams (see 17-34 and 35-56). Despite his focus on "opposed categories" (25) and "double potential" (124), however, he warns against an oversimplified reading of these authors as holding "a purely dualistic" view of their subject (25).

religious mysteries rarely proceeds unimpeded in medieval dream poetry; the fictional

dreamer is, after all human and fallible" (129).[28]

Kruger classes most late-medieval dream poems as "middle visions" for

incorporating some elements of both the higher and the lower visions (129).[29] He uses the

example of the dreamer in *Pearl*, whose grief stands in the way of his acceptance of the

pearl-maiden's heavenly perspective (129), but the many examples of confused or

seemingly naïve dreamers in dream poems from Chaucer onward help to support this

view of the dominance of the middle vision. Against the tendency of critics to deride

these hapless narrators for their inadequacy as interpreters of the dream's action as it

occurs, we are better off viewing them as representing a common human point of view

with respect to transcendent mysteries.[30] Whether these moments of confusion in dream

poems are emotionally moving, as in *Pearl*, or played up for comic effect, as in

Douglas's *Palis of Honoure*, they act as evidence of the intrinsic "middleness" of the

human perspective. These middle dreams inhabit "a realm located between the divine and

the mundane" and take place "on a field of action neither confined to earth nor hopelessly

beyond human reach" (Kruger 130).

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[28] This description of the dreamer as "fallible" should be understood in the theological
sense, not in the sense of the "fallible narrator" of narrative theory (see Spearing's
discussion in *Textual Subjectivity* 148-9ff.).

[29] According to Kruger the "middle vision" does not arise out of the older extremes, but
has its own "long history," which he traces back at least to Lucian "in the second century,
call[ing] on conflicting explanations of the dream to help create a complicated
ambiguity" (129): in the end, Lucian's fiction is "caught between the claim of divine
inspiration and the suggestion of the dream's unreliability" (130; see also Kruger 17-18).

[30] See Spearing's sensitive reading of the dreamer in *Pearl* (*Textual Subjectivity* 157-73)
and especially his connection of "an attitude of patronizing superiority toward the poem's
first person" with "'fallible narrator' assumptions" (164).

Finally, Kruger's study also calls attention to the direct connection between dream theory and the problematic standing of fictions in the middle ages. He shows that writers such as Macrobius, Calcidius, and Augustine

> often concentrated attention on intermediate kinds of dream and on the
> middle realm that those dreams especially explore. Higher and lower
> dreams are relatively unambiguous in their ability or inability to reveal
> truth; but dreams like Macrobius's *somnium* raise a host of tricky
> questions about the relationship between the divine and the mundane, truth
> and fiction, abstract ideas and the figural means by which those ideas may
> be expressed. (35)

These explorations of the "intermediate kinds of dream" influence subsequent medieval dream poetry, shaping in particular its usefulness for raising questions about the value of fictions. Poetic fictions raise parallel epistemological questions to those raised by dreams, a fact that is recognized explicitly in Macrobius and others who follow him (see Kruger 130-35). The *somnium* is the third and most intermediate Macrobian category of dream, one that is true but that "conceals with strange shapes and veils with ambiguity the true meaning of the information being offered, and requires an interpretation for its understanding" (I.iii.10). The line is fine indeed between a dream that acts as an allegory and a fiction (*narratio fabulosa*) in which "a decent and dignified conception of holy truths, with respectable events and characters, is presented beneath a modest veil of allegory" (I.ii.11). The latter is Macrobius's description of "the only type of fiction approved by the philosopher who is prudent in handling sacred matters" (I.ii.11). Although he does not approve of fables that "merely…gratify the ear" (I.ii.8), he is not as

condemnatory toward those "that draw the reader's attention to certain kinds of virtue" (I.ii.9). He does not approve as appropriate to philosophy stories in which "both the setting and the plot are fictitious, as in the fables of Aesop, famous for his exquisite imagination," but he does not "[relegate these] to children's nurseries" or suggest they are wholly without value either (I.ii.9, 8). From Macrobius on, however, writers contend with the question of the value of fictions alongside questions of the validity of dreams, because of the way that "enigmatic dreams and figural literature call each other to mind" (Kruger 133). Dream theory imbues dream poetry with the self-reflexivity it displays as a form, as the literary dream simultaneously concerns itself with the status of the dream it depicts and with its own status as a fiction: "Framing his or her poem as a dream, the medieval author focused attention on a human experience clearly linked to literary process, and the reader of a dream vision was prepared for a poem that, examining dream experience, might also examine its own status as poetry" (135).[31]

This self-reflexivity intrinsic to the form is amplified in the dream poems of the fifteenth and early-sixteenth centuries, particularly in those that we describe as Chaucerian. This latter term is more a useful shorthand for scholars than a concrete category. Fox has called the term "so equivocal as to be almost meaningless" and has clearly outlined the many difficulties involved in identifying Scottish poems as "Chaucerian" ("The Scottish Chaucerians" 167-170). Still, the term persists to this day in common usage, though in a highly qualified way. Phillips associates the Chaucerian label with the perpetuation of the structure of the framed narrative ("Frames and Narrators" 71-

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[31] Kruger explores the connection between dreams, fictions, and mirrors in dream poetry at 130-40, arguing that the "view of the dream vision as self-reflexive receives support from the striking and pervasive medieval association between dreams and that premier instrument of self-examination, the mirror" (136).

7). Recognizing the difficulty of the term, Boffey's succinct definition is both useful and carefully delineated: "Chaucerian" poems "share a degree of self-conscious Chaucerian reference, and in certain ways explicitly announce their affiliation to (or in some instances their departures from) a particular tradition of writing which they associate with Chaucer's name" (*Fifteenth-Century English Dream Visions* 6). For English and Scottish poets after Chaucer, then, writing in the self-reflexive dream form was a way not only to follow a revered model, but also consciously to appropriate the model for themselves, taking advantage of the relative freedom offered by the form. Against the idea of an "anxiety of influence" as common to Chaucerian authors of the fifteenth century,[32] I suggest that the continued use of the dream form represents a solution Chaucerian poets employ to circumvent this problem.

In Chapters 1 and 2 I examine dream poems at the end of the fifteenth and beginning of the sixteenth centuries, particularly those of the Scottish Chaucerian poets, to show how self-reflexivity manifests doubly in their work, both as dream poetry, and as Chaucerian poetry. The Scottish poets are particularly interesting for their varied and creative uses of the dream form, and the first chapter examines how Henryson and

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[32] Teramura most recently expounds on the suggestion first made by Spearing (*Medieval to Renaissance* 108). Pearsall offers a fine corrective to the modern criticism leveled against fifteenth-century poets for their seeming lack of appreciation of Chaucer's "humour, realism and irony" and their common praise of his rhetoric and eloquence ("The English Chaucerians" 202). He writes that modern readers should not assume that Chaucer's early readers missed Chaucer's humor or genius. Rather,

> in the imitation of Chaucer, as distinct from the tributes paid to him, there were practical as well as theoretical considerations at work. He could give to his followers his genres, his language, his style, his metres, and these they readily took to do what they could with, but his other qualities, as outlined above and defined by modern criticism, were more specifically inimitable and therefore remained largely unimitated as well as unsung. (203)

Dunbar write dream poems that call upon the full range of dream traditions available to them to produce works that are experimental and creative, and announce their own authorship. In no way bound to a moribund idea of love allegory, these poems continue the dream tradition as often by flouting conventions as by sustaining them.

In Chapter 2, I draw upon Spearing's work in *Medieval Autographies* to show that in Dunbar and Douglas the late medieval dream poem takes an increasingly subjective turn in its presentation of its own authorship. Here Skelton's dream poems serve as a good counterpoint to the Scottish poets. Similarly self-reflexive, his dream poems *The Bowge of Court* and *The Garlande of Laurell* reflect different degrees of authorial anxiety and triumph and bound the range of the form's manifestations in this time period, but in Skelton's unique poetic voice.

With a few exceptions, the poems in these first chapters are still examples of complete dream poems with closed frames, yet these already reveal the fundamental flexibility of the form in its ability intersect with other forms—lyric and dramatic as well as narrative. As fewer of these pure dream poems are written, elements of the form continue to be used particularly in generically innovative or experimental works. The second chapter ends by examining the dream form as it is found in prefaces to works of translation, as in Douglas's prologue to the thirteenth book of his *Aeneid* or Heywood's prologue to Seneca's *Thyestes*. These works of translation show how the exploration of the idea of authorship that occurs in late medieval dream poetry helps to create a transition into the humanistic translation projects of the English Renaissance.

Chapter 3 takes up the continuation of the dream poem in the sixteenth century, in spite of its increasing fragmentation. Over the course of the century, this continuation

manifests with particular clarity in poems that express mourning, in love elegies, funereal laments, and tragic visions that take their form largely from the medieval dream poem. The topic of mourning, raised initially in English dream poems by Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess* and by *Pearl*, recurs frequently beginning in the mid-sixteenth century, with a number of poems presenting mourning characters—some explicitly dressed in black as in Chaucer's poem—in settings that are wholly or in part derived from dream poetry. These examples begin to omit the occurrence of an actual dream, but instead present fantastical visionary experiences akin to dreams, in fictional settings that recall the dreamscapes of earlier poems, and, instead of sleep as an alternate state of consciousness, call attention to the imagination or "thought" of the speaker. With this focus on "thought" the creativity of the dream form is asserted explicitly, even as the dream frame begins to fall out of use.

The chapter shows that, instead of simply falling out of fashion as new forms come into prominence, the dream poem is frequently the starting point for new forms and creative projects. The dream form is an important background to several of Spenser's shorter poems, particularly his *Ruines of Time* and *Daphnaïda*. The latter has taken a chronic critical beating for comparing unfavorably to Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess*, which it rewrites. Putting the poem into a context of more contemporary uses of the dream form—and not just viewing it as Spenser's direct response to Chaucer—helps to illuminate some of Spenser's choices in rewriting the *Book of the Duchess*.

Chapter 4 builds upon the previous chapter by continuing its examination of Spenser, turning next to *The Faerie Queene*, and the intersection of dream poetry with Renaissance epic. Despite the fact that the two *Cantos of Mutabilitie* are explicitly modeled on Chaucer's *Parliament of Fowls*, Spenser's use of the dream poem in his epic

has not been fully recognized. In this chapter I argue that both the dreaming episodes at the opening of Book 1 and the Bower of Bliss set piece at the end of Book 2 develop out of Spenser's interaction with Chaucerian dream form. Spenser's use of dreams primarily, though not exclusively, emphasizes their deceptive potential, but at the same time he sets these dreams in an imaginative fictional landscape that he values for its truth-telling potential. His debt to the dream poem is double, like the medieval dream poem itself.

In conclusion, I observe that Shakespeare illuminates the double potential of dream poetry by reflecting back upon the medieval dream poem and making explicit the qualities of the form that medieval poets themselves sometimes conceal beneath expressions of humility or inexpressibility. Thus, the disavowal of responsibility voiced by Robin Goodfellow at the end of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* appropriates to drama the rhetorical benefit of the framing device from dream poetry. At the same time it states that rhetorical function of the medieval dream frame overtly and confirms the significance of a dream frame to Renaissance readers. Milton similarly invokes the double potential of dreaming in *Paradise Lost* by using dreams to represent both temptation and creation in Eve's and Adam's respective dreams. Adam's dream of his own creation and placement in paradise shows particular debt to the medieval dream form, confirming the connection of the form with poetic creativity by using it to depict divine creativity.

The continuation of the medieval dream poem in the Renaissance can rightly be called an afterlife, then, not because the form ends with decline and death, as has sometimes been assumed, but because it persists after its initial flourishing, both influencing other forms and undergoing transformation in the process. To view the form

simply as a "minor genre in the Renaissance" is to discount the fullness of this afterlife:

when an "extended narrative" is "set in a dream frame" in the seventeenth century, this is

not simply a vestigial use of a past form (Weidhorn 70). It is one manifestation of a form

that has a much deeper and richer creative significance and is present in the literature of

the Renaissance in various ways. The form does, indeed, fragment over time; it is

combined with and subsumed by other forms in the Renaissance. As this happens, the

creative energies of the dream poem infuse life into new forms.

Chapter 1

The Scottish Chaucerians I:

Henryson, Dunbar, and the Range of the Dream Form at the End of the Fifteenth Century

In these first two chapters I examine several examples of the dream form as it is

used at the end of the fifteenth and beginning of the sixteenth centuries, to show the

importance of the self-reflexivity of the form for its development into the Renaissance.

The Scottish dream poems of this period are particularly interesting for the creativity they

display. The Scottish Chaucerians, principally Henryson, Dunbar, and Douglas, do not

just use the form: they adapt and change it to suit their various purposes. Although it is

difficult to generalize about the very different works these poets produce, some

overarching similarities in their use of the dream form do exist. These poets, first of all,

do not perpetuate a narrow definition of dream poetry—certainly not one tied exclusively

to an idea of the dream form as love allegory. Rather, they work with a range of dream

traditions available to them, both old and new: their poetry reveals that by reintegrating

Chaucerian precedents back into a broadly defined form, they are able to write poetry that

is indeed their own. In spite of their indebtedness both to a traditional form and to

Chaucerian precedent, these dream poems ultimately have the effect of announcing their

original authorship.

My focus on the Scottish poets in a project on the English dream poem is justified

for several reasons. First among these is the fact that these poets view themselves as

writing in a Chaucerian tradition: even if they are not exclusively or slavishly indebted to

him, Henryson, Dunbar, and Douglas all mention Chaucer by name.[1] Moreover, the

Middle Scots in which they write is not an impediment to reading their poems as

contributing to the development of English poetry. Fox writes of Middle Scots as "simply

a development of Northern English," and if that formulation sounds bluntly imperialistic,

he is quick to point out that "the poets who wrote in it (except for the politically

conscious Douglas) spoke of it as 'Inglis', not as 'Scottis'" ("Scottish Chaucerians" 166).

But the main reason to explore these poets' uses of the dream form is that because the

work of these poets stands in the transition between medieval and Renaissance in English

literature, their use of the dream form can help to illuminate the nature of that transition:

their developments of the form offer intermediate points of connection between Chaucer

and the Renaissance in England. Henryson's *Testament of Cresseid*, for instance, was the

most widely known Scottish poem to "English readers in the sixteenth and seventeenth

centuries" because of Thynne's inclusion of it in his 1532 edition of Chaucer's works

(Fox, *Poems of Robert Henryson* civ): its placement in Thynne's edition between *Troilus

and Criseyde* and the *Legend of Good Women* led to the widespread misattribution of the

poem to Chaucer—a belief that was not fully corrected until the nineteenth century

(ciii)—but it also increased the poem's readership and influence (xciv-v, civ). In this first

chapter, I compare Henryson's use of the dream form with Dunbar's to show how each

author's work bounds the range of the form in the late fifteenth century.

In the next chapter, I turn to examine another development of late medieval dream

poetry—its increasing focus on the individuality of its narrating voice, which is equated

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[1] Fox points out that "the Middle Scots poets are also differentiated from their English contemporaries by having a specifically Scottish literary tradition" that tempers the direct impact of Chaucer on their poetry ("Scottish Chaucerians"166).

with that of the poet. In this I follow upon Spearing's suggestion in *Medieval Autographies* that certain situations led writers to insert "fragments of individual experience into a general autographic experientiality" (100): he offers that the experiences of imprisonment—as in the work of Charles of Orleans and James I of Scotland in the *Kingis Quair*—and mental illness—evidence of which is found in Margery Kempe and Thomas Hoccleve—led these authors to explore the ways that these experiences mark them as separate or different from others (100-1). But in the late medieval dream poems of Dunbar and Douglas, as well as in Skelton, this sense of difference or individuality begins to surface also in poets' self-reflexive presentations of the creative act of writing poetry, and this awareness arises in part out of the nuances of the dream form itself.

The self-reflexivity that readers have often noted in the late medieval dream vision is related to the balance in the form between tradition and originality. DeVries uses the term "reflexive" in contrast with "representational" to discuss different readings of Dunbar's *Goldyn Targe*: in the latter mode, critics read the poem as "embodying a reaction to or a rumination on extra-poetic experience"—the defeat of Reason by Love, for example—whereas critics in the former camp argue that "the subject of the poem is the poem—or poetry—itself" (113). DeVries argues reasonably that the poem is best read in both modes, because of "the *Targe*'s complex relationship with the various traditions which lie behind it, and because this complex relationship is itself in many ways the subject of the poem (insofar as the traditions and the *Targe* itself are concerned with representing the vagaries of human experience, particularly the experience of love)" (114). His distinction works well not just for Dunbar's poem, but also for many of the

dream poems of the period: the way that the dream frame and the content of the dream reflect upon one another makes both the content and that reflection central to the poem's significance.[2] This self-referential quality can be found already in the dream poems of the fourteenth century. But the continued use of the form intensifies its intrinsic self-reflexivity, as DeVries emphasizes in pointing out the "complex relationship with the various traditions which lie behind it" as one of the subjects of Dunbar's poem. The poets who continue to write in this form choose to present their work in relation to their own experiences in the fiction of the dream frame but also with respect to the work of earlier poets—primarily Chaucer, with Lydgate and Gower praised alongside him. In the poetry of Henryson, Dunbar, Douglas, and Skelton, the intrinsic self-reflexivity of the dream form is demonstrated in different ways, as these authors deploy the form with various attitudes toward the dream content they present.

Robert Henryson shows creative and clever variations on the dream form he inherits: the earliest of the poets considered here, writing in the second half of the fifteenth century,[3] he is on the surface the most modest in his claims about his own authorship, but at the same time he is the one who most radically breaks from tradition in his use of the dream form, particularly with his *Testament of Cresseid*. Rather than using dreams for allegorical purposes, he uses them to explore the topic of literary authority and its connections both to political and to moral authority. In the Prologue to his tale "The Lion and the Mouse" in his *Morall Fabillis*, he uses the conventional opening of a dream poem to introduce the character of Esop, who appears to Henryson in his dream

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[2] Another example of a strongly reflexive reading is Cooney's reading of Skelton's *Bowge of Court* as primarily about allegorical writing.
[3] His dates are uncertain; for a discussion see Fox (xiii-xxii). Citations of the *Morall Fabillis* and *Testament of Cresseid* are to this edition.

and, at the request of the author, narrates the tale that the prologue introduces. Kindrick

calls this opening "traditional… provid[ing] a setting for a dream vision, employing all

the usual elements" (n. "The Lion and the Mouse"), but the question of why he uses this

traditional device remains.[4] On the one hand, Esop acts as a figure of authority for the

tale that is to be told; his presence suggests that the dream is an *oraculum*, one of

Macrobius' reliable dream types, in which "a parent, or pious or revered man, or a priest,

or even a god clearly reveals what will or will not transpire, and what action to take or

avoid" (I.iii.8). One possibility is that since the fable has a political moral, the author is

putting it in the mouth of the venerable authority so that "both the indolent ruler and the

insolent commons can be condemned" (Fox 264). In this way, the poet avoids taking

personal responsibility for speaking directly to his superior "lordis" (1594).[5] This reading

is aided by his description of Esop as "The fairest man that ever befoir I saw" (1348) and

of "gentill blude" (1370): he emphasizes the nobility of the oracular figure, and also his

authority over and responsibility for the tale being told in calling him "poet lawriate"

(1377). Gray posits that "Henryson's own imagination has created a handsome visual

image appropriate to an 'auctor,'" because of which "we are left with the strong suspicion

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[4] Spearing has observed that the use of the dream frame here is unusual because it frames only one of the tales, rather than the collection of *Morall Fabillis* as a whole (*Medieval to Renaissance* 196). He reads the framing as evidence of "consciously planned symmetry, focused in the centre" for the tales of the collection (195). The tale of "The Lion and the Mouse" holds the central place in the Bassandyne print (195). See also Fox, who argues that the "The Lion and the Mouse" and "The Preaching of the Swallow," together at the center of the collection of fables, are linked by their "themes of persuasion and prudence" and that these central tales point to these same themes in the collection as a whole (*The Poems of Robert Henryson*, lxxviii-ix).

[5] On the historical context, see Gray (*Robert Henryson* 142-44). He points out that references to contemporaneous political events such as the Lauder rebellion of 1482 are far from certain, though "there can be no doubt that the fable was relevant to 'this cuntrie' in the late Middle Ages" (143-4).

that Henryson was unaware of the image of Aesop as an ugly, wise slave" (*Robert Henryson* 40, 41). Whether unaware or purposefully altering the tradition, Henryson has composed his own "man of gret auctorite" (*House of Fame* 2158) for his purposes in this poem.

Emphasizing the authorship of Esop—in spite of the fact that there is no authoritative text of Aesop's fables—Henryson posits himself as the conveyer of Esop's words: the tale itself is presented as a direct quotation of the dream figure. In positioning himself thus, Henryson ties his use of the dream form to the humility *topos*, by which at the beginning of the General Prologue to the *Morall Fabillis* he introduces himself as the translator of the collection. There, he seems to give up all responsibility for the work with this disclaimer:

> Of this author, my maisteris, with your leif,
>
> Submitting me to your correctioun,
>
> In mother toung, of Latyng, I wald preif
>
> To mak ane maner of translatioun –
>
> Nocht of my self, for vane presumptioun,
>
> Bot be requeist and precept of ane lord,
>
> Of quome the name it neidis not record.
>
> (29-35)

As Gray points out, the "lord" who is supposed to have commissioned the work is not identified—"if he ever existed" (*RH* 31). Moreover, the posture of translation does not work for "The Lion and the Mouse," which poses not as a translation from the Latin but as a direct transmission from the original author. For all of the effort put into the humility

topos and dream figure as distancing devices, Henryson does not really distance himself from the substance of the tale. The humility *topos* of the General Prologue is set within a context of a strong defense of poetry. The poem begins with an argument strongly in favor of "feinyeit fabils of ald poetre" as useful "to repreif [man] of … misleving" (1, 6). He uses the commonplace image of the hard "nuttis schell" containing a "sueit and delectabill" kernel for an image of the value of a fable, with its "morall sweit sentence" contained within the "subtell dyte of poetry" (15-6, 12-3). But Henryson also defends the power of the fable to delight as "richt profitabill" (19): into lives of earnest study, it has the power to add "ane merie sport, / To blyth the spreit and gar the tyme be schort" (19-21). Here he subtly reverses the image of the nutshell, suggesting that the "merie sport" of pursuing the interpretation of the fable has value in itself and that the "subtell dyte of poetry" may itself be "sueit and delectabill" (16). Despite this rhetorically subtle opening, as part of his humble stance he disclaims any understanding of "eloquence / Nor rethorike" (37-8): but rhetorical arguments quite obviously play a large part in the plots and resolutions of the fables. The mouse, for one, saves himself from the lion with his long and eloquent displays of rhetoric (1431-46, 1461-1502).

Similarly, although Esop is the figure of authority in the dream, he tells the tale only at the urging of the dreamer and despite his own reservations about the value of such a "fenyeit tail" (1389-90). If, as the oracular father figure of the poem, Esop is supposed to "clearly reveal…what action to take or avoid," then his initial position is to present an argument against the fable—that the world is now so corrupt that his "taillis may lytill succor mak" (1394-5). The dreamer then persuades him by pointing out that he may benefit from hearing it (1402), and Esop acquiesces. Henryson thus allies his persona as

the hearer of the tale with that of his reader—who obviously also should not want to belong to the world of "deif" ears and hearts "hard as stane" (1393)—and reveals that, far from disclaiming responsibility for the tale, he actually takes responsibility for it onto himself, but uses the figure of authority to encourage the attentive listening of his readers. The analogy that equates attending to the fable with listening to "haly preiching" (1390) is concluded in the moralitas of the tale, when Esop encourages the dreamer to "Perswaid the kirkmen ythandly to pray / That tressoun of this cuntrie be exyld" (1616-17).[6] Not only must preaching be attended to, but also the preachers themselves need to be persuaded to do what they should: the message of the fable is good for every level of society represented by the tale, king (1575), "commountee" (1587), "lordis" (1618), and "kirkmen" (1616). No mere translator, then, despite what he says in the prologue, the dreamer asserts the importance of telling the fable and consequently is commissioned to help enact its moral, presumably through his rhetorically persuasive writing and distribution of the fable. His authority is literary, not political, but through this literary authority, his fable is designed to "Perswaid" more than just himself. This responsibility is hedged by the authoritative dream figure, who simultaneously bolsters Henryson's authorship in a dynamic that is mutually reinforcing.

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[6] In drawing the connection between "preiching" at the beginning and "kirkmen" at the end of the frame, I do not mean to give the false impression that the moral of the tale only admonishes perpetrators of treason, to the benefit of the elite classes. This is not the case at all in either the fable or its moral: the six preceding stanzas begin with a warning to princes, and emphasize the importance of their showing mercy to the common people. The exhortation against treason and that "lordis keip thair fay / Unto thair soverane king" (1618-19) is thus founded on the idea advocated by the fable that the king is maintaining justice among his people (1576ff) so that "justice [can] regne" (1618). The moral repeats the reciprocity between the lion and the mouse of the fable (cf. 1545-9).

In lieu of the dream form's association with love allegory, then, Henryson brings

out an affinity between the dream poem and the beast fable with the tale of "The Lion

and the Mouse." In discussing the *Morall Fabillis* in the context of the form of the beast

fable, Gray asserts that "This strange form, humble and sometimes despised, and yet at

the same time respected as the vehicle of wisdom…finds itself, interestingly, in the

forefront of the defence of poetry, in support of a rather different paradox, that poetry,

though it is 'feigned' is yet true" (52).[7] Henryson's use of the dream form intensifies the

discussion of the value of poetic fiction. He begins by invoking a type of dream that

Macrobius approves as reliable. But in his discussion of fictions, Macrobius downplays

the value of fables, including those of Aesop, "in which both setting and plot are

fictitious" (I.ii.9). In the dreamer's discussion with Esop, then, the dreamer does not

guarantee the usefulness of the tale, but he affirms at least its potential to convey "Sum

thing" that may be learned and born away and that—at some point in the future—"may

availl" (1402-3).[8] Stated as a question and a hypothetical—who knows if the fable will be

of value?[9]—the dreamer echoes questions about the truth and usefulness both of dreams

and of fictions. In choosing to add the dream form to his form of beast fable, Henryson

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[7] Gray characterizes this as an example, for the medieval thinker, of the problem of an "'impossible' fiction." He quotes William of Conches: "'by Aesop's fables we are brought to some insight into behavior, and yet they signify nothing true'" (Gray *RH* 53). See also Spearing, who points to beast fables as an "extreme case" in fiction, because "the literal sense is manifestly and grossly untrue" (*Medieval to Renaissance* 187-8).

[8] This formulation recalls Chaucer's narrator reading "a certeyn thing to lerne" at the beginning of *The Parliament of Fowls* (20). The two parts of the dream in that poem can also be seen as merging the oracular dream form with a version of a beast fable, though Chaucer reverses the fable's tight resolution and moral, replacing it with deferral and indecision.

[9]
  …Quha wait nor I may leir and beir away
  Sum thing thairby heirefter may availl?
  (1402-3)

uses a feigned *oraculum* to frame this rhetorical discussion of the uncertainty of the fable's ability to convey truth "be figure of an uther thing" (7). Despite the parallel uncertainty surrounding a dream fiction, from within the safety of a feigned oracular dream, Henryson indirectly reasserts the value of his chosen form, the fable. By referencing the debate over its value, he points the reader to his own answer about the value of his fiction, which echoes what he affirms in the General Prologue, and which Esop confirms by agreeing to his request. This carefully wrought perspective on the value of fiction stands in contrast with Sidney's much more confident estimation of the value of a beast fable. Unlike the philosopher, who "teacheth obscurely, so as the learned only can understand him," the poet

> is indeed the right popular philosopher, whereof Aesop's tales give good
> proof: whose pretty allegories, stealing under the formal tales of beasts,
> make many, more beastly than beasts, begin to hear the sound of virtue
> from those dumb speakers. (223)

The value of the Aesopian tale here is plainly asserted and offered as a "proof" of the value of poetry more generally. That Henryson combines the dream form with the beast fable shows his desire, a century earlier, to assert the same kind of poetic freedom.

The dream in Henryson's *Testament of Cresseid* takes a much more complicated position with respect both to literary and to moral authority. Though not a dream poem proper—here a third-person heroine rather than a first-person narrator experiences a significant dream at the center of the poem—the poem's debts to the dream form are crucial to its meaning, and, as such, the poem should be considered as a development of

the form.[10] A continuation, and revision, of the ending of Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, Henryson's poem demonstrates the flexibility of the dream form for use alongside other poetic forms. Patterson has described it as a "witty compendium of late medieval literary styles" but one that reads as more than the sum of its parts, despite its "poetic variety" (696). The overall structure of the poem is unmistakably indebted to the dream form. The opening carefully reverses the seasonal opening typical of the dream form, replacing motifs of the paradisal spring and *locus amoenus* with an indoor, winter setting.[11] Instead of May, the season is "Lent," with the "doolie" associations of that season (5); the sun, with "his bemis bricht," is setting rather than rising (9-14); and instead of experiencing the sun's light in a garden, the narrator views its brightness as it bursts in "throwout the glas" of the window from which he is forced away by an Artic blast of wind, in contrast with the temperate breeze of a *locus amoenus* (15-21). Like a Chaucerian dreamer, the narrator then takes up some reading, first Chaucer's *Troilus*, then "ane uther quair" which purportedly gives a different ending to Chaucer's tale. The remainder of the poem retells this alternate ending: the narrator stays awake but recedes

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[10] In this argument I differ somewhat from Spearing, who discusses the *Testament* in *Medieval to Renaissance in English Poetry*, but not in *Medieval Dream-Poetry*, where he describes the poem as "a narrative which includes a dream as an important episode" but not a dream poem (182). This is, of course, correct, but I argue that the dream poem is a necessary background, and that Henryson offers this dream as a variation on the form. My agreement with Spearing's assessment of the tone of the poem, however, is apparent in this section: references here are to his reading in *Medieval to Renaissance*.

For another perspective on Henryson's use of the dream form, see Lynch ("Henryson's 'Doolie Dreame'"). She argues at first that "many of the underlying themes of the *Testament* remain those of the dream vision genre, however thoroughly Henryson inverts and reverses the vision's traditional position in regards to its literary and philosophical concerns" (179). But in concluding, she moves to a position that views Henryson's work as "something more radically hostile to a convention that attributed an educative effect to a literary text" and that "anticipates the exhaustion of the genre" (196).

[11] For more on this convention, see Curtius (195-200).

into the background of the poem after the prologue, and the dream in the poem is given to Cresseid.[12]

In a recent article on Henryson's use of the dream vision tradition in the poem, Lynch examines how "the book [the 'uther quair'] has unexpectedly and entirely displaced the dream that ought to have marked the next phase of the poem" ("Henryson's "Doolie Dreame"" 179). Her essay then explores the consequences of this displacement, which she sees as destabilizing almost any interpretation of the poem's content. She argues that whereas the vision form can "authenticat[e] the moral or imaginative truth of the poem," the tale Henryson presents instead is just another story, which "competes with other versions" with no way to "arbitrate among competing interpretations" (179).[13] Because Lynch wants to read the dream of dream poetry solely as an authenticating device—instead of as potentially authenticating or ambiguous—her reading is ultimately stymied by what she sees as the "many internal contradictions" that result from the dream's displacement to a fiction in the poem (179). This unease with the poem's use of the dream form is largely based on an assumption of what the dream *should* do: "lay its

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[12] Although the narrator appears to stay awake throughout the prologue, it is interesting to note that he takes up the second book "To brek [his] sleip" (61). This line is suggestive of the biphasic sleep pattern recently posited by Ekirch as typical in preindustrial times, in which people regularly "experienced two major intervals of sleep bridged by up to an hour or more of quiet wakefulness" (300). Henryson may be assuming what is now unfamiliar information about sleep patterns: the narrator reads Chaucer before his first sleep, which he has no need to mention, and takes up the "uther quair" in the contemplative hour before his second sleep. Fox simply glosses "To brek my sleip" as the narrator's "wish to stay awake" (344), which is already a break with precedents in which wakeful narrators wish they could fall asleep.

[13] I see this interpretation as a natural extension of Lynch's tendency to read the dream in a poem as confirmation of transcendence. In this case, where Henryson's purpose is clearly to carve out creative space for his original ending to Chaucer's poem, it seems ungenerous to dismiss his effort as so completely destabilizing: is it necessary always to "arbitrate among competing interpretations"? Spearing's comment on the authenticating power of a dream is relevant here (see n40 below).

visionary imprimatur on the waking world" (179). Such a rigid understanding of the dream form leads to an interpretation of this poem that is skewed unnecessarily toward "incoherence" (184) and the decline of the form (196). In contrast, Pearsall offers that one of the poem's strengths is its "connectivity, the way all its parts knit and work together to make of a linear narrative a *composition* full of echoes and anticipations" ("Henryson's *Testament of Cresseid*" 172). This analysis is much closer to the reading experience of the poem, which is clearly well-wrought, even if this connectivity also helps to reveal inconsistencies and "fractures and fissures" in an "ostensibly monolithic patriarchal order" (181). Henryson's poem demands a more capacious understanding of the dream form.

As in the *Morall Fabillis*, Henryson ties the dream form of the *Testament* to the making of fiction. In support of his alternate ending to Chaucer's *Troilus*, he cites "ane uther quair," which tells the "fatall destenie / Of fair Cresseid, that endit wretchitlie" (61, 62-3). Scholars agree that this other book is an invented authority, which Henryson sets up to justify diverging from Chaucer's text, just as he used the unnamed "lord" in the Prologue to the *Morall Fabillis* to justify that "fenyeit" work. Henryson introduces the other book as an alternative to Chaucer's by calling Chaucer's story into question, but at the same time he casts doubt on the authority of the "uther quair":

> Quha wait gif all that Chauceir wrait was trew?
>
> Nor I wait nocht gif this narratioun
>
> Be authoreist, or fenyeit of the new
>
> Be sum poeit, throw his inventioun
>
> Maid to report the lamentatioun

> And wofull end of this lustie Creisseid,
>
> And quhat distres scho thoillit, and quhat deid.
>
> (64-70)

Here the distinction is not between a "fenyeit" and a "trew" story (a fable being the "impossible" paradox of feigned but true). Instead, Henryson sets up a distinction between two kinds of narratives: an "authoreist," (authoritative) narrative, and one that is "fenyeit of the new / Be sum poeit, throw his inventioun." These lines reveal much about the uncertain status of fictional narratives in the fifteenth century, and the difficulty for a poet to write something that is both fictional and new. He does not claim directly that an "authoreist" text is "trew"—even Chaucer's text may not be, after all, though Henryson refers to him as "worthie Chaucer glorious" and cites him as an authority on the sufferings of Troylus (41, 57-60). Rather, the distinction implied here is between a tale that is authoritative because it is old and one that is suspect because it is new. With this somewhat unstable dichotomy Henryson questions both the old (Chaucer's tale) and the new (the "uther quair") he is ostensibly citing. By questioning the truth of Chaucer's narrative, he creates space for continuing an invented story without making it correspond in every detail with Chaucer's.[14] But he also sidesteps writing a justification of his own "inventioun" by anticipating and acknowledging a reader's potential objection to a "fenyeit" tale, shifting the blame for it to his "uther" authority: having created the safety of a retold tale for himself, he proceeds with the "narratioun" of the other text, even if that text is "fenyeit." Hidden within his disclaimer is the bold assertion that he is "sum

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[14] Henryson's reader has to allow that the events he recounts take place before the death of Troilus described by Chaucer. This does not necessarily contradict Chaucer's account of the death of Troilus at the hands of Achilles, but it requires flexibility from the reader about the timeline of events.

poeit" himself, and that his tale is "fenyeit of the new…throw his [own] inventioun."[15]

With this rhetorical play Henryson reveals by concealing an assertion of his own

authorship. To claim as Lynch does that "by subverting the validity of his sources…he

also sabotages his own authority as a writer" is to take a subtle rhetorical maneuver quite

literally and bluntly use it against the author (196). Henryson stops just short of claiming

authorship for himself, but he also does not refrain from telling a new story.

The story he tells is a daring one, and the dream at its center carries the weight of

its ambiguous moral authority. *The Testament of Cresseid* has been and remains one of

the most debated poems of the period, and scholarly discussions have centered mainly on

the author's attitude toward his heroine: "redemptive" readings of the heroine conflict

with those that see the narrator's expressions of pity for Cresseid as insincere and the

terrible punishment inflicted on Cresseid as revealing the author's participation in

traditional misogynistic readings of the character.[16] There is certainly a long tradition of

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[15] According to Spearing, "This appears to be the earliest use in English of the word 'invention' to mean 'literary creation', and it is interesting to see the dignified term 'poet' used in the same line. Henryson is hovering on the edge of a fully Renaissance outlook, in which the poet is seen as a creator, and originality is one of his merits" (*Medieval to Renaissance* 167). This is true, but it must be noted also that Henryson hides the full power of the description behind the term "fenyeit," with its negative connotation of telling falsehood in stories.

It is also intriguing to consider Henryson's displacement of the dream in the poem to his fictional tale in the light of Ekirch's idea of a second sleep. Henryson may be offering a subtle critique of the dream frame as unrealistic and favoring a more naturalistic story for his narrator, who is simply a reader. His story does not rely on having a fantastical visionary dream. That is placed solidly within the story—which is already either ancient history or a fiction. Henryson thus rearranges the conventions of the form by consolidating the fictional tale and the fantastic dream within the core, and offering reading in place of dreaming as a more realistic framing device.

[16] Kindrick gives a good summary of these positions in the introduction to his edition. Patterson's is perhaps the strongest redemptive reading. Gray reads Cresseid's story as a tragedy, though one that is "not totally bleak and hopeless" because she "painfully and late achieves some self-knowledge" (*Robert Henryson* 207). Riddy's feminist reading

reading the *Testament* as "a fine poeticall way to expres the punishment & end due to a false vnconstant whore," as Sir Francis Kinaston described the poem in 1639 (qtd in Kindrick, Introduction, and Gray 163). More recently, Pearsall has voiced objections to the way feminist readings of the poem by Aronstein and by Riddy baldly assert that Henryson's purpose is "confirming the patriarchal order" (Pearsall, "Henryson's *Testament of Cresseid*" 180), but his own reading also sees Henryson's motivation as a poet as a desire to punish Cresseid for her moral failings (173-4). He reads Henryson's questioning of Chaucer's version of events as his disapproval of Chaucer's leniency toward Cresseid (173). But at the same time, Pearsall points to "the intensity with which we are made to care" about "Cresseid and her sadness" in the poem (170): his reading does not reconcile these two positions sufficiently to show how it is possible for the modern reader still to be moved by a poem that punishes its heroine so mercilessly. The answer is found the way Henryson merges the dream structure of the poem with a tragic framework: he strikes a balance in the poem between punishment and pity by exploiting the ambiguity of the dream at the center of the poem.[17]

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opposes the humanism of what she terms the "getting-of-wisdom reading" (238) in favor of a gendered reading of the poem. She argues that the "abjection" of the feminine in an antifeminist poem such as this one contributes to the "very making of masculinity" (244): Cresseid "has to have been exiled, repudiated, and stricken with disease so that Troilus can lay claim to the 'humanitie' which she attributes to him" (248). Though Pearsall is not entirely dismissive of Riddy's reading—there is "no point in trying to refute…that Henryson's poem is immersed in patriarchal discourse"—he points out ways in which the poem reveals "fractures and fissures within this ostensibly monolithic patriarchal order which betray its meanness, its contradictions, its weakness, its denial of the humanity of the humans over whom it presumes to preside" (181).

[17] Gray emphasizes the tragic outline of the poem, comparing it to a Senecan drama "with its scenic construction, its violent and extreme emotions, the horror of its conclusion, and the urgency of its 'sentence'" (165).

Pearsall shows brilliantly how in condemning Cresseid, the gods in the poem "[convict her] on a technicality," her blasphemy against them, rather than for her real but unpunishable crime, her infidelity to Troylus (176). And it does seem that Henryson's poem is not sympathetic toward Cresseid in the same way that Chaucer's had been: whereas Chaucer refrains from piling on, and generously offers to "excuse hir yet for routhe" because "she so sory was for hir untrouthe" (see V.1093-99), Henryson's ends moralistically, with its exhortation to "worthie wemen" not to "ming…your lufe with fals deceptioun," and to bear Cresseid's tragic end in mind as a caution (610, 613, 615).[18] Against the reading of the *Testament* as merely punitive, however, stand a number of examples of the poet's pity of his heroine, which cannot be taken as insincere without eviscerating the poem of its emotional power. Henryson presents the downfall of Cresseid as a "tragedie" (4), and the reversal of her fortune is represented by the loss of all her beauty. She begins the poem as the epitome of beauty, "the flour and A per se" (78), and falls through "filth" and "fleschelie lust" (80-1), to physical deformity and death. Parallel phrases describe her as the "lady bricht of hew" and the suffering Troylus as "pail of hew" (44, 46), leading to the reading of her "due" punishment as "poeticall" (Kinaston) because it fits the suffering she caused. But although this trajectory of downfall is the basic structure of the poem's tragedy, Henryson evokes a fuller expression of tragedy by arguing against her downfall as it happens.[19] Gray suggests that

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[18] Henryson does excuse Cresseid "als far furth as I may" (87) in one sympathetic stanza that imitates Chaucer's, but Chaucer's masterful tone is hard to replicate: this is perhaps one reason some readers unfairly misread Henryson's tone as ironic. Of course, Chaucer himself is not immune to the same criticism: Spearing points to a history of the misreading of Chaucer's attitude to Cresseid as ironically antifeminist (179-80).

[19] Kelly summarizes what he gathers from the poem to be Henryson's idea of tragedy: "It is a poem about a person of high standing who began in prosperity and ended in *misery*

Henryson draws on "the double motivation and double responsibility of ancient tragedy where the gods are all-powerful, but men are free to decide and held responsible for their actions" and that because this is a tragedy "it generates in the reader an immense sense of unfairness" (192; see also 175). When Henryson introduces Cresseid in the poem, she has already been abandoned by Diomeid, is disgraced, and "desolait" (71-7). When, "destitute" (92), she returns to her father's house, the reader is surprised and somewhat relieved to see her forgiven and welcomed back (93-5). It is a false ending, near the beginning of the poem, but Calchas' forgiveness of his daughter shows a surprisingly Christian attitude in a pagan world: though humiliated rather than repentant, she returns to a forgiving father like the prodigal son of the parable. At this point in the poem, though the reversal of her fortune is effectively complete—she *is* "desolait" in her exile—she is, of course, only at the beginning of her downfall.[20]

When in the next scene she complains to Venus and Cupid about her abandonment and disgrace, this does not strike the reader as an unforgivable offense, because it is generically consistent with the position in which she finds herself. Henryson's use of the genre of complaint for Cresseid as an abandoned woman is fitting at this point in the narrative, since from her perspective, her service to Venus and Cupid

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from which there was no recovery; it bewails this state of affairs, and it draws suitable lessons of mutability and caution" (*Chaucerian Tragedy* 257, emphasis mine). It seems to me that Henryson's poem puts a particular emphasis on the irreversibility of Cresseid's situation.

[20] Patterson writes that "both her roles of abandoned maiden and cautionary example [later in her *ubi sunt* lament] share an important characteristic: they assume that the speaker has come to the end of the road, either literally that her life is finished and she is looking back on it tearfully or that she has achieved a static condition which allows for no further development" (708).

has left her "all forlane" (126-40).[21] She does not show an awareness that her

abandonment by Diomeid parallels her own abandonment of Troylus, but neither does

she have much left to hope for, since she is "maid ane unworthie outwaill" (129). Her

father's welcome and vain hope that "Peraventure all cummis for the best"

notwithstanding, she realizes already that she does not have a future (104). The dream

that follows, then, in which the gods condemn her even further by afflicting her with

leprosy for the blasphemy of her complaint, seems both gratuitous and merciless, and not

just to the modern reader. Henryson's narratorial voice interjects an objection to Saturn's

judgment, building a critique of Cresseid's punishment into the text as it occurs, and

calling the judgment of the gods into question:

> O cruell Saturne, fraward and angrie,
>
> Hard is thy dome and to malitious!
>
> On fair Cresseid quhy hes thow na mercie,
>
> Quhilk was sa sweit, gentill and amorous?
>
> Withdraw thy sentence and be gracious -
>
> As thow was never; sa schawis through thy deid,
>
> Ane wraikfull sentence gevin on fair Cresseid.
>
> (323-9)

A reader could easily argue that Cresseid is not simply "sweit, gentill, and amorous" in

the story and deconstruct the stanza as insincere on that basis. But, on the other hand, at

some point in the past she was—"was" is simply a past-tense verb—as innocent as the

line claims, and the poet's critique of the god is so specific that it cannot be discounted as

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[21] Davenport observes that the motif of "the deserted, sorrowing woman" is typical of fifteenth-century complaint ("Fifteenth-century complaint" 129).

false pity: instead, the stanza gives voice to the feeling of unfairness created by the

tragedy, which Gray calls "choric" (175, 192). The language with which the poet

critiques Saturn is familiar from the *Morall Fabillis*: the moral to "The Lion and the

Mouse" urges lords to "to remit sumtyme ane grit offence, / And mitigate with mercy

crueltie" (1596-7).[22] It would be more fitting for the god to show "mercie" and "be

gracious," just as Cresseid's father is with her. The effect of the stanza is that the reader

feels that the sentence is indeed "to malitious" and "wraikfull." Moreover, the narrator

presents his objection as an apostrophe to Saturn: it is itself a complaint. This adds to the

impression that the girl is being treated unfairly for complaining to the gods in the same

way that the narrator just has with impunity.[23]

That her vision of the gods takes place in a dream is crucial for the emotional

impact of the poem. Henryson uses the dream setting simultaneously to punish and to

pity Cresseid, making his tragedy not just about her fall—which could still strike an

unsympathetic reader as just—but also about the unnecessary cruelty of her punishment.

It is a strategy that engages the emotions of the reader on behalf of Cresseid—no easy

task for the poet, whose job here is to move even the unsympathetic reader to pity,

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[22] Saturn's "fraward[ness]" to humans also recalls his characterization in Chaucer's
Knight's Tale. See Spearing (*Medieval to Renaissance* 174 and 177-8, especially).
[23] Douglas's narrator in *The Palis of Honoure* finds himself condemned and reprieved in
a similar situation. See Chapter 2, below. There is an additional parallel between
Henryson's narrator at the opening of the poem reading the tale in his "oratur" (8), and
Cresseid complaining about the gods in a "secreit orature" with the door "cloisit fast"
behind her (120, 122). The privacy of her complaint further undermines the gods, who
are concerned about the "greit injure done to our hie estait" (290), but whose public
punishment of Cresseid is also what exposes her secret blasphemy.

without excusing the heroine for the suffering she caused Troylus.[24] Henryson's strategy

is very different from Chaucer's: the latter makes Cresseid sympathetic by showing fear

and hopelessness—not cruel or fickle inconstancy—as realistic motivations for not

returning to Troilus. In contrast, Henryson's poem does the very piling on that Chaucer

explicitly refrains from—his gods "chyde / Forther than the storye wol devyse" (1093-

4)—to elicit feelings of pity from the reader. Henryson produces this emotional appeal by

placing the dream, and the ambiguous morality of its sentence, at the center of the poem.

