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Courting Fame:
The Palace of Honour or the Honour of Pallas?

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A Thesis

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ABSTRACT

Courting Fame: The Palace of Honour or the Honour of Pallas?

Anthony Peter Luscombe

This study examines Chaucer's House of Fame (c. 1379) and a number of related dream poems written by "Chaucerian" successors, principally Gavin Douglas (Palice of Honour 1501) and John Skelton (Garlande of Laurell c. 1523). These poems are discussed in terms of different aspects of "fame" as it was understood in Middle English, including "fame" in the sense of "renown", of "reputation", and of "the body of received stories or knowledge". Differences in the treatment of these various subjects are considered in order to obtain a sense of developments in artistic capacities and conceptions of poetic function.

The process by which Chaucer's poem, and more generally his literary technique and approach, were adopted and adapted by his successors can also be seen to involve "fame". There is therefore discussion of an emerging sense of a literary tradition specifically in English, which yields a better appreciation of Chaucer's achievements and of the nature of his influence.

The opening sections interpret the three principal poems as posing a problem (concerning human influence and control of "fame") and providing two distinct answers (one spiritual, the other secular). Later sections are devoted to discussion of specific aspects of poetry: the position of the poet in society, the manner in which poetry functions to inform or educate, the emergence of literary institutions. Chaucer is consistently seen as an innovator, particularly in the awareness he shows and the use he makes of the uncertainties of discourse. Skelton is interpreted as attempting further innovation, but without achieving the same lasting influence.

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I. The Reception Hall

Amid the world tweene heaven, and earth, and sea, there is a place,
Set from the bounds of eche o them indifferently in space,
From whence is seene what ever thing is practisd any where,
Although the Realme bee nere so farre: and roundly too the eare
Commes whatsoever spoken is. Fame hath his dwelling there ...

within the courts is preace

Of common people, which too come and go doo never ceace.
And millions both of trothes and lyes ronne gadding every where,
And woordes confusely flye in heapes. Of which, sum fill the eare
That heard not of them erst, and sum Colcaryers part doo play,
Too spread abrode the things they heard. And ever by the way
The thing that was invented growes much greater than before,
And every one that getts it by the end addes sumwhat more....
This Fame beholdeth what is doone in heaven, on sea, and land
And what is wrought in all the world he layes to understand.

(Metamorphoses XII: 42-6, 56-63, 68-9)¹

With Ovid's image of a House of Fame as his starting point, Chaucer produced a poem of the same name which provided an extended examination of the subjects of rumour, fame and reputation. Later writers, in turn, took elements from Chaucer's poem as the basis of their own works, each modifying or building on the ideas and accounts of his predecessor to produce poems with quite different meanings. The whole process of transformation resembles in many respects that of fame itself as

¹ The translation given here is that of Golding, first published in 1567.

described by Chaucer in the poem, as successive stages of communication result in a reputation which might have little or no resemblance to its source. Indeed, a connection between the two processes is implicit in the range of meanings comprehended by the word "fame" in the Middle English period: in addition to "celebrity, renown", it could mean more generally "reputation (whether good or bad) as to character or behavior", but could also be used for "any report ... or widely circulated opinion ... tiding or rumor" (Kurath). Words were the common medium of all these types of fame, each of which involved a verbal description of a person or event which could not be witnessed directly. Poetry and other modes of writing were a less ephemeral, but inherently no more reliable, medium for transmission of accounts than was speech. They were even more intrinsically involved, however, in the processes of "fame" in the wider sense suggested by Delany: "fame ... as the body of traditional knowledge that confronted the educated ... reader" (3). That "traditional knowledge" included religious and philosophical wisdom, accounts of historical events, classical stories, literary techniques and language itself. It reached the literate through the written word, and it was through writing that they could add to, or modify, the store of knowledge passed on to future generations.

It is the intention in this paper to examine notions of (and the relationship between) fame, honour and poetic function and achievement principally as they are represented in and by Chaucer's House of Fame and two succeeding works from the beginning of the sixteenth century. Gavin Douglas' Palice of Honour and John Skelton's Garlande of

Laurell.² Chaucer's poem presents the reader with a series of problems concerning the distorted nature and arbitrary distribution of fame and the status and purpose of the poetic art. The poems by Douglas and Skelton both build upon elements from The House of Fame and, although not presented explicitly as answers to the poem, each can be seen to suggest solutions to some of the problems that it poses. Both of the poets acknowledged the influence of Chaucer's writing and he can, therefore, be seen to have contributed to "the body of traditional knowledge"--specifically, literary knowledge--that they inherited. Chaucer helped to broaden both the scope and the stylistic range of English poetry, and the three poems can be used to indicate this wider sense in which later poets were his successors, were "Chaucerians". That the seeds of the solutions that Douglas and Skelton present explicitly were, as I indicate, contained in Chaucer's own writing is appropriate for such a seminal literary figure.

The opening section of the paper considers the ways in which The House of Fame presents us with an image of human impotence both in the processes of fame and in the achievement of true art. The poet-narrator perceives each as being under the control of higher powers which are arbitrary in their actions and heedless to the needs of man. Words, their common medium, are seen as providing at best only a partial representation of the truth. The perceptions of the narrator are, however, to be distinguished from those of Chaucer the author, who adopts the persona for ironic purpose. The narrator's views are

² Works by Chaucer, Douglas and Skelton are cited by line number from the editions edited by Benson, Bawcutt and Scattergood. Citations of "Riverside" in the text refer to the notes and commentary in The Riverside Chaucer and are identified by page number.

considered here both because they illustrate a Chaucerian technique which was adopted by some of his successors and because they are useful as a representation of a naive and unsophisticated poetic position against which to set Chaucer.

In the following section the distinction between the poet and the narrator becomes central to the argument.³ The narrator is an unquestioning adherent to the traditions of courtly love poetry, a devotee of Venus and, as a result, his views, Chaucer indicates, are restricted and distorted. Whilst retaining love as a major subject in his writing, Chaucer pointed to, and thereby liberated himself to some extent from, the limitations of the traditional form. However, even with the author's and the reader's wider perspective on events in The House of Fame, questions remain. Words do not reproduce real events and people, but what can they provide? If human accounts will always be seen as fallible, then how can authority be achieved, how can knowledge be transmitted and lessons imparted? Earthly fame and reputation cannot be relied upon to do justice to human lives and achievements; how can that justice be obtained? Poetry should not be limited to the subjects and approaches of traditional courtly love verse, but what should it aim to achieve and how can literary precedents be used to achieve it?

By challenging the boundaries of poetry as they were accepted in

³ Leicester questions the value of distinguishing between "Chaucer the pilgrim" and "Chaucer the poet" in reading The Canterbury Tales. "[W]hat we have in front of us is the activity of a poet, a maker, giving his own rhythm and pattern, his own shape and voice", he says, "And that maker is the speaker of the poem, the voice of the text. There is no one there but that voice, that text" (221). Similar arguments could be applied to the dream poems considered here. Within this paper, however, the evocation of a narrator and dreamer who is distinct from Chaucer is, I believe, useful for the reasons I give here in the introduction. The discussion of the naive and unsophisticated narrator serves, in particular, to enhance our appreciation of Chaucer's achievements.

his time, and broadening the range of subject and style within his writing, Chaucer helped to open the way for other writers who consolidated and built on his innovations. About a century after Chaucer's death, Douglas wrote Palice of Honour, using thematic and stylistic elements derived from Chaucer, but to provide a sense of assurance and authority both as regards human reward and poetic purpose and achievement. His message is essentially that of Christianity: virtue will be rewarded in the afterlife and the poet conveys that news with God's authority and support. Douglas' poem achieves a coherent and assured picture of existence through elevation of his subject from the earthly world to the heavenly and of his style from the mundane to the eloquent. He does not deny the inherent injustice of worldly fame, only the importance of it.

In contrast, John Skelton tackled the subject of earthly fame head on, demonstrating, particularly in his political satire, that humans could have their effect on their own and other people's reputations and that they were not impotent to influence public affairs--even if they could not ensure justice for either the individual or in the society. In line with his assertion of human capability, his denial of human impotence, he demonstrates how, in the hands of a creative poet, the inherent indirectness and potential ambiguity of words can be turned to strengths. In his poetry, Skelton shows how the poet can control his technique and style to suit his subject, and, rather than let the conventions constrain him, he uses and adapts them for his own purpose, thereby extending the range of poetry further.

In consideration of the subject matter, the authority, the fame and influence of poetry and poets, there remain some central questions: Why

is poetry seen to be of value, to be worthy of serious attention? What does it provide that is of benefit to humanity? Does it teach us something, and, if so, how? How, in short, does it function? As a contribution to the discussion on these questions, I will here examine the various poems for statements on and portrayals of education or instruction, for manifestations of the poet's use of his learning, and for practical demonstrations of the teaching and learning processes. The general, but by no means consistent, trend is from direct modes of communication in which the recipient is passive to indirect modes in which he or she is an active participant. (In Barthes' terminology, it is a trend towards a "scriptible" text.) The increasing awareness of the uncertainty and unreliability of meaning and truth brings with it a greater emphasis on initiative and responsibility on the part of the reader.

The final major section of the paper examines the growth of a literary tradition in English in the period covered by the three poets: Chaucer borrowing from the literature of other cultures and introducing figures and techniques into English writing; Douglas representing an assured use of conventions and styles that had become established since, and partly as a result of, Chaucer; and Skelton attempting to expand the literature in new directions. It was within this developing tradition that Skelton saw the possibility of a just and lasting literary reputation. Even if he did not receive due recognition in his own lifetime, evidence of poetic abilities could survive through works which would, he hoped, be preserved within the literary canon, so that a more detached, if still subjective, evaluation could be made by posterity.

The works of Douglas and Skelton represent, I would argue, a stage

in the maturation of English poetry both subsequent to and developing from Chaucer. In contrast to Chaucer's narrators, who looked to the past for inspiration and yet showed no confidence in human abilities, each of these poets displays a belief in the value of the literature: one demonstrating its current accomplishments, the other looking to further advancement in the future. The House of Fame receives less attention than almost all of Chaucer's other narrative poems, and Douglas' and Skelton's poems have been largely neglected, and are certainly far from inclusion in the reduced canon of literary studies. The intention here is therefore to give more serious consideration to some works which represent an important period in the establishment of a literature in English. That those works, particularly those of the versatile Skelton, who has for long been remembered only for the Skeltonic, both deserve and reward that attention, only reinforces my belief in the project.

Having outlined what I do intend to cover, it is necessary, before beginning, to spend a few paragraphs saying something about what is not attempted. The aim has been to assemble the poems and to interpret them as a group of related works. Working in this way from the particular out to the general, the eventual aim would be to relate that discussion to recent critical theory. The discussion of uncertainty of discourse, for example, could be expressed in the terminology of deconstruction. Consideration of the ways in which poetry functions could be given in terms of reader response theory. Such work has not been attempted within the scope of the present study, and remains a potential future project.

Another expansion of the study could involve a discussion of these poets in relation to a fuller set of predecessors and successors, including, for example, Virgil and Dante before, and Spenser and Sidney

after. As it stands, attention is generally restricted to the period spanned by the works, from the late fourteenth to the early sixteenth centuries. This period is one which has been characterised (for example, by Spearing) as a time of transition from "Medieval" to "Renaissance". At the end of the fifteenth century, humanist ideas from Europe were beginning to gain influence in England. The intention here is not to present these poems as representative of their periods, either by reading them in the light of such historical information or by using them as the basis of a "thick description" of the culture.⁴ Since an awareness of the uncertainties of discourse is one of the major themes of the study, poetry and history are seen as equally fallible representations of the period. Each is therefore interpreted as reflecting upon the other. General trends of thought, particularly an increasing emphasis on human powers and achievements, are certainly found to be common to both accounts, but in detail the correspondence is not exact. Each of the poets was an individual, and their works were therefore not necessarily representative of the poetry, let alone of the society, of his period. (Indeed, Chaucer and Skelton, I suggest, were trying to liberate themselves from the constraints imposed by poetic convention that existed at the time.) It is appropriate therefore that none of the poets is found to fit neatly with the characterisation of humanist ideas on education and eloquence: Chaucer may be seen to display humanist characteristics 'ahead of his time'; Skelton may in some respects be seen

⁴ The term "thick description" was coined by Clifford Geertz to describe a technique in which an individual item (an event, an institution, a document, a literary work) is "interrogated in such a way as to reveal through analysis of minute particulars the dynamics of a whole society, the lineaments of a culture" (Montrose 356). This technique and the terminology have been adopted by some literary critics commonly classified as "new historicists".

to be going beyond them.

Finally, since the study does not attempt to tackle feminist questions directly, a few brief comments are appropriate in this introduction. All the poets were, of course, male, as were all the human characters that they portray as participants in the narrative action. Interestingly, however, many of the personified powers and divine personages that they encounter in their dreams--Fame, Venus, the Muses, Pallas--are female. The increasing sense of human powers and capabilities, which I suggest is discovered in the poems, is therefore very much one of liberation for man. The one figure of absolute authority, Douglas' Honour, is, we might note, still unequivocally male. It was, as has often been observed, very much a male dominated and male defined world and, despite any challenge to that suggested by Chaucer's portrayal of the Wife of Bath, no significant change of perception is apparent in the period.⁵

⁵ The narrators in poems by both Chaucer and Skelton are commissioned specifically to write poems in praise of women, thereby symbolically retaining control of the processes by which women are portrayed and perceived.

II. The House of Fame

The House of Fame is introduced in Ovid's Metamorphoses during the account of the Trojan Wars, apparently to explain the Trojans' foreknowledge of the arrival of the Greek fleet. Although the transmission of news is included amongst the activities described as taking place in the house, it is the sense of transmutation of news which dominates. The passage, a brief, effectively self-standing episode involving some form of metamorphosis, is typical of the work. It is as an image of distortion and transformation, removed from its context, that the passage is memorable, and it is this aspect of Fame's activities which Chaucer extracted as the basis for his poem, The House of Fame. The works therefore act to illustrate the processes by which accounts alter through successive stages of compilation and editing.

Making use of the wider sense of "fame", Chaucer expanded Ovid's image to one of associated Houses of Fame and Rumour, and extended their activities to include the full metamorphosis from tidings to reputation.¹ The first mention of the House of Fame appears in the poem near the end of the second book, when the narrator, Geffrey (729)², is informed by his guide, the eagle, that:

First shalt thou here where she [Fame] duelleth,
And so thyn oun bok hyt tellith.
Hir paleys stant, as I shal seye,
Ryght even in the myddes of the weye

¹ Ovid's "Fama" has, in fact, been rendered as "Rumour" by some translators (e.g. Innes 269).

² I use the name "Geffrey" in the paper to indicate the poet-narrator within the poem, who is to be distinguished from "Chaucer", the author of the poem.

Betwixen hevene, erthe, and see;
 That what so ever in al these three,
 Is spoken ...

 every sounne mot to hyt pace (711-7, 720).

Although the description does initially seem to be faithful to the account in "thyn ounne bok", Ovid's Metamorphoses, there is already one crucial difference: no longer is there any mention of Fame being able to see all events; her information is only that conveyed by the sounds of speech. In several respects, indeed, we are now confined to the medium of words. Geoffrey's first 'sight' of the House on this occasion is a verbal one, as it was in his previous encounter, and as it is to be for us throughout. The uncertain correspondence between words and reality or truth is to be an underlying theme of the present study. Words are the medium not just of reputation and rumour, but also of the poet, historian and minstrel, and the special position that these artists have in Chaucer's House of Fame suggests a connection between the two types of activity. The gossip of the crowded courts, the mixing of "trothes and lyes", the augmentation and distortion of accounts are all present in Ovid, but Chaucer amplified and adapted these ideas to create in Geoffrey's dream-poem an image of fame and rumour as totally arbitrary processes which were apparently beyond the influence of humans. In their metamorphosing effect, his activities as poet therefore parallel in some respects those of the courts he portrays. The problems of fame can be interpreted as problems also, therefore, of the poetic and narrative arts; the distortions of rumour can also be those of poetry. This section of my study examines the characteristics of fame in its various senses as they are presented in the poem, and indicates the relationship between

them and the perceived problems of poetic composition.

For the opening part of the study, the viewpoint that is considered is principally that of the narrator, Geoffrey. He is one of a number of Chaucerian narrators who displays a naivety and lack of perception in his approach both to writing and more generally to life. Chaucer's own more sophisticated approach is demonstrated in the ironic use that he makes of these narrators. By observing limitations and inconsistencies in their views, I may seem to be taking them too seriously, to be taking, perhaps, a naive view of their naivety. In considering them at this length, however, the intention is, first, to gain better appreciation of Chaucer's technique, but also to establish them as representations of the poet beside which to set Chaucer. The ironic distance between what Geoffrey intends to say and what he actually says (what, we might suppose, Chaucer intends to say) is examined more fully in the following section. Discussion of the narrative purpose and effect of the irony continues throughout the study.

In Middle English, the word "fame" could mean "renown" (as now) or "reputation" of any kind. It could also be used, however, in an even wider sense, to refer to "any report ... or widely circulated opinion ... tiding or rumor" (Kurath). In Ovid's House of Fame it is this last form of "fame" which is current, but in Chaucer's poem it is to the House of Rumour that we must look to find similar dealings in "tydynge" of current events:

every wight that I saugh there
Rounded everych in others ere
A newe tydyng prively,

Or elles tolde al openly

 When oon had herd a thing, ywis,

 Were the tydynges soth or fals,
 Yit wolde he telle hyt natheles,
 And evermo with more encres
 Than yt was erst (2043-6, 2060, 2072-5).

So far, the text follows closely that of Ovid, but the description is then expanded and extended: we have further tidings of those "tydynges". There is elaboration of their content and means of conveyance: they are "Of rest, of labour ... of deeth, of lyfe ... Of qwalme of folk, and eke of bestes ... Of plente, and of gret famyne" (1961-1976), and were brought to the House by "shipmen and pilgrims ... pardoners,/ Curroures" (2121-2130). The assembled company deals, it seems, in everyday gossip, and not just in news of eminent people and events. The account of the tidings' existence is also extended beyond the stage of circulation and transmutation described by Ovid: eventually, we learn, it reaches the state of being "ful yspronge" and is then allowed to "flygh forth faste for the nones" (2081, 2087).

"Aventure", Geoffrey observes, "is the moder of tydynges" (1982-3), giving form not just to the tidings themselves, but also to the events they supposedly describe. Chance's role does not end there, however. Geoffrey observes how different tidings "gonne of aventure drawe" so that "fals and soth compounded/ Togeder fle for oo tydynges" (2089-91, 2108-9), and how chance or mood affect the subsequent acts of interpretation and judgement which result in reputation or renown for the people concerned:

Thus out at holes gunne wringe
Every tydyngge streght to Fame,
And she gan yeven ech hys name,
After hir disposicioun (2110-3).

We already know about Fame's capricious nature and the arbitrariness of her judgements from an earlier episode in the poem where she had decreed the fate of a series of groups of petitioners (1520-1868). Her verdicts then bore no relation either to the wishes of the petitioners or to their deserts. Some specifically asked to be misrepresented or to be granted a bad reputation or even anonymity, but their requests, like those of other petitioners for (good) fame, were apparently as likely to be rejected as accepted. Although Fame is still making judgements "After hir disposicioun", the nature of those judgements is different. Delany notes that one scene deals with "eminence ... achieved in the past", whilst in the other the "exclusive concern is the present" (105, 106).³ A further difference, however, is that the earlier judgements had been of whether the petitioners be awarded fame (good or bad) or anonymity, of whether they be given a name (of prominence) at all, whereas the judgements made on the basis of the tidings from the House of Rumour are of the "name" or reputation to be "yeven ech" person. Fame's control of the processes of "fame", in all its senses, is therefore seen to be universal. She hears the speech, rumour and gossip of every person (715-852). She oversees its transmutation and distortion. She determines the reputation of all:

³ Although generally true, some phrases in the petitioners' appeals seem to indicate that they include the living as well as the dead: one group, for example, specifically makes a request in regard to their present lives--"let us to the peple seme/ .../ That wommen loven us for wod" (1745, 1747). What is certainly true is that the combined set of judgements in the two episodes cover the dead as well as the living.

living and dead, famous (in the modern sense) or not, desirous of fame or not. And all processes are equally arbitrary, and all products therefore meaningless and insubstantial.

Fame, according to Geoffrey's vision, is in the unreliable hands of a transcendent power. What a person's reputation is and whether he (or she) has fame may indeed be largely beyond his or her individual control. In the personification of Fame, however, the responsibility has been displaced even further: it is as if the human race played no part in the formation and propagation of fame, and was a collective victim of the gods. A similar displacement occurs when Geoffrey presents us with the image of Eolus broadcasting Fame's judgements to the world: "As swifte as pelet out of gone" (1643) with Sklaundre, and "Al esely, and not to faste" (1675) with Laude. Such characteristics of fame's spread are, of course, explicable in terms of human behaviour and interest, and Chaucer makes the human involvement clear in the names he gives the two trumpets.⁴ The figures of Fame and Eolus reflect not Chaucer's sense of human impotence, therefore, but Geoffrey's.

The reputations assigned by Fame and broadcast by Eolus at the end of this process are still not immune from change, or even complete erasure, in the future. The arbitrary control of Fame is maintained, however. Before "let[ting] hem goon", Geoffrey tells us,

After hir disposicioun,

[She] yaf hem eke duracioun,

⁴ Chaucer's Fame has many of the characteristics of Fortune in earlier literature. However, because any role played by humanity in the processes of fortune is less obvious than that in the processes of fame, the sense of displacement of responsibility would have been less insistent if Chaucer had portrayed the former.

Somme to wexe and wane sone (2113-7).

A similar indication of the transience of certain names and the endurance of others appears in the description of the rock on which the house stands:

Tho saugh I al the half ygrave
With famous folkes names fele,
That had iben in mochel wele,
And her fames wide yblowe. (1136-9)

On one side "They were almost of-thowed.../ So unfamous was woxe hir fame" (1143, 1146), whilst "on the other .../ ... they were/ As fressh as men had writen hem here/ The selfe day, ryght or that houre" (1151, 1153-7). Chance again seems to be the deciding factor.

This image of inscribed names, besides indicating the uncertain endurance of fame, acts as a reminder of the function that writing and other verbal accounts perform in its preservation and transmission. Neither people nor their actions can be witnessed directly by posterity. Their fame and reputation are therefore in the hands of the poets or, more generally, the writers and artists who are present in Fame's house.⁵ Ranging from the series of historians (1429-1512), each of whom "Upon a piler stonde on high/ .../ And ... bar on hys shuldres hye/ The fame" (1430, 1435-6) of various races, nations and individuals, down to the "mynstralles,/ And gestiours" in their "sondry habitacles" who "tellen tales ... Of al that longeth unto Fame (1197-1200), all play their part in its transmission and transmutation.

Geffrey, as a poet, is seen to be involved in these processes.

⁵ The role of pictorial, as well as verbal, accounts is suggested by the Temple of Venus in Book I of The House of Fame.

Jupiter, he is informed, has instructed his guide "To further the with al my myght,/ And wisse and teche the aryght/ Where thou most tidynges here" (2023-6). Geffrey makes the most of his opportunities:

I altherfastest wente
About, and dide al myn entente
Me for to pleyen and for to lere,
And eke a tydyng for to here (2131-4).

Rumours, particularly of love, are the raw material of his art and he is still avidly pursuing them (2144) as the poem ends. Having observed the propagation and distortion of Rumour, supposedly helpless to intervene, he now participates in the activity through his writing, oblivious to the connection. He may state that a certain "tydyng . . . shal not now be told for me", but it is not that he is taking a positive stand against the propagation of rumour. Instead, it is his sense of weakness, of inadequacy which again emerges: "hit no nede is, redely;/ Folk kan synge hit bet than I;/ For al mot out, other late or rathe" (2136-2139).

