



Transformative Allegory: Imagination from Alan of Lille to Spenser

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Transformative Allegory: Imagination from Alan of Lille to Spenser

A dissertation presented

by

Sara Elizabeth Gorman

to

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in partial fulfillment of the requirements

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Transformative Allegory: Imagination from Alan of Lille to Spenser

Abstract

This dissertation traces the progress of the personified imagination from the twelfth-century *De planctu Naturae* to the sixteenth-century *Faerie Queene*, arguing that the transformability of the personified imagination becomes a locus for questioning personification allegory across the entire period. The dissertation demonstrates how, even while the imagination seems to progress from a position of subordination to a position of dominance, certain features of the imagination's unstable nature reappear repeatedly at every stage in this period's development of the figure. Deep suspicion of the faculty remains a regular part of the imagination's allegorical representation throughout these five centuries. Within the period, we witness the imagination trying to assert its allegorical position in the context of other, more established allegorical figures such as Reason and Nature. In this way, the history of the personification of the imagination is surprisingly continuous from the twelfth to the sixteenth centuries. This "continuity" is not absolute but functions as a consistent recombination of a standard set of features of and attitudes toward imagination that rematerializes regularly. In order to understand this phenomenon at any point in these five centuries, it is essential to examine imagination across the entire period. In particular, the dissertation discovers an alternative, more nuanced view of the personified imagination than has thus far been posited. The

imagination is a thoroughly ambivalent character, always on the cusp of transformation, and nearly always locked in a power struggle with other allegorical figures. At the same time, as the allegorical imagination repeatedly attempts to establish itself, it becomes a locus for intense questioning of the meaning and process of personification. The imagination remains transformative, uncertain, and at times terrifying throughout this entire period.

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Abbreviations

EEBO Early English Books Online

MED The Electronic Edition of the *Middle English Dictionary*

Introduction

Imagination is more important than knowledge. Knowledge is limited. Imagination encircles the world.
--Albert Einstein

I am certain of nothing but the holiness of the Heart's affections and the truth of the Imagination.
--John Keats

The “imagination” as a creative entity has continuously been an object of fascination since the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Romantics tried to codify its features and operation. As James Engell has pointed out, the idea was so fascinating that it developed simultaneously in various contexts in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, including religion, philosophy, criticism, literature, and science.¹ Engell's argument rightfully notes that the imagination as we understand it today was the creation of the eighteenth century.²

Despite the fact that Engell's book was published in 1981, earlier iterations of the literary imagination have not been explored in the same depth as the Romantic imagination. Medieval scholars have not followed suit and investigated the *literary* development of the imagination in the medieval period. Although studies of the philosophical development of the imagination before and after the influx of Aristotelian texts into Western Europe abound, there are no in-depth analyses of the simultaneous evolution of the allegorical figure of Imagination in medieval literature. We are thus left

¹ James Engell, *The Creative Imagination: Enlightenment to Romanticism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), vii.

² Ibid.

with a drastically incomplete literary history of the imagination, one that emphasizes uniformity between the Romantic period and our current understanding of the imagination but fails to delve back deeper into literary history to understand whether these ideas are continuous, fragmented, or somewhere in between. As Michelle Karnes has noted, there is no dearth of studies of the imagination, but most of them relegate the medieval imagination to a place of significant inferiority.³ The imagination, in these accounts, is triumphantly invented by Plato, elaborated upon by Aristotle, and then enters a “dark” period of feeble development until finally emerging as a prestigious agent of human creativity in the eighteenth century.⁴ These accounts display glaring inaccuracies and fail to recognize the reality of vivacious and often vicious debates about the imagination in the medieval period. In fact, there is certainly one way in which our modern conception of the imagination is closely related to the medieval conception: the medieval imagination was similarly a source of considerable mystery and fascination. Vibrant debate about the imagination was a regular part of philosophy and literature in the medieval and early modern periods, so ubiquitous in fact that it is surprising that there is not more scholarship on each and every aspect of the medieval imagination, including its literary development.

This dissertation seeks to remedy in part this lack in the literary history of the imagination before the eighteenth century. The period from 1150 to 1590 begins and ends with strikingly similar challenges leveled at the imagination. In the twelfth century, Neoplatonic philosophy expresses suspicion of the imagination’s distortion of original truths. In the

³ Michelle Karnes, *Imagination, Meditation, and Cognition in the Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 1-2.

⁴ Ibid.

sixteenth century, Reformation theology fears the imagination's ability to proliferate false idols in the mind. Across the entire period, fear of the imagination is based on fundamental concerns about distortion of reality and the natural world. This fear takes on many different forms across the period, but it is always a strikingly present element of the allegorical representation of imagination. The flourishing of Aristotelianism in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries creates, on the surface, a more accommodating and less suspicious environment for the imagination. In these two centuries, the imagination develops with the most latitude, at times flouting Reason and demoting Nature. Yet within this imaginative freedom lurk concerns about the imagination's power that become manifest in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

This dissertation traces the progress of the personified imagination from the twelfth-century *De planctu Naturae* to the sixteenth-century *Faerie Queene*, arguing that the transformability of the personified imagination becomes a locus for questioning personification allegory across the entire period. The dissertation demonstrates how, even while the imagination seems to progress from a position of subordination to a position of dominance, certain features of the imagination's unstable nature reappear repeatedly at every stage in this period's development of the figure. Deep suspicion of the faculty remains a regular part of the imagination's allegorical representation throughout these five centuries.

Within the period, we witness the imagination trying to assert its allegorical position in the context of other, more established allegorical figures such as Reason and Nature. In this way, the history of the personification of the imagination is surprisingly continuous from the twelfth to the sixteenth centuries. This "continuity" is not absolute but functions as a consistent recombination of a standard set of features of and attitudes toward imagination that

rematerializes regularly. In order to understand this phenomenon at any point in these five centuries, it is essential to examine imagination across the entire period.

In particular, the dissertation discovers an alternative, more nuanced view of the personified imagination than has thus far been posited. The imagination is a thoroughly ambivalent character, always on the cusp of transformation, and nearly always locked in a power struggle with other allegorical figures. At the same time, as the allegorical imagination repeatedly attempts to establish itself, it becomes a locus for intense questioning of the meaning and process of personification. The imagination remains transformative, uncertain, and at times terrifying throughout this entire period. The medieval period was not simply afraid of the imagination, however, as is often posited.⁵ As this dissertation amply demonstrates, the period engaged with a form of rich questioning of the imagination that rendered it a highly dynamic and constantly changing force in the allegorical landscape.

Sensitivity to the ways in which different discursive areas treat the imagination constitutes a central portion of the dissertation. In many cases, the literary imagination does not develop in precisely the same way as the philosophical imagination. The personified imagination has the tendency to resist its own intellectual-historical development, often remaining rooted in the past. Many chapters thus demonstrate the manner in which the personified imagination does *not* reflect contemporary advances in faculty psychology but remains more firmly in dialogue with its literary forebears.

Scholarship on the medieval imagination has focused mainly on the imagination in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. My dissertation tells a longer history of the medieval imagination beginning in the twelfth century, examining the moment before the influx of

⁵ See Karnes, *Imagination*, 2-3, for an account of the common scholarly view that imagination produced nothing but fear and trepidation in the medieval period.

Aristotelian imaginative theory into England, and continuing to the sixteenth century. The dissertation thus traces a *longue durée* of the development of the allegorical figure of imagination. The decision to extend the discussion into the early modern period is also part of an attempt to suggest that Renaissance theories of imagination are not as divorced from their medieval counterparts as they might seem.

The term “imagination” first appears as the Greek *phantasia* in Plato’s middle dialogues.⁶ Plato’s writings on imagination are, however, sparse. Neoplatonic philosophy developed Plato’s theories of imagination much more fully, along with the influence of Aristotelian writings on the faculty. For Neoplatonists, as for Aristotle, the imagination acts as an intermediary between sense and reason. For Plotinus, the imagination has a memorial function, “harbouring the presentment of an object that has disappeared.” Thus the imagination is also “a seat of memory.”⁷ Like Plato, the Neoplatonists distrust the sensible, material world and thus demote the imagination as a potential propagator of falsehood.⁸

While Neoplatonic thought aligns imagination primarily with the senses, Aristotelian theories of cognition allow the imagination to play a direct role in understanding. Careful to separate his musings on the imagination from its “metaphorical” senses, Aristotle argues that imagination must be sufficiently divorced from perception. Perception, according to Aristotle, is an activity visited upon a necessarily present object whose outcome is always based in truth. Imagination, on the other hand, is a mental exercise practiced upon an object that is either

⁶ Karnes, *Imagination*, 23-4.

⁷ Plotinus, *Enneads*, trans. Stephen MacKenna (London: Penguin Books, 1991), 283.

⁸ Karnes, *Imagination*, 25.

present or absent whose outcome may be, and often is, false.⁹ Aristotle's imagination is most certainly not an entirely positive force. While imagination prepares sense perceptions for interpretation by reason and understanding, it is often false, unlike "knowledge or intellect," which "are always correct."¹⁰ Most basically, Aristotle's imagination is the part of the brain that intervenes between perception and intellect, storing and recombining images once seen in nature but now absent. Yet Aristotle's *phantasia*, like the medieval tradition that inherits it, is heterogeneous. Under the heading of imagination falls not only absent images but also dreams, puzzling sense-data, and indistinct visions. Imagination is also responsible for the spontaneous production of mental imagery.

The legacy of Neoplatonic and Aristotelian theories of imagination on the medieval period necessarily results in a compound, complex, and strikingly heterogeneous faculty. In the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, Aristotelian and Arabic theories of cognition and imagination begin to circulate in Europe. Yet the influx of philosophical texts by Aristotle, Avicenna, and Averroes did not simply spell the death of hundreds of years of development of Neoplatonic theories of the imagination. Instead, new theories and old theories combined in new ways, producing complex accounts of the imagination that are difficult to label as purely "Aristotelian" or "Neoplatonic." A common controversy revolved around the extent to which imagination participates in reasoning. Manuscript evidence bears extensive witness to this debate between a Neoplatonic view of the imagination as tied primarily to the senses and a more Aristotelian account of the imagination as taking part in the act of reasoning. Some

⁹ Aristotle, *De Anima (On the Soul)*, trans. Hugh Lawson-Tancred (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1986), 198.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 199.

manuscripts with diagrams of the brain position the imagination in the posterior part of the first cell, the cell responsible for sensation and perception. Others place the imagination in the posterior part of the brain, closer to *aestimativa*, *cogitativa*, and *ratio*.¹¹ These manuscripts, then, illustrate the defining heterogeneity of late medieval imaginative theory.

In the thirteenth century, new commentaries on Aristotle began appearing with great frequency in Europe. These commentaries may be viewed as evidence of the varied, constantly shifting nature of the philosophical imagination in this late medieval period. Aquinas' *Commentary on Aristotle's De anima* posits an imagination that results from a movement of the senses that then places a mental image in the potential intellect.¹² As Aquinas notes, without the imagination, there can be no formation of opinion, and therefore the imagination plays an essential role in the functioning of the intellect.¹³ The most powerful view of imagination was propagated by Avicenna, who lent the imagination prophetic capacity.¹⁴ Avicenna also unusually distinguishes between *imaginatio* and *phantasia*, assigning *phantasia* a more elevated function.¹⁵ This splitting of the imagination into two parts is picked up by Reginald Pecock in the fifteenth century.

In the midst of this thirteenth-century flowering of Aristotelian philosophy, distrust of the imagination was still rife. Indeed, Aristotle's texts were not accepted without a struggle in thirteenth-century Europe. Oxford philosophers absorbed Aristotelianism swiftly, but

¹¹ Edwin Clarke and Kenneth Dewhurst, *An Illustrated History of Brain Function: Imaging the Brain from Antiquity to the Present* (San Francisco: Norman Publishing, 1996), 8.

¹² Thomas Aquinas, *A Commentary on Aristotle's De anima*, trans. Robert Pasnau (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 143-4.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 325.

¹⁴ Karnes, *Imagination*, 6.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 54-5.

Aristotle's natural philosophy and metaphysics were banned in Paris as early as 1210 and again in 1215.¹⁶ Varying receptions of Aristotle across Europe resulted in extremely diverse theories of imagination. As Karnes notes, "heterogeneity" is thus the defining feature of the medieval imagination.¹⁷ Even in the midst of this diversity, and the many different directions scholarship on the imagination has thus necessarily taken, one theme seems to emerge repeatedly: that the imagination is somehow a lowly part of the mind, important only in its relation to reason.¹⁸ Yet, as this dissertation demonstrates, the medieval literary imagination was far from "lowly" or insignificant. Instead, it was a source of lively debate and discussion, subject to versatile representation.

Against the backdrop of this heterogeneity and a constantly developing nexus of theoretical frameworks for the imaginative faculty, the allegorical figure of the imagination emerges. The literary imagination is always affected by this philosophical story, but it is no mere shadow of intellectual-historical developments in faculty psychology. This dissertation reveals a vibrantly varied and tensely self-conflicted literary imagination. Allegory allows for a richer and often deeper examination of the complexities of the nascent figure of the imagination than philosophy does. My argument thus often relies on the conviction that "what philosophy could not do, poetry might."¹⁹ Allegory permits relational aspects of the

¹⁶ Marcia L. Colish, *Medieval Foundation of the Western Intellectual Tradition 400-1400* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 289.

¹⁷ Karnes, *Imagination*, 7-8.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 31. Mary Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought: Meditation, Rhetoric, and the Making of Images, 400-1200* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 120.

¹⁹ Theodore Silverstein, "The Fabulous Cosmogony of Bernard Silvestris," *Modern Philology* 46 (1948-49), 116.

imagination's identity to arise in ways that could not be expressed with quite the same nuance in philosophy. The richness of the deeply conflicted relationship between Imagination and Nature, for example, was not much commented upon in either Neoplatonic or Aristotelian philosophy. The personified imagination, then, poses a challenge to the simple story of the development of the philosophical imagination according to dominant intellectual schools.²⁰ For Alan of Lille's imagination should no more be called "Neoplatonic" than Chaucer's can be titled "Ockhamist."

In the coming pages, imagination will be defined strictly as the psychological faculty that stores and recombines images, relaying information between the senses and the intellect. The allegorical imagination is not some mysterious creative capacity but becomes personified according to its place and function within the mind. The imagination is allegorized under a variety of names, including Genius and Archimago, throughout these five centuries. These various names will all be treated, sharing the common feature of representing the mind's image-making capacity. These personifications also explore the imagination's function in more creative realms, including altered states of consciousness such as dreaming. Discussion of literary works are limited mainly to texts in which an allegorized version of the imagination appears, with the exception of some of the texts discussed in the chapter on the fifteenth century as well as Chaucer's *House of Fame*. There is good cause for focusing exclusively on texts with allegorical representations of imagination. These texts show special awareness of surrounding

²⁰ See William J. Courtenay's passionate case against the simplicity of categorizing philosophical thoughts according to "schools": William J. Courtenay, "Schools and Schools of Thought in the Twelfth Century," in *Mind Matters: Studies of Medieval and Early Modern Intellectual History in Honour of Marcia Colish*, ed. Cary J. Nederman, Nancy Van Deusen, and E. Ann Matter (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009), 13-14.

philosophical and theological debates about the nature of the imagination, and these debates are well represented in abstractions of this mental faculty. These allegorical texts thus present the most appropriate loci for discussion alongside philosophical and theological accounts of the imagination.

Although scholarly work on philosophical theories of medieval imagination and on medieval allegory abounds, no single work of scholarship to date considers primarily the literary development of imagination in the medieval period. Furthermore, while there are several studies on medieval allegorical figures such as Nature, there are no book-length projects on the allegorical figure of imagination in the medieval period. This dissertation project seeks to remedy this gap between literary practice and philosophical theory, considering late medieval and early modern allegorical representations of the imagination against the backdrop of an intellectual-historical story about the rise and fall of Aristotelian faculty psychology between the middle of the twelfth century and 1590.²¹ I have chosen to devote special attention to the development of imagination as an allegorical figure in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century England in order to remedy another gap in scholarship on the medieval imagination, most of which stops short at around 1400.

The dissertation mostly focuses on late medieval representations of imagination in English allegorical texts but includes one chapter on twelfth-century philosophy and allegory in order to argue for the importance of the twelfth century to the legacy of the personified imagination in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century England. There is also a

²¹ “Faculty psychology” refers to the tradition, stemming from Aristotle’s *De anima*, of defining the functions of the various faculties of the mind and soul, including the five senses, imagination and memory.

chapter on the *Roman de la Rose*, another non-English text, because its influence was far-reaching in England, as evidenced by Chaucer's fourteenth-century English translation of the text. Arguing for the seminal influence of twelfth-century allegory on fourteenth- and fifteenth-century allegorical representations of imagination subverts a more common argument that the late medieval English concept of imagination was based mostly on Aristotelian texts and commentaries that circulated in England from the thirteenth century onwards. A large part of the dissertation's argument is that late medieval English texts represent the personified imagination as a figure of uncertain status, often caught between a Neoplatonic representation of imagination regular to the twelfth century and an Aristotelian representation of imagination disseminated after the twelfth century. Because twelfth-century allegories with representations of imagination such as Bernard Silvestris' *Cosmographia*, Alan of Lille's *De planctu Naturae*, and John of Hauville's *Architrenius* enjoyed considerable popularity in late medieval England, there is good cause to start with this set of texts as examples of Neoplatonic conceptions of imagination that influenced later medieval writers.

Rather than retell a linear intellectual history of faculty psychology that begins with Platonism, changes radically in the thirteenth century with the influx of Aristotelian texts, and ends with a repudiation of Aristotelianism in the sixteenth century, this dissertation accounts for a constantly shifting nexus of theories about the imagination and the perpetual tensions among them. Ultimately, the dissertation poses a larger question about periodization, asking: Could telling a history of medieval to Renaissance through imagination reveal a different kind of history than has traditionally been posited about the transition between these two periods?

Classic scholarly work on the medieval and Renaissance imagination includes Murray Wright Bundy's *The Theory of Imagination in Classical and Mediaeval Thought*; E. Ruth Harvey's *The Inward Wits: Psychological Theory in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*; J.M. Cocking's *Imagination: A Study in the History of Ideas*; and Jacques Le Goff's *Medieval Imagination*.²² These books are all interested in tracing chronological developments in philosophical, medical and theological theories of the imagination. Only Harvey's book treats both the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, whereas Bundy focuses on the classical period and Le Goff solely on the medieval period. Harvey states from the beginning that her study delineates only the Aristotelian tradition, explaining that "the more detailed Platonic scheme of the soul's powers which passed into the Latin West through Augustine does not concern us here."²³ By "inward wits," Harvey means the inner senses theorized by an Aristotelian-influenced medical tradition. Her work thus stands at the center of a tradition of scholarship on the imagination that deals only with Aristotle and represses some of the major challenges to Aristotelian faculty psychology throughout the medieval period, an alternative history that this project will bring to light.

More recent work by philosophers such as Robert Pasnau has taken into account challenges to Aristotelianism in the later medieval period. In *Theories of Cognition in the Later Middle Ages*, Pasnau treats later Scholastics such as Peter John Olivi and William Ockham in order to investigate the ways in which they challenged "Aquinas's

²² Murray Wright Bundy, *The Theory of Imagination in Classical and Mediaeval Thought* (Urbana: The University of Illinois Press, 1927); E. Ruth Harvey, *The Inward Wits: Psychological Theory in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (London: Warburg Institute, 1975); J.M. Cocking, *Imagination: A Study in the History of Ideas* (London: Routledge, 1991); Jacques LeGoff, *Medieval Imagination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968).

²³ Harvey, *The Inward Wits*, 32.

Aristotelian-based theory of cognition.”²⁴ Yet Pasnau, lamenting the way in which philosophers “tend to skip, with a few apologetic murmurs, from the fourth century B.C. to the seventeenth century,” covers only the period between 1250 and 1350.²⁵ The fifteenth and sixteenth centuries are still missing in this account of the imaginative faculty from a philosophical perspective.

Most recently, Michelle Karnes has proposed a revised view of the medieval imagination, one that focuses not so much on suspicion of the faculty but more on its centrality as a devotional tool. Karnes understands imagination in the same way as I define it here, in its technical and philosophical sense, taking her cue from medieval theories of cognition. Karnes sweeps away the notion that imagination is in any way weak in the medieval period. She redefines the scholastic influence of imaginative theory on devotional writing and practice and affords the imagination a positive form of power as a crucial meditative instrument. Karnes’ study treats an entirely different genre of texts than mine does and has little to say about the literary evolution of the imaginative faculty. Nonetheless, we share a common conviction that imagination “enjoyed uncommon authority” in medieval thought, that theories of cognition were passionately debated in the late medieval period, and that “imagination occupied a central place within them.”²⁶ Karnes warns against excessively negative views of the medieval imagination.²⁷ While I agree that any disproportionate claims about medieval suspicion of the imagination are

²⁴ Robert Pasnau, *Theories of Cognition in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 2.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.

²⁶ Karnes, *Imagination*, 2-3.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 7-8.

bound to falter, it would be impossible to ignore the strong fears of the imagination that pervade the literary, allegorical representation of the faculty. Karnes' study still focuses on the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Aristotelian imagination, while I insist upon examining this version of the imagination in the context of the centuries preceding and following this blossoming of Aristotelian theoretical material.

Work by Jane Chance Nitzsche and James Simpson is essential to any consideration of the Genius figure, a type of the imagination that survives in Spenser's *Faerie Queene*. Nitzsche's study, *The Genius Figure in Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, traces the relationship between the classical and medieval Genius, keeping intact the "Horatian definition" of Genius as "a god of human nature, born with each man and living until his death."²⁸ Nitzsche discusses the medieval association of genius with "inventive powers" or "mental abilities," but she does not address the direct equation of "genius" with "imagination" as a psychological faculty, an equivalence that begins in the twelfth century with figures such as John of Salisbury.²⁹ Nitzsche's account is more interested in the relationship between Genius and Nature than in the functioning of Genius as the imaginative faculty.

Simpson's *Sciences and the Self* deals extensively with later medieval iterations of Genius and delineates the notion of Genius as the imagination.³⁰ Although Simpson posits the movement of Gower's Genius toward the role of "the increasingly rational

²⁸ Jane Chance Nitzsche, *The Genius Figure in Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975), 3.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 6.

³⁰ James Simpson, *Sciences and the Self in Medieval Literature: Alan of Lille's Anticlaudianus and John Gower's Confessio amantis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

imagination,”³¹ a more optimistic view of Genius than this dissertation takes, he focuses at length on the ways in which Genius can offer deceptive and incorrect information.³² Moreover, Simpson’s study poses a question that is equally important to this dissertation: “How might poetry provide original and distinctive forms of philosophical knowledge?”³³ This question also implicitly lies at the center of this project. At many points in the dissertation, and especially in dealing with the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, literature will be influenced by but not directly in line with contemporary philosophical theories of the imagination and faculty psychology. Investigation of the gap between the literary and the philosophical in these cases will form part of the core of the original work in this project.

Literary scholarship thus far on medieval allegorical representations of the imagination tends to occur within the context of analysis of the dream vision genre or of medieval allegory as a whole. Kathryn Lynch’s *The High Medieval Dream Vision* provides a relatively optimistic view of the process by which the dreamer moves from the shady depths of imagination to the enlightenment of reason.³⁴ These dream poems nearly always, at least in the high medieval period, present “reason’s dialogue with the dreamer’s imagination” which “prepares it to receive the truths that can be abstracted from images.”³⁵ In other words, these dream visions, according to Lynch, enact the

³¹ Ibid., 194.

³² Ibid., 172.

³³ Ibid., 13.

³⁴ Kathryn L. Lynch, *The High Medieval Dream Vision: Poetry, Philosophy, and Literary Form* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988).

process of psychological progress from the specific knowledge supplied by the imagination to the universal knowledge supplied by reason. In the process of describing this psychological “progress,” Lynch has the tendency to gloss over the independent and sometimes troubling work the imagination performs in these dream visions.

My dissertation intervenes in this critical dialogue in several unique ways: by taking into account theories of imagination on either side of the supposed flourishing of Aristotelianism in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries; by examining philosophical and literary texts alongside one another and not in isolation, allowing the literary texts to speak in contrast to and often against philosophical texts while still being influenced by them; and by presenting a challenge to the acceptance of a transformation narrative that charts the rise and fall of positive attitudes toward the imagination by suggesting the presence of suspicious attitudes toward the imagination before Reformation iconoclasm.

Chapter one establishes a struggle between Genius and Nature in Alan of Lille’s *De Planctu Naturae* (1160s), considered in the context of two contemporary poems with personifications of Nature and Genius, John of Hauville’s *Architrenius* (1180s) and Bernard Silvestris’ *Cosmographia* (1140s). In this chapter, I argue for Genius’ creative capacity and thus give imagination a more prominent, if threatening, place in relation to Nature. I show how Nature may not be the venerated and idealized figure that she seems to be, but is instead unable to create anything new, a role that Genius quickly subsumes. At the same time, the chapter establishes imagination’s association with the “image,” of which Neoplatonic philosophy is markedly suspicious. Suspicion of imagination in this case becomes key to setting up hints of imagination’s potentially dangerous power, in

³⁵ Ibid., 69.

addition to showing imagination's creative power. The chapter establishes the relational quality of allegory and the way that literature, as opposed to philosophy, may enact a debate among allegorical figures, such as Nature and Genius.

Chapter two moves forward a century and builds upon chapter one's uncertainly poised imagination, arguing that imagination is a transformative allegorical figure in the thirteenth-century *Roman de la Rose* (1275). This chapter also shows how imagination personified is a figure that questions both allegory itself and the constancy of images. In this text, the imagination questions itself by representing itself as a figure in flux. The imagination in some ways resists philosophical progress toward the Aristotelian view of the recombinative imagination and remains suspended in a twelfth-century Neoplatonic, Silvestrian model. Questions about the original creativity of imagination arise, as the imagination at times inserts its own commentary and new material into the presentation of recombined sights. Reason also emerges as a figure in competition with Nature and Genius, as the text fears the unnatural and pushes Nature into a more relegated, powerless space. Thus the *Roman de la Rose* is not completely divorced from Neoplatonism and cannot be simply a joke on *De planctu Naturae*. Instead the text seriously engages with both Neoplatonism and Aristotelianism, the past and the present, and represents a key moment in which imagination recombines the past.

Chapter three segues from the purely transformative to an imagination in the midst of a severe and obvious personification crisis. The personification crisis was suggested by the instability of Genius in the *Roman de la Rose* but becomes manifest in Chaucer's *House of Fame* (1379). Here there is no Genius or Imagination personified, but I argue instead that Chaucer's dreamer, Geoffrey, represents the personified imagination.

The imagination's relationship to images is here fundamentally questioned. If imagination's purely creative ability was probed in the *Roman de la Rose* and *De planctu Naturae*, imagination's reasoning capacity is investigated in *The House of Fame*. The text primarily poses the question: is imagination capable of reasoning and judgment? Nature is now nowhere to be found, but in this text imagination is seen struggling with reason, Nature's enemy in the *Roman de la Rose*. I show how imagination faces an ontological crisis and crisis of embodiment that lend themselves to the eventual breakdown of the personified imagination in the fifteenth century. Literature and philosophy are aligned here, as the imagination's crisis in *The House of Fame* is well-represented in contemporary philosophical texts about imagination and optical theory. Yet literature goes one step further than philosophy in detailing the relational qualities of imagination, especially in relation to Reason. This text thus introduces the irrational imagination, an imagination subject to fear and terror. I argue that this particular development of the imagination, subject to irrationality, terror, and a severe ontological and personification crisis, can be achieved only in literature and not in philosophy.

In chapter four, I establish that the fifteenth-century imagination recombines elements of the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century imaginations, rather than representing a break from these centuries. I demonstrate that, in this century, the imagination faces a personification crisis so extensive that its personification eventually becomes impossible by the end of the century. The imagination is often divided within itself, and eventually deteriorates as a personified figure. The fifteenth-century imagination thus functions as an extreme continuation of the problems of personification in the fourteenth-century imagination. The chapter also argues for the way in which personification allegory can

produce a history that runs counter to philosophy. Similar to Genius in Jean de Meun's thirteenth-century *Roman de la Rose*, the fifteenth-century literary imagination resists the pattern of philosophical development of the faculty. Again imagination as a literary figure cannot move forward but remains rooted in the past. As in chapter two, imagination challenges personification, its ability to remain stable, its ability to represent the essence of anything, and its relationship to reality and the natural world.

If the divisive and even self-destructive nature of the imagination came to the fore in fifteenth-century literature, the sixteenth-century imagination takes this divisive figure to the extreme. The dissertation's final chapter argues that the sixteenth-century imagination, examined through Spenser's *Faerie Queene* (1590), is both a culmination and recombination of forces at play in the literary representation of imagination in the preceding four centuries. The collapse and division of the imagination seen in the fifteenth century has now run its course, resulting in utter fragmentation. Imagination's creative ability and its relationship to the body and the individual self are just as rigorously questioned in the sixteenth century as they were in the twelfth century. Imagination is again a figure rooted in the past, holding onto the devastation of the early modern period's fragmentation from the medieval period.

Chapter 1

Imagination as Usurpation: Genius and Nature in the Twelfth Century

In his study of the “goddess Natura” in medieval literature, George Economou argues that the concept of Natura as the “*mater generationis*, the intermediary, subordinate, or vicar of God in the universe” developed in conjunction with medieval Platonism.³⁶ As Economou asserts, the notion of Natura as *vicaria Dei* advances as part of a twelfth-century Chartrian fascination with nature, natural science, and natural philosophy.³⁷ Some scholars, such as Peter Dronke, have further suggested that the figure of the “goddess Natura” did not originate in the classical period but in the twelfth century.³⁸ As Economou points out, the “literary career of the goddess Natura” did not begin until the middle of the twelfth century.³⁹ In the development of Natura as a personified literary figure, the intellectual and the literary setting were intimately connected. The School of Chartres was the twelfth-century locus of both philosophical discussion of Nature and of literary production that reified her as an allegorical figure.⁴⁰

³⁶ George D. Economou, *The Goddess Natura in Medieval Literature* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002), 2.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 3. For “*vicaria Dei*,” see 54-5.

³⁸ Peter Dronke, “Bernard Silvestris, Natura, and Personification,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 43 (1980): 16-17.

³⁹ Economou, *The Goddess Natura in Medieval Literature*, 58.

⁴⁰ The notion of the “School of Chartres” has had some detractors, most notably R.W. Southern. See his *Medieval Humanism and Other Studies* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1970), 61-85. For arguments against in favor of the notion of the School of Chartres, see Peter Dronke, “New Approaches to the School of Chartres,” *Anuario de estudios medievales* 6 (1969), 117-40. See also Nikolaus Häring, “Chartres and Paris Revisited,” in *Essays in Honour of Anton Charles Pegis*, ed. J.R. O’Donnell (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1974), 268-329.

As Winthrop Wetherbee notes, the Chartrians’ “intense interest in the World Soul” led to “the idea of a more or less autonomous ‘Nature,’ operative in cosmic and human life and ensuring moral as well as physical stability.”⁴¹ As a literary and philosophical development particular to the twelfth century, the emergence of the figure of Natura represents a wider contemporary interest in the natural world from various intellectual arenas, including grammatical, legal, theological, and scientific.⁴²

Thus it seems safe to assume that the twelfth century represents a time of intense interest in everything relating to nature and the natural world. The appearance of several major allegories featuring the goddess Natura in this century should therefore not be surprising. Yet what precisely is this “Nature” of twelfth-century allegory? Is her personified representation a clear outgrowth of twelfth-century natural philosophy? Is Nature in these allegories truly a “more or less autonomous” figure in the universe, as Wetherbee has positioned her? In fact, Nature is a significantly more complicated figure than has thus far been posited and her supremacy as a universal creator is by no means assured. In particular, Genius, a figure for the imagination, challenges Nature’s absolute reign.

Scholarly assessments of the twelfth-century Neoplatonic interest in Nature and the natural world have often led to a valuation of the allegorical figure Nature as a supreme messenger of God, a *vicaria Dei*, whose rule as an emanation of the divine

⁴¹ Winthrop Wetherbee, *Platonism and Poetry in the Twelfth Century: The Literary Influence of the School of Chartres* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), 34.

⁴² Brian Stock, *Myth and Science in the Twelfth Century: A Study of Bernard Silvester* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), 64.

seems sound.⁴³ This chapter will challenge the assessment of Nature as a divine emanation, a supreme being with unquestioned creative ability.⁴⁴

A reconsideration of the personified goddess Natura in twelfth-century literature requires an accompanying reconsideration of her priest Genius. As Wetherbee has argued, the allegorical figure Genius in twelfth-century texts developed coterminously with the emergence of Natura and depends on a similar twelfth-century investment in defining the World Soul.⁴⁵ These two allegorical figures emerge in the same intellectual moment, and they should not be considered in isolation. Yet what precisely is Genius' role in relation to Natura? Is he truly Natura's subordinate? Reassessing Genius' position relative to Natura requires a similar reconsideration of his powers. Is he more or less powerful than Natura? Does he have the capacity to act independently of her command? Does he show potential to disobey her? These questions held primary importance for twelfth-century allegorists such as Alan of Lille and Bernardus Silvestris.

