FOURTEENTH CENTURY POETRY

PATTERNS OF LOSS, RECOVERY AND CONSOLATION IN CERTAIN FOURTEENTH CENTURY POEMS

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INTRODUCTION

My aim is to discuss "Patterns of loss, recovery and consolation" in a selection of fourteenth-century poems. Before anything else, some word on my principles of selection might be helpful. My approach must of course be limited by the proportions of the thesis. With this in mind I attempted to find reasonably compact *oeuvres* that would helpfully illustrate the patterns I wished to explore. The choice of the Breton lays was obvious[1]; here was a body of work small enough to be adequately handled and possessing a clear unity of *genre*. The choice of Chaucer's dream visions seemed to provide a desirable contrast. They represent of course a poetry of an immeasurably higher order; but within my own terms it is perhaps more important that this excellence has as its corollary an audience more amenable to a poetry of allusion, especially as all the visions depend for a large part

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[1] A brief word on the lays I omit. The *Lay le Freine* is a text of questionable integrity, based on Weber's reconstruction following Marie de France's *Lai le Fresne*. The *Erle of Toulous* seems at best a marginal instance of my pattern. There is no real pattern of loss, just a suspension of worldly status prior to improvement. The *Franklin's Tale* I see as transcending the *genre*. To discuss it at all adequately would be to extend my study to even more tedious lengths.

of their comedy on the detailed exploration of the comic figure of the artist through a specifically literary frame of reference. Between these two groups is Pearl, in some respects a perfunctory warning of the dangers of classification. Pearl falls into neither of the categories of "recovery" or "consolation". It offers a doctrinal consolation which its art renders more equivocal than is apparent from the narrative. And it suggests that the acceptance of correct doctrine is not to be seen as the consequence of correct exposition.

It is also necessary to offer some definition of my terms before proceeding. My concern is with "loss", "recovery" and "consolation". Loss is the common factor in all the poems under discussion. But the nature of the loss determines whether a process of recovery or consolation takes place. In the lays the loss is one of identity through a deprivation of social status. At the crudest level the narrative seems to be constructed so as to be governed by values that are external to the poem. The happy ending seems to reflect the preconceptions of the audience in a way that limits the artistic excellence of the poems. Poems like Degaré and Gowther are controlled by a moral or social assumption that does not seem to be reflected in the poetry. Emaré, Launfal and Orfeo indicate a growing artistry mirroring concerns that are aspects of the poetry. In varying degrees they focus on the ability of a protagonist to effect some resolution and recovery within the terms of his society,

but without its support. In Launfal this is viewed comically through the hero's inability to reconcile his virtues and benefits with what society demands of him. Orfeo and Emaré are opposite sides of the same coin. The latter sees an unclearly articulated doctrine as the way through hardship to ~~wordly~~ worldly success. In Orfeo the literal affirmation of the hero is sufficient to secure his recovery of well-being. It represents the farthest one can go in a pattern of literal recovery. Here the determination of the hero renders all other processes unnecessary. He is able to surmount all obstacles by an intensity of feeling which circumstance enables him to channel according to his most potent talents.

But whilst the lays see recovery as restoration, Pearl seems to set out to undercut such values. Much of the irony of the poem seems to rest on the Dreamer's attempt to establish and confirm a pseudo-relationship with the Pearl maiden. During the course of the poem, this ceases to be the prime concern. The maiden establishes a set of values apparently on a different scale from the Dreamer's loss and subsuming it. The dénouement, however, seems to imply that this is more equivocal from the Dreamer's point of view. He attempts an act of physical recovery only to be thrown back on doctrine by default in the concluding lines. The contrast between the Dreamer's ambition and its results would

in other contexts seem funny. Here it only serves to confirm that a revelatory vision of heavenly reality can provide no immediate consolation for grief. It can only affirm the fact of loss and offer a focus for consolation. The protagonist remains the subject of forces outside his control.

Chaucer's poetry suggests, I think, a rejection on the part of the artist of all consolation outside his art. This carries with it a recurrent concern with the artist's response to experience. In The Book of the Duchess, The House of Fame and The Parliament of Fowls the artist-persona is presented as a comic incompetent usually uncomprehending and always uncertain about how to react to the experience he is presented with in his vision. Such solace as the Dreamer derives seems to come totally from his ability to offer an accurate exposition of his experience. I stress accuracy because the poems offer an illusion of reportage and of laboured but relevant erudition. An essential part of the comedy comes from this use of pedantry as an artistic device. In the case of the two finished poems at least, the final resolution of the comic persona to return to reading and accurate recounting, has through the poem acquired a different validity from what such personas would have expected before their dream. All three poems set out to introduce dreamers to totally foreign experience. Thus for the first time the experience of the aspiring poet acquires an

integrity in its rejection of its earlier insistence on the vicariousness of experience for the poet.

The Book of the Duchess focuses on an assumption that the most efficacious way of surmounting grief is to turn experience of loss into art. This provides an outlet for both foci of experience. The Dreamer is roused from lethargy to perpetuate the elegiac and courtly grief of the Man in Black. In The House of Fame the artist appears to receive comfort from an affirmation of his imaginative experience at the expense of his rational or moral values. The paradoxical situation of the dream indicates how the artist can in fact overcome such values and offer an artefact capable of turning even the random processes of fame into a means of comfort. And the Parliament seems to centre on the manner in which the artist can order his own mundane preconceptions into comic art. The concern with love that provides the occasion for all three has frequently restricted consideration of them to those terms. As will be apparent, my own concern tends to subordinate this aspect, out of a desire to offer some tentative statement of the consolation available to the protagonist rather than the terms in which he desires to find consolation. One would not wish to denigrate the comic dichotomy between these two states but if I have chosen to emphasize the poems' humour less than it has deserved it will, I hope, be adjudged as due to lack of space not lack of appreciation.

I can only emphasize that I am limited in my concern to a study of the aesthetics within the dream that I see as providing the means of consolation.

In spite of the questionable validity of interpretative criticism, I do feel my approach raises certain questions about medieval poetry that have been neglected by current critical trends. During the course of this thesis I will have some occasion to attack the most notable of these, that of "scriptural exegesis" as promulgated by D. W. Robertson. My admiration for Robertson's work is tempered by a sense of the need to underly his erudition by a greater sense of the text as an intrinsic document rather than an indication of the influence of the Patrologia Latina. This is of course an overstatement - Robertson has been the first to acknowledge the limitations and dangers inherent in his method; but few have made any effort to establish any sort of preliminary approach that would provide a critical complement to his method. This is in a very minor way what I am attempting to do.

For in essence my aim is to suggest some of the pressures other than patristics that appear to be reflected in the text. In doing so I consciously attempt to turn my own limitations to advantage. My lack of erudition and of breadth of reading force me into some association with the text per se. The only virtue I would suggest for this is its possibilities for offering some statement about the attitude of the artist to his material in certain specific cases. The poems in the early chapters seem to reflect ideas of society

in relation to two different contexts, and the inability to reconcile the two results in his translation. But the fact of the gifts would seem to imply a desire to place him satisfactorily within the world. His inability, and the greater security it ensures for him once more make Launfal a curiously redundant knight. I can only re-emphasize that I am aware of the world he has to contend with, but surely the point remains that his endowments do not compensate for an inability to sustain himself in a cupidinous world. The world that gives him a consistency of virtue also removes all pressures against such consistency. Timelessness implies a removal of testing.

This movement towards timelessness of status is confirmed by the gradually changing frame of reference within which the poem is conducted. It begins within an overt Christian idea of time. Arthur weds Guinevere on a "Wytsonday" (50); Hugh and John leave Launfal at "Pentecost" (113): the climax to Launfal's poverty comes "Upon a day of the trinite/A feste of greet solempnite" (181-2). This Christian context disappears as soon as Launfal enters the faery world. After this point time acquires a more secular reference. Launfal gives a feast that lasts a "fourtenyght" (495) and agrees to fight Valentyne after a similar length of time (542). With the return to Arthur's court time continues to be secular after the initial occasion -

"Seynt Jonnys Masse" (618)[19]. After Launfal's departure the movement becomes complete. He is placed within a time setting that is definite yet imprecise:

> Euery er, vpon a certayn day,
> Me may here Launfales stede nay,
> And hym se wyth syght. (1024-1026)

The time scheme modifies in accordance with the narrative movement. It confirms Launfal's gradual isolation from a time sequence that can relate him to a social order that could in turn render him open to social criticism. George Poulet has sought to define medieval attitudes to time as:

> not a mode of duration absolutely different from permanence. It was only permanence incomplete, still in the process of achievement, and guided towards completion by the forms inherent in being ... Being was made capable of action. But this capacity was not in time; it was in permanency. It was the permanent form that established the possibility of existence and action.[20]

Launfal completes and transcends this process - he steps outside time; existence and action become the permanent form. And with this he steps outside the possibility of being judged in temporal terms - he finally ceases to be an unknightly figure when he ceases to be accessible to social judgement.

Sir Orfeo uses a different concept of time within its pattern of recovery. It takes the Boethian idea of time for

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[19] Cf. for example 631, 678, 696, 818.

[20] George Poulet, Studies in Human Time (New York, 1959), p. 5.

which it was originally the exemplum and forshortens its moral implication.[21] Orfeo interprets the Boethian supreme good as what is obviously mutable. Yet the poem throws all its weight against this acceptance of mutability. Orfeo remains under the sway of earthly time[22] but can nonetheless select his dearest good from within its sway. He is the antithesis of Launfal who remains until the end within the possibility of time's judgement. Launfal has to transcend time to find his "bote", Orfeo can finally enjoy time as he wishes.

This ability to impose his own will is confirmed by the conception of Orfeo that appears in an important analogue of the poem, Walter Map's De Nugis Curialum:

> I must mention a knight of Little Britain, who found the wife whom he had lost and long mourned from the hour of her death in a great throng of women at night, in the depths of a most lonely valley. He was most full of fear and wonder and, seeing her alive whom he had buried, did not believe his eyes, and was uncertain as to what the fates had wrought. He preferred to snatch her with confidence whatever the outcome whether destined to rejoice in this ravishment, if his sight were true, or to be defrauded by a phantom, so that he could not in any case be accused of cowardice in restraining his hand.

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[21] V. Boethius, Consolation of Philosophy, trans. R. H. Green (Indianapolis and New York, 1962), Book III, Prose 2.

[22] Cf. the following lines:

> Now King Orfeo newe coround is,
> and his quen, Dame Heurodis,
> and liued long after-ward,
> and seppen was king be steward. (593-596)

The fact of death is left implicit but not regarded as ultimately defeating.

