

JIHOČESKÁ UNIVERZITA V ČESKÝCH BUDĚJOVICÍCH  
FILOZOFICKÁ FAKULTA  
ÚSTAV ANGLISTIKY

BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE

THE DREAM VISIONS OF GEOFFREY CHAUCER

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Studijní obor: Anglický jazyk a literatura a Italský jazyk a kultura

Ročník: 3

2024

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## **Poděkování**

Ráda bych poděkovala vedoucímu své práce, Mgr. Tomáši Jajtnerovi, Ph.D. et Th.D., který se mnou měl vždy mnoho trpělivosti a ochotně mi v průběhu celé práce pomáhal. Děkuji za dobré rady a především Váš čas.

## **Anotace**

Obsahem této bakalářské práce je středověká snová alegorie a analýza tří snových vidění Geoffreyho Chaucera: *Parliament of Fowls*, *Book of the Duchess* a *House of Fame*. Popisuje vývoj žánru snových vidění od dvorské poezie pozdního středověku a liberalizace autorství skrze světskou literární tvorbu. Vymezuje Chaucerovy texty v kontextu dobové filozofie a Anglického prostředí. Nakonec se zabývá středověkou teorií snů a samotnou analýzou jednotlivých pasáží originálních textů. Vše se zohledněním dobových konvencí a Chaucerovy osobnosti.

## **Annotation**

The contents of this thesis are medieval dream allegory and an analysis of three dream visions by Geoffrey Chaucer: *Parliament of Fowls*, *Book of the Duchess* and *House of Fame*. It describes the development of the genre of dream visions, beginning with court poetry and the liberalisation of authorship through secular literary production. It defines Chaucer's texts in the context of medieval philosophy and the English environment. Lastly, it focuses on medieval dream theory and the analysis of individual segments of the original texts. All while considering the conventions of the era and Chaucer's personage.

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## INTRODUCTION

The work of *Geoffrey Chaucer* is still considered one of the best exemplars of medieval authorship and dream allegory in English literature. His unexhausted topical material and attention to detail make for a seemingly allusive and cryptic world of dream realms. His untiring popularity, even centuries later, serves as a testament to his originality and the unique attributes of his work, which seems laced with subtle pieces of a puzzle which may never find itself complete again.

This thesis, among other questions, aims to explore and pinpoint certain aspects of his work which make it unique and personal, whether or not his dream worlds serve a higher allegorical purpose. What makes Chaucer's work relevant today, and what made it relevant back in the Middle Ages? What is the essence of the 'Chaucerian tradition? Did he pose himself as a philosopher, or did he merely aim to please his largely noble audiences? These are the main questions which this work aims to explore.

It is my firm belief that only through historical context and a contemporary lens we can gain insight into these questions. That is why I have chosen to reference my work with evidence and cultural context. Chaucer is, in some respects, difficult to grasp even through solid knowledge of the era, and attempting to do so without it would certainly prove fruitless. Hence, the initial chapters of this thesis concern themselves with the general aspects of late medieval literature and philosophy, building a solid foundation for a thorough understanding of the English context and the environment in which Chaucer found himself for the majority of his life.

The latter chapters focus on dream allegory and its conventions, the Chaucerian tradition and finally, draw on examples from Chaucer's work to fully explore the main questions this thesis aims to explore and answer. Not neglecting the specific conditions of Chaucer's life and the environments in which his work was created perhaps reveals a deeply

personal compendium of allegory mixed with private accounts, which could serve to unveil Chaucer's state of mind and interests when composing his lines, as well as the spaces most familiar to him.

We may never achieve a complete picture of who Geoffrey Chaucer was, or what exactly inspired his work. But the collective and untiring efforts of many medievalists seems to let us in on a profoundly personal space of not mere dreams, but an intimate world of self-exploration unlike we see elsewhere.



## 1 THE ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT OF DREAM ALLEGORY

The goal of this chapter is to pinpoint the most significant developments in literature which have contributed to the development of the genre of dream allegory. Namely, *court poetry*, *the emergence of secular works and authorship*, and *the rediscovery of dream allegory as a genre* with yet unexhausted potential.

The origins of dream interpretation and allegory, as well as the shift towards humanism will be presented later, as they are necessary for a complete image of the context in which dream allegory found itself during the late medieval era. However, an exploration of the main European literary influences needs to be conducted first, for their presence had contributed to a cultural life separate from its ancient predecessors and allowed dream allegory to reach its full potential.

Despite the unfortunate, and still rather prevalent belief in the unoriginality and dullness of the medieval era, a closer look shows us a deeply symbolic and colourful cultural life. The very term ‘*rinascita*,’ first used by *Giorgio Vasari* in *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori, e architettori* (1550), suggests a rebirth of sorts, specifically a rebirth of art and culture, which were lost to humanity with the fall of the Roman Empire. This has, however, been successfully disputed by both medieval and Renaissance scholars as a mere desire of the Renaissance period to separate itself from its predecessor. As understandable as this need for separation due to philosophical and social shifts was, it has unfortunately caused gradual and not yet fully reversed damage to the image of the medieval era.

### 1.1 COURTLY LITERATURE AND POETRY

Court poetry, as a late medieval genre and as it is defined today, is the product of continental Europe, namely Burgundy and France, and as such it was first brought to Britain in the 11th century, through the Norman expansion and conquest. It reflects the idealised

expectations and real-world conventions surrounding late medieval knighthood and feudalism, transformed to represent and describe an ideal relationship between a noble lady and her knight.

This phenomenon has, according to Gustave E. von Grunebaum partially originated from Arabic texts brought to Europe, which seem to have introduced the concept of love as a powerful, even overpowering motivator for human behaviour and a tool for divine ascension (Grunebaum, 233).

Denomy points out that in his *Treatise on Love* Avicenna "assigns to human love, the love of the sexes, a positive and contributory role in the ascent of the soul to divine love and union with the divine." Overcoming the traditional separation of the orbits of activity of the animal and rational souls in man and the consequent separation of natural and spiritual love...(Grunebaum, 233).

Moreover, he believes that the Muslim and Latin cultures both draw from the same common heritage of Platonism and need to be understood as mutually influential if we wish to study them correctly (Grunebaum, 233-238). However, love as a painfully unrequited desire was, according to Grunebaum, developed in medieval Europe.

...only its ennobling power is directly posited and explained by Avicenna's reasoning, although the idea of 'love for love's sake' as well as the exaltation of the beloved lady can be traced in Arabic literature (but not in Arabic philosophy) two centuries and more before Avicenna wrote. The concept of love as desire never to be fulfilled is at times implied by the poets but never endowed with the weight of a doctrine (Grunebaum, 234).

Still, there is not much evidence for the presence of courtly love, or *l'amour courtois*, outside of the literary world and the confines of the highest social classes. As John Benton mentions, there is no immediate record of any law or absolute adherence to these conventions at the French court. Rather, it seems to have been a certain set of ideals ritually subscribed to by the noble courts:

Problems of sex and love were clearly common topics at a court such as that of Champagne, interesting both the worldly-wise and the morally sensitive. If Chretien and Andreas were indeed ironic moralists, they used this interest to hold the attention of their audience. A sophisticated audience may well have enjoyed and understood such an approach... if, as this study suggests, most authors spent comparatively little time at court, then the importance of direct personal contact was probably slight (Benton, 590).

The symbolic presence of courtly love, however, is often found in, or perhaps proven by the symbolical acts occurring during tournaments or celebrations held by nobility. Such as the crowning of the queen of Beauty or Grace at celebrations, or a knight choosing his lady of honour during jousting competitions. The existence of courtesy books supports, despite argued otherwise by some, this symbolic existence of courtly love through various rules in etiquette and social code. While not enforced by law, these social conventions originating in the ideal of courtly love were certainly followed and practised by the high society. Simply put, there was a certain set of socially acceptable situations in which men could ostentatiously show affections, even if purely symbolical, towards the 'fairer sex' or a lady of their choice. In a world in which love, and its private moments were mostly regarded as personal and to be

shared only by those involved, it is no surprise that we find the “quiet suffering” of those in unrequited love so universally accepted.

## 1.2 SECULAR DRAMA AND LITERATURE

Just like it is difficult to trace the true moment of origin, or a time before the aforementioned tradition of storytelling, we cannot clearly point out a time prior to the existence of theatre and drama, or rather, the concept of purposeful imitation. We can, however, trace the origins of medieval drama, as we understand it today, to Greco-Roman Europe.

