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**“Tyme, Rime, Minde & Kinde: The Reverberation of Time in Composition, Cognition, and
Kynde in *The Book of the Duchess*”**

A Thesis Presented

by

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to

The Graduate School

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements

for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in

English

Stony Brook University

August 2012

Stony Brook University

The Graduate School

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Abstract of the Thesis

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In Europe during the fourteenth century the perception of time was revolutionized by the invention of the mechanical clock. The device rendered the old, qualitative, self-referential perception of time obsolete and replaced it with a means of time reckoning abstracted from human experience. In this thesis I will analyze the influence of the emergence of the mechanical clock on Geoffrey Chaucer’s earliest known work: *The Book of the Duchess*. I utilize close reading and numerology to interpret the relationship between the forest and the humans of the Dreamscape. Ultimately, I argue that Chaucer allocates the old qualitative perception of time to the humans and contrast it with the quantitative time of the forest. He does this in order to show that perceiving time apart from human experience inevitably goes against human nature or “kynde” by elucidating a qualitative approach to time’s influence on the supreme human act of composition.

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Introduction:

The influence of the mechanical clock is a relatively unexplored feature in Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Book of the Duchess*. With its capacity to reckon time, the revolutionary invention aided the poet to forge a new path for the consolatory dream vision. It is my goal to show that at the beating heart of *The Book of the Duchess* lies the ever-present, subconscious awareness of time, which in the fourteenth century was revolutionized by the invention of the escapement mechanism. This device was not only innovative to medieval people's ability to reckon time, but it forever altered scientific and social perceptions of time itself. The older, qualitative experience of time was supplanted by the newer quantitative perception. However, despite its cultural and scientific impact, "...the extent of the verbal imprint left by this ingenious new machine on the literature of this period has only begun to be discovered..."¹ I argue that the "verbal imprint" left by the invention of the mechanical clock in *Duchess* pervades two distinct aspects of the text: Chaucer's use of poetics for a time-influenced consolation and the agreement of human kynde with the coalescence, rather than the demarcation, of qualitative and quantitative perceptions of time.

¹ Nancy Mason Bradbury et. al. "Changing Times: The Mechanical Clock in Late Medieval Literature." *The Chaucer Review* Vol. 43, No. 4 (2009), pp. 351-375, at 351.

Time: An Overview

Prior to the mechanical clock, time telling devices such as sundials, water clocks, and marked candles were limited to either indicating the position of astral bodies or measuring "...the interval between one human intervention and another..."² These constraints resulted in the dependence of time telling on a "...natural system of reference, that is, daylight and/or time measures that were strongly dependent on experience..."³ In other words, perception of time before the mechanical clock was a qualitative experience.

However, as Joel Kaye notes, the fourteenth century experienced a shift in the perception of time. The compulsion to measure and quantify pervaded late medieval scientific thought, in fact, objects and ideas "...that have never been measured since, were subjected to a kind of quantitative analysis."⁴ Roughly three hundred years before the frenzy to quantify entered medieval mainstream scientific thought, however, the desire to order and measure was pursued in western monastic life, "in part[,] out of the routine of the monastery."⁵ Water clocks and marked candles, the primary time telling tools of choice, were gradually becoming insufficient and obsolete. A perpetual and accurate means of tracking the hours was desired for the purpose of "...synchronizing the actions of men..."⁶ in the monastery. It was not until the fourteenth century that the desire to quantify the hours of the day was achieved by the mechanical clock. Now, if someone needed to know the time, they wouldn't consult an astrolabe to chart celestial

² Bradbury and Collette, 353

³ Dohrn-van Rossum, Gerhard. *History of the Hour: Clocks and Modern Temporal Orders*. tr. Thomas Dunlap. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.

⁴ Joel Kay. *Economy and Nature in the Fourteenth Century*. U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1998. 3

⁵ Mumford, Lewis. *Technics and Civilization*. New York: Harbinger Books, 1963. 12

⁶ Mumford, 13.

bodies or catalogue the position of the sun, but would merely have to consult a clock. A.J. Gurevich explains that time is now perceived as “...something flowing at a uniform, regular pace, divisible into equal, non-qualitative units...”⁷ The natural system of reference that informed the old qualitative perception of time was gradually pushed into abstraction by the new quantitative perception. In other words, the mechanical clock “...disassociated time from human events and helped create the belief in an independent world of mathematically measurable sequences...”⁸

In 1915 George L. Kittredge famously stated that Chaucer’s “...specialty was mankind, and his writings are almost conterminous with human interest... Society, in all its aspect, is the continual theme of Chaucer’s verse.”⁹ Undoubtedly, the same man who created the intricate portraits of the Pardoner and the Wife of Bath, saturated and informed as they are by social conventions, is a man not only inspired, but compelled to record the features of society and its effect on the individual. Therefore, it is necessary we understand the social importance of hour-striking in late medieval England. Hour-striking, when it could be heard, “...was of enormous significance [to late medieval people]...for it allowed them to keep track of the equal hours...”¹⁰ The striking of the equal hours¹¹ signaled many different events; such as: the times of prayer (sunrise, sunset and the first, third, and ninth hours of the day), the appropriate times for the operation of business stalls and when to put out recreational fires. Given the social importance of

⁷ Gurevich, A.J. “Time As A Problem of Cultural History.” *Cultures and Time*. Paris: The Unesco Press, 1976. 229-245. at 241.

⁸ Mumford, 15

⁹ George L. Kittredge. *Chaucer and His Poetry*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. 1963. 10

¹⁰ J.D. North. *God’s Clockmaker: Richard of Wallingford and the Invention of Time*. London: Hambledon Continuum. 2005. 190

¹¹ “Equal hours” are the hours kept by the clock. As opposed to the “unequal hours” derived from the cycle of the sun and moon which varied in length with the season of the year.

the clock and Chaucer's penchant for writing on matters of public interest, I argue that it is possible for us to conduct a reading of his work with a keen eye towards the social impact of the mechanical clock. Specifically, I believe that the historical demarcation of the perceptions of time informs and inspires Chaucer's *The Book of the Duchess*. Evidence for this claim can be found in the last 320 lines of the poem which feature five references to or appearances of time and/or clocks. Yet, what is most intriguing and telling is that it is a mechanical clock that signals the end of the dream:

...as I you telle,
That in the castell ther was a belle,
As hyt hadde smyten houres twelve.
Therwyth I awook myselve...¹²

This passage is of paramount importance because it depicts the clock striking twelve, its full mechanical possibility. It is also one of six appearances of the number twelve and its multiples:

...every tree stood by hymselfe
Fro other wel ten foot or twelve,"¹³

"A woner wel-farynge knight...
Of the age of foure and twenty yer,"¹⁴

"He made of rym ten vers of twelve..."¹⁵ "Me ys wo that I lyve houres twelve,"¹⁶ "...ye had lost the ferses twelve..."¹⁷ Astrologically and Biblically, twelve signifies perfection, completion and

¹² References to Chaucer's work are from *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd edition, ed Larry D. Benson: Boston, 1987. BD, 1321-1325. Hereafter cited by text and line number.

¹³ BD. 419-420

¹⁴ BD. 452-455

¹⁵ BD. 463

¹⁶ BD. 573

¹⁷ BD. 722

fullness¹⁸ and its fundamental purpose for the mechanical clock is to divide and catalogue the twelve hour day and night cycle of the twenty-four hour day.¹⁹

I believe that the appearances of the number twelve are references to the twenty-four hour day-and-night cycle of the mechanical clock. The paradigm shift in perception of time inspired Chaucer to utilize this cycle and alter the height of the trees found in the garden on lines 398-445 as well as the age of the Knight, noted for its discrepancy with regard to the age of John of Gaunt, whom he is meant to represent. The trees and the Knight represent the two forces in *Duchess* that require consolation: the forests²⁰ and the humans. To deviate numerically from his sources in regard to these forces reveals not only the poet's desire to change the consolatory aspect of the consolatory dream vision, but to elicit a connection between time and consolation.

