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# Mourning, Melancholia, and Masculinity in Medieval Literature

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MOURNING, MELANCHOLIA, AND MASCULINITY  
IN MEDIEVAL LITERATURE

by

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A Dissertation  
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the  
Doctorate of Philosophy

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in the Graduate School  
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DISSERTATION APPROVAL

MOURNING, MELANCHOLIA, AND MASCULINITY  
IN MEDIEVAL LITERATURE

By

Rebekah M. Fowler

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial

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for the Degree of

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in the field of English

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AN ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION OF

REBEKAH M. FOWLER, for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in English, presented on JANUARY 27, 2011, at Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

TITLE: MOURNING, MELANCHOLIA, AND MASCULINITY IN MEDIEVAL LITERATURE

MAJOR PROFESSOR: Dr. Ryan Netzley

This dissertation examines male bereavement in medieval literature, expanding the current understanding of masculinity in the Middle Ages by investigating both the authenticity and affective nature of grief among aristocratic males. My focus is on the pattern of bereavement that surfaces across genres and that has most often been absorbed into studies of lovesickness, madness, the wilderness, or more formalist concerns with genre, form, and literary convention, but has seldom been discussed in its own right. This pattern consists of love, loss, grief madness and/or melancholy, wilderness lament/consolation, and synthesis and application of information gleaned from the grieving process, which is found in diverse texts from the twelfth century romance of Chrétien de Troyes' *Yvain* to the fifteenth century dream vision/*consolatio Pearl*. A focused study of how bereavement is represented through this pattern gains us a deeper understanding of medieval conceptions of emotional expression and their connections to gender and status. In other words, this project shows how the period imagines gender and status not just as something one recognizes, but also something one feels.

The judgments and representations of bereavement in these texts can be explained by closely examining the writings of such religious thinkers as Augustine and Aquinas, who borrow from the neo-Platonic and Aristotelian schools of thought, respectively, and

both of whom address the potential sinfulness and vanity of excessive grief and the dangers for this excess to result in sinful behavior. This latter point is also picked up in medical treatises and encyclopedic works of the Middle Ages, such as those of Avicenna and Isidore of Seville, which are also consulted in this project. The medieval philosophical and medical traditions are blended with contemporary theories of gender, authenticity, and understanding, as well as an acknowledgement of the psychoanalytic contributions of Freud and Lacan. Through these theories, I explore the capacity for the men in these texts to move beyond the social strictures of masculinity in order to more authentically grieve over the loss of their loved ones, which often constitutes a type of lack. However, my purpose is not to view losses *as* lack, but rather, to see them as a positive impetus to push beyond the limits of social behavior in order to realize textually various outcomes and to suggest the limitations of such socially sanctioned conventions as literary forms, language, rituals, understanding, and consolation to govern the enactment of grief.

## DEDICATION

To my brother, Brian Fowler, who has felt deep sorrow and who, through his grief, demonstrated that men can and do feel strongly—and can show it; to my parents, Earl and Delores Fowler, for always encouraging me to follow my heart and for being supportive when my heart has drawn me in unconventional directions; and to my husband, Dallas Kearns, for the sacrifices.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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INTRODUCTION:  
FEELING MASCULINITY

Men grieve. They love, they lose their beloveds, they mourn their loss; yet, this does not alter the fact that they are men. My dissertation considers male bereavement in medieval literature as a means of expanding the current understanding of masculinity in the Middle Ages by looking at representations of men as *feeling* men, not just men who fight and love, that is, not just as men who fall into hegemonic ideals or who are defined solely in terms of sexuality. I examine four male characters from as many texts—*Yvain*, *Sir Orfeo*, *The Book of the Duchess*, and *Pearl*—who are grieving over a lost beloved, each following a basic pattern, but each, also, utilizing the pattern to express his own unique grief and, therefore, exhibiting authentic emotions. While each man follows the pattern of losing a beloved, suffering some degree of grief madness in a wilderness setting, and returning to relative sanity, the types and expressions of loss each man suffers vary. In fact, each of the men in these texts acts in some way that operates outside of social conventions that suggests that these conventions fall short when it comes to the expression of deep emotions. While social norms presented in the texts suggest that the aristocratic medieval man should remain stoic, refrain from swooning and lamenting publicly, and get over their losses quickly, the characters do not comply. According to their own unique situations and losses, each goes either completely mad, succumbs to prolonged melancholia, or demonstrates his folly by flouting the comfort of consolation; the men swoon, lament, share their stories with other men, and despair of their hopelessness; they make assumptions about the “privacy” afforded by the forest, and they

long for their sorrow to end. For some, like Yvain, it does. For others, like *Pearl's* Dreamer, it cannot end until he leaves this corporeal life.

Each of these men expresses his grief authentically. He is not just *enacting* grief; he is *feeling* it, and through the expression of his pain he is affirming his masculine self. The gestures and words the authors afford their characters make palpable the pain they are feeling, allowing us to see that masculinity involves more than just chivalric prowess and courtly love, more than social identity and external veneer. When these men swoon and exclaim, "Alas!" they enjoin readers to share their pain, not simply to observe it. However, inasmuch as the texts are written for an audience, these gestures and expressions are also for the characters themselves; they do not require the readers' approval, and may even elicit disapproval for their candor. Through their candor, they demonstrate that masculinity is not divorced from emotionality, nor should it be. While removal to the wilderness suggests timidity about freely expressing deep sorrow in a social setting, none of these men refrains from expressing it altogether. Although others attempt to distract the mourners from their grief, grief persists. Many of these texts suggest that society encourages men to abstain from the practice of grief, but these men unapologetically grieve and explore their (masculine) identities through their sorrow, either by identifying with the role they have lost, as with Yvain, recognizing what it means to be a true man in *Sir Orfeo*, learning to set aside courtly convention and simply naming the loss in *The Book of the Duchess*, or conceding, along with the Dreamer in *Pearl*, that, as a mortal man, consolation is always deferred.

Grief, as defined by the texts, is a profound reaction to a loss that employs a set of behaviors including laments, isolation, a level of insanity ranging from full-blown mania

(madness) to milder forms of melancholy, and wishes for one's own death. Behaviors may also include swooning and carelessness in conjunction with the other four qualities and each character presents his unique set of characteristics of grief. In addition to the four common denominators of grief in these texts is also the nature or origin of the loss itself. In each case, the man loses a beloved female character, which excites a particular reaction to the loss that in many ways, mimics the sorrow of a jilted lover. Because grief madness often resembles lovesickness, many examples of men's grief have been subsumed into studies of lovesickness rather than being regarded as the much deeper, more profound, and more presumably permanent sorrow of grief madness, which bears, in itself, the mark of the masculine reaction to a loss.

Medieval masculinity, as the texts understand it, begins with chivalric and courtly identity; that is, the textual society in which the men operate considers them masculine by the ideals of medieval knighthood and nobility, though each character challenges the social conventions when they collide with their "authentic" expressions of grief. The grieving characters each possess a courtly inheritance. Sir Yvain, Sir Orfeo, and the Black Knight are all knights; Orfeo is also a king. The Dreamer in *Pearl*, though not identified as a knight or king, uses courtly language throughout the poem, thus identifying him as one who is connected to the court. Courtly society holds these men to an ideal that they are unable to uphold; yet, the texts allow for some leeway here—society, when it comes to men's need to express emotions, is wrong. Nonetheless, each man resorts, initially, to the manic or melancholic isolation of the wilderness in which to experience grief away from judgmental courtly society before addressing what happens in the aftermath of his grief.

The wilderness itself is an ideal, as a trope for the locus of lament either over lovesickness or grief madness. Although the wilderness is always figured as an outdoor space isolated from the court and its people, its appearance changes to fit the needs of each text. In *Yvain* and *Sir Orfeo* the wilderness is the comparatively wilder forest of the European Middle Ages, filled with the potential for adventure and danger; in *The Book of the Duchess* the wilderness is the locus of the royal hunt and significantly tamer than in the previous texts; and in *Pearl* the forest is supplanted by a personal garden and the mystical forest of the dream vision. In each case, a “wilderness,” or isolated outdoor space is the locus of lament, taking the laments found among lyric poetry and troubadour *planhs* as a model for the landscape of sorrow and grief. Each of the four texts I examine for this dissertation presents a slightly different, yet clearly recognizable, version of the pattern defined above. These differences are determined largely by the nature of the bereavement and by genre. Accordingly, each chapter presents a discussion of how the genre of the focal text affects its approach to grief as well as an examination of the type of loss the male character suffers and the manner in which the loss occurs. All five, through their focus on grief, demonstrate that masculinity is not immune to emotionality and that medieval men were represented as *feeling* men.

#### Emotions/Grief

The emotion most often associated with men in medieval texts is undoubtedly love, which appears in the romances as the courtly love between knights and ladies, the homosocial love between fellow knights, or the love of God as expressed through the Grail quest. Religious writings, too, focus on the love of God and love of and for Christ.

Love is ubiquitous, perhaps because of its ability to appeal so universally to both carnal and spiritual desires. Regardless of the context, though, men are regularly attributed the capability of experiencing this “emotion.” But, what are emotions? Thomas Dixon’s *From Passions to Emotions* provides a cogent history of emotions that is more specifically a history of the terminology for what we now call emotions and defines various terms from the writings of Aristotle, Seneca, Augustine, and Aquinas, noting their transition to the modern and current use of the word “emotions.” Dixon justifiably seeks to problematize the current trend toward viewing “emotions” of the past through our contemporary psychological theories that tend to view “reason and the emotions [as] antagonists” (2). One of Dixon’s main arguments with current thinking on emotions in earlier periods is the over-secularization of psychology (2). He incites his readers to acknowledge the importance of religion in the development of “the emotions” as we know them today rather than ignoring the fundamental role religion played in their formation. In addition, he contends that our modern term “emotions” is far too broad and simplistic and lacks the precision of earlier terminology and its usage (i.e. passions, motions, and affections). In agreement with Dixon, I generally assume an understanding of grief as a “passion” that we recognize in modern parlance as an emotion.

Whether a stirring of “emotion” a man might feel is an appetite, a passion, or an affection, according to such thinkers as Augustine and Aquinas, depended, in part, upon corporeality and spirituality. What we might today think of as instinct, such as hunger, thirst, or the desire for sex, is an “appetite,” while hate, fear, and anger are “passions,” which are more reasoned reactions to events and stimuli, and are subject to acts of the will. Love and sorrow may be construed as passions, particularly if corporeally directed,

but they may also be “affections” that are higher-minded and connected to the rational thinking that brings the practitioner closer to God. The difference between passions and affections, writes Dixon, is that passions “were unruly and disturbed the body [whereas] affections were more orderly and often spiritually directed” (21-2). Spiritual love is directed toward “goodness, truth and ultimately God” (Dixon 22), while the spiritual side of sorrow is sympathy toward others as opposed to grief over one’s own loss. Certainly, men are not exempt from any of these three modes of feeling—appetitive, passionate, and affectionate—and are expected, in a religious culture, to aspire toward more of the latter of the three, which becomes evident in my discussion of *Pearl* in Chapter Four.

Similarly, in the first three chapters, a secular social code is in place that suggests that “unruly” passions damage the public ethos of courtly men, unless, it seems, that passion is love. Grief over a personal loss is, perhaps, inevitable, but to publically display that passion is not. A similar hierarchy of feelings applies for society in these texts as it does in spiritual matters; feelings that are not reined in are inappropriate for these characters by virtue of their status as aristocratic men. That is, because Yvain and the Black Knight are knights, they are held to the social standards of knighthood—strength, valor, honor, and courage, primarily. Orfeo, as a king, must behave as a king should, with level-headed practicality and a mind toward the well-being of his kingdom. For all three of these men the bar is set high because of their social stations, which are possible, in part, because they are men. The Dreamer in *Pearl*, on the other hand, is less obviously aristocratic, so his emotions are judged less by his status than by spiritual concerns, though his courtly focus and approach to his “beloved” marks him as a man, and his emotional approach, therefore, as masculine.

In addition to spiritual and social conceptions of emotions in the Middle Ages were the medical beliefs related to humoral theory that affected temperament, which also related to what we now perceive as the emotional states of happiness, anger, calmness, and melancholia.<sup>1</sup> Each of these was affiliated to a corresponding bodily fluid—blood, yellow bile, phlegm, and black bile—and such elemental factors as heat, cold, moisture, and dryness. The most common mental illnesses were believed to be the result of too much melancholy, or black bile, which led to melancholia in most cases and mania when the black bile became burnt, or adust. Both melancholia and mania were considered mental illness or forms of madness, but melancholia was generally believed to be more easily treated and overcome—or at least less dangerous—than was mania.<sup>2</sup> Mania is full-blown madness in which the sufferers had little to no conception of who they were or what they were doing. Those who had suffered a loss and were grieving, then, were often said to be suffering from excess melancholy and were treated with various distractions and cures to help them overcome their grief. On occasion, though, the bereaved would suffer a far harsher form of melancholia and slip over the brink into mania, typified by characters like Yvain who forgets for a time who he is and why he is mad.

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<sup>1</sup> For more information on the humors, see Jennifer Radden's *The Nature of Melancholy: From Aristotle to Kristeva* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000), Isidore of Seville's *Etymologies* (Trans. Stephen A. Barney, W. J. Lewis, J. A. Beach, and Oliver Berghof. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006), *Galen On The Passions And Errors Of The Soul* (Ed. Paul W. Harkins and Walther Riese. Columbus: Ohio State UP, c1963), and *The Medical Works Of Hippocrates* (Ed. John Chadwick, Springfield, Ill.: Thomas, 1950). [Editors and translators should be outside of parentheses if you're using Chicago, which you are, right? In any event, check this and fix throughout if necessary.]

<sup>2</sup> For more on madness and mania, see Judith Neaman's *Suggestion of the Devil: Insanity in the Middle Ages and Twentieth Century* (New York: Octagon, 1978) and Penelope Doob's *Nebuchadnezzar's Children: Conventions of Madness in Middle English Literature* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1974).

While my primary concern is with the emotion of grief, the related concepts of melancholia and madness are prevalent throughout these four texts. A working understanding of physical, mental, and spiritual conceptions of sadness, melancholia as a result of prolonged sorrow, and the mania that ancient and medieval thinkers feared followed unchecked melancholic moods enables us to read these men as suffering so greatly from their losses that they are unbalanced, both mentally and humorally, soul-sick, and teetering on the brink of despair. Current arguments concerning “healthy” grief are fairly consistent with medieval thought. George L. Engel, in 1960, for example, questioned whether or not grief is a disease, and Stephen Wilkinson, following up on Engel’s contention in 2000, posits that “normal grief” is a mental disorder. Interestingly, both arguments agree with the medieval medical notions as propounded by Isidore of Seville that madness, also called “insanity” or *insania*, etymologically refers to un-health. Yet, for the medieval audience, the question was less whether or not grief itself was a form of insanity as it was whether or not it could lead to insanity, and in *Yvain* we find that it can. With the help of such works as Isidore’s, and medical works on the humors by Aristotle, Hippocrates, Galen, and Avicenna, paired with religious thought on sin and madness, each character can be read as either medically ill due to an overbalance of black bile, as punished for personal sins, or as being tested in his faith by these mental illnesses. *Sir Orfeo* makes the strongest case for a humoral reading of melancholia, as his illness lasts for ten years and his physical description suggests that black bile is in abundance in his system, manifesting itself in his dark, hirsute appearance. Penelope Doob also reads Orfeo as a penitent and as a “holy madman” (185), following the approach that his



madness is either a means of paying penance for his role in losing Heurodis or as a test of faith, both of which I question in Chapter Two.

Religious arguments such as those utilized by Doob find their basis in the writings of Augustine and Aquinas, among others, who contend that immoderate grief is a sin and, therefore, unhealthy for the soul. Furthermore, widespread medieval belief rooted in such religious thought holds that madness *and other diseases* are the direct result of a combination of original sin, or sin in the world, and the effected individual's personal willful sinfulness. In other words, original sin led to disease in the world, a theory promoted by many medieval thinkers, including Aquinas and Hildegard of Bingen, and moral delinquency or culpability on an individual level attached disease to that person. The role of original sin, therefore, serves as the cause of disease, generally, while individual sin results in disease in the particular sinner. Madness, then, is always present in the world, but affects individuals only by association with their particular sins. Those madmen thus cursed by virtue of their own vice may be purged of their madness through prayer, faith in Christ, or possibly exorcism.<sup>3</sup> The notion of spiritual *insania* is further attended to in *Pearl*, in which the Pearl Maiden calls the Dreamer "mad" for grieving over her death. His unmoderated and misguided grief leads to the sinfulness that causes his soul-sickness.

In the texts included in this dissertation, grief is identifiable by the profundity of the loss experienced, grief madness, and attempts to reclaim the lost beloved. Each of these men suffers a profound loss not accounted for by mere lovesickness around which his tale revolves. The relationships these men hold to their lost beloveds are more intense

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<sup>3</sup> For more on madness and faith, including cures, see Doob.

than those between the typical courtly couple of the worthy knight and the ideal lady of higher social station who remains unobtainable and distant. For example, though Yvain suffers early from lovesickness in the traditional romance plot, he woos and wins his lady and the two marry. His later loss, then, is more profound, as that of the wife to the husband, than his earlier lovesickness. Lovesickness is the continual deferral and frustration of desire, of never having access to the desired object. Grief madness consists of having had, and then lost, the desired object, resulting in a dramatic reaction to the loss to the point of becoming mad or melancholic. Each man's madness is slightly different from the others, but all four produce laments that are enacted in an outdoor space and either exhibit mad behavior, like eating raw meat, growing out their hair, or traversing the forest in bare feet, or they are said by others to be mad as a result of their sorrow. Yvain goes mad and flees to the forest where he laments only after he has regained his relative sanity; Orfeo laments privately in his chamber, but then chooses to flee to the forest where he lives in despondent melancholia for ten years and laments again after seeing Heurodis pass by in a troop of fairy ladies in a hunt. Orfeo's flight to the forest is further figured as madness because he gives up the throne in order to grieve his loss, effectively leaving his kingdom in the hands of other "lesser" men, which would have seemed mad to the courtly set. The Black Knight sits out the social use of the forest in order to individually, loudly, and wildly laments his dead wife in a clearing in that same forest and the Narrator, who finds him and attempts to console him, calls him "mad" for his grievous laments. The Dreamer in *Pearl* laments his dead daughter in a garden where she is buried and continues to grieve his loss in the forest of the earthly paradise of his dream vision as the Pearl Maiden, his beatified daughter, attempts to console him. This same

maiden calls him “mad” for grieving over her, who is now in heaven, and he further asserts his madness by choosing to attempt to reclaim his earthly daughter rather than enjoy the promise of heavenly reward.

Finally, each character attempts to reclaim the lost beloved, either literally or metaphorically. Again, there is great variation in the centrality of loss and in how and at what point the lost object is sought in an attempt to bring it (or her) back, as well as in the levels of success each character meets. Yvain does not immediately seek to reclaim Laudine, but every adventure he undertakes after his banishment sees him moving closer to the recognition of his authentic role and what he needs to do to reclaim her and he finally directly faces her and wins her back. Similarly, Orfeo does not immediately rescue Heurodis from the fairy Otherworld. In fact, he does not seem to go to the forest to reclaim Heurodis at all, and only attempts to do so after he sees her with the fairy ladies and decides, in a moment of despair paired with renewed vigor (paradoxically), that he has nothing left to lose. As with Yvain, he is successful in reclaiming his lost beloved. The Black Knight longs to have his wife White back, and blames Dame Fortune for taking her from him. As the most “realistic” of the texts, in that it has a historical basis in the real death of Blanche of Lancaster, wife of John of Gaunt, White’s reclamation is not literal, but functions metaphorically as the elegy of the dead wife. The Black Knight spends the entire poem recounting her virtues and reclaiming her through memory. *Pearl’s* Dreamer, likewise, spins out his desire to reclaim his dead daughter through the entirety of the poem, and has access to the deceased and beatified child through the dream vision, where he encounters her in heaven. However, like the Black Knight, his bid

is unsuccessful in the end, as the lost beloved is dead and cannot be reclaimed for this life.

The focus on memory and elegy, as found prominently in *The Book of the Duchess*, aligns grief closely to the encomia common to courtly love poetry and the forlorn lover's accounting of the ideal lady's virtues, both physical and behavioral. This makes perfect sense since grief is the loss of someone or something beloved and the love lament is nothing if not the outpouring of emotions over the beloved, but lost, lady (in most cases—there are some laments by women about men, but most are men lamenting over ladies). Yet, as noted above, there is a distinction between lovesickness and grief madness: the type and depth of the loss. Whereas lovesickness laments a love loss that is imagined—that is, the lover has been refused by the lady, so the love is not, nor has ever been reciprocated—or the lover has been betrayed by a lady whose love he thought was his alone. Yvain, in contrast, has lost his marriage due to his own misstep and the loss is, therefore, figured as grief rather than lovesickness. His is a role-changing loss, not one that is relatively easily replaced by a new love.

Grief, as defined by these texts, is based on deep love and profound loss, induces madness that is enacted in the matching wildness of an outdoor setting, and is so prevalent as to become each character's focus as he attempts to rectify his loss. Grief, in fact, requires madness for the men in these texts as the product of their affective masculine reaction to loss. Their gestures and words indicate a depth of emotions—of “unruly passions”—that allow for a more authentic expression than that afforded by the orderly “rational” world of prescribed societal rules concerning the decorum of public mourning, regardless of how expressive or stoic these expressions are. Passions like grief,

when authentically practiced, are not polite. They may not follow the rules of ritual. They explode like the “whirlwind” in Yvain’s mind, several degrees from rationality, but not anathema to reason, until the turbulence ends and the aftermath ensues, the madman finally coming out of the wilderness.<sup>4</sup>

### The Wilderness

Medieval literature is rife with tales of the wilderness and madness, and the convergence of the two. Romance characters go mad and take to the forests for their subsistence, or lose their minds after entering the woods. Many a medieval lyric finds as its setting for lament and lovesickness the forest’s canopy and deep thickets.<sup>5</sup> And consolatory texts frequently take place in the out-of-doors.<sup>6</sup> Corrine Saunders and Penelope Doob have done much to point out the prevalence of “wildness” and “madness” in medieval literature. They, and others, draw parallels between the wilderness and the mental state of such characters as Sir Lancelot, Sir Yvain, and the Black Knight from Chaucer’s *Book of the Duchess*. Mary F. Wack and Judith Neaman, to name but two,

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<sup>4</sup> This is not to say that public mourning in a ritualized setting, either in the Middle Ages or today, cannot be authentic. My point here is that public display can often be, either in reality or perception, a performance that is inauthentic for the sake of public appearances. Likewise, private grief can be inauthentic in an act put on for oneself. However, in these texts, the act of removal leads, with the possible exception of the Black Knight (see Chapter Three), to an authentic expression of grief.

<sup>5</sup> For more on the origins of lyric laments, see Judith M. Davis’ *A Handbook of the Troubadours* (Los Angeles: U of California P, 1995) and Linda M. Paterson’s *The World of the Troubadours: Medieval Occitan Society, c. 1100-c. 1300* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995). For studies on lyrics, specifically, see William Doremus Paden’s *Medieval Lyric: Genres in Historical Context* (Urbana, IL: U of Illinois P, 2000), Peter Dronke’s *The Medieval Lyric* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell, 1968), and James Wilhelm’s *Lyrics of the Middle Ages* (Florence, KY: Taylor & Francis, 1990). The latter of these is a collection of lyrics, and but one of many currently available.

<sup>6</sup> David Means’ *The Consolatio Genre in Medieval English Literature* (Gainesville, FL: U of Florida P, 1972) provides an excellent overview of the *consolatio* genre.

have also connected lovesickness and love loss to melancholia, madness, and the forest. In each of the instances, the wilderness appears as a liminal space through which characters must pass and enact their grief before coming to a conclusion about their grief in the end, either by reclaiming the lost object or by realizing that reclamation is not possible.

Depictions of Sir Lancelot's sundry bouts of madness and wilderness wanderings are commonplace and expected, Lancelot representing the quintessential lovesick knight who loses himself to his desire for an unavailable woman of higher social status. Similar exhibits of irrationality crop up in other romances, as well; *Yvain* is one such example that appears in this study. Yvain, having been convinced by Sir Gawain to travel the tournament circuit, absents himself too long from his home and finds himself banished by his wife from her kingdom. Indeed, Laudine refuses to allow him to return as her husband and Yvain is left, like Lancelot after an especially hurtful rejection by Guinevere, wandering the wilderness in a state of profound despondency that leads to madness. *Sir Orfeo*, likewise, presents a romance hero who takes to the wilderness after suffering a loss. Orfeo's wife, Heurodis, is abducted by the Fairy King and taken to the otherworld, an event about which Orfeo and Heurodis are forewarned, but that Orfeo and all his men are powerless to prevent. Orfeo eventually gains back his queen after a period of time in the wilderness where he subsists, like the biblical King Nebuchadnezzar, off of the offerings of the "desert." The wilderness, again, appears as the locus of the lament.

Though not a character in romance, Chaucer's Black Knight is also on the brink of emotional collapse in the forest where he is reduced to loud sighs and lamentations. The speaker of Chaucer's dream vision overhears these outbursts and intervenes,

encouraging the Black Knight to share his tale of woe. Chaucer carefully weaves this interaction into the poem so that the reader is convinced that, like so many knights of romance, this one, too, is suffering from lovesickness or the refusal of his beloved. Unlike Yvain, however, the Black Knight has not been spurned by his beloved; rather, his beloved White has died. Yet, a similar pattern is apparent: a man who has known his heart's desire suddenly finds himself separated from his beloved, leading him to bouts of extreme grief, feelings of melancholy, and potential madness, and enacting his grief in the wilderness.

The Dreamer in *Pearl* presents a unique take on the liminal wilderness setting, beginning in a garden where the pearl has been lost. The pearl, a metaphor for his young daughter who has died, has been buried in this garden, and here is where the Dreamer laments, rather than in a forest. However, the garden still fulfills the role of the locus of lament in a natural setting and the Dreamer's further liminality between feeling the sorrow of his daughter's death and comprehending its permanence finds him traveling through a marvelous land—an otherworldly wilderness and therefore a liminal space itself—adorned with forest, cliffs, rivers, and all of the trappings of the wilderness setting, but made of precious materials.

Why the wilderness? The most cogent and concise reason is that provided by Saunders in her discussion on *Sir Orfeo*: “Orfeo follows the familiar pattern of the flight into the forest of the lover maddened by grief or loss. . . . The forest, then, is the appropriate locus for the expression of the extremity of Orfeo's grief. Here, however, Orfeo's ‘madness’ demonstrates his own familiarity with the topos of the forest as landscape of lament and loss” (137). The wilderness arises again and again in these texts

related to grief because there is a “topos of the forest as the landscape of lament and loss.” Tradition, as mentioned previously, based on lyric poetry and the songs of the troubadours, as well as classical mythology, holds that lamenting over loss takes place in the wilderness. Furthermore, “maddened lovers” flee to the forest because this is the tradition. Yet, why this is the tradition and how the wilderness is used is more complex than this. Saunders, Doob, and Neaman have all acknowledged that the wilderness reflects the inner turbulence of the man who finds himself there, and that the wilderness serves as a place of penance, of trial, and of adventure and sport. They have also noted its liminality, particularly in Saunders’ case, as the threshold to the Otherworld in *Sir Orfeo* (140). If the reasons for the tradition are this varied, then the forest as the “landscape of lament and loss” is a tradition in form, only.

What, exactly, happens in the forest varies from text to text, as each character’s madness is as unique as his approach to loss and what his stint in the wilderness reveals about his masculinity. The forest may, as with Yvain, reflect the wildness of the bereaved’s inner turmoil. Orfeo’s wilderness reflects the earth-bound nature of his ten-year melancholia. Likewise, for the Black Knight the forest serves as a melancholic retreat, but an orderly one still subject to courtly codes of conduct. *Pearl’s* Dreamer vacillates between joy and grief in the marvelous land that indicates his wilderness, reflecting his unhinged frame of mind as he attempts to come to terms with his loss. Yet, each man finds in this liminal space a locus of becoming: becoming reconciled to loss; becoming a “true” man; becoming a role; becoming a communicator; becoming consoled; becoming differently masculine.



“Becoming differently masculine” uniquely occurs for each character. Yvain begins his time in the forest completely devoid of a role—a madman with no sense of who he is, where he belongs, or what he should be doing. The forest, however, brings Yvain face-to-face with the reality that Gawain’s version of masculinity and of whom he should be—the knight errant—fails to resonate with him. The forest proves transitional for Yvain in that it represents a turnstyle, of sorts, through which he accesses numerous adventures as a knight errant only to fully discover that what he desires is to prove his masculinity at home, defending his wife and her domain as a domestic knight. Orfeo, who spends the greatest amount of time in the forest, remains despondent in the wilderness, identifying most strongly with the deathly cold of winter, until sport brings Heurodis, ensconced among a troop of fairy ladies, back into his immediate consciousness. The forest becomes truly liminal for Orfeo as he enters the Otherworld of the Fairy King’s realm through it and reclaims Heurodis. Through his ordeal and the cold grief suffered in solitude, Orfeo becomes convinced of the value of authentically expressed emotions, even those displayed in public, as a sign of a “true man.”

The Black Knight, taking the tradition quite literally, takes to a glade to lament his loss, only to find that traditions are hollow and fail to convey the sincerity or truth of loss; therefore, the “social presence” of the solitary lament in the forest, usually taken up by the male lamenter, fails to communicate to other men because it utilizes the courtly language associated with exciting the sympathies of ladies instead of direct language. Chaucer also uses the forest as a mirror of the literary forms utilized in this text, showing at once the forest’s wildness, which compares to the wild emotions of love and loss expressed in the lament. Yet, the forest, like the lament, the elegy, and the *consolatio*, is

more formally ordered than it is in the earlier texts, suggesting a formality like that of literary genre. Also like the conventions of literature, which take raw emotions and tame them through rhyme, meter, and stanzaic formulae, the forest appears as rhythmic in its even spacing of trees and carefully placed branches, suggesting the ability of form to contain and make acceptable emotional outpouring, rather than allowing for its “unruly” authenticity.

*Pearl's* Dreamer experiences his wilderness as a corporeal separation from his beloved daughter and finds that masculine bluster and force are useless in the heavenly realm where earthly desires have no place. Thus the forest, according to these texts, provides that space for each man to come to terms with a masculine self that may not live up to the noble ideal, but that suggests that it does not have to, nor is it necessarily preferable to do so. The wilderness gives each man the opportunity to expose the open wounds of loss, to feel them, express them vividly, and to learn through the experience that they are no less men than they were before their losses.

### Masculinity

As a study of masculinity, this project presents the medieval man as more complexly represented in texts than many histories of medieval men, including such notable works on chivalry and fighting men as those by Keen and Kaeuper, suggest. I am certainly not alone in this respect, as numerous critical works focus on masculinity in general, and medieval masculinity in particular. While scholars like Derek Neal have found archival evidence, such as court records, that provide a glimpse into masculine practice among commoners, the more prevalent evidence provides images of “those who

fight” and “those who pray,” two of the three recognized estates of society in the Middle Ages, according to the ninth-century king Alfred and elaborated upon by countless other medieval thinkers (such as Aelfric) and modern scholars. The first three texts prominently feature fighting men—knights and kings—while the Dreamer of *Pearl* is less clearly defined. That he is in a private garden and that he refers to a lost pearl, however (regardless of the metaphorical nature of the gem), suggests a man of means.

Clare A. Lees’ *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages*, Jacqueline Murray’s *Conflicted Identities and Multiple Masculinities*, and J. J. Cohen’s *Becoming Male in the Middle Ages* consider what it means to be male in the Middle Ages and suggest that masculinity is less rigidly defined than scholars had long thought. Monographs like Neal’s *The Masculine Self in Late Medieval England* focus more directly on one subset of medieval men, in this case, the peasantry. Still other texts take masculine pursuits as their subject matter and define the medieval man through his actions. Among these texts are such works as Richard Kaeuper’s *Chivalry and Violence in Medieval England*, Maurice Keen’s *Chivalry*, and Juliet Barker’s *Medieval Tournament in England 1100-1400*, which all detail what it means to be a knight in the Middle Ages. Carolyn Walker Bynum, Felice Lifshitz, Lisa Bitel, Bonnie Wheeler, and others consider masculinity in terms of monastic life, which both openly embraces more traditional feminine roles of nurturance and empathy and a warrior mentality as suggested by the metaphor of spiritual warfare. Such questioning of masculinity assumes a preconceived belief about masculinity against which these texts and essays argue. That is, in order for these works to “eschew the idea of a fixed or hegemonic masculinity,” as Murray claims in her introduction (x), there has to be an image of “fixed or hegemonic

masculinity” against which these texts push. This stereotypical version of masculinity, these studies—as well as my own—suggest, is but one idealized version of what it is to be a man in the Middle Ages.

The qualities of medieval “hegemonic masculinity,” particularly as it relates to these four texts, include the propensity to use intellect rather than the passions to guide behavior, dominance over women, physical virtues of knightly prowess and all that that entails, endowed virtues of masculine nobility, and a set of behaviors that suggest each of the previous traits. Contrasting with the dominance typically afforded the medieval man through his intellect and economic and political advantage is his role as courtly lover, through which his lordship, in this domain only, is handed over to the lady—at least in literature. This, too, defines medieval masculinity and serves as an anomalous counterpoint to the “normal” set of masculine behaviors.

As Neal argues, “masculine identity in late medieval England depended on a social presence” (7), and this was also true of France and England in the high Middle Ages of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. How a man presented himself, and how he was perceived, before others determined who he *was* both to others and to himself. As Neal details, slander of a man and the negative attributes of that slander, whether true or not, defined the slandered man, “diminishing” his social self to the point that it affected his life and livelihood (36). Likewise, any behavior that ran counter to expected behavior resulted in a revised understanding of who a man *was*, not just what a man *did*. Publicly displaying one’s grief, for example, marked one as weak and womanish, as shall be demonstrated, in particular, in the chapter on Orfeo. “Being a man,” continues Neal on this point, “meant being present, visible, accepted among and interacting with a

community of other males in the formal and informal structures of a man's immediate community" (7). D. M. Hadley similarly writes that "performance and public affirmation of identity were central to the construction of masculinities" (14). This was certainly no less true of the aristocracy as it was of the commoners of which Neal writes; indeed, "social presence," or the public face of the man, was, perhaps, even more important for the aristocracy, particularly those with closer ties to the throne, because they were held to higher standard of physical appearance and "noble" attributes.

Among the ideal social traits that are most often suggested in these texts is the ideal public face of man as intellect or reason, that is, with "abstraction, and thus a capacity for philosophy" (Bloch 28), able to withstand misfortune with cool aplomb. This propensity for intellect is often pitted against "the world of senses" often associated with women (Bloch 29), appreciating reasoned self-control above passionate, and therefore feminine, expression. This ideal finds roots in Platonic thought and in the Stoic tradition, and later in the teachings of the Church Fathers, who further encouraged moderation in all things, including reacting to loss (though we have seen above that "moderation" does not mean "abstention" from passions). We see this especially with Yvain, Orfeo, and the Black Knight, as each man refrains from breaking down in front of the other members of court and reserves his lamenting and madness for less public or civilized venues. The reasons for this abstention from public displays of emotion are certainly predicated upon idealized masculine identity, and for the men in this study, men who hold highly public positions of some authority (particularly Orfeo), "self-control was expected" (Hadley 12), and self control required intellect, reason, and a clear understanding of moderation. Excessive emotions displayed publicly would not meet this expectation.

However, this public face, or “social presence,” of the medieval man—the “hegemonic masculinity” suggested by Murray—fails to adequately complete the portrait of the men represented in these four texts. The public man who defeats other men in combat, sports with his fellow nobles, and sits on the throne, and who obeys social conventions and rituals, is only one thin layer of the portrait—the gloss or the veneer of the top layer. These men do not just act a part or genuflect to social norms; they also *feel* independently and authentically. Perhaps the public face is stoical and controlled, but the private man, these texts show, is not. Knights do go mad from grief; kings suffer ten-year-long bouts of melancholia over the loss of a wife; noblemen shake their fists at Fortune and recite elegiac verse when their wives die; and fathers, in their sorrow over their lost daughters, blame God and refuse consolation. Grief is messy business and men are not exempt from experiencing it. And through it, each character becomes more complete, adding the dark, soulful undertones to the portrait to which the social veneer merely affords the appearance of polished “finish.”

### Feeling Masculinity

What does it mean to “feel masculinity”? As the four texts in this dissertation demonstrate, feeling masculinity means to know joy and to know sorrow. To feel masculinity requires more than simply talking about feelings or observing others’ emotions from a safe distance. Feeling masculinity recognizes that “feeling” may be accomplished through socially agreed upon rituals, but *authentic* feeling often does not. Feeling masculinity is risky. It takes courage; sometimes it takes coaxing; and occasionally, as with the experience of the men in these texts, it requires change.

I begin my textual examination with Chrétien de Troyes' twelfth-century poem *Yvain, ou, le Chevalier au Lion*. What *Yvain* brings to my overall contention that masculinity is something to be felt, and not just seen, in medieval texts is the acknowledgment that a knight can feel and express loss that is more profound than lovesickness, and that is integrally connected to his identity. While scholars and readers alike often claim that medieval romance is partly responsible for the sentimentalized view of love, when we read closely, we find that the knight loves the lady because she is beautiful and virtuous; the lady is an ideal type, not a real woman. These are not sentimental, innately emotional feelings; they are image-based impressions and are entirely unrealistic. Looking even closer, though, we find that Yvain and Laudine's love for one another is surprisingly practical. They love one another, superficially, for the ideals that they represent to one another (the ideal lady and the ideal knight), but more practically, for what they can provide one another: protection and a good bloodline for future generations and a steady gig fighting other knights to prove and practice knightly prowess. The roles, then, are the basis of the love relationship and emotions are directly tied to utilitarian concerns. Knighthood and marital life are not just facades donned to attract others, they are roles that define who one is.

Loss of these roles corresponds with loss of identity. When love is related to the role, and the role to identity, the love relationship becomes intimately intertwined with the self. Yvain's loss of Laudine leads to his loss of role, affecting the loss of self, which is his masculine identity. When Yvain first goes silent and then goes mad, Chrétien presents a man who is *feeling* his loss of masculine identity, not *stating* it. Silence, madness, laments, longing for death, self-imposed isolation—we can see these through

the author's words, but more than seeing them, we can feel them. Chrétien makes them palpable and, as a result, enables us to see that loss is deeply painful, and that when a man loses his identity as a man, he *feels* it, immensely. Masculinity is not just the image of the strongly muscled and valiant knight who can battle for hours without stopping, seemingly fearless and indefatigable. Nor is it simply the lover who pines for the out-of-reach lady and allows her to play the part of his lord while he submits to love—a role also based on a social veneer. Masculinity, *Yvain* submits, is also a practical and real role that defines who a man is, and a man is deeply attached—dare we say *emotionally* attached?—to those roles, and through those roles, he experiences strong feelings of joy, pain, love, and loss.

The chapter on *Sir Orfeo* looks more directly at social convention and the perception of how grief should be enacted by men versus how it should be performed by women. The difference, I claim, is partially realized in public and private displays of mourning behaviors, public exhibition of grief being more feminine, while men are expected to grieve privately. Private grief becomes even more necessary for Orfeo, I argue, because he is a king who is expected to behave in a traditionally noble and kingly fashion: rationally, bravely, militaristically, and with measured self-control. Furthermore, as king, Orfeo is to set personal emotions aside in favor of the realm, and to do otherwise is viewed as madness. However, Orfeo's sojourn into the forest where he subsists for ten years in a melancholic torpor, leads to his confrontation with the Fairy King and the realization that knightly and kingly honor are not always the true mark of a man, and that public displays of feelings sometimes are, if they are honestly felt and sincerely presented. What I argue in this chapter is that authentic masculinity is not only



masculinity that appeals to the ideals of prowess and strength, but is also masculinity that recognizes the value of deep feelings to create a well-rounded and honest man who does not have to put on the pretense of emotionless-ness.

Having established in *Yvain* that grief does not have to consist of the death of loved one, Orfeo's loss proves to be equally devastating as both the loss of a beloved, and the perceived loss of his kingly power and masculine identity according to the aristocratic ideal. Orfeo challenges the masculine ideal by proving that might does not always prevail; some situations call for those skills more often associated with the senses, such as music, which he combines with skillful rhetoric to out-manuever the Fairy King. More importantly, he challenges the masculine ideal by suggesting that men can feel and that sincerely expressed passions are the sign of an authentic, honest, and loyal man. Masculinity in this text, then, is felt as authentic through open expression of genuine emotion. *Sir Orfeo* presents a form of masculinity that encourages emotionality if that emotionality is true.

The chapter on Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess* follows logically from the *Orfeo* chapter in its treatment of the loss of a spouse and the male reaction to that loss. It is also an apt bridge to the *Pearl* chapter as it, too, is both consolation and dream vision. In addition to considering the religious and classical contributions to a medieval understanding of emotions, this chapter grapples with the question of the ability of the language of generic forms to convey meaning and authentic feelings, and therefore to lead to understanding and empathy from others. Throughout the text, the Black Knight, mourning the loss of his wife, utilizes generic conventions to convey his loss to the Narrator, who has stumbled upon him in the forest. Although the Narrator wants to

understand the Black Knight's loss, the knight's reliance on the lyric lament and on romance staples of the elegy and the trope of the ideal lady fail to communicate his loss to the Narrator, who only comes to comprehend this loss when the Black Knight bluntly states, "She ys ded!" (1300). Literary forms, then, may assist the writer or speaker in expressing emotions, but do little to share information with the listener, or to authenticate the emotions expressed, unless the listener has suffered a similar loss and can empathize.

The poem's focus seems to be more closely connected to solace or consolation, and the Black Knight appears to have been consoled, or at least distracted from his grief, but consolation does little to explain to the Narrator why the Black Knight grieves. Masculinity is felt in this chapter through the Black Knight's use of literary conventions, often employed by men to describe the ideal lady and memorialize her. However, although the Black Knight utilizes the conventions, they appear empty. He recites a formal lament, tells a classic wooing tale, and curses Fortune, but each form that he applies seems shallow and unconvincing. During his discussion with the Narrator, he continually presents what is expected of a mourning man, not what lies deeper. The conventions allow him to evade authentic emotion, even while he appears to exude passion. Authenticity is only reached through the starkest pronouncement of the truth of the Black Knight's loss at the end of the poem, and only here does the Narrator comprehend, and feel along with the Black Knight, the depth of the bereaved man's loss. Chaucer invites us into the Narrator's frustration in his attempts to understand the nature of loss through tired conventions that fail to convey true grief. Only when the Black Knight baldly states that White is dead, and confesses that this (finally) "ys [his] trouth" (1309) does the Narrator express sympathy with the line "hyt ys rowthe!" (1310). The

Black Knight's "truth" is raw and authentic, not prettied up with poetic language or empty gestures, and in his truth, though this truth is enough, we experience the only moment of authenticity the Black Knight shares.

Despite its recognizable differences from the previous texts, *Pearl* still presents a bereaved male character performing his grief according to the established pattern. Where the others view bereavement from a secular vantage point, *Pearl* is a religious allegory and consolation, aimed to ensure the reader of the blessings of heaven both for himself and for his departed loved ones. Also, the lost loved one in each of the previous texts is an adult female to whom the aristocratic male has a romantic tie. The deceased in *Pearl* is a small child, the daughter of the Dreamer, who takes on the very adult role of teaching and guiding her grieving father.

This chapter demonstrates how the medieval Christian thought of St. Thomas Aquinas considers sorrow and happiness and how the Dreamer goes about abating the former, while he attempts to achieve the latter, but in a decidedly non-Thomistic fashion. While Aquinas argues that there is virtuous sorrow and sorrow that is filled with vice, and that the ultimate happiness can only be achieved when one comes as close as he ever will to understanding God by seeing him face to face, which does not happen in this life, the Dreamer attempts to end sorrow and find ultimate happiness by reclaiming his dead daughter, even if it means snatching her from the banks of the river that flows from the throne in the City of God. The Pearl Maiden, who is the beatified version of the deceased daughter, proceeds to teach and console the Dreamer in an attempt at Boethian consolation, but the Dreamer refuses consolation, preferring instead to subsume himself in his desire for his lost beloved. When he finds himself tossed back into his earthly

garden after attempting to cross the river to take the Pearl Maiden, he realizes his error in not letting go of his earthly desire and substitutes this desire for a desire for the Lamb and the City of God. However, because the Lamb and heaven are at a remove, this substitution still brings only deferred consolation, or the consolation of a promise rather than an end to sorrow.

Masculinity and how it is felt in this text is less clearly defined than it is in the others. This is partly due to the first-person narrative that neglects to present a picture of who the Dreamer is. Rather, the reader experiences the Dreamer through his own voice, and is not given a proper introduction. He self-identifies as a jeweler, though this could be metaphorical, since he refers to his dead daughter as a pearl, but we know nothing else about him. We do not know if he is a knight, a noble, or a merchant. He is, however, conversant in the language of courtly love and uses it as a male lover would, referring to the Pearl Maiden as the ideal lady in his description of her. He also attempts to dominate the Pearl Maiden, which also suggests masculine authority and establishes him as a member of the “fixed or hegemonic” male population noted by Murray.

The Dreamer’s masculinity is *felt* through his desire to dominate and reclaim his daughter and, therefore, his happiness. That is, unlike the previous male characters who are more structurally bound by social roles and whose passion must find ways to work through or around those roles, the Dreamer represents an almost entirely affective masculinity. He deals in the language and gesture of joy and sorrow—of desire—rather than that of role-bound identity and subjectivity. His joy is gone, he claims, and the only way he will ever feel it again is to have the source of his joy, his daughter, back. Instead, what he feels is the deep sorrow that is expressed throughout the poem, even in the midst

of the most blissful moments of the text. When walking through the marvelous land, he is reminded of her; when he sees her again and recognizes her, he laments her as lost; even when he is allowed a glimpse of heaven and feels the joys it brings, his is the singular masculine loss of the father whose earthly joy is gone. What he feels at the end of the poem is no longer gendered, but is a universal desire for the Lamb and the City of God that must replace his gendered loss of the daughter for the father—the daughter he attempts to dominate and force back to his earthly realm. The love and joy the Pearl Maiden reveals to him is a genderless and classless one, where there is no dominance, and he feels this as a difference, preferring, for much of the poem, his earthly joy over a heavenly one.

The men in these texts do not reserve emotions for formalized wooing and love laments. They also feel the pain of loss, and feel it lavishly. They swoon, cry, lament, wish themselves dead, and go mad from grief. They suffer long bouts of melancholia as a result of loss and refuse easy consolation. They pour out their hearts in an attempt to make themselves heard, only to be misunderstood and ridiculed as womanish or overly abstract. Still, they lament. They grieve over lost roles, over their failure to prove themselves ideally male, over Fortune's cruelty, over deceased beloveds, over loss of joy. Medieval men are not relegated to the suit of armor standing in the corner of English castle—an empty shell that we can imagine picking up a lance, mounting a horse, and charging the opponent in the joust. No; these suits of armor have souls, and when the armor is set aside these souls bleed onto the page. They feel passionately and (increasingly more) openly, expressing what they are feeling. They are men who love,

who lose their beloveds, and who mourn these losses. They are men who prove their masculinity by *feeling* their masculinity.

CHAPTER ONE: LOVE LOSS, LOSS OF PURPOSE  
AND GRIEF IN *YVAIN*

Chrétien de Troyes' *Yvain, ou, le Chevalier au Lion* tells the tale of a knight who seeks adventure and finds a wife, but who loses his wife as the result of his own failure to keep his word to her. After his loss, Yvain flees to the forest where he goes mad with grief. A young maiden who finds the naked and sleeping Yvain in the forest remarks, "espoir aucun duel a eü / qui le fet ensi demener; / an puet bien duel forsener" (perhaps some grief has caused him to be here in this manner; one can certainly go mad with grief; 2930-2). The madness that Yvain suffers is linked in these lines to grief, though the maiden has no way of knowing what his grief is. Though James R. Averill states that "the typical occasion for grief is the disruption of a social relationship through the death of one of the principle participants" (724), he also acknowledges that people grieve over any loss of a "significant object," whether this object is "another person, for example, a spouse or a child, [or] a material object such as wealth, or a symbolic one such as reputation" (724). Furthermore, Averill argues that any loss that "disrupt[s] the performance of an accustomed role as clearly as may the death of a significant individual" can be considered grief if it "[entails] the loss of self-esteem . . . or [deprives] the person of the meaning and rationale for his actions" (725). What I argue in this chapter is that Yvain, having fought for his role as Laudine's husband/defender, and having thus identified with the role as that which is authentic to him as a man, suffers a deep loss that constitutes grief that he can only surmount by reclaiming the role.

The role that becomes the "authentic" role to which Yvain aspires, claims, and loses, is that of the domestic knight, which he values above his opening role as knight

errant, the more traditional of literary chivalric roles. As a domestic knight, Yvain is still able to prove his battle prowess in protecting Laudine's kingdom from attacks on the marvelous fountain, attacks that have wreaked havoc in the form of severe storms on Laudine's lands. Even as he engages in defensive battles against encroaching knights, he is husband and lover to Laudine, the ideal lady. The role of domestic knight serves as a social contrast to the knight errant, who is often not matrimonially bound to a single woman, and who travels the countryside in search of adventure. Yvain fulfills both roles in the text, but the role of domestic knight is the harder won and more dearly held of the two, which becomes clear through Yvain's grief madness and long melancholy. Yvain identifies this domestic role with one particular person—Laudine—and values it over all other roles, leading to devastation at its loss. The role is so dear because it is one that Yvain specifically pursues rather than one that comes to him by happenstance, as with most instances of knight errantry presented throughout the tale. Although the quest for the role begins with a bid to reclaim his cousin's honor, itself a type of domestic pursuit, it continues with Yvain's concerted efforts to woo Laudine, and ends with his having won his suit.

The text, in some ways, presents Yvain's wooing of Laudine as a standard courtly love story; Yvain falls instantly in love with the ideal woman, laments the fact that she is unreachable, and sets about trying to win her love. Yet, Chrétien's ideal woman is not presented ideally. When Yvain falls in love with her, she is sullied by her grief over her murdered husband, Esclados the Red, and Yvain is her husband's murderer. The love lament becomes more complicated because Yvain is Laudine's enemy and, as a result, he must use deception to gain her hand. In order for Yvain to secure the role as her



husband/defender, or the domestic knight, a role he seeks to acquire after his victory over Esclados and his pity-driven love for the dead man's widow, he engages the help of Laudine's maid, Lunete, and her rhetorical expertise. This use of deception is used to identify the true Yvain to Laudine as a worthy suitor and champion by allowing Lunete to tell the truth of Yvain's pedigree and prowess while fudging some facts, or at least delaying them, to gain him access to Laudine. In this way, dishonest means are employed to successfully place Yvain in the role with which he authentically identifies—domestic knight. Yvain's love is connected to the "significant object" of this role and the possibility it provides for him to be defender, protector, provider, and husband, and his grief thus stems from the loss of this role, of which Laudine is a central component.

The typical pattern for the bereaved medieval male, of which Yvain is an early example, includes a tradition of lament in which the lover flees to the forest in a fit of mad grieving. He remains there for anywhere from a few hours, as with Chaucer's Black Knight in *The Book of the Duchess*, to many years, as in the ten-year grief suffered by the hero in *Sir Orfeo*. The grieving man suffers a metaphorical death as he removes himself from society and may experience, as does Yvain, a loss of identity. "If the space of madness is one of living death," writes Sylvia Huot, "it does also offer its own consolation: that of freedom from the burden of endlessly recreating the self as a narrative subject, implicated in the web of discourse and desire" (150). Yvain finds himself in the forest in this temporary escape from the various roles that define him. However, this "freedom from the burden of endlessly recreating the self as a narrative subject" is but a brief pause for him. Once he is cured of his madness he is tasked with redefining himself, which he does through an assumed identity and adventures. The

“living death,” then, is but a speed bump on the road to productive self-discovery or, as I argue, a designation of roles, in which grief appears to be motivated less by love loss than by loss of purpose. However, purpose and love are linked in this text and both are rediscovered as Yvain recovers from his grief. That grief is tied to social purpose does not make it inauthentic. For Yvain, the “ongoing exclusion” he experiences is only “ongoing” for a limited period before he returns to the life of the court as a fully active member of that society, and returns to clearly defined roles.

