

CHAUCER'S FOUR EARLY DREAM VISIONS: STAGES IN
THE CREATIVE EVOLUTION OF A WRITER

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CHAPTER I

BACKGROUND FOR THE STUDY

In the fourteenth century, a man whom John of Gaunt called Geoffrey composed poetry which was generally well received by his noble audiences. This poetry has continued to be well received by less noble audiences ever since. Indeed, the poetry of Geoffrey Chaucer, line for line, has given birth to hundreds of times its own volume, though not psychological weight, in studies, criticisms, and expressions of delight. It is an old field which yearly produces much new corn. Geoffrey Chaucer's four dream-vision poems, the Book of the Duchess, the House of Fame, the Parliament of Fowls, and the prologue to the Legend of Good Women, have been approached by some scholars as works written to commemorate specific historical events or persons. Other scholars examining these relatively early works have identified sources or certain developmental stages in Chaucer's rhetorical artistry. Certainly each of these approaches is of value in acquiring a broad view of this fourteenth-century genius; however, these early poems call for examination from still another viewpoint--the focus of creativity. This way of considering Chaucer's poetry, focusing on its creative aspects, though more recent than the source studies of the

1930's, is certainly not original. Laurence Shook, Wolfgang Clemen, and A. C. Spearing all have seen one or more of the dream-vision poems as containing discussions of creativity. My own interest in the creative discussions contained in Chaucer's poetry grew from lectures of Lavon Buster Fulwiler, whose dissertation exploring the image progressions in Chaucer's poetry precede certain other works which in some measure concern the topic of creativity. Earlier studies both provide the authority and lay the groundwork for the current study, but to read the dream-vision poetry wisely is to read it in the context of its age; so preliminary to my own hypothesis must come a brief discussion of the society in Chaucer's day and a close look at the development of the dream-vision tradition, followed by a review of Professor Fulwiler's theory that images in the works treat the theme of creativity.

Geoffrey Chaucer lived in an age which had never heard the word "democracy." Man, it was believed, had been created by God to reign over the earth and to stand a little lower than the angels. His was a middle position in the great chain of being; however, within mankind's order other natural hierarchies existed. Each man had his own particular niche. Such a system may seem rigid to the twentieth-century mind, but it was believed and upheld by the doctrine of the

church and strongly reinforced by the political situation and the literary arts of the Middle Ages.

England during the time of Chaucer was united not so much by any prevailing sense of nation as it was joined by a vast network of interlinked loyalties between classes, institutions, and persons. The king ruled, but he ruled only so long as he had the support of the noble families. The noble families had power over the small, still-new middle class and over the peasants who worked the land, but nobles were dependent on the lower classes for their wealth while the lower classes looked to the upper for protection. This political structure, known as the feudal system, had been introduced to England with the Norman invasion of 1066. By the fourteenth century, some changes resulting from the terrible plagues and the rising middle class were taking place; but for the most part, the feudal system was intact. Men still swore allegiance to their lord on earth and to their King in Heaven.

It is difficult for the modern mind to comprehend the impact of the church during the Middle Ages. It was the single largest institution in all Europe. The church provided a good living for persons in ecclesiastical positions, and the number of persons in holy orders or otherwise connected to the church is attested to both by historical records and by the number of religious characters appearing

in the literature of the day. In the Canterbury Tales, for instance, appear a prioress, a nun's priest, a monk, a friar, and a summoner for ecclesiastical offenses. These characters point not only to the abundance but to the variety of ecclesiastical positions.¹

The hierarchy of positions within the church's organization simply dramatized the church's teachings on the theory of right order. Certainly the well-known writings of St. Paul influenced the attitudes of medieval Christians toward a system of hierarchy, but other works did too. St. Augustine's On Christian Doctrine and St. Bonaventura's The Mind's Road to God taught hierarchical progression as God's plan for creation. Such teachings were especially effective because the church was the seat of all learning, controlling both the universities and the instruction of the common people. It taught through sermons and miracle plays, and it taught by example, maintaining its own special hierarchy, demanding obedience, giving sanctuary. Its doctrines included the necessity of a sworn fidelity and a belief in the power of vision and of love.²

¹Matthew Browne, Chaucer's England, Vol. II (1869; rpt. New York: AMS Press, Inc., 1970), p. 187.

²D. W. Robertson, Jr., A Preface to Chaucer (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1962), p. 7.

Given the political and religious temper of the Middle Ages, it comes as no surprise that a system of hierarchy should be found in the literary arts. In story and song at least, the same knight who swore allegiance to his God and his king would also remain faithful to his lady. Thus the literary idea of love--courtly love--first emerged in the songs of the troubadour poets Guillaume IX, Cercamon, Macabru, and Janfre Rudel. Later works, such as those by Bernard de Ventadour, proposed specific behaviors for the lover, but it remained for Andreas Capellanus to codify the concepts in his De Arte Honeste Amandi. Although love was a subject much debated in the Middle Ages, the art of courtly love probably never existed outside the bounds of the literary world; yet its impact was great. Courtly love differed from previous concepts of love in several ways, two of which are particularly relevant to this study. First, in the system of courtly love the woman was placed in a superior position. It was she who accepted or rejected the gifts and deeds of the lover. The man swore his fidelity, burned with desire, suffered lovesickness, and sought her recognition of him as her devoted servant.³ Second, the system of courtly

³Alex J. Denomy, "An Inquiry into the Origins of Courtly Love," Medieval Studies 6 (1944), 176-77.

love was a literary system, and courtly love poems traditionally appeared in the form of dreams or visions.⁴

A dream vision may be defined as any poem "whose main substance is a dream or vision, dreamt invariably by the 'I' of the poem."⁵ Recently there has been some debate on whether the dream vision constitutes a separate genre.⁶ Certainly it is not listed in any of the medieval rhetorical manuals, and it did often appear as a frame for other genres.⁷ However, regardless of its official status, the dream vision was an immensely popular literary form during the Middle Ages, developed from both religious and classical traditions.

Although the Bible as we know it was not always readily available, scriptural visions were accessible to medieval scholars. The visions of the Old Testament prophets, such as Ezekiel, as well as the dreams of Pharaoh and Nebuchadnezzar, interpreted by Joseph and Daniel, strengthened the general belief in the validity of dreams

⁴Howard R. Patch, The Other World: According to Descriptions in Medieval Literature (Massachusetts: Harvard Univ. Press, 1950), p. 196.

⁵A. C. Spearing, Medieval Dream-Poetry (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1976), p. 1.

⁶For opposing views see Spearing, Medieval Dream-Poetry, pp. 2-3, and James Wimsatt, Chaucer and the French Love Poets (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1968), p. 126.

⁷Benjamin S. Harrison, "Medieval Rhetoric in the Book of the Duchess," PMLA 49 (1934), 429.

and visions. From the New Testament writings came St. John's vision of the final judgment and the vision of St. Paul. The popularity of the Pauline vision is attested to by eight copies in Middle English which still survive.⁸

Approved and popular religious visions were not all scriptural, however. The visionary aspect of spiritual insight or the reception of divine truth was reinforced by numbers of other accepted documents. The dialogues of Gregory the Great, written in the late sixth century, record religious visions. Hincmar, "a ninth-century archbishop of Rheims, an acute politician, and a bad poet," records the experience of a priest named Bernoldus. In Visio Bernoldi the vision comes to the priest as he lies seriously ill. It is a vision of the religious otherworld, and its message is to pray for the souls of the dead. Most of these early religious visions taught through revelation; almost all contained descriptions of otherworld--heaven or hell.⁹

Bede, in his Ecclesiastical History, writes about Drythelm's guided tour through the religious otherworld, but Bede employs Virgil's description, found in Book Six of the Aeneid, for the approach to the underworld. This joining of the classical pagan descriptions with the traditional

⁸Patch, The Other World, p. 91.

⁹Spearing, p. 14.

Christian teachings was not at all uncommon in the Middle Ages. Classical writings, though not often visionary in nature, abounded with descriptions of encounters with other-world and reinforced the idea of dream or visionary encounters. The most influential of the classical works was a dream vision written by Cicero as a conclusion to De Re Publica. This work was to be Cicero's "equivalent" to Plato's Republic. Plato's work had ended with the vision of Er; Cicero's De Re Publica concluded with the dream of Scipio. Unfortunately, the rest of De Re Publica was lost to the Middle Ages. Only the dream of Scipio was accessible to medieval scholars, and that as a part of a work by Macrobius. Macrobius was interested in the nature, origin, and significance of dreams. In addition to the dream of Scipio, his work provided for the medieval writer an elaborate catalogue of every type of dream imaginable. Dreams might be true revelations or might be results of eating too much; they could be useful and instructive, helping men deal with their problems, or they might be mere phantoms, nightmares of the imagination. Macrobius' interest in dream phenomena was mainly scientific, but his influence on medieval literature was widespread.¹⁰

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 8-9.

Backed by the authority of such well known religious and classical visions, the dream gained increasing popularity as a vehicle for secular poetry--especially the love-vision poetry of the French poets.

It is commonly held that the most influential of the French love-vision poems was the Roman de la Rose by Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun. The Roman, a thirteenth-century courtly-love poem, brought together in its allegorical dream setting and treatment of love traditional religious imagery with an allegorical secular imagery. The Roman also linked the topic of love with the composition of poetry. In the section by Jean de Meun, Raison instructs the poet persona in the art of poetic interpretation:

Her own word, she says, sometimes has 'autre sen.'
And if the dreamer will consider the 'integumentz'
of the poets, he will find there 'une grant partie
des secrez de philosophie' wherein he should take
delight as well as great profit.¹¹

Jean de Meun failed to develop the topic of poetic creativity, but his early statements did point to the possibility of a serious discussion of creativity within the dream-vision framework.

Later French love visions added new possibilities for the use of the dream vision. Reality, in the form of biographical segments, intruded on the dream otherworld. Watriquet de Couvin's Dits des Quatre Sieges contains a

¹¹Robertson, p. 61.

serious religious message, but the poem also contains a narrator who manages to slip in the names of Couvin's patrons and to awake in the arms of Couvin's mistress. Machaut's earliest poem, Dit dou Vergier, relates the poet's own bouts of lovesickness. Finally, there is the advertisement in Froissart's Paradys d'Amours. In this poem the poet persona enters Love's Paradise, meets his mistress, and is commended on his poetic skill. The writing in these later works moves away from the strictly allegorical imagery of the Roman to a more realistic dream setting and to a renewed interest in the discussion of dreams. This trend toward a more realistic style revealed a rising new interest in both the poet and poet persona, in his life, his personality, his social status, and his personal affairs.¹²

By the time Chaucer began writing, several uses of the dream vision had been carefully established. From the classical, scriptural, and other religious visions came the tendency of the vision to act as a didactic device, a vehicle for discussing important problems. Moreover, the apocalyptic nature of the visionary experience gave added authority (so important in this age) to the material being related. In secular writing, the dream vision proved highly popular, compatible with different genres, and useful for discussing otherwise unexplainable events, such as falling

¹²Spearing, pp. 41-43.

in love. Though not listed in the rhetorical manuals, this "dream mechanism" was a type of abbreviation that allowed the poet to move rapidly into his subject.¹³ It also provided a solution to a purely social problem of the age: "how can the socially inferior poet address himself to his aristocratic audience?"¹⁴ But to emphasize these pragmatic aspects of the dream vision is not to say that this mode of literature was not considered a vehicle for truth. In fact, just the opposite was true. The vision in medieval literature was more than a convenient narrative device. It was a device, but it worked because in many ways the perception of medieval peoples was "different from ours in kind; accepting a more inclusive concept of reality, they saw more than we do."¹⁵ Using the dream vision allowed both poet and audience to dispense with the usual physical limitations and to concentrate on the happenings of otherworld, a place where experience concerned psychological life rather than physical exploits. It was a form peculiarly suited to the discussion of love and the poetry of love. And it was the

¹³Lavon Buster Fulwiler, "Image Progressions in Chaucer's Poetry: Exposition of a Theory of Creativity," Diss. Michigan State Univ. 1971, p. 64.

