

The Path to Wholeness: The Therapeutic Potential of Bodily Writing in Late Medieval
Dream Visions

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Katherine Ann Robison

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Introduction

Bodily Writing: An Apocalyptic Template

Louis Heyligen, a musician at the papal court of Avignon, recorded in his *Chroniques de Flandre* that in 1347 a “great mortality and pestilence” had begun in the Orient. He describes the conditions in terms that recall the plagues of the Apocalypse: “On the first day it rained frogs, serpents, lizards, scorpions and many venomous beasts of that sort. On the second day thunder was heard, and lightning flashes mixed with hailstones of marvelous size...killed almost all men, from the greatest to the least. On the third day there fell fire together with stinking smoke from the heavens, which consumed all the rest of men and beasts.”¹ This plague, later known as the Black Death, spread quickly and within two years had slain half of Europe, including Heyligen himself.

The Black Death was not the only catastrophic event to strike during the fourteenth century. Just a few decades earlier, northern Europe was devastated by a Great Famine (1315-1322)—what some historians have termed Europe’s only true famine.² Adding to these calamities was the Hundred Years War that raged from 1337 to 1453, the

¹ “Eodem anno, in mense septembri, incepit quaedam et maxima mortalitas et pestilentia...Primo quidem die ranas pluit, serpentes, lacertos, scorpiones et multa hujus generis venenatorum animalium; secundo vero die audita sunt tonitrua, et ceciderunt fulgura et choruscationes mixte cum grandinibus mire magnitudinis super terram, que occiderunt quasi omnes homines...tercio die descendit ignis fetido fumo de celo, qui totum residuum hominum et animalium consumpsit” (*Breve Chronicon clerici anonymi ex MS Bibliotheca Regiae Bruxellis*, in J.-J. de Smet, ed., *Recueil des chroniques de Flandre/ Corpus chronicorum flandriae* [Brussels: Hayez, 1856], 3:14, quoted in Laura A. Smoller, “Of Earthquakes, Hail, Frogs, and Geography: Plague and the Investigation of the Apocalypse in the Later Middle Ages,” in *Last Things: Death and the Apocalypse in the Middle Ages*, ed. Caroline Walker Bynum and Paul Freedman [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000], 157).

² Massimo Montanari, *The Culture of Food*, trans. Carl Ipsen (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1994), 70. Montanari observes, “Repeated incidents of nutritional stress...prepared the way for the plague epidemic that devastated the continent between 1347 and 1351” (70).

Papal Schism that occurred between 1378 and 1418, the Uprising of 1381 in England, an earthquake in 1382, and civil war in France from 1407-1435. As John Aberth states, “At no other time in history did so much variegated misery—famine, war, plague, and death—descend all at once as upon England and Europe during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.”³ Little wonder, then, that people believed the end of the world was nigh and employed the language of the Book of Revelation to describe their circumstances.⁴

By placing the horrors of the late Middle Ages in an Apocalyptic context, however, writers implicitly offered their readers hope of eventual peace and refuge.⁵ The writings of the apostles, especially John, promised that after suffering and death would come a new and better world: the reign of Christ in the Millennium.⁶ While the literalism of the Millennium had been discounted by early Church Fathers such as Augustine, Jerome, and Gregory, new interpretations gradually offered the possibility of its actually

³ John Aberth, *From the Brink of the Apocalypse: Confronting Famine, War, Plague, and Death in the Later Middle Ages* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 6.

⁴ Plagues are foretold in Revelation 16: 8-11 and 18:8 and the Apocalyptic portions of the Gospels: Matt. 24: 7 and Luke 21: 11. Laura Smoller writes, “Contemporary authors described the onset of the great pestilence not just with terrifying omens, but specifically with language drawn from Christian apocalyptic” (“Of Earthquakes,” *Last Things*, 157).

⁵ As Aberth puts it, “In a time of darkness, suffering, and death, comes the promise of redemption, renewal, and resurrection” (*Brink*, 6).

⁶ Richard K. Emmerson explains that medieval readers “took John at his word when he referred to his Revelation as a ‘prophesy’” (“The Apocalypse in Medieval Culture,” in *The Apocalypse in the Middle Ages*, ed. Richard K. Emmerson and Bernard McGinn [Ithaca: University of Cornell Press, 1992], 299). Michael Camille argues that “in this climate of heightened popular enthusiasm,” artistic depictions of the Apocalypse in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries were made for an audience who expected to literally witness these events for themselves” (“Visionary Perception and Images of the Apocalypse in the Later Middle Ages,” in *The Apocalypse in the Middle Ages*, 277).

occurring.⁷ Slowly but surely, the concept of a literal period of peace spread across Western Europe. Robert Lerner states, “Granted that the Augustinian taboo against literal millennialism had by no means been lifted, ever more Western European prophets were beginning to challenge it. In other words, faith in a wondrous earthly future was growing just when Western Europeans were poised to storm the globe and survey the heavens.”⁸

Such optimism, along with a growing interest in subjective, individual experience (that would ultimately lead to the Reformation), encouraged a preponderance of visionary writings, both “authentic” and “literary.”⁹ The fourteenth century in particular saw an influx of prophets, visionaries, and mystics as well as vernacular translations and new interpretations of the Book of Revelation.¹⁰ Within this milieu, “the visionary aspect of

⁷ Augustine asserted that the Church was already living in the Millennium, which Christ had established during his ministry, and that the Book of Revelation was a spiritual allegory rather than historical prophecy. (In so doing, he divorced the regenerative tradition, which he reserved for the Final Judgment, from the eschatological tradition of apocalyptic thought.) Consequently, the Council of Ephesus condemned belief in a literal Millennium in 431. See Justine Rydzeski, *Radical Nostalgia in the Age of Piers Plowman: Economics, Apocalypticism, and Discontent* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1999), 22. Rydzeski notes, however, “Whether the Church sanctioned belief in the Millennium or not, it was unable to counteract the apocalyptic fervor and beliefs of the masses, which it found easier to harness than to eliminate” (*Radical Nostalgia*, 22). For a helpful overview of millennialism, see Robert E. Lerner, “The Medieval Return to the Thousand-Year Sabbath,” in *The Apocalypse in the Middle Ages*, 51-71.

⁸ Lerner, “Medieval Return,” 71. Perhaps the most famous, and radical, of these new interpretations was the work of Joachim of Fiore. E. Randolph Daniel writes, “Understood in Joachim’s terms, the Apocalypse was not an addendum to the New Testament, canonized but kept apart from the rest. On the contrary, it was the culmination and summary of the entire course of history. Joachim broke decisively with the Tyconian-Augustinian tradition of interpreting the Apocalypse allegorically and instead interpreted it historically” (“Joachim of Fiore: Patterns of History in the Apocalypse,” in *The Apocalypse in the Middle Ages*, 87).

⁹ Barbara Newman discusses the differences, and overlap, between these categories in her *God and the Goddesses: Vision, Poetry, and Belief in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003). Jessica Barr argues, “The fact that many dream vision poems were written during the period in which visionary literature was in its fullest blossoming suggests that the two ‘genres’ did not develop in isolation from each other” (*Willing to Know God: Dreamers and Visionaries in the Later Middle Ages* [Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2010], 6-7).

¹⁰ Nigel Morgan notes that illustrated Apocalypses were among the most popular forms of illuminated books in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. He states, “It can be concluded

the Apocalypse became important for scholarly exegetes and lay readers alike as they sought to understand the nature of Saint John's experience in terms of their own spiritual lives."¹¹ For the medieval person, John's success as a visionary—his ability to access and understand divine knowledge—became a symbol of hope amid the terrors and uncertainty that permeated daily life.¹²

It is against this backdrop that the poetic form known as the dream vision came into its own as a genre.¹³ The form is typically characterized by a first-person narrator who falls asleep and embarks on a dream, in which he is (usually) led by a guide toward some divine or significant insight.¹⁴ Consequently, many early literary dreams were explicitly explained as being caused by supernatural forces. Macrobius, who provided a

that the majority of the English Apocalypses with illustrations were probably intended as books for the laity. They present a sort of popular theology in their commentary texts" (*The Douce Apocalypse: Picturing the End of the World in the Middle Ages: Treasures from the Bodleian Library* [Oxford: Bodleian Library, 2007], 19). See pp. 11-12 for a list of sixteen illustrated Apocalypse manuscripts.

¹¹ Camille, "Visionary Perception," 277.

¹² Bernard McGinn explains "how radically far the apocalyptic mentality was both from traditional Jewish religious thought and from similar concerns with eschatology found elsewhere in the Hellenistic world. The new and challenging nature of the religious vision found in the apocalypses and in related texts is evident in the manner of the revelation, the content of the message, the kind of God who reveals, even the kind of salvation promised" ("John's Apocalypse and the Apocalyptic Mentality," in *The Apocalypse in the Middle Ages*, 5).

¹³ The dream vision has a rich history, originating with classical and early Christian visions or "spiritual adventures" like those recorded by Virgil, Cicero, Boethius, and Bede. A.C. Spearing writes, "The early centuries of Christianity, and indeed the whole period down to and including the Middle Ages, saw the growth of religious vision-literature on a large scale" (*Medieval Dream-Poetry* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976], 13).

¹⁴ Spearing, *Medieval Dream-Poetry*, 18. Kathryn Lynch explains that the traditional high medieval vision saw a higher truth imaged in a lower world (like a mirror) and focused on "the Dreamer's movement from confusion to spiritual health" ("The Logic of the Dream Vision in Chaucer's *House of Fame*," in *Literary Nominalism and the Theory of Rereading Late Medieval Texts: A New Research Paradigm*, ed. Richard J. Utz [Lewiston, New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1995], 180, 187). Lynch explains that in the eleventh through thirteenth centuries, the dream vision was used as a philosophical model, in which the dreamer ascended to truth under the guidance of Reason or another authoritative figure (*High Medieval Dream Vision: Poetry, Philosophy, and Literary Form* [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988], 116).

commentary of Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis* in about 400 A.D., introduced an elaborate categorization that incorporated both divine and natural sources for dreams and was widely used (or at least acknowledged) through the late Middle Ages and Renaissance.¹⁵ However, once Aristotle was rediscovered in the thirteenth century, his works "reintroduced into European discourse the possibility that dreams are never divine in origin."¹⁶ Consequently, late medieval dream poets became uneasy about the power of human reason to take steps towards divine knowledge in the manner of their predecessors.¹⁷

Much of the recent scholarship on dream visions has attempted to read these poems through the lens of medieval dream theory.¹⁸ While these works have made large

¹⁵ Macrobius identified five categories: *insomnium* (nightmare), *visum* (apparition), *somnium* (enigmantic dream), *visio* (prophetic vision), and *oraculum* (oracular dream). See Spearing, *Medieval Dream-Poetry*, 9-10.

¹⁶ Steven Kruger, *Dreaming in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 84. Kruger observes that, as a result of these medical writings, authors began to question the trustworthiness and transcendence of the dream (119).

¹⁷ Jessica Barr argues that dream visions in late medieval England adopt a "skeptical attitude towards their dreamers' abilities to understand their visions" and reflect a "crisis of authority." She writes, "It is clear that the vision was a site of critical interrogation—perhaps even dispute—in late medieval England... These works thus reveal a tension between the truth-bearing potential of the vision and the problems of human intellection and ratiocination" (*Willing*, 237-38). She asserts that the number of dream visions written in England within a short span of time and their shared differences from earlier visions "suggest that something was happening in late medieval England—and that broader cultural concerns over authority and epistemology are reflected in the vision literature of that period" (237).

¹⁸ For example, A.C. Spearing's *Medieval Dream-Poetry* examines a comprehensive list of late medieval dream visions and their adherence to classical and medieval tropes. While his catalogue is extremely thorough and vital for understanding the form, he tends to evaluate the aesthetics of the poems by a somewhat subjective standard (differentiating, for example, between the "intelligent and unintelligent" imitators of Chaucer, at 171). In her *High Medieval Dream Vision*, Kathryn Lynch classifies literary visions into subgenres, focusing on the philosophical vision in particular. Steven Kruger's *Dreaming in the Middle Ages* moves in a slightly different direction by arguing that dream theory and practical responses to dreams do not always correspond. He convincingly links human experience to the literary process, emphasizing its ambiguities and self-reflective nature as a work of art (135). A volume of essays edited by Peter Brown, titled *Reading Dreams: The Interpretation of Dreams from Chaucer to Shakespeare*

strides toward understanding “the influence of dream theory upon literary works,” both individually and as a form, I concur with Jessica Barr’s declaration that “[scholars’] own recognition that many dream poems do not adhere strictly to Macrobian categories suggests that a new interpretive paradigm is needed to understand these texts more fully.”¹⁹

One such interpretive paradigm, I contend, is the Apocalyptic fervor in which these dream visions were produced. The second half of the century, following the worst outbreaks of famine and plague and the resurgence of Apocalyptic commentary, is marked by “an extraordinary concentration of dream visions”—more than at any time previously or any time since.²⁰ I would argue that, in the dream vision, poets found a vehicle that could not only respond to the period’s sense of uncertainty and di-vision

(New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), proposes to bridge the gap between the medieval and early modern periods, though many of the essays also default to reading the poems in light of contemporary dream theories. An early exception to this trend is Constance Hieatt, who argued in her *Realism of Dream Visions: The Poetic Exploration of the Dream-Experience in Chaucer and His Contemporaries* (The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1967) that medieval dream visions were modeled after real dreams. Consequently, her work leans heavily on modern psychological theory.

¹⁹ Barr, *Willing*, 237. The pervasiveness of the dream vision genre—and the relatively short duration of its popularity—has long perplexed scholars. Kathryn Lynch states, “The reasons for the greatness and popularity of the vision narrative remain puzzling, hinting at some specialized intent these poets shared that we no longer grasp” (*High Medieval Dream Vision*, 1). Peter Brown argues, “We need a more specific and complex historical context” (“On the Borders,” 24). Steven Kruger concurs, “We have irremediably lost touch with the everyday fabric of medieval dream life” (*Dreaming in the Middle Ages*, 4). Finally, A.C. Spearing argues, “We badly need...insights into the largely unformulated generic systems that helped to shape medieval writing” (“Introduction,” *Reading Dreams*, 5). In his book, *Medieval Dream-Poetry*, Spearing argues that it is unlikely “to be possible to establish the dream-poem as a *completely* ‘distinct literary kind;’ but this is not to say that the dream-framework was merely a gratuitous or optional component of a wide range of kinds of medieval literature. For one thing, the authors of medieval dream-poems themselves seem to have been conscious of writing within a distinct literary tradition of dreams and visions” (3). While this dissertation does not purport to resolve these questions, it is my hope that it might unveil some reasons behind the dream vision’s popularity and motivation as a “genre.”

²⁰ The language is Peter Brown’s in “On the Borders of Middle English Dream Visions” in *Reading Dreams*, 22.

(dreams can be profoundly alienating) but that could also foster a return to wholeness by following John's method.²¹

In this study, I propose to examine a particular aspect of Revelation's influence: the body as a vehicle for writing. In the Book of Revelation, John's body serves as an important nexus for his words. Not only does he eat the text offered to him by the angel, which allows for his ensuing vision, but he also witnesses words inscribed on actual bodies. This bodily writing determines the outcome for each soul; at the end of the vision, it is the people who have "[God's] name...on their foreheads" [nomen ejus in frontibus] (Rev. 22.4) that will be healed.²²

Similarly, many late medieval dream poets utilize writing as a means of healing their persona's afflictions. In this context, bodily writing, as I define it, is a form of self-directed writing that emphasizes the necessity of corporeal experience and that fully expects to influence the body's processes, usually in a therapeutic capacity. The fact that

²¹ Spearing notes, "The majority of English dream-poems show nothing of purgatory, and their treatment of hell is usually subordinate and often oblique...By contrast with this varying treatment of hell, medieval dream-poems regularly employ a heavenly setting of a constant kind" (*Medieval Dream-Poetry*, 16). This suggests that dream vision writers may have been more focused on the salvific aspects of the Apocalypse rather than the damning parts.

²² While there was no guarantee that a person would be saved at the second coming—God not only saves but poisons (see Rev. 8: 11); in the *Douce Apocalypse*, a thirteenth-century illuminated Apocalypse, the illustration of Wormword, the falling star that poisons the waters, is depicted with a grinning face, as if it is taking pleasure in the destruction it is causing (Morgan, *Douce Apocalypse*, 59)—many medieval commentators read the Book of Revelation through an optimistic lens, choosing to interpret events like the marking of the 144,000 as figurative rather than literal events. Nicholas of Lyra writes in his 1329 commentary that the number of saved souls could not literally be 144,000 (*Nicholas of Lyra's Apocalypse Commentary*, trans. Philip D.W. Krey [Kalamazoo: Western Michigan University, 1997], 96). He states, "It should also be known that, when it is said here: Twelve thousand were sealed, a determinate number is used for an indeterminate; for in those days many more were baptized throughout the world" (7). The prose commentary of an English fourteenth-century Apocalypse and a contemporary French commentary present similar interpretations. See *An English Fourteenth Century Apocalypse Version With a Prose Commentary: Edited from MS Harley 874 and ten other MSS*, ed. Elis Fridner [Lund, Sweden: Hakan Ohlssons Boktryckeri, 1961], 55-56.

this impulse corresponds in strong ways to the kind of writing performed in the Book of Revelation suggests that John's vision played a significant role in the formation of the late medieval dream vision.²³

In this dissertation, I will consider four iconic but very different dream visions—two English, two French²⁴—from what I am terming “the long fourteenth century”: Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun's *Roman de la Rose* (c.1225-1278), William Langland's *Piers Plowman* (c.1377), Geoffrey Chaucer's *House of Fame* (c.1380), and Christine de Pizan's prose *L'Advison-Christine* (1406).²⁵ Each of these dream visions approaches bodily writing from a different perspective, but in every case it is used as a remedy for illness, whether physiological or psychological.

My first chapter will examine the historical and critical aspects of the concepts surrounding bodily writing—including contemporary understandings of physical, mental, and spiritual health care (especially penance)—in order to lay the foundation for my examination of the aforementioned texts. The remaining four chapters, each dedicated to

²³ I am certainly not the first to suggest that the Book of Revelation was a source of inspiration for medieval vision writers; the references to apocalyptic events contained within dream visions are numerous and obvious. As Justine Rydzeski notes, “With so many generic features in common, John's Apocalypse, Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*, Alain de Lille's *Complaint of Nature*, and Langland's poem, among others, illustrate the close relationship between apocalypse and dream-vision poems” (*Radical Nostalgia*, 24). (*The Apocalypse of St. Paul*, for example, was an influential third-century dream vision that combined paradisiac and apocalyptic scenes and was greatly influenced by St John's Apocalypse. See Spearing, *Medieval Dream-Poetry*, 13.) Dante and the *Pearl*-poet make explicit gestures to John's vision, as do more overtly secular texts. See Emerson, “Apocalypse,” 295, and McGinn, “John's Apocalypse,” 6.

²⁴ England and France were the largest producers of the dream vision, and the French tradition heavily influenced the English.

²⁵ Readers may wonder why I have not chosen to include the *Pearl* in my examination, as it is perhaps the dream poem most obviously influenced by Revelation. The reason is that I do not see the dreamer in *Pearl* using the device of bodily writing as I have described it. It is true that he finds some solace for his grief, but the therapy in this text, I find, is not as dynamically interested in the body or writing specifically as a means of treatment.

a particular dream vision, are organized thematically rather than chronologically.

I will begin with the most overtly Apocalyptic text of my dissertation: William Langland's *Piers Plowman*. For Langland, bodily writing is a deeply spiritual endeavor, and the workings of the body are necessary in order to atone for sin. In the poem, the dreamer-narrator, named Will, embarks on a pilgrimage to heal a sin-caused illness. In the course of his allegorical journey, he consumes texts like the *Paternoster* that are then incorporated into his body and that help him more fully understand the healing process of the Word (Christ). To preserve the *kynde knowing* acquired by his body, he puts his discoveries into writing. The result is the poem itself, a physical alms deed that he hopes to offer to readers struggling with the same problems.

Chapter Three considers *Le Roman de la Rose*, the formative thirteenth-century dream vision written by Guillaume de Lorris and completed by Jean de Meun. For Jean, bodily writing is a thin metaphor for (masculine) sexual reproduction and the duties of the male *auctor*. In the original text, Guillaume's dreamer must perform penance by writing a romance if he wishes to be healed of his lovesickness. In Jean's portion, however, the dreamer lacks the experience necessary to do so, and it falls upon Jean the author to write the romance for him. Jean thus argues that writing, which is dependent on as well as formative of corporeal experience, must be based in practical knowledge in order to be transformative.

My fourth chapter will consider the work of Christine de Pizan, a proto-feminist who responded directly to the *Rose*. (Christine was the first known woman to write professionally.) Consequently, in her *Advison-Christine* she applies a unique perspective

to the concept of bodily writing, reclaiming writing as a woman's activity by comparing it not to procreation but to childbirth and nursing. In her text, Christine's persona examines her inner self through writing in order to stimulate her memory and so produce proper self-knowledge, which will allow her to recover from her melancholy. Moving beyond her own health, Christine sees literature as a means of establishing harmony in the body politic. Thus, in *L'Advison*, texts are prescribed to treat not only Christine's illness but also the sick kingdom of France.

My final chapter discusses the *House of Fame* by Geoffrey Chaucer. Like the other dream vision narrators, Chaucer's persona, Geoffrey, is unwell: he has overtaxed his brain from too much work. Unlike most dream visions, however, Chaucer puts a comic spin on bodily writing. His special brand of performative humor, combined with strong sensory imagery, fosters an ethical reading experience that activates Geoffrey's memory so that he can first recognize and then treat his brainsickness. The game of the dream takes him out of his (aching) head and puts him in contact with other people, and in each step of his journey, Geoffrey sees how language and bodily well-being are inextricably connected; affecting one will affect the other.

Because late medieval poets insist on possibilities of healing and wholeness in the course of their dreams, they seem to take a step backward in their understanding of human physiology. I would contend, however, that these writers are responding to what they perceive as failings in medical practice to provide a holistic healing of body and spirit. Applying their knowledge of medical concepts and terminology, late medieval writers repossess the power of remedy from physicians and suggest that there are certain

remedies that poetry can provide that medicine cannot. In dream visions particularly, it is the dream frame—as both a reflection of the poet’s physical and mental condition and a catalyst for introspection and transformation—that allows these medical principles to be effectively applied. As a result, dream poetry, written through the body, enabled late medieval writers to find wholeness and self-knowledge, not just for themselves but also for their readers.²⁶

²⁶ This may be why late medieval dream poets looked to John’s vision. As Rydzeski states, “Salvation is both individual and social; while individuals are redeemed, society and nature enjoy the *renovatio mundi*...Salvation is both spiritual and physical; this is no salvation of disembodied souls, but of individuals ‘new’ in body and spirit” (*Radical Nostalgia*, 20).

Chapter One

Reading Bodies and Writing Wholeness

Bodily writing is first and foremost about facilitating a return to health, and medieval poets viewed their writing as a serious means of therapy. Julie Singer argues, “It is of crucial importance to note that [in the Middle Ages] remedy is not...the exclusive domain of physicians and surgeons.”¹ Consequently, “medicine’s inspiration (as a source for structural paradigms of the body) stands in tension with a sense of rivalry as poets...counter medical conventions by proposing alternate constructs.”² Bodily writing is one such “alternative construct” for medical treatment and, in the texts I examine here, it involves two primary steps: diagnosis and treatment.

In this chapter, I will first discuss the body’s significance in medieval culture, detailing the ways in which bodily signs were frequently deciphered, or “read,” like a text. In the context of late medieval dream visions, reading the dreamer’s body and state of mind, as revealed in the dream, allows the poet to diagnose the illness plaguing her poetic persona. Once the illness is identified, the dreamer can begin to recover her self-knowledge and so find wholeness.

¹ Julie Singer, “Playing by Ear: Compensation, Reclamation, and Prosthesis in Fourteenth-Century Song,” in *Disability in the Middle Ages: Reconsiderations and Reverberations*, ed. Joshua Eyler (Burlington, Vt., 2010), 41. Elsewhere, Singer writes, “I propose that we consider the ‘medicalization’ of late medieval poetry—that is, the adoption of medical concepts and terminology—not as an endorsement of medical theory or practice but simply as a signal of a turning inward: a renewed emphasis not on the external world but on the poet-lover’s body, its functions and its dysfunctions...as a means of highlighting the therapeutic potential of poesis” (*Blindness and Therapy in Late Medieval French and Italian Poetry* [Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2011], 9).

² Singer, “Playing by Ear,” 41.

The second section will discuss the “treatment” stage. Because bodily writing is a holistic therapy, treatment must address the dreamer’s spiritual, physical, *and* mental ailments. Accordingly, the dream journey is often framed as a pilgrimage or other type of penance (spiritual remedy); the dreamer usually eats specific foods or medicines (physical remedy); and textual foods are used to activate the dreamer’s memory and so facilitate psychological healing (mental remedy). As a final step, the dreamer must write. This writing, which stems from bodily concerns and experience, uses various devices like allegory to foster contemplation and consolation and even to modify the medical construct in which the dreamer participates (substituting a physician or other authority figure for the individual’s own efforts, and the law of contraries for the law of similarities, for example) so that healing can occur. Finally, the finished poem—as a documentation of the dreamer’s journey to wholeness—serves as a guide for the poet’s readers who may be hoping to treat their own illnesses.

Reading the Body: Diagnosis

In the later Middle Ages, the body held a place of paramount yet contested significance. Generally speaking, post-Aristotelian medievals maintained a monistic view of the body and soul—physiological and psychological processes were considered interconnected and interdependent. The thirteenth and fourteenth centuries in particular saw a move away from Platonist realism and disembodied metaphysical essences toward psychology and the experience of individual bodies.³ The role of sensation—what the

³ Sarah Kay argues, “Efforts were concentrated instead on theorizing how universals...were arrived at from our experience of particular bodies” (*The Place of Thought: The Complexity of One in Late Medieval French Didactic Poetry* [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007], 12).

body experiences with its five senses—was thus considered key to the acquisition of knowledge and the development of reason.⁴ Medieval psychology conceived of the brain as divided into three main cells or faculties: imagination, reason, and memory. Kathryn Lynch explains, “The first was termed the imagination or fantasy, a receptacle for storing and combining images called forth from the *sensus communis* or common sense, responsible for coordinating the evidence provided by the five senses. The second cell was...the residence of reason, which discriminated among imaginative perceptions. The third and final lobe at the rear of the brain contained memory.”⁵ Because information was fed to the faculty of reason by way of the imagination and *sensus communis*, the senses were incredibly important.

But the senses also had the potential to be corrupted or deceived, particularly by temptations of the flesh. Because of this, disputes over the body’s role were inevitable. Sarah Kay and Miri Rubin state, “Inasmuch as the human body was both an outer, misleading shell, and a psychosomatic whole, authority over the body was contested between physicians and priests, between the clergy and the laity, and between men and women.”⁶ One way to determine authority, to define boundaries and overcome

⁴ See Steven Kruger, “Medical and Moral Authority in the Late Medieval Dream,” in *Reading Dreams: The Interpretation of Dreams from Chaucer to Shakespeare*, ed. Peter Brown (New York: Oxford University, 1999), 56.

⁵ Kathryn Lynch, *The High Medieval Dream Vision: Poetry, Philosophy, and Literary Form* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), 28. Lynch adds, “Since the purpose of psychology was to define the relationship of material to immaterial—of body to soul—it necessarily had to be a physical system as well” (28). See also Raymond Klibansky, et al., *Saturn and Melancholy* (London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1964), 68. For the role of memory in the Middle Ages, see Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*, 2nd edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

⁶ “Introduction,” *Framing Medieval Bodies*, ed. Sarah Kay and Miri Rubin (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), 5. Sarah Kay writes in “Women’s Body of Knowledge: Epistemology and Misogyny in the *Romance of the Rose*” in the same volume, “The increasingly

ambiguity, was to evaluate or “read” the bodies of others. Reading bodies allowed people to make judgments about the actions and character of those around them.⁷ It allowed physicians to diagnosis illnesses.⁸ It even allowed priests to determine the state of a person’s soul.⁹ Walter Simons explains that bodies that departed from the ideal of moderation in particular had to be interpreted; thus, the role of the hagiographer in the *vitae* was critical. For example, the hagiographer of the *Life of Marie d’Oignies* “reads” Marie’s unusual bodily behavior for the benefit of his audience and in so doing confirms her righteousness: “Her outward body demonstrated the composure of her inward mind...reading the unction of the Spirit in her face as if they were reading from a book, they knew what virtue came from her.”¹⁰

In the Book of Revelation, bodies are read quite literally: all men are marked with the sign of the Beast or the name of God.

And he shall make all, both little and great, rich and poor, freemen and bondmen, to have a character in their right hand, or on their foreheads. And that no man might buy or sell, but he that hath the character, or the name of the beast, or the

complex treatment of the mind-body dichotomy in this period [the twelfth and thirteenth centuries], and the growing emphasis (under the influence of new translations and adaptations of Aristotle) on the senses as a source of knowledge, lead to the body figuring in intellectual discourses other than those propounding moral or theological hierarchies” (211).

⁷ For example, physiognomy—the assessment of a person’s character or personality from his or her appearance, especially the face—was a common practice in the Middle Ages, evidenced in the Prologue to Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*.

⁸ Terence Scully explains, “The physician’s prescription ensued from a close analysis of the individual’s natural temperament” (*The Art of Cookery in the Middle Ages* [Rochester: Boydell Press, 1995], 185).

⁹ Medieval guidebooks for penance explained that “a just repentance” must be assigned “according to a man’s works...and how one understands the sorrow of his heart and his own earnestness” (*The Old English Handbook*, trans. Allen J. Frantzen in *Anglo-Saxon Penitentials: A Cultural Database*, Corpus 201, 121-22, D55.09.01, my emphasis).

¹⁰ Walter Simons, “Reading a Saint’s Body: Rapture and Bodily Movement in the *Vitae* of the Thirteenth-Century Beguines,” in *Framing Medieval Bodies*, 15, 19.

number of his name. (13:16-17)¹¹

And I beheld, and lo a lamb stood upon mount Sion, and with him an hundred forty-four thousand, having his name, and the name of his Father, written on their foreheads. (14:1)¹²

And they shall see his face: and his name shall be on their foreheads. (22.4)¹³

The words or characters inscribed on men's foreheads are based on their deeds.¹⁴ Thus, reading a person's body means reading her deeds and intentions. The reflection of her inner self, based on her works performed in life, is recorded not just on her physical body but also in Heaven. No one may enter the New Jerusalem except for those whose names are "written in the book of life of the Lamb" [scripti sunt in libro vitae Agni] (21:27). John writes, "And I saw the dead, great and small, standing in the presence of the throne, and the books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged by those things which were written in the books, according to their

¹¹ "Et faciet omnes pusillos, et magnos, et divites, et pauperes, et liberos, et servos habere caracterem in dextera manu sua, aut in frontibus suis: Et nequis possit emere, aut vendere, nisi qui habet caracterem, aut nomen bestiae, aut numerum nominis ejus."

¹² "Et vidi: et ecce Agnus stabat supra montem Sion, et cum eo centum quadraginta quatuor millia, habentes nomen ejus, et nomen Patris ejus scriptum in frontibus suis."

¹³ "Et videbunt faciem ejus: et nomen ejus in frontibus eorum."

¹⁴ Many commentators viewed the events of Revelation through the lens of predestination. From this perspective, the elect were chosen before they were born; thus, their deeds do not determine their salvation, but rather their deeds are a result of their predetermined state. Of the book of life, Nicholas of Lyra writes, "This book is that same book of divine predestination, which is called a book metaphorically because those are represented in it clearly those who are simply ordained to pursue the blessed life, which the book will reveal in the judgement, because then it will appear manifest who are to be received into blessedness and who are not" (*Nicholas of Lyra's Apocalypse Commentary*, trans. Philip D.W. Krey [Kalamazoo: Western Michigan University, 1997], 218-19). Nicholas does acknowledge, however, that the dead will be judged based on their works. "Not only will they be judged according to deeds and words, but also according to interior intentions and thoughts" (219).

works” (20:12).¹⁵ At the Last Judgment—the moment of supreme importance in Christian theology—everyone’s bodies will be read, and those who are found worthy shall receive a new name and be marked as followers of God. “He that shall overcome...I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God, and my new name” (3:12).¹⁶

To prepare for this most final of readings, men must read and evaluate their own bodies on a continual basis. As Paul states in his second epistle to the Corinthians, “Try your own selves if you be in the faith; prove ye yourselves. Know you not your own selves, that Christ Jesus is in you?” [Vosmetipsos tentate si estis in fide: ipsi vos probate. An non cognoscitis vosmetipsos quia Christus Jesus in vobis est?] (13:5). The purpose of reading one’s own body and gauging one’s righteousness is to recognize the imprint of

¹⁵ “Et vidi mortuos, magnos et pusillos, stantes in conspectu throni, et libri aperti sunt: et alius liber apertus est, qui est vitae: et iudicati sunt mortui ex his, quae scripta erant in libris, secundum opera ipsorum.”

¹⁶ “Qui vicerit...scribam super eum nomen Dei mei, et nomen civitatis Dei mei novae Jerusalem, quae descendit de caelo a Deo meo, et nomen meum novum.” Beyond these examples, the Book of Revelation is replete with examples of (fantastic) bodies, from the four living creatures and four horsemen to the unusual body of the slaughtered Lamb, from the giant locusts with human faces and the seven-headed dragon to the dragon’s monstrous allies who distribute the mark of the beast, from the pregnant woman clothed with the sun to the judged bodies who will enter Heaven or burn in Hell. Elaine Pagels explains that John’s visions of monsters are modeled on creation stories even older than those in Genesis, particularly the Babylonian creation myth of the sun god Marduk and his battle with his mother, the great female dragon Tiamat, and her army of monsters, who embodied the ocean depths and powers of chaos—not unlike the Greeks’ story of Zeus battling Kronos and the Titans. Pagels writes, “Whoever wrote the opening of Genesis probably *knew* the ancient dragon story, for Genesis says that even before God created the world, he began not with *nothing*, as Jewish and Christian theologians and philosophers later claimed, but with a formless void, chaos, wind, and ‘deep’ waters” (*Revelations: Visions, Prophecy, and Politics in the Book of Revelation* [New York: Viking Penguin, 2012], Ch. 1, ebook). She asserts, “John’s visions and monsters are meant to embody actual beings and events...His vision of a great mountain exploding reflects the eruption of Vesuvius in 79 C.E. The dragon’s seven heads suggest the emperors of the Julio-Claudian dynasty, as ‘the number of the beast’ may allude to the hidden name of Nero” (Ch.1). The Book of Revelation’s use of strong corporeal images as a means of making its message both urgent and personally applicable makes it an apt model for later dream vision writers.

Christ within the soul. Even though an absolute knowledge of God may be impossible while in mortality, there is still a reflection of God in men's bodies, still something to interpret. And, in fact, men are instructed to interpret the darkened mirror through which they behold God's image. Sylvia Huot states, "We require the mediation of a mirror—a visual and symbolic code of images, language, and dogma—in order to approach the mystery of divinity."¹⁷ Reading God's code, in bodies and in scripture, is crucial for the attainment of wholeness and the acquisition of divine truth.¹⁸ "Now I know in part; but then I shall know even as also I am known" (1 Corinthians 13: 12).¹⁹

In dream visions, the interpretation of the body is accomplished through several literary devices. Perhaps the most important device is the description of the dreamer's actions and physical appearance. The lettered medieval person learned at an early age how to read bodies using the rhetorical exercise of description, beginning with the very first of subjects: the *ars grammatica*.²⁰ An excerpt from Matthew of Vendôme's *Ars Versificatoria* (c.1175) reads, "Description may be of two kinds, both suited to either praise or vituperation. The first kind is of the exterior (*superficialis*), dealing with the

¹⁷ Sylvia Huot, *Dreams of Lovers and Lies of Poets: Poetry, Knowledge, and Desire in the Roman de la Rose* (Oxford: Legenda, 2010), 46.

¹⁸ Huot writes, "Techniques of exegesis enable us to access hidden meanings; but even these are still expressed symbolically, and articulated by means of human language. A closer approach to divine revelation may be made by turning inward, but even this contemplative approach cannot escape the need for a kind of reading or decoding. The image of God imprinted in the human soul is, itself, an internalized 'text': 'This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them' (Hebrews 10. 16)" (*Dreams of Lovers*, 47).

¹⁹ "Nunc cognosco ex parte: tunc autem cognoscam sicut et cognitus sum."

²⁰ Thus, Langland observes that "Grammer [is] the ground of al" (15.371). James J. Murphy writes, "For Augustine and other Christians [grammar] prepared the way to an understanding of Scripture...Every medieval writer on the subject acknowledges that grammar is the first of subjects" and "the gateway of all other sciences," including medicine (*Rhetoric in the Middle Ages: A History of Rhetorical Theory from Saint Augustine to the Renaissance* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974], 137-38).

beauty of the body or external appearance. The second kind deals with internal (*intrinseca*) attributes of a person.”²¹ In dream visions, descriptions of the body begin with the *superficialis*—external appearance and actions while awake—and move to the *intrinseca*—internal attributes as revealed within the narrator’s dreams. Because the dream vision narrator is a literary creation (even if he is a reflection of his creator), his body is in fact textual, making the practice of reading a body quite literal—as it is for Paul, and as it is in Revelation.

Another important literary device, intrinsic to the dream vision as a form, is the first-person narration. In the later Middle Ages, new theories of knowledge, such as that developed by William of Ockham, challenged previous questions of “objective” ontology and emphasized the importance of first-person, subjective experience.²² The “I” who describes the dream generates his own understanding of the vision based on the experience of his body, making the narrative highly subjective and personal.²³

²¹ Murphy, *Rhetoric*, 164.

²² Stephen Penn explains, “According to Ockham, the reality attributed to universals, whether as immanent properties of individuals or as archetypes *ante rem*, is purely fictional, the result of a process of *abstractive cognition*. This process is always secondary to that of *intuitive cognition*, the act of knowing and conceptualizing individual entities, which are then represented by *natural signs* in the mind. As concepts, universals *are themselves singulars*, leading Ockham to the conclusion that...every universal...is not a universal, except by signification, because it is a sign of many things” (“Literary Nominalism and Medieval Sign Theory: Problems and Perspectives,” in *Nominalism and Literary Discourse: New Perspectives*, ed. Hugo Keiper, Christoph Bode, and Richard J. Utz [Atlanta: Rodopi B.V., 1997], 159). Sarah Kay notes, “Putting emphasis instead on perception and the individual’s will to know insinuates the subject into the heart of philosophical inquiry, and has immediate and obvious implications for literature. It helps to explain...why poets should associate their thought with experiences of vision (including pictures and dreams, for example) as well as with formal patterns of language” (Sarah Kay, *The Place of Thought*, 13).

²³ Of course, by having the subject describe his or her own body, dream visions deviate from the advice of texts like the *Ars Versificatoria*, which instruct, “In giving descriptions, a person other than the person described should give it” (Murphy, *Rhetoric*, 164). Although the

Furthermore, the narrator often shares a name with the poet, which solidifies his corporeal presence further, even without biographically linking him to the author of the poem.²⁴ (These are, of course, characteristics of John's vision as well.²⁵)

Such a focus on the body, and the dreamer's subjectivity, usually reveals that the narrator is suffering from an illness, often linked to a sense of alienation or lack of self-knowledge.²⁶ Mary Carruthers notes that this is common in the visionary and monastic tradition: "Illness, anxiety, and restlessness are common mental states...from which the emotional stages of contemplation (which is an act of progressive vision) relieves one, or so one hopes," just as John was eased of his "tribulation" [Rev 1:9] in the course of his

physical descriptions provided in dream visions cannot be considered objective, their subjective nature reveals even more about the dreamer's psychological and physiological condition.

²⁴ This technique was probably first developed in *Le Roman de la Rose*. Stephanie Viereck Gibbs Kamath writes, "The *Rose* presents a dramatic development in creating a first-person narrator who acts diegetically not only as the poem's protagonist but also as an author" ("Naming the Pilgrim: Authorship and Allegory in Guillaume de Deguileville's *Pèlerinage de la vie humaine*," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 32 [2010]: 179-213, at 180-81). She adds, "On closer examination, what George Kane once described as a curious and ambiguous 'practice of signature' ultimately yields a vision of how late medieval writers conceived of vernacular authorship...An image of authorial identity takes shape within the mind of the reader exploring the conflicting elements of narration, and later writers reveal themselves as readers through their ability to signal their own identities through this same structural vehicle" (212-13, citing George Kane, "*Piers Plowman*": *The Evidence for Authorship* [London: Athlone Press, 1965], 53, 57).

²⁵ John's body is also at the center of the narrative: "I, John, your brother and your partner in tribulation, and in the kingdom, and patience in Christ Jesus, was in the island, which is called Patmos" [Ego Joannes frater vester, et particeps in tribulatione, et regno, et patientia in Christo Jesu: fui in insula, quae appellatur Patmos] (Rev. 1:9). Similarly, at the end of the vision, John reminds his readers that he witnessed these things himself and physically participated in the aforementioned events (Rev. 22:8). See Michael Camille, "Visionary Perception and Images of the Apocalypse in the Later Middle Ages," in *The Apocalypse in the Middle Ages*, ed. Richard K. Emmerson and Bernard McGinn [Ithaca: University of Cornell Press, 1992], 287-88.

²⁶ Noah Guynn writes, "Insofar as the Augustinian (and more generally medieval) subject is constituted discursively, subjectivity is also necessarily about self-alienation. A writer is always a secondary, deficient creator in that he is himself a finite, kinetic creation, one with a beginning and an end but no moment of stasis or pure consciousness in between" ("Authorship and Sexual/Allegorical Violence in Jeun de Meun's 'Roman de la rose,'" *Speculum* 79 (2004): 628-659, at 639). Guynn writes, "Instead of seeking to achieve self-presence, Augustine hopes to transcend the narrative of his life and to move toward higher truths, however imperfect his access to those truths may be" (639-40).

vision.²⁷ Indeed, most late medieval (English and French) dream visions depict their narrators as physically, mentally, or spiritually unwell and in need of healing.²⁸ (Often the dreamer's illness is presented as lovesickness, which was considered a type of mental illness.²⁹) The dreamer in Machaut's *Dit dou vergier* is "pleins d'amoureuse maladie" (19), and in *La fonteinne amoureuse*, he is terrified: "J'en os horreur et frëour" (76).³⁰ Chaucer's narrator in the *Book of the Duchess* is sick, melancholic, and unable to sleep, while the dreamer in his *Parliament of Fowls* is "fulfyld of thought and busy hevynesse" (89).³¹ Froissart's persona in his *Joli buisson de jonece* is despondent and pained, and the narrator of *Pearl* is grief-stricken—"a deuely dele in my hert denned" (51).³² Clanvowe in his *Boke of Cupide* is "slynn with the feveres white" (41) and also insomniac.³³ John Lydgate's narrator in *The Temple of Glass* is burdened with "grievous hevynesse" (1) and

²⁷ Mary Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought: Meditation, Rhetoric, and the Making of Images, 400-1200* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 174.

²⁸ James Simpson argues, "Authors in this period very often represent themselves not simply as deficient and debilitated in some way, but as taken over, possessed by a force whose power is pathological" ("The Power of Impropriety: Authorial Naming in *Piers Plowman*," in *William Langland's Piers Plowman: A Book of Essays*, ed. Kathleen M. Hewett-Smith [New York: Routledge, 2001], 150).

²⁹ See Mary Wack, *Lovesickness in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1989). Wack argues that, for medieval physicians, lovesickness was a real disease, a disorder of mind and body (149). See also Judith Neaman's *Suggestion of the Devil: Insanity in the Middle Ages and the Twentieth Century* (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1975), 20.

³⁰ Guillaume de Machaut, *The Fountain of Love (La fonteinne amoureuse) and Two Other Love Vision Poems*, ed. and trans. R. Barton Palmer (New York: Garland Publishing, 1993).

³¹ Larry Benson, ed., *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd edition (Boston: Oxford University Press, 1987).

³² Jean Froissart, *Le joli buisson de jonece*, ed. Anthime Fourrier (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1975); Malcolm Andrew and Ronald Waldron, ed. *Poems of the Pearl Manuscript* (Exeter: University of Exeter, 1999).

³³ John Clanvowe, *The Works of Sir John Clanvowe*, ed. V. J. Scattergood (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1975).

often “sore astonyed” (954).³⁴

The division evidenced in dream vision narrators often reflects the society in which the dreamer finds himself, so that the dream framework “reads the public outer world through the means of an intensely private inner world.”³⁵ Peter Brown states, “The dream vision’s liminality—its ability to convey a sense of fragmentation and failure of continuity between self and the outer world—allowed fourteenth-century writers in particular to frame responses to the tumultuous social, political, and religious conditions of their day.”³⁶ Common problems include social inequality, plague, hunger, inept (or greedy) doctors and priests, and even the threat of poisoning from spoiled foods. The dream visions in this dissertation confront these problems through bodily writing—a microcosmic solution with a macrocosmic application—which can set them and the societies in which they operate on the path to wholeness.³⁷

The Path to Wholeness: Treatment

While most dream visions document threats to the body, they also provide a solution by demonstrating the path to healing. John Lydgate’s narrator in the beginning of *A Complaynte of a Lovers Lyfe* laments that he is unable to find “socour of my smert” (19) or “summe relesse of my peyn / That me so sore halt in every veyn” (20-21).³⁸

³⁴ John Lydgate, *The Temple of Glass*, in *Fifteenth-Century English Dream Visions*, ed. Julia Boffey (New York: Oxford University, 2003).

³⁵ Brown, “On the Borders of Middle English Dream Visions,” in *Reading Dreams*, 44.

³⁶ Brown, “On the Borders,” 44.

³⁷ For example, the dream vision *Winner and Waster* (c.1352-53) focuses on the problems plaguing society (like famine) by focusing them through the lens of the dreamer’s body, which is necessarily affected. For a highly detailed analysis of the (nutritionally deficient) diet of the medieval peasant, see Kathy Pearson, “Nutrition and the Early-Medieval Diet,” *Speculum* 72 (1997): 1-32.

³⁸ John Lydgate, *A Complaynte of a Lovers Lyfe*, in *Chaucerian Dream Visions and*

However, in the poem he discovers a well in a garden, surrounded by pine, myrrh, cedar, ash, and oak trees (65-73), all of which have medicinal properties. This well refreshes his soul and body and, from a literary standpoint, establishes a theme of transformation. This theme harkens back to the Book of Revelation in which the reward awaiting faithful Christians is total healing and unmediated knowledge, unification and newness, by coming face to face with Christ and partaking of the healing leaves of the tree of life and the living water.³⁹

Bodily writing was a primary way for dream poets to work out their salvation and enact a self-directed return to wholeness, a literal rewriting of the poet's body that drew on spiritual, physical, and mental remedies in order to recover their self-knowledge.⁴⁰

Complaints, ed. Dana M. Symons (Kalamazoo: TEAMS, 2004), 71-111.

³⁹ "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes: and death shall be no more, nor mourning, nor crying, nor sorrow shall be any more, for the former things are passed away. And he that sat on the throne, said: Behold, I make all things new... And he said to me: It is done. I am Alpha and Omega; the beginning and the end. To him that thirsteth, I will give of the fountain of the water of life, freely" [Et absterget Deus omnem lacrimam ab oculis eorum: et mors ultra non erit, neque luctus, neque clamor, neque dolor erit ultra, quia prima abierunt. Et dixit qui sedebat in throno: Ecce nova facio omnia... Et dixit mihi: Factum est: ego sum alpha et omega, initium et finis. Ego sitienti dabo de fonte aquae vitae, gratis] (Rev. 21:3-6). Many medievals believed that all who endured to the end, by overcoming temptations and performing penance, would be saved. As Justine Rydzeski explains, "Whether one is saved or damned clearly depends on one's actions, for the sheep are rewarded for feeding the hungry, welcoming the stranger, clothing the naked, and visiting the sick and those in prison, while the goats are damned for neglecting such acts of charity" (*Radical Nostalgia in the Age of Piers Plowman: Economics, Apocalypticism, and Discontent* [New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1999], 18-19). Whether this salvation could truly be brought about by works and the result of exercising one's will, or if was already predetermined, was a matter of changing (institutional and individual) interpretation.

⁴⁰ Contemporary theories of phenomenology, in which bodily interactions lead to an attainment of self-awareness or self-consciousness, may help us better understand the medieval view of recovering (self-)knowledge. As in medieval thought, phenomenology sees no distinction between mind and body; rather, the body is simply engaged in action with things it perceives. It is the focus of everything a person does and everything that is done to that person. As one explores the world, his body is gradually revealed to him. For this reason, self-awareness is embodied and embedded in one's interactions with outside forces. Paul Ricoeur writes, "I can become aware of myself through the eyes of other people... Thus, embodiment brings intersubjectivity and sociality into the picture" (*Philosophie de la volonté. 1: Le volontaire et l'involontaire* [1950], 56-57). Like

The remainder of this chapter will examine these remedies (the “bodily” part of bodily writing) as well as the ways poets used their words to revise the medical constructs in which they operated and subsequently share their cure with their readers.

Spiritual Remedy

Pre-moderns understood that a sinful soul was a diseased soul, as Matthew 9 indicates: when the Pharisees asked, “Why doth your master eat with publicans and sinners?,” Jesus responded, “They that are in health need not a physician, but they that are ill” (Matt. 9: 11-12).⁴¹ For this reason, medieval theologians followed medical principles when prescribing penance, which they viewed as a type of remedy or medicine.⁴² George Christian Anderson argues, “As one reads the penitentials, it is

the descriptive act in the *Ars Versificatoria*—“In giving descriptions, a person other than the person described should give it”—the best way to discover the cause of illness and the path toward healing is by submitting one’s body to be read by other people. In dream visions, the act of “publication” makes the dreamer’s body public. As Patrick Gallacher puts it, “Eventually, the interplay between the voluntary and the involuntary that begins in my body matures and achieves fruition only with other persons in a community and in the pursuit of ultimate meaning” (“Chaucer and the Rhetoric of the Body,” *The Chaucer Review* 28 (1994): 216-36, at 217). This perspective is useful for considering the dreamers’ progress, which depends on his or her development of self-awareness, his acknowledgment of his own authority over his body, which grows as he interacts with both his own psyche (in the dream) and other characters around him.

⁴¹ “Et videntes pharisaei, dicebant discipulis ejus: Quare cum publicanis et peccatoribus manducat magister vester? / At Jesus audiens, ait: Non est opus valentibus medicus, sed male habentibus.”

⁴² George Christian Anderson, “Medieval Medicine for Sin,” *Journal of Religion and Health* 2 (1963): 156-165, at 156. Anderson acknowledges it is not clear whether the physician of souls was always a clergyman, but he probably was (157). Just as prescriptions for medicine varied according to a person’s physiology, the prescriptions for penance varied according to the person’s position and abilities. The *Old English Handbook* states, “And there must be severe penance as a remedy, although always according to rank and to the measure of guilt, according to the judgment of the canons. And also one must seek it (remedy) according to the abilities of the man, and to his rank, and to the penitence of his own heart. To one a year’s remedy, to one more than a year’s; to one a month’s remedy, to one more than a month’s; to one a week’s, to one more than a week’s, and then according to the measure of guilt; to some a day’s, to one more than a day’s; and to some a lifetime” (Cambridge, Corpus Christi College MS 201, p.121, D55.03.01). All references to the *Old English Handbook* and other penitential manuscripts come from *Anglo-*

evident that an individual who committed a sin was regarded as sick. The term ‘physician’ was generally applied to those who administered penance...The penalties were applied much more as a kind of medicine than punishment; they were referred to as ‘remedia,’ ‘medicamenta,’ or ‘formenta.’”⁴³ The *Old English Handbook*, a book of penance from the eleventh century, reads⁴⁴:

The need of a greatly sinful man is very dependent on a wise confessor, just as the healing of a sick man is (dependent) on a good physician...There must be severe penance as a remedy...The physician who must heal grievous wound well must have a good salve for that. Nor are there any wounds so evil as the wounds of sin, for through them a man perishes in eternal death unless through confession, cessation (from sin), and repentance he becomes healed. Then the physician who must heal the wounds ought to be wise and careful. One must first cure him through good teaching and with it do so that he vomits the poison that is within him...just as a man (vomits) poison through a good drink. No physician can cure well before that poison is (cast) out; nor can any man likewise prescribe penance

Saxon Penitentials: A Cultural Database by Allen J. Frantzen, <http://www.anglo-saxon.net/penance>.

⁴³ Anderson, “Medieval Medicine,” 157.

⁴⁴ The *Old English Handbook* Corpus 201 (hereafter OEH), of which there are six extant manuscripts, is the penitential I reference most frequently in this study (1) because of its relevant content, (2) because it is the latest of the Anglo-Saxon penitentials but still compiled before Lateran IV, which is important for the vernacular-minded, self-directing writers of the dream visions, and (3) because it would have been easy to reference. Frantzen notes, “The Old English Handbook is the latest and most fully developed Anglo-Saxon handbook of penance. It is a more complete guide for the confessor than any other vernacular penitential in England, although like them it does not appear to have been put into final form by its compiler...By far the shortest of the three vernacular texts, it would therefore have been the easiest to consult...The Old English Handbook contains only a fraction of the tariffs found in the other penitentials; unlike them it does not seem to have been intended as a compendium of penitential decisions but instead as a compact guide for the confessor” (“OE Handbook, Description and Index”).

well to him who does not wish to confess.⁴⁵

Penance, as the only means to heal the division created by sin, was a necessary step in the process towards (re)union, as documented in the Book of Revelation: when spiritual illness plagues John/ the reader, he is required to repent: “In like manner do penance: if not, I will come to thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth” [Similiter poenitentiam age: si quominus veniam tibi cito, et pugnabo cum illis in gladio oris mei] (2:16). In fact, John and the Church are instructed to do penance before the vision can proceed: “Be mindful therefore from whence thou art fallen: and do penance, and do the first works. Or else I come to thee, and will move thy candlestick out of its place, except thou do penance” (Rev. 2:5).⁴⁶

Even as a spiritual remedy, penance was rooted in the body: because the soul and body were considered integral parts of a single whole, illness in the soul created illness in the body, and physical activities could satisfy for spiritual transgressions.⁴⁷ Peregrine Horden, paraphrasing St. Basil, states, “The medicine of the body is a paradigm for the therapy of the soul. It is a model conceded to us by God. But that does not make the medicine of the soul a mere metaphor. It actually falls within the province of the ideal physician. Such a figure will be ambidextrous: he will not confine his art to healing the

⁴⁵ Frantzen, *Anglo-Saxon Penitentials*: OEH, Corpus 201, 121, D55.01.01-55.07.01. This passage demonstrates the importance of self-awareness in the healing process: the penitent person must want to confess and regain wholeness. Anderson observes, “Confession was considered to be a form of self-diagnosis of spiritual illness” (“Medieval Medicine,” 158).

⁴⁶ “Memor esto itaque unde excideris: et age poenitentiam, et prima opera fac: sin autem, venio tibi, et movebo candelabrum tuum de loco suo, nisi poenitentiam egeris.”

⁴⁷ Rosanne Gasse states, “The sacraments of baptism, penance, and the Eucharist have an essential function in the promotion of overall health, because the body and the soul are not dichotomous, but integral” (“The Practice of Medicine in ‘Piers Plowman,’” *The Chaucer Review* 39 [2004]: 177-97, at 181).

body but will seek also the cure of diseases of the soul.”⁴⁸

Many penitentials (under the practice of tariff penance) followed the humoral principle of contraries when assigning satisfaction.⁴⁹ The *Old English Handbook* states, “Let him watch and toil...that often before he slept and was sluggish...Let him suffer cold and a cold bath because of the heat of the sinful desire that he previously performed.”⁵⁰ However, the law of contraries could not govern penance fully, as certain types of punishment could satisfy for virtually any sin, whether of a contrary nature or not.⁵¹ Chief among these were fasting, prayer, and alms deeds, the three primary parts of satisfaction.

Fasting was prescribed for a wide range of sins, from relatively benign transgressions such as getting another person drunk or tasting blood to more serious offenses including adultery, sodomy, abortion, murder, witchcraft, and bestiality.⁵² Alan

⁴⁸ Peregrine Horden, “Religion as Medicine: Music in Medieval Hospitals” in *Religion and Medicine in the Middle Ages*, ed. Peter Biller and Joseph Ziegler (Rochester, NY: York Medieval Press, 2001), 145.

⁴⁹ Anderson writes, “The use of the law of opposites or contraries as medicine for sin is also seen in the many references to diet found in Penitentials. Apparently, it was known that certain foods or excesses of certain foods cause an imbalance in body chemistry. Some attempt was made to regulate behavior by balancing body chemistry through a change of diet. Many types of penance required that one abstain from fat, meat, beer, and wine” (“Medieval Medicine,” 160). In Passus 5 of *Piers Plowman*, Repentance follows this principle by assigning forms of penance that are directly contrary to the vice: Glutton is told to fast, Sloth is told to go to church, etc.

⁵⁰ Frantzen, *Anglo-Saxon Penitentials*: OEH, Corpus 201, p.123, D55.16.01.

⁵¹ Dream vision writers may have turned to pre-Lateran IV penitentials not only for their focus on a private relationship between God and the penitent, rather than a communal relationship, but because the transcendent role of fasting in tariff penance served as an appropriate metaphor for the way eating practices could provide alternatives to the mainstream construct of humoral contraries in medical explanations of bodily processes and dreaming.

⁵² For example, the *Old English Penitential* states, “If any woman deliberately destroys her child in herself with drink or murder it with anything, she is to fast for 7 years, 3 on bread and water and for 4 years (she is to fast) 3 days each week on bread and water and on the others partake of her food without meat” (Frantzen, *Anglo-Saxon Penitentials*, Oxford, Bodleian Library, Laud Misc. 482, p.16a, Y44.17.01) and “Whoever through deceit causes another to be

of Lille explains the power of fasting in his *Summa*:

Fast is medicine to soul and body. It preserves the body from disease, the soul from sin. About its medicinal effects, earthly and heavenly philosophy agree. If Adam had fasted in paradise..., he would not have been exiled into damnation. If Esau had fasted..., he would not have lost his birthright. If Noah had fasted..., he would not have lost his modesty. Therefore, through fasting the body is purged.⁵³

Fasting, as a medicine for both soul *and* body, was not dualistically motivated: its purpose was not to punish the body or free the spirit from its carnal prison. Rather, it represented an attempt to gain knowledge through proximity to God by means of one's own corporeality. Caroline Bynum explains, "Extravagant penitential practices [were] an effort to plumb and realize all the possibilities of the flesh...[and were] a profound expression of the doctrine of the Incarnation: the doctrine that Christ, by becoming human, saves all that the human being is."⁵⁴ Because the nature of things was located in matter, understanding and experiencing matter—knowing the body more fully in a state of hunger—allowed for the acquisition of truth. By opening the mind to another level of consciousness, fasting also encouraged visions, making it a useful mode of treatment for

drunk, he is to fast 40 days" (p.17b, Y44.30.01). The OEHD states, "If anyone fornicates with an animal, he is to fast fifteen years, eight on bread and water and for seven, each year, the three forty-day periods and on Wednesday and Friday as long as he live and repent his misdeed ever after" (Corpus 201, p.120, D54.33.01).

⁵³ Quoted in Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 44.

⁵⁴ Bynum, *Holy Feast*, 294.

dream poetry.⁵⁵

Increased consciousness was also encouraged by the second component of satisfaction, the proper recitation of prayers and psalms. Newman explains that religious practices that relied on visualization and recitation could produce visionary experiences and meditation on texts or images could lead to a vivid encounter with a divine or allegorical figure.⁵⁶ It is perhaps for this reason that rumination and recitation were frequently paired with fasting in the penitentials. The *Old English Handbook* states, “Let [the penitent person] everywhere earnestly obtain prayers of intercession by mass singing and psalm singing and, for his Lord's mercy, reprove himself very greatly with severe abstinence from food and drink and every bodily desire.”⁵⁷ Singing psalms and/or psalters was even interchangeable with fasting. For example, the *Old English Penitential* states, “If [a person] vomits because of illness, he is to fast seven days *or* sing the psalter

⁵⁵ Peter Brown argues that the dream threshold “offers a point of entry into new levels of perception otherwise inaccessible” (“On the Borders,” 36).

⁵⁶ Barbara Newman, *God and the Goddesses* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 29-30. She argues, “While most scholars today hold visions to be exceptional events, medieval visions were in some contexts not only encouraged but expected. We now know them to have been embedded in an elaborate nexus of religious practices, including the devotional use of images and the technique of visualization, that were by no means exceptional. A fuller list of these practices would include *lectio divina* with its complements of *oratio* and *meditatio*, or ‘rumination’ on a sacred text; contemplation of the paints in books and churches; frequent reading of visionary literature, including saints’ lives; fasting; lengthy vigils and interrupted sleep; and guided meditations on such themes as Christ’s Nativity and Passion and the life of the Virgin. The rosary, which combines an emotionally charged set of visualizations with recitation of a mantra, is the best known and most elaborate of such devotions. It would hardly be surprising if a nun or beguine, adept at spiritual exercises and gifted with a strong visual imagination, were to find the texts and images of her accustomed meditations ‘coming to life’ from time to time in the form of visionary experience... Conversely, however, the act of literary production might itself be the stimulus, and imaginative vision the response” (29-30).

⁵⁷ Frantzen, *Anglo-Saxon Penitentials*, OEH, Corpus 201, p. 122, D.55.14.01.

twice.”⁵⁸

The third main part of satisfaction was alms deeds, which implies a material service rendered to the poor for Christ’s sake. The *Handbook* states, “A man may redeem much with alms...[Let him] improve people’s journeys with bridges over deep water and over foul ways, and distribute earnestly what he has for God’s worship...And let him help poor man earnestly, and widows and stepchildren and all foreigners. Let him...feed the needy, and clothe, house, warm, bathe, and makes beds for them according to their own needs.”⁵⁹

Doing satisfaction for sin—by fasting, praying, and doing alms—had several important qualities. The first is that it was sometimes indeterminate. Ryan McDermott states,

Priests from at least the thirteenth century frequently imposed, in addition to a specific penance, this general penance as part of the absolution: “May whatever good you do and suffering you endure be for the remission of your sins”...If the penitent does more good beyond the penance, those works will avail for the remission of sins because the priest has endowed them with the expiatory power of the keys...This meant that when wisely applied, the three parts of penance did not constitute a closed sequence with a discrete beginning and end, confined to the parish church during obligatory annual shrift in Holy Week, but permeated all

⁵⁸ Frantzen, *Anglo-Saxon Penitentials, Old English Penitential*, Laud Misc. 482, p.18a, Y44.43.01

⁵⁹ Frantzen, *Anglo-Saxon Penitentials*, OEH, Corpus 201, p.122, D.55.13.01-55.14.01.

of life.⁶⁰

This lifelong, open-ended quality of satisfaction is indicated even in tariff penance: “If a lay person slays another without fault, he is to fast 7 years on bread and water and then 4 years as his confessor instructs him, and after those 7 years of repentance, *he is ever to repent his misdeeds diligently*, to the extent that he may; for it is unknown how acceptable his penance was to God.”⁶¹

Perhaps this is why the internal journey of dream visions is often framed as a pilgrimage that occurs as an allegory within the psyche or an extraterrestrial voyage. Peter Brown explains that pilgrimage signaled the alienation of the soul from God. He writes, “Pilgrimage and dream have complementary potentials: the one, pilgrimage, is ideally an exteriorized mysticism; the other, dream vision, may be an interiorized pilgrimage, with an urge to mirror and effect spiritual transformation through self-examination.”⁶² The prevalence of the pilgrimage motif may also be due to the Apocalyptic influence. Caroline Bynum and Paul Freedman explain that an Apocalyptic mindset necessarily meant that “human society was on pilgrimage, in transit (what Frank

⁶⁰ Ryan McDermott, “Practices of Satisfaction and Piers Plowman’s Dynamic Middle,” *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 36 (2014): 169-207, at 193-95. He argues that medievals “conceive[d] of sacramental and literary satisfaction not as the termination of a discrete penitential sequence (contrition, confession, satisfaction), but as an ongoing, open-ended habit of beginning again and making good ends” (172).

⁶¹ Frantzen, *Anglo-Saxon Penitentials*, OEH, Corpus 201, p.117, D54.05.01. My emphasis.

⁶² Peter Brown, “On the Borders,” 46-47. Susan Stakel argues, “Pilgrimage literature and dream visions have long been studied as separate, unrelated genres. Their superimposition... reveals the surprising but very basic similarity of the two forms” (Susan Stakel, “Structural Convergence of Pilgrimage and Dream-Vision in Christine de Pizan,” in *Journeys Toward God*, ed. Barbara N. Sargent-Baur [Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1992], 195). And Kathryn Lynch writes, “The frequent use in visionary poems of pilgrimage and exile as a motif seems to me to grow out of an awareness of this connection [between the liminality of pilgrimage and mysticism, both salvific journeys that initiate an individual into a deeper level of existence]” (*High Medieval Dream Vision*, 48).

Kermode calls the mid-dest).”⁶³ It is this middle state that sets the key for transformation, and the process is often cyclical and ongoing. Justine Rydzeski states, “The actual movement of a pilgrimage, that popular metaphor for one’s passage on earth, reinforced the circular paradigm as a means to final salvation. While pilgrims hoped to move straight toward salvation, they visited holy places and, barring death or detour, usually returned home. While the spiritual movement may have been linear, the physical movement was circular.”⁶⁴ The dream vision pilgrimage is more often about the process, or movement, than the destination. The experience that arises from the continual workings of the body and the exercise of individual will can result in greater self-knowledge and self-authority.⁶⁵

There is one final aspect of penance I wish to consider here, and that is the role of the penitent’s volition. The *Handbook* suggests that ongoing satisfaction can be monitored by the individual: “He who thus *continually condemns himself* fares harshly, but nevertheless he is happy if he *never soften* (this discipline) until he has fully repented.”⁶⁶ This practice suggests that by placing the responsibility for self-monitoring on the penitent’s own shoulders—he must determine both when he has sinned and when he has fully repented—by “condemn[ing] himself,” penance is necessarily self-prescribed.

Sarah Wood argues that there was a “laicizing” trend in the fourteenth and

⁶³ “Introduction,” *Last Things: Death and the Apocalypse in the Middle Ages*, ed. Caroline Walker Bynum and Paul Freedman (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 5.

⁶⁴ Justine Rydzeski, *Radical Nostalgia*, 14.

⁶⁵ Gallacher observes, “Autonomy can manifest itself only in conjunction with a corporeal dependence” (“Chaucer and the Rhetoric of the Body,” 217).

⁶⁶ Frantzen, *Anglo-Saxon Penitentials*, OEH, Corpus 201, p.122, D55.12.01.

fifteenth centuries that “frequently looked backwards to pre-Lateran IV, de-institutionalized ideas about penance.”⁶⁷ Because penitential texts were included in vernacular books of hours, they were widely available to a lay readership, even encouraged as aids to private repentance and produced in smaller sizes for individual reading.⁶⁸ Wood states, “To adapt the commonplace medical metaphor for penance, an interest was growing in alternative and self-help therapies; a desire emerged for the presentation of information on the basics of the faith within the context of a more individual and holistic approach to spiritual health.”⁶⁹ Thus, the inclusion of penance bolsters the self-directed aims of many dream visions and aids the dreamers on their path to wholeness.⁷⁰

Physical Remedy

Because the satisfaction of fasting, prayer, and almsgiving dictates what should and should not be eaten, and how the eating should be performed (ultimately culminating in permission to again partake of the Eucharist), penance naturally resonates with the discourse of ingestion also employed in medieval dream visions:⁷¹ in addition to treating

⁶⁷ Sarah Wood, *Conscience and the Composition of Piers Plowman* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 61.

⁶⁸ Wood, *Conscience*, 61. She observes, “The small size of many of the books...implies that they were produced for private reading, suggesting their association with private, individual forms of spirituality” (61, note 54).

⁶⁹ Wood, *Conscience*, 66.

⁷⁰ John’s cure too is rooted in his own efforts: “He that shall overcome shall possess these things” [Qui vicerit, possidebit haec] (Rev. 21:7). It is given to every person to choose for himself the path he will follow: “And he that will, let him take the water of life, freely” [Et qui sitit, veniat: et qui vult, accipiat aquam vitae, gratis] (Rev. 22: 17). Dream poets follow this same model, keeping in mind that healing is ultimately made possible through the Word. “And he was clothed with a garment sprinkled with blood; and his name is called, the Word of God” [Et vestitus erat veste aspersa sanguine: et vocatur nomen ejus: Verbum Dei] (Rev. 19:13).

⁷¹ In addition to prescribing fasting for almost every conceivable type of sin, the books of penance also dictate the proper consumption of the Eucharist and detail foods that are to be

the spiritual condition of the dreamer, late medieval dream visions address physical complaints, usually by stimulating the senses and bodily processes (most popularly, the digestive system). Consequently, many medieval dream visions rely on a trope of ingestion for administering the dreamer's "treatment."

Food played a crucial role in medieval life, particularly in the contexts of medicine and religion.⁷² Pre-moderns wholeheartedly believed the maxim "you are what you eat."⁷³ Sometimes the food the dreamer consumes is a symbol of a medicine or remedy, like the apple Venus offers the lovesick knight in *Fonteinne*. Often, it is a fountain or spring with transformative properties.

This practice is also found in Revelation. At multiple times in John's vision he is instructed to eat of certain foods, including the text itself.⁷⁴ "And I went to the angel,

avoided. Allen Frantzen notes in his index on Food, "To include every reference to fasting would be to include virtually all of some texts in this index" (*Anglo-Saxon Penitentials*). These unclean foods include carrion, blood, food intended for witchcraft or devil worship, food that has been seized, semen, scabs, worms, urine, feces, anything eaten by a dog or mouse or weasel, animals torn by wolves or dogs, and birds or other animals strangled in nets.

⁷² Medicine was primarily food. From Antiquity through the Renaissance, the various humors of virtually every known edible substance were carefully catalogued so that the correct food, herb, or drug could be recommended for treatment. These analyses were recorded in health manuals, herbal treatises, and even collections of recipes (Terence Scully, "A Cook's Therapeutic Use of Garden Herbs," in *Health and Healing from the Medieval Garden*, ed. Peter Dendle and Alain Touwaide [Rochester: Boydell Press, 2008], 63). Peter Murray Jones concurs, "Medical literature of the Middle Ages is eloquent on the virtues of herbs. Herbals, recipe books, and manuals on medical therapy can tell us what herbs, singly or in combination, were prescribed for a particular illness or complaint" (Peter Murray Jones, "Herbs and the Medieval Surgeon," in *Health and Healing*, 162).

⁷³ Joyce Salisbury, *The Beast Within: Animals in the Middle Ages*, 2nd edition (New York: Routledge, 2011), 46. Martha Calin and Joel Rosenthal write, "'You are what you eat' was a good deal more than a cliché... Personality, gender distinctions, and the line between purity and impurity could be traced, to some extent, by a study of consumption patterns and predilections" (*Food and Eating in Medieval Europe* [Rio Grande, Ohio: Hambledon Press, 1998], xi).

⁷⁴ A similar process is recorded in the Old Testament in Jeremiah: 15:16—"Thy words were found, and I did eat them, and thy word was to me a joy and gladness of my heart: for thy name is called upon me, O Lord God of hosts" [Inventi sunt sermones tui, et comedi eos: et

saying unto him, that he should give me the book. And he said to me: Take the book, and eat it up: and it shall make thy belly bitter, but in thy mouth it shall be sweet as honey. / And I took the book from the hand of the angel, and ate it up: and it was in my mouth, sweet as honey: and when I had eaten it, my belly was bitter” (Rev. 10:9-10).⁷⁵ Food and words unite again when the Lord promises to his faithful followers “hidden manna” [manna absconditum] and “a new name written” [nomen novum scriptum] (Rev. 2:17). He further invites his people to dine with him (Rev. 3:20) and to join him at the marriage supper of the Lamb (Rev. 19:9).⁷⁶ Finally, in the celestial kingdom, the tree of life contains leaves “for the healing of the nations” [ad sanitatem gentium] (Rev. 22.2).

Medieval readers understood the power of food to transform, especially since they regularly partook of bread believed to be the *physical body* of Christ. Caroline Bynum explains that Christians “received their God most intimately in that holy meal in which he became bread and wine.”⁷⁷ Eating the body of God, particularly as the culmination of

factum est mihi verbum tuum in gaudium et in laetitiam cordis mei, quoniam invocatum est nomen tuum super me, Domine Deus exercituum]—and Ezekiel: “And he said to me: Son of man, eat all that thou shalt find: eat this book, and go speak to the children of Israel. / And I opened my mouth, and he caused me to eat that book: / And he said to me: Son of man, thy belly shall eat, and thy bowels shall be filled with this book, which I give thee. And I did eat it: and it was sweet as honey in my mouth. / And he said to me: Son of man, go to the house of Israel, and thou shalt speak my words to them” [Et dixit ad me: Fili hominis, quodcumque inveneris, comede: comede volumen istud, et vadens loquere ad filios Israel. / Et aperui os meum, et cibavit me volumine illo: / Et dixit ad me: Fili hominis, venter tuus comedet, et viscera tua complebuntur volumine isto quod ego do tibi. Et comedi illud, et factum est in ore meo sicut mel dulce. / Et dixit ad me: Fili hominis, vade ad domum Israel, et loqueris verba mea ad eos] (3:1-4).

⁷⁵ “Et abii ad angelum, dicens ei, ut daret mihi librum. Et dixit mihi: Accipe librum, et devora illum: et faciet amaricari ventrem tuum, sed in ore tuo erit dulce tamquam mel. / Et accipi librum de manu angeli, et devoravi illum: et erat in ore meo tamquam mel dulce, et cum devorassem eum, amaricatus est venter meus.”

⁷⁶ Nicholas of Lyra interprets the supper to mean “the comprehension of the sacrament of the eucharist through faith formed by love” (*Nicholas of Lyra’s Apocalypse Commentary*, 206).

⁷⁷ Caroline Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 31. She notes that medievals did not simply eat Christ; they were also eaten by Him. This is key to the process of transformation.

penance, enacted a metaphysical transformation, a holistic form of healing permeating both body and soul. Ann Astell notes, “Through a complex interaction of the physical and spiritual senses, eucharistic eating suggested...that the exercise of the spiritual senses could in fact alter the physical ones...Christ’s glorified body and soul, received in the Eucharist, were believed to nourish this human capacity for transfiguration and to guarantee its fulfillment in the life to come.”⁷⁸ Literally partaking of Christ’s body and blood was understood to enable healing and change, from forgiveness of sin to the bestowal of ecstatic visions.⁷⁹ Bynum writes that as the Middle Ages progressed,

Abstinence [fasting] was seen less as self-control, offered to God in propitiation for Adam’s sin of greed and disobedience, than as a never-sated physical hunger that mirrors and recapitulates in bodily agony both Christ’s suffering on the cross and the world’s unquenchable thirst for mystical union. The bread of heaven...was replaced in late medieval hymns, poems, and paintings by the flesh

“Augustine of Hippo (d. 430) and Hilary of Poitiers (d. 367) had said that we are all present in the sacrifice and Resurrection of the cross, that Christ, in dying, digests and assimilates us, making us new flesh in his flesh” (31).

⁷⁸ Ann W. Astell, *Eating Beauty: The Eucharist and the Spiritual Arts of the Middle Ages* (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 2006), 4. She writes, “To see the consecrated Host for what it was—Christ—was to see it with the eyes of faith; to hear, to smell, to taste, and ultimately to touch Christ and be touched by Him. At the base of all the physical senses, touch was paradoxically at the pinnacle of the spiritual senses in the view of medieval mystics... ‘a knowing and an intimacy without mediation’ that marked and effected... ‘a complete transformation of the will in love’” (4).

⁷⁹ Scholars have observed that Eucharistic consumption was often coupled with fasting—two food practices that, for the medieval person steeped in culturally significant rituals, could enact dramatic changes and even invoke visions that united one with God. Bynum writes, “In an atmosphere where confessors and religious superiors controlled access to the eucharist and stressed scrupulous and awe-filled preparation, recipients naturally approached the elements in a spiritually and psychologically heightened state. When, after mumbling inaudibly, the priest suddenly and to the accompaniment of incense and bells raised on high a thin, shimmering wafer of unleavened bread embossed with the image of Christ, it is small wonder that the pious sometimes ‘saw’ Jesus” (*Holy Feast*, 60). See also Barbara Newman, *God and the Goddesses*, 29.

of Christ, ripped open and spilling forth pulsating streams of insistent, scarlet blood, to wash and feed the individual hungry soul.⁸⁰

Writers and readers of medieval dream visions, then, would have been acutely aware of the role that food could play in visionary experiences and intense understandings of physicality.

The relationship between food and vision is not limited to Judeo-Christianity. Indeed, the sacred meal features in almost all religions and is derived from an even older metaphysical belief system about eating and dreaming.⁸¹ By adopting the sacred meal into their narrative, then, dream poets participate in a larger tradition of spiritual communion with the divine. In so doing, they assert that certain types of food and drink might alter the dreamer's consciousness in more substantial—and spiritual—ways than the materialist model of the humors allowed, particularly within a visionary context. When the transformative nature of food was combined with the concept of penance, it became immediately relatable and even more potent. Incorporated into poetry, it made

⁸⁰ Bynum, *Holy Feast*, 33. James of Vitry explains that the only remedy for Mary of Oignies was “the manna of celestial bread... The holy bread strengthened her heart; the holy wine inebriated her, rejoicing her mind; the holy body fattened her; the vitalizing blood purified her by washing. And she could not bear to abstain from such solace for long. For it was the same to her to live as to eat the body of Christ” (*Holy Feast*, 59).

⁸¹ See Richard Reitzenstein, *Hellenistic Mystery-Religions: Their Basic Ideas and Significance* (Pickwick Press, 1978). In many cultures, sacred (often hallucinogenic) foods, called entheogens, were ingested explicitly in order to prompt a vision. Archeologist John Marco Allegro has argued that the roots of Christianity lay in fertility cults and that the ingestion of visionary plants persisted into the early Christian era. He interpreted the Plaincourault Chapel's famous fresco of the tree of life to be a depiction of the ritual ingestion of *Amanita muscaria* as the Eucharist. See John Marco Allegro, *The Sacred Mushroom and the Cross: A Study of the Nature and Origins of Christianity within the Fertility Cults of the Ancient Far East* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Co., 1970). This image does in fact bear a striking resemblance to the mushroom-like illustrations of the tree of life found in Apocalypse manuscripts like the “Douce Apocalypse.” See Nigel Morgan, *The Douce Apocalypse: Picturing the End of the World in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Bodleian Library, 2007), 100.

writing a truly bodily affair.

Mental Remedy

Metaphors of ingestion were also useful for facilitating treatment on a mental level.⁸² Boethius famously used this type of metaphor in his *Consolation of Philosophy* when Lady Philosophy tells his persona that although as a youth he was “fed with the milk and reared upon the nourishment which was [hers] to give,” he has since been led into false paths.⁸³ She proposes to stimulate his memory by giving him a “draught, soft and pleasant to the taste, which, as it penetrates within, may prepare the way for stronger potions.”⁸⁴ Julie Singer observes, “In later medieval readings of the *Consolation* the doctor-patient metaphor has become one of the prosimetrum’s most salient features.”⁸⁵ The literal, medical aspect of the metaphor seemed to appeal to medieval writers; Sarah Kay notes that medieval rewritings of the *Consolatio* tend to offer a form of consolation that is “more physical,” making “more concessions to the here and now of the embodied individual.”⁸⁶ The physical nature of this treatment is important because even though the

⁸² Mary Carruthers writes, “Commentary on the two moments in Scripture (Ezekiel 3:3 and Revelation 10: 9-11) in which a prophet is given a book to eat that is as sweet as honey in the mouth underlines the need to consume one’s reading. ‘Therefore we devour and digest the book, when we read the words of God,’ says Hugh of Fouillois in the twelfth century. ‘Many indeed read, but from their reading they remain ignorant...others devour and digest the holy books but are not ignorant because their memory does not let go of the rules for life whose meaning it can grasp’” (*Book of Memory*, 209).