Despite the clear traceability of medieval theatre to its ancient origins, there is one, perhaps the most fundamental difference between these two. While in the Greco-Roman tradition, theatre was mainly intended to entertain, medieval theatre takes the theologically educational approach before attempting comedy. “Notwithstanding any popular elements it may contain, the Chester cycle, like all the other English cycles of religious pageants, was conceived and controlled by a logic which was theologic” (Cawley, 15).

That is not to claim that Greco-Roman theatre was not ritualised or that there is no moral teaching to be extracted from the stories. A need simply arises to emphasise the absolute devotedness of medieval drama to the biblical matter and thus the universally accepted One Truth, as it was aimed to educate its spectators about the stories found in the Bible and the moral and divine consequences of human behaviour. Liturgical drama in the Christian tradition possesses a higher status of knowing the truth which Greco-Roman theatre does not necessarily carry. We can make a similar comparison between medieval liturgical theatre and Tudor drama, which no longer claims or seeks to reveal some divine truth and is more focused on interpersonal relationships and the morality of our actions, which are often contrasted through the lens of constitutional law and the code of honour. “Medieval religious drama is valuable not only for itself, but as a preparation for the golden age of English drama.

The staging of the miracles and moralities (the use of a balcony, of unlocalised playing-space, mechanical effects, and music) and the freedom of the medieval playwright...”(Cawley, 23)

Liturgical plays were overseen by the Church and served the purpose of retelling and introducing biblical stories and legends of saints in an entertaining and memorable way. The inability to read or speak Latin mostly disconnected the commoners from any direct contact with the Bible. Hence, miracle and mystery plays were a convenient way to introduce and retell stories from the Bible and of the saints’ deeds.

Despite sacerdotal control, there is evidence of secular authorship. Theatre and pageants were highly popular during the late Middle Ages and with the rise of the upper classes, many townsmen had access to literature and education. This class of successful craftsmen and intellectuals, associated into guilds, suddenly felt a desire to take part in the creation and staging of the pageant plays. Having the finances and assets to produce pageant wagons and often very elaborate costumes, they heavily contributed to the emergence and prevalence of vernacular drama, which was ultimately accepted by the Church and became an integral part of Corpus Christi festival and other holidays. Thus, any claims of an absence of secular authorship in pre-Elizabethan drama are clearly unjustified and misinformed. The unfortunate, yet common lack of attention given to the authorship of vernacular drama merely stems from their anonymity and shrouds its authors in invisibility.

Late medieval prose follows the same trend of gradual separation from the Church. Going back to the early medieval era, texts and their distribution were almost fully dependent on monasteries. The monastic production was far more fruitful and widespread compared to its secular counterpart. Only the rise of the merchant towns and the consequent increase in the numbers of educated citizens all across the continent led to a greater production of secular works. Up until then, most secular literature was originally of oral tradition.

We mark the chivalric romances, chansons de geste, and courtly literature as the first literary genres of the late medieval era written almost exclusively by the secular class. This is an important shift, for it must have caused a significant difference in the distribution of texts within society. The *Roman de la Rose* is probably the best known example of such literature. This thirteenth century piece is a remarkable milestone, as it managed to influence literature long after its date of origin. It is no doubt the source from which many following authors drew inspiration, making it a blueprint for court literature in its true sense. According to Filip Krajník, the uniqueness of *Roman de la Rose* also lies in its two authors, who managed to, in two seemingly unrelated parts, set the rules and conventions for dream allegory which would be strictly followed for centuries to come (Krajník, 20).

Finally, we stand at the turn of the fourteenth century and literature along with secular authorship is to experience its best years yet, all over Europe. The readership is now far greater than before, and the works consumed by the average reader include theory as well as popular literature. The authorship is astronomically different from what it used to be as well, and we find literature of many varying genres. From the autobiographical works of rulers, such as Charles IV and his *Vita Caroli*, to the first recognised works of women, for example Christine de Pisan's *The Book of the City of Ladies*. We can now finally speak of a new, fully established and widely read class of authors, the secular authors of the late medieval era.

Amongst this substantial number of works, one place stands out the most with its, at this point, long-lasting and untiring tradition of secular authorship. It is Britain, with its great and highly productive writers of dream allegory, such as William Langland, the Pearl Poet, and finally, *Geoffrey Chaucer*.

## 2 THE CONDITION OF DREAMS

This chapter aims to provide historical and cultural context regarding the emergence of humanism and late medieval voluntarism, as the correlated societal shifts were responsible for the consequent liberalisation of dreams.

### 2.1 SHIFT TO HUMANISM

The conception of reason as a virtue has always been a firmly established belief during the Middle Ages. To many thinkers of the medieval world, there was logic in faith and the structure of our world, created by God – a belief solidified by the scholastics. And there was faith in logic, for how does one separate the perfection of God's creation from the human element. That was the overriding and indeed very powerful argument of many medieval thinkers, for it prevailed for centuries until the Late Middle Ages. It is, understandably so, difficult for many modern medievalists to find empathy towards this line of thinking, but it was the most natural conclusion one could draw in European Christendom. Perhaps it is the nature of our time that should, above all, make us more understanding of the medieval quest for truth instead of holding its lack of modern science against the thinkers of that period.

It was in the climate of high medieval feudal order, canon law and the papal state that specialised, institutional education emerged. It was the natural development of the now highly structured medieval society. After all, medieval university is still alive today, we find traces of it in the organisation of faculties, for example. Education was not sporadic anymore; the life of a scholar was a lifestyle and study became accessible to the wider population of cities. The non-ecclesiastical majority began gaining access to what was outside of their scope of focus for centuries, namely the works of classical philosophy as well as preserved texts from the earliest Christian authors of our continent. It was most natural then, for the advocates of reason and logic to find much liking in the works of *Aristotle*. His observations in

metaphysics and *Posterior Analytics* became the blueprint for medieval logic and the art of observation. While universities had access to different materials and even lecturers, the main body of ‘science’, as Marrone calls it, was thus established:

With all these qualifications, however, it was largely under Aristotle’s tutelage that extraordinary efforts were made during the thirteenth century, even in theology faculties, to establish a body of knowledge to which all rational minds, Christian or not, could be expected to assent. One result was that a great deal of what would now be considered philosophy was done by theologians (Marrone, 34).

The medieval giant of philosophy – scholasticism – was thus ready to make itself known in the dynamic thirteenth century, which marks the end of the High Middle Ages. It was an era of war as well as prosperity. We mark early colonialism with *Marco Polo’s* successful voyage to Asia, a boom of economy and even civil liberty developments in ‘Magna Charta Libertatum’. But the rising class of learned townsmen and non-theological philosophers was becoming more displeased with the strong control the Church had over education. What first manifested as seemingly meaningless arguments between scholars was soon to manifest in a deep dispute and finally the truly schismatic fifteenth century.

Many argue that the Church was never non-problematic, for it largely supported itself on imposing rules and control in all areas of life. An observation which can be hardly disputed, yet it is often too simplified. Nevertheless, during the end of the High Middle Ages, a slow but increasingly more apparent dichotomy of philosophy and theology became apparent. Not however as an issue of logical affirmation of the structure of the world, as that was done since the work of *Anselm of Canterbury* (1034–1109) and the early days of scholasticism, which aimed to affirm the logic of our world through God-endowed reason.



Instead, notable disputes can be observed within the *Corpus Universitatis* at the time, arguments and discussions were held over the position of philosophy against theology – an essentially philosophical issue of nominalism clashing with realism. On one side there stood the ‘conservatives’, i.e. the theologians who, in simple terms, believed in the now typical Western conception of philosophy and reason as assets to theology and God, and on the other, the non-clerical philosophers who began to promote philosophy free of doctrine and therefore certain aspects of theology, including ‘foisted’ reason:

There were in fact some scholastics, mostly in arts faculties and especially at Paris, who held that philosophy by itself could lead to the heights of truth which the masters of theology considered attainable only in their professionally privileged discourse guided by faith and the teachings of the church (Marrone, 35).

This line of thinking was perhaps brought on by what is sometimes referred to as ‘natural reason’, or as *William Ockham* (1287-1347) called it, ‘efficient reasoning’. Both separate the truth of God and the human capacity for reason. They argue that the inference of a human, restrained by certain limitations, cannot reliably arrive at a self-evident truth other than God. Ockham’s interest in logic and reason is why he is attributed today with the Ockham’s razor. Despite his conclusions being largely of Aristotelian origin:

Thus, the inference ‘All men are reasoners, Brownie is a non-reasoner, so Brownie is a non-man’ is valid because the conclusion has two exponents (‘Brownie is something’ and ‘Brownie is not a man’), and the first of these is an exponent of the minor, while the second follows syllogistically from the major premise together with an exponent of the minor (‘Brownie is not a reasoner’) (Thom, 146).