The mechanical clock inspires Chaucer to omit the rhetorical consolation that was pertinent to the dream vision tradition in favor of consolation through a cycle motivated by the passage of time. For a medieval person, as for us, a twenty-four hour day was divided into two twelve hour sections. In essence, the division of the day hours and the night hours on the clock wheel is contingent upon the number twelve. Therefore, in the same way that a clock uses twelve to catalog the cycle of the day, I will argue that the consolatory cycles of the human and non-human utilize twelve for the same purpose. It is the seasonal cycle which consoles the non-human figures in the poem and it is the cycle of Fortuna's Wheel (joy and woe) which consoles the humans.

Chaucer's alterations of the height of the trees and the age of the Knight reflects the

¹⁸ John Macqueen. *Numerology: Theory and Outline History of a Literary Mode*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. 1985. 16.

¹⁹ J.D. North. *Chaucer's Universe*. New York: Oxford University Press. 1988. 76

²⁰ "Forest" here is treated as a all-inclusive term encompassing all creatures and vegetation within the forest of the Dreamscape, sometimes referred in opposition to the humans as "non-human."

influence of time on the distinctive ways that either entity catalogues the passage of time within each cycle: the trees are "...fourty or fifty fadme lengthe..."^{21 22} and the age of the Knight is "...foure and twenty yer..." Both numbers are divisible by twelve: 240 or 300 divided by twelve = 20 or 24; the knight's age, 24 divided by 12 = 2. Each number is divisible by twelve in order to represent symbolically one full revolution of a clock wheel which represents a time-influenced cycle.

This time-determined cycle only appears when an entity is congruent with kynde, the natural order.²³ As such, it initially appears that the poem suggests that nature, unlike humans, forgets its sorrow due to its harmony with kynde. Harmony with kynde results in the consolatory cycle of the seasons. Seemingly, it would appear that there is no such cycle for the human entities of the poem, suggesting that their suffering is indeed, as the Dreamer states, "agaynes kynde."²⁴

However, the conversation between the Dreamer and the Knight reveals the natural cycle of joy and woe, an idea echoed by Aegeus in *The Knight's Tale*: "Joye after wo, and wo after gladnesse..."²⁵ Both human and non-human cycles offer their own consolation linked by the passage of time. Yet time manifests itself differently for each entity. For nature time is responsible for the changing season which then signals growth in the garden. For the Dreamer

²¹ BD, 422

²² Middle English Dictionary. 1. "fadme" n. (a) a unit of length, a measurement of six feet or thereabouts... 40 x 6 = 240; 50 x 6 = 300

²³ Middle English Dictionary. 1. "kinde" n. (a) The aggregate of inherent qualities or properties of persons, animals, plants, elements, medicines, etc... An entity is congruent with kynde when it conforms to the activities that befit its natural faculties (i.e. birds that fly are in agreement with kynde because they utilize a natural component of their body, their wings).

²⁴ BD, 16.

²⁵ CT. I. 2839-2846

and the Knight time is responsible for the progress of age, which is analogous to the movement of Fortuna's Wheel, the overseer of joy and woe.

Consolation is linked to these two different results of time through the use of symbolic crowns and philosophical wisdom in Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*. Lady Philosophy states that "...how much soever the evill doe rage, yet the wise man's crowne will not fade nor wither."²⁶ Repeatedly, *Consolation* describes the wise man or the sage, with bearing a crown or wreath. Marcia L. Colish states that the "...sage must apply his free will to the liberation of his soul, seen as his true moral ego, from imprisonment in a physical body...Man is less free when his soul is joined to his body."²⁷ I believe that *The Book of the Duchess* interprets this Boethian wisdom as being contingent upon one's ability to free oneself from the oppression of the physical world. Specifically, for our discussion, this wisdom depends metaphorically on nature's ability to forget the poverty of winter and on the human's ability to see past the grief of loss. Arguably, both entities gain access to this Boethian wisdom due to their association with a crown or wreath: the trees are noted as having "...croppes brode..."²⁸ and, upon the conclusion of his conversation with the Dreamer, the Knight's crown is implicit when he is referred to as "...this king..."²⁹

However, I believe that the historical abstraction of human experience from time reckoning prompts Chaucer to link consolation through wisdom with qualitative and quantitative perceptions of time. This connection reflects the fundamentally different approaches to

²⁶ Boethius. *The Consolation of Philosophy*. ed. and tr. William Anderson. Great Britain: Centaur Press. 1963. Book IV. Verse III.

²⁷ Marcia L. Colish. *The Stoic Tradition From Antiquity to the Early Modern Ages: II. Stoicism in Christian Latin thought through the Sixth Century*. The Netherlands: E. J. Brill, Leiden. 1985. 286-287.

²⁸ BD. 385

²⁹ BD. 1314

consolation available to the human and non-human entities. For instance, the height of the trees and the age of the Knight, both of which document the passage of time through the number twelve, reflect the contrast between quantitative and qualitative perceptions of time.³⁰ For the trees, the number twelve serves to describe their height in fathoms, a quantitative unit of measurement. One merely has to look and see the height with one's eyes, in the same way that one merely has to consult a mechanical clock if they wish to know the time.

However, to give the age of a man is a different matter altogether. As Howie White states on the subject of human and non-human nature, humans "...clearly exist on higher levels, having sensitive and rational dimensions to their souls."³¹ Therefore, where consolation for nature (i.e. the seasons) is a fixed, synchronized and quantitative event which impels *physical* growth in the garden, consolation for humans is a qualitative occurrence which has bearing on an individual's *emotional* growth, which is reflected in the Knight's (or any human's) age. This difference between the physical and the non-physical is reflected in either entity's association with a crown or wreath. The tree's crown is physical, visually understood as the leaf-bordered height of the tree. The crown attributed to the Knight through his kingship is metaphorical. In other words, the crown is symbolic of the Knight's emotional consolation where the tree's literal crown is representative of its physical consolation or rebirth. This difference reflects the debate between qualitative and quantitative perceptions of time. I argue that Chaucer attempts to revalidate a qualitative perception of time by indicating its fundamental place in human kynde through its

³⁰ It is of the utmost importance that the difference between qualitative and quantitative perceptions of time is made clear, as I refer to them frequently. Something is quantitative when its essence is rooted in the physical, tangible world. When I refer to "quantitative consolation," I mean that consolation for that entity is a purely physical act and can be measured accordingly i.e. with units of measurements. Qualitative is purely the opposite of quantitative. That is, for something to be qualitative its must be rooted in intangible experience. It is, in essence, something that cannot be physically measured.

³¹ White, Hugh. *Nature, Sex, and Goodness in a Medieval Literary Tradition*. New York: Oxford University Press. 2000. 235.

role in consolation.

Further reinforcing a qualitative interpretation of humanity's kynde, *The Book of the Duchess* rejects the effect of the mechanical clock to synchronize the actions of men with other men by allocating the quantitative perception of time to the seasonal cycle of nature. The fact that all of nature's diverse parts are flourishing in the renewal of May is an example of the desire to synchronize the actions of men that anticipated the mechanical clock. The synchronizing I refer to is a phenomenon of the mechanical clock in bringing "...a new regularity into the life of the workman and the merchant..."³² Although earlier methods of time reckoning still existed, the social influence of the mechanical clock is undeniable. It was the ringing mechanism of the clock that controlled the hours when men and women work and pray. The poem draws a comparison between the synchronized gathering of creatures in the forest and the coordinated gathering of men at designated times. It does this to associate the new way of perceiving time quantitatively with the non-humans, an aspect of the mechanical clock that *Duchess* treats incredulously. To contrast with this synchronization, the poem positions the cycle of joy and woe as individually relative. That is, two different people can be at two opposite points of the cycle at the same time. This then suggests that congruency with kynde in humanity is diversity of experience in human individuals and that grief or happiness for one person does not necessarily mean grief or happiness for another.