Kruger has recently argued that Cresseid's dream can be read as representing a

late-medieval "'somatizing' of dream theory" (55) and that through the dream the poet

brings together the transcendent and physical realms "in mutual reinforcement" (63): that

is, "the medical details of the dream make moral punishment not only a transcendent,

divine decision but also the natural consequence of 'unnatural' behavior, while the

celestial qualities of the dream intimately tie a mundane physical event, Cresseid's

illness, to the judgments of 'deuyne sapience'" (55). In this view, the poem shows a

"unitary process through which mundane and transcendent dream causes both operate"

(55). This is certainly one aspect of the way that the poem uses the dream: it is a "'self-

reflecting' dream, which mirrors Cresseid's cares and her condition—in a precise medical

way" (Gray 181). But an exclusive focus on a medicalized discourse or on the unity of

medical and moral process in the dream runs the risk of glossing over the very crucial

dynamic of the dream's moral ambiguity that the poem's narrator seeks to bring out as

problematic: it rationalizes and "naturalize[s]" (Kruger 55) what is supposed to be

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[24] I agree with Spearing that "It would be difficult not to feel pity for a woman who has
suffered this reversal of her earthly situation, whatever she might have done to deserve it,
and *The Testament of Cresseid* is a deeply compassionate poem" (179).

shocking and unexpected.[25] The "somatic" consequence of the dream is jarring both to

Cresseid and to the reader (see l. 350). On the one hand, Cresseid's dream gives the

reader a vision of pagan gods whose authority is not binding on the medieval Christian

reader and whom the reader—and the poet himself apparently—need not worry about

offending.[26] On the other hand, as planetary deities, representing the forces of nature to a

medieval audience, their power is perhaps not so easily explained away and is quite

terrifying (see Kruger 52): Saturn is "fraward and angrie" toward humans and Cynthia,

the inconstant moon, can only echo Saturn's judgment in her "sentence diffinityve"

(333), just as she can only reflect the light of the sun and has "of hir selfe…nane uther"

(259; see Fox lxxxvi). Kruger's reading, however, insists on the position of the planetary

gods as 'Participant of devyne sapience' (289): that is how their power would have been

viewed, as "influence over contingent things" (Gray 192). But, as it is placed in the

poem, this line offers at most an ambiguous statement of the gods' moral authority. The

description comes from Cupid, addressing the group of gods gathered to bolster

themselves against Cresseid's complaint. Cupid's speech hardly gives an objective view

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[25] I do not quarrel with Kruger's research into the late-medieval "somatizing" of dream theory, just with his literary interpretation here, which is intriguing but does not offer as persuasive a reading of the poem as his earlier work linking medieval dream theory and poetry. Henryson is working not with unmediated dream theory but with a literary tradition of dreams as they have been used in poetry.

[26] This observation points to the principal weakness in Kruger's reading of Cresseid's dream. Although he shows how her dream could be read "in a wholly physical, medicalized way," he argues that Henryson does not make Cresseid's dream a "purely physical phenomenon" (55): rather, the poet "merges a religious, moralizing language with a medical, physicalizing one," with the transcendent and physical realms reinforcing one another (55). Kruger's reading does not account for the distance Henryson creates between the medieval present and the pagan past, which can be seen in the narrator's criticism of Saturn as well as in temporal cues: see Spearing 172-3, on Henryson's treatment of the pagan past as "having a religious outlook of its own" that is "not to be dismissed as merely erroneous" but also not to be conflated with a medieval Christian religious outlook.

of the gods: indeed, this line prefaces a piece of rather hyperbolic rhetoric claiming the

"greit injure done to [the gods'] hie estate" (290) and that "Was never to goddes done sic

violence" (292). It would seem that if Henryson's pagan gods are transcendent, they are

also prone to exaggeration and overreaction, or "touchy and callous," as Spearing puts it

(174).

Cresseid's dream has a concrete power in the poem that dream poems do not often

convey.[27] Awakenings in dream poems often occur when a somatic or sensory moment

within the dream disrupts it sufficiently to propel the dreamer back into the waking

world: riotous birdsong (the *Parliament of Fowls*), the toll of a bell (the *Book of the*

Duchess), the firing of a cannon (*The Goldyn Targe*), or falling off a bridge (*The Palis of*

Honoure). In these cases, however, the reality of the dream remains within the mind of

the dreamer and can only be translated into a poem. The horror of Cresseid's "doolie

dreame" and "uglye visioun" (344) is that its ugliness is immediately enacted in the

poem's reality. Spearing describes it as "a pagan equivalent to a Christian mystical

vision, in which, it must be assumed, she sees the truth; and the truth is horrifying"

(*Medieval to Renaissance* 174). Yet, if one of the characteristics of a mystical vision is

the privileged access to a transcendent realm for the visionary—an opportunity for

spiritual illumination—then what this heroine experiences is not an equivalent but an

inversion of such a vision: she is condemned with physical consequences by her vision

with no opportunity for repentance upon awakening in the real world. This dream flouts

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[27] Kruger, however, suggests that they might do just that and that "Recognizing the
somatic possibilities of the dream may move us away from the simple allegorizing and
spiritualizing tendencies of much dream-vision criticism" (62). This is indeed a welcome
revision of a criticism that can get locked into "simple allegorizing and spiritualizing."
For his reading of the *Book of the Duchess*, see 64-83.

the usual expectations of dream poetry dramatically: the gods of the dream neither

respect the dream boundary, nor simply foretell the future outside of the dream, but enact

the punishment of the heroine, directly affecting the heroine physically and publicly in

the waking world.[28] Henryson exploits the ambiguous status of dreams to underscore the

ambiguous morality of the gods but couples this ambiguity with an irreversible

punishment to amplify the emotional impact of Cresseid's tragedy.

The conclusion of the poem, with Cresseid's realization of Troylus' enduring

love—his "treuth" (573)—intensifies the pathos of her fall, but also to some extent

restores her dignity in death, providing her with a moment of self-knowledge.[29]

Cresseid's movement through Boethian Stoicism—as she first learns to "mak vertew of

ane neid" (478)—to self-awareness—by which she concludes, "Nane but my self as now

I will accuse" (574)—does not excuse the gods, but it paradoxically elevates human

dignity as Cresseid becomes fully aware of her own human weakness. Her self-

accusation strikes some as another example of Henryson's antifeminist bias, as she seems

to confirm and internalize attitudes against women within herself: Cresseid's realization

is in fact simpler and more powerful, and a rejection of gender stereotypes. Both Lynch

and McDiarmid point out that her self-accusation is often misread as a reference to her

"earlier mistake of blaming the gods" when in fact she is pulling back from her statement

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[28] Kelly identifies Cresseid's dream as an "action dream," in which "something physical [happens to] the dreamer in the dream that stays with the dreamer when he or she awakes" (*Chaucerian Tragedy* 235). He offers several precedents (all positive and affirming in nature) from medieval dream poetry, but notes that "Miraculous dreams of this sort are most frequently met with in hagiographic literature" (236). That such dreams often involve the miraculous curing of illnesses bolsters the idea of Cresseid's dream as an inversion of a mystical vision.

[29] In this I agree with Gray that the poem offers a tragic vision, rather than redemption (207), though the end of the poem is concerned with recognitions, with Cresseid's self-recognition at the climax.

two lines earlier that "Thocht sum [women] be trew, I wait right few ar thay" (572; Lynch 186; McDiarmid 38). In the end—and only in the very last line of her complaint— she does not blame womankind for her own inconstancy.

The power of Henryson's conclusion for Cresseid depends also on the poet's rearrangement of the underlying dream form with which the poem begins. After the dream leaves her a leper, Cresseid makes her second complaint of the poem, a long complaint against Fortune in the form of an *ubi sunt* lament (407-469). She lists her losses with a series of traditional images: she has lost a luxurious bedchamber (416-24), the joys of spring and Maying in a garden (425-33), and the "fame and hie honour" of being considered the "flour" among women (434-5).[30] All of these images have associations with dream poetry in addition to their traditional meanings, but the image of the bedchamber is particularly resonant: in this context immediately following Cresseid's fateful dream, it represents the ordinary comfort of sleep and dreaming that she has lost as a result of her punishment. At the same time it is the locus of her earlier sensual lifestyle, now past, and with its grief at the passing of earthly luxuries, is a traditional *memento mori*, foreshadowing her death later in the poem.[31] Likewise, the next stanza recalls conventional springtime prologues to dream poems, which begin with dreamers walking in spring gardens, "with thir greissis gay / And fresche flowris, quhilk the quene

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[30] That the content of her complaint is traditional does not take away from the power of Henryson's arrangement of his material: for an interesting comparison, see Davenport's analysis of the Lydgatian *Lament for the Duchess of Gloucester* ("Fifteenth-century complaints" 142-44 and 148-52.) The anonymous poem is undated, as is Henryson's poem, but must have been written after the fall of Eleanor Cobham in 1441 (Davenport 142). Like Cresseid, Eleanor wants her fate to serve as a warning to others. Her refrain "All women may be ware by me" ends each stanza. She also complains about her loss of rich fabrics and clothing (113-15).

[31] Carruthers discusses the significance of the bedchamber to medieval monastic dream visions in *The Craft of Thought* (171ff.).

Floray / Had paintit plesandly in everie pane" (425-7). The reference to herself as a

"flour" reinforces the reference to the courtly garden and is perhaps a subtle allusion to

Alceste, the faithful wife, imaged by Chaucer as the daisy in his Prologue to the *Legend*

of Good Women.

All of these images from Cresseid's complaint refer back to the dream form

implied by the opening of the poem. The narrator's retreat from his "oratur" (8) to his

"chalmer" (28), where he reads "To brek [his] sleip" (61), parallels Cresseid's reference

to the bedchamber in her complaint, as well as the "secreit orature" where her fateful

dream takes place (120). Cresseid repeats the narrator's description of her from the

beginning of the poem (78): but if she was once a flower, she is now "decayit" (436). The

springtime setting for dream poetry alluded to here is also present in its absence at the

beginning of the poem. There, in spite of the cold weather, the narrator's thoughts

surprisingly still turn to Venus, but she is raised as a reminiscence of his youth: he thinks

of praying to her, that his "faidit hart of lufe scho wald mak grene," but he is too busy

tending the fire that will warm his cold body to do so (24, 26). The narrator presents the

"doolie sessoun" as appropriate for his "cairfull dyte" (1), and the season's cold reminds

him of his present old age and of his distance from his own warm-blooded "youthheid"

(30). Thus, the poem sets itself up as a contrast to a dream poem, and the narrator's body

presents an image of that contrast. When Cresseid experiences her tragedy, then, as a

series of reminiscences of what she has lost—and the images she recalls also use the

same images from dream poetry—her experience parallels both the form of the poem and

the bodily experience of the narrator.

This parallelism culminates with Cresseid's growing understanding of Fortune as

the poem progresses. In her complaint about her ill fortune, she sees Fortune as "fikkill quhen scho beginnis and steiris" (469). It is only at the end of the poem—when she recognizes that her real loss has been her own rejection of the faithful love of Troylus— that she can understand her true position with respect to Fortune. In her refrain of recognition, "O fals Cresseid and trew knicht Troylus!" (546), she recognizes the similarity between herself and Fortune. Cresseid comes to a profound realization of her own humanity: she is no longer, in her own mind, just a "mirror" of misfortune for others (457).[32] Both Troylus and Fortune have become mirrors to her of her own "unstabilnes" (568). She cannot just blame "the greit unstabilnes, / Brukkill as glas" on Fortune (568-9): "Becaus [she] knaw[s]" it, she now sees it in herself, but, most importantly, in accusing her "self," she shows that she is a "self." This recognition is neither a paradoxical triumph for Cresseid—the downward pull of the tragedy is undeniable—nor is it a confirmation that all of Cresseid's misfortune was deserved because of her own "unstabilnes." What Cresseid's lines do show is an idea of the human position in the face of the "great unstabilnes": rather than weakly "excus[ing]" Cresseid for her "brukkilnes" as the narrator does at the beginning, the poem as a whole looks directly at human "brukkilnes"—imaged by Cresseid as well as by the aged narrator—unflattering as it is.[33]

Cresseid's words dominate the end of the poem: she ends the poem in her own

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[32] Patterson writes perceptively of Cresseid's complaint as "an attempt to avoid…experience" and a "defensive pause" that marks her resistance to learning "a lesson more painful and more personal" (709). Spearing expands upon this point, arguing that "she avoids subjectivity" when she "turns[s] herself into an object" by which others may learn (184).

[33] Although the poem's presentation of Cresseid is clearly not gender-neutral, neither is its conclusion exclusively about gender (see Pearsall, qtd n.16 above). I read Cresseid's conclusion and testament as the real conclusion of the poem, with the assessment in the last stanza as a weak final word that is inadequate to the tragic vision that has taken place.

words, if not on her own terms, writing her "testament," from which the poem takes its

title (576). There is not much left to say after her pivotal recognition scene and testament,

as the poem makes clear. Neither Troylus nor the narrator adds anything more of

substance to her story: "Sum said" that Troylus made a tomb for her, with a terse epitaph

declaring her death (603ff). His response to the tale of her death is appropriate for a

tragedy: he reacts with "wo" and "greit sorrow" and with the same physiological

symptoms that he suffered when first abandoned by her (599-600). But there is nothing

left for him to say: "Siching full sadlie," he says, "I can no moir; / Scho was untrew and

wo is me thairfoir" (601-2). The poem's one-stanza conclusion is a perfunctory gesture at

drawing a moral for female readers, and it draws attention to the inadequacy of

concluding a tragedy with a moral. More appropriate is the final line, recognizing that

there is nothing more to say: "Sen scho is deid I speik of hir no moir" (616). In a gesture

that is familiar from final scenes in Renaissance tragedies, the poem ends both with

testament and silence. In Chapter 3, I will examine some later examples of poems that

find a similarly tragic blueprint in the form of the dream poem.

If Henryson clearly demonstrates creativity in his deployment and rearrangement

of the elements of the dream form, William Dunbar's works show that great variety can

be achieved from within the conventions of the dream form. Late medieval dream poems

in general tend to be faulted either for a dull style, dutifully but ploddingly adhering sets

of formulaic conventions, or, instead, for an aureate style that is short on substance, in

which, despite a scintillating surface, the allegory does not amount to much.[34] Critics

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[34] This distinction is most apparent in Lewis, *The Allegory of Love*, 232-96. He describes,
for example, William Nevill's *The Castle of Pleasure* as the "the nadir of the whole genre"
of love allegory and faults the author for being "a very dull young man" who writes a

have used both styles as evidence for "the death of allegory" (Speirs 57), a conclusion

that occurs when poems are judged solely on their allegorical content. Dunbar's poem

"Ane Dreme" and his better-known dream allegory *The Goldyn Targe* are two poems that

model this distinction in style and the problems of interpretation that arise when dream

poetry is conflated with allegory by critics. [35]

 In the first poem, the speaker is "halff sleiping" in his bedchamber when suddenly

the room seems "all depent with many divers hew / Of all the nobill storyis, ald and new,

/ Sen oure first father formed was of clay" (1, 3-5).[36] A perfunctory gesture at an aureate

beginning, with the references to painting, colors, and "aray" of the chamber, introduces

a much less scintillating poem, as a long catalog of personifications traipses past the poet

in his bed. Despite the pleasant company that enters his chamber, the poet is unable to

cast aside his "melancholie" (49). The cause of his distress is revealed in the middle of

the poem: he has "lang maid service [in the court] in vane" and is melancholy because he

has received no reward (53-4). Personifications such as Considerance, Ressoun,

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formulaic poem (253). In contrast, he observes in other poems "a weakening of the genuinely allegorical impulse. The trappings of allegory are retained but the true interest of the poets lies elsewhere, sometimes in satire, sometimes in amorous dialectic, and often in *mere* rhetoric and style" (251, emphasis added). The fault in this kind of analysis is that one may lose sight of what a poem *is* by focusing on what it is not. Also, perhaps underlying this distinction is Lewis's tendency to see sixteenth-century verse as either "drab" or "golden" (*English Literature in the Sixteenth Century*).

[35] Few of Dunbar's poems can be dated with certainty (Lewis, *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century*, 90-1). Born c. 1460, he was probably younger than Henryson, whose dates are uncertain, and older than his contemporary Gavin Douglas. He was active in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, though Douglas's *Palis of Honoure* (c. 1501) probably predates some of Dunbar's work. Some of his occasional poems can be dated from the events to which they refer (*The Thrissil and the Rois* refers to the marriage of James IV of Scotland to Princess Margaret of England and her arrival in Scotland in 1503). Some poems can be dated from early prints (1508 or earlier): poems known only through manuscript miscellanies are much harder to date. "Ane Dreme" is preserved in the Reidpeth MS (1622). *The Goldyn Targe* was printed by Chepman and Myllar in 1508.

[36] References to Dunbar are to Kinsley's edition.

Discretioun, Temperance, and Patience then counsel him to wait patiently for the prince

to grant his benefice (107). The strangeness of this theme for a dream poem warrants a

closer inspection: despite the first lines, any merit to the poem will not be found in an

aureate style. However, this poem is dismissed by one of Dunbar's modern editors not for

its plain style—which would seem at least at first glance a fair enough critique—but for a

generic fault: Kinsley sees no "artistic" merit in the poet's use of the "dream allegory to

urge his claim to a benefice" because "the narrow personal concern suits ill with the

broad, general, and august associations of allegory" (334). The problem with the poem

lies not in its apparent dullness but in the fact that it defies the generic expectation of an

allegory: Kinsley does not ask or answer why Dunbar chooses to frame his "personal

concern" as a dream.

　　In a poem like *The Goldyn Targe*, in contrast, Dunbar's aureate style is on full

display. The sunrise in the first stanza, with its "clere depurit bemes cristallyne," casts a

shimmering glow over the entire landscape from the opening of the poem on (5).[37]

Moreover, Dunbar hits upon all of the conventions of a dream vision: a May setting (9), a

chorus of birds (10), falling asleep in a garden by a river (46-8), encounters with

allegorical personifications such as Nature and Venus within the dream (73), and a

sudden awakening because of a noise within the dream (235-45). Davidoff reads "the

entire poem," in fact, as an example of "Dunbar's consummate skill in handling

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[37] According to Ebin, the opening section of the poem "represents the effect of the rising
sun on the landscape," which "transform[s] Nature into a richly enameled surface" (151).
Scheps, drawing on Ebin's analysis, emphasizes Dunbar's use of "reflected light" in the
poem (343). He brings out the "dynamic equilibrium between the [sun] and the surfaces
which reflect [its rays]" in the poem, noting that "throughout the poem, the narrator's
focus is constantly shifting from one object to another just as the light that suffuses the
landscape is consistently being reflected from an apparently endless number of enameled
surfaces" (343).

conventional literary patterns" (167); it is interesting to her primarily as the norm from which his other poems diverge. He cannot be faulted in this poem for diverging from generic norms, yet this poem has also been judged as a failed allegory. Speirs calls the poem a "sheer verbal exercise" (56), complaining that "without life informing it, language, however brilliant its surface, and however aristocratic its lineage, is verbiage" (55). *The Goldyn Targe* is seen as a purely "formal" or "ceremonial poem" like the *Thrissil and the Rois*, though it is not clearly occasional in the same way as the latter poem (55, 57).[38] Other readers, however, have defended Dunbar's poem from its naysayers. Fox argues for approaching the poem through its "structure," even though its "high style" is "of primary importance" (312, 314). He justifies Dunbar's "use of a catalog technique" (327)—maligned by Lewis as a "mere catalog of personifications" (qtd Fox 313)—by showing that "the careful order in which the figures are arranged" (329), particularly when the groups of ladies attack the narrator, makes for a "concise" and "vivid" allegory and a presentation of ideas that matches the poet's technical style in the poem, with its tight, controlled stanzas and interlocking images. Similarly, Ebin urges an evaluation of the poem "through its form as a dream vision" (149) and points to the way that the poem's three parts—the prologue, the dream, and the closing of the dream frame with its envoy of praise for Chaucer, Gower, and Lydgate—work together to create a "precise statement of the role of the poet in illuminating his matter" (154).[39] Both of these critics view the poem as a dream poem, and their judgment of the allegory within

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[38] See also Lewis (*English Literature in the Sixteenth Century* 92). Scheps presents a good summary of critics who fault Dunbar's poem for its "lifelessness," on the one hand, against those who defend him for prioritizing language over allegorical significance (339).
[39] In DeVries' distinction between "reflexive and representational" readings of the poem (113), Ebin's argument clearly falls in the former camp.

the dream—in Fox's case that the allegory is "concise" and in Ebin's that it is "reduced to bare essentials" (150)—is framed by their understanding of dream poetry.

But what Ebin sees as Dunbar's "extreme experimentation with the dream vision" (150), Scheps views as a disintegration of the form. Although his view of the tone of the poem as parodic is clearly an outlying view among critics, the consequence of that claim—that Dunbar "calls attention…to the inadequacy of the genre in which he seems to be writing" (350)—deserves attention because it is another example of the view of the dream poem as a form in decline at the beginning of the sixteenth century. Scheps' claim that the poem undermines the dream form itself shows a misunderstanding of Dunbar's use of the form both in this poem and in his work generally. Homing in on Dunbar's reduplication of Pallas and Minerva as two separate characters within one line (78) Scheps comments that the inconsistency undermines the form itself because:

> Dunbar's dreamer cannot possibly be seeing the figures he claims to be seeing. Therefore, we must question the accuracy of his powers of observation, and such questioning cannot help but make us somewhat skeptical about the reliability of the vision itself. Given the fact that the vision form has but a tenuous, and usually allegorical, connection to reality, to understand it one must trust the accuracy of the dreamer's description of events which only he has seen. (350)

Here Scheps recognizes a powerful characteristic of dream poetry when he points out its reliance on "the accuracy of the dreamer's description of events which only he has seen." This uncertainty about the reporting of a dream is tied to broader philosophical discussions of the ability of dreams themselves to convey truth (see Kruger 35ff.).

Chaucer's dreamer so often points out the marvelous aspect of his "swevene" (see *Book of the Duchess* 276ff., *The House of Fame* 62-5), as a way of acknowledging that a reader may have trouble either believing that the dream occurred, or interpreting its significance.[40] He may then call attention, self-reflexively, to the dream as the impetus for the poem's composition: if the experience is uncanny and unique, so too, presumably, is the poem that arises out of it. Scheps' skepticism about the dream's reliability is understandable and characteristic of the act of interpretation required of poems in this form: he simply misreads and overstates the extent to which Dunbar "calls attention" to the poem's "incongruit[ies]" and the "inadequacy of the genre."

The tone of the poem from its very opening is in fact quite subtle. Scheps reads the narrator waking and falling back asleep in the course of one line as a comic juxtaposition that mocks the ludicrousness of the convention (347). But viewing it in the context of Dunbar's whole stanza shows that in fact rising and resting are the dominant images, repeated in multiple ways to draw attention to the delicate balance between night and day with which the poem opens.[41] Dunbar is concerned with describing the precise moment of the sunrise:

> Ryght as the stern of day begouth to schyne

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[40] Discussing the idea of the dream frame as an "authenticating device," Spearing points out that, although "one purpose of the dream-framework is no doubt to define an area within which the poem, as it were 'has permission to exist,'" the dream frame by itself does not authenticate the content of the dream. He continues: "The use of the dream-framework is frequently to evade the whole question of authenticity, of belief or disbelief. What the dream-poet implicitly says is not, 'This is true—I know because I dreamed it—and therefore you must believe it.' It is, 'I truly dreamed it; but there can be no guarantee that a dream corresponds to the truth. You had better give it whatever credence you usually give to dreams'" (*Medieval Dream-Poetry* 75).

[41] Fox calls attention to the parallel risings in this opening stanza of the narrator, the sun, and the lark (line 8, not quoted here; See Fox, "*Golden Targe*" 321). I emphasize how he uses rising and setting together for his opening image.

Quhen gone to bed war Vesper and Lucyne

I raise and by a rosere did me rest;

Up sprang the goldyn candill matutyne

With clere depurit bemes cristallyne…

(1-5)

The alliterative line drawing together rising, resting, and the iconic rosebush is placed directly between the setting star and moon and the rising sun to draw attention to the balance of the moment; as is typical of such openings, human activity is placed in the context of the larger celestial motions. The structure of the lines in the opening stanza is precise and thoughtful.

The supposedly ridiculous scenario of falling asleep immediately upon awakening is simply a misreading of the traditional convention. The major dream poems do, in fact, concern themselves with the plausibility of the convention by which the dreamer falls asleep at the start of the poem, and their dreams do not occur without an explanation and justification of their times and locations. In the *Roman de la Rose* the dreamer sleeps in his own bed at night as usual and dreams of walking out on a May morning (Dahlberg 21ff.). Of Chaucer's dream poems, the narrator sleeps outdoors in May only in the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*, and that is because it is night, and he plans to do homage to the daisy early the next morning.[42] In Chaucer's other dream poems, a bout of insomnia and vivid bedtime reading are not unrealistic reasons for falling asleep and having strange dreams. The narrator of *Piers Plowman* does fall asleep outdoors on a May morning, but that is because he is a pilgrim and is weary from walking (C 7); in

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[42] Chaucer's attention to the details of his devotional rite are concrete and naturalistic, even though his devotion to the daisy clearly has a symbolic import.

Pearl, it is obviously intense grief that leads to sleep. In other poems an unspecified "heviness" or restlessness (*The Temple of Glass* 1)—sometimes shorthand for lovesickness—precedes the start of the dream and impacts its contents. In choosing to omit a specific backstory, Dunbar truncates the convention, but his real break from precedent—and where he shows his originality in deploying the form—is in drawing the reader's attention to the artistry rather than the realism of the scene.

The opening of the poem clearly calls attention to its artifice, in keeping with its aureate style. The sun awakens the birds, which simultaneously are given heavenly and human qualities. They sing "Full angellike," but they sing their "houris," marking time as humans would, from within "thair bouris" in the trees, which are described in terms of human art, with "courtyns grene" for leaves, and "Apparalit" in "blomes" (10-12). The fields are "Anamalit" and the whole landscape bejeweled (13, 14ff.). As Spearing has observed, Dunbar's other ceremonial dream poem *The Thrissil and the Rois* calls attention to the artifice of the dream form by drawing a contrast between the paradisal May landscape of convention and the reality of weather in Scotland in May (*Medieval Dream-Poetry* 193-4). But in *The Goldyn Targe*, the landscapes of the waking world and the dream world are barely distinguishable: the dreamer dreams of a landscape much like the one in which he falls asleep "On Florais mantill" (48). The poem overtly embraces artifice in its deployment of aureate style from the start. It seems strange that the poem would be faulted for the unrealistic conventions of its form, when its style is so conspicuously artificial to begin with. Spearing suggests that this conscious deployment of an artificial form is part of Dunbar's purpose: "in Dunbar's hands the dream-poem has become a hall of mirrors, in which reality and artifice reflect each other in perpetually

recurring paradox" (197). If the love allegory found in the dream is revealed to be

"nothing but a hideous fantasy," so too the "reality" the dreamer returns to upon waking

is "a landscape of rhetorical artifice" (196-7). Noting this interest in artifice, however,

should not automatically relegate Dunbar to a category of "mere" style or of "verbiage"

without substance. Nor does it render the dream form empty and meaningless. Rather, by

pairing the device of the dream with a focus on his poem as a highly wrought creation,

Dunbar frees himself to explore and develop the connection between dreams and poetic

creativity. Dunbar's narrator is concerned with expressing what he sees within his

"dremes fantasy" (l. 49).

What the dream portion of the *The Goldyn Targe* reveals, then, is not primarily an

allegory "reduced to bare essentials" (Ebin 150). Rather, it shows Dunbar's version of a

"poetic of the dream experience" (Spearing, "Dream Poems" 168). The allegorical

personifications of the dream sequence are familiar from the *Roman de la Rose,* but

Dunbar's adaptation of traditional material is often surprising. His image of a ship

carrying a company of goddesses is unconventional in its presentation, as even Scheps

acknowledges (348)[43]: appearing "agayn the orient sky" it seems at first to be flying,

because of its comparison to a "falcon" (l. 50, 54), but at the end of the poem it

disappears just as quickly as it came "atour the flude" (237). With the flexibility that

comes only in a dream, the "bruke" of the dream setting is both a bubbling stream and a

sea ("flude") that can carry a ship (234). The dream state is also emphasized by the way

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[43] Speirs, though highly critical of Dunbar's poem, sees in the dream's vivid imagery "something much more like Spenser than even the Chaucer of the translation of the *Roman de la Rose*." But rather than applauding this innovation, he prefers the negative narrative, aligning his position with the expectations he holds of medieval allegory, writing that "Medieval allegory is here seen changing into something else; it is the death of allegory, its swan song" (57).

characters appear on the scene in an ever-changing pageant that is taken in visually by the narrator instead of interacting with him through speech.[44] He relies almost exclusively on visual cues to orient the reader—"Thare saw I," (73, 82, 87-8, etc.) in addition to "me thoucht" (96)—and pauses to comment on the experience as a visual one: he is not afraid of the ladies in battle formation, for instance, because "The party was so plesand for to sene" (143). But this visual quality is made more dreamlike by the speed with which the changes to the scene take place: the ship approaches land "full lustily / As falcoun swift" (53-4); the battle is marked by "scharp assayes" (170) and showers of arrows (178, 195), with its allegorical figures changing from line to line; and the whole battle ends "sudaynly in the space of a luke" and "in twynklyng of ane eye," both images connecting speed with sight (232, 235). Dunbar's poem clearly emphasizes the changeability of the dream state: the form of the poem as a dream mirrors its concern with "the vagaries of human experience, particularly the experience of love" (DeVries 114). The fact that the dream's *psychomachia* ends with the dreamer's disappointment in love also subverts the reader's expectations of a courtly love allegory. Any ambiguity of tone in the dream's treatment of love, then, speaks not to the inadequacy of the genre but to the malleability at its essence.

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[44] Ebin notes the lack of "dialogues, monologues, and long dramatic encounters" along with a lack of introspection from the narrator as Dunbar "divesting the dream vision of its traditional advantages" (150-51). Despite her focus on the poem as a dream vision, Ebin's analysis remains overly tied to the idea of dream vision as allegory.

Conlee connects the pageantry of the *Targe* with the court of James IV and that king's "love of pageantry" ("The Golden Targe" Introductory note). He suggests that the visual emphasis in Dunbar's poem might "be understood as an actual, visible spectacle, not as a cartoonish figure in a dream-landscape." Of course, the possibility also runs the other way—that real-life dreaming influences court masques and pageants, a correspondence that Jonson explores much later in his *Vision of Delight*. In any case, an understanding of court spectacle does not invalidate Dunbar's presentation of his dream as a dream.

Dunbar's method in *The Goldyn Targe* has been dismissed as mere rhetorical display, but his emphasis on artifice in dream poetry can alternatively be read as his effort at literary innovation. Not simply a display of rhetoric and ornamentation, his dream poetry forces from the reader a conscious suspension of disbelief, enabling the poet to convey the vivid "termes" of his imagery as a fictional world of his own devising (70, 257). The dream frame that Dunbar crafts is immediately recognizable to the reader as such, but he goes on to use the space of the dream to surprise the reader with the freshness of his images (270). This assessment of his use of the dream form fits with the purposes of the aureate style Dunbar employs: as critics of Dunbar note disparagingly, the purpose behind the aureate style was to craft something consciously "poetical" (see Speirs 55-7). Speirs, for one, sees this as problematic because Dunbar's "'aureate diction'…is at a distinct remove from living speech, and therefore from life…; is in fact purely 'literary' or 'poetical,' rootless, without actuality" (55). While no one would dispute the value of poetic diction that expresses the "living speech" of a particular "locality," it is false to assert that all poetic works must be bound so specifically: dream poetry is precisely one form through which poets freed themselves from the constraints of "actuality." The dream poet exploits the fact that no reader has the standing to tell him that his dream is not real, and being unrealistic does not make the dream unreal: it may in fact be quite realistic—for a dream.

Seeing Dunbar's verbal style as interconnected with the creativity behind his use of the dream form in *The Goldyn Targe* also helps to make sense of the envoy's place in the poem. Though much of its content is traditional—the praise of Chaucer, Gower, and Lydgate and the humility *topos* with which he ends, addressing his own "lyttil quair"

(271)—it is not perfectly obvious how this conclusion fits the poem. Speirs famously sees

Dunbar misreading Chaucer for praising him as the "rose of rethoris all" (54), mainly

because Dunbar does not call attention to the Chaucer modern critics prefer to depict.[45]

But a closer examination shows that Dunbar praises Chaucer not solely for his rhetoric,

but more generally for being the greatest of poets in English: he "beris of makaris the

tryumph riall" and expresses himself in "fresch anamalit termes celicall" (256-7), in

contrast with every other "tong terrestriall" (260).[46] That he praises Chaucer as the master

of the language in which he is also writing (259), and that he does so in the terms of his

own aureate diction shows both a consistency with the aureate opening of the poem and a

confidence in his own chosen style. But Dunbar also praises the earlier poets for their

"lusty fresche endyte" (270). The conclusion, then, shows Dunbar placing himself in a

literary tradition, but he also admires that tradition for the freshness of its writing.

Dunbar's own "termes," then, reveal something of his understanding of tradition and

originality: he values in his models the inventiveness that his own work displays both in

its style and its use of form.[47]

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[45] Fox counters that it does not do justice to Chaucer's "rhetorical skill" to disparage Dunbar's appreciation of his rhetoric. He summarizes that "both Dunbar and Douglas plainly value Chaucer not for his humour, nor for his genial insight into humanity, nor for his interesting stories, but for his use of and improvement of English as a poetic language" ("Scottish Chaucerians" 169).

[46] Bawcutt notes that Douglas's description of the "nature and function of poetry" in *The Palice of Honour* includes traditional topics such as "the near-equation of poetry and rhetoric (lines 835-836)" (*The Shorter Poems of Gavin Douglas* xliii).

[47] I agree with Fox's position that "The Middle Scots poets are addicted to praising Chaucer, Lydgate, and Gower, surely, because they wish to announce that they are following in their footsteps, *and that they too are modern, sophisticated, and technically skillful poets*" ("Scottish Chaucerians"170, emphasis mine). I would add that Dunbar's address to Chaucer should be read more as rhetorical praise of Chaucer, than as praise of Chaucer's rhetoric. Dunbar surely knows that Chaucer's "termes" are not exactly the

The Goldyn Targe is even better understood when viewed as one of Dunbar's many dream poems and one of his explorations of different resonances of the form. Beyond just the questions of tone and the conduciveness of the dream form to ambiguity, Dunbar also uses the dream device because the topics of his poems vary so widely. He is not concerned solely with creating allegorical meaning in his dream poems, a fault according to Lewis though surely a purposeful decision on Dunbar's part, and another way in which he uses the dream form creatively. The fact is that readers never know quite where a dream poem by Dunbar will take them. Though the aureate *Goldyn Targe* conveys its paradisal landscapes with relish, many of his dream poems are as likely to take a nightmarish turn—and, indeed, even the paradisal garden of the aureate poem becomes a paradoxical "hell" when Reason is blinded (215).[48]

Such reversals should not be taken as simple comic reversals of the conventions that readers of dream poetry expect, however. The turn toward the diabolical in Dunbar's dream poetry instead reveals the poet's use of the full tradition of dream poetry, which long held the possibility of deceptive or diabolical dreams alongside the possibility of divine illumination through dreams (Kruger 125). It may also reflect a late-medieval clerical bias emphasizing the importance of the "discernment of spirits" and the possibility of demonic deception in visions (Newman 6, 33ff.). Newman describes the theological conflict that arose out of "increasing lay interest in elite devotional practices"

same as his own: he praises them as "anamalit" because that is what he values and aims for in his own poetry.

[48] Dunbar's dream poems often present comic and satiric visions of hell: these include the two parts of "Fasternis Evin in Hell," with its dance of Seven Deadly Sins and "Turnament" between the Tailor and Sowtar, "The Antechrist" and "Ane Ballat of the Fenȝeit Freir of Tungland," deride the deceptive exploits of the alchemist John Damien, and "Renunce thy God and cum to me" presents a satire under the guise of demonic temptation.

aimed at cultivating visionary experiences and "prelates [who] tended to favor a more cautious, skeptical theology" (6). By focusing on the possibility of demonic deception in dreams in a way that Chaucer does not, Dunbar both evokes older traditions of dream poetry, and reflects contemporary clerical preoccupations with the possibility of demonic influence on dreaming. Dunbar principally exploits this downward potential of dreaming for comic and satiric purposes: he frequently touches on the dream form's epistemological concerns in jest. But in his vivid exploration of the double potential of dreams he anticipates the imaginative exploration of deception later in the Renaissance. Spenser too explores the deceptive potential of demonic dreams at the beginning of *The Faerie Queene*, and although Shakespeare's Iago is several degrees removed from medieval precedents in dream vision, Renaissance drama is similarly preoccupied with mechanisms of deception and its potentially demonic origins. Othello imagines himself as "ensnared" by the devil at the end of his tragedy (*Othello* 5.2.308), both deceived by the "demi-devil" Iago and punished by "fiends" for Desdemona's death (307, 282).[49]

Even the seemingly dull allegory of "Ane Dreme" is quite interesting against this more complete background of dream poetry. In "Ane Dreme" Dunbar gives an example of a dream poem that is aware both of Chaucerian precedent and of a broader mode of dream interpretation. He begins in a voice that recalls Chaucer, and places the poem in a Chaucerian artistic tradition, asserting in the opening that his bedchamber becomes filled with pictures of "Of all the nobill storyis, ald and new, / Sen oure first father formed was of clay" (4-5). This hyperbolic reference to *ekphrasis* in dream poems links the poem to its Chaucerian precedents in a comic way: rather than a specific story (such as the *Aeneid*

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[49] All references to Shakespeare are from *The Norton Shakepeare.*

found at the beginning of the *House of Fame*) or a series of thematically linked images (like those found on the gate of the garden in the *Parliament of Fowls*), this narrator, it would seem, encounters an overwhelming flood of images. The description serves mainly as a placeholder, a reminder of the tradition in which this poem participates: Dunbar's narrator does not take the time to read or even to observe the "nobill storyis" in any detail. Yet there is more to this opening than hyperbole: the reader is, in fact, given one specific reference to ponder, in the mention of the creation of Adam (5). Dunbar's opening is at once an exaggeration that serves as a comic self-referential moment, and a reference to creativity as a subject of dream poetry. Rather than exploring the realm between heaven and earth, Dunbar is exploring the space between artistic creativity and anti-creation or parody.

The poem also calls attention to the problem of interpretation by referencing the possibility of demonic deception in dreams. The narrator is distracted from interpreting the images of ancient stories on his walls by the merry company invading his bedroom, and he focuses on assessing his overall dream experience as it occurs, thinking to himself,

…This is ane felloun phary,

Or ellis my witt rycht woundrouslie dois varie;

This seimes to me ane guidlie companie,

And gif it be ane feindlie fantasie

Defend me, Jhesu and his moder Marie!

(11-15)

This dream narrator consciously stops to question both the experience of the dream and his interpretation of it as it occurs, marking this poem primarily as a dream poem. Its

allegory is obviously present in the many personifications that enter the poem, but readers

are encouraged from the start both to doubt those personifications and to question the

narrator's interpretation of them. The narrator reminds us first that a dream can be a

marvel: everything points to this as a "guidlie company." Yet, he is aware that his "witt"

may in fact "varie," and the group may just as easily be "feindlie." His only recourse in

the face of this uncertainty is to call upon "divine protection" (Kruger, *Dreaming* 56).[50]

However, this is still the beginning of the poem, not a conclusion in which demons are

expelled: the dreamer's prayer is phrased as a hypothetical—*if* I am in danger, protect

me—and he proceeds in the experience as if it were benign. Despite his interpretation of

the company as "guidlie," however, he does not allow himself to be influenced by their

attempts to cheer him, showing that even if he has interpreted the vision correctly, he

does not act in a way that corresponds to his interpretation. This leaves the reader to

ponder the vision, its interpretation by the narrator, and the narrator's response to his

interpretation at the same time. Dunbar uses the theme of dream interpretation to create a

comic inertia in the poem, which ultimately mirrors the message of the poem about

"waiting" for a benefice from the prince. The narrator is caught in a melancholy state,

despite the guidlie company sent to cheer him; he may well be equally bound to his

unimproved condition, regardless of the quality of argument he makes in the poem for his

own advancement. And the reader of the poem, if he is the prince, may interpret the

argument correctly without it affecting his behavior. The comic suggestion is that he will

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[50] Kruger describes the "Hymnus ante somnum," a poem by Prudentius which elaborates upon the doubleness of dreams and the difficulty of interpretation for the Christian soul. Prudentius' poem ends with a prayer of protection from demonic influences: Kruger concludes, "Faced with the vicissitudes of dreaming, one can do nothing other than attend vigilantly to God; the final response to the confusing realm of dreams can only be a prayer for divine protection" (56).

have to keep waiting, but there lies in that fact also the possibility of resolution through comic suggestiveness: a comic appeal may be more effective in securing a prince's favor than might a serious plea.[51] The clever mirroring of the poem's dream content with the reality of Dunbar's situation and its use of comic tone all suggest that there is more to the piece than an allegory that breaks with decorum. Dunbar exploits different resonances of the dream form, beginning with the contrast between "guidlie" and "fiendlie," in order to explore a purely earthly dilemma: in the poem's final irony, the clergyman and poet is concerned with a worldly benefice and advised by personifications who may not be "fiendlie," but who represent qualities that are human, social, and courtly, rather than heavenly.

Dunbar similarly exploits the contrast between angelic and demonic dreams in "How Dunbar wes desyrd to be ane Freir," this time with a more typical conclusion. The poem begins with a vision of Saint Francis bringing the dreamer a religious habit and asking him to "Reffus the warld" by becoming a friar (5). The dreamer's reaction is one of terror and revulsion at the garment (6-10), but he addresses the saint respectfully and deferentially (21-5) even as he argues that he cannot become a friar. In this satiric poem, he argues that "Off full few friars that hes bene sanctis I reid," then, ironically, asks for "ane bischopis weid / Gife evir thow wald my sawle gaid unto hevin" (28, 29-30). This first objection is an argument from authority: he has seen from his reading that the way to sainthood is by becoming a bishop, not a friar. But then he goes on to argue from experience: he has worn the habit in the past and only used it to "begyle" (45). As

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[51] As Spearing notes, "The author of a begging-poem will naturally wish to make it as ingenious a display of literary skill as possible, in the hope that it will catch its recipient's attention" (*Medieval to Renaissance* 111).

Kinsley notes, the focus on the friar's habit participates in the critique common at the time of the habit as "the sheep's clothing disguising the wolf" (347). He also notes that Dunbar employs "a not uncommon device used against the friars—satirizing them from an assumed posture within the order" (346-7). Dunbar ties these satirical lines of critique focusing on the deceptiveness of friars into the dream form by making the dream as a whole a deceptive dream: the apparition of Saint Francis is actually "Ane fieind…in liknes of ane freir" (47). The figure is not shown to change in his appearance from a saint to a fiend. Rather, recognizing the deceptiveness of the apparition is seems to be a matter of proper intuition—the dreamer simply asserts that "This freir that did Sanct Francis thair appear, / Ane fiend he wes in liknes of ane frier" (46-7). This interpretation is confirmed as the apparition vanishes "with stynk and fyrie smowk" (48). In tying the satire against friars to the deceptiveness of dreams, Dunbar again calls to mind Spenser, whose Archimago disguises himself in the "long blacke weedes" of a hermit before tormenting the Redcrosse knight with false, demonic, dreams (1.i.29; see I.i.36ff.).

The above poems show two late-fifteenth century authors concerned both with the possibilities of the dream form and with its implications for an idea of authorship. Henryson uses the dream form in the *Morall Fabilis* to authenticate his authorship while posing as a mere translator, and in the *Testament* he rearranges the form to carve out creative space for a new kind of endeavor—a newly invented continuation of an old story, told not as a dream but as a story. But in the latter Henryson also presents the tragic conclusion by reversing and reinterpreting images from the dream form, so that the poem's conclusions arise organically out of the dream form's typical preoccupations. Dunbar's dream poetry also pursues the form's typical concerns, though with the express

purpose of crafting his own "fresch endyte." His awareness of the double potential of

dreams also becomes a useful tool for poetic invention, as he turns the downward pull of

the dream form to comic and satiric effect. Given the double potential implied by the

dream state, it is not surprising that these authors can adapt the dream form both for

tragic vision and for comedy. In the next chapter I examine some further implications for

the dream form's creative potential at the start of the sixteenth century by considering

how the narrating "I" of dream poetry becomes increasingly identified with the

composing poet in later medieval dream poems.

Chapter 2

The Scottish Chaucerians II:

The Narrating "I" in Late Medieval Dream Poems

In his recent book *Medieval Autographies*, Spearing describes a form of writing popular with "French poets and their readers from the thirteenth century on and to those writing and reading in English from the mid-fourteenth century on" (99): he calls this "extended, non-lyrical, fictional [writing] in and of the first person" *autography* (1), and he categorizes dream poetry as a subgenre of this form of writing (20). The characteristics of this form of first-person writing that Spearing highlights are, first of all, its writtenness: this form of writing challenges the prevailing assumption of literary critics that "writing can only be thought of as a representation of speech" and that, consequently, "a written 'I' would always be the label of a represented speaker, a fictional being potentially in possession of all the characteristics, including consciousness or subjectivity, that we normally attribute to human persons" (12). This fictional narrator is presumed to be "distinguishable from the author" (2) and often seen as "unreliable," so that the job of the reader is "recognizing the gap between what he or she says and the coherent meaning really intended by the author" (4). Spearing argues that, in fact, "Behind the 'I' of a medieval text there may be no narrator or speaker, no represented fictional person, and in the commonest kinds of Middle English poem, especially up to the middle of the fourteenth century, there usually is none": instead, the "I" of a poem represents "a near but empty space, proximal but not personalized, waiting to be inhabited by any reader" (16). Given a context of medieval reading wherein poems were

"probably read aloud to an audience of listeners…the narratorial 'I' would need to be a space suitable for occupation by any actual teller, and if it were individually characterized, it would be less suitable for that purpose" (19). What these poems convey with the narratorial "I," then, is not subjectivity, but rather "the effect of experience without an experiencing subject" (21): such "experientiality" is what is conveyed by the "I" of a dream poem, and is "an effect of literary language" (21).

The benefits of reading medieval dream poems as examples of autography are numerous, but the principal benefit has to do with clarifying how the so-called character of the narrator is understood. Pearsall has suggested in his discussion of Henryson's *Testament of Cresseid* that the idea of "the narrative *persona* has perhaps now had its day" because it tends to affirm an "authorial voice" somewhat rigidly: "fallible first-person narrators imply the existence somewhere else of someone manipulating their fallibility" (175). Seeing the author and narrator in this light places too great a burden of coherence on that narrating *persona*, who must be seen as fallible in a logically consistent way throughout the text—or show logically coherent character development (Spearing 3, 5). Seeing the "I" of autography through the lens of "experientiality" rather than subjectivity, on the other hand, allows for a reader to engage with "powerful and engaging 'reality effects,'" in, for example, the Wife of Bath's prologue (74), while recognizing that "Chaucer's presentation of the Wife of Bath is marked by inconsistencies that must qualify any sense of the systematic characterization of a 'speaker' whose every word is an expression of her inner life" (77-8). Spearing's emphasis on "experientiality" is especially helpful for the "I" of a dream poem.

