THE FIGURE OF THE POET IN SOME FOURTEENTH
CENTURY NARRATIVE POEMS

by

GREGORY CHARLES KRATZMANN

All sources have been acknowledged and
this thesis is by own composition.

A thesis presented for the Degree of Master of
Arts at the Australian National University

Canberra
1972
All sources have been acknowledged and this thesis is my own composition.

G. C. Kratzmann.
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This thesis is an attempt to show how the overt presence of a number of fourteenth century English poets in their poems is related to the "sentence" of the works. The deployment of the authorial "I" is essentially a rhetorical technique, a means by which a given author endeavours to persuade his audience to accept and understand a certain view of life. In this thesis, I have endeavoured to indicate the chief modes of authorial representation, and to show what effects are generated by the presence of an "I" figure in a number of poems. A consideration of Chaucer's use of the first person method is included, since his poetry incorporates similar conventions and forms to those used by his contemporaries, achieving considerably different effects. The method used is largely that of linear exposition of particular poems: I have tried to avoid giving exposition for its own sake, and my aim throughout has been to amplify the nature and the effectiveness of the forms of authorial representation employed. The restriction of length has made it impossible for me to consider in any detail the influences of European literature upon the ways in which Middle English poets portrayed themselves in their writings.

In recent years, the question of the authorial "I" has become the subject of keen critical enquiry among scholars of Middle English. My debt to critics such as George Kane, A.C. Spearing, John Lawlor, Derek Pearsall, and P.M. Kean is acknowledged frequently throughout the following chapters. Like the poet-figure in the Book of the Duchess, who is concerned
to check the knight from repetition, anyone aware of the amount of critical literature on this topic might be tempted to remonstrate, "Hyt ys no nede to reherse it more". I make no apologies for having written this thesis, however, since there is at present no extended study in which the authorial "I" is studied as a rhetorical method used in basically the same way by a number of fourteenth century poets.

Apart from the debts to other authors which are acknowledged above and in footnotes, I should like to record a debt of gratitude to my supervisor, Dr W.S. Ramson, who has been a source of help and encouragement. My thanks are due to Professor G.H. Russell, who supervised the early drafts, and to the Australian National University for the award of a research scholarship.
All authors, irrespective of the literary periods to which they belong, are engaged in the task of persuasion, the task, that is, of persuading their audience to accept the validity of a particular point of view or of a particular way of looking at the world. Invariably, the writer of a work is concerned not only about his choice of language, form, and structure, but also about the manner in which he projects himself as speaker or narrator. Aristotle writes long about the importance of the image of the speaker projected within an oral oral work to its reception by an audience.

Persuasion is achieved by the speaker's personal character when the speech is an appeal to make us think and feel. He should not try and be more fully and more exactly like others; this is true generally whatever the question is, the absolutely free when most interesting or important views and opinions are disputed. This view of persuasion, like the others, should be subverted to what the speaker is, and the ample image of his character before he has.

Although they may not have had direct acquaintance with the Victorians or with other classical instances of a similar kind, and although the literary theorists of their own line had almost nothing to say on the subject, many medieval poets display a serious concern in their works for the kind of self-image which they project.

The projection of an even more. . . . but, of course, dependent wholly upon what he says or what he says about himself overtly, i.e., in an "I". Other writers writers would
All authors, irrespective of the literary periods to which they belong, are engaged in the task of persuasion; the task, that is, of persuading their audiences to accept the validity of a particular point of view or of a particular way of looking at the world. Invariably, the writer of a work is concerned not only about his choice of language, form, and structure, but also about the manner in which he projects himself as speaker or narrator. Aristotle writes thus about the importance of the image of the speaker projected within an oratorical work to its reception by an audience:

Persuasion is achieved by the speaker's personal character when the speech is so spoken as to make us think him credible. We believe good men more fully and more readily than others; this is true generally whatever the question is, and absolutely true when exact certainty is impossible and opinions are divided. This kind of persuasion, like the others, should be achieved by what the speaker says, not by what people think of his character before he begins to speak.¹

Although they may not have had direct acquaintance with the Rhetoric or with other classical treatises of a similar kind, and although the literary theorists of their own time had almost nothing to say on the subject, many medieval poets display a serious concern in their works for the kind of self-image which they project.

The projection of an author's ethos is not, of course, dependent wholly upon what he says or upon what he says about himself overtly; i.e. as an "I". Many modern writers would

endorse the Joycean dictum about the desirability of detachment: "The narrative is no longer purely personal. The personality of the artist passes into the narration itself, flowing round and round the persons and actions like a vital sea". When we read the *Canterbury Tales*, just as when we read *Ulysses*, a powerful impression of the author's ethos emerges, largely as a result of the words and the interactions of created characters. The same is true of Chaucer's dream vision poems and of Langland's *Piers Plowman*, even though in these works the author is present as an "I". The impressions of strong authorial personalities which emerge from these poems depend not only upon what each poet says in direct commentary and as a character in a fictional action, but also upon the whole texture and configuration of each work. It would be possible, if one wished, to talk about the "personality" or the "implied author" conveyed by the works of Langland, Chaucer, Gower and the Pearl-poet; possible, but not particularly helpful, providing that one was seriously interested in understanding what each of these poets has to say. As Stephen Knight has remarked, the "true nature" of an author is not of serious interest unless it is itself discussed within the work.¹

The concern of this thesis is not with hypothetical authorial personalities,² but rather with the overt participation

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2. The irrelevance of the process of deducing an authorial personality from an imaginative work is all too clearly demonstrated by Edward Wagenknecht's study, *The Personality of Chaucer*, Norman, University of Oklahoma Press (1967).
in their poems of a number of Middle English poets. Within the
genre to which most of the poems to be discussed belong - the
dream vision - it is possible to distinguish two main types of
the authorial "I". These are the author as teacher and narrator,
and the author as character. The first of these occurs most
frequently in the opening sections of vision narratives, in
which poets address their audiences directly to introduce the
matter which is to follow. Thus at the beginning of the *Roman
de la Rose*, the great seminal poem which influenced the style of
many English poets of the fourteenth century, the speaker relates:

> Within my twenty yer of age,
> Whan that Love taketh his cariage
> Of yonge folk, I wente soone
> To bedde, as I was wont to done
> And faste I slepte; and in slepyng
> Me mette such a swevenyng
> That lyked me wonders wel.
> But in that sweven is never a del
> That it nys afterward befalle,
> Ryght as this drem wol tel us alle. (11.21-30,
> Chaucer's translation)

Similarly, Dante signals the narration of his ostensibly personal
experience:

> Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita
> mi ritrova f per una selva oscura,
> che la diritta via era smarrita.1

Guillaume Deguileville, who may have influenced Langland, writes
at the beginning of the *Pelerinage de la Vie Humaine*:

> Thys sholde ben a trewe vsage
> Off folkys in ther pylgrymage.
> Doo telle myn aventure cler,
> How passyd syx and twenty yer,
> Telle vn-to on and all,
> How that yt ys to me ffall,
> In the Abbey off Chalys ...2


2. Lydgate's translation, 11.301-07; F.J. Furnival, ed.,
London, Nichols and Sons (1905).
Each of these first person passages contains an implication that the experience to be narrated contains a message of some kind for the audience; this is evidenced, for example, by the presence of the first person plural form in the extracts from Guillaume de Lorris and Dante ("wol us telle", "di nostra vita"), and by explicit statement, e.g.,

Now this drem wol I ryme aright
To make your hertes gaye and lyght,
For Love it prayeth, and also
Commaundeth me that it be so, (R.R., 11.31-34)

and,

ma per trattar del ben ch'i' vi trovai,
dirò de l'altre cose ch'i' v'ho scorte. (I, 11.8-9)

Lydgate's prologue to his translation of the Pèlerinage leaves no doubt of the universal implications which his readers should discern in the experience of the poem's "I":

In thys book, yf that they rede yerne,
Pylgrymes schal the verray trouthe lerne,
yiff they sette ther trewe dylygence
To vnderstonde clerly the sentence,
What hyt menyth, & the moralyte;
Ther they may, as in a merovr, se
holsum thynges, & thynges full notable. (11.81-87)

The few prefatory statements quoted above, like those in Middle English poems such as Pearl, Confessio Amantis and Piers Plowman, serve the rhetorical function of attracting the attention and interest of an audience, and frequently they carry the suggestion that the experience to be recounted will be universally relevant.2

2. Literary tradition no doubt played a considerable part in this process. An audience who knew, even at second hand, poems such as the Roman de la Rose and La Divina Commedia would surely have expected a poem beginning with a brief description of how, for example, an "I" wandered about alone, to deal with general moral and philosophical issues.
The rhetorical pose of the teacher is expressed in a more direct way in at least some of the poems which are considered in the following chapters. Langland, the authors of some of the religious lyrics which are written in a simplified dream vision form, and to a lesser extent Gower and Chaucer, all adopt the accents of the preacher in order to make a point in a forceful and explicit way. Illustrations of this authorial stance are Langland's,

Ac ich warne 3ow werkmen wynne whyle 3e mowe,
For hunger hydferwardes hyeþ hym faste, (C,IX,11.344-45)

and the famous exhortation to "yonge fresshe folkes" at the end of Troilus and Criseyde.¹ For this rhetorical stance associated with the first person method, the ultimate origin of which is probably classical oratory,² there are many equivalents in medieval European literature. Three passages of explicit authorial moralizing, the first from the Purgatorio,³ the second from the Roman de la Rose, and third from the Pèlerinage de la Vie Humaine, are noted here:

Non vo' però, lettor, che tu ti smaghi di buon proponimento per udire come Dio vuol che 'l debito si paghi.
Non attenda la forma del martire,
penza la succession; pensa ch'al peggio,
oltre la gran sentenza non può ire ... (11.106-11)

1. The effects generated by this exhortation are by no means simple; see pp.243-45, below.
2. The immediate influence is, of course, that of the sermon.
The tyme, that passeth nyght and day,
And resteles travayleth ay,
And steleth from us so prively
That to us semeth sykerly
That it in oon poynt dwelleth ever,
And certes, it ne resteth never ... (11.369-74)

But fynally, when al ys do,
I ha wyst lordys deceyved so
In dyvers contres, mo than on,
Whan ther ffrenshepyes were agon.
Lat no man trusten on ffortune,
Wych selde, in on, lyst to contune. (11.13639-44)

None of the passages of direct address quoted above - with the exception, that is, of the lines at the end of Troilus and Criseyde - reveals very much about the "I" who utters them; what is conveyed in each of them is an attitude to experience, rather than an impression of the speaker's ethos.¹ For this reason, the major emphasis in the chapters which follow is upon the various poets' self-depictions as characters within their works. In the section on Confessio Amantis, however, greater attention than usual is paid to passages in which Gower addresses

¹. Discussion of the author as eyewitness stance is largely omitted from this study, since, like the preacher standpoint, its use does not reflect back upon the nature of the speaker. The eyewitness pose, which probably has its origins in heroic epic and classical legend, is apparent in its basic form in medieval romance, in tags such as "I sawe never non swyche", and "I dar wel sey in sert". The use of the ethical dative in Sir Gawayne and the Green Knight, 1.1905, is a variant of the device. The characteristic effect of the pose is that of adding the authority of personal experience to the narrative: "I saw this with my own eyes, therefore you should believe". This is essentially the effect which is generated by the use of the "I saw" convention in the Roman de la Rose, 11.817-1302 (Chaucer's trans.), in Pearl, 11.985-1080, and in Piers Plowman, Passus I, 11.9-231. For a discussion of the evolution of this form of first person narrative, see R. Scholes and R. Kellogg, The Nature of Narrative, New York, Oxford University Press (1966), Chapter 7.
his audience directly, since in this work a tension between the poet's teacher and character roles appears to be a consciously designed way of articulating "sentence".

The authors of *Pearl* and of the Parlement of the Thre Ages, like Gower, Langland, Chaucer and the writers of a large group of religious lyrics, portray themselves in their poems as "I" figures with limited moral awareness, figures who are shown in discourse with characters whose apprehension of reality is superior to their own. In dream vision poems, the experience in which the poet-figure is educated by one or more teachers invariably forms the substance of the visionary experience introduced by a first-person passage of the kind quoted above. In *Pearl*, the grieving "I" is corrected and instructed by an otherworldly maiden who argues from the infallible grounds of patristic authority; in Confessio Amantis, Amans is taught by Genius, the priest of Venus; Will, in Piers Plowman, encounters a variety of authoritative personages on his search for "kynde knowyng". Medieval dream vision literature contains many other examples of the entelechy; i.e. the kind of narrative whose distinguishing characteristic is the process by which some human figure, usually that of an "I" who represents a poet, is instructed and edified by others. The motif of the poet-figure's education is central to the Roman de la Rose and the Pèlerinage de la Vie Humaine, and to works by Machaut and Froissart. La Divine Commedia (which of course is not a dream vision poem)

1. In the Parlement of the Thre Ages, the process of education is not represented as proceeding directly from authority-figure to "I".
is the most famous example of the genre. All of these poems, English and European alike, have their ultimate origin in the type of Latin dialogue poetry in which an "I" who purports to be the author speaks to, and is corrected by, a personage of greater wisdom and authority. The medieval authors were acquainted with the Platonic method of dialogue indirectly, through their knowledge of Boethius' *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, in which the author sets out his philosophical system by means of a reported dialogue between himself and Lady Philosophy. Elizabeth Merrill's comment on the rhetorico-aesthetical basis for the use of this form by Plato is as relevant to the poetry of the medieval period as it is to the works of Plato and Boethius:

That Plato did not gather up the teachings of his master, interpenetrated as they are by his own thoughts and beliefs and imaginings, and present them in the form of treatise or essay is due, of course, to the fact that his poet-mind saw things concretely, and realized that thought, with personality added to it, is a greater thing than thought alone.¹

The assumption which underlines Middle English poems such as *Pearly Piers Plowman* and *Confessio Amantis* is that the telling of a story which involves a human "I" figure is a more effective means of teaching than straight exposition; their authors are in implicit agreement with the Horatian maxim about the worth of poetry, "omne tulit punctum qui miscuit utile dulci / lectorum delectando pariterque monendo",² which Sidney was to

¹. *The Dialogue in English Literature*, Yale University Press (1969), p.3; this study was first published in 1911.

The particular mode of teaching through delight which the poets of the fourteenth century employ highlights their awareness of the appeal of a story in which there is a naïve or sinful "I" who is shown, in terms of action or a series of encounters described in dramatic terms, to make some kind of progress towards understanding. It is significant that the Roman de la Rose, Confessio Amantis, Piers Plowman, the House of Fame and a number of the lyrics contain references to "aventure"; one conjectures that these poems held a similar appeal for their audiences as picaresque novels had for readers in the eighteenth century. John Lawlor comments thus upon the ironies implicit in the recording of the experiences of the fallible authorial characters in some Middle English dream vision poems:

What is common to Chaucer, Gower and Langland is the presence of an "I" who exhibits both eagerness to learn and a residual stubbornness, so that in the long run the central truth of the poem must be asserted at the expense of the Dreamer ... This is a mode of creative imagination which, properly handled, can move the poem away from statement to demonstration, to a cumulative effect which is not that of a merely argued process observable in the Dreamer but of a conclusion the reader cannot avoid when the guide himself has been brought to newness of understanding.

1. "For these [i.e., the poets who treat of 'matters Philosophicall'] indeede doo meerely make to imitate; and imitate both to delight and teach; and delight to move men to take that goodnes in hande, which without delight they would flye as from a stranger; and teach, to make them know that goodnes wherunto they are mooved." E.S. Shuckburgh, ed., An Apologie for Poetrie, Cambridge (1951), p.11.
2. R.W. Southern discusses the hold which imagery of movement and quest presumably had upon the medieval imagination; The Making of the Middle Ages, London, Hutchinson's University Library (1953), p.222.
The extent to which the story of the "I" does represent a demonstration rather than a statement of a theme does of course vary, according to the degree to which the poet-figure is dramatized, and to which his responses to his instructor are emphasized. The presence of the "I" in Piers Plowman and in Confessio Amantis, for example, is not realized with the same continuing sense of immediacy as it is in Pearl.

The nature of the relationship between the authors of poems such as those mentioned above and the "I" figures who narrate and who participate in their dramatic actions is a matter which continues to interest readers of these works. As E.V. Gordon notes in his introduction to Pearl, the concept of the wholly fictional "I" is foreign to medieval poetry:¹ there are no fourteenth century equivalents to "character" narrators such as Roderick Random, Nellie Dean, David Copperfield, and Gabriel Betteredge. (The "I" of the prose work Mandeville's Travels does seem to be completely fictional: his presence is not, however, emphasized to any great extent.) George Kane, working from an earlier essay by R.W. Chambers² on the degree of congruence between poet and "I" in Piers Plowman, produces persuasive evidence that most writers of dream vision narratives not only included their names in their poems, but also referred to themselves as writers, either directly or indirectly.³ Gower, Langland and

Chaucer all follow this practice. By so doing, Kane points out, they "created the ambiguous situation where encouragement to identify poet and narrator is given by their possession of the same name and checked by the character of what is narrated; that they did this suggests that the ambiguity had a purpose".\(^1\) Langland and Gower at certain points in their poems do appear to be attributing autobiographical elements to their "I" figures, not out of any simple impulse towards self-expression, but as a rhetorical technique, a means of heightening their presentation of "sentence". Kane's assertion that "an unmistakable first purpose"\(^2\) of identifying author and "I" was to publish the author's name is questionable, at least in the case of *Piers Plowman* and *Confessio Amantis*.

The encouragement to identify author and "I" consistently throughout poems such as *Piers*, the *Confessio*, *Pearl* and the *Roman de la Rose* is checked not only by the character of the events related in the dream sequences (these frequently concern an experience in an otherworldly milieu), but also by the very nature of the "I" which is presented in the passages of dialogue. Often in *Piers* and the *Confessio*, for example, the poets depict themselves as figures of such limited intelligence that they do not know the meaning of even the most basic concepts. In the *Visio* section of Langland's poem, for example, Will has to ask Holy Church "What be montayne by-meneb and be merke dale",

and later asks of another teacher, "What is holychurche, frend?"; similarly, Amans in Gower's poem asks his confessor questions such as "What thing is Ire?". The members of the audience for whom these poems were written would surely have recognised that the characters portrayed in this way were the authors only inasmuch as the latter were adopting a standpoint conventionally used by writers of instructional literature. The rhetorical pose of the ignorant "I" is as old at least as the Boethian dialogue and the earliest catechistic writings.¹

The idea that the author of any of these poems is consistently synonymous with the "I" who may bear his name is undercut even further if one takes into account that it is the prerogative of any writer to project into his work a particular version of himself for the purposes of persuasion. Wayne Booth comments,

> Just as one's personal letters imply different versions of oneself, depending on the differing relationships with each correspondent and the purpose of each letter, so the writer sets himself out with a different air depending on the needs of particular works.²

The fact that most of the Middle English poems to be discussed in this thesis were written to be recited rather than to be read is irrelevant in this context, in view of the ease with which a version or image of the self may be projected through speech.

¹ Chambers observes: "The development of the dialogue sometimes necessitates that the dreamer should be represented as ignorant of things which the author knows quite well, or that he should be depicted as slow to understand them when told". Op. cit., p.443.

Bertrand Bronson is right to note that the circumstance of oral delivery - the poet reading his work to an audience - precludes a total separation between poet and "I" (largely because of the convention of naming), but he does not take sufficiently into account that a speaker who has even moderate mimetic ability is capable of conveying to his hearers a variety of images of himself.¹

There is an integral connection in all of the poems mentioned between the manner in which authors depict themselves and "sentence". By this is meant not so much the modes of authorial presence outlined above - the poet as narrator and teacher, and the poet as character in the "drama" sequences of his work - as the way in which these modes are realized. There are considerable differences in the degree of naturalism with which the "I" figures in the lyrics, *Pearl*, the *Parlement of the Thre Ages* and the other poems are portrayed; these are differences which are apparent not only between poems, but within individual poems (notably, within *Confessio Amantis* and *Piers Plowman*). The poet-figures in *Pearl* and the *Parlement of the Thre Ages* have an undeniable "truth to life": in *Pearl* the effect of verisimilitude is connected with psychological realism, while the reality of the "I" in the *Parlement* is the

¹ In *Search of Chaucer*, Toronto (1960), pp.26-28. Referring specifically to Bronson's viewpoint, D.R. Howard points out that even the historically minded critic may distinguish between author and projected "I" if he recognizes that any device, whether conversational or literary, is a matter of rhetoric which can be discussed in literary terms; "Chaucer the Man", *PMLA* 80 (1965), p.337.
product of an accretion of circumstantial detail. Both these manifestations of naturalistic style are used intermittently by Gower and Langland in depicting themselves as characters within their poems.

The use of a realistic style of first person portrayal appears calculated to enhance the appeal of a dramatic style of narrative. The authors of these Middle English poems, by attributing some individuating detail to their "I" figures, seem to be consciously attempting to develop them into more interesting creations than the stereotyped pupil-adventurer figures of poems such as the *Roman de la Rose* and the *Pèlerinage de la Vie Humaine*, who are portrayed for the most part in terms of generality. The generalizing style of representation is, of course, in accord with the didactic impulse of these poems; both portray an experience which has a clear relevance to a wide, general audience. In most of the English poems, however, the "I" figures combine generality and individuality: the use of a realistic style of poet-characterization throughout *Pearl* and in parts of *Confessio Amantis*, for example, has the effect of producing figures which combine the individual with the typical and general. The "I" of *Pearl* demonstrates a truth which is applicable to humanity in general but carries a more immediate human appeal than the "I" of the *Roman de la Rose*. Leo Spitzer, who proposes the theory that the "poetic I" in all medieval literature is a representative of mankind, remarks that Dante in the *Commedia* portrays himself as a representative of humanity, but at the same time incorporates particular, personal
.. Dante does not allow us to forget that his empirical personality (his feeling, speaking, gesticulating personality) is included in this "I" - as he shows himself, now being jostled along in a procession of devils, now ascending toward Heaven magnetically attracted by the eyes of Beatrice. For the story that Dante had to tell, both aspects of his composite "I" were necessary: on the one hand, he must transcend the limitations of individuality in order to gain an experience of universal experience; on the other, an individual eye is necessary to perceive and fix the matter of experience.1

The theme of the necessity for personal effort and struggle in the search for truth is an important one in poems such as Pearl, Confessio Amantis, and Piers Plowman, just as it is the Commedia. In each of these poems, the inclusion of what are apparently empirical or autobiographical details about the poet has an essentially rhetorical function in reinforcing "sentence"; so too has the inclusion of details which have their source in imagination rather than in the biography of an historically real author. Each of the dream vision poems to be discussed illustrates in some degree a technique of exploring moral issues through characterization which is often vividly realistic. The success with which an "I" may be depicted simultaneously as individual and type is most strikingly apparent in Pearl.

The progress of the various "I" figures whose nature is essentially representative is, it may fairly be inferred, intended to serve as an example to an audience. An important assumption underlying the experiences narrated in Pearl, Confessio Amantis, Piers Plowman and a large number of the religious lyrics

is that each reader or listener will be prompted to undertake his own search for knowledge, and that he will be guided by the progress of the protagonist, and warned by the errors made by the latter. There is some contemporary evidence which suggests that medieval poets intended to lead their audiences to make this kind of identification with their "I" figures. Dante explains the way in which he attempts to instruct his audience in the Paradiso:

Inasmuch, then, as the subject dealt with in the present work is out of the common, it is the aim of the first part of the exordium or prologue to bring about the abovementioned three results with regard to this out-of-the way subject. For the author declares that he will relate such things as he who beheld them in the first heaven was able to retain. In which statement all those three things are comprised; for the profitableness of what he is about to be told begets a favourable disposition in the hearer; its being out of the common engages his attention; and its being within the range of possibility renders him willing to learn. Its profitableness he gives to be understood when he says that he shall tell of that which above all things excites the longing of mankind, namely the joys of Paradise; its uncommon nature is indicated when he promises to treat of such exalted and sublime matters as the conditions of the celestial kingdom; its being within the range of possibility is demonstrated when he says that he will tell of those things which he was able to retain in his mind - for if he was able, so will others be also.¹ (my italics)

It is justifiable to assume that the English poets mentioned above were motivated by similar (although perhaps less ambitious) concerns, in view of the fact that their works are cast in a form broadly similar to that of the Commedia; i.e. an experience of correction, narrated by an authorial "I". The subject matter of the Roman de la Rose is of course far removed from that of

Dante's poem, yet the form and basic rhetorical method of the two are broadly similar. Jean de Meun clearly implies that the "I" of his poem should be regarded as both a typical human being and an example; addressing his audience directly, he says of the book itself,

Mais pour c'en escrít les mêismes
Que nous e vous de vous mêismes
Poissons quenoissance aveir;
Car il fait bon de tout saveir.  1

Lydgate's explanation that those who read his translation will see edifying matter "as in a merovr", and Gower's stated hope "That every man ensample take" from the record of his own experience (C.A. Bk.I, 1.79) also testify to a convention of identification between "I" and audience in narrative poems of this kind.  2 In view of the fact that at least some of these poems were written to be read aloud - presumably by their authors, since the "I" is frequently named - it may be conjectured that the persuasive power of the example might have been strengthened by an audience's knowledge of the speaker and his life. Relevant in this context is Aristotle's observation that the speaker's reputation outside his role as orator may contribute

2. The concept of the narrating "I" as example is not restricted to works written in the dream vision form. In the prologue of the Middle English homily Patience, for example, the author explains that he is a pobr man himself, and that he suffers his poverty, since Penne is me ly3tlokerhit lyke and her lotes prayse, Penne wy er wyth and be wroth and Þe wers have. (11.47-8) He is thus a living embodiment of the attitude which he encourages his audience to adopt. This "personal" passage (the only one in the poem) thus has a rhetorical function beyond that of "helping to ingratiate the homilist with his audience": J.J. Anderson, ed., Patience, Manchester University Press (1969), p.8.
to the persuasive effect of the image projected through his speech. 1

This examination of authorial presence and participation is divided into six chapters. Chapter 1 is a survey of the forms of the "I" in some Middle English religious lyrics; these poems are considered because they illustrate some of the characteristics and functions of the poet-figures in the longer, more complex poems. In the second chapter, the effects generated by the presence of the "I" in *Pearl* and the *Parlement of the Thre Ages* are discussed. These two poems are dealt with in the same chapter not only because they are relatively short works written in the alliterative mode, but also because they present their "sentence" in such a way that the claims of personal emotion are not invalidated.

Chapter III is a consideration of the poet-figure in the *Confessio Amantis*, in which particular attention is paid to the contribution made by Gower's self-dramatization to the theory of poetic composition announced in the Prologue. The following two chapters are concerned with the way in which the presence of the "I" in *Piers Plowman* contributes to its meaning. The first of these consists of an exposition of the poem, which focusses mainly upon the consecutive appearances of Langland's dreamer, Will; it provides the basis for a more intensive discussion of the figure's role in Chapter V.

In Chapter VI, an attempt is made to assess the effect of Chaucer's self-depictions as an "I"; *Troilus and Criseyde* and the *Canterbury Tales* are included, since although they are not written in the dream vision form, the presence in them of the poet in his capacity of narrator is a significant rhetorical device. In the Conclusion, a brief comparison is made between Chaucer's use of the modes of overt authorial presence and the use made of them by other fourteenth century English poets: the comparison highlights Chaucer's individuality and at the same time points to the essential similarity of purpose underlying poems such as *Pearl, Confessio Amantis* and *Piers Plowman.*
CHAPTER 1:  

The "I" in the Middle English Religious Lyric.
A consideration of the nature and functions of the poet figures - or, more properly, the first person speakers - in Middle English religious lyrics is relevant to the present study because the dominant manner in which the "I's" in the lyrics are portrayed is reminiscent of a basic style of poet-characterization in longer narrative poems such as *Confessio Amantis* and *Piers Plowman*. In those lyrics which do feature a first person human speaker whose attitudes or state of mind is directly described, there is an absence of individuating, personal detail in the treatment of the "I": the speaker is, with very few exceptions, portrayed as a type of humanity, not only in terms of his characteristics, but also in terms of the manner of his presentation. Unlike the hero of *Troilus and Criseyde*, who is a typical courtly lover presented for the most part in concrete, immediate detail, the "type" figures of the religious lyrics (the sinner, the pupil) are portrayed in very general, non-specific terms. After reading in Carleton Brown's anthologies a number of lyrics written in the first person

1. Not all medieval religious lyrics are, of course, in the first person of a human writer or speaker. Many are written from an omniscient, preacher-like standpoint; e.g. Carleton Brown, ed., *Religious Lyrics of the XIVth Century*, rev. G.V. Smithers, Oxford, Clarendon Press (1952), nos. 50, 81, 115.
mode, we recognize that the speakers in the vast majority of them are in fact one and the same speaker, a kind of medieval Everyman or universal sinner.

The basic form of the "I" in the Middle English religious lyric is well illustrated by the following short penitential poem which, like most others of its kind, derives its form and language directly from the Liturgy:

I was vn-kuynde,
And was penne blynde,
To worche a^eynes his wille,
That furst me wrou^t,
And setthe me bou^t
Fro peynes he was^put to ille,
per-fore we pray
To the today,
That knowes both good and ille
Graunt vs lyue,
We may vs shriue
Vr penaunce to folfille. 1

This poem forms part of a confiteor recommended by the author of A Treatise on the Manner and Mede of the Mass. It falls naturally into two parts, the first (ll.1-6) an admission of personal sinfulness, the second (ll.7-12) a prayer on behalf of all Christian men. The poem exhibits the rhetorical strategy of all verse prayer of the period, the declaration of abasement and of complete worthlessness in the absence of God's grace, followed by the plea for grace. In some of these works, the testimony of sinfulness is expanded, but always in terms of the recognized

categories of sin rather than in terms of the actual personal failings which fall into these categories. The conventional pattern of the versified general confession, illustrated by these lines,

To ofte ich habbe yn myne lyve y-sen3ed with my wittes fyue, Wit eren yhered, with e3en sy3t, Wit senfol speche dey & ny3t, Wit cleppinges, with kessenge also, Wit hondes yhandled, wit fet ygwo, Wit herte senfolliche ypo3t, Wit al my body euele ywro3t; And of al my folye Mercy, lord, mercy ich crye,  

is often carried over into poems which are not actually general confessions. The rhetorical pattern of the prayers to the Virgin is essentially similar to that of the prayers and confessions addressed to God or to Christ. In a typical prayer to Mary the speaker confesses that he is a sinner, "a sorful dreri wight", proceeds to enumerate Her Joys as preparation for a plea for assistance to those who share his sinfulness - "pu kid pi might and help vs suith" - and concludes with a prayer for "All pat singes pis sang".

This line tells us at least part of the reason for the anonymity of the speakers in these poems, and for the generalized accounts of their characteristics. Most of these short medieval poems (which are termed lyrics only

2. See e.g. Brown XIV, no. 124.
for the sake of distinguishing them from other types of contemporary verse) were written by members of the clergy for the use of the community at large. The confession from *A Treatise on the Manner and Mede of the Mass* quoted above was intended by whoever adapted it from the liturgy to be used by each member of the congregation during the service; similarly, other forms of verse prayer such as the Song of the Five Joys alluded to above were intended to be read aloud by individual Christians during their private devotions.¹ Obviously enough, the inclusion in the poems by their original authors of personal and private details such as names and the details of particular individual sins would have hindered identification with the "I" of each work on the part of the audience for whose edification they were intended. There are relatively few lyrics in which pleas for individual people are made.²

The anonymity of the speakers in most religious lyrics is attested to by the tendency for the first person singular to modulate into the first person plural; in two of the poems noted so far, there are the phrases "Therefore we pray" and "help vs suith". The tendency for "I" to


². The mid-twelfth century hymn to the Virgin by St. Godric incorporates the poet's name:

Sainte Marye Virgine,
Moder Jesu Christes Nazarene,
Onfo, schild, help thin Godric,
Onfang, bring heyilich with thee in Godes Riche.

become "we" - neatly exemplified also in the two versions of a thirteenth century gnomic poem originating in the medieval Latin "three tidings" motif\(^1\) - is germane to all forms of the Middle English religious lyric: simple prayers and confessions, meditations upon the Passion and the Joys of the Virgin, and lyrics expressive of the mystic's desire to be united with God. The strength of the habit of mind which this convention reflects - the individual self regarded as having no greater claim than other selves to Divine attention - is nowhere better evidenced than in the occurrence of the "we" form in several lyrics of the Rollean School. For example, the *Salutation to Jesus*\(^2\) (which is attributed to Rolle himself) expresses an intensely personal relationship between the first person speaker and Jesus,

```
On þe I sette al my desyre, þou erti my luf-langyng,
þi luf es byrnand als þe fyre, þat ever on
he wið spryng
(11.10-11),
```

but concludes on an unmistakably communal note, which to modern eyes may appear to be rather incongruous:

```
þi luf es fast in ilk a fandyng, and ever at
al owre nede.
(1.27)
```

Incongruous, because we do not expect to find in a poem which employs the strongly personal language of secular love poetry that the speaker is prepared to concede that his own is not the only claim to the attention of the Beloved.

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Not until we read the prose devotional works of this "incendiary" group of clerics do we recognize that the "both- and" nature of the Rollean conception of Love is essentially similar, although perhaps more fervently expressed, to the doctrine of charity as it is expressed in other writings. This extract from *The Form of Perfect Living* (significantly, written in the first person plural) is a moving illustration of the cast of mind which is reflected in the interchangeability of "I" and "we" in so much medieval literature:

Luf es a lyf, copuland togedyr þe lufand
and þe lufed .... Luf es thyng, thurgh
þe whilk God lufes us, and we God, and ilk ane of us other.

The circumstances in which the lyrics were written - for the use of and recital by each member of the vast community to which the poet belonged - partly explains the absence of individuating details about the "I" figures in them. Apart from this implied notion that the poem is "common property", there is an assumption underlying the bulk of the religious lyrics that the very fact that they contain religious subject matter is a guarantee of audience interest, and hence that the inclusion of detailed personal responses to experience is unnecessary. Stephen Manning's comment reveals a keen insight into this reason for the presence of a generalized "I", a sharer of common human experience, in so many of these poems:


In the song [i.e. the medieval religious lyric], the speaker is not sharply characterized; he tends to be anonymous, or Everyman. In the dramatic lyric, the speaker is sharply characterized because, among other things, the experience of which he speaks is so intense that he unconsciously (or consciously, for that matter) betrays a considerable part of his personality in presenting the experience. Moreover, the speaker in the song removes himself from his experience to sing of it rather than to dramatize it. His song presupposes that the events and people of which it sings contain values within themselves which the speaker merely reports. On the other hand, the dramatic lyric attributes a value to the people and events simply or primarily because they approximate actual experience. Reality in this type of lyric obviously centres around the self, and the emphasis upon the self is more typical of modern than of medieval times. A singer assumes that his audience shares in the values underlying his reported experience; he reports it, in fact, in terms which reinforce the generally accepted and understood forms of the emotion.¹

The first part of Manning's observation highlights the main reason for the puzzlement which some modern readers feel when they find the term "lyric" applied to these short medieval poems concerned with religious observance and instruction. Our reading of post-sixteenth century poetry has led us to associate the term "lyric" with poems which express emotional intensity and strong personal feeling, poems illustrative of definitions

¹. Wisdom and Number, Lincoln (1962), p.35. Manning's use of "song" throughout his study of the religious lyrics is misleading, since not all of them were written to be sung.
of the poet's nature such as those made by Shelley\(^1\) and Yeats\(^2\). There are no real medieval equivalents to the strong evocations of personal, individual feeling contained in Donne's "Batter my heart, three person'd God", or Hopkins's "Not, I'll not, carrion comfort, Despair, feast on thee".

There are however, some moving examples of a fusion between strong personal and strong religious feelings in poems which incorporate a first person human speaker, of which the best is perhaps the early thirteenth century quatrain:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Now goth Sonne under wod:} \\
\text{Me reweth, Marye, thy faire rode.} \\
\text{Now goth Sonne under Tre} \\
\text{Me reweth, Marye, thy sone and thee.}
\end{align*}
\]

It is obvious that this poem - impressive by the critical standards of any age because of its understatement, selection of significant detail and suffusion of personal conviction - tells us little about the speaking "I", save that he is a devout and compassionate Christian. The same comment might also be made of the two famous late

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2. E.g. "Out of the quarrel with others, we make rhetoric; out of the quarrel with ourselves, we make poetry", cited in R.O. Payne, \textit{The Key of Remembrance}, New Haven, Yale U.P. (1963), p.19.

Although many medieval lyrics are unashamedly utilitarian and (to modern eyes at least) "unpoetic", there is clear evidence to show that at least some of the anonymous poets did possess the ability to portray figures in a comparatively realistic way, as strong and memorable individuals. This is provided by the characterizations of Christ and the Blessed Virgin, in poems in which they speak either to one another, or directly to mankind. The realistically portrayed first person speakers in the passages quoted below, the first from a dialogue poem whose dramatic impact centres about Mary's ignorance of what is to befall her all-wise infant Son, the second from one of Christ's addresses to Man, illustrate the hold which the events of the Nativity and the Resurrection had over the minds of their creators:

(1) "Sing nou, moder," seide þat child,
"Wat me sal be-falle
Here after wan i cum to eld-
So don modres alle.

Ich a moder treuly
þat kan hire credel kepe
Is wone to lullen louely
singgen hire child to slepe.


2. Brown XIV, no. 132.

3. e.g. Brown XIV, nos. 56, 67.

4. Brown XIV, nos. 3, 4, 47.
Suete moder, fair & fre,
Sipen þat it is so,
I preye þe þat þu lulle me
& sing. sum-wat þer-to."

"Suete sone," seyde sche,
"Wer-offe suld i singge?
Wist i nevere get more of þe
But gabrieles gretingge."

(Brown XIV, no. 56, 11.9-24)

(2) þe wrynge ich habbe y-trodded al mysulf on,
And of al monkunde he was non oper won.
Ich hoem habbe y-trodded in wreþe and in grome,
And al my wede ys by-spreynd wyth hoere blod ysome,
And al my robe y-uueled to hoere grete shome.

(Brown XIV, no. 25, 11.9-13)

The realism of these two passages - which in the first
inheres in the Franciscan spirit of tenderness with which
the relations between Mother and Son are portrayed, and in
the second, in the enumeration of the details of Christ's
Passion - is of course rhetorically functional, in view
of the fact that both poems are intended as aids to
devotion. In a sense, the subject matter of these poems
provides the sanction for their realism, just as it renders
unnecessary strong characterization of the "I" who is in
the first poem the supposed beholder of the figures in
dialogue, and in the second the representative of humanity
who asks the identity of "þys lordling þat cometh vrom þe
vyht."

The dialogue between the Blessed Virgin and the Child
from which the passage quoted above is taken belongs to a
group of poems which may be designated as "frame" lyrics,
because in them the narrative of a particular event or an
exhortation from a Biblical or supernatural figure is set
within the frame of a vision or an experience recorded by a
human "I". This group of lyrics, many of which are recorded in the Vernon manuscript, is of particular importance to the present study, first because it illustrates the generalizing "I" characteristic of other Middle English lyric poetry, but with a slightly larger dimension of detail, secondly because the poems which belong to it employ a structure similar to that of longer poems in which an experience of the poet-figure is narrated. The frame lyrics exemplify a simplified form of the rhetorical strategy associated with the presentation of poet-figures in works such as Pearl, the Parlement of the Thre Ages, and Confessio Amantis.

A very simple frame lyric is the Vernon manuscript poem with the refrain "Ay Merci, God, And graunt Merci!"\(^1\) In the first four lines, the speaker sketches in the "scene" of a past experience:

\[
\text{As I wandrede her bi weste} \\
\text{Faste vnder a Forest syde,} \\
\text{I sei3 a wiht went him to reste,} \\
\text{Vnder a bou3h he gon a-byde.}
\]

The "wiht's" confession and his supplication for mercy,\(^2\) which are overheard by the poet, take up the remainder of the poem; the monologue is quite conventional, being an extended version of the form of confession quoted at the

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2. Note that the penitent pleads on behalf of all men, using the first person plural pronoun: e.g. "help vs, Prince of alle pite,/ Atte day pat we schal dy,/ bi swete face pat we may se". (11.93-95)
beginning of this chapter.¹ The effect of the first person introduction, with its overtones of *chanson d'aventure* and love experience,² is perhaps to suggest that the speaker is in need of some wholesome moral advice; this suggestion is not, however, developed by reference back to the speaker's state of mind at the end of the poem³. The introduction probably served a stronger rhetorical purpose, that of drawing the attention of an audience or of other speakers to the religious subject matter of the overheard monologue by leading them to believe that they were about to hear a very different kind of song. The practice, frequently encountered in the frame lyrics, of including a first-person "secular" preface in a religious song⁴ - presumably to induce an audience to believe that it was about to hear a song of "love aunterus" - has an interesting parallel in one of William of Malmesbury's stories about Aldhelm. The saint is reputed to have stood on a bridge, singing secular songs into which he began to introduce religious ideas when a sufficiently large group of listeners had gathered.⁵

1. See above, p.23.


3. See below, p.34-35.


5. Cited in Patterson, op. cit., p.16.
The deployment of the "I" in the lyric quoted above, which is in the form of a dialogue between the Virgin and Christ, has an effect which goes beyond attracting the audience's attention. In this poem, there is an integral relationship between the completed first person frame and the reported dialogue. Like "Ay Merci, God, and graunt Merci!", this poem begins by locating the "I" in a situation which suggests that the theme of what is to come might be secular:

Als i lay vp-on a nith
Alone in my longging,
Me bouhthe i saw a wonder sith,
A maiden child rokking.