⁴³ See Sara Ritchey, "The Place of Nature in Twelfth-Century Spirituality," *Religion Compass* 3:4 (2009), 601, for a discussion of twelfth-century Nature as a reflection of "divine harmonies" and of the "human soul and its perfectability." See also Economou, *The Goddess Natura in Medieval Literature*, 54-5. For an overwhelmingly positive view of twelfth-century Natura, see M.D. Chenu, *Nature, Man and Society in the Twelfth Century: Essays on New Theological Perspectives in the Latin West*, ed. Jerome Taylor and Lester K. Little (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 38-9 for an account of the twelfth-century's triumphant discovery of nature as a force that "restored sanity" in man's "intellectual life." For a more measured and suspicious view of twelfth-century Nature's power, see Hugh White, *Nature, Sex and Goodness in a Medieval Literary Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), especially 86-98. See also Maurice Gandillac, "La Nature chez Alain de Lille," *Bien Dire et Bien Apprendre* 2 (1980): 113-124.

⁴⁴ On Genius in general, see Winthrop Wetherbee, "The Function of Poetry in the 'De Planctu Naturae' of Alain de Lille," *Traditio* 25 (1969), 112-18. See also Edgar C. Knowlton, "Genius as an Allegorical Figure," *Modern Language Notes* 39 (1924): 89-95. See also C.S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936), 361-3.

⁴⁵ Wetherbee, *Platonism and Poetry in the Twelfth Century*, 34.

Genius is not best explained as Nature's "other self," a kind of equal, in *De planctu*, as Barbara Newman, among others, has argued.⁴⁶ Instead, Genius behaves as the antidote to Nature's failures as an image-maker, and he emerges as an able creator and animator when Nature fails in this capacity. He thus begins to take over a role that is traditionally assigned to Nature. By creating and animating images, where Nature cannot, Genius rises from the shadows of the seemingly superior Nature.

At the same time as Genius' role as creator is championed in this text, he is also poised as an "image," necessarily somewhat degraded and suspicious in the text's Neoplatonic context. Genius is able to redeem the dishonored Nature not only by excommunicating sexually deviant men but also by resuming her work of image production and craftsmanship. Yet Genius' redemption is not wholly positive, since *De planctu Naturae* is suspicious of images and image-making. Genius' triumph at the end of *De planctu* is therefore ambiguous. He is at once able to remedy Nature's failure as image-maker and animator and is at the same time a supreme craftsman of the very product of which the text is often leery: images. He is at once a redeemer of Nature's failed creative abilities and a degraded image himself. Genius' creation of evil beings with his left hand and the presence of his true alterego, Antigenius, as a figure threatening Nature's divine plan, reveal the text's anxiety about Genius' capacity to assume Nature's creative function. His revitalization of Nature's inability to produce and animate images is equally figured as a threatening usurpation of her power.

⁴⁶ See Economou, *The Goddess Natura in Medieval Literature*, 92-3; Wetherbee, *Platonism and Poetry in the Twelfth Century*, 207; Nietzsche, *The Genius Figure in Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, 93. Barbara Newman, *God and the Goddesses: Vision, Poetry, and Belief in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 69.

While asserting Genius' assumption of Nature's power, I will thus also reassess the question of how precisely Nature fails in *De planctu* and in the contemporary *Architrenius*. True, Nature in *De planctu* cannot control unnatural and inappropriate sexual activity. Yet a subtler, though equally distressing, element of her failure in both *De planctu* and the *Architrenius* is her inability to create and animate images. Her artistry and capability as a creator have been compromised. As Newman has observed, Alan "confers authority on Nature with one hand and withdraws it with the other."⁴⁷ While Newman locates Nature's failings in her femininity, I would argue that her failures are, more importantly, in the realm of image-making. In *De planctu*, Genius emerges not only to excommunicate those who have misbehaved sexually but also to take over Nature's failed image-making capacities. This text and its twelfth-century environs, then, demonstrate a key moment in which the role of Genius as creator and animator of images develops. The *Architrenius* takes this accusation of Nature's creative inabilities a step further both by suggesting that Nature creates horrid, unnatural creatures and by exposing her as an empty rhetorician with no capacity to generate knowledge. *De planctu* demotes Nature in terms more subtle than this but nonetheless reveals a keen suspicion of her creative abilities at its core.

To demonstrate how unique Alan's exploration of the relationship between Genius and Nature is, I will also briefly investigate the representation of Genius in the most significant influence on Alan's depiction of Genius and Nature, Bernard Silvestris' *Cosmographia*.⁴⁸ A brief exploration of this text demonstrates how twelfth-century

⁴⁷ Ibid., 69.

allegorists dealt with the inheritance of classical versions of Genius and sheds light on the ways in which Alan's version of Genius breaks from classical traditions.⁴⁹

The idea that Nature's role is vulnerable in these twelfth-century allegories is significant in the battle between Aristotelian and Neoplatonic philosophy.⁵⁰ Should Nature be valorized in a Neoplatonic universe?⁵¹ Neoplatonic philosophy is not interested in the "natural" in its own right but in Nature as an emanation of the divine.⁵² On a basic level, then, Aristotelian philosophy is more concerned with the natural world than Neoplatonic philosophy is. Twelfth-century poems allegorizing Nature intervene directly

⁴⁸ For the influence of Bernard Silvestrus on Alan, see Peter Dronke, "Les cinq sens chez Bernard Silvestre et Alain de Lille," *Micrologus* 10 (2002), 9.

⁴⁹ Nietzsche, *The Genius Figure in Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, 43.

⁵⁰ For a complex history of Natura before and up to Alain, see Giorgio Santillana, *The Origins of Scientific Thought: From Anaximander to Proclus, 600 B.C. to 300 A.D.* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 28. See also Edgar C. Knowlton, "The Goddess Natura in Early Periods," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 19 (1920): 224-253. See Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1953), 106-127. Finally, see R.G. Collingwood, *The Idea of Nature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960).

⁵¹ On Platonic Nature in the twelfth century, see Veronica Fraser, "The Goddess Natura in the Occitan Lyric," in *The Medieval World of Nature: A Book of Essays*, ed. Joyce E. Salisbury (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1993), 129, 130, 132. See also J.M. Parent, *La Doctrine de la Création dans l'École de Chartres* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1938), 93, 93, 110. See also Arthur O. Lovejoy and George Boas, *Primitivism and Related Ideas in Antiquity* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1935), 28, 64. See also Tullio Gregory, *Anima Mundi: La Filosofia di Guglielmo di Conches e la Scuola di Chartres* (Florence: G.C. Sansoni, 1955), 175-246.

⁵² For Platonism in Alan's milieu, see Helen Rodnite Lemay, "Platonism in the Twelfth-century School of Chartres," *Acta* 2 (1975): 42-52. For scriptural and Neoplatonic aspects of Alan's nature, see Alberto Bartola, "'Natura' e 'scriptura' in Alano di Lilla," *Doctor Seraphicus: Bolletino d'Informazioni del Centro di Studi Bonaventuriani* 40/41 (1993-1994): 109-132. For purely Christian aspects of Alan's nature, see Jean Jolivet, "La Figure de Natura dans le De Planctu Naturae d'Alain de Lille: Une Mythologie Chrétienne," in *Alain de Lille, le docteur universel: philosophie, théologie et littérature au XIIe siècle: Actes du XIe Colloque International de la Société internationale pour l'Étude de la Philosophie médiévale, Paris 23-25 Octobre 2003*, ed. Jean-Luc Solère, Anca Vasiliu and Alain Galonnier (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), 127-44. On the dominance of Platonism in the twelfth century, see Raymond Klibansky, *The Continuity of the Platonic Tradition during the Middle Ages* (London: Warburg Institute, 1939).

in the debate between Aristotelian and Neoplatonic views of the natural world. It would be incorrect to assume that these allegorical texts contain ideas of Nature that are either wholly Neoplatonic or wholly Aristotelian. The power of Nature and her role in the universe is questioned in these allegories in part because these authors, most of whom were also philosophers and theologians, wish to enact a stage on which to work out the concept of Nature and the natural.⁵³ Thus the representation of Nature's uncertain power in these texts depicts a philosophical as well as a literary debate. Natura is Aristotelian as well as Platonic, and her allegorical figuration represents a way of staging a debate between these two modes of philosophical thought. Furthermore, the use of allegory provides an arena in which the role of Nature in the universe could be contemplated not only absolutely but also relationally, thus producing a rich set of possibilities for exploring the relationship between Nature and Genius. Establishing Genius' independent power as well as his potential for suspicious and dangerous behavior serves as an important preamble to Genius' development throughout the late medieval period, especially in Jean de Meun's *Roman de la Rose*, a text heavily influenced by *De planctu*.⁵⁴

Genius' attempts to usurp Nature's power represent an essential quality of the personified imagination: its power struggle with well-established allegorical figures such as Nature. At the same time, suspicion of Genius as a maker of unnatural and wayward

⁵³ On allegory and the Chartrian school, see Monica Ceroni, "Tipologia dell'allegoria Chartres: Bernardo Silvestre e Alano di Lilla," *Medioevo Romano* 24 (2000): 161-188.

⁵⁴ For Alan's influence on Jean de Meun, see Daniel Poiron, "Alain de Lille et Jean de Meun," *Bien Dire et Bien Apprendre* 2 (1980): 135-51. See also Sylvia Huot, "Bodily Peril: Sexuality and the Subversion of Order in Jean de Meun's 'Roman de la Rose,'" *The Modern Language Review* 95:1(2000), 56.

images maintains Imagination in a liminal space, in the process of establishing his allegorical presence and identity.

Nature Disgraced: Alan of Lille's De planctu Naturae

As George Economou argues, Alan of Lille “did more than any other author to establish and fix the characterization of the goddess Natura.”⁵⁵ The influence of Bernardus Silvestris’ *Cosmographia* on Alan’s depiction of Natura is certainly palpable. Yet Economou likely alludes to the fact that the influential image of Nature as a tragic figure of epic proportions is the original work of Alan of Lille. Alan’s Nature, although described at much greater length than Bernard’s, is also much more markedly limited in her powers.⁵⁶ Aside from the *Cosmographia*, Plato’s *Timaeus* can be discerned in the background of Alan’s text, and Boethius’ *De consolacione Philosophiae* provides the most prominent literary influence on Alan’s prosimetric form. Little is known about Alan of Lille, and the date of *De planctu Naturae* is difficult to establish. Reference to *De planctu* in Peter of Poitiers’ *Sententiae*, written between 1168 and 1176 and possibly before 1170, suggests that *De planctu* may have been written before 1170.⁵⁷ R. Boussaut dates *De planctu* to some time between 1179 and 1182.⁵⁸ James Sheridan, wishing to

⁵⁵ Economou, *The Goddess Natura in Medieval Literature*, 3.

⁵⁶ Newman, *God and the Goddesses*, 71.

⁵⁷ Alan of Lille, *Plaint of Nature*, trans. James J. Sheridan (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1980), 31-2.

⁵⁸ Alan of Lille, *Plaint of Nature*, trans. Sheridan, 32.

separate the *De planctu* from the *Anticlaudianus* by more years than Boussaut, tentatively dates the work to 1160-1165.⁵⁹

The poem begins with the poet lamenting the state of the world when he is interrupted by the appearance of the majestic figure of Nature. Nature's stature, beauty and garments are then described at length. Nature, filled with grief, recounts the disobedience of Venus, assigned to her as a delegate to aid her with worldly creation. Venus, married to Hymenaeus, became bored and had an affair with Antigenius, producing the offspring Jocus. Nature then details some of the vices, providing the poet with means to avoid them. Hymenaeus appears along with the virtues Chastity, Generosity, Temperance and Humility. Finally, Nature summons Genius to excommunicate sinners from her realm. The poet then awakes abruptly from his "ecstasy."

Alan's text makes clear that Nature has been disgraced by man's disobedience. Yet Alan's description of Nature, even as a disgraced figure, displays considerable insecurity about the extent of her *inherent* power. The dreamer's first reaction to Nature's appearance is one of awe, in an allegorical intervention that clearly owes much to the Philosophy's dramatic entrance in the sixth-century *De consolatioe Philosophiae*.⁶⁰ One

⁵⁹ Alan of Lille, *Plaint of Nature*, trans. Sheridan, 35.

⁶⁰ Philosophy in this text appears as a commanding figure, full of splendor, with shining eyes and great height: Boethius, *Consolatio Philosophiae*, ed. James J. O'Donnell (Bryn Mawr: Thomas Library, Bryn Mawr College, 1990), Book I, Prose I: "Haec dum me cum tacitus ipse reputarem querimoniamque lacrimabilem stili officio signarem astitisse mihi supra uerticem uisa est mulier reuerendi admodum uultus, oculis ardentibus et ultra communem hominum ualentiam perspicacibus, colore uiuido atque inexhausti uigoris, quamuis ita aeui plena foret ut nullo modo nostrae crederetur aetatis, statura discretionis ambiguae. 2 Nam nunc quidem ad communem sese hominum mensuram cohibebat, nunc uero pulsare caelum summi uerticis cacumine uidebatur; quae cum altius caput extulisset ipsum etiam caelum penetrabat respicientiumque hominum frustrabatur intuitum." Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy*, trans. Joel C. Relihan (Indianapolis:

of the first details we hear about Nature relates to the light reflecting from her hair: “Cuius crinis, non mendicata luce sed propria scintillans, non similitudinarie radiorum representans effigiem sed eorum claritate natiua naturam preueniens, in stellare corpus caput effigiabat puelle...”⁶¹ Alan insistently elucidates that the light reflecting from Nature’s hair is not borrowed light (“non mendicata luce”) but light emanating from Nature herself (“sed propria scintillans”). “Propria” is a particularly forceful word, meaning not simply “hers” but “particular” to her or “not common with others.”⁶² We are to imagine that Nature’s hair shines with light that she owns or even produces herself. In a Neoplatonic universe, this insistence on Nature’s “unborrowed light” establishes her as an original form rather than as a degraded copy or image.

Alan emphasizes Nature’s status as “original form” further in the next phrase: “non similitudinarie radiorum representans effigiem sed eorum claritate natiua naturam preueniens.” In this neatly expressed ascending tricolon, Alan communicates with more and more vigor the brilliance of Nature’s emphatically inherent and unborrowed light.

Hackett Publishing Co., 2001), 2: “Her countenance demanded absolute reverence: Her eyes glowed like fire, penetrating far beyond the common capability of mortals; her color was intense, her strength inexhaustible, even though she was so full of eternity that it was impossible to believe that she was of my own generation; and her height was hard to fix. For at one time she would keep herself within common mortal limits, but at another she would seem to strike at the heavens with the crown of the top of her head—and whenever she stuck her head up still higher she would pierce heaven itself and disappoint the vision of those mortals who tried to contemplate her.”

⁶¹ Alan of Lille, *De planctu Naturae*, ed. Nikolaus M. Häring, *Studi Medievali* 3:19 (1978): 797-879, II.3-5. All further quotations of this text will be taken from this edition. Alan of Lille, *Plaint of Nature*, trans. Sheridan, 73: “Her hair shone with no borrowed sheen but with one special to itself and, presenting an image of light-rays, not by mere resemblance but by a native lustre surpassing the natural, it made the maiden’s head image a star-cluster.” All further translations of this text will be taken from this edition.

⁶² Charlton W. Lewis, *An Elementary Latin Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), s.v. “proprius.”

Yet even within this avowal of Nature's inherent light, language associated with images and similitudes emerges. The words Alan uses to describe Nature's self-producing light are mostly terms applied to images and representations. The emphasis on Nature's self-producing light is an attempt to show that Nature is no representation or emanation of any other source. Yet Nature is immediately shown to be representing ("representans") something else. Furthermore, Alan's use of figura etymologica to play on the root of the word "effigiem" further accentuates the text's reliance on imagistic language. "Effigiem," most basically meaning "image" or "effigy," derives from artistic production and craft and is associated with mere copies of original forms. The opposition established between the idea of the "native" or original ("natiua") and the copied or non-native ("mendicata") seems to collapse here. Alan undermines his own insistence on Nature as "original form" as distinct from "imagistic copy" by using terms associated with describing images to refer to Nature. The use of this ekphrastic language establishes Nature herself as an image. While Alan clearly attempts to demonstrate that Nature is not a representation of some other being, his language consistently reveals the impossibility of leaving images and representations behind.

Concerns about representation become yet more prominent in the description of the gems on Nature's crown depicting the Zodiac. Alan describes the three Zodiacal stones on Nature's crown:

*In anteriori namque ipsius diadematis parte tres preciosi lapides
audaci sue radiationis superbia reliquis nouem anthonomasice
prefulgebant. Lapis primus lumine noctem, frigus incendio pati
iubebat exilium. In quo, ut faceta picture loquebatur mendacia,
leonis effigiata fulminabat effigies. Lapis secundus, a priori non
secundus in lumine, in prefate partis audaciori loco prefulgurans,
quasi ex quadam indignatione reliquos lapides deorsum aspicere
uidebatur. In quo, prout ueritatis simia pictura docebat, sub*

imitatoria confictione progrediendo retrogradus, incedendo recedens,
cancer post se uidebatur. Lapis tercius oppositi lapidis splendorem
pauperulum habundantibus sue claritatis recompensabat diuitiis.⁶³

The descriptions of images here are clearly Platonic in their insistence on the levels of remove that occur in viewing a crafted object. The images that shine inside the stones on Nature's crown are merely images of images. For example, the image of the lion in the first stone is not only an image of an image ("leonis effigiata...effigies") but an image of an image contained *within* a stone. The removal of the image from any expression of the act of seeing is emphasized by the construction of the sentence, beginning "In quo" and proceeding to another subordinate clause ("ut faceta picture loquebantur mendacia") before arriving at a description of the image itself ("leonis effigiata fulminabat effigies"). The image itself is so shrouded by the hypotactic construction of the sentence that by the time it is described, we are not entirely sure what we are seeing. Furthermore, Alan depicts the work of images in terms related to speech ("loquebantur") rather than sight, suggesting that vision has been excluded from this discussion entirely.

The description of the second stone is most obviously disdainful of images. The image within the stone merely imitates truth ("prout ueritatis simia pictura docebat"). The sentence defers the description of the crab image itself until the last clause. Between the beginning of the sentence "In quo" and the final clause naming the image ("cancer post

⁶³ Häring, II.55-64. Sheridan, 77-9: "In the front part of this diadem three precious stones glowed in front of the other nine, shining with a pride and daring that are reflected in their names. By its light the first stone imposed the sentence of exile on night and by its warmth on Winter. For in it, as the pleasantly deceptive picture showed, the image of an image of a lion flashed forth. The second stone, but not second to the first in light, glowing forth from a bolder position in the above-mentioned section, seemed to look down on the rest of the stones with a certain attitude of disdain. In it as the picture, aping truth, showed, a crab seems to be following himself when, in feigned imitation, he goes backward as he goes forward and forward as he goes backward. The third stone, by the overflowing riches of its brightness, made up for the impoverished splendour of the stone on the opposite side."

se uidebatur”) are two clauses in a row to remind us that the image is a mere imitation. The crab crawls backward and forward only in “feigned imitation” (“sub imitatoria confictione”). His movement is highly unnatural, moving forwards while going backwards and backwards while going forwards (“progrediendo retrogradus, incedendo recedens”). Like the description of the first stone, the depiction of the crab image is embedded in reiteration of images’ aping nature. As a result, the images become secondary to the text’s assertion of the feigned nature of images.

Yet the greatest peculiarity of this passage is that it sounds almost identical to the description of Nature’s hair upon her entrance in prose 1. The passage is similarly concerned with the origin of the light emanating from the jewels on Nature’s crown, establishing the relative brightnesses of the three stones (“Lapis tercius oppositi lapidis splendorem pauperulum habundantibus sue claritatis recompensabat diuitiis”). The language here, especially the words “splendorem” and “claritatis,” is reminiscent of the language in the passage describing Nature’s hair. This linguistic similarity draws a parallel between the dreamer’s first vision of Nature and this passage, except that in this passage Alan explicitly expresses suspicion of images. This parallel suggests that we may now look back to Nature’s arrival with skepticism. Is her appearance as triumphal as we once thought or should we question her majesty? Should we be wary of the assertion that her hair shines with “unborrowed” light? Alan seems to linger in both these passages on the question of the source of Nature’s majesty. The source of Nature’s power is crucial because it stimulates further questions about the independence of her authority. Is Nature independently powerful or does she rely on God? Can her power be usurped by other figures, such as Venus and Imagination?

After describing the images on Nature's garments with a combination of skepticism and celebration, Alan delineates a strange detail of Nature's failure: her inability to create lasting images. Nature's physical appearance is steeped in images, as her garments detail all of creation. Yet Nature proves unable to formulate images herself:

Hec uestium ornamenta quamuis sue plenis splenditatis flammarent ardoribus, eorundem tamen splendor sub puellaris decoris sidere paciebatur eclipsim. In latericiis uero tabulis arundinei stili ministerio uirgo uarias rerum picturaliter suscitabat imagines. Pictura tamen, subiacenti materie familiariter non coherens, uelociter euanescendo moriens, nulla imaginum post se relinquebat uestigia. Quas cum sepe suscitando puella crebro uiuere faciebat, tamen in scripture proposito imagines perseuerare non poterant.⁶⁴

The beginning of this passage continues Alan's insistence on Nature's inherent splendor, as he details how her own "splendor" eclipses the splendor ("plenis splenditatis") of the images on Nature's garments ("uestium ornamenta"). He strengthens the opposition between Nature's inherent luminosity and the splendor of her garments by the use of the adversative "quamuis." Yet behind this continued assertion of Nature's independent splendor lie mistrust of her power and admittance of her failure. The images ("ornamenta") appearing on Nature's garments may be full of splendor ("plenis splenditatis"), but the pictures *she* creates cannot come into full existence. Everything Nature draws is quickly erased ("non coherens"). The use of the term "moriens" in reference to the disappearance of Nature's images emphasizes her inability to bring anything permanent to life. Alan tries to redeem Nature's animating and image-making

⁶⁴ Häring, IV.1-8. Sheridan, 108: "Although the ornaments of these garments are on fire with the full glow of their splendour, their brilliance suffered eclipse by comparison with the star-like beauty of the maiden. With the aid of a reed-pen, the maiden called up various images by drawing on slate tablets. The picture, however, did not cling closely to the under-lying material but, quickly fading and disappearing, left no trace of the impression behind. Although the maiden, by repeatedly calling these up, gave them a continuity of existence, yet the images in her projected picture failed to endure."

capacities by suggesting that her repeated calling up of new images gives the images a sort of life (“Quas cum sepe suscitando puella crebro uiuere faciebat”). Yet even within the same sentence, turning on a “tamen,” he must recognize that she cannot produce lasting animated images (“imagines perseuerare non poterant”). Thus the images Nature creates are not only fleeting but are also condemned to death (“moriens”). Nature, a supposed universal life force, not only cannot produce lasting images but also cannot bring them to life. This inability to produce animated images is not only a large part of Nature’s failure in this text but is also a skill that Genius is shown to possess at the end of the text.

“Stepmotherly Cruelty”: Nature in John of Hauville’s *Architrenius*

John of Hauville’s *Architrenius*, a text contemporary with *De planctu*, demonstrates an equally ambivalent attitude toward the power of Nature. Yet whereas in *De planctu*, Nature blames Venus for corrupting mankind, in the *Architrenius* Nature is explicitly responsible for the wayward behavior of mankind. Nature in the *Architrenius* produces unnatural creations and monstrosities and is thus, in a sense, markedly *unnatural*. Despite this immediate difference between John’s Nature and Alan’s Nature, Nature in the *Architrenius* has an essential shortcoming in common with Nature in *De planctu*: she cannot produce lasting images. In this text, then, Nature again displays a form of helplessness as a creator; she must cede her image-making capacities to a better artisan and imager.

The *Architrenius* (“Arch-Weeper”) is a late twelfth-century narrative poem in 4361 lines of Latin hexameter. The poem was dedicated to Walter of Coutances, the

Archbishop of Rouen, in 1184 by its author John of Hauville, a Norman grammarian possibly from the village of Hauville near Rouen where he was likely teaching by 1184.⁶⁵ There is evidence that John of Hauville knew Alan of Lille's work, and the *Architrenius* was itself popular and influential throughout the medieval period, especially in the fifteenth century.⁶⁶ The poem details the allegorical journey of Architrenius, a young man who is shocked to find that all of his thoughts and impulses tend toward vice. He embarks on a journey to find Nature, whom he blames for his brutish impulses, and meets Venus, Avarice, Presumption, Gluttony and Ambition along the way. He finally confronts Nature who answers his accusation and offers him Moderation as a bride.

This text represents an especially clear example of the simultaneous disparagement and veneration of Nature also seen in *De planctu*. Nature is depicted as a thoroughly ambiguous and equivocal character, even once Architrenius is supposedly reconciled with her at the text's end. Within the passage introducing Nature lurks a powerful suggestion of her destructiveness. The passage begins by proclaiming Nature's supreme power:

Non habet arte manus, nec summa potencia certo
Fine coartatur: astrorum flammeat orbes,
Igne rotat celos, discursibus aera rumpit,
Mollit aque speram, telluris pondera durat,
Flore coronat humum, gemmas inviscerat undis,
Phebificans auras, stellas intexit Olimpo.
Natura est quodcumque vides, incudibus illa
Fabricat omniparis, quidvis operaria nutu

⁶⁵ Johannes de Hauvilla, *Architrenius*, ed. Winthrop Wetherbee (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), x. All quotations and translations of this text will be taken from this edition.

⁶⁶ Johannes de Hauvilla, *Architrenius*, xxx-xxxii.

Construit, eventusque novi miracula spargit.⁶⁷

Nature is here described in a typical fashion as an artist and forger of new creatures.

While Alan's Nature fails at the particular art of creating lasting images, the Nature of the *Architrenius* is unquestionably master of all the arts ("Non habet arte manus"). Nature in her forge is autonomous in this text. She retires to her forge in order to create as she pleases ("quidvis operaria nutu/Construit"). Unlike Alan, who must revisit the question of whether Nature's light is her own or borrowed, John of Hauville seems confident in portraying Nature as independent master of her creative art. She constructs ("construit") according to her own will ("nutu"). She is even portrayed as a form of all-encompassing figure ("quodcumque vides").

Yet even within this affirmation of Nature's independent power lurks a troubling expression of her *unnatural* capabilities:

Ipsa potest rerum solitos avertere cursus,
Enormesque serit monstrorum prodiga formas,
Gignendique stilum variat, partuque timendo
Lineat anomalos larvosa puerpera vultus.⁶⁸

In the midst of describing Nature's power, the passage details her monstrous fertility. Part of Nature's celebrated power includes her ability to alter the course of the natural ("potest rerum solitos avertere cursus") in order to produce monstrous giants ("monstrorum

⁶⁷ Ibid., I.234-242: "There is no art that her hand has not mastered, and her supreme power knows no limit. She kindles the starry orbs, makes the heavens revolve by her vital heat, stirs the air with conflicting movements, makes the watery region fluid and hardens the bulk of the earth. She decks the land with flowers, plants precious gems in the deep, imbues the air with Phoebus' light and adorns the firmament with stars. Whatever you behold is Nature; she labors at her all-creating forge, creates at will whatever she pleases, and spreads abroad a miraculous array of new products."

⁶⁸ Ibid., I.243-247: "She has power to alter the normal course of events, and prodigally litters the world with huge and monstrous forms. The style of her conceptions is ever changing, and the fearful labor of her fantastic fertility gives shape to abnormal creatures."

prodiga formas”). The fearful quality of this creation is obvious in the formulation “partuque timendo,” a construction that not only binds her creation inextricably to fear but also makes fear the instrument by which she creates these monstrous forms. Nature suddenly seems a paradoxically divided figure, herself capable of producing unnatural creations. This passage is followed by a long description of various examples of Nature’s “unnatural” inventions, including many sexually perverse mythical figures. In the *Architrenius*, as in *De planctu*, we find a figure of Nature demoted and disgraced by unnatural sexual activity, but here, Nature is herself responsible for producing this unnaturalness and depravity.

Nature is portrayed in the *Architrenius* as at once gloriously all-powerful and surprisingly cruel. She is described as “cuncta potentis,” and her first appearance to Architrenius mimics her appearance to the dreamer in *De planctu*. Architrenius is stupefied by her, even feeling some stirrings of desire: “Miratur solito magis Architrenius, ardet.” Even more remarkably similar to the introduction of Nature in *De planctu*, Nature in the *Architrenius* is awe-inspiring primarily because of her splendor:

Sideris ardescens mulier spectatur et igni
 Laciis educto rutilum procul explicat orbem.
 Ingeminatque loci radios; nam Vere marito
 Pregnativa parit rosulas et lilia Tellus,
 Splendoresque serit alios fecudula florum
 Flora, perhennantis iubar effusive diei.
 Non hiemis fecem queritur tersissima veris
 Area, nec recipit Zephirus consorcia brume.
 Hec mulier vultu roseo phebescit, ephebis
 Defecata genis, senior matura, virentis
 Servat adhuc laurum faciei, temporis evo
 Non minor, ut Pilios longe precesserit annos.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ Ibid., VIII.290-301: “...a woman glowing like a star appears before him. Her brilliance, flashing forth on every side and casting a circle of radiance far abroad, lends a twofold splendor to the place, for Earth, made pregnant by the bridegroom Spring, brings forth rosebuds and lilies,

Nature's gleaming appearance is repeatedly emphasized in this passage. She glows like the stars ("sideris ardescens") with a radiance that penetrates all places ("loci radios"). The repetition of "splendor" from Alan's text draws a parallel between the description of Nature here and her appearance in *De planctu*. John further underlines Nature's splendor in the description of her face, glowing like Phoebus ("vultu roseo phebescit"). The terms "pregnativa," "ingeminatque," "serit," and "fecundula" all draw repeated attention to Nature's ability to create and procreate. Yet even this mention of Nature's fertility bears a negative undertone, since we have already learned about Nature's capacity to produce unnatural creatures. Even within this description of Nature as a brilliant creator arises the notion of her "unnatural" danger. Her role as a powerful creator is almost immediately undermined just as soon as it is introduced.

As in *De planctu*, Nature's abilities as imager and artisan are shown to be lacking in the *Architrenius*. To begin with, Nature is not the artist of her own woven robes in the *Architrenius*, as Philosophia is in *De consolatione Philosophiae*:

Divitis ingenio picture gaudet et auri
 Gloria vasorum rutilo pallore choruscat,
 Nec precii nec laudis egens. miratur in illis
 Artificis Natura manum seseque minorem
 Agnovisse pudet; nam gracia surgit in auro
 Plenior et quevis facies ornacior exiit.⁷⁰

while Flora, modestly prolific spreads abroad the splendors of other blooms, her bounty like that of an endless spring day. The immaculate face of this Spring is not troubled by the dregs of winter, nor must Zephyrus endure the company of frost. This woman, Phoebuslike in the rosy glow of her face, has the unblemished cheek of youth, though ripe in years."

⁷⁰ Ibid., IV.301-306: "A glorious array of drinking vessels rejoices in the skill of their sumptuous decoration, and gleams with the ruddy pallor of gold, unsurpassed in costliness and quality. Nature herself wonders at the artisan's handiwork, and is ashamed to realize herself inferior, for a richer beauty than hers resides in gold, and whatever shape it assumes appears more elegant."

Nature here recognizes (“agnovisse”) her inferior artisanship (“Artificis Natura manus seseque minorem”) and is even ashamed to admit it (“pudet”). It seems to be no coincidence that the term “ingenio” appears in the context of Nature’s rival artisan, as Genius is the figure who usurps Nature’s creative ability in *De planctu*. As in *De planctu*, no matter how splendid the description of Nature, her creative capacity is ultimately deemed inadequate.

Architrenius’ complaint to Nature revolves around two supposed faults on her part: her failure to provide him with any knowledge and her cruelty. Architrenius begins by suggesting that he is too overwhelmed by wonder to understand what Nature explains, yet this “overwhelming” is soon translated into a kind of frustration with Nature’s reliance on rhetoric. Architrenius draws a distinction between “wonder” and “knowledge” in Nature’s words, proclaiming that “Mirari faciunt magis hec quam scire.” Productive knowledge (“Scire”) is precisely what Nature’s words cannot produce. After yet another long speech by Nature, Architrenius becomes still more exasperated, exclaiming: “Quam procul eloquii fluvius decurret et aures/ Influet exundans,” ait Architrenius “utre/ Iam duplici pleno? satis est hausisse referto/ Vase, nec auricule pelagi capit alveus undam.”⁷¹ Architrenius at first assumes that his inability to gain knowledge from Nature’s words derives from his wonder at her appearance. Yet in this passage, just before he embarks on a long harangue of Nature’s cruelty and unnaturalness, suggests his understanding that her rhetorical eloquence communicates no actual information. The “eloquii fluvius” is certainly a reference to Nature’s rhetoric. Nature’s speech, like her

⁷¹ “How much longer,” says Architrenius, “will this river of eloquence run on, filling my ears to overflowing though the sack has already been filled twice over? Enough has been poured out when the jar is full; the little vessel of my ear cannot contain an ocean.”

images in *De planctu*, is ultimately fleeting precisely because it overflows the capacities of the human listener's ears. The suggestion that Architrenius' ears are already filled to their capacity and that Nature's acts are somehow unnecessarily repetitive ("Iam duplici pleno") especially enfeebles her authority. In this criticism, Nature is not merely unhelpful but also powerless. Just as Nature's images in *De planctu* die upon her creation of them, her words in the *Architrenius* have no lasting form and produce no permanent knowledge. Nature is, perhaps ironically, remarkably unproductive.