> He seized her, therefore, and for many years derived as notable delight from this union as in the years before (her death) ... Indeed, a prodigious wrong to nature, and quite incredible if sure proofs of its truth were not extant![23]

It is this kind of "character" that the Orfeo-poet uses to define his hero. The essence of Orfeo's recovery is that it is contrary to nature. But unlike Map Sir Orfeo regards this unnaturalness as commendable, commendable because it enables the reinforcement of an "order", political and social, that sees the supernatural as antithetical to any sort of harmony in life. Orfeo's unnaturalness imposes a less permanent solution, but it does so simply because he conceives of his loss and recovery in terms of an inevitably transient order. Its very unnaturalness both in Map and in Orfeo lies in the attempt to deflect a combination of time and the supernatural by an effort of will. And inevitably for all Orfeo's greater worldly meritoriousness, he cannot enjoy the same degree of permanence as Launfal. Both Map and the Orfeo poet leave the conclusion fairly open-ended; neither specifically mentions the fact of final death - but in both versions it remains clearly implicit.

But significantly in Orfeo there is one reaction to loss that does not appear subject to time in the same way as Orfeo's. I have already suggested how the court's reaction to

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[23] Walter Map, De Nugis Curialum, trans. F. Tupper and M. D. Ogle (London, 1924), p. 218; cf. also p. 97.

Orfeo's "death" implies a reflection of his own stoic constancy - they do not forget their love for him just as he does not forget his love for Heurodis. But their reaction remains in some ways startling. The steward's grief for instance:

> Allas! wreche, what schal y do
> þat haue swiche a lord y-lore?
> A, way! þat ich was y-bore,
> þat him was so hard grace y-yarked,
> and so vile deþ y-marked! (544-548)

It is startling for several reasons; his response seems to parallel Orfeo's first response to loss - there is the same helpless abandonment to emotion in the face of a seemingly irresolvable situation:

> When King Orfeo herd þis cas,
> 'O, we!' quaþ he, 'Allas! Allas!
> Lever me were to lete mi liif
> þan þus to lese þe quen mi wiif!'
> He asked conseyl at ich a man,
> Ac no man him help no can. (175-180)

But in the case of the steward there is an obvious distinction. Grief has become transferred from a courtly relationship, based upon heterosexual love, to a vassal lord relationship that would seem to owe more to earlier Germanic traditions[24] than those of the Breton lai. And if the lords can offer Orfeo no advice they seem to find less difficulty with the (admittedly less supernatural) problems of the steward:

> His barouns him tok vp in þat stounde
> and telleþ him hou it geþ
> - "It nis no bot of mannes deþ." (550-552)

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[24] Cf. for instance The Wanderer, lines 37-44.

I have already attempted to show how this is at odds with the narrative movement of the poem. Nor is there any precedent for it in the stock interpretation of the Orpheus story. Boethius implies a kind of moral affirmation that has no parallel in the court's advice:

> This fable applies to all of you who seek to raise your sovereign day. For whoever is conquered and turns his eyes to the pit of hell, looking into the inferno, loses all the excellence he has gained.[25]

The dialogue between the barons and the steward represents a negation of the hope of consolation; physical loss does not become a means of moral testing in the way Boethius suggests. In Sir Orfeo any moral process is short-circuited at this point by the willingness to accept loss without questioning.

The dialogue is integrated into the poem by its irony. The ease with which Orfeo's court succumbs to a realization of the physical inevitability of death when it is not in fact inevitable, contrasts with Orfeo's reluctance to accept the apparently insoluble supernatural problem of Heurodis' loss. The court's resignation before Orfeo's apparent loss, their doctrinaire stoic acceptance becomes dramatically relevant through Orfeo himself and his ability to overcome all forms of material loss. The nature of this dramatic relevance has been summed up as

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[25] Boethius op. cit., poem 12, Book III.

"an effect comprising a compact and necessarily logical sequence expressed in symbols"[26]. In this symbolic sequence the court becomes the antithesis of faith, the kind of acceptance the poem works towards refuting.

Sir Orfeo is not a "consolation" poem. The quest for consolation is conducted on a narrative and symbolic level; it aims not at the resolution of an interior spiritual conflict but at the avoidance of a moral dictum - Orfeo does "turn his eyes to the pit" but has the actual talent to contrive a happy ending. The constancy of his emotion (after his initial reaction) prevents the poem from accepting, except ironically, the spirit of the court. Yet the poem explores at different levels problems that do relate it to the consolation poems I wish to discuss later. Its suspense is narrative rather than dialectical, functioning through a fundamental incomprehension on the part of subordinates rather than of a central character, the central character alone being physically capable of surmounting the loss the poem presents. The two facts of a central reaction to loss and of a doctrinal or explicitly formulated attitude of consolation do not complement each other here. Here the pseudo-consolation (the court's) is diametrically opposed to Orfeo's physical indomitability.

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[26] D. M. Hill, "The Structure of Sir Orfeo", Medieval Studies, XXIII (1961), 140.

All the same it is an important poem in relation to consolation. It might have been such a poem if the court's experience had been validated, for it does explore a fundamental dichotomy common to all the poems I will discuss later, a dichotomy based on a desire to surmount the physical facts of loss by finding some viable means of acceptance of loss. This is the difference I have attempted to show working within Sir Orfeo where the experience of loss is not finally accepted by the figure who needs it most. Consolation therefore obviously does not become necessary; there is no need for it when the fact of loss is denied.[27] In the later poems I will be discussing consolation is no longer a process of literal restoration but

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[27] J. B. Severs op. cit., p. 207, notes a propos Orfeo: "...the abandonment of all society and therefore of the kingdom is entirely an unreasoning expression of unbounded grief and overwhelming anguish of spirit. Orfeo does not try to seek Heurodis out. He has no plan. He is not going anywhere. He is finally spurred into action only by the accidental sight of Heurodis among the crowd of ladies: then and not till then, does he have any incentive to win her back."
It seems necessary to be clear on what this important observation means in relation to my interpretation of the poem. For instance Orfeo's sorrow never has the same total abandonment of responsibility as Launfal's, in spite of the greater control over his fate available to the latter. Orfeo resigns his position specifically because he is no longer able to rule because of his loss (cf. 209-210). Similarly it is the recognition of "mii wiif" that precipitates the process of recovery. Throughout Orfeo's sense of social responsibility remains an effective control over his actions. At no point does loss mean what it does for Launfal - an inability to decide where his responsibilities lie.

of learning to endure more comprehendingly - it is the effort of comprehension that distinguishes these poems from Sir Orfeo.

II

As I have said, the two poems form an interesting contrast. On the one hand there is Launfal depicted as inadequate in worldly terms. On the other, Orfeo the figure who even in grief still is aware of and capable of fulfilling his responsibilities to those who depend upon him. The different consolations afforded to each serve to clarify their respective positions within their patterns. The distinction is not so much between different types of consolation as between obverse aspects of the same type. Both Launfal and Orfeo are specifically secular figures living within a doctrinal frame of reference that is at best rudimentary. Their consolation can only come in terms of re-defining a world that has previously been mutable. Launfal acquires a permanent function in an idealized context; Orfeo re-establishes the status quo. The standards in both are different - in Orfeo an almost bourgeois uxoriousness coupled with a political concern; in Launfal the creation of a set of circumstances specifically for an individual where knightly values can be practised. In both cases the needs of society seem most adequately served by the dénouements, and appear to be a primary desideratum of the movement to recovery. In the poems I shall be discussing next loss cannot be resolved

within such socially conscious formulations. Yet in Sir Orfeo there seems to be a groping towards a different kind of attitude, a more physically passive attitude to loss.

CHAPTER III

PEARL

In Sir Orfeo the vision of the other world embodies a negation of life; the idea of sleep and the portrayal of the court of Orcus combine to form a vision of death's kingdom. In Pearl the other world and the Maiden within it contain the poem's most potent assertion. I must follow this by saying I have no wish to become involved in any discussion of the poem as either allegory or elegy with the ensuing controversy over the poem's central symbol. I remain uncertain on what level to approach the Pearl, whether as literal or allegorical, whether as intended to be a symbol of virginity or as Robertson suggests of the whole Celestial City.[1] There seems little doubt that the use of such a symbol would have more than one possible interpreta-

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[1] See D. W. Robertson, "The Pearl as Symbol", MLN, LXV (1950), 159-160.

tion for a fourteenth century audience.[2]

All this adds to the difficulties of a coherent explanation of the poem in terms of its central symbol. I have no wish to become involved in the problem of the meaning of virgins and virginity in the poem - though I would not deny their importance in any comprehensive account of the poem. I would only suggest that the pearl can become a consistent symbol of consolation if the poem is approached from another direction, through the dreamer's urgent need for consolation.

I claim no originality for this suggestion. Charles Moorman in a thoughtful article was among the first to suggest that

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[2] The likelihood is of course that the symbol was intended in a primarily religious/allegorical sense. C. A. Luttrell, "The Medieval Tradition of the Pearl Virginity", Medium Aevum, XXXI (1962) 194-200, who illustrates the use of the pearl as homiletic symbol for virginity derived from Matthew 13:45-46. Sister Mary Madaleva in her "Pearl A Study in Spiritual Dryness" (London and New York, 1925) argues that the pearl cannot refer to a literal virginity. Nevertheless one feels some accord with W. C. Schofield's moderate observation that "... a learned man of the fourteenth century was so used to interpretations of the pearl that the word could hardly be mentioned without a great many rising to his mind instantly.. " ,in his "Symbolism, Allegory, and Autobiography in the Pearl", PMLA, XXIV (1909), 639.

> the quickest way to come to the heart of the poem would be to waive aside all questions of allegory and symbolism and to concentrate not upon the figure of the girl but upon that of the narrator ... we accompany the 'I' of the poem through his vision, and it is through his eyes that we see the magical landscapes and the girl. In the terms of Henry James the narrator is the 'central intelligence' of the poem ... [3]

The reaction against current critical approaches is extreme, so extreme as not to be valid in detail. It relates the poem to an ahistorical tradition of "fiction" that conflicts in many respects with the concept of the poem as a consolatio. It is to see the progress of the poem as entirely subjective, the Dreamer interpreting for himself what is happening to him. It is an extreme overstatement of Sister Madaleva's view of the poem as a "study in spiritual dryness"[4] - only there the focus on the dreamer's condition was made only to show the excellence of his antithesis in the Pearl Maiden. Spearing, in what seems to be one of the more searching appraisals of the poem, provides an important corrective to this sort of judgement:

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[3] C. Moorman, "The Role of the Narrator in Pearl", MP, LIII (1955-56), 73.

[4] Cf. Madaleva, op. cit., 22 "I propose ... to interpret the poem as a purely subjective study in spiritual dryness ..."