Dunbar's *Goldyn Targe* clearly benefits from this kind of reading of its dreamer: Ebin has described the "I" of this poem as "impersonal and almost anonymous" and "Prone neither to the intimate monologues of earlier narrators nor to detailed examination of his feelings and emotions" (150-51). This description may overstate how personal the "monologues" of earlier narrators in dream poetry really are, but as a description of this dreamer it is quite accurate: this "I" stands for the proximal relationship of the subject position to the reader, and projects the experientiality of the dream that takes place. The energy of Dunbar's verse, and the focus for the reader, is on the visual effect of the dream experience, rather than on the dreamer as a character. If one focuses on the dreamer as a character, inconsistencies immediately become apparent: observing the courts of gods and goddesses the dreamer is "sudaynly affrayt" (134), and one stanza later, having been spotted and arrested by Venus, he is "noucht affrayit" because the ladies pointing their bows at him are "so plesand for to sene" (142-3). To discuss this sudden change in terms of characterization is quite obviously fruitless, because the "I" is not a character with a coherent inner life, but the feelings of fear or lack of it he asserts are rather filters through which the reader may view the action of the dream and assess its allegorical significance.[1]

Similarly, Henryson's narrator at the beginning of the *Testament of Cresseid* has been the subject of much comment and speculation, though not for the same anonymity that Dunbar's narrator displays: rather, his brief characterization at the beginning of the poem leads to questions about his motivations and biases throughout the poem. Patterson

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[1] Spearing's description of the narrating "I" as analogous to the camera's perspective in a film works well for the kind of dream experience Dunbar relates (21-2). To extend that analogy, the feelings of fear or no fear could be compared to the way a film's musical score increases or decreases tension in the audience.

wonders, for instance, whether "the narrator, like Cresseid, learn[s] the lesson" of "self-understanding" offered by the poem (713), but he notes that "Henryson declines to give us enough information to answer the question" (714). This fading of the narrator from the text is typical of autography, and recognizing this fact circumvents the problem of the narrator's "incomplete characterization" (Parkinson, Introduction ¶7). The narrator "finally disappear[s] from the text" because he serves a particular rhetorical function in the prologue and in the telling of Cresseid's dream, not because he is a deficient character, a "weak and self-involved narrator" (Lynch "'Doolie Dream'"196). Acknowledging the poem as autographic allows for an acceptance of the inconsistencies that typically exist in such poems when the narrator is forced into an artificial idea of "coherence" imposed on the poem by critics (Spearing 3).[2]

Beginning with an understanding of uncharacterized experientiality in a work of autography allows readers to notice changes to that model when they occur. In some late medieval dream poems there is a subtle shift toward conveying a narratorial "I" more closely associated with the person of the poet and the poet's material circumstances outside of the poem. While these poems remain autographic, this shift toward a more explicit association of a narrator with an author's real life is important in the development of the dream poem.[3] An increased emphasis on the individual experience becomes another way for the dream form to authenticate a fiction, but rather than grounding the authenticating work of a dream in universal philosophical concerns, these poems

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[2] See also Kelly, *Chaucerian Tragedy*, who says about Henryson's *Testament* that "It cannot always be analyzed in accord with postmedieval ideals of unity and coherence" (259).
[3] I continue to use the term *narrator* (or *dreamer*, when appropriate) as shorthand for the "I" of the poem.

authenticate the fiction of the dream by providing corroborating details from life outside

of the dream and even the poem. This is not to argue that a poem such as "How Dunbar

wes desyrd to be an Freir," the title of which is an editorial insertion, is about the actual

Dunbar or ought to be used to glean information about the poet's life.[4] But what now

seems quite obviously a satirizing rhetorical maneuver—the feigned stance of writing

from within a religious order to reveal its deceptiveness—has in the past seemed real to

readers of Dunbar's poem.[5] The fact that the poem has been read that way, even if

incorrectly, shows that its fiction is set up to work by creating an impression of

authenticity. In a parallel example, Burrow has emphasized the self-writing that occurs in

Dunbar's begging poems addressed to the king—one of which, "Ane Dreme," is also a

dream poem: in his reading, these "petitionary poems" at times "strike a more personal

note," such as when Dunbar complains of suffering a migraine (Kinsley 72), and point to

the development of "autobiographical writing…within the matrix of petitionary appeal"

(Burrow 148).

For the narrating "I" to be equated with the poet is, of course, not entirely new in

dream poetry, one of the primary conventions of which from Chaucer onward is the self-

referential nature of a poem in which the dream the poet experiences gives rise to the

poem he goes on to write.[6] The dream is given as the reason for the poem's existence.

This direct connection between the dream and the poem which arises from it is most

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[4] That Dunbar was once a Franciscan novice has been claimed in the past, solely on the
basis of this poem. Given the dearth of information on Dunbar's life, it is not surprising
that such speculation has taken place. For more on this discussion, see Kinsley 346.
[5] See Kinsley (346-7) and Conlee (headnote to "How Dunbar…" and n21-24).
[6] For more on the mimetic and self-referential aspects of Chaucer's dream poems, see
Edwards. At the outset of his study he notes his aim to show that Chaucer's dream poems
"have to do with both mimetic representation and aesthetic speculation" and that "one
measure of Chaucer's superb artistry" is how "he joins these two domains so closely" (1).

explicit in *The Book of the Duchess*, which concludes with the poet awaking from his dream and resolving to "put this sweven in ryme / As I kan best, and that anoon" (1332-3). It is also explicit in *The House of Fame*, despite its unfinished frame, as the narrator announces in the first Proem that he "wol you tellen" his "wonderful" dream (65, 60). In this poem, the narrator Geffrey (729) is associated with the poet Chaucer by name, however ironically or comically his character impersonates the real poet, and also by the theme of poetic fame underlying the poem (see Spearing, *Medieval Dream-Poetry* 82-8).[7] In the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*, the poet's role is again at the center of the dream, even more explicitly, as the God of Love comes to the dreamer and accuses him of impeding his readers' service to Love with his writings, specifically, with his translation of the *Romaunce of the Rose* "that is an heresye ayeins my lawe" (330) and with *Troylus and Criseyde* "That maketh men to women lasse triste, / That ben as trewe as ever was any steel" (333-4). Alceste, on the other hand, calls upon Chaucer's other works to defend him from the god's ire (414-430), and proposes that in reparation for the false loves he has depicted, he "shal no more agilten in this wyse / But he shal maken as ye wol devyse, / Of women trewe in loving al hire lyf" (436-8). In this case, then, the dream is not just the cause of the poem containing the dream but is the prologue to the subsequent literary project of the legend of good women that follows. The only exception in this list is, seemingly, *The Parliament of Fowls,* in which the narrator is less focused on retelling the dream as a marvel: he begins by telling of his reading, presents the dream as arising naturally from his reading (95-112), and concludes by resolving to keep

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[7] Spearing argues that "the *House* is the first of Chaucer's poems in which the narrator is realized in the specific role of poet" (82).

reading (695-9).[8] Rather than calling attention in the frame to the dream as the centerpiece of the poem (even if it is), Chaucer integrates the dream more seamlessly into the poem by making the theme of the frame reading rather than writing. Even so, as he begins to tell the dream, he pauses to invoke Venus, who "madest [him] this swevene for to mete" (115), and asks for her help in writing the dream: "so yif me myght to ryme and ek t'endyte" (119). Even when the dream is more integrated, the poem self-referentially calls attention to its own composition.

In Dunbar's "Ane Dreme," on the other hand, the impetus for writing is less the dream than the poet's material circumstances, which are both the subject of the dream and, in reality, stand outside the dream and are prior to the poem. For Kinsley, the narrow personal focus of this poem is what makes it an unsuccessful poem—mainly because he judges it as an allegory, which is normally seen as a universalizing genre, more philosophical than personal.[9] But Dunbar's poem does not simply reverse the

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[8] This framing suggests that the dream arises from the reading he has just done of the *Somnium Scipionis*, and that therefore the dream is caused by "internal human process" (Kruger, *Dreaming* 18). But, of course, the poem is not quite so straightforward about the status of the dream: the figure of Scipio appearing to the dreamer suggests the authoritative figure of a Macrobian *oraculum*, and he says that he has come to "quyte" him for his "labour" in "lokyge of myn olde bok totorn" (112, 110). But the same authoritative figure appeared within the dreamer's reading, so whether it is a true *oraculum* or merely a natural dream mimicking one is left unresolved. Spearing further points out that, despite the natural explanation of dreams in the stanza preceding the dream ("The wery huntere slepyng in his bed, / To wode ayen his mynde goeth anon…" [99-100ff.]), the narrator goes on to attribute the dream to Venus (115). Spearing summarizes that "there is an ambiguity concerning the status of the dream, which implies an ambiguity in the status of the poem itself, and by extension of imaginative fiction in general" (*Medieval Dream-Poetry* 91-2).
[9] Even as far back as Macrobius, however, "personal" is considered a valid category of the enigmatic dream (or *somnium*), which can also be "alien, social, public, and universal" or a combination of these (I.iii.10, Stahl 90). Kruger notes Macrobius' focus on "the intermediate dream's ability to address a wide range of experience, from the self-concerned to the cosmic" (35).

expectations of allegory: his turn toward a more personal subject matter in dream poetry

is just one example in a larger transition that occurs in the form in the fifteenth and early-

sixteenth centuries.[10] Similarly, in "How Dunbar wes desired to be ane Freir," although

the poem describes the event of a dream, its theme, the corruption of friars, serves as its

own justification for a poetic satire. Of course, the same could be argued about the *The*

Book of the Duchess: the death of the Duchess Blanche is an event in the real world and

reason enough for an elegiac poem to be written. However, Chaucer's poem specifically

draws attention to the dream as its impetus for writing and veils references to the real

world in riddles. In contrast, "How Dunbar…" tries to create the impression of being

about the real Dunbar—or at least a clergyman like Dunbar—even if it is not. These

examples from Dunbar pointedly draw attention to the poet's life outside of the dream

and the poem both: whether that pose is real or feigned, the position taken by the poem is

that the poet's life is being reflected in the dream. And if the dream reflects the poet's

life, then the poem as a whole seems more truthful than feigning.[11]

Perhaps the most vivid precedent for this personal turn in English poetry in the

15th century can be found in Hoccleve's "My Compleinte" (c. 1419-20, see Ellis 128), the

first poem in Hoccleve's framed narrative *Series*. Though not a dream poem, Hoccleve's

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Moreover, the "begging-poem" has a history of its own as a genre in this period: Spearing reminds us that poets from Chaucer onward relied "on royal or noble support, and support that was usually given for services other than poetry itself" (*Medieval to Renaissance* 111).

[10] The fact that so many of Dunbar's poems are undated means that it is hard to ascribe any particular influence he has within this trend. His poems can only be taken as late-fifteenth or early-sixteenth century examples to be compared with other poems from the period. This increasingly personal focus within dream poetry has been pointed out by critics with respect to individual poems, but never comprehensively examined as an aspect of the development of the dream poem into the sixteenth century.

[11] For a discussion of dream theory in relation to the questionable status of fictions, see Kruger (*Dreaming* 130ff.).

complaint has much in common with dream poetry, beginning with its reversal of the spring motif common to openings of dream poems.[12] The opening is autumnal, but with a specific focus on the bleakness of the changes that take place at the end of that season: it opens "Aftir þat heruest inned had hise sheves, / And that the broun sesoun of Mihelmesse / Was come" (1-3).[13] "Aftir" clearly modifies both clauses: the opening takes place both after the harvest and after the coming of the season of Michaelmas. The leaves have not merely turned yellow, they have been "doun throwen undirfoote" (6), and, indeed, the action of the poem turns out to begin "in the ende of Nouembre" (17). The change of season reminds Hoccleve that "stablenesse in this worlde is there noon. / Ther is noþing but chaunge and variaunce" (9-10). But, rather than just stimulating philosophical musings on mutability—including, for instance, the possibility of positive change as well as negative, in the inevitable return of spring, for example—the change of season "[sinks] into [his] herte roote" (7), and Hoccleve becomes afflicted with a severe melancholia:

> And in the ende of Nouembre, vppon a niȝt,
>
> Siȝynge sore, as I in my bed lay,
>
> For this and oþir þouȝtis wiche many a day,
>
> Byforne, I tooke, sleep cam noon in myn ye,
>
> So vexed me the þouȝtful maladie.
>
> (17-21)

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[12] For more on the overlap and compatibility between dream poetry and complaint, see Chapter 3.

[13] References are to Ellis's edition, with line numbers of citations given parenthetically in the text.

His word choice ("as I in my bed lay") recalls the onset of the dream in any number of

dream poems, and the mention of insomnia recalls Chaucer's narrator in *The Book of the

Duchess*.[14] Hoccleve's restlessness does not lead to sleep, however. Instead, it manifests

in a long complaint, because

> The greef aboute myn herte so sore swal
>
> And bolned euere to and to so sore
>
> That nedis oute I muste therwithale.
>
> I thouȝte I nolde kepe it cloos no more.

(29-32)

Given this overpowering sorrow with which the prologue to the complaint begins and

ends, and the way that his complaint "[bursts] oute" of him as a result, the actual content

of the complaint is surprising and not at all conventional. He begins by describing a past

illness, his "wild infirmite" (40), visited upon him by God (36-9), "which þat I hadde, as

many a man wel knewe / And which me out of mysilfe cast and threwe" (41-2). He goes

on to explain that this public illness, during which his friends offered pilgrimages for his

health (43-9), left him five years earlier and that he is thankful to God "Of his good and

gracious reconciliation" since "My wit and I haue bene of such accord / As we were or

the alteracioun" (58-60). The complaint, then, is not about the past illness, from which he

is grateful to be relieved, but about the subsequent suffering that the *relief* from his illness

has caused: "but by my sauacioun, / Sith þat time haue I be sore sette on fire / And lyued

in greet torment and martire" (61-3). This unusual poem defies expectations on many

levels from its opening: it turns out not to be about universal themes of mutability, arising

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[14] Cf. *BD* 1-44ff., *HF* 111-4, *PF* 88-95, and also Lydgate, *The Temple of Glas* 1-14.

out of the change of seasons, nor about the melancholia of lovesickness sometimes found

in dream poems that begin with such restlessness, nor a Job-like complaint about the

misfortune of becoming ill. Instead, the complaint combines elements of all of these

themes but arises principally from a "þouȝtful maladie," suffered in the present autumnal

setting, in the aftermath of recovering from an illness in the past.[15]

   While the author universalizes some of these themes, and ultimately the *Series*

culminates in the theme of the fourth poem, the "ars vtillisima sciendi mori," the

complaint itself is remarkably personal in its subject matter. The direct cause of his

suffering is the loss of his sense of self as a result of his illness as well as the loss of the

social standing that he cannot seem to recover, despite his recovery. On the one hand, he

overhears gossip about himself and fears that he is not fully accepted by his former

friends: they seem, from his perspective, not to trust that he is in his right mind again and

"spake of me so wondringly" that "for the verry shame and feer I qwook" (150-1). On the

other hand, because others doubt his recovery, he does not know for certain whether he

can trust his own sense of himself as recovered from the illness: looking at his own face

in the mirror, he wonders "if any othir were it than it ouȝt" (159) because "Men in her

own cas bene blinde alday, / As I haue heard seie manie a day agoon, / And in that same

plite I stonde may" (170-2).[16] In citing a saying that purports to be universal, Hoccleve

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[15] I argue in the next chapter that in later poems this melancholic focus on "thought" becomes a substitute for dreaming in poems that imitate the dream form in great detail but omit the event of a dream.

[16] This difference in perception is taken up again in the next poem of the *Series*, a "dialoge" between Hoccleve and a Friend. After Hoccleve reads him his Complaint, the Friend argues that he should not circulate it "Amonge þe peple" (24) because everyone has forgotten "Howe it stood with thee" (29). But Hoccleve retorts that he "woote what men han seide and seien of me. / Her wordis I have not as ȝit forgote" (37-8), and that

shows an interest in general questions of human nature, yet the poem is also painfully

personal and specific to his situation. Moreover, the poem does not employ a clear

distancing device to separate, in the reader's mind, the narrator of the complaint from the

poet himself. Instead, as the "Dialoge" makes clear, the narrator is identified repeatedly

by name as Hoccleve (3ff.), and indeed Hoccleve's modern editor assumes that it is valid

to gather biographical information from the evidence in Hoccleve's poems, including

dating a nervous breakdown to c. 1414. Hoccleve's poems demonstrate "explicit

engagement with the immediate personal circumstances of the poet and the wider social

context of his work" (Ellis 5). Dunbar's "narrow personal concern" seems quite

unremarkable and unobjectionable next to Hoccleve's vivid depiction of his own mental

health, yet for both poets, personal concerns have become a valid starting point for

poetry.

    The Kingis Quair offers another example of an increasingly subjective perspective

within dream poetry in the early fifteenth century. This poem is generally attributed to

James I of Scotland and corresponds to what is known of the king's life story (Spearing,

Medieval Dream-Poetry 184). It is also a good example of an intermediate form between

Chaucer's dream poems that take the position of arising out of dream experience and later

poems that take the position of arising out of the poet's life outside of the dream.[17] *The*

Kingis Quair straddles both forms. The poem's deft construction weaves together

since people everywhere knew of his sickness, he has all the more reason to publicize his
recovery (57-63).

[17] As Spearing writes, "It is impossible to decided where to draw the line in [the portion
of the poem which retells James's life story] between literary reminiscence and genuine
autobiography" (184). He concludes that "we can say no more than that it *gives the*
impression of genuine autobiography, since inevitably the only evidence about the poet's
inner experience is in the poem itself" (184).

Chaucerian insomnia, reading, and dreaming experience with the poet's lived experience, but with some clever rearranging of the usual causal connections between reading and dreaming that would be found in one of Chaucer's poems. In the first place, the restless narrator takes up a copy of Boethius to read in the night when he cannot sleep (12-16), but instead of reading just to fall asleep, he becomes quite engaged in the reading experience, reflecting on "the writing of this noble man" (33).[18] When he does become too tired to keep reading, he still lies awake, stimulated by the reading experience, with "This mater new in [his] mind rolling" (54) of the role of Fortune in the life of a person. Reflecting upon Boethius, the narrator connects his reading experience with his own life story: "Among thir thoughtis rolling to and fro / Fell me to mind of my fortune and ure" (64-5). Then, the sound of the bell ringing for matins seems to tell him to write his own story (75-7). Even though the narrator is awake, the description of the sound—"me thought the bell / Said to me,"—recalls Chaucer's descriptions of his sensory experiences within dream poems, which often take this same form of "me thought" (see *Book of the Duchess* 291, 345). And indeed, later in the *Kingis Quair*, when the narrator recalls a dream that he has had in the past, he describes it with the same formulation, "Me thought" (510ff.) The king attributes the bell's prompt to the "illusion" (82) of his "fantasye" or "ymagynacioun" (75, 79). But instead of ignoring an illusory sense experience, he decides "Sum newe thing to write" (89) and begins to write his own "buke." Like Hoccleve's "þouȝtful maladie," the King's attention to his own inner thoughts, his "ymagynacioun," reveals a growing association between dreams, imagination, and poetic creativity within the form of dream poetry.

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[18] References are to the text of the *Kingis Quair* in Boffey.

The subsequent telling of his story, including his capture and imprisonment, and falling in love with a beautiful woman he sees from the window of the tower where he is a prisoner, gives the impression that there is plenty of material in the life of James I for a book, without a dream to stimulate the book's writing. This poem's dream, embedded in the poem and stimulated by the king's experience of falling in love, is recalled and incorporated into the writing of the book. But though the reading does not stimulate the dream and the dream itself does not lead directly to the writing of the book, the dream is still significant to the structure of the poem as a dream poem. In this case, the recalled dream puts lived experience into a new perspective, first by representing the king's education in love and also by predicting future good fortune for him (1198-1202). The message of the dream does not have a consoling effect at first: when he awakens, the narrator suffers even more greatly from lovesickness because he thinks "That nan other thingis bot dremes had, / Nor sekirnes, my spirit with to glad" (1217-8). His first impulse is not to put faith in what was only a dream. He begins to hope after a turtledove confirms the message of the dream with a sign that is a token "of all my help and blisse" (1260). But it is in retrospect that the full significance of the dream is clear to him, as he comes into Fortune's good favor again (1264-8). The king finds that his reading in Boethius confirms the content of his past dream, and that the dream also echoes the Boethian themes of the king's reading. In retrospect, then, it is clear that the dream helps to explode the physical limitations placed upon the dreamer in his double "thraldome," his captivity in the tower (190-1), and then his parallel captivity in love (285), a captivity exacerbated by the fact of his imprisonment and realized when he cannot follow his lady out of the garden (468-9). The dream signifies metaphysical liberation for the dreamer—

seen clearly in his ascent from his chamber into the heavens at the dream's opening (523-532)—even before his physical liberation has taken place. It is after the prophetic value of the dream has been realized that the poet can recognize something of his own story in his reading of Boethius and finally knows how to write "sum newe thing," when before he has "more ink and paper spent / To lyte effect" (87-8). The king's book is the result of the dream, the reading, and the life story illuminating each other.

Spearing suggests in *Medieval Autographies* that the cases of Hoccleve and James I offer evidence that their peculiar situations of mental illness and imprisonment led these writers to insert what may be recognized as "fragments of individual experience into a general autographic experientiality" (100). Autography under these circumstances, he explains, becomes "a step on the way toward autobiography," although, of course, "autobiography in the sense in which we now understand it did not yet exist, so that medieval autographers cannot have been knowingly striving toward it, nor yet avoiding it" (99). These writers did, however, "live in a culture that was growing more interested in individual lives and especially in individual interiorities" (99). By the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, this individuality can be discerned in dream poetry arising not just out of the extreme situations Spearing cites. It also begins to surface in poets' self-reflexive presentations of the creative act of writing poetry—as with the king's self-presentation in the *Kingis Quair*, which, in the end, is as much about the writing of the king's book as it is about the resolution of his personal narrative.

Spearing has pointed out elsewhere that *The Kingis Quair* was not circulated widely and that therefore this lovely dream poem was not nearly as influential, particularly on the Scottish poets, as it clearly would have been were it known to them

(*Medieval Dream-Poetry* 186): "Dream-poetry in Scotland seems to have made a completely fresh start, going back once more to the Chaucerian model half a century later than *The Kingis Quair*" (187). It is quite interesting, then, to note the similar intertwining of the poet's life with the dream and the theme of poetic composition early in the sixteenth century in Gavin Douglas's *The Palis of Honoure*. Lewis considers *The Palis of Honoure* more successful than the poems of Dunbar because he judges it as an allegory, and he deems the allegory more substantial in Douglas than in Dunbar (*Allegory of Love* 290).[19] Yet more recent criticism has not taken as much interest in Douglas as in Henryson and Dunbar among the Middle Scots poets: Gray points out that Douglas has remained obscure, while "both Henryson and Dunbar have successfully escaped the prisonhouse of the 'Scottish Chaucerians'" (149). He gives three reasons for this situation, citing first the complexity of *The Palis of Honoure*, secondly the fact that Douglas's greatest work is a translation, and finally the difficulty of his language.[20] In

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[19] As Bawcutt notes, however, it is important to recognize that Lewis also chooses the most substantial (i.e. theological) reading possible at a crucial point where the two texts of the poem available to us diverge. In the London text of the vision of Honour at the end of the poem, the dreamer sees "a god armypotent," whereas the Edinburgh text reads "ane God Omnipotent" (1921). Lewis reads the Scottish "ane" as a pun signifying both "a" and "one," a distinctly Christian perspective, which may not have been intended by the author, as "armypotent" was a "stock epithet" for Mars and "appropriate in the martial context" (Bawcutt 210n1921). Parkinson's edition uses the London text but acknowledges that the reading is uncertain (Introduction and n1921).

[20] This final difficulty can be partially remedied by well-annotated scholarly editions. Coldwell's Scottish Text Society edition of Douglas's translation of the *Aeneid* in four volumes is still the only one widely available for use by scholars. Bawcutt's edition of *The Palice of Honour* presents the two complete sixteenth century prints of the poem available to us—the London edition of 1553 and the Edinburgh edition of 1579—side-by-side with little editorial judgment in the notes about which text may present the better reading at moments where they differ. Moreover, her text is unglossed, which only serves to emphasize the difficulty of the language, when this need not be the case. Parkinson suggests that although Bawcutt uses the Edinburgh as her base text, her notes make a case for London as the base text (Introduction). Parkinson's TEAMS edition of *The Palis of*

defending Douglas in the face of what he sees as scholarly neglect, Gray calls *The Palis*

of Honoure "traditional, though not conventional, flamboyant in style, but genuinely

eloquent" (151). He rightly places it in the "well-established genre of the dream vision,"

and focuses on the way Douglas's use of the form displays simultaneous "indebtedness

and originality" (151-2).[21] His indebtedness and his originality both are closely tied to the

choices he makes in his use of the dream form. His poem is "Chaucerian" in its

indebtedness, in that it draws most obviously on Chaucer's *House of Fame* and on the

Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women* (see Bawcutt, *Shorter Poems* xxx). But of

Chaucer's dream poems, these two are the most personal in their close identification of

the autographic narrator with the name and works of Chaucer the poet. In following this

model, Douglas inserts his own individuality into his dream poem.

     In *The Palis of Honoure* Douglas draws upon Chaucer's model of a poem that

arises out of the experience of the dream it recounts, but he does so with interesting

variations on the model he inherits, much like the rearrangement of causal connections in

the composition of *The Kingis Quair*: Douglas's poem is concerned not only with its own

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Honoure—the spelling of the title is different in the London edition—is available in an
online version and is fully glossed and annotated; he uses London as the base text,
correcting "obvious misreadings" with the Edinburgh text. Parkinson's gives a succinct
summary of the drawbacks of each text:

> Copland's [London] text contains several errors, misprints and even misreadings,
> as well as the glaring omission of a whole stanza (lines 1711-19); but on the other
> hand, Charteris [in the Edinburgh text] seems to have been a more thorough editor
> of the poem, tidying up (and anglicizing) the spelling to conform with late
> sixteenth-century Scottish practice, and providing contemporary alternatives to
> obsolete grammatical forms and words preserved in Copland's print. In short,
> Copland is sloppy but arguably closer to Douglas's original.

Citations to the poem here are to Parkinson's text, cited by line number.

[21] Bawcutt uses similar language when discussing Chaucer's influence on Douglas; she
argues that Douglas's poetry shows "a well-informed affection for Chaucer…side by side
with a proud and conscious independence of him" ("Douglas and Chaucer" 404).

composition but also with poetic composition more generally. Bawcutt has suggested that the "role of the poet" is crucial to the allegory's significance, observing that the narrator is an active participant in the action of the dream, and that seeming digressions can be justified as contributing to "an allegory of a poet's education" (xxxvii-xlii). Although Parkinson emphasizes the narrator as a courtier rather than a poet, and offers that the poem describes "the education of a not very educable courtier" (*The Palis of Honoure*, Introduction), Bawcutt's model is more precise and still persuasive—though Honour is not the equivalent of poetic fame, the dreamer's courtly life is depicted as that of a poet. This focus on the education of the narrator as a poet in *The Palis of Honoure* is similar to the focus on the education of the king as a lover in *The Kingis Quair*, and Douglas's poem contains similar references to the poet's life outside the boundaries of the poem.

The prologue immediately calls attention to the connection between dreaming and poetic composition. It begins with an aureate landscape similar to Dunbar's in *The Goldyn Targe*, with a narrating "I" who has gone out to do his "observance" on a May morning (6).[22] He finds it a "Richt halsom … sessoun of the yeir" (46), and is so refreshed with his walk through the "garding [garden] of plesance" (7) that he cannot tell if his experience is real or not: "so reioysit and confort was my sprete / I not wes it a vision or fanton" (59-60). The narrator attributes his joy either to a true vision or to a false or illusive one.[23] These options refer to the dual possibilities inherent to any dream,

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[22] *The Palis of Honoure* probably predates *The Goldyn Targe*. The first is usually dated c. 1501 (see Bawcutt, *Shorter Poems* xxviii); the latter was printed in 1508. In his edition of Dunbar's poems, Kinsley suggests in his notes that there may be several references to *The Palis of Honoure* in *The Goldyn Targe*.

[23] Cf. Dunbar "Ane Dreame," who concludes that, since his vision "seimes…guidlie," it probably is, though he notes the possibility that it is not (13). Dunbar's narrator seems to trust his emotional response to the dream, whereas Douglas's doubts his.

either to be an inspired or a deceptive vision, though the narrator has not yet fallen asleep. He responds to the landscape surrounding him as if it were a dream, and even as he raises this doubt about the reality of his setting, he hears a voice singing a hymn in praise of May, which sends him quickly from his state of rejoicing to a state of fear, "Sore effrayit, half in a frenisye" (90). The source of this fear is somewhat ambiguous: he clearly feels incapable of singing similar "laudis day be day" to the May morning (95). Whether this panic arises from his inexperience in poetic composition, and he fears composing the song—because his "every wit [is] away" (98)—or whether his inexperience in love makes him incapable of praising the May adequately is not clear, but immediately after he asks for help from Nature, May, and Venus, he falls into an "extasy or swoun" (106), which leads to the "avision" described in the three parts of the poem that follow (126). Well before the dream begins, however, the poem has already introduced its theme of poetic composition in connection with the dream state of the narrator.

The end of the dream frame confirms its continuity with the prologue in its characterization of a dreamer who does learn something about poetic composition through the vision. When he awakens "In the gardyn quhare I fyrst doun fell" (2091), he finds that "all [its] lustie plesance [is] away" (2093). In contrast with the heavenly vision of Honour he has just experienced, he finds that "All erdly thyng" now seems "barrant and vyle" (2100). At first, all he can do in response to this discovery is to "[curse] the feildis" in the Garden that were previously so beautiful to him (2102). But then he finally concludes: "Till make ane end, sittand under a tre / In laude of honour I wrait thir versis thre" (2114-5). The song of praise that he could not muster to May in the prologue becomes at the end of the poem the verses to Honour that he writes in a barren landscape,

despite his sense of displacement upon awakening in the real world, because of the transformative experience of his vision. This conclusion is not triumphant in its tone, however, as the poem ends with an envoy to the king, praising the king for his "Suppreme honour" (2147) and casting itself in humble terms as a "Breif burall quair, of eloquence all quyte" (2161).

The end of the dream frame, moreover, does not immediately indicate a direct connection between the dream the poet has just experienced and the composition of the dream poem that is being concluded, in the manner of *The Book of the Duchess*. Instead, *The Palis of Honoure* shows its narrator composing poems both in the dream frame and within the dream itself. Upon arriving in the dream landscape, which proves to be a nightmarish "wyldernes abhomynable and wast" at first (155), he erupts in a complaint against "Cruel Fortoun" (166): the complaint is a poem inset into the narrative, with a refrain against the "Inconstant warld and [fortune's] quheill contrarius!" (172, 182, 192).[24] The formality of the complaint notwithstanding, the inset poem is easy for the reader to overlook as an example of poetic composition from the dreamer because the poem directs the reader's attention to its substance, the contrast of the current hellish landscape with that of the garden previously depicted. Shortly thereafter, however, the dreamer again delivers a poem, this time one that becomes the focus of the narrative action. After watching the Court of Venus pass by in procession, the narrator summons his courage and sings a "lay" to that merry court (606), complaining of the inconstancy of fortune—and, by extension, of love—and cursing "fals Venus," Cupid, and her court (634-6). This lay clearly corresponds to the first complaint against Fortune earlier in part

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[24] Bawcutt refers to the five lyrics Douglas inserts ("Shorter Poems" xxxviii).

one. After that complaint, the narrator begins to hear beautiful, harmonious music, but he
cannot respond to it with joy, as "every wycht" might:

> For quhen a man is wreth or furius,
>
> Malancolyk for wo or tedius,
>
> Than is al plesance till hym maist contrare
>
> And semblably than so did wyth me fare:
>
> This melody intonyt hevinly thus
>
> For profund wo constrenyt me mak care.

<center>(394-9)</center>

Paradoxically, what should make anyone glad increases the narrator's melancholy. A
similarly contrarian reaction from the narrator upon seeing the procession of lovers in
Venus' court reveals that his emotional state impedes his ability to respond appropriately
to music and beauty and also impedes his experience of love; his incomplete aesthetic
response to Venus' court reveals a corresponding limitation in poetic composition. The
contrast between the "myrth" of the numerous "gudly folk" of the court and the narrator's
melancholic state leads him to sing his lay "Loude as [he] mocht" so that the whole court
stops to hear him (606, 598, 637). The resulting composition is a poem that enrages the
goddess and her courtiers, who, discovering the poet-dreamer, attack him in a mob for his
heresy against love. The dreamer finds himself on trial before the goddess and potentially
facing execution because of his blasphemous verses (666), though he makes clear that he
fears death less than what else may befall him: "But sore I dred me for sum othyr jape /
That Venus suld throw hir subtillyté / In till sum bysnyng best transfigurat me" (738-40).
Douglas ties the trial scene to the idea of metamorphosis to a powerful effect:

transformation is what the dreamer fears, when he does not know if the goddess will transform him into a beast. But transformation of himself and his own poetry, through the influence of Calliope who intervenes on his behalf, is in fact the effect the dream ought to have on the dreamer as a poet.

Although the end of the dream frame does not point directly to the beginning of the dream poem's composition, the poem does make clear that the dream has inspired its writing. The narrator points this out after one digression on the properties of sound traveling through water and air:

> Anewch of this, I not quhat it may mene.
>
> I wyll returne till declare all bedene
>
> My dreidfull dreme with grysly fantasyis.
>
> I schew tofore quhat I had hard and sene,
>
> Perticularly sum of my paynfull tene.
>
> But now God wate quhat ferdnes on me lyis!

<div align="center">(382-7)</div>

The poem as a whole is motivated by his dream, and he makes an extra effort to draw this connection for the reader. Even before this digression, he reminds the reader to notice this poem as a dream poem, underscoring the dreaming and visionary nature of this particular moment of the dream. Though the poet is already within the dream, he becomes very sleepy again, apparently from the noxious fumes of the wasteland in which he finds himself:

> My dasyt hed fordullit dissyly
>
> I rasyt up, half in a letergy,

> As dois a catyve ydronken in slep
>
> And so opperyt tyl my fantasy
>
> A schynand lycht out of the northest sky.
>
> Proportion sounding dulcest hard I pepe
>
> The quhilk with cure till heir I did tak kepe.

<center>(355-61)</center>

The stanza introduces the harmonious music that the dreamer cannot appreciate because of his disturbed emotional state, but it frames the digression by first calling attention to the experience of a dream, suggesting that this dream may be of the kind that enlightens the dreamer. While the "schynand lycht" represents the approaching court of Venus, the morning star, in this context, appearing to his "fantasy," it can also be read as the illumination of a dream. This illumination is ambiguous, positioned as it is in what is almost a dream within a dream. The "fantasy" of this stanza is the dreamer's within the dream, not that of a waking poet or narrator, and what follows is an emotional reaction of deep melancholy to the music he hears and his subsequent resentful lay to Venus. At this stage, the dreamer seems still the "catyve ydronken in slep" more than a poet illuminated by the "schynand licht." By calling attention to this distinction so early in the poem, Douglas suggests both possibilities—illumination and captivity—for the dreamer as a poet over the course of the poem as a whole. The conclusion of the dream frame suggests that this ambiguity remains unresolved until the very end of the poem, when he decides to write the verses to Honour. But even at this point, after the transformative experience of the dream, the end of the dream frame does not suggest a neat end to the dreamer's captivity: on the contrary, after his awakening, the poem emphasizes his continuing

enclosure, as he "remanyt into the garth twa houris" (2101) and it now seems "maist lyk to Hel" (2094). The humble rhetorical position of the envoy suggests that the end of the poet's captivity ultimately depends on the king's approval of the poem, as the "auctor direkit his buke" to the king (2143).

To this point, I have been arguing that Douglas's poem casts the dreamer in the role of a poet; he is not just an observer of the action of the dream, but a participant in it, and even a creator of it, composing poems within the narrative of the dream that create the narrative of the dream. If there were no more to the narratorial "I" in this poem, he would still be another example of a straightforward autography like the narrating "I" of Dunbar's *Goldyn Targe*. Or, like the vaguely characterized old man in the prologue to the *Testament of Cresseid,* Douglas's would be a writing narrator akin to Henryson's reading narrator. But I think it would be a mistake to read the "I" of *The Palis of Honoure* merely as an empty subject position. This "I" is not just referring to an unspecified subjectivity that happens to be that of a poet: he is in fact closely tied to Douglas the poet, just as the king in the *Kingis Quair* is individuated by the life story of James I. Though Douglas's poem is not as clearly a step toward autobiography as the king's book, it does more than present an uncharacterized experientiality. At the end of the poem, Douglas has given the impression that his dreamer has been transformed by the dream within the poem, but just where a reader would expect to find a more precise confirmation of the effect of the dream on the dreamer as a character, the poem concludes with the narrative marker "Till make an end" prefacing the verses to Honour (2114). An oddly placed reminder of the poem's writtenness, the phrase refers ambiguously both to the conclusion of the poem as a whole by its "auctor" (2143) and to the conclusion of the dream experience by the

narratorial "I" who sits under the tree to write his verses. The effect of the line is a subtle merging of the identity of the composer of the verses to Honour with the "auctor" of the "buke" as a whole (2143). This is not to argue that the poem distinguishes itself entirely from autography, but rather that Douglas is inserting something of his own authorial identity into the narrating "I" of the poem.

To be sure, autographic experientiality is still present in the poem and is particularly useful as a framework for reading the vacillating emotions of the dreamer. Critics have sometimes objected to the mobbing scene and the extreme emotional positions taken by the dreamer within it as a fault in characterization (Gray, "Gavin Douglas" 152-3). Here the idea of autography offers a helpful corrective: it is perfectly in keeping with dream poetry as a form of autography to read the emotional state of the dreamer as an indicator of the experientiality being conveyed by the narrating "I" in the poem rather than as the subtle characterization of a full and complete subjectivity. At the same time, however, this dreamer's characterization is not as incoherent as that of Dunbar's dreamer in *The Goldyn Targe.* Gray, for example, argues that Douglas invokes the narrator's extremes of emotion as "part of a fascination both serious and playful with metamorphosis throughout a poem that with its constant transformations of scenes and mood seems to be mirroring the process" (153). At this point in the narrative in particular, the narrator fears metamorphosis for good reason: he has seen the courts of Minerva, Diana, and Venus pass by, and, as he spies on these courts from inside a hollow tree (314), he identifies the hart preceding the court of Diana as Acteon chased by the goddess's hounds (319-324). He recognizes that in spying on a goddess and then angering her, he has placed himself in a parallel position, and Acteon's situation is the

first example of metamorphosis that he thinks of when he fears what Venus will do to

him (745).

The sense of experientiality created by the narrating "I" dominates in this

encounter with Venus, and together with the vicious mobbing scene, serves to diminish

the stature of the goddess both to the dreamer and to the reader. Like the gods in

Henryson's *Testament*, she appears petty and vindictive.[25] Dream poetry often comments

on contrasts or tensions inherent in courtly love poetry, and *The Palis of Honoure* is no

exception. Chaucer's *Parliament of Fowls* places Venus in contrast with Nature, for

example. In the *Kingis Quair*, on the other hand, Venus represents virtuous love and is

allied with the other goddesses Fortune and Minerva (see Boffey, *Fifteenth-Century*

English Dream Visions 91). In Douglas's poem Venus is contrasted with multiple figures:

first both Minerva and Diana, whose courts are noticeably less popular; then the Muses,

and Calliope in particular; and, finally, Honour, the overarching figure whose palace is

the destination of all of these courts. Though Venus is a fearsome goddess in part one of

the poem, she is placated rather easily by Calliope, whose "Court Rhetorical" enters the

narrative just in time to adjudicate the conflict between Venus and the dreamer. Once

Venus becomes the complainant before the Muses, the dreamer finds his "curage

[growing], the quhilk afore wes lost, / Seand [he has] so gret ane advocate" (971-2).[26]

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[25] That the dreamer fears being transformed into a beast because of some "jape" by
Venus helps to reinforce this image of the goddess, as does the argument of Calliope that
"To sla him for sa small a cryme, God wate, / Greter degradyng wer to your estate / All
out than wes his sclander or sich plede" (957-9). She argues that it would be better for
Venus to hand him over to Calliope and for the poet to make reparation for his offence
(955-969).
[26] Calliope is his Advocate in a legal sense in the trial scene, but the title also recalls the
Holy Spirit (cf. John 14:16ff.), and suggests the idea of poetic inspiration by eliding the

The dreamer then easily placates the goddess by offering a lay in her praise as a retraction of his first offending piece. This lay arises out of the relief he feels for being out of danger (1015-9), and is thus a contrast to the first lay motivated by discontentment, but its construction is much like that of the first lay, including a similar use of repetition, and reveals that the poet—as a poet—has not yet been changed or educated by the dream. He can easily write the opposite of his previous poem when his emotional state is opposite.

But the theme of transformation in the trial scene and throughout the poem points to more than the vacillating emotions of the narratorial "I" and suggests that the topic is of more than passing thematic significance: it also calls attention to Douglas's larger artistic ambitions with this poem. These references point to Douglas's indebtedness not only to Chaucer, but also to a larger tradition of Ovidian poetry (see Bawcutt, *Gavin Douglas* 58-59).[27] The focus on metamorphosis also suggests the conscious progression of a poetic career from the Ovidian preoccupations made clear in this poem to Douglas's

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classical Muse with the Christian Spirit of God. This is, of course, an idea that Milton develops fully in *Paradise Lost.*

[27] Bawcutt highlights the importance of Ovid to Douglas and points to numerous references in the poem both to Ovid directly and to the theme of metamorphosis (*Gavin Douglas* 58ff.; *Shorter Poems* xxix). Honeyman, on the other hand, notes that in the *House of Fame*, Ovid is Venus' clerk, whereas Douglas in the trial scene "downplay[s] Chaucer's reference to Ovid" by making the clerk Varius, "whose name evokes the inevitable instability of Love and Fortune" (80 n.5). She argues that Douglas' change "reinforces the philosophical rather than romantic angle of his vision, incorporating Chaucer's device while making it serve a loftier purpose." I agree that Douglas is eager to connect Love and Fortune and that the name of Varius suits his philosophical purpose (see also Bawcutt, *Gavin Douglas* 54). It is hard, however, to accept that this "downplays" Ovid. He ties the theme of metamorphosis to the idea of changes in Fortune and is concerned to place Love poetry into a broader philosophical context, but this should be seen as an expansion upon, rather than suppression of, Ovidian themes in the poem. Ultimately, his "loftier" purpose is found in the Virgilian project.

subsequent Virgilian project, the translation of the *Aeneid*.[28] The Virgilian project is

hinted at already in *The Palis of Honoure*: the poet is released by Venus first on the

condition that he write the short lay in her praise, but also by promising to grant her "nixt

resonabil command" (997). This assignment is given him in the third part of the poem,

when, reconciled to the goddess, he meets her again in the palace of Honour, and she

gives him a book to "put in ryme" (1752). In the next stanza, he notes to the reader,

"Twychand this buke peraventur ye sall here / Sumtyme efter quhen I have mare lasere"

(1756-57). The marginal note from the London edition of 1553 specifies that "By thys

boke he menis Virgil" because in Douglas's appendix to his translation of the *Aeneid* he

notes that he is now "fully quyt" of his "ald promyt" to Venus "As wytnessith my Palyce

of Honour" (*Direction* 119-122). There he also instructs anyone who is dissatisfied with

his translation to "assay al slang laubour agane, / And translait Ovid, as I haue Vergill"

(112-3). As Coldwell notes, this is a reference to Caxton's *Eneydos,* which directs

misunderstanding readers to read Virgil or Ovid (STS I, 263n113). Here Douglas keeps

the pairing of Ovid and Virgil but wittily suggests that a naysayer would benefit from,

and likely be stymied by, a project to translate Ovid. His own poetic career reflects this

pairing: the Ovidian dream poem self-consciously precedes and foreshadows the

Virgilian epic.

  There is a distinction, then, in how *The Palis of Honoure* calls attention to the

poet's artistic situation and the way Chaucer does so in the *House of Fame* and *The*

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[28] Morse further suggests that Douglas's translation of the *Aeneid* rolls into itself the
Virgilian career of writing in "the low, the middle, and the high styles" (107): he
translates the epic, but in his Prologues to the individual books "create[s] an equivalent to
Virgil's earlier career as pastoral poet by making use at numerous points…of both the
Georgics and the *Bucolics*" (see 113-4).

Legend of Good Women. Douglas clearly draws upon both of Chaucer's dream poems and includes a trial scene based on the one the poet endures in the Prologue to *The Legend of Good Women*.[29] In the latter poem, Chaucer's entire poetic career is laid out and judged by the God of Love and defended by Alceste. In this sense, the poem is not self-contained, but refers to the poet's work outside of itself. But Douglas alludes to the poet's life outside of the poem even more specifically than Chaucer does. Just as his poem shows poetic composition taking place within the narrative structure of the poem, and alludes to his future poetic compositions, so also Douglas's status as a clergyman becomes a part of the poem's discussion. When on trial before Venus, the poet uses his status as a "spirituall" rather than a "seculare" man to try to deflect the charges against him, claiming that Venus has no jurisdiction over him (696-7).[30] Honeyman points to Bawcutt's analysis of this distinction as evidence that Douglas introduces a "spiritual dimension" to his poem that Chaucer does not (70). But whereas Bawcutt focuses on the "potentially comic discrepancy between 'spirituall' and 'seculair,'" in the scene, Honeyman seems to miss the scene's comic implications. She does notice the conflict in "the streak of deference [toward Venus] that runs through the narrator's assertions of

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[29] Bawcutt points out the many structural parallels between the trial scene in *The Palis of Honoure* and the poet's predicament in the Prologue to *The Legend of Good Women* (*Shorter Poems* xxxiii-iv). Honeyman analyzes how *The Palice of Honour* responds to *The House of Fame*: she is not the first to point out that Douglas' poem responds to Chaucer's, but her analysis is the most recent. She emphasizes Douglas' differences with Chaucer, pointing out that Douglas adds "a moral level to the quest scheme established in the *House of Fame*" (68). Her argument is that "The *Palice's* focus on communicating a world of eternal wisdom is in clear opposition to the *House of Fame's* emphasis on a quality known for its capricious nature" (74). Though this contrast between the two poems is clear—she notes as Bawcutt had that the Palice's foundation is of marble, whereas Fame's House has a foundation of ice (74-5)—Honeyman overstates the moral certainty conveyed by Douglas's poem.

[30] Later in his life Douglas was to repeat this argument when on trial for attempting to purchase a bishopric (see Bawcutt, *Gavin Douglas* 13, and *Shorter Poems* 186 n.664ff).

spiritual superiority over Venus," but she takes the conflict at face value, asserting that "while the poem's value system undeniably privileges the narrator's Christian view over Venus' pagan one, the narrator does fear Venus' capacity to strip him of his capacity for self-governance, and this eventually leads him to a form of compromise whereby the narrator both acknowledges Venus' power and remains loyal to God, Honour and his own poetic autonomy" (70). Honeyman misses what Bawcutt suggests and what Spearing points out overtly: that the trial scene uncovers the irony that a cleric should be a captive of Venus in the first place. As Spearing describes it, "If the love-garden of the opening was transformed in his dream into a hideous wilderness, that is what it ought to have been all along to a celibate priest" (*Medieval Dream-Poetry* 206). Spearing goes on to argue that the poem's subsequent focus on the narrator as a poet mediates between these conflicting roles of lover and priest (207). The solution that poetry mediates the impasse mirrors the perspective of the narrator in Chaucer's *Parliament of Fowls*, in which the poet-narrator's dilemma is his inexperience in love. The dream gives him his poetic material, despite his personal inexperience (160-63, and 167-68). Douglas's dilemma differs from Chaucer's in that the status of lover and clerk are fundamentally incompatible, except perhaps in a satiric poem.

Although the introduction of the Muses helps to resolve the obvious contradiction in the narrator's character as a clerk and lover, it does not change the fact that he is a professed—and ambitious—clergyman. The narrator's status as a clerk in *The Palis of Honoure* is more than just a momentary preoccupation that is neatly resolved by the poem: even within the poem, Douglas's ambition as a clergyman is tied to his ambition as a poet. As Bawcutt notes, "It has been plausibly suggested that there was a connection

between [this poem's dedication to the king] and Douglas's appointment to St. Giles'

sometime before March 1503" (*Gavin Douglas* 49). In the poem itself, he is

simultaneously eyeing his future poetic project, demanded of him by Venus, and his

promotion within the ranks of the clergy by the king. With the king as his primary reader

(2146), Douglas uses this work both to display his current poetic ability, and as a promise

of subsequent productivity.