Architrenius goes on to accuse Nature of a form of cruelty unnatural for a motherly figure:

Compaterisne tuam scelerum, Natura, flagellis
Affligi sobolem? que sic in pignora pacem
Maternam turbavit hiemps? odiumne noverce
Matris amor didicit? o dulces ubera numquam
Exhibitura favos! heu pignora semper amarum
Gustatura cibum! pietas materna rigorem
Induit et scopulis Progenes induruit Ino.
Sed quid ego dubito, luctusne refundere culpam
In matrem liceat? matrem vexare querelis
Exhorret pietas. prohibet reverencia matris,
Imperat ira loqui; rabies in turpia solvit
Ora, pudorque ligat. sed iam declino pudoris
Imperium, maiorque michi dominator Erinis.
Torrenti—fateor—ire non impero: de te,
Pace tua, Natura, queror. tibi supplicat omnis
Maiestatis apex et nobis semper avarum
Obliquas oculum, nulla dulcedine clausas
Scis reserasse manus. homo preda doloribus evum
Tristibus immergit, nec amicis utitur annis,
Nec fruitur letis, nec verna vescitur aura...
Tolle, parens, odium! tandem mansuesce, novercam
Exue, blanda fave! morum bona singula mater
Possidet, et nato nec libra nec uncia servit.⁷²

⁷² Johannes de Hauvilla, *Architrenius*, IX.178-210: "And can you, Nature, allow your offspring to be tormented by the scourge of wrong? What winter storm has so aroused your motherly gentleness against your charges? Has a mother's love learned a stepmother's hatred? Alas that your breasts will no longer impart their honeyed sweetness! Alas that your charges must

As Architrenius emphasizes Nature's abandonment of her offspring, he repeats words for "mater" in almost every line in different grammatical formulations, from the accusative adjective "maternam" in line 180 to the genitive noun in line 181 to the nominative adjective in line 183. The use of the rhetorical device *trahitio* to repeat different grammatical formulations of the word "mater" in lines 185-187 is an especially clear example of Architrenius' obsessive reformulation of the word: "luctusne refundere culpam/ In matrem liceat? matrem vexare querelis/ Exhorret pietas. prohibet reverencia matris." Three different grammatical uses of the word "mater" appear in these three lines alone, from the impersonal accusative "matrem" to the accusative "matrem" to the genitive "matris." The repetition of the word "mater" indicates Architrenius' disbelief at Nature's cruelty toward her own offspring. Yet the consistent grammatical reformulation of the word may reveal a certain way in which Hauville's text actively reformulates the idea of Nature. The text seems to pose the question: "Should Nature be deemed the supreme *mater generationis*?" By the end of this passage, Architrenius has substituted the term "stepmother" for "mother" twice, effectively depriving Nature of her role as fertile producer. The transformation of Nature from "mother" to "stepmother" resonates with earlier suggestions in the text of Nature's inability to produce the best-crafted art and images, revealing her failure as creator.

henceforth taste only bitter food! Motherly compassion has cloaked itself in severity, and Ino has grown as hard as unyielding Procne. But what am I to do? I doubt whether it be right to place the blame for my suffering on my mother: filial devotion shrinks from assailing a mother with complaints. But what reverence for a mother forbids, wrath commands me to declare. Anger gives rein to foul speech, tough modesty resist it. I must now reject the rule of modesty, for the Fury who dominates me is too strong. I must admit that I cannot stem the tide of my wrath. By your leave, O Nature, my complaint is of you. Withdraw your hatred, O Parent, grow mild at last, put off stepmotherly cruelty and be gentle and kind. A mother's nature should possess every good quality, and not deal with her child in terms of pounds and pennies."

Both the *Architrenius* and *De planctu* specify the ways in which Nature cannot be considered an independent creator and maker. While the attack on Nature may be far more explicit in the *Architrenius* than in *De planctu*, the accusation that Nature is not actually as productive as she should be is emphasized in both texts. In the *Architrenius*, Nature's role as benevolent creator has been compromised by unnatural behavior and creation on the one hand and by a lack of artistic skill on the other. In the *De planctu*, the blame of unnatural creation falls upon Venus rather than on Nature, yet the accusation that Nature has become somehow deficient as an artist, imager and animator is very apparent. The *Architrenius* may simply represent a later development in twelfth-century views on Nature, in which Nature begins to take on more responsibility for the unnatural behavior of man. Whether or not this is truly the case, a comparison of these two texts reveals a startling lack of faith among twelfth-century authors in the ability of Nature to maintain her role as cosmic artificer.

The Classical Genius: Bernard Silvestris' Cosmographia

If Nature is shown to be weak, unnatural and unable to create independently in these twelfth-century allegories, Genius emerges not as her subordinate but as the figure who *can* perform the tasks at which Nature fails. Especially in *De planctu*, Genius' ability to create images compensates for Nature's failures as creator. In this way, Genius is not simply Nature's other half but emerges as her superior. He can perform the actions that Nature cannot and thus his role as imager and animator, a capacity that Imagination takes on in full force in the later medieval period, begins to solidify. The end of *De planctu* offers us a preview of the eventual disappearance of Nature as Genius' priest in

Gower's *Confessio Amantis*. Before discussing Alan's innovations in the representation of the character of Genius, I will first examine his twelfth-century influence's iteration of this same character. Bernardus Silvestris' Genius in the *Cosmographia* serves as an important bridge between the classical and medieval forms of this personified figure. By way of examining Bernardus' Genius, it is possible to observe how Alan's Genius represents a departure from a more traditionally classical representation of Genius as a figure for reproduction and generation. Alan's text instead moves in the direction of the medieval iteration of Genius as imager and imagination. Alan's Genius also emerges as a much more equivocal figure than Bernardus' Genius.

The *Cosmographia*, a prosimetric work in two parts, was dedicated to Thierry of Chartres and completed before 1147 when it was read before Pope Eugene III.⁷³ The text ultimately depends on a Platonic view of the universe deriving directly from Plato's *Timaeus* and enjoyed great popularity throughout the medieval period, surviving in about 50 manuscripts. The work begins with "Megacosmus," describing the creation of the physical universe. The text opens with Natura's complaint to Noys that the world is unordered. Noys responds by asserting her own role as daughter of God, begetting the World Soul (Endelechia) and marrying Endelechia to Mundus. This marriage leads to the creation of the nine orders of angels, the stars, and the planets. The cosmic cycle is established under the jurisdiction of Natura. The second part of the text, "Microcosmus," details the creation of man. Natura travels through the universe, meeting Genius, Urania, and Physis who aid in the creation of man. Noys assigns specific roles to Natura, Urania, and Physis. Urania provides a soul for man derived from Endelechia, Physis provides

⁷³ Bernardus Silvestris, *The Cosmographia of Bernardus Silvestris*, trans. Winthrop Wetherbee (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 20.

man with a body, and Natura unites the soul and the body. Thus the creation of both the universe and man is complete.

For Winthrop Wetherbee, the Genius of the *Cosmographia*, responsible for assigning forms to human souls, encapsulates Nature's journey in general. Genius, as the representation of the "union of form with matter," sits at the edge of the universe in order to "define the limits of Nature's ascent toward the origins of being."⁷⁴ In Wetherbee's view, Genius becomes a kind of intermediary between Nature, representing "form," and Urania, representing "celestial *ratio*." He performs the "archetypal act" of bringing these two elements of form and *ratio* together.⁷⁵ Genius thus behaves as a mediator on behalf of Nature, a role typical of the imagination in general, and paves the way for a concept of Genius as Nature's priest and messenger.

As Jane Chance Nitzsche notes, Bernardus' Genius is an eloquent combination of different forms of classical Genius. Nitzsche suggests that the Genius Nature meets at the edge of the universe may not quite be a unified figure but a combination of various "*genii*" that collectively comprise a gamut of classical subtypes of Genius. These include the "astrological genius," the Genius of generation; the "daemonic genius," a kind of intermediary usually between this world and the underworld; and the "*genius loci*," the "begetting Genius of marriage."⁷⁶ Wetherbee's notion of Genius as an intermediary between Nature's "formal impulses" and Urania's *ratio* complements Nitzsche's

⁷⁴ Wetherbee, *Platonism and Poetry in the Twelfth Century*, 92-3.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 174-5.

⁷⁶ Nitzsche, *The Genius Figure in Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, 67.

“daemonic genius.”⁷⁷ As Nietzsche observes, Genius is also cast in the role of Pantomorph, the celestial scribe, in the text. Pantomorph fashions creatures by copying from the heavens and imitating the Creator (or “Opifex”). While Pantomorph writes, Nature, with the help of her sisters Urania and Physis, forms creatures as a creator in her forge.⁷⁸ The roles of Nature and Genius in this account seem to be clearly separated, except for one important overlap. Nature copies from the mirror Urania receives from Noys depicting the ideal forms of all things just as Pantomorph (a figure for Genius) writes down the form of all creatures by copying from the forms in heaven. Thus, as Nietzsche suggests, the “Artifex Natura” is herself a copy of “the scribe and artist Genius.”⁷⁹ We can already see how the roles of Nature and Genius are not entirely clearly delineated in the *Cosmographia*, and the question of who does what and who is subordinate to whom comes to the fore even more in *De planctu*. The source of the problem of defining the roles of Genius and Nature is the variation in classical formulations of Genius. Defining Genius, and his role in relation to Nature, is particularly difficult in light of the innumerable roles he plays in a variety of different classical texts. The “conglomeration” that is Genius in the *Cosmographia* makes Alan’s task of defining him in *De planctu* yet more complicated, especially as Alan forges a rather original and unprecedented depiction of Natura in his text.

Genius’ main role in the *Cosmographia* is that of cosmic generator. “Genius” is used to specify a spirit that is joined to man’s body in the early stages of conception:

⁷⁷ Wetherbee, *Platonism and Poetry in the Twelfth Century*, 174-5; Nietzsche, *The Genius Figure in Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, 67.

⁷⁸ Nietzsche, *The Genius Figure in Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, 73-4.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 73-4.

Ea igitur spirituum distinctio que in aere mansitat, sed sereno, tranquillans mentes contrahunt, quia cohabitant in tranquillo. Ex istorum quoque numero secundus est Genius, qui, de nascendi principiis homini copulatus, vitanda illi discrimina vel mentis presagio, vel soporis ymagine, vel prodigioso rerum spectaculo configurat. Horum quidem non adeo sincera, non usquequaque simplex est divinitas, verum corpore—sed ethereo—circumplexa. Ex etheris namque serenitate et liquore aeris defecatam opifex puritatem excepit, unde divinas extrinsecus animas materiis, ut ita dixerim, simplicibus illigavit. Cum corpore igitur velud incorporeos, subtiliores inferis, set superis grossiores, inbecilla non sufficit humanitas intueri.⁸⁰

Genius is here defined as a life force, since he joins man's body from the first stages of conception ("de nascendi principiis homini copulatus"). The words "nascendi" and "copulatus" in particular evoke the sense of procreative activity and of birth itself. This is thus the classical genius identified by Nietzsche as the cosmic force associated with generation.⁸¹ Yet Bernardus does not leave the definition of Genius at that. Genius is also responsible for formulating dreams and signs that help guide human beings. Within a single sentence, Bernardus has thus combined two different forms of classical genius and fused them into one new Genius figure: the procreative, generative genius and genius as producer of dreams and images.

⁸⁰ Bernardus Silvestris, *Cosmographia*, ed. Peter Dronke (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1978), 135. All further quotations of this text will be taken from this edition. Bernardus Silvestris, *The Cosmographia of Bernardus Silvestris*, trans. Winthrop Wetherbee (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 107-8. All further translations of this text will be taken from this edition: "The class of spirits who dwell in the atmosphere, but in serenity, maintain calm of mind, as they live in calm. Second in rank to these is the genius which is joined to man from the first stages of his conception, and shows him, by forebodings of mind, dreams, or portentous displays of external signs, the dangers to be avoided. The divinity of these beings is not wholly simple or pure, for it is enclosed in a body, albeit an ethereal one. For the creator drew forth the distilled essence of ethereal calm and ethereal fluidity, and adapted divine souls to a material which was, so to speak, unmixed. Since their bodies are virtually incorporeal, and subtler than those of lower creatures, though coarser than those of higher powers, the feeble perception of man is unable to apprehend them."

⁸¹ Nietzsche, *The Genius Figure in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, 49-50.

Interestingly, Genius is not simply responsible for producing images and dreams in the mind of man but has a specifically prophetic or discriminatory function. A trio of ablatives reveals Genius' tools for showing man what dangers to avoid: "vel mentis presagio, vel soporis ymagine, vel prodigioso rerum spectaculo." Genius' production of images in the mind is thus not his only function in this text. The creation of images in sleep, portentous signs, and forebodings in the mind are all means to an end. Genius' more essential role is to use these images to show human beings what dangers to avoid. This is a quite positive view of Genius' role and displays faith in the utility of his imagistic inventions. In a similar fashion, Genius is figured as a form of personal guardian in this text. Bernardus describes how each man will be assigned a "genius" to watch over him: "Cum igitur homo, conductante quidem Providencia, novum figmentum, nova fuerit creatura, de clementissimo et secundario spirituum ordine deligendus est Genius, in eius custodiam deputatus. Cuius tam ingenita, tam refixa est benignitas, ut, ex odio malicie displicentis, pollute fugiat conversantem."⁸² Genius is designated as a form of "custodiam," described as fully benign ("benignitas"). It makes sense that Genius' role as imager is also one of personal guidance for the mind of man. The images Genius creates are also meant as benign guidance, forming part of his task as custodian.

Imager and Priest: Genius in De planctu Naturae

⁸² Bernardus Silvestris, *Cosmographia*, 135. Wetherbee, 107: "Accordingly, when the new design, the new creation of man has taken place, a 'genius' will be assigned to watch over him, drawn from this most merciful and serviceable race of spiritual powers, whose benevolence is so deep-seated, and unalterable, that they shun, out of a hatred of evil, any contact with the vile or displeasing."

Bernardus' rather positive and personal depiction of Genius constitutes a major source of influence for Alan of Lille's Genius in *De planctu*. The "conglomerative" nature of Bernardus' Genius, derived from several different forms of classical genius, also strongly informs Alan's version of Genius. Yet Alan's text is more interested in exploring the relationship between Nature and Genius than Bernardus' text is. Genius is a cosmic force, rather than a personal guardian, in Alan's text. His prerogative as Nature's priest is to function as her subordinate and take action against mankind on her behalf. Yet the extent of Genius' subordination to Nature and thus the exact nature of his relationship to her are repeatedly probed in *De planctu*.

Nature's official process of summoning Genius constitutes the first mention of the figure in this text. Genius must be summoned in writing: "Tunc illa cedula[m] papiream huius epistolaris carminis inscriptione arundinis interuentu signauit."⁸³ The performance of this summoning by inscription ("inscriptione") suggests a formal ritual, as indicated by the terms "signauit" and "epistolaris." Nature writes a formal letter to Genius, inscribed with her signature. Alan emphasizes the formality and ceremony surrounding the relationship between Nature and Genius by detailing this mode of summoning, replete with official language. This letter-writing is only the first sign of Alan's deep interest in delineating (and complicating) the relationship between Nature and Genius. Nature's letter to Genius reads like a long, rhetorical plea:

Natura, dei gracia mundane ciuitatis uicaria procuratrix, Genio, sibi alteri, salute eique per omnia serenantis fortune blandicias amicari. Quoniam similia cum dissimilum aspersione similibus sociali habitudine gratulantur, in te uelut in speculo Nature resultante similitudine tecum in tuo profectu proficiens aut in tuo defectu equa lance deficiens. Quare circularis debet esse

⁸³Häring, XVI.184-186. Sheridan, 207: "Then Nature, with the aid of a reed-pen, inscribed on a sheet of paper an official formula of the following kind."

dilectio, ut tu, talione dilectionis respondens, nostram fortunam facias esse communem. Patrati sceleris euidencia, clamoris generis imaginem, humani generis naufragium tibi habundanter eloquitur. Vides enim qualiter homines originalis nature honestatem bestialibus illecebris inhonestant, humanitatis priuilegiam exuentes naturam, in bestias morum degeneratione transmigrant, Veneris in consequentia affectus proprios consequentes, gulositatis uorticibus naufragantes, cupiditatis uaporibus estuantes, alis superbie ficticiis euolantes, inuidie morsibus indulgentes, adulationis ypocrisi alios deaurantes. Hiis uiciorum morbis nullus medicinalibus instat remediis. Hunc scelerum torrentem nullus obice defensionis castigat.⁸⁴

The beginning of this letter constitutes the formula for letter-writing in Latin. The addressor, Nature, appears in the nominative (“Natura”) addressing the addressee Genius in the dative (“Genio, sibi alteri”), sending greeting (“salute”) as per the customary language of the opening of Latin letters. The letter is itself a highly rhetorical form of expression, bringing Alan’s Natura closer to the Natura in the *Architrenius*, who speaks fountains of rhetorical eloquence.⁸⁵ It is intriguing that Natura should need to address Genius with such formality. There is something ceremonial and official about their relationship, and the fact that Nature needs to summon Genius using a rhetorically

⁸⁴ Häring, XVI.187-204. Sheridan, 206-7: “Nature, by the grace of God, vicar-governess of the city of earth: to Genius, her other self, greetings and wishes that in all things he may be befriended by the delights of fair fortune. Since like, with disdain for unlike, rejoices in the bond of relationship with like, finding myself your alter ego by the likeness of Nature that is reflected in you as in a mirror, I am bound to you in a knot of heartfelt love, both succeeding in your success and in like manner failing in your failure. Love, then, should be a circle so that you, responding with a return of love, should make our fortunes interchangeable. The evidence of crime committed, evidence that all but shouts aloud, tells you at length of the shipwreck of the human race. For you see how men dishonor the dignity of their original nature by succumbing to bestial allurements, and abandoning a nature with the privilege of humanity, cross over to join the beasts by degeneration in their morals, as they follow their own inclinations in the pursuit of Venus, suffer shipwreck in whirlpools of gluttony, burn with the hot vapour of greed, fly on the counterfeit wings of pride, give themselves over to the bites of envy, gild others with the hypocrisy of flattery. No one brings medicinal remedies to bear on these diseases of vice.”

⁸⁵ For Alan’s use of rhetoric, see Alain Michel, “Rhétorique, Poétique et Nature chez Alain de Lille,” *Bien Dire et Bien Apprendre 2* (1980): 113-124.

eloquent letter may suggest that she is *his* subordinate.⁸⁶ At the same time, Nature's act of summoning Genius to aid her and her identification of herself as "vicar-governess" and "vicaria Dei" suggests that she is second in command only to God and that Genius must be her subordinate. Already, the relationship between the two figures, and particularly the question of who is subordinate to whom, is examined.⁸⁷

In a typical definition of the relationship between Nature and Genius, Genius is identified by Nature as her other self ("sibi alteri"). The role of Genius as Nature's "likeness" is emphasized in the second sentence of Nature's letter by the figura etymologica on the root "simile": "Quoniam similia cum dissimilum aspersione similum sociali habitudine gratulantur, in te uelut in speculo Nature resultante similitudine tecum in tuo profectu proficiens aut in tuo defectu equa lance deficiens." Some form of "simile" occurs four times in different grammatical formulations in this single sentence: first as a nominative ("similia"), then as an accusative antonym "dissimilum," then as an accusative ("similum"), and finally as an ablative ("similitudine"). The use of this word certainly reinforces Nature's insistence on Genius as her other half or her "likeness." Yet the constantly changing nature of the word itself suggests a subtle way in which Genius as Nature's "likeness" may not be an assured and constant concept. Furthermore, the presence of "dissimilum" in the litany of "similum's" subtly indicates a way in which the text may be working against itself and showing that

⁸⁶ See Rita Copeland and Ineke Sluiter, eds., *Medieval Grammar and Rhetoric: Language Arts and Literary Theory, AD 300-1475* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

⁸⁷ This is in contradistinction to many scholars who claim that Genius is obviously Nature's subordinate. See H. David Brumble, "The Role of Genius in the *De Planctue Naturae* of Alanus de Insulis," *Classica et Mediaevalia Revue Danoise de Philologie et D'Histoire* 31 (1970), 306: "Clearly Genius is some kind of underling, or aspect, of Nature..." See also R.H. Green, "Alan of Lille's *De Planctu Naturae*," *Speculum* 31 (1956), 672.

Nature and Genius may not best be characterized as twins or likenesses, even as Nature herself tries to assert this relationship. This primary assertion of the relationship between Genius and Nature as “twins” is immediately undermined, however subtly, almost as soon as it is introduced.

To complicate matters even further, Nature’s definition of Genius as both her other self and as her likeness or mirror image indicate two different types of relationship and suggests that the exact nature of the relationship between these two figures has not been resolved. Scholars such as Winthrop Wetherbee and Jane Chance Nitzsche have taken Nature’s reference to Genius as “sibi alteri” to mean that he is certainly considered her twin in this text.⁸⁸ Yet the exact equation of Nature and Genius should not be assumed so easily. Nature first calls Genius her “sibi alteri,” intimating that they are of the same substance and virtually identical. Yet Nature then devolves into a series of images of mirrors and likenesses that suggest divergence from an exact equation between her and Genius. Wetherbee contends that Nature’s view of Genius as “velut in speculo” indicates that Genius represents an exemplary form of Nature, a “higher reflection of herself.”⁸⁹ Yet evidence for this view in Nature’s letter itself or in the text in general is scarce. Instead, Genius reflects Nature as an image or likeness, similar to the kinds of images or likenesses he himself creates, but he cannot, in this view, be an exact copy of Nature. As a mere reflection or likeness, he is, at least from a Neoplatonic perspective, a degraded version of an original. Earlier descriptions of the images on Nature’s own

⁸⁸ See Economou, *The Goddess Natura in Medieval Literature*, 92-3; Wetherbee, *Platonism and Poetry in the Twelfth Century*, 207; Nitzsche, *The Genius Figure in Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, 93.

⁸⁹ Wetherbee, *Platonism and Poetry in the Twelfth Century*, 207.

garment demonstrate that the text is apprehensive about the integrity of images and likenesses. The formulation of Genius as Nature's "likeness," the real import of the word "similitudine," encompasses a view of Genius as an inferior copy of the "original" Nature. The repetition of "in te" and "in tuo" reinforces the mirror image and the idea that Nature can see herself in Genius as if in a mirror. Yet the idea that they are exact twins, that he is her exact other self, or that he can be equated with her does not recur after Nature's initial address to him as "sibi alteri." Is Genius a degraded, subordinate version of Nature? Is he similar to her but not as powerful? Are they exact copies of each other occupying the same cosmic role? Alan complicates rather than resolves the answers to these questions.

Genius' entrance is quite different from Natura's arrival in Prose 1. He is neither the awe-inspiring nor tragic figure that Nature is. He is instead described as an old man who has been strangely unaffected by age:

Cuius statura mediocritatis canone modificata decenter nec diminutionis querebatur afferesim nec de superfluitatis prothesi tristabatur, cuius caput pruinosi caniciei crinibus inuestitum, hiemalis senii gerebat signacula. Facies tamen iuuenili expolita planitie nulla fuerat senectutis exaratione sulcata. Vestes uero, opere sequente materiam, huius uel illius nescientes inopiam, uidebantur nunc inflammari purpura, nunc serenari iacinto, nunc colore succendi coccineo, nunc bisso expressius candidari.⁹⁰

While Nature is clearly an imposing, majestic figure, Genius has a kind of mediocre or middling stature ("statura mediocritatis"). Mention of Genius' hair is reminiscent of the

⁹⁰ Häring, XVIII.59-66. Sheridan, 215: "His height, kept within fitting limits by the rule of the mean, neither had a complaint to make about shortening by contraction nor was he saddened by superfluous elongation. His head, covered with hair hoar-frosted by greyness, bore minor signs of winter-like old age. However, his face, smooth with the regularity of youth, had not been furrowed by the plough of age. His garments, with workmanship suiting material, suffered from no defect in the former or the latter and seemed now to be aflame with purple, now to have the brightness of the hyacinth, now to be afire with scarlet, now to have the clear white of linen."

text's earlier focus on the magnificent gleam of Nature's hair. Yet Genius' hair, far from producing its own divine light, is simply described as dressed in grey and displaying the signs of old age ("cuius caput pruinosis caniciei crinibus inuestitum, hiemalis senii gerebat signacula"). Again reminiscent of the introduction of Nature at the beginning of the text, Genius' garments are described but again in language that falls short of the majesty due to Nature. The images on Genius' garments are described as well-suited to their material ("opere sequente materiam"). All that can be said of their workmanship is that it is not defective ("huius uel illius nescientes inopiam"). In fact, the primary feature of Genius' description seems to be this insistence on his mediocrity, his well-suitedness, and his appropriateness. Having evoked the dramatic description of Nature by focusing on Genius' stature, hair and garments, Alan shies away from a depiction of Genius that would resemble Nature's majesty. He is instead unremarkable: of middling height and "appropriately" dressed.

From this underwhelming description, we would not expect Genius to have the kind of power Alan reveals him to have. Yet Genius soon emerges as a triumphant imager where Nature has previously failed at this very task. In particular, Genius has the ability to breathe life into inanimate images:

Ille uero calamum papiree fragilitatis germanum numquam a sue inscriptionis ministerio feriantem, manu gerebat in dextera: in sinistra uero morticini pellem nouacule demorsione pilorum cesarie denudatam, in qua stili obsequentis subsidio imagines rerum ab umbra picture ad ueritatem sue essentie transmigrantes, uita sui generis munerabat. Quibus delectionis morte sopitis, noue natiuitatis ortu alias reuocabat in uitam. Illic Helena, suo decore semi-dea, enfasi sue pulcritudinis mediante, 'pulcrutido' poterat nuncupari. Illic in Turno fulmen audacie, uigor regnabat in Hercule. Illic in Capaneo gigantea ascendebat proceritas, in Vlixie uulpina uigebat calliditas. Illic Cato pudice sobrietatis nectare debriabatur aureo, Plato ingenii splendore rutilabat sidereo. Illic stellata cauda Tulliani

pauonis ridebat. Illic Aristotiles sententias enigmaticarum locutionum
latibulis inuoluebat.⁹¹

In this passage, Genius is exposed as a craftsman of images and as a scribal figure. He hovers over his papyrus with a pen in his right hand. Yet Genius does not simply create images with his pen on papyrus; he animates them. As a usual, continuous gesture narrated in the imperfect, Genius bestows life upon his images as a kind of generous gift. While the images on Nature's garments and inscribed on the diadems of her crown are derided for their pale imitative nature, Genius has the capacity to bring mere images out of the untrustworthy shadow ("ab umbra picture") of Neoplatonic suspicion into the light of true existence ("ad veritatem sue essentie"). The opposition formed here between the copied picture ("picture") and the essence ("essentie") of true creation suggests that Genius has the capacity to create original objects rather than suspicious images or copies. This capability gives Genius, who was only moments ago degraded as a mere likeness of Nature, a nearly God-like status.

Of course, Alan has in part taken this ability of Genius' directly from Bernard's *Cosmographia*, in which Genius, in keeping with classical tradition, is a life-giving force who inscribes images of creatures in a book. Yet there is greater significance to Alan's emphasis on Genius' life-giving animating ability than simply its existence in the

⁹¹ Häring, XVIII.68-80. Sheridan, 215-16: "In his right hand he held a pen, close kin of the fragile papyrus, which never rested from its task of enfacement. In his left hand he held the pelt of a dead animal, shorn of its fur of hair by the razor's bite. On this, with the help of the obedient pen, he endowed with the life of their species images of things that kept changing from the shadowy outline of a picture to the realism of their actual being. As these were laid to rest in the annihilation of death, he called others to life in a new birth and beginning. There Helen, a demi-goddess in beauty, by reason of her impressive beauty, be styled 'The Beauty.' There the thunderbolt of impetuosity held sway in Turnus, strength in Hercules. There a giant's stature rose high in Capaneus, the cleverness of the fox was active in Ulysses. There Cato was intoxicated with the golden nectar of modest sobriety; Plato glowed wit the shining star of genius. There Cicero's peacock with its bestarred tail exulted. There Aristotle ensconces his ideas in the coverts of enigmatic expressions."

Cosmographia. The description of Genius' ability to animate the images functions as a specific and pointed correction of Nature's inability to perform the same action earlier in the text. In Prose 2, Nature inscribes pictures on slate tablets that immediately disappear: "Pictura tamen, subiacenti materie familiariter non coherens, uelociter euanescendo moriens, nulla imaginum post se relinquebat uestigia." While Genius is heralded for his ability to bring images to life, with the term "uita" repeated twice in the description of his image-making and animating activities, Nature can do nothing but create images that die as they come to life. Her images leave no traces ("uestigia"). In fact, it is never even said that Nature brings images to life but only that the images she composes immediately die ("uelociter...moriens"). This inability to create anything is a devastating failure for Nature in this text, as she is supposedly God's agent of creation, his *vicaria Dei*, who should have the capacity to create and animate. The Natura of the *Architrenius* experiences a similar failure when she discovers herself an inferior artisan and creator of images in Book Four and feels deep shame at her lack of creative ability. It seems particularly significant that Nature's failure becomes Genius' triumph in *De planctu*. As Nature has been stripped of her power, Genius has usurped the precise abilities that Nature has lost.

This usurpation of Nature's power by Genius cannot be an entirely comfortable or positive outcome. Although Genius is attributed God-like power in his ability to transform mere images into original, "honest" creations that bespeak a Neoplatonic veneration of "essence" over imagistic copy, he is still initially depicted as a degraded image himself. Furthermore, Genius creates with *both* his right and left hands. Everything

Genius creates with his right hand becomes a positive force in the universe, such as the “semi-dea” Helen. Yet everything Genius creates with his left hand turns out to be evil:

Post huius inscriptionis sollempnitatem dextere manui, continue depictionis defatigata laboribus, sinistra manus, tanquam sorori fesse subueniens, picturandi officium usurpabat, manu dextera pugillaris latione potita. Que ab orthographie semita falsigraphie claudicatione recedens, rerum figuras immo figurarum laruas umbratiles, semiplena picturatione creabat. Illic Thersites, turpitudinis pannositate uestitus, pericioris fabrice solerciam postulabat. Illic Paris incestuose Cipridis frangebatur mollicie. Illic Sinon sinuose locutionis latebris armabatur. Illic Ennii uersus, a sententiarum uenustate ieiuni, artem metricam effreni transgrediebantur licentia. Illic Pacuuius, nesciens narrationis modificare curriculum, in retrograda serie sui tractatus initium locabat.⁹²

Genius’ left hand adopts the task of creation when his right hand becomes tired. The use of the term “continue” suggests that there exists a regular trade-off between the work of Genius’ right hand and the work of his left hand. Even so, the “sinistra manus” does not just take over from a willingly tired right hand but “usurpabat” the work of the right hand. Considering that the left hand continues to produce Thersites, Paris, and Sinon, traitors and inciters of unnatural violence, it is not surprising that there may be something sinister about the way in which the left hand assumes the role of the right hand. While the right hand has made imagistic imitations into essential beings, the left hand operates once again in the realm of shadowy images. The movement from the production of the right

⁹² Häring, XVIII.81-91. Sheridan, 216-17: “After this solemn process of enfacement, his left hand, as if were helping a weary sister, came to the aid of his rights which had grown tired from the toil of continuous painting and the left took over the work of portrayal while the right took possession of the tablets and held them. The left hand, limpingly withdrawing from the field of orthography to pseudography, produced in a half-completed picture outlines of things or rather the shadowy ghosts of outlines. There Thersites, dressed in his disgraceful rags, impeached the expertness of one more skilled in strategy. There Paris was being broken down by the wantonness of the lewd Cyprian. There Sinon was arming himself with subterfuges for a sinuous speech. There the verses of Ennius, destitute of elegance of idea, crossed the bounds of metrical practice in unrestrained license. There Pacuvius, unskilled in arranging the sequence of his narrative, places the beginning of his discourse at a stage that points backwards.”

hand to that of the left hand is described as a movement from orthography (“ab orthographie”) to forgery (“falsigraphie”). At first Alan suggests that the left hand creates images of things (“rerum figuras”) but then corrects this with the dramatic turn of phrase “immo” to reveal instead that what the left hand fashions are mere shadowy ghosts of figures (“figurarum laruas umbratiles”). The use of both “laruas” and “umbratiles” emphasizes the extent of the remove of these images from real essential beings of the sort the right hand produces. The construction of the entire phrase with “rerum figuras” interrupted by “immo figurarum laruas umbratiles” further highlights the importance of asserting that the figures created by the left hand are not simply images of things but, at an even further remove from reality, shadowy ghost-like outlines of images of things.

Thus even as Genius usurps the creative capacity of Nature and breathes life into images, the positive creative ability of his right hand is also usurped by the negative creative ability of his left hand. Genius is himself a divided figure who can create both true essences and shadowy false images. He is at once elevated and demoted in the text’s Neoplatonic scheme. Genius’ “false” creations raise the question of whether there may be more of a connection between Genius and Antigenius than is usually posited. According to Nature’s complaint, Venus, bored with the conjugal bed she shares with Hymeneus, has an affair with Antigenius that leads to the damnable and unnatural behavior of mankind and the offspring Jocus:

Venus, hiis furiis aculeata letalibus, in suum coniugem Hymeneum, thori castitatem peste adulterationis incestans, cum Antigenio cepit concubinarie fornicari suiue adulterii suggestionibus irretita letiferis liberale opus in mechanicum, regulare in anomalum, ciuile in rusticum inciuiliter inmutauit meumque disciplinare inficiata preceptum, malleos ab incudum exheredans consortio adulterinis dampnauit incudibus. Ipse etiam

incudes natiue suorum malleorum deplorantes absentiam lacrimabiliter
uidebantur deprecere.⁹³

This passage delineates the process of the turn from Venus' natural sexual behavior to perversion. As Venus moves from her conjugal bed with Hymeneus to her adulterous bed with Antigenius, she also moves from "liberale opus" to "mechanicum," from "regulare" to "anomalum," and from "ciuile" to "rusticum inciuiliter." This dwelling on Venus' transformation from upright, noble and natural sexual behavior to mechanical, anomalous and uncivil rustic behavior is later echoed in the movement from the noble creations of Genius' right hand to the degraded production of his left hand. Just as Antigenius usurps the role of Hymeneus, Genius' left hand usurps the work of the right hand. The results, unnatural behaviors and unnatural offspring or creations, are similar. This parallel construction of usurpation begs the question of whether Antigenius is really the opposite of Genius or whether he is instead an essential part of Genius, the part characterized by the work of Genius' left hand. "Usurpation," represented by the term "usurpabat" in the description of the relationship between Genius' left hand and his right hand, should perhaps be seen as the central concept in Alan's *De planctu*. The text can be seen as serial usurpations: that of Hymenaeus' marriage bed by Antigenius, that of the creative role of Nature by Genius, and that of the creative work of Genius' right hand by his left hand.