However, despite the skepticism of *The Book of the Duchess* concerning a quantitative perception of time, it rejects a complete separation of both perceptions. I will argue that *The Book of the Duchess* values the qualitative experience that measures the passage of time by the joy and woe cycle because it is utilized by the "sensitive and rational dimensions" of an individual for a supreme act only available to humans, composition. Yet, the poem takes into

³² Mumford. 14

account a quantitative understanding of qualitative experience due to its effect on the type of composition produced by the human. However, before Chaucer could comment on the contemporary shift in scientific and social thought through different reflections of consolation, he needed to challenge and restructure the conventions of the consolatory dream vision to suit his needs.

A Poet Gets His Hands Dirty: Recreating a Genre:

The consolatory dream vision that Chaucer would have been familiar with in the fourteenth century was the coalescence of two classical genres: *consolatio* and spiritual vision. In order to understand Chaucer's reworking of these genres, we must understand the traditions that inform the medieval consolatory dream vision. As a genre, consolatory literature or *consolatio* has its roots in late antiquity and appears in a variety of mediums: eulogies, letters between friends, and even moments in epic poetry. For example in *The Iliad*, Hermes appears as a consolatory guide to Priam.³³ To console someone was a public demonstration and affirmation of one's rhetorical skill. Therefore, ancient *consolatio* attempts to console the recipient through rhetorical dialogue,³⁴ utilizing logic, rationality and a rhetorical argument structured around three topics: the temporality of life, death as freedom from the pains of life, and the value of this death as a lesson, preparing the recipient for his own future death. These works treat grief as natural for a given period of time, so long as it does not last excessively.³⁵

Most influential on medieval consolation literature was Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*. Rather than assuaging the protagonist's woe with philosophical rhetoric delivered by a representative figure, Boethius has Lady Philosophy herself console him, preaching stoicism and a proper indifference to the mutable happiness of earthly existence. Marcia L. Colish notes that "...what is of critical concern to him [Boethius] is the intellectual guidance and moral strength that philosophy could supply, which he imbues and reexpresses with a freedom, a

³³ Homer. *The Iliad*. tr. Robert Fitzgerald. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux 2004. 24: 490-551

³⁴ Seneca (ca. 4BC-65AD) has notably written three *consolatio* pieces in the form of dialogues: *De Consolatione ad Helviam Matrem*, *De Consolatione ad Polybium*, *De Consolatione ad Marciam*.

³⁵ "consolation" *Oxford Dictionary of the Classical World*. Ed. John Roberts. Oxford University Press, 2007. *Oxford Reference Online*. Oxford University Press. SUNY Stony Brook University. 10 October 2011 <<http://www.oxfordreference.com.libproxy.cc.stonybrook.edu/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t180.e555>>

freshness, and an immediacy that guaranteed *Consolation* the classic status it enjoyed in medieval literature.”³⁶ *Consolation* proved to be popular among medieval readers due largely to the spread of Christianity. Medieval Christians found the stoicism of *Consolation* to fit perfectly with the doctrinal view of mortal life and happiness as merely temporary in comparison with eternal happiness in the afterlife. It is precisely this theme that contemporaries of Chaucer focus on: temporal happiness as insufficient for spiritual and/or philosophical fulfillment. And much like the authors of antiquity, medieval poets still adhered to themes of consolation because they admired Boethius’s contribution to the genre, the addition of personified abstractions and fantastical elements.

The second genre that informs the consolatory dream vision is the spiritual vision and it isn’t so much an established genre as a classical trope or instance. Most of western literature is predominantly set in the realm of the physical, in the world of physical action. Yet, scenes of spiritual adventure, when a protagonist departs the physical world, are scattered throughout major works of classical literature. For example, as A.C. Spearing notes about the *Odyssey*, Odysseus’s wanderings “...take him out of the ‘real’ world of the Mediterranean, into the ‘other’ world, the underworld, Tartarus.”³⁷ Odysseus travels to the underworld to procure knowledge from an authority, the blind prophet Tiresias. The consulting of an authority not readily present in the physical world is a trope that would later be found in many medieval consolatory dream visions. However, Homer’s works were relatively unknown during the medieval period “and this underworld episode conveyed its influence through the scene written in imitation of it by Virgil

³⁶ Colish. 280-281

³⁷ A.C. Spearing. *Medieval Dream-Poetry*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1976. 7

in the *Aeneid*.”³⁸ These spiritual adventures or visions became the means by which a physical character could consult the non-physical world to commune with an authority. Instances of spiritual adventure also pervade scriptural visions: for example, The Apocalypse of Paul and the Latin works of Hincmar feature distinct apocalyptic visions of hell.³⁹

However, much like *consolatio*, the work most influential on medieval spiritual adventures was Boethius’s *Consolation*. Classified as a doctrinal vision by Spearing, Boethius’s work, is paramount in its treatment of personified abstractions because they “...could not engage in dialogue and homily in the objective world, but they could well do so in the world of the mind...”⁴⁰ The logical engine for access to these personifications was the dream. Utilizing the non-physical world in this way to access personified abstractions greatly influenced the allegory driven world of late medieval dream poets such as Guillaume de Machaut and Jean Froissart whose contributions to the consolatory dream vision are numerous.

The combination of *consolatio* and spiritual vision gave rise to the five genre conventions of medieval consolatory dream visions: there must be: (1) A suffering Dreamer in need of consolation (2) An idealized Dreamscape, usually a garden (3) An authoritative guide who leads and/or instructs the suffering Dreamer (4) Personified abstractions, such as Reason, Truth, or Love (5) and a spiritual and/or philosophical resolution for the Dreamer’s suffering.

However, central to understanding Chaucer’s work is the realization that the poet’s “...originality lies in his stylistic rehandling of traditional themes ...[and that] old material was for him a mine of inspiration, to which he could apply all the ingenuity of his late Gothic

³⁸ Spearing. 8

³⁹ Spearing. 11-16

⁴⁰ Spearing. 20

sense...”⁴¹ The fact that Chaucer quotes and employs literary sources in his work does not necessarily mean that he is evoking the very same themes or allegorical readings present in them. Therefore, the fact that *The Book of the Duchess* draws inspiration from other prominent dream visions of its time does not necessarily mean that it will feature or adhere to the same generic conventions.

In addition to this treatment of traditional sources, Stephen Davis notes that in regard to *The Book of the Duchess*, Guillaume de Machaut’s influence goes beyond tropes and themes. Davis locates three facets of Machaut’s verse, “...his creative response to a vernacular tradition, his attempts to make common cause with his patrons, and his exploration of the complexities of lyric and narrative reference...”⁴² These three facets often embody and reflect “...the historical perspective of Machaut and his courtly patrons.”⁴³ Machaut’s relationship with his audience is what influences Chaucer, according to Davis. However, where Machaut was writing for the rarefied and closed world of courtly patrons, Chaucer “...addresses his own historical situation...[and] envisions a new English audience, an audience neither exclusively bourgeois nor exclusively noble, one that included secular clerks and functionaries in the service of the court and the city of London.”⁴⁴

In the late fourteenth century an historical issue pertinent to the diverse English audience that Chaucer addressed would undoubtedly have been the shifting perception of qualitative and quantitative time. I believe this paradigm shift in perception prompts *The Book of the Duchess* to

⁴¹ F.N.M. Diekstra. Chaucer’s Way With His Sources: Accident into Substance and Substance Into Accident. *English Studies* 62, No.3 (1981). 215-236, at 215-216.