Despite scholasticism not being directly anti-ecclesiastical, it is worth noting here that the early attempts at partial separation of philosophy and theology were already seen as

problematic for a myriad of reasons, not all of them concerned purely with salvation. The disputes almost seem to have foreshadowed the spread of humanism. The Church was an organisation in itself, separate from secular law, yet with control of certain secular matters, and one can hardly dismiss the fact that it was reliant on its scope of influence. Thus, "...the call to pursue wisdom through reason, not as an injunction to separate philosophy from theology, but as an invitation to see how, by following reason into the depths of the soul, one could come to discover the truth of revelation without recourse to ecclesiastical supervision" (Marrone, 36) was seen as a threat not only to the Christendom, but the very grounds for the existence of the Church and the Papal State.

At the turn of the High and Late Middle Ages, philosophy was a political matter, arguably more than ever before. The newfound interest in language, for example William Ockham's writings on nominalism and realism, brought the human ability for interpretation into spotlight. And while William Ockham, as well as many others, called not for complete separation of philosophy and religion, their questions surrounding human involvement in forming reality and the course of the world soon took over early Late Medieval thought. A transformation in approach to logic took place all over Europe as "...fourteenth-century universities devoted enormous intellectual energy to the investigation of logical puzzles – puzzles involving self-reference..." (Marrone, 36) which led to what Marrone fittingly refers to as "a degree of scepticism" regarding metaphysics and the status of theology in academia.

Originating from the rediscovery of Classical political philosophers, such as Cicero with his commentaries on law, and the consequent civil liberty reforms in thirteenth century Italy manifested in the development of humanism. Essentially, the early humanists, such as Dante with his *De monarchia*, arrived at a need for separation of church and state. Emphasis was placed on secular community and personal freedoms as well as responsibility towards said community. Simultaneously, as mentioned in the preceding chapters on literary

developments, vernacular and secular works began emerging in great numbers all across Europe as a natural consequence of the new individualistic tendencies.

On this topic, Krajník finds an essential connection between the belief in individual and legal freedom, and human dignity. He notes that the natural consequence of such development is the belief that humans harness a capacity to interpret and understand the surrounding environment.<sup>1</sup> Marrone presents a very similar observation, later noting that “...scholasticism itself, or at least the unquestioned dominance of the dialectical and disputatious methods of the high medieval universities, began to show signs of retreat” (Marrone, 40). Furthermore, he comments on the development of English politics and the study of law, which, according to him, have replaced theology in both academia and secular thought (Marrone, 40).

The development of philosophy on the European continent is a long chapter, no less dramatic than most people would assume. Monastic life and the rediscovery of Classical works of philosophy can be attributed with a lot of credit, which lies in the emergence and self-affirmation of medieval European philosophy. From the first careful steps to great leaps, seemingly covering periods of slow progress. There is undisputable evidence that medieval philosophy was colourful and progressive, contrary to popular belief. And while, in the context of this thesis, we speak of humanism as the newly rediscovered way of thinking, scholasticism and even monastic life were new once, too.

Late medieval society, and more specifically the rising secular class, was becoming displeased with sacerdotal control as time went on. Not acknowledging such a major shift in

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<sup>1</sup> “... z původně pasivního pozorovatele kosmického zápasu Boha a Satana o konečné vyznění dějin spásy (a sním zároveň o lidskou duši) se postupně stal aktivní účastník tohoto dění...v kontextu tohoto posunu ve vnímání člověka a jeho podstaty hovoří někteří medievalisté o středověkém humanismu, jehož hlavním rysem byla vedle důrazu na lidskou důstojnost rovněž víra ve schopnost člověka porozumět světu kolem sebe a přispívat k jeho zlepšení” (Krajník, 9-10).

attitude would not only be an oversight, but it would also essentially overlook a major chapter in medieval history. The separation of faith and reason is not always necessary to study the era, especially in the earlier stages of the Middle Ages, but is inherently contextual for the development of humanism, a school of thought that is, in some ways, surprisingly close to modern day attitudes.

The medieval citizen was no longer only part of a community centred around a church or a monastery, despite those being without doubt important for their own reasons. There were traders congregating into guilds, universities with their faculties, and rich community life built on grounds other than solely parish spheres. Secular life was not free of religion, but it was separate from the Church. It was on these grounds that scholasticism allowed the boom of university and later, humanism actively pushed back against doctrinal ways of study and sacerdotal control, becoming essentially anti-scholastic. The High and Late medieval individualist tendencies allowed for the commencement of secular and vernacular art, social reform, and ultimately the culturally and socially significant genres such as folklore plays or secular dream vision.

Finally, during the late Middle Ages, as a consequence of the narrative initiated by humanism, we follow the emergence of a concept known as voluntarism. Most commonly linked to the work and teachings of *John Duns Scotus* (1266 – 1308), voluntarism concerns itself with the correlation between will and knowledge. It does not essentially aim to override God's will, more so it suggests that the lack of knowledge or humanity's access to anything divine (a concept solidified through the increase in individualism and gradual separation of secular matters) causes us to lack immediate certainty of the morality of our actions.

As will be explained later, voluntarism is an essential component to decoding Chaucerian literature, for it seems to correlate with Chaucer's inclination towards the concept of free will.

## 2.2 DREAM INTERPRETATION

The condition of dreams during the medieval era, although sometimes complicated, proves to us that the Middle Ages were certainly no exception to the human preoccupation with dreaming. If anything, the unceasing interest in dreams and their interpretation proves to us a rich inner life of the medieval person.

Notably, the interpretation and condition of dreams were, more often than not, approached from radically different stances and even found themselves at the centre of disputes. Part of the issue was fear of ‘deceitful’ dreams, something that the preceding traditions of dream interpretation do not necessarily follow. In this context, Krajník comments on the Greco-Roman tradition specifically. He points out that the arrival of Christianity produced a certain level of anxiety regarding ‘Devil’s dreams.’ In other words, dreams of erotic or otherwise ‘corrupt’ nature were given much attention in certain circles and were essentially responsible for the fear of a potential attempt by Satan to stray a good Christian from God.<sup>2</sup>

These concerns, clearly visible in much of medieval (and especially clerical) work perhaps create some ground for the misconception that dreams were a topic entirely forbidden, or even one of heresy. Especially regarding the early medieval period. Yet, Moreira suggests otherwise, providing us with some crucial information. The separation of clerical and secular was notable even back then, let alone the High and Late Middle Ages:

Thus while social distinctions might be negligible, early medieval sources lay enormous stress on the differences between lay and clerical Christians in all areas of

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<sup>2</sup> “Nejistota a úzkost, které snění vždy obklopovaly, se s nástupem křesťanství ještě prohloubily. Příčinou byla politika církve, která neměla zájem o přímý kontakt člověka se světem nadpřirozena bez církevního prostřednictví, ale také myšlenka d'ábelského snu, kterou řecko-římská tradice neznala. Sen se pojí s tělesností, přes niž proniká k člověku d'ábel a nabízí mu neřest, smilstvo a všechny další hříšné svody. Tato utkvělá představa na mnoho století předurčila rozporupný či vyloženě negativní obraz snu v křesťanském morálně-teologickém rámci” (Krajník, 11).

religious activity: expectations of spiritual and religious adherence and the penalties that should be exacted for religious infractions. What made clerics' interest in dreams distinct was their sense of responsibility for the religious life of their flock (Moreira, 623).

It would seem that while the concerns of monastic life may appear pedantic, in a sense, medieval society was never short of a certain spectrum of rigour. That was also true for dreams and their contents, of course. At first glance, the medieval period may appear disinterested in the secular experiences of dreaming. “That lay dreams were recorded in religious writings of the era, however, suggests that they held a noteworthy place in Christian religious culture and that the religious elite believed these dreams to be worthy of religious interpretation” (Moreira, 622).