⁹³ Häring, X.131-137. Sheridan, 163-4: "Venus, goaded by these deadly furies into turning against her husband, Hymenaeus, and defiling the chaste marriage-couch by the blight of adultery, began to live in fornication and concubinage with Antigenius. Trapped by the deadly suggestions arising from her own adultery, she barbarously turned a noble work into a craft, a work governed by rule into something ruleless, a work of refinement into something boorish, and studiously corrupting my precept, she dispossessed the hammers of fellowship with their anvils and sentenced them to counterfeit anvils. These natural anvils could be seen bewailing the loss of their own hammers and begging for them with tears."

All of these usurpations, *including* that of Nature's creative role by Genius, are treated with suspicion and anxiety in the text.

If Antigenius may represent the work of Genius' left hand, then the recreation of Genius as Venus', rather than Nature's, priest in John Gower's fourteenth-century *Confessio Amantis* begins to make more sense. Perhaps the seeds for a Genius who is *not* Nature's subordinate are already present in Alan's text, both in the figure of Antigenius and in the suggestion that Genius himself may be more disobedient than he seems. Alan's text implies on some level that Antigenius is actually an essential part of Genius and that his dissent from Nature is therefore somewhat ingrained or inevitable. The development of Genius as a figure increasingly associated with Venus rather than Nature and as a decreasingly "natural" force in the universe should thus be seen as a continuous phenomenon that emerges in the twelfth century rather than as an innovation of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The threat of Genius' "unnatural" behavior is therefore a surprisingly continuous one, beginning perhaps as a latent threat in Alan of Lille's twelfth-century text and becoming manifest by the fourteenth century.

In this twelfth-century material, philosophy and literature are bound tightly together, since many of the authors of these literary texts are also philosophers and the literary texts themselves in some ways straddle the line between literature and philosophy. What cannot quite be captured in purely philosophical texts, however, is the nuance of the complex relationship between Nature and Genius that Alan depicts. The literary form of allegory allows for a certain kind of experimentation with the relationship among important figures in philosophical thought, such as Nature and Genius. The subtle dance that Genius engages in, aiding but also carefully usurping Nature's place in the

cosmos, relies upon the presence of a narrative, allegorical story and the careful manipulation of literary language. This particular feature, and the introduction of the notion of the literary imagination as a perpetually transforming character, always redefining its role in relation to other allegorical figures, could not be expressed in non-narrative philosophical prose in the same way.

Genius continues to emerge from the shadows of Nature's influence and dominance in Jean de Meun's thirteenth-century *Roman de la rose*. In this text, Genius attempts anew to assert his dominance over Nature. Yet as we shall see, the allegorical role Genius endeavors to establish for himself is in no way secure. Genius remains changeable and ambiguous, always on the edge of different transformative possibilities, and always altering and reasserting his allegorical position.

Chapter 2

Protean Genius: Jean de Meun's Transformative Imagination and the Image Crisis in the *Roman de la Rose*

If Alan of Lille left us with a Genius poised between benevolent and unnatural creativity, Jean de Meun's portion of the *Roman de la rose* picks up with a Genius whose very essence is transformation. Scholars have long been troubled by the figure of Genius in Jean de Meun's portion of the *Roman de la rose*.⁹⁴ Frustratingly sly, Genius may at first seem merely facetious, perhaps a figure for the writer Jean de Meun himself. Many critics have chosen to view Genius as a figure for a fiercely ironic opposition to the Neoplatonic Genius of Alan of Lille's twelfth-century *De planctu Naturae*.⁹⁵ Yet this view has consistently figured Genius as a purely antithetical character without pondering what Genius may represent in Jean's text. The result is an artificial sense of rupture in the development of the allegorical Genius (or Imagination) figure in the later medieval period. If critical consensus posits that Jean's Genius is merely a reaction against Alan of Lille's then there can be no discussion of the complex ways in which Jean de Meun's Genius traces a critical moment in the philosophical development of the imaginative faculty.

⁹⁴ Sarah Kay, *The Romance of the Rose* (London: Grant & Cutler Ltd., 1995), 88-9.

⁹⁵ Patricia J. Eberle, "The Lover's Glass: Nature's Discourse on Optics and the Optical Design of the Romance of the Rose," *University of Toronto Quarterly* 46 (1976-77), 286; Nietzsche, *The Genius Figure in Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, 116; Denise N. Baker, "The Priesthood of Genius: A Study of the Medieval Tradition," *Speculum* 51: 2 (1976), 284-5.

The development of Nature and Genius in the *Roman de la Rose* is in some essential ways a continuation of their portrayal in *De planctu*. Nature has been more definitively relegated to Genius' control, being banished to her forge at the start of his speech.⁹⁶ The shift from Genius as Nature's priest to Genius as Nature's confessor also indicates a change in the power dynamic between these two figures: in this text, Genius is more explicitly Nature's superior. Yet Nature's role is usurped by Reason more than by Genius in this text, a figure who is explicitly said to be outside the realm of Nature's creation. The text expresses general anxiety about the place of the "natural" in the universe. Nature herself becomes increasingly confined to her forge, becoming a conscientious smith rather than a powerful cosmic force in the universe. As in *De planctu*, Nature's dominion over artistic creation is also anxiously questioned in this text. In the *Roman*, Nature's role, like her confinement to her forge, has become more limited, and the components of her traditional role as cosmic creator have been parceled out among other allegorical figures, including Art, Reason and Genius.

Yet Genius does not simply "usurp" Nature's creative role in the universe in the *Roman*. The relationship between the two figures is not merely a question of power in the *Roman* the way it seems to be in *De planctu*. Instead, Genius, even while confining Nature to her forge, emerges as an uncertain figure, constantly caught in a process of transformation. While Nature becomes less powerful, Genius also undergoes a significant transformation in the process of his own sermon. Over the course of his sermon, Genius transforms from the classical and Silvestrian generative force to the later medieval

⁹⁶ For the "demotion" of Nature in this text, see Susan Stakel, *False Roses: Structures of Duality and Deceit in Jean de Meun's Roman de la Rose* (Saratoga CA: Anma Libri, 1991), 79.

“recombinative imagination.”⁹⁷ By detailing the process of this transformation, the *Roman* projects an image of Genius as an “in-process” figure whose identity is in flux.

As he is suspended in this process of change, Genius becomes somewhat of an untrustworthy figure. Genius’ rewriting of the spring of Narcissus episode from the first part of the *Roman* suggests that he does not only recombine images previously seen but he also alters them significantly. The extent to which we can trust what we see has already been frustrated by Nature’s discourse on optics, and Genius furthers this concern by demonstrating how imagination’s recombined images can be just as distorted as the figure of the bent stick in the water. This chapter will argue that in his constant transformation, Genius in the *Roman* encapsulates unease about images in the text as a whole. He is not only a recombination of the images seen earlier in the dream, but he also functions as a recombination of the text’s obsessive assessments and reassessments of the capacities of images and especially the text’s apprehension about the ability of images to convey truth rather than distortion.

Genius’ transformation from generative priest to recombinative imagination occurs over the course of the portion of his sermon in which he re-narrates the lover’s encounter with the Garden and the Fountain of Narcissus. This portion of the speech not only demonstrates Genius as a figure in flux but also witnesses Genius attempting to figure out how much interpretative work the recombinative imagination should perform. The narration of the Fountain scene reveals that the very concept of the “recombinative

⁹⁷ By “recombinative imagination” I mean a significantly Aristotelian sense of the psychological faculty as that which reformulates and re-presents images once seen in nature. The phrase itself is derived from Nicholas Watson, “The Phantasmal Past: Time, History, and the Recombinative Imagination,” *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 32 (2010), 1-37.

imagination” is similarly in flux in Jean de Meun’s intellectual milieu. While claiming to summarize the previously viewed scene, Genius simultaneously inserts a large amount of commentary and then repeatedly reverts to a supposed mere summary. This examination of the work of the imagination by a figure representing it is unusual and troubles both the reliability of the function of the imagination and the supposedly stable and clearly identified nature of an allegorical figure. Perhaps more than any other allegorical figure in the text, Genius consistently upsets the idea of the allegorical figure as an assured and constant representation of a concept.

If Alan of Lille’s text can be seen as a series of usurpations, the *Roman* should be seen as a series of transformations. At every turn, the text is confronted by the inconsistencies of nature and anxious about the ease with which anything can be transformed. Even the poem’s compositional process is transformative. The text may be seen as a holistic approach to love that is interrupted and resumed by another author. This “poetics of inconsistency” must in some way trouble the poem’s presentation as personification allegory. Allegorical figures should be static and unmoved, but this cannot be the case in a text that is permeated by perpetual transformation. The result is a series of allegorical figures who are caught somewhere between the static and the protean. This pattern reaches its culmination in the ultimate figure of transformation, Genius. If Nature teaches us to be wary of sight through her discourse on optics, Genius exhorts the reader to be wary of “recombinative” sight, of the work of the imagination, and of the supposedly inert nature of images. Genius becomes an encapsulation of the text’s crisis about both the deceptive possibilities of vision and the transformative power of images.

If Genius usurps Nature's creative capacities in *De planctu*, in the *Roman*, he assumes her inclination toward transformation and takes it to an even more profound level. Nature reveals that her cosmic role may be unstable, delineating her constantly shifting relationship to Art and Reason and the distribution of the characteristics usually associated with her across a range of other allegorical figures. Yet the series of transformation continues at the end of her confession, when Genius relegates her to a space of confinement and repetition and reveals himself to be the real figure of transformation in the text. For Sarah Kay, Nature's speech represents a crux in the text upon which Jean's simultaneous engagement with and abandonment of Boethius converges.⁹⁸ Yet I would argue that Genius in fact brings the text's crux to its fruition. It might be said that Genius extracts Nature's transformative capacities and makes them his own in a movement that fashions him as the *engin* of the text's image crisis. I will first detail Nature's processes of transformation, then demonstrate how Genius extracts and usurps them in a speech that also asks some frightening questions about the operation of the recombinative imagination. Finally I argue that Genius' self-fashioning as a transformative figure in the process of change captures the text's pervasive concern with the mutability of images.

Thirteenth-Century Philosophy: Jean de Meun's Intellectual Milieu

Before examining the attitudes toward Nature and Imagination in the *Roman de la Rose* directly, it is essential to account for the philosophical climate in which both Guillaume de Lorris and especially Jean de Meun wrote. In doing so, we find Jean de

⁹⁸ Kay, *The Romance of the Rose*, 96.

Meun's suspended, transformative Genius to be interestingly in line with concurrent developments in faculty psychology. Importantly, theories of imagination begin to move toward Aristotelian faculty psychology, away from notions of Augustinian illumination and devaluing of the senses. At the same time, philosophy in Jean's surroundings, including faculty psychology, is surprisingly heterogeneous, poised between Neoplatonism and Aristotelianism. Aristotelian ideas are not absorbed easily but instead present a set of ideas that are constantly in flux across this period as philosophers attempt to solve the problem of incorporating Aristotelianism into dominant Augustinian and Neoplatonic world-views. Jean's uncertain Genius, often suspended between cosmic generative force and recombinative imagination, thus reflects a larger philosophical conundrum about how to manage the overwhelming flood of Aristotelian and Arabic philosophical texts.

Thirteenth-century Paris was the seat of scholasticism, vastly demonstrating the influence of new translations of both Arabic and Greek philosophical sources. Particularly important for theories of imagination were Latin translations of Avicenna's *De anima* and Aristotle's *De anima*. The influx of new Aristotelian-influenced philosophical materials into Paris in the thirteenth century was a result of several twelfth-century translation movements. In the twelfth century, Toledo was a center for translation from the Arabic of Aristotelian texts and related works by Arabic writers.⁹⁹ There were also translations in Italy directly from Greek Aristotelian texts, most significantly those

⁹⁹ John Marenbon, *Medieval Philosophy: An Historical and Philosophical Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2007), 210-11.

by James of Venice between 1130 and 1150.¹⁰⁰ In the thirteenth century, scholars in Sicily and Toledo, among other places, undertook further translation, including Michael Scot, Hermann the German, William of Luna, a translator of Averroes, and William of Moerbeke. Moerbeke translated almost the entire Aristotelian corpus between 1260 and 1286. Moerbeke's texts eventually became the standard for Latin translations of Aristotle in the medieval period.¹⁰¹

Aristotle's texts were not absorbed into the thirteenth-century French philosophical milieu seamlessly, however. In 1210 in Paris, the scientific works of Aristotle were banned.¹⁰² The ban on Aristotle's natural philosophy was repeated in 1215 in the statutes for Paris University.¹⁰³ The injunctions were repeated once again in 1231, indicating that they must not have been strictly followed.¹⁰⁴ Aristotelian thought did provoke fear and uneasiness in the minds of thirteenth-century religious leaders. As Luca Bianchi has argued, these injunctions were instituted in part to protect sacred science against the infiltration of pagan science and in part inspired by Pope Innocent III in his

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Gordon Leff, *Medieval Thought: St Augustine to Ockham* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1958), 172. See also Claude Lafleur, "Les Guides de L'Étudiant' de la Faculté des Arts de L'Université de Paris au XIII^e Siècle," in *Philosophy and Learning: Universities in the Middle Ages*, ed. Maarten J.F.M. Hoenen, J.H. Josef Schneider, and Georg Wieland (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995), 137-8.

¹⁰³ Leff, *Medieval Thought*, 172.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 172-3. Although see Luca Bianchi, "Les Interdictions Relatives à L'Enseignement d'Aristote au XII^e Siècle," in *L'Enseignement de la Philosophie au XIII^e Siècle, Autour du 'Guide de L'Étudiant' du MS. Ripoll 109*, ed. Claude Lafleur (Turnhout: Brepols, 1997), 113, who argues that the 1231 prohibitions were much less harsh than those of 1210 and 1215 and represented a softening attitude toward Aristotle's natural philosophy.

fight against potential heresies.¹⁰⁵ In addition, because the injunctions specified commentaries on Aristotle, they may have included works by commentators such as Avicenna and Alfarabi.¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, philosophers and theologians were themselves uncertain about how to incorporate Aristotelian materials into their work. As Marenbon has noted, philosophers in the period between 1250 and 1275 especially experimented with different modes of incorporating Aristotelian philosophy into their world-views.¹⁰⁷ This experimentation resulted in the vastly different, but all Aristotle-inspired, philosophies of Bonaventure, Albert the Great, Aquinas, and Siger of Brabant.¹⁰⁸

Claims that the imagination occupies an elevated position in Aristotelian philosophy seem well-founded. In Neoplatonic thought, the imagination behaves as an intermediary between sense and reason, as is its basic function in Aristotelian philosophy. However, Neoplatonists exhibit distrust of the sensible world and of the senses and subscribe to Plato's theory of forms.¹⁰⁹ This attitude necessarily demotes the imagination, which does not contribute in a profound way to intellectual understanding. As Karnes observes, the "imagination's alignment with the senses means that it functions most often to impede understanding" and thus "it is therefore no surprise that the tradition's dominant attitude toward *phantasia* is negative."¹¹⁰ In the scheme presented in pseudo-

¹⁰⁵ Bianchi, "Les Interdictions," 111.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 112.

¹⁰⁷ Marenbon, *Medieval Philosophy*, 205-6.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Karnes, *Imagination, Meditation, and Cognition in the Middle Ages*, 25.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

Augustine's twelfth-century *Liber de spiritu et anima*, imagination presents symbols to reason, "hinting through its visibility at invisible truths."¹¹¹ Aristotelian imagination does more than transmit symbols to reason: this imagination transmits actual data subsequently utilized in the process of intellectual apprehension. Thus for Aristotle, and for the thirteenth-century scholastics influenced by him, the imagination participates directly in intellectual understanding.

Aristotle's imagination as presented in *De anima* is often difficult to understand and incredibly diverse. This diversity leads to a lack of coherency in the presentation of the faculty, which left room for subsequent thinkers to disagree and vary widely in their reformulations of the faculty's function. Imagination may retain images of things once sensed, create new mental images, produce dream images, or present images to the intellect.¹¹² Because Aristotle posited that the soul cannot think without images, the imagination must be part of every intellectual act. Thus imagination in a certain sense becomes a form of understanding.

Yet even as Aristotelian texts made their mark on thirteenth-century philosophy, Neoplatonic and Augustinian distrust of the senses did not disappear. The first phase of translations of Aristotelian texts in the early thirteenth century tended to be amalgams of Aristotelian and Neoplatonic sources. Gordon Leff warns against distinguishing too sharply between the direct influence of Aristotle and the influence of Aristotelian texts transmitted in Neoplatonic garb through translated Arabic sources.¹¹³ Two stages of the

¹¹¹ Ibid., 26-7.

¹¹² See Ibid., 33.

¹¹³ Leff, *Medieval Thought*, 142.

influx of Aristotelian texts into Western Europe, including Paris, may be observed: the first stage witnessed Aristotelian texts translated from the Arabic with much Neoplatonic influence; the second stage involved more purely Aristotelian texts freed from these Neoplatonic accretions, with translations taken directly from the Greek.¹¹⁴ The scholastics of the mid-thirteenth century had been trained in Augustinian and Neoplatonic natural philosophy. When confronted with Avicenna, they tried to apply his philosophical system to Augustine's. In these theories, the agent intellect accounted for "divine illumination."¹¹⁵ Once Averroes' commentaries on Aristotle became available, the situation became more complex.¹¹⁶ Controversies arose about whether the senses and the imagination provided the intellect with knowledge or whether intellectual knowledge was the result of some outside illumination from divine sources.¹¹⁷ Aquinas was especially concerned with easing this controversy, but Aristotle and his *De anima* came increasingly under attack after the Thomist solution.¹¹⁸

Greco-Arabic and Greco-Latin accounts of psychology and the imagination differed in some essential ways. Significantly, Aristotle did not believe in divinely inspired dreams and denied the notion that a strong imagination could result in prophetic visions.¹¹⁹ Avicenna, on the other hand, promulgated the notion that an extremely

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 171.

¹¹⁵ David Knowles, *The Evolution of Medieval Thought* (London: Longman, 1989), 197-8.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Dag Nikolaus Hasse, "The Soul's Faculties," in *The Cambridge History of Medieval Philosophy*, ed. Robert Pasnau (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 317.

powerful imagination could produce prophecy.¹²⁰ There was also disagreement about the number of internal senses. Avicenna maintains five internal senses, while Averroes and Aquinas recognize only four (common sense, imagination, cogitative faculty, and memory).¹²¹

Theories of imagination confronted further serious changes with the introduction of Averroes' *Long Commentary* on Aristotle's *De anima*. Avicenna's *Liber de anima seu sextus de naturalibus*, translated into Latin at Toledo in the second half of the twelfth century, divides the imagination into two parts, a lower retentive imagination, which simply stores images, and a higher compositive imagination, which combines images and presents them to the intellect.¹²² This splitting of the imagination was picked up by some thirteenth-century scholastics, including Albertus Magnus, but most thirteenth-century scholars conflated the two.¹²³ Averroes' treatment of the imagination is much more extensive than Avicenna's. Averroes eliminates Avicenna's estimative power and expands the imagination to include this function. The estimative power, introduced into the Latin West via Avicenna, constitutes judgment capability. For example, a sheep's perception of a wolf does not in and of itself indicate fear to the sheep. This is instead the prerogative of the estimative faculty, which allows the sheep to judge that the perceived

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.,309.

¹²² Karnes, *Imagination, Meditation, and Cognition in the Middle Ages*, 41-2.

¹²³ Ibid.

wolf is in fact a threat.¹²⁴ For Averroes, this judging capability is part of the imagination's functioning, effectively elevating the imagination from a more sensory position to a position of judgment and even reason.¹²⁵

Thirteenth-century scholastics such as Albertus Magnus and Thomas Aquinas struggled with the extent to which imagination participates in reason and judgment. These thinkers were caught in the middle of an extensive debate about the imagination, as it varied among dominant Arabic and Greek thinkers. At the same time, these thirteenth-century scholastics remained profoundly influenced by Neoplatonic and Augustinian thought on the imagination and did not necessarily abandon these views in the presence of new materials. Thus Jean de Meun encounters a philosophical imagination that is itself in flux, often caught between Neoplatonic and Aristotelian formulations. His depiction of Genius is a serious engagement with and dramatization of this uncertain imagination. Just as many scholastics grappled with Avicenna's dual imagination and Averroes' "estimative" imagination, so Jean de Meun presents a Genius unsure of whether to simply re-present images or to interpret them, reason about them, and judge them.

The Transformation of Nature: Nature, Reason and Art

As George Economou and Alan Gunn, among others, have pointed out, a full assessment of Jean de Meun's Genius cannot be made unless his Nature is also understood.¹²⁶ This is certainly the case in *De planctu Naturae* and remains essential in

¹²⁴ Ibid., 50-1.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ George Economou, "The Character Genius in Alan de Lille, Jean de Meun, and John Gower," *The Chaucer Review* 4:3 (1970), 203. For further entanglements of the figures in scholarly

the *Roman*, since Genius' characteristics become ever more prominent as a result of comparison with Nature. Jean de Meun's Nature demands comparison with her predecessor, Alan of Lille's *Natura*, in part because Jean's text displays Alan's profound influence, including occasional direct translations of passages from *De planctu*. Sarah Kay suggests some essential ways in which Jean's description of Nature reveals his primarily Aristotelian, rather than Neoplatonic, stance. His employment of an extended ineffability topos in his description of Nature constitutes an admission of the "deficiencies of art" that belies Jean's "disagreement with the neo-platonist Alan of Lille, and mocks both the poetic efforts of the first author of the *Rose* and his own."¹²⁷

Hugh White focuses on what may be the most striking feature of Nature's behavior in the *Roman*, her confession, as the real essence of Jean's departure from Alan, noting that because "we are invited to think in terms of a Nature having done something wrong" as a result of her confessing, "Nature's dignity is undercut." Alan's *Natura*, on the other hand, is a figure of "dignity, power, and moral authority."¹²⁸ Nature's association with the sins of mankind through her confession consequently associates her with the "animal" and "sub-rational" forces in the universe. In White's view, Nature is a less elevated figure in Jean de Meun's universe, but the fact that she is fitted with "Alanian trappings" suggests a direct challenge to Neoplatonic conceptions of the universe in

discussion, see especially Alan M.F. Gunn, *The Mirror of Love: A Reinterpretation of 'The Romance of the Rose'* (Lubbock, Texas: Texas Tech Press, 1952), 270-21, who sees the two figures together as the apex of the text's so-called "love-truth motif." See also Hugh White, *Nature, Sex, and Goodness*, 124.

¹²⁷ Kay, *The Romance of the Rose*, 76.

¹²⁸ White, *Nature, Sex, and Goodness*, 122.

which a supreme Natura is the immediate executor of God's will.¹²⁹ In a sense, then, Nature's role has in this text been usurped by Reason, a newly intervening figure who will gain in importance in the later medieval period. If Nature's creative role was primarily usurped by Genius in *De planctu*, it could be argued that Reason is the Genius of the *Roman*, subtly yet powerfully adopting Nature's jurisdiction.

In Guillaume's portion of the poem, Reason is described as a figure who could not be created by Nature.¹³⁰ She enters the scene from above, as distinct from Nature's entry from below, tucked away in her forge. Her appearance is overwhelming, and her description closely matches the majestic and otherworldly entry of Natura in Alan of Lille's *De planctu*:

En ce point ai grant piece esté,
Tant que einssi me vit maté
La dame de la haute garde,
Qui de sa tor aval esgarde.
Resons fu la dame apelee.
Lors est de sa tor avalee,
Si est tot droit a moi venue.
El ne fu joesne ne chanue,
Ne fu trop haute, ne trop basse,
Ne fu trop graille ne trop grasse,
Li œil qui en son chief estoient,
Com .ij. estoiles reluissoient,
Si ot ou chief une corone,
Si ressembloit haute persone.
A son semblant et son vis
Pert qu'el fu faite em paradis
Car nature ne seüst pas
Oevre fere de tel compas.
Sachez, se la letre ne ment,

¹²⁹ Ibid., 127-8.

¹³⁰ For an excellent summary of Reason's special place in this text, see Armand Strubel, *La Rose, Renart et le Graal: La littérature allégorique en France au XIIIe siècle* (Geneva: Editions Slatkine, 1989), 206.

Que dieus la fist demoinement
A sa semblance et s' image
Et li dona tel avantage,
Qu'el ait pooir et seignorie
De garder home de folie,
Por coi il soit tieus qu'il la croie.
Ainssi con je me demantoie,
Atant ez vos resons commance.¹³¹

The association of Raison's eyes with stars ("ij estoiles") is reminiscent of the description of Philosophia's eyes in *De consolacione Philosophiae*.¹³² Yet mention of the crown on Raison's head ("Si ot ou chief une corone,/ Si resembloit haute persone") seems to invite

¹³¹ Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, *Le Roman de la rose*, ed. Armand Strubel (Paris: Le Livre de Poche, 1992), ll. 2969-2995. All further quotations of this text will be taken from this edition: "My heart was close to breaking at the thought of the rose that I must now leave behind. I was a long time in this state, until the lady from her high vantage-point in the tower looked down and saw me thus downcast. The lady's name was Reason, and, descending from her tower, she came directly to me. She was neither young nor old, neither too tall nor too short, neither too thin nor too fat. The eyes in her head shone like two stars and she wore a crown upon her head; she looked like a person of importance. It was apparent from her form and her face that she was made in paradise, for Nature could not have fashioned anything so perfectly proportioned. Know that if the books do not lie, she was made in the firmament by God in his own image and likeness, and that he gave her such virtue that she has power and authority to keep a man from folly, provided that he be such as to trust in her." *The Romance of the Rose*, trans. Frances Horgan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 46. All further translations of this text will be taken from this edition.

¹³² Philosophy in this text appears as a commanding figure, full of splendor, with shining eyes and great height: Boethius, *Consolatio Philosophiae*, Book I, Prose I: "Haec dum me cum tacitus ipse reputarem querimoniamque lacrimabilem stili officio signarem astitisse mihi supra uerticem uisa est mulier reuerendi admodum uultus, oculis ardentibus et ultra communem hominum ualentiam perspicacibus, colore uiuido atque inexhausti uigoris, quamuis ita aevi plena foret ut nullo modo nostrae crederetur aetatis, statura discretionis ambiguae. 2 Nam nunc quidem ad communem sese hominum mensuram cohibebat, nunc uero pulsare caelum summi uerticis cacumine uidebatur; quae cum altius caput extulisset ipsum etiam caelum penetrabat respicientiumque hominum frustrabatur intuitum." Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy*, 2: "Her countenance demanded absolute reverence: Her eyes glowed like fire, penetrating far beyond the common capability of mortals; her color was intense, her strength inexhaustible, even though she was so full of eternity that it was impossible to believe that she was of my own generation; and her height was hard to fix. For at one time she would keep herself within common mortal limits, but at another she would seem to strike at the heavens with the crown of the top of her head—and whenever she stuck her head up still higher she would pierce heaven itself and disappoint the vision of those mortals who tried to contemplate her."

comparison with Alan's long description of Nature's crown in the beginning of *De planctu*. Alan spends several pages detailing the "tres preciosi lapides" that "prefulgebant" on Nature's crown depicting the Zodiac. Unlike Philosophia, whose height and appearance shift radically at each moment, Raison's appearance is in fact average and relatively stable. In her "averageness," her middling height and weight, and her seemly and constant proportions, she is strikingly similar to Alan's Genius. Raison is neither young nor old ("ne fu joine ne chenuue"), neither too tall nor too short ("ne fu trop haute, ne trop basse") and neither too fat nor too thin ("ne fu trop graille, ne trop grasse"). These lines do not exactly describe what Raison is as much as what she is not, but they do succeed in suggesting that there is something "mediocre" about her, recalling Genius' "statura mediocratis" in Alan's text.

Yet Raison's identification with Alan's Natura is particularly peculiar given Guillaume's insistence on her transcendence of the realm of the "natural." Nature's appearance, her "semblant" and her "vis," makes clear that she was fashioned in paradise ("fu faite em paradis"), precisely because Nature could not have fashioned such a creature ("Car nature ne seüst pas/ Oevre fere de tel compas"). This statement is strong: not only did Nature not make this creature but Nature cannot fashion anything of such proportions ("tel compas"). The use of the word "tel" ("such") suggests a failure on Nature's part to create an entire class of creatures. Guillaume continues to relate that Raison was created by God himself directly in his own image ("a sa semblance et s' image"). God gives her ("li dona") authority ("pooir et seignorie") to keep man from folly ("de garder home de folie"). The word "seignorie" endows Raison with nobility and fashions her as a lord with dominion over a jurisdiction. Her direct contact with God, not

only created in his image but given authority directly by him, renders Raison a replacement for the *vicaria Dei* identity that Nature occupied in *De planctu*. The idea that Raison directly replaces Nature in this text is emphasized by aspects of her description that are reminiscent of Alan's description of Natura. Guillaume's expression that Raison could not have been created by Nature, that she is somewhat unnatural, is unsettling. The text seems to suggest that as Nature's dominion becomes less significant, the figures who overtake her role are decreasingly natural, allowing unnaturalness to reign free in the cosmos.

Jean adopts Guillaume's suggestion of Raison's usurpation of Nature by placing words spoken by Natura in *De planctu* into Raison's mouth. In a tirade against the God of Love, Raison describes the torment of amorous passion to the dreamer:

Amours ce est pais hayneuse,
 Amours est hayne amoureuse
 C'est loiautez la desloiaus,
 Ce est desloiautez loiaus,
 C'est paours toute asseüree,
 C'est esperance desesperee.
 C'est raisons toute forsenable
 C'est forsenerie raisnable,
 C'est douz periz a soi noier
 Grief fais legier a palmoier...¹³³

Jean continues with a near exact translation of Meter 1 of *De planctu* until Raison arrives at the very end of her speech and seamlessly departs from Natura's words in *De planctu*:

Touz li mondes va cele voie
 C'est li dieus qui touz les desvoie
 Se ne sont cil de male voie
 Que genius escommenie,

¹³³ *Le Roman de la Rose*, ed. Strubel, ll. 4290-4299: "Love is hostile peace and loving hatred, disloyal loyalty and loyal disloyalty; it is confident fear and desperate hope, demented reason and reasonable madness. It is the sweet danger of drowning and a heavy burden that is easy to handle" (*The Romance of the Rose*, ed. Horgan, 65).

Pour ce qu'il font tort a nature.
Et pour ce, se je n'ai d'aus cure,
Ne vueill je pas que les gens aiment
De cele amour dont il se claiment
En la fin, las, chaitif, dolant
Tant vait lor amours affolant.¹³⁴

In this passage, Raison explicitly expresses her distance from Nature. Genius has excommunicated those who have done wrong by Nature (“font tort a nature”). Raison qualifies that all the world can see the consequences of this kind of bad behavior (“malle vie”). Yet at this point Raison departs from Nature. She declares that she does not in fact have much concern for those of bad nature (“de male voie”) who have been excommunicated by Genius (“et pour ce, se je n'ai d'aus cure”). Raison continues to express her lack of interest in the fact of the sexual disobedience of man against Nature and her sole concern with alleviating the suffering of those in love (“Ne vueill je pas que les gens aiment/De cele amour dont il se claiment”). Raison is not necessarily concerned with mankind’s lack of moral rectitude; she simply does not want to hear the lover complain and be sorrowful (“chaitif et dolant”). Raison successfully usurps Natura’s words and then declares herself uninterested in the problems that occupy Natura in *De planctu*. She has both replaced Natura and rendered her position invisible. As with Guillaume’s primary description of Raison, this speech suggests the rise of something

¹³⁴Ibid., ll. 4338-4347: “No one has been found who is so highly born, so wise, of such proven strength or courage, or so virtuous in other respects that Love has not conquered him. The whole world treads that path, for he is the god who leads everyone astray except those excommunicated by Genius because their evil ways are an offence against Nature. I am not concerned with these, however, but I do not want people to love in such a way, to be so maddened by Love that in the end they admit themselves to be unhappy and sorrowful wretches. But if you really want to avoid being hurt by Love and to be cured of this madness, you cannot drink a better draught than the thought of fleeing from him. This is the only way you can be happy: if you follow him, he will follow you, and if you flee him he will flee away” (*The Romance of the Rose*, ed. Horgan, 66).

unnatural, outside of Natura's jurisdiction, in Nature's place. As John Fleming notes, the iconographic attributes of the sublime Natura are given over to Lady Reason in the *Roman*.¹³⁵ Yet it is striking that Natura should be transformed into Reason, whose role in this text is explicitly *supernatural*.¹³⁶

Nature in Jean's text is, above all, a diligent worker. Confined to her forge, she works as quickly as possible against the pressure of the death of her creatures. A long passage about the beauty of her creations and Art's impotence in relation has convinced several scholars, including Sarah Kay, that "Art kneels before Nature" in the *Roman*.¹³⁷ A closer look at the passage in which Jean supposedly declares Nature's supremacy over Art and the sequence that follows it should, however, cast some doubt on this position. After detailing how Nature slaves away in her forge in the fight against Death and Corruption, Jean praises Nature's creations above the pale imitations of Art:

Dont ars faisoit ses examploires
Qui ne fait pas forms si voires,
Mais par mout ententive cure,
A genoulz est devant nature
Si prie et requiert et demande
Comme mendicant et truande,
Povre de science et de force
Qui de sivre la mout s'esforce
Que nature li vueille aprendre,
Comment ele puisse comprendre
Par son enging en ses figures
Proprement toutes creatures.
Si garde comment nature oevre
Car mout voudroit faire autele oevre
Et la contrefait comme singes.