As the dialogue proceeds, the identities of the speakers become gradually apparent. The Child asks His Mother to sing to him about His future - "So don modres alle" (1.12) - but because of her limited human knowledge she is able to tell him only of the Annunciation and the Nativity: Christ interposes to predict the events of His life on earth, and tells her of the Resurrection to comfort her. Thus the magnitude of Christ's suffering and its significance for mankind is conveyed with delicate pathos, in convincingly human terms. Unlike the penitential frame lyric discussed above, this poem returns at its conclusion to the "I" of stanza 1, thereby completing the frame:

1. For a more detailed account of Brown XIV, no. 56 than I am able to include here, see S.A. Weber, Theology and Poetry in the Middle English Lyric, Ohio (1969), pp. 69-86.
Serteynly, þis sithte i say,
þis song i herde singge,
Als i lay þis 3olis-day
Alone in my longingge. (11.145-48)

The return has the effect of emphasizing the immediacy of the events which form the subject of the dialogue: the fact that the vision has been seen by an ordinary man with whom the poem's audience may identify suggests that the Divine sacrifice has an application to men's lives here and now. The poet's visionary experience is verified by the shift from the rather vague "Me þouhte i sau" in the first line to the emphatic "Serteynly, þis sithte i say" in the last, and by the information (withheld at the beginning) that the vision occurred "þis 3olis-day". The repetition of "longging" suggests further that this should be the universal state of mankind in this season.

In another "Als i lay vp-on a nith" frame lyric from the same manuscript, the "I" is a participant in the action which he recalls. He tells that when he saw a "mayden brith" with her child, he suspected that she might be a maid who had suffered the general fate of women recorded in the secular lyrics:

I wondrede of þat suete with,
& to my self i sayde,
Sche hadde don mankindde vnrithe,
but ʒif sche were a mayde. (11.9-12)

1. Weber comments, op. cit. p.208: "In these frame quatrains the "I" refers to the seer of the vision, and the poet uses the "I" to add a testimony of truth. In the first quatrain "I" acts as a witness, who, 'alone', and 'longging' can be identified with anyone who might hear the poem."

2. Brown XIV, no.58.
His musings are overheard by "a man of þe elde lawe", Joseph, who corrects the misapprehension by telling the speaker about the Immaculate Conception. Joseph's instruction is verified by the poet's direct comment to his audience towards the end of the poem:

But þis child þat i sau þan,  
‡ Ioseph seyde,  
I wot þe child is god ‡ man  
‡ is moder mayde. (11.53-56)

Having told his vision and testified to its truth, the poet proceeds to tell his audience that they should share his response - "þis child þanne worchip we"(1.61).

Poems of this kind, in which representative human figures see and are addressed by biblical or supernatural speakers, are interesting from a theological as well as from a rhetorical point of view, in that they testify to the closeness of the relationship between man and God and to the value of man's natural feelings in worship.¹

The form of the second "Als i lai vp-on a nith" lyric is a fairly common one. It recurs in the frame lyrics which Brown entitles Mercy Passes All Things (in which the "I" is instructed by the example of a merlin)², The Bird with the Four Feathers (in which the instructor is again a bird, typifying sinful humanity in old age)³, and Deo Gratias

2. Brown XIV, no. 95.  
(in which the narrator is taught by a priest in a church).\(^1\) The better-known *Quia Amove Langueo*\(^2\) is also of this type: here, the "I" who stands "In a tabernacle of a toure ... musyng on the mone" is the object of a poignant appeal from the Virgin, who mourns for mankind's wilfulness:

> Nowe man, have mynde on me for-euer,
> loke on pyt loue pyt languysshyng,
> late vs neuer fro other disseuere,
> Myne helpe ys pytne oune, crepe under my wynge.

\((11.89-92)\)

In the frame lyrics discussed in the preceding pages, the presence of the "I" of the poet-speaker has the rhetorical effect of adding a "human" dimension to the presentation of Christian "sentence". The showing of ordinary sinful and ignorant human figures in visionary contact or discourse with either Biblical figures such as Christ, Mary, and Joseph, or with other exponents of Christian authority, carries the implicit moral that sinful mankind is well within the bounds of Divine surveillance and assistance. Frequently, there is either a prayer or a piece of overt moralizing from the poet to reinforce the "sentence" presented in the body of the work.\(^3\) The involvement of the "I" in the two roles of sinner-pupil and teacher-admonisher is seldom presented to such good effect as it is in the well-known lyric from Ms. Harley 2253, "Nou skrynketh rose and lylie flour."\(^4\)

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2. Brown XIV, no. 132.
3. E.g. see the last two stanzas of Brown XIV, no. 95.
The poem begins with a general moral statement about the mutability of human love, and an exhortation to believe in Christ (11.1-10). The speaker proceeds to tell of his own experience in the past, using the familiar *chanson d'aventure* convention of some of the frame lyrics discussed above:

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from petres-bourh in o morewenyng, 
as y me wende o my pley3yng ..
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He tells that he mourned for his "folie" (the exact nature of which, characteristically, is not specified) and prayed to the Virgin - for "ous", rather than for himself alone. In the third and fourth stanzas, he stresses that he still feels a sense of guilt and fear, and tells his audience that their only hope, like his, is in the "medycyn" of the Virgin. After praying again for sinful mankind, he makes a direct exhortation to a particular section of his audience:

```
Wymmon, wip bi iolyfte,  
þah þou be whyt & bryth on ble, 
þou þench on godes shoures;  
............. ......... (this line absent from ms.)
falewen shule þy floures.  
```

1. The inclusion in a short didactic poem of anything so specific about the speaker as a place-name - "petres-bourh" - is very unusual. Usually, the speaker's setting in time and space is generalized, and if details are given, they have an obvious thematic relevance, as in the lyric which begins:

```
In Somer bi-fore þe Ascenciun  
At Evensong on a Sonundai,  
Dwellyng in my devociun,  
For þe pees fast gon I prai ...(Brown XIV, no.119,11.1-4.)
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The presence of this local detail does little, however, to counteract the tone of generality which surrounds the presentation of the speaker. In terms of realism and particularity, the "I" in this poem is almost as anonymous as the speakers in the confessional poems discussed at the beginning of this chapter.
The fact that this exhortation marks a return to the subject matter of the first stanza,

ne is no quene so stark ne stour,
ne no leuedy so bryht in bour
pat ded ne shal by-glyde,  (11.4-6)

makes it clear that the poet's intention is to draw a contrast between earthly and divine love. He projects himself as a sinner who has learnt by experience the lesson that prayer and contemplation are better medicine for the soul than "pleyʒyng". He does this in order to provide authority for his final exhortation to women, that they should contemplate "godes shoures", just as he contemplates the purity and steadfastness of the Virgin. The rhetorical strategy illustrated by the deployment of the "I" is that the poet's self-portrayal as a sinner who has learnt the nature of truth provides the authority for his moralizing to others. There is a similar kind of "lesson of experience" realized through the manner in which the authors of Confessio Amantis and Piers Plowman depict themselves. The analogy between lyric and long allegorical narratives is a valid one, even though the "I's" in the longer poems are portrayed with greater realism and detail. In both kinds of poem, the demonstration of the poet-figure's sinfulness (manifested in the mention of "pleyʒyng" or "wanderyng") as a preparation for a lesson delivered in an omniscient voice, represents a variation upon a normal method of medieval didactic poetry. This is marked by a consistent use of an
The speakers in the frame lyrics and simpler devotional poems discussed above are, as we have seen, essentially types of humanity - the repentant sinner, the pupil figure - who are portrayed in a generalized fashion, with a notable absence of detail. The anonymous nature of these "I" figures is to be explained first by an implicit assumption about the autonomous nature of the poems' subject matter, secondly by the circumstances of the lyrics' transmission and presentation, and thirdly by literary convention. It would not have occurred to any of the lyric poets that they could portray themselves as types in a realist way - as the writers of longer allegorical and narrative works do - without interfering with the identification between "I" and audience, and hence with their task of correction and edification.

In a small but very interesting group of Middle English lyrics, the "I" of the speaker is portrayed in quite a different way. In those poems in which the speaker is an old man, close to death, there is a considerably greater

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1. This extract from a poem by William Herebert illustrates well this frequently encountered admonitory type of authorial voice:

By-bench, mon, j0erne on oeuche wyse
Er pou boe brought to bylke asyse,
On what pou shalt truste pare.
What god pou hauest, mon, her ydon
Prest per pou shalt ounder-oun,
Elles ever pou worst in kare. (Brown XIV, no. 23)
amount of realistic detail in the presentation of the "I" than there is in the lyrics discussed above. These poems are obviously cautionary in their intent, and the function of the realistically portrayed type figures in them is to arouse fear in the hearts of their listeners. R.M. Woolf, in her discussion of the Middle English death lyric (a genre of which the "old man" lyrics comprise a sub-group), touches upon the reason for which an audience might be expected to shun identification with the speaking "I" figures:

Love is usually a pleasurable emotion, whether poetically transmuted or not: the method of the Passion lyric therefore does not raise any particular aesthetic problem. But this is clearly not true of fear, for this emotion, unless given poetic transformation, is repellent to all; and people shun situations that will provoke it. The writer of the Passion lyric could therefore expect an imaginative co-operation from the reader, whilst the writer of the death lyric would have to expect an evasive and self-protecting response.1

The rhetorical strategy by which the writers of the "old man" poems confront their audiences' innate self-protecting tendencies is explicitly illustrated in the fourteenth century alliterative poem, the Parlement of the Thre Ages. In these lines, the ugly and rather vicious figure of Elde tells the antagonistic Youthe and Medill-Elde that they will one day come to share his frightening state:

Thou man in thi medill elde, hafe mynde whate I saye!
I am thi sire and thou my sone, the sothe for to telle,
And he the sone of thi-selfe, hat sittis one the stede,
For Elde is sire of Midill Elde and Middill Elde of
3outhe;
And haues gud daye, for now I go; to grave moste me
wende;
Dethe dynges one my dore, I dare no lengare byde.

(11.649-54)

The combination of warning and example in the short poems
to be considered below is never quite so explicit as this,
but it is nonetheless implied in each of them. The figure
of Elde manifested in *Thre Ages* and in shorter Middle
English didactic poems derives mainly from Latin literature,
from the elegies of Maximianus and the *De Contemptu Mundi*
of Innocent III.¹

The best of the poems of this kind in Middle English
literature is that in ms. Harley 2253, which Brown entitles
*An Old Man's Prayer*.² The work is in the form of a
monologue: it begins with the old man's prayer to be
absolved from sin ("He3e louerd, pou here my bone"),
and the bulk of the poem consists of a series of contrasts
between recollected "murthe" and present wretchedness.
The emotional and rhetorical force of this lyric derives
from the expression of the speaker's regret for the passing
of his strength and prowess in hunt and bower. The
following lines illustrate well the blend of nostalgia and
self-contempt:

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1. See G.R. Coffman, "Old Age from Horace to Chaucer",
*Speculum* IX (1934), pp.249-77.
Whil ich wes in wille wolde
In vch a bour among pe bolde
yholde wip pe heste;
Nou y may no fynger folde,
Lutel loued ant lasse ytolde,
y-leued wip pe leste.
A goute me hap ygreyped so,
ant ofer eueles monye mo,
y not whet bote is beste.
Bat er wes wilde ase pe ro,
nou y swynke, y mei nout so,
hit siwel me so faste.

Faste y wes on horse heh
ant werede worly wede.
Nou is faren al my feh,
Wip serewe bat ich hit euer seh;
a staf ys nou my stede. (11.18-34)

His consciousness that he has been guilty of the seven deadly sins (11.52-63) does little to counter the impression of nostalgia, and when he professes contrition, there is a feeling that he does so as much because he is now physically unable to engage in "murthes" as because he is genuinely repentant. The measure of the speaker's despair is contained in his plea for immediate death:

Dreadful dep, why wolt pou dare
bryng pis body bat is so bare
ant yn bale ybound? (11.86-88)

The concluding lines, which express the old man's intention to fall at the feet of God and his prayer,

god vs lene of ys lyht,
bat we of vontes habben syht
aut heuene to mede! (11.105-07)

do little to dispel the stark picture of Wanhope created in the earlier part of the poem. The possibility that personal experience played some part in the characterization of this "I" does suggest itself, but it is of no direct relevance to the poem's "sentence". An Old Man's Prayer was almost certainly written for the edification of an audience. The
voice of the moralist is perceptible in the comment "such is euel and elde", (1.46) which follows the speaker's detailed account of his present decrepit state. There is a stronger reminder to sinners that they are liable to suffer some day the same woe, in the use of the first person plural. The comment, "y sugge by ope r as e bi ous" (1.83) is followed by a direct appeal to the audience,

Careful mon ycast in care,  
y falewe as flour y-let forpare. (11.89-90)

There is another such challenge towards the end of the poem:

whet ys be beste bote  
bote heryen him pat haht vs boht,  
vre lord pat al bis world hab wroht,  
ant fallen him to fote? (11.99-102).

While it is impossible to disagree with Manning that this poem "presents as fine a characterization of the speaker as the Middle English religious lyric achieves",¹ it is essential to recognize that the characterization of the "I" has a firm didactic basis. The poem depicts a figure both pathetic and frightening in its realism, as a caution to those who would take a wilful delight in worldly "murthes". The speaker does not actually say to his audience, as the Elde does in the Parlement of the Thre Ages, "Makes 3oure mirrours bi me, men bi 3oure trouthe,"²

2. Elde's stern advice has a counterpart in a number of medieval tombstone inscriptions, of which this extract is typical:

Remembyr your-selfe well duryng tyme & space:  
I was as ye are nowe; and as I, ye shal be.  
Robbins, no. 126, 11.3-4.
but this is the response which the characterization of the old man implicitly requires.

The thirteenth century lyric which Brown entitles *Le Regret de Maximian* may well have provided the inspiration for *The Old Man's Prayer*. More diffuse in structure, and with rather less psychological detail than the later poem, the *Regret* is nevertheless also a cautionary exemplum of the ugliness and loneliness of sinful old age. Like the "I" of the fourteenth century poem, the figure of Maximian laments his lost vigour, is envious of those younger than he, and is filled with mingled self-pity and disgust:

```
Reu³foul is mi reed;
Hoe makeþ me selden gled,
Mi wif þat sholde be.
Of me hoe is al seed,
Hoe saþ ich waste breed.
Mine frend me nuleþ I-se.
Ich telle me for a qued,
þe wille ich mi³t, en heueed
I-beten nedde ich hoe
Crist þou do me reed!
Me were leuere deed,
þen þus alive to bee. (11.250-61)
```

Unlike the later poem, this one ends on a note of defiance, in the speaker's threat to do "hire" (presumably the "wif þat sholde be" alluded to in 1.252) an act of violence to stop her reproaches — "Were ich mon so ich was". This statement has none of the grand heroism of the modern poet's self-assertion, "An aged man is but a paltry thing/ A tattered coat upon a stick": it is hollow and grotesque,

since the speaker acknowledges his complete helplessness. The work's significance as an exemplum rather than a self-expression *per se* is attested to in the introduction to the monologue proper, when the speaker states that the plight of an old man is a common one:

```
bo laste his lif so longe,  
bat he bigon to ounstronge, 
As fele men tidep swo. (11.19-21)
```

There is also an echo of this warning in the monologue itself (1.132).

These two poems have closer affinities with works in which the "I" speaks in the stern accents of the preacher than with the simple confessions, prayers, and frame lyrics discussed earlier. Obviously enough, these "old man" poems differ from other contemporary admonitory poems in the degree to which their speakers are characterized: the "I" in most of the admonitory poems is an anonymous figure, representing no more than the authority of the Church, whereas the "I's" in *The Old Man's Prayer* and the *Regret* are presented with a comparatively large amount of realistic detail. The speakers in the latter works are presented in a realistic way in order to arouse in the reader or listener feelings of fear and disgust, and hence

1. See above, p.40: cp. also this extract from a fourteenth century poem on the evils of false friendship:

```
Eueri mon I counseile,  
To gouerne him in such a wyse, 
if hit so beo pat frendschup fayle  
His owne deden wol maken him ryse.  
Hold him In a mene a-syse -  
Euer to beo corteys and hende,  
ben baldely may he dispise.  
Euere fy on a feynt frende!  
```

(Brown XIV, no.104,11.57-64)
to encourage repentance and improvement. The use of unpleasant physical and psychological detail as a rhetorical device is also characteristic of other lyrics which treat the subject of death. Descriptions of decomposition and decay in the Middle English Body and Soul dialogues come readily to mind. Closer to the method of the "old man" monologues, however, are several short poems in which the speaker envisages the actual moment of death: e.g.

\begin{verbatim}
Wanne min eyhnen misten
and min heren sissen,
and mi nose koldet,
and mi tunge ffoldet,
and mi rude slaket,

al to late, al to late,
wanne be bere ys ate gate. 1
\end{verbatim}

The realism produced by the accretion of detail in all of these poems represents primarily a conventional rhetorical technique rather than a reflection of the actual experience of particular individual human beings.

The method of the "old man" poems may be further illuminated by a brief consideration of the twelfth century verse homily, Poema Morale. 2 This work - which is not strictly a "lyric", even in the sense in which modern critics of medieval literature employ the term - has as its theme the central importance to salvation of Man's free will, as these lines illustrate:

\begin{verbatim}
\end{verbatim}
Men are exhorted to lay up treasure in heaven by being merciful to their fellows, and by being careful not to place too much trust in worldly affections. A large part of the poem is devoted to a vivid description of the torments in store for those who choose to follow their own wills, rather than the will of God (11.220-95). One of the most interesting features of the piece, that which makes it relevant to the present study, is the first person introduction in which the speaker talks about himself as one who has led a sinful life:

Ich em nu alder þene ich wes awintre and a lare
Ich welde mare þen ich dede mi wit mihte bon mare.
Wel longe ich habbe child ibon a worde and a dede
þeh ich bo a wintre ald to þung ich em on rede.
Vnnet lif ich habbe iled, and þet me þincþ iede ..

Although now repentant, he is unable to "do bet" because of old age:

Ich mihte habbe bet idon hefde ich þe iselþe,
Nu ich walde ah ich ne mai, for elde and for un-helþe
Elde me is bistolen on er ich hit wiste.

This introductory passage of "self-revelation" plays an integral part in the unfolding of the poem's "sentence": the moralization on the dire consequences of persistence in sin is made the more convincing because of what the audience has been told about the preacher; viz., that he is one who learnt, through his own experience as a sinner, that the true Way is not "þe brode stret" of the individual will, but "þene narewe wei and þene wei grene" which has been defined by God's law. Through his own example, he stresses to his
audience that conversion in old age is no effective guarantee of salvation. Although he is now genuinely contrite, he still appears to lead the life of a sinner - "and yet me þincþ ilede" - and he is afraid because old age has robbed him of the power to manifest the reality within himself to the outside world. The method of stressing the necessity for a close correspondence between "will" and "works" through the dramatizing of the poet-figure's state of consciousness recalls Langland's manner of self-portrayal in *Piers Plowman*, C Passus VI.

The example set by the old man narrator of the *Poema Morale* differs from that of the "I's" in the two poems discussed earlier. The speakers in both *The Old Man's Prayer* and *Le Regret de Maximian* represent in one sense man's potential for continuing sinfulness, even in old age; there is a strong impression in both monologues that the speakers shun acts of sin only because they are no longer capable of them. These two lines from *Poema Morale* provide an instructive gloss upon this kind of continuing sinfulness:

\[
\text{Wenne de} \delta \text{ is attere dure wel late he bidde} \delta \text{ are}
\]
\[
\text{Wel late he lathe} \delta \text{ vvel werc pe ne mei hit don ne mare. (11.127-28)}
\]

It is probable that the writers of the two Maximianus-inspired monologues inserted the detail of hypocrisy into the depiction of their first-person speakers in order to heighten the effect of the repulsiveness of old age, and hence to encourage their audiences to early repentance. Gower and Langland, like the writers of these three poems,
portray themselves as old men in order to provide a warning about the common fate of mankind, as we shall see in subsequent chapters.

The main characteristics of the "I" in the religious lyrics are, then, a useful introduction to those of the major allegorical narratives of the fourteenth century. The three "old man" poems discussed above are atypical of the medieval lyric genre in that their speakers are presented in a vividly naturalistic way. They resemble the poet-figures in longer works such as *Pearl, Confessio Amantis*, and *Piers Plowman*, who are also depicted in some detail. It is essential to recognize, however, that the realistic style in which the "I" is presented, in shorter and longer poems alike, does not imply self-expression on the part of the poets. The author of *The Old Man's Prayer*, like the author of *Pearl* and the writers of short confessional poems, prayers, and "frame" meditations, bodies himself forth in his writing primarily as a representative of humanity rather than as an individual. Although the longer poems to be discussed now do not reflect to the same extent as most of the lyrics the concept of the work of art as common property, the poets are present, like the speakers in the lyrics, as parts of the "comun vois".
CHAPTER 2:

The Figure of the Poet in
the Parlement of the Three Ages and Pearl.
In the two poems to be discussed in this chapter, the Parlement of the Thre Ages and Pearl, the first person speakers are portrayed in a manner very different from the manner in which the speakers in most of the religious lyrics are portrayed. Compared with the speakers in simple devotional poetry, the "I" figures in these two alliterative works have definite local habitations - if not names. In most of the religious lyrics, whether simple prayers, forms of confession, or "frame" poems, the "I" is conceived as a representative of humanity, portrayed in a generalized, non-specific way: the poet-figures in both of the works to be considered now are also representative figures, but they are depicted in much more vigorous, more realistic, terms. The two anonymous fourteenth century poets are "self-conscious" artists, inasmuch as they project into their creations extended discussions of their interests and moral attitudes, and evidence of their moral development. In both the Parlement of the Thre Ages and Pearl, the presentation of self is integral to the unfolding of "sentence" which is of an unmistakably Christian kind. No less than the shorter poems considered in the previous chapter, these two poems manifest a concern for the "sawle gode" of their audiences, at the same time as they set out what are ostensibly "personal" experiences.

Both poems employ, although in a heightened and more elaborate way, the rhetorical strategy associated with the use of the "I" in the frame lyrics. This is a strategy of demonstration and dramatization, whereby the poet portrays himself as a sinner who has learned by experience - usually experience
gained in vision - a lesson about man's relation to God and to the life to come. The extent to which an initial state of sinfulness is emphasized does vary; for example, the "I" figures in "Nou skrinketh rose and lylie-flour" and *Pearl* are, unlike those of "Als i lay vp-on a nith" and the *Parlement of the Thre Ages*, clearly "placed" as sinners. In the statements made by the speakers at the end of all four poems, however, there is a sense of increased awareness and resolve. In order that the audience may appreciate the application to their own lives of the lessons learnt by the speakers, it is necessary that the latter be portrayed in such a way to attract the identification of their listeners or readers. In the lyrics, identification is encouraged by the very generality and anonymity of the speaker; the term "identification" obviously has a very literal sense when applied to works intended for repetition by a wide audience.¹ In the case of the two alliterative poems, identification between audience and poet-figure is more in the nature of curiosity and sympathetic association. Both poets portray themselves as attractively human figures whose range of experience is capable of being shared by their audiences: their participation in a community of feeling is conveyed by the use of the first person plural pronoun encountered so frequently in the religious lyrics, notably in prayers at the conclusion of the poems.

*Pearl* and the *Parlement of the Thre Ages* are to be considered in the same chapter for two reasons. First, they

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¹ The "old man" poems discussed at the end of the previous chapter are excluded, since in these poems the example offered by the speaker is of a cautionary kind.
exhibit a basically similar structure: each begins with an account of what the poet-figure did or thought at some point in the past; this preliminary statement is followed by the account of a vision seen in sleep, comprising the major part of the poem; at the conclusion of each there is comment upon the significance of the dream, relative to the poet's state of mind before falling asleep. (The nature of the poet's participation in his dream in the Parlement is different from that of the "I" in Pearl, since in the latter the poet is actively present as a character within his own vision.) More important than structural similarity is the fact that the two poems present "sentence" in a basically similar way, by juxtaposing the claims of human emotion, expressed through the figure of the poet, against the claims of Christian doctrine in such a way that the claims of authority are not invalidated. Rather, their significance is heightened by the fact that they are shown within the framework of human acceptance or rejection. The conclusion of Pearl, like the conclusion of the Parlement, underlines not only the increased awareness of each "I", but also the refusal or inability of each to accept wholeheartedly the claims of authority as they are advanced by the doctrinaire figures who speak in the visions.

I.

Since the Parlement of the Thre Ages is neither as popular nor as well-known as Pearl, a brief summary of the narrative may be in order. The poem begins with a description of how the poet spent a morning "in the monethe of May", engaged in the "mirthe" of poaching in the woods; after stalking, killing, and dismembering a hart, he falls asleep and dreams a vision of three men who are identified as 3outhe, Medill-Elde, and
Elde. The first two of these engage in a spirited argument about the respective merits of their antithetical ways of life — in the terminology of a contemporary alliterative poem, "Southe" represents Waster, and Medill-Elde, Winner. Their "threpe" is silenced when the third figure reveals his identity to them, and declares that ultimately Southe's spending and Medill-Elde's getting are equally futile. Elde warns them that he was at different stages of his life as each of them is now, and that their activities, like his, will be brought to a close by repulsive and disabling old age. In order to bring home to his audience the transience of worldly glory, Elde recounts the stories of the Nine Worthies of medieval legend and makes additional mention of a number of other famous figures such as Aristotle, Solomon, Merlyn, and the lovers whose adventures form the staple stuff of medieval romance. After this recital occupying some 330 lines of the printed text (which modern critics invariably find disproportionate and rather tedious), Elde repeats his warning and goes off to his death. The poem concludes with a brief mention of the poet's waking in the late afternoon and of his departure from the wood, together with a prayer.


2. See, for example, Dorothy Everett, Essays on Middle English Literature, Oxford, Clarendon Press (1955), p.51, and John Speirs, Medieval English Poetry, Faber (1958), pp.299-300. But it is as well to keep in mind the medieval audience's fondness for apparently (to modern eyes) uninteresting catalogues and lists, which goes some way towards explaining, if not towards justifying, the length of Elde's sermon.
The prologue, in which the poet tells of his activities before falling asleep, is unusually long and detailed when compared with the introductory sections of most other dream vision poems: the proem of the *Roman de la Rose*, for example, is less than half the length, and tells us almost nothing about the poet as he exists outside the world of dream. The author of the *Parlement* depicts himself as a poacher, going out alone into the woods in May to try his luck.¹ There is little in the whole of Middle English literature to equal the description of the stalking, killing, and dismemberment of the hart for sheer naturalistic vigour, and the passage has deservedly been the subject of admiring comment by all who have written about the poem. Dorothy Everett's comment is typical:

There is some good description in the poem, particularly in the passages on deer stalking and hawking, where the poet writes circumstantially and, it would seem, from first-hand observation. We can share the excitement of the deer stalker as he watched to see "by waggynge of leues" where the wind was, and then, taking up his stand behind a crab-apple tree, remained long motionless, in spite of the gnats that "gretely me greuede and gnewen myn eghne", while the hart "stotayde and stelkett and starede full brode".² (Italics mine)

The information that the hunting is illegal is introduced casually, in the manner of an aside to his audience:

1. "Try my luck" translates "my werdes to dreghe" (1.5). All quotations are from the most recent edition of the poem, that by M.Y. Offord. E.E.T.S. O.S. 246 (1959).

2. Op. cit., p.51. It is interesting to observe that this generally "objective" modern critic identifies so strongly with the speaker in this part of the poem - note the section in italics. How much more must the contemporary audience, listening to the account of a ritual about which they were no doubt better informed than Miss Everett, have sympathized with the speaker!
These first 100 lines of the poem do, at one level, amount to a fourteenth century plain man's guide to the techniques of hunting and dissection. What is more interesting, however, is the impression of the speaker's ethos which emerges from them. The figure who engages in this burst of spirited activity is clearly a man who is in the prime of life, enjoying all that primitive nature has to offer him; the very vigour of the description attests to the speaker's delight in sport on a sunny day. Emotionally as well as literally ("my body and my bowe I buskede with leues"), he is part of the May landscape, like the birds which are "iche ... faynere þan oþer/ That the derke was done & the daye lightenede" (11.15-16).

When the fourteenth century audience heard the lines,

And als I satte in my sette the sone was so warme,
And I for slepeles was slome, and slomerde a while;
And there me dremed, in that dowte, a full dreghe sweuynn,
And whate I seghe in my saule the sothe I schall telle,

they would almost certainly have anticipated that the nature of the dream would bear some relation to the speaker's waking mood. Chaucer mentions a popular medieval notion of the connection between dreams and waking experience in terms which are particularly appropriate for the dreamer in the Parlement of the Thre Ages:

The wery huntere, slepynge in his bed,
To wode ayeyn his mynde goth anon.¹

¹. The Parlement of Foules, 11.99-100.
The ethos of the speaker of the prologue permeates the description and the dramatic "characterization" of Jouthe in the following part of the poem. Jouthe is the only one of the figures who "threppeden full 3erne" to elicit the poet's wholehearted approval - "the semelyeste segge that I seghe euer" (1.135). The lines in which the comely, richly attired young man is described exhibit the same uncritical enjoyment which characterizes the earlier hunting description, e.g.:

He was balghe in the breste and brode in the scholdirs,  
His axles and his armes were i-liche longe,  
And in the medill als a mayden menskfully schapen;  
Longe legges and large, and lele for to schewe.  

(11.112-15)

The bias of the poet's viewpoint in favour of Jouthe is further highlighted by the fact that the description of the character is as long as the descriptions of Medill-Elde and Elde combined, and by the very structure of the debate between Jouthe and Medill-Elde, four-fifths of which is taken up with the speeches of Jouthe. But the clearest evidence of the poet's identification with the character is provided by Jouthe's ringing defence of his way of life against Medill-Elde's charge of "wasting": the bulk of this speech (11.195-260) is an account of Jouthe's chief recreation, hawking. The passage is characterized by the same detailed, technical language as is found in the dream prologue, in which the poet's own recreation is described. Here, clearly enough, the mind of the hunter returns "to wode ayeyn":

Then fawkoners full fersely founden þam aftire,  
To helpen thaire hawkes thay hyen thaym full 3erne,  
For the bitt of his bill bitterly he strikes.  
They knelyn doun one thaire knees and krepyn full lowe,  
Wynnne to his wynge and wrythen thaym to-gedire,  
Brosten the bones and brekym thaym in sondire,  
Puttis owte with a penn þe maryo one his gloue,  
And quopes thaym to the querrrye that quelled hym to þe dethe.  

(11.226-33)
An audience hearing the poet read this part of the "overheard" debate could hardly fail to notice his similarity to the character, since only a short time before they had heard him make a speech of similar content and style.

John Speirs notes the resemblance between the "I" of the introduction and the character 3outhe seen in the vision:

The initial deer-stalking episode and the later episode of Youthe hawking by a river have clearly the greatest relevance in conveying the Pride of Life experience that is contrasted with Age.¹

In view of the similar attitude to life shown to be shared by the poet and the character who is also "gerede alle in grene" (1.122), together with the highly sympathetic portrait of 3outhe which emerges from the debate with Medill-Elde, it seems justifiable to regard 3outhe as a surrogate and spokesman for the poet. The identification between the two is not, of course, complete, as there is an implicit difference between the respective social positions of poet and envisioned character. Unlike his less aristocratic counterpart, 3outhe is free to hunt within the limits of the law. It is possible to see in the portrait of 3outhe made through description and dramatic speech an image of the "I" who speaks in the prologue as he would like to be. The idealization of the poet-figure in the narration of a dream experience is characteristic of many dream vision poems: the "I" who experiences a series of adventures within the stylised landscape of the first part of the Roman de la Rose, for example, is not an historically real Guillaume de Lorris, but an idealized version

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of the typical courtly lover; similarly the "I" who enters the Garden of Love in the *Parlement of Foules* is a different figure from the speaker of the introductory lines, inasmuch as he is no longer introspective, but fascinated by the external world. The *Parlement of the Thre Ages* differs from these works in that in it the poet is not directly present in the events of the vision. Probably, he felt that by submerging his own ethos as it is presented earlier in the poem beneath the ethos of a typical figure such as 3outhe, the sentence of his work might be furthered. The transformation of the poet which occurs in the vision is an example of the characteristic medieval preference for figures of a generalized kind over individual and particular ones. Yet although 3outhe is clearly a typical figure, he is presented with that vigour and force which characterizes the presentation of the less typical "I" of the introductory hunting description.

To the point at which the debate between 3outhe and Medill-Elde ends (1.264), the combined effect of the prologue and of 3outhe's victory over the sour materialism of his antagonist is to suggest a carefree, even hedonistic view of life. Medill-Elde is not portrayed with sufficient force or at sufficient length for his attitude of sober materialism to counter the attitude to life implied in the prologue and uncompromisingly stated in 3outhe's part of the debate. The only hint

1. For a view of the relation between the figure of 3outhe and the Three Living Men of literary convention, see Offord, *Introduction*, p.xl.
of any darker reality to the point at which the debate ends is
the brief description of Elde (11.152-68). The poet's distaste
for the figure is conveyed in language similar to that of the
"old man" lyrics discussed in the previous chapter; note for
example the following lines,

Crokede and courbede, encrampeschett for elde;
Alle disfygured was his face, and fadit his hewe,
His berde and browes were blanchede full whitte,
And the hare one his hede hewed of the same.
He was ballede and blynde, and alle babirlippede,
Totheles and tenefull, I telle 3owe for sothe.

(11.154-59)

There is also something rather fearful about the character's
implied hypocrisy: Elde cries for Christ's mercy and mutters
the creed, but at the same time he is described as being "envyous
and angrye", and as having no joy in anything but his crutch and
his couch (11.160-62, 1.165). Hypocrisy, too, is characteristic
of the Elde-type speakers in the group of poems discussed in
the previous chapter.¹

In the lively debate which follows, this description is
temporarily forgotten. When Elde begins to speak, however,
the attitude of delight in worldly joys which has until this
point been strongly advocated is immediately cast into shadow.
There can be no mistaking the authoritative tone of Elde's
speech, when he tells Medill-Elde and 3outhe that he was once
as they are, and that Death will bring to an end the different
worldly pursuits of them both:

I sett bi my-selfe and sekis it no forthire:
While I was 3onge in my southe and 3ape of my dedys,
I was als euerrous in armes as ouer of 3oure-selven,

¹. See above, pp.40-47.
If we try to look at the poem from the point of view of its listening audience, we realize, even more than when we read it on the printed page, what an abrupt change in the prevailing tone of the narrative this speech marks. Keeping in mind that the poet is now speaking to his audience in the voice of Elde, we realise that he is now displaying himself to his listeners in a totally new light - as one who warns and exhorts, rather than as one who shows a youthful, carefree attitude to life. Previously, the "I" of the poem, both in the prologue and in the persona of Southe, offered himself as a figure to attract sympathy and identification; now, in the persona of Elde, he is clearly a figure to be feared.¹

¹ It is justifiable to suggest the ramifications of the poem's original mode of presentation, in view of the fact that it is made so clear within the work; e.g. "And whate I seghe in my saule the sothe I schall telle" (1.103), "And 3e will, ledys, me listen ane hande-while" (1.106). In the consideration of the poet figure in Pearl and in other fourteenth century poems, questions of manner of presentation - listening vs. reading audience - will not be discussed, since there is not such decisive evidence of this as there is in the Parlement. As narrator reading aloud to an audience of listeners, the poet would have inevitably been required to "act out" the part of Elde: the assumption of this role, after the convincing self-portrait at the beginning and the associated part of Southe, must have come as something of a shock to his listeners.
The typical but grimly realistic characterization of Elde loses most of its effect when he begins to tell the series of exemplary stories on the theme of the transience of worldly glory. The purpose for which the stories of the Nine Worthies are told seems to have been overlooked (by the poet) for most of the 330 lines which follow Elde's stern warning to 3outhe, Medill-Elde, and the audience "outside" the poem. It is easy for even the reader to forget that these are told by Elde for a clearly defined moral purpose, so we can imagine how much more difficult it must have been for the listening audience to regard the stories as anything but examples of worthy deeds, examples to be savoured for their own sake. Perhaps the narrator found it physically difficult - in terms of voice, gesture, etc. - to sustain the portrayal of Elde. Again, it may be that the poet was sufficiently cunning to present the catalogue of the Worthies in such a way that his audience would receive and enjoy it as history to which no moral was appended, in order to startle them into recognition when Elde - or rather, the poet playing the part of Elde - sounds again the dark note of *vanitas vanitatum* at the end:

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Sythen doughtynes when dede comes ne dare noghte habyde,
Ne dethe wondes for no witt to wende where hym lykes,
And ther-to paramours and pride puttes he full lowe;
Ne there es reches ne rent may rawnsone your lyues,
Ne noghte es sekire to youre-selfe in certayne bot dethe..
```

(11.631-35)

But the most reasonable explanation for the slackening of emotional intensity in the Nine Worthies episode is that the poet temporarily lost interest in the "message" announced so memorably by Elde at the beginning of his speech.
The passage quoted above indicates that the poet does regain his sense of the dramatic framework of the narrative. Elde speaks again with the authority of fate, announcing the common end of mankind:

Als God in his gospelle graythely 3ow teches:
*Ite ostendite vos sacerdotibus,*
To schryue 3ow full schirle, and schewe 3ow to prestis.
*Et ecce omnia munda sunt vobis,*
And 3e bat wronge wroghte schall worthen full clene.
Thou man in thi medill elde, hafe mynde whate I saye!
And he the sone of thi-selfe, bat sittis one the stede,
For Elde es sire of Midill Elde and Midill Elde of 3outhe;
And haues gud daye, for now I go; to graue moste me wende..

(11.644-53)

That his authority is that of the Church is suggested by the fact that Elde's rhetoric is the rhetoric of the Middle English sermon: the admonitory second person style, and the incorporation of Biblical quotation are devices of the sermon¹ and sermon-based poetry.² The fact that 3outhe and Medill-Elde make no direct reply has a twofold significance: their silence, at the level of the "scene" which the narrator recollects, suggests that they have no defence against Elde's wisdom, and at the level of the poet-narrator's relation to his audience, it suggests that Elde is speaking to a much wider audience than one of two people. In other words, the absence of any opposition from the other figures in the dream implies that Elde has become the official representative of the poet: this identification of character and narrator in the absence of other "dramatic" speeches at this point in the poem is the logical consequence of reading aloud.

¹. W.O. Ross, *Middle English Sermons*, E.E.T.S. O.S. 209, nos. 14, 166 ("3e" form); 34, 35 (Biblical quotation).
Although there is some truth in Oakden's suggestion that "his [the author's] ostensible sympathy is with Old Age," we must take into account the fact that the poem does not conclude with Elde's dire warning of the imminence of death. There is a return to the situation of the poet before he fell asleep, "on a banke be a bryme syde". He is not awakened by Elde's sermon, but by the sound of a bugle "be blowen full lowde" (11.656-57): this presumably is the noise of a hunt which, in the terms of the poem, signifies a return to the delights of the world. The poet relates that after lying there for a while longer (1.657), he "foundede appon fote and ferkede to-warde townn" (1.659): he does not suggest that he did so in order to follow Elde's command, "To schryue 3ow full schirle, and schewe 3ow to prestis", but merely because the day had come to an end. The manner in which he sums up his experience seems rather ironical:

\[
\text{And in the monethe of Maye thies mirthes me tydde, } \\
\text{Als I schurtted me in a schelf in be schawes faire, } \\
\text{And belde me in the birches with bewes full smale, } \\
\text{And lugede me in the leues that lighte were & grene.}
\]

(11.660-63, italics mine)

It is natural that he should recall his hunting experience and his vision of 3outhe's victory over Medill-Elde as "mirthes", but the description hardly applies to his vision of Elde. There is a suggestion here that it is possible to take Elde and his grim warning too seriously. The terms of the prayer with which the poem concludes are a more reliable indication of the poet's ultimate point of view:

1. Alliterative Poetry in Middle English, Manchester (1936); reprinted 1968, Archon Books, p.53.

2. There is no evidence in the poem to support Speirs's statement that the dreamer makes his way home "soberly", op. cit., p.301.
There dere Drightyne this daye dele vs of thi blysse,  
And Marie, hat es mylde qwene, amende vs of synn.

By praying for himself and for all his listeners, the poet indicates his awareness of an ultimate religious sanction, but it is significant to note that he does not address his prayer to Elde's stern Old Testament God, but to "dere Drightyne" and "Marie .. mylde qwene". The last eleven lines provide an indirect answer to Elde's stern warnings of temporality. Elde speaks with an undeniable authority, but the poet manages to suggest in the ways that have been suggested above that worldly joys are not so worthless and hollow as Elde and "Ecclesiastes the clerke" assert.

The conclusion of the poem thus presents a synthesis of two views of life, the view of Elde on the one hand, and the view expressed directly by Jouthe and implied in the introduction on the other. The carefree attitude which Jouthe espouses, and which the poet himself espoused before his visionary experience, is retrospectively modified at the end of the poem by the speaker's recognition of his sinfulness. He does not reject the preacher's sternly ascetic moralizing, but he does suggest that Elde's teaching should not prohibit the natural human activities which find their expression in one man's activities on a day in Spring. By showing that his own outlook - implicit in the first person introduction and directly expressed by Jouthe - was modified but not undermined by the moralizing of Elde - the poet offers himself as an example to his audience, even though he does not say, as Elde does, "I sett ensample bi my-selve".

II

The poet-figure in Pearl, unlike his counterpart in the Parlement of the Thre Ages, is present as an "I" throughout almost
the whole of the poem, from the preliminary "setting" for the dream experience, through the narration of the reported vision and dialogue, to the moralitas and the prayer with which the work concludes. In Pearl, even more than in the other alliterative poem, the poet's self-depiction through what he tells about himself in the prologue and through the "characterization" within the dialogue, is integral to our understanding of the lesson taught by the poem. Pearl is unquestionably a more memorable and complex poem than the Parlement, not only because of its highly original treatment of the "I", but also because of its stylistic configuration. There are obvious difficulties involved in apprehending the meaning of a work of such great structural refinement, a work incorporating an intricate pattern of symbolism and underlain by both intense personal feeling and considerable theological knowledge.