On that note, we must also note the difference between what Steven F. Kruger calls ‘somatic’ dreams and what we could refer to as visionary (setting the dreams of corrupt or satanic origin to the side for now), with the latter proving more problematic. Not in the sense that visions or prophecy were inherently bad, quite the contrary, but more so in the sense that roadside prophets, wayfarer preachers and even laity claiming prophetic visions posed a problem for the strongly instituted medieval world order:

Yet peasants and other labouring individuals are occasionally represented in the sources as having received dream instructions, usually from long-lost saintly martyrs awaiting discovery in marginal areas of the countryside. The peasant was the hidden saint's natural ally, and clerical authors did not cover up their contribution to the saint's cult. One peasant, for example, was informed supernaturally by the martyr Genesius where he could find his lost oxen: the oxen were grazing at the site of the saint's tomb, which needed covering. The peasant complied with the request for

protection and in time, after the site had become a centre of healing, Bishop Avitus of Clermont built a church over the grave (Moreira, 624).

Clearly, secular dream took up a notable amount of space within medieval thought and could easily be a welcome occurrence under the right circumstances. That is not to say that all fear of Satan's temptation or doubt was ever fully eradicated, but even the clergy took interest in what was going on in the lives of their entrusted, no matter if physically, socially, or spiritually.

Somatic dreams were definitely the less problematic kind. The Greco-Roman tradition commonly accepted dreams resulting from the condition of the human body, which translated to medieval thought through Aristotle's *De insomniis*, for example. Alternatively, the works of *Cicero*, *Synesius* and others, many of whose ideas laid dormant until the High Middle Ages.

It was in the twelfth century that many of those works were rediscovered, during the early days of university and increasingly rapid social change. As mentioned before, the rising class of tradesmen and townspeople, as well as the newfound interest in classical works of philosophy ushered individualist tendencies. Many advancements were made during the era in most fields, medical sciences included. Consequently, perhaps more than ever before within medieval Europe, attempts to categorise, study, and describe dreams were made and many new theories quickly emerged:

We perceive, during the twelfth century, a clear "somaticization" of certain aspects of dream theory. Writers who used Macrobius's five-part scheme tended to emphasize more strongly than did Macrobius the lower sorts of dream (*insomnium* and *visum*), and to expand on the relations of such dreams to bodily disorder...Macrobius's twelfth-century followers concentrated attention on the physiology of both *visum* and

insomnium, particularizing and elaborating the suggestion that dreaming has a somatic component (Kruger, 70).

Generally speaking, this new conception of somatic dreams came to replace the ‘ordinary’ dream, or the dream of no particular prophetic or otherwise exceptional value. Despite that, specific aspects remained disputed. Some of the more common questions prevailed: Are people truly equipped to recognise the difference between harmless and Satan-sent dreams? And how do we tell visionary, harmful, and somatic dreams apart? Simply put, certain worry was still present, over satanic temptation, and the constantly changing traditional tripartition of dreams was to some a source of doubt, even disagreement.

What the somatic dream newly attempted to describe, however, was the influence of one’s well-being and current state on the quality and contents of one’s dreams. That is not to say that earlier theories did not in a way accept such ideas, but somatic or ‘condition-caused’ dreams were more often than not assigned to certain medical conditions, illness, or states of delirium. The already commonly understood connection between medicine and dreams was then taken further by twelfth century philosophers and medics.

One of the many examples would be *Hildegard of Bingen* (1098-1179). She assigned to dreams a certain moral component, where evaluation of one’s morality was done by both God and Satan. This contemplation ultimately resulting in a naturally occurring decision, upon what kind of dream would the dreamer have. While others, *Augustine* (354-430 AD) for example, were careful to make the connection between morality and dreams, the twelfth century abbess made a strong point of “temperate living and well-ordered physiology” (Kruger 76-77). In a sense, she was not far off from what is commonly accepted today and what was not lost even to the earlier periods. Her contributions to medicine and dream theory



aided in the liberation of dreams, as she assigned quite the revolutionary amount of responsibility over the reliability and quality of dreams to the dreamer.

Hildegard's contemporaries were not far behind with their own conceptions. Generally speaking, we follow a trend of gradual 'liberation' or relaxation regarding dreams and dreaming:

Twelfth century writers, like their late-antique forerunners, thus associated dreams with a variety of opposed terms: truth and falsehood, internality and externality, demonic and divine agents, moral probity and perversity. But, as also in late-antique thought, none of these oppositions was allowed to stand without qualification, without the suggestion that there existed mediate kinds of dream (Kruger, 78).

Both Kruger and Krajník take special note of *Alain de Lille* (1128?-1202) and his tripartition of dreams. According to Kruger it goes as follows: *contemplation*, which is the most rare and excellent of dream, usually caused by divine influence; *imagination*, dreams of ordinary kind, stemming from one's knowledge of the world; and finally, *sloth*, foolish or corrupt dreams. Kruger further notes that "Alain suggests, moreover, that the *middle* dream, in its middleness, is the quintessentially *human* dream" (Kruger, 80).

This approach to dreams began to take over, essentially concluding that dreams have always been part of human life and thus it is not only natural for dreams to occur, but taking interest in them was not imminently harmful. That, of course, was met with opposition from some individuals, as freedom of interpretation was not always viewed as unproblematic. Still, the subsiding fear of Satanic dream and newfound interest in somatic conditions affecting the dreamer's state as well as the reliability of dreams led to impactful changes.

Some places came to ‘liberate’ dreaming sooner than others, notably France. On this topic, Krajník mentions that in France, dream interpretation had been anointed during the twelfth century. And that vernacular dream-books became a common occurrence soon after, supported by the Church.<sup>3</sup> Dream-books are an important piece of evidence, for it is their mere existence and production during the High and Late Middle Ages that proves the rising interest in secular dreaming. Essentially giving a certain amount of interpretative freedom, within a set of confines and prescribed symbols of course, to the laity. It is then no surprise that the original work of dream vision, the *Roman de la Rose*, was written in France.

The English situation is slightly more complicated for that matter, and we generally do not speak of the genre up until the fourteenth century. Yet, even in the English context we follow similar liberative trends as in much of western Europe. Extant evidence can be found in the chronicles of a London man by the name *Arnald Fitz-Thedmar* (1201-1274), for example. He authored a short family history, including the events surrounding his own birth in 1201 and his mother’s peculiar dream. The dreams of pregnant women seem to have held an exceptional position, but the content of the dream itself does not need to interest us. What is, however, a worthy piece of information is that she had visited a man that was able to interpret her dream:

A certain skilful man thus expounded this dream, and said to the woman as follows:—"The log of wood signifies your husband, and the slab of marble the son who shall be born of you...your husband will return home, and will continue to be master of this house all the days of his life, and after him your son will succeed by

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<sup>3</sup> “Příkladem může být Francie, kde ve 12. století katolická církev posvětila snové vykládání a podpořila šíření stejných lidových snářů, které boloňský profesor práva a teologie Gratianus ve stejné době odsuzoval” (Krajník, 14).

right of inheritance to the house aforesaid." And so it happened. For the woman's husband was not in the City...after his death, his son Arnald, before-mentioned, came into possession of the house by right of inheritance (The History of Arnald Fitz-Thedmar).

Arnald's family was Christian and of German origin. They had lived in London for generations by the year of his birth and seem to have been a usual family. Thus, there is no ground for assuming that his mother would somehow be inclined to hold unorthodox practices per se, in seeking out a man to expound her dream. Moreover, the fact that the man essentially assigned the dream with prophetic value is merely glossed over, with focus on the actual contents of the dream instead – something that would perhaps pose as significantly more problematic in earlier periods. We can then, with the knowledge that French culture had influence over Britain at that time, and the evidence available, assume that dreams already held a significant role in British lay culture by the turn of the twelfth and thirteenth century, with only the genre of dream visions becoming more popular later on.

### 2.3 CHAUCER AND DREAMING

Part of what is so fascinating about Chaucer is the way he approaches dreams in his works. Compared to the preceding tradition, Chaucer does not make use of dreams as a mere 'means to an end'.

By that, I mean the prevalent use of dreams specifically because they easily offer themselves to fantastic stories and landscapes (which would otherwise be out of the realm of possibility), lending them an air of credibility – an attribute of literature which was especially persisted upon during the late Middle Ages. It is no coincidence that many authors of the era open their texts with personal details, achievements, and proof of their 'expert' knowledge,

confirming their position within society and educated circles before presenting their work.

The cult of the author was slowly becoming just as important as the textual content itself, with writers publicly claiming their work now.

In that sense, Chaucer is not different, he himself opens his dream visions with subtle mentions of his work and makes use of his extensive reading curriculum, especially the classical works he is familiar with. What is most intriguing, however, is that he, unlike many, expands upon his dream allegory with theory. Some of his lines offer a small glimpse into his conception of dreams.