Poets and artists are involved with Fame not just as her agents, but also as the objects of fame and renown in their own right. The historians are regarded as "folk of digne reverence" (1426), and the minstrels and musicians, we are told, "in her tyme famous were" (1249). Indeed, artists can celebrate and prolong (or, for that matter, denigrate and obscure) the names of their fellow-artists, as the reference to "Messenus,/ Of whom that speketh Virgilius" (1243-4) indicates and demonstrates. Chaucer and Geffrey can, of course, be seen to be performing such acts: one consciously, the other less so. The poet's writing might be envisaged as a potential means for fixing the account, for providing "for the nones" a durable record of the deeds of famous men, including poets, for the

future. What is demonstrated in the poem, however, is the converse: the possibility of distortion and deletion. Geoffrey expresses regret that he does not know who made the decorations that he admires in the Temple of Venus (470-4). But then, having named a number of the historians and outlined their achievements, he is shown by Chaucer to be arbitrarily, and apparently unconsciously, truncating the rolls of the famous himself:

What shulde y more telle of this?
The halle was al ful, ywys,
Of hem that writen olde gestes,
As ben on trees rokes nestes;
But hit a ful confus matere
Were al the gestes for to here,
That they of write, or how they highte. (1513-9)

Other selections of names that he records are supposedly less arbitrary, being made on the basis of status or merit. After Orpheus and three other minstrels have been mentioned by name, Geoffrey reports that

small harpers with her glees
Sate under hem in dyvers sees,
And gunne on hem upward to gape,
And countrefete hem as an ape,
Or as craft countrefeteth kynde. (1209-13)

The characterisation of each musician's abilities and achievements, like the list of names itself, relies on precedent, however (Riverside 986). Geoffrey is merely drawing a new dividing line between those whose names are and are not recorded.

The lesser artists are described in the last quotation as imitating their masters: apishly, uncomprehendingly, and inadequately. The ways in which Geoffrey describes this relationship, the similes that he uses in particular, provide insight into his perceptions of artistic achievement. First, he characterises craft, purely human artistic activity, as imitation, an attempt to reproduce nature or reality.⁶ His association of the masters with "kynde" and their inferiors with "craft" then has implications for both relationships. In one direction, we can infer that craft's attempts to reproduce nature are not seen as entirely successful. In the other, there is the suggestion that the masters have access to more than just human powers, that are only adequate for "countrefeting", and not for the creation of high art. Geoffrey, we learn, has been neglected in the past (614-9), and he now appeals successively to Venus, the Muses, Thought and Apollo, for support in his writing (518-528, 1091-1109), declaring that he does not wish "To shewe craft, but o sentence" (1100). There is the sense again that, without this support, his human efforts to convey "sentence", and those of any aspiring artist, are futile. He sees himself as being as dependent on higher powers in achieving his art, as he was in obtaining his material.

As with all other aspects of Geoffrey's vision considered so far, we are aware of the irony that is present in Chaucer's portrayal. Before accepting that Geoffrey's past failures are attributable to a lack of external help, therefore, we should perhaps examine his approach to art. He had set out to record tidings of love. The poem that he actually

⁶ The word "craft" as used in Chaucer's poetry has been glossed as "art", but in more contexts as "skill, artifice ... guile, cunning ... trick ... [or] trade" (Davis), all of which have a sense of purely human endeavour.

produces is a record of the events of his dream, an attempt "My sweven for to telle aryght" (79). In both cases, his efforts to represent reality through his art are apparently therefore limited to direct description of specifics, and that, as he states himself, is a task that is sometimes beyond human ability: "al the men that ben on lyve", he says, "Ne han the kunnyng to describe/ The beaute of that ylke place" (1167-70).⁷ The function of poetry as it is viewed by Geoffrey is merely to record and transmit: it is a faming of events. As with other senses of "fame", it relies on the medium of words to describe something or someone which cannot be observed directly by the reader or listener--and it inevitably suffers from the same limitations. Geoffrey's words do not reproduce his experience, but, ironically, they do, seemingly unknown to him, provide a representation of reality through a medium which requires the reader to use initiative in interpreting, through allegory and image. Indeed, in his description of the magicians, healers and illusionists (1259-81) present in the House of Fame, we have an image of successful artists, those "that craftely doon her ententes", and a statement of how they achieve a representation of reality: through "Ymages" (1267-9).⁸

In matters both of fame and art, therefore, Geoffrey is portrayed as

⁷ Although this is a standard formula, an example of one type of "the inexpressibility topoi" in Curtius' terminology (159-61), it is particularly pertinent here because Chaucer is using it with reference to the domains of Fame, who embodies one form of verbal (mis)representation. The natural laws which bring all speech to her house, the eagle explains, enable perfect reproduction of all sound: "Hyt ... hath so very hys lyknesse/ That spak the word, that thou wilt gesse/ That it the same body be" (1076-81). Is this another example of "craft" being inferior to "kynde"?

⁸ The passage describing illusionists in the poem serves also to highlight the dual role of poets with respect to fame. The final words in the lines, "there saugh I, and knew hem by name,/ That by such art don men han fame" (1275-6), can be understood either as "by creation of such art ..." or "through portrayal in such art do men have fame".

failing to appreciate that the relationship between account and reality cannot be direct or exact. That art might reflect upon or provide insight into life, rather than reproduce it, is beyond him. In fact, when relationships or connections more generally are not made explicit, they are simply not evident to him, and he feels powerless in his own activities as a result. It is ironic indeed therefore that he should state his intention to remain autonomous both as regards fame and art, and thereby further demonstrate his inability to see beyond the immediate:

Sufficeth me, as I were ded,
That no wight have my name in honde.
I wot myself best how y stonde;
For what I drye, or what I thynke,
I wil myselven al hyt drynke,
Certeyn, for the more part,
As ferforth as I kan myn art. (1876-82)

This stated position of autonomy is neither consistent with the image of individual human helplessness that he has presented, nor compatible with his poetic activities. Since his words "Mot nede come to Fames Hous" (786), the very act of writing poetry, of making an account of his dream, excludes any possibility of autonomy: he is both creating material for future critics and judges and actively participating in the processes of Fame.

Although Geoffrey seems happily unaware of it, the poem that he is writing presents us with many problems. Worldly rumour and reputation are apparently meaningless, the distribution of fame is arbitrary, and each human is powerless to affect them or to avoid being their subject. The

aim of art, he seems to indicate, is to provide a faithful representation of reality, but if the artist is to succeed he is dependent on higher powers both for the subject matter and the artistry. Geoffrey's imperceptiveness, his inconsistency, his limited capabilities and vision as a poet are all made apparent to the reader, however. This, together with an awareness that any verbal account is limited as a direct reproduction of reality, enables us to view the poem differently. We can extract a meaning which is different from, but related to, that which Geoffrey intends--and that we are aware (that Chaucer makes us aware) that we can do so is in itself a significant positive advance. Any account may necessarily involve distortion and partial truth, but it can induce thought and understanding in other ways. Geoffrey's account reminds us that humans, and writers in particular, participate in the processes which he feels powerless to affect, and that he is unwittingly doing so in the very act of writing his poem. Chaucer, in writing his poem, was also modifying accounts, but he was doing so consciously and purposefully.

The account which comprises The House of Fame is simultaneously a story of Fame and Rumour, a poem about a poet, and a description of verbal descriptive powers, and therefore embodies the very lack of authority that it describes. An outer layer of uncertainty is provided by the dream framework of the poem. Introducing his account with a summary of the various categories of dream--"avisoun ... revelacioun ... fantome ... oracles" (7,8,11)--Geoffrey declares, "I certeynly/ Ne kan hem noht, ne never thinke/ To besily my wyt to swinke,/ To knowe of hir signifaunce/ The gendres" (14-7). Being unconcerned with the "signifaunce" of those terms, he remains unaware that his dream may--or

may not--have some significance beyond the events that comprise it. The reader, however, can think of the dream as a representation of reality parallel to that of art or, more specifically, poetry. Only if a dream were a "revalacioun" or an "oracle" would it provide access to some deeper level of reality. Even a "fantome", "a crowd of fortuitous mixed and disordered images" (Winny 27), as lacking in direct meaning as the judgements of Fame, can be used as a stimulant or a starting point for thought, however. Indeed, the process is almost the conscious equivalent of an "insomnium", "an associative dream, induced by the activities or preoccupations of the sleeper" (Winny 26). A poem does not, therefore, have to be authoritative to be effective: the means by which meaning can be made available are far more complex and diverse.

The poem's final denial of authority, its final act of inconclusion and inducement to thought, is achieved by the abrupt ending, the "incomplete" ending as some commentators have called it:⁹

Atte laste y saugh a man,
Which that y nevene nat ne kan;
But he semed for to be
A man of gret auctorite.... (2155-9)

Whether intentionally "incomplete" or not is irrelevant since any attempt at pronouncement would in any case have been futile. What reliance could have been placed on tidings, even from a man said to be "of gret auctorite", if seen in a dream of dubious status and reported only "as I kan now remembre" (63) through the medium of poetry?

⁹ Delany, for example, describes the poem as "unfinished" (3), and talks of its "incompleteness", speculating that it "seems to lack only a few lines" (108). She does, however, note that "It is difficult to imagine any figure of authority sufficient to overcome the impact of the rest of the poem" (108).

III. The Court of Venus

Although the House of Fame provides the title for Chaucer's poem, the house itself only appears in the last of its three books. A significant portion of the preceding text is taken up with an account of Geoffrey's visit to the Temple of Venus and a reading of the story of Dido and Aeneas as depicted on its walls. The apparent lack of connection between the books has led some critics to describe the poem as having an "incoherency" or an "amorphous structure" (qtd. Delany 2). There are, however, clear thematic links between the various sections, as Delany, for example, shows. Further insight into the subjects of fame, rumour and poetic narrative is certainly provided in the retelling of the classic story. Because of the location and content of the story, however, there is also a sense of a connection between these subjects and that of love. This section of the paper will examine that connection and, in particular, the relationship between the poet and Venus or Love as it is portrayed by Chaucer, not just in The House of Fame, but also in the prologue to a later poem, The Legend of Good Women.

Love, a natural topic of rumour, was also the subject of an established tradition in poetry. The previous section noted the problems both of worldly human fame and reputation and of poetic representation of reality. The aim here is to connect the two sets of problems through consideration of the poet's role within the courtly love tradition. In this discussion, the distinction, already noted, between the points of view of Chaucer and of his narrators becomes important. They are seen to be servants of Venus, trapped within the poetic tradition; he is only adopting them as temporary personae through whom he can (amongst other

things) pass comment on and induce thought about that tradition. They intend their poems to be in praise of Venus, but the words which Chaucer places in their mouths provide the reader with a sense of their limited perceptiveness and ability, and the limited scope of the conventional genre of love poetry. The poems therefore remain within the tradition on one level, but escape from it on another. Chaucer thereby expands the scope of love poetry, of poetry as a whole, and demonstrates the potential power of words to achieve more than just a description of a specific event or sight.

The first direct mention of the House of Fame in the poem is provided by the eagle: "When we be come there", he tells Geoffrey, "thou shalt here .../ Of Loves folke moo tydynges,/ ... then greynes be of sondes" (672, 675 ,691). Noting that Geoffrey's previous poetry had been a failure because he had "ha[d] no tydynges/ Of Loves folk" (644-5) about which to write, the eagle explains that Jupiter intends the visit to supply his future needs. Geoffrey's problems as a poet of Love are seen to be similar to those that he portrays as humanity's in relation to Fame: he is entirely dependent upon the good disposition of his god for the inspiration, the achievement and the judgement. The promised visit is therefore like the answer to a prayer.

"[T]hou", the eagle observes to Geoffrey, "so longe trewely/ Hast served"

[Jupiter's] blynde newew Cupido,
And faire Venus also,
Withoute guerdon ever yit,
And neverthelesse hast set thy wit ...
To make bookes, songes, dytees,

In ryme, or elles in cadence,
As thou best canst, in reverence
Of Love, and of hys servantes (615-25).

This allegiance to the cause of Love on Geoffrey's part continues to be unquestioning and unshakable. As the "man of gret auctorite" steps forward to cut the poem short, he is still making for the "corner of the halle/ [W]her men of love-tydynges tolde" (2142-3) despite his previous disappointments. Even when writing down his account of the events, it is to Venus (in the guise of "Cipris") that he calls first for support (518-9).

What, we might ask, makes him so loyal? "To be a poet, in the earthly circle for which Chaucer wrote, was the same as to be a love-poet", Spearing states, "it was taken for granted that love was the inspiration of poetry" (Dream 83). Spearing arrives at this conclusion on the basis of the courtly poetry which survives from the period. Geoffrey, as the eagle observes, also only experiences that world through the medium of books, and has apparently arrived at the same conclusion.

Thou herist neyther that ne this;
For when thy labour doon al ys ...
In stede of reste and newe thynges,
Thou goost hom to thy hous anoon;
And, also domb as any stoon,
Thou sittest at another book (651-7).

Sypherd states his belief that The House of Fame was "directly inspired by the Old French love-vision literature. It is," he says, "a love-vision of the genre to which belong the Roman de la Rose [and] the Paradis d'Amours" (13). Where the House does not follow the precedents he

cites is in the relationship of its narrator to love. The narrators of those earlier French poems were conventionally lovers themselves, needing help in their love lives and commonly receiving it through the dream. The poems acted as celebrations dedicated to Love or as offerings to the loved one.¹ Geoffrey, however, "haddest never part" himself (628). Books are his means of access and his outlet to life and, in imitation of the narrators he encounters, he writes "in reverence/ Of Love and of hys servantes" (616).² The supposed motivation for love poetry has disappeared. The dream no longer inspires the poet to write; instead, the desire to write exists prior to the dream, which merely provides the poet with material.

What shulde I speke more queynte,
Or peyne me my wordes peynte
To speke of love? Hyt wol not be;
I kan not of that faculte (245-8),

he says, but just which "faculte" he means, love or circumlocution (or any other indirect form of expression), remains uncertain.

Spearing states that "the very fact that Chaucer ... invokes Venus as the presiding deity of his poem indicates that Chaucer does not see

¹ Green provides a review of the courtly love tradition which had grown up in poetry of the mediaeval period (101-35). Sypherd and Wimsatt both summarise a number of individual French dream-poems. Included in Wimsatt's reviews are many "poems of complaint and comfort" (88-133), and at least one (Prisons d'Amours) in which the dreamer "entreats Amour to help him write a poem which will please his lady" (32).

² During his review of different types of dream, Geoffrey refers to
the cruel lyfe unsofte
Which these ilke lovers leden
That hopen over-muche or dreden,
That purely her impressions
Causen hem avisions (Fame 36-40).
He apparently takes those earlier dream-vision poems as literal accounts of lovers' experiences.

himself as having escaped from the relatively constricting role of the courtly poet of love" (Renaissance 27). It is Geoffrey, however, who has not escaped, does not even think to escape, from the traditional role. It is he who invokes Cipris, he who is calling for help "to telle al my drem aryght" (527). The dream was not Chaucer's--for him, it was allegory--and so the invocation (and the other quotations cited above) can be read as comments upon the conventional genre. "Chaucer is sufficiently sceptical about his traditional material to undercut it with irony", Delany states (43), pointing out, for example, that he has "alter[ed] the traditional May date of the courtly dream-vision to December 10 (line 63)".³ Although, on one level, The House of Fame is a poem in honour of love, on another it is a poem which is about love poetry. Indeed, whilst it might appear to be of the love-vision genre, as Sypherd suggests, it might equally well be categorised as satire. Chaucer therefore makes the genre less "constricting" for the poet and, possibly, even demonstrates his ability to escape from the "role of the courtly poet of love".

When Andreas Capellanus wrote his book, De Arte Honeste Amandi, on the art of courtly love, he did so in play, as he later admitted. The Courts of Love which he described were, Green believes (120-6), only entertainments. Geoffrey does not seem to appreciate such distinctions between the world of art and the real world. He feels the need for tidings of love in order to write successful love verse and apparently intends his poetry to be a record of those tidings, rather than a work of creativity and imagination (just as he intends his House of Fame "To

³ The Riverside Chaucer (979) cites a couple of preceding mediaeval dream poems in which events take place on days in November.

telle al my dream aryght" (527), to be a record of the events that occurred). When he talks of "the harme, the routhe" that results from "untrouthe" in love, he treats books and experience as equally reliable sources of information, even perhaps reverses the precedence of the two: "men may ofte in bokes rede" of it, he says--only adding as an afterthought, "And al day se hyt yet in dede" (385-6).

Citing a series of examples of such "untrouthe", all found in Ovid's Heroides, he concludes emphatically, "In certeyn, as the book us tellis" (426). That this faith in the authority of books, in the veracity and justice of the fame they transmit, is a misguided faith is indicated, ironically, by the very story which he has just recounted. In the version of the story of Dido and Aeneas as depicted on the walls of the Temple of Venus, there are warnings not to take things at face value--

Allas! what harm doth apparence,

When hit is fals in existence! (265-6)

--rebukes concerning the deceptiveness of words--

O, have ye men such goodlyhede

In speche, and never a dele of trouthe? (330-1)

--and laments at the cruelty and injustice of fame--

thorgh yow is my name lorn,

And alle myn actis red and songe

Over al thys lond, on every tonge.

O wikke Fame! (346-9)

Through the very form of the story that he gives Geoffrey to tell, Chaucer provides a less obvious, but equally significant message concerning the nature of fame, in particular of fame in the sense of transmission of information. This version of the story combines those

from Virgil's Aeneid and Ovid's Heroides, whose "differences", Delany observes, "are not easily reconciled" (48). Their very discrepancy indicates the indefinite nature of fame, and the adaptation that the story has undergone here illustrates the process of mutation described in the latter part of the poem.⁴ The formation of this composite version can be thought of as similar to that of "fals and soth compounded ... for oo tydynge" (2108-9); the derivation of a reputation for Dido from any poetic tidings of events--either as "shrewish" from Virgil or "loving, tender, and pathetic" from Ovid (Delany 51)--as similar to the judgements of Fame. Although Geoffrey believes in the authority of accounts received from books, Chaucer ironically makes him an agent in the process of distortion of stories and reputations, specifically those of love and lovers. When Geoffrey cuts short his story and directs his readers to the works of his famed predecessors (378-9, 449-50), he is performing a further, apparently arbitrary, editing of the account.

That Geoffrey refers anyone who wants "to knowe hit" (i.e. the rest of the story) to Virgil or Ovid (377-9) also indicates a false perception of the function of poetry, which is not to tell the story of events. The discrepancy between the two versions (of which he seems unaware) does not imply that one is "false": both might be equally valid as artistic representations of reality. Instead, it is because Geoffrey can blindly recount this inconsistent hybrid that he is denied serious consideration as an artist--and because Chaucer compiled the account conscious of its

⁴ The account of Dido and Aeneas even involves a change in the role that Fame plays in events. In The Aeneid, Dido had denounced Aeneas because he had caused her to lose her "fama prior", "the fair fame which used to be mine, and my only hope of immortality" (4.321-23 trans. Knight). Here she is concerned that "Alle [her] actes [are] red and songe/ Over al thys lond, on every tonge" (347-8). Fame, "O wikke Fame!", has given her immortality--but not in the form that she wants.

implications that he earns attention. Similarly, it is Geoffrey's reproduction of his dream's "amorphous structure" in his poem, and Chaucer's imposition of thematic and formal connections, which demonstrate the difference in their artistic accomplishments.

In the referral of the reader to Ovid for the continuation of Dido's story and in the citation of many stories from Ovid as examples--of betrayed lovers (388-426) or magicians (1271-4), for instance--there is an acknowledgement of the achievements of a great poet of the past. Geoffrey's description of Ovid as "Venus clerk .../ That hath ysowen wonder wide/ The grete god of Loves name" (1487-9) indicates a belief that Ovid had achieved that status through the writing of love poetry, that he had benefited from the sponsorship of the god and goddess of love. To Geoffrey's own efforts, in contrast, Cupid had been "rechcheles" (668). As a poet, he is akin to the "smale harpers" who "countrefete" their masters (1209-12): he relies on the repetition of existing tales, whether in the form of tidings or of stories extracted from existing works. Not having the ability to create anything new within the limits of the traditional genre, and not thinking to look outside it, he attributes his failure to the lack of new tidings from the Court of Venus. The surroundings in which Chaucer places him on leaving the Temple of Venus are suitably barren:

As fer as that I myghte see,
Withouten toun, or hous, or tree,
Or bush, or grass, or eryd lond;
For al the feld nas but of sond (483-6).

A similar image, suggesting that the resources of love as a subject

for poetry were near exhaustion, occurs in another of Chaucer's poems, in the prologue to The Legend of Good Women.⁵ Another benighted poet makes an appeal:

But helpeth, ye that han konnyng and myght,
Ye lovers that kan make of sentement;
In this cas oghte ye be diligent
To forthren me somewhat in my labour,
Whethir ye ben with the leef or with the flour.
For wel I wot that ye han her-biforn
Of makyng ropen, and lad away the corn,
And I come after, glenyng here and there,
And am ful glad yf I may fynde an ere
Of any goodly word that ye han left. (F 68-77)

This poem is also a description of a dream vision and it too is concerned with the subjects of fame and reputation. Its poet-narrator has, indeed, many characteristics in common with Geoffrey. He too believes in the written word as a means for recording history and he too gives credence to the "appreved" contents of books from the past (F,G 17-28). Although, again like Geoffrey, he is "ful col" himself (G 258), his poetic efforts are made "in the honour/ Of love .../ Whom that", he says, "I serve as I have wit or myght" (F 81-3). The god of Love responds now not with indifference, however, but with strong rebukes and threats of punishment. What has roused his anger are two poetic works by means of which, Cupid claims,

⁵ Two distinctly different texts of The Legend of Good Women survive, and both are included in The Riverside Chaucer. In the parenthetical references in this paper, each quotation is identified as coming either from the F or the G text.

thow ... al my folk werreyest,
And of myn olde servauntes thow mysseyest,
And hynderest hem with thy translacioun,
And lettest folk from hire devocioun
To serve me, and holdest it folye
To serve Love. (F 322-7)

The two works concerned are Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde and his translation of Le Roman de la Rose. Again, however, we should not identify this poet too closely with Chaucer, who was, I suggest, adopting the persona of a guileless failed love-poet so as to provide ironic comment on the tradition of love poetry. It is ironic indeed that Venus should point out in the poet's defence that

Al be hit that he kan nat wel endite,
Yet hath he maked lewed folk delyte
To serve yow [Cupid], in preysing of your name.

He made the book that hight the Hous of Fame (F 414-8).

Geffrey, this poet's fellow-dreamer in The House of Fame, may indeed have wished his poem to be a pure celebration of Love; that, however, was not what Chaucer let him produce--although, perhaps, "lewed folk" might have read it as such. That Venus should be intended by Chaucer to misread one work, and that Cupid should be portrayed by Chaucer as misunderstanding the intentions of the poet with respect to others, indicates the limited vision of traditional artistic images of love. Of wider significance, however, are the implications of these misreadings in terms of verbal ambiguity. For Geffrey and his fellow narrator in the Legend, ambiguity is a failing of words which prevents them from achieving absolute meaning, from conveying the truth of an event--and a failing for which

they are liable to be punished. In Chaucer's hands, however, ambiguity is a strength: he uses it to convey a larger, more universal meaning, to invoke thought in the reader, and to demonstrate a potential scope for poetry extending well beyond the limits of love verse.

In addition to citing The House of Fame as a work in praise of Love, Venus notes in the poet's defence that he had composed the offending works as a result of his unquestioning belief in the authority of books:

for this man ys nyce,

He myghte doon yt, gessyng no malice,

But for he useth thynges for to make;

Hym rekketh noght of what matere he take. (F 362-5)

He ne hath nat doon so grevously amys,

To translaten that olde clerkes writen,

As though that he of malice wolde enditen

Despite of love, and had himself yt wrought. (F 369-72)

We are, perhaps, to understand her as seeing in him, in his gullibility and imperceptiveness, and in his lack of discrimination and his creative timidity, a potential new recruit to their declining court. Making him feel beholden to her, and promising the support of Love's servants in his future efforts (F 493-4), she rapidly signs him up in their service to write poems on subjects of her choice and in her honour: "Speke wel of love; this penance yive I thee" (F 491). Again, therefore, there is an ironic distance between what the poet thinks he is telling us, which is to the honour of his new patrons, and what Chaucer actually makes him tell us. The poet claims that Venus' "grete bounte doubleth hire renoun" (F 522), but her actions, which seem more ones of exploitation than "bounte", are unlikely to enhance her renown for the more perceptive

reader. Whilst Cupid is said to be "Enhanced and honoured" (F 386) as a result of his display of mercy, he is seen to pardon the poet only after the potential benefit to his reputation has been pointed out to him (F 407-8, 440). In his mind, his reputation for generosity is to be derived, therefore, from an act motivated not by selflessness, but by self-interest. So much for the validity of fame!