¹⁴Spearing, p. 44.

¹⁵Carolly Erickson, The Medieval Vision: Essays in History and Perception (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1976), p. 29.

form that Chaucer chose as ideally suited for his own discussion of the creative process.

Modern recognition of Chaucer's special use of the dream-vision tradition has been slow in coming. It has been only within this decade that scholars have explored and verified this focus on creativity. In 1971, Lavon Buster Fulwiler, working with both the direct source material from which Chaucer borrowed and the other sources available to Chaucer as well as the rhetorical manuals of the day, concluded that the discussion of creativity was of singular importance in Chaucer's early dream-vision poetry. Moreover, she discovered Chaucer's basic method for handling the discussion of creativity--a pattern which she designated the "image progression." An image progression differs from an image cluster as the dynamic differs from the static. Shakespeare grouped images, clustering them to impart a single emotion or idea; Chaucer arranged groups of images to convey movement:

in his groupings he suggests motion, action, or progress toward a goal or solution to a problem and leads the reader from one thought to another.¹⁶

Chaucer's development and use of the image progression is original, found neither in the rhetorical manuals of the day nor in the writings of other medieval poets. Chaucer employed commonplace imagery and maintained the traditions

¹⁶Fulwiler, pp. 4-5.

of the dream-vision frame, but his use of these materials served a special purpose:

In a manner similar to that of his work with specific sources, Chaucer gained service from conventions. He stirred and brought to action the topic of creativity lying dormant in the conventional imagery, and he intentionally combined reciprocally reinforcing elements of thought progressions analyzing the literary impulse.¹⁷

The function of Chaucer's image progression is twofold. Operating within the dream-vision frame, the image progression provides structure and movement in the poem. The images within the progression may be scattered throughout the poem, but they serve as stepping stones, guiding the poet persona to and from otherworld, making the "natural-supernatural" connection. More important, the image progression itself provides the clue to poetic creativity. The elements of the progression are those elements which are necessary to the shaping of poetry: nature images signifying the creative and the eternal are linked with images from the literary past and with an initially unproductive poet persona in an otherworld experience. It is the remembrance of this experience that enables the poet persona to create his dream poem.¹⁸

¹⁷Ibid., pp. 71-75.

¹⁸Ibid., pp. 5-9.

It was the discovery of the image-progression pattern and its variations that opened the door for this study. Each of the four dream-vision poems presents the elements of its image progression differently, and the basis for this difference, I believe, lies in the differing aspects of creativity being discussed in each poem. This, then, is my hypothesis: each of Geoffrey Chaucer's four early dream-vision poems deals with a specific stage in the writer's development; moreover, each separate work progressively incorporates those aspects of creativity discussed in previous works and thus reveals a definite pattern of artistic evolution which, in turn, makes up the creative focus of the whole. I shall begin by identifying those elements of the dream vision found in each of these four early poems and by discussing their variations of emphasis.

CHAPTER II

THE ELEMENTS OF THE DREAM VISION

The basic components of the literary dream vision are three: the dream-frame, the dream otherworld, and the dreamer. The dreamer appears on both sides of the dream-frame, both dreaming the dream and relating it; the dream otherworld includes the setting and the characters who appear in the dream; and the dream-frame suggests the narrative mode, establishes structure, and provides a point of departure into otherworld.

It is important that one not confuse the dream-frame with the dream itself. The dream-frame, as the name implies, forms the boundaries of the dream, clearly delineating the mundane waking world from the visionary otherworld. Marking the entrance to and egress from otherworld, the dream-frame includes those details surrounding the sleep which precedes the dream, the descriptions of the dreamer's awakening, and the effects produced by the dream. Each of Chaucer's four dream-vision poems is enveloped by such a frame; yet the elements of the dream frame differ slightly from poem to poem.

In the Book of the Duchess, the time of the dream is late at night. A sorrowful poet persona, suffering from

lack of rest as a result of eight years of lovesickness, prefers reading to the companionship offered by games. Coming upon the story of Seys and Alcyone, he expresses surprise and promises a featherbed to Morpheus if the god will send him sleep. The poet persona immediately falls asleep and dreams that he is awakened by the songs of birds. This event marks his entrance into otherworld. At the close of the dream, the poet persona leaves otherworld at the sound of a clock striking twelve. He awakes, finding he has fallen asleep over his book, and begins to write down his marvelous dream. In addition to providing the structure of the poem, the dream-frame in the Book of the Duchess indicates a progression on the part of the poet persona from sorrowful listlessness to purposeful creative endeavor.

The House of Fame, an unfinished poem, has an incomplete dream-frame. However, the first half of the frame does contain some significant details. As in the Book of the Duchess, the time is once again night, but here the date, December 10, is also given. Supposing this to be an occasional poem celebrating some particular marriage, various scholars have supplied possible reasons for this dating, but there may be a more simple explanation for the date. Under the Julian calendar, December 10 would fall very near, if not on, the winter solstice. The nights would be long, and the preparations for the feast of St. Lucy, the protectress

of vision and light, would be at hand. Certainly this night would be an appropriate time for a dream vision. The poet persona, as one who is tired from making a long pilgrimage, falls asleep. He awakes in otherworld inside a bright temple of glass. The rest of the dream-frame is missing, but again certain things are implied. The poet persona dreams in winter, a season barren of creativity, but he dreams near, or possibly on, the feast of St. Lucy, the bringer of light and visions. Finally, he compares himself to a person on a pilgrimage, at once a religious and a questing image. Thus in the House of Fame, the search motif, connected with a person of some religious authority, appears in the opening dream-frame, before the poet persona enters the dream otherworld.

In the third poem, the Parliament of Fowls, the dream-frame is again complete. The poet persona reads a specific book, relating the dream of Scipio, all day long. He is searching for something in particular, "a certeyn thing to lerne";¹ yet at the end of the day he is still frustrated in his search: "For bothe I hadde thyng which that I nolde,/And ek I nadde that thyng that I wolde" (ll. 90-91). It grows too dark to read, and the weary poet

¹Geoffrey Chaucer, The Parliament of Fowls, in The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, ed. F. N. Robinson, 2nd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1957), l. 20, p. 311. All other references to this work will be cited in the body of the text.

persona seeks rest. He dresses for bed and finally manages to fall sound asleep, waking (in his dream) to see the character from his day's reading standing beside the bed. The dream, of course, details the visit to otherworld, and the frame is completed with the shouting of birds which wakes the poet persona. He immediately takes up other books to read, patiently hoping for something better. In this dream-frame, the poet persona's search for an answer continues, but some progress appears as the dreamer's final state of hopeful patience and renewed activity seems better than his initial state of brooding worry and frustration.

At first glance the final dream vision, the prologue to the Legend of Good Women, presents a stumbling block to close study in that two versions of the poem exist, and there is as yet no conclusive proof as to which is the later or the better of the two. However, in concerns of imagery, character, and action, there is no need to choose one text over the other; for despite some minor variations, the details of the two versions are much the same. In version A, the date given as the setting of the dream is the end of May; the B version cites the first day of May as the date of the dream vision. Although the exact dates differ, in each version the time is May, the month traditionally associated with the love vision, given to rites of spring and symbolizing the creative forces in nature. The poet persona goes out early

in the morning to spend the day in the meadow gazing at the daisy. The description of the meadow occurs within the dream-frame in the B version and within the dream otherworld in the A version of the poem; despite variety of placement of the description, however, the meadow recurs as an image. In fact, the audience is told that the two meadows seem identical. After his daylong excursion, the poet persona returns home and has some young men prepare him a bed strewn with flowers. He lies down and falls asleep to dream of the meadow and the daisy. In the two versions of the prologue, the closing sections of the dream-frame are even more similar than those which constitute the opening frame. In each, the poet persona wakes at a word from the god of love and begins his appointed work. The progression in this final dream vision is not from sorrow to joy but from a happy though momentarily noncreative poet persona to a busy, creative writer with a specific purpose.

Chaucer shaped his descriptions of the settings for the dream-producing sleep to complement and give meaning to the whole poem. The dream frame provided clues to the meaning of the otherworld encounter which was to follow and showed the progression in the character of the poet persona. It also distinguished between world and otherworld.

The magic realm of otherworld appeared often in medieval literature, in the romance as well as in the

dream-vision mode; although it was essential to the second, it only added to the first. The dream otherworld of medieval literature was quite realistic in that within its bounds time and space ceased to matter. In otherworld man could be awakened by singing birds, could hear the signal for a hunt, and could go to ride without encountering such mundane problems as having to put on clothes, to open doors, or to find a horse. In a more extreme example, one might see Nature presiding over a council of birds or perhaps even be carried high into outer space by a golden eagle. In the literary dream vision, as in a real dream, anything could happen, but this is not to say that the settings and characters were haphazardly placed.

Settings of the dream otherworld were clearly recognized and often stylized, with imagery from both classical and scriptural writers; the traditional otherworld vision of paradise as a garden is straight from Genesis, the Apocalypse, and the Song of Songs.² But the purpose of the imagery was not merely to appeal to the senses but rather to reveal some discoverable truth. This use of imagery as a means of discovery was early espoused by St. Augustine in Contra Mendacium. Later it carried into secular poetry by

²A. C. Spearing, Medieval Dream-Poetry (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1976), p. 1.

Boccaccio in the Genealogie and by the early French poets in the Roman de la Rose.³ The imagery of these works was the imagery of nature sharply divided to proclaim good--images of light, garden, rose, water, or springtime--or to display evil--images of deserts, caverns, or darkness. However, it remained for Chaucer to take these standard otherworld descriptions and bring to life their creative implications.⁴

The description of otherworld in Chaucer's earliest dream-vision poem, the Book of the Duchess, seems purely conventional; indeed, source studies show Chaucer borrowed heavily from the early French poets as well as from Ovid for both imagery and passages. Yet Chaucer's use of these borrowed descriptions for a discussion of creativity freshens these conventional images. It is May in the dreamer's otherworld, a time of year traditionally associated with promise, growth, and happiness. Certainly it is the ideal time for the rebirth of the sorrowful imagination, the deadened creative force of the poet persona. This renewal process is achieved as the dreamer moves through an otherworld which contains three distinct settings.