¹³⁵ John Fleming, *The Roman de la Rose: A Study in Allegory and Iconography* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969), 195-6.

¹³⁶ John V. Fleming, *Reason and the Lover* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 29.

¹³⁷ Kay, *The Romance of the Rose*, 75-6.

Mais tant est ses sens nuz et linges
Qu'el ne puet faire choses vives...¹³⁸

Art seems to fail in precisely the same way that Natura fails in *De planctu*: she cannot create anything living. Just as Alan describes the diadems on Natura's crown in *De planctu* as aping nature, Jean assumes a fairly standard Neoplatonic attitude and reveals that Art can do no better than "contrefait comme singes" the work of Nature. Jean repeats Art's failure to animate anything in the passage immediately following, revealing that Art could portray anything beautifully ("bien pourtraictes bien figurées") but that she could never render them alive: "Ne les fera par eulx aller/ Vivre mourir sentir parler." She thus fails at Nature's dual task of vivifying and simultaneously fending off death.

Significantly, both Art's weakness and Nature's strength are described in terms of some form of natural *mental* composition of these two figures. Art cannot create like Nature because she is "povre de science et de force," with "science" referring not merely to her lack of experiential knowledge but to a lack of a mental capacity for intellect that Nature has.¹³⁹ Yet this line also suggests that Nature's craftsmanship is based on a physical ability and emphasizes Nature's work in the forge as mechanical. More importantly, Nature carries out her work by the use of her "engin" ("par son engin");

¹³⁸ *Le Roman de la Rose*, ed. Strubel, ll. 16021-16038: "Art took these for her models, but her forms are not so true. With most attentive care she kneels before Nature, like a poor beggar who lacks both knowledge and strength but who strives hard to follow her. She begs and prays and implores Nature to teach her how to use her skill so that her figures may properly encompass every creature, and she watches how Nature works, for she would very much like to do the same work herself. Like an ape, she mimics Nature, but her understanding is so weak and bare that she cannot make living things, however natural they seem" (*The Romance of the Rose*, trans. Horgan, 247-8).

¹³⁹ "Science" means an exact knowledge of a certain subject ("connaissance exacte d'un certain ordre de choses"). Frédéric Godefroy, *Dictionnaire de l'ancienne langue française* (Paris: F. Vieweg, 1881-1902), s.v. science.

Art's lack of this mental capacity requires her to beg Nature for help. The use of the word "engin" is significant because it links Nature to Genius by suggesting that part of her success arises from the mental abilities that the allegorized Genius encompasses, skills associated with the imagination.¹⁴⁰ So far it seems as though Art is definitively inferior to Nature in this scenario, and that, at least in a Neoplatonic universe, Nature has been upheld as a supreme creator and Art as a mere ape.

Yet two features in the description of Nature in Jean's text following this comparison with Art suggest that perhaps Nature does not quite reign supreme over Art. Jean's subsequent inability to describe Nature suggests that her role is not secure, and, as a result, her absolute ascendancy over Art cannot be established. Furthermore, Jean reverts to an appeal to the "artistic" in his (failed) attempt to describe Nature:

Bien la vous vousisse descrire
Mais mi sens n'i porroit souffire.
Mi sens? K'ai je dist? C'est du mains!
Non feroit voir nus sens humains
Ne par voiz vives ne par notes,
Et fust Platons ou Aristotes,
Algus, Ouclydes, Tholomees,
Qui tant orent granz renommées
D'avoir esté bon escrivain.
Leur enging seroient si vain
S'il osoient la chose enprendre,
Qu'il ne la porroient entendre,
Ne Pymalion entaillier;
En vain s'i porroit travaillier
Parasius, voire Apelles
Que mout bon peintre apel, les
Biautez de li jamais descrire
Ne porroit, tant eüst a vivre;
Ne Myro ne Policletus

¹⁴⁰ "Engin" most basically means native wit or mental ability ("habilité") but may also mean "craft" ("artifice"). It also has a sense of fraud or deceit embedded in it, as evidenced by the definitions "fraude," "ruse" and "tromperie." Godefroy, *Dictionnaire de l'ancienne langue française*, s.v. engin.

Jamais ne savroient cest us...
Tant est de grant biauté nature.
Zeusys? Non pas, mais tuit li mestre
Que nature fist onques nestre,
Car or soit que bien entendissent
Sa biauté toute et tuit vousissent
A tel portraiture muser,
Ainz porroient lor mains user
Que sit res grant biauté portraire.¹⁴¹

Sarah Kay points out that the corresponding moment in Alan's *De planctu* results in an extensive description of Natura that lasts for several books. The "ineffability topos" Jean instead employs here is, in Kay's view, a comic exaggeration, "humorously underlining the inadequacy of language for description."¹⁴² In this way, Jean divorces himself from his Neoplatonic predecessor and declares his thirteenth-century Aristotelian influence.¹⁴³

Yet viewing this passage simply as humorous may obscure its other meanings. While it is true that Jean significantly departs from his predecessor Alan by harping on the impossibility of describing Nature, this passage also, and perhaps more significantly, demonstrates the impossibility of expunging Art from the realm of Nature. Here, Jean not only displays a sense of humor but he also expresses anxiety about the place of Art in his

¹⁴¹ *Le Roman de la Rose*, ed. Strubel, ll. 16169-16188; ll. 16206-16214: "I would gladly have described her to you, but my wit is not equal to the task. My wit, do I say? Not only mine! No man's wit could depict her, whether in speech or writing, were he Plato or Aristotle, Albus, Euclid, or Ptolemy, who now enjoy the reputation of having been good writers: their powers would be too weak, and if they dared undertake the task, they would not be equal to it. Pygmalion could not carve her, Parrhasius would strive in vain, and even Apelles, whom I call a very good painter, could never describe her beauties, however long he lived. Nor would Miro or Polycletus ever be successful... But Nature's beauty is so great that Zeuxis could never have succeeded, for all his skill in executing and colouring his portrait. Zeuxis? No, nor all the masters that Nature ever bore. For even if they had grasped the extent of her beauty and wanted to waste their time trying to portray it, their hands would have worn out before they had managed to depict such very great loveliness. Only God could do it" (*The Romance of the Rose*, trans Horgan, 250).

¹⁴² Kay, *The Romance of the Rose*, 75-6.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

own text. He cannot simply discount it in a Neoplatonic insistence on its mere imitative quality. As Kay points out, Jean has perhaps moved away from a Neoplatonic world view, and the result is that he is not quite sure how to deal with the problem of Art, especially as it relates to Nature.

In this passage, Jean does not only point to the inability to use *language* to describe Nature but the inability for art to depict Nature. He begins with a list of writers who could not describe Nature, including Plato, Aristotle, Euclid and Ptolemy, and suggests that it is precisely their “engins,” the word from which “Genius” derives, that renders them unable to depict Nature in writing. Jean experiences, perhaps anxiously, a similar failure of his own genius. He includes an underhanded comment on Genius’ “failure” in service of Nature, a failure that will be elaborated upon below. Yet more importantly, this emphasis on failure in writing immediately diverts to an exploration of the visual-artistic failures in the depiction of Nature. Without any transition, Jean continues to muse about the inability of artists and sculptors such as Pygmalion, Miro and Polycletus to portray Nature and ends with a long excursus on Zeuxis’ frustrations in this very task. Jean begins the passage with what feels like the form of *praeteritio* so often utilized by Guillaume in describing the Garden of Pleasure. Yet Jean does fail to describe Nature here. Playing on his predecessor Guillaume, Jean’s non-description of Nature reveals the real problem: that it is impossible to keep Art out of the text. Art has supposedly just been revealed to be undeniably inferior to Nature and yet she is suddenly necessary to complete a description of Nature herself. Nature in this passage becomes strangely dependent on Art. Reliance on the visual of the sort that Guillaume employs by

describing everything by sight cannot be expunged even in the case of an allegorical figure who speaks at length about the unreliability of vision.

In fact, where Natura in Alan of Lille's *De planctu* is defined almost immediately as God's vice-regent or *vicaria Dei*, Jean's Nature rehearses a series of possible titles for herself before finally arriving at one definitively:

Cil Dieus meïsmes, par sa grace,
Quant il ot par ses devises
Ses autres creatures mises,
Tant m'ennora, tant me tint chiere
Qu'il m'en establi chamberiere,
Servir m'i laisse et laissera
Tant com sa volenté sera:
Nul autre droit je n'i reclame;
Ainz le merci, quant il tant m'aime
Que si tres povre damoisele,
En si grant maison et si bele,
Il, si granz sires, tant me prise.
Pour chamberiere? Certes, voire,
Pour conestable ou pour vicaire
Dont je ne fusse mie digne
Fors par sa volenté benigne.¹⁴⁴

While Alan's Natura is quite confidently proclaimed *vicaria Dei* soon after her entry into the text, Jean's Nature much less dramatically narrates the process of being named "chamberiere" and then suddenly changes this title twice within one line. She claims to have been overwhelmingly honored ("tant me honnora") by being established ("etablit") as "chamberiere." Nature is so enamored of the title that she repeats it eight lines later after a dramatic escalation that masterfully defers the word amidst a proliferation of the

¹⁴⁴*Le Roman de la rose*, ed. Strubel, ll. 16772-16788: "When he had settled his other creatures according to his plan, this same God in his grace showed me such honour and love that he made me chamberlain of all; he allows and will allow me no other right here, but thank him, great lord that he is, for loving and valuing me enough to take so poor a maiden as chamberlain in so grand and fair a house. As chamberlain? Truly, as constable indeed, and vicar, titles of which I could never have been worthy except through his benign will" (*The Romance of the Rose*, trans. Horgan, 259).

word “tant.” Yet for all Nature flaunts her title, when the word “chamberiere” is finally repeated at line 16785, the validity of the title is comically undermined by an uncertainty of nomenclature in the next line in which Nature reveals that God named her his “conestable” or “vicaire.” While the additions of “conestable” and “vicaire” are in a basic sense meant to elevate Nature’s status in relation to God, they have the accompanying effect of revealing a problem with Nature’s story. She insists with precision on having been honored with the title of “chamberiere,” and by adding two new titles to this “honor,” it becomes a more likely possibility that Nature’s role in relation to God is actually undefined. If Alan’s Natura was certainly and triumphantly *vicaria Dei*, Jean’s Nature is only “vicaire” as an afterthought to an already suspect title of “chamberiere.” Jean’s Nature is not only indescribable but may have no name at all.

If Art pales in comparison to Nature in a Neoplatonic context, and Jean is somewhere between a Neoplatonic and Aristotelian view of Nature, then Nature’s evaluation of Plato’s dismissal of her serves as an important clue into the status of Nature in this text. Nature, as part of her confession, laments not only man’s disobedience but also, and perhaps more extensively, her own lack of grace. In the passage above, she reveals that her “honorable” title bestowed directly by God is in fact not as confident as it might seem. In a long discussion of Platonic views of Nature, she complains about her disreputable position in Plato’s corpus. Her assessment of Plato reveals that he has relegated her to a status of insignificance in comparison with God, that her creative abilities are unimportant and, especially distressingly, that she cannot render anything eternal.

Connois je bien que vraiment
Celui ne li donné je mie:

La ne s'estent pas ma baillie
 Ne fui pas sage ne poissant
 De faire rien si connoissant.
 Onques ne fis riens pardurable:
 Quanque je faz est corrompable.
 Platon meïsmes le tesmoingne
 Quant il parle de ma besoingne
 Et des dieus qui de mort n'ont garde.
 Leur createurs, ce dist, les garde
 Et soustient pardurablement
 Par son vouloir tant seulement;
 Et se cil vouloirs nes tenist
 Trestouz morir les couvenist.
 Mi fait, ce dist, sont tuit soluble,
 Tant ai pooir povre et obnuble
 Au regart de la grant poissance
 Du Dieu qui voit en sa presence
 La trible temporalité
 Souz .i. moment d'eternité...¹⁴⁵

Nature admits her inability to give understanding to man and particularly shows her lack of power (“ne fui pas sage ne poissant”). She is not the prime actor in man’s ability to be “connoissant,” a word associated with the powers of the intellect, and as we have already seen, this is probably most accurately the province of Reason. When we first encounter Nature, she is hard at work in her forge in order to fend off death. Her inability to create anything permanent, as expressed in this passage, is actually a moment of similarity between her and the Natura of *De planctu*, who also fails to create anything that is not immediately erased. It is essential not to make too much of the demotion of Nature in this

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., ll. 19060-19080: “Undoubtedly, as I know very well, it was not I, in truth, who gave him his understanding. That is outside my province, and I had neither the wisdom nor the power to make anything so intelligent. I have never made anything eternal, and whatever I make is corruptible. Plato himself bears witness to that when he speaks of my work and of the gods, who have no need to fear death. It is their creator, he says, whose will alone protects and maintains them throughout eternity, and if that will did not sustain them, they would perforce all die. All my works are perishable, he says, for my power is poor and obscure before the great power of the God who perceives the three aspects of time as present to him in a moment of eternity” (*The Romance of the Rose*, trans. Horgan, 294).

passage in comparison to Alan's Natura, who is supposedly more securely able to create lasting creatures.¹⁴⁶ In fact, Alan's Natura is explicitly unable to do this and her role as *vicaria Dei* is therefore in crisis, much like Jean's Nature.

What is most significantly different about Jean's Nature is not that she is demoted from her ability to create something lasting but that she analyzes her own disfavor from a Neoplatonic viewpoint. While Alan only hints at Natura's inability to animate anything as part of the description of her, in Jean's text Nature articulates the realities of her failures herself. This self-consciousness makes sense in light of Nature's unusual act of confession, an action that forces her to assume a part in man's increasing neglect of natural behavior. While in Alan's text, Natura's blame is always, at least explicitly, outward on figures such as Venus and mankind in general, Jean de Meun develops a far more inwardly focused version of Nature who has internalized the criticism suggested about her in the background of twelfth-century texts such as *De planctu Naturae* and *Architrenius*.

Jean's Nature is certainly different from Alan's Natura but not perhaps in the way we might expect based on some of the existing scholarship on the topic. It cannot simply be the case that Alan's Natura is wholly "Neoplatonic" while Jean's Nature is "Aristotelian," and that the difference between them can be explained by appealing to a historical influx in Aristotelian texts in the Latin west by the time Jean writes his continuation of the *Roman* in the thirteenth century. In many ways, Jean's Nature is caught squarely between a Neoplatonic and Aristotelian view of the natural, and Jean's

¹⁴⁶ Several scholars emphasize difference while obscuring certain similarities between Alan's Nature and Jean's Nature. See, for example, Lucie Polak, "Plato, Nature and Jean de Meun," *Annual proceedings of the Graduate Centre for Medieval Studies in the University of Reading* 3 (1977), 81-2; Kay, *The Romance of the Rose*, 75-6; White, *Nature, Sex, and Goodness*, 124-31.

description of her captures the essence of a figure in flux. Nature's relationship to God, as "chamberiere," "vicaire," or some other title, is undecided and constantly transforming in the course of Nature's speech. Her role has been partially reassigned to Reason, at least insofar as Reason reiterates words that were once spoken by Nature in Alan's text. Perhaps most importantly, Nature has not been proved to be superior to Art, and concerns about visual representation are by no means outside of Nature's (and Jean's) purview. Sarah Kay is perhaps a bit too quick to dismiss Jean's description of Art bowing before Nature as evidence for his lack of concern with the question of visual representation that seems to haunt both Alan of Lille and Guillaume de Lorris. I have already shown how Art's subservience to Nature is immediately questioned by Jean's explicit anxiety about how to describe Nature and especially by his long explanation of the impossibility of depicting Nature pictorially. Far from ridiculing Alan and Guillaume for their anxieties about artistic representation, the problems of visual representation, of vision, and of the art of images are absolutely central to Jean's portion of the *Roman* and especially to the depiction of two intertwined allegorical figures: Nature and Genius.

In this concern with visual representation and images, Genius and Nature become inextricably connected in Jean's *Rose* in a way that differs fundamentally from the "usurping" qualities of Alan's Genius. The two figures share a central preoccupation with artistic representation and vision. Nature includes a summary of scientific work on optics and the necessity of being skeptical of vision in her speech, and Genius builds upon this suspicion in his reinterpretation of Guillaume's fountain of Narcissus scene. Genius' sermon represents the crux of the entire text's obsession with visuality and images, Guillaume's portion included. While the relationship between Genius and Nature is as

complicated and uncertain in Jean's text as it is in Alan's, the nature of the complication is significantly divergent in the *Rose*. Here, Genius enfoldes an already transforming figure, Nature, into his own identity, summarizing her words and escalating her concerns about vision. The confessor takes on the voice and concern of the confessee. Nature's own fluidity is subsequently encompassed in Genius' amorphous, ever-transformative identity in Jean's *Rose*.

Genius as Transformation

The relationship between Natura and Genius in *De planctu Naturae* can certainly be seen in terms of a power struggle. In Jean's *Rose*, though, "power struggle" and the possibility of usurpation of authority is not the best way of viewing the relationship between these two figures, which might be far more dynamic and fluid than it is in Alan's text. The confessor-confessee relationship is certainly formal, but the interaction between Nature and Genius does not stand on the same ceremony as the formal rhetorical language with which Natura summons Genius in *De planctu*. In fact, as both Kay and White observe, Genius begins his sermon by "invoking the 'authority of Nature,'" but the content of his "pronouncements" more accurately serve Venus and Amor.¹⁴⁷ As Eberle notes, the changes Jean makes to Alan's figure of Natura are "paralleled" in the changes he makes to Genius.¹⁴⁸ In a sense, Genius is much more Nature's "other self" in the *Roman* than he is in *De planctu*. In the *Roman*, Genius expands upon Nature's

¹⁴⁷ Kay, *The Romance of the Rose*, 88-9; see also White, *Nature, Sex, and Goodness*, 130-1.

¹⁴⁸ Eberle, "The Lover's Glass," 285.

transformative capacities rather than simply attempting to usurp her capacity as creator.

This suggests a certain kinship between the two figures.

At the end of Nature's confession, she gives instructions to Genius that at first resemble her interaction with him in Alan's *De planctu*:

Alez, amis, au dieu d'amours
Porter mes plains et mes clamours,
Non pas pour ce que droit m'en face,
Mais qu'il se confort et solace
Quant il orra ceste nouvele
Qui mout li devra estre bele
Et a noz anemis grevaine...
Pardon qui bien soit souffisanz
Leur donnez, non pas de .x. anz
--Nel priseroient .i. denier –
Mais a tous jors pardon plener
De trestout quanque fait avront,
Quant bien confesser se savront.
Et quant en l'ost serez venuz
Ou vous serez mout chier tenuz,
Puis que saluer les savroiz,
Publiez leur en audience
Cest pardon et ceste sentence,
Que je vueill que ci soit escrite.¹⁴⁹
Lors escrit cil, et cele dite,
Puis la seele et la li baille
Et lie prie que tost s'en aille,
Mais qu'ele soit ainçois assoste
De ce que son penser li oste.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁹ *Le Roman de la Rose*, ed. Strubel, ll. 19373-19379 & 19397-19414: "Go, my friend, to the God of Love, and take with you my complaints and protests. I do not want him to make me any reparation, but to take comfort and solace from this news, which should be very welcome to him and calamitous for our enemies... Give them a pardon that will be amply sufficient: not just for ten years, for that would not be worth twopence to them, but a perpetual, plenary pardon for everything they have done, when they make a good confession. When you reach the host, where you will be warmly welcomed, and when you have greeted them on my behalf as you know how to do, then announce to them in a loud voice this pardon and decree that I would like you to write down here.' Then he wrote at her dictation, and she sealed it and gave it to him, begging him to go quickly but first to absolve her from anything that might have slipped her mind" (*The Romance of the Rose*, trans. Horgan, 298-9).

This focus on the written form of Nature's instructions, with Genius taking dictation, is reminiscent both of Nature's composition of a letter to invoke Genius in *De planctu* and of the primary identification of Genius as a writer upon his entry in Alan's text. Jean pauses over Genius' writerly identity here by the quick succession of "escribe" and "escrit" both as part of Nature's commandment that Genius write down her words and his fulfillment of this order. The focus on the process of Genius' writing continues in the next line with the detail of Nature sealing the dictation ("puis la seele"), a detail also noted in *De planctu*. The description of every exchange between Nature and Genius in this passage, including Nature's handing the sealed dictation to Genius ("la li baille") serves not only to emphasize Genius' function as Nature's scribe but also to force a pause in the text to reflect on the relationship between these two figures a moment before it transforms significantly.

Yet Jean's version of the Genius-Nature relationship calls upon Alan's model only to dismiss it promptly. Although Nature has just used a series of imperatives to guide Genius, in the next moment, Genius fully assumes his role as confessor and gains the ability to command Nature:

Si tost comme ot esté confesse
 Dame nature la deesse,
 Si com la lois veult et li us,
 Li vaillanz prestres genius
 Tantost l'assoust et li donne
 Penitance avenant et bonne
 Selonc la grandeur du forffait
 Qu'il pensoit qu'ele eüst forffait.
 Enjoinst li qu'ele demorast
 Dedenz sa forge et laborast
 Si com ainz laborer soloit
 Quant de noient ne se doloit,
 Et son servise ades feïst
 Tant k'autre conseil i meist

Li rois qui tout puet adrecier
Et tout faire et tout despecier.¹⁵⁰

Genius, who moments ago took dictation on the orders of Nature, now adopts an imperative tone with the indirect command “enjoinst li qu’ele demorast,” suddenly borrowing Nature’s imperatives for his own speech. The specific injunction that Nature remain in her forge is significant in its clear attempt to circumscribe Nature spatially. The use of the word “demorast” conveys a sense of inactivity and staid languishing. The initial placement of the word “dedenz” highlights Nature’s conscription to an “inside” space that is somehow constricted. Genius conscribes Nature to this circumscribed space just before Jean tells us that Genius has the capacity to fly. After Genius changes his clothing, he “prent eles pour tost voler.”¹⁵¹ Genius’ extraordinary mobility is emphasized here by the (rather unnecessary) qualification that he takes to his wings (“eles”) in order to fly away (“voler”), and fly away quickly (“tost”) at that. The focus on Genius’ mobility is striking in light of both the previous passage, in which Genius consigns Nature to her forge, and in the context of what comes immediately after. Just after Genius flies off, we are made privy to Nature’s endless laboring in her forge. In a moment of stark contrast to Genius’ powerful movement, Nature is shown to be unable to move at all: “Lors remest nature en sa forge,/ Prent ses martiaus et fiert et forge/ Trestout ausi

¹⁵⁰ *Le Roman de la Rose*, ed. Strubel, ll. 19415-19430: “As soon as the goddess, Lady Nature, had made her confession as was lawful and customary, then Genius, her worthy priest, gave her absolution and imposed on her a good and fitting penance, appropriate to the seriousness of the

fault he thought she had committed. He enjoined her to remain in her forge and toil as she used to when she had no cause for grief, and to continue in the performance of her duties until the king who has the power to set all things right, to create and destroy everything, should offer some other remedy” (*The Romance of the Rose*, ed. Horgan, 299).

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, l. 19442: “Then, taking to his wings, he flew swiftly away” (*The Romance of the Rose*, ed. Horgan, 299).

comme devant.”¹⁵² The passages are linked by the use of the term “lors,” which encourages reading continuously from the point of Genius’ winged departure to this scene of Nature toiling in the forge. As in Genius’ instructions to Nature to return to her forge, this description of Nature’s work there reiterates her spatial and temporal confinement. She remains (“remest”) in the forge, unable to leave this single space, and to compound matters further, her work appears highly repetitive, as she “trestout ausi comme devant.” The use of both “ausi” and “devant” only further highlights Nature’s inability to move both outside of the forge itself and, less literally, to a different form of work.

Genius thus begins to emerge as the primary figure of transformation in the Nature-and-Genius portion of Jean’s text. Genius does in a sense usurp Nature’s identity by repeating some of her words at the beginning of his sermon. What is significant about Genius’ “usurpation” of Nature in Jean’s text is that it involves limiting Nature’s role to a singular, unchanging set of actions in her forge while Genius becomes the ever-changing figure that Nature seemed to be earlier in the text. The “usurpation” may be characterized as a transformation in and of itself. Thus Genius’ long list of transformative activities begins with his transformation of his relationship to Nature by consigning her to her forge and then re-articulating her words in a new context. The relationship between Genius and Nature thus takes on a new form of fluidity.

Perhaps more significant than Genius’ transformation of his relationship with Nature is his own establishment as a transformative figure. Over the course of his sermon, Genius demonstrates that he is suspended somewhere between an identity of

¹⁵² Ibid., ll. 19442-19444: “Nature remained in her forge, wielding her hammers, smiting and forging just as before...” (*The Romance of the Rose*, trans. Horgan, 300).

“generative” Genius and “recombinative” imagination. This kind of transformation-in-process is an uncomfortable concept to assign to an allegorical figure who should represent a stable identity. In the process of his transformation, Genius draws upon anxieties in both Guillaume’s and Jean’s portions of the text about the transformative capacity of objects that should not be able to transform, most notably images. Genius also enfold Nature’s concerns about the deceptiveness of vision into his sermon, and, in the process of establishing himself as the recombinative imagination, casts doubt on his own ability to represent visual stimuli accurately.

Several scholars, such as Jane Chance Nietzsche, Rosemund Tuve, Charles Dahlberg, and John Fleming, have noted Genius’ double role in Jean’s text.¹⁵³ Yet these analyses tend to focus on Genius as god of generation and as priest and, with the exception of Nietzsche’s work, these scholarly accounts use Genius’ double role as proof of Jean’s ironic intentions. According to these scholars, Jean must be making fun of the tradition of Genius portrayed in twelfth-century allegories such as Bernardus Silvestris’ *Cosmographia* and Alan of Lille’s *De planctu Naturae*. Nietzsche refutes these claims by arguing that Jean in fact carefully intertwines the two roles of Genius as “generation god and priest” and that the marriage of these two traditional identities for Genius into one figure is a normal function of allegory and need not be interpreted ironically.¹⁵⁴ Nietzsche is correct to question the confidence with which many scholars have called Jean’s Genius

¹⁵³ See Nietzsche, *The Genius Figure*, 116-17. Rosemond Tuve, *Allegorical Imagery: Some Mediaeval Books and their Posterity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 327. *The Romance of the Rose by Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun*, trans. Charles Dahlberg (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), 5, 9-10, 13, 19.

¹⁵⁴ Nietzsche, *The Genius Figure*, 116-17.

“ironic” to explain away his dual role. Yet her explanation of Genius’ two roles relies upon identifying him as god of generation and as priest. Nowhere do any of these scholarly accounts discuss Genius’ retelling of the lover’s encounter with the fountain of Narcissus.¹⁵⁵ This omission has the accompanying effect of overlooking Genius’ evolving role as the recombinative imagination in Jean’s text.

Genius’ transformative nature is highlighted by his frequent change of clothing and by his winged mobility. In his first description, Genius appears dressed as Nature’s priest. After absolving Nature, Genius changes into secular clothing for his flight to earth:

Et je m’en vois endementiers,
Fait genius, plus que le cours,
Pour faire as fins amanz secours,
Mais que desaffublez me soie
De ceste chasuble de soie,
De ceste aube et de cest rochet.
Et vest sa robe seculiere
Qui mains enconbreuse li ere
Si com s’il alast queroler...¹⁵⁶

Jean takes special care to show Genius in the *process* of changing his garb. Since Genius himself says that he will “desaffublez” (“undress”), the addition of “et vest sa robe seculiere” is unnecessary. Genius delineates each article of clothing he will take off (“desaffublez”), including his ‘aube,’ “rochet,” and “chasuble de soie.” The use of

¹⁵⁵ Many scholars seem more interested in the relationship among fiction, nature, and the fountain. See for example David F. Hult, *Self-Fulfilling Prophecies: Readership and Authority in the First Roman de la Rose* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 287. See also John V. Fleming, “The Garden of the *Roman de la Rose*: Vision of Landscape or Landscape of Vision?” in *Medieval Gardens*, ed. Elizabeth B. MacDougall (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Colloquium Series in the History of Landscape Architecture 9, 1986), 222.

¹⁵⁶ *Le Roman de la Rose*, ed. Strubel, ll. 19432-19441: “And in the meantime,’ said Genius, ‘I will make all haste to bring aid to true lovers, but first I must take off this silk chasuble, alb, and surplice. He hung them all on a hook and put on his secular clothes, which were less cumbersome for him, as if he were going to dance” (*The Romance of the Rose*, trans. Horgan, 299).

“ceste” before the listing of each article of clothing brings the reader closer to observing Genius taking off each article. Then we are told about the process of his putting on his new clothing. The whole narration of Genius’ changing of his clothes suspends the allegorical figure in a moment of transformation. Jean prolongs the moment by having Genius point out each article he is doffing and then adding the comment that Genius will then don secular clothing. The addition of the fact that Genius will be less encumbered by his new garb and that he could even dance (“si com s’il alast queroler”) only emphasizes the unpredictability of Genius’ actions as a protean figure. Genius, who only moments ago was officially absolving Nature of her sins, is now ready to fly off with ease and so light in dress that he could dance. The transformation is indeed profound.

Soon thereafter, Genius changes his attire once again in preparation for his sermon. This time, he is re-dressed by Venus, thereby combining a change in his attire with a change in his identity as priest and messenger of Nature to priest and messenger of Venus.

Tantost li dieus d’amours afuble
A genius une chasuble;
Anel li baille et croce et mistre
Plus clere que cristal ne vistre:
N’i quierent autre parement,
Tant ont grant entalitement
D’oïr cele sentence lire.
Venus, qui ne cessoit de rire
Ne se pooit tenir coie
Tant par estoit jolive, et gaie,
Pour plus enforcier l’anateme
Quant il avra fini son theme,
Li met al poing .i. ardant cirge
Qui n’estoit pas de cire virge.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., ll. 19481-19494: “Then the God of Love arrayed Genius in a chasuble and handed him a ring, crosier, and mitre, clearer than glass or crystal. They sought no other ornament, for they greatly longed to hear him read the sentence. Venus laughed continually and could not keep quiet

The repetition of the verb “affubler” in this passage recalls the previous passage, moments earlier, in which Genius changes into his secular clothing from his priestly garb. The mention of specific items of clothing or attire in this passage has a similar effect to their mention in the previous passage, drawing the reader’s attention to the process of Genius’ transformation and his suspension in a transformative state in between. The process of change is meticulously completed with the detail that Venus and Genius “n’i quierent autre parement.” The use of the word “parement,” close to our word “apparel,” draws attention to the intricate process by which Genius must be appareled and re-appareled with each action he performs. The idea that Venus must cease seeking pieces of “apparel” for Genius before he can intone his sermon suggests that his identity transformation cannot be complete until he has completed his change of attire. Venus’ laughter (“ne cessoit de rire”) adds a level of performative pleasure to Genius’ transformation and prolongs the process of his change by forcing the reader to pause over it.

Genius’ primary identification as a figure in transition is significant for two reasons: first, because it manifests itself in his sermon as a microcosm of a larger shift in concepts of *ingenium* or *imaginatio* from a generative force to a recombinative force that re-presents images in the mind; second, because it serves as a crux for the text’s concern with the transformative capacities of objects that should be stable, including images. In this latter point, Genius serves as the text’s “recombinative imagination” by performing a summary of its internal anxieties about images. Of course, the ability of an ever-changing

in her joy and gaiety; in order to lend added force to his anathema, when he had finished his speech, she put into his hands a lighted candle, which was not made of virgin wax” (*The Romance of the Rose*, trans. Horgan, 300).

figure to provide accurate recombination of previously observed sights in nature is a major concern in this portion of the text and has the effect of reiterating Nature's anxiety about the reliability of vision.

Genius begins his sermons by invoking the authority of Nature and seemingly revealing himself to be the god of generation. This Genius, who encourages fertility and allows for the human race to be renewed, is mostly inherited from classical models of the figure, as Jane Chance Nitzsche has documented, and is famously transmitted by Bernard Silvestris' *Cosmographia*.¹⁵⁸ Yet even in portraying this sub-type of the genius figure, Jean's Genius is caught between two slightly different identities. On the one hand, he conveys Nature's message, acting as her priest. On the other, he has just confined Nature to her forge and been re-costumed by Venus who seems to have silently reclaimed him as her messenger. Even in Genius' assumption of the identity of "god of generation," Jean's text still equivocates about who exactly Genius is, to whom he is subordinate, and whose message he conveys.