In spite of these difficulties, however, it seems strange that for so long criticism of the poem has been preoccupied with considerations such as the relative merits of considering it as either allegory or elegy, the precise nature of the poem's symbolism, and the sources of the theological arguments contained within it.¹ Strange, because even though these considerations have brought forth some enlightening results, they are only

peripheral to what Charles Moorman terms "the dramatic heart of the poem",\(^1\) the dialogue between the poet-figure and the Pearl-maiden. Moorman's study of Pearl, like a later one by A.C. Spearing\(^2\) which seems to be indebted to it, uses the method of tracing the dialogue between the obstinately literal-minded poet figure and his all-wise otherworldly instructress in order to show that the fundamental stylistic and structural feature of the poem is drama of a very human and realistic kind. This study owes much to the arguments of both critics, and differs from them in only a few points of detail. An awareness of the Pearl-poet's achievement in the use of self-characterization as a rhetorical method should, however, be sharpened by comparison with the use of the technique by other contemporary poets.

The Parlement of the Thre Ages begins with the description of a set of events, and as this description proceeds, an impression of the speaker's nature or ethos emerges. In the first sixty lines of Pearl an event is also described - a visit to a "huyle" or grave mound - but the state of mind of the speaker is focussed upon in a more direct way than it is in the other alliterative poem. The poet addresses his audience as one who mourns a loss whose nature is only obliquely stated; the use of the feminine pronoun with reference to the lost pearl\(^3\) suggest that the

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speaker's grief has a human source, but the exact identity of the figure "so clad in clot" is not established. The speaker's grief is present and immediate;

I dewyne, fordolked of luf-daungere
Of þat pryuy perle wythouten spot, (11.11-12)

but his own commentary upon it suggests that at one time he was even more desolate and sorrowful: he tells that when he visited the mound "In Augoste in a hyȝ seysoun", he was unable to subdue his will to Reason (1.52) or to derive comfort from the example of Christ:

I playned my perle þat þer wat spenned
Wyth fyrce skylle þat faste fæȝt;  
þaȝ kynde of Kryst me comfort kěnned,  
My wreched wylle in wo ay wraȝte. (11. 53-56)

"My wreched wylle in wo ay wraȝte": this line incisively sums up the way in which the speaker behaves during the visionary experience which comes when he falls asleep at the spot where the "pearl" was buried. At the introduction to this part of the narrative is the comment:

My goste is gon in Godeȝ grace
In auenture þer meruaylȝ meuen. (11.63-64)

The debate which follows is the history of the poet-figure's attempt to follow the implications of "Godeȝ grace" as it is explained by the heavenly teacher, the attempt which is continually thwarted by the assertion of his "wreched wylle". In Pearl, the human will is dramatized mainly in terms of the poet-dreamer's emotional insistence upon possessing and re-claiming that which he considers to be his - the person of the now transfigured Pearl-maiden.

The dreamer's first words to the Maiden, whom
he recognizes as she who had been to him "nerre þen aunte or nece", indicate a blend of joy and reproach which is undeniably realistic:

"O perle", quod I, "in perle, py, t,
Art þou my perle þat I haf þayned,
Regretted by myn one on ny, te?
Much longeung haf I for þe'layned,
Sy þe en into gresse þou me agly, te.
Pensyf, payred, I am forpayned,
And þou in a lyf of lykyng ly, te.....
What wyrde hat, hyder my iuel'vayned,
And don me in þys del and gret daunger?" (11.241-50)

He is unable to refrain from opposing his beloved's life of "lykyng" to his own life of "longyng" and "daunger", and this earns him reproof from the Maiden; she points out that he had never owned a pearl at all, merely a rose "þat flowred and fayled as kynde hyt gef", and that his "wyrde" has been a benefactor rather than a thief, since it has given him an eternal treasure (11.270-74). The dreamer begs to be excused for his rashness, but goes on to assert that he will cross the stream to live forever with the Maiden whom he sees in the valley. Indignantly, she tells him that these "þre worde3 ... spoken at ene" are quite ill-founded, and that he must consider the laws which God has ordained for man's entry into the "lyf of lykyng". But this advice is small comfort for him and he tells her in stronger terms than before of his present anguish:

My precios perle dot, me gret pyne.
What serue, tresor, Bot gare, man grete
When he hit schal efte wyth þene, tyne?
Now rech I neuer for to declyne,
Ne how fer of folde þat man me fleme.
When I am partle of perle myne,
Bot durande doel what may men deme? (11.330-36)

1. For a good discussion of the "recognition" scene, see P.M. Kean, The Pearl: An Interpretation, Routledge and Kegan Paul (1967), Chapter II. "The immediate recognition, the emotional reaction, the reference back to an event, not an idea, all point away from personification and towards realism." (p.118).
The Maiden reminds him again that his human point of view is sadly limited: instead of deeming "doel-dystresse", she says, he should "Deme Dry^ten" by earnest prayer, since "Hys comforte" is the only means both of present consolation and of eternal salvation. The dreamer appears at last to have accepted her teaching as truth, since he begs her forgiveness for words spoken in passion - "spornande in spelle" (11.362/64) - and states that the ground of his happiness is "Bot Crystes mersy and Mary and Jon" (11.382-84). In return for this new humility the Maiden speaks to him more kindly than she had done before, and she begins to satisfy his curiosity about her splendid state. But he is unable to comprehend her lyrical statement of the bond of love between herself and Christ:

I am holy hysse:
Hys prese, hys prys, and his parage
Is rote and grounde of alle my blysse. (11.418-20)

Reluctant to incur her censure again ' "Dysplese^ not if I speke error" - he suggests gently that she is guilty of usurping the place of the Virgin (11.427-28). The Maiden tells him about the condition of "courtaysye" in the eternal kingdom, by which all who dwell there are as kings and queens,

So fare we alle wyth luf and lyste
To kyng and quene by cortaysye. (11.456-68)

This explanation does not satisfy the dreamer, with his earth-bound notions of hierarchy and right, and he expostulates that such a state is unworthy of God, since it could accept one so young:

~ou lyfed not two _er in oure _ede
~ou cowpe neuer God nauer plese ne pray,
Ne neuer _aw _er Pater ne Crede;
And quen mad on be fyrst day!
I may not traw, so God me spede,
pat God wolde wrybe so wrange away. (11.483-88)
In order to show him that worldly notions of less and more are inapplicable to God's mercy, the instructress narrates the parable of the labourers in the vineyard, explaining that she is as those who came "In euentyde into be vyne". But he remains unconvinced - "Me ðynk þy tale vnrresounable" - and counter-argues by a wilful use of Scripture to support his notion of grace as a reward for righteous works (11.590-96). The Maiden explains patiently that God's grace knows no such considerations of less and more, and tells him of the special place of the innocent, established through Christ's sacrifice. She declares that if he is to repeat his words before God, his presumption will be revealed, and she counsels that righteousness will be of no avail if he does not possess the innocent attitude of the child:

Gyue þe to passe, when þou arte tryed,
By innocens and not by ryȝte. (11.707-08)

The dreamer does not pursue his contention about "ryȝte" any further, but his inability to accept the Maiden's claim concerning her position in the heavenly society is again soon apparent, in his accusation that she has supplanted others in becoming the bride of the Lamb:

And þou con alle þo dere out dryf
And fro þat maryag al oþer depres,
Al only þyself so stout and styf,
A makeleȝ may and maskelleȝ. (11.777-80)

She explains to him the difference between "maskelloses" and "makeleȝ", and proceeds to tell him about Christ's sacrifice for man in Jerusalem, and that there is no competition among the pure souls for the love of Christ - "þe mo þe myryer, so God me blesse". The speech in which the Maiden discourses upon the sacrifice of the Lamb and His reunion with the blessed in Paradise is a long one, uninterrupted by further questions from
the dreamer. It is interesting to observe, however, that the audience is not allowed to forget the presence of the questioning "I": the Maiden refers several times to "pou" (e.g. "Lest les pou leue my tale farande", 1.865) and her use of "maskele\textsubscript{3}" at the end of the speech (1.900) looks back to the dreamer's mistaken allegation at the beginning. Unlike the author of the \textit{Parlement of the Thre Ages}, the Pearl-poet does not allow his dramatic "situation" to be submerged beneath a lengthy passage of explication and instruction from an exponent of doctrine. Elde loses sight of his immediate audience when he embarks upon the narration of a series of exempla. So too do the authority-figures in \textit{Confessio Amantis} and \textit{Piers Plowman}. Gower, Langland, and the author of the \textit{Parlement} do not show the Pearl-poet's ability to realize doctrine in a frame which is consistently dramatic.

The dreamer's apology to the Maiden is poignant in its mixture of self-abasement and continued misunderstanding:

"Neuer \textit{be} les let be my \textit{ponc}!
Quod I. "My perle, \textit{ba}, I appose;
I schulde not tempte by wyt so wlonc,
To Kryste\textsubscript{3} chambre \textit{bat} art ichoze.
I am bot mokke and mul among,
And pou so ryche a reken rose.."  \hspace{1cm} (11.901-06)

His reference to the resplendent Maiden as a "rose" reveals that he is not yet fully aware of all that her transfigured state implies: at the beginning of the dialogue, the Maiden tells him that what he had possessed on earth was a rose, which "To a perle of prys is put in pref" (1.272). The dreamer's misdirected use of the rose metaphor suggests that he still
regards the Maiden as his personal possession. The wilfulness inherent in this idea of continued ownership is, however, of a less serious kind than that revealed in some of his previous comments and questions, and it passes unchecked by the Maiden.

The dreamer's continued bewilderment manifests itself in his naïve comment about the City of God (11.919-22): he cannot understand how the Maiden can live in Jerusalem, since "pat noble note" is situated in Judaea. Moreover, he shows himself to be still dubious about that which he cannot see "with y3en", in spite of the Maiden's initial reproof (1.296). His instructress again offers satisfaction, by explaining that the Lamb dwells with the blessed in the New Jerusalem recorded in the Apocalypse, and by consenting (through permission of Christ) to his request for a sight of that "clene cloyster". She sums up all that she has been trying to teach him by emphasizing his inability to enter the city:

To strech in þe strete þou hast no vygour,
Bot þou were clene wythouten mote. (11.971-72)

This is the last time that the Maiden speaks directly: most of the remainder of the narration of the visionary experience is taken up with the description of the New Jerusalem and of the pageant of maidens led by the Lamb. Some commentators feel that there is a slackening of emotional and dramatic intensity

1. It seems justifiable to regard the second use of the rose metaphor in the light of the first, in view of the precision with which imagery is used in the poem. For a discussion of the meaning of the pearl image itself, see W.S. Johnson, "The Imagery and Diction of 'The Pearl': Toward an Interpretation", Conley, pp.220-71, and Spearing, op. cit., pp.159-70.

in this section of the poem, where the poet addresses his audience directly. But in fact one kind of drama is here replaced by another: more accurately, one strand of the drama as it has been developed to this point is elaborated, while another is discarded. In this long descriptive passage (11.985-1152) there is a greater sense than earlier in the poem of the contrast between the poet-figure's two levels of awareness - between his present relative wisdom exhibited in the vision prologue, and his inner conflict and amazement within the dream.

The recording of the dreamer's incredulous reaction to the sight of the New Jerusalem - through comments such as "I stod as stylle as dased quayle" and "Alas, þoþ I, who did at spyt" - prepares for his delighted recognition of the one familiar feature in it,

\begin{align*}
\text{þen sa} & , I þer my lyttel quene, \\
\text{þat I wende had standen by me in sclade.} \\
\text{Lorde, much of mirþe wat} & , þat ho made \\
\text{Among her fere} & , þat wat so quy! 
\end{align*}

(11.1147-50)

This in turn makes completely credible the forbidden act of attempting to cross the stream. It is hardly necessary to note that this has a kind of inevitability, since the debate has shown so well the dreamer's inability to concur completely with the teachings of the Maiden. This air of inevitability is heightened by the effect, present throughout the poem but most obviously after the dialogue section, of the poet's viewing himself in retrospect, as it were. He knows now, as he addresses his audience in the present tense, that his mind was driven to "maddyng", but that then the action was motivated by irresistible impulse.
The final section of the poem (Section XX) is narrated in the voice of one who is more self-aware than the "I" who participates in the debate; he recognizes that had he obeyed the Maiden's injunction,

As helde, drawen to Godde, present,  
To mo of his mysterys I hade ben dryuen. (11.1193-94)

The action which results in the termination of the vision brings about his fullest realization, which he conveys directly to his audience:

Bot ay wolde man of happe more hente  
þen moþte by ryþt vpon hem clyuen.  
þerfore my ioye wat sone toriuen,  
And I kaste of kythè, þat lasteþ aye.  
Lorde, mad hit arn þat agayn þe stryuen  
Oþer proferen þe oþ þagayn þy paye. (11.1195-1200)

He commends the pearl - in a valediction which reinforces the idea that she was his child^1- to the protection of Christ, and his concluding prayer shows that he has hopes to share her estate:

þat in þe forme of bred and wyn  
þe preste vus schewþe vch a daye.  
He gef vus to be his homly hyne  
Ande precious perleþ vnto his paye. (11.1208-12)

The emphasis on "us" in these lines extends the application of the narrator's experience to a wider audience. P.M. Kean remarks that in this final section of the poem, there is a shift in "voice" away from the disturbed and wilful accents of the dreamer toward a note of detachment and objectivity:

After stanza 99 the Dreamer does not speak again in the person we have come to identify with him: the narrative "I" is still kept, but it is used to give explanation and comment which could not come convincingly from one whose "wreched wylle

in wo ay wra^te". There is no indication that the solution to the moral problem of the opening is conceived in terms of the complete conversion of the Dreamer: he has stood so consistently as "Will", and his reaction at every crisis of the poem has been so turbulent, that such a conversion would fail to satisfy. The poet therefore speaks, as the maker of a poem in which he has been giving expression to an aspect of himself through the Dreamer-mask, but from a standpoint undisturbed by the emotional involvement of this other self.¹

This separation of poet and narrator tends to oversimplify the complex realism of the voice which emerges at the end of the poem. The note of strong human emotion is maintained in the reference to "my perle" (1.1206) and there is a tone of resignation rather than of unquestioning acceptance of revealed truth in the report of his apostrophe to the pearl upon awakening:

If hit be ueray and soth sermoun
bat bou so styke in garlande gay,
So wel is me in pys doel-doungoun
bat bou art to bat Prynce paye. (11.1185-88)

The sincerity of his claim to have some support in Christ is unquestionable, but the language in which it is expressed - "For I haf founden hym, boe day and na^te, A God, a Lorde, a frende ful fyin" - reveals the disparity between the bond between him and Christ and that between Christ and the Maiden.²

Of greater significance than these suggestions of the narrator's present continued sorrow, however, are the lines which begin the poem. It may be safely assumed that the poet intended the end of his work to lead the reader or listener back to the beginning, in the light of the echo throughout the final section

2. The language in which the Pearl-maiden expresses her devotion is heavily reminiscent of Rollean lyrics: e.g. "My ioy, my blys, my lemmam fre" (1.794).
of the first line, "Perle, plesaunte to prynces paye". The first five stanzas of *Pearl* do not describe a state of mind which existed exclusively in the past; some of the lines are in the present tense, indicating a state of feeling which exists in the "now" of the poem's time-scheme - in other words, after the learning experience of the dream vision. In stanza 1, the poet tells his audience,

\[ I \text{ dewyne, fordolked of luf-daungere} \]
\[ \text{Of } \hat{p} \text{at pryuy perle wythouten spot, (11.11-12)} \]

and in the following stanza he addresses the ground which covers the body,

\[ O \text{ moul, } \hat{p} \text{ou marre, a myry iuele,} \]
\[ My priuy perle wythouten spotte. (11.23-24) \]

These two passages make it clear that he continues to mourn for his lost pearl, in spite of the fact that she has explained to him that from an eternal perspective he has never owned a jewel at all, and in spite of her caution against "doel dystresse". In the light of these passages, we recognize that the dream experience has not brought the "I" to a state of "resounable" behaviour, and that he is still, although to a lesser extent than before, a victim of human will and passion. ¹ The use of the present tense in the prologue should be a caution against applying to the poem any notion of a simple progression, as more than one modern critic has done. Blenkner, for example, under-estimates the subtlety of the poem when he notes that the presentation of the "I" illustrates "a switch from a secular

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¹ Spearing, op. cit., p.127, says that it is part of the ambiguity of the poem that it should both begin and end in the present tense, "the initial, unconsolled sense of loss being felt as immediately as the final reconciliation".
to a religiously oriented point of view". In *Pearl* there is no direct "progress from grief and confusion to peace".

The effect of the poet's persistence in sorrow is to underline the vast difficulty involved in discarding a limited human attitude to death and loss for the attitude endorsed by Christian doctrine. Considered in absolute terms, the story which the poem tells is one of failure. The poet-figure transgresses the limits of "Gode grace" by attempting to cross the stream which separates the dream landscape from the heavenly realm. This action, which brings about the termination of the vision, is symbolic of the value which temporal affection has in his mind: like his repeated attempts to contradict the Maiden, it is an expression of the "wreched wylle". The human imperfection of the "I" is further attested to by the powerful evocation of "doel-dystresse" in the introductory lines of the poem. (It is worth recording that medieval theology, to a much greater extent than modern, emphasizes the sinfulness inherent in persistent mourning for the dead.)

The "sentence" of *Pearl* is thus presented in a highly dramatic and suggestive way: the moral that man must endeavour to conform to what he knows to be the will of God is taught by a method of extended "exemplum". The audience is offered

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2. On this point, see J. Conley, op. cit., pp.64-65.
the story of a man who is instructed in a detailed and varied way about the Christian attitude to death and loss, and the fact that his human weakness is shown to prevent him from following absolutely the precepts laid down by the Maiden only serves to sharpen and intensify the lesson which the poem teaches:

Were it not for his [the narrator's] continuing and touching love for the Maiden, the poem would not move us as it does; were it not for his continuing intervention with questioning and arguing, it would not even engage our attention as a doctrinal work.¹

Spearing's emphasis that the poem teaches a lesson to a wide audience through the example of an "I" who engages their human sympathies is a sound and perceptive one. Moorman's study, on the other hand, emphasizes that the "I" on whose experience the poem focusses learns a lesson which has an essentially private and personal significance:

In the terms of Henry James, the narrator-poet is the "central intelligence" of the poem; in those of Brooks and Warren, the poem is the "narrator's story", in that we are never allowed to see and judge the experience presented by the poem objectively and for ourselves but are, instead, forced, by the point of view which the poet adopts, to accept the experience of the vision only in terms of its relationship to him. The mind of the narrator in Pearl...... is the real subject under consideration. It is with the figure of the narrator alone in an "erbere" that the poem begins and ends; it is he who controls the argument with the pearl-maiden by introducing the subjects for debate and by directing the path of the discussion with his questions; it is for his benefit that the maiden relates the parable of the vineyard and allows him to view the New Jerusalem.²

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¹ A.C. Spearing, op. cit., p.116.
The experience of the poet is presented in such a way that it has also a clear public and community significance. The "I" in *Pearl* is both individual and type, the balance between the two aspects of his ethos being created by a consistently realistic form of characterization. The Pearl-maiden's first reproof shows that she regards him more as a type than as an individual: "Wy borde ʒ e men? So madde ʒ e be!" Similarly, in the poet's reflection upon his impetuosity in trying to cross the stream, he refers not merely to "my mynde", but to "my maneʒ mynde". The Pearl-maiden's "sermoun" is of course directed at a wider audience, however appropriate its successive stages are to the immediate situation — it will be noted that her speeches frequently employ the first person plural form so common in all forms of Middle English didactic literature.

That this "narrator's story" was consciously intended by the author to have a primarily didactic cast is further suggested by the treatment of what would seem to be autobiographical elements in the poem, the reflection "Ho watʒ me nerre ʒ en aunte or nece" (1.233), and the thinly veiled accusation "pou lyfed not two ʒ er in oure ʒ ede" (1.483). These allusions imply that the pearl does have some kind of historical identity; without this assumption, they are quite meaningless. Taken with the enigmatic references to the speaker's loss in the introductory section of the poem, these allusions suggest that the poet deliberately "objectified" a personal experience for didactic ends, to make his experience meaningful for a wide audience. (Conley quite rightly states that "The presumed and belaboured issue of *Pearl* — whether the mourned loss is fictitious
or real - is, in fact, secondary".\(^1\) If it were not for the two allusions quoted above, the argument against autobiography advanced by W.H. Schofield\(^2\) would be unexceptionable). There is a strong probability that the name of the poet is included in the poem: Barbara Nolan, working from an earlier argument advanced by O. Greenwood,\(^3\) has recently demonstrated that an anagram and a signature - "Iohn Massy" - seem to be woven into the texture of *Pearl*.\(^4\) The evidence is persuasive, given the poet's interest in complicated numerical forms, and the presence of cryptogrammatical and anagrammatical signatures in contemporary poetry.\(^5\) In view of the highly cryptic nature of the signature (even by the standards of the time), the poet probably could not have expected very many members of his audience to recognize it. It is important to recognize that the postulated


But my critics insist: The poem is so full of personal feeling that the author *must* be voicing a personal grief. He is a gentle, sensitive man; he knows how a father would feel under the circumstances; he *must* have been married; he *must* have had a child - and, let there be an end to argument!" Timidly one might expostulate: "Why, he was a poet, and it is the business of a poet to 'body forth the forms of things unknown', and poets have sometimes imagined characters that seem real though their creators never themselves outwardly lived through the experiences that they represent themselves as having had." p.669.


signature is included mainly as a form of petition - that "Massy" may come to the "paye" of the Heavenly Prince. The purpose of the signature is thus not to promote the poet's personal fame, but to attempt to secure salvation. The prayer for personal grace is only a part of the supplication for the "us" of the Christian community, made in the concluding lines of the poem.

The rhetorical method of Pearl is thus clearly comparable, in its basic outlines, with the method employed in the frame lyrics discussed in the previous chapter. In Pearl, as in poems such as "Als i lai vp-on a nith" and "Quia Amore Languedo", a redemptive lesson is taught dramatically through the example of an "I" who learns through a visionary experience. In both the long poem and these shorter works, the speaker is presented as a figure with whom an audience may sympathize and identify, one who extends the significance of his experience to his listeners by his use of "we" and "us", as well as of "I" and "me". The methods in which the typical and generalizing "I" is presented are, however, quite different. The speakers in the lyrics are anonymous entities, who attract attention and interest mainly because they are alone, usually wandering or waiting. They are participants in drama of a fairly "static" kind, consisting usually of monologues spoken by extra-human figures in response to questions or wonderment from the human speakers. The author of Pearl, on the one hand, portrays himself with a force and vigour which is undeniably naturalistic: the convention

1. This is essentially the same purpose for which Godric includes his name in his hymn to the Virgin.
of the otherworldly doctinaire figure is used, just as it is in the frame lyrics and in the *Parlement of the Thre Ages*, but not to the neglect of the poem's dramatic situation. In *Pearl*, the "I" of the poet-dreamer is maintained in the forefront of the reader's attention, not only at the beginning, but also throughout the narration of the dialogue.

*Pearl* and the *Parlement of the Thre Ages* alike go beyond the semi-dramatic lyric poems in that they present moral instruction within a framework of human acceptance and rejection. Both the hunter in the *Parlement* and the bereaved man in *Pearl* are shown to have achieved increased awareness of their responsibilities to God's law, but at the same time they are figures who persist in actions and states of mind which are expressly (or implicitly, in the case of the *Parlement*) disapproved of by the exponents of authority in their respective visions. The continued attachment to what is temporal and sinful serves to sharpen rather than to diminish the exemplary significance of the two poet-figures, by showing the frailty of the human will. In both poems, the naturalistic manner in which the first person speakers are portrayed is the main reason for their rhetorical effectiveness: it is regrettable that the author of the *Parlement* did not possess his contemporary's sense of structural economy and cohesiveness.
CHAPTER 3: John Gower as Amans in *Confessio Amantis*.

In the first book of John Gower’s English poem, *Confessio Amantis*, there is an unambiguously stated view of the poet’s conception of the relation between the use of the first person technique — or, more accurately, of the falling "I" — and the presentation of "sentences". After commenting on the binding and blinding properties of love, the poet declares that his own experience in "this dole" qualifies him to be a teacher of "nae that han lovers abouts":

Pro point to point I wol declare
And wryten of my woeful care,
Me woeful day, my woeful chance,
That men nowe take remembrance
Of that thi wol al hereafter rede:
That every men enample sake
Of wisdom which him is betake,
And that he wot of good aprise
To teche it whom of such erprise
Is forto pradise straightherefore
Wol wryte and acheve al openly

In this chapter, an attempt will be made to show that Gower does not realize his aim of presenting an “enample” by means of the representing of his fictional dialogue with Love’s representative. *Confessio Amantis* illustrates a rhetorical strategy which is essentially similar to that of *Pearl* and the *Parliament of the Worlds*. Each of them purports to describe an experience of the author, one in which he is instructed and enlightened. In Gower’s poem, unlike the others, the significance of the “personal” experiences for a general audience is explicitly stated.

At the beginning of the Prologue, the poet records his intention to write of “nae that han outlere”, while observing the authority of what was written in previous ages by “these clise
In the first book of John Gower's English poem, *Confessio Amantis*, there is an unambiguous statement of the poet's conception of the relation between the use of the first person technique - or, more accurately, of the fallible "I" - and the presentation of "sentence". After commenting on the binding and blinding properties of love, the poet declares that his own experience in "this Scole" qualifies him to be a teacher of "hem that ben lovers aboute":

Fro point to point I wol declare  
And writyen of my woful care,  
Mi wofudl day, my wofull chance,  
That men mowe take remembrance  
Of that thei schall hierafter rede:  
That every man ensample take  
Of wisdom which him is betake,  
And that he wot of good aprise  
To teche it forth, for such emprise  
Is forto praise; and therfore I  
Woll writye and schewe al openly  
How love and I togedre mette,  
Wherof the world ensample fette  
Mai after this, whan I am go,  
Of thilke unsely jolif wo. (11.73-88, my italics)

In this chapter, an attempt will be made to show that Gower does realize his aim of presenting an "ensample" by means of the recounting of his fictional dialogue with Love's representative. *Confessio Amantis* illustrates a rhetorical strategy which is essentially similar to that of *Pearl* and the *Parlement of the Thre Ages*: each of them purports to describe an experience of its author, one in which he is instructed and enlightened. In Gower's poem, unlike the others, the significance of the "personal" experience for a general audience is explicitly stated.

At the beginning of the Prologue, the poet records his intention to write of "newe som matiere", while observing the authority of what was written in previous ages by "these olde
wyse" (11.1-7). This statement is, of course, essentially similar to the better-known "olde feldes ... newe corne" metaphor.\(^1\) Gower declares that in the present work he intends to write not merely "of wisdom" (1.13), but

\[
a\ bok\ between\ the\ tweie, \\
\text{Somewhat of lust, somewhat of lore.} \\
\text{(11.18-19)}
\]

On the evidence of the Prologue alone - which sets out the causes and some of the manifestations of flux and discord in contemporary society - it might well seem that Gower's understanding of the Chaucerian "sentence-solaas" theory leads him to write of lore (sentence) in one part of the work, and of lust (solaas) in another. His own comment on the Prologue,

\[
\frac{\text{For this prologe is so assised}}{\text{That it to wisdom al belongeth (11.66-7),}}
\]

does tend to support such an idea of aesthetic compartmentalization. But the passage quoted above from Book I shows that his manner of writing is rather more sophisticated: the main part of the poem is to be devoted to the teaching of "wisdom" (I, 11.79-80), and the manner in which it is written - a mixture of dialogue and exemplary story - shows that Gower regarded teaching and entertainment as artistic ends to be furthered simultaneously. This is, of course, a method of teaching which we have come to recognize as being characteristically "Chaucerian", although in Gower's poetry it is discernible only in Confessio Amantis.

The method of teaching by means other than those of complaint and direct exhortation in an omniscient, "preaching"

\[1.\ F.N.\ Robinson\ ed.,\ The\ Works\ of\ Geoffrey\ Chaucer\ (Oxford, 1957),\ The\ Parlement\ of\ Foules,\ 11.22-25.\]
authorial voice applies not only to the tales which comprise the bulk of the poem, but also to the framework in which they are cast, the confession of a lover - the poet's representative - to the priest of Venus, from whom the former receives correction and instruction about avoiding the cardinal vices. About the exemplary and cautionary tales which Genius relates to Amans little need be said here, since they lie outside the scope of the present discussion. It will be sufficient to say that several of the stories (many of which illustrate points of morality in general, and not merely the morality of courtly love) are narrated with impressive economy and suggestiveness. There is some truth in Derek Pearsall's comment that "story telling [released] Gower's potential imaginative energy, so that he could penetrate to the heart of realize what elsewhere he could only say". But although the stories in Confessio Amantis contribute more to the total meaning of the poem than (for example) the stories of the Nine Worthies do to the meaning of the Parlement of the Thre Ages, they are of no greater importance than the framework in which they are presented. The late nineteenth century editor of the poem, G.C. Macaulay, did little justice to the art of the "confession" itself when he commented:

After endeavouring to 'give an account of his stewardship' in various ways as a moralist, the author at length found his true vocation this time in his native tongue, as a teller of stories. The rest is all machinery, sometimes poetical and interesting, sometimes tiresome and clumsy, but the stories are the main thing.

1. "Gower and Lydgate": Writers and their Work (Longmans), no.211, p.17.

2. The English Works of John Gower, E.E.T.S., E.S., nos.81 and 82. Introduction, p.x. All quotations are from this edition of the poem.
More recently, C.S. Lewis has drawn attention to the excellence of Gower's achievement as a dramatist, in his characterization of Amans. More will be said of Lewis's study later.

Confessio Amantis offers an interesting instance of the capacity of a medieval poet to transform himself for the purpose of teaching a moral lesson "by example"; this is reflected in the change of authorial voice which takes place after line 160 of Book I, when the poet assumes his role as a character in the experience which he relates. Up to this point, Gower speaks in his customary literary voice, that typical of the class of writing which John Peter styles as medieval Complaint:

the writing is tied to a system rather than a personality ... satiric variations - urbanity, malevolence, raillery, scurrility, cynicism - lie beyond the range of Complaint, which, like the Christianity it espouses, strives always to be sober and reasonable, if occasionally severe.

The poet provides his own comment on the style of the Prologue and of the opening lines of Book I in the earlier Latin work, Vox Clamantis, the whole of which is written in a style basically similar to the opening (and conclusion) of the Confessio. The role of prophet and keeper of the nation's conscience which Gower employs in the whole of the Vox and in the early part of the Confessio does not require the addition of any personal or individual characteristics, and it is clear from the passages quoted below that he wishes to efface from his writing any

3. See below, pp.119-20.
suggestions of a personality:

Embrace the matter, not the man, and the spirit, not the bodily form in this material, for I myself am a poor fellow.

I shall not speak of my personal affairs in the words which follow, but I shall report them just like a well-informed messenger.¹

The impersonality of Gower's style in the first section of Confessio Amantis is reflected by an extensive use of the first person plural form so widely used in the Middle English religious lyric. He comments again on the reason for his use of this form of address at the beginning of the section on the duties and shortcomings of temporal rulers:

And that I take to record
Of every lond for his partie
The comun vois, which mai noght lie. (Prol. 11.122-24)

By writing in voce populi - i.e. in the voice of righteous humanity - as he does throughout Vox Clamantis and in the introductory and concluding sections of Confessio Amantis, the poet obviously intended that his work should have a particular form of authority; his use of the form echoes the classical and Thomistic notion of "vox populi, vox dei".² It is admittedly misleading to quote small sections from writing which depends largely for its effect upon length and mass, but the following extracts from the Prologue may give some indication of the persuasiveness of Gower's first person plural style:

Bot we that duelle under the mone
Stonde in this world upon a weer (11.142-43),


². Ibid., p.386.
The tone of this passage - part of a long section on the corruption of the fourteenth century Church - is closer to medieval satire than to medieval complaint; a little further on comes a telling use of an "incapacity" formula, a type conventionally associated with the use of the first person narrative method in medieval Latin poetry:¹

But plainly for to speke of that,  
I not how thilke body fat,  
Which thei with deynte metes kepe  
And leyn it softe forto slepe,  
Whan it hath elles al his wille,  
With chastite schal stonde stille:  
And natheles I can noght seie,  
In aunter if that I misseye.  (ll. 473-80)

These lines are perhaps derived from the portraits of the clerical figures in the General Prologue, where professed inability and ignorance are the norms of Chaucer's satirical technique. Elsewhere in the Prologue, conventional formulae associated with the use of first person narration are used rather less imaginatively; note, for example, the poet's admission of his "small wit" (1.81).

The prologue to the earliest version of Confessio Amantis contains a specifically personal allusion which is absent in the revisions: this is, of course, the account of the origins of

the poem, the poet's acceptance of an order from his "liege lord" Richard II, whom he met one day while sailing on the Thames, to write a poem which would magnify the royal "worthinesse". Although of considerable interest from an historical point of view, this passage of self-revelation is of slight literary interest, since it does nothing to further the thematic concerns of the work.

Before going on to consider the way in which the poet characterizes himself in the main part of the work, a final remark about the "I" of the Prologue may be made. An impression of the poet - as a man of humility, moral orthodoxy, integrity and social conscience - does emerge, but it is promoted by what he says about his "matiere" rather than by any information which he gives about himself as an individual. A modern critic of the Wayne Booth school might call the impression of Gower the man derived from a reading of this part of the Confessio Amantis and of his Latin and French poems his "literary personality", the version of himself which he habitually implied in his writings. We have no way of knowing definitely whether this was a true picture of Gower the man, but it would seem - on the evidence of Chaucer's dedication of Troilus and Criseyde to "moral Gower" and of what we know about the circumstances of his life - that it was so.

1. J.H. Fisher, in his study John Gower: Moral Philosopher and Friend of Chaucer (Methuen, 1965), makes some interesting speculations about the reasons for the poet's changed attitude to Richard, after the first draft of this poem was written: see pp.112-15.

It can be stated with reasonable certainty that there is a much greater element of literary artifice in the presentation of the poet throughout the subsequent Books of *Confessio Amantis*. The declaration at the beginning of Book I,

Forthi the Stile of my writinges
Fro this day forth I thenke change, (11.8-9)

relates as much to the change in the manner in which the "I" is presented as it does to the change in the poet's subject matter. Gower now portrays himself directly, as an actor in an experience dramatically - specifically, in terms of direct speech - narrated. The change from the omniscient, "complaint" style typical of the earlier poems and of the Prologue is signalled by a marginal note in Latin beside the lines which tell of his allegiance to the "Scole" of Love:

Hic quasi in persona aliorum, quos amor alligat, fingens se auctor esse Amantem, varias eorum passiones variis huius libri distinctcionibus per singula scribere proponit.

The "I" of *Confessio Amantis*, Amans (who is towards the end of the poem identified with the poet himself), differs from the narrators in the two poems discussed in the previous chapter in that he is not portrayed consistently as a "realistic" figure. His presentation is sometimes strikingly imaginative, simulating an illusion of actuality, and sometimes flat and unrelievedly formalistic. In this, as will be shown in a later chapter of this study, Gower's method is very similar to that of Langland. In the following pages, the characteristics of Gower's persona will be discussed, and an attempt will be made to define the contribution of the "I" to the overall meaning of the poem.
When Amans is first represented in Book I - in both a passage of recollection and one of direct speech - there is little to distinguish him from any of the other countless protagonists of the literature of *fin amour*. Wandering alone through the woods in the month of May, he is reminded of his unrequited love by the singing of the birds. "Wisshinge and weeping", he makes a complaint to Venus, in quite conventional language and imagery:

O thou Cupide, O thou Venus,  
Thou god of love and thou goddesse,  
Wher is pite? wher is meknesse?  
Now doth me pleinly live or dye,  
For certes such a maladie  
As I now have and longe have hadd,  
It myhte make a wisman madd,  
If that it scholde longe endure.  
O Venus, queene of loves cure,  
Thou lif, thou lust, thou mannes hele,  
Behold my cause and my querele,  
And yif me som part of thi grace,  
So that I may finde in this place  
If thou be gracious or non. (11.124-37)

Gower undoubtedly drew upon his reading of secular courtly literature for this initial characterization of Amans, but this is no reason to level the charge of unimaginativeness against him. In the light of his stated intention to provide an "ensample" for his audience, it is sound rhetorical strategy to provide them with an "I" of a type with which, in their reading of popular secular literature, they would be accustomed to identify.

As the dialogue between Amans and the priest who is appointed by Venus to hear his shrift progresses, Gower moulds this typical lover into a character who possesses life-like qualities and an appeal for the reader which goes beyond that of a mere type figure. As a starting point for determining the realism
of Gower's "I", it may be helpful to examine the Lover's responses to the questions and teaching of Genius in Book I. Genius begins the long dialogue by which the moral state of Amans is to be determined by cautioning him against the sins of the eye and of the ear; after telling him the "ensamples" of Acteon, Medusa, and the Sirens, Genius enquires whether Amans has governed his own senses wisely. The latter couches his reply in the terms of the two stories which he has just been told; he says that he has looked upon Medusa,

Min herte is growen into Ston,
So that my lady therupon
Hath such a priente of love grave,
That I can noght miselve save, (11.551-56)

and that unlike Ulysses, he is driven into helpless confusion whenever he hears the sound of his lady's voice (11.558-68). The irony of the comparison of the lady to Ovid's monster may be unintentional, but there is a stronger possibility that it is meant to suggest a strain of humorous self-depreciation in the character of Amans. (The same might be said for his allusion to the Ulysses story.) In his confession of the sin against hearing, there is certainly evidence of a greater self-awareness than is apparent, for example, in the nature of the first-person hero of the Roman de la Rose: his admission,  

I am topulled in my thoght,
So that of reson leveth noght,
Wherof that I me mai defende (11.565-67),

indicates that although he is aware of the excesses in his behaviour, he is unable to counteract them. The passage is an

effective dramatic illustration of the generalized comment about love at the beginning of Book I:

To thing which god in lawe of kinde
Hath set, for ther may noman finde
The rihte salve of such a Sor.  (11.31-33)

The candour of Amans is further attested to by his reply to Genius's question about whether he has been a hypocrite in love: he states that he is incapable of hypocrisy, since his heart is more sick than his visage shows (11.713-16). However, he readily admits that towards women other than his lady he has not always been so honest:

Bot, Sire, if I have in my yowth
Don other wise in other place,
I put me therof in your grace:
For this excusen I ne schal,
That I have elles overal
To love and to his compaignie
Be plein withoute Ypocrasie.  (11.730-36)

The fact that Amans is given a "history" in this way enhances his interest for the reader, at the same time as it underlines the sincerity and depth of his present emotional involvement.

The Lover's singleminded devotion to the lady is given fuller expression in his confession to the second branch of Pride, Inobedience, which follows the stories on the theme of the evils of hypocrisy. The disclosure of his reaction to her injunction "Be stille" conveys eloquently his distracted emotional state:

If I that heste schal fulfille
And therto ben obedient,
Thanne is my cause fully schent,
For specheles may noman spede.
So wot I noght what is to rede;
Bot certes I may noght obeie,
That I ne mot algate seie
Somwhat of that I wolde mene;
For evere it is aliche grene,
The grete love which I have.  (11.1290-99)
In the second part of his confession to the sin of disobedience, the force of Amans' passion is conveyed in terms of imagery; the lines,

For ther was nevere rooted tre,
That stod so faste in his degre,
That I ne stonde more faste
Upon hire love, and mai noght caste
Min herte awey, althogh I wolde. (11.1319-23)

indicate that Gower well understood the effects which could be achieved by metaphor. Perhaps he had been inspired by Chaucer's use of nature imagery in *Troilus and Criseyde*, as a way of articulating the progress of the love affair. Simile also helps to give "point" to the Lover's confession of presumption, which follows the tale of Florent, told as an example of the virtue of obedience. Amans expresses his "wenyng" in terms of nautical imagery:

For if a man wole in a Bot
Which is withoute botme rowe,
He moste nedes overthrowe.
Riht so wenynge hat ferd be me. (11.1960-63)

The speech in Book I which does most to surround Amans with an air of actuality is his confession to the sin of Vainglory. He freely admits that he is like the lovers of whom Genius has spoken disparagingly, those who dress gaily and compose "rondeal, balade, and virelai" (1.2709) in order to gain "avantage" in love. With a wryly ironic pun, Amans tells the outcome of this activity in his own case:

Thus was my gloire in vein beset
Of al the joie that I made;
For whanne I wolde with hire glade,
And of hire love songes make,
Sche saide it was noght for hir sake,
And liste noght my songes hiere
Ne witen what the wordes were. (11.2736-42)

The depth of his feeling is indicated when he says that his
songs make him sorrowful rather than glad (because he knows that the lady will not heed what they say), and when he adds that he is made happy by hearing good tidings of her:

How that my lady berth the pris,
How sche is fair, how sche is wis,
How sche is wommanlich of chiere:
Of al this thing whanne I mai hiere
What wonder is thogh I be fain? (11.2755-59)

The impression of Amans which emerges from his speeches in Book I is one of an attractive and compellingly human figure, one who, at the same time as he possesses most of the characteristics of the courtly lover type in Middle English secular literature, has a certain individual appeal. The reader becomes interested in and sympathetic towards Amans because of the singleminded sincerity of his feeling (an impression fostered partly by the direct, unpretentious style of Gower's writing, partly by the one impressive lyrical passage cited above), by his honesty and gentle humour (the latter a rare characteristic among the race of courtly lovers), and by the realistic circumstantial detail with which he is presented in parts of the confession.