The first otherworld setting is the chamber in which the poet persona awakes. The room is beautiful, full of

³D. W. Robertson, Jr., A Preface to Chaucer (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1962), p. 7.

⁴Lavon Buster Fulwiler, "Image Progressions in Chaucer's Poetry: Exposition of a Theory of Creativity," Diss. Michigan State Univ. 1971, p. 64.

light, and decorated with pictures of characters from the Roman de la Rose and of other famous literary figures. These images represent famous lovers, a traditional subject for secular dream-vision poetry. But they also bring to mind those literary works which tell the lovers' stories and focus on the works themselves, both as products of the creative imagination and as sources for future works. In this first otherworld setting, the dreamer has been awakened by another symbol for creativity, singing birds. In medieval literature, birds were a symbol for fecundity and were often pictured as decorating the robe of Nature, but Chaucer's birds are creating music, the sister of poetry. In Chaucer's description emphasis moves from the biologically creative aspects to the artistically creative aspects of the birds.

From the chamber the dreamer moves into the second otherworld setting, the woods. This movement marks his passage into a deeper otherworld. In the woods the grass is green and lush, and there seem to be as many flowers as there are stars in heaven. As the dreamer moves deeper into the woods, the creative works of nature become more abundant. There are tall trees and a wonderful assortment of forest animals. Everything is joyfully alive. Squirrels are feasting, and the harts (an obvious pun), who have escaped the hunters of the earlier scene, are here too. But the animals move swiftly away, and gradually the dreamer becomes

aware of a man in black. The dreamer's confrontation with the man in black is the heart of the elegy and rightfully takes place in the deepest section of the forest, in the heart of otherworld. There is only one detail of setting, but it is significant. The man in black is seated with his back next to an oak, "an huge tree."⁵ It is here, at the foot of the oak, a symbol of strength and of the eternal, that both the man in black and the poet persona will find release from sorrow and renewal of inspiration. In the Book of the Duchess, then, otherworld is pictured as a place of abundant creativity where the sojourner may refresh his spirit.

In the House of Fame, the descriptions of otherworld, though still traceable to various French and Italian sources, are more fantastic than the forest otherworld of the first poem. The scene changes often--there are six distinct settings in three short books--and sometimes the changes are abrupt, as when the eagle scoops up the poet persona. Yet here too the settings of otherworld are more than just a backdrop for the action.

Book I of the poem contains descriptions of two otherworld settings, the temple of Venus and the desert of

⁵Geoffrey Chaucer, The Book of the Duchess, in The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, ed. F. N. Robinson, 2nd. ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1957), l. 447, p. 271. All other references to this work will be cited in the body of the text.

sand. In his dream, the poet persona wakes in the temple of Venus, a temple made of glass, possibly mirrors, which houses rare statues and paintings of "olde werk."⁶ On one wall, engraved in a tablet of brass, is the story of Aeneas and Dido, which Chaucer properly credits by rendering Virgil's famous opening lines in Middle English, "'I wol now singen, yif I kan,/The armes, and also the man'" (ll. 143-44). After relating an abbreviated version of the story, the poet persona leaves the temple only to find himself in a barren field, a desert of sand without house or tree, town or grass. This second setting of harsh barrenness contrasts strongly with the first setting of rich ornamentation. If the sand images a dearth of creative power, then the poet persona, left alone, without the beauty of old works, is in desperate straits. But help, in the shape of a golden eagle, is on the way.

The eagle first appears at the close of Book I. At the opening of Book II, he provides the poet persona with both advice and a means of transportation, carrying the amazed dreamer through the heavens to that place where Fame dwells. This flight through the heavens takes up the larger part of the second book, but the description is slight.

⁶Geoffrey Chaucer, The House of Fame, in The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, ed. F. N. Robinson, 2nd. ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1957), l. 127, p. 283. All other references to this work will be cited in the body of the text.

From his bird's-eye view, the poet persona can see the houses and life of the countryside, the stars of the Milky Way, and the creation of clouds and storms. The view is astounding, yet the poet persona recalls that his firsthand experience on this fantastic flight only reiterates what he has read:

And than thoughte y on Marcian,
 And eke on Antecaudian,
 That sooth was her description
 Of alle the hevenes region,
 As fer as that y sey the preve;
 Therefore y kan hem now beleve. (ll. 985-90)

Present experience but proves past authority.

As the poet persona approaches the house of Fame, he hears a noise like the crash of the sea upon a rocky shore. It is appropriate that the dreamer's first encounter with the dwelling place of Fame, or Rumor, as she was sometimes known, should be one of sound rather than of sight. As the eagle brings the poet persona close to his destination, the dreamer is frightened by the dreadful noise. The "grete soun" (l. 1025) stretching farther than the visual field is the result of the tidings, both false and true, which are carried to the temple of Fame. The poet persona likens the noise to the roar of the ocean. The sea is at once a symbol of creation and destruction: it can provide life and yield great treasures, but it can also destroy life and sink the ships and their cargo. The sea image, with its mixture of

false and true tidings, poses a problem: how does one separate the good from the bad, the ephemeral from the eternal?

In the final, incomplete book of the House of Fame there are again two otherworld settings. The first is the house of Fame; the second, a house of twigs.

The temple of Fame is built high on a mountain of ice in which the names of various writers are carved. Again, there is a sense of duality; some names are protected and appear as clearly as when they were first etched in the ice, but other names melt away. The castle is made of beryl, an elaborate structure, of one piece, constructed without joints. Within the temple of Fame is Fame's great hall, plated with gold and precious stones. In the hall are great pillars of iron and lead, "mad for gret noblesse,/And in hem hy and gret sentence" (ll. 1425-26). These pillars, supporting Fame's renown, are held up by such writers as the seven Jewish ancients, the classical Homer, and even an early English writer. It seems as though every great writer is there:

The hall was al ful, ywys,
Of hem that writen olde gestes,
As ben on trees rokes nestes. (ll. 1514-16)

Like the temple of Venus, the temple of Fame is filled with literary works, but in this place the creator of the work is also clearly recognized.

When the poet persona leaves the temple of Fame, he sees the house of twigs. This twirling stick house is a center of creativity. Shaped like a cage, it is the place where tales come and grow. To the poet persona it seems a labyrinth, some ancient puzzle. Amid the mass confusion and great noise, this final otherworld setting seems at once more promising and more confusing than anything that has come before. The raw sounds of composition are here, but they must somehow be properly sorted.

The expansive otherworld settings in the House of Fame contrast sharply with the clearly defined otherworld settings in Chaucer's third dream-vision poem, the Parliament of Fowls, which contains the highly stylized setting usually associated with the French love-vision poetry, the vision of an enclosed garden.⁷

The entrance to the enclosed park is through a gate inscribed in gold and black. The verses written in gold promise eternal Maytime full of fruitfulness and good fortune; the verses in black warn of barrenness and sorrow. Again there seems to be a duality in otherworld. Assuring him that the verses are not meant for him, the poet persona's guide pushes him through the gate and into the garden.

⁷James Winny, Chaucer's Dream-Poems (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, Inc., 1973), p. 125.

Inside the garden, the traditional imagery of trees, water, and flowers takes on new liveliness at Chaucer's touch. The flowers are bright, the birds are singing, and the water sparkles with life:

And colde welle stremes, nothyng dede
That swymmen ful of smale fishes lighte,
With fynnes rede and skales sylver bryghte.
(ll. 187-89)

In addition to sensory appeal, Chaucer centers his descriptions on function. Even the trees are described in terms of usefulness, a type of cataloguing that conflicted with the traditional tenets of secular dream-poetry description.⁸ In the otherworld setting of the Parliament of Fowls, Chaucer purposely emphasizes the number and function of beautiful creations. In this well-ordered garden, everything has its own special place and its own special duty.

Moving farther into the garden, the dreamer sees a temple of brass. It is the temple of Venus. The interior houses broken bows, the trophies of Cupid, and the walls are painted with the stories of famous persons who have died for love. Yet the names of the lovers are simply catalogued; no further descriptions are given.

Leaving the temple, the poet persona enters the third otherworld setting. Like the first, it is lovely and green, but this time the dreamer sees Nature herself,

⁸Ibid., p. 120.

surrounded by birds. Her temple, or hall, is constructed of branches and boughs, and her seat is a hill of flowers. The time is St. Valentine's day. This third otherworld setting presents the ideal scene for choosing one's love, and that scene, of course, is what the poet persona witnesses.

Throughout each of Chaucer's first three dream visions, the otherworld settings constantly change. The Book of the Duchess and the Parliament of Fowls each contain three distinct settings; the House of Fame has six: two in each book. But the final dream vision, the prologue to the Legend of Good Women, has only one otherworld setting, a description of the meadow.

It is spring in this otherworld. The earth has cast off the cold and sorrow of winter and is dressed in warmth and green. The flowers seem to embroider the grass. Blossoms cover the trees. The birds are singing, but in this setting, their songs are clearly heard and understood. The birds rejoice in the season, singing lays of love and a special hymn to St. Valentine. Though briefly described, this otherworld setting contains no hint of sorrow or sterility. No shadowy caves, no deserts of sand, no warnings on the gate intrude here. Otherworld, in the prologue, is a magical meadow, a paradise full of warmth and delightful creativity.

In each of his dream visions, Chaucer employed traditional otherworld images, yet he shaped traditional description to his own purpose. First, he selected those images most closely associated with the creative, the eternal, and the life-giving forces. Next, he added new details to freshen the material. And last, he presented the material in such a way as to illuminate particular aspects of the creative otherworld in each of the four poems. By doing so, Chaucer sharpened the poems' focus on creativity by his selection and presentation of otherworld characters.

The Book of the Duchess presents only two characters in the otherworld dream action: the poet persona and the knight in black. The poet persona, who appears both in and out of otherworld, will be discussed in a separate section. His is the role of the dreamer. The knight in black imparts information to the dreamer--information that the dreamer turns into a creative work. This interchange of information is quite direct, between two somewhat similar characters (the knight in black, like the poet persona, suffers from love), yet this meeting is clearly an otherworld experience. The knight, who is found seated in a magical forest, yields the desired information only after the traditional third attempt, when the dreamer has proved himself faithful to his purpose and the knight has shown himself faithful to his love. The sorrowing knight imparts the final knowledge of

Good Fair White in a straightforward manner: "She ysed!" (l. 1309). The door to the dream otherworld closes quickly, but not before the knight in black is seen riding homeward to a "long castel with walls white,/Be seynt Johan! on a ryche hil" (ll. 1318-19). These final lines, still inside the otherworld experience, identify the knight as John of Gaunt, the man who commissioned Chaucer to write an elegy for his wife Blanche. Clearly, the characters in the Book of the Duchess are intended to be recognized as real people appearing as they might appear in a dream. The function of the knight is simple: his lament and his moving discourse on his love will supply the poet persona with material for a beautiful poem. By keeping the cast of otherworld characters small, Chaucer focuses strongly on this single interchange of information. The Book of the Duchess is a poem which reveals how a knight gained love and a poet regained creativity.