⁴² Stephen Davis. “Guillaume de Machaut Chaucer’s Book of the Duchess, and the Chaucer Tradition.” *The Chaucer review* Vol. 36, No.4 (2002) 391-405, at 394.

⁴³ Davis. 394

⁴⁴ Davis. 395

veer from the genre conventions that inform other consolatory dream visions in order to reflect Chaucer's desire to revalidate a qualitative perception of time. Specifically, in regard to the five traditions of consolatory dream visions, *Duchess* curiously omits the last three criteria. There is no guide, no personified abstractions and no spiritual and/or philosophical resolution for the human entities. It is important to note that these omitted conventions impart meaning through clear and overt instructions to the dreamer. It is the authoritative guide's purpose to point out to the dreamer his implicit philosophical and/or spiritual deficit. On the dreamer's journey through the Dreamscape, personified abstractions act as negative and positive symbolic authorities to raise the dreamer's awareness of his deficit. What this means is that the spiritual problem of the dreamer is solved by the very entity that made that problem apparent. Generally, adherence to all five criteria means that resolution of the dream becomes insular, making the dream a Macrobian *oraculum*; a dream "...in which a parent, or a pious or revered man, or a priest, or even a god clearly reveals what will or will not transpire, and what action to take or to avoid." ⁴⁵

Therefore, I argue that *The Book of the Duchess*, by omitting these last three genre conventions, is not intended to be read as an *oraculum*. The poem is intended to be interpreted as a Macrobian *somnium*, a dream "...that conceals with strange shapes and veils with ambiguity the true meaning of the information being offered, and requires an interpretation for its understanding." ⁴⁶ Consequently, since meaning and allegorical significance are not readily apparent, it is the job of the audience to interpret meaning through observation and analysis of interrelating entities in the poem.

The next two sections focus primarily on elucidating and validating the presence of the

⁴⁵ Macrobius. *Commentary on Scipio's Dream*. tr. William Harris Stahl. New York: Columbia University Press, 1952. III. viii

⁴⁶ Macrobius. III.viii

seasonal cycle of nature and the cycle of joy and woe for the humans. The presence of a cycle invariably confirms time's influence in *The Book of the Duchess*. By its very nature, movement within a cycle is motivated by the passage of time i.e. winter becomes spring because time passes. Therefore, my efforts to locate and justify the presence of cycles are part of my search for and justification of the presence of qualitative and quantitative perceptions of time in *The Book of the Duchess*.

The Dreamscape

It is widely accepted that Chaucer's chief source for *The Book of the Duchess* was Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun's *Roman de la Rose*, Chaucer himself even acknowledges this fact within the poem itself.⁴⁷ Although his use of and deviations from this courtly French dream vision have been widely studied, Chaucer breaks from his source in one particular instance which has been overlooked or deemed an offhanded remark by a young aspiring poet. The trees of *Duchess* found in lines 418-425 are inspired by the trees of *Roman* in lines 1346-1351. Lorris states of his trees:

...But you should know
That all these were spaced as was most fit,
Each from its neighbor distant fathoms five
Or six, and yet the branches were so long
And high that for defense against the heat
They knit together at the tops...⁴⁸

Whereas Chaucer describes his trees as follows,

And every tree stood by hymselfe
Fro other wel ten foot or twelve—
So grete trees, so huge of strengthe,
Of fourty or fifty fadme length,
Clene withoute bowgh or stikke,
With croppes brode, and eke as thikke...⁴⁹

Chaucer deviates from Lorris in three profound ways. He preserves the use of fathoms; yet they no longer describe the distance between the trees, but have been reconfigured to reflect their

⁴⁷BD. 332-334:

And alle the walles with colours fine
Were peynted, bothe text and glose,
Of al the Romaunce of the Rose...

⁴⁸ Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun. *The Romance of the Rose*. tr. Henry W. Robbins, ed. Charles W. Dunn. New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc. 1962. 1346-1351.

⁴⁹ BD. 418-425

height. The reimagining of the trees grants them a staggering stature of two-hundred and forty or three-hundred feet. This leads us to the next deviation, the omission and alteration of numbers that reflect measurements. Chaucer omits “fathoms five or six” and writes instead “fourty or fifty fadme.” Regarding the first two alterations, it is clear that Chaucer intends his trees to appear grandiose, adjectives such as “grete,” “huge,” and “thikke,” which are nowhere to be found in *Roman*, connote largeness on a grand scale. This desire to greatly embellish the trees is only heightened by the fact that Chaucer decides to make them between two-hundred and three-hundred feet tall. More pertinent to our discussion, these trees are linked with the revolution of a clock wheel by their divisibility by twelve.

In order to understand the purpose of these first two deviations, we must observe a third, Chaucer’s addition of “crope.” Lorris includes a reference to the treetops, which Chaucer certainly doesn’t alter with his use of “crope.” The term certainly denotes the top of a tree, but the notion of a crown is an understood association of “crope.”⁵⁰ The significance of the crown is noted in the *Consolation of Philosophy*, “...And how much soever the evill doe rage, yet the wise man’s crowne will not fade nor wither. For others’ wickedness depriveth not virtuous minds of their proper glory.” And since the trees “...had forgete the poverttee...”⁵¹ of winter and are now flourishing, I believe Chaucer personifies them and depicts their leafy tops as crowns in order to suggest that they have undergone consolation. It is this desire to imply consolation that prompts Chaucer to make the first two deviations from *Roman*. He refocuses attention on the height of the trees and alters the numbers by which they are measured in order to conflate a qualitative (through height) perception of time (through the use of twelve) with the consolation of the seasonal cycle (ultimately realized by the crowns of the trees).

⁵⁰ *Middle English Dictionary* 5. “crop” n. (a) the tip of a branch, (c) the crown (of truth)

⁵¹ BD. 410

However, the consolatory effect of the seasonal cycle is contingent upon the non-human entity's congruency with kynde which *Duchess* goes out of its way to emphasize. Therefore, it is necessary to observe the non-human entities relationship with kynde because it also reinforces the interpretation of the seasonal cycle as a quantitative cycle. It must be understood that the relationship of an entity to its diverse parts is synecdochic. The emotional and physical condition of the parts reflects the whole. In other words, if a deer is depicted as happy, that is reflective of the non-human entities as a whole. Its happiness represents a happiness of all non-human entities.

When the dream begins the Dreamer encounters singing birds that:

...sate among
Upon my chamber roof wythoute
Upon the tyles, overall aboute...⁵²

Their chirping causes his chamber to “rynge/Through syngynge of her armonye.”⁵³ The implication is that the harmony of the birds and the harmony of kynde are symbolically equivalent. Therefore, the harmony of their song is the confirmation that their actions are in agreement with kynde. The Dreamer also associates their singing with heaven:

...hyt had be a thing of heaven
So mery a soun.⁵⁴

This utterance echoes the notion that the condition of the non-human entities is in agreement with divinely ordained kynde. The description of the garden further reinforces the non-human entities conformity with kynde. The Dreamer notes that it is:

⁵² BD. 298-300

⁵³ BD. 312-313

⁵⁴ BD. 308-309

As thogh the erthe envy wolde
To be gayer than the heven...⁵⁵

As in the previous example, the mention of heaven serves to associate the celestial appearance of the flowers with their agreement with heavenly kynde.