> The pearl symbol is not static but dynamic: it develops in meaning as the poem extends itself in time, and this development in meaning is co-ordinated with the developing human drama of the relationship between the Dreamer and the Maiden. The whole force and poignancy of the poem derives from its basic structure as an encounter involving human relationship ... [5]

I will attempt to show why I consider this a more satisfactory emphasis - even though I reach conclusions somewhat opposed to Spearing's. Apart from my already stated unwillingness to discuss the pearl's symbolic values, any approach based upon relationship, particularly a relationship for the Dreamer's ultimate edification, runs the obvious risk of falling into a kind of naturalistic fallacy, centering too much on the relationship as relationship, rather than on the values as consolation the possibility of relationship embodies. The necessarily ephemeral encounter within the dream vision finds its prospect of fulfilment not in a direct relationship between Dreamer and Maiden, but in the vision of the hundred and fourty four thousand virgins - at the simplest level, the corporate life of the New Jerusalum.

To defend these contentions it is perhaps best to look at certain cruces in the Dreamer's progress towards consolation.

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[5] A. C. Spearing, "Symbolism and Dramatic Development in Pearl", MP, LX (1961-62), 3.

The whole poem revolves round the antithesis that

> In blysse I see the blythely blent,
> And I a man al mornyf mate; (385-386)[6]

an antithesis based on the seemingly unbridgeable gulf existing between Dreamer and Maiden. The first two stanzas explore this gulf as it exists in the Dreamer's own mind in a way that shows the incompleteness of his awareness of the precise nature of his loss. His reaction to the gardens of his waking and dreaming consciousness is conditioned by this sense of loss,

> That spot of spyses mot nedes sprede,
> Ther such ryches to rot is runne:
> Blomes blayke and blwe and rede
> Ther schynes ful schyr agayn the sunne.
> Flor and fryte may not be fede
> Ther hit doun drof in moldes dunne; (25-30)

Within his waking garden he associated his pearl with a fructifying immortality that "may not be fede", the belief that

> For uch gresse mot grow of graynes dede - (31)

The human condition is seen as analogous with the natural world; solace is to be found within the earthly world by reproducing through a literal fertility what has been lost. The opening stanza contains suggestions of natural growth as the only possible solace, a solace on earth. The Dreamer sees his solace in terms of his own grief and accords therefore a disproportionate weight to earthly permanence. The maiden exposes the doctrinal fallacy

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[6] All references to Pearl and Sir Gawain and the Green Knight are from A. C. Cawley's edition (London, 1962).

in his consolation when she states in Stanza V:

> For that thou lestes was bot a rose
> That flowred and fayled as kynde hyt gef. (269-270)

She sees his "loss" in terms of the ephemerality of the natural world. As a sentiment it compares with the reaction to the changing seasons in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight: "Then al rypes and rotes that rose upon fyrst." (528) Such is the inevitable course of natural worldly life; the point in Sir Gawain is that the only one who does not change with the passage of this natural time is the supernatural Green Knight. So in Pearl the supernatural protagonist, the Maiden, is excluded by definition from the natural cycle which is the Dreamer's only concept of permanence. The initial step in his "re-education" has to come by his transference to a milieu where these principles of cyclical fertility do not apply.

Stanza 2 sets up the antithesis. Against the natural radiance of fertility of the opening lines

> Blomes blayke and blwe and rede
> Ther schynes ful schyr agayn the sunne. (27-28)

there is presented a world

> Where rych rokkes wer to dyscreven.
> The lyght of hem myght no man leven,
> The glemande glory that of hem glent; (68-70)

It is a world of reflected light[7], a world of brilliance where

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[7] For a comprehensive account of the imagery of Pearl see W. S. Johnson, "The Imagery and diction of the Pearl", ELH, XX (1953), 161-180, who sees a "direct and explicit contrast" between the images out of the world of growing things and the images of light.

the jewels that radiate this light reflect quite literally a deeper significance. The brightness of nature is seen as extinguished by this reflected light.[8] Similarly with the superseding of the natural comes a re-orienting of ethical priorities, external to the Dreamer and emphasized in his attitude to the physical aspects of this brilliant world. The jewels take on a new significance behind their splendour. The literal pearls he notes have a superabundance that points back to his own doting over the loss of a single one.[9] The catalogue of jewels (109-120) seems to embody an ironic comment on the Dreamer's powers of apprehension - as with the pearls he observes them accurately but without the capacity to relate them to his own condition. There is, for instance, a logical association between beryl, emerald and sapphire that relates significantly to the Dreamer's condition.[10] Beryl within this tradition nourishes love between man and woman,[11] emerald directs concern away from the body

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[8] Cf. ll. 81-84.

[9] Cf. ll. 81-82.

[10] See J. Evans and M. J. Serjeantson, English Medieval Lapidaries (E.E.T.S., O.S. 190), to which the following account is greatly indebted.

[11] Cf. Evans and Serjeantson, op. cit., 28, Bxii, "Berill norissheth loue betweene man and woman"; cf. also 40, Cxii; 72, Fxxv; 125, Gxvii.

towards the soul[12] and the sapphire is essentially remedial, releasing the body from imprisonment.[13] One perceives the progression from a concern for an earthly relationship to a renewed focussing on an inner state as a means to resolving the kind of imprisonment the Dreamer is suffering from. Yet this is what the Dreamer has so far shown himself incapable of doing.

The problem, then, is one (for the Dreamer) not so much of re-education as of re-orientation; of seeing his grief in terms other than those of his own loss. The Pearl Maiden extols the excellence of her present state in a way that makes his sorrow seem akin to covetousness:

> Sir, ye haf your tale mysetente,
> To saye your perle is al awaye,
> That is in cofer so comly clente
> As in this garden gracios gaye ... (257-260)

He does not perceive the different stages in their respective wyrde which he sees as something arbitrary, to be viewed in terms of his own peevish self-concern:

> What wyrde has hyder my juel vayned
> And don me in thys del and gret daunger (249-250)

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[12] Cf. Evans and Serjeantson, op. cit., 20, Biii, "þe more he shal loue his body in clennesse, and þe lesse whille to thenke on his solle, and to be of better berynge and to loue gode workys ..." Cf. also 40, Ciii; 85, Flxviii.

[13] Cf. ibid., 120, Gii "When a man holdeth the saphir he shall haue in thought and in hart ye bliss and ye lyknkng of hert." Cf. also 22, Bv; 101, Fcviii.

There is a fatalistic parallelism in his attitude that can admit of no possibility of development beyond their relationship at his moment of loss. His assertion that

> I trawed my perle don out of dawes.
> Now haf I fonde hyt, I schal me ma feste,
> And wony wyth hyt in schyr wod-schawes ... (282-284)

is an attempt to restore the status quo as it was when they were both alive and points to the crucial area of his spiritual ignorance. The maiden's rejoinder takes the form of a point by point refutation of his new plans (289-336) followed by an effort to restore the spiritual first principles he patently lacks:

> The oghte better thyselven blesse,
> And love ay God, in wele and wo ... (341-342)

and a few lines later:

> Stynt of thy strot and fyne to flyte,
> And seek hys blyhte ful swefte and swythe. (353-354)

Yet when he attempts to do what she says, what becomes apparent is the extent to which he is doing so not because of its intrinsic truth but because of what he still considers to be a direct relationship between them. As he says

> Rebuke me never wyth wordes felle,
> Thagh I forloyne, me dere endorde,
> Bot kythes me kyndely your coumforde,
> Pitosly thenkande upon thysse. (367-370)

The courtly mode of address points to his immediate concern; Christian doctrine is introduced almost as an afterthought in muted contrast:

> Bot Crystes mersy and Mary and Jon,
> Thise arn the grounde of alle my blisse (383-384)

As a statement it does not match one's experience of the Dreamer; he seems to move, not to a new acceptance of doctrine, but rather to an awareness that his earlier assumption - that their new meeting automatically restored him to his former position in their relationship - was incorrect; he has achieved a new acquiescence, but not a new understanding. That he still does not understand what her new status is and that it has destroyed his pre-eminence in their relationship, becomes apparent as he approaches the detailed doctrinal consolation.

There is, for example, a more tentative incredulity, a modified personal address, as he questions her about her new status. But it is still towards her that his attention is directed rather than the doctrine that she embodies - her, that is, as a material being seen in terms of what she was. Hence the incredulity:

> Art thou the quene of hevenes blwe,
> That al thys worlde schal do honour? (423-424)

he still cannot place her in a context, doctrinal or physical, where what she says becomes really meaningful. His reaction to the parable of the vineyard seems indicative. The Dreamer postulates an argument for a strict correspondence between earthly works and heavenly rewards:

Thenne the lasse in werke to take more able,
And ever the lenger the lasse, the more, (599-600)[14]

Inevitably his worldly orientation leads him into heresy. Robertson's contention that "the interpretation and use of the parable of the Vineyard in the Pearl are consistent with medieval exegetical tradition"[15] seems to miss the point by placing the heresy within the exposition within the Maiden's exposition rather than in the Dreamer's legalistic response. As Kaske has pointed out, the Dreamer seems to be presenting an Old Testament response; he is a man without the revelatory vision the Maiden has perceived, earthbound in his doctrine as in his attitudes to the physical world. It is interesting to compare the Dreamer's attitude to this parable with that in Harley Lyric 10, "The Labourers in the Vineyard".[16] In this poem there is a direct awareness of the moral and doctrinal significance of this parable:

This world me wurcheþ wo;
rooles ase þe roo,
y sike for vnsete,
ant mourne ase men doþ mo
for doute of foule fo,
hou y my sunne may bete. (49-54)

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[14] Cf. R. E. Kaske, "Two Cruxes in Pearl: 596 and 609-610", Traditio, XV (1959), 418-428.

[15] D. W. Robertson, "The Heresy of the Pearl", MLN, LXV (1950) 155.