Kevin Brownlee has argued that Genius rewrites parts of Guillaume de Lorris's text. According to Brownlee's argument, Genius reformulates Guillaume de Lorris' Garden as a *beau parc* and in the process formulates himself as the new writer of the text by repeatedly referring to his speech as "*écriture*."¹⁵⁹ Yet Genius' "rewriting" of Guillaume's Garden of Pleasure may more accurately delineate the process of

¹⁵⁸ Nitzsche, *The Genius Figure in Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, 115-16.

¹⁵⁹ Kevin Brownlee, "Jean de Meun and the Limits of Romance: Genius as Rewriter of Guillaume de Lorris," in *Romance: Generic Transformation from Chretien de Troyes to Cervantes*, ed. Kevin Brownlee and Marina Scordilis Brownlee (Hanover: Published for Dartmouth College by University Press of New England, 1985), 127.

recombination. Sarah Kay has noted that Genius as related to the Latin *ingenium* can mean “imagination” and that Jean de Meun “acknowledges this etymological connection” by having Genius speak about the “devices of the imagination” in his description of Jupiter.¹⁶⁰ Kay comments that Jean de Meun’s Genius may further be a figure for the imagination. I would suggest that Genius only steps into this role as Imagination when he recounts the dreamer’s encounter with the Fountain of Narcissus. Here, Genius becomes Imagination in the more firmly Aristotelian sense of relying on the senses to recombine and re-present sights once seen in nature. Kay identifies a hierarchy in which Jean’s Genius represents a “higher” allegory “in which images construct transcendent truths” and argues that Genius’ recapitulation of Guillaume’s Garden and Fountain reveals his attempt to “relegate” Guillaume’s text to “the ‘lower’ kind of imagination, in which images relate to physical experience.”¹⁶¹ Yet Genius does not emerge as a “higher” version of imagination, nor does he simply “rewrite” Guillaume’s text. He transforms in the process of speaking his sermon and enfolds within his speech and his transformative identity anxieties about the transformative capacity of images and artistic creations in both Guillaume’s and Jean’s portions of the text. The reiteration of the Garden represents a moment in which Genius mutates from priest of generation to recombinative imagination. The fact that the reader witnesses this transformation renders Genius an uncomfortably unstable figure, commensurate with his frequent attire changes and constant flight.

¹⁶⁰ Kay, *The Romance of the Rose*, 89-90.

¹⁶¹ Kay, *The Romance of the Rose*, 90

Genius' reiteration of Guillaume's garden scene pretends to be a straightforward summary but in fact constantly makes apparent the fact that it is a reinterpretation.

Genius begins his reiteration of the lover's vision of the "beau parc" by claiming certain obvious and immediately apparent characteristics of the Garden's features:

Car qui dedenz ce parc seroit,
A seür jurer oseroit,
Ou meist sanz plus l'oeill leanz,
Que li jardins seroit neanz
Au regart de ceste closture
Qui n'est pas faite en quarreüre,
Ainz est si ronde et si soutilie
C'onques ne fu berill ne bille
De forme si bien arondie.¹⁶²

Genius' comments here are based upon the common experience of any person ("qui"), a strange point of alienation from the dreamer, whose actual experience he supposedly summarizes. Even stranger is the repeated use of the subjunctive and conditional in this passage ("seroit" "oseroit") as though Genius is not describing a real sense experience that actually occurred but merely a hypothetical situation in which someone *would* judge the sights of the Garden in this particular way if he *were* to enter it. Already, Genius' relationship to the particularities of the sights of the dreamer are in question, and he offers an interpretation of the Garden in general rather than a reiteration of the scene as viewed by the dreamer.

Genius then begins his proper summary of the dreamer's view of the Garden and Fountain first by posing the question: "Que voulez vous que je vous die?"¹⁶³ Horgan

¹⁶² *Le Roman de la rose*, ed. Strubel, ll. 20293-20301: "Anyone who entered the park, or simply cast his eyes inside it, would dare swear with certainty that the garden was nothing in comparison with this enclosure, which is not square in form but round, and so skilfully shaped that no beryl or ball was ever so perfectly rounded" (*The Romance of the Rose*, trans. Horgan, 312).

translates this line as “What should I tell you?” but it more precisely means “What would you like me to tell you?” At this point, Genius reveals that his subject matter cannot be a mere regurgitation of the sights Amant saw in the Garden. Furthermore, by asking this question, Genius pauses in a moment of formulating his summary of the sights of the Garden, a speech that allows him to assume the identity of the recombinative imagination. Once again, Genius appears in a moment of transformative process. Finally, Genius arrives at his topic, a summary of Amant’s vision of the Garden: “Parlons de choses qu’il vit lores/Et par dedenz et par defores,/Et par bries moz nous en passon,/Pour ce que trop ne nous lasson!”¹⁶⁴

Significantly, the constant shift between first-person and third-person pronouns throughout this portion of the speech indicates a transformative moment in which Genius is still the priest speaking his sermon of generation and yet transitions into a role of service to the dreamer’s senses as a messenger inside his psyche. The constant shift between direct reporting and commentary also demonstrates wavering on Genius’ part about the extent of the imagination’s interpretative role. A concise example of both of these phenomena occurs in Genius’ description of the Fountain of Narcissus as first seen by the dreamer:

Ele sourt, ce dist il, a granz ondes
Par .ij. dois creuses et profondes:
Mais el n’a mie, bien le sai,
Ses dois ne ses eaues de sai;
N’est nule chose qu’ele tiengne
Qui trestout d’autrui ne viengne.

¹⁶³ Ibid., l. 20302: “What should I tell you?” (*The Romance of the Rose*, ed. Horgan, 312).

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., ll. 20303-20306: “Let us talk of the things he saw there, inside and out, but let us speak of them briefly, so that we do not grow too weary” (*The Romance of the Rose*, trans. Horgan, 312-13).

Puis si redist que c'est sanz fins
 Qu'ele est plus clere k'argenz fins.
 Vez de quels truffles il vous plaide!
 Ainz et voir si trouble et si laide
 Que chascuns qui sa teste i boute
 Pour soi mirer, il n'i voit goute.
 Tuit s'i forsenent et s'angoissent
 Pour ce que point ne s'i connoissent.
 Au fonz, ce dist, a cristaus doubles
 Que li solaus, qui n'est pas troubles,
 Fait luire quant ses rais i giete,
 Si clers que cil qui les aguiete
 Voit touz jours la moitié des choses
 Qui sont en cel jardin encloses,
 Et puet le remenant veoir
 S'il se veult d'autre part seoir,
 Tant sont cler, tant sont vertueus.
 Certes, ainz sont trouble et nueus!
 Pour coi ne font il demonstrance,
 Quant li solaus ses rais i lance,
 De toutes les choses ensamble?¹⁶⁵

In the first part of this passage, Genius inserts asides that draw attention to the fact that the main actor in this scene is the dreamer and that Genius is simply reiterating, correcting and summarizing what the dreamer has already seen. In the first line especially, the tag “ce dist il” interrupts Genius’ reporting about the gushing of the fountain so that the reader must pause over the recognition of the dreamer’s primary role in this sight. Yet Genius does not allow the description to continue for long without

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., ll. 20429-20455: “It gushes out, he tells us, in great waves through two deeply hollowed channels, but I know very well that neither the channels nor the water originate there: everything that it has comes to it from somewhere else. He goes on to say that it is infinitely brighter than pure silver. See what tales he is telling you! In fact, it is so ugly and muddy that anyone who hangs his head over in order to look at himself will be unable to see a thing. Everyone goes wild with anguish because he cannot recognize himself. At the bottom, he says, are two crystals of such power and radiance that when the rays of the unclouded sun fall upon them, they shine so brightly that anyone looking at them can always see half the things that are enclosed in the garden, and can see the remainder by stationing himself on the other side. But it is certain that they are cloudy and murky. Why, when the sun’s rays fall upon them, do they not reveal at once?” (*The Romance of the Rose*, trans. Horgan, 314-15).

inserting his own voice, sometimes in the jarring form of altering the syntax from declarative to exclamatory or interrogative and sometimes in the equally abrupt shift to a first-person pronoun. Genius again describes the dreamer's supposed evaluation of the stones at the bottom of the fountain as "plus clere k'argenz" with a verbal tag reminding the reader of the third-person presence here "puis se redist." Yet immediately after this, Genius' own voice bursts into the passage with the exclamatory "vez de quels truffles il vous plaide!" The use of the exclamatory voice as well as the direct appeal to "vous," Genius' audience, brings Genius back to a manner of speaking that occupies the first part of his sermon in which he directly exhorts his listeners to generative behavior. As Genius assumes the role of the recombinative imagination, his identity as generative priest, directly ordering his listeners to perform certain actions, continues to rise to the surface.

Genius signals his return to reporting the sights the dreamer has seen in the fountain with another version of the third-person tag, "ce dist": "Au fonz, ce dist, a cristaus doubles." As in the first line of this passage, the "ce dist" interrupts Genius' summary of what the dreamer actually saw, emphasizing the fact that the dreamer, another being, is the agent who in fact witnessed these phenomena. Genius makes a number of declarative statements about the brightness of the crystals, concluding that the crystals are so bright and pure ("tant sont cler, tant sont vertueus") that one can see the other half of the garden by peering at them. As with the passage discussed above, the ease of these declarative statements is abruptly interrupted by yet another exclamation closely followed by a question: "Certes, ainz sont trouble et nueus!/ Pour coi ne font il demonstrance,/ Quant li solaus ses rais i lance,/ De toutes les choses ensamble?" The word "certes" imposes a pause on the reading of this passage, and the juxtaposition of the

exclamation and question here removes the reader from the dreamer's description and recalls Genius' presence. "Certes" also signals Genius' role as commentator. This particular set of exclamation and question defines itself as a form of paratext beside the primary description of the scene seen by the lover.

Thus Genius equivocates about his role in the retelling of the Fountain scene, simultaneously inhabiting the functions of summarizer and commentator. By the end of this passage, Genius begins to speak as though he *is* the dreamer, fashioning himself the sole agent in the sight of the fountain and substituting first-person conjugations of "dire" for the previous third-person tag "ce dist." He enjoins his audience to pay attention to his (perhaps superior) description of the fountain:

Or levez un pou les oreilles,
Si m'en orrez dire merveilles.
Cele fontaine que j'ai dite,
Qui tan test bele et tant profite
Et garist, tant sont savorees,
Toutes bestes enlangorees,
Rent touz jors par .iij. dois soutives
Eaues douces, cleres et vives.¹⁶⁶

As at the beginning of his reiteration of the dreamer's view of the fountain and in the various interjections discussed above, Genius here appeals directly to his audience by using the imperative "levez." The word "or" followed by an injunction to listen normally signals the beginning of a speech, revealing a way in which Genius here starts afresh, this time using his own voice rather than reporting what the dreamer has supposedly seen. He refashions the dreamer's experience as his own by substituting "j'ai dite" for "ce dist,"

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., ll. 20467-20474: "Now prick up your ears, and you will hear me tell of wondrous things. The spring of which I have told you is extremely beautiful, and the water, sweet, clear, lively, and so delicious that it has great power to heal sick beasts, wells up continually through three skilfully constructed channels" (*The Romance of the Rose*, trans. Horgan, 315).

effectively removing consideration of the dreamer's primary experience of the fountain from view. Earlier iterations of the third person have now been erased in favor of repetition of the first person with "m'en orrez dire merveilles" and "que j'ai dite."

Kevin Brownlee has noted that Genius here "rewrites" and even corrects Guillaume's text in a turn of events that perhaps figures Jean de Meun's anxiety about the existence of his predecessor's writing.¹⁶⁷ It is certainly true that Genius necessarily rewrites the scene of the dreamer's encounter with Narcissus' fountain and that this must represent Jean's act of rewriting or writing over Guillaume's portion of the *Roman*. Yet Genius' actions here may be more equivocal than absolute rewriting. When he reverts to the first person and directly addresses his audience, Genius also reverts to his role as generation god and priest. These moments are intertwined with recapitulation of what the lover saw in the fountain, and they witness, with their accompanying insistence upon the presence of the third-person "il" with repetitions of "ce dist," Genius assuming the function of the recombinative imagination. Genius' entire recapitulation of the dreamer's view of the Fountain of Narcissus thus also encompasses the *process* of Genius' transformation from god and priest of generation to recombinative imagination. Along the way, troubling questions about the imagination arise, including whether the imagination can wholly alter a sight once seen in the process of recalling and recombining it, and whether imagination can offer commentary on visual stimuli in a way that similarly alters the experience of the senses.

Genius and the Image Crisis

¹⁶⁷ Brownlee, "Jean de Meun and the Limits of Romance," 120-1.

Genius as grand summarizer and recombinative imagination does more than reiterate the dreamer's vision of the Fountain of Narcissus. His transformative nature serves as its own kind of summary of the entire text's anxieties about transformation. Genius recombines the anxieties of both Guillaume's and Jean's portions of the text and represents not only the dreamer's imagination but also the text's imagination. Genius is, then, the true *engin* of the text. Genius thus encapsulates the text's own "image crisis."

In Guillaume's portion of the text, images that should be stable are described as though they have transformative capacities. The descriptions of painted images, conversely, posit past lives, processes of becoming and continuous existence in all verbal tenses and moods, immediately producing not one but multiple images of these figures. The descriptions of Vieillesse and Tristesse are particularly instructive on this point. The dreamer relates how "la pesance et li anuiz" which Tristesse "soffroit de jor et de nuiz,/ L'avoient faite mout jaunir/ Et maigre et pale devenir."¹⁶⁸ The notion that Tristesse carries around the weight of "anuiz" both day and night suggests her continuous existence. Similarly, the positing of a process of "devenir," of *becoming* rather than *being* "maigre et pale," renders necessary a concept of Tristesse as mobile within and progressing through time. The pluperfect in the description of Tristesse constructs a complexly layered history for this image, as the dreamer relates that "trop *avoit* son cuer *corrocie*"¹⁶⁹ and that "En maint leu *l'avoit* *dessiree* / Com cele qui mout iere iriee"¹⁷⁰ and

¹⁶⁸ *Le Roman de la rose*, ed. Strubel, ll. 299-302: "...the sadness and distress and troubled thoughts which she suffered night and day had made her turn quite yellow, thin, and pale" (*The Romance of the Rose*, trans. Horgan, 7).

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, l. 311, my emphasis: "her heart was exceedingly sad and her grief deep and intense" (*The Romance of the Rose*, trans. Horgan, 7).

how “Qu’ele *n’avoit pas este lante / D’esgratiner toute sa chiere.*”¹⁷¹ These pluperfects are embedded in imperfects and perfects, insinuating that Tristesse, although seemingly an immobile image, has a continuous, temporally layered past that has delivered her to this moment.

The description of Vieillesse likewise reveals the continuous existence of painted images across tenses and moods. In describing her appearance, the dreamer’s language is steeped in a description of what she once looked like: “Mout ere ja ses vis fletriz/ Qui fu jadis soef et pleins.”¹⁷² The word “jadis” refers to an imagination of her former appearance. Vieillesse is also infused with conditional and subjunctive force: “S’ele morist ne grant pechiez/ Car touz ses cors estoit sechiez/ De vieillece et anientiz.”¹⁷³ As the dreamer contemplates Vieillesse in a counterfactual situation – “s’ele morist ne grant pechiez” (“if she *were* to die, it *would not be* a shame”) – her existence now crosses into the realm of imaginary projection. The effect of these multiple temporal existences for both Vieillesse and Tristesse, to take only two examples, is to replace staid, discontinuous fragmentation with multiplicity, continuity and mutability. As Stephen Nichols observes, Guillaume’s ekphrasis “serves as a metacommentary showing the reader-viewer how to

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., ll. 317-318, my emphasis: “...no one, however hard-hearted, could have seen her without feeling great pity for her, for she struck and tore at herself and beat her hands together” (*The Romance of the Rose*, trans. Horgan, 7).

¹⁷¹ Ibid., ll. 314-315, my emphasis: “She had not been slow to scratch her own face” (*The Romance of the Rose*, trans. Horgan, 7).

¹⁷² Ibid., ll. 352-353: “Her face, once soft and smooth, was now quite withered and covered in wrinkles” (*The Romance of the Rose*, trans. Horgan, 7).

¹⁷³ Ibid., ll. 349-351: “If she had died, her death would not have been important or wrong, for her whole body was dried up and ruined by age” (*The Romance of the Rose*, trans. Horgan, 7).

enter the allegorical world of the narrative.”¹⁷⁴ Such textual pausing over commentary that both draws the reader into the text and results in contemplation specifically of transformation is reminiscent of the effect of the portion of Genius’ sermon in which he reiterates the events surrounding the dreamer’s view of the Fountain of Narcissus.

The Narcissus episode itself, which Genius recapitulates, is in its original formulation a reflection on transformation, mutability and the ability of images to multiply and change ceaselessly. This episode has been interpreted as an instance of bodily and psychic fragmentation and especially as an icon of stasis. As Thomas Hill has argued, Narcissus, “fixed” in his gazing position, encodes no ability for “change or growth.”¹⁷⁵ Jean-Charles Huchet, offering a Lacanian analysis, suggests that “the fact that the image is fractured serves as a reminder of the lack which is inherent in symbolic representation.”¹⁷⁶ Yet, although mirror reflections threaten to fragment the self, fragmentation here gives way to a process of generating other, endlessly proliferating images. Appropriately, then, the dreamer does *not* see himself right away when he looks into Narcissus’ fountain, even though he does begin from a notion of the fountain as reflecting a fragmented self-image. The dreamer relates how he perceives “ou mireor” a rose-hedge “entre mil choses,” referencing the innumerable, proliferating sights the mirror offers him.¹⁷⁷ Even more unusual, though, are the “.ij. pierres de cristal,” which he

¹⁷⁴ Stephen G. Nichols, “Ekphrasis, Iconoclasm, and Desire,” in *Rethinking the Romance of the Rose: Text, Image, Reception*, ed. Kevin Brownlee and Sylvia Huot (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), 150.

¹⁷⁵ Thomas D. Hill, “Narcissus, Pygmalion, and the Castration of Saturn: Two Mythographical Themes in the *Roman de la Rose*,” *Studies in Philology* 71 (1984), 413.

¹⁷⁶ Quoted in Kay, *The Romance of the Rose*, 82.

sees “ou fonz de la fontaine.”¹⁷⁸ The crystals themselves comprise an unstable image, as the dreamer describes their mutability according to the light the sun sheds on them: “Lors perent colors plus de .c./ Ou cristal qui par le soleil / Devient jaunes, ynde, vermeil.”¹⁷⁹ The concept of “devient,” becoming, with its recourse to transformation, invokes most readily the mutability of the very mirror itself and its own “multiplicity,” collecting and reflecting “plus de cent” colors.

The dreamer goes on to liken the work of the crystals to a mirror, relating that just as

...li mireors mostre
Les choses qui sont a l’ancontre
Et i veoit on sanz couverture
Et la color et la figure,
Trestout ausi vos di de voir...¹⁸⁰

So “le cristal” offers:

A ceaus qui dedanz l’eaue musent
Car touz jorz quel que part qu’il soient,
L’une moitie dou vergier voient
Et s’il se tornent maintenant,
Puent veoir le remenant.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁷ *Le Roman de la rose*, ed. Strubel, l. 1612.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, ll. 1534-1535.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, ll. 1543-1545: “...more than a hundred colours appear in the crystal, which turns blue and yellow and red in the sunlight” (*The Romance of the Rose*, trans. Horgan, 24).

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, ll. 1552-1557: “...things placed in front of a mirror are reflected in it, and their appearance and colour are seen quite plainly” (*The Romance of the Rose*, trans. Horgan, 24-5).

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, ll. 1559-1563: “...the crystal truly disclose[s] the whole of the garden to him who gazes into the water. For whichever side he is on, he can always see half of the garden, and by turning he is at once able to see the remainder” (*The Romance of the Rose*, trans. Horgan, 25).

The mirror is revelatory, bringing images out of the “couverture” of unseeing. However, this cannot be a moment of “enclosed” reflected vision because the “mirror” referenced here is already within another mirror (the fountain itself), suggesting proliferating layers of mirror images in the first place. Furthermore, the crystals do not produce a reflection of the gazer back to himself but create several images of the garden and reflect a multiplying wealth of images, as they “mostroient / .C. mile choses qui paroient.”¹⁸²

Looking into the fountain, about to confront what should be a self-fragmenting image, the dreamer instead sees these highly mutable reflective crystals, which also generate a multiplicity of images (“mile choses”). This episode suggests that fragmentation may generate imagistic proliferation – a primary act of imagistic fragmentation in the form of mirror-gazing, which separates the subject into constituent parts, immediately becomes an instance of a multiplicity of perpetually transforming images.

As is the case in the Pygmalion episode, the realization of the deceptive qualities of vision and the capacity of images to transform continuously produces an important and sudden change in affect. The viewer suddenly shifts from feelings of wonder and marvel to feelings of sheer terror. The dreamer interrupts his own narrative to exclaim his dismay at having been deceived by the images in the fountain:

Mes de fort eure me miré:
Las, tant en ai puis soupiré!
Cil mireors m’a deceü:
Se j’eusse avant queneü
Quel la force ere et sa vertu,
Ne m’i fusse ja embatu,
Car maintenant es laz chäi
Qui maint home a pris et traï.¹⁸³

¹⁸² Ibid., ll. 1602-1603.

The use of the word “mes” suggests an affective turn from enchantment and marvel to terror and fear. The exclamatory outburst beginning with the lamenting “las” forces a hesitation in the text after which the dreamer forces us to pause over his affective experience. The particular mention of the “force” and “vertu” of the crystal’s mirror reveals a concern over the power of images or image-making devices such as mirrors in general. This momentary lamentation bespeaks a pervasive concern in the *Roman* about the power of transforming images and explicitly connects this power to an affective response of fear and despair, signaled by the dreamer’s interjection of his plaintive “las.”

In Jean’s portion of the *Roman*, the Pygmalion episode offers a strikingly similar musing on the transformative capacities of images, a point of consistency between the two portions of the text. Pygmalion is almost a Genius figure in his entanglement with Nature and Venus and his despair over to whom to be most loyal. His despairing about his relationship to Nature and to Venus recalls the way in which Genius repeatedly transfers allegiances between Nature and Venus. As Pygmalion creates his image, he laments being at odds with Nature:

Ez vous qu’il ne s’en donne garde,
 K’amours en ses roisiaus le lace
 Si fort qu’il ne set que il face.
 A soi meïsmes s’en complaint,
 Mais ne pot estanchier son plaint:
 ‘Las, que faz je, dist il, dor gié
 Maint ymage ai fait et forgié
 C’on ne savoit prisier leur pris,
 N’ainc d’euls amer ne fui seurpris!...
 Que puis je faire en cest article?
 Par foi, s’une roynne amasse,

¹⁸³ Ibid., ll. 1604-1611: “But it was an evil hour when I looked at my reflection. Alas, how often I have since sighed about it! The mirror deceived me, and if I had known in advance what force and power it had, I would never have approached it, for at once I feel into the trap that has captured and betrayed many men” (*The Romance of the Rose*, trans. Horgan, 25).

Merci toutevois esperasse
Pour ce que c'est chose possible.
Mais ceste amour est si orrible
Qu'el ne vient mie de nature.
Trop mauvairement me nature:
Nature en moi mauvais fill a;
Quant me fist forment s'avilla.¹⁸⁴

Pygmalion's entanglement with the God of Love is immediately apparent in this passage, as he becomes entrapped in her web ("lace") with excessive strength ("si fort"). The entanglement with Love leads Pygmalion into despair, with a traditional lament beginning with the exclamatory "las," mimicking the Latin "helas." Intriguingly, Pygmalion comes to the realization that he must be in conflict with Nature, recognizing that this "unnatural" love could not have been perpetuated by nature herself ("ne vient mie de nature") and that he has treated Nature poorly ("trop mauvairement me nature"). He has transformed into a terrible child of Nature ("mauvais fill"). The battle between Love and Nature is reminiscent of Genius' position, constantly shifting alliances between Venus and Nature.

If Pygmalion is a quasi-Genius figure, his statue underpins concerns about imagistic transformation that come to the fore in Genius' own perpetually mutating

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., ll. 20840-20870: "Love bound him so tightly in his nets that he did not know what he was doing. He uttered his grief to himself, but could not stifle his complaint: 'Alas!' he said, 'What am I doing? Am I asleep? I have made and forged many images whose worth was beyond price, and I have never been overcome with love for any of them... What can I do in this situation? By my faith, if I loved a queen, I could at least hope for mercy because it would be a possibility, but this love is so horrible that it cannot be Nature's work. I am at odds with Nature, who has a bad son in me and who disgraced herself in making me. And yet I ought not to blame her for my insensate love; I have only myself to blame" (*The Romance of the Rose*, trans. Horgan, 321).

identity. Pygmalion's first reaction upon realizing that his statue has come to life is not only shock but also fear:

Lors voit qu'ele est vive et charnue,
Si li debaille la char nue
Et voit les biaux crins blondoianz
Commes ondes ensamble ondoianz,
Et sent les os et sent les vaines
Qui de sanc erent toutes plaines,
Et le pouls debatre et mouvoir.
Ne set se c'est mençonge ou voir,
Arriers se trait, n'en set que faire
Ne s'ose mais pres de lui traire
Qu'il a paour d'estre enchantez.
'Qu'est ce, dist il, sui je tantez?
Veille je pas? Nanil! ainz songe!
Songe? Par foi, non faz, ainz veille!
Dont vient donques ceste merveille?
Est ce fantosme ou anemis
Qui s'est en mon ymage mis?'¹⁸⁵

Although Pygmalion's realization that his statue's materials have transformed into live flesh ("vive et charnue") seems initially to invoke an elated response, it is essential not to ignore the feelings of terror and skepticism that follow closely thereafter. The concern over the truth or falsity of his vision not only recalls Nature's and Genius' discourses on the deceptions of optics but also resonates with the first few lines of Guillaume's portion of the poem in which "songe" is famously rhymed with "mençonge." The connection with the early parts of Guillaume's portion of the text is made more apparent in

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., ll. 21137-21154: "He saw she was living flesh; he caressed the naked flesh, he saw the lovely bond locks shining and rippling together like the waves, he felt the bones and the veins all full of blood, and the throbbing movement of the pulse. He did not know whether it was false or true, and drew back, unsure of what to do. He dared not approach more closely, for he was afraid of being bewitched. 'What is this?' he said, 'Am I being tempted? Am I awake? No, I am dreaming. But I have never had so realistic a dream. Dream? By my faith, I am not dreaming but awake. So where has this marvel come from? Is it a phantom or a demon that has possessed my image?'" (*The Romance of the Rose*, trans. Horgan, 325-6).

Pygmalion's questioning of whether or not he is in fact dreaming, with the word "songe" repeated several times and appearing prominently at the beginning of line 21150.

The most significant turn in Pygmalion's reaction to the liveliness of his statue appears at line 21145 when he actually retreats in fear: "arriers se trait." The use of the word "arriers" provides a visual image of Pygmalion recoiling from the statue. The element of fear arises explicitly two lines later when it is explained that Pygmalion retreats because he is afraid ("a paour") of being bewitched ("d'estre enchantez"). Pygmalion is specifically troubled by his lack of knowledge about the force behind this transformation, urgently wondering about from where this change originates: "Dont vient donques ceste merveille?" He finally entertains the notion that his statue has been possessed: "Est ce fantosme ou anemis/ Qui s'est en mon ymage mis." The use of the word "fantosme" in addition to "anemis," a more traditional sense of "demon" or "devil," suggests the entry of the idea of the imagination, broadly conceived, into this scene of the statue's enlivening. Although "fantosme" may most simply mean a delusion or phantom such as a ghost-like figure, the root of the word is also related to the work of the *fantasia*, a close companion of the imagination. The line thus has a double sense, contemplating both the possibility that the image itself has been invaded by a demon and also the possibility that Pygmalion's *fantasia* or imagination has itself been infested with misleading phantasms. Terror associated with the imagination has its roots in thirteenth-century Aristotelian examples of monstrosities associated with the imaginative act of dreaming. The dreaming imagination has the capacity to recombine images once seen in nature to produce terrifying monstrous hybrids. The Pygmalion episode compounds this inherent monstrosity of the imagination by introducing the frightening notion that the

desirable and the monstrous are actually closely linked. Critics have long puzzled over the foray into the Pygmalion story in the context of the lover's conquest of the rose at the end of the *Roman*.¹⁸⁶ As it stands, it appears digressive and tangential. Yet the Pygmalion episode reflects the text's concerns about imagistic animation and transformation and the possible deceptions of sight, anxieties that Genius, whose speech directly precedes the Pygmalion episode, represents.

In her analysis of Jean's Genius, Eberle argues that he differs from Alan's Genius because rather than being the personification of "man's innate tutelary spirit, reason," he is the embodiment of man's "inherent concupiscence." She notes that Jean's Genius is thus a "false priest," while Alan's is a "true one."¹⁸⁷ Yet such an argument simply strips Genius of identities he may have occupied in *De planctu* without properly taking into account the new positions he assumes in the *Roman*. Without deliberating on whether Genius is a wholly ironic figure, it is possible to detect in Jean's Genius a transformative figure suspended in the process of mutating from a twelfth-century god of generation to a personification of the recombinative imagination. In addition to presenting himself as a grand summarizer (if not occasional distorter) of the sights the dreamer has seen, he emerges as a form of *engin* for the text as a whole, concisely embodying both authors'

¹⁸⁶ See Robert Pogue Harrison, "The Bare Essential: The Landscape of *Il Fiore*," in *Rethinking the Romance of the Rose: Text, Image, Reception*, ed. Sylvia Huot and Kevin Brownlee (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), 293. See also Lewis, *The Allegory of Love*, p. 139. For "digression" as a major principle of the *Rose*, see Douglas Kelly, *Internal*

Difference and Meanings in the Roman de la rose (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), 124.

¹⁸⁷ Eberle, "The Lover's Glass," 286.

concerns about images' transformative capacities. This type of transformation, as seen with the Pygmalion episode, has the capacity to produce terror.

While thirteenth-century philosophy about the imagination was moving forward toward a more purely Aristotelian outlook, Jean's Genius demonstrates a moment in which the literary imagination lags behind and moves only reluctantly forward. Once again, as in Alan's *De planctu*, narrative style and literary language allow for a depiction of the allegorical imagination as thoroughly divided between an older concept of imagination as a god of generation and a more modern development of imagination as recombinative. The devices that Jean employs to communicate literature's lag behind philosophy are themselves literary, including narrative devices such as extensive detail about a character's process of changing clothing. The ability to experiment with character and literary description allows for a much richer exploration of imagination's reluctance to change in literature, while philosophical texts are necessarily more straightforward about this move toward Aristotelian recombination.

Genius' identification as a transformative figure both puts pressure on the idea of the allegorical figure as a unified, stable unit and, in an unexpected twist, helps to unify the two portions of the *Roman* by encapsulating the concern with imagistic mutation central to both of them. Although Genius' sermon, especially his transfiguration of the lover's initial sight of the Fountain in Guillaume's portion of the text, is normally viewed as a rejection of Guillaume's text, a form of ridicule that devalues and discredits its predecessor, a deeper consideration of the allegorical representation of Genius helps draw the two portions of the text together rather than drive them apart. If the Fountain of Narcissus itself embodies the concept of fragmentation, then Genius, who reiterates this

primary scene of fragmentation, comes to represent a form of unity. At the same time, Genius' figuration as a character constantly suspended in the process of transformation denotes a form of instability that runs counter to the unification that this allegorical figure seems to perform. Yet even if Genius is caught somewhere between priest of generation and recombinative imagination, he does come to embody the *text's* "recombinative imagination" by representing a succinct summary of its defining characteristic as a series of transformations. The image crisis represented by Jean's Genius becomes a yet more prominent feature of Imagination's identity in Chaucer's *House of Fame*, as Chaucer questions whether imagination creates images of substance at all. A transformative and uncertain imagination thus evolves into one in the midst of an ontological crisis in this fourteenth-century text.

Chapter 3

The Embodiment Crisis and the Irrational Imagination: The Dreamer as Image and Imagination in *The House of Fame*

Jean de Meun left us with a constantly transforming imagination that becomes a locus for concerns over the transformative capacities of images themselves. If Jean de Meun's Genius represents imagination's uncertain allegorization, Chaucer takes this uncertainty one step further in *The House of Fame*, jettisoning imagination into the midst of an ontological crisis and questioning its ability to produce images.

Debates over optical illusions in fourteenth-century England produced a series of serious ontological questions about the imagination. What is it and how does it function? What is the mechanism by which it causes us to see objects that are not really present? Does it create real images with weight and material presence or does it make a subjective judgment that is transferred to the intellect with no intermediary? Although Chaucer's fourteenth-century milieu was perhaps just as saturated with optical theory as Jean de Meun's thirteenth-century Paris, much of the scholarship thus far on later medieval

optical theory has been produced by historians of science and by intellectual historians rather than by literary scholars.¹⁸⁸ Some of these studies, such as David Lindberg's, have discredited much of the optical theory produced in the fourteenth century, claiming incorrectly that no new advances in the field of optics occurred between Roger Bacon and Johannes Kepler.¹⁸⁹ These claims have made it somewhat difficult for literary scholars interested in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries to ponder how optical theory and theories about vision and cognition might have related to the literary production of this period and to literary and non-literary theories of imagination. In scholarship on English literature, this phenomenon seems particularly strange, since the dream vision genre flourished in the fourteenth century. Most of the scholarship on this topic, however, centers on dream-theory rather than on vision-theory and optics.¹⁹⁰

Vision-theory and optics are of immediate relevance to studies of the imagination in the fourteenth century, because, as optical theory and theories of vision developed in

¹⁸⁸ David C. Lindberg, *Theories of Vision from Al-Kindi to Kepler* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976); Pasnau, *Theories of Cognition*; Katherine Tachau, *Vision and Certitude in the Age of Ockham: Optics, Epistemology and the Foundations of Semantics, 1250-1345* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1988); G.R. Evans, *Getting it Wrong: The Medieval Epistemology of Error* (Leiden: Brill, 1998).