Scholars have conducted numerous studies of emotions and of grief and have formulated models of therapy and understanding of bereavement, especially since the mid-twentieth century, yet we still struggle to comprehend what grief is, why we grieve, and how we *should* grieve, questions that also plagued medievals. Texts like *Yvain* seek to answer some of these questions. As Elizabeth Schulze-Busacker notes, grief is related to the loss of joy in the *planh*,<sup>7</sup> and Constantine claimed that the most common losses for which madness is an end result are the death of a loved one, or the lover being “untrue”—that is, separation imposed by dishonesty or betrayal. The separation leads to the “disruption of social relationships” and a shift in roles, as explained by Averill, and for the medieval knight, this shift in roles could be jarring at the least, and devastating at its most dire. Roy Baumeister writes: “People were differentiated mainly by certain roles—family, rank, occupation . . . The public self dominated. The medieval person’s identity was defined by a society within a firm network of cultures, institutions, and tradition . . . furnished by society” (153-4). To lose face in one or any of these roles would be a source of great loss because the role *is* one’s identity. The results of this loss lead to grief, which,

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<sup>7</sup> *Planhs* are laments, usually for the deceased, written by Occitan troubadours.

in this text is represented through grief madness that is enacted in a forest setting and through which Yvain comes to an understanding of his role in life. His most profound change occurs immediately after news of his loss and in the forest setting during which he first spends time alone. Change progresses as he transfers his affection for his lost beloved to the lion who becomes his traveling companion after he saves it, and as he finally refocuses on claiming his roles as valiant knight and husband/defender to Laudine once more.

### Love, Significance, and Grief

Grief is often figured as the result of the loss of someone or something beloved by the bereaved.<sup>8</sup> Certainly the loss of a loved one is great cause for grief and is at the core of many occasions for grief and mourning. However, Averill suggests that the loss that results in grief is not necessarily limited to those people or objects that we love, but also to “the loss of a *significant* object” (724, my emphasis). That is, the lost object or person may not necessarily be beloved, but still holds strong significance for the bereaved. “Significant objects” are those whose loss “entails the disintegration of social relationships, with a consequent alteration in the living pattern and social condition of the bereaved” (724). Loss of a job, a means of support, or even the loss of an enemy might constitute such a loss if the loss produces strong emotions and a sense of upset that also leads to “a loss of self-esteem . . . or [deprives] the person of the meaning and rationale for his actions” (725). When Laudine demands that Yvain never come back to her kingdom, Yvain suffers such a blow to his self-esteem, as well as a change in his

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<sup>8</sup> See, for example, John Bowlby’s *Loss (Attachment and Loss Series. 2 vols. NY: Basic, 1976)*, and Colin Murray Parkes’ *Love and Loss (Oxford: Routledge, 2006)*.

circumstances, and these changes, in conjunction with and as coincident with his love for Laudine, are what grieve him the most and lead to his grief madness.

Yvain claims to love Laudine and Chrétien takes pains to describe how his hero has been struck by Love's arrow, becoming exemplary of the lovesick courtly knight. The reader is manipulated into believing that Yvain is so heartsick when Laudine banishes him because he loves her deeply, having "left his heart behind" (2645), and that he is wounded to the core and much aggrieved because he had failed to keep his promise to her as a true lover. Yvain's love for Laudine ignites instantly; indeed, he suffers from love at first sight. Yet, his love is based, in part, on his pity for the grieving Laudine rather than on her beauty alone, beauty being the single most important element in medieval romance that excites love in the male courtly lover. The pity Yvain feels for Laudine is for her loss of Esclados the Red, the knight who defends the fountain from attacks like the one Yvain launched and who is the lady's husband, whom Yvain has killed. Yvain's pity is thus enmeshed with his guilt as he feels pity for the lady's grief, and guilt over the fact that he is the cause of it. His love for her is a complex one based on his knowledge that he has caused her grief and that he holds the key to her renewed happiness as her new champion and defender of her fountain and a new husband to share her bed. Yvain's love, then, is contingent upon Laudine's beauty coupled with the promise of a new, permanent and domestic role for him to play—a role other than knight errant and avenger of his cousin's dishonor in losing a similar battle with Esclados—the dual role of defender and husband. Yvain's bid for Laudine's hand is, however, riddled with the possibility of failure, both because he is engaging in a love suit, which always contains the possibility of failure, and also because the lover he seeks to take is also his

enemy as the wife of the man he has just killed. Yvain is not inured to this fact, as Chrétien states that “son cuer a o soi s’anemie, / s’aimme le rien qui plus le het” (his heart was with his enemy and he loved the one who hated him the most; 1362-3). Laudine is set up as the unreachable lady and Yvain as he who pines for her, acknowledging that his thoughts “ne cuit pas savoir” (are not very prudent; 1436). He calls himself a “fos” (complete idiot) for despairing over this impracticality. Yet, he believes that he is “m’esuet an son dongier” (“destined to be in her power”; 1446). Yvain is so controlled by her ideal beauty and is so willing to pursue her that he does not mind being imprisoned in her castle and “mialz vialt morir quë il s’en aut” (he would rather have died than leave; 1544).

Imagery of imprisonment prevails throughout the text, beginning with Yvain’s initial entrapment between portcullises after he chases Esclados to the castle. At first, his imprisonment in the castle is undesirable, but when it turns to the prison of love, he no longer dismays of his incarceration there. Unlike his later imprisonment to grief, or even Lunete’s literal caging for her role in helping Yvain woo Laudine, Love’s cage is a sweetly gilded one that Yvain does not desire to leave. Staying in Laudine’s castle, then, really serves as a prison inasmuch as Yvain poses a threat and is threatened because of his role in the master’s death. The punitive possibilities of being a prisoner of Love include the heartbreak of love denied, love destroyed, or the death of the beloved, the former of which leads to lovesickness, and the latter two to grief madness. Love is no longer a prison if love is returned; it only punishes if it is not. So, Yvain seeks to end his imprisonment by becoming a true tenant in the House of Love, or at least in Laudine’s castle where he can take his chances at vying for her love.

Catherine Belsey, in a reference to the novel *The Passion* by Jeanette Winterson, refers to the comparison made in the novel between love and gambling, stating, “Love and gambling are compulsive, unpredictable, thrilling, dangerous. What is at stake is a loss” (688). The same is true in medieval texts, though “gambling” could be exchanged for Lady Fortune and her wheel. In both cases, the lover rescinds control over love’s outcome to fate, daring it to be favorable while remaining aware of its (or her) capriciousness. The typical courtly lover nonetheless enjoys the thrill and danger of love and the knowledge that Fortune could contrive to take it away from him at any moment and Yvain’s added level of potential danger seems to sweeten the pot. By proving himself capable of winning his enemy’s wife for his own he would prove his worth as a man of prowess both in combat and in courtly wooing, though this hardly seems to be Yvain’s first thought. There is a hint of the fear of loss in lovesickness as well as the experience of loss that comes with rejection of the lady. Yet, the lover still pines, believing that *all* is not yet lost—there is still hope. The lady may reconsider; she, being the only physician for his malady, may yet contrive to heal him. Since woman is changeable, and Yvain says as much of Laudine—“fame a plus de cent corages” (a woman has many tempers; 1438)—the possibility of becoming her lover remains viable. While Yvain fears that Laudine will reject him due to his role in Esclados’ death, he wins that gamble and Laudine becomes his wife. By taking a further gamble, however, in staying gone too long, Yvain tempts fate—or Fortune—and loses. Fortune’s wheel has stopped with the lover at the bottom. There is nothing for it but for the lover to mourn his loss, which is believed to be permanent, even if the loss is not the death of the beloved.

Laudine herself has lost her beloved and suffers grief not unlike that which Yvain later suffers, and pity over her grief leads Yvain to seek to end her suffering by replacing Esclados in the role of husband/defender. That he seeks to step into this role and that it serves as the basis of his love is indicated, first, by the nature of his love for Laudine. While Chrétien claims that Yvain is in love with Laudine by stating that Love had newly raided Yvain's heart, making new territory of it (1359-60), he also describes Yvain's impulse to love her in a strange pairing of an elegiac listing of her ideal physical qualities to how she mars them through her grief madness.

The longer Yvain gazes upon Laudine the more he loves her, but he also desires something else: "Ce quiele plore et qu'ele list / volsist qu'ele lessié eüst / Et qu'a lui parler li pleüst" (That her weeping and reading would cease and she would, instead, find pleasure in talking with him; 1422-4). He wishes to see her grief ended and her joy renewed in conversation with him, but later lines indicate that his admiration of her beauty is also connected to her grief, and it is this pity for her situation in conjunction with her beauty that sparks his love. He admires her beautiful hair, but is angered that she tears it out (1463-7); he has never seen such lovely eyes, though she cries incessantly (1471-7); her face is well formed and delicately colored, yet she tears at it as if she were her own enemy (1478-81). Chrétien ends Yvain's voyeuristic listing of Laudine's fine, but grief-stricken features with, "Et voir, ele ne se faint mie / Qu'au pis qu'ele puet ne se face; / Et nus cristauz ne nule glace / N'est si clere ne si polie" (And truly, she is not at all able to stop harming her face, and yet neither crystal or glass is clearer or more polished; 1482-5). Yvain seems to be saying here that she is beautiful despite the self-mutilation to which grief has brought her, but he has not seen Laudine as anything but the grieving

widow. From the moment he lays eyes on her she is suicidal with grief and falls into swoons (1148-9), and every description of her from Yvain's perspective until he meets her face-to-face is bound up in the image of the grieving damsel in distress.

Laudine herself seems to be less aggrieved over the loss of a man she loves than over the role he plays as protector of the fountain. When Yvain hears her lamenting the dead Esclados, Laudine speaks to the dead man, saying,

Chevaliers sor cheval nesist  
 Qui de rien nule vos vausist.  
 De vostre enor, biax sire chiers,  
 Ne fu onques nus chevaliers,  
 Ne de la vostre conpaignie;  
 Largesce estoit la vostre amie  
 Et hardemanz vostre conpainz

(No other knights on horseback are equal to you. Beautiful, beloved sire, no other knight has ever been as honorable or as worthy as you. Your companion was none other than courage and generosity was your friend; 1289-95.)

Though she does view Esclados as her beloved, the focus of her grief is the loss of the valiant knight, that is, his prowess, his honor, his worth, his courage, and his generosity.<sup>9</sup> Nowhere does she specify that what she misses is the attentions he lavishes on her. Rather, the love she bears Esclados is for the honor he holds as a good knight. Yvain is not ignorant of this possibility, as he has overheard the lady's lament, so he knows that what Laudine values most in a mate is his ability to ably and boldly protect her and her kingdom. When she is bereft of the noble and honorable knight who fulfills the position, she is faced with the immediate need to refill it, whether she is ready to face this inevitability or not. In this, she must be pragmatic and Lunete uses this pragmatic need to help Yvain court Laudine.

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<sup>9</sup> "Largesce" here refers to the willing sharing of the spoils of combat with his fellow combatants.



Yvain, for his part, is looking for more than just love; he also wants a fulfilling purpose that allows him to identify as something other than the knight errant whose purpose is random and loosely defined. Yvain, believing himself to be comfortably defined by the loose boundaries of knight errantry, finds his purpose changed upon meeting and marrying Laudine. His authentic purpose is now found in marital stability and a clearly defined set of actions: defending the fountain and Laudine's kingdom, and serving as her husband. Although his earlier adventures and need to avenge Calogrenant serve as his purpose early on, it is precisely because he *is* driven by a specific purpose, not random good deeds, that he is so focused on the act. Correspondingly, the particular role he later longs to maintain as Laudine's domestic knight, which is also purpose-driven, is adopted as the result of his own desire to right a perceived wrong—Calogrenant's defeat at the fountain—which results in a further righting of a wrong—replacing Laudine's lost champion. In other words, Yvain's role as domestic knight is one of his choosing, not one imposed upon him, and because he has chosen it, it feels more authentic. He experiences the deep joy of having found his ideal lady and ideal purpose and sorrows profoundly when he loses them. Love in this text is bound to honor and roles. The knight must behave honorably through displays of prowess and generosity and the lady must remain worthy of his feats of prowess by having need of them and bearing the noble qualities of a fine lady, such as her beauty. The pity Yvain feels for Laudine is rooted in her loss of the honorable knight, a role that he knows he can fill, even though he is the cause of that loss. Just as Laudine is both cause and physician of Yvain's love wound, he is both cause and cure for her sorrow. Thus the version of courtly love Chrétien presents in Yvain is pragmatic—see or have a need and fill or seek to fill

it—and the cause of grief for Laudine is a matter of a loss of the significant person without whom her living pattern is altered.

As a result, Yvain will step into the role as “significant object” for Laudine, claiming the role of knight of the fountain, husband to and defender of Laudine and her kingdom. While Laudine is certainly a romantic interest in the sense of the lover/wife, she is also the woman who invests Yvain with a new role, or a new purpose for his life. No longer a knight errant—a *bachelor*—responsible only to his own thirst for adventure and revenge, or responsible to the entire realm through defense of the helpless, Yvain’s main obligation switches to Laudine and her kingdom and he is newly defined through this role.<sup>10</sup> When he loses his role as defender and husband, his loss is extreme, resulting in grief that proves, initially, to be debilitating, as indicated by his madness. In his state of insanity he takes a hiatus from productive social roles, but returns to them by degrees as he begins to provide for the hermit, rescues the lion, and defends the defenseless as the Knight with the Lion, a newly assumed identity, before resuming his role as Yvain, husband and protector of Laudine and her fountain.

#### Yvain’s Roles

The two main roles with which Yvain identifies in this text are the role of husband/defender to Laudine and of knight errant. These two roles are interrelated, but I

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<sup>10</sup> Matthew Bennet explains that, “When first knighted, the young man was known as a *bachelor*, and was expected to pursue a career in the *mesnie* (household) of a great man, or to make his way in the world in some other manner, such as tourneying or finding a rich heiress. The latter course of events gave rise to the ideal and the reality of the knight errant; later enshrined in romances of the late twelfth century onward as the pursuit of a noble object, such as a woman worthy of love, or an even greater goal, the Holy Grail” (“Military Masculinity in England and Northern France c. 1050-c. 1225.” *Masculinity in Medieval Europe* London: Longman, 1999. 71-88).

discuss them, initially, as separate because they demarcate two different, but connected, sets of behaviors in Yvain's tale. Yvain acts as a valiant knight errant at the opening of the poem when he takes on the adventure of the marvelous fountain and fights Esclados the Red, when he proves himself full of prowess at tournament, and again when he undertakes various adventures for the weak and helpless after Laudine banishes him. His role as husband/defender, or domestic knight, begins the moment he sees Laudine for the first time and continues until his banishment from her kingdom, picking up again at the end of the story when he and Laudine are reunited. The significance of these roles is that they are both roles that Yvain takes very seriously—roles that define him. When he fails to keep his word to Laudine, thereby inciting her anger and his own banishment, he loses his role and sense of purpose as her husband and defender. The loss of his role as domestic knight leads to his grief madness, during which he also neglects his role as knight errant. The loss of the former, however, is the greater loss for Yvain because his role as domestic knight is the one with which he more firmly identifies.

Yvain's enactment of the domestic knight role begins, as established above, with his first glimpse of the grieving Laudine, with whom he falls in love. Mary Wack's translation and commentary on Constantine's chapter on lovesickness from the *Viaticum* provides an interestingly complex picture of courtly love that relates to masculine identity and roles, and that offers useful insights into the relevance of the role of domestic knight to both Yvain and to his textual contemporaries. While the inversion of lady as lord was, at least in the romances, socially sanctioned, this was a role otherwise less typical for men, as women had hitherto been viewed as entirely subjected to men. Wack writes, "To practice love service to an idealized woman—that is, to take the conventions seriously at

whatever imaginative or active level—was to abase one’s own sense of self, of masculine identity” (169). The most common means for men to respond to this threat to their identities, claims Wack, was either to practice deceit by pretending to serve the lady or to suffer lovesickness. In the case of the latter, Wack argues, “the success of the lover’s malady ... as a literary posture, as a seduction ploy, and as an illness requiring treatment rested on its ability to modulate an erotic subjectivity that contravened the realities of gender roles and power relations” (171). In other words, lovesickness is an illness, in part, because it requires the normally dominant aristocratic male subject to relinquish his subjectivity to the normally submissive aristocratic female object and to become, himself, submissive to the lady’s whims, including her rejection of his love advances. Thus, the inferior lady becomes the lord and the superior knight becomes the servant, which denies the reality of medieval social stations. This denial of the reality of male superiority/female inferiority, argues Wack, surely threatens the male sense of self, leading to “anxiety, hostility, and fear accompanying a socially problematic desire for an idealized woman,” which was then “displaced and objectified as the disease of love” (171).

During his stint as a lovesick knight who fears he cannot claim the ideal lady, Yvain seems to suffer the anxieties produced by this inversion by his frequent references to his imprisonment by Love and his apparent inability to do anything but desire Laudine. However, once Yvain settles into his role as Laudine’s domestic knight, he seems secure in his masculine identity, as evidenced by his exuberant willingness to face Arthur and his men at the fountain as Laudine’s new champion. Any discomfort toward Yvain’s role as domestic knight stems less from Yvain’s projection of himself in this role than it does

from Gawain's unflattering comments on Yvain's marital status, which reflect current criticism of the increasingly "soft" aristocratic man.

Gerard of Berry comments that those affected most by *hereos*, or lovesickness, are, "said to be noble men who, on account of richness and the softness of their lives, are more likely to suffer this disease" (dicuntur uiri nobiles qui propter diuicias et mollitiam uite tali potius laborant passione; Wack 202-3). Gerard's comment is also a criticism of the current courtly values that have put aside the valorous warrior mentality of the earlier heroic age in favor of refined courtly trappings and rules of conduct. Chris Blazina notes, for example, that this was due, in part, to the relative peace enjoyed in Europe at the time and portrayed in the texts, which serves as "a corrupting force to the spirit of the knight" (36). Likewise, Raymond Cormier addresses this difference of behavior and character in his article on sources for *Yvain* in which he contrasts the heroic Cú Chulainn of Irish lore with the Yvain of courtly French Arthurian tales. Cormier notes that some of the major differences between the two include increased politeness and etiquette in the presence of ladies or those "worthy of respect" in the French stories (130), the absolute "human-ness" of the heroes in Arthuriana as opposed to godly or superhuman qualities in the Irish tales, and the refinement of the later tales that stand in contrast to what Cormier calls the "status-hungry, semi-barbarous warriors" in such tales as those of Cú Chulainn. Cormier also alludes to the *Song of Roland* and other, earlier, heroic texts in which the hero was a man of swift and decisive action. Thus, Gerard's "soft" courtly male demeanor stands in stark contrast to earlier European representations of emotional behavior, including love, anger, and grief, which were less openly displayed.

In his introduction to the anthology *Discourses on Love, Marriage, and Transgression in Medieval and Early Modern Literature*, Albrecht Classen addresses the shift in twelfth-century Europe from a chivalric, heroic society to a “softening of chivalry’s rough edges and the development of courtly society” in which the role of the aristocracy was changing from knightly defenders against invading forces to a leisure class that enjoyed tales of adventure and love (2). Moshe Lazar also addresses this change in his discussion of *fin-amor* in the troubadour tradition, writing, “Feudal service, warrior virtues, and harsh language were replaced by amorous service, courtly attributes and lyric articulations of love’s constant sorrows and rare blissful joys” (61), and J. Stephen Jaeger posits that courtliness in literature was part of

A movement aimed at taming the reckless assertiveness of the European feudal nobility, at limiting its freedom in manners and morals, at restraining individual willfulness, and at raising this class from an archaic and primitive stage of social and civil life to a higher stage, imbuing it with ideals of modesty, humanity, elegance, restraint, moderation, affability, and respectfulness. (3)

One of the changes in literature that occurred during this shift, as suggested by Lazar, is in the perception of love. Love during the ninth- through the eleventh-centuries, Classen argues, had focused on friendship and “a moral, ethical, and social phenomenon only” (1), whereas love beginning in the early twelfth century came to refer, additionally, to erotic or romantic love between a man and a woman. This new focus on the amorous relationships between men and women developed into what we now think of as “courtly love,” which is most often represented as a man, usually a knight, suffering with lovesickness over a woman, usually of higher social status, whom he has little or no hope of accessing sexually. The love generally goes unrequited, the knight longs for death, and the lady, for once, gains the upper hand in her refusals of the knight’s affections.

Related to courtly love is also what the troubadours call *cortezia*. Lazar defines *cortezia* as a virtue that “sometimes presents itself as a notion encompassing all of the qualities and virtues of a perfect knight and, other times, as the component in a set of other principles that characterize the perfect lover” (67). *Cortezia*, therefore, further involves the “perfect” quality of *fin’amor* in its insistence on the perfection of the knightly lover and melding love with knighthood, or knightly duty. As Lazar demonstrates, then, terms like *cortezia*, *courtoisie*, *fin’amor*, and *courtly love* are highly ambiguous in nature. Yet, the qualities and virtues of both knight and lover come together in the following quote by Avicenna if we consider that chivalry is inherently noble.

Avicenna writes,

Whenever (man) loves a pleasing form with an intellectual consideration ... then this is to be considered as an approximation to nobility and an increase in goodness. For he covets something whereby he will come nearer to the influence of that which is the First Source of influence and the Pure Object of love, and more similar to the exalted and noble beings. And this will dispose him to grace, generosity, and kindness. (trans. Fackenheim 221)

Thus Avicenna presents the ennobling power of love and the virtues it encourages, as well as acknowledging an origin—the “pleasing form” of another—which is addressed, also, by both Constantine and Andreas Capellanus.

Yvain, who had been so self-determined as an adventuring knight, takes his role as courtly lover equally seriously, offering to place himself fully in Laudine’s power, saying, “Dame, nule force si forz / n’est come cele, sanz mantir, / qui me comande a consantir / vostre voloir del tot an tot” (My lady, without lying, there is no power so powerful as the one that commands me to consent to your will in everything; 1990-2). Yvain further attests to the power that Love has over him when he responds to her question concerning what compels him to give himself over to her so completely. He

replies that it is his heart, which was stricken through his eyes by her beauty and has inspired his great love for her. He follows by explaining in what way he loves her:

An tel que graindre ester ne puet;  
 en tel que de vos ne se muet  
 mes cuers, n'onques aillors nel truis;  
 an tel qu'aillors pansser ne puis;  
 en tel que toz a vos m'otroi;  
 an tel que plus vos aim que moi;  
 en tel, s'il vos plest, a delivre  
 que por vos vuel morir ou vivre.

(In such that my heart does not / quit you, and I never find it elsewhere; / in such that I cannot think of anything else; / in such that I give myself entirely to you; / in such that I love you more than myself; / in such that, should it please you, / I would gladly live or die for you; 2029-2036).

Thus the courtly paradigm is set and Yvain declares himself a servant to his lady. Yvain's words bespeak a willingness to give up love of self and to live or die in service for the lady. Though Yvain has followed the script of the courtly lover up to this point, and though Laudine plays her role by putting him off before agreeing to let him serve her, Yvain and Laudine marry, thus changing the nature of the relationship.

Andreas Capellanus, a contemporary of Chrétien's, says that if lovers marry, "love is violently put to flight" (Parry 156). Lazar highlights the preference of the troubadours for extra-conjugal love during this period, stating that "love outside of marriage [is] the only love to be called *bona* 'noble', *varaia* 'true', and *fin* 'perfect'" (74). Additionally, Lazar argues that, "Whereas married women are acquired political and economic assets and the husbands their masters, *fin' amor* exists in a context of sensual longing, verbal love games, separations, frustrated sexual expectations, postponed physical union, temporary satisfactions, and stolen looks or kisses, fear of competing lovers, etc." (74) As Lazar's passage suggests, popular thinking of the period, at least in



literary works, was that once love culminated in a marital union, it lost that which made it noble, true, and perfect. Though we do not necessarily see this, at least not immediately, with Yvain and Laudine, the common thinking expressed by Capellanus and others, and expressed by Gawain, was that the relationship changes significantly once the lovers who fought so hard for love have free access to it—its intensity decreases.

Indeed, Chrétien provides very little evidence in *Yvain* that the desire Yvain feels for Laudine continues after the two are wed. While he provides us with evidence of Yvain's increased "softness" after his marriage, fond words about the beloved holding the heart, and sorrow at separation, desire for the lady seems to have ebbed after Yvain won her. I would argue that the nature of the relationship changes, and perhaps was really little more than a repetition of Laudine's apparent desire for Yvain—a desire to replace Esclados and take on the role of husband and protector. Granted, Yvain was enamored of Laudine's beauty, but he was equally, if not more enamored of her reaction to her deep loss. She was a woman in need of a protector and a lover, and Yvain was willing to assume both roles. This shift in love's focus highlights Yvain's role as husband/defender, which should be considered in terms of domestic knighthood. That is, this role demands of its actor both marital duties as a husband and the courageous, military action of a knight. Marriage already alters the way Yvain is represented; he is no longer the courtly suitor, but the married man whose love service is no longer related to the illicit amorous pursuits of unmarried *fin' amor*, but rather, to the "bourgeois *fin' amour*" of "conjugal love" (Lazar 171-2).

In the Middle Ages, conjugal love would be love for the purpose of procreation, as well as for control of property and legal protection (Karras 61). Although the lands are

Laudine's, they would likely revert to the husband in the case of remarriage, which was itself unusual among medieval elite women (Kuehn 705). When the husband of an aristocratic or merchant-class woman died, that woman, "needed male labor, managerial acumen, and legal stature" that only a man could provide (Kuehn 705). We have no proof that Laudine is owner of the kingdom over which she presides, and if Esclados had been the previous landowner, she would have needed a male owner to take over the landholdings as successor, in a legal sense. In this case, Yvain would have become, through his marriage to Laudine, a property owner. Laudine, as a woman, would need to "appear subordinate" to Yvain, even if she called the shots (Karras 62). At the very least, Yvain's marriage makes him responsible for the kingdom's safety. Unlike the men whom Yvain encounters after his banishment who appear as lords to lands they are unable to defend, such as the lord of *Pesme Aventure*, Yvain is an able protector of his and Laudine's duchy. He willingly battles all comers to the fountain, as Esclados had, as part of his responsibility to his wife to defend the kingdom from potential usurpers and troublemakers, but also to prove his continued valor as a knight. Thus, his marriage to Laudine requires him to be domestic, in terms of familial life and "bourgeois *fin' amor*," but it also requires him to demonstrate knightly prowess when necessary. Yvain seems to have the best of both worlds through his alliance with Laudine.

Yet, medieval texts and modern critics regularly claim that knightly prowess is threatened as the rules of *amour courtois* take precedence and thoughts of the lady surpass those of feats of arms. Thus, courtly love surpasses chivalry as an ideal, upsetting the masculine sense of self as suggested by Wack, and we see this war of ideals resonating in this romance. However, it seems to be less *Yvain's* conception of who he

should be than it does Gawain's, and perhaps that of others of Arthur's knights, that is problematic. Suffice it to say Yvain transgresses the courtly ideal by accessing the woman that he desires and that this access leads to upheaval in the remainder of his story and begs for re-conceptualization of the chivalric, masculine ideal. Yvain's primary role has shifted from that of knight errant to husband and protector, and Gawain plants the seeds of doubt as to the value of this role to the worthy knight, claiming that Yvain is growing soft through his association with Laudine.

This text, and many of Chrétien's earlier ones—most notably *Erec and Enide*—speak of the relative “softness” of the lives of nobles, particularly those who find themselves in the company of women. In *Erec and Enide*, for example, after Erec marries Enide, his fellow knights lament his new softness and womanish behavior, scorning his marriage as causing Erec to spend far too much time in the quiet and luxurious company of Enide rather than in the lists or on the battlefield. “Sovant entr'ax se demantoient / de ce que trop l'amoit assez,” writes Chrétien (Often they lamented among themselves that he loved her far too much; 2406-7). Furthermore, the other knights say of Erec that he “que recreant aloit ses sire / d'armes et de chevalerie; / molt avoit changiee sa vie” (was becoming recreant about arms and knighthood; he had profoundly changed his way of life; 2428-30). Erec, thus, sets out on adventures, Enide in tow and wholly subservient to her husband, to prove that he has not lost his knightly prowess. Likewise, Gawain insults Yvain and uses this argument to persuade his fellow knight to join him on the tournament circuit to prove his manly valor, saying that Yvain, like Erec, would be *recreant* if he did not properly serve Arthur by continuing his chivalric practice among the Round Table knights.

Richard Kaeuper asks, “Could a life of prowess be continued by the knight who settled into married life?” (220). His initial response is doubtful, stating that “the characteristic knightly freedom to wander and fight, to play the tournament circuit, is suddenly curtailed by the needed stability of married life” (220). Gawain has “expressed doubts” about this, as well, and causes Yvain’s to doubt himself, necessitating Yvain’s agreement to travel with Gawain, his brother in arms. Joan Ferrante and C. B. R. Combellack both argue that Yvain’s love for Gawain spurs this decision. Ferrante, for example, claims, “The devotion of friends, Gauvain and Lunete, to whom Yvain is bound by ties of gratitude and affection, is more important than the devotion of husband or lover” (156). Similarly, Combellack asserts, “Yvain is a man of two loves, love for his wife and love for Gawain” (19). Ferrante’s point recalls the earlier warrior tradition of the bonds of friendship as addressed by Classen and others and we see in Yvain the struggle between the old tradition and the new in his reluctant desire to go with Gawain. In the larger social battle, Gawain represents prowess and the warrior class while Laudine represents courtliness and domesticity. In Yvain’s personal struggle, Gawain represents his role as knight errant, or *bachelor*, and social acceptance among his knightly peers, while Laudine represents his role as domestic knight and his more authentic self. Gawain places Yvain in the awkward situation of having to choose between the two, though Yvain tries to find the median between *bachelor*-hood and married life.

Although Yvain has proven himself worthy of honor through his defense of the fountain and his defeat of Sir Kex, as well as through his earlier defeat of the previously undefeated Esclados, Gawain convinces Yvain that if he becomes soft through married life he will lose his worth as a knight. As a result, says Gawain, “Que n’est pris droiz que

ele l'aint / Que ses los et pris remaint" (It would not be right for [a beautiful lady] to still love a man who no longer has honor or renown; 2491-2). The tournaments would provide a way, by Gawain's logic, for Yvain to maintain his knightly honor through prowess and therefore bring honor to Laudine and secure her love. As though lending credence to Gawain's "leash and yoke" criticism (le frain et le chevoistre; 2500), in which he claims that Yvain is chained to Laudine, Yvain must first ask for Laudine's permission to leave, and uses the language of courtly servitude to do so, assuring Laudine that she is "ma tres chiere dame, / vos qui estes mes cuers et m'ame, / mes biens, ma joie, et ma santez" (my most dear lady, you who are my heart and soul, my wealth, my joy, and my well being; 2553-5). He follows these words with a request for her to "une chose m'acreantez / por vostre enor et por la moie" (grant me one favor for your honor and mine; 2556-7), which Laudine, unaware as yet that he wishes to leave for a time, willingly grants. The "honor" of which Yvain speaks is, of course, the reaffirmation of his knightly prowess. Kaeuper argues, "Honour is the veritable currency of chivalric life, the glittering reward earned by the valorous as a result of their exertions, their hazarding of the their bodies" (130). When Yvain claims that Laudine's favor will bring honor to them both, he is without a doubt referring to displays of prowess that will bring him honor.

The struggle between domesticism and knight errantry for Yvain seems to favor domesticism throughout a significant portion of the text, and when Yvain is faced with sidelining his role as domestic knight in favor of knight errantry, he suffers his greatest loss. Yet, the role of knight errant is the role at which Yvain first becomes adept and is the role for which he has been trained. The Yvain we meet at the beginning of the poem is a knight errant, who seeks adventure at the marvelous fountain. The role of knight

errant resumes in tourney and again when he is banished from Laudine and her kingdom. He plays the role well, though not happily, with the exception of his initial assault on the fountain and Esclados. This assault, however, carries with it the domestic connection with the cousin who is humiliated, so even here Yvain's errantry is not divorced from a familial connection. As a result, though this role is central to Yvain's masculine identity, the role of domestic knight holds the most purpose for Yvain.

At the opening of the text Yvain listens intently to the tale his cousin Calogrenant tells of an adventure he recently encountered as a knight errant. Calogrenant, learning of a marvelous fountain protected by an undefeated knight, takes up the challenge. Although he survives the combat, he does not come away unscathed. His horse is taken by his better as a spoil of the battle and Calogrenant, as a result, loses his knightly honor. Yvain, a blood relative to Calogrenant and knight errant himself, determines to avenge his cousin's dishonor by seeking out the fountain and fighting Esclados, a pursuit also sought by the rest of King Arthur's knights for mere challenge to their prowess, as it had been for Calogrenant. Yvain refuses to share his glory with the others and sets out alone. This opening gambit establishes Yvain as a knight errant and a knight bent on revenge, that is to say, a knight behaving honorably as a good knight errant should—seeking adventure, looking to right a perceived wrong, and demonstrating a desire to prove his bravery against difficult odds. His role as knight is thus established as one with which he fully identifies. He hopes to gain honor by redeeming Calogrenant's, and he is successful in his bid to do so. Yvain meets with Esclados at the fountain, fights valiantly, and bests his opponent, striking him a mortal blow and reclaiming Calogrenant's honor through his own and establishing himself as one of the best knights in the land, since only

Calogrenant had survived Esclados, and none had defeated him. He is further able to prove his worth when King Arthur and his men finally make their way to the fountain and, as the defender of the fountain, Yvain also defeats Sir Kex. Through this action, Yvain's knightly prowess is fully established, though his field of combat is rendered dubious by Sir Gawain.

He enacts this role most substantially after his banishment from Laudine and his return from utter madness through a series of adventures through which he champions various women and others who are unable to defend themselves. During this period Yvain is the epitome of knight errantry, traveling the countryside and taking up battles as they present themselves. The first of these requires him to defend the Lady of Norison, in whose castles he has convalesced from his grief madness, and who is threatened by Sir Alier, a usurping knight who has often attempted to take the Lady's lands. Having no husband/defender, she must rely on outside help, such as that which Yvain can offer. Yvain is successful in his bid to oust Alier and, as with his earlier success against Esclados and Kex and his victorious tournament season, his knightly comportment is proven to be that of a hardy and worthy knight errant.

With the Lady of Norison, Yvain also faces the possibility of revisiting his role as domestic knight, but he refuses it, suggesting that what Yvain desires is a *particular* role as domestic knight, not *a* role as domestic knight. The Lady wishes Yvain to stay, offering to give him all honor, suggesting she become his "fame ou a amie" (wife or lover; 3313), and extending to him the opportunity to be lord over her lands (3324-29), but he refuses, inciting her anger. Although he gives no concrete reason for his refusal, Chrétien writes, "S'est partiz, mes que bien l'en poist / Que plust remenoir ne li loist" (So

he departed, despite his great regret that he was unable to remain any longer; 3333-34). The word “loist” here implies that he is not *able* to stay, but also that he does not have the *freedom* to stay, which could refer either to the legal matter of his marriage to Laudine, or to his emotional attachment to her. Since Laudine and Yvain had been married such a short time and had not produced any progeny, the legal matter seems to be less of an issue than Yvain’s emotional connection to Laudine and his role as *her* husband and defender. Performing this role for the Lady of Norison would be similar to that enacted for Laudine, but Yvain does not desire this commission because he did not choose it. The Lady and her maids find him, his battle with Alier transpires from a need to defend Norison, and the lady attempts to woo him. Conversely, Yvain espied Laudine first and love stemmed from that gaze, his battle with Esclados put him on the offensive, and he (with the help of Lunete) wooed Laudine. In other words, Yvain is more attached to his role as Laudine’s domestic knight because he chose it, he pursued it, and he gained it. His was an active claiming of the office, and the position is, therefore, more significant to him.

Similarly, his experience at *Pesme Aventure* holds the potential for slipping into the role as domestic knight for a beautiful young woman—the daughter of the King of the Isle of Maidens, who is trapped in the castle with his family because of his own foolishness. As with the Lady of Norison, Yvain succeeds in rescuing the king and his family from a dangerous situation, acting as the quintessential knight errant. In this case, he frees the family from a curse that binds them to a castle held by two demons, and in which countless maidens are kept as an annual payment to the demons for the king’s family’s safety, and where the maidens live in deplorable conditions, weaving silk.



Having dispatched the demons, freed the maidens, and lifted the curse, Yvain is then offered the hand of the king's incomparably beautiful daughter as his prize. As with his offer by the Lady of Norison, Yvain refuses marriage to the maiden, telling her father that it is neither possible nor proper for him to do so (*poïsse ne deüsse*; 5720). Again, he rejects the possibility of adopting the role of domestic knight because, as with Norison, the situation and the woman are not of his choosing, and his heart is not free. In fact, the king and his son, from the moment Yvain approaches the castle, refuse to let him leave, and refuse to open the gates unless Yvain marries the girl. Yvain is effectively imprisoned at this moment in a role of domestic knight that is an unhappily substitutive one for a woman other than Laudine and the particular domestic knighthood in which he finds significance. In other words, Yvain does not seek a general role, but a specific one. Knight errantry nearly always carries the mark of anonymity rather than familiarity and domestic knighthood that is not attached to a specific domicile lacks the qualities—familiarity, love, comfort, ownership, authenticity—that allow Yvain to fully identify with the role.

Not all of Yvain's errant adventures pose the dilemma of substitutive domestic knighthood posed by taking a new wife. However, two present him with substitutes for his earlier conflict between knight errantry and domestic knighthood. When Yvain stumbles upon the adventure of Harpin of the Mountain, he learns that the threatened family is kin to his dear friend Gawain, who is not there to help because he is in search of the missing Queen Guinevere. Out of loyalty to Gawain and in respect to his knightly duty, Yvain agrees to help the anxious family who awaits the arrival the following morning of Harpin, a giant who has threatened to kill the sons of the family unless the

daughter is handed over as sex slave for Harpin's men. A conflict arises, however, in that Yvain has also agreed to rescue Lunete, who is to be burned stake for her role in convincing Laudine to marry him, by noon the next day. Harpin arrives late and Yvain nearly abandons his defense of Gawain's niece in order to rescue Lunete in time. He hesitates to make the choice, exhibiting his inner turmoil between his roles as a knight errant and domestic knight—between proving his loyalty to Gawain and his love for Laudine, who has banished him. However, when push comes to shove, he chooses Lunete over Gawain's niece and prepares to depart, leaving Gawain's family to fend for themselves.

Chrétien spares Yvain the need to make this decision, however, presenting Harpin just as Yvain has decided to leave, and both the niece and Lunete are rescued in the nick of time. During these two overlapping adventures, time, choice, and substitution become central to how Yvain handles the situations, as both time and choice initiate the lapse in judgment that causes Yvain to lose Laudine and his role. He had overstayed his time at tourney and thus appeared to choose Gawain and knight errantry over Laudine and marriage. As with the conflict of the choice and time that led to his grief, Gawain and Laudine once again surface as Yvain's choices, and Yvain very nearly chooses Gawain over Laudine yet again. The choices of Gawain and Laudine are proxy choices, substitutions for the struggles that Yvain faces to authenticate his role as a man. Gawain's niece stands in for Gawain, and Lunete, Laudine's maid, for Laudine, but the connection is clear and the situation recalls Yvain's previous one with the tournament circuit. Unlike before, when Yvain was neglectful of the time, he is here made dreadfully aware of it. Lunete is set to burn and Yvain has promised her he will return for her and will fight her

accusers, the seneschal and two knights. But, Gawain's niece is also in need of defending the next day. Once again, he nearly overstays his time in Gawain's world and risks losing a connection back to Laudine's through the death of Lunete.

These substitutions present, again, the familial connections that draw Yvain to help, highlighting once more his craving for domesticity. He is so torn between these two battles because Gawain is his brother in arms—a fellow Round Table knight and dear friend—and Lunete serves, or had served, his lady and had helped him to woo her. However, Gawain's familial connection to Yvain is not as strong as his connection to Laudine, as it also represents the hegemonic notion of masculinity as being associated with shows of prowess and the knightly ideal. Laudine's pull prevails once again, as the thought of not rescuing Lunete causes Yvain to think that he would rather die soon or face madness again than not rescue her (*vis del sens*; 4074). On the other hand, when considering Gawain's reaction should he not rescue the niece, Yvain conjures only Gawain's nobility and imagines that he will suffer a broken heart thinking about failing the other man. The disparity in reactions is significant, demonstrating that Yvain's reactions to failing Laudine and failing Gawain are not equal. Failing Laudine, Yvain contends, would once again bring madness—or death. Failing Gawain would result only in a broken heart. While a broken heart and madness both require healing, madness seems to run a higher risk of permanency, as Yvain knows. Additionally, madness leads to loss of identity altogether, whereas a knight errant can still function with a broken heart. The second option, should he fail Laudine by failing to assist Lunete, is death, the ultimate permanent penance, which again far exceeds the broken heart he would suffer from

failing Gawain. Knight errantry takes a back seat once more to domestic knighthood, despite Yvain's ability to perpetually prove himself as a worthy warrior.

Yet another role sets up a substitutive domestic relationship that comes close to fulfilling Yvain's need to have honor in the eyes of a significant individual and that is his role as savior and companion to the lion. As with Laudine and the Lady of Norison, the lion is on the losing end of a battle he cannot win alone. Whereas Laudine and the lady were both in need of a proven knight to defend their landholdings the lion is embroiled in a one-on-one fight for survival against a serpent who is about to deal his opponent a fatal blow. Yvain, having witnessed enough of the battle to judge the lion the more inherently noble of the two beasts, steps in and slays the serpent and nurses the lion back to health. In gratitude, the lion becomes his traveling companion and steps in, as Yvain had done, to rescue his rescuer when defeat seems imminent.

In many ways, this partnership with the lion provides the companionship that Yvain had enjoyed with Gawain in the tourney melee while giving him a purpose--savior and friend to the lion—that recalls his role with Laudine, as defender and husband. Yet, the lion is not Laudine—it is not the wife and lover to whom Yvain has been deemed disloyal and in whose eyes his honor is lacking. Indeed, the lion holds a mirror up to Yvain's own past deeds and Yvain laments his earlier behaviors, believing they still represent his current state. He is remorseful and longs to repair past wrongs, but despairs of his options for doing so. Where the lion has put all of his trust and loyalty in Yvain, refusing to leave his side or allow him to suffer defeat in battle, Yvain sees himself as the man who abandoned Laudine and left her defenseless at home, no one to protect her fountain or serve as her companion, for over a year, after having promised that he would

return within a year's time. This hits Yvain most powerfully when he and the lion chance upon the fountain that he had once defended for Laudine and in his sorrowful reverie over his neglect of his role he swoons, wounding himself on his sword.

The lion, believing Yvain dead after his swoon and the flesh wound the sword deals him, attempts suicide upon the same sword as a result of his sorrow over his slain savior. This relationship between Yvain and the lion suggests the relationship between Yvain and Laudine. Yvain sees in the lion the loyalty toward him that he had not extended to Laudine, which causes Yvain to question his failure to serve her, or to die from his failure to do so, regardless of the ramifications of the valiant knight dying for grief. Yvain is figured as the lion's superior, indicating his return to the world of man and to the masculine chivalric ideal. Yvain awakens and stops the lion from its suicide attempt, reflecting afterwards on the nobility of the beast in contrast to himself and the worth of the beast's life over his. He does not relish the lion's near death as noble, but views the beast as inherently noble in its willingness to die out of loyalty to his companion in a sense of loyalty he had not afforded Laudine. Yvain seems incapable at this point of seeing his own nobility because his self-loathing is so intense. The lion appears here as yet another substitution, at once a foil to Yvain's earlier lack of loyalty, and a stand-in for Laudine—a new domestic charge to oversee, protect, and defend. Yet, the lion is himself protector and defender and Yvain comes to quickly appreciate the value of reliability and partnership, which has implications for properly conducted domestic knighthood that Yvain discovers through this relationship with the lion. Yvain is learning worthwhile lessons about the aspects of loyalty and companionship that would serve him well in the role of domestic knight.

This does not mean, however, that Yvain has forgotten his loyalty to fellow brothers in arms. His final knightly conflict before returning to the fountain requires him to fight Gawain directly, though neither knight knows until they take a break from battle, whom his opponent is. This adventure involves yet another young woman, one who stands to lose her inheritance to a greedy older sister. Having searched exhaustively for Yvain, the disinherited sister's maid finds him and secures him as her mistress's champion in the dispute, which is to be tried by combat at Arthur's court, and Gawain fights for the other sister. Once their identities are revealed to one another, each man's love for the other causes him to declare himself defeated, necessitating a decision from Arthur. This combat pits Yvain against Gawain, the inadvertent cause of Yvain's sorrow. This combat, then, provides Yvain with a physical manifestation of his conflict with Gawain and Gawain's role in his dishonor and loss, while allowing him to prove to Gawain and the court that he is a worthy knight. In the end, though, Yvain and Gawain are reconciled and still friends, Arthur finds in favor of Yvain's maiden, handing Yvain a soft victory over Gawain, and Yvain sets out alone, save the lion, once more, to try to reconcile with Laudine, over whom he is "por amor an fin morroit" (finally going to die of love; 6502). Yvain could have chosen to stay at court and revel in his victory over Gawain and in his solid reputation under the pseudonym of Knight with the Lion, enjoying a life of knight errantry, but he opts, instead, to attempt to reclaim the one role in which he finds significance and that he had lost—domestic knight to the lady Laudine.

### Loss of the Significant Object: The Role of Domestic Knight

The role of domestic knight gives Yvain his *raison d'être* and the loss of such a significant role, as Averill argues, constitutes an occasion for grief. Therefore, when Yvain is faced with the loss of his role as Laudine's husband/defender, he is bereft of his true purpose. He is able to function as a knight errant, and is frequently compelled to do so by a sense of duty or out of respect for one of the interested parties, but the respect he bears such others as Gawain pales in comparison to his love, mercenary as it may seem, for Laudine; and his duty feels obligatory and joyless, lacking the pleasure of purpose found with his post by Laudine's side. When he loses his role as domestic knight he loses his authentic masculine self—a self that finds pleasure in domestic life with Laudine and in proving his knightly worth by defending the homefront rather than protecting and defending nameless others or winning titles and lauds in tournaments, which prove empty by comparison. When Yvain can no longer have his joy, he opts for madness—a complete forgetfulness of his identity as husband and defender—as a reaction to the confusion he experiences over his loss of the significant role.

Doob, while considering multiple forms of madness in the Middle Ages, refers to the erratic behaviors of those who suffer loss “when a beloved person has died or been untrue” as “grief-madness” (30). She counts among grief madness sufferers Troilus, Lancelot, and our hero, Yvain. The symptoms to which Doob specifically refers include “tearing the hair and face, beating one's head against a wall, swooning, and suicide” (30). While we do see some of these behaviors from male characters, they are more often associated with female characters, as with Laudine and Heurodis in *Sir Orfeo*, both of whom scratch at their faces, pull their hair, thrash about, and swoon in the throes of

sorrow. The self-mutilation and suicidal tendencies are socially acceptable female reactions to bereavement since, as E. Jane Burns notes, the “courtly code . . . sees men as relatively bodiless while consigning women to the realm of skin” (122). Additionally, Sylvia Huot explains, “female madness is associated with bodily incapacitation and death” (152), whereas male characters, such as the clerk in Machaut’s *Jugement du roi de Navarre*, and Yvain, go mad differently because “madness allows [them] to stage [their] own exclusion on an ongoing basis, day after day” (149). That is, the clerk, Yvain, and the male characters analyzed in this dissertation take advantage of their period of madness to separate themselves from society, but are neither “incapacitated” in body, nor do they literally die, unlike many of the female characters who suffer from grief madness.

The difference is explained, in part, by Cormier, who asserts that what he calls Yvain’s “folly”—his grief madness—is, as with “the French hero” more generally, “only an intellectualization” (133). Cormier further states that, though Yvain separates himself from “a chivalric way of life” and the court, he is still in contact with the hermit who cooks him meat and provides bread for him (133), and is, therefore, still in contact with some aspect of society, even if this contact is with the societal fringe. The “intellectualization” to which Cormier refers explains the difference between the rehabilitation of Cú Chulainn and Yvain, Cú Chulainn having been quarantined away from all others and Yvain merely removing himself from courtly society. However, the “intellectualization” of the grief-mad knight in the forest also describes the difference between the typical medieval female mourner and the typical medieval male mourner. As opposed to the bodily reaction of the women addressed above, the male characters are



generally more rational in their madness in that they observe their frenzy for a period of time, but remain alive with the possibility of realizing their rehabilitation.

The relative rationality of the medieval man may explain why suicidality is rarely encountered among male characters who suffer grief madness. One prominent exception, which I would be remiss not to mention, is Tristan in the tale of Tristan and Isolde who dies of grief when Isolde betrays him. More often, however, the man goes mad, though he may entertain thoughts of death and suicide, and in his madness resides his metaphorical death. Simon Gaunt contrasts Tristan and Isolde with Lancelot and Guinevere and concludes that, in *Lancelot*, dying for love is “understood as a symbolic structure, to be imitated symbolically, and not literally” (128). We can understand the same concerning grief madness and the male character. Dying of grief is symbolic for Yvain and the other male characters in this study, not literal.

In this text, neither the hero nor the beloved dies. Rather, the hero mourns the loss of his beloved that stems from misunderstanding and circumstances of his own making, which leads to the loss of his honor and of his role as her husband and protector. The loss is, nonetheless, regarded as permanent and Yvain believes, initially, that hope is also lost, which stands in contrast to his earlier belief in the changeable nature of women. There is very little indication that he believes that the malleability of women will turn the heart of his beloved once again toward him, so he flees under the belief that all is lost and that all that remains is the solitude of the forest and madness. Yvain makes a conscious choice to disappear from courtly society, a rash act in and of itself, rather than to die of grief, and therefore chooses the masculine approach to mourning.

Cormier contrasts Cú Chulainn who is established as a warrior and goes into berserker frenzies in battle, with Yvain's more civilized and courtly behavior. These comparisons are, however, enough for the reader to see how different representations of emotions are between these older texts and the newer ones that reflect the new aristocratic aesthetic addressed earlier. Charlemagne's reaction to Roland's death in the *Song of Roland* also provides an interesting contrast to *Yvain* in terms of who is to be mourned and how—an aesthetic that is also seen in the Middle High German *die Klage*, or *The Lament*, which is most likely a later appendage to the epic poem, *Nibelungenlied*, which is itself based on Germanic hero lore of the oral tradition. In both of these texts, kings—Charlemagne in *Roland* and Etzel in *die Klage*—grieve copiously over slain warriors. In the case of Charlemagne, the loss is that of a dear friend while Etzel mourns myriad deaths as the result of the battle with the Burgundians and Queen Kriemhild's brothers in the great hall of the Hunnish empire. Among these dead that Etzel mourns is his wife, Kriemhild, but she is not, primarily, the deceased whom he mourns. Rather, the heroic model is to mourn the loss of a good warrior or warriors above the loss of a beloved. In the heroic texts, then, battle losses are the primary reason for laments, sorrow, and deep melancholy. With the new courtly fashion, however, swooning, sighing, and a melancholic disposition shift to matters of love and personal significance. Initially, as with Yvain, this sadness is for the love that is unattainable, but the same behaviors will come to represent, as well, love that is lost. Yet, despite these differences, the grief experienced is over sudden and seemingly irreversible change and over the loss of “significant objects”—warriors, a wife, a kingdom, a clearly defined role as ruler,

defender, or husband—that indicate that, though there is a “softening” of social values, the root of the loss, the significant object or the role, is the same.

In Yvain’s case, this loss is initiated by his own actions. As expected, once a promise is made early in a romance, the promise must be broken and thus Yvain overstays his year. The men are making merry and celebrating a victorious season of tournaments when a damsel approaches the camp on her horse and gives greeting to all at court except Yvain, whom she calls “le mançongier, le guilor, / le desleal, le tricheor” (the liar, the deceiver, the unfaithful one, the cheat; 2723-4). She announces that Yvain has been disloyal and unkind to her lady—that he has stolen Laudine’s heart and not given it back, which is not what a kind or true lover would do, saying, “Cil n’anblent pas les cuers qui aiment, / si a tex qui larrons les claimant / qui en amer vont faunaoiant / et si n’an servent nes neant” (Those who love truly do not steal hearts, / but there are those who call them thieves, / while they themselves only pretend to love / and in reality know nothing about it; 2733-6). Rather than steal his lady’s heart, continues the maiden, a true lover (li amis prant; 2737) takes his lady’s heart, keeps it safe from potential thieves, cares gently for it, and returns it. Such words are deeply damaging to Yvain, who not only believes that he is a “true lover,” but also that he has found his true purpose as Laudine’s husband/defender. These accusations fly in the face of what Yvain believes about himself and who he is as a man, and wound him even more than does the act that follows. The maiden demands Laudine’s ring back, stating directly to Yvain, Laudine “n’a mes cure de toi” (no longer cares for you; 2771), before approaching him and physically ripping the ring from his finger. With her words and the stripping of the ring, the maiden has effectively also stripped Yvain of his title, and hence his role as husband

and defender. He has been called disloyal and has lost his honor and the significant objects of his wife and of his authentic role.