As the small cast of real personages is appropriate to the simple forest setting in the dream otherworld of the Book of the Duchess, so the otherworld multitudes, including a talking eagle and Fame personified, complement the sometimes bizarre, ever-expanding otherworld setting of the House of Fame. Though seemingly a hodgepodge of persons from everyday life, great writers, figures from the past, and mythological figures, the characters in this second

dream otherworld are united by ideas of creativity and authority.

The eagle is the first otherworld character that the poet persona encounters. The bird appears in each of the poem's three books as the dreamer's friendly guide into the realm of otherworld. Chaucer's possible sources for the choice of the eagle are numerous: the eagle may have come straight out of Dante, out of Ovid, or even out of Pindar, where he early appears as a sign of poetic inspiration.⁹ Certainly any bird might well be linked with ideas of creativity, but the golden eagle, as the ancient emblem of the Roman empire, also carried the import of authority, authority supported by the eagle's function in the poem. The eagle is a fearless guide in the otherworld and, at the same time, serves as a guide to keep the poet persona's imagination from getting out of hand. He interrupts the dreamer's personal vision of stellification. In Book III the eagle is seen sitting on a stone just outside the house of twigs. Of his appearance one writer has concluded:

The implications that the bird has never been far away from the poet persona since bringing him to the area and that the emblem of the creative rests high on a permanent foundation unite nature imagery with productive poet and the eternal.¹⁰

⁹Laurence K. Shook, "The House of Fame," in Companion to Chaucer Studies, ed. Beryl Rowland (Toronto: Oxford Univ. Press, 1968), p. 349.

¹⁰Fulwiler, p. 210.

Also implied in this description is the image of authority resting on a strong, permanent foundation.

Although the eagle derides the poet persona's respect for old books, his actions serve to reinforce authority. A symbol of creativity and authority, the eagle is sent by Jove, another authority figure. He relates the wonders of the universe, beginning, in each instance, with the authority found in old books and using, to convey his message, the authority of established rhetorical devices. In the House of Fame the eagle's speeches on composition, including the "ridiculously incorrect assertion that he has successfully conveyed his message without recourse to rhetoric," are original with Chaucer.¹¹ In presenting the character of the eagle, Chaucer focuses on the relation of authority to creativity; in drawing the characters of Fame, her court, and the man of great authority, Chaucer sharpens the focus.

Fame appears as the most capricious creature ever devised. Now short, now tall, she alters her appearance as she arbitrarily assigns the fate of those persons seeking her favor. Fame exists outside of nature. Her home is on neither earth, nor land, nor sea. She is the sister of Fortune and is associated with rumor as well as with renown. A deity who is recorded in Virgil's Aeneid, Horace's Satires,

¹¹Ibid., p. 210.

and Livy's History, Fame is associated with tradition at large,¹² and she is very powerful. An assortment of minstrels and magicians (some good, some bad, but all creating) wait upon the lady. Her great hall, though built on ice, is supported by strong pillars of iron revealing the great literary figures and upheld by the writers of earlier years. The house of Fame, full of creativity, is upheld by the strength of tradition, of authority.

Once outside the house of Fame, the poet persona approaches the house of twigs in which there appear the shapes of persons voraciously exchanging news.

Although news is equivalent to neither remembered old books nor literary composition, it is related to them; perhaps there is even a passing bow to adaptation and reworking of old material in the growth of tidings conveyed from person to person.¹³

However, results are mixed: evil unites with good, false with true. Within this fecundity of possible ideas some order is desperately needed, and that need is to be fulfilled with the entrance of the final otherworld character, the man of great authority.

Very little is known, and much guessed, about this final otherworld figure. Some scholars have suggested that

¹²Shelia Delany, Chaucer's House of Fame: The Poetics of Skeptical Fidelism (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1972), p. 3.

¹³Fulwiler, p. 211.

he was to be a contemporary of Chaucer; some say he was to be the character of Boethius; yet his exact name will always remain a mystery, for the House of Fame ends abruptly with this character's entrance into the house of twigs.¹⁴ However, his epithet, "a man of gret auctorite" (l. 2158), does tell something of his purpose. Here is the character who was to bring some order into the chaotic creation of the house of twigs. Whatever his name, he is a figure of authority, of order, and of tradition.

The first otherworld character to appear in the Parliament of Fowls is also associated with tradition and old books. Africanus, guide to Scipio, the major character in a story the poet persona has just finished reading, appears as the guide for the poet persona at the beginning of the dream. In some ways the character of Scipio is similar to that of the poet persona. Like the poet persona, he is also a dreamer, but Africanus has shown Scipio what might be considered the ultimate vision. Transported above the galaxy, Scipio has learned that the business of man is to work for the "commune profit" (l. 75). The implications of this idea are twofold: first, working for the common profit refers to the most basic creative activity, procreation; second, it also implies that each creature has a

¹⁴Paul G. Ruggiers, "The Unity of Chaucer's House of Fame," in Chaucer Criticism, Vol. II, ed., Richard J. Schoeck and Jerome Taylor (Indiana: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1961), p. 271.

definite purpose which, when fulfilled, will benefit the whole of creation. It is this second aspect of the concept of common profit that incorporates the medieval philosophy of the great chain of being. Scipio is a man who has realized both the totality of the plan and his own place in the overall scheme. The elder Africanus has served once as the guide to otherworld. Scipio's quest into otherworld has long ago been successfully completed. This success promises well for the poet persona when Africanus promises to show the dreamer some "mater of to wryte" (l. 168). But unlike the hovering guide in the House of Fame, Africanus merely shoves the poet persona through the gates of the otherworld garden and leaves him on his own.

Upon entering the otherworld garden, the poet persona encounters Cupid, the blind son of Venus. This particular portrayal of Cupid as a blacksmith forging and sharpening his arrows, "some for to sle, and some to wounde and kerve" (l. 217), presents a sorrowful, if not dangerous, aspect of love. The other figures in the otherworld garden are also mixed; Pleasaunce, Curteysie, Youth, and Desyre are here, but they are accompanied by Flaterye, Foolhardyness, and Lust. Directly outside the temple of Love sit Pees and Pacience. In the temple are two major figures: Priapus appears decked with garlands of fresh flowers, and Venus, in company with Bacchus, hears the pleas of lovers. Both love,

Venus, and creativity, Priapus, reside in the temple; but because theirs is an established court, designed for the already initiated, the poet persona must go elsewhere.

Returning to the garden, the poet persona espies Dame Nature conducting the parliament of birds. Nature is surely a symbol for the creative, but she is also a symbol for right order. Nature calls the birds together and presides over the debate. She grants her beloved formel the right of free choice and encourages the three terceletts to be of "good herte" (l. 660). Nature is the vicar of God, responsible for procreation and right order in the great chain of being. These first three otherworld characters all come from stories in medieval and ancient literature, but the most important of the otherworld characters in this third dream vision, the fowls, are products of nature.

The birds, named in the title and appearing at the heart of the poem, provide a single "dominant emblem of creativity."¹⁵ Coming on St. Valentine's day to choose a mate, the majority must wait for the high-ranking eagles to make their choice. In the best courtly-love tradition, the tercel eagle declares his love for Nature's prize, the beautiful formel. Two other suitors follow, and it seems that the lady must make a choice. All types of birds, from the noble birds of prey to the practical waterfowl, enter

¹⁵Fulwiler, p. 213.

into the debate. Birds of prey suggest that the lovers do battle to see who wins the formel's hand; waterfowls hold the idea of service for love in contempt, suggesting that if the formel will not love a suitor, he must choose another love. The turtle, perhaps representing the clergy, takes the position that the lover must be true to his love even in the absence of reciprocal feeling. Nature's final decision, to postpone the proceedings for a year while letting each of the suitors continue to serve the lady, seems to uphold the courtly concept of love presented by the turtle. However, implicit in the decision to postpone the choice of suitor is the matter of worthiness or suitability. Each of the suitors is a noble, but Nature, acting the part of reason, states a preference for the first. And the turtle, prior to her plea for constancy in love, has remarked on the value of acting within one's abilities:

But bet is that a wyghtes tonge reste
 Than entermeten hym of such doinge,
 Of which he neyther rede can ne synge.
 (ll. 512-16)

This passage brings the creators of words and song into the great chain. Poets also add to the common profit, but one must be certain of his calling before declaring his vocation.

Within the otherworld of the Parliament of Fowls is a sense of right order, of everything in its place. In the garden each figure seems motionless, assigned to its proper

place: Venus reclines in the temple; Nature carries out her duties as God's vicar; and even the birds, though noisily engaged throughout the debate, are content with the final ruling of Nature. Having been mated for the common good, the birds rejoice and break into song. To the tercelet, Nature has given another year, rightly used, to work out the problem. Everything in this otherworld setting has its place in the scheme of things; everything works for the common profit.

In Chaucer's final dream vision, the cast of other-world characters is again small, and of these, only Cupid and Alceste interact with the poet persona. Cupid appears as a noble lord, clothed in silk embroidered with green leaves and red roses. From his face radiates light (in one version he is crowned with the sun) too bright to be gazed upon. Cupid carries two fiery darts, and, though blind, he recognizes the poet persona by his voice and upbraids him for earlier works. Clearly the god of love is angered, but he is a noble lord and shows mercy in compliance with a request from his queen.

The queen has entered on the arm of Cupid, as the formel had first appeared on the arm of Nature in the earlier dream vision. She is identified as Alceste; dressed in green and white, she resembles the daisy from which she has been metamorphosed. The daisy, a symbol of

creativity associated with light, brightness, and freshness, has earlier been declared the poet persona's muse, the mistress of his wit. In the dream otherworld, Alceste dramatizes this relationship with the dreamer. She is familiar with the poet persona's works: in interceding for him, she lists the early works of the Chaucer canon including the Book of the Duchess and the Parliament of Fowls. But most important, Alceste serves as a source of inspiration for all lovers:

And wost as wel that kalendar ys shee
 To any woman that wol lover bee.
 For she taught al the craft of fyn lovyng.
(ll. 542-44)

Herself a model of the perfect lover, Alceste reminds the poet persona that love is all-powerful and must be obeyed. She commissions him to do penance by writing the legends of good and faithful women, a penance that the god of love then commands.

These last two otherworld characters have the actions and appearance of the most high-ranking nobility; yet their function is simple. They are to receive homage and to command service, specific service from a particular person, the dreamer-narrator.