These characteristics of the Lover, as they are presented in Book I, are maintained and developed throughout the subsequent books of the Confessio. The singlemindedness of the Lover becomes more apparent as the poem proceeds. Repeatedly, he confesses that he is "guilty" only in respect of his controlling passion: for example, he is envious of other men "nowher bot in o place" (II, 1.31), he is guilty in thought of Supplantation - "And al this speke I bot of on" (II, 1.2399), and of the actual sin of hatred, but only of his lady's cruel words - "The word I hate and hire I love" (III, 1.883). The
impression we form of the Lover's obsessive interest in his own predicament is partly a result of the form in which the poem is cast. The stories which Genius tells illustrate a wide variety of themes and cover a great diversity of matter (often within themselves), and the priest's comments are invariably of the most general kind;¹ Amans' questions and his responses to

1. There is a close similarity in theme and style between the speeches of Genius and the commentary of Gower in propria persona in the Prologue and the beginning of Book I; this should be apparent from comparing the two extracts on the theme of individual responsibility given below; the first is in Gower's own literary voice, the second in the voice of Genius:

   Bot what man wolde himself avise,
   His conscience and noght misuse,
   He may wel ate ferst excuse
   His god, which evere stant in on:
   In him ther is defalte non,
   So moste it stonde upon ousselve
   Noght only upon ten ne twelve,
   Bot plenerliche upon ous alle,
   For man is cause of that schal falle ... (Prologue, 11.520-28)

   And every man for his partie
   A kingdom hath to justifie,
   That is to sein his oghne dom.
   If he misreule that kingdom,
   He lest himself, and that is more
   Than if he loste Schip and Ore
   And al the worldes good withal. (Book VIII, 11.2111-17)

Another important parallel is provided by Genius's numerous repetitions of the "for loves lawe is out of reule" dictum at the beginning of Book I (11.18-33). Genius is, of course, distinguished from the poet to some extent by virtue of the fact that he expounds his "lore" to a particular audience, Amans, but in general it could be said that Genius functions throughout most of the poem as a spokesman for the poet. The extent to which Gower models Genius in his own image is reflected in his alterations in the character of the priest of the Roman de la Rose (see G.D. Economou, "The Character Genius in Alain de Lille, Jean de Meun, and John Gower", Chaucer Review, 4, 1970, pp.203-10); Gower's main alteration is that he makes Genius a specifically Christian figure, advocating sexuality only within the bonds of matrimony (VIII, 11.1-198). That Genius serves as a mouthpiece for the poet is nowhere more obvious than in the lengthy digressions in the poem, notably the exposition of the religions of the world in Book V, and the discourse on the principal points of philosophy which occupies the whole of Book VII. The latter, which echoes Gower's concern for responsible kingship in the Vox Clamantis, provides the major justification for Coffman's view of the poem (cont., .../.)
the teaching of Genius invariably concern his lady, and because of the contrasts, both in theme and in style, between these and the long passages which precede and follow them, they foster the illusion of his singleminded devotion to her. At the end of Book VII, Gower makes skilful dramatic use of the difference between the Lover's strictly personal concerns and Genius's broader interest in the vices and virtues as they apply both to love and to morality in general. The whole of this Book is taken up with the priest's exposition of the teaching of Aristotle to Alexander - a matter rather remote from the immediate concern of his listener - and at its conclusion Amans pleads courteously:

Do wey, mi fader, I you preie:
Of that ye have unto me told
I thonke you a thousandfold.
The tales sounen in myn Ere,
Bot yit myn herte is elleswhere,
I mai miselve noght restreigne,
That I nam evere in loves peine. (11.5408-14)

Occasionallly, the Lover's singlemindedness is set in a humorous context: in Book III, for example, he responds thus to the tale of Phoebus and Daphne, which is told as an example of the danger of fool-haste in love,

1. (cont. from previous page)
as a "King's Courtesy Book" ("John Gower in His Most Significant Role", Elizabethan Studies and Other Essays in Honour of George F. Reynolds, University of Colorado Studies, Series B, II, 1945, pp.52-61). The poet occasionally distances himself from Genius - as he does, for example, in Book V, where Genius admits to Amans that he has hitherto avoided speaking of Venus because he is ashamed of being "here oghne Prest" (11.1382-83). In general, however, it might fairly be said that Genius, like the Maiden in Pearl, acts as a spokesman for the author, considered as one who is familiar with the tenets of orthodox medieval morality.
He exhibits an equally literal-minded, and equally comic, response to the tale of Leucothoe - told to illustrate the evil of stealth in love - when he suggests that Phoebus was ill-advised to make his assault by day:

Bot in youre tale, as it betidde,  
Venus discoverede al the cas  
And ek also brod dai it was. (V, 11.6790-92)

It is difficult to decide whether the humorous appeal of these passages stems from the detached irony of the poet, or from the character's own appreciation of the incongruous - it seems likely that the former is the more accurate explanation. In Amans's confession of Avarice, however, there is a stronger impression that he himself has a sense of humour. He professes an amused disdain for those who are avaricious about material goods,

for he
Mai whanne him list his tresor se  
And grope and fiele it al about. (11.102-03)

The avarice-treasure metaphor is used between these two passages in a rather different context, that of expressing the spiritual significance of his love:

For certes, if sche were myn,  
I hadde her levere than a Myn  
Of Gold; for al this worldsriche  
Ne mihte me make so riche
As sche, that is so inly good.
I sette noght of other good;
For mihte I gete such a thing,
I hadde a tresor for a king. (11.85-92)

The total effect of this section of the confession, with its variations of tone and rhythm, and its unifying metaphor drawn from the structural scheme of the poem, is to suggest that the speaker is definitely something other than a one-dimensional literary type.

In the previous chapter, we have seen that the dramatic interest of *Pearl* is centred in the Dreamer's continued refusal to concur with the teaching of the Maiden, because his divinely-appointed "reson" is overridden by his sinful human will. In *Confessio Amantis*, there is not the same sense of a pervasive conflict between opposing points of view. This is partly due to the fact that the bulk of the poem is comprised of stories, and partly a result of the different quality of the dialogue sections of the poem. Compared with the rebellious "I" in *Pearl*, whose continuing inability to regard loss from the fixed and eternal viewpoint of his instructress imparts to his characterization such a sharp air of reality, Amans is a quiescent figure. The impression of reality and individuality promoted by the methods of conveying his fixity of purpose (outlined above) is weakened to some extent by formalism in his presentation. Frequently, Amans is represented as a child-like figure, who is unaware of the meaning of words and concepts. The following extracts are typical of this:

I wot noght, fader, what ye mene:  
Bot this I wolde you beseche,  
That ye me be som weie teche  
What is to ben an ypocrite. (I,11.588-91)
Another aspect of this manner of presentation, which has its origins in the characterization of the pupil figures in the catachistic dialogues which Middle English devotional writers developed from Latin models, is that Amans seldom questions Genius's instruction. His customary response is exemplified in his answer to the advice against the sin of Avantance:

I thonke you, my fader diere,  
This scole is of a gentil lore;  
And if ther be oght elles more  
Of Pride, which I schal eschiue,  
Now axeth forth, and I wol suie  
What thing that ye me wol enforme. (I, 11.2664-69)

Presumably, it was such "stock" passages which Macaulay had in mind when he commented that the framework of the poem was "all machinery". The modern reader's response to speeches such as those quoted above, which are bound to a scheme rather than to any concept of consistently realistic characterization, has been largely conditioned by the Bradleyan school of "character" criticism. With our inbuilt admiration for the realistic and concrete, we are apt to feel, in regard to Confessio Amantis, that such writing weakens the force of the Lover's presentation: we would do well to remember, however, that the audience for whom Gower wrote his "ensample" would almost certainly have been at a loss to understand our charges of inconsistency. Rather than regarding the more formal and stereotyped aspects of Amans's presentation as blemishes upon the surface of an otherwise commendable realism, we might do well to view the
speeches in which he is portrayed as an individual as being departures from the normal manner in which medieval allegorical poets portrayed themselves, as exemplified in the *Roman de la Rose* and the *Pèlerinage de la Vie Humaine*.¹

Although Amans is presented throughout most of the poem as a passive, quiescent type of pupil, there are two occasions upon which he opposes his will to that of the confessor. C.S. Lewis and Derek Pearsall² have drawn attention to the passage on "travail" in Book IV as an instance of the character's independence of mind. Amans replies to Genius's counsel that a lover should engage in deeds of arms for the sake of his lady - a basic tenet of the law of courtly love³ - by quoting Christian law, and by vowing, in strikingly pragmatic terms, the supreme importance of the lady to him:

And forto slen the hethen alle,
I not what good ther mihte falle,
So mochel blod thogh ther be schad.
This finde I writen, hou Crist bad
That noman other scholde sle.
What scholde I winne over the Se,
If I mi ladi loste at hom? (11.1659-65)

To slen and feihten thei [the prelates] ous bidde
Hem whom thei scholde, as the bok seith,
Converten unto Cristes feith.
Bot hierof have I gret mervaile,
Hou thei wol bidde me travaile:
A Sarazin if I sle schal,
I sle the Soule forth withal,
And that was nevere Cristes lore. (11.1674-81)

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1. See above, p.15.
3. Genius summarizes the orthodox view concerning the worthiness of arms (Book IV, 11.1620-44).
He reinforces his argument by citing an "ensample" of his own (the story of Achilles and Polixen) for the first and only time in the dialogue, and by stressing quite eloquently that although he would "travail" if his lady so commanded, the ends of warfare seldom justify the hardships which it involves. It must be added that the force of Amans's radical disagreement with Genius is weakened by the absence of a reply to the exampla of the worthiness of valour in love which the latter supplies (11.1815-2199). This is rather surprising, in view of the fact that in this section Amans is stating a view of war which is closely paralleled by Gower's own: in Book VI of *Vox Clamantis* he states that war and killing should not be undertaken without a just cause, and implies strongly that personal passions do not constitute a just cause.¹ The section on "travail", considered as a whole, illustrates the subordination of an effect of strong and realistic characterization by narrative expediency. The argument about the morality of warfare in the cause of love is abruptly truncated when Amans enquires, in response to Genius's remark that worthy women prize "manhode and ... gentilesse",

Mi fader, bot I were enspired
Thurgh lore of you, I wot no weie
What gentilesce is forto seie,
Wherof to telle I you beseche. (11.2200-03)

The second instance of a clash of wills between Amans and his instructor, more important in articulating the "sentence" of the poem than the argument on war, differs from the latter in that it is narrated with a view to plausible and interesting

characterization. This disagreement concerns the reaction of Amans to his confessor's counsel to set his heart "under that lawe,/ The which of reson is governed / And noght of will" (VIII, 11.2134-36); reluctant to renounce what is most precious to him, he persuades Genius to present a petition on his behalf to Venus. The final episode of the narrative will be examined in greater detail below, but it may be noted here that in it the impulse toward characterization of the "I" is in complete accord with the impulse toward the articulation of meaning. This cannot be said of the passage from Book IV, discussed above.

It may be helpful to summarize the characteristics of the author's representative in the poem, as they have been observed in the preceding paragraphs. Although there is an element of formalism in the presentation of Amans - apparent in speeches in which he asks Genius the meaning of basic concepts - there is also an element of what might be broadly termed naturalism. The individuality of the figure is promoted partly by the skilful poetic use which Gower makes of the basic characteristic of all the protagonists in the literature of fin amour, the lover's obsessive interest in his lady: Amans's continual asseverations of his love for one alone, in a variety of tonal contexts ranging from the elevated to the broadly humorous, convey to the reader the urgency and fundamental seriousness of his passion. The tonal differences within the character's speeches assist to promote an impression of reality: we respond to him in a much more immediate way than we do, for example, to the protagonists of the Roman de la Rose, the Pelerinage de la Vie Humaine, or of
the majority of courtly love lyrics which involve a suffering "I". The latter seldom interest us as personalities, since they are presented as stereotypes - stereotypes, for example, of the implausibly naïve student of morality, or of the melancholic lover. In the presentation of Amans in Confessio Amantis there are elements of both kinds of stereotype (evidenced by the formalism discussed above, and by the rhetorical quality of the complaint to Venus in Book I), but there are also elements of individuality which are largely absent in the poems mentioned above. It should not be thought that these are necessarily inferior in poetic quality to the Confessio, on the basis of the lesser measure of realism with which their first person speakers are presented. Their appeal is of a different kind from that of the Confessio, and of the other long narrative poems which form the subject of the present study.

C.S. Lewis has drawn attention to the individuality of Gower's lover. Although his study tends to underestimate the formalistic, mechanical aspect of Amans's presentation, his comment on the general effect of the figure's speeches is quite valid:

The content may claim to be a "just representation of general nature" - and therefore, as seldom fails, of individual nature too. The experience of the lover is presented with a truth that convinces us, and with much mingling of humour and pathos.¹

He notes that this effect has been made possible by Gower's ability to "look outward", to incorporate in the character's

speeches some of the circumstantial detail of everyday life:

Hence it comes that the lover's speeches are full of the movement of the actual world. We see the "younge lusty route" of his rivals surrounding his mistress: we see Gower himself bowing and proffering his service, conducting her to church, playing with her dog, and riding beside her chariot: we see the lady at her needlework, or at the dice, dancing, or listening to the story of Troilus as he reads aloud. We see Gower postponing the moment of leave-taking, and, after he has gone, rising at night to look across the housetops to his lady's window.¹

It remains to consider what contribution is made to the poem by one important individualizing characteristic of Amans, which is stressed in the final Book - his old age. Here, in the scene in which Venus, accompanied by the two bands of lovers, refuses his petition and advises him to make a "beau retret" because of his advanced age, the difference between Gower's lover and the protagonists of other courtly literature is only too apparent. The scene is so important to the total meaning of the poem that it is necessary to examine in considerable detail the presentation of the central character within it.

¹ Op. cit., p.214. Exception might be taken to the terminology of the above comment; i.e. to the emphasis on visual appeal. We are drawn by very few of the lover's speeches to "see" anything, although we do form an impression of an actual and particular life. Lewis's emphasis in this regard is curious, since a few pages earlier he makes the very good point that the "pictorial imagination finds little to feed on in the Confessio Amantis" (p.205). The critic's claims for Gower's realistic characterization should not be accepted unquestioningly: Amans is not quite so "true to life", at least in the first seven Books of the poem, as Lewis suggests - he is not, for example, portrayed with the consistent realism with which the "I" in Pearl is portrayed.
In Book VIII, after the lengthy exposition of the vices and virtues has been completed, Gower focusses attention upon the characterization of the lover, which is the means by which the "sentence" of the work is rounded off. Amans, and, by implication, the audience of the poem, have been instructed throughout the preceding Books about a correct attitude to life and love, an orthodox attitude which involves the avoidance of sin in its manifold forms and an observation of "mesure". But the narrative remains incomplete, since Amans is still confronted by the problem of how to attain "that worthi place / Wher alle lust and alle grace / Is set" (VIII, 11.2037-38). When the long tale of Apollonius is completed, Genius advises his pupil to avoid that love which does not accord with reason. Amans thanks Genius politely for the tale, and again, but with greater urgency than earlier in the dialogue, reminds him of his plight - how the "o sillable" of his lady overthrows his "thousand wordes on a rowe" - and begs for advice, "as for an ende" (11.2029-59). The answer of the priest is that the love from which he suffers is a sin, and that he must now take "the rihte weie" by following "that lawe / The which of reson is governed / And noght of will" (11.2060-2149). It is clear that Genius's warning at the conclusion of the Apollonius tale was directed more closely at Amans than he the realized, and his indignation and bewilderment at the advice are recorded in vigorous dramatic terms:

Mi fader, so as I have herd
Your tale, bot it were anserd,
I were mochel forto blame.
Mi wo to you is bot a game,
That fielen noght of that I fiele;
The fielinge of a mannes Hiele
Mai noght be likned to the Herte. (11.2149-55)
The reader is likely to identify himself with Amans quite strongly at this point, since hitherto his expectation has been that the outcome of the love suit was likely to be successful. The passage of indirect speech after line 2188, in which the narrator records that there was "gret perplexite" between him and Genius, does little to satisfy the reader's curiosity about his fate: the fact that the narrator, speaking in the present tense, acknowledges that his behaviour in the past was "unresovable" does not preclude the possibility that the gaining of self-awareness has been accompanied by the attainment of the lady's affections.

The reason for Genius's surprisingly unfavourable response to Amans's chances becomes clear towards the end of Venus's reply to the petition which Amans persuades her priest to convey. Venus explains that, although he has been innocent of sin against Kinde, and although he has served loyally in her court, it is not fitting that the reward of love be granted:

Mi medicine is noght to sieke
For thee and for suche olde sieke,
Noght al per chance as ye it wolden,
Bot so as ye be reson scholden. (11.2367-70)

There is a strange discrepancy between the tone of the Latin verse and that of the passage of comment which follows it (11.2377-95). The former implies strongly the absurdity of love between youth and age - "Sicut habet Mayus non dat natura Decembri" - while the latter suggests that Venus's verdict is illogical and unfair:

1. See also below, pp.114-18.
Lo, thus blindly the world sche diemeth
In loves cause, as tome siemeth. (11.2385-86)

The goddess's following speech reinforces the moral of the Latin verse; its cold wisdom is irrefutable, as the following extracts testify:

For loves lust and lockes hore
In chambre acorden neveremore,
And thogh thou feigne a yong corage,
It scheweth wel be the visage
That olde grisel is no fole .. (11.2403-7)

That which was whilom grene gras,
Is welked hey at time now.
Forthi mi conseil is that thou
Remembre wel hou thou art old. (11.2436-9)

The end is not yet, however, absolutely conclusive, since Amans, viewing the two companies led by Youthe and Elde in his swoon, is still "in hope of grace" (1.2725). There follows the recording of the discussion among those surrounding the prostrate lover, after which Cupid, acting in consultation with his mother, removes the "fyri Launcegay". Amans beholds himself in Venus's mirror, and at last becomes fully aware of his folly:

Wherinne anon myn hertes yhe
I caste, and sih my colour fade,
Myn yhen dymme and al unglade,
Mi chiekes thinne, and al my face
With Elde I myhte se deface,
So riveled and so wo besein,
That ther was nothing full ne plein,
I syh also myn heres hore. (11.2824-31)

This passage, with its sharp physical detail, has an affinity with the poems discussed in Chapter 1, those narrated by an "I" who is an old man, close to death. Gower, like the authors of An Old Man's Prayer and Le Regret de Maximian, creates a powerful visual image of the physical repulsiveness attendant upon old age. The passage, like the two lyrics, functions as a warning - a warning that love is destined to fail because of the ravages of
time. This "moralitee" is reinforced by the less severe imagery of seasonal change in the following lines:

I made a liknesse of miselve
Unto the sondri Monthes twelve,
Wherof the yeer in his astat
Is mad, and stant upon debat,
That lich til other non acordeth.

For who the times wel recordeth,
And thanne at Marche if he beginne,
Whan that the lusti yeer comth inne,
Til Augst be passed and Septembre,
The myhty youthe he may remembre
In which the yeer hath his deduit
Of gras, of lef, of flour, of fruit,
Of corn and of the wyny grape.
And afterward the time is schape
To frost, to Snow, to Wind, to Rein,
Til eft that Mars be come ayein:
The Wynter wol no Somer knowe,
The grene lef is overthrowe,
The clothed erthe is thanne bare ...  (11.2837-55)

This passage throws into ironic relief several preceding section which employ the same kind of imagery. For example, in Amans's confession to "inobedience" in Book I, he describes his passion this,

For evere it is aliche grene,
The grete love which I have.  (11.298-99)

Shortly after this come the lines which have already been quoted, and in Book IV he again likens his heart to "the grene tree" (1.2680). At the end of Book IV, the metaphor of the return of summer is used by Genius to encourage Amans:

When Somer hath lost al his grene
And is with Wynter wast and bare,
That him is left nothing to spare,
Al is recovered in a throwe ...

And so per cas thi graces liche,
Mi Sone, thogh thou be nou povere
Of love, yit thou miht recovere.  (11.7824-34)

1. Above, p.97.
The alteration in the context of the nature imagery, from joyful to dark inevitability, is an index to a larger rhetorical strategy underlying the presentation of Amans throughout the poem. Gower creates in the minds of his readers an expectation which he does not intend to fulfil, by leading them to believe that Amans will be successful in his quest for the lady. The figure is presented, with reasonable consistency, as a typical courtly lover - albeit one with an unusual attraction for the reader, because of the degree of realism with which he is portrayed. The unexpected disclosure in the last Book that Amans is an old man to whom the pleasures of love are denied, seems calculated to compel the audience of the poem to the realization that their own earthly pleasures are destined to the same end. C.S. Lewis comments perceptively that the disclosure of the lover's agedness has the effect of a palinode, one conceived in highly original dramatic terms:

For once he has hit upon the theme "Love cured by Age", he has no more need for the clumsy device of a separate palinode: the whole story becomes a palinode, and yet remains a love story - a pathetic, though not dismaying picture of Passion at war with Time, while more than half aware that Reason sides with Time against it.¹

The present discussion is indebted to Lewis's fine appreciation of the final scene, beside which the remarks made earlier by W.G. Dodd appear hopelessly inadequate:

It is with a distinct shock that we learn, having followed the perfectly natural story of the lover's fortunes, that, after all, he is only an old man whose "lockes hore" do not accord with "loves lust". We wish that the poet might have chosen a less bungling way of ending his poem.²

Fortunately, we do not.

Donald Schueler has attempted to show that the view that the disclosure of Amans's old age comes as a shock to the reader is in fact mistaken. He argues that "the agedness of the Lover is expressed explicitly and implicitly throughout the Confessio Amantis, not just at its conclusion". The grounds for this argument are, firstly, that Gower (whom we know to have been an elderly man when he wrote the poem) states in Book I that the experience to be recounted occurred "siththe go noght longe"; secondly, that the initial disapproving attitude of Venus and Cupid can best be explained in terms of the lover's age; thirdly, that in Books I, II, and VI, there are speeches in which Amans himself indicates that he is no longer young; and fourthly, that there is evidence to show that he would willingly be released from his love, suggesting that he is not a young man. Schueler's argument is not very convincing, as the following analysis of its parts attempts to show.

The fact that Gower declares in the Latin marginal note that he intended to write "in persona aliorum" suggests that he did not wish his audience to indentify the "I" of the lover too closely with himself; so too does the excision of the name "John Gower" from Book I in all the manuscripts of the third version, and in all but one of the second version. Schueler's argument in this respect might have some validity if it could be shown that the poet read the work aloud to an audience of

listeners, but it seems more likely, from suggestions in the text,¹ that it was intended for an audience of readers.

The view that the love-deities' disapproval in Book I suggests the "unlikliness" of Amans is hardly supportable, in view of the fact that Venus and Cupid, as they are represented in medieval courtly literature, are not renowned for their friendly treatment of aspiring lovers. Their sternness² functions as a skilful dramatic justification for the confession which follows. For Schueler's argument that Amans "wants to be let off, to be 'hol' again", it is possible to find warrant from the text, as for example in Book VIII, when he tells Genius, "I mai noght, thogh I wolde, asterte" (1.2156), but it is also possible to find many instances of his desire for the lady's mercy; in the petition which follows the extract quoted above, for example, he asks that Venus remove his "infortune",

So that Danger, which stant of retenue
With my ladi, his place mai remue. (11.2285-86)

It is difficult, moreover, to see how any statement of regret about the fact that he is a victim of Cupid's dart carries a suggestion of Amans's old age, since even Troilus, the greatest and best-known of all the courtly heroes, expresses concern about his subjection to love.³ Schueler's third argument, that some of

1. E.g. Book I, 1.78, 1.84.
2. C.S. Lewis also reads too much into this section of the poem, when he assigns a prophetic function to it: The Allegory of Love, p.217.
3. Troilus and Criseyde, 11.507-08.
Amans's speeches imply that he is no longer young, is a more substantial one. Twice, he confesses to what he has done, or to what he might have done, in his "lusti youthe" (I, 11.730-32), VI, 11.1365-69), and there are two indications of his envy of fellow suitors, "Of hem that lusti ben and freisshe" (II, 11.39-44, 457-62). These passages do admittedly hint that Amans is no longer a young man, but they are not sufficiently explicit to nullify the reader's surprise when Venus first speaks about his age in Book VIII. The contemporary audience may not have seen any suggestions of the hero's age in the passages mentioned above: it is interesting to note that Chaucer's model courtly lover in the Book of the Duchess refers to the past, when he was governed "in ydelenesse" by Yowthe,¹ even though in the present time of the poem he is only "of the age of foure and twenty yer".²

Schueler's view, that the conclusion of the work is inevitable from the start because the reader recognizes that Amans is old, and hence doomed as a member of the school of love, does not take account of the fact that Genius gives him encouragement to be hopeful. One instance of this has been noted above (V, 11.7824-34), and beyond this the following extracts may be noted:

Forthi, mi Sone, it is no wonder
If thou be drunke of love among,
Which is above alle othre strong:
And if so is that thou so be,
Tell me thi Schrifte in privite;
It is no schame of such a thew
A yong man to be dronkelew ... (VI, 11.100-06)

2. Ibid., 1.455.
Bot, Sone, thou shalt bidde and prei
In such a wise as I schal seie,
That thou the lusti well atteigne
Thi wofull thurstes to restreigne
Of love, and taste the swetnessse. (VI, 11.391-95)

The former, in which Amans is addressed as "a yong man," is particularly significant in the context of the strategy by which Gower encourages his audience to believe, throughout the first seven Books of the poem, that there is nothing "different" or exceptional about Amans. These speeches have apparently also been overlooked by J.A.W. Bennett, who comments that throughout Confessio Amantis, the priest's attitude towards Amans's chances of success is one of discouragement.¹

Gower's concern that Amans should, in the last episode of the narrative, be regarded as something other than the typical hero of courtly literature is indicated by the fact that here, for the first time in most versions of the poem, he is given an actual name:

And as it were halvinge a game
Sche axeth me what is mi name.
"Ma dame", I seide, "John Gower". (11.2319-21)

Soon after, when the fiery dart has been withdrawn and the absolution given, Venus uses his name again:

"Lo", thus sche seide, "John Gower,
Now thou art ate last cast,
This have I for thin ese cast,
That thou nomore of love sieche". (11.2908-11)

By thus contradicting his initial statement that he intends to speak throughout "in persona aliorum", Gower invites his audience to consider him as he is known to them, a man advanced in years,

committed to religious and social concerns which go to comprise a moral system according to which the satisfaction of man's natural desires forms only a small part. The identification of poet and lover in Book VIII is unquestionably a major element in Gower's rhetorical strategy. He does not ridicule the "I" whom he has portrayed so sympathetically throughout the poem, but he draws the moral that mundane love, no matter how virtuous, is in accord with "the lawe of kinde" only when it is the experience of the young. Without any direct exhortation to "yonge fresshe folkes", Gower compels his audience to the recognition that they themselves will one day be in his position, and that it is the duty of every one of them to seek out and to abide by that law which circumscribes the law of love - in the words of Genius, to "Tak love wher it mai noght faile".

The universal applicability of the story of a particular lover is achieved largely by the way in which the protagonist is presented throughout the confession, as one who is apparently "sufficant / To holde love his covenant", and who draws the interest and sympathy of the poem's audience, in spite of the obvious "mechanical" element in his presentation. Amans's story is such a moving exemplum of the inevitable decay of love because in the final Book he is presented as one who has a whole personality. His reality does not diminish after the great speech of self-recognition, as the following lines which describe his reaction to Venus's gift and his leavetaking testify:

And thus bewhapid in my thought,  
Whan al was turnyd in to nought,  
I stod amasid for a while,  
And in my self y gan to smyle  
Thenkende upon the bedes blake,  
And how they weren me betake,  
For that y schulde bidde and prei.
The return to the style of medieval Complaint after this passage marks the completion of Gower's teaching; C.S. Lewis rather unfairly describes the last 200 lines of the poem as "a long and unsuccessful coda". The epilogue, which (in the manuscripts of the second and third versions of the poem) sets out the duties of the estates and of the ruler, and which includes some final remarks on the subject of love, is admittedly inferior to poetic texture to the remainder of Book VIII. This is the result of a change from a style in which "personality" is consciously developed to one in which restraint and impersonality are exercised. The poet speaks here, as he does at the beginning of the poem and in his earlier works as one of a community. The following lines, which employ the first person plural mode of address, are typical of the style:

Ferst forto loke the Clergie,  
Hem oughte wel to justefie  
Thing which belongith to here cure,  
As forto praie and to procure  
Oure pes toward the tevene above,  
And ek to sette reste and love  
Among ous on this erthe hiere. (11.2995-3001)

Yet the return to Gower's habitual, public voice is right and necessary. Having pointed the moral that it is the responsibility of an old man to be an exemplar of "vertu moral", Gower presents

his audience in these lines with evidence of his own concern for the well-being of the Christian community.

The lines at the end of the poem which describe the blindness of earthly love (VIII, 11.3144-61) echo those at the beginning (I, 11.34-57), but we read the former with new awareness, since we have been shown in the intervening Books a convincing example of the suffering occasioned by passion, in the story of the lover who bears the name of the poet. The effect of Gower's self-transformation into the image of a lover, whom he finally identifies with himself, is to give him authority to make generalizations on the subject of love. The twentieth century reader - and perhaps too the reader of less pragmatic ages - is more prepared to accept "the wisdom of experience" than he is to accept the sentence of the less personal, less particular, mode of medieval didacticism, of which Gower's earlier works are typical examples. There can be no doubt that the portrayal of himself as a fallible "I" in a dramatized process of education brings a new dimension of compassion and tolerance to Gower's work, the presence of which serves to intensify the expression of belief in the law of caritas.
CHAPTER 4:

The Figure of the Poet in *Piers Plowman* (1).

In *Piers Plowman*, just as in *Pearl* and *Confessio Amantis*, the illustration of the post-figure’s education and edification is an all-important rhetorical technique. Like the author of *Pearl* and *John Gower*, Langland holds up to his audience an experience which he represents himself as having had, in order that they might recognize both the attitudes requisite for salvation and the difficulties involved in achieving and retaining those attitudes.

The task of illustrating and defining the quality of Langland’s self-participation is, however, a more difficult one than that of showing how the authorial “I” achieves its effect in *Pearl* and *Confessio Amantis*. This is because of the greater stylistic variety within *Piers Plowman*, coupled with a diffuseness of structure. Structurally, *Pearl* and *Confessio Amantis* are both characterized by a consistent use of dialogue between two people: the post-figure and the Pearl-maiden, Amens and Genius.¹ Structurally, the major dialogue in each of these poems acts as a unifying device. By following the answers made by the authority figures to the questions posed by the post-figures, the audience is able to chart its way through the poems. In both works there are structural techniques subsidiary to the dialogue forming the tightly-integrated system of symbolism in *Pearl*, and the looser, but effective enough, framework of the cardinal virtues in *Confessio Amantis*.

¹ Venus and Cupid are additional speaking figures in Gower’s poem, but their roles are fairly slight.
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In *Piers Plowman*, the poet-figure's search for a "kynde knowyng" of the means of salvation is an important rhetorical and structural motif. R.W. Frank comments on the implications of Langland's use of a narrative structured about a "personal" experience:

What the poet focusses on is man and the drama of his salvation. The divine plan is in the background. It gives shape and organization to *Dowel*, *Dobet*, and *Dobeat*, and animates the fundamental conviction pervading the poem that salvation is possible for man. At moments this or that aspect of the divine plan may become the center of attention, as in the crucifixion scene or the scene in which the Holy Ghost distributes grace to mankind. But the poet is looking at man rather than at the Triune God; it is the implications of the divine plan for human salvation that give the poem its direction; and it is the spectacle of man now blundering and now moving forward within the framework of this plan that gives the poem its drama. 1

Will's progress - "now blundering and now moving forward" - is not, however, emphasized to the degree that the dreamer's progress towards knowledge is in *Pearl*. Similarly, the authorial "I" of *Piers Plowman* is not placed in the forefront of our attention in the way that Gower's "I" is at the end of *Confessio Amantis*. Langland's method is to focus attention upon Will and his search for the means of salvation intermittently, while rounding out his thematic concerns through a variety of other methods; for example, the sermon addressed directly to the audience outside the poem, but ostensibly directed at Will by one or other of the

personages whom he encounters in dream, the exemplum (present, for example, in the Samaritan's explanation of the Trinity), and the miniature allegorical action (for example, the meeting of the Four Daughters of God). There are many dialogues within *Piers Plowman*, and these do not always involve Will. Sometimes, it appears that Will's place has been taken by another representative of sinful humanity, in order that emphasis may be given to a particular point of doctrine: this occurs, for example, in the episodes which involve Recklessness and Activa Vita.

In an attempt to define as closely as possible the extent to which Langland's participation in the poem influences our appreciation of the fundamental questions about salvation which it raises, I have divided the discussion of the "I" in *Piers Plowman* into two parts. The present chapter is largely expositional in nature, since in it are traced Langland's several appearances throughout the poem, both as Will and as the preacher figure whose accents closely resemble those of the various exponents of "authority" whom Will encounters in his dreams. In this section, special attention is directed towards the varying styles in which Will is portrayed as a character - these range from naturalistic and perhaps autobiographical realization reminiscent of the way in which the authorial "I" in *Pearl* is portrayed, to the blandly formalistic style which marks so many of Amans's questions in *Confessio Amantis*. 
In the following chapter, an attempt is made to come to terms with some important issues raised in the exposition: for example, the question of Will's progress towards salvation, and its significance for the poem's "sentence", the question of Will's "typicality" and of the relationship (if any) of Will to Piers, and the justification for regarding Langland's presence in his poem as the major unifying element of the work.

The entire discussion of the poem is based upon the C version. Since George Kane's investigation into the question of authorship¹ has established that Piers Plowman in its several forms is in fact the work of one man, it seems only logical to concentrate upon the version which the poet almost certainly regarded as his "last word", despite the textual difficulties which have led most commentators to work from B. Some attention will, however, be given to the more important alterations in the manner of the poet's self-presentation which occurred in the revision of B.

The opening lines of the poem establish that what is about to be told involves the personal experience of the poet. He declares that he will tell his audience of what

he saw in sleep when he went wandering on Malvern hills "In a somere seyson". Lines 1-13 of Passus I tell us very little about the narrator, save that he is dressed in rough garments, that he does not lead a monastic life, and that he desires to hear "wonders": there is no inducement to observe any relation between the speaker's psychological state and the substance of the dream which follows, such as there is in Pearl, the Parlement of the Thre Ages, Confessio Amantis and in Chaucer's vision poems. The poet, considered as a character in his own vision, plays a fairly insignificant part in developing the meaning of the Visio section of the poem. He is present, for the most part, as an observer and an expositor: the keynote of his presentation in the Visio is summed up in line 13 of Passus I: "Al ich saw slepynge as ich shal 3ow telle". Most of the major episodes of the Visio - the activity of the folk on the field, the parliament of mice and rats, the trial of Meed (which occupies three whole passus), the sermon of Conscience and the confession of the Deadly Sins, and the activity of Piers among the folk - do not involve the participation of the beholder. The accents of the preacher and moralist are blended with those of the observer and expositor, as the following extracts indicate:

Thus ȝe ȝeuep ȝoure golde ȝlotones to helpe,  
And lenep it to loreles þat lecherie haunten.  
(I, 11.74-5)

For God knoweþ by conscience and by kynde wille,  
Thi cost and here couetyse and who þe catel ouhte  
For þi leue lordes loue leueþ suche wrytinges;  
God in þe gospel suche grauynge noþt a-loweþ,  
Nesciat sinistra quid faciat dextera.  
(IV, 11.71-75)
Langland frequently addresses his listeners in this way, thereby implicating them directly in the events recounted. The sermon-style passages quoted above emphasize that the poet's listeners are the folk on the field, who are all too easily deceived by pardoners, and that they are directly involved in the activities of Lady Meed.

Although the dominant mode of the poet's presentation in the Visio is that of omniscient observer and commentator on the poem's "action", there is also an element of participation in the events of the dream. At the beginning of Passus II, Langland declares that he will show his audience "What be montayne by-mene and be merke dale" (11.1-2); this he does in simple dramatic terms, by recording his reactions to Lady Holy Church and Lady Meed. Of Holy Church - who arouses his fear "thauh hue faire were" (1.10) - he asks "Mercy, ma dame what may bys be to mene?" (1.11). Here the poet makes use of a conventional rhetorical technique in dialogue poetry, that of putting into the mouth of an "I" a simple question, in order to elicit a detailed reply from a second figure, usually associated with doctrine or authority. (This technique has been noted in the previous chapter, with reference to Amans's questions such as "What thing is Ire?").

1. The influence of the vernacular sermon on Langland's style has been noted by G.R. Owst, Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England, Cambridge (1933), pp.548-49. For an example of a combination of second person and first person plural modes of address ("pu"... "we"), see W.O. Ross, ed., Middle English Sermons, no.7.
This conventional kind of dialogue is sharpened by the revelation that although Holy Church knows the dreamer's name ("Wille, slepest þow...?") he does not know her identity. The impression of Will's spiritual inadequacy is strengthened by the Lady's reproof when Will asks her name: she says that he ought to know her, because of his baptismal pledges to work her will throughout his life (II, ll.72-5). His next request - for the "kyndelich" (i.e. natural, inward) knowledge of how to believe in Christ, and how to save his soul - elicits a reply about the origin and evil of pride, the chief sin against Truth. This does not satisfy the dreamer, who reiterates the point that he desires a 'kynde' knowing of salvation: Holy Church chastises him as "þow dote de daffe", explaining that there is a contradiction in the terms of his question, since natural knowledge of love lies in his own heart. She continues to give a figurative description of Divine Love, and to preach the need for charitable works. This speech (II, ll.139-205) illustrates a feature of the presentation of most of the doctrinaire figures whom Will encounters in the Vita,¹ that of initially addressing Will, and then going on to speak to a wider audience: Holy Church, having mentioned the supreme example of Charity, turns her attention to powerful men of the world, whom she addresses directly:

1. See pp.139-41, 145, 149, 153, below.
It is clear that a single figure, "in Abit as an Ermite", is not being addressed at this point.

At the beginning of the following Passus, attention is again focused on the dreamer. He asks his instructress for knowledge of the false, and his attention is directed towards a lady on his "lyft half" (III, 1.8). His reaction to this new figure seems consciously designed to arouse in the reader the memory of his reaction to the lady on his right side. Will had been afraid of Holy Church, but his reaction to Meed is much less timorous:

Hure a-raye with hure rychesse myn herte. (1.16)

Although the poet-dreamer is not present as an actor in the episodes of the betrothal, arrest, and trial of Meed, he is involved in them, to the extent that he is attracted by the material opulence which the principle represents.

At the beginning of Passus VI, a new dimension is introduced into the presentation of the dreamer: here, in the account of his awakening and of his encounter in the more distant past with Reason, the "I" becomes something other than an expositor-commentator and a relatively stereotyped rhetorical cipher. Will is presented as a figure which might, in the modern critical sense, be
termed a "character"; a figure, that is, with a personal history and an individual consciousness. We learn that he has a wife named Kit, with whom he lives in Cornhill, writing against "lollers", although outwardly living a "lollerne lyf" himself. The reported dialogue with Reason, in which Will attempts to make excuses for his way of life by referring to his personal history, is vastly different in tone from his earlier discussion with Holy Church. The powerfully ambiguous conclusion of Will's reply to Reason's demand - the admission that he has "tynt tyme and tyme mysspende" (1.93), mingled with the hope "to haue of hym pat is al-myghty/ A gobet of hus grace and bygynne a tyme,/ pat alle tymes of my tyme to profit shal turne" - leads E. Talbot Donaldson to remark:

Despite his deep desire that his way of life should be found respectable, the poet knows in his heart that all the most subtle distinctions in the world are never going to succeed in lending it respectability.

There is, undeniably, a convincingly "personal" air about this part of the poem - what Donaldson justly refers to as a "brilliantly realized .... irony of effect", deepened by the double attitude towards mendicancy displayed elsewhere in the poem. The picture of Will at the beginning of Passus VI is very similar to that of the dreamer throughout the whole of Pearl: an illusion of

1. His tallness and his education, he pleads, render it impossible for him "To worchen as a workeman";

   (VI, 11.22-25, 35-41, 53-56.)

2. "Piers Plowman: The C-text and its Poet",

3. Ibid., p.223.
the "whole man" - as distinct from the representation of an impossibly naïve pupil-figure or an omniscient preacher - is created in both. The characterization of Will in his confession to Reason might well be termed naturalistic, because of the accretion of personal detail - about the speaker's appearance, his childhood, and his present occupation - and because of the keen psychological insight revealed in the account of Will's attempt to avoid censure by railing against the shortcomings of others. The question of whether or not autobiography underlies this naturalistic representation of the poet-figure cannot be answered definitely, in the absence of external evidence about the poet's life, just as it cannot be answered definitely in the case of Pearl. It is likely, however, that Langland did draw upon his own life for the portrayal of Will in Passus VI, in view of the fact that the poem was almost certainly written, in the first instance, for an audience of listeners. This audience would rightly have experienced bewilderment had they been addressed by a known poet who presented them with a set of facts about himself which they recognized to be incorrect. Literary tradition, moreover, contains ample precedents for the relaying of biographical details such as those contained in the sixth Passus of Piers Plowman. Arguments which involve consideration of oral delivery and contemporary poetic practice are more persuasive than Donaldson's rather evasive disclaimer of fiction in this passage:

Without going into its details, we should observe that the rejection of the poet's account of himself entails one great responsibility that no one has ever attempted to meet: that is, to explain what purpose the autobiographical passage was meant to serve if it is fictional.

In the context of what precedes and follows it, the "autobiographical" passage serves a definite thematic purpose. The fact that Will lives in a manner which is opposed to God's law (defined by Reason in his sermon to the people, VI, 11.114-201) underlines his participation in the folk's wilful adherence to sinful ways. (The state of the folk is described in Passus I, and then again, more forcibly, in the account of Piers Plowman's attempt at reform in Passus IX). Further, the evasiveness of Will's rhetoric is reminiscent of Lady Meed's attempt at self-justification in the preceding episode, and of the recalcitrance manifested in the confessions of some of the personified Sins in the following Passus — notably in those of Luxury, Avarice, and Gluttony. The overall effect of the insertion of the "autobiographical" section in C, Passus VI (absent from the corresponding part of the B version) is the addition of a new dimension of realism to the portrayal of universal wilfulness in the Visio. The realism of Will's confession to Reason is of a different kind from the realism of the Lady Meed and Piers-at-work scenes on the one hand, and of the confessions of the Sins on the other.