The difference between intention and achievement emerges again when the poet tries to explain why he wrote the offending works. "Yt was myn entente", he states,

To forthren trouthe in love and yt cheryce,
And to ben war fro falsnesse and fro vice
By swich ensample; this was my menyng. (F 471-4)

Venus cuts him short, however: "Let be thyn arguynge," she tells him, "For Love ne wol nat countrepleted be/ In ryght ne wrong" (F 475-7). The exchange suggests both the possibility of misinterpretation of poetry, or verbal accounts in general, and the unreasonable and unreasoning nature of Love. Both point to a potential for misrepresentation and injustice in love poetry. Indeed, the characteristics of fame portrayed in the earlier poem are emerging again, and the poet can be seen to have been recruited into the service not just of Love, but also of Fame. The series of poems he has been impressed into writing are to comprise "a glorious legende/ Of goode wymmen, maydenes and wyves,/ That weren trewe in lovyng al hire lyves;/ And ... of false men that hem bytraien" (F 483-6). He is told to "reherce of al hir lyf the grete" (F 574), basing his version on accounts which "in thy bookes alle thou shalt hem fynde" (F 556). He is therefore agreeing to participate in the processes of selection and abridgement that have been seen to be inherent to fame. But, unlike the

true narrative poet, who also takes part in such processes, he does not do so with an intent to provide or make accessible further meaning.

It would, I think, be far-fetched to suggest that Chaucer went to the lengths of writing the poems that follow merely in parody of the unsatisfactory results that arise from a blind attempt to "reherce" love-poetry in its traditional form (although critics are almost unanimous in their lack of enthusiasm (Riverside 1059)). The poems can, however, be seen to be ambiguous as celebrations of love in that, whilst they retain the conventional stance of praise or worship of women, they are concerned with love's less attractive aspects, infidelity and unhappiness. Fish notes also that Chaucer

whitewashes the semi-villainesses of mythology by omitting one half of their legends, [thereby] undercutting his narrative as he delivers it ... the reader who sees Medea presented as a woman betrayed will certainly recall that she slew her children (229).

Through its own content, therefore, the poem implicitly challenges the very genre of love poetry to which it belongs, just as did Book I of The House of Fame.⁶

In both poems, therefore, there is a significant distance between the views of the author and those of his narrator. The problems that Geoffrey encounters in love and the writing of his love poetry are similar and related to those of fame examined in the previous section. He has to rely on capricious deities--now Venus and Cupid, instead of Fame--for the

⁶ That the literary representation of love, rather than the set of women, was the real subject of The Legend of Good Women is suggested by the description of the work as "the Seintes Legende of Cupide" in the introduction to "The Man of Law's Tale" (61). Interestingly, one of the sections of The Legend gives another account of the story of Dido: this time essentially that of the betrayed lover portrayed in Ovid's Heroides.

tidings which he needs to write his poetry, and for the verbal ability "To telle [them] aryght". Both he and his fellow narrator in The Legend see themselves as dependent also on the Court of Venus for a fair judgement of their verse and for a just distribution of poetic renown and reward--neither of which they have so far received. Each poem represents on one level its narrator's attempt to record faithfully the events of his dream experience and to reproduce the tales of love with which he has been supplied. On the other level, however, the poems are ironic reflections on the sorts of poet depicted in the narrators, on their approach to their work, and on the traditional form of poetry that they have adopted. Read in this way, the poems provide a different perspective on the subject of narrative representation. Rather than trying to provide an account of events, they represent an imaginative and thought-provoking use of words. The poet is not dependent upon tidings any longer because his work is not an attempt to reproduce experience, but to provide some more universal truth. Chaucer presents his poets as willingly trapped within the traditional genre of love poetry, a genre which relied on the use of convention. Without the creative ability to use the conventions in original ways, and without the vision to venture outside the genre, they were indeed doomed to failure. Chaucer himself, however, had that ability and that vision, as he demonstrates here and in his subsequent works. He did not show how humans could obtain just reward for their abilities and achievements and did not prescribe any specific roles for the poet. Instead, by raising questions, he opened the way for a general reformulation of ideas concerning poetic subject and function.

IV. The Palace of Honour

A century after Chaucer's death in 1400, his fame and his renown as a poet were very much alive, and, with the advent of printing and the support given by Caxton, his works were receiving wider circulation. During the fifteenth century, there was a significant output of poetry from Scottish writers such as Henryson and Dunbar, who openly acknowledged the influence of Chaucer's work. These poets are commonly described as "Chaucerians", but to characterise them as such on the grounds that they used a "full-blown high style" is, Lewis points out (75), misleading.¹ Their praise of Chaucer is evidence of an appreciation of his ironic approach and, as this study attempts to show, the benefits that they derived from his writing were much wider and less direct than just that of stylistic influence. Late in the period of this "Scottish Renaissance" came a poet named Gavin Douglas, whose longest original work, The Palice of Honour, published around 1501, contains elements which can be traced back to both The House of Fame and the prologue to The Legend of Good Women. In those poems, Chaucer had raised a number of questions concerning fame and poetic art and authority; Douglas' work can be seen to offer a possible solution. This section of the paper shows how Douglas borrowed some basic ideas from Chaucer's poems, but how he adapted and extended them to arrive at a conclusion which is authoritative and reassuring. Douglas' poet-narrator, like Chaucer's, has an encounter with the Court of Venus, but he does not

¹ "Chaucer is, for British poets, an early and distinguished practitioner" of the style, Lewis says, but it derived ultimately from the "Anglo-French school" (75). Fox (168-70) discusses in more detail the linguistic and stylistic influence of Chaucer on the poets of the Scottish Renaissance.

remain within the restrictions of love poetry. He, like Geffrey, is given an aerial guided tour, but the tidings he obtains are not of earthly love, the sights he sees not of arbitrary divine rule. Instead, he is taught that poetry comprises a variety of different genres and he learns of a true Divine love and a just Divine rule. In writing his poem he makes use of his lessons to convey to others the benevolence and justice of God.

The persona that Douglas adopts in the poem is, like Geffrey, that of a poet wishing to serve the cause of love. It is a spring morning; the flowers are opening; the praises of the "Maternall Moneth" of May are being sung (64-88); but our poet can only lament his failings:

O Nature, Quene, and O ye lustie May,
... how lang sall I thus foruay,
Quhilk yow and Venus in this garth deseruis?
Recounsell me out of this greit affray,
That I may sing yow laudis day be day. (91-5)²

The essential elements of the literary dream-vision are all in place, and he duly falls into a swoon and is blessed with the "Visioun" (126) which is described in the remaining two thousand lines of the poem.

The first major break with the traditional dream vision occurs with the description of his new surroundings: there are now no birds singing and no flowers blooming; instead, there is a "desert terribill ... [an] uglie flude horibill ... a hiddious trubil ... swappis brint with blastis boriall" (136-144). It is in this setting that he is confronted with the

² In the Scottish Text Society edition of the poem, Bawcutt provides texts from both the London and Edinburgh manuscripts, assigning no consistent precedence to either. The Edinburgh text is chosen for quotation in this paper on the grounds that it contains a relevant stanza (1711-9) omitted in the London text.

sight of the luxury and splendour of "Venus' court" (595):

Quhat sang! Quhat Ioy! Quhat harmonie! Quhat licht!

Quhat mirthfull solace, plesance all at richt!

Quhat fresche bewtie! Quhat excelland estait! (403-5)

The contrast is too much for him,

For quhen a man is wraith ar furious,

Melancholik for wo or tedious,

Than is all plesance till him maist contrair (394-6),

and he launches into a "lay" of woes (607-35). "Wo", he sings, "Wo worth this my feruent diseis dolorous!" (630). He is not content, however, to confine his song to a lamentation of his own cares: "Wo", he continues,

Wo worth the wicht that is not pieteous,

Quhair the trespassour penitent thay se!

Wo worth this deid that daylie dois me die!

Wo worth Cupyd and wo worth fals Venus!

Wo worth thame baith! Ay waryit mot thay be!

Wo worth thair Court and cursit destinie! (631-6)

This scene of a poet's complaint combines elements from two literary precedents. Within the genre of French dream-vision poetry, there were a large number of examples of what Wimsatt describes as "poems of complaint and comfort" (103-150) in which lovers complained about their affairs, and were comforted. In The House of Fame, from which Douglas borrowed the figure of a narrator who was principally a writer (rather than a lover), Geoffrey remained loyal to his chosen patrons and any dissatisfaction only emerged through the medium of the eagle in his dream. This poet, by contrast, displays an independence of mind and spirit, seeing faults in the court's behaviour and being willing to voice his grievances. The

possibility of progression beyond the limits of the conventional genre is indicated therefore both in the character of the narrator and in the adaptation of poetic precedents.

Overhearing the complaints, Venus is naturally offended, and the scene which follows parallels in many respects that of the prologue to The Legend of Good Women. The accusation is overstated--

Yone Catiue had blasphemit me of new
For to degraid and do my fame adew;
A laitlie Ryme, dispitefull and subtell,
Compylit hes, reheirsand loude and hie
Sclander, dispite, sorow and velanie
To me, my Sone, and eik our Court for ay (946-51)

--and all argument in defence is summarily dismissed (726-8). The main accuser now, however, is Venus, who seems very protective of her status and reputation. The argument for showing mercy is similar to that in The Legend: "To slay him for sa small ane cryme .../ Greitar degrading war to your estait" (957-8); "his sclander or sich plede/ Quhow may a fule your hie renoun chakmate" (959-60).³ This argument is now presented to Venus, however, and comes from outside the court, from Calliope. The Court of Venus in this poem is apparently even less secure and less in control than that portrayed by Chaucer, as might be expected if we understand it to represent the poetic traditions of courtly love, now with a further century of poetic developments to compete with.

This notion of Venus and her court as representing a survival from

³ The Edinburgh and London editions of the poem differ crucially at this point: the latter has "renoun" in place of "honour", and, in the light of the distinction drawn between the two later in the poem, is to be preferred.

the past, specifically the literary past, is strengthened by two later encounters in the poem. The first, in an outer courtyard of the palace, where knights are still engaged "on Venus' service ... In deidis of armis" (1448-9). The second, when Venus' mirror displays to the poet episodes from history as described in books and other verbal accounts, from the Bible (1498-1576) through the classics (1577-1692) to the legends and romances of Britain (1711-9). The literary basis of these stories is made apparent by the interpolation of such comments as "as Poetis can define", "as Virgill weill discriues", "as writes Liuius" (1613, 1632, 1658), and to reinforce the point the catalogue concludes with the all-encompassing entry

And breiflie euerie famous douchtie deid
That men in storie may se or Chronikill reid
I micht behald in that Mirroure expres (1693-5).

Douglas (reiterating Chaucer) indicates that these verbal accounts and the reputations they spawn can be illusive or distorted:

yone Mirroure cleir [our guide explains],
The quhilk thow saw befoir Dame Venus stand,
Signifyis na thing ellis to vnderstand
Bot the greit bewtie of thir Ladyis facis,
Quhairin louers thinks thay behald all graces. (1760-4)

Venus, viewing the aspiring poet from her position as Queen of Love and patroness of love-poetry, regards him as naturally one of her servants. Amongst the crimes of which she accuses him, therefore, is that of insubordination:

First quhen thow come, with hart and haill Intent
Thow the submittit to my commandement.

Now, now, thairof me think to sone thow faillis.

I wene na thing bot folie that the aillis. (712-5)

It is ironic that she is condemning in him precisely the characteristic, inconstancy, repeatedly associated with human love, that "eirdly lufe quhilk sendill standis stabill" (485). Inconstant and unreliable as she may be towards her servants, what she expects from them is loyalty, and not the rapid change from delighted exclamation to violent execration displayed by the poet-narrator. (That her clerk is named Varius might suggest that the service she expects her writers to provide to lovers is less reliable.) Equally ironic, bearing in mind that distortion and dissimulation are features common to Fame and Love, is her accusation that the poet is being "subtell" (948). He had previously, he says, "not ane letter fengeit" (640), but soon learns, as we see, to be more subtle in his future verse to Venus.

As in Chaucer's poem, the poet's punishment is waived in exchange for a commitment to write a poem in celebration of love.⁴ The difference, however, is that he is not released by Venus to enter directly into her service, but, through the intervention of Calliope, to join the company of the Muses and to write of greater matters. The lay he composes and reads on the spot attributes to Venus and love precisely those characteristics, joy and constancy, which they have been shown not to possess:

Rander louingis for thy Saluatioun
Till Venus, and vnder hir guerdoun all houris
Rest at all eis, but sair or sitefull schouris.

⁴ The commission that Venus gives to the poet is to translate The Aeneid, a task that Douglas finally completed two decades later.

Abide in quiet, maist constant weilfair

Be glaid and lycht now in thy lusty flouris (1039-43).⁵

His description of Venus is so patently untrue that it can only be interpreted as flattery; indeed, that she accepts the verses as evidence of his penitence (1050) can only be attributed to her imperceptiveness. The poet, however, is demonstrating that he is competent in writing love verse, in using the standard images of "lusty flouris" and perfect weather, and that he is aware of the limitations of Venus and the poetry that she represents. It now seems to be he, rather than Venus (as in the earlier poem), who is in control in the encounter. Aware that fame is more than a simple record of attributes and achievements, and that it is available to human input and influence, he plays along with the game. He is demonstrating that he can use words for more than just describing his experiences, that he can manipulate them for his own purposes.

Venus apparently believes that her "hie estait" depends on such insubstantial praise, and it is ironic that she should have already accepted Calliope's argument that the equally insubstantial "sclander" of this "fule" cannot her "hie renoun chakmate" (959-60). Having received recompense for the offence done her, Venus proceeds to display her true capricious nature: "And with that word all suddenlie scho went" (1051). "Yit still abaid thir Musis on the bent" (1053), observes the poet, indicating the difference between the Courts "Amorous" (671) and "Rethoricall" (835): the latter is not so ephemeral and inconstant; it truly seems to be "the Court of plesand steidfastnes ... of constant merines ... of Ioyous discipline" (844-6).

⁵ In the Edinburgh version of the poem, the last line is omitted. The line from the London version has been substituted here.

After his encounter with the unpredictability of Venus and his sight of the (mostly) unhappy lovers that constitute her Court--"wobegone Thysbe,/ Dolourous Progne, trist Philomena" (568-9)--it is not surprising to find the poet a ready convert to that of the Muses:

Gloir, honour, laude and reuerence conding

Quha may foryeild yow of sa hie ane thing?

And in that part your mercie I Imploir,

Submitting me my lifetime Induring

Your plesure and mandate till obeysing. (1063-7)

Calliope is not, however, so easily impressed as Venus: "I stand content, thou art obedient" (1047), she comments drily after hearing the poet's lay, and, in response to his professions of allegiance, "Silence! ... I haue aneuch heirfoir./ I will thow wend and vesie wonderis moir" (1068-9). His abilities and experience may be sufficient for the purposes of composing love poetry, but he has a lot to learn before he can hope to accede to the Court of the Muses and earn the praises of Calliope. She expects him to undergo a thorough education before he is to attempt to achieve the authority and monumentality of the epic poetry which she represents.

The nymph assigned to the poet as his guide (1071) plays a similar role to that of the eagle in The House of Fame. The material of the future epic poet's education comprises much more, however, than "tydynges/ Of Loves folke". The Muses' art is apparently greater and ranges wider than just love poetry. The first priority is not the human events of the past, but less mutable natural and man-made features of the world which have in many cases provided the background for episodes in literature (Bawcutt 194-6). Symbolically, the poet is being taught the

foundations of his art, is being taught that it consists of more than just reporting of stories. It is only when the party has settled for a period beside the Caballine Fountain on the Helicon Mount (1134) that attention turns to human events, as a series of poets are summoned to "Declair quha war maist worthie of thair handis" (1189). The court undertakes a discussion of "Quha traist louers in lustie yeiris grene" (1184), but only as a preliminary to presentations of works of comedy, satire and invective (1225-34). In this company, we might note, Ovid is no longer "Venus Clerk" (Fame 1487), but Calliope's (1187). He "tauld of" not just "lufis meditatiounis [and]/ The craft of lufe", but also "Of diuers vther maters" (1222). "He was", the poet concludes, "expert of all thing as it semit" (1224).

The note of retrospective qualification in those final three words is deliberate on the poet's part. The Muses' Court is seen to be superior, to be more knowledgeable, than that of Venus; it is not, however, the supreme court of all, which resides, as the protagonist is to discover, in the "heuinlie Palice" (1451), the "Palice ... hecht hie Honour" (1793). This hierarchy of courts is indicated through the settings in which they are observed: Venus' in the "desert terribill"; the Muses' in the "plesand plane" beneath the Caballine Mountain (1144-6); and the Palace of Honour in "ane plane of peirles pulchritude" (1414). A similar sense of progression is provided by a series of descriptions derived from the traditional ideal settings of a dream vision: each in turn Paradisiacal or Heavenly (8, 1163, 1413); each seeming ideal in comparison to what preceded it. Their 'relative perfection' is suggested in subtle ways: after the description of the

earthly garden, the Caballine surroundings are "Ineffabill" (1164), but (paradoxically) are still described (1144-52), whereas the Palace of Honour requires an extended passage (1255-63) merely to describe its indescribability. Finally, when the poet wakes from his vision, the earthly garden which had initially been seen as a "Gardyne of plesance,/ ... as Paradice amiabill" (7-8) now seems a "Herbrie maist like to Hell/ In till compair of this ye hard me tell" (2094-5). Besides indicating the transcendent beauty of the divine, this contrast demonstrates the change that has taken place in the poet. Originally he had used the superlatives thoughtlessly, but now, benefitting from his education, he reserves them for subjects worthy of the honour. In various ways, therefore, Douglas was making use of the established devices and figures of love poetry, but modifying them to provide the greater meaning required for his superior and superlative subjects: poetry and the divine.

The subservience of both Venus and the Muses to Honour is indicated also in the location of their gardens (1466, 2063), in the grounds of the palace but outside the central building where the "Court of Honour" (1965) resides and "God Omnipotent" (1921) presides. We have come a long way from Ovid's House of Fame: the King Who rules here--"the greit God ... in euerie thing perfite", "he that all dois knaw" (1266,1265)--is not just all-seeing, but all-powerful and all-knowing. In Fame's House "dwelleth", Ovid told us, "Lyght credit ... rash error ... Vayne joy ... hartlesse feare ... Brute ... and Seditioun" (XII.64-7). In Honour's Palace, however, in place of the personified vices, there are personified virtues: "Lawtie [is] keipar ... the Portaris clepit Patience ... Firme Constance is the Kingis Secretair ... The Kingis Minyeoun roundand in his Eir/ Hecht Veritie ... And schortlie euerie vertew and plesance/ Is

subject to yone Kingis obeysance" (1784, 1791, 1797, 1824-7). Here function all those qualities lacking in the House of Fame and the Court of Venus, and the distinction between heavenly Honour and earthly Fame is clearly spelt out:

Honour ... to this heuinlie King
Differis richt far from wardlie gouerning,
Quhilk is bot Pompe of eirdlie dignitie,
Geuin for estait of blude, nicht or sic thing.
And in this countrie Prince, Prelate or King
Allanerlie sall for vertew honourit be.
For eirdlie gloir is nocht bot vanitie
That as we se sa suddenlie will wend,
Bot verteuous Honour neuer mair sall end. (1972-80)

Whereas fame could be awarded arbitrarily and unjustly, in the Palace of Honour the "Chancelair is clepit Conscience,/ Quhilk for na meid wil Pronounce fais sentence./ With him ... Science, Prudence, Iustice, Sapience" (1810-3). Whereas Fame was surrounded by constant noise, "Peace, quiet, rest oft walkis vp and down/ Intill [Honour's] Hall, as Marschellis of Renoun" (1804-5). Whereas fame was ephemeral and variable, "Ay vertew ringis in lestand Honour cleir" (1997), and "the greit sentence diffinitive" (2054) is passed on evil-doers. The Palace of Honour, we learn, is reserved for the "Maist vailyeand folk and vertuous in thair liues" (1964), and the infamous fall in their attempt to enter (1767-1782). In contrast, "As gret a fame han shrewes ... for shrewednesse,/ As goode folk han for goodnesse" (Fame 1852-4).

Douglas' poem presents us therefore with an answer to the problems of fame (in at least one of its senses). Earthly fame and renown are

temporary and ultimately worthless, and so the injustice of their distribution should not concern us. Heavenly honour is the true goal, and the means for achieving it is well-defined and reliable: "Vertew is ... the perfite sicker way,/ And nocht ellis, till lestand honour ay" (2008-9). The sense of assurance concerning the validity of the message is reinforced by the absence of doubt about the status of what the poet explicitly describes as his "Visioun" (126), indicating in passing that he is familiar with the taxonomy of dreams (60). Although confident in his claim, the poet, aware that verbal accounts do not necessarily carry authority, is concerned about its reception: "gif I wald this auisioun Indite,/ Ianglaris suld .../ Cry 'Out on dremis quilks ar not worth ane mite!'" (1267-9). He decides to proceed with the poem (1270-2), however, and does so "Traistand in God my purposis to escheif" (1278). He sees therefore a true purpose for poetry in the propagation of Christianity, a purpose which he can rely on God to enable him to convert into a true and effective art. "The glorious Lord ringand in persounis thre,/ Prouydit hes for my Saluatioun" (777), he claims. God is the inspiration and is to be the support in his project: "I sall discryve .../ Myne Visioun", he says, "as God will giue me grace" (125-6).

Although the poem, like The House of Fame, is seen by its narrator to be his description of his dream, there is now a greater motive behind it: he is aware that his vision has meaning and purpose, and he is concerned that his audience appreciate it (1293-5). Whereas Chaucer and Geoffrey were seen to convey different meanings and to have different intentions, Douglas and his poet are working towards the same end, even if the narrator is sometimes not fully aware of the implications of the words that Douglas has given him. The positive message of the poem is

reinforced by this sense of harmony, which is provided additionally through the portrayed relationship between the various courts. Although the hierarchic structure suggests a direction of progression for poetry--from the limitations of love poetry, to the wider scope of the art forms governed by the Muses, to the ultimate, the portrayal of the Divine--the various levels are not presented as being in opposition to one another. Indeed, the Muses provide the poet with the means to observe the Palace of Honour, and their representative stresses to him the importance of passing on the knowledge that he gains through his writing (1398-1400). Honour can therefore be promoted through the art of the Muses, and the poet calls on them to further help him in his purpose, both in the writing of the poem and in the education of his readers:

Ye Musis nine, be in my adiutorie,
That maid me se this blis and perfite glorie....
Sum gracious sweetnes in my breist Imprent
Till mak the heirars bowsum and attent,
Reidand my writ, Illuminate with your loir (1288-9, 1293-5).

Although words are, the poet says, quite inadequate to describe the wonders that he saw--"the hundreth part all day/ I might not schaw thoct I had toungis ten" (1259-60)--an attempt is made to suggest them through the complex rhyming patterns of the verses which end Douglas' poem. A true verbal representation does not necessarily have to be a literal one; the limited descriptive powers of words need not result in an ineffective vehicle for conveying the required sense. Just as, by analogy with dreams, events can be foretold in "oracles" through symbols as well as through direct visions, so the sense of a poem can be conveyed through form and allegory as well as by direct description. The three stanzas "In

laude of Honour" (2115) provide a fitting conclusion to a work in which answers are suggested to the problems of earthly fame and poetic progression. In their use of conventional images from love poetry, they indicate that the true love, and the true fame, are divine, and that a true application for poetic technique and ability is to be found in the promotion of faith.⁶

O hie Honour, sweit heuinlie flour degest,
Gem verteous, maist precious, gudliest
Of grace thy face in euerie place sa schynis ...
Thy name, but blame; and royal fame diuine is.
Hail rois, maist chois til clois thy fois greit nicht!
Haill stone, quhilk schone vpon the throne of licht!