[16] G. L. Brook, ed., The Harley Lyrics (Manchester, 1948), pp. 42-43.

a willingness to relate to a personal predicament because of involvement in the world that re-affirms an aspect of the Dreamer's fault that the Maiden does not labour. He still sees doctrine as unrelated to his personal problem - this seems to be his sin in the Maiden's eyes. Hence against a literalness of outlook that cannot see a parable as possessing any immediate relevance, she sets an affirmation of grace as the hope of redemption:

> Grace innogh the man may have
> That synnes thenne new, yif him repente,
> Bot with sorw and syt he mot his crave,
> And byde the payne therto is bent.
> Bot resoun, of ryght that con noght rave,
> Saves evermore the innosent; (661-666)

There seems to be an analogy with Dante's Vita Nuova. There he speaks in a similar position to the Dreamer's of his thoughts as divided into two camps - "one of these is called the heart or appetite, and the other the soul or reason ..."[17] The Maiden's words dispel the antithesis. Reason - the Maiden's words - is seen as governing appetite - the Dreamer's sense of loss - to redeem those who are ultimately "innosent". The means for this redemption is grace, based on God's "fraunchyse" (609) that comes from baptism (653). The parable of the Pearl from Mattew enforces the point (721-744). Her conclusion follows as an

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[17] Dante, The New Life, trans. W. Anderson (Harmondsworth, 1965), p. 103.

affirmation of man's hope of redemption through the Atonement:

> I rede the forsake the worlde wode
> And porchace thy perle maskelles. (743-744)

As a consolation it has doctrinal validity without any indication of personal efficacy. The Dreamer's process of consolation seems to be obstructed by a series of progressive intellectual retrenchments. The problem of status within the New Jerusalem is clarified, (I advisedly do not say resolved because there is no evidence that it is within the Dreamer's mind), only to be replaced by a consideration of role:

> Breve me, bryght, quat kyn offys
> Beres the perle so maskelles? (755-756)

This provokes the long description of the New Jerusalem and the Maiden's place among the "hondred and forth fowre thowsande flot" (786). The irony of this description comes in the Dreamer's first words for a hundred and twenty lines,

> I am but mokke and mul among,
> And thou so ryche a reken rose,
> And bydes here by thys blysful bonc
> Ther lyves lyste may never lose. (905-908)

The Dreamer is still looking for the kind of consolation the Maiden has been attempting to show he cannot obtain, an immediate solace of relationship transcending the dichotomy between their respective states, based as well on an unreal awareness of their respective states that still sees no hope of progression beyond the fact of physical loss. He still believes in his worldly maturity as having a greater validity than her doctrinal exposition:

I se no bygyng nawhere aboute.
I trowe alone ye lenge and loute
To loke on the glory of thys gracious gote. (932-934)

In his belief in the validity of the material the Dreamer's basic position has not changed throughout the poem. The nearest Biblical parallel that comes to mind is John 21, 24-29 : "Because thou hast seen me thou has believed. Blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed." It is when faced with the actual New Jerusalem, the vision of the ultimate rewards of grace, that the Dreamer comes closest to consolation. Jerusalem itself becomes a key word, a city reflecting both an heavenly and an earthly mode of existence[18] possessing both a physical and a metaphorical level of meaning that are finally coalesced in his vision. Thus there is an intentional irony when the Dreamer assured his audience that :

Hade bodyly burne abiden that bone,
Thagh alle clerkes hym hade incure,
His lyf were loste anunder mone (1090-1092)

like the Biblical Thomas he has been presented with the literal resolution of his difficulties. The doctrinal climax of the poem is his vision of the Maiden within the New Jerusalem (1093-1152). The irony I spoke of seems to lie in the Dreamer's having come to realize the insupportability of such "bodyly burne" within a "spiritual" environment. Nevertheless he attempts to impose

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[18] Cf. A. R. Heiserman, "The Plot of Pearl", P.M.L.A., LXXX (1965), 10.

his physical presence into this milieu in a manner that implicitly questions the doctrinal climax.

For the literal proof of the Maiden's words is only the prelude to the dramatic resolution of the poem. The problem is of course obvious; what is one to make of the "luf-longyng in gret delyt" (1152) that prompts the Dreamer to wade the stream. A contrast with Abelard's view of the New Jerusalem provides a possible source of illumination:

> Vera Jerusalem
> est illa civitas
> cuius pax iugis est
> summa iucunditas:
> ubi non praevenit
> rem desiderium
> nec desiderio
> minus est praemium.[19]

The last two lines seem to be important - "Nor is the heart's possessing/Less than the heart's desire" (Waddell). In the Dreamer's case the heart's possessing is less than the heart's desire, as he himself is forced to recognize:

> Bot ay wolde man of happe more hente
> Then moghte by ryght upon hem clyven. (1195-1196)

The Dreamer waking in Pearl does not find eternal bliss, only a recognition of a dichotomy between what he desires and what he in fact experiences. This is the essence of his "consolation" -

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[19] Helen Waddell, Medieval Latin Lyrics, (Harmondsworth, 1962) from Sabbato ad Vesperas, 174. The poem is particularly interesting in the way it relates the two ideas of a dreamer and the New Jerusalem - though in a more straightforwardly devotional way than Pearl.

the knowledge of the "vera Jerusalem" Abelard speaks of, and a willingness to obey the Maiden's exhortation and say:

Now al be to that Prynces paye (1176)

But within that abidcation of will he is permitted the prayer of the final lines

He gef us to be his homly hyne
And precious perles unto his pay. (1211-1212)

Ultimately his solace rests on his ability to reconcile both his losses, the initial one of death and the loss of the Jerusalem of his dream, with the hope that motivates Abelard's lyric, hope of the eventual possibility of permanent bliss. Doctrinal hope comes only with the renewed awareness of physical loss - the Dreamer does not finally <u>believe</u> until he has lost all hope of the kind of physical relationship he seems to desire. Only then is he able to connect the doctrine he has dreamt with what he has dreamt he has almost acquired. Only then does consolation become meaningful for him in terms of what he is, in terms of his necessary ephemerality as a human being. As in <u>Sir Gawain</u> the protagonist moves between two worlds; in neither of them is he fully aware of their complexities of meaning until events have completed themselves in a pattern that is determined by his own ignorance, an ignorance that is shown to be the mark of a specifically human condition. As with Gawain the Dreamer only belatedly grasps the point of his supernatural translation. Chastened he has learned the inexorable lesson of man's efforts to subdue the supernatural by his own unaided endeavours.

Pearl then rejects the Dreamer's efforts at an intrinsic relationship; ultimately doctrine is the only means to a vision beyond relationship. Attempts to assert social premises in outmoded contexts produce only a statement of a more immediate religious "reality"; a statement the Dreamer unwittingly proves. In his wading the stream he becomes "like" the Breton lai heroes in endeavouring to implement a transient vision within the terms of the world. The problem of consolation becomes primarily one of contexts - the dreamer sees the Pearl literally when as far as she is concerned she is allegorical (cf. 301-302). But the endeavour cannot as with Launfal or Orfeo be assessed in terms of its worldly success. What matters here is not the most feasible social resolution, however unmerited by the protagonists' merits; here the individual is appraised against a clearly enunciated body of doctrine; his inability to find an intrinsic solace because of his desire for social intercourse gives an important and ironic aspect to this pattern. The unfeasibility of relationship also exposes the unfeasibility of doctrine. Neither can offer adequate consolation. The loss of the hope of renewal makes the acceptance of doctrinal hope more ironic. The irony in the Dreamer's position looks forward to the Chaucerian dream-visions. There as well there can be no immediate consolation for the dreamer. The hope of consolation however is less easily defined - indeed the whole question of the need for consolation becomes important for the first time (after The

Book of the Duchess particularly). My final concern will be to show the completion of the pattern. The movement begun in Pearl where the Dreamer is consoled ex necessitate becomes in these poems a grief that doctrinal forms are no longer capable of satisfying. What remains is to see the alternative patterns that present themselves.

CHAPTER IV

THE BOOK OF THE DUCHESS

In Pearl there is an ordered body of correct doctrine against which the Dreamer's physical loss is evaluated. In The Book of the Duchess consolation is derived in a more complex way. For between the Dreamer and the fact of loss is placed a reporter of this fact - the Black Knight; and impinging on this central grief is the fact of the Dreamer's own sorrow. The process of consolation entails a more detailed comprehension of the nature of loss because of the obstructions between the Dreamer and the grief he is confronted with. Thus it seems necessary initially to establish the Dreamer's own attitude to sorrow. For it becomes clear that any positive pattern of consolation within the poem can only be extrapolated through the Dreamer's given preconceptions and predispositions concerning sorrow.

He is portrayed initially as living "agaynes kynde":

> Al is ylyche good to me -
> Joye or sorwe, wherso hyt be -
> For I have felynge in nothynge ... (9-11)[1]

The effect of this has been the loss of all "quyknesse" and

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[1] F. N. Robinson, ed., The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer (London, 1957). All references to Chaucer will be from this edition, henceforward cited as Chaucer, Works.

"lustyhede";

> but trewely, as I gesse,
> I holde hit to be a sicknesse
> That I have suffred this eight year,
> And yet my boote is never the ner;
> For there is phisicien but oon
> That may me hele ... (35-40)

The problem is the interpretation of the "phisicien". Robertson and Huppé discuss the problem thus:

> On the one hand, the image of the lady as the only physician to her lover's discomfort is traditional. On the other hand, the image of Christ the Physician represents an even earlier and more pervasive tradition. A similar ambiguous clue is afforded by the eight years' malady, which may simply indicate the extent of the lover's suffering, or with reference to the Physician Christ, it may be a specific reflection of an eight years' malady found in the New Testament, that of Aeneas in the Acts of the Apostles.[2]

As a piece of explication this seems somewhat tortuous. There is little in the context to validate an interpretation that relates the poem to a minor New Testament figure - an interpretation resting on a ninth century gloss, for which he cites no parallel literary use. Moreover, it ignores the rather more enigmatic lines that follow:

> That wil not be mot nede be left;
> Our first mater is good to kepe. (41-42)

The first line seems to imply a quite specific movement away from the hypothetical "phisicien", a movement hardly consonant

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[2] B. F. Huppé and D. W. Robertson, Fruyt and Chaf: Studies in Chaucer's Allegories (Princeton, 1962), p. 33.

with any doctrinal affinities - unless one is prepared to accept the possibility of heresy in an occasional poem - for here he is talking about a specific non-existence. The other problem that follows from this is what is the "good" the Dreamer speaks of? Robinson glosses the word as having specific associations with benefit generally in a material sense,[3] and in view of his disturbed state and his next action, to reach for a book to "drive the night away" (49), it seems that the phisicien admits of a less exegetical explanation than Robertson and Huppé allow. The Dreamer's loss seems to be the typical grief of the Chaucerian courtly lover[4] seeking his solace within a specifically worldly context. He sends not for a Bible but for a "romaunce" (48) as an alternative to either "ches or tables" (51). What I think is emphasized is that the Dreamer cannot think of his predicament in other than worldly terms. It is perhaps necessary to distinguish as Chaucer himself seems to between courtly and doctrinal responses to his need for the solace of sleep. After telling the Ceyx/Alcyone story he echoes his earlier statement:

> For I had never herd speke or tho,
> Of noo goddes that koude make
> Men to slepe, ne for to wake;
> For I ne knew god but oon. (234-237)

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[3] Chaucer, Works, 953. "Good" sbst. property, wealth, goods; benefit, advantage.

[4] Cf. Knights Tale, Chaucer, Works, 30, ll, 1359ff; Troilus and Criseydd, ibid., 394, ll. 484ff.