Fundamentally, congruency with kynde is defined as an entity's ability to maintain natural homeostasis within its diverse parts.⁵⁶ The homeostasis of parts in kynde is comparable to the congruency in the community of plants and animals in the garden. Not only are the birds singing on top of the bedchamber walls together and in harmony, the Dreamer states that under the shadows of the trees:

...many an hert and many an hynde
Was both before me and behynde,
Of founes, sowres, bukkes, does,
Was ful the woode, and many roes...
Shortly, hyt was so ful of bestes....⁵⁷

The plants and animals are all in such agreement that they commune together, they eat and live together. It does not seem unreasonable to postulate that the text is inviting us to associate the seasonal consolation of May with nature's congruency with kynde. However, in regard to aesthetic beauty, which is certainly present in the flora and fauna of *Duchess*, I would like to point out Robert W. Hanning thoughts on embellishment in medieval literature:

By decoration I mean the embellishment of almost any human activity or artifact so as to render it aesthetically pleasing. Society's decorative impulse wholly or partly conceals primary levels of experience or meaning beneath an artfully applied surface, be it of paint, rhetoric, game, or ritual. The effect of decoration is frequently to leave undefined, or to

⁵⁵ BD. 406-407

⁵⁶ See footnote 23.

⁵⁷ BD. 427-434

obscure, the relationship between the ornamental surface and the underlying “raw material” it embellishes... we must therefore attempt to analyze, not simply enjoy, its effect... In short, we must interpret.⁵⁸

Despite the fact that Hanning is concerned with human pretenses, I believe we can apply his interpretation to all decoration. Therefore, we must look past the harmonious presentation of the non-human entities in order to further our understanding of the text. Seeing past the grand presentation of nature reveals that every instance and example of the seasonal cycle that has been brought up has been fundamentally quantitative. The measuring of the trees in fathoms, their subsequent association with the mechanical clock, even the overemphasized harmony of non-human nature is arguably quantitative.

It is the use of “crope” or crowns in the Boethian sense that identifies the seasonal cycle of the non-human entities as quantitative. If we are to interpret the consolation symbolized by the croppes of the trees in a true Boethian sense, we must observe a key passage: “...And how much soever the evill doe rage, yet the wise man’s crowne will not fade nor wither. For others’ wickedness depriveth not virtuous minds of their proper glory.”⁵⁹ Keeping this in mind, I would like to focus on the depiction of winter in *Duchess*:

...winter, thorgh hys colde morwes
Had mad hyt suffer...⁶⁰

Winter here is undoubtedly brought in as an evil with regard to nature, the same type of evil that *Consolation* states will have no effect on the crown of the wise one. However, the overemphasis

⁵⁸ Robert W. Hanning . “Sir Gawain and the Red Herring: The perils of Interpretation.” *Acts of Interpretation*. ed. Mary J. Carruthers and Elizabeth D. Kirk. Oklahoma: Pilgrim Books. 1982. 5-23. at 5

⁵⁹ Boethius. IV. Prose III

⁶⁰ BD. 411-412

on the regrowth of nature suggests, logically, that the croppes of the trees had not lasted the winter:

For al the wode was waxen grene
Swetnese of dewe had made it waxe.⁶¹

Quite literally then, winter through its evil dismantled the crown (or literal wreath) of the trees. This suggests that the consolation associated with nature through its crown is not true Boethian consolation, but a different consolation altogether.

Further reinforcing the seasonal cycle as quantitative, the text states that only after forgetting is the forest made happy, *Consolation* seems to regard forgetfulness as an attribute not conducive to proper consolation. Upon first encountering Boethius, Lady Philosophy states:

“Doest thou not know me? Why doest thou not speake? Is it shamefastnesse or unsensiblenesse that make thee silent? I had rather it were shamefastnesse, but I perceive thou art become unsensible...but he will easily remember himself againe, if he be brought to know us first.”⁶²

Lady Philosophy explicitly states that Boethius cannot be consoled until he remembers himself again. Therefore, the fact that consolation for the forest hinges on the stipulation that it forget winter is indicative of the fact that the seasonal cycle and the consolation it offers is quantitative. The consolation that the non-human entities are subject to is grounded in reality, it is physically mutable: “...no earthly good, not even autarchy of the sage, can be the supreme good...By definition, the supreme good cannot be one that is identical with or immanent in the mutable physical world.”⁶³ This passage brings to light the simplest yet most profound evidence for a

⁶¹ BD. 414-415

⁶² Boethius. I. Prose II

⁶³ Colish. 284

quantitative reading of the seasonal cycle. The “crope” or crowns on which consolation of the non-human entities hinges exists physically, undoubtedly belonging to the “mutable physical world” which Colish states is incapable of supreme good. Without a doubt, the crown attributed to the consoled wise one or sage in *Consolation* is metaphorical and reflects the qualitative nature of his consolation.

Chaucer attributes qualitative wisdom which utilizes the rational and complex components of a person to the forest. This is done in order to illuminate the error of perceiving time in the quantitative manner that the invention of the mechanical clock ushers in. The quantitative perception of time is well suited for the forest and gardens of nature which lack the rational dimensions of a person. In order to illuminate this difference further, I argue in the next section for the presence of a qualitative perception of time found within the human consolatory cycle of joy and woe.

The Dreamer Meets The Griever: My Song Ys Turned to Plevnyngge

Where it is commonly agreed that the Knight in black is meant to be analogous to John of Gaunt, the age discrepancy of the Knight has baffled scholars for many years. At the time of Blanche of Lancaster's death, which *The Book of the Duchess* is written to commemorate, John of Gaunt was twenty-eight. Curiously, though, Chaucer decides to state the age of his Knight explicitly as "foure and twenty yer." This has mostly been attributed to a scribal error or, once again, the verse of a novice poet. However, I believe that the age attributed to the Knight has a deeper sense. In regards to clocks and time reckoning, twenty-four connotes two full twelve-hour revolutions of a clock; a full day. This way, the Knight becomes pivotal in understanding the cycle of joy and woe. His utterance "She ys ded!"⁶⁴ at the end of the poem serves as the signifier and the culminating event which allows the human entities of the poem to experience transition. Perhaps this is better explained as follows: for nature, the transition of winter to spring took place outside the events of the poem; a similar transition will take place for the humans except the audience will be privy to it.

Two unusual instances of the number twelve are particularly worthy of attention: the distance between the trees which is "...wel ten foot or twelve..."⁶⁵ and the Knights complaint which is "...ten verse or twelve..."⁶⁶ Despite the fact that these appear to be offhand remarks, their role is paramount in establishing the transition that will take place for the humans. If twelve connotes a full revolution, to attribute a numerical value between ten and twelve to an object or person is symbolically suggesting that entity is primed to complete a full revolution of a clock, or

⁶⁴ BD. 1309

⁶⁵ BD. 420

⁶⁶ BD. 463

in other words, experience an emotional transition within a cycle. But first, I must establish that not only does a cycle exist for the humans, but that it is a qualitative cycle. To do this, I must observe the human entity's congruency with kynde.

The Dreamer feels it is in opposition to kynde to suffer as long as he has:

...agaynes kynde
Hyt were to lyven in thys wyse
For Nature wolde nat suffyse
To noon earthly creature
Nat longe tyme to endure
Withoute slep and be in sorwe...⁶⁷

Similarly, when the Dreamer hears the grieving Knight's lament, he states:

...by my trowthe
Hit was gret wonder that Nature
Myght suffer any creature
To have such sorwe...⁶⁸

The use of such language to describe the grief of both figures is sufficient evidence that the Dreamer is associating both of their conditions as contrary to kynde. However, to agree with such an assessment would be doing *The Book of the Duchess* a disservice. It would be careless of us to forget that it is the Dreamer himself who is commenting on his own dream. Traditionally, a dreamer does not interpret his own vision. Two specific examples cited in the text illustrate this convention: Joseph's interpretation of Pharaoh's dream and Macrobius's *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*. Joseph interprets Pharaoh's dream because Pharaoh is unable to do so himself. In fact, the morning after his second dream "...his spirit was agitated, and he sent for all the magicians of Egypt, and all its wise men; and Pharaoh told them his dreams, but none could

⁶⁷ BD. 15-21

⁶⁸ BD. 466-468

interpret them for Pharaoh.”⁶⁹ Pharaoh’s first instinct is not to interpret the dreams himself; he seeks someone else do it for him. It can be argued that the agitation he feels is also analogous to the displacement of kynde that the Dreamer experiences. Similarly, Macrobius, upon rumination on *Scipio’s Dream*, decides that “The reason for including such a fiction and dream in books dealing with governmental problems, and the justification for introducing a description of celestial circles...seemed to me to be worth investigating; and the reader, too, will perhaps be curious.”⁷⁰ Macrobius notes that there must be significance behind these inclusions not illuminated by the text itself. Macrobius takes it upon himself to interpret *Scipio’s Dream* to further his and our understanding of the piece. Given this error of the Dreamer, I question his assessment that his grief is against kynde.