(2216-7, 2125, 2129, 2134-5)

In response to Chaucer's poem, which portrayed (ironically) a mechanism, the judgements of the capricious Fame, to explain a perceived injustice in life, Douglas presents a mechanism of justice, but one whose results cannot be directly witnessed. To set alongside these, we can consider two dream poems written in the intervening period. Lydgate's Temple of Glas portrays Love as promising success to lovers who remain constant in their attentions. The Kingis Quair shows success being awarded to those whose efforts in love are conducted in accordance with divine will, which itself is not completely knowable. The first therefore provides us with a redundant explanation: earthly affairs can be witnessed, and if justice were seen to exist in them, no further

⁶ Douglas' belief was not just in the powers of conventional figures, as illustrated above, but also in the inviolability of classical versions of stories. He "took Chaucer severely to task" (Delany 25) for his free adaptation of the story of Dido and Aeneas: "My mastir Chaucer gretly Virgill offendit", Douglas says in his translation of The Aeneid (2:14).

explanation would be required. The second is again concerned with justice in "human business", but "sees [it] not in terms of categorical imperatives, like Lydgate, but as a series of subtly related contingencies" (Pearsall 228). From the meaninglessness of Fame, we have progressed to a meaningful rule, but one which can only partially be verified by observation. The next step is to define a rule whose results are to be taken completely on faith, and that is what The Palice of Honour provides. When questions cannot be resolved by human observation and thought, we naturally turn to the teachings of Scripture, which are taken to have divine authority. That at least is the sceptical fideist view defined by Delany (7-21), and, as she points out (24), a view presented in the prologue to The Legend of Good Women:

A thousand tymes have I herd men telle
That ther ys joy in hevене and peyne in helle,
And I acorde wel that it ys so;
But, natheles, yet wot I wel also
That ther nis noon dwellyng in this contree,
That eyther hath in hevене or helle ybe,
Ne may of hit noon other weyes witen,
But as he hath herd seyde, or founde it writen;
For by assay ther may no man it preve.
But God forbede but men shulde leve
Wel more thing then men han seen with ye! (Legend 1-11)

Chaucer provided the foundation, the situations and ideas, upon which The Palice of Honour was built. That he did not give Douglas' definitive statement of the Christian answer does not mean that he was unaware of it. Indeed, since the scenario of the Last Judgement would be familiar

to contemporary readers, would not the scene of Fame's judgements perhaps have brought that image to mind for many of them?⁷ The House of Fame, I suggest, makes that answer available without presenting it explicitly, and without providing the Palice's sense of assurance. That existence can be fully explained and justified is a conclusion which might be felt by some readers to be too comfortable. The realities of life do not seem to conform to such a tidy pattern and are more consistent with the sense of uncertainty and contingency found in Chaucer's poems, and in the works of John Skelton considered in the following section.

⁷ Sypherd (68) includes the Last Judgement in his review of precedents for various aspects of The House of Fame.

V. The Human Court

The Palice of Honour was shown in the previous section to evade the problems of worldly fame by replacing it as a goal with the true and reliable heavenly honour, and to circumvent any scepticism about the authenticity of its vision or the validity of its message by invoking divine authority. The realities of everyday life remain, however, and Douglas' poem might still be criticised for being remote from the practical needs of his readers--just as Venus had been criticised by the narrator for being aloof from her surroundings and the plight of her subject (Honour 631-2). The Palice of Honour does indicate connections between the earthly and heavenly realms: it states the ubiquity of God's presence (2125); it promotes the virtuous life on earth as the means for attaining that in heaven; it notes the divinity of "royal fame" (2129). The poem does not, however, present any practical suggestions as to how members of its audience, the educated, courtly class, might live a life of virtue in a fallible world. Indeed, far from indicating how they might act to rectify the injustices and abuses of others in the society, it displays a belief in the soundness of those institutions.

All three of the poets whose works are featured in this paper had connections with the royal courts of their time, and this section will examine how their poems present the position of poets in human courts: their problems of status and reputation, of patronage and reward. The treatment of the subject by Chaucer and Douglas is, at most, allusive, the affairs of court and of society in general are of principal concern, however, in John Skelton's writing, particularly his satirical verse. In his poem Garlande of Laurell, he reintroduces a personification of fame,

now in the figure of the Queen of Fame, whose jurisdiction is principally over the realm of contemporary reputation, and whose designation might be taken to indicate her as a reflection of certain characteristics of the royal court. Although Skelton's poem, like Chaucer's, characterises Fame as unjust and arbitrary, the processes by which reputations are created and destroyed are no longer portrayed as being beyond human influence. Instead, Garlande (and other poems by Skelton) present acts of celebration and defamation of contemporaries directly within the text. Far from lamenting the inability of words to reproduce experience through description, the poems indicate and demonstrate the positive uses that can be made of their intangibility: the potential power of ambiguity, the benefits of verbal obscurity.

Although Chaucer was an esquire of the English king with an appointment as controller of the wool custom at the time that he wrote The House Of Fame (Riverside 978), the poem does not directly refer to the court of the time. Spearing goes as far as to say that it "is notorious that Chaucer's work contains very little overt reference to contemporary political events" (Renaissance 230). The poem can, however, be seen to make some implied criticisms of courtly life and to suggest some of the potential problems of a poet in the court. We might, for example, read the description of the gossip-mongers in the House of Rumour as applying to the court surrounding the king. We might also read as an indirect lament at Chaucer's own unrewarded diligence the passage which tells of the poet's efforts "To make bookes, songes, dytees/ ... in reverence" of his master and his entourage "Although [he] maist goo in the daunce/ Of hem that hym lyst not avaunce" (622-40).

It has commonly been suggested that The Legend was written for a royal occasion (Riverside 587) and that changes between the F and G texts are explicable in terms of changes in circumstances at court (Spearing, Dream 104).¹ Green (134) deduces from contemporary documents that poets were not employed in such a capacity by the kings of that period, that they generally held other positions and only wrote poetry as a secondary occupation. They could apparently still attain a prominence in court life through their poetry, however, and thereby make themselves the target of criticism and abuse. In Chaucer's House of Fame, we can find references to some aspects of this courtly fame: the flattery of "pursevantes and heraudes,/ That crien ryche folkes laudes" (1321-2); the criticism of a poem by those who, "thorgh presumpcion/ Or hate, or skorne, or thorgh envye,/ Dispit, or jape, or vilanye,/ Misdeme hyt" (94-97); and the backbiting of rivals, "Betwex [whom] was a lital envye" (1476). Although the poem outwardly portrays the unjust distribution of fame and formation of false reputation as being the result of the actions of personified Fame and Rumour, these quotations indicate the possibility of human culpability. The king's entourage included many courtiers who "have hys servyse soght, and seke" (Fame 626). That such people were commonly involved in false praise of themselves and slander of their rivals is made explicit in Venus' observation to Cupid in The Legend of Good Women:

in youre court ys many a losengeour,
 And many a queynte totelere accusour,
 That tabouren in youre eres many a soun,

¹ The Parliament of Fowls has also been proposed as a poem written for a royal occasion (Riverside 994).

Ryght after hire ymagynacioun,

To have youre daliance, and for envie. (352-6)

Chaucer's poems point to the abuses, including those of words, which become mere "soun" when based on nothing more than the speaker's "ymagynacioun". They are left as problems, however, and there is the sense in the literal narration that the individual, including the poet, is powerless to alter matters.

At the time that Douglas wrote The Palice of Honour, he was only about twenty-six years old and just setting out on a career in the church (Lewis 76n). His concern was more with obtaining royal patronage than with noting its drawbacks, and such is apparent in the dedication of "his buik to the richt Nobill and Illuster Prince Iames the Feird King of Scottis" (2143-2169). Douglas awards the king both earthly and divine fame--"Supreme Honour, Renoun of Cheualrie,/ Felicite perdurand in this eird/ With Eterne blis in heuin by fatall weird" (2147-9)--and makes a "fairly explicit hint to the King" (Bawcutt 214)--"thy michtie Excellence ... Thow quhais micht may humbill thing auance" (2156, 2160). We have already seen Douglas' poet's successful propitiation of Venus, and his attempt to win Calliope's favour, through flattery in verse. It is an ironic reflection upon the realities of earthly secular and spiritual power that, as Bawcutt impassively notes (214), "by 11 March 1503 Douglas had become Provost of St Giles', Edinburgh". His blatant propagandising on behalf of James had apparently been rewarded.

Douglas' use of the word "court" to describe each of the successive assemblies that the poet encounters, and his use of "Quene" and "King" to refer to Venus (934), Calliope (1075) and Honour/God (1818), suggest

that in certain respects they are a reflection of the human court. His depiction of Achitophel and Sinon as outcasts (240) from the court perhaps indicates therefore a youthfully idealised image of the court's integrity. He was later to experience the reality: he was appointed Chancellor, took part in political intrigues, was imprisoned, and eventually fled Scotland to live on an English pension! (Lewis 77, 90) His observation that "Prince, Prelate or King/ Allanerlie sall for vertew honourit be ... / Deith sets the terme and end of all thair hicht" (1976-7, 1992) may contain the suggestion that kings and princes might not be entirely virtuous in their rule. There is no real consideration of the abuses of courtly life, however, and therefore none either of the possible remedies.

John Skelton, a close contemporary of Douglas, held positions in the English court, including that of tutor to the future Henry VIII. Whether he was "a life-long courtier", as Heiserman states (17), or a life-long (but largely unsuccessful) courter of the king's favours, as Walker portrays him, he displayed a consistent interest in court affairs through his poetry. His writing, unlike Douglas', shows an awareness of the realities of the life of the court right from the start. The title of his first major poem, Bowge of Court--literally, "the free rations provided in the royal court" (Scattergood 395)--can be understood to suggest the undignified scramble for courtly rewards. The poem itself is again in the form of a dream vision narrated by an aspiring poet, Drede, who encounters a series of court-followers with such names as Favell, Suspecte, Dysdayne, Dyssymulation, Disceyte and Subtylte, and observes

them conspiring against him (418-27).² "Our courte is full of dysceyte", Dyssimulation deceitfully informs him, "Ye be malygned sore"; "a connynge man ne dwelle maye/ In no place well, but foles with hym fraye" (469, 451, 445-6). About to be physically assaulted, Drede says he "thoghte to lepe; and even with that woke,/ Caughte penne and ynke, and wroth this lytell boke" (531-2).

Skelton's satire was to mature into the form found in the later political poems, but even in this brief outline of an early, rather derivative, work the critical and reformative intent is obvious. Skelton believed that he could warn against the abuses of power through his writing, and thereby affect the course of events.³ In satire, he had found a genre which was of direct relevance to earthly human lives. It was a genre which was often related, both in its motivation and its desired effect, to the problems of fame described by Geoffrey in The House of Fame: the injustice might be one of status; the aim might be to enhance or diminish reputation. Several of Skelton's poems were warnings about and criticisms of political actions, those of Cardinal Wolsey in particular (Gordon 185-211). His writing was also concerned, however, with an area of contemporary fame much closer to himself: that of the poet. He suggests in The Bowge of Court that the "connynge man" was a target of abuse in court. The damage that criticism of rivals could do to the reputation of a poet, even one deserving of renown, is indicated by

² Favell was "the type-name of the flatterer" (Scattergood 397).

³ The obscure lines in Latin from Garlande of Laurell (596-601) which Scattergood has translated as "You bear things to be feared beyond measure, the very thunderbolts of Jupiter. With curved talons he is as ready to go to various dangerous places as was Celaeno Arms ... force, fraud, a barbarous world!", have been interpreted by Hammond as Skelton "alluding to his own industrious use of letters as a weapon of attack" (qtd. Scattergood 502).

his description of the verbal battle between Demosthenes and Aeschines (Garlande 130-154). A piece of work need not necessarily deserve criticism to receive it: other motives could come into play, and, as Pallas observes, "harde is to make but sum fawt be founde" (Garlande 112). Criticism of rivals need not even be based on the merits of the writing: it could, as Skelton demonstrated in his poem Agenst Garnesche, consist merely of personal abuse. "Flytings", such as this, were not intended to be taken as literal abuse, and were probably written as a form of entertainment to be "recited before the king as a stylized duel in verse" (Kinsley 95).⁴ In their approach to their subjects, however, such poems suggest the limited effectiveness of direct criticism, and, as overstated parodies of irrationally-argued courtly feuds, they function as subtle indictments of the conduct of the society.

In The House of Fame, Geffrey is shown modifying the reputations of others and altering the list of those whose names are preserved, whilst representing fame as a process beyond the influence of humanity. Chaucer, although aware of the powers that humans, and poets in particular, had to form and affect the renown of others, generally did not portray, or even name, contemporaries in his poems. Douglas has been seen to mention King James (and "Greit Kennedie and Dunbar yit vndeid" (923)), but only with the intention of reporting, or perhaps enhancing, already established reputations. Skelton, however, took the representation of the processes of fame one step further: the poem itself was the deliberate means by which he changed his readers' views of other people and their actions. Instead of suggesting that humans were powerless before the judgements of

⁴ A better known example of the genre is "The Flyting of Dunbar and Kennedie".

Fame, he was openly demonstrating his ability to form and change reputation.

In contrast to the stylised abuse of the flytings, Garlande of Laurell contains a genuine attack by Skelton on a personal enemy: "Envyous Rancour truely he hicht./ Beware of hym, I warne you" (753-4). This adversary, Roger Statham, is only named in code and "has not been satisfactorily identified" (Scattergood 504); the passage is, however, consistent with an attack on a rival poet. "Interpolata, que industriusum postulat interpretem, satira in vatis adversarium", we read after a series of rather directionless and vacuous exchanges between Occupacyon and "Skelton" (707-741)--which are possibly, I suggest, intended to be a parody of Statham's own work.⁵ Although Skelton is direct in his presentation of the defamation of contemporaries, is actually incorporating it into his poem, what he is demonstrating is the potential power of verbal indirection and obscurity. The reader is challenged to decode the name, to translate the Latin tag, to interpret the satire, and if he or she recognises the subject of the parody, the presence of the characteristic fault is demonstrated far better than it could be by any direct criticism.

The inherent limitation of words for Geffrey's purposes, their inability to provide a direct reproduction of experience, was not one which inhibited the effectiveness of either parody or satire, which were by their very nature indirect. A straight description and condemnation of abuses might easily be dismissed or ignored. Satire could potentially

⁵ The Latin is translated by Scattergood as "An interpolated satire on the poet's adversary, which demands an industrious interpreter" (503). We should note that Skelton has awarded himself the elevated title of "vates", with its sense of prophet or seer, as well as poet.

have much greater impact, attracting a wider and more attentive audience through humour and hyperbole, and making itself more memorable and more widely and lastingly relevant through use of imagery and allegory. Indeed, we can identify in good satirical writing many characteristics that might be seen as desirable in literature in general if it is to have a purpose and meaning beyond the immediate. In The Bowge of Court, the personified vices were not identified with specific people and so the poem acted, and could continue to act, as an attack on all the hangers-on and backbiters in court society, or in any community. Its very generality made it all the more effective since anyone who objected or retaliated effectively condemned himself. "I wyll not saye it is mater in dede,/ But yet of tyme suche dremes be found trewe" (537-8), the narrator comments: in other words, "Give it some thought, and see if you derive anything of truth from it".

Spearing (240-1) considers other means by which Skelton avoided making direct criticism. By placing it in the mouth of a fictional character such as Jane Scrope in Phyllyp Sparowe, the author simultaneously makes the views expressed more credible because of her innocence and detachment from the subject, and leaves himself free to disown them if challenged. The ambiguity of indirect forms of criticism therefore provided the protection that direct accusations, however just, could not ensure. That such considerations were in Skelton's mind is stated explicitly in Speke Parott⁶--

⁶ Although the criticism of Wolsey in Speke Parott is placed in the parrot's mouth and made in obscure terms, it was apparently not sufficiently indirect to protect Skelton: he had to dedicate the later Garlande of Laurell to the cardinal (1587-93), and did so "Inter spemque metum" ("Between hope and dread") (1593). Walker provides a very interesting account of the relationship between the two men, particularly as it is manifested in Skelton's poems.

in this processe, Parrot nothing hath surmysed,
No matter pretendyd, nor nothing enterprysed,
But that metaphora, alegoria withhall,
Shall be his protectyon, his pavys and his wall (200-3)

--and Garlande of Laurell--

Juvenall was thret, parde, for to kyll
For certayne envectyfys, yet wrote he none ill (95-6).
A poete somtyme may for his pleasure taunt,
Spekyng in paroblis ...
Yet dyverse ther be, industryous of reason,
Sum what wolde gadder in there conjecture
Of suche an endarkid chapter sum season. (100-1, 106-8)

In these quotations, Skelton indicates the benefits of verbal ambiguity and implication (as opposed to explicit statement) when used in a specific context. He demonstrates further the virtues of ambiguity in another related quotation: "Wordes be swordes", Pallas tells the poet, "and hard to call ageine" (567). The line is simultaneously a statement concerning the power of words, a critical observation on the dangerous state of society--"words can result in duels or can provoke physical attacks"--and a warning--"be careful what you write because your words can hurt and can't be withdrawn"--all of which are relevant in the context. We have come a long way from Geffrey's regrets at his inability to reproduce specific experience through words: Skelton is making a virtue out of their very intangibility. Indeed, if literature is to convey a more universal message, is to tell a larger truth, it must utilise the verbal indefiniteness of meaning. Satire might be only one, and often an ephemeral, form of literature, but the aim of Skelton's

parrot might be seen to be that of all creative writers: "trowthe in parabyll wantonlye [to] pronounce" (364).

Allegory, metaphor and ambiguity were not, of course, either invented or introduced into English writing by Skelton and his contemporaries. All, in fact, are present in The House of Fame and vital to the dual reading (Chaucer's, Geffrey's) of events. However, in his book Medieval to Renaissance in English Poetry, Spearing notes the emergence of the "idea that great poets conceal their meaning with a veil of allegory" (249). The reason for the change, Spearing suggests, was the "general elevation of the status of poetry ... poets could now legitimately demand their readers' fullest attention". We might note, however, that whilst Chaucer was able to leave his irony unmarked, Skelton had to identify his method, had to point directly to his use of obscurity. He may have "concealed his meaning", but he did not conceal the act of concealment. Although he may have seen this as making the poetry more effective for its immediate purpose, in the process he sacrificed some of its ability to pronounce "trowthe" in a variety of contexts, and therefore also some of its potential claim to be of enduring and universal interest.

Both Heiserman (191-2) and Walker (91-2) observe that Skelton was disappointed in the lack of response from his audience, in their failure to appreciate the satire in Speke Parott particularly, and how this is manifested in his subsequent compositions. Treating that audience's literary limitations with due pragmatism, however, he simply made his "meanings [in Parott] more obvious in the increasingly specific political stanzas of the envoys" (Walker 91). An equally pragmatic view of the

realities of life is demonstrated when, in his representation of personal feuds between writers, he presents arguments in which truth, relevance and justice have little part. By contrast, the image that Douglas presents, that of Cicero righteously beating down Catiline from the walls of Honour with a book (Honour 1770-3), suggests a belief in the just outcome of disputes in the established society. In their treatment of another aspect of contemporary fame, the purchasing of favour at court, the two poets' presentation is closer: both incorporate the act itself in their writing; both can be understood to be flattering their potential future patrons in their poems (although with contrasting success). Douglas would, one suspects, have denied that he was trying to curry favour through his tribute to King James. Skelton, however, is quite overt and knowing in his actions.⁷ Occupacyoun, Fame's registrar in Garlande of Laurell, clearly states that he and Skelton can increase one another's renown through their respective positions and talents:

for my sake spare neyther pen nor ynke;
 Be well assurid I shall aquyte your hyre,
 Your name recountynge beyonde the lande of Tyre (549-51).

In the same way, Skelton's tributes to the ladies of the court of the Countess of Surrey, his patroness at that time (Nelson 199)⁸, contain frequent reference to their mutual enhancement of reputation: "To be your remembrauncer, madame, I am bounde" (864);

Ful wel I know

⁷ Walker is less complementary when considering this aspect of Skelton's writing. "[The] desperate search for favour", he says, "culminated in the fulsome sycophancy of the ... Latin stanza [405-10], attributed to Parott, in which Henry, the King who 'rules this English realm', is compared to Jupiter, and declared to be a god himself" (97).

⁸ Walker presents an extended argument refuting the commonly held view that the Howard family were Skelton's long-term patrons (5-34).

My besy cure

To yow I owe

.....

So I, iwis,

Endeavoure me

Your name to se

It be enrolde,

Writtin with golde. (927-9, 935-9)

In these examples, we can see that Skelton has gone beyond the mere description of the faming of contemporaries, just as he did when he dealt with their defamation: he is demonstrating the process through the text of his poem--and, perhaps, indicating its potential for abuse.

These ladies are not, however, the only people in the poem to receive praise. The most prolonged celebration of talent in the poem is that of Skelton himself, or, perhaps more accurately, of "Skelton poeta". We might read the poem as being an attempt at self-promotion, an attempt by Skelton to enhance his own reputation by reporting the tributes paid to him by Pallas, Calliope, Chaucer and others. Skelton's poem is, however, very aware of the distinction between demonstration and assertion, and of the limited effectiveness of the latter. In being apparently so openly self-promoting, it is actually disarmingly self-mocking. Clearly, no reader is going to be convinced of a poet's genius on the evidence of statements supposedly made by divinities and dead poets, seen in a dream, and recorded in the poet's own work. Its authority would be as dubious as that of the "man of gret auctorite" in The House of Fame. Skelton adds further irony by portraying "Skelton poeta" drawing back from, and having to be forcibly taken to, the Court

of Fame (442-8). The poem was hardly the product of a reluctant courtier of Fame. In Skelton's poem, therefore, we see a return to the disruptive and challenging techniques used in Chaucer's works, after the more respectful and reassuring approach of Douglas.

To supplement the ironic assertions of his poetic abilities, Skelton actually incorporates into the poem a demonstration, in the form of the series of tributary verses. These are supposedly produced in response to the Queen of Fame, the consistent critic of "Skelton" and the principal opponent of his election to the court of Fame. "He wyll not endeavour hymselfe to purchase/ The favour of ladys with wordis electe" (75-6), she complains: the praises of others do not convince her of his abilities; she wants to see the evidence herself. In justification of his limited output, the narrator points out the impossibility of the poet's position in her court (and, perhaps, by implication, in Henry's?).⁹ No form of writing was guaranteed to satisfy--

For if he gloriously publisshe his matter,

Then men wyll say how he doth flatter.

And if so hym fortune to wryte true and plaine ...

Then sum wyll say he hath lyttill brayne,

And how his wordes with reason wyll not accorde (83-88)

--and royal patronage was not distributed according to ability--

whome that ye [Fame] favoure ... hath a name ...

And whome ye love not ye wyll put to shame.

⁹ "Cui nec regalis munificentia nec fortune benignitas adhuc opulentius dignatur aspirare", Skelton wrote to Henry VIII (qtd. Nelson 117). He certainly felt that he had received poor treatment, and Nelson (198) suggests that the image of "Skelton" in a slippery position on the wall, peering over it to the English court and king (Garlande 602-22) was intended as an image of his precarious position in Henry's Court.

Ye counterway not evynly your balance;

As wele foly as wysdome oft ye do avaunce (177-80).

This final line seems familiar. "As gret a fame han shrewes... for shrewednesse,/ As goode folk han for goodnesse" (1852-4), it was stated in The House of Fame, and the criticism of Fame's arbitrariness is common to Chaucer and Skelton. A comparison of their poems does, however, provide a sense of development, but often in directions which Chaucer's poetry can be seen to have indicated. Geoffrey had felt powerless to affect the processes of Fame, but Chaucer had shown him to be implicated in them; Skelton now openly points to the ways in which humans deliberately influence the reputations of others, and even incorporates such celebration and defamation into his poem. Whilst Chaucer avoided any social criticism in The House of Fame, he had introduced it in The Canterbury Tales through the mouths of his characters; Skelton now makes social satire a principal element in his writing, making criticisms both indirectly--through characters, but also by various other means--and directly. His satirical verse both identified and demonstrated the power of words when used indirectly, in such forms as allegory, ambiguity and parody. He thereby evaded the problems which Chaucer's persona, Geoffrey, had encountered when he attempted to use words as a direct means for reproducing experience. Chaucer had himself made use of such devices, not least in enabling the reader to appreciate the distinction between his views and Geoffrey's, between The House of Fame as allegory and as an account of an experience. In Garlande of Laurell, the distinction between author and persona, between what the poem comprises and what it describes, are deliberately blurred. Obscurity and structural ambiguity had become virtues. The reading audience was expected to possess greater

sophistication and to be more willing to expend the extra effort which literature was now seen to deserve.