So it is that while Yvain is in the midst of being honored for his masculine prowess and chivalric performance in the tournaments—the honor he claimed to be winning for both Laudine and himself—he is simultaneously upbraided for his lack of *courtoisie* to his lady by another woman. The failure to keep his promise is the equivalent of a lie that places a blot on Yvain's honor, and as such, a stain on his knightly veneer, thus causing a diminution of this portion of his role, as well as to the domestic front. As John of Salisbury argues, "If its accomplishment [keeping a promise] is within your power, unless you show the will to do the favor, your promise does not inspire gratitude while your lie blackens your character" (iii.11.187). Failure to keep a promise is here likened to a lie by John of Salisbury. Moreover, Yvain has failed to keep his word to a lady, which Kaeuper states is also a breach of knightly virtue. Yvain seems immediately to recognize the tarnishing of his reputation and that the "blackness" that this lends to his character is the impetus for the lady's scorn. Though he has proven himself honorable among other men, he has not kept the honor of his promise to his lady.

Yvain is banished from his beloved and he takes this banishment, as indicated by the maiden's claim that Laudine wishes to see him "n'a mes" (no more; 2771), to be permanent. As Paul R. Lonigan observes, "As far as tradition is concerned, lovers were supposed to act a little mad because of the presence of their emotion; but here we have an exaggeration of Love's fatal effects—Yvain not only loves (once he remembers), but he is now stricken with the realization that he will have his love no more; hence the extreme reaction on his part" (82). The feared permanence of this separation—indeed, of the loss

of his love and his position as her defender—coupled with the public humiliation before the other men, causes Yvain to slip into a stupor, unable to speak or to react for some moments. He is capable only of thinking about how badly he wishes to flee to some wild and unknown place where he will not be found. Ojars Kratins argues that Yvain’s “loss of *joie* does not affect the relationship between him, the knight, and the society of the court, but only his personal love relationship to the lady” (“Love” 39). This assessment is not entirely accurate, though. Yvain’s “loss of *joie*” is the result of his failure to keep his word in “his personal love relationship,” but it is also, as Kratins later admits in *The Dream of Chivalry*, a “[trespass] against the code of chivalry” (100). Kratins further asserts, though, that this trespass goes unmentioned and that his pain is “not only . . . private *but* it also does not reflect upon his standing with the court” (101). Kratins defends this point by arguing, “Arthur and his knights do not expel Yvain, which, we may presume, they would do if Yvain became a stain on their shared reputation” (101). Just as Yvain’s trespass against chivalry goes unmentioned, there is no indication that Arthur and the court will expel Yvain because Yvain expels himself. However, Kratins’ points are well made here, and there is ample evidence that Yvain’s loss of honor is limited to his knightly role in Laudine’s court. Indeed, the knighthood on which his lack of loyalty negatively reflects is on *domestic* knighthood rather than that of knighthood more broadly and socially conceived.

Yvain leaves the camp and flees to the woods, clueless as to where he is going. In his sorrow, Yvain consciously chooses to go mad rather than to suffer the remembrance of his lapse in trust to Laudine, thinking that “ainz voldroit le san changier / quë il ne se poïst vengier / de lui qui joie s’a tolue” (he would rather lose his mind than be

unable to take revenge upon himself, who had taken away his own happiness; 2797-9).

Lonigan questions the action in this statement, writing, “If he hates himself so, why, then, does he not commit suicide at this point and be done with it?” (81). The simple response is, “Because the story would end here.” A more compellingly multivalent response is the following: first, masculine characters must follow the motif of going mad from grief rather than the feminine motif of dying from it; and second, the grieving masculine character must lose his identity, even if only temporarily. After making the conscious choice to go mad, then, he loses his mind in “monte uns torbeillons” that stirs in his head (a great whirlwind; 2808), losing at the same time his identity as a knight and as a husband, shedding his clothing, stealing a child’s bow and arrow, and killing and eating animals raw like an animal himself. He becomes, at this point, more of a *vilain* than the wild man who keeps the beasts and points Calogrenant and Yvain toward the marvelous fountain (Kratins 101). Whereas the wild man keeps beasts and speaks intelligibly, Yvain hunts like a beast, eating the meat raw, and has lost capacity for speech and memory. The *vilain* knows what his role is—to keep the beasts of the forest and answer questions of adventuring knights—whereas Yvain no longer plays a social role. Having broken his promise and stained his knightly honor, he is no longer a husband and defender or a valiant and honorable knight. He is largely without honor and existing in a nascent state, ripe for redefinition.

### The Forest

Yvain must “separate himself from the social order by living in the forest,” which is “significant in Continental tradition, doubtless to be associated with alienation from a

chivalric way of life” (Cormier 133), despite his own apparent unawareness of his conscious choice to enter the woods. The forest in *Yvain* takes on a variety of roles, just as Yvain himself does. It is the place of adventure and knight errantry, the place where Yvain finds the fountain that brings him to Laudine, the place of wild beasts and the *vilain*, and the place of grief madness. In each incarnation the forest takes on a different persona. As the forest of adventure, including that of the fountain, it is a place of potential, carrying the knight from one possible success to the next. It serves as a mere vehicle through which a knight passes and adds notches to his belt of honor by completing adventures successfully—or loses honor, as with Calogrenant, in his defeat. The *vilain*’s forest is the verdant forest of beasts and the hunt. It is the forest where animals are “kept” for the enjoyment of sport and the bounty of the royal feast. The forest of grief-madness, however, does not, in this instance, present itself as a place to pass through as part of a larger pastime. Rather, it appears as a destination, a possible endpoint to a journey. In Yvain’s case, it is the journey of his honor and the roles his honor had brought with it. When honor is lost, there is no pavilion of celebration, no marvelous fountain to defend, and no castle or marriage bed to turn to at the end of the day. What remains is wilderness where honor is of little consequence because survival takes precedence over socially determined codes of behavior. That Yvain has been entirely stripped of his honor is evident in his stealing from a child a ridiculously under-sized bow and arrow with which to hunt for food, and in his increasingly uncivilized comportment—nakedness, hirsute appearance, long nails, and eating raw meat. Yvain had grown so “bestly” during his time in the forest that “l’en li poïst anpoignie / la barbe a plain poing sur la face” (“one could have grabbed a whole fistful of beard upon his

face”; 3140-41). In this, he resembles the lion who later becomes his constant companion and namesake, which is to say that he resembles, as well, a *vilain*, or one who is coarse and uncourtly (Lazar 65). That his hair has grown out so long and wild also indicates that Yvain has been in the forest for some time with little to no human contact. The hermit represents the first human contact Yvain encounters after entering the forest and already by this time Yvain is naked and clearly mad.

In the height of his madness, Yvain stumbles upon a hermitage in the forest, says Chrétien, “com hom forsenez et salvage” (“like a madman and a savage”; 2828), and the hermit inside fears him because he appears as a madman, naked and senseless. Despite his fear of the naked madman outside his door, however, the hermit leaves coarse and unsavory bread out for Yvain, which the former knight takes gladly. In thanks, Yvain brings raw meat to the hermit, not unlike a cat depositing its fresh kill at its owner’s doorstep in contribution to her “pride.” The hermit then cooks the meat and leaves some for Yvain. In this respect, Yvain begins to re-enter civilization by ingesting cooked meat rather than the raw that he had been eating. Yet, the hermit never invites him in and never engages him in conversation, though Yvain, mad as he is, does not demonstrate any violent behavior toward him.

Yvain remains wild and the reciprocal arrangement with the hermit continues for an undetermined period of time, though this portion of the story is brief. However, Yvain has been in the forest long enough for his beard to grow long enough that one could grab a handful of it (anpoignier; 3130). No mention is made of human contact other than the hermit during his time in the woods, which is designated as “a long time (longuement; 2881), up until the moment he is found by the Lady of Norison and her maids. The lady’s



maid recognizes the sleeping Yvain, but only after studying him for several moments does she recognize him by a scar on his head and reports back to her mistress that the man is Sir Yvain, who had gone missing some time before and whom none had heretofore been able to find. Yvain is once again named; he is no longer a nameless madman, though he is not yet conscious or cured of his illness. What is more, the scar by which he is recognized establishes his identity through connection to the combat that caused it. Yvain was a worthy knight known for his prowess; he was a man of honor. That he neglected his promise to Laudine had little bearing on his role as a knight in the larger context. Having recognized Yvain, the maiden further explains to her mistress that the knight appears to be out of his mind and that grief can sometimes cause this to happen: “espoir aucun duel a eü / qui le fet ensi demener; / an puet bien duel forsener” (perhaps some grief has caused him to be here in this manner; one can certainly go mad with grief; 2930-2). Chrétien appears to be familiar with the ideas espoused by Constantine and others that grief can, indeed, cause man to lose his mind and is, thus, one of several passions, including love, that can cause madness. The lady, aware of this cause, however, is not aware of what the grief is that has caused it, further indicating that Yvain’s loss of honor is a personal one and not one shared by the nobles who know of him more widely.

The lady and her maids treat Yvain with an ointment that works so well that it effectively “de cervel li trest si fors / la rage et la melancholie” (expelled the madness and melancholy from his brain; 3008-9). Yvain is quickly healed of his madness and, in the company of the ladies, rejoins courtly life, temporarily leaving the forest behind. The forest of grief-madness, which Yvain initially sought as an end-point where he would go

mad and never again have to face the sorrow of his loss, proves to be just as transitory as if it had been as the place of knight errantry and sport. While it served as the wild locus for his wild grief, it also sees the taming of that grief through the domestic intrusion of the lady and her companions and the medicinal balm of a madness-curing ointment. The court finds its way into the forest, and the forest, temporarily the province only of beasts, Yvain, and a hermit who never ventures to engage in civil discourse with him, is suddenly peopled by noblewomen, unescorted by able men. The Lady of Norison, traveling only with two of her maids (ii. *demeiseles* / *Et une lor dame*; 2883-4), enter the forest where they find Yvain and bring him back to sanity. Similarly, the maid of the sister whom Yvain later champions in trial by combat travels alone (*Tote seule*; 4827) all day and into the night in search of Yvain. Although she is fearful, she arrives at a castle unharmed after hearing a report from a horn (4851), further indicating the relative safety of this post-madness forest, as well as the incursion of courtly society into it. The forest, then, is only as wild as it needs to be, and is easily tamed when the time is right. It is wild in that it is not the castle, the pavilion, or the village. It is wild if the traveler in it is solitary and has no purpose in mind. But when the forest is peopled and its people travel with purpose, it takes on a significantly less threatening demeanor.

Once Yvain is recognized and healed, he is no longer without purpose. Indeed, the Lady of Norison, who heals him, finds a purpose for him right away, after he has had time to convalesce at her castle. He needs time to heal, as “*si l’a ses granz max ataint / qu’a poinnes puet sor piez ester*” (his grave malady had so weakened him / that he could barely stand upon his feet; 3044-5). Only at this moment does he realize that something has changed to cause him to grow weak, though he had previously marveled at his

nakedness, unaware of his long bout with madness: “Mes nuz se voit com un yvoire; s’a grant honte, et plus grant eüst / sē il s’aventure seüst; / mes ne sot por coi nuz se trueve” (But then he saw that he was naked as ivory; he was ashamed, and would have been more so had he realized what had happened to him; but he did not know why he was naked; 3024-7). Indeed, this is his first moment of true cognition since the onset of his illness. His memory seems to be, at first, stalled in a pre-grief moment when he was clothed and sane.

Yvain’s madness has been so complete that he does not recollect his actions since the onset of his illness. Yvain does not, in fact, seem to recall his pre-madness state for at least a month, since we are told that he spent “at least two weeks” recuperating at the lady’s lodgings and another two weeks traveling with the lion before happening upon the fountain that led him to his love (3086, 3491). His sorrow is renewed to the point that “par po ne reforsena mes sire Yvains cele foiee” (My lord Yvain nearly lost his mind again; 3494-5). The first trigger for Yvain’s recollection of what led to his madness occurs only with a physical reminder of his love for Laudine in the form of the fountain. Chrétien does not state as much explicitly, but uses words that express the reenactment of his earlier sorrow and the fountain setting to connect the earlier grief to his current spell. For example, “reforsena” (to go mad again; 3494), and his thousand grievous sighs (“mil foiz las et doolanz s’apele”; 3498), suggest the repetition and resurfacing of his earlier grief. The reason for his renewed grief and near-madness is not expressed explicitly; yet the fountain is the trigger, suggesting not only his grief over Laudine, but also his grief over his loss as defender of the fountain as a probable cause. Yvain recovers from his grief swoon at which time, Chrétien states, Yvain has such mortal hatred (“hair de mort”;

3546) for himself that he wishes he had died from the sword wound he accidentally incurred in his faint. Moreover, he asks himself, “*Que feta me an si dolant cors?*” (What good is a soul in such a sad body?; 3539). He states that a man who, like him, is unfaithful to his lady ought to hate himself. Here he turns back to the loss of his lady through his own dishonorable behavior, which also hints at his own neglect of his role as husband—as domestic knight. His grief and self-loathing are so strong that he claims, “*De moi s’est leesce estrangiee / et tuit solaz*” (All happiness and comfort have abandoned me; 3556-7). He returns to the courtly paradigm of the joy of love, stating that the loss of this ideal love through his own failure to keep his word is the cause of his deep grief: “*Des joies fu la plus joieuse / cele qui m’ert aseüree; / mes molt ot petite durée! / Et qui ce pert par son mesfet / n’est droiz que boene aventure et*” (Of all joys, the greatest joy was the one assured to me; but it lasted such a little while! And he who loses such joy by his own mistake has no right to good fortune; 3560-4). His melancholy, then, based on his loss of courtly joy, is one part courtly love talk and one part loss of honor in his failure to prove his loyalty to Laudine. Through marriage to Laudine he had enjoyed “assured” honor in his defense of the fountain—a role that Esclados had carried out so honorably that Laudine esteemed him as the best and most valiant knight ever. Yvain, as victor over Esclados, had already proven his worth and as husband and defender would have the opportunity to do so over and over again. That Laudine held Esclados in such high esteem, though he was not known in Arthur’s court, suggests that the honor he had enjoyed as Laudine’s husband, “assured” joy and honor, would have been Yvain’s, as well. By falling prey to Gawain’s taunts about marital “softness,” Yvain believed that he needed the honor of knight errantry—or at least of the socially visible and successful

knight on the tourney circuit—to prove his masculine worth to Laudine. He failed to see then that Gawain’s version of masculinity is not the only version. Domestic knighthood, too, requires and invites honor, and for men like Esclados and Yvain, is the more authentic choice. Yvain seems to realize this when revisiting the fountain, and laments.

As with the Black Knight, whom we meet in Chapter Three, Yvain, unbeknownst to himself, has an audience for his lament at the fountain. In the chapel by the fountain a female prisoner, who proves to be Lunete, overhears his cries. She asks who this is who cries and he returns the question, asking who she is. “Je sui . . . un cheitive, / la plus lolante riens qui vive” (I am a prisoner, the saddest creature alive; 3575-6), she replies. Yvain assures her that her “diax est joie; tes maux biens” (grief is joy and [her] suffering bliss; 3577) compared to his. She counters, stating that his freedom makes him happier and that she is to be burnt for treason the next day. Yvain again attempts to trump her, arguing that her suffering can be relieved by her rescue from the prison. Recalling earlier moments, we are to understand that Yvain’s love for Laudine was a prison, while he was actually imprisoned in Laudine’s castle, but his sorrow over her loss due to his error serves as a truly tortuous prison, even more than the physical walls that hold Lunete because it is, he believes, permanent. It has also stripped him of his purpose.

Lunete claims that only Sirs Gawain or Yvain may rescue her and her identity is then revealed as the maiden who had helped him to woo Laudine. Yvain is all the more miserable when he realizes that it is because of Lunete’s role in getting Laudine to marry him, the disloyal and dishonored knight, that she is to die. Whereas the Lady of Norison, who nursed him back to health, and her maids are unaware of Yvain’s dishonor to Laudine, in Laudine’s court his disloyalty is crippling. In the larger realm of knight

errantry, of *bachelor*-hood, Yvain is still honorable, as is proven again and again as he gains honor after honor in his adventures, but when he chose the roles of defender and husband for Laudine, he opted to put the role of *bachelor* behind. When he did not, he jeopardized his role, as well as Lunete's.

### Reclaiming the Role of Domestic Knight

The role for which Lancelot suffers grief madness is the role of domestic knight to Laudine. When he failed to return to her on time he wrongly led her to believe that this role was of little importance to him and that he favored the life of the knight errant over that of husband and defender. Because Gawain's comments, based on common hegemonic masculine love, led Yvain to believe that a woman could only love him if he sought honor in this way, Yvain lost Laudine's love and gained no honor for her. Because he failed her, he lost her and his place, and therefore his identity. He went mad, was healed and reminded that he could still find purpose as a knight errant, and fought valiantly in an attempt to recompense his loss. However, knight errantry proved inadequate to alleviate his sorrow. While no longer grief-mad, he remained melancholic, needing to leave off knight errantry for domestic knighthood, but not domestic knighthood for just anyone. The role of the host was not a general role, easily replaced by a similar one, but a specific role. He did not suffer unnamed loss, but specific, nameable loss—Laudine—and only the replacement of that loss with what was originally lost can end the sorrow that the loss precipitated.

Yvain seeks to reclaim his role of domestic knight by visiting the fountain once again in order to cause the terrible storms that will devastate Laudine's kingdom.

However, with no champion there to defend the fountain, Yvain knows that he will be able to create storms indefinitely until Laudine agrees to take him back—or at least to see him. Lunete, having spoken with Yvain when he rescued her from her detractors, has agreed to do what she can to convince Laudine to take Yvain back, saying that she would not be “recreanz ne pereceuse” on his behalf (unfaithful or idle; 4651). Lunete thus suggests to Laudine that she should seek out the Knight with the Lion, who had defeated Harpin of the Mountain and the three knights who had wrongly accused her, among others.

Oddly, Yvain will once again employ deceptive practices to regain his authentic role. Considering that deception is what landed Lunete in this position, and more pointedly, deception in Yvain’s service, Yvain’s and Lunete’s willingness to engage in such practices again is surprising. The incident that brought Lunete to this pass occurred when Yvain first came to Laudine’s castle and laid eyes on her. Lunete finds the lovesick Yvain so distraught that she agrees to help him court Laudine, and she does so through trickery and careful rhetoric. Yvain’s love would seem to be cheapened by this ploy, but we find that love for Yvain and Laudine is based on necessity coupled with the right “look,” not simple sentiment, and what appears to be deceit on the parts of Lunete and Yvain is actually a clever handling of Laudine’s grief and a reminder that her kingdom’s needs should come before her own. The only way Lunete is able to coax Laudine out of mourning is to remind her that the fountain needs protecting from King Arthur, who is on his way to try his hand at the adventure it promises. The best way to do this, argues Lunete, is for Laudine to wed the valiant knight who proved himself worthy by defeating Esclados. Laudine is livid and refuses Lunete’s recommendations twice before

apologizing for her harsh words and agreeing to see the knight, asking after his rank and “*quies hom est it*” (“what kind of man he is”; 1806). Laudine is thus coaxed out of her sorrow and takes a pragmatic approach to her situation, seeing that Lunete is right: she does need a new champion to protect the fountain and her kingdom.

Yvain and Lunete again use Lunete’s rhetorical skill (deception) to convince Laudine to take Yvain back. This deception begins after Yvain rescues Lunete from the seneschal and two knights who had reminded Laudine of Lunete’s role in encouraging the marriage to the disloyal Yvain. While Lunete’s role was undeniable, she claims that her earlier contrivances were more for the benefit of Laudine than for Yvain (3648-9), and for this reason, she was not guilty of treason. Lunete’s early deception, her claim suggests, was made because she knew that Yvain would be a good husband and defender. She, of course, had no way of knowing that he would err by not returning on time. That she is still willing to assist Yvain, even after she was accused and nearly killed for assisting him, attests to her deep faith in him not to make the same mistake in the future, and in her gratitude for his rescue and subsequent role in returning her to Laudine and seeing to her pardon. Here, Lunete again deceives Laudine by promising Yvain that she will not reveal his identity to Laudine until the appropriate time. Yvain deceives by speaking to Laudine without revealing himself as Yvain, her husband, but by saying that all will not be well for him until he receives the pardon of his lady. Both characters thus deceive Laudine by omission in order to bring about a favorable outcome for all parties involved: Lunete by being vindicated for her earlier wise counsel for Laudine to marry Yvain; Laudine by regaining a husband and champion; and Yvain by restoration to his role as domestic knight.



Lunete once again uses rhetoric so expertly that Laudine agrees to help the knight gain the pardon of his lady, swearing an oath that she will see to it that the knight will receive this pardon. Laudine is initially angered by Lunete's manipulation when she discovers that the knight whom she has agreed to pardon is her own husband who had been disloyal and whom she had banished, but she knows that she cannot back out of her vow, especially since her anger with Yvain was over his own oath-breaking. For her to break her oath would be uncourtly, dishonorable, and hypocritical. She reluctantly, but faithfully, grants his pardon after he plies her with many thanks and the promise that he will never betray her again. The tale ends with Yvain back by Laudine's side, each of them "amez et chier" (loved and cherished; 6810) by the other. Yvain is thus reinstated into his roles as husband and defender. This will prove essential in order for Yvain to overcome his grief and to allow him to expunge his guilt, for which he also suffered grievously, at having cost himself Laudine's respect and love—his honor—as well as his role as her husband and defender. In this case, Yvain finally sees the possibility of reclaiming his losses.

The deceptions that are employed throughout the text are deceptions of omission rather than outright lies, and those used by Lunete tend to slowly build toward whole truths. In other words, Lunete reads her mistress well, and knows how to navigate Laudine's elevated emotional states—first grief, and later resentment—in order to best convince the lady that what may sometimes appear as the least viable solution to a problem may actually be the best. The man who killed her husband is the best man to replace him precisely because he was able to kill him. The man who seems unpardonable should be pardoned. These are not claims that are easily digestible in one large bite, but

are, as Lunete knows, more palatable if taken in degrees. Moreover, in the case of Yvain's pardon, they are more palatable if depersonalized and approached from an objective point of view. Laudine finds the valiant Knight of the Lion worthy of forgiveness, while Yvain was not, though they are one and the same. Through deception, Lunete encourages Laudine to see beyond her own prejudices to the real man—the authentic Yvain—the Yvain who identifies with the role as domestic knight in Laudine's service. And once the authentic Yvain is revealed he can assume, or resume, his authentic role. Yvain “the liar, the deceiver, the unfaithful one, the cheat” (2723-4) is the Yvain who put on the pretense of accepted masculinity for Gawain and the other Round Table knights. The Yvain revealed by degrees, no less valiant or knightly, is the true Yvain who needs to serve his domestic knighthood with Laudine.

Some critics, like Joan Ferrante, have argued that Yvain's reunion with Laudine “serves no function in his moral development” (157), but serves, instead, to further imprison him. Because Yvain “forces” Laudine to come to the fountain, Ferrante argues, to bring about accord between them, “there has been no real development in their relationship” (158). While I would agree that their relationship at the end appears to be similar to the way it was when they first came together, it is not entirely the same. I disagree, also, with the argument that he is “imprisoned” by his bid to reclaim his place. Rather, he appears to have genuinely embraced his roles as husband and defender of the fountain, despite his year plus away from Laudine, and he is joyous to have the roles back. His grief and misery came from losing Laudine and the role with which he was entrusted when he was with her, as the new knight of the fountain, and the loss included the loss of chivalric honor he incurred by knightly pursuit. Although knight errantry

brought Yvain great honor and renown as the Knight of the Lion, it failed to completely remove his lingering sorrow. This lack of renewed *joie* in these pursuits reveals that his real joy was not in the perceived freedom of knight errantry, but in his role as *Laudine's* fountain defender and husband. This return to the fountain and to *Laudine*, then, while figured earlier as a prison, is the only action that frees him from the imprisonment of his grief because it is the only role that gives him the freedom to be his authentic masculine self.

Ferrante makes a valid point that little seems to have changed in the relationship. Yvain first becomes *Laudine's* husband and defender through deceit with the help of Lunete and repeats that ploy at the end, indicating a sameness in the relationship. For Yvain, though, the relative sameness of his pre-tourney married life is exactly what he desires. While the tactics of deception are the same at the beginning and end of the relationship, placing Yvain into his authentic role, Ferrante seems to have overlooked Yvain's extended period of mourning, the lessons in loyalty taught by the lion, and the lack of pleasure Yvain derived from his adventures after his banishment. She gives Yvain little credit for having learned lessons from grief and loss about where his bliss lies, lessons that carry with them the likely result of positive outcomes for his relationship with *Laudine* if his joy is restored.

What, then, does this tell us about grief in this text? First of all, the text demonstrates that love and the roles inhabited by those whom one "claims" to love are often confused, but that loss of either can be crippling. *Laudine* falls into suicidal grief over the loss of *Esclados the Red* because he was the most valiant knight and defender she had ever known. For a medieval lady, this conflation of the best possible knight with

the best possible lover *is* love and to lose the man who fills this role for her, personally, is to suffer a great loss. Yvain suffers an equally debilitating loss and goes mad when Laudine banishes him for not keeping his word to return to her and he loses his honor as a knight, whose virtues include keeping one's word to a lady and *loyauté*, along with his dual role of husband/defender. For the medieval knight, the ideal lady gives him purpose as defender of her person and her kingdom, and love is thus equated with that purpose. Losing the ideal lady, therefore, results in loss of role and purpose. The text enjoins us to believe that, despite Laudine's reluctance, both in Yvain's first attempt to win her love and in his last, they "loved and cherished" one another for the rest of their lives once the role was reinstated. To our contemporary sensibility, this rings false because we have a notion of romantic love that is based on sentimental feelings and emotions that we call "love"; that is, love for us is internally motivated by feelings and highly individualized. Love for Yvain and Laudine, on the other hand, is a matter of practical need and the filling of roles. Good breeding, good training, and proven ability to fulfill the roles, whether of worthy knight or ideal lady, are the basis for an aristocratic love alliance. Therefore, the happiness at the end of the tale is not an illusion (though it is, of course fiction). It is an honest assessment of the situation. Sorrow is mitigated because love has returned. Love, which may be based in part on personal appearances, is pragmatic in that it seeks the individual who best fills a need, or enters into a specific time-honored role. When the filler of that role fails to perform, love is lost, and the role with it. The role—in Yvain's case of domestic knight in Laudine's service—*is* the man, and when this role is lost, so is the man, resulting in excessive grief and a desire to reclaim the lost role.

## CHAPTER TWO:

GRIEF AND THE *TREWE MAN* IN THE BRETON LAI *SIR ORFEO*

The fourteenth-century Breton lai *Sir Orfeo*, based on the classic tale of Orpheus and Eurydice, tells the tale of a loving married couple separated tragically by the wife's abduction by the Fairy King and the husband's eventual success in rescuing her from her abductor. This is, of course, an over-simplification of the story and but one way to read its basic plot. As R. H. Nicholson alleges, "Lais are initiated by disaster or loss (of place, parents, etc.), and they are constituted of the adventures which eventually conclude in recovery from the loss suffered (return to place, parents, etc.)" (173). *Sir Orfeo* certainly follows this formula, but within the format, the text uses loss and the grief Orfeo suffers in its aftermath to uncover a false, but self-imposed, structure of appropriate and inappropriate grief practice. While Heurodis grieves lavishly, Orfeo's subjects weep at their losses of both Heurodis and Orfeo, and the steward openly falls into a swoon when he hears of his king's death, Orfeo only demonstrates clear gestures of grief in his private chamber, where he swoons and weeps to the point of exhaustion. During his self-imposed exile to the forest Orfeo returns to restrained bereavement, having fallen into the "malaise" (240) of his melancholia, and this only clearly after he has walked away from his people in Traciens.<sup>11</sup> The poet presents Orfeo as a man who is so caught up in the trappings of kingship—property, wealth, subjects, power—that he prohibits himself from revealing the "trew man" that he later applauds in his steward. In other words, he plays the part of king so well that he mistakes the role for the man. The "true" Orfeo is visible

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<sup>11</sup> All references to the text of *Sir Orfeo* are from the Auchinleck Manuscript (ca. 1330), found in *Sir Orfeo*, edited by A. J. Bliss. Auchinleck is the earliest extant version of this lai. Numbers in parentheses refer to line numbers from this manuscript.

only during those instances when he is alone with his sorrow—in his privy chamber and in the forest—and in his praise of the steward’s outward expression of bereavement, for which Orfeo verifies the use of grief as a measure of truth. Grief, then, serves as a means of dispelling the artifice of Orfeo’s public role as king, even if only temporarily, and through that grief the honesty, sincerity, and openness of the “true man” are revealed.

Upon his return to Traciens, disguised as a minstrel who tells the steward and the court of King Orfeo’s death by wolves, the steward swoons in grief at the news. Orfeo extols the reaction as the mark of a “trewe man,” inviting the obvious reading that the steward has remained loyal to his king during the ten years of his absence. Certainly Orfeo does mean to suggest the virtue of the steward’s fealty, but this could be verified through other means than an emotional outpouring. “True man,” in this context, seems to mean something more than simply “loyal.” In addition to this traditionally accepted medieval definition of “truth,” I agree with Derek Neal’s discussion of “true men” in *The Masculine Self in Late Medieval England*, in which he argues that “there is no exact modern equivalent for this meaning of ‘true’,” but that the word “encompasses ‘honest,’ ‘loyal,’ ‘faithful,’ and ‘open,’ [which are] connotations that have largely been dropped for the word” (42). Neal further argues that, though we today tend to distinguish between the “real man” of today and the “true man” of the Middle Ages, this is a false “modern distinction” (42). Rather, he finds evidence in court documents and various other archival materials in which the word “true,” and references to “true men,” suggest that truth often means “open,” “honest,” and as demonstrating a “manifest veracity” (43). Furthermore, this term is directly linked to masculinity by its connection to keeping oaths and, therefore, respecting “the homosocial code enough to deal openly, guilelessly with other

men [which would] establish a masculine social self [that would] be accepted as a ‘real man’: a ‘true man’ in the modern sense” (44). The steward openly and guilelessly expresses his grief, and for this, Orfeo, who has had difficulty in doing the same, praises the act as that of a “trewe man.” A man, especially one who has been responsible for the general welfare of a kingdom in the king’s absence, who can honestly and openly reveal his feelings in the presence of others is a man devoid of artifice, a man who is not caught up in the trappings of the position. He is the type of man Orfeo has generally failed to be, but one whom Orfeo admires, and one, perhaps, whom Orfeo can hope to emulate.

The tale provides a carefully plotted illustration of grief, of how grief can unseat the noblest, most chivalric, and royal of men, and demonstrates the propensity of some men to hide their true feelings in public in order to protect a social veneer while their public behaviors are sometimes even more puzzling, or even false. The pattern of bereavement, as in the previous chapter on Yvain, inevitably includes the movement from the public sphere of the court to the solitude of the forest, where Orfeo lives a melancholic and static existence for ten years in a setting free of artifice and the trappings of his office, but where he still approaches his loss with reserve, albeit the reserve of the melancholic disposition rather than the demands of kingly comportment. Only when Heurodis reappears after ten years, and the problem of his grief resurfaces does he lament and take action in a moment of despair that, ironically, incites him to break his torpor by attempting to reclaim his lost beloved. This action encourages from Orfeo a return to his knightly and kingly bravery, but also requires that he *feel* something, and feel it strongly enough to take action, regardless of the consequences. Whereas his loss of Heurodis initially drove him to a melancholic malaise, it here drives him to expressive action that

brings him closer to the actions of a “true man.” His trip to the fairy Otherworld causes him to look beneath the artifice of both the marvelous place and of the royal trappings in which he had been caught up, and to use some aspects of those trappings, most notably courtly protocol, against themselves to bring about a positive end to his grief.

In the previous chapter I argued that Yvain suffers from bereavement, though his lost loved one has not died. Heurodis’ madness and abduction are consonant with death and Orfeo’s grief, stemming from her disappearance, provides the purpose for his actions throughout the majority of the poem. Ellen Caldwell, Penelope Doob, and Corinne Saunders all shoot sideways glances at Orfeo’s grief, as do most critics who write about *Orfeo*, but no one seems to address it directly, treating it, instead, as a “given” of the art from of the lai and of romance.<sup>12</sup> Orfeo’s grief deserves more attention as the focal point of the tale. His sorrow is that of a loving husband and king lamenting his loss, which consists simultaneously of Heurodis’ disappearance and of that of his kingly identity, and the representation of his grief highlights his enactment of socially and self-imposed constraints on grief. Orfeo, as a king and knight, puts on a public face of military fortitude and power, even when he experiences the sorrow inherent in loss and the self-doubt that accompanies the inability to protect both household and kingdom—affects that are not proper, according to his personal code and the code of his court, for public viewing. What Orfeo’s experience reveals, however, is that embracing the passions associated with love and loss that are traditionally deemed improper for a man of his

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<sup>12</sup> Caldwell writes, “Yet Orfeo does undergo an extreme test, surrendering his kingdom and living in exile for ten long years, grief-stricken over the loss of his wife” (299). Doob acknowledges that “Orfeo leaves his court in poverty, moved by grief and love” (184). And Saunders notes that the forest becomes the “setting for Orfeo’s own journey of grief and discovery” (136). Yet, these statements are the extent of these critics’ acknowledgment of Orfeo’s bereavement.



station allows the knight and king to rule and act more shrewdly by knowing when to use force and when to appeal to affect for a more direct means to an end. Knowing loss deeply and personally allows him to see the limits of force and of the public knightly/kingly persona in preventing and combating life's inevitabilities for which the true man has more effective weapons. Grief, then, is far less simple than Caldwell, Doob, and Saunders all suppose, as it is more than a fixed reaction to a set conception of loss. Loss is never uniformly experienced and grief never exactly practiced. The king Orfeo does not grieve as the private Orfeo grieves. Neither Orfeo grieves as the subjects of Traciens do; Heurodis grieves unlike anyone else; the steward grieves like a true man because he grieves openly and honestly.

#### A Changing Masculine Paradigm

Orfeo's initial swooning in his privy chamber stands in contrast to the steward's later reaction to the (fabricated) news that Orfeo had been savaged by wolves. The steward, defacto king of Traciens after Orfeo departs for the forest, swoons publicly: "Adoun he fel aswon to grounde" (down he fell, swooning, to the ground; 549). The barons of the court, here rightfully called "*His barouns*" (my emphasis; 550), since he has temporarily succeeded the "dead" Orfeo, reprove him for his behavior in publicly swooning. The clearest explanation the barons provide is that the new is "no bot of mannes deb" (only new of a man's death; 552). News of "a man's death," the barons seem to suggest, is hardly worth getting worked up about, thus intimating that a paradigm had been set for dispassionate reactions to such news. Either men, generally, are expected not to react unabashedly aggrieved or men of *authority* should not. The former appears

the less likely because both knights and ladies weep when Heurodis is abducted and again when Orfeo leaves; yet, ritual public mourning may account for this. Phillippe Ariés acknowledges that:

Medieval and early modern mourning was more social than individual. Helping the survivor was neither its sole nor its primary purpose. Mourning expressed an anguish of a community that had been visited by death, contaminated by its presence, weakened by loss of one of its members. (582)

Thus, crying deployed in the loss of both king and queen not only weakened the community on a mundane level, but also because the community has been weakened by the loss of monarch. Since Orfeo has been gone for ten years, and his loss has already been mourned, the barons are here suggesting that Orfeo is “bot a manne”—any man who might have died—no longer the king.

The steward, in consequence, has been the king in deed in the barons’ estimation, and a second possibility for why the steward’s swoon is untoward presents itself: kings do not publicly swoon when presented with bad news. The public swoon indicates just such a loss of control that Ariés elsewhere suggests was becoming unacceptable in the later Middle Ages and hearkens back to the outmoded public mourning practices of Arthur and Charlemagne, not to those of the later *King Orfeo* whose public choices are decided, in part, by the court and his counsel. Due to the social nature of death, Orfeo as a king, and the steward as his stand-in must think first of their social roles, at least publicly, then of personal loss. The ritual laments that appear in Arthurian legends might last for hours, days, or even months, and include, even among men, instances of fainting, tearing at hair and clothing, and raking at their own faces with their fingernails (Ariés 143-4). However, claims Ariés, “In the later Middle Ages it no longer seemed as legitimate or customary to lose control of oneself in order to mourn for the dead” (162). This social

convention seems to be absorbed into the fabric of Orfeo's court; the barons hold an expectation that their ruler will not lose control, and the model for this behavior is Orfeo himself. Even in his most grievous private lament Orfeo does not tear at his hair or rake his face, establishing him as different from both Arthur and Charlemagne, and certainly as different from Heurodis, who does engage in these common gestures of grief.

Orfeo's restraint is apparent throughout the text, beginning with his first reaction to, and conversation with, Heurodis after her initial abduction by the Fairy King. Orfeo is upset, having never been "wers for no þing" (worse off for anything; 98), but no indication is given that he is angry, sad, or otherwise—only that he had never before received such terrible news or encountered such a horrifying experience. When he first sees and speaks to Heurodis, he does so with "grete pite," suggesting empathy for her, but not an expression or recognition of his own feelings. When he speaks to her, he wonders at her appearance and lists her physical virtues that are now marred rather than reacting as the steward does at news of Orfeo's death. He does react verbally with exclamations like "A!," "Allas!," and "O we!," but this is the closest we come to an affective reaction to the sight of Heurodis or to her story. These exclamations are accompanied by the statement that Orfeo is "forlorn" when she tells him that she must leave him (127), but still, he uses only words, no gesture that suggest his grief. Rather, he tries to take charge of the situation by refusing to let Heurodis go, or at least to go without him. Never do Orfeo's gestures in the chamber betray anything other than surprise at the situation with which he is faced and a desire to maintain control. He offers some words intended to comfort, but all are related to preventing the separation, again, to controlling the situation, as a king should. Even when Heurodis disappears, Orfeo refrains from crying

with the men at arms, whom he has arrayed to defend Heurodis. While these men mourn the loss publicly, Orfeo does not. The poet is clear about this, stating, “þo was þer criing, wepe & wo. / þe king into his chaumber go” (then (or though) ther was crying, weeping, and woe. The king went to his chamber; 195-6). If the “þo” in the first line is read as “then,” the statement is one of mere fact, followed by another—Orfeo went to his chamber. If, however, this word is read as “though,” this pair of sentences claims that Orfeo went to his chamber “although” those who were with him wept over the loss of Heurodis, which emphasizes the fact that Orfeo does not mourn publicly with his men. Either way, Orfeo shows restraint in the presence of others and refrains from weeping publicly, saving his loss of control for the privy chamber.

When Orfeo approaches Heurodis’ bedside, ten knights accompany him; one thousand are with him when Heurodis disappears. In neither instance does he break down, and in both instances he has witnesses to his kingly comportment. The barons respond to this example when they deem the steward inappropriate in his reaction to the king’s death. If the king showed restraint by not swooning publicly when his wife was abducted, then surely the proxy leader could show restraint, as well. However, while the members of the court scold the steward for his behavior, Orfeo, having struggled with his own grief, no longer sees this public swoon as a weakness. Rather, he understands such heartfelt outpouring of emotion as an indication of true feelings quite separate from those of the convention of the courtly lament ritual or of the model he had provided. The poet writes of the steward’s lament, “King Orfeo knewe wele bi þan / His steward was a trewe man / & loued *him* as he auȝt to do” (King Orfeo knew well by this that his steward was a true man who loved him as he ought to do; 553-5). To Orfeo, the steward’s publically

expressed feelings indicate loyalty to his king, honesty, and true nobility rather than weakness. However, Orfeo did not arrive at this conclusion easily. Only by struggling to satisfactorily express his own grief has Orfeo come to see the value of outwardly expressive emotions like the steward's. Orfeo must struggle for ten years to get to this point, as his early mourning practices over the loss of Heurodis closely adhered to the social norms described by Ariés, and his own propensity to present a kingly image to his people.

That Orfeo's restraint in grief is based, in part, on kingly image finds support in the early description of Orfeo and Traciens, in Orfeo's accounting of Heurodis' virtues, and in the litany of royal trappings that Orfeo leaves behind when he takes to the forest. Orfeo, aside from his talent and love of harping, which becomes central to a more affective, late Orfeo, is primarily presented as a strong and healthy man and as having the qualities of a good king, including the virtues of generosity and good breeding. Traciens is, likewise, described as "a cite of noble defens" (48), indicating that it is well fortified and therefore strong, emitting a further sense of kingly strength and control over Orfeo's realm. Within these fortified walls, the text explains, Orfeo enjoys, of course, the crown, but also a life filled with fur-lined robes, a bed dressed with purple linen, and strong knights and ladies as subjects, all the trappings of kingship. Heurodis, too, is described as the fairest of all ladies, and was also lovely and good in virtue. Orfeo has all good things, and when he walks away from them, they are named and enumerated; they are granted importance as the substance of his role as king, and therefore of his image as a king. In none of the descriptions of Orfeo is he called "true"; rather, every description of him prior to his turn to the forest presents him as either a harper—which plays no part outside

of the introduction until he leaves for the forest—or as a king, which is the focus of the first one-third of the poem.

### A True Knight and King

As a knight and king,<sup>13</sup> Orfeo is saddled with certain public responsibilities and is expected to look and act like both knight and king through courtliness and chivalric bearing. He is entrusted with the safety and security of his people and must present himself to his subjects as a man who is both willing and capable of fulfilling this role.

Kingship and knighthood were not superficial titles meant only to suggest social status to

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<sup>13</sup> The poet tells us that Orfeo is “kinge, In Ingland” (39) and that he lives in Traciens (Winchester). Yet, the title of the poem, *Sir Orfeo*, suggests through the prefix “sir” that he is also a knight. Kaeuper states that a good medieval king is, by necessity, a good knight (103). The brief description we are given of Orfeo early in the poem (aside from the fourteen lines dedicated to extolling the virtues of his harping) suggests that he fits the bill of knight and king. He is “an heize lording, / A stalworþ man and hardi bo; / Large and curteys he was al-so” (a high noble, A hardy and bold man; who was also generous and well-bred; 40-2), and we learn in lines forty-three to forty-four that he is the son of Pluto and Juno (he is, after all, a medieval Orpheus). This latter point confirms line forty in which we are told that Orfeo is a high noble. Thus, we know that Orfeo’s nobility is through his bloodline as well as in his behavior: he is of noble birth and, therefore, well-bred. Being of a noble house, Orfeo is expected to be endowed with certain qualities, which Maurice Keen so succinctly enumerates in *Chivalry*. A collapsed inventory of Keen’s finely articulated list of characteristics can be divided into two groups: tangible qualities related to legal proof of nobility and monetary concerns, and qualities that reflect temperament and behavior, or individual virtue. The “legal” trappings of nobility include land holdings, title, birthright, demonstrations of prowess, and spreading of largesse (Keen 159). Temperamental elements relate to the virtues that should be demonstrated in those of noble birth, but may also be evident in those who are not of noble lineage. These include justice, faith, loyalty, honor, courtesy, and, again, both largesse and prowess, to name but a few (Keen 159). Orfeo is clearly a noble in the sense of lineage as the son of Juno and Pluto, and, being a king, has land holdings (Traciens) and title (both “king” and “sir”). He is generous to harpers (27-28), and we are told that he is “large & curteys” (42), which is to say that he is liberal with his largesse and kind-hearted. That he is also “stalworþ” and “hardi” suggests prowess on the battlefield, as “hardy,” according to the *Middle English Dictionary*, means “strong in battle, fearless of danger, stout-hearted” (Hardi). And “bold” is defined as “brave, courageous, daring, fearless” (Bold).

*Sir Orfeo*'s audience, but are markers of a warrior class that still flourished in this period.<sup>14</sup> Military bearing necessitates an impassive exterior that Orfeo presents to his people, as Maurice Keen, Richard Kaeuper, and D. M. Hadley all suggest, and the *Orfeo* poet presents Orfeo as kingly in his concerns, his need to control a situation, his description, his trappings, and in his abstention from public mourning. The poem establishes Orfeo as both noble and as a king through his physical description, reference to his lineage, and enumeration of his many chivalric and noble characteristics, which sets Orfeo up as a model man. Equally important to the physical qualities of a good knight in establishing the public face of the aristocratic medieval male are the mental aspects of chivalric behavior, which become central to Orfeo's bereavement.

Associations of power with masculinity are clearly delineated in the physique of the knight and in the understanding that he should be brave and fierce in battle, but over and over again in the descriptions of nobility and chivalry we read that prowess and authority must be accompanied by "self-restraint" (Hadley 12), or reasoned control (Kaeuper 157). Maurice Keen translates Alain Chartier, confirming this addition: "You who come of noble houses, and are the heirs of the gentle blood, you should be possessed of virtue and reason" (159). "Virtue," for the knightly class, includes justice, faith, loyalty, honor,

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<sup>14</sup> Maurice Keen writes of significant changes in chivalry and knighthood in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries that include changes in military tactics such as standing armies, infantry, and artillery instead of *chevaliers*, or mounted soldiers (*Chivalry* New Haven: Yale UP, 1984. 239). Kaeuper writes that chivalry saw a "demise" in the fifteenth through seventeenth centuries as a result of the "dissolution" of the "power, status, piety, and cultural ideals" that marked medieval chivalrous practice (*Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe* Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999. 302). "Some [of these] elements largely disappeared," Kaeuper writes, while "others underwent considerable transformation, but above all, the interlocking, mutually strengthening fashion of elements dissolved" (302).

courtesy, largesse, and prowess (Keen 159), and all were to be accompanied by “reason.” The Orfeo of these early stanzas seems to more than adequately fill the role.

If reason and virtue were imperative for the making of a good knight, they were all the more important as qualities of a good king. Kings were to engage in war when necessary, as Kaeuper makes clear in his discussion of the Capetian dynasty, but were also expected to “secure order” (93), a role also acknowledged by England’s Plantagenets in their bid to keep “the king’s peace” (109). Part of securing order, of course, included the king looking out for his “subjects’ well being” by ensuring their security as well as justice in the secular and ecclesiastical courts (Kaeuper 100). In his introduction to *England in the Reign of Edward III*, Scott Waugh cites a sermon by Thomas Brinton that claims that there are three things in which “the honour of kings rested”: “military power, prudent counsel, and the just governing of the people” (5).

Orfeo exhibits the kingly qualities proposed by Brinton. He goes to his counselors in his time of need to seek advice for preventing Heurodis’ abduction and then trusts them, particularly the steward, to look after his kingdom during his absence, which implies good counsel. His people seem to find him just and to hold him in high esteem, as suggested by Orfeo’s conversation with the steward. When the steward welcomes Orfeo, disguised as a minstrel, into the castle “For mi lordes loue, Sir Orfeo” (518), he reveals Orfeo’s generosity to others. That harpers and minstrels are still welcome after ten years into the castle in honor of Orfeo the king, also a harper and lover and music, suggests that Orfeo was, and still is, warmly regarded there. As for “military power,” the description of Orfeo as “stalworþ” and “hardi” proves that he has the stature of a strong knight (41), and that he has command of “ten hundred kniȝtes” further indicates that he has military



authority. Thus, Orfeo is, by all indications, a true knight and king through his steadfastness, bravery (hardi-ness), courtliness, generosity, and through his ability to secure his kingdom behind walls of “noble defenses” (48).

As a true knight and king, the loss of Heurodis, and of Orfeo’s perceived loss of manhood, serves a double wound to his self image. For him to fail at protecting Heurodis from her horrific fate would certainly prove to be a terrible blow to him. By losing her to the Fairy King he has shown himself to be incapable of looking out for Heurodis’ well being, and if he is unable to protect her whom he loves, how will he protect those whom he serves as king? Seth Lerer writes that “the *impotence* of his ‘armes’ and ‘ten hundred knyghtes’ (182-83) indicates that Orfeo’s court here is strong only in number” (97, my emphasis). Impotence, indeed. His military might proves worthless in this battle and he takes the defeat as a sign not only of the lack of quality in his knights, but more directly, of his inability to rule. Hadley writes, “Because military prowess was gendered as an attribute of secular, masculine, elite identity, inability or inexperience in the military sphere was a sign of subordination, and associated explicitly with those who did not belong to the dominant masculine group” (11). To be king and not be able to prove one’s military worth, then, would be utterly devastating and emasculating. To grieve for this public wound to the ego, and especially to mourn publicly for the personal loss of his spouse, would be to encourage further criticism for his weakness. To engage, however, in the public ritual lament for a public military loss would not; yet, Orfeo still abstains.

### Ways to Grieve

Grief takes several forms in *Sir Orfeo*, the public ritual of mourning being but one of them. Members of the court mourn by crying and weeping when Heurodis disappears and again when Orfeo leaves; Heurodis grieves her impending abduction and subsequent loss; the steward grieves his king's "death"; and Orfeo grieves over his loss of Heurodis in a variety of ways, some more successful than others. All characters but Orfeo grieve openly, again suggesting something in Orfeo's individual makeup or the gravity of his role as king that prevents him from doing so. The ritual of public mourning practiced by the court goes on without him, although a precedent had been set for kings to participate—to a degree—in such rituals with both Charlemagne and Etzel. Orfeo's grief, even when he does practice it behind closed doors and in the forest, looks nothing like the riotous grief of Heurodis, nor is it public like the steward's. Orfeo's true emotions concerning his loss remain private—controlled and hidden from public view in order to maintain the veneer of kingship, even after he has been defeated and would likely have been granted a moment of public mourning, like King Etzel in the Middle High German poem *Die Klage*, who weeps over his fallen soldiers and his devastating loss.

### The Court

An example of a military lament occurs in the Middle High German poem *Die Klage*. Albrecht Classen, in his consideration of death and masculinity in Middle High German poetry, remarks on the lines from *Die Klage (The Lament)* in which King Etzel, having lost all of his knights in battle, openly and excessively weeps. His behavior is initially accepted, likely due to the extensiveness of his loss and to the fact that his grief

follows the “ritual performance of bereavement” that is deemed acceptable for public losses like this one (Classen 38). The poem suggests that, regardless of the acceptance of public bereavement, the ritual has limits of time and expression and that when these limits are exceeded the public bereavement becomes unacceptable. Once Etzel’s grief “transforms into despair and assumes a dangerous level” (40), two of the king’s counselors intervene and “try to appeal to his many virtues” (40). In the text of the poetry they admonish Etzel not to act “stet als ein Blode vvip. Div ir zvht vnd ir lip. Nach frivnden sere hat gesent. Des sin vvir von iv vngevent. Daz ir vnmanliche tvt” (like some silly woman who is moping around pining for her friends. (“We are not at all accustomed to seeing you act in such an unmanly fashion”; ll. 1021-1025; McConnell 51).<sup>15</sup> Though the poem is German, the same principles seem to apply to Orfeo for how an Englishman, and a king, is to enact his bereavement—at least in public. To publicly break down, sob, weep and moan, and swoon over loss is to act “like some silly woman” rather than to act in kingly, as court and subjects are “accustomed to seeing” a king behave. In other words, regardless of what a king might do in private to express his grief safely away from public scrutiny, a public display of despair by a king suggests that he is irrational, and therefore incapable of level-headed leadership. A king is always watched and any sign of weakness suggests cracks in the social and political foundation. Personal loss, then, must not be lavishly mourned because a king, more than anyone, must get back to the business of living and to the business of the realm. Signs of despair are signs of a lack of control, and Orfeo, throughout the first portion of the text, proves himself to

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<sup>15</sup> Translated by Winder McConnell in his side-by-side translation of “Div Chloge,” *The Lament of the Nibelungen (Div Chlage)* (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1994).

be a king who is in control. The loss of Heurodis shows that his control is limited and falling into despaire would only make the situation more dangerous for him as a king.

Members of the court do engage in the ritualized public lament that Ariés and Classen suggest commemorates public and communal loss. We do not know if women or men are responsible for the weeping when Heurodis first disappears, as we are only told that “ten hundred kni3tes” accompanied Orfeo and Heurodis to the garden to try to defend her from the Fairy King’s abduction, so it seems likely that the “criing, wepe & wo” is coming from the knights (195). This reaction seems surprising, in some ways, when considering other romances in which the loss of a woman is of less consequence than that of a man. One need only recall the reaction by Arthur and his men to Guinevere’s abduction by Meleagant in Chrétien’s version of the *Knight of the Cart* in which Arthur and his retinue are more concerned over losing Kay than over losing Guinevere. In Malory’s version, Guinevere, knowing that the men are more valuable than herself, stops the carnage of Meleagant’s men of the May-ing Round Table knights, begging Meleagant to take her and leave the knights alive. Similarly, in Malory’s telling of the death of Elaine of Astolat, Arthur, Guinevere, and the knights who accompany the royal pair weep only briefly after finding the lovely young woman dead on the barge, and even then they weep “for pity of the doleful complaints” against Lancelot found in a letter pinned to Elaine’s dead body rather than over the loss of the young woman herself (*Works* XVIII.xx).