      The Palis of Honoure directs the reader's attention to the poet's life outside of the

poem. These references to the author's life even within the dream portion of the poem act

as a counterpoint to the artificiality of the dream form that arises from the imitation of

Chaucer and the other dream poets of the fourteenth century. The insertion of personal

experience into the form affects how the dream is to be interpreted as part of a poetic

tradition: situating the events of the poem with respect to his own life is one way for the

poet to argue for the significance and validity of the dream experience being depicted and

shows that he bases his poem on more than mere convention or imitation. This

development reflects an expansion on previous uses of the form, because it shows both

the poet's direct use of the dream form and an additional level of self-reflexivity in a

poet's consciousness about writing in the dream form. Moreover, recognizing that the

poet's subjectivity is entwined with the dream poem he is writing reveals something of

the way dream poetry works to create fiction. As Kruger has noted, one important aspect

of the dream poem is its negotiation of the ambiguous status of a fiction, which, like a

dream, can be located between earthly and heavenly realms and is subject to a similar

process of interpretation (130-34). But the addition of personal detail in a poem like *The*

Palis of Honoure complicates this process of interpretation by suggesting, even if subtly, that the dream is perhaps not a fiction at all.

In one reading of *The Palis of Honoure*, for example, Amsler draws a direct connection between the poem's dream form and the forms of "the *Bildungsroman* and autobiography, both literal (Augustine's *Confessions*) and fictional (*Jane Eyre* and *The Sorrows of Young Werther*)" (187). As a "retrospective narrative," Amsler argues, the dream poem uses "tense manipulation to express the intersubjective relationship between the present narrating self and the past dreaming self" (186, 188). This reading relies on the recognition of a distinction between "two voices in the poem" (186)—that of the knowing "narrator" and that of "the misunderstanding dreamer" (195)—and Amsler comments that

> In first-person narratives such as autobiography and the dream vision, the narrator generally seeks to achieve coherence and avoid personal, cultural, or spiritual dissociation by ensuring that his past self arrives in the present at the point where his present self already is, that is, by ensuring that the past becomes the immediate present. (187)

This description of retrospective narrative and the comparison with autobiography is useful to a point: the narrative of the past self arriving in the present is an obvious element of the dream form, handled in various ways in the conclusion of a dream frame, often with the "present narrating self" taking on the project of writing the dream that has just ended. And although the comparison with the *Bildungsroman* is anachronistic, in the case of *The Palis of Honoure* with its focus on the formation and education of a poet it is not wholly inappropriate as an analogy. However, with the neat distinction between the

voices of the "present narrating self and the past dreaming self" and the tensions that may

be found between those two subjective positions, Amsler is describing the very search for

"coherence" that Spearing objects to in modern critics' approaches to medieval

autographies, a coherence that is not always to be found, and is often confounded by the

poems themselves.[31] Furthermore, neither literal nor fictional autobiography by itself is a

perfect match for the kind of self-writing found in the more personal autography Spearing

identifies in the work of Hoccleve or James I. Amsler's analysis, distinguishing between

a past and a present self within a text, works well when both selves are clearly

nonfictional, such as Augustine in his *Confessions*, or fictional, such as Jane Eyre. In the

former, the reader is urged to note the causal connections between the experiences of the

past and the present self who emerges from these experiences.[32] In the latter, the reader

suspends disbelief at the outset and reads the fictional narrative as if the narrator were a

real person with a real past. In both cases, the "intersubjective relationship" takes place

on the same level of reality. But a poem such as *The Palis of Honoure* in particular

stymies such straightforward judgments, because it contains elements of fiction and

nonfiction and blends them cleverly but also somewhat indiscriminately. *The Palis of

Honoure* asks the reader to suspend disbelief about the clearly artificial structure of the

dream within a narrative frame, while asserting both dream and frame as if they have

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[31] See *Medieval Autographies* 3-4. In a different context, Kelly notes that "[Henryson's *Testament*] cannot always be analyzed in accord with postmedieval ideals of unity and coherence. For instance, Venus in the beginning [of that poem] is not to be completely harmonized with Venus in the middle; she is instead to be taken as she comes" (*Chaucerian Tragedy* 259). This interpretation also applies very well to Douglas's Venus, by turns petty and benevolent, in *The Palis of Honoure*.

[32] This oversimplification, of course, brackets the question of creative license or embellishment of memories in a work of nonfictional autobiography, and presupposes that the interpretation of memories must take place for an account of a life to be written.

actually happened to a person who resembles the actual poet, and attributing the writing

of the poem itself to the influence of the dream and the heavenly vision that occurred in

it. Fittingly, the end of the dream frame suggests simultaneously that a genuine heavenly

vision has occurred—in contrast with the dream, now "All erdly thing" seems "barrant

and vyle" (2100)—and that the dream is the product of a poet's art. Describing his

longing to return to the dream, the narrator states that, "Always my mynd wes on the

lusty yle, / In purpose evir till have dwelt in that art, / Of rethorik cullouris til have fund

sum parte" (2104-6).[33] The inherent ambiguity of dream experience enhances the

effectiveness of its use for the creation of a fiction that toys with the distinction between

truth and fiction.

The *Palis of Honoure* is like the *Kingis Quair*, then, in using the dream and

autobiographical detail to authenticate the poem. Both poems work by creating a fiction

that seems autobiographical, and by suggesting that the dream really happened in the life

of a real person. One distinction between these two poems is that the King renders his

autobiographical story in artistic terms, making his life like a work of art, whereas

Douglas inserts autobiographical details to make his work of art lifelike. Unlike later

authors (such as Lodge and Spenser in the next chapter) who embrace the fictionality of

their work, subsuming dreams into myth or allegory much more unapologetically, these

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[33] Parkinson glosses these lines with an emphasis on the multiple meanings of "fund." He reads it that "Douglas's dreamer yearns to remain in the country of poetic invention that he 'fund' (found, invented) in his dream." But there is also the pun on the word "art," which here means "country." The lines, then, could be read to mean the (real) country where he discovered "sum parte" of "rhetorik cullouris," or as a country "of rhetorik culloris" invented by him. I read the former as the primary sense but with the second strongly connoted.

fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century authors justify their fictions by creating the illusion of representing something that really happened to them.

A brief comparison with the dream poems of Skelton helps to bear out my argument about the way authenticating personal details in *The Palis of Honoure* interact with the poem's dream form to create an "I" that is closely tied to the poet himself. In both *The Bowge of Court* and *The Garlande of Laurell* Skelton handles the dream form's use of a narratorial "I" in ways that signal a departure from medieval precedents and similarly tie the "I" of the poem to the voice of the poet. In *The Bowge of Court* the dream prologue presents a poet narrator struggling to compose the kind of poetry he has read in "poetes olde," who are marked by their "great auctoryte" (8-9).[34] Motivated by "theyr renome and theyr fame" (15), the narrator is "sore moved to aforce the same" but is stymied in the endeavor by "Ignorance," who tells him he is "to dulle" to "illumyne" (17-18, 20). Although Skelton's dream prologue is in many ways typical of the form— with its seasonal opening and contemplative but restless narrator—it breaks with precedents as well. Ignorance is personified even before the allegorical dream portion of the poem begins, creating an intrusion of the "covert termes" of allegory into the waking portion of the poem (10). The prologue also distinguishes itself from a typical love allegory by its realistic setting: the poet falls asleep "At Harwyche Porte, slumbrynge as I laye, / In myne hostes house called Powers Keye" (34-5). Scattergood's notes point to arguments that use these locating details to date the poem (395-6), but even if attempts to identify the host's house are inconclusive, the setting is clearly intended to be more realistic than either the poetic love garden favored by Dunbar and Douglas or the

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[34] References to Skelton are to Scattergood's edition of the poems.

bedchamber of unspecified location that is the setting for some of Chaucer's reading

narrators.[35]

In this poem, the impression of a realistic locating detail in the prologue helps to

cast the poem's dream as a real dream to be interpreted, downplaying the dream as a

poetic fiction, in spite of the metapoetic themes within the dream itself.[36] In the prologue,

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[35] I do not mean to deny an artistic purpose to Skelton's locating detail. Dickey comments perceptively that although the location is "usually glossed…as an actual building owned by a friend of Skelton, the inn where Drede sleeps [Powers Keye] is perfectly apt for the poem's allegory on all its levels, mercantile, courtly, and metapoetic" (240 n.9). Of course, the reference to a host's house also recalls the General Prologue of the *Canterbury Tales*, with its character of the Host (747): the narrator locates himself "in Southwerk at the Tabard as I lay," (20) just before the group of pilgrims enters the inn. The phrase "as I lay" is repeated by Skelton, and in Chaucer seems to signal what will be "another of his dream visions" before its turn to the waking world with the entrance of the pilgrims into the tavern (Benson 5). Nevertheless, the primary impression of this detail is to locate the poet-sleeper in the real world.

[36] It has become increasingly common for the dream portion of the poem to be interpreted self-reflexively, as an exploration of metapoetic concerns as much as an indictment of court culture. Although Simpson reads the poem primarily as political and the dilemma of the poet as that of the satirist ("Killing Authors" 186ff.), he also sees the parallel between the "poetic and political" levels of the poem: the crisis for the poet as Drede in the poem is that "by failing to write courageous, morally forthright satire, Skelton equally fails to join an ancient poetic tradition in which poets, or at least some of them, 'spared not vyce to wrythe'" (189).

Other self-reflexive readings focus more on the poem's meaning with respect to language itself: Cooney argues that the poem reflects a "crisis of allegory" at the beginning of the early modern period triggered by "the textual practices of the new humanist translators and philologists" (162). In this reading, Skelton's poem puts emphasis on the "slipperiness of language itself" (157). Dickey reads the poem as integrating multiple levels of allegory, but he focuses primarily on Drede as a poet, arguing that through the allegorical figures of the dream "Skelton examines the pressures on one who aspires to the laurel, pressures which include not only the weighty fame of predecessors, but also, and more problematically, the potential amorality of fiction, the fear that both the artist and the con artist use the same bag of tricks" (244). Barr and Ward-Perkins see the poem's problematizing of language as a critique of "the central premises of traditional advice to princes literature" (250): in their reading, Skelton's poem asks "If the language which circulates at court is that which is rewarded by court sustenance, how can a speaker lay claim to the transparent, honest counsel so earnestly enjoined as a 'sine qua non' of good government in conventional treatises on counsel for the king?" (251).

Skelton's narratorial "I" is clearly characterized as an aspiring poet, and the locating

detail helps to associate this "I" with the writer of the poem. The abrupt ending of the

dream frame gives immediacy to this association, as the narrator upon awakening from

the dream instantly "[Catches] penne and ynke, and [writes] this lytell boke" (532). The

connections between poet, book, and dream are then confirmed in the last stanza of the

poem, which links the interpretation of the book directly with dream interpretation. The

frame ends with an overt assertion of the ambiguity of dreams: the poet hopes that with

his book

> …no man were myscontente;

Besechynge you that shall it see or rede,

In every poynte to be indyfferente,

Syth all in substaunce of slumbrynge doth procede.

I will not saye it is mater in dede,

But yet oftyme suche dremes be founde trewe.

Now constrewe ye what is the resydewe.

<div style="text-align:center">(533-9)</div>

This is one of the clearest presentations by a late medieval poet of the benefit of the

dream form for creating ambiguity: he begs that his reader will be "in every

poynte…indyfferente," and presents such ambivalence as the only reasonable option,

given the poem's origins in "slumbrynge." He closes by reminding the reader of the

double potential of dreaming: *he* is not willing to say that the dream is substantial, "But

yet oftyme suche dremes be founde trewe." Thus, he leaves it to his reader to interpret the

"resydewe" of this dream. The prologue, furthermore, locates the dream as a middle

vision, subject to interpretation, by calling attention to the range of the poet's imagination on a vertical axis: as a poet, he fears "[climbing] hyer than he may fotynge have" because of the potential for "[sliding] downe" (27-8). His poetic career is first imaged as a ride on Fortune's wheel. But next he presents the same "up and down" image as an act of contemplation: "Thus up and down my mynde was drawen and cast / That I ne wyste what to do was best" (29-30). In his work as a poet, he is both "up…drawen" and "down…caste" in his "mynde," and he is caught in the middle. His dream arises out of this double potential he sees for himself as a poet, and dreaming has the same double potential and tension of drawing upward to a heavenly vision or casting down to an earthly or even diabolical one, as Kruger points out (128-9).

Skelton exploits this double potential of dreaming not simply to end his poem with ambiguity, but rather to place ambiguity at the center of the exploration of Drede's poetic dilemma. Dickey writes of the dream frame in *The Bowge of Court* that

> Despite…the poem's obvious force and effectiveness as an allegory of
> Fortune and a court satire, the prologue and concluding two stanzas
> explicitly frame the poem as a treatment of the poet himself, his adequacy
> or inadequacy, his techniques, subject matter, motives, inspiration, and
> finally his creation of an object in quest of interpretation. (241)

What his article does not fully appreciate, however, is how important the dream form with its double potential is to this "treatment of the poet himself." Not just a poetic "technique," the dream form holds together the various "mercantile, courtly, and metapoetic" themes that Dickey expounds so well (240n9). Like Cooney, Dickey emphasizes the parallel allegories associating the "covert termes" of poetic language with

the duplicity of the characters Favell, Harvy Hafter, Disdayne, Dyssymulacyon, and

Disceyte encountered by Drede in the dream (244-46, 247-48).[37] He then reads the figure

of Suspycyon as representing an extreme of the "concealments of allegory," hiding all

meaning in a "murk of absent antecedents," and contrasts this with Drede's interpretation

of Ryotte, which shows the opposite extreme of "moral didacticism" (249): in this

reading, the character of Ryotte "seems particularly designed to expose Drede's

limitations as a practising poet," because the bluntness of the poet's "moral reflections"

reveals his inability to "cloke…subtylly" like the "poetes olde" that he desires to emulate

(Dickey 249). These opposite extremes within the dream with respect to language are left

unresolved by the dream, although the nightmarish near-murder of Drede leaves the

impression that the dream's political climate makes speaking impossible. After his

encounter with Suspycyon, for instance, Drede is left "musynge in [his] mynde" (230),

but having promised to keep Suspycyon's secret counsel, "[he dares] not speak. [He]

promysed to be dome" (229). The impossibility of poetic achievement within the dream,

however, leads directly to the waking composition of the book. Regarding this point,

Simpson asks, "What is the 'resydewe' of this poem: court satire or simply the inability

to produce court satire?" ("Killing Authors" 182). The poem's dream form allows the

poet to leave this question unresolved. The only resolution lies in his steering readers to

interpret the book as they would a dream, but it is quickly apparent that this answer does

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[37] Cooney emphasizes how Skelton's poem "reflects not a serene but a tortured view of
the allegorical mode" as the allegorical figures encountered by Drede do not represent
"clear distinctions of a universal kind," but rather "verbal distinction" that in Skelton's
critique ultimately "collapses" (162). Cooney reads Skelton's allegory as a suspicion of
the humanist championing of "*copia*, of the plenitude and variety of language" (162) and
as questioning, in this context, the survival of allegory, "with its dependence on absolute
and transcendental truths and ideas" (161; see 159-63 for her discussion).

not resolve the tensions the dream has raised. The poet points to "indifference" as an interpretive mode both for a dream and for his writing: not claiming that the dream is "mater in dede," he ends by suggesting that the dream could be "trewe." But even if the reader could decide the question of the dream's double potential in favor of its truth, that does not in itself resolve the question of the dream's "resydewe": if the dream is a true one, after all, that leaves Drede as a poet in a precarious position, unable to speak. In the end, the absence of a clear answer is what answers Simpson's question, for the inability to produce a court satire is itself a form of court satire.

In spite of the more realistic opening, then, *The Bowge of Court* differs from *The Palis of Honour* in its presentation of the poet within the dream. Whereas the prologue suggests that the poet is transparently writing about his own experience, the poet of Skelton's dream hides behind an allegorical mask as the character Drede. This concealment of the poet's identity behind a character type drawn from love allegory and placed into an "allegory of Fortune" (Dickey 241) both mirrors the poem's metapoetic concerns about allegorical concealment and fits its political satire. The dream is introduced and assessed realistically, but any real-life association implied there between Drede and the poet is hedged by the deniability intrinsic to the dream form, a deniability that is of obvious importance for the poem to work as a court satire.

In *The Garlande or Chapelet of Laurell*, on the other hand, Skelton does the opposite, not simply creating the impression of an association between poet and dreamer, but specifically identifying the poet dreamer with his own name: the dreamer is both the narratorial "I" of the poem and identified as Poeta Skelton. Moreover, the subject of the poem is not just composition by *a* poet; rather, Skelton's own poetic production,

laureation, and admittance to the court of the Queen of Fame are at the center of the dream's discussion. Dyce's famous comment that "the history of literature affords no second example of a poet having deliberately written sixteen hundred lines in honour of himself" (qtd in Scattergood 496) though amusing is misleading, however, as the poem is not purely triumphant in tone as Dyce suggested. Published in 1523, the poem is understood to have been begun around 1495 to celebrate Skelton's academic laureations "by the University of Oxford in 1488, by Louvain in 1492 and by Cambridge in 1493" (Scattergood 496). The poem does indeed present itself as furthering the fame and name of "Poeta Skelton," but it does so with extreme self-awareness, investigating the impediments to enduring fame before applauding its poet at the very end of the poem's dream. This dream, moreover, is set in a narrative frame that encourages an understanding of the dream's double potential. Whereas *The Bowge of Court* plays with the notion of the impossibility of meaningful poetic language in a court setting, in *The Garlande of Laurell* poetic immortality is possible, but perhaps not for Skelton. Laureation in the poem stands not just for academic recognition, then, but for a place at the court of the Quene of Fame (59-63), that is, an enduring recognition that would admit Skelton to the ranks of the "auncient poetis" in the queen's court (65, cf.1100-4). As the Quene of Fame points out to Dame Pallas at the beginning of Skelton's dream, the laureate court is not something one can be "avaunce[d]" into with arguments (115): it is only by writing something "memoryall" that one achieves "a name inmortall" (118-19).

As in *The Bowge of Court*, Skelton uses locating details in the prologue to the dream to merge the identities of the "I" of the poem with the real Skelton: the header of the poem reads that the poem is by "Mayster Skelton, Poete Laureat, studiously dyvysed

at Sheryfhotten Castell, in the foreste of Galtres" and the location is confirmed in the fourth stanza, which places the poem's "I" in the "forest of Galtres" (22). In addition to identifying and locating the poet, however, the prologue also serves as a framework for the concerns about lasting fame that will be raised by the dream: Skelton uses the dream form's typical preoccupation with the variability of fortune (11), as he does also in *The Bowge of Court*, to suggest from the outset the uncertainty of fame. Even the poet who has already been recognized as "Poete Laureat" begins the poem in contemplation of the fragility of fortune, "musynge in [his] thought" at the "somer flower" and changing weather (8-12), the stump of an oak "that somtyme grew full streyghte" (17-18), and the exhausted hart about to be felled by a hunt (24-7). This meditation on mutability and mortality leads into the dream of Poeta Skelton's presentation before the Quene of Fame. Although the dream culminates with the poet's recognition and acclaim, the frame narrative ends with another reminder of doubleness, with the poet's waking vision of the figure of Janus "with his double chere" (1515) and a final reminder of fortune and doubleness in the final line, "Good luk this new yere, the olde yere is past" (1518).

The dream form, then, acts as a restraint upon the poem's self-promotion, placing Skelton's personal concerns about poetic fame into a more universal context, one in which fame, like fortune, cannot be guaranteed to last and dreams cannot be guaranteed as true. It is within this ambivalent and insecure context of the dream frame that Skelton's self-promotion takes place. But the poem also plays with the dream form's self-reflexivity, and the applause given to Skelton's "laurell" near the end of the dream (1503) wittily suggests that the writing of this dream is the "memoryall" work that will satisfy the Quene of Fame. Skelton takes the dream form's usual events out of sequence: instead

of the dream leading to the poem's writing, the poem is already being judged and applauded before the dream's end—before it is even written. Over the course of the poem, Skelton allows the arguments in favor of his laureation to fall flat, and presents himself humbly to his predecessors, Gower, Chaucer, and Lydgate, as "glad to please, and loth to offend" (413, 427, 441), but in the end he places himself in their company by exploding the usual timeline of the dream form. He turns autographic dream poetry into something more personal by making his "I" represent not just himself as a poet, but himself as the poet who is in the process of composing the poem. As Breen notes, this "I" breaks into and "actually disrupts the integrity of the dream narrative" to express his impatience with Fame's rejection and to state at line 1491, "Now hereof it erkith me lenger to wryte" (Breen 358).[38] The dream's end suggests that, indeed, he cannot argue his way into the court of Fame: a self-fulfilling prophecy, his "laurell" speaks for him, but only within the tenuous reality of a dream.

But the reference to the "laurell" at the end of the dream is not just a metapoetic reference to the work being written. The word carries multiple levels of significance throughout the poem: in referencing this poem, it also stands for the whole body of his work read out by Occupacyon, for his academic laureation, and for his status as a member (or potential member) of Fame's court. It is also figured in the "cronell of lawrell" (776) that is made for him at the center of the dream by the Countess of Surrey

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[38] Breen writes that "At no other moment does the poem actually pull its audience out of the dream and into the moment of composition" (358): he notes that although "the dreamer returns immediately afterward, in line 1492, to Occupation's presentation of Skelton's poem about Apollo, it is no longer rendered in Occupation's voice. Instead Skelton himself relates the rest of the dream vision (lines 1492-1510), claiming for himself an ambiguous narrative voice, not clearly that of Skelton the dreamer within the dream, and certainly not that of Skelton the speaker within the frame narrative (who awakens only at line 1511)" (359).

and her ladies. As Tarnoff points out, having received "this chapelet" (807) from the
ladies,

> When Skelton subsequently enters the Queen of Fame's court "Where all
> the sayd poetis sat in there degree" (1104), he is not praised for his poetic
> achievement (at least not initially), but for his chaplet. To be precise,
> Skelton imagines the initial reception of his poem (that is, the poem we are
> reading entitled the *Laurell*) through the accolades his chaplet wins for
> him from among the court's literary establishment. (432)

But in addition to the physical object of needlework, the *Garlande of Laurell* also
contains the garland of verses penned by Poeta Skelton for the ladies, in recompense for
their gift to him. Tarnoff fittingly describes this work as a "poetic daisy chain in which
embroidered flowers [l. 802] and their artificers are transformed into verbal conceits"
(427). This portion of the dream offers more authenticating detail, tying the poem to the
poet's real life with the reference to the Countess of Surrey and the identifiable ladies of
her coterie. But the Countess is presented with the same gravity that is given to Fame and
Dame Pallas in the poem, and in her "goodly chaumber of astate" she is seated "in a
chayre…honorably" surrounded by her gentlewomen (768-70). In a quieter, more
enclosed, version of the "suyng to the Quene of Fame" earlier in the poem (253), the
gentlewomen offer their work to Poeta Skelton in exchange for his "remembraunce" of
"iche of them [with] thankis commendable" (812, 820): Skelton memorializes them for
their work of art, and the garland he creates for them is "memoryall" of his poetic work

as well.[39] Like Douglas's inset lyrics, Skelton's are deftly integrated into the dream's

larger themes of fame and memorialization, but whereas Douglas's lyrics are integrated

into the plot of the narrative, Skelton's stand out, pointing also to a new role for the

dream form as a frame for a collection of lyrics.[40]

Like Douglas's *Palis of Honour*—a medieval dream poem that foreshadows the

poet's next project, a Renaissance work of translation—Skelton's *Garland* occupies an

interesting place between literary periods. Breen argues that the *Garland* presents an idea

of poetic laureation that stands against the idea of an "'early modern' Skelton," the

"original 'self-crowned laureate'" who "deliberately and self-consciously lays claim to

the laurel and, crucially, appropriates its classical symbolic connotation: individual

achievement, everlasting fame, and…unqualified conquest" (349). Against this "wholly

triumphant" picture, Breen reads the poem as "contributing to the development of a more

fluid conception of historical periodization, one in which the laureate poet becomes

defined through his function within a broader artistic project of cultural transmission"

(350). Here the achievement of the laurel does not mean "rest[ing] in victorious *otium*":

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[39] Both Tarnoff and Breen call attention to the exchange that takes place in this scene
(Tarnoff 426; Breen 356-7). Tarnoff focuses on the exchange of feminine (needlework)
and masculine ("the poet's pen") objects of art (427-29). Breen calls attention to the
connection between "laureation and poetic duty": Skelton's exchange with the ladies
offers "a model of artistic production" based on "generosity" and reciprocation, rather
than the competition exhibited before the Queen of Fame (356).
     Breen furthermore connects Skelton's memorialization of the ladies through his
verses (357) with Apollo's description of the laurel earlier in the poem as "a
remembraunce of Daphnes transformacyon" (l. 320). Breen points out that "Apollo's
laurel is a token neither of conquest nor of any other kind of triumph" (352) but rather it
is solely "a token of literary 'remembraunce'" (353).
[40] See *The Court of Venus* in Chapter 3, below. Phillips points to the dream poem as "one
of the ancestors of the Elizabethan poetic miscellany and the sonnet sequence" ("Dream
Poems" 384).

Identity for the laureate is thus not defined exclusively in terms of a status

gained as a reward for past literary work. Rather, poetic identity is also

contingent upon continued creative labor for which the stakes are

considerably higher than personal gain: to access, adapt, and transmit a

literary tradition that traces its genealogy back through the beginning of

history and into mythology. (350)

Apollo is, after all, the original laureate, according to the poem: "Phebus was formest of

all that came theder" (l. 287). Thus, despite the lengthy accounting of Skelton's poetic

works in the poem, the Queen of Fame expresses her concern about his "slowthfull

ydelnes" (120) and finds him "wonder slake" (69). Breen's argument suggests that

Skelton is not simply using rhetorical modesty that is obviously contradicted by his long

list of achievements: in fact, "the laurel to which he aspires is not a self-generated

reward; rather it is conferred through a process of evaluation, deliberation, and election"

(352). This model of laureation, based on "a sense of ongoing, collaborative obligation"

(362) helps to explain the full significance of the artistic exchange between Skelton and

the ladies who make the chaplet: just as the chaplet itself is the result of the ladies'

"collective work," so too "Skelton's lyrics may indeed serve to advance his name as a

poet, but only because they provide occasion for him to preserve the women's identities"

(Breen 357). The poem presents literary history as both forward- and backward-looking,

and Breen ties this simultaneous sense of past achievement and future obligation to the

figure of Janus at the end of the dream frame.

Although Phillips fittingly describes the *Garland* as a poem "finely balanced

between self-promotion and self-deprecation" (384), this is not the only distinction the

poem balances. In addition to the focus on past and future—"olde yere" and "new yere" (1518)—the figure of Janus also reflects the poem's full expression of the dream form's double potential, with its location between heavenly and earthbound perspectives, between good fortune and ill, and between memorialization and its potential denial. The end of the dream brings together heavenly and earthly perspectives: the noise of the poet's moment of triumph resounds from the "starry hevyn" to the "grownde" (1508-9). His awakening "out of [the] dreme" (1511) back into the mutable world of the dream prologue is then paired with the waking vision of Janus, whom the poet sees when he looks "to the hevyn sperycall upwarde" (1514). The god's "almanak" reflects knowledge of the future that the poet himself may or may not have just acquired through the dream (1516). The reassertion of fortune ("Good luk this new yere") in the last line reflects this uncertainty, not merely about the double potential of dreaming, or of a poet's fortune: Skelton deftly ties the ambiguities of the dream form to the mutability of the human condition, an aspect of the dream form that is explored by subsequent poets but most clearly picked up and illuminated by Spenser.

These dream poems from late medieval poets show a self-consciousness about the experience of writing poetry that is an integral part of the form from Chaucer on. What changes, however, is the degree to which these poets use the dream form to associate fantastical dream experiences with their real-life identities and poetic reputations. This leads to a paradoxical use of the dream as a device for conveying a fiction. On the one hand, as part of an established literary tradition, a late medieval dream poem is a highly allusive and overtly wrought literary creation that calls attention to the more artificial and conventional elements of the form: Douglas's dreamer in the *Palis of Hounoure* falls

asleep in a garden that is drawn out of the tradition of dream poetry. But Douglas and Skelton both, nonetheless, work also to ground these works with points of reference to life in the real world, most importantly by tying the identity of the narrating "I" in these poems with themselves as authors. Their use of autographic dream form, then, and the experientiality it conveys becomes more precisely the experientiality of a particular poet. Later in the sixteenth century, poets who continue to use elements of the dream form are much more unapologetic about the fictional worlds they create with them.

Coda: The Dream Form in Prefaces to Works of Translation

All of the poems examined in these two chapters taken together demonstrate the fundamental malleability of the dream form, both in its usefulness for a variety of topics—the career of Dunbar alone reveals this—and in its ability to overlap with other poetic forms and modes, such as love allegory, court satire, begging poem, lyric sequence, tragic vision, and even nascent autobiography. This generic flexibility is one of the main qualities of the form to carry over into Renaissance works and in the sixteenth century its influence can be seen in a variety of elegiac forms, in tragic and love visions, as well as incorporated into the epic worlds of Spenser and Milton. It is used also in prefaces to works of translation, itself an important new—and self-consciously transitional—form in sixteenth-century English writing. Douglas's influence extends into the later sixteenth century principally through his larger project of the translation of the *Aeneid*, which he completed in 1513, and with which he purposefully ended his poetic career (Conclusio 1). He points out confidently in the Conclusio following the thirteenth

book that after his death his name will live on through this translation (5-12). He ties his

own immortality as a poet directly to his connection with Virgil: "Thus up my pen and

instrumentis full ȝor / On Vergillis post I fix for evirmore" (13-14). Indeed, Bawcutt

points out his "continuous" reputation as the "'learned bishop of Dunkeld'" and influence

on later English poets such as Surrey and Sackville ("Dunbar and Douglas" 86-7). His is

the first Renaissance translation of that poem into English, and was an influence on

Surrey's partial translation, printed in 1557.[41]

But even as his Virgilian project eclipses his earlier dream poem in importance,

the poet insistently recalls *The Palis of Honoure* in the concluding verses to his epic

translation, fashioning a complete poetic career for himself out of the two poems together

(STS IV, Mensioun 6-8; Direction 119-24): if the *Eneados* completed his poetic career,

the *Palis* began it. But Douglas also brings the dream form into his translation, in his

Prologue to the thirteenth book, a fifteenth-century addition to Virgil's epic by Mapheus

Vegius. The prologue begins with a typical seasonal opening, though the more than 70

lines of natural description of the end of the summer day reveal that the poet feels free to

linger "musing apon this and now on that," having completed the translation of the

twelve books of the *Aeneid* (66). When he falls asleep out in the field, under a tree, he is

greeted in his dream by an angry "agit man" (76) wearing "on his hed of lawrer tre a

crown / Lyke to sum poet of the ald fasson" (87-8). Despite the laurel crown, Vegius does

not cut as noble a figure as Henryson's Esope: his "threidbair" garments suggest to the

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[41] Coldwell downplays the influence of Douglas on Surrey (see STS I, 118-19), but
Ridley has asserted that "the similarity between the two translations in lines, phrases, and
isolated words, is so striking as to suggest that Surrey actually wrote with a copy of
Douglas' work before him" (25). Bawcutt assesses the evidence in her book-length study
of Douglas, judging that although "It is possible to over-estimate Surrey's indebtedness
to Douglas" the borrowings are still "many and pervasive" (198; see 197-99).

dreamer that he has not changed his clothes "fully that fourty year" (82-4). Mapheus

Vegius is distinctly displeased that Douglas has ignored his thirteenth book of the *Aeneid*

in his translation (99-106). Though Douglas addresses the old man "with reverens" (89),

his treatment of Vegius as a poet is somewhat cavalier. Douglas hopes that Vegius will

excuse him for his omission, but Vegius is not satisfied until Douglas promises to

translate his book—a promise he extracts by clubbing the poet with "twenty rowtis" on

his back (147). After waking, Douglas proceeds with the translation, not with any

particular enthusiasm for Vegius's book, but out of a sense of obligation he feels from the

"bissy" birds that have also awakened to greet the new day and peasants going out into

the fields: he resolves not to "be a daw, [he] will not slepe" but will keep his promise

(184). The prologue ends, then, more quickly and resolutely than it began.

In this parody of an oracular dream, the father-figure who appears is not

particularly revered, but he gets his way by giving the dreamer a beating. This use of the

dream form allows Douglas to append Vegius's book to his project while pointing out the

book's inferior status to the original Virgilian material (189). But the preface is not

wholly negative in its outlook: Douglas recognizes a benefit to himself in dutifully

applying himself even to this material, and he allows that Vegius is popular and that "my

text sall mony like" (190). Paradoxically, then, this dream prologue offers both a

justification of the translation and a denial of personal responsibility for choosing to

include it with his serious project. At the same time, Douglas uses it to elevate his own

poetry, by pointing out that although Vegius's original is inferior to Virgil's, "I speke na

wers than I have doyn befor" when translating Virgil's twelve books (194): his

translation, in other words, has the power to elevate Vegius's text beyond its original

value. This attitude is a far cry from the posture of a translator as a humble, unpresuming, conveyor of his author's words—the pose taken by Henryson at the beginning of the *Morall Fabillis* (43) and whose Esop is the very reverend father that Vegius is not.

The dream form is still used for such rhetorical expressions of humility in later works of translation, such as Jasper Heywood's Preface to his translation of Seneca's *Thyestes,* the second of his Senecan translations, published in 1560.[42] But in Heywood, as in Douglas, there is a stronger sense of the dignity of the translator's work. When Seneca visits Heywood in the prologue's dream, the young poet is overjoyed and moved to tears at the sight of the "long desyred sight" of the great author of Tragedies (160-2). Seneca has come in search of the translator of his *Troas*, to ask him to translate his "oother works" as well, so that readers can see them "In Englishe verse, that never yet / coulde latine understande" (199, 203-4). Heywood modestly identifies himself as the translator, but argues that the project would suit others better: protesting that he is too young and that there are stronger poets available (247-8), he offers a list of the active poets of his day who are better qualified, such as North, Sackville, Norton, and Googe (259-62ff.). He also raises the dilemma of errors of transmission, and questions his ability to produce an adequate and accurate translation: he takes responsibility for some of the errors in his *Troas* translation (321-35), but blames others on the Printer to whom he had entrusted his

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[42] A similar preface introduces Googe's translation of Palingenius' *The Zodiake of Life,* a work which Heywood references in this preface (293-4), also placing "Palingene" alongside Homer, Ovid, Horace, Virgil, and Lucan in his description of the garden of Parnassus (627). Editions of Googe's translation were printed in 1560 and 1561, and the prominence of these references, as well as the reference to Baldwin's 1559 printing of the *Mirror for Magistrates*, reveal the importance of these works to Heywood (De Vocht 338n291). Googe's prologue, though not specifically a dream, involves a vision of the Muses who commission his translation, despite similar protestations of humility on his part (see Googe, 1561, EEBO).

work (339-347). Seneca, somewhat anachronistically, commiserates with him on the unreliability of Printers (361-82), but reassures Heywood in his insecurities by offering his direct assistance with the project (385-6). To that end, he shows him a "gylded book"—a perfect and heavenly edition of the Tragedies, written by "The Muse her selfe" (505). Written with "Inke" made from the water of a Heliconian spring, it is completely reliable, as Seneca tells him:

> Thou maist believe it trewly wrote,
>
>   and trust in every whit
>
> For here hathe never prynters presse
>
>   made faute, nor never yet,
>
> Came errour here by mysse of man.
>
> (655-9)

Within the dream, then, Heywood has an opportunity to correct his own edition of Seneca against this ideal copy, after which the dream ends, and he awakens. Like Douglas in *The Palis of Honoure*, he is distraught to leave the privileged space of the dream, though his extensive description of his woe has much more pathos: he curses Morpheus

>   a thousande tymes,
>
>   that he had made me sleepe
>
> At all, or ells that he me wolde,
>
>   in dreame no longer keepe.
>
> (731-4)

The profound disturbance of awakening from the dream, however, is what allows him to undertake the translation project: he finally invokes the fury Megaera, and begins to write when he "[feels] the furies force / enflame [him] more and more" (763-4).

Despite the protestations of modesty early in the preface, then, Heywood presents his translation as a privileged one: his youth and unworthiness as a poet notwithstanding, through his dream he has been granted access to a perfect base text of Seneca's Tragedies from which to work. Moreover, upon awakening he writes with the force of a fury, an appropriate inspiration for the tragic subject matter of the drama, which allows him to write "so dreadfull thing" with "dolefull style" (761-2). The dream is presented uncritically as a transcendent experience, and its ending propels him into just the state of despair necessary for an appropriately tragic translation. Heywood's preface gives several indications of the importance of works of translation at this point in the sixteenth century: the fact that he mentions Googe's translation of Palingenius' *Zodiak of Life* alongside the *Mirror for Magistrates* is revealing, as is the dreamer's very demonstratively emotional involvement with his author in the dream. Though it is difficult for a modern reader to appreciate the embraces and tears with which Heywood greets Seneca, this level of pathos is tied to the importance of the translator for "renew[ing] the name" (174) of the author. Heywood's preface reveals how the exploration of the idea of authorship and poetic immortality that occurs in the late medieval dream poetry of Douglas and Skelton helps to create a transition into the translation projects of the English Renaissance.

Chapter 3

Men and Women in Black: Sixteenth-Century Elegiac Dream Poetry

Whereas late medieval poets such as Douglas and Skelton use increasingly specific identifying details to authenticate dream poems by locating them in the real world, poets of the sixteenth century develop the form in a different direction, using it to describe a level of reality that is clearly fictional. Over the course of the century, poets frequently drop the mechanics of the dream frame altogether, as Henryson and Hoccleve had done earlier, and instead explore the potential of the form for describing a fictionalized reality by joining themes from dream poetry with other poetic forms and genres. This overlap of the dream poem with other forms becomes its most prominent feature in the Renaissance, so much so that as a form itself it tends to be overlooked by readers. Even as other narrative devices replace the dream frame, however, the rest of the dream poem, with its characteristic patterns and preoccupations, remains an important form in this period, frequently used in conjunction with the mode of elegy.

In his volume of *The Oxford English Literary History* Simpson gives the most attention to dream poems in a chapter titled "The Elegiac," in which he focuses on "an Ovidian tradition of love poetry in which the unfulfilled lover turns away from public affairs" and on "the powerful continuities of this Ovidian tradition across the period 1350-1550" (121).[1] Although he makes a strong case for such an Ovidian continuity, his

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[1] He draws this definition of Elegy from Ovid's *Amores* 3.I in which the spirits of Elegy and Tragedy vie for the poet's attention, and Elegy prevails (Simpson 121). Similarly, as if to validate this definition of elegy, Simpson moves into this chapter of his book immediately after his chapter on "The Tragic." See Harrison on Ovid's development as an elegist and "strategy of diversification in erotic elegy" (82; see 80ff.).

argument relies on a partial definition of elegy that skews interpretation solely toward the political and does not fully account for the ways that the dream form is used elegiacally across the period divide.[2] Like dream poetry, the elegy has a history of being used for a wide variety of subjects, from its origins in Greek (*elegos*) as a metrical term associated with mourning (Alexiou 104), to the classical use of elegiac couplets for a "range of subjects," including love poetry (Braden and Fowler).[3] And although it is generally understood that a shift to the modern definition of elegy primarily as a poem of mourning takes place "particularly after the sixteenth century" (Sacks 3), the association with mourning had always been present, as "all the Roman elegists also write elegies in the modern sense" (Braden and Fowler).[4] When the sixteenth-century dream poem is used both for amorous complaint and funereal mourning, then, it reflects the fact that these different senses of *elegy* coexist at least from Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess* onward.[5]

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[2] Simpson acknowledges that his focus is on "the 'politics' of love poetry" and that "There are, of course, many other ways of understanding elegiac practice in the period" (175). The problem is that all of the "other ways" Simpson proposes are also at heart political—he mentions this poetry as courtly social practice (175) or as "informed by bureaucratic practice" (177). Certainly the political is a very interesting dimension in the poems he describes, but not all elegiac verse in the period places an equal emphasis on the lover's turn "away from public affairs." This definition is simply too specific for a poetic mode that is in fact quite loosely defined and varied in its content.

[3] Braden and Fowler note that "The popularity and prestige of what is still called the Roman love elegy make *elegy* a loose synonym for "love poem" in early modern usage." Sacks writes that "Latin adaptations of the elegiac form continued the fairly miscellaneous approach to content, but with an increasingly intense focus on the amatory complaint" (3). Alexiou argues more forcefully for the origins of elegy in Greek funeral lament, despite the fact that "the early extant elegies range from sympotic to political and military in content, but none is addressed to the dead or even remotely mournful in tone." She goes on to explain that "although no early mournful *élegoi* have survived, they are known to have existed" (104).

[4] See Kay (9, 29), Sacks (3).

[5] Kay categorizes the "allegorical dream vision" as one of five kinds of personal elegy that arise in English "first at the close of the Middle Ages" (9-10). He sees the dream poem as the most "literary" of the kinds, but discounts its influence as "slight" (10). I

When Spenser publishes *Daphnaida* and calls it "An elegie" in its subtitle, he is using the term in the modern sense, although its sense of "love elegy" is still in use.[6]

The topic of mourning is central to prominent fourteenth-century dream poems such as *Pearl* and Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess*, and it recurs frequently well into the second half of the sixteenth century in poems that simultaneously show the influence of the dream poem. This intersection of dream poetry and elegy is particularly noticeable in narrative works that are self-consciously transitional or experimental, as the examples from Sackville, Lodge, and Spenser will show. Although most of these Elizabethan examples omit the occurrence of an actual dream, they nonetheless represent a continuation of the dream form as they describe fantastical visionary experiences akin to dreams, in settings designed to recall the dreamscapes of earlier poems.[7] Frequently replacing the device of the dream in this narrative pattern is an attention to the "thought" of the narrator, a meditational structure that is already apparent in conjunction with dreaming in Skelton's prologues to *The Bowge of Court* (29)[8] and *The Garlande of Laurel* (8, 29). The connection between the themes of "thought" and dreaming can be traced back to Proem 2 of Chaucer's *House of Fame*:

> O Thought, that wrot al that I mette,

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argue for more interconnection between the kinds of poems he sees as distinctly separate in his system of classification, specifically the later interconnection between the *de casibus* tradition and dream poetry.

[6] See Kay (125-6). The dual senses of *elegy* are well-represented by Donne's career: he calls some of his love poems "Elegies," but his public elegies, the "Anniversaries" and one commemorating Prince Henry, are the only poems published in his lifetime. The first edition of his verse, published in 1633, was titled *Poems by J. D. with Elegies on the Author's Death* (Rollins and Baker 482).

[7] Davidoff calls such poems "Dream-Vision Analogues" or "waking visions." In such poems "there is no break in consciousness, but in other ways the poems are structurally identical to conventional dream visions" (89).

[8] Here the word Skelton uses is *mynde*.

And in the tresorye hyt shette

Of my brayn, now shal men se

Yf any vertu in the be

To tellen al my drem aryght.

Now kythe thyn engyn and myght!

(523-8)[9]

Spearing points out that "Thought" here is drawn from Dante's *Inferno*, "which confirms that by 'Thought' Chaucer means memory" (*Medieval Dream-Poetry* 223n45). The faculty of memory stores the dream in the "brayn," like a "tresorye," but the invocation also points to it as the engine of composition, allowing the poet to "tellen al [his] drem aright." Instead of a dream, in these later examples, then, the narrator's "thought" gives way to an interaction with a character in mourning. All of the poems included in this chapter present similar mourning characters—some explicitly dressed in black, recalling Chaucer's mourning "man in blak" in *The Book of the Duchess* (445). These figures voice grief in laments and complaints that often make up large portions of these poems, yet the term "complaint" is not adequate for describing these poems in their entirety. Despite the obvious overlap with complaint, these narrative poems remain notable as developments of the dream form.[10]

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[9] All references to Chaucer are to Benson's edition.

[10] When Richard Danson Brown argues that *The Ruines of Time*, the first poem in Spenser's *Complaints,* "should primarily be viewed as a dream vision" (104), he points out that "dream vision and complaint are frequently complementary" (108). Spenser's "manipulation of the different literary modes with the poem indicates that it will not be contained by the normative expectations of either dream vision or traditional complaint" (108). An element of complaint is certainly common to all of these poems of mourning: this is not surprising, for, as Davenport comments in his study of complaint, "Inherent in every complaint is the theme of death" (208).

In his study of the rise of the funeral elegy in the English Renaissance, Kay

focuses on the public dimension of the funeral elegy: he connects the new prominence

afforded to public elegy with the Reformation and the loss of liturgical funeral practice

that resulted from it (2-3), and he delineates the bounds of his study very clearly to focus

on these public poems. Thus, despite the thoroughness of his study and his attention to

the poems within his purview as literary compositions and not only as public

performances, he does at times downplay lines of literary development that lie just

outside his topic of the public elegy. His attention to the influence of the dream poem is

minimal because he sees allegorical dream visions as "slight" in their influence on public

elegy, and he singles out Spenser's *Daphnaida* as a lone exception. He sees dream poems

as "inappropriate models for public elegies because of their private delicacy and

intimacy" (10). But this is a surprising assessment of dream poetry, which is obviously

put to public ceremonial use in Dunbar's *Thrissil and the Rois,* for example: it is not

obvious why the form should be incompatible with public elegies, or why poets might not

find in its "private delicacy and intimacy" a source for language to express mourning.[11]

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[11] The omission in Kay's study is due in part to his classification of medieval elegy into distinct categories that overlap in practice in the transitional period I am describing here (See n5, above). Furthermore, his own argument on public elegy does not bear out his dismissal of the dream poem to its background. A significant chapter of Kay's study focuses on the many elegies written upon the death of Prince Henry in 1612, and he points out that "the period just before Henry's death had added notably to the stock of material on which elegists might draw. The *Mirror for Magistrates*, for example, reappeared in 1610. Richard Niccols, one of its new editors, wrote a Spenserian allegory, *The three sisters teares*, on Henry's death. Then there was the publication of Shakespeare's *Sonnets* and of Spenser's *Mutabilitie* cantos in 1609, and, above all, of Donne's *Anniversaries.* Donne's influence was immense, and universally acknowledged" (128). It does not detract from the (greater) significance of Shakespeare or Donne at this poetic moment to point out that Niccols' inclusion in Kay's list points directly to the continuing influence of *The Mirror* collection and the dream poems it contains, including Niccols' own new addition in the 1610 edition, *A winter nights vision* (see Kay 160).

Moreover, the way Kay describes this category of poems shows that they warrant more attention than he gives them. These "most 'literary'" of elegies at the close of the middle ages "represented…an attempt to confront the problems posed by death and by the act of writing itself: they dramatized the gulf between human understanding and the perspective of eternity" (10). This poetic intersection between dream poetry and elegy that at its core interrogates the contingency of the human condition is more prominent in the sixteenth century than Kay acknowledges, and with wider "literary" consequences beyond its impact on public elegy. Reading Spenser's *Daphnaida* within this tradition does help to illuminate that much-maligned poem, but *Daphnaida* is not the only Renaissance poem that fits into this context. The dream form interrogates the topic of death in universal terms that, as an investigation into Tudor literature will show, do not limit the form or its subject matter to one side of the medieval-Renaissance period divide.

Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess*, the earliest of his dream narratives and a masterful model of a dream poem used for funereal elegy, alone calls into question Kay's suggestion of a stable dichotomy between public and private elegy for poems of this period. Certainly no poem is a better model of "private delicacy and intimacy," yet it is written to memorialize the dead wife of Chaucer's powerful patron John of Gaunt. Though the exact nature of the poem in relation to public ceremonies for the Duchess is debated, the poem's connection to her memorialization has been noted since Chaucer's time and is discussed to this day—an effective public memorial indeed.[12] Moreover, the black knight's complaint—with its focus on his courtship of White—seems more

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[12] Edwards notes that "Chaucer himself connects the poem to the death in 1368 of Blanche of Lancaster" in his *Legend of Good Women* (65). For more on the public memorialization of Blanche, see Hardman.

appropriate for a poem of private mourning. But this part of the poem draws so clearly on courtly traditions of love poetry that it is impossible to read it simply as the revelation of private feelings or experiences, encoded as it is in the literary, and social, language of courtly poetry. Indeed, the poem's social dimension and its intimate feel are inextricably linked, since the intimacy between two human characters, specifically between the dreaming narrator and the mourning man in black, is central to the poem's work of mourning and consolation. A longer consideration of the dynamics in this poem is in order here, because this poem is one of the principal models for elegiac dream poems that follow.

In addition to its elision of public and private mourning, the poem's use of a dream form complicates its presentation of the work of mourning. The poem, as any dream poem, puts the burden of interpreting a dream on the reader, an interpretive act that can be fraught with tensions. In his study of medieval dream theory, Kruger calls attention to the way that dream poetry "exploits a double potential": dream fictions can draw upon the "opposed, extreme kinds of dream—true and false, external and internal, good and bad," that "bound the range of dream experience" in medieval treatises on dreams and their classification (124). Poets, however, rarely choose to depict either extreme, choosing more frequently the style of a "middle vision," one that allows them to "explore areas of betweenness—the realms that lie between the divine and the mundane, the true and the false" (Kruger 128-29). The intimacy, then, between the dreamer and the mourning character in Chaucer's poem is forged within the dream setting—and also, in a paradoxical sense, in spite of it. In a fundamental sense, of course, any intimacy forged within a dream is illusory: the man in black as a figure in the narrator's dream exists

inside his head and not as a person encountered in the poem's waking world. Yet the

encounter with the man in black dominates Chaucer's poem, and the emotional

connection forged through grief between the two human characters dominates the tone of

the poem. The setting of the dream allows the poem to move seamlessly from the literal

hart hunt that takes place at the beginning of the dream to the figurative "hert-huntyng"

that takes place in the conversation with the man in black, but the latter is the focus of the

dream and of the poem as a whole (*BD* 1313).[13] Chaucer takes advantage of the tension

inherent in the dream form to draw emotional truth out of a setting that is wholly

fictional, and potentially even suspect because of its status as a dream.[14]

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[13] On the significance of the hart hunt, and the multiple senses of *hert* in the poem, see
Prior. She writes that "Octavian's hunt, which had paused early in the dream, has in fact
been replaced by the encounter between the Dreamer and the Black Knight, and
moreover…the encounter itself represents the continuation of the hunt, a metaphorical
equivalent of the literal quest" (10). In her analysis Prior draws on medieval hunting
treatises rather than dream theory, but her description of the transition within the dream
landscape from the literal hunt to the metaphorical one is very useful (10-12), as is her
connection of the hunt to *routhe* and *pitee* in the poem (18-19).

[14] Akbari points out the contradiction in the origin of the dream in *The Book of the
Duchess*, which "is apparently significant and even prophetic, generated by the
intervention of the god Morpheus; but in fact, according to medieval categorizations of
dreams, the dream cannot be meaningful, for it is generated by internal causes, the daily
residue contained in the dreamer's mind" (187). She goes on to concur with Russell's
suggestion that "late medieval dream visions such as Chaucer's imply that truth can
indeed be found in dreams, not because it is handed down from an external source, but
because the daily residue itself has a value" (Akbari 188). Although it is true that
Macrobius categorizes such dreams as "not worth interpreting" (I.iii.3), his is not the only
system of classification available by Chaucer's time. Spearing handles the contradictory
origins of the dream in the poem more subtly, showing how the poem situates itself
simultaneously in several common medieval categories of dream:

> The dream in *The Book of the Duchess*, then, could be classified as a *somnium
> naturale*, a *somnium animale*, or a *somnium coeleste*. One significance of this
> uncertainty as to how it should be classified is that it is part of the tact with which
> it fulfils its social function. Seen in one way, the dream is a heavenly vision,
> conveying the truth in a symbolic form: Blanche is dead, and death is a fact which
> can only be accepted. But on the other hand, who is Chaucer to claim visionary
> powers, which would seem to place him in a superior role, priestly or prophetic,

To the modern reader schooled in the delights of ambiguity it can go without saying that Chaucer shapes a work of art out of contradictory dream material. However, Kruger reminds us of an additional burden upon the medieval poet: that the "hierarchical definition of dream vision [poetry]," drawn out of systems for classifying dreams, "is further bolstered by medieval treatments of fiction itself: for the Middle Ages, it was not only the dream that was potentially double in its significance and moral value, but also poetry" (131). As Kruger points out, Macrobius begins his *Commentary* on Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis* not with the dream classification for which he is best known but rather with a defense of the *Somnium* "as a fictional construct" (Kruger 131). Macrobius classifies fictions, distinguishing between "fables" and "fabulous narratives" (I.ii.9), and approves of the latter as acceptable for treatment by philosophers when "a decent and dignified conception of holy truths, with respectable events and characters, is presented beneath a modest veil of allegory" (I.ii.11).[15] Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess* is ambiguous at the level of the dream, but also as a fiction. Although the dream setting is fictitious, the poem presents the truth that Blanche the Duchess is dead: "the argument is real but is presented in the form of a fable" (I.ii.10). Moreover, the "dignified" and "respectable" character of the mourning knight suggests that Chaucer's poem would fit Macrobius's definition for a fiction appropriate for philosophy. The poem's long

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in relation to his patron? Surely it would be better for the poet to hedge his bets, by hinting at the visionary possibilities of the dream, but claiming explicitly no more than that it is 'wonderful' and hard to interpret? In this way he could leave open the possibility that the dream was merely one of the 'fantasies' (28) in the head of a melancholic, or the product of mental indigestion caused by reading too much in pagan books. At the same time, the merely psychological explanation of the dream would provide suggestions for the organization of the dream-poem as an intricate late-medieval work of art. (*Medieval Dream-Poetry* 61)

[15] Kruger outlines Macrobius's five-fold classification of fiction (132-3).

prologue, however, counterbalances the dignified treatment of the knight in the dream

portion of the poem. Before falling asleep, the dreamer reads a passage from Ovid's

Metamorphosis which, in the dreamer's retelling, presents Morpheus the god of sleep as a

comic character; although not exactly "base" or "unworthy" (I.ii.11), his dignity is

questionable as Juno's messenger struggles to awaken him—blowing "his horn ryght in

here eere" (182)—and Morpheus then appears to Alcyone in a grotesque dream, speaking

through the "dreynte body" of her husband king Seys (195).[16] The prologue culminates

when the poem's insomniac narrator prays to Morpheus and Juno for sleep, and promises

Morpheus a "fether-bed, / Rayed with gold" with pillows and a richly decorated

bedchamber if he is granted sleep (251-61). Immediately, the narrator falls asleep,

suggesting—in the waking world of Chaucer's poem—that Morpheus's action is indeed

motivated by this strange, undignified bribe. Though it does not seem that Chaucer had

the Macrobian classification of fictions in mind, or that he was purposefully destabilizing

a Macrobian idea of an "appropriate" fiction, the juxtaposition in his work does call

attention to the mixed nature of the medieval dream poem as a form.[17] The variety of

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[16] Hanning observes that Chaucer changes the Ovidian tale in this detail of the figure of
Seys coming to Alcione in a dream: in Ovid "Morpheus, *artificem simulatoremque
figurae* (l. 634), assumes the shape of Ceyx" (129), whereas Chaucer presents it not as
"an imitation of Seys but an inhabiting of the drowned body" (135). Hanning sees the
details surrounding Morpheus in Chaucer as a "parodic evocation of the harrowing of
Hell and the Last Judgment to set up Alcyone's confrontation with death, 'resurrected' in
her dream and bearing a message that seems to short-circuit itself by announcing death's
irrevocability yet counselling [sic.] abandonment of sorrow" (136). See also Minnis
(93ff.).

[17] Fisher points out that Chaucer apparently had only secondhand knowledge of
Macrobius when he wrote *The Book of the Duchess*, since his reference to "Macrobeus"
at line 284 shows a mistaken idea of the contents of the poem: "By the time he wrote *PF*,
however, Chaucer had read Macrobius and could make extensive firsthand reference to it"
(548n284-87).

narratives and narrative modes Chaucer draws upon for *The Book of the Duchess* is

strange enough that it has become commonplace for critics of the poem to pause to justify

the inclusion of the Ovidian story in the prologue. The best interpretations avoid both

dismissing disparate materials as irrelevant and forcing coherence by pretending that

disparities do not exist.[18] What *The Book of the Duchess* reveals through these disparities

is that, like the larger frame narrative form that Chaucer uses later for his *Canterbury*

Tales, the dream form not only allows for a combination of heterogeneous narrative

elements, it also creates meaning out of this combination. The dreamer attributes his

wonderful dream directly to his reading and prayer to Morpheus (222-30), the former

arising out of the latter, the true out of the ridiculous.

Perhaps the best example of the mixed nature of the medieval dream poem is the hugely influential *Romance of the Rose*, the first lines of which reveal the double nature of dreams: "Many men say that there is nothing in dreams but fables and lies, but one may have dreams which are not deceitful, whose import becomes quite clear afterward" (Dahlberg 31). The two portions of the poem, moreover, further typify both the upward (Guillaume de Lorris) and downward (Jean de Meun) pull of dream poems within the same work.

[18] Fisher dismisses "attempts to find a relationship" between the prologue and the dream and calls the former a "distraction": "The poem does not get started until the dream begins at l. 291. But from there to the end, the pattern of consolation is flawless" (543). This kind of criticism seems motivated more by a sense that Chaucer's early poetry only "foreshadows the triumphs of the *Canterbury Tales*" than by a serious consideration of the poem itself (543).

In fact, many fruitful readings come out of considering the prologue in relation to the poem as a whole. Hanning argues for the "centrality of Ovid's Ceyx and Alcyone" to the "structure and concerns" of Chaucer's poem (126). Akbari notes that Chaucer transfers the metamorphosis that should come at the end of the Ovidian story to the end of his poem, in the metamorphosis of Blanche into the white tower, which is the climax of the poem and her memorialization (187 and 194-5). Edwards shows how the Ovidian story "supplants the narrator's distracted imaginings" (74) and acts as a "source of imaginative power" (73): "Ovid's story is…refashioned as an element of [the narrator's] subjectivity. At the same time the story reshapes subjectivity by importing another set of images and an alternative structure into poetic consciousness" (73).

Indeed, despite the parodic elements in the prologue, the frame of the poem is already a complex work of mirroring themes, even before the "wonderful" dream that is embedded begins (277). The prologue begins with the dreamer's account of his insomnia, the "sorwful ymagynacioun" that is "always hooly in [his] mynde" (14-15), plaguing him with life-threatening "Defaute of slep and hevynesse" (25). His "melancolye / And drede…for to dye" are immediately mirrored in the tale he reads from Ovid: Alcyone's "hertely sorowfull life" stems from her fear that her husband the king has died. This connection of grief with the "drede" of death—the narrator fears for his own death, Alcyone grieves first from not knowing "Whether [her] lord be quyk or ded" (121)—anticipates, of course, the sorrow of the man in black in the dream and the threat of his own death from grief (469, 481-2, 488-9, 690-2). But, additionally, the dreamer's response to the grief of the black knight mirrors his response to the tale he reads of Alcyone.[19] The emotional intimacy that forms between the dreamer and the knight within the dream, and which gives the dream portion of the poem its particular resonance, is already present in the prologue of the poem in the intimate sympathy the reading narrator feels for the Ovidian queen, but before the full significance of this sympathy can be appreciated by the reader of Chaucer's poem. Chaucer calls attention to the significance of the reading response at this early point in the poem, describing his reaction to Alcyone's grief at her husband's unknown whereabouts:

> Such sorowe this lady to her tok

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[19] These parallel responses of "pittee" and "rowthe" are frequently noted by critics. See Prior (12-14). Hanning summarizes particularly well: "the 'routhe' and 'pitee' felt by the narrator for Alcyone, on reading of her grief (l. 97) has been metamorphosed in the dream into the 'routhe' and 'pitee' of the knight's lament for his dead beloved (l. 465), and finally into the dreamer's 'routhe' for the black knight's loss" (140).

> That trewly I, that made this book,
>
> Had such pittee and such rowthe
>
> To rede her sorowe that, by my trowthe
>
> I ferde the worse al the morwe
>
> Aftir, to thenken on hir sorwe.
>
> (95-100)

To take these lines at face value would, surprisingly, mean that Chaucer prioritizes the Ovidian story *over* the dream the narrator is about to describe. Such a conclusion is inconsistent with the end of the poem, since after his dream of the black knight the dreamer determines to "put this swevene in ryme" (1332). It does not seem likely that he would still be so focused on the grief of Alcyone "al the morwe / After." Rather, it seems that Chaucer is doing all he can to bring the reader's attention to his pity for Alcyone's sorrow, including deploying a formulaic expression about still feeling for her plight the next day. The literal "morwe" after the poem is not really important, but it is invoked here to amplify the importance of this moment of the narrative. This passage also shows that the dreamer's experience of fiction in the poem—first reading from Ovid and then experiencing the dream—does not exactly mirror the experience of Chaucer's reader. To the dreamer within the poem the tale he reads is as much "a wonder thing" (61) as the dream that will follow is "wonderful." And although the Ovidian material of the prologue becomes amusing in its retelling for Chaucer's reader, at the same time that Chaucer is entertaining, he is also calling attention to the details that will ultimately give the poem its gravity.

Similarly, when the long prologue of the poem finally gives way to the "wonderful" dream, Chaucer again pauses to call the reader's attention to the coming dream as a dream. He introduces the dream as:

> …so ynly swete a sweven,
>
> So wonderful that never yit
>
> Y trowe no man had the wyt
>
> To konne wel my sweven rede—
>
> (276-9)

By asserting the dream's wonders even before he begins describing them, Chaucer emphasizes the separation between dream and waking reality in the poem—an idea reinforced visibly on the page for the reader by the fifteen lines declaring the wonders of the dream between the moment of falling asleep and its beginning. But thematically, this passage also reminds the reader of the ambiguity of dreams, by stressing this particular dream as simultaneously subject to and transcending interpretation: the passage asserts that "no man"—not even Joseph of Egypt or Macrobius—could interpret this dream properly (278, 280-4).

The dream then begins with the dreamer awakening into a dream world: he dreams that he is waking up to the sounds of birds, and the bedchamber in which he wakes is the dream setting, not the bedroom in which he had fallen asleep reading Ovid and praying to Morpheus. The beginning of the dream strongly signals an alternate reality, first with clear verbal directions: the narrator's voice tells us "thys was my sweven" (290), "Me thoughte thus" (291), and "Me mette thus" (293). These cues are reinforced by the initial dreaminess of the passage: details such as the overwhelmingly

harmonious birdsong that awakens the dreamer, the bedchamber decorated with "hooly al the story of Troye" in the windows and the walls painted with "al the Romaunce of the Rose" (326, 334), the sudden sounds of the hert-hunt, and the dreamer's mounting of his horse to join the hunt before leaving the bedchamber (356-58) all contribute to establishing the dream setting with sufficient unreality. This dreamlike quality continues as the dreamer follows a "whelp" into a forest of towering trees that are crowded with animals (389, 434). However, by the time the dreamer encounters the man in black, a narrative portion of the poem has begun that differs from the possibilities of waking reality only in that it is not taking place in waking reality. The initial signals of the dream state give way to signals of straightforward actions within the dream, such as "I was go walked fro my tree" (387).

This break in verbal markers is not absolute, but there is a distinct shift in tone. The description of the dreamer's approach to the man in black is both realistic and dream-like:

> But forth they romed ryght wonder faste
>
> Doun the woode; so at the laste
>
> I was war of a man in blak,
>
> That sat and had yturned his bak
>
> To an ooke, an huge tree.
>
> (443-7)[20]

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[20] Benson reads "they" in line 443 as a reference to the hunt riding past (cf. 1312): he acknowledges that several other editions use the pronoun *I*, a reading that may be preferable (1137).

In this realistic portion of the dream narrative, the dreamer encounters the man in black, who happens to be sitting with his back against an oak tree. The dreamer becomes aware of his presence and begins to converse with him, as with another human being, with no doubts or hesitations about the nature of this other man, except for more "wonder": he is a "wonder wel-farynge knyght… Of good mochel, and ryght yong" (452, 454). Thus, although the boundary between waking and dreaming in this poem is unambiguous, over the course of the poem it comes to be a distinction without much difference. The dream begins with the dreamer waking, and the longest portion of the dream narrative involves a coherent—if somewhat mysterious— conversation between two men. What the dream setting facilitates in the end is not so much an alternate reality as an alternate kind of narrative, with the open-ended narrative possibilities that go along with being in the dream state, but also with a very human encounter between the dreamer and the man in black.

Both realistic and mysterious, *The Book of the Duchess* reveals how the dream form is in a unique position to handle the delicate subject of human grief. As Kruger explains, dream poems in the style of the "middle vision" use the device of the dream to

> depict a realm located between the divine and the mundane. Definable as
> neither a miraculous revelation nor merely a psychosomatic dream, the
> middle vision involves both higher and lower portions of the cosmos,
> taking place on a field of action neither confined to earth nor hopelessly
> beyond human reach. Navigating a course between unambiguously
> upward- and downward-looking visions, the middle vision offers a way of

exploring the connections between the world in which we find ourselves

and the transcendent realm for which we yearn. (130)

The topic of grief is clearly one such "connection" that the middle vision explores: as with dreams, there is an analogous "middleness" inherent to the experience of grief. Grief locates a human being squarely between this world and another one, one that is unknowable to reason and into which the beloved has passed. The mourning character is, in effect, caught between death and life, coming as close to experiencing death as a person can without actually dying. In his first impression of the man in black, for example, the dreamer expresses his "gret wonder that Nature / Myght suffre any creature / To have such sorwe and be not ded" (467-9). This is perhaps one reason the knight's grief is manifest in symptoms of physical illness.[21] After his initial complaint,

> Hys sorwful hert gan faste faynte,
>
> And his spirites waxen dede;
>
> The blood was fled for pure drede
>
> Doun to hys herte to make hym warm,
>
> For wel hyt feled the herte had harm
>
> . . . .
>
> …and that made al
>
> Hys hewe chaunge and wexe grene
>
> And pale, for ther noo blood ys sene

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[21] The description of symptoms also calls to mind lovesickness as it is depicted in medieval courtly poems. The knight's subsequent description of his courtship of his lady draws out the parallel between his "sorowe" and "woo" when she initially rejects his suit, and his current "sorowe" at her death: when she finally pities him and gives him a ring, he is "as blyve / Reysed as fro deth to lyve" (1277-8). For more on the cult of lovesickness, see Wack.

> In no maner lym of hys.

<div align="center">(488-92, 496-9)</div>

With this emphasis on the physicality of grief, and the knight's own desire for death, the poem exhibits the downward pull of the middle vision toward this world. On the other hand, his lady White embodies "beaute" (903), "godnesse" (985), "Trouthe" (1003), and is "both fair and bryght" like her name (950). Her presence and absence in the poem create the poem's upward pull: because she is gone, she is longed for, an image of "the transcendent realm for which we yearn" of Kruger's formulation. When she is memorialized at the end of the poem in the "long castel with walles white, / Be Saynt Johan, on a ryche hil" (1318-9), there is—in addition to the punning references to Blanche, Lancaster, John of Gaunt and Richmond—the suggestion of a heavenly castle to which the dreamer is drawn before being woken by the castle's bell. The poem's moment of consolation is also appropriate to the delicate balance it strikes between higher and lower visions.

The "emotional release" at the end of the poem comes suddenly, at the moment of the dreamer's recognition that the knight's "losse" is "routhe" (1310; see Akbari 194).[22] The knight's consolation is described metaphorically, personified by the hunters riding home from the hunt, because "al was doon / For that tyme, the hert-huntyng" (1312-3). Chaucer's description points realistically to an experience of grief as repetitive or cyclical: one experience of consolation does not end grief permanently but only "For that tyme." Still, the dreamer's recognition of the "routhe" of the knight's loss arises out of his long and intimate interaction with the man in black. It mirrors the "pittee" and

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[22] See also Prior (18).

"rowthe" he feels for Alcyone, when reading of her grief, but with a difference: the experience of the dream has refined and clarified the experience of pity. At the beginning of the poem, the grieving narrator reads of Alcyone's sorrow and feels sorrow himself: he feels her emotions. At the end of his interaction with the man in black, he not only feels the sorrow of the man in black, he understands it as well. To that point, the knight has to point out the dreamer's lack of understanding, as he repeats the refrain, "I have lost more than thow wenest" (706, 1138, 1306). When the dreamer finally understands that "She ys ded," he also understands how much the knight has lost and what is "routhe." And this recognition from the dreamer is, in turn, the only real consolation available to the knight. Thus, the dreamer is presented earlier as uncomprehending, not for the sake of his characterization, but because the function of the dream—and of the poem, as elegy—is to represent grief and true sympathy, sympathy that is not simply an emotional reflex but that arises out of understanding.[23] And like the dreamer, the reader of Chaucer's poem, when "hit ys doon" (1334), is also in the position of acquiring an expanded understanding of the nature of grief through the experience of reading the dream in the poem. Interpreting the dream, in the end, has less to do with "Joseph… / Of Egipte" or "Macrobeus," than with the understanding that arises from a conversation with another person.

This extended examination of details from the *Book of the Duchess* serves as a norm from which to understand how the form of the dream poem works to illuminate the

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[23] The dreamer's seeming obtuseness is the subject of much debate among scholars: is the dreamer dullwitted, or cleverly feigning ignorance in order to provide the knight with the opportunity for "talk therapy"? Minnis provides a thorough summary of the critical discussion (124-30). Spearing's insights in *Medieval Autographies* obviate the need to resolve the debate about the dreamer's characterization.

topic of grief. Many similar details can be found in *Pearl*, which also depends on an intimate conversation within a dream for its work of mourning and consolation. In contrast with Chaucer's poem, however, in *Pearl* the mourner and the dreamer are one and the same, and the conversation takes place between the dreamer and the "pearl" whose loss he mourns, his daughter who died before her second birthday (483).[24] Constance Hieatt has remarked, contrasting these two poems, that

> the purposes, themes, and moods of the two poems, although they are both elegies, are not at all related. One is a deeply serious discussion of a theological issue, as well as an expression of personal grief of the most poignant kind. The other is a tactful expression of sympathy for the grief of another, its purpose eulogy of the dead lady and consolation of her bereaved husband. Both the eulogy and the consolation are in purely human terms; Christian views of death and the afterlife are not so much as mentioned….
>
> What these two poems have in common is not really their purpose, although they are both elegies; they are elegies with entirely different purposes. Nor is there any really striking similarity in the echoes of the older dream vision poems to be found in both. Their real affinity is as dream literature, poems which use the peculiar psychology of dreams as a help in achieving their particular aims. (73)

Although Hieatt is right to note that the dream form gives the poems their similarity, her focus solely on dream psychology is too narrow, as is her understanding of the

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[24] References are to line numbers in Cawley and Anderson.

"purposes" of elegy. The two poems as elegies take a remarkably similar approach to the topic of grief, although each arrives at a unique consolation, aiming as each does at a different audience. Consolation for the man in black comes as a moment of recognition at the end of the poem, when the dreamer shares in his understanding of his loss. *Pearl* puts human grief in a Christian theological context in a way that the *Book of the Duchess* does not, but both poems examine and take seriously the human experience of grief. Even though *Pearl* pulls more strongly in the direction of a higher vision, toward revelation of divine truths, it is still a middle vision because of the downward pull of the jeweler's grief, a pull toward the earth that is imaged in the poem's opening as a focus on the "spot" where the pearl is buried (25, 37, 49). The jeweler sees the grave as imprisoning his pearl and "playn[s] the perle that there was spenned" (53). The consolation the poem offers is mixed: at the end of the poem, the heavenly vision affirms the jeweler's faith, even as it increases his awareness of this world as a "doel-dungeon" (1187) and his sense of his own exile from the eternal realm into which he has just tried to cross (1177-81).

Moreover, the Christian consolation the poem offers would not be nearly as "dere" at the end of the poem (1183) if the poet's presentation of the conversation between the characters were less psychologically and rhetorically astute. The poem works on the basis that the character of the pearl-maiden is in a unique position to offer Christian consolation, as she is the one being mourned. Indeed, the jeweler's consolation is conditional and relies upon the truth of the vision of her happiness in heaven:

>If hit be veray and soth sermoun
>
>That thou so stykes in garlande gay,
>
>So wel is me in this doel-doungoun

> That thou art to that Prynses paye.

> (1185-8)

The grieving father can accept what is "to that Prynses paye" only when he sees the "veray avysyoun" of his pearl in a beautiful setting. Only after establishing the "If…so" of that condition does he go on to conclude the theological lessons of the vision for himself in the final two stanzas. The question of whether the dream is, in fact, "veray" and can be trusted underlies this conditional, but it does not undermine it. In the end, the dreamer does not return to the possibility that the vision was untrue or deceptive, because the poem is an expression of his faith.

Pearl offers the consolation of faith without downplaying the reality of human grief, but this consolation also depends upon a certain rhetorical decorum. In a sense, the pearl-maiden's arguments to her father are shockingly lacking in tact: they call attention to this fact, even, and are designed to shock the reader into thinking in the pearl-maiden's terms, rather than those of her grieving father (337-43). But the pearl-maiden can scold the jeweler for his "madde" grief successfully, simply because she is the only one who could possibly do so (290): she is the only one with the rhetorical *ethos*. The same arguments in the mouth of another character—the injunction to "love ay God, in wele and wo," for example (342)—would likely sound trite and unconvincing, even repulsive. Like the *Book of the Duchess*, *Pearl* depends upon the intimacy of the conversation between its two characters and upon the understanding between them, in spite of differences. There is a gap of understanding between the dreamer and gentle knight in Chaucer's poem; likewise, there is a gulf between father and daughter in *Pearl* that, ultimately, is

unbridgeable except by faith. The fact of death remains, represented in the dream by the river that the father cannot cross, in spite of the consolation the poem offers.

Although the tone of intimacy that is crucial to these poems and their treatment of mourning does not always carry through to the same degree in later works, this intimacy between characters remains a formal characteristic of the narrative structure of two kinds of elegiac narrative poems well into the sixteenth century. In the remainder of this chapter, I will examine examples of both love mourning and funereal mourning to show how the medieval dream poem overlaps with elegy in the sixteenth century. In the poems that follow, several elements of the dream form remain important, including the interaction of the narrator with the mourning character, the juxtaposition of the narrator's melancholy with the grief of the mourner, and the focus on the narrator's pity. As the poems move away from embedding a dream within the narrative, they instead come to focus intently on the inward thought of the narrator, an inwardness that is naturally implied by the dream form, but also already is suggested in the "sorwful ymagynacioun" of Chaucer's dreamer (14), or the grief at war with reason in the heart of the father in *Pearl* (51-2). Finally, even when the poems do not explicitly use the device of a dream, they retain some of the common preoccupations of the dream form, entering into a visionary mode, or striking a balance between high and low visions. These poems that follow in the mournful notes represented by *Pearl* and the *Book of the Duchess* provide a strong continuity across the medieval-Renaissance period divide.

Returning to love elegy after the poignant presentation of grief in the *Book of the Duchess* or *Pearl* can seem like a falling off. When Lydgate, for example, writes a poem modeled on Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess*, he recalls Chaucer both by imitation and

reversal, which does not always work in his favor. In his *Complaint of a Lover's Life*,

thought to date from the period 1398-1412 and more commonly known as *The Complaint

of the Black Knight*, as it was titled when appended to editions of Chaucer in the

Renaissance (Norton-Smith 161), Lydgate plays upon the very real quality of Chaucer's

dream by dispensing with the dream mechanism altogether. Instead, the dreamer begins

the poem asleep but wakens to have his experience of the black knight's complaint in the

waking world. In another reversal, instead of interacting directly with the mourning

character, creating the dynamic of intimacy so palpable in Chaucer, Lydgate's narrator

specifically hides himself from the black knight, to overhear and then later transcribe his

complaint. Norton-Smith in his edition of Lydgate describes this reversal as a "technical

regression" that "nullifies Chaucer's important addition [to Old French precedents]: the

interplay of poet-figure and lover" (161).[25] Additionally, the poem seems "regressive"

compared with *The Book of the Duchess* because Chaucer had translated the courtly love

elegy into a poem of funereal mourning: in contrast, the move back to love elegy is

simply not as affecting. With much less at stake—Lydgate's black knight is a scorned

lover rather than a grieving husband—Lydgate's love elegy lacks the poignancy of death

that marks the funereal elegy. Although the narrator-poet's pity for the complaining

knight in Lydgate mirrors the feelings of Chaucer's reader-dreamer for the grieving

Alcyone and the mournful man in black, Lydgate's poem is intrinsically less distressing

for the reader. Lydgate's poet recalls Chaucer's dreamer but in the prologue to *Book of*

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[25] Phillips notes the *Complaint of the Black Knight* as an example of "the eavesdropping frame," which "appeared in *dits amoureux* from their thirteenth-century beginnings. It acts, to put its role at its simplest, as a divider, marking a detachment of the narrator from the experiences of the protagonist(s) of the core narrative" (78). Such distancing devices stress the imposition of the narrative onto the experience of the narrating figure, in "the unsought dream, the involuntary overhearing, the aimless wandering, and so on" (80).

the Duchess not the poem as a whole: he is full of pity and emotion but not yet transformed by his dream experience.

Despite these differences with Chaucerian precedent, it would be wrong simply to dismiss Lydgate's poem for failing to engage the reader; indeed, what is interesting about Lydgate's poem is that although it steps back from Chaucer's comparatively fuller engagement with the topic of human grief, it is nonetheless a poem designed to work by activating its reader's sympathies. To the extent that it achieves the reader's engagement, it does so through the framing of the narrative in the manner of a dream poem. Like *The Romance of the Rose*, the poem opens with the motif of a May morning; the sun rises to "chase away the night" and "bydde lovers out of her slepe awake" (5, 7).[26] The scope of this common starting point is then narrowed in the next stanza, with its mention of the lovers' "hevy" hearts upon rising (8). These are unrequited lovers, spending "drery," "hevy" nights, bidden to rise by Nature and "Hope…in dispite of Daunger and Dispeyre" (9-10, 12). And one such riser is the narrator himself, as the poem specifies further. When he appears in the next stanza, like Chaucer's dreamer he does not explicitly identify the "sekenes" sitting "so nygh [his] hert" (18) or attribute it directly to unrequited love, but he rises in the same frame of mind as the lovers in the previous stanza, mirroring their activities by going out to hear the birds sing, and hoping "for to fynde socour of [his] smert, / or attelest sum relesse of [his] peyn" (19-20). Because Lydgate sets up the narrator's state of mind by mirroring, rather than direct assertion, the reader is drawn to contemplate the nature of the narrator's "peyn" and to compare the restless poet-sleeper to the other lovers just described. As in the *Book of the Duchess*, the

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[26] References to Lydgate are to line numbers in Norton-Smith's edition.

narrator's restlessness is also set up to mirror the pain of the mourning character, the complaining knight. Lydgate's narrator does not interact with the knight directly in the poem, yet the two interact in the mind of the reader: the structure of the poem ensures that the reader is forced to contemplate the two characters in juxtaposition. Lydgate's poem demonstrates a turn toward interior contemplation that is one way the medieval dream form will carry through into the Renaissance.

Love elegies continue to draw upon the conventions of the dream poem, and not only in works that come across as "regressive." Much of the poetic material that can be identified as the afterlife of the medieval dream poem in the Renaissance is found in examples of generic experimentation and innovation in the period. The focus on the inner pain of the lovelorn poet-narrator, for example, is an obvious point of intersection between narrative poems and lyrics, particularly in the vogue for Petrarchan love lyrics in sixteenth-century England. While the focus of this chapter is on narrative descriptions rather than lyrics, it is worth noting how the genres overlap in the mid-sixteenth century in one of the earliest extant Tudor miscellanies, *The Court of Venus*, of which only a few fragments survive. The undated fragment in the Folger Shakespeare Library is thought to be from the early 1560s (c. 1562-3) and is perhaps a reprint of an earlier lost edition entered into the Stationer's Register in 1557-8 (Rollins and Baker 191). A narrative prologue introduces the love lyrics and resonates with references to medieval dream poetry. The narrator is walking in the woods on a May morning, hears a hunting horn, and moves toward it. He soon tires of chasing the hunt, "And at the last, forweary," he sits down, "Thinking a while to take [his] resting" (12-13), like the narrator of a dream

poem.[27] Instead of falling asleep, the narrator is caught up by an awareness of his solitude

and begins to complain of his inner pain:

> And for that I knew myself to be alone
>
> And sodeinly my grief I began to complain;
>
> Methought I had good place myself to moan
>
> And ease my heart of mine own pain,
>
> Beseeching Venus to lose me out of chain.
>
> I was so fast and sure stung through the heart
>
> With the fiery chain that I could not start.
>
> (15-21)

Although in the first stanza the narrator's grief remains unspecified—he goes out walking

to "[bring his] heart out of care" (4)—here the narrator's "grief" is identified clearly as

lovesickness. More than just a moment of complaint, although the anonymous author

clearly identifies it as such (16, 22), the passage takes on additional resonances of the

dream form when the character of Genius appears and interrupts the narrator's solitude.

Genius acts as the emissary of Venus to "confess" the lovelorn on the brink of death from

love (28) and to help relieve him of his "grief" (32). Placing his head on Genius' knee, in

a gesture that recalls the intimacy between characters in a dream poem (36-7), the

narrator is the mourning character of this poem. But instead of receiving comfort from

complaining to Genius, he listens to Genius tell "his tale" that "of [his] disease there were

five hundredth mo" and that he should "leave [his] wo" (42, 41). Thus, rather than

mirroring the internal state of Genius's mind, the narrator's situation mirrors that of all

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[27] References are to line numbers in Rollins and Baker (191-2).

other lovers suffering for love. Genius instructs the narrator to write his complaint in order to receive "redress" (45). The evidence that is to be presented in Venus' court for all lovers' redress is to be found in the lyrics that follow from the prologue's end.

That this prologue to *The Court of Venus* draws upon dream poetry is further confirmed by John Hall's response to the volume: in 1565 he publishes a volume of religious verse titled *The Court of Virtue* which protests the "fylthy" songs of "Venus court" (43).[28] This volume begins very clearly with a dream prologue, confirming—and at times also correcting—the conventions of the form. For instance, Hall begins with a typical *chronographia*, but instead of just allowing the description of the constellations and course of planets to indicate a springtime opening, he clarifies for the reader that God has given the heavenly bodies their "course moste naturall":

> Almightie God that all hath wroughte
>
> Thus through their course moste naturall,
>
> Within three signes together brought,
>
> These sterres that creatures men call:
>
> In these three were these planets all,
>
> The Crab, the Twyns, the horned Bull,
>
> Of wonders thus his workes are full.
>
> (3)

Given this devout opening, it is not surprising that the cause of the narrator's melancholy at the start of the poem is not lovesickness but "pensyve hevynesse": he goes walking outdoors "the tyme to passe, / When thought [his] soule did sore oppresse" (4). When he

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[28] References are to stanzas in the text of 1565, available on EEBO.

tires of walking, he sits with his back against a tree, recalling Chaucer's man in black, and falls asleep; this, however, turns out not to be the start of a dream vision (10-11). He is "So sore encombred" that he immediately wakes (12): only after praying does he fall asleep again, and his dream begins. Thus, Hall writes a dream poem that devotes attention both to the "sorowe" or "thought" in the soul of the narrator and to the dream that arises out of it because of his prayer—but to "God…omnipotente," rather than Morpheus (14). The three ladies Vertue, Hope, and Love appear to him in the dream: Hope and Love chastely embrace him and console him, while Lady Vertue urges him to "be bolde," and in her "tale" laments the vices of society (23-24), which include the seven deadly sins but also the reading of books such as *The Court of Venus*. Thus motivated to publish courageously by the Lady Virtue, Hall ends the prologue introducing his collection of devout lyrics intended to combat vice. The overtly moralistic tone of the poem notwithstanding, Hall's prologue follows the same form of the poems he opposes: his inner turmoil mirrors that of the figure who comes to console him. The task of writing that he is charged with provides consolation for both mourners—by encouraging virtuous reading.

Although the dueling courts of Venus and Virtue are not, by any means, examples of great poetry, they still put the dream form to innovative use as prologues to collections of lyrics within the new format of the printed miscellany. The Renaissance poem that recombines the conventions of the dream poem with love elegy to the most dramatic and innovative effect, however, is Thomas Lodge's long verse narrative *Scylla's Metamorphosis, interlaced with the unfortunate love of Glaucus*. Lodge places the Ovidian tale of Scylla's rejection of the love of Glaucus and her consequent

metamorphosis into a narrative frame drawn out of dream poetry. In the *Metamorphoses* the story of Glaucus is related in the third person, whereas Lodge gives the tale a first-person narrator, and the poem opens with his grief. This solitary, mournful narrator is familiar from Lydgate and *The Court of Venus*:

> Walking alone (all only full of grief)
>
> Within a thicket near to Isis' flood
>
> Weeping my wants, and wailing scant relief,
>
> Wringing my arms (as one with sorrow wood),
>
> The piteous streams, relenting at my moan,
>
> Withdrew their tides and stayed to hear me groan.
>
> $(1)^{29}$

Despite its familiarity, Lodge's opening also shows an important variation of the influence of the dream poem. The more demonstrative wails and groans in this passage, emphasized by the stanza's alliterative diction, are appropriate to the more fantastical mythological narrative Lodge presents.[30] Lydgate's courtly amorous complaint draws the reader's attention to the waking world, as do the prologues to *The Court of Venus* and *Virtue*. *The Court of Venus* replaces a dream with a moment of complaint that dovetails into an allegorical vision, but this vision serves to call attention not to the singularity of the lover's dilemma, but to its universality in the real world, a concern presumably shared equally by the mourning character and the reading public taking up the volume of love lyrics. Similarly, in *The Court of Virtue*, which does feature a dream, the focus of the

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[29] Lodge's poem is found in Braden: references are to stanzas.
[30] They also show a debt to Sackville, whom I will examine next in connection with his influence on Spenser.

dream is squarely on the real-world vices of the reading public, down to its specific choice of books. In fact, although *The Court of Virtue* so vehemently opposes its amorous counterpart, both poems represent polarities that are inherent to the dream form. The former emphasizes earthly love but in doing so offers a vision of heavenly figures (Genius, Venus). The latter emphasizes its heavenly vision of Hope, Love, and Virtue, but Lady Virtue's preoccupation with earthly vices shows that Hall can only attempt to write a higher vision.

Scylla's Metamorphosis also combines gods and men into a middle vision, but the result is more distinctive. Lodge replaces the dream with the narrator's interaction with mythological characters in a fantastical setting. This translation to a mythological world recalls a dream since, at the end of his journey over the ocean on the back of a dolphin with Glaucus (113), the narrator returns to the real world to write what he has experienced (130). The Envoy then enjoins the Ladies reading the poem to heed the warning offered by the story of Scylla's pride and "contempt" of a true lover, recalling the moralizing conclusion of Henryson's *Testament*, but the poem is not an amorous version of a morality tale. It is, instead, a colorful and imaginative rendering of a clearly fictional (and dream-like) time and place. The poem's focus is on the fictional tale rather than on any consequences in the real world—except perhaps for the poet writing of his experience.

The poem also reveals a dramatic orientation that is new to love elegy: the intense passion of the characters' grief is theatrical, calling attention to the outward signs of inner turmoil. The narrator at the opening describes himself as "alone" and "full of grief," but he quickly acquires an audience, first in the "piteous streams" who "[stay] to hear [him]

groan" and then immediately in the next stanza when the "sea-god Glaucus" appears. As

in other poems, the grief of the narrator mirrors the still greater grief of the mourning

character with whom he interacts. As he sits "under a willow tree" with the head of

Glaucus on his knee, his pity shifts from himself to his companion:

> And when my tears had ceased their stormy shower,
>
> He dried my cheeks, and then bespake him so,
>
> As when he wailed I straight forgot my woe.
>
> (3)

Glaucus's demonstrative mourning actually comforts the narrator, who "Comparing

[Glaucus's] mishaps and moan with [his own]" begins to "smile for joy and dry his

drooping eyen" (8). Glaucus's more extreme lovesickness causes physical symptoms (33)

that bring him close to Death (78) and require the intervention and ministrations of

nymphs, goddesses, and Cupid to restore him (34-37, 79, 90-1). All of this lovesickness

in the poem is seen by the characters experiencing it as "tragic" (20, 73), an interpretation

that, surprisingly, Lodge does not undermine. Instead, he rescues the poem from

melodrama or bathos through the story's comic resolution: Glaucus is cured, and Scylla is

punished for her crime of coyness (125). As Braden points out, the poem makes "the role

of the unrequited male lover" a "glamorous one":

> complaining of his lot, [Glaucus] finds, charms every woman around,
>
> except the refractory object of his desire. So great is their care that in due
>
> course this community rises up in group rage against the one woman who
>
> dare do wrong by him. (408)

Lodge's Renaissance version of a love elegy makes the Petrarchan lover the mourning character of a Chaucerian dream poem, but replaces the dream of the frame with its mythological world.

By emphasizing the mythological setting over real world implications, the poet carves out a space for the poem to convey "wonder," which it retains from its use of the dream form. Passing over the sea with Glaucus, the narrator describes their conversation as "nought but still of wonder / Of change, of chance, of sorrow and her ending" (114). Glaucus is cured of his grief, but the narrator is not and remains "pensive" (113). It was Glaucus' grief, after all, that had comforted him of his woe. Before his cure, Glaucus had emphasized how his situation mirrors that of the narrator at the start:

> All solitary roam I here about;
>
> Now on the shore, now in the stream I weep.
>
> . . . .
>
> And here consort I now with hapless men,
>
> Yielding them comfort (though my wound be cureless).
>
> (68-9)

Building on the theme "Of change, of chance," Lodge inserts a little irony, curing the "cureless" wound, and leaving the comforted but uncured narrator "pensive." Even though so much of the poem has dealt with exteriorized grief, in true dream form it returns to the theme of contemplation. The narrator begins the poem wailing rather than meditating: in fact, just after Glaucus appears in the poem, he delivers a speech instructing him in what to think, and his theme is of the world's "inconstancy" (4-7).[31]

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[31] Cf. the narrator in the opening of Sackville's *Induction*.

His somewhat self-serving conclusion tells the narrator to "know times change by course of fate, / Then mourn no more, but moan my hapless state" (7). Ironically, Glaucus is unable to take his own lesson on mutability, though it will benefit him before the poem's end. Yet, the narrator does take Glaucus' instruction seriously, and he does "moan" the god's "hapless state." His pity recurs at many points in the poem, as he pities first Glaucus, then Scylla (8, 106), and this pity reverberates throughout the poem in the pity of the nymphs and deities for Glaucus, then Scylla (104), and in the pity Scylla withholds from Glaucus in scorning his love. But the pensiveness at the end of the poem connects these feelings of pity with the philosophical orientation Glaucus had offered the narrator at the beginning of the poem (114). This is the pensiveness, arising out of experience, of the narrator as author of the poem who "Alonely…apart did write this story / With many a sigh and heart full sad and sorry" (128). As in the beginning, he is "alone" and "apart," but he has experienced something like the "wonderful" dream in Chaucer: the experience with Glaucus transforms the narrator's wailing pity into thoughtful composition.

In the love elegies described above, love-longing causes grief as if for a death and is also expressed as a cause of death: in the *Court of Venus*, the narrator is "betwixt life and death," (36), and Glaucus is described as "pale as any corse" so that he, apart from his sighs, might be seen as a "citizen of Death" (77). However, Chaucer's achievement in *The Book of the Duchess* was to turn the common theme of a lover dying for love into an examination of the same lover grieving the death of his beloved. Following from this development, dream poetry in particular takes up not just the theme of love grief, but also the natural extension of the form into a larger exploration of the themes of human grief and mortality. This is clearly the tradition within which Spenser situates his *Daphnaida*.

This much-maligned pastoral elegy published in 1591 has long been recognized as a rewriting of Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess*. It is best understood as a poem that comes out of the extension of dream poetry into the Renaissance, but because that history has not been thoroughly documented, it goes unrecognized by critics of *Daphnaida*. Much of the criticism this poem has suffered arises out of an incomplete understanding of its poetic influences.

The central poem of the mid-sixteenth century for understanding Spenser's use of the dream form for funereal mourning is Thomas Sackville's *Induction* to the *Complaint of Henry Duke of Buckingham*. Sackville's *Complaint* was published in the second edition of the *Mirror for Magistrates* collection in 1563. The complaint proper is preceded by an *Induction* of 79 rhyme royal stanzas, which is the more celebrated piece of poetry. Manuscript evidence rediscovered by Marguerite Hearsey in the early twentieth century suggests that Sackville intended an epilogue to complete the frame begun by the induction, but this epilogue is unfinished in manuscript, and it was never published with the Complaint in the *Mirror* (Hearsey 121). The incomplete framing did not impede the poem's success, however, and it was admired in the sixteenth century and later.[32] The *Induction* is notable as a Renaissance poem for drawing on Book VI of Virgil's *Aeneid*, and also Douglas' and Surrey's translations of the epic; in his description of a descent into hell Sackville carefully follows but also expands upon Aeneas's descent to the underworld (7-8). This particular passage from the *Aeneid* is in itself significant to the history of dream poetry; in the underworld, Aeneas is given a vision of the future, and

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[32] For examples of contemporary praise of Sackville, see Hearsey (2-5). Bradford writes that "On the strength of its own merits, it is one of the first truly great Elizabethan poems—whether or not one agrees with the trite judgment that it is the finest long poem between Chaucer and Spenser" (8).

returns from the underworld through the Ivory Gate of Sleep, which "notoriously" suggests that what came before was a false dream (Baswell 229).[33] It is equally worth noting, however, that Sackville arrives at his epic passage by calling first upon the form of an English dream poem.

The *Induction* begins quite clearly as a dream poem might, with the distinction that it reverses some of the form's usual conventions. Instead of a springtime motif, Sackville chooses to start with "The wrathfull winter proching on apace" (1). The action takes place at sunset, rather than dawn; and in the place of the deafening harmony of spring birdsong, we are told that the

> small fowles flocking in their song did rewe
>
> the winter's wrath, wherewith eache thing defaste
>
> in wofull wise bewaild the Somer paste.
>
> (12-14)

Flouting these conventions is not original to Sackville.[34] Indeed, just as Lydgate plays with reversals already in his *Complaint of the Black Knight* by waking the narrator at the

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[33] The Ivory Gate is, of course, the gate of "false dreams" (Baswell 229). Baswell notes how John of Salisbury "treats the *Aeneid* almost as a dream book" (393n23).