⁸³ Citation taken from *Consolation of Philosophy*, trans. Philip Ridpath (London: C. Dilly, 1785), 11.

⁸⁴ *Consolation*, 44.

⁸⁵ Singer, *Blindness and Therapy*, 117. Singer adds, “The fact that Philosophy’s therapy begins with a metaphor is also of considerable significance insofar as it signals a type of textual healing that will become more pronounced in medieval adaptations of the Boethian work...The *Consolatio*’s more physical, medical metaphor fits neatly with a late medieval penchant for medicalized language and for metaphor pertaining to the body” (116-17).

⁸⁶ Sarah Kay, “Touching Singularity: Melancholy and Consolation in the Medieval French *dit*,” in *The Erotics of Consolation: Desire and Distance in the Middle Ages*, ed. Catherine

“medicine” functions on a metaphorical and thus psychological level, it is literally intended to activate a physical faculty housed in the brain, and mental acts like the work of memory were not regarded as distinct from physiological processes.⁸⁷ The food (proper philosophy) offered to Boethius is thus intended to remind him who he really is by *feeding* his memory.⁸⁸

In the Middle Ages, the faculty of memory was crucial to the production of proper knowledge because, as we discussed earlier, the senses had the potential to be corrupted or deceived.⁸⁹ Memory could pair physical experiences with experiences gleaned from

Léglu and Stephen Milner (Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 36, quoted in Singer, *Blindness and Therapy*, 117.

⁸⁷ Carruthers states, “It is the spatial, somatic nature of memory-images that allows for secure recollective associations to be formed...Recollection is like reasoning: Thomas Aquinas says that human beings not only have memory as animals do, as a spontaneous remembrance of things past, but they also have it in a particularly human way, as reminiscence, ‘a quasi-syllogistic search among memories of things past in their individuality.’ But because it is also a physiological process, recollection is subject to training and habituation in the manner of all physical activity” (*The Craft of Thought*, 63-64).

⁸⁸ It should be noted that many medieval commentators drew on Boethius when (figuratively) interpreting Revelation. Nicholas of Lyra quotes from the *Consolatio* Book 3, 9 when he states, “As Boethius writes in the *Consolation*, ‘From the heavenly pattern you draw out all things bearing the world in your mind and forming it in the same likeness’” (*Nicholas of Lyra’s Apocalypse Commentary*, 150). Nicholas also finds John’s ingestive metaphors to be allegorical. He writes, “Concerning the first one should say that the refreshment of the saints is not understood by us, unless by a corporeal image. Moreover, for refreshment two things are needed, namely, food and drink” (231). He then explains that spiritual foods are described with corporeal language to increase the reader’s comprehension. For example, manna was “given corporeally to the children of Israel in the desert (Ex 16), but the true manna is he himself, who says in Jn 6, ‘Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven.’ And it is added, ‘I am the bread of Life.’ This is the heavenly manna that refreshes the saints inside and outside” (50). Consequently, Nicholas sees the scroll that John eats as representing visionary knowledge (74) rather than a literal book. Later dream vision writers, however, embraced the corporeal vehicle of these metaphors as well as the tenor in order to treat both body and soul.

⁸⁹ The Middle Ages exhibits a profound interest in the debate between reason and sensuality (the capacity for physical sensation). As Chaucer’s parson in *The Canterbury Tales* states, “For it is sooth that God, and resoun, and sensualitee, and the body of man been so ordeyned that everich of thise foure thynges sholde have lordship over that oother...And why? For sensualitee rebelleth thanne agayns resoun, and by that way leseth resoun the lordship over

books in order to correct erroneous information. Because dreams were produced by the imagination, which was fed directly by the *sensus communis*, rather than the memory, they were considered unreliable.⁹⁰ This is why in many dream visions, the poetic persona is encouraged to feast on texts. Entering the dream allows for a fuller diagnosis, but one must feed the memory by reading correct materials, which can counteract faulty information and facilitate the acquisition of self-knowledge.⁹¹

Reading activates the memory because learning was considered to be a remembering, or recognition.⁹² Plato argued that we are able to recognize goodness and truth because we have seen it before (*anamnesis*). Similarly, Augustine, in his *Confessions*, states that it would be impossible for him to recognize God if a memory of Him were not already imprinted in his soul: “If I now find thee not by my memory, then

sensualitee, and over the body...so is both sensualitee rebel to resoun and the body also” (10.260-65). For another example, see John Lydgate’s *Assembly of Gods: The Accord of Reason and Sensuality in the Fear of Death*. Penelope Billings Reed Doob writes, “Ideally, all man’s actions should be ruled by reason; to the extent that he departs from reason and its judgments of what is good, man is mad (seen psychologically) and sinful (seen morally)” (*Nebuchadnezzar’s Children: Conventions of Madness in Medieval Literature* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974], 8).

⁹⁰ Avicenna states, “Imagination turns itself toward a thing’s likeness as if toward the thing itself. This likeness is called an image or phantasm. It receives it from the common sense and preserves it even in the thing’s absence...The common sense receives a form but does not preserve it, whereas imagination receives and preserves all sensible forms. This same power is called the formative, with regard to the formations that are produced in dreams. Things within dreams seem to be present, however, because forms are made to come back to the common sense” (Robert Pasnau, ed., *Cambridge Translations of Medieval Philosophical Texts, Volume Three: Mind and Body* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002], 27-28).

⁹¹ Carruthers explains, “What we see in a text is not rules for what we *ought* to be, but images of what we *are*, ‘our own beauty, our own ugliness.’ It is this which enables us to make these texts our own. We read rhetorically, memory makes our reading into our own ethical equipment (‘stamps our character’), and we express that character in situations that are also rhetorical in nature, in the expressive gestures and performances which we construct from our remembered experience, and which, in turn, are intended to impress and give value to others’ memories of a particular occasion” (*Book of Memory*, 226). According to Isidore, “Writing [too] is an activity of remembering, as remembering is writing on the tables of the mind” (139).

⁹² Carruthers argues that a medieval person’s formulation of “selfhood” was a function of memory. “Instead of the word ‘self’ or even ‘individual,’ we might better speak of a ‘subject-who-remembers,’ and in remembering also feels and thinks and judges” (*Book of Memory*, 226).

am I undmindful of thee: and how shall I find thee if I do not remember thee?”⁹³ Signs, including text, stirred one’s past memories of experience in order to bring something present to the mind.⁹⁴ By activating the memory, then, usually through proper reading and writing, one could restore wholeness to a divided body. Such perspectives espouse a realist position (as opposed to a nominalist position), namely that truth exists independent of individual thought, not as a result of it, and that in mankind’s postlapsarian state, we have merely forgotten Truth.⁹⁵ For Augustine and other similarly minded writers, reading about pre-existing universal truths leads to knowledge.

For this reason, Macrobius, summarizing Plato in his *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*, uses a digestive metaphor to explain how division can be healed through reading:

Souls, whether of the world or of the individual, will be found to be now acquainted with division...Now if souls were to bring with them to their bodies a

⁹³ Quoted in Sylvia Huot, *Dreams of Lovers*, 45.

⁹⁴ Carruthers explains, “Human understanding occurs in an occasional setting; it is not universally and eternally fixed. By their very nature signs are sensible, practical, worldly, belong to the traditional realm of rhetoric and must be understood within its procedures, most particularly the process of decorum, of fitting a word to a thing in terms that an audience will understand...Because it recalls signs, reminiscence is an act of interpretation, inference, investigation, and reconstruction, an act like reading” (*Book of Memory* 29). Carruthers notes that books, too, were memorial cues and aids (memory itself was viewed as not unlike a book, a medium upon which something was to be written), and ideas written in the memory were to be actively thought about and processed, not left alone (18).

⁹⁵ Hugo Keiper explains, “Especially in scholastic philosophy, someone who holds the ‘view that universals [...] have a real substantial existence, independently of being thought’, is called a realist, while a nominalist holds ‘that universals have no existence independently of being thought and are mere names, representing nothing that really exists’” (“A Literary ‘Debate over Universals’? New Perspectives on the Relationships between Nominalism, Realism, and Literary Discourse,” in *Nominalism and Literary Discourse: New Perspectives*, ed. Hugo Keiper, Christopher Bode, and Richard J. Utz [Amsterdam: Rodopi B.V., 1997], 5). Conceptualists hold an intermediate position, namely that universals have reality as categorical concepts within the mind.

memory of the divine order of which they were conscious in the sky, there would be no disagreement among men in regard to divinity; but, indeed, all of them in their descent drank of forgetfulness, some more, some less... Truth is more accessible to those who drank less of forgetfulness because they more easily recall what they previously knew above. That is why in Greek the word for reading means “knowledge regained”: when we are learning the truth we are relearning those things that we naturally knew before the influx of matter intoxicated our souls as they approached their bodies. Moreover, this is the matter which, imprinted with ideas, has fashioned the whole mass of the universe that we see everywhere about us. The highest and purest part of it, upon which the heavenly realm depends for sustenance and existence, is called nectar and is believed to be the drink of the gods, whereas the lower and more turbid portion is believed to be the drink of souls; this is what the ancients meant by the river Lethe.⁹⁶

Reading—whether from a literal book, or the Book of Nature—allows people to heal, just

⁹⁶ William Harris Stahl, trans., *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio by Macrobius* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 135. Macrobius is quoting Plato’s *Timeaus* and *Phaedo*. Nectar as a symbol of divine knowledge is not accidental. The Ancient Greeks believed that certain foods (ambrosia and nectar) could make one a god. Andrew Dalby explains, “Ambrosia was the food of the gods and of their horses, and nektar was their drink...it was precisely this nourishment that guaranteed their immortality and set them apart from human beings” (*Food in the Ancient World From A to Z* [New York: Routledge, 2003], 7). In the *Iliad*, Homer suggests that the food one eats is directly connected to one’s mortality or immortality, for immortal food creates immortal blood, or *ichor* (5.339342). Although ambrosia and nectar were not available to mortal Greeks, classical Greek ethnography does raise the possibility of diets that approach that of the gods. For example, the Eleusinian Mysteries, the initiation ceremony for the cult of Demeter and Persephone, involved the use of kykeon, which translates to mean ambrosia (Carl Kerényi, *Eleusis: Archetypal Image of Mother and Daughter*, trans. Ralph Manheim [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967], 40). Men were also able to share food with the gods during religious ceremonies. Helen King writes, “In ancient Greece, meals are shared with the gods, with parts being set aside for them... Sacrifice brings men and gods together, uniting them in the act of consumption” (“Food as Symbol in Ancient Greece,” *History Today* 36 [1986], <http://www.historytoday.com/helen-king/food-symbol-classical-greece>).

like medicine does, so that they can recover their lost (self-)knowledge.

The physical, digestive nature of memory work permeated all aspects of medieval literary life so that, like Macrobius, many writers naturally described reading (nourishment of the mind) in terms of bodily processes, such as ingestion.⁹⁷ Nicolette Zeeman explains, “The devotional literature of the Middle Ages uses the figure of ‘taste’ to describe understanding which it considers to be not only cognitive but also affective and experiential; as a result of a pun on the Latin nouns *sapor*, ‘taste,’ and *sapientia*, ‘wisdom,’ this is ‘sapiential’ understanding.”⁹⁸ Wisdom, or knowledge, could be “eaten,” and just like food, texts could enact a literal, physiological change within a person. Carruthers states, “Reading is to be digested, to be ruminated, like a cow chewing her cud...The process familiarizes a text to a medieval scholar, in a way like that by which human beings may be said to “familiarize” their food. It is both physiological and psychological, and it changes both the food and its consumer.”⁹⁹

⁹⁷ Because of the prevalence of these metaphors, Carruthers argues, “‘Digestion’ should be considered another basic functional model for the complementary activities of reading and composition, collection and recollection” (*The Book of Memory*, 207).

⁹⁸ Nicolette Zeeman, *Piers Plowman and the Medieval Discourse of Desire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 2.

⁹⁹ Carruthers, *Book of Memory*, 206. “*Ruminatio* is an image of regurgitation, quite literally intended; the memory is a stomach, the stored texts are the sweet-smelling cud originally drawn from the meadows of books (or lecture), they are chewed in the palate. Gregory the Great says that in Scripture ‘*venter mens dicitur*,’ thereby adding *venter* to *cor* as a synonym for memory in Scripture. Six centuries later, Hugh of St. Victor, discussing *memoria* in *Didascalicon*, says that it is imperative to replicate frequently the matter one has memorized and placed in the ‘*arcula*’ of one’s memory, and ‘to recall it from the stomach of memory to the palate. Composition is also spoken of as *ruminatio*...[An] example, the most famous of all, is in Bede’s account of the English poet, Caedmon, who changed what he learned by hearing in *lectio*, or sermons, into sweetest poetry by recollecting it within himself (‘*rememorandum rerum*’) and ruminating like a clean animal (‘*quasi mundum animal ruminendo*’). Caedmon’s ruminatio occurs at night, the optimal time for such activity; the fact that he was a cowherd may be coincidental to the story, but Bede emphasizes it so much that one suspects he thought the detail significant” (206). She observes, “The monastic custom of reading during meals is described in

Because a text impresses itself upon the body's faculties, it can shape one's mental and even physical health. In the words of Hugh of St. Victor, a twelfth-century theologian, "what we read is transformed into our very selves." He explains,

First, one focuses on the example, next one acts in imitation of it, and then one internalizes the imitation so that one's own vital power (*virus*) is permanently changed. The moment such a change occurs is the moment of desire, and, with it, of will. It is also the moment during which the full process of meditative study is completed; when, in Gregory the Great's words, what we read is transformed into our very selves, a mirror of our own beauty or ugliness, for we have, like Ezekiel [or John], eaten the book.¹⁰⁰

The change enacted by texts, then, is a byproduct of the will. A person's vital power can only be transformed if the participant is willing, if she desires to change. Dream poets demonstrate this desire by pursuing bodily writing—a self-initiated therapy that views writing, like reading, as an extension of the body, capable of producing change.¹⁰¹

some texts as an explicit literalizing of the metaphor of consuming a book as one consumes food" (208).

¹⁰⁰ Carruthers, *Book of Memory*, 231.

¹⁰¹ Claire Le Brun-Gouanvic explains that writing, like reading, was also considered a medicinal food and/or healing drink. See Claire le Brun-Gouanvic, "L'écriture médecine: une relecture de l'*Avison Christine* (1405)," in *Dans les miroirs de l'écriture. La Réflexivité chez les femmes écrivains d'Ancien Régime*, ed. Jean-Philippe Beaulieu and Diane Desroisiers-Bonin (Montreal: University of Montreal, 1998), 20. Carruthers notes, "Merely to store memory by reading is an incomplete process without composition, for composing is the ruminative, 'digesting' process, the means by which reading is domesticated to ourselves" (*Book of Memory*, 238). As Seneca wrote, "The food we have eaten, so long as it retains its original character and floats in our stomachs as a mass, is a burden; it passes into tissue and blood only when it has been changed from its original form. So it is with the food which nourishes our mind... We must digest it; otherwise it will only come into our acquired memory-store [*memoria*] and not pass on to become part of our own abilities [*ingenium*]" (238). This is illustrated in Bede's account of the poet Caedmon, who converted what he heard in *lectio* into poetry by recollecting it within himself and ruminating like the cows he tended. See *Book of Memory*, 207.

Transformative Writing

Just as John ate the scroll and recorded the word of God—“What thou seest, write in a book” [Quod vides, scribe in libro] (Rev. 1:11)—dream vision writers emphasized the importance of writing for enacting transformation. Julie Singer observes that in medieval texts, “writing can both literally and physically shape the body” and a “verbal body might respond to varied [literary] theories.”¹⁰² She argues that late medieval lyricists in fact used language to reshape the body and heal impairments.¹⁰³ Similarly, a large number of late medieval dream visions feature poetic personae who are impaired physically, mentally, and/or spiritually, whom the poem then attempts to heal through various rhetorical strategies, including (personification) allegory, wordplay, and poetic form.

Many dream visions utilize allegory, particularly personification allegory. In this mode, the dreamer abstracts elements from his or her waking experience, which become

¹⁰² Julie Singer, *Blindness and Therapy*, 214. She writes, “Manipulating their characters’ eyesight by means of irony, metaphor, metonymy, and synecdoche, late medieval poets suggest that words can succeed where cutting-edge medical interventions cannot. Their blind poetic subjects, though (paradoxically) unable to look, nonetheless reinforce the paranomastic interplay of the *mire* and the *miroir*: how we look at ourselves *is* how we heal ourselves” (*Blindness and Therapy*, 21).

¹⁰³ Singer, *Blindness and Therapy*, 2. “More than they cite or incorporate scientific knowledge (a procedure we see in the writings of Chrétien de Troyes, Jean de Meun, and even Dante Alighieri), late medieval lyricists construct an *alternative* rhetorical system that embodies the written (poetic) word by using rhetorical constructs to supplement or ‘heal’ impaired bodies. Thus, while later medieval lyricists owe much to their predecessors—the troubadours, the Sicilians and, especially in France, the *Roman de la Rose*—their use of language to reshape the human body signals a new, differently embodied sort of ‘medicalization’ from the turn of the fourteenth through the middle of the fifteenth century. This is a turn that we first observe in Italy, among the poets of the *dolce stil novo*, and that flourishes in the hands of its two greatest practitioners, Petrarch and Guillaume de Machaut” (2).

the “dramatis personae of the mind’s study.”¹⁰⁴ They interact with the dreamer’s faculties, which are also personified, so that the dreamer, in conversation with these characters, learns how to navigate physical experience and take charge of his whole personhood.¹⁰⁵ (Thus, in *Le Roman de la Rose* the dreamer encounters figures such as Reason, Nature, Jealousy, and Friend.) Traditionally, allegory was used to “ensure the spiritualizing of the things of sense, to bring [one’s] dreamer, and reader, to the point of spiritual revelation and renewal through the recuperative therapy of orthodox allegorical interpretation.”¹⁰⁶ Such use of allegory was consistent with the aims of early dream visions, which sought to abstract material images in the search for divine truths: allegory—and its partner forms tropology, anagogy, etc.—directed one’s attention beyond earthly

¹⁰⁴ Russell Peck, “Chaucer and the Nominalist Question,” *Speculum* 53 (1978): 745-60, at 747. William of Ockham taught that knowledge was acquired in two stages: (1) the perception of experience, or intuitive cognition, and (2) the abstraction of that experience, or abstractive cognition. Thus, this process of abstraction enables the acquisition of knowledge. James Simpson argues, “The phenomenal world can be grasped only in conceptual terms, terms that recognize the presence and impersonal force of systems that drive individual action” (“The Power of Impropriety,” 149).

¹⁰⁵ Shaun Gallagher and Dan Zahavi write, “Bodily self-awareness is not an awareness of the body in isolation from the world; it is embedded in action and perception... The body attains self-awareness in action when it moves through the world” (“Phenomenological Approaches to Self-Consciousness,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* [Winter 2005, revised Fall 2010], <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/self-consciousness-phenomenological/#BodSelAwa>). See also Edmund Husserl, *Ding und Raum: Vorlesungen 1907* (Nijhoff, 1973). However, as Gallagher and Zahavi explain, “Bodily self-awareness, like self-consciousness more generally, has limitations. I am never fully aware of everything that is going on with my body. Indeed, my body tends to efface itself as I perceive and act in the world.” By featuring worldly exploration within the actual body of the dreamer, such effacement is prevented. The body *is* the world.

¹⁰⁶ Kathleen M. Hewett-Smith, “‘Nede ne hath no lawe’: Poverty and the De-stabilization of Allegory in the Final Visions of *Piers Plowman*,” in *Piers Plowman: A Book of Essays*, 238-39. She explains that allegory traditionally established a hierarchy that sublimates physical concerns in favor of spiritual ones. “Allegoresis makes possible what our fallen natures disallow—the revelation of divine mysteries within the objects of the material world. In this formulation, the things of sense are unimportant in and of themselves; instead, they become merely the ‘means’ of attaining divine understanding. For Augustine, the central (and inevitable) Christian tension between visible and invisible, temporal and eternal, corporal and spiritual is resolved by imagining a hierarchy in which we ascend toward truth, by the idealizing power of allegory” (235).

signs toward heaven.¹⁰⁷

However, medievals were aware of the limits of an allegorical mode. As Augustine himself acknowledged, to try to define God in linguistic terms—even to define him as indefinable—is impossible: “If what I said were ineffable it would not be said. And for this reason God should not be said to be ineffable, for when this is said, something is said. And a contradiction in terms is created, since if that is ineffable which cannot be spoken, then that is not ineffable which can be called ineffable.” His solution is that this contradiction be “passed over in silence rather than resolved verbally.”¹⁰⁸ Thus, as Kathleen Hewett-Smith states, “For Augustine, the act of faith can fill the de Manian void at the heart of allegory for it allows us to believe that there is something beyond human comprehension... Allegory both makes faith possible and requires faith to succeed.”¹⁰⁹

Later dream vision writers, however, focused on the limits of allegory—the gap between word and deed, or, to borrow another popular medieval metaphor, the chaff and the grain—not just to disrupt the signification process but to embrace a fuller oneness of self.¹¹⁰ In this space, they acknowledge the dreamer’s physical humanness as being equal

¹⁰⁷ Augustine wrote, “A sign is a thing which causes us to think of something beyond the impression the thing itself makes upon the senses” (Hewett-Smith, “Nede,” 236). D.W. Robertson sees this allegorical relationship as key to understanding what he terms the “medieval aesthetic.” See his *A Preface to Chaucer: Studies in Medieval Perspectives* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962), 58.

¹⁰⁸ Hewett-Smith, “Nede,” 236

¹⁰⁹ Hewett-Smith, “Nede,” 237. She notes that in contemporary theory, “the need for allegorical expression draws attention to the impossibility of representing transcendent truths in limited human language. As Gordon Teskey observes, allegory ‘evokes a schism in consciousness—between a life and a mystery, between the real and the ideal, between a literal tale and its moral’ by ‘forc[ing] on our attention the difference between what it refers *to* and what it refers *with*’”(236-37).

¹¹⁰ Medieval exegetical tradition taught that the true meaning of scripture required work to comprehend, just as it required work to remove the grain from inside the chaff. The chaff, accordingly, came to represent the figurative language that covers this true meaning. Augustine

to his or her spiritual self, asserting that reality cannot and should not be subsumed into an idealized meaning. Dream visions, then, as Joseph Wittig puts it, view “experience through mutually illuminating and autonomous sets of realities, multiple-term metaphors in which tenor and vehicle are equally primary.”¹¹¹ In other words, the late medieval dream vision “articulates a space within which both the literal and spiritual dimensions of [physical conditions like] poverty might *mean* with equal weight.”¹¹² This exposure is necessary in order for bodily writing to address all aspects of one’s health, the physical and the spiritual, and so be effective in lived experience.

The dream vision’s focus on the significance of the literal is communicated in the popular maxim, “a word should be cousin to the deed”—a proverb mentioned by dream vision writers like Jean de Meun and Geoffrey Chaucer.¹¹³ While this phrase forces a text

writes, “It is more rewarding to discover meanings that are won only with difficulty” (R.P.H. Green, trans., *On Christian Teaching* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008], 33). Other famous writers to use this metaphor included Bernard de Clairvaux (*Sermones Super Cantica* 73, I.2) and Mathieu de Vendôme (*Ars versificatoria* I, 55 and III, 43). By the later Middle Ages, however, the chaff itself (literally, the auxiliary ingredients consumed by the hungry peasant, which Augustine called “the food of pigs, not men” [47]), and the space between it and the grain, became just as important as the grain itself as it represented a reality that could not be ignored. In “Toward a New Dietary Balance,” in *Food: A Culinary History from Antiquity to the Present*, ed. Jean-Louis Flandrin and Massimo Montanari, trans. Albert Sonnenfeld (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), Massimo Montanari writes that the most significant factor in the shift from the first half of the Middle Ages to the second half was the development of an agrarian economy (247). After this switch, the term “dearth” came to mean a bad harvest or a limited availability of cereals: “Now that peasants could no longer gather or hunt, the meat in their diet was replaced by cereals, pulses, and vegetables, widening the gap in diet between the rich and the poor” (248). The result was that in times of hunger many peasants ate “famine bread,” the product of auxiliary grains and even grasses (264). See also Herman Pleij, *Dreaming of Cockaigne: Medieval Fantasies of the Perfect Life*, trans. Diane Webb (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 100, 111.

¹¹¹ Joseph S. Wittig, “‘Piers Plowman’ B, Passus IX-XII: Elements in the Design of the Inward Journey,” *Traditio* 28 (1972): 211-280, at 228.

¹¹² Hewett-Simth, “Nede,” 253.

¹¹³ This proverb has a long history (and was used by different people to mean different things), beginning with Plato and popularized by Boethius. Stephen Penn explains, “These words

to confront its own mode of referentiality, the very notion of pointing to the “deed,” or bodily action, that a word is attempting to convey demonstrates the importance of the body as a foundation for successful communication. Because deeds carry more weight than words, words that most closely approximate bodily action will be more effective.¹¹⁴

Writers emulating the Book of Revelation would be especially motivated to merge words with deeds. In Revelation, the experiences or works of individual bodies are written down in the book of life so that words come to mean the deeds themselves.¹¹⁵ Indeed, men can only behold God’s face if his name is already written on their foreheads, if the words are part of their bodies. This writing must be earned. In a sense, then, the individual *himself* writes (or qualifies for) God’s name on his body based on the actions his body takes, just as John writes what God tells him. “And he said to me: Write, for these words are most faithful and true” [Et dixit mihi: Scribe, quia haec verba fidelissima

have been variously interpreted, but are generally taken to be an affirmation of the narrator’s—if not the poet’s—philosophical realism” and a concern with nominalism (“Literary Nominalism,” 180). The use of this phrase did of course draw attention to the writing process itself and the impossibility, to use modern terms, for the signifier to literally mean the signified. John McGavin writes, “In the *General Prologue*, the notion of the word being cousin to the deed is encapsulated in a play upon fiction: the readers knows that there is no deed’ for Chaucer’s words to refer to since his poem is not a mimesis of any pilgrimage which actually took place... Words are not the natural brothers or sisters of the things they are applied to; they are in a relationship which itself requires further scrutiny, further definition” (*Chaucer and Dissimilarity: Literary Comparisons in Chaucer and Other Late-Medieval Writing* [Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 2000], 17).

¹¹⁴ This has a biblical precedent. John states, “Let us not love in word, nor in tongue, but in deed” [non diligamus verbo neque lingua, sed opere] (1 John 3:18). In the Middle Ages, the authors of the Gospel of John and the Book of Revelation were believed to be the same person.

¹¹⁵ Penn Szittyta documents a similar sentiment in English history. William the Conqueror’s census book, known as “Domesday,” was a considered by his contemporaries to be analogous to the *liber vitae* of the Last Judgment, “a fearfully exact register of the inhabitants of the blessed kingdom” (“Domesday Bokes: The Apocalypse in Medieval English Culture,” in *The Apocalypse in the Middle Ages*, ed. Richard K. Emmerson and Bernard McGinn [Ithaca: University of Cornell Press, 1992], 374-97, at 375). Szittyta states, “The royal book is significant not only as an embodiment of the nation but as an emblem of both the new power of writing and the beginning of the momentous change ‘from memory to written record’” (377).

sunt, et vera] (21:5).

By manipulating and acknowledging the limitations of allegoresis (the gap between word and deed) and the reality of the human condition, dream vision writers invite satire, wordplay, and even comedy into their texts. Satirical personification is particularly potent. James Simpson argues, “As deployed in satirical texts, personification is diagnostic, isolating the pathological forces that invade the body politic...It is also...therapeutic, designed to control and disperse those pathological forces.”¹¹⁶ The result of this therapeutic mode is a type of consolation in which language soothes and even heals the dreamer’s malady by helping her psychosomatically work through her problems, envisioned as forces in her psyche, as she records them on paper.

For some writers, this consolation comes from the game and comedy of language itself. Betsy McCormick finds that literary games fostered ethical reading by interacting with the memory: “That is ultimately the purpose of literary games (and dream visions): to create liminal spaces in which complex ideas can be enacted, explored and tested.”¹¹⁷ Mary Clemente Davlin agrees that “all poetry, in its tension, delight, and supra-logical character, is a form of play.”¹¹⁸ The dream vision in particular, by taking advantage of a liminal space between body and mind, waking and sleeping, fosters this play, and several

¹¹⁶ James Simpson, “The Power of Impropriety,” 149. Singer agrees that lending textual abstractions to a tangible body can render that body whole. See *Blindness and Therapy*, 147.

¹¹⁷ Betsy McCormick, “Remembering the Game: Debating the *Legend’s* Women” in *The Legend of Good Women: Context and Reception*, ed. Carolyn P. Collette (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2006), 130.

¹¹⁸ Mary Clemente Davlin, *A Game of Heuene: Word Play and the Meaning of Piers Plowman B* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1989), 1. “Some works of literature may be seen as games in the further sense that they are designed to be played not only by author, actors and characters, but also by readers or audience through interaction of some kind, including active play with language in which audiences may ‘make’ or ‘discover’ meaning” (2).

of the writers I examine in this dissertation emphasize the ludic aspects of poetry and dream vision (which allow for an open-minded examination of social issues) in order to foster their narrators' healing.

For dream vision writers especially, it is the form of the poem as a dream vision that allows these medical principles to be applied effectively. The dream frame is both a reflection of the poet's physical and mental condition and a catalyst for introspection and transformation. By reading the body of the dreamer as revealed in her mind, her physical and mental health could be explored in an entirely unique way. Thus, when dream vision writers enter the dreaming mind of their poetic personae, they begin a process of actively thinking about and working through the dreamer's psychological and physiological impairments (activating the memory).¹¹⁹ This process—discovering one's inner self within the dream—allows the poet to rewrite the dreamer's biological pathways, culminating in a healing transformation that is made efficacious within the transcendent dream state.¹²⁰

This type of poetic healing is possible because the medieval practice of medicine called for the balancing of the body's four humors. As such, it was dependent upon rhetorical principles of symmetry and complementarity and verbal strategies such as

¹¹⁹ For example, Christine's treatment in *Le Chemin de long estude*, which she calls the path of long study, is really a voyage through her books as imagined in her mind and expressed on paper—her cure is literally the acts of reading and writing. But these literary processes are informed by the experience of her body. (And her experiences are in turn derived from her books.) Andrea Tarnowski, in her introduction to Christine's *Chemin* writes, "La narratrice déchiffre le monde par ses cinq sens, au lieu de l'apprendre uniquement dans les livres" [The narrator deciphers the world by means of her five senses, instead of relying solely on the learning in her books] (Christine de Pizan, *Le Chemin de longe étude*, ed. Andrea Tarnowski [Paris, 2000], 22).

¹²⁰ See Singer, *Blindness and Therapy*, 3.

substitution and opposition. By constructing parallel rhetorical systems, medieval poets could write their own path to healing.¹²¹

Rewriting Medical Constructs

In medieval thought, the humor or complexion of any physical substance was defined as a particular mixture of two qualities: hot or cold, and dry or moist. A substance's temperament tended toward the sanguine if warm and moist (which meant blood was the element most present); phlegmatic if cold and moist (phlegm was the most present); melancholic if cold and dry (black bile or melancholy was the most present); and bilious if warm and dry (yellow bile or cholera was the most present). The average human was thought to possess a humor that was moderately warm and moderately moist, and since pre-moderns believed that "both food and medicine were complexionate and affected the complexion of the person who ingested them," the best meal to ingest was one that most closely matched this moderate combination.¹²² Thus, a person could stay in good health by keeping her humors balanced through food and medicine.

This theory was important not just for the maintenance of good health but also for its restoration. As Nancy Siraisi writes,

¹²¹ Singer writes, "These authors exploit humoral medicine's principles of symmetry and complementarity, with their rhetorical strategies of substitution, concealment, and verbal transformation serving to establish not just poetic but physiological harmony. Just as humoral theory depends upon principles of likes and contraries in order to restore balance (and thus to heal), poetry makes possible a parallel therapeutic system in which verbal oppositions and substitutions counter or rewrite received medical wisdom. After all, given the rhetorical underpinnings of medieval medicine, it is far from inconceivable that the author of lyric would employ rhetorical figures as categories of therapy" (*Blindness and Therapy*, 2).

¹²² Nancy G. Siraisi, *Medieval and Early Renaissance Medicine: An Introduction to Knowledge and Practice* (Chicago, 1990), 121. See also Terence Scully, "Tempering Medieval Food," in *Food in the Middle Ages*, ed. Melitta Weiss Adamson (New York, 1995), 3-23; and P. W. Hammond, *Food and Feast in Medieval England* (Dover, N.H.: Alan Sutton Publishing, 1993), 90.

Medical theory asserted that the human body exists in either health, sickness, or a neutral state between the two... This classification placed almost all internal illness in the domain of complexional imbalance... Hence, the care offered by medical practitioners other than surgeons consisted primarily in the management of the body in health (that is, the management of a good temperament) and the treatment of internal and some external illnesses attributed to complexional imbalance.¹²³

Consequently, the conventional solution for disease was to prescribe for the patient some type of food, medicine, exercise, or diversion that would restore balance by counteracting the excess humor.¹²⁴ Siraisi explains that “Rational treatment consisted of finding a medicine with qualities that counterbalanced the patient’s complexional disorder—hence the idea of cure by contraries. In the simplest possible example, a cold medicine would cure a hot disease.”¹²⁵

However, John’s healing in Revelation does *not* follow the humoral law of

¹²³ Siraisi, *Medieval and Early Renaissance Medicine*, 120.

¹²⁴ This includes music. Noga Arikha notes that in the 1620s Monteverdi composed a new set of songs with the intent to balance the humors of his listeners. “It is clear that he conceived their effects in terms that can only be called humoral: the songs of love were designed to appease listeners, while the songs of war were supposed to stimulate them. Robert Burton would have approved of this; he had written in his *Anatomy of Melancholy* that music was a ‘roaring-meg against melancholy, to rear and revive the languishing soul’... Monteverdi’s songs of war might indeed have accelerated the course of the animal spirits, stimulated the pulse, perhaps increased the secretion of the blood in phlegmatic individuals; the songs of love, by contrast, would have reduced the secretion of choler, slowed down the pulse, regulated the flow of animal spirits, and reduced melancholic anxiety, turning it into a deeper, calmer contemplation” (Noga Arikha, *Passions and Tempers: A History of the Humours* [New York: HarperCollins, 2007], 181).

¹²⁵ Siraisi, *Medieval and Early Renaissance Medicine*, 145. Julie Singer explains how Petrarch uses the contrary principles of irony as a therapeutic tool in her *Blindness and Therapy*, Ch. 3.

contraries. (There are no contraries in Heaven.¹²⁶) Instead, his vision emphasizes the law of similarities (“like cures like”). John writes that those who are healed “are they who are come out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and have made them white in the blood of the Lamb” [Hi sunt, qui venerunt de tribulatione magna, et laverunt stolas suas, et dealbaverunt eas in sanguine Agni] (7:14). It is not soap and water, or some other opposing agent, that makes the blood-red stains of sin wash clean. Rather, it is blood itself: the blood of Christ.¹²⁷

Revelation was not the only text to employ an isopathic approach to treatment (cure by “similarities”), as opposed to an allopathic approach (cure by “opposites”). Siraisi explains that the formulation of cure by contraries had a few gray areas, including “how to explain the action of various substances that, for whatever reason, were not considered to act by virtue of the primary qualities.”¹²⁸ One such substance was theriac, a “compound of vipers’ flesh and other ingredients [that] was supposedly a universal antidote to poison as well as a remedy for diseases caused by an excess of melancholy and phlegm.”¹²⁹ While one explanation lay in the theory that certain substances had a “specific form” that made them an exception to the rule of complexional qualities, under the model of cure by similarities, theriac served as an effective cure against poison

¹²⁶ Consequently, things in Heaven continue in their present state. “He that hurteth, let him hurt still: and he that is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is just, let him be justified still: and he that is holy, let him be sanctified still” [Qui nocet, noceat adhuc: et qui in sordibus est, sordescat adhuc: et qui justus est, justificetur adhuc: et sanctus, sanctificetur adhuc] (Rev. 22:11).

¹²⁷ As Isaiah explains, “If your sins be as scarlet, they shall be made as white as snow: and if they be red as crimson, they shall be white as wool” [Si fuerint peccata vestra ut coccinum, quasi nix dealbabitur; et si fuerint rubra quasi vermiculus, velut lana alba erunt] (Isaiah 1:18).

¹²⁸ Siraisi, *Medieval and Early Renaissance Medicine*, 145.

¹²⁹ Siraisi, *Medieval and Early Renaissance Medicine*, 118.

because it contained the flesh of a poisonous animal.¹³⁰ Clifford Allbutt observes,

That the search of antidotes on the opposite principle of *contraria contrariis* should have been likewise an immemorial study is eas[y] of comprehension. . . .

The doctrine of isopathy is really akin to the doctrine of “sympathy” which, like “isopathy” itself, had so prodigious a vogue in the Middle Ages. Thus the laying on of the sword, or even the rust of it, healed its wounds; the blood of the Gorgon healed its bane; and so on: these and such beliefs survived through the Romano-Greek period and long afterwards.¹³¹

There are numerous biblical and classical examples of what we might today call “hair of the dog that bit you” cures: Moses’s brass serpent is a famous instance.¹³² A notable example in the Middle Ages is found in Chaucer’s *Squire’s Tale*. One of the visiting knight’s gifts is a sword that is able to heal the injuries it causes: “And what man that is wounded with the strook / Shal never be hool til that yow list, of grace, / To stroke hym with the plat in thilke place / Ther he is hurt; this is as mucche to seyn, / Ye moote with the platte swerd ageyn / Stroke hym in the wounde, and it wol close” (V 160-65). Another example is contained in the work of John Skelton, who treats madness with

¹³⁰ Cure by similarities extended to the symptoms caused by the substances, not just the material from which they were made. For example, a plant that produced a fever in a healthy person could be used to treat a fever in a sick person.

¹³¹ Clifford Allbutt, *Greek Medicine in Rome* (London, 1921), 353. Allbutt notes that isopathic treatments may have been a forebear for modern immunization theory: “In one feature of the poison lore we find some true anticipation of modern pharmacological knowledge; namely, the establishment of tolerance of a poison by gradual habituation of the body to its presence” (355). Julie Singer states, “Treatment with likes...continues to provide a fruitful avenue for late medieval attempts at rhetorical remedy” (*Blindness and Therapy*, 187).

¹³² “Moses therefore made a brazen serpent, and set it up for a sign: which when they that were bitten looked upon, they were healed” (Num. 21:9).

madness in his satire “Speke, Parrot.”¹³³ Even Trotula of Salerno (perhaps unwittingly) uses isopathic logic when she claims that “contraries are cured by contraries.”¹³⁴

While most dream visions unquestionably emphasize the importance of moderation and balance, many of them also turn toward isopathic remedies rather than allopathic ones. For example, most dream vision figures, like the dreamer in *The Temple of Glass* and the knight in *La Fonteinne amoureuse*, are cured of their lovesickness not by forsaking love but by embracing it more fully.¹³⁵ A beloved lady is both the disease and the cure (*Temple* 230, 478), and, as the narrator states in *Complaynte of a Lover’s Life*, lovesick men will cry “Unto his foo [i.e. beloved] for to ben his leche [doctor]” (473). In *The Quare of Jelusy*, a jealous lover condemns jealousy after witnessing the jealousy of his beloved; in *The Bouge of Court* a dreamer (“Drede”) is treated for his fears with a dream that embodies his terror; and in *The Book of the Duchess*, Chaucer’s melancholic persona reads about a melancholic character (Ovid’s Alcyone) then dreams about a

¹³³ This is the argument of Nathaniel Owen Wallace, “The Responsibilities of Madness: John Skelton, ‘Speke, Parrot,’ and Homeopathic Satire,” *Studies in Philology* 82 (1985): 60-80. Later, Mowbray in Shakespeare’s *Richard II* references an isopathic cure in metaphoric terms: “I am disgrac’d, impeach’d, and baffled here, / Pierc’d to the soul with slander’s venom’d spear, / The which no balm can cure but his heart-blood / Which breath’d this poison” (1.1.170-73; *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans [Boston, 1974], 807).

¹³⁴ Monica Green, ed. and trans., *The Trotula: An English Translation of the Medieval Compendium of Women’s Medicine* (Philadelphia, 2002), 89.

¹³⁵ Julie Singer identifies a similar gesture in medieval love lyrics, in which love is not only the illness but also the cure: “If love (sickness) can lead to the composition of verses, these verses, in turn, can become not only a symptom but also a remedy” (*Blindness and Therapy*, 5). She writes, “While singing of love can deepen a poet’s melancholy, it can also be a healing process... This discourse depends on the truism that ‘like responds to like’—that is, that the correspondence between the mathematical principles that structure the human soul and those that underlie the physical world would permit music, which shares that same mathematical basis, to bring physiological and celestial rhythms back into harmony. Melody can function as a remedy for malady precisely because the two have such similar effects on bodily balance and rhythm” (6-7). She also notes that treatment with likes can be “effected through the replacement of key terms with a comprehensive, rather than a contiguous, discourse: that is, through *synecdoche* rather than *metonymy*” (187).

melancholic figure (the Black Knight), with the result that he is again able to compose.¹³⁶ Finally, in Christine de Pizan's *Chemin de long estude*, Christine's poetic self is afflicted with a mental illness (brainsickness), compounded by excessive reading. But rather than seek an oppositional remedy for her problem, which would require leaving her books and her writing (the source of her income), she attempts to treat herself with the very thing that is causing her illness: more studying.¹³⁷ In short, by changing the expectations for medical treatment, medieval poets could plot the journey to health on their own terms.

Sharing the Cure

Like John, dream vision writers record their visions not just because it allows them to work through their own healing process but also because it makes that process available to other readers.¹³⁸ The end of Revelation promises that those who read and apply the knowledge from the vision will be benefited: "Blessed is he that keepeth the words of the prophecy of this book" [Et ecce venio velociter. Beatus, qui custodit verba prophetiae libri hujus] (Rev. 22.7). In a similar way, medieval writers are conscious of

¹³⁶ *The Quare of Jelusy*, in *Chaucerian Dream Visions and Complaints*, ed. Dana M. Symons (Kalamazoo: TEAMS, 2004), 149-81; John Skelton, *The Bouge of Court*, in *Fifteenth-Century English Dream Visions*.

¹³⁷ See Katie Robison, "'Thou wolt make . . . thyn hede to ake': A Post-Chaucerian Treatment for Madness in Christine de Pizan's *Chemin de long estude*," *The Chaucer Review* 49.2 (2014): 184-203. Even though Christine's reading of Boethius initially intensifies her melancholy, she notes that isopathic reading as a form of therapy can enact a real physical and mental change within a person. "In reading, I was relieved of the anger and pain that had weighed me down—for a good example does much to raise one's spirits and dispel wrath" [en lisant passay l'ire / Et l'anuyeuse pesance / Dont j'estoie en mesaisance— / Car bon exemple ayde moult / A confort, et anuy toul] (*Chemin*, 210-14).

¹³⁸ The Lord tells John to send his vision "to the seven churches which are in Asia, to Ephesus, and to Smyrna, and to Pergamus, and to Thyatira, and to Sardis, and to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea" [et mitte septem ecclesiis, quae sunt in Asia, Epheso, et Smyrnae, et Pergamo, et Thyatirae, et Sardis, et Philadelphiae, et Laodiciae] (Rev. 1:11). "And he said to me: Thou must prophesy again to many nations, and peoples, and tongues, and kings" [Et dixit mihi: Oportet te iterum prophetare gentibus, et populis, et linguis, et regibus multis] (Rev. 10:11).

their obligation to share their healing knowledge with their readers.¹³⁹

Michael Solomon has described a particular kind of literate practice in the Middle Ages, which he terms “sickly reading,” in which written works, particularly *Regimena sanitatis* or health manuals, were seen by readers as capable of solving their problems and curing diseases. He argues that a reader “who is ill or suffering from bodily pain has the tendency to approach a text differently from a healthy reader” and that “late medieval and early modern vernacular medical texts appealed to readers who were experiencing or anticipating those unwanted bodily conditions that we have come to characterize as disease.”¹⁴⁰ I would contend that dream visions, like penitentials, were likely resources for self-directed treatments and that dream poets would have anticipated an audience of “sickly readers” for whom they offer the remedy of bodily writing.¹⁴¹

Sharing knowledge is in fact the final step in self-actualization—the achievement of a dialectic between self and others.¹⁴² Indeed, as Jessica Rosenfeld notes, medieval

¹³⁹ Carruthers explains, “Literary works become institutions as they weave a community together by providing it with shared experience and a certain kind of language, the language of stories that can be experienced over and over again through time and as occasion suggests” (*Book of Memory*, 14). The experience of reading thus shapes character: “Character indeed results from one’s experience, but that includes the experience of others, often epitomized in ethical commonplaces, and made one’s own by constant recollection” (222).

¹⁴⁰ Michael Solomon, *Fictions of Well-Being: Sickly Readers and Vernacular Medical Writing in Late Medieval and Early Modern Spain*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 8. He states, “We can generalize that the onset of illness powerfully encourages the ailing subject to engage in intensive moments of self-reflection...Sickly reading emerges as such when the afflicted either invents or accepts the text’s explicit claims that the work in hand will serve his or her immediate medical needs” (8).

¹⁴¹ Interestingly, the grammatical exercise of describing bodies like the one outlined in the *Ars Versificatoria* above intrinsically links the reading of bodies to the production of text (the goal of the *Ars Versificatoria* and other grammar books). This too is the goal of Revelation. “Scribe in libro,” God tells John. Likewise dream vision writers hope that others will read their poetry and benefit from it.

¹⁴² Carruthers states, “Rhetorically conceived, ethics is the application of a *res* or generalized content (most often expressed in a textual maxim) to a specific, present occasion

commentators considered poetry to be an ethical genre rooted in human experience. She writes, “Vernacular poetry constituted a site for thinking through ethical problems such as conflicting loyalties, conflicting emotions, and the necessity for self-sacrifice within the larger context of pursuits of human justice, love, and happiness.”¹⁴³ It may even be that the concept of a “civic being” was brought into consciousness as a result of literary and rhetorical practices.¹⁴⁴ Key to this process is the interaction of the reader herself. As McCormick argues, “The ethical results of reading such texts are... dependent upon each reader’s experience.”¹⁴⁵

Literacy thus not only enables a person to take authority and responsibility for her own body, to stay healthy, but it also enables her to help other people.¹⁴⁶ Christine de Pizan states in her *Chemin de long estude*,

The more [learning] is spread, the more it returns to those who spread it, and the

which is public in nature, because it requires an audience... The presence of an audience would appear to be crucial to the making of the ethical action. This simply reminds us that a rhetorical conception of ethics requires that its social and public nature be stressed. But it is remarkable that instances of moral judgment in medieval literature seem so often to require both a literary text and an audience to complete them, whether the audience is in the work itself or is created by a direct address to readers” (*The Book of Memory*, 224-25).

¹⁴³ Jessica Rosenfeld, *Ethics and Enjoyment in Late Medieval Poetry: Love after Aristotle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 1. She observes, “Early Christian theologians had certainly treated happiness as a spiritual goal, but this happiness was typically only accessible in the afterlife or through experiences bestowed by God’s intervention. Absorbing a notion of self-reflection and intellectual contemplation as the highest *human* happiness would require a re-examination of central concepts in medieval ethics: action, love, pleasure, felicity, the good. Human happiness thus became a valid starting point for ethical inquiry, and earthly ‘imperfect’ felicity a suitable moral goal. The new translation of Aristotle’s *Ethics* offered an ethical goal imaginable within the space of the narrative of a human life” (2).

¹⁴⁴ Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought*, 2.

¹⁴⁵ McCormick, “Remembering the Game,” 130.

¹⁴⁶ Paul writes, “To one indeed, by the Spirit, is given the word of wisdom: and to another, the word of knowledge, according to the same Spirit... That there might be no schism in the body; but the members might be mutually careful one for another” [Alii quidem per Spiritum datur sermo sapientiae: alii autem sermo scientiae secundum eundem Spiritum... Ut non sit schisma in corpore, sed id ipsum pro invicem sollicita sint membra] (1 Cor. 12:8, 25).

more it is shared, the more everyone's share is worth. . . . It is learning that has the authority, in its own right and through its beneficial powers of conversion, to transform the operation of an imperfect and terrestrial work into celestial perfection. (5213-16, 5229-34)¹⁴⁷

Literature can heal the whole world as well as the individual, and most dream vision writers believed that the key to individual and communal wholeness was literacy and education, something they felt compelled to share with others. Consequently, the therapeutic process illustrated in dream visions provides a template for readers seeking to chart their own path toward healing.

Dream vision writers, indeed all writers, thus shoulder a large responsibility—and anxiety about their ability to fulfill that responsibility. E. Talbot Donaldson says of *Piers Plowman*, “Throughout all versions of the poem, the Dreamer manifests grave concern about whether a writer's way of life is justifiable in a world where there is such need for practical service.”¹⁴⁸ As we will see, the writers featured in this dissertation grapple with this onus in various ways, but it seems probable that most dream poets saw the transmission of bodily writing as one way to offer “practical service” to their readers.

Conclusion

The dream visions that I analyze in this dissertation, along with many other late medieval dream visions, focus on bodily writing as a means to chart a return to

¹⁴⁷ “La quelle plus est espandue, / Plus est aux respandans rendue, / Et plus est par tout deppartie, / Plus en vault chacune partie; / . . . / C'est celle qui l'auctorité / A de droite propriété / Par sa bonne conversion / De müer l'operacion / De l'oeuvre imparfaicte et terrestre / A la perfeccïon celestre.”

¹⁴⁸ E. Talbot Donaldson, *Piers Plowman: An Alliterative Verse Translation*, ed. Elizabeth D. Kirk and Judith H. Anderson [New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1990], 243.

wholeness. While each writer interprets bodily writing in his or her own way, the basic elements of this therapy are present in every text I consider in this study. The dreamer is ill, divided from himself, and so lacking self-knowledge. The reader is then invited to read the dreamer's body and diagnose this illness through a number of textual cues. Subsequently (or sometimes concurrently), the dreamer embarks on a journey, or pilgrimage, of transformation through his mind as filtered through his body. His or her treatment is usually based on metaphors of spiritual, physical, and mental ingestion and explores alternative constructs for medical treatment. This treatment is almost always self-prescribed and dependent on the writing process, i.e. the poem itself. In this way, dream poets play with language to merge words with bodies (tenor and vehicle mean equally) so that the treatment is effective on a physiological level as well as a psychological one. These writers are also conscious of their obligation to share their remedy with others. Literacy is therefore viewed as a tool of empowerment, critical for achieving self-awareness, and thus health.

Chapter Two

Bodily Writing as Penitential Satisfaction in *Piers Plowman*

Piers Plowman is an allegorical dream poem, comprised of a series of eight visions, attributed to William Langland and dated to the second half of the fourteenth century.¹ In the poem, the dreamer-narrator, named Will, embarks on a journey of penance in order to make restitution for his sins and so recover his self-knowledge. Langland's alliterative poem is the most overtly apocalyptic dream vision I examine in this dissertation.² For Langland, bodily writing serves a primarily spiritual purpose: it is through the workings (and grace-sanctioned surrendering) of Will's body that his sins can be healed.

The text devotes the bulk of its attention to exploring this physical work—the “bodily” aspect of bodily writing. (While Will ingests plenty of texts, it is not until his sixth vision that he actually puts anything in writing.) From the beginning, we are invited to read Will's body, and we are reminded to keep doing so as the poem progresses.

Unlike most dream visions, which remain in the dreamer's sleeping mind, *Piers Plowman*

¹ There are four versions of the poem: the A, B, and C Texts (named by Walter Skeat) and the Z Text, which is not universally accepted as authentic. I will be examining the B Text, which was written after the coronation of Richard II and contains allusions to the Great Schism, placing the date of its writing sometime between 1377 and 1379. My decision to use the B Text is based on the structure of the poem—the waking and dreaming moments—and the manner in which Will's dreams, especially his inner dreams, are used in his progression toward Truth.

² See Morton W. Bloomfield, *Piers Plowman as a Fourteenth-Century Apocalypse* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1961); Claudia Rattazzi Papka, “The Limits of Apocalypse: Eschatology, Epistemology, and Textuality in the *Commedia* and *Piers Plowman*,” in *Last Things: Death and the Apocalypse in the Middle Ages*, ed. Caroline Walker Bynum and Paul Freedman (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 233-56; Justine Rydzeski, *Radical Nostalgia in the Age of Piers Plowman: Economics, Apocalypticism, and Discontent* (New York: Peter Lang, 1999); and Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, *Reformist Apocalypticism and “Piers Plowman”* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

returns to Will's waking state repeatedly throughout the poem. With each break between visions, the text provides us with a *superficialis* description of Will's physical body and its gradual deterioration. Perhaps most important to this description is his wearing the clothing of a penitent. Because penance is an external, public manifestation of a private, internal illness, reading Will's body allows us to read beyond surface.³ While we do not know the sin Will has committed, we can surmise that it has threatened his self-knowledge—"Yet have I no kynde knowynge," he laments (1.138).⁴

In order to be healed of his sin-disease, Will must follow the three fundamental parts of satisfaction: fasting, prayer, and alms deeds.⁵ This tripartite medicine, administered through a discourse of ingestion and symbolized by Piers Plowman's sowing, culminates in a transformation that centers around Christ's consumable body: Will's own works can only take him so far; in the end he must rely on God's grace to heal him. The Word Made Flesh thus becomes a powerful symbol for the poetic self-help process that makes Will's (ingestible) penance efficacious.

Throughout the poem, Langland uses the companion metaphors of plowing, planting, and harvesting—tropes that stand not just for the work of satisfaction (Piers

³ See George Christian Anderson, "Medieval Medicine for Sin," *Journal of Religion and Health* 2 (1963): 156-165, at 161.

⁴ All citations come from William Langland, *The Vision of Piers Plowman: A Critical Edition of the B-Text Based on Trinity College Cambridge Ms. B.15.17*, ed. A.V.C. Schmidt, Everyman, 2nd edition (North Clarendon, VT: J.M. Dent, 1995). For scholarship on "kynde knowynge," see Hugh White, *Nature and Salvation in Piers Plowman* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1988), 41-59; Mary Davlin, "Kynde knowynge as a Middle English equivalent for 'Wisdom' in *Piers Plowman B*," *MAE* 50 (1981): 5-17; Mary Davlin, "Kynde Knowynge as a Major Theme in *Piers Plowman B*," *RES* 22 (1971): 1-19; Britton J. Harwood, "Langland's *Kynde Knowynge* and the Quest for Christ," *MP* 80 (1983): 242-55.

⁵ Because "the major objective of penance was rehabilitation," Will's penitence suggests he is embarking on a journey of transformation (Anderson, "Medieval Medicine," 161).

states, “Of preieres and of penaunce my plough shal ben” [7.120]) but also for the labor of writing.⁶ In this way Pier’s continual plowing foreshadows the bodily writing Will later performs as well as the shape of the poem itself.⁷ Like Piers’s repetitive plowing, the poem follows a cyclical structure as Will journeys deeper into his consciousness. His penitential journey is thus both linear and circular—linear because with each dream he makes more progress, and circular because his dreams are repetitive, teaching him the same information in new ways⁸—drawing readers’ attention to important “middles” in the narrative.⁹

⁶ Eric Jager writes, “Monks adopted the classical analogy between writing and plowing; parchment was likened to a field, the pen to a plow, and ink to seed” (Eric Jager, *The Tempter’s Voice: Language and the Fall in Medieval Literature* [Ithaca: Cornell University, 1993], 73).

⁷ The metaphor of plowing effectively yokes the imagery of medicinal food-crops, which Piers plants in Passus 19, and Will and Langland’s work of writing; the penitential pilgrimage Piers (and later Will) undertakes makes this medicine efficacious by reuniting his alienated soul with Christ’s healing grace. Justine Rydzeski writes, “Langland relies on the eschatological tradition for his model of individual salvation and on the regenerative tradition for his vision of a reformed society. *Piers Plowman*’s agricultural roots and its hopes of holy society on earth clearly belong in the regenerative tradition, and if we consider the poem in this context, its spiraling visions, the dreamer’s endless search for Piers, and general lack of closure reflect an understandable predicament rather than clear poetic failure... The enigmatic ending of *Piers Plowman* may be more satisfactory than it seems because it depicts... the very condition of earthly pilgrims and their endless search” (*Radical Nostalgia*, 11).

⁸ Rydzeski notes that pilgrimages were themselves both linear and circular. “While the spiritual movement may have been linear, the physical movement was circular” (*Radical Nostalgia*, 14).

⁹ Numerous scholars have commented on the cyclical, concentric structure of *Piers Plowman* and the subsequent importance of its “middles” or centers. See for example Pamela Raabe, *Imitating God: The Allegory of Faith in Piers Plowman B* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1990), 57-58. Ryan McDermott argues that the poem is organized chiastically and places the defining moment in its crucicentric middle, during the Holy Week and Pentecostal liturgies of Passus 18 and 19 (“Practices of Satisfaction and *Piers Plowman*’s Dynamic Middle,” *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 36 (2014): 169-207, at 189-90). He writes, “This incarnational and crucicentric middle bears a centripetal force that draws the poem’s acts of invention and the readers’ acts of interpretation back to it” (185). While the eschatological vision in Passus 18 is clearly an important episode, there are also other defining “middles” throughout the poem. Perhaps the most important is the journey itself. The poem begins *in medias res*, in the middle of things, and although Will’s focus is ever on the life to come, it is here in this middle (his travels in *Middelertne*), that the most important work will be done and his enlightenment found.

By recording this process, Will creates a “sickly text” for future readers to follow.¹⁰ The poem itself becomes the bread of satisfaction that Langland offers to his audience as instructive medicine, the product of his plowing and the fulfillment of his own penance, his alms deed. Because this “bread” can only be eaten by the educated (those who can read), the educated have a greater responsibility to care for the poor. Indeed, Will’s vision for the future of the poor—and the world—is an Apocalyptic society founded in Christ, where greed and pride no longer corrupt. In striving for this utopia, Will takes seriously the charge to give away his money to the indigent and take no thought for the morrow.¹¹ The wholeness he seeks cannot be limited to his own body but must be extended to everyone.

Because these themes build on each other as the poem progresses, I have organized the chapter according to each of Will’s eight visions. Within each dream, I will consider how his view of bodily writing progresses.¹²

Vision I

¹⁰ In light of the poem’s alternative leanings—and because Will starts the poem *in medias res* (we are not told whether his penance was prompted by a priest)—it seems plausible that he is subscribing to practice of self-help reading. Rebecca Krug has charted the ways in which *Piers Plowman* responds to the influence of the *regimen sanitatis* genre, which encouraged readers to attain health by applying cures found in texts: “Both the B Text and the *regimens* represent reading as a practice that enables personal transformation” (“*Piers Plowman* and the Secrets of Health,” *Chaucer Review* 46 [2011]: 166-81, at 167).

¹¹ James Simpson argues that by focusing on social regeneration Will is absorbed into the common will: “The poem’s authorship ideally becomes its readership, written as it is by a common will, or *voluntas communis*” (“The Power of Impropriety,” 154).

¹² I am in agreement with James Weldon who notes that critical analysis of *Piers Plowman* often rests on editorial decisions that divide the poem into *visio* and *vita* or into the triad of *dowel*, *dobet*, and *dobest*. In his opinion, these theories have obscured our reading of the poem *as a dream vision*. “Bipartition and segmentation inevitably mask the B-text’s unique arrangement of a sequence of dream visions (each with its distinctive generic markers of prologue, vision, and epilogue) and cloud any structural grouping of those visions” (James Weldon, “Decorative Reading: Some Implications of *Ordinatio* in *Piers Plowman*,” *Florilegium* 14 [1995-96]: 137-156, at 137).

The first lines of *Piers Plowman* invite us to read Will's body.¹³ In them, we learn that he is dressed in woolen clothing and has been wandering the countryside: "In a somer seson, whan softe was the sonne, / I shoop me into shroudes as I a sheep were, / In habite as an heremite unholy of werkes, / Wente wide in this world wondres to here" (Pr.1-4). Will's external description suggests that he is voluntarily embarking on a life of itinerant poverty, though the text does not explain the reason for this decision.¹⁴

We can glean some insights, however, by comparing these lines to the instruction contained in penitentials such as the *Old English Handbook*: "It is a serious (act of) penance that a layman lay aside his weapons and wander widely barefoot and not be one night where he was the one before, and fast greatly, and watch, and pray earnestly day

¹³ The human body, especially Will's, plays a fundamental role in *Piers Plowman*. Mary Clemente Davlin states, "Paradoxically, *Piers* is a thoroughly bodily poem while its content is religious and spiritual. Its brief, vivid descriptions of posture, gesture, and the state of body parts, bodily shape, sensation, action, bodily relationships, and similarity to other animals give the poem physical density in its natural and social contexts" ("God and the Human Body in *Piers Plowman*," *The Chaucer Review* 46 [2011]: 147-65, at 155). Elsewhere, she writes, "All sorts of relationships and connections between God and human beings are implied or dramatized throughout the text" ("Chaucer and Langland as Religious Writers," in *William Langland's Piers Plowman: A Book of Essays*, ed. Kathleen Hewett-Smith [New York: Routledge, 2001], 140).

¹⁴ Many scholars have rightfully argued that Will is a representative of the (voluntarily and involuntarily) indigent. Anne Scott writes, "Will comes closest in medieval literature to...recording the voice of the medieval poor" (Anne Scott, *Piers Plowman and the Poor* [Portland: Four Courts Press, 2004], 156). She argues, "With the passage of time, Will comes to experience the various aspects of material need, the scandalous privation of the involuntarily poor: hunger, thirst, cold, and the marginalization that comes from being regarded, at times, as not only poor but insane" (28). Nicolette Zeeman writes, "In his metaphorical 'journey'... Will undergoes various forms of physical suffering... due to hunger, overeating and fever" (*Piers Plowman and the Medieval Discourse of Desire* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006], 244). Will's *superficialis* depiction certainly matches the text's portrayal of the poor: "Ac beggeris aboute midsomer bredlees thei soupe, / And yet is wynter for hem worse, for weetshoed thei gange, / Afurst soore and afyngred, and foule yrebuked" (14.160-62). This bodily suffering is necessary for Will's spiritual healing (which is why the poor are sanctified).

and night, and put on wool.”¹⁵ If we view Will’s circumstances through the lens of penance, his physical appearance becomes comprehensible. He has sinned and desires to repent. Like the penitentials dictate, Will is barefoot and dressed in wool like a hermit, though his works are unholy (thus, the need for penance). The *Handbook* further specifies that during the period of penance, the penitent not “come into a warm bath, nor onto a soft bed, nor taste meat, nor anything from which drunkenness come, nor that he come into church. But he should eagerly seek holy places and make his offenses known, and...ever be repenting his sins fervently.”¹⁶ This description matches Will’s actions throughout the poem: he refrains from eating and going to church and instead wanders *widely*, praying and watching for wonders, most notably the miracle of forgiveness and transformation.¹⁷

In order for Will to achieve a holistic state of health, he must seek divine Truth, which will teach him how to absolve his sins. His progress, however, depends on his development of self-awareness, which grows as he interacts with both his psyche and

¹⁵ *The Old English Handbook*, trans. Allen J. Frantzen in *Anglo-Saxon Penitentials: A Cultural Database*, Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, 201, p.122, D55.10.01.

¹⁶ Frantzen, *Anglo-Saxon Penitentials*, OEH, Corpus 201, p.122, D55.10.01.

¹⁷ The Latin *miraculum* (miracle) comes from *mirari* (“to wonder”). The Latin Vulgate designates by *miracula* wonders of a supernatural nature. Thus, when Will watches for wonders, he is watching for miracles, particularly the miracle of grace and forgiveness. See Gillian Rudd, *Managing Language in Piers Plowman* (Rochester, NY: D.S. Brewer, 1994), Ch. 15: “Wit through Wonders.” Because Will’s actions in the B text correspond closely to the instruction provided in older vernacular manuals such as the *Old English Handbook*, which is an eleventh-century compilation of earlier Anglo-Saxon penitential manuscripts, I find that Will is prescribing his own transformative treatment based on what he has read in the penitentials and so is participating in a “laicizing” trend that “looked backwards to pre-Lateran IV, de-institutionalized ideas about penance” (Sarah Wood, *Conscience and the Composition of Piers Plowman* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012], 61).

other characters around him in the *intrinseca* (dreaming) portion of the poem.¹⁸ These interactions are amplified and integrated through the use of allegory, so that figures like Wit represent both an external character and an internal force within Will himself.¹⁹

While this double entendre of allegory was first put to use in *Le Roman de la Rose*, *Piers* embodies allegory's doubleness within Will's very name and personhood.²⁰ Jessica Barr

¹⁸ By beginning with the *superficialis* (Will's external appearance and actions while awake, which match the instruction in the penitentials) and moving to the *intrinseca* (Will's internal attributes as revealed within his dreams), the poem joins the two parts of the dreamer's *persona* into a unified discourse that provides a full, holistic picture of his health. Because Will provides the description himself, the "reading" of his body is more subjective and personal. Mary Davlin notes that "Langland typically uses only one or several...body parts for description, rather than using the rhetorical figure of *descriptio*" ("God and the Human Body," 149). However, Davlin does not consider Will's waking moments, only the dreams. Morton Bloomfield argues, "The second division of *Piers Plowman* is essentially organized around the journey of the mind into itself" (*Apocalypse*, 64). See also Joseph S. Wittig, "'Piers Plowman' B, Passus IX-XII: Elements in the Design of the Inward Journey," *Traditio* 28 (1972): 211-280, at 228.

¹⁹ Ernest Kaulbach reads the poem as an interior exploration of dream psychology, as understood by medieval writers. See his *Imaginative Prophecy in the B-Text of Piers Plowman* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1993). From a phenomenological perspective, Will is becoming aware of his condition—stive for self-awareness—by subjecting his body to the involuntary forces at work in the world. Patrick J. Gallacher, writes, "Freedom can operate only within a physical nature which is uniquely mine, or even uniquely me...The body is...the source of my basic experience of acting and being acted upon, of the voluntary and the involuntary, of being both a subject and an object" ("Chaucer and the Rhetoric of the Body," *The Chaucer Review* 28 [1994]: 216-36, at 217).

²⁰ Michel Zink, citing H.R. Jauss, argues that in Guillaume's *Rose* "allegory for the first time expresses not the movements of the soul in general, but rather the narrator's own subjectivity" ("The Allegorical Poem as Interior Memoir," trans. Kevin Brownlee and Margaret Miner, *Yale French Studies* 70 [1986]: 100-126, at 118). A crucial part of this bodily discourse is Will's first-person narration, an intrinsic part of the dream vision as a form, which makes Will's experience subjective and personal: the "I" who narrates the poem clearly belongs to a body. Shaun Gallagher and Dan Zahavi explain, "The first-person point of view on the world is...always defined by the situation of the perceiver's body, which concerns not simply location and posture, but action in pragmatic contexts and interaction with other people" ("Phenomenological Approaches to Self-Consciousness," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* [Winter 2005, revised Fall 2010], <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/self-consciousness-phenomenological/#BodSelAwa>). When the dreamer is named Will, his corporeal presence is solidified further, even without biographically linking him to the author of the poem.

The authorship of *Piers Plowman* has been greatly debated, but E. Talbot Donaldson notes, "The name of William Langland is associated with the poem from an early period. One manuscript has a fifteenth-century annotation that connects him with the Malvern Hills area of the

states, “The possibility of generalizing Will's experience makes Piers a poem about the journey of both an individual character (Will) and an ‘Everyman,’ represented by one of the faculties with which the human subject was most identified [the will].”²¹ Thus, Will’s interactions with others during his wanderings may well represent the “various aides and obstacles that the will faces on the way to a significant relationship with the divine,” as well as his personal progress toward a fuller consciousness of self.²² (It is no coincidence that his guide for most of his later visions will be Conscience.²³)

This allegorical journey facilitates Will’s healing. Kathleen Hewett-Smith argues that Langland, while exploring the limits of allegoresis, ultimately uses allegory in an attempt to “ensure the spiritualizing of the things of sense, to bring his dreamer, and

West Midlands of England. . . The poem also connects its Dreamer-narrator with the Malvern Hills. Puns on the Dreamer-narrator’s name of ‘Will’—at one point he calls himself ‘Long Will,’ who has ‘lived long in the land’ (XV.152)—appear to confirm the name” (*Piers Plowman: An Alliterative Verse Translation*, ed. Elizabeth D. Kirk and Judith H. Anderson [New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1990], viii). See also C. David Benson, “The Langland Myth,” in *William Langland’s Piers Plowman: A Book of Essays*, ed. Kathleen M. Hewett-Smith (New York: Routledge, 2001), 83-101; James J. Paxson, “Inventing the Subject and the Personification of Will in *Piers Plowman*: Rhetorical, Erotic, and Ideological Origins and Limits in Langland’s Allegorical Poetics,” in *Piers Plowman: A Book of Essays*, 195-231; and James Simpson, “The Power of Impropriety: Authorial Naming in *Piers Plowman*,” in *Piers Plowman: A Book of Essays*, 145-165.

²¹ Jessica Barr, *Willing to Know God: Dreamers and Visionaries in the Later Middle Ages* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2010), 153. James Simpson argues, “Even if it is true that ‘William Langland’ really was the poet’s name, the logic of the poem insists on repeatedly thematizing ‘Will’ (and occasionally ‘long’ and ‘land’) in such a way as to efface the boundaries between author and reader” (“The Power of Impropriety,” 147-48).

²² Barr, *Willing*, 154. Nicolette Zeeman states, “Langland identifies the powers of the soul and looks at how they engage with phenomena outside the mind—revelation, the natural world, texts, images, people and lived experience” (*Discourse of Desire*, 19).

²³ According to Donaldson, conscience can also mean consciousness in the modern sense. “Langland’s major character who bears this name develops in importance and complexity as the poem progresses, so that both aspects of the word’s meaning [“ethical integrity” and “consciousness”] must be borne in mind in following his role” (*Piers Plowman*, 251). Robert Van Gulick states, “Consciousness has been thought to open a realm of possibilities, a sphere of options within which the conscious self might choose or act freely” (“Consciousness,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* [Summer 2004, revised Spring 2014], <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/consciousness/>).

reader, to the point of spiritual revelation and renewal through the recuperative therapy of orthodox allegorical interpretation.”²⁴ This therapy involves acknowledging the humanity of the dreamer.²⁵ Nicolette Zeeman agrees that “concrete, embodied phenomena are central to the figural and analogizing matrix of the poem.”²⁶ She finds that Langland links such phenomena together through puns and wordplay that are magnified on a structural, narrative level.²⁷ She argues, “Langland’s satirical wordplay is in this way quite closely locked into the logic of disintegration and renewal that characterizes the spiritual narratives of *Piers Plowman*...for Langland, such processes almost certainly contribute to the psychic reorientation of the soul towards God...In fact, Langland’s satirical wordplay and narrative iconoclasm may be central to his soteriology.”²⁸

While Langland emphasizes wordplay and satire in this therapeutic process, I would not suggest that he is interested in comedy in the same way as some of the other writers I examine in this study. The aims of his project are deeply serious. Nonetheless, the variable meanings at work within allegory and dream allow him to fuse together and play off multiple discourses and images in order to psychically reorient his dreamer toward wholeness. As Mary Davlin argues, “Language in *Piers Plowman* is something

²⁴ Kathleen M. Hewett-Smith, “‘Nede ne hath no lawe’: Poverty and the De-stabilization of Allegory in the Final Visions of *Piers Plowman*,” in *Piers Plowman: A Book of Essays*, 238-39.

²⁵ Hewett-Smith argues, “Rather than seeing an unbridgeable gulf in that space between human and divine, Langland, like Augustine, articulates a space for divine figuration that not only acknowledges but embraces our humanity” (“Poverty and the De-stabilization of Allegory,” 237).

²⁶ Zeeman, *Discourse of Desire*, 27.

²⁷ Zeeman argues, “terms or images...are used to connect what appear to be very different phenomena...when terms such as those mentioned above shift in meaning, whole narrative sequences, figures or personifications suddenly change in demeanour, appearance and signification” (*Discourse of Desire*, 26).

²⁸ Zeeman, *Discourse of Desire*, 28.

with which one plays, and the play is of ‘of heuene’ at least in the sense that it is for Will and for Langland a way to truth.”²⁹

In keeping with this allegorical pattern, Will’s first vision stands as a microcosm for the rest of the poem—the beginning of an allegorical web that continues across the remaining seven dreams: “Al this I seigh slepyng, and sevene sythes more” (Pr.321).³⁰ Or, to use a more appropriate metaphor, Will’s first vision sows the seeds of his penance that will develop over the course of the text. By returning to the same lessons and themes again and again, but with new levels of meaning, the text glosses itself (like the Bible does).³¹

One of these seeds is planted exactly halfway through the prologue, in one of the text’s important middles. The king and his advisers prepare means for the “Commune,” or common people, to have adequate “communes,” or food (Pr.117). This is critical because the people have been “povere sith the pestilence tyme” (Pr.84) and require both proper nourishment/ medicine and spiritual guidance (their parish priests and pardoners have taken the silver for themselves [Pr.81]). Their solution is to appoint plowmen: “The Commune contreved of Kynde Wit craftes, / And for profit of al the peple plowmen

²⁹ Mary Clemente Davlin, *A Game of Heuene: Word Play and the Meaning of Piers Plowman B* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1989), 1. Elsewhere, she argues, “Langland communicates his experience not by direct appeal to emotion, but through such devices as wordplay and paradox, first engaging the mind and then the heart” (“Chaucer and Langland as Religious Writers,” 123).

³⁰ In this sense, allegorical signification, as Maureen Quilligan describes, takes place on a horizontal surface of interaction, not simply on a vertical system of interpretation. “Only by looking closely at individual narratives, without imposing any preconceptions on their paratactic development, shall we be able to trace the complicated patterns of interconnected meaning which spread like a web across their horizontal verbal surfaces” (Maureen Quilligan, *The Language of Allegory: Defining the Genre* [Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1979], 33).

³¹ This is the observation of William Elford Rogers, *Interpretation in Piers Plowman* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2002), 20.

ordeyned / To tilie and to travaille as trewe lif asketh” (Pr.118-20).

This episode, at the very center of the prologue, sets a metaphorical scene for the rest of the poem. The remedy for the physical illness of the people is to eat good crops sown by trusty plowmen, “as trewe lif asketh.” The remedy for spiritual illness is the same: the self-directed medicine of penance that encourages men to follow a life of good works and a specific pattern of ingestion, namely fasting, eating simple meals with prayer and psalms, and feeding the poor.

This level of meaning is established in the succeeding lines when a lunatic counsels the king to rule wisely and an angel appears to expound on his counsel in Latin.

Thanne loked up a lunatik, a leene thyng withalle,
And knelynge to the Kyng clerghially he seide,
“Crist kepe thee, sire Kyng, and thi kynngryche,
And lene thee lede thi lond so leaute thee lovye,
And for thi rightful ruling be rewarded in heven!”
And sithen in the eyr on heigh an aungel of hevene
Lowed to speke in Latyn—for lewed men ne koude
Jangle ne jugge that justifie hem sholde.

(Pr.123-30)

The lean lunatic may very well be a type for Will—and even Piers—as he appears later in the poem (in addition to being considered insane and hungry, both are also identified as

knowing their letters).³² The lunatic's appearance sows another seed of Langland's penitential medicine: showing compassion to the poor. As the angel states, "*Qualia vis metere, talia grana sere*" (Pr.136)—such seeds as you sow, such a crop will grow.³³ This is a theme the text returns to multiple times over the course of Will's visions and forms a central tenet of the "good work" Langland hopes to do by offering readers his poem.³⁴

The importance of these "crops" is emphasized when Holy Church counsels Will to seek Truth. He responds that he has no "kynde knowynge" (1.138) to understand her words, and she rebukes him for neglecting his studies. She then explains,

For Truthe telleth that love is triacle of hevene:

May no synne be on hym seene that that spice useth.

And alle his werkes he wroughte with love as hym liste,

And lered it Moyses for the leveste thing and moost lik to hevene,

³² Will responds "as a clerik" (8.20), and the priest says Piers is "lettred a litel" (7.132) when he responds to the pardon. (In the C Text, a passage thought to be autobiographical identifies Will as a clerk, at lines 1-104.)

³³ The angel's "laicized" Latin rhyme may also represent laicized attitudes about directing one's own path to a relationship with God, as Langland purports to do by offering his text as a type of medicine. However, the very nature of his work demonstrates the limitations inherent to a personal relationship with Christ (also represented by the angel's Latin): this relationship is dependent on literacy. Without an education or basic knowledge, one cannot be a sickly reader nor "consume" Langland's self-help medicine. Gillian Rudd observes that by the end of the poem, "the link between food and knowledge has become so strong that any reference to eating contains within it a reference to hunger for knowledge as well" (*Managing Language*, 105, note 13).

³⁴ While only the literate can consume Will/Langland's medicine, the text warns against overconsumption. Once the angel concludes his verse, a Goliard, or wandering cleric (another potential type of Will) reacts in anger. He is called a "gloton of wordes" (Pr.139), and his attitude is correspondingly echoed by the gluttonous wasters, minstrels, dissembling beggars, and greedy clergy who populate Will's dreams and against whom the text continually preaches moderation. (See the first 82 lines of the prologue.) It is a gluttonous misuse of food *and* words that has caused the poverty that now threatens the common people (Pr.80-82). As Jill Mann has argued, "a perversion in eating and drinking leads to a perversion in words and vice versa" ("Eating and Drinking in *Piers Plowman*," *Essays and Studies* 32 (1979), 34). See also Rudd, *Managing Language*, 105.

And also the plante of pees, moost precious of vertues:
For hevene myghte nat holden it, so was it hevvy of hymselfe,
Til it hadde of the erthe eten his fille.
And whan it hadde of this fold flesh and blood taken,
Was nevere leef upon lynde lighter thereafter
(1.148-56, 159)

Holy Church teaches that Christ is the embodiment of love, “leche of life” (1.204), who stands in contrast to the doctors and apothecaries who lie about the “gommes” (2.227) used in their spices and medicines. Christ is more than a doctor, however; he is a medicinal plant—a spice—that grows naturally on the nourishment of the earth and becomes flesh and blood.³⁵ Rydzeski notes, “The dying of plants to produce seeds, and from them new life, reflects a long tradition of agricultural metaphors for both the individual eschatology of death and the social transformation of apocalypse.”³⁶ The fusion of this metaphor with Christ’s body represents not only the flesh and blood that is made accessible to the common person in the form of the Eucharist but also the regenerative renewal required for a broken society. These metaphors are brought together in the image of the grain being harvested by plowmen to make bread—the literal food of penance (in the form of Eucharist) and the regular food of the indigent. Thus, the humble

³⁵ In the Middle Ages, spices were used as medicines and disease preventatives (Paul Freedman, *Out of the East: Spices and the Medieval Imagination* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008], 2).