Beginning with lines 1-4 of *House of Fame*, we can observe a detail, which may be easy to overlook, but is interesting, nonetheless. “God turne us every drem to goode!/For hyt is wonder, be the roode,/To my wyt, what causeth swevenes/Eyther on morwes or on evenes;” (Chaucer, 348) Right at the beginning, a key fact is established: God does not directly cause dreams or dreaming, nor are all dreams in His power. He merely possesses the ability to bring pleasant dreams, according to Chaucer, who pleads with God to do just that. Following up with lines 55-65, Chaucer once again affirms that he can do nothing but hope that God watches over his dreams.

For I of noon opinioun/Nyl as now make mensyon,/But oonly that the holy  
roode/Turne us every drem to goode!/For never, sith that I was born,/Ne no man elles,  
me befor,/Mette, I trowe stedfastly,/So wonderful a drem as I/The tenthe day now of  
Decembre,/The which, as I kan now remembre,/I wol yow tellen everydel. (Chaucer,  
348-349)

He seems to hold some amount of faith that despite his own lack of knowledge, dreams will be understood fully one day, thanks to the work of scholars. Lines 51-54 read as follows: “For hyt is warned to derkly; –/But why the cause is, nocht wot I./Wel worthe, of this thyng, grete clerkys,/That trete of this and other werkes;” (Chaucer, 348-349).

This essentially falls into line with what we know from the preceding chapter. That dream theory, while having established a certain basic conception (the traditional tripartition), was wildly varied at the time. There were many theories floating around and one could hardly reach a conclusive answer regarding the origin of dreams – a question which seems to have pestered Chaucer’s mind.

As seen in lines 5-50 of *House of Fame*, he lends quite a bit of space to the exploration of ‘dream types’, although his conception appears incomplete and lacks the traditional three categories (as would be expected, given that he probably came into contact with the work of Alain de Lille and other scholars concerned with dream theory). Despite the loose form of his conception, we find traces of theory surrounding the tripartition – the somatic dream, the divine dream, and the contemplative/melancholic dream.

Line 55 refers anaphorically to the preceding lines, especially lines 5-50, which give us insight into Chaucer’s line of thinking in regard to dreams and dreaming. Or more so, his confusion when it comes to their origin, which he expresses with a certain undertone of frustration.

And why th’effect folweth of somme,/And of somme hit shal never come;/Why that is an avision,/And why this a revelacion,/Why this a drem, why that a sweven,/And nocht to every man lyche even;/Why this a fantome, why these oracles,/I not; but whoso of these miracles/The causes knoweth bet than I,/Devyne he, for I certainly/Ne

can hem noght, ne never thinke/To besily my wit to swinke,/To knowe of hir  
 signifiounce/The gendres, neither the distaunce/Of tymes of hem, ne the causes,/Or  
 why this more than that cause is –/As yf folkys complexions/Make hem dreme of  
 reflexions;/Or ellys thus, as other sayn,/For to gret feblenesse of her brayn,/By  
 abstinence or by seeknesse,/Prison-stewe or gret distresse;/Or ellys by  
 dysordynaunce/Of naturel acostumaunce,/That som man is to curious/In studie, or  
 melancolyous,/Or thus, so inly ful of drede,/That no man may hym bote bede;/Or elles,  
 that devocion/Of somme, and contemplacion/Causeth suche dremes ofte;/Or that the  
 cruel lyf unsoften/Which these ilke lovers leden/That hopen over-muche or  
 dreden,/That purely her impressions/Causeth hem avisions;/Or yf that spirites have the  
 might/To make folk to dreme a-nyght/Or yf the soule, of propre kynde/Be so parfit, as  
 men fynde,/That yt forwot that ys to come,/And that hyt warneth alle and some/Of  
 everych of her adventures/Be avisions, or be figures,/But that oure flesh ne hath no  
 might/To understonde hyt aryght, (Chaucer, 348-349).

One joining factor of his dream visions is the sheer number of references to classical literature which he includes, often as a sort of exemplar or commentary surrounding the dream which he wants to recall later in the text.

Aside from the fact that this clearly proves him to have been a man of great literary education, his preoccupation with instances of dreaming in the old works almost seems systematic. He seems to have been especially concerned with one type of dream, the dream of contemplative or melancholic origin.

His works of dream allegory almost exclusively begin with the lyrical subject recalling a time when he was stricken with the ailments of love. Unable to sleep, he was drawn to old stories of love, also dreaming and mystical realms, as if attempting time and time again to

gain some higher sense of understanding from them. As seen in lines 218-230 of *Book of the Duchess*, for example.

My first matere I wil yow telle,/Wherefore I have told this thing/Of Alcione and Seys  
the king,/For thus moche dar I saye wel:/I had be dolven everydel/And ded, right  
thurgh defaute of slep,/Yif I ne had red and take kep/Of this tale next before./And I  
wol telle yow wherefore:/For I ne myghte, for bote ne bale,/Slepe or I had red thys  
tale/Of this dreynthe Seys the king/And of the goddess of slepyng. (Chaucer, 333)

Yet, despite his clear lack of satisfaction surrounding his own knowledge on dreams, he seems to have found a certain amount of comfort in reading about them, hoping to gain some insight into their origin. He himself states so in the final lines (695-699) of *Parliament of Fowls*. “I wok, and othere bokes tok me to,/To reede upon, and yit I rede alwey./I hope, ywis, to rede so som day/That I shal mete som thing for to fare/The bet, and thus to rede I nyl nat spare.” (Chaucer, 394).

Furthermore, he seems to have been relatively open to ‘new’ ideas, clearly fascinated by the earlier conceptions of dreams, which only seems a testament to his desire for answers.

For example, when the lyrical subject of *Book of the Duchess*, driven by desperation and insomnia, invokes Morpheus and Juno to make him fall asleep. Although, he admits that it was odd of him to do so, because he had no reason to believe these gods even existed, as stated in lines 231-237. “Whan I had red thys tale wel/And overlooked hyt everydel,/Me thoghte wonder yf hit were so,/For I had never herd speke of tho/Of noo goddess that koude make/Men to slepe, ne for to wake,/For I ne knew god but oon” (Chaucer, 333). Despite any doubt of their existence, the subject falls asleep in mere moments, much to his surprise.

We can never with utmost certainty prove that Chaucer truly intended to identify himself with all that the lyrical subject says or thinks. Whether he himself was pestered by sleepless nights, or if he merely posed the subject that way to stretch the perils of young, inexperienced love, which remains the central (even if surface-level) subject of his work.

However, it is clear that Chaucer's personal interests and work are intricately woven into his texts, as is discussed in the following chapters as well. And they must have played a much greater role in his dream visions than what the surface level lets on.



### 3 CHAUCER'S DREAM ALLEGORY

This chapter concerns itself with the Chaucerian tradition and the individualistic aspects of Chaucer's literature, mainly drawing on examples from three of his works of dream allegory, namely *The Book of the Duchess*, *The Parliament of Fowls*, and *The House of Fame*.

#### 3.1 CHAUCERIAN TRADITION

In the English context, the second half of the fourteenth century is the true golden age of the genre of dream visions. That is not to say that dream allegory was not present before, it simply had yet to meet its potential, for only the latter fourteenth century was truly productive in that area. Unfortunately, the ideal conditions for the genre to thrive seem to have ceased at the turn of the century already, with rapid change and the arrival of the Tudor Era during the second half of the fifteenth century. Simply put, the emerging Renaissance mind had little preference for connections with the preceding period and much of Europe was thrown into volatile religious conflict during the time, ultimately resulting in unprecedented social change and the death of certain values and aspects of the medieval era.

Of course, some works of dream allegory have emerged during the fifteenth century, but aside from clear syntactic differences, they mostly stray from the distinctive medieval style and thus cannot be truly considered as such anymore.

Many medievalists agree that the popularity of the genre of dream allegory was caused by the widening divide between the worldly and the divine, familiar and unattainable. Compared to earlier periods, late medieval individualist tendencies led to a certain separation of Earth and God, with matters of the mortal realm often being in the hands of the people themselves rather than an omnipotent, imposing force. God was slowly becoming more of a choice. Not necessarily in the sense of whether one was a Christian or not, as being a heathen was still a grave sin and straying from Catholicism was seen as revolt, as we can see

throughout Europe during this era, but more in the sense of inviting Him into one's life and accepting guidance from divine forces. A concept quite unknown to the earlier, monastic periods.