He distinguishes between the power of the story to help him sleep and the power of the supernatural protagonists within the story. He also distinguishes quite explicitly between his phisicien and his God. The two sets of facts seem related in their importance. His God cannot help him to sleep; the only "boote" (38) is the physician whose physical presence he lacks. The fact that he prays to pagan gods in jest but with an awareness that it is wrong to do so

> in my game I saide anoon -
> And me lyste ryght evel to pleye - (238-239)

seems to suggest that the Dreamer has set up a false connection between his suffering and his solace. He sees the resolution of his grief in extra-religious terms; doctrine lacks efficacy; he wants a physician but not a Christian one.

His use of the Ceyx/Alcyone story serves to illustrate this. The emphasis of the original story is changed to reflect the Dreamer's concerns. The original source of this story[5] concentrates primarily upon Cey's death[6] and the actual process of consolation[7]. Chaucer however seems to concentrate on the details of this process of consolation[8] and upon Alcyone's

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[5] Ovid, Metamorphoses XI, 410 ff. All references to this version come from the Loeb Edition of the Metamorphoses, Vol. II (London and New York, 1922).

[6] Meta. XI, 474-572.

[7] Ibid., 583-655.

[8] Chaucer, Works, pp. 268-269, ll. 129-216.

reactions. On the other hand he interpolates to the extent of encouraging Alcyone to die at Ceys' exhortation[9] and omits the conclusion of the Ovid version with its hope of some solace beyond death.[10] In short Chaucer concentrates upon the more "pessimistic" aspects of his source. The irony of the process of consolation is that it contains no hope. Even the world of Morpheus is more akin to the faery world of Sir Orfeo in its portrayal of life as purposeless negation[11] - and contrasts with the Dreamer's own state where his "ydel thoght" (4) keeps him awake. The Dreamer emphasizes the other world to make it as negative and futile as his own waking state. In this light his references to "No God but oon" become more revealing about his own state. He is occupied with earthly loss and yet overlooks the obvious means of transcending such loss - through the hope of another world or of another life beyond the present. This is to some extent borne out by a comparison with another roughly contemporary account of the Ceys/Alcyone story, in Gower's Confessio Amantis.[12] He gives greater suspense to his

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[9] Ibid., 201 ff.

[10] Meta. XI, 731 ff.

[11] Cf. Chaucer Works, 269, ll. 170-177, and Sir Orfeo 387-404.

[12] As quoted in Fourteenth Century Verse and Prose, ed. K. Sisam (Oxford, 1959), pp. 131-137. Henceforwarded cited as Gower.

story by omitting any account of Ceys' death until Alcyones' vision.[13] Otherwise he follows quite strictly the Ovidian outline, including the conclusion of the story.[14] Like Ovid he emphasizes Morpheus' domain as a place of inactivity[15] without emphasizing the idleness in the way Chaucer does. Such are the main differences. The Dreamer sees no hope beyond the dream world - his story stops with death, the process of revelation brings nothing beyond confirmation of loss. It offers an escape but by its very nature an ephemeral one confirming and heightening a loss he is already aware of.

Thus before he begins to importune the god of sleep the Dreamer has indicated he desires the forgetfulness of idleness. There is no positive pattern of consolation to be discerned - the Ceyx-Alcyone story is simply a parallel of his own. He has no interest as a morally significant story as the highly selective manner of his recounting and his frivolous offer to Morpheus indicates. He remains self-centred in his grief, unmoved by the account of another's loss or willing to even see the parallels in their situation.

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[13] Gower, 130 ff.

[14] Gower, 169 ff.

[15] Ibid., 77 ff.

His awakening into the dream world changes all this. In contrast to his earlier lassitude he seems to possess a heightened degree of sensory awareness:

> Blwe, bryght, clere was the ayr,
> And ful attempre for sothe hut was;
> For nother to cold nor hoot hyt nas,
> Ne in al the welken was no clowds. (340-343)

There is a degree of precision in the Dreamer's sensibilities that reflects the vitality of his new milieu. It is a world of joy where the fact of awareness overcomes its darker, worldly implications:

> And sooth to seyn, my chambre was
> Ful wel depeynted, and with glas
> Were al the wyndowes wel yglased ...
> That to behold hyt was gret joye.
> For holly al the story of Troye
> Was in the glasynge ywoght thus ... (321-327)

The tragedy of Troy becomes forgotten in the beauty of its representation. There seems to be a movement to a greater aesthetic detachment that contrasts with his earlier emotional interest in the Ceyx/Alcyone story.

And there is activity to contrast with his earlier idleness. The Dreamer for the first time finds himself involved in a search for rather than an escape from something:

> whan I herde that,
> How that they wolde on-huntynge goon,
> I was ryght glad, and up anoon
> Took my hors, and forth I wente
> Out of my chambre ... (354-358)

I would willingly beg the question of what he seeks. One feels a definite sympathy with Robertson and Huppé's attempt to find

an allegorical double entendre on "hert" that can relate it to Christ the hunter.[16] One is willing to believe that such seemingly inconsequential details as "Octivyen" (368) do have an ulterior significance.[17] And I have no refutation to offer. What I would submit however is that at the simplest level it seems clear that the failure to catch the hert (383-384) reflects in a significant way on the Dreamer's changed attitude.

The mere fact of search is of course important. Less so seems to be the fact that he does not find the literal "hert" he has been searching for. What he does seem to come upon seems to be a kind of natural antithesis to the world of Morpheus - that is, the world the Dreamer desired to inhabit when awake:

> Ther never yet grew corn ne gras,
> Ne tre, ne (nothing) that ought was ... (157-158)

Within the Dreamer's own dream world it is

> Ful thikke of gras, ful softe and swete
> With floures fele, faire under fete ... (399-400)

And if the landscape is in contrast to the one he evoked earlier, the Man in Black contrasts with the Dreamer as he is now. He sounds quite literally a discordant note within the harmony of the Dreamer's world[18]:

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[16] Robertson and Huppé, op. cit., pp. 49 ff.

[17] Ibid., pp. 48-49.

[18] Chaucer, Works, p. 270, ll. 312-316.

He sayd a lay, a maner song,
Without noote, withoute song ... (471-472)

and in contrast with the Dreamer's new found purposefulness which remains unclearly motivated on a literal or psychological level, he offers an image of his former inactivity.

The idea of the Black Knight as a surrogate for the Dreamer is not a new one[19] and I have no wish to discuss the argument once more in detail. I have noted various parallels between the two, and I will note more. What I am more concerned with is the positive pattern of consolation embodied in the Dreamer's response to the various problems posed by the Black Knight. The relationship between the Dreamer and the Black Knight is the first step beyond the self-concern that has so far predominated.[20] The nature of the loss is unequivocally defined in a situation that inverts that of Ceys/Alcyone:

Allas, deth, what ayleth the,
That thou noldest have taken me
Whan thou take my lady swete,
That was so fair, so fresh, so fre,
So good, that men may wel se
Of al goodnesse she had no mete! (481-486)

The statement is revealing as a further step towards consolation. Death is wished for because certain quite explicitly stated

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[19] Cf. B. H. Bronson, "The Book of the Duchess Re-Opened", PMLA, LXVII (1952), 863-881. J. Lawlor, "The Pattern of Consolation in The Book of the Duchess", Speculum, XXXI (1956), 626-648. Robertson and Huppé, op. cit., p. 55.

[20] Chaucer, Works, p. 271, ll. 466-469.

positives no longer exist, because of a concern for a relationship. In relation to the Dreamer this seems to make him not so much a surrogate as an ironic counterpoint to the Black Knight's grief. The negations that make up the lassitude of unfulfilment of his own sorrow contrive to give a degree of positive assertion to the Black Knight.

He has for instance the power to stimulate a response to grief. In contrast to the morose self-interest of the Dreamer who has not lost enough to desire more than the idleness of sleep within a sterile world, the Black Knight gains distinction. He has an explicit awareness of what his loss has entailed. Like Alcyone he desires to die because he knows the extent and permanence of his loss in death. He exposes a distinction between his grief and that of the Dreamer based on the unequivocal fact of death and its presence within so beautiful a world.

This reflects the change of perspective within the poem. There is the initial contrast between the Dreamer's sleeping and waking states. And if the former state is more impressive than the latter the appearance of the Black Knight forces another re-appraisal of his stature. He has in effect already forgotten his own grief in the hunt, and he acquires a new function as the means of clarifying the nature of the Black Knight's grief which is, as I said, much clearer and more acute than his own, but of providing some means of consolation for this far greater sorrow.

The Dreamer, as he admits,[21] cannot understand this grief. But it seems important to distinguish between any suggestion of obtuseness on his part, and his desire for further information.[22] And he manages to invest this desire with a social practicality that robs it of any sense of vicarious and morbid self-involvement:

> For by my trouthe, to make yow hool,
> I woldo al my power hool.
> And telleth me of your sorwes smerte;
> Paraunter hyt may ese youre herte,
> That semeth ful seke under your syde.

As a positive desire it suggests a possible means of consolation. In practice though, it seems only to expose the madness of the sort of permanent solace the Black Knight desires.

> Be oure Lord, hyt ys to deye soone,
> For nothing I leve hyt noght,
> But lyve and deye ryght in this thoght. (690-692)

The linking of God with this particular relief seems curious especially as he shows no awareness of divine Fate, (in the Boethian sense), in his loss. Once more it is left to the Dreamer to make the positive doctrinal assertion. He blames "fals Fortune" (619) and likens himself to the futile labours of "Cesiphus" (589) and "Tantale" (709). Again it is the Dreamer who offers a doctrinal consolation that is valid in terms of his own experience of loss, but which reflects back ironically on his earlier grief.

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[21] Ibid., ll. 537-538.

[22] Cf. Lawlor, op. cit. - although he makes the distinction for rather different reasons.

But ther is no man alyve her
Wolde for a fers make this woo! (740-741)

And the Dreamer's newly discovered emotional rationality calls for some sort of rationalization from the Knight. Yet the irony remains acute. The Dreamer offers correct doctrine based on inexperience. Against his imposing list of those who have succumbed to the vacillations of Fortune[23] the only defence open to the Knight is to produce an assertion of the uniqueness of his loss. The outcome is the eulogy that contains the poem's solace - solace for both Dreamer and Knight. Both the knowledge of loss that considers it transcends doctrine, and the inexperience that there can be a final comfort, have their part to play.

For the Black Knight, comfort comes with the eulogy itself. He praises her physical perfection[24] and accomplishments. It is almost as an afterthought that a hundred and sixty five lines later he begins to speak of her virtues. She has previously been described in courtly terms, in terms of her social accomplishments where even her beauty was a means of determining her social superiority.[25] She becomes for him

My happe, my hele, and al my blisse,
My worldes welfare, and my goddesse (1039-1040)

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[23] Chaucer, Works, p. 274, ll. 725 ff.