The dreamer is the one character common to each of the four dream-vision poems. He is presented as a book-loving, curious, and sometimes forlorn poet, somewhat

outside the courts of love. This linkage of the poet with the lover had its precedents in classical works. Plato writes of the god of love as a poet who inspires men to become poets. Ovid's Ars amatoria serves as a handbook for poets as well as a manual for lovers.¹⁶ In the Middle Ages, the concept of the poet-lover continued with the troubadours and flowered with the French love poets, such as the writers of the Roman de la Rose. The French poets also modified the role of the dreamer by identifying dream-vision narrators with the actual authors of the poems in which they appeared. Works by Machaut and Froissart contain allusions to patrons, to events of the time, and to the personal affairs of the poets. Froissart, in Espinette Amoureuse, includes his own love affair with Marguerite and an account of his visit to England. Medieval poets were also known to refer to their other works by having the narrator list the poet's works. In Paradys d'Amours, the dreamer is a poet who just happens to be carrying in his pocket an original poem, a popular piece that is clearly another work of Froissart. In Machaut's Jugement dou Roi de Navarre there is an apology for an earlier poem, Jugement dou Roi de Behaigne.¹⁷ Chaucer's works contain three such catalogues, all found in

¹⁶Shook, p. 343.

¹⁷Spearing, pp. 43-46.

introductory passages: two in the Canterbury Tales,¹⁸ another in the Legend of Good Women. Such "recantations" provided the medieval writer a form of self-advertisement. An even more direct tactic used by Medieval poets was to identify the poet persona as the poet. Machaut begins his Jugement dou Roi de Navarre calling the narrator by the poet's Christian name. At the end of his poem, Machaut adds his surname, making sure no one will mistake his identity. Langland's famous dreamer is called Will, and in the House of Fame, the dazed dreamer is addressed as "Geffrey," after his creator. The link between the poet persona and the poet existed strongly in the dream-vision poems.¹⁹ Sometimes it was stated, but it was also often only implied. Chaucer's dream visions present no physical descriptions of the poet persona. In an age of oral tradition, when the poet stood before his audience to read his work, no written description of the narrator was needed: the voice of the poet became, for the moment, the voice of the poet persona. Of course, the poet and the poet persona were never truly identical. Froissart embroidered his love affair, and Chaucer never revealed the married man working

¹⁸The Chaucer catalogues in the Canterbury Tales come in the Man of Law's Tale (ll. 57-75) and in the Retractation at the end of the Parson's Tale (ll. 1085-87).

¹⁹Spearing, pp. 43-46.

to support a family; yet part of the man, the poet, shone through. Through his poet persona, Chaucer spoke not of the custom office but of poetry, not of personal experience but of the universal experience of the evolution of the artist.

The poet persona at the beginning of the Book of the Duchess suffers from some eight-year sickness, incurable but by one. He seeks solitude and cannot sleep. These are the classic symptoms of lovesickness. Pain, loss of color, insomnia had all been recorded by Ovid and carried through the courtly-love romances of the Middle Ages. But in the Book of the Duchess, in conjunction with the sorrow of the dejected lover comes the despair of the poet: in the opening segment he suffers from a "sorwful ymagynacioun" (l. 14); his mind is numb; he cannot compose. However, by the end of the poem, the poet persona is writing enthusiastically about his wonderful dream. It is this dream, this otherworld experience, that has allowed the poet persona to regain his creativity. The power of the otherworld is strong. From the moment the narrator enters the dream, he is lively, happy, and full of energy. No longer benumbed, he is alive to the sounds of the birds and to the beauty of the stories worked in glass. His otherworld encounter with the man in black does not bring happiness, but it does bring an acute

intellectual and emotional responsiveness. No longer passive, the dreamer gently encourages the knight to unload his grief, and in the knight's release of emotions, the poet persona realizes his own poetic release. Once outside the dream world, he shapes the dream experience into verse as best he can, and "that anoon" (l. 1333).

Geffrey, the poet persona in the House of Fame, is someone who has already been in the service of love. His initial state is not so much one of sorrow as one of frustration: looking over the book, he suffers not so much from his lack of creative responsiveness as from his inability to deal with the material which he has on hand. On the best possible night of the year for dreaming, the poet persona falls asleep readily, like one on a pilgrimage, and awakes in an other-world overflowing with material to be shaped by the writer. He has for examples the stories of the great lovers and the great writers who support the pillars in the temple of Fame; nevertheless, his fanciful flights leave him astounded, and he can only stare at the abundance of raw material found swirling in the house of twigs. Unlike the simple vision in the Book of the Duchess, this dream contains everything, and the dreamer is faced with choosing the appropriate material. ✓ In this otherworld is much creativity, but there is also much confusion. The poet persona must learn to choose wisely. Exactly how he does this is only implied--the poem

stands incomplete--but the beginning of the poem attests that the poet persona has developed some selection process and has thus been able to shape his second otherworld experience into a poem.

At the beginning of the Parliament of Fowls, the poet persona is frustrated. He has spent all day reading, searching for "a certeyn thing to lerne" (l. 20), but by nightfall he has gleaned only the moral of common profit, and he is dissatisfied. Wearied he falls asleep and in his dream encounters Africanus, his otherworld guide. However, the poet persona has lost his taste for love and must be shoved through the gates into the otherworld garden.

Left on his own, the dreamer in the Parliament of Fowls does not interact with any of the otherworld characters. Although a non-participant, the poet persona structurally unites the poem. He moves from the temple to the meeting place of the birds, following his own interest. The dreamer moves from the established structure of love, the temple, toward that noisy arena where lovers are not yet committed; he is drawn to the center of the action, to the debate of the birds. Here too the poet persona is only an observer, but his interest is keen. He misses not one word of the sometimes courtly, sometimes silly arguments, and he stays until the very end. The parliament adjourns, and the decision is delayed. The eagles must wait a year, but the

time is to be spent in service to the beloved. As the poem closes, the poet persona appears in the same position as the three suitors. Like them he lacks an answer, but taking the advice of Nature, he returns to his work, hoping through diligence to obtain some better thing. In this final emotional state, the poet persona has shown some progress; though still searching, he is no longer frustrated. Time, the trial of all lovers, will reveal his place in the scheme of things, even as it joins the proper eagles in the theme of common profit.

In the final dream vision, the poet persona is no longer outside the main action; he interacts with the otherworld characters. He is, in fact, the main character. Like Geoffrey in the House of Fame, this poet persona is, as indicated by the catalogue given in the poem, clearly intended to be Chaucer. However, he differs from his counterparts in the three earlier poems. As the poem opens, the poet persona appears as a happy, confident person: anxiety and sleeplessness are gone. He has learned the way to otherworld and is no longer hesitant about entering that realm. To insure a pleasant journey, he orders the proper bed, one strewn with flowers, and he then falls asleep quickly. Both in and out of otherworld, the poet persona speaks as the lover. He kneels adoringly to the daisy, addressing her in gentle, courtly terms. She is his muse, his source of inspiration,

and her transfiguration into Alceste only enhances the relationship. The poet kneels before the queen as he has knelt before the daisy, and she, as both muse and protectress, shields him from the wrath of Cupid, acknowledges his service, and gives him work to do. As the poem ends, the poet persona has advanced from casual happiness to purposeful behavior. No longer an outsider, he is in service to the god of love. He has received his commission as a poet; he has found his muse.

In each of the four dream-vision poems, the elements of the dream vision combine to focus on various aspects of creativity. The Book of the Duchess, with its small cast, its emphasis on the hunt, and its direct interaction, focuses on that process of inspiration first described by Fulwiler. Chaucer's use of the image progression is an essential part of each of the dream visions; yet in the three later works the focus of discovery shifts to highlight other aspects of creativity. In the House of Fame, the combination of imagery, fecundity in a chaotic state, with the characters of the eagle, the ancients, and the man of great authority, points to one of the problems of the creative imagination. There is an emphasis on the need for order, the problem of finding authority. In the Parliament of Fowls everything seems to be in order. Here the theme of common profit, of everyone in his appointed place, is supported by the

beautiful garden and the gentle rule of Nature. But the very concept of common profit produces a problem: what is one's proper place? Each of the eagles claims the right to the same mistress, and the poem ends without a final resolution. In the prologue to the Legend of Good Women, the problem is not rightful acceptance but proper service, and this is resolved succinctly with a specific command from the god of love. This last dream-vision poem, more than any other, focuses on the character of the poet persona. He has become both the courtly lover and the courtly poet, one who practices under the auspices of the god of love.

It is evident that in each of these poems different problems are addressed; yet before these questions can be clearly defined, it will be necessary to examine those elements of the four poems which exist apart from those of the dream-vision tradition and to see how these other elements strengthen the creative focus of discovery, authority, argument, and apology. To those non-dream-vision elements--qualities typical of other genres and qualities of rhetoric--Chapter III will address itself.

CHAPTER III

ELEMENTS OUTSIDE THE DREAM VISION TRADITION

In addition to the dream-frame, the dream, and the dreamer, there exists in each of the four poems of the current study rhetorical material quite distinct from the necessary components of the dream-vision tradition.

Chaucer's incorporation of certain characteristics of other genres and of certain additional rhetorical devices into the dream-vision mode accords with the artistic practices of his age. There is no mathematical computation which allows one to equate exactly the various stylistic elements of the different art forms within a given period of history; yet some correlation seems to exist. In any given age, within a particular geographical region, developments in architecture, in art, in music, and in literature seem to follow similar lines and so to create specific "periods." In the Middle Ages, taste in art was gradually moving from the Romanesque to the Gothic. Chaucer lived during the early Gothic period, but the influence of the Romanesque style can be found in his works, just as it was found in much of the church architecture and decoration of the day.

The order of Romanesque art was intellectual rather than natural: painted figures, or sculpted ones, such as

those which decorate the apse of the Abbey church at the monastery of Cluny, were physically separated by time and space but were united by an idea.¹ Each figure was at once separate yet was a part of the whole. This medieval bent for creating an overall theme out of very distinct elements gave rise to polyphonic music. Master Leonin, a contemporary of Chretien de Troyes, was the originator of polyphony, "the building of musical commentaries--organa dupla, or two-part organa--upon traditional chaunts." Romanesque artists and musicians built onto and around a definite center. But it was a center visible only to the imaginative intellect. In the literary arts, poets created what has been termed works of "interlace":² works in which the thematic center was defined by the overlay of lesser themes and rhetorical devices:

The conceptions of acentricity of design in Romanesque ornament and of narrative acentricity in polyphonic romance offer helpful analogies to the idea of discursive acentricity in the Roman de la Rose. The only resting-place of Jean de Meun's thought seems to be a Christian orthodoxy which is purely theoretical in the sense that it receives no positive emphasis in his work; but it is precisely this absence of a center that gives

¹D. W. Robertson, Jr., A Preface to Chaucer (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1962), pp. 149-50.

²Eugene Vinaver, The Rise of Romance (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1971), p. 23.

his work its extraordinary freedom to elaborate a whole range of possible attitudes towards fundamental human issues.³

By Chaucer's time, the imaginative center had given rise to the art of elaboration--the overlay of genres, the use of the digressio, and the addition of other rhetorical decorations. But Chaucer's elaborations were more than mere rhetorical flourishes in the best tradition. Each addition was built around the imaginative center of the whole, enriching the general subject matter and sharpening the foci of the poems on matters of creativity.

In medieval times, a chief concern of a poet was the selection of the appropriate genre. It was a choice not casually made but rather compelled by both the subject and the writer's attitude toward the subject. Genre was the garment of the subject, defining its limits and creating certain conventions of treatment. A good poet would no more dress a bawdy tale in the elegiac mode than a sane man would wear a belled cap to a funeral.