³⁶ Rydzeski, *Radical Nostalgia*, 28. “For society, the harvest is the Final Judgment; for the individual, the harvest signifies the moment of judgment at death, when one begins to reap the rewards or suffer the punishments of one’s works on earth. The more one plants and tends, the greater is the harvest, just as the more good works one does, the greater is one’s heavenly reward” (28).

work of plowmen, with whom the text identifies in title, form, and content, is symbolic of Christ's transformative medicine—medicine that depends on one's good works and is sealed by grace.³⁷

This medicalized discourse is more supplemental than expressive of mainstream medical practices. Though moderation is helpful and important—"Measure is medicine," says Holy Church (1.35)—Will does not find a cure strictly through humoral balance and the law of contraries, or indeed any secular teaching. Instead, the isopathic medicine he ingests (the blood of Christ that can heal the bloodstains of sin) *transforms* his person in every way, body and soul (and stands as a rebuke to practitioners who abuse their authority or neglect the spiritual half of the body).³⁸ This is the divine Truth that Will needs to understand in order to heal.³⁹ However, because he lacks "kynde knowynge," experiential knowledge—but also an intimate knowledge of Kind (God)—he must continue to gain understanding through his dreams.

Vision 2

At the end of the vision, the king and his knights go to mass (5.1-2), and Will wakes up, much to his regret. But before he "hadde faren a furlong" (5.5), fatigue

³⁷ Zeeman argues that acquiring understanding involves "hard work, practice, and suffering" (*Discourse of Desire*, 110). This is in part why Will must emulate the life of the poor.

³⁸ Rosanne Gasse states, "Medicine is a serious craft in *Piers Plowman*. Its practitioners must not ignore the necessary links between the mind, the body, and the soul, because any medical craftsman who does... is a charlatan and a liar" ("The Practice of Medicine in 'Piers Plowman,'" *The Chaucer Review* 39 (2004): 177-97, at 191). She writes, "If physicians are doctors of death in *Piers Plowman*, they are so by choice: in their ignorant supposition that they can treat the body independently of the soul" (191).

³⁹ Conscience describes the utopic state Will has to look forward to: the triumph of *parfit truthe* under the reign of Christ, a wonder beyond all others (3.299-309). Conscience references Isaiah 2:4: "And they shall turn their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into sickles." This resonates with the counsel in the *Old English Handbook*—"It is a serious (act of) penance that a layman lay aside his weapons and wander widely"—and unites Will's penance with the metaphor of plowing.

overcomes him: “That I ne myghte ferther a foot for defaute of slepyng, / And sat softly adoun and seide my bileve; / And so bablede on my bedes, thei broughte me aslepe” (5.6-8). This odd behavior (wanting and being able to sleep again so rapidly) is possibly explained by his penance. If Will is unable to attend Mass because he is performing satisfaction for sin, he would certainly desire to see more of the holy sacrament in his dreams, as well as continue his search for *kynde knowynge*. His fasting makes this desire for sleep achievable (and understandable), and he encourages the advent of another vision with the second component of satisfaction: praying on his beads.⁴⁰

Will’s second vision accomplishes many of his hopes. The vision returns to the field of folk where Reason delivers a sermon and Repentance assigns penance to the seven deadly sins. The explicit discourse of penance prompts Will to begin his quest for *kynde knowynge* in earnest, and his name is revealed once he feels the sting of contrition. “Thanne ran Repentaunce and reherced his terme / And gart Wille to wepe water with hise eighen” (5.60-61). Will’s penitent tears, accompanying the first appearance of his name, mark his moment of confession and rebirth—an important step toward wholeness. As James Simpson states, “Analysis of name is the prelude to and premise of therapy.”⁴¹

The other significant event to occur during this vision is the arrival of Piers the Plowman. Langland’s seeds of satisfaction thus begin to take root as we move from

⁴⁰ The *Old English Handbook* (OEH) states, “Let [the penitent person] everywhere earnestly obtain prayers of intercession by mass singing and psalm singing” (Allen J. Frantzen, *Anglo-Saxon Penitentials*, Corpus 201, p. 122, D55.14.01). Barbara Newman argues that the rosary devotion could inspire visions (*God and the Goddesses* [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003], 29-30).

⁴¹ Simpson, “The Power of Impropriety,” 150.

faceless plowmen in the first dream to an actual character in the second. Piers makes his appearance after the Seven Deadlies have finished confession. Like Will, the newly confessed are eager to seek Truth. As Truth's servant, Piers is the only one who knows where to find him, and he offers to guide the other penitents there on a pilgrimage: "To penaunce and to pilgrimage I wol passe with thise othere" (6.84).⁴²

Before they leave, Piers asks the penitents to help him plow his field, which he tends at Truth's command in order to care for the poor: "For I shal lenen hem liflode, but if the lond faille, / As longe as I lyve, for the Lordes love of hevene. / And alle manere of men that thorough mete and drynke libbeth, / Helpeth hym to werche wightliche that wynneth youre foode" (6.17-20). The work takes longer than expected, however, and the penitents never leave on their pilgrimage. Losing their motivation, many of the workers begin to feign (what we would now term) disabilities in order to receive free food, and Piers chastises them with the aid of Hunger. However, for those who truly could not labor to earn their bread, Piers has compassion: "But if he be blynd or brokelegged or bolted with irens, / He shal ete whete breed and drynke with myselve / Til God of his goodnesse [garisoun] hym sende" (6.136-38).⁴³

Some scholars have contended that because Piers attains a pardon (in Passus 7) without going on pilgrimage, the path to Truth is found in the good works one performs

⁴² Denise Baker writes, "According to Piers the repenting sinners can approach Truth's castle by obeying the Mosaic Law, but they can gain entrance only through penance and grace" ("From Plowing to Penitence: *Piers Plowman* and Fourteenth-Century Theology," *Speculum* 55 [1980]: 715-25, at 716).

⁴³ Jennifer Gianfalla argues that *Piers* provides evidence of a remarkably complex medieval interest in understanding and defining disability, demonstrating an awareness and acceptance of all types of impairments in "'Ther is moore misshapen amonges these beggeres': Discourses of Disability in *Piers Plowman*," in *Disability in the Middle Ages: Reconsiderations and Reverberations*, ed. Joshua R. Eyster (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010), 119-134.

at home, helping his neighbor. In other words, Piers's plowing—his feeding the poor—is the pilgrimage, the penance he does “as longe as I lyve.”⁴⁴ As he states, “I wol worshipe therwith Truthe by my lyve, / And ben His pilgrim ate low for povere mennes sake” (6.84, 101-2). However, as Denise Baker points out, this does not explain why Piers later tears the pardon. Baker's interpretation is that Langland is purposefully misleading his readers in order to make them confront their own nominalist ideas about the relationship between works and grace and so convert them to an “Augustinian consciousness of man's dependence on God's gift of grace.”⁴⁵

I agree that God's grace is essential to the text's understanding of absolution: transformation can only occur through Christ's healing power. However, progress toward this moment of spiritual transformation must first be demonstrated through bodily exertion. I would argue that Piers tears the pardon and renounces his plowing as an indication of his contrition. While his initial intentions to care for the poor were well founded, he became distracted by material concerns. He knows that the workers are his “bloody brethren, for God boughte us alle” (6.207) and observes, “Truthe taughte me ones to loven hem ech one / And to helpen hem of alle thing, ay as hem nedeth” (6.208-9). But instead of loving and helping his fellow penitents as instructed, he asks Hunger to punish them for being lazy. And then, while he deprives his workers of food, he eats *too much*,

⁴⁴ See John Burrow, “The Action of Langland's Second Vision,” *Essays in Criticism* 15 (1965): 247-68. Mary Carruthers argues, “Piers's plowing is a pilgrimage” (*The Search for St. Truth: A Study of the Meaning of Piers Plowman* [Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973], 65).

⁴⁵ Baker, “From Plowing to Penitence,” 725. She explains, “The Nominalists contradicted the Augustinian teaching about man's debilitated nature...[and] contended that through good works accomplished *ex puris naturalibus* man gained grace and merit *de congruo*” (719).

becoming one of the gluttonous sinners the text despises.⁴⁶

In a moment of epiphany—the pardon reminds him to “Do wel and have wel, and God shal have thi soule”(7.112)—Piers realizes his error: he neglected the welfare of those in his care and turned to a physical, secular cure when it needed to be spiritual. Consequently, Piers tears the pardon “atweyne” (7.115). From this point on, his hunger will not merely be a physiological tool; it will be consecrated fasting to treat his soul, and his new remedy will be the ongoing penance of fasting, prayers, and alms deeds.

“I shal cessen of my sowyng,” quod Piers, “and swynke noht so harde,

Ne aboute my bely joye so bisy be na moore;

Of preieres and of penaunce my plough shal ben hereafter,

And wepen whan I sholde slepe, though whete breed me faille.

The prophete his payn eet in penaunce and in sorwe,

By that the Sauter seith—so dide othere manye.

That loveth God lilly, his liflode is ful esy:

Fuerunt michi lacryme mee panes die ac nocte.”

(7.118-24)

Instead of focusing on his *bely joye*, Piers will eat his *payn*, provided by his plow, in

⁴⁶ In an effort to remedy the situation, Piers turns to Hunger for guidance in medical matters, asking him to provide a cure for his sore stomach. Hunger advises him to avoid physicians—“There are mo [li]eres than leches—Lord hem amende! / They do men deye thorough hir drynkes er destyne it wolde” (6.272-73)—and treat the problem himself through hunger and moderation. While Hunger’s advice is not necessarily bad, the problem is that Piers has neglected his spiritual health in the interest of his physical health and has unintentionally threatened the lives of his workers the way that doctors threaten the lives of their patients (6.272-73). (In promoting himself, Hunger becomes as single-minded as the doctors he criticizes, “lead[ing] individuals to focus solely on the body’s well-being” [Rebecca Krug, “*Piers Plowman* and the Secrets of Health,” 173].)

penaunce. This passage thus unites the metaphors of plowing and pilgrimage—good works and grace—that implement Will’s holistic medicine for the rest of the poem. In so doing, the text “acknowledges the need to suffer penance, but also the need to suffer other things such as the world and the will of God.”⁴⁷ Will’s treatment, while spiritual, is still dependent on physical experience.⁴⁸ This moment of contrition/ realization is marked by Piers’s tears, just as Will’s was, forging the first link between the two characters.

In this dream, Piers (a type for Will) is caught between various authorities telling him how to regain his health. (After Piers declares his intentions, the priest remarks, “Thow art letted a litel” (7.132). Because of this learning, he recommends Piers become a doctor of divinity and preach as he pleases. Piers, however, rejects not only the priest’s self-serving suggestion but the priest himself, choosing to direct his own path toward wholeness.⁴⁹) In the end, he rejects both physician and priest in favor of his own educated interpretation, dependent on his penitent exertions and ultimately God’s grace. When Will awakens from the dream he is troubled by this conflict, though he too recognizes the importance of grace: “I counseille alle Cristene to crie God mercy... That God gyve us grace” (196-8). He will not understand until later that he needs to emulate Piers’s example.

Vision 3

⁴⁷ Zeeman, *Discourse of Desire*, 15.

⁴⁸ Rebecca Krug argues that the B Text “turns to ideas about physical health and healing throughout the poem in order to find ways to value physical existence without allowing physicality to distract believers from their spiritual goals” (“*Piers Plowman* and the Secrets of Health,” 166).

⁴⁹ Sarah Wood sees in this interaction Langland’s “emphasis on an individual relationship with God.” Because Piers is lettered, he can interpret the pardon on his own, and he “imposes his penitential act upon himself rather than performing it at the instigation of a priest” (*Conscience*, 61-62).

Will wakes from his second dream, “meteleees and moneilees” (7.142) and muses on his “metels” (7.143) for a long time afterward.⁵⁰ After witnessing Pier’s penance in his dream, he now knows to seek Dowel. “Thus yrobed in russet I romed about / Al a somer seson for to seke Dowel” (8.1-2). Will’s waking pilgrimage brings him into contact with two friars who explain that God has given him the means to govern his own journey toward repentance and a life of doing well: “For he [God] yaf thee to yeresyyve to yeme wel thiselve— / And that is wit and free will, to every wight a porcion” (8.52-53). Interestingly, the friars seem to support Will’s self-directed penance and his attempt to establish an individual relationship with God, as guided by his will. This corresponds to the counsel in the penitentials, which states that a just repentance is dependent not only on a good confessor but also “according to a man’s works...and how one understands the sorrow of his heart and his own earnestness.”⁵¹ Will, however, does not yet feel he possesses the “kynde knowynge” (8.57) required to find Dowel and absolution; thus, he asks the friars to point him in the right direction. This critical conversation will take on new significance once Will’s self-awareness has more fully developed and he better understands the importance his own will plays in determining his healing.

After this conversation, Will resumes his travels—“And thus I wente widewher, walking myn one” (8.62)—until he sits down in a clearing and falls asleep again. In his third vision, the information Will learned from Piers’s example is revisited, but this time Will is the direct recipient. Just as Piers relied too much on secular knowledge, rather

⁵⁰ The orthographic similarity between *meteleees* and *metels*, placed only one line apart, signifies the causal connection between Will’s penitent ingestion (especially fasting) and his transformative visions. In fact, the root *mete* can denote both “food” as a noun and “dream” as a verb, as in, “I awakned therwith, and wroot as me mette” (19.485).

⁵¹ OEHL, Allen J. Frantzen, *Anglo-Saxon Penitentials*, Corpus 201, p.121-22, D55.09.01.

than *kynde knowynge*, Will too is rebuked by Scripture for relying on his secular, clerkly learning rather than his *Paternoster* (10.466-468). Consequently, Will weeps “for wo and wrahte of hir speche” (11.4)—just as Piers tore the Pardon “for pure tene” (7.115). Even though Will is angry, his anger is directed at himself, and his tears are a sign of his contrition.⁵²

Once Will’s contrition is reestablished, his process of self-examination intensifies with the move to a second layer of dreaming.⁵³ In this inner (or middle) dream, he is taken to gaze into a mirror called “Middelertne” (11.9) and told, “Here myghtow se wondres, / And knowe that thow coveitest, and come therto, peraunder” (11.10-11).⁵⁴ The mirror is a symbol of self-examination; it allows him to reflect on his time spent in the most important “middle” of all: mortality.⁵⁵ Indeed, the dream itself is triggered by

⁵² “Al for tene of hir [Scripture’s] text trembled myn herte, / And in a weer gan I wexe, and with myself to dispute / Wheither I were chose or noight chose” (11.116-7). This process of failure, rebuke, and renewal is consistent with the pattern Zeeman charts in her *Discourse of Desire*: “The soul’s experience of itself as tempted and at risk enables it to apprehend its own nature and its relation to God; the experience of failure and loss is often connected to the renewal of spiritual desire” (30).

⁵³ James Simpson writes, “Langland is the only English writer (to my knowledge, the only medieval writer), to have used the device of the dream within the dream. He does so, I think, as a way of engaging deeper, more emotional aspects of the self in resolution of intellectual problems. The inner-dream cannot be regarded as a straight continuation of the intellectual problem in the previous passus; it is more of a replay of certain central issues, which provoke Will to see them in a different, more intense and personal light” (*Piers Plowman: An Introduction*, 2nd edition, [Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2007], 106).

⁵⁴ “A merveillous metels mette me thanne, / For I was ravysshed right there—for Fortune me fette / And into the lond of longyngy and love she me broughte, / And in a mirour that highte Middelertne she made me to beholde” (11.6-9).

⁵⁵ Anne Middleton argues that Langland alludes to his own name in the phrase *lond of longynge*, “a place of absolute authorial as well as spiritual self-confrontation and self-revelation”: “As a signature, the Lond of Longyng invites us to take our bearings in the allegorical narrative from Will’s position, a position that is realized as historically concrete as well as figurative: such mnemonic narrative marking is...precisely the purpose of the signature-system” (“William Langland’s ‘Kynde Name’: Authorial Signature and Social Identity in Late

Scripture's assertion that "Many men know many things and do not know themselves" (11.3).⁵⁶ Zeeman argues that these words "drive Will into natural, embodied experiences of suffering, confusion, humiliation, and fear—the negatively revelatory vision of the created self."⁵⁷ Will, like Piers before him, is led astray by Covetousness and wanders aimlessly in his dream, abandoning his search for Dowel, until at last he reaches old age.⁵⁸ Covetousness counsels him to secure a pardon from the friars. "For whiles Fortune is thi frend freres wol thee lovye" (11.55). But Fortune soon abandons Will, and once he loses his riches, the friars fail to grant him the pardon they promised. Awakening to the hypocrisy of the clergy, Will embarks once more on a course of serious introspection.⁵⁹

Will recalls, as Piers did, that Christ has bought all men with his blood, making him the only person who can truly pardon—and heal—sin.⁶⁰ Christ offers his followers a healing drink that will cure all sin, a drink that originates from his own body (11.121-22).⁶¹ With the sacrament of baptism, then, comes the commitment to care for one's "bloody brethren": "For alle are we Cristes creatures, and of his cofres riche / And

Fourteenth-Century England," in *Literary Practice and Social Change in Britain, 1380-1530*, ed. Lee Patterson [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990], 44).

⁵⁶ "Multi multa sciunt et seipsos nesciunt."

⁵⁷ Zeeman, *Discourse of Desire*, 209.

⁵⁸ Will reaches old age in "real life" in Passus 20.

⁵⁹ Zeeman writes, "In the course of the narrative, Will encounters the hardships and deprivations of the world; he loses the strengths of the body and material goods in old age and poverty, and then he loses the attention of the friars. The fact that he suffers injustice at the hands of the members of the clergy has the side-effect of again associating his natural experience with that of the laity, those who 'lack' the attributes of clericalism" (*Discourse of Desire*, 213).

⁶⁰ "For Crist cleped us alle, come if we wolde— / Sarsens and scismatikes, and so he dide the Jewes: / *Ovos omnes scientes, venite...* / And bad hem souke for synne save at his breste / And drynke boote for bale, brouke it whoso myghte. / 'Thanne may alle Cristene come,' quod I, 'and cleyme there entree / By the blood that he bought us with and thourgh bapteme after" (11.119-124).

⁶¹ Christ's life-giving drink stands in contrast with the deadly "drynkes" of corrupt medical professionals (6.273).

brethren as of oo blood, as wel beggeres as erles. / For at Calvarie, of Cristes blood
 Cristendom gan sprynge, / And bloody brethren we bicomme there, of o body ywonne...No
 beggere ne boye amonges us but if it synne made” (11.198-201, 203). Christ’s body binds
 men together, and the bounties of his earth make everyone rich, if these bounties are
 shared.⁶² For this reason, when men “maken festes” (189) they should “calleth the
 carefulle therto, the croked and the povere” (192).⁶³

In Will’s previous dream, Piers clearly understood his temporal obligation to care
 for “the croked and the povere.” What he did not understand was that the only true
 beggars are those who alienate themselves from God through sin: “No beggere ne boye
 amonges us but if it synne made” (203). While men are charged to care for the poor, the
 poor are never truly alone; God will keep them as he keeps the sparrow. Furthermore, the
 poor will receive spiritual blessings the rich will not, if they are patient (11.255-56):
 “Although it be sour to suffer, ther cometh swete after; / As on a walnote—withoute is a
 bitter barke, / And after that bitter bark, be the shelle aweye, / Is a kernel of confort kynde
 to restore. / So is after poverte or penaunce paciently ytake, / Maketh a man to have
 mynde in God” (11.255-62). Here Langland draws on the metaphor of the chaff and the
 grain to allegorize the experience of the medieval peasant, an allegorization that will

⁶² Christ judges men by how kind or God-like they are: “Jesu Crist of hevене, / In a
 povere mannes apparaille pursueth us evere, / And loketh on us in hir liknesse and that with
 lovely chere, / To knowen us by oure kynde herte and castynge of oure eighen, / Wheither we
 love the lords here bifore oure Lord of blisse” (11.184-88).

⁶³ Those who share what they have with the poor and needy will be repaid. “Ac for the
 povere I shal paie, and pure wel quyte hir travaille / That yveth hem mete or moeie and loveth
 hem for my sake” (11.194-95).

become more profound as Will experiences the “bitter bark” of lived reality for himself.⁶⁴ This suffering, the bark, “is for Langland an essential component of *kynde* experience,” as essential as the “kernel of comfort” that follows it.⁶⁵

But what Piers misunderstood was that he could not replace his pilgrimage or penance with his works alone. He needed to repent and make satisfaction so that his sins could be healed through the grace of Christ. “Penaunce paciently ytake, / Maketh a man to have mynde in God.” Because he is a man, he is a sinner. And because he is a sinner, he needs to repent and tend to his spiritual development: “for pilgrymes are we alle” (11.240).⁶⁶

Keeping in mind Brown’s definition of dream vision as “an interiorized pilgrimage, with an urge to mirror and effect spiritual transformation through self-examination,” we can see Will’s dreams begin to shape into pilgrimage. He is learning that his transformation can only be gained through self-examination, sincere penance, and spiritual knowledge. As Zeeman puts it, “In this Dream, Wil comes to see himself *only* through observing, and himself suffering, the unreliability of the world and the immorality of others...experience and suffering in the world precipitate moral self-

⁶⁴ Hewett-Smith argues that later in the poem abstract truths will be conveyed not by experiential allegory (plowing, seeking, or feasting) but by a “more powerfully intellectualized (and intellectualizing) form of the mode...[that will] expose, even advertise the process of signification” (238).

⁶⁵ Zeeman, *Discourse of Desire*, 206. She writes, “Here *pacience*—not indifference to the world, but acceptance of suffering in it—is described in terms of lived and acted experience...Love will not change literal events...but it provides a (suffering?) way of relating to the world that determines how you understand it” (*Discourse of Desire*, 261).

⁶⁶ Zeeman writes, “Medieval pastoral theorists were acutely aware that, like all outward appearances, outer action may be hypocritical; nevertheless, they along with Langland, continued to place enormous emphasis on external action as a *kynde* index of inner life” (*Discourse of Desire*, 207).

awareness.”⁶⁷ Through this experience, Will learns that absolution can only come through Christ, who too appeared in “pilgrymes liknesse” (11.241).

Unfortunately, Will’s middle vision ends too soon, and he laments that he did not sleep longer: “Wo was me thanne / That I in metels ne myghte moore have yknowne” (11.404-5). But his lesson is not over yet, and Imaginative picks up where his inner vision left off. In his dream within a dream, Will was taught that it was not just material goods that should be shared. He was counseled, “Be we noght unkynde of oure catel, ne of oure konnyng neither” (11.212). Just as God shares his goods *and* knowledge with men, so men should share their goods and knowledge with others.⁶⁸ Withholding knowledge is not only un-Kind, un-Godlike, but it also keeps men from finding the path that leads to Kind, from acquiring *kynde knowynge*.

Imaginative continues this discourse by discussing the redemptive potential of education, claiming, “Clergie and kynde wit cometh of sighte and techyng, / As the Book bereth witnesse to burnes that kan rede” (64-65).⁶⁹ As an example, he explains that when the woman was taken in adultery, Christ saved her with his understanding of “clergie”

⁶⁷ Zeeman, *Discourse of Desire*, 214. In the dream, Kind appears and calls Will by name, telling him that “thorough the wondres of this world wit for to take” (322). This Book of Nature—bodily experience—helps Will understand. “And on a mountaigne that Myddelerthe highte, as me tho thought, / I was fet forth by ensaumples to knowe, / Thorough each a creature, Kynde my creatour to lovye” (323-25).

⁶⁸ At multiple points in the text, readers, especially the rich, are counseled to give to the poor. “Beth noght unkynde, I conseiile yow, to youre evenecristene...for that kynde doth, unkynde fordooth” (17.262, 273). “Forthi I rede yow riche, haveth ruthe on the povere, / Though ye be mighty to mote, beeth meke in youre werkes, / For the same mesure that ye mete, amys outhur ellis, / Ye shulle ben weyen therwith whan ye wenden hennes...loven leelly and lene the povere, / Of swich good as God yow sent goodliche partheth” (1.175-78, 181-82).

⁶⁹ Zeeman argues that drawing on Imaginative, rather than a higher rational power, “exemplifies the non-developmental nature of Langland’s psychological analysis”: “This power uses and manipulates sensory or natural experience, primarily in the form of mental images and the ideas associated with them; it is also associated with dreams, images and figurative textuality” (*Discourse of Desire*, 246).

(12.77) or learning: “Cristes writynge saved; / So clergie is confort to creatures that repenten /... / For Goddes body myghte noight ben of breed withouten clergie” (12.82-83, 85). Christ’s learning and *writing* saved the woman, just as his body saves and just as Langland hopes his writing will save his readers; furthermore, Christ’s body could not “ben of breed” without learning. Thus, learning is not only a comfort but a necessity to those who would repent and direct their own path toward healing.⁷⁰

Learning is a crucial part of repentance because men who are educated know how to escape sin: “For if the clerke be konnyng, he knoweth what is synne, / And how contricion withoute confession conforteth the soule” (174-75). Those who are uneducated, on the other hand, go to confession without contrition and thus make little progress. They are also likely to blindly follow the instruction of the priest, who might be just as ignorant as they are: “But as his loresman lereth hym bileveth and troweth, / And that is after person or parish preest, and paraventure bothe unkonnyng” (182-83). This is a central tenet of the poem: self-directed penance through education is often preferable to the guidance of unrighteous or merely ignorant priests. This education, however, must be grounded firmly in spiritual texts if men are to avoid repeating Piers’s mistake.

With this *konnyng*, Will has made substantial progress from his earlier conversation with the friars. This waking, external interaction, now paired with a sleeping, internal one, has propelled him one step closer to his development of self-

⁷⁰ Zeeman claims, “Not only does Christ’s *clergie* perhaps say something new (we are not told), but the way it communicates is sacramentally mysterious and miraculous. Like the eucharist, it operates in one way for the good and in another for the bad” (*Discourse of Desire*, 253-54).

consciousness and an understanding of free will.⁷¹ This is the purpose of his penitent journey, and his remedy is gradually revealed to him as he encounters more figures, both foils and examples, within his dreams. As Will's self-awareness grows, the closer he comes to cultivating his own form of bodily writing.

Vision 4

When Will wakes up and compares the enlightenment he gleaned during his dream (signified allegory) to the waking world (the sign), he falls into despair. "And I awaked therwith, witlees nerhande, / And as a freke that fey were, forth gan I walke / In manere of a mendynaunt many yer after, / And of this metyng many tymes muche thought I hadde" (13.1-4). What frustrates Will, in addition to his own shortcomings, is how the institution of the Church is failing its members. Laymen like him require healing, but the clergy is corrupt. He laments, "How that lewed men ben lad, but Oure Lord hem helpe, / Thorough unkonnyng curatours to incurable peynes" (13.12-13). *Curates* are supposed to cure through penance (20.282-83), but instead these *unkonnyng* priests are actually causing men *incurable* pains. The layman's only hope is that the Lord will help him. And here, while awake, Will begins to more fully comprehend the self-directed, individual relationship he needs to cultivate with Christ. Because he has not yet found absolution, Will does not give up his penance of wandering and fasting. After puzzling

⁷¹ In this dream, the topic of pardoning and Grace does not revolve around an actual document, as it does in Passus 7. What persists is the argument with the clergy concerning the rules for salvation. This time, it is Will, not Piers, who fights with the priest and rejects what he at first believed. He undergoes the experience of committing and then sorrowing for sin. The fact that this occurs in a dream within a dream points to the highly personal nature of the experience. This time, when Will "awakes," he does not question the legitimacy of the dream; instead, he recognizes, "Now I woot what Dowel is" (11.407).

over his dreams, he lies back down and goes to sleep (13.21).⁷²

The ensuing dream, born of Will's current frame of mind, expounds on the self-directed aspect of his treatment and explicitly joins his tripartite medicine to a discourse of ingestion. Will attends a feast hosted by Conscience, the "embodiment of the virtuous (lay) penitent imagined in vernacular penitential literature."⁷³ The food that Conscience offers his guests is in fact scripture: "Conscience called after mete, and thanne cam Scripture / And served hem thus soone of sondry metes manye— / Of Austyn, of Ambrose, of alle the foure Evaungelistes: / *Edentes et bibentes que apud eos sunt*" (13.37-40). For Will and Patience, sitting at the side table, Conscience sends "bread" and dishes of penitential psalms. "He sette a sour loof tofor us and seide, '*Agite penitenciam,*' / And siththe he drough us drynke: '*Dia perseverans— / As longe,*' quod he, 'as lif and lycame may dure'" (13.48-50). He then proceeds to serve them multiple psalms and comforts them with "murye tales" (13.52-60). Sarah Wood observes that the comfort offered by his food and words corresponds to the comfort or spiritual counsel offered in vernacular penitential texts.⁷⁴ Serving sour bread with *beati quorum* and other psalms unites Langland's literal and textual forms of penitent ingestion.

Will and Patience's fare stands in stark contrast with the rich meal eaten by the

⁷² Will's desire to dream again—to return to an allegorical world—suggests he has not given up on allegory as an epistemological mode.

⁷³ Wood, *Conscience*, 59.

⁷⁴ Wood, *Conscience*, 59-60. Zeeman finds that the personifications Thought, Wit, Study, Clergy, Scripture, and Imaginative, while encompassing academic learning and clerical activities, "also include elementary—and no doubt vernacular—forms of knowledge and practice. . . . As Langland uses them, they denote categories of understanding and experience that, at different levels, can be accessed by a lay or unlearned person as much as by someone advanced in spiritual or intellectual life" (*Discourse of Desire*, 24).

gluttonous Doctor, who refuses to dine on scripture.⁷⁵ This episode confirms that the rich, the clergy, the doctors, none of society's consecrated leaders, are fit to have authority over Will's body or his soul.⁷⁶ Consequently, he must find a cure himself.⁷⁷

Wood argues that Conscience and Patience's subsequent instruction to Hawkin the Active Man in Passus 13 and 14 follows the same principles of a vernacularized penance that emphasizes the individual's relationship with God. They are not priests, so they do not absolve him. Instead, they teach him how to help himself through lay spiritual counsel.⁷⁸ Hawkin's situation echoes that of Piers: he has committed the sin of gluttony,

⁷⁵ See Margaret Kim, "The Politics of Consuming Worldly Goods: Negotiating Christian Discipline and Feudal Power in *Piers Plowman*," *Traditio* 59 (2004): 339-68. Will laments, "'Ac this Goddes gloton,' quod I, 'with his grete chekes, / Hath no pite on us povere; he parfourneth yvele'" (13.78-79). The Doctor's opulent meal symbolizes the sinful state of the world: the ostentatious feast days celebrated by the wasteful rich, the excessive meals enjoyed by the religious orders, the greedy neglect of physicians, all combined to the abuse of the poor and starving. Susan F. Weiss writes, "The feast or banquet is seen as a locus of pleasure and plenitude, a kind of hedonism, a way of liberating the senses and deriving enjoyment of a rather sensual nature" ("Medieval and Renaissance Wedding Banquets and Other Feasts," in *Food and Eating in Medieval Europe*, ed. Martha Calin and Joel Rosenthal [Rio Grande, Ohio: Hambledon Press, 1998], 159).

⁷⁶ Zeeman notes that the contrast in this passage between spiritual and material food creates a type of experiential satire that is also "lay, vernacular, and anticlerical" (*Discourse of Desire*, 259). The text notes that these gluttons are damned unless they repent and "wepe salte teris: *Vos qui peccata hominum comeditis, nisi pro eis lacrimas et oraciones effuderitis, ea que in deliciis comeditis, in tormentis evometis*" [You who feast upon men's sins, unless you pour out tears and prayers for them, you shall vomit forth in torment the food which you feast on now with pleasure] (13.45). This is similar to a passage in the OEHD: "One must first cure him through good teaching and with it do so that he vomits the poison that is within him...just as a man (vomits) poison through a good drink. No physician can cure well before that poison is (cast) out" (Allen J. Frantzen, *Anglo-Saxon Penitentials*, Corpus 201, p.121, D55.05.01-55.07.01).

⁷⁷ Says Wood, "Conscience offers, in place of feasting and entertainment, hard penance (the contrite tears Piers had earlier vowed to eat instead of bread). His penitential 'feast' contrasts with the behavior of the Doctor, who preaches of Paul's 'penances' (B.13.66), yet lives off rich food and 'miswinnings' (B.13.42)" (*Conscience*, 59-60). The result is that "Langland emphasizes the individual conscience over academic forms of knowing" (58-59). It is for this reason that Conscience determines to become a pilgrim with Patience until he has "preved moore" (13.183).

⁷⁸ Wood, *Conscience*, 61-63.

and his sin has led to physical illness.⁷⁹ He confesses that he “moore mete eet and dronk than kynde myghte defie” (13.404), and as a result of his gluttony, he “kaughte siknesse somtyme for my surfetes ofte; / And thane I dradde to deye in dedlich synne” (405-6).

Like Piers did, Hawkin turns to secular sources for a cure—in this case, witches (13.338)—and neglects his duty to care for the poor (13.425). Consequently, his physical ailments, caused by sin, propel him into wanhope and dread.

Hawkin’s coat—a symbol of his soul—has been soiled. Even though he has tried to wash it, through penance and physical suffering, he cannot keep it clean permanently.⁸⁰ Conscience explains that Hawkin’s coat will only stay clean if he repents continually, and he links the tripartite nature of penance—contrition, confession, and satisfaction—explicitly to Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest: “*Cordis contricio*... / Dowel shal wasshen it and wryngen it thourgh a wis confessour— / *Oris confessio*... / Dobet shal beten it and bouken it as bright as any scarlet / ... / *Satisfaccio*—Dobest. / Shal nevere my[te] bymolen it, ne mothe after biten it” (14.18-21, 24-25). Satisfaction in particular, which precedes a live of Dobest, is critical for keeping a soul clean. As Patience explains, contrition will cripple the sin, but it is satisfaction that destroys it and so heals the sinner, “That it nevere eft is sene ne soor, but semeth a wounde yheeled” (14.96).⁸¹

⁷⁹ “I cache the crampe, the cardiacle some tyme, / Or an ague in swich an anger, and som tyme a fevere” (13.335-36).

⁸⁰ “It hath be laved in Lente and out of Lente bothe / With the sope of siknesse, that seketh wonder depe, / And with the losse of catel... And was shriven of the preest, that [for my synnes gaf me] / To penaunce, pacience, and povere men to fede, / Al for coveitise of my Cristendom in clenness to kepen it” (14.5-7, 9-11).

⁸¹ “Contricion, faith, and conscience is kyndeliche Dowel, / And surgiens for dedly synne whan shrift of mouthe faileth / ... / Contricion dooth but dryveth it doun into a venial synne, / ... / Ac satisfaccion seketh out the roote, and bothe sleeth and voideth, / And as it nevere hadde ybe, to noghte bryngeth dedly synne, / That it nevere eft is sene ne soor, but semeth a wounde

What Hawkin—and so Will—needs to learn is that penance is not a single act or deed, something that can be done once and never tended to again. It is an open-ended, lifelong journey. Wood states, “Spiritual perfection or ‘Dobest’ comes only *after*, not upon completion of, sacramental penance...Conscience’s arrangement of the three Do’s implies that Dowel is an infinite *process*, not a finite object.”⁸² This clarification is critical, for Hawkin (and Will) cannot hope to achieve transformation all in one moment. Hawkin’s coat will continue to get dirty, and his journey may have no ending: healing his soul and body from the ravages of sin and disease will take a lifetime, and he may never attain that realization of epiphany before he dies. “‘*Dia perseverans*— / As longe,’ quod he, ‘as lif and lycame may dure’” (13.48-50).⁸³

Patience explains what such a life of ongoing penance looks like. In so doing, he returns to concepts that have appeared previously in Will’s dreams and continues to link penance to a discourse of ingestion. Patience’s view is much like Piers’s in Passus 7, and he emphasizes the importance of grace—receiving rather than earning.⁸⁴ For example, Patience offers to give Hawkin flour and dough without the intermediate step of plowing. “‘And I shal purveie thee paast,’ quod Pacience, ‘though no plough eryl, / And flour to fede folk with as best be for the soule; / Though never greyn growed, ne grape upon vyne, / Alle that lyveth and loketh liflode wolde I fynde, / And that ynogh—shal noon

yheeled” (14.87-88, 92, 94-96).

⁸² Wood, *Conscience*, 66.

⁸³ As Wood states, “The work of penance requires continual reiteration—the idea of doing well as measurable acts gives way to the idea of doing well as an infinite, unmeasurable, ongoing penitential state” (*Conscience*, 66-67).

⁸⁴ Wood argues, “For Patience, the three parts of penance described by Conscience represent only the beginning of a much more radical transformation, the pursuit of a more spiritual mode of life in ‘patient poverty.’ This state demands nothing less than the total transformation of Hawkin from ‘Actif’ to passive/ patient” (*Conscience*, 65).

faillie of thing that hem nedeth” (14.29-33). He can do this because, as Will learned in Passus 11, God has provided everything his creatures need on Earth. (He is taught this again at 15.363-66.) In an ideal world, plowing would not even be needed. But men have created food shortages through their “unkyndenesse” (14.72)—they are greedy and consume resources without sharing: “If men lyvede as mesure wolde, sholde never moore be defaute / Amonges Cristene creatures, if Cristes wordes ben trewe” (14.70-71).

Christ’s *words* guarantee that there is enough for all. It is for this reason that Patience feeds Will and Hawkin more texts, victuals of great virtues, which he had packed in his bag in Passus 13 (lines 217-18). “Out of his poke hente / Vitailles of grete vertues for alle manere beestes, / And seide, ‘Lo! Here liflode ynogh, if oure bileve be trewe” (14.37-39). He then offers them a piece of the Lord’s Prayer (which Scripture told Will he should rely on in Passus 10), rendering the second component of satisfaction literally ingestible: “And thanne was it a pece of the *Paternoster*—*Fiat voluntas tua.* / ‘Have, Haukyn,’ quod Pacience, ‘and et this whan the hungreth, / Or whan thou clomsest for cold or clyngest for droughte / ... / Tharstow nevere care for corn ne lynnyn cloth ne wollen, / Ne for drynke, ne deeth drede, but deye as God liketh” (14.49-51, 56-57). This prayer (“Thy will be done”) is the only nourishment people truly need. If they “eat” it when they are hungry or cold or thirsty, they will soon stop longing for bread or clothing or drink. Instead, they will accept God’s will, whatever it is.⁸⁵ This is worth far more than any physical food: it is “swete to the soule, no sugre is sweeter; / For pacience is payn for poverte hymselfe / And sobrete swete drynke and good leche in siknesse” (313-15).

Words/ texts can even protect men from Satan. Patience explains that if Will and

⁸⁵ See Gillian Rudd, *Managing Language*, 122.

Hawkin sin again, they can repent as many times as they need to. This perpetual process of repentance is important because it creates a public document proving Christ has paid their sinner's debt, preventing the devil from making a claim on them. "Ac the parchemyn of this patente of poverte be moste, / And of pure pacience and parfit bileve" (192-93). The parchment—the very fabric of the letters patent—is made from their penance: their poverty, patience, and perfect belief, the work done by their bodies. But it does no good if one cannot read it, and again the text teaches the importance of education. When Patience reaches the end of his sermon, Hawkin asks him to translate his Latin conclusion into English, for he is uneducated and does not understand. Patience does translate for him, but the disadvantage Hawkin faces is clear. The tears he sheds at the end of the dream thus hold multiple meanings: his contrition for sin; his despair that "synne seweth us evere" (323), making penance an eternal process; and his plight as an uneducated layman in the hands of corrupt leaders.

In this dream, Patience unites Will's penitential medicine (fasting, prayer, and alms) with a rigorous discourse of textual ingestion. But even though he emphasizes patient poverty and an almost passive reliance on grace, the importance of penance as an active force is still essential. I find that this discussion forms one of Langland's most important "middles." It is in the middle of Will's fourth vision, the midpoint of his total eight. The center of his dreaming experience, then, brings together the multiple images and metaphors Langland uses to describe Will's penitential medicine and propels it to a new level: the instruction Will and Hawkin receives "gestures towards a spiritual life broader than that offered by catechesis in the basic elements of the faith" and suggests

penance is not the end but rather the beginning.⁸⁶

Vision 5

When Will wakes up, he is perhaps, as Hawkin was, discouraged by the never-ending nature of the penance he has assigned himself. He feels more “witless” (13.1) than ever before and despairs of acquiring *kynde knyngne*: “Ac after my wakyng it was wonder longe / Er I koude kyndely knowe what was Dowel. / And so my wit weex and wanyed til I a fool weere” (15.1-3). Will’s despair soon turns into madness, and people mock him. “Folk helden me a fool; and in that folie I raved, / Til Reson hadde ruthe on me and rokked me aslepe” (15.10-11). While it might be possible to read Will’s madness as a result or even cause of his dreams (and despair), I believe his self-description suggests something else. Abandoning one’s worldly possessions or flouting social conventions for religious purposes, like the Desert Fathers and saints, was known as becoming a fool for Christ.⁸⁷ Will refuses to bow to the rich or honor social mores (15.4-9).⁸⁸ Thus, he is a fool in two ways: because he is in a state of penance, relinquishing the things of the world to follow Christ, and because he lacks the knowledge he desires to

⁸⁶ Wood, *Conscience*, 66-67.

⁸⁷ 1 Corinthians 4:10 reads, “We are fools for Christ’s sake” [Nos stulti propter Christum]. The text draws a further connection between Will and “the lif of holy seintes” (15.269) in their manner of penance. Conscience states, “What penaunce and poverté and passion thei suffrede— / In hunger, in hete, in alle manere angres. ‘Antony and Egidie and othere holy fadres / Woneden in wildernesse amon wilde beestes; / Monkes and mendinaunts, men by hemselfe” (15.270-74). These Desert Fathers and saints performed their “penaunce” in a state of poverty, just as Will does. This included fasting, which aided visionary experiences and thus the acquisition of knowledge. For example, Mary Magdelene lived on nothing but “leyvede [roots] and dewes” (15.295) and mostly meditation on God, Egidius lived on the milk of a wild hind who came to him only intermittently, etc. These saints, especially St. Anthony, were famous for their visions and models for the layperson, like Will, hoping to receive instruction from God.

⁸⁸ “And some lakkede my life—allowed it fewe— / And leted me for a lorel and looth to reverencen / Lordes or ladies or any lif ellis— / As persons in pelure with pendaunts of silver; / To sergeaunts ne to swiche seide noght ones, / ‘God loke yow, lordes!’—ne loutede faire” (15.4-9).

complete his journey and find absolution. He may even be a fool for thinking such a conclusion is possible.

When Will falls asleep again, his desire for knowledge is at the forefront of his mind. Consequently, the text again teaches that education and knowledge are critical for fostering an individual relationship with God—for clerks and priests lead ignorant men astray (15.70 ff.), and as Will later observes, none know how to properly read or interpret texts: “Wherfore I am afered of folk of Holy Kirke” (15.384). However, consuming *too* much knowledge is a trap that should be avoided: “*Non plus sapere quam oportet sapere*” (15.69).⁸⁹ Instead, Will must adopt the type of passive, “Thy will be done” approach advocated by Patience. His medicine of penance, his search for divine Truth, is a lifelong process that cannot be rushed.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ “Know no more than you need to know” (Rom. 12.3). The poem notes that if preachers and clerks were true of their tongues, then unlearned men would not be loath to learn from their teaching, placing the blame for misuse of knowledge on the clergy (15.103-10). Zeeman finds that Will’s experiences are “classic and recognised issues of pastoral and spiritual care, and they do not necessarily entail any criticism of the intellect or its objects. Will’s failures have a lot to teach: they illuminate the proper place and limitations of teaching and understanding” (*Discourse of Desire*, 22). She argues that “the terms and figures with which Langland represents understanding derive primarily from psychology and the phenomenology of practical and personal experience in the world” (23).

⁹⁰ At the beginning of the dream, Will readily admits that he wants to know “alle the sciences under sonne and alle the sotile craftes” (15.48). Conscience responds that the desire to “konne and to knowe science” (15.62) is what got Adam and Eve kicked out of Paradise, “right as hony is yvel to defie and englymeth the mawe” (15.65). This answer would seem to suggest that divine knowledge is not accessible to mortals and that the desire to learn more than one needs is gluttonous. (Will was also compared to Adam when he woke from his inner dream in Passus 11 lamenting he had not learned more: “Adam, the whiles he spak noght, hadde paradys at wille; / Ac whan he mamelede aboute mete and entremeted to knowe / The wisdom and the wit of God, he was put fram blisse” (11.415-17).) Will’s desire for enlightenment, then, is compared to forbidden fruits and dangerous honey. (Will’s dream or “metels” is orthographically linked to Adam’s “mete,” and both men are chastised for seeking more than they should.) This is because acquisition of knowledge cannot come on man’s terms but only on God’s. Its timing and quantity cannot be forced, just as Will cannot force himself to sleep longer and learn more. (He also expresses this wish at the end of his first dream (5.3-4).)

This process, however, can be aided by the development of charity, which Conscience describes in explicitly penitential terms: “*Fiat-voluntas-tua* fynt hym everemoore. / And if he soupeth, eet but a sop of *Spera in Deo*. / He kan portreye wel the *Paternoster* and peynte it with *Aves*, / And outhertwhile is his wone to wende on pilgrimages / Ther poore men and prisons liggeth, hir pardon to have” (15.179-83). Charity clearly follows the medicine of penance: he fasts, eats psalms and prayers, goes on pilgrimages, and does good deeds for the poor. But he also demonstrates the passive acceptance of grace advocated by Patience (*Fiat-voluntas-tua* [Thy will be done]).

It is no wonder, then, that Will expresses an interest to meet him and asks if clerks know where to find him (15.195-97). Conscience tells him that he cannot find Charity without the help of Piers Plowman. “Therefore by colour ne by clergie knowe shaltow hym nevere, / Neither thorough wordes ne werkes, but thorough wil oone, / And that knoweth no clerk ne creature on erthe / But Piers the Plowman—*Petrus, id est, Christus*” (15.209-12). This passage demonstrates the limitations of education.⁹¹ Will cannot become acquainted with Charity through his book learning; instead, he must cultivate *kynde knowynge*, experiential knowledge, and a personal relationship with Christ (represented by Piers) through his *will* alone.⁹² His growing awareness of himself as a free agent, a creature endowed with the faculty of reason, will allow him to direct his own path toward Christ.

⁹¹ Compare the denigration of “colour” here to its role in Chapter Five.

⁹² Piers now indisputably stands as a type for Christ, particularly the mortal body he inhabits. Mary Clemente Davlin argues, “Piers Plowman is an embodiment of the Christian belief that existentially all of these realities—Church-Christian-man-God—are in some way *one* in Christ. It is this whole Christ, the mystical Christ, whom Piers represents” (Mary Clemente Davlin, “*Petrus, Id Est, Christus*: Piers the Plowman as ‘The Whole Christ,’” *The Chaucer Review* 6 [1972]: 280-92, at 282).

Conscience expounds on the role of the will when he later compares Charity to a fruit that grows on a tree. Will declares he would undertake a pilgrimage of “twenty hundred myle” in order to have his “fulle of that fruyt” (16.10-11), underscoring the penitential nature of charity. He then asks where the fruit can be found. Conscience responds, ““It groweth in a gardyn..that God made hymselfe; / Amyddes mannes body the more is of that stoke. / Herte highte the herber that it inne groweth, / And *Liberum Arbitrium* hath the lond to ferme, / Under Piers the Plowman to piken it and to weden it” (16.13-17). Charity as a fruit fuses together the many metaphors Langland has employed to describe the healing medicine of satisfaction: Conscience has already described Charity as a penitent who performs good works, and Piers’s plowing was previously established (in Passus 7) as the work of penance. As a fruit, Charity underscores the ingestible nature of penance; it must be consumed, just as Christ’s body must be consumed, in order for it to be effective.

Furthermore, the tree on which charity grows is planted within each individual body.⁹³ It is farmed by *Free Will*, under the guidance of Piers Plowman. By using a pictorial representation, Conscience (and Langland) helps Will/ the reader increase his *knowynge*, in part by stimulating his memory.⁹⁴ Memory work is a physical process,

⁹³ Derek Pearsall states that the tree (in the C Text) is “the divine potential implanted in man” (William Langland, *Piers Plowman: An Edition of the C-text*, ed. Derek Pearsall [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978], 293, note 7). Donaldson explains that the tree (in the B Text) stands for several concepts at once: a fixed state with three conditions, the Trinity, the hierarchy of sexual states, and a historical sequence (*Piers Plowman*, 183, note 8).

⁹⁴ Pearsall explains that the tree “is probably most directly indebted to pictorial uses of trees as devices for presenting relationships and sequence in spatial terms” (*Piers Plowman*, 293, note 7). Davlin also argues that the “web of names and descriptions of body that forms so much of the fabric of the poem is supplemented by an elaborate lexical set of words for family members,” including images of trees (and cognates of *kynde*): “People at the time objectified and

organized and motivated by images, that can lead to knowledge.⁹⁵ Consequently, these images remind Will that the penance that brings him closer to Christ's healing grace must be self-directed and individual—a choice of the will—as well as grounded in bodily exertions.⁹⁶

As Will acquires more *knowynge*, more self-awareness, through his experiences—his interactions with external and internal forces—the discourse of satisfaction's healing power becomes more cohesive, and the relationship between body and soul becomes more unified. Conscience teaches that as a result of penance, “folkes sholden fynde, that ben in diverse siknesse, / The bettre for hir biddynge*s in body and in soule*” (15.424-25, my emphasis). He also states that spiritual leaders must tend to both aspects of one's health: “No man sholde be bishop but if he hadde bothe / *Bodily foode and goostly foode* to gyve there it nedede” (574-75, my emphasis).⁹⁷ Unfortunately, as we have been told again and again in the poem, these leaders are critically absent. In fact, the clergy themselves are in need of medicine. “*Dos ecclesie* this day hath ydronke venym, /

understood kinship through various visual forms of tables and trees, like trees of Jesse” (Davlin, “God and the Human Body,” 153).

⁹⁵ Mary Carruthers argues, “Human memory operates in signs, images that call up material which is not immediately present” (“The Poet as Master Builder: Composition and Locational Memory in the Middle Ages,” *New Literary History* 24 [1993]: 881-904, at 881). For the connection between image, memory, and invention, see Mary Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought: Meditation, Rhetoric, and the Making of Images, 400-1200* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), Ch. 3.

⁹⁶ Pearsall explains that it is Free Will who tends the tree of Charity because Free Will is “that part of man which bears the impress of the image of God to which man was created” (*Piers Plowman*, 294, note 28, quoting Donaldson, “*Piers Plowman*”: *The C-Text and Its Poet* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1949], 189, note 157).

⁹⁷ Conscience says bishops should “fedem hem with goostly foode, and nedy folk to fynden” (572). Rosanne Gasse argues, “Effective medical intervention...is particularly linked to the sacraments of the Church, a linkage that is in absolute keeping with standard medieval practice...The sacraments of baptism, penance, and the Eucharist have an essential function in the promotion of overall health, because the body and the soul are not dichotomous, but integral” (“Practice of Medicine,” 180-81).

And tho that han Petres power arn apoisoned alle!’ / A medicine moot therto that may amende prelates, / ... / And purgen hem of poison, er moore peril falle” (15.559-61, 66).⁹⁸ The only physician laypeople can truly trust is Christ. Like the ideal bishop described above, Christ fed his followers with *bodily foode* and *goostly foode*. He “feden us and festen us for everemoore at oones” (15.484). He healed people of “selkouthe sores” (15.588) and fed the five thousand with “two fishes and five loves” (15.590). In other words, he is a healer of both bodies and souls.⁹⁹

It is at this point, after Conscience tells Will about the Tree of Charity, that Will enters his second middle dream, another moment of heightened self-examination, and learns even more about Christ’s role as a healer.¹⁰⁰ Langland uses the single image of the Tree of Charity to “illustrate several ways of factoring out a problem, some illustrating cumulative sequences and some fixed patterns.”¹⁰¹ Consequently, the symbolism assigned to the fruit changes as the allegory changes until it comes to represent mankind as a whole. Jesus will be born in the fullness of time, when “that Piers fruyt floured and

⁹⁸ This is reminiscent of the language used in the *Old English Handbook*: “One must first cure him through good teaching and with it do so that he vomits the poison that is within him...just as a man (vomits) poison through a good drink. No physician can cure well before that poison is (cast) out” (Allen J. Frantzen, *Anglo-Saxon Penitentials*, Corpus 201, p.121, D55.05.01-55.07.01).

⁹⁹ Rosanne Gasse states, “Christ then is solidly identified as the familiar figure of *Christus Medicus*, the Good Physician...a healer of souls and bodies” (“Practice of Medicine,” 18). Davlin states, “More basic than these ways in which sinful or good bodily actions may displease or please God is the theology underlying the bond between God and the body: that is, the Christian belief in the creation, the incarnation, the indwelling, the eucharist, and the hope of bodily resurrection. The careful tangibility with which the poet presents these mysteries is notable” (“God and the Human Body,” 159).

¹⁰⁰ Will falls into a “love-dreem” (16.20), a nod perhaps to the French tradition of love visions but more relevantly a sign that his dream comes from—or is transformed by—Love himself.

¹⁰¹ Donaldson, *Piers Plowman*, 183, note 8. Interestingly, Joachim de Fiore used a tree to exemplify his three ages or *status*. See E. Randolph Daniel, “Joachim of Fiore,” 84.

felle to be rype” (16.94), and he will joust with the devil for possession of Piers’s fruit.¹⁰²

To protect Jesus against Satan, Piers (Christ’s human nature) teaches Jesus medicine: “And Piers the Plowman parceyved plener tyme, / And lered hym lechecraft, his lif for to save” (16.103-104). Jesus must know how to first “warisshen” (16.105) or cure himself from the wounds of the enemy before he can cure others. Just like Will, he must glean this knowledge from his body.¹⁰³ Jesus proceeds to practice his healing craft, progressing from “surgerie” to raising Lazarus from the dead until he becomes a “parfit praktisour” (16.106-07): “And soughte out the sike and synfulle bothe, / And salvede sike and synfulle, bothe blynde and crokede” (16.108-09). Because Jesus is God inhabiting a human body, he is the only person who is able to heal both physical and spiritual illness.

In this episode, the text captures the paradox of a deity whose force is “simultaneously immanent and supramundane.”¹⁰⁴ Piers represents the flesh that Jesus inhabits (*Petrus, id est, Christus*) so that he is *able* heal those afflicted with corporeal diseases such as blindness, injury, dumbness, leprosy, and bloody bowels. As Caroline

¹⁰² “And thanne sholde Jesus juste therefore, and bi juggement of armes, / Wheither shold fonge the fruyt—the fend or hymself” (16.95-96). If Piers is the whole Christ, as scholars have argued, then Piers’s fruit must be the fruit of God: his children, the members of the Church. See Mary Clemente Davlin, “*Petrus, Id Est, Christus*,” 280-92. By making mankind the fruit, something consumable, Langland enriches the consumable body of Christ: Christ ingests the fruit, which in turn will ingest him. Ann Astell writes, “In the Eucharist...the human communicant eats God, and God eats him or her to achieve a mutual in-one-anotherness, which is the precondition for empathetic understanding” (*Eating Beauty: The Eucharist and the Spiritual Arts of the Middle Ages* [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006], 11).

¹⁰³ Derek Pearsall explains, “God in his Incarnation must live and suffer as a man and must learn his job as ‘leche of lyf’ in terms of the capacities of the human Free Will. He must learn ‘creaturely limitation’ and refrain from ‘a premature exertion of his full Godhead’” (*Piers Plowman*, 299, citing David Aers, *Piers Plowman and Christian Allegory* [London: St. Martin’s Press, 1975], 108).

¹⁰⁴ Kathryn Lynch, *The High Medieval Dream Vision: Poetry, Philosophy, and Literary Form* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), 70. Lynch argues that the dream form is particularly suited to capture this paradox.

Bynum explains, Christ, by becoming human, saves all that the human being is, including the body.¹⁰⁵ Furthermore, it is his *bodily* suffering that (isopathically) heals men's souls. As Isaiah puts it, "He was wounded for our iniquities, he was bruised for our sins...and by his bruises we are healed."¹⁰⁶

This is of course powerfully symbolized by the Eucharist. Christ is not just a healer. He is the medicine. "No medicine under molde the man to heele brynge... Withouten the blood of a barn born of a mayde. / And be he bathed in that blood, baptised as it were, / And thanne plastred with penaunce and passion of that baby, / He sholde stoned and steppe—ac stalworthe worth he nevere / Til he have eten al the barn and his blood ydronke" (17.92, 94-98). Again, Christ's mortality is emphasized ("born of a mayde"), for this is what makes his medicine effective for a mortal body. The plaster of penance (good works) is a vital part of this healing, but without the blood of the baby (grace), full strength will not return. Will, and all men, must consume Christ's flesh as well as their medicine of penance. Thus, the Eucharist and all that it represents is the direct solution to the flawed medicines offered by corrupt doctors and curates.¹⁰⁷ It is for this reason that men are told to feast on Christ and his Word (the bread of life).

¹⁰⁵ Bynum, *Holy Feast*, 294. Bynum argues that extravagant penitential practices are an effort to plumb and realize all the possibilities of the flesh (not an attempt to escape from or despise the body).

¹⁰⁶ Isaiah 53:5. "Ipse autem vulneratus est propter iniquitates nostras, attritus est propter scelera nostra; disciplina pacis nostrae super eum, et livore ejus sanati sumus." Incidentally, Isaiah also speaks about Christ's development to become a "parfit praktisour," saying he "shall grow up as a tender plant" [Et ascendet sicut virgultum coram eo] (53:2).

¹⁰⁷ Rosanne Gasse says of this passage, "The first and third references literally fuse human flesh and the divine body; the one by immersion, the other by ingestion. Penance, too, encloses the sacramental about the human flesh. No wonder then that Langland, through Conscience, lists the parson, parish priest, confessor, and bishop as the only acceptable sort of *leche*...they are only clergymen who can perform all three of these healing rites [baptism, penance, and Eucharist]" ("Practice of Medicine," 181).

As a result of this (middle) dream, Will comes to understand that his spiritual illness can be healed through the physical work of his body precisely because Christ atoned for his sins through the sacrifice of *his* body. In a small sense, then, Will's physical penance mirrors Christ's passion.¹⁰⁸ At this point, Will's wandering is again recharged as purposeful pilgrimage. He now seeks Piers the Plowman—the symbol of Christ's (bodily) healing power and forgiveness: “And I awaked therwith, and wiped myne eighen, / And after Piers the Plowman pried and stared, / Estward and westward I waited after faste / And yede forth as an ydiot, in contree to asprie / After Piers the Plowman—many a place I sought” (16.167-71). This moment of renewed dedication, like the others that precede it, is marked by Will's tears of contrition. Once again, he (re)starts his penitent journey, his progress toward a greater consciousness of self and a fuller realization of his agency. This dream, perhaps more than any other, confirms that this progress is dependent on his body—and the body of Christ.¹⁰⁹

Vision 6

After waking from his fifth vision, Will continues his pilgrimage, “Wolleward and weetshoed ... / As a reccheles renk” (18.1-2). Again, he grows weary of the world and longs to return to his dreams (18.4). “And lened me to a Lenten—and longe tyme I slepte; / Reste me there and rutte faste til *Ramis palmarum*” (18.5-6). In keeping with the ongoing nature of penance he has come to understand, Will states that he “yede forth lik a

¹⁰⁸ As Mary Davlin states, “The body is connected with God in the poem not only through God's creation and comforting, but also through the way human physical action mirrors divine action” (“God and the Human Body,” 160).

¹⁰⁹ This progress can be viewed as “a measured embodiment of autonomy and dependence—an affirmation that may at times rise to a sense of mythic participation and communion, but only through a dialectic of self and otherness in regard to the body and the world” (Gallacher, “Chaucer and the Rhetoric of the Body,” 217).

lore al my lif tyme” (18.3).¹¹⁰ His acceptance of his medicine’s ongoing nature is perhaps what he needed to make further progress, for his ensuing vision, which takes place during the Holy Week liturgies, significantly expounds on the metaphors of Christ as doctor that were first introduced in the middle visions of Passus 11 and especially 16.¹¹¹ Once again, Jesus enters Jerusalem to joust with Satan for the fruit of Piers the Plowman. In order to do battle, however, he must wear Piers’s armor, “for no dynt shal hym dere as *in deitate Patris*” (18.26). In other words, Christ must adopt a body of flesh and blood (now in a more explicit way, as armor) in order to redeem mankind: as God Christ cannot suffer, but as man he can.

Will witnesses Christ’s passion and crucifixion and then his glorious triumph over Death. Like Will’s penance, Christ’s victory rests on a narrative of ingestion—and a medical modality that does not conform to the law of contraries. Mercy declares, “Venym fordooth venym” (18.152), and Christ confirms, “Gile is bigiled, and in his gile fallen” (18.361): “Now bigynneth thi gile ageyn thee to turne / And my grace to growe ay gretter and widder. / The bitternesse that thou hast browe, now brouke it thiselwe; / That art doctor of deeth, drynk that thou madest! / For I that am lord of lif, love is my drynke, / And for that drynke today, I deide upon erthe” (18.362-57).¹¹² This metaphor brings the

¹¹⁰ The OEH acknowledges the ongoing nature of penance: “To one a year’s remedy, to one more than a year’s; to one a month’s remedy, to one more than a month’s; to one a week’s, to one more than a week’s, and then according to the measure of guilt; to some a day’s, to one more than a day’s; and to some a lifetime” (Frantzen, *Anglo-Saxon Penitentials*, Corpus 201, p.121, D55.03.01).

¹¹¹ McDermott writes, “The Holy Week and Pentecost liturgies set the itinerary for Will’s progress through the scenes of redemption history, with Conscience as his guide. Along the way, Will participates in these quasi-historical events by making liturgical acts of devotion, such as kneeling at the coming of the Holy Spirit” (“Practices of Satisfaction,” 189).

¹¹² “I faught so, me thursteth yet, for mannes soule sake; / May no drynke me moiste, ne

triacle motif introduced in Passus 1 full circle.¹¹³ In Passus 1, we are told that *triacle* is Love (1.148) and Love is “leche of life and next Oure Lord selve” (1.204). Thus, Christ’s drink of love is his own blood—the very remedy he offers to mankind, making all men “bretheren of blood” (377). As Gasse explains, “Just as the viper’s own flesh becomes the means for the physician to counter its venomous effects on the body through *triacle*, so Satan’s deceit in Eden becomes the means for the resurrection of the body when Christ the Good Physician turns the poisoner’s own tactics against him, and poison counteracts poison.”¹¹⁴ Satan is the doctor of death, the force behind the liars and charlatans who populate the text’s medical landscape—and Will’s own disease of sin. But through the blood of Christ, Satan is defeated and Will’s body *and* soul can be redeemed. As the angels sing, “*Culpat caro, purgat caro, regnat Deus Dei caro*” [Flesh sins, flesh redeems, flesh reigns as God of God] (18.408). Will’s flesh caused him to sin, but the penance his flesh performs allowed him to be absolved because of the flesh inhabited by the Son of God.¹¹⁵

At the sound of the music celebrating Christ’s triumph over Death, Will wakes up

my thurst slake, / Til the vendage falle in the vale of Josaphat, / That I drynke right ripe must, *resureccio mortuorum*. / And thanne shal I come as a kyng, crowned, with aungeles, / And have out of helle alle mennes soules” (18.362-73).

¹¹³ *Triacle* or theriac was the standard remedy for poison in the Middle Ages, a compound made from the flesh of a viper, which could be applied topically or drunk as a medicine. See Rosanne Gasse, “Practice of Medicine,” 182; Nancy G. Siraisi, *Medieval and Early Renaissance Medicine: An Introduction to Knowledge and Practice* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 118; Christine Nockels Fabbri, “Treating Medieval Plague: The Wonderful Virtues of Theriac,” *Early Science and Medicine* 12 (2007): 247-83.

¹¹⁴ Rosanne Gasse, “Practice of Medicine,” 183.

¹¹⁵ Mary Davlin argues, “If the human body made by God is from the beginning a sign of kinship with God because it is made in God’s image and likeness, then the human body after the incarnation, when God takes on human likeness, becomes the bond of that kinship” (“God and the Human Body,” 165).

and is reunited with his family.¹¹⁶ This is perhaps the greatest moment of transformation in the poem. “Right with that I wakede, / And called Kytte my wif and Calote my doghter: / ‘Ariseth and go reverenceth Goddes resurexion, / And crepeth to the cros on knees, and kisseth it for a juwel! / For Goddes blissede body it bar for oure boote, / And it afereth the fend—for swich is the myghte, / May no grisly goost glide there it shadweth!’” (18.428-33). By participating in the Easter liturgy and witnessing Christ’s divine power, Will feels he is at last absolved of his sins and again worthy to partake of the Lord’s body while awake.¹¹⁷ It is for this reason that he changes his clothes and is reunited with his family and community at Mass. Kissing the cross was an act deeply incorporated into penitential culture, as the thirteenth-century Constitution of Giles of Bridport demonstrates: “Let no one presume on Easter Day to approach the Body of Christ unless he has first confessed and adored the cross.”¹¹⁸ The cross was also a symbol of God’s *blissede body*—the body that makes Will’s penance efficacious. To go to Mass on Easter is to show that he has completed his satisfaction and that he understands the source of his cure.

For the first time, perhaps because he is about to partake of the Eucharist, Will *writes* about what he dreams: “Thus I awaked and wroot what I hadde ydremed, / And

¹¹⁶ The dreamer waking because of music was a common device in medieval dream visions, though *Piers Plowman* may have been one of the first to employ it. It is used in Chaucer’s *Book of the Duchess*, Lydgate’s *Temple of Glass*, Clanvowe’s *Boke of Cupide*, and Dunbar’s *Thrissil and the Rois*.

¹¹⁷ Recall that the OEH charged the penitent that he not “come into church. But he should eagerly seek holy places and make his offenses known, and...ever be repenting his sins fervently” (Frantzen, *Anglo-Saxon Penitentials*, OEHL, Corpus 201, p. 122, D55.10.01).

¹¹⁸ Henry John Feasey, *Ancient English Holy Week Ceremonial* (London: Thomas Baker, 1897), 120, cited in McDermott, “Practices of Satisfaction,” 189. McDermott notes that kissing the cross was “treated simultaneously as an expression of contrition and work of satisfaction” (189).

dighte me derely, and dide me to chirche, / To here holly the masse and to be housled after” (19.1-3). By putting his dream into words, Will bridges the gap between his waking and sleeping states, his body and soul, and solidifies the textual nature of his medicine. This writing is truly “bodily,” not just because “Will’s writing in the waking state corresponds to the textually encoded liturgical actions of kneeling and creeping to the cross,” but also because it represents the fulfillment of his textual, ingestible penance.¹¹⁹

Will’s bodily writing also conforms to the third part of satisfaction: almsgiving. Because the poem is intended to educate, “the writing of the poem constitutes the work of ‘alms’ as penitential satisfaction.”¹²⁰ Says McDermott, “Writing in the middle is important for Langland because it becomes the chief activity by which Will does well... Making *Piers Plowman* performs the work of penance that Langland goes out of his way to articulate in some detail.”¹²¹ Will’s writing, then, mirrors and even continues Piers’s plowing; it is his way to help others and make satisfaction for his sins. Just as Christ heals men by offering them his own body, Will heals by offering his words. By educating other laymen about the process of penance, he can help them develop their own self-consciousness in order to create a transformative relationship with Christ.

Vision 7

Now that Will has found absolution and “concluded” his penance, it seems that the poem should also conclude. But while he is at Mass, Will slips into yet another

¹¹⁹ McDermott, “Practices of Satisfaction,” 187, 190.

¹²⁰ McDermott, “Practices of Satisfaction,” 193.

¹²¹ McDermott, “Practices of Satisfaction,” 185. “Because this middle becomes a middle by virtue of readers’ recursions to it in their own lives of sacramental participation in crucicentric satisfaction, it dynamically moves outside the text” (185).

dream. “In myddes of the masse, tho men yede to offryng, / I fel eftsoones aslepe” (19.4-5). It is possible, as many critics have argued, that the poem’s “ending” really lies in Will’s previous eschatological vision.¹²² However, the fact Will falls asleep in the *myddes* of Mass suggests that his penance is not yet complete. He is still *in medias res*. Consequently, he has more to (re)learn.¹²³

Will’s stymied progress may in fact be critical to his development of an individual relationship with Christ and to the progress Langland intends for those who read his self-help text. Stephanie Batkie argues, “The poem uses its formal structure, that of the wandering, allegorical pilgrimage, to change the stakes for vernacular reading. Will’s stumbling progress through the dreamscape, fraught as it is with missteps and misreadings, is as necessary for readers as Piers’s virtuous certainty about the road to Truth, or Christ’s victorious harrowing of hell.”¹²⁴ More than simply sharing his

¹²² McDermott argues, “By chiasmic patterning, Langland draws the focus due a poem’s ending away from the actual ending, reorienting it to a site at the middle of the ending where Will participates intensely in the salvific work of doing well” (“Practices of Satisfaction,” 185). Jessica Barr similarly states, “At this point, for the first time in the poem, Will is moved to actually perform a devotional act... The fact that this experience does not lead to a permanent and *static* change... does not invalidate the transformative effect of the revelatory experience. In *Piers Plowman*, the path to knowledge is not a straight line but a continuous process that constantly circles back to its beginning” (*Willing to Know God*, 155-56).

¹²³ Many critics argue that the text should be read circularly rather than linearly; however, the progress Will makes, even in his mistakes, and the development of other important characters like Conscience and Piers suggest that, while the circular/ repetitive nature of the text should be kept in mind, the poem should also be read linearly. Barr finds that the poem “can be mapped on a plan that is at least loosely linear, and that its circling back upon itself is nonetheless part of a forward momentum” (*Willing*, 156, note 12). Elizabeth D. Kirk similarly argues that the poem follows a linear sequence, albeit a spiraling one (*The Dream Thought of Piers Plowman* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972], 11).

¹²⁴ Stephanie Batkie, “‘Thanne artow inparfit’: Learning to Read in *Piers Plowman*,” *The Chaucer Review* 45 (2010): 169-93, at 192. “The poem is full of individual readers looking to change themselves through devotional understanding; some are successful and some are not. But if the poem is to be affective on any level, the individual or the societal, the effort must come from the *inparfit*, transformational labors of its audience members” (192-93).

knowledge, Will shares his *experiences* with his readers, allowing them to participate with him in his mistakes and so acquire their own *kynde knowing*.

After falling asleep, Will again dreams of Christ's healing power. In this dream, everything he has already learned is revisited, as we would expect. Thus, he sees Jesus jousting in Piers's armor once more, and Conscience reappears to continue teaching him. He learns that Christ defends his followers from bodily sickness—he “fended hem [the Jews] from foule yveles, feveres and fluxes” (19.45)—as well as spiritual sickness—he “fenden us fro fallynge into synne” (19.65)—fulfilling his calling to feed the “afyngred” (19.127) and heal through grace: he “heeled and halp that hym of grace askede” (19.131).

All of this Will has been told before. But this time the information Will has received in previous visions is enacted in a vivid drama, in which Will himself plays a part. First, Christ gives Piers another pardon. “Dobest he [thou]ghte,/ And yaf Piers power, and pardon he grauntede...To bynde and unbynde bothe here and ellis, / And assoille men of alle synnes” (19.183-84, 190-91). He then appoints Piers, his corporeal representative, to sow virtues that will continue to nourish his followers. “My prowor and my plowman Piers shal ben on erthe, / And for to tilie truthe a teeme shal he have...And whoso ete of that seed hardy was evere / To suffer al that God sente, siknesse and angres” (19.260-64, 292-93).

Like the Tree of Charity, Piers, with the help of Grace, plants his fruit within man's soul. “And Grace gaf Piers greynes—cardynales vertues,/ And sew it in manes soule” (276-7). With apostles and saints for his team, Piers harrows the ground with the Old and New Testaments. This he does to prevent vices from contaminating the virtues,

the way crabgrass and weeds contaminate grain.¹²⁵ “Thise foure sedes Piers sew, and siththe he dide hem harewe / With Olde Lawe and New Lawe, that love mygthe wexe / Among thise foure vertues, and vices destruye. / For communliche in contrees cammokes and wedes / Foulen the fruyt in the feld ther thei growen togideres; / And so doon vices vertues” (19.312-17). Grace helps Piers build a house in which to store the harvested virtues and then wanders “as wide as the world is, with Piers to tilie truthe” (19.336), in an echo of the poem’s opening lines and the pilgrimages performed by other characters in the text (Will, Piers, Hawkin, and Conscience).¹²⁶

In Will’s second vision, Truth gave Piers a pardon and a team with instructions to perform his labor tilling the earth and to Do-Well. But Piers replaced his spiritual duties with physical concerns. After realizing his error, he tore the pardon and pledged himself to a life of penance, dependent on grace, in order to atone for his mistakes. Now, in Will’s penultimate vision, Christ Himself gives Piers the pardon. But this time Piers is called to till Truth throughout the Earth—to plant seeds of virtue and bring souls to Holy

¹²⁵ The crabgrass and weeds may represent the dangerous auxiliary ingredients and substitute “grains”—the literal bitter bark—to which the medieval peasant was often subject. In Passus 6, we are told that it is common in times of scarcity for the poor to eat “pese loof” (6.179), “benes and bren ybaken togideres” (6.182), and food meant for animals (6.193). This kind of bread is often referred to in the literature as “famine bread”—a product that substitutes wheat with any available ingredients, including grass, bark, and straw. Joyce E. Salisbury writes, “In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, horsebread was baked out of the less desirable grains—for consumption by horses, dogs, and paupers” (*The Beast Within: Animals in the Middle Ages*, 2nd edition [New York: Routledge, 2011], 134). The indigent were also subject to foods that were contaminated deliberately. See 3.79-84; 5.216-17; 19.402-404; and 20.174. By contrast, the seeds Piers sows protect the “fruyt” and allow for true healing.

¹²⁶ Grace is elsewhere compared to a “gras...grevaunces to abate...Pacience and poverte the place is there it groweth” (12.59, 61). Grace, then, is also a food—a healing herb to counteract the dangerous grasses and auxiliary ingredients the poor might eat—that is grown within patience and poverty. “Grace sholde growe and be grene thorough hir good lyvyng, / And folks sholden fynde, that ben in diverse siknesse, / The bettre for hir biddynges in body and in soule” (15.423-25).

Church. Before his plowing was intended to help the poor with their physical needs; now the seeds he sows will feed men's souls *and* bodies. Because plowing is also a metaphor for Will/ Langland's writing, the poem as a work of virtue can be planted in the reader's soul, pointing him toward a relationship with Christ.

Although Piers was guided by Truth before, there was room for error. This time, Christ's law is irrevocable. It is sealed in Heaven. This shift corresponds to the evolution of Piers himself throughout the poem. Where he began as a farmer striving to do well in the world, now he is Christ's representative (even Christ himself), charged with Doing Best. By witnessing this scene, Will has journeyed much closer to an internalized understanding of individual Grace and its relationship with doing good works (Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest). Piers must labor with his plow in order for Truth to be planted and shared, just as Will must labor to share truth through his writing. But his labor would count for nothing if it were not consecrated by Christ's Grace. This consecration is also what Will hopes for his poem. Truth is individual and must be planted in men's souls/ bodies individually if they are to experience a transformation.

Even though Pride leads the other vices on an attack against Piers's plants, with the intent to "blowe hem doun and breke hem and bite atwo the mores" (19.341), all is not lost because of Grace. As Conscience says when he offers the sacrament to his fellow Christians, "Here is breed yblessed, and Goddes body thereunder. / Grace, thorough Goddes word, gaf Piers power, / Myght to maken it, and men to ete it after / In helpe of hir heele [health] ones in a month, / Or as ofte as thei hadde nede" (19.389-93). This diet—God's body and Piers's fruit—truly has the power to transform the bodies and

souls of those who eat it, “tho that hadde ypaied / To Piers pardon” (393-94). It is the combination of good works, the labor of penance to repay their debt, and the healing power of God’s grace (made efficacious through a mortal body, represented by Piers) that allows them to heal and change.

Will is performing his own penitential labors—as he notes at the end of the dream, “I awakned therwith, and wroot as me mette” (19.485)—and needs now to have his work consecrated. Thus, he worships Grace at the bidding of Conscience (his own self-awareness). “Knele now,’ quod Conscience, ‘and if thow kanst synge, / Welcome hym and worshipe hym with *Veni Creator Spiritus!*’ / Thanne song I that song, and so dide manye hundred, / And cride with Conscience, ‘Help us, God of grace!’” (19.210-13). Will’s singing while asleep links his writing while awake, and his devotional act of bodily writing earns his work the consecration he desires.

Vision 8

Sadly, the psychomachia within man’s soul rages on, and when Will awakes from his dream, he is once more alone and friendless. Hungry and cold, he continues his penance in a dejected state of mind. “And as I wente by the way, whan I was thus awaked, / Hevy chered I yede, and elenge in herte; / For I ne wiste wher to ete ne at what place, / And it neghed neigh the noon, and with Nede I mette” (20.1-4). Perhaps because he has just been writing about his dream—merging his waking and sleeping states together—Will experiences a waking vision.

In this vision he interacts with the personification Need. There are only two other extended waking periods in the poem: Will’s meeting with the friars in Passus 8 and the

so-called autobiographical passage in Passus 5 of the C Text. However, as Hewett-Smith points out, “neither so overtly confuses the boundaries between allegorical vision and fictive reality.”¹²⁷ In this episode, the world of allegory and the world of the sign (lived experience) are no longer separated. Need has stepped outside of allegory’s natural state (the dream) to interact with Will’s lived experience. This dialogue bridges the gap between the potential elision of the sign (i.e. the physical suffering of real people) into idealized allegory on one hand and the potential disruption of allegory on the other. Need’s discourse thus allows both the kernel and the bark to have equal significance.¹²⁸ This allegorical maneuvering, culminating in his final vision, allows Will to more fully understand the relationship between his soul and body and between the suffering of his fellow men and the suffering of Christ.

This vision is necessary because even after everything he has learned, Will is still relying on works. He believes his own exertions—penance that mimics Christ’s physical suffering—can cure his ailing soul. Although Will has indeed progressed in his self-awareness and individuality, he has failed to grasp the most important lesson yet: having come to an understanding of his free will, he must now exercise that will not just to

¹²⁷ Kathleen Hewett-Smith, “Poverty and the De-stabilization of Allegory,” 244. Nicolette Zeeman acknowledges the slipperiness of Need’s discourse: “Nede raises the unnerving possibility that the ‘not-having’ of the natural order may in fact *not* catapult the soul back to God, but make the soul even more preoccupied with ‘having’” (*Discourse of Desire*, 281). I find that this consequence of Need’s speech is still consistent with his role as an embodiment of human experience. Poverty alone will not direct one’s soul toward God. It is the human will, which can be refined through poverty, that is responsible for this divine orientation. As Hewett-Smith argues, “Nede presents the *experience* rather than the authority of need... provid[ing] instead a portrait of the fact of necessity and want” (243-44).

¹²⁸ Hewett-Smith writes, “In both its recovery of the literal—the *experience* of need—and its emphasis on the mutuality of need between God and humankind, the de-stabilization of allegory precipitated by images of poverty... provid[es] significance *within* the epistemological void constitutive of allegorical discourse” (“Poverty and the De-stabilization of Allegory,” 253).

perform satisfaction and cultivate a relationship with Christ but to relinquish control altogether, to surrender his will to God's will: "Thy will be done."¹²⁹ Instead of worrying what or when he will eat, Will needs to focus on the four virtues sown by Piers. If he tends to his spiritual nourishment first, the physical will follow.