Could it be that the knights in *Sir Orfeo*, like Orfeo himself, lament the bruise to their knightly self-worth after being so perfectly defeated? Are they actually lamenting Orfeo’s defeat as a great king? Or are they engaging in ritualized public lament? Perhaps

all three. Traciens is proudly declared a well-fortified city and Orfeo is, likewise, declared a great king. The knights, too, are called “kniȝtes of priis” (excellent knights; 249), clearly good, strong, and brave fighting men. Yet, they have lost Heurodis without a fight. Their loss of the queen is their collective loss. Not only has their queen disappeared, but she disappeared under their guard and they had sworn to die in her defense. That none of them had the opportunity to do so, including the king himself, provides reason enough for grief. The men mourn publicly over their communal loss of the queen and the communal defeat against an unseen enemy who was able to breach both Traciens’ walls and the *scheltrom* they had erected round Heurodis to protect her (a tight, circular rank of man; 187). They grieve, also, for Orfeo’s defeat as much as for his wife. They are thus performing the conventional public mourning lament for the lost queen as a form of social cohesion among a group who has, in Ariés’ words, “been visited by death”—or at least by an inexplicable loss (582).

Orfeo’s “barouns, / Erls, lordes of renouns” mourn again when Orfeo announces his plans to depart (201-2). They “cri” and “wep” to the point of speechlessness (220, 222), much as they had when Heurodis disappeared. As the group who cries in the “halle” consists of those whom Orfeo called together, there are, again, no women in this scene to perform the lament—only noblemen. Yet, they cry and weep in an effort to get Orfeo to stay. Certainly Orfeo’s vassals love their king and wish him to remain, and their loss is public and social and speaks to the effects of a lost monarch on the entire kingdom, much as the weeping over Heurodis’ loss was for the queen and for Orfeo’s

loss of his consort,<sup>16</sup> and for the impact this loss has on the community. The weeping in which they engaged at the loss of Heurodis and of Orfeo, which is not denigrated, represents the ritualized, accepted form of public mourning alluded to in Classen and Ariés while the potentially public airing of Orfeo's grief, like the steward's, seems improper because kingly duty requires the maintenance of social cohesion and the public good. Even if his knights and barons weep and cry, and even if they would have understood had he joined them, Orfeo does not weep publicly over his loss. His is not the open grieving of the ritual lament, nor is it the riotous grief of Heurodis.

### Heurodis

“Dangerous levels” of mourning, suggest King Etzel's men, are the province of women, not men. Women are body, not reason. According to numerous accounts of the period, based primarily on the Creation story and Eve's “secondary” nature,<sup>17</sup> unlike reasonable men, women and women's bodies are heedless of boundaries. Woman is perceived as chaotic and riotous. In her riotousness, the woman, like Heurodis, mimics the chaos that is death. Katharine Goodland, in her description of the lament, states that the loss exacted by death results in social “imbalance” and “chaos” that the ritual of lamentation seeks to redress (10), and that the woman who engages in the ritual laments “embodies both a personal and public sense of loss” (18). Heurodis is not performing a ritual lament in the sense that she publicly mourns the loss of another; rather, she

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<sup>16</sup> See Falk's article for a discussion of a lack of heir as part of the political loss Orfeo suffers.

<sup>17</sup> For more on this, see Blamires and Bloch, whose works include quotes and excerpts from works by the Church Fathers and such writers as Jean de Meun and Jehan Le Fevre on the nature of women.

embodies the chaos of her own loss through the chaos of her feminine body, paradoxically demonstrating both the fearsomeness of public grief and the proper feminine ritual enactment of it. Thus what, for Orfeo, remains a private despair, melancholia, and mania, is, in Heurodis, unabashedly public and honest.<sup>18</sup>

The first indication the text provides that anything is amiss with Heurodis is when she, on a beautiful May day, stops under a grafted tree with her two attendants to rest from her peregrinations around an orchard, where she falls asleep. She wakes suddenly, screaming and thrashing about, and begins to scratch at her face and behave as a madwoman. Her ladies, frightened and concerned, both leave her alone in the garden—neither of them remaining with her—to get help. That Heurodis' bout of madness, later attached to her fear of her abduction and grief over her impending loss,<sup>19</sup> occurs in a garden is relevant on multiple levels. First, the garden figures prominently as a romance trope, at least since the advent of Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun's *Roman de la Rose*, written a century earlier. The garden as the locus of love and love longing would have been immediately apparent to the audience of *Sir Orfeo*, and one that sets the stage for the entrance of the God of Love or his devotees. Yet, despite the acknowledgement in

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<sup>18</sup> Interestingly, women were also, according the same readings of women mentioned in the note above, considered deceitful and full of artifice; yet, Heurodis more honestly expresses her despair than Orfeo does. However her grief is problematic not in the truth of its open expression, but in its excessiveness, which is also a hallmark of women's grief.

<sup>19</sup> For more on the how fairy abduction is used as a cover for more sensitive issues, such as sexual impropriety and rape, see [you might as well cite the book instead of the article] Mary Ellen Lamb's "Taken by the Fairies: Fairy Practices and the Production of Popular Culture in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*" (*Shakespeare Quarterly* 51.3 (2000): 277-312) and Peter Narváez's "Newfoundland Berry Pickers 'In the Fairies'": Maintaining Spatial, Temporal, and Moral Boundaries Through Legendry" (*The Good People: New Fairylore Essays* Ed. Peter Narváez. Lexington, KY: U Presses of Kentucky, 1991.) For more on the propensity of cultures to use the fantastic, and fairies in particular, to discuss socially sensitive matters.

the early lines of the poem that *lais* most often present stories of love, *Sir Orfeo* does not provide the reader with the expected *hortus amoenus* here. Rather, he sets the reader up for the pleasantries of love—a May day, a nap under the tree, the garden setting—only to turn the tables and present the garden as a *locus furoris* instead.

The garden, originally pleasant and full of potential for love, becomes the wilderness of Heurodis' grief madness. The space of the castle orchard resembles the untamed space of the forest and the madman in its purpose as a space of lament. However, Heurodis does not lament; she goes mad. That neither of Heurodis' attendants stays with her in the garden attests to the perceived danger that exists there, which is further exhibited by the poet's use of the lines "Þe tvo maidens hir biside / *No deerst* wiþ hir no leng abide" (the two maidens who had been with her *dared not* stay with her; my emphasis, 83-4). Not only *will* neither of them stay, they *dare not* to stay. They fear the wildness of the queen's behavior and both leave the wilderness of the garden to retrieve more capable help in the form of "boþ squier and kniȝt" (both squire and knight; 89), who come in droves of "sexti & mo" (89-90). The wildness of the situation seems to call for the might of numbers as well that of strong and brave men, though most of those who come can only gawk and serve as witnesses to the queen's insanity. When the maidens leave her alone in the garden, she is left to face the solitude of her despair, much as Orfeo is later in the poem, momentarily providing a parallel between the two characters' solitary experience of grief. However, the reader is never privy to Heurodis' time alone in the orchard as we are with Orfeo's, as the poet opts, instead, to follow the maidens back to court where they gather support to aid and witnesses to observe the queen's madness and Heurodis' grief becomes, once again, more public and open.



A large retinue of courtiers and knights invade this space of the garden and Heurodis' solitary moment is broken as the courtiers come to view the spectacle of the queen's insanity. Heurodis does not temper her passions as a result of the intrusion by her courtiers, but instead continues to scream and thrash about, revealing the depth of her despair and necessitating her physical removal from the garden and restraint in her chamber. This public viewing of her madness is in direct opposition to what Orfeo suggests is customary, at least for him as a king, as such moments of passionate excess should be confined to private spaces or, certainly when reduced to madness, to the wilderness, unless understood to be the enactment of ritual lament.<sup>20</sup> However, Heurodis

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<sup>20</sup> Elsewhere in this chapter I address the Middle High German lament, *Die Klage*, but numerous other versions of the lament are also extant in medieval manuscripts. While *Die Klage* and other, similar, laments, as the Anglo-Saxon *Seafarer*, suggest a masculine origin for the form, and love laments from medieval lyric poetry further support this connection, the lament enacted seems to be the province of women, at least in medieval and early modern drama. Paul Edward Kretzmann contends that the medieval version of these formal poems of loss may be seen in the *planctus* of Mary Magdalene found in such drama as the York, Townley, Chester, and Coventry cycle plays in England, and the Pfarrkircher Passion and Egerer Spiel in Germany (*The Liturgical Element in the Earliest Forms of the Medieval Drama with Special Reference to the English and German Plays*. Whitefish, MT: Kessinger, 2008. 114). Katharine Goodland traces the female lament back to Homeric texts as well as early cultural practice among clan societies, such as that of the early Irish (*Female Mourning and Tragedy in Medieval and Renaissance English Drama*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005). As with Kretzmann, Goodland points to the female performance of the lament in medieval and early modern drama, and particularly through, though not limited to, such plays as the N-Town *Raising of Lazarus* and *Crucifixion* (11-12). Goodland notes, as well, the poetic connection, relating both ancient Greek tradition, in which women's weeping was believed to "commune with the natural and the supernatural realms" (17). This, Goodland asserts, is picked up in the Middle Ages when women's laments were believed to "reach the heavens" (17), at least in the dramas. The form of the narrative lament as outlined by Goodland includes five "thematic elements: 1) the lamenter's relationship with the dead; 2) the lineage of the deceased and his/her public place in the community, to include both praise and blame; 3) details of the death; 4) anger at the deceased, family members, or enemies; 5) and a competitive display of anguish" (18). As a side note, these five elements correspond, interestingly, to what many modern psychotherapists and psychoanalytic thinkers refer to as the "stages of grief." While each of these instances of lament may be carried out by men, the role of public

is a woman and Orfeo and his barons do not scorn her for her madness. Instead, she receives Orfeo's pity.

The first hint of the impact his loss has on Orfeo occurs when he goes to Heurodis' room after her initial abduction. Orfeo is, essentially, the last to know of Heurodis' breakdown in the garden and only witnesses her madness when finally called to her privy chamber. Orfeo arrives in the company of ten of his knights and is also joined by, presumably, those of her rescue party who remain to hold her still. Upon waking from her nightmare, the poet tells us that Heurodis "froted hir honden & hir fet" (fretted her hands and her feet; 79), scratched at her face, and tore at her clothing (80-1) so that "sexti & mo" (sixty or more; 89) knights and ladies have to hold "hir þer fine fast" (hold her very tightly; 94). Heurodis surely is, in this moment, as R. Howard Bloch has noted in reference to terms used by Jean de Meun and Jehan Le Fèvre, an example of woman as "riot" (4). Orfeo refers to her usual sense of calm in contrast to her current state, asking of her that "hast ben so stille" what has provoked her current state and thus engages his queen in conversation, breaking the fevered motions of her apparent mania (103). A tender moment of worry and pity as Orfeo encourages Heurodis to speak is here shared by a group of no less than ten, and perhaps as many as seventy onlookers, and Orfeo is thus called upon to act accordingly. He does not disappoint, as he behaves as a good husband and as a noble and reasonable king should by ministering to Heurodis,

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lament seems more often to be conducted by the women in these texts and social practices, particularly in cultural practice. Goodland also notes that social historians have acknowledged three common stages of grief: "a rite of separation, a liminal or transitional period, and a rite of incorporation" (10). The modern grief theory of John Bowlby (*Loss: Volume III: Loss: Sadness and Depression*. 3<sup>rd</sup> vol. New York: Basic, 1980), which is most often used in grief studies and grief therapy yet today, lists four phases of mourning: 1) Numbness and protest; 2) Yearning and Searching; 3) Disorganization and Despair; and 4) Reorganization (85).

primarily with the use of reasoned speech. Only by engaging her in conversation is Orfeo able to bring Heurodis to rational speech, after which he learns the substance of her despair. Heurodis' combined fear and grief is finally revealed when she enacts the lament for her own loss, as evidenced in the traditional gestures of grief: hair tearing and face scratching.

Ellen M. Caldwell argues that Heurodis' behaviors after the initial visitation are an attempt to ward off the second attack, noting that her self-mutilation is part of a tradition of holy women and that she engages in this act "in an attempt to preserve her chastity to her spouse Orfeo" (292).<sup>21</sup> Regardless of the Fairy King's warning that nothing she does will prevent her further abduction, Heurodis makes the mad attempt, much as Orfeo attempts in vain to use force to secure his wife. Yet, heroic as Heurodis may seem in her attempt to save herself, her actions are, in nature, nonetheless representative of passionate excess. Heurodis represents an honest (true) display of her emotions, but also the extremity of public bereavement, and her barrage of words as she tells Orfeo of her ordeal under the ympe tree further presents her "riotousness" in her inability to stem the flow of her story.<sup>22</sup> In her lament to Orfeo after her dream visitation from the Fairy King, Heurodis explains her terror. She begins by telling him: "Ac now we mot delen ato / —Do þi best, for y mot go" (But now we must part. / —Do what you will, but I must go, 125-6). Orfeo is understandably distraught and not willing to accept this seemingly arbitrary separation, telling her that he goes with her wherever she goes

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<sup>21</sup> St. Brigit is one such example of a holy woman who self-mutilates as an act of self-protection.

<sup>22</sup> Curtis R. H. Jirsa and other critics have noted that the translation of *ympe-tre* into "grafted tree" or even "apple tree," as Bliss sometimes calls it in his prefatory material in his edition of *Sir Orfeo*, is uncertain (Jirsa, Curtis R. H. "In the Shadow of the Ympe-Tre: Arboreal Folklore in *Sir Orfeo*." *English Studies* 89.2 (2008): 141-151).

(129-30). He has not yet understood the impact of her plight and believes that he can control the situation by calming his wife with reassuring words. Heurodis continues with the horrifying details of her experience, claiming that the Fairy King took her, and that he promises to come again the next day to bring her back to his kingdom permanently:

‘Loke, dame, to-morwe þatow be  
 Riȝt here vnder þis ympe-tre,  
 & þan þou schalt wiþ ous go,  
 & liue wiþ ous euer-mo;  
 & ȝif þou makest ous y-let,  
 Whar þou be, þou worst y-fet,  
 & to-tore þine limes al,  
 þat noþing help þe no schal;  
 & þei þou best so to-torn,  
 ȝet þou worst wiþ ous y-born.’ (165-74)

(See to it, Madame, that tomorrow you are right here under this grafted tree, and then you shall go with us, and live with us forevermore; and even if you see fit to impede us, obstruct though you may, by seeking to get ill, or tearing yourself limb from limb, nothing that you do will help you; and even having torn yourself to pieces, you will still be taken away with us.)<sup>23</sup>

Regardless of the Fairy King’s words, Heurodis commits the very acts he cites as useless attempts to prevent her fate. Like Orfeo, she attempts to control the situation—to be princely in her own right as the queen. She does tear herself to shreds, become ill (mentally), and seek help, all of which fail to result in her exemption from fairy abduction and result, instead, in the public belief that she is utterly mad. It is clear from her relaying of the events of her “dream” and her attempt to awaken from this nightmare that Heurodis had a terrifying experience and that this experience leads to her excessive display of grief that presents as mania. Yet, hers is a reaction that Orfeo will not be allowed, or allow himself, to imitate; while Heurodis, as a woman, is granted a very public mode of resistance and mourning, Orfeo is not.

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<sup>23</sup> I have translated these lines for clarity rather than attempting the poetic.

Heurodis finally, after Orfeo speaks to her, lies “stille ate last” (117), indicating both physical and mental exhaustion as well as her final resignation that there is nothing she can do to prevent the next day’s events. When she does regain her senses, the first thing she does is “wepe swiþe fast” (weep excessively; 118), suggesting a physical manifestation of her exhaustion, her sorrow at facing the inevitable, and her deep melancholia. Indeed, after sharing her tale with Orfeo, Heurodis is silenced. Oren Falk asserts that this apparent mutism “indicates her profound trauma” (260), which is a reasonable reading, but added to this trauma, we may add Heurodis’ profound grief for what she already knows is lost. After her chaotic outpouring of words in the telling of her story, not a single word is recorded for Heurodis as she is reduced to a voiceless body that has been publicly purged of its true feelings in an impromptu act of lament. She is no longer riot; indeed, she practically disappears even before her final abduction by the Fairy King and becomes, like the fairies who whisk her away, like a vapor able to permeate the boundaries of life and death, mortal and fairy. Additionally, though, Heurodis’ open mourning, despite its public excess, seems also to have been cathartic, finally bringing a release to the tension of her terror and her madness. Sharing the truth of her situation in words and her feelings toward them in gestures finally calms her and her calm can be as much acceptance as it can resignation to what is to come. In this, her true grief is more useful than Orfeo’s solitary moment in his chamber and more immediately productive than his ten years in the wilderness. Heurodis has been forcefully abducted, and will be again, which leads to her ultimate madness. We do not learn until Orfeo entreats his queen to speak that her madness, like that of the men of which I write, stems, in large part, from her despair at losing her husband and her place—she is to be bereft of all that

she knows and loves. Heurodis' public excess thus serves, initially, as a foil to Orfeo's apparent early stoicism and exemplifies the antithesis of what is expected of Orfeo as a knight and king.

### Mapping Orfeo's Grief

Orfeo's grief begins at the moment when he learns that Heurodis, his beloved wife, has awoken mad from her nap under a grafted tree in the castle garden and has been brought to her chamber, still in a fit of panic and unresponsive to all attempts at help. She is calmed enough to respond only at the woeful questioning of Orfeo, who has come to the bedside in her privy chamber to find her fitful, pale as death, and bloody from self-inflicted scratches to her face (97-116). Though Heurodis has not yet been permanently borne away, she has been visited by her abductor, taken against her will, and threatened with her inevitable fate. During his conversation with Heurodis, Orfeo betrays his grief by exclaiming "A!," "O we!," and "Allas!," but his gestures fail to convey his deep emotions, and his words can be construed less as words of sorrow at his impending loss than words of concern over how to prevent it. While in Heurodis' chamber, Orfeo still behaves as a controlled, decision-making king by talking Heurodis to rationality and making a decision to defend her with a force of his retainers.

After his valiant attempt with a thousand of his men to surround Heurodis to prevent her abduction, Orfeo finally breaks down, though not publically. He goes alone to his chamber where he falls into a swoon and weeps and cries loudly and long until his life was nearly "y-spent" (199). The line that follows is telling in that it suggests Orfeo's sense of utter powerlessness: "—Per was non amendement" (200). He cannot change

what is. He cannot fix the damage. He cannot bring Heurodis back. Heurodis is gone and he is powerless to change that fact. This line also suggests that there is no consolation for him, which is reiterated in the scene that follows when he faces his court, whose pleas that he remain on the throne fall on deaf ears. Not only are his courtiers *unable* to counsel or console him, but he will also not allow himself to be consoled.

Orfeo has already been put to the test when Heurodis relays her dream and its future reality to him. His fervent denial that this abduction will come to pass, his words of love and solidarity with Heurodis, and his exclamatory responses indicate a heightened level of emotion that could be construed as a loss of self-control and momentary lapse in reason, which is witnessed by, at least, the ten knights who have accompanied him to the queen's chamber (99). Yet, his outburst could most likely be read as justified anger, since his wife—his “property”—has been damaged, and thus would seem a right and natural reaction for a king and a man.<sup>24</sup> In fact, Orfeo exhibits control after speaking with his wife and takes counsel with his men (“He asked conseyl at ich man”; he asked each man for counsel; 178), as Brinton notes a good king should do, as to how to proceed. His good counsel has none to offer (“Ac no man him help no can”; but no man could help him; 180), and Orfeo makes the fateful decision to take up arms and attempt to prevail with military might. Thus, while his counselors seem to find the facts of Heurodis' situation to

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<sup>24</sup> As Dominique Battles rightly notes, many critics have linked the loss of Heurodis with the loss of kingdom. “Orfeo's failure . . . to protect the queen becomes, therefore, not simply a personal loss but a military defeat of sorts, witnessed by hundreds of fighting men, to a foe whose land holdings, as far as we can tell, outclass Orfeo's own” (“*Sir Orfeo* and English Identity.” *Studies in Philology* 107.2 (2010): 179-211. 179). See also Edward Donald Kennedy, “Sir Orfeo as *Rex inutilis*.” *Annuaire medievale* 17 (1976): 88–110; A. S. G. Edwards, “Marriage, Harping and Kingship: The Unity of *Sir Orfeo*.” *American Benedictine Review* 32 (1981): 282–91; and Andrea Pisani Babich, “The Power of the Kingdom and the Ties That Bind in *Sir Orfeo*.” *Neophilologus* 82 (1998): 477–86.

be beyond their control, Orfeo insists that this is a controllable situation. This is, on the one hand, a kingly move, but on the other, a thinly disguised attempt at maintaining his public veneer and controlling his true emotions by controlling the situation.

Orfeo does remain in control before his court. He does the kingly thing. The poet draws a distinction here; rather than weeping publicly over Heurodis—and his military loss—Orfeo makes the appearance of being in control of his reason while his men mourn, and takes to the solace and privacy of his chamber where no one can see him, save us, the readers. Here, he “swoned opon þe ston, / & made swiche diol & swiche mon / Þat neiȝe his liif was y-spent” (swooned upon the stone floor and made such dolorous cries and moans that his life was nearly spent; 197-9). Orfeo swoons when he loses Heurodis, suggesting that this act, as well as weeping and moaning, is not detrimental in itself. Rather, it is the public display of weakness that is troublesome for the nobleman, and especially for a king. Orfeo’s private swooning and lamentations in his chamber allow him to save face among his subjects as a man in control—a kingly man. That he grieves so copiously, however, is significant. The controlled man in Heurodis’ chamber and at the site of her disappearance is but a façade. The true Orfeo suffers his loss deeply. He swoons. He cries and moans over his loss for hours to the point of exhaustion. He feels deeply, but he feels alone; because no one is there to witness, or more importantly, to share his grief, it remains hidden and “dishonest.” This seems to be his real grief, but it is not truly presented, and does not, therefore, allow his people to witness the “true man.” As a result of his loss, Orfeo decides to set aside the façade of kingship and put on the mantle of pilgrimage, mourning, penance, and take to the woods to lament there.



As we have seen already in Chapter One, Yvain takes his bereavement outside of the court and polite society and moves the excessive wildness of his grief to the wilds of the forest. Here, the nobleman is free to lose his mind to his melancholy and regroup, once again in control of his reason, with the courtly set.<sup>25</sup> Similarly, having privately expressed his grief in his chamber—a luxury only a high noble would have—Orfeo then follows the literary trope of enacting his sorrow in the wilderness. The poem suggests that fleeing to the forest where sorrow need not be contained seems to be more attractive than waiting for snatches of personal time in which to take to the privy chamber and grieve in measured and reasoned portions. Thus, Orfeo must go to the forest to weep and grieve over his loss, this being the implications of his stated reason for departure. Though the Orpheus of myth goes to the Otherworld for the express purpose of finding Eurydice, there is no evidence of such intent with Orfeo. R. R. Gros Louis, Baldwin, and Penelope Doob all concur that “there is no search” (Gros Louis 16), no fulfilling of a promise to remain together (Baldwin 136), and no conscious “setting out to find” Heurodis (Doob 184). Orfeo never says to his court that he is going to rescue her, only that she is gone and that her *loss*, not her *recovery*, is the reason for his departure.

#### The Blow to Orfeo’s Masculinity

Typically, *lais* find their protagonists in the forest setting in search of adventure. That Orfeo goes to the woods to mourn rather than to seek his queen suggests that Orfeo

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<sup>25</sup> Modern grief theory, such as that established by John Bowlby, Colin Murray Parkes, and others formulate a pattern that closely aligns with that established in these texts and addressed here in relation to *Sir Orfeo*. Bowlby, in particular, notes that grief usually follows the pattern, though not particularly in this order or in its entirety. See note 18 in this chapter.

is a different kind of hero. That he loses in a military display and is never seen in the course of the tale as militarily successful is also a marker of his difference. He is, nonetheless, given the opportunity to present himself as the conventional romance hero. Orfeo's status as king serves to effectively rally his troops to action, to save Heurodis from her impending abduction. The troops, as good subjects and soldiers, are willing to lay down their lives in Heurodis' defense: "Þai made scheltrom in ich a side, / & sayd þai wold þere abide / & dye þer euerichon, / Er þe quen schuld fram hem gon" (They protected her from every side, and all said they would remain there and die there before they would let the queen be taken; 187-90). Still, Heurodis is gone without a trace, despite Orfeo's best efforts to prevent her loss. He also could not go with her into the Otherworld, and into her madness and virtual death. When she disappears, he suffers the sorrow that accompanies loss rather than determination to get her back. Unlike the kidnapping of Guinevere by Meleagant in *Lancelot* and numerous other stories of abduction in the romances, there is no sense that Heurodis is retrievable. No one saw her abductors. No one knew where to look. As with death, Heurodis was simply gone and there appears to be "no amendement."

Orfeo's inability to protect Heurodis results in an additional loss—a blow to his masculinity. He was unable to keep his wife spotless and without blemish: her face is now bloodied and scarred by her own hand and she wears the mental wounds of her sorrow. And while Orfeo is bodily safe and remains in his kingdom, Heurodis is both wounded and gone. Orfeo has failed to act as a good husband and king, and this feeling of ineptitude is making itself visible in his refusal to be consoled and his relatively quick decision to leave his kingdom.

He does what he can to save her and when this fails, he engages in the “rite of separation” common to the grieving (Goodland 10). Orfeo’s deep affection is significant because it provides a reason for Orfeo’s deep grief. His is not the ritualized public lament of the socially bereaved, but rather the personal grief of one who has lost his beloved. Orfeo’s reactions in all scenes that include both him and Heurodis attest to his love for her. After Heurodis tells him she must go and explains why, he claims, perhaps hyperbolically, that he would rather lay down his own life (“Leuer me were to lete mi liif”) than to lose her (177-8). However, once she is gone, he does not, after all, die. But, what follows serves as evidence that what he is feeling is not simple anger at the threat of lost goods or kingdom—that which his public persona conveyed— but is heart-sickness at the thought of losing the wife to whom he has become emotionally attached. While he may not die bodily, he does give up his life as king and social figure, effectively dying to the world.

Neal writes of the “social and psychological aspects” of gender identity, in which the private and social selves are inextricably linked (6). Neal cites David Gary Shaw’s definition of the pre-modern social self, explaining that the society in which the individual operates views that individual through a “bundle of perceptions” (Shaw 15). Nonetheless, Neal observes that “the social self is still a self” despite its social relations (28). Furthermore, he adds:

This does not mean premodern Europeans had no concept of the individual or conceived their own identities solely in terms of belonging to a group. Social pressures did not seal premodern persons into a limited range of inflexibly formed identities. Their shape was in motion, formed by push and pull, between inside and outside, psyche and culture. (28).

In fact, Neal provides historical evidence of defamation cases and concludes that defamation was so insidious “because it was not defined in terms of what the [defamed man] did or did not *do*. What mattered was what he was” (46). For a man to be labeled means that there is “something wrong with *him*” and his social self, as a result, shrinks (47). Orfeo has not been defamed by others, but his public inability to save Heurodis carries the same impact as defamation. He is defeated by the Fairy King and rendered ineffective and this social defeat psychically wounds him. Orfeo’s disappointment in himself as a husband is certainly a private, ‘interior’ pain that he cannot share with anyone else. But, there is an ‘exterior’ component to his ineptitude, as well: his failure to uphold his chivalric and royal obligations.<sup>26</sup>

Thus Orfeo’s public, “exterior” self is also judged by his moment of private “interior” weakness and he is, once again, deemed lacking. This public failure is turned inward, though, as he seems to be filled with self-recrimination rather than blame from his retainers or subjects. They, after all, beg him to stay and they, too, weep for the loss of Heurodis. Despite the well wishes of his people, his sorrow at having failed Heurodis reflects also his sorrow over having failed those same people who now support him as the boundary between public and private once again proves permeable and Orfeo’s private thoughts impact his public choices. As Caldwell claims, Heurodis’ abduction “creates not only a rift in the marriage and the kingdom, but a rape of Orfeo’s authority and identity” (297). That is, Orfeo’s authority as a kingly figure has been forcefully taken from him

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<sup>26</sup> It is worth mentioning, however, that the “interior” and “exterior,” while they seem like easily demarcated extremes, are not sharply delineated, as the social often impinges upon the psychic in shaping identity and “individual” beliefs. Similarly, the private, “interior” self, particularly of recognized authority figures or people of elevated social stature, frequently affect the social, “exterior” world.

through the abduction of Heurodis; he had no way to defend himself from the Fairy King's assault to his identity as able king and valiant knight who capably defends his kingdom, his lady, and his honor. He, like Heurodis, has been secreted away (*raptus*) by this fairy abduction, and he opts to remove himself physically by heading to the forest.

### The Forest of Lament

Orfeo explicitly states that he has decided to leave Traciens for the forest because he has lost Heurodis, who is the fairest lady he ever knew (209-10). His grief over his loss thus serves as his motive to take to the forest. As with Yvain, Orfeo appears to be in relative control of his decision to go into the woods, which we have seen is customary for this man. The Arthurian knight, as I have already argued, *opted* to go to the forest and go mad or die rather than consciously live with the loss of his beloved. As a responsible king, however, Orfeo must put some things in order before he goes and we see him, still apparently reasonable, call together his advisors and appoint his steward as regent of Traciens and to command them to call together a parliament to elect a new king once word of his, Orfeo's, death has reached them. However, while this move seems prudent and reasonable, he has not taken this decision at the advice of his counsel as is customary for a good king; he has made a unilateral decision—certainly his right as monarch—and demands that his subjects abide by it, lashing out at them when they cry and beg for him to stay—“Do way! It schal be so!” (Stop it! It shall be so!; 226)—in a public outburst of emotion that is heretofore unprecedented.

What is more, his decision is made based on passion rather than reason. He is compelled to leave because his “quen y-lore,” who was “Be fairest leuedi þat euer was

bore” (he lost his queen, who was the fairest lady ever born; 209-10). He is not going into exile because he has been deposed or because his life is in peril. Nor has he been advised to leave the realm in more capable hands. He is imposing this exile on himself because he has lost his wife. The poem intimates that Orfeo abandons his kingdom purely for emotional reasons rather than matters pertaining to the governance of the state. His failure on Heurodis’ behalf equals failure on behalf of his entire kingdom. That his people want him to stay, however, establishes this failure as the creation of his overwrought mind rather than a popular fact. Because he is basing this decision on his grief, and in spite of his earlier private mourning and show of making arrangements for the care of his kingdom, his decision risks being perceived as an unkingly one. He appears to be putting private grief before the public good, which is, in Traciens’ society, neither kingly nor manly. In this respect, Dean Baldwin may be right in asserting that Orfeo “is acting desperately, perhaps irrationally,” but not in his argument that Orfeo’s decision to leave Traciens for the forest is without motive (136).

While grief is given as the primary “motive,” or reason, for Orfeo’s exile, the trope of the forest lament, as explained in Chapter One, is a common one, as are tales of the wilderness penitent and pilgrim. Orfeo grieves, yes, but by donning the *sclavin* hem, once again, seems to confuse a role for the man who fills it. Unlike Yvain, the attachment to the role of king has not led to authentic grief. While kingship and its apparent failure is part of his loss, for Orfeo the nature of the loss proves less problematic than how to mourn it. He understands that he has lost his wife and his idealized image as a king and knight, but he has not yet found a satisfactory method of bereavement. He came closest in his private chamber, but no one is there to share the grief, the chamber lament proved

empty; so, he turns to a trope as a potential outlet, shedding the trappings of kingship and donning the garb of his new role, which will prove to be, mostly, equally inauthentic and unsatisfactory.

By removing himself, Orfeo seems to accept that his grief is not appropriate for the public social realm, so he leaves his kingdom to those whom he believes still have their good wits about them. Contrary to popular opinion and against common sense, Orfeo acts as a good English king and, as Susan Crane has suggested, does what is best for the common good of his people (138).<sup>27</sup> Lerer and Nicholson, similarly, both point out that Orfeo's "last act as king reaffirms the political order" (Lerer 98), and conforms "to the familiar doctrine of kingly obligation" (Nicholson 166). Orfeo's initial decision to leave may not seem rational, but this act is. Like Lancelot and Yvain he is still in enough control of his faculties to perform rationally by focusing on social needs, saving the ultimate "irrationality" of individual grief for the forest.

Hence he eschews his role as a man and ruler. He leaves everything behind, takes up his harp, dons a *sclavin*, and heads for the woods. Lerer and Baldwin both assert that Orfeo goes to the forest because it is a literary conceit to do so—the formula calls for it. On one level, they are correct. "His time in the wilderness, then," writes Baldwin, "is best understood not as a time of penance nor of trial nor of purification; rather, Orfeo is (unconsciously) following the tradition of lovers generally and romance lovers in particular until his lady can be restored to him" (137). Lerer, giving Orfeo a more active

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<sup>27</sup> Crane is here referring to the English focus on the common good of the kingdom over the continental concern with "[validating] the condition of the aristocracy" (138). Although *Sir Orfeo* self-identifies as a Breton lai like those of Marie de France, the Auchinleck, Ashmole, and Harley manuscripts are all English and reflect English attitudes and characteristics. Orfeo, therefore, behaves accordingly and keeps the good of the people in mind.

role in his choice to go to the forest, says, “Such a journey enacts the willing isolation of the hero from society; it helps him come to terms with himself apart from the demands of feudal and marital life” (98). Doob and others, those against whom Baldwin is reacting, latch onto the lines in which Orfeo prepares himself for his sojourn into the forest as evidence that he is embarking on a personal pilgrimage that both likens him to Christ and to a penitent. In support of this argument Doob figures Orfeo as a “holy mad man” who, like Christ and the desert fathers, must face temptations and hardship in the desert in penance for sins or to fulfill their spiritual obligations.<sup>28</sup>

The evidence for this penchant to make Orfeo a penitential pilgrim or Christ figure resides, in part, in his eschewing of worldly things, his bare feet, and the trading in of his kingly garb for pilgrim’s weeds—the *sclauin* of the poem (228). Bliss glosses *sclauin* as “pilgrim’s mantle” (70), and traces its roots to the Anglo-Norman *esclavine*. The *Old French Dictionary* defines *esclavine* as a “hooded cape (worn by travelers, pilgrims, etc.)” (Esclavin). While Bliss’s definition is very specific and affords Doob and those who prefer the “Orfeo as pilgrim” model a solid foundation for such an argument, the definition provided by Hindley, et. al., is broader and allows for some play in the actual use of this “hooded cape.” We know Orfeo is traveling; yet there is no evidence that his

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<sup>28</sup> Banishment as a punishment for crimes is another option, since Orfeo finds himself guilty of failure to protect Heurodis and his kingdom. For more on banishment as punishment, see Valerie Flint’s essay “Space and Discipline in Early Medieval Europe” (*Medieval Practices of Space*. Ed. Barbara Hanawalt and Michal Kobialka. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2000. 149-66) in which she speaks of penitential pilgrimage as a means of “rehabilitation” for the penitent (161). It may be of interest to see that one particular punishment found in a Burgundian penitential Flint studied was for “an exile for ten years” (161). Most intriguingly, this punishment was meant for a clergyman who “murders a near relative” (161). Though not within the scope of this project, the connection between this sentence and Orfeo’s ten-year-long self-exile and his guilt over Heurodis’ death could prove most interesting to explore.



journey is a pilgrimage. Even Doob, so intent on fashioning Orfeo as a type of Christ, admits that “the object of Orfeo’s pilgrimage is obscure” (185). The garment may simply signal Orfeo’s movement from one locale to the next, also signifying his movement from one stage of mourning to another as each new space signifies a new turn in his process. Through its own shifting codes, the mantle becomes a multi-purpose costume that enables Orfeo to signal to the social world his own separateness—a separateness that will lead to difference and change in the social paradigm. In this respect, it is, as with his kingly trappings, a costume or façade that allows him to play a role, though exactly which role he intends to play other than that of forest lamenter is unclear. Indeed, the costume will later allow him entrance into the societies of the Fairy King and the court of Traciens as a beggar and minstrel. The *sclavin* thus serves as a visual “pass” to each of the realms he enters, changing in purpose as needed and indicating its use as a prop.

When he first adorns himself with the *sclavin* he has eschewed his kingly garb to abscond to the forest and mourn. What this *sclavin* represents is both simple travel garb and, in conjunction with his bare feet and lack of shirt or any other garments suggesting more comfortable clothing, an outward sign of his despair.<sup>29</sup> Though this event occurred some one hundred years after the penning of this lai, it resembles the account of the madman in the forest who accosts Henry VI and effectively instigates the king’s initial bout with insanity: “The homespun clothing, the bare head, the naked feet of the prophet

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<sup>29</sup> Goodland writes of cultural mourning rituals in which women are the primary mourners, “Just as the dead are separated from the community, so the mourners mark themselves off from society by remaining unkempt and denying social interaction during the period of mourning. The disheveled hair and bare feet of mourning women signify this state, which in some cultures might last for up to a year following the burial” (10). Like these women, Orfeo leaves barefooted and disheveled to retreat from society in his mourning. His disheveled appearance increases along with his time in the forest.

of doom [the accosting madman] were, for the king's men, sure signs of madness. The forest setting, the poor clothing and the unmannerly behavior were socially, and therefore spiritually, disorderly" (Neaman 120). The parallels between the description of this madman and Orfeo are astonishing and will be even more so as his time in the forest extends to ten years. What this example demonstrates is that Orfeo's *sclavin*, this unadorned and singular garment, is the mantle of Orfeo's melancholy and later brush with mania—his madness; but it is also his mourning dress.<sup>30</sup> He dresses in the *sclavin* at this point as a public indication of his mourning over Heurodis. He is, as a result, engaging in the ritualized mourning practice of donning the mourning garment at the same time that he eschews such practices by going into the woods to grieve individually rather than finding satisfactory mourning in social practices, whether externally or internally imposed.

Orfeo's journey into the woods, then, goes beyond mere pilgrimage, while it embraces its features of sojourn and dress. As Saunders and others have noted, the forest is a liminal space. In the case of Orfeo it represents not only the "limen to the Otherworld," as Saunders so beautifully argues (133), but also the space between life and death, and the period during which Orfeo seeks his authentic grief and himself as a "true man." This is the space of bereavement and despair. But the space of grief represented by

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<sup>30</sup> In *Mourning Dress* (London: G. Allin and Unwin, 1983), Lou Taylor states that medieval mourners, both men and women, "wore black, draped gowns for mourning," the men's gowns having "developed from the gowns worn in the sixth century by Benedictine monks" (70), having large hoods with which they could completely cover their heads. Black was not always the color of mourning, however, as "Samite brown" is recorded in Chaucer and elsewhere (70-1). By this description, Orfeo's *sclavin* could easily be seen as very similar to mourning dress rather more so than to a penitent's hairshirt, though a pilgrim's weeds would not necessarily have to be those of a penitent and could also resemble the loose, flowing, hooded robes of the mourner.

the forest is also a bridging of the two sides of the limen that will bridge the divide between life and death, but also between the artificial Orfeo who relies on the veneer of his social roles and the Orfeo who comes to respect public displays of grief as “true.” In this in between space, Orfeo has essentially made himself dead to the courtly world, but cannot yet enter the Otherworld that mirrors back the artifice of courtly trappings, nor is he yet able to enter Traciens as a “true man.” That Orfeo is able to sustain himself on the offerings of the forest, but barely, suggests his liminality during this period. He is alive, but precariously so, as we are told that he has grown terribly thin as a result of his misfortune: “Al his bodi was oway duine” (his body had dwindled away; 261). That he resides alongside death is evidenced in the line “Bot wilde wormes bi him strikeþ” (But wild worms [serpents] by him glide [slither]; 252). Though this line could refer to snakes (serpents were often called “worms” in Middle English) and therefore unholy and evil torments or actual vile neighbors of the slithery sort, it could also refer to simple earthworms. If the latter, Orfeo is side-by-side with the worms, who make meals of detritus and dead flesh, attesting to his proximity to death and serving as a *memento mori* for both himself and the readers of this story. This reminder is both of his own mortality and that of his beloved Heurodis, both mad, and both effectively dead to the world of Traciens’ courtly mortal men and women. If Orfeo originally entered the forest in grief-induced adherence to a role, the role has taken on a reality that becomes transformative and Orfeo’s melancholic state becomes real. The man of action and controlled rule becomes mired in the torpor of melancholia.

Another telling clue that Orfeo’s journey is not a simple penitential one, or a pilgrimage of other sorts, is in the description of his beard. Its length—“to his girdle-

stede” (waist)—is explained by the ten years he has been in the forest (266). But the other descriptors bear humoral explanation. His beard is “blac & rowe” (black and unkempt; 265). In ten years’ time we would expect to read that Orfeo’s beard is grizzled with age, but instead, his beard is described as black. Doob expends considerable effort in explaining Orfeo’s “blackness” as a manifestation of his status as, first, a wild man, and second, Christ, explaining that “many early church fathers believed that Christ was physically ugly” (192). This, she claims, was their sign of suffering and a means of tricking Satan, in Christ’s case, and the Fairy King in the case of Orfeo. A much more likely cause of Orfeo’s “blackness” is his melancholy, which the beard’s unruliness also suggests.<sup>31</sup> Melancholia, Isidore of Seville explains, is “black bile,” so named “because it is a large amount of bile mixed with the dregs of black blood” (IV.v.4), and is the humor responsible for causing the state of melancholy. Galen claims to be able to recognize an

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<sup>31</sup> This reading of both melancholy and mourning in *Sir Orfeo* recommends itself to a treatment of Freud’s “Mourning and Melancholia.” However, unlike Freud I do not read mourning and melancholy as separate but similar events wherein melancholy suggests the loss or diminishment of ego and mourning the loss of an object separate from the self. Rather, I view melancholy here as a stage of mourning that the men in these works go through as a part of the larger mourning practice and pattern. While I do not disagree with Freud’s understanding of what types of loss melancholy and mourning are, I aver that mourning often includes a period during which the individual blames himself for the loss of the beloved and wishes to die. This desire for death after the loss of a loved one is common to the traditional lament (see Goodland, 18, for example), and suggests the melancholic loss of ego with its self-recriminations and wish to die. I do not, however, agree that every individual or character who mourns will pass through this period of melancholy, nor do I argue that melancholics are always in mourning. What I mean to say here is that the men in these texts, particularly in the romances and in Chaucer’s *Book of the Duchess*, do go through a period of melancholy in which they experience a loss of ego that must be reclaimed by going through the despair of utter loss. Consonant with Freud, however, the periods of both melancholy and mourning end after an unspecified period of time. One more point that I must address here is my use of terminology. Whereas Freud uses the term “melancholia” to refer to the state of depression, I use this term in the medieval sense to refer to the substance of black bile believed to be responsible for the illness and the term “melancholy” to refer to the mental state itself.

overabundance of “atrabilious humor” (melancholia) in a person if they “look lean, darker and hairy” (Siegel 195). Thus, the black hair belies the black mood, the leanness, darkness, and hairiness admitting to the melancholy. Similarly, Avicenna claims that melancholics “show . . . the same blackness and thickness of hair and beard” (Radden 77).<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, he confirms that those suffering from melancholy are recognizable by, among other things, their “multitude of body hair [and] its powerful blackness” (Radden 77).

That Orfeo spends so much time close to the ground and digging and rooting for tiny morsels to eat recommends itself to Avicenna’s description of melancholic behaviors, which include “a constant looking at only one thing, and at the earth” (77). And Neaman explains that black bile is “cold and dry like earth” (7). As noted above, Orfeo’s connection to the earth may also be indicative of what Avicenna sees in “certain ones” as a “love [of] death” (Avicenna 77). Many other descriptors used by Avicenna (i.e., fear, quick anger) do not seem to fit Orfeo, but his “bad judgment” in his decision to leave Traciens and his “delight in solitude” certainly fit the bill (Radden 77). One additional clue is his quickly changing emotions as he watches the hunting scene and laughs aloud to see such “fair game” in the success of the hawking fairy ladies (315). This is the only moment of levity we see from Orfeo during his period in the wilderness

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<sup>32</sup> Avicenna’s writings on the humors, among other medical treatises, were widely accepted throughout the Middle Ages and were used as standard medical texts in such universities as Montpellier and Louvain in France and Bologna in Italy. For more on Avicenna’s popularity in medieval Europe, see the following: Leah Goodman, *Avicenna* (London: Routledge, 1992); Nancy G. Siraisi, *Avicenna in Renaissance Italy: The “Canon” and Medical Teaching in Italian Universities after 1500* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1987); Mazhar H. Shah, *The General Principles of Avicenna’s Canon in Medicine* (Karachi: Nareed Clinic, 1966); and O. Cameron Gurner, *A Treatise on the Canon of Medicine of Avicenna* (London: Luzac, 1930).

and this unusual laughter could be construed as the laughter of one of those, as Avicenna notes, “certain melancholiacs who laugh whenever they imagine something that pleases and delights them, especially those whose melancholy is pure melancholy” (Radden 77).

That his term in the forest extends to ten years suggests the intensity of his suffering and grief. Though we are not privy to any anxious moments or self-reproaches during these years, his depression and loneliness are not in doubt. His depression has been previously discussed and upon his departure we learn that “No man most wip him go” (233), revealing that his is a solitary journey. That he finds nothing to please him, save his harp—no “kniȝtes of priis” or “leuedis” (249-50), only “wilde wormes” and the animals of the forest keep him company (252)—confirms the loneliness of his venture. Though he has his harp—itself a potential cure for the melancholy that plagues him—the joy it brings is fleeting, and when he stops playing, “No best bi him abide nold” (No beasts would remain with him; 280). The only other company he has while in the forest is the occasional trooping fairies, but he always watches their sport and play from a distance, never engaging in conversation or pleasant repast with them. For ten years he suffers the lasting effects of his grief, a fact that separates his sojourn from the typical *aventure* of medieval romance in which the time spent adventuring rarely lasts for more than a few years. Orfeo’s ten years is unprecedented,<sup>33</sup> and fits more convincingly with

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<sup>33</sup> Doob comments on the ten-year exile, stating that the significance of the length of time is “uncertain,” and offers suggestions that hold religious significance to explain this period of time (n. 183). For example, she suggests a connection between the number ten and the fulfillment of the law—Christ’s and Orfeo’s—that suggests that Orfeo is a type of Christ. She also equates the number ten with perfection (the Ten Commandments as the perfection of law) and the perfection of Christ through suffering (Christ as the fulfillment of law). I find her explanations interesting, but dubious. The likening of Orfeo to Christ, particularly in viewing the number ten as perfection through suffering, does not seem to work in the case of Orfeo who, despite his ordeal, does not suffer torture at the hands of

the mourning inherent in the Old English elegy, as Battles argues, in which wanderers may grieve indefinitely. Battles connects *Sir Orfeo* to the earlier elegies, stating, “the protagonist [of elegy] finds himself alone in the wild, hostile landscape cut off from his civilization as the result of either natural or political catastrophe” (197). The exile of the elegy can also, she contends, “express a state of mind, not necessarily a physical condition, and both types of exile, mental and physical, come into play in *Sir Orfeo*” (197).

When he sees Heurodis again after ten years, but is unable to speak with her, Orfeo is full of “wo” at having, once again, to be separated from her (331), but also at, once again, reacting to his grief in a more authentic manner, similar to his breakdown in his privy chamber. Yet, he is, once again, alone. At this moment, we witness Orfeo at his self-reproachful best and we can only assume that this fresh encounter reopens the wounds of his earlier failure to keep Heurodis safe. He laments, “Allas! To long last mi liif, / When y no dar nouȝt wiþ mi wiif / (No hye to me) o word speke” (Alas! I have lived too long when I dare not even speak a word to my wife and she does not hasten to me; 335-7). He admonishes himself for his inability to speak to her and, once again, to keep her close to himself. After ten years of separation, Orfeo has grown thin and hirsute from his time in the woods while Heurodis’ appearance has remained the same. Heurodis recognizes her husband despite his physical change and is moved to tears, but words do

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others. His exile, which brings about his suffering, is self-imposed, not undertaken for the wrong-doing of others. Also, unlike Christ, while Orfeo is a more complete man, he is certainly not perfect at the end of the tale. Nor does the biblical passage cited associate the number ten with the fulfillment of the law in an overt fashion. It does refer to God’s commandments [wouldn’t this be the overt reference, to the Decalogue?] and Christ’s fulfillment of them, but it is unclear how Christ as fulfillment of the law relates to Orfeo or how Orfeo “fulfills the law.”

not come, this small gesture recalling her earlier grief. Heurodis' lack of speech is perhaps nowhere more heart wrenching than when Orfeo encounters her in the forest riding in the wild hunt of the fairy ladies. We know that the fairy ladies quickly whisk her away when they realize that the forest beggar is Heurodis' husband, which could explain her lack of speech. Yet, she does not even attempt to cry out to him, to say hello, to call over her shoulder. She remains silent. Granted, so does Orfeo in this moment, but his tongue is loosened once he meets the gatekeeper to the Otherworld and he begins the dialogue that will lead to Heurodis' release, and to his changed perspective about public image.

He is so reproachful of his own behavior that he wishes repeatedly for his own death, saying, “”Whi nil deþ now me slo?” (Why will death not slay me?; 332), and bemoaning the fact “þat y no miȝt / Dye now after þis siȝt” (that I may not die now, after this sight; 334). Adding to these recent statements Orfeo's connection with the worms, it becomes clear that Orfeo's melancholy has reached the threshold of despair and he is seriously entertaining thoughts of his own death. He finally decides to throw caution to the wind, carelessly announcing, “Of liif no deþ me no reche” (I don't care whether I live or die; 342), and follows the fairy huntresses into the hill.

### Into the *Roche*

Ironically, it is Orfeo's desire for death that revives him and compels him into action. Having accidentally encountered Heurodis, Orfeo renews his efforts to reclaim her and save her from her fate. This glimpse of his wife serves as a reminder of his earlier joy in “the courtly rituals once practiced by him” (Saunders 140). Saunders continues,



saying “he laughs at a memory of long ago, thus participating in an alternative reading of the forest as a landscape of sport, and triggering his own action” (140). It is not the sport, however, that pushes him to renew his attachment with Heurodis. While it incites him to take a close look at the hunting party itself, he is not motivated until he risks losing Heurodis again and feels he has nothing more to lose beyond her. Just as grieving according to the perceived social norms of Traciens was inadequate for the enormous grief Orfeo feels, the forest, too, fails to aptly contain his sorrow. Public, socially ritualized mourning, cloistered private laments, and prolonged static grieving in the liminal forest have not satisfactorily provided the mode of grieving that he needs, and Orfeo is prompted to seek another alternative, which he will not find until he encounters the steward in Traciens. However, his experience in the Otherworld opens his eyes to the possibilities of affect through the use of his harp, as well as to the limitations of the kingly veneer, which will open up, in turn, the possibility of open grief and recognition of “true” masculinity.

Heurodis’ appearance after ten years of separation serves as an impetus in Orfeo to shrug off his melancholy and risk uncertainty to reclaim some semblance of his previous joy. While Orfeo has a renewed vigor, it does not initially seem to be for the stuff of life—it is for death, as indicated by his decision to go into the fairy mound with the statement that he does not care if he lives or dies. Thus he re-experiences his urge to be reunited with Heurodis, whether in life or in death. In medieval terms, Orfeo’s melancholia has become burnt, or adust, resulting in mania. The scales have tipped and Orfeo’s melancholic state has potentially edged over into madness.

Melancholy, as we have seen, affects reason (Isidore IV.vii.9). It also leads to “apoplexy and torpor or despondency or fear,” according to Aristotle (Radden 58). Orfeo is no longer despondent or fearful, has lost his torpor, and is demonstrating his cleverness in his dealings with the Fairy King. Having reached the point of despair and toyed with his own death to the point of entering its realm, Orfeo has crossed the boundary between melancholic and manic madness. Neaman’s research explains that, to medieval churchmen, “madmen [are] potential suicides and all suicides proven madmen” (55). Orfeo’s willingness to die, and indeed his active movement toward potential death and the type of Land of the Dead found in *Sir Orfeo’s* Otherworld, presents him now as a madman whose melancholy has reached the point of mania.