[24] Ibid., p. 275, ll. 820 ff.

[25] Ibid., p. 275, ll. 848 ff.

This is the key to his grief, the classic fall in Chaucerian tragedy[26], through fixing one's eyes on what is by definition transitory, subject to Fortune's wheel.

This defines the consolation that is available to him. As Lawlor[27] points out, the climax to the Knight's story comes not with marriage - the sanctifying of relationship by doctrine, giving it a permanence beyond the physical - for marriage is not mentioned; it comes rather with acceptance within the courtly tradition. But it is a fairly ironic sort of acceptance based on a rejection of the best he can offer. Neither his songs nor his offers of love can win her affections. What finally secures him his goal is his constancy in her service:

> .... she wel understod
> That I ne wilned thyng but god,
> And worship, and to kepe hir name
> Over alle thyng, and drede shame
> And was so besy hyr to serve; (1261-1265)

Thus within the terms of his service the Black Knight remains subject to Fortune's wheel. This is his consolation: the fidelity of his service in grief, the dutiful constancy to her memory that is the most enduring comfort the terms of their relationship can offer. As a consolation it is related to Alcyone's desire for the image of her love. And like her desire

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[26] Cf. D. W. Robertson, "Chaucerian Tragedy", ELH, XIX (1952), 1-7.

[27] Lawlor, loc. cit.

it carries with it the hope of death as a means of release. It relates back to the Dreamer's initial hope of comfort in sleep - only the degree of suffering is heightened. Unrequited love can be solaced by the lethargy of sleep, so fulfilled love demands the more permanent solace of death.

But there is another comfort beyond the courtly. It lies in the Dreamer's refusal to let the fact of death become an end in itself.

> "She ys ded!" "Nay!" "Yis, be my trouthe!"
> "Is that youre los? Be God, hyt ys route!"
> And with that wotd ryght anoon
> They gan to strake forth; al was doon,
> For that tyme, the hert-huntyng. (1309-1313)

The consolation seems to lie in the understated response of the unsuccessful courtly lover, in the steadfastness of his refusal to be overly impressed by the Black Knight's loss. For him it remains "so queynt a sweven" (1330). There can be no escape from loss but it can become a productive form of grief in art.

> I wol, be processe of time,
> Fonde to put this swevene in ryme
> As I kan best ... (1331-1333)

beyond the sterility of lethargy. His own inability to share in the full meaning of the Black Knight's loss is offset by his capacity for turning this to his advantage in the eulogy to Blanche. Just as earlier in his dream he found solace in art and activity so now the two activities are linked in his poetic vision that transcends in time grief within the dream. If the Black Knight cannot transcend earthly grief, the means is open to the Dreamer as poet.

II

The Book of the Duchess then, sees the most enduring way of surmounting affliction and loss as the creative response of the artist. The House of Fame seems to be concerned with the implications of this resolution. It explores the problems facing the earthbound, oppressed artist and suggests a pattern of consolation subordinating all considerations to the fact of artistic creation. The movement of the poem is to suggest art as an end in itself divorced from the pressures the artist in his earthbound state sees as restricting, pressures of morality, intellect and the random processes of Fame herself. The crux of this process is of course the dream, literally liberating the aspiring artist for a narrative that has many of the characteristics of a jeu d'esprit. But within this context a fundamentally serious pattern is worked out, a pattern that enables one to view the poem as something more than a melange informed by no consistent precept,[28] as a poem of consistent artistry if not of finished art.

The poem opens on the problem of the artist when

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[28] The most telling stylistic criticism has come from Charles Muscatine in his Chaucer and the French Tradition (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1964), p. 108 - "Not for nothing did Manly call the House of Fame a prologue to a collection. Technically it is full of choice and widely prized accomplishments. Structurally, it is most charitably seen as an experiment, wherein the poet's energy and imatination by far outrun his sense of form." For further comment in the same vein see Ibid., pp. 107-115 passim.

confronted with the bare subject matter of art - his experience "God turne us every drem to goode!" (I). What is immediately clear is that this is no mere pious ejaculation, but a clear appeal based upon some sense of incapacity. He seems at least to have no sense of the artistic potentialities of what he has dreamt. It is certainly "so wonderful a drem" (62) but the terms he views it in are technical, not as artistically potential. The long account of the nature of dreams (1-52) serves by its laborious pedantry to define significantly the attitude of the waking Geffrey towards his experience. There is no way he can relate such experience to an ordered body of knowledge:

> But why the cause is, noght wot I
> Wel worthe of this thyng, gret clerkys,
> That trete of this and other werkes; (52-54)

The opening clinical attitude towards dreams is abandoned for a statement of incapacity, confirmed in the mode of presentation. The syntactic breathlessness[29] Muscatine notes extends the incapacity into the poem's artistry. The sheer undigested mass of material at Geffrey's disposal and its indiscrimate treatment - jumping from point to point through a recurrent conjunctive "or" seems to suggest a pattern of poetic ineptitude that limits Geffrey's response to experience. The need for consolation lies primarily in this presentation of an aspiring

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[29] Ibid., p. 108.

poet restricted in his attitude to art by his search for a causality external to it. His search for such an order ironically denigrates his efforts throughout the poem.

This becomes clearer with the invocation which pursues this rational connection between dream and art:

> Unto the god of slep anoon,
> That duelleth in a cave of stoon
> Upon a strem that cometh fro Lete, (69-71)

The source of this invocation[30] is common to Chaucer's other description of Lethe in the Book of the Duchess. There it represented all that was antithetical to creative activity. Here it is linked with a defensive attitude that will permit no "mysdemen" of his work; he links those who would do so with Croesus as deserving of this fate. But the use of the Croesus image cuts both ways, where does misinterpretation begin but with those who like Croesus are wilful and self-interested. So far Geffrey has spoken in tones of unambitious inadequacy. The contrast between this lack of stylistic compunction and the exegetical zeal he posits in his audience implies a defensiveness that evokes the most extreme emotional contrast to his own factualness. Moreover his attempt to defend himself through his prayer to "Jesus God" (97) reinforces the irony through the inept jingle "dreme he barefoot, dreme he shod"; the effort to

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[30] Ovid, Metamorphoses XI, 592 ff.

relate Christ to his own stylistic inadequacy produces only a parody of his own prayer.[31]

The story proper opens with an iterative emphasis on the facts of the case:

> Of Decembre the tenthe day,
> Whan hit was nyght, to slepe I lay
> Ryght ther as I was wont to done ... (111-113)

But once more he succeeds only in evoking the antithesis of his initial intention. The pedantic faithfulness he strives for finds itself invoking the most extreme types of unreasoning passion Venus, Cupid and Vulcan.[32] Yet this has found expression in art, in the "portreyture" that abounds in the temple. Similarly when he focuses his attention it is again on the unfaithfulness of Aeneas. And the contemplation of this infidelity in art rouses Geffrey to his first abdication of factual relevance for the similar "infidelity" he finds celebrated around about him.

It seems important to be clear on just what is unusual in Geffrey's description of the Aeneid. L. B. Hall[33] has shown that his handling of the over-all structure is strictly in accordance with medieval practice. And a consideration of one

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[31] For the suggestion that Chaucer is here parodying anathema see James A. Work, "Echoes of the Anathema in Chaucer", PMLA, XLVII (1932), 419-430.

[32] Cf. J. Seznec, The Survival of the Pagan Gods, p. 110.

[33] "Chaucer and the Dido-andAeneas Story", Medieval Studies, XXV (1963), 148-159.

of the stock sources of medieval exegesis, Boccaccio's De Genealogia Deorum, shows clearly that the need he feels "to excusen Eneas/Fullyche of al his grete trespas" was shared. Boccaccio interprets the morality of Aeneas' dilemma thus:

> So he represented in Dido the attracting power of the passion of love, prepared for every opportunity, and in Aeneas one who is readily disposed in that way and at length overcome. But after showing the enticements of lust, he points the way of return to virtue by bringing in Mercury, messenger of the gods, to rebuke Aeneas, and call him back from such indulgence to deeds of glory. By Mercury, Vergil means either remorse, or the reproof of some outspoken friend, either of which rouses us from slumber in the mire of turpitude, and calls us back into the fair and even path to glory. Thus we burst the bonds of unholy delight, and armed with new fortitude, we unfalteringly spurn all seductive flattery, and tears, prayers, and such, and abandon them as naught.[34]

On both the literal and moral levels the attitude is clearly defined in such a way that Aeneas weakness becomes ultimately virtue and Dido is symbolic of passion attempting to overcome duty. The moral norm seems clear to Geffrey. The problem is to establish the values that enable him to undertake a virtual inversion of this orthodox standpoint.

There seems little doubt where the weight of Geffrey's non-rational sympathies lies. He fills in the details in such

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[34] Translated in Boccaccio on Poetry, by C. G. Osgood (Indianapolis and New York, 1956), p. 69

a way as to throw the weight of his sympathy behind Dido to the extent that Aeneas is denied a word of direct speech. And he takes specific responsibility for this creation - "Non other auctour alegge I" (341). Under the stimulus of infidelity in art Geffrey finds himself exercising a similar function within his own material for art - his dream. R. J. A. Allen has noted perceptively that:

> Chaucer turned the conventional description of wall paintings into a complex device for enriching the dramatic effect of his story and thus shows the delight with which it entered his consciousness in his fictitious dream ... The dream has become an act of creation, playfully treated as if it were involuntary.[35]

But the fact of creativity does not explain the point of creativity. For Geffrey sees what he creates as rationally unsatisfactory by comparison with what he experiences. When in the temple he exclaims

> Yet sawgh I never such noblesse
> Of ymages, ne such richesse,
> As I saugh graven in this chirche; (471-473)

But as soon as he emerges into the harshness of the dessert he repudiates what he has just experienced:

> "O Crist!" thoughte I, "that art in blyss
> Fro fantome and illusion
> Me save!" (492-494)

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[35] R. J. Allen, "A Recurring Motif in Chaucer's House of Fame", JEGP, LV (1956), p. 397.

and repudiates it as insubstantial. It is a return to the factual fidelity of the opening lines. There it expressed itself in the pedantic disinteredness that knew no art. Now it is unwilling to recognize the implications of its own art. This act of pedantic piety becomes ironic both by its context and by what it invokes. For Geffrey has become a means of making his "chirche" less of a "fantome and illusion". Moreover his prayer is the prelude to an encounter that offers an empirical basis for assessing fame which is to be totally destroyed. The main problem of these later books is of providing a standard for Geffrey that enables him to turn his desire for a factual basis to his experience into a way of creating art. The movement from the opening, where this factual pious zeal defines the poet comically, to a situation at the end of I, where this attitude whilst existing is external to his artistic capabilities, is the beginning of the consolation that can turn incompetence into art.