This dichotomy, however, consequently put into question the connection between divine and human, and more doubt was cast upon the mutual understanding between humanity and God himself. The line "God moves in a mysterious way", although authored by *William Cowper* (1731-1800) centuries later, holds much merit to this period: The existence and greatness of God were not part of the question per se, but rather our conception and capacity for any understanding of His doing.

The essence of late medieval Christianity lies not in the doubt of God, as that would certainly crack the increasingly more fragile and all the more convulsively upheld sense of order, but rather in the denial of any direct and omnipresent connection of human intelligence to divine plans and will. That is not to say, that humanity would not be subject to it, but rather that God's will might go unnoticed or even unfulfilled as we can never truly grasp any greater plan beyond whatever is inherently human, and thus go ignoring His signs. As will be discussed in the following chapters, this is a rather common theme for late medieval literature, Chaucer's work included.

To put an example, one of the first instances that come to mind is the formel's choice in *Parliament of Fowls*, which is deeply connected to the concepts of virtue and free will, as shall be discussed later. For now, what interests us is the fact that she is naturally endowed with the power to ignore Nature's plan for her to find a mate, thus essentially allowing her to put her personal motives before any greater or supernatural plan which is lost to her.

This seemingly unbridgeable gap between the two realms is where dreams, and thus dream allegory as well, come into play.

As evidenced in the preceding chapters, dreams themselves had a lasting tradition around them by the beginning of the fourteenth century already. The interpretation and expounding of lay dreams seem to have been a common occurrence, assigning prophetic or other values to dreams which would have otherwise gone unnoticed – the middle dreams. A peasant's dream no longer had the 'mere' capacity to lead him to a martyr's forgotten grave or anything of such great value but could reveal things more mundane within the great scale of divine plans. Such as, whether he was to have a daughter or a son, whether his cow was going to calf this week or the next or make him wary on his next travel for he could encounter some danger.

According to Krajník, both Steven F. Kruger and Peter Brown agree that the increasing interest in dreams was caused by the need for exploring the gap between the human and the divine, as well as describing the ambivalent space between them, which was in a sense perceived as full of puzzles and personal revelations.<sup>4</sup>

Chaucer, generally speaking, tends to go against the concepts typical of dream allegory as well as earlier traditions. His settings seem to be less dream-like than they are in the works of other authors, and he challenges the theme of love with a certain tone of irony. His narrators are young and know little of love, yet they serve it loyally – per his own words. Love is also rarely rewarded in his work, which is something that goes directly against the conventions of court poetry. He betrays the ideal of love in most of his work in some way, whether it is death in *Book of the Duchess*, the lack of choice on *Parliament of Fowls* or practically the entirety of *Legend of Good Women*, where suffering awaits the women loyal out of love.

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<sup>4</sup> “Steven Kruger klade zvýšený výskyt snových vidění do souvislosti s myšlením pozdního středověku, které zdůrazňovalo propast mezi božským konáním a lidskou schopností toto konání chápat. Sny, které se odehrávaly mezi světem člověka a říší nadpřirozena, oba tyto světy spojovaly, ovšem zároveň popisovaly ambivalentní prostor mezi nimi. Brown ve svých úvahách na Krugera do jisté míry navazuje. Ve své hypotéze vychází z kulturně antropologické teorie přechodových rituálů a snový prožitek přirovnává ke středověkým poutím na svatá místa, jejichž účelem bylo přiblížit se Bohu a spasení” (Krajník, 27).

This challenge to established traditions and deep contemplation is perhaps what embodies the term ‘Chaucerian’. On one hand, Chaucer respected the order of the world he knew, and seems to have accepted his largely noble readership with their preferences. On the other, he directly opposes the old and familiar. This careful, perhaps almost fragile, unity of old and new, combined with his characteristic narrative is what makes his work truly captivating and unique.

### 3.2 THE ENVIRONMENTS

The portrayal of environments in literature is a truly exhaustive topic, although nature specifically, as a medieval literary phenomenon, tends to sometimes be set aside and overshadowed by the theologic notions of forbidden gardens and sacred havens. That is not to say that such interpretations through Biblical values and stories do not hold importance or merit, as they are certainly most relevant for religiously inclined societies such as Europe during the Middle Ages.

However, as per the point, the immediate and sometimes automatic association of nature with the Biblical renders us blind to many, more delicate notions. One of them being the fact that Chaucer’s spaces are not inherently Biblical, despite many scholars approaching it as such, and in a sense, they cannot be blamed for doing so.

When it comes to dream allegory, it is perhaps a byproduct of the approach to dreaming as spiritual exploration and pilgrimage, with dreams being a mid-realm of sorts, as was explained in the previous chapter.

It is not difficult to make such conclusions in the light of preceding traditions, or with our knowledge of other texts from Chaucer’s time. Take *The Pearl* for example, a work so deeply intertwined with a personal experience whose subject and author are lost to time, and

laced with layers of spirituality and Biblical notions, so much so that assuming a certain expectation of religiosity over a medieval author is perhaps natural.

With Chaucer, however, it is often argued otherwise. The choice of time and place seems more deliberate in his work. It appears to have little to do with any religious or other inclinations, but rather seems to reflect the environments he was familiar with. His work is deeply subjective and expects a certain amount of knowledge from the reader, the environments do not feel as mere settings. Instead, they lend another layer of complexity to his work.

Much of his dream allegory takes place in gardens, which tend to be associated not only with theologic notions, but with the earlier conventions of court poetry. It is worth noting, that Chaucer often goes against this tradition. As Krajník points out, Chaucer's style is distinct in its ties to the continental trends of the time.<sup>5</sup> Yet it seems to purposefully attack the earlier conventions and ideas.

We know that Chaucer was a man of notable status, which gave him access to the highest circles of English society and his diplomatic achievements in representing the matters of the English crown allowed him a chance to travel overseas and see, most notably, the French and Italian courts for himself. Thus, we can assume that he came into direct contact with the literary culture of those places as well, bringing the continental conventions back home with him.

There is a feeling of familiarity in Chaucer's work, as if he was letting us in on parts of his life through the landscape he describes. One of the most striking examples would be *Book of the Duchess*, a work most probably devoted to his benefactor and close friend, later

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<sup>5</sup> “Souběžně se skupinou skladeb se silným morálním a duchovním étosem existovala v Anglii druhé poloviny 14. Století také tradice dvorských snových vidění – „dvorských“ nikoliv nutně ve smyslu, že vznikly v kontextu královského dvora (i zmiňované aliterární básně mohly být, a nejspíš skutečně byly, spojeny s aristokratickým publikem), ale tím, že se formou a obsahem zřetelně hlásily k modelu kontinentální dvorské poezie” (Krajník, 36).

also brother-in-law, *John of Gaunt* (1340-1399). Taking a closer look at the setting of the dream, we may perhaps find a place more personal and meaningful, both to the royal prince and Chaucer, one that does not merely invoke the beauty of the creation of nature or reflect the apparent despair of the black knight.

In the beginning of the recounted dream, the subject is drawn to the noise of a hunt and as it begins, he wanders into the surrounding woods, finding a sorrowful figure under an old oak tree – a knight dressed in black. A shady tree deep in the woods, hiding a grieving man, could easily pose as a mirror to the knight’s disposition and solitude. Not partaking in the hunt, he sits alone, missing his lost love. What is interesting however, is that Chaucer, as the author, makes it a point to emphasise and affirm the fact that it is no wild and overgrown forest, but something closer to what we would today associate with an English park. A space suited for comfortable walking or riding, something close to a hunting ground:

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 hymselfe/  
Fro other wel ten foot or twelve –  
/So grete trees, so huge of strengthe,  
/Of fourty or fifty fadme lengthe,  
/Clene withoute  
bowgh or strikke,  
/With croppes brode, and eke as thikke –  
/They were nat an ynche  
asonder –  
/That hit was shadewe overal under (Chaucer, 335, 414 – 426).

Accepting the possibility that the text is indeed devoted to John of Gaunt, we may actually be getting a moment of insight into his life and grief, making the *Book of the Duchess* a deeply intimate affair. “John of Gaunt’s holdings included the Savoy Palace on the Thames and at least forty-six hunting parks by the 1370s, making him “by far the greatest lay landowner in the late fourteenth century after the king” (Howes, 127).” And while we cannot prove any real connection with certainty, an image lends itself, of John of Gaunt, forgetting the world around

him with every distraction it might promise, stricken with grief over the death of Blanche by who's side he had himself be laid to rest years later.