Skelton had shown how contemporary reputations could be made and changed, both with and without just cause. He had not found a method for ensuring justice for himself as a poet, and had not achieved the recognition and rewards in the human court of his time that he felt that he deserved. On one level, the poem is a description of Skelton's laureation; on another, it is itself a metaphorical garland, a symbolic tribute to his talent. On neither level, however, is it intended to persuade the reader of the abilities of "Skelton poeta"; indeed, it deliberately undermines its own descriptions through internal inconsistency. As the poem has shown, however, the most effective method for conveying a sense of the truth is not through an attempt at direct literal description. When the object or activity itself comprises words, it can be presented directly, can be incorporated into the poem itself. When that object is the poetic talent of the poet, the complete poem is the evidence, although there is never any absolute truth about its literary merits. The poet's work could hope to survive as part of a literary canon deemed worthy of continued serious consideration, and a later section of this paper is concerned with the developing sense of a literary tradition in English. Before passing to that subject, however, it is necessary to consider perceptions of the purpose and value of poetry, to consider how it was seen to have a claim to be of lasting service to humanity, and thereby to be worthy of preservation. In the following section, therefore, I examine notions of how poetry functions: to educate, to inform or instruct, perhaps, or to enlighten or stimulate.

VI. The Court of Sapience

The laberous and the most merveyulous werkes
Of Sapience, syn firste regned nature,
My purpos is to tell as writen clerkes
.....
Al this mater she taught me of her grace--
I spak with her, as ye may here and rede,
For in my dreme I mette her in a mede.

(Court of Sapience 1-3, 12-14)

The transmission of wisdom (or, indeed, of any sort of knowledge or information) is, according to this account, direct and quite unproblematic. In his dream, the narrator says, he was taught "Al this mater" by Wysedom, and he will pass it on for us to "here and rede". The writings of scholars are to act as the basis for his work. There is no suggestion of any possibility of doubt about authenticity, authority, or ability. Wisdom is simply provided and passed on through the written word. There is no attempt to disguise the fact that the presentation of this material as a revelation in a dream is a fiction. Poetry is apparently seen as a medium through which information and knowledge can be transmitted, but, further, that the work is not presented directly as an encyclopaedia suggests that a veneer of literary rhetoric is regarded as necessary to the enterprise.

This section of the paper is concerned with notions of the instructive or educative powers of literature. Can it, and should it, function to teach the reader something, and, if so, how? Is it as a medium of enlightenment that literature earns the right to be read, to be

taken seriously, to be preserved? The subject is tackled by consideration of different modes of teaching and learning, as they are described, portrayed or embodied in the works of Chaucer, Douglas, Skelton and others. In addition to a number of direct statements on education contained in the poems, I consider their depiction of characters learning or being taught. What and how, for example, do the dreamers learn from their experience, and what roles do their various guides play? In the discussion, particularly of Skelton, I also consider what his poems demonstrate about the accumulation of knowledge that he had obtained from his reading and the uses that he made of it in his writing. Most important of all, however, is the question of how the poems themselves function. Do they aim to teach, and do they teach, us something? What is the mode of the lesson: didactic or discursive; directly instructional or relying on the active participation of the reader? How do they achieve their impact? By establishing their authority? By creating a sympathy or receptiveness in the audience? By literary technique? The genre of the dream-vision poem is particularly useful as a means for approaching these subjects since it combines the potential affective impact of art with the attributes of dream, a notional medium of external revelation, but also of self-discovery. The genre can therefore be used in a wide range of different ways, as the poems demonstrate. The image of direct transmission of wisdom presented in the opening quotation is at one extreme of the range that is considered. Other poems are used to indicate the limitations of this approach, and to illustrate how less direct modes of communication can operate.

The main dream poems and their authors have already been encountered in previous sections. The purpose is to consider changes in perception

and approach, which are neither uniform nor consistent, and so the section is organised according to different aspects of change and not in strict chronological order of the works. As in earlier sections, Chaucer is distinguished from Geoffrey and his fellow narrators. The latter are taken to represent an extreme naive position, sometimes one which bears comparison with The Court of Sapience; Chaucer, however, is seen to be aware of problems and complexities, and more advanced in his approach. The first half of the section contrasts Chaucer's works with the notional works of his narrators and with other dream poems by "Chaucerians" from the fifteenth century. Included in this part are discussions of what provides authority to an account or persuasiveness to an argument, and what conversely is achieved by presentation of inconclusive, inauthoritative and diverse material. In the second half, attention turns to the poets of the early sixteenth century, Douglas and Skelton. Further topics that are introduced include use of the resources provided by preceding literature, and the powers of eloquence.

A general theme across the full discussion is the increasing requirement for initiative and responsibility to be taken by the dreamer, or the reader, or humanity as a whole, in the extraction of a lesson. Education changes from a form of instruction to a provision of resources to be assimilated and, subsequently, applied. Since this emphasis on human enterprise and endeavour is one aspect of humanism, which was beginning to gain influence in England in the early Tudor period, an attempt is made in the later part of the discussion to relate the changes found in the poems to humanist ideas. Although Skelton is closest to the humanists in his approach, he cannot, I suggest, be so easily characterised.

The work from which the opening quotation was taken is an anonymous dream poem probably written in the third quarter of the fifteenth century. In story line, it bears some resemblance to the principal poems featured in this paper. The narrator prays to God for help and falls into a dream in which he is conducted to and guided around an edifice peopled by personified abilities and attributes. In this case, it is for access to "Dame Sapyence" that he prays to God (120), and it is "wysedom" that, he says, "in my book wyl I preche". The Court of Sapience was written over half a century after Chaucer's death. However, because it is very conservative in its approach, relying for its content almost exclusively on writings from previous centuries, it can be used to establish a baseline view against which to consider deviations and developments. Central amongst the author's borrowings is a notion of wisdom categorised under three headings: science, intelligence and sapience.¹ The three are progressively more spiritual in nature, and progressively less sensibly accessible to humanity. An appreciation of the third is simply beyond human powers unaided: "The joy of it with tonge may not be told!" (1729). To attain Sapyence, we are dependent on divine grace.

The narrator "prayd to God abone [sic]/ To teche me weye unto Dame Sapyence" (120-1), he tells us, and through the medium of his dream, he was granted that access. The experience is therefore by its nature divine revelation, and the poem can be seen to have as antecedents the various "scriptural and Christian visions" outlined by Spearing in his study of

¹ Harvey documents the various sources in her introduction to the poem (xxiv-xxxviii). She identifies Balbus' mediaeval Latin dictionary Catholicon as the immediate source for this classification (85-6), although the ultimate source is Plato.

dream-poetry (11-16). Those earlier accounts acquired their authority from their location in the divinely sanctioned Scriptures. The narrator of the Court also presents his dream as divinely inspired, but then cites his relatively more worldly sources, the writings of those "clerkes" referred to in the opening quotation. "Dicit Bonaventura Cardinalis in libro De meditacionibus ..." (607n), he tells us, for example, or "vide per doctores et per Januensem, in suo Catholicon in verbo sapiencia" (146n). There is no sign of doubt about these works, despite their non-scriptural nature, and no awareness of the possibility that anyone else might, in turn, question the authority of his own writing. The entire enterprise involves faith in divine powers, but a faith based on fear: "drede of God", we are told, "is way of al wysedome" (945). Some "secretes of the deyte/ ... ought not reherced be;/ ... [and] shold be pryvate and occult", the narrator states, "These artycles ... I rede we leve, and take Quicumque vult" (2241-7).² Similar ideas are found in another dream story which might be taken as a predecessor of the Court: "Resignation ... to the limits of our nature, and renunciation of ultimate knowledge or power, are the lessons of Scipio's Dream", Delany notes (80-1). Cicero's Somnium Scipionis does describe a dream vision in which wisdom is imparted directly to the dreamer for human benefit. Unlike The Court of Sapience, however, it conveys its "lessons" not by simple statement, but through the story, through, for example, Scipio's realisation of "the relative insignificance of his empire" when he views

² "Quicumque vult", Harvey explains in her commentary, are "the opening words of the Athanasian Creed, the definitive statement of orthodox belief on the mystery of the trinity" (152). The word "leve" can apparently be read as either "leave" or "believe": i.e. the line becomes "I advise that we pass on from [these matters] and accept them on faith".

it from the heavens (Delany 80). Even compared with its predecessors, therefore, The Court of Sapience is extreme in the passivity and trust that it expects, and the small amount of imagination it demands, from recipients of its (supposed) wisdom.

Included amongst The Court's predecessors (although not perhaps in direct line of descent) were the many Old French love dream-vision poems. In those poems, the dreamer commonly learnt about love matters either from a person of authority or through observation of events at the court surrounding Venus or the God of Love. With the insight provided by the vision, he could return to the waking world and resolve his formerly problematic love life.³ The lesson for the dreamer was still direct: the truth was presented explicitly to him, albeit through the indirect medium of his dream (and, perhaps, through transparent allegory involving, for instance, "Love", "Reason" and "Nature", or "Esperance" and "Plaisance").⁴ As far as any instructional message to the reader was concerned, the subject is less clear cut. "Most dream-visions in medieval literature", Delany observes, "begin with an assertion of the truth of dreams" (38). Such assertions are at least a gesture at direct instruction, implying that the poem contains significant information that the reader is intended to believe. However, unless contemporary readers of these poems accepted that the poets were the privileged recipients of truth (whether through dreams or otherwise), such claims should, logically, have carried no weight. Indeed, their very presence implies

³ Sypherd gives summaries of a few "representative" French love-visions (1-5). The plot summary I give here fits the majority of these poems, including Le Roman de la Rose and works by both de Machault and Froissart, all of whom were known to Chaucer.

⁴ The first three personifications appear in Le Roman de la Rose (and many other poems). The last two are from Froissart's Paradys d'Amours (Sypherd 4).

the possibility of doubt. No blanket statement can be made about all French love dream-poetry, of course. Some of the poems may genuinely have been intended to impart wisdom direct to their audience. There is certainly, however, an awareness in the genre, as the Fablel dou Dieu d'Amours demonstrates, that there are limitations to the authority of dreams and, by analogy, of poetic pronouncements. In that poem, the love vision is treated ironically: the dreamer learns that his amie has been returned to him, only to wake to the discovery that the dream has lied (Wimsatt 55).

Having encountered poems which display no awareness of the possibility of doubt and others which openly acknowledge it, we pass to the dream poems of Chaucer, where, I suggest, we have both simultaneously. This feat is achieved again through the device of the imperceptive poet-dreamer, a device which enables us to read the one text either as Chaucer's or the narrator's. Taking this approach, and through comparison with other dream poems, I aim to show in the following few pages how Chaucer demonstrates a higher degree of awareness of various problematic aspects of communication, and how his works are likely to induce a more questioning attitude in the reader. In the earliest of these poems, The Book of the Duchess, the narrative structure outlined above is not followed exactly. The narrator does meet a figure of authority and does hear of matters of love, but, although a reading of the dream as the remedial somnium of a melancholy lover is possible (Spearing Dream 59-61), that aspect of the poem is almost incidental to the main story. Instead, it is the Black Knight, a character that the dreamer meets, who is seen to be the distressed lover. The account that

he provides of his troubles is veiled initially in metaphor and euphemism, which the dreamer fails to penetrate. Only when the knight reverts to a literal description does he manage to convey to the dreamer that his beloved has died. In the figure of the narrator who is unable to comprehend anything but the direct literal account, we can find an image of the dreamer who expects his dream to simply provide him with its meaning (or, perhaps, the reader who expects a poem to perform the same service). As readers of this poem who understand, for example, that the "ches" (651) that the knight refers to is not a literal game, we are made more conscious of the evocative, but uncertain, operation of metaphor, of language in general.

Amongst Chaucer's dreamers, this narrator is not alone in his limited understanding of image and metaphor. Geoffrey outlines what he has (and has not) learnt from his visit to Fame:

For wel y wiste ever yit,
Sith that first y hadde wit,
That somme folk han desired fame
Diversly, and loos, and name.
But certeynly, y nyste how
Ne where that Fame duelled, er now,
And eke of her descripcioun,
Ne also her condicioun,
Ne the ordre of her dom,
Unto the tyme y hidder com. (1897-1906)

What he "nyste ... er now" and has learnt concerns Fame, the symbol ("her descripcioun ... her condicioun"), rather than fame, the thing that she personifies. An awareness of a connection between the personified Fame

and the abstract quality is present, but there is no sense that Geoffrey (the narrator) recognises that connection as allegory. In the narrative approach of The Court of Sapience, there is, I suggest, an equally mistaken sense of allegory, although in almost the opposite extreme. It is not now that an awareness of symbolic connection is absent, but that it is all too inescapably present: there is effectively no distinction to be made between the personification and the attribute it represents. "The Court is essentially encyclopaedic", Harvey rightly observes in her introduction (xxvii), "it is the substance, not the presentation of his matter that is [the poet's] main concern". Without any true sense of allegory, The Court is effectively just a record of established wisdoms, just as Geoffrey's poem is a record of what he has heard and experienced: his wish is "Somme newe tydynges for to lere" (1886), and what he intends in his poem is simply "to telle al my dreme aryght" (527). We are given no suggestion in either poem that the dreamer uses what he has been given in his dream other than as the material for his poem. It apparently has value for him only as something to pass on, as something to be learnt and not to be learnt from. Each narrator effectively therefore sees himself as a passive conduit, and his readers as equally passive recipients, of information. Where the poems differ is in the ironic distance that Chaucer provides between himself and his narrator. It is a distance which makes The House of Fame an observation on (perhaps a warning against) naivety, rather than a manifestation of it.

Before examining in greater depth how Chaucer's poems function to stimulate thought, I consider briefly a couple of less challenging dream poems by his successors. These poems at least avoid portraying learning as just passive reception, and evoke a sense that an essential part of

the process is the application of what has been learnt, and not just its acquisition. In The Kingis Quair, the narrator, supposedly James Stewart, writing from the perspective of subsequent experience, tells of a dream vision concerning Venus, Minerva, Divine Reason and Fortune.⁵ A love founded and conducted according to Christian doctrines will prosper, he was told. By following that advice, he in turn tells us, he has achieved the state of marital happiness of which this poem is the celebration. The advice is direct both for the narrator and, by implication, for the reader, but is not expected simply to be accepted on its own authority. The narrator received a sign of ratification from God (175-9).⁶ The reader has the exemplary evidence of a real historical life story (for that is what the text, since it is presented as being the work of James Stewart, purports to be).⁷ In Lydgate's Temple of Glas, it is the dreamer himself who benefits from envisaging a successful application of advice. He observes a distressed lover being advised by Venus to declare his love, and then duly performing the act and achieving his goal. Spearing has condemned Lydgate's use of the dream structure, suggesting that it was adopted merely in imitation of Chaucer, and to no narrative (or other) purpose:

Within the dream [the Dreamer] plays no part: he does not participate in an encounter with some authoritative figure, as in

⁵ The question of the true authorship remains unresolved, although James's claim is still regarded as credible, according to McDiarmid's introduction to the poem (28-48).

⁶ Passages from The Kingis Quair are referenced by stanza number, in accordance with the procedure adopted in the cited edition.

⁷ Le Roman de la Rose is also written in the light of the narrator's subsequent experience: "in that sweven is never a del/ That it nys afterward bealle" (Chaucer Romaunt 28-9). The difference is that the work, written by two different poets several decades apart, makes no pretence at being 'true'.

all of Chaucer's dream-poems, nor are we even made aware of his helplessness in relation to his dream-experience.... He is merely an observer, before whom the dream unfolds itself as a kind of pageant. (Dream 174)

But, whatever the limitations of the poem (and there are many), the use of a dream structure does serve a purpose, as becomes apparent in the closing section. We learn here that the poet is addressing the poem to his lady, and that it is to "recomavnd [him] Vnto hir & to hir excellence" (1395-6). The narrator is apparently applying what he has learnt from his observation, and the poem is the result.⁸

In both of these poems, therefore, the act of communication is seen to have purpose, to lead to application. In both also, the recipient of advice is granted supporting evidence of its validity, before he is required to apply it. The poems therefore present the reader with a rather naive pattern of direct imitation, and, although the writers may have been Chaucer's successors, neither has picked up the aspects of unresolved doubt and continued individual responsibility that underlie his dream poems. It may be true, as Spearing says, that each of Chaucer's dreamers "participate[s] in an encounter with some authoritative figure", and that we are always "made aware of his helplessness in relation to his dream-experience". No authoritative message is ever delivered, however, and there always remains an awareness that, helpless as a human may be as regards the dream- (or, for that matter, the reading-) experience, he or she is free to interpret that

⁸ Since Lydgate was a Benedictine monk, we can give him credit for having adopted a fictional persona, and to have understood the Chaucerian technique at least to that extent. Whether declarations made in the verbose style adopted for the poem would have met with success is up to the reader to judge.

experience as she likes. Two of Chaucer's dreamers are merely conducted to their respective destinations, and left to make what they can of the visit (House, Parliament). Doubt always remains (e.g. in House, Legend) about any adviser's authority or disinterest in offering advice. The questionable status of the dream ("fantome" or "oracle") is highlighted, but not resolved (House 1-53). The reader, like the dreamer, ultimately therefore has to take responsibility for interpretation and judgement of truth.

These examples of the Chaucerian approach consist of unsound introductions and indecisive or questionable conclusions, and all therefore involve a basic undermining of the integrity of the narrative structure. The same questioning attitude is induced by the poems on a smaller scale, however, as a more detailed consideration of one episode of The House of Fame illustrates. A major theme of the poem is, of course, the fallible nature of human communications, and in the second book it is communication in the form of a lesson that is portrayed. The uncertainties are evident. The eagle prefaces his dissertation on the mechanism of sound transmission by confidently stating that he "wille/ Tellen the a propre skille/ And a worthy demonstracioun" (725-7). This "worthy demonstracioun" begins, however, with a premise (the principle of "natural inclination") which is established by appeal to his auditor's knowledge--"Geffrey, thou wost ryght wel this" (729)--and is interpreted fallaciously--Fame's House, he states, is the "kyndely stede" of all speech. The same flawed approach continues. Individual theories that he cites and techniques of argumentation that he supposedly uses may have been acceptable, but the argument simply does not hold together. "From beginning to end," Delany observes, "the Eagle's speech relies on

tautology, analogy, non sequitur, reductive simplicity, abuse of the syllogism, circular argument and 'proofs' that prove nothing" (75). To cap it off, the eagle issues a challenge to dissenters:

And whoso seyth of trouthe I varye,
Bid hym proven the contrarye. (807-8)

Geffrey has said not a word, but that the eagle feels a need to substantiate his claim, and has been unable to do so, is painfully obvious. We are being made conscious of the possibility of unsound argument and of the need to be vigilant and sceptical.

Our sense of inauthenticity is reinforced when the eagle demands,
Telle me this now feythfully,
Have y not preved thus symply,
Withouten any subtilite
Of speche, or gret prolixite? (853-6)

The quotation shows an awareness that effectiveness in teaching is dependent on the mode of presentation and not purely on content. The irony, of course, is that the eagle's own "patronizing pomposity" and "elaborate rhetoric" (Delany 74) are characteristics almost guaranteed not to induce receptivity. "A good persuasion," Geffrey says, "and lyke to be/ Ryght so as thou hast preved me" (873-4). The argument was well conducted, in other words, although it didn't constitute a proof. (Even so, it seems to have induced a degree of belief in Geffrey.) Delany characterises the eagle's lesson as a "parody of science" (74). The episode makes apparent the uncertain reception of information covering a wider range than just scientific theory, however.

And than thoughte y on Marcian,
And eke on Antecaudian,

That soothe was her description
Of alle the hevenes region,
As fer as that y sey the preve;
Therefore y kan hem now beleve. (985-990)

Without "the preve" of his eyes, those works of cosmology would not, apparently, have had full credence. With that "preve", they become for him completely authoritative on all matters:

'No fors,' quod y, 'hyt is no nede.
I leve as wel, so God me spede,
Hem that write of this matere,
As though I knew her places here' (1011-4).

Just what ensures acceptance of an argument or belief in information is as uncertain as ever, but, we have been made to realise, it is not simply logic.

Although the examples considered so far may suggest it, Chaucer's poems do not just undermine the act of teaching. In The Book of the Duchess, we are witnesses to a successful lesson, as the Knight learns to confront the reality of his bereavement, and, we suppose, to live beyond it. This lesson is accomplished, however, not by direct delivery of advice. Instead, the Knight is forced to dispense with metaphors and euphemisms, in so far as they are evasions, because of the dreamer's inability to comprehend.⁹ The lesson, like those that Chaucer's poems give to their readers, consists not of revelation, but of a prompting to thought, an awakening of perception, both previously dormant. It therefore involves, both in its achievement and its meaning, the use of

⁹ It has been suggested that the dreamer, rather than being literal-minded, could just be acting courteously and tactfully (ctd. Burlin 257). The mode by which the lesson is achieved is still, however, indirect.

already accessible resources.

According to a frequently cited theory (Riverside 966), the poem was intended to reflect on the recent bereavement of the Duke of Lancaster, and to act as an encouragement to the Duke to resume an active interest in life. Direct advice, Spearing suggests (54-5), would have been unacceptable because of the relative social standing of the two men. Instead, by presenting a story which paralleled the Duke's sufficiently closely to induce a recognitory response, the poem was used to deliver an indirect lesson.

The story of Ceyx and Alcyone which appears at the opening of the poem (62-214) also has certain elements in common with the Knight's, but there are now also important differences. Most notable amongst these is that Alcyone, unlike the Knight, actually learns of her spouse's death in the dream. Delany observes that "the dream [recounted in the poem] is authenticated by means of a book which the Narrator reads just before falling asleep. The content of [the] dream is supposedly generated by the book" (40). This device may indeed be "conventional", as Delany states, and may act elsewhere as a "certification of literary truth". (Alcyone, we imagine, might have wanted authentication for her dream.) In this poem, however, there seems little need for such, since no revelation is involved and no wisdom is directly offered. What the inclusion of the classical story does suggest concerns a mode by which books can function to provide lessons. The dream's content is "generated by", not taken from, the book, which therefore acts to stimulate thought, not to provide direct answers. What the juxtaposition of the two stories also serves to do, therefore, is highlight the distinction between a lesson involving passive reception and one requiring active participation.

A similar effect of contrast is achieved in The Parliament of Fowls. The inclusion of a précis of the Somnium Scipionis at the opening of the poem draws attention to the difference between a dream which tells "of hevene, and helle/ And erthe" (32-3), and one in which nothing is explicitly revealed or resolved. The narrator says that he is trying "a certeyn thing to lerne" (20), but he gains satisfaction neither from the dream he reads about, nor from the one he experiences. "For bothe I hadde thyng which that I nolde,/ And ek I ne hadde that thyng that I wolde" (90-1), he tells us after reading of Scipio. He has obtained something from the direct lesson provided by the dream via the book, but it is not about love, the subject that concerns him. His own dream is about love, but still does not give him, does not explicitly state, the answer. He is left to continue his search in books:

I hope, ywis, to rede som day

That I shal mete som thyng for to fare

The bet, and thus to rede I nyl nat spare. (687-9)

"The thing sought is surely found in the dream itself, without the Dreamer being aware of it", Spearing suggests (90). His attempts to define what that "thing" is are unconvincing, or "crude", as he puts it. He is nearer the mark when he says that the poem is "deliberately enigmatic; it holds back from direct statements and conceptual formulations". It is because the poem presents a range of alternative views, none of them definitive, that it fails to satisfy the dreamer. The answer may be there, but he (and the reader) has to play an active role in extracting it. He has, perhaps, to use it as a starting point, a stimulant for his own thoughts.