Of Chaucer's four dream-vision poems, two, the Book of the Duchess and the Parliament of Fowls, belong to genres distinct from the dream-vision tradition; the last, the prologue to the Legend of Good Women, provides a frame for a larger work; and the second, the House of Fame, contains

³A. C. Spearing, Medieval Dream-Poetry (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1976), p. 33.

structural elements which by the eighteenth century had emerged as a distinct form--that of the fantastic voyage. Each of these modes overlays the dream-vision structure and imbues each dream vision with those special characteristics inherent in the form of the cooperating genre.

It is common knowledge that Chaucer's earliest dream vision, the Book of the Duchess, is an occasional poem, an elegy for Blanche, the wife of Chaucer's patron John of Gaunt. In combining the elegiac mode with the dream vision, Chaucer solved the problem of a man in a lower class, however fictionalized his character, speaking freely to a member of the nobility. However, the combination of the two forms also highlights certain features found both in the lament for the dead, a genre in its own right during the Middle Ages, and in the elegy, that genre which encompassed the lament.

Laments for the dead frequent medieval poetry. Treated as a separate genre by the rhetorical manuals of the age, the literary lament carried with it recognizable characteristics. Laments were often found in the longer works of history, such as works dealing with the matter of Arthur, or with Charles and Roland, or in combination with one of the classical tales such as the story of Dido. The scope of the lament was broad. A lament might encompass many persons, as does Arthur's lament for the slain knights in Le Morte Arthur; it might be anticipatory, as is the lament in

Cassandra's warning; or it might be for one who is lost, stolen, or captured rather than dead. There were even laments for animals, but most frequent was the lament for a specific person, either a man or a woman, by the bereaved friend or relative. Launcelot's lament for Guineverell falls into this last category as does the knight's lament for Good, Fair White.⁴

The content of the lament, in addition to the traditional expressions of grief for and praise of the dead, often showed concern for the future. Hence the lament disclosed something of its deliverer as well as something of its subject. Arthur's lament at the end of Morte Arthur reveals the king to be a better person than the grieving Charles who delivers the lament in Sir Ferunbras, and in his expressions of grief and praise, the knight in the Book of the Duchess proves himself the worthy companion of the Good, Fair White.⁵

Laments tended to be set speeches. Interplay between the characters during a lament was somewhat uncommon,⁶ but laments were often "cut off" by someone's offering consolation, or more frequently, chiding the mourner for

⁴Velma Bourgeois Richmond, Laments for the Dead in Medieval Narrative (Pittsburg: Duquesne Univ. Press, 1966), pp. 31-35.

⁵Ibid., pp. 51-52.

⁶Ibid., p. 113.

"unnecessary lamentation."⁷ Interruptions brought a third character into the action. In the Book of the Duchess, this third party is the poet persona, whose attitudes toward the bereaved reveal something of both the knight in black and himself. The poet persona, once aware of the true nature of the knight's loss, forgoes any moralizing. He can only exclaim, "Be God, hyt ys routhe!" (l. 1310). This spontaneous outburst, which ends the lament, reveals the extent of the poet persona's ability both to understand the knight's grief and to empathize. The larger poem--the elegy--that encompassed the lament also provided insight into the characters and the theme of the poem.

The earliest elegies were Greek and therefore were unknown to Chaucer's age, but the form of the elegy passed through the Romans and combined with those lamentations native to Old English poetry to create a tradition widely recognized in medieval literature. Because elegiac poetry was usually employed to praise the dead, the images of elegiac poetry tended toward chiaroscuro. Dark images surrounded the mourner and bright images described the dead. Symbols of brightness surrounding the elegy and the person lamented came into medieval poetry through three avenues: from the classical writers came the stellification of the

⁷Ibid., p. 38.

dead, from the Biblical writers came the tradition of light associated with goodness and God, and from the writers of Old English poetry came the story of the burning phoenix.⁸ But elegiac poetry did more than contrast light with darkness: it affirmed that out of darkness came light. Hence, the departed achieved some better place, and the mourner gained some consolation. In a very real sense elegiac poetry was the poetry of enlightenment. It was discovery through psychological revelation rather than through dramatization.⁹ Though at the end of the Book of the Duchess, the knight has literally been "no place," he has achieved some measure of comfort; the poet persona, though dreaming, has become creatively awake.

When Chaucer combined the elegiac mode of enlightenment (complete with the lament that in itself revealed the character of its participants) with the dream-vision tradition of otherworld edification, the result was dazzling. The splendor of Good, Fair White is comparable only to that brightness which seems to encompass the poet persona in his epiphany, that moment when he confronts the truth and regains both feeling and creativity.

⁸Abbie Findlay Potts, The Elegiac Mode: Poetic Form in Wordsworth and Other Elegists (New York: Cornell Univ. Press, 1967), pp. 42-45.

⁹Ibid., p. 92.

Though scholars have searched diligently for an appropriate historic occasion which may have precipitated the House of Fame, they have not yet found one. Certainly the poem is a dream vision, but it has always struck scholars as being also of a "definitely transitional character."¹⁰ It is the last of Chaucer's dream-vision poems to employ the octosyllabic couplet and the first to move beyond the bounds of established literary tradition toward, perhaps, the definition of a new literary genre, that of the imaginary voyage.

The imaginary voyage, though not recognizable as a separate genre until the eighteenth century, a literary period which saw Defoe's Robinson Crusoe and Swift's Gulliver's Travels, has roots in the oral traditions of pre-literate societies. Early Asian, Polynesian, and African stories are stories of quests encompassing the supernatural: "not physical but spiritual adventure, the journeys of the soul into the past, the distant or hidden present, and the future."¹¹ The written progenitors of the imaginary voyage genre include great classical works: Homer's Odyssey, Plato's Republic, and Lucian's True History:

The Odyssey is a Fantastic Voyage of the Non-Philosophic variety; the Republic is a

¹⁰Robertson, p. 280.

¹¹Spearing, p. 7.

Philosophic account of an imaginary commonwealth;
and the True History is the earliest known
Philosophic Voyage.¹²

Two classical journeys with which Chaucer was known to be intimately acquainted were the journey of Boethius related in the fourth book of De Consolatione Philosophiae, which Chaucer translated, and the journey of the younger Scipio through the heavens, which Chaucer related in the opening of the Parliament of Fowls.

In the Middle Ages, many writers combined the marvelous with the didactic to produce a type of allegorical journey:

The Divine Comedy, the Marvelous Voyages of St. Brandon, and the legend of St. Patrick's Purgatory are all affiliated with the "literature" of fantastic travel and grotesque adventure.¹³

Piers Plowman and the numerous accounts of the quests for the Holy Grail, so popular in medieval literature, also hold some elements of the fantastic; yet the genre, be it the imaginary voyage or the allegorical journey, was not clearly defined or recognized as a separate entity during the Middle Ages. By placing some of the elements of the fantastic journey in the House of Fame, Chaucer was working with traditions not fully formalized, traditions much like the rumors in the poem's

¹²Mrs. J. O. Garrett, "The Imaginary Voyage as a Motif in the Eighteenth Century English Novel," Thesis Texas State College for Women, 1933, p. 2.

¹³Ibid., p. 5.

twirling house of twigs. Yet this very lack of a definite second genre supports the theme of the poem and dramatizes by form, or rather lack of form, the poet persona's quest for authority.

In the Middle Ages, debate, the genre overlay in the Parliament of Fowls, was often linked with the dream vision. In fact, the dream-frame was one of the five elements essential to the medieval poetic debate genre.¹⁴ Working in conjunction with the debate genre, the dream vision set the scene and provided any reason or philosophical background for the debate.¹⁵ However, the debate genre acted on the dream-vision tradition even as it incorporated it. All of the surviving poetic debates of the Middle Ages, though widely variant in tone, in characters, and in setting, work from a single assumption: the existence of a system of right and wrong that is capable of being judged. Medieval poetic debates were, in the main, arguments over propriety, questions of proper behavior or questions of proper position.

In the Parliament of the Three Ages and in Winner and Waster the argument concerns proper behavior. In the first poem Old Age rebukes the carefree attitudes of Youth

¹⁴Gladys Wenzel Rios, "The Middle English Poetic Debate: A Definition of a Genre," Diss. Texas Woman's Univ., 1973, p. 19.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 56.

and the materialistic goals of Middle Age, reminding them that man's primary purpose in this world is preparation for the next world. This argument assumes a natural hierarchy of action based on a tacit agreement of what is most beneficial to man. In this case, the joys of heaven are more important than the joys of earth. In Winner and Waster the opposing characters argue before a judge the merits of their very different lifestyles. Their arguments rest on what each person is contributing to the community of man, to the common profit, by his use of money.

The Owl and the Nightingale, the earliest medieval poetic debate, has, like the Parliament of Fowls, birds as major characters. The owl, representing solemnity, argues inconclusively with the nightingale, who represents love and gaiety. They debate who is the better bird. The arguing is fierce, often dissolving into bouts of name-calling; Again the criterion for worth is one of contribution. The bird who best serves man is the best bird.

Viewing Chaucer's Parliament of Fowls as a part of the debate tradition, one can more readily discern the central question of the debate--the theme of common profit. Nature wills that one should attain his proper place, in accordance with breeding and service, through what one is and through what one contributes to the common good.

Chaucer's fourth dream-vision poem is a prologue to a series of stories, legends of good women. Prologue as a genre came from the Greeks. It was derived from the proagon, Sophocles' entrance for his chorus; the dithyramb, the Hierphant's chant; and the prologos, "that part of the Greek drama preceding the entrance of the chorus which is probably related to the words spoken by the sacred Herald."¹⁶ Prologues tended to be both personal and honest. The prologue was the writer's opportunity to address the audience directly, to express his feelings about the work which followed. Statements concerning the author's intent were usually sincere, relating those things that the writer did "really feel" and would "stand by if pressed."¹⁷ By the Middle Ages the prologue had become attached to modes of expression other than the drama and had gained a number of uses. The prologue could serve as "a petition, an organ of censure, an apology, a satire, a supplicatory address, a grace before a feast, a bill of fare, and a dedication."¹⁸ The third use, the apology, Chaucer presented in his prologue to the Legend of

¹⁶Autrey Nell Wiley, ed., Rare Prologues and Epilogues (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1940), p. xxiii.

¹⁷Herbert J. C. Grierson and Sandys Wason, The Personal Note: First and Last Words from Prefaces, Introductions, and Epilogues (London: Chatto and Windus, 1946), p. 3.

¹⁸Wiley, p. xxiii.

Good Women. In this poem the poet persona is intended to be recognized as the poet. The prologue, shaped as a dream vision, both relates Chaucer's past works and provides an explanation for his current project. This final dream vision, presented as the prologue to a work of greater scope than anything Chaucer had yet attempted, doubly affirms its sense of apology. The poet is writing in the service of Love, and he will continue to write even greater works.