Or has he? While Orfeo’s initial instinct is for death, it leads him toward renewed life. His fresh bid for a reunion with Heurodis cements his bond with her and confirms his identity as her spouse while at the same time providing him the potential to break free of the bonds of his melancholy and move forward with his life. Once again, he dons his *sclavin* as he sets out for the fairy mound. Once again, we find slippage of symbolism and terminology. While the poem may recall the earlier reference to the garb of a pilgrim, a reasonable conclusion in conjunction with this embarkation on a journey into the Otherworld, it may also indicate that he is covering his nakedness—once again donning his humanity—or, in light of the current discussion and the fact that he is on the brink of madness and despair, the *sclavin* may also, once again, represent the madman’s mantle. The act of dressing, again, in the *sclavin*, the only garment he wore into the woods, suggests that when he was at the height of his melancholy he remained naked, his bare emotions mirrored in his bare body, expressing the natural “real-ness” of his grief and

separating him from the artifice of courtly convention and ritual lament. Thus the putting on again of the robe signifies a move away from his bare melancholy into something else. Does he dress for death, having decided that he no longer cares whether he lives or dies? Certainly, as Gros Louis contends, “the increasing isolation” Orfeo experiences during his ten years in the forest can be read as “a substitute for death” (247) and this life that he has been living is “a life that approximates death” (247). At this moment, though, Orfeo makes the decision to confront death head-on. By revisiting Heurodis’ “death” and following her to that place where he was previously unable to go, risking suicide by deciding to cross the limen between the forest and the Otherworld of the fairy realm.

Contrary to assertions made by Baldwin that Orfeo has accepted “the inevitability of death,” as well as Heurodis’ loss, as early as his decision to leave Traciens (247, 249), Orfeo does not truly accept this inevitability until he visits the Otherworld. Yes, he has lived alongside death in a liminal state, but the poem suggests that he has not really grasped, despite his apparent acknowledgement and engagement in the grieving process, that death differs from death-like melancholia. Indeed, because Heurodis simply vanished and Orfeo has seen nor heard any sign of her for so long, he has no proof of her death. Once he sees Heurodis in the place of death that is the Otherworld, Orfeo accepts, finally, that she is “dead,” among the other shades, and that he must reorient himself to a new life and Heurodis to a different role in it. By acquiescing to her presence among the others who have been brought to the Otherworld—both dead and mad—Orfeo is certifying her loss. Only after this confirmation can he set about the task of reclaiming her and moving forward with the task of living anew in the kingdom of his former glory rather than in the limen between his former life and Heurodis’ madness or virtual death.

As Lerer has skillfully argued, Orfeo uses his knowledge of kingly behavior and reputation to his advantage once he gains entrance through the gates of the Otherworld (105), demonstrating a clear change in behavior from the torpor of his previous ten years. From the moment he passes through the entrance to fairyland, it is clear that he is dealing with royalty, but also with glories beyond the temporal life of kings. The description of the jeweled city central to the Fairy King's kingdom, complete with a massive castle adorned with flying buttresses and all manner of gothic architectural features, recalls St. John's description of the New Jerusalem in Apocalypse 21.<sup>34</sup> While the buttresses suggest contemporary, temporal architecture, the materials out of which the castle is built suggest an Apocalyptic, or at least an Otherworldly, court. As with the holy city, the kingdom of the Fairy King is adorned with gold, crystal, and sundry precious stones. In The Apocalypse the city is made of "pure gold, like to clear glass" (21:18). The wall of the Fairy King's castle "Was clere & schine as cristal" (was clear and shone like crystal; 358), while the pillars are described as being made of "burnist gold" (burnished gold; 367). Orfeo even wonders that this place could easily be confused for "Þe proude court of Paradis" (376), indicating the religious parallel as well as a description of an earthly court. The comparison of the fairy realm to heaven further attests to Orfeo's brush with mortality, as one usually only glimpses Paradise after death—a point that will figure more prominently in the discussion of *Pearl* to follow.

References to the afterlife aside, even in referring to the Otherworld the poet uses royal terminology; "Þe proude court" indicates not only that Orfeo is in a special place, but also that he understands that he will be dealing with royalty and must use his kingly

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<sup>34</sup> All references to the Bible are from the Douay-Rheims translation of the Vulgate.

acumen to achieve his ends, even if he must pose as a commoner to do so. Traveling solo, as any man or woman must at the moment of death, Orfeo is without his army and the chivalric trappings of his previous kingship. If he is to outwit Death, here represented by the Fairy King, he must use cunning rather than might and enter the castle humbly, as a minstrel. Orfeo has no time to return to Traciens, regain the trust of his men, and gather an army, and his earlier failure to defeat this foe by force must surely have entered his mind. Again citing Lerer, Orfeo “has rejected the display of force which failed him at home and which the fairy king himself had brandished before Heurodis. Rather than offering scenes of conquest, as the classical sources do, the Auchinleck narrator presents patterns of domestication” (105). This choice of Orfeo’s signals a changed—or changing—man. His long melancholy has been broken and he is on the brink of reorganization, and this reintegration with society brings with it a new Orfeo—one who willingly presents a “blak and rowe” visage in a courtly setting, though he does not reveal his true identity to the Fairy King.

Once Orfeo gains entrance to the Otherworld under his minstrel’s disguise, he is surprised at what he finds inside and the reader is sure that this place has an intimate relationship not with eternal life, but rather, with death. There among the beauty and glory of the bejeweled palace are all manner of people who have been brought to the Otherworld in various attitudes of death. The poet lists among the occupants those who died in childbirth, in battle, by choking, drowning, or fire. Those who are, apparently, not dead are said to be “awedde” (400), this word stemming from “wode” (mad), an attribute earlier ascribed to Heurodis by her attendant. Line 390 presents an interesting bit of wordplay that suggests that the dead and the insane appear here together in varying

degrees of dead-ness. Orfeo finds in the castle folks who were “þouʒt dede, & nare nouʒt” (were thought dead, and were not not a bit; 390). This double negative “were not not,” coupled with the “þouʒt dede” that precedes it, implies that those who are there are either believed to be dead (þouʒt dede), or they are not *not a bit* dead (nare nouʒt).<sup>35</sup> That is, there are either those who are certainly dead (or believed to be by their loved ones), and those who are dead to the world through madness, either as a result of their shunning by society or their shunning of it, as Orfeo has done. What this “nare nouʒt” does, then, is to both affirm death and deny it because it is juxtaposed with those believed to be dead despite the acknowledgement that they are not one bit dead—or not at all dead. Madness is thus associated with death, which means that Heurodis, whom Orfeo finds among the other figures, is either dead or not not dead (mad). Indeed, Orfeo himself may now be counted among the “not not dead,” though he has not been summoned by the Fairy King. This portion of the poem makes it clear that Heurodis’ state is considered to be permanent, since she has been brought here by the Fairy King, and that the poem accords Orfeo no intention of rescuing her when he initially enters the forest, though his renewed vision of her drives him to re-engage with courtly society and to reconnect with Heurodis, even if he must don yet another costume and assume another role to do so. By

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<sup>35</sup> According to the Old English Dictionary, double negatives were commonly used through the sixteenth century without causing confusion of meaning (Double Negative). This does not mean, however, that cancelling as we now understand it did not occur in Middle English use of double negatives. However, despite Robert Lowth’s contention in 1762 that “two negatives make an affirmative” in Middle English as they had in classical Latin (Myers, L. M. and Richard L. Hoffman. *The Roots of Modern English* Second ed. Boston: Little Brown, 1979. 216), double negatives were frequently used to reinforce or intensify one another. The “nare nouʒt” above, in its proximity to the figures who were “þouʒt dede,” suggests a degree of dead-ness. There are those believed to have died and then those who are not one bit dead, yet are associated with death and appear in this place of death.

claiming the role of minstrel, however, Orfeo is actually presenting the affective side of his true self. The poet tells us in the beginning of the poem that Orfeo is a harper, and among the best ever heard. This “blak and rowe” man is not *King* Orfeo, but he minstrel Orfeo who knows what it means to feel weakness and sorrow. This is the true Orfeo, stripped of royal trappings, and having surpassed the role of forest lamenter.

### Revisiting Social Conventions

From the beginning of the lai we are told that Orfeo loved to play the harp, was good at playing, and found joy in the music of the harp. During his period in the forest, his harp was the only thing that brought him any pleasure. But, somehow he had always failed to connect the joy of the harp to his happiness with Heurodis, or, more importantly, to whom he was as a man. Now he will use his skill in harping to bargain with the Fairy King for Heurodis. That is, he will use the pleasure of music as a means of positively remembering his beloved wife by connecting it to her release and by affectively acknowledging the part of his masculinity that does not require kingly trappings and social posturing. In other words, Orfeo is operating outside of artifice, even while he uses his art. Music will work in the Fairy King’s land to bring him solace and succor where it had not in the forest because the fairy court, like the court of Traciens, is steeped in the artifice of courtly ritual and artistry, to which the beauty of the place, claims Lerer, attests. The harp, a manmade instrument, and the music it produces, another artificial means like the rituals of lament and mourning, will work in this place whereas it did little to forge connections between Orfeo and the forest creatures that live more naturally. Though the creatures would stop and listen, they were not moved to remain and offer

Orfeo succor or advantages because the forest is the place of nature and truth, even if nature and truth are harsh taskmasters. The courtly realms of man and fairy are ruled by laws, rituals, force, and, when necessary, deceit—all forms of artifice.

Though Lerer's points are well taken concerning the artifice inherent to the manmade instrument and the musical forms that are played on them, music is, at the same time, an outlet for the passions and a means by which a man might express his emotions. That Orfeo was, from the start, an excellent harper suggests that there is more to his character than a staid military leader. In fact, Orfeo is said to be so talented at the harp that there existed "a better harpou in no plas" (32). His harping is, simply put, heavenly: "In on of þe ioies of Paradis, / Swiche melody in his harping is" ([his harping] is as one of the joys of Paradise, it is so melodious; 37-8). Music is one of the seven liberal arts—part of the quadrivium—related to mathematics, and hence, that Orfeo had "leyd þer-on his wittes sharp" to learn it suggest his connection to reason and his use of it here to find a rational solution to his dilemma of how to rescue Heurodis and escape this place. At the same time that music is rational and mathematically measured, Orfeo's ability is compared to heavenly music. Roughly contemporary with the Auchinleck manuscript are the writings of Richard Rolle, a mystic who writes of hearing heavenly music when contemplating Christ. Music in the mystical, heavenly sense is equated as much with the passions as with reason and it is to the combined passion of heavenly music and artifice of its practice and performance that Orfeo turns to rescue his queen, and himself as a true man.

The minstrel's ruse is used to explain Orfeo's unprecedented appearance in the Otherworld to the Fairy King, who is stymied by the fact that he has not requested for



Orfeo to come.<sup>36</sup> It is, the Fairy King surmises, not Orfeo's time to appear in the land of the dead.<sup>37</sup> But, Orfeo tells him, he is a minstrel come to play for the lord of the castle, as is his trade (430-4). Orfeo plays so beautifully, and to the great pleasure of all present, that the Fairy King offers to pay him any price he asks. So begins Orfeo's bargain with Death—a bargain based, says Lerer, "on social convention" (104). He asks for Heurodis, of course, but the Fairy King thinks her, a fair noblewoman "wiþ-ouren lac" (perfect, or without blemish), too precious for such a "lene, rowe & blac" (lean, unkempt, and dark) man (459-60). The Fairy King is, of course, repeating the courtly convention of outward appearances over inner virtue and honest motives. As Lerer and others note, Orfeo is quick to remind the Fairy King that "his willingness to go back on his word mocks the courtly generosity he espouses" (105). In other words, when a true aristocrat—especially a king—makes a promise, he must keep it. This is the social convention of courtly society. A gift presented requires a gift returned; a man's honor is in his word. Knowing this to be true and not wanting to ignore courtly protocol, the Fairy King relents and Orfeo leaves the fairy mound with his wife, prepared to go back to his former post in

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<sup>36</sup> For more on how Orfeo uses his minstrel's disguise to gain entrance to the fairy underworld, see Jerianne D. Schultz's 2007 Southern Illinois University Carbondale dissertation, *Creativity, the Trickster, and the Cunning Harper King: A Study of the Minstrel Disguise Entrance Trick in "King Horn" and "Sir Orfeo"* (Southern Illinois University, 2007), especially pages 172-178 and 256-7, wherein Schultz discusses Orfeo as a trickster character who uses deceit to gain access to the underworld and Orfeo's crossing of social boundaries through unexpected behaviors, respectively.

<sup>37</sup> Noted folklorists such as Katharine Briggs and Lewis Spence have found abundant evidence that many Celtic and other cultures have associated the fairy realm with the dead, or with those who died too soon (Briggs 170). Additionally, in the Orpheus myth Eurydice, bitten by a snake, falls into "the world of Death and flowing Darkness" (from Horace Gregory's translation of Ovid, Book X, 273). Baldwin and Doob similarly address the overt connection between the Otherworld and death, Baldwin by pointing out the "hazy" line between fairy abduction and death in medieval lore (134) and Doob following a similar tack in her discussion of the Celtic land of the living dead (198).

Traciens. Lerer's discussion of Orfeo's courtly *savoir faire* is pertinent and right on point, but there is more to this scene than mere artistry and courtly eloquence. That Orfeo is able to maneuver the Fairy King so expertly also means that he is once again in control of his faculties and prepared to leave behind his ineffectual beliefs about kingship and mourning as both being about controlled self-restraint, and presenting a public self that is more honest and "true." Orfeo's return to the throne will bring with it social change. He is not yet, however, his kingly self. By appearing first as a man of lower station—a minstrel—he is enabled to slip more easily through the gates of this place of madness and death, and will use the minstrel Orfeo to reenter the gates of Traciens.

#### The Return to Traciens

Orfeo's bargain with the Fairy King has proven successful and he is allowed to cross the threshold back into life, taking with him the experience of the Otherworld. He has effectively faced his own insane melancholy and social death and is then able to comfortably raise the specter of his own bodily death without balking because the old King Orfeo is, indeed, dead. The tale he tells to the steward and his court when he appears to them disguised as a poor minstrel-beggar provides for him the opportunity to put the old Orfeo aside and to use the passion of music to reconnect with his court in ways both familiar and fresh. When the steward asks him where he got his harp, recognizing it as Orfeo's, the latter tells the steward that he had come across a man torn to shreds by wolves in the forest, this harp lying next to the corpse. That he invents the story of his own death while presenting a blatant lie, also attests to the king's willingness to leave the grieving Orfeo, the one who has been already ten years dead to society,

behind. He here acknowledges that the melancholic Orfeo remains in the forest, having become dead and “not not dead” through his remote and natural grief. He has negotiated the “irrational” worlds of the forest and fairy, “which veers from mystery into nightmare,” as Nicholson notes, and back into the realm of “the rational, humanly social” one (Nicholson 161). In other words, he has come through the forest of grief and the Otherworld of death to the civilized world of reorganization and life, both psychically and physically. However, his return is not a return to the *status quo*, and this deception is the first part of that change.

That Orfeo lies to the steward about Orfeo being killed by wolves is problematic in a reading of the returned Orfeo as a “true man,” since “true” suggest honesty. However, Orfeo is not being cruelly deceptive, nor is he entirely false in what he is saying. The Orfeo that remains, figuratively, torn to shreds by wolves is the Orfeo who suffered the long years of lycanthropic melancholy—becoming animalistic in his existence, growing his hair and nails. He was thus “torn apart by wolves” in that his lycanthropic melancholy had savaged him. That Orfeo is gone, and the man who now stands before the steward is a new man, and one who had earned the right to Orfeo’s harp as the affective Orfeo. He returns to Traciens a new kind of hero.

Heurodis has been rescued, as Baldwin and Nicholson suggest, in part because the genre calls for her be rescued, but also because Orfeo must save her in order for the audience to read his success as an example of effectively handling his bereavement. The queen’s rescue is less important than Orfeo’s enacting of it. She represents his loss, and loss more broadly conceived, and by redeeming her he demonstrates his successful bereavement in the forest and his ability to once again master his roles as man, knight,

and king, though differently manifested. Orfeo has braved the unknown in a form of knightly bravery that would be familiar to those medieval folk who understood the nobility of spiritual battle as opposed to true military force.<sup>38</sup> Orfeo's struggle with his own melancholic loss represents just such a soul-searching battle. Heurodis is not, therefore, insignificant, as she provides the purpose for Orfeo's grief and his successfully overcoming of it. She represents Orfeo's love, loss, and recovery, but also the open form of grieving that had remained unavailable to him as a knight, and a king. He has, by rescuing Heurodis, also reclaimed for himself and for other men in Traciens the right to grieve honestly and openly in a social setting, and to live affectively.

#### The New Masculine Paradigm Established

When Orfeo first arrives in Winchester after escaping the Otherworld and finds shelter, Heurodis accompanies him as the marker of his success. Yet, Orfeo cannot present himself as King of Traciens so soon. He has been gone for ten years and he is a changed man—not the King Orfeo of years prior—and cannot, therefore, simply step back into his role as monarch. He must test the waters to make certain that he would be welcome. After relaying the story, in the minstrel's guise, of the death of Orfeo and

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<sup>38</sup> See, for example, Jacqueline Murray, "Masculinizing Religious Life: Sexual Prowess, the Battle for Chastity and Monastic Identity." (*Holiness and Masculinity in the Middle Ages*. Cardiff: U of Wales P, 2004. 24-42); Jacqueline Murray, "One Flesh, Two Sexes, Three Genders?" (*Gender and Christianity in Medieval Europe: New Perspectives*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2008. 34-51); Ruth Mazo Karras, "Thomas Aquinas's Chastity Belt." (*Gender and Christianity in Medieval Europe: New Perspectives*. U of Pennsylvania P, 2008. 52-67); and Felice Lifshitz, "Priestly Women, Virginal Men: Litanies and Their Discontents." (*Gender and Christianity in Medieval Europe: New Perspectives*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2008. 87-102). Each of these texts presents an argument for spiritual battle that equates the religious devotee to a knight, regardless of sex, thus presenting the truly spiritual devotee as masculine, this masculinity being measured by the difficulties of the spiritual battles undertaken.

seeing the steward swoon, Orfeo is certain of his welcome back to Traciens and reveals his true identity. Orfeo's initial decision to leave Traciens hinged on his connection to Heurodis and his inability to remain without her. He had been unable to voice his great loss as she had through excessive weeping and laments and once she was gone, so too was his ability to use her female body as a vehicle to express his deep sorrow. By bringing her back, he allows for her expressiveness and the steward serves as the vanguard of a new courtly paradigm.

The steward throws himself “ouer & ouer þe bord” in the great hall (578), falls at Orfeo's feet (579), and cries out his recognition of Orfeo as his “lord, sir, & our king” (582). Like his earlier swooning at word of Orfeo's supposed death, the steward is extravagantly expressive, yet the lords who had earlier scolded him for his public swoon now react in kind, also throwing themselves in jubilation at Orfeo's feet (580-1), instead of rebuking the steward. Having witnessed Orfeo's gratitude toward the steward for his devotion, expressed most fully in his swoon, the lords are brought to understand that when Orfeo said to the steward, “ich founde þe þus trewe” (569), it was precisely because the steward had shown true grief. Orfeo says to the steward, “ʒif þou of mi deþ had ben bliþe / þou schudst haue voided also swiþe” (573-4). In other words, had Orfeo found the steward to be happy for his death, he would know him not to have been devoted to his king and he would have exiled the steward. The words “trewe man” at lines 554 and “found þe þus trewe” at 569 take on double meaning as the steward both proves himself true to his king in fealty and a *true man* in his willingness to outwardly express his fealty through a public display of his emotions. In the social climate of pre-ordeal Traciens such a display was outlandish, but Orfeo the king now extols it as “trewe.” By following the

steward's lead in jubilantly crying out their pleasure at Orfeo's return, the barons and lords acknowledge and establish a new social paradigm for public expression. Having successfully reintroduced himself to his court and received a jubilant reaction from his subjects, Orfeo is "baped," "schaued," and attired "as a king" (585-6), thus effectively shedding, once more the *sclavin*. The bathing, shaving, and attiring also suggest a return to veneer and outward appearance, still maintaining that that body, shaved and attired "as a king," is certainly masculine in the traditional sense, and that, even if a man is "true," there is still a place in the courtly world for the external trappings of kingship. The two can coexist. Image alone is empty. Appearances need to be accompanied by actions and those actions should be true.

Orfeo the king has returned to his people, and so has Heurodis. She embodies Orfeo's successful struggle with and embracing of his passions and the king is now the positive image of the man who turns his time in the wilderness into an active working through of bereavement in which a favorable end is achieved. Having proven his worth as a king who can rule a people, not by sheer force of arms, but with the nobility of a man who has faced private battles and learned from them, Orfeo is ready to be crowned once more: "Now King Orfeo newe coround is, / & his quen, Dame Heurodis, / & liued long after-ward" (Now King Orfeo is newly crowned, and his queen, Dame Heurodis, and lived long afterwards; 593-5). Orfeo is transformed from beggar/minstrel into a king—changed—Heurodis is brought to the castle from the beggar's house unchanged from the day she was last on the castle grounds. Her lack of change suggests that the feminine paradigm for expressing grief or other strong emotions has not changed. However, her earlier display of public grief and madness no longer serves as the feminine foil to

Orfeo's masculine self. She does not need to be vocal or active now because she no longer needs to be the embodiment of Orfeo's—or any man's—expression of grief (or joy).

Heurodis' continued silence thus marks a change in the nature of Orfeo's attachment to her. Where she had been the vocal and visible presence of an ideal woman and a wife prior to her first abduction, his attachment to her was changed when she became the object of his loss and the focus of his long bereavement. Yet, unbeknownst to Orfeo at the time, she also served as the impetus for a change in expressive modes in Traciens. Orfeo has accepted more active and open forms of emotional expression as a result of having to live so long with unsatisfactory modes of mourning while grieving for Heurodis. That Heurodis is so clearly ancillary after his return demonstrates that Orfeo is no longer ruled by an attachment that requires Heurodis to be the outward expression of his own sorrow as he incorporates her "body" into his own. Contrary to Nicholson's assertion that "King Orfeo is himself again" (179), I aver that he is a *new* self, reorganized and altered. If his melancholic period of mourning marked him as one who had lost his reason and, therefore, his "loss of the instinct for virtue" (Neaman 41), which would mark him as a noble, as a king, and as a man, then his celebratory welcome home and his second coronation also sees the jubilation at the return of his reason, and therefore, his noble and royal virtue and ability to keep order and stability in both his person and his kingdom. Yet, the return to reason, alone, is not the cause for jubilation at the return of the king and queen; added to this case is jubilation at the ability to openly express joy (or sorrow).

The crowning at the end of the poem reminds the reader of the role of public ritual once again as the joyful celebration of the ritual procession and coronation replace the ritual mourning of the abduction of Heurodis and the departure of King Orfeo. The celebrations, though, are accompanied by “all maner of menstraci” (589), which attest to the return of passion in abundance. The poet exclaims, “Lord! Þer was grete melody” (590), in an outburst of feeling that expresses the fervor of the great “ioie þai wepe wiþ þer eiþe” (joy they expressed by weeping; 592). There is no sense of an ending of the weeping this time, though the weeping is for joy and not sorrow. The atmosphere is one of open exaltation that rivals the calm social tenor of Traciens at the opening or the military fervor of the attempt to protect Heurodis, and the melancholic middle of Orfeo’s forest years. The revelry continues as Orfeo and Heurodis are crowned and the “overly” emotional steward succeeds King Orfeo to the throne. Orfeo is, after all, “*newe* coround” (my emphasis; 593)—the old Orfeo is gone, along with the abducted Heurodis. Having effectively used his melancholic and manic bouts in the wilderness to face the threat of the Fairy King—the arbiter of his loss—in the Otherworld, he has worked through that loss and understood that the grief associated with loss needs to be enacted as a natural process that brings, eventually, an understanding that the loss is survivable and, in Orfeo’s case, reversible. Likewise, Orfeo’s ordeal helps him realize that it is the outward expression of emotions, such as those witnessed in Heurodis and in the steward, that elucidate truth and loyalty in those who love and that occasional madness reveals deep passion that can, if used well, lead to renewal and greater compassion for others, and, for Orfeo, to a broader conception of what it means to be a good king and a man who *can* mourn.



The new Orfeo is an improved Orfeo no longer fearful of his inability to defend his kingdom or his wife. Having reclaimed both after a period of private suffering and privation he has born witness to the positive public outcome possible from periods of private turmoil. By going to the woods for his personal mourning pilgrimage and allowing himself to break down, he has granted himself the ability to have private moments, to be human despite its seemingly animalistic propensity for wildness, and to use that wildness to generate a more “real,” or “true,” public presence that understands the valuable lessons to be gained from occasional irrationality. Only by playing the minstrel and the madman does Orfeo grasp what it means to be man. Only by understanding that sometimes man must toy with madness, as grief is prone to lead a man to do, can he appreciate reason. Orfeo has gained a greater understanding of the limits of social convention by witnessing its transgression in Heurodis,<sup>39</sup> the steward, and the Fairy King, and by blurring its boundaries himself by leaving his kingdom to pursue his grief and by praising the steward’s public expression of his. Orfeo has learned to appreciate gain by acknowledging loss and learning to move beyond it to reclaim his sense of self, but a self that is more complete and, as a result, more capable of being a good king. Just as the steward’s public swooning showed him to be a “trewe man,” Orfeo demonstrates that openly expressing emotions is to reveal oneself as truly a man. Social rituals proved inept for Orfeo’s expression of grief, and hiding his sorrow from public view by retreating to the forest led only to stasis. Only his impassioned leap into the void of the

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<sup>39</sup> Another way that Heurodis seems to transgress believed social norms is by being honest in her sorrow. Many medieval writers, for example, Jehan Le Fevre, considered women’s weeping to be deceitful and a form of artifice (Blamires 185-7). Heurodis’ grief, transgressive by traditional male (and royal) standards as detailed above, also transgresses this stereotype of the deceitful woman by being heartfelt and natural and demonstrating less how Orfeo and other men should *not* grieve than how they *should*.

fairy rock expressed his devotion for Heurodis and Traciens. Only the passion of song reclaimed them both, not Orfeo's knightly stature or kingly comportment, not cool reason instead of passion. Wise counsel got him nowhere and military prowess was useless in battling that which withstands reason: the Fairy King—and loss. The only way to combat deep emotions, *Sir Orfeo* suggests, is to succumb to it authentically, as a *trew man*.

CHAPTER THREE:  
FORM AND UNIVERSAL UNDERSTANDING IN CHAUCER'S *BOOK OF THE  
DUCHESS*

Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess* explores the possibility of understanding another's experience with grief. Chaucer utilizes traditional literary forms to aid the readers' understanding of the individual nature of grief and melancholy and the difficulty in correctly comprehending another's sorrow. By borrowing from several traditions, including courtly love poetry, romances, dream vision—all three of which utilize the forest trope—*consolatio*, and elegy, Chaucer demonstrates the absence of a universal understanding of grief, necessitating the multi-genre approach, and utilizes multiple conventions from the literary tradition in an attempt to fulfill our desire to understand others, ourselves, and our particular situations.

The Narrator, who appears to be strikingly obtuse throughout much of his conversation with the Black Knight, actually engages in a hermeneutical process in an attempt to find meaning in the Black Knight's story of loss by continually asking him clarity-seeking questions and providing examples of causes for grief. He uses references to classical tales, attempts at rational thinking, and Socratic questioning to elicit the details that will render the Black Knight's meaning clearer to both the narrator and to the audience. Throughout the process he misinterprets the Black Knight's meaning, but continues to press until he finally understands the Black Knight's statement, "She ys ded" (1309), and acknowledges his new understanding with the reciprocally terse phrase, "By God, hyt ys routhe!" (1310). The Black Knight, for his part, provides personal anecdotes,

some literal and some metaphorical, in attempts to make the nature of his grief clear to the Narrator. His anecdotes are peppered with references to the courtly love lyric and romance traditions as well as to elegy while the Narrator resorts to the convention of *consolatio*. Through dialogue, the two finally come to terms with the Black Knight's particular grief, which informs the Narrator's own melancholy—the framing tale leading to and closing off the dream vision of the Black Knight's sorrow.

Chaucer thus compounds traditional forms in order to create a text that is a consolation that at once utilizes the philosophical basis of the *consolatio* and relies on elegy and courtly literature in order to bring the Narrator and the reader to feel compassion. This connection occurs most notably in the text when the Black Knight states in the clearest possible terms that the nature of his grief over his beloved White rests upon the fact that “She ys ded!” (1309). Leading up to this declaration, the Narrator asks the Black Knight to tell his tale of sorrow, which the Knight recounts through courtly tropes of the ideal lady, utilizing both courtly and elegiac forms, neither of which, in themselves, lead to understanding between the two men. Nor does the Black Knight seem to desire immediate elucidation of the simple fact of White's death. Instead, the forms serve to allow the Black Knight *to* lament. Only by working through the genre, by lamenting through the use of elegiac and courtly forms, does the Knight get to the point where he can state the fact simply instead of obliquely through poetics. For the Narrator to hear him express his passion through the lament is just as important to the Black Knight, and to Chaucer, as it is for the Narrator to know *why* he laments; it is the affect, not the fact, which elicits empathy.

The work of the lament thus leads to understanding by culminating in clarity of speech. The Black Knight's speech had heretofore relied on conventional love speech to relay its meaning and the Narrator understood it as such—as another in the tradition of the love lament that occurs in the forest after a lover's beloved has betrayed or denied him. It utilizes all of the trappings of idealized language and a hyperbolic announcement that the Black Knight is sorrow and vice versa and so he wishes to die. Since the Black Knight's loss is not, as he suggests, a common one, a common trope does not do it justice and he finds himself thrice telling the Narrator, “Thou wost ful lytel what thou menest; / I have lost more than thou wenest” (743-4). In other words, despite his long tale, his language fails to connect with the Narrator, whom the Black Knight correctly insists does not know what he (the Black Knight) means because the knight has lost more than the Narrator thinks he has. The two have been at an impasse because the Narrator's conception of the purpose of the forest lament does not match the Black Knight's use of it. Only through the use of the connections of philosophical dialogue and mnemonics and through the use of consolatory methods is the Narrator able to bring the Black Knight to a place where the Narrator can understand what exactly the Black Knight's loss is and, therefore, to an acknowledgement of “the irreducible facts of mortality” (Davis 402). Through the language of the elegy and courtly tropes, the Black Knight attempts to express his loss, and through the workings of *consolatio* the Narrator encourages the Black Knight to do so. Literary form presents a vehicle through which each man believes he can best manage to express and comprehend love, loss, and grief because these forms have been used to describe these feelings in the past. There is a tradition of elegy being used to memorialize the beloved and dead, and Boethius was, apparently, consoled by the

words of Lady Philosophy. However, the poem uses the forms differently than its characters do. Rather than successfully communicating a loss or offering words of comfort, each character fails to communicate with the other, and forms are revealed as empty structure unable to adequately support authentic expression of emotions.

This blending of genres as means by which universal understanding is attempted is the undertaking of this chapter. Throughout the chapter I use the term “form” to refer to generic conventions. In most cases, when I discuss form I am referring to the particular generic forms of dream vision, lyric (lament and love poetry), romance, elegy, and *consolatio* and the conventional tropes and themes used in these genres during the mid- to late Middle Ages. While I acknowledge that the tropes and themes of these forms may not have been as rigidly established as I state in this chapter, the Narrator’s understanding of them is, and this, I argue, is why the Narrator and the Black Knight fail to communicate a clear meaning of the Black Knight’s loss.

In the case of the forest, form takes on an additional meaning, that of spatial form, which becomes conflated with the formal literary aspects of the dream vision and the lament and serves as a visual analogy for the literary genres that incorporate the forest and that are incorporated into the forest setting. Likewise, the Narrator’s chamber, which is filled with images of the romance of Troy painted on the walls and in the stained glass windows, designates a blending of spatial and literary forms.

Broadly speaking, then, form is conceived in this chapter not only as literary genre, but also as an aesthetic enterprise in which, as Hegel would argue, ideas come “nearer to the character of natural phenomena, to the senses, and to feeling” (362). While Hegel refers primarily to the visual arts, some of the same principles apply here.

Particular forms best represent particular “ideas” and form and content must be equal to the task of that representation. Genre is thus specifically chosen for the purpose of expressing particular senses and feelings produced by the content of the text, which is, in the case of *Book of the Duchess*, grief. Whereas lyric expresses feelings extremely well, it does little to encourage universal understanding of the content it expresses. *Consolatio* serves to alleviate another’s sorrow through philosophical consideration of the situation, but does not allow the bereaved the emotional outlet afforded by the lyric. Thus, while both forms are appropriate for the content of grief, neither single-handedly succeeds in expressing, consoling, or explaining grief. Chaucer attempts to solve this problem of the limitations of the single form for expressing content by combining forms as a means of coming to terms with loss and grief.

### Genre Mixing

James Winny, James Wimsatt, and George Kittredge show the extent to which *The Book of the Duchess* borrows from other texts and from his contemporary literary tradition, generally. All three discuss Chaucer’s reliance on the *dits amoureux* of Guillaume de Machaut, Jean Froissart, and Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun. B. A. Windeatt, Michael St. John, and William Quinn, on the other hand, consider Chaucer’s use of dream vision and a general acknowledgment of the poem’s borrowing from the form of consolation and from Ovidian and Biblical tales. Each of these various traditions is found in the poem, causing critics to comment on the poem’s style and purpose as being as much about poetic formula as it is about its purported content. Julie Ebel, for example, writes, “The poem’s central concern is thus not with the knight’s grief, but with

the nature—and validity—of poetic convention” (203). Robert R. Edwards, additionally, contends that the poem is about poetry *and* other things related to both purpose and context (14, 45). I agree with Edwards, for, although Chaucer is concerned with the ability of poetry to convey meaning, he is also concerned with how to represent grief and consolation in a useful and satisfying manner that will benefit the reader by encouraging (and sometimes frustrating) understanding of both grief and consolation. I argue that form and content are carefully paired in the *Book of the Duchess* and that Chaucer uses the motif of grief to determine his use of conventional literary forms and tradition as an exploration of and balm for grief inasmuch as sympathetic agreement with another’s sorrow can lead to consolation, even if the “other” with whom one sympathizes is a literary construct. Forms such as the *dits amoureux* and the romances elicit recognition of courtly types, such as the lost lady love, thus utilizing similarity within the genre to encourage a sense of “knowing” the lost beloved. Perhaps more useful is the traditional *consolatio*, which by its very nature seeks empathy with the bereaved as a means of reaching an understanding of another’s loss and of using that understanding to bring comfort, both in the work itself and in the extrapolation of its strategies to an actual bereaved reader.

### *Consolatio*

The text is often considered a *consolatio* because it seems to want to find some degree of solace for both the Black Knight and the Narrator; however, more than consolation, the text seeks compassion, or understanding of and desire to lessen another’s



sorrow, from the audience by demonstrating it—or something like it—in the Narrator.<sup>40</sup>

The basic set-up of the *consolatio* is, nevertheless, in place. Memory plays a central role in the genre of *consolatio*, though descriptions of the form rarely specifically mention memory as a component of the genre.<sup>41</sup> Traditional Latin *consolatio* and Christian consolation utilize, as well, many of the components we have seen in the Narrator’s encouragement of the Black Knight’s telling, including the use of allegorical or mythical figures as examples. Boethian consolation presents Philosophy as an allegorical character who speaks directly to the narrator rather than being represented as a series of disembodied *topoi* (Means 9). Lady Philosophy is but one of the many allegorical figures that appear to the narrator and allegorical characters replace the mythological ones

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<sup>40</sup> For a discussion of the Thomistic definition of *compassio* see Barad, Judith A. “The Understanding and Experience of Compassion: Aquinas and the Dalai Lama.” *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 27 (2007): 11-29.

<sup>41</sup> Michael Means and Martin R. P. McGuire both offer overviews of the common elements of Latin *consolatio*, which is based on the original Greek form. Means’ list is more general than McGuire’s, so I provide both lists here. According to Means, Latin *consolatio* includes: “(1) the gathering together of commonplace philosophical themes (*topoi*) of a consolatory nature; (2) combining them into a framework based primarily on rhetorical considerations; (3) citing examples of historical or mythological characters who have endured severe misfortunes courageously; and (4) applying and addressing the whole to an individual who has suffered a particular misfortune—usually though not always the death of a near relative or friend” (8). He adds to this list Cicero’s steps to the first part of consolation, which roughly translate to: 1) acknowledges that evil either barely exists or does not exist at all; 2) discusses “the lot of life” generally and that of the mourner, specifically; 3) realizes that there is no advantage to excessive grief (8-9). In his introduction to *The Church Fathers: Funeral Orations: St. Gregory Nazianzen and St. Ambrose* McGuire cites ten common elements of consolation: 1) “Fortune rules all”; 2) that all men are mortal; 3) virtuous living is more important than long life; 4) “time heals all ills”; 5) death frees mankind from illness, age, and misfortune; 6) we are to learn and take comfort from others’ examples; 7) the dead no longer suffer; 8) a better, happier life awaits us beyond the grave; 9) “reason must temper grief”; 10) “displays of emotions are unmanly” (xii-xiii). McGuire further notes that Christian consolation uses all of these elements, but adds belief in the Trinity and in Christ’s salvific powers, which makes grief not only unreasonable, but also vain because we weep for our own loss rather than rejoicing in the deceased’s joyous heavenly reward.

common in Greek and Latin *consolatio* (Means 10). Moreover, Means claims, Lady Philosophy's arguments are deeper than the "stock," "shallow panaceas" offered in Ciceronian and Senecan *consolatio* (9), and Boethius' consolation serves a didactic purpose, apocalyptic in nature, that offers lessons that are relevant to an afterlife in which the torments of this life are no longer important (13).

Interestingly, though Chaucer's *Book* has often been called a Boethian consolation, it has more in common with the Latin form of *consolatio* than the Boethian, or at least it conflates the forms. Chaucer uses *topoi* presented by both the Narrator and the Black Knight rather than direct counsel from Philosophy to present loss and consolation, and he uses examples, even if they are negative, from classical and historical texts *combined* with allegorical figures (e.g. Fortune, who also appears in Boethius' *Consolation*) to make his points. Phillips, Winny, and Delasanta all argue that, for various reasons, Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess* does not quite fit the bill of a typical consolation. Phillips argues that the *Book*, in fact, never becomes a proper *consolatio* because the Black Knight never accepts comfort (37), while Winny asserts that some of the concerns of the poem, because of numerous concerns it addresses, are "incompatible with an elegiac purpose" (45). Delasanta, arguing against Huppé and Robertson, finds that the text *does* offer consolation, and Christian consolation at that, but not the heavily patristic variety that Huppé and Robertson attribute to it (246). Means also disagrees with the contention that the *Book* is a Boethian consolation in the strict sense of the phrase, saying:

There seems to be . . . no Boethian pattern of consolation within the "frame" of the poem. Within the vision itself we do find such a pattern, but it is an almost complete reversal of the kind found in the *Consolation of Philosophy*: an apparently fumbling, obtuse narrator consoles a "superior" figure. Chaucer here

seems to be using Boethian techniques in much the same inverted, essentially comic way he uses details from the *Divine Comedy* in *The House of Fame*. (103)

That Chaucer plays with the *consolatio* form is unsurprising given his propensity to bend most forms to his own particular ends, but his apparent bending of the “rules” of Boethian consolation may have just as much to do with the fact that he is borrowing from sources other than Boethius than that his is purposefully standing the form on its head strictly for comic effect. As I argue throughout this chapter, Chaucer uses conventions to encourage greater understanding and sympathetic agreement with one man’s grief. The Boethian *consolatio*, since it is a literary form and philosophical exercise more than it is a bid to console an actual bereaved, lends itself to the questioning inherent in hermeneutical interpretation and an attempt to understand another’s perspective.

In the introduction to his section on the *Book of the Duchess* in *Chaucer’s Dream Visions and Shorter Poems*, William A. Quinn notes that there is still significant debate over who is consoled in the piece (115). Lumiansky suggests that it is the Narrator while D. W. Robertson and Bernard Huppé argue that it is Chaucer himself. We cannot, of course, leave out the Black Knight as the consoled. The focus of the poem thus seems, finally, to be closely connected to solace or consolation. The reader must be the ultimate recipient of consolation, since the Black Knight does not seem to clearly receive consolation, nor does the Narrator, though he is inspired upon waking to re-engage in a creative pursuit—writing this poem. Chaucer does not, however, offer the reader easy consolation. Rather, as Phillips and St. John both assert, Chaucer leaves the reader thinking, leaving no immediate “moral conclusions” (St. John 44). He does, though, leave room for a form of consolation that “depends as much on ethical and social persuasion as on an appeal to the private experience of loss,” according to Edwards (xii). Chaucer,

therefore, allows for a “moral” reading of the text—that the text has the power to provide consolation and to serve the didactic purpose of arguing for the value of natural law and its lust for life. The conventions utilized and examined by the poem, then, allow for art to serve as a balm for the bereaved. Phillips writes of the *Book* that “the work poses—but is it soothingly or problematically?—the relationship of literature to painful emotional reality. Several moments suggest the comfort that art can offer the bereaved, while disconcertingly revealing the ultimate inadequacy of words to assuage the real-life pain” (32). Although, as the Black Knight’s words so often convey, language is not always accurate—or perhaps even adequate—the reader can find consolation, as the Black Knight and Narrator do, in the very attempt to understand the inevitable facts that underlie emotional outpouring and to recognize the value of conventions for presenting and formalizing both emotions and the truths that drive them. The thrust of the poem seems, therefore, to be less geared toward consolation than it is toward sympathy for another’s grief—toward a good faith attempt to understand another’s pain, not necessarily to assuage it.

#### The Formalized Forest

Chaucer’s conventionality is evident in more than simply his use of various literary genres, though. The trope of the forest as the locus of bereavement for the medieval aristocratic male mirrors the uniformity of literary forms while signifying the commonality of grief as something that is not as wild and disordered as previous texts in this study would have us think. Like the forest in the previous texts, though, Chaucer’s forest serves as a space where death and despair overlap with life and potentiality. Yet,

unlike the grief experienced in the forest by the two men discussed thus far, Chaucer presents grief as a manageable, and *managed*, exercise that begs to be understood rather than hidden. The simultaneous tidiness and unkempt vitality of the forest in which the Narrator finds the lamenting Black Knight serves as a reminder of its concomitant adaptability and aliveness. While the forests in which Yvain and Orfeo find themselves are presented as more threateningly wild spaces, the Black Knight's forest, though no less dynamic, is orderly and carefully plotted, much like his expression of grief and the literary forms it utilizes, which may be a by-product of Chaucer's close attention to form, a testament to the character of John of Gaunt, and an indicator of the changing use and nature of the forest lament.<sup>42</sup> Though the forest has been used as a locus of lament, it is the nature of the man's lament in it is understood as foreign because wild. By presenting the forest as something akin to a manor garden composed of large trees, the reader's prior conception of the manicured outdoor space is addressed and new information about the forest added in order to bring the reader into a tamed forest space that is less threatening than the wild forest visited by Yvain or Orfeo. Chaucer uses the tradition of the forest lament, but tames it and places it in space that is more familiar to the reader as a means by which he can come more quickly to an understanding between the audience and the Black Knight.

I do not mean to suggest by this that literary forms are inherently tame in their conventionality, but rather that generic forms were highly familiar to an aristocratic

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<sup>42</sup> I do acknowledge, however, that equally wild versions of forest laments, not limited to aristocratic men, reappear in early modern epics, such as Spenser's *Faerie Queen* and Wroth's *Urania*. On another note, this taming of grief may also be a consequence of the Black Death, which brought with it such a high mortality rate—Blanche of Lancaster being one of its victims—that attitudes toward life and death were, of necessity, drastically altered.

audience and that this familiarity would contribute to solace for the bereaved and sympathy for another's loss. Unlike Ebel, who finds that Chaucer argues *against* the usefulness of convention, claiming that the poem serves primarily to question the "nature—and validity—of poetic convention" (203), I allow that he does toy with and question conventions, but not that he finds them to be invalid. To invalidate the conventions would be akin to criticizing the audience for whom his poem was written and to devalue the memory of Blanche of Lancaster, which would put Chaucer in an awkward position with his patron, John of Gaunt. Additionally, this suggests that literary tradition has little to nothing to offer a contemporary (to any period) audience. Instead, Chaucer uses the conventions as a familiar backdrop against which to memorialize Blanche and offer consolation to her kin and court and to make public and recognizable Gaunt's grief by keeping it within the bounds of conventional propriety and traditions so that the audience can better understand this grief. There is certainly "wildness" in the Black Knight's grief, but the wildness is utterly conventional and follows literary precedent. Edwards, in a vein similar to Ebel's, asserts that Chaucer's early works (of which the *Book* is among the earliest) "are necessarily highly constrained in style and theme, and they function within a notably self-conscious environment where social values and behavior share the same language as poetic fiction" (*Dream* xii).

Chaucer's audience was comprised initially, if we agree that the poem was written at the behest of John of Gaunt to memorialize Blanche's death,<sup>43</sup> of the royal household

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<sup>43</sup> Scholars largely agree that Chaucer wrote the *Book of the Duchess* as a memorial piece for Blanche, the Duchess of Lancaster, who died of the bubonic plague either in 1368 or 1369 (J. J. N. Palmer. "The Historical Context of the *Book of the Duchess*: A Revision." *Chaucer Review*. 8 (1974): 253-61; Edward I. Condren. "The Historical Context of the *Book of the Duchess*: A New Hypothesis." *Chaucer Review*. 5 (1971): 195-212.). There is

and nobility, who would have known the works of Lorris and Meun, Machaut, and Froissart, the latter of whom was the court poet of Phillipa of Hainault, queen consort to Edward III, during this period and the first of whom was also roughly contemporary with Chaucer and Froissart. The French love lyric, as well as its increasingly popular vernacular English cousin, was very fashionable and widely read in the courts of Edward III and his successor Richard II, for whom John of Gaunt served as a primary advisor during the young king's minority. The romances of Alexander, Charlemagne, and Arthur, as well as those found in Breton lais, had been circulating for centuries by this time;<sup>44</sup> so, by Chaucer's period the romance was an ancient form. Dream vision, too, has a long history, appearing in such works as Virgil's *Aeneid*, Macrobius' *Somnium Scipionis*, Boethius' *Consolatione Philosophie*, and the Bible, as well as in contemporary works,

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still disagreement over whether or not the poem was commissioned by her husband, John of Gaunt, since there is no extant evidence, though the general consensus favors this possibility, since Chaucer is believed to have been patronized by the duke on other occasions and the poet was certainly a squire and diplomat of the royal court of which John was a member, being the third son of King Edward III. The debate still rages over when Chaucer composed the piece, though the death of Blanche is generally used to date it. The argument centers on whether the poem was written to be read at one of the annual memorial services held in honor of Blanche and, if so, which year. Some authors claim that, if the poem was written under the patronage of John of Gaunt, then it was likely performed at a service no earlier than 1372, when the duke returned to England from the continent, or possibly in 1374 when he ordered a chantry chapel and tomb built in her honor in St. Paul's Cathedral, or upon the chapel's completion in 1376 (Phillipa Hardman. "The *Book of the Duchess* as a Memorial Monument." *Chaucer Review*. 28.3 (1994): 205-215). Still others argue that the poem may have been written after John's death in 1399 (Zacharias P Thundy. "The Dream of Chaucer: Boethian Consolation or Political Celebration?" *Carmina Philosophia*. 4 (1995): 91-109). Regardless of the potentially relevant dating, critics generally agree that the poem is related in some way to the death of Blanche of Lancaster.

<sup>44</sup> *The Romance of Alexander* dating from as early as the third century, the *Chanson de Roland* from the twelfth century, with the earliest known versions of the Charlemagne tale emanating from the pen of Archbishop Turpin in the eighth century (Bullfinch 603). Arthurian legend has its origins in chronicles recalling the Battle of Mount Badon, dating to the sixth century, while Arthur's name first appears in the ninth-century *Historia Brittonum*, becoming especially popular in romance form in the twelfth century.

where it still found currency (Spearing 13). The genre of the consolation had been written, read, and considered in apocalyptic writing, in Macrobius, and Boethius (Means 2), as well as in forms of Greek funeral speeches dating to at least the fifth century BCE with Isocrates and finding a Latin voice in Cicero (McGuire viii). We also find elegy in these Greek and Latin funeral speeches and the origins of the Christian memorial sermon. These sermons, based on pagan consolation, added scriptural readings and the hope of salvation, and can be found in early form in sermons by Gregory of Nazianze and St. Ambrose, both from the fourth century CE (McGuire xiii).

The Narrator desires understanding as early as the opening stanzas of the poem where he wishes he could explain his own illness. He finds himself unable to sleep as the result of an unexplained eight-year-long illness. Either because of the illness or because of his sleeplessness the Narrator claims that nothing matters to him; he is in the throes of a melancholic lethargy that leaves him flat and through which he claims, “Al is ylyche good to me— / Joye or sorowe, wherso it be—” (9-10). Yet, despite claiming that joy and sorrow are all the same to him, he reiterates his sorrow, saying that “sorwful ymaginacion / ys alway hooly in [his] mynde” (14-15), and that he is “in sorwe” due to lack of sleep (21). This sorrow leaves him filled with “melancolye” (23), “drede” (24), and “hevynesse” (25), and he has “lost al lustyhede” (27) to the point of desiring death. He claims that when anyone asks him why he cannot sleep, the asker “laseth his asking trewly” (133), because he “can not telle why” (34). In other words, the Narrator is incapable of conveying the meaning of his inability to sleep because he does not understand himself why he cannot sleep. The poem, and especially the dream section, is subsequently set up as an exploration of the meaning of his eight-year-long insomnia and



its accompanying melancholy. The origin of his ailment, however, is never revealed, though understandings of both possible salves and the fact that others, too, suffer, are. Oddly, the Narrator spends extensive time on the root of the Black Knight's grief, but not on the root of his own melancholy. Yet, we get the sense from the poem that learning to sympathize with another's plight may reveal to us something of the nature of our own, and of the Narrator's.

That the Narrator regains his "lustyhede" enough to write the poem upon waking and that he finally is able to sleep after reading about Alcyone's loss suggests that he comes to these comforts after finding relevant meaning in the tales of the Black Knight and of Alcyone for whom he

Had such pitee and such rowthe  
To rede hir sorwe that , by [his] trowthe,  
[He] ferde the worse al the morwe  
Aftir to thenken on her sorwe. (97-100)

In other words, Alcyone's grief over Ceyx's death causes him to ponder it and to feel pity for her in her loss. Although Alcyone's situation is not necessarily the same as the Narrator's own, and although he may not have responded as she does, he comprehends her situation, likely by finding a similarity in his and her shared inability to sleep, and instantly feels pity for her. What is curious is that his pity (*rowthe*) for the Black Knight is delayed because his own preconceived notions hinder understanding.

The reader is introduced to the Black Knight's grief and to the Narrator's inability to understand it, when the Narrator initially encounters the other man in the woods. The Narrator enters the forest where he finds the Black Knight after "waking" into his dream. The sound of the hunting horns draws him out of his house and onto his horse as he joins the hunt. When inquiring from one young hunter as to the source of the hunt, he is told

that King Octavian has organized it, thus establishing the hunt as a royal one and the forest as the “historical” forest of kingly sport (Saunders 8-10). It is also, however, the *silva* of Classical Greek thought. In discussing classical understandings of the forest, Corinne Saunders refers to the term *silva*, or forest, which was adopted by Christian thought as representing the possibilities latent in matter, or God’s creation of the earth out of chaos (22). She cites Bernardus as believing that *silva* was

active, longing for form and thus matching the imposition of form from without with the appropriate transformation. Matter is portrayed as the ‘stuff’ of the tangible world and of humanity. It provides the link between the human and the divine, since God acts upon it and humanity is formed from it. (22)

The forest, then, both exudes potentiality and, in the hand of Chaucer, also shapes the Black Knight, the Narrator, and the reader into participants in a shared meaning, which is achieved through contact with the forms of the forest and of literature. The chaos of the Black Knight’s grief is thus “given form” through the lyric lament/elegy and the Narrator tries to order the Knight’s grief through the form of *consolatio*. Both men approach the Black Knight’s melancholia through their shared moment in the forest—*silva*—the place of potential and raw matter. The raw matter of *silva* is ordered in Chaucer’s telling so that it can serve as spatial form that houses the Black Knight and the Narrator as they employ generic forms to transform the Black Knight’s grief from a chaotic and suicidal lament into a final shared statement: “She ys ded!”

The Black Knight appears early in the dream vision sitting against a broad oak tree where the Narrator finds him. As a member of the hunting party himself, the knight, like the Narrator, is hunting *something*, but what? Various critics have mentioned the connection between *hert*-hunting and *heart*-hunting, including Saunders, who writes, “Paralleling Octavian’s hunt, the Narrator hunts the heart of the man in black in an act of

complaint and consolation” (156). If the Narrator hunts the Black Knight’s heart, what heart does the Black Knight hunt? Whose heart? Or what “hert”? Surely not White’s, as some have suggested,<sup>45</sup> as hers has been won and she is now lost. It could be that he seeks to reconnect with that heart in this hunt, but a more probable explanation is that the heart he “hunts” is his own.<sup>46</sup> Along with his “fers,” White, he has lost his heart and goes to the forest to find it, facing the presumed (but defanged) perils of the forest, or of his grief, in the process.