The Parliament is not unique amongst Chaucer's poems in presenting to the reader a collection of people (or birds) representing different aspects of a given subject: the structure is precisely that of The Canterbury Tales.¹⁰ Indeed, many of the dream poems considered in this paper, including the central three by Chaucer, Douglas and Skelton, involve visits by dreamers to courts, which by their very nature are assemblies or collections of many different people. This being the case, the subject of collection--the sequential presentation of different instances of a certain kind--would seem to be inherently relevant to the paper. What needs to be considered is the effect achieved, the impression made on the reader, by the presentation of such assemblies. These effects are themselves diverse, even within the set of dream poems by Chaucer, but they can, I think, be related to the differences in educative approach adopted in the works. A collection generally involves some aspect of commonality which gives coherence to it as a collection, but also some way in which the items are distinct, by which they add to the composite effect. The subject will be considered through these aspects of commonality and difference. Sometimes one emerges to provide meaning, sometimes the other--but, sometimes, as I show, the collection is incoherent, or in some other way challenging in its composition. The effects achieved in each case are discussed.

Poems which present a series of alternative views on a subject can be regarded as functioning like a form of debate. Limitations and strengths of the various views become apparent as each is placed in

¹⁰ Although not a dream poem, The Canterbury Tales might be seen as having a dream structure, with the narrator for the majority of the narrative enclosed in a group remote from everyday life, apparently powerless to intervene. Like Chaucer's earlier dream-narrators, he too sees his narrative as a direct transcription of events (e.g. I.725-736).

opposition to or juxtaposition with the others. A suggestion of comprehensive coverage is essential, however, if the work is to be entirely effective as a debate. It may end inconclusively with all (or a number of) viewpoints still intact, or it may end with one view dominant, and therefore with its authority enhanced.¹¹ In either case, if a belief can be induced in the reader that the full range of possible views has been covered, it is less easy to dismiss the subject under debate. Either the conclusion must be accepted, or the reader must address the merits of the various arguments. In The Canterbury Tales, a sense of comprehensiveness is achieved by selection of a representative set of pilgrims from different estates (Mann). In The Parliament of Fowls, the range is suggested by the diversity of the birds' species and characters (325-368). Other approaches are also possible. Instead of picking an individual from each group, that group can be represented by its common factor, as in Le Roman de la Rose, where the characters that the dreamer encounters are personified qualities, both good and bad. Again it is the range which makes the work effective as a presentation of alternative views.

The Court of Sapience also contains many personifications of abstract qualities: Sapyence, Intellygence and Scyence; Fayth, Hope and Charyte; etc. The intention is quite different, however. All descriptions are consistent in being elements of Christian doctrine, and there is no suggestion of an alternative. Indeed, the poem indicates that human endeavours to resolve uncertainties are mistaken: "one clerk

¹¹ The Canterbury Tales has been interpreted both ways, with "The Parson's Tale" being taken by some as the definitive answer. Lawrence (146-7) even suggests that this tale is the author's last-ditch, and unsuccessful, attempt to turn the entire Tales into a work of Christian doctrine.

another doth confounde/ Soo that the trouthe by none of them is found"
(2006-7). The approving citation of St. Basil's maxim, "Gode thyng ...
shold have remembraunce,/ And that shold passe which standeth in
doutance" (2008-9), seems like a direct attempt to preempt any debate.
The poem contains many other collections, of course (and might even be
taken as comprising one big collection), but in every case it is the
sense of commonality which is dominant. When numerous examples of
different varieties of natural objects--stones, plants, fish, birds, etc.
(925-1470)--are listed, we are not interested in the individual items.
Harvey's introduction to the poem provides an explanation for the
inclusion of such lists:

It was an accepted medieval belief [she says] that the study of
the natural world and its properties was virtuous because 'by the
werkes is the werkeman knowen': all creation proclaimed its maker
by its order, variety, and beauty. (xxxiii)

A comparison of the list of birds (1386-4135) with a similar list in The
Parliament of Fowls (323-371) makes the difference of purpose clear. In
one, although differences of appearance and behaviour are noted, the
emphasis is on unity:

Debate ne strif, dyscord, ne yet dystaunce
Among them myght not engendred be,
Echone other supported in degre. (Sapience 1405-7)

In the other, the birds are given characters, and often ones not
conducive to harmony:

The thef, the chough; and ek the janglynge pye;
The skornyng jay; the eles fo, heroun;
The false lapwyng, ful of trecherye;

The stare, that the conseyl can bewrye (Parliament 345-8).

The birds' characters subsequently emerge in the debate, of course, and it is therefore through the aspect of difference that the collection makes meaning available to the reader. In the list in The Court of Sapience, it is only as components of a mutual creation that the birds are significant.

The emphasis on harmony in the Court's list goes to reinforce the sense of purpose to creation, the sense that all elements fit in with the divinely-imposed order of existence. A quite different effect is achieved in The House of Fame by the presentation of a succession of different "companyes" of petitioners. What is significant here is the very absence of a single rule by which the fame assigned each group can be related to the achievements and aspirations of its members. As it stands, the collection, although complete as a classification, is incoherent and, unless that incoherence is to be accepted, the reader is left to seek another rule, another factor, which could make sense. The House of Fame does contain collections in which an element of commonality is present. There are lists of historians and musicians, for example, and lists of abandoned lovers and high-fliers. The people in these lists are named individuals, not types, and have been brought together from different places and historical times to give a sense of the scope, or even universality, of the role. The diversity of the examples acts to reinforce the idea that this catalogue is meant to illustrate. All these historians, for example, from ancient writers in Greece and Rome through to "Englyssh Gaufride" (1429-72), uphold the fame of their respective countries.

A different form of impression may be made, however, when all or

most of the items in a collection have in common some feature which is not an inherent characteristic of the group as defined. The list adds to the reservoir of examples that the reader has encountered, perhaps "By pref, and ek by storyes herebyforn" (Legend G 525-9), and, by creating the sense of a general rule, can effectively alter his or her view of the subject. The predominance of writers from the classical period in the list of historians suggests to us the high regard then accorded to ancient literature. To the contemporary reader, however, it might have enforced or reinforced that regard. In a similar way, because all the stories of aerial travellers cited by the eagle (914-24) involve human overreaching, a sense of the same is, Delany suggests (79-83), created for our present story. In each case, an alteration of perception, whether intended or not, whether consciously accepted or not, has taken place.

It is precisely this form of effective lesson that concerns the God of Love when he challenges the dreamer about the representativeness of the stories in his poems:

Ne in alle thy bokes ne coudest thou nat fynde
Som story of wemen that were goode and trewe? [he demands]
Yis, God wot, sixty bokes olde and newe
Hast thou thyself, alle ful of storyes grete,
That bothe Romayns and ek Grekes trete
Of sundry wemen, which lyf that they ladde,
And evere an hundred goode ageyn oon badde. (Legend G 2/1-1)

The argument is not over the predominance of good or bad in life. The God of Love, after all, draws his counter-evidence from the reservoir of stories contained in "bokes" (and, we suspect, is not concerned about what is the truth anyway, only with what will keep his servants loyal).

What is at issue here is the effect, what will be perceived as the truth. When a penance is later demanded of the narrator, a specific criterion is set for selection of the women to be portrayed: they are to be "goode women, maydenes and wyves,/ That were trewe in lovyng al here lyves" (G 473-4). Love aims to control the lesson concerning love that readers of the legend are to derive. The impression conveyed by the full poem, of which the prologue is an inherent part, is, however, different and far less definitive. There is an awareness that this is a selection made with a specific purpose, and that diversity is the reality. Chaucer has again avoided any dogmatic message, and has left the initiative with the reader. The lesson, as in his other dream poems, is not in the form of direct instruction, but is heuristic in approach and concerns the processes of learning and teaching themselves.

A further example of Chaucerian meta-lesson occurs when the story of Dido and Aeneas is recounted in such a way as to stimulate thought about the mutability of fame and the unreliability of history.¹² Much of the poetry of the period retold stories taken from classical sources, of course. The God of Love even refers the poet to the "storyes grete ... [of] bothe Romayns and ek Grekes" as if he were inevitably restricted to the retelling of these stories. What Chaucer's poems provide (and are aware of providing) is a "retelling", in the sense of a "different telling" or a "telling to different effect", of stories such as those of

¹² The implications of the story as told in The House of Fame are discussed in Section III of this paper, "The Court of Venus".

Dido and Aeneas or of Ceyx and Alcyone.¹³ What they often purport to provide, and what the narrator of the Legend aims to provide, is "a retelling" in the sense of "a repetition": "For myn entent is," he says, "The naked text in English to declare/ Of many a story, or elles of many a geste,/ As autours seyn; leveth hem if yow leste" (G 85-8). Like Geffrey's "tydynges", those stories are simply material to be faithfully reproduced, regardless of their truth. "[H]e useth bokes for to make," Alcestis observes, "And taketh non hed of what matere he take" (G 342-3). The author of The Court of Sapience also reproduces established stories, most notably that of the reconciliation of the four daughters of God, which takes up the entire first book. Their use is not without thought, as is apparent from the slight narrative alterations made to enhance aspects particularly pertinent to the host poem (xxx). The essential story and the message that it conveys are unchanged, however. Indeed, the very approach of The Court of Sapience, involving citation of sources and reference to (rather than explanation of) stories and ideas, relies on the use of that material as it exists.

When the poem makes reference to a series, for example, of philosophers (Sapience 1877-90), we might think that background knowledge would be necessary for a full appreciation of the point. However, although such a list might act as a good basis for the bibliography of a student of mediaeval philosophy, there is clearly no expectation that the reader of the poem either knows or will attempt to know the writings

¹³ In The Book of the Duchess, Chaucer truncates the story of Ceyx and Alcyone, omitting the episode of their transformation to sea-birds. "Chaucer has been careful to make the story and the dream fit each other exactly", Spearing observes, "The purpose of the dream is not to offer the Black Knight the promise of a reunion beyond death" (58). Other critics have offered different explanations for the truncation (Riverside 968).

concerned. Indeed, as the editor notes (129), the author was not familiar with those works himself, merely lifting the list from an earlier work, and mistakenly citing as logicians many "natural scientists or medical authorities whose connection with logic seems remote indeed" (138). The purpose of such citation was more, it seems, to provide the work with an aura of knowledgeability and authority, in the face of which the reader was to be reduced to a numbed state of submission and acceptance.¹⁴ A comparison with Chaucer's adaptation of a story such as that of Dido and Aeneas, where a knowledge of preceding versions is necessary before the full significance becomes apparent, highlights the difference between works which intend to instruct and those that try to make education a joint activity.

If Douglas' Palice of Honour is now introduced into the discussion, another different (perhaps more honourable?) use of classical references is discovered. This poem, like The Court of Sapience, is a work of didactic allegory, but, unlike the Court, it attempts to create a spirit of cooperation with the reader. Spearing (204) notes how various figures act for the dreamer as symbolic harbingers for the successive courts as they approach, and it is as symbols or illustrations, relying on a knowledge of the relevant stories for their effect, that the many classical references are used in the poem. It is the familiarity of the material which the poem uses, and not, as in the Court, its aura of unchallengeable authority. The purpose is to clarify understanding, and thereby to enhance the Christian message, rather than to suppress

¹⁴ A similar, and it seems similarly successful, tactic involves the bewilderment of readers through bombardment with passages of extreme aureate diction, as in the poems of Lydgate (to whom, incidentally, the Court was long attributed (xxi)).

thoughts of alternative. A comparison of the description of the court of Dame Science (Sapience 1653-78) with that of the court of the "Quene of Sapience" (Honour 200-262) further illustrates the greater degree of wit both displayed in and demanded by the later work. Both passages contain similar lists of the sages of antiquity (Sapience 1764-80, Honour 250-62). In the first, the description of their activities is unilluminating:

They poynt, they wryte, they dyspute, they depure,

They determyne eche thyng that hath nature. (1672-3)

In the Palice, however, those same sages of antiquity are mounted on horseback. "Full soberlie" they behaved, we are told, "Their hie prudence schew furth and nathing roundit" (205-7). By extracting these figures from their familiar domaine, Douglas has created new meaning. There is a sense of the sages as humans, with, perhaps, less-than-total authority, but with "hie prudence", a form of practical wisdom which is of value in a secular society. Whilst one poem tries to induce submissiveness in the reader through a feeling of inadequacy, therefore, the other negates such feelings, and thereby induces a spirit of cooperation.

The Palice of Honour does contain many encyclopaedic lists of people, places, stories, etc. for our enlightenment: Fox even goes as far as to describe the list as "the basic structural device" of the poem (198). In Spearing's comment on the ending of one of these lists, we may get a clue as to why these undigested collections of information are more palatable here than they were in The Court of Sapience. When "Douglas cuts himself short with 'Aneuch of this--I not quat it may mene' (382)", Spearing says,

he is making fun not only of himself as Dreamer but of the kind

of poem which his dream constitutes: a vision which takes upon itself the role of an encyclopaedia, and supplies information relentlessly, whether or not it is desired. (Dream 204)

Although Douglas' poem, unlike any of Chaucer's dream poems, is overtly didactic, it follows those poems in its adoption of an unwittingly incompetent narrator at whose expense the reader and author can enjoy a complicitous smile. The effectiveness of its message is enhanced in consequence. The device elicits a positive response from the reader in a way that The Court of Sapience's direct, but patently insincere, Lydgatean statement of artistic inadequacies (22-70) cannot.

Another passage in which we are drawn to amusement at the expense of the dreamer occurs at the end of the first part of the poem. "I dred me", he tells us,

That Venus suld throw hir subtillitie
In till sum bysning beist transfigurat me
As in a Beir, a Bair, ane Oule, ane Aip. (739-41)

He recollects all the precedents for such transformations--Acteon, Io, Lot's wife, Lycaon, Nebuchadnezzar--and explains that

For by exempilis oft I hard tofoir
He suld bewar that seis his fellow spurne.
Mischance of ane suld be ane vtheris loir. (760-2)

We are amused not just that he should place himself in such distinguished company, but also that he should have derived such a literal lesson from those mythological and scriptural stories. As if to emphasise the point, direct instruction is notably absent during the dreamer's education under

the guidance of Calliope's nymph.¹⁵ He is to observe and absorb, to "wend and vesie wonderis moir" (1069). The sights that he is shown do not explicitly convey any message. Instead, he is apparently being provided with a collection of diverse items of worldly information to act as a foundation, as background, for what is to follow. The emphasis is not on full comprehension of one subject--"Yit studie nocht our mekill", the nymph tells him (1871)--but rather on breadth of knowledge and experience, encompassing, amongst other things, both natural phenomena and the human arts.

'This may suffice,' said scho, 'tutchand this part.

Returne thy heid, behald this vther art.' (1396-7)

The well-rounded education with which our poet has been provided is all in preparation for his visit to Honour's Palace, where he is to be granted the sight of something which he cannot observe in his earthly life. It is, in short, a revelation. He is told to pay attention to what he sees and to record it faithfully afterwards in his poem (1463).

Ga efter me and gude atendance tak,

Quat now thow seis, luik efterwart thow write. (1463-4)

The mode by which he is to convey that message of the divine to humanity is therefore by direct description of his experience. He, like Scipio, is to tell the world of the revelation he has been granted in his dream, although that revelation (of Honour's Palace and His menage of personified virtues), unlike Scipio's, is disguised (albeit thinly) as allegory. Ultimately, what he humbly describes is how he failed, how it

¹⁵ The explanation that the nymph provides concerning the "lustie schip ... hecht ... the state of grace" (1380-95) is strictly an explanation about a ship, as far as the dreamer is concerned. The explicitness of the allegory is clumsy, however, and seems like an artistic lapse on Douglas' part.

was simply beyond his strength to witness the wonder of this sight:

sa my harnis trimblit besily

Quill I fell ouir and baith my feit slaid by,

Out ouir the heid into the stank adoun (2085-7).

In a neat and amusing variant on the inexpressibility topos, he has indirectly conveyed his message.¹⁶ The poem does attempt to instruct its readers about the nature of the divine through reasonably conventional allegory. It achieves its purpose, however, through more subtle means than some of its predecessors. This is no simple account of a revelation which is expected to be accepted through its directly stated claim to authority. Neither is it a regurgitation of established doctrines, merely presented in the form of a dream vision, and relying for its authority on the citation of venerable and learned sources. The failure to deliver is, as Fox observes (196), a further example of "Chaucerian borrowing", and again one which is used to good effect: by involving the reader in an active imaginative role, the failure actually enhances the interest in and the impact of the poem. Simultaneously, the poem has avoided displaying the internal inconsistency from which The Court of Sapience suffers, in which sapience and science are clearly stated to be distinct in terms of human comprehension, whilst the two are treated as equally amenable to direct statement in catalogue form.

Douglas' poem espouses a broad-based education. The Court of Sapience devotes a long section to the liberal arts. Both poets call on their God to provide them with the powers of eloquence in their literary

¹⁶ The standard form of the topos is simply a statement that the sight was inexpressible in its beauty or its wonder, etc. Douglas does use this conventional form elsewhere in the poem (1255-63).

efforts (Sapience 15-28, Honour 1288-96). These features are taken sometimes to be indicative of humanist leanings. Douglas was certainly aware of the existence of humanist scholars, as his reference to Poggio (1232) demonstrates. Indeed, the education given to his dreamer sounds remarkably like that prescribed by the English humanists, Elyot and Celtis:

every liberal man should know the histories and deeds of the Greeks and Romans and the antiquities and peoples of Germany. He should fortify this with a firm knowledge of human and physical geography (Rice 100).

The humanists certainly regarded eloquence and a well-rounded education as two highly desirable possessions. Such high regard is not, however, peculiar to the movement, and does not in itself demonstrate any particularly humanist tendency. Indeed, "humanist" is a rather nebulous term: there was no humanist manifesto as such to define clearly the aims and philosophy of the movement, which varied from country to country in any case. In order, therefore, to obtain some feeling for the general trends of thought involved, several different authors' descriptions of humanism will be considered. Certain recurrent ideas are identified for use in discussion of the various poems.

In his study of the changing conceptions of "wisdom", Rice observed a progression from the "medieval notion of the wise man ... whose perfection came to him as a gift of grace and whose properly sapiential knowledge was confined to divine things" to one who aimed for "self-achieved perfection ... universality of [scientific or intellectual]

knowledge ... self-sufficiency" (122).¹⁷ The Court of Sapience and The Palice of Honour clearly seem more compatible with the former. They are certainly both concerned with "divine things", and both portray humans being provided with knowledge of the divine. Even eloquence, or the arts more generally, are seen as "part of man's ... endowment by his creator" provided to give "him", as the editor of the Court puts it, a "perception of the workings of the divine wisdom" (xxxvi). In both poems, of course, the narrator is seen to pray to be granted the powers of eloquence. But beyond that, those powers are consistently characterised as means for making the audience receptive. "Teiche me your facund castis Eloquent ... Till mak the heirars bowsum and attent" (Honour 1290-4), the poet prays of the Muses. He hopes that his verse can be like theirs in "prouokand with glaidnes/ All gentle hartis to thair lair [learning] Incline" (848-9). Even more explicit in its portrayal of humanity's passive role in acquiring wisdom are the descriptions of the arts which appear in The Court of Sapience. The seven personified liberal arts reside with Sapience where they "Styre folk to leve the world and drawe to heven" (2205). Arithmetic, we are informed, "told us .../ How thre persones and one God aboune/ The trynyte conteyneth with renoun" (1940-3). Of "Dame Rethoryke, modre of eloquence" we are told, "Eche word of hyr myght ravyssche every herte! ... heven it was to here her beauperlaunce" (1891, 1897, 1902).

Another feature which the preceding quotations have in common is their sense of very literal or direct mechanisms by which the arts are

¹⁷ This description of the Renaissance view actually applies to Carolus Bovillus, but has the general features of a number of the humanist views considered by Rice in his chapter "The Wisdom of Prometheus" (93-123) on the human efforts to possess wisdom.

supposed to bring humanity to a knowledge of God. The humanists did believe that human benefit would arise from eloquence and the arts, but the form of that benefit was different from that suggested by the Court, and the means and manner by which it was to arise were far less specific and far less tangible. There is an indefinite humanist assumption, Grafton and Jardine observe, that "competence in the ancient languages is equivalent to a preparation for Christian piety" (142). That piety was not an end in itself, however, as McConica's description of the Erasmian vision indicates: "The implicit aim was an international society ... steeped in a common cultural discipline derived from the ancient world ... and bound together essentially by Latin eloquence" (41). The religious element, we might note, is not explicitly present in this description of the Erasmian "aim". Christianity certainly underlay his vision, but there is the essential sense of a human undertaking, of earthly achievement through individual and joint activity. "Christ ... it was", he wrote, "who supplied the intellect, who added the zest for enquiry" (qtd. McConica 38), but now those attributes have been provided not for enquiries into the workings of the divine, but for achievement within human society.

The emphasis on classical culture and language, particularly on eloquence, which recurs in descriptions of humanism, also involves both human achievement in the past and the acquisition of disciplines and abilities for use in future endeavours. The change in attitude towards the writings of ancient authors is central to the argument given by Weiss in his study of early manifestations of humanism in England. "Medieval scholarship had regarded [them] mainly as quarries of information from which it was possible to derive facts, anecdotes, useful examples, and

fine phrases, or as texts susceptible of an allegorical interpretation", he says. The humanists, by contrast, regarded them as "work[s] of art from which inspiration of an aesthetic and stylistic nature could be derived" (3). Douglas (and Chaucer, for that matter) used the classical stories in ways, already discussed, which are much closer to the former. Caspari (26) notes as a symptom of humanist influence the large number of English translations from Latin in the early sixteenth century. "Humanist", for Weiss, however, is a term reserved for scholars who "studied the writings of ancient authors ... and attempted to ... write like the ancient authors of Rome" (1, my emphasis).¹⁸ Douglas did, of course, undertake his translation of the Aeneid, and produced a poem which is generally acknowledged to demonstrate an appreciation of the spirit of the original. In that respect, at least, he can be seen to display accomplishments which would have earned humanist praise. In the various other respects that have been considered, however, any notion of him (let alone the writer of The Court of Sapience) as a humanist looks a little thin. We must instead look southwards, to Skelton, in our search for an outlook which is more closely consistent with these characterisations of the movement.

Before embarking on the series of verses which were to demonstrate his abilities to the court of Fame, "Poeta Skelton" prays: first "to Mynerve,/ She to vouchsafe me to informe and ken", and then "To Mercury

¹⁸ "During the first quarter of the fifteenth century there prevailed in this country a taste for writing Latin in an extremely flowery and 'euphuistic' style" (Weiss 28). For Weiss, however, these writers do not qualify as "humanist" because they show no appreciation of the purpose of style, or any awareness of when to use such style appropriately and effectively. Do we sense in that description a bunch of latinist Lydgates?

.../ Me to supporte, to helpe, and to assist,/ To gyde and to governe my
dredfull trembyng fist" (824-8). His invocation of the Roman divinities
of knowledge and eloquence (Scattergood 504) might seem to be no more
conclusive as evidence of humanistic ideals than were similar passages in
the earlier poems. However, in the poems that follow, eloquence and style
are the substance, and not simply the means for conveying it.¹⁹ These
short poems are the justification of the poet's "pretence/ Of [his]
professyoun unto umanyte" (817-8). Their eloquence, their beauty, are
therefore seen to have virtue, to be a power for human good, in their own
right. In this passage from Garlande of Laurell, there is therefore
something of the "humanist" sense of the intangible and unspecified
benefits for humanity to be derived from eloquence. Skelton also wrote
Latin verse, was an advocate of a classical education, and demonstrated a
positive interest in stylistics. In him, it appears, we find an attitude
to education and learning which approaches more closely that of the
humanists than did those of Douglas or any of the other preceding dream-
poets. Skelton was certainly aware of humanism, having met Erasmus early
in his career, even earning praise from him. He did not, however, simply
accept the humanist beliefs. He was as independent and individualist in
this, I will suggest, as in his verse.