Need explains that he makes men feel humble.¹³⁰ Thus, when Christ became a poor man, he subjected himself to the greatest mortification possible. "And God al his grete joye goostliche he lefte, / And cam and took mankynde and bicam nedy" (40-41). If Will is to truly follow Christ's example, he must be willfully needy—giving no thought to what he will eat—as Patience counseled in an earlier vision. "Sith he that wroghte al the world was wilfulliche nedy, / Ne nevere noon so nedy ne poverer deide" (49-50). As one of the tenets of satisfaction, Will has fasted before, but now he must relinquish control over the form his fasting will take. Only by fully submitting his will to God's can Will truly be cured.

Once Need finishes his lecture, Will falls asleep and dreams his final, most Apocalyptic vision. In the dream, Antichrist attacks Truth, and Conscience gathers the Christians together into Holy Church. This conflict brings us full circle to Will's first vision, as several key themes are revisited. "I conseilte, quod Conscience tho, 'cometh with me, ye fooles, / Into Unite Holy Chirche, and holde we us there. / And crye we to Kynde that he come and defende us / Fooles fro thise fendes lymes, for Piers love the

¹²⁹ Nicolette Zeeman writes, "The poem constantly brings together figures of passivity and activity, insisting on the ethical obligation both to experience and to act—to experience in the very modes of *action*... The poem's insistence on a properly 'patient' attitude is demanding precisely because the poem simultaneously demands a real engagement with moral life and works" (*Discourse of Desire*, 8).

¹³⁰ Need notes that the virtues would be abused if it weren't for his intervention (20.35-36).

Plowman. / And crye we on al the commune that thei come to Unitee, / And there abide and bikere ayeins Beliales children” (20.74-79). In Will’s first vision, the *commune*, who are in poor health because of the plague, appoint plowmen to provide for their physical needs, “to tilie and to travaille as trewe lif asketh” (Pr.120), and a lean lunatic counsels the king to rule with mercy. Here, Conscience gathers his fellow penitents or fools—echoes of the lunatic (fools for Christ)—together and bids the *commune* to join them and feast on the spiritual food planted by Piers the Plowman. As before, the *commune* require spiritual and physical healing because of the diseases that plague the world, sent to bring men to repentance (20.80-86).¹³¹ In the face of these physical ailments and the spiritual attack on Truth by Antichrist, the common people need good leaders more than ever.

These leaders, of course, are absent, as they were in Will’s first vision. Medical professionals in particular are corrupt, as evidenced when Life, who is running from Elde (Old Age), asks Phisik for help. “And bisoughte hym of socour, and of his salve hadde, / And gaf hym gold good woon that gladede hir hertes; / And thei given hym ageyn a glazene howve” (20.170-172). Just as Hunger described in Passus 6, the physicians take gold in exchange for their remedies. But their salves and trinkets, their “dyas and drogges” (20.174), prove useless, for even doctors succumb to old age and death

¹³¹ “Kynde Conscience tho herde, and cam out of the planets, / And sente forth his forreyours—feveres and fluxes, / Coughes and cardiacles, crampes and toothaches, / Rewmes and radegundes and roynouse scales, / Biles and bocches and brennyng agues, / Frenesies and foule yveles—forageres of Kynde / Hadde ypriked and prayed polles of peple” (20.80-86). Reason “preved that thise pestilences was for pure synne” (5.13) so that men would repent. Bryon Grigsby states, “While Langland operates within a plague discourse informed by both medicine and theology, he also blames the medical and ecclesiastical communities for failing to protect the physical and moral health of society” (Bryon Grigsby, “Plague Medicine in Langland’s *Piers Plowman*,” in *Teaching Literature and Medicine*, ed. Anne Hunsaker Hawkins and Marilyn Chandler McEntyre [New York: Modern Language Association, 2000], 200-201). See also Grigsby, *Pestilence in Medieval and Early Modern Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2014).

(20.177). This leads Life to conclude that “surgerie ne phisik / may nought a myte availle to medle ayein Elde” (20.179).

Spiritual doctors (curates) are just as unlikely to heal as physical doctors. “For persons and parish preestes, that sholde the peple shryve, / Ben curatours called to knowe and to hele, / Alle that ben hir parisspens penaunces enjoigne, / And be ashamed in hir shrift; ac shame maketh hem wende / And fleen to the freres—as fals folk to Westmynstre” (20.281-85). Instead of going to their priests, the people are being corrupted by friars who offer to absolve their sins for money—a private transaction in place of a public penance.

In the face of this turmoil, beset with both spiritual and physical illness (20.190-92), Will asks Kind what craft he should learn.¹³² “Lerne to love” (20.208) is the response. Will asks how he will see to his physical needs, and in an echo of Need, Kind tells him that if he loves truly and puts his trust in Christ (i.e. Love), he will never lack for the things he requires (20.209-11). This is the culmination of a lesson first introduced with Piers’s pardon in Passus 7, continued in Will’s inner dream of Passus 11, and reinforced in Patience’s sermon in Passus 14. Will has been developing his individuality

¹³² “Craft” is an important term in the poem. In his first vision, Will begs Holy Church to “Kenne me by som craft to knowe the false” (2.4), indicating his ever-present desire to discern Truth. In the poem, the craft of plowing, “contrived of Kynde Wit” (Pr.118), is intended to help the people, through honest bodily labor, and to compensate for the medical profession that fails them (Piers indicates that “phisik” is not a true craft at 20.342-43). Now, at the end of the text, Will is finally told that the craft he must learn, if he is to know Truth, is how to surrender his will to Christ. This craft is connected to the memory work that Will has done (by interpreting the signs of his body and of texts), which directs his mind back to God. Carruthers explains that any craft can only be learned “by the painstaking practical imitation and complete familiarization of exemplary masters’ techniques and experiences” (*Craft of Thought*, 1). For more on the “craft” of memory see Mary Carruthers and Jan M. Ziolkowski, eds., *The Medieval Craft of Memory: An Anthology of Texts and Pictures* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002) and Carruthers, “The Poet as Master Builder.”

so that he can make the ultimate decision: to relinquish his will.¹³³

This is exactly what he does. “And there by conseil of Kynde I comsed to rome / Thorough Contricion and Confession til I cam to Unitee” (20.208-13). Will repents of his willfulness and resumes his pilgrimage, demonstrating his (public) contrition and making confession. By so doing, he finds his way to Unity, where Conscience is defending the Church. Once again, he is joining himself to the congregation, having been absolved of his sins. But this time he does so with the approval of Kind rather than his own judgment.

Unfortunately for Will’s fellow members, the assault of vices is too strong. Hypocrisy attacks “many a wise techere” (20.303), causing Conscience to seek help for those such as Contrition who have fallen sick, “thorough synne ywounded” (20.306). Since Shrift prescribes “sharp salves” and makes them do penance (20.307), the unhappy patients ask for someone who “softer koude plastre” (20.311). Sir Love-To-Live-In Lechery suggests Friar Flatterer who claims he is a surgeon and can make salves.

Not surprisingly, the friar fails to heal Contrition and instead makes him worse by accepting payment in place of true penance. This is a fatal mistake.¹³⁴ Accordingly, when Contrition abandons contrition, “the soverayneste salve for alle kynne synnes” (20.373),

¹³³ James Simpson finds that Will’s renunciation of will is linked to his perception of charity and serving the communal good. “If Will is to find himself...he is to do so through and in others. This fluidity of name, and of selfhood, is already implicit in the typological association of Piers and Christ, where the highest potential of a proper name produces another: *Petrus, id est, Christus*. And just as Christ’s pun on the proper name Petrus is exploited in *Piers Plowman*, so, too, does William Langland exploit the full range of his name: just as *Petrus/petra* is the foundation of an institution, so, too, is Langland’s creation of a common will. It is because Will can only become himself through communal practice that Passus 15 also focuses on the church as an institution. Whereas Holy Church had instructed Will in Passus 1, here it is the integrated soul, speaking in the voice of all Christians, who addresses the Church” (“The Power of Impropriety,” 164).

¹³⁴ As the *Old English Handbook* reads, “No man can repent his sins without confession, any more than he who has drunk poison may become well unless he spew out the poison violently” (Frantzen, *Anglo-Saxon Penitentials*, OEH, Corpus 201, p.121, D55.07.01).

Pride and Sloth are free to attack Conscience. Conscience cries for Clergie and Contrition to help him. “‘He lith [adreynt] and dremeth,’ seide Pees, ‘and so do manye othere; / The frere with his phisyk this folk hath enchaunted, / And plastred hem so esily [hii] drede no synne!’” (20.376-80). Instead of curing his patients, the friar takes their money and then drugs them with his “phisyk” so that they lie drowned in dream.¹³⁵ As a result, there is no one to help Conscience. Neither Clergy (education) nor Contrition can save man’s soul once it is infected with the poison of secular medicine. Satan is the doctor of death, and Antichrist, who leads the attack on Holy Church and for whom the friar works, represents the opposite of Christ’s medicine. The poem thus ends with this warning: any healing practice that does not originate with Christ will fail.¹³⁶

In the last lines of the B text, Conscience decides to become a pilgrim and “walken as wide as the world lasteth, / To seken Piers the Plowman” (20.382-83).¹³⁷ Piers, as the representative of Christ’s bodily healing and a symbol of vernacular, individualized learning, is the only person who can help Conscience and bring the church members out of their stupor by awakening them to a consciousness of self. For this reason, Conscience prays, “Send me hap and heele [luck and health]” (386), and he “gradde after Grace” (387) until Will wakes up.

This dismal ending to the poem seems to suggest that something has gone wrong.

¹³⁵ This is Donaldson’s translation of line 377 (*Piers Plowman*, 241). Such drugged dreaming is the opposite of the kind pursued by Will.

¹³⁶ This is the lesson Hawkin learned when he sought healing from witches (13.338).

¹³⁷ Zeeman argues, “Like Piers, Pacience and Conscience earlier on, Conscience is now both the giver and the recipient of the rebuke—pain and anger are directed outward and inward. Once more Piers is gone. Once more Conscience departs. Such narratives of denial and loss have shaped the poem since its inception, and it is no surprise that one more such narrative brings the poem to its famously gaping close” (*Discourse of Desire*, 283).

Many critics have argued that the cycle of wandering, which continues beyond the confines of the poem, signifies the inconclusive nature of revelatory experiences.¹³⁸ Others cite the gap between “the apocalyptic vision and the apocalyptic text, between revelation and representation,” the limits of textuality, to be the problem.¹³⁹ While it is certainly plausible that Will (or Langland) doubts the capability of man to understand divine Truth, I contend that *Piers Plowman* nonetheless maintains the optimism of an apocalyptic vision while tempering it with a realistic perspective about the shortcomings of humankind. From this perspective, the most likely reason for the poem’s non-ending is simply that Will’s penance is not over. As long as he is alive, *in medias res*, he will make mistakes. Thus, he must continue to repent, to start again, as he has throughout the poem. By starting a new pilgrimage for Piers Plowman, Conscience demonstrates that penance is ongoing and never-ending.

Conclusion

Piers Plowman presents bodily writing as a crucial means of healing a soul from

¹³⁸ See Jessica Barr, *Willing to Know God*, 156. David Benson argues that there is no authoritative meaning in *Public Piers Plowman: Modern Scholarship and Late Medieval English Culture* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004), 99-107. Mary Davlin claims that the “poem does not end with an arrival at the place of God” (*The Place of God in Piers Plowman and Medieval Art* [Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2001], 34). Steven Kruger finds that the ending highlights the “tension between Christian ideals and the hard, corporeal facts of life” (“Mirrors and the Trajectory of Vision in *Piers Plowman*,” *Speculum* 66 [1991]: 74-95, at 92-93). See also John Bowers, *The Crisis of Will in Piers Plowman* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1987).

¹³⁹ Papka, “Limits of Apocalypse,” 255. She states, “It is not so much representation that undermines revelation, but rather history itself... In *Piers Plowman*, the plague has destroyed not only the social order but also man’s ability to understand the significance of that destruction, and that inability is reflected in—and in a sense allegorized by—the poet’s resistance to the proclamations of the fiction of judgment... Langland’s [text] falls back from its apocalypse [in Passus 20] to the chaos of the field full of folk, where history is still in progress and the attack of Antichrist is not the End, but just the beginning of yet another pilgrimage in search of a truth that can no longer, or not yet, be found on this earth” (255).

the ravages of sin, a therapy it examines explicitly in the context of Apocalyptic thought. The poem emphasizes the role of the dreamer's body in gaining (experiential) knowledge or *kynde knowing* and the importance of this bodily knowledge in the progress towards wholeness. The union for which the dreamer yearns is at once personal and universal, physical and spiritual: forgiveness of sin, corporeal health, and a renewed society with Christ at its head. The path to this wholeness lies with the efforts of the educated individual; through a progression toward consciousness—an awareness of self via the body's interactions with the world and the *lifelong* work of satisfaction—one can develop the agency, or will, needed to establish an individualized relationship with his Creator and ultimately surrender that will to God's grace.

But perhaps most importantly, *Piers Plowman* argues that merely reading about such things is insufficient. In order for Will to make any progress toward a physical and spiritual transformation, he has to *use* his body—both within his visions and in the real world. By the end of the poem, words are immaterial if not connected to the thing they represent (the bark matters), and deeds are meaningless without a body performing them. “Cristes writynge saved” (12.82), the text tells us, precisely because his words were accompanied by powerful action. Likewise, Piers's pardon was meaningless unless he did something to serve those for whom he was responsible.

In a similar way, Will's writing both solidifies the *kynde knowing* acquired by his body and shares this *knowing* with others. The text stands for Will's experience because language has been made a part of his body through his ingestive practices—Will and other characters literally consume texts, just as John did, making the words a part of their

bodies—and because the poem is his alms deed, a work produced by physical action that has the potential to heal his soul.

Like Revelation, *Piers Plowman* demonstrates the salvific capabilities of bodily writing: it is writing that enables a person to fully reflect on his or her experience and so grow from it while simultaneously prompting others to take the same steps towards personal development and wholeness.¹⁴⁰

¹⁴⁰ Langland's poem did indeed prompt readers to take action, though perhaps not the kind he had in mind. Many scholars have written about how *Piers Plowman* was used as propaganda in the events leading to the Peasants' Revolt of 1381. See, for example, Andrew Galloway, "Making History Legal: *Piers Plowman* and the Rebels of Fourteenth-Century England," in *Piers Plowman: A Book of Essays*. Justine Rydzeski notes that "some readers took the social vision and the call for change in *Piers Plowman* seriously enough to transform the allegory of *dowel*, *dobet*, and *dobest* into a program for sometimes violent social action, adapting key terms from the poem and reiterating the pilgrimage to Christian perfection as a contemporary battle of *trewemen* and their oppressors" (*Radical Nostalgia*, 13).

Chapter Three

Bodily Writing as (Textual) Reproduction in *Le Roman de la Rose*

From *Piers Plowman* we turn to an earlier dream vision allegory—one that, at first glance, could not be more different. Where *Piers* is concerned with divine love, how to heal one's soul in a corrupt world, *Le Roman de la Rose* is primarily occupied with secular love, how to secure a physical relationship. In part because of its (often scandalous) subject matter, the *Rose* was enormously popular and continued to be widely read, debated, moralized, and imitated for centuries after it was written, making it one of the most influential dream visions of the late Middle Ages. (There are almost 300 extant manuscripts.) Guillaume de Lorris wrote the first 4,000 lines between 1225 and 1230. However, the bulk of the romance's 21,000 lines—and the story's popularity—are due to Jean de Meun, who “completed” the tale between 1269 and 1278.

Despite its secular theme, the *Rose*, like *Piers*, adheres to the pattern of bodily writing and dreaming modeled in the Book of Revelation and explores the path to wholeness via alternative remedies—albeit from a more cynical perspective. In the poem, the dreamer, called Amant or the Lover, falls asleep, enters a beautiful garden, and becomes enamored of a rosebud. As soon as Amant falls in love with the Rose, however, he becomes ill and loses his self-knowledge. In order for him to regain his health and become whole, he must do penance and follow the commandments outlined by the God of Love. This requires him to pursue love rather than reject it, as the principle of contraries would suggest. Guillaume's original portion of *Le Roman de la Rose* thus

establishes a metaphor of penitential ingestion based on an isopathic modality. His comparison between the dreamer seeking the good graces of Amour and a repentant sinner separated from God is plainly modeled on the principles of satisfaction outlined in the penitentials. Within the context of worshiping his beloved, the dreamer must fast, pray, and do alms, keeping the words of Amour written on his heart. In return, Amour will grant him a transformative medicine, much like the Eucharist, that will heal all his wounds.

In his continuation of the *Rose*, Jean de Meun builds on this narrative. But while Guillaume uses the bodily work of penance as a metaphor for the pursuit of love, Jean uses the pilgrimage for Love as a metaphor for mastering one's body. This is possible only through bodily writing.¹ With his pen, Jean replaces Guillaume (whom he identifies as the Lover) and clearly separates author from dreamer. This distancing allows him to use his writing to liberate the Lover's body from external (female) forces that seek to control and/or divide it, enabling Amant to reacquire his self-knowledge. But this self-mastery comes at a price: the mastery of other bodies. Male writing impresses a male likeness onto the tablet of the female body, and it is men who engender textual procreation by creating new texts from old in a patriarchal lineage. Jean's version of "like from like" thus supports a violent hegemony, converting homeopathy into homology and manipulating the religious discourse of penance to underscore adherence to a single system and viewpoint.

Despite these unpleasant aspects of the text, Jean does recognize that self-

¹ As Frances Horgan states, "With the appearance of Jean de Meun, we move from the court to the University...to an atmosphere of robust academic debate" (Frances Horgan, trans., *The Romance of the Rose* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1994], xiv).

knowledge can be found through bodily writing and that literacy is a truly transformative cure. As Nature states, “The power of [man’s] free will is so great, if he truly knows himself, that he can always protect himself when he feels within his heart that sin wishes to master him” (17577-81).² In order to write knowledgably about love, however, one must first experience it. It is for this reason that Jean separates himself from the Lover; as a more experienced person, *he* can finish the *Rose* and write Amant’s way to sexual union and thus self-knowledge. I will briefly examine Guillaume’s portion of the *Rose*, in which the Lover loses his self-knowledge and the discourse of penitent bodily writing is established, before devoting the bulk of the chapter to Jean’s concerns about the Lover’s health and the alterations he makes to bodily writing as a cure.

Guillaume’s *Rose*: The Lover’s Loss of Self-Knowledge

Like *Piers Plowman* and indeed most dream visions (and love lyrics), the dreamer of *Le Roman de la Rose* is ill, the details of which we can determine by reading his body. Diagnosing his ailment as lovesickness, a type of madness born of his loss of self-knowledge, helps us to understand the nature of the spiritual and physical remedy he must undertake—an isopathic treatment dependent on bodily writing.

The Lover begins his journey in apparent health. However, after falling asleep and entering the Garden of Pleasure, he foolishly looks into the spring of Narcissus, against which “sense and moderation are of no use” [Ci n’a mestier sens ne mesure] (1582). Instead of seeing his reflection, like Narcissus did, the dreamer beholds a crystal mirror in

² “Car frans vouloir est si poissanz, / S’il est de soi bien connoissanz, / Qu’il se peut touz jors garantir, / S’il puet dedenz son cuer sentir / Que pechiez vueille ester ses mestres.” I am using Armand Strubel’s edition of manuscripts BN 12786 and BN 378: *Le Roman de la Rose* (Paris: Poche, 1992.) For English translations, I rely on Frances Horgan’s translation (1994) of Felix Lecoy’s edition (Paris: Poche, 1992), making modifications when I find them necessary.

which he sees a rosebud.³ He is drawn toward the Rose because of her attractive odor, and the scent fills his whole body.⁴ The Lover then desires to possess the Rose and like Narcissus becomes “alienated from his rational faculty and blinded by self-deception.”⁵ Consequently, like many before him, the dreamer is seized by a “rage” (1620) that recalls the lovesick madness of Yvain, Tristan, and other “wild men” of French romance.⁶

The Lover’s loss of control over his body and mind is solidified by the arrows that Amour, the God of Love, shoots into his eye: “The arrow, which was tremendously strong, he shot at me in such a way that it entered my eye and struck my heart” (1689-91).⁷ The Lover is immediately taken by a chill (1693) and becomes sick. “I was filled with great trouble and torment. Because of this double danger, I did not know what to do or say or where to find a physician for my wound, for no medicine could be expected

³ Even though the spring does not show the Lover his reflection, it still functions as a mirror, revealing the viewer’s innermost desires: “There is nothing so small, so secret, or so hidden that it is not displayed there, as if it were etched in the crystal” [Si n’I a si petite chose, / Tant soit repote ne enclose, / Dont demostrance ne soit faite, / Com s’ele ere ou cristal portrait] (1564-67). This supports the poet’s claim at the beginning of the text that secret things will be seen openly.

⁴ “When I drew near, I assure you, the sweet scent of the rose penetrated my very core” [Vers le rosier tantost me tres / Et sachiez bien, quant je fui pres, / L’odors de la rose savoree / M’antra jusqu’an mi la coree] (1622-25). The material and sensual (olfactory and auditory) aspects of the Garden, including the womblike fountain, suggest that the Lover has entered a female realm. Constance Classen explains that the senses were gender coded. “Women’s and men’s bodies were thus imagined to present a lexicon of sensory signs, which could be read in accordance with the prevailing gender ideology... As the guardians of the proximity senses of smell, taste, and touch, women’s place was in the home, cooking, sewing, and taking care of their families” (*The Colour of Angels: Cosmology, Gender, and the Aesthetic Imagination* [New York: Routledge, 1998], 65, 7).

⁵ Sylvia Huot, *Dreams of Lovers and Lies of Poets: Poetry, Knowledge, and Desire in the Roman de la Rose* (Oxford: Legenda, 2010), 34.

⁶ For conventions of medieval wild men, see Penelope Billings Reed Doob, *Nebuchadnezzar’s Children: Conventions of Madness in Medieval Literature* (New Haven: Yale University, 1974), 134-207.

⁷ “L’arc qui estoit forz a merveille / [Il] trait a moi par tel devise / Que parmi l’ueil m’a ou cuer mise.”

from herb or root” (1718-23).⁸

Because moderation or *mesure*—a result of cure by contraries—has no role in the sickness of love, the cure must come from the source.⁹ Amour, who is the cause of the Lover’s illness (even before he shot the arrows he was stalking the Lover in the garden [1678-79]), is also the source of a remedy.¹⁰ He administers an “oignement precieus” (1845) that is both sweet and bitter and so both temporarily soothes and aggravates the lover’s wounds—“D’une part oint, d’autre part cuit” (1876). The Lover’s only permanent recourse from his pain is to surrender to Love completely.¹¹ In other words, he needs a treatment based on the principle of “like cures like.” As Amant declares to Amour, “My life is in your hands. I cannot live until tomorrow unless it is your will. I hope for joy and health from you, for I shall never have them from anyone else, but only if your hand, which wounded me, provides a remedy” (1904-10).¹²

Sylvia Huot explains that in the Middle Ages the loss of self-knowledge was connected to sin: “To know oneself is to understand one’s rational faculty as the image of

⁸ “Angoisseus fui mout et troblez. / Por le peril qui fu doblez / Ne soi que faire ne que dire / Ne de ma plaie ou trouver mire, / Que par herbe ne par racine / N’en atendoie medicine.” The narrator of *Yvain* observes, “A sword-blow is cured and healed very quickly as soon as a doctor attends to it, but the wound of love is worst when it is nearest to its physician” [Colz d’espee garist et saine / Mout tost, des que mires y paine; / Et la plaie d’Amours empire / Quant ele est plus pres de son mire] (*Le Chevalier au lion ou Le Roman d’Yvain*, ed. David Hult [Paris: Champion, 1994], 1375-78).

⁹ This is not unlike Christ defeating Satan’s poison with poison in *Piers Plowman*.

¹⁰ Even though Amant was ensnared by a woman, Amour is the god of Love and so the indirect cause.

¹¹ Amour tells the lover, “Vassal, you are captured. There is no way to escape or defend yourself... The more willingly you surrender, the sooner you will find mercy” [Vasaus, pris es, que plus n’i a / Dou destordre ne dou deffendre... Quant plus volantiers te rendras, / Et plus tost a merci venras] (1881-84).

¹² “Ma vie est en vostre main, / Ne puis vivre jusqu’a demain / Se n’est par vostre volenté. / J’atant par vos joie et santé, / Que ja par autre ne l’auré, / Se vostre main qui m’a navre / Ne me donne la garrison.”

God, to see one's sins, to repent and be reconciled with the Creator...Salutary self-knowledge...allows human sinners to seek God's forgiveness and to recover the mutual love between creature and Creator."¹³ Because the Lover has been blinded by passion and so lost sight of his true self or image—like Narcissus before him—his illness is a sin. For this reason, Amour describes his remedy in terms of penance. By performing penance, the Lover will again “know himself.”

Amour offers to give the Lover a potion and a salve that will completely heal him of his wound if he is faithful in keeping his commandments.¹⁴ The Lover is thus like a sinner who needs to prove worthy of the healing power of the Eucharist through his works—by keeping the Lord's commandments.¹⁵ (The Lover even shows his devotion with a kiss and beholds Love's “jewels” [1953-2009], just as Will “crepeth to the cros on knees, and kisseth it for a juwel” [18.430]).

Once the Lover has “confessed” and declared his devotion, Amour calls the Lover his disciple and states, “You have spoken well; now hear my commandments and remember them” [Tu diz mout bien. / Or les escoute sel retien] (2049-50). The commandments he gives the Lover are a type of penance: “I will give you a penance; it is that day and night, without repentance, you should fix your thoughts on love. Think of it always and unceasingly” (2231-34).¹⁶ The use of the word “repentance” here is a tongue-in-cheek commentary on the Lover's situation. He cannot repent of—or regret—

¹³ Huot, *Dreams of Lovers*, 34, 32.

¹⁴ “Car je sai bien par quel poison / Tu seras traiz a garison. / Se tut e tiens en loialte / Je to donré tel diaute / Qui de ta plaie te garra” (2031-32).

¹⁵ Amour's salve and potion are like the bread and wine of the Sacrament.

¹⁶ “t'anjoing en penitence / Que nuit et jor sanz repentance / An amors metes ton panser. / Touz jorz I panses sanz celer.” Horgan translates *repentance* as “backsliding.” The Old French *repentir* is actually the source for repentance in English.

the repentance process. Instead, he must immerse himself in the source of his illness if he is to be cured. In keeping with the ongoing nature of satisfaction, this penance is open-ended. Amour explains, “The lover will never have what he seeks: something is always lacking and he will never be at peace, and this war will never end until I choose to bring about peace” (2417-20).¹⁷

The Lover’s penance necessitates bodily exertion and suffering—“No pain can equal that suffered by lovers” [Nus maus n’ataint /A celui les amanz taint] (2601-02)—and includes the standard components of fasting, prayer, and alms deeds: a good lover will think little about food, will devote all of his thoughts and meditations to his mistress, and will lavish her and her friends with gifts (2503-74). By watching and serving his lady day and night, no matter the cost, his physical works will prove his love and earn him his cure. “Nothing good was every obtained without payment; thus the more we pay for something, the better we appreciate the purchase, and good things painfully acquired are the more gladly received” (2596-2600).¹⁸

Amour gives the Lover three gifts to help him with his penance: Pleasant Thought, Pleasant Conversation, and Pleasant Looks. These gifts might correspond to the three parts of penance generally—contrition, confession, and satisfaction—or perhaps to the three main components of satisfaction specifically—fasting, prayer, and alms deeds.¹⁹ At the very least, the number three gestures to the tripartite nature of penance and helps

¹⁷ “Amanz n’avra j ace qu’il quiet, / Touz jorz li faut, ja en pes n’iert. / Ja fin ne penra ceste guerre / Tan con l’en vueille la pes querre.”

¹⁸ “Nus n’a bien s’il ne le comperre; / S’en aime l’en mieus le chaté / Quant l’en l’a plus chier acheté / Et plus en gré sont recue / Li bien ou l’en a mal eü.”

¹⁹ There is certainly a correlation between thought and contrition (both occur in the mind) and conversation and confession (both originate in the mouth), though the link between looks and satisfaction is more tenuous.

to reinforce the religious metaphor.

Perhaps the most important aspect of the metaphor is that *Le Roman de la Rose* itself is a record of Amour's commandments. "The God of Love gave me his commandments, word for word as you shall hear them now. They are well expounded in this romance, and anyone who aspires to love should pay attention, for the romance now improves. From now on it will be well worth listening to, if there is anyone to recite it, for the end of the dream is very beautiful and the matter of it is new" (2055-69).²⁰ The Lover must do his penance by following the God of Love's commandments, but the commandments make up the text. Consequently, the Lover's cure *is* the text. It is his writing that makes his penance efficacious and earns him his remedy.²¹

Because Amant's cure will be recorded, the text has the potential to "heal" others as well.²² As in *Piers Plowman*, the dream vision is presented to readers as a model for their own cure. "I can assure you that whoever hears the end of the dream will be able to learn a great deal about the games of Love, provided he is willing to wait until I have

²⁰ "Li deus d'amors m'encharja / Tout ausi con vos orroiz ja / Mot a mot ses commandements: / Bien le devise cist romanz / Qui amer velt or i entende / Car li romanz des or commande / Des or le fet bon scouter, / S'il est qui le sache conter. / Car la fins dou songe est mout bele / Et la matiere en est novele: / Qui dou songe la fin orra, / Je vos di bien que il porra / Des geus d'amors assez apenre, / Por quoi il veille tant attendre / Dou songe la senefiance."

²¹ As Huot states, "Cupid's wish for a truly comprehensive 'art of love' defines the *Rose* as part of a poetic tradition, subordinating the pleasure of possessing the Rose to the task of committing this experience to poetry... The *Rose* stages the sexual quest in a manner that naturalizes both the driving force of desire and its heterosexual and reproductive aspects, while at the same time identifying it metaphorically with the production of the poem itself" (*Dreams of Lovers*, 23).

²² Frances Horgan states, "[Guillaume's] poem can be read as a kind of textbook, in which the Lover's adventures illustrate the theoretical manual for courtly lovers dictated by the God of Love" (*Romance of the Rose*, xiii). Huot concurs: "Jean invites us to see the *Rose* as a poem designed both to instruct and to persuade its readers; like Ovid's poetry, it will convert men and women alike to the great game of love" (*Dreams of Lovers*, 23).

begun to expound the significance of the dream” (2065-70).²³

However, Guillaume’s text concludes without revealing the “end” he promised. Huot argues that the deferred ending creates an “erotics of reading” and that the poem “explores the dynamics of erotic desire, in part, as a parody of spiritual desire.”²⁴ The discourses of spirituality and sexuality are thus intertwined so that reading the *Rose* becomes like reading medieval devotional texts, which “frequently employ the motif of reading metaphorical books within the mind, variously identified with the self-scrutiny of the conscience, the act of meditating on the life of Christ, or a contemplative discovery of the insights afforded by divine Grace.”²⁵ Consequently, even though the *Rose* is not ostensibly concerned with spiritual matters, as *Piers* is, it nonetheless employs a similar spiritual discourse to convey the possibility of transformation and healing.

The narrative of penance contributes to the poem’s examination of bodily writing, which explores spiritual, physical, and mental remedies by means of cure by similarities and transformative ingestion. Within the frame of a dream, the Lover can “read” his inner self and, through the interactions of his body (most notably his writing of the romance), work toward restoring it to wholeness.²⁶ But because true self-knowledge or awareness is

²³ “Qui dou songe la fin orra, / Je vos di bien que il porra / Des geus d’amors assez apenre, / Por quoi il veille tant attendre / Dou songe la senefiance / Et la vos dirai sanz grievance.”

²⁴ Huot, *Dreams of Lovers*, 46, 47. She argues, “The belief that we will receive some kind of illumination, some insight or knowledge of something new, motivates us to keep reading the poetic text. If ever it became clear that we had that knowledge already, there would no longer be any sense of deferral” (46).

²⁵ Huot, *Dreams of Lovers*, 49.

²⁶ The *Rose* is an allegorical poem and so dramatizes the inner workings of human psychology (see C.S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition* [1936]). Yet the text breaks down the divide between internal, subjective allegory and bodily (inter)actions: the allegorical personifications are not limited to the Lover’s psychological faculties. Some of the personifications represent attributes of the beloved (Rose); some represent external deities like Amour, Nature, and Genius; and some, like La Vieille and Ami, are not even personifications. As

not entirely possible until death, barring a mortal encounter with deity *in visio*, the deferred gratification of courtly love becomes equated with the never-ending nature of penance.²⁷ While on earth, it is the journey and progress toward self-knowledge that matters most.

For Jean de Meun, however, the promise of restored self-knowledge at some future point is unacceptable. It is critical that the Lover be able to function as a self-aware agent in the temporal world *now* because natural forces are constantly threatening his body—and indeed all (male) bodies. The Lover’s cure is dependent on his writing, but he has no experience in love. This, for Jean, is a problem. In order to write knowledgably about love, one must first experience it.²⁸ As he states, in one of those rare moments when he addresses his readers directly, “Find[ing] an appropriate way of putting the deed into a book, so as to describe it as accurately as possible...[is] extremely difficult... Whoever does the writing, if he is not to deprive us of the truth, his words must echo the deed, for when words rub shoulders with things, they should be cousins of the deeds”

the Lover moves through the narrative, interacting with the various characters, he gains the experience necessary he needs in order to sexually unite with the Rose (and to write about the art of love). Stephanie Viereck Gibbs Kamath argues, “Rather than being overtly explained by an authorial ‘master,’ the meaning of the text is registered obliquely through the dramatic interaction and dialogue of personifications” (“Naming the Pilgrim: Authorship and Allegory in Guillaume de Deguileville’s *Pèlerinage de la vie humaine*,” *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 32 [2010]: 179-213, at 186).

²⁷ Huot observes, “Though the soul may long for absolute knowledge of God, while still imprisoned in the flesh it is incapable of experiencing it” (*Dreams of Lovers*, 46). In the same way, “the Rose is an object of endlessly deferred knowledge, as we ask ourselves what it is, or what it means. Guillaume’s narrator promises to explain all that, saying that we will understand the dream once he has expounded it; but he never does. Our understanding of the Rose is as chimerical as is the Lover’s enjoyment” (44).

²⁸ Huot observes, “In Cupid’s eyes, attaining the Rose will endow ‘Guillaume de Lorris’ with the knowledge and authority needed to begin work on a poem designed to contain the entire ‘art d’amors’” (*Dreams of Lovers*, 25). She argues that Jean’s poem responds to an Ovidian model that sees “the fulfillment of erotic desire [as] a necessary pre-condition to any serious literary work” (25).

(15187-96).²⁹ It is for this reason that Jean separates himself from the Lover; as a more experienced person, *he* can finish the Rose and write Amant's way to sexual union and thus self-mastery.³⁰

Jean's *Rose*: The Lover's Treatment

For Jean, it is critical that the Lover sexually unite with the Rose: bound by the narrative established by Guillaume, in which only love can cure lovesickness, there is no other way for him to restore the Lover's self-knowledge. Because the Lover cannot accomplish this feat on his own, Jean must do it for him. I will first discuss the threats to self-authority the *Rose* documents, against which the Lover must defend himself—these include dismemberment, poisoning, starvation, and even an inability to use language, all of which stem from the doings of women—before moving to Jean's expanded isopathic discourse (symbolized by the phoenix) and the bearing it has on the proper methods for both sexual and textual reproduction. As *Le Jaloux* (the Jealous Husband) states, “[Women's] nature prompts each one of them to set her mind on doing worse... No man can constrain [their] will. All women have the advantage of being mistress of their own wills... But anyone who could change [their wills] would be masters of their bodies”

²⁹ “Et del escrivain qui le fait / Veult metre proprement en livre, / Pour mieus la verité descrire, / Si n'est ce pas chose legiere, / Ainz est mout fort de grant maniere / Metre bien les faiz en escrit, / Car quiconques la chose escrit, / Se dou voir ne vous vault embler, / Le dit doit le fait ressembler; / Car les voiz as choses voisines / Doivent ester a leur faiz cousins.” Jean is quoting Plato (he incorrectly attributes it to Sallust), but his words echo nominalist concerns about the unreliability of language when not grounded in embodied experience. Daniel Poirion finds that Jean's portion exhibits “une certaine nostalgie de la plenitude”—a longing for a golden age in which *le dit* and *le fait* achieved real coherence (“Lets mots et les choses selon Jean de Meun,” *L'information littéraire* 26 (1974): 7-11, at 9).

³⁰ In fact, he rewrites the whole poem, magnifying and complicating the original content. Frances Horgan states, “Although Jean's contribution to the romance is approximately four times the length of Guillaume's, the plot can be summarized quite simply, and is to extent a duplication of the plot of the first part” (*Romance*, x).

(9151-52, 9162-64, 9167-68).³¹ The *Rose* suggests that if a man can control a woman (the purpose of bodily writing) he can neutralize the threats to his own body. Furthermore, by mastering his *own* will and mind, he will gain the necessary self-authority to protect himself from further division.

Female Threats to the Male Body

For Jean, the greatest threats to the (male) body come from (female) Nature, who has been corrupted by Original Sin.³² Nature, who controls women (the baser sex), is at war with man and is constantly trying to harm his body, to divide him from himself. These divisive threats include dismemberment, poisoning/ drugging, starvation, and even the loss of linguistic control, requiring a very specific way of reading bodies in order to evaluate the risk of harm.

In his portion of the romance, Jean continuously references the risks posed by women and feminine Nature, thus highlighting the urgency (and justification) for the Lover's conquest of the Rose. By attaining the Rose, the Lover will regain control over his own body, and he will also achieve mastery over the Rose herself, thus limiting the chance of future attacks on his person. (Since women were associated with the more

³¹ "Car leur nature leur commande / Que chascune a pis fere entande... Volenté ne puet nus contraindre. / Tel avantage ont toutes fames, / Qu'el sont de leur volenté dames... Mais qui changier les vous peüst, / Des cors la seigneurie eüst."

³² Huot states, "This application of misogynist tropes to Lady Nature is authorized by the traditional association of the natural and the bodily with the feminine, an association that underlies the *Rose*. It might be as well to recall, in this context, that Original Sin, the event that corrupted sexuality in particular and Nature in general, came about because, as God himself put it, a man listened to his wife and thus relinquished his authority over her. As a result, man is now condemned to an endless struggle to subjugate woman on the one hand, nature on the other. Within the western Judaeo-Christian tradition, the widespread identification of 'Nature' as feminine and 'Culture' as masculine allows the conflict between nature and culture to be expressed in gendered terms. It is this underlying homology that informs the literary exploration, in both erotic and satirical texts, of the philosophy of nature through the characterization of women" (*Dreams of Lovers*, 42).

corporeal sense of smell, it is likely that the Rose is at least partly responsible, from Jean's perspective, for beguiling and even poisoning the Lover with her intoxicating scent.³³) Thus Ami (Friend) urges the Lover, "Pluck the rose by force and show that you are a man" [Cueilliez la rose tout a force / Et moustrez que vous estes hon] (7692-93).

In the poem, women are often the cause of dismemberment, poisoning, and drugging—all means of (self-)division—usually through the use of food. The purity and proper tempering of food was a major concern in the Middle Ages, as it played a critical role in one's health.³⁴ Because food preparation and even "skill in physic" belonged to the domain of women, men were left in a very vulnerable position.³⁵ Caroline Walker Bynum has explored how the overseeing of food in the household—through what she terms "manipulative food practices"—enabled women to control their social circumstances and determine the shape of both their lives and their family's lives.³⁶ As the culturally assigned preparers of substances that have the innate potential to either

³³ Carol Hefferman sees the spring in which Amant first glimpsed the Rose as symbolic of the female womb: "In view of the obvious womblike associations of the well in which the Lover catches his first glimpse of the Rose reflected in the magic crystals, one wonders if there might be some lingering hint of the menses about the dye in the well, for the poisonous effects on men of the catamenia have a long and well-explored history" (*The Phoenix at the Fountain: Images of Woman and Eternity in Lactantius's Carmen de Ave Phoenix and the Old English Phoenix* [Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 1988], 135).

³⁴ This was enough of a concern to prompt government regulations. P.W. Hammond writes, "The quality of food in the Middle Ages, in the sense of its purity, is difficult to determine... There was also the problem of the deliberate adulteration of goods... Measures were taken against at least some of these problems, and both the town authorities and central government tried to ensure that the food was 'of the nature and quality demanded'" (*Food and Feast in Medieval England* [Dover, N.H.: Alan Sutton Publishing, 1993], 80).

³⁵ Four hundred years later, the seventeenth-century *English Housewife* lists some of the skills necessary for the "complete woman." These include, "skill in physic, cookery, banqueting-stuff, distillation, perfumes, wool, hemp, flax, diaries, brewing, baking, and all other things belonging to a household" (Gervase Markham, *The English Housewife*, ed. M.R. Best [Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1986], cited by Classen, *Colour of Angels*, 66).

³⁶ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Holy Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 220-222.

nourish or harm, women were in positions of extreme power.

Jean's text clearly demonstrates anxiety about the potential for women to abuse this power in order to manipulate and harm men. Many scholars have discussed the discourse of dismemberment that runs through the poem—the stories of Samson, Hercules, and Abelard, among others, serve as cautionary exempla for male readers.³⁷ In most cases, it is a man who is dismembered (divided) by a woman, often using food. For example, Ami explains that Hercules's sweetheart Deïaneria lacerated and inflamed his flesh with poison (9200-02). Women are also accused of deceiving and drugging their husbands. La Vieille (the Old Woman) explains how a woman can change her appearance using “plant-extracts” [jus d'herbes] (13306): “fruit, wood, leaves, bark, and roots have powerful medicinal properties” (13307-08).³⁸ She hides her ointments and concoctions in boxes in her room and ensures that no one can smell or see them so her deception will not be discovered. But this is not the extent of her deceit: La Vieille argues that a wife can, and should, drug her husband with the same “erbes” so that she can sleep with her lover. “And if she cannot get him drunk with wine, she could obtain about a pound of herbs which she could safely give him to eat or drink: he will then fall into a deep sleep, and as

³⁷ Even when the dismemberment is not performed by women (as in the case of Saturn and Nero's mother), it is a person's sexual organs that are removed/ruined, which leaves him or her vulnerable in Jean's model of bodily writing, which I discuss below. For scholarship on dismemberment, see David Hult, “Language and Dismemberment: Abelard, Origen, and the *Romance of the Rose*” in *Rethinking the Romance of the Rose: Text, Image, Reception*, ed. Kevin Brownlee and Sylvia Huot (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), 101-30; Ellen Freidrich, “Insinuating Indeterminate Gender: A Castration Motif in Guillaume de Lorris's *Romans de la Rose*,” in *Castration and Culture in the Middle Ages*, ed. Larissa Tracy (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2013), 255-79; Thomas Hill, “Narcissus, Pygmalion, and the Castration of Saturn: Two Mythographical Themes in the *Roman de la Rose*,” *Studies in Philology* 71 (1974): 404-26; Sylvia Huot, *The Romance of the Rose and Its Medieval Readers: Interpretation, Reception, Manuscript Transmission* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

³⁸ “Car mout ont forces et mecines / Fruit, fust, feuille, escorce et racines.”

he sleeps allow her to do whatever she likes” (14347-53).³⁹ The same foods can be used to heal and poison, and since women—as more corporeal creatures, closer to Nature—are equipped with this knowledge, they pose a serious threat to men’s self-mastery.

Other characters also express these concerns. Le Jaloux observes bitterly, “Do we not see how mothers-in-law brew poisons for their sons-in-law and cast spells and enchantments?” [Ne voit on comment les marrastres / Cuisent venins a leur fillastres / Et font charmes et sorceries] (9153-55).⁴⁰ And Raison (Reason) describes Fortune as a woman who “deceives and tricks and drives people mad, suckling them like a mother” [Les deçoit et boule et affole / Et les alaite comme une mere] (4846-47). Instead of nourishing them the way a good mother would, she acts like a *stepmother* and applies a painful plaster to their hearts, soaked not with vinegar but poverty.⁴¹ Again, a woman can turn something nurturing and into something harmful.⁴²

The text does grant that men can be deceitful as well. Raison warns Amant about doctors and lawyers, and Faux Semblant (False Seeming) censures avaricious clergymen,

³⁹ “Et se de vin nel puet faire yvre, / D’erbes doit avoir une livre, / Ou plus ou mains, dont sanz dangier / Li puet faire boire ou mangier: / Lors dormira cil se formant / Qu’il li larra faire en dormant / Tretout quanque cele vorra.” Note that la Vieille specifies the amount of herbs that can be used *sanz dangier*, suggesting that consuming too many herbs could be dangerous.

⁴⁰ Le Jaloux’s allegation even borders on witchcraft.

⁴¹ “Et leur assiet, comme marrastre, / Au cuer .i. dolereus emplastre, / Destrempeé non pas de vin aigre, / Mais de povreté” (4893-96). Fortune also contaminates men with her murky, poisonous waters, like the menses-polluted fountain in the Garden (6061-74).

⁴² The poisonous nature of women is underscored when Genius compares the two springs (of the Garden of Pleasure and the Heavenly Park): one of them, with its cloudy and murky crystals, drugs the living with death; the other restores the dead to life. He tells his audience, “Drink of the fair spring which is so sweet and bright and healthful that as long as you drink of its water you will never die” [Boivre de la bele fontaine / Qui tan test douce et claire et saine / Que jamais mort ne recevroiz] (20655-57). Likewise, the God of Love says that Jean will drink from one of the two casks of Jupiter—one clear and sweet, one murky and bitter. The murky water of death is a reference to the contaminating influence of women (again, we are reminded of the female catamenia, see note 33) while the clear water is a symbol for the pure intellectualism of men. There is little question which cask Jean will choose.

whom he represents.⁴³ Of course, Raison's accusations come from a woman, and Faux Semblant is by his very nature duplicitous. Still, the *Rose* concedes that society as a whole suffers from the same type of division to which men are subject, leaving people without proper leaders or caretakers.

One particularly threatening condition that affects everyone is hunger.⁴⁴ (This too is a woman's fault, since Eve partook of the forbidden fruit and plunged Nature into a

⁴³ Raison explains, "Lawyers and physicians are all bound with these chains [of greed]... They find gain so sweet and desirable that the physicians would like to have sixty patients for each one they have, and the lawyers would like, for each of their cases, thirty, or indeed two hundred or two thousand, they are so consumed by covetousness and deception. The same is true of theologians who travel around the land, when they preach in order to obtain honors, favors, and wealth" [Avocat et phisicien/ Sont tuit lyé de ce lien... Tant ont le gaaing douz et sade./ Que cil vorroient pour .i. malade / Qu'il ont, qu'il eüssent .xl., / Et cil pour une cause .xxx., / Voire .cc., voire .ii. mile, / Tant les art couvoitise et guile. / Si sont devin qui vont part terre, / Quant il preechent pour conquerre / Honnors et graces et richeses] (5087-99). Raison also blames the rich for the fate of the starving poor: "Certainly, [misers] neither love God nor fear him, for they amass hoards of money and keep more than they need, when they can see the poor outside, trembling with cold and perishing of hunger" [Certes, dieu n'aiment ne ne doutent / Qui teus deniers en tresor boutent / Et plus qu'il n'est mestiers les gardent, / Quant les povres dehors esgardent / De froit trambler, de fain perir] (5117-21).

⁴⁴ Guillaume de Lorris wrote the original portion of the *Rose* sometime between 1225 and 1230, when agricultural productivity was high. Around the year 1270, however, "the growth of the European economy came to a dramatic halt," and the last decades of the thirteenth century saw a sharp decline in agricultural production (Massimo Montanari, *The Culture of Food*, trans. Carl Ipsen [Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1994], 56, 58). In "Toward a New Dietary Balance," in *Food: A Culinary History from Antiquity to the Present*, ed. Jean-Louis Flandrin and Massimo Montanari, trans. Albert Sonnenfeld (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), Montanari writes, "From the mid-1300s to the mid-1400s, the population fell dramatically once again, following the Black Death (1348-50) and the famines that preceded and accompanied it" (248). Jacques Le Goff describes this period as "the return of hunger" (*Il Basso Medioevo* [Milan, 1967], 305, quoted in Montanari, *Culture*, 68). Jean de Meun contributed his much larger section sometime between 1269 and 1278—in the very midst of this "return of hunger." The result is a marked difference in their approach to food. Guillaume's lover wanders the Garden of Pleasure admiring the plentiful and exotic fruits, nuts, and spices (1323 ff.) while Jean's characters, in contrast, constantly speak of hunger and deprivation. Herman Pleij notes how the fruits and spices in the text serve as symbols of power and wealth in *Dreaming of Cockaigne*, trans. Diane Webb (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 96-97. Paul Freedman also explains how spices, as seen in the *Rose*, "were effective in claiming, conveying, and confirming social status" (*Out of the East: Spices and the Medieval Imagination* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008], 5, 12). This is another reason Genius criticizes Guillaume's Garden later on.

fallen state where divisive conditions like hunger and poverty exist.) The text demonstrates the dangers of hunger when Richesse warns the Lover about Pauvreté, telling him, she will “make you linger so long on a little straw or hay that she will let you *die of hunger*” [Se povretez vous puet baillier, / El vous fera tant baaillier / Seur un pou de chausme ou de fain, / Qu’el vous laira morir de fain] (10141-45, my emphasis). This is the only occasion when Faim becomes an actual personification. Richesse tells the lover that Faim lives in a stony field where no wheat [blez] grows (10160). “She is long and thin, weak and feeble and in great need of oat bread; her hair is all disheveled, her eyes hollow and deeply sunken, her face pale, with dry lips and cheeks smeared with filth” [Longue est, et maigre et lasse et vaine, / Grant souffraite a de pain d’avaine; / Les chevelz a touz hericiez, / Les ieulz crues en parfont gliciez, / Vis pale et baulievres sechiees / Joes de roille entechiees] (10167-72). The rest of her description is just as grim: visible entrails, taut skin, protruding bones, hollow stomach.

Because Faim is impoverished, she is forced to eat auxiliary ingredients, the byproducts of grain production, such as straw and chaff—considered fodder for animals but inedible for humans.⁴⁵ “Hunger lives in a stony field where no wheat grows nor any bush or scrub...Hunger, who sees neither wheat nor trees there, pulls up the very grass with her sharp nails and tough teeth, but finds it very sparse because of the thickly scattered stones” [Fains demeure en .i. lieu perreus / Ou ne croist blez, buissons ne broce...Fains, qui ne voit ne blez ne arbres, / Les herbes en arrache pures / As tranchanz ongles, as denz dures; / Mes mout les trueve cleres nees / Pour les pierres espes semees]

⁴⁵ The chaff is the inedible, protective casing of cereal grains that must be shelled before the wheat is ground into flour.

(10156-57, 10160-64). The homonymic pairing of *fain* (*foin* or hay) and *fain* (*faim* or hunger) above drives home the divisive nature of toxic foods, so vividly illustrated in Faim's portrait.

In the *Rose*, hunger not only divides the body, potentially causing death, it also divides the mind. As Nature explains, hungry people experience dangerous dreams:

It often happens that when someone is deliriously ill, and when there are not enough caretakers present or they are lying in their homes alone, they get up and begin to walk, never stopping until they find some wild place, or meadow or vineyard or hedged farmland, and they fall to the ground. There they can be found afterward, if one were to pass by, no matter how much later; because they had no one to take care of them except, perhaps, idiots and evil-doers, they are all dead from hunger and suffering. (18331-46)⁴⁶

The consequences of having insufficient food are dire indeed, undermining the very means by which Jean communicates this danger: the allegorical dream vision. (If starvation or toxic foods, like La Vielle's drugs, can cause dreams—not unlike the friar's drugging of Contrition in Passus 20 of *Piers Plowman*—how can we trust the Lover's own dream?)⁴⁷

⁴⁶ “Si rest bien souvent avenu / Quant aucun sont pris et tenu / Par aucune grant maladie, / Si com il pert en frenesie / Quant il n'ont gardes souffisanz / Ou sont seuls es hostels gisanz, / Qu'il saillent sus et puis cheminent / Et de tant cheminer ne finent / Qu'il treuvent quelque lieus sauvages, / Ou prez ou vignes ou boscages, / Et se laissent illuec cheoir. / La les puet on apres veoir / Se l'on i vient, combien qu'il tarde, / Pour ce qu'il n'orent point de garde / Fors gent, espoir, fole et mauvese, / Tuit mort de fain et de mesaise.”

⁴⁷ Constance Hieatt explains that because allegory can mean two or more things simultaneously, it is well suited to the dream frame: “The most usual effect of dream-work... is the possibility of multifold and shifting meaning, and multifold and shifting meanings are exactly the characteristics of medieval allegory and symbolism in general” (*The Realism of Dream*

Indeed, Nature goes on to explain how dreams themselves, like poison and hunger, can trick and entrap man's senses. She observes,

Many are so deceived this way that they leave their beds and even put on their shoes and clothes and all of their gear while their common sense sleeps and all of their particular senses are awake. They take their staffs, they take their satchel, or their stakes or sickles or billhooks, and they make their way along the roads without knowing where they are going. They even ride on horses and thus pass over mountains and valleys, by dry paths or by muddy ones, until they come to foreign lands. And when their common sense wakes up and they return once more to their right mind, they are extremely surprised and astonished. And when they are with other people, they attest that this is no story, that they were carried there by devils who removed them from their homes—and it was really they themselves who did it! (18309-30)⁴⁸

Visions [The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1967], 106, 104). Many scholars have acknowledged the multiple voices in Jean's portion of the romance. For example, Sylvia Huot in *Dreams of Lovers* notes the "kaleidoscopic discourses" at work in the *Rose* (5); Noah Guynn in *Allegory and Sexual Ethics in the High Middle Ages* (New York: Pallgrave Macmillan, 2007) calls the text "hybrid, encyclopedic, and polyphonic" (137); and Alastair Minnis in *Magister Amoris: The "Roman de la Rose" and Vernacular Hermeneutics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) argues that the *Rose* not only admits of diverse readings, but that it actually invites them (159). Steven Kruger argues that a type of unity is still possible within such plurality and ambiguity: "We might see the dream as a place where moral or spiritualizing and somatic or naturalizing discourses, rather than being played off against each other, come together in mutual reinforcement" (*Dreaming in the Middle Ages* [New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992], 63).

⁴⁸ "Que maint en sont si deceü / Que de leur liz se sont meü / Et se chauceñt neïs et vestment / Et de tout leru hernois s'aprestent / Si com li sen commun sommeillent / Et tui li particulier veillent: / Prennent bourdons prenent escherpes / Ou piels ou faucilles ou serpes, / Et vont cheminant par les voies / Et ne sevent ou toutes voies, / Et monetn neïs es chevaus / Et passent ainsi monz et vaus, / Par seiches voies ou par fanges, / Tant qu'il vienent as lieux estranges. / Et quant li sen commun s'evueillent, / Mout s'esbahissent et merveillent / Quant puis en leur droit s'en revienent; / Et quant avoec la gent se tienent, / Si tesmoignent non pas por fables / Que la les ont porté dyables / Qui de leur ostel les osterent— / Et il meïsme s'i porterent!"

Dreams can cause men's "particular senses" to overwhelm their *sensus communis* and disturb their imagination to the point that they leave their homes in the middle of the night and wake up in strange places, completely unaware of how they got there. A dreamer might believe he is hearing the music of instruments, smelling odorous spices, tasting savory foods, and feeling his lover in his arms—even though none of it is real.⁴⁹ In fact, Nature claims that all dreams are nothing more than illusions and lies (18349-67).⁵⁰ Her discourse thus questions the very fabric of which the text is made, illustrating yet another form of division.⁵¹

According to Nature, dreams on a literal level are deceptive, caused as they are by the corruptible senses. The underlying signifier for Amant's dream is therefore suspect.⁵²

⁴⁹ "Et ot vieles et citoles / Et flaire espices odoreuses / Et gouste choses savoreuses, / Et sent entre ses braz s'amie / —Toutevois n'i est il mie" (18388-92). Alis was similarly deceived by his dreams—the result of a woman's potion—in Chrétien de Troyes's *Cligès*.

⁵⁰ This is a stark contrast to Guillaume's opening lines, in which he asserted that dreams are meaningful and can signify future events—"For my part, I am confident that dreams are significant" [Car androit moi ai ge creance / Que songe sont senefiance] (15-16). For Guillaume's view of dreams, see Ernest Langlois, *Origines et sources du Roman de la Rose* (Paris: E. Thorin, 1891), 55; Karl D. Uitti, "'Cele [qui] doit estre Rose clamee' (*Rose*, vv. 40-44): Guillaume's Intentionality," in *Rethinking the Romance of the Rose: Text, Image, Reception*, ed. Kevin Brownlee and Sylvia Huot (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), 43-44; and David Hult, *Self-Fulfilling Prophecies: Readership and Authority in the First Roman de la Rose* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 114-126.

⁵¹ A.C. Spearing and Douglas Kelly, among others, have argued that Jean transforms Guillaume's truthful *somnium* into a false *insomnium*. Spearing argues that the last line of the text may complete the "transformation from a vision of truth to a mere fantasy, from a *visio* (in Macrobius's terms) to an *insomnium*. If so, the *Roman de la Rose*... [is] the first to make deliberate use of the ambiguity of the concept of 'dream,' which will come to be of great importance in later dream-poems" (*Medieval Dream-Poetry* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976], 40). Kelly's central claim in *Internal Difference and Meanings in the Roman de la Rose* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995) is that Jean changes Guillaume's allegory, redefining the *somnium*, which requires interpretation, as an *insomnium*, a false dream.

⁵² Douglas Kelly argues, "Amant and the reader must awaken to reality in order to discover that the dream is a literal and allegorical *insomnium*, or wish fulfillment dream. In this equation, Jean de Meun represents Phanie and the reader is Croesus, Amant, Rose, or some variant or antithesis of one of them. The reader must decide to identify with the character or stand at a distance" (*Internal Difference*, 75).

This uncertainty about the dream extends to the medium of language itself: by forcing the poem to confront its own mode of referentiality, Jean demonstrates how language (which is built of signs) is unreliable. This has dangerous consequences, especially for men.

Sylvia Huot writes, “When the man reveals himself through speech, he becomes a spoken text that the woman can ‘read’ and appropriate, since spoken language is very much a feminine domain.”⁵³ If a man cannot control his speech, it can be used against him by a woman.

The slipperiness of language is demonstrated in several moments of allegorical disruption throughout the text, most markedly in the speech given by Faux Semblant, the embodiment of duplicity. Notably, the linguistic division he models is paired with concerns about the divisive effects of hunger.⁵⁴ In his conversation with Amour, Faux Semblant rails against the religious orders for eating while others are starving. More than that, he dramatizes their neglect within his own character. Dressed as a religious, he declares, “Of religion, without fail, I *leave* the grain and *take* the chaff” [De religion sanz

⁵³ Sylvia Huot, “Bodily Peril: Sexuality and the Subversion of Order in Jean de Meun’s ‘Roman de la Rose,’” *Modern Language Review* 95 [2000]: 41-61, at 51.

⁵⁴ I find that Faux Semblant functions at the center of a web of signification that communicates the divisive state of the world. Susan Stakel argues that Faux Semblant is at the center of Jean’s portion of the romance (*False Roses: Structures of Duality and Deceit in Jean de Meun’s Roman de la Rose* [Saratoga, CA: Anma Libri, 1991], 60). Indeed, Faux Semblant seems to stand as a central node in the text’s concerns about hunger. The most explicit concern about hunger and its companion, poverty, is communicated in the discourses of Raison, Ami, Faux Semblant, La Vieille, and Nature. In keeping with the chiasmic structure that characterizes the *Rose*, parallel aspects link the speeches of Raison and Nature, for whom poverty is a social problem, and Ami and La Vieille, for whom poverty is a personal problem, with Faux Semblant’s speech serving as the unifying center.

C	Raison	Social problem
B	Ami	Personal problem
A	Faux Semblant	Center- personal and social problem
B	La Vieille	Personal problem
C	Nature	Social problem

faille, / J'en lais le grain et preng la paille] (11219-20, my emphasis). In addition to exhibiting the carnality and hypocrisy that exist within corrupt monastic orders, by voicing his preference for the chaff rather than the grain, Faux Semblant directs our attention to the material reality of hunger and toxic foods, and in so doing, disrupts the allegorical process of which he is a part by exposing the gap between signifier (chaff) and signified (grain).⁵⁵

The literal level of Faux Semblant's speech (the chaff) is communicated when Amour asks him to more fully explain how his deception works: "For, if we determine who you are by your clothes, you seem to be a holy hermit! [Car si com tes habiz nous conte, / Tu sambles ester .i. sainz hermites!] (11234-35).⁵⁶ To this, Faux Semblant replies, as we might expect, that he only *seems* to be a hermit, for he is in fact a hypocrite (11236). Amour questions further:

Amour: "You preach abstinence." Faux Semblant: "True indeed, but I fill my belly with rich food and wine, as a theologian would." Amour: "You preach poverty." Faux Semblant: "Indeed, though I am abundantly wealthy. But however much I pretend to be poor, I have no regard for poor men... When I see those poor creatures naked on their stinking dung-heaps, shivering with cold, crying and

⁵⁵ He says, "They call themselves poor but they are fed with fine, delicious morsels and drink precious wines; they preach poverty to you while fishing for great wealth with their seines and trammel-nets" [Et se font povre, et si se vivent / Des bons morsiaus declieus / Et boivent les vin precious, / Et la povreté nous preeschent, / Et les granz richeses peeschent / As seymes et as tramaus] (11048-53). Speaking as one of these false religious, Faux Semblant explains that he would not want to be poor because "such people endure too much suffering" (11505, Horgan).

⁵⁶ Strubel includes a 96-line interpolation in his edition, which separates these two moments. This interpolation is not included in Lecoy's edition or the majority of extant manuscripts.

moaning with hunger, I do not get involved.”⁵⁷

The only questions Amour poses are about the speaker’s abstinence and poverty, and Faux Semblant proudly admits to disregarding both. He also acknowledges a relationship with Abstinence Contrainte, who is compared in the text to the pale horse of the Apocalypse.⁵⁸ Susan Stakel observes, “Every critic who mentions Atenance interprets her abstinence on the sexual paradigm. Textual evidence, however, indicates that her abstinence is from food, not sex. She needs Faux Semblant to cover for her so that she will not die of *hunger*.”⁵⁹ (Faim’s *vis pale* anticipates the *pale et morte* face of Abstinence Contrainte.) Clearly, then, food (and its lack) is a central concern for Faux Semblant.⁶⁰ It is therefore not unlikely to suppose he has a more literal meaning in mind when he uses the words *grain* and *paille*. Indeed, the frequent recurrence of these terms

⁵⁷ “[Amour] Tu va preschant astinance! / [Faux Semblant] Voire voir, mais j’emple ma pance / De tres bons morsiaus et de vins / Tels comme il affiert a devins. / [Amour] Tu vas preschant povreté. / [Faux Semblant] Voire, riches a poesté. / Mais combien que povres me faigne, / Nul povre je ne contredaigne / ... / Quant je voi touz nuz ces truanz / Trembler sus ces fumiers puanz / De froit, de fain crier et braire, / Ne m’entremet de leur affaire” (11237-44, 11249-52).

⁵⁸ “Si ressembloit la puste lisse, / Le cheval de l’apocalisse / Qui senefie la gent male / D’ypocrisie tainte et pale: / Car cil chevaus sor soi ne porte / Nulle couleur fors pale et morte. / De tele couleur enlangoree / Ert astinance coloree” (12071-78). The pale horse is associated with famine and death—a critical detail, as I will explain shortly. The Vulgate reads: “And behold a pale horse: and he that sat upon him, his name was Death. And hell followed him. And power was given to him over the four parts of the earth, to kill with sword, with famine and with death and with the beasts of the earth” [et ecce equus pallidus et qui sedebat desuper nomen illi Mors et inferus sequebatur eum et data est illi potestas super quattuor partes terrae interficere gladio fame et morte et bestiis terrae] (Revelation 6:8). The text tells us that Abstinence lived a life of thievery and pretense because of her constraint and that this constraint was not undertaken willingly—a result, perhaps of poverty and/or hunger?

⁵⁹ Stakel, *False Roses*, 48, my emphasis. Stakel names Fleming, Tuve, Ryding, Poirion, and Warren as critics who read Constrained Abstinence in a sexual light. She notes: The description of Atenance Contrainte as “pale et morte,” in addition to its apocalyptic connotations is consistent with a physical appearance contrived to imply malnutrition” (49).

⁶⁰ This is not the first time he has railed against the religious orders for eating while others are starving, and Stakel observes that on two occasions he catalogues a long list of foodstuffs (*False Roses*, 58).

and their synonyms in alimentary contexts throughout the poem strongly suggests this to be the case.⁶¹

By directing the reader's gaze to the chaff or signifier, Faux Semblant's speech not only highlights the dangers of poverty and starvation, but it also exposes the limits of allegory, the ability of language to mean accurately. He makes this rift clear by shifting his speech to another level of signification: clothing. He tells Amour, "I seek nothing more than the habit...I disguise myself in such a guise as pleases me" [Je n'en quier sanz plus que l'abit...En tele guise / Com il me plaist je me desguise] (11222-24). By directing our attention to clothing, Faux Semblant would have his audience read the bodies of others to determine their character. But as he argued earlier, just because someone wears a religious robe, it does not mean he is a religious person: "The habit does not make the monk" [Li abiz ne fait pas le moine] (11062).⁶² Furthermore, not *all* religious are hypocrites.⁶³ Consequently, this relationship proves untenable, and the dissolution of the

⁶¹ In addition to *la paille*, the text assigns the "chaff" various names: shell (*la coque*), bark (*l'escorce*), and grass/ herbs (*les herbes*). For example, Nature alludes to this metaphor when explaining that the rich care nothing for the poor: "There are many for whom *nothing is worth a nutshell* except the obtaining of possessions and property. And yet they call themselves noble" [Si n'i refont il pas grant force: / Il n'i donroient une escorce, / Maint en y a, fors del avoir / Les possessions et l'avoir. / Si dient qu'il sont gentill homme] (18855-59, my emphasis). Nature's use of the term *escorce*, which means bark or chaff, links her statement directly to Faux Semblant's, who also used the word *escorce* (11862-64). Leaving the grain and caring only about wealth means turning your back on the dying. The term *coque* shows up in Raison's story about Croesus who interprets his dream literally rather than allegorically (6515). Faux Semblant also uses *coque* at line 11821.

⁶² Susan Stakel observes that Faux Semblant uses forty-eight different terms from the lexical field of apparel, such as *l'abit* and *guise*, most of which the text associates with duplicity (*False Roses*, 52, 55). For example, *abit* is rhymed with "pour genz enbasher y abit" (11221-22). The result is that the religious clothing itself becomes synonymous with deceit. Stakel writes, "By the time of the final reference to clothing the signifier has been completely effaced, leaving only the signified, doubleness" (54).

⁶³ Faux Semblant's assertion that "the habit does not make the monk" severs the connection between signifier and signified; for if a habit does not necessarily mean a monk is

signifier (clothing) eradicates our ability to compare the levels of meaning at work in Faux Semblant's speech and even the allegory at large.⁶⁴

Faux Semblant's discussion of clothing hearkens back to Guillaume's portion of the text in which all of the personifications wear colorful dresses. Claire Nouvet writes, "Medieval rhetoric repeatedly compares its figural language to a 'dress,' a '*superficialis ornatus verborum*' that 'clothes' a thought presumed to exist independently from it. Defined as a purely formal art, rhetoric 'informs' language, it shapes it, thanks to its rhetorical tropes, which are, according to Geoffrey of Vinsauf, its 'verbal flowers' as well as its 'colors.'"⁶⁵ Dream vision writers typically invite readers to read the *superficialis* description of the dreamer—his appearance, including his clothing (this was essential to our understanding of Will)—but here the Lover is unable to read the bodies of others because they are personifications clothed in rhetorical colors and integument that hide their true nature, just as Faux Semblant's habit could tell Amant nothing about the man wearing it.

Ultimately, this allegorical murkiness points us back to the dreamer himself,

good, it also cannot automatically mean a monk is bad. As Stakel observes, "The outer garment, as a matter of fact, should be a sign that a second level of meaning does exist and that its nature must be determined before it is possible to ascertain either correspondence or disparity between the two levels" (*False Roses*, 55).

⁶⁴ Alastair Minnis writes, "Tantalizingly, and sometimes frustratingly, Jean de Meun vacillates freely between various idioms without investing exclusively in any single one. There is no master discourse relating to linguistic and literary theory which can be seized upon and made the hermeneutic key to Jean's entire text" (*Magister Amoris*, 159). Similarly, Douglas Kelly argues that the *Rose* "does not articulate a single meaning or evaluation of either the literal plot or its allegory. It offers no definitive gloss, moral, or interpretation" (*Internal Difference*, 127).

⁶⁵ Claire Nouvet, "An Allegorical Mirror: The Pool of Narcissus in Guillaume de Lorris' *Romance of the Rose*," *The Romanic Review* 91 (2000): 353-74, at 363.

inviting us to read *his* body instead.⁶⁶ The dream, as a reflection of Amant's disordered mind, can reveal nothing about the people around him, but it *does* reveal the division that has taken place in his mental faculties—a division that occurred when he looked into Narcissus's pool and was subsequently ensnared by the Rose. In fact, the allegorical turmoil ruling the dreamer's mind reflects the turmoil of the crystal mirror where he first lost his self-knowledge. Even though the mirror is supposed to reveal truth “without the rhetorical veils of allegory,” the very colors it refracts are the rhetorical “colors” or tropes that allegory uses to veil its meaning.⁶⁷ Claire Nouvet argues, “The crystalline mirror of the pool which ‘shows’ the colors and figures of the world does not therefore discover these figures as it deceptively claims. It generates them as precisely ‘colors,’ ‘figures;’ that is, tropological ‘covers.’”⁶⁸ The mirror purports to reveal, but it actually conceals. The result is that, while the Lover believes he is seeing “the true colors and figures of the natural world,” he is really looking at allegory itself.⁶⁹

In *Piers Plowman*, the allegory is disrupted because Will needs to understand that reality cannot be subsumed into an idealized meaning. Physical existence is just as important as spiritual existence; indeed, spiritual health depends on the physical. But in

⁶⁶ Alastair Minnis argues that two discourses are at work in the poem: integument (allegorical “covering”) and satire (“stripping” or de-allegorizing in order to reach the literal): “Just as the terms ‘naked’ and ‘clothed’ are relative to and presuppose each other, so too do integumental and satiric versions of narrative” (*Magister Amoris*, 21). Perhaps the “undressing” we are required to do to read the dreamer's body depends on these moments of satire.

⁶⁷ Nouvet, “Allegorical Mirror,” 362.

⁶⁸ Nouvet, “Allegorical Mirror,” 365.

⁶⁹ Nouvet, “Allegorical Mirror,” 367-68. She argues, “Placed at the core of a dream which has defined itself as an allegorical vision, the speculum of the pool mirrors, within the dream, the vision ‘*per speculum*’ that produces the dream vision in its entirety. It is, as it were, a mirror within the mirror, an allegory for the allegorical vision” (368). She also notes that the mirror in the pool is pre-figured by the mirror Oiseseuse holds in her hand.

the *Rose*, this allegorical disruption removes Amant further from physical reality. Yes, several markers in the text direct our attention to the “chaff” and the hazards of poverty, but ultimately these dangers are allegorized to represent a highly personal (and likely imagined) threat to the Lover’s health. As a result, the threatening dream world he has entered reflects the madness overruling his senses, just like the dreams Nature described.⁷⁰

The dangers of this divisive state, in which Amant can neither read the bodies of others nor control the linguistic construct in which he operates, are demonstrated by Le Jaloux. In a humorous episode, the jealous husband becomes frustrated at his inability to reach his wife because of the many layers of clothing that separate the two of them (8847 ff.). He complains, “When I want to take my pleasure with you, I find it [the dress] such an encumbrance, so irritating and annoying, that I am unable to achieve my aim” (8858-61).⁷¹ His wife’s dress deflects rather than reveals her true self.⁷²

In the same way, Nature, with her colors and flowers, “has been de-natured by the

⁷⁰ In Nature’s discussion of dreams, the imagination (which governs dreams) is overrun by the senses while the sleeper’s memory, which could act as a corrective, lies dormant. This is consistent with the narrative of division in the poem, which consistently links remembering to dismemberment. For example, as the Lover approaches the Rose, he compares his efforts to Hercules’s labors and recalls how the hero was dismembered by Cacus: “D’Ercules vous peüst membrer / Quant il vost Cacus desmembrer!” (21625-26). Pairing *membrer* with *dismembrer* reminds us that the Lover’s memory cannot serve its function because Amant’s mind is in a state of disorder and will remain so until he overpowers the Rose. (This pairing is also used in the episode with Nero, in which Nero dismembers his mother and then puts the pieces back together, hoping to remember where he was conceived (6193-94). The unsettling act of taking apart and putting together (a woman’s) sexual organs might serve as a metaphor for the work Jean is doing in the poem as he hopes to help the Lover regain his self-knowledge.)

⁷¹ “Car quant me vueill a vous deduire, / Je la trouve si encombreuse, / Si tres grevaine et si ennuieuse / Que je n’en puis a chief venir.”

⁷² E. Jane Burns finds that the wife’s clothes “forge a threateningly ambiguous sartorial body that allows the husband’s wife to use excessively ornate feminine dress to gain crucial social mobility” (*Courtly Love Undressed: Reading Through Clothes in Medieval French Culture* [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002], 45).

rhetorical colors of allegory.”⁷³ (Colors are the first detail mentioned about Nature’s dress, at lines 59-66.) The text thus creates a parallel between Nature and the wife, and indeed all women, who manipulate language. Le Jaloux laments to his silent wife, “It is foolish of me to say this, for I now that when you leave me you will repeat all my words... You might have them smash my head or break my thighs or slash my shoulders” (9211-18).⁷⁴ Genius similarly explains (to Nature) how a woman can seduce her husband into telling his secrets so that he cuts his own throat (16383) and “with his words he hangs himself” [par sa parole se pent] (16547). To the Lover, women represent a real threat. If they control language and remain unknowable (and so uncontrollable), they can literally divide their male counterparts.⁷⁵ In this context, the Lover (imagines he) has only one recourse. He must control the women who have divided him (the Rose, even Nature) and any who might divide him in the future. This he can only do through bodily writing—silencing women and taking control of the narrative—which is the penance given to him by the God of Love.⁷⁶

⁷³ Nouvet, “Allegorical Mirror,” 364.

⁷⁴ “Si faz je que fols de ce dire / Car je sai bien que tire a tire / Mes paroles toutes direz, / Quant de moi vous departirez... me povez faire entamer / La teste, ou les cuisses briser, / Ou les espules enciser.” Ironically, we never hear the wife’s point of view. Her story is told by Le Jaloux who is in turn narrated by Ami, a character who fixates on women’s ability to disguise their true nature with their clothing and ornaments.

⁷⁵ Genius compares women to snakes waiting to attack unsuspecting men with their poisonous tongues: “No remedy can heal the burning of that poison. Herbs and roots are useless; the only medicine is flight” [Car de cestui venim l’ardure / Nus triacles ne la cure: / Riens n’i vault herbes ne racine; / Seul fourir en est medicine] (16617-20).

⁷⁶ There is an interesting parallel to Le Jaloux’s wife in the Pygmalion episode later in the poem (20787-21184)—inserted just as Amant is about to conquer the Rose. Unlike Le Jaloux, Pygmalion chooses and even makes the (very elaborate) clothing his wife wears; his wife, a statue, remains silent and thus harmless. When she is turned into a woman, she fulfills his every desire. Thus Pygmalion serves as a role model for the dreamer and a reflection of Jean himself. (Pygmalion goes mad with desire for the statue, his own creation, just as the Lover goes mad for

It is no wonder then that the Lover rejects Raison (twice) when she offers to cure him of his lovesickness.⁷⁷ Her treatment mandates that the Lover renounce love: “If you really want to avoid being hurt by Love and to be cured of this madness, you cannot drink a better draught than the thought of fleeing from him” (4348-52).⁷⁸ The remedy she offers is herself: reason. “Whoever is at one with reason will never love *par amour*” [Que qui c’onc a raison s’acorde / Jamais par amour n’amera] (6880-81). Because Raison demands the Lover forsake his penance, Amant refuses her offer, choosing to remain faithful to his God. “If I am mad, then it is my loss” [Se je sui fols, c’est mes damages] (7209). As he stated previously, maintaining the narrative of a penitent soul, “There is nothing left to do except to suffer and offer my body to be martyred, and wait with firm hope until Love sends me relief. I must wait for mercy” (4172-75).⁷⁹ Furthermore, Raison, as the opposite of “senseless” love, offers a cure dependent on contraries, and the Lover can only be cured by similarities.⁸⁰ Finally, and most importantly, Raison is a woman, and the remedy

the Rose and Jean falls in love with his work.) See Reiner Leushius, “Pygmalion’s Folly and the Author’s Craft in Jean de Meun’s *Roman de la Rose*,” *Neophilologus* 90 (2006): 521-33.

⁷⁷ Raison informs the lover that he that he has drunk so much of Love’s bitterness he has developed a “mental illness” [maladie de pensee] (4232, 4374).

⁷⁸ “Se tu veuls bien eschever / Qu’amours ne te puisse grever, / Et veuls garir de cel malage, / Ne puez boivre meilleur beverage / Comme penser de li fourir.” She says, “This is the only way you can be happy: if you follow him, he will follow you, and if you flee him, he will flee away” [Tu n’en puez autrement jouir. / Se tu le suiz, il te sivra, / Se tu le fuiz, il te fuira] (4353-55).

⁷⁹ “Dont n’I a mais que de sousfrir / Et mon cors a martire offrir / Et d’attendre en bonne esperance / Tant k’amours m’envoie alejance.”

⁸⁰ He states that he cannot follow her advice because “there are so many contradictions in this lesson” [En ma leçon a tant contraire] (4361). Raison even uses contraries to define Love. “It is mad reason and reasonable madness...healthful sickness and a most sickly health...a sin touched by pardon and a pardon tainted by sin” [C’est raisons toute forsenable. / C’est forsenerie raisnable...C’est langors toute santeive, / C’est santez toute maladive... Entechiez de pardon pechiez, / De pechiez pardons entechiez] (4296-97, 4302-03, 4312-13). Ironically, toward the end of the poem, the Lover states that knowledge can only come from contraries: “The nature of opposites is that one explains the other” [Ainsi va des contraires choses: / Les unes sont des

for the Lover's illness (bodily writing) must come from a man.⁸¹

Fashioning Like out of Like: The Phoenix

In order to set the stage for his discussion of bodily writing (as explained by Genius), Jean uses the myth of the phoenix to illustrate the isopathic nature of the Lover's cure. The phoenix, who is born in spices, represents an "artificial" antidote (born of Culture) to protect Amant against deceptive Nature. This section will discuss this exemplum before I conclude the chapter with Genius's instruction regarding bodily writing.

The importance of like things not only curing but *coming* from like things (a man healing a man, love curing lovesickness) is emphasized in the passage about Nature's forge. In this portion of the poem, Jean draws heavily on Alain de Lille's *De planctu naturae*, from sections like the following:

The artisan of the universe...decreed that by the lawful path of derivation by propagation, *like things*, sealed with the stamp of manifest resemblance, *should be produced from like*. Accordingly he appointed me [Nature] as his substitute, his

autres gloses" (21576-77). However, while knowledge and experience can come from experiencing opposites—which is perhaps why the text is filled with so many contradictory discourses—the Lover's cure is homologous: Amant can only be cured by experiencing love, not its opposite (even if knowing the opposite allows him to define it). For scholarship on "contraires choses," see Douglas Kelly, *Internal Difference*, 65; Nancy Freeman Regalado, "'Des contraires choses': la fonction poétique de la citation et des *exempla* dans le *Roman de la rose* de Jean de Meun," *Littérature* 41 (1981): 62-81; Mary Franklin Brown, *Reading the World: Encyclopedic Writing in the Scholastic Age* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 187.