Unlike Yvain and Orfeo, the Black Knight does not appear to go into the forest with the express purpose of losing his mind to his grief or of imposing exile on himself. Indeed, we have no indication what his intent was unless it was to join the hunt, as we only meet up with the Black Knight as part of the Narrator’s dream. Yet, the knight does not engage in the physical hunt with the others; he finds a quiet grove approached by a “a floury grene” that is “litel used” (398, 401), and there finds repose against a great oak tree where he makes his lament. By having the Black Knight seek solitude in the forest, Chaucer acknowledges the traditional form of the solitary aristocratic man bereaved who must not weep publicly and, as a result, retreats to the privacy of the forest to lament openly there. As Saunders notes, the forest “is portrayed as the appropriate setting for the complaint of the Black Knight, following the patterns of Orfeo, Tristan and Merlin, and

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<sup>45</sup> See, for example, Sandra Pierson Prior’s “Routhe and Hert-Huntyng in the ‘Book of the Duchess’” (*The Journal of English and German Philology*. 85.1 (1986): 16) and David Luisi’s “The Hunt Motif in ‘The Book of the Duchess’” (*English Studies*. 52.1-6 (1971): 309-11).

<sup>46</sup> This is a fairly prominent argument with which I agree, and which has been made from various perspectives. For example, Paul F. Baum discusses the Black Knight’s heart in reference to the pun on “hart” in “Chaucer’s Puns” (*PMLA* 71 (1956), 239), while Joseph E. Grennen considers the Black Knight’s heartbreak from a medieval medical perspective (“Hert-Huntyng in the *Book of the Duchess*. *MLQ*. 25 (1964). R. A. Shoaf and Rodney Delasanta, alternatively, both consider the penitential aspects of hart- (or heart-) hunting.

recalling the use of the forest in the Middle English lyrics” (156). Thus, Saunders views the forest as the traditional place of lament, and the Narrator, as we shall see, seems to recognize this trope.

When the Narrator comes upon the Black Knight he finds a man who “had wel nygh lost hys minde” to grief and who wishes “to deye soone” (511, 688). This desire for death is, as with Orfeo, directly related to the death of a wife, and as with Orfeo, the Knight’s bereavement finds him in the woods lamenting and giving vent to his melancholy. Like Orfeo, the Black Knight is not completely mad when he goes to the forest, but his lamentations and overwhelming grief cause him to be physically and emotionally separated from the rest of the hunting party. His emotional outpouring designates him as one who is not in complete control of his reason—who demonstrates the chaos of pre-ordered *silva*—and the Narrator believes him to be “wel nygh” insane (511). While in the woods, the man in black weeps and cries out loudly, unaware that the Narrator is observing him. Once the Narrator makes his presence known and begins to question the Knight, the latter shares his tale of loss, showing himself to be more *tretable* (rational) than the Narrator originally thought and the Narrator continues on with the dialogue in an attempt to get to the root of the other man’s grief (533).

Despite the similarities between *Sir Orfeo* and *The Book of the Duchess*, the latter provides a more formulaic version of bereavement that borrows heavily from French *dits amoureux* and consolatory and elegiac writings and the Black Knight seems to move through his grief rather more quickly than, though just as successfully as Orfeo. Also of note is that the line “*wel nygh* lost his mind” (my emphasis) suggests that, unlike Yvain who has lost his mind to grief or Orfeo who abandons himself to potential death by

entering the fairy mound, the Black Knight is near to this point, but has not yet gone entirely mad. Finally, as Georgia Ronan Crampion notes, the Black Knight, unlike Orfeo, enters into a discussion with the Narrator in a “grim attempt to break through grief’s solitude, to speak, to be understood,” although, “One man’s loss is not another’s; losses are never equivalents, never capable of being understood by another” (495).

Nevertheless, the attempt is made and a sympathetic agreement finally reached through conversation.

The dialogue begins after the Narrator overhears the knight’s brief lament—a courtly lyric. In the neat package of the Black Knight’s opening lament, Chaucer lays out what he will present over the remainder of the dream sequence in the words of the Black Knight as he retells his tale of love and loss. The lamenter assumes that he is alone and the words he speaks are meant for himself, apparently not intending to be heard mid-composition. As Helen Vendler claims, lyric “remains the genre that directs its *mimesis* toward the performance of the mind in *solitary* speech” (1-2). Yet, Chaucer makes the lyric public by allowing the Narrator to witness the Black Knight in the process of his composition. By thus publicizing the lament, Chaucer allows for an initial connection between the Narrator and the Black Knight through which the Narrator situates himself and his beliefs about the other man’s lament by comparing it to his previous knowledge of the lyric tradition coupled with his own past experiences and recent sorrow. By its common adoption and the effects it has on the reader, the reader—or in this case, the listener/Narrator—makes his own interpretation of the lyric and understands the Black Knight’s lament through this interpretation. Hence, the Black Knight latches onto the lyric tradition by reciting a poem that represents the outpouring of his grief and his belief

that his joy has abandoned him along with his lady. But, the Narrator reads the loss as a betrayal or spurning, not a death, because the tradition is often, like the Black Knight, ambiguous on the nature of the loss.

Among the tropes the Black Knight adopts is the sense that he has no joy or desire to carry on, which suggests that he has lost “corage”—heart or spirit—and comes to this place to reclaim it, allegedly (or hyperbolically) by joining his lady in death, though Death will not take him. Through this lament, he is engaging in the courtly ritual of what Louise O. Fradenburg terms “mourning-until-death” (597), or grieving until his heart literally breaks, which J. E. Grennen argues was believed possible by purveyors of medieval medicine. However, by sharing the tale of the journey of his heart with a hapless forest wanderer, the Black Knight’s heart is prevented from fatally breaking as he finds a willing listener who offers him the good will to work toward an understanding of his personal grief.<sup>47</sup> As many others have argued,<sup>48</sup> the Narrator thus serves as a conduit for the Black Knight to work through his grief through the Chaucerian version of talk therapy, which really amounts to an exercise in the engagement of various literary forms, and attempts at connecting meaningfully with the sorrow of another.

The Black Knight’s appearance in the forest is marked by his bereavement over White’s death, which is the central theme of the poem, rather than White’s initial

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<sup>47</sup> Hans Georg Gadamer used the term “good will” in his essay “Text and Interpretation” (trans. Dennis J. Schmidt and Richard E. Palmer. Ed. Diane P. Michelfelder and Richard E. Palmer. *Dialogue and Deconstruction: The Gadamer-Derrida Encounter*. Albany, NY: State University of New York P, 1989. 21-51) to refer to the relationship, or the “fundamental condition” that must be realized, between the “two partners” who wish to understand one another (33).

<sup>48</sup> G. L. Kittredge argued this in *Chaucer and His Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP) in 1915 and critics since then have been writing about the “talking cure” in *The Book of the Duchess*.

spurning of him, which appears only as part of his recollection of the story of their love. In this, Chaucer seems to side with Machaut's lady in the *Jugement dou Roy de Navarre*, whose argument is that loss of love by death is more terrible than loss by denial or betrayal. The Black Knight's laments do, indeed, present his plight as wholly devastating, and while he confesses his melancholy after White's denial, he offers very little evidence of a long and suicidal bout. This is, in the scope of the poem, downplayed to emphasize the final loss of death. Instead of brooding endlessly over White's rejection, and apparently without fleeing to the forest like Yvain when Laudine rejects him, the Black Knight copes with his melancholy, renews his suit a year or so later, and meets with success, thus winning the affections of the ideal woman, marrying her, and suffering all the more for the loss incurred by White's death. It is this loss, not the loss of rejection, that finds him grieving in the forest, and it is the shifting of the trope of the forest love lament to the trope of the forest as locus of mourning that leaves the Narrator confused and frustrates understanding between the men; this is not the use of the forest lament with which the Narrator is familiar.

The trope of the forest first appears when the Narrator enters into his dream by being awoken by a cacophony of birdsong.<sup>49</sup> This is one of the elements, asserts Wimsatt (89), that Chaucer borrows from Machaut, who uses a bird as a means of bringing his narrator to the debaters, a knight and a lady, who talk together in a wooded space.

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<sup>49</sup> Phillips lists several common framing devices used in dream visions, including the following: "the garden, the palace, the temple, the island, or an initial statement that the author rode out, or wandered in solitary melancholy" (9). Though she mentions the garden, which is related to the forest, Phillips neglects to include the forest in her list of framing devices. While the garden may be more common in dream visions than forests are, the forest figures prominently as a framing device in other genres, like romances and lyrics.

Chaucer, then, conflates Machaut's bird with his Narrator's dog guide and the birdsong that announces the beginning of his dream (Wimsatt 89). Though not yet in the forest, the birds presage his foray into the outdoors by bringing the outdoors in. When we are confronted with the birdsong, the sound of the hunting horn, and the Narrator's breaching of his chamber walls to head outside and into the woods, we are faced with the land of the dream vision, which is also a land of vivid color and life. This is first noted in Chaucer's description of the stained glass windows that meet the Narrator upon entry into his dream world, which depict scenes from the *Romance of the Rose* and the story of Troy, both of which have some bearing on Chaucer's poem in their use of tropes of love and loss. The outdoors of the *Romance of the Rose* and the epic heroic tale of Troy—that is, the garden of Deduit and the field of battle (and the love stories that supplement the tales of Troy)—both evoke the outdoor setting that will draw the Narrator into the forest. Along with his literarily informed version of the outdoors is his “real life” familiarity with the hunt, and the hunting horns draw him out of his gilded chamber.

The vividness of the glass window is further enhanced by the sounds of the birds and the hunting horn, and the brightness of the day:

Upon my bed with bryghte bemes,  
 With many glade gilde stremes;  
 And eke the welken was so fair –  
 Blew, bryght, clere was the ayr,  
 And ful attempre for soothe hyt was;  
 For nother to cold nor hoot yt nas,  
 Ne in al the welken was a clowde. (337-43)

The day is bright and beautiful, cloudless, and temperate. There is no cold wilderness, as with the rock-clad valley leading to Morpheus' land of sleep found in the tale of Ceyx and Alcyone—a valley in which no grass or plants grow and the only topographical



features other than the stone walls of the valley are small pools and streams of water—the river Lethe? (155-160)—which further illustrate Ceyx’s watery death. The dark nighttime chambers of the Narrator and of Alcyone give way to the clarity and life of a perfect dream day. More importantly, the harsh landscape of the land of sleep that also marks the jagged pain of Alcyone’s suicidal grief is nowhere present in the forest of the Narrator’s landscape. *His* forest is, for now, associated with sport and play.

The forest into which the Narrator is immediately whisked after heeding the blowing of the horn is as bright and lush as the dancing colored light effects produced by the sun shining through the stained glass windows at the opening of the dream. The liveliness of the trotting horses, running hounds, and countless hunters and foresters joins with the vivacity of the woods in Chaucer’s description as the Narrator enters the fresh forest. The Narrator truly does seem, upon his entry into the dream, to “shake off his torpor and commit himself to the world of affairs” (St. John 54). The Narrator follows a whelp “doun by a floury grene” that is “ful thikke of gras, ful softe and swete,” in which “floures fele, faire under fete” (398-400). Chaucer then continues on with a description of the forest’s lushness, saying:

For hit was, on to beholde,  
As thogh the erthe envye wolde  
To be gayer than the heven,  
To have moo floures, swiche seven,  
As in the welken sterres bee. (405-9)

In fact, the barren landscape of the Ceyx and Alcyone tale is once again conjured in the cold and wintry contrast that Chaucer presents in the following passage:

Hyt had forgete the poverttee  
That winter, thorgh hys colde morwes,  
Had mad hyt suffre, and his sorwes. (410-12)

This is not the cold valley of Morpheus, nor is it the harsh and realistic forest of *Sir Orfeo* in which the hero must scrape for morsels of food and for shelter during the harsh winter months. In other words, the Narrator's experience of the forest is not as a landscape that Winter bathed in sorrow, but as an ideal May forest, thick with flowers and "waxen grene" with the "swetnesse of dew" (414, 415).

In addition to the freshness of growth, which attests to the abundance of life in the poem, Chaucer fills his forest with animals. Though the hunt for the hart seems to be unsuccessful in capturing its quarry, the forest path is filled with "many an hert and many an hynde" (427), as well as "founes, sowres, bukkes, does" (429), and "roes" and "sqwirelles" (430, 431). In fact, the forest is "so ful of bestes" that the Narrator believes even Argus, with his hundred eyes, cannot see and keep count of them all (434-442). Although the nature that abounds here is not the same as the "Nature" that the Narrator cites in reference to the Black Knight's suicidal thoughts, a connection can be drawn here between the life of the forest (nature) and natural propensity of all living things to live.<sup>50</sup> The potential for *silva* to shift from chaos to order is again apparent as the disorder of the Black Knight's suicidal grief surrenders to the possibilities provided by the forest to formalize his sorrow through generic conventions. As R. M. Lumiansky has argued, in stating that suicide goes against nature (*Book* 715), the Narrator equates Nature with Life as starkly opposed to Fortune's association with Death (Lumiansky 125). Winny, similarly, acknowledges Chaucer's use of Machaut's argument in *Navarre* "that natural law gives the bereaved lover the right to put his sorrow behind him, since no extremity of

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<sup>50</sup> In his *Etymologies* Isidore of Seville defines nature (*natura*) as that which "causes something to be born (*nasci*, ppl. *Natus*), for it has the power of engendering and creating" (xi.i.1). Nature, according to Isidore, is associated with birth, life, and, by extension and by virtue of their being "made from the soil," to human beings (xi.i.4).

grief can restore what has been lost” (70). Likewise, nature in the form of the forest provides a means by which the Black Knight may “put his sorrow behind him.” The Narrator, too, appears to have embraced the philosophy of natural law as he strikes forth to participate in the hunt, leaving the valley of Morpheus behind even as he sleeps.

This is a forest of potentiality, not of dread. Winny states, “the poem associates dreaming with a state of moral obliviousness and physical inertia which frustrates the purpose of natural life, and urges respect for the creative impulse which renews all living things after the ordeal of winter” (73). Yet, it is in the Narrator’s dream that he encounters the “natural life” and “creative impulse” that will enable him to break free of Morpheus’ “moral obliviousness” and “physical inertia.” Sleep, rather than dreaming, seems to be the culprit, and for the Narrator, even sleep brings healing. The dream, however, provides the reader with a glimpse of the value of life and the exuberant behavior of a puppy draws the Narrator further into the forest.

Despite the abundant wildlife, Chaucer does not resort to the “hert” of the hunt, nor to the birds from the beginning of the dream, to bring the Narrator to the Black Knight. In this, he departs from Machaut, though he still provides a dog in the narrative, which hearkens back to the dog that accompanies the lady in *Behaingne*—another indication, perhaps, that in his *Book* Chaucer will side with the lady’s bereavement over the knight’s heartbreak due to betrayal as the more grievous loss. When considering Chaucer’s presentation of the forest, generally, however, a different reading of the whelp becomes clear. The whelp appears to the Narrator as he leans against his tree during the hunt. The hunt is populated by numerous “relays and lymeres”—hounds used to track

and chase the deer—so this pup is likely part of the hunting pack.<sup>51</sup> Yet, the behaviors, generally, are typical of a dog that is testing the friendliness of an unfamiliar person: head down, creeping slowly toward the individual in a submissive gesture with ears and hairs back and smooth as opposed to alert and on-end as though threatened by or threatening to the Narrator. Indeed, both Narrator and whelp seem to have developed an understanding of their roles as the dog enacts the traditional job of guide and the Narrator obligingly follows.

The pup cozies up to the Narrator and then runs away, encouraging the man to follow him further into the forest where he encounters the Black Knight. The whelp thus introduces the Narrator to the lush forest landscape and to the emotional outpouring of the Black Knight; but the dog's domesticity also refers to another aspect of the poem—the Black Knight's docile grief—and here is where the Narrator's May forest collides with the Black Knight's forest of lament. Although the Black Knight mourns his loss in the forest like Yvain and Orfeo, his grief is melancholic, but not mad, in that he has not forgotten, nor does he seem to want to forget, who he is, from whence he comes, or his purpose for being in the forest. It is moderated by the formulae that Chaucer borrows to present the tale. This is a well-groomed, domesticated grief, not the full-blown mad mourning of the romance heroes, and the equally orderly forest reflects this difference.

The Black Knight's well-ordered grief and Chaucer's taming of the forest parallels Chaucer's use of generic conventions. There is no shortage of vitality here, as the verdant landscape suggests; however, for all its voluptuousness, Chaucer's forest is

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<sup>51</sup> The puppy has been much analyzed by other critics and is of minor importance here. See, for example, Saunders, 156, John Block Friedman, ("The Dreamer, the Whelp, and Consolation in the *Book of the Duchess*." *Chaucer Review* 3 (1969): 145-62), Rooney, Hefernan, and Bolens and Taylor.

surprisingly reserved when compared to Yvain's and Orfeo's experiences, as we find in his description of the trees in the forest:

Hyt ys no need eke for to axe  
 Wher there were many grene greves,  
 Or thikke of trees, so ful of leves;  
 And every tree stood by himselve  
 Fro other wel ten foot or twelve –  
 So grete trees, so huge of strengthe,  
 Of fourty or fifty fadme lengthe,  
 Clene withoute bowgh or stikke,  
 With croppes brode, and eke as thikke –  
 They were nat an ynche asunder –  
 That hit was shadewe overall under. (416-426)

Befitting the description of the rest of the forest, the trees are large, healthy and strong, full of broad leaves and providing ample shade for the forest inhabitants. What is odd about the description here is that the trees are evenly spaced apart every ten to twelve feet in order not to crowd the others and that they contain no stray “bowgh or stikke” that might inhibit the beauty of the scene. As Saunders has suggested, this is a dreamscape, so the trees take on dream-like characteristics and therefore appear perfect (156). Again, the use of generic form determines how and where the Black Knight will perform his grief by producing a landscape in which to enact it that mirrors the quality of the grief itself: recognizably “wild,” but aesthetically ordered, like the lament. After all, as Saunders claims, the forest “is portrayed as the appropriate setting for the complaint of the Black Knight, and recalls the use of the forest in Middle English lyrics” (156).

Regardless of the apparent appropriateness of the setting, the lively green growth of the forest and the strong and healthy trees seem to contrast starkly with the Black Knight's dark clothing and grievous laments. The shade produced by the trees has been read by Huppé and Robertson as analogous to the Black Knight's sorrow and oblivion

(143). Yet, the shady ground beneath the trees does not negate the lushness of the forest or the brightness of the day. The shade here occupies only a single line of the poem while the description of the liveliness of the forest takes up some forty-six lines, suggesting that, despite Nature's abundant propensity to life, this solitary man sits enshrouded by the shadow of his singular grief. St. John further associates the trees with the Black Knight's rank in their immensity and the depth of his emotions in their height and shade (30). But, despite his rank, the Black Knight's sorrow separates him from the larger group. As with the poems in previous chapters, the loneliness that accompanies grief separates the aristocratic male from the standard group identification and, therefore, from being understood by that group.

Although the forest is appropriate as a locus of lament, this forest, unlike the previous ones, is tamed. The trees are orderly and rhythmic in presentation, stand evenly spaced apart, and are naturally pruned and tidy, much like poetry itself and much like Chaucer's presentation of the Black Knight's grief, which is entirely conventional in both content and form while being less so in presentation. Though not the manicured garden of love alluded to in the poem's reference to the *Romance of the Rose*, this forest's artificiality bears the mark of social and cultural courtly intervention rather than the overgrown and dangerous forest of adventure found in the romances. This forest is the ideal forest, perfect for a courtly expression of aristocratic grief—a forest still, so recognizable as the locus of the lament, but with the luxuries of courtly artifice in order to cultivate an orderly rendition of bereavement according to similarly symmetrical and orderly conventions of generic forms.

Helen Phillips remarks on the popularity of the dream narrative in the Middle Ages, stating that its fashionableness must have been “to a great extent because of the opportunities it offered not only for variety of subject but also for sophistication of structure for playing with different frames and narrative levels within the same work” (3). This “playing with” frames and levels, she continues, allows for the text “to move between narrative and lyric, or between narrative and debate or didactic speeches, and dreams readily accommodate both allegorically and realistically conceived characters and landscapes” (3). I would add to this that it also allows the characters to say and do things that their historical counterparts cannot, such as “publicly” and excessively mourning a death or, in the case of the Narrator, boldly question a man of higher social rank than himself in order to coax him into clarifying his point and into using recollection to overcome grief. Doing the latter allows the reader to surmise that, while grief and other emotions must necessarily be uniquely and individually experienced, they are, nonetheless, felt as a certain type of experience known to members of all social ranks.

#### The *Dits Amoureux* and the English Love Lyric

Since others have expertly and thoroughly addressed Chaucer’s borrowing from the *dits amoureux*, I will only refer to those instances in which Chaucer’s uses these texts to discuss grief, the forest, and gender. As Wimsatt so eloquently details, Chaucer’s *Book of the Duchess* owes much to Machaut’s *Jugement dou Roy Behaingne*, *Jugement dou Roy de Navarre*, and *Remede de Fortune*. While Wimsatt’s comparisons are sweeping and he covers a great deal of territory, culminating in the importance of Chaucer’s use of his narrator, the most notable connection between Machaut’s texts and the *Book* is

twofold: the entrance of the debating parties into a forest setting, complete with singing birds and a dog (discussed above), and the debate itself, which is between a man and a woman who argue whether the most devastating loss of a loved one is that exacted by death or of a rift caused by a lover's betrayal. Concerning the verdicts of the two different kings in Machaut's *Behaingne* and *Navarre*, *Behaingne* finds for the knight that a lover's betrayal is worse and *Navarre* sides with the lady, that the death of a loved one is the greater loss. As Wimsatt acknowledges, "the whole section of Chaucer's poem in which the Black Knight participates combines elements of the situations and stories of the two despondent lovers in *Behaingne*" (92). The result is a character who suffers from both love sickness after the refusal of his affections by his lady and from the death of his beloved wife after he has gained her hand. The Black Knight's loss, then, as he insists to the Narrator of the poem, is the worst of all not because White was, by all men's standards (1052), the fairest lady possible, but because his grief combines both forms of loss and this is what the Narrator must struggle to understand and the Black Knight to make understood.

The complaint of the spurned lover would have been one of the courtly conventions familiar to Chaucer's audience—and to the Narrator—from the works of Machaut, Froissart, Lorris and Meun, the romances, Classical mythology, and from contemporary love lyrics. Similarly, Chaucer's Narrator recognizes in the Black Knight the gestures, attitudes, and language of the standard love lament: the virtues of the lady love, loss or rejection of love, the departure of life's joys, and a desire for death. We need only refer back to Yvain's and Orfeo's elegiac descriptions of their loved ones, their declarations of the loss of joy after losing them, and the resultant desire for the end of



their suffering, usually by either pleading for death, as with Yvain, or being heedless of it, like Orfeo. Love lyrics, too, are rife with these commonplaces. Consider, for example, this brief thirteenth-century lyric, “I Live in Great Sorrow”:

Fowles in the frith,  
 The fisses in the flod,  
 And I mon waxe wod:  
 Mulch sorw I walke with  
 For beste of bon and blod.

(“Birds in the wood, the fish in the river, and I must go mad: I live in great sorrow because of the best creature living”; Davies 52; Davies’ translation).

Also, the thirteenth-century poem alternately entitled “The Cleric Courts His Lady” and “My Deth I Love, My Lyf Ich Hate” provides the complete formula of beautiful lady, loss of (or failure to obtain) love, joy’s departure, and a longing to die. Thus, the Narrator could easily construe the Black Knight’s lament as a standard lover’s complaint, since it follows the pattern so precisely.

The Narrator shares the knight’s opening lament in its entirety:

I have of sorwe so gret won  
 That joye gete I never non,  
 Now that I see my lady bright,  
 Which I have loved with al my might,  
 Is fro me ded and ys agoon.  
 Allas, deth, what ayleth the,  
 That thou noldest have taken me,  
 Whan thou toke my lady swete,  
 That was so fair, so fresh, so fre,  
 So good that men may wel se  
 Of al goodness she had no mete! (475-486)

The first stanza opens with the knight’s sorrow, addresses his loss of joy, mentions that his sorrow is due to the loss of his lady, whom he loved entirely, and ends with a statement about her being “dead and gone.” The next stanza picks up with the knight’s own longing for death and four elegiac lines addressing his lady’s fine qualities. All of

these characteristics are attributes of the lover's complaint, and the Black Knight's later detailing of his tale of woe addresses, in part, White's rejection of him.

Thus Chaucer alludes to the conventional aspect of both courtly love poetry and of the courtly romance—the lamenting lovesick knight who moons over his lady and longs for death because she has refused him. The Narrator is not disappointed in his assumption to this end, as the Black Knight shares the story of how he wooed White and was initially denied, effectively presenting himself as a standard-bearer for representations of the literary courtly norm and its generic forms, and the Black Knight performs his duty to a tee. He begins with the trope of the heartsick lover who wishes to die, but cannot, using all of the expected hyperbolic language. His world is reduced to dichotomies—day has turned to night, joy to sorrow, health to sickness, love to hate (598-612)—and he makes of himself the ideal sufferer of bereavement in his statement “For y am sorwe, and sorwe ys y” (597), which is not a far cry from the line “mulch sorw I walke with” found in “I Live in Great Sorrow.” True, as Helen Phillips argues, the *dits amoureux* of Froissart and Machaut, while “[centering] on the theme of love [also] become the occasion for many other themes: death, Fortune, and literature itself” (11), as the *Book of the Duchess* indicates; but for the Narrator, this lament's focus on death is not a focus on the death of the lady, but on the Black Knight's longing for his own death.

The Narrator does not initially understand that the Black Knight grieves because his wife has died. Considering Machaut's debate again, there are two reasons for deep sorrow: one being the death of a loved one and the other to express sorrow over the rejection or betrayal of a lover. The story of the Black Knight's love for White and how he attempted to convince her to allow him to perform love service in her behalf is entirely

orderly and conventional. He spies her at a gathering, thinks her the most beautiful woman in the world, describes her beauty in idealized terms, falls in love with her, writes songs and poetry to woo her, and promises to serve and worship her always as a devotee of the God of Love ought to do. Indeed, as with the Dreamer in the *Romance of the Rose*, the Black Knight is “espied” by Love and is powerless to reject the god’s powers over him (835-6). Predictably, the object of the lover’s attentions turns him down. In this wise the poem revisits tropes found in the story of Yvain and of countless other romance lovers, as well as those of courtly love lyrics. While many lyrics, such as the anonymous fourteenth-century “Byrd One Brerë” proffer praises of the lady’s virtues, both physical and spiritual, and a statement that only the lady can save the lover from his great sorrow, other lyrics, such as the anonymous “A Fickle Mistress,” “An Inconstant Mistress,” and “A Heartless Mistress” focus on the deep wounds caused by betrayal and denial of affections and the resulting incurable sorrow and despair. Few, indeed, consider the death of a beloved. The Narrator, then, demonstrates his recognition of, if not his own participation in, these common lyric tropes and assumes that the Black Knight is doing the same because, in his use of elegiac tone and language, he is.

Conversely, R. M. Lumiansky, argues that the Narrator, like the Black Knight, suffers from bereavement rather than lovesickness (118), as was then, and remains yet today, the prominent theory for the Narrator’s sleeplessness and emotional numbness. Lumiansky suggests that the logical organization of the poem can only be explained if all three segments—the Narrator’s frame tale, the telling of the Ceyx and Alcyone myth, and the dream of the Black Knight—share a common theme. That theme, for Lumiansky, is bereavement. Like Lumiansky, I argue that the Narrator finds solace through his

exchange with the Black Knight because the Black Knight is going through a similar plight; however, I further argue that the Narrator has misunderstood the Black Knight's grief as lovesickness rather than that he is himself bereaved. If he had been grieving over a death, would he not have identified more quickly with the Black Knight's initial reference to his beloved being "dead and gone"? Would it have taken so long for him to understand that the Black Knight's loss is not that of a rift caused by a lover's squabble or scorn? Especially since the Narrator had fallen asleep reading a tale of bereavement due to death, it seems more likely that had this been his malady, he would have recognized the same in the Black Knight and sympathetic agreement would have occurred much sooner. Instead, the Narrator assumes lovesickness as the Black Knight's ailment because the courtly tradition holds that behavior like the Black Knight's is the conventional behavior of knights in love and love service denied. Steven Davis concurs, arguing that the Narrator is certainly familiar with the Machauldian (or French) ethic, and therefore is not expecting the Black Knight to lament over death rather than deceit or denial of affections (401).

Chaucer, through the Narrator, points out the pitfalls of this courtly convention by launching into an admonition of the Black Knight for his thoughts of death, using tales of suicidal lovers to illustrate his points. In the romances I have examined thus far in this dissertation, men go mad and experience a period of despondency and a desire to die as a result of their bereavement and lovesickness, but they do not succeed in dying of grief. This is a reaction generally reserved for women. We see this in the litany of Classical characters to which the Narrator refers after hearing the Black Knight's tale of woe. Among the women on the list are Medea, Phyllis, Dido, and Echo (726-735)—a list to

which we might add Alcyone, of whom the Narrator reads: all of them died because their lovers did not return to them. All but Alcyone, however, are aggrieved because their loves are untrue, not because they have died, which has caused James Winny to conclude that Chaucer's Narrator is staunchly against *fin amour* and that his reference to Dido as a "fool" suggests that the Narrator does not realize that the Black Knight "shares the outlook" of such lovers who would die for love (69). Winny prefers to believe that the Narrator is "ignorant" of *fin amour*, although he is willing to argue that the Narrator suffers from lovesickness. While true that both could be the case, it is doubtful that one who suffers sleeplessness as a result of love—a courtly romance staple—would be unfamiliar with or ignorant of the courtly love ideal of perfect love (*fin amour*), especially since he self-presents as a well-read man who is familiar with the literature that espouses it. That he would turn to tales of this type of love for solace suggests that he is not, in fact, ignorant of *fin amour* at all. Rather, this turn to women of classical romance demonstrates the Narrator's clear awareness of the tradition in which men do not simply pine away for their lovers, despite their threats to do so. Furthermore, the Narrator lacks understanding of the Black Knight's true plight and this list of lovesick women serves as negative exempla for the purpose of overcoming grief over love loss rather than grief over death. With the exception of his very recent reading of the Ceyx and Alcyone tale, which he has clearly not yet incorporated into his mental library of tales of love and loss, all of those who die of grief die because their lovers have betrayed or denied them.

The Narrator does not include Alcyone in his list of suicidal lovers, though he certainly presents her as one in the prelude to the dream sequence. When the Narrator chooses a tale to read in order to help him sleep, he chooses the story of love and loss in a

married couple. He picks the tale up at the moment when Alcyone begins to fear that the worst may have happened to her husband, Ceyx, but cannot bring herself to face the likelihood that he is dead. Alcyone prays to Juno that she might have a sign concerning the fate of Ceyx and whether he is living or dead. Juno sends her messenger to Morpheus with the request for him to inhabit the body of the dead Ceyx in order that he might relay his message “in person” to his beloved that he is dead. Morpheus in Ceyx’s skin goes to Alcyone and lovingly tells her that he is dead and encourages her not to despair. True to the tale, Alcyone is nonetheless distressed. However, Chaucer alters the myth both by presenting Ceyx and Alcyone as a loving couple and by having Alcyone die of a broken heart three days after learning the fate of her dear Ceyx, but not providing the ultimate metamorphosis of the loving married couple into birds, thus allowing them a happy ending together. Instead, Chaucer’s Alcyone dies of grief and that is where Chaucer’s version of the tale ends.

Why this abrupt ending and why no reunion between Ceyx and Alcyone? The first obvious reason and one that Lumiansky supports, is that the ending is not necessary for Chaucer’s purpose (122)—the Narrator has read all he needs to read in order find a possible cure for his sleeplessness; he asks Morpheus to grant him sleep, even promising a nice feather bed if the god would be so kind as to comply. But this is only the immediate cause of this change. Other reasons that relate more directly to the Narrator’s lethargy and to the later bereavement of the Black Knight also recommend themselves. Among these are the possibilities that there will be no earthly happy reunion between the Black Knight and White, so granting such a reunion to the mythical couple would serve no didactic purpose, and that ending the tale with Alcyone’s death aligns her more

directly with Dido, Medea, and the other suicidal women listed in the dream. To die for loss of love is weak and womanish and Chaucer uses this female analog here to make this point.<sup>52</sup> Just as the Narrator urges the Black Knight to let his despair go, “Chaucer’s revenant [Ceyx] wishes [Alcyone] to spare herself the distress and exhaustion of unrestrained grief” and stresses the “danger of . . . depression by trying to arouse [the Black Knight] to the futility of grief” (Winny 49). Certainly Winny is correct that the Narrator seeks to explain the dangers of depression with the Black Knight; however, the grief that the Narrator finds “futile” is that over a lover’s betrayal or scorn, as he does not yet understand that the Black Knight grieves over his wife’s death, which the Narrator will later deem to be most pitiable.

Using the tale of Alcyone as a precursor to the Narrator’s learning of, and attempt to understand, the Black Knight’s grief, then, serves as an example of the handling of grief that is echoed by the list of women (and Samson) that comes later as well as a reference back to generic norms. The Black Knight should not die because form—both social and generic—rarely allows for it and because masculinity is a performative product of these forms. Samson is an anomaly among this list, and while he serves as one example of men who die from grief, the Narrator is suggesting that this is not the

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<sup>52</sup> Patricia Clare Ingham argues in “From Kinship to Kingship: Mourning, Gender, and Anglo-Saxon Community” (*Grief and Gender: 700-1700*. New York: Palgrave, 2003) that “female mourning might be an activity with important cultural powers” as opposed to a passive and unproductive “victimhood” (18). While I do not deny that this might be the case, particularly in the Anglo-Saxon texts to which Ingham refers, in all of the medieval texts studied in this dissertation feminine grief is viewed, by the texts, as certainly being passive and unproductive and men who grieve like women are scorned for behaving in an unseemly and unmanly fashion. Rather than bucking up and taking action by moving forward with their lives, they are wallowing in sorrow and self-pity, which serves no cultural purpose for an aristocratic man.

preferable way for a man to handle loss.<sup>53</sup> In all of the examples in this dissertation the successful male mourner does not die or commit suicide; he goes mad or very nearly so. He goes to the woods to go *wode*, expresses his grief in loud laments, swooning, sobs, melancholia, and despair, learns valuable lessons about his own strength and fortitude, regains his sanity, and goes on with his life. Thus Alcyone as an example serves primarily to show that death, like Chaucer's version of the tale, is final and that neither Ceyx nor Alcyone will be returning from it, and will certainly not be reuniting in another earthly form to continue their loving marriage. While the Narrator does not share this tale with the Black Knight, indeed he does not even mention this tale among the others, it serves as the basis for the Narrator's reminder to the Black Knight that suicide is a damnable offence from which he will neither be able to continue on with this corporeal life, nor expect a heavenly one.

Though the Narrator had just read the tale of Ceyx and Alcyone, he does not connect Ceyx's death or Alcyone's suicidality with the Black Knight's sorrow. Chaucer, however, does. Referring back to Machaut's *Behaingne* and *Navarre*, Chaucer's extensive use of the lover's complaint refers not only to a lover's rebuke or betrayal, but also serves double duty as an expression of bereavement after the death of a loved one. If a man in a courtly lyric or romance laments copiously over his lady's betrayal it is acceptable because he has promised her love service and the God of Love contrives to inflame his passions so that he has no other choice but to behave irrationally.

Contemporary Christian teachings, however, state that excessive grief over the death of a

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<sup>53</sup> In the prose *Lancelot*, Lancelot does, however, refuse to eat after Guinevere's death, but his own death comes only after he joins a religious order, suggesting (though not entirely successfully) that Lancelot's languishing death is forgiven.



loved one may be read as *tristitia* or *accidie* and is, therefore, vain and sinful.<sup>54</sup> In order to avoid the sinfulness imposed by patristic teachings, then, Chaucer borrows the language of courtly love and loss to explain and affectively represent other forms of loss. In particular, this language and these conventions give the Black Knight a voice that patristic teachings do not allow him by giving him language through which to express his immense grief. Thus in his borrowing from Machaut, Chaucer answers the debate over which is the greater loss—that of the betrayed or that of the bereaved—by answering, “both,” to some degree, yet favoring the loss of death as the greater loss while borrowing the language of the loss of betrayal as the means through which to express it. That is, there seems to exist, aside from laments found in epics like King Etzel’s in *die Klage* or Charlemagne’s over Roland in the *Chanson de Roland*, or in religious verse related to Christ’s passion or the sinner’s sorrow, no other formal, aristocratic mode for showing grief for a lost loved one. Thus the Black Knight must use the language available to him to express his feelings. Edwards claims that “the rhetoric of [the Black Knight’s] complaint diverges from the emotional core of lived experience” (*Dream* 87). Boardman, alternatively, looks at the expression of love, writing, “Unlike Alcyon, [the Black Knight] can get his love back only by remembering her in poetry, and it is through him that we see a growing conflict between the courtly poetic tradition and the experience of love” (572). While we may agree that language may only approximate experience and that highly formalized and idealized literary style may not adequately express strong

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<sup>54</sup> For a thorough discussion of the implications of *accidie* and a reading of the *Book of the Duchess* from a patristic perspective see Bernard Huppé and D. W. Robertson, Jr.’s 1963 essay on *The Book of the Duchess*, which can be found reprinted in William A. Quinn’s *Chaucer’s Dream Visions and Shorter Poems* (New York: Garland, 1999. 131-182).

emotions, the reader is left without doubt as to the Black Knight's love or his grief by the end of the poem. Thus, it seems false to suggest that the conventions fail to express emotions adequately when, in reality, they turn them into ideals and this is, in part, why the Narrator fails to connect the Black Knight's speech to a "real" loss, and finds his suicidality unfounded.

Oddly, one man is added to the Narrator's list of suicidal lovers and, as with the tale of Ceyx and Alcyone, the focus of the tale seems somewhat altered to suit the needs of the poem. The male character that the Narrator adds to this list is Samson, whom the Narrator claims died "for Dalida" (738), which we take to mean that, like the women previously listed, Samson dies for love, committing suicide by bringing down the temple because Delilah betrayed him. What the Narrator clearly leaves out is that Samson's destruction of the temple is an act of revenge. He does, however, fit the mold, in many ways, of the "emotionally prostrate, devoted lovers [who] are often dubbed 'feminized' heroes" (Phillips 45). Phillips goes on to explain that this device had long been used in Medieval romance and that "the creation of medieval aristocratic masculinity sometimes depends less on an absence of emotional extremes than on their presence in combination with this invocation of purportedly changeless and ahistorical chivalric prowess" (45). Yet, again, while these men may demonstrate emotional excess, they are often, in some way, punished for it, as with Chrétien's Erec, who is taunted for his womanish leisure after wedding Enide and must prove himself with feats of arms to regain his manhood. The addition of Samson to this list is significant because the Narrator paints him as a jilted lover not unlike the women he first lists; yet, the Narrator says of him, "But ther is no man alive her / Wolde for a fers make this woo!" (740-1). The Black Knight would

certainly have been familiar with the biblical tale and would recognize that this example was added by the Narrator in an attempt to show that, while men, too, have died for love, their losses are much greater than the loss he has suffered—the loss of “a fers” (741)—which the Narrator reads literally as the loss of a game piece (queen) in a game of chess,<sup>55</sup> or more conventionally, as the a metaphor for loss by betrayal or spurning. Certainly, at this point the Narrator has misunderstood what it is, exactly, that the Black Knight has lost; he has not yet grasped that the man’s wife is dead and that his loss is, therefore, permanent and devastating.

Thus, when the Narrator lists Samson among the suicidal women of Classical tales, he has in mind the impracticality of any man in his contemporary day and age dying over such commonplace occurrences. To do so would be to be akin to being an unreasonable woman who would die over a lost lover. As Elaine Tuttle Hansen argues, this is the proper response for the bereaved wife (i.e. Alcyone), but not for the bereaved husband, who should resume the task of living (71-2). Though the mythical tales are exciting and still popular, they are, after all, literary and do not reflect what “real” people ought to do. Indeed, the Narrator begins his list of dying lovers by reminding the Black Knight that the choices made by these characters amount to self-murder (724), which is a damnable offence (725), and that love loss is hardly worth that risk.

The jilted lover connection, as many other scholars have noted, indicates that Chaucer’s Narrator has little understanding of the Black Knight’s true loss and therefore

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<sup>55</sup> Some confusion exists about the meaning of the word “fers,” but the general consensus has been that it means “queen.” However, “counselor” has also been suggested. For one such discussion of this term see Guillemette Bolens and Paul Beckman Taylor, “Chess, Clocks, and Counsellors in Chaucer’s *Book of the Duchess*.” *Chaucer Review*. 35.3 (2001): 281-293).

coerces him into relaying his tale in order to better understand.<sup>56</sup> That critics are so quick to read the Narrator as intentionally obtuse in order to draw the knight out is, however, to give him credit for knowing the contents of his whole dream before he has had it.

Additionally, Davis argues, the narrator has no reason, based on his own experience, to think that the Black Knight is genuine in his grief rather than merely enacting a romance trope (399). There is no clear indication from the Black Knight's words up to this point that his wife has died as opposed to being dead *to him* as the result of betrayal. Though he claims Death as the reason for his sorrow and declares Death his foe (577-583), he has not explained, in concrete and plain terms, why. Even his overview of his grief in the initial lament with the lines that his "lady bryght" is "fro me ded and ys agoon" could be read less as corporeal death than figurative mortality (477-9), especially when the "dead and gone" line is preceded by the line "which I have loved with al my myght" (478), which bears all the marks of the typical love lament. The Narrator is not to be faulted for

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<sup>56</sup> Numerous critics have discussed the Narrator's apparent obtuseness in great detail. Readers argue anything from the Narrator's intentional "misunderstanding" as a means of drawing the Black Knight out to the Narrator's actual lack of understanding due to the difference of language register in social rank. For an example of the former, see Louise O. Fradenburg, ("My Worlde's Blisse": Chaucer's Tragedy of Fortune." *South Atlantic Quarterly*. 98.3 (1999): 563-92) and G. L. Kittredge, (*Chaucer and His Poetry*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1970, especially pages 51-54). For the latter example, see Arthur W. Bahr, ("The Rhetorical Construction of Narrator and Narrative in Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess*." *Chaucer Review*. 35.1 (2000): 43-59) and Phillip C. Boardman ("Courtly Language and Strategy of Consolation in the *Book of the Duchess*." *ELH* 44.4 (1977): 567-79). Helen Phillips argues that, as with the narrators in many dream narratives, our Narrator is one "who advances through an experience which came to him from some source external to his own active control and whose role is, above all, to see and hear ... is, after all, more the surrogate of the reader, gradually experiencing the narrative, and the critic attempting to interpret it, than of its author writing it" (13). This corresponds with one of Winny's several explanations (which also include politeness, simple misunderstanding, and misjudgment as possibilities) that the Narrator's obtuseness could ultimately have been created in order to share information with the reader (60).

understanding such talk of death as being that of the courtly lover's complaint with which both the Black Knight and the Narrator are most certainly familiar. When the Black Knight follows his line about Death being his foe with "That I wolde dye, hyt wolde not soo" (584), it is hardly surprising that the Narrator reads this inability to die as the reason why Death is the foe of the Man in Black. How is he to know, when the Black Knight claims that death over "a fers," or even "ferses twelve" (723), is a bit extreme, that the knight is not simply speaking of losing a chess piece, or even a lover, but rather, stating that his wife has died? The Black Knight is, essentially, perverting the romance and lyric genres by using the trope of love loss unconventionally, and this misuse of genre is what leaves the Narrator ignorant of the Knight's true intent.

The Black Knight's use of the language of courtly love has, however, been read by such critics as Ebel and Davis as a detriment to his ability to accurately express himself. St. John finds that the love lyric, in the hands of the Black Knight, is "no pretense, but a true reflection of a very real state of inner turmoil" (45), though he also finds that the Black Knight himself seems to lack faith "in the efficacy of conventional rhetoric to convey real meaning" (35). This concern of the Black Knight's is most evident in his frustration with the Narrator's inability to comprehend what he is trying hard to convey. For Edwards, this tension between understanding and being understood is one of the problems with which Chaucer is grappling:

The aesthetic problem [Chaucer] faces—and this is the critical project of the early narratives—is to find a means of externalizing internal experience, of transferring what exists within consciousness to an intelligible form that has a social and moral existence and is thus an object of knowledge. (68)

Indeed, this is one of the uses Chaucer makes of the dream vision, generally, and recollection and memory more specifically—to elucidate and make concrete through

literary forms and devices the internal experience of love and loss and to try, despite both Edwards' and Boardman's claims, to reconnect internal experience with rhetoric and the outward expression of emotions. It seems that by making the implicit explicit through form, Chaucer seeks a connection between the Black Knight's (and perhaps John of Gaunt's) loss and the reader's acknowledgment and comprehension of it. Yet, Boardman and Edwards have missed the point: form already externalizes emotion by committing it to the page. The lament is laid bare first for the Narrator to hear and then for the reader to read. The problem is not that the Black Knight is not externally expressing his inner turmoil, but that his emotional outpouring denies the concrete statement that the Narrator requires for comprehension. Furthermore, because the Narrator has failed to understand, the forms that both men, and particularly the Black Knight have been straining to make work have proven to be empty in face of the raw truth of the matter. What the truth requires is an authentic statement, followed by authentic sympathy, which the plain statement affords.

### Elegy

The Black Knight engages in the lover's complaint, which invites a reading of the affective response to loss. He insists that philosophy and other favored, "rational" remedies of the day have not worked for him:

No man may my sorwe glade  
 That maketh my hewe to falle and fade  
 And hath myn understondyng lorn  
 That me ys wo that I was born!  
 May noht make sorwes slyde,  
 Nought al the remedyes of Ovyde,  
 Ne Orpheus, god of melodye,  
 Ne Dedalus with his playes slye;

Ne hele me may no phisicien,  
 Noght Ypocras ne Galyen;  
 Me ys wo that I lyve houres twelve. (563-73)

Whereas Ovid worked for the Narrator by providing a tale that held, for him, the secret to sleep, the Black Knight is not aided by marvelous stories. In fact, the didacticism of the Narrator in referring to characters from classical tales does not move the Black Knight or console him. He seems equally tone-deaf to the natural music that surrounds him in the forest and will not, he claims, be healed by Orpheus' melodies. If neither of these aesthetic distractions helps, then surely drama will do no better. Finally, the Black Knight assures the Narrator that the medical cures handed down from Hippocrates and Galen are useless to help his cause. His illness, he believes, is beyond humoral imbalance that can be cured by food, drink, or exchanging or purging fluids. His is the direst of all illnesses.

Yet, he engages in art as a possible release for his sorrow that may lead to an alleviation of his pain. He engages in the lament and in the elegy, which serves to eulogize White through memory, thus engaging in another of the common "cures" for melancholy and loss. By eulogizing White, that is, by remembering her aloud, he shares a perception of her that allows the Narrator to think of her as the Black Knight wishes her to be remembered, thus allowing the Narrator to forge his own image of White that allows the two men to share a similar, but not exact, understanding of her. As a result, eulogy, as the generic form memory takes in this poem, serves to bridge a gap in understanding between the Narrator and the Black Knight and further serves to remember White to the text's readers through its written form.

Edwards, St. John, and Winny acknowledge the Narrator's and Black Knight's use of memory as a means by which to overcome grief. Edwards refers to "medieval

faculty psychology,” which consists of three “principle categories”: imagination, memory, and intellect (4), which also correspond to medieval understanding of the configuration of the brain as conceived by such thinkers as Avicenna and Galen. Edwards and Winny both address the importance of imagination to the *Book of the Duchess* while Edwards and St. John add to this the role memory plays in the “healing” of the Black Knight and the Narrator. Though memory meant something slightly different in the Middle Ages than it does in our contemporary age of psychology and psychoanalysis, there was then, as now, considerable interest in its purpose and process. Although the *Book* uses *imaginatio* in its “formation of images from sensory experiences” as well as Chaucer’s ability to put into combination general images to create “a new composite image” (150), especially in the Narrator’s post-mortem introduction to White, memory seems to be the primary operating faculty engaged in Chaucer’s approach to death, grief, and recovery.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Studies of memory can be traced to the teachings of Aristotle, up through Augustine and Galen, and Avicenna and Averroës, to Aquinas, who insists on the role the soul and *phantasmata* play in memory (Harvey 61). According to Simon Kemp, who has written extensively on medieval psychology, faculty psychology essentially originated with Aristotle and was subsequently debated and revised by Galen, Augustine, and Nemesius, whose reworking of the Aristotelian notion of brain ventricles combined with Galen’s placing of the faculties in these ventricles became the most commonly taught version of cognitive—or faculty—psychology practiced during the Middle Ages (*Medieval* 54). For more on faculty psychology and its origins, see Simon Kemp’s two works, *Medieval Psychology* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990) and *Cognitive Psychology in the Middle Ages* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1996) and E. Ruth Harvey’s *Inward Wits: Psychological Theory in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (London: Warburg Institute, 1975). Rudolph Siegel’s *Galen on Psychology, Psychopathology, and Function and Diseases of the Nervous System* (Basel, Switzerland: S. Karger, 1973) provides a good background on Galen’s theories of psychology and brain functions and S. van Riet’s edition of Avicenna’s *Liber de Anima seu Sextus de Naturalibus*, found in two bound editions (volumes I-III in the first, IV-V in the second; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1972 and 1968), contains the writings of Avicenna on the functions of the brain. Aristotle’s *De*



Memory, however, was viewed as a storehouse for images (species) that were embedded in the mind (like images engraved on a wax table, according to Aristotle) in the past and for which the rememberer must search, in the present, to recall and re-present, and this seems to be the faculty at work at this point in the *Book*. In his history of memory, *Marking the Mind*, Kurt Danziger refers to Aristotle's reference to recollection as "hunting up the series" of references of time and space that enable individuals to recall the past (68). Chaucer's hunt, then, takes on another dimension as the hunt to recollect White—or more generally, to recollect the past. In this sense, memory is equated not with the passive memory afforded to all animals, but to active recollection. This "hunt," or recollection, states Danziger, was often accomplished in the Roman model through the mnemonic device of remembering individuals "by forming an image of their location in physical space" (68). The Black Knight does this as he begins to recount his story of White by thinking of her in "a place ther that I say / Trewly the fairest companye / Of ladyes that evere man with yē / Had seen togedres in oo place" (806-9). The Aristotelian model, by contrast, seeks "relationships of similarity, opposition or contiguity" and was ultimately interested in the power of the dialectical argument to prompt recollection (68). Chaucer engages the Black Knight in conversation with the Narrator who plies him with questions designed to promote recollection, or active memory. The reason for this, suggests St. John, is that the Narrator "adopts the orthodox medieval view that reason can transcend and overcome physical condition" (45)—that is, actively engaging the mind in inductive thinking can relieve the Black Knight of his grief.

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*Anima* is the source from which all of the others stem. See W. D. Ross's *The Works of Aristotle* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1930).

The Narrator is poised to assist the Black Knight in his bid to recall White and his story of his love for her because he has himself utilized memory and recollection to bring himself to the point of accepting natural law and re-engagement with life, even if just in his dream. Moreover, this use of recollection grounds him in a tradition that serves as the basis of his understanding of the Black Knight's situation that will lead to an attempt at shared understanding—or at least agreement—of the nature of the Black Knight's sorrow. By reading the tale of Ceyx and Alcyone and recalling the tales depicted in the glass of his dream chamber windows, Phillips notes, the Narrator evokes, both for himself and for Chaucer's readers, "reminiscences" and "associations" with these texts that conjure up original evocations of them or, to use the medieval concept of *imaginatio*, to create new images and associations for both the Narrator and the reader (17).<sup>58</sup> By doing so, the Narrator is more able to connect the tradition with which he is familiar with the tale the Black Knight shares of his beloved White. Davis, too, refers to the room in which the Narrator awakens into his dream as a "chamber of memory" devoted to recollection of the tales of the *Romance of the Rose* and the story of Troy (396)—the parts of the tradition with which the Narrator is familiar. Thus, the Narrator has employed these literary conventions to engage the Black Knight, first by alluding to classical tales, and then by getting the knight to share his own with a similar mnemonic exercise that acts a map for reading the Black Knight's tale.