Meed and Piers scenes are effective largely because of their action-drama nature, the confessions because of their adaptation of naturalism to conventional "matiere". The incorporation of the poet's personal testimony, set forth in a style which is more individualistic than the style of the other confessions, adds a layer of gravity to the representation of man's sinful state, by emphasizing both the pervasiveness of *cupiditas* and the difficulty involved in escaping from it.

In the account of the confessions of the Sins to Repentance, of Repentance's prayer for the folk and of Piers Plowman's activity among them, the role of the poet is purely that of observer and commentator. Langland's method throughout Passus VII-X is to allow the allegorical action "to speak for itself", as it were, without either his inclusion in it as a character or omniscient authorial comment. After the account of the intemperance of Piers's servants during the time of plenty, however, the poet addresses his audience directly in stern admonitory accents:

Ac ich warne 30w werkmen wynne whyle 3e mowe,  
For hunger hyderwardes hye\# hym faste;  
He shal awake \(30W\) water wasters to chaste.  
Ar fewe 3eres be fulfilled famyne shal aryse,

And so seith *saturnus* and sent 3ow to warne.  
Porwe flodes and foule wederes frutes shullen faile,

Pruyde and pestilences shal muche puple fecche.  
Thre shupes and a shaft with an vm. folwynge,  
Shal brynge bane and bataile on bothe half be mone.  
And 3anne shal dep with-drawe and derthe be Iustice,

And dawe 3e deluere deye for defaute,  
Bote god of hus goodnesse graunte ous a trewe.  

(IX, 11.344-55)
The address to "30w werkmen" establishes that the poem's listeners are, in fact, the folk on Piers Plowman's half-acre, while the mysterious prophecy contained in lines 351-53 suggests that the poet possesses an insight which his audience does not have. As if to dispel any "holier-than-thou" impression which these lines might create, Langland includes himself among the Christian community dependent upon God's grace, by the use of the first person plural form in the last line.

The poet retreats once more during the account of the pardon given Piers by Truth - until the point at which the mocking priest asks Piers for a sight of the pardon, when the poet again assumes a character role: "And ich by-hynde hem bope by-heeld al þe bulle" (1.285). Rosemary Woolf comments,

This is a most extraordinary treatment of the Dreamer: normally he is either a detached observer of the vision or he is present in the dream in life-like contact with the other characters. Here, however, the reader sees him in physical relationship with the other characters but they are unaware of this, as though he were a ghost in his own dream. The effect is to bring the words of the pardon into startling focus: the poet manifestly intends us to be surprised.1

Surprised we are indeed, when the poet, who has been present at the scene of the mysterious argument between Piers and the priest, is apparently unable to offer any explanation or

clarification of it. The poet, like the reader, is left "musynge" about the reason for the priest's impugning of the document of indulgence sent to the folk by Truth, and for the absence of a defence by Piers. His very bewilderment about the meaning of his dream offers a clue to its meaning: he suggests - Cato to the contrary (11.303-04) - that there are dreams whose significance, when interpreted, is profound. The mention of two famous Old Testament dreams, those of Nebuchadnezzar and Joseph, suggests that his own dream may be prophetic. The final dream of the poem, in which Will beholds the bestowal of a second divine document upon Piers, again for the salvation of erring mankind, recalls the dream which concludes with the "jangling" between Piers and the priest: the parallel would appear to be a consciously designed one, in view of the legal language which Grace uses when bestowing the authority of the Church upon Piers.¹ The pardon scene, in which the priest questions the authority of Piers - and of Truth - prefigures the final scene in the poem, in which the forces of Pride (Antichrist) undermine the authority of the Church: in this sense the priest (whom Coghill labels "the villain of the piece"²) may be understood as prefiguring Antichrist. The point of the pardon scene in Passus X is to emphasize that the forces which work against Grace are continually present in the world.

¹ E.g. XXII, 11.257-58.
There is evidence, in the poet's sharp attack at the end of Passus X upon most kinds of printed indulgences, of a second allegorical purpose at work in the pardon scene. This is to question the validity of documents as aids to salvation. The message is clearer in the B version, where Piers tears the pardon in anger, saying that he has been excessively concerned with "bely-ioye" (B, VII, 1.118). The removal of this highly dramatic scene in C has the effect of placing greater emphasis upon the "prefiguring" function outlined above. The poet-figure's bewilderment about the pardon at the end of Passus X is an effective connection between the *Visio* and the *Vita* section of the poem, which occupies the following thirteen passus.

James I. Wimsatt gives a concise summary of the doctrinal rationale for the division of the poem into two broad structural blocks:

Towards the end of this dream [i.e. of the confession and the pilgrimage to Truth] the people receive a disappointing "pardon", which merely states that those who do well go to Heaven and those who don't to Hell. This points up the individual's responsibility for his salvation; since there is no blanket pardon, each person must find out for himself what it is to do well. The first two dreams of Piers, known as the Vision, thus have presented an allegory of public

1. The style of this passage (11.332-37) is essentially similar to the style of the exhortation at the end of Passus IX; see above, p.133.

2. It is necessary to refrain from a too-literal reading of this passage, and to see that in tearing the pardon, Piers is not rejecting the divine authority itself.

3. The absence of the tearing scene in C seems to undermine the significance of Rosemary Woolf's ingenious argument, according to which the pardon becomes a pardon only after Piers has torn it, an act which [sic] symbolizes the mercy and forgiveness shown in the Redemption. If the importance of the scene centres upon the act of tearing, it is difficult to see why the poet removed it in the revision.
progress, and they have shown that the progress possible on this level, while no doubt important, is ultimately limited. Eventually each person must set out on his own quest for Dowel (Do Well).  

The Dowel section of the *Vita* begins, as the *Visio* had done, with the poet's recollection of roaming about in a "somer seson". The search for Dowel is motivated by two experiences in the first part of the poem. One is the confusion about the pardon, the other is Holy Church's remark that Will must find other instructors if he is not satisfied with her teaching:

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And þis ich trowe be treuthe who so can teche þe betere,
Loke þou soffrie hym to say and so þou myght lerne.
(XI, 11.145-46)
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Will's first teachers when he sets out alone after the "social" vision are two itinerant Minorities. He is dissatisfied with their answer to his question about the habitation of Dowel, but couches his objection courteously, in the scholastic language with which friars would be familiar:

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Contra, quaþ ich as a clerke and comsede to dispute. (XI, 1.20)
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His impatience is quite apparent, however, at the end of the friars' exemplum on the theme of free-will; Will protests, just as he had done to Holy Church (II, 1.137), that he desires a more inward and meaningful definition of truth,

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I have no kynde knowyng, quaf ich, to conceyue al by speche,
Ac yf ich may lyue and loke ich shal go lerne bettere. (11.56-57)

John Lawlor draws attention to the irony implicit in Will's misunderstanding of the friar's parting words,¹ "Ich bykenne þe Crist þat on þe croice deide". (1.58) It does not become apparent until much later in the quest that its whole meaning and purpose is contained in some advice which Will interprets as a formula of farewell.²

In the lines which sketch the setting for the following dream,

Ich wente forþ wyde where walkynge myn one,
In a wylde wyldernesse by a wode syde.
Blisse of þe briddes a-byde me made,
And vnder lynde in a launde lenede ich a stounde,
To litchen here laies and here loueliche notes
Murthe of here murye mouthes made me to slepe,
(XI, 11.61-66)

there is a suggestion that the search for knowledge of Dowel is a laconic and pleasurable matter. The settings for some of the later dreams convey a markedly different impression.³

The group of teachers whom Will encounters consecutively in his next dream — Thought, Wit, Study, Clergy and Scripture — represent, as Wimsatt points out,⁴ aspects of the dreamer's rational self. (Thought is cogitation,

² Will's misunderstanding is apparent in his parting words to the friars: "þe same saue 30w fro meschaunce". (1.59)
³ See below, pp.174-75.
Wit, the faculty of perception, while Study, Clergy and Scripture represent the potential for improvement through learning.) Will is dissatisfied with what Thought reveals about the three forms of doing well, and expresses his feeling in similar terms to those which he had used when replying to Holy Church and the friars:

"3ut sauerep me nat bi sawe," quap ich, "so me crist spede", 
A more kynde knowyng coueite ich to huyre 
Of dowel and of dobet and dobest of alle." 

(XI, 11.107-09)

Thought leads Will to Wit, who explains, in terms of the rather wooden allegory of the Castle of Kynde (XI, 11.127-149), that doing well in its various forms is manifested in the person of every man whose soul is guarded by conscience, or Inwit, who is the marshal of the "Lord of lyf and of lyght". Wit goes on to explain the evil brought about by misuse of conscience, in a speech which is obviously directed at an audience wider than Will: some of it, for example, is directed at "princes of holy churche" (11.191-201), while a larger proportion of it is obviously intended for the attention of those capable of procreation. (Will is, of course, a representative of the latter group.) Dame Study, whom Will encounters next, also addresses a wider audience; she is particularly concerned about the evils of sophistry and pedantry.

1. And whil iow art song and sep and by wepne kene, 
Awreke þe þerwith on wyuyne for godes werk ich holde hit:

............... 
3e þat han wyues, beþ war worcep nat out of tyme, 
As adam dude and eue as ich whiler tolde.(XI, 11.287-92)
Langland gives a dramatic edge to her diatribe by causing her to mistake Will for one of those learned men who "gnawen god with gorge" (1.41): she returns to her immediate audience at the end of the speech, when she warns her husband about showing holy writ "Amonges hem pat hauen hawes atte wille" (1.82). Will shows himself to be a model pupil by pledging meekly to obey the law of charity which his instructress extols (11.88-92), as a return for which he is directed to take the way to Clergy and Scripture.

The fact that Wit and Study represent human faculties and abilities is obscured, to some extent, by the "digressions" within their speeches. Wit undertakes a diatribe against the abuses to which wedlock is put (XI, 11.256-302), and Study attacks the rich for their ill-treatment of the poor (XII, 11.47-71). Both do return to their immediate audiences after these passages of generalized sermonizing, but the narrative line of the allegory - Will's search for knowledge through the use of his own common-sense and intellect - is temporarily obscured. Movement away from the immediate situation of the dreamer to a mode of discourse only marginally related to Will's questions or comments is a typical feature of Langland's style. This stylistic and structural trait probably has its origins in the digressive tendencies of the medieval sermon, in particular of the so-called "university" sermon. Étienne Gilson sums up the doctrinal rationale for changes in subject matter such as those apparent in the speeches of
Wit and Study: "Edification of souls is more to be prized than continuity of discourse".\(^1\) St. Gregory's defence of digression in religious discourse is directly applicable, not only to the overall dispositio of the poem and to the repetition characteristic of its verbal texture,\(^2\) but also to the movement in individual speeches from address to a particular audience to address to a wider, more general audience:

> There is no doubt that the commentator on holy writ should act just like this: whatever subject he is dealing with, if he happens to find at hand an occasion for appropriate edification, he should as it were turn aside the flood of his eloquence towards that nearby valley; and then, when he has poured enough into it, he should fall back into the channel of his prepared speech.\(^3\)

Through the vehicle of Wit's speech to Will, Langland instructs his audience in the proper uses of marriage, and then returns "back into the channel of his prepared speech" to the story of Will's quest for knowledge of salvation.

Will's encounters with Clergy and Scripture in the C-text are recorded in a less discursive way. Clergy's speech (XII, 11.142-162) is a warning that intellectual

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3. Ibid., p.84.
enquiry and speculation must be governed by faith. The difficulty involved in the acceptance of this apparent stricture upon intellectual activity is dramatized through Will's encounter with Scripture, who flaunts her knowledge before him:

\begin{quote}
\textit{Panne scripture scorned me and many skyles shewed,}
And contynaunce made to clergie to congie me, hit semede,
And lakkede me in latyn and lyght by me sette,
And seide, "\textit{multi multa sapiunt, \& scipios nesciunt.}"
\end{quote}

(XII, 11.163-65)

Will's perplexity about the contribution of learning to doing-well and hence to salvation is signalled by his immediate passing into another dream, the dream of Fortune and her realm:

\begin{quote}
Tho wepte ich for wo and wrapede of here wordes, And in a wynkynge ich worth and wonderlich ich mette.
For ich was raueshed ryght ber; fortune me fette,
In-to be londe of longynge and loue hue me brouhte.
\end{quote}

(11.166-69)

In the Land of Longing he is beguiled by Lust-of-the-Flesh and Lust-of-the-Eyes, and he disregards the warning of Elde ("Thou shalt fynde fortune faile at by moste neede," 1.190), choosing instead to follow Recklessness. This figure, who acts

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1. In the B-text, Clergy embarks upon a lengthy digression, similar to those noted already in the C-text, upon the abuses to which religion is put (X, 11.266-335): in it, Clergy addresses proud priests directly, as "\textit{3ow}" (e.g. 11.270-73). In B, Will expresses his doubts about the value of poverty (1.345) and learning (e.g. 11.442-57), whereas in C these objections are placed in the mouth of Recklessness.
as a spokesman for the dreamer, declares that there is no certainty in learning, and that he places greater value upon the grace of God as a way to salvation.

Recklessness's argument about the magnitude of Divine mercy is weakened by its stress on man's passiveness: he interprets the maxim "Homo proponit et deus disponit" as one which confers licence upon man to follow indiscriminately the promptings of his will. The poet reflects that in following the advice of Recklessness he counted "Clergie and hus consail ... ful lytel": furthermore, his passiveness indicates that he has forgotten Thought's teaching about conscience and its influence upon rightful action.

The poet tells of how he enjoyed the delights of Fortune's handmaidens until he "for-3at 3outhe and 3orn in-to elde" (XIII, 1.13). When he complains indignantly to Leaute (Loyalty) about his treatment at the hands of mercenary friars, Will is reminded of his own individual

1. Note that Recklessness "answers" Clergy and Scripture directly:

   Yf we sholden worchen after here workes to wynnen ous heuene,
   That for hure werkes and witt wonye now in peyne,
   Then wroghte we vnwisliche for al 3oure wyse techynge.
   Ac ich countresegge be nat, cleregie ne by.
   connynge, scripture ...
   (KII, 11.221-24)

2. E.g. For be more a man may do by so pat he do hit, The more is he worth and worthi of wyse and goode ypreised.
   (XI., 11.309-10)
responsibilities: as Scripture had done earlier,\(^1\) Leaute implies that he is deficient in knowledge of himself: "Ac be þow neuer þe furste: the defaute to blame" (1.36). Will then ponders upon whether or not he is among God's chosen, and concludes by recognizing that no salvation is possible without Mercy. In this passage of direct speech (XIII, 11.53-70), he is presented as one who has considerable knowledge of theological concepts: there is no trace of the simple rhetorical device of the naive questioner, but at the same time there is not the sense of an individual sensibility which characterizes Will's musings in Passus VI.

After this speech, Will is removed from the centre of attention for some 300 lines. The appearance of Trajan, the righteous heathen, provides the impetus for Recklessness's eloquent praise of the "lawe of loue" and of patient poverty: the kernel of the speech is contained in the following lines:

\begin{quote}
For-thi lerne we lawe of loue as oure lord tauhte;
The poure peuple faile [we] nat whil eny peny ous lasteþ
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
Al was ensample sothliche to ous synful here,
We sholde be lowe and loueliche and leel, eche man to oþer,
And pacient as pilgrimes for pilgrimes arn we alle.
\end{quote}

(XIII, 11.119-30)

The note of passiveness present in Recklessness's earlier

\(^1\) Scripture's association with Leaute is emphasized by his reappearance at this point: "He seith soth", quaf scripture þo and skypte an hy, and prechede .. (XIII, 1.40)
speech is now absent: emphasis is placed upon the responsibility of the individual in the scheme of salvation, and two important issues raised earlier in the poem — the value of learning and of material riches — are clarified.¹ The tendency noted above, in the speeches of Wit and Study, for the "teachers" of the poem to address an audience wider than one, is even more noticeable in the second speech of Recklessness. This is apparent in his very first words — "Lo, lordes! what leaute dude ... Wel au3te be lordes pat lawes kepen pis lesson to have in mynde" (XIII, 11.88-9) — and in subsequent exhortations to "lordes .. and ladies",² "lewede men",³ and priests⁴. The comment at the end of Recklessness's sermon,

Thus recehelessnesse in a rage a-resonde clergie, And scorned scripture pat meny skyles shewed
to have in mynde" (XIV, 11.129-30), is perhaps misleading, since Recklessness's speech which begins after the disappearance of Trajan (XIII, 1.88) contains no fundamental disagreements with what Clergy and Scripture had earlier attempted to teach Will: Recklessness now does not condemn learning as he had done before (XII, 11.221-22), but makes the point that it is useless if not

¹. Recklessness does not dispute the value of learning, but he does point out that intellectual endeavour is useless if it is not regulated by the spirit of love (XIII, 11.93-95); neither does he say that riches are evil per se (XIV, 11.26-27).

². XIII, 11.219-20.

³. XIV, 11.29-30.

⁴. XIV, 11.104-07.
governed by love and loyalty (XIII, 11.92-95). Again, as in Passus XII, Recklessness is unexpectedly identified with Will: Kynde comes "clergie to helpen" (1.131), bidding "hym" (i.e. Recklessness) look in the mirror of the world, and then comes the line:

And ialh bowede my body by-holdynge al a-boute (1.134).

In this abrupt transition from "he" to "I", the poet seems to be deliberately trying to encourage his audience to believe that Recklessness and the dreamer are separate entities, only to show that they are in fact the same character, for the purpose of exemplifying Will's change in attitude - from the recklessness of Wanhope to a specifically Christian kind of non-caring, the life of "pacience and pouerte". Donaldson's comments on the two senses of recklessness, and on their application to the dreamer's progress, are very perceptive; e.g.

The two characters are fastened together with transparent tape. C was careful that the reader should see through it and perceive at once the Dreamer and Recklessness .... I suggest that C was having a sort of double-edged joke, first in the identification of the Dreamer with Recklessness, second in the surprising development of Recklessness from one who is made to appear a very bad actor to one who exemplifies, to some extent, the virtue of patient poverty.

By separating the figures of Will and Recklessness, Langland manages to inject another sermon into the narrative without the serious dramatic impropriety which would have resulted from Will's sudden appearance as a teacher of the audience outside the poem.

1. See p.143f, above.
The motif of Will's education is brought forcibly to the surface of the poem's argument in the account of his encounter with Kynde and Reason, who together represent the supernatural principle by which the world is governed. Will's vision in "be myrour of myddel-erde" is reminiscent of the vision of the field full of folk at the beginning of the poem. Both focus upon intemperance - wilfulness - in the community, although in Passus XIV the emphasis is upon sinfulness in the area of man's appetitive rather than his political behaviour. There is a keen irony in the indignation which Will expresses to Reason, since he is shown (in the Land-of-Longing episode) to have been guilty of lack of "mesure". Will questions Reason,

Thei ouerdon hit day and nyght and so dop noon opere.
Bestes ruwelen hem al by reson and renkes ful fewe.
And ēr-fore meruailep me for man, as in makynge,
Is most yliche be in wit and in werkes,
Whi he ne loueþ by lore and lyueþ as þow techest?
(XIV, 11.191-96).

Reason reminds Will, as Loyalty had done before, that willingness to blame others argues a basic lack of self-knowledge,

"For-þi," quaþ reson, "ich rede the rewele þi
tonge evere,
And er þow lakke eny lyf loke ho is to preise".
(11.207-08)

This supernatural agency also points out the danger of questioning God's ways (11.199-206), in an amplification of Recklessness's statement of the virtue of patience. The poet reports that he was ashamed for his presumption:
This last exclamation suggests first that Will has regressed - since earlier, through the association with Recklessness, he appeared as one quite well-informed about "doing well" - and secondly, that the task of leading the Good Life in everyday circumstances is an extremely difficult one.

Will's backsliding is highlighted again in the answer which he gives to the "wiht" seen upon awakening to the question "What ys dowel?". He says,

"To see muche and suffren al certes, syre, ys dowel."

This remark indicates a very limited understanding of "suffer": Reason uses the term to describe an attitude of willing and loving patience, but in Will's mouth, suffering means little more than a grudging acceptance one's lot. Ymaginatif tells Will that if he had suffered truly - that is, "in ensaumple" of God's suffering, he would have learnt more:

Haddest bow suffred ... slepyng þo bow were, bow sholdest have knowe þat cleregye can and more conceyued þorwe resoun.

Will's new teacher, at a literal level, appears to signify the faculty of reflection\(^1\) implanted in man through the

\(^{1}\) This is suggested by Ymaginatif's description of his way of life: ydel was ich neuere, þauh ich sitte by my-self suche is my grace. (XV, 11.1-2).
grace of God. By means of the dream dialogue between Will and Ymaginatif, Langland conveys the information that Will's reflection has made him aware of his errors of impatience and scepticism about the value of learning in the search for salvation: the dreamer readily admits that he should be ashamed for having tried to "a-reason Reason" (XIV, 11.243-46). A large part of Ymaginatif's sermon consists of an eloquent defence of learning, and an explanation of the difference between true and false learning (XV, 11.30-83). Although Ymaginatif addresses his counsel to a wide audience ("alle cristene ... alle creatures"¹), the poet does not allow his audience to lose sight of the immediate, dramatic context of the sermon. The teacher recalls Will's past experience and error, thereby inviting the audience of the poem to observe what progress Will has made. This occurs, for example, in the following explanation after the defence of learning:

Whi ich haue ytold þe al þis ich took ful good hede, How contrariedest cleregie with crabbède wordes, þat is, how lewede men and luþere lyghtloker were saued þan connynge clerkes of kynde vnderstondyng. (11.99-102)

Ymaginatif also returns to the subject of the righteous heathen, with particular reference to Trajan: he implies that if the heathen, even the Saracens and the Jews, have lived righteously, they may, like Trajan, come to heaven without having been baptized (11.203-06). The allusion to Trajan, like the allusion to Clergy and Scripture, ¹. XV, 11.43,64.
hearkens back to the attitudes which Will had expressed earlier (in the person of Recklessness); both of them are placed in Passus XV in order to demonstrate that through reflection and experience, Will has become even more enlightened.\footnote{Notes to 'Piers the Plowman', E.E.T.S., O.S. 67, p.300.}

The record, at the beginning of Passus XVI, of Will's reflections upon awakening serves as a summary of his progress towards the knowledge of salvation. Even though Will has been made aware, by his disastrous experience of Fortune and by serious reflection, that the whole meaning of life inheres in the reciprocal love of man and God, he is unable to translate this knowledge into action. This is conveyed by the mention of a long period of desperate and aimless wandering:

\footnotesize{And ich awaked þer-with wittlees ner hande; As a frek þat feye were forth gan ich walke In manere of a mendinaunt meny þeres after. (XVI, 11.1-3)}

Musing upon Ymaginatif's counsel "þat iustus by-fore iesu in die iudicii/Non saluabitur bote uix helpe" (11.22-23),\footnote{Recklessness does not condemn learning outright, but Ymaginatif explains, through the exemplum of the two men in the Thames, that learning may be a positive aid to salvation. Recklessness's earlier advocacy of Trajan is given a deeper significance when Ymaginatif explains that Trajan is an example of the righteous heathen, and not an isolated case of God's mercy.}

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2. Skeat quotes Wyclif's explanation of this proverbial expression: "And, as men sein, in this word 'unneþe shal þe just man be saved' is menyd þis word Iesus, whoso coude undirstonde it. For in þis word VIX ben but þree lettris, V, and I, and X. And V betokeneþ fyue; I betokeneþ Iesus; and X bitokeneþ þe V wundes of Iesus Crist oure Lord". \footnote{Notes to 'Piers the Plowman', E.E.T.S., O.S. 67, p.300.}
Will passes into another dream, one in which he is shown to do well. In this dream, Will is bidden by Conscience and Clergy to dine with them in the house of Reason. Will's behaviour in the feast scene illustrates that he has understood what he has been taught by various teachers, and that he is able to translate this knowledge into action. He sits at a side-table with Patience, eating the food of a penitent: although he is not perfectly patient, because he is angry about the gluttonous and hypocritical doctor on the dais, Will does bear in mind what Leaute and Reason have taught him about blaming others:

Ac me es lob, pou ich latyn knowe to lacky eny secte,
For alle we ben brethren paue we be diuersliche clopede.
(11.78-79)

His "wil ful egre" does threaten to assert itself towards the end of this address to Patience, but Will's companion restrains him from instantly "a-posing" the doctor - and he obeys:

Ich sat stille as pacience wolde. (1.107)

Then, with the approval of Patience and Conscience, Will asks the friar about Dowel, and signifies that he is dissatisfied with the answer:

"Certes, sire," þanne seide ich "hit semeþ nat here, In þat 3e parteþ nat with ous poure þat 3e passeþ dowel, Noper louyeþ as 3e lereþ as oure lorde wolde, Et visitavit & fecit redemptionem plebis sue israel. And 3e fare þus with 3oure sike freres ferly me þynkeþ, Bote dowel endite 3ow in die iudicii."
(XVI, 11.115-19)
Conscience, acting through Patience, bids Will "be stille" before he begins to rant (1.121) and resumes the interrogation of the doctor himself. Although Will's rebuke illustrates right action in the context in which it is placed, the danger of both accusation and theological speculation is reiterated through Clergy's refusal to participate in the debate, except to emphasize the teaching of Piers Plowman. The separation of Clergy from Conscience and Patience serves to exemplify the essence of Ymaginatif's teaching that although learning may be an aid to salvation, it is ultimately inferior to good works and patience. That Will is taking the right course of action is suggested by the fact that he does not remain with Clergy, but sets out on pilgrimage to "parfitnesse" with Conscience and Patience:

Thus wente forþ here way with gret wil ich folewed. (XVI, 1.185)

After this, for some 300 lines, the poet-figure resumes an observer function similar to that which he plays throughout most of the Visio section.

In the following scene, the dialogue between Patience and Active, the latter functions "as a foil to patient poverty". It is dramatically more appropriate that Active rather than Will should be Patience's pupil at this point in the poem for two reasons. The first is that the events of the preceding episode have demonstrated that Will has learned the lesson of patience (at least in part); the

second is that the character of Active is a more effective instrument for the demonstration of the inadequacies of the active way of life, in view of Will's clerical station. Patience's lengthy sermon on the theme *pacientes uincunt* provides both an insight into the reason for Piers Plowman's disappearance, and the ideal against which Will's aberration as a result of his encounter with Need is to be measured.

At the end of Patience's discourse (which frequently reaches out beyond Active to a wider audience including the rich and powerful, e.g. Passus XVII, 11.8-9), attention is again directed at the poet-dreamer, who becomes the pupil of a new authority named Liberum Arbitrium. The list of his names and attributes which this "cristes creature" unfolds to his listener clearly suggests that he represents an ideal form of creation, "the fully integrated psyche". In Liberum Arbitrium's eloquent sermon about the absence of charity in contemporary society there are several instances of the digressive tendency apparent in the speeches of Wit, Study, and Patience, when the speaker addresses sections of society to which his immediate listener and pupil does not belong: e.g.,

```
For wolde 3e letteride leue the lecherie of cloþinge,
And be courteis and kynde of holy kirke goodes,
Parte with the poure and 3oure pruyde leue,
(XVII, 11.255-57)
```
Alas! lorde and ladies lewede counsail haue 3e, 
pat founded be to fulle to feffe suche and fede 
With pat 30ure barnes and 30ure blod by goode lawe may cleyme!
(XVIII, 11.55-57)

Right so, 3e clerkus, 30ure couetise er come ouht longe, 
Shal dampne dos eclesie and depose 30W for 30ure pruyde;
(XVIII, 11.214-15)

In the Liberum Arbitrium episode, Will's error is again - as before in the dialogues with Clergy, Scripture, and Reason - the method by which Langland stresses the difficulty of achieving a state of mind which is pleasing to divine authority. After reciting the catalogue of his names, Liberum Arbitrium suggests that Will might like to know the origin of them (XVII, 11.206-08); to this question, Will courteously replies,

3e, syre, ... by so pat no man were a-greued, 
Alle þe science vnder sonne and alle sotile craftes 
Ich wolde ich knewe and couthe kyndeliche in myn herte.
(11.209-11)

Liberum Arbitrium retorts immediately that Will is "on of prydes knyghtes" (1.212), and that it is unnatural and unreasonable for anyone except Christ to expect to know everything. Will's entry into the realm of Fortune at an earlier stage in his search had been prompted by a rejection of learning; by answering Liberum Arbitrium's question as he does, Will goes to the opposite extreme of wishing to know too much. His response produces a lecture on the evils of pride from his teacher.

Will's subsequent question to Liberum Arbitrium, upon
the nature and the dwelling place of charity,

"Charite, qua\^) ich \^po "\^pat is a \^ping for sothe
That maistres\^) comenden muche; wher may hit be
founde?" (XVII, 11.284-85)

serves the simple and obvious rhetorical function of
providing a springboard for another flow of exposition from
the preacher. The information about himself which Will
provides in this question and in a later comment however,
gives a further dimension of meaning to the interchange:

Ich haue lyued in london man\^e longe \^eres,
And founde ich neuere in faith ... (11.286-87)

"Were ich with hym, by crist, qua\^) ich "\^ich
wolde neuere fro hym,
\^pauh ich my by-ly\^ue sholde begge a-boute at menne
hacches. (11.334-35)

By recalling the conversation with Reason in Passus VI,
which occurred at a distant point in the past, the information
that Will persists in a mendicant's life in London reveals
that he has not put into application Reason's injunction
"to bygynne/\^pe ly\^f \^at ys lowable and leel to \^pe soule"
(VI, 1.103). Although the intervening sections of the poem
suggest that Will has made some progress along the road to
"kynde knowyng", it is clear that he is still a far from
"parfit" being.

At the level of style, the purely rhetorical, anti-
realistic manner in which Will is presented in his first
encounter with Holy Church is again apparent in a later
question. Just as Will picks up the last word of Liberum
Arbitrium's sermon, "charite", and then asks what it means, he sets off from the final word of his teacher's later complaint upon the state of the times to ask: "What is holychurche, frend" (XVIII, 11.124-25). At a purely literal level - i.e. the story of Will's search - this question would indicate stupidity and forgetfulness on his part, since Lady Holy Church was the first authority whom he encountered. But it is not legitimate to place this interpretation upon the question, since Liberum Arbitrium does not rebuke him for asking it. At the level of direct instruction and edification, however, Will's question is a device which contributes to the argument of the poem: Liberum Arbitrium's answer, "charite", he seyde, "Lyf, and loue, and leaute in o by-leyue and lawe, A loue-knotte of leaute and of leel by-leyue, Alle kynne cristene cleuynge on o wyl, Withoute gyle and gabbynge gyue and selle and lene " (XVIII, 11.125-29), summarizes the themes of selflessness and patience which have been discussed before, thereby giving a succinct definition of the significance of the role of the Church; the speech also serves as preparation for Liberum Arbitrium's discussion of those (notably the Saracens) who live outside the Christian Church.

In Passus XIX, the questions which Will asks Liberum Arbitrium about charity and its dwelling-place are obviously of a "rhetorical" kind, designed by the poet to elicit a flow of information from the representative of authority: e.g.,
"Leue liberum arbitrium", quaś ich, "ich leyue, as ich hope,
Thou coubest telle and teche me to charite, ich leyue?
(XIX, 11.1-2)

[Ich] askede þo "yf hit were al of on kynde" (1.57)

"Whi groweþ this frut in þre degrees?" (1.84)

Will's questions are not, however, purely mechanical: the very strangeness of the country called oor-hominis lends appropriateness to the use of the "naïve narrator" convention, just as the strangeness and "idealness" of Guillaume's garden make it appropriate that the "I" figure of the first part of the *Rose* should appear unrealistically naïve and questioning. Similarily, there is something fitting about Will's silence in vision of the Annunciation and of parts of Christ's life. Even though the dreamer does not actually speak during this vision (XIX, 11.121-79), we are nonetheless aware that he is present, and for this reason we are able to understand Will's bewilderment upon awakening at the noise of the Betrayal:

> With muche noyse þat nyght ner frentik ich awaked,
> In Inwit and in alle wittes after liberum arbitrium
> Ich waitede wyterly, ac ne wiste whider he wente.  
> (11.180-82)

Will's role in the following episodes is a more active one. He encounters Abraham, who typifies Faith, and is taught about the Trinity (XIX, 11.194-240). The significance of Will's question,

1. On the appropriateness of the naïve narrator in the first part of the *Roman de la Rose*, see C. Muscatine, *Chaucer and the French Tradition*, Univ. of California Press (1957), p.34.
The Mystery of the Trinity is well dealt with by Abraham. Here, for once, is a man who can speak from direct experience of God. The Dreamer had asked for examples drawn from practice; Abraham's appearing is evidence that the Dreamer will get in full measure what he has long sought.

Abraham repeats the warning which had been given to Will by Study, Reason, and Liberum Arbitrium, in answer to a question about the Trinity: "Muse not to muche per-on" (1.200).

The poet suggests, in moving dramatic terms, Abraham's impact upon the dreamer, when Will weeps at the sight of the leper and the patriarchs in Abraham's bosom,

"Alas! ich seid, "pat synne so long shal lette
The myght of godes mercy pat myghte ous alle amende!
(XIX, 11.288-89)

The drama continues with Will's bewilderment and indignation towards Hope, who explains that he is in search of one who will fulfill the Old Testament law by love; Will mistakenly thinks that Faith and Hope are searching for different goals, and vigorously declares his intention of following the former:

"Go by gat, quaß ich to spes "so me god helpe,
Tho pat leornep thi lawe wolle litel while hit vsen!
(XX, 11.44-5)

Will's confusion is resolved when he observes and meets a figural embodiment of the goal of the search undertaken by Faith and Hope: the Samaritan performs the act of charity which the latter are unable to perform, and counsels Will that he must follow the teachings of both Faith and Hope. The Samaritan provides two metaphorical exempla of

the Trinity (XX, 11.112-213), and warns that the Spirit of Grace will not touch those who have been uncharitable ("vnkynde", 1.216) to their fellow Christians. Like several of Will's previous teachers, the Samaritan addresses a wide audience, as the following extract indicates:

For bi beo war, 3e wyse men bat with be worlde deleb,
That ryche beon and reson knowen reuleb wel 3oure soule.
Beob nat vnkynde, ich consaile 3ou to 3oure emcristene.
For menye of 3ow ryche men by my saule, ich lye nat,
3e brenneb, ac 3e blaseb nat and bat is a blynde bekne.
(XX, 11.224-28)

Although Will is not represented as playing a very active part in the encounter with the Samaritan, his presence is powerfully evoked in the account of his state of mind after awakening:

Wo-werie and wetschod wente ich forth after,
As a recheles renke at reccheb nat of sorwe,
And 3eode forb lyke a lorell al my lyf tyme,
Til ich wax wery of pis worlde and wilnede efte to slepe, ...
(XXI, 11.1-4)

This bewilderment which borders upon despair is an indication of the vastness and the incomprehensibility of the issues of faith and love about which Will's instructors in the dream have spoken. The poet-figure's despair is, of course, an indication of sinfulness, since Wanhope has been explicitly condemned by Patience at an earlier stage in the search. Yet Will is right to persist in looking for The Good in "pis worlde", and the fact that his next vision occurs on Palm Sunday suggests that he is being aided by
God's grace. Here, in the vision of Christ coming to joust in the armour of Piers Plowman, is the dreamer's greatest "example": he sees clear evidence that the two human beings who have done good deeds and followed "pe lawe of loue" are transformed into Godhead:¹

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On was semblable to pe samaritan and somdel to peers plouhman,
Barfoot on an asse bak bootles cam prykye ...
(11.8-9)
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Will beholds Christ's sacrifice and his ultimate victory over the forces of evil in the harrowing of hell. He plays no direct part in these episodes, nor in the pageant of the Four Daughters of God, but at the end of the vision it is very clear that he has been deeply moved by what he has seen. Awakening to the sound of church bells proclaiming the resurrection, he bids his wife and daughter come to "reuerence godes resurreccioun/And creop on kneos to pe croys and cusse hit for a Iuwel/And ryhtfullokest a relyk non riccher on erthe" (XXI, 11.474-76).