Similarly as gardens, hunting parks and other grounds were a natural part of the rich households of England. The elaborate and intentional construction of walled-off spaces and orchards, slowly transitioning into groves and kept hunting grounds was the fashion of the era, both on the Isles and on the continent:

As is well documented, the fashion for elaborate pleasure grounds flourished during Chaucer's lifetime, and he surely knew several first hand and others by reputation... These large pleasure grounds could be up to several dozen or hundreds of acres in size and were divided into separate areas, often with a smaller walled garden close to the castle or manor house but connected in some way to a much larger area: a walled park that housed wild animals, an orchard that could both produce fruit and serve as a pleasance, and sometimes an herber or bower at some distance from the residence itself. As I have argued elsewhere, these landscapes encouraged movement through the space, on foot, horseback, or even in a boat, to produce moments of discovery and surprise (Howes, 126).

The spaces we today associate with wilderness in Chaucer's writing may have originally represented the spaces familiar to both Chaucer and his noble audience. Making his environments more complex and personal than what they first appear as.

Another example of how Chaucer makes use of real-life settings in his dream realms can be found in *House of Fame*. The unassuming lines at the beginning of 'Story' are by many interpreted as a jest at the difficulties of marriage. Possibly caused by Skeat's interpretations:

On Decembre the tenthte day,/Whan hit was nyght, to slepe I lay/Ryght ther as I was  
wont to done,/And fil on slepe wonder sone,/As he that wery was forgo/On  
pilgrymage myles two/To the corseynt Leonard,/To make lythe of that was hard  
(Chaucer, 349, 111-118).

Interestingly enough, Scott Lightsey has found through historical records that yet again, Chaucer's work relies heavily on his personal experiences and expects a certain amount of knowledge from his readers, as he potentially describes the route he took upon a successful landing in England after returning from Italy:

On his way home from the Continent, Chaucer likely took the fastest route then known to the crown's emissaries, docking at the channel port of Hythe, Kent, and walking the two miles from the harbor to the town's well-known Church of St. Leonard. In this church stood a shrine featuring an image of the saint holding a miraculous fane, or weathervane, now lost, but during Chaucer's time thought to bring travelers safely home from overseas (Lightsey, 190).

While *House of Fame* is already considered a deeply personal work for Chaucer, Lightsey's finding gives the work a real-life setting instead of a dream realm of sorts, similar to the forest setting in *Book of the Duchess*.

Moreover, Lightsey finds little connection between the cult of St. Leonard and matrimony, ultimately suggesting that the lines about Leonard have more to do with the actual church that Chaucer passed on his way home than with any reference to religion or a cult of a saint.<sup>6</sup> Interestingly enough, Krajník mentions a similar instance of possible

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<sup>6</sup> "Although these characteristics of Saint Leonard's cult offered good enough reason for Chaucer to invoke the saint, I believe a fuller explanation of the lines in the House of Fame is to be found along the path Chaucer likely



misinterpretation of a saint's name in *Parliament of Fowls*, finding that some medievalists rely heavily on a saint's name alone and ignore the fact that the compendium of saints in the Middle Ages contained many namesakes and even duplicates,<sup>7</sup> which is exactly the same problem Lightsey points out:

However, recourse to the French poem and to Saint Leonard's cult in the late Middle Ages makes it clear that Skeat's connection between these two references to Saint Leonard relies only on the name of the saint, ignoring the considerable divergence in form and context between the two poems as well as contemporary notions about Saint Leonard (Lightsey, 189).

This ultimately poses the conclusion that Chaucer's references to historical figures, saints, and characters from ancient literature and mythology have more to do with his interests and work than a religiously or otherwise inclined reason. His work seems to be interlaced with very niche references to his travels, diplomatic enterprise, and relationships. His dream realms are in a sense more real than dream-like, as they seem to at least reflect or even outright be the places he knew and visited.

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followed as he returned to England, which, if I am correct, involved a two-mile pilgrimage to the Church of St. Leonard at Hythe" (Lightsey, 194).

<sup>7</sup> "Podle Kellyho hypotézy však Chaucer neměl při psaní svých valentýnských básní na mysli žádného z „únorových“ Valentýnů, ale jednoho z prvních janovských biskupů, Valentýna († asi 307), kterého zmiňuje Jakub de Vorigaine ve své kronice města Janova *Chronicon januese* a jehož úmrtí připadlo na 3. května...I přes svůj vysoký církevní post byl Valentýn z Janova pouze místním světcem a ze všech valentýnských básníků se s ním měl možnost seznámit jen Chaucer, který do Janova zavítal v roce 1373 na diplomatickou misi. Chaucer si mohl janovského biskupa zvolit jako patrona zamilovaných ani ne tak pro to, že by měl světec ve svém domovském městě tuto pověst...ale protože 3. května 1381 král Richard II. Nejspíš osobně stvrdil manželství smlouvou s Annou Českou, podepsanou jeho zástupci o den dříve..."(Krajník, 81-82)

### 3.3 FREE WILL AND KNOWLEDGE

The question of knowledge seems to have been almost all-consuming to many medieval minds. As was explained in the preceding chapters, it had much to do with how the world was understood as and organised back then and, in a sense, the newfound set of individualistic ideas of the late Middle Ages betrayed the security of either knowing, or having the unconceivable decided for us. The concept of free-will as an almost opposing side to divine forces shattered the security promised by earlier notions surrounding human intellect.

Chaucer's own interest in voluntarism probably comes through most notably in *Parliament of Fowls*, which is centred around the concept and its theory. However, we can find other examples, such as *The Second Nun's Tale*, as Elizabeth Robertson explains.

Chaucer seems preoccupied with the position of free will. On one hand, he endows it with a certain hierarchical advantage, compared to the more usual conception of free will as subject to reason. On the other, he cannot seem to figure out where it truly stands in the grand scheme of divine forces, and his work is interlaced with exploration of the different theories which were around at the time:

Sherry Reames has powerfully demonstrated the ways in which Chaucer's revision of his sources deemphasizes the role reason plays in the two future martyrs' conversion; she concludes that the tale's emphasis on "supernatural power at the expense of human understanding and choice" results in "theological pessimism" about "the value of human nature and earthly experience" (Robertson, 111).

What seems to shape Chaucer's reflections on morality, free will and virtue, concepts he himself seems to have found difficult to fully contain, is their inherent connection to the human element. Generally speaking, he appears critical of the human capacity to ever truly

grasp anything beyond what is inherently human, once again emphasising the difficult position of knowledge and experience – their lack of seems to be most problematic to him.

Taking *Parliament of Fowls* as the primary example, we are greeted not by some elevated insight into these difficult concepts, but quite the opposite as we meet a narrator who is inexperienced, almost confused at times, a young man who finds it immensely difficult to figure out the right course of action in the face of temptation contrasted by the idealised notions of strength of will and virtue:

The narrator's timid and indecisive response before the garden contrasts strikingly with medieval ideals of fortitude displayed in the lives of saints and martyrs. Alan of Lille defines fortitude as a constancy of will that remains steadfast despite changes in fortune: "one is neither broken by the blow of adversity nor elevated by the charms of prosperity" (Powrie 381-382).

This falls in line with the wider intellectual culture of the late Middle Ages, as voluntarist ideas have cast certain doubt onto the human capacity for morality and virtue, as free will essentially allows one to make irrational decisions based on lack of access to divine knowledge:

Long before the formel appears, the dream narrator's desires and interests inhabit the spotlight. His initial preoccupations circle around textual and epistemic questions related to medieval virtue theory. When he sets aside his study of ethics, he flounders in the field of experience, failing to meet tests of courage, temperance, and justice (Powrie, 377).

Similar themes can be followed in *House of Fame* as well, ultimately painting an image of distrust towards the human tendency for naivety and temptation, as neither fuels reason or knowledge. This, in a sense, puts human perception in a difficult position, rendering it naturally unreliable in serving divine purposes.

In *Parliament of Fowls*, Chaucer essentially follows up on contemporary debates surrounding human access to natural reason and thus our ability to honour virtue and morality. “Chaucer’s dream vision considers not only the relation between thinking and feeling but also the ways in which those psychological forces determine the human capacity for virtue” (Powrie, 369).