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<sup>58</sup> The imagination is where images are embedded into the consciousness of the observer as a visual image. As Rudolph Siegel has taken pains to explain, "imagination" is not really an apt translation of Galen's use of this word since the activity refers less to creating images—something that happens in the *cogitativa*—than to a comprehension of the sensual perception (141-44). Once these images are imprinted on the imagination, they move the middle ventricle where they first encounter the *cogitativa*. This is where the actual image supplied by the imagination is altered and formed into a new visual image that often combines familiar images to make the new one.

The Narrator directly engages the Black Knight in the active work of memory when he instigates the telling of the Knight's tale with "tellethe me of your sorwes smerte" (555). In this way he goads the knight into recounting his story, which in itself is a mnemonic used to recall the source or sources of the man's grief. The Black Knight is shortsighted, according to medieval thought, in his belief that the Narrator's ruse will not successfully help him to accept his grief, since he acknowledges himself that his understanding is "lorn" (lost; 565).<sup>59</sup> The visual images of memory, according to Aquinas, are required for understanding—the intellect, which does not itself store images, relies on the storehouse of the memory to assist in producing understanding (Kemp 75).<sup>60</sup> The Narrator, seeming to work with this notion, disregards the Black Knight's comment about the inability of all cures to help, and continues to prod the Black Knight into recollection in order both to spur him to think rationally about his loss and to more concretely express it in order that his loss can be made more comprehensible for both the Black Knight and the Narrator himself.

The Black Knight's recollection has all of the hallmarks of the associative nature ascribed to memory by Aristotle and his followers, as one part of the Black Knight's tale causes him to recall another. This is not to suggest, however, that Chaucer's presentation of the Black Knight's representation is not, in some ways, linear; indeed, the tale is carefully plotted and chronologically presented as his tale progresses from love at first sight to White's death, but progress is interspersed with the Black Knight's looping back

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<sup>59</sup> By "understondyng" here, the Black Knight likely means his capacity to think rationally about his loss, since he has lost all ability to be consoled, has a downcast countenance, and has fallen into such deep despair that he no longer has a lust for life.

<sup>60</sup> For a more thorough description of Aquinas' conception of understanding, see the *Summa Theologica*, part 1, section VI, questions 84-6.

into his morbid sorrow. Here, the Narrator must prompt the Black Knight to continue by referring to Socrates' claim that Fortune holds no sway over him. The reference to Socrates, while used to downplay Fortune's wiles, also affirms the dialectic in which the Narrator engages the Black Knight and encourages him to remember White and share his story. He asks the knight, "Why so?" (721) and "how that may be?" (745) and prods the Black Knight with, "Good sir, telle me al hooly / In what wyse, how, why, and wherefore / That ye have thus your blysse lore" (746-8), thus providing specific questions in a hermeneutical exercise for the Black Knight to address in detail. The knight seems to be poised for his long recollection, as he asks the Narrator to sit down while he relays his story (749), which fills the next 291 lines.

The Narrator again interrupts, though, when the Black Knight lapses once more into what the Narrator seems to read as a solipsistic melancholy over his beloved White. The Narrator questions the knight's claims to her universal beauty, suggesting that his is a subjective viewpoint, thus requiring the knight to requite him with a more detailed response—more memories of White—and with the acknowledgment that she was deemed most fair by "alle that hir seyen" (1052). Throughout this section the Black Knight engages in the elegy proper for White, presenting her as the paragon of virtue and moderation. Phillips suggests that the Black Knight's description presents her as embodying the "controlling restraint and self-mastery" required of a lady of her rank (34). "This is," she continues, "a portrait of a young noblewoman who has learned the difficult and ever contradictory arts of perfectly well-bred behavior in a woman" (34). For St. John, the Black Knight's description, couched in the language of courtly love, "overrides [the] previous empirical experience of any reality" of White's bodily existence

(58). This is not just the language of courtly love; it is also the language of the medieval memorial encomium which, as McGuire recounts, similarly often portrayed the deceased in abstract terms of virtuous ideals rather than as a well-defined, “real” individual (ix). That the Black Knight paints White as less than real also impacts how the Narrator perceives the Black Knight’s loss as accordingly “less than” serious.

This confusion may be explained, in part, by the Black Knight’s recollection of his lovesickness over the then maiden White’s rejection of him, which prompts the Narrator to joke, “Me thynketh y have such a chaunce / As shryfte wythoute repentaunce” in response to the Black Knight’s “truth” that he would never “for al thys world” leave his lady (1108-14). Huppé and Robertson read this line as the Narrator telling the Black Knight that he is akin to one who does not repent for that to which he confesses and that, as such, the Narrator is reading his tale as a confession of his love (161). Moreover, they read this confession as one that will continue to go unabsolved because it is based in “earthly love of his lady” rather than in heavenly peace, and therein lies his lack of consolation (161). Ebel, alternatively, reads these lines as the Narrator’s lack of understanding of the Black Knight’s point and argues that the Narrator believes the knight to be regretful of his extreme love of White and that his line is a suggestion that he will surely be forgiven for his luxuriousness without having to repent (204). Robert A. Watson, in yet another interpretation, traces Chaucer’s use of this phrase to a dialogue with Reason and the Lover in the *Romance of the Rose* and argues that the Narrator’s purpose is to tell the Black Knight that he “need not regret the experience he has recounted” (572-3). In this sense, Watson agrees with Huppé and Robertson that the knight’s story is a “confession” of sorts, just as it agrees with Ebel’s reading. Watson

writes of the line, “it follows the confessional mode of answering the circumstantial questions that the dreamer has posed” (573). Watson claims, “The key phrase rather shows the therapeutic aim of the confession: to remember truly and faithfully and to be refreshed rather than aggrieved by recollection” (573). To take this point one step further, the Narrator, serving as “confessor,” would not demand further penance of the Black Knight because, primarily, the Narrator has not understood that there is a problem that needs mending, but also because the penance is in the telling. The Narrator finds the Black Knight’s account an admirable and comprehensible statement given the proofs the Black Knight has given him for White’s virtues and his own devotion.

The Narrator, having listened to the Black Knight’s initial lament and to the back story of his love for his lady, coaxes the Knight into talking about how he first spoke to White and of his success in wooing her (1130-36), reminding him that, despite his explanations up to this point, he has yet to clearly explain what it is that he has lost (1135-5, 1139-40). The Black Knight ends his tale of his wooing, marriage, and love of White with, “And thus we lyved ful many a yere / So wel I kan nat telle how” (1296-7). This ending leaves the Narrator cold, though it ends happily, because he has not yet learned precisely what the Black Knight has lost. As the Knight’s tale seems to come to an end the loss with which the Narrator is familiar from the courtly lover’s lament—the spurning by the beloved—has been reclaimed and the tale apparently ends in gain, causing further confusion on the Narrator’s part as to why the Knight should still be grieving. The Narrator presses to interrogate the Black Knight once more by asking him, “Where is she now?” (1298). The knight, incredulous, retorts that this is what he had been explaining all along—that his great loss is the loss of White. Yet, the Narrator still

does not understand the *nature* of the loss and asks, “Allas, sir, how? What may that be?” (1308), eliciting the simplest statement from the Black Knight, “She ys ded!” (1309).

### Conclusion

Chaucer seeks to bring the reader, whether bereaved or merely interested in a good story, to see how conventions can provide comfort, though somewhat meager, in the face of the mutability of Fortune and passion. The end result of the understanding that is obtained in the poem is that the Narrator seems to be enriched by his experience of hearing another’s perspective on sorrow, even if we are left uncertain as to whether or not the Knight has equally benefitted in the sharing. That the Narrator, first, is able to fall asleep thanks to the effects of reading a good classical tale and, second, awakens from his dream ready to write—an active pursuit as opposed to the numb torpor of the opening lines—suggests that the consolation of text and dream have helped him. Thus, the use of forms—classical mythology, dream vision, *dits amoureux*, *consolatio*, and finally, the narrative poem—have sufficiently served to satisfy him and bring him through the illness he suffers at the beginning. Likewise, Chaucer’s poem suggests that literary forms and conventions can help to allay the anxiety of loss through shared experiences. The loss is not reversed and consolation remains incomplete, just as understanding remains imperfect. As Gadamer claims, “It is enough to say that we understand in a different way, if we understand at all” (682); yet, by “[placing] ourselves in the other situation,” we attempt to understand it (685). Once the Narrator is able to see the Black Knight’s loss by looking beyond his limited understanding of this loss through his perception of the forms used to convey it, he is able to see “loss” in its complexity. Mauchaut’s lady and knight

are merged in the Black Knight and “loss of the beloved” is freshly regarded as including *both* the rejecting lover *and* the dead one. The Black Knight, through his perceived misuse of forms, illustrates the limitation of these forms to extract universal comprehension from its users.

Literary conventions like the lyric lament and *dits amoureux*, exhibit an outpouring of emotion that excite the reader’s passions to respond affectively, but not necessarily properly, to another’s plight. The reason for this is that lyric and romance rely on affect and not on comprehension, on a visceral response, and not on reasoned understanding of the textual problem. In the case of the Narrator and Black Knight, the Black Knight’s use of these conventions leads the Narrator to respond with his own interpretation of these forms. Additionally, *consolatio* and elegy prove effective in their attempts to draw from the Black Knight an elegiac reconstruction of his tale of love and loss for the purpose of finding the source of that same loss. Recalling the tale and reimagining White are possible and serve as distractions from his sorrow, but they cannot elucidate for the Narrator why the Black Knight mourns so deeply. Only by breaking form can the Black Knight make his meaning clear and the Narrator comprehend his meaning. Yet, forms serve their purpose—to express emotion in the case of the lyric; to establish tropes of love and loss through the romances and *dits amoureux*; to seek a means of displacing sorrow through the *consolatio*; to use memory to reconnect with the lost beloved in the elegy—but when understanding is sought, they fail. Only direct questioning and response can approximate such comprehension. Questions like “Where is she now?” and “What may [your loss] be?” and simply stated answers like “She ys ded!” finally communicate the Black Knight’s loss. Indeed, they make clear the stark and



universal finality of the loss of death. But, bald fact does little to demonstrate the *particular* love and loss *felt by* an individual—a Black Knight, a John of Gaunt—or the *particular* understanding of that loss by an individual—a Narrator, a reader—that such generic proliferation as that found in *The Book of the Duchess* affords. What Chaucer achieves in this text is not universal understanding of another's grief, but universal understanding that loss and grief exist, and a plurality of understandings of what loss and grief are, why we suffer them, and how they feel.

## CHAPTER FOUR:

DEFERRED CONSOLATION AND SUBSTITUTION IN *PEARL*

The late fourteenth-century (ca. 1400) dream poem *Pearl* presents a vision of grief and consolation in which excessive grief over loss of worldly possessions is figured as madness and moderate sorrow over the sinful nature of man is considered reasonable. By the end of the poem the primary figure, the Dreamer, still grieves, but his sorrow is no longer over earthly things. Rather, as Thomas Aquinas might suggest, the Dreamer's sorrow is for his own sinfulness, which excludes him from the City of God, and for Christ's suffering. The Dreamer, then, does not cease to grieve or to desire, but rather his desire shifts to heaven and his grief to the suffering of the Lamb. In this way, the poem remains throughout a poem about grief inasmuch as it represents, in Thomistic terms, appropriate and inappropriate ways of sorrowing. In addition, Christian consolation proves to be fleeting at best because the Dreamer does not seek consolation. Rather, he seeks a self-dissolving union with, first, his deceased daughter, and then with the Lamb—a dissolution that he believes will end his sorrow, but that instead prolongs it.

Among the lessons the Dreamer gleans from his vision, then, are not just the obvious ones of Christian consolation through faith in Christ and the partaking of the Sacrament, but also lessons in desire and grief. The *Pearl* poet does not end the poem with a blissful reunion in heaven, but instead brings the reader back down to earth by leaving her with a Dreamer who remains moderately doleful, but hopefully so, and who still desires, but whose desire shifts from the earthly to the divine. The poem, therefore, reminds the reader that consolation is not a return to joy, but is, instead, merely a distraction from grief and a shift in the focus of desire, which is sometimes itself riddled

with reasons for grief. Grief is, in this text, the physical manifestation of desire for what is lost inasmuch as courtly love is the manifestation of desire for that which one cannot have. For this reason, I argue, the Pearl poet adopts the language of courtly love to represent grief. This perpetuation of loss experienced in both grief and courtly love frustrates the homiletic nature of *Pearl* that proposes a shift from desire for the lost daughter to desire for the Lamb that, according to the Pearl Maiden, should bring an end to grief. Instead, the desire for the Lamb and for the City of God that the Dreamer experiences in the Eucharist and in his dream vision proves consoling, but only insofar as consolation serves as a temporary deferral of grief that replaces a loss for a future, yet still absent, promise. That is, the loss of the daughter is replaced by the promise of the kingdom of heaven and the Eucharist serves as a reminder of yet another loss—that of Christ’s suffering, crucifixion, and ascension, and apocalypse deferred.

The language used throughout the poem, courtly language is, essentially, a language of loss in that it reflects unrequited love and, in the case of a deceased or estranged beloved, love that is lost.<sup>61</sup> In this respect, courtly love language is always a language of distance and deferment. Alternatively, Aquinas uses the language of philosophy to discuss appropriate degrees and kinds of sorrow. For Aquinas, the sorrow over the lost beloved is not to be lamented because it does not represent sorrow over sin and evil in the world. Sorrow over these things is conducive to contemplation of Christ

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<sup>61</sup> Some exceptions may include courtly love that culminates in marriage; however, even in these tales, as in *Yvain*, there are moments of separation that exemplify loss or the desire is consummated in marital sex. One of the nearest examples of the preservation of the deferred beloved occurs in “*Les Deus Amanz*” by Marie de France, but the only reason this love remains deferred is because the lover dies in the process of carrying his beloved up a hill in order to win her hand in marriage. Thus, the lover dies before he has to suffer the actual loss of the beloved and before the love is consummated. The lady, however, does suffer loss and dies of a broken heart.

and the ultimate happiness contemplation of God brings through a heavenly reward. Instead, the Dreamer's sorrow is over a worldly loss and one that should not hinder his progression toward the ultimate good realized in heaven. Furthermore, as the Dream Maiden attempts to make clear, his sorrow is wrongly placed because she has met her heavenly reward, for which he should be happy. The two divergent understandings of sorrow represented by the Dreamer and the Pearl Maiden are taken up by their equally divergent uses of language. The Dreamer, using courtly language, laments the loss of his daughter while the Pearl Maiden—the glorified form of the daughter—admonishes him for grieving over his loss, rather than acknowledging his own “madness” in a meaningful way by lamenting his own sins and reveling in her position in heaven and the potential for his eventual, though deferred, arrival there. The two characters thus exemplify the secular and the spiritual approaches to loss as the poem both presents a homily on the power of Christian consolation and refuses to accept this consolation as a satisfactory end to grief or, indeed, as true consolation.

Consequently, what seems at first blush to be a happy ending to the Dreamer's grief over his dead daughter is not a happy ending at all. This chapter follows the course of grief from the Dreamer's first expression of his loss to the plaintive final lines by considering the poet's use of courtly language to express deep sorrow. In addition, the writings of Aquinas on sorrow as a vice and a virtue prove a useful guide to reading the poem. Through this reading I consider worldly desire as a form of madness, expressed by both the Pearl Maiden and the Dreamer, and address an alternative to this madness through sorrow over sin, which separates the Dreamer from God. Also important in this chapter are the various locations of garden, forest, and Holy City as loci of grief and

consolation. Last, I address the final consolation presented in the poem as both a questionable source of comfort and a source of perpetual longing and grief.

Most critics acknowledge that the starting point and motivating factor of the poem is grief and the outcome is consolation, though there is debate over the degree of success of the final consolatory moment. While Ann Chalmers Watts, for one, places grief at the center of the poem, very few critics have made it the primary focus of their analysis of the poem, preferring, instead, to favor various secular or religious approaches either to the language, the tropes, or the eventual consolation of grief. David Aers, Ann Astell, and others have discussed the poet's use of courtly language and the connection with the *Song of Songs* and the Apocalypse of St. John, and A. C. Spearing approaches the poem through an allegorical reading, considering each of the four levels of allegory. While I am certainly interested in the movement towards resolution of grief that occurs as the Dreamer moves through his vision and awakens to reflect upon his dream in the ending stanzas, what interests me more is how grief is represented, how it pervades the text, where it occurs, and how it does not so much abate as change.

Concerning allegorical readings of *Pearl*, what I am most concerned with here is a literal reading of the text as a poem about grief and consolation. Any allegorical reading takes into account the readers' interpretation of the text and, therefore, the author's awareness of audience and how that audience might read the poem. With this in mind, I argue that the *Pearl* poet writes a poem about grief as a means of expressing grief, representing it in the best way he knows how—through courtly language, a continual cycling back upon the Dreamer's sense of loss, and of ever-present desire. This desire is often presented as lack, as in, for example, Teresa Reed's "Mary, the Maiden, and

Metonymy in *Pearl*,” or as an always unfulfilled desire that seeks to fill a void. While I agree that the Dreamer never consummates his desire, so to speak, by gaining the far bank of the stream to the City of God and reaching the Pearl Maiden, and while his desire is for a lost object, he never ceases to desire in the poem and his desire propels him forward to continue to question and learn lessons from the Pearl Maiden, gaining much more than a reunion with the lost beloved. Though he seems, in the course of the dream, to ignore the lessons learned, upon waking and reflecting upon his dream the Dreamer accepts the lessons learned and his desire shifts from that for the Pearl Maiden to desire for the Lamb and the City of God—a desire that must remain ongoing and unfulfilled in corporeal life, but is considered rewarding, when contemplated, as the will to the ultimate good and ultimate happiness as defined by Aquinas. The Dreamer’s intemperate grief over the Pearl Maiden turns to sorrow over his past sins and attainment of the heavenly joy that he cannot yet achieve, and it is this righteous sorrow and desire for union with the Lamb that becomes the ceaseless and ever-deferred goal in earthly life.

Since this shift does not occur until the end of the poem, the desire for the Lamb is presented as the ultimate goal, though the goal beyond the poem is the City of God, which the Dreamer cannot achieve. The shift happens just before the final stanza in which the Dreamer confesses, finally, to have “founden” the Lamb to be, for a “god Krystyin,” a “God, a Lorde, a frende ful fyin” (a God, a Lord, and an excellent friend; 1202-4). In the last two lines of the penultimate stanza, the Dreamer declares any man mad who would “agayn þe stryuen,” strive against God (200), whom he should think, instead, to repay, and in the last eight lines of the poem the Dreamer gives over his grief to God, saying:

Ouer þis hyul þis lote I laȝte,  
 For pyty of my perle enclyin,  
 And syþen to God I hit bytaȝte,  
 In Krystez dere blessyng and myn,  
 Pat in þe forme of bred and wyn  
 Þe preste vus schewez vch a daye.  
 He gef vus to be His homly hyne  
 Ande precious perlez vnto His pay. (1205-12)

(On this hill where it chanced to happen that I had lain supine for pity of my pearl, I afterward committed my Pearl to God, with my own blessings and the blessings of Christ, who, in the form of bread and wine, the priest shows to us each day. He granted us to be His and to serve him humbly that we should be precious pearls to his pleasure.)

In these final two stanzas, the Dreamer acknowledges the madness of his earlier inability to choose to follow God's commands over his desire to reclaim his lost child. His grief had blinded him to everything else, including his own salvation. In this respect, the *Pearl* poet presents a depiction of grief that is, to a Christian medieval sensibility, sinful and vain and a Dreamer whose earthly desire fills him with the hubris to go against God's will by asserting his own. The final stanza rights the wrong, so to speak, of the Dreamer's manic sorrow, but only inasmuch as he replaces his secular desire for the Pearl Maiden with a more spiritually appropriate desire for the Lamb. To suffer sorrow due to separation from Christ in his heavenly realm is acceptable, while grieving for a Christian soul now rewarded with her seat in heaven is not—this is to grieve for one's own loss rather than to revel in the deceased's heavenly joy. Thus the Dreamer's initial grief is admonished at the same time that it is a necessary prelude to his final, though limited, consolation and proper Christian grief, which leads to his heavenly vision of both the City of God and of the Lamb. His sinful attempt to claim both Maiden and the City of God serves to further separate him from both, leading to contemplation of the Lamb, which can be his only consolation in this earthly life.

### The Audience and Affective Forms of Christian Devotion

The audience for *Pearl* would have understood this message of Christian consolation as one intended for them as well as for the Dreamer. Sandra Pearson Prior has argued that the *Pearl* poet was a courtly and learned poet who writes for an equally courtly audience, as we can see from the poet's references in other poems in the Cotton Nero A.x. Art. 3 manuscript to courtly interests such as hunting and feasts (2). His use of courtly language and of familiar courtly tropes also suggests that his audience was, as Prior suggests, either a courtly set themselves or an audience who had access to a court (n.3). Such tropes as the familiar garden with its references to the Garden of Deduit from the *Roman de la Rose* and to the formula of the love lyric, as well as to the Dreamer's familiarity with proper courtly forms of address all suggest the courtly audience.

This is also an audience who is familiar with biblical teachings, as the poem makes direct reference to the parables of the vineyard and the pearl of great price, repeating them in the body of the text, and takes its vision of Heavenly Jerusalem directly from the Apocalypse of St. John. Readers would recognize a reference to the Bride and Bridegroom from the Song of Songs in the Pearl Maiden's position as a queen of heaven and her reference to the Lamb beckoning her to come to him by calling her his "lemman swete" (sweetheart or lover; 763). Song of Songs deftly combines the religious with the courtly and affect with Christian intellect. As this is also the period during which increased attention was paid to the practice of affective piety and mystic visions, *Pearl* would have been recognizable to a courtly lay audience as a lesson in proper and improper affect in relation to life's trials. Such texts as Julian of Norwich's *Shewings*



(short text ca. 1373, long text ca. 1393) and Richard Rolle's *Fire of Love* and *Pricke of Conscience* (both ca. 1340) encourage close identification with biblical figures, preferably those involved in Christ's passion (the Holy Virgin, Mary Magdalene, John, and Christ himself), as well as emotional outpouring in connection with the pain and sorrow of Christ's passion. Such forms of devotion require the devotee to metaphorize Christ, saints, and martyrs by their own imitation of the suffering of Christ or his followers, though not necessarily in exact replication of that suffering. For example, if a devotee suffers an illness, she might allow herself to meditate upon the pains and unpleasant effects of the illness in order to identify more closely with Christ's suffering. Additionally, the contemplative metonymically substitutes a painting, an image from a book of hours, or another object for the real presence of the figure of contemplation—Christ, the Virgin, a saint. The substitution, through meditation, conjures the vision of the real, though not making present the real figure of devotion. That is, Christ is not *actually* present, though he is present in the mind's eye through careful concentration and contemplation on the metonymic substitution of the devotional object.

Such affective piety is often associated with commoners like Margery Kempe and Christina Mirabilis, and with women more than with men of all social levels. Among the aristocracy, women practiced piety through the use of books of hours, psalters, and breviaries, which they used for private devotion. Aristocratic homes frequently contained portable altars and chapels for the practice of piety, as well.<sup>62</sup> Such books and pietistic

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<sup>62</sup> For an interesting, if brief, article on private devotional practices in the Middle Ages see "Private Devotion in Medieval Christianity" found at the website for the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Department of Medieval Art and the Cloisters at [www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/priv/hd\\_priv.htm](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/priv/hd_priv.htm). For additional reading and images on private devotion in the Middle Ages see Hans Belting's *Likeness and Presence: A*

practices were not limited to women, though, as many devotional books belonged to men. For example, Jean duc de Berry owned several books of hours and a handsome book of hours was also commissioned by Simon de Varie.<sup>63</sup> In many of these books, as well as in many late medieval and early renaissance paintings such as the *Madonna of Chancellor Rolin* by Jan van Eyck (ca. 1435), which would become increasingly popular as they were placed in family chapels and in the homes of aristocratic men, male patrons were pictured in devotion to Christ, the Madonna, and various saints. The patrons were pictured on their knees, hands folded, looking into a frame of vision at once in the same room and separate from them to indicate their devotional vision and focus of their meditation. The immanence of the meditative vision attests to increased interest in devotional practices, even among aristocratic men, that seeks to connect on emotional and intellectual levels with the object of devotion, whether it be the Madonna and the Christ child or Christ's crucifixion.

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*History of the Image Before the Era of Art* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1994), H. S. van Os' exhibition catalog, *The Art of Devotion in the Late Middle Ages in Europe, 1300-1500* (London: Merrell Holberton, 1994), and Sixten Ringbom's *Icon to Narrative: The Rise of the Dramatic Close-Up in Fifteenth-Century Devotional Painting* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Doornspijk, Netherlands: Davaco, 1984). See also Jennifer Bryan's *Looking Inward: Devotional Reading and the Private Self in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2008) and Jessica Brantley's *Reading in the Wilderness: Private Devotion and Public Performance in Late Medieval England* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2007).

<sup>63</sup> For example, the *Tres Riches Heures du Jean duc de Berry* (ca. 1410) is one of the most lavish and famous of all books of hours. Simon de Varie's, a later work (ca. 1455) is also quite luxurious. Jean Duc de Berry, a Valois, was himself "very rich" and he enjoyed collecting books, so his many books of hours and devotional texts were, in part, a display of wealth and the ability to commission beautiful works. Yet, of all of the books he commissioned, most, and the most beautiful volumes, were devotional texts. Devotional texts and artwork commissioned by men henceforth, such as that of Simon de Varie, would feature more pietistic images of their patrons participating in meditative devotion.

Practices by the aristocracy and other laypeople in connection with daily prayers and contemplation encouraged reflection like that demonstrated by the Dreamer at the end of the poem, as well as visions similar to that of the Dreamer's dream. Even when the patrons are featured in the earthly trappings of their position (i.e. Simon's armor or Rolin's lavish robes), the focus is on Christ and even the worldly armor or furs are implicated in heavenly thanksgiving and devotion. Indeed, such pietistic practice discourages contemplation and affect that are not directly related to Christian meditation.

Lynn Staley Johnson argues that the Dreamer practices his piety negatively:

The poem itself bears witness to the dangers of emotionalism, or of purely affective faith, in the dreamer's early despair, in his simple-minded reactions to the maiden's instructions, and in his furtive attempts to cross the river alone. As the poem implies, emotion on its own is vulnerable to self-involvement, ultimately to despair; and the believer must learn to live by faith, not by touch. (175)

Certainly the poem demonstrates the dangers of affect that is wrongly focused (self-involved), but where Johnson misses the mark is in labeling the Dreamer's initial grief and despair as "purely affective faith." As the Pearl Maiden points out, the Dreamer is, indeed, relying solely on affect and sensory experience to guide his understanding, but this, she warns, is not faith. However, the Dreamer never claims that it is; he does not claim to be faithful—either affectively or intellectually—in his "early despair." He is direct in his statements that what he seeks is not greater understanding of and belief in God, but the return of his daughter. What the Dreamer must learn is that he can practice affective demonstration, but that the affect must be properly directed toward spiritual matters. This medieval focus on properly-directed affect has its origins in the early works of Augustine and in the writings of Bernard of Clairvaux, but also in later scholastic works by Aquinas, who argues that some passions (i.e. envy and anger) are vices, while

others (i.e. pity) are virtues and that all should be directed toward the good and toward ultimate happiness (*Summa Theologica* lix.1.2). Moreover, Aquinas argues that passions are not only “properly-directed” in kind, but also in degree, and that moderation of passions is also important for virtue.

### Thomistic Sorrow and Ultimate Happiness

Aquinas argues that “*virtus cum tristitia esse non possit*” (“sorrow is incompatible with virtue”) because it is intemperate and imprudent, it hinders work, and it is “*animi ægritudo*” (Sylvii 3.115; “a disease of the soul” Pegis 452). However, Aquinas also notes that Christ experienced sorrow, so sorrow is “*potest esse cum virtute*” (Sylvii 3.115; “compatible with virtue” Pegis 452). There are three instances in which sorrow is acceptable and they are all related to the application of reason as a moderator of passion, as well as to the specific object of sorrow. Sorrow is virtuous if: 1) “*tristitia est de malo quod jam accidit*” (Sylvii 3.115; “sorrow is for an evil that is already present” Pegis 452); 2) the sorrow is for past sins; or 3) the sorrow felt is for another’s sins (452-3). Continues Aquinas, “*Unde ad virtutem pertinet quòd tristetur moderatè in quibus tristandum est*” (Sylvii 3.116; “Moderated sorrow for an object which ought to make us sorrowful is a mark of virtue” Pegis 453). Furthermore, “*sed de his quæ quocumque modo repugnant virtuti, virtus moderatè tristatur*” and “*quòd tristitia immoderata est animæ ægritudo; tristitia utem moderata ad bonam habitudinem animæ pertinet secundùm statum præsentis viæ*” (Sylvii 3.116; “virtue sorrows moderately for all that thwarts virtue, no matter how”; “immoderate sorrow is a disease of the soul, but moderate sorrow is the mark of a well-disposed soul, according to the present state of life” Pegis 453). Aquinas’

larger philosophical project, to encapsulate it in a much too reductive nutshell, argues that the will moves constantly to achieve good, that good seeks out happiness, and that the ultimate happiness is found in the contemplation of truth, “truth” being God, which can only be achieved when man’s every desire is fulfilled, which cannot be hoped for in life on earth. Furthermore, intellectual virtues and moral virtues that are guided by the intellect and prudence and not by the “lower appetite,” or motivation driven by the senses rather than the intellect, seek ultimate happiness while actions driven by the senses often fall into vice and seek happiness in worldly pleasures like sex, food, honor, glory, wealth, power, bodily goods, and art. Seeking after earthly pleasures, even in grief, is often pursued without prudence and, therefore, immoderately, and leads to vice rather than virtue, and seeks only earthly happiness rather than ultimate happiness.<sup>64</sup> Moderate sorrow for that which hinders virtue, then, is acceptable sorrow, whereas excessive sorrow, particularly for worldly things and not sorrow over sin, is itself sinful—a vice. That is, sorrow over the sinfulness of grief over a lost loved one who has gone to her heavenly reward is a virtue whereas the grief for the loss itself is a vice because it is a bodily loss and is selfish. Moreover, *excess* grief in any case may be considered vice.

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<sup>64</sup> For a more detailed version of Aquinas’ philosophy, see Anton C. Pegis’ *The Basic Writings of Saint Thomas Aquinas* (2 vols. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1945), especially the section on *Summa Contra Gentiles* on “The End of Man” and “Man and the Providence of God” and the *Summa Theologica* I-II, 1-13 and I-II, 55-89. For a gloss of Aquinas’ philosophy, see Eleanor Stump’s *Aquinas: Arguments of the Philosophers* (Oxford: Routledge, 2005), and Peter Kreef’s *Summa of the Summa* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1990). For a quick overview of medieval philosophy and its basic tenets, see *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Philosophy* (Ed. A. S. McGrade. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003). See also Etienne Gilson’s *The Christian Philosophy Of St Thomas Aquinas* (Notre Dame: U of Notre Dame P, 1994).

Somewhat paradoxically, and pertinent to the outcome of the Dreamer's own sorrow in *Pearl*, is Aquinas' response to the argument that sorrow hinders work: "Tristitia impedit operationem de qua tristamur; sed adjuvat ad ea promptius exequenda per quae tristitia fugitur" (Sylvii 3.116; "Sorrow hinders the work that makes us sorrowful: but it helps us to do more readily whatever banishes sorrow" Pegis 453). The Dreamer, accordingly, languishes in his sorrow over his daughter's death, and in his initial mourning state is kept from engaging in activities other than that of mourning his lost child. He participates in no work (i.e. prayer and contemplation) that would make him mindful of those true reasons for sorrow that are, by Aquinas' standards, legitimate reasons for grief. Rather, his sorrow is excessive and self-interested rather than sorrowing over his sinfulness, sin in the world, or the sins of others. Nor is it the affective sorrow felt by a devotee for Christ's suffering as a result of sin. Yet, the Dreamer's sorrow over his daughter leads him to the consolation of the Lamb and the Eucharist and properly focused sorrow and desire for the perfect happiness of contemplation of God and heaven. Since the Dreamer's grief over his daughter leads him to grieve over his own sinfulness and to see that his desire for earthly joy is only a precursor to the beatific joy of heaven, it pushes toward the good of ultimate happiness, but not without a struggle.

What the poem does for the reader is to exemplify the popular Christian belief founded on the words of the Church Fathers that excessive earthly sorrow over the deceased Christian who has found her home in heaven is fruitless while also suggesting that this apparent fruitlessness still operates as a movement of the will toward a good that is ultimately virtuous. The Dreamer is, as David Aers notes, an individual mourner whose personal struggle with faith flies in the face of orthodox Catholicism and flirts with

Lollardy (71). That is, because he acts apart from the communal nature of Catholicism he is less a spokesman for mankind, as Michael Means suggests, than an upstart who practices a more personal faith. Yet Aers redeems the Dreamer's highly individualized faith by marking also the communal "us" at the end of the poem that places the Dreamer among the community of the Christian faithful that partake in the social act of the sacrament of the Eucharist (72). Thus, the text reaches out to the reader as an individual believer and as a member of the body of Christ and the Church, and offers, to use Jane Chance's term, a "homiletic" message for its readers (33). In this way, the text serves as both a form of consolation and a form of admonishment for the believer who would forget himself—go mad—to his sorrow over earthly losses. The consolation presumably comes in letting go of intemperate sorrow over corporeal things and in relinquishing a hold over those corporeal things themselves. For the Dreamer, he must commit his daughter to Christ, thus severing his union with her, and at the same time, must forge his own union, through the Eucharist, with Christ. Likewise, the readers would understand from the homily that the desire to hold on to earthly treasures, even in the form of people we love, yields no fruit and fails to secure the Christian a place in the City of God. The poem reminds the reader that the real focus of desire, Christ, is offered up daily in the Holy Mass for those who will accept it. Yet, the Dreamer himself shows that the homily is an inadequate substitution for the end of sorrow by allotting only a single stanza to the final lesson, demonstrating through this brevity that access to the Eucharist is, likewise, all too brief. Also, by substituting the vision of Christ in his dream in which Christ is "present" with the bread and wine that is "shown" to believers each day, the Dreamer reveals that the sacrament is a reminder of that presence, though not a true substitute for

the eternal heavenly presence to come. Certainly the theology of transubstantiation, which the Dreamer would likely follow, suggests that the real presence of Christ rather than a substitution has occurred, yet the reminder occurs “vch a daye” (1210), suggesting that the visual presence that the Dreamer seems to crave, while available at a given time each day, is not ever present as it is in the City of God, and as a result is a mere substitute for the blessings of eternal life.

Yet, despite the easy homiletic the poem offers to its readers, neither knowledge of the ultimate happiness of heaven nor the promise of the Eucharistic union with Christ solves the problem of grief and desire in the poem. Rather, the last two stanzas, which almost seem appended to the overall cycle of grief, bliss, and vision, provide unsatisfactory consolation and emphasize the individual nature of grief and of affective devotion. The loss of the daughter is momentarily forgotten and replaced by a desire for heaven, but the loss of separation from the kingdom of heaven replaces it and true joy is again deferred. Even the daily offering of the Eucharist fails to provide the fulfillment of the desire to be reunited both with the deceased girl and with the kingdom of heaven, though it provides brief interludes of comfort until the Dreamer is allowed his final entry into the kingdom at some point beyond the close of the poem. The brevity of consolation leads the Dreamer to remind himself, if not the reader, that the solace is there, but that, despite the positive spin on the message of deferred joy, it is inadequate because metonymic—a substitution for the Lamb and a promise rather than the reality of heaven.



### Desire for The Lost Object and the Hope of Consolation

As with the texts covered in the previous chapters, the grief presented in *Pearl* is performed by a man who speaks in typically masculine, courtly terms. Where *Pearl* differs from the previous texts in this dissertation is primarily in the religious nature of the route to consolation and in the form the final consolation takes. Other differences, though less central to this project, are the nature of the relationship between the beloved and the bereaved and the use of the “homodiegetic” narrative; that is, the narrator is simultaneously the one narrating the tale and a character in his own narrative, whereas the mourners in the other texts are not simultaneously the narrators (Spearing 150). These two differences allow us to see the ubiquity with which courtly language is used to express loss. In other words, the homodiegesis of the narrative enables the reader to witness grief first-hand rather than through a mediator. What the *Pearl* poet accomplishes by providing the reader with an unmediated mourner is to provide a narrator who is an individual speaking from his personal pain, not just a universal mourner representing grief, generally. Though he does allow, as Means suggests, for an “everyman” reading of grief, he also demonstrates that sorrow is deeply personal, as is consolation and the individual’s path to it. The Dreamer thus serves as a substitute for the reader, much as a devotional image stands in for that which is being meditated upon or the Eucharist represents the sacrificial Christ. Even though the Dreamer’s grief resembles that of Yvain, Orfeo, and the Black Knight, it is presented from a highly personalized point of view that allows the reader to see what he feels, thinks, and how he struggles to accept comfort for his loss.

The Dreamer's personal expression of grief opens the poem as he laments the loss of his Pearl in the garden where he walks. The nature of the pearl is not initially apparent, as the Dreamer refers to it in terms of a gemstone—a literal pearl—by describing its shape, size, and color. Through the knowledge that the pearl is being used metonymically to refer to a dead girl, the Dreamer's grief, consistent with that over the death of a loved one and combined with burial references, clues in the reader to a human loss—to death—rather than a simple material loss—to something misplaced. The Dreamer conveys to the reader that his Pearl is now buried in the earth and on this mound of dirt where his Pearl was lost new life will spring from her rot. He lies down on the earthen mound, weeping for his beloved, and falls soundly asleep after which he has the dream that serves as the center of the poem. In his dream, the Dreamer experiences a marvelous landscape through which he moves and encounters the beatified figure of his lost beloved—presumably his two-year-old daughter. The daughter, henceforth called the Pearl Maiden, serves as a teacher for the Dreamer, thus establishing *Pearl* as a poem “in the tradition of the dialogue education poems, specifically, the literary genre stemming from Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*” (Means 51). The Pearl Maiden, like Lady Philosophy in Boethius' text, guides the Dreamer through his mourning to consolation through a series of lessons based on the Dreamer's own misunderstandings and questions. The lessons shared by the Pearl Maiden are all based in scripture, thus establishing the religious focus of the lessons to be learned. Throughout the poem the Dreamer struggles to understand the meaning of the lessons, a miscomprehension that has generally been attributed to the tendency of the dream poems to produce obtuse narrators for whom the dream slowly reveals its lessons.

For Jim Rhodes, however, the Dreamer's questioning and interpretation of the parables and lessons take on a much more active role. Rhodes prefers to read the poem "in terms of Bakhtinian dialogic instead of Boethian dialogue" (126), explaining that:

In Boethian dialogue, the interlocutor holds unquestioned superiority over the correspondent, whereas in Bakhtinian dialogic no such superiority is apportioned. For Bakhtin, both sides have equal authority, even when the dialogue takes place within only one party, usually as a struggle or interplay between two categories: the authoritative word (religious, political, or moral discourse, the word of the fathers or teachers) and internal persuasive discourse (translating external discourse into one's own words or vocabulary with one's own accents, gestures, modifications), which, Bakhtin says, is denied all privilege, backed by no authority, and goes unrecognized by scholarly norms or opinions. (126)

Rhodes is correct that the Dreamer has more agency than a traditional Boethian consolation affords. Indeed, it is through his plying the Pearl Maiden with questions that he hears the stories and is granted his final vision of the Heavenly Jerusalem that will ultimately inspire the pity for the Lamb that he will recall after reflecting upon his dream. Additionally, his willfulness is constantly present in the poem and leads to the abrupt ending of the dream when he attempts to cross the stream that separates the earthly realm from the heavenly in order to be with the Pearl Maiden. This willfulness is directly related to the Dreamer's corporeality and fixedness on earthly desire over a desire for that which is good for the soul, but inevitably leads, through neoplatonic movement toward transcendence, to the higher good of his final contemplation, though not to final consolation.

There is a strange moment in the poem when the Dreamer moves into the dream vision at which time he states that his spirit leaves his body behind on the mound, thus leaving the corporeal behind in the favor of the intellectual. As with the moment of death, the soul leaves the body; yet, the Dreamer is not dead, but is dreaming. He is not,

therefore, physically present in the earthly paradise in which he walks at the opening of his dream or in his dealings with the Pearl Maiden. Yet, his reactions are highly sensory and corporeal. Although soul and reason often overlap in medieval thought, the Dreamer's soul does not appear to be entirely linked to reason, but operates on a largely sensual level, guided by bodily desire and a focus on sights, smells, and sounds that keep him bound to his earthly loss and desire. Although it can be argued that this affective reaction to the landscape of the dream and to seeing his lost Pearl and the City of God are customary for mystical experience, there is no indication that his is a mystical vision. He has been proffered a glimpse of heaven and of God, but he does not present them as a vision through which he experiences the divine and merges with it as in the Chancellor Rolin painting or the Simon illumination. Nor has he met with the final contemplative act that culminates in the fulfillment of all desire and ultimate happiness. Rather, his desire during the dream episode is almost entirely centered on the Pearl Maiden, the object of his earthly desire. As with the artwork, though, in which subtle markers—a page break, pillars, the patron's kneeler, a pattern in a tiled floor—separate the devotee from the divine vision, he stands separated from the Maiden by the imagined physical presence of the wondrous stream. As the vision progresses, however, the Dreamer is drawn deeper and deeper into the realm of the divine and he attempts to cross the line between meditative vision and living experience in order to either pull the heavenly vision back down to earth or, ideally, to assert his own will in achieving happiness by entering the divine realm. He has not yet comprehended, despite the Pearl Maiden's tutelage, that the fulfillment of desire for the lost Pearl remains out of reach, is a worldly and imperfect

desire, and only perpetuates his grief. He cannot merge with this heavenly identity, with the vision, but must find consolation in substitution.

Certainly, the Dreamer's path to understanding the Pearl Maiden's lesson is not as direct or unproblematic as Louis Blenkner suggests. Blenkner argues for an "essentially passive" Dreamer who is shuttled along through his dream vision and a series of landscapes that coincide with neo-Platonic notions of light and intellectual and spiritual enlightenment (27). While this is a compelling theory and Blenkner presents solid evidence of the varying degrees of light as the Dreamer moves from the garden of his initial grief to the marvelous land of the earthly side of the stream and then to the brilliance of the City of God on the opposite bank, the Dreamer seems only to hear and to see, but not to gain understanding of the vision as it unfolds. Even in his amazement at the vision of the procession of martyrs and the marriage of the Lamb, which fills him with "delyt" (1141), he does not seem to apprehend the meaning of the vision. In fact, he does not appear to put the message together into a workable, tropological lesson until he awakens in the earthly garden, soul and body reunited, and reflects upon the vision in its entirety. The Dreamer's path to understanding, rather than being a smooth path to enlightenment, includes a constant cycling back into the grieving moment, a desiring for the return of the daughter, not a straight trajectory toward enlightenment and consolation. The Dreamer's constant cycling back to his possession of Pearl demonstrates the persistence of his grief and establishes the poem as one that is as interested in expressing sorrow as it is in pointing to the consolation of that sorrow.

In other words, while the poem takes Boethian consolation as its basis, consolation is not the focus. Rather, grief permeates the poem and various distractions

serving as consolation are present throughout the text in an effort to mollify that which resists mollification—grief. The question then becomes one of whether or not grief *should* be consoled. The Dreamer is only reluctantly comforted, but constantly returns to thoughts of his lost child and resorts to actions that would reunite him with his dead daughter. Even the acceptance in the last stanzas of Eucharistic comfort and knowledge of a heavenly reward seem too pat. Every good Christian knows that consolation for grief and heavenly reward comes from Christ and through the grace of God. Yet, Christ is the “man of sorrows” and himself epitomizes loss and grief. To delight in Him is to embrace sorrow of a different stripe, that is, sorrow that leads to ultimate happiness in the Thomistic sense rather than sorrow over the loss of earthly joys. Thus, sorrow can be a good if the sorrow is that over Christ’s suffering, or if it is grief without consolation over earthly loss that leads to contemplation of Christ’s sorrow and ultimate joy. Sorrow itself, if rightly directed and moderately practiced, is desirable as the earthly means to the end of sorrow over earthly loss.

### Courtly Language and the Language of Grief

Grief is first expressed in the poem in the first stanza when the narrator announces his loss:

Allas! I leste hyr in on erbere;  
 Þurȝ gresse to grounde hit fro me yot.  
 I dewyne, fordolkeð of luf-daungere  
 Of þat pryuy perle withouten spot.

(Alas! I lost [my pearl] in the garden. It fell from me and traveled through the grass to the ground. I languish, grievously wounded, from the loss of my beloved—of that perfect pearl without a spot; 9-12).

The narrator's grief is introduced with the emotive word, "Allas!" and the statement that he has "leste" his pearl in the garden. The narrator begins to elaborate upon his feelings of sorrow with the terms "dewyne" and "fordolked" (languish and grievously wounded), both of which effectively depict the depth of his loss and the resulting emotional outpouring. The term "luf-daunger," according to Malcolm Andrew and Ronald Waldron's gloss, is used "metaphorically to suggest longing for, and separation from, any loved object, and the whole line is perhaps reminiscent of the phrase *quia amore langueo* ('for I am sick for love')" (n. 54). This, explain Andrew and Waldron, is a reference to the Song of Songs, which serves as one of the clear analogs for the poem, and links the biblical love between bride and bridegroom to the courtly love language of the poem and the love between the Dreamer and his pearl. The narrator expresses the depth of his love and loss, but also indicates that his loss is not just that of a common object, but of a valuable and beloved one. This motif of grief continues throughout the first five stanzas as the narrator mourns in the garden.

The language used to express this loss is borrowed from the lover's lament that we have seen used in the previous chapters to express a spouse's dejection, a spouse's abduction, and a spouse's death. In each case, the lament is performed by a man and in each case he is driven to madness and despair over his loss. Hence the narrator of the poem produces language that is highly conventional and excessive in order to express his grief. This language is, of course, the courtly language of the romance, the lai, and the love lyric, which is peppered with references to love longing, swooning, melancholic expressions of desire, and despair to the point of near-death over separation from the beloved.

Scholars such as Angela Carson and María Bollón Fernández have argued that the use of courtly language in this poem suggest that the Pearl Maiden is not the narrator's daughter, but is, rather, his lover. However, as I have argued with the Black Knight's use of the courtly love lament, this trope comes to be used not only for the broken-hearted lover who has been spurned or betrayed, but also for the physical loss of the beloved. The beloved need not be the lover of courtly romance or of the variety of the *Roman de la Rose*. Although the language and setting are taken from these conventions, the context is not the same. The desire for the object that is no longer near is, nonetheless, quite similar and therefore elicits a similar reaction from the bereaved. It is of little importance at the opening of the poem what relationship Pearl bears to the Dreamer or whether she is a daughter or a lover. This is not to say that a relationship of some sort is not requisite for the Dreamer's final conclusions concerning his consolation. As Marie Borroff notes:

The visionary confrontation with the person of his lost beloved is an essential step in the movement of his soul away from despair: it is an emotionally charged experience, confirming and deepening his belief in the personal immortality promised by Christian doctrine. (129)

What is important is that he has lost *someone* dear to him and that he uses the conventional language—that is, courtly language—and delivery of loss to express his deep grief. This is not to say that the “someone” who is lost is irrelevant, as the bond between bereaved and dead beloved determines the depth of the loss experienced; however, the loss itself and the changes that the Dreamer experiences are of primary relevance to the poem. In order to make the inarticulate loss explainable, the *Pearl* poet, like the others, borrows from other literary forms and texts that express deep emotion, Song of Songs, St. John's Apocalypse, *Roman de la Rose*.



Song of Songs and *Roman de la Rose* both feature love and love longing and *Pearl* borrows heavily from both texts. The language the Dreamer uses is that of the male lover seeking to win over a lady, much as the Lover does the Rose in *Roman de la Rose*. The Dreamer's approach is that of the aggressor as he verbally and consistently pushes to reunite with the Pearl Maiden, and the Pearl Maiden could easily be read as the object of a lover's desire. Fernández, for example, argues that the Dreamer's description of the Pearl Maiden is consistent with the typical description of the courtly lady. The Dreamer provides an elegiac description of the lost pearl in the opening stanza that illustrates Fernández's point:

Perle plesaunte, to prynces paye  
 To clanly clos in golde so clere:  
 Oute of oryent, I hardly saye,  
 Ne proued I neuer her precios pere.  
 So rounde, so reken in vche araye,  
 So smale, so smoþe her sydez were;  
 Queresoever I jugged gemmez gaye  
 I sette hyr sengeley in synglure (1-8)

(Dear Pearl, which princes are pleased to set so radiantly in gold, throughout all of the Orient, I can truly say that I have never seen her precious peer. So round, so lovely in any setting; so small, and so smooth were her sides. Wherever I judged bright gems, I valued her above all in uniqueness.)

Although the lavish praise appears to be for an actual gemstone rather than a listing of the virtues of a person, as in the encomia that so often accompany elegies, the extolling of the gem's virtues presage the encomium for the Pearl Maiden that follows in the dream vision. The reference to "smoþe sydez" and peerless beauty are common descriptors of the courtly lady.

The human connection is made when the Dreamer encounters the embodiment of his pearl in the form of the Pearl Maiden in the dream vision. He notices her at the foot of

a crystal cliff on the opposite bank. At first he simply notices a charming “faunt” (child; 161), but as he looks closer, he “[knows] hyr more and more” (168). He scrutinizes her carefully, taking in and describing her appearance, including the pearl-strewn clothing that she wears and the smooth, small whiteness of her appearance, all of which further associate the girl with the lost pearl. The maiden is described as:

A mayden of menske, ful debonere;  
 Blysande whyt watz hyr bleaunt;  
 .....  
 Hyr vysayge whyt as playne yuore:  
 .....  
 So smoþe, so small, so seme slyȝt,  
 Rysez vp in hir araye ryalle,  
 A precios piece in perlez pyȝt.  
 .....  
 Al blysnande whyt watz hir beau biys,  
 .....  
 Her semblaunt sade for doc oþer erle,  
 Her ble more blaȝt þen whallez bon.  
 As schorne golde schyr her fax þenne schon,  
 On schylderez þat leghe vnlepped lyȝt.  
 Her depe colour ȝet wonted non  
 Of precios perle in porfyl pyȝt. (162-216)

(A maiden of courtesy, quite gracious in manner; her silk garment was gleaming white; . . . her face was white as plain ivory; . . . so smooth, so small, so becomingly slender, she stood up in her royal array, a precious being set in pearls. . . . All gleaming white was her beautiful linen garment;<sup>65</sup> her dignified face like a duke or an earl, her complexion whiter than a whale’s bone. As winding, shining gold her hair then shone; it fell lightly, unbound, on her shoulders. Her intense white hue did not lack in comparison to the precious pearls that bedecked the border of her cloak.)

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<sup>65</sup> The Pearl Maiden is depicted as being significantly older than the three years of age she was at her death. Theologically, this was unproblematic, as some medieval scholars believed that the resurrected body would be thirty-three years old, as was Christ at his death and resurrection. For a thorough treatment of resurrection theology, see Carolyn Walker Bynum’s *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200- 1336* (Columbia University Press, 1996).

The reader is left with no doubt that the maiden is an embodiment of the Dreamer's lost pearl and the Maiden here presented is clearly not a two-year old child. Again, the description—ivory skin, slender body, golden hair—are all designations of the courtly lady so often wooed by the lover and her courtly graciousness bespeaks a maturity beyond that of a child. Fernández is, therefore, correct in her assertion that the “faunt” that the Dreamer first notices appears not to be a child; but, as Means points out, the Pearl Maiden is in her beatified form in heaven and cannot be expected to be in the form of her two-year-old body, which will not join the soul in heaven until Judgment Day (58). Fernández pushes the courtly lovers theme even further by claiming that the “religious fall” that occurs in the poem is presented “in terms of sexual frustration” (38), that the Dreamer's final bid to cross the stream is a metaphor for sexual intercourse (47), that the Pearl Maiden is a temptress (44), and that the Dreamer falls from the Pearl Maiden's favor (38).