Wonderment and elation again characterize Will in the following passus; the naïve bewilderment in Will's question to Conscience in the vision of Christ which comes in "myddes of pe masse",

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"Is this ihesus pe Iouster?" quað ich "bat Iuwes duden to depe,
Ober is hit peers plouhman? ho peynted hym so rede?"
(11.10-11)
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¹. Here, in dramatic terms, is the fulfilment of Holy Church's promise:

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For he, is trewe of hus tonge and of hus two handes,
And do pe werkes ber with and wilneb no man ille,
He is a god by pe gospel and graunty may hele,
And like oure lorde also by seynt lukys wordes.
(II, 11.84-87)
```
emphasizes the great mystery of the divine in man. Will is silent throughout the whole of Conscience's account of how the "Three Lives" find their meeting place and fulfilment in the life of Christ (XXII, 11.26-198), but the applicability of Christ's sacrifice to Will's life and salvation is underlined by his joining the folk who pray for Grace with Piers and Conscience:

"Kneole now, quap conscience "and yf pow conne synge, Welcome hym and worshupe hym with 'veni, creator spiritus!"

And ich sang pat song po and so dude meny hondred
And cryden with conscience "help ous, god of grace!"

(XXII, 11.209-12)

At this point in the poem, the fact that Will acts in accord with Conscience suggests that he now leads his life in conformity to the counsel given him by Holy Church:

Hit is a kynde knowyng pat kenne in þyn herte
For to louye þy lord leuest of alle,
And deye rapere þan to do eny dedlich synne.

(II, 11.142-44)

Will had been united with Conscience before (i.e. when he joined Conscience and Patience in the search for truth; XVI, 1.185), but the disappearance of this figure at the beginning of Will's dialogue with Liberum Arbitrium suggests that Will acts without conscience in wishing to know too much.

Throughout the remainder of Passus XXII, the poet figures only in his capacity of beholder, as he does throughout most of the Visio. Just as he does there, Langland shifts his attention away from the story of the dreamer to the state of the world at large. There is an account of the bestowal of the gifts of Grace upon Piers and his fellows, followed
by the description of the confrontation between Conscience's forces and the forces of Pride. Conscience in this scene figures as the embodiment of right conscience in the community as a whole, the concept which is exemplified in the vicar who speaks out against pride in the head of the Church; the antithesis of Conscience is represented by the figures of the brewer and the "kyng with corone". At the beginning of Passus XXIII, Langland refocusses attention upon his "I" figure. In the dreams of Christ and Piers Plowman, Will had represented the triumph of Conscience, but in the account of his waking experience, it becomes clear that Will's affinities lie with the forces which oppose Conscience in his dream. He wanders about "elynge in heorte" because he has nothing to eat - his plight is dramatized in the account of what a figure called Need has to tell him. Need's sophistry is apparent in his arguments that temperance is the greatest of the cardinal virtues, that neediness is next to godliness, and that man is a completely passive creature. He advises Will to act in defiance of Conscience: "So Neode at grete neode may nyme as for hus owen,/With-oute consail of conscience or cardinale vertues" (11.20-21). It is only too apparent that Will has forgotten the lesson of patience and charity which Liberum Arbitrium had earlier tried to teach him. When Will asks Liberum Arbitrium about the need of the charitable man,

"Who fynde\(p\) hym his fode?" qu\(a\)\(p\) ich, "ober what frendes hath he, Rentes ober richesses to releue hym at hus neode?" (XVII, 11.313-14)
he is told,

"Of rentes ne of richesses ... reccheþ he neuere,
A frend he hap þat fynt him at faileþ him neuere".
(11.315-16)

By the weakness of Will's faith in Christ, shown in the Need episode, we are made aware that he has indeed been "vnnder-nome" (XXIII, 1.51).

The final episode of Piers Plowman is a demonstration of the consequences which follow, on a universal scale, from individual action which is not governed by faith and conscience. Will figures significantly in this scene in which Antichrist battles against the forces of Conscience and Unity, by being ruthlessly treated by Elde. Elde is portrayed as being one of the aspects of Kynde, who is Conscience's ally in the struggle; after the account of Elde's depredations, there is an abrupt transition to the first person mode:

And Elde hastede after hym [Life] and ouer my hefde þeode ... (1.183)

Elde's attack on Will and its effects are recorded in a vigorous, naturalistic way:

"3e, leue lordeyn?" quaþ he and leyde on me with age,
And hitte me vnnder þe ere vnneþe may ich huyre.
He boffatede me a-boute þe mouthe and bete oute my wangenþeþ,
And gyuede me wiþ goutes ich may nat go at large.
And of þe wo þat ich was yn my wif hadde reuth, and wisshedel wel witerlyche þat ich were in heuene For þe lyme þat she loued me fore and leef was to feel, And a nyghtes nameliche when we naked were, Ich ne myghte in none manere maken hit at heore wille, So elde and hue hit hadde a-feynted and forbete.
(XXIII, 11.189-98)

The style of this passage recalls that of the "old man"
persona poems discussed in Chapter 1. Langland uses this manner of writing - or so it may be conjectured - in order to make a particularly strong impression upon his audience, to remind them that they too will suffer the same pathetic and grotesque fate as his "I". In the context of the poem, the above passage underlines the necessity for immediate action if salvation is to be achieved. Kynde counsels Will (as he has been counselled so many times throughout his search), "Lerne to loue ... and lef alle o^Jer ^ynges", and also answers Need by silencing Will's fears about his sustenance:

And Jow loue leelliche lacke shal be neuere Wede ne worldlich mete while py lyf laste. (11.210-11)

Emphasis in the remainder of the final passus is placed upon Conscience rather than upon Will, although there is a clear implication\(^1\) that Will is a member of Conscience's company. Conscience resists the blandishments of Need (11.232-41), as Will alone had been unable to do, but is driven out of the Church because of the repeated attacks of Pride and his allies.

The fact that at the end of the poem the personified Conscience rather than the human dreamer-poet sets out alone on pilgrimage to "peers pe plouhman" has two implications. First, that Langland avoided the specific in favour of the general, in order to suggest that it is

\(^1\) This is implicit in lines 212-14:

And ich þorgh consail of kynde comsede to rome Thorgh contricion and confession til ich cam to unite;
And þer was conscience constable crystine to saue.
the task of every conscience to seek its own salvation in a corrupt world. Secondly, that Will is no longer capable, because of old age, to pursue the search. Through the figure of Will we are shown, for the last time in the poem, that man's innate moral and physical frailty is an almost insuperable object in the way of right living. Ultimately the promise of perfection is signalled only by the shadowy figure of Piers Plowman.
CHAPTER 5: The Figure of the Poet in *Piers Plowman* (2).

As free wilt and free wit folwe a man suere
To repen Nhận and eyes and rowne out of synne,
To confession till he come to his
ends.

Nay we may we no great til we restitue
Our lyf to sure lord god for sure lykemes gultes
(XII, 11.81-55)

"Wher-of serve ye?" Ich saide, "lyke olhmor
arbitrium?"

"Of acu tymo to ryght," quah he, "falsynes to
destroye,
And som tymo to scraf, bote serve and teene,
Layke opel leve of my lykemes chese.
To do well wher wyke a wil with a rayson,
And may nat he with-wone a body to bare me
wher hya lykesh."

(XVII, 11.173-78)

These extracts, the first a summing up of the friar's teaching at the beginning of Will's search, the second Liberum Arbitrium's description of his own nature, express a theme which is important in the 'sentences' of *Piers Plowman*. This theme is that of the necessity for man to act alone - the support of Holy Church and learning - in order to be saved. Learning to love and learning to be patient are the fundamental issues to which the argument of the poem continually returns. For example, they are dramatically embodied in single incidents which involve the actions of individuals who break away from the community. In the pardon scene of the B version, for example, *Piers*, after leading the folk down one way on the pilgrimage to Truth, declares that he will no longer be so concerned about "baly loye" and that henceforth he will lead a different kind of life. In C, the sense of a strong decisive action in undertaking a pilgrimage of a less communal kind is not so strong). Again, Congrossion and Patience forsake the company of Clergy at the banquet and set off to find
Ac free wil and free wit folwe a man euere
To repenten and ryse and rowen out of synne,
To contricion, to confession til he come to hus ende.

Raper haue we no reste til we restitue
Our lyf to oure lord god for oure lykames gultes (XI, 11.51-55)

"Wher-of serve 3e?" ich seide, "syre Liberum arbitrium?"

"Of som tyme to fyghte," quap he, "falsnesse to destruye,
And some tyme to suffre bope sorwe and teene,
Layke ot)er leue at my lykynge chese,
To do wel ober wikke a wil with a reyson,
And may nat be with-oute a body to bere me wher hym lykeb." (XVII, 11.173-78)

These extracts, the first a summing up of the friar's teaching at the beginning of Will's search, the second Liberum Arbitrium's description of his own nature, express a theme which is integral to the "sentence" of Piers Plowman. This theme is that of the necessity for man to act alone - albeit through the prompting of Grace and with the support of Holy Church and learning - in order to be saved. Learning to love and learning to be patient are the fundamental issues to which the argument of the poem continually returns; for example, they are dramatically embodied in single incidents which involve the actions of individuals who break away from the community. In the pardon scene of the B version, for example, Piers, after leading the folk some way on the pilgrimage to Truth, declares that he will no longer be so concerned about "bely ioye" and that henceforth he will lead a different kind of life. (In C, the sense of a strong decisive action in undertaking a pilgrimage of a less communal kind is not so strong). Again, Conscience and Patience forsake the company of Clergy at the banquet and set off to find
Dowel in another way (C, 11.185-90), and at the end of the poem Conscience breaks away from a corrupt church and vows to become a pilgrim in search of Piers Plowman (XXIII, 11.380-82).

The story of Will in search of salvation is an embodiment of the theme of individual responsibility. His struggle for a "kynde knowyng" of the Way, with its numerous backslidings and confusions, represents the poet's main method of showing his audience not only the Way, but also the great difficulties involved in keeping to it. The teachings of Holy Church, Freewill and Conscience are quite misunderstood by at least one modern critic, who comments,

He [Will] does not seek in a spirit of humility but in a spirit of speculative curiosity, and the basic failure of his questionings is the strong personal element - "How may I save my soul?"

As Liberum Arbitrium suggests, every man has "a wil with a reyson", with which he may do "wel oþer wikke". Langland's presentation of Will is such that we are made well aware of man's proclivity to "do wikke", even when he is seriously intent on doing well. There is, undeniably, a "strong personal element" at work in Will's nature, but it is misguided to view this as a flaw when, for example, Will asks Holy Church,

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1. David Mills, "The Role of the Dreamer in 'Piers Plowman','" in S.S. Hussey, Critical Approaches, p.209. Mills argues, on the rather dubious grounds of a possible meaning of "shepe" in B, Prol., 1.2., that the dreamer has separated himself from the world.
"How ich may sauy my saule bat seynt art yholde" (II,1.80). The poem places very little emphasis upon Will as "man in society", but what we are told about his social relationships makes clear that he is concerned about more than his own spiritual welfare; e.g. he bids his wife and daughter go to reverence the cross, and he does participate in the worship of the community (XXII, 1.211). The message that it is the responsibility of every individual - acting alone, rather than as one of a community - to achieve salvation, is sounded very clearly by the separation of Piers Plowman from the folk at the end of Passus I.

A clue to Will's significance in the poem is provided by his very name, as numerous commentators have observed. Although it is difficult to support Robertson and Huppé's contention that the presentation of the poet-figure at the beginning of Passus I is such that he carries overtones of the false prophet and the flattering lunatic of the Gospels, their general judgement of Will's significance seems quite valid:

When the name Will is first introduced ... it is accompanied by a play on its meaning as the faculty of Will. This play on the name of the dreamer and his character as it is developed in the poem together suggest that the dreamer is representative of the faculty of will rather than that of any individual person. .... The function of

the dreamer in the poem is to seek
Piers Plowman so that he may learn and
be instructed in the ways of perfection.
As the object of such instruction the
faculty of will is peculiarly
appropriate, since it was considered to
be the source of moral action.¹

A fourteenth century prose treatise entitled Propyr Wille²
provides an illuminating commentary upon the two potentialities
of the poet-figure's free will, his "free will ... To
repenten and ryse and rowen out of synne" and "his wikked
Wille, that many werke shendeth/And dryueth away Dowel".³
The writer of the treatise (possibly Walter Hilton) makes a
distinction between "commen wille" and "propyr wille". The
treatise opens with a statement that "propyr wille" should
be transformed into "commen wille":

Propyr wille þat is forsakyn & made commen þan
it is acordant wyht godegis wylle, and alle gode
mens wille, and principaly over alle thynge
till our suffraynes wil to whame we ere suget
made ryȝt als vn-to gode, als þe reule of
religion askys.

The definition of common will is amplified to mean total
conformity with the will of Godhead in its three parts —
a blessed state enjoyed by "goddis clerkys", who perceive
all things immediately. These are men who give themselves
to "parfyte lyuynge", and they are distinguished from those
who "er tauȝt of men". The latter are in a precarious
position, since they are prone to the sin of pride; i.e.

². Reproduced in C. Horstman, ed., Yorkshire Writers,
³. The latter passage is not in the C-version; see
B, IX, 11.205-06.
of "propyr wille":

And be cause of pat payne is propyr wille, qwilke is called helle, for fendys dwellys perin; for na creature pyn3 be consciens bot fendes, to quam we gyfe leue only thorow pride .... Bot some men ere fouly bygylled of bis propyr wylle and desayuyd as in smal thynges, pat it sal not dere. Pese men are blyndyd with pride, pat pay may nouȝt see howe payr conscyence es pynde for comen wilis gane; for na pynge bot propyr wyl is noriser of pride, qwilke is be maste preciouuse homage and be derest desire pat Lucifer lykes.

The treatise concludes with an exhortation to follow Christ, the supreme example of the supremacy of common over proper will:

Pe ensaimple gaf Ihesu goddis sone of heuen, pat bande hym so thorowe mekenes vn-to comen wylle for be saluacion of alle mankynde, so fully, so trewly, so stratly, pat fra be begynnyng of hys paynful passyon vn-to be laste poynyt of hys dede neuyr he blenked anes to his owen wylle. For he was swa obedient vn-til alle pe wylles pat desired to be safe, & namely to hys fadyr wylle pat walde it sulde be so .... Sen he dyd pus, do we so, for he has in bis kende vs oure owen nede.

The poet-figure in Piers Plowman is engaged in a search for the knowledge of salvation: in the terms of the treatise, he is endeavouring, throughout most of his life, to reach the state of "commen will", the state which involves the negation of self-directed or "propyr" impulses. His observation of the field - a symbol of the body politic, social, and religious - makes him aware of the preponderance of self-will in his environment, and causes him to begin the search for knowledge of "doing well". The fact that he does so is adequate evidence of Will's basic righteousness (unlike most of Pier's labourers, he is interested in gaining greater awareness of Truth), but it is also made clear that Will
carries within himself elements of the sinfulness - cupiditas - which he observes in his fellow men in the Visio.

Will's ignorance of truth is apparent in his encounter with Holy Church in the Visio: in this part of the poem, his culpability is also manifested in the self-excusing "confession" to Reason in Passus VI. His meeting with the friars, and subsequently with Thought, Wit, Study and Clergy fails to provide the "kynde knowyng" for which he asks. These figures are more than "intellectual abstractions", since the advice which they give Will is potentially useful assistance in the quest of salvation. (In this introductory part of the Vita Will is warned about the consequences of abusing his free-will, and instructed that a right use of conscience, together with patience and love, are essential to the Good Life.) Will's passing into
the realm of Fortune is an act which symbolizes his unwillingness to use his own God-given faculties and abilities to the fullest extent: in particular, the misuse of intellect is stressed, through Will's exasperation with Scripture. A change in attitude is underlined by the contrast between the aspects of Recklessness, who comes to be identified with Will: at first Recklessness advocates a passive, "catch as catch can", attitude, but this changes to a specifically Christian non-caring, of the kind later to be advocated in the sermon on patient poverty.

Yet even after Will has gained in knowledge by his painful experience in the Land of Longing, his volition is in a far from "parfyt" state. He manifests a culpable willingness, in the encounter with Reason, to blame others for the sinful state of the world, he is excessively curious and speculative (as Liberum Arbitrium's reproof suggests), and shows repeatedly that he is unable to adhere to the Christian ideal of patience (this is evidenced for example, in the meetings with Hope and with Need). These errors all point to the fact that Will is repeatedly influenced by purely personal considerations, both intellectual and material. In the words of the writer of the Propyr Wille treatise, Will exhibits clear signs of being "desayuyd in smal thynges". Yet in spite of these backslidings, there is evidence to show that Will does make some spiritual progress. He does try to follow Ymaginatif's counsel about "suffering" (to which his behaviour at the
banquet testifies), he does come to contemplate the central mysteries of the Faith, and he does learn to pray for mercy. At the end of his life, Will uses his free will rightfully; having been beaten down by Elde, he consults Kynde and comes to Unity "Thorgh contricion and confession" (XXIII 11.212-13). This act recalls the friars' definition of the good man, who uses his "free wil and free wit .... To repenten and ryse and rowen out of synne". Another aspect of his rightful use of free will is his act of reproving the gluttonous doctor in Passus XVI; when Will plays the part of a teacher here he fulfills one of Liberum Arbitrium's functions - "Of som tyme to fyghte ... falsnesse to destruye".

The frailty of the dreamer's will is forcibly conveyed by the descriptions of his waking intervals, particularly in the latter part of the poem. Awakening from the dream in which Imaginative had counselled and chastized him, Will is deeply disturbed:

And ich awakede þer-with wittlees ner hande;
As a frek þat feye were forth gan ich walke
In manere of a mendinaunt meny þeres after.
(XVI, 11.3-4)

In view of what Reason says about mendicancy, these lines suggest that Will is in a state of despair. This impression is strengthened by the opening lines of Passus XXI,

Wo-werie and wetschod wente ich forth after,
As a recheles renke þat reccheþ not of sorwe,
And þeode forþ lyke a lorell al my lyf tyme,
and of Passus XIII,
And as ich wente by be waye whan ich was bus awaked,
Heuy-chered ich seode and elynge in heorte.

Elizabeth Salter makes the following perceptive observation on the basis of these passages:

There is a sense of increasing urgency [in *Piers Plowman*] about the whole process of sleeping and waking, which contrasts strongly with the normal run of dream poems.

This "sense of increasing urgency"² bears a direct and important relation to the divided state of the poet-figure's will. At a positive level, it implies that the quest for salvation assumes a larger and larger importance for Will. Yet the desperation (Wanhope) to which Will gives way in his waking experience is sinful, since it is an attitude irreconcilable with the doctrine of Patience as it is promulgated by several of his instructors. There can be no suggestion that the progress towards the Christian ideal which Will does make is illusory, just because it is presented as occurring within dreams in which Will figures as an actor: for Langland, the dream vision form is a way of portraying the reality of experience.³ It does appear however, that Will's failure to take decisive action in the waking experiences alluded to after Passus XVI is an indication of deficient will. His reflection upon awakening from the dream of Reason, "slepyngge, ich hadde grace/To


2. The settings of the earliest vision - the summer morning on Malvern Hills, and the cheerfully animated woodland - do not suggest any particular determination on the part of the dreamer.

3. David Mills ("The Role of the Dreamer", p.187) misguidedly attempts to graft modern dream psychology to Langland's "I", by suggesting that the sequence of dreams may have their origin "in the Dreamer's own confused mind".

wite what dowel ys ac wakyng neuer" (XIV, 11.218-19), does suggest that it is difficult to pursue the search in everyday life.

Having established that the story of Will's search for "kynde knowyng" and salvation reflects the frailty of the human will, continually divided between "propyr" and "commen" impulses, we should go on to ask the question, "To what extent are we made aware, as we actually read the poem, of the poet-figure's moving forward?" The question is an all-important one, since our approach to the structure of the poem depends largely on the way in which it is answered. Furthermore, the issue of whether or not Will is a memorable and significant figure in the poem affects our understanding of Langland's rhetorical strategy. It may be illuminating to note two opposing views of the extent to which the poet-figure is present in our consciousness as we read Piers Plowman.

H. Lüdeke, in his pioneering study of first person narrators in Middle English poetry, advances the view that the role of Langland's "I" is a purely formal one (i.e. a necessary adjunct to the use of the dream vision form):

Langlands Piers Ploughman bietet, als ausgesprochene Lehrdichtung, wenig Handlung. Auch ist das Lehrhafte nicht dem Erzähler, der sich, wie meistens

im Traumgedicht, wesentlich passive verhält, sondern den Personen der Dichtung in den Mund gelegt.

This view of the poet-figure as a passive, formal, and relatively insignificant element in the poem is based upon statistical analysis of the three major versions:

In der A-Fassung, die noch am meisten Handlung hat, sind von 2567 Zeilen nur 35 dem Erzähler in eigener Person in den Mund gelegt, also 1.36% vom Ganzen. Die B-Fassung mit ihrer ungleich größeren Ausdehnung und schwereren didaktischen Ladung weist von 7242 Zeilen bloss 67 auf, die vom Erzähler in erster Person gesprochen werden, also nur 0.92% vom Ganzen; während die C-Fassung zwischen beiden steht mit 90 aus 7357 Zeilen und 1.22%. Das ist .... ein sehr geringes Verhältnis für den Anteil des Erzählers.

These figures refer only to direct statements made by the narrator, but even when his reflections and the lines addressed specifically to him by other personages in the poem are taken into account, they do not raise the total percentage of lines relating to his participation to above 4% of the poem. Comparable figures (i.e. relating to lines spoken by and directly to the narrator) for Pearl would be difficult to assess, in view of the sense of dialogue which pervades the latter work, but an estimate of 70% might be ventured.

There are obvious limitations upon the method of applying statistics to


2. Ibid., p.5.

3. Lüdeke's statistics are based upon what the "Erzähler-Ich" actually says; op cit., p.6.
poetry in this way, but the statistics for the narrator's participation in *Piers Plowman* do contain a warning for those who would regard the poem as a drama in which the narrator's presence as a fallible and realistic "character" is consistently emphasized.

John Lawlor's study of the role of the poet-figure in *Piers Plowman* stresses the importance of the "I", but it is weakened by an attempt to relate almost every episode and detail of the poem to the central thesis that the imaginative appeal of the *Vita* inheres "in the very failure of enquiry so long as the initiative is with the Dreamer."¹ The implication that there is a continuing sense of dialogue throughout the poem, conveyed by the following statement,

> It is his [Langland's] achievement to communicate a universal sense of unchanging cross-purpose between entrenched authority and an eager enquirer,²

does not bear close examination. Lüdeke's claim - that in *Piers Plowman* "sentence" (das Lehrhafte) is conveyed directly through what the authoritative personages of the poem say to the audience rather than to Will alone - is more than once validated by the text. The tendency of

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¹. 'Piers Plowman': an Essay in Criticism, p.294. (This argument is a restatement of an earlier one: see J. Lawlor, "The Imaginative Unity of 'Piers Plowman',' Review of English Studies, 7 (1956), pp.225-37.)

². Ibid., p.293.
Langland's preacher figures to address a general audience rather than Will alone, and to exhort sections of that audience to which Will clearly does not belong - "3e letteride", "3e clerkes", "3ow riche" - has been noted frequently in the previous chapter. So, too, has the tendency for Will to recede from the reader's attention; for example, in the lengthy episode in which Patience lectures Active, and in some of the visions of revelation towards the end of the poem. Lawlor's account of the dialogues in *Piers Plowman* might more readily be applied to *Pearl*, a poem in which there is, throughout the dialogue between the poet-figure and the Pearl-maiden, a "sense of unchanging cross-purpose between entrenched authority and an eager enquirer".

Although Will does seem to disappear from time to time throughout the poem, the fact remains that his presence is central to an appreciation of the work's "sentence". Through the example of Will's successive insights into the nature of truth, and of his repeated lapses into arrogance and despair, Langland underlines the lesson that no matter how intent a man is upon being saved, his frail human will persists in retarding him. Clearly enough, this lesson is also a warning. The story of Will's search for salvation constitutes, in stylistic terms, the basic structural scheme of *Piers Plowman*. Although the poet does occasionally depart from the story

1. See above, pp.139-41, 145, 149, 153.
of his central character - through the development of new figures such as Recklessness and Active, and through the use of a sermon style of address in the presentation of Will's various teachers - he always returns to the poem's "ground-plan" of Will in search of truth. For example, Will is unexpectedly identified with Recklessness in Passus XI, and in Passus XVII, Will falls naturally into the pupil role which Active has played immediately before. In Passus XXI, Will's role as a passive observer of the events of the Crucifixion, the Resurrection, and the Harrowing of Hell makes a suggestive contribution to the "sentence" of the poem. The very fact that Will is able to observe these great events of divine history implies their immediacy. Through Will, the direct bearing of the Resurrection upon modern man is conveyed: ¹ This message is sounded even more clearly in the following passus when Will kneels with Piers and "meny hondred" to pray for Grace.

The emergence of the poet at several points in the poem as an authoritative figure, who warns and admonishes his audience just as preachers such as Wit, Liberum Arbitrium and the Samaritan do (see, for example, IX, 11.344-55, XXI, 11.357-59), in no way impinges upon the basic structural scheme of the "I" in quest of knowledge. It is predominantly by means of the dreamer's questions

¹. For a view contrary to this, see J. Mills, op.cit., p.191.
and errors, which punctuate the *Vita*, that the reader's attention is directed to past and imminent events in the chronology of the poem, with the result that the meaning of these events and episodes is amplified. John Burrow comments on the general relevance of Will's presence as dreamer and seeker to the structural unity of *Piers Plowman*:

As for Will, it is his dissatisfaction with his successive visions which drives the poem along. The result is a structure more like that of Eliot's *Four Quartets* than Dante's *Divine Comedy*: not a linear sequence of ideas and images (though that is what the headings 'Dowel', 'Dobet' and 'Dobest' may well suggest), but rather a series of attempts, running in circles and epicycles, to embody adequately in ideas and images a cluster of perceptions about the secret inner world which Will represents.¹

(Will is not, of course, dissatisfied with all of his visions.)

By saying that Will represents "the secret inner world", Burrow implies that Will is a representative, a type of humanity, who exhibits traits and responses which have a general applicability to all men. This assumption that Will plays a representative role is also made at the beginning of the present chapter (in the theory that Will exemplifies the two potentialities of the human will), and it is one which recurs throughout critical literature on the poem whenever the "I" is mentioned. As well as the extracts from criticism by R.W. Frank² and D.W. Robertson,³

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². See above, p.123.
³. See above, p.169.
the following may be noted:

...when the dreamer asks his questions, he is asking them for all the Christians of his day. His problems were their problems. And when he listens to or answers or watches illustrations of them, he and the audience become one.  

The role of the Dreamer is to represent contemporary man ....  

... the Dreamer himself is included within the range of the satire; and this very inclusion is the condition of our advancing at all in the argument of the poem. It is through a fallible guide that the poet manoeuvres his reader. 

In the remainder of this chapter, an attempt will be made to suggest some reasons for this prevalent tendency to regard Langland's dreamer as a figure with whom every reader of the poem may identify.

The manner in which Will is presented in the first passus of the Visio establishes quite definitely that Will is typical of the world in which he lives, the world of the field full of folk which he sees in his first vision. Will's affinity with the society whose dominant impulse is acquisition and whose neglect of spiritual things is all too apparent, is dramatically underscored by his reactions to the two ladies whom he sees in the dream. He is afraid of Lady Holy Church "thauh hue faire were", but the sight of Lady Meed arouses no such trepidation:

1. J.V. Holleran, op.cit., p.43.  
"Hure a-raye with hure rychesse rauesshede myn herte". The non-realistic nature of many of Will's questions throughout the poem is another important index of his typicality: questions such as "What is holychurche?", and "as ich hope/ Thou cou^est telle and teche me to charite, ich leyue?" are, obviously enough, placed in Will's mouth by the poet in order to call forth a flow of instruction for a general Christian audience. Will's representative nature is also suggested by his very name, although this is probably less clear to the modern reader than it was to the fourteenth century audience, accustomed to hearing frequent references to the will in sermons and devotional treatises. The patently allegorical nature of most of the figures to whom Will speaks - for example, Lady Holy Church, Thought, Wit, Study, Reason, Free Will - should, however, make clear to even the modern reader that the "I" in Piers Plowman is not primarily a representation of any particular person.

Will is such an appealing representative of humanity because of the dimension of actuality which comes to surround him as the poem proceeds. Part of the reason for Will's "realism" arises from his possession of a memory - a memory, that is, which is all too human, because often faulty. Will's failure to remember what had been taught to him earlier, and his recognition of that failure, are quite forcibly illustrated in the dialogue with Ymaginatif (Passus XV). Will is reprimanded on two counts; first,
for having presumed to "a-reson" Reason, and second, for having thought too lightly about the value of learning to salvation. The lengthy passage of reflection at the beginning of Passus XVI provides at the level of structure a welcome summary of the events which have taken place up to this point, while at the level of Will's characterization it serves to increase our awareness of the poet-figure's reality. A poignant instance of Will's possession of memory is his recollection of Piers Plowman, whom he had seen in his first vision. At the beginning of the dream of the Crucifixion, Faith tells Will that Jesus will come to joust in Jerusalem to claim the souls of mankind which he calls "peers frut be plouhman". We are reminded that Will has prior knowledge of Piers, when he asks eagerly, "Ys peers in bis place?" Will's recollection of Piers in this way compels the reader, in turn, to recollect the earlier appearances of Piers Plowman; that is, as the man who attempts to lead his fellows to salvation in the first vision and who emerges suddenly during the banquet scene to preach the importance of caritas. Will recalls Piers Plowman a second time in the vision of Christ's triumph: "Is this ihesus be IOuster", quap ich pat Iuwes duden to depe,/Oper is hit peers plouhman? ho peynted hym so rede". The combined effect of these two recollections is to cause the audience of the poem to meditate upon the existence of divine potential within man.
The air of actuality which surrounds the figure of the dreamer stems not only from his displays of memory, but also from the naturalistic style of some of his speeches. In the encounter with the friars at the beginning of the Dowel section, for example, Will manifests a rather self-conscious sense of courtesy by addressing the Minorites in the scholastic style of argument with which they would have been familiar:

"Contra", quaeb  ich as a clerk and comsede to dispute,  
And seide sothliche "septies in die cadit iustus,  
Fallynge fro ioye iesus wot pe sothe! ....  
Ergo, he ys nat al-way at hom among 3ow Freres ...  
(XI, 11.20-28).

Later, he responds to the berating given him by Dame Study in an almost servile manner:

"mercy, ma dame 3oure man shal ich worthe  
As longe as ich lyue bothe late and rathe,  
And for to worche 3oure wil the while my lyf dureb..."  
(XII, 11.89-91)

In Passus XX, Will's failure to reconcile the teachings of Hope with those of Faith is mirrored in his indignant dismissal of Hope:

"Go by gat," quaeb ich to spes, "so me god helpe,  
Tho pat leorneb thi lawe wolle litel while hit vsen!"  
(11.44-45)

These three extracts illustrate Will's tendency to adjust the style of his address in accordance with the estimation he places upon the worth of particular figures encountered in the search. Chaucer employs a similar naturalistic technique in characterizing the figure of Harry Bailly in Canterbury Tales. Several passages in the B version of Piers Plowman, in which the poet-figure is delineated in
compellingly naturalistic terms, are absent in the revised version of the poem. For example, in B XVI, the progress which Will has made towards subjugating his will is strikingly highlighted through a gesture by Piers, after his mention of the Trinity.

And I have told what hitte the tree the trinite
it meneth,
And egreliche he loked on me & per-fore I spared To asken hym any more ther-of. (11.63-65)

Will's silence at this point speaks eloquently: it is as though he had remembered Dame Study's condemnation of theologians who "gnawen god with gorge" by debating upon the nature of the Trinity. A second deleted passage of naturalistic description is the account of Will's state of mind in the waking interval after the vision of Haukyn: he tells that his "witte wex and wanyed", and that he was reluctant to pay homage to lords and ladies, with the result that people thought him to be a fool (B, XV, 11.1-10). Perhaps Langland, in his revision of the poem, removed these and other sections in which Will is presented in strongly naturalistic terms because he felt that his "I" might be regarded primarily as an individual rather than as a representative of common humanity. (Whatever their cause, the deletions from the revised version of the poem show that the poet placed a smaller value upon realistic description than the majority of twentieth century critics, who have chosen to direct their attention towards the B-text, on the grounds of what they consider to be its superior poetic merit).
In B, Passus XII, the poet-figure is presented in a naturalistic way, but the realism of this passage is of a distinctively autobiographical kind. Ymaginatif tells Will that he has followed him "bis fyue and fourty wyntre", telling him repeatedly that he should amend before old age comes. The teacher reproves Will thus:

And bow medlest he with makynges and my3test go sey bi sauter,  
And bidde for hem bat 3iueth pe bred; for  
þere are bokes ynowe  
To tell men what dowel is and dobet, and dobest bothe,  
And prechoures to preue what it is of meny a peyre freres. (11.16-19)

Will advances - as he says "somwhat me to excuse" (1.20) - a defence of poetry which is patently unconvincing as it concludes,

Ac if þere were any wight þat wolde me telle  
What were dowel and dobet and dobest atte laste,  
Wolde ich neuere do werke but wende to holicherche,  
And þere bydde my bedes but whan ich eet or slepe. (11.26-29)

One suspects, in view of the strong emphasis placed upon the purpose of poetry, that the poet removed this passage because it revealed too much of himself. In its revised form, this "confession" occurs in Passus VI of the C version, in Will's dialogue with Reason. In C, there is not so much emphasis upon the place of the poet in society, and the "autobiographical" details which are given serve to heighten the impact of the passages which precede and follow it.¹

¹. See above, pp.129-32.
In the B version, the passage of self-revelation is not fitted so convincingly into a generalizing context.

The effect, in both texts, of the injection into Will's characterization of an element which is probably autobiographical in its realism is to add what might be termed "a testimony of experience" to the presentation of "sentence". The poet's profession of his own sinfulness and unworthiness is a highly sophisticated variant of the time-honoured humility topos. The rationale for Langland's confession is essentially similar to the rationale for the use of humility and inadequacy formulae in all types of medieval didactic literature; i.e. that an audience will be more receptive to doctrine which is taught by one who, to some extent at least, shares their sinful condition. The following extract from the beginning of a fourteenth century English sermon is typical:

But notwithstandyng, it is full herde for me, for I know my-selfe vnabull and not sufficiencte for to do pis dede. ¹

The preacher goes on to say that he is able to teach only through the grace and favour of God. In the dialogue with Reason, Will expresses the hope that, sinful though he is, he may have "A gobet of hus grace". This statement has, beyond its immediate meaning, an application to William Langland's aspiration to be a true teacher through the medium of his "makynges". M.W. Bloomfield, in his discussion

¹ W.O. Ross, ed., Middle English Sermons, no. 37, p.207.
of the general significance of the authorial "I" in *Piers Plowman*, makes the following comment:

> Evaluating the "I" of the poem is important in its interpretation, but certainly the "I" and the author are related to each other. Will is both William Langland and every Christian man. In brief, the dreamer is both species and individual at the same time.

It is important to realize however, that Will is not consistently William Langland throughout the poem; only in one place in the final version of the poem may the two be identified with anything approaching precision. Will does become, as the poem proceeds, "both species and individual", but the illusion of individuality is created by a naturalistic style of writing which almost certainly does not have its source in autobiography.

The typicality of the poet-figure in *Piers Plowman* is underlined not only by the allegorical function of Will (symbolized by his name) and the general nature of many of the questions which he puts to other allegorical figures, but also by the fact that his presentation incorporates aspects of the familiar "three ages" motif of medieval literature. The search which provides the structural basis of the *Vita* section occupies the whole of Will's mature life. J.F. Adams, who uses the B-text for his study of the poet-figure, comments thus:

> The poem describes the progress of the Dreamer

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in his chronological maturity and through increasing moral understanding over a major portion of his life, beginning as a young man and ending at the point of imminent death.1

Two major episodes in the C version focus upon Will at particular stages of his life. He sojourns in the Land of Longing, ruled by Fortune and her maidens, from the time when he is "3ong and 3ep" (XII, 1.179) until he "for-3at 3outhe and 3orn into elde" (XIII, 1.13); later in the poem, Will's turning "into elde" is vigorously dramatized in the account of the attack upon Unity. In the first of these episodes, Elde addresses Will as a representative of mankind,

Man ... mete ich with pe by marie of heuene!
Thou shalt fynde fortune faile at by moste neede,
And concupiscentia-carnis clene the for-sake!
(XII, 11.189-91)

Like the fuller account of Elde's encounter with Will towards the end of the poem,2 this episode serves as a warning to the poem's audience of the brevity of human life. In the B text, although not in the C, specific reference is made to Will's Middle Age, when Ymaginatif is introduced:

I have folwed pe in feithe þis fyue and fourty wyntre,
And many tymes have moued pe to þinke on þine ende,
And how fele fern3eres are faren and so fewe to come,
And of þi wylde wantounesse þo þow 3onge were,
To amende it in þi myddel age lest mi3te þe faylled.


2. See above, pp.163-64.
In jyne olde elde þat yuel can suffre
Poverte or penaunce or preyeres bidde.
(XII, 11.3-9)

In both the B and C texts of Piers Plowman the motif of the three ages is employed only to emphasize Will's representative nature. Adams makes too wide a claim when he attempts to show that the three ages motif is integral to the overall structure of the poem:

The ages of his [Will's] life as covered by the poem correspond roughly to youth, middle age, and old age, and the divisions of the poem [i.e. Dowell, Dobet, and Dobest] center roughly about the temptations, mental faculties and spiritual assists peculiar to each age.  

The weakness of Adams's argument may be demonstrated by his labelling of Anima, Mens, Kynde, Inwit and Scientia as the "animal spirits" which govern youth. The theme of the Ages of Man is simply not emphasized to a sufficiently great extent in Piers Plowman for it to provide the kind of unifying function which it provides in Guillaume de Deguileville's Pelerinage de la Vie Humaine and in the Parlement of the Three Ages.

In a recent article, Jay Martin implicitly rejects the idea that Will is a representative of common humanity by proposing that he is portrayed as a divinely-inspired fool, with the result that his

several dreams have a veracity which is beyond question.¹
There can be no doubt that Will is frequently portrayed
as a rather slow-witted figure, but it is difficult to
see him as "the transcendent sage",² of a type which
the poet himself describes in C, Passus X, and for
whose welfare he is deeply concerned. These men are
"Godes mynstraales", who wander about following the moon
"with a good wil". They are privileged to disdain the
rich and powerful:

Withoute bred and bagge as þe boke telleþ,
Barfot and bredles beggeþ bei of no man.
And þauh he mete with þe mayre amyddes þe
strete,
He reuereenceþ hym ryght rouht no raþer þan
anoper. (X., 11.120-23)

Unlike these men who are "reckless" in the true sense
of the word, Will is a self-confessed beggar (C, VI, 11.47-
52). In B, Passus XV, there is admittedly evidence to
show that Will does bear some resemblance to "Godes
mynstraales"; he relates that, following the vision of
Haukyn, he was thought to be "a fole", because he was
loath "to reverencen/Lordes or ladyes". The account of
Will's meeting with Anima which follows this passage
illustrates, however, that his will is far from being

1. "Wil as Fool and Wanderer in 'Piers Plowman',"
Texas Studies in Literature and Language, 3 (1961),
p.540. It is not necessary for Will to be a fool in
the sense outlined by Martin for the truthfulness of
his visions to be beyond question - this is partly a
matter of literary convention, partly a result of the
simple fact that no serious objection is raised within
the poem to the validity of dreams.
2. Ibid., p.539.
good. It is probable that Langland deleted B, XV, 11.1-10 not only for the reason mentioned above, but also to cancel any suggestion that Will should be regarded as a seer. Only once in the final version of the poem is there any suggestion that the poet-figure has an insight which is not shared by his audience, in the enigmatic prophecy contained in IX, 351-53. Here, however, it is clear that the poet is speaking in *propría persona*, with the accents of the preacher rather than those of Will the dreamer.

Because of the importance which his search plays in terms of the overall structure of the poem, and because of the appeal for sympathetic identification which the manner of his presentation offers, the figure of Will functions as an example or "mirour" to the audience of *Piers Plowman*. There is another major exemplar in the poem - the figure of Piers Plowman, which is shown to be essentially similar to the figure of Christ, insofar as Piers illustrates the divine potential in man. Recklessness explains that every man should strive to model his behaviour upon the behaviour of Christ when he was on earth.

1. See above, p.186.
2. See above, p.133.
3. Recklessness's statement about the exemplary nature of Christ is similar to that contained in the *Propyr Wille* treatise; see p. 171 above.
A1 was ensample sothliche to ous synful here,
We sholde be lowe and loueliche and leel, eche
man to oper,
And pacient as pilgrimes for pilgrimes arn we
alle.
(C, XIII, 11.128-30)

The example which the figure of Will offers is of a
rather different kind, since unlike the figure of Christ-
Piers Plowman, Will is not always to be revered and
imitated. The fact that Will does engage in the search
for Good underlines that such action is necessary to
every man who desires salvation, but the evidence of Will's
repeated failures and backslidings points up the
cautious moral that man is continually prone to be other
than "lowe and loueliche".
CHAPTER 6: The "I" in Chaucer's Major Poems.

In the poetry of Chaucer, there is also a vital link between the deployment of the "I" figure and "sentence". Gaveston was undoubtedly correct when he wrote, of Chaucer, that "Alle bys water is ful of hye and quycksa sentence", but it is important to realize that Chaucer's conception of matter and "sentence" differs markedly from that of contemporary English poets. Christian ideas and their transmission are of some interest to Chaucer - the ending of Troilus and Criseyde, the Faëry Tale, and the "retractious" at the conclusion of the Reeuerke Tale - testify to this - but they do not provide the motivation for writing which they provide for Langland and the author of Pearl.

1. Epilogue to the Book of Form, quoted in Caroline P. Spurgeon, Five Hundred Years of Chaucer Criticism and Allen Covey. Cambridge (1925); repr. New York, Russell and Russell (1935), vol. 1, p. 61.
The subject matter and the "sentence" of the works discussed in previous chapters - the religious lyrics, *Pearl*, the *Parlement of the Thre Ages*, *Confessio Amantis*, and *Piers Plowman* - are predominantly religious. The authors of these poems set out, in poetic form, the knowledge which Christian men must possess if they are to live rightfully and to achieve salvation. In each of these works (with the exception of most of the lyrics) the manner of the poet's self-depiction is an all-important aspect of rhetoric, for it is through the dramatization of the searchings and weaknesses of the various "I" figures that the Christian audience is compelled to apprehend the potential hindrances to their salvation. From the "human drama" of the poems comes, in large part, their claim to be considered as something more than moral treatises in verse form.

In the poetry of Chaucer, there is also a vital link between the deployment of the "I" figure and "sentence". Caxton was undoubtedly correct when he wrote, of Chaucer, that "alle hys mater is ful of hye and quycke sentence", but it is important to realize that Chaucer's conception of matter and "sentence" differs markedly from that of contemporary English poets. Christian ideas and their transmission are of some interest to Chaucer - the ending of *Troilus and Criseyde*, the *Parson's Tale*, and the "retracciouns" at the conclusion of the *Canterbury Tales* testify to this - but they do not provide the motivation for writing which they provide for Langland and the author of *Pearl*.

To a much greater extent than any of his contemporaries, Chaucer is concerned with matter which is secular, philosophic (in a very broad sense), and aesthetic: the nature and value of human love, the tenets of Platonic and neo-Platonic thought and science, the problems of the artist in interpreting classical and other "auctoritee" ... these are fundamental issues to which the poet returns again and again in his writing. We have no warrant to assume that Chaucer was a better-read author than Gower, Langland, and the author of *Pearl*, but it is fair to say that, as a poet, Chaucer made a more widespread and thorough-going use than his contemporaries did of the knowledge contained in works such as Boethius' *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, Macrobius' commentary on Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis*, classical epic, and contemporary French poetry. This is not the place for a detailed investigation of Chaucer's eclecticism: it is mentioned only to introduce the idea that in all of his major poems, Chaucer invites those who "herkne ... or rede" to perceive the relevance of various systems of thought and belief to the complexity of actual experience.

The following extracts from two very recent books of Chaucer criticism are of the utmost importance to our understanding of the way in which the poet conveys his "sentence". P.M. Kean remarks that the method of *Troilus and Criseyde* is fundamentally similar to that of the dream visions, in that "No compulsion is brought to bear on the reader"\(^1\); in none of

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Chaucer's poems, that is, is the reader compelled to accept any inclusive summing-up from a narrowly doctrinaire point of view. Robert Payne sounds a warning to the reader who assumes that each poem should articulate a single moral or doctrinal theme to which other themes and ideas are subservient:

We do not always do Chaucer's poems any great service when we try too hard to harmonize the various gospels they may assert. It is too easy that way to oversimplify almost out of existence their principal poetic implications.¹