The Eagle, like Geffrey places the weight of his authority on facts. Like him he purports to offer unaffected discourse, the stylistic exposition of knowledge in the most apposite manner:

> Without any subtilite
> Of speche, or gret prolixite
> Of terms or philosophie,
> Of figures of petrie,
> Or colours of rethorike? (855-859)

Criticism has exposed both the interior logic[36] and the stylistic inconsistency[37] of the eagle's claims. But the effect of such criticism has been to focus attention on the situational comedy in the relationship between the unlearned man in the admonitory grip of the erudite eagle. But this seems to be to fall into the trap of taking the eagle's exposition as intrinsically important. H. L. Levy suggests that:

> In the second book... Chaucer criticizes the medieval tendency to lend versimilitude to creations of fantasy by building them upon the foundations of contemporary science.[38]

This defines an attitude external to the relationship existing within the poem, without fully comprehending how the facts of the exposition combine with the situational satire to suggest a re-ordering of attitudes to art and fame. For the eagle is a creature of art, "of gold" (503). What it provides both in this role and as the emissary of fame is a response totally consistent with Geffrey's mundanity. There is, it appears, a distinct style to facts but it is a style that undercuts the whole authority of fame. For the logic the eagle expounds seems antithetical to the act of imaginative creation Geffrey undertakes in Book 1. The eagle seeks to subdue all

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[36] Cf. W. S. Wilson, "The Eagle's Speech in Chaucer's House of Fame", JEGP, LV (1956), 397.

[37] Cf. F. E. Teager, "Chaucer's Eagle and the Rhetorical Colours", PMLA, XLVII (1932), 410-418.

[38] H. L. Levy, "As Myn Auctour Seyth", Medium Aevum, XII (1943), 30.

imaginative activity. His opening injunction "Awak" threatens the whole edifice of the dream vision. It is the contrast between this physical authority and all it implies (i.e., a reduction of art and fame to extrinsic causality) and Geffrey's response to it that suggests the nature of his aesthetic consolation.

The eagles views on the relationship between art and imaginative faculties clarify the relationship Geffrey sees as substantiated in his dream:

> And than thoughte y on Marcian,
> And eke on Anteclaudian,
> That sooth was her descripsion
> Of all hevenes region,
> As fer as that y sey the preve;
> Therefore y kan hem now beleve.
> With that this egle gan to crye,
> 'Lat be' quod he, 'thy fantasye! (985-992)

It is Geffrey's most explicit consolation to date, his ability to use his own knowledge to endorse the imaginative flights of other artists. Here his bookish obduracy produces a paradoxical insistence upon imaginative assertion,

> 'No fors' quod y, 'hyt is no nede.'
> I leve as wel, so God me spede,
> Hem that write of this matere,
> As though I knew her places here ... (1011-1114)

It exposes the further comic paradox which has just been shattered of the over-verbose bird of art and the submissive poet limited to an assenting "Yis". Now for the first time the poet accepts and asserts his imaginative experience in a way that relates it to his waking knowledge. Consolation for Geffrey's comic

subjection and erudition comes as I said from turning these very qualities to effect within the dream. The authority of fame emerges as inimical to the artist. As with Dido, fame is a cause but not a consequence of activity. The consequence rests with the artist.

For the House of Fame reveals that Fame is not a fruitful concern of the artist. There is no rational basis to her dispensations; the manner of apportioning fame is beyond earthly comprehension:

> For thus y seye yow, trewely,
> What her cause was, y nyste.
> For of this folk ful wel y wiste,
> They hadde good fame ech deserved
> Although they were dyversly served;
> Ryght as her suster, Dame Fortune,
> Ys wont to serven in commune. (1542-1548)

The conjunction of ideas seems relevant to the artist's predicament. The whole consolation offered by the eagle's journey becomes ironic. His avowed intention, it will be recalled was to give him "of Loves folk moo tydynges" (675) as a reward for bookish toil. Geffrey receives instead a recognition that whatever he writes <u>about</u>, its destiny is outside his control. The randomness of Fame's processes is imlicit in the nature of the House of Fame itself. As Curtius observes: "Here the poet combines two or three principles of classification, but carries none of them through ... The poet does an untidy job: it is a

'ful confus matere'" (1517)[39]. There seems to be more design to the House than Curtius admits; the untidiness seems part of Fame's general untidiness. The consolation for the poet lies in the recollection of his moral confusion in Book 1. Such confusion is replaced by an unambitious desire for aid to "helpe me to shewe now/That in myn hedymarked ys - " (1102-1103). His assurance that:

> I wot myself best how y stonde;
> For what I drye, or what I thynke,
> I wil myselven al hyt drynke,
> Certeyn, for the more part,
> As fer forth as I kan myn art . (1878-1883)

seems to suggest to the comic humility and within the context of the poem, a fundamentally serious attitude. The poet for the first time suggests that the possibility rests within his own capacities. The poem remains as a vindication of this unambitious desire. His final entry into the House of Rumour "of fals and soth compouned" (2108) is an acceptance not of Fame's authority but an ironic reflection on her promise of "love tidings". Geffrey's own creation is the only love tidings the poem contains. Fame provides no consolatory vision for the poet. It is the poet who makes his own consolation out of Fame.

One can only tentatively impose a pattern on such an unfinished and in many ways flawed poem. Much seems to hinge

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[39] Ernst Curtius, European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages (New York, 1963), pp. 262-263.

on the undisclosed identity of the "man of gret auctorite". But one can, I think, perceive a sense of the integrity of the poet's own experience that is steadily seen to outweigh all other considerations. It would of course be a total misinterpretation to call it Chaucer's Dejection Ode but it does tend towards much the same conclusion - that poetic activity is the only proper concern of the poet.

III

My concern is with the artist's predicament and the solace vouchsafed him for his recognition of such a predicament. Frank Kermode has written specifically a propos the modern artist that "...to be cut off from life and action, in one way or another, is necessary as preparation for the "vision'". This is not, I think, totally peculiar to modern poetry. This extremity of condition is found most completely in Chaucer in the Parlement. In the account that follows I take the poem to be the apotheosis of the expression of the relationship between the artist and certain key terms, notably love and labour, terms which appear initially as thwarting art, but which, through the introduction of the notion of "comoun profyt", provide finally the way of transmuting experience into the order of art. Consolation thereby becomes the fact of aesthetic expression uniting all three terms, but in a way that involves the reversal of their significance for the poet. Initially love and labour are synonymous within

the artist's mind. Finally, through the experience of the need for "comoun profyt" this inward-looking attitude ceases to be sterile self-absorption. Such "profyt" provides an objective focus for the poet's emotions and the consolation it implies provides a new inspiration to effort in the final lines.

The poem opens with a pattern of unexpected connections relating the poet and the experience of love. The opening line "The lyf so short, the craft so longe to lerne", is transposed from its stock rhetorical relevance to the poet's craft to a reflection of his feelings about love. But he goes on to admit (8ff) that he has had no direct experience of love; his knowledge is derived from his reading. Immediately two facts emerge - the poet is outside the experience he wishes to discuss, and the experience itself embraces extremities of emotion ("hise myraklis and his crewel yre" 11) which his inexperience is aware of, without being able to assess:

> I dar nat seyn, his strokis been so sore ,
> But, "God save swich a lord" - I sey na moore. (13-14)

The languor of the opening lines is discovered to reflect an essential second-handness of experience; a lack of commitment that makes his most generalized statements of his condition - "Nat wot I wel wher that I flete or synke" (7) meaningless in their own terms. But what is clear is his acceptance of recorded experience is a defining characteristic, a characteristic in itself that limits his poetic "authority" in his

chosen sphere.

It is apparent that the books he uses are not likely to provide much inspiration. Yet it is equally evident that what he reads indicates something of his true interests:

> To rede forth so gan me to delite,
> That al that day me thoghte but a lyte. (27-28)

That is clear contrast to the anguish and labour he perceives in love. Yet, that it is to be a book about love is implicit in all that has preceded; the implication is prolonged in the withholding of the title for an outpouring of proverbial wisdom (22-28). The revelation of the title - Macrobius' commentary on the Somnium Scipionis - sustains the unexpected connections with this most brilliant inconsequence. Here is a work that is held to be "one of the basic source books of the scholastic movement and of medieval science"[40], a work that clearly attacks "lykerous folk" (79) and is capable of evoking such an enthusiastic response from the avowed poet of love. Moreover Africanus' injunction is to a way of life aimed not at earthly love, but at an expectation of toil before the reward of immortality:

> 'Know thynself ferst inmortal,
> And loke ay besyly thow werche and wysse
> To comoun profyt, and thow shalt not mysse
> To comyn swiftly to that place deere,
> That ful of blysse is and of soulys cleere. (73-77)

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[40] Macrobius, Commentary on the Dream of Scipio, ed. W. H. Stahl (New York, 1952), p. 10.

Just how seriously one is intended to take this advice remains far from clear. One can only argue that in terms of the poem it is not necessary to see anything intrinsic in it that the poem itself does not convey. The fundamental contrast within those terms seems clear. As the poet himself notes after his reading:

> For bothe I hadde thyng which that I nolde,
> And ek I ne hadde that thyng that I wolde. (90-91)

The clear statement of loss reflects the extent to which the poet's intellectual efforts are not in any way related to his desired experience. The couplet recurs in Chaucer; in his Boece (III, proseiii, 33ff) it occurs as part of a general attack on faith in Fortune's gifts; in the Complaint unto Pity it is used in an attack on the "crueltee and tirannye/of Love" (6-7). The Parlement combines both these attitudes. The ambiguities of his desired experience are seen against a cosmic background. The reaction to it is "aesthetic"; that is to say his reading, relating the need for "comoun profyte" to his proven inadequacies as a poet exposes the urgency of relating knowledge to an outgoing impulse. R. W. Frank has written:

> The morality in the poem then, is not morality for its own sake. It is "literary" morality which serves a literary purpose. That purpose is to state, within a comic framework, one attitude toward love, the disapproving attitude

> of the moralist, and to contrast it with other contradictory attitudes.[41]

Though I agree with much of this observation, to my mind Macrobius fulfils a more defining function than Frank appears to allow. In relation to the poet the exhortation to "know thyself ferst inmortel" represents both the antithesis of interest and the necessary focus of his attention. His veneration of the written word can find no inspirational response within him; reading provides an awareness of the manner of consolation without any response in action.