⁸¹ Many scholars have noted the homosocial (and perhaps homosexual) discourse in the poem. The most obvious concerns Bel Accueil (Fair Welcome), who is part of the Rose and is the one who must grant Amant access. Bel Accueil is, however, a masculine word, and so the masculine pronoun *il* is often used to designate the Rose. See Simon Gaunt, "Bel Accueil and the Improper Allegory of the *Roman de la Rose*," in *New Medieval Literature*, vol. 2, ed. R. Copeland, D. Lawton, and W. Scase (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 65-93; Ellen Friedrich, "Oiseuse: An Introduction to a Homoerotic Reading of Guillaume de Lorris's *Romans de la rose*" (PhD dissertation, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, 1999).

vice-regent, the mistress of his mint, to put the stamp on the different classes of things so that I should mold the images of things, each on its own anvil, not allow the product to deviate from the form proper...striking various coins of things according to the mold of the exemplar and producing copies of my original *by fashioning like out of like*.⁸²

Nature follows God's decree by forming new generations in her forge. Jean writes, "Nature in her forge is always hammering, always forging, always renewing individuals through new generations. When she has no other solution, she stamps them with the impress of particular letters, that she may give them true forms in the coins of different currencies" (16013-20).⁸³

To emphasize the importance of like things in this process of regeneration, Jean inserts an exemplum into his text that was not in his source: the (re)birth of the phoenix.⁸⁴

The example of the phoenix truly demonstrates [the eternal nature of the form] for two phoenixes cannot exist at the same time. There is always just one phoenix and it lives, before it reaches its end, for five hundred years; at the last moment, it makes a large fire of spices, and it throws itself upon the flames and burns. Thus it destroys its body. But because it keeps its form, from its ashes, however much it may have been burned, another phoenix is reborn. Or it may be the same one that Nature thus resurrects, she who profits so much from this species that she would

⁸² *Plaint of Nature*, trans. James J. Sheridan (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1980), 145-46. My emphasis.

⁸³ "Nature...dedanz sa forge / Touz jourz martele, touz jorz forge, / Touz jourz ses pieces renouvele / Par generacion nouvele. / Quant autre conseil n'I puet metre, / Si taille enprainte d'autel letre / Qu'el leur donne forms veroies / As coins de diverses monnoies."

⁸⁴ Alain does mention the phoenix in his *Planctu* but not in this context.

completely lose her being if she could not revitalize the phoenix. (15979-94)⁸⁵

The phoenix is provided as an example of the ultimate preservation of the form, but there is nothing *natural* about its regeneration: the phoenix does not mate. The new bird comes directly from the old, like from like. And yet the phoenix is so important that Nature would lose her being if it did not regenerate.⁸⁶

The phoenix's strange relationship with Nature is underscored by the "large fire of spices." The detail about the phoenix's use of spices in its funeral pyre can be found in sources as early as the fifth century BCE. Herodotus, for example, records in his *History* that the phoenix "comes all the way from Arabia, and brings the parent bird, all plastered over with myrrh, to the temple of the Sun [in Egypt], and there buries the body. In order

⁸⁵ "Et par le phenix bien le samble / Qu'il n'en puet ester .ij. ensamble. / Touz jors est il uns seuls pheniz / Et vit, ainçois qu'il soit feniz, / Par.v. c. anz; au darrenier / Si fait .i. feu grant et plenier / D'espices, et s'I boute et s'art. / Ainsi fait de son cors essart. / Mais por ce qu'il sa forme garde, / De sa poudre, comment qu'il s'arde, / Uns autres phenix en revient / Ou cil meïsmes, se deviant, / Que nature ainsi resouscite, / Qui tant a s'espice proufite / Qu'ele perdroit du tout son ester / S'el ne faisoit cestui renaistre." Jean's description of ".i. feu grant et plenier d'espices" might be translated as a large fire filled with spices, but Lecoy observes that *plenier* modifies *feu* and signifies *grand*. This would suggest that the fire is not "scented with spices" as Horgan translates it, but rather is *made* of them—a conclusion supported by Isidore of Seville's account (see below).

⁸⁶ There is an interesting parallel between Christian Apocalyptic thought and the pagan phoenix. The regenerative myth of the phoenix, with its circular flight, resonates with early regenerative apocalyptic traditions. (This circular view often conflicts with a linear, teleological interpretation of the last days, but many dream visions manage to incorporate an eschatological view into the regenerative model, emphasizing the cyclical nature of healing and history.) Justine Rydzeski explains, "The pagan version of the story associates the phoenix with the sun because of its return and rebirth at the temple at Heliopolis, a city of the sun that features a holy tree, spices and perfumes, and a fountain, lake, or spring. When Lactantius, Gregory, and other Christians such as the Old English poet recount and interpret the phoenix myth, it becomes an allegory of the Final Judgment and the resurrection of the dead. On one level, the phoenix itself signifies Christ, and the birds who follow him are the righteous saved; at the same time, the phoenix signifies every Christian who builds a nest of good works" (*Radical Nostalgia in the Age of Piers Plowman: Economics, Apocalypticism, and Discontent* [New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1999], 14). The holy city, healthful spices, and living waters associated with the phoenix's home have strong correlations with the symbols of healing contained in the *Le Roman de Rose*.

to bring him, they say, he first forms a ball of myrrh as big as he finds that he can carry; then he hollows out the ball, and puts his parent inside, after which he covers over the opening with fresh myrrh.”⁸⁷ Ovid in his *Metamorphoses* states that the phoenix lives on “drops of incense, and the sap of the cardamom plant...As soon as it has lined [its nest] with cassia bark, and smooth spikes of nard, cinnamon fragments and yellow myrrh, it settles on top, and ends its life among the perfumes.”⁸⁸ Pliny the Elder in his *Natural History* writes, “When it is old it builds a nest from sprigs of wild cinnamon and frankincense, fills it with scents, and lies on it till it dies.”⁸⁹ Isidore of Seville in his *Etymologies* states simply, “When [the phoenix] sees that it has grown old it constructs a funeral pile for itself of aromatic twigs.”⁹⁰ And Guillaume le Clerc writes in his *Bestiaire*:

At the end of five hundred years it feels that it has grown old and loads itself with many rare and precious spices and flies from the desert away to the city of Leopolis. There, by some sign or other, the coming of the bird is announced to a priest of that city who causes fagots to be gathered and placed upon a beautiful altar, erected for the bird. And so, as I have said, the bird, laden with spices comes to the altar, and smiting upon the hard stone with its beak, it causes the flame to

⁸⁷ Herodotus, *The History of Herodotus*, Book 2, trans. George Rawlinson (London: Everyman’s Library, 1997), accessed April 5, 2016, <http://classics.mit.edu/Herodotus/history.2.ii.html>.

⁸⁸ Ovid, *The Metamorphoses*, trans. Anthony S. Kline (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 2000), Book XV: 391-417, accessed April 5, 2016, <http://ovid.lib.virginia.edu/trans/Metamorph15.htm#488378554>.

⁸⁹ Pliny, *Natural History, Volume III: Books 8-11*, trans. Harris Rackham (London: Harvard University Press, 1940), 295.

⁹⁰ *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, trans. Stephen A. Barney, et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), Book XII.vii.22, page 265.

leap forth and set fire to the wood and the spices. When the fire is burning brightly, the phoenix lays itself upon the altar and is burned to dust and ashes. Then comes the priest and finds the ashes piled up, and separating them softly he finds within a little worm, which gives forth an odor sweeter than that of roses or of any other flower. The next day and the next the priest comes and on the third day he finds that the worm has become a full-grown and full-fledged bird, which bows low before him and flies away, glad and joyous, nor returns again before five hundred years.⁹¹

Why does Jean include the phoenix—and its spices—in his section on Nature?

We may find an answer to this question in another of Jean's interpolations. In at least two different moments in his text he borrows from Virgil's *Georgics* in order to describe the Golden Age. The first instance is during the discourse of Ami:

Formerly, in the days of our first fathers and our first mothers...men were not so fastidious in the matter of food and dress. Instead of bread, meat, and fish, they gathered acorns in the woods...They rubbed the grain from the ears of corn and gathered grapes in the vineyards without putting them in presses or vats. They sustained themselves abundantly with the honey that ran down the oak-trees and drank pure water, *without asking for spiced or aromatic wine*, nor did they ever drink wine that had been decanted. At that time the earth was not plowed but was just as God had prepared it and bore of its own accord the things with which each

⁹¹ L. Oscar Kuhns, "Bestiaries and Lapidaries," in *Library Of The World's Best Literature, Ancient And Modern*, Vol. 4 (London, 1896).

man fortified himself. (8359-60, 8366-69, 8377-88, my emphasis)⁹²

The second is much later in the text, this time in the sermon of Genius: “No one ever plowed until Jupiter came. No one had ever tilled or hoed or cultivated the ground...He felled the honey-bearing oaks and dried up the streams of wine...[He] invented *entirely new sauces and various kinds of spices*, to which he added many herbs. *This was the beginning of the arts*” (20123-26, 20137-38, 20176-79, my emphasis).⁹³ In this part of the *Georgics*, Virgil does not mention spices.⁹⁴ And yet Jean grafts them onto his source not once but twice. In each case, the spices (cooking) represent an artificial substitute (Jupiter’s invention) for a prelapsarian life, along with plowing and the arts. Spices, then, are set up in opposition to Nature. They are artificial rather than natural.⁹⁵

In the Middle Ages, spices were brought to Europe from the Far East by Muslim

⁹² “Jadis au tens nos premiers peres / Et de nos premeraines meres...N’erent pas si delicious / Ne de robes ne de viands: / Il cueilloient el bois les glandes / Pour pains, pour char et pour poissons...Et des espiz de blé frottoient / Et des roisins es bois grapoient / Sanz metre en pressoir ne en esnes. / Le miel decoroient des chesnes, / Dont abondaument se vivoient; / Et de l’eau simple veuvoient / Sanz querre pigment ne claré, / N’onques ne burent vin paré. / N’ert point la terre lors aré, / Mais si com dieus l’avoit parée, / Par soi meïsmes aportoit / Ce don’t chascuns se confortoit.” Men are free to eat “tous fruiz, raciness, et herbetes” (8376) because Nature has not yet been corrupted.

⁹³ “Avant que Jupiter venist / N’ert nus qui charrue tenist; / Nus n’avoit onques champ aré / Ne cerfoui ne reparé...Cist les chaisnes mieleus tranche, / Les ruissiaus vineus estancha...Et fist les sausses toutes nueves / D’espices de diverses guises / Ou il ra maintes herbes mises. / Ainsi son tars avant venues.”

⁹⁴ Jean’s other sources for the Golden Age, Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* (Book I) and Juvenal’s *Satire VI*, also do not mention spices.

⁹⁵ Paul Freedman notes that between the years 1000 and 1513, Europe was completely enamored of spices. (*Out of the East*, 1.) Spices were desirable for many reasons but first for their flavor; in European cookbooks of the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries, spices appear in 75 percent of all recipes (20). Spices also formed the basis for perfumes and cosmetics, and because their origins were mysterious, hidden away in the unknown east, they were considered rare and exotic (8). This meant that they were very costly. For this reason, spices were markers of social status, indicating prominence and affluence and used in opulent displays of wealth, especially on feast days.

traders.⁹⁶ Because they had to be transported long distances, they arrived preserved. Consequently, medieval Europeans conceived of spices as being *dry*. Paul Freedman states, “This is a crucial difference between spices and herbs... Herbs were thought of as green and fresh... familiar, literally part of the European landscape.”⁹⁷ While herbs are natural (and thus can be manipulated by deceitful women), spices are not.

Crucially, Guillaume de Lorris wrote spices into the fabric of his Garden of Pleasure. “There were many spices in the garden, cloves and licorice, fresh cardamom, zedoary, anise, and cinnamon, and many delicious spices good to eat after a meal” (1337-43).⁹⁸ The Garden is where the Lover became enamored of the Rose. By emphasizing spices, then, as something that transcends Nature (associated as they are with the phoenix and the purest form of regeneration), Jean links the Lover’s reliance on pure reproduction

⁹⁶ Indeed, Euro-Muslim relations might have influenced Jean’s feelings about spices. Almost all of Jean’s potential sources agree that the phoenix lives in Arabia and travels to Egypt to die. (Guillaume le Clerc differs slightly in claiming that the phoenix lives in India, and Pliny the Elder asserts that it travels to the mythical island of Panchaia. Interestingly, both India and Panchaia, along with other spice-producing countries, are mentioned in Virgil’s *Georgics* Book II.) Despite his familiarity with the *Georgics*, Jean was probably not thinking about Virgil’s comparison of “incense-teeming sand” and Italy when he wrote spices into his text. Nonetheless, there are strong parallels between the phoenix and the spice trade which suggest he may have had the Mediterranean arena in mind: the bird hails from Arabia/ India and travels to the Mediterranean (Egypt) where it dies, just as spices are harvested from the east and brought west in a dried/ dead form (and receive new life, perhaps, in the people who consume them; Jean does include a strange aside about “corrumpables,” presumably plants, which in their death nourish other creatures [dont autres choses se norrissent] (15910-14).). The fact that he couples the phoenix’s spices with a discussion of Nature’s “coins of different currencies” certainly suggests a nod toward economics, however implicit. See Janet L. Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D. 1250-1350* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 15. It may be that Jean saw the spice trade—and the Mediterranean market as a whole—as a necessary, if not wholly pleasant, cultural intrusion on the economy and life of western Europe. As a side note, spices are associated with the whore of Babylon in Rev. 18:13 and Alain condemns them as an aid to lust (*Plaint*, 173-4).

⁹⁷ Freedman, *Out of the East*, 8.

⁹⁸ “Si trovast, qui en eüst mestier, / Clos de girofle et requalice, / Ou vergier, mainte bone espice / Graine de paradis novele, / Citouant, anis et canele / Et mainte espice delitable / Que bon mangier fait après table.” All of these spices come from the East: India, Indonesia, or other parts of Asia.

with the source of his illness: Love's garden. Like cures like.⁹⁹ Because spices are also a *food*, their presence adds to the Apocalyptic discourse of transformative ingestion begun by Guillaume.¹⁰⁰

The fact that the Garden's spices are fresh or "novele" contributes to the unnaturalness of Amant's cure, for it implies that the garden is located, not in France, but somewhere mysterious and exotic. This characteristic creates an instant parallel between Guillaume's Garden of Pleasure and the Garden of Eden, which was thought to be in the Orient.¹⁰¹ Even though Genius later denigrates Guillaume's Garden and relocates Amant's cure to the Heavenly Park, which is filled with a sweet fragrance that stems from no *material* source, the paradisiacal nature of both gardens has a strong religious resonance, rendering the Lover's cure not only isopathic but divine (and so not "natural").¹⁰² In this way Jean keeps the Lover's cure within the discourse of penance established by his predecessor.

But Jean alters this discourse slightly to meet his goals. Whereas in Guillaume's portion the sweet smell of the Rose penetrated the Lover's core ("coree"), in Jean's portion, things are reversed: the bodies ("cors") and thoughts of "every lady alive" [toutes

⁹⁹ Spices *were* in fact used as medicines and disease preventatives (Freedman, *Out of the East*, 2). Jean emphasizes their healing capabilities by making an orthographical play on spices (*espices*), species (*espieces*), and individuality (*es pieces*, *especiaus*). Unnatural spices unite the species by linking together individuals who have been restored to wholeness.

¹⁰⁰ In this sense, spices supplant the Rose's odors twice over, since in the Middle Ages, smell was sometimes considered a form of ingestion. Later, John Mandeville and Petrarch, among others, would write about peoples who nourished themselves by smelling apples, though the belief existed before that. See John Larner, *Marco Polo and the Discovery of the World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 8 and Herman Pleij, *Dreaming of Cockaigne*, 119.

¹⁰¹ Freedman notes that the Garden of Eden was considered the true home of spices (*Out of the East*, 81) and that Christian writers endowed the Garden with a specifically aromatic, as opposed to merely flowery, atmosphere (92). Thus, Eden was located in the east because "everyone knows that the air becomes perfumed as one approaches India" (97).

¹⁰² Spices were regularly used in religious rituals, including Mass.

les fames vivanz] (20680) are permeated—even *impregnated* (“encensees”)—with the odor from Genius’s candle. Fragrant spices (Culture) thus overcome the material odors of women (Nature) and so restore the proper order. Consequently, when Amant, dressed as a pilgrim, reaches the Rose’s reliquary, which is “more fragrant than a pomander” [plus olant que pomme d’ambre] (20810), he is not ensnared by the smell but succeeds in taking the Rose.

Jean makes further changes by taking the discourse of penance that Guillaume allocated to the Lover and assigning it to Nature. Nature, desiring to repent of her sins, goes to Genius to make confession. “‘Genius, my fair priest,’ [Nature] said, ‘you are god and master of the organs of reproduction, setting all to work according to their particular properties and completing the task as is appropriate to each. I am tormented by repentance for a folly that I did not refrain from committing, and would like to make my confession to you’” (16289-98).¹⁰³ Genius offers Nature a return to wholeness through his tools and “organs of reproduction.” As Nature laments in her confession (an echo of the Lover’s own confession to Amour), man has forsaken his duty to reproduce, to make like from like. The remedy is the same one offered to Amant: “As soon as the goddess, Lady Nature, had made her confession as was lawful and customary, then Genius, her

¹⁰³ “Genius, dist ele, biaux prestres, / Qui des lieus estes dieus et mestres / Et selonc leur proprietez / Trestouz en oeuvre les metez / Et bien achevez la besoingne, / D’une folie que j’ai faite, / Dont je ne me sui pas retraite, / Mais repentance mout m’enpresse, / A vous m’en vueill faire confesse.” Genius acknowledges her sin and goes on at length about the follies and sins of women, and how they threaten men. In particular, men should never tell women their secrets. “Be on your guard against women, if you have any love for your bodies or your souls. At least do not do anything so wrong as to disclose to them your secrets” [Gardez vous de voz fames / Se vos cors amez ne vos ames / Au mains que ja si mal n’ouvrez / Que les secrez leur descouvrez] (16581-82). His advice: “Flee, flee, flee, flee, flee, my children, flee such a creature” [Fuillez, fuiez, fuiez, / Fuillez, enfanz, fuiez tel beste] (16586-87).

worthy priest, gave her absolution and imposed on her a good and fitting penance, appropriate to the seriousness of the fault he thought she had committed. He enjoined her to remain in her forge and toil...until the king who has power to set all things right...should offer some other remedy” (19415-24, 19428-30).¹⁰⁴ Nature has been corrupted by Original Sin; as a result, the order of procreation has been perverted. If order is to be restored, she must do penance.

In her natural (feminine) form, Nature threatens to divide men. However, her wiles can be overcome and even pardoned by Culture—the tools of masculinity and civilization.¹⁰⁵ These include the arts, such as cooking with spices, and even the “true art” of alchemy.¹⁰⁶ Jean notes that alchemy can completely transform an individual, merely through the operations of the (masculine) intellect: “Whatever may be true of species, individuals, at least, when subjected to the operations of the intellect, can be changed into so many different forms, and their complexions so altered by various transformations, that this change can convert them from their original species and put them into a different

¹⁰⁴ “Si tost comme ot esté confesse / Dame nature la deesse, / Si com la lois vault et li us, / Li vaillanz prestres genius / Tantost l’assoust et li donne / Penitance avenant et bonne / Selonc la grandeur du forffait / Qu’il pensoit qu’ele eüst forffait. / Enjoinst li qu’ele demorast / Dedenz sa forge et laborast... Tant k’autre conseille i meist / Le rois qui tout puet adrecier / Et tout faire.”

¹⁰⁵ It is perhaps for this reason that men carefully recorded the dangers of herbs—whose properties were known and used more frequently by women—in medieval Herbals, where other men could read them and so avoid the threat. See Minta Collins, *Medieval Herbals: The Illustrative Traditions* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000).

¹⁰⁶ Making another change to Alain’s *Plaint*, Jean transitions from Nature’s forge to Art’s press. “From this press Art made her own models, though she does not produce forms that are as true...Indeed, she watches how Nature works, for she would very much like to do the same work, and she mimics her like a monkey” [Dont ars faisoit ses examplaires, / Qui ne fait pas forms si voires...Si garde comment nature oeuvre / Car mout voudroit faire autele oeuvre / Et la contrefait comme singes] (16021-22, 16033-35). While personified Art (who is female) is clumsy at her efforts to reproduce Nature and can only use alchemy to deceive the eye, Jean takes care to point out that real alchemy, real transformation, “is a true *art*” [Alquemie est art veritable] (16089).

one” (16091-99).¹⁰⁷ With the intellectual tools of Culture—an appropriate medicine-food—men can subdue unruly Nature and regain control of their bodies.¹⁰⁸

Jean’s incorporation of the phoenix, with its spices, serves to reinforce the binary of masculine Culture versus feminine Nature.¹⁰⁹ Spices, as something “artificial,” clearly belong in the realm of Culture and indicate that the Lover’s cure must be based on a purer, more transcendent form of reproduction (like from like). The phoenix is at once outside the laws of Nature *and* the ultimate preservation of the form. Thus it exists outside material explanations for healing, rebirth, and change. (Birth is normally a feminine paradigm.) Instead, men must depend on men—and women must depend on men—in the proper order of procreation. The phoenix is thus an exemplary symbol for someone like the Lover who is attempting to take control over his own body and enact his own transformation.

Bodily Writing: Proper Reproduction

The *Rose* teaches that it is crucial for men to have control over their own bodies. In order for them to feel confident that their senses (on which they rely for knowledge) are not being manipulated by women, they must control women’s bodies as well as their

¹⁰⁷ “Comment qu’il aut des espieces, / Au mains les singulieres pieces, / Ens sensibles oevres souzmisses, / Sont muables en tant de guises / Qu’el pueent leur complexions / Par diverses digestions / Si muer entr’euls, que cist changes / Les met souz especes estranges / Et leur tost l’espece premiere.”

¹⁰⁸ As Nature herself states, “Through learning and pure, nourishing education...through certain medicines, provided they are good and pure, and through soundness of intellect, men can cause things to happen differently, provided they have been wise enough to restrain their natural tendencies” [par doctrine / Par norreture nete et fine, / ... / Ou par aucunes medecines, / —Pour qu’el soient bonnes et fines / Et par bonté de’entendement, / Procurer qu’il soit autrement, / Pour qu’il aient comme senez / Leur meurs naturels refrenez] (17081-82, 17085-90).

¹⁰⁹ The phoenix also stands for art: Jean plays on *s’art*, which means “burns himself,” and *art* (15985). And, of course, spices are among the crafts introduced when Jupiter invented the arts.

own through the tools of Culture. Their success lies with the proper process of reproduction, which they can achieve through bodily writing: “writing” on bodies with their procreative pens and then writing texts by drawing on their (sexual) experience.

After assigning Nature her penance, Genius travels to Amant’s army and offers a similar pardon to all those who repent and use their “tools” appropriately (as some have been neglecting them). He declares, “It was an evil day for Nature when she gave stylus and tablets to those false folk of whom I have spoken, and hammers and anvils...and sharp-pointed plowshares fit for her plows...The false ones...wish to destroy her by fleeing the anvils, tablets, and fallow fields” (19547-52, 19559-62).¹¹⁰ In the proper order of the world, men must use their tools (the obvious phallic symbols of hammers, pens, and plowshares) on the anvils, tablets, and fields of women.¹¹¹ In order to protect themselves from feminine threats, including the dissolution of language, men must take

¹¹⁰ “Mar leur ait nature donné, / As faus dont j’ai ci sermonné, / Greffes, tables, martiaus, enclumes...Et sos a pointes bien aguës / A l’usage de ses charrues...Ainz veulent nature destruire / Quant ses enclumes veulent fuire, / Et ses tables et ses jасhieres / Qu’el fist precieuses et chieres.”

¹¹¹ Genius instructs, “Plow, barons, plow for God’s sake, and restore your lineage” [Arez, pour Dieu, baron, arez/ Et vos lignages reparez!] (19705-06). Even though reproductive organs are natural, they were not used before the Fall. Thus they are associated with Culture, the time of Jupiter’s invention. Recall that “no one plowed before Jupiter came” [Avant que Jupiter venist / N’ert nus qui charrue tenist] (20123-24). Similarly, in *Piers Plowman*, Will was taught that in an ideal world, plowing would not be needed (14.29-33). Eric Jager writes, “For patristic and medieval culture, the Fall served as the origin of not only texts as objects but also the scribal task of reproducing texts, above all Scripture. This task, of course, was crucial to the definition and the continuity of the church as a tradition and cult of the Book. Scripture had one divine Author, but many human ones; inspired by God, it had been written by men. And in order to be disseminated it had to be multiplied by human copyists, or scribes. Patristic authors accordingly invested the scribe’s work with great moral and theological significance...Patristic and medieval culture saw the scribe as a son of Adam laboring in the textual ‘field.’ Monks adopted the classical analogy between writing and plowing; parchment was likened to a field, the pen to a plow, and ink to seed...Although at least one ancient tradition associates the institution of writing with Eve, patristic and medieval culture viewed inscription as essentially a masculine task” (Eric Jager, *The Tempter’s Voice: Language and the Fall in Medieval Literature* [Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, 1993], 73).

charge in matters of procreation.¹¹² They must be the ones to decide what will be reproduced.¹¹³ Huot argues that Genius ultimately loses control of the metaphor, resulting in a “sort of allegorical implosion” that subverts the patriarchal system he endorses.¹¹⁴ Other scholars, however, such as Noah Guynn, assert that the oppressive gender roles supported in the text remain intact: “Jean de Meun’s *Rose* works, often quite inconspicuously, to confirm the status of men as literary/ sexual subjects and women as literary/ sexual objects by allegorizing both authorship and desire.”¹¹⁵

¹¹² As Huot explains, “In employing these metaphors, Genius presupposes the familiar equation of the female body with the earth (to be subdued, ploughed, planted, and harvested by men), with raw materials (to be shaped and forged and transformed into the implements of patriarchal culture), and with blank tablets (to be filled with masculine writing). Seemingly, this language would allow Genius to counteract the threat of feminine, bestial, and elemental rebellion evoked by la Vieille and Nature. As long as men manage to remember which tablets they are supposed to write on, as long as they forge properly and plough the appropriate fields, both the natural and the feminine will be under patriarchal control: all will be well” (“Bodily Peril,” at 57).

¹¹³ Huot states, “Genius portrays the woman as one who can reproduce whatever the man gives her. If he speaks to her, she can appropriate his words and replicate them to an audience of her choosing, thereby assuming control of his public identity. The man must prevent her from gaining this power by withholding information and not allowing words to escape him. Instead, Genius explains, he must use her to reproduce himself not through linguistic representation, but through procreative replication” (“Bodily Peril,” 43).

¹¹⁴ Huot writes, “As the reading process is increasingly eroticized and transferred from the language of the text to that of the body, the man increasingly loses control... The feminine ‘text’ increasingly exerts control over the masculine ‘reader’ by manipulating itself as a sign” (“Bodily Peril,” 50).

¹¹⁵ Guynn says, “It would be a mistake, in my view, to argue that the *Rose* embraces a more generalized form of sexual liberation, that it seeks to dismantle repressive gender binaries, or that it actively subverts the patriarchal ideologies of thirteenth-century clericalism... The fact that the author is alienated from his own text or that the text is aware of the poetic subject as fundamentally split does not lead to an emancipation *of* or *in* the process of reading. On the contrary, the splitting of the subject would appear to be the condition of possibility for the exclusion or silencing of female readers and for the perpetuation of misogyny... The poem’s unmasking of its own internal incoherences... works to shore up men’s sexual, social, and political power under patriarchy and to confirm women’s status as mute, passive sexual objects, as the butt of a particularly vicious form of priapic humor... Jean’s romance is always teleologically oriented toward a ritualized act of ‘masculation’ that celebrates and legitimates the violent seizing or capturing of women’s bodies ‘tout a force’” (“Authorship and Sexual/ Allegorical Violence in Jean de Meun’s ‘Roman de la rose,’” *Speculum* 79 [2004]: 628-659, at

Because the Lover is also seeking a pardon, he too must participate in the proper form of reproduction. Attaining the Rose will cure him of his illness and gain him forgiveness of his double sin (first, for becoming divided from himself, and second, for not previously engaging in sexual activities). As a result of his experience, he will regain his self-knowledge and will be able to protect his body from future deception and division.

Genius's metaphor equates sex not only with forging and plowing (a definite departure from *Piers!*) but also with writing, just as the Lover has previously been charged with writing the romance.¹¹⁶ Indeed, for Amant, reproducing *text* is just as critical as reproducing with the Rose, as Genius demonstrates by counseling his listeners to protect their bodies by reading "the delightful *Romance of the Rose*" [Li jolis romanz de la rose] (19886), which explains how to guard oneself from vices. For Jean, literature is just as transformative as alchemy and has the ability to save one's body (and soul) from ensnarement.

In keeping with the concentric, rose shape of the text, Genius's mention of the poem in which he exists as a character points us back to the very center of the romance and to this process of textual reproduction, in which the God of Love also speaks about

628, 653, 655). Guynn's view is shared by Gordon Teskey (*Allegory and Violence* [Ithaca, NY, 1996]) and Alastair Minnis (*Magister Amoris* [Oxford, 2001]).

¹¹⁶ In Huot's words, "Taking Genius at his word would imply a view of the Lover as writing his way to the Rose: a vision remarkably similar to that outlined by Cupid" (*Dreams of Lovers*, 23). She adds, "If Genius proposes a metaphoric 'writing' as the task of the Lover, it could also be said that Jean, as an authorial figure distinct from the Lover, writes his way to the Rose in the most literal possible sense" (24).

the romance.¹¹⁷ There, the Lover (identified by Jean as Guillaume de Lorris) has been given a penance to do the work of love. Because penance is an ongoing process that may never be completed (and courtly love/ erotic desire is in a perpetual state of prolongation), there is no reason to suppose Amant will ever actually attain the rose. But if he is to complete the other commandment of Amour—to record the work of love in writing—he must have sexual experience and bodily knowledge.¹¹⁸ Without that self-knowledge, he cannot write Love’s poem. In order to get around this conflict, Amour appoints a new poet: Jean de Meun.

Because the Lover (identified now with Guillaume de Lorris) did not succeed in attaining the *Rose*, his mission will be reborn in Jean. Guillaume’s death and Jean’s (re)birth thus follows the pattern of the phoenix:

Here Guillaume will rest. May his tomb be filled with balm and incense, myrrh and aloes, for he has served and praised me well. Then will come Jean Chopinel, gay in heart and alert in body, who will be born in Meung-sur-Loire and will serve me, feasting and fasting, his whole life long, without avarice or envy. He will be so wise that he will have no cure from Reason, who hates and condemns

¹¹⁷ Sylvia Huot has argued that at least some medieval readers “appreciated the concentric structure as an important aspect of Jean’s poetics” and points to a chiasmic pattern of illustrations in an early fourteenth-century manuscript in her *Romance of the Rose and Its Medieval Readers: Interpretation, Reception, Manuscript Transmission* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 320.

¹¹⁸ Huot states, “The Lover’s promise to Reason, however, implies that the fulfillment of erotic desire is a necessary pre-condition to any serious literary work; sexual knowledge itself will be the lens through which he will read a corpus of poetic, philosophical, and scientific texts” (*Dreams of Lovers*, 25).

my ointments, which smell sweeter than balm. (10565-78)¹¹⁹

Guillaume's body will be buried in spices, like the phoenix. And Jean, who will give new life to Guillaume's persona *and* text, is also surrounded with spices (in feasting and in Love's ointment). By continuing the *Rose*, Jean is preserving the form, and the romance is thus the product of a union between two men: "quant Guillaumes cessera, / Jehans le continuera" (10591-92).

Jean can succeed where Guillaume failed (1) because he (ostensibly) does possess experience in love and (2) his aim will not be sexual reproduction but *textual* reproduction. Huot explains, "It will be the *Rose*, rather than the Rose, that inflames the young Jean's desires."¹²⁰ As Amour states, "He will so love the romance that he will want to complete it" [Cist avra le rommant si chier / Qu'il le vorra tout parfenir] (10588-89). By separating himself from the Lover, Jean can write the book of Love, which will fulfill Amour's commandments and allow Amant to claim the Rose.¹²¹

¹¹⁹ "Ci se reposera Guillaumes / Li cui tombiaus soit plains de baumes, / D'encens, de mire et d'aloé, / Tant m'a servi, tant m'a loé. / Puis vendra Jehans Chopinel, / Au cuer jolif, au cors isnel, / Qui naistra sur Laire a Meun, / Qui a saoul et a geun / Me servira toute sa vie, / Sanz avarice et sanz envie, / Et sera si tres sages hon / Qu'il n'avra cure de raison / Qui mes oignemenz het et blasme, / Qui plus flairent soef que basme."

¹²⁰ Huot, *Dreams of Lovers*, 25.

¹²¹ Noah Guynn takes the opposite view. Guynn states, "Reading Jean de Meun's continuation of the *Roman de la rose* through the lens of Augustinian semiotics and psychology, we can easily see how the self-alienating signature is part and parcel of a larger project of subjecting the allegorical fiction to dissemination...Inscribed at its precise physical center with the names of its two authors, the *Rose* stands as a memorial for their creativity, but a memorial that implies the loss of the creator in the creation that bears his name, the evacuation of the author from his own mark, and the transformation of the poet into a poem that signifies his absence. Given the spectacular excesses of the double signature, however, it would seem that the *Roman de la rose* valorizes rather than simply regrets a theory of language as dismemberment and loss...The dislocation of word and thing, author and text, creator and creation is the very condition of possibility for the production of meaning: in order to signify, signs must cast off concrete, identifiable intentions" ("Authorship," 640). Stephanie Viereck Gibbs Kamath similarly argues that Jean "uses Amours to signal the text's authorship within its allegory, simultaneously

Amour declares that the finished work will be called *The Mirror of Lovers*. He says, “Jean will proclaim our words in the language of France...and those who hear them will never die from the sweet pains of love, provided only that they believe him” (10645-47, 10649-50).¹²² Jean’s text, then, is meant to be an instruction manual for his readers, as the title, “Le miroer aux amoureux” (10655), suggests—a way for men to enact their own transformation.¹²³ Like Langland, Jean views writing as curative.¹²⁴ By replicating knowledge, passing it on to others, he will complete Amant’s penance.¹²⁵ This reproduction follows the proper order: Jean creates like from like, giving new life to old

presenting the authors’ names and denying their presence and control within the narrative frame” (“Naming the Pilgrim,” at 186).

¹²² “Si fleüstera noz paroles/ Par carrefors o par escoles, / Selcon le langage de France...Que jamais cil qui les orront / Des dous maus d’amer ne morront / Pour qu’il le croient seulement.”

¹²³ The Mirror for Princes (*principum specula*) books were a sort of prototypical self-help genre that instructed rulers on proper modes of behavior. Huot writes, “In different ways, then, Jean invites us to see the *Rose* as a poem designed both to instruct and to persuade its readers; like Ovid’s poetry, it will convert men and women alike to the great game of love” (*Dreams of Lovers*, 23). Amour acknowledges that the goal of the romance is remedy: “If these two could have found a remedy, they would have counseled me at once” [Se cil conseil mettrent i peüssent, / Tantost conseillié m’en eüssent!] (10609-10).

¹²⁴ Interestingly, although Jean is not identified with the dreamer at this point, he as the author is also in need of a remedy and reliant on penance. Amour states, “And if, however things go, he [Jean] should happen to fail in some respect (for there is no one who does not sin, everyone has some fault), his heart will be so true to me that when he feels himself at fault he will always, at least in the end, repent of his misdeed, having no wish to betray me” [Et s’il avient, comment qu’il aille, / Qu’il en aucune chose faille, / Car il n’est pas hom qui ne peiche / (Touz jours a chascuns quelque teiche), / Le cuer vers moi tant avra fin / Quant en courpe se sentira, / Du forfait se repentira / Ne me vorra pas lors trichier] (10579-87).

¹²⁵ Huot observes, “Perhaps, then, the *Rose* is the fruit of that labor: a learned treatise on all aspects of love and desire, in which plenty of Latin authors are indeed glossed” (*Dreams of Lovers*, 24). Guynn writes, “The narrator here establishes a genealogy leading from the great ‘aucteurs’ of bygone days to the present moment of writing. He seeks to obviate dissent by allying himself with seemingly incontrovertible sources: ‘li preudome,’ whose worthiness is indissociable from their gender. In fact, the wisdom of these men appears to transcend history altogether: even though they lived in ‘divers tans’ (and presumably also diverse places), they nonetheless articulate the same consistent view of ‘les meurs femenins.’ These men speak in a single voice...The *excusasion* serves to form a collective body of men in which there is no dissent and utter historical and textual continuity” (“Authorship,” 652).

texts, just like the phoenix. Perhaps this is why so many discourses and texts are interpolated into the romance.¹²⁶

Written in “the language of France,” Jean’s *Rose* is also a celebration of the vernacular. Alastair Minnis finds that Jean’s vernacularization of Latin theory in particular is central to the poem’s hermeneutic and generic experimentation, and Rita Copeland has argued that Jean’s method of vernacular translation became a privileged discourse by taking over the role of academic criticism.¹²⁷ Sarah Kay explains that this privileging of the vernacular, and verse form, is one way in which the *Rose* influenced the literature of the fourteenth-century.

Jean de Meun had demonstrated that verse was not just a possible vehicle for thought but actually a highly appropriate one. The twin themes of the *Rose*, desire and knowledge, are dialectically intertwined so that desire for knowledge generates knowledge of desire, and vice versa. By using a verse form associated with vernacular romance, and adorning it with features associated with courtly lyric, the *Rose* implies that poetic genres are directly relevant to philosophical and

¹²⁶ Guynn observes, “Jean was one of the great masters of the Scholastic art of *compilatio*: the encyclopedic accumulation and coordination of a variety of erudite *materiae* and *auctoritates*...According to medieval literary convention, the *compiler* must disavow any sort of *intentio auctoris* and must resist stating his own opinions. His goal is instead to collect, translate, and collate the opinions of “li preudome...qui les anciens livres firent” (the worthy men who wrote the old books; lines 15193-94)...The genealogy by which authority is passed from one text to another through citation is clearly defined as a patrilineage in the *Roman de la rose*” (“Authorship,” 632, 653). Mary Carruthers explains, “Both ‘authority’ and ‘author’ were conceived of entirely in textual terms, for an ‘auctor’ is simply one whose writings are full of ‘authorities.’ And an ‘author’ requires ‘authority’ only by virtue of having his works retained ‘sententialiter’ in the memories of subsequent generations” (*The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*, 2nd edition [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008], 236). See also Mary Franklin Brown’s *Reading the World*, Ch. 4.

¹²⁷ Alastair Minnis, *Magister Amoris*, 15; Rita Copeland, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages: Academic Traditions and Vernacular Texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 150, 179.

theological reflection.¹²⁸

What I find most important about Jean's use of vernacular French, however, is that it makes his text—his prescription for self-mastery—available to more readers. Thus, Genius can command his followers to literally learn his sermon “word for word” [mot a mot] (19912).

An emphasis on learning texts “word for word” is repeated frequently in the poem, stressing the importance of accuracy and permanence in the transmission of writing.¹²⁹ Words are most efficacious when they are recorded on proper materials. For example, La Vieille tells Bel Accueil (Fair Welcome) that when Paris declared his love for Oenone, he carved the words in the bark of a tree, “en lieu de chartre.” Consequently, his promise was not worth a tart (13223-26).¹³⁰ By contrast, when Bel Accueil records La Vieille's words *on his body*, not only do the words stay with him, but he can also teach them to others. La Vieille states, “I know that these words will be taught in many schools. Fair and most sweet son, if you live—for I can see that you are happy to write in full all my instructions *in the book of your heart* and that when you leave me you will, God

¹²⁸ Sarah Kay, *The Place of Thought: The Complexity of One in Late Medieval French Didactic Poetry* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 179.

¹²⁹ Amour instructs Amant to record his commandments “word for word”: “Li deus d'amors m'encharja / Tout ausi con vos orroiz ja / Mot a mot ses commandements” (2055-57). When Danger (Rebuff) spies on the Lover and Bel Accueil, the Lover notes that he “[wrote] down everything we said, word for word” [Et mot a mot toutes metoit / Nos paroles en son escrit] (14828-29). This testimony can then be used against Amant.

¹³⁰ I would translate “en lieu de chartre” as “instead of a charter or formal document.” Horgan, however, translates the phrase as “instead of paper,” while Strubel translates it “en guise de chartre”—or “by way of charter.” Each translation provides a slightly different interpretation, but I think it's safe to assume that Paris's inscription was worthless primarily because it was carved on a tree rather than recorded in a more appropriate and recognized medium.

willing, continue to teach and be a master like me” (13503-09, my emphasis).¹³¹ This passage is perhaps an allusion to 2 Corinthians, in which Paul states, “You are our epistle, written in our hearts, which is known and read by all men. Being manifested, that you are the epistle of Christ, ministered by us, and written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in the fleshly tables of the heart” (3:2-3).¹³² When words are written on and in men’s bodies—as they are in Revelation—writing is both permanent and transformative, an irrevocable contract, for the words can then be “known and read by all men.”¹³³

Genius, of course, advocates a slightly different type of bodily writing, but one with similar results: “Those who will not use their styluses, *through which mortals may live forever*, to write on those fair and precious tablets that were not prepared by Nature in order to be left idle, but were lent instead so that all might write on them... may all these be excommunicated and condemned to hell” (19633-68, my emphasis).¹³⁴ The bodily writing that is sexual procreation creates permanence, allowing men to “live forever,” through their progeny, just as they can live forever through their words—a responsibility so sacred, that to forsake this charge is to risk the permanent division of

¹³¹ “Biau tres douz filz, se vous vivez, / —Car bien voi que vous escrivez / El livre dou cuer volentiers / Touz mes enseignement entiers, / Et quant de moi departirez, / Touz mes enseignements lirez / Et en serez maistres com gié.”

¹³² “Epistola nostra vos estis, scripta in cordibus nostris, quae scitur, et legitur ab omnibus hominibus: Manifestati quod epistola estis Christi, ministrata a nobis, et scripta non atramento, sed Spiritu Dei vivi: non in tabulis lapideis, sed in tabulis cordis carnalibus.” See also Romans 2: 15, Proverbs 3:3, Proverbs 7:3, and Jeremiah 31:33.

¹³³ La Vieille is teaching Bel Accueil how to succeed as a lover, in a manner consistent with other misogynist representations of women in the text. The superficial content of her words, however, does not diminish the significance of their being incorporated into a body.

¹³⁴ “Mes cil qui des greffes n’escrivent / Par coi li mortel toz jors vivent, / Es beles tables precieuses / —Que nature, pour ester oiseuses / Ne leur avoit pas apretees, / Ainz leur avoit pour ce pretees / Que tuit I fussent escrivain...Ou tout l’escommeniement / Qui touz les met a dapnement.”

damnation. The cost, however, is the silencing of their female partners. Huot observes,

It is this bodily ‘writing,’ a silent language, that allows for masculine control of the discourse of sexuality. When the man reveals himself through speech, he becomes a spoken text that the woman can ‘read’ and appropriate, since spoken language is very much a feminine domain. But when the man writes, he inscribes his text onto the female body, debasing her status from that of reader to that of blank page or tablet, passively receiving his script and unable to alter or control it... Writing, whether linguistic or procreative, allows men to determine both cultural and biological discourse, and to control the transmission of both knowledge and identity to future generations.¹³⁵

Writing, whether sexual or textual, is the most important tool men have at their disposal if they want to secure their safety—and permanence. And so Genius instructs men not just to write through bodily experience but to write *on bodies*: women’s bodies.¹³⁶

The reward for bodily writing is entrance into the heavenly park, which, like the phoenix, is “surrounded by the natural order and yet outside it, just as thought is shaped by physical reality yet not part of it.”¹³⁷ Consequently, Genius promises his followers, “There you will live forever, and drink of the fair spring which is so sweet and bright and

¹³⁵ Huot, “Bodily Peril,” 51-52.

¹³⁶ Nicolette Zeeman argues that religious exegesis recognizes that “the authors of the bible and other authoritative Christian texts have their own skills, knowledge, and intentions about what they are up to, but also claims that they are instruments, often unwitting instruments, in a process worked by God for his own ends. ‘Natural’ human activity participates complexly within the revelatory process” (“*Piers Plowman*” and the Medieval Discourse of Desire [New York; Cambridge University Press, 2006], 204). Such a theory may serve as a contrast to Jean’s, or it might participate in a hierarchy, where God writes using men, and men write using women.

¹³⁷ Sarah Kay, *The Place of Thought*, 183.

healthful that as long as you drink of its water you will never die” (20655-57).¹³⁸ The spring, an echo of the water of life found in Revelation, does not just offer health and immortality (the result of proper procreation); it also offers self-knowledge: “It has such marvelous power that as soon as those who go to see it turn towards it and look at their own faces in the water, whatever side of it they are on, they are always able to see, and rightly to understand, all the things in the park and themselves as well. Once they have seen themselves there, they become such wise masters that nothing that exists will ever be able to deceive them” (20571-82).¹³⁹ Unlike the female-tainted pool that ensnared the Lover and caused his self-division, the park’s spring—which can only be accessed when men have taken charge of the reproductive act—restores self-mastery and wholeness.¹⁴⁰ Sarah Kay observes, “Genius’s *parc* is a metaphysician’s paradise from which all physical reality is excluded but where all true knowledge is simultaneously

¹³⁸ “Boivre de la bele fontaine / Qui tan test douce et claire et saine / Que jamais mort ne recevroiz.” Carol Hefferman notes that the phoenix and the fountain are often paired in medieval literature. “The fountains appear to be a part of an interconnected pattern of imagery that, for want of a better term, I call ‘gynecological imagery,’ a term to be understood in an extended sense to include images pertaining to female physiology as well as to rituals associated with puberty and birth. So fundamental is this perception of the imagery that it leads one to suspect that the phoenix’s secular associations with restoration and renewal come from the gynecological suggestions” (*The Phoenix at the Fountain*, 14). In this sense, the Lover’s restoration of self—and eternal preservation of life, through his texts—comes from mastering the female cycle of renewal.

¹³⁹ “Si ra si merueilleus pooir / Que cil qui la le vont veoir, / Si tost com cele part se virent/ Et leur faces en l’eaue mirent, / Touz jours, de quelque part qu’il soient, / Toutes les choses dou parc voient / Et les connoissent proprement / Et euls meïsmes ensement; / Et puis que la se sont veü, / Jamais ne seront deceü / De nulle chose qui puisse ester, / Tant I deviennent sage et mestre.”

¹⁴⁰ Sarah Kay observes, “Genius has unerringly identified what will prove the principal foci of oneness for the didactic authors that follow: the one of the universal (the species, man); that of the singular (the individual man); the One of the divine; and the community of believers with that One. The way he combines them, however, is intellectually preposterous. There is outrageous miscegenation of sex and theology in the promise that the individual can achieve union with the Godhead through reproduction. In addition, there is quite egregious confusion of the particular with the universal. Immortality is the concern of the individual, whereas reproductive sex enables the perpetuation of the species” (*The Place of Thought*, 180).

available... This whole metaphysical construction depends entirely on the body.”¹⁴¹

Bodily experience—and bodily writing—thus leads to salvation and wholeness.¹⁴²

The self-awareness granted by the fountain allows men to know themselves and their own free will, much like how God sees all of creation through his own mirror.

Nature states,

God knows the things that will happen and what their ends will be, even though the event may come about through the will of its master, who holds the power of choice... [God] has seen it from all eternity, truly represented in his everlasting mirror, which he alone can polish, and this without in any way detracting from free will. This mirror is himself, from whom we took our being... This is predestination, this the divine prescience that knows all and guesses nothing, that extends its grace to men when it sees them striving to do good, but has not therefore supplanted the power of free will. All men act of their own free will, whether for joy or sorrow. This is God’s present vision, for when we unravel the definition of eternity, we find that it means the possession of life that cannot be

¹⁴¹ Kay, *The Place of Thought*, 184. Guillaume’s portion of the text is associated with the material and corruptible (a murky spring, an earthly garden with objects you can touch and smell, a text that won’t be finished, a burial in a tomb) and Jean’s portion with what we might call the transcendent or spiritual (a colorless spring that grants eternal life, a heavenly park, a sweet fragrance with no source, a text that is already written but continues almost outside the bounds of time). But to access this park, one must use his body (and women’s). In this sense, Sarah Kay has argued that Jean’s text represents a challenge to the traditional Boethian hierarchy, and that material things might be a guide to spiritual things, and sensuality an impulse towards truth (“Women’s Body of Knowledge: Epistemology and Misogyny in the *Romance of the Rose*,” in *Framing Medieval Bodies*, ed. Sarah Kay and Miri Rubin [Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994], 226). Huot similarly argues that in the poem, especially the transition from Raison to La Vieille, “there is a consistent pattern of moving from spirit to letter, from soul to body, specifically the female body as an erotic entity” (“Bodily Peril,” at 46).

¹⁴² In Revelation, faithful Christians are only allowed to access the healing waters if God’s writing is on their foreheads and their works are recorded in the book of life.

ended, an entire and undivided whole. (17425-29, 17470-76, 17488-17502)¹⁴³

Proper (isopathic, textual) reproduction and bodily writing allow men to use their free will and so find the path to wholeness.

As the Lover approaches the Rose and thus the attainment of his self-knowledge, Jean pays tongue-in-cheek homage to his predecessor by describing his triumph in pilgrimic terms. “I thanked him a hundred thousand times, and promptly made my way, like the good pilgrim I was...towards the aperture, there to fulfill my pilgrimage” (21350-56).¹⁴⁴ When the Lover takes the Rose, his two forms of penance (sexual and textual reproduction) are completed, and his breach of self is healed, allowing him to wake up.¹⁴⁵

Conclusion

Unlike Will in *Piers Plowman*, Amant completes his penitential pilgrimage and is thus returned to full health by achieving control over his body (and the body of another). However, like *Piers Plowman*, this process is also dependent on education and literacy, on the act of writing itself. Just as *Piers Plowman* is Will’s alms deed, *Le Roman de la Rose* is Jean and the Lover’s offering to the God of Love. In order to regain his self-

¹⁴³ “Ainsi Deus...Set les choses a avenir / Et quel chief il sont a tenir, / Comment que la chose puist estre / Par la volanté de son mestre...Et de touz jors l’a il veüe / Par demoustrance veritable / A son miroer pardurable, / Que nus fors lui ne set polir, / Sanz riens a franc voloir tolir. / Cist miroers, c’est il meïsmes, / De cui commencement preïsmes...C’est la predestinacion, / C’est la prescience divine / Qui tout sait et riens ne devine, / Qui set as genz sa grace estendre / Quant il les voit a bien entendre, / Ne n’a pas pour ce sousplanté / Pooir de franche volanté. / Tuit homme oevrent par franc voloir / Soit pour joïr ou pour doloir. / C’est sa presente vision, / Car qui la diffinicion / De pardurableté deslie, / Ce est possession de vie / Qui par fin ne puet ester prise / Trestoute ensamble sanz devise.”

¹⁴⁴ “Je, qui l’en rent merci .c. mile, / Tantost comme bons pelerins, / Hastis...Vers l’archiere acueill mon voiage/ Pour fornir mon pelerinage.”

¹⁴⁵ Huot states, “Literary, epistemological, and sexual readings of the Rose come together if we read the poem’s conclusion both as a depiction of (at least potentially) procreative sex, and as an act of literary procreation” (*Dreams of Lovers*, 24). The phoenix, who is at once the ultimate form and yet outside the bounds of procreation, is the perfect symbol for this dual form of reproduction.

knowledge, Amant needs to write Love's commandments, which would allow him to sexually unite with the Rose. But it is impossible to write convincingly about love without experience. Thus, his restoration is dependent on another type of procreation—the reproduction of texts—and experiential knowledge, in which he was aided by Love's new poet, Jean.

But Jean's bodily writing contains a violence that Will's does not. In order to control the process of textual reproduction, men must silence women, who threaten to subvert their own words, and use female bodies as the tablets for their procreative writing.¹⁴⁶ Indeed, in the discourse of transformative ingestion, men might be thought of as *consuming* women in order to regain wholeness and security, thus incorporating women's bodies into a literary patrilineage.¹⁴⁷

This violence—and its flawed justification—was not lost on Jean's readers. In one of her missives in the famed *Querelle de la Rose*, Christine de Pizan points out the absurdities of Jean's claims that women inherently pose a threat to men: "And since he so strongly forbids men to confide in women, who, he claims, are so eager to know their secrets—though I do not know where the devil he found such rubbish and tainted speech,

¹⁴⁶ Guynn observes that one of Jean's most vocal critics, Christine de Pizan, "demonstrates that [this] silence betrays an underlying violence—indeed a specifically sexual violence that is realized on women's bodies" ("Authorship," 658). Christine argued that the freedom literacy offered to men should also be extended to women. "Christine points to the specific material relationship between libraries and misogyny; between the privileged space set aside for the production, conservation, and consumption of texts and the deliberate exclusion of women; between a form of social and political power predicated on literacy and the silencing of certain kinds of voices" (658).

¹⁴⁷ The French word *consommation* means both consummation and consumption. (The Latin root *consummo* means "to take up completely.") This ingestive discourse is emphasized by other consumable substances: the spices on which Jean feasts and the *parc*'s spring. The phoenix's spices symbolize patriarchal reproduction, and the living waters of the fountain are only offered as a reward for bodily writing.

which he arranges in a long passage—I ask all those who believe that this is true to tell me when they have seen a man accused or killed, hanged, or reprimanded in the streets due to the indiscretion of his wife. I think they will be hard to find.”¹⁴⁸ Arguing from the standpoint of lived experience, Christine undermines Jean’s claims by using his own justification for experiential knowledge against his text. “Moreover, he speaks unnecessarily and defamingly of married women who terribly betray their husbands, though he cannot know about the married state from experience, and thus can only speak about it in general terms.”¹⁴⁹ Christine, who *does* have experience in marriage, can argue that things are not as Jean describes. “My purpose is simply to uphold the absolute truth because I know from experience that the truth is contrary to those things which I am denying. And as much as I am a woman, I am much better able to speak of these things than one who has no experience.”¹⁵⁰

Despite its many faults, it may be that Jean truly hoped his work would offer some healing to the world, “the possession of life that cannot be ended, an entire and undivided whole” [possession de vie / Qui par fin ne puet ester prise / Trestoute ensamble

¹⁴⁸ “Et pour ce que il tant deffent dire son secret a femme—qui du savoir est si engrant, comme il recorde, dont je ne sçay ou tous les deables trouva tant de fatras et de paroles gastées qui la sont arengés par lonc proces—mais, je pry tous ceulx qui tant le font autentique et tant y adjoustent foy qu’ilz me sachent a dire quans ont veuz accuséz, mors ou pendus ou reprochéz en rue par l’encusement de leurs femes: si croy que cler les trouveront seméz” (“Christine’s Reaction to Jean de Montreuil’s Treatise on the Roman de la rose, 1401-1402,” in *Debating the Roman de la Rose: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Christine McWebb [New York: Routledge, 2007], 126, lines 165-171). She argues that because Jean speaks in absolutes and “insults all women,” he undermines his own argument, for experience teaches that not all women are evil.

¹⁴⁹ “Et ancore, tant supperflument et laidement parla des femmes mariées qui se deçoivent leurs maris—duquel estat ne pot savoir par experience et tant en parla generaument” (126, lines 190-93).

¹⁵⁰ “Mon motif n’est simplement fors soustenir pure verité si comme je la sçay de certaine science ester au contraire des dictes choses de moy nyées. Et de tant comme voirement suis femme, plus puis tesmoingnier en ceste partie que celui qui n’en a l’experience, ains parle par devinailles et d’aventure” (128, lines 230-35).

sanz devise] (17500-02).¹⁵¹ For male readers, at least, who were subject to the deceptive, divisive tricks of Nature, the artistic tools of Culture—reproducing the teachings of wise men through literature—could offer true renewal and longevity, just as the phoenix promises rebirth and immortality. Freed from the corruptive influences of Nature through the transformative teachings of literature, man can regain his free will and autonomy: “If he truly knows himself, he can always protect himself” [S’il est de soi bien connoissanz, / Qu’il se peut touz jors garantir] (17578-79).

¹⁵¹ Or, perhaps he viewed his work as a provocative joke. Whether satirical or sincere, however, the Apocalyptic pattern is certainly present.

Chapter Four

Bodily Writing as Political Cure in *L'Advision-Christine*

Leaving Jean de Meun, we now consider one of his most vocal critics: Christine de Pizan. This chapter will focus on Christine's autobiographical *Advision-Christine* (1406), the only prose dream vision I consider in this study, which places the Apocalyptic conceit of bodily writing in a woman's sphere in order to counteract its misogynistic application in the *Rose* (representative of a wider world of social failings) as well as to remedy Christine's own divisions/ illnesses. The *Advision* is divided into three parts. In the first part, Christine falls asleep and in her dream is consumed by the giant Chaos. Within his entrails, she travels to the kingdom of France, embodied by the crowned lady Libera who, recounting her history, laments her current sickness. In the second part, Christine converses with Dame Opinion at the University of Paris. Finally, in the third section, Christine meets Lady Philosophy, who prescribes various texts to heal the "stomach of [her] understanding" (*Vision*, p.111) [lestomach de [son] entendement] (*L'advision*, p.170).¹

¹ There are only three extant manuscripts for *L'Advision*: Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fr. 1176; Brussels, Bibliothèque royale, 10309; and ex-Phillips 128. There are currently three modern editions, two in Old French and one in English: *L'advision Christine*, ed. Mary Louis Towner (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America, 1932); *Le Livre de l'advision Cristine*, ed. Liliane Dulac and Christine Reno (Paris: Champion, 2001); and *The Vision of Christine de Pizan*, trans. and ed. Glenda McLeod and Charity Cannon Willard (Rochester, NY: D.S. Brewer, 2005). I have used the Old French citations from Towner's edition—designated *L'advision*—except when quoting from Christine's introductory preface or *Glose*, in which case I rely on Dulac and Reno, designated *Livre de l'advision*. Towner's edition was published before the discovery of ex-Phillips 128, the only manuscript to include the *Glose*. It is based instead on the other two manuscripts: Brussels, Bibliothèque royale, 10309 and Paris, B.N. f. fr. 1176. I have chosen to use Towner because her edition presents the material in a manner that is more faithful to the original text, whereas Dulac and Reno's edition has incorporated modern punctuation

It is difficult to discuss Christine's *Advision*—indeed any of her work—without also addressing Christine the writer or the circumstances in which she wrote, not only because she is the first known woman to make a living from her writing but also because the *Advision* is explicitly autobiographical, shedding light on the struggles of a woman at the turn of the fifteenth century.² In her text, Christine makes it clear that she (or at least the version of herself she presents to the world) has been dealing with an illness, most notably melancholy, which has arisen primarily from the premature death of her husband.³ Her ailment, which she details in Book Three, is both mental and physical, and is the result of many “pestilence[s]” (*Lavision*, p.155): in addition to suffering, like Job, from a “long illness” (*Vision*, p.97) [longue maladie] (*Lavision*, p.155) and anxiety over the “harsh plague” (*Vision*, p.106) [dure pestilence] (*Lavision*, p.165), she has also dealt

(which certainly makes it more user-friendly). Unless otherwise noted, English citations are taken from the edition done by McLeod and Willard, hereafter designated *Vision*, which models its punctuation and paragraph breaks on Dulac and Reno. Occasionally, I will draw on Christine Reno's English translation from “Christine's Vision,” in *The Writings of Christine de Pizan*, ed. Charity Cannon Willard (New York: Persea Books, 1994), which is based on ex-Phillips 128. McLeod and Willard's edition is based primarily on Brussels, Bibliothèque royale, 10309 and Paris, B.N. f. fr. 1176 but relies on ex-Phillips 128 for the preface.

² Christine was mindful of her unique situation, commenting in her *L'Advision-Christine* that her works were well received by the nobility because of their novelty: “I attribute this reception not to the value of my works but rather to the fact that they had been written by a woman, a phenomenon not seen in quite some time (“Christine's Vision,” 18) [leur fis present comme de nouvelles choses quelque petiz et foibles que ilz soient / de mes volumes de plusieurs matieres lesquieulx de leur grace comme princes benignes et tres humbles les virent volentiers et receurent a ioye. Et plus comme ie tiens pour la chose non usage que femme escripse comme pieca ne avenist / que pour dignete qui y soit] (*Lavision Christine*, ed. Mary Louis Towner (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America, 1932), pp.164-65].

³ In this text she spells out her ailment quite explicitly, while in other dream visions, like *Le Chemin de long estude* (1403), her audience must read her body closely for signs of illness. Perhaps Christine provides such a straightforward account of her sickness here because, as she herself acknowledges, she hides her inner troubles behind her outward appearance, making it difficult for others to read her body. “So I promise you that from my external appearance and clothing the burden of my troubles was scarcely discernible among people” (*Vision*, p.98) [Si te promet que a mes semblans et abiz peu apparoit entre gens le faissel de mes anuis] (*Lavision*, p.156).

with bouts of depression, caused by the death of not just her husband but also her father, children, friends, and patron, which “renewed the wounds of [her] afflictions” (p.109). Finally, the cruelty of the men who robbed her of her income, forcing her to work for a living and beg for assistance, has aggravated her sickness⁴—“And today I am still not cured of that malady [shame] which I believe damaged me as profoundly as an attack of fever might have” (p.98).⁵

Like other dream vision writers, Christine turns to writing as a treatment for her sicknesses. Consequently, her persona in *L'Advison* seeks Lady Philosophy (i.e. learning), who teaches her that she *can* be cured through her writings, if she bases them on her experiences. The treatment that she prescribes is the introspective process of bodily writing, which resonates with the Apocalyptic pattern of self-directed healing. Consequently, her text employs not only a strong somatic discourse (that equates the benefits of study and composition with the benefits of good food and medicine⁶) but also a narrative of penance and pilgrimage, which Christine uses to rectify the inappropriate application of pilgrimage she found in *Le Roman de la Rose*.⁷ The third faculty of the

⁴ “fu renouvellement des navreures de mes adversitez” (*L'advison*, p.167).

⁵ “et encore au iour duy ne suis garie de celle maladie. Dont tant ne me greveroit comme il me semble quant faire le mesteut un axces de fievre” (*L'advison*, p.157).

⁶ Nicolette Zeeman explains, “The devotional literature of the Middle Ages uses the figure of ‘taste’ to describe understanding which it considers to be not only cognitive but also affective and experiential; as a result of a pun on the Latin nouns *sapor*, ‘taste,’ and *sapientia*, ‘wisdom,’ this is ‘sapiential’ understanding” (*Piers Plowman and the Medieval Discourse of Desire* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006], 2).

⁷ Susan Stakel argues, “Christine is responding to what she sees as a burlesque pairing of dream and pilgrimage in the *Roman de la rose* that leads to a clear case of *mensonge*” (“Structural Convergence of Pilgrimage and Dream-Vision in Christine de Pizan,” in Barbara N. Sargent-Baur, ed., *Journeys Toward God* [Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1992], 195-203). She writes, “It is clear that [Christine] knew the *Rose* well, and it is one of the wonderful ironies of literary history that she was able to mine and renew so successfully a work that she had roundly condemned...From the melding of dream-vision and pilgrimage in her work there

brain, memory, is critical to this therapeutic process: it is Christine's memory that will sift through experiences gleaned by her body and pair them with experiences gleaned from her books so that proper self-knowledge is produced. It is this treatment I will consider first.

Perhaps more explicitly than any other writer I consider in this study, Christine felt that productive writing, firmly based in individual (especially female) experience, could offer a remedy for social illnesses, like misogyny, just as it could for personal illnesses.⁸ In order to make this relationship clear, Christine creates a character to literally embody the body politic: the princess Libera. In the text, Christine's illness parallels Libera's so that her problems serve as a microcosm for the problems facing the state.⁹ She notes that her fortunes (like France's) have declined with the death of the good king

emerges a dynamic vehicle for the transmission of Christine's ideas that is much more effective in refuting Jean de Meun than was her exchange of letters with Jean de Montreuil and Pierre and Gontier Col" (Stakel, "Pilgrimage and Dream-Vision," 195).

⁸ Helen Solterer argues that Christine realized "a polemical mode cannot succeed in countering the public defamation of women" and instead found more success in her allegories, in which "sapiential writing" can counteract past symbolic violence through an ethical reorientation of writing toward society's benefit (*The Master and Minerva: Disputing Women in French Medieval Culture* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995], 164, 174, quoted in Noah Guynn, "Authorship and Sexual/ Allegorical Violence in Jean de Meun's 'Roman de la Rose,'" *Speculum* 79.3 [2004], 628-59, at 656). As Noah Guynn puts it, "In her subsequent work, especially the *Chemin de long estude*, Christine would turn to ethical reflection, prophetic vision, and sapiential writing, balancing her bitter denunciation of the great misogynists of the past with a forward-looking, affirmative advocacy of women" (Guynn, "Authorship," 656-57).

⁹ Christine was highly conscious of the "Apocalyptic" time in which she lived and the politically uncertain situation in France. Many of her works address such crises as the Hundred Years War, the Great Schism, and the French civil war, as well as the moral failings of France's leaders. Christine viewed her writings as more than an observational venture, however; she felt they could actually influence and help her fellow countrymen. As Renate Blumenfelt-Kosinski states, "The fate of her adopted country affected [Christine] deeply and informed many of her works...the worsening situation in France conditioned her own literary output...Indeed, Christine's trajectory from being an observer and chronicler of the events surrounding her to attempting to intervene in these events is reflected in the forms she chose for her works and the voice she adopted in them" ("Christine de Pizan and the Political Life in Late Medieval France," in *Christine de Pizan: A Casebook*, ed. Barbara K. Altmann and Deborah McGrady [New York: Routledge, 2003], 9).

Charles V and the subsequent rise of the feud between the Orléanists/Armagnacs and Burgundians.¹⁰ Consequently, Christine's vision is intended to enact a real change by rallying support against the Burgundians. As Tracy Adams argues, Christine is "teaching her readers how to understand the relationships they see around them, and prompting them to engage."¹¹ Accordingly, her persona's remedy—the contemplative life (study)—can also be a remedy for the body politic.¹² Bodily writing can heal the individual, and by healing each individual, the *res publica* can in turn be cured.¹³ The second half of my

¹⁰ For example, Christine laments the lack of charity in her land that leaves widows like her so poorly cared for. She observes that she met "nowhere any charitable person, great or small" (*Vision*, p.100) [ie ne trouvasse nulle part grant ne petit charitable] (*Lavisson*, p. 158) and instead endured ridicule from "those sated with wines and plump with pleasures" (*Vision*, p. 100) [aucuns remplis de vins et graisse daise souvent y ouoie] (*Lavisson*, p.158). These problems are also reflected in the political sphere. Tracy Adams writes, "The feud between the Orléanists, or Armagnacs, and Burgundians, that 'sickness that so tears through the land' brought on by mad King Charles VI's inability to reign, is a central theme in Christine de Pizan's corpus...And yet her literary engagement with the feud, her use of 'literature as a potent social mediator' to influence the course of the conflict, has received little attention" (*Christine de Pizan and the Fight for France* [University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2014], 1).

¹¹ Adams, *The Fight for France*, 139.

¹² In this way, Christine provides a solution to the debate (with a foothold in both the École des Chartres and Florentine academies) that argued the merits of the contemplative life versus the active life, an argument that was largely derived from Neoplatonic readings of the *Aeneid*. Jane Chance writes, "The setting of the story in Carthage, whose destiny was so dominated by Juno, was, in the *Aeneid* commentaries, often associated (along with Juno) with the active life, just as Troy (along with Venus) was associated with the voluptuous life, and Italy (along with Pallas Athena) with the contemplative life...This allegorization was widely known in the Middle Ages" (*The Mythographic Chaucer: The Fabulation of Sexual Politics* [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995], 54). For Christine, the turn inward (the contemplative) prepares the ground for the healing of the outward *res publica* (an active endeavor). This move is also demonstrated in her *Chemin de long estude*, in which the Cumaean Sibyl—a character from the *Aeneid*—serves as her guide.

¹³ Christine utilized different forms for her different audiences, but it is interesting that in the midst of the Armagnac-Burgundian conflict, Christine makes her shift from verse to prose. Scholars have various explanations for this phenomenon, but Adams argues that writing in prose allowed Christine to complete "the transformation into female cleric that she had begun with the *Roman de la rose* debate" (*The Fight for France*, 7). Perhaps Christine felt that the seriousness of her topic required a more serious form. Adams writes, "[Christine] has a clear notion of her different publics, appealing to them variously through courtly poetry, relatively simple verse allegory, complex, obscure prose allegory, and prose treatises" (5).

chapter will address the political application of her treatment.

Christine's Treatment

Christine's treatment in *L'Advision* resonates strongly with the bodily writing performed in the Book of Revelation—an isopathic restoration of self-knowledge by means of a somatic metaphor—but with an important distinction. It is uncompromisingly feminine. The kind of medicine she consumes, and in turn provides, is based on a conceit of childbirth and the nurturing mother, as well as her own uniquely female experiences, tempered properly by the experiential knowledge provided by books. These experiences, when put in writing, provide a mirror that sparks Christine's memory and allows her to recognize the real cause of her illness: a trial sent by God to strengthen her character. Achieving this self-awareness about her situation involves a process that combines pilgrimage and contemplation. The first, pilgrimage, is a physical movement associated with a spiritual state, and the second, contemplation (or mental digestion, as Christine describes it), is an inward movement explained as a physical process. In this way, Christine melds together the benefits of both the active life and the contemplative life and so unites all aspects of Christine's being—mental, physical, and spiritual—so that healing can occur.

Like the other dream visions we have studied, *L'Advision-Christine* is framed as a pilgrimage. In her opening lines, Christine quotes Dante by explaining that she was midway through her pilgrimage when she stopped to rest for the night and subsequently experienced her vision: "I had already passed halfway through the journey of my pilgrimage when one day at eventide I found myself fatigued by the long road and

desirous of shelter” (p.18).¹⁴ This is, of course, a reference to her age; the pilgrimage is her life, which suggests that her journey can only end at death, and thus her renewal must be a continual process, a continual movement. The transitory nature of this process is emphasized when Christine states she is *halfway* through the pilgrimage: in the middle or mid-dest (“la moitie”). Even in her dream Christine observes, “It seemed to me that my spirit left my body, and...was flying *in mid-air*” (p.18, my emphasis).¹⁵ This middle state—one of constant motion—sets the stage for discovery and transformation.¹⁶

Christine notes in her *Glose* that her dream, as a reflection of her waking life, can also represent “the pilgrimage for human life” (p.10), or thought more generally.¹⁷ The dream is thus a parallel journey (movement of the mind) to the one she undertakes while awake (movement of the body). Even though the dream is a mental journey, the corporeal

¹⁴ “Ja passe avoye la moitie du chemin de mon pelerinage. comme un iour sus lavespir me trouvasse pour la longue voye lassee et desireuse de heberge” (*L'Avision*, p.73). In another of her dream visions, *Le Chemin de long estude*, Christine dresses in simple clothes as a demonstration of her commitment to a pilgrimage of learning, much like Will does in *Piers Plowman* (and quite unlike Amant, who uses silk thread and a silver needle to hastily sew on elaborate sleeves in the *Rose* [see lines 91-93, 98]). She states, “I donned simple garb, a muffler and a wimple” [Si m’atournay d’un atour simple, / Touret de nes je mis et guimple] (701-02).

¹⁵ “avis mestoit que mon esperit laissoit son corps et...ma semble que mon corps en lair voulast” (*L'Avision*, p. 73).

¹⁶ Susan Stakel, writing of both *L'Avision* and *Le Chemin de long estude*, states, “We see [Christine] say her prayers, fall asleep, and divide into resting body and floating dream-spirit. Both dreams, then, have the traditional prologue that carefully delineates the border between waking state and dream state, a frontier that translates here as the marker of the pilgrim’s departure or separation from the familiar world... The dream, then, with its total eclipsing of the body, is the ideal vehicle of expression for pilgrimage” (Stakel, “Pilgrimage and Dream Vision,” 199).

¹⁷ “songe puet estre pris pour pensee, pelerinage pour vie humaine” (*Livre de l’advision*, p.3). This may be a subtle reference to Guillaume de Deguileville’s *Pèlerinage de la vie humaine*.

In the late twentieth century, a manuscript (ex-Phillips 128) was discovered containing a gloss written by Christine herself explaining her use of allegory in Book One. It was edited by Christine Reno in 1992. See “The Preface to the *Avision-Christine* in ex-Phillips 128,” in *Reinterpreting Christine de Pizan*, ed. Earl Jeffrey Richards (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1992), 207-227.

aspects of her ensuing transformation, explained by way of the body's digestive processes, are equally critical to her project.¹⁸ Both body and spirit must be involved in order for her healing to be effective.

This corporeal aspect is underscored by the arrival in Christine's dream of an immeasurably tall man ("de grandeur inextimable" [*Lavision*, p.73]) with a belly that envelops the whole world. When Christine sees him, he is in the process of simultaneously eating and emptying himself. The food that he eats is material, but that which comes "par lautre conduit" (p.73) is intangible. In a manner highly reminiscent of Apocalyptic characters, his name is written on his forehead: "c.h.a.o.z" (p. 74) or Chaos.¹⁹

After observing the giant, Christine notices a shadowy figure of a woman standing nearby and feeding him by pouring a mixture into molds and cooking the molds in his mouth.

She was endlessly mixing a mortar in which she put bile and honey, lead and feathers to congeal together. She would fill pitchers of various shapes with this material and afterwards pour small amounts of it into the aforesaid molds, which

¹⁸ The interconnectedness of mind and body is an important theme that is illustrated throughout the text, including in the figure of Dame Opinion, who states, "It is necessary that I who am composed of the nature of the soul, inasmuch as I am contemplative, and of the nature of the body, inasmuch as I am ignorant, must be and exist within the heart of the human creature" (*Vision*, p. 58) [Et pour ce convient que moy qui composee suis de la nature de lame en tant que ie suis speculative et de la nature du corpos en tant que ie suis speculative et de la nature du corps en tant que ie suis ignorant soie et habite ou cuer de creature humaine] (*Lavision*, p. 115).

¹⁹ The description of the giant Chaos's enormous size is also reminiscent of Boethius's Lady Philosophy and Chaucer's goddess Fame. For a study on chaos, see Douglas Kelly, *Christine de Pizan's Changing Opinion: A Quest for Certainty in the Midst of Chaos* (Rochester, NY: D.S. Brewer, 2007). See also Earl Jeffrey Richards, "Somewhere between Destructive Glosses and Chaos: Christine de Pizan and Medieval Theology," in *Christine de Pizan: A Casebook*, 43-56, for a discussion of Thomas Aquinas's revival of chaos to mean primordial confusion and its connection to the *poeta theologus*.

she would stop and seal well. All this she made not in one but in many different forms; she would put everything to cook and take form in the gigantic figure's mouth, which was so broad that it resembled a great oven, heated as a tempered bath might be. There she would leave them for the time which, according to the differences and weights of the molds, was most appropriate for each. (pp.19-20)²⁰

When the molds are fully baked, small figures emerge which are promptly consumed by the giant.²¹ This fascinating process continues without ceasing. Then, incredibly, Christine's spirit is seized by the woman and mixed into the molds as well. The woman (glossed as Nature) creates a new body for Christine's spirit with the same mixture of gall, honey, lead, and feathers and makes her feminine, "because she who had cast it wished it to be so" (p. 20).²² The new Christine is cooked in Chaos's mouth and "just like the others, [she] was suddenly swallowed into the giant's belly" (p. 20).²³

Christine provides a key to understanding this remarkable episode within her gloss. She explains that the shadow can stand for Nature, who feeds the world even

²⁰ "elle destrempoit mortier quelle coaguloit ensemble / En laquelle mixtion metoit fiel. miel. plomb. et plume. dycelle matiere emplissoit buires de divers facons lesquelles apres versoit en petite quantite es diz moules qui bien estouppoit et seeloit. tout ce fait non dune guise mais en diverses differences mettoit tout cuire et confire en la gueule du dit grant ymage qui tant estoit lee quelle representoit une grant fournoise chaufee en maniere dattrempees estuves la les laissoit iusques a temps convenable lun plus que lautre selon la difference et la grosseur des outilx" (*Lavision*, p. 74).

²¹ "Small bodies, variously shaped in accordance with the imprints of the instruments, would then be taken from the molds...as soon as these tiny figures left their dies, then the large figure in whose mouth they had been cooked would greedily swallow them all into his belly in a single gulp" (*Vision*, p. 20) [Adont sailloient hors de ces moules petis corps de divers facons selon les empreintes des instrumens...aussi tost que ces petiz yimages laissoient leurs moules adonc le grant ymage en quel gueule avoient este cuis les transgloutissoit tous vifs en sa pance sans nombre a une goulee] (*Lavision*, pp. 74-75).

²² "comme le vouldist ainsi celle qui la destrempe avoit faite a la quell cause ce tient" (*Lavision*, p.75). In contrast, in *Mutacion de Fortune*, Christine is changed into a man.

²³ "semblablement que les autres soubdainement transgloutie ou ventre de cel ymage" (*Lavision*, p.75).

though she lacks a material body. Christine writes, “All this we can see by the generations which naturally succeed one another, by which the world, or the human and other living species, are preserved” (p. 11).²⁴ This role sounds much like the one assigned to Nature (and the phoenix) in the *Rose*. However, as we will see later, Christine’s Nature serves as a corrective to Jean’s by valorizing the female sex rather than denigrating it. (Recall that Nature specifically chose to make Christine female; later, she will command Christine to compose texts based on her experiences as a woman.) Thus, the preservation of the species is returned to a woman’s sphere, for only women can give birth.

After arriving in the giant’s entrails, a servant gives Christine a liquid that is “very sweet and pleasing” (*Vision* p. 20) [douce et tres souefve] (*Lavision*, p. 75), which she is carefully allowed to drink. This drink causes her to grow taller and stronger. Food is then given to her in proportion to her increasing size until she is able to feed herself. Consequently, she grows in knowledge and begins to understand “the remarkable nature of the entrails of the belly of this image” (*Vision*, p. 20) [la diversite des entrailles du ventre de lymage] (*Lavision*, p. 75) which encompass the entire world.²⁵

The food and drink Christine consumes represent both actual physical nourishment as well as the texts and experiences that foster her intellectual development. Indeed, in her gloss, Christine observes that the nourishment Nature gives her is both

²⁴ “tout ce pouons nous veoir par les generacions qui naturellement se font, dont le monde, c’est asavoir espece humaine et les autres especes vives, sont maintenues” (*Livre de l’advision*, p. 4).

²⁵ “The space enclosed by this image seemed long and wide, extending so far and wide that a man’s lifetime might not serve to seek out all the many countries included within in it” (*Vision*, p. 20) [mais tant me sembloit longue et lee lespace de la pourprise dycellui corps que lespace de la vie dun home ne pourroit souffire a toutes cerchier les diverses contrees qui en lui sont comprises] (*Lavision*, p. 75).

physical and mental, facilitating the growth of her mind as well as the growth of her body: “This wise woman would increase and augment the food in proportion to my strength until I could carry and feed my body by myself; because of it, my judgment was increasing and providing me with an understanding of the remarkable nature of the entrails of the belly of this image, through which I would walk on foot” (p.20).²⁶

Christine explains that this process applies to not just her but to all of mankind: it “can be clearly understood as the birth and nourishment both of her [Christine’s persona] and similarly of all human creatures” (p. 12).²⁷ Nature, as the ultimate nurturer, “feeds the world” (*Vision*, p. 11) [paist le monde] (*Livre de l’advision*, p.4).