[34] Hoccleve begins "My Compleinte" with an autumnal opening (l.1-21). Bradford places Sackville in a Tudor tradition of winter landscape poetry. He also shows Sackville's debt to descriptions of winter in Douglas and Lyndsay. The first gives a famous description of winter in his prologue to Book VII of his translation of the *Aeneid* (14), but Bradford argues that "the link between Douglas' germinal ideas and Sackville's full-blown development of them may have been Sir David Lyndsay's *Dreme*, for in that poem the bleak and barren winter landscape conveys intimations of mortality to the poet….Sackville's winter landscape, then, in terms of its meaning and function, has its deepest roots in Scottish, rather than English, poetic tradition" (15). Bradford, however, fails to connect both of these with the common background of Chaucerian dream poetry, to which both are obviously indebted. He is more concerned with the "figurative language" in Sackville and subsequent Renaissance poets, particularly in their use of winter as a metaphor of mutability and human mortality (18, 33-39).

start of the poem, altering the season or time of day is, by Sackville's time, a normal

variation within the form. His use of these reversals shows, more than anything, his

willingness to reuse this set of conventions: what is surprising is only that he can still put

them to a genuinely creative use. Sackville uses the reversals in the opening of the poem

to arrive at his theme: by contrasting the winter that is against the "Somer" that is

expected in such a poem, and by showing the defacing of all that was beautiful in nature,

with "every blome down blowen" (7), he can naturally draw the lesson that

> all earthlie thing is borne
>
> to die the death, for nought long time may last.
>
> The somers beauty yeldes to winters blast.
>
> (54-6)

He describes this landscape by undoing the details of Lydgate's aureate style, with "the

mantels reant" (5) and "tappettes torne" (7). The larger conclusion implied about form in

the opening to the *Induction* is that the contrast between spring and autumn, between

summer and winter, is naturally present within the form of the dream poem and yields

quite organically into a mode of complaint and to meditations on mutability, changes in

Fortune, or the universality of death, themes that both Lodge and Spenser will explore.

In Sackville's poem, however, there is the additional element that this theme is

conceived within the mind of the poem's narrator. Unlike the poems it draws upon,

Sackville's does not include a dream, but replaces it with a visionary experience that

follows from the narrator's contemplation.[35] Again, as in Lydgate, a restless narrator has

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[35] Further evidence that Sackville ought to be read in the tradition of the dream poem can
be seen in John Higgins' Induction to his 1574 edition of the *Mirror for Magistrates*. He
clearly draws on Sackville, but places the episode of his induction back into a dream,

gone to "[walk] about" out of doors (21), this time braving the elements, however, rather than invited by them, "the cruel season bidding [him] withholde / [him] selfe within" (19-20). Though these lines literally refer to staying indoors in bad weather, there is an additional resonance to "withholding one selfe within" that suggests the state of contemplation in which the narrator is, in fact, lost. Immediately, night begins to fall, catching the narrator unawares. His contemplation is focused on the change of season: he is "sorrowing…to see the somer flowers / the livelie grene the lustie leas forlorne" (50-1). But, caught by nightfall, he incorporates this more immediate image of change into his meditation, noting that

> beholding darke oppresse the daie so neare
>
> the sodden sight resorted to my minde
>
> the sundrie changes here in earth we finde.

<div align="center">(61-3)</div>

And it is this "musing … in thought" on the changeability of this world that leads his "busie traunce" to thoughts of the fall of princes, connecting the winter landscape to the larger theme of the *Mirror* collection (64, 67-8). The mourning in Sackville's poem, then, is not specifically funereal, but historical and tragic in the *de casibus* tradition.[36]

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with Morpheus as the guide into the underworld (EEBO). Higgins' Induction is reprinted in the 1610 edition, along with another dream poem, Niccols' "Winter Night's Vision" (EEBO).

[36] Budra argues that *de casibus* literature must be viewed primarily as a "form of history writing" (xiii), rather than as tragedy, though it comes to be associated with tragedy over time. He argues that in his *Induction* "Sackville swings the *Mirror* in the direction of tragedy, placing more emphasis on the fear and pity of the narrative of decline than on its historical/political implications" (54). The association of *de casibus* literature with tragedy is complex, due in part, as Budra writes, to the "various authors' erratic understanding of the literary terms they employed and the slipperiness of the concept of fortune itself" (xiii.) He credits Chaucer with forming the association between the *de*

Beyond just obvious analogies to change or to the fall of princes, however, the narrator's "traunce" also leads into the poem's visionary events in a way that is comparable to the dream in a dream poem. As a direct result of his contemplation, the first mourning character the narrator encounters is Sorrow, a personification who appears in response to his musings and eventually leads him into the underworld to hear Buckingham's complaint. The particular description of Sorrow as "wobegone" (91), tearing her hair, wringing hands, and "sighing sore" (76-7), recalls the Sorrow of Chaucer's *Romaunt of the Rose* (Hearsey 96-7). But she also appears as suddenly as the night has fallen, and as a character "in black all clad," recalling Chaucer's mourning knight (73).[37] The narrator, seeing her great distress, "so sorrow[s] at her sorowes eft / that what with greif and feare [his] wittes [are] reft" (125-6); he realizes it is "vain" to ask her to cease in her sorrow, since that is her name, but he does try to "comfort [her] in paine" since he is "a man him self with sorrow slain" (134-8).

Sorrow's appearance signals a sudden shift in the narrator's, and the reader's, awareness of the reality being presented by the poem. In the early stanzas of the poem we are in a winter landscape constructed as a careful reversal of a *locus amoenus*, but the stanza immediately preceding Sorrow's appearance reminds us that we are still in

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casibus tradition and tragedy in his *Monk's Tale*: Chaucer "took Boccaccio's historical model and saw in it the classical tragic narrative arc: '*Tragedye is to seyn a dite of a properite for a tyme, that endeth in wrecchidnesse.*'" (Budra 47). For more on the various ideas of tragedy available in the middle ages, see Kelly (*Ideas and Forms of Tragedy*). He argues that in England Chaucer and Lydgate pass an idea of tragedy through the *Mirror for Magistrates* to Shakespeare (175). See also his *Chaucerian Tragedy*.

[37] There is a nice ambiguity in the phrase as Sackville positions it in the stanza. "In black all clad" clearly refers primarily to the "wight" who "[falls] before [his] face" (74), but in unpunctuated manuscript form could just as easily refer to the "night" in the preceding line: "And strait furth stalking with a doubled pace / for that I sawe the night draw on so fast / in black all clad…" (70-3).

England: the narrator's "busie traunce" presents him with "such fall of peres as in *this*

realme had be" (68, emphasis mine). With Sorrow's appearance, and the narrator's

interaction with this allegorical figure, the reality changes suddenly. The narrator is

"aghast" and "mazed" to discover that Sorrow can tell him the exact subject of his recent

contemplation and, moreover, that she promises to show him "with eie that erst in

thought [he] rold" (155, 157, 168). The reader is then equally stunned when the narrator

identifies this character as a "goddesse" and falls down to worship her (162, 169-70).

The full shock of this passage comes out of its careful interweaving of epic, biblical, and

medieval allusions. The narrator's identification of Sorrow as a goddess echoes Aeneas'

O, dea certe in the first book of the *Aeneid*, and also calls to mind any number of

medieval allegories, dream poems or not, in which the goddesses Venus, Nature, or

Fortune appear. But the language also imitates Christ's calling of his first disciples in the

Gospel of John, in the invitation to "Come…and see" (149), immediately followed by the

revelation that the divine figure knows what a human is thinking, as Christ does with

Nathaniel when he reveals that he saw him under the fig tree (John 1:39, 48-50). These

details would not be nearly so shocking if the narrator had actually fallen asleep and was

dreaming of, even worshipping, the goddess Sorrow; instead, Sackville writes something

so impossible to his early modern English Protestant audience that it can only signal an

unambiguously fictional reality. In invoking this clearly fictional alternate reality that

draws upon but is not a dream, Sackville stands as a precedent both to Lodge in *Scylla's*

Metamorphosis and to Spenser's *Daphnaida* and others of his shorter poems.[38]

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[38] Lodge also echoes Sackville in the demonstrative behavior of his mourning characters.

Spenser's *Ruines of Time* gives a variation on Sackville's Sorrow in the character of Verlame, the Genius of a ruined and forgotten ancient Roman city. She appears as a vision to the narrator at the beginning of that poem and resembles the goddess Sorrow in appearance and grieving behavior. The poem does not attribute her appearance to any thought by the narrator as Sackville does, but that is the very cause of her grief in the poem. The narrator is present, by chance, on the shore of the River Thames in the first stanza, near the site of ancient Verlame "Of which there now remaines no memorie, / Nor anie little moniment to see" (4-5).[39] The character Verlame mourns, then, because the narrator is there *not* contemplating her demise, as he might if there were some "little moniment" to stimulate his memory. In turn, her sorrow and complaint make him "with inward sorrowe wexen faint" (472), and her disappearance, as sudden as her appearance had been, leaves him with "thought" that is "greeved" (478) and "deepelie musing at her doubtfull speech" (485).[40]

When these grieving characters appear in Sackville, Lodge, and Spenser, they are both within and distinct from the waking reality of the poems. Unlike Chaucer, with his clear differentiation of sleeping and waking states but with a very human mourning character, the Renaissance poets here give characters that are clearly not of the ordinary world. Lodge's characters are mythological, while Sackville's and Spenser's are both

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[39] References to Spenser's short poems are in Oram, et al.

[40] It is important to note the influence of Du Bellay on Spenser's visionary poetics, particularly in the *Complaints* volume. Spenser's translations of Du Bellay's *Songe* appeared first in the 1569 volume of Jan van der Noot's *A Theatre for Worldlings* (Oram, et al. 461). He revised and added to these translations to include them in the *Complaints* volume as *The Visions of Bellay* (441). The fact that Du Bellay's sonnets are also dream visions does not take away from the influence of Sackville, but it does show that the form of the dream vision persists in different ways in the Renaissance, and is by no means solely an English form.

allegorical and spectral. All of them emphasize difference and other-worldliness, but without the distinction between sleep and waking states. As the dream mechanism is dropped, this distinction shifts to one between a waking and a more fantastical fictional reality, a fiction which, like a dream, or the "thought" of a narrator, gives the poet a freedom to represent whatever the imagination conceives.

In *Daphnaida* Spenser applies this expansion of the dream form to large-scale topics of mourning such as mutability and the fall of princes to the specifically funereal occasion he has in the death of Douglas Howard, the wife of the courtier and poet Arthur Gorges. Far from understanding the dream background to this poem, critics almost always begin by pointing out that Spenser drops the dream frame of his Chaucerian model and recasts the poem as a pastoral elegy (Oram, et al. 488).[41] This is true on the surface, of course, but in the interpretations of Spenser's poem that follow from this starting point, critics tend to agree that *Daphnaida* is not a particularly good pastoral elegy. The extreme grief voiced by the character Alcyon is the troubling point for critics, with most following the influential views of Oram and of Harris and Steffen on the matter. To salvage the poem, Oram reads the poem ironically, arguing that Spenser's Alcyon represents immoderate grief in mourning for his lost Daphne, and subtly urging the poem's primary recipient, Arthur Gorges, not to follow the character's example of overwrought mourning for his dead wife (Oram, "*Daphnaida*" 155). Though he admittedly can only speculate about why Spenser would offer a poem as such an admonition when overtly the poem is an elegy honoring Douglas Howard (150), Oram suggests that the older poet, Spenser, having himself lost his first wife, is in a position to

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[41] Even Martin, in an otherwise excellent article on *Daphnaida*, writes that it "differs from its predecessor…in omitting the framing devices of the medieval vision" (88).

instruct the younger Gorges on proper grief (154). Harris and Steffen, equally influential

in shaping opinion of the poem, put forward the argument that favors Chaucer's *Book of*

the Duchess over Spenser's poem because the former so deftly reminds the reader of the

interrelation of life and death, whereas Spenser's poem fails to reintegrate these two

polarities of human existence, and thereby fails to provide the kind of consolation that an

elegy should offer, and that readers of elegies expect.[42]

Critics have largely agreed with these arguments, judging the "unrelievedly

gloomy" tone of the poem as unpoetic unless intended ironically (Oram, et al. 487).[43]

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[42] Harris and Steffen base their argument about the purpose of pastoral elegy on
Poggioli's elegant formulation that "The task of the poetic form is to remind the pastoral
mind that nature is not only a provider, but also a destroyer: that it generates from its
womb not only life, but also death" (Poggioli "The Oaten Flute" 165; qtd in Harris and
Steffen 19). They then go on to assert the reverse: "not only death but life" is reaffirmed
for the grieving character. Their argument, then, hinges on the fact that Chaucer's poem
provides consolation but Spenser's does not, because "Consolation resides in the full,
unequivocal remembrance of this duality [of life and death], in the assurance that loss and
gain, joy and grief, life and death are merely disparate parts of a single whole--that each
side of the equation balances the other, and that the equation itself is everywhere
subsumed within the ultimate compassion of God's vision" (19). Martin offers a sufficient
rebuttal: "the assumptions that grief must be first ordered (according to what rule?) then
exorcised, that to do this a poet must establish a fixed context within a generic convention,
and finally that a context of emotional possibilities is to be used to eradicate a particular
emotion, bespeak too moralistic and suppressive an attitude towards both poetry and
human feeling" (89).
[43] Sacks sees in *Daphnaida* and in Spenser's other early elegies a problematic
"dominance of inert states of melancholy" and "pronounced artificiality" that lead to
Spenser's "delay" in producing a poem of mourning on the death of Sidney (39). Pigman
sees in Alcyon an "example of stubborn, self-centered, destructive grief" that is most
"disturbing" and "pathological" for its "obsessiveness" (76). DeNeef offers a more subtle
reading that sees Alcyon not as a faulty mourner but as an example of a bad poet, who
flattens out the experience of grief in reversing "pastoral consolations" in a "perverse
poetic uncreation" (42). DeNeef's reading is still moralistic, setting the "false-speaking
Alcyon" against the "Right Poet Spenser" (50). Martin rightly objects that "The
unresolved end of *Daphnaida* shows us that recognition of loss is as valid a position for
poetry as consolation" (90n16). DeNeef, at least, though he disapproves, does
acknowledge that Spenser's "man in black may…be considerably more seductive than he
initially appears, for despite his extreme point of view he still articulates a recognizably

There is, in fact, a real rigorist position in the period with respect to mourning, which

Pigman emphasizes in *Grief and English Renaissance Elegy*. It is the position represented

by Feste's retort to Olivia in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*: "The more fool, madonna, to

mourn for your brother's soul, being in heaven" (1.5.61-2; see also Pigman 27). But

Shakespeare places Feste's retort at the end of an artificial "proof" that reveals Olivia's

mourning as the artificial charade that it is (1.5.53): the scene has more to say about

posturing than about real grief. Yet Harris and Steffen argue that "the tenets of proportion

emerge from *Daphnaida* largely because the world-view of Spenser's audience enables it

to recognize and reject excess" (20). This position against excessive grief in poetry,

however, is challenged by the continued popularity and publication of editions of the

Mirror for Magistrates throughout the sixteenth and into the seventeenth century. This

evidence suggests that demonstrative expression of grief would not always have been

considered out of proportion by Spenser's audience.[44] Thus, while the ironic readings can

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human perspective" (44). Kay agrees with critiques of Alcyon as "self-absorbed" in his grief (50), but he ultimately downplays this fact, arguing that the numerological ordering of the poem suggests the ability of art to bring order to human passions, and that the refrain "Weep Shepheard weep, to make mine undersong" implies that Alcyon is not wholly disconnected from the community of shepherds (52). This reading is a bit sanitizing, however, with regard to the real darkness of Alcyon's vision and his isolation: Alcyon is not really a "spokesman" for the shepherds in the poem.

[44] See also Kay's analysis of Sidney's Arcadian elegies, which prefaces his reading of *Daphnaida* (Kay 38-47). Three elements he points out in Sidney's treatment of mourning in the *Old Arcadia* can be applied to *Daphnaida*. The emotionally demonstrative mourners are presented by the narrator as adhering to ancient Greek practice of mourning. Spenser synthesizes the dream form with pastoral elegy to create his demonstrative mourner. Sidney's mourning poems also do not end with consolation (41, 43, 46). Finally, the perspective of Agelastus, the professional mourner who represents the group of mourners as a whole, specifically calls attention to the difficulty of summoning adequate language for the mourning situation. As Kay observes, Agelastus "presents his own rough, uncontrollable style as a mirror of his inner state:
>   One word of woe after another traineth;
>   Ne do I care how rude be my invention,

be clever, they are necessitated, in the first place, by Spenser's poem being compared directly to Chaucer's—and failing miserably in the comparison.[45] In fact, the ironic reading of the poem becomes unnecessary if the starting point for interpretation is reframed.[46] Spenser does not simply drop the dream frame and recast his poem: rather, he drops the device of the dream, but in a way that still recalls the form of the dream poem and draws upon it for creative purposes. Moreover, rather than directly revising the dream poem he gets from Chaucer, Spenser is equally indebted to intermediate models—such as Sackville and Lodge—that have already begun to rework the dream mode for the purpose of complaint, and the poem's strategies become clearer when read in the context of these other poems. By turning to Chaucer as a source, Spenser hearkens back to the original model of the dream poem, but his own poem draws methodically upon the transformations that have already taken place in the form.

So it be seen what sorrow in me reigneth.
This is the problem of writing he addresses: how accurately or adequately to convey the sense of his own feelings" (Kay 44). Ultimately, Kay will argue that Alcyon's lament brings artistic order to chaotic feelings, just as Agelastus, the professional poet brings order to the "artless wailing" of the Arcadians (45). But Spenser also amplifies the difficulty of expressing grief by making the mourner a husband rather than a professional poet for mourning. Alcyon's appearance and style are all the more "rough" and "uncontrollable" for his proximity to the person being mourned. Martin rightly underscores that in Alcyon "Spenser is portraying a *potential* poet and situating the *possibility* of poetry inside the experience of grief" (90).

[45] Martin argues, on the other hand, that such comparisons "have oversimplified Chaucer's vision and thus invalidated the basis for their comparison" (84).

[46] Gibson reframes interpretation of the poem by focusing on the legal troubles facing Gorges from the Howards: this is a much more convincing historical context for the poem than Oram's explanation of Spenser's loss of his first wife. Indeed, as Gibson shows, Spenser's commendatory letter is so focused on establishing the connection of the Gorges family to the Howard family that it is hard not to bear this framework in mind at the outset for interpretation. Gibson flatly asserts that "there is nothing in *Daphnaida's* prefatory material to support the ironic reading—no implication in the dedicatory letter to the Marchioness of Northampton that the purpose of the poem is to advise her nephew against unmannerly grief—and nothing in the text of the poem either" (25-6).

Spenser's poem begins with an invocation banishing the Muses, calling instead on the Fates and Persephone to hear the "rufull plaint" of one Alcyon, "the wofulst man alive" (4-5). But after this dire invocation signals the heavy mourning that will follow, the poem begins again, this time in the mode of a dream poem, placing the reader in a familiar autumnal setting, and showing a narrator "walk[ing] abroade" in the evening

> to breath the freshing ayre
>
> In open fields, whose flowring pride opprest
>
> With early frosts, had lost their beautie faire
>
> (26-8)

The early death of the flowers plants in the mind of the narrator "a troublous thought" (29), which, as in Chaucer and Lydgate, is not precisely identified, but, as in Sackville, leads to "meditation / Of this worlds vainnesse and lifes wretchednesse" (33-34). As he "muze[s]" on himself as "of many most, / Most miserable man," the mourning character of the poem appears to him, "a sory wight…/ Clad all in black" (36, 37-8, 40). The mourning Alcyon, however, is neither the knightly character found in Chaucer or Lydgate, nor a personification or specter like Sorrow or Verlame, but, instead, Spenser calls on both of these types to create something in between. Alcyon seems at first like an apparition: he is "espie[d]" by the narrator suddenly and wild in his appearance, with "careless locks, uncombed and unshorne," overgrown beard, and sighing and groaning as he walks (38, 43-4, 48). At the least, he seems to be a stranger: his staff makes the narrator think he is "Like to some Pilgrim come from farre away" (42). On second glance, however, the narrator realizes that he is only Alcyon, no supernatural specter or stranger

encountered by chance in a dream, but a shepherd that the narrator comes to recognize as someone he already knows.

Spenser reuses this description in Book IV of the *Faerie Queene*, describing Timias' wretched condition after being banished from the favor of Belphoebe, in an episode that echoes Elizabeth's banishment of Ralegh. Unable to find "ease of grief, nor hope of grace," the Squire becomes a "wofull wight" in the woods (IV.vii.38), growing out his hair and beard until he is unrecognizable (40). Of course, in Spenser's epic the characters do not interact with a narrator-figure, but the Timias episode draws on this aspect of the dream form when the grieving Timias interacts with a series of characters who discover him in the woods. First, Prince Arthur arrives but does not recognize him "That albeit his owne deare Squire he were" (43). Next, a "turtle Dove" hears his lament and joins him in his mourning song:

> Who seeing his sad plight, her tender heart
>
> With deare compassion deeply did emmove,
>
> That she gan mone his undeserved smart,
>
> And with her dolefull accent beare with him a part.
>
> (IV.viii.3)

This dove, having "lost her dearest love" (3), brings Timias some comfort and becomes his "Companion" in his "woe and wrong" (5). The dove also, by chance, brings Belphoebe to the mourning Timias, who in his mourning comes to resemble an apparition: he is "Like ghost late risen from his grave agryz'd" (12). Like Arthur, she does not recognize him, but like the dove, she pities him: "She knew him not, but pittied much his case" (12). His restoration comes from being able to reveal to Belphoebe that

she is the cause of his misery: her recognition then restores him to her "former favours

state" (17). In this episode Spenser combines the knight mourning for love with the dove

grieving the death of her mate in a larger political allegory that draws on the history of

the dream form for its combination of themes of grief and compassion.

But in spite of the narrator's familiarity with the shepherd, Alcyon functions as do

the other mourning characters in all of these poems: Chaucer's man in black and Sorrow

are in fact more similar than distinct. Chaucer's fully human and decorous knight faints,

groans, and sighs like Sorrow or Verlame, and he even describes himself as a

personification, saying that whoever sees him "May seyn he hath met with sorwe, / For y

am sorwe and sorwe ys y" (*BD* 596-7). Likewise, Alcyon, a shepherd and lowly human

character, matches any specter or vision in the extremity of his grief. Read within this

context, the extremity of his grief is jarring but not entirely inappropriate.[47]

Instead of the alternate reality of a dream world or of a visionary experience

within the waking world, Spenser uses the pastoral setting as a fictionalization of reality,

which acts in this poem like a dream setting, allowing for more imaginative possibilities

than a realistic setting would. As in a dream poem, this fictional reality enters *Daphnaida*

rather than beginning it. The title and Alcyon's name in the opening stanza are only

limited markers of the poem as pastoral; the second opening of the poem suggests a

dream poem like any other, and we are not fully in a pastoral setting until the narrator

identifies the black Pilgrim as Alcyon, "the jollie Shepheard swaine" (54). The pastoral

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[47] There is a sense of wastefulness in the Timias passage: the Squire is "wretchedly
wearing out his youthly yeares, / Through wilfull penury consumed quight" (IV.vii.41).
The fact that his nobility descends into "rude brutishnesse" (45) is clearly undesirable, yet
Timias is entirely at the mercy of time and Belphoebe, as Ralegh was to Elizabeth (see
IV.vii.47, IV.viii.17), which attenuates his culpability.

setting, moreover, demonstrates a double vision of reality that gives the poem its

complexity. Alcyon describes two different realities within the pastoral setting: the first,

an innocent pastoral world before Daphne's death, is remembered by Alcyon in stark

contrast with his current bleak reality, which mirrors the autumnal setting of the opening

of the poem. As in Sackville, the contrast between the past and present gives rise to the

complaint of the poem. But the addition of the double pastoral within the poem allows for

an imaginative exploration of the limits of grief, and gives the poem an element of

thought experiment. Spenser uses the pastoral world of this poem to mimic the kind of

ambiguity or doubleness that Kruger emphasizes is characteristic of medieval dream

poems, and the questions they ask of literature itself: "Depicting a dream whose status

vis-à-vis truth is ambiguous,…a dream vision focuses attention on that aspect of literature

most problematic for the Middle Ages—its position between truth and falsehood"

(Kruger 135). In *Daphnaida*, Spenser's pastoral, by implying both classical and Christian

norms, blurs the authoritative power of each perspective in order to plumb the depths of

human grief.

   Daphnaida achieves this ambiguity by experimenting with the form of the

pastoral elegy that is set within the larger frame of a dream poem. In his "November" in

the *Shepheard's Calendar* Spenser had already written a pastoral elegy that conforms to

generic norms and expectations, ending in consolation and Christian apotheosis.[48] In

Daphnaida, instead, Spenser places the poem's consolation early in Alcyon's lament,

within the innocent pastoral setting and memory of Alcyon, completely undermining its

emotional power. Daphne's death, as Alcyon recalls it, is a model Christian death; she

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[48] See Gibson on *Daphnaida* as a "tragic reshaping" of "November" (39).

even instructs him not to grieve because she goes "with gladnesse to [her] wished rest."[49]

This consolation is no consolation to Alcyon in his grieving state—not only does the

poem show the impossibility of preempting grief with consolation, but Daphne's attempt

at consolation also adds to Alcyon's wretchedness by underscoring more fully what he

has lost. Daphne's noble perspective on death casts Alcyon's position as a despairing

one, yet the placement of her perspective within the poem diminishes its persuasive

power, and at the end of the poem Alcyon remains unconsoled.

The poem aims for more than just the freedom to create bleak irresolution for its

own sake, however. It draws upon elements of the dream form to move this elegy toward

a new kind of tragic vision. Alcyon describes his courtship of Daphne to the narrator of

the poem in an allegory comparing her to a wild lioness that he tames:

> Much was I moved at so goodly sight
>
> Whose like before mine eye had seldome seene,
>
> And gan to cast, how I her compasse might
>
> <div align="center">(113-115)</div>

Having tamed her, he goes on to describe his happiness:

> Long thus I joyed in my happinesse,
>
> And well did hope my joy would have no end:
>
> But oh fond man, that in worlds ficklenesse
>
> Reposedst hope, or weenedst her thy frend,
>
> That glories most in mortall miseries,

---

[49] *Pearl* demonstrates the possibility of Christian consolation, but the pearl-maiden can offer heavenly consolation in a way that Daphne cannot: the former gives her father reasons to stop grieving, based upon her current state of happiness, whereas the latter tries to keep her husband from grieving in the first place.

And daylie doth her changefull counsels bend:

To make new matter fit for Tragedies.

(148-154)

Alcyon contrasts his earlier desire to "compasse" his lioness with her untimely demise. It is surprising that he is able to "compasse" her in the first place, but success gives him a false security and does not protect from the "worlds fickleness." It is this awareness of change and fortune that shapes Alcyon's tale as a tragedy. He describes his own situation as "new matter fit for Tragedies." In fact, his matter is old not new: John of Gaunt lost his wife well before Arthur Gorges lost his. But, moving from the precedent of Chaucer to that of Sackville, in *Daphnaida* Spenser has reenvisioned the Chaucerian elegiac dream poem as a tragedy in the tradition of *de casibus* and the *Mirror for Magistrates*, but with additional changes. Instead of the reversal of fortune and fall suffered, rightly or randomly, by a great public personage—tragedy as a moralistic or cautionary tale from history—the poem presents the natural death of one woman, and the reversal of fortune suffered by her husband, a simple shepherd, in his loss of her. There is indeed something discordant in making the natural death of one woman the subject of a tragedy: it is new matter for tragedy, just as Spenser's *Amoretti* offer courtship and marriage, rather than unrequited love, as new matter for a sonnet sequence.

The question that remains is whether it is "fit" matter for a tragedy, and, if so, what Spenser is trying to accomplish with it. When Lodge similarly incorporates the term "tragedy" into *Scylla's Metamorphosis*, it is ultimately not to be taken seriously: Glaucus applies the term to his and the narrator's lovelorn feelings, unaware of the comic resolution that is about to occur. Lodge presents Glaucus' grief seriously but makes it

ironic through its resolution. Alcyon's situation does not change, however, and the poem

ends with his despair unresolved. The poem's detractors see Alcyon's despair—and the

language he uses to describe it—as evidence of his solipsism.[50]

But Alcyon's expressions of grief, though extreme, and presented as such, also

express natural human emotions about death. It does not follow that simply by reason of

their extremity Spenser means for the reader either to condone them or to condemn them

moralistically. Oram criticizes Alcyon for seeing "his anguish as unique," even though

"suffering, as Spenser's poetry insists repeatedly, is a condition of all creatures" (144).

The reader may indeed be tempted by *Daphanaida* to say with *Hamlet's* Gertrude "why

seems it so particular with thee?" (1.2.75). But even if Hamlet's grief for his father is

immoderate in some of its expressions, Shakespeare makes it difficult to point out this

fact without seeming callous, indifferent, not grieving enough, or, like Gertrude,

remarried to the murderer of one's spouse. It is Claudius, after all, who holds the rigorist

position at the opening of *Hamlet*, chiding Hamlet for his "fault to heaven" and to

"nature" in continuing to grieve for his father (1.2.101-2): but, of course, Claudius knows

best that old Hamlet's death was not natural. In his lament for Daphne, Alcyon argues

that her early death was "against all course of kinde: / For age to dye is right, but youth is

wrong" (242-3). Even though Daphne's death was natural, it seems unnatural, like the

flowers cut off by an early frost in the prologue, and Alcyon follows a natural impulse in

pointing this out. As Steinberg notes, Spenser's purpose may be theological as well,

presenting a Calvinistic Protestant iconoclasm and pessimism about the power of art to

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[50] See, for instance, Oram on the "vanity" in Alcyon's hyperbolic language (144). Pigman
sees Alcyon's response to Daphne's death as "self-absorption" because he "contradicts"
her view of her own death (79).

console (129). Contrasting *Daphnaida* with the *Book of the Duchess*, Steinberg points out

that in Spenser's poem "loss is not innocent or beautiful but devastating and

destabilizing, an effect of sin in the world" (129). In this larger theological sense, then,

Daphne's death—and every death—is unnatural.

It is Spenser's use of the dream form that fosters the reader's understanding of

Alcyon's despair. The narrator of the poem, like the many poet-narrators in earlier dream

poems, encounters Alcyon only after his own heavy meditation has led him to conclude

that he himself is the most miserable of men. His interaction with Alcyon, however, gives

him the perspective on his own misery that allows him, in retrospect, to call Alcyon "the

wofulst man alive" in the Invocation of the poem (5). Just as Glaucus persuades Lodge's

narrator to "moan" for him, Alcyon's tale of his Lionesse moves the narrator to "pittie of

his heavie plight" (170). But pity is not enough, since the narrator still emphasizes the

pity he feels as "almost equall paine" to that of Alcyon (175); as Steinberg points out, he

still "cannot fully comprehend" Alcyon's "greater loss" (139).[51] Though he is not

unsympathetic, he clearly wishes Alcyon would rein in his passions: but "milde

counsaile," even if well-intentioned, is not an effective consolation for Alcyon's fresh

grief (191).[52] The narrator needs to experience the whole of Alcyon's "heavie plaint" and

have his every attempt at "recomfort" rebuffed, in order to comprehend the real depth of

Alcyon's grief (540, 546). Thus, while a similar dynamic of sympathy between narrator

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[51] Steinberg provides a good summary of the education of the narrator over the course of
the poem (138-140).

[52] Similarly, Glaucus' instructions at the beginning of Lodge's poem do not comfort the
narrator, nor do they comfort Glaucus himself: the narrator's consolation comes, rather,
from "Comparing" his sorrow with that of Glaucus (8). It is only after the events of the
poem that the narrator can contemplate the counsel that Glaucus provided at the
beginning.

and mourner is found in all of the poems described here, the narrating characters all need

to experience the events of the dream, or an analogous experience, to comprehend

feelings of grief—both their own which open and close the poems, and those of the

mourning characters they encounter. In her study of Chaucer's dream visions, Akbari

equates this comprehension with "insight" (195). The insight offered by Spenser's poem

is that sometimes no "counsaile" will console.

The purpose of Spenser's elegy, then, is complex and multi-dimensional. To

Gorges, it offers an understanding of the depths of human grief and the inadequacy of

most responses to it. To the poem's immediate readership upon publication, as Gibson

argues, it presents "an image of an excessively melancholy Gorges as a means of

bringing Gorges's [legal] plight to the attention of an influential wider audience" (37).[53]

Beyond the immediate legal context, however, as literature the poem offers a glimpse of

death and grief that is both "common" and "particular" (*Hamlet* 1.2.72, 75). Spenser's

narrator comments, as Alcyon walks away refusing his hospitality, that he looks "As if

that death he in the face had seen" (565), which he has—or at the least come as close to it

as is possible. The poem ends in irresolution: the narrator does not know what becomes

of Alcyon after this encounter; the contemporary reader does not know the result of the

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[53] Gibson suggests that the poem may have had its intended effect, as Gorges won the
legal judgment that their daughter "Ambrosia was Douglas's true heir" rather than a
changeling, as her family argued (42). This legal victory was as "short-lived" as
Ambrosia herself: when she died in 1600, her lands reverted to the Howard family (42,
and n.56). For more on the argument regarding Ambrosia's parentage, see 33-4. This
aspect of Gibson's argument is significant because many readers of *Daphnaida* see in
Alcyon's neglect of Ambrosia in the poem proof of his moral failing. Gibson's reading
offers that the passage emphasizes Douglas's "maternal care for her own child," thereby
arguing for her maternity (33), and that Spenser, "by making Gorges guilty of forgetting
the welfare of his child in his grief for his wife…absolves him from more materially
damaging accusations," that she is a "forged childe" and not Douglas's daughter at all
(34).

legal struggle facing Gorges; and the poem does not force the reader to approve of Alcyon's despair, but observing it gives the reader a glimpse of tragic vision, showing the seriousness of what it means to look death in the face.

In noting the limited influence of dream vision on public elegy, then, Kay is essentially correct: rather than merely occasional, the concerns at the heart of these poems are best viewed as part of a larger literary context. But these concerns are not to be bracketed aside, as if minor to the period or just an example of a fading medieval style. The dream background expands to include imaginative situations that do not require the justification of a dream in order to be explored but that still draw creative power out of the form and its conventional concerns. Even when the "long borne Infant" is a "fruit of heavinesse" proceeding from "a troublous thought" in a "weaker wit," as Spenser's narrator cryptically describes his meditation at the start of *Daphnaida*, the "muz[ing]" has a creative result in the story and lament of Alcyon (29-36). The poems of mourning in this chapter use the background of the dream poem to synthesize lines of thought about love-grief, the fall of princes, and the mutability of the human condition. The subject of mutability clearly continues to fascinate Spenser to the very end of the *Faerie Queene*, a theme which the next chapter will take up. Arguably, the themes found in these poems find their fullest dramatic expression in later Renaissance tragedies, such as *Hamlet* or *King Lear*. But even prior to the great dramatic tragedies, the form of these poems arrives at and begins to interrogate the nature of tragedy. From Chaucer to Spenser, these poems isolate feelings of grief that proceed from loss or change. The form of the dream poem sets up the interaction between dreamer and mourning character that leads to an intensifying examination of the nature of pity, within increasingly fearful landscapes,

from Sackville's underworld to Spenser's bleak pastoral. The route to Shakespeare's

"woe" and "wonder" has at least one of its origins in Chaucer's "pittee" and "routhe."

Chapter 4

The Dream Poem in the Imaginative Landscape of *The Faerie Queene*

It is surprising that Spenser's use of the dream poem in *The Faerie Queene* has never been fully explored, despite the fact that many studies make mention of the form.[1] There are several reasons for this topic remaining understudied. The primary one is the fact that some of the most important dream moments in *The Faerie Queene*—Britomart's dream in Isis Church in Book V, for example—do not immediately and obviously call to mind the medieval dream poem, and the set pieces in *The Faerie Queene* that seem most clearly to reference dream poetry—such as the Bower of Bliss or the Cantos of Mutabilitie—do not contain dreams. Still, the influence of the medieval dream poem persists in *The Faerie Queene*, even where it is not at first apparent, and the intersection between epic romance and dream form in Spenser proves to be more fruitful than would seem from this inauspicious starting point.

Unlike *Daphnaida*, *The Faerie Queene* as a whole does not rewrite an existing dream poem, nor is the narrative placed within a dream frame. Spenser takes pains to point out in his Letter to Raleigh that, in contrast with the "Historiographer," who recounts narrative events in the order in which they occurred, the "Poet" begins his story by "thrust[ing] into the middest, even where it most concerneth him, and there recoursing to the thinges forepaste, and divining of things to come, maketh a pleasing Analysis of

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[1] In one full-length study Anderson explores the influence of *Piers Plowman* on *The Faerie Queene* and in doing so takes an interest in Spenser's participation in the "dream tradition" (3). I share her opinion that "our critical tradition still has more refined ideas about Spenser's use of Ovid or Vergil than about his use of the English past, which clearly held a fascination for him" (2).

all" (Roche 16-17).[2] This overt avowal of epic form by the author seems to preclude the

use of a dream frame in the work. Yet, immediately before placing his work as an epic, in

the same letter Spenser identifies his subject as Arthur and his quest for the Faery Queene

he has "seene in a dreame or vision" (16). Arthur's dream, in fact, hints at an inversion of

a dream frame for *The Faerie Queene* as a whole: its story begins not when Arthur falls

asleep but when he wakes up from his dream. However, despite the prominent place of a

dream in the backstory of the epic—even, ostensibly, driving the narrative—the

significance of this dream to the epic overall seems somewhat tangential to the reader.[3]

Similarly, although Chaucer's *Tale of Sir Thopas* is recognized as one of the

sources for Arthur's dream of the fairy queen, Chaucer's parodic romance seems an

incongruous starting point for an epic poem.[4] The strangeness of the source, however,

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[2] Future references to the poem are to this edition.

[3] For the ineffectiveness of the Arthur/Gloriana pairing in the narrative, see Hough (226). Hough writes that "the loves of Artegall and Britomart provide a stronger narrative thread," than the Arthur story, although "We cannot tell how far this is due to the incomplete state of the design" (226). Indeed, the second background story Spenser gives in his letter to Raleigh describing the feast at the court of the Faerie Queene is arguably the more interesting for its introduction of the Knight of Book 1. I attribute the reader's sense of the relative unimportance of the backstory in *The Faerie Queene* to the hybrid quality of the epic romance as a genre and to the differing approaches to time in each genre. In the early books of the *Aeneid*, for example, the embedded backstory of the Trojan War is clearly of great significance, creating the sense of past, present, and future with which the epic as a whole is concerned. In a romance a backstory can be seen in the more diffuse context of *entrelacement,* in which references to tales outside the bounds of the primary narrative lend a sense of mystery and the marvelous to a story that is ever-unfolding. The special wonder of the epic as a form is that it can present a vision of time as a unified whole; romance, in contrast, works by hinting at such a unity, but never revealing it fully in narrative form. Spenser tries to take advantage of both of these approaches to time, though *The Faerie Queene* is closer to romance with respect to its backstory. The Arthur story clearly lends significance to the main narrative, and is necessary insofar as the poem aspires to be an English epic, but the narrative that is in the foreground commands the reader's attention.

[4] Miskimin takes Spenser's "transformation of Sir Thopas's dream of his elfin queen into Arthur's dream of Gloriana" to signify that "no 'source' can be ruled out as improbable"

calls attention to Spenser's choice to rework this particular tale in Chaucer. That Spenser

references the event of the dream in particular in the letter to Raleigh suggests that the

dream functions as a creative starting point for Spenser, even in the context of his

complete transformation of his source material. Though he clearly chooses not to frame

the whole poem as a dream, and it is possible to downplay the dream's significance for

the epic as a whole, it is at the same time impossible to ignore Arthur's dream altogether.[5]

It is there from the outset, if only as a catalyst to be superseded by other narrative

techniques.

It is equally impossible to ignore the sheer number of dreams in Spenser's poem.

Much critical attention has been devoted to these, but the interpretation of dreams in

Spenser rarely sheds light on the question of his use of the dream poem. There is, first, a

tendency in dream criticism to blur the distinction between literary dreams and dreams in

life. An examination of the varieties of oneirocriticism available to medieval and

Renaissance authors can indeed be integral to the understanding of literary dreams, as

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(289). In a recent dissertation on Renaissance editions of Chaucer, Sean Lewis notes that "Spenser approache[s] a Chaucer rendered 'sage and serious' by Stow and Thynne," whose editions downplay comedic elements in Chaucer (293). Lewis explains Spenser's use of *Sir Thopas* as an attempt "to 'reform' or 'perfect' pieces of the Chaucerian canon that lend themselves most clearly to comedic treatment" (327).

[5] MacCaffrey also sees Spenser as working from dream form even where he chooses not to use it directly. In the context of describing how Spenser makes "plausible" the "visionary moments" in the poem, she writes that "Spenser, for reasons we cannot now know, chose not to compose the Faerie Queene as a dream-vision, but he shows great inventiveness in finding substitutes for the sense of historicity, of fictive literalness, which that genre promotes" (66). MacCaffrey's study shows how Spenser's allegory contributes to the history of imagination, whereas I argue that the dream form itself, which she recognizes as important, also fundamentally contributes to this history and underlies Spenser's contribution.

Kruger, for example, shows in his meticulous study on *Dreaming in the Middle Ages*.[6]

Kruger rightly takes a cautious approach to interpreting literary dreams through the

dreambooks and treatises available to medieval authors, noting that it is often impossible

to prove a necessary connection between the two kinds of texts, though his study is a

model of how to explore possible connections with sensitivity to "poetic complexity"

(123). Other critical approaches to reading dreams in Spenser's poetry, however,

inevitably draw the critic far from the medieval dream form under consideration here and,

anachronistically, may reveal more about Romantic or Freudian approaches to dreams

than about Spenser's use of dream form or the dream theories available to him.[7]

  This latter approach can be seen as culminating in interpretations that equate the

poem as a whole with a dream—the fact that it is not a dream poem notwithstanding.

Coleridge relates what he calls the "true imaginative absence of all particular space or

time in the Faery Queene" to the state of dreaming: "it is truly in a land of Faery, that is,

of mental space. The poet has placed you in a dream, a charmed sleep, and you neither

wish, nor have the power, to inquire where you are, or how you got there" (4). One

twentieth-century critic explains the simultaneous strangeness and "familiarity" of "the

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[6] I have gained much from his chapter on "Dreams and Fiction" (123-49), and I take the
distinction between "dreams and fiction" (i.e., literary dreams) and "dreams and life" (i.e.,
autobiographical accounts of medieval dreaming) from him (150-1). See also Lewin,
whose introductory chapter surveys the variety of oneirocriticism available to
Renaissance authors, and her chapter on Spenser explores many instances of sleep and
dreaming in *The Faerie Queene*.

[7] I do not object to Romantic- or Freudian-influenced readings of Spenser, which are
often appreciative and astute. I am merely pointing out that the approach to dreams in
such readings is often different in tone and emphasis from the medieval and early modern
dream criticism that would have been available to Spenser. They also assume a Romantic
association between dreams and the power of the poetic imagination, an association that
is just being formed and about which authors are much more ambivalent in medieval and
early modern poetry.

organization" of Spenser's poem by likening it to what we find in dreams: "These stories that begin inexplicably, do not end, are interrupted and resumed, fade into each other and go on in an order apparently emancipated from time and space" are familiar "because we have all met such experiences before—in dreams" (Hough 95). Such assessments are general enough to be unobjectionable in the broadest sense: a dream is not a bad metaphor for a poem, but it ought to be recognized when the metaphor is not a necessary one. One could just as easily use the word "romance" as a substitute and arrive at the same understanding of the poem's blurring of "particular space or time." MacCaffrey, much more accurately, attributes "the recurrent comparisons of *The Faerie Queene* to a dream" to "the effect produced by paratactic narrative" (50). Exploring the dreams in Spenser and seeking to uncover his use of the dream poem needs to involve more than a vague sense of dreaminess.[8]

But Murrin, in specifically addressing a contrast between *The Faerie Queene* and medieval dream poetry, also slips into Romantic assumptions to which even twentieth-century critics are susceptible. He observes:

> In *The Romance of the Rose* and in *The Parliament of Fowls* a narrator dreams the story, and the characters, therefore, clearly function as projections of his psyche. In *The Faerie Queene*, however, we become the dreamers, but we neither control the dream as the medieval narrator does nor are the personae projections of our collective psyche. J. R. R. Tolkien's warning in a different context applies here: 'In Faërian drama

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[8] Anderson attempts to be more precise when she asserts the "inner, remembered quality of experience" in the poem as revealing its indebtedness to "the dream tradition" of Langland (22). Unfortunately, her arguments are often too strained to demonstrate this connection persuasively.

you are in a dream that some other mind is weaving, and the knowledge of

that alarming fact may slip from your grasp.' In *The Romance of the Rose*,

we are safely distanced from the events for they take place in the mind of

another. In *The Faerie Queene*, we are helpless, and it is not even our own

dream. This experience of an *objective* dream is, as far as I know, a unique

creation by Spenser. ("The Varieties of Criticism" 349)

This analysis, again, rests on the Romantic presupposition that "we become the

dreamers," but for this position Murrin offers no real evidence, apart from "the sense of

remoteness, the allegorical personae, and the dreamlike sequences" (349). Murrin, in fact,

backs away from this starting point by observing that the dream "take[s] place in the

mind of another": he concludes by calling it an "objective dream," when perhaps the

starting assumption that the poem represents a dream in the first place should be

reconsidered. Also problematic is the post-Freudian assumption that "the characters" of a

dream poem "clearly function as projections of [the dreamer's] psyche." This reading

greatly oversimplifies medieval dream allegory as a form. In a dream poem, the

characters function as projections—"mirrors" would be the less anachronistic term

(Kruger, *Dreaming* 136)—of many things at once: the dreamer's psychic state, the

dreamer's reading (Ovid, Macrobius), the poet's social situation (John of Gaunt's loss of

his wife; a proposed marriage for Richard II), or of society at large. Kruger notes that

"Medieval mirrors…serve not only to reflect the self, but also to reveal information about

the world beyond the self" (136-7). Inasmuch as the vast cast of characters in *The*

Romance of the Rose, for example, reflects projections—as we understand them—of the

dreamer's psyche, it is clear that at the same time the allegorical characters correspond to

figures that a medieval reader of the poem would recognize as corresponding to ideas in the world outside of the psyche.

One final complication for uncovering Spenser's use of medieval dream form is the intervening influence upon Spenser of the Italian Renaissance epics, those of Ariosto and Tasso in particular, whom Spenser mentions in his Letter to Raleigh. In attending to the influence of the Italians, critics have sometimes downplayed or ignored the still-relevant native medieval influences on Spenser. C. S. Lewis, for example, in the opening of his chapter on Spenser in *The Allegory of Love*, rightly warns against attributing medieval backgrounds to *The Faerie Queene* in episodes where the Italian epic is a more proximate source (297, 305). His is a fair warning for any source study, but it seems to overlook the obvious fact that Spenser—or any poet, for that matter—may use sources in combination.[9] Giamatti, in contrast, makes just such an argument for Spenser's combination of sources: he writes that Spenser takes "the mood of the dream vision and the method of allegory from the French and English poets of the Middle Ages and mingle[s] them with motifs, scenes, characters, and structure from the Renaissance poems of Boiardo, Ariosto, to some extent Trissino, and Tasso" to create *The Faerie Queene* (236). Yet in his analysis, which focuses on Book 2, and especially the set piece of the Bower of Bliss at the end of Canto 12, no further mention is made of dream vision, not even in how it may contribute to the "mood" of the piece, as he claims. This omission is understandable, since Giamatti's primary argument is about the influence of the Italian romantic epic on Spenser, and the Bower of Bliss episode is subtle in its references to

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[9] It is a commonplace to cite the creative reworking of classical, medieval, and Italianate source materials as a fundamental characteristic of Renaissance poetry in particular.

dream poetry, but it shows again that even critics who recognize the presence of the

medieval dream poem in Spenser's poetry fail to make an adequate account of it.