¹⁸⁹ Lindberg, *Theories of Vision*, 122: "By the close of the thirteenth century the intromission theory was firmly established, and in the Baconian synthesis we find many of the principles on which Kepler would later build his theory of the retinal image—the punctiform analysis of the visible object, the requirement of a one-to-one correspondence between points in the visual field and points in the eye, a stress on mathematical analysis, and a relatively advanced understanding of the propagation of light and its refraction in transparent substances. But in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries we find little or no additional progress."

¹⁹⁰ See Lynch, *The High Medieval Dream Vision*; Kathryn L. Lynch, *Chaucer's Philosophical Visions* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2000); A.C. Spearing, *Medieval Dream-Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976); Steven F. Kruger, *Dreaming in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

France and England, the mechanism of the imagination became of urgent interest to many philosophers.¹⁹¹ A debate that arose asked the questions: do the imagination and the images it produces have real, material substance or are they simply “illusions”? What is the precise mechanism by which these illusions may be seen?¹⁹² At the same time, optical theory contemporary with Chaucer, and mainly deriving from Alhazen, involved a firm recognition that the process of seeing involves the imaginative faculty directly.¹⁹³ This idea that the imagination is involved in initial sense perception is also reflected in *The House of Fame*.

This chapter will argue that questions about imagination and the images it produces posed by fourteenth-century optical theory are also posed by Geoffrey’s body throughout *The House of Fame*. The uncertainty about the substance of Geoffrey’s body reflects contemporary debates about the materiality of the imagination’s imagistic products. Geoffrey’s body thus becomes a locus for debate about the imagination itself. Geoffrey also represents imagination in his activities in relation to images throughout the poem, acting always as an intermediary between sense perception and understanding. Geoffrey enacts the process of movement from perception to intellectual understanding.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹¹ See Kruger, *Dreaming in the Middle Ages*, 130, for the idea that science in the fourteenth century pushed writers and philosophers toward examining the mechanism of everything. See Linda Tarte Holley, *Reason and Imagination in Chaucer, the Perle-Poet, and the Cloud-Author: Seeing from the Center* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011), 1, for the ways in which the sciences furnished interest in the imagination in the fourteenth century. See Tachau, *Vision and Certitude*, 99-100, for the centrality of imagination in perspectivist optics.

¹⁹² Tachau, *Vision and Certitude*, 92.

¹⁹³ Peter Brown, *Chaucer and the Making of Optical Space* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2007), 53-4.

¹⁹⁴ See Holley, *Reason and Imagination*, pp. 61-63, for this definition of imagination in relation to Chaucer. See also Kruger, *Dreaming in the Middle Ages*, 131, for a definition of the “middleness of imagination” and Suzanne Conklin Akbari, *Seeing through the Veil: Optical Theory and Medieval Allegory* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 41-2. See Kathryn L. Lynch,

In a sense, then, Geoffrey becomes a personification of imagination in this text. He enacts the processes by which imagination functions and also embodies the question about whether imagination's products have weight and material substance.

This text witnesses imagination in the midst of a crisis of embodiment, as Chaucer's philosophical milieu questioned the very substance of imagination's imagistic productions. Geoffrey represents both the images produced by the imagination and the imagination itself. He is thus a locus for consideration of a major debate about the materiality of images produced by the imagination. On a larger scale, the text itself can be seen as an exploration of the space between vision and understanding, the very realm of the imagination.

Chaucer's knowledge of contemporary philosophy is a highly contentious issue in Chaucer scholarship, but there is reason to believe that he knew something about Ockham and also, as will be shown below, something about the optical debates of his time. Kathryn Lynch is particularly devoted to the idea of a "philosophical Chaucer," contending that Chaucer had "direct" and "sustained" knowledge of philosophy, even if he does not maintain a "consistent set of positions," and even if he approaches philosophy satirically and with "comic distance."¹⁹⁵ Furthermore, for Lynch, resistance to Chaucer's philosophical side might be a bias of traditional Chaucer scholarship, which views fourteenth-century scholasticism as "dry" and "desiccated" and Chaucer as a

"The Logic of the Dream Vision in Chaucer's *House of Fame*," in *Literary Nominalism and the Theory of Rereading Late medieval Texts: A New Research Paradigm*, ed. Richard J. Utz (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1995), 200, for a definition of dream vision as a genre that typically enacts a dialogue between reason and imagination, usually with reason prevailing.

¹⁹⁵ Kathryn L. Lynch, *Chaucer's Philosophical Visions* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2000), 14-16.

literary genius, a “proto-humanist” of sorts.¹⁹⁶ Sheila Delaney identifies the impact of nominalist philosophy on Chaucer’s creation of *The House of Fame*, and Ann Astell suggests that Chaucer had a tier of “bookish readers with an education, income, and interests similar to Chaucer’s own” and that *The House of Fame* displays Chaucer’s desire to be a “philosopher-poet.”¹⁹⁷ Suzanne Akbari has noted that the eagle’s example of sound waves as akin to circles emanating from a stone thrown in a pond is taken from John Pecham’s widely used text on optics, in which he examines the specific role of the intermediary in vision.¹⁹⁸

There is thus a small, though growing, critical consensus that deems Chaucer worthy of a philosophical title, one that would indicate his sustained engagement with contemporary philosophical and scientific questions. Discussions about optical theory were, moreover, widespread in the fourteenth century, with perspectivist theories finding their way into sermons and preaching manuals.¹⁹⁹ As optics and perspectivist theories exploded in fourteenth-century England, their consequences were significant for all philosophers, since optics had the ability to shed light on the nature of material reality

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 6.

¹⁹⁷ Sheila Delany, *Chaucer’s House of Fame and the Poetics of Skeptical Fideism*; Ann W. Astell, *Chaucer and the Universe of Learning* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 3, 18-19. For another view of Chaucer’s engagement with contemporary philosophy, and especially psychology, see Lois Roney, *Chaucer’s Knight’s Tale and Theories of Scholastic Psychology* (Tampa: University of South Florida Press, 1990). See also Laurence Eldredge, “Chaucer’s House of Fame and the Via Moderna,” *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 71(1970): 105-119.

¹⁹⁸ Akbari, *Seeing through the Veil*, 206-7.

¹⁹⁹ Dallas G. Denery II, *Seeing and Being Seen in the Later Medieval World: Optics, Theology and Religious Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 6-7.

and cognition.²⁰⁰ A number of scholars have, furthermore, established Chaucer's engagement with optics in particular in his literary work.²⁰¹

This chapter will first explore the optical and imaginative theories of Peter Aureol and Adam de Wodeham, with reference to William of Ockham and William Crathorn, as key representatives of the debate about imagination's material output in the fourteenth century. Then I will show how Geoffrey's body represents the uncertainty of the materiality of images produced by the imagination in *The House of Fame*, as well as how Geoffrey's actions in relation to images renders him an embodiment of the faculty. The embodiment of imagination presented by Geoffrey not only dramatizes a troubling debate about the ability of imagination to create material objects but it also poses pointed questions about the ability of imagination to incorporate judgment and reason into its initial processing of images. Is imagination a true intermediary between sense perception and understanding? How well does it incorporate reason and understanding into its processing and representation of images previously seen? These questions are most poignantly posed in the interaction between Geoffrey and the eagle, who represents reason. This version of the imagination "personified" is subject to irrational behavior that must

²⁰⁰ Cynthia Hahn, "Visio Dei: Changes in Medieval Visuality," in *Visuality Before and Beyond the Renaissance: Seeing as Others Saw*, ed. Robert S. Nelson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 174-5.

²⁰¹ See, for example, Carolyn Collette, "Seeing and Believing in the 'Franklin's Tale,'" *The Chaucer Review* 26 (1992): 395-410; Joseph E. Grennen, "The Calculating Reeve and his Camera Obscura," *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 14 (1984): 245-257; Linda T. Holley, "Medieval Optics and the Framed Narrative in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*," *Chaucer*

Review: A Journal of Medieval Studies and Literary Criticism 21 (1986): 26-44; Miriam Moore, "Troilus's Mirror: Vision and Desire in *Troilus and Criseyde*," *Medieval Perspectives* 14 (1999): 152-165; Susan Yager, "'A Whit Thyng in Hir Ye': Perception and Error in the *Reeve's Tale*," *The Chaucer Review* 28 (1994): 393-404.

be repeatedly corrected by the embodiment of reason in the form of the eagle, in a struggle that remains unresolved at the end of the poem. This struggle at times produces terror, suggesting that imagination may be subject to fear when it disobeys reason and that imagination tends naturally toward irrationality. If in the *Roman de la Rose*, Nature conflicted with Reason, by Chaucer's *House of Fame*, it is the imagination that struggles to remain within the confines of reason, always tending toward the irrational. At the same time, the ontological crisis of the fourteenth-century imagination in some ways segues into its internal fragmentation in the fifteenth century.

Peter Aureol's "Esse Apparens" and Oxford Views on Imagination

In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, a number of philosophers, including John Duns Scotus, Peter Olivi, and William of Ockham, theorized about an intermediary between vision (sense perception) and knowledge (intellect).²⁰² This intermediary space is, of course, the realm of imagination.²⁰³ Many philosophers posited the possibility of a *species in medio*, a mediator between sensation and intellection, and a controversial conversation arose about whether this "species in medio" had real weight or not. Is the species something sensed in the world or is it entirely without material reality?²⁰⁴ Michael Camille has argued that theorists of vision posited theories of the transmission of the species from the object viewed to the internal senses that seemed to result in an "increasing dematerialization" of the visual process. I would argue instead that the

²⁰² Tachau, *Vision and Certitude*, 87-8.

²⁰³ See William A. Quinn, "Chaucer's Recital Presence in the *House of Fame* and the Embodiment of Authority," *The Chaucer Review* 43:2 (2008), 172.

²⁰⁴ Tachau, *Vision and Certitude*, 88.

question of the materiality of the internal senses, and especially of the imagination, was still one of great uncertainty in the fourteenth century, an uncertainty which Chaucer seems to relish in *The House of Fame*.²⁰⁵

Wondering about optical illusions, such as a stick bent in water or a mirror image, fourteenth-century philosophers wanted to know the mechanism by which a human being can see something that is not really there. This, they knew, was the realm of the imagination, since it is the imagination that can conjure images of objects once seen in nature but now physically absent, and it is the imagination that can produce new images out of recombinations of images once truly existing. Oxford theorists such as Adam de Wodeham (1298-1358) argued that optical illusions were the direct result of the workings of the imagination. In the process of questioning the mechanism by which it is possible to see something not actually there, fourteenth-century philosophers in both England and France debated about whether the imagination in these cases produced a real object with material substance, or simply endowed the intellect with a subjective image. In early fourteenth-century France, the philosopher Peter Aureol (1280-1322) took up this question, positing the existence of an “*esse apparens*,” an entity created by the imagination that affects the eye just as a real object in nature does. Aureol’s successors frequently react to his idea of the *esse apparens* as though it is a certain statement of the imagination’s ability to produce material images. In reality, Aureol wavers about whether imagination may produce material substances.

²⁰⁵ Michael Camille, “Before the Gaze: The Internal Senses and Late Medieval Practices of Seeing,” in *Visuality Before and Beyond the Renaissance*, ed. Robert S. Nelson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 204.

William of Ockham (1288-1348) and William Crathorn (fl. 1330s), among many others in England, quickly disputed the idea of the *esse apparens*, claiming the existence only of a subjective image sent from the imagination to the intellect. Aureol's theory came under similarly harsh criticism in fourteenth-century Oxford. One of the most prominent of these Oxfordians, Adam de Wodeham, argued that the imagination could produce no discernible material object and flatly denied the existence of the "esse apparens." The debate that ensued thus came to ask one essential question: can imagination's output be seen as a material object, sensed by the individual as any real object in nature would be?

Aureol's term *esse apparens* was synonymous with many other terms which appear abundantly in his work, including an 'intentional being' (*esse intentionale*), 'objective being' (*obiectivum*), or a being that is 'conspicuous' (*conspicuum*), 'fictitious' (*fictivum*), 'seen' (*visum*), 'judged' (*iudicatum*), or 'intuited' (*intuitum*).²⁰⁶ The *esse apparens* is best defined as a mediating figure, somewhere between the truth of the object as it really appears (*in veritate rei*) and the subject's perception of it, fueled by the imagination. The example of the optical illusion created by the mirror figures prominently in Aureol's positing of this term.²⁰⁷ First, he argues alongside Alhazen, whom he calls the "Perspectivist," that mirror images "cannot be species which have *really*, or in fourteenth-century terms, subjectively (*subjective*) penetrated the mirror to become a real part of it."²⁰⁸ Aureol goes on to state without doubt that the imagination

²⁰⁶ Tachau, *Vision and Certitude*, 90.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 92.

produces an *esse apparens* as part of its functioning.²⁰⁹ Since with imagination there is no “extramental” object that produces an image, a mental image as a substitute must be formed. This “mental image” is the *esse apparens*, here called “intentional being,” a term Aureol uses interchangeably with *esse apparens*. Aureol wavers on whether the *esse apparens*, the mental image produced by the imagination, has the weight and substance of a real object, just as he is undecided about whether optical illusions truly impress a real image on the eye. He leaves the question in the hands of his predecessor, Durand of St. Pourcain (d. 1334), a Dominican philosopher, who argued that the “*esse intentionale*,” which Aureol develops into the *esse apparens*, may be “*contra esse reale*,” or that it may “*habet esse debile*.” In other words, it may exist outside of reality or may have real weight and substance but weight and substance that is simply “weaker” than the weight and substance of a real object in nature impressed upon the eye.

William of Ockham, a figure most likely known to Chaucer,²¹⁰ was the first to attack Aureol’s concept of the *esse apparens*. Ockham insisted that the positing of such a being was superfluous, since no intervening object is created by the imagination in cases of optical illusions and mirror-gazing.²¹¹ Ockham uses the example of the mirror, also used by Aureol, to demonstrate that the *esse apparens* is unnecessary:

Sed ad hoc nihil imaginabile requiritur nisi res quae intelligitur et
speculum et ceterae res existentes realiter et ipsum iudicium existens
subiective in anima quod nec intentionaliter nec realiter est infra

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 99.

²¹⁰ See William H. Watts and Richard J. Utz, “Chaucer’s Poetry: A Bibliographical Essay,” *Medievalia et Humanistica* 20 (1993): 147-73 and Helen Ruth Andretta, *Chaucer’s Troilus and Criseyde: A Poet’s Response to Ockhamism* (New York: Lang, 1997).

²¹¹ Tachau, *Vision and Certitude*, 137.

speculum. Et isto modo si sensus haberet iudicium distinctum a sensatione, posset sine medio iudicare rem esse in speculo, nihil causando nec intentionaliter nec realiter nisi illud iudicium.²¹²

Ockham argues that the judgment existing subjectively in the soul (“ipsum iudicium existens subiective in anima”) of the mirror image is all that is needed for the intellect to process it. No intervening object formed by the imagination is necessary. The judgment may occur without any mediator (“sine medio”). All that exists in this case is the judgment itself (“nisi illud iudicium”). For Ockham, no formulation of an object in space, viewed by the individual as a real object in nature and impressed upon the eye as such, is required to process optical illusions such as a mirror reflection. Ockham’s rejection of the mediator, the “intelligible species,” stirred a significant amount of debate in fourteenth-century England.²¹³

In the 1330s in Oxford, another figure, William Crathorn, sided with William of Ockham against Peter Aureol’s *esse apparens*.²¹⁴ Crathorn agrees with Ockham that the way in which a memorialized image once seen in nature but now absent can be seen again by an impression made upon the imagination that is intuitively viewed by the soul, without any creation of an intermediary material image by the imagination. Crathorn explains how this “generated cognition” (“notitia genita”) occurs:

²¹² Ibid., 145: “Nothing imaginable is required except the thing which is intellectually known....the mirror, and other really existing things; and the judgment itself, which is neither intentionally nor really behind the mirror, but subjectively existing in the soul. And in this way, if the sense should have a judgment distinct from sensation, it could—without any mediation—judge that the thing is in the mirror, without causing anything, either intentional or real, other than that judgment.”

²¹³ William J. Courtenay, “Reception of Ockham’s Thought in Fourteenth-Century England,” in *From Ockham to Wyclif*, ed. Anne Hudson and Michael Wilks (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), 93.

²¹⁴ Tachau, *Vision and Certitude*, 258.

Dico igitur quod notitia genita vel verbum mentale differt realiter a specie conservata in memoria; est enim una qualitas genita a specie conservata in memoria simillima sibi. Quantum mihi videtur imprimitur medie cellule, ubi impressa intuitive videtur ab anima cogitantis.²¹⁵

The middle cell (“medie cellule”) is the imagination, on which the image generated by the memory of something once seen in nature is impressed. The imagination creates nothing at this point but instead the soul sees this image intuitively (“intuitive”) and hence intellectual cognition of the image occurs.

In fourteenth-century Oxford, Adam de Wodeham was responsible both for introducing a much more detailed account of Aureol’s optical theory to England than the English had been exposed to before and for introducing a detailed and studied critique of the concept of the *esse apparens*. As Tachau has pointed out, the accuracy and detail with which Wodeham presents Aureol’s claims in his *Lectura secunda* indicate a much keener awareness of Aureol’s texts than other contemporary or slightly older Oxford optical theorists.²¹⁶ Thus Wodeham’s readings and transmission of Aureol’s work are reliable and generally not filtered through contemporary Oxford philosophers such as Chatton, who discuss Aureol but in far less detail. Wodeham dwells on Aureol’s *esse apparens*, recognizing all of Aureol’s synonyms for the term.²¹⁷ Wodeham presents a skeptical view of the *esse apparens*, claiming that it is unnecessary as a concept to explain the perception of absent or non-existent objects or images. He is, furthermore, skeptical of

²¹⁵ Ibid., 261: “Thus I say that the generated cognition or mental word really differs from the species conserved in memory; for it is an essential quality generated from the species in memory most similar to itself. Which seems to me to be imprinted on the middle cell, whence the impressed thing is seen intuitively by the mind of the person thinking.”

²¹⁶ Ibid., 287-8.

²¹⁷ Ibid., 296.

the existence of an entity which basically functions as an intramental mediator cloaking direct cognition of an extramental reality, and he questions whether it is possible for such an illusion, or “apparent being,” to be fully indistinguishable from the extramental object it supposedly represents.²¹⁸

Wodeham instead believes that there is no mediation of any “apparent being” but that the imagined sight may directly become an abstract universal. This abstract universal gains new properties and new intuition and immediately presents itself to an intuitive form of cognition that does not depend upon an illusionistic perception of something absent:

Est igitur secunda conclusio quod per notitiam abstractivam propriam immediate sequentem notitiam intuitivam, obiectum talis actus non causat aliquod esse diminutum vel apparens quod mediat inter cognitionem et cognitum.²¹⁹

This “notitiam intuitivam” renders the claim that the “obiectum talis actus” must be “diminutum vel apparens quod mediat inter cognitionem et cognitum” unnecessary. In other words, Wodeham seems particularly averse to two claims about the *esse apparens*: the notion that it is possible to “see” directly something which is actually absent or non-existent; and the need to posit a mediating factor between the thing perceived and the perceiver in such situations, for this is the function of intuitive cognition and the perception of abstract universals.

²¹⁸ Ibid., 297.

²¹⁹ Adam de Wodeham, *Lectura secunda in librum primum Sententiarum*, ed. Rega Wood (St. Bonaventure, NY: St. Bonaventure University, 1990), Prol. quaest. 4, concl. 2 (96): “So it is my second conclusion that through its own new abstraction immediately following a new intuition, the object of this act does not cause anything to be diminished or appearing that mediates between the person thinking and the object thought.” All further quotations of this text will be taken from this edition.

As Wodeham points out, imagination is caused in any case by an initial sensory perception (“est motus factus a sensu”) and it functions in order to remain in the place of an object now absent (“nata est manere in absentia obiecti”). Wodeham then continues to apply this view of the imaginative faculty’s role in sensory perception of an absent object to the perception of a non-existent object, like the image of oneself in the mirror:

*Aliter forte posset dici secundum istam viam quae ponit speciem videri in speculo, quod species ibi derelicta in organo repraesentat ita magnitudinem et distantiam et non tantum rem talem, sicut imago in speculo. Et ideo visa species ita apparet res videri, sicut visa specie in speculo apparet quod una facies videatur. Sed istam viam non teneo nec nego modo, quia assumptum in argumento de magnitudine et distantia non multum concordat experientiae meae, etsi sic esset. Prima via est mihi probabilior.*²²⁰

The “prima via” which to Wodeham (“mihi”) seems more probable (“probabilior”) is that the force of a strong imagination creates the subjective image of a non-existent thing, such as an image in a mirror, rather than that the perceiver sees something with material existence. For Wodeham, the imagination produces no material substance, even if it is a “weaker” form of real materials, but an image that remains in the mind and produces nothing with weight or substance.

Although we cannot know for certain whether Chaucer knew Aureol and Wodeham directly, it is relatively well-established that he was familiar with Ockham’s writing, and Ockham, as we have seen, was active in this optical debate, embedding

²²⁰ Ibid., Prol. quaest. 4, concl. 2 (96): “Otherwise it could be said according to this way of thinking that there is placed a species appearing in the mirror, which species there left behind in the organ thus represents the magnitude and distance and not so much the thing itself, thus [we see] an image in the mirror. And thus with the species being visible a thing seems to appear, such that a visible species appears in the mirror which seems like a face. But I do not maintain this way of thinking nor do I merely deny it, because what is taken up in the argument about magnitude and distance does not concord well with my experience, if it is thus. The first way of thinking seems more probable to me.”

much of Aureol's arguments about the *esse apparens* into his own work.²²¹ Moreover, there is some evidence that Chaucer knew something specific about the *esse apparens* debate between Aureol and Wodeham. Optics in general exploded as a topic of intellectual fascination in fourteenth-century England, as *perspectiva*, which encompassed the psychology of perception as well as the transmission of light and the physiology of the eye, was assimilated into the broader scientific and intellectual milieu.²²² There is general evidence that Chaucer developed a familiarity with optical writings of various sorts. His *Treatise on the Astrolabe* bespeaks an engagement with Latin science, and *perspectiva* may have reached him through encyclopedic and homiletic literature, with which he was certainly familiar.²²³

It is also possible to trace some similar concerns about optics and imagination in Chaucer's work and in Aureol's and Wodeham's philosophical debates. In particular, Chaucer uses examples of mirror-gazing that seem to reflect upon similar examples used by Aureol and Wodeham to ponder the *esse apparens*. A direct expression of the fact that mirrors produce no actual "impression" in one of Chaucer's early poems, "Against Women Unconstant," provides some proof that Chaucer may have known something about Wodeham, his response to Aureol, and general debates about mirror gazing and its

²²¹ See especially Richard Utz, ed., *Literary Nominalism and the Theory of Rereading Late Medieval Texts: A New Research Paradigm* (Lewiston: E. Mellen Press, 1995). See also Helen Ruth Andretta, *Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde: A Poet's Response to Ockhamism* (New York: Peter Lang, 1997). And see Edward E. Foster, *Understanding Chaucer's Intellectual and Interpretative World: Nominalist Fiction* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1999).

²²² Brown, *Chaucer and the Making of Optical Space*, 69-70.

²²³ *Ibid.*, 112, 120-2.

relationship to the perception of non-existent objects. In this poem, Chaucer compares the lack of impression produced by the mirror with the inconstancy of a woman:

Madame, for your newefangelnesse,
Many a servaunt have ye put out of grace,
I take my leve of your unstedfastnesse,
For wel I wot, whyl ye have lyves space,
Ye can not love ful half yeer in a place;
To newe thing your lust is ay so kene;
In stede of blew, thus may ye were al grene.
Right as a mirour nothing may impresse,
But, lightly as it cometh, so mot it pace,
So fareth your love, your werkes beren witsse.²²⁴

The very expression of the opinion that “a mirour nothing may impresse” is a paramount claim, even though it might be buried in a larger metaphor about female fickleness.

The idea that vision is caused by an impression upon the eye was well-established by Ockham, who proposed that first the object impresses upon the eye something that soothes or irritates; then it impresses upon the eye a likeness of itself; and finally this impression is the cause of the phenomenon of seeing.²²⁵ For sight to occur, there needs to be some form of impression upon the eye. Although Aureol never claimed that seeing one’s image in the mirror is the result of an image impressed upon the eye, his positing of the *esse apparens*, and the manner in which the mirror gazer believes to see his reflection by means of the visual faculty, necessitates the inclusion of such a possibility. Wodeham attacks this opinion, arguing that the claim for such an impression of a non-existent object upon the eye unnecessarily excludes the possibility of the functioning of the imagination in such cases:

²²⁴ Geoffrey Chaucer, “Against Women Unconstant,” in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1987), ll. 1-10. All further quotations of Chaucer will be taken from the *Riverside Chaucer*.

²²⁵ Lindberg, *Theories of Vision from Al-Kindi to Kepler*, 141-142.

Dicendum est quod illud non est verum secundum primam
responsionem, quia ‘unus alius videns illud sensibile impressum
isti’ non haberet imaginationem vehementem obiecti principalis.²²⁶

He furthermore rejects the claim that looking “in speculo” produces the sense that “sicut
si illa species imprimeretur oculo meo proprio.”²²⁷ Wodeham’s major objection is that
there is not any illusion that an actual impression occurs, since the imaginative faculty
produces the mirror image, and the imaginative faculty cannot create material images.
The language is laden with terms about impression (“impressi,” “impressum,”
“imprimetur”), so that when Chaucer introduces the term “imprese” within the specific
topic of mirror gazing, the connection of his writing to this contemporary philosophical
debate seems increasingly likely.

Several other examples of “imaginary” or “conjectured” mirror images strengthen
this point about Chaucer’s suspicious mirror discourse and the manner in which it relates
to contemporary conjectures about the non-existence of the mirror image. The “mirror”
of the imaginary marketplace in *The Merchant’s Tale* is particularly apt here. The
introduction of this particular image is associated with Januarie’s suspicions and “heigh
fantasye” about his wife’s faithfulness:

Heigh fantasye and curious bisynesse
Fro day to day gan in the soule impresse
Of Januarie aboute his mariage.
Many fair shap and many a fair visage
Ther passeth thurgh his herte nyght by nyght.
As whoso tooke a mirour polished bryght,
And sette it in a commune market-place,
Thanne sholde he se ful many a figure pace
By his mirour; and in the same wyse
Gan Januarie inwith his thoght devyse

²²⁶ Wodeham, *Lectura secunda*, prol. quaest. 3 (77-78).

²²⁷ *Ibid.*

Of maydens whiche that dwelten hym bisyde.
He wiste nat wher that he myghte abyde.²²⁸

Here, the introduction of the mirror is explicitly associated with non-reality, related to Januarie's "heigh fantasye and curious bisynesse" about his marriage. The conjectured, but not actual, image of the mirror "polisshed bryght" and "sette...in a commune market-place" relates to the manner in which Januarie "Gan...inwith his thoght devyse." As Akbari notes, Januarie's "heigh fantasye" denotes his imaginative faculty, and the "commune market-place" may be a reference to his *sensus communis*, which is responsible for passing the sensible species to the imagination.²²⁹ The mirror, then, is explicitly connected here with the manner in which the imaginative faculty absorbs and represents the visual data from the *sensus communis*. Furthermore, the entire mirror-sequence in this case is imaginary, since Januarie does not really set up a mirror in a market-place nor does anyone represented look into this conjectured mirror. Thus this representation of mirror gazing is highly reminiscent of Wodeham's argument that the perception of any mirror image is dependent upon the imaginative faculty. Mirror gazing here is conjectural and provisional; it does not represent the process of actually seeing one's own image in a mirror, but suggests instead that the functioning of the imagination produces no substantial image. Here, Chaucer's associations of the mirror with the non-sight of one's image and with the imaginative faculty recall Wodeham's arguments against Peter Aureol's *esse apparens*.

The philosophical milieu in which Chaucer writes *The House of Fame* and with which he actively engages throughout his career is, then, one of intense questioning of the

²²⁸ Chaucer, *The Merchant's Tale*, ll. 1578-1587.

²²⁹ Akbari, *Seeing Through the Veil*, 224-5.

imagination and the mechanisms of its functioning. An influx of optical theory produced questioning about optical illusions that necessarily implicated the imagination because of its role in sensing objects that are not truly there. Imagination's capacity for falsehood in these cases was certainly feared, but these philosophers were primarily interested in mechanical questions about how this sort of sensation occurs. The thrust of the debate became essentially a question about embodiment, on the one hand proposing that the imagination produced physical objects to be interpreted by the individual just as he or she would sense real objects in nature, and on the other hand positing the existence only of a subjective judgment sent from the imagination directly to the intellect. This focus on the question of mediation had consequences for theories of imagination more generally, since the imagination may be viewed as the ultimate mediator, always relaying information between the senses and the intellect.

Geffrey's Uncertain Weight and the Dreamer as Imagination

In *The House of Fame*, Chaucer displays an extensive engagement with the imaginative debate in contemporary Oxford by formulating the dreamer Geffrey as an encapsulation of the question of whether imagination's products have substance and weight. Throughout his dream, Geffrey's body wavers between having substance and material weight and being weightless, thus aligning him with contemporary debates about the substance of imaginative production. At the same time, when Geffrey approaches images, he processes them using both sense perception and prior knowledge or memory, resulting in an enactment of the imagination, which exists between vision and understanding. In a similar manner, his dream is an actualization in imagistic form of

texts and images already seen or read, once again enacting the work of the imagination. In this way, the dreamer himself may be viewed as an embodiment both of the imagination and of its imagistic productions.

Discussions of uncertain embodiment in *The House of Fame* have proposed that such ambiguous corporeality represents the concept of poetry as existing in a realm between “body” and “intellect,” between the abstraction of the idea and the “particularity of the embodied.”²³⁰ Yet suggestions that this ambiguous corporeality may represent the ambiguous corporeality of objects produced by the imagination have not been posited. Unlike the introduction to the dream in the *Roman de la Rose*, the introduction to the dream in *The House of Fame* does not account for the dreamer’s body. The dreamer is suddenly transported from his bed to the “temple ymad of glass” without any mention of the state of his body as this transition occurs:

But as I slepte, me mette I was
Withyn a temple ymad of glas,
In which ther were moo ymages
Of gold, stondyng in sondry stages...²³¹

Immediately before this, he relates that he had a “wonderful drem” on “the tenthe day now of Decembre” and that he will “tellen everydel” as much as he can “remember.”²³² Yet this introduction leads immediately into the depths of sleep with no mention of the dreamer’s position in bed, his falling asleep, his getting out of bed, his travel to this “temple,” or any other form of bodily engagement. Susanna Fein has gestured toward this

²³⁰ See Stephen F. Kruger, “Imagination and the Complex Movement of Chaucer’s *House of Fame*,” *Chaucer Review* 28 (1993), 117-18; see also Sheila Delaney, *Chaucer’s House of Fame: The Poetics of Skeptical Fideism* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1972), 44.

²³¹ Chaucer, *The House of Fame*, I. 119-127.

²³² *Ibid.*, I.62-65.

sense of bodily crisis in the travel to the temple of glass, suggesting that, although the proem, with its extensive cataloguing of dream-theory, casts aside the notion of “actual travel” in dreams, Geoffrey’s dream posits that he *has* traveled somewhere specific.²³³ *How* he gets there is left unexplained, and invokes questions of whether his body exists and how it might move in the dream.

Yet for a poem that leaves such a lacuna at the primary moment of the onset of the dream, the remainder of the dream-vision is quite concerned with the condition of the dreamer’s body. The question of the presence of a body for the dreamer becomes more complex when he recounts how an eagle took hold of him and carried him off to Fame’s house:

And with hys grymme pawes stronge,
Withyn hys sharpe nayles longe,
Me, fleynge, in a swap he hente,
And with hys sours ayen up wente,
Me carynge in his clawes starke
As lyghtly as I were a larke...²³⁴

There is some equivocation about whether or not the dreamer has bodily weight here. It is possible that the line “As lyghtly as I were a larke” refers to the dreamer’s bodily lightness but it may also refer to the “light” manner in which the eagle grips and bears the dreamer. The eagle has a potent bodily presence which contrasts with the dreamer’s lightness or even disembodiment – the dreamer mentions the eagle’s “grymme pawes stronge,” his “sharpe nayles longe” and his “clawes starke.” In the context of such vivid corporeality, the dreamer seems to lack bodily presence. There is no mention of

²³³ Susanna Fein, “Other Thought-Worlds,” in *A Companion to Chaucer*, ed. Peter Brown (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 2000), 333.

²³⁴ Chaucer, *The House of Fame*, II. 541-553.

component body parts, no suggestion of the eagle gripping the dreamer's flesh, or even the detail of by what body part the eagle grasps him. At this moment, it seems likely that the dreamer has no body, no fleshly, corporeal substance.