The four materials from which Nature creates Christine’s food (gall, honey, lead, and feathers) represent “the four elements of which all things are composed” (p.11), and in her nourishment, Nature is careful to tend to each person according to their complexion, or natural combination of humors.²⁸ Consequently, the oven she uses is

²⁶ “ycelle sage croissoit et engroissoit la pasture au feur de ma force tant que apar moy porter et paistre mon corps ie pos. ou quell croissoit lentendement qui ia me donnoit cognoissance de la diversite des entrailles du ventre de lymage par sus les quelles a .ii. pies ie marchoye” (*L’advision*, p. 75).

²⁷ “se puet clerement entendre la naissance et premiere nourriture et de elle et semblablement de toute creature humaine” (*Livre de l’advision*, p. 5). In a literal sense, this episode signifies how Christine moved from Lombardy to France when she was young.

²⁸ “.IIII. elements don’t toutes choses sont composees” (*Livre de l’advision*, p. 4). The gloss notes that the shadow could also stand for human life (which passes like a shadow), which nourishes man while he’s alive: “But with what does she feed him? With bitterness, like bile; with foolish pleasure, like honey; with heaviness, like lead; with lightness, like feathers. The mouth in which she places this mixture is his thought, in which she has various utensils, that is different ways of thinking” (*Vision*, p. 11) [Mais de quoi le paist elle? D’amertume, comme fiel; de folle plaisance, comme miel; de pesanteur, comme plomb; de legiereté, comme plume. La gueule ou elle met ceste destrampe, c’est sa pensee ou a divers outilz, c’est assavoir diverses differences de cogitacions] (*Livre de l’advision*, p. 5). Finally, the shadow might also be the Catholic faith. In which case, “the mouth of the image is the Church; bile is remorse of conscience; honey, the hope of divine mercy; lead, the fear of hell; feathers, life that soon passes away” (*Vision*, p. 12) [La gueule de l’image, c’est l’Eglise; fiel, c’est remors de conscience; miel,

likened to a tempered (“attempree”) bath.²⁹ Because temperance was a critical aspect of medieval cooking, Nature’s adherence to this principle shows her to be a responsible and educated nurturer.³⁰

Nature’s honeyed food and sweet drink also gesture to an exegetical tradition, rooted in the writings of Ezekiel and John, that equates studying with eating.³¹ This

c’est esperance de la misericorde divine; plomb, crainte d’enfer; plume, vie tost passee] (*Livre de l’advision*, p. 5).

²⁹ The idea of temperance, or moderation, is advocated as a requirement of health in the popular *regimen sanitatis* genre. One such text, the pseudo-Aristotelian *Secret of Secrets*, states, “If a man ete and drynke moderatly and temperatly he shalle fynde helthe to his lyf, strengthe to his body, and helthe of alle his lymes” (Robert Steele, ed., *Three Prose Versions of the Secreta Secretorum*, EETS e.s. 74 [London, 1898], 22, cited by Rebecca Krug, “Piers Plowman and the Secrets of Health,” *The Chaucer Review* 46.1-2 [2011], 172). Other handbooks on health included the *Tacuinum Sanitatis*, an eleventh-century Arab medical treatise by Ibn Butlan, and the thirteenth-century *Mensa Philosophica* by Michael Scott. See P.W. Hammond, *Food and Feast in Medieval England* (Dover, N.H.: Alan Sutton Publishing, 1993), 100.

³⁰ Terence Scully explains that “the medieval cook, as well as the household physician and the most percipient members of the household who wished to be fully aware of the nature of what they were eating” were more interested in the humors of their meals than in the flavor or texture (“Tempering Medieval Food” in *Food in the Middle Ages*, ed. Melitta Weiss Adamson [New York: Garland Publishing, 1995], 6). The cook’s mission was to produce dishes with a net humoral complexion that was best for human consumption, i.e., moderately warm and moderately moist. He or she accomplished this by tempering foods that were too cold or too dry, or too hot or too moist—in other words, mixing them with their opposites so that the substances would take on a new and healthier nature. Scully explains that sauces were the principle vehicle for this transformation, and demonstrates that the word “temper”—often inadequately translated as “mix”—appears in virtually every medieval recipe for sauces (12).

³¹ The combination of honey and bitterness in Nature’s food is reminiscent of when John eats the book: “And it was in my mouth, sweet as honey: and when I had eaten it, my belly was bitter” [et erat in ore meo tamquam mel dulce, et cum devorassem eum, amaricatus est venter meus] (Rev. 10.10). Claire Le Brun-Gouanvic states, “Depuis saint Grégoire et Origène, le lien entre le livre qu’il fallait manger dans la prophétie d’Ezechiel et la douceur du miel est un *topos* des commentaires scripturaires” (“L’écriture médecine: une relecture de *L’Avision Christine* de 1405,” in *Dans les miroirs de l’écriture: La réflexivité chez les femmes écrivains d’Ancien Régime*, ed. Jean-Philippe Beaulieu [Montréal: Université de Montréal, 1998], 18). Mary Carruthers notes, “Commentary on the two moments in Scripture (Ezekiel 3:3 and Revelation 10: 9-11) in which a prophet is given a book to eat that is as sweet as honey in the mouth underlines the need to consume one’s reading. ‘Therefore we devour and digest the book, when we read the words of God,’ says Hugh of Fouilloy in the twelfth century. ‘Many indeed read, but from their reading they remain ignorant...others devour and digest the holy books but are not ignorant because their memory does not let go of the rules for life whose meaning it can grasp” (*The Book*

association continues throughout *L'Advision*. For example, later in the text, Christine praises the “sweet taste of knowledge” (*Vision*, p. 116) [doulz goust de science] (*L'advision*, p. 176) and states, “I hunger in mind and spirit for that which I am no longer able to possess: the knowledge of you, sweet Philosophy! Ah, savory, honeyed treasure, sovereign above all others. How happy are they who taste you fully!”³² This early episode, then, establishes an important psychosomatic metaphor that Christine will use to communicate the application and effects of her treatment.

In an earlier dream vision, *Le Chemin de long estude*, Christine treated her illness by increasing her knowledge through study. This she did with hopes of bringing an end to the chaos that plagued the Earth. In order to be effective, her therapy had to be physiological, incorporated into her body; thus, Christine drank from the fountain of the Muses before transmitting her knowledge in the form of an encyclopedic poem.³³ In

of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture, 2nd edition [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008], 209).

³² This is a combination of the translation done by Reno in “Christine’s Vision” (p.16) and McLeod in *Vision* (p.103). “Et ores est le temps venu que mon engin et sentiment mendie en disirant ce que par faulte de apprendre ne peut avoir. Cest assavoir lart de toy philosophie ma mie science / ha doulce savoureuse chose et enmillee qui tous autres tresors en valeur precedes comme souveraine/ tant sont eueux ceulx qui a plain tassavourent” (*L'advision*, p.162).

³³ Christine’s guide, the Sibyl, takes her to the fountain on Mount Parnassus, also known as the “fontaine de clergie” [fountain of wisdom] (*Le Chemin*, 1091). The Sibyl encourages Christine to drink from the pool (1085-86). The spring locale of Parnassus, in direct opposition to the dismal autumnal setting of the prologue, seems at first to suggest a cure by contraries: “The verdant meadow we found was dressed with flowers and delicate plants, just like Les Prés Verts in the month of May when they are covered in a variety of colors” [Ainsi flourie la trouvames / Et verdoyant d’erbe menue / Et tout en l’estat maintenue / Que ou mois de may sont les vers prez / De plusieurs couleurs dyaprez] (*Le Chemin*, 718-22). However, the fountain holds an isopathic cure, not an allopathic one. Instead of drinking a substance intended to temper her humoral imbalance, such as warm wine (recommended for melancholy), Christine drinks from the cool fountain—from the works of philosophers and poets, the very source of her malady, just as she mentally “drinks” of them in the writing process itself. The presence of variegated colors at the fountain may also suggest an embodied use of rhetoric—especially since Christine drinks from the water—that contrasts with the colorful yet ineffective fountain in the *Rose*, in which allegory

L'Advision, she pushes this treatment further with a more explicitly corporeal examination. Rather than fleeing from earthly chaos to the celestial realm of the governing Influences, as she did in *Le Chemin*, she confronts Chaos (now personified) directly—to the point that she is even eaten and digested by it. Everything that follows in the text takes place *within* the giant's intestines. Christine is being digested even as she attempts to heal her own “stomach of understanding.” This forces her to seek truth and healing within her corporeal environment, in the very heart of discord. Thus, she finds her “fountain” not on the Mountain of Parnassus but within the city of Paris.³⁴

After traveling through the giant's entrails, Christine finally arrives in France, a country/ princess she had heard about from Fame's trumpets.³⁵ The physical movement of her journey parallels her intellectual movement as she continues to study the customs of this new land until her mind is enlarged. As Christine notes in the autobiographical

becomes more diffuse and immaterial. Sarah Kay writes, “Christine de Pizan not only repeats Genius's summons to a place of thought but also responds, in her fountain of the Muses, to the way he repudiates Guillaume de Lorris's fountain. With the *Ovide moralisé* as her intermediary, she recuperates the fountain as a *locus* of enlightenment, seriously reflecting on it as a metaphysical spectacle instead of a burlesque one” (*The Place of Thought: The Complexity of One in Late Medieval French Didactic Poetry* [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007], 185).

³⁴ At the beginning of Book 3, the sacristine of the convent instructs Christine to help herself to the treasure trove of knowledge the way the Sibyl directed Christine to drink her fill of the fountain (*Vision*, p. 88).

³⁵ This reflects autobiographical reality, when Christine moved with her father to France. “At that time when Fame, who had blown and was still blowing with all her trumpets and horns in the country where I was, had been shouting out what she had already made known both there and in other lands... then because of the cries of Fame and after conclusive messages confirmed these matters, my guardians left, desirous to serve such a princess” (*Vision*, p. 21) [En cellui temps comme renommee a tout ses corps et buisennes eust corne et encore cornast en la contree ou iestoy ce que la et par toutes autres contrees avoit ia par moult long temps segnefie / de rechief a hault voix ne cessast de crier ... Adonc par les cris de fama après ce que messages certains orent de ceste chose certefiez ceulx qui mavoient en bail desirans de tel princesse servir se partirent de la] (*L'Advision*, pp. 75-76). Fame's trumpets play a crucial role in Chaucer's *House of Fame*, the subject of the next chapter.

section of Book Three, her entire life has been a long progression toward knowledge—a pilgrimage for truth.

Thus I arrived at the age when one naturally attains a certain level of knowledge, and looking back over my past life and ahead to the inevitable end, like a traveler who has just passed over a dangerous route and who, turning back in amazement, resolves never to go that way again but to find a better path, I came to the realization that the world is full of dangers and that there is only one good: the way of truth. So I turned to the path of study, towards which I was inclined by nature and constellation.³⁶

This journey toward learning is something to which Christine is naturally inclined. But her proficiency could only come after years of work, progressing from subject to subject: “But like a child who first learns the alphabet, I began with the ancient histories... proceeding from one to the other and coming to the Romans, the French, the Britons, and several other historians, and then to what scientific learning I was able to grasp in the time available for study. Next, I took up the works of the poets, my knowledge increasing all the while.”³⁷ Nature celebrates Christine’s progress, which she also describes as a

³⁶ Reno, “Christine’s Vision,” p. 17. “Ainsi en cellui temps que naturellement estoit parvenu mon aage au degre de cognoissance regardant derriers moy les adventures passes et devant moy la fin de toutes choses Tout ainsi comme un home qui a passé perilleuse voye se retourne arrier regardant le pas par merueille / et dit que plus ny entrera et que a meilleur se tendra/ Ainsi considerant le monde tout plein de laz perilleux/ et que il nest fors pour toute fin un seul bien qui est la voye de verite me tray au chemin ou proper nature et constellacion mencline. Cest assavoir amour destude” (*Lavision*, pp. 162-63).

³⁷ Reno, “Christine’s Vision,” p. 17. “ains comme lenfent que au premier on met a la. b. c. d. me pris aux hystoires anciennes des le commencement du monde... procedant de lune en lautre descendant aux rommains/ des francois/ des Bretons et autres plusieurs hystoriagrafes/ après aux deducions des sciences selon ce que en lespace du temps que ie y estudiay jen pos comprendre. Puis me prix aux livres des pouetes/ et comme de plus en plus alast croissent le bien de ma cognoissance” (*Lavision*, p. 163).

journey (“continuing and wandering every day through your studies, comprehending the precepts better and better”³⁸), and commends her for fulfilling her nature, which is explicitly feminine.

Christine’s “travels” lead her to the Universities and finally to a convent of learning. “To mount higher to see various beautiful things was sufficient only my great desire and longing to obtain a place and permission to learn more” (p. 88).³⁹ There she climbs to the highest tower in the convent.

Thus escorted, I was led to the highest tower where was located a very beautiful room—bright, shining and very richly painted in choice colors, in which all the sciences and their subordinated branches were portrayed around their walls. And throughout the said room, places had been arranged to seat the students listening to the lessons of the masters reading in that place from a lectern that was high and very finely decorated. (pp. 88-89)⁴⁰

After ascending to the highest tower, Christine is nearly blinded by the resplendent Lady Philosophy, who calls her by name and assures her that all is well. Philosophy praises the love Christine has for her and the desire she has to increase in wisdom. “My most loyal servant. . . Because of the love you bear me, the desire which leads you here, in

³⁸ *Vision*, p. 105. “continuant et vacant tous iours a lestudye comprenant les sentences de mieulx en mieulx” (*Lavision*, p. 163).

³⁹ “de plus hault monter pour veoir diverses beautez fu souffisant seulement mon bon desir et amour a mempetrer lieu et licence de plus savoir” (*Lavision*, p. 146).

⁴⁰ “ainsi convoyee fus menee tout au plus hault sommeton ou quell avoit situee une tres belle sale clere luisant et de fines couleurs tres richement peinte ou furent pourtraittes toutes sciences et leurs dependences au tour des parois et tout par mi la ditte sale avoit formes arrangees pour seoir les escoliers escoutans les lecons des maistres la en droit lisans en chaiere / qui la estoit haulte et moult bien ouvree” (*Lavision*, p. 147). Mary Carruthers explains that students learned by studying murals (*The Craft of Thought: Meditation, Rhetoric, and the Making of Images, 400-1200* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998], 178).

compensation for your ignorance, will be of use to you” (p. 89).⁴¹

After being reassured by Philosophy, Christine throws herself at the goddess’s feet and begs her, as a “just and true physician” (*Vision*, p. 90) [jus et vraye phiscienne] (*Lavision*, p. 149), to cure her of her illness. “I believe that you will not forget me, your humble servant, whom you have fed from the scraps of the great repasts of your tables; rather, you will bestow a comforting remedy on the wounds of her unfortunate woes” (p. 90).⁴² Philosophy agrees to treat Christine and employs a remedy closely modeled on Boethius’s *Consolation of Philosophy*, including its somatic metaphors of medicine and healing.⁴³ In the *Consolatio*, Philosophy tells Boethius that he was “fed with the milk and reared upon the nourishment which was [hers] to give,” but the Muses have since poisoned him.⁴⁴ “‘Who,’ said she, ‘has allowed yon play-acting wantons to approach this sick man—these who, so far from giving medicine to heal his malady, even feed it with sweet poison? These it is who kill the rich crop of reason with the barren thorns of passion, who accustom men’s minds to disease, instead of setting them free.’”⁴⁵

⁴¹ “mon nacelle tres loiale... Car lamour que as a moy et le desir qui te meine en suppleant ton ignorance te sera valable” (*Lavision*, p. 147).

⁴² “je suppose que moy ta servile mercenaire que tu as nourrie des demourans des grosses viands de tes tables tu noublieras ains donras remede reconfortant les navreures de ses infortunees adversitez” (*Lavision*, pp. 148-49).

⁴³ Many scholars have examined the similarities between Christine’s text and the French translation of Boethius. Julie Singer writes, “Noted for its wealth of autobiographical detail, this third book of the *Avision* also quotes extensively from the *Livre de Boece de Consolacion* as it illustrates metaphoric strategies of healing in the late medieval Boethian tradition” (*Blindness and Therapy in Late Medieval French and Italian Poetry* [Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2011], 128). See also Benjamin Semple, “The Consolation of a Woman Writer: Christine de Pizan’s Use of Boethius in *Lavision-Christine*,” in *Women, the Book, and the Worldly*, ed. Lesley Smith and Jane H. M. Taylor (Cambridge, 1995), 39-48; Glynnis M. Cropp, “Boèce et Christine de Pizan,” *Le Moyen Age* 87 (1981): 387-417.

⁴⁴ Citation taken from *Consolation of Philosophy*, trans. Philip Ridpath (London: C. Dilly, 1785), 11.

⁴⁵ *Consolation*, 7-8.

Philosophy then proposes to replace the Muses' "sweet poison" with "the sweet persuasiveness of Rhetoric": "it is time for thee to take and drain a draught, soft and pleasant to the taste, which, as it penetrates within, may prepare the way for stronger potions."⁴⁶ Similarly, Christine's Philosophy agrees to help Christine by providing medicine or comfort ("reconfort" [*L'avisio*n, p. 171]) that will heal her patient's "stomach of understanding" (*Vision*, p. 111) [lestomach de ton entendement] (*L'avisio*n, p. 170).⁴⁷

The physical nature of Christine's treatment, already established by her journey in Chaos's entrails, underscores the bodily nature of therapeutic study. As Christine observes, quoting Gregory the Great, "Your doctrine and the Holy Scripture sometimes are meat to us, sometimes drink. In the most obscure places, there is meat to us, for when we explicate it, it is the meat that we chew, and when we understand it, it is like meat that we swallow. But in the places where it is most clear, it is drink to us because when there is no need of exposition, we drink it just as we find it" (p. 133).⁴⁸ Just as medicine heals the body, eating and digesting scriptural "foods" enables spiritual, emotional, and even physical healing.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ *Consolation*, 44.

⁴⁷ Carruthers explains that "the stomach of memory" was a standard metaphoric model (*Book of Memory*, 207). Christine's Philosophy does focus on Christine's digestive process, but Claire Le Brun-Gouanvic notes that Christine expands the concept of medicine to include food more generally: "Par la profusion de metaphors gustatives, elle a élargi le concept de médecine orale à celui de nourriture" ("L'écriture médecine, 19).

⁴⁸ "ta doctrine et sainte scripture aucune fois nous est viande/ aucune fois buvrage/ en lieux plus obscurs est ce que nous est viande quant nous lexposons/ cest la viande que nous maschons/ et quant nous lentendons cestainsi comme la viande quant nous avalons/ mais es lieux ou elle est plus clere elle nous est buvrage. Car quant elle na besoing de exposition nous la humons ainsi comme nous la trouvons" (*L'avisio*n, p. 192).

⁴⁹ Miranda Griffin compares Christine to Derrida, noting, "Both Christine de Pizan and Derrida show that reading is a privileged encounter with Fortune, imparting significance to apparently random diversions along the path of study. Both illuminate the transformative power of reading: reading can transform grief into consolation, and ignorance into recognition; it can

This type of therapy is successful on a holistic level precisely because it is divine. Philosophy—whom Christine identifies as Theology and indeed God and all proper sciences⁵⁰—is a trustworthy caretaker, just like Nature. In order to help Christine heal, the goddess prescribes a personalized medicine, based on Christine’s temperament, with the goal of helping Christine realize that her troubles are not the result of Fortune’s capriciousness.

That you are deceived I will prove through the application of a simple example. Just like the skillful doctor who considers the power of the nature and complexion of his patient and according to his strength or weakness gives him a medicine and purgative, so I will employ a light and restrained diet in you because of the weakness of the stomach of your understanding, to which heavy and weighty things, those like the ones I once gave my beloved Boethius (as you found in his book), would be hard to digest and convert to the sustenance you need. (p. 110)⁵¹

The “reconfort” that Philosophy offers is, of course, textual.⁵² Philosophy explains, “And

transform chance events into meaningful destiny; it can transform one language into another—and, in *La Mutacion de Fortune*, reading can transform a woman into a man” (“Transforming Fortune: Reading and Chance in Christine de Pizan’s ‘Mutacion de Fortune’ and ‘Chemin de long estude,’” *The Modern Language Review* 104 [2009]: 55-70, at 64).

⁵⁰ “You, Philosophy, the repository and substance of all the other sciences, which are your appendages...you reveal yourself in the form of Holy Theology to nourish my ignorant spirit most wholesomely for my salvation” (*Vision*, p. 132) [toy philosophie larmoire et corps de toutes sciences lesquelles sont tes membres...tes monstre en fourme de saintte theologie pour repaistremon ignorant corage le plus sainement a mon salut] (*Lavision*, pp. 190-91).

⁵¹ “Et que tu es deceue te prouveray par pratique de gros exemple tout ainsi comme lexpert medecin qui considere la faculte de la nature et complexion de son pacient. Et selon sa force/ ou foiblece lui donne urgatoire et medecine/ Ainsi useray en toy de regisme tenue/ et legier pour la foiblece de lestomach de ton entendement a qui choses pesantes. Telles ou semblables que iadis donnay a mon ame boece/ sicomme en son livre as trouve/ seroient fortes a digerer et convertir a la sustentacion de ta neccessite” (*Lavision*, pp. 169-70).

⁵² This is like the textual “conforts” consumed by Will in Passus 13 of *Piers*. Glynnis Cropp details Christine’s “reconfort” in “Philosophy, the Liberal Arts, and Theology in *Le Livre*

as country examples make the ignorant more easily understand the form of things, by this way on the foundation of Holy Writ, the most sure, I will lead you back, if I can, to a genuine understanding of your error” (p. 110).⁵³ In her prescriptions, Philosophy continues to employ metaphors of food and medicine. “Now consider the fair lessons of the Holy Doctors, for on such sustenance I intend to feed you as it may penetrate more deeply into your mind than would the force of subtle arguments” (p. 118).⁵⁴

Philosophy declares that Christine’s ailment arises from her incorrectly blaming Fortune for her trials when the source of her adversity is really God.⁵⁵ God gives his children trials in order to strengthen their characters. As Philosophy states, echoing her persona in the *Consolatio*, “Oh blind creature, who attributes to misfortune God’s gifts and His own chalice, from which He gives you drink!...Certainly, most perverted is the

de la mutacion de Fortune and Le Livre de l’advison Cristine,” in Healing the Body Politic: The Political Thought of Christine de Pizan, ed. Karen Green and Constant Mews (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2005), 154.

⁵³ “Et pour ce comme exemples ruraulx soyent aux simples/ cause de plus legierment comprendre les fourmes des choses par celle voye sus fondement de saintte escripture la plus seure/ te ramenray se ie puis a vraye cognoissance de ton tort” (*Lavision*, p. 170).

⁵⁴ “Or regarde les beaulx enseignemens des sains docteurs. Car de tel viande/ te vueil ie repaistre comme elle soit plus penetrant par aventure en ton entendement que force dargumens ne seroit” (*Lavision*, p. 177).

⁵⁵ “Certainly friend, from your speech I perceive how foolish partiality deceives you in the judgment of your own condition...Why do you ungratefully complains of the blessings you have received...Where then is the good sense of your understanding that it knows not what is of use to it?” (*Vision*, p. 110) [Certes amie a tes paroles cognois comment fole faveur te decoipt es iugemens de ton meismes estat...Et pour quoy te plains tu par ingratitude ds biens que as receus...Et ou est doncques le sens de ton entendement qui ne cognoist ce qui lui est profitable] (*Lavision*, p. 169). Philosophy points out that God’s will is recorded in writing (as in Revelation) and is thus immutable, unlike fickle Fortune: “And that which is written in the secret of God...you wish to apply to chance” (*Vision*, p. 111) [Et ce qui est ou descret/ de dieu escript...vuelles appliquer a aventure (*Lavision*, p. 170)].

stomach that receives proper food and digests it to the detriment of its nourishment.”⁵⁶

The purpose of Christine’s “medecine,” then, is to help her recognize that her hardships are not a punishment from Fortune but a blessing from Heaven: “God is a doctor who gives tribulation to the sick sinner as medicine for his salvation not as pain for his damnation. Oh sick sinner, when you receive God’s medicine in tribulation, you grieve, you moan, and cry out to your doctor. He hears you not according to your desire, but He listens to you in regard to your salvation” (p. 113).⁵⁷ The suggestion that God sends Christine trials in order to save her from sin implies that she is a sinner in need of repentance (as are all men). Thus, Christine’s illness is not merely physiological or psychological, but also spiritual. Consequently, a central theme of the text is that she must renounce physical comforts and riches, which she has lamented losing, as these are not blessings but instead punishments.⁵⁸ Christine is reminded that it is the poor and

⁵⁶ “O creature aveuglee qui attribues a male fortune les dons de dieu/ et son propre galice dont il tabeuvre...Et certes moult est perverty lestomach qui propice viande recoipt/ et la convertist damagiablement a sa nourriture” (*Lavision*, p. 169).

⁵⁷ Dieu est un medecin qui au malade pecheur baille tribulacion pour medecine a son salut non pas pour peine de sa dampnacion. O malade pecheur quant tu recoips la medecine de dieu en tribulacion tu te deulx tu te plains et cries a ton medecin il ne te escoute pas a ta voulente. Mais il te escoute a ta sante” (*Lavision*, p. 172). Christine is here quoting from Augustine. Glynnis Cropp explains, “[Christine] must learn that good comes from adversity, a strong line of argument in the *Consolatio* also...God, as doctor, cures the sinner by inflicting tribulation in order to save the sinner, not to condemn, as God cares about the individual’s health, not individual will” (“Philosophy,” 153).

⁵⁸ “A continual succession of temporal good fortunes is not a sign of being loved or chosen by God; rather it is a sign of perpetual damnation...happiness lies not in riches and worldly honors...When one seeks them [the pleasures of the body]...they engender infirmities; and such are the wages of those who put place their purpose there” (*Vision*, pp. 126-27) [continuee succession de temporelle prosperite nest mie signe de ester ame ne esleu de dieu. Ains est signe de pardurable dampnacion...richeces et honneurs mondains nest pas felicite...quant on les quiert [les delices du corps]...ilz engendrent enfermetez/ Et telle est la paie de ceulz qui leur fin y mettent] (*Lavision*, pp. 186-87). Philosophy provides as examples the saints and church fathers who suffered greatly and possessed little, concluding, “You are much more apt to go to heaven on the road of affliction than those fed on rich fare” (*Vision*, p. 120) [si estes vous plus

disabled who are the most blessed because they come closest to emulating the life of Christ,⁵⁹ patience is the only nourishment a person needs, as nature provides enough for everyone.⁶⁰

Philosophy explains that Christine's illness ultimately stems from her lack of self-knowledge, her inability to view her circumstances and life for what they really are. She states, "Thus you most certainly complain without cause, for you do not rightly know what tribulations are, and in this reveal you are a weak, frail, and impatient woman *who little knows herself*" (p. 112, my emphasis).⁶¹ It is thus Philosophy's task to help Christine reach a higher level of self-consciousness; this becomes the goal of her journey. "As you have not entirely traversed the sea of your pilgrimage, I will offer you the

aptes en la voie de tribulacion a aler ou ciel que ceulz qui sont nourriz es grans delices] (*Lavision*, p. 179).

⁵⁹ "Consider what many good people and Christians like yourself can say, who by strange Fortune have lost not only their temporal goods but also their limbs, mangled by long illness and other chance adventures, and in various other cases are tormented in spirit and in their bodies and still with this in such poverty that they do not have their own place or anything with which to cover themselves... They are blessed, just as God Himself says about them and those who are patient [in Matt. 5:3, 9]" (*Vision*, p. 112) [Avises en toy meismes que pevent dire pluseurs bonnes personnes/ et crestiens comme toy qui par estranges fortunes nont pas seulement perdu tous leur biens temporelx mais leurs membres dont sont mahagnez par longue maladie/ et par survenue aventure/ et en autres cas divers tourmentez en esperit ou en leurs corps/ et encore avec ce en tel pouvrete que ilz nont lieu propre ne chose pour eulx couvrir... beneurez sont/ Tout ainsi comme dieu le dist lui meismes dyceulx et des paciens] (*Lavision*, pp. 171-72).

⁶⁰ Philosophy, quoting Cassiodorus, reminds Christine of the bitter cup from which Christ drank: "'We endure,' he says, 'small things. But if we remembered well what a draught for us was drunk on the cross by our Lord, who summons us to him, we have the reason for patience'" (*Vision*, p. 118) [nous endurons dist il petites choses mais sil nous souvenoit bien quell buvrage pour nous but en la croix notre seigneur qui a lui nous appelle nous avons matiere de pacience] (*Lavision*, p. 178). In addition, Philosophy echoes one of the primary messages of *Piers Plowman*: "Nature is sustained with little; he who lives by the necessities of nature is saved and he who lives by the excess of pleasures is lost" (*Vision*, p. 122) [nature est de pou soustenuie qui vit a la neccessite de nature il se sauve / Mais qui vit selon les superfluitez de delices il se pert] (*Lavision*, p. 181).

⁶¹ "ainsi certes te plains sanz cause. Car ne sces adroit qu sont tribulacions/ et en ce monstres que tu es femme tender fresle et pou souffrant qui de pou se scent" (*Lavision*, p. 171).

promised truth on the lesson of your life” (p. 122).⁶² By becoming self-aware and learning to master her own body Christine can be freed of her afflictions.⁶³ The textual treatment Philosophy provides to Christine is thus a mirror Christine can use to better know herself and treat her illness through the application of self-knowledge: “‘Use,’ [Jerome] says, ‘Theology’s lesson in place of a mirror to correct what is ugly in you, and preserve what is beautiful in you, and make yourself more beautiful. For you, Holy Theology, have a mirror that reveals impurities and teaches their purification’” (p. 133).⁶⁴ If Christine is able to view her situation from God’s perspective—revealed to her in the holy texts—she can begin the healing process.⁶⁵ In order to do this, she has to honestly consider the events of her life and the feelings of her heart.⁶⁶ The introspection and self-

⁶² “Mais pource que tu nas pas encore la mer de ton pelerinage toute passee te tendray de promesse verite sus lenseignement de ton vivre” (*Lavision*, p. 181).

⁶³ Philosophy explains that only a body governed by reason is free: “Alas, man, and if you look at your own body, you would find nothing more feeble; for the bite of a dog or a fly if it enters you, it sometimes kills you. And how can you, who are so proud, have power over another if it is not over the body or the affairs of Fortune? But the heart which is free and strong through the guidance of reason, it is not possible for you to move by force” (*Vision*, p. 126) [helas homme et se tu regardes ton corps tu ne trouveras pas plus foible chose. Car le morz de un chien ou une mousche se elle entre dedens toy toccist aucune fois / Et de quoy peus tu qui tant te orgueillis avoir pouvoir sus autre / Ce nest ou corps et es choses de fortune mais a force le cuer qui est franc et fort par le conduit de raison nest mie en toy de mouvoir] (*Lavision*, p. 185).

⁶⁴ “Use dist il de la lecon de theologie en lieu de mirouer pour corriger ce que tu as en toy lait et pour garder ce que tu en toy bel / et te faire plus belle. Car toy saintte theologie as un mirouer qui monstre les ordures et les aprent a nettoyer” (*Lavision*, p. 192). For more on Christine’s use of mirrors, see Rosalind Brown-Grant, “L’Avison Christine: Autobiographical Narrative or Mirror for the Prince?,” in *Politics, Gender and Genre: The Political Thought of Christine de Pizan*, ed. Margaret Brabant (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992), 95-111.

⁶⁵ “Learn how to master yourselves, and then it will not be so burdensome for you to bear tribulations out of love for Him for whom you shall do it” (123) [apprenez a seigneurir vous meismes/ Et adonc ne vous seront tant greves a porter les tribulacions pour lamour de celui pour qui le ferez] (*Lavision*, pp. 182-83).

⁶⁶ Mary Towner writes, “The comfort which Dame Philosophy continues to give to Christine is in short a deeper penetration into the story of our author’s interior life, into the picture of her ascetic nature. It is a summary of her musings with her soul in her struggle with the divine plan, for Dame Philosophy is indeed the voice of her conscience. The colloquy that takes place between the two is a communing of a sorely-tried creature with her God, as she has already

examination that Christine performs within her text is thus a critical aspect of her therapy.

In order to heal, Christine must delve into her inner self. She does this by examining the details of her life and situation through her writing. Claire Le Brun-Gouanvic explains that the complaint form Christine uses is an authorized genre, hearkening back to Augustine's *Confessions*.⁶⁷ Placing the complaint—a form that looks back on the events of one's life—within a dream allows for a deeper form of introspection, for it pairs the work of memory (recalling and considering past events) with the images produced by the body during sleep.⁶⁸ Avicenna wrote that “the images produced during dreams and trances will disappear unless they are associated with images that are already in image storage, already familiar and accessible to recollection.”⁶⁹ Thus, Christine's dreaming memories call up her stored memories and help create a picture of who she truly is.⁷⁰ This process is cemented by recording her memories in writing. Mary Carruthers explains,

The act of bringing memory images together into a single, compositive design is the path to greater, more comprehensive understanding... For Augustine, the pieces brought together in *cogitatio* make a sum greater than its parts. Knowledge

identified the dazzling figure with the Almighty; a colloquy in which grace triumphs over nature and brings the heavily burdened woman to acknowledge that sufferings... are a mark of God's predilection” (“Analysis of L'Avision,” *L'Avision*, 50).

⁶⁷ Le Brun-Gouanvic, “L'écriture médecine,” 14.

⁶⁸ Le Brun-Gouanvic observes, “Il faut de surcroît prendre en compte dans l'analyse le statut textuel de ce fragment autobiographique, son enclassement dans une structure de *visio* qui permet un abandon, une plongée dans les profondeurs des regrets et des reproches inavoués, voire inavouables... La plainte, au-delà des données biographiques de grand intérêt, permet d'observer un effort d'introspection” (“L'écriture médecine,” 14). See also Jean-Philippe Breaulieu, “L'Avision Christine ou la tentation autobiographique,” *Littératures* 18 (1998): 15-30.

⁶⁹ Carruthers, *Book of Memory*, 74-75.

⁷⁰ Compare this to Amant's disordered dreaming, in which memory is “dismembered.”

extends understanding not by adding on more and more pieces, but because as we compose our design becomes more capacious, it dilates. “New” knowledge, what has not been thought, results from this process, for dilation leads ultimately even through the deepest “cavi” of memory to God.⁷¹

Plumbing her memory will lead Christine to new understandings about herself (self-knowledge) and her illness.⁷²

Indeed, Christine’s memory work does lead her to an important insight: it was her hardships that led her back to her studies and writing.

I returned to the life that naturally pleased me the most: that is to say, solitary and tranquil. Then, because of this solitude, there returned to me from the earlier days memorized passages of Latin and the languages of the noble sciences and various learned sayings and polished bits of rhetoric that I had heard in the past...

Although naturally and from my birth I was inclined to this, my occupation with the tasks common to married women and the burden of frequent childbearing had

⁷¹ Carruthers, *Book of Memory*, 1st edition (1998), 199. “Augustine characteristically speaks of this as ‘going through.’ How shall I reach God? he asks. “ I shall pass through [*transibo*] even this power of mine which is called memory; I shall pass through it to reach Thee, sweet Light” (199).

⁷² Carruthers explains that memory was a foundational component of knowledge during the Middle Ages, and writing was considered a supplement or aid to the memory (*Book of Memory*, 16). This is partly because the faculty of memory was associated with ethics and the development of virtue (156). As Christine notes in her gloss, the virtue of the soul, represented by the stars that circle the head of the giant (when he represents individual man) are “understanding, knowledge, memory, and the others” (*Vision*, p. 10) [l’entendement, congnoissance, memoire, et les autres] (*Livre de l’advison*, p. 4). Later, she summarizes Augustine who explains that several trinities exist within each person. One of these, the reasonable trinity, is comprised of memory, understanding, and will. It is thus important to the development of her character and knowledge that her memory increases: “As I persevered in this way for several years, *enlarging my memory*, I was instructed in this lady’s noble power and mastery” (*Vision*, p. 21, my emphasis) [Et comme ainsi ie le continuasse par l’espace de pluseurs ans croissant ma retentive je fus infourmee de la hature poissance et seigneurie] (*Lavisson*, p. 76).

deprived me of it. (p. 102)⁷³

Philosophy points out that if Christine's husband had not died, she would never have had the motivation—nor indeed the time—to take up her scholarly pursuits, the calling to which Nature had ordained her, and she never would have become a writer.⁷⁴ (Note that it was her memory of childhood learning that sparked this renewal of purpose.) Christine is able to produce her own texts precisely because she can draw on her memory. “Nature willed that from my studies and experience there be born new works, and commanded, ‘...I want you to bring forth new books which...will present your memory...throughout the world in all places; these in joy and pleasure you will deliver from your memory.’”⁷⁵ Christine's writing enables her introspection (diagnosis) and helps implement her treatment by organizing her memory and facilitating positive thoughts (consolation).⁷⁶

⁷³ “revins a la vie qui plus naturellement me plaisoit. Cest assavoir solitaire et coye/ adonc par solitude me vindrent au devant les ruminacions du latin et des parleures des belles sciences et diverses sentences et polie rethorique que ouy le temps passe... Car non obstant que naturelement et des ma nativite y fusse encline me toloit y vaquer loccupacion des affaires que ont communement les mariees/ Et aussi la charge de souvent porter enfans” (*Lavision*, p. 161).

⁷⁴ “By your own words, there is no doubt that if your husband had survived until the present, you would have spent less time on your studies; for the household chores would not have allowed it... Then you should not consider yourself wretched when you have among other blessings one of the worldly things that it most delights and pleases you to have, namely, the sweet taste of knowledge” (*Vision*, p. 116) [a ton propos il nest mie doubtte que se ton mary te eust dure uisques a ore/ lestude tant comme tu as ne eusses frequente. Car occupacion de meinsage ne le teust souffert... dont ne te dois tu pas tenir pour meseuree quant tu as entre les autres biens une des choses du monde qui plus te delicte et te plaist/ a avoir. Cest assavoir le doulz goust de science] (*Lavision*, pp. 175-76).

⁷⁵ This translation is a combination of Reno, “Christine's Vision,” p. 17, and McLeod, *Vision*, p. 105. “Ains volt que par legendrement destude et des choses veues nasquissent de moy nouvelles lectures. Adonc me dist... veuil que de toy naiscent nouveaulx volumes lesquieulx... presenteront ta memoire... en toutes places lesquieulx en ioye et delit tu enfanteras de ta memoire” (*Lavision*, pp. 163-64).

⁷⁶ Carruthers states, “Writing is a servant to memory, a book its extension, and like the memory itself, written letters call up the voices of those that are no longer present” (*Book of Memory*, 139). Consequently, composing a book involves bringing together pieces of the memory. “As division is the mode of reading, as Hugh of St. Victor says, so composition—the

Christine recognizes how her writing has already helped her cope with grief and misfortunes:

Fortune had not yet wounded me as much as she might have, if I had not been accompanied by the little muses of the poets. Notwithstanding that you drove them back and chased them away from Boethius' company during the time of his afflictions to nourish him with nobler fare, these led me to compose tearful rhymes lamenting my dead love and the good times past... And likewise to pass the time and attract some gaiety to my sad heart I began to compose amorous and gay poems of other sentiments. (p. 102)⁷⁷

Christine chooses to compose love poems in order to “attract gaiety to [her] sad heart.”

Julie Singer has argued that love lyrics could serve a therapeutic function: “If love (sickness) can lead to the composition of verses, these verses, in turn, can become not only a symptom but also a remedy.”⁷⁸ For Christine, who is suffering from an extreme

‘placing together’ of bits laid away by division—is the mode of text-making, what we call ‘writing.’ The memory bits culled from works read and digested are ruminated into a composition—that is basically what an ‘author’ does with ‘authorities’” (189). Susan Stakel argues that in many ways *L’Advision* completes the work done in *Le Chemin*. In *Le Chemin*, Christine serves a passive, scribal role, delivering Raison’s decision to France, but in *L’Advision* she plays a more active role, and it is her writing that opens the path to healing. Stakel notes, “In *L’Advision* Christine surpasses the scribal function, to become truly an author. Her studies have led her from history to sciences to poetry, and in that final art she feels transformed (“Pilgrimage and Dream-Vision,” 202). Le Brun-Gouanvic argues that Christine “passe de la femme lisant... à la femme écrivant” (“L’écriture médecine,” 19). The therapeutic work of writing parallels the body’s work of digestion, allowing Philosophy to heal Christine’s “stomach of understanding.”

⁷⁷ “encore tant grevee fortune comme elle ne peust/ que ie ne fusse accompagniee des musetes des pouetes non obstant que les reboutas et chacas arriere de la compagnie de boece ou temps de sa tribulacion pour le repaistre de de plus haultes viandes/ ycelles me faisoient rimer complaints plourables regraittant mon ami mort et le bon temps passe... Et meismement pour passer temps Et pour aucune gayete attraire a mon cuer douloureux faire ditz amoureux et gais dautrui sentement” (*L’Advision*, pp. 160-61).

⁷⁸ Singer, *Blindnes and Therapy*, 5. She notes, “The function of lyric as both a symptom of and a cure for illness is perhaps the most overt point of contact between poetry and medicine in

version of love sickness (“lamenting [her] dead love”), composing love poems offers an isopathic, and more effective, treatment for her broken heart.⁷⁹ Consequently, as Singer notes, “Christine clearly acknowledges the role that poetic composition can play in healing—despite her awareness that Boethius had rejected those same poetic muses.”⁸⁰

Le Brun-Gouanvic agrees that in the *L’Advision* writing serves a fundamentally therapeutic purpose: “plus que l’étude et la lecture, c’est l’écriture qui est donnée à voir comme remède au Malheur et comme element unifiant de la personnalité.”⁸¹

the later Middle Ages. According to late medieval convention the state of the poet-narrator’s body conditions his literary output, particularly when the content of that literary production is explicitly medicalized. Not surprisingly, then, the composition of lyric poetry is frequently listed, along with depression and fever, as a symptom of love” (3).

⁷⁹ Christine also follows an isopathic mode of treatment in her *Chemin de long estude* by treating her melancholy caused by excessive studying (and grief) with more studying. See Katie Robison, “‘Thou wolt make . . . thyn hede to ake’: A Post-Chaucerian Treatment for Madness in Christine de Pizan’s *Chemin de long estude*,” *The Chaucer Review* 49 (2014): 184-203.

⁸⁰ Singer, *Blindnes and Therapy*, 130. She writes, “Christine alludes to the manner in which she has sought comfort in the composition of verse: describing rather than illustrating poetry’s therapeutic potential. . . she has written in order to lift her own spirits” (130). Singer judges Christine’s text, which lacks the verse interventions common in the prosimetrum form, to be a less developed healing strategy, “describing, rather than illustrating, poetry’s therapeutic potential” (130). I find, however, that Christine’s prose is just as effective as her poetry for facilitating healing. Tracy Adams argues, “Like Guillaume de Machaut and Jean Froissart, Christine encodes the relationship between self-mastery and effective government in love poetry, containing her poetic dramas of amorous intrigue within a framework of Boethian consolation. There is no easy solution to the disorder at court, as her indecisive love debates suggest. Still, virtue, acceptance of hierarchies, and unstinting love—in other words, Boethian resignation—are the best solution” (*The Fight for France*, 6).

⁸¹ “L’écriture médecine,” 17. At the conclusion of the text, Christine praises Philosophy’s remedy: “Oh most sovereign adminstratress of nourishment and medicinal restorative, who not only heals the invalid wounded by sorrow but gives her life, strength, and vigor by the sweet ointment and liquor of your comfort, you, Philosophy, the repository and substance of all the other sciences, which are your appendages. . . you reveal yourself in the form of Holy Theology to nourish my ignorant spirit most wholesomely for my salvation. . . Have you not served me with your most advantageous and worthy dishes which come from the table of God the Father. . . Lady, what can I say about you and the good that you have done me with the holy foods of your feast, which have satisfied me and led me to know the ignorance of my misunderstanding. . . You are a most rich meat which contains in yourself all delights, just like the manna that rained for the Jews from heaven, which tasted in everyone’s mouth as he or she wished it” (*Vision*, pp. 132-34).

After acknowledging how her writing has helped her, Christine must next recognize how her writing is closely linked to her experience as a woman. To increase Christine's self-knowledge further, "because [she] does not know [her] condition," Philosophy poses an important question.⁸² She asks if Christine would change her situation with anyone else.

So I ask you if you now a man or woman...that you might have willingly changed your simple condition and way of life, the desire that you have and the love and pleasure of study you take and your solitary existence, to possess the care and burden of so many different affairs both of soul and of conscience, or the passion of greed, and all such emotions and even that your feminine and feeble body should be changed to a man's in order to be transformed? (p. 121)⁸³

Philosophy's question refers to Christine's allegorical transformation in her *Mutacion de Fortune* in which she is changed into a man.⁸⁴ Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski notes that

⁸² "Just as the doctor after he has cured his patient gives him a diet to maintain his health and prevent a relapse, so I will give you the rule and way that lead to the true happiness that all human hearts must tend to, for there is no other. And first and foremost, because you do not know your condition, I will ask you a question to make you know it" (p. 121) [tout ainsi comme le bon medecin quant il a cure son maladie lui baille regisme pour preserver sa sante et adfin que il ne renchee te baillera y ordre et voye de estre conduite a la vraye felicite ou tout cuer humain doit tendre comme il nen soit point dautre/ Et premierement pour ce que tu ne cognois ton estat le te fer cognoistre te feray une demande] (*Lavision*, p. 180).

⁸³ "Si te demande se tu cognois homme ou femme...que tu vouldisses avoir changie ton simple estat et maniere de vivre/ la volente que tu as et lamour et delit de estude que tu prens a ta vie solitaire/ pour avoir la cure et charge de tant de devers faisselz/ Et dame de conscience et lardeur de convoitise et tout tel courage comme a le plus eureux et fust meismes converty ton corps foible et femenin en homme pour estre transmuee" (*Lavision*, pp. 180-81). By acknowledging that she would not want to trade places with anyone else, Christine is forced to admit that her situation is not so terrible.

⁸⁴ See *Mutacion de Fortune* I:12, lines 1325-08. For a discussion of Christine's gender change and her evolution as a writer, see Douglas Kelly, "Les Mutations de Christine de Pizan," *Mélanges de philologie médiévale offerts à Marc-René Jung* (Torino: Edizioni dell'Orso, 1996), 599-608, and Miranda Griffin, "Transforming Fortune."

Christine's gender transformation in the *Mutacion* "allows her to become a historian, a role until then reserved for males."⁸⁵ Her work as a historian, which can only be done as man, brings Christine much needed comfort. In *L'Advision*, however, Christine realizes it is fruitless to desire to become a man. Instead, she must accept her feminine nature and the strengths that arise from it. More than that, she must recognize the connection the therapeutic value of her writing has to her gender and the experiences that are unique to women.⁸⁶

By valorizing female experience, Christine reverses the misogynist metaphors employed by Jean de Meun in the *Rose*. Christine's *Nature in L'Advision* instructs Christine,

Take the tools and hammer out on the anvil the material that I will give you, so durable that neither iron nor fire nor anything else will be able to destroy it. So forge pleasant things. When you were carrying the children in your womb, you experienced great pain in order to give birth. Now I want you to bring forth new books...Notwithstanding the pain and labor, just as the woman who has given birth forgets her pain as soon as she hears her child cry, so you will forget the pain of labor on hearing the voice of your books. (p. 105)⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski, "Christine de Pizan and the Political Life in Late Medieval France," in *Christine de Pizan: A Casebook*, 11.

⁸⁶ Maureen Quilligan argues that Christine appropriates the work of male authors and revises that work according to her experience as a woman (*Allegory of Female Authority: Christine de Pizan's "Cité des dames"* [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991]).

⁸⁷ "prens les outiliz et fiers sur lenclume / la matiere que ie te bailleray si durable que fer ne feu ne autre chose ne la pourra despecer si forge choses delictables our temps que tu portois les enfans en ton ventre grant douleur a lenfanter sentoies /. Or veuil que de toy naiscent nouveaulx volumes...non obstant le labour et travail le quel tout ainsi comme la femme qui a

Sylvia Huot and Barbara Newman, among others, have noted how Christine repossesses the reproduction/ composition metaphor (the anvil and hammer) to counteract the misogynist metaphor of male penetration in Jean de Meun and other writers like Alain de Lille.⁸⁸ In so doing, she invokes the “long monastic tradition that contrasted the pains of carnal childbirth with the joys of spiritual motherhood.”⁸⁹ Placing poetic fertility within the realm of female experience and childbirth—a very different sort of bodily writing than that advocated by Jean de Meun—revitalizes the reproductive construct and grants Christine greater authority as a (female) writer.

This image of the nourishing mother also helps fuse together the metaphors of eating and writing in the text (which began with the image of Nature feeding the world in Book One).⁹⁰ Caroline Bynum explains, “Women’s bodies, in the acts of lactation and of giving birth, were analogous both to ordinary food and to the body of Christ, as it died on the cross and gave birth to salvation.”⁹¹ Indeed, in many mystical texts, Christ—the Word—is described as a nursing mother. V.A. Kolve notes, “[Christine] too is called on to conceive a true (or truer) Word, but as a widow and mother.”⁹² The “word” to which

enfante / si tost que ot le cry de lenfant oublie son mal/ oubliera le travail du labour oyant la voix de tes volumes” (*L'Avision*, pp. 163-64).

⁸⁸ See Sylvia Huot, “Seduction and Sublimation: Christine de Pizan, Jean de Meun and Dante,” *Romance Notes* 25 (1985): 361-73, at 366-67, and Barbara Newman, *God and the Goddesses: Vision, Poetry, and Belief in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 122.

⁸⁹ Newman, *God and the Goddesses*, 122.

⁹⁰ Le Brun-Gouavnic states, “Ce qui me paraît quant à moi remarquable dans *L'Avision*, c’est l’unique intrication des réseaux métaphoriques de la maternité, de la nourriture et du livre, sur laquelle Christine fonde sa représentation de la femme écrivain” (“L’écriture médecine,” 17).

⁹¹ Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Holy Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 30. She writes, “Food as a polysemous symbol of suffering and fertility lies at the center of how women thought and how they survived” (93).

⁹² V.A. Kolve, “The Annunciation to Christine: Authorial Empowerment in *The Book of the City of Ladies*,” in *Iconography at the Crossroads: Papers from the Colloquium Sponsored by*

Christine gives birth is also something to be consumed, much like Christ's body. Le Brun-Gouanvic states,

Christine reçoit du père le livre—ou la ‘ruminacion’ du livre—doux comme le miel et en fait profiter les autres par l’écriture. De meme que dans l’histoire des commentaires patristiques, le miel de l’Écriture devient le miel des paroles ou des écrits du commentateur, de même Christine, nourrie de Philosophie, produit à son tour oeuvre ‘delitable’: dans *L’Avision*, le theme du *Doctor mellifluus* croise celui de la mere nourricière.⁹³

By depicting herself as giving birth to nourishing texts, Christine combines the conventionally masculine act of “ruminacion du livre,” which she learned from her father, with the nurturing acts of motherhood, producing a text that can in turn be offered as medicine to her readers.⁹⁴

This metaphor of the nourishing mother is strengthened at the beginning of Book Three, when Christine enters the convent and is instructed by the sacristine to help herself to the treasure trove of knowledge. “She gave me leave to boldly thrust my hand in and

the Index of Christian Art, Princeton University 23-24 March, 1990, ed. Brendan Cassidy (New Jersey: Princeton University, Department of Art and Archeology, 1993), 181.

⁹³ Le Brun-Gouanvic, “L’écriture médecine,” 19.

⁹⁴ Recall that Christine is reminded of “les ruminacions du latin” (p. 116)—memorized passages of Latin—she was taught in her childhood. Study in the Middle Ages emphasized the importance of memorization or *ruminatio*: texts had to be properly digested (Carruthers, *Book of Memory*, 206). Study was primarily a male pursuit, but *ruminatio* was also prescribed for women. “A late *Regula* for women adapted from the writings of St. Jerome makes the connection clear: there should be reading during meals ‘so that while the body is fattened [*saginat*ur] with food, the mind should be filled [*saturet*ur] with reading” (*The Book of Memory*, 166-67). This type of (masculine) textual nourishment is combined with more feminine nourishment in *L’Avision*. Bernard Ribémont takes the opposite stance, arguing that there is a dearth of mother figures in Christine’s corpus in “Christine de Pizan et la figure de la mère,” in *Christine de Pizan 2000: Studies on Christine de Pizan in Honour of Angus J. Kennedy*, ed. John Campbell and Nadia Margolis (Atlanta: Rodopi, 2000), 149-62.

take as much as I might carry from the said treasures of her coffers. And I, not refusing this, eager for enrichment, thanking her, knelt to fill my lap with treasure” (p. 88).⁹⁵ This filling of knowledge is similar to the moment in *Le Chemin* when Christine drinks from the fountain of wisdom.⁹⁶ (Knowledge is referred to multiple times throughout *L’Advision* as a treasure, thus equating the convent’s treasures with the fountain of knowledge—two sources from which Christine “drinks.”⁹⁷) Louise D’Arcens notes that the lap/ womb is the receptacle of knowledge in both *L’Advision* and in *Le Chemin* (line 1021) “where Aristotle is described as having ‘empli son giron’ (filled his breast) [with] the waters of the Fountain of Sapience.”⁹⁸ Similarly, in *La Cité des dames*, Christine’s lap is illuminated with a ray of light that “quicken her (pro)creative power, which is located in her loins.”⁹⁹ D’Arcens states, “The fact that in Christine’s Annunciation, the light falls not on her head, but on her lap, is crucial to her attempt to authorize her text as the product of a female author...in thus altering iconographic tradition Christine

⁹⁵ “me donna congie de hardiement mettre la main et prendre tant comme porter pourroie des tresors de ces coffres/ et ie de ce non reffusant comme convoiteuse de enricher en la mericant me baisse pour mon giron en emplir” (*L’advision*, p.146).

⁹⁶ “So, always studying different subjects, my mind drank in more and more things” (*Vision*, p. 105) [Ainsi tousiours estudiant diverses matieres mon sens de plus simbuoit de choses estranges] (*L’advision*, p. 164).

⁹⁷ Hugh of St. Victor wrote, “Knowledge is a treasury and your heart is its strongbox. As you study all of knowledge, you store up for yourselves good treasures, immortal treasures, incorruptible treasures, which never decay nor lose the beauty of their brightness” (Carruthers, *Book of Memory*, 339). Christine observes that she stood beside the “beautiful fonts of Philosophy” (*Vision*, p.103) [beaulx conduis de philosophie (*L’advision*, p. 161)] when she was young but she was too foolish to take her fill of them. “Ah Fortune, what treasure you stole from me!” (*Vision*, p.103) [ha fortune quel tresor tu me tolis (*L’advision*, p. 162)]. Towner observes, Christine “pushes onward to the threshold of the convent hall where her thirst will be fully sated from the fount of Wisdom” (“Analysis of *L’advision*,” 47).

⁹⁸ Louise D’Arcens, “*Petit estat vesval: Christine de Pizan’s Grieving Body Politic*,” in *Healing the Body Politic*, 212, n. 42.

⁹⁹ D’Arcens, “Grieving Body Politic,” 212.

acknowledges that the body she writes out of has conceived and given birth.”¹⁰⁰ The therapeutic role of study and writing is united with metaphors of ingestion in the figure of Christine as a mother who both nourishes (her textual children) and is nourished (by Philosophy and Nature).

Christine’s gender and her love for knowledge were bestowed on her by Nature. Her femininity is thus an integral part of her work—something she cannot ignore, as she attempted to in the *Mutacion*.¹⁰¹ Indeed, Christine’s experience as a woman, mother, and widow has equipped her in unique ways to be a writer (an insight she has gleaned from her process of introspection). As she states, “Nature willed that from my studies and *experience* there be born new works.”¹⁰² All of her experiences, even the negative ones, have contributed to her knowledge.¹⁰³ This leads her to observe, “There is no greater good in the world... than that which comes from understanding and which perfects it in knowledge, which thing is done by study which teaches science *and the experience of*

¹⁰⁰ D’Arcens, “Grieving Body Politic,” 211.

¹⁰¹ As D’Arcens states, “Christine asserts her creative authority not simply as a woman, but as a woman with an individual history and embodiment” (“Grieving Body Politic,” 212).

¹⁰² Reno, “Christine’s Vision,” p. 17, my emphasis. “Ains volt que par lengendrement destude et des choses veues nasquissent de moy nouvelles lectures” (*Lavision*, pp. 163).

¹⁰³ Philosophy points out, “If you had remained rich, powerful, and without cares, fed on rich fare... you would not have had the experience of knowing the world and cause to hate it so (which God wants), and consequently, you would not have been so wise” (*Vision*, p. 116) [Item se riche et garnie et sans tribulacion fusses demouree/ en delices te fusses nourrie... si neusses mis lexperience de cognoistre le monde/ et cause de tant le hair la quelle chose dieu veult/ et par consequent ne fusses si scavent] (*Lavision*, p. 176). She also argues, “The experience of hardship must benefit you... take heed since they [hardships] are useful to the mind and for the good of your body; to the soul, if you use them well, they are more advantageous” (*Vision*, p. 117) [les espreuves de tribulacion te soient prouffitables... prens garde puis que ainsi est que a lentendement et au bien de ton corps sont valables se a lame/ se bien en as use plus sont prouffitables] (*Lavision*, p. 176).

many things. These two causes make the person wise” (p. 116, my emphasis).¹⁰⁴ By acknowledging that her writings are shaped by her experiences, Christine hearkens back to Aristotle, who argued that knowledge is composed of experience constructed from many memories.¹⁰⁵ Christine’s memories, of her experiences as a woman, thus contribute to her knowledge.

Like many other dream vision writers, Christine’s views on knowledge and experience seem to correlate, at least in part, with the principles of nominalism. She demonstrates that bodily experience is a key component in the search for knowledge, but she notes that experience can also lead to imperfect knowledge. For example, in Book Two, Christine encounters Dame Opinion who prompts men to seek out experiences on which to construct their understanding; however, their findings can often be corrupted.¹⁰⁶ She explains, “I am built on what the imagination tells man—good or bad. So I often produce an erroneous judgment” (p.57).¹⁰⁷ In medieval psychology, the imagination (or fantasy) is a “receptacle for storing and combining images called forth from the *sensus communis* or common sense, [which is] responsible for coordinating the evidence

¹⁰⁴ “Il nest ou monde plus grant bien...que celui qui vient de lentendement et qui le parfait en savoir laquelle chose fait estude qui apprent science/ et experience de moult de choses. Ces deux causes font la personne estre sage” (*Lavision*, p. 175).

¹⁰⁵ Carruthers, *Book of Memory*, 40. Memory is the faculty that presents (or re-presents) experience, the basis upon which moral judgments must be made (85).

¹⁰⁶ Opinion boasts, “I made the first man and woman bite into the apple through my deceitful advice...I caused him to seek out and research the properties of grasses and plants, and I made him learn how to work the land and made him seek out the nature of created things until he learned it all” (*Vision*, p. 55) [Le premier homme et sa femme par mon exort decepvable fis en la pomme mordre...je lui fis querre et encerchier les proprietes des herbes et des plantes/ Et lui apris la maniere des terres coultiver et la nature des choses crees lui fis exprouver tant quil les ataigny] (*Lavision*, p. 112).

¹⁰⁷ “Je suis fondee sur ce que la fantasie raporte a lomme soit mal ou bien/ si fais souvent faulx iugement” (*Lavision*, p. 114).

provided by the five senses.”¹⁰⁸ Because the information gleaned from experience, or the body’s senses, can be warped, the resulting conclusions are not always accurate.¹⁰⁹

This danger is demonstrated in the Universities, where Christine observes the scholars’ many disputations. Each scholar is surrounded by colorful shadows (opinions) that advise him.¹¹⁰ Christine notes that the shadows did not receive their colors inherently. “For outside causes gave them their forms; they had them not of themselves.

¹⁰⁸ Kathryn Lynch, *The High Medieval Dream Vision: Poetry, Philosophy, and Literary Form* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), 28.

¹⁰⁹ Tracy Adams observes, “Because the *Advision* begins by recalling the first lines of Dante’s *Divine Comedy* (‘I had already passed the midpoint of the road of my pilgrimage’) (11), the section devoted to Opinion can be seen, like Purgatory, as a place of passage, where the pilgrim leaves behind the strife of earthly factionalism, in this case between the Orleanists and Burgundians rather than Dante’s Guelphs and Ghibellines, to prepare for a divine vision” (*The Fight for France*, 134).

¹¹⁰ “Lifting my eyes, I saw flying among them a great, feminine, bodiless shadow as if a spiritual thing quite strange in nature. And experience proved that she was preternatural, for this substance I saw as a single shadow, yet more than a hundred thousand million (indeed innumerable) parts—some large, others small, others smaller still—was she creating from herself... The groups were differentiated each from the other by their colors; for by all the colors that have ever existed and more were they differentiated one from the other. There was one great mass all white, others all red, others blue, others the color of fire, others of water, and so on with all the hues... I saw that these groups of shadows flying through the air surrounded all the clerks disputing in the said schools. And before the one who wished to propose his question might speak, one of these shadows would come to whisper in his ear, as if to advise him what to say. Afterwards, when another would wish to respond or reply, another shadow would also come to whisper in his ear. And thus there was no disputant who did not have around his head one, two, three, four, or even more, who were all advising him” (pp. 53-54) [en haulcant mes yeulx avisay volant entre yceulx une grant ombre femmenine sanz corps sicomme chose esperituelle de trop estrange nature/ Et quelle fut merveilleuse lexperience prouvoit. Car celle chose veoye estre une seule ombre./ mais plus de .c^m. millions voire innombrables parties/ les unes grandes les autres mendres autres plus petites de soy elle faisoit... Si estoient ces tourbes separees les unes des autres ainsi comme les couleurs delles/ se differoient car de toutes les couleurs qui oncques furent et de plus que oncques nen fu estoient differenciees les unes des autres. Car une grant tourbe en y avoit de toutes blanches/ une autre de toutes vermeilles/ les autres indes/ autres de couleur de feu/ autres dyaue/ et ainsi de toutes les couleurs... Dycelles tourbes dombres qui par lair vouloient ie veoie tous environnez les clers disputans es dittes escoles/ et avant que cellui qui vouloit proposer sa question parlast. une de ses ombres lui venoit sacouter a loreille comme selle lui conseillast ce quil devoit dire/ Et apres quant lautre vouloit respondre ou repliquier une autre ombre lui aloit semblament sacouter. et ainsi ny avoit la nul arguant qui neust au tour de son chief. ou une ou .ii. ou .iii. ou quatre ou plus grant quantitie qui toutes le conseilloyent] (*Lavisio*n, pp. 109-10).

They had to be colored—they were not otherwise” (p. 55).¹¹¹ The colors of the scholars’ thoughts, then, are derived from their own preconceptions based on personal experience. Their experience informs their opinions. But their opinions are also the “cause of their discords and debates, which would sometimes grow so greatly among them that they made the hot-natured ones come *de verbis a verbera* [from words to blows]” (p. 54).¹¹² Their knowledge, then, born of faulty experience, is imperfect, tending toward conflict rather than harmony.

This episode at the beginning of Book Two is put in contrast with the beginning of Book Three, when Christine “drinks” from the treasure trove at the convent. This treasure, pure knowledge, harmoniously encompasses all of the colors of the rainbow and exists independently of her own opinions; it is something that the masters teach to their students and for which she must strive. This objective nature of knowledge suggests that Christine was not a committed nominalist.¹¹³ For her, universal truths do exist, but the best way to access these truths is through physical effort and individual experience.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ “Car estranges causes leur donnoient leurs fourmes non mie delles maismes les avoient/ coulourees convenoit que elles fussent autrement point ne fussent” (*Lavision*, p. 111).

¹¹² “ycelles ombres fussent cause de leurs discors. et debas qui aucune fois tant mouleplioit entre eulx que de telz de chaude cole y avoit faisoient venir *de verbis ad verbera*” (*Lavision*, pp. 110-11).

¹¹³ In this regard, Christine seems to side somewhat with Macrobius, on whose *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio* (I.12.9) she modeled her Dame Opinion. Macrobius, acknowledging Plato, writes, “Although the truth is not evident to all on earth, all nevertheless have an opinion, since opinion is born of failure of the memory” (*Commentary on the Dream of Scipio by Macrobius*, trans. William Harris Stahl [New York: Columbia University Press, 1990], 135). Macrobius espouses a realist position, namely that truth exists independent of individual thought, not as a result of it, and that in mankind’s postlapsarian state, we have merely forgotten Truth. He states, “That is why in Greek the word for reading means ‘knowledge regained’: when we are learning the truth we are relearning those things that we naturally knew before the influx of matter intoxicated our souls as they approached their bodies” (135).

¹¹⁴ Thus, Christine encourages her readers to be steadfast in the “pain and labor of learning” (*Vision*, p.103) [la peine et labour de apprendre (*Lavision*, p. 162)]. Tracy Adams

This includes the experience of study. Carruthers explains, “Character indeed results from one’s experiences, but that includes the experiences of others... ‘What I read in a book’ *is* ‘my experience,’ and I make it mine by incorporating it (and we should understand the word ‘incorporate’ quite literally) in my memory.”¹¹⁵

Because Christine’s “medicine” (her education and poetry) emphasizes personal experience, it is necessarily self-directed. Cropp states that Christine’s remedy differs from Boethius because Boethius “was by virtue of his education, public life and patrician status, a different patient from Christine whose education has been private and self-determined and whose experience was personal.”¹¹⁶ Singer identifies this self-prescribed quality in the ballad Christine inserts into her prose. “Coming immediately after Christine’s pitiable (and self-pitying) autobiography, this poem, with its opening verse ‘*Helas ou donc trouveront reconfort*’ (Alas, where, then, will they find consolation), takes on the appearance of an attempt at home remedy.”¹¹⁷

Christine’s remedy *is* self-administered, but this does not mean that her “home

argues, “Opinion, then, encompasses the truth that Boethius possesses through faith, but because Opinion can be wrong, the figure also represents the false ideas of those misled by their passions... In a political work like the *Advison*, opinion is particularly problematical: France’s problems are the result of the quarrel between two factions both convinced of the rightness of their cause. Surely, one is right, but which one is not easily known on earth. This is why Christine works so hard to convince her reader that she herself has been through a process by which she has been freed of the obscuring shadows of the passions” (*The Fight for France*, 136). One of Christine’s sources for Opinion was Thomas Aquinas’s commentary on the *Metaphysics*, in which he links theology and philosophy as the purest science. “This science [theology-philosophy] is the one that, first, considers first causes; second, comprehends universals rather than particulars, accessible through the senses... and third; comprehends not only things that are abstractable from matter but things that are separate altogether from matter” (Adams, *The Fight for France*, 136).

¹¹⁵ Carruthers, *Book of Memory*, 211.

¹¹⁶ Cropp, “Philosophy,” 153.

¹¹⁷ Singer, *Blindness and Therapy*, 130.

remedy” is inferior to treatments offered by experts.¹¹⁸ Indeed, her treatment is successful enough that she feels confident offering it as a model for others threatened with similar self-division.¹¹⁹ As she states through the voice of Philosophy, “As illness gave you your opinion, medicine was necessary whatever caused it. But so that my remedy may be of use to some of your friends who are similarly afflicted as well as other simple or ignorant people in the Christian community to whose understanding this will come, the remedy advantageous to the cure of such a disease will not be denied you by me” (p. 118).¹²⁰

Christine’s remedy is meant to be of use to her friends and neighbors. Recall that Nature commanded Christine to bring forth “new books which in the time come and perpetually to the world will present your memory before the worldly princes and throughout the world in all places” (p. 105). Christine’s memories, then, can be helpful to any and all of her readers—even the leaders of the state. The text illustrates this more explicitly when the embodied kingdom of France, Libera, receives the same treatment.

¹¹⁸ Even though Philosophy dictates the treatments to “Cristine,” Christine the author is the one giving voice to Philosophy. Christine thus defines her own treatment, diffused through the lens of allegory and dream vision.

¹¹⁹ “nouveaulx volumes lesqueulx le temps avenir et perpetuelment au monde presenteront ta memoire devant les princes et par lumiers en toutes places” (*Lavision*, pp. 163-64). Glenda McLeod observes, “In making this journey from scribe to author, the narrator also traces an itinerary from fragmentation to integration with obvious applications for a society riven by civil strife” (“Interpretive Essay,” *The Vision of Christine de Pizan*, ed. Glenda McLeod and Charity Cannon Willard [Rochester, NY: D.S. Brewer, 2005], 141). She notes, “The *Vision* seems intended for a public audience...A single, firm and positive voice proposes a solution to Christine’s dilemma” (140). Stakel concurs, “[Christine] will bridge the gap between individual and community by offering her own journey as an exemplum for all those who would ameliorate self and society. She has successfully made her own pilgrimage; now she will be a guide for others” (“Pilgrimage and Dream-Vision,” 202).

¹²⁰ “car se toy meismes ne ty reputasses ne le fusses mie/ dont puis que maladie ta meismes reputation te donnoit medecine. Il convient a quelque cause que le mal soit venue. Mais a celle fin que a de tes amies ou amis semblablemtn enformez/ ou a dautres simples ou ignorans du colliege crestien a qui ce venra a cognoissance puisse mon remede estre valable le regisme prouffitable a garison de tel maladie ne te sera par moy vee” (*Lavision*, pp. 177-78).

France's Treatment

Christine is unequivocal in her text that her remedy can be applied to her readers and, by extension, the state of France. She demonstrates this in three ways: (1) her allusions to prophecy, (2) her use of allegory, and (3) the parallels between Libera and herself. Through these devices, *L'Advison-Christine* makes the case that if each individual, as an important member of the body politic, were to "heal" themselves of their spiritual and intellectual illnesses (which can affect their physical health) then the body politic as a whole would be also be healed.

The health of the body politic was a pressing concern for Christine, writing on the threshold of the Armagnac-Burgundian war. After King Charles VI's bouts of madness threatened his ability to reign, a feud erupted between the House of Orléans—those who supported Louis I, Duke of Orléans—and the House of Burgundy—those who supported Philip the Bold, Duke of Burgundy—over who should control the throne.¹²¹ The quarrel took a deadly turn when Jean of Burgundy succeeded his father and threatened the city of Paris in 1405. (Two years later, he would have Louis assassinated.) This conflict, which would eventually turn into civil war, occurred while France was already engaged in the Hundred Years' War against England and in the midst of the wars surrounding the Papal Schism.

Thus, when Christine wrote *L'Advison*, in 1405-06, she did so with a particular urgency. The nation was collapsing before her eyes, and it was with the intent of ending

¹²¹ The struggle was compounded by "the conviction that the king was divinely ordained, coupled with the fiction that he was in control when he appeared lucid, maintained through a series of royal ordinances that treated his mental illness as temporary 'absences,' [which] prevented his deposition and the installation of a permanent regent" (Adams, *The Fight for France*, 5-6).

the conflict that she took to her pen—a task she had to negotiate with the utmost care, for although she sided with the Orléanists, she still wrote under the patronage of Philip of Burgundy.¹²² Tracy Adams explains, “Christine intended her interventions in the conflict to produce effects...As the situation between the dukes worsened, Christine sought for a time to augment the queen’s authority, promoting Isabeau as the face of the regency while continuing to create authority for Louis as its force.”¹²³

Early in *L’Advision*, Christine makes it clear that her words are intended to serve as a remedy for her readers and, by extension, the kingdom of France. She does this first by casting her text in terms of prophecy. Like William Langland and Guillaume de Lorris, Christine compares her “merveilleuse avision” (*L’advision*, p. 73) (which she also labels a “songe” [p. 73]) to the dreams of famous individuals: “An amazing vision overcame me in the sign of a strange prophecy; even though I am hardly Nebuchadnezzar, Scipio, or Joseph, the secrets of the Almighty are not denied the truly simple” (*Vision*, p. 18).¹²⁴ By calling her dream prophetic, Christine establishes a parallel between her vision and the prophecies of John, which warn “of the plagues to come in the world, both in the kingdom of France and elsewhere, because of sins rampant there,

¹²² Adams writes, “Christine herself promoted the Valois monarch as a single figure aided by a diverse group of counselors, a system that she believed was threatened by the Burgundians. For her, Charles V had been the guarantor of an ideally ordered society, protecting the throne against challenges from Charles of Navarre and Edward III of England while consolidating power in ongoing negotiations with the great lords of the kingdom. For counsel, he had relied on a close group of minor or even nonnoble advisors, and he had kept his brothers, the dukes of Anjou, Berry, and Burgundy, under control by assigning them appanages over which he retained ultimate control, as Françoise Autrand has shown. Embedded in this experience, Christine would have seen Louis of Orleans—who as son of the previous king and brother of the present outranked his uncle—as the only possible regent during the absences of Charles VI” (5).

¹²³ Adams, *The Fight for France*, 4.

¹²⁴ “me survenist merveilleuse avision en signed estrange presage. Tout ne soye mi nabugodonozor scipion ne joseph ne sont point veez les secrez du treshault aux bien simples” (*L’advision*, p. 73).

which is to say because of the pride of the rich and powerful, and the lasciviousness, fraud, avarice, and lack of faith in the world” (p. 16-17, also mentioned at p. 56).¹²⁵ In its condemnation of the kingdom’s sins (i.e. the rich who give no thought to the needy poor) and its state of political division, Christine’s text follows the example of other dream visions (and biblical prophecies) that loudly diagnose the diseases of society—diseases to which her writings can minister. Her opening words prepare us for her text’s project and, in particular, instruct us to follow her progress as a writer; for, it is her writing that can provide healing to society, as it did for herself.¹²⁶ As Adams states, “In the *Advision* the narrator’s autobiography serves as a lens through which to focus the conflict. Because Christine, like Boethius, is consoled by philosophy, her vision unclouded by false opinion, she is in a position to act as the conscience of the kingdom.”¹²⁷

¹²⁵ “des pestillences a avenir au monde tant au royaume de France comme autre part par les pechez qui y cueurent, c’est asavoir par l’orgueil des riches et puissans, et par la luxure, fraude, convoitise et faulte de foy qui est au monde” (*Livre de l’advision*, p. 10). For the other reference to John, see *Lavisio* p. 113.

¹²⁶ By mentioning Nebuchadnezzar, Scipio, and Joseph—and by mentioning the rhetorical figure of antiphrasis in her preface (p. 16)—Christine also points to the organization her text will follow. Glenda McLeod argues that each of Christine’s three books corresponds to these figures, providing “a general, over-arching insight into both the narrator’s evolution as a writer/ thinker and an understanding of what medieval commentators would call Christine’s *modus tractandi* or mode of proceeding” (“Interpretive Essay,” *Vision*, 139). Christine moves from discussing royal politics “in the voice of an apocalyptic prophet,” like Daniel in Book One. In Book Two, she takes on the role of a scholarly commentator like Macrobius, and in Book Three she provides a personal tale of suffering, like Jacob, and “redemption [is] applied to the broader problems of the sufferer’s people” (139). McLeod states, “This tri-partite identification by opposites, consistent with allegorical form, invites us to ponder exactly who and what the narrator is. If she is not Nebuchadnezzar, Scipio, or Joseph, who are the models? Following the statement antiphrastically, that is by seeking the opposites of these characters in their respective texts, we can arrive at three fruitful possibilities: not the mad King Nebuchadnezzar but his courtier and advisor, the prophet Daniel; not the author and political exile Scipio but his scholarly and philosophic commentator Macrobius; and finally not the son Joseph, whose life and dreams divided his family, but the father Jacob, whose dreams and experiences laid the foundation for Israel’s national identity” (“Interpretive Essay,” *Vision*, 138).

¹²⁷ Adams, *The Fight for France*, 8. See also Adams, 139.

A second way Christine makes her aims clear is through her use of allegory, which she outlines in her *Glose*.¹²⁸ The layering of meanings inherent in allegory is central to Christine's project, for the spiritual and physical healing that her persona experiences can also be applied to the body politic of France and even to the world.¹²⁹ The giant, for example, can signify the whole world (heaven, earth, and the abyss) as well as each individual, since "man [is] the image of the microcosm" (*Vision*, p. 10) [some [est] ymage de petit monde] (*Livre de l'advison*, p. 4).¹³⁰ As another example, Christine's "birth" and her development within Chaos's belly can also be interpreted, according to the gloss, as each man's moral progression as well as the growth of faith in France.¹³¹

¹²⁸ Christine writes, "Poetry is beautiful and subtle when it can present several meanings and when one can take it different ways" (*Vision*, p. 11) [lors est la poisie belle et soubtille quant elle puet servir a plusieurs ententes et que on la puet prendre a divers propos] (*Livre de l'advison*, p.3).

¹²⁹ As she states, "The fiction of this book can be allegorized in three ways, that is to say, applied to the general world, which is the earth, also to the individual man, and then to the realm of France" (p. 12) [la fiction de cestui livre se puet alegorisier triblement, c'est assavoir assimiller au monde general, qui est la terre, aussi a homme simgulier et puis au royaume de France] (*Livre de l'advison*, p. 6). The giant, who represents the state, is afflicted with the kingdom's pains, just as Christine is: "Sometimes he bears a sorrowful countenance; this indicates the tribulations that he frequently experiences" (*Vision*, p. 11) [Par fois il fait chere doulereuse, ce sont les tribulacions que souvent sent] (*Livre de l'advison*, p. 4). D'Arcens argues, "It is apparent from her writings that Christine clearly regards France's fate and her own as intertwined" ("Grieving Body Politic," 226).

¹³⁰ Christine notes that his name, Chaos, means the beginning—that mass from which God made heaven, earth, and all things—as well as the confusion that still reigns in the world (*Vision*, p. 10). In this sense, his mouth or first opening can represent the birth of all corporeal things, and his second opening, the death of all living creatures. His head, which reaches heaven, represents man's spirit; his belly represents the physical operations necessary to life; and his feet, placed in the depths, represent death. Finally, the giant can also stand for the kingdom of France, "which is large and forms a single body" (p. 11) [lequel est grant et n'est que ung corps] (*Livre de l'advison*, p. 4).

¹³¹ "Likewise, it can represent sinful man when he is drawn from the ignorance of sin to penitence by the voice of the Holy Scriptures or by the blessed sermons and thereafter arrives at the perfect life" (p. 13) [Item, puet segnefier l'omme pecheur quant il se tire de l'ingnorence de

Liliane Dulac and Christine Reno find that Christine's emphasis on a "political interpretation within an allegorical schema is unusual for the period" and that Christine's glosses often conflate her own life with the French nation.¹³² I would argue, however, that Christine's conflation of her persona and the body politic of France is intentional and indeed key to her *modus tractandi*: the progress that Christine makes can be applied to her readers, to her country, and even to the world.¹³³ This is one reason, I contend, that scholars have noted a predominance of political theory in Christine's text. The cure she advocates can, and should, extend from individuals to nations, and it is her allegorical frame that binds these interpretations together.¹³⁴

Christine's allegory grows less nebulous when she gets to the figure of Libera.¹³⁵ Many critics have commented on Christine's political writings and her depictions of a specifically feminized body politic.¹³⁶ But in *L'Advision* Christine moves beyond the

pechié a penitence par la vois des saintes Escriptions ou par saintes predicacions, et puis vient vie de perfection] (*Livre de l'advision*, p. 6).