One example from early in *The Faerie Queene* demonstrates the importance of

recognizing medieval sources alongside others and simultaneously introduces Spenser's

first reference to medieval dream poetry in his epic. In the first episode of Book I to

involve the topic of dreaming, the hermit Archimago calls up a sprite and sends him to

the house of Morpheus on an errand to bring back "A fit false dreame" to deceive his

guest, the Redcrosse knight (I.i.43). The sprite travels to the house of Morpheus, in a

passage drawn principally from similar descriptions of the House of Sleep in Ovid's

Metamorphoses and Statius's *Thebaid*. But that Spenser also draws on Chaucer's cave of

Morpheus in *The Book of the Duchess*, can be seen in several key details.[10] Both Ovid

and Statius describe a river flowing "close to" (*Theb.* 10.96) or "from the bottom of the

cave" (*Met.* 11.602); Statius's makes no sound (*Theb.*10.95-7), while Ovid's cave is

silent except for the sound of "the stream of Lethe, whose waves, gently murmuring over

the gravelly bed, invite to slumber" (*Met.* 11.603-4). Chaucer draws upon Ovid, but turns

the stream into a waterfall running down to the cave: there is nothing near the entrance of

the cave of Morpheus, "Save ther were a fewe welles / Came rennynge fro the clyves

adoun, / That made a dedly slepynge soun" (*BD* 160-2). In addition to drawing on this

watery image from Chaucer for describing the guests in Archimago's house as "drownd

in deadly sleepe," (*FQ* I.i.36), Spenser retains Chaucer's detail of the waterfall, and even

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[10] In 1890, Cook outlined the various precedents for Spenser's treatment of the House of
Sleep: he also includes passages from Ariosto, Poliziano, Homer, and Virgil, but Chaucer,
Statius, and Ovid are clearly the most important sources.

amplifies its description: Morpheus sleeps so soundly "drowned deepe / In drowsie fit" because

> …to lull him in his slumber soft
>
> A trickling stream from high rocke tumbling downe
>
> And ever-drizling raine upon the loft,
>
> Mixt with a murmuring winde, much like the sowne
>
> Of swarming Bees, did cast him in a swowne.
>
> (I.i.41)

Spenser's antiquated diction here also preserves the Chaucerian rhyme in "downe" and "sowne." Appropriately, this soporific setting makes the god of Sleep very hard to wake. Ovid's Iris eventually wakes the god with the brightness of her garments (11.617): in subsequent poems, the messengers need to work harder. Statius specifies that the brightness of Iris's garments and her voice are *not* enough to wake the god: she still speaks gently to him (10.126-7ff.), but she repeats herself and beats his breast with her hand (132-3). Both English poets further amplify the forcefulness of these wakings: in Chaucer Juno's messenger calls repeatedly and comically blows a horn in the sleeping god's ear (182). Spenser, however, takes the comic force of Chaucer and crafts a darker, more violent passage suitable to the fell purpose of his messenger, who pushes the god "rudely" and "with paine," then "Sh[akes] him so hard, that force[s] him to speake," and, finally, threatens him in order to deliver his message (I.i.42-3).

Furthermore, both Ovid and Statius use the name Somnus for the god of Sleep,

whereas Spenser follows Chaucer in calling the god of sleep Morpheus.[11] In Ovid,

Morpheus is one of the "thousand sons" of Somnus and is known for his shape-shifting,

the quality to which both Chaucer and Spenser call attention, although to very different

ends (*Met.* 11.635). Chaucer follows the Ovidian tale in which Morpheus takes the shape

of the drowned body of Ceyx to reveal to his grieving wife Alcione in a dream that he has

died.[12] But Chaucer's retelling omits the Ovidian ending, which reunites the lovers as

birds after death, and focuses on the revelation of the king's death, which will mirror the

revelation of the death of the Duchess at the climax of the dream portion of the poem.

Chaucer's version downplays what is clear in Ovid—that Alcione has received the

message from Morpheus in a dream—and instead overlaps the narrator's reading of Ovid

with the dream that is the "first matere" of his dream poem (198); he suspends the

resolution of the Ovidian tale and replaces it with the resolution of the Black Knight's

grief within the dream to strengthen the mirroring between the reading and dreaming

portions of the poem. Spenser responds directly to the connection found in Ovid and

Chaucer between shape-shifting and dreams, but he reverses the purpose of the dream in

both of his sources. Chaucer's dream, so focused on the revelation that "She ys ded!"

(*BD* 1309), represents a true dream, just as Morpheus' simulacrum of Ceyx in Ovid

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[11] Although Svensson recognizes that Spenser draws upon Chaucer, he does not emphasize the significance of this fact for helping to clarify Spenser's relation to medieval precedents in English poetry.

[12] It is clearer in Ovid than in Chaucer that the vision occurs in a dream, as Ovid shows that the queen awakes as a result of the vision (see *Met.* 11.677-9, cf. *BD* 212-3). Chaucer does not make this as clear, perhaps purposefully to blur the distinction between dream and reality in the tale: he focuses on Morpheus inhabiting the real body of the drowned Seys (144) and coming to the foot of the queen's bed to speak with her (194-99). The connection with dreams is then made in the dream portion of the poem.

represents the king's "true shade" (*Met.* 11.688-9). Both Chaucer and Ovid recognize the

ambiguity inherent in Alcione's dream, Ovid calling attention to the irony that Alcione

learns the truth about her husband from a god feigning the appearance of his dead body

(*Met.* 11.658-73), and Chaucer cutting off the Ovidian tale abruptly by noting that the

grief of learning the truth promptly kills the queen (*BD* 214): both poets, however, focus

on the truth of the revelation, whatever the means or consequences. Spenser instead

directs his focus to the negative potential of dreams in their ambiguity, directly reversing

the function that Ovid and Chaucer give to Morpheus of creating a true shade. Rather

than producing an image that reveals truth, he creates a false image, under orders from

Archimago, in order to deceive, and he does this through a dream. Rather than taking the

shape himself, Morpheus sends his dream back with Archimago's messenger through the

"Yuorie dore" (44), Virgil's gate for false dreams in the *Aeneid*.[13]

What Archimago does with this "ydle dream" also follows from Spenser's

interpretation of Ovid and Chaucer (46). His dream works in conjunction with another

sprite, whom Archimago has made to look like Una and "taught to imitate that Lady trew,

/ Whose semblance she did carrie under feigned hew" (46), just as Morpheus imitates the

dead king Ceyx. In *The Book of the Duchess*, Morpheus is told to come to Alcione,

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[13] Brooks-Davies notes the following interpretation from Macrobius of Virgil's Gates of Horn and Ivory: Macrobius presents "the idea that the soul, partly disengaged from the body during sleep, gazes at the truth through a veil. Sometimes the veil allows truth to be perceived, in which case it is said to be made of horn (which can be so thin as to be transparent); sometimes the truth is not allowed to be seen—hence the alternative opaque ivory" (25). (See Macrobius I.iii.17-20. Stahl 92). While this passage from Macrobius serves as a handy point of connection between dream theory and allegorical theory, and is, moreover, one of the most persuasive interpretations of Virgil's two gates of which I am aware, it is not clear that Spenser has this passage of Macrobius in mind, given that his second gate is of silver, rather than horn (I.i.40). Spenser certainly associates the ivory gate with false dreams, following Virgil: he does not show that he has used Macrobius.

"ryght at hyr beddes fet" (199) in the body of Seys and to "do the body speke ryght soo /

Ryght as hyt was woned to doo / The whiles that hit was alyve" (149-51). The dream and

the Una-shaped sprite come to "where the knight in slomber lay," the former to "[make]

him dreame of loues and lustful play" and to present him with an image of Una that

confuses him:

> And she her selfe of beautie soveraigne Queene,
>
>> Faire *Venus* seemed unto his bed to bring
>>
>> Her, whom he waking evermore did weene,
>>
>> To be the chastest flower, that ay did spring
>>
>> On earthly braunch, the daughter of a king,
>>
>> Now a loose Leman to vile service bound:
>>
>> And eke the *Graces* seemed all to sing,
>>
>> *Hymen io Hymen*, dauncing all around,
>
> Whilst freshest *Flora* her with Yvie girlond crownd.
>
> <div align="center">(I.i.48)</div>

The dream is as ambiguous as it is disturbing to Redcrosse. The image of Una as a "loose

Leman" is in stark contrast to the "waking" image he has of her as "the chastest

flower."[14] But the lines surrounding the core of the stanza are equally confusing,

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[14] This passage reveals a narratorial perspective in the line "whom he waking evermore did weene," for a dreamer would not use the word "waking" to describe his own mental state while dreaming. Insofar as narratorial commentary intrudes on this passage, however, its purpose is to call attention to the distinction between Redcrosse's dreaming and waking impressions, not to call attention to the poet's "narrative presence" (Anderson, *Growth of a Personal Voice* 25). Anderson makes much of the narrator's "voice" in *The Faerie Queene*, asserting that it is a development from the narrator of dream vision, and particularly indebted to the narrator of Langland's *Piers Plowman* (22; see 21-33). While I think it is a great leap from the textual "I" of the medieval dream

potentially innocent but not carrying quite enough weight to redeem the dream. "Faire

Venus" brings Una "unto his bed," and the reader's opinion of Venus is clearly meant to

be colored by the final line of the preceding stanza in which Una complains to Redcrosse

in the dream that Cupid "Her chast hart had subdewd, to learn Dame pleasures toy" (47).

Yet the intervening description of Venus is that "of beautie soveraigne Queene": this

description recalls the "Faire Venus" of the Proem to Book I, and also seems

momentarily like an Elizabethan reference. With similar ambiguity, the final three lines

of the stanza are epithalamic in tone, rather than simply lewd. It seems that what started

as a dream of "wanton blis and wicked joy" (47) changes into a dream of a marriage bed,

and this is what wakes the knight:

> In this great passion of unwonted lust
>
> > Or wonted feare of doing ought amis,
> >
> > He started up, as seeming to mistrust,
> >
> > Some secret ill, or hidden foe of his…
>
> > (I.i.49)

He wakes because he is unaccustomed to having such dreams, "Or" because he *is*

accustomed to fear "doing ought amis." But whether "doing ought amis" in the dream

means simply indulging in lust or indulging a fantasy of marriage to the unchaste

"daughter of a king" is left tellingly ambiguous, though he knows enough to "mistrust" it.

Yet when he wakes, the Una-shaped sprite is there to confirm—in waking reality—the

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poem to the much more subtle narratorial presence in a passage such as this one, I do
grant that this stanza recalls medieval autography by calling attention to itself as "writing,"
rather than as representation of a narrator's speech (see Spearing, *Medieval Autographies*
9-15). Even Anderson admits, however, that it is unnecessary for her purposes to
distinguish between *narrator* and *poet* in the observations she makes about this "narrative
presence" (26).

image of a "loose" Una from the dream. The sprite impersonates Una, just as Chaucer's Morpheus inhabits the body of the dead king so persuasively, and the result of the knight's confrontation with the sprite-Una in fact mirrors the conclusion of the "ydle dream": he respects her love and affirms that he holds himself "bound" to her, though he is also "much griev'd to thinke that gentle Dame so light" (54-5).

Thus, in Spenser's first reference to dream form in his epic, he exploits the ambiguity of dreams as preceding poets had not, for the sake of crafting a complex image of separation from Truth, represented by the true Una. He begins with the dream as an image of deception—for the dream and the sprite are shown to be imposed upon Redcrosse by Archimago from without[15]—as one false image is confirmed by another false image so that together they appear to be true. Despite the stark reversal of purpose, Spenser's repetition of false images here is a version of the mirroring between reading and dreaming that Chaucer uses to confirm truth in *The Book of the Duchess* or to seek for "a certeyn thing" in *The Parliament of Fowls* (20).[16] But, Othello-like, Spenser's opening also becomes an exploration of the complex interplay of deception and self-deception as the poem progresses: Redcrosse is left "musing at" the false images with

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[15] It is problematic to assert as Anderson does that "Archimago is a force within as well as outside him," because by taking this position she slips into arguing that the House of Morpheus reflects the interiority of Redcrosse: she sees Morpheus as "an aspect of Redcrosse's nature" (29). I think the narrative does support a reading that blends external stimuli with internal motivations, but to focus too much on the interiority of Redcrosse might limit the power of Archimago to Book I, when, in fact, he is an explicit presence in Book II, and his influence reverberates throughout the poem as a whole.

[16] I am by no means suggesting an oversimplified reading of Chaucer's dream poems with respect to their truth claims: the *Parliament of Fowls* concludes with indecision, despite the narrator's search for "a certeyn thing," while the truth uncovered by *The Book of the Duchess* is an emotional recognition of "routhe" (1310). Nonetheless, it is clear that Chaucer's method is to build meaning by layering and mirroring: the conclusion is that the narrator writes the dream because he has experienced something profound through it.

which he is confronted and then "That troublous dreame gan freshly tosse his braine / With bowres, and beds, and Ladies dear delight" (55). When he is then awoken again and confronted with the image, presented to him by Archimago, of his lady in bed with a lusty young Squire, it is not virtue that sparks his rage, but "gealous fire" (I.ii.5).

What Spenser presents with the character of Archimago and the House of Morpheus at the start of his epic does not apply solely to the story of Redcrosse, but also gives the reader clues for interpreting the complex array of images and dreams in the epic as a whole. In particular, this passage introduces Spenser's technique of insisting upon the attractiveness of dangers that threaten his knights throughout the epic, a technique that he deploys most insistently in the set piece at the end of Book II, describing Acrasia's Bower of Bliss. In a study that focuses on the "appeal and dangers of repose" offered by Phaedria as a temptation in Book II, Parker draws attention to a revealing example that demonstrates this aspect of Spenser's narrative technique. Parker begins by observing that Phaedria's temptation to idleness in Book II, Canto vi, parodies the same part of the Sermon on the Mount that Guyon cites earnestly in the next canto when he confronts the temptation of Mammon (373). She reflects that

> The dangerous proximity of Guyon's "temperaunce" and Phaedria's *tempe*
> is, of course only one of many instances in Spenser's "faery lond" of the
> doubleness of all things, of Ralegh's warning that "some virtues and some
> vices are so nicely distinguished, and so resembling each other as they are
> often confounded." Phaedria's retreat from worldly pursuit may look like
> the "little Hermitage" of "Contemplation" that prepares Redcross for his
> Pisgah vision in Book I, but is in reality closer to its perversion in the

House of Pride, "sluggish Idleness," in his monkish garb, turned away

from "worldly cares" for "contemplation sake" (I.iv.20). (373-4)

Parker's observation applies directly to the introduction of Archimago in the very first

canto of the *Faerie Queene*. Here Spenser already introduces a contrast between knightly

activity and idleness disguised as contemplation. When Redcross inquires of the hermit

"if he did know / Of straunge adventures, which abroad did pas," the hermit replies,

…how should, alas,

Silly old man, that liues in hidden cell,

Bidding his beades all day for his trespas,

Tydings of warre and worldly trouble tell?

With holy father sits not with such things to mell.

(I.i.30)

He then counsels Redcross and his company to spend the night in his Hermitage, to "with

the Sunne take [their] timely rest, / And with new day new worke at once begin: /

Untroubled night they say gives counsel best" (I.i.33). There is, in fact, very little in the

introduction of Archimago that reveals the danger he presents to the protagonists. His

would seem to be wise and temperate counsel: the plain hermitage offers no worldly

"entertainement" or obvious temptations (I.i.35). Rather, "Rest is their feast, and all

things at their will; / The noblest mind the best contentment has. / With faire discourse

the evening so they pas" (35). This seems to be a fine example of Aristotelian virtue.

Only the lines that follow, with the hermit's "tongue as smooth as glas" and his discourse

of "Saintes and Popes" and "*Aue-Mary*," hint at the image of hypocrisy Spenser is

crafting in the character of Archimago, the image-maker (35), who immediately sets about to disrupt an "Untroubled night" for his guests.

Thus, it is more than just the mention of "bowers" in Redcrosse's "troublous dreame" that suggests a connection between this opening passage and the Bower of Bliss at the end of Book II. At the very opening of his epic, Spenser has introduced the themes of seeming temperance, of idleness in contrast with knightly action, and, in the context of Redcrosse's false dream, the genuine appeal as well as the danger of erotic imagery, all themes which resonate again in the grand set piece of Book II, Canto 12. In fact, reading the Bower of Bliss in the context of dream poetry is remarkably productive, not only because considering this passage in light of dream poetry reveals the full range of Spenser's use of the form, but also because this perspective illuminates several perennial interpretive difficulties raised by the passage. The Bower of Bliss is one of the most complex reading experiences in the Faerie Queene, and its full effect upon the reader is due, in part, to the complexity of Spenser's references to dream poetry.

Despite its lack of a dream frame, the garden setting of the Bower of Bliss immediately invites comparisons to dream poetry, since the love garden is a common setting for the medieval dream poem.[17] Among dream poems, Spenser's passage adheres most closely to Chaucer's *Parliament of Fowls*, a poem he references overtly in the Cantos of Mutability, in a rare acknowledgment of his debt to Chaucer in *The Faerie Queene* (VII.9).[18] Of course, Chaucer is not Spenser's most immediate source for the

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[17] See Spearing, *Medieval Dream-Poetry*, 17-8.

[18] Lewis goes so far as to claim that Spenser's "discipleship to Chaucer exists only in profession, not in practice" (*Allegory of Love* 305). Miskimin enters more fully into Spenser's use of Chaucer in the *Shepherd's Calendar*, discussing their differences with

Bower of Bliss: it has long been recognized that Spenser draws most heavily on Tasso's

description of Armida's palace in *Gerusalemme Liberata* 15-16 for this set piece, even

quoting Tasso extensively. Both passages tell of a journey by a knight or knights to a

mysterious land where a Circean enchantress holds another knight captive. However,

Spenser's differences with Tasso are as important as his direct quotations, and it is

particularly important to recognize that precisely where Spenser departs from Tasso, he

reveals the influence of Chaucer and the form of the dream poem. Moreover, even his

borrowings from Tasso resonate with the influence of dream poetry that stands behind

Tasso's epic, especially *The Romance of the Rose*, which is alluded to in Tasso's song of

the Rose, but also recalled by Spenser's use of a garden of love inhabited by allegorical

personifications.[19]

Spenser's use of Tasso is, in fact, quite complex, and critics do not always agree

on what their differences represent.[20] Approaching the Bower of Bliss from the

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respect to time and mutability, and the complicated nature of Spenser's "indebtedness" to
Chaucer, which is often difficult to trace in specific works (297-8).

[19] The influence of *The Romance of the Rose* is obviously felt in Chaucer as well as Tasso.
It is, of course, a mistake to think of English dream poetry either as a purely native form
(which is clearly not the case) or as influenced only by the French dream poems, *dits
amoreux*, and *chansons d'aventure*, though they clearly derive from these (see Spearing,
Medieval Dream-Poetry 41-42ff., and Davidoff 61-62). What is sometimes overlooked is
Chaucer's indebtedness to Dante and Boccaccio. The Proems to *The House of Fame*
show his indebtedness to Dante (see Spearing, *Medieval Dream-Poetry* 84 and 76 on
Chaucer's use of the eagle from *Purgatorio* IX.) In the *Parliament of Fowls* he quotes
extensively from Boccaccio's *Teseida*, in a manner similar to Spenser's use of Tasso
(Pratt). See also the essays in Boitani's collection, and Payne.

[20] Durling writes that Tasso's episode is concerned with "the Aristotelian concept of
incontinence" (340), and, in contrast, Spenser is concerned not just with incontinence, but
with "the condition of intemperance, in which reason is corrupt; incontinence, the state in
which the appetite overcomes the unwilling reason, is merely the downward pathway to
intemperance" (341). Durling's conclusion about Tasso is that he "did not succeed in
reconciling his richly sensuous erotic imagination with his equally intense moral and
religious convictions…. [the] incompatibility of love and duty is one of [his] fundamental

perspective of dream poetry, however, illuminates some of the contrasts in detail. The contrasts begin with the journey that leads to the enchanted place. In Tasso, though the journey is fantastical in its speed, it is a journey through the real world, providing a geographic survey of Mediterranean locations of import to Tasso's epic of the first crusade (15.3-20). Having surveyed the Mediterranean in a whirlwind tour, the knights pass out of the strait of Gibraltar (23) and out on the open ocean finally face the unknown. The girl conveying them in a magical boat tells them something of the still-undiscovered lands that lie beyond the strait, including that Ulysses has traveled and died there (26); she also describes Columbus's future discovery of the New World, of course still-unknown to the medieval knights of the epic (31-2).

An echo of Tasso can be seen in Spenser's Proem to Book II, in which he refers playfully to his land of Faerie as real but still undiscovered, as the New World once had

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themes" (340). Giamatti argues for a more extreme version of this position, writing that "Tasso saw nothing redeeming in Armida's world (though he desperately tried to redeem Armida) and therefore he pictured her garden as completely artificial" (275). Spenser, on the other hand, according to Giamatti, leaves "room in the good life for the senses," provided that "the rational—ultimately Christian—mean is maintained." Thus, Spenser shows "real, as well as artificial, nature in the Bower," though in showing art "striving" with Nature, Spenser "means us to see an allegory of the good, natural, healthy instinct as it is perverted and infected by lust and overindulgence" (275). Quint's article on Tasso in the *Spenser Encyclopedia* refers to the same passages in Tasso and Spenser but interprets their contrast between Nature and Art entirely differently. He argues that "The art which creates Tasso's garden strives to look like nature, though nature at her most artistic," whereas Spenser in creating the "striving" dynamic between Nature and Art takes what is "merely playful in Tasso" and makes nature "appear wanton by an art which seeks to compete with nature at nature's expense" (679). According to Quint's interpretation, Tasso's Armida is closer to nature, and therefore "ultimately redeemable," in constrast with Spenser's Acrasia, a "witch" who "represents a demonic lust" (679). See also Gough, who argues persuasively that Tasso's Armida is redeemable just as pagan art and learning are redeemable: Tasso uses the trope of the "captive woman" used by Jerome and others to represent pagan learning converted to Christian use. Armida can be converted to Christianity, just as "classical eloquence and poetic language more generally" can be put to Christian use (524).

been (2-3). In Canto 12, however, he suppresses Tasso's references to real Mediterranean locations, keeping Guyon's journey to the Bower of Bliss entirely within the land of faery. His travel narrative is intentionally Homeric, but squarely in the tradition of allegorizing Homer, rather than of seeking real-world analogues for the stops in the *Odyssey*.[21] The travellers sail past Odyssean hazards with names like "the *Gulf of Greediness*" (3) and the "*The Rock of* vile *Reproch*" (8) in the place of Charybdis and Scylla, with no reference to the strait of Gibraltar. The journey is, in fact, less allegorical than it is moralistic and exemplary, for the meanings of the *exempla* encountered by Guyon and the Palmer are barely veiled. In fact, the Palmer immediately explicates one *exemplum* for Guyon. Sailing past the Rock of Reproch, he intones,

> …behold th'ensamples in our sights,
>
> Of lustfull luxurie and thriftless wast:
>
> What now is left of miserable wights,
>
> Which spent their looser daies in lewd delights,
>
> But shame and sad reproch, here to be red,
>
> By these rent reliques, speaking their ill plights?
>
> Let all that live, hereby be counseled,
>
> To shunne Rocke of Reproch, at it as death to dred.

> (II.xii.9)

The moralization is unambiguous, and the Palmer's somber explication makes clear that the journey portion of the canto presents a collection of *exempla* "here to be red," that is,

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[21] Borris outlines the tradition of Homeric and Virgilian allegoresis from classical times to the seventeenth century (14-21ff.). For more on the allegorical approach to Virgil in the middle ages see Baswell (9-10 ff.).

interpreted by the reader as much as by the travellers. Though the Palmer's interpretation

is simplistic, it nevertheless serves an important function, calling attention to the

literariness of the passage. Spenser is overtly crafting a sea voyage out of Homer and

allegorical moral tales, such as *The Ship of Safegarde* (1569) by Barnabe Googe.[22]

    In the first part of the canto, then, Spenser's imitation of Tasso is minimal.

Instead, Spenser shifts his own references to the New World to the argument in the

Proem. In doing so, he invokes a problem at the beginning of Book II that is also

addressed by Ariosto's opening to Canto 7 of *Orlando Furioso* and by dream poetry: the

justification of fiction.[23] Spenser addresses potential detractors of fiction in his Proem,

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[22] Googe's poem, though it may well have been unknown to Spenser, is representative of the kind of sermonizing allegorical tale Spenser references. McKeown and Sheidley point out in the introduction to their recent edition of Googe's poem that Spenser's Bower of Bliss "shares striking parallels with Googe's Island of Fleshly Pleasure," but they acknowledge that "[there] is little evidence to suggest that Spenser was directly indebted to Googe's poem…. Spenser certainly did not require the example of Googe's allegory to spur on his own fecund imagination" (xxvi-xxvii).

    Greenblatt's focus on travel narratives as precedents for the journey in the canto is necessary for his colonialist reading of the Bower but obscures the more obvious references to Homer's *Odyssey* that stand out in the travel portion of Canto 12, while failing to point out that many travel narratives of the time modeled descriptions of perilous journeys on the *Odyssey* as well. He prioritizes the travel narrative in his interpretation so far as to be misleading, effectively suppressing the "rich matrix of classical and medieval thought" (171) standing behind the Bower of Bliss. The name of Circe is relegated to a footnote, for instance, while travel narratives are quoted extensively (180). Against the colonialist reading of the Bower, see A. Kent Hieatt ("Early Modern Origin").

[23] Macrobius in his *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio* connects the justification of fictions with the interpretation of dreams; even before he presents his system of classifying dreams, he argues first for the appropriateness of certain kinds of fictions for philosophical discourse. In an appropriate fiction, according to his formulation, "a decent and dignified conception of holy truths, with respectable events and characters, is presented beneath a modest veil of allegory" (I.ii.11). See also Kruger, who illuminates the "complicated parallel" Macrobius formulates between dreams and fictions (131-4), and Spearing (*Medieval Dream-Poetry* 9).

    Renaissance apologies for poetry (from Lodge, Nashe, Harrington, and others), written mainly in response to puritan objections to plays and playgoing, stand as evidence

justifying his allegorical world of faery by presenting it as real but still unknown—as the

New World had been before it was discovered. In a similar argument, Chaucer at the

beginning of his *Parliament of Fowls* points to "al this newe science," which comes "out

of olde bokes," as "newe corn" comes from "olde feldes" (22-5). The primary purpose of

the analogy is to explain his reading of an old book when seeking "a certeyn thing to

lerne" (20). But the analogy also acts as a subtle argument to justify the poem he is about

to present. Though the method of learning in the poem—receiving knowledge through a

dream—is ambiguous at best in its reliability, it has a respectable origin in "olde bokes,"

for the old book in question is Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis.* Spenser's justification

functions in the same way: he calls upon verifiable evidence, the physical discovery of

new lands, to justify his fiction.[24] He makes the argument playfully, for he is of course

well aware that he has invented his land of faerie and that comparing it to the New World

is a false analogy. Yet, he does not intend the argument merely for a joke. The effect of

the Proem is to caution the reader not to discount the value of allegorical fiction, for it is

"witlesse" to "so much misweene / That nothing is but that which [a man] hath seene"

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that the value of fiction was still debated in Spenser's time. The best known of these
defenses is Sidney's *Defence of Poesy*, published in 1595 by Ponsonby and by Olney as
An Apology for Poetry (Duncan-Jones 371). Sidney's "luminous *apologia* for imaginative
literature" may have originally been written in response to Stephen Gosson's *School of
Abuse* (1579); however, it stands alone among the apologies for far exceeding in import
and merit the context of the "tedious" debates of the time (Rollins and Baker 599).
[24] When Giammati writes that Spenser's "imagination happily transcended his immediate
reading," in the context of cautioning the reader that Spenser's uses of literary and
philosophical precedents are eclectic rather than consistent, it is worth noting that
Spenser does not present his work as that of a happily roaming imagination (235). As this
Proem shows, he strives wittily to place the work of the imagination into a respectable
context.

(Proem 3). In this he echoes Ariosto's suggestion that travel narratives are not believed

by the vulgar, who only believe what they can see and touch (*Orlando Furioso* 7.1).[25]

Furthermore, by arguing that his epic is a "famous antique history," like Henryson

before him Spenser also "vouch[es]" for its value on the basis not of its newness but of its

antiquity and historicity. By this argument, he ties his poem to the "great auncestry" of

his own monarch, Queen Elizabeth (Proem 4). But this aspect of the argument also

functions as a Macrobian justification of fiction: if "Faery lond" is a real historical place,

then the fiction Spenser presents falls under the Macrobian category of a *narratio*

fabulosa, as distinguished from the "ordinary fable" in which "both the setting and plot

are fictitious" (I.ii.9). Spenser here argues that the setting is real, and, moreover, not

inaccessible to the astute reader, who "By certaine signes here set in place / …may it

find" (Proem 4). For the reader approaching the Bower of Bliss, the Proem serves as an

indicator of the kind of careful reading Spenser desires for his poem.

The complex reading experience of the Bower begins with the journey portion of

the canto, a context that is often forgotten in readings that jump straight to the Bower of

Bliss in the second half of the long canto. With its placement in the canto, the Bower

seems at first that it will be the final, and most important, in a series of "ensamples," an

amplification, even, of the days spent "in lewd delights" by the unfortunates on display

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[25] In Harington's 1591 translation of Ariosto, the
> …fond and simple common sort,
> Beleeve but what they feele or see with eyes,
> Therefore to them, my tale may seeme a fable,
> Whose wits to understand it are not able.
>   (7.1.5-8, EEBO)

Harington here uses *fable* in the sense of a feigned tale; Ariosto keeps his emphasis on
the "inexperience" of readers preventing them from believing what they have not seen:
"Per questo io so che l'inesperienza / farà al mio canto dar poca credenza" (7.1.7-8).

on the Rock of Reproch. Indeed, when Spenser's knight and Palmer arrive in Acrasia's land, they recognize that they reached their destination, "the sacred soile, where all our perils grow" (37). The Bower, then, looks to be another of the "perils" they have already encountered, and yet it promises to be an even greater danger. Simultaneously, the texture of the canto changes, for in the place of the unambiguous *exempla* of first half of the canto, the Palmer suddenly describes this dangerous land as "sacred." This is the first indication for the reader that the Bower does not lend itself to simple moralization in the same way that the Rock of Reproch does. The literariness to which the sea journey alerts the reader, however, continues as the travelers make their way to the Bower.

Here again Spenser differentiates himself from Tasso very distinctly. Tasso's description of his knights' arrival in Armida's land is much more precisely described. Armida's island lies just past the Fortunate Isles (15.41-2). Its location in the sea outside of the straits of Gibraltar makes it mysterious to the travelers, but it is still somewhere in the real world. The knights' destination is to be the palace on top of the mountain on the island (44): they travel to the base of the mountain to take advantage of the remaining daylight (45). Such details are purposely obscured in Spenser's description of Guyon's arrival in Acrasia's "faire land" (II.xii.37). The knight and Palmer are lost in a mist until just before they land; when their boat does strike land, they recognize the place they are seeking, but it is not described for the reader. There is no mountain as in Tasso, but there is also no sense of scale, no landscape or description of vegetation: there is, in short, nothing for the reader to visualize. They simply "[march] fairly forth, of nought ydred" (38). This forward movement of the characters certainly comes from Tasso, who places great emphasis on the knights pressing on in their quest. On their way to the Bower,

Spenser's Guyon and Palmer encounter a group of wild beasts, which the Palmer tames

with his staff. This detail is also drawn from Tasso, though Tasso's knights encounter a

series of progressively more dangerous beasts on their way up the mountain. At each

stage, when Spenser does draw on Tasso, the result is blurred and indistinct, where

Tasso's descriptions are crisp and detailed.

The result of this blurring is that the arrival of Guyon and the Palmer in Acrasia's

land, separated somewhat from the voyage preceding it by the mist, comes to resemble an

arrival in a medieval dream poem much more than Tasso's landscape, replete as it is with

geographical and topographical detail. Chaucer's arrival with Scipio at the gate of the

garden in the *Parliament of Fowls* serves as a good example of the vaguely described but

sudden arrival that takes place in dream poems: the narrator tells that "This forseyde

Affrican me hente anon / And forth with hym unto a gate broughte / Ryght of a park

walled with grene ston" (*PF* 120-2). Immediately, the job of the dreamer is to read and

interpret the verses written on the gate. Similarly, in *The House of Fame*, the dreamer

finds himself in the Temple of Venus, with no indication of how he got there, but in the

Temple he finds the story of the *Aeneid* depicted on the walls, and the first book of the

poem shows his reading of this tale (I.119-20). Spenser's travellers also come upon the

garden of Canto XII suddenly: "Thence passing forth, they shortly do arrive, / Whereas

the Bowre of Blisse was situate" (42). Spenser's description of the garden then follows

the most common conventions used for descriptions of gardens in dream poems: it is

identified first as a *hortus conclusus*, "Goodly…enclosed round about" (43).[26] Its ivory

gate is another significant reference to dream poetry, drawn from Virgil and echoing

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[26] For more on this convention, see Spearing, *Medieval Dream-Poetry* 17ff.

Spenser's use of the ivory gate for false dreams in the first canto of Book 1 (cf. I.i.40, 44 and II.xii.44). The story of Jason and Medea may "Be red" in the gate (46). Within the gates, the garden is a *locus amoenus*, complete with its motifs of a flowering meadow (50), temperate climate (51), fountain (60ff), and birdsong (70-1, 76), all contributing to an overall impression of the place as "the most dainty Paradise on ground" (58).[27] This opening description is likely where Giamatti sees Spenser drawing on the "mood of the dream vision": though he does not explain precisely what he means by this observation, he is likely referring to the dreamscape-like setting Spenser creates by drawing on this cluster of conventions from dream poems without specifically placing them into a dream.

Tasso is following these conventions as well, from the ekphrastic reading of the gate to the description of the garden as a *locus amoenus*. However, any dreamlike effect in Tasso's garden is suppressed in the context of the passage, first, because the focus of the knights on the purpose of their journey propels them forward in the narrative: to the island, up the mountain, past obstacles, to the palace, through its gate, and into the garden, where Rinaldo is quickly made to see how his sojourn in the garden has been a distraction from his own, purposeful, knightly action. Tasso's focus throughout is on the continuity of the journey; his knights do not linger to be tempted by the enchantments of the place. What is more, the poet calls attention to the enchantments as enchantments: the song of the rose is voiced by an enchanted bird, for instance (16.13-15), and the narrator informs the reader that the knights have successfully avoided enchantment by resisting drinking from the magical fountain in front of the palace gate (15.65-6).

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[27] For a complete description of the *topos* of the *locus amoenus* and its use in descriptions of nature from classical antiquity to the sixteenth century, see Curtius, 195-200.

Spenser, on the other hand, plays with dislocation and disorientation for knight and reader both, by adapting the material he draws from Tasso to create a landscape more akin to a Chaucerian dreamscape. Spenser depicts his garden as a series of gates, with the Bower located beyond the third gate. Here the space is neither associated with a large castle like Armida's, nor is it clearly defined: the gates may imply entrances into concentric circles of the garden, or suggest a more linear formation within the enclosed space, but it is neither clear nor necessary to know which is the case. What matters for the reader is Guyon's journey through the space, his experience of it, and, more specifically, the way that his journey is slowed within the garden.

Unlike in Tasso, hesitation is one of the distinguishing characteristics of the dreamer in Chaucer's *The Parliament of Fowls*. Reading the gate of the garden he approaches with his dream-guide Scipio, the narrator is stymied by the conflicting possibilities the gate promises: the verses "of gold and blak," the former promising bliss, the latter warning of "Disdayn and Daunger," lead to a moment of comic indecision on the part of the dreamer (141-7). Frozen as a piece of iron "betwixen adamauntes two / Of evene myght," he cannot decide whether to enter the garden at all, until Scipio forces him through by shoving him (148-9, 153-4). This moment represents emblematically the larger ambivalence about love presented by the poem as a whole. Scipio clarifies, in another note of comic irony, that the dreamer had nothing to fear from the gate in the first place, because the gate's dual inscriptions are addressed only to lovers (159): the dreamer, who has "lost [his] tast" of love, according to Scipio, may nonetheless "se" what he "canst not do" (160-3), observing this garden of love in order to write about it, without participating in the art of love himself (167-8). The temple of Venus, which the

dreamer sees next, presents both sides of love, desirable and dangerous, together (274-294). The raucous pairing off of birds, overseen by Nature, is also jeopardized in the poem by the indecision of the formel eagle in selecting her mate, and the poem ends by postponing her decision while allowing the other birds to proceed in theirs.

In the place of an oracular dream-guide like Scipio, Spenser gives Guyon the Palmer for a companion in his journey to the Bower: the Palmer ensures that Guyon does not stray from the purpose of his quest (69). At first Spenser's knight enters the garden so purposefully that he outdoes even Tasso's knights, upsetting the mazer of the false Genius at the gate; his forcefulness is the opposite of the hesitation displayed by Chaucer's dreamer. Yet Guyon's path through the garden is slowed in a different way, by the beauties he encounters in the place. It might seem at first that a distinction between Chaucer's method in *The Parliament of Fowls* and Spenser's in the Bower is that Chaucer synthesizes where Spenser distinguishes. Rather than a love garden containing love's good and evil, the gold and the black, Spenser in *The Faerie Queene* presents different love gardens in his Bower of Bliss in Book II and the Garden of Adonis in Book III, the first corrupt and the second wholesome.[28] Rathborne sees splitting as one of the methods of Spenser's allegory: "Just as Spenser splits up the conception of a goddess of fame into the sharply opposed figures of Lucifera and Gloriana, so he depicts the traditional fairy mistress of romance under the equally opposed aspects of Gloriana and Acrasia" (216). But it must be recognized that when Spenser does this, it is not just simple dichotomizing: ultimately, in epic form, the presentation even of opposites has the effect of presenting a whole through its parts, and splitting is in the end a way of

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[28] This is the kind of moral dichotomizing that is found in C.S. Lewis's reading of the Bower of Bliss and the Garden of Adonis in the *Allegory of Love* (324-33).

synthesizing within the context of the epic as a whole. Quint summarizes that Spenser

may have been influenced by Tasso in this conception of how to construct an epic whole:

"[Spenser's] idea [in the Letter to Raleigh] that the knight-heroes of the individual books

together form a composite picture of the fully virtuous man is similar to Tasso's

allegorical conception of the crusader army whose cooperating members constitute 'man

disposed into the state of natural justice' (*Prose diverse* ed 1875, I:301-8)." (Quint 678).

When Spenser lists Tasso as one of his models in the Letter to Raleigh, it is in this

context (Roche 15).

One problem with this reading of the Bower of Bliss in contrast with the Garden

of Adonis, however, is that it flattens out the reading experience of the Bower. The reader

of Book II is, after all, still unaware of the existence of the other Garden and must take

the Bower on its own terms, and those terms are not perfectly clear. Viewing the Bower

as a Spenserian synthesis of gardens from Tasso and Chaucer, on the other hand, reveals

that Spenser refers to multiple literary gardens at once in the Bower of Bliss in order to

confound the reader's perceptions of the place. Guyon's progress through the Bower of

Bliss confuses the reader because the combination of dream poem, earthly paradise,

heroic quest, and moral allegory do not all pull in the same direction at once. Fletcher

touches upon this phenomenon when discussing "parodic transformations" in Spenser,

noting that "everywhere [in *The Faerie Queene*] the hero must decide if he is looking at

the real thing, or at a double of the real thing. He is rarely given a choice between flatly

different things" (36). Thus, "the Bower of Bliss and House of Busirane are demonic

parodies of temples of pleasure and love" (35), and Fletcher continues

the key to the direction of parodic change will be the hero's freedom to
continue his quest. If he is free to go forward, for him at that moment the
labyrinth is benign or at least neutral. If he is held or trapped in
place…then he is a creature of the sinister maze. Similarly, if a 'paradise'
like the Bower of Bliss prevents free exit to its denizens, then it is a
demonic parody of a true paradise. The defining principle is freedom to
enter and leave. (36)

This analysis certainly corresponds to the description of the Bower of Bliss as a *hortus*
conclusus that is promiscuously open to all, yet the enclosure of which is meant to keep
"entred guests…within" (II.xii.43). Clearly the knight Verdant and those who have been
transformed into beasts also suffer the entrapment with which the Bower endangers
entrants.

But perhaps even more important than this entrapment is Spenser's focus on
"semblants" within the garden. The Genius who sits at the gate to welcome visitors to the
garden is a double for "that celestial power" rightly called by that name, but this one is
"to that quite contrary": "The foe of life, that good envyes to all, / That secretly doth us
procure to fall, / Through guileful semblaunts, which he makes us see" (48). Guyon
promptly breaks Genius's staff "with which he charmed semblants sly" (49). This figure
of a false Genius rightly calls to mind the maker of semblants of Book I, Archimago, and
by referring obliquely to Archimago in the Bower, Spenser reminds the reader of the
false dreams that charmer creates at the beginning of the epic. It is with this context of
resemblances and false dreams in the background that the reader approaches the rest of
the description of the garden, including the "striving" conflict between Nature and Art

(59); the fountain decorated with "shapes of naked boyes / Of which some seemd with lively jollity / To fly about" (60); and the "yvie" made of "rich mettall…so coloured / That wight, who did not well avis'd it vew / Would surely deem it to be yvie trew" (61). Spenser's emphasis on elements of the garden seeming to be what they are not is consistent with his description of the false dreams crafted by Archimago.

This apparent conflict between Nature and Art in the place is one of the perennial difficulties critics have with the Bower of Bliss episode. Lewis's analysis drawing out the contrast between Art and Nature in the Bower of Bliss became the foundation for twentieth-century interpretation of this canto, and it was certainly a needed corrective to the earlier "Romantic view of the Bower as a privileged locale of poetry and the imagination," as Alpers describes it ("Bower of Bliss" 106). Lewis's oversimplified moralizing of Nature and Art, however, was in turn quickly corrected (Tayler 119). Tayler illuminates the Bower of Bliss and Garden of Adonis further by tying these episodes to Spenser's use of the categories of Nature and Art in Book VI, the pastoral book of Courtesy. He points out that Spenser does not use these terms of thought in the absolute moral sense that Lewis puts forward. Rather, these terms, as understood in the Renaissance—and used by Spenser—were "flexible" in their definition and range of connotations, so that they could be used not to define in an absolute sense, but to explore two very broad categories in a dialectic relationship to one another ("nature and art" 505). Thus, Tayler concludes that the Bower of Bliss serves as an example of "art perverting nature," whereas the Garden of Adonis is emblematic of art perfecting nature (505).

Yet the role of Art in the Bower of Bliss has continued to be problematic for recent critics. For one thing, as Alpers points out, even as the canto critiques perverting

Art, Spenser's descriptions of the Bower are some of his most memorable passages: "the 'pure' sensory and imaginative delights of the Bower are not a Romantic invention" ("Bower of Bliss" 105). Lewis's point of view, in his opinion, is "unable to inquire into the disturbing fascination of the Bower of Bliss" (106). There is undoubtedly tension between what Spenser says about Art in the passage and the art by which he tells it. Alpers writes elsewhere that it is clear that Spenser "has a complex and indeed ambivalent relation to the phenomena he has brought to life" (*Poetry of The Faerie Queene* 306). But while this tension strikes the modern reader as a revealing—and perhaps even untenable—contradiction, it is hard to imagine Spenser being unaware of the tension he was creating in his poetry. Ambivalence about art lies at the very origins of dream poetry as a form: poets of the middle ages and Renaissance were as concerned with the problematic nature of fiction as they were with the problem of dream interpretation. Thus, when Ariosto's Ruggiero unmasks the sorceress Alcina as a hag in *Orlando Furioso,* the poet uses the exposure of the ugliness beneath her beauty as an image of "deceptive art" and the "allegorical right reading" which it necessitates: "the narrator tells us that the hero has finally learned 'to interpret the pages which for so many years had concealed the truth'" (Gough 525).[29] Spenser clearly did not choose to follow Ariosto's model in this, either in his treatment of Acrasia or in instructing his reader so precisely. Rather, Spenser's artistic intention seems to be to write artfully and appealingly of art that is problematic; indeed, this contradiction lies at the heart of the effectiveness of the passage. Spenser writes the Bower of Bliss as if it were a false dream, yet he refrains

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[29] "7.74: 'interpretar le carte / che già molti anni avean celato il vero" (Ed. Ascoli, qtd in Gough 525 n.7).

from making this connection to dreaming overtly, in order to amplify the tension of the

reading experience.

A second, related, problem for the modern critic is the sudden and violent

destruction of the Bower by Guyon, the knight of Temperance, in a "tempest" of

"wrathfulness" (2.12.83). This destruction is problematic not only because in targeting

the beauties that preceded it, Spenser seems to be attacking his own art, but also because

it comes across to the reader as fundamentally intemperate behavior for the knight of

Temperance.[30] Alpers traces readers' objections to the destruction of the Bower of Bliss

to Spenser's "inability to render dramatic action" (*Poetry* 306): he writes that "through

the whole magnificent canto, it is only when he renders action that Spenser's moral

intelligence loses its clarity and poise" (306). Alpers contrasts stanza 80, which describes

the sleeping, disarmed, Verdant, with stanza 83, which shows Guyon tearing down the

Bower: in his view, the former shows "the fullest expression of Spenser's moral

intelligence in the canto" because "The understanding registered in the final exclamation

["O horrible enchantment"] is firm and unambiguous in point of moral judgment, yet it in

no way denies the hold the Bower of Bliss has had on us as readers or could have on us as

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[30] Greene presents a good summary of objections to the destruction of the Bower (30-1).
    In an Aristotelian schema, of course, anger itself is not necessarily problematic:
with anger, as with all the passions, temperance lies in the mean. In *Nichomachean Ethics*
IV.5 Aristotle does suggest that "to err…in the direction of deficiency" of anger is
preferable than its excess, but his reasoning for this is pragmatic: excessive anger is
"commoner (since revenge is the more human), but bad-tempered people are worse to
live with" (1126^a1). Still, Aristotle acknowledges that "those who are not angry at the
things they should be are thought to be fools, and so are those who are not angry in the
right way, at the right time, or with the right persons" (1126^a1). Insufficient anger is a
kind of insensibility, and "to endure being insulted and to put up with insults to one's
friends is slavish" (1126^a1). The question, then, is whether Guyon's "wrathfulness" is
appropriate or excessive: it is not clear that he is, in fact, angry "with the wrong persons,
at the wrong things, more than is right, too quickly, or too long" (1126^a1).

men" (305). In contrast with this "poised" understanding, the subsequent destruction of the Bower seems gratuitous and vengeful. Greenblatt's prominent reading of the Bower of Bliss sees the destruction in terms of a necessary "exercise of power" in order to preserve "civility" (173).[31]

In contrast with Greenblatt's colonialist reading, however, Schoenfeldt emphasizes the physicality underlying the psychomachia in Spenser, which is depicted in the House of Alma episode of Book II. What is lost in the "ideological enjambment between self-control Spenser articulates and the colonial domination in which the poem also participates" (240) is the understanding of the "self that Spenser endorses": one that must regulate a "repertoire of desires" internal and physical (239). Against Greenblatt, he observes that "the sense of order that emerges from book 2 is not a discipline necessarily complicit with colonial suppression…but something very different, potentially even opposite: a discipline intended to inculcate the internal stability that makes possible the subject's liberation from the passions that rage within all" (241).[32] Temperance, in this

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[31] Greenblatt emphasizes that a "paradox" lies at the heart of the destruction of the Bower: it is "a violent attempt to secure that principle of difference necessary to fashion the self…. This is why Acrasia cannot be destroyed, why she and what she is made to represent must continue to exist, forever the object of the destructive quest. For were she not to exist as a constant threat, the power Guyon embodies would also cease to exist. After all, we can assume that the number of people who actually suffer in any period from *melt-down* as a result of sexual excess is quite small…small enough to raise questions about the motives behind the elaborate moral weaponry designed to combat the supposed danger" (177). Such a perspective would be quite foreign to Spenser: Acrasia as a character may be his invention, but the concept that she embodies goes back to Aristotelian ethics. Surely, in Spenser's Protestant worldview, Acrasia cannot be destroyed because she represents an aspect of human nature that we are as capable of eradicating as we are of undoing the Fall.