The body of work produced by Skelton displays what I would
characterise as a creatively eclectic approach. As might be expected,
therefore, we can find relevant material in many forms, from direct

¹⁹ In his commentary on Garlande, Lewis singles these verses out for
praise: "All that is of value in this production is contained in the
seven lyric addresses Some of these are very good indeed: what
astonishes one is the simplicity of the resources from which the effect
has been produced" (141). Spearing is even more glowing in his praise:
they are "ravishingly beautiful", he says, possessing "an exquisitely
delicate poise" (Dream 216-7).

pronouncements on education, to enigmatic passages which demand considerable thought from the reader, who effectively has to create her own meaning and take the initiative in her own education. In my discussion of Skelton, in addition to considering education as described in and achieved through his works, I will examine what they demonstrate about his use of his own learning. What we find, I suggest, is an extensive knowledge of previous writing, of grammar and of literary figures in particular, being employed in varied, often original, ways--hence my description of Skelton as having a "creatively eclectic approach".

Erasmus' praise of Skelton came after a visit to the English court, where Skelton held the position of tutor to Prince Henry. "[D]omi harberes Skeltonum, unum Britannicarum literarum lumen ac decus," he wrote to the Prince, "qui studia tua possit, non solum accendere, sed etiam consummare" (qtd. Salter 30).²⁰ The necessity of a well-rounded and classically-based education, particularly for the future rulers of the country, was a central concern of humanism. According to Caspari, the English humanists, following Plato's dicta, "demanded that future 'governours' partake of a rigorous education in the intellectual disciplines.... [O]nly such training [it was stated] would qualify them for leading positions in the state" (17). It is therefore of great interest to consider what Skelton made of his position as "creaunser" to the future king, as "master ... in hys lernyng primordially". "The honor of Englonde I lernyd to spelle," he later wrote,

I yave hym drynke of the sugryd welle

²⁰ "Skelton, that incomparable light and ornament of British letters can not only kindle your studies but bring them to a happy conclusion" (Walker 40).

Of Eliconys waters crystallyne,

Aqueinting hym with the Musys nyne. (Agenst Garnesche v.95-105)

During that period, he wrote a Latin treatise for the prince's benefit which is included in the works listed in the Garlande:

The Duke of Yorkis creauncer whan Skelton was,

Now Henry the viij, Kyng of Englonde,

A tratyse he devysid and brougt it to pas,

Callid Speculum Principis, to bere in his honde,

Therin to rede, and to understande

All the demenour of princely astate,

To be our kyng, of God preordinate. (1226-32)

There is the obvious inference to be drawn that the prince was (or was to be made) conversant with Latin. A number of other observations can also be made about these two descriptions of Skelton's role. There is the recurrent suggestion of the need for active participation on the part of the student in his education. Skelton was only "Aqueinting hym with" resources which are later to be known more intimately, and used. The treatise is to be "read in", not just "read". It is a "speculum" (mirror) for the prince, who is to "understande" his role as leader of the nation, and not a picture to be imitated.²¹ The education that Skelton gave, at least in the retrospective view of the mature poet, did not simply aim to give direct instruction to the future king in his responsibilities.²²

²¹ The word "demenour" has the sense of "conduct" (cf. French "demener"), rather than "bearing", as often now.

²² The Speculum Principis was long thought to have been lost, leaving us no opportunity to verify Skelton's references. A manuscript by Skelton in the British Museum has now, however, been identified with reasonable confidence as the work. The manuscript has not been consulted during the course of this study, but Salter reports that the "description [in Garlande] fits the document in every respect" (28).

The term "creauncer", which Skelton uses in both poems to describe his role, has the sense of a constraint, of someone holding the student back until ready to fly on his own.²³ A comprehensive knowledge of a subject's background, and a full grounding in its techniques, were deemed necessary, we might deduce, before the student could be allowed to take the initiative. Such, at least, was what Skelton stated explicitly in A Replycacion. This poem was written in response to some heretical pronouncements made by "certayne yong scolers" who, Skelton says,

have delectably lycked a lytell of the lycorous electuary of lusty lernyng, in the moche studious scolehoue of scrupulous philosophy ... and have waded but weakly in his thre maner of clerkly workes, analeticall, topicall, and logycall.... [P]opholy and pevysshe presumption provoked them to publysshe and to preche to people imprudent perilously.²⁴

Skelton does not simply condemn, however. He adopts the language of a teacher and simultaneously demonstrates his own, and taunts the "scolers" for their lack of, practical ability in Latin and "dialeticall/ And principles silogisticall":

If ye to remembrance call
Howe syllogisari
Non est ex particulari.
Neque negativis.
Recte concludere si vis.
Et cetera id genus (96-103).

²³ A creance is a "long fine line or cord attached to a hawk's leash, by which she is restrained from flying away when being trained" (O.E.D.).

²⁴ In the collection edited by Scattergood, no line references are provided for the prose sections of this poem. These quotations appear on pages 373-5.

In two ways, in both its medium and its message, therefore, the poem indicates that there is more to communication than a simple transmission of information. Education does not just consist of instruction, it says, it requires also the application and practice of what has been learnt. It is, however, as much the style and diction of the condemnation as its substance which gives that message impact.

Skelton commonly incorporated Latin phrases and lines (such as those just quoted) into his poems, and he wrote a number of complete poems in the language.²⁵ A proper education in the classical languages, Skelton makes clear in Speke Parott, involves more than just an ability to read and comprehend. Attacking the teaching of Greek as it was then practised in the universities, he observes

That they cannot say in Greke, rydyng by the way,
'How, hosteler, fetche my hors a botell of hay!'
Neyther frame a silogisme in phrisesomorum
Formaliter et Grece, cum medio termino (146-9).

The quotation again suggests a view of education as the application of knowledge--here both linguistic and dialectic--as well as the acquisition of it. Later in the same passage, Skelton is still criticising teaching practices, now in Latin. The inability of students to apply their learning is still being decried, but the reason why this is perceived as a limitation in the education is made more explicit: "Plautus in his comedies a chyld shall now rehearse," he observes, but that child

Can skantly the tensis of his conjugacyons;
Setting theyr myndys so moche of eloquens,

²⁵ Scattergood's edition of Skelton's poems does not include those written in Latin, but a descriptive list of those poems is given as an appendix (521).

That of theyr scole maters lost is the hole sentens. (176,180-2)

What Skelton is arguing is that the pupil is learning only to imitate or to "reherse", and is not required to understand or to develop a capacity for creative thought. Only with the knowledge of the rules of grammar was it possible to adapt the learnt vocabulary (and eloquential constructions) and to achieve appropriate original expression, and thereby to display understanding, intelligence and creative ability. The contemporary controversy in educational circles to which Skelton was referring, known as the "Grammarians' War", was one connected with the rising influence of humanism with its emphasis on the learning of Greek and the "immersion in the best stylists of the ancient world" (McConica 41).²⁶ Therefore, whilst much of Skelton's writing might seem to align him with the humanists, he was far from uncritical in his acceptance of their views. Greek might be worthy of study, but only if it did not "take attention away from the Latin ... and scholastic methods of argument", a move which he believed would mean "that the seven liberal arts ... will be destroyed" (Scattergood 458). Similarly for the study of the stylists, whose words he frequently adopted in his own poems (e.g. Garlande 742-51), provided that it did not displace the basic grounding in grammar.

His views on grammar can be related to those expressed in A Replycacion on scholarly precocity. In both cases, individuality or deviation from the established rules is permitted when (but only when) a comprehensive knowledge and understanding of precedents has been

²⁶ Scattergood explains that the "Grammarians' War of 1519-21 [was between those who] sought to teach spoken Latin by rule and precept... [and those who wanted] the learner to imitate good classical authors and to give less attention to the rules of the language." Skelton, Scattergood emphasises, "was a supporter of the traditionalists" (458).

obtained. That Skelton did not take a rigidly prescriptive view of either Latin or English is apparent from the neologisms and idiosyncratic grammatical constructions which appear in his own verse.²⁷ He clearly did not accept the view, which Grafton and Jardine present as that of the humanists, that the only "acceptable deviant uses" of language were those which had been "sanctified by their appearance in the works of the great Greek authors" (213). Those classic works certainly provided him with a supply of "deviant uses" available for his writing, but he was no more limited to them than he was by the rules of grammar itself (or, indeed, by the rules of argumentation, as he demonstrates in the varied techniques employed in the satiric Speke Parott). Innovation was permitted. Precedent was to be used, not to be regarded as authoritative and complete, and hence restrictive.

The attitude towards the content of writings established as authoritative is similar to that towards their style. When it suited his purpose, he could make use of the perceived authority of "those memorable bearers of distilled wisdom" which were used as the basic instructional materials of the Erasmian education: "aphorisms ... proverbs and the sayings of ancient men" (McConica 41). "It is wele recorded/ In his pystell ad Paulinum,/ Presbyterum divinum", Skelton informs the readers of A Replycacion, "Rede what Jerome there dothe say" (325-8). "Words be swordes, and hard to call ageine", is extracted from his store of aphorisms, and recycled to good effect (Garlande 567).²⁸ He was also

²⁷ Some indeed are so idiosyncratic that they defy translation (e.g. Garlande 596-601, which Scattergood (501) describes as "the despair of editors"). Some entertaining examples of English neologisms are found in the passage in which Skelton berates the "yong scolers" (Replycacion pp. 374-5).

²⁸ The relevance of this line is discussed in the chapter of this paper on "The Human Court".

quite capable, however, of dismissing established wisdoms, and in his meaningless concatenation of proverbs (Garlande 1430-45), he even seems to have been ridiculing (temporarily, of course) the very notion that such sayings could be cited to support an argument.²⁹ Again, the attitude seems to be that the material was there to be used, if conducive to his purpose. The broader the range of knowledge, therefore, the larger the supply of available resources.

Skelton's statements on education emphasise the active participation of the student. His own writings demonstrate that he participated actively in the creation of meaning from the literature that he read. If we consider images of the teaching process in his poems, and the modes of communication employed in those poems, do we find them to be consistent with the pattern? In the dream poems of earlier writers, an important role was commonly played by some person or animal who acted as a guide to the dreamer. The guide might, as in The Court of Sapience, present the allegorical court and its significance directly to the dreamer (and reader). She might simply conduct the dreamer through a sequence of sights without explanation, as in The Palice of Honour. Or he might merely transport the dreamer to the entrance, propel him inside, and abandon him, as in The Parliament of Fowls and The House of Fame. In Skelton's two dream poems, we encounter two more types of guide: the false guide (Bowge) and the fellow-conspirator (Garlande). To negotiate the journeys which these poems describe, and to negotiate the journey which is involved in the reading of Skelton's poetry, you have to have

²⁹ A further example of what, in its context, appears to be the ironic quotation of an aphoristic saying is relevant to the topics of fame and honour discussed elsewhere in this paper: "Yf fortune be frendly, and grace be the guyde,/ Honowre with renowne wyll ren on that syde" (Parott 139-40).

your wits about you. None of the three major poems by Skelton which are featured in this study (Bowge, Parott and Garlande) simply surrenders its meaning to the reader. The indirectness of what he called "metaphora, alegoria" (Parott 202) is supplemented by a tone and approach which it is difficult to pin down with complete assurance. To what extent is Garlande self-mocking, and to what extent self-aggrandising? How sincerely are we to take his latterday praises of Wolsey? In order to derive a coherent meaning, and avoid becoming the poem's dupe, we have to cooperate with it. Equally, however, we have to show initiative, making our own input to the reading. Ultimately, the meaning is our responsibility, and that, as I suggested elsewhere, was one of the practical virtues for Skelton of his cryptic approach.

"Parrot pretendith to be a bybyll clarke!" (119), the parrot itself proclaims, before releasing a string of apparently random biblical references. The passage serves to mock those who study a text in order to extract some recondite meaning embedded in it. But does that mean that this string of references is devoid of meaning? The various political significances which critical works have discovered in the passage suggest otherwise. Skelton was not simply extracting meaning inherent in the biblical passages to which he refers; he was generating his own meaning by adapting them for use as parallels with contemporary political events. Whilst not relying on the authority of the source directly, he was taking advantage of the perceived authority attached to it to provide the same attribute for his argument.

In quotations, in styles, in poetic forms, conventions and topoi, Skelton made himself familiar with the full range of precedents. His knowledge then served as a repertoire to be used in his own writing, not

just directly, but also in modified and developed forms. "Mens tibi sit consulta, petis?", he asks at the end of Garlande of Laurell. "Sic consule menti;/ Emula sit Jani, retro speculetur et ante." (1519-20): in English, "Do you wish your mind to be skilful? In that case, pay attention to your mind; let it be like that of Janus which looks back and forward" (Scattergood 512). In his quest to give his poetry maximum effect, Skelton certainly looked back at the literary precedents, and made use of them. Some of those precedents were found in the writing of "maister Chaucer", who, Skelton observes, "nobly enterprysyd/ How that our Englysshe myght fresshely be ennewed" (Garlande 388-9). Following that example, Skelton did not confine himself to using those precedents as they were, but instead looked forward to their potential for further new and innovative development. His use of the classical image of Janus, and the associations it brought with it, provides just one example. Since the meaning, the lesson, is as much the creation of the reader as of the writer, I, in turn, feel free to interpret Skelton's advice to fit my application.

In this chapter, I have noted a number of different developments in the ways that education and instruction are portrayed, described or embodied in poetry. It may be a movement from statements which are direct and require simple acceptance to poems which acknowledge the sceptic, or whose enigmatic or ambiguous forms demand active thought. It may be from the citation of, and the direct incorporation of elements from, preceding works of established reputation to the creative adaptation of those works. It may be from poems in which the principal concern when attempting to communicate was with the explicit meaning of the words, to

ones with an authority based on ability or on technical accomplishment, in which style and narrative approach were of equal or greater importance in achieving effect. Recurrent themes in the discussion have been the trends from directness to indirectness, from certainty to contingency, from simplicity to complexity. What all these trends have in common is that they necessitate an increasing emphasis on individual influence, initiative and responsibility. Since this emphasis is inherent in the humanist movement, and since the period spanned by the poems is also the period in which that movement began to acquire influence in England, an attempt has been made to relate the changes in the poems to the rise of humanism.

At one end of the spectrum, I have suggested, comes The Court of Sapience; at the other, the works of John Skelton. Chaucer, although at the beginning chronologically, can be seen to have been fairly advanced in certain respects, unexamining notions of unquestionable authority, demanding greater participation by the reader, and demonstrating an awareness of the roles played by many diverse aspects of the text in determining its meaning and effect. It would be a mistake, however, to think that there was a uniform or consistent progression through the period even in the poetry of those who explicitly acknowledged a debt to Chaucer. In some respects, those "Chaucerian" poets--certainly Lydgate, but also, perhaps, Douglas--were more conservative in approach, failing (or choosing not) to follow Chaucer's direction. Douglas did adopt certain of Chaucer narrative devices, but used them to enhance an explicitly stated message. John Skelton, in contrast, adopted those devices, and the narrative approach, but took them even further. He certainly questioned authority and precedent, and challenged the reader,

but rather than leave questions unanswered so as to induce thought, he sometimes presented apparently categorical answers which had either to be accepted or rejected, and therefore demanded thought. A Replycacion provides us with an example which actually concerns the subject of this chapter, the function of poetry, the authority of the poet. Having condemned the "yong scolers", Skelton adds on an extended defence of the poet's right to make such pronouncements. He claims the writings of laureate poets to possess "a mysteriall,/ And a mysticall/ Effect energiall" derived from "inflammacion/ Of spyrituall instygacion/ And divyne inspyracion" (366-8, 379-81), citing appropriate authorities in support. Then he suggests, on the basis of evidence provided by one of his own poems, that this is a claim to which we "must consent/ And infallibly agre/ Of necessyte" (359-64). Do we take him to be serious in these claims? Walker certainly does (58-9). I think that they were made with tongue firmly in cheek. But what matters is that we have been forced to consider the question. Skelton may have espoused many of the humanist ideas, therefore, but he took the notions of human initiative and responsibility to their logical limit: they were available to and demanded from humans individually. As a writer, he could adopt whatever approach best suited him in each circumstance. His readers in turn could draw their own conclusions from the poems. Judging from the limited popularity of his major works, responsibility and freedom were not what the majority of readers wanted from their poetry.

VII. The Court Rhetorical

"Suntyme he must vyces remorde", Pallas says of the poet, "Beware, for wrytyng remayneth of recorde!" (Garlande 86, 89). The quotation identifies two contemporary aspects of the poet's activities considered in a previous chapter of this study: it points to the responsibilities that he has to his society and warns of the dangers he runs in fulfilling them. The observation that poetry "remayneth of recorde" can also, however, be seen to invest it with a greater significance, and the poet with a certain power. As part of the "recorde", it would acquire a degree of authority, becoming a representation for the future of his immediate subject and, more generally, his own times. It would also, however, be a record of the poet and of his abilities. As the body of preserved writing grew, it was seen to contain the accumulated knowledge and achievement of the past, and to act as a source of literary traditions and conventions upon which writers could rely and build. The court which surrounds the Muses, the "Court Rethoricall" (835) in Douglas' poem, can be seen to embody such literary establishments, providing authority in artistic matters, determining value and precedence through discourse and debate (Honour 1180-1233). This section of the paper examines the implications of the developing perception of an authoritative, established literary tradition and shows how the works of Chaucer, Douglas and Skelton can be seen to manifest the progressively increasing sense of confidence which it provided. In Skelton's poetry, we find a use of the conventions which is assured, but also challenging, which demonstrates a belief in his own abilities and in the values of a progressive, continually developing, poetic tradition in English. The poet might not receive due recognition

and reward while alive, and might even suffer as a result of his writing; Skelton was able to suggest, however, that if his "wryting remayneth of recorde" the hope for a just evaluation of his work, and the means for a true poetic reputation, lay in the wiser judgements of a notional future.

Although there is no explicit consideration of the fame of poets themselves in The House of Fame, their presence as recorders or upholders of the fame of others, and the very naming of them by Chaucer, indicates the process by which poets' reputations survive through their works. Even when a writer is not named, any mention of a fictional or historic event which he has recorded or created, or of locations or people which he has celebrated, indirectly preserves the memory of his artistic career--and, in a modern edition, earns him a mention in the notes.¹ In Chaucer's Legend of Good Women, his poet notes the honour due books because of their function as storehouses of knowledge:

mote we to bokes that we fynde,
Thurgh whiche that olde thinges ben in mynde ...
And yf that olde bokes were away,
Yloren were of remembraunce the key.
Wel ought us thanne honouren ...
These bokes (17-8, 25-8)

Skelton takes the notion one step further, however, noting through his poet-narrator in Bowge of Court how the quality of a poet's writing

¹ See, for example, the Riverside notes (981) to the list of lovers in The House of Fame or Bawcutt's (201-6) to the tour through history in Venus' mirror in The Palice of Honour. That the provision of such notes is a survival of humanist practice demonstrates a direct mechanism whereby humanism leads to preservation of human renown.

ensures the preservation of his name along with the poem:

I, callynge to mynde the great auctoryte
Of poetes olde, whyche, full craftely,
Can touche a troughte and cloke it subtylly
Wyth fresshe utteraunce full sentencyously
.....
Wherby I rede theyr renome and theyr fame
Maye never dye, bute evermore endure. (8-12, 15-16)

Drede, the narrator, "sore moved to aforce the same" (17), is advised by ignorance "not to wrythe, for he so wyll atteyne,/ Excedynge ferther than his connyng is" (22-3). Although Drede may be incapable, the possibility remains that a poet, even a contemporary poet, might be possessed of "connyng", through which he could achieve authority for himself. No longer is he seen merely as a craftsman through whom authoritative works might be created.

With an established corpus of classical works of acknowledged "auctoryte" available, and, as yet, no equivalent body of independent vernacular literature, the English narrative poets often adopted or adapted stories and subjects from other traditions for their own poems--a form of celebration or tribute in itself. Ovid's works, which themselves embodied a retelling, provided the inspiration for The House of Fame and the source of many references within it. Douglas made a highly regarded translation of The Aeneid, and both he and Chaucer included modified versions of episodes from it in their poems (Honour 1630-56, Fame 143-467). A similar process is involved in the adoption of the dream-vision structure of Old French love-poetry, and in the use of standard literary figures, styles and verse forms. However, because such aspects were

sometimes less directly translatable from one language to another, English equivalents were derived and indigenous conventions grew up.

One such device, originally used by Ovid in his Tristia, and introduced into English by Chaucer, was the addition of an envoy, addressed to the "littell quair", telling it to go forth in the world.² Just as classical stories had lived on for many centuries to the continued renown of their original recorders, so, on a much more modest scale, the envoy implies, could a contemporary poem survive independently of, but also to the honour of, its author--possibly even beyond his death. Douglas adapted the convention by making the envoy an ironic renunciation of the poem: "Breif buriall quair, of Eloquence all quite,/ ... I quiteclame that I kend the" (2161, 2166).³ It took Skelton, however, to make full use of the implications and possibilities of the device, extending Speke Parott to almost twice its original length by the addition of a series of envoys. (Effectively, it seems, he was sending it forth time after time.) Some were highly cryptic dated satirical comments on the current political situation (Heiserman 157-65); others announced the fame that the poem itself would bring the poet:

Go, litelle quayre, namyd the Popagay

² Go, litel book, go, litel myn tragedye ...
So prey I God that non myswrite the,
Ne the mysmetre for defaute of tonge.
And red wherso thow be, or elles songe,
That thow be understonde, God I biseche!

(Troilus and Criseyde V, 1786, 1795-8)

³ Lydgate's Temple of Glas also has an envoy, but his narrator releases his poem to the world for a very specific purpose:

Now go thi wai, thou litel rude boke,
To hir presence, as I the comaund,
And first of al thou me recomavnd
Vnto hir & to hir excellence (Temple 1393-6).

Something has gone wrong with the logic, however, because, although the book is to act as his representative, he gives her his permission to rewrite it: "For as hir liste, I wil the efte correcte" (1400).

... pray them that yow beholde,

In there remembraunce ye may be inolde. (278-80)

Psitace perge volans ...

Crescet in immensem me vivo Psitacus iste;

Hinc mea dicetur Skeltonidis inclita fama. (322, 519-20)⁴

Skelton is again making use of a third party in his manipulation of reputation: the parrot, who was earlier seen to voice criticisms of Wolsey, is now the personification of Skelton's poetry going forth as his envoy to proclaim his fame.

Although standard forms and figures can degenerate into meaningless cliché, their familiarity can, in the right hands, be made to work constructively. Once established, they can be used to evoke particular responses and associations in the reader. Each of the three poets considered in this paper also demonstrates how modifications to and deviations from the conventions can provide enhanced effect or increased impact. Chaucer, as we have noted, used the conventional form of the dream poem, but used it to indicate lack of authority. Douglas employed the similes and settings of love poetry to suggest the transcendence of divine love. It is in Skelton's work, however, that we find the most diverse use of the conventions: sometimes straight, sometimes ironic. He is, he indicates, a poet in complete control of the available literary figures and techniques, using them knowingly, not blindly in imitation of his predecessors. Garlande of Laurell opens, for example, with the poet, wandering not quite "under a forest side", but "in the frytthy forest of

⁴ "Parrot, go quickly ... This parrot will grow greatly while I am alive; thence will the renowned reputation of Skelton be proclaimed" (Scattergood 462, 454, 465). A version of this appears also as an epigraph to the poem, but with "pagina" (leaf, book) in place of "Psitacus" (parrot).

Galtres" (22), "musynge .../ How all thynge passyth as doth the somer flower" (9), and continues,

Whyllis I stode musynge in this medytatyon,
In slumbrynge I fell and halfe in a slepe ...
As one in a trans or in an extasy,
I sawe a pavylyon wondersly disgysede ...
Enhachyde with perle and stonys preciously ...
Within that, a prynces excellent of porte;
But to recounthe her ryche abylyment ...

Therto am I full insufficyent (29-30, 37-8, 40, 43-4, 46).

The standard figures follow one after another, but it is not that the poet is "insufficyent"; he is all too competent and is using the conventions very consciously and carefully. It is appropriate that such figures should be used in the introductory passage of a poem whose subject is the celebration of poetic achievement: they simultaneously act as a tribute to poetic tradition and demonstrate the poet's conversancy with it and competent use of it. Later in the poem, in the tributes to the circle around the Countess of Surrey, Skelton adopts the simile approach which is standard in love poetry, but does not use it in its standard form. The ladies are compared to various figures and objects, but not to those conventionally chosen for such purposes. Fish comments, "the joke is on the mode rather than the Countess for whom he feels an affection that can only be cheapened by conventional conceit" (230). By adapting the conventions and thereby demonstrating that he is not using them gratuitously and unthinkingly, therefore, Skelton brings a new life to them and achieves a sense of sincerity in his compliments.