However, in order to decide definitively whether or not the emotional states of the Dreamer and the Knight are in congruency with kynde, we must observe what I feel cannot be a mere coincidence, the strong contrast between the harmony of the human entities and that of the non-humans. The flora and fauna live in extreme and unreal harmony. It is no accident then that initial analysis of the Dreamer and the Knight reveals that they are extremely dissimilar and have nothing resembling the harmony of the forest. In fact, the Dreamer and the Knight can’t even agree on what they are talking about:

“Now, good syre,” quod I thoo,
Ye han wel tol me herebefore;
Hyt ys no need to rehearse it more...
”Yee!” seyde he, ”thow nost what thow menest;
I have lost more than thou wenest.”

⁶⁹ JPS Tanakh. Genesis 41:8

⁷⁰ Macrobius. I.iii

“What los ys that?”⁷¹

They are especially dissimilar in their ways of coping with their grief. First, the Dreamer suffers from insomnia. He states, “I may nat slepe wel nygh noght...”⁷² However, the Knight, after his *compleyente*, “...gan faste faynte...”⁷³ Where the Dreamer’s emotions render him an insomniac, the Knight suffers the opposite reaction. His emotional state causes him to faint.⁷⁴ The Dreamer and the Knight are also dissimilar in regard to their viewpoints on chess. The Dreamer states that he would rather read a book “Then playe at either ches or tables.”⁷⁵ The Knight, however, is preoccupied with chess. He claims that:

...fals Fortune hath pleyd a game
Atte ches with me...⁷⁶

The Knight then uses a chess-based conceit to illustrate the loss he has sustained. Further exemplifying their difference is the fact that the Dreamer chooses to “...rede and drive the night away...”⁷⁷ where the Knight instead composed a “...rym...”⁷⁸ The Dreamer and the Knight are estranged from and opposites of each other. It is hard to imagine any kind of consolatory cycle or

⁷¹ BD. 1126-1139

⁷² BD. 3

⁷³ BD. 488

⁷⁴ The physiological difference between sleeping and fainting is noted. However, they are connected in *Duchess* by emotion. Specifically, the Dreamer claims a lack of emotion is responsible for his insomnia: “For I have felynge in nothing...” (11). When the Knight faints it is clear that he is overcome by an abundance of emotion. This difference in emotions suggests that the Dreamer’s insomnia and the Knight’s fainting spell are linked and meant to be viewed in opposition of each other.

⁷⁵ BD. 51

⁷⁶ BD. 618-619

⁷⁷ BD. 49

⁷⁸ BD. 463

congruency emerging from their relationship.

Yet the extreme dissimilarities of the Dreamer and the Knight serve two functions: they are meant to reject and act in opposition to the synchronization of the creatures within the forest; and the physical, quantitative incongruence between the Dreamer and the Knight prompts an emotional and qualitative assessment. This actually reveals that though the Dreamer and the Knight are physically nothing alike, they share and have experienced many of the same emotions.

In order for this qualitative connection to become apparent, we must take into account an episode that past scholarship has been unable to analyze properly, the Knight's account of his courtship of White. Aside from a narrative on how he won his lady's love, the story contains a summary of the Knight's emotional history from youth to the present. In a full comparison between the Dreamer and the Knight, this episode allows us to go beyond a physical comparison to an emotional one, not available to the non-human entities of the poem despite their over-emphasized conformity with kynde.

In the opening lines of *The Book of the Duchess*, the Dreamer states, "Al is ylyche good to me..."⁷⁹ The sentiment is echoed by the Knight to describe his disposition as a child, "Al were to me ylyche good."⁸⁰ Intriguingly, the Knight's disposition as a youth is the same as that of the Dreamer at present. The young Knight claims that everything was "ylyche good" because his "...werkes were flitting..."⁸¹ due to his "...ydelnesse..."⁸² This idea is echoed by the

⁷⁹ BD. 9

⁸⁰ BD. 803

⁸¹ BD. 801

⁸² BD. 798

Dreamer, “I have so many an ydel thought...”⁸³ The Knight’s past emotions are those of the present-day Dreamer. There is, however, a difference in mental capacity between the two. The Knight claims that all was ylyche good and his thoughts were ydel because:

...malice hadde my corage
Nat that tyme turned to nothings
Thruh too mochel knowleching...⁸⁴

The Knight believes that he was “ydel”⁸⁵ and that all was “ylyche”⁸⁶ good to him because he had not experienced the malice or pain of knowing too much, which we can easily associate with a lack of real life experience due to his youth. In essence, the pain often associated with life had not affected the young Knight’s mind.

Yet the Dreamer states that a sorrowful mind is causing him to experience the same emotions as the young Knight;

Sorwful imaginacious
Is alwey hooly in my minde.⁸⁷

I would explain this odd situation by suggesting that the Dreamer and the Knight are ignorant of the causes of their emotional states. In light of the young Knight’s past disposition, I believe that the current condition of the Dreamer is not a state unfamiliar to him. Rather, it is a state that he, unknowingly, has returned to. In other words, the Dreamer reverts to this emotional state in the same way that Spring will always return to Winter.

⁸³ BD. 4

⁸⁴ BD. 793-796

⁸⁵ *Middle English Dictionary* 1. “idel” adj. (a). Of no effect or significance, futile, vain, worthless; also, false, sinful.

⁸⁶ *Middle English Dictionary* 1. “ilich” adj. (a). Like, similar, alike; resembling.

⁸⁷ BD. 14-15

The ydelnesse of the young Knight and the Dreamer is one phase of a two-phased cycle. The young Knight's ydelnesse is the first incarnation of the phase, where experience had not caused him grief. The ydelnesse of the Dreamer is symbolic of humanity's return to that child-like phase with the addition of grief caused by experience. For the remainder of this essay, and for simplicity's sake, I will refer to the phase of the young Knight and the Dreamer as the Recessive phase. I call this phase Recessive because it is the antithesis of the next phase depicted by the Knight's story, the Composition phase.

In the process of his courtship of White, the Knight states that:

...for to kepe me from ydelnesse
Trewly I did my besynesse
To make songes, as I best coude
And ofte tyme I songe hem loude...⁸⁸

The Knight's inclination to sing in order to ward off ydelnesse is comparable to the birds on top of the Dreamer's bedchamber walls singing in celebration of the passing of Winter. Fundamentally, the Knight's song is symbolic of his transition from the Recessive phase of his youth to the Composition phase. The passivity of the Recessive phase is in stark opposition to the active facets of the Composition phase, in the same way that Winter is the antithesis of Spring.