Fernández's reading, like Angela Carson's, which also argues that the Pearl Maiden is an adult, are modern understandings of the *sexualized*, but not *sexual*, desire presented in the poem. Courtly love, while certainly pertaining to sexual desire, is essentially about sexual deferral, its language perpetuating loss by continually lamenting the separation of the lover from the beloved. The language reflects desire, yes, but not the fulfillment of that desire. The emphasis is not upon the sexual act, but upon thinking about and longing for it. The beloved who remains ever in the lover's thoughts remains distant—a presence lost or absent. In this regard, courtly love remains, at its core, a

practice of perpetual deferral and loss rather than an essentially erotic one in which sexual desire is fulfilled.<sup>66</sup>

Texts on spiritual subjects frequently take as their basis Song of Songs in which the soul (or the Church) is figured as the Bride of Christ (the *sponsa*) and Christ as the Bridegroom. The language is highly sensuous and overtly sexualized as the union of the soul or the Church with Christ is likened to the union of sexual intercourse. However, as Ann Astell asserts, Song of Songs presents both a literal and an allegorical meaning, which is to say there is the carnal reading and the spiritual reading (2). Astell bases her reading of Song of Songs on the writings of Origen, arguing that *eros* is only

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<sup>66</sup> “For a competing model of desire in which ends are not perpetually deferred, but insistently present, see Leen De Bolle’s Deleuzian study in “Preface: Desire and Schizophrenia.” *Deleuze and Psychoanalysis: Philosophical Essays on Deleuze’s Debate with Psychoanalysis* Louvain, Belgium: Leuven UP, 2010. 7-32, in which she states, “in courtly love, desire is not oriented towards a transcendent ideal or the overcoming of a lack, nor is it the abandonment of desire in favour of a higher objective. What is at stake on the contrary, is that desire finds itself in a situation in which there is no lack whatsoever, in which it is fulfilled by itself. Pleasure then coincides with desire. In courtly love, everything is admitted, except these things that would restrict desire: satisfaction or any transcendent instance that subordinates desire to an exterior instance” (26). This paradigm affords an alternative possibility to desire fulfilled or desire as lack, suggesting that desire for desire’s sake is the real focus of courtly love. Jeffrey J. Cohen (*Medieval Identity Machines* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2003) argues that Chrétien’s Lancelot is a prime example of a desire that fits the Deleuzian “masochistic contract” in his merging of “masculinity, femininity, matrimony, sexuality, chivalry, the sacramental, the public, the private” in a “radical, self-negative *conjointure*” (83, 84). I do not disagree, and certainly *Lancelot* is unique: “no medieval romance has caused more discomfort among its interpreters, an uneasiness for the most part displaced onto the author and exorcised through a fanciful reconstruction of his biography” (82). Most romances and their reliance on courtly love, even if their protagonists, like Lancelot, merge binaries, desire a nameable object rather than desiring for desire’s sake. The lady is a “transcendent ideal,” the “higher objective” is both the lady and honor as a knight. The ideal of courtly love may be perpetual desire—deferred pleasure—but rarely, not even in *Lancelot*, does the desired object go unfulfilled [this doesn’t make sense: if it rarely goes unfulfilled then this entire gambit about deferral is incorrect] and often the object is denied or lost, leading, certainly, to continued desire, but desire for what is lost—a lack.

commendable when it is directed toward God and the “*mens* withdrawn from the body and its lusts” (3, 4). Furthermore, the bridal soul is rational and suppresses bodily drives (Astell 7). On the allegorical level, then, the intercourse between the Bride and Bridegroom is not a corporeal intercourse, but a sacred and spiritual one, and the Dreamer’s desire for his Pearl mirrors, though not exactly because this is still an earthly desire, that of the Song’s Bride and Bridegroom.

The Dreamer first tries to reconnect with the Maiden after he recognizes her beneath the gleaming cliffs on the opposite bank of the stream. He seeks assurance of her identity, since he recognizes her, but her appearance as a noble lady leaves him confused. He asks:

Art þou my perle þat I haf playned,  
 Regretted by myn one on nyȝt.  
 Pensyf, payred, I am forpayned,  
 And þou in a lyf of lykying lyȝt,  
 In paradys erde, of stryf vnstrayned.  
 What Wyrde hatz hyder my juel vayned,  
 And don me in þys del and gret daungere?  
 Fro we in twynne wern towen and twayned,  
 I haf ben a joylez juelere” (242-52).

(Are you my pearl that I have been weeping over, whom I express my regret over at night? Pensive, wasted, I am afflicted, and you dwell in a life of pleasure, in a land of paradise, untroubled by strife. What Fate has brought my jewel here, and left me in this sorrow and great deprivation? Since we were separated and pulled apart, I have been a joyless jeweler.)

The maiden confirms that it is she by stating that she is not lost, but is here in this beautiful garden (257-60), which will later be revealed as the City of God. Despite this argument, though, the maiden is still lost to him and he has difficulty comprehending that this loss should not be deeply mourned. The Dreamer’s question to the Pearl Maiden betrays a revival of his earlier grief in the earthly garden as he relives his loss and heart

sickness and we witness his oscillations between sorrow and joy. Though his meanderings through the marvelous land had seemed to take his mind off of his loss, the Dreamer is still mindful of it, as is evidenced by the acknowledgment that the wonder of the setting “abated [his] balez, / Forbidden [his] stresse, dystried [his] paynez” (abated his sorrow, quelled his distress, and destroyed his hardships; 123-4). The landscape seems to provide temporary solace, though his earlier grief is still a recent memory that is recalled in his acknowledgement that it has briefly abated. The cyclical nature of the Dreamer’s grief becomes apparent as the reader sees him first charmed by his surroundings into forgetting his grief and then tossed back into it when he confronts the Maiden. The sight of the Pearl Maiden is so shocking to him that “such a burre myȝt make [his] herte blunt” (such confusion gave his heart a blow; 176).

His mood cycles up again once he recovers from his initial confusion at the changed appearance and recovery of Pearl and the sight of the Maiden dispels his sorrow: “My grete dystresse þou al todrawez” (You have completely dispelled my great distress; 280). This moment exemplifies the courtly love topos as Aers describes it: “In this familiar courtly language the lost object fulfills the traditional feminine role of nurturing life source; she is the man’s essential physician without whom his life becomes a disease, a nightmare of emptiness and tormented dreams” (57). Aers references the traditional paradox of courtly love as presented in *Yvain* in which the “wound of love grows worse when it is nearest to its doctor” (*Yvain* 1377-8). That is, seeing the source of love—the doctor/lady—can serve as a comfort, but not being allowed immediate access to her causes deeper pain. The Dreamer, similarly, finds comfort in having found Pearl, yet the realization that he cannot reclaim her reopens the wound of his loss. The Dreamer finds

in the Pearl Maiden's recovery the balm for his grief, but his hope is soon dashed as the Maiden rebukes him for being "vncortoyse" (discourteous or uncourtly; 303) for blaming Fate for her loss and for claiming ownership over her. The Dreamer makes attempts throughout the dream to get close to the Pearl Maiden, but is kept constantly at bay because, as the Pearl Maiden explains, he cannot cross the stream until he is pure, and his comfort needs to come from God, not from her. His earthly desire for the Maiden, because it is focused on corporeal joy rather than on the divine, keeps him from reuniting with her, as does the fact that he yet lives. The knowledge that he cannot join the Pearl Maiden prompts him, finally, to take matters into his own hands, defying God's command, and he plunges into the stream to gain the opposite side and his pearl. Thus his desire to reclaim the lost object, while not here expressed as the mournful, sorrowful expression of grief, nonetheless indicates that his grief has not been consoled.

His sorrow is once again renewed when he awakens from his dream to find that his suit has been unsuccessful and he has, essentially, lost his pearl a second time. When he realizes that he is back on the earthen mound, he says: "I raxled, and fel in gret affray" (I stretched out my hand and fell into great distress; 1175). He is distressed at having been thrown out of "þat fayre regioun" and longs for both the experience of that place and for the Pearl Maiden (1179). However, the nature of his grief shifts in these lines as the Pearl Maiden's message is finally affirmed and he realizes that the sorrow he should have felt, and now feels, is for his disobedience to God and his focus on earthly joy rather than heavenly bliss. Thus the Dreamer continually struggles with consolation and continually cycles back to grief. What consolation is accepted comes only in the final stanza, though the means of obtaining comfort is continually supplied by the Pearl

Maiden throughout the dream. This delay of consolation establishes the poem as a poem about grief that addresses the stubbornness of deep sorrow in resisting comfort, even if the comfort is vividly demonstrated through a pseudo-mystical vision and biblical exegesis.

The Pearl Maiden's attempts to bring the Dreamer to consolation indicate a push-pull between persistent grief and comfort that suggests a divide between desire and fulfillment. The Pearl Maiden's exegesis attempts to put an end to the Dreamer's initial grief, or his desire to have her back, while the Dreamer's desire is to continue to long for that reunion. The Christian consolation offered seems, then, to deny the Dreamer his authentic emotion by insisting that it be replaced by faith in an afterlife and a more reasonable, in Christian terms, desire for Christ. What results, though, is not the negation of sorrow, for the Dreamer still grieves over his separation from the City of God and from the perpetuity of Christ's presence that the Eucharist can only momentarily afford. The poem addresses the Dreamer's constant mindfulness of loss combined with hopefulness for a place in heaven heretofore denied. That heaven is denied him suggests that immanence of Christ's presence—or at least of the kingdom of God—is not found on earth. Rather, the Dreamer must look toward the transcendence that comes only after death to this world and its ways.

### The Loci of Grief

#### The Garden

This constant push and pull of sorrow and joy makes active the working through of the Dreamer's process of mourning and coming to terms with his loss of the Pearl



Maiden, though not with loss, generally. Just as the process is marked by the Dreamer's behaviors, it is also marked by space. Location, John Finlayson explains, is "intimately linked" to emotion in *Pearl*, and the Dreamer's "journey is as important as the goal" (315). Similarly, Aers addresses the landscape, particularly the forest setting of the marvelous land, as a location capable of destroying grief and offering the Dreamer "more bliss than he can tell" because of its proximity to Paradise (60). Each stop on the way to the Dreamer's consolation reflects a moment on his emotional journey from what Borroff refers to as "an initial state of bafflement and despair to a final state of understanding and reconciliation" (124). The Dreamer's journey both begins and ends in the earthly garden, which Finlayson argues is "a place associated with loss, lamentation, and intimation of consolation" (318). It is in this garden that the reality of the narrator's situation is first presented to the reader. The connection to earthly love and loss are the prevailing focus of the opening five stanzas as the narrator falls upon the mound of earth where he lost his pearl and weeps. He describes the place initially as "clot" and "moul," or soil and mold, that would "marre" and "spot" his pearl (22-5). His pearl, once pure, smooth, and lovely is now subjected to putrefaction in its burial place in the garden soil. Yet, the narrator's perspective, despite his morbidity, is matter-of-fact in his realization that from rot comes life. The description switches from one of corruption to one of growth as the narrator moves from the spreading of spice trees on the spot—a reminder of the spices used in burial rituals—to a description of the vivid flowers that will spring forth from the decaying material in the soil. The narrator frankly states,

Flor and fryte may not be fede  
 Per hit doun drof in moldez dunne,  
 For vch gresse mot grow of graynez dede;  
 No whete were ellez to wones wonne (29-32)

(Flower and fruit could not be fed if the pearl had not sunk down into the dun earth, for each plant must grow from dead grain; No wheat would otherwise remain to be harvested)

Indeed, already in this spot he finds a plethora of flowers blooming and shining in the sun, among them “Gilofre, gyngure, and gromlyoun, / And pyonys powdered ay bytwene” (Gillyflower, ginger, and gromwell, and peonies powdered in between; 43-4). The flowers that spring from the pearl’s detritus, then, point to the mutability of earthly life, that is, to the cyclic nature of life and death, as well as to the cyclical nature of the Dreamer’s own joy and grief.

The garden has figured prominently in many discussions of *Pearl*, such as Teresa Reed’s, that cite possible analogs for the garden where the Dreamer laments his loss. Among these are the Garden of Deduit, the Garden of Delights, the garden in the Song of Songs, and the Garden of Eden. Indeed, the earthly garden in *Pearl* witnesses the Dreamer’s transformation from mourning father in the opening stanzas to resigned penitent and devotee of the Lamb in the last. In a slightly different but similar vein, Blenkner refers to the three realms through which the Narrator travels—the earthly garden, the marvelous land, and the Holy City—as three gardens as indicated by the growth in the first two and the Pearl Maiden’s contention that she resides in a blissful garden when the Dreamer recounts his grief to her. The earthly garden, however, is associated with mutability, as represented in the cycle of life from the rotting pearl to lively blooms that spring upon the earthen mound. Likewise, the garden as representation of mutability is a reminder that the Dreamer is earth-bound and earth-focused as he remains fixated on his earthly desire for the Maiden. The return to the garden at the end of the poem serves as a reminder that, as earthly creatures, none of us easily escapes the

hardships and sorrows of corporeal existence. The Dreamer returns to the mound where he reflects upon his dream and takes comfort from it, but without the benefit of heavenly bliss. “The light of truth sought by the contemplative,” states Blenkner, “however diluted and filtered, touches even this world, the ‘erbere’ where blossoms ‘schyneȝ schyr agayn þe sunne’ (l. 28); beatitude—eternal enduring peace—may not, however, be attained in ‘þys doel-doungen’ (l. 1187)” (36). Like Reed, then, Blenkner suggests that the garden may yet offer the Dreamer a “transformation of the human heart,” even if it cannot offer bliss or the peace of consolation. In this regard, the garden and the forest of the previous texts operate in much the same way.

The *Pearl*-poet applies the conventional landscape of the lament—the forest—but not in conventional ways. Rather than performing his complaint in the untamed forest visited by Yvain and Orfeo, or in the considerably more ordered forest of the *Book of the Duchess*, the *Pearl*-poet grieves in a private garden more akin to the garden of the *Romance of the Rose*, or in a garden reminiscent of the one in which Heurodis experiences her moment of loss, which serves as the prelude to Orfeo’s forest lament. As with the Black Knight, while in the forest, the Dreamer is subjected to consolatory words and philosophy, which have little effect, and both of these traditional methods of relief from grief, as well as the forest trope, prove limited in their capacity to console the Dreamer. Additionally, whereas memory assists the Black Knight through his grief, it only gets in the way of the Dreamer’s progress, as it encourages his obsessive desire to reclaim the Pearl of his past.

### The Forest

The garden thus serves as the primary setting for the narrator's grief and lamentation, as Finlayson suggests, but does not figure initially as a site of consolation unless we consider the Dreamer's exhausted sleep, which leads to the consolatory dream vision. Rather, the forest serves in the poem as the first locus of consolation, albeit one that appears in a dream vision rather than in the Narrator's waking experience. Aers suggests that it is the novelty of this space that allows the Dreamer to feel comforted by it, arguing that, because this is a land like no other—a forest bedecked with jewels and unusually vivid and precious growth—the Dreamer is taken in by the scene and momentarily forgets his sorrow (59). There is a certain appeal to this argument, as grief can, indeed, be momentarily overcome by focusing on novelty; yet, many readers of this poem have overlooked the common trope that the poet utilizes—the trope of the forest of lamentation and consolation. I argue that, in the other texts discussed in this dissertation, the forest performs a similar function to that of the garden in *Pearl*, serving, as Finlayson states, as the location of “loss, lamentation, and intimation of consolation” (318). While Blenkner refers to this space as a garden, it is presented at the opening of the dream not as an enclosed garden, but as a sprawling countryside. The Dreamer first recognizes “klyfez cleuen” (sheer cliffs; 66), and then begins to move “toward a foreste” (67). He speaks of the growth and sights increasing in wonder as he moves “fyrre in the fryth,” or further into the forest (103). Just as Yvain, Orfeo, and the Black Knight before him, then, his grief drives him into the woods, though his flight to the forest takes the form of dreaming soul separated from the sleeping body. The difference in *Pearl* is that the forest is not allowed to be the locus of final consolation, though it remains the place from which

the bereaved reenters the world of the living. Rather, the forest serves as only a temporary stop in the “aventure” through which the Dreamer will “miraculously move” (adventure; *meruaylez meuen*; 64).

The Dreamer does not move through the cliffs, streams, and bowers of the dream forest to have adventures of the sort experienced by Lancelot, Yvain, Orfeo, and Chaucer’s Narrator; the Dreamer does, nonetheless, have a unique adventure as he travels through this marvelous land. His adventure initially introduces him to a location unlike any earthly place with which he has had experience. The trees are recognizable as trees, cliffs as cliffs, and streams as streams, but the landscape is created of much more precious stuff than is the natural growth of his earthly garden. Whereas the garden, even with its brightly colored blossoms, is entirely natural, the marvelous landscape, referred to by Blenkner and Finlayson as the Earthly Paradise, is constituted of precious gems and jewels that amazes the Dreamer to the point that he forgets his sorrow for a time, much as the Narrator in Chaucer’s *Book of the Duchess* forgets his melancholy when faced with the excitement of the hunt and lushness of the forest into which he wanders. “These glories of the landscape,” remarks Jonathon Nicholls, “move the Dreamer deeply, and he refers to the comforting effect that it has on his grief” (104). Just as the loss of his Pearl “moved the Dreamer deeply,” so the wonder of the dream landscape moves him to immediately lay aside his grief and experience the wonder of the forest.

Yvain is healed of his deep sorrow in the forest by a magical ointment and doing good deeds for others. Orfeo’s healing also begins in the forest with his sighting of Heurodis, which spurs him into action. The Black Knight, likewise, seems to find comfort in the forest by talking to the Narrator and sharing his memories of White. The

forest, for these men, does indeed provide the “intimation of consolation,” and the immediate joy the Dreamer finds in the marvelous forest hints, at first, that this will be the case, as well, for the Dreamer. Yet, the *Pearl* Dreamer, by contrast, does not take his ultimate comfort in the forest, but in the garden where he initially lost his pearl. One significant reason for this is that the Dreamer, unlike the men before him, does not *need* to remove himself from public scrutiny for his grief. Unlike Yvain, Orfeo, and the Black Knight, who are in social settings related to the court at the moments of their loss or despair, the Dreamer is alone. He has no need to flee to a remote location in order to escape the social stigma of open mourning. His private garden, like Orfeo’s Heurodis’ should have done, offers him personal space in which to lament his loss. In addition, the garden is also the burial site for his dead Pearl, so his grieving here serves as the funerary rite of grieving at the graveside. Thus the garden serves as the originary locus of his lament and to his awakening to what consolation, though limited, he might find in the dream he has there. The Dreamer’s healing does, however, *begin* in the dream forest into which he stumbles and from whose stream bank he first sees the Pearl Maiden, who shares with him the joys of the source of his future comfort. This comfort is, of course, expected to come through the sacramental bond of the Dreamer with Christ through the Eucharist.

Like Chaucer’s Narrator the Dreamer remembers his grief anew and the forest reasserts itself as the conventional space that allows the aggrieved to mourn, lose his mind to grief, and work through that grief either by adventuring or talking through his sorrow. In much the same way that these other texts present their mourners as mad, *Pearl* presents the Dreamer as a type of madman in the forest. His madness is most notable for

the Dreamer's inability to put aside his desire for union with the Pearl Maiden over a desire for heavenly bliss. As with the other men presented in this project, the Dreamer's melancholic grief has pushed to the limits of sanity into mania and he is willing to take the risk. Madness is addressed repeatedly in the poem by both the Dreamer and the Pearl Maiden. Jane Chance addresses the dialogue in this section, writing, "Throughout their dialogue, the Joyless Jeweler emphasizes his misery and madness, while the Pearl Maiden gently remonstrates [with] him over his pride, literalism, and selfishness" (42). The first mention of madness, as Chance's comment indicates, is presented by the Pearl Maiden in response to the Dreamer's tale of woe over losing her. She tells him that his is "a mad purpose" to grieve over "a raysoun bref," or a transitory purpose (267-8). What she is attempting to convey to the Dreamer is that life is fleeting, explaining to him that she was "but a rose / þat flowred and fayled as kynde hyt get" (but a rose that flowered and failed as nature intends; 269-70). Here, the Dreamer's own acknowledgment of the cycle of nature and life from the garden—that is, the growth that springs forth from dead matter—is revisited, yet he does not seem receptive to the lesson in the presence of his lost child because his focus is solely on repossessing her. The Pearl Maiden further addresses his madness by pointing out that to call "Wyrde," or Fate, a thief, is to call God a thief, thereby blaming that which should be his comfort (273-5).

The Maiden again confronts the Dreamer about his madness for attempting to bargain thus with God. She accuses him of jesting, exclaiming, "So madde ȝe be!" (290), and claiming that he speaks too rashly. She addresses his corporeality, his sensual experience, as a hindrance to understanding, as the Dreamer believes only by seeing; that is, because he sees the Pearl Maiden, he believes what she says, he believes that he can be

with her, and, because he sees her on the opposite bank and she was once his, he can cross the water to reclaim her (295-300). She continues to scold the Dreamer, calling him not only mad, but “discourteous” for claiming that the Lord would lie about life and death and about who can gain the far bank (303-4). The madness that is man’s, the Pearl Maiden explains at the some length, is due to original sin and Adam’s partaking of the fruit, which also, inevitably, leads to death.

The Pearl Maiden, now blessedly ensconced in heaven, seems to forget that the Dreamer is yet human and human madness remains his lot. He, unlike her, cannot boast the treasure of heaven except to lose it again when waking from his dream vision. Beatitude is not his and as Aquinas argues, cannot be his while he lives. Sorrow is ever present in human existence and ultimate happiness impossible. Regardless, the Pearl Maiden is correct in stating that the Lamb should bring comfort, but does not let on that this comfort cannot, in human life, be permanent. What is framed as madness on the Dreamer’s part is actually honesty about the nature of grief. That which causes delight is lost and delight itself is gone. Without delight, what good is life?

In the Dreamer’s own words he points to the human madness that leads him to risk his life and damnation to reclaim his child (1154). He mentions his frenzy again in line 1166 when he is prevented from crossing the stream by awakening from his dream. Blenkner, citing both Richard Rolle and St. Bonaventura on the “highest good,” heavenly beatitude, explains human madness, or the madness of the world, thus:

Those who have, through contemplation, been given a foretaste of the sweetness of heavenly beatitude can only despise the world and long to possess heaven. Having glimpsed the highest good, they realize it is the *only* good, and having attained to the highest truth, they cannot be deceived by any false good. To desire a lesser good is the madness of the world. (45, author’s emphasis)



The “lesser good” here is the Dreamer’s determination to place his desire for the earthly memory of his daughter—his desire to reclaim the heavenly figuration of her and place her back in her role as his earthly possession—over his desire for the Lamb. At this point, the Dreamer has seen the heavenly vision, has delighted in it, and has yet placed his desire for his dead daughter before the desire for everlasting bliss. His love for the Maiden, as Means explains, “though human and understandable, is not *caritas* but *cupiditas*, love governed not by humility but by sinful pride” (52). In his pride, the Dreamer believed that nothing could stop him from obtaining the object of his desire. Spearing argues that his failure to do so, and his final loss of the Pearl Maiden, is a result of “the human liability to desire excessively,” as well as “human resistance to God’s will” (165). While I agree with the point that the Dreamer exerts his own will and resists God’s—the move that results in “human madness”—I disagree that it is excessive desire that leads to the Dreamer’s banishment from the City of God and the Pearl Maiden. Rather, it is the Dreamer’s earthly desire for union with the Pearl Maiden that causes the final rift between the Dreamer, the Pearl Maiden, and the City of God.

*Pearl’s* forest, then, does offer consolation, but only a superficial consolation too easily won. The Dreamer allows the forest to console him based solely on its marvelous qualities. He speaks, as Nicholls notes, of the “adubbemente of þo downez dere / Garten my goste al greffe forȝete” (splendor of the magnificent hills that cause my soul to forget my grief; 85-6). The scene is so visually striking, with its crystal cliffs, leaves that shimmer like “bornyst syluer” (burnished silver), and pearl-strewn paths that the Dreamer remembers his grief only to state that he has forgotten it (72-86). In addition to the sights of the marvelous land, the Dreamer addresses scents and savors that are equally

wonderful: “So frech flauorez of frytez were, / As fode hit con me fayre referte” (Such fresh perfumes wafted from the fruit trees that they refreshed me like fine food; 87-8).

Birdsong pleases his sense of hearing, as well:

Fowlez þer flowen in frythe in fere,  
of flaumbande hwez, boþe smale and grete;  
Bot sytole-stryng and gyternere  
Her reken myþe moȝt not retrete,  
For quen þose bryddez her wynges bete,  
Þay songen wyth a swete asent. (89-94).

(Birds, both small and large, flew in that woodland, arrayed in brilliant hews; The strings of the citern strummed by the citern player might not reproduce the lovely sound, for when those birds beat their wings, their songs rose in sweet ascent.)

As the Dreamer goes further into the forest the wonders multiply and he sees beautiful meadows, spices, pear trees, hedgerows, rich river beds, and banks that rise like threads of gold (fyldor fyn; 103-5). The forest is, then, a place of sensory delights that serve as a temporary distraction from the Dreamer’s sorrow. He allows bodily, sensory experience to control his passions instead of resorting to the higher-minded consolation afforded by contemplation of God and ultimate happiness as examined by Aquinas, and by the Pearl Maiden, and which will, finally, stand in as yet another temporary solace. This is due, in part, to the Dreamer’s literal-mindedness, but also, claims Rhodes, “His attention to the sights, sounds, and odors of the [forest] indicate his attunement with the physical world and point to his sensitivity to human finitude, change, and the enigma of death” (133). In a reversal of the typical medieval mindset in which woman is associated with body and corruption and man as mind and spirit, the Dreamer is here connected with body and sensory experience through his intemperate grief. This openness to affect, however, prepares him to be receptive to the experience of the forest and to his own figuration as *sponsa* to Christ the Bridegroom at the end of the poem.

Before the Dreamer can be consoled, he must have the experience of the forest that will lead to his relief from sorrow and reintegration into society. Marie Borroff acknowledges that the Dreamer sets out like a “knight-errant out for adventure” (127). Similarly, Spearing claims that the Dreamer “finds himself propelled, like a knight in medieval romance . . . and by the end [of his vision] he has still not lost the conviction that he can make an independent and heroic way towards his goal” (“Visions” 106-7). In this way, the Dreamer is likened to Yvain, who seeks adventure in the forest and who engages in adventures as part of his grieving process. What Borroff and Spearing have neglected to recognize is the role the forest plays for the grieving men. Just as Yvain, Sir Orfeo, and the Black Knight enter the forest not for the purpose of adventuring, but for the purpose of mourning, so the Dreamer’s grief “propels” him into the forest of the marvelous land where its wonders ameliorate his pain. However, entry into the marvelous land is but the first part of that adventure. The Dreamer will not leave the marvelous land and its forest until he attempts to ford the stream to the City of God and wakes in the earthly garden of his earlier lament. His adventure—or the working through of his grief—takes place primarily in the forest and the garden settings, then, aligning him with the tradition of the wilderness lament, the garden serving as the locus of the lament and of the potential for consolation and the forest as the threshold to the working through of grief.

### The City of God

All three of the characters discussed in previous chapters participate directly in the adventures that will carry them through the forest of lament and to reintegration. The

adventure, which the Dreamer himself names as such, begins with a walk in the forest, but appears to continue in stasis, as the Dreamer remains on one side of the stream, watching the action take place from afar. Though the Dreamer remains in the marvelous land for the duration of his dream, much of the adventure occurs on the opposite shore or in the interchange between the Dreamer in the marvelous land and the Pearl Maiden on the opposite bank. The Pearl Maiden remains separated from the Dreamer, much as the meditative vision is separate from the devotee. Ironically, the Dreamer is relegated to a position as an onlooker—as one who must base his consolation on the sensory experience of vision rather than the kinesthetic experience of participating in the actions of the City of God, despite the Pearl Maiden's earlier scorn for his belief that she stands before him on the opposite side of the stream simply because he sees her there. She scolds him for needing ocular proof to solidify his faith. Yet, it is a visual lesson to which the Pearl Maiden must resort in order to drive her point home. The visual lesson remains at a remove, much as the reading from Apocalypse remains separate from the reader. The reader, like the Dreamer, participates in the action of his vision, only by watching and relaying it. Thus, the Dreamer never leaves the banks of the marvelous land and its forest and his "adventure" is limited to a distant viewing of heaven's bliss. His experience, still homodiegetic in nature in that he both narrates the dream vision and witnesses it, is nonetheless altered in the level of participation. He no longer laments bodily as he had in waking life, or moves through space as when first entering his dream vision. He does, though, engage in dialogue with the Pearl Maiden and move along the near shore until his attempt to cross the river. However, the separation necessarily changes the level of participation in which he is allowed to engage, and the separation itself differentiates

between the worldly and heavenly realms. Though the space of the dream into which he awakens is marvelous, it is not the City of God and is therefore accessible to the Dreamer, whereas the space across the river is not yet available to him. As such, he can only experience it through his access to the Pearl Maiden—that is, through dialogue and vision, not through his own movement through that space.

The Pearl Maiden uses the parable of the pearl of great price as a figure of the heavenly realm of the City of God, which bears a striking resemblance, in the poet's own admission, to the Heavenly Jerusalem of the Apocalypse of St. John. The City of God, viewed by the Dreamer from a hillside on the opposite shore, is described even more brilliantly, though less naturally, than the marvelous land in which the Dreamer stands. The Dreamer sees on the far bank, through transparent walls, a city "Pat schyrrer þen sunne with schaftez schon" (that shone brighter than the sun with rays of light; 982). The city appears to be lit from within and the Dreamer is amazed that "of sunne ne mone had þay no nede" because "Þe Self God watz her lombe-lyȝt" (there was no need for sun or moon; God himself was their lamplight; 1045-6). The river of light is said to flow from the throne, enlightening and filling every street (1058-9). The precious materials that constitute the Holy City begin with "brende golde bryȝt" (brightly burnished gold; 989), and sits upon a foundation of twelve layers of "gentyl gemmez" (the finest gems; 991). The gems are the twelve listed in the Apocalypse: jasper, sapphire, chalcedony, emerald, sardonyx, ruby, chrysolite, beryl, topaz, chrysoprase, jacinth, and amethyst (999-1016), each of which the poet details with a description of its color and brilliance. The Dreamer also details the City's size and shape, which appears to be a reduced scale of the

Apocalyptic version (only twelve furlongs as opposed to twelve thousand furlongs), and the pearly gates, complete with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel (1030, 1037-40).

The Pearl Maiden has been given permission by the Lamb to allow the impure Dreamer, for his edification, to see the City. Through this final vision, which reenacts scenes from St. John's own, the true marvel of the Dreamer's vision occurs. He witnesses the procession of the holy blessed and the marriage of the Lamb, who appears as the wounded Christ with a copiously bleeding side wound. The streets overflow with the procession and with the river of light that flows from the throne of God, and the Dreamer is amazed at the sight:

Anvnder mone so gret merwayle  
 No fleschly hert ne myȝt endeure  
 As quen I blusched vpon þat baly,  
 So ferly þerof watz þe fasure.  
 I stod as style as dased quayle  
 For ferly of þat frech fygure,  
 Pat felde I nawþer reste ne trauayle,  
 So watz I rauyste wyt glymme pure. (1081-88)

(Underneath the moon was a great marvel that no fleshly heart might endure; when I gazed upon that realm, so wonderful was the form. I stood as still as a dazed quail for wonder of that fair figure, that I felt neither rest nor work, I was so ravished with the pure radiance.)

The "fygure" upon which the Dreamer gazes in wonderment is the Lamb, who leads a procession of "vergynez" (virgins, elsewhere referred to as martyrs; 1099). The Lamb is described as leading the procession and appears, at first, as the Lamb of the Apocalypse with "hornez seuen of red golde cler" (with seven horns of clear red gold; 1111). The Lamb is further described as the most beautiful and marvelous creature ever, being both "symple" and "gent," or humble and gentle (1134), despite the "wounde ful wyde and weete con wyse / Anende Hys hert, þurȝ hyde torente" from which "His blod outsprent"

(a large, wet, gaping wound was visible near his heart, tearing through his skin; his blood flowed out of it; 1135-7). What amazes the Dreamer even more is that the Lamb does not seem to be in pain, but continues on. He is so moved by the sight that he declares, “Any breste for bale aȝt haf forbrent / Er he þerto hade had delyt” (any heart ought to have burnt up with sorrow before it had any delight for that; 1139-40). In other words, the Dreamer is acknowledging that the Lamb’s sorrow and sacrifice were far greater than any man should want for himself—a true source of sorrow. Finally, through this vision, the Dreamer seems to be understanding that his grief is temporary and finite and the Lamb thus serves as a reminder that obsessive self-concern over human suffering is fruitless and is, therefore, to be avoided. As Borroff claims, the Dreamer is filled “with a responsive delight, with compassion, and with love” at the sight of the Lamb (153-4) and seems to be on the brink of consolation as a result of this vision and Christ’s model.

#### No End to Sorrow

Yet, this sight still does not convince him to set aside his desire for the Pearl Maiden. Rather, it seems to incite him to heightened frenzy in his will to procure her once again for himself. He sees his “lytel queen” in the procession of virgins (1147), delighting in the Lamb, and his first instinct is not to rejoice in her delight, but “to wade / For luf-longyng in gret delyt” across the stream to her (to wade, for love-longing in my great desire; 1151-2). While he initially has desire for the Lamb, it is the sight of the Pearl Maiden among the blessed that provokes him to make his move and we see the first sign of non-dialogic action from the Dreamer since his initial movement into the forest. His rash movement to reclaim the Maiden indicates that he seeks to be subsumed into the life

of the Maiden—to be reunited with her and end his sorrow rather than to find consolation for it. He seeks a quick and easy ending to the pain of loss rather than an extension and substitution of it through consolatory visions, words, and practices. His impetuosity and unwillingness to set aside his paternal claim on the Pearl Maiden in order to receive his own heavenly reward—or the promise of it—lead to the judgment that he is not yet ready to enter into the City and he is banished through the act of awakening from his dream and losing, yet again, his beloved Pearl.

Many critics have debated the level of agency afforded the Dreamer in his vision. Borroff, for one, argues that the Dreamer's role up to the point where he enjoys the vision of the Lamb and then attempts to ford the stream is a "passive response to scriptural authority [that] gives way to direct experience of emotional intensity, and this in turn brings about an action that abruptly breaks off the dream" (145). Finlayson, conversely, sees the Dreamer's role as primarily active up to the point of the "flat" vision of Heavenly Jerusalem in which he regards the Dreamer as an observer:

The Dreamer, though in a state of heightened consciousness, is still alive in *this* world and, thus, cannot be *in* the City of God. We can also, however, see in the manner of presentation another, parallel fact: the Dreamer *sees* the City of God, 'As John þe apostel hit syð syth syȝt' (985), but at a distance from himself spiritually, emotionally, and imaginatively; his *seeing* is with the eyes of another, through one organ of God's revelation, the writing of John. (334)

Finlayson further addresses the multiple ways of knowing the truth and indicates that the Dreamer knows by "'seeing,' since God is immanent in all creation," and by "'knowing' (recognizing) by reference to spiritual revelation" (334), but that this is not enough for understanding. Whether "seeing" is active or passive and whether or not "understanding" is necessary for agency in a vision such as this one remains unclear. J. A. Jackson favors an active Dreamer, stating, "The vision at the heart of the poem cannot be properly



expressed because it can only be experienced, lived—in the world to come, of course, but in this one as well” (157). For Jackson, then, the act of having the dream gives the Dreamer agency. Spearing explains this tension between active and passive as part and parcel of the religious vision and that the reader would be mistaken to read the Dreamer as passive: “Dreaming, in this poem, does not indicate an abdication of responsibility on the poet’s part, an escape into a world less demanding and less serious than that of everyday waking life” (“Visions” 113). Jackson presents a possibility that allows for some agency on part of the Dreamer even if we read him as primarily an onlooker: [The Maiden] attempts to explain for the Dreamer that as a member of the Church, he is always already a potential participant in the mystical union he witnesses at the heavenly court. On the very surface, then, her initial explanation is less about the heavenly realm than it is about the ubiquitous structure of proper desire and substitution, and its potential existence on earth as it is in heaven. (169)

What this suggests is that the Dreamer “always already” has the potential to participate in desiring Christ and this desiring, later defined by Jackson as *agape* that is an “irreducible, infinite structure of desire that cascades over itself—a structure upon which everything else is commentary—so much that it moves between the always-wanting (meaning both lacking and desiring) and the always-giving” (175). If we consider the Dreamer’s role from this perspective, he has been active all along through his perpetual desire for the Pearl Maiden. The goal of the Pearl Maiden’s lessons then, claims Jackson, is to “resituate the Dreamer’s desire” so that it is properly focused on the Lamb (158). The Pearl Maiden must, then, use “[the Dreamer’s] desire and grief as the

first stages in holy love, [so that] he may move toward penance and thus toward Christ and marriage to the Lamb” (L. S. Johnson 171).

This will prove to be quite a task for the Pearl Maiden, as the Dreamer is so wrapped up in his longing for the recovered Pearl that he seems to be oblivious to the lessons the Pearl Maiden has to teach. His eyes are so filled with the sight of her that, despite hearing her words, his intellect does not apprehend what she is saying. He is stuck in his concupiscible state of being that the Pearl Maiden defines as “impure.” She, nonetheless, attempts to help the Dreamer understand, through his intellect and reason, that grief over earthly losses is misplaced and that he should delight in her blessed place in heaven. Though the form the poem takes in the conversations between the Pearl Maiden and the Dreamer can best be defined as a Boethian consolation, unlike the conversation between Boethius and Lady Philosophy, the Pearl Maiden fails to bring the Dreamer consolation. Like Chaucer’s Narrator, the Dreamer appears to be ignorant of his teacher’s words as the Pearl Maiden attempts to teach him the ways of the City of God. That he does not readily accept the spiritual consolation offered by the Maiden owes much to the Dreamer’s groundedness in secularity and his own corporeality and inability to truly grasp the divine lessons provided by the Pearl Maiden. The Dreamer’s inability to let go of his earthly desire for his lost Pearl in exchange for desire for the Lamb and the City of God stands in the way of understanding and, therefore, of ultimate happiness.

The lessons that the Pearl Maiden shares with the Dreamer are largely lessons intended to explain her appearance in the City of God and how she achieved such an honor, which are lessons that should transfer to his own situation and to those of the readers of the poem. The Dreamer is unable to comprehend how the maiden came to be

so lavishly appointed in her pearl-laden costume; that is, he questions how a child came to be a noblewoman of such means. The Pearl Maiden responds by retelling the parables of the vineyard and of the pearl of great price, as well as the story of Jesus and the children, which explain how a child so young in years can become one of the blessed and, more pointedly, a queen of heaven. She likens herself to the workers hired at the eleventh hour who received the same pay as those who had worked all day. Though she is young she is no less treasured than one who has long been a Christian. This parable is used, too, to explain how she can be a queen in heaven and not supplant the Holy Virgin. Wendell Stacy Johnson discusses the theme of “more” that pervades the Pearl Maiden’s lessons. In her retelling of the parable of the vineyard, for example, Johnson explains:

In the vineyard, a place of vegetation comparable with the garden-grave, the sense of *more* is possible (the desire for more reward or for more bliss and beauty, as in the land just this side of the river), but in the divine sense the *more* is freely given: not limited by the standard of time, but demanded by the quality of mercy, which is infinite. (172)

The Dreamer does not comprehend the concept of “more” that the Pearl Maiden shares with him because, as Johnson claims, his is an “earthbound nature” and “it is hardly easy to ascend at once from an earthly to a clearer understanding” (176).

Despite the Pearl Maiden’s attempts to enlighten the Dreamer and to redirect his desire and sorrow, the Dreamer wishes only to reclaim the Pearl Maiden by plunging into the stream. This attempt initiates the Dreamer’s awakening. As with the mourning men in the previous texts, there is a question of suicidality that is raised by this action. Indeed, the Dreamer claims that he chose to make the attempt “þaȝ [he] þer swalte” (even if he perished; 1160). He claims that it is the delight of the sight of his Pearl Maiden in the procession of the blessed that leads to this folly:

Delyt me drof in yȝe and ere,  
 My manez mynde to maddyng malte;  
 Quen I seȝ my freely, I wolde be þere,  
 Byȝonde þe water paȝ ho were walte.  
 I þoȝt þat no þyng myȝt me dere  
 To fech me bur and take me halte,  
 And to start in þe strem schulde non me stere,  
 To swymme þe remnaunt, þaȝ I þer swalte (153-60)

(Delight poured into my eye and ear, melting my human mind to madness when I saw my gracious one. I wanted to be there with her, though she was beyond the flowing water. I thought that nothing could stop me, even by dealing a severe blow, or could halt me, and nothing would stop me from starting into the stream, and swimming the remainder, even if I perished).

The Dreamer has been told that he cannot yet enter the City of God because he is not yet pure, yet his desire to reclaim the Maiden overwhelms his sense of propriety and he ignores the warnings. Aers argues that the Dreamer's longing is to terminate desire in the full possession of its (fantasy) object, a possession that dispenses with all mediations, all negotiations, and all language. It is a longing that dispenses with God and the tradition into which the maiden sought to steer him. The defiant readiness to die in his transgression of traditional boundaries signifies a kind of suicide, an analogue to Troilus's, one that the tradition he defies would treat as a sin against Justice. (68)

Yet, the Dreamer knows that he will not see the Maiden again this side of the stream and he despairs of this separation.

The Dreamer refuses understanding every step of the way and in his refusal, he actively rejects Christian consolation for his grief. The Pearl Maiden, who should be a source of comfort to him, cannot comfort him because the comfort she offers is not herself. It is, instead, the comfort of the Lamb and of the assurance of her place among the blessed, which the Dreamer ignores. He is impressed with the visual appearance of the City of God and with the idea that he, like the Maiden, could be royalty in this place,

but he fails to understand the deeper relevance of the grace of the Lamb that the Maiden reveals. Not even after witnessing the procession of maidens and the marriage of the Lamb does the Dreamer apprehend a higher meaning, contemplation of God leading to ultimate happiness.

The final stanza of the poem sees the Dreamer finally acknowledging that Pearl is no longer a part of his earthly life and his mourning for her must come to an end. It also sees the Dreamer moving toward desire for the Lamb and sorrow over his own sinful nature and Christ's suffering. Joy and bliss are yet withheld from the Dreamer as he awakens from his dream vision. He takes comfort in the teachings of the Pearl Maiden, but is still aggrieved by this separation. His initial reaction upon waking is to be upset at being tossed out of the wondrous land. He is filled with "a longeyng heuy" (heavy longing) for the "fayre regioun" (fair region; 1180, 1178), and he recalls the Pearl Maiden and her "sermoun" (1185). Here, finally, he consents to be glad for her place in the "garlande gay," or "circle of the blessed" (Andrew and Waldron n.109), while he remains in his "doel-doungen," or earth and its sorrows (1187). The Dreamer acknowledges that his joy was caught up in his earthly love for Pearl and that in trying to reclaim her by crossing the river, he tried to claim more than was his due (1189-91). He acknowledges that he has not heeded the Pearl Maiden's message and, through pride, has lost out on "mo of His mysterys" (more of God's mysteries (1194). He is finally able to put aside his pride and look to God for his comfort. He reflects on his vision and applies the knowledge he has gained to his current situation. He has allowed his grief, finally, to bring him to a spiritual union with the Lamb and to a longing for heaven, which is a virtuous, contemplative form of sorrow with, in Christian terms, a right-minded goal of

beatitude. He has not, because he cannot, ceased to grieve, but has changed the object of his grief to already present evil, to his own sin, and to the sins of others that necessitated Christ's suffering.

When the Dreamer does finally contemplate God and Christ's suffering at the end of the poem, he seems, finally, to have awakened to the homily provided by the Pearl Maiden. He accepts that Christ should bring comfort. Yet, sorrow persists as the Dreamer substitutes his dissolution into the Pearl Maiden with self-dissolving union with the Lamb. This type of consolation, the Dreamer learns, brings not the end of sorrow, but ultimate happiness deferred. *Pearl* is not a poem that promises consolation as an end to grief, but one that demonstrates grief's inevitability in corporeal life and reminds the reader that, here on earth, there is no end to sorrow, only a substitution of one sorrow for another—corporeal for spiritual—that separates the damned from ultimate, yet deferred, beatitude.

## CONCLUSION: AFFECTIVE MASCULINITY

This dissertation has argued that medieval noblemen are represented as men who feel, not just as men who fight, woo ladies, and defend the poor and weak from injustice and danger. Through a study of representations of the grieving process of love, loss, madness or melancholis, wilderness lament and consolation, and assessment of the grieving process, we can begin to see emerge a picture of the medieval male in affective form—as one who emotes and expresses his feelings, either through socially codified conventions or through authentic—that is truly felt and spontaneously experienced—reactions to his loss. These characters grieve over lost roles, over lost spouses, and over lost children. They grieve over changes in situation and shifts in significance. Each of the four texts in this project figure representations of men affected by loss. This phrase bears repeating, and with emphasis: each man represented in this study is *affected* by loss. That is, he reacts affectively, emotionally, to the fact of his loss through grief behaviors that are, to varying degrees, authentically expressed, which is to say that they are *humanly* and spontaneously expressed.

Yvain and Orfeo express their grief externally and vividly, displayed for the world to see, and decidedly masculine as opposed to the more feminine expression of feminine grief that includes tearing at one's hair, scratching at one's face, and other physically, that is bodily, damaging behaviors up to and including suicide. Rather, these men flee to the wilderness and express their grief through such methods as laments, swoons, lyric poetry and bouts of melancholia. Yvain's inhuman grief madness—more often the province of male characters—gives way to the Dreamer's more inclusively—that is, less clearly gendered—human sorrow as we find that grief dissolves gender

boundaries. For the Black Knight and the *Pearl's* Dreamer, the true grief is internal and more personal. What seems so clearly divergent in gendered grief behaviors practiced by Laudine and Heurodis as opposed to those enacted by Yvain and Orfeo are of little consequence to the Black Knight, whose practice of grief is more closely bound to courtly literary conventions and the practice of the forest lament that accompanies them. Yet, the true expression of grief for him is not that of the wildman in the forest or of self-imposed exile, but of temporary reprieve from the social realm and, ultimately, bald acknowledgment of his loss. Similarly, the Dreamer eschews the gendered convention with the exception of his deployment of courtly language and tropes as his authentic expression of grief takes place entirely in the interior landscape of his dream vision where he is free to express his emotions without social sanction from (especially) his male peers.

What does this tell us about masculinity? About grief? Can we separate these two in these texts? Concerning masculinity, perhaps we would be better to use the word “man” and what it suggests about socially- and personally prescribed behaviors. In gendered terms, this study examines the binary of man versus woman, and this seems to be the most clearly defined “masculinist” approach to these texts. Yet, masculinity should not be defined solely by what separates a man from a woman, whether biologically or socially. Masculinity, and masculine identity, is about more than that. Feminist theorists would bristle at any argument that women are only identifiable in that they are not men—that there is a clear divide between the two genders, and that femininity and masculinity are always necessarily defined by this polarity. Rather, both femininity and masculinity, as many scholars have argued, is more appropriately considered on a continuum. There



are masculinities and femininities, plural, and this project seeks to examine how affect defies clearly gendered, or binarily-gendered, masculinity. More pointedly, this project argues that society often argues for gendered emotions or affect while the reaction to an emotion as strong as grief is actually genderless. Gestures of grief are often those given to us by our culture and are gendered; genuine grief often is not, and the grief demonstrated in *Pearl*, being the most affective of the four here, exemplifies just such a genderless grief.

Thus, in addition to the recognizable binary of man versus woman, there are other binaries that define men and that are, again, easily confounded in these texts. Among these are the oppositions of nobleman versus common man, *human* versus *inhuman*, and man versus human. This addresses expectations of noblemen as defined in terms of knighthood and kingship, in particular, and the expectations held of each of these social stations. Preferred behaviors can be adduced through examinations of courtesy books, including those that outline proper chivalric duties and virtues that are expected, particularly by the clergy, of fighting men in an effort to “civilize” these warriors and limit the savagery. Although these courtesy texts are real-world examples that are being applied to fictional works, knowing that romances include overly-romanticized and idealized versions of knighthood, kingship, and courtly behavior, what we find in these texts is often an equally idealized adherence—or attempt to adhere—to these chivalric codes and mores. Thus, a character like Yvain demonstrates his masculinity by attempting to be both ideal knightly combatant and ideal courtly knight, Orfeo holds himself to an idealized standard of knighthood and kingship that he is unable to uphold, and the Black Knight and the Dreamer utilize idealized courtly conventions in their

laments and their attempts at wooing their respective maidens, through the conventions of courtly love language. Through this attention to conventions, codes, and mores, then, we begin to see that masculinity is much more than *just* the opposite of femininity; masculinity in the Middle Ages is also defined by how well a man understands and performs his role as man of a particular socio-economic estate.

If a man is considered to be a man by virtue of not being woman and a particular *kind* of man by his virtues as a member of the warrior class, his masculinity is also connected to questions of humanity. A strange slippage occurs here as men frequently risk becoming inhuman through grief madness and profound melancholia. Yet, they are able to prove their manly metal by overcoming these bouts and returning to sanity. While their grief may temporarily disengage them from society and civilized behaviors—those behaviors previously discussed as essential to the medieval noble masculinity presented in these texts—it is, after all, only temporary. Yvain, for example, is healed of his madness by the Lady of Norison and her maid, who recognize him as a worthy man; that is, he is remembered as a valiant and well-respected Round Table knight. Orfeo, too, breaks the torpor of his melancholy by taking action to change his circumstances. While his choice arguably teeters on the brink between bravery and madness, his final choices are those that utilize cunning and skill learned through his tenure as king as they encourage him to break the inertia of melancholia in order to actively alter his circumstances. This active engagement, in leaving madness and melancholia behind is both a sign of a return to the reason that is the mark of man—*human*—through those faculties that place him closer, to a medieval theological mindset, to God, but also revisit his propensity, as a knight, toward action and adventure. His bouts with madness or

melancholia are but another in a series of adventures or battles to be undertaken and successfully—that is, victoriously—completed. To survive the insanity of grief is to prove one's worth as a man.

In addition to considerations of humanity in opposition to inhumanity is the binary of man versus *human*. In other words, noble masculinity becomes less defined as an identity in strict opposition to femininity, peasant masculinity, or an animalistic impulse to a lack of reason, as it becomes identified with humanity as a whole. As I stated at the outset of this project, men grieve. Although they may be represented as grieving differently from women, they grieve nonetheless. Grief is, therefore, a *human* reaction to loss, not just a feminine reaction or the reaction of low-born men. Inhuman as grief madness may appear, these texts suggest that this animalistic behavior, too, is one among many *human* responses to loss, even if not the most effective or desirable one. Above all, while these texts do not especially represent grief madness as a positive impulse or choice, or even necessary for authentic grief, they also do not entirely condemn it, but suggest that losing one's self to grief may, in some instances, be the only way a man can authentically express deep loss. Authentic grief—grief that is felt truly, sincerely, as a real emotion—is not, after all, reserved for women or for men, but is a *human* experience that knows no gender boundaries. Although the texts of *Yvain* and *Sir Orfeo* suggest differences in *how* men and women grieve and *The Book of the Duchess* finds expression of grief to be complicated by differences in social station, *Pearl* provides an ambiguously stationed man, who is only identified by the reader as a man by virtue of his use of courtly tropes and the occasional self-reference to gender, in a bid to show us that these differences, in the face of grief, are irrelevant. What is relevant is that we *all*

suffer loss, and if we all suffer loss, then men, too, suffer when they lose someone or something dear to them. Difference dissolves both in the fact of loss and in the desire for consolation and, ultimately, the end of grief suffering. There are no more divisions, suggests *Pearl*, when all one desires is to be reunited with the lost beloved or to be able to move beyond loss. There are no more boundaries; for example, the river that divides the Dreamer from the City of God becomes irrelevant from the Dreamer's perspective, when all that exists is the loss and the desire to reclaim the lost. Grief, as with the Black Knight, ("y am sorrow, and sorw ys y"), becomes the identity, the role, the authentic self—at least during its experience—more so than is the role of knight, king, father, man.

Why is this project, then, not about grief more generally instead of about masculinity and grief? This is, in part, for the simple reason that I found these four texts and what they have to say about grief important and interesting, and all of the main characters are men by default; but, it is also because, despite *Pearl's* more all-encompassing message, the ways in which the men in the majority of these texts suffer are in ways particular to men—ways that are detailed in the first two chapters and ways that primarily involve madness as opposed to suicide, loud forest laments as opposed to silent suffering, and uses of a wilderness setting to enact that grief. These particular behaviors indicate a masculine way of grieving, despite a universal experience of grief, and it is through examining this masculine way of grieving that we can begin to explore men as affective beings, not just active ones, as emotional beings and not *just* gendered or sexually defined ones. Just as there is a spectrum of male and female sexual behavior and identity, as so much feminist and masculinist studies scholars argue, there is also a spectrum of male and female emotional behavior, including in approaches to loss. While

some patterns of behavior become apparent, no man, not even in fictional representations, ideally fit each criterion. Rather, they suffer different losses, exhibit grief behaviors uniquely, have a variety of encounters with the wilderness, and find their ways through the particular wildernesses of their grief madness through equally various routes, while nonetheless having lost and experienced the profound response to loss that we call grief. Grief is a general term, yes; but, grief is singularly, uniquely, experienced, giving each man his authentic response and a greater sense of what it is to be a man—affectively.

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