The three poems considered in this paper provide an illustration of

stages by which a conventional device becomes established, acquiring sufficient acceptance and familiarity that its use in modified forms would be readily recognised and appreciated as such. Chaucer's invocation of the Muses in The House of Fame (520-2) was the first in English poetry (Riverside 982); Douglas' (1288-96) was a fairly standard request for assistance; and in Garlande of Laurell, the Muses come uncalled to support the poet at the Court of Fame. Both in the way he used this convention and the form in which he used it, Skelton seems to suggest that he (or his poet) had access to the poetic resources represented by the Muses. He "hath tastid of the sugred pocioun/ Of Elyconis well" (73-4), whereas Chaucer's poet only knew it by repute (Fame 521-2), and Douglas' saw it and "did persew/ To drink, bot ... of the water [he] might not taist a drew" (1141-3). These sequences are not just examples of progression in the use of individual conventions; they are also indicative of something much wider: of the development of a literary tradition and a literary awareness, and of a growing feeling of confidence and self-assertion in English poetry.

That feeling is manifest in both The Palice of Honour and Garlande of Laurell, but again there is a sense of progression from one to the other: the former displays a confident use of established forms and styles, whilst the latter demonstrates a readiness to venture beyond. Douglas' poet praises the Muses for their "eloquent firme cadence Regulair" (821), and he deviates from standard nine-line stanza forms previously used by Chaucer only in his lays of lament and celebration (163-192, 1015-1044).⁵ Skelton demonstrates his control of conventional

⁵ Fox documents Chaucerian precedents for these verse forms, including the elaborately rhymed stanzas which close the narrative part of the poem (2116-2142). "Douglas's use of the forms of these two poems reminds us of an aspect of Chaucer ... which has often been overlooked", he comments, "Chaucer as a metrical innovator" (197).

poetic forms, particularly in the sequence of poems written on behalf of the ladies of the court of his patroness, but further displays his versatility in other, less regular, forms, in particular the strings of short, irregularly rhyming lines now known as "Skeltonics".

The contrasting attitudes of the two poets is, perhaps, even more apparent when considering style and diction. The admiration expressed for the Muses' "facund castis eloquent" and for Calliope's "Kinglie stile" (1290, 877) leads Bawcutt to deduce that "Douglas clearly aspires to the high ... style" (xlvi). The poem demonstrates, however, that Douglas was well aware of, and was capable of realising, the poetic possibilities of low as well as high diction (e.g. 127-162). Although Douglas apologises for "this Roustie rurall Rebaldris of Eloquence all quite" (2150, 2161), it is with the same false modesty that, at the beginning of the poem, he had disclaimed (in fine rhetorical style) any rhetorical ability (127-135).⁶ What we are to take seriously in both apologies, however, is his sense of the power of eloquence: "Douglas", as Fox comments, "raises his poem off the ground with sheer rhetoric" (197).

Although Skelton had initially believed in the inherent authority of eloquent writing, Fish observes that "[i]n the poems of 1521-23 he is increasingly skeptical of the persuasive powers of eloquence" (132). In the mixing of styles and the rapid variations of tone in his poetry, he again displays his versatility and his willingness to take risks. Both extremes of diction (and all those in between) were worthy elements of

⁶ Chaucer's narrator in The Canterbury Tales also apologises for the coarseness of his material, but claims that he has no choice: "I moot reherce/ Hir tales alle", he says, "Or elles falsen som of my mateere" (I.3173-5).

the Muses' art as far as Skelton was concerned, and he was proud to declare them so. Neither should be denigrated or apologised for since each had its use in the right context; the effect of one, indeed, was to reinforce the impact of the other:

To make ... trifels it asketh sum konnyng,
In honest myrth, parde, requyreth no lack;
The whyte apperyth the better for the black
And after conveyeauns as the world goos,
It is no foly to use the Walshemannys hoos. (Garlande 1235-9)

Although the high style was sometimes, as Lewis notes (75), associated with Chaucer, his poetry, particularly in The Canterbury Tales, covers a wide stylistic range. Indeed, he can be seen to have helped broaden the options available to his successors and to have contributed to the greater consciousness of style that existed by the end of the fifteenth century.⁷ The difference between Skelton and Chaucer was not therefore one of stylistic ability or versatility--indeed, Chaucer would almost universally be acknowledged to be the greater poet--but of context in English literary history. By Skelton's time, it was possible to pass meaningful comment on the development of English literature, and his comments on the writing of his predecessors provide insight into his view of high and low styles. Lydgate's "haute" diction is not seen in any way to be superior to the "playne" style of Chaucer; on the contrary, it is Chaucer's economy and clarity which are praised:

Chaucer, that famous Clarke,

⁷ Fox discusses some aspects of the stylistic debt that "Chaucerians" owed to Chaucer (168-170).

His tearmes were not darcke,
But pleasaunt, easy, and playne;
No worde he wrote in vayne.

Also John Lydgate
Wryteth after an hyer rate;
It is dyffuse to fynde
The sentence of his mynde

.....

some men fynde a faute,

And say he wryteth to haute. (Phyllyp Sparowe 800-7, 811-2)

Skelton was going against the accepted opinions of the literary establishment in his critical appraisal of Lydgate. In Phyllyp Sparowe, he displaces responsibility for his "dangerously radical ... literary judgements" (Spearing 240), without in any way weakening them, by putting them in the mouth of a fictional character. In Garlande of Laurell, the indirect technique is even more subtle, as the fictional "Lydgate", with his "accustomable/ Bownte" (436-7), is made to comment "That welny nothyng there doth remayne" to say (430), thereby unwittingly suggesting the redundancy of his own writing, and further indicating that the cause of his literary shortcomings was his very lack of verbal awareness.⁸ In these quotations Skelton suggests that the high regard for Lydgate, and literary judgement in general, could be revised--as, in Lydgate's case, it has now been.

⁸ In the eagle from Chaucer's House of Fame, we might see a precedent for a character whose self-assured verbal pomposity is undermined by his own words. In the case of the eagle, the subversion is achieved through the speciousness of his argument (729-852) and the obvious falsity of his appeal: "Have y not preved thus symply,/ Withouten any subtilite/ Of speche, or gret prolixite ...?" (854-6). Further discussion of this scene can be found in the previous section of this study.

Elevated diction, such as Lydgate's, may have dazzled, but in itself was not praiseworthy; it was only so when used appropriately and constructively. Skelton's own writing could sometimes be highly ornate and also highly redundant, as can be seen in a sample from his tribute to the Countess of Surrey:

Unto you, madame, I make reconusaunce,
My lyfe endurynge I shall both wryte and say,
Recount, reporte, rehearse without delay
The passynge bounte of your noble astate,
Of honour and worshyp which hath the formar date (838-42).

Such overstatement did not arise, however, from haughtiness, from the sort of self-important verbosity of which he suggests Lydgate was guilty. Although there is perhaps a suggestion that "Skelton poeta" is making a gesture of excessive attention and enthusiasm for the benefit of his patroness, Skelton himself is very much in control of the writing and aware of the effect he creates. Because of the growth of vernacular poetry during the fifteenth century, Skelton's audience also had a greater degree of literary sophistication than did that at the time of Chaucer and Lydgate, and he could expect an appreciation of his deliberate manipulation of style. Although he was sometimes disappointed in his contemporary readers' response, and modified his style as a result (Fish 132, 256; Heiserman 191-2), Skelton could hope that the literary awareness of readers would continue to increase, and that in time an ideal of literary "wisdom" would be approached. We might see in his evocation of Pallas, "the wisest ... of goddesses" (Scattergood 497), a representation of that ideal, and, in her sponsorship of "Skelton poeta",

a suggestion of the true knowledgeable judgement of his works.⁹

The increasing body of literature in English had also brought with it a sense of a developing literary history in the language, of a structure in which the names and achievements of poets could be preserved. In The House of Fame, all the poets and writers mentioned had been from the classical period, but, by the beginning of the sixteenth century, a triumvirate of English writers--Gower, Chaucer and Lydgate--had become established as "the founders of English poetry" (Scattergood 413).¹⁰ As a result of this increased awareness of writing in English, Douglas could add them to the list (898-924) of "famous Poet[s]" (850), could add "patient ... Grissillida" (587) to his list of famous lovers, and could make reference to "the Mirrour send to Canace" (1493), without further explanation. In Garlande of Laurell, Skelton had the confidence, or ironic nerve, to extend the line of succession even further--to include himself.¹¹ The "Englysshe poetis thre" (391) come forward to escort him to the Court of Fame, and each in turn pays tribute to "Brother Skelton", who modestly denies his own merit:

⁹ The attribute associated with Pallas/Minerva was "contemplative wisdom" which, Fulgentius explains (63), "is many-sided [and] is kept hidden ... strikes at long range with its pronouncements ... has its flashes of lightning even in the dark ... [and] cannot die or be seduced". All are characteristics which support the sense of a just, if still subjective, future literary judgement. It is interesting to note that Douglas' poet also has an encounter with Pallas, in the form of "the Quene of Sapience ... Lady Minerva" (Honour 241-2), whose court quickly passes him by.

¹⁰ At an intermediate stage in the establishment of this triumvirate, the author of The Court of Sapience, long thought to be Lydgate, paid tribute to "O Gower, Chaucers, erthely goddes two,/ Ofthyrst of eloquence delycacye" (50-1)!

¹¹ Skelton was not alone in adding his name to the line of succession: "In William Bullein's A Dialogue against the Feuer Pestilence (1564) is found ... describe[d] a vision of Parnassus, of which the only English residents are Gower, Chaucer, Lydgate, Barclay, Sir David Lindsay, and Skelton" (Nelson 226).

Mayster Gower to Skelton

'Ye have deservyd to have an emplement
In our collage above the sterry sky,
Bycause that ye encrease and amplyfy
The brutid Britons of Brutus Albion,
That welny was loste when that we were gone.' (402-6)

Poeta Skelton to Maister Gower

'Maister Gower, I have nothyng deserved
To have so laudabyle a commendacion:
To yow thre this honor shalbe reserved ...' (407-9)

Mayster Chaucer to Skelton

'Of all our hool collage by the agreament,
... we shall brynge you personally present
Of noble Fame before the Quenes grace,
In whose court poynted is your place.' (417-20)

In putting words into their mouths, by acting effectively as their scriptwriter, Skelton is indirectly putting himself at least on a comparable level with the big three, and, although outwardly he denies himself to be worthy of that honour, we are hardly expected to take his protestations seriously.¹² His celebration of their achievements and his acknowledgement of a debt, particularly to Chaucer (421-5), indicates his belief in the establishment of an English literary tradition. By the end of the poem, he is not apologising for "sentence Imperfite [and] ... barrant termis", as Douglas had done (2162, 2165), but is proclaiming the

¹² Skelton might be seen to suggest that he, "Mayster Skelton, Poete Laureat", was to be more highly celebrated than his predecessors, who "wantid ... the laurell" (397). This description is, I think, intended more as a reflection of the increased honour accorded poets in the later period, however.

coming of age of English poetry: "Ite, Britannorum lux O radiosa", he says,

Barbara cum Latio pariter jam currite versu;

Et licet est verbo pars maxima texta Britanno,

Non magis incompta nostra Thalya patet,

Est magis inculta nec mea Calliope. (1521, 1525-8)¹³

The Muses are now referred to as "our Thalia" and "my Calliope": it is all of a part with the poet's assertion of human abilities, of his own contribution to his artistic creation.

The Queen of Fame's opposition to his candidacy can, as I have already indicated, be read as a reflection of the attitude of the royal court in England: although honoured through his laureateship, Skelton had to find patronage, such as that of the Countess of Surrey, outside the immediate circle of Henry VIII (Nelson 197-8). In electing himself to the "collage" of poets "above the sterry sky", and appointing himself to a place in the Court of Fame (regardless of the Queen's objections), Skelton is suggesting the possibility of a less ephemeral renown for the poet. When "Skelton poeta" goes before Fame to face the "charge" she has laid against him (1138), Occupacyoun stands behind him and assures him, "Be mirry ... be not afferde a whit,/ Your discharge here under myne arme is it" (1145-6). The object she refers to is her "boke of remembrauns", containing "recordis [of] ... / What Skelton hath compilid and wryton in dede" (1129-31). The corpus of his work provides the poet with a means of access to a just evaluation in the future: "When Parrot is ded, he

¹³ "Go, shining light of the Britons, and celebrate, our songs, your worthy British Catullus! ... Though barbarous, you now compete in an equal race with Latin verse. And though for the most part it is made up of British words our Thalia appears not too rude, nor is my Calliope too uncultured" (Scattergood 512).

dothe not putrefy" (213). Renown consists merely of a verbal representation, possibly false, of a person's achievements and abilities, which cannot, in general, be observed directly after his death. For the poet, however, his abilities are displayed in, his achievements consist of, words and so they remain available for assessment. (Symbolically, Skelton even preserves part of the text of an earlier poem, Phyllyp Sparowe, within that of the Garlande (1254-1375).) Once a work is written, even one which the author wishes to disown, it cannot be erased from the record, as Poeta Skelton discovers (1479-83): "quod scripsi, scripsi" (1456).¹⁴ It is an indication of Skelton's confidence in the concept of "literature in English", and of his own achievements in particular, that he should cite a catalogue of his works in support of his election. Chaucer's works, in contrast, were cited in defence of his poet (Legend 417-28), and with the acknowledgement "Al be hit that he kan na wel endite" (414).

Eterno mansura die dum sidera fulgent,
Equora dumque tument, hec laurea nostra virebit:
Hinc nostrum celebre et nomen referetur ad astra,
Undique Skeltonis memorabitur alter Adonis.¹⁵

¹⁴ Since the work which the poet wishes "to rase" from Fame's books (1480) is not known (Scattergood 511), we cannot judge its merits. One suspects, however, that it was either a non-existent work or one to which Skelton, ever aware of the effect of his words, was trying to draw attention. Douglas claims in his dedication to The Palice of Honour that he "quitclame that I kend the" (2166). He was, of course, not disowning the work at all and was relying on it to enhance his reputation, and to further his career. How seriously we should take the "Retraction" attached to the end of The Canterbury Tales is more problematic. In practice, the retracted works remain, of course, part of Chaucer's canon.

¹⁵ "While the stars shine remaining in everlasting day, and while the seas swell, this our laurel shall be green: our famous name shall be echoed to the skies, and everywhere Skelton shall be remembered as another Adonis." (Scattergood 497)

So reads the prologue to Garlande of Laurell. Right at the outset it is stated that the poem which follows, "hec laurea nostra", will ensure that Skelton (already, we note, honoured with a Latin name) will be remembered. When the poem itself is read to the Court of Fame--"when of the laurell she [Occupacyon] made rehersall" (1503)--it is duly acclaimed--"'Triumph, triumph!' they cryid all aboute" (1507)--and Skelton is duly identified as Britain's Adonis (1523). The claims are clearly outrageous and the argument, of course, is circular, but the passage does serve to indicate Skelton's answer to the problem of literary fame.¹⁶ Judgement of a poet's work during his lifetime is only provisional; the poems live on, and a more just and informed assessment can be made by posterity. If a writer's works are worthy of fame, he can hope in due time to be granted the recognition he deserves, to receive, like "Skelton poeta", the honour of Pallas.

In portraying Pallas as the wise judge of literary merit, overriding the unjust criticisms of the Queen of Fame, Skelton indicates the fallibility of earthly literary reputation. In contrast to The House of Fame, however, the superhuman powers are not now shown as responsible for the fault, but as the remedy to it. An English literary tradition was being established on the basis provided by writers of the Middle English period, amongst whom Gower and Chaucer were singled out as lasting influences and benefactors. Skelton indicates in his conclusion to Garlande of Laurell (1521-32) that he sees English literature as approaching, but still not having reached, its maturity and, in his

¹⁶ Appropriately, perhaps, the laurel crown is itself also circular. Skelton recounts how the laurel crown originated as a memorial to Phoebus' ill-fated love for Daphne (Garlande 287-322). On the head of Skelton/Adonis, a reincarnation of the beautiful youth beloved of Venus, can we see it as a symbolic memorial also to conventional love-poetry?

treatment of Lydgate, that established literary opinions were still highly fallible and subject to revision. Lydgate, he might be suggesting, had complacently assumed that the literature had attained a maturity and that he could achieve greatness by mere refinement and amplification for its own sake. Although the innovations of Gower and Chaucer allowed their successors to achieve an assured style and an authoritative technique, as Douglas shows, the literature had to experiment if it was to continue to develop. Skelton can be seen to be attempting to expand English literature, to be challenging the accepted boundaries both in the subject and the style of his verse. In his adaptation of conventions, he demonstrates his competence in established poetic techniques and his ability to innovate, just as Chaucer had a century or more earlier. The directions of his innovation were not, however, particularly appropriate if he intended it to have a continuing renown and influence. A wide ranging style means that none becomes identifiably his. Contemporary satire can be of ephemeral interest, particularly if it is openly directed at very specific targets, as was sometimes the case with Skelton's writing. As a result, as Heiserman observes, "after the 1570's ... Skelton's poems ... disappeared from serious consideration" (7). Worldly literary reputation, as Skelton indicated, was highly unreliable and although English literature had become (or was becoming) accepted as worthy of preservation, there was no guarantee that his works would survive that period of neglect--indeed, many of those listed in Garlande of Laurell have not survived (Scattergood 407-12) (or was Skelton playing his literary games again and naming fictitious works?). That his name has survived is largely due to the Skeltonic, which, because of its very looseness of structure, is perhaps an appropriate symbol of the poet's

attempt to break through literary constraints. After several centuries in which his name has been regarded as a byword for rather trivial verse, Skelton's reputation has, however, been resurrected. The claims of high genres are now treated with greater suspicion in English literary studies, which are, perhaps, approaching the stage of knowledgeable detachment and wisdom that he anticipated. His collected works were republished in the nineteenth century (Dyce); in the 1930's and 1940's there were studies to decipher the cryptic political references (Nelson, Gordon); the 1960's saw the publication of books placing him in his historical and literary context (Heiserman, Fish); and, in the 80's, we find a work (Walker) which starts the process of revision of even these recent accounts. Judgements of literary merit will always, of course, be subjective, but Skelton's views of literary reputation seem finally to have been vindicated and he has now taken up his position in English poetic history as a versatile and adventurous, if not lastingly influential, writer of the early Tudor period.

VIII. The College of Poets

'Ye have deservyd to have an emplement
In our collage above the sterry sky ...
Of all our hooll collage by the agreament,
... we shall brynge you personally present
Of noble Fame before the Quenes grace,
In whose court poynted is your place.'

(Garlande of Laurell 402-3, 417-20)

So "Chaucer" informs "Skelton poeta". We are still located in the sky, and are still concerned with the Court of Fame, but the image of a "collage" of poets is very different from that of the House of Fame provided by Chaucer himself. The earlier poem had presented us with a group of related problems concerning the authority and fidelity of verbal representations by and of humans. Fame and rumour were seen to be distortions of the truth and their formation to be under the control of higher powers. Love and its infidelities were seen as the natural subjects of the poet, who had therefore unwittingly and irreversably been coopted as the agent of these powers, the personified Fame and Rumour. Writing in English was seen as crude, immature and lacking in authority, and poets were seen to be dependent upon inspiration from capricious gods if they were to achieve anything worthy of the name "art".

In the works of Douglas and Skelton, we have seen two very different, but not incompatible sets of answers to these problems. Douglas accepted that earthly fame was meaningless and that human powers were limited, but his response was to dismiss the first as nugatory and to look for inspiration and direction from a reliable and just God.

Heavenly honour takes the place of fame. True divine love and fidelity displace the vicissitudes of human love as the subject of poetry. The confident and controlled eloquence of his writing manifests his sense of its authority and the validity of its message as assured by the sanction of God.

Skelton, in contrast, retains worldly fame as his subject, but proposes means by which the perceived problems can be circumvented. Fame and rumour are not beyond human influence, he indicates, they are actually functions of human activity. Any individual, and the poet in particular, can actively participate in the processes, and can try to form and change reputations in the direction of truth. The distortions of fame and rumour arose because each was a verbal representation of events, and therefore, at best, only a partial one. The same limitation was inherent to poetry as an authoritative medium of instruction, as a direct means for humans to communicate wisdom. In his poems, Skelton indicates the power of indirect representation, even obscurity, and demonstrates how it can be used to achieve a greater impact and to convey a more universal truth. The reader is asked to do more than just accept, and must take responsibility for judging the veracity or validity, must actively derive truth from the work. Although earthly fame remains fallible, Skelton indicates that, in the case of the poet, any misrepresentation of his ability can always be rectified. The evidence of that talent is contained in the corpus of his writing, which could survive beyond his lifetime for direct examination by later generations. The poet could always hope for justice, therefore, in a future evaluation made by a notional ideal, wise, impartial literary jury.

The reference to the college of poets, quoted at the beginning of

this section, is one which implies more than just the possibility of a fame based on the deserts of the poet. The image also suggests the establishment of a literary tradition which includes writing in the vernacular: English literature was apparently coming of age and English poets could aspire to a form of literary fame and immortality. Further, we can see an indication of the greater influence humanity is perceived to have in the running of its own life. It is a group of humans up in the sky now, not gods. The college comes to an "agreement" to forward the poet in the Court of Fame; no longer can Fame administer her rewards according to whim. The sense that humanity is instrumental in the processes of life--in art, in acquisition and communication of knowledge, as well as in fame--naturally acts as a prompt, or an incentive, to take initiative and responsibility. The poet is free to work creatively with the available resources: resources both of subject and technique, and resources of the individual as well as those provided by precedent. In turn, the meaning, the lesson that the reader derives can be as much the product of his or her own thoughts as of the text or of the writer.

That it is through Chaucer's mouth that Skelton presents us with such an image of purposeful human self-assertion might seem false when we consider the sense of futility and arbitrariness provided by The House of Fame. We might, however, think of him as having benefited from his position of omni-vision "above the sterry sky": the elements of many of the ideas presented by Skelton were present in Chaucer's poems and it was merely a change, a widening or lengthening, of view that was necessary to make them explicit. The involvement of humans in general, and poets in particular, in the formation of reputation was apparent in The House of Fame; all that was needed was a liberation from the sense of impotence

and dependence for that to become a vision of a purposeful use of discourse by humans. The notion that poets were confined to the writing of courtly love verse and dependent on the support of Venus was one which was held by Geoffrey; Chaucer can be seen to have broadened the poetic scope, both in form and subject, through his writing, and thereby to have provided the greater artistic freedom that his successors enjoyed. Similarly, the perception of words as a means for direct communication, for a literal representation of reality, was one which Geoffrey, not Chaucer, held. The poem was the description of an experience for Geoffrey, but for Chaucer it was allegory--and, because of this duality of view, it was also a demonstration of the power of verbal ambiguity. Geoffrey's House of Fame was complete in itself; Chaucer's was only a starting point, an inducement to thought. Finally, the citation of a corpus of works in the prologue to The Legend of Good Women, although made in the defence of the poet, indicates the possibility that literary reputation could be revised on the basis of a direct examination of the poems themselves.

This structure of sequential reference--of Skelton to Chaucer, of Chaucer to his earlier works--can itself be seen to symbolise the process of progression and development which, over the course of the fifteenth century, had led from the beginnings provided by Chaucer to the established English literary tradition extant at the time of Douglas and Skelton. Two particular strands of that development had led from the arbitrary judgements of a merely omniauditory Fame to, on one hand, the just rewards meted out by an omnipotent God in His Palace of Honour and, on the other, to the true literary recognition offered to poets by honour of an omniscient Pallas. The perception of the verbal accounting of

humans had progressed from one of meaninglessness, fallibility and impotence to one of knowledge, authority and self-assertion. The change was not uniform or universal, either in poetry or in the society--no change ever is--but the poems act to represent a general trend in perceptions and thought in a period of transition from "Mediaeval" towards "Renaissance".

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