*Parliament of Fowls* is essentially a collection of different approaches to reason and virtue, first illustrated through the narrator’s journey and then through the parliament itself. For much of the event, the formel is encouraged to take the advice of lady Reason, presented with three choices for a mate. Chaucer’s irony fully comes through here, as two of the choices are immensely lacking in either reason or will, with only the royal tercel, supported by both Nature and Reason, presents himself as the best choice. For his desire is preceded by logical consideration:

His speech invokes the conventions of courtly literature to articulate his feelings: his heart bleeds with the pain of love (425); he can only beg her for her mercy, otherwise he would surely perish on the spot (421–23). His words may indeed be heartfelt, but they are also carefully scripted. Through his choice of mate and his choice of words, the royal tercel illustrates that his desires are moderated and directed by his thoughts; as such, he represents an ideal Thomistic agent, with his will’s desire naturally following reason’s determination (Powrie, 387).

The formel is thus presented by a clearly reasonable choice, one which she however fails to understand as such, as Reason essentially pushes to deprive her of free will. The formel is paralysed by her own lack of knowledge or certainty over Reason's argument. This ultimately results in her asking to postpone her choice by one year:

The formel's choice punctures narrative expectations. The poem has primed readers to see the royal tercel as the clear frontrunner. Twice he displays his capacity to balance his wits with his passions, as he presents the most polished love confession and the most enthusiastically endorsed parliamentary proposal. Furthermore, he comes highly recommended by Nature and Reason (631–37). His actions model the ideal collaboration of reason's thought and will's desire, and this is why the poem, with its anti-intellectual objectives, refuses to acknowledge or reward him. If Chaucer's Parliament were Thomistically designed, then the royal tercel would have won the formel's affections. It is significant that Reason and Nature speak with one voice, since this indicates that Reason's determination of the royal eagle's worthiness is not a privately made, potentially erroneous judgment, but one that accords with natural law and is unquestionably correct. In a Thomistic Parliament of Fowls, the formel's will could not help but follow Reason, and her prudent decision to choose the royal tercel would have unfolded into other acts of virtue, demonstrating that all virtues are essentially connected to prudence (Powrie, 390).

Chaucer ultimately places free will over any reason or natural law, practically in direct opposition to them. We can trace this conception to John Duns Scotus and as Krajník points out, the formel's reluctance to choose is the ultimate act of voluntarism.<sup>8</sup> Assuming that the

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<sup>8</sup> "Triumf vůle (Dunsova „svobodného řádu“) and Přírodou a rozumem („přirodním řádem“) nastává v poslední části básně... Ač paní příroda na počátku zdůrazňuje, že všichni ptáci přilétli „si vybrat sem/své druhy“ (v. 388-

formel is genuinely unsure of the best course of action, her reluctance to make the choice poses as the most virtuous option in the light of her lack of access to divine will:

For the formel to find Nature's words morally compelling, Nature would need to say that God wills her to choose the royal tercel; Reason's recommendation is not good enough. Since human beings normally do not have access to the divine will, Scotus advises that individuals try to assess moral goodness subjectively, judging whether the action in question is correct with respect to its goal, time, and place (Powrie, 391).

Robertson finds a similar occurrence in the study of *The Second Nun's Tale*:

While seeing the angel is crucial to both Valerian's and Tiburtius's conversions, the tale is ambiguous about whether that sight precedes or follows belief. Where Augustine, drawing on Corinthians, emphasizes the inadequacy of human physical sight in comparison to spiritual sight, Chaucer's tale refuses to subordinate human to spiritual perception (Robertson, 120).

This ultimately leads us to the conclusion that Chaucer held certain sympathies towards voluntarism. Ultimately accepting our lack of access to divine knowledge and will, we are only left with Reason to argue for what seems best. However, the lack of experience, which would otherwise, had we enough of it, allow us to see Reason's point, overrides even the most logical of decisions. This places the element of personal motivation and choice right between

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389) a že přitom musí být „poslušni [jejího] úřadu a práva“ (v.387)...Rozhodnutí orlice žádnou volbu neučinit je potom posledním krokem vzpoury vůle proti autoritě rozumu. Jak totiž poznamenává Lynchová, svobodná vůle podle voluntaristické filozofie spočívala v možnosti neusilovat o to, co by pro člověka mělo být žádoucí...Navzdory všem doporučením i očividné iracionalitě svého kroku orlice žádá o roční odklad, čímž naznačuje, že až na volbu dojde, bude se jednat o výběr založený čistě na její svobodné vůli, která jí zaručí důstojnost hodnou jejího postavení“ (Krajník, 93-94).

Reason and God, for only He could challenge free will. Chaucer's approach in *Parliament of Fowls* finds a unique balance between deep philosophy and irony, adding another layer of personal connection to his allegory.

## CONCLUSION

The contents of this thesis were medieval dream allegory and an analysis of the dream visions by Geoffrey Chaucer. It described the development of the genre of dream visions and defined Chaucer's texts within the literary environment of medieval England. Finally, it focused on medieval dream theory and analysed the original texts while providing historical context.

Court poetry is where we find the earliest conventions of the Chaucerian tradition. Or rather, as is later discussed, the conventions which Chaucer goes against. Nevertheless, court poetry and courtly love were important milestones in the development of secular literature. They were a product of the increasingly rigid ideals of nobility and the concept of knighthood. Lacking much real-world evidence, however, courtly love and its conventions seem to have mostly existed within the literary world, as some unattainable ideal. In real life, they manifested through ritualised acts of knighthood and devotion to a lady, often during tournaments and other social occasions. Some of the earliest works of dream allegory have emerged at this time, most famously the French *Roman de la Rose* – a work which has, singlehandedly, managed to set a strong foundation for future writers, Chaucer included.

Following a gradual separation from the Church, vernacular drama paved the way for other secular genres. Excluding the nobility and other exceptions, we find that lay authorship was not a wide genre in the earlier medieval periods. The emergence of universities and the rise of the middle class brought education and power to the people of towns and cities all across Europe. Aside from gaining political and administrative privileges, the educated merchant class began to take interest in writing. Ultimately resulting in the emergence of not only vernacular authorship, but also a brand new readership, which suddenly had the power to dictate new trends. Chaucer too was born into this class of educated laity.

The natural consequence of the legal liberation of the individual during the high and late Middle Ages was a shift to humanist ideals. A shift which mostly persisted, during



Chaucer's time, as a philosophical conflict between knowledge and free will, and resulted in the conceptualisation of voluntarist doctrine. Chaucer himself was much preoccupied with the idea of free will and explores the topic extensively in his dream visions. He seems to have held sympathies towards the ideas of voluntarism: That free will is a separate 'entity' and can essentially choose to remain misguided, for it has the power and right to choose as much.

This separation of human and divine comes through in other areas as well, including dream theory. The traditional tripartition of dreams partially stems from the increased interest in medical sciences and marks an important change in the attitudes towards dreams and dreaming. Lay dreams were no longer a dismissible topic, nor a taboo, but a part of daily life. Although, they essentially remained a mystery to the medieval thinkers.

Chaucer himself was concerned with the origin of dreams, and in the spirit of voluntarism and late medieval attitudes, he did little to assign them to divine activity. He held a loose concept of somatic dreams as well as the tripartition, as would be expected for his time. But he seems to have been perplexed by the origin of the visions themselves. We find traces of his thoughts on dreams and dreaming in his work, a rather unique occurrence. One that has gained him notable status as a 'dream theoretician' during his lifetime already.

Geoffrey Chaucer was a man of power and great education. We cannot deny his social position, despite the fact that his work holds an air of humility. His work is laced with subtle hints as to who he was and what his life was like. It does not present any radical, imposing views, nor is it politically charged, lending an image of Chaucer as a man of temperate character and wisdom. One, that would certainly be valued during his diplomatic journeys.

His dream allegory is less surreal than what some may assume at first glance. His preoccupation with love and mystery seems to be a reaction to the continental trends, which he certainly had the chance to observe in person. Rather than serving as mere setting, Chaucer uses it to point out certain irony, or even the hypocrisy of the earlier traditions. Love often

goes punished, by death or otherwise, which is stark contrast to the genre of court literature. His work does not strictly follow the conventions of earlier dream allegory but explores them in detail, with the aid of his extensive reading curriculum. It gives his work unique depth, as the central topic of love merely hangs on the surface, shrouding the underlying philosophical and moral themes in a veil of superficiality.

The more we delve into his dream visions, the more we find that they are laced with deeply personal topics and environments. From the royal hunting parks and gardens to Chaucer's travels. The essence of the Chaucerian tradition seem to lie not in the mystical and amorous, but rather in the personal and introspective. He strived to better understand the human condition and himself. Perhaps, it is the reason why Chaucer remains relevant today, centuries later. For his work has much to offer, and aside from his, sometimes palpable, irony and witty rhyme, he offers a piece of himself to those who are willing to listen and ponder.

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