A customary method by which "various gospels" are asserted is the juxtaposition of matter originating in a variety of "olde bokes"; in the *Parlement of Foules*, for example, a reworking of Macrobius' commentary on Cicero is placed alongside an episode whose obvious antecedents are the *Roman de la Rose* and the *De Planctu Naturae* of Alanus de Insulis. In the *Canterbury Tales*, the variety of experience is articulated through the vivid and realistic characterization of a number of first person speakers. Again, in *Troilus and Criseyde*, a juxtaposition of attitudes to experience is brought about not primarily through allusions to different sets of philosophical literature or through characterization, but by the conflicting allegiances expressed by the poet himself. This chapter is about one of the rhetorical methods which Chaucer employs in order to compel his audience to think for themselves, to ponder the implications of what they read. This is the method of the poet's participation in his work, both as selfconscious narrator speaking directly to his audience about his own state of mind and about

his reactions to his "matiere", and as character in the events recounted (the poet's 'character' role is obviously employed in the vision poems and the Tales, rather than in Troilus and Criseyde).

In this chapter an attempt will be made to suggest ways in which the poet's own comments and his reactions to the "situations" of the poems influence our apprehension of their meanings. What the poet says, either directly to his audience or to other characters within the frame of reported dialogue, very often has the effect of causing us to question the relevance of any one theory or doctrine as a satisfactory explanation of the variety and intractability of experience. The manner of the poet's self-portrayal is an integral element of his style, although it is by no means the only way in which he achieves the presentation of an objective and largely "uncommitted" viewpoint. Dispositio, fluctuating tone, and the use of imagery, for example, contribute to the same effect. A poem-by-poem consideration of the place of the "I" figures must necessarily take into account these and other elements of Chaucer's style, but the main emphasis of this chapter is upon the nature and function of the poet's self-depictions. The scope of this thesis prohibits detailed consideration of every poem; ¹ it is hoped, ¹. In the interests of economy, consideration of the "I" in the Prologue to the Legend of Good Women has been omitted completely. For a thorough discussion of the function of the poet's presence in this work, see John Gardner, "The Two Prologues to the 'Legend of Good Women'", Journal of English and Germanic Philology 67 (1968), pp.594-611, and R.O. Payne, op. cit., pp.91-111.
however, that sufficient evidence will be provided in the following pages to support the generalizations made above, and to provide the basis for a comparison of Chaucer's use of the first person technique with the use made of it by other fourteenth century poets.

The *Book of the Duchess* is the first of Chaucer's works in which he is present as an "I" who speaks about himself and who figures significantly in a dramatic situation: the "I" of the short poems written before the *Book of the Duchess* - the *ABC* and perhaps *The Complaint unto Pity* - is the conventional medieval Everyman, exhibiting no individualizing characteristics. The *Book of the Duchess* is an occasional poem, addressed to the bereaved John of Gaunt in commemoration of the death of his wife. Because of the style of presentation which the poet applies to himself, the work acquires a significance which transcends its immediate purpose and occasion, as a meditation upon the general and timeless question of human grief and loss.

The opening lines of the poem evoke a personal mood of ennui and frustration:

I have gret wonder, be this lyght,  
How that I lyve, for day ne nyght  
I may nat slepe wel nygh noght;

1. It would be difficult to deny the historical significance of this poem, in view of Alceste's reference to it in the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women* as "the Deeth of Blaunche the Duchesse" (F, 1.418), and of the pun in 11.1317-19 on the name of the Lancastrian seat.
I have so many an ydel thoght, 
Purely for defaute of slep (11.1-5)

For I have felynge in nothyng, 
But, as yt were, a mased thyng, 
Alway ia poynt to falle a-doun; 
For sorwful ymagynacioun 
Ys alway hooly in my mynde. (11.11-15)

The speaker's state of mind is a complex one, since he suspects that he knows the cause of his suffering ("I holde hit be a sickenesse / That I have suffred this eight year"), but is simultaneously aware that self-absorption is wrong, yet inescapable:

And wel ye woot, agaynes kynde 
Nyt were to lyven in thys wyse; 
For nature wolde not suffyse 
To noon erthly creature 
Nat longe tyme to endure 
Withoute slep and be in sorwe. 
And I ne may, ne nyght ne morwe Slepe ... (11.16-23)

This state of "amasement", induced not only by suffering but also by an inability to take action which will remedy suffering, reminds us of our introduction to the poet-figure of Pearl. The "I" who speaks at the beginning of the Book of the Duchess is not, however, afflicted by an immediate and sharply-felt grief like that of the speaker in Pearl. He has suffered "this eight year", and the conversational rhythm of his account of himself suggests that he has become habituated to sorrow.

Viewed from a rhetorical standpoint, in the context of what is to come later in the poem, the evocation of the poet-figure's state of mind fulfils two basic functions. At the level of the poem's "occasion", it provides a kind of authority
which enables Chaucer to proceed to address without presumption one of greatly superior social station; the poet's own experience is such that it makes him well-qualified to offer sympathy to another, even to one of the most notable peers of the realm. The speaker suggests that his own state of sorrow and ennui has its cause in love, through the use of the metaphor of the lady as physician,

For there is phisienc bot oon
That may me hele .. (11.39-40)

This is a conventional figure in the literature of courtly love.¹ Chaucer uses it in a veiled and ambiguous way in the present context, it may be conjectured, in order to suggest that he has some knowledge of affairs of the heart, without seeming to intrude upon the sorrow of the real-life knight. John Lawlor simplifies the complex portrait of the speaker presented in the first fifty lines when he comments:

No question now of the nature of the poet's sickness, nor of its hopeless quality. But this time sickness is a matter of delicate absurdity. The poet as hapless lover is an established role, and its humour is self-evident to the audience. Both the first move and the second perfectly exemplify the balance Chaucer is to hold throughout his poem. Sorrow is real, in the patron; in the poet it is touched with absurdity.²

There is no suggestion that the speaking "I" is to be regarded as a tragic figure, but on the other hand there are no suggestions

¹. See, for example, Chaucer's own Balade, To Rosemounde,
   It is an oynement unto my wounde,
   Thogh ye to me ne do no daliaunce (11.7-8),

that his predicament should be viewed in a humorous way.
Lawlor appears to be reading back into the opening lines of the poem a humorous element which emerges in the characterization of the poet at a later stage in the poem. His comment that the poet is playing "an established role" is curious, in view of the obvious fact that the Book of the Duchess is Chaucer's first ambitious essay in the art of poetry. His comment upon the poet-figure's awareness of the unnaturalness of persistent sorrow - "And wel ye woot, ageynes kynde / Hyt were to lyven in thys wyse" - is, however, rather more to the point:

In this opening gambit Chaucer has challenged the grievous indifference to life of the mourning John of Gaunt. The sickness of the poet feigns as his own preserves propriety, but the reference none the less comes home.¹

At a more general level, the characterization of the poet in the opening lines carries the suggestion that escape from self-absorption and sorrow is not to be won easily. The use of the present tense throughout the introduction - "I have grete wonder" rather than "I hadde grete wonder" - clearly implies that even after reading and dreaming, the poet returns to his own personal dilemma. The fact that he is depicted as suffering now, in the present, has important implications for the poem's meaning to an audience wider than the court circle. From the very beginning there is an implicit appeal for us to enquire into the reasons for the speaker's state of mind, as Wolfgang Clemen remarks:

This state of uncertainty, indeed of vague emptiness, unconsciously evokes a mood of expectancy; we feel that something must be about to happen and expect what follows to impart some direction to this sensation of vagueness and possibly to indicate some way out of the dilemma.

What follows is at best only a limited way out of the dilemma: the implications of the present tense introduction are not wholly denied by the events of the poem.

The poet goes on to tell how, "this other night", he gained some respite from his sleepless state by reading a book "Of quenes lives, and of kinges, / And many other thinges smale" (11.58-9). Perhaps Chaucer does at this point permit his audience a smile at what appears to be his simple-minded directness. The joke is a double-edged one, however, since the Ovidian story does demonstrate that in the face of mortality the lives of kings are in fact "thinges smale". The speaker's tone remains predominantly serious throughout this part of the narrative, as his comment upon the grief of Alcione suggests,

Such sorrow ethis lady to her tok
That trewly I, which made this book,
    Had such pittee and such rowthe
To rede hir sorwe, that, by my trowthe,
I ferde the worse al the morwe
After, to thenken on hir sorwe. (11.95-100)

Here, as Clemen and Bronson note, Chaucer is, by expressing sympathy for the bereaved wife in Ovid's story, indirectly

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2. There is some lightening of tone in the account of Juno's messenger's descent to the underworld. The comedy is not, however, as broad as some commentators have suggested. P. M. Kean wisely points out that "our comprehension of his colloquialisms may be at fault" (op. cit., p.55).


extending "pittee" and "routhe" to the bereaved John of Gaunt. The story offers no consolation, however, other than that of showing that grief is a timeless and universal condition - "To lytel while oure blysse lasteth!" (1.211).

At the conclusion of the Ovidian narrative, the poet redirects our attention to his own state of mind; he declares that his reading has, as it were, saved his life, by enabling him to sleep. The tone of the passage which describes his promise to Morpheus of bedroom furniture in exchange for sleep is humorous, and hence clearly different from the tone of both the introduction and the adapted story. (The joke which Chaucer makes of his literal-mindedness is effective in showing that life is something more than a vale of tears; one suspects, however, that it might have been even more effective had it not been allowed to run on for so long.) There is an implied promise in the poet's description of his dream as being "so ynly swete" that this different side of life will continue to be displayed. Certainly the frame of mind of the poet within the dream landscape of idealized nature parallels the state of his environment:

Hyt had forgete the povertee
That wynter, thorgh hys colde morwes,
Had mad hyt suffre, and his sorwes,
All was forgotten .. (11.410-13)

The moral, implied in these lines, that it is unnatural to persist in sorrow (just as it would be unnatural for winter to last throughout the year) is stated more clearly when the poet reflects upon the figure mourning alone beneath the tree:
by my trouthe,
Hit was gret wonder that Nature
Myght suffre any creature
To have such sorwe, and be not ded.  

The poet-figure, like Nature itself, seems to have "forgotten" his sorrows, and hence the lesson of "the lawe of kinde", introduced in the first person introduction, is sounded once more. Chaucer's use of seasonal imagery has the further connotation that sorrow, like the bleakness of winter, is destined to return again.¹

In the dialogue between the dreamer and the man in black, Chaucer depicts himself as one who appears to be naïve and un-tutored. That the dreamer is not ignorant of the knight's situation is clearly implied by the fact that he stays with him to "Have more knowynge of hys thought" (1.538, my italics). Bronson quite rightly notes that the dreamer knows, from the very beginning, the nature of the Knight's sorrow:

The Dreamer observes at once that the Knight is in mourning and, approaching him silently, receives the sufficient explanation through the knight's over-heard lament, that Death has stolen his bright lady. This is information to which, as a stranger, he has no right; but he cannot bear to leave a man in such grief without making any attempt to comfort him.²

The dreamer, who has the same "pitee" and "rowthe" for the sorrowing knight as he had in his waking experience for the mourning Alcione, offers himself as one who is sympathetic yet uncomprehending. By pretending first that he thinks that the stranger sorrows because Octavian's hunt has passed by him

¹ Cf. P.M. Kean, op. cit., p.61, who regards the motif of seasonal change as a wholly consolatory one.
(11.539-41), then that the suffering is due to the loss of a chess piece (1.723), the dreamer prompts the mourner to talk about his loss. In view of the promise which the dreamer makes at the outset,

For, by my trouthe; to make yow hool,  
I wol do al my power hool ... (11.553-54)

it is clear that he places a therapeutic value upon communication. Chaucer's portrayal of himself as one who is apparently slow to grasp the meaning of the various sections of the knight's experience as they are recounted to him has an obvious basis in the poem's "occasion". By showing that the knight in the poem is consistently "nouther towgh ne queynte" in his treatment of one who is, on the surface of things, very dull-witted, the poet pays full tribute to the "gentilesse" of the knight who exists in real life.

A detailed discussion of the courtesy manifested in the dialogue would be superfluous, in view of P.M. Kean's sensitive analysis of this part of the poem.¹ It may be helpful, however, to note the way in which the experience of the bereaved man is placed in the context of universal experience through the characterization of the dreamer in the dialogue. Intent on correcting the dreamer's apparent misconception about the nature of his loss, the knight makes a lengthy speech about the beauty and virtue of his lady, in the best tradition of courtly eloquence. The listener's unfamiliarity with the hyperbolic strain in the language of courtly love causes him to protest at the knight's claim that his lady was the fairest of all women:

I leve yow wel, that trewely
Yow thoghte that she was the beste,
And to behold the alderfayreste,
Whoso had loked hir with your eyen. (11.1048-51)

This subtle rejoinder carries the implication that no man can assert absolute claims in an area of experience involving the emotions. The dreamer's matter-of-factness promotes a similar effect at a later stage in the dialogue, when the knight seems likely to give a second elaborate set of classical allusions as a way of demonstrating the purity of his love. The dreamer hastily checks him,

"Now, goode syre," quod I thoo,
"Ye han wel told me herebefore,
Hyt ys no nede to reherse it more .." (11.1126-28)

The knight is manoeuvred by his interrogator into making the disclosure that the lady did eventually grant him her favours, and that they did experience great felicity ("Oure hertes wern so evene a payre / That never nas that oon contrayre / To that other").

The dreamer pretends to misunderstand the implication of this consistent use of the past tense, and enquires the meaning of "I have lost more than thow wenest" (1.1306). The answer that she is dead elicits only a bleak "Is that youre los? Be God, hyt ys routhe!" from the dreamer.

Ultimately, no real consolation can be offered to the real bereaved husband by the account of the poet's meeting in the wood with the fictional mourning lover. It is true, as P.M. Kean comments, that the poem does provide "an offering from one human being to another, within the strict framework of agreed manners and of an accepted social scale, of sympathetic
understanding of an unhappy situation."\(^1\) Chaucer does not attempt
to employ either of the two standard medieval consolatory
approaches - the messages of Christianity and of philosophy.\(^2\)
The poet does suggest, by portraying himself as a humorous figure
in the account of the pledge made to Morpheus, and in the
rejoinders noted above, that there is more to life than
unrelieved sorrow: Dorothy Bethurum exaggerates the significance
of this humour, however, when she remarks that by inviting
his audience to laugh at him, Chaucer "makes possible some
sort of acceptance of death".\(^3\) The consolation of laughter
is, in the long term, no more effective than the warning sounded
early in the poem that it is "agaynes kynde" to persist in
sorrow. The final "sens" of the *Book of the Duchess* - which has
an application for a wider audience than a fourteenth century
nobleman and his circle - is that deep sorrow is inescapable,
except for short periods, such as when one escapes from the
preoccupations of self through laughing, talking to others,
reading, or dreaming. This moral is articulated in a rather
subtle way through the return, at the end of the poem, to the
situation of the poet, awake with the book "of the goddes of
slepyng" in his hands. The return to the present tense brings


2. The dreamer does not make use of the opportunity
which the knight's railling against Fortune (11.619-709)
provides for an exposition of the standard Boethian argument.

3. "Chaucer's Point of View as Narrator in the Love Poems",
a recollection of the introductory lines of the poem: we recall that the poet suffers now, even after the events of his dream "so ynyly swete".

In the *Book of the Duchess*, the sorrow of poet and knight alike clearly implies a desire to possess something which is stable and immutable. Chaucer returns in the *Hous of Fame* to the theme of man's yearning for stability and his desire to apprehend truth, and here, as in the earlier poem, the manner in which the poet depicts himself as an "I" is integral to the presentation of "sentence". The central idea of the poem is the problematic task of distinguishing what is true and permanent from what is false and illusory, throughout a wide spectrum of experience. In Book III, after describing his attempt to read the semi-obliterated names on the rock of ice, the poet confronts his audience with the question "What may ever laste?" (1.1147). Implicitly, from the very beginning of the *Hous of Fame*, Chaucer invites his audience to ponder this question with reference not only to fame as an abstract entity, but also to particular areas of experience, notably to learning and to love. Further, he encourages us to observe that what may be meaningful for one man may not be so for another: it becomes clear, as the poem proceeds, that the tentative answer which the poet himself finds to the question - the activity of the artist in the past and in the present - will not be satisfactory to every member of his audience. It is tempting to conjecture that
Chaucer might have been well satisfied by the confusion into which most modern critics are put when they attempt to find in the *Hous of Fame* a single coherent theme or line of argument. Here, to a greater extent than in the *Book of the Duchess*, the poet appears to be trying to unsettle his audience, to leave them with unanswered questions. *Dispositio* (in particular the juxtaposition of the Virgilian story with the personal experience of the dialogue with Jove's emissary, and with the allegorical action involving the goddess Fame), and the work's many changes of style and tone are of course partly responsible for this effect; the manner in which Chaucer chooses to portray himself as narrator is, however, an important cause of its elusiveness and suggestiveness.

Chaucer, in the Proem to Book I of the *Hous of Fame*, assumes a pose of complete helplessness and bewilderment in the face of a multiplicity of theories about the causes of dreams:

God turne us every drem to goode!
For hyt is wonder, be the roode,
To my wyt, what causeth swevenes .. (11.1-3)

The effect of the following lengthy catalogue of possible causes of dreams is to make us participate to some extent in the breathless confusion of the speaker, who challenges us to find an answer: "whoso of these miracles / The causes knoweth bet than I, / Devyne he" (11.12-14). It is clear that Chaucer is acting out a role in this proem, since elsewhere in his poetry he offers quite a positive statement about the relation between waking and dreaming experience. ¹ There is, undeniably, an

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¹. In the *Parlement of Foules*, Chaucer relates that after he had read about Africanus and Scipio, the former visited him in his sleep. Although he says "Can I not seyn if that the cause were / For I hadde red of Affrican byforr", a clear relation between waking experience and the cause of dreams is suggested by the lines,

The wery huntere, slepynge in his bed,
To wode aylyn his mynde goth anon,
The juge dremeth how his plees been sped ... (11.99-101)
element of humour in the pose adopted at the beginning of the 
*Hous of Fame*; we may smile, for example, when the speaker's 
refusal to express an opinion leads him to repeat the avowal 
in the first line (11.55-58). To regard the lengthy proem as 
being wholly a joke at the expense of a dull-witted poet is, 
however, to simplify the complexity of the passage. David M. 
Bevington falls into this error when he remarks of the rhetorical 
preliminaries in Book I,

The portrait is of an earnest scholar, over-fed 
with scraps of knowledge but starved of comprehension, 
who is anxious to appear learned, but succeeds only 
in being overwhelmed by his materials.¹

This critic fails to recognize the implications of the fact that 
the passage is written in the present tense. How, one wonders, 
could the speaker's (sic) "weak grasp of philosophic and artistic 
problems" represent "a starting point for the journey into wider 
knowledge"² when it is clear that the experience of the dream 
is concluded? As in the *Book of the Duchess* and again in the 
*Parlement of Foules*, the present tense first person prologue 
renders invalid any interpretation based on the notion of a 
progression from ignorance to knowledge, from "blissful but 
unrealistic fantasy to a mature awareness".³

The primary effect of the poet-figure's confusion at the 
beginning of the poem is to suggest the difficulty inherent in

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³. Ibid., p.298.
approaching truth through learning. How, Chaucer implicitly asks his audience, are we to apprehend the truth when the authorities, the "grete clerkys", give different accounts of it? The fact that dream theory is chosen as the subject of the poet's puzzlement about the value of learning appears calculated to sharpen our sense of uncertainty, since the poem is itself a dream vision. The poet's assertion that his dream is "wonderful" (1.62) is undermined somewhat by his twice-stated anxious wish that every dream should turn out to be of good account. The audience is made to wonder just what kind of truth can be told by a poet who seems so doubtful about the nature of his own experience.¹

The speaker's recognition of the variety of human aspirations contained in the prayer to the All-Mover to

\begin{quote}
yive hem joye that hyt here  
Of alle that they dreme to-yere,  
And for to stonden alle in grace  
Of her loves, or in what place  
That hem were levest for to stonde \quad (11.83-87),
\end{quote}

reinforces the message of "differentness" contained in the extended allusions to learning in the Proem. Life, like the learning which forms part of it, is apparently not to be readily labelled and classified. This suggestion in the Invocation to Book I is amplified in Book III, in the account of the inexplicable movement and confusion of Fame and the inhabitants of her dual-chambered

¹. The association of the dream with truth-telling in literature is so obvious as to require no elaboration; for a detailed consideration of contemporary dream theory and poetic practice, see C.B. Hieatt, *The Realism of Dream Visions: the poetic exploit-ations of the dream-experience in Chaucer and his contemporaries*, The Hague, Mouton (1967).
residence. We are given, in the first Invocation, a clue to the poet's own highest value when he pronounces a curse upon those who would wilfully "misdeme" his vision:

\[
\text{pray I Jesus God} \\
\text{That (dreme he barefot, dreme he shod),} \\
\text{That every harm that any man} \\
\text{Hath had, syth the world began,} \\
\text{Befalle hym therof ..} \\
\text{(11.97-101)}
\]

Although it is difficult to determine the precise tone of these lines and of the remainder of the Invocation, there is sufficient gravity about them to compel us to recognize that Chaucer attaches a very high importance to his poetry. He has "charyte" enough to understand that men have different goals in life, but this does not extend to readers and listeners with "malicious entencion". Even the most well-intentioned member of Chaucer's audience must, however, be confused by the time he reaches the end of the Invocation, since the poet, having begun by telling of his difficulties in understanding dreams, then threatens anyone who misunderstands his own "sweven". R.O. Payne comments thus on the introductory section of the poem:

The conclusion of the Invocation (lines 81-110) gives still another twist to the knot of uncertainties tied up in the Proem. The reader is dragged into the problem too, so the poet's problem is now not only what to believe, how to find out, and how to put it into verse, but also what the audience will make of it. And this time, contrary to his usual attitude, Chaucer charges his readers directly with the responsibility

1. J.A.W. Bennett comments upon the shifts in the poet's "tone of voice" within the invocations in the poem:

[Chaucer] is still half-mocking himself and keeping his readers on the *qui vive* as he quickly shifts from one stance to another.

for understanding him, and in the curse delivered upon those who do not understand, gives negative recognition to the possibility that poetry may fail not through its own fault, but through that of its readers.1

The other rhetorical preliminaries in the poem - the Proem to Book II, and the Invocation in Book III - provide further "demonstraciouns" of the difficulties involved in separating the illusory from the true. Chaucer represents himself in these first person passages as a poet who is determined, against great odds, to fix his experience in words and to make it meaningful to "every maner man / That English understande kan". The predominant tone of these passages is that of a high seriousness which is not unworthy of their Italian models: consider, for example, these lines in the second part of the Proem to Book II,2

Now faire blisfull, O Cipris,
So be my favour at this tyme!
And ye, me to endite and ryme
Helpeth, that on Parnaso duelle,
Be Elicon, the clere welle. (11.518-22)

At the beginning of Book III, he implies that it is impossible for a poet to be both truthful and technically proficient. The disclaimers of poetry,

Nat that I wilne, for maistrye,
Here art poetical be shewed, (11.1094-95)

And that I do no diligence
To shewe craft, but o sentence, (11.1099-1100)

1. The Key of Remembrance, p.132. Payne provides an illuminating discussion of Chaucer's approach to the problem of relating art to truth and belief, through his alignment of the triad books-experience-dream; the complexity of Chaucerian dispositio in the vision poems is elaborated in Chapter 4, pp.112-46.

2. See also P.M. Kean, op. cit., p.92.
are to be understood rhetorically rather than literally; i.e., as an instance of the problems confronting one whose chosen work is communication. Even as we read these lines, we recall the poet's testimony, at the beginning of the poem, to the difficulties inherent in comprehension, and we are thus cautioned against responding in a simple and direct way to the record of the present "sweven".

The manner of Chaucer's self-depiction as first-person narrator influences our awareness of the difficulty of distinguishing between illusion and reality in areas of experience which are more mundane than those of science, learning, and reading. The subject of the "slydyng" quality of human love, treated earlier in the Book of the Duchess, recurs in the House of Fame, in the reworking of the story of Dido and Aeneas in Book II. Chaucer does not condemn earthly love - indeed, he addresses Venus as "my lady dere" (1.213) - but his reactions to the sorrows of Dido reveal all too clearly the possibility that love may lead to confusion and unhappiness:

Allas! what harm doth apparene,
Whan hit is fals in existence!

For also browke I wel myn hed,
There may be under godlyhed
Kevered many a shrewed vice.

In view of the plight of Dido and of other misguided lovers (11.388-426), the reason for the poet's own rather half-hearted allegiance to love - "I kan not of that faculte" - is apparent. Clearly, love is not an experience which "may ever laste", in the sense that it cannot ensure anybody of continuing good fame.
The most memorable feature of Chaucer's participation in this poem is, of course, the characterization of himself in Book II, in the account of his dialogue with the eagle who promises him some "guerdon" for his long service to Love. By showing himself as one who is more interested in survival than in gaining knowledge, Chaucer makes himself into a figure of fun: this is apparent in his reply to the would-be teacher's invitation to observe the positions of the stars,

"No fors," quod y, "hyt is no nede.  
I leve as wel, so God me spede,  
Hem that write wel of this matere,  
As though I knew her places here;  
And eke they shynen here so bryghte,  
Hyt shulde shenden al my syghte,  
To loke on hem."  

(11.1011-17)

The richly comic dialogue between the quivering "Geffrey" and the smugly loquacious emissary of Jupiter assists in the development of the poem's "sentence". The poet does gain some knowledge from his aerial journey, but he is mistaken when he expects that it will bring him to a plane above the confusions and ambiguities of experience. That he does have such an expectation during the flight is suggested by his recollection of the De Consolatione Philosophiae (11.972-78). The experience narrated in Book III makes abundantly clear that the destination is not, as it is for Boethius, the home of the righteous where "the King of kings holds sway / The reins of all things holding tight". In retrospect - that is, in the light of the aimless

1. E.g., he reflects that he can now believe what Martianus Capella and Alanus de Insulis have written about "the hevenes region", since his experience has given him a "preve" (11.985-90).

world-view associated with the sway of Fame set out in Book III - there seems to be some wisdom in the poet's preference for books over the society of his "verray neyghebores".

The events of the journey's end are decidedly anti-climactic. Having promised to tell us of a "wonderful" experience, the poet shows us that the world of human affairs (symbolized by Fame and her abode) is characterized only by illusion and flux. The effect appears to be a consciously designed one, created in order to highlight the means by which the poet holds himself apart from the great mass of mankind who desire only "renoun", whether deserved or not, and who direct their movements according to the promptings of rumour. When asked if he has come to obtain fame, the poet-figure replies in an unmistakably serious and forthright tone,

"Sufficeth me, as I were ded,
That no wight have my name in honde.
I wot myself best how y stonde;
For what I drye, or what I thynke,
I wil myselfen al hyt drynke,
Certeyn, for the more part,
As fer forth as I kan myn art." (11.1876-83)

He is totally unimpressed by the notion of temporal fame; if his name is to be perpetuated at all, it will be because of his art rather than because of any personal considerations.¹ These

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1. R.O. Payne's explanation of these lines is followed here:

It is at least a very good possibility that these lines should be read as a kind of contrast between the personal mortality of the man and the potential durability of that part of his experience and intelligence .. which he can convert into poetry. (op. cit. pp.86-87).
lines amplify the suggestion contained in the Invocation to Book III: "Nat that I wilne, *for maistrye* / Here art poetical be shewed" (my italics). A.C. Watts observes the seriousness of this passage, although her distinction between author and character is not a necessary one, if we recognize that Chaucer normally writes in an ironical voice:

In this passage the unqualified earnestness of the hitherto comic "I" obliterates an understood separation between the author and "Geffrey". It makes the two nearly one. The sudden shift in tone, the morally damned environment, the resulting coalescence of author and "I" occur nowhere else in Chaucer's poetry except at the ending of *Troilus and Criseyde*.

The endorsement of art as the poet-figure's preoccupation in life is corroborated by other first person comments in the poem, not only in proems and invocations, but also in his remarks upon art. He is wholly admiring of the temple of Venus:

"A, Lord!" thoughte I, "that madest us, Yet sawgh I never such noblesse Of ymaghes, ne such richesse, As I saugh graven in this chirche". (11.470-73)

Later, he represents himself as lacking words to describe the splendour of Fame's palace:

That hit astonyeth yit my thought, And maketh al my wyt to swynke, On this castel to bethynke, So that the grete craft, beaute, The cast, the curiosite Ne kan I not to yow devyse, My wit ne may me not suffise.. (11.1174-80)

The answer which the poet has to the question "What may ever laste?" is of little relevance to those of his audience who are not themselves artists. Moreover, the artist's solution to the problem of separating truth from illusion is shown to be not a

simple one. P.M. Kean, referring to the poet's treatment of his source materials and to the eagle's implied promise to show him, at first hand, potential poetic subject matter, comments,

[Chaucer] raises seriously many problems very relevant to the poet: the relation of art to nature, for example, and to other works of art as the objects of imitation; the question of the poet's personal responsibility to his own experience and creative powers.1

Chaucer's treatment of himself in the *Hous of Fame* shows, further, that his "wonderful" journey has brought him few insights. After the statement of his *credo* in Book III, he tells his interlocutor that he has learnt very little in Fame's house:

> For wel I wiste ever yit,  
> Sith that first y hadde wit,  
> That somme folk han desired fame  
> Diversly, and loos, and name. (11.1897-1900)

The eagle provides the information that the poet was, before his dream experience, quite unhappy:

> Syth that Fortune hath mad amys  
> The fruit of al thyn hertys reste  
> Languisshe and eke in poynt to breste. (11.2016-18)

The speaker's tone in the first Proem - which refers to a time after the experience - suggests that perhaps his confusions about knowledge have been exacerbated as a result of it.

In the *Hous of Fame*, Chaucer leads his audience to believe that they are to be told something which will be to their profit and delight ("So yive hem joye that hyt here"), comparable in scope with the great prophetic dreams of Isiah, Scipio, Nebuchadnezzar, and Pharoah, all of which have universal applicability. Instead, he explores in the poem problems which have

relevance mainly to himself, as a literary artist. The "sentence" which is applicable to a wider audience - that life itself, and in particular love and learning, are riddled with illusion - is of a patently negative kind. Although there is no first person conclusion to this poem, as there is to the *Book of the Duchess* and the *Parlement of Foules*, it is almost inevitable that the presence of such a conclusion would give no positive moral direction to the work.

In the *Parlement of Foules*, Chaucer poses a series of problems for his audience which have a more universal applicability than those posed in the previous poem. The poet, in his customary manner, does not establish within the work any definite answers; instead, he provides his audience with the "matiere" from which they may form their own conclusions. Again, as in the earlier dream visions, the manner in which Chaucer projects himself as narrator and character within the poem is directly associated with the objectivity and overall tentativeness of the work. In the *Parlement of Foules*, these characteristics arise primarily from the shaping of the poem into a series of structural blocks which are connected in rather oblique ways. The divisions are as follows: a first-person prologue, in which the poet-figure expresses his bewilderment about Love, and tells that once he read a book "a certeyn thing to lerne"; an account of the book, the Ciceronian *Somnium Scipionis*, with its commentary by Macrobius; a description of the dream which followed his reading, which is itself divided into two parts, whose
Hauptfiguren are Venus and Nature respectively; a concluding stanza, in which the poet's unsatisfied state is again brought to prominence.

The introductory stanzas of the Parlement are similar to the opening lines of the Book of the Duchess in the mood of uncertainty and irresoluteness which they evoke. In the Parlement, the cause of the poet's disquiet is explicitly stated:

The lyf so short, the craft so long to lerne,
Th' assay so hard, so sharp the conquerynge,
The dredful joye, alwey that slit so yerne:
Al this mene I by Love, that my felynge
Astonyeth with his wonderful werkynge
So sore, iwis, that whan I on hym thynke,
Nat wot I wel wher that I flete or synke. (11.1-7)

It is likely that he does permit his audience at least a smile at his own expense, when he admits his ignorance of love "in dede" (1.8), and when he expresses his fear of love's mastery, "God save swich a lord - I can na moore" (1.14), but the picture of the speaker built up in these introductory lines is not primarily that of a comic figure. The answer which he provides to his own question, "But wherfore that I speke aß this?",

Nat yoore
Agon, it happede me for to beholde
Upon a bok, was write with lettres olde,
And therupon, a certeyn thing to lerne,
The longe day ful faste I redde and yerne (11.17-21),
contains the suggestion that his present disquiet may be, at least in part, the result of his search for that "certeyn thing".

The description of the poet-figure's reaction to the story which sets out the necessity for setting the "commune profit" above the demands of the self makes clear that he has not found in the "olde boke" what he had been searching for:
And to my bed I gan me for to dresse,
Fulfyld of thought and busy heynesse;
For bothe I haddethynge which that I nolde,
And ek I nadde that thyng that I wolde. (11.88-91).

Although Chaucer uses elsewhere a very similar expression to that in lines 90-91, to describe a state of unrequited love, its context in the *Parlement* suggests that a wider area of reference is implied. A lesson about the relation between man's mortal and immortal states would appear to be the meaning of "A certeyn thing to lerne", since the phrase immediately precedes the account of Scipio's dream.

In the account of the experience which befalls the poet after he has fallen asleep, the audience is implicitly invited to observe a meaningful relationship between the dream and the poet's state of mind while awake: this is because of Africanus' reappearance, and because of the metaphorical account of the paradoxical nature of love, which echoes the poet's reflection in the opening stanza. Two problems are thus raised for our consideration. The first is that of how to explain and resolve the paradox inherent in the nature of human love, which contains potential for both "blys" and destruction - "the mortal strokes of the spere" (1.135). The second is that of reconciling human experience with Africanus' doctrine of "commune profit" leading to salvation.

These two concerns are explored in the two sequences of the poet's dream experience, through the medium of a highly

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1. For al that thyng which I desyre I mis,
   And al that ever I wolde not, ywis,
   That finde I redy to me evermore.
   (*A Complaint to His Lady*, 11.43-45)
objective and (in the case of the parliament episode) dramatic narrative mode. (The effectiveness of this part of the poem stems primarily from description and dialogue rather than from any evocation of the poet's presence, and for this reason a close analysis of the way in which the two issues mentioned above are treated in the account of the dream cannot be attempted here.) Chaucer's self-portrayal is emphasized only at the beginning of the dream narrative, in the account of his meeting with the "maister" in Cicero's book. The poet's confusion in the face of the contradictory messages on either side of the gate,

No wit hadde I, for errour, for to chese,  
To entre or flen, or me to save or lese (11.146-47),
is undoubtedly humorous, and even more so when Affrican reveals blandly that one who has lost his "tast" for love is immune to what the park has to offer:

But natheles, although that thou be dul,  
Yit that thou canst not do, yit mayst thou se.  
For many a man that may nat stonde a pul,  
It liketh hym at the wrastlyng for to be ... (11.162-65)

This unflattering treatment of the poet-dreamer has a double-edged effect. Apart from making fun of the poet, the passage contains a reminder that there may be some wisdom in standing aloof. The latter effect is meaningful in terms of the passages of direct address at the beginning and conclusion of the work, passages which convey a more serious characterization of the poet than this one.

In his account of the garden surrounding Venus's temple, Chaucer plays the role of observer and recorder of impressions. This aspect of the poem's first person method reveals an
The impression that the inhabitants of the garden live in an enduring state devoid of contradictions is undercut when the description of the allegorical characters customarily associated with courtly love begins. The inadequacy of the religion of Venus is implied not only by the static quality of the description, but also by the poet-dreamer's dissatisfaction: he does not seem impressed by the goddess herself ("But thus I let hire lye"), and he gives no praise to even the artfulness of the temple adorned with the stories of ill-fated lovers.

Movement, variety, and life; these qualities which are absent from that part of the garden inhabited by Venus and her retinue are present in full measure in the dramatic account of the parliament of birds gathered about the "noble goddess Nature" on St. Valentine's day. The poet recedes almost entirely


2. The frozen, unproductive nature of Venus-worship is summed up by the comment on the women dancing about the temple (11.232-36).
from this part of the poem, in which the theme of "commune profit" in its relation to love is developed through the account of the tercel eagles' dispute about the formel and of the reactions of the lesser birds. As Stephen Knight points out, the dramatic sequence underlines the moral that the forces of individualism in society are too strong to enable a continuing state of harmony to exist:

This "parlement of foulys" here is in perfect equilibrium, for Chaucer supports no class. The nobility of the noble statements is as fine in its kind as is the comic vulgarity of the comic and vulgar statements, in its own kind. The emergent points are that society is a balanced thing and people must disagree in it, must become excited in it and argue; and also that beauty does not have to plunge into earthly love.\(^1\)

Nature does regulate this individualism in order to make procreation possible, and hence establishes herself in a position superior to that of Venus. But the harmony which she establishes is a temporary thing: this is marked by the fact that the roundel gives way to "shoutyng" (1.693).

At the end of the poem, our attention is redirected towards the feelings of the poet: in the concluding passage, he tells of his reaction to the dream,

I wok, and othere bokes tok me to,
To rede upon, and yit I rede alwey
I hope, ywis, to rede so som day
That I shal mete som thyng for to fare
The bet, and thus to rede I nyl nat spare. (11.695-99)

J.A.W. Bennett says of these lines that they convey a sense of "a dilemma diminished, if not resolved",\(^2\) for narrator and


reader alike:

Wakened with this music [i.e. the harmonious chant of the birds] in his ears he can turn back to his books with a renewed and surer hope that his search is worth the making. Something at least he has learnt - thus we may safely gloss the final stanza - some inkling of the place of love in the scheme of things. With a modesty that is only superficially a literary convention, and at bottom a token of Chaucer's essential humility before the wonder and mystery of life, he refrains from extracting any rule-of-thumb moral from his fable, or from suggesting that he has discovered final truth about love.¹

This view of the poet's final address to his audience is sensitive, in that it takes into account Chaucer's ultimate unwillingness to define a clear relationship between the finite and the infinite; in this it shows a more accurate reading than that of Charles Muscatine, who regards the irreconcilability of the doctrines preached by Africanus and Nature as a comic antithesis, a joke made at the expense of the narrator because of his bookishness.² Bennett's view of the ending, although it does take into account the poet's refusal to make a resounding endorsement of the doctrine of plenitude, does however seem to err on the side of optimism. The ending of the Parlement, like that of the Book of the Duchess, is in the present tense, and because of this very fact it induces us to think again of the introduction, where Chaucer speaks as one who has the wisdom gained by a visionary experience. If we choose to observe a synthesis among the forms of "sentence" articulated within the poem's main structural blocks, we do so in defiance of the poet as he is dramatized in the work; in other words, we simplify


the meaning of the work as a whole, which is to provide us with
the material for an enquiry into the relationship between temporal
and eternal systems of value. The example of the poet suggests,
however, that there is no "certeyn thing", in the sense of
something fixed and stable, providing release from the complica-
tions and ambiguities of experience.  

In his successive self-depictions as a first person
narrator in the dream vision poems, Chaucer undoubtedly makes
use of irony. He portrays himself as one who is often confused
and limited in vision in order to achieve definite thematic
effects. The absence of forthright moral affirmations, applicable
to a broad range of human experience, is the distinctive feature
of Chaucer's first person method in these poems. There is no
way of gauging the extent to which Chaucer the man expresses
distinctively personal moods and insights through the medium
of his "I"; the two passages about the causes of dreams, 2
different in the degrees of confidence which they express,
illustrate the poet's tendency to tailor the style of his self-
depiction according to the needs of his "matere". R.M. Jordan

1. In Knight's view, the poem does provide us with "a
certeyn thing"; i.e. an orthodox Christian moral position, as
articulated in the Somnium section (op. cit., p.226, p.233).
Acceptance of this argument depends largely upon whether we
accept the Donaldsonian view of the Chaucerian "I" as a puppet
manipulated by the author; see below, pp.229-30.

2. See above, p.211.
is right when he comments upon the variety of tones encompassed by Chaucer's first person technique: "The narrating 'I' is Chaucer, Chaucer displaying the great range of his expressive resources".¹ Less accurate, however, is his observation that "until the very end Chaucer preserves the fiction that the narrating voice he uses in the poem is dissociated from a poetic sensibility, from the kind of sensibility which we know is behind the poem and to which we attach the name Geoffrey Chaucer."² The speaker who addresses us at the beginning of each of the three poems discussed above has a voice which is urbane and often serious, rather than naive and foolish. Jordan's position, like that of a number of other critics,³ appears to have been at least partly determined by E. Talbot Donaldson's essay, "Chaucer the Pilgrim",⁴ which argues that the "I" in the General Prologue is a character, a fictional entity clearly separate from the author. This argument is misguided in respect of the General Prologue,⁵ and also in respect of the vision poems. Those who use it apply to the passages of direct address the largely humorous picture of himself which Chaucer creates in his

2. Ibid., p.68.
3. See, for example, the comments on the Chaucerian "I" made by Morton Bloomfield, "Distance and Predestination in 'Troilus and Criseyde'", PMLA 72 (1957), p.18; Paul Ruggiers, The Art of the 'Canterbury Tales', Univ. of Wisconsin Press (1965), pp.16-41; Bevington, op. cit.; Knight, op. cit., pp.233-34.
5. See below, pp.246-47.
dramatic writing, and in so doing simplify the complexity of the poet's self-characterizations in these passages. Although the figure of the poet as narrator in each of the poems discussed above is not to be interpreted consistently as an autobiographical version of Chaucer, his outlook on areas of experience such as loss, love, and knowledge should not be dismissed as being humorously inadequate.

In *Troilus and Criseyde*, Chaucer again encourages his audience to make their own moral discriminations about the value of temporal, physical love as a force for good. As in the *Book of the Duchess*, the *Hous of Fame* and the *Parlement of Foules*, the manner in which the poet projects himself into the narrative is integral to the work's overall "question-raising" effect. Unlike the dream visions, however, *Troilus and Criseyde* does contain passages in which the "I" of the poet makes absolute moral claims and judgements. The complexity of the poem arises in large measure from the fact that the figure of the poet endorses two opposing and apparently irreconcilable sets of doctrine: on the one hand, he commends love as a supreme harmonizing and ordering principle, and on the other, he asserts the supremacy of the medieval Christian doctrine of contemptus mundi.

From the very beginning of the poem, Chaucer embarks upon a style of self-characterization which seems calculated to

1. J. Lawlor, op. cit., p.51, comments on the effectiveness of dramatic passages in which Chaucer becomes "the patient of his story", such as Book II of the *Hous of Fame*, and the introductory section of the dream narrative in the *Parlement of Foules*. 
secure the maximum possible involvement of his audience in the narrative to come. He urges them to bring the "pref" of their own experiences to bear upon their apprehension of the story of Troilus,

But ye loveres, that bathen in gladnesse,
If any drope of pyte in yow be,
Remembreth yow on passed hevynesse
That ye han felt, \( (11.22-5) \)

and to feel that they have a vantage point upon the story which is superior to his own, because of his lack of direct experience of love,

For I, that God of Loves servantz serve,
Ne dar to Love, for myn unliklynesse,
Preyen for speed, al sholde I therfore sterve,
So fer am I from his help in derknesse. \( (11.15-18) \)

At the same time, however, Chaucer does not allow his audience to regard him as one who is unable to speak authoritatively on the subject of a love "aventure". The invocation to Tisiphone, together with the assumption of a role similar to that of the Pope, leave us in no doubt of the seriousness with which the poet regards his story and his relation to it.

John Lawlor comments on the importance of the main loci of the poet's presence in *Troilus and Criseyde*,

The proems are full of interest, for they tune the audience to the kind and degree of awareness with which the author comes to each new development of his story.\(^1\)