The actual dream becomes the way of reconciling love and labour for "comoun profyt". This is not to say that the poet becomes more like Scipio. The contrasts between them within the poem's terms seem to be predominantly of experience; Scipio can understand his role in a cosmic world picture; the poet has no way of focusing his own experience. But the poet functions on a different scale of sensibility. They share the same guide, but in the case of the poet he does not know enough to ask the right questions. Hence he has to force bodily into experience (cf. 154) in a comic manner that enables him to sustain his role "betwixsyn adamauntis two/Of euene myght"(148-149). Scipio in a similar position but within the cosmos

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[41] R. W. Frank, "Structure and Meaning in the Parlement of Foules", PMLA, LXXI (1956), 533.

finds philosophic truth. The poet finds that for him truth is only found in artistic resolution.

The invocation to "Cytherea" (113) that prefaces his dream is both appropriate and ironic. It illustrates the sort of constancy that distinguishes his labour from his "inspiration" - even though this inspiration has been shown to be self-thwarting. But it is clear that he is offered his vision for his labour, for similar reasons to Geffrey in the House of Fame:

> ... "Thow hast the so wel born
> in lokynge of myn olde bok to-torn ...
> That sumdel of thyn labour wolde I quyte". (109-110,112)

But this casual labour becomes linked to a new attitude of activity specifically related to love:

> Whan I began myn swevene for to write,
> So3if me myght to ryme and ek t'endyte. (118-119)

I cannot agree with Robertson and Huppé that the whole invocation is one of "ironic inappropriateness"[42]. Love remains the subject of the poem - but the poet no longer appears as an aspiring lover neglecting poetry, but as a poet seeking to invoke the central experience of this poem - though not of course the poem's cause. The latter is specifically and denigratingly ascribed to the dreamer by Africanus:

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[42] D. W. Robertson and B. F. Huppé, Fruyt and Chaf (New Jersey, 1963), p. 109.

> For thow of loue hast lost thyn tast, I gess
> As sek man hath of swet and byttyrnesse.
> But natheles, althow that thow be dulle,
> Yit that thow canst not do, yit mayst thow se
> And if thow haddist cunnyng for t'endite,
> I shal shewe the mater of to wryte . (160-165)

The nature of the poet's consolation becomes clearer: he is to be offered the material for art that his own "experience" of love has denied him, the rest is a test of "cunnyng". Robertson and Huppé's concern for moral exegesis leads them I think, to limit importantly the artist's status by taking the materials they claim he uses as totally determining the poem's art.[43] Such a view seems to limit Chaucer's art to an extent where one looks primarily for the significacio behind the poetry, rarely at the poetry itself. For me this passage, which they dismiss summarily, seems to indicate something important about the way the poem works, admittedly only on the surface level on which I wish to discuss it. As I interpret these lines they seem to suggest that through his effort - the antithesis as I have said of his love feelings - the poet finds himself with "mater of to wryte". What this in turn seems to imply is that one is asked to judge the poem initially at least as a result of his "cunnyng", as in fact a finished work of art. Only then is it I think proper to proceed to the so-called cortex of morality.

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[43] Cf Robertson and Huppe, op. cit., passim and especially p. 113, for their discussion of Chaucer primarily as moralist.

If I tend to constantly stress this poem as a work of art about the artist's predicament it is because I find much criticism unconcerned with fundamental preliminaries like these. The necessity of historical perspectives can here at least fundamentally limit the action of the poem. The movement of the poem becomes a testing of the poet's capacities against Africanus' implied criticism. His image of wrestling - activity as an end in itself - is of course no more efficacious than his earlier attitude of emotion as an end in itself.

His vision is initially of an idealized locus amoenus[44]. There seems to be an implicit contrast between what he sees and the vision of the world Macrobius presents. Here cosmic generalities become careful details, a world free from the implications of moral dilemma, and echoing in little the divine harmony of the spheres (cf. 190-191). But more important one perceives in the verse itself a response to Africanus' injunction. There seems to be a new awareness of poetic capacities moving from the careful pedantry of the lists (176-182) to the more evocative brilliance of the ensuing stanzas (183-210). But though there seems to be a quickening of poetic enthusiasm one is left with an impression of an essentially unfocused virtuosity. The locus amoenus, one understands, does not have inhabitants to match its ideal state. Not even the prime agent

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[44] On the locus amoenus see Ernst Curtius, op. cit., pp. 195-200.

of love "Cupide, oure lord" (212) can sustain the attention of his aspiring servant. The vices that surround him may well be intended to denote that "the paradisal garden had been corrupted by man"[45] but if so these are connotations lost with an oral poetry. One is left with an impression of a kind of poetic shorthand, a hurried passing over of attitudes no longer conceived as relevant to the poet's state. Even the more sustained description of the temple of Venus and its inhabitants seems to show a reticence[46] amounting to a detachment that reflects back on his earlier enthusiasm. The appropriate inappropriateness of his invocation becomes clear amid the furtive languor of sensory forgetfulness. As an image it seems incapable of sustained attention on the poet's part for his attention focuses upon further images of love's folly and tragedy, images he notes without finding them of any "poetic" interest (285-294).

Within the temple then he finds only an anarchy of emotion where the only images of love's activity denote death. Outside the temple he wanders "mynseluyn to solace" (297). One of the chief reasons for this need would appear to be the nature of the possibilities as poetry his experience offers him.

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[45] Robertson and Huppé, op. cit., p. 116

[46] On Chaucer's re-working of Boccaccio's Teseida; in this passage see J. A. W. Bennett, The Parlement of Fowls (London, 1957), pp. 93-97.

It seems to imply some doubt of the worth of such experience - certainly the creative response it evokes is limited - for the most part his detached reportage is enriching his own understanding, or lessening his paradoxical condition. As in the House of Fame the promised experience seems not to lie where expected. It is the Parlement itself that provides the final significant consolation for the poet.

The most important source for this part of the poem is Alan of Lille's De Planctu Naturae, a work relating man's imperfect obedience to Nature especially in matters of sexual love.[47] The idea is sustained in the Parlement and gives a further relevance to Macrobius' vision. For this is the opposite end of the cosmic scale where "comoun profyt" is abandoned for the birds' self-will. Here love provides the stimulus to unnatural conduct. Capellanus writes a propos the tercel:

> What strange tercel would we consider one who would leave the partridges, cranes, and pheasants and seek his quarry among the wretched sparrows or the sons of the hens.[48]

Yet this is the disruption of order that seems to be implied. Love has become the obstruction of reason holding up the literal creative processes of nature. The analogy with the poet of

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[47] There is a valuable summary of the De Planctu in Curtius, op. cit., p. 118.

[48] Andreas Capellanus, The Art of Courtly Love, ed. and trans. J. J. Parry (New York, 1959), pp. 84-85.

the opening lines is obvious. But now the analogy becomes a means of objectifying his emotion into art. For the first time the poem becomes consistent sequential narrative reflecting an awareness that this is really apposite to the poet. "But to the poynt" (372) he says dismissing an even longer catalogue of descriptions. One becomes aware of a control over nuance that enables him to reflect his materials as comic art. He interjects:

> Of al myn lyf, syn that day I was born,
> So gentil ple, in loue or othir thyng,
> Ne herde neuere no man me beforn,
> Ho that hadde leyser and cunnyng
> For to reherse hyr cher and hire spekyng; (484-488)

The courtly balanced phrases, the careful clause structure, are totally destroyed in the clamour of bird cries that follows (491 ff). I have no wish to follow the details of the debate other than to follow Muscatine in noting that it shows "the poet for the first time aligning his style in the pattern of his attitudes"[49]. It is its resolution I wish to consider.

The "meaning" of Nature's final verdict and the formel's vow not to "serue Venus ne Cupide' (652) is perhaps best expressed in the final roundel. Art imposes a unity upon a resolution limited by time. It is of course not a rational solution, but the love the tersels offer entails a solution by Nature reconciling such love with "comoun profyt". The poet has a similar

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[49] Muscatine, op. cit., p. 116.

task; he is also called upon to reconcile emotional inclination with the "comoun profyt" his art imposes upon him. And in the end he returns to his labour, the labour that provided the stimulus of his art:

> and yit I rede alwey;
> I hope, iwis, to rede so sum day
> That I shal mete sum thyng for to fare
> The bet, and thus to rede I nele nat spare. (696-699)

One is reminded, though less grimly, of the sentiment of Hrabanus Maurus:

> Nullum opus exsurgit quod non annosa vetustas
> expugnet, quod non vertat iniqua dies.
> grammatas sola carent fato, mortemque repellunt.
> preterita renovant grammata sola biblis.[50]

Such is the only consolation of the artist. He acquires his fortitude for endeavour from the enjoinders of Africanus and Nature, but his end product is scarcely philosophy made practical. The poem itself remains the most lasting indication of a consolation stemming out of the artist's hope of imposing order and meaning on his transient experience.

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[50] Medieval Latin Lyrics, ed. and trans. by Helen Waddell (Harmondsworth, 1962), p. 118.

CONCLUSION

My immediate conclusions about specific poems are stated in the Introduction. This was done by design. My Introduction sets out the "structure" of my thesis. What I wish to do here is to suggest the apparent ramifications of this structure.

As will be apparent, my analyses have tended to underemphasize certain parts of the poems that might be said to offer consolation. All the poems of consolation seem to imply in some degree a questioning of the comfort residing in the symbolic set-pieces that form their climaxes. The pearl or the New Jerusalem, the exegitical interpretation of physician or hunter or the re-creation of what has been lost and (more overtly) the visions of the actualities of fame and love all seem to imply a conscious sense of dissatisfaction with the ostensible values in the poem. That such values are latent I would not wish to deny. But I would emphasize they seem latent. To a modern reader at least there is some sense that the consolation a poem generates is not the one it states. Consolation emerges as predominantly an acceptance of actuality. On such terms there can be no consolation for loss, only hope beyond it.

The irony that distinguishes Pearl and the Chaucerian dream visions from the earlier poems becomes of course an obvious way of defining the poem's audiences. The concept of irony

requires as a postulate an audience capable of distinguishing between the ostensible and the actual. In the Breton Lays recovery seems to be a literal reflection of an attitude of social desirability. One has then, two quite distinct "classes" of poetic written for audiences of distinctly differing sensibilities. The Breton Lays are limited by their writer's inability to do other than reflect his audience's attitude towards loss. The "happy ending" is necessary even to the extent of changing the Orpheus legend or of validating the heroine's milieu where his virtue is not tested. In general terms the lack of tragic endings seems in part traceable to this equation between moral excellence (however relative) and ultimate reward. It is no part of my intention to conclude with quasi-anthropological speculations on the medieval psyche. Nonetheless it does appear possible to distinguish two distinct audiences for fourteenth century poetry, one in part controlling its own poetic responses, the other making certain stock attitudes a way of affirming an aesthetic that could use such attitudes as viable subjects for a poetry that represents the vision of the artist not a social norm. For ultimately my distinction between recovery and consolation has to be an aesthetic one. My own concern has been to provide some account of the factors that go to make up this distinction.

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