[32] For his rebuttal of Greenblatt, see 240-3. See also Nohrnberg, who points out that in the Castle of Alma Guyon "pays court to his 'interior paramour,'" namely "Shamefastness." He continues, "And what, one may ask, is threatened with 'shame'? In the context of temperance, the answer seems to be personal autonomy. This answer puts

context, is "an active, even heroic maintenance of order in the face of perpetual

insurrection" (242). Thus, Guyon, for all his fierce determination, resists the allure of the

Bower only with difficulty, as the girls bathing in the fountain cause him finally to

hesitate: he begins to "relent his earnest pace, / [and] His stubborne brest [begins] secret

pleasaunce to embrace" (65). So many readers have found the allure of the Bower

irresistible because Spenser insists that it is.

The Bower may be modeled on a false dream, but it is a beautiful false dream, and

Spenser does not deny that the beauty of the place is beautiful, even if it is deceptive. In

fact, he takes pains to point out the dangers of the garden as Guyon and the reader pass

through, noting the charms of Genius (49), the "wroth" of Excess (57), the "wanton

merriments" of the girls in the fountain (68), and the "deface[d]" nobility of the young

man asleep in the Bower (79-80). Despite the Palmer's rebuke (69) and the constant

warnings along the way, the appeal and beauty of the garden dominate the reader's

impression of the place. Spenser follows Tasso rather than Ariosto in allowing Acrasia to

retain her beauty to the end of the canto (Gough 525). She is bound and not redeemed by

Spenser as Tasso redeems Armida, but she is not herself foul. Guyon's destruction of the

garden, on the other hand, makes "of the fairest late, now…the fowlest place" (83). He

destroys the "goodly workmanship" of her garden, palace, fields, groves, and all. The

reaction of dismay by the reader is nearly universal, as numerous critical responses have

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the theme of self-mastery in what must have been its original context, motor and
muscular control" (299). Nohrnberg connects this theme of "ambulatory" independence
as an image of temperance in Book 2, to the "motifs of travel and vagabondage in this
legend. The examples of orientation and disorientation in physical space go much beyond
a character's occasionally losing his footing or balance" (300).

shown, revealing something about the ubiquity of the temptation to intemperance.[33] The

knight of temperance, by contrast, is the one who remembers that he is in this place to

begin with because he has sworn "dew vengeance" upon Acrasia for the deaths of

Mordant and Amavia and orphaning of Rudimane in the first book of the canto (II.i.61).

This loneliness of Guyon in his action against the Bower, against the desires of the

reader, signals what Borris describes as a distinct feature of the kind of heroic poem

Spenser envisions in *The Faerie Queene*: "by promoting 'spiritual virtuosity' as the

ultimate standard of heroism, rather than martial ability, noble birth, courtly

accomplishment, or even the classically conceived virtues themselves, *The Faerie*

Queene tends to subvert established models of heroic poetry and contest conventional

distinctions of status" (Borris 164). The Bower functions by making the spiritual terrain it

represents very tangibly and appealingly physical, so that the reader forgets the

psychomachia it represents, because the allure of the place is overpowering. In terms put

forward by Carruthers, the Bower could be described as a verbal place of "material

ekphrasis," the *ductus* of which pulls the reader in opposite directions at the same time

(*The Craft of Thought* 222-3):[34] here the signs of the moral allegory are placed clearly

enough for the reader to ignore them willfully. Far from a straightforward "ensample"

like those found in the first half of the canto, the Bower becomes the opposite of a

contemplative cloister garden for meditational practice. Spenser's use of Tasso and

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[33] See Pollock.
[34] In her study of medieval monastic compositional and memorial practice, Carruthers
points out that "the meditational structures of monastic rhetoric also commonly included
buildings" (237). She explains the rhetorical concept of *ductus* as "the movement within
and through a work's various parts" (77) or the "'way' through a literary composition"
(79). But she makes clear that *ductus* also applies to the way a picture or physical
structure "engages socially in a meditative dialogue with its viewers" (223).

Chaucer supports this observation: while traveling to and arriving at the garden, Spenser

purposely blurs the landscape he receives from Tasso, and the result is a landscape that

looks more Chaucerian. Within the garden, Spenser follows Tasso more closely,

rendering the landscape much more vividly to entice the reader with its beauties.

Thus, in the Bower Spenser uncovers a tension between dream poetry and moral

allegory. The dream form provides the medieval author a freedom to invent a narrative,

instead of being bound to the retelling of an historical narrative. At the same time, a

dream poem contains within its structure its own justification and potential for

deniability: because the events being retold are a dream, the author cannot be blamed for

retelling them, nor can an objector to the fiction provide any evidence that what is being

written is untrue. The narrative freedom provided by the dream form is parallel to the

way a dream provides a certain freedom from moral restraints: just as an author can deny

responsibility for any falsehood a dream in a poem may contain, so a dreamer in life is

not morally culpable for what happens in a dream.[35] A moral allegory, however, is

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[35] Kruger summarizes the positions of Augustine, Tertullian, and Gregory the Great with respect to the moral status of actions that take place in dreams: "because the rational, estimative powers of the soul are inactive during sleep, the dreamer cannot be held accountable for the subject matter of the dream, or for the judgments made while dreaming" (Kruger 44). Kruger quotes Tertullian's vivid comment from his *De Anima* that "We will no more be condemned for a rape committed in a dream than we will be crowned for dreaming we are martryrs" (qtd Kruger 44). Jennifer Lewin writes that "Characters may intend to fall asleep but they cannot be said to anticipate or intend to let happen the consequences of their sleep. Sleep is a suspension of intentionality; and does not the poem suggest that so many things linked to it are suspensions of selfhood as well, such as Acrasia's seduction of Verdant, who is slumbering fast when we see him; has Verdant neglected, ignored, or not known the virtuous alternative to "life" in the Bower of Bliss? Sleep prohibits us from gaining this knowledge. It signals an epistemological crisis for the character but more importantly for the reader, the interpreter, left with images and effects instead of access to all that we could know about the characters' minds. In a poem whose purpose is to fashion persons into images of virtue and gentility,

structured to show just the opposite, that when decisions are made, they are consequential, and if one chooses incorrectly, one might end up an "ensample" on the Rock of Reproch. Indeed, the moral allegory of the Bower of Bliss is clear enough: as Greenblatt puts it, "I believe that one easily perceives that danger from the beginning and that much of the power of the episode derives precisely from the fact that his perception has little or no effect on the Bower's continued sensual power…. We can master the iconography, read all the signs correctly, and still respond to the allure of the Bower." (172). Spenser emphasizes this "allure of the Bower" more than Tasso does with his knights' constant forward progress: within the garden, the dream-like quality of the Bower lies principally in the power of its beauties to override the reader's response to its moral allegory.

The dismay of the reader upon its destruction, then, is something Spenser provokes by the structure of the Bower as both moral allegory and dream garden. The destruction of the Bower can be read as a conclusion of the moral allegory, with its "dew vengeance," as well as the abrupt ending of a dream: dream poems tend to end, as dreams in life might, with an interruption (a ringing bell, the sound of birds) that leads to awakening. What is intriguing, moreover, is that Spenser may have received the connection between the destruction of the Bower and the passing of a dream from Tasso himself. Tasso describes Armida's destruction of her palace after the rescue of Rinaldo in an epic simile, comparing its disappearance to the passing of a dream:

> As oft the clouds frame shapes of castles great
>
> Amid the aire, that little time do last,

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the impasses dreams and sleep create make the moral impact of the poem difficult to register" (31-2).

But are dissolv'd by winde or Titans heat;

Or like vaine dreames soone made, and sooner past:

The pallace vanisht so, nor in his seat

Left ought but rocks and crags, by kind there plast.

(16:69)[36]

The translation here is that of Edward Fairfax, whose celebrated verse translation of the complete epic, printed in 1600, was influenced by his reading of Spenser (Wood 680). In his translation, her palace vanishes "like vaine dreames"—an apt Spenserian formulation. Tasso's Italian in fact goes further, suggesting a dream that is not simply "vaine" but envisioned by a disturbed or ill person (*ch'egro figura*). Armida's palace disappears (*sparver*) like the hallucination. This focus in Tasso on the sudden disappearance of Armida's palace like a dream becomes in Spenser the sudden destruction of the Bower. The connections already noted between the Bower and false dreams earlier in *The Faerie Queene* suggest that with this sudden and violent destruction Spenser confronts the reader with the challenge of awakening from a beautiful—but ultimately false—dream. It is telling of the illness of his condition, then, that Grill the swine refuses to awaken. Whereas in Book 1 the deceptive dreams lead progressively to Redcrosse's separation

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[36]   Come imagin talor d'immensa mole
         forman nubi ne l'aria e poco dura,
         ché 'l vento la disperde o solve il sole,
         come sogno se 'n va ch'egro figura,
         cosí sparver gli alberghi, e restàr sole
         l'alpe e l'orror che fece ivi natura.
                  (16:70, emphasis mine)

Caretti glosses line 4 of the stanza as "come dilegua il sogno che un malato delirando immagina" [as the dream disperses, which a raving sick man imagines] (496n70.4, translation mine).

from Una and Truth, the destruction of the Bower images moral correction as an awakening from a dream, an awakening that is undesired because it is beautiful.

These examples from the opening of *The Faerie Queene* and the Bower of Bliss suggest that Spenser's use of the dream form in *The Faerie Queene* is focused solely on false dreams and their negative, deceptive, potential—the beauty of the Bower notwithstanding. The episode of Britomart's dream in Isis Church, however, shows that this is not always the case (V.vii.12-24). The negative potential of dreams is still present in this episode. As Britomart awakens from her strange dream, her response recalls that of the Redcrosse knight after his first false dream in Book I: she awakes "full of fearefull fright, / And doubtfully dismayd through that so uncouth sight" (16). She stays awake afterward "musing…/ With thousand thoughts feeding her fantasie" (17), and seeks the counsel of one of the priests in the Temple in the morning, hoping that he can "guide [her] out of errour blind" (19). To her surprise, however, she finds that the priest sees the vision not as dangerous or false, but a prophecy of her future from "th'immortall Gods" (21). Spenser still emphasizes the potential for deception by the dream, but in this case allows for the dream to reveal truth prophetically.

Spenser's most direct reference to dream poetry in *The Faerie Queene*, however, comes in the two Cantos of Mutabilitie, first printed in 1609. For the setting of these cantos, Spenser draws directly from Chaucer's *Parliament of Fowls*, and instead of describing his figure of Nature he explicitly defers to the authority of "old *Dan Geffrey*," reminding the reader that Chaucer also uses the inexpressibility *topos* for Nature in his poem, deferring to the description in his source, Alan de Lille (VII.9). These cantos are neither framed by nor do they contain a dream, yet they condense several preoccupations

of dream poetry into a set piece that works as a *de facto* conclusion for Spenser's epic

vision.[37] Though it is not entirely clear that we have left behind Spenser's land of Faery

in these cantos, their setting calls attention not to the middle vision of that land but to the

high and low visions offered by dream poetry: the cantos join references to the real

world, the Irish countryside of Spenser's estate, with their account of a heavenly vision.

Thus, Arlo-hill, the mountains Mole and river Molanna are Spenser's poetic names for

actual locations in "Ireland," which he also names (38), and Spenser directs readers to

recognize these locating details and associates them with his own poetry, as Skelton had

done (VI.36), even as he also gives them a mythological back story (37-55). But the

cantos also give a vision "Of heavenly things" (VII.1-2) in the council of gods and their

challenge by Mutabilitie, recalling both the pageantry and the blasphemy of Henryson's

Testament. Cresseid's accusation of the gods is punished in Henryson's poem, and that

punishment is questioned by the narrator in a way that undermines the authority of the

gods. But Mutabilitie's defiance of the gods is contained, rather than punished, in

Spenser's poem: in handing down her brief verdict, Nature only disagrees with

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[37] The question of whether Spenser intended these cantos as a conclusion is beyond the scope of this project. Roche asserts the cantos "were undoubtedly intended by Spenser as part of the uncompleted poem" (1231), but it is, of course, impossible to know what place they would have had in a larger book of "Constancie" (see also Zitner 289). However, as a *de facto* conclusion, the cantos undoubtedly work all the better for their incompleteness, which mirrors their theme of mutability. The numerology of Cantos VI, VII, and VIII also reflects their themes of time in contrast with eternity. Six and seven are the numbers traditionally associated with divine creation: God creates the world in six days, and on the seventh day he rests, establishing the practice of a weekly Sabbath rest, in time and in the Law. The eighth day becomes significant in Christian thought because of the resurrection of Christ on the first day of the week, representing God's new creation and the Sabbath rest of eternity for God's people (see Hebrews 4:1-11). Roche notes that for the "The VIII Canto, unperfite" Spenser draws the theme of the eternal Sabbath rest from the ending of Augustine's *City of God* (1243). Since the end of Canto VII asserts that "all things" in time and subject to change "Doe worke their own perfection so by fate" (58), the next Canto's incompletion suggests a paradoxical "unperfite" perfection.

Mutabilitie's conclusion, not with her arguments; the Titaness is told only to

"Cease…further to aspire" and to agree to be ruled by Nature (VII.59). With this verdict,

Jove is "confirm'd in his imperial see" (59): the authority of the gods is affirmed, then,

but in a contingent way, as Nature predicts a future time "that all shall changed bee / And

from thenceforth, none no more change shall see" (59). In this Christian apocalyptic

worldview, Spenser envisions the temporal and changing world giving way to

unchanging eternity, a view he repeats in the second stanza of Canto VIII: "For, all that

moveth, doth in *Change* delight: / But thence-forth all shall rest eternally" (2).

With the Cantos of Mutabilitie, then, Spenser focuses on a prominent theme of

dream poetry, offering a fuller meditation on the musings on Fortune and mutability that

are found in the prologues and dream frames of Hoccleve, Henryson, Skelton, Sackville,

and his own earlier short poems. In these precedents, the narrators begin with a reversal

of the typical springtime opening of dream poetry, which leads very organically to a

contemplation of mutability and change, and these musings call attention to the "thought"

of the speaker, out of which comes the subsequent dream or visionary experience.

Skelton's *Garlande of Laurell* begins with its narrator "musynge in [his] thought / How

all thynge passyth as doth the somer flower" (8-9), for example, and in Sackville's

Induction, the narrator "sorrow[s]…to se the somer flowres / …forlorne" (8.1-2) and is

"musing on this worldlie welthe in thought" when his "busie traunce" begins (10.1, 4). It

is telling, then, that the final two stanzas we have of *The Faerie Queene*, the brief "VIII

Canto, unperfite" begin with the narrator's words, "When I bethink me." The final canto

bears quoting in full, as it shows Spenser's development of the theme that is an integral

part of the sixteenth-century use of the dream form:

When I bethink me on that speech whyleare,

    Of Mutability, and well it way:

    Me seems, that though she all unworthy were

    Of the Heav'ns Rule; yet very sooth to say,

    In all things else she beares the greatest sway.

    Which makes me loath this state of life so tickle,

    And love of things so vaine to cast away;

    Whose flowring pride, so fading and so fickle,

Short *Time* shall soon cut down with his consuming sickle.

Then gin I thinke on that which Nature sayd,

    Of that same time when no more *Change* shall be,

    But stedfast rest of all things firmely stayd

    Upon the pillours of Eternity,

    That is contrary to *Mutabilitie*:

    For, all that moveth, doth in *Change* delight:

    But thence-forth all shall rest eternally

    With Him that is the God of Sabbaoth hight:

O that great Sabbaoth God, graunt me that Sabaoths sight.

(VIII.1-2)

Unlike previous examples, Spenser's meditation is a conclusion rather than a prologue, and therefore he offers it as a reflection on "that speech" from the previous Canto, rather than out of his own contemplation of nature (1). Instead, he uses natural imagery to

express spiritual realities: as his thoughts turn to "this state of life," he muses on the

vanity of "flowering pride, so fading and so fickle" which "Time shall soon cut down"

(1). The stanza that follows also begins with "thought," but this time of what "Nature

sayd," and it ends, significantly, with the narrator's desire for vision, "that Sabaoths

sight" (2). Spenser's Cantos of Mutabilitie, then, position themselves not as prologue to a

poetic dream or vision, but as prologue to the real beatific vision of God in Eternity.

In the previous chapter I argued that Spenser's *Daphnaida* draws a connection

between dream poetry and pastoral. When he recasts Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess* as a

pastoral instead of a dream, Spenser calls attention to a similarity between the two forms.

Each is a purposeful and self-conscious fictionalization of reality: both shift narration to

an alternate reality, whether that of a pastoral or of a dream world. The allegorical world

of *The Faerie Queene* is obviously a much larger imaginative landscape, but this

landscape likewise creates a space for the play of imaginative fiction in a way that reveals

the lasting effect of the medieval dream poem. That Spenser argues within his epic for the

truth of his fictional world reveals that the analogy between dreaming and the making of

fiction is still in place even at the end of the sixteenth century.

Conclusion:

Dreams and Dream Poetry of the Later Renaissance

Approaching works of the later Renaissance in England through the medieval

dream form continues to be remarkably productive, though at times counterintuitive. The

late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are not replete with examples of framed dream

narratives of the variety produced by the fifteenth century and earlier. Weidhorn, for

example, writes in his study *Dreams in Seventeenth Century English Literature* that

> 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 writers like Drummond (as
>
> poet), Cowley, and Henry More were attracted to it. (70)[1]

Weidhorn then proceeds to show how these works fall into various categories, some

"Psychological, Autobiographical, Philosophical," some "Political, Polemical, Satirical"

and others "Moral and Religious" (70, 77, 81). The plenitude of terms in these headings

indicates that just as medieval dream poetry as a form was notable for the variety of its

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[1] The works he mentions here are Drummond's *A Cypress Grove*, Donne's *Ignatius His Conclave*, influenced by Kepler's *Somnium* (79), and, of course, Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. In this chapter on "Dream Visions in Seventeenth Century Literature" Weidhorn also examines Drummond's philosophical love poems, "Song i" and "Song ii," Cowley's "Complaint," "A Dreame of Elysium," and his political work "A Discourse by way of Vision, Concerning the government of Oliver Cromwell," as well as Henry More's "Insomnium Philosophicum" (70-88).

uses, so also this variability continues in its later "archaizing" examples; the strength of

Weidhorn's study lies in pointing out the variety of uses of dreams in seventeenth-

century works. There is certainly no shortage of examples of literary dreams from this

period, but there are also many examples of works that recall or respond to medieval

dream poetry without necessarily creating a complete narrative set in a dream frame: the

repurposing and rearrangement of the dream frame that began with Henryson's

Testament can be seen continuing throughout the Renaissance in England. Thus, while

Weidhorn is correct in pointing out that the "extended narrative set within the frame of a

dream" is not as fruitfully used by major poets of the seventeenth century as it was

earlier, this fact only reveals a part of the story—what the afterlife of the medieval dream

poem does *not* look like.[2] It does not fully account for the ways the form *does* continue to

be present in the later works of the Renaissance in England, nor does it account for

transformations that have taken place in the form throughout the sixteenth century, which

I have aimed to show in Chapters 3 and 4. When elements of the dream form are

combined with and subsumed by other forms in the Renaissance, this does not mean an

end to the form's influence: on the contrary, as the examples from Spenser have shown,

they form an integral part of the imaginative vision that arises out of such recombination.

This kind of recombination is apparent when Shakespeare references the medieval

dream form. Shakespeare's use of dreams and dreaming in his dramas is pervasive: as

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[2] Weidhorn does not seem to take into account close analogues to dream poems, such as
Chapman's *Euthymiae Raptus, or the Tears of Peace* (1609), which recalls a dream poem,
with its prologue, situation of mourning, and allegorical pageantry, but is a waking vision
born of "silent meditation" (Rollins and Baker 19, l. 28). Despite its allegorical and
visionary apparatus, Chapman's poem discusses "learning" in a way that is of its time,
rather than "archaizing." Moreover, Chapman's vision begins as an encounter with
Homer, of whose works he was translator (cf. Douglas's encounter with Vegius or
Heywood's with Seneca).

Garber's book-length study attests, dreams are clearly an integral part of his dramatic vision. Of course, not all of these uses refer specifically to the medieval dream poem, but nonetheless, an influence of the form can be detected in his work. What is most astonishing in Shakespeare's appropriation of the dream form to drama, however, is the way that it sheds light on the original medieval use of the form. When Shakespeare references the medieval dream poem, he states explicitly the qualities of the form sometimes left unstated by medieval poets or concealed by them in expressions of authorial humility or inexpressibility.

Shakespeare's most overt rewriting of a dream frame takes place in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, which shows indebtedness to Chaucer's Knight's Tale, as does Shakespeare's late collaboration with Fletcher *The Two Noble Kinsmen*. But the play is structurally even more indebted to Chaucerian dream poetry.[3] Acts 1 and 5, which are set in Athens, frame the central three acts set in the forest, where the fairies intrude into the affairs of the young Athenians and the rude mechanicals. When Hermia and Lysander, running away from Athens, appear in the forest in Act 2, Scene 2, she is already tired from "wand'ring in the wood," and he has "forgot [their] way" (41-2), so their plot in the woods begins with their going to sleep. They are almost immediately awakened, with the entrance of Helena and Demetrius, but not before Robin Goodfellow anoints Lysander's eyes with the magic flower's love juice. This magic potion used by Oberon and Puck on

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[3] Lynch begins to argue for this structural indebtedness in "Baring Bottom" (99-100), although her focus shifts to demonstrating a direct influence of Chaucer's Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women* on Shakespeare's play (105ff.). I certainly agree with her comment that "For the Renaissance writer, [dream theory] was mediated through a complex literary tradition that has received too little attention in discussions of this play, the tradition of the medieval dream visions itself shaped by late antique and medieval theories of the psyche and of the role of the imagination in dreams" (100).

the eyes of unwitting sleepers to make them fall in love with the first thing they see upon awakening, thus, overlaps with the real disorientation that comes from passing between sleeping and waking states. Hermia and Lysander awaken at different times and to different realities from the one in which they fell asleep together, and both of their experiences are variations on the dreaming found in dream poetry: Lysander experiences a sudden love vision when he awakens and sees Helena, whereas Hermia wakes up to a nightmarish vision of a lost love. Her waking experience is foreshadowed by the dream she tells as she awakens of a "serpent [eating her] heart away" and Lysander mocking her for it (155-6).

Just as the young lovers' plot begins with sleep and enchantment, so their escapade in the woods ends again with an enchanted sleep (3.3) and a scene of awakening (4.1). At the center of the play, Oberon instructs Puck to remedy the confusion of the lovers with a "death-counterfeiting sleep" (3.2.365) and a corrective herb applied to the sleeping Lysander's eye that will "take from thence all error" and restore him to Hermia. As for the rest of the lovers, Oberon then foresees that "When they next wake, all this derision / Shall seem a dream and fruitless vision / And back to Athens shall the lovers wend" (371-3). Oberon offers a magical sleep to all of the lovers to end the night's confusion in a seemingly natural way: Hermia and Helena were of course untouched by the original love juice, and the women's agitation in the woods is the result of their waking interactions with the men under its influence. For his part, Demetrius will remain enchanted even after waking. But for all of the lovers, the experience in the woods seems after the enchanted sleep to have been one episode of sleep and dreaming from which they are all awakened by the hunting party in Act 4, Scene 1. Lysander replies to

Theseus' query, "amazedly / Half sleep, half waking" and remembers only that he "came with Hermia hither"—that is, he remembers the opening of the dream frame, before he first fell asleep in the woods (143-4, 148). To the still-enchanted Demetrius, on the other hand, "It seems… / That yet we sleep, we dream" (189-90). He recognizes by the evidence of their shared experience of awakening that "we are awake" but suggests that they "recount [their] dreams" as they return to Athens (194-5).

The overall effect of the whole adventure has been a blurring of the distinction between sleep and waking, which is reflected in the series of images the lovers use to describe this effect. To Demetrius, "These things seem small and indistinguishable / Like far-off mountains turned into clouds" (184-5): he describes the blurring effect of distance on a visual experience. Hermia's image is a visual one as well: when she says, "Methinks I see these things with parted eye / When everything seems double," she recalls the "Methought I sawe" formulation of recounted dream experience in dream poetry, except that she uses it in the present tense (186-7). Her image of a "parted eye" modifies Demetrius' image of blurred vision, into an image of "double" vision, however, an idea Helena corroborates with her description of Demetrius as "found…like a jewel, / Mine own and not mine own" (188-9). Shakespeare presents his audience with a dream's ability to blur the distinction between waking and sleep, but also brings out the double potential of dreaming: to the women, the experience is not just "indistinguishable" but "double," an experience of being both asleep *and* awake, which, of course, they were.

With Theseus's famous speech on imagination, which follows at the beginning of Act 5, Shakespeare reiterates the double potential of dreaming, tying it to the imaginative work of poetic composition. In Theseus' view the lovers' "story of the night" (23)—that

is, the "dreams" they "recount" on their way back to Athens—is "More strange than true"
(2). Hippolyta, on the other hand, recognizes something "strange and admirable" in the
fact that "all their minds" have been "transfigured so together" (27, 24). Their discussion
reflects the parallel double potential with respect to truth both of dreams and of fictions:
the lovers' dream can be "more strange than true," like a "poet's pen" which "gives to
airy nothing / A local habitation and a name" (15-18). Theseus gives a disparaging view
of the value of poetic fictions, just as Henryson refers dismissively to the book he cites
which may be "fenȝeit of the new / Be sum poeit, throw his inventioun" (*Testament of
Cresseid* 66-7). But just as Henryson's tone is carefully chosen both to conceal and to
reveal Henryson's own "inventioun," so too Theseus' skeptical formulation says more
about the role of the poet than the character intends, a positive view of the poetic
imagination as a creative force. The image is itself a double one: Theseus intends to tie it
to the "seething brains" and "shaping fantasies" of "lovers and madmen" (4-5), but his
statement also functions as an assertion by Shakespeare of poetic creativity as divine
creation out of nothing. Hippolyta's response does not contradict Theseus' position, but
rather points to and affirms the doubleness it implies: to her, "strange *and* admirable" are
not terms that cancel each other out (27, emphasis mine). In Shakespeare, the double
potential of the dream form becomes a characteristically Renaissance expression of
paradox.

These themes tying the doubleness of dreaming to poetic creativity are
recapitulated in the subplot of Bottom's dream. When Oberon arranges a restoration and
awakening for Bottom, he is dismissive of the effects of the experience: after his head is
put right, Oberon thinks Bottom may "think no more of this night's accidents / But as the

fierce vexation of a dream" (4.1.65-6). But, of course, Bottom will not "think no more" of

his "rare vision" (199-200): his plot comically yet crucially retains the element of the

dream form in which the dreamer awakens to compose a poem recounting his dream. His

speech upon awakening gives another statement of the double potential of dreaming: it

contains both the pull heavenward of transcendent dreams, with its echoes of St. Paul's

description of his vision of heaven in Corinthians, and the earthy downward pull of

"Bottom's dream" which "hath no bottom" (209). But his statement of transcendence is

as comically garbled as the experience itself had been—"The eye of man hath not heard,

the ear of man hath not seen…what my dream was" (4.1.205-7). Shakespeare combines

this element of the dream form, that the dream must be recounted, with another feature

that is contradictory if used at the same time: the inexpressibility *topos*. According to

Bottom, his dream is "past the wit of man to say what dream it was," and "man is but a

patched fool if he will offer to say what methought I had" (200-204).[4] But because

Bottom himself cannot express what has happened to him in his dream, he "will get Peter

Quince to write a ballad of" it (207-8). Bottom's faith in poetic creativity is as comic and

double as Theseus' skepticism: Peter Quince's pen will either embody the dream Bottom

finds inexpressible, or it will be truly an "airy nothing,"

     If Shakespeare voices the dream poem's inexpressibility through the wonder

expressed by the lovers, Hippolyta, and Bottom, so also in the epilogue he caps the play's

use of the dream form with Robin Goodfellow's disavowal of responsibility:

> If we shadows have offended,
>
> Think of this, and all is mended:

---

[4] Of course, what Bottom "thought he had" refers with comic doubleness both to the love of the Queen of the Fairies and his ass's head: it cannot just be discounted as the latter.

> That you have but slumbered here,
>
> While these visions did appear;
>
> And this weak and idle theme,
>
> No more yielding but a dream,
>
> Gentles, do not reprehend.
>
> If you pardon, we will mend.

<div align="center">(1-8)</div>

Comparing not just the events in the woods but the play as a whole to a dream, this is a more lighthearted disavowal of responsibility than that at the end of Skelton's *Bowge of Court,* which also suggests that its poem's dream need not be taken seriously "Syth all in substaunce of slumbrynge doth procede" (536). Still, Shakespeare's statement of the rhetorical function of the dream frame is just as clear as Skelton's. Skelton places the burden of interpretation of the dream's potentially true "resydewe" on the reader (539), just as Puck playfully elicits judgment—that is, applause—from the audience. But his excuse that "all is mended" if only the viewers think "That [they] have *but* slumbered here" emphasizes the function of the dream frame in creating deniability for medieval authors. By ascribing a dream frame to his play as a whole and stating its rhetorical function so directly, Shakespeare confirms the significance a dream frame would have had still for Renaissance readers.

Shakespeare does not build the same dream form into *Romeo and Juliet*, though talk of dreams fills the play. In one larger structural similarity with dream poetry, the opening sonnet-prologue casts the weight of the lovers' "star-crossed" fate over the play as a whole (6), lending resonances of the dream poem's preoccupation with Fortune to

Romeo's lament that he is "fortune's fool" after he has slain Tybalt (3.1.131). Likewise,

immediately after Mercutio's Queen Mab speech, Romeo has a premonition of "some

consequence yet hanging in the stars" (1.4.107). But this play's most significant reference

to dream poetry comes in the speech itself, which, like *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, ties

dreaming to poetic creativity. The speech recalls Chaucer's exploration of dream causes

in *The Parliament of Fowls*:

> The wery huntere, slepynge in his bed,
>
> To wode ayeyn his mynde goth anon;
>
> The juge dremeth how his plees been sped;
>
> The cartere dremeth how his cart is gon;
>
> The riche, of gold; the knyght fyght with his fon;
>
> The syke met he drynketh of the tonne;
>
> The lovere met he hath his lady wonne.

<p align="center">(99-105)</p>

For every person listed, dreams are determined by their daytime occupations, by way of

giving a naturalistic internal motivation to his own dream in which Scipio appears to him

immediately after he has been reading the *Somnium Scipionis*. Chaucer complicates the

simple correspondences in this stanza with a second explanation of his dream two stanzas

later, when he addresses Venus, stating that she "madest [him] this sweven for to mete"

(115; Spearing, *Medieval Dream-Poetry* 91-2). He leaves open the question of whether

his dream is internally or externally motivated. Mercutio's speech explores the same

theme of dreams corresponding to different dreamers' daytime preoccupations or states in

life (1.4.71-94), but his explanation is far from naturalistic. Instead, he creates a miniature

portrait of great detail of the "fairies' midwife" Queen Mab (55-70), then flamboyantly

ascribes dreams to her. He presents a complex image of dreaming in which the dreamers'

internal motivations lead to dreams that are externally motivated by a fictional character.[5]

Romeo cuts off the fantastical speech by pointing out the obvious: that Mercutio "talk[s]

of nothing" (96). Mercutio's response echoes Theseus' speech on the imagination:

>True. I talk of dreams,
>
>Which are the children of an idle brain,
>
>Begot of nothing but vain fantasy,
>
>Which is as thin of substance as the air,
>
>And more inconstant than the wind…
>
>(96-100)

But although Mercutio's reply seems to deny any real "substance" to dreams—like

Theseus' "airy nothing," they are "Begot of nothing but vain fantasy"—his speech about

them, in fact, serves as a substantial set piece in the play's first act. It comes in response

to Romeo's cryptic, seemingly significant, assertion "I dreamt a dream tonight" (50) and

punning suggestion that dreamers only "lie" in bed "while they do dream things true"

(52). Mercutio's speech is an absurdly elaborate fictional creation, a work of poetic

imagination, that responds to the equally absurd earnestness with which Romeo asserts

the truth of dreams: at the end of the speech, ironically, Mercutio is the more substantial

character for knowing that he "talk[s] of nothing."[6] Shakespeare's interpretation of the

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[5] Garber emphasizes the element of folk tradition in the character of Queen Mab (9-10).
[6] Like dreaming, the idea of "nothing" pervades Shakespeare's dramas (see Garber 32-3, 41, and ff.). See also Tayler's important "King Lear and Negation."

double potential of dreaming is encapsulated in his use of "nothing" for describing both the insubstantiality of dreams and the creative power of the imagination.

Milton similarly explores the double potential of dreaming in *Paradise Lost* with his juxtaposition of Eve's and Adam's dreams at the center of the epic. Eve's dream is presented in Book IV as externally-caused by Satan, who is found by the angels Ithuriel and Zephon

> Squat like a toad, close at the ear of Eve;
>
> Assaying by his devilish art to reach
>
> The organs of her fancy, and with them forge
>
> Illusions as he list, phantasms and dreams.

> (IV.800-03)

Satan's action here recalls Spenser's Archimago using false dreams to create illusions in Book 1 of *The Faerie Queene*. When Eve recounts her dream to Adam at the beginning of Book V, it is clear that Milton crafts Eve's dream narrative by arranging and carefully reversing several elements of the medieval dream form. The dream begins with Eve rising from sleep within her dream to go "forth to walk" through Eden at night (36): unlike a dream poem's riotous birdsong, this nighttime setting is "silent, save where silence yields / To the night-warbling bird" (39-40) and a sunlit landscape is replaced by the moon that "now reigns / Full-orbed" (41-2). Arriving at the forbidden tree, she sees there "One shaped and winged like one of those from heav'n / By us oft seen" (55-6): this angelic presence then eats the fruit of the tree and urges Eve to do likewise, which she does, though it remains unstated, hidden by the "me thought" of a retold dream:

> …the pleasant savory smell

So quickened the appetite, that I, me thought,

Could not but taste. Forthwith up to the clouds

With him I flew, and underneath beheld

The earth outstretched immense, a prospect wide

And various: wond'ring at my flight and change

To this high exaltation; suddenly

My guide was gone, and I, methought, sunk down

And fell asleep; but O how glad I waked

To find this but a dream!

(V. 84-93)

Eve's dream is obviously rich with resonances and the foreshadowing of her fall in Book IX, with the temptation in the dream and her symbolic flight and fall. The perspective of her "prospect wide" is repeated in Book XI, after the Fall and before the expulsion from Paradise, when Adam and Michael "ascend / In the visions of God" the highest hill in Eden "from whose top / The hemisphere of earth in clearest ken / Stretched out to amplest reach of prospect lay" (376-80). Milton, thus, ties the language of ascent and descent of dream poetry to his themes of knowledge and fall, sin and redemption. Moreover, Eve's "guide" is also drawn from dream poetry, like the eagle in *The House of Fame*,[7] but the figure of Satan "like" an angel is an image of a false dream guide in an oracular, prophetic dream: the dream is prophetic, but instead of speaking as a trustworthy authority, the dream guide is deceptive.

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[7] Spearing points to Dante's *Purgatorio* IX as Chaucer's source, but also to a medieval tradition of "the flight of contemplation or of thought" (*Medieval Dream-Poetry* 76).

Aers has described Eve's dream as one "of astonishing complexity, one that includes some startling theological implications" ("Interpreting Dreams" 91). In particular, her dream represents the ambiguous moral status of prelapsarian temptation. As Adam points out in response to Eve's narrative, her dream is "of evil sprung… / Yet evil whence? In thee can harbor none" (V. 98-9): it cannot have been internally motivated, given their unfallen nature. Adam does not know of Satan's whisperings in Eve's ear, and he seeks a naturalistic explanation for the dream, blaming Eve's "lesser faculties" of soul (101), and "fancy" in particular (102).[8] This faculty, which "forms imaginations, aery shapes" (105), is normally under the control of "reason" (106), except in sleep when "mimic fancy" imitates reason by "misjoining shapes" (110-11). This insubordination of fancy to reason in dreams is morally neutral, as Adam admits (117-19), though in the context of Satan's insubordination to God in the poem Adam's description takes on a more sinister resonance; he notes that the dream seems to recapitulate their "last evening's talk… / …with addition strange," the "addition" presumably whispered in her ear by Satan (115-16). But even Adam's statement of the moral neutrality of dreaming contains a telling ambiguity. He tells Eve that

> Evil into the mind of god or man
>
> May come and go, so unapproved, and leave
>
> No spot or blame behind: which gives me hope
>
> That what in sleep thou didst abhor to dream,
>
> Waking thou never wilt consent to do.
>
> (V.117-21)

---

[8] That is, her faculty of fancy is the "lesser" compared to her own reason; he is not blaming her dream on her inferiority.

An evil dream leaves "no spot or blame behind" because it is "unapproved" by the

dreamer's sleeping reason. But in a secondary sense, Adam's language suggests that

Eve's dream is blameless *so long as* its "Evil" is "unapproved" by her (117-18): this

secondary reading seems to strain the grammar of the sentence, but it is, in fact,

supported by his next comment that "what in sleep thou didst abhor to dream / Waking

thou never wilt consent to do." He suggests that the evil of the dream was not only

"unapproved" but "abhor[red]" by her "in sleep," which is not entirely the case, as Aers

points out (91).[9] Thus, whereas patristic theologians would offer that Eve's dream is

blameless because it is a dream (see Kruger 44), Adam's formulation is slightly more

legalistic. His interpretation of moral culpability makes "her pleasures in the

transgressions of the law" within the dream look more culpable than they are (Aers 91),

but the fact that the dream enacts the temptation scene of Book IX before it happens also

reinforces this sense that her dream is more than "but a dream." Milton uses the neutral

space of dreaming to convey the moral complexity of temptation, even before the actual

Fall.

Adam's account of the cause of Eve's dream describes the power of "fancy" to

produce the "Wild work" of "misjoining shapes" in dreams (112), and surely Milton uses

the phrase "aery shapes" as a variation of Shakespeare's "airy nothing." Whether Eve's

temptation in the dream is truly a nothing or a something, given its prophetic value, is left

ambiguous. But with Adam's dream of his own creation in Book VIII, Milton gives an

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[9] Aers discusses how Adam's response to Eve's dream exhibits a "monologism that
leaves no spaces for Eve's voice, her feelings, and her particular experiences" (91-2). Her
dream narrative is her own, but he is the sole interpreter of it, and his prediction about its
prophetic value is not only short-sighted but, as Aers points out "sets aside" the evidence
Eve gives in her narrative that she did not merely "abhor" what was happening in her
dream (91).

opposite view of a dream's potential truth, clearly tying the dream form to creativity by using the form to represent divine creation. Describing his own beginning Adam tells Raphael it was like being "new-waked from soundest sleep" and describes his first glimpses of the world (253): with its "flow'ry herb," "Hill, dale, and shady woods, and sunny plains / And liquid lapse of murmuring streams," and "Birds on the branches warbling" the creation he sees is depicted as a *locus amoenus* (254, 262-3, 265). But discovering this world and his own body, Adam wonders how he has come to be and who his "Maker" is (277-8). Not hearing a response to his query from the nature surrounding him, he sits down—"Pensive" like the narrator of a dream poem (287)—and falls asleep "On a green shady bank profuse of flow'rs" (286). In the dream that follows, Adam meets a "shape divine" (295), who raises him up and flies with him, placing him in the "enclosed" garden (304). Adam's dream corresponds in many details with Eve's dream, and when Adam is placed in the garden, he too is moved to eat fruit "that hung to the eye / Tempting" (307-8). Unlike Eve, who awakens and finds to her relief that it was "but a dream," Adam awakens to find "Before [his] eyes all real" (310). When he then meets the "Presence Divine," he is meeting his dream "guide" in waking reality (314, 312). Thus, Adam's memory of his own beginning takes the form of a dream poem, as does the dream by which he learns of his own creation and through which he meets God. What was in Dunbar's "Ane Dreme" a joking connection between dreaming and the creation of Adam, in Milton's epic becomes the most serious of *oracula*, with God for Adam's dream guide. Like Spenser, Milton uses the dream form in combination with epic form, and the similarities between the earthly paradise of Renaissance epic and the gardens of medieval dream poetry make for a seamless blending of genres, particularly in Milton's

poem, which is already the story of a "garden of bliss" (VIII.299). The grand scale of an

epic allows Milton to explore in parallel dream passages indebted to the dream form the

double potential of dreaming as nothing, in Satan's temptation of Eve, and of creation out

of nothing, in God's creation of Adam.

Another genre that works in the later Renaissance in England as an analogue to

dream poetry is the masque, with its blurring of distinctions between actors and audience,

reality and played reality. Shakespeare's analogy between the theater and dreaming

notwithstanding, masques are structurally and thematically even more akin to dream

poems. Shakespeare himself expands upon this analogy: Prospero's famous "Our revels

are now ended" speech in Act 4 of *The Tempest* comes at the end of the masque

celebrating the betrothal of Ferdinand and Miranda (4.1.148-58). Prospero compares the

spirit-actors of the masque to the "baseless fabric of this vision" (151): no matter how

elaborate, the scenery set up for a masque is temporary and removable. He then expands

the image to refer to the passing away of all things in time:

>…the great globe itself,
>
>Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve;
>
>And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
>
>Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff
>
>As dreams are made on, and our little life
>
>Is rounded with a sleep.

<div align="center">(153-8)</div>

Shakespeare's allusion to his own building, "the great globe itself," depicts the theater as

seemingly more substantial than a masque, though, like the world itself, it will "dissolve"

just like "this insubstantial pageant." The final image is of the whole of a human life as a

dream, "rounded with a sleep." An expansion on his dream frame for the lovers in *A*

Midsummer Night's Dream, it is an image of life as a dream poem, framed by the "sleep"

of birth and death. Milton's creation of Adam depicted as an awakening into a dream

landscape illustrates a continuation of Shakespeare's image.

Jonson's masque *The Vision of Delight* (1617) directly equates the form of the

masque with dreaming, as Night calls on Fant'sy at the beginning of the pageant, to bring

his "figures" and "various shapes of things, / Creat[ing] of airy forms a stream" to make a

"waking dream" for the audience (39, 40-1, 43).[10] In the speech that follows Fant'sy

points out that he cannot please every viewer with the same dream, for "it is no one

dream that can please these all / Wherefore I would know what dreams would delight

'em" (50-1). Playing upon the different possible causes of dreams as Mercutio's Queen

Mab speech had done, he wants to know what his dreamers want so that he can externally

cause dreams that correspond to these internal motivations. He acknowledges, moreover,

that among the various dreams he can offer are "Some that are proper and signify o'thing

/ And some another, and some that are nothing" (59-60). Hawkins observes that the

scenes in the masque that follow represent the various Macrobian dream types (285),

beginning with the antimasque of dancing "phantasms" that come in at the end of

Fant'sy's long speech. With the character of Fant'sy Jonson also calls attention to a

connection between dreaming and "poetic fancy" (Hawkins 287). As he progresses

through the different Macrobian dream types in the masque, he puts on "a virtuoso

exhibition of various kinds of poetry" (288), that culminates with a vision of the King and

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[10] All references to the masque are to Orgel's edition of Jonson's masques, cited by line
number.

his courtiers in an idealized landscape of "perpetual spring" (*Vision* 190). But, as

Hawkins points out, the King represents himself in the play, not an allegorical figure

(290): thus, the masque presents a "gradual movement from the presentation of sheer

fantasy to the presentation of the natural world as it ideally might be and finally to the

representation of contemporary reality, the king and court, perfected and enriched by

poetic significance" (292). Whether Jonson really intended this masque as an anatomy of

Macrobian dream types is less important than the fact that the final vision blurs the

distinction between reality and the dream of the masque. With its image of the real king

as he ought to be, the masque then ends by returning its royal participants to "action" in

the real world as a new day begins (229), expressing the hope that the ideal from the

dream carries over into reality.

But seventeenth-century uses of the dream form were not limited to dramas,

courtly entertainment, and formal poetry of high style. In a pamphlet from 1620 titled

Dekker his Dreame, In which, being rapt with a Poeticall Enthusiasme, the great

Volumes of Heaven and Hell to Him were opened, in which he read many Wonderfull

Things, Thomas Dekker uses the dream form to excuse the "poeticall enthusiasme" of his

apocalyptic vision (EEBO). The poem is, in fact, more polemical than poetical, with

prose passages inserted between sections to aid interpretation. But Dekker's use of the

dream form recalls both Dunbar's interest in visions of hell, and the late medieval

association of the form with prison poetry. Writing after a seven-year imprisonment, in

his introduction "To the Reader" Dekker presents his dream as a vision experienced by

his "waking Soule" of the glories of Heaven followed by the "In-utterable horrors" of the

pains of Hell. In showing him both Paradise and the "Jayles of Hell," the dream gives

him access to a range of experience, high and low, that is "More…than ever I could before [behold], when my eies were wide open." The experience of the dream thus both mirrors and stands in contrast to his physical imprisonment—which he compares to a "long Sleepe" and a "drowsy voyage." He then likens the conflicting pulls of his dream to a musical experience, writing that:

> Joyes tooke me by the hand in the first dance, but feares & sorrowes whipt me forward in the second. I must not now tell, what I saw, neither can I now see so much as I have told. What Musicke led both these measures, do but open my Song-Booke, and the Lessons are there set downe.
>
> If the Notes please thee, my paines are well bestowed. If to thine eare they sound untuneable, much are they not to be blamed, in regard they are the Aires of a Sleeping Man.

His pairing of the inexpressibility *topos* with the disavowal of responsibility here echoes *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Dekker directs the reader past the introduction and into the "Song-Booke" that is his poem. He does not claim that what he saw is inexpressible, only that he cannot express it "now"—that is, at the point in time that he is addressing the reader—drawing a contrast between this writing and the immediacy of the poem to the experience of the dream. The poem has "set downe" the dream experience, for himself and the reader, because "neither can [he] now see so much as [he has] told." Dekker thus points out a naturalistic function of the dream poem to preserve the marvelous experience and keep it from being forgotten. As Bottom hopes Peter Quince's "ballad" of his dream will do, the poem not only preserves the dream for memory, it also turns it into an artistic creation, a "Song-Book" composed of "Notes." But, like Puck, who compares the

theatergoer's experience to a "slumber," Dekker adds his own disavowal of responsibility for his poem: if it does not please the reader, it is to be regarded as "the Aires of a Sleeping Man."

Dekker's echoes of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* here also point to a new chapter in the afterlife of the medieval dream poem: its incorporation into Renaissance writing. Once the form is appropriated by a writer of Shakespeare's stature, it becomes harder when reading later writings to separate the influence of a specifically medieval dream form from the influence of Shakespeare's use of the dream form. As the form becomes fully integrated into Renaissance genres, it is no longer necessary for poets to look back as far as the Chaucerian dream poem for a "poetic of dream experience" (Spearing, "Dream Poems" 168) when there are many, more proximate, Renaissance examples both of dreaming and of revisions to the medieval dream form. That is not to say that Chaucerian influence ceases or becomes undiscernible in later work—the examples from *Paradise Lost* show clearly that a distinctly medieval form is still easy to recognize as late as Milton—but a general integration of the concerns of the dream form into various Renaissance forms does take place as well. And because the development of the dream poem in the Renaissance corresponds explicitly to the growth of ideas of poetic creativity, the recombination of the dream form into Renaissance genres continues to result in works that are both innovative and self-reflexive, as the medieval form had been in its own right.

Thus, against a narrative of stagnation or decline, I have argued that the story of medieval dream poetry in the Renaissance is one of ongoing poetic creativity, and an increasingly self-conscious poetic creativity at that. Even as the form fragments and is

subsumed into other genres, the Renaissance appropriation of the medieval dream form

cannot with any accuracy be described in terms of the death or decay of the earlier form.

The medieval dream poem in the Renaissance is hardly the purview of minor poets with

antiquarian interests: the evidence from Shakespeare and Milton attests that quite the

opposite is true. The persistence of the medieval dream form in the Renaissance can

rightly be called an afterlife, but an afterlife understood as a continuation, not an end.

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