\(^1\) Op. cit., p.55. R.M. Jordan, op. cit., pp.79-95, discusses the poet's comments at the beginning of each Book and within the body of the work, from the point of view of structural organization: his discussion of the "I" is linked with his thesis about "progressive divisibility" (p.84).
Yet of the first and longest proem, he has little to say, other than that in it Chaucer establishes "the sad necessity he is under; .. his own distance from the matter of love; .. and the 'compassioun' the story calls for on his part".¹ In the first eight stanzas of Book I, Chaucer introduces the idea of the two religions; that presided over by the deity of Love, and Christianity. His use of the terms "Love" and "God" is such as to cause his audience to wonder about the source of his own allegiance. Nowhere is there a direct statement to the effect that the poet is in the service of Cupid; the parody of the papal title establishes only that he serves the servants of the God of Love (1.15). Furthermore, he asks his audience to pray, not to "Love", but to "God": this comes as something of a surprise, since shortly before he confides that he himself dares not pray "to Love" (1.16). The following lines, in which the audience is directed to pray to God, imply a distinct separation between the two deities, and carry the suggestion that "God" is a power superior to Love:

Thus biddeth God, for his benignite,
So graunte hem soone owt of this world to pace,
That ben despeired out of Loves grace.

And biddeth ek for hem that ben at ese,
That God hem graunte ay good perseveraunce,
And sende hem myght hire ladies so to plese
That it to Love be worship and plesaunce.
For so hope I my sowle best avaunce,
To prey for hem that Loves servauntz be,
And write hire wo, and lyve in charite,

And for to have of hem compassioun,
As though I were hire owne brother dere. (11.40-51)

The fact that lovers are asked to pray to God on behalf of those who are under the sway of Love suggests that God is the superior authority; this suggestion is reinforced by the fact that the poet himself prays to God (1.48) but not to Love (11.16-17). There can be no doubt that this introductory account of the poet's conception of his role pays tribute to the power of Love, but there are definite hints that his ultimate allegiance is to the Christian God. The use of commonplace Christian terminology in lines 47-51 ("sowle" ... "charite" ... "compassioun") is further evidence for the suggestion that the poet regards himself as a member of a company whose membership extends beyond "loveres"; i.e. the Christian community in general. In his side glances at the state of lovers - some being "in gladnesse" and "at ese", while others are in "payne and wo" - the poet shows himself to have the same awareness of the complexity of love as he displays in the introduction of the Parlement of Foules. At the beginning of Troilus and Criseyde, however, he reveals an awareness of a superior reality, an awareness which is absent from his self-depictions in the dream vision poems.

Soon after the beginning of the narrative proper, the poet interposes himself between his audience and his "matere".

1. It is unlikely that the religious allusions throughout the introductory section reflect the transference, common enough in medieval love literature, of Christian ideas and images to secular contexts. The consistency with which references to "Love" are separated from references to "God" surely indicates that Chaucer intended a tension between the two systems of belief to be observed.
He implies clearly that Troilus is in fact guilty of the blindness for which he mocks others (1.202), through being unaware of the compulsive and binding nature of Love. The moral is sounded for the audience in quite unequivocal terms:

Forthy ensample taketh of this man,
Ye wise, proude, and worthi folkes alle,
To scornen Love, which that so soone kan
The fredom of youre hertes to hym thralle;
For evere it was, and evere it shal byfalle,
That Love is he that alle thing may bynde,
For may no man fordon the lawe of kynde. (11.232-38)

In the light of these lines, the poet's restatement of his own distance from this pervasive and "blissed" impulse - "the wherfro God me blesse" (1.436) - is rather puzzling. A similar viewpoint is expressed in the proem to Book II, but this time with reference to the tone of his writing. As if to counter the perspicacity shown in the account of Pandarus's manipulation of Troilus, the poet disclaims direct knowledge of love,

A blynd man kan nat juggen wel in hewis, (1.21)
and professes to be a mere translator,

Forwhi to every lover I me excuse,
That of no sentement I this endite,
But out of Latyn in my tonge it write. (11.12-14)

The above is in accord with two earlier first person references to sources, "I rede it naught, therfore I late it goon" (I, 1.133), and the well-known allusion to "myn auctour called Lollius" (I, 1.394).

In the proem to Book III, the poet makes quite a different statement about his relation to his writing. He asks of Venus,

Ye in my naked herte sentement
Inhielde, and do me shewe of thy swetnesse.(11.43-44)

This, clearly, is far removed from "of no sentement I this endite".
In this proem Chaucer does not actually pledge his allegiance to the goddess (11.39-40), but he does encourage his audience to recognize the pervasiveness and worth of love; e.g.,

In hevene and helle, in erthe and salte see
Is felt thi myght, if that I wel descerne;
As man, brid, best, fissh, herbe, and grene tree
Thee fele in tymes with vapour eterne.  

He intensifies his earlier plea for the recognition of "the lawe of kynde" by relating love to the Christian scheme of things, and to his own allegiance suggested in the proem to Book I:

God loveth, and to love wol nought werne;
And in this world no lyves creature
Withouten love is worth, or may endure.  

In this proem, the poet's comments have the effect of associating love with a strong and noble religious impulse.

The authorial comments throughout Book III strengthen the endorsement of the value of human love which is made in the proem. Nowhere is the poet's complete involvement with his story made more explicit than in the comment which follows the account of the consummation. After appealing to lovers to judge the joy of an experience which he has not known,

Of hire delit, or joies oon the leeste,
Were impossible to my wit to seye;
But juggeth ye that han ben at the feste
Of swich gladnesse, if that hem liste pleye!  

the poet poses the rhetorical question,

Why nad I swich oon with my soule ybought,
Ye, or the leeste joie that was theere?  

The pose of would-be lover is indeed an unusual one for Chaucer, and through it he expresses a reverence for Love which is at least as great as his reverence for the Christian God, implied
at the beginning of Book I. Throughout Book III, the poet's comments foster an impression that God is concerned for the wellbeing of lovers: for example, in the passage of commentary on Troilus and Criseyde's lovemaking (ll.1373-1414), there are no fewer than seven references to "God" or "Lord". The proliferation of these exclamations suggests that more than the usual emphatic effect of an oath is intended. The fact that Troilus uses a similar style of language (in fine disregard of historical realism), together with the echoes between the poet's invocation to Venus in Troilus's hymn to Love, indicates that Chaucer is in complete accord with the viewpoint of the lovers, that the joy of love is indeed "hevene blisse" (l.1322). The view of love which the poet encourages his audience to accept at the end of Book III is not undermined in any way by the demonstration, made chiefly through the account of Pandarus's influence, of the "disese" which love carries with it.

In the proem to Book IV, an abrupt change in the poet's point of view is signalled, a change which corresponds with the final, "woful" stage of the love story. Love, the power which had been praised so eloquently as a force for continuing harmony, is now linked with Fortune, a far less reliable deity:

But al to litel, weylaway the whyle,
Lasteth swich joie, ythonked be Fortune,
That semeth trewest whan she wol bygyle,
And kan to fooles so hire song entune,
That she hem hent and blent, traitour comune! (ll.1-5)

"Swich joie" as Troilus and Criseyde have experienced is not, after

1. Bk III, ll.1373, 1378, 1380, 1385, 1387, 1400, 1410.
all, a guarantee of peace and stability. The poet makes clear that he continues to react with strong personal feeling to the new development in his story:

For which right now myn herte gynneth blede,
And now my penne, allas! with which I write,
Quaketh for drede of that I moste endite. (11.12-14)

His awareness of instability and uncertainty is also conveyed through the following comment upon the "auctors" who have written about Criseyde:

Allas! that they sholde evere cause fynde
To speke hire harm, and if they on hire lye,
Iwis, hemself sholde han the vilanye. (11.19-21)

The possibility that the authority of old books might be questionable is here raised for the first time in this poem. Throughout the previous books, the poet frequently indicates that he is omitting something from his source or adding something to it, but without any suggestion that the source may be wrong. By raising a doubt about the reliability of old books as records of his heroine's behaviour, the poet implies that each member of his audience must make his own decisions about authority and truth. (This kind of recognition of individualism, expressed through the poet's direct comment, is also a major theme in the *House of Fame.*

The "sentement" which the poet brings to his account of the disintegration of the lovers' joy is well illustrated by his comments upon Criseyde in Books IV and V. His "routhe" for her is recorded in a forcefully dramatic way, not only through what she says in direct speech and in her letters, but also through the varying tones of the poet's direct commentary upon her
infidelity. On the one hand, there is the expression of his sympathy¹ and the half-unbelieving references to what the "auctours" have said about her course of action;² on the other, there are quite unambiguous statements about her untruth; for example, this reference to the ease with which she discards her lover,

But God it wot, er fully monthes two,
She was ful fer fro that entenciuon!
For bothe Troilus and Troie town
Shal knotteles thoroughout hire herte slide. (V, l.l.766-69)

In a similar vein, there is the note of sarcasm in the authorial aside which precedes Criseyde's letter of self-justification:

For which Criseyde upon a day, for routhe, -
I take it so, - touchyng al this matere,
Wrot# him ayeyn ... (V, l.l.1587-89)

It is not necessary to see this "I" who says "I take it so" in the way that E. Talbot Donaldson does,³ as a naive narrator who adopts a wildly emotional attitude towards his heroine, refusing to accept the reality of her behaviour which is all too obvious to the audience. The speaker may with more justification be regarded as an informed and urbane figure, using an ironic tone which he relies upon his audience to recognize as such. Likewise, the line "But trewely, I kan nat telle hire age" (V, l.826) reflects only upon his great interest in the character, rather than upon a hypothetical retreat from reality which manifests itself in an anticlimactic statement.⁴

2. V, l.l.1037, 1044, 1050.
The infusion of authorial "sentement" into the story is also illustrated in the attitude which he adopts towards Troilus. The dramatization of his agonized waiting for Crisyde elicits our greatest sympathy for him, and in this we are encouraged by the poet's direct comment,

But Troilus, thow maist now, est or west,
Pipe in an ivy lef, if that the lest!
Thus goth the world, God shilde us fro meschaunce,
And every wight that meneth trouthe avaunce!

(V, 11.1432-35)

In these lines the poet expresses his resentment that one who, like Troilus, seeks the achievement of "trouthe" through love should find only misery.

It is true, as P.M. Kean suggests, that in *Troilus and Crisyde* the poet frequently refrains for quite long periods from recording his own reactions to the narrative:

Indeed, the love story, not doctrine, is the heart of the poem, and Chaucer has done with it what he was never to do again - exposed his reader directly, with only the slightest intervention on the part of the narrator, to the full impact of the action and the actors, that is, to "love in dede" with all its inherent, painful, and irresolvable contradictions.¹

¹ Op. cit., p.178. This is a salutary warning to critics who attempt to read *Troilus and Crisyde* as primarily a story of the development of its "I"; G.T. Shepherd, for example, suggests that "the Narrator is the only fully developed character in the poem" ("The Narrator in 'Troilus and Crisyde'" S. Sullivan, ed., *Critics on Chaucer*, London, George Allen and Unwin, 1970, p.88). H.M. Leicester goes much further in attempting to fit almost every piece of dialogue and reported action in the poem into a kind of mosaic of the poet-figure's consciousness; *The Rhetorical Moment: Studies in the development of the first-person narrative mode in Chaucer's poetry*, New Haven, Conn. (1967).
Our understanding of the *moralitas* presented in the poet's own voice at the end of the work is, however, directly connected with our interpretation of the work as a whole. The ascent of Troilus to "the holughnesse of the eighthe spere", from which he laughs at lovers on earth who are ignorant of heavenly felicity, is closely paralleled by the poet's emphatic dissociation of himself from the lovers and their world:

_Swych fyn hath false worldes brotelenesse! (1.1832)_

_Lo here, of payens corsed olde rites,  
Lo here, what alle hire goddes may availle._

(11.1849-50)

He turns again to the lovers in his audience, whom he has addressed directly many times during the narrative, to direct them towards the source of true felicity:

_O yonge, fresshe folkes, he or she,  
In which that love up groweth with youre age,  
Repeyreth hom fro worldly vanyte,  
And of youre herte up casteth the visage  
To thilke God that after his ymage  
Yow made, and thynketh al nys but a faire  
This world, that passeth soone as floures faire._

_And loveth hym, the which that right for love  
Upon a crois, oure soules for to beye,  
First starf, and roos, and sit in hevene above;  
For he nyl falsen no wight, dar I seye,  
That wol his herte al holly on hym leye.  
And syn he best to love is, and most meke,  
What nedeth feynede loves for to seke? (11.1835-1848)_

In this ringing exhortation to his audience, Chaucer makes unmistakably clear his own allegiance to the Christian God, the allegiance hinted at in the proem to Book I. Between the two passages in which the poet defines his own position, however, he expresses a belief which is difficult to reconcile with the Christian position on earthly love.
At the conclusion of the poem, the love between man and woman is not condemned as being intrinsically evil. The poet recognizes that love "up groweth" inevitably in all young people, and this recognition is quite in accordance with his earlier pronouncement, "God loveth, and to love wol nought werne". The problem is that of reconciling the view of love as "hevene blisse" expressed in Book III with the Christian view, according to which the affairs of this world are as impermanent as the flower. There can be no answer to this problem, as Miss Kean points out in her account of the fundamental Boethian argument:

The world is essentially subject to change, and, indeed, it is only through change that it can achieve any semblance of stability. This, however, is a stability of the whole at the expense of the parts. Individuals, whether natural objects or human beings, cannot expect material permanence, since the continuity of nature depends on the completeness of the cycle of birth, death, decay and rebirth which ensures the continuance of the species.¹

The many references in the poem to Fortune, of which that in the proem to Book IV is one of the most memorable, support this idea. In Book III, however, Chaucer succeeds in manipulating his audience into a position such that they forget that the individual love cannot be a microcosm of the beneficent cosmic principle. This he does in passages of first person commentary which imply that Troilus and Criseyde are in the grip of a religious force; normally evasive about his personal commitment to love, the poet confides in Book III that he would pay the price of his soul for the least part of the "hevene blisse"

¹. Op. cit., p.120.
possessed by the Trojan lovers. By encouraging his audience to empathize with Troilus and Criseyde, by appeals such as "But juggeth ye that han ben at the feste / Of swich gladnesse" (11.1312-13), the poet implies that they may share in the state of apparently enduring felicity. There are hints in Book III of the fall from "wele" announced at the beginning of the poem, but these are outweighed by the poet's persuasion to forget that worldly joy is transitory.

In his study of *Troilus and Criseyde*, Sanford Meech makes the following observation about Chaucer's use of the first person as a means of persuasion:

Instead of maintaining the consistency attainable by him as omniscient author, Chaucer prefers to enact the process of illumination which his audience must experience if it is to appreciate his poem to the full. He convincingly simulates a gradual change in his point of view, moving from preponderantly worldly to preponderantly extraworldly attitudes.  

In accordance with the principle of decorum governing an author's relation to his matter, announced at the beginning of Book I,

> For wel sit it, the sothe for to seyne,  
> A woful wight to han a drery feere,  
> And to a soryful tale, a sory cheere,  

(11.12-14)

Chaucer affects a sober demeanour in his account of "the losse of lyf and love yfeere / Of Troilus"; this is marked by a withdrawal from the narrative, a willingness to allow dialogue and reported action to convey their own sober moral. It is true that some of the few direct comments in Books IV and V

do suggest that the poet has learnt that earthly felicity is short-lived, but the illumination does not point unequivocally to "preponderantly extraworldly attitudes". Continuing sympathy for the lovers, and for Troilus in particular, together with an underlying regret that their felicity did not last, mark the mood of the narrative in Books IV and V.

Lawlor remarks that the "I" of Troilus and Criseyde is "One who, as the story gains hold, moves from comfortable self-possession to absorption in what is actual, and increasingly painful". Chaucer, even at the beginning of the poem, does not present himself as being comfortably self-possessed, but he does show himself to become increasingly interested in the force of human love as the story proceeds, until he endorses the attitude of his hero at the moment of greatest happiness. Thereafter, he predicts the tragic outcome of the story before Troilus recognizes it, but it is true to say that the narrative in Books IV and V is accompanied by a poet-figure who is absorbed in "what is actual, and increasingly painful". This mood is well exemplified in his repeated questioning of the veracity of the old books which contain the story.

There is no reason to assume that the exhortation and the prayer to the All-wise Trinity at the end of the poem indicate

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any deferring on the part of the poet to orthodox moral doctrine: there are, after all, hints at the very beginning of the poem that the authority of the Christian God must be supreme. But if the ringing conclusion is meant to "still questioning", the poet has not done his work well enough. He has shown his audience, by the example of his own illumination, that human love guarantees no permanence ("litel hertes reste"), and has both explicitly and implicitly shown his acute regret that the lives of individuals cannot reproduce the pattern of an overall cosmic harmony. Nowhere in the narrative, however, does the poet provide any evidence to support his claims that love is "The blynde lust", the work of "visible and invisible foon"; these claims are contradicted in the concluding section itself, by the admission of the naturalness of a love which grows up inevitably with all men, as part of the Christian scheme. The rhetorical strategy associated with Chaucer's first person intrusions is not complete when he demonstrates, through the example of his own attraction to Love followed by enlightenment, that "pleyn felicitee" cannot be achieved by the affections.

In his eloquent condemnation of love at the end of the poem, the poet appears to be making a conscious and deliberate overstatement, for the purpose not of stilling questioning on the part of his audience, but of fostering it. The attempt to place Troilus and Criseyde securely back into the world of classical antiquity,

1. E. Salter, "'Troilus and Criseyde': a Reconsideration", in Patterns of Love and Courtesy, p.105.
Lo here, of payens corsed olde rites,
Lo here, what alle hire goddes may availle,(H.1849-50)
is part of this rhetorical ploy; throughout the narrative until this point, the poet had encouraged his audience to observe the relevance of the Trojan love affair to their own experience.

The combined effect of the poet's ostensible asceticism and of his insistence on the "pastness" of the story is to encourage us to ponder upon the problem not only of the contradictions inherent in human love, but also upon the problem of understanding the nexus between temporal and divine love. Meech comments thus on this effect:

The coexistence in his lines of long and short views of life, both feelingly expressed, creates a tension, which might have been dispelled readily enough to the satisfaction of metaphysicians, but which is left in full force to the lively excitement of all readers.1

Chaucer, in his comments upon consecutive stages of the story, expresses allegiance to two views of life, but neither position can ultimately be accepted unreservedly. As in the vision poems, the poet withdraws at the end, to allow the members of his audience to reach their own conclusions about the complexity of experience.

Whereas in Troilus and Criseyde Chaucer endorses, through his first person comments on the narrative, two opposing forms of doctrine, he poses in the General Prologue as one who has no consistent point of view or standard of judgement at all. The

effect of these two dissimilar rhetorical stances is, however, the same - it is that of prompting his audience to make their own discriminations and moral judgement. It is considerably easier to locate the poet's attitudes towards the various pilgrims described than it is to locate a single and consistent viewpoint in *Troilus and Criseyde*. This is because the pose which Chaucer adopts, that of an uncritical admirer of most of the pilgrims, is a relatively transparent one: the "I" who purports to have been one of the "felaweship" himself is in fact acutely aware of the moral limitations which most of his fellow pilgrims possess. At the beginning of the series of portraits, the poet states his intention,

Me thynketh it acordaunt to resoun
To telle yow al the condicioun
Of ech of hem, so as it semed me,
And which they weren, and of what degree,
And eek in what array that they were inne. (1.37-41)

The authorial comments - or in the case of some of the portraits, the lack of authorial comments - reveal much about the moral "array" of the pilgrims, as well as information about their superficial appearances.

The transparency of the authorial naiveté pose is well illustrated by the description of the Friar. After a list of details which emphasizes the pride of this "noble post", there comes the judgement of his character, "Curteis he was and lowely of servyse" (1.250). From the foregoing detail, it should be clear that this churchman is anything but "lowely of servyse". There can be no question that the narrator is unaware of the friar's venality, in view of the barely veiled sarcasm of
"Therfore in stede of wepyng and preyeres / Men moote yeve silver to the povre freres" (11.231-32). A similar authorial position is taken in the descriptions of the Pardoner, the Summoner, the Franklin, and the Doctor. The Pardoner is introduced as a "gentil" person - and later described as a "noble ecclesiaste", but the ironical value of these epithets is apparent from the sense of repugnance which permeates the setting down of the details of the Pardoner's life. Similarly, a sharp undercutting technique is employed in the description of the Doctor; "a verray, parfit praktisour", indeed, is one who "lovede gold in special".

In some of the portraits, Chaucer makes even more explicit the fact that he is able to perceive the reality which lies behind the façade of some of the pilgrims. The following comments on the Merchant and the Franklin illustrate this:

"Ther wiste no wight that he was in dette.. (1.280)
Nowher so bisy a man as he ther nas
And yet he semed bisier than he was. (11.321-22)

In other portraits, he prefers to retreat almost entirely, permitting the accretion of carefully selected physical detail to do the work of characterizing by itself. No judgement of the Prioress, for example, is made, but the details of her portrait leave no doubt that she is far from an ideal nun, although a charming - if self centred - woman. Here, as in the portraits of the Reeve and the Wife of Bath, the selection of telling physical detail renders overt commentary unnecessary.
In a few of the portraits, there is no ironical discrepancy between authorial commentary and clearly implied reality. In the descriptions of the Knight, the Clerk, the Parson and the Plowman, Chaucer makes favourable comments which serve to complement, rather than to undercut, the effect produced by the recording of external detail. For example, there is nothing in the description of the Knight to suggest that the comment "He was a verray, parfit gentil knight" (1.72) has an ironic edge to it; similarly, there is no inducement given to contradict the statement that the Parson is "riche .. of hooly thoght and werk" (1.479). The unqualified admiration accorded by the poet to these four figures suggests that they provide the standard by which the other figures - to a greater or lesser degreeironically portrayed - are to be judged. There is a clear implication, conveyed by the point of view which the poet adopts, that men are to be judged according to their degree of concern for their fellows, and according to whether or not their life style corresponds to what they preach. Unlike most of the other pilgrims, the Knight, the Clerk, the Parson, and the Plowman are free of the various forms of the besetting sin of pride, and they are concerned, in their various ways, with promoting the spread of "charite". It is interesting to note that Chaucer uses the first person plural pronoun in the portraits of the Knight and the Parson:

At mortal batailles hadde he been fiftene,
And foughten foroure feith at Tramyssene (11.61-62)

For if a preest be foul, on whom we truste,
No wonder is a lewed man to ruste .. (11.501-02)
The use of the "we" form in this way reinforces our sense of an author who is at once detached from his narrative and genial towards his audience. Dieter Mehl comments thus on the objective, informal presence of the "I" in the General Prologue:

.. der Erzähler ganz hinter seinem Gegenstand zurücktritt und dem Leser sein eigenes Urteil nicht aufnötigt, obwohl er selbst sich offensichtlich ein Urteil gebildet hat. Dadurch schafft der Erzähler eine Atmosphäre des geheimen Einverständnisses und der Vertrauheit zwischen sich und dem Leser, die sehr viel wirkungsvoller ist als eine einfältige Pilgerfigur sein könnte.1

Mehl is right to disagree with Donaldson's idea that the "I" of the General Prologue is a simple-minded "Pilgerfigur", a reporter who is "usually actually unaware of the significance of what he sees, no matter how sharply he sees it", and who is in general "the victim of the poet's pervasive - not merely sporadic - irony".2 To Mehl's criticism of the Donaldsonian viewpoint might be added J.M. Major's remark that "no innocent could hit the mark so many times accidentally".3 The figure who narrates the General Prologue is not, however, as Major suggests, "a kind of alter ego of the poet",4 but Chaucer himself, witty and urbane, feigning ignorance and unquestioning admiration from time to time for the purpose of moral criticism. The ironical


4. Ibid., p.160.
voice which he uses has a persuasive effect - in the case of some of the pilgrim sketches - which goes beyond the suggesting of moral shortcomings. For example, the simile used of the Monk's bridle, "Gynglen in a whistlyng wynd als cleer / And eek as loude as dooth the chapel belle" (11.170-71), underlines the Monk's moral distance from the chapel bell, but at the same it suggests something of the character's joy in life and gives a sense of the poet's fascination with his exuberance. The enduring and widespread appeal of the General Prologue stems not only from the realism and wit of the portraits, but also from the impression of the poet's compassion and "charitee" which accompanies the placing of the characters in a Christian moral context.

Chaucer is not overtly present in the General Prologue as an "I" who tells the audience directly about his own state of mind. There is no "personal" statement in the General Prologue comparable with "I have gret wonder, be this lyght, / How that I lyve", or "Why nad I swich oon with my soule ybought, / Ye, or the leeste joie that was theere?". The excuse for plain speaking towards the end of the General Prologue (11.725-46), with its plea of "litel wit", suggests only the poet's desire to secure and to maintain the goodwill of his audience. It cannot without distortion be interpreted as a gloss upon the ethos of the "I" who narrates the portrait sketches. In the tales themselves (excepting of course the two which involve him as teller), Chaucer makes no direct observations at all. This self-effacement from the narrative is signalled by the use of an "adherence to
matter" topos at the beginning of the *Miller's Tale*, where he insists that he must reproduce the truth of his experience as an observer of the company:

And therefore every gentil wight I preye,
For Goddes love, demeth nat that I seye
Of yvel entente, but for I moot rehece
Hir tales alle, be they bettre or worse,
Or elles falsen som of my mateere.  

(1/11.3171-75)

At only two places in the *Canterbury Tales* does Chaucer consciously draw the attention of his audience to himself; in the tales of Sir Thopas and Melibeus, which in the terms of the central fiction of the poem, are his contributions to the Host's story-telling competition. The "I" who tells the farcical tale of Sir Thopas is, like the "Geffrey" who is snatched up by the eagle and the figure who converses with the sorrowful man in black, one who is clearly not an urbane and learned court poet. We may infer that Chaucer was sufficiently confident of his reputation as a poet by the time *Sir Thopas* was written to permit his audience a broad joke at his own expense. The joke is, however, a double-edged one, in that Chaucer ridicules not only his own abilities, but also the contemporary taste for mediocre tale-rhyme romances. The following *Tale of Melibee* is also a piece of ironic commentary upon the contemporary taste (exemplified in the Host's request) for poetry which presented *either* "murthe" or "doctryne", but never both at once. Perhaps, by compelling his audience to attend to this long and tiresome moral story, Chaucer was endeavouring to prompt them to the recognition that tonal

1. The Prologue to *Confessio Amantis* provides evidence of Gower's dissatisfaction with such a narrow, compartmentalized view of poetry; the work itself demonstrates his attempt to write a work "somwhat of lust, somewhat of lore".
variations are desirable and necessary in literature, even of the most "moral" kind. Further, by dramatizing himself as he does in these two tales, Chaucer demonstrates, through his own example, the value of humility: he does not presume to be a better story-teller than any of the pilgrims. (The manner of his self-portrayal reminds us of the eloquent disclaimer of personal glory in Book III of the *House of Fame.*)

The same modesty is also apparent in the faint praise which the Man of Law accords to Chaucer's poetry: this worthy pays tribute to his creator's wide-ranging appetite for poetic material, but has scant regard for Chaucer's craftsmanship.¹

Chaucer displays his name again at the very end of the *Canterbury Tales*, after the list of his "retracciouuns". Here, he names himself not out of any wish to be remembered by posterity as a self-depreciatory and sceptical poet, but for the reason that so many other medieval poets appended their names to what they wrote; that is, to beg divine forgiveness for their shortcomings.² As at the end of *Troilus and Criseyde* he speaks as an "I" who is a member of the Christian community, with a pious interest in salvation. The conclusion of *Troilus and Criseyde* brings into effect a juxtaposition of authorial attitudes, religious and secular; the note of finality which surrounds the Retraction that follows the soberly orthodox Parson's Tale is absent from the ending of *Troilus and Criseyde.*

As Paul Ruggiers remarks,

1. "I kan right now no thrifty tale seyn,
   That Chaucer thogh he kan but lewedly
   On metres and on rymyng craftily,
   Hath seyd hem in swich Englisshh as he kan ... (II, B', 11.46-49).

The Retraction ... does not pretend that delight in the world of men and women did not exist - it rather throws it into sharp relief, but asserts the sense of another pressing reality which the form now allows Chaucer finally to admit: the rueful confession from an artist who looks back upon his achievement that the most interesting materials for poetry are the signatures of fallen men.¹

Moving as Chaucer's final allegiance to the Christian God is, its existence does little to nullify any reader's enjoyment of what the poet rather harshly terms his "enditynges of worldly vanitees". The poems in which Chaucer is present as an "I" figure who disclaims any positive single allegiances and certainties are none the less moral than "the translacion of Bœce de Consolacione, and othere bookes of legendes of seintes, and omelies, and moralitee, and devocioun", because of their effect of questioning established sets of doctrine rather than of endorsing them.

In the works of Gower and Langland, as well as Chaucer, the deployment of the authorial "I" is essentially a way of persuading an audience to accept truth as it is preached in Christian revelation. Through their respective self-depictions as sinful men who are shown "the right way" in examples involving instruction and correction, these poets encourage their audiences to benefit from their examples — that is, by resisting their achievements in gaining insight and knowledge, and by avoiding their errors. In the group of lyrics in which the "I" is an old man, the example is predominantly cautionary in tone; in the longer dream-vision narratives, both aspects of the process of exemplification are in evidence.

CONCLUSION

An essential element of the rhetorical process whereby the audience is stimulated toward positive moral action is demonstration that each "I" is inferior in knowledge and ability not only to his instructor within the poem, but also to the audience outside the poem. Thus Amaen in the Confessio Amantis and Will in Pierre Plougon are shown on occasion to be quite ignorant of even basic theological and moral concepts. A more explicit kind of irony is apparent throughout Piers Plowman in parts of Pierre Plougon, when the dreamer are shown to make the same moral error more than once; this subtle and dramatic kind of frustration carries the assumption that listeners and readers will be perceptive enough to recognize the moral and intellectual shortcomings of the "I" figures, from the position of superior awareness.
In the works of Gower and Langland, as well as in *Pearl*, the *Parlement of the Thre Ages* and the religious lyrics, the deployment of the authorial "I" is essentially a way of persuading an audience to accept truth as it is proclaimed in Christian revelation. Through their respective self-depictions as sinful men who are shown "the rihte weie" in experiences involving instruction and correction, these poets encourage their audiences to benefit from their examples - that is, by emulating their achievements in gaining insight and knowledge, and by avoiding their errors. In the group of lyrics in which the "I" is an old man, the example is predominantly cautionary in kind; in the longer dream vision narratives, both aspects of the process of exemplification are in evidence.

An essential element of the rhetorical process whereby the audience is stimulated toward positive moral action is demonstration that each "I" is inferior in knowledge and ability, not only to his instructor within the poem, but also to the audience outside the poem. Thus Amans in the *Confessio Amantis* and Will in *Piers Plowman* are shown on occasion to be quite ignorant of even basic theological and moral concepts. A more complex kind of irony is apparent throughout *Pearl* and in parts of *Piers Plowman*, when the dreamers are shown to make the same moral error more than once; this subtle and dramatic kind of illustration carries the assumption that listeners and readers will be perceptive enough to recognize the moral and intellectual shortcomings of the "I" figures. From the position of superior awareness
conceded to the audience in each of these poems arises in large measure the "dulce" aspect of their mode of instruction. It is important to recognize, however, that none of the characters who are shown to participate in processes of correction in these poems is so naïve and limited that he cannot be identified as a type of humanity.

Chaucer differs from his contemporaries inasmuch as the self-depictions in each of his major works do not reflect the notion of a type of humanity whose experiences offer an invitation for those who "herkne ... or rede" to perceive and affirm truths which are absolute and unquestionable. The effect of the presence of an "I", in the dream visions and Troilus and Criseyde alike, is rather that of persuading his audience to meditate upon the variety and complexity of experience and upon the value of the doctrines by which experience is conventionally codified. The following lines from a lyric attributed to Boethius express the kind of problem which Chaucer continually poses for the consideration of his audience:

This discord in the pact of things,  
This endless war twixt truth and truth,  
That singly hold, yet give the lie  
To him who seeks to yoke them both -  
Do the gods know the reason why?

It may well be that Chaucer assumes that the Christian God does know the reason why, but in his poetry - and particularly in the way he chooses to portray himself as an "I" in his poetry - he

1. Quaenam discors foedera rerum  
causa resolvit? quis tanta deus  
veris statuit bella duobus,  
ut quae carptim singula constant  
eadem nolint mixta iugari?

shows a concern that man as well should at least try to know the truth.

When he addresses his audience directly in the dream vision poems, Chaucer projects himself as one who is unable to make absolute pronouncements and judgements. In the introductory sections of the Book of the Duchess, the House of Fame, and the Parliament of Foules he portrays himself as one who after a dream experience continues to be perplexed about the ambiguities of experience: the use of the present tense in each of these passages suggests that the various dream experiences may in fact be the cause of the speaker's state of mind. The conclusion of the Book of the Duchess, because it returns to the waking situation of the poet, leads us back to the beginning of the work, so that we are persuaded to feel that his sorrow may be the result not only of his own eight years' sickness, but also of a realization of the finality of death and of the impossibility of consoling one who has suffered a great loss. In the House of Fame, after accompanying the "I" of the poet into a world where nothing but art seems to have stability and purpose, we feel that his aside in the first Proem - "But why the cause is, noght wot I" - reflects more than disingenuousness. So too the demonstration of love's contraries in the Parliament of Foules makes the expression of the poet's bewilderment at the beginning seem very appropriate. These statements (which may or may not reflect the views of Chaucer the court poet and public servant upon the nature of experience) serve the rhetorical function of leaving the reader to puzzle at the ambiguities and complexities which confuse the
speaking "I". We do small justice to the tone of these passages, to their shifting, circling rhythms, if we insist that the speaker is patently naive, one who continually has the experience but misses the meaning which we as readers are able to comprehend. Chaucer does of course invite us to perceive meaning and truth where he cannot — for example, by the frequent allusions to his "inabilitee" in love — and this aspect of his writing gives it the interrogative tone of a demaunde. In the end, though, we are brought to share the poet's pervasive tentativeness and sense of puzzlement.

It might be argued that the particular ethos of the speaker which Chaucer projects in these passages of direct address to his audience is related to the fact that the matter and the "sens" of his writing are not predominantly religious. Gower, Langland and the authors of the two shorter alliterative poems take their subject matter from a variety of sources but the ends towards which their persuasive efforts are directed are unmistakably Christian. It is very likely that in passages of direct address to their audiences, such as the Prologue and Epilogue of Confessio Amantis and the various exhortations throughout Pierre Plowman, Gower and Langland felt constrained by the purpose of their writing to depict themselves as relatively impersonal and omniscient figures. The stance which they adopt in these passages is that characteristic of the preacher and the homilist. Chaucer utilizes this convention of the "I" as an omniscient teacher figures at the conclusion of Troilus and Criseyde, in the eloquent exhortation to "yonge
fresshe folkes". As Chaucer employs it, the stance does not have the effect of persuading his audience to endorse the absolute standard of Christian morality: it seems consciously designed to conflict with the position which the poet has taken throughout the narrative which has gone before, the position of one who sympathizes so much with the two "yonge fresshe folkes" of his story that he expresses a wish that he might have experienced such joy as theirs. Instead of stilling questioning from the audience, as Gower and Langland attempt to do in presenting themselves as teachers, Chaucer leads us back into his poem to attempt to answer the questions raised by his final rhetorical position.

The opening passage of direct address in *Pearl* is very similar in tone and effect to the introductory sections of the *Book of the Duchess*, *the House of Fame* and *the Parliament of Foules*. Here, too, is an "I" who represents himself as continuing to suffer even after a visionary experience in which some correction has been received:

I dewyne, fordolked of luf-daungere
Of pat pryuy perle wythouten spot.

(There is, of course, more pathos in the suffering of this figure than there is in that of Chaucer's "I".) The extent of this poet's departure from the conventions of authorial representation may be gauged by comparing the introductory section not only with passages of direct address in the *Confessio* and *Piers Plowman*, but also with the treatment of the "I" in the two homiletic works which are assumed to be by the same author. The speaker in *Patience* and *Cleanness* is a representative of authority
rather than a "rounded" human being.¹ The effect achieved in *Pearl* by the emphasis on the poet-figure's persistence in sorrow, despite his finding "A God, a Lorde, a frende ful fyin", is that of stressing the sinfulness and fallibility of mankind: there is no suggestion, as there is in Chaucer's dream vision poems, that the validity of what the "I" has seen and learnt in his visionary experience is to be questioned. The compellingly realistic characterization of the poet plays an essential part in the presentation of the work's Christian "sentence".²

The depiction in *Pearl* of the process in which the poet increases in awareness, like the dialogue sections of *Confessio Amantis*, *Piers Plowman*, and some of the frame lyrics, is essentially a demonstration in both positive and negative terms of the kinds of knowledge which are necessary for salvation. In the dream vision poems, Chaucer uses the motifs of the lesson and the journey to direct the attention of his audience not towards absolute standards of morality, but towards the variety and incomprehensibility of both experience and doctrine. In the *House of Fame*, for example, the Dantesque invocations to Books II and III carry the implication that a lesson of serious moral import is about to be told: neither the eagle's grandly eloquent discourse on physics nor the record of the happenings at Fame's

¹. See also p.18, above.

². So too, although in a rather different way, does the portrait of the poet in the *Parlement of the Thre Ages*: here, the presentation of the poet is such that it illustrates that certain claims of the human will are not incompatible with the claims of "doctrine".
court, however, fulfil the expectation created by the invocations and the promise of "sentence". Chaucer's richly comic use of the master-pupil dialogue convention in Book II has the effect of suggesting that there is something faintly ludicrous about scientific learning itself: Jove's eagle continues to hold forth, proud of his "prolixitee", and apparently oblivious to his pupil's unwillingness. In Book III, serious doubt is cast upon the value of the whole fabulous journey when "Geffrey" reveals that he has learnt nothing new from his observation of the goddess and her followers. The motif of the journey into experience and knowledge which is central to *Piers Plowman* is used again in the *Parlement of Foules*. Here too the poet's observations, although they are of things which are both worthy and interesting, fail to show him the "certeyn thing" for which he has been seeking. In both the *Hous of Fame* and the *Parlement* we are permitted to smile at the fearfulness of Chaucer the pupil, but in neither poem is the audience put at a superior vantage point from which it is able to perceive an order and meaning which the poet is unable to perceive. The vision poems illustrate a subtle rhetorical strategy of encouraging the audience to feel more knowledgeable than the poet-figure, and then showing that there are, after all, good reasons for his confusion. In poems such as *Pearl*, *Confessio Amantis* and *Piers Plowman*, on the other hand, the audience is encouraged to endorse the insights at which the poet-figures arrive, and even - in the case of *Piers* at least - to observe absolute truths and sanctions.
which the "I" is not fully able to recognize even in the final stages of his search.

Chaucer's self-representations as an "I" in his poems from the Book of the Duchess through to the Tales, encompass a variety of moods and tones - from apparent gravity and seriousness, to mock naivety and broad farce. The modern reader of the poems may frequently wish that he could observe that element which is absent from them as they appear on the printed page: the physical presence of the poet, reading aloud to an audience of listeners. Reading the works of Chaucer's contemporaries does not, in general, produce this effect, since it is relatively easy to discern consistency of attitude in the "I's" who figure in poems such as Confessio Amantis and Pearl. The shifts in the tone of the Chaucerian "I", apparent in all of the major poems, seem calculated to leave the audience in doubt about the nature of the poet's real beliefs and allegiances. The "Sufficeth me, as I were ded, / That no wight have my name in honde" passage in Book III of the House of Fame is one of the few places in Chaucer's work where he seems to be speaking without the defences and qualifications of irony. Perhaps the greatest complexity in Chaucer's poetry concerns the presence in it of an "I" who in both dramatic sequences and passages of direct address is presented in strongly realistic terms, yet who offers very little to his audience in the way of positive moral direction. In the other fourteenth century poems in which the overt presence of the
The authorial "I's" in *Pearl*, the *Parlement of the Thre Ages*, *Confessio Amantis*, *Piers Plowman* and the religious lyrics are alike in that they are representative figures. This fundamental "everyman" quality is not undercut by the incorporation of either naturalistic or apparently autobiographical detail into their presentation: the figure of the poet in *Pearl* demonstrates a most effective coexistence of individuality and generality. The poet-protagonist in each of these works is realized as an allegorical figure, one who although patently human, is also identifiable as a personification. Only the "I" of Langland's poem is actually called Will, but the name might just as readily have been applied to the authorial representatives in the other poems, since each of them has the distinguishing characteristic of a form of self-will, which is shown to be in contradiction to the Will of God. In *Pearl*, for example, the "wreched wylle" of the poet-figure is manifested in a refusal to recognize that the material concept of possession has no applicability to things spiritual, and in *Confessio Amantis* the basic wilfulness of Amans-Gower is connected with a refusal to recognize the sphere of activity proper to an aged man. Both figures are shown, by a method of extended exemplum, to recognize the sinfulness of their wilful attitudes.

In none of Chaucer's poems is the authorial "I" depicted as either a representative of sinful humanity or a personification of the erring will. He portrays himself as an individual
sensibility, as distinct from an individual-within-the-type, and although he endeavours through his deployment of the "I" to persuade his audience to share his scepticism toward conclusive and absolute judgments, there is always the implication that they should continue to reflect for themselves upon the problems which are raised in the poems. When Chaucer uses the first person plural form, as for example in the following passages,

Upon a tre, besyde a welle, I say
Cupide, oure lord, his arwes forge and file, (P.F., 11.211-12)
Us lakketh nought but that we witen wolde
A certeyn houre, in which she comen sholde (T.C., III 11.531-32), it is to implicate his audience in the scenes and events of the narrative. Chaucer's use of the "we" form does not reflect the religious assumptions which its use by Gower, Langland, and the authors of Pearl, the Parlement of the Thre Ages and the religious lyrics reflects. These assumptions are well illustrated by this explanation of why "our" is used instead of "my" in the Paternoster:

bis word lerneð vs and seip þat we beþ alle breþeren, grete and smale, pore and riche, hige and lowe, of on fader and on moder, þat is to seye of God and holy chirche, and þat non schal scorne ne despise ðepere, but loue as his broþere, and on schal helpe a-noþere, as dobþe lymes of a mannes owne body, ....... bis word "oure" techeþ us to þate pre þinges, namely, pride, hate, couetise.1

The modulation in each of these poems of "I" into "we" suggests that each of the poets intends that his audience should recognize the spiritual affinities which it shares with the central figure of each work.

The tendency, apparent in the works of the religious poets, for "I" to become "we", testifies to a pervasive sense of humility; the persuasive effect achieved by the presentation of the "I" in poems such as Pearl, Confessio Amantis, and Piers Plowman is connected in large measure with the unwillingness of each poet to claim any insights or experiences which lie outside the realm of normal human experience. Although Chaucer projects himself in his writing as an "I" who is distinct from the "we" of the Christian community, he too carefully refrains from appearing as one who exists in self-satisfied intellectual isolation. The effect of humility and the implicit readiness to defer to superior knowledge are characteristics of Chaucer's first person method which are found but seldom in the works of the group of fifteenth century Scottish poets who attempted to emulate his highly individualistic style of self-projection.
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### (1) EDITIONS USED

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