Chaucer's dream visions come dressed in a variety of modes. The solemn beauty of the elegy, the moral vitality of the debate, the sense of purpose of the prologue, and even the need for form associated with the House of Fame support those concerns of artistic creation considered above in the discussion of the elements of the dream vision. The addition of a second genre affects the whole poem, forcing each dream vision to align itself with those qualities inherent in the second genre while remaining faithful to its own traditions. A smaller, but no less vital, addition to Chaucer's dream poems was the incorporation of the digressio and the invocation. Each of the four poems contains at least one instance of one of these rhetorical devices that were so popular during the Middle Ages; three of them contain more. Yet in every case, the addition supports and illuminates the whole.

In medieval poetry the digressio was a favorite device recommended by such rhetoricians as Martianus Capella,

John of Garland, and Geoffrey of Vinsauf. The last, in his Poetria Nova, advises the writer

to digress into another part of the matter (ad aliam partem material) or [to] introduce another matter (aliquid extra matariam). In the former case digression would serve either as a reminder or as an anticipation of something that belongs to the matter in hand; in the latter, it would amount to a diversion, a change of theme, but with the implied assurance that the narration would eventually be resumed at the point at which it was interrupted.¹⁹

Modern use tends to link the term to the latter type--aliquid extra matariam--but Chaucer in his dream-vision poetry used only the first type of digressio, an illumination of the matter at hand.

In the opening sections of the Book of the Duchess the poet persona reads the story of Seys and Alcyone, which he then relates to the audience. Alcyone, not knowing the fate of her husband, Seys, suffers from sleeplessness. She prays to Juno, who sends her both sleep and a vision from otherworld. Juno sends Aeolus to wake Morpheus and to command him to bring up the body of the drowned king. Seys then appears before Alcyone to reveal his fate and to ease her anguish. The story is from Ovid, but Chaucer, in contrast to his source, focuses not on Seys but on Alcyone, the dreamer.²⁰ Chaucer abbreviates the story so that the

¹⁹Vinaver, p. 75.

²⁰Wolfgang Clemen, Chaucer's Early Poetry (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1963), p. 32.

parallel between Alcyone's vision and the narrator's dream comes to the forefront:

It is in her divinely sent dream vision that Alcyone finds the answer to her question and her sorrow; similarly, it is in an old-book-inspired dream that the poet persona finds release from sorrow and frozen imagination.²¹

In this first digressio the focus, like the focus of the dream vision, is on the gaining of inspiration through an otherworld experience. Nothing is without place. Even the comical picture of Aeolus, the god of wind, blowing his trumpet in Morpheus' ear dramatizes the difficulties that inspiration overcomes in the sorrowful, sleeping imagination.

In the House of Fame there are two digressios: the abbreviated story of Dido and Aeneas, engraved on the walls of Venus' temple, and the eagle's discourse on sound. In the story of Dido the ghost of Creusa, Aeneas' wife, appears to inform him of his destiny. Aeneas embarks on his voyage which Aeolus interrupts with a ship-wrecking storm. Fortunately, Aeneas is under the protection of Venus, who persuades Jupiter to save him. Venus in disguise then guides Aeneas to Carthage, where he meets, wins, and leaves Dido. Dido betrayed charges Aeneas with seeking the accolades of fame through his false love while perverting the account of her

²¹Lavon Buster Fulwiler, "Image Progressions in Chaucer's Poetry," Diss. Michigan State Univ., 1971, p. 190.

true affections into the stuff of gossips. The story closes with a brief telling of Aeneas' journey into Hades, where he still moves under the protection of Venus. In this very abbreviated version, the topic is the discernment of truth--of the good--with a special emphasis on old books. In fact, the poet persona interrupts his summary of the classic tale to direct his audience to his sources, the writings of Virgil and Ovid, and to remind the listeners that these old stories "have become mother to new poetry."²² This careful rehearsal of sources is seen also in the second digressio. The eagle, citing Plato and Aristotle, explains various phenonema. His scientific discussion points out the orderly arrangements in Nature: each element seeks its own. Nature houses a divine harmony quite different from the haphazard, capricious flux of Fame. In this second digressio special emphasis is given to the Greek theories of sound; however, the purpose is not so much scientific as literary: sound is presented as it relates to composition and to fame.²³ Moreover, the production of sound, a movement from the original source outward in everwidening circles, effectively dramatizes the power of one piece of literature to influence, even propagate, other works. As in the first digressio the idea of authority, or previous sources, is linked to the production of literature.

²² Ibid., p. 63.

²³ Ibid., p. 63.

In Chaucer's third dream-vision poem, the Parliament of Fowls, credit for the sources of the dream of Scipio is given. This classical tale, which the poet persona reads in the waking world, tells of the otherworld experience of Scipio, another dreamer. Led by Africanus, Scipio journeys through the heavens. He sees at firsthand the harmony of the universe and learns of the heavenly bliss shared by persons who work for the "commune profit" (l. 75). By trimming away much of the well-known story Chaucer emphasizes the idea of common profit. The prediction of the moving stars supports the theme of proper place. And the space given to the nine spheres, "that welle is of musik and melodye" (l. 62), and their influence on earth links the poem's theme of right order with the act of artistic creation. Thematically forged, the bond between the remainder of the poem and this opening segment is further strengthened by the character of Africanus, who acts as the otherworld guide for both Scipio and the poet persona.

The final dream vision contains no digressio. Although there is a mention of the relationship of Zephyrus, the warm and gentle west wind, to Flora, the goddess of spring, no story ensues. The story of Alceste's metamorphosis into the daisy, which sounds like one of the classical legends so often used as a digressio, is original

with Chaucer.²⁴ For the prologue to the Legend of Good Women Chaucer created his own "classical" story.

As common to medieval literature as the digressio, but still nonessential to the dream vision, was the practice of invoking supernatural aid. Major invocations to the classical gods and goddesses or to the Christian God appear most frequently at the beginning of poems; shorter, though not less ardent, appeals for aid may be found almost anywhere within a work. In his four dream-vision poems Chaucer used the invocation both to set the tone and to amplify the creative focus of each work.

The Book of the Duchess presents two invocations. The first is Alcyone's prayer to Juno; the second is the poet persona's appeal to Morpheus. Alcyone promises to become one of Juno's devoted followers if only the goddess will send her a dream, a vision that will reveal her husband's whereabouts and relieve her distress. Juno, acknowledging Alcyone's prayer, causes the queen to fall into a deep sleep and sends a messenger to waken Morpheus, instructing the sleeping god to dredge up the drowned Seys. Alcyone's request for insight is granted as her husband appears bearing a message from otherworld. The queen's successful prayer provides the impetus for the poet persona's invocation. Having read of Alcyone's success in obtaining rest,

²⁴Ibid., p. 156.

the sleepless poet persona prays--half jokingly, half in despair--to Morpheus. He promises the god of sleep, so rudely disturbed by the earlier adventure, a fine featherbed if only Morpheus will grant him some repose. Immediately the poet persona falls asleep, and he too receives a dream vision from otherworld. In each instance the effect of the invocation is both immediate and twofold: the suppliant receives both sleep and a vision. The poet persona, following Alcyone's example, finds the key to the entrance of otherworld.

In the House of Fame invocations abound. Pagan deities, the Christian God, and well known saints all receive their share of prayers. In Book I the invocation to the god of sleep is prominent. It is separated from the rest of the poem, coming between the poem and the story, and it is fuller than either of those found in the Book of the Duchess. Moreover, this prayer to the god of sleep, asking Morpheus' help in relating the vision which the poet persona has dreamed, displays a greater knowledge by the poet persona of the god's habits and habitat than the invocation in the earlier poem. Invocations to Venus come near the end of Book I and at the beginning of Book II. Recalling what he has seen in the temple of Venus, the poet persona acknowledges Venus' protection of Aeneas and prays that the goddess

of love might also watch over him. In the prayer within the poem to Book II, the poet persona again seeks the aid of Venus, but this time he specifically asks for help in recording his dream "to endite and ryme" (l. 520). The final prayer to a classical deity is the invocation to Apollo at the opening of Book III. The poet persona addresses Apollo as the god of science and light (l. 1091), of knowledge and inspiration. In his appeal to the father of poetry the poet persona seeks special assistance so that the "sentence" (l. 1100) of his work may shine through. When composing this passage Chaucer may well have used Dante's description of Apollo in Paradiso I, but Chaucer's emphasis on both the poetical nature of the god and the creative focus of the poem with the prayer that "Here art poetical be shewed" (l. 1095) has no counterpart in Dante's passage. The invocations to classical deities in the House of Fame contain appeals for aid in writing, but there are other invocations as well.

Four times prayers are offered to the Christian God. The poet persona begins the poem by asking God to turn every dream to good. He follows his prayer to the pagan deity Morpheus with a prayer to Jesus, asking that the poem be clearly understood and praying for a curse on readers who would misinterpret his dream. At the close of Book I, the

poet persona cries out to Christ for protection from "fantome and illusion" (l. 493), those dreams which Macrobius had classified as false visions. The final appeal to God comes not from the poet persona but from the eagle who, having deposited Geffrey at the foot of Fame's palace, gives him the blessing of God and prays that the Almighty will grant the poet persona the grace "some good to lernen in this place" (l. 1088).

In addition to these longer prayers cries to various Christian saints are sprinkled throughout the poem. Saint Thomas of Kent is called on when the poet persona views the unlikely foundation of the house of Fame. The eagle while instructing his student cries out to Saint Mary, Saint Clarem, and Saint James. When promising entrance to the house of twigs the eagle calls, most appropriately, on that most famous gate keeper, Saint Peter.

The tone of these many invocations ranges from the serious to the humorous; yet each prayer, be it addressed to pagan deity or Christian God or saint, represents an appeal for aid from a recognized authority.

In Chaucer's Parliament of Fowls appear two invocations. Each invocation is delivered by the poet persona, and each is addressed to a classical figure traditionally associated with love. In the opening lines of the poem, the poet persona reveals his relationship with the god of love.

His only knowledge of the god comes from reading books that relate the god's duality, his "myrakles and his crewel yre" (l. 11). The poet persona stands in awe of such a powerful figure, and like a peasant to a king, he can only exclaim, "God save swich a lord!" (l. 14). The poet persona's prayer to Cytherea expresses closeness and familiarity. He addresses the goddess of love as "thou blysfyl lady swete" (l. 113) and credits her with sending him this wonderful dream. He then asks her assistance in the art of writing. These two very different invocations not only reinforce the poem's debate mode but also demonstrate in the character of the poet persona the idea of internal conflict. Thus the poet persona is closely aligned with the debate mode of the poem.

The prologue to the Legend of Good Women contains only one major invocation. Like the tone of the invocations in the Book of the Duchess, the tone of this invocation is simple and direct; like the prayers in the House of Fame and the Parliament of Fowls, this prayer asks for guidance in the craft of writing. But here the similarities end. This final invocation reveals a relationship between the poet persona and the one to whom he prays that is different from any of those described in the three earlier poems. First, the daisy to whom the poet persona prays is neither pagan deity nor Christian saint. The daisy, though called upon as

one would invoke a deity, is clearly the poet persona's muse. She is the mistress of his wit, and she will use him as her harp. Second, the rhetoric of this invocation shows the poet persona in a particular relationship with his muse: his speech takes on the refined phrases of the courtly lover as he promises obedience and complete surrender to his lady. She in turn is to be both guide and sovereign, aiding him both in "this werk" and in "sorwes alle" (l. 96). This prayer is at once a plea for assistance and an affirmation of a relationship. The courtly lover addresses his lady, the writer his muse.