The Knight then states that *Fortuna*, by chance, brought him to the presence of White, the catalyst for the Composition phase. He then also claims that Fortuna is responsible for the loss of his wife and that now the goddess "...worchet me ful wo..."⁸⁹ The recent grief that the Knight

⁸⁸ BD. 1155-1158

⁸⁹ BD. 815

suffers is comparable to the long-endured grief of the Dreamer. He states, regarding his grief, that:

...trewely as I gesse,
I holde it be a siknesse
That I have suffred this eight yere
And yet my bote is never the nere
For ther is phisicien but oon,
That may me hele...⁹⁰

The Dreamer's use of a metaphor to depict his grief as an illness and his statement that there is only one "phisicien" who could heal him are purely Machauldian conventions from the *dits amoureux*. The illness metaphor is used by a male, courtly lover when his love is either unrequited or his lady has died. Therefore, it is clear that the Dreamer and the Knight have both lost the women they loved. They are linked by this loss. For the Dreamer, this loss was the catalyst for his transition to the Recessive phase eight years ago. It is not unreasonable then to assume that the Knight, having just experienced this grief, will soon follow him to the Recessive phase.

However, I believe that the Dreamer is on the verge of transition as well. Upon waking up at the end of the dream, The Dreamer states that:

...I wol, by processe of tyme
Fonde to putte this sweven in ryme
As I can best..."⁹¹

The phrase "as I can best" links the desire to compose with that previously felt by the Knight. The poem ends with the Dreamer's transition to the Composition phase. The Knight's final

⁹⁰ BD. 35-40

⁹¹ BD. 1331-1333

transition from Composition to Recessive is also depicted. The Knight states, when asked again about White, that “Shy ys deed!”⁹² This blunt utterance is in opposition to the lyrical chess conceit the Knight utilized earlier. The literalness of the Knight here is of the same vein as that which impeded the Dreamer’s understanding of the Knight’s conceit. The Knight’s omission of lyric metaphor symbolizes his transition from the courtly conceit of a Knight in the Composition phase to the frank, literal-mindedness of the Recessive phase. In essence, both the Dreamer and the Knight shift dispositions with the Recessive/Composition cycle. It is important to note that the transitions of the Dreamer and the Knight occur at the same time and are signaled by the same event, the striking bell of a clock mechanism.

The Dreamer hears the clock mechanism that signals his transition and the Knight’s: “...smythen houres twelve...”⁹³ This single appearance of an actual clock in *The Book of the Duchess* brings the entire poem to a point. I return to the phrase “ten or twelve” which we find in two distinct instances in *Duchess*. As it occurs in a discussion of clocks, the phrase is constantly moving. By moving, I mean that twelve on a clock signifies completion but ten falls just short of completion. Therefore, by saying that an object or person is ten or twelve in a discussion where twelve has such strong significance, the phrase remains elusive and resists a definitive meaning. In order to illustrate this movement further I turn to the Knight’s complaint to himself. The text states that it was of “ten vers or twelve.” In reality, the complaint is exactly eleven lines long. Now this serves two significant and completely different functions. Throughout the poem I believe it is safe to say that the Knight is slowly reaching that point of transition where he will leave the courtly lyric of his youth and the Composition stage behind and enter the passivity of the Recessive stage. If twelve is meant to symbolize a complete revolution, the Knight telling a

⁹² BD. 1309

⁹³ BD. 1323

lyric complaint that is only eleven lines is significant because it comes just short of being a complete realization of a courtly lyric and thus defers his transition away from Composition phase. Conversely, it also serves to anticipate his transition towards the recessive phase because it is so close to completing a full revolution. This is what I mean when I say “ten or twelve” is a phrase that moves, locating its primary purpose as elusive.

The other instance I want to focus on is the distance of the trees from each other in the forest. Every tree was apart from each other by “ten four or twelve.” Now this detail is rather unimpressive on its own. However, in light of scholarship by Bolens and Taylor, it is possible that “...since the dreamer walks to where a whelp leads him from one tree to another against which the Black Knight sits (444-47), the distance between the dreamer and the knight might be understood as the same as that which separates one tree from another...”⁹⁴ In other words, it is possible that the distance between the Knight and the Dreamer when they first meet is ten or twelve feet. This would then connote that the distance between the Dreamer and the Knight before they speak is the same numerical value as a full revolution of the clock.

In conjunction with my analysis above, and as a way to round this section up, I’d like to propose a highly speculative theory and join the ranks of those who have attempted to solve the mystery of the Dreamer’s eight year sickness. My focus is primarily on the number eight and its connection with the clock through the number twelve. The only logical assumption I can interpret from this cryptic inclusion is that at the time of Blanche of Lancaster’s death, John of Gaunt was twenty-eight⁹⁵. Kittredge also notes that at the time Gaunt and Chaucer would also

⁹⁴ Bolens, Guillemette and Paul Beckman Taylor “Chess, Clocks, And Counsellors in Chaucer’s *Book of the Duchess*.” *The Chaucer Review* Vol. 35 No. 3. (2001) pp. 281-293, at 285-286

⁹⁵ J.J.N. Palmer. “The Historical Context of the ‘Book of the Duchess:’ A Revision.” *The Chaucer Review* Vol. 8, No. 4 (1974), pp. 253-261. Although the poem’s date of composition is still open to debate, Palmer has provided sufficient evidence for the fact that Blanche of Lancaster’s death was not in 1369 as previously believed. Rather, by

have been the same age.⁹⁶ An eight year illness that began when someone was twenty-eight would invariably mean that that individual was now thirty-six. It is possible that the Dreamer is indeed older than the Knight. Upon first seeing him, the Dreamer states that he was “...ryght yong therto...”⁹⁷ It is only logical that someone older would call someone younger, “yong.” Given the Knight’s age and the speculative age of the Dreamer, the difference between their ages is exactly twelve. Not only is this number reflective of the possible distance between the two when they meet, but that distance in conjunction with the Composition and Recessive phases I’ve been discussing, the Dreamer is indeed one stage ahead of the Knight, who has just entered the Recessive phase the Dreamer has left. Or in other words, the Dreamer is one full clock revolution ahead of the Knight. Therefore, it is possible that the eight year sickness serves as another numerical reference to the Recessive and Composition phase of the Dreamer and the Knight.

analyzing internal evidence within a letter from Louis de Male to Queen Philippa, Palmer was able to deduce that the date of her death was 1368, making John of Gaunt twenty-eight at the time,

⁹⁶ Kittredge. 37

⁹⁷ BD. 454

Tyme, Rime, Minde, Kinde

The final step in understanding the difference between perceiving time qualitatively and quantitatively is observed in the poem's treatment of composition. In the same way that Duchess contrasts consolation within each cycle, the text does the same for composition. Specifically, the poem contrasts the singing of the birds with the lyrics and poetry of the Dreamer and the Knight. The birds that appear atop the Dreamer's miraculously roofless chamber are noted for their singing:

For ther was noon of hem that feyned
To syngre, for ech of hem hym peyned
To fynde out mery crafty notes.
They ne spared not her throtes.⁹⁸

I must also return to the Knight's description of his disposition when composing for the first time:

...for to kepe me from ydelnesse
Trewly I did my besynesse
To make songes, as I best coude
And ofte tyme I songe hem loude...⁹⁹

Just as Chaucer draws on Boethius to help differentiate between quantitative and qualitative consolation, he does so here for the act of composition as well. In his discussion of Boethius' *De Musica*, David Chamberlain states, "In chapter 34, Boethius explains that true "musicus" is the theorist who understands and judges music (rhythms, melodies, poems) by reason, rather than either the instrument who performs with physical skill or the poet who composes by 'natural

⁹⁸ BD. 317-320

⁹⁹ BD. 1155-1158

instinct””¹⁰⁰ This understanding of *De Musica* allows us to identify the difference between the birds and the Knight. The birds are noted for their physicality. In spite of pain, they strained their throats to find the proper notes. The Knight, however, is presented differently. His desire to “make songes, as I best coude” reflects an uncertainty of cognitive reason. Yet it reflects cognition nonetheless. The Knight and the Dreamer are linked by this desire to compose the best poetry they can: the Dreamer states “As I kan best...”¹⁰¹ Undoubtedly, in the same way that *The Book of the Duchess* utilizes *Consolation* to distinguish the physical “crope” of the trees from the metaphorical crown of the Knight, it uses *De Musica* to differentiate between the physicality of the birds’ singing and the cognitive abilities of the humans.