¹³² Liliane Dulac and Christine Reno, "The *Livre de l'advision Cristine*," in *Christine de Pizan: A Casebook*, 206.

¹³³ I agree with Andrea Tarnowski, who writes, "Using the narrative to trace only the contours of Christine's individual voyage through life...in the end obscures much of its import" ("Perspectives on the *Advision*," *Christine de Pizan 2000*, 105-114).

¹³⁴ Tarnowski argues, "For Christine, allegory is a principle as well as literary technique. It invites serial interpretations while binding them together; it demands movement from the particular cause to its universal import. The author's task consists in forging rhetoric to describe the unity-in-plurality that allegory supposes" ("Perspectives," 105). She contends, "It is allegory that spans the distance between the different results that critics have offered" (109).

¹³⁵ Just as an individual's illness reflects France's, Libera's sickness "can refer to the individual man" (*Vision*, p. 16) [puet ramener a homme singulierement] (*Livre de l'advision*, p.9) as well as "the tribulations of the human body and even the spirit" (*Vision*, p. 15) [les tribulacions qui sont en corps humain et mesmement en esperit] (*Livre*, p. 9).

¹³⁶ The collection of essays entitled *Healing the Body Politic: The Political Thought of Christine de Pizan*, edited by Karen Green and Constant Mews (2005), is dedicated to this very topic. In one of the essays, Cary J. Nederman explains that the body politic was an "organic metaphor [that] functioned...as a cipher for a conception of ordered power that derived 'from above' and implied modes of strict subordination and rule" ("The Living Body Politic: The

metaphor of the body politic (in which each member of society forms a part of the country's "body"¹³⁷) to a "literal" body: the crowned princess Libera. In order to argue that France is sick and will benefit from her literary medicine, Christine draws multiple parallels between "Cristine's" body and Libera's body.¹³⁸

First, like Christine, France is both unwell and in mourning. Libera states, "I am suffering from a serious illness, incurable if the medicine comes not by the grace of God" (p.36).¹³⁹ Libera's condition is physically visible:

I saw then this princess entirely covered in tears, and her beautiful face, usually

Diversification of Organic Metaphors in Nicole Oresme and Christine de Pizan," 20). Nederman observes that "Christine de Pizan was the only political author of medieval or early modern Europe who designed an entire book—the *Livre de corps de policie* (1406)—around the theme of the body politic" (19), a metaphor she tried to divest of its hierocratic overtones. Tsae Lan Lee Dow argues that Christine uses a feminine body politic to present women as useful and active members of the community; it is the "happy marriage" of the masculine and feminine bodies politic that allows for a united and harmonious France ("Christine de Pizan and the Body Politic," 227-43). And Louise D'Arcens argues that Christine uses an alternative, feminized body politic to establish her authority as a female author ("Grieving Body Politic," 201-226). See also Kate Langdon Forhan, *The Political Theory of Christine de Pizan* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2002), Ch.3.

¹³⁷ This metaphor is derived ultimately from Paul's epistle to the Corinthians in which he compares the members of the church to the parts of a body which must work together (1 Corinthians 12:12-26.)

¹³⁸ Adams writes, "The first part of the *Advison* deals with the chaotic state of France, represented by the miserable Libera, whom the poet leaves in distress at the end of the section; the distress of this section is mirrored by the turbulent state of Christine's own life in the work's third section, which is resolved by Philosophy, whom the poet finally recognizes as Theology...A number of unmistakable references connects parts 1 and 3: the despairing Libera of part 1 and the plaintive narrator Christine of part 3 (both characters come from foreign lands to settle in France, both are widows, both are devastated by the death of Charles V, both believe that their tribulations were caused by Fortune, and, as I will suggest here, both suffer when Philip of Burgundy, despite the careful arrangements of Charles V's regency orders, seizes control of the kingdom)...It is with reference to this science [Theology-Philosophy], I believe, [that] Christine links France to her private tribulations: both the kingdom and Christine manifest particular disruptions caused by a more abstract, or universal, transgression" (133, 137). Le Brun-Gouanvic notes, "Les ressemblances entre la dame et Christine, toutes deux veuves et 'adoulées,' sont appuyées" ("L'écriture médecine," 11).

¹³⁹ "[ie] suis dolente d'une grievve maladie comme incurable se de dieu par sa grace ne vient la medecine" (*L'avison*, p.91).

fresh and blooming, was pale and gloomy... The venerable princess then raised part of her gown and showed me her naked sides, saying, "Behold." Then my gaze turned in that direction; I saw the white and tender sides blackened and beaten by the force and trampling of the crowds and collapsed in places as far as the entrails not cut by the blow of the sword. (p. 31)¹⁴⁰

France has been injured and sickened by the discord and conflict among her people. As she laments,

What greater perplexity can visit the heart of a mother than to see anger and strife engendered and continued to the point that arms of war are taken up and seized by alliances among her own legitimate children of loyal fathers, whose crimes mount so that they ignore the grief of their poor mother... and release the multitude of their alliances upon her until they break and mangle her completely. (p. 30)¹⁴¹

Like Christine, Libera is a mother, and her dismay over the discord in France is similar to Christine's concerns about the unjust and chaotic state of the world.¹⁴² Because chaos is a

¹⁴⁰ "Adonc ycelle princee je vi toute covrir de larmes/ et sa belle chiere qui estre souloit fresche et couluree toute destainte et noircie... Adonc la tres venerable princesse haulce le pan de sa vesteure et a moy descuevre le nu de ses costez disant regarde/ lors me veue tournee celle part comme iavisasse les costez blans et tendres par force de presse et de desfoulement noircis et betez et par lieux encavez aucques iusques aux entrailles non mie trenchez de cops despee" (*Lavision*, p. 86).

¹⁴¹ "Quelle plus grant perplexite peut venir ou cuer de mere que veoir yre et contens naistre et continuer iusques au point darmes de guerre prendre et saisir par assemblees entre ses propres enfans legittimes et de loyaulx peres/ et a tant monter leur felonnie quilz nayent regart a la desolacion de leur povvre mere... Ains laissant aler la foule de leurs assemblees sur elle tant que toute la debrisent/ et mahangnent" (*Lavision*, pp. 85-86).

¹⁴² As part of Christine's allegorically layered project, France is a reflection of not just Christine but also the giant Chaos, who is also unwell from the moral failings of the world: "Nothing about the statue was ill-favored, but at times he would appear sad, melancholy, and sorrowful, just like a man who feels various passions and pains throughout the many parts of his body, because of which, he uttered great moans and various cries of lamentation to God" (*Vision*, p. 19) [En ceste statue navoit riens de diffourme. Excepte que par fois faisoit chiere triste adoulee

source of Libera's illness, her situation would seem to be without cure. Consequently, Libera bemoans, "What is most distressing to me is the fear of worse—that without medicine, my wounds may become ulcerated and incurable" (p. 32).¹⁴³

But there is more to France's injuries/ disease than discord and political strife. "The illness lies in yet another area, dear friend. For since it resembles not this sadness that holds the heart in bitter thought, it remains to tell you of the height of my woes" (p. 32).¹⁴⁴ She explains that the country has fallen into moral decrepitude because of a plague of sin, not unlike the "pestilence" that afflicted Christine. She states that the plague is widespread throughout my land, and especially more among the great than the small...A subtle wind blows around and near here...so poisonous that all attacked by it become swollen and distended...This plague is so widespread, which is worse than an epidemic, that it is a great pity!...Such a quality has this swelling that it changes the gaze, countenance, and speech and makes the person contemptuous, exceedingly irritable, and malicious; and for many it drives them to a cruel death without escape. This scourge is so common, no less than those of Egypt in my realm, that the great, middle, and low, all the way down to the earthworms, are commonly infected by it. (p.36)¹⁴⁵

et plourable Tout ainsi comme homme qui par diverses parties de son corps sent et sueffre diverses passion et douleurs pour la quel chose gettoit grans plains/ et a dieu lamentacions par divers cris] (*Lavision*, p. 74).

¹⁴³ "Et qui plus mest grief cest la paour de pis/ et que mes plaies par faulte de remede soient converties comme infistulees et incurables" (*Lavision*, p. 87).

¹⁴⁴ "Encore autre part gist la maladie amie chere car comme il ne soit a celle douleur pareille qui le cuer tient en amere pensee reste a te dire les comble de mes souffraittes" (*Lavision*, p. 87).

¹⁴⁵ "qui est commune par toute ma terre. Et par especial plus que es petis entre les plus grans...un soubtil vent...cy environ court et pres de cy/ lequel est tant envenimes que toute

Libera shows Christine how Dames Reason, Justice, and Chivalry have been imprisoned and overcome by vices, much like Libera herself: “Lying pale and gloomy on a bed, I saw another lady of great authority with the countenance and appearance of a sick and infirm woman, a trampled and broken thing” (p. 33).¹⁴⁶ Similar to the way the false friar put Conscience to sleep with his draught in *Piers Plowman*, Chivalry has been lulled to sleep by Lust: “The foolish woman would once again put her to sleep with her song” (p. 34).¹⁴⁷ And Reason, with her “large, very bright mirror” (*Vision*, p. 34) [grant mirouer tres cler] (*Lavision*, p. 88), a symbol of self-knowledge, is locked away from view. Consequently, the vices run rampant, and the citizens of France are blind to their true condition.

personne qui ferus en est devient gros et enfles... Si est si comme cest pestillence qui pis valt quepidimie par toute ma terre que cest grant pitie... Tel propriete a celle enfleure quelle change regart contenance et parole et la personne rend desdaigneuse et trop despite et tant engrige souvent avient en maint en ya que elle a trop cruelle mort et sanz respit les conduit. Si est tant commune ceste plaie non mendre que celles degipte en mon royaume que grans moyens et petiz iusques aux vermissiaux de terre communement en sont frapez” (*Lavision*, pp. 91-92). Libera’s description of the plague that ravishes her country, like the biblical plagues in Egypt, further situates Christine’s vision in the prophetic tradition, as does her subsequent mentioning of Daniel: “In regard to the swelling of this malady that ravages my land and the ensuing misfortune where it makes its way, the prophet Daniel recites in the third chapter the vision that the proud King Nebuchadnezzar once saw. It says he saw a tree so tall, large, and lofty, that it reached all the way to the sky; it had so many branches that they extended on every side of the world. All earthly creatures alike were filled by the great abundance of the fruit of this tree... The abundance of fruit from this tree is that detestable, contagious plague which is widespread to all. This prophecy signifies that aforesaid infirmity” (*Vision*, pp. 36-37) [De lanfleure de ceste maladie qui ainsi court parmi ma terre et de linconvenient ou elle tire et quil sens ensuivra recite le prophete daniel ou .iii^e. chapitre lavision que vid iadis lorguillex roy nabugodonozor il veoit ce dit un arbre qui tant estoit hault grant et esleve que iusques au ciel ataignoit si branchu estoit que ses branches sestendoient de tous les du monde de la grant plante du fruit de cel arbre estoit remplie communement toute mondaine creature... labondance du fruit de cel arbre/ Cest ycelle detestable contagieuse maladie qui communement est en toute gent. Ceste prophecie segnefia la ditte enfermete] (*Lavision*, p. 92)]. The impending madness of Nebuchadnezzar has obvious parallels to the madness that afflicts Charles VI.

¹⁴⁶ “En un lit couchee pale et descouloree vi une autre dame de grant autorite a chiere et semblant de femme malade et enferme comme chose deffoulee et desroupte” (*Lavision*, p. 88).

¹⁴⁷ “la fole de rechief par son chant lendormoit revenoit” (*Lavision*, p. 89).

Throughout *L'Advision*, the embodiment of virtue and knowledge has been signalled through the presence of bright and harmonious colors.¹⁴⁸ Philosophy is exceedingly bright and contains within her domain all of the world's colors (in contrast with the ever-changing colors of the shadowy Opinion). The highest room in the convent is covered in colorful murals, and the giant Chaos is clothed in a *dyapree* and radiates light (from his eyes to his entrails).¹⁴⁹ Gold especially is used to indicate nobility and knowledge.¹⁵⁰ Christine even concludes her text by comparing it (and the study of it) to three precious stones, the third being a "bright, radiant, and unclouded" ruby (p. 134).¹⁵¹ However, in this moment, when the virtues are sick and imprisoned, they are described as being "descoulouree" and dim. This is another indication that the people of France lack self-knowledge and are in need of healing.¹⁵²

The solution for Libera is the same as it was for Christine: introspection through the work of memory.¹⁵³ Thus, Libera instructs Christine, "Friend, to whom God and Nature have conceded the gift of a love of study far beyond the common lot of woman,

¹⁴⁸ Dulac and Reno note, "L'image de la lumière [est] très présente à chacune des étapes parcourues par Christine, marque clairement la continuité d'un progrès" ("Introduction," *Le Livre de l'advision*, xx).

¹⁴⁹ This is a silk cloth ornately decorated with flowers and arabesques, usually woven in a gold thread and characterized by a shimmering quality. Similar descriptions are used by Boethius, St. Augustine, and Alain de Lille (*Vision*, p. 19, note 3). Amour, in *Le Roman de le Rose*, was also dressed in a richly decorated and colorful garment.

¹⁵⁰ As we will see shortly, Libera is a golden plant descended from the Golden Age. Gold is also the color assigned to theology in the passage about Dame Opinion, underscoring the connection between true knowledge and color.

¹⁵¹ "cler et resplandissant et sans nue obscure" (*L'advision*, p. 193).

¹⁵² There are parallels to the crystal's deceptive rhetorical colors in the *Rose* and to Chaucer's "colors of rhetoric" in his *House of Fame* in Chapter Five.

¹⁵³ Christine asks Libera to remember the events that led her to this illness: "so that in speaking you might forget your troubles, please explain to me the chain of causes for these dissensions" (*Vision*, p. 32) [afin que entente de parler vous entre oublie que descouvrir me vueilliez les encloueurs des causes de ces zezanies (*L'advision*, p. 87)].

prepare parchment, quill, and ink, and write the words issuing from my breast ... [and] *present the written memories of my dignity*" (p. 22, my emphasis).¹⁵⁴ For each woman, the healing process begins with self-examination, recalling the origin and journey of her life and the source of the sorrows that plague her.

Libera uses the metaphor of a plant to describe her history, explaining that she is descended from a golden tree planted in Troy, which was overrun by the Greeks and nearly destroyed.¹⁵⁵ "One shoot among others from the crown of this golden tree was carried to this land, which they planted in fertile soil in a noble orchard. This plant grew until I took my name from its beauty and was called Libera. Thereafter, through proliferation through cultivation, this noble shoot continually grew and increased always with great dignity" (p. 23).¹⁵⁶ With this history, Libera places her origins firmly in the Golden Age. Christine notes in her gloss, "The earth begins its plaint with its earliest deeds, which is to say since the age which is called the Golden Age, when people lived freely and without avarice, and then how this time ended when people became covetous

¹⁵⁴ "amie a qui dieu et nature ont concede oultre le commun ordre des femmes le don damour destude/ aprestre parchemin ancre et plume et escripts les paroles yssans de ma poitrine...[et] present des memoires escriptes de ma dignete" (*L'Avision*, p. 77). Several scholars have pointed to this moment as evidence that Christine's work belongs to the *Miroir des princes* genre. Le Brun-Gouanvic writes, "C'est à ce moment que la fonction de Miroir du prince de *L'Avision* est la plus explicite" ("L'écriture-médecine," 12). Rosalind Brown-Grant argues, "*L'Avision* should be read, not as autobiography, but as aiming to inculcate in the princely reader the ability to read allegorically as a method for salvation" ("Mirror for the Prince," 96).

¹⁵⁵ Christine's gloss explains, "In the story of these plants of gold which were transported can be understood many stories of the second age and of individuals who descended from the good sons of Adam, such as patriarchs, prophets, and other holy and worthy men... Likewise, this can signify... how [France's] deeds arose in the beginning from the noble Trojans, whom Christine calls the tree of gold for their richness and nobility" (*Vision*, p. 14).

¹⁵⁶ "larrecins entre les autres fu transportee en ceste contree une vergete yssue de la cosme du susdit arbre dor. Laquelle il planterent en hault vergier en terre fructueuse. Ycelle plante parcrut tant que de la beaulte delle ie pris mon nom et fut pellee Libera" (*L'Avision*, p. 78).

and as soon as Rapine entered the world” (p. 13).¹⁵⁷ It is because of the fallen state of the world that Libera is ill and vices reign. Thus, *L’Advision*, like other dream visions, longs for wholeness and the return of a prelapsarian state.

Libera’s metaphor acknowledges the spiritual and physical aspects of the healing required to return to a state of wholeness. Like the plant metaphor in *Piers Plowman*, Libera’s plant is connected to Christ and his redemptive power. The gloss states that the graft,

can signify the lineage of Our Lady, and first Abraham and the other descendants; from whom the earth can rejoice in such noble seed which grew so that it surpassed all other plants: this was Jesus Christ who surpassed all things. The earth took its name from him and was called “Libera.” Truly the earth was liberated by that noble plant, Jesus Christ, who freed man from the Enemy. They crowned the third shoot, the third person of the Trinity, Jesus Christ, King of heaven and earth, who bore fruit of great worth (p. 14).¹⁵⁸

Libera’s “roots” in Christ grant her salutary powers, not unlike the tree of life in Revelation. However, these powers depend on the care given to nurturing the plant. The

¹⁵⁷ “commence la terre sa complainte a ses premieres gestes, c’est asavoir depuis l’aage qui s’appella l’aage doré, ouquel les gens vivoient franchement et sans convoitise, et puis comment ce temps failli lors que les gens devindrent convoiteux et si tost que Rapine vint au monde” (*Livre de l’advision*, p. 7).

¹⁵⁸ “puet segnefier le lignaige Nostre Dame, et premierement Abraham et les autres descendues, dont la terre se pot esjoir de si noble semence qui tant crut que elle surmonta toutes autres plantes: ce fu Jhesucrist qui surmonta toute chose. La terre en prist son nom et fu ‘Libera’ appellee. Voirement fut terre franchie par celle noble plante: c’est Jhesucrist qui franchi homme de l’Ennemi. Ilz couronnerent le .III^e. giton: ce fu la | tierce personne de la Trinité, c’est Jhesucrist, roy de ciel et de terre; cestui porta fruit de grant dignité” (*Livre de l’advision*, p. 8).

various monarchs who have ruled France have either nourished it or neglected it.¹⁵⁹

Unfortunately, France has in recent history fallen into the hands of “negligent gardeners” (*Vision*, p. 24) [cultiveurs maudiligens] (*Lavision*, p. 80). She was saved, however, by the “physician” Charles V.

Like a father who, tender toward His beloved daughter, wishes to stop the flails of her torturers and spread the oil of His mercy on the wounds of her afflictions, there then appeared the able physician [Charles V], come by succession to my ancient inheritance, who, leaving aside idleness in his youth, in the palace of my nobleness received the crown of dignity. Lady Wisdom, the venerable goddess of ordered things, came and refitted him like a dear son in the mantle of her properties. Then saying, ‘Flee! Flee! You enemies of happiness! Let the remedies of restoration arrive!’” (p. 27)¹⁶⁰

The metaphor takes a literal turn as Libera describes how Charles V restored the physical

¹⁵⁹ For example, the plant was diseased by a pestilence until Clovis, who was baptized and introduced Christianity, found water to refresh her: “He eagerly pursued so many matters through the wise doctors that the abundant, living river filled with streams, brooks, and fountains to such extent that all my plants were watered and given life. Oh what a noble gardener was he, for he so increased and augmented the permanence of my legacy that he became the first witness of my salutary glory” (p. 24) [et tant pourchaca par sages maistres que labondance du fleuve vivant rendy ruiissiaux sources et fontaines en si grant quantite que toutes mes plantes en furent arrousees et vivifees. O noble coultiveur fu ycellui/ car moult il augmenta et percrut la perpetuite de mon heritage. en tel manier quil fu le premier registre de ma salvable gloire] (*Lavision*, p. 79).

¹⁶⁰ “comme pere piteable de sa tres amee fille voutt cesser les verges de ses bateures et esprendre luil de sa misericorde sus les navreures de mes maladies. Adont sourdi le phisicien propice venus par succession a lheritage de mon ancienete et ou palais de mes nobleces receu loreale de dignete delaissant en joenes iours les meurs de legierete vint dame sapience deessee venerable des choses ordennees qui comme chier filz le revesti du mantel de ses proprietes lors disant fuiez fuiez vous anemis de beneurte. Laissez venir les remedes de restauracion” (*Lavision*, p. 82). Charles V’s injunction to Libera’s enemies—“Flee! Flee!”—is reminiscent of Philosophy’s command to the Muses in Boethius’s *Consolation*, and of Genius’s advice to the barons to flee from women; all intend to heal their patients.

fields of France, removing the bad seeds just as he removed Libera's enemies.¹⁶¹ "Then they began to destroy the useless herbs and renew the untilled earth where they provided and attracted good seeds. Thus continuing the proper cultivation of the land, they made room for the small grasses and the sweet little plants to rise above the secret place where they had been hidden beneath the thorns" (p. 28).¹⁶² The health of the metaphorical plant of France is evidenced in the literal health of its fields and crops. Because flourishing crops and "herbes" mean the availability of food and medicine for France's subjects, Charles V can be considered, in a real sense, a sort of savior or physician.

After Charles V's death, however, Libera's fortunes (like Christine's) declined, and the literal fields suffered along with the metaphoric plant, torn apart by political, religious, and civil strife: "That torment, continuing today among my laborers, withers and desiccates the green leaves and the liquors of my fruits, drains my fountains, diminishes my reputation, and torments me cruelly" (p. 32).¹⁶³ Libera even compares her condition to the master of the vineyard in the parable recorded in Mark 12:1-2, further solidifying the Apocalyptic and prophetic implications of Christine's vision.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶¹ This is reminiscent of the planting (and weeding) Piers does at the end of Piers Plowman.

¹⁶² "Adonc se prindrent a estirper de tous lez les inutiles herbes chardons orties et toute male racine derompre et sacher hors et a tout nettoier et faire nouvel guerret ou ilz anterent et attrairont bonnes semences ainsi continuant le labourage droitturier donerent lieu aux herbetes et douces planteletes saillir hors de tapinage ou muciez orent este soubz les espines qui toutes les suffoquoient" (*Lavision*, p. 83).

¹⁶³ "Ceste orreur courant au iour dui parmi mes gaignages rent fletris et seches les verdure et liquers de mes fruis/ tarist mes fontaines amendrist mon renom/ et lourdement me tourmente" (*Lavision*, p. 87).

¹⁶⁴ Libera states, "Does Jesus Christ not also speak to me then in the parable of the vine?" (*Vision*, p. 43) [ne parla doncques a moy jhesucrist en la parabole de la vigne (*Lavision*, p. 99)]. Christ's parable, in which the messengers of the vineyard (prophets) are repeatedly killed by false cultivators, foretells the destruction of the world. Libera also compares herself to a pregnant woman, creating a parallel between the "fruit of her womb" (*Vision*, p. 44) [le fruit de son ventre

As it was for Christine, Libera's treatment is administered through literary processes, especially the reception of corrective examples through "texts from the Holy Scriptures, which we cannot deny and in which there are no lies" (p. 45).¹⁶⁵ Mary Louis Towner states,

The diagnosis of the moral ills of her children being completed, *la Dame Couronnée* prescribes. She quotes from sacred and profane history, from the scriptures, from the prophets and philosophers, similar examples that had woeful results; and she pleads with her children to take heed. The Old Testament is her chief source since it is replete with warnings for just such vices as are common in the day with la Dame 'a perdu la joie de son chief' (fol. 15v). The elaborations on the Biblical allegories are unique. To a complete analysis is added the author's interpretation which implies a pointed criticism of the corrupt politics of the reign of Charles VI.¹⁶⁶

The moral and political problems that ail France can be cured if people are taught the prophecies of the scriptures. In other words, the answers lie in literacy and an education that teaches the acquisition of virtues.¹⁶⁷ The parallels Christine draws between her own

(*Lavision*, p. 99)] and the fruit of the plant. This adds another nuance to the nurturing and healing abilities of women extolled in the text.

¹⁶⁵ "textes des saintes escriptures que nyer ne povons et ou na menconge" (*Lavision*, p.100).

¹⁶⁶ Towner, "Analysis of *Lavision*," 32-33.

¹⁶⁷ Susan J. Dudash observes that while Christine was sympathetic to the needs of the ordinary people, she was quite vocal in her condemnation of their vices, especially those that resulted from their frequenting the tavern. See her "Christinian Politics, the Tavern, and Urban Revolt in Late Medieval France," in *Healing the Body Politic*, 19-34. D'Arcens observes that there is an ethical dimension of Christine's politics, based in a "more personal moral practice of 'living well'" ("Grieving Body Politic," 204).

treatment and Libera's highlight this solution.¹⁶⁸

Initially, the therapy contained in holy writ would seem to be a cure by contraries—righteous examples held up to convince the wicked of their errors. However, this medicine is actually an isopathic remedy, for as Philosophy taught in Book 3, “since everything hates its opposite, will not the wicked be participants in their wickedness?” (p. 123).¹⁶⁹ People who are wicked gravitate toward more wickedness, not righteousness. How then can Christine's readers be cured of their spiritual illness? By turning their thoughts to God. “If man's thought is directed attentively to God, whatever is bitter in this life seems sweet and everything that afflicts he considers repose” (p. 123).¹⁷⁰ The more one thinks of God, the more righteous she becomes to the point that all contraries are neutralized. There are no longer bitter opposites or trials; everything is sweet so that God's followers are “strengthened in trials just like the burning fire whose flame the wind

¹⁶⁸ Louise D'Arcens states, “By aligning her own complaint in Part III with France's complaint in Part I, Christine ensures that Philosophie's advice... is extended not only to her, but also to the sphere of national politics” (“Grieving Body Politic,” 204-05).

¹⁶⁹ “comme toute chose hee son contraire ne seront pas leurs haineux participans de leurs mauvaistiez” (*Lavision*, p. 182).

¹⁷⁰ “se la pensee de lomme est adreciee en dieu par forte entencion quanqui est amer en ceste vie lui semble doulz/ et tout quanque afflict il repute repos” (*Lavision*, p. 183). This counsel, drawn from Gregory, is a commentary on Ezekiel's eating the scroll, which was both sweet and bitter. As Christine quotes, “Again, the blessed Gregory says, in *On Ezekiel*, ‘God mixes His punishments to us with His gifts so that whatever worldly things were tempting us may seem bitter, so that in our spirits a fire of loving patience may take flame which always encourages us to long for heaven, and thus He bites us delightfully, torments us sweetly, and afflicts us joyfully’” (*Vision*, pp. 123-24) [Encore dit le benoit gregoire sur ezechie/ dieu avec ses dons nous mesle ses fleaulx ad ce que tout quanque mondainement nous delictoit nous semble amer Et adfin que en noz courages un feu se alume de charitable pacience qui nous excite tousiours au desir du ciel/ Et ainsi nous morde delictablement nous tourmente souefment/ et qui nous contriste ioyusement] (*Lavision*, p. 183). This continuation of the somatic metaphor demonstrates how contraries and conflict are subsumed into a transformation that emphasizes harmony and oneness.

beats down and yet causes to grow” (p. 129).¹⁷¹ The wind—an opposing force—does not change the nature of the fire; it strengthens it.

As Christine was reminded, the scriptures and church fathers teach that riches, honors, and pleasures of the body do not bring happiness. “For nothing is worthy of the name of happiness...if it is not eternal...The true happiness that feeds the soul and gives glory, renown, delight, and satisfaction? This is God and nothing else” (p. 128).¹⁷²

Turning to God for nourishment and remedy is the ultimate isopathic cure. Revelation teaches that there are no contraries in Heaven and men continue in their same state;¹⁷³ similarly, Philosophy instructs Christine that “those who have righteousness are righteous and those who have wisdom are wise, so those who have divinity are gods, and he who has happiness is God. Thus all the blessed are God, but there is only one God by nature, and He is many by participation” (p. 130).¹⁷⁴ God’s blessing to those who follow him is thus “the gift of perpetuity” (*Vision*, p. 130) [don de pepeuite] (*Lavision*, p. 189), and this is the blessing Christine desires for France.

¹⁷¹ “affermez es tribulacions comme le feu ardent que le vent rabat la flamme et toutevoye le fait plus croistre” (*Lavision*, p. 188). While Christine champions healing by similarities, she does acknowledge the benefit of contraries (as she does in the use of *antiphrasis* as a rhetorical strategy). For example, she notes that faithful Christians will be aware of opposites to righteousness: “But since experience of the opposite is often revealed to us, we see most of the virtuous and intelligent unfortunate in regard to worldly riches” (*Vision*, p. 125) [mais comme l’experience du contraire nous soit manifeste veons le plus des bons et de cler engin mal fortunez es biens mondains] (*Lavision*, p. 184).

¹⁷² “Car riens digne nest destre appelle felix...sil nest perpetuel...la vray felicite qui repaist lame et donne souffissance Or tourne ta face dautre part si verras celle qui donne poissance gloire renomnee et delitt tout ensemble/ ce est dieu autre chose ne lest” (*Lavision*, p. 187).

¹⁷³ “He that hurteth, let him hurt still: and he that is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is just, let him be justified still: and he that is holy, let him be sanctified still” [Qui nocet, noceat adhuc: et qui in sordibus est, sordescat adhuc: et qui justus est, justificetur adhuc: et sanctus, sanctificetur adhuc] (Rev. 22:11).

¹⁷⁴ “ceulz qui ont droiture sont droitturiers/ Et ceulz qui ont sapience sont sages/ ainsi ceulz qui ont divinite sont dieux/ mais par nature il nest que un dieu/ et par participation il en est moult” (*Lavision*, p. 189).

Conclusion

In contrast with Jean's desire to establish a male-centered hegemonic system, Christine's writings are intended to help society heal by striving for a divine state of homogeneity—one in which all members are treated the same.¹⁷⁵ This is particularly true in the ways she emphasizes including women in the political sphere. Karen Green argues,

One should not underestimate the originality and strength of Christine's major political innovation: her inclusion of women within the body politic...No one had previously so firmly assigned women an integral place within the polity. Nor had anyone previously claimed, as explicitly as Christine did, that women possessed equally with men the kind of prudence necessary for governing a polity, a household or their own person.¹⁷⁶

If France is to be healed, all of her "children," men and women, must be active participants. And when women are involved as equals, and their experience consulted,

¹⁷⁵ Nederman finds that Christine advocates balancing the humors, so to speak, of the body politic, emphasizing "an egalitarian, and sometimes an anti-clerical (or, at any rate, anti-papal), sensibility. This is captured by the idea that there is a natural equilibrium within the body—a sort of equitable harmony—that must be maintained for the sake of the health and well being of the organism. Equalization means that no part of the entity can legitimately lay stake to a disproportionate amount of common resources and/or refuse to share what it possesses when required for the public good. No part (not even the clergy) is greater than the whole. The operation of the body is thus a homeostatic process, in which a premium is placed on intercommunication and exchange among the various limbs and organs themselves, as a result of which the head (or ruler) is treated as a servant of the whole rather than as a commander" ("Living Body Politic," 21-22). He adds, "In general, [Christine's] work demonstrated deep concern about the needs and interests of a large portions [sic] of the populace—among them women, city-dwellers, and the poor—by insisting upon the inescapable reciprocity of the relationship between the French people and the royal regime. Christine's thought is thus characterized by the striking inconclusiveness of the audience she addresses and the social complexity she acknowledges" (27).

¹⁷⁶ Karen Green, "Introduction," *Healing the Body Politic*, xv.

greater progress can be made toward healing.¹⁷⁷ Thus, Christine begins by throwing her support to Isabeau. In so doing, she “profoundly affected female regency as it developed in France from the fifteenth through the early seventeenth century.”¹⁷⁸

In *L'Advision*, Christine applies an Apocalyptic model of bodily writing—digesting worthy books and examining her inner self through writing—in order to heal her spiritual, mental, and physical ailments.¹⁷⁹ Christine argues that writing, when based on individual experience and filtered through the faculty of the memory (in which knowledge acquired from proper authorities is stored) can allow a person to diagnose and treat their own illnesses. By writing about her own (female) struggles with illness and the cure she finds through nurturing literature and composition, Christine passes this remedy onto her readers. As Rosalind Brown-Grant observes, “*L'Advision* shows Christine, as exemplar, demonstrating...how to look into the self as if in a mirror and to see that self anew.”¹⁸⁰ This holds true when applied on a large scale: the more people who find wholeness through self-knowledge, the healthier society can become. The contemplative life is thus a complement, even a prerequisite, to a type of “active” engagement that can completely revitalize the state.

¹⁷⁷ Dulac and Reno observe, “Although the depiction of the political horizon in the *Advision* is bleak, the figure of the woman writer who emerges and the political role she designates for herself are far from traditional and far from pessimistic. The confidence Christine invests in her self-portrayal can be read as a promise of her astonishing activity, particularly in the field of political writing, in the years to follow” (“*L'advision Cristine*,” 209).

¹⁷⁸ Adams, *The Fight for France*, 4.

¹⁷⁹ Stakel writes, “The pilgrimage motif carries through from departure, adventure, and struggle to self-realization, transformation, and affirmation... There has been a definite progression, from understanding first the material, then the intellectual, and finally the divine sphere... She emerges instilled with a new feeling of confidence in herself as woman and author” (“Pilgrimage and Dream-Vision,” 201).

¹⁸⁰ Brown-Grant, “Mirror for the Prince,” 108.

Chapter Five

Bodily Writing as Comic Reinvention in the *House of Fame*

The final dream vision I consider in this dissertation is the *House of Fame* (c.1379-80) by Geoffrey Chaucer. Like Christine's *Advison*, the *House of Fame* is divided into three books.¹ In the poem, the poetic speaker—named “Geffrey”—has a dream in which he enters a glass temple decorated with gold statues and reads the story of Aeneas. He then leaves the temple and finds himself standing in a desolate and colorless field of sand. Just as he is about to succumb to despair, a gold eagle appears and carries him into the sky. The eagle informs Geffrey that because of his literary efforts, Jove wishes him to travel to Fame's house. After a journey through the heavens and an arduous climb up Fame's steps, Geffrey enters a noisy and colorful room filled with crowds of people where he beholds the goddess, who is so large “that with hir fet she erthe reighte, / And with hir hed she touched hevене” (1374-75).² Fame judges different groups of people, granting them either renown or obscurity, and her decrees are sounded

¹ While Christine's text follows a clear development from book to book, Chaucer's text does not, despite potential parallels to the tripartite division of *oratio*, the three branches of the trivium, and the mind's three primary faculties. Kathryn Lynch states, “Like its predecessors in the genre, this is a tripartite vision echoing the tripartite structure of the human mind, with its faculties of understanding: imagination, reason, and memory...the literary images of Book I appeal to the Dreamer's imagination; the Eagle's discourse in Book II to his reason; and the figures of Book III to his memory—except that the Eagle's instruction and Fame's distribution of renown yield no authoritative truth; the spiritual journey that the vision poem usually chronicles ends up where it began, trapped in images of purely earthly significance” (“The Logic of the Dream Vision in Chaucer's *House of Fame*,” in *Literary Nominalism and the Theory of Rereading Late Medieval Texts: A New Research Paradigm*, ed. Richard J. Utz [Lewiston, New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1995], 180).

² All citations come from Larry Benson, ed., *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd edition (Boston: Oxford University Press, 1987). Fame has obvious resonances with Boethius's Philosophy, Alain de Lille's Nature, and other visionary goddesses, as well as the Lamb in the Book of Revelation.

by large trumpets of gold (to proclaim notoriety) and black (to publish shame). After listening to her verdicts, Geoffrey is led to the House of Rumors, and the poem ends abruptly—still in the dream—just as he is about to meet a man “of gret auctorite” (2158).

In part because of its incomplete conclusion, many critics find the *House of Fame* to be parodic and even cynical of visionary learning.³ I would argue, however, that the spiritual journey in the *House of Fame*, rather than being stymied, still explores a path to wholeness. Like other dream poets, Chaucer was mindful of the Book of Revelation and mimicked its template of bodily writing:⁴ the *House of Fame* features a dreamer who

³ Many scholars, most notably Sheila Delany in her *Chaucer's House of Fame: The Poetics of Skeptical Fideism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), have observed that Chaucer emphasizes the unreliability of traditional information and epistemologies (2). Kathryn Lynch writes, “The *House of Fame* is so thoroughgoing a parody of the classic literary vision that one can almost reconstruct the major conventions of that genre by working backwards from Chaucer’s poem... This pattern of raised and dashed expectations penetrates deeply into the grain of the poem, which becomes the very inverse of the classic dream vision... the spiritual journey that the vision poem usually chronicles ends up where it began, trapped in images of purely earthly significance (“Logic of the Dream Vision,” 179-80).

⁴ We know Chaucer had the Book of Revelation in mind when writing *House of Fame* because he compares the goddess Fame to the four beasts “as John writ in th’Apocalips” (1385) and incorporates a notable amount of Apocalyptic imagery into his poem. Leo J. Henkin sees Revelation as an analogue to the *House of Fame* and points to convincing parallels between the Goddess Fame and the four beasts, the muses and the heavenly choir, the description of Fame’s hall and God’s throne, and the judgments trumpeted by Aeolus and the seven angels, among other things (“The Apocrypha and Chaucer’s *House of Fame*,” *Modern Language Notes* 56 (1941): 583-588). He states, “Chaucer found the material of the Revelation accessible and easily susceptible to treatment in a visionary poem. Characteristically he transformed the material and integrated it with details borrowed from diverse sources” (588). Richard Emmerson writes, “Apocalypse imagery... resonates throughout a surprising number of ‘secular’ texts, even ones like the *House of Fame*, which invokes ‘the god of sleep’ (69) when recounting its visionary experience. When these echoes are investigated, they often suggest an underlying pattern, so that although Chaucer explicitly cites Morpheus to ensure that he accurately relates his vision, he implicitly recalls a higher divinity and thus perhaps another visionary mode: ‘he that mover ys of al, / That is and was and ever shal’ (81-82). When we realize that these are the very words of praise with which the Four Living Creatures laud the Lord God Almighty (Apoc. 4:8), that this dream vision describes a heavenly temple, and that Chaucer’s inspired guide is an Eagle, the traditional symbol of John, then the poem’s apocalyptic resonances take on fuller significance” (“The Apocalypse in Medieval Culture,” in *The Apocalypse in the Middle Ages*, ed. Richard K. Emmerson and Bernard McGinn [Ithaca: University of Cornell Press, 1992], 295).

embarks on a journey of self-discovery with the intent of treating an illness, and the text draws on a discourse of transformational ingestion that invokes the nuances of penance and pilgrimage.⁵

Like so many other dream vision narrators, Chaucer's poetic persona is ill. His guide, the eagle, explains that he has been sent to relieve Geoffrey of his writing-induced brainsickness, which leaves him apathetic and uninterested in his fellow men. In order to heal, he needs to treat both the spiritual and physiological aspects of his illness by repenting—praying, fasting, and performing alms deeds—and leaving his home to immerse himself in the doings of his neighbors. Healing, then, will result from the workings and experience of his physical body and the “tidings” he hears of other people, which he will render into poetry. The unfinished nature of the poem (and Chaucer's return to these themes in later works) suggests that this process is ongoing, like the perpetual nature of penance.⁶

⁵ Chaucer's other dream visions demonstrate a similar impulse, what Steven Kruger has termed a therapeutic move from reading to dreaming. See his “Medical and Moral Authority in the Late Medieval Dream,” in *Reading Dreams: The Interpretation of Dreams from Chaucer to Shakespeare*, ed. Peter Brown [Oxford, 1999, 51-83, at 69]. One key feature in each poem is the dreamer's reading of a book, a device Chaucer may have borrowed from Guillaume de Deguileville's *Pèlerinage de la vie humaine*. (The narrator of the *Pèlerinage* reads *Le Roman de la Rose*—a text Chaucer translated into English.) Stephanie A. Viereck Gibbs Kamath writes, “Widely recognized for its role in popularizing the literary pilgrimage genre, Deguileville's allegory also witnesses another feature important to English readers: like the “Will” who narrates the vision of Piers Plowman, or the “Geoffrey” who recounts travel in *The House of Fame*, the narrator of Deguileville's allegory bears a name that readers interpreted as an authorial signature” (“Naming the Pilgrim: Authorship and Allegory in Guillaume de Deguileville's *Pèlerinage de la vie humaine*,” *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 32 [2010]: 179-213, at 181).

⁶ For example, Patrick Gallacher argues that this same interest in the body and healing continues in *The Canterbury Tales*. He writes, “Perhaps the most obvious indication of this rhetoric of the body involves sickness and health. It begins with the fact that pilgrims go to Canterbury in the first place ‘the hooly blisful martir for to seke, / That hem hath holpen whan that they were seeke’; and ends with the climax of the *Parson's Tale*, where the fruit of penitential pilgrimage is described in the last few lines as the perfectly healthy and transformed

In place of a traditional resolution, then, Chaucer communicates the success of this healing through the dream journey itself. Again and again, Geoffrey witnesses how images (of bodies) shape words, and how words shape (images of) bodies.⁷ In a literal way, he sees how language can determine a body's fame or shame, health or sickness. This process moves beyond the text, so that the poem's readers can use this creative power to (re)shape their own bodies. For Chaucer, bodily writing is about writing bodies.⁸

Chaucer draws his readers' attention to the relationship between language and bodies by using sensory description. When moments of language production in the poem are based on information gleaned by the body's five senses or lay the foundation for the

risen body: 'ther as the body of man, that whilom was foul and derk, is moore cleer than the sonne; ther as the body, that whilom was syk, freele, and fieble, and mortal, is inmortal, and so strong and so hool that there may no thing apeyren it'" ("Chaucer and the Rhetoric of the Body," *The Chaucer Review* 28.3 [1994]: 216-236, at 216).

⁷ Geoffrey mentions that he himself is attempting to put the images in his mind into words: "O Thought, that wrot al that I mette, / And in the tresorye hyt shette / Of my brayn, now shal men se / Yf any vertu in the be / To tellen al my drem aryght" (523-27). And later, "And yif, devyne vertu, thow / Wilt helpe me to shew now / That in myn hed ymarked ys— / Loo, that is for to menen this, / The Hous of Fame for to descryve" (1101-05).

⁸ In this way, the text is reminiscent of John's famous lines in the Gospel: "In the beginning was the Word... All things were made by him, and without him was not any thing made that was made" [In principio erat Verbum... Omnia per ipsum facta sunt: et sine ipso factum est nihil, quod factum est] (John 1:1-3). Just as men's existence came into being because of the power of God's word alone, Chaucer—as the creator of his poem—shapes bodies through his words. Indeed, for a poet writing in the visionary tradition, words are equipped with a physical, creative significance. Hugo Keiper notes, "It is entirely possible, and no doubt intended, that we discern profound analogies between the evangelist's statement about the universe at large and textual universes of human making: our text not only envisages the world's beginnings in terms of some original, creative 'word,' 'sound' or 'language'; or even of some primordial Script or Ur-Text author(iz)ed by God, just as God, in turn, is author(iz)ed by it—if the references to 'God' in our quotation are supplanted by 'author(s)', the Gospel's words are equally applicable to any man-made text, but especially so to literary fictions" ("A Literary 'Debate Over Universals'? New Perspectives on the Relationships Between Nominalism, Realism, and Literary Discourse," in *Nominalism and Literary Discourse: New Perspectives*, ed. Hugo Keiper, Christophe Bode, and Richard J. Utz [Atlanta, GA: Rodopi B.V., 1997], 1).

(re)formation of new bodies, they are described with colors.⁹ For example, the eagle, who speaks from bodily experience, is gold and described with strong sensory details (as when Geoffrey feels the pain of his sharp claws¹⁰). The presence of colors is significant because images and murals were important to memory work and invention, and the temple's pictorial depiction of the *Aeneid* in particular stimulates Geoffrey's desire to incorporate bodily experience into his writings.¹¹ Just as John internalized his God-given calling by eating the book, the symbol of his mission to serve others, Geoffrey too participates in a form of textual ingestion by internalizing Aeneas's story. This process, along with instruction from the golden eagle and his visit to Fame's sensuous palace, prompts Geoffrey to convert not only his inexperienced writings into something more colorful, but also his illness into health. His words have the power to rewrite his body.

⁹ Chaucer's decision to mark such moments with color may have been intuitive. In the Middle Ages, there was an understood connection between colors and bodies. To name but a few examples, bodies were represented by the colors of the four humors (black, green, yellow, and red); facial coloring was analyzed by physiognomy (as demonstrated in the Prologue to *The Canterbury Tales*; two well-known examples are the Wife of Bath—"Boold was hir face, and fair, and reed of hewe" [458]—and the Summoner, "That hadde a fyr-reed cherubynnes face, / For saucefleem he was, with eyen narwe. / As hoot he was and lecherous as a sparwe, / With scalled browes blake and piled berd" [624-27]); and empathetic pain was stimulated by strongly colored depictions of Christ's passion in paintings and manuscripts. (Alexandra Kaczenski provides an example in her paper, "And they clothed him with purple" MS Harley 1892: Illumination and Personal Devotion in the Era of Print," presented at the Eleventh Oxford Medieval Graduate Conference, St. Edmund Hall, Oxford, April 17, 2015.)

¹⁰ "With hys grimme pawes stronge, / Withyn hys sharpe nayles longe, / Me, fleyng, in a swap he hente, / And with hys sours [upward flight] ayen up wente" (541-44).

¹¹ In fact, the senses were considered a means of adding color to memory. Mary Carruthers and Jan M. Ziolkowski write, "Memories were thought to be carried in intense images (*intentio* + *simulacrum*)...indeed memory depended on imagination, the image-making power of the soul. While commending the value of the other four senses as a means of giving additional 'color' to memory images, all writers on the subject single out the visual sense as the easiest to recollect, the most secure for the memory work of composition" (Mary Carruthers and Jan M. Ziolkowski, ed., *The Medieval Craft of Memory: An Anthology of Texts and Pictures* [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002], 11). While Geoffrey's other senses are activated in the text, it is perhaps his sense of sight that does the most productive work, beginning with his reading of the images in the temple.

Although the poem places a marked emphasis on healing and re-formation, the tone of the *House of Fame* is rather different from other dream visions. Whereas Christine's *Advison*, for example, saw the work of bodily writing as a serious endeavor, necessary for combatting the moral ills of her time, Chaucer seems more interested in the absurdity and "gaming" inherent in linguistic representation and the ways such humor can benefit his audience.¹² For Chaucer, humor is both medicine and mirror.¹³ The diversion and laughter of entertaining literature can itself combat a variety of mental illnesses, and satirical humor especially can help readers see themselves for what they really are.¹⁴ In Chaucer's poetry, then, healing lies not merely in the accumulation of

¹² Jean de Meun probably wrote his portion of the *Rose* with more than a little tongue-in-cheek; he mentions that he adds a few of his own thoughts to the *auctores'* commentary "for my game" [par mon jeu] (15239), perhaps to rile up his readers. Scholars have argued that Chaucer's dream visions exhibit a similar sense of sarcasm. As William Watts states, "Chaucer so often approaches weighty metaphysical and epistemological matters with a tone of bemused attachment and histrionic despair over the possibility of resolving thorny issues that there may very well be more *game* than *ernest* in the poet's response to the *greet disputisouns* of the fourteenth century" (William H. Watts, "Chaucer's Clerks and the Value of Philosophy," in *Nominalism and Literary Discourse*, 155).

¹³ Catherine Haigney calls Chaucer's use of humor in his dream visions "epistemological comedy." She writes, "By seeking a different kind of knowledge altogether, these subversive and original narratives shape their own genre, a Chaucerian literary form that might be called 'epistemological comedy'" ("Chaucer's Epistemological Comedies: *The Book of the Duchess*, *The House of Fame*, and *The Parliament of Fowls*" [Diss. University of Virginia, 1989], abstract). See also Laura Kendrick, *Chaucerian Play: Comedy and Control in the Canterbury Tales* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988) and Carol Falvo Hefferman, *Comedy in Chaucer and Boccaccio* (Cambridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2009).

¹⁴ Jan Walsh Hokenson explains that classical theories about comedy were preserved in medieval schools by Latin grammarians. "In *De Comoedia*, Donatus merely notes that through comedy 'one learns what is useful in life and what, on the contrary, is to be avoided' (305)...It is Donatus who ostensibly quotes Cicero as defining comedy as 'an imitation of life, a mirror of custom, an image of truth' [imitatio vitae, speculum consuetudinis, imago veritatis] (*The Idea of Comedy: History, Theory, Critique* [Madison, New Jersey: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2006], 31). As Nora Corrigan argues about gaming and comedy in Chaucer's corpus, "At various points, it becomes a mark of gentility, a spur to creativity and philosophical reflection, a source of consolation, and a means of resolving conflicts without serious violence" ("The Knight's Earnest Game in Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*," in *Games and Gaming in Medieval Literature*, ed. Serina Patterson [New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015], ebook, my emphasis).

knowledge or the use of superficial rhetoric but real, embodied experience, which can be enhanced through the (playful) process of reading and writing.¹⁵ This play helps activate the memory in order to facilitate an ethical comprehension of both story and self that ultimately allows him to reshape the dreamer's body. As Betsy McCormick states, "Not only do books hold the key to memory, but the experience of reading, or of playing, a literary game can also be written into memory."¹⁶ She explains, "Performative reading is designed to ethically affect the reader. What is remembered both individually in the mind, and collectively in the literary tradition is the essential component of ethical memory and, eventually, ethical action."¹⁷ The *House of Fame* is a performative text with the potential to affect the reader in a real way by engaging his or her ethical memory. By exploring the ways in which bookish consumption can become a lived, dynamic process, the poem renders bodily writing a ludic and yet therapeutic process of writing bodies.

In the first half of this chapter, I will make the case that Geoffrey is unwell.

Because the poem opens within the vision (after a proem that muses on the various

¹⁵ Because of his focus on bodily experience, many scholars have considered Chaucer's work within the context of fourteenth-century nominalism. One of the first to write on this topic was Russell Peck. He argues that "though [Chaucer] may not be interested in whether we can know with certitude only individual things, he is profoundly interested in how we can know individual things. And though his concern may not be with questions about whether universals exist in creation or only in our heads, he is always interested in those generalizations which fill people's heads and which exist there exclusively insofar as they matter to that individual. That is, Chaucer is not interested in the questions as problems in logic, but, rather, as phenomena of experience" ("Chaucer and the Nominalist Questions," *Speculum* 53.4 (1978): 745-60, at 745). For a comprehensive overview of nominalist approaches in Chaucer's corpus, see William H. Watts and Richard J. Utz, "Nominalist Perspectives on Chaucer's poetry: A Bibliographical Essay," *Medievalia et Humanistica* 20 (1993): 147-73.

¹⁶ Betsy McCormick, "Remembering the Game: Debating the *Legend's* Women," in *The Legend of Good Women: Context and Reception*, ed. Carolyn P. Collette (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2006), 126.

¹⁷ McCormick, "Remembering," 117. She states, "If what is read is incorporated into individual memory, individual ethics, and hence, ethical behavior, then playing a literary game by picking and choosing what to remember would have real consequences for the reader" (117).

causes of dreams), we never see Geoffrey in waking reality. Thus, in order to “diagnose” Geoffrey’s condition, we must read his body as it is revealed to us within his dream.¹⁸ (Chaucer is not as explicit as Christine, for example, about his persona’s ailments.) In the second half of the chapter, I will explain how Geoffrey’s application of bodily writing, which draws on sensory details (especially colors) and humor to activate important memory work, allows him to self-treat his illness, even though the poem lacks a traditional ending to communicate his success. As a result of his journey, which is both cosmic and comic, Geoffrey better understands the transformative power of language, particularly when it is delivered as an offering of diversion.

Geoffrey’s Illness

For Chaucer, the dream frame is crucial for identifying and then treating his illness, and the interiority inherent to the dream-state allows him to fully explore his persona’s condition. Consequently, the *House of Fame* invites us to read Geoffrey’s body by using a variety of literary devices. These include the temporal setting of the dream, the allusions to pilgrimage and penance, the (contrasting) loci of the temple and desert, the figure of the eagle, and the physical description of Chaucer’s persona, as provided by his guide.

Chaucer immediately draws his readers’ attention to Geoffrey’s sickness by changing the traditional dream vision setting. Most medieval dream visions open in the

¹⁸ Kathryn Lynch observes that while Chaucer’s other early poems provide evidence of a “psychic disorganization within the Narrator” in their prologues, the *House of Fame* only characterizes the dreamer within the confines of the dream itself (“Logic of the Dream Vision,” 185).

spring.¹⁹ One reason for the traditional vernal setting is that spring corresponds to the humor of blood, which possesses warm and moist qualities and indicates an amorous temperament. Most early dream visions, like *Le Roman de la Rose*, are at least ostensibly poems about love. The *House of Fame*, however, which is not about love, departs from tradition by opening in winter: Geoffrey's dream occurs on "Decembre the tenth day" (111).²⁰ While critics have ventured many hypotheses about the meaning for this date, one possibility is that Chaucer wishes to indicate his persona is ill and possibly specify the type of ailment.²¹ According to medieval complexional theory, winter corresponds to a phlegmatic temperament: "Phlegmatic temperaments usually had an excess of [phlegm] in the brain or lungs, and tended to be sluggish in action and reaction. [Phlegm] was cold and moist, associated with the winter and old age; many common illness, such as head colds, were also attributed to its actions."²² A winter setting, then, communicates that

¹⁹ Most medieval dream visions take place in a garden or another *locus amoenus*. Such descriptions were long-established conventions derived from biblical and classical sources and used by medieval writers to signal the beginning of a dream. See A. C. Spearing, *Medieval Dream-Poetry* (New York, 1976), 17, and Peter Brown, "On the Borders of Middle English Dream Visions," in *Reading Dreams* 22-50, especially at 27.

²⁰ John Leyerle suggests that this timing is crucial to the content of the poem; he observes that the sun in December approaches the constellation in Aquila, "the Eagle," and on December 10 the sun is in Sagittarius, "the house of dreams, tidings, and travels," and the night domicile of "Jupiter, the most benevolent of the planets" ("Chaucer's Windy Eagle," *University Texas Quarterly* 40 (1971): 247-65, at 249).

²¹ Christine de Pizan's *Chemin de long estude* opens on October 5, and she uses the autumnal setting to communicate that her persona is struggling with a mental illness (melancholy). See Katie Robison, "'Thou wolt make . . . thyn hede to ake': A Post-Chaucerian Treatment for Madness in Christine de Pizan's *Chemin de long estude*," *The Chaucer Review* 49.2 (2014): 184-203.

²² Noga Arikha, *Passions and Tempers: A History of the Humours* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), 10. People with a phlegmatic temperament were characterized as inward and private, slow and hesitant. Modern humoral theories suggest that phlegmatic individuals experience interest in a subject after first observing others' interest—a characteristic that could be applied to Geoffrey. See Rudolf Steiner, *The Four Temperaments* (Forest Row, England: Rudolf Steiner Press, 2008).

Geffrey is ill—perhaps spiritually as well as physically. (Sloth is one of the seven deadly sins.²³)

Indeed, the text provides evidence for a spiritual aspect of Geffrey's sluggishness, alongside a physiological one, by framing the dream as a type of pilgrimage. The narrator notes (like Christine in *L'Advisioun*) that he falls asleep as one that "wery was forgo / On pilgrimage myles two" (115-16), and his supplication to Christ intimates pilgrimage by mentioning barefoot dreamers (like Will in *Piers Plowman*).

Mysdeme hyt, pray I Jesus God
That (dreme he barefoot, dreme he shod),
That every harm that any man
Hath had syth the world began
Befalle hym therof or he sterue,
And graunte he mote hit ful deserve.

(97-102)

Furthermore, Geffrey hopes "oonly that the holy roode / Turne us every drem to goode" (57-58). He also prays that God, "that mover ys of al" (81), will offer health and protection to dreamers: "And shelde hem fro poverte and shonde, / And from unhap and ech disese" (88-89). Clearly, then, he hopes that his dream can offer him some relief, and his interest in pilgrimage, prayer, and penance more generally may suggest a spiritual ailment, compounded by or perhaps causing a physical "disese."²⁴

²³ Sloth is a type of spiritual apathy or phlegmatism and includes being physically and emotionally inactive.

²⁴ Chaucer understood that illnesses could be caused by multiple conditions, and he indicates this in the very opening of his poem. Musing on the causes of dreams, he begins with

This spiritual aspect of Geoffrey's illness is underscored when the dream begins inside a temple. Even though the temple appears to be pagan—dedicated to Venus—opening his dream in a religious locus suggests something about Geoffrey's spiritual condition. The Latin word *templum* originally signified a religious space where the auspices could be taken.²⁵ It was a scale model of the universe, a place for learning about the cosmos and one's place in it while residing in the middle world.²⁶ The temple's presence thus implies that the dreamer may glean important, eternal insights during his vision. Furthermore, a temple was often a metaphor for the human body (as well as the body of Christ) in medieval exegesis.²⁷ The word temple, then, carries important

corporeal conditions, such as bodily humors, hunger, and disease—"As yf folkys complexions / Make hem dreme of reflexions, / Or ellys thus, as other sayn, / For to gret feblenesse of her brayn, / By abstinence or by seknesse" (21-25)—before moving to the realm of the mind—"Som man is to curious [diligent] / In studye" (29-30)—and the spirit—"devocion/ Of somme, and contemplacion/ Causeth such dremes ofte" (33-35). This list follows a hierarchy of concerns, moving from the physical to the mental and spiritual—in B.G. Koonce's words, it "progresses from inward states to exterior spiritual forces, and from the less to the more veridical" (*Chaucer and the Tradition of Fame: Symbolism in The House of Fame* [New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1966], 48)—but it also indicates the holistic and interconnected nature of the body. For example, he observes that a *mental* condition, "febleness of the brain," can arise from *physical* causes, such as hunger and sickness. It is interesting to note that Chaucer borrows this list from Nature's discourse on dreams in *Le Roman de la Rose*.

²⁵ The augurs marked "the space of earth to be included for observations, which was a rectangular space called *locus effatus*... a space bounded by points," such as trees, rocks, or other stationery objects (William Smith, et al., "Templum" in *A Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities* (1890), <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.04.0063:entry=templum-cn>). The *Middle English Dictionary* notes that "temple" could refer to both a building dedicated to pagan gods (as it is here) as well as a place of Christian worship, like the Temple of the Heavenly Jerusalem. It could also refer to the "man, mankind, the human soul, the human body" as well as the body of Christ. See *Middle English Dictionary*, s.v. "temple."

²⁶ See Fred Hoyle, *From Stonehenge to Modern Cosmology* (San Francisco: Freeman, 1972) and I. E. S. Edwards, *The Pyramids of Egypt* (New York: Penguin, 1961), 256, 287, 290-96. Mircea Eliade writes, "Because of its situation at the center of the cosmos, the temple or the sacred city is always the meeting point of the three cosmic regions: heaven, earth, and hell" (*The Myth of the Eternal Return: Cosmos and History*, 2nd edition [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005], 15).

²⁷ John Nelson Miner explains, "Allegorically, the term refers to the body of our Lord, as when in the Gospel of St John our Lord says, 'destroy this temple,' that is, this living church

resonances with the body, knowledge, and healing.²⁸ By reading about the bodily experience of Aeneas and Dido (which I elaborate on in the next section) inside a building that can signify both the human body and the healing body of God, Chaucer draws the reader's attention to Geoffrey's own bodily state—which is necessarily physical and spiritual. Accordingly, it is in the temple that Geoffrey first catches sight of his own illness, breaking from his summary of the *Aenied* to observe, “For also browke I wel myn hed, / Ther may be under godlyhed / Kevered many a shrewed vice” (273-75). The story of Aeneas's unfaithfulness to Dido serves as a mirror for Geoffrey, revealing his own sins. His use of the phrase, “as I hope to keep my head,” is also a subtle allusion to the brainsickness from which he suffers, and which the eagle will more fully reveal.

Consequently, when Geoffrey leaves the temple, he enters a large desert—a further reflection of the bleak condition of his soul (spiritual illness) and his sluggish temperament (mental illness).²⁹ “When I out at the dores cam, / I faste aboute me beheld. / Then sawgh I but a large feld, / As fer as that I myghte see, / Withouten toun, or hous,

(*ecclesiam presentem*); moreover, the apostle says, ‘The temple of the Lord is holy, which you are.’ Tropologically, the term refers to whosoever is faithful, for the apostle says to such as these, ‘Do you not know that your bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit?’ Anagogically, the term is used with reference to the fatherland of heaven, where, as it is said, there is a holy temple like to Jerusalem” (*The Grammar Schools of Medieval England: A.F. Leach in Historiographiacal Perspective* [Quebec: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990], 183).

²⁸ Paul wrote, “Know you not, that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?” [Nescitis quia templum Dei estis, et Spiritus Dei habitat in vobis?] (1 Corinthians 3: 16).

²⁹ This desert, or field of sand, has received many critical interpretations. The most obvious source for a desert landscape is Dante's *Inferno* (1.64 or 14.8-13). As I will discuss later, there are also strong parallels to the *Aeneid*. See John Steadman, “Chaucer's ‘Desert of Libye,’ Venus, and Jove (The Hous of Fame, 486-87),” *Modern Language Notes* 76 (1961): 196-201, and Jane Chance, *The Mythographic Chaucer: The Fabulation of Sexual Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 54. Howard Patch notes the analogues to French wastelands (in Machaut, Froissart, and Deschamps, among others) in which the desert “seems to be the realm of despair for the lover” (“Chaucer's Desert,” *Modern Language Notes* 34 [1919]: 321-28, at 328).

or tree, / Or bush, or grass, or eryd lond; / For al the feld nas but of sond” (480-86). The sharp contrast between the temple and the desert sets up a comparison between the colorful, experiential writing of medieval authorities (and Aeneas’s own experience as a character), which I will discuss shortly, and the infertility or colorlessness of Geoffrey’s current work as a writer, which necessarily arises from his sins. The despair Geoffrey feels at being confronted by his illness, as reflected in the desert, prompts him to offer a prayer: ““O Crist,’ thoughte I, ‘that art in blysse, / Fro fantome and illusion / Me save!’ / And with devocion / Myn eyen to the hevene I caste” (492-95). As a result of this “crisis,” or reflection of his inner self, Geoffrey directs his gaze heavenward where he will soon see the arrival of his spiritual guide: the eagle.³⁰

The eagle’s arrival is yet another confirmation that Geoffrey is suffering from an ailment that is both spiritual and physical in nature. The eagle has received a decent amount of attention in the literature.³¹ However, as far as I know, no one has discussed its

³⁰ The word “crisis” comes from Sheila Delany, who states, “The desert itself is an unusual feature in medieval dream-vision literature, the traditional locus being the garden or wood. With its biblical and Dantesque overtones, the desert scene creates a sense of impending crisis” (“Phantom’ and the *House of Fame*,” *The Chaucer Review* 2 [1967]: 67-74, at 67). Delany focuses on the importance of the term “phantom” in her essay, noting that the glass temple implies a theme of fragility and lack of substance that runs throughout the poem. She reads this crisis as originating in “the sterility of the immediately preceding episode of the Temple” and argues that the story of Dido and Aeneas “seems to have generated no further narrative material” for the poet. I disagree that the temple was a sterile source of inspiration. Instead, I find that the contrast between the temple and the desert, which *is* sterile, sets Geoffrey on the path to self-reflection and knowledge.

³¹ Wilbur Owen Sypherd saw the eagle as combining the various functions of divine messenger, hero’s guide, and helpful animal (*Studies in Chaucer’s Hous of Fame* [London: Chaucer Society, 1907], 86). John Steadman looks to the “widespread medieval tradition which conceived the eagle as a symbol for contemplation” in order to conclude that we should consider “Chaucer’s aerial guide in the light of medieval expositions of the soaring eagle as an image of the flight of thought” (“Chaucer’s Eagle: A Contemplative Symbol,” *PMLA* 75 [1960], 153), while others have pointed to writers like Dante and Ovid as likely sources for Chaucer’s bird. Dante dreams of an eagle with plumes of gold in *Purgatorio* 9.19-20 and describes another eagle

(biblical) connection to food, consumption, and healing.³² Not only was the eagle connected to John, whose visionary ingestion influenced the poem, but it was also frequently linked with nourishment in the Old Testament.³³ The eagle was a symbol of nourishment and prosperity when God's commandments were kept and of destruction and disease when they were not. Deuteronomy 32 provides an example of the former:

He found him in a desert land, in a place of horror, and of vast wilderness: he led him about, and taught him: and he kept him as the apple of his eye. As the eagle enticing her young to fly, and hovering over them, he spread his wings, and hath taken him and carried him on his shoulders... He set him upon high land: that he might eat the fruits of the fields, that he might suck honey out of the rock, and oil out of the hardest stone. Butter of the herd, and milk of the sheep with the fat of lambs, and of the rams of the breed of Basan: and goats with the marrow of wheat,

in *Paradisio* 18-20. Chaucer, of course, alludes to Ovid's story of Ganymede at line 589. Christopher Baswell finds that the eagle and Geoffrey's flight reify a series of images that explore the Virgilian/ Boethian association, stating, "The parallel carrers of Aeneas, Boethius, and Geoffrey are... brought together in the single figure of the eagle" (*Virgil in Medieval England: Figuring the Aeneid from the Twelfth Century to Chaucer* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995], 239). He writes, "The eagle (*ales Iovis*) allows Geoffrey to re-enact Aeneas's sighting of the eagle and swans (*Aen.* 1.393-400). And as the winged messenger of Jupiter, the eagle replicates the role of Mercury come to awaken the sleeping Aeneas at the end of *Aeneid* 4. The eagle also reifies a Boethian metaphor that is particularly appropriate to this stage in the *House of Fame*: the feathers of philosophy" (238-39).

³² Leo J. Henkin includes the eagle in his discussion of Revelation only as a counterpart to the angel: "Just as the eagle carries Chaucer aloft and leaves him at the foot of the rock on which Fame's hall stands, so an angel carries away St. John to a great and high mountain. As the eagle points out to Chaucer from a distance the site of Fame's House, so the angel shows to John the holy Jerusalem" ("The Apocrypha and Chaucer's *House of Fame*," *Modern Language Notes* 56, [1941]: 583-88, at 587).

³³ See, for example, Psalms 103:2, 5 ("Bless the Lord... who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's") and Habakkuk 1:8 ("the eagle that hasteth to eat"). The eagle is found on the list of forbidden foods in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14. Note that in the Middle Ages the John of the Gospels and the John of Revelation were believed to be the same person.

and might drink the purest blood of the grape.³⁴

The “desert land...of vast wilderness” resonates with the “large feld...of sond” (482) like the “desert of Lybye” (488) from which the eagle rescues Geoffrey before delivering him to a high land to partake of better fruits—to enjoy some “disport and game” (664) and to “be of good chere” (671).³⁵

In his role as deliverer, the eagle explains the cause of Geoffrey’s illness. Because he spends so much time alone with his books, the eagle tells him, “thou wolt make / A-nyght ful ofte thyn hed to ake” (631-33).³⁶ He elaborates, “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 / Tyl fully daswed ys thy look” (654-58). The eagle is here using a trope of madness to describe Geoffrey, as medical authorities considered excessive study to be a cause of melancholy and mental disorder.³⁷ Bartholomaeus states that melancholy can come from “to greet studie,” and Constantine the African, the likely source for Bartholomaeus, writes in his *Opera*, “All those will fall into melancholy who overexert

³⁴ “Invenit eum in terra deserta, in loco horrois, et vastae solitudinis: circumduxit eum, et docuit: et custodivit quasi pupillam oculi sui. Sicut aquila provocans ad volandum pullos suos, et super eos volitans, expandit alas suas, et assumpsit eum, atque portavit in humeris suis...Constituit eum super excelsam terram, ut comederet fructus agrorum: ut sugeret mel de petra, oleumque de saxo durissimo; Butyrum de armento, et lac de ovibus cum adipe agnorum, et arietum filiorum Basan: et hircos cum medulla tritici, et sanguinem uvae biberet meracissimum” (Deuteronomy 32:10-11, 13-14).

³⁵ The eagle in Ezekiel 17 allegorically plants a tree that bears good fruit. (Ezekiel was a visionary who, like John, ate a book in the course of his dream.)

³⁶ Thomas Hoccleve receives a similar scolding from his friend: “So farest thow ioie hastow for to muse / Vpon thy book and there in stare & poure / Til that it thy wit consume and deuoure” (*Thomas Hoccleve’s Complaint and Dialogue*, ed. J. A. Burrow [New York, 1999], lines D404-6).

³⁷ See *Hoccleve’s Dialogue*, 96nD302-4, and Stephen Harper, *Insanity, Individuals, and Society in Late-Medieval English Literature: The Subject of Madness* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 2003), 29.50-51.

themselves in reading.”³⁸ Staying up late and overeating could compound these effects.

Noga Arika states,

Too much food in the stomach turned “the power of nature” away from the head. Staying up too late was inadvisable for those with intellectual ambition, in part because melancholy and phlegm dominated at night... Negative melancholy, in other words, could be avoided if one followed the *Regimen*, took medical preparations based on *materia medica*, and used the right talismans to channel the effects of the planets.³⁹

Interestingly, according to the *House of Fame*'s prologue, too much study—and melancholy—is also a cause of dreams: “som man is to curious [diligent] / In studye, or melancolyous” (29-30). Later dream vision writers, no doubt taking their cue from Chaucer, as well as medical authorities and even the Bible, frequently mention this

³⁸ Bartholomaeus Anglicus, *On the Properties of Things: Trevisa's Translation of De proprietatibus rerum*, ed. M. C. Seymour, 3 vols. [Oxford, 1975], 1:350; Constantinus Africanus, *Opera* I, 283, cited by Raymond Klibansky, Erwin Panofsky, and Fritz Saxl, eds., *Saturn and Melancholy: Studies in the History of Natural Philosophy, Religion, and Art* (London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1964), 84. In *On Melancholy*, Constantine states, “Typical of the rational [soul] are excessive thinking, learning by heart, studying unfathomable things, suspicion, hope, imagination, and correct and incorrect judgments about issues. All these things, if the soul should do any of these frequently and without moderation, cause it to slide into melancholy” (Rufus of Ephesus, *On Melancholy*, ed. and trans. Peter E. Pormann [Tübingen, 2008], 212). Constantine, in turn, took his information from Ishaq ibn 'Imran's *On Melancholy*, which he translated into Latin. Ishaq's text reads, “‘The toil of the soul is the thought of the soul.’ Just as the toil of the body makes one succumb to difficult diseases, the easiest of which is fatigue, so the toil of the soul makes one succumb to the most difficult and worst of the diseases, namely the disease of melancholy” (Rufus of Ephesus, *On Melancholy*, 293).

³⁹ Arikha, *Passions and Tempers*, 125. John Leyerle suggests that the eagle's presence corresponds to astrological signs in the poem (“Chaucer's Windy Eagle,” 249). This would make sense if Chaucer subscribed to the belief that the planets could affect one's health.

danger in their poems.⁴⁰ For example, John Skelton's narrator in the *Bouge of Court* is told, "A wonder thyng that ye waxe not madde. / For and I studye sholde as ye doo nowe, / My wytte wolde waste, I make God avowe" (241-243). And Gavin Douglas's narrator is warned in the *Palice of Honour*, "Yit study not ovir mekil a dreid thow vary, / For I persave the halflyngis in a fary" (1871-72).

Thomas Hoccleve, a devotee of Chaucer, notes in his *Complaint* and *Dialogue* (c.1419-20) that he had recently suffered from a mental illness, which his friend—the other speaker in the *Dialogue*—suggests was caused by over-exuberance in his studies:

"Thy bisy studie aboute swich mateere
Hath causid thee to stirte into the plyt
That thou were in as fer as I can heere."
(lines D302-4)

"Of studie was engendred thy seeknesse,
And that was hard. Woldest thou now agayn
Entre into that laborious bisynesse,
Syn it thy mynde and eek thy wit had slayn?"
(lines D379-82)

"Namely thing of thoughtful studie kaght
Perillous is as that hath me been taght."
(lines D398-99)⁴¹

⁴⁰ David states, "Of making many books there is no end: and much study is an affliction of the flesh" [Faciendi plures libros nullus est finis; frequensque meditatio, carnis afflictio est] (Ecclesiastes 12:12).

⁴¹ Hoccleve's *Dialogue*, ed. Burrow. I have modernized the thorns.

Hoccleve was (historically and fictionally) considered for a period of time to be mad, and the behavior that may have caused his problem—too much reading—is the same behavior troubling Geoffrey.⁴²

In keeping with the interconnectedness of the body's systems, Geoffrey's illness is manifested in a physical way even though likely caused by spiritual apathy. Because of his immersion in his work, the eagle chides, "thou hast no tydynges / Of Loves folk yf they be glade, / Ne of noght elles that God made; / And noght oonly for fer contree / That ther no tydyng cometh to thee, / But of thy verray neyghebores, / That duellen almost at thy dores, / Thou herist neyther that ne this" (644-51). In other words, Geoffrey has been neglecting his fellow men. The severity of this crime is underscored by the eagle's role in the Old Testament. Deuteronomy contains the law of the Hebrews, and one of their primary tenets was that, because all things come from God, everyone has a God-given right to whatever he needs. To take more than one needs is a sin, as it is to deprive others of what they need.⁴³ Those who withhold food and clothing from their neighbors are in danger of a variety of punishments, including disease and death.⁴⁴ In these cases, the

⁴² Even though Hoccleve denies that excessive study was the cause of his madness, it was considered a viable source of mental disorder, as his friend's comments illustrate.

⁴³ See Deuteronomy 23:24-25 ("Going into thy neighbour's vineyard, though mayest eat as many grapes as thou pleasest: but must carry none out with thee. If thou go into thy friend's corn, thou mayest break the ears, and rub them in thy hand: but not reap them with a sickle") and Deuteronomy 10:18-19 ("He doth judgment to the fatherless and the widow, loveth the stranger, and giveth him food and raiment. And do you therefore love strangers, because you also were strangers in the land of Egypt").

⁴⁴ Deuteronomy 28:1-12 confirms the teachings of chapter 32, but it also provides an example of negative consumption—a frightening reversal of all the blessings that were promised earlier and a warning that everything will be consumed. "The Lord shall send upon thee famine and hunger, and a rebuke upon all the works which thou shalt do: until he consumes and destroy thee quickly... May the Lord set the pestilence upon thee, until he consume thee out of the land... May the Lord afflict thee with miserable want, with the fever and with cold, with burning and with heat... The Lord give thee dust for rain upon thy land, and let ashes come down from

eagle becomes a symbol of destruction.⁴⁵ The eagle's presence in the *House of Fame*, then, serves as both warning and remedy.

The *House of Fame* includes several elements that imply Geoffrey is suffering from an illness. The dream is set in winter, suggesting an excess of phlegm, which corresponds to his isolation and apathetic attitude toward his neighbors.⁴⁶ His illness is also manifested in his tendency to immerse himself in his studies, a behavior known to make a person "braynseek" (*Dialogue*, line D129). The settings of the temple and desert highlight the spiritual aspect of this illness, as does the eagle, who serves as a biblical reminder of the dangers that await if he continues on his present course.

Because Geoffrey's illness is both spiritual and bodily, he can only heal if he incorporates penance into his treatment. In this context, the eagle's arrival initiates a spiritual journey to recovery and health by prompting Geoffrey to repent.⁴⁷ When the eagle

heaven upon thee, till thou be consumed. . . And be thy carcass meat for all the Fowls of the air, and the beasts of the earth. . . The Lord strike thee with madness and blindness and fury of mind. . . Thou shalt cast much seed into the ground, and gather little: because the locusts shall consume all" (28: 20-38).

⁴⁵ "The Lord will bring upon thee a nation from afar, and from the uttermost ends of the earth, like an eagle that flyeth swiftly, whose tongue thou canst not understand. . . And will devour the fruit of thy cattle, and the fruits of thy land: until thou be destroyed, and will leave no wheat, nor wine, nor oil, nor herds of oxen, nor flocks of sheep: until he destroy thee" [Adducet Dominus super te gentem de longinquo, et de extremis terrae finibus in similitudinem aquilae volantis cum impetu, cujus linguam intelligere non possis. . . Et devoret fructum jumentorum tuorum, ac fruges terrae tuae: donec intereas, et non relinquat tibi triticum, vinum, et oleum, armenta boum, et greges ovium: donec te disperdat] (Deuteronomy 28: 49, 51).

⁴⁶ It is worth noting that Hoccleve's *Complaint* is set in November, and many of Chaucer's imitators, who also feature brainsick narrators, similarly set their dream visions in the winter.

⁴⁷ Even though Chaucer's persona is being prompted to repent, Hugo Keiper observes that Geoffrey's dream might still be self-initiated: "One might speculate, then, that Geoffrey, finding himself in an epistemological stalemate of sorts, picks up, as it were, another (self-engendered?) dream in order to dig deeper into the issues raised in Book I" ("I wot myself best how y stonde": Literary Nominalism, Open Textual Form and the Enfranchisement of Individual Perspective in Chaucer's Dream Visions," in *Literary Nominalism*, 224, note 54). In this sense, with the eagle's arrival, Geoffrey might be said to be entering a dream within a dream, like Will in *Piers Plowman*,

first snatches up Geoffrey, the poet is overcome with terror and loses consciousness. “So astonyed and asweved / Was every vertu in my heved, / What with his sours and with my drede, / That al my felynge gan to dede” (549-52). The poem’s use of “felynge” here suggests a double entendre, referring not only to Geoffrey’s sense of touch but also his mind’s consciousness. The eagle calls the fainting Geoffrey by his name and commands him to “Awak!” (556). As a result of the eagle’s command, Geoffrey says, “My mynde cam to me ageyn” (564). This observation is significant to his healing process; the eagle’s arrival begins the reversal of his aching head.

To return to full health, Geoffrey must now fulfill the requirements for penance. In other words, he must pray, fast, and do alms deeds. Upon recognizing the desert-like state of his soul/ health, Geoffrey has already been led to pray for deliverance. Thus, the first component of penance is what prompted the arrival of the eagle. The second component is fasting. In accordance with his role as a biblical nurturer, the eagle tells his protégé that although he lives like a hermit, his “abstinence is lyte” (660), suggesting that Geoffrey needs to feed his soul rather than his body; in other words, he needs to fast. Accordingly, as I will discuss in the next section, Geoffrey “consumes” not physical food but a text that serves as a model for his course of treatment and, later, experiences that will help him become a better writer.⁴⁸

This concern also resonates with the third aspect of penance, the doctrine of alms

and thus directing the course of his treatment, or at least digging deeper into his psyche where he can glean new insights.

⁴⁸ Chaucer’s continued interest in the problems of the peasant “class” (the *House of Fame* was penned one year before the Uprising of 1381) persists throughout his corpus, suggesting an element of guilt over the security (and overeating) that came with his connection to the court. See for example his *Nun’s Priest’s Tale*, which is a dream tale obsessed with food that explicitly mentions the uprising. The dreamer, Chauntecleer, is (like Geoffrey) a possible avatar for Chaucer.

deeds. The eagle reminds Geoffrey not only to nourish his mind with better material (rather than nourishing his body with an excess of food), but also of his duty, particularly as a writer, to give back to the community, to show a sincere interest in the welfare of his fellow men, and to incorporate their experience into his work. It is this third requirement in particular with which the eagle will assist Geoffrey.