With each separate element of the dream-vision genre, with each additional element, be it as all-encompassing as genre or as slight as a plea to Saint Peter, Chaucer as a fine Romanesque artist shaped his dream-vision poetry around the unseen, yet very real, center of creativity. As the elaborate ornamentation of the Romanesque turns to reveal new delights, so does the emphasis of the poems shift to reveal the evolving aspects of the poet's growth. Progression and evolution in art are themes often associated with the Gothic mode. Chaucer, who was a product of the Romanesque school, was also a builder of the Gothic school, that mode in which the sum of a man's works as well as the parts was consciously designed. The final key to these

various questions concerning creativity, both as separate entities and as progressive stages, is found by examining the opening statements of intent. Those few lines which begin each dream-vision poem reveal the particular focus of the poem and present its place in Chaucer's exploration of the dream-vision mode as a means of discussing poetic creativity.

CHAPTER IV

THE PARTS AND THE WHOLE

Each of Geoffrey Chaucer's four early dream-vision poems deals with a specific stage in the writer's development; moreover, each separate work progressively incorporates those aspects of creativity discussed in previous works and thus reveals a definite pattern of artistic evolution which, in turn, makes up the creative focus of the whole. Statements of intent which appear as the beginning lines of each of the poems concisely summarize the topic of creativity inherent in each poem.

The Book of the Duchess is a poem in which characters gain emotional release through an otherworld experience. The opening statement to the poem incorporates a simple, straightforward exclamation: "I have gret wonder, be this lyght" (l. 1). Yet this direct statement previews the thematic focus of the entire work. To wonder is to feel surprise or amazement, to be curious and to be emotionally alive. The word "light" conjoins two ideas: the illumination associated with the elegiac mode and the inspiration associated with Apollo, the god of poetry. Clearly the subject of the sentence--the "I," or the poet persona--has been suffering from a loss of creative power. In the course of

the poem Chaucer demonstrates through a pattern of images how the poet persona regains his literary fecundity. The subject of the Book of the Duchess is creativity, and the creative focus of the poem is the poet's discovery of the process of inspiration. The poet persona learns that a poet gains inspiration through an otherworld experience bounded by old works and creative images.

The House of Fame reveals a problem encountered by travelers in the creative otherworld, where good and bad constantly change shape and sometimes blend together. The poem's opening line, "God turne us every drem to goode!" at once poses the problem of the persona's inability to deal with his dream and presents the answer to the dilemma. The prayer, a fervent plea for aid in shaping the poet persona's visionary experience, results from the poet persona's realization of the need for some strong shaping force. This force must be able both to appropriately select the good ideas from the numerous stimuli encountered in the dream otherworld and to appropriately organize these selections into a recognizable form. In having the poet persona address this prayer to God, Chaucer reveals the only answer possible in a medieval culture. Only authority--the voice of God or the great literary works of the past--can aid the poet in correctly shaping his experience.

Antithesis opens the House of Fame: "The lyf so short, the craft so long to learn" (l. 1). The juxtaposition of these opposing ideas both sets the framework for the debate that follows and brings to the forefront the topic of literature. In this opening the poet persona, who has remained silent throughout his otherworld experience, declares the duality of his feelings. His debate, though internal, is as real as that of the three eagles. In the Parliament of Fowls the poet battles with the matter of dedication. Like the service required of a courtly lover, writing is difficult work and requires a certain suitability on the part of the writer so that the common good can be served. At the end of the poem both the suitors and the poet persona must wait for an answer. The birds prepare for a year of work, and the poet persona resumes his study. Time, not Nature, is the revealer of one's true calling and proper place in the great chain of being. In the Parliament of Fowls, Chaucer presents the writer as he faces the problem of his own suitability for a literary vocation.

In the beautifully balanced opening lines to the Legend of Good Women everything is in its proper place: "A thousand tymes have I herd men telle/That ther ys joy in hevne and peyne in helle" (F, ll. 1-2). In this final dream-vision poem, Chaucer presents the stance of a poet

who has found his calling. The prologue is at once the poet's apology and his promise, both the defense of his vocation and the presentation of a greater work to follow.

Matters emphasized in each of the four dream visions are joined by a common concern with creativity. Such matters were not haphazardly worked into the poem of the moment but rather presented as an ongoing process revealing the various stages in the creative evolution of the poet. That the apology in the prologue to the Legend of Good Women would follow those matters discussed in the three earlier poems is only logical. The order of treatment of the other stages is not so readily apparent, but it is discernible as one reviews the content of the image progression in each dream-vision poem.

In the Book of the Duchess, the earliest of the four dream visions, Chaucer introduces his image progression and those elements necessary for poetic composition. Chaucer shapes a formula for the creative progression:

. . . frozen creativity, old literature as
preserver of creativity, and divine inspiration
in otherworld as the thawing agent releasing
poetic power.¹

In this first dream vision, more than in any of the three which follow, Chaucer places great emphasis on the poet

¹Lavon Buster Fulwiler, "Image Progressions in Chaucer's Poetry: Exposition of a Theory of Creativity," Diss. Michigan State Univ. 1971, p. 126.

persona's method of receiving inspiration; it has been pointed out that "... 1035 verses (more than seventy-seven per cent) concern the poet persona's dream in which he receives inspiration."² Within the poem's small cast the poet persona plays a major role. He discovers the entrance to otherworld, he discovers the knight in black, and he discovers the truth in the knight's lament. These discoveries lead to an even greater find--the discovery of poetic inspiration. Inspiration and discovery of a subject are the first essential steps for any writer, and it is no accident that these matters form the chief concerns of Chaucer's first dream-vision poem. In the Book of the Duchess the poet persona discovers how to gain poetic inspiration; in the House of Fame he learns how to deal with the vast number of ideas available to his renewed imagination. The otherworld in the House of Fame is one of confusion and abundance. Minstrels and rumors in the house of twigs embody the staggering, chaotic mixture of good and bad sounds or ideas available to the poet persona. The poet's problem is not a lack of creativity or inspiration but rather a need for control. Separating, selecting, and arranging material from this creative chaos can be accomplished only with the aid of authority. Thus in the House of Fame references to old books, proverbs, mythical characters, classical writers, Biblical writers,

²Ibid., pp. 197-98.

and philosophers demonstrate the wealth of tradition from which the writer may learn so that his works too may overcome the capricious nature of Fame. The need for rhetoric, for the marriage of form and content, dominates the image progression in this second dream vision. Having received creative inspiration, the poet must become the shaper of his ideas. This second stage of creative development detailed in the House of Fame is an outgrowth of the first stage of discovery outlined in the Book of the Duchess.

In the Parliament of Fowls the sources of authority are reduced to one source; similarly, the images of creativity are reduced to one. The emphasis of this poem is the debate motif, and within the setting of a court of love the debate becomes intensely personal. The opening lines of the poem bring together the discussion of literature with the personal feelings of the poet persona. The focus of the poem is not so much the making of poetry as the poet persona's attitude toward writing. The choice of "craft"--a skill that is difficult to learn--coupled with the aura of debate within a court of love demonstrates both a knowledge of and a reluctance toward the vocation of poetry on the part of the speaker. It is a knowledge which can be gained only after the first flush of poetic inspiration and after some struggle with the authority of rhetoric. The Parliament of Fowls presents a picture of otherworld not

encountered in the earlier dream-vision poems. Its negative aspects are more forceful than those encountered in the Book of the Duchess, and its orderly arrangement is contrary to the creative chaos in the House of Fame. To be a poet requires not only inspiration and rhetorical skill but also, a serious dedication to the craft, a conscious choice of vocation. The inclusive ending of the poem reveals not Chaucer's inability to formulate a question or "a failure to work out its [the poem's] imaginative interests,"³ but rather Chaucer's emphasis on the seriousness of the question, and possibly, at that time, his inability to boldly choose the answer.

The final dream vision, the prologue to the Legend of Good Women, presents the resolution to the problem of choice related in the Parliament of Fowls. In this poem the image progression is much more concise than in the earlier works. The discussion of literature is direct; the emphasis is on the poet persona and his relationship with poetry. Incorporating the discovery of inspiration in the Book of the Duchess, the authority in the House of Fame, and the debate motif in the Parliament of Fowls into a single otherworld meeting of the poet persona with Alceste and Cupid, Chaucer presents the final stage in the development of a poet. The

³James Winny, Chaucer's Dream-Poems (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, Inc., 1973), p. 116.

poet persona offers his apology for making poetry. He takes the stance of both poet and lover.

No explicit description identifies the poet persona in one poem as the same character who appears in any of the other dream visions; yet the poet persona in any one poem is closely related to each of the other poet personae by his concerns with poetry, with creativity, and with love. Each poet persona is a poet who seeks and finds creative inspiration through an otherworld experience. Each is also careful to point out his relationship to the court of love. The first is cast in the role of the forlorn lover; the second has written in the service of love; the third has had his fill "of swete and bytternesse" (l. 161) and is no longer the servant of love; and the fourth plays the role of the courtly lover. Each poet persona is also aligned to the others by his relationship with Chaucer. This relationship is by name in the House of Fame, by works in the prologue to the Legend of Good Women, and by tacit understanding of the position of the poet as presenter in the oral tradition in all the poems. As the common theme of creativity binds the four poems together as a unit, so the common figure of the poet persona unites the poems and moves from one creative concern to the next. Within each poem the poet persona changes from the unproductive author to the creative poet. From work to work the poet persona reveals the range of possible relationships

in courtly love and poses the various concerns linked with the poet's evolution. In every case the poet persona is a conscious creation of Geoffrey Chaucer. Thus it can be reasoned that the concerns about matters of creativity voiced in each separate poem belong not only to Chaucer's poet persona but to Chaucer as well.

In the Romanesque manner Chaucer shaped his dream-vision poetry around a common topic of creativity; in the Gothic manner he developed the progression and the aspiration of the series of dream-vision poems into a whole. The Book of the Duchess, the House of Fame, the Parliament of Fowls, and the prologue to the Legend of Good Women are at once separate and united.

In any great art the artist creates a paradox: a divine tension between the individual and the universal. It is this tension that gives the work its energy, that allows it to pass through time unscathed. In the greatest works of art the balance between the one and the all is mastered both in subject and in form. Everything works, everything fits. The greatness of Chaucer's dream visions lies in his ability to shape and maintain creative tension. Each poem--each part of each poem--exists separately, illuminating some particular aspect of the creative process; yet each poem is a part of the whole. Linked by common purpose, structure, and imagery, Chaucer's four dream-vision poems trace that pathway that marks the creative evolution of a poet.

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