The physicality of the birds reflects the quantitative and anticipated nature of the seasonal cycle. The Recessive/Composition cycle of the humans, however, treats composition differently. The passage of time within the Composition phase is crucial, as *Duchess* presents it as affecting one’s cognitive ability. This change in cognition is reflected in the type of lyric or poem that is composed. For example, before White’s death, the Knight composes a lyric:

Lord, hyt maketh myn herte light
Whan I thenke on that swete wyght...¹⁰²

Then after her death he composes a “...compleynte...”¹⁰³ Each composition of the Knight is a courtly lyric, yet the passage of time undeniably leaves its mark across each lyric in a progressively different manner. For the Knight, there is a linear transition through the

¹⁰⁰ Chamberlain, David S. “The Nun’s Priest’s Tale and Boethius’s *De Musica*” *Modern Philology* Vol. 68, No. 2 (1970) 188-191, at 188.

¹⁰¹ BD. 1333

¹⁰² BD. 1175-1176

¹⁰³ BD. 464

Composition phase in regard to love. The beginning of the phase is marked by his desire to win his lady's love. The end of the cycle is marked by the Knight's lamenting his love lost through death.

The Dreamer's transition away from the Recessive phase shows us the next cognitive incarnation of the Composition phase. Upon waking up and finding the story of Ceyx and Alcyone still in his hand, the Dreamer states:

‘Thys ys so queynt a sweven
That I wol, be processe of tyme,
Fonde to put this in ryme
As I kan best...¹⁰⁴

Where the Knight had a purpose, the Dreamer is curiously silent as to why he must put his dream into rhyme. It is possible that there is no reason. It is merely a compulsion to create verse as per his shift away from the Recessive phase. This desire to merely record his dream is indicative of the fact that the Dreamer is new to the Composition phase. It is possible that the phrase “as I can best,” is reflective of a human having just entered this phase. If the natural progression of time denotes that the Composition phase of the young Knight shifts from gaining love to losing love, then there must be a discernible time-influenced progression within the Composition phase that the Dreamer has just entered. Interestingly, the latter stage of the Dreamer's Composition phase is exemplified quite early in *Duchess*, by the description of the book containing the story of Ceyx and Alcyone:

And in this bok were written fables
That clerkes had in olde tyme
And other poetes, put in rime
To rede and for to be in minde

¹⁰⁴ BD. 1330-1333

I designate these lines as the latter stage of the Dreamer's composition phase because they satisfy the temporal conditions set forth by the Dreamer in the last lines of *Duchess*. Although these lines are not referring to the Dreamer, they are still relevant as they inform the Composition phase to which the Dreamer has just transitioned. He states that he will "by the process of time, strive to his dream in rhyme, in verse," where, in regards to the fables, "clerkes and other poets had a long time ago put these fables in rhyme." The process of time needed by the Dreamer is presented as having passed. This is indicated by the statement "olde tyme." And the rhyme that is conditional on the passage of time has been written. There is no "fonde," no striving, to record something in rhyme. It is already done. It is interesting to see the effect of time on this Composition phase.

The progression seems to be that where poets first record what they see or experience, they soon begin to amend what they observe using the knowledge they have gained. I argue for this reading because of the changes Chaucer made to the story of Ceyx and Alcyone in Ovid's *Metamorphosis*. In the *Metamorphosis*, Alcyone does not die of grief. After she discovers her husband's body, they are both turned into birds and left to live happily the rest of their lives together. However, having learned of her husband's death in Chaucer's version, she dies three days later. Helen Phillips notes that Chaucer saw "...an opportunity to voice a certain kind of consolation: that which comes from a recognition that all earthly joy, including a beloved person, has to be subject to transience."¹⁰⁶

Ultimately, what Chaucer changes reflects an understanding of the law of kynde, the fact

¹⁰⁵ BD. 52-56

¹⁰⁶ Helen Phillips. "The Book of the Duchess: Introduction." *Chaucer's Dream Poetry*. ed. Helen Phillips and Nick Havely. New York: Longman. (1997).

that all living things must follow their natural course, which includes death. The law of kynde is even referenced in the description of the fables, as well as the notion of keeping this law of kynde “in minde.” To keep something “in mind” is, in a sense, not to forget it, which, as we learned from *Consolation*, is inherent to consolation through wisdom. I believe the latter half of the Dreamer’s Composition phase consists of the person, after much time has passed, gaining wisdom and a practical understanding of kynde. The person understands that this wisdom is transient. Upon returning to the Recessive phase, any wisdom gained may be lost. Therefore, the latter part of this Composition phase reflects the same sadness of loss that the Knight’s compleynte embodies. However, although this sadness is reflected, melancholy is not the goal of the latter part of the Composition phase. The goal is to share that knowledge so that the law of kynde will not be forgotten in times of grief.

The description of the fables does not only reflect the latter part of the Dreamer’s Composition phase, but the last words of lines 53-56 are extremely telling. These lines are the only instance, other than the Knight’s lament, where Chaucer breaks his rhyme scheme. He does so for a good reason. Instead of following the ABAB patten, these four lines follow AAAA. The conformity of end rhymes in conjunction with their assonance is indicative of their importance. The words tyme, rime, minde, kinde embody the Recessive/Composition phase of the humanity by portraying the exact sequence and progression of time within the cycle. It is as follows: The passage of *time* informs what one *rhymes* about. What one *rhymes* about reflects what is in one’s *mind*. And what is in one’s *mind* is contingent upon *kynde*. The passage of time in the Composition phases of the Knight and the Dreamer encompasses the entirety of a man’s life. He loves. He loses love. His grief informs him of the natural order. He ultimately wants to record this knowledge so that people may keep it in mind.

The impetus for the birds' and the humans' composition are remarkably different. Where time controls the inclination of the birds to sing according to the fixed cycle of seasons, it is responsible in the humans for the progression from the courtly lyric to the consolatory exemplum. This progression is conclusively informed by time's effect on human emotions. Therefore, I believe Chaucer has revalidated a qualitative perception of time by intertwining it with the most rudimentary facet of humanity: our emotions.

Conclusion

To ascribe a fixed, synchronized and quantitative perception of time to human events is not merely dangerous, but against human kynde. It is in no way possible that the quantitative consolation of nature which revolves around physical growth could possibly contain the range of emotions and cognitive shifts that are present in the lives of the Dreamer and the Knight. However, although Chaucer's emphasizes a qualitative perception of time as congruent with kynde, his skepticism about a quantitative approach doesn't blind him to the fact that it is an integral part of the Recessive/Composition cycle. Rather than use a quantitative approach to time, the poem treats the accumulation of experience in a quantitative manner. By depicting a progression from courtly lyric to consolatory exemplum, *The Book of the Duchess* is treating the progression of emotions as quantitative. That is, the beginning and end human emotions, not the qualitative experiences of the individual, are anticipated. By way of conclusion I argue that Chaucer's genius in working with qualitative and quantitative perceptions of time in *The Book of the Duchess* extends past the events and characters of the poem to the poem itself. By omitting genre conventions that allow meaning to be clear and precise, Chaucer has forced his audience into a position where allegory will become clear if the same rational and cognitive functions that are conducive to qualitative time reckoning are utilized to interpret the poem.

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