In order to help Geoffrey hear tidings of other people, the eagle takes him to Fame's house. "And therefore Joves, thorgh hys grace, / Wol that I bere the to a place / Which that hight the Hous of Fame, / To do the some disport and game, / In som recompensacion / Of labour and devocion / ... / So that thou wolt be of good chere. / For truste wel that thou shalt here, / When we be come there I seye, / Mo wonder thynges, dar I leye, / And of Loves folk moo tydynges" (661-66, 671-75). Geoffrey's illness is rooted in his work as a writer, but his writing can also be his cure if he leaves his isolation and bases his work on real people and real experiences, including, critically, "disport and game." (One of the cures for melancholy and mental illness is diversion or "good chere."⁴⁹) It is for this reason that Geoffrey must go to Fame's house. There he will meet "A ryght gret companye withalle, / And of sondry regiouns, / Of alleskynnes condiciouns / That dwelle in erthe under the mone, / Pore and ryche" (1528-32).⁵⁰ The

⁴⁹ Bartholomaeus suggests purgatives and electuaries as a remedy, and writes that "suche schal be refreisschid and comforted and withdrawe fram cause and mater of busy thoughtis" (*On the Properties of Things*, 350). Julie Singer explains how music was also used as a treatment for melancholy (*Blindness and Therapy in Late Medieval French and Italian Poetry* [Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2011], 5).

⁵⁰ John Leyerle (in "Windy Eagle," 256) and Kathryn Lynch (in "Logic," 191) argue that Geoffrey is not actually being taken to experience love. He is, however, being taken to witness others' experience of love, as well as a form of language production that arises from and even gives life to this experience. After all, his penance is to be more mindful of the people around him and to include them in his writings.

new works that Geoffrey will pen will be both immersed in the doings of men and for the benefit of his readers.

Geoffrey's journey seems to follow the pattern of cure by contraries (moving from the earth to the sky, from seclusion to interaction) and ending at Fame's house, "Ryght even in myddes of the weye" (714). Because Geoffrey is phlegmatic, or sluggish and cold, this move toward the warm sun suggests an allopathic therapy, as does the (golden) eagle who takes him there.⁵¹ Medieval bestiaries explained that the eagle could rejuvenate itself by flying to the region of the sun and then plunging into a healing fountain of water.⁵² For this reason, and because it would lift its young toward the sun, the eagle was often used as a symbol for Christ (which is appropriate for Geoffrey's spiritual illness). The eagle thus serves as an important symbol for the upward *and* downward motion of Geoffrey's journey.⁵³ (The eagle swoops "downward" (508) to get Geoffrey.) This does not mean that

⁵¹ Gentile of Foligno (d. 1348) instructs a patient suffering from melancholy to eat warm, well-cooked foods and to avoid most raw fruits and vegetables (Faith Wallis, ed., *Medieval Medicine: A Reader* [New York: University of Toronto Press, 2010], 412). Robert Burton would later recommend "a cup of wine or strong drink" for the melancholic person (who is cold and dry) as it makes a man "bold, hardy, courageous" and "takes away all fear and sorrow" (*The Anatomy of Melancholy*, ed. Floyd Dell and Paul Jordan-Smith [New York, 1941], 451).

⁵² Guillaume le Clerc writes in his *Bestiaire*, "The eagle is the king of birds. When it is old it becomes young again in a very strange manner. When its eyes are darkened and its wings are heavy with age, it seeks out a fountain clear and pure, where the water bubbles up and shines in the clear sunlight. Above this fountain it rises high up into the air, and fixes its eyes upon the light of the sun and gazes upon it until the heat thereof sets on fire its eyes and wings. Then it descends down into the fountain where the water is clearest and brightest, and plunges and bathes three times, until it is fresh and renewed and healed of its old age" (L. Oscar Kuhns, "Bestiaries and Lapidaries," in *Library Of The World's Best Literature, Ancient And Modern*, Vol. 4 [London, 1896]). The Middle English Bestiary (British Library Arundel MS 292) mentions that the eagle's "muth is get wel unkuth / With paternoster and crede." Sources accessed at <http://bestiary.ca/beasts/beast232.htm>.

⁵³ Chaucer's eagle is more comedic than instructive, but it is precisely this comedy (the "downward" motion) that proves important to Geoffrey's progress. As the eagle himself states, every thing has its natural place: "Lyght thing upward, and downward charge" (746). I will discuss this more in the next section.

Chaucer excluded similarities as a potential treatment, however. Writing was the cause of Geoffrey's illness (and sins), and his writing is what can heal him—if he bases it in bodily experience.⁵⁴ Indeed, as I will argue in the next section, his words alone have the ability to re-form his body.

Rewriting Geoffrey's Body

Geoffrey's dream models a process of healing in which he observes how words create bodies, preparing him to in turn (re)create his own body through his writings (i.e. the poem). The process begins with Venus's temple, where words become interchangeable with images of bodies, and moves to the disquisition of the eagle, who explains that all words rise to Fame's house, where they assume the shape of the bodies who uttered them. Next, Fame's proclamations directly influence the bodies who hear them and even turn the petitioners' words back into disembodied states. And finally, at the House of Rumors, words produced by ghostly bodies (in)form the breadth of bodily experience. In order to emphasize the bodily work Geoffrey must do as part of his penance, Chaucer infuses each of these instructive episodes with colors and sensory details as well as a strong dose of humor, which is perhaps the "sugar" that makes his medicine more palatable.⁵⁵ I will consider each of these four episodes in turn.

The Temple

⁵⁴ This isopathic form of treatment is visible in Chaucer's other dream poems, like the *Book of the Duchess*, in which a melancholic narrator reads about a melancholic character and subsequently dreams about a melancholic figure, with the result that he is again able to compose.

⁵⁵ The "spoonful of sugar" approach was well known in the pre-modern world. In her Golden Speech, Queen Elizabeth I mentions "physicians who, ministering a drug, make it more acceptable by giving it a good aromatical savor; or when they give pills, do gild them all over" (*Elizabeth I: Collected Works*, ed. Leah S. Marcus, Janel Mueller, and Mary Beth Rose [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000], 339).

Even though the eagle's arrival awakens Geoffrey to an awareness of his condition and his need for penance, his journey to self-awareness and wholeness begins with the opening of the dream, while he is still inside Venus's temple. Here the relationship between words and bodies is first explored, demonstrating not only how words create images (and vice versa) but also the importance of bodily experience as a foundation for good writing. This episode, which draws on theories of verbal and visual memory, ethical reading, and literary gaming, prompts Geoffrey to emulate literary visionaries like Virgil (and his characters) and John in order to rewrite his own body.

The activation of Geoffrey's memory is key to this transformation. For medievals, the faculty of memory was essential not only for the process of composition but also because it sorted through bodily experiences, which were easily corruptible, and paired them with knowledge gained from books.⁵⁶ In this way, it could serve as a corrective to the information received from the *sensus communis* by balancing knowledge from physical experience with knowledge from the experience of study. Consequently, in order to foster more productive memory work, medieval writers would often study images. While murals, like the ones in Venus's temple, were frequently used to map out topics during the process of invention, the concept of "image" was actually quite fluid.⁵⁷ Words

⁵⁶ Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*, 2nd edition (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2008) 2, 85).

⁵⁷ Mary Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought: Meditation, Rhetoric, and the Making of Images, 400-1200* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 178. She writes, "It is the very habitual nature of the pictures in one's most familiar place (one's house, indeed one's very bedroom) that makes them inventively fruitful over time for a variety of matters." We see this same *modus operandi* in Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess* when the *Roman de la Rose* appears on the walls of the dreamer's bedroom and in the *Parliament of Fowls* when the dreamer enters a temple depicting the stories of famous lovers.

on a page could be considered images.⁵⁸ And writers often conceived of poetic ornamentation as literary “pictures” that could guide their readers through the text.⁵⁹

In the *House of Fame*, however, Chaucer extends the process of poetic ornamentation so that literary images become *literal* images. Inside the temple, the opening lines of the *Aeneid* are “written on a table of bras” (142) hanging on the wall; however, the remainder of the story appears to be depicted in images.⁶⁰ Thus, Geoffrey states, “First sawgh I the destruction / Of Troye” (151-52, my emphasis), and he progresses through his reading using the verb “to see” rather than “to read.” For example, he recounts, “Ther saugh I graven eke withal, / That every herte myght agryse / To see hyt peynted on the wal” (209-11). And at the conclusion of the story, Geoffrey exclaims, “Sawgh I never such noblesse / Of ymages, ne such richesse, / As I saugh graven in this chirche” (471-73).

But even though Geoffrey is viewing the story “peynted on the wal,” he sometimes describes the epic as if it is told in words rather than (or in addition to) images: “I saugh next, in al thys fere, / How Creusa, daun Eneas wife... When hir spirit gan appere, / *The*

⁵⁸ Carruthers states, “Letters used for writing were considered to be as visual as what we call ‘images’ today...as a result the page as a whole, the complete parchment with its lettering and all its decoration, was considered a cognitively valuable ‘picture’” (Carruthers, *Craft of Thought*, 122).

⁵⁹ Carruthers writes, “Organizations of images...are designed to strike the eye of the mind forcefully, and to initiate or punctuate a reader’s ‘progress’ through a text, in the way that particular images (or parts of images) structure the ‘way’ of one’s eye through a picture. Indeed, the manufacture of mnemonic imagery could be analyzed as a process of mental ‘ornamentation’...Such ornamentation is no frill, but plays the essential role of catching the attention of a reader and orienting his/her cogitative procedures. All of the figures and tropes, but especially the ‘difficult’ ones like allegory or oxymoron, were understood to offer to a hearer or viewer a site for his or her further invention, acting as a marker on the text’s ‘surface’ of matters that might especially require attention, concentration” (*Craft of Thought*, 122).

⁶⁰ “There were moo ymages / Of gold, stondynge in sondry stages, / And moo ryche tabernacles, / And with perre moo pynacles, / And moo curiouse portreytures, / And queynte maner of figures / Of olde werk, then I saugh ever” (121-27).

wordes that she to hym seyde... Ther sawgh I graven eke how he... With hys shyppes gan to saylle” (174-75, 190-91, 193, 195, my emphasis). Christopher Baswell suggests that this process is an exaggerated version of personification allegory, which he calls systemic reification, in which verbal constructs “become things, possessing agency and acting in the narrative.”⁶¹ This process demonstrates how words, if used properly, can become agents with the potential to enact a physiological change. Words *create* bodies. Just as Virgil’s words are depicted as paintings (of bodies), Geoffrey sees Creusa’s very words as images (“I saugh next... The wordes that she to hym seyde”). The overlap between verbal and visual modes highlights the importance of literature in the healing process, and it is the dream frame in particular that makes this fusion of text and bodily image possible: by providing a vehicle in which this kind of bodily formation can occur, the dream facilitates healing.⁶²

This type of remedy depends on another function of the brain: the memory. In the

⁶¹ Christopher Baswell, *Virgil in Medieval England*, 237. This process continues in parts two and three. Baswell writes, “When the eagle carries him [Geoffrey] off (541-48), Boethius’s feathers of philosophy—the metaphoric medium of ascent—literally swoop down and lift Geoffrey up, and that idea made flesh in turn articulates the principles of sound being made flesh which allow Geoffrey to see the equally reified figures of rumor in the House of Fame. But this making of images and ideas into objects and characters extends to the codex itself. Stories have become spaces in which the narrator can roam, and figures clad in red or black—letters come to life—will later run around the House of Fame. The scheme of reification has of course already had its place in Book One, with its book turned into a temple of Venus by way of the traditional arts of memory. But it is far more overt in Books Two and Three, and exploits especially a series of images made prominent in the allegorical vision of the *Aeneid*, particularly the spiritual allegory inspired by Boethius” (237-38).

⁶² Baswell writes, “Geoffrey’s report of the story in the temple combines ephrasis and textuality in a whole that could be experienced only in memory or dream. Once past the initial lines, it becomes emphatically clear that what he is summarizing is visual, not textual... Then, in a surprising piece of sympathetic perception, Geoffrey begins briefly to *hear* the story (though he uses only indirect discourse) when Creusa’s ghost appears to Aeneas (187-92)” (*Virgil*, 233).

Middle Ages, there was no distinction between verbal and visual memory.⁶³ Thus, poets understood that both depiction and description could be used to activate past recollections.⁶⁴ For example, Richard de Fournival dedicates his text to his beloved and explains that, in his absence, his use of depiction (*painture*) and description (*parole*) will act as a substitute for his physical self: “When I am not in your presence this composition will by its picture and its word restore me to your present remembrance.”⁶⁵ Here, Geoffrey is both reading *and* viewing a book a come to life. His memory is thus doubly activated by the use of his (visual) senses and the colorful images surrounding him. The pictures in the temple trigger Geoffrey’s memory—allowing him to recognize his condition, as we have seen: “Ther may be under godlyhed / Kevered many a shrewed vice” (274-75)—by forming figures who speak to him on a personal level.

While a stimulated memory is critical for the recovery of self-knowledge, it is

⁶³ Carruthers, *Craft of Thought*, 122. She writes that there was an “emphasis upon the need for human beings to ‘see’ their thoughts in their minds as organized schemata of images, or ‘pictures,’ and then to use these for further thinking” (*Craft of Thought*, 2). See note 7 for how Geoffrey applies this process in his composition of the poem.

⁶⁴ Richard de Fournival explains in his *Bestiaire d’amour* how *painture* and *parole* provide access to the memory: “Wherefore God, who so loves man that He wants to provide for his every need, has given him a particular faculty of mind called Memory. This Memory has two doors: Sight and Hearing. And to each of these two doors a pathway leads, namely Depiction and Description. Depiction serves the eye and Description serves the ear. How one may repair to Memory’s House through Depiction and Description is evident in that Memory, which guards the treasury of knowledge acquired by the mind of many by virtue of his intelligence, renders the past as if it were present. This happens by Depiction and Description. For when one sees the depiction of a history of Troy or of some other place, one sees the deeds of those past heroes as if they were present. And so it is with Description...because one is converting past to present by these two things, namely Depiction and Description, it is clearly apparent that by these two things once can have access to Memory” (*Master Richard’s Bestiary of Love and Response*, trans. Jeanette Beer [West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Press, 2000], 1-2).

⁶⁵ Richard de Fournival, *Bestiary*, 2. He further explains how word and picture can overlap: “I shall show you how this composition has Depiction and Description. That it describes in words is obvious, because all writing is performed to reveal the word and to be read. When it is read, the writing then reverts to word-form. It is obvious, besides, that it contains depiction, for no letter exists unless painted” (2).

also essential for the process of composition. The physical experience represented by the *Aeneid*—by the writers and the characters alike—inspires Geoffrey to improve his writing (and health) by creating a new poem. His memory will allow him to document his dream and thus his journey back to health. As Richard de Fournival puts it, “When one sees the depiction of a history of Troy or of some other place, one sees the deeds of those past heroes as if they were present.”⁶⁶ The “presence” of Aeneas and Dido, brought to life by the words of Virgil and Ovid and rendered into images, inspires Geoffrey to add experiences to his life and thus his own writings—in several ways.⁶⁷

First, Virgil and Ovid were considered experienced and uncontested literary authorities in the Middle Ages.⁶⁸ Ovid especially was regarded as an expert in matters of love, and his writings, such as the *Ars Amatoria* and the *Amores*, emphasized the importance of personal experience.⁶⁹ Because Virgil and Ovid wrote from bodily experience, their words are able to come to life in the form of colorful images in the temple. Geoffrey too is a writer, but his words are colorless.⁷⁰ As the eagle observes, while Jove has been mindful of the many “bookys, songes, dytees” (622-23) that Geoffrey has created in the service of Cupid and Venus (“That have hys servyse sought, and seke; / And

⁶⁶ Richard de Fournival, *Bestiary*, 2.

⁶⁷ Chaucer amends his account of Aeneas by borrowing from Ovid’s perspective, as he explicitly mentions: “Whoso to knowe hit hath purpose, / Rede Virgile in Eneydos / Or the Epistle of Ovyde” (378-79).

⁶⁸ See Richard Jenkyns, *Virgil’s Experience: Nature and History; Times, Names, and Places* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

⁶⁹ See Sylvia Huot, *Dreams of Lovers and Lies of Poets: Poetry, Knowledge, and Desire in the Roman de la Rose* (Oxford: Legenda, 2010). In Book 3, Elegy 5 of the *Amores*, Ovid includes a dream.

⁷⁰ It is the colorless desert—a stark contrast to the sensuous temple built of Virgil and Ovid’s words—that demonstrates the dullness of Geoffrey’s own writings (which is linked to his illness/ sins).

peynest the to preyse hys art,” 626-27), Geoffrey has no personal experience with love (“Although thou haddest never part,” 628). This is because, as we have noted, his literary work has been pursued in seclusion. In Baswell’s words, “Geoffrey’s world is the world of books, of mediated and predigested experience.”⁷¹ In order to follow the example of these classical masters, he must imbue his words with his own experience.⁷² This he does when he later visits Fame’s house.

Second, the spiritual journey of Aeneas (portrayed in images) serves as a model for Geoffrey’s own journey. As Gregory the Great explains, “What we see in a text is not rules for what we *ought* to be, but images of what we *are*, ‘our own beauty, our own ugliness.’”⁷³ In the story of Aeneas, Geoffrey sees a reflection of himself: a fallible man who has sinned and must undertake a journey of redemption.⁷⁴ This prompts him to reenact the hero’s quest. Just as Aeneas comes to the Libyan coast after leaving Dido, Geoffrey too finds himself stranded in a “desert of Lybye.”⁷⁵ The rest of the dream continues to imitate Virgil’s text, including the hero’s descent to the underworld.⁷⁶

Third, by using the *Heroides* as a source, Chaucer emphasizes Dido’s experience

⁷¹ Baswell, *Virgil*, 239.

⁷² Ovid connects his poetry to his experience: “We too shall be sung throughout the world, and ever my name shall be united with thine own [nos quoque per totum pariter cantabimur orbem, / iunctaque semper erunt nomina nostra tuis] (*Amores*, 1.3.25-26).

⁷³ Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, 226.

⁷⁴ Virgil saw Aeneas’s “sin” as necessary, while Chaucer perhaps does not. This may be why he also draws on Ovid’s perspective.

⁷⁵ Jane Chance argues, “The emphasis here on Carthage and the desert serves as a warning (understood certainly by the literate audience of Chaucer’s time) that the hero—Eneas, and Chaucer, who surely must identify with him—ought to scurry onward to Italy and the goal of the contemplative life, Pallas Athena (wisdom)” (*Mythographic Chaucer*, 54).

⁷⁶ For more of these parallels, see Baswell, *Virgil*, 230-37. The House of Rumors has important similarities to the underworld, as I will discuss later.

as equally important to Aeneas's, if not more devastating.⁷⁷ After all, it is Dido who is most severely affected by language. Geoffrey quotes her lament in his summary: "O wel-away that I was born! / For thorgh yow is my name lorn, / And alle myn actes red and songe / Over al thys lond, on every tongue. / ... / Eke, though I myghte duren ever, / That I have done rekever I never, / That I ne shal be seyde, allas, / Yshamed be thourgh Enease, / And that I shal thus juged be" (345-48, 354-57). Dido blames Fame, but really it is language—the rumors that "seyth the peple prively" (360)—that proves to be her undoing. She cannot fight a reputation given to her by words, and this irrevocably changes the shape of her life.

Perhaps, then, it is not surprising that Geoffrey comes to his most important realization while summarizing Dido's story.⁷⁸ Not only does Dido's experience lead him to recognize his own failings and the danger of trusting too quickly, thus underscoring the importance of experience—"Hyt is not al gold that glareth" (272) and "he that fully knoweth th'erbe / May saufly leye hyt to his yē" (290-91)—but he also embraces the knowledge he is gaining in his dream, which is itself a form of personal experience: "As me mette redely— / Non other auctour alegge I" (313-14). While Virgil and Ovid have served as important models of experiential writing, it is here that Geoffrey realizes that he must become his own authority. He can transcribe Dido's words because they've come to him (as images turned words) in his dream. This personal experience becomes just as

⁷⁷ Ovid's *Heroides* is a collection of poems written from the perspective of mistreated heroines. Chaucer's use of the text here, and his sympathy for Dido, serves as a precursor to his *Legend of Good Women*.

⁷⁸ Jane Chance argues, "Chaucer's narrator resembles his hero Eneas less than he does Dido, or one of the other two female victims" (*Mythographic Chaucer*, 55).

important as the experience gleaned from a book.⁷⁹ “But wel-away, the harm, the routhe,
 / That hath betyd for such untrouthe, / *As men may ofte in bokes rede, / And al day sen hyt*
yet in dede, / That for to thynten hyt, a tene is” (383-87, my emphasis). This inspires him
 to put Dido’s experience into his own words: “What that she wrot or that she dyde; / And
 nere hyt to long to endyte, / Be God, I wolde hyt here write” (380-83). Baswell writes,
 “At what is for Geffrey the heart of the story, he finds not his *auctor* or his epic hero, but
 rather himself—‘non other auctour alegge I’—and the reshaping power of his response to
 the text.”⁸⁰

In this response, we see Chaucer’s particular brand of humor. Even though Dido’s
 story speaks to him on a personal level, and his journey is modeled on Aeneas’s, Geffrey
 is really nothing like the epic hero(es) he hopes to emulate. The humor of this
 juxtaposition allows Chaucer to adopt a comic posture towards otherwise serious
 historical and philosophical issues.⁸¹ Nora Corrigan argues, “For Chaucer, the play world
 is...never wholly separate from the real world.”⁸² Such play opens a dialogue between
 the text and the audience by inviting them to note the comic parallels and departures from
 the source material. This type of interactive reading fosters an ethical comprehension of

⁷⁹ Chaucer makes a similar gesture in his *Legend of Good Women*. His narrator states, “there is game noon / that fro my bokes maketh me to goon” (F 33-34) except for the games of May. Thus, because it is May, he can say, “Farwel my bok and my devocioun!” (F 39). McCormick argues, “By abandoning his books, the narrator exchanges his seeming preference for literary authority for that of experiential knowledge—in this instance, the experiential knowledge a game provides” (“Remembering,” 121).

⁸⁰ Baswell, *Virgil*, 234.

⁸¹ Baswell states, “Chaucer can construct in Geffrey an avatar at once serious and comic, straightforward and parodic. Geffrey as reader of *auctoritee* is best understood as a character already enacting, refiguring the hero he will read, and who will enact that hero again at the close of the poem” (*Virgil*, 229).

⁸² Corrigan, “The Knight’s Earnest Game.”

not only the story but also the listener.⁸³ As understood in the Middle Ages, an ethical text invoked self-reflection (via memory) in the reader, just as the *Aeneid* invokes such reflection in Geffrey.⁸⁴ By casting his dreamer as a not-so epic hero who nonetheless sees his own reflection in works of literature, Chaucer invites his readers to find their own mirrors and consequently their weaknesses.⁸⁵ In so doing, he invites them to join Geffrey on the path to healing.

There is another comic adaptation in this episode, and that is Geffrey's imitation of John the Revelator. In the Book of Revelation, John's words became an extension of his physical body after he consumes the book. Recall that Geffrey reads the story of

⁸³ For example, in *The Canterbury Tales*, the storytelling game incorporates the readers so that "the relationship between Chaucer's fictional storytellers, their equally fictional listeners, and their material mirrors the real-world relationship between the poet, his real-world readers, and the poem itself," thus the storytelling contest opens a process of self-discovery (Nancy Corrigan, "The Knight's Earnest Game." She is summarizing G.D. Josipovici, "Fiction and Game in *The Canterbury Tales*," *Critical Quarterly* 7 (1965): 185-97). In the Prologue to Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*, Chaucer makes overt references to debate authorities like Ovid and Jerome, the flower and the leaf tradition, and even the word "game" itself in order to indicate to his audience that he is creating a game space. See McCormick, 119-123 and William Quinn, *Chaucer's Rehearsals: The Performability of The Legend of Good Women* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1994). The dreamer's penitential (and ludic) situation opens the opportunity for healing by setting him to work on a text prompted by and grounded in real experience that forces him—and the reader—to carefully consider which *exempla* are worthy of ethical memory. In the text, references to games and debates intersect with references to memory, especially its association with books (see lines F 17-18, 25-26, 508-10), in order to emphasize "the kind of trained ethical memory so essential to medieval poetics" (McCormick, 124).

⁸⁴ An ethical text required "a recollecting subject, a remembered text, and a remembering audience" (Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, 227). Thus ethics is connected to memory, specifically memory comprised of *imagines* ("likenesses") and *intentiones* ("responses") (227). A crucial part of this synthesis between image and recollection (reflecting on images to sort through/ generate new thoughts) is the audience provided by the dreamer. See Sandra Pierson Prior; "Routhe and Hert-Huntyng in the 'Book of the Duchess,'" *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 85 (1986): 3-19, at 14.

⁸⁵ What Prior says of the *Book of the Duchess* could be applied here, "The Dreamer, whose grief belongs to experience, lacks the knowledge or tools for defining his sickness... The figure of the Black Knight is thus a mediating one, for he brings together and synthesizes important features from the Dreamer's personal life and from the Ovidian story. Crucial to this synthesis is the audience provided by the Dreamer" (Prior, 13-14).

Aeneas in the temple, possibly out loud.⁸⁶ For medievals, reading out loud was a way to familiarize, internalize, and take physiological possession of a text—a process akin to digestion.⁸⁷ Just as John’s internalization of the book (his mission) changes him, Geoffrey’s reading of the *Aeneid* sets the stage for his own transformation. This connection is made more explicit by the fact that Geoffrey reads (consumes) the text *during* his vision, like John, rather than before, like Chaucer’s personae did in his dream visions the *Book of the Duchess* and the *Parliament of Fowls*.⁸⁸ The temple thus supplies

⁸⁶ The *House of Fame* was written during a transitioning culture, in which texts were both read aloud (often in groups) and silently (by individuals). For example, in another of Chaucer’s works, *Troilus and Criseyde*, Criseyde and two of her friends listen to their companion read aloud from the Romance of Thebes: “two othere ladyes sete and she, / With-inne a paved parlour; and they three / Herden a mayden reden hem the geste / Of the Sege of Thebes, whyl hem leste” (2.81-84). Nancy Mason Bradbury writes, “A given story might in the course of its career be read privately by an educated individual, read aloud from manuscripts by members of the household to their social equals, and both read aloud and recited from memory by professional performers, both to their social superiors in banquet halls and to their equals in taverns and marketplaces” (*Writing Aloud: Storytelling in Late Medieval England* [Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998], 20-21). She finds that Chaucer’s works tend to emphasize the oral quality of literature, pointing to elements of a minstrel style and evidence of his interest in oral performance, which are put in conversation with moments of private reading: “The easy move from poem to conversation might remind us that even a long narrative poem like Chaucer’s might have been surrounded in performance by the same lively discussion, jesting, posturing, and flirtation that accompany in Chaucer’s text both the reading of the Theban romance in Criseyde’s paved parlor and Antigone’s song” (*Writing Aloud*, 195). Even if Geoffrey does not read the text out loud, according to the eagle, written and spoken speech are the same (lines 718-24).

⁸⁷ Carruthers, *Book of Memory*, 205-6. Carruthers notes that Augustine believed mental pictures—which are essential to thought and composition—could be fashioned regardless of whether one was reading in silence or out loud (*Craft of Thought*, 122). She writes, “Reading is memorized with the aid of *murmur*, mouthing the words subvocally as one turns the text over in one’s memory...It is this movement of the mouth that established rumination as a basic metaphor for memorial activities. The process familiarizes a text to a medieval scholar, in a way like that by which human beings may be said to ‘familiarize’ their food. It is both physiological and psychological, and it changes both the food and its consumer” (*Book of Memory*, 205).

⁸⁸ John Fyler groups the book in *House of Fame* in the same category as the books in *Book of the Duchess* and *Parliament of Fowls*, acknowledging briefly, “Though here the book...is inside the dream, in a series of wall paintings” (“Introduction to *The House of Fame*,” *Riverside*, 347). This to me is a crucial distinction, one that cannot be glossed over so easily. Geoffrey reads the story of Aeneas *after* he is already asleep; the book is therefore not responsible for the rest of the dream. It has a different function.

Geffery's healing "food," which is later bolstered by the appearance of the nurturing eagle.

By capturing the material, physical nature of images, the episode at the temple emphasizes the body's centrality as a site for the production and integration of language. When Geffrey views words as pictures and reads pictures as words in a sort of game-like environment, the result is a heightened stimulation of his memory, which is necessary for his progression toward self-authority—and for writing poetry. As a result of this reading experience, in which he compares himself to other literary icons, Geffrey does indeed come to better know himself and recognizes that he is dis-eased (prompting his prayer and the appearance of the eagle).⁸⁹ This is his first step on the path to wholeness.

The Eagle

The interchangeability of the verbal and visual at Venus's temple continues in the eagle's disquisition, as does an emphasis on bodily experience as part of Geffrey's therapy and his work as a writer. The eagle demonstrates the importance of experience when he claims, "Of every word of thys sentence / A preve by experience" (877-78). Because his words spring from experiential knowledge, the eagle points out that he can prove his point "Withoute any subtilite / Of speche, or gret prolixite / Of termes of philosophie, / Of figures of poetrie, / Or colours of rethorike" (855-59). Throughout the poem, empty figures of speech, or "colours of rethorike," are contrasted with language that is based on experience and is literally colorful, like the story of Aeneas and Dido in

⁸⁹ Baswell notes, "The act of reading itself (Dido's or Geffrey's) occupies the emotional high point of the first book of the *House of Fame*" (*Virgil*, 234).

the temple.⁹⁰

As an example of the uselessness of empty rhetoric, the eagle argues that every “speche, or noyse, or soun” (783) is the same, nothing more than disturbed air: “Spech is soun, / Or elles no man myghte hyt here / Soun ys noght but eyr ybroken; / Lowd or pryvee, foul or fair, / In his substaunce ys but air” (762-68). This passage has generated a fair amount of commentary in the scholarship, with most scholars concurring that the eagle’s argument is undermined by multiple logical fallacies.⁹¹ I would propose, however, that these fallacies are intentional: in addition to embodying the comedy Chaucer found central to his project (this speech is clearly supposed to be funny), the eagle is demonstrating the very uselessness of the “colors of rhetoric” that he decries.⁹² Any writer (or orator) can create words out of air, but only words grounded in lived experience can affect a lasting change.

Indeed, the eagle himself asserts that his disquisition is a game. After defining the nature of language, he tells Geoffrey, ““Take yt in ernest or in game”” (822). And he says of his lecture on experience, ““Be Seynt Jame, / Now wil we speken al of game!”” (885-

⁹⁰ Lynch notes that references to “figures of poetrie” and “colours of rethorike” (857-59) “involved the technical jargon of trained philosophers, ‘scole-termes’ as he denotes them in the Merchant’s Tale (IV.1568), a jargon that the Eagle claims to have avoided successfully in his explications of sound” (*Chaucer’s Philosophical Visions* [Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2000], 10).

⁹¹ For example, see Lynch, “The Logic of the Dream Vision.” Many scholars read here the influence of Ockham’s semiological and linguistic theory, finding that the eagle depicts language as unreliable and fragmented, thus severing the bonds between signifier and signified. Sheila Delany states, “From beginning to end, the Eagle’s speech relies on tautology, analogy, non sequitur, reductive simplicity, abuse of the syllogism, circular argument, and ‘proofs’ that prove nothing” (*Chaucer’s House of Fame*, 75).

⁹² As Delany notes, “Another source of humor in the Eagle’s monologue is that its elaborate rhetoric cannot disguise an unconvincing argument” (*Chaucer’s House of Fame*, 74). In so doing, the eagle illustrates the very problems with rhetoric he pointed out to Geoffrey. (Ultimately, the eagle’s claims about Fame do turn out to be true, as Geoffrey himself later verifies, precisely because he is speaking from personal experience.)

86). By framing this moment as play, Chaucer helps his literary persona, and his audience, recognize the ambiguous nature of language. Words can distract and deceive, but they can also have a real impact, as they did on Dido. How they are used, then, becomes a sort of game, one with potentially grave consequences.⁹³ This is a serious subject, but the eagle's humor effectively opens a dialogue between reader and text, allowing for introspection and greater memory work on the part of Geoffrey and those hearing about his journey.

The eagle's discourse also underscores the basic connection between words and bodies. His view that written and oral speech is interchangeable may be an extension of medieval logic, which specified three kinds of *oratio*: written, spoken, and "conceived" (or thought).⁹⁴ As he states, "The way therto ys so overt, / And stante eke in so juste a place / That every sound mot to hyt pace; / Or what so cometh from any tonge, / Be hyt rounded, red, or songe, / Or spoke in suerte or in drede, / Certeyn, hyt moste thider need" (718-24). William of Ockham describes the difference between the first and second type of *oratio* partly as a function of the different bodily sense to which each kind of speech refers. He writes, "A written term is part of a proposition written on some material, and is or can be seen with the bodily eye. A spoken term is part of a proposition uttered with the mouth and able to be heard with the bodily ear. A conceptual term is a mental content or impression."⁹⁵ This perspective strengthens the connection between language and bodily

⁹³ This is not unlike the dangerous games in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the author of which is presumed to have written *Pearl*, another dream vision.

⁹⁴ Some scholars have argued that each of the three books in the *House of Fame* may even correspond to these three types of *oratio* (Book 1 to the written work, Book 2 to speech, and Book 3 to thought). See Lynch, "Logic of the Dream Vision."

⁹⁵ Lynch, "Logic," 193.

experience; it is the senses (eyes, mouth) that allow people to access language and use it effectively. Even thought, based in the faculty of reason, is an indirect product of sensory experience. All information abstracted by the faculty of reason ultimately originates with bodily experience and the *sensus communis*, or the information collected by the senses. At a very basic level, then, bodies produce language (which is why language should in turn reflect bodily experience).

This concept is solidified—quite literally—when the eagle explains that the words/ sounds that travel to Fame’s house, upon arriving, assume the form of the bodies from which they originated. “But understond now ryght wel this: / Whan any speche ycomen ys / Up to the paleys, anon-ryght / Hyt wexeth lyk the same wight / Which that the word in erthe spake, / Be hyt clothed red or blak; / And hath so verray hys lyknesse / That spak the word, that thou wilt gesse / That it the same body be, / Man or woman, he or she” (1074-82). Just as Virgil’s words became bodies in Venus’s temple, words produced by human speech take the shape of the bodies who produced the words.⁹⁶ The words are clothed in red and black and appear just like the person who spoke them.⁹⁷ Here, colors again signal an overt link between bodies/ images and language and so are

⁹⁶ Of this episode, Hugo Keiper writes, “It seems to me that it can be interpreted in the sense that any utterance inevitably bears the stamp, and consequently, the ‘shape’ of its speaker. The allegory might thus be read as an oblique way of pointing out the ineluctability of perspective, which we have seen to be so central an idea in all of Chaucer’s dream poems” (“I wot myself,” *Literary Nominalism*, 224, note 56). B.G. Koonce finds that by converting words into images Chaucer sets the stage for “an elaborate inversion of the Last Judgment” (*Chaucer and the Tradition of Fame*, 158).

⁹⁷ As an interesting aside, the clerk from Oxford in *The Canterbury Tales* carries “Twenty bookes, clad in blak or red” (Pr. 294). Scholars have not found anything particularly significant in the coloring of the books’ covers, but perhaps Chaucer is making yet another connection between words and bodies (or having a bit of fun) by alluding to the *House of Fame*.

contrasted with the useless colors of rhetoric demonstrated just lines before.⁹⁸

Consequently, Geoffrey sees how his cure (writing) is dependent on his body. In order to improve his writing, he must gain more physical experience. Healing will come as he explores that experience through the act of composing the poem.

The text confirms that Geoffrey's focus should be on bodily experiences when the eagle offers to teach his protégé about the stars and Geoffrey declines. "Nay, certeynly, quod y, 'ryght naught / ... / Hyt shulde shenden al my syghte / To loke on them" (994, 1016-17). This response would seem to support scholars' claims that Chaucer is mocking visionary learning. But in the context of his treatment, Geoffrey's answer makes perfect sense. His remedy is strictly connected to human experience (the source of his writing), not the "eyryssh bestes" (932) or celestial bodies that inhabit the skies. Gazing at the stars too long would blind him—literally and metaphorically—and Geoffrey needs his eyes to witness the experience of his fellow mortals. At this point in the poem, he knows precisely what he needs to do to cure his aching head, and he is committed to it. At Fame's house, he will proceed with his treatment.

Fame's House

Fame's house, which recalls the jeweled city of the Apocalypse, is a smorgasbord of sensory imagery: music, taste, smells, sounds, and sights. Above all, it is a site for entertainment and games. "Ful the castel, al aboute— / Of alle maner of mynstralles / And gestiours that tellen tales / Both of wepinge and of game, / Of al that longeth unto Fame" (1196-1200). Here, Geoffrey sees every kind of musician and entertainer, including

⁹⁸ The words may be separated from the people who created them, but they still represent those people, and thus the poem creates a symmetry between language and bodies; affecting one will affect the other.

all of his literary idols displayed on pillars, along with scores of people awaiting judgment: “What shulde I make lenger tale / Of all the pepil y there say, / Fro hennes into domes day?” (1282-84). But the greatest entertainment of all is the one provided by the goddess and her trumpeters. No one knows what judgment Fame will grant to her petitioners, and even Geoffrey observes that she seems fickle in her pronouncements. I would argue, however, that her decrees are like a game, one that reflects the connection between language and experience.⁹⁹

Unlike Geoffrey’s colorless language, the decrees from Fame’s trumpets are composed of strong sensory details. Mirroring the sensory blending in Venus’s temple, the trumpets are not merely made of sound; they are also made of colors and even smells. For example, one of the blasts from the trump of gold smells like roses. “And, certes, al the breth that wente / Out of his trumpes mouth it smelde / As men a pot of bawme helde

⁹⁹ Many critics have pointed out that Fame seems to assign her judgments randomly: Geoffrey observes that, in his view, all of the petitioners seem worthy of renown, but that Fame is as fickle as her sister Fortune (1542-47). This is often used as an argument that Chaucer was interested in nominalism, or the lack of a link between signifier (fame) and signified (the people’s works). Jessica Barr states, “Fame’s house is a kind of nominalist nightmare: the democratization of all language as it arrives within her walls and the arbitrariness of her judgments demonstrate what might happen in a world where language ceased to provide access to an underlying reality” (*Willing to Know God: Dreamers and Visionaries in the Later Middle Ages* [Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2010], 241). I find, however, that this capriciousness underscores the connection between experience and language: in the real world, good things do not always happen to good people. Thus Fame’s pronouncements are a faithful reflection of lived experience. Lynch notes that Fame “is reflective rather than productive of the variable state of human affairs...the world over which Fame rules (which unfortunately is easily recognizable as the ‘real world’) is not one that we would readily describe as ‘logical.’ It is...a world of individuals, whose behaviors do not easily translate into any universal truth” (“Logic,” 199). Words do have a real influence on a person’s life, as we will see more dramatically at the House of Rumors. It is also possible that the people’s works, or perhaps their intentions, may be deserving of shame, and Geoffrey is not gifted with the omniscience of the goddess to know this for himself. In this way, Fame’s judgments approximate biblical judgment (as found in the work of Chaucer’s literary model Dante).

/ Among a basket ful of roses” (1684-87).¹⁰⁰

When Fame denounces a group of people of whom she does not approve,
however, her trumpeter Eolus takes out his “blake trumpet of bras” (1637).

And such a smoke gan out wende
Out of his foule trumpes ende,
Blak, bloo, grenyssh, swartish red,
As doth where that men melte led,
Loo, al on high fro the tuel.
And therto oo thing saugh I wel,
That the ferther that hit ran,
The gretter wexen hit began,
As dooth the river from a welle,
And hyt stank as the pit of helle.
Allas, thus was her shame yronge,
And gilteles, on every tongue!
(1645-56)

Fame’s pronouncement is filled with color (and smell) because it is closely linked to individual experience. As the people pleaded, “Graunte us now good fame, / And let our werkes han that name” (1554-56). Indeed, if the words that ascend to Fame’s house take

¹⁰⁰ Here we find another echo of the Apocalypse: “And when he had opened the book, the four living creatures, and the four and twenty ancients fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints” [Et cum aperuisset librum, quatuor animalia, et viginti quatuor seniores ceciderunt coram Agno, habentes singuli citharas, et phialas aureas plenas odoramentorum, quae sunt orationes sanctorum] (Rev. 5:8).

the form of people, it may be that the petitioners are really words that are being returned to their original form: bodies create words, which become bodies, and then words again.

The possibility of this is demonstrated by the four colors that the people's works assume: black, blue, green, and red. Black and red recall the clothing of the words-turned-people, but the four colors together are also reminiscent of the body's four humors, which Chaucer mentioned at the beginning of his text. These are black bile, yellow bile, blood, and phlegm. "Swartish" or dark red easily correlates with blood, and black with black bile. "Bloo" means dark blue-gray and thus could stand for phlegm.¹⁰¹ The *Isagoge* notes that there are "five varieties of phlegm": acrid phlegm is "associated with cold and dryness, and tinged with black bile," and so would take on this color.¹⁰² Another variety is glassy phlegm, which is "caused by great coldness and coagulation." Finally, "grenyssh" could refer to yellow bile, which also has five varieties, two of which are green. The "fourth kind of bile is green, like *prasius* [*a light green semi-precious stone*]." Another bile is "green like verdigris and burns like a poison." These four colors, then, by composing a picture of the human body, underscore the connection between physical experience and language.¹⁰³ Fame's pronouncements may seem capricious, but they are linked in an explicit way to bodily activity.

This connection is strengthened by the parallels between the "melted lead"

¹⁰¹ As glossed by Robinson in *The Riverside Chaucer*, p. 367, n. 1647.

¹⁰² All citations in this paragraph are from Faith Wallis, *Medieval Medicine*, 141, and Joannitius's commentary/ translation of the *Isagoge*. Incidentally, the *Isagoge* mentions the problem of universals and was used by William of Ockham in his textbook on logic.

¹⁰³ Because the people are rewarded ill renown, their humors may not be in proper order—Isidore of Seville wrote that diseases are caused when humors increase beyond the limits set by nature (Wallis, *Medieval Medicine*, 7)—and the coloring could be a result of mixing and coagulation.

appearance of the trumpet's smoke ("Blak, bloo, grenyssh, swartish red, / As doth where that men melte led") and the names engraved in ice at the foundation of Fame's palace that were "molte away with hete" (1149): "But wel unnethes koude I knowe / Any lettres for to rede / Hir names by; for, out of drede, / They were almost ofthowed so / That of the lettres oon or two / Was molte away of every name, / So unfamous, was woxe hir fame" (1140-46). Both sets of people—those whose names are erased from the ice and those about whom Eolus trumpets—receive bad fame and obscurity. Their names are melted. They are forgotten, disembodied, and dissolved into colored smoke, parts of a body but not a whole.¹⁰⁴ What happens to words (a person's name and reputation) thus affects what happens to their body, just as it did for Dido. This is why it is critical that Geoffrey take control of his language; his health depends on it. It is the only way to win the game.

At this point in the dream Geoffrey has visited a temple filled with golden images, been rescued by a golden eagle, and been brought to hear Fame's golden trumpets. The golden coloring of Geoffrey's instructors—which gestures toward knowledge and illumination—would suggest that he should follow their example concerning experiential writing. Indeed, after mingling with a variety of people, Geoffrey seems to have learned the lesson the eagle wanted to teach him. He states, "I wot myself best how y stonde; / For what I drye [experience], or what I thynke, / I wil myselven al hyt drynke" (1878-80). It is not a coincidence, I believe, that he announces (and, by rhyming, pairs) the way he will "thynke" with a somatic verb, "drynke." Rather than hide in his room with his books (and food), from now on Geoffrey will "consume" experiences—his own as well as

¹⁰⁴ Catherine Haigney argues that the beryl walls of Fame's palace become like a mirror "broken into fragments that reflect only parts of the whole" (*Chaucer's Epistemological Comedies*, 251).

others.’ In this moment, Geoffrey understands himself more fully; he becomes his own authority.¹⁰⁵ This is evidence that his remedy (writing based on bodily experience) is working.

House of Rumors

As a result of his time at Fame’s palace, where he is privy to the experiences of countless numbers of people and the language production that is based on those experiences, Geoffrey is better equipped to imbue his own words with color. The final stage of his treatment is to now have experiences of his own. Thus, when a stranger asks Geoffrey what he is seeking, Geoffrey replies, “The cause why y stonde here: / Somme newe tydynges for to lere” (1885-86). The stranger leads him to the House of Rumors where Geoffrey witnesses the poem’s most dramatic enactment of language’s effect on bodies. Spoken words become animate things that travel throughout the world, to the real benefit or detriment of those about whom they speak. Like the rest of the poem, this final episode is colored with the comedy and sensory imagery that has characterized Geoffrey’s journey in order to direct our focus toward the flawed and illogical nature of the human condition. After all, only man can be harmed—or healed—by the power of words.

The House of Rumors is a labyrinthine structure made of colorful twigs: “falwe [yellow], rede, / And grene eke, and somme weren white” (1936-7). These colors signal another link between bodies and words: in the house, Geoffrey (again accompanied by the eagle) finds a “congregacioun / Of folk, as I saugh rome aboute” (2034-35), just as he

¹⁰⁵ Lynch sees no evidence that there is a restoration “from a confused and disorganized psyche to wholeness and reason” (“Logic,” 184). However, even if the poem does not have a tidy resolution, Geoffrey has emerged better equipped to navigate the world. As Keiper states, “For anyone living (or believing) in this kind of world or reality, it were indeed advisable, then, that he find his own standing, as Geoffrey obviously does” (“I wot myself,” 227).

roamed about the temple of Venus.¹⁰⁶ The people he meets, “Some within and some wythoute, / Nas never seen, ne shal ben eft” (2036-37), are reminiscent of Aeneas’s encounters in the Underworld (as is the reference to Daedalus’s engraved doors).¹⁰⁷ Both characters must descend to a lower place in order to gain important knowledge and experience by talking to other people. As the poem reads, “Tho saugh y stonde in a valeye, / Under the castel, faste by, / An hous, that Domus Dedaly, / That Laboryntus cleped ys” (1918-21).

The otherworldly beings Geoffrey meets—perhaps speech embodied—spread rumors relentlessly until their words leap out of the house of their own accord: “And whan that was ful yspronge, / And woxen more on every tonge / Than ever hit was, [hit] wente anoon / Up to a wyndowe out to goon” (2081-84). These “tydynges,” which describe the gamut of human experience, are dispersed throughout the world by Fame and prompt the very experiences in those who hear them, for good or ill.¹⁰⁸ Thus, the

¹⁰⁶ In the temple, Geoffrey reports, “I romed up and doun” (140). Chauntecleer the rooster performs the exact same movement in the *Nun’s Priest’s Tale* (2898), which is also a text concerned with dreams, language, and bodies.

¹⁰⁷ Baswell writes, “Both these episodes link Geoffrey to Aeneas not as a martial or erotic conqueror, but rather as a gazer in moments of narrative suspension. At both points, Aeneas is a reader of events... So Geoffrey is—at these moments anyway—linked to Aeneas as a ‘reader,’ someone responding to the problematic power of human artificade to draw him away from his role as actor... This crossing of epic hero and mundane reader in the figure of Geoffrey is not surprising when we recall that the whole program of ‘Bernard’s’ allegory was to refigure Aeneas as a spiritual Everyman; the insertion of the contemporary reader’s experience into the epic has ancient roots by the time Chaucer invokes it here” (*Virgil*, 227).

¹⁰⁸ “And over alle the house angles / Ys ful of rounynges and of jangles / Of werres, of pes, of mariages, / Of reste, of labour, of viages, / Of abood, of deeth, of lyf, / Of love, of hate, acord, of stryf, / Of loos, of lore, and of wynnynge, / Of hele, of seknesse, of bildynges, / Of faire wyndes, and of tempestes, / Of qwalm of folk, and eke of bestes; / Of dyvers transmutacions / Of estats, and eke of regions; / Of trust, of drede, of jelousye, / Of wit, of wynnynge, of folye; / Of plente, and of gret famyne, / Of chepe, of derthe, and of ruynes; / Of good or mys government, / Of fyr, and of dyvers accident” (1959-76). The rumors are not all truthful or good, and indeed

words, produced *ante rem*, influence those who hear them so that they *cause* deeds rather than proceed from them.¹⁰⁹ Words have power over bodies.

At the close of the poem, as Geoffrey wanders the house listening to all of the rumors, too many for him to recount, we see that he has indeed remedied his problem. He has fully immersed himself in tidings, near and far (“of some contre,” 2135)—indeed at their very source—and he is interacting with and preparing to write about other people. However, just as Geoffrey is about to meet a man of “gret auctorite” (2158), the poem cuts off mid-sentence. This abrupt, and perhaps incomplete ending, along with the general chaos at the House of Rumors, seems to undermine Geoffrey’s progress toward knowledge and healing.

I find, however, that the “earthbound” ending of the poem perfectly captures the sense of comedy and absurdity that is so central to Chaucer’s understanding of bodily writing.¹¹⁰ Several critics describe Chaucer’s poem as an “open text” that embraces fragmentation and uncertainty—like many dream visions—in the spirit of play.¹¹¹ As Hugo Keiper states, in these kinds of texts, “linguistic games or, more generally, a playful

the untruthful ones often spread the furthest: “Were the tydynges soth or fals, / Yit wolde he telle hyt natheles, / And evermo with more ences / Than yt was erst” (2072-75).

¹⁰⁹ Lynch states, “Fame’s realm is to an extent the realm of thought, for it is where reputation, what is thought about people, receives physical and audible form before being disseminated as actual speech” (“Logic,” 194). This has parallels to the episode in Book 2 of Christine’s *Advison*, when the (colored) thoughts of the philosophers influenced their deeds.

¹¹⁰ The term “earthbound” comes from Kathryn Lynch, who argues, “Instead of focusing attention on the human effort to comprehend the multiplicity of earthly experience under the aegis of the divine, this poem parodies the logical systems that attempt to organize and give meaning to worldly diversity, a meaning that remains firmly earthbound” (“Logic of the Dream Vision,” 182).

¹¹¹ Peter Brown states, “The dream vision’s liminality—its ability to convey a sense of fragmentation and failure of continuity between self and the outer world—allowed fourteenth-century writers in particular to frame responses to the tumultuous social, political, and religious conditions of their day” (“On the Borders,” 44).

attitude towards language take precedence over rational argument or logical, scientific proof.”¹¹² Scholars disagree about whether the *House of Fame*’s ending is intentional or not, but I am inclined to think it is. The unfinished nature of the poem fits with the continuing nature of penance and process: the poem cannot end if the dreamer’s penance is ongoing. In addition, by leaving the cycle of deeds becoming words and words becoming deeds to continue *ad infinitum*, the poem undercuts man’s attempts to definitively delineate (objective) authority and meaning, forcing the reader and the text into a never-ending state of play and thus introspection.¹¹³

With this view in mind, I would contend that Chaucer intentionally inverses or parodies the traditional dream vision, not because he wants to demonstrate man’s incapacity to produce knowledge, but because he is not interested in pursuing universal/objective knowledge as such. If Chaucer wanted to illustrate man’s inability to abstract knowledge from the dreaming process, it would have been better to preserve the classic conventions and end the process with failure. But instead he does not even attempt to follow this course (or “finish” the poem). This is because it is not objective knowledge that will save Geoffrey, but a subjective understanding of the human experience, even, and

¹¹² Hugo Keiper, “A Literary ‘Debate over Universals’?,” 20. He writes elsewhere, “It can thus be said that Chaucer’s dream poems display a marked and profound tendency to undercut or relativize abstractions, generalizations, and absolutes of any sort; and that this tendency goes together with—and partly enables—the virtually unchecked proliferation of points of view, and the concomitant enfranchisement of individual perspective which, to my mind, is so characteristic a feature of these texts” (“I wot myself best how y stonde,” 225-26). “Within the limits of our earthly existence, this is all we know and can ever expect to know. Perhaps, as Geoffrey seems to tell us, this is all we need to know. Hence, when we arrive at the—apparently—abrupt, fragmentary ending of the poem, we realize that there is no hope of ever arriving at an authorizing moment of true, unmediated authenticity, perception, or, indeed, experience” (225).

¹¹³ After all, *The House of Fame* is a text ostensibly based on a dreaming experience, while the experience is in fact a fictional construct, a product of the text.

perhaps especially, when it borders on the absurd.¹¹⁴

In this sense, Chaucer takes the opposite approach of Christine, who finds a scholastic approach to learning to be most beneficial.¹¹⁵ But as Walter Curry notes, Chaucer was an artist first and a philosopher second.¹¹⁶ As an artist, he is concerned primarily with his subject: in this case, tidings of other people. As Baswell observes,

At this point in the *House of Fame*...Geffrey begins once again to re-enact rather closely the experiences of Aeneas. For not all possibilities of vision...have been exhausted. There remains...the alternative offered to Aeneas. This is the way to vision and truth not through abandoning the world, but by re-entering it...through contemplation of his own life and world, Aeneas may grasp cosmic truths.¹¹⁷

Geffrey can only find healing by “re-entering” the world and exploring the human condition. The *House of Fame*, then, is not about the failure of men to abstract knowledge from singulars and so access divine truth, as scholars have argued, but rather about the attraction and diversion that exists within the singulars themselves.

Recall that the eagle was sent to Geffrey because Jove wanted him to “be of good

¹¹⁴ Keiper writes, “Yet in so far as literature, as a rule, is centrally concerned with (re)presenting, or (re)creating, all sorts of human experience, be it of an ordinary kind or completely exceptional in nature, we have to reckon that literary texts will not normally provide us with any clear-cut answers to our issues. Instead, by refraining from such answers and ready-made solutions, or indeed by questioning or deconstructing them, literary discourse would rather tend to defy the strict but—to the poet’s eye—somewhat simplistic logic of philosophy or scholastic theology” (“A Literary ‘Debate over Universals’?,” 18).

¹¹⁵ Miranda Griffin observes, “Learning about the macrocosm (about the history and geography of the world, or the arrangement of the heavens) enables Christine to find some consolation on a microcosmic, personal scale” (“Transforming Fortune: Reading and Chance in Christine de Pizan’s ‘Mutacion de Fortune’ and ‘Chemin de long estude,’” *The Modern Language Review* 104.1 [2009]: 55-70, at 56).

¹¹⁶ Walter Clyde Curry, *Chaucer and the Medieval Sciences*, 2nd edition (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1960).

¹¹⁷ Baswell, *Virgil*, 241.

chere” and to experience some “disport and game” by hearing about and meeting other people. It is the very “game” of this journey that leads to healing.¹¹⁸ Geoffrey is reminded of this again at the House of Rumors, when the eagle tells him, “But sith that Joves, of his grace, / As I have seyde, wol the solace / Fynally with these thinges, / Unkouth the syghtes and tydynges, / To passe with thyn hevynesse, / Such routhe hath he of thy dystresse” (2007-12). Jove wants to “solace” Geoffrey through tidings and new, exotic sights. His therapy is thus based on entertainment. Words (tidings, stories) can be a powerful source of comfort and healing, particularly when based on the experience of individuals, precisely because they provide this diversion. And as we have seen, entertainment, especially satire, serves as a mirror for the reader that stimulates ethical reading and better memory work. The lens of comedy makes a deeper probing possible, leading to self-knowledge without following rote didactic prescriptions. This is the cure Geoffrey receives. Consequently, at the end of the poem, he eagerly explores the House of Rumors “for to pleyen and for to lere” (2133).

Conclusion

Viewed as a whole, the *House of Fame* reveals to Geoffrey a reflection of his life in all of its absurdities and shortcomings. In short, the text becomes an image. And this image—a more substantial, physical representation of the dreamer—can be used to shape him into the person he wants to be. As Geoffrey observes when he first arrives at Fame’s house, “And clerkes eke, which konne wel / Al this magik naturel, / That craftely doon

¹¹⁸ At the end of the eagle’s speech, the bird tells Geoffrey to “take hyt in earnest or in game” (822). Delany points out, “In fact we have to take the entire lecture in earnest *and* in game, for however respectable the Eagle’s scientific theory, however impressive his literary pedigree, he remains a comic character” (*Chaucer’s House of Fame*, 74). Geoffrey’s guide is fundamentally comic, just as his cure is.

her ententes / To make, in certeyn ascendentis, / Ymages, lo, through which magik / To make a man ben hool or syk” (1265-70). Geoffrey specifically states that clerks create “ymages” rather than words.¹¹⁹ Through this magic, they are able to make men whole or sick.¹²⁰ Although Chaucer typically had a negative view of clerks (i.e. philosophers), and lists them here alongside “Magiciens, and tregetours, / And Phitonesses, charmeresses, / Olde wicches, sorceresses” (1260-62), I find that Chaucer is not in this moment denigrating the clerks’ variety of magic for the simple reason that they are among the entertainers at Fame’s banquet, in line with the musicians and jugglers and performers, who are meant to relieve his aching head. The transformation clerks achieve with their words, then, is a form of entertainment that will help cure Geoffrey’s illness.¹²¹ (This is

¹¹⁹ “Magik naturel” means natural science or astrology, and the “ymages” are probably astrological images, but the central themes of the poem legitimize a more open interpretation. It is also important to note that Chaucer may be speaking tongue-in-cheek. After all, he gives a sarcastic salute to clerks in the introduction of the poem: “Wel worthe of this thyng grete clerkys / That trete of this and other werkes” (53-54). And William Watts has argued that “Chaucer frequently portrays these contemporary clerks...in terms that suggest either criticism or derision” (“Chaucer’s Clerks and the Value of Philosophy,” 153). Even if Chaucer does generally deride clerks (i.e. philosophers and university students), however, he may still be enamored of language’s power to transform words into images.

¹²⁰ Recall that melancholy “could be avoided if one followed the *Regimen*, took medical preparations based on *materia medica*, and used the right talismans to channel the effects of the planets” (Arikha, *Passions and Tempers*, 125). Many medieval healers recited charms or benedictions when administering medicines (Wallis, *Medieval Medicine*, 70), and Nancy Siraisi notes that therapeutic substances were sometimes “placed in amulets or administered to the accompaniment of recited charms” (*Medieval and Early Renaissance Medicine: An Introduction to Knowledge and Practice* [Chicago, 1990], 149). Clifford Backman explains that Arnau de Vilanova used magic as well as medicine to treat the sick Pope Boniface VIII. “Arnau’s use of amulets, incense, and astrology...reflected this connection [between body and soul] because the ‘magical’ aspects of the treatment aimed, in theory, at curing the spiritual component of Boniface’s ailment while the ‘nonmagical’ treatments (warm baths, soft foods, weak broths, and some herbal medicines) addressed the physical component” (“Arnau de Vilanova and the Body at the End of the World,” in *Last Things: Death and the Apocalypse in the Middle Ages*, ed. Caroline Bynum and Paul Freedman [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000], 150).

¹²¹ The transformation here performed by language is almost alchemical, like the passage in the *Rose* in which the phoenix generates new life. While Jean de Meun approves of alchemy—

underscored by the presence of Medea and Circes (1271-72) as well as other witches and magicians who are able to literally change men's physical form.)

Chaucer's comedy heals by more than just entertaining, however. It directs Geoffrey's—and the reader's—focus back to the source of his humor: the mundane, and sometimes absurd, details of human life. Baswell states, "In the end, Geoffrey finds himself where most of humankind does in a fallen world. Like his model Aeneas, Geoffrey must make a descent before he can hope for any true visionary flight."¹²² It is this "descent" or corporeal-driven examination that makes the dream efficacious. Like the descent of the bestiary eagle after he has flown toward the sun, Geoffrey must refocus on his body and his neighbors—just as he "romed up and down" (140) as he read about Aeneas and Dido.¹²³ As Steven Kruger puts it, the poem ultimately turns inward, "back into self-exploration."

In terms of medieval literary theory, and the medieval theory of imagination, this last movement, the return to self-consciousness, makes perfect sense. For the Middle Ages, poetry is poised between body and intellect, wedding an instructive content of ideas to a sensible and pleasurable form. Fashioned in the poet's

"Alquemie est art veritable" (*Rose*, 16089)—Watts includes alchemy as one of the "devious means" Chaucer sees clerks using to defraud their neighbors ("Chaucer's Clerks," 153). Chaucer may not have approved of alchemy, but he certainly seems open to other types of transformative science (or magic), including literature. (The fact that Chaucer relies on astrology so heavily in this poem and that the boundaries between text and image are so frequently blurred suggests an amenable view.)

¹²² Baswell continues, "If we leave him waiting attentively before an Authority who never speaks, the resolution is no more ambiguous than that of Aeneas who learned the truths of cosmogony and history, then left the Underworld through the gate of false dreams" (*Virgil*, 244).

¹²³ Interestingly, Nicholas of Lyra writes in his Apocalypse commentary, "By these six wings [of the four beasts in Rev. 4: 8, which the poem references at line 1385] ecclesiasts ought to ascend upwards through the contemplation of divine things and to descend downward to the edification of their neighbors" (Philip D.W. Krey, trans., *Nicholas of Lyra's Apocalypse Commentary* [Kalamazoo: Western Michigan University, 1997], 70).

imagination, it consists of images, which stand between the “corporeal” and the “intellectual.”¹²⁴

The images of Chaucer’s poem, within the context of a dream, unite the corporeal and the intellectual so that Geoffrey can create a new self. This “consistent, if complicated, pattern of movement” throughout the poem, ending with a return to self-consciousness, suggests that such a process of self-discovery is ongoing, forever circulating between the divine and mundane, the spiritual and physical.¹²⁵ Consequently, Geoffrey’s transformation (healing, absolution, self-knowledge) does not depend on a static, cosmic understanding but rather on the truths generated by dynamic, earthly existence.¹²⁶ Perhaps this is why the poem does not—indeed, cannot—end. In order to (re)write wholeness, Geoffrey must continually engage and even revel in the human condition.¹²⁷

¹²⁴ Steven Kruger, “Imagination and the Complex Movement of Chaucer’s *House of Fame*,” *The Chaucer Review* 28 (1993): 117-34, at 117.

¹²⁵ Kruger, “Imagination,” 117.

¹²⁶ Patrick Gallacher writes, “Chaucer rejects the extremes of detachment and abandon and recommends a consent to the human condition that is reflective, liberating, and finally celebratory” (Gallacher, 233).

¹²⁷ Perhaps this is why we see Chaucer returning to similar themes again and again in his work. See Gallacher’s “Chaucer and the Rhetoric of the Body” for an overview of Chaucer’s interest in the body.

Conclusion

“Put in ryme that proces”: Bodily Writing in Today’s World

To end this study, I wish to look briefly at a dream vision written about 100 years after Christine’s *Advison-Christine*: Gavin Douglas’s *Palice of Honour*. This text, composed in 1500 or 1501, alludes to all of the dream poets we have examined here.¹ In addition to referencing them directly, Douglas borrows many of their narrative devices. For example, his dreamer enters a garden in May like the one in *Le Roman de la Rose*, climbs a mountain of glass like Geoffrey in the *House of Fame*, explores the world like Christine in *L’Advison* (and *Le Chemin*), and watches a performance of Passus 6 (the Hunger episode) from *Piers Plowman*. Like these other dreamers, Douglas’s narrator is mentally unwell (his dream is really a fainting spell, in which he faints again), and the poem encompasses a discourse of healing—there is a mirror that reveals everything (like the crystals in the *Rose*) and heals anyone wounded in the tournament, and the poem frequently mentions beneficial foods and herbs.² Venus even shows the dreamer the book he will eventually write, in which he is to record this salvific process.³

But unlike his predecessors, Douglas does not seem to place confidence in the

¹ Indeed, the text is so crowded one could make the case that Douglas is trying to outdo all of his predecessors by incorporating elements from every pre-existing dream vision.

² The mirror is encrusted with jewels that staunch the flow of blood (1477-85).

³ “‘Remembris thow,’ said scho, ‘withouten were, / On thy promyt quhen of thy gret dangere / I the deliverit (as now is not to nevyn)?’ / ... / Than suddandy in hand a buke scho hynt / The quhilk to me betaucht scho or I went, / Commandand me to be obedient / And put in ryme that proces than quyt tynt. / I promised hir, forsuyth, or scho wald stynt, / The buke ressavand, thairon my cure to preve. / Inclynand syne lawly, I tuke my leve. / Twychand this buke peraventur ye sall here / Sumtyme efter quhen I have mare lasere” (1741-43, 1749-57). Citations taken from Gavin Douglas, *The Palis of Honoure*, ed. David Parkinson (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1992).

healing or unifying power of dreams. Despite his allusions to health and self-knowledge, his narrator continues to lack both. For example, when after an arduous journey the dreamer approaches the Muses's fountain, like Christine before him, his attempts to drink from the spring are foiled.⁴

Besyde that cristall strand swete and degest
Them till repois, thayr hors refresch and rest,
Alychtit doun thir Musis clere of hew.
The cumpany all halely, lest and best,
Thrang to the well tyl drink, quhilk ran southwest
Throw out a meid quhare alkyn flouris grew.
Amang the layf ful fast I did persew
Tyll drynk, bot sa the gret pres me opprest
That of the watir I micht never tast a drew.

(1135-1144)

The throngs of people surrounding the fountain are too dense; consequently, the dreamer “never tast a drew” of the water.

Douglas's deliberate invocation and rejection of the digestive metaphor as a means of conveying knowledge and healing—so crucial in the dream visions I have examined here—suggests that he was aware of the pattern of bodily writing in these earlier texts but either finds it inadequate (his frequent references to hunger and disability

⁴ He passes several fountains and wels on the way: “We passyt the fludis of Tygris and Phison, / Of Trace the riveris Hebrun and Strymon, / The mont of Modyn and the flud Jordane, / The facund well and hill of Elicon, / The mont Erix, the well of Acheron, / Baith didicat to Venus en certane. / We past the hill and desert of Lybane, / Ovir mont Cinthus, quhare God Appollo schone / Straucht to the Musis Caballyne fontane” (1126-34).

may indicate that, for him, signified reality was too immediate to be allegorized) or unnecessary. Indeed, Douglas's poem seems more interested in comedy for its own sake than as a vehicle for therapy.

For example, the dreamer encounters "colors of rhetoric" growing on plants in a garden.⁵ Because these rhetorical devices are disembodied (linked to plants instead of people), waiting to be plucked and used arbitrarily, they illustrate the very uselessness of ornamental poesis that Chaucer decries in the *House of Fame*. In addition, their synthesis with plants subverts the herbal and medicinal undertones of fourteenth-century dream visions, like *Piers Plowman*, in which Christ himself—the ultimate embodiment of healing power—is described as a plant. Furthermore, these rhetorically colorful plants grow next to trees that produce precious stones. Such an image literally combines the garden (regenerative) and urban (eschatological) Apocalyptic traditions—the tree of life with the gleaming millennial city—and yet provides neither healing nor respite. It is simply another useless poetic flourish.

One further example: the Apocalyptic splendor of the palace of honor and the brightness of the resident god makes the dreamer fall into a trance (1923). Douglas then recounts that the god, presumably annoyed, "smate me doun and byrsyt all my bonys"

⁵ "The swete florist colouris of rethoreis / Gaddris full fast, mony grene tendir plant; / For with all plesance plenist is yone hant, / Quhare precious stansys on treis doyth abound / In sted of frute, chargyt with peirlis round" (2066-70). (The pearls on the trees may be a reference to *Pearl*.) As I noted in Chapter Two, images of trees were used to organize complex schemes of information, but here the trees seem to serve no purpose.

Douglas's use of colors is fascinating in this poem—the dreamer is awakened when he falls into a moat of "mony divers hew" (2077)—but like the other devices, his ornamentation seems to exist merely for ornamentation's sake. Perhaps this is intentional, and Douglas is purposefully separating tenor from vehicle in order to emphasize an underlying reality that has no connection to this bizarre dream world.

(1924). The dreamer's Nymphic guide carries him outside and revives him. When he explains why he fainted, she laughs and says she will no longer take him to see things that frighten him. Unfortunately, she does not keep her promise, and when they later cross a bridge, Douglas's narrator confesses that he is so scared his "harnys [brains] trymlt bissyly" (2085), and he falls into the water. This shock wakes him from his dream.

Such moments are undoubtedly intended to be humorous and not necessarily productive. The dreamer never recovers from the fearfulness that caused the dream. (In the prologue, his idyllic garden turns into a frightful wilderness where the fish in the stream yell like elves and he hides in the hollow of a tree.) Nor has his self-knowledge increased. Instead of writing what he's learned at the end of the dream, he devotes three stanzas to the praise of Honor. As David Parkinson writes, "The dreamer envisions an invigorating world of learning, but does not seem terribly confident about his own ability to enter and possess it."⁶ Although the Book of Revelation remains a clear influence on the text, its message of transformation, oneness, and bodily writing seems to have lost its relevance.

I mention this poem in order to demonstrate the uniqueness of the dream visions composed in the *Zeitgeist* of the long fourteenth century. In nearly all medieval dream visions, the dreamer is divided from himself. Early dream visions (written in the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries) charted the dreamer's path to healing via a process of

⁶ Parkinson, *The Palis of Honoure*, Introduction, <http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/parkinson-douglas-palis-of-honoure-introduction>. Parkinson finds that Douglas does maintain "a close relation between reading (and writing) and progress, spatially considered, towards realization (if not possession) of an ideal," but I cannot say I am in complete agreement.

abstraction that allowed him to approach the divine. In later (fifteenth-century) dream visions, like Douglas's, however, the narrator's illness seems to serve a comedic purpose that mocks man's attempts at transcending the divisive state of the world.⁷ But in the fourteenth century, dream vision writers met these two extremes in the middle. Poets combined materialist principles with more transcendent ideas about healing and transformation, particularly by utilizing Apocalyptic metaphors of ingestion. Pairing medical knowledge with the insightful lens of dreams allowed dream vision writers to acquire healing powers that surpassed the curative potential of available medical remedies and thus write their own journey to health.

Examining Douglas's poem—separated by the dream visions in this study by a century or more—also reminds us of the great distance between the writers I have analyzed here and us as modern readers. What interest does a study of medieval dream visions hold for us today, in a materialist world that is so far removed from the fourteenth century and its Apocalyptic fervor? As Caroline Walker Bynum and Paul Freedman have rightly stated, “The present moment is, if anything, characterized by a *waning* of apocalyptic expectations...At the end of the twentieth century we are neither very apocalyptic, nor very eschatological, nor even very scared.”⁸

And yet, our current lives do have some resonance with the state of things in the fourteenth century. “We do feel unease before a future that seems likely to include

⁷ Douglas's poem is symptomatic of the progress toward “Renaissance” thought. Although dreams would continue to have a strong (and often supernatural) presence in early modern texts, including key roles in notable works like Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* and Milton's *Paradise Lost*, their function as a vehicle for bodily therapy waned, until eventually the form disappeared altogether.

⁸ Caroline Walker Bynum and Paul Freedman, eds., *Last Things: Death and the Apocalypse in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 16-17.

terrible environmental destruction, the proliferation of world systems that control by mindless technology, a degradation of sensibility, literacy, and attention span, perhaps even [the] effacement of the human.”⁹ Studying dream visions from the perspective of bodily writing not only affords new insights into a genre that has long mystified scholars but also prompts us to rethink the relationship between scientific and literary authority. Whereas during the Middle Ages the power of poetry could be considered just as effective as medicine in the healing process, today science and medicine are typically elevated over the humanities as more practical fields—an example of how disciplinary boundaries change over time.¹⁰ However, the medieval concept of self-healing through alternative means still carries a profound resonance with the modern world.

We need only look at that growing percentage of society who, concerned by the ravages of incurable diseases and the side effects of modern medicine, have increasingly turned to self-directed or alternative care.¹¹ Such an undertaking is easier, and possibly more dangerous, in today’s world, where we have access to instantaneous information on every topic imaginable as well as a far greater array of potential treatments. In this sense,

⁹ Bynum and Freedman, *Last Things*, 17.

¹⁰ Julie Singer, *Blindness and Therapy in Late Medieval French and Italian Poetry* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2011), 212-14. She writes, “In our era, rife with false dichotomies between the ‘practicality’ of science and the ‘uselessness’ of arcane humanistic pursuits, many have lost sight of one of the love-imprint’s underlying principles: the power of poetry, as late medieval writers demonstrate, extends far beyond the reach of the scalpel” (212).

¹¹ Hugo Keiper points out that although we live in a nominalist world, there has been a resurgence of holistic, new age trends, what he calls new modern realism, characterized by scientific realists like Rupert Sheldrake (“Introductory Essay: A Literary ‘Debate Over Universals’? New Perspectives on the Relationships Between Nominalism, Realism, and Literary Discourse,” in *Nominalism and Literary Discourse: New Perspectives*, ed. Hugo Keiper, Christoph Bode, and Richard J. Utz [Atlanta: Rodopi B.V., 1997], 8-9, n.23). Recent decades have seen a rise of health food stores and nutritional supplements, as well as alternative treatments like homeopathy—a mode of “like cures like” that has striking parallels with the isopathic tendencies of medieval dream visions.

those who advocate self-directed care are not so unlike their medieval counterparts, who championed literacy and education as the means for gaining self-knowledge and authority for one's body.¹² As one such advocate states, "The best doctor in the world, the best nutritionist in the world, is you."¹³

Self-diagnosis and self-medication are of course highly risky activities. There is, however, another avenue of care connected to bodily writing in dream visions, and that is the act of writing itself. Modern studies have documented numerous benefits of compositional activities, from journaling to making lists.¹⁴ Writing, especially by hand, has been found to facilitate greater learning and retention and to combat depression.¹⁵ Even writing about life goals is associated with a significant increase in well-being.¹⁶

¹² The modern medium of (independent) film documentary may be an artistic counterpart to the popular, vernacular dream vision. One such documentary, *Food Matters* (2008), claims on its website, "What you're about to learn could likely save your life" (<http://foodmatters.tv/food-matters-film>). The documentary interviews several experts from the fields of nutrition and health, most of whom advocate self-directed care. In the film, Ian Brighthope states, "You have a right to self-care and self help... People need to be made aware of the great benefit of improving their health... We've still got a health system which really is a disease care system and dominated by doctors and hospitals, pathologists, and pharmacologists." Victor Zeines claims, "As more and more of our population start taking their health into their own hands, there's going to be even more and more of a change." And Phillip Day asserts, "A change is due. Clearly the old ideas aren't working, and what we need... [is] a fresh paradigm and we need to go back to basics."

¹³ David Wolfe, interviewed in *Food Matters* (2008).

¹⁴ See Paula Rizzo, *Listful Thinking: Using Lists to be More Productive, Highly Successful, and Less Stressed* (New York: Viva Editions, 2014). Rizzo states, "There's a therapeutic and calming effect to writing a list... Psychologists and psychiatrists often suggest that their patients make lists to avoid anxiety."

¹⁵ Virginia Berninger, et al., "Early Development of Language by Hand: Reading, Listening, and Speaking Connections; Three Letter-Writing Modes; and Fast Mapping in Spelling," *Developmental Neuropsychology* 29 (2006): 61-92; James W. Pennebaker and Janel D. Seagal, "Forming a story: The health benefits of narrative," *Journal of Clinical Psychology* 55 (1999): 1243-54. The study asserts, "Writing about important personal experiences in an emotional way for as little as 15 minutes over the course of three days brings about improvements in mental and physical health. This finding has been replicated across age, gender, culture, social class, and personality type" (abstract).

¹⁶ Laura A. King, "The Health Benefits of Writing about Life Goals," *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 27 (2001): 798-807.

Fascinatingly, psychologists have found that depression and other mental illnesses often stem from a person's view of their life story as incoherent or incomplete. Consequently, psychotherapists can prompt patients to revise their stories in which they play the role of the protagonist who, despite setbacks, continues to make progress.¹⁷ Writing or rewriting one's story thus allows a person to reinvent herself.¹⁸ As Bridget Murray explains, "There is emerging agreement...that the key to writing's effectiveness is in the way people use it to interpret their experiences, right down to the words they choose...To tap writing's healing power, people must use it to better understand and learn from their emotions."¹⁹ Expressive writing in particular has been found to help individuals cope with and recover from stressful events such as job loss and trauma.²⁰

While the educational and psychological benefits of writing may seem intuitive to those of us who write regularly, there is also evidence that writing may help heal on the *physiological* level.²¹ In clinical trials, regular journaling was found to strengthen immune cells, and expressive writing sped the process of rehabilitation.²² Even the

¹⁷ Jonathan Gottschall, *The Storytelling Animal: How Stories Make us Human* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2012). See also Laura J. Kray, et al., "From What *Might* Have Been to What *Must* Have Been: Counterfactual Thinking Creates Meaning," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 98 (2010): 106-118.

¹⁸ Timothy Wilson, *Redirect: The Surprising New Science of Psychological Change* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2011).

¹⁹ Bridget Murray, "Writing to Heal," *American Psychological Association* 33 (2002): 54.

²⁰ Stefanie P. Spera, et al., "Expressive Writing and Coping with Job Loss," *Academy of Management Journal* 37 (1994):722-733; James W. Pennebaker and Sandra K. Beall, "Confronting a traumatic event: Toward an understanding of inhibition and disease," *Journal of Abnormal Psychology* 95 (1986): 274-81.

²¹ Murray, "Writing to Heal;" Nancy P. Morgan, et al., "Implementing an Expressive Writing Study in a Cancer Clinic," *The Oncologist* 13 (2008): 196-204.

²² James Pennebaker, et al., "Disclosure of Traumas and Immune Function: Health Implications for Psychotherapy," *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 56 (1988): 239-45; Elizabeth Broadbent, et al., "Expressive writing and wound healing in older adults: a randomized control study," *Psychosomatic Medicine* 75 (2013): 581-90.

positive thinking fostered by regular writing can lead to better sleep and overall physical health.²³ As James Pennebaker puts it, “When people write, healthy changes occur.”²⁴

In light of these findings, the impulses of medieval dream vision poets to write their return to health is remarkable indeed. Medieval poets rewrote their stories and sought consolation by activating their memory and synthesizing knowledge in order to treat a variety of physical and mental illnesses. The fact that modern science confirms such methods may be effective suggests that these poets were serious about their efforts to improve their own health as well as that of their readers.

The Apocalyptic influence evidenced in late medieval dream visions—self-directed healing of one’s whole self through bodily writing—thus has a potent resonance with today’s world. We have all been in the grips of illness or despair, perhaps frustrated at the incompetence of religious, political, or medical leaders to help us and/or our troubled world, even with the vast knowledge and technological advancements that exist in our age. Perhaps we have taken our healing into our own hands or attempted to build a new future for ourselves, relying on the tools of literacy and self-education. Perhaps we too have longed for wholeness or a sudden insight of clarity, and if we have found such a thing, have wanted to share it with our friends and family. Perhaps, when it comes down to what makes us human, we are not so different from the medieval person struggling to

²³ Nancy Digdon and Amy Koble, “Effects of Constructive Worry: Imagery Distraction, and Gratitude Interventions on Sleep Quality: A Pilot Trial,” *Applied Psychology: Health and Well-Being* 3 (2011): 193-206; Karen A. Baikie and Kay Wilhelm, “Emotional and Physical Health Benefits of Expressive Writing,” *Advances in Psychiatric Treatment* 11 (2005): 338-46; Barbara L. Frederickson, “The role of positive emotions in positive psychology: The broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions,” *American Psychologist* 56 (2001): 218-226.

²⁴ James W. Pennebaker, *The Secret Life of Pronouns: What Our Words Say About Us* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2011). See also Pennebaker, *Opening Up: The Healing Power of Expressing Emotions* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1990).

care for herself and her world through the tools available to her. And perhaps by reading about that struggle, we will better know ourselves. If nothing else, studying these poems reminds us of the role literacy and a liberal arts education can play in empowering individuals to seek (and define) their own path to wholeness and of the human impulse to seek understanding through art and literature.²⁵

²⁵ New educational movements, like the Montessori method, are emphasizing student-led learning and arts-centered curricula as a means of facilitating stronger critical thinking and cognitive development.

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