Despite the appearance of the dreamer's disembodiment in this passage, another moment of flight with the eagle suggests the opposite, when the eagle comments that the dreamer is "noyous for to carrye."²³⁵ At this moment, the dreamer *must* exist in some palpable, bodily form, despite the equivocations of previous passages.²³⁶ Has the dreamer suddenly become embodied or has he been embodied all along? Where was his bodily weight in previous passages? In light of this equivocation, it becomes problematic to know how to read the dreamer's accounts of his physical exertions in the dream. He relates how he sees the "hous and site"²³⁷ "That stood upon so hygh a roche,/ Hier stant ther non in Spayne"²³⁸ and relates how he struggled to "clomb with alle payne,/ And though to clymbe it greved me,/ Yit I entetyf was to see."²³⁹ Bodily presence seems a certainty here, as the dreamer laments his own weight and the body which he is obliged to carry along with him as he ascends the rock to the "hous." Yet this is still the same dreamer whose body was carried as "lyghtly" as if he were a "larke." This uncertainty provokes a question about corporeality: is bodily presence so tenuous that the body can have weight in one moment and be insubstantial in the next?

²³⁵ Ibid., II. 574.

²³⁶ See Kruger, "Imagination and the Movement of Chaucer's *House of Fame*," 125-6, who notes that at times the dreamer is "firmly attached to his body."

²³⁷ Chaucer, *The House of Fame*, III. 1115.

²³⁸ Ibid., III. 1117-1118.

²³⁹ Ibid., III. 1118-1120.

Perhaps most significant is Geoffrey's comic repetition of Paul's question in II Corinthians 12: "Thoo gan y wexen in a were,/ And seyde, 'Y wot wel y am here,/ But wher in body or in gost/ I not, ywys, but God, thou wost.'"²⁴⁰ Significantly, this pondering is immediately followed by the Eagle's exclamation: "'Lat be,' quod he, 'thy fantasye!/ Wilt thou lere of sterres aught?'"²⁴¹ "Fantasy" signifies the imagination here.²⁴² The text makes an explicit connection between confusion about bodily weight and the working of the imagination, engendering a broad association between thoughts about materiality and the workings of "fantasye." This association brings Geoffrey's uncertain weight in yet closer alignment with philosophical questions about the materiality of imagination's products.

Questions about the tenuousness of bodily presence are thus not unrelated to anxieties about the tenuousness of material presence in both imagistic products of the imagination and in images more generally. This equation makes sense in terms of Augustine's concept of images as somewhere between "corporeal" and "intellectual," between "that which is truly a body and that which is neither a body nor like a body."²⁴³ The dreamer's first encounter with images in the "temple ymad of glas" provides the most concise point of entrance for observing the ambiguity about the materiality of images in this dream. The dreamer's recounting of these narrative images in the temple

²⁴⁰ Ibid., II.979-982.

²⁴¹ Ibid., II.992-993.

²⁴² See Delaney on phantom and fantasy, *Chaucer's House of Fame*, 58-68 and "'Phantom' and the House of Fame," 69. See also William Quinn, "Chaucer's Recital Presence," 172 and Piero Boitani, *Chaucer and the Imaginary World of Fame* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1984), 181.

²⁴³ See Kruger, *Dreaming in the Middle Ages*, 117.

alternates between statements which assert “There saugh I grave” and “There saugh I.” This alternation is consistent throughout descriptions of images in the temple of glass, but one example in particular, in which a “saugh I” is literally caught between two “there saugh I grave” formulations, is particularly telling. First, the dreamer relates “Thoo sawgh I grave how to Itayle/ Daun Eneas is goo to sayle,”²⁴⁴ then “And also sawgh I how Sybile and Eneas”²⁴⁵ and finally a return to the “graven”: “Tho saugh I grave al the aryvayle/ That Eneas had in Itayle.”²⁴⁶ “Graven” emphasizes the objectification of these images, referring specifically to the act of carving, engraving, or incising.²⁴⁷ Perceiving their “gravenness,” the dreamer pays considerable attention to their *material* condition, as images carved in wood. The implicit question in this case is one of how essential the “graven” aspect of these images is. How present (and continuously present) are their materials?

Just as the dreamer seems at moments to have considerable weight (and therefore to be *in corpora*) and at other moments to be weightless (and thus to be *ex corpora*), the images he sees at moments are ostentatiously “graven” (and therefore ostentatiously “material” or “embodied”) and at other times not “engraved” (and therefore immaterial or “disembodied”). The same form of ambiguity seems inherent in considerations of the “embodiment” of both the dreamer and the images he describes.²⁴⁸ Furthermore, this kind

²⁴⁴ Chaucer, *The House of Fame*, I. 433-434.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, I. 439.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, I. 451-452.

²⁴⁷ *MED*, s.v. graven.

of questioning of the embodiment of the dreamer and its explicit alignment with the images of which he takes inventory aligns the dreamer's body with contemporary debates over the materiality of imagination's products, which are indeed images. Geoffrey's body represents the entirety of this debate about the imagination, at once thought to produce images with no weight and to produce material substances. In this sense, Geoffrey's body becomes a locus for reflecting upon a current debate about imagination; the dreamer himself becomes an enactment of this very imagination. In the process, it can be said that Geoffrey, the dreamer in the poem, is a form of imagination personified.

Geoffrey's association with the imagination is strengthened by the way in which he interacts with and describes the images seen in the dream. Several moments in the text associate Geoffrey with the traditional functioning of the imagination as a mediator between initial sense perception and understanding. Geoffrey's approach to images in the Temple of Venus is a perpetual negotiation between initial sight and understanding that suggests constant use of the imagination.²⁴⁹ If Geoffrey's *modus operandi* is one of mediation between sight and understanding, then he can be said to be enacting the work of the imagination. For example, upon first entering the temple, Geoffrey describes what he sees:

In which ther were moo ymages
Of gold, stondynge in sondry stages,
And moo ryche tabernacles,
And with perre moo pynacles,
And moo curiouse portreytures,

²⁴⁸ See Lynch, "The Logic of the Dream Vision," 186-7 and 202 for a discussion of the central epistemological and ontological crises of this text.

²⁴⁹ For an iconoclastic reading of the Temple of Venus, see B.J. Koonce, *Chaucer and the Tradition of Fame: Symbolism in the House of Fame* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), 100-1.

And queynte maner of figures
Of olde werk, then I saugh ever.
For certeynly, I nyste never
Wher that I was, but wele wyste I
Hyt was of Venus redely,
The temple; for in portreyture
I sawgh anoon-ryght hir figure
Naked fletyng in a see,
And also on hir hed, pardee,
Hir rose garlond whit and red,
And hir comb to kembe hyr hed,
Hir dowves, and daun Cupido
Hir blynde sone, and Vulcano
That in his face was ful broun.²⁵⁰

Geffrey begins by simply describing what he sees: “ymages of gold...stondyng in sondry stages” and “ryche tabernacles...with perre moo pynacles” and “curiouse portreytures” and “queynte maner of figures of olde werk.” Yet after this initial reporting of objects seen, Geffrey goes on to identify what these images represent and to combine understanding with initial sight in his description of Venus. Geffrey describes seeing (“I sawgh anoon-ryght”) a “Naked fletyng” image with a “rose garlond whit and red” on her head. While describing this initial sight, Geffrey simultaneously conjures the workings of memory and understanding to identify this as an image of Venus and subsequently to identify “daun Cupido” and “Vulcano/That in his face was ful broun.” What begins as a confused barrage of sight becomes organized according to an understanding that this place is Venus’ temple. This processing of images in the interstices of the sense of sight and the understanding and reason is precisely the realm of the imagination. Geffrey here not only enacts the mediating function of the imagination but also exists in a text that presents itself as embodying the milieu of the imagination, between sight and understanding.

²⁵⁰ Chaucer, *The House of Fame*, I.121-139.

The imaging of the story of Dido and Aeneas also puts Geoffrey in the position of enacting imaginative function.²⁵¹ Geoffrey begins simply by describing the sights of the story of Dido and Aeneas, with alternating “saugh I” and “sawgh I graven.” The repetition of “saugh I” places emphasis on the visual component of this experience. Although Geoffrey begins by suggesting a form of the first few lines of the *Aeneid* text written on a “table of bras,” he quickly reverts to a purely visual description. He describes how he “sawgh” the “destruction/Of Troye thurgh the Grek Synon”²⁵² and the literal image of “how Venus,/Whan that she sawgh the castle brende,/Doun fro the heven gan descende.”²⁵³ In describing Juno’s vengeful storm, Geoffrey notes “Ther saugh I such tempeste aryse/That every herte myght agryse/To see hyt peynted on the wal.”²⁵⁴ If there was any doubt before about whether Geoffrey views a written version or a pictorial version of the *Aeneid*, he here draws attention to the thoroughly visual nature of this experience. He proceeds with the entire story of Book IV in a good amount of detail, dwelling particularly over Dido’s story. He describes how Dido “gan to wringe hir hondes two”

²⁵¹ This is a much commented-upon portion of the poem. Charles P.R. Tisdale reads it as a moment of association between Geoffrey and Aeneas as wanderers, seeking “recognition and discovery” (See Charles P.R. Tisdale, “Virgilian Reason and Boethian Wisdom,” *Comparative Literature* 25:3 (1973), 261). Geoffrey, like Aeneas, is caught in a moment of “conflict between ephemeral desire and transcendent duty” (254). Ann Astell views this engagement with the *Aeneid* as an invitation for Chaucer to join the ranks of the “philosopher-poet[s]” whose classical works were interpreted in the medieval period as “allegories veiling philosophical truth” (See Astell, *Chaucer and the Universe of Learning*, 18-19). Kathryn Lynch interprets the exploration of Dido’s story versus Aeneas’ as a logical exercise, a *sic et non* of competing truths (Lynch, “The Logic of the Dream Vision,” 190).

²⁵² Chaucer, *The House of Fame*, I. 152.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, I.162-164.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, I. 209-211.

when she senses the stirrings of love upon meeting Aeneas. Particularly detailed and visually rich is the description of Dido's death:

And when she wiste sothly he
Was forth unto his shippes goon,
She into hir chambre wente anoon,
And called on hir suster Anne,
And gan hir to compleyne thanne,
And seyde that she cause was
That she first loved him, allas,
And thus counseyllled hir thertoo.
But what! When this was seyde and doo,
She rof hirselve to the herte
And deyde thorgh the wounde smerte.²⁵⁵

Geffrey pauses over this visual representation of Dido's death, detailing the way in which she enters her room and calls Anna to her before stabbing herself and dying of a "wounde smerte." This section of the poem pauses over the process of visual perception, engaging in rich descriptions of the portraiture in Venus' temple and repeating the tag "saugh I" and "sawgh I graven" to emphasize the primary moment of vision.

By the end of this passage, and significantly just after pausing over the visual representation of Dido's death, Geffrey reveals his prior knowledge and memory of what he has just seen:

Whoso to knowe hit hath purpose,
Rede Virgile in Eneydos
Or the Epistle of Ovyde,
What that she wrot or that she dyde;
And nere hyt to long to endyte,
Be God, I wolde hyt here write.²⁵⁶

After his description of these primary visual stimuli, Geffrey conjures up memory to indicate his prior knowledge of these images from the reading of "Virgile in Eneydos"

²⁵⁵ Ibid., I.364-374.

²⁵⁶ Ibid., I.377-382.

and “the Epistle of Ovyde.” He even notes that the story is “to long to endyte,” otherwise he “wolde hyt here write,” acknowledging a process by which he would retrieve images from memory, a functioning of the imagination. Just as in his initial encounter with the Temple of Venus, Geoffrey here approaches images with a combination of perception and understanding. He begins with pure sight, describing everything he sees, then moves to apply memory and understanding to these visions. This intermediary role is, once again, the work of the imagination, which Geoffrey himself enacts.

Geoffrey’s representation of the imagination as an insecurely weighted body reveals Chaucer’s engagement with debates over imagination’s production. Geoffrey’s insecure weight is a proxy for imagination’s embodiment crisis, as his body becomes a locus for fierce questioning of the imagination’s power to create real objects. At the same time, it suggests the centrality of the imagination to the imagistic richness of the dream vision, since it is the imagination’s functioning that allows the dreamer to make sense of images seen in the dream. Geoffrey’s enactment of imagination’s functioning in this dream vision allows imagination the power to make judgments, insofar as images are interpreted not only in a space between sight and understanding but also by using the powers of both vision and knowledge simultaneously. This ability of imagination to participate in judgment was shunned by Aristotle but forms an important part of Reginald Pecock’s fifteenth-century theory of imagination: it was a common question asked by philosophers of faculty psychology about the functional capabilities of the imagination.²⁵⁷

²⁵⁷ See Reginald Pecock, *The Donet*, ed. Elsie Vaughan Hithcock (New York: Kraus Reprint, 1971), 10, for a description of the imagination that allows it the capacity to judge characteristics of a sight: “And also he iugith and deemeth bitwix tho thinges, whiche thingis noon oon outward witt may knowe, and therefore noo oon outward witt may iuge and deeme bitwix hem: as ben whitnes and swetenes, he mai not discrive and juge the diuersite bitwix hem. And sithen touche

Imagination, Reason, and Terror

If Geoffrey represents both imagination and its imagistic products in *The House of Fame*, then his companion and guide, the eagle, represents reason. As Linda Holley has suggested, Geoffrey has “a fine display of the rational method” on the way to Fame’s house. The eagle provides a model, albeit flawed, of scientific and logical reasoning.²⁵⁸ B.G. Koonce, among others, has posited that Chaucer’s eagle has close affinities with and may be meant to signify Virgil’s Mercury, who in turn signifies reason.²⁵⁹ The eagle’s affinity with reason is solidified by Chaucer’s allusion to Boethius’ flight and the “feathers” of philosophy at the height of the ascent to Fame’s house.²⁶⁰

Yet the appearance of the eagle is not a simple appeal to the dreamer’s reasoning faculties. The eagle instead represents a conflict between imagination and reason. Geoffrey’s interaction with reason is actually a crisis moment for the imagination, with the imagination suspended between proliferating phantasms and allying with reason to promote understanding. This crisis produces a sense of urgency and terror, as imagination

mai not knowe and perceyue to gider bothe hardnes and sourenes, He mai not discryue and iuge the diuersite bitwix hardnes and sourenes.” In the *De anima*, Aristotle assigns this kind of judging and understanding capacity to the intellect. See Aristotle, *De Anima (On the Soul)*, trans. Hugh Lawson-Tancred (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1986), 201.

²⁵⁸ Holley, *Reason and Imagination*, 61.

²⁵⁹ Koonce, *Chaucer and the Tradition of Fame*, 121; see Lynch, “The Logic of the Dream Vision,” p. 180, for a tripartite division of *The House of Fame* according to different faculties of the mind. Lynch suggests that Book I is an appeal to the dreamer’s imagination, Book II an attempt to awaken his reason, and Book III a stimulation of memory. See also Spearing, *Medieval Dream-Poetry*, p. 76, for the connection between Dante’s eagle in *Purgatorio* IX and Chaucer’s eagle and the contention that the medieval eagle represents contemplation and thought. For Chaucer’s eagle as a Dantean figure, associated with the intellect, see John M. Steadman, “The House of Fame: Tripartite Structure and Occasion,” *Connotations: A Journal for Critical Debate* 3.1 (1993/94), 3.

²⁶⁰ Koonce, *Chaucer and the Tradition of Fame*, 134.

becomes equally as likely to behave either as an arbiter of false images or as a reliable intermediary between sense and intellect. The dynamic between imagination and reason reveals that in the absence of reason's guidance, the imagination has the capacity to produce terrifying and misleading phantoms, unchecked by understanding, knowledge, and rationality.

Just before Geoffrey is scooped up by the eagle, he experiences a moment of profound fear. First he recognizes that he has no knowledge of where he is. Overwhelmed by visual sensations, he has no corresponding knowledge or reason to interpret them:

'A, Lord,' thoughte I, 'that madest us,
Yet sawgh I never such noblesse
Of yimages, ne such richesse,
As I saugh graven in this chirche;
But not wot I whoo did hem wirche,
Ne where I am, ne in what contree,
But now wol I goo out and see,
Ryght at the wiket, yf y kan
See owhere any stiryng man
That may me telle where I am.'²⁶¹

Geoffrey dwells on the visual wonders of Venus' temple, declaring "Yet sawgh I never such noblesse/ Of yimages," again emphasizing the craft of these images by specifying that he "saugh" them "graven" in the "chirche." Yet his dismay and discomfort as a result of this rich visual stimulation is immediately palpable. Geoffrey expresses discomfort about his lack of knowledge about these images, unaware of "where I am" and "in what contree" and "whoo did hem wirche." The pure stimulation of images in the absence of knowledge about them produces a form of discomfort and urgency, conveyed by the quick succession of "ne" and "but," producing an alarming focus on what is *not* known. If Geoffrey is the imagination, then we can see how imagination without reason and

²⁶¹ Chaucer, *The House of Fame*, I.470-479.

knowledge confronts numerous visual stimuli with no ability to process them. As an intermediary between sense perception and understanding, imagination seeks knowledge after being exposed to visual stimuli. Chaucer's Geoffrey dramatizes this process.

The desire to know more about this primarily visual experience prompts Geoffrey to "go out and see." Yet this exit from Venus' temple results in a moment of profound fear. Flailing in the interstices between visual stimulation and reason, imagination loses its way:

Whan I out at the dores cam,
I faste aboute me beheld.
Then sawgh I but a large feld,
As fer as that I myghte see,
Withouten toun, or hous, or tree,
Or bush, or grass, or eryd lond;
For al the feld nas but of sond
As small as man may se yet lye
In the desert of Lybye.
Ne no maner creature
That ys yformed be Nature
Ne sawgh I, me to rede or wisse.²⁶²

As Sheila Delaney notes, the desert is unusual in medieval dream vision, in which the "traditional locus" is usually a "luxuriant garden or wood."²⁶³ Here instead a desolate landscape confronts Geoffrey, who can see nothing "but a large feld" that seems to extend endlessly, "as fer as that I myghte see." The lack of the usual dream-vision luxuriant garden locus is emphasized by the fact that the desert lacks "tree," "bush," "grass" or "eryd lond." The comment that there is "no maner creature/ That ys yformed be Nature" in the desert may either mean that the land is completely desolate or that Geoffrey sees

²⁶² Ibid., I.480-491.

²⁶³ Delaney, *Chaucer's House of Fame*, 58.

indescribable, unusual figures, of the sort created by the imagination but not existing in nature.

This second interpretation makes sense in terms of Geoffrey's sheer terror in the next few lines, as he exclaims: "'O Crist,' thoughte I, 'that art in blysse,'/Fro fantome and illusion/Me save!' And with devocion/Myn eyen to the hevne I caste."²⁶⁴ "Fantome" here has most commonly been interpreted as referring to Macrobius' dream-type *phantasma*, but the word has clear associations with a particular form of imaginative functioning.²⁶⁵ For Aristotle, "phantom" was part of imaginative functioning, an image serving as an intermediary between perception and understanding. Stoic philosophers created a separation between "fantom" and "fantasy," with "fantasy" representing the imagination's storage and recapitulation of images once seen in nature and "phantom" as a faculty producing optical illusions and visual delusions, usually in the space of dreams.²⁶⁶ By the time Chaucer writes, "fantome" has developed its own set of meanings, including "that which deludes the senses or imagination; illusion (as of dream or hallucination)."²⁶⁷ Thus "fantome" maintains an interesting relationship to the imagination, both as a type of its functioning and also as something that abuses it. Here, Geoffrey, a form of imagination, fears being taken over by a darker form of the

²⁶⁴ Chaucer, *The House of Fame*, I.491-494.

²⁶⁵ See Quinn, "Chaucer's Recital Presence," 172; James Winny, *Chaucer's Dream-Poems* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1973), 85; and Boitani, *Chaucer and the Imaginary World of Fame*, 181, for a definition of "fantome" according to Macrobius. Brown, *Chaucer and the Making of Optical Space*, 172, suggests that "fantome and illusion" refers to "error and hallucination," of the sort feared by optical theorists contemporary with Chaucer. See Delaney, *Chaucer's House of Fame*, 61, on the other hand, for the connection between "phantom" and "phantasy" or imagination.

²⁶⁶ Delaney, *Chaucer's House of Fame*, 60-1.

²⁶⁷ *MED*, s.v. fantom.

imagination, an “illusion” or “delusion” in the form of phantoms that typically harass the imagination. Chaucer thus suggests that an imagination overloaded with strange sensory images without the intervention of reason and understanding may be overcome by terrifying phantoms and illusions that lead the functioning of the imagination, and thus of the mind, astray. The fragility of the imagination is enacted with particular urgency and depth here.

No sooner does Geoffrey face this fear of phantoms than the eagle comes soaring down to protect him. Just as he casts his eyes toward heaven, he sees the eagle flying toward him:

Thoo was I war, lo, at the laste,
That faste be the sonne, as hye
As kenne myghte I with myn yë,
Me thoughte I sawgh an egle sore,
But that hit semed moche more
Then I had any egle seyn.
But this as sooth as deth, certeyn,
Hyt was of gold, and shon so bryghte
That never sawe men such a syghte,
But yf the heven had ywonne
Al newe of gold another sonne;
So shone the egles fethers bryghte,
And somewhat downward gan hyt lyghte.²⁶⁸

The eagle appears as a saving grace in a moment of distress for Geoffrey, the imagination suspended between phantoms and an understanding of images provided by reason. At this moment, the imagination is provided with a guide figure, a figure regular to the dream-vision genre, who lifts him up and carries him away from the threats of illusion and phantom. Without reason, the imagination, it seems, tends toward deception and frightening delusions.

²⁶⁸ Chaucer, *The House of Fame*, I.495-508.

In Book II, the eagle becomes yet more identifiably a representation of reason, repeatedly enacting its function. When Geoffrey questions Fame's ability to know all, the eagle quickly disputes with the help of reason:

'...For hyt
Were impossible, to my wit,
Though that fame had alle the pies
In al a realme, and alle the spies,
How that yet she shulde here al this,
Or they espie hyt.' 'O yis, yis!'
Quod he to me, 'that kan I preve
Be reson worthy for to leve,
So that thou yeve thyn advertence
To understonde my sentence.'²⁶⁹

As Geoffrey doubts the eagle's words, the eagle reiterates that he will enact the work of reason to prove himself right ("that kan I preve/ Be reson worthy for to leve"). By contrast, Geoffrey's disbelief of the eagle's line of argument casts him in an irrational light. The image of the eagle struggling to carry a heavy Geoffrey thus takes on a slightly different meaning. No longer is it simply a joke on Chaucer's possible portliness but it is a more serious recognition of the difficulty the imagination faces in obeying reason. When the eagle exclaims that Geoffrey is "noyous for to carrye," he in part recognizes imagination's tendency toward the irrational, resisting the firm grip of reason. Geoffrey is inclined to fall back toward the earth and to land right back in the desert from which the eagle saved him in the first place, prone to frightening delusions and phantasms. The dialogue between Geoffrey and the eagle exhibits this tension between imagination and reason, as Geoffrey is inclined to disbelieve the eagle's supposedly reasonable claims and the eagle retorts with more, and more urgent, appeals to reason.

²⁶⁹ Ibid., II.701-710.

At times, the eagle even reprimands Geoffrey for becoming too embroiled in “fantasy.” As Geoffrey contemplates the weight of his body, recognizing that “wher in body or in gost/ I not,” the eagle struggles to bring him back to the discourse of reason, exclaiming “ ‘Lat be,’ quod he, ‘thy fantasye!/ Wilt thou lere of sterres aught?’”²⁷⁰ In addition to bridging the gap between contemplation of material substance and the imagination, as discussed above, the eagle’s outburst indicates reason’s dismay at the imagination’s natural inclinations. Geoffrey, as the imagination, yields perpetually to “fantasye” that is devoid of the work of reason, and the eagle’s exasperation is another attempt to ally the imagination with reason. Learning of the “sterres” represents a reasonable discourse, something to be proven by logic and observation, and a movement away from the distracting meanderings of the imagination.

Yet the eagle, as reason, ultimately fails to set Geoffrey on the right path. Reason is not well-incorporated into the imagination in this text, and the suggestion remains that reason may be outside the confines of the dream. One of the first commands the eagle gives the dreamer is that he “Awak,” at which point Geoffrey claims that “My mynde came to me ageyn,/For hyt was goodly seyde to me...” Yet by the end of Book II, there is no sense that Geoffrey has learned how to incorporate reason into the workings of the imagination. Rather, Geoffrey continues to challenge the eagle until the eagle simply disappears, like Virgil at the end of *Purgatorio*. Geoffrey is left with “wonder,” not understanding, upon the eagle’s departure, as the eagle explains the mechanism by which voices from the House of Fame are heard:

Whan any speche ycomen ys
Up to the paleys, anon-ryght

²⁷⁰ Ibid., II.991-992.

Hyt wexeth lyk the same wight
Which that the word in erthe spak,
Be hyt clothed red or blak;
And hath so verray hys lyknesse
That spake the word, that thou wilt gesse
That it the same body be,
Man or woman, he or she.
And ys not this a wonder thyng?²⁷¹

The eagle still speaks from a position of reason, attempting to explain rationally the way in which the voices of the House of Fame are heard. Yet, in describing the inhabitants of the House, the eagle essentially describes the products of imagination, the “lyknesse” of people who once lived on earth and “spake the word.” The viewer’s imagination is stimulated by these figures, being left to “gesse/That it the same body be,” recalling the sight of the actual person, now merely a “lyknesse.” This description of imaginative work leaves the eagle, in a sense, speechless. He is unable to explain this phenomenon any further except to ask, “And ys not this a wonder thyng?” It is at this moment, a moment that perhaps represents the failure of reason in the face of the imagination, that the eagle abruptly departs: “And with this word, ‘Farewel,’ quod he...”²⁷² The relationship between reason and imagination, in the form of the eagle and Geoffrey, remains unresolved. Imagination continues to tend toward the irrational, and reason has not succeeded in implanting its way of thought into imagination’s functioning. Instead, it might be said that reason is at last overtaken by the wonder of the imagination.

In Guillaume de Lorris’ portion of the *Roman de la Rose*, Reason begins to take control of Nature, often usurping her role. In Chaucer’s *Parliament of Fowls*, a similar relationship between Nature and Reason seems prominent, as Nature, despite being the

²⁷¹ Ibid., II.1073-1083.

²⁷² Ibid., II.1085.

“vicaire of the almyghty Lord,”²⁷³ ultimately declares her inadequacy, proclaiming “If I were Resoun, thanne wolde I/ Conseyle yow the royal tercel take.”²⁷⁴ Yet recognizing that she is not “Resoun,” Nature prolongs the decision by a year and effectively announces her inability to resolve natural problems.²⁷⁵ In *The House of Fame*, Reason meets a new and different challenge: imagination. The stunning irresolution that scholars have noted in *The House of Fame* owes much to this challenging relationship between imagination and reason.²⁷⁶ Imagination’s dominance over reason seems possible at the moment of the eagle’s departure, yet imagination does continue to soar to the House of Fame, a place of imaginative wonderment, rather than falling back to the desert of terrifying phantasms. Has Reason instructed imagination or has Reason been defeated by imagination? Chaucer leaves the question largely unanswered, although the suggestion

²⁷³ Chaucer, *The Parliament of Fowls*, l. 379.

²⁷⁴ Chaucer, *The Parliament of Fowls*, ll. 631-2.

²⁷⁵ Although see Kathryn L. Lynch, “The ‘Parliament of Fowls’ and Late Medieval Voluntarism Part I,” *The Chaucer Review* 25:1 (1990), 6, for the view that it is the “will,” not “reason,” that has the true authority in this poem; see also Helen Cooney, “The ‘Parlement of Foules’: A Theodicy of Love,” *The Chaucer Review* 32:4 (1998), 363-4 and J.A.W. Bennett, *The Parlement of Foules: An Interpretation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), 131 for the view of Nature as supremely authoritative in this poem. See David Aers, “*The Parliament of Fowls*: Authority, the Knower, and the Known,” in *Chaucer’s Dream Visions and Shorter Poems*, ed. William A. Quinn (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1999), 293, for the idea that the poem disavows the existence of any transcendental reason or “sapientia.” See Hugh White, “Chaucer Compromising Nature,” *The Review of English Studies* 40:158 (1989), 165-7 for the view that Nature’s authority is troublingly challenged by the specter of Reason. For a reading that links nature’s failure to problems with reading in the poem, see Judith Ferster, Reading nature: The Phenomenology of Reading in the Parliament of Fowls,” *Mediaevalia* 3 (1977): 189-213.

²⁷⁶ See Akbari, *Seeing through the Veil*, 201; see Holley, *Reason and Imagination*, p. 61, who interprets the eagle’s flight with Geoffrey as a struggle between reason and imagination. See J. Stephen Russell, *The English Dream Vision: Anatomy of a Form* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1988), 194, for the view that the dream never resolves and thus leaves Geoffrey “incarcerated in his own nightmare world.” See Eldredge, “Chaucer’s Hous of Fame and the Via Moderna,” 119, for a view of the text as expressing the way of the *via moderna*, ultimately resulting in a recognition of the unresolved, constantly multiplying way of things.

lurks that imagination's power has indeed overtaken reason, who has no choice but to leave the scene. The existence of imagination unaided by reason is, as we saw earlier, potentially frightening. In this text, then, Reason has met a more formidable challenge than Nature in the form of imagination.

At first glance, *The House of Fame* seems to be an utterly fragmented poem.²⁷⁷ This fragmentation has baffled critics and has caused scholars such as Kathryn Lynch to divide the poem into parts, Book I an exploration of imagination, Book II an exploration of reason, and Book III an exploration of memory.²⁷⁸ Other critics, such as Ann Astell and B.G. Koonce, have divided the poem according to the ascent signaled by Dante's *Commedia*, from the lowly corporeal vision in *Inferno* to the lofty contemplative vision in *Paradiso*.²⁷⁹ Yet, although *The House of Fame* does represent three separate episodes, the Temple of Venus, the flight with the eagle, and the House of Fame, and although it does end incompletely with the appearance of a mysterious man of authority, the poem itself is unified around the figure of Geoffrey as a personification of imagination. Although the poem may not represent a progressive narrative that witnesses the imagination moving from the depths of sensory perception to the heights of reason and intellectual understanding, the text is still unified in its consistent and persistent questioning of the nature of both imagination and its imagistic products. Picking up a struggle between Reason and Nature in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, *The House of Fame* presents a

²⁷⁷ See Akbari, *Seeing through the Veil*, 201; Winny, *Chaucer's Dream-Poems*, p. 111; Tisdale, "Virgilian Reason and Boethian Wisdom," 247; Charles Muscatine, *Chaucer and the French Tradition: A Study in Style and Meaning* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), 114.

²⁷⁸ Lynch, "The Logic of the Dream Vision," 180.

²⁷⁹ Koonce, *Chaucer and the Tradition of Fame*, 140; Astell, *Chaucer and the Universe of Learning*, 18.

new and perhaps more troubling challenge to Reason in the form of imagination. Imagination's "dark" side is momentarily revealed as it becomes subject to the harassment of phantoms and delusions and as it so easily slips from the firm grip of reason. At the same time, this imagination is somewhat forward-looking, beginning on a path toward firm internal division in the fifteenth century, as it navigates the question of its own materiality and its ability to create anything with substance. Once seemingly fragmented, Chaucer's dream-vision now not only converges on the central question of the nature of the imagination but also belongs in a narrative of struggle among Nature, Reason, and imagination that precedes it in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and follows it in the fifteenth.

Chaucer's *House of Fame* shows certain strong affinities with surrounding optical theory and imaginative philosophy. At the same time, the ambivalence of the figure of imagination, as represented by Geoffrey, is still much more palpable in the literary milieu than in the purely philosophical. Most importantly, the narrative details of the relationship between the eagle and Geoffrey, namely reason and imagination, allow for a kind of "play space" in which we can view imagination actively trying to work out its role in relation to reason. This kind of dialectical, relational definition of the imagination would be much harder to convey with such nuance in a philosophical text that discusses these faculties separately and one at a time. While the fourteenth-century imagination cannot be said to be strictly divorced from its philosophical counterparts, we can still once again see that literary form allows for a much richer and often more conflicted imagination, especially vis-à-vis its allegorical companions.

Chapter 4

The Divided Imagination: Imagination's Personification Crisis

The philosophical story of the imagination in the fifteenth century reveals a faculty of the mind becoming ever more powerful, usurping the roles of judgment and reason. Yet much of the literature of the fifteenth century evokes an imagination with quite a different profile. A group of three texts all composed in the last few decades of the fifteenth century witness the imagination confronting a crisis of personification. As the personification of the imagination becomes increasingly divided and ultimately collapses, the imagination becomes more internalized as a psychological force. The resulting personification crisis produces an imagination that is repeatedly shown to be an unnatural forger of delusions, a part of the brain that causes terror.

In the fourteenth century, Chaucer left us with an imagination in the midst of a crisis about its very being: what can it produce and of what does it consist? The potential for a deceptive and frightening force becomes clear in Chaucer's work as the imagination is deluged by dangerous phantoms and delusions. Imagination, in Chaucer's view, tends toward the irrational, a victim of unnatural and unwanted images. Fifteenth-century texts resume the story where it left off, as imagination becomes increasingly divided and unstable. The fifteenth-century literary imagination may be most akin to Jean de Meun's thirteenth-century Genius, who, caught in a perpetually transformative state, inevitably calls the notion of personification into question. The fifteenth-century literary imagination, by displaying the collapse of a particular personified figure, also asks larger questions about the nature and process of personification.

If imagination has changed from the twelfth to the fourteenth centuries from a usurper to a protean figure to an irrational figure, in the fifteenth century we are confronted with a figure divided against itself. Using *Hickscorner*, *The Court of Sapience* and *The Palis of Honoure* as case studies, this chapter argues that imagination is at once a locus of contentious, internal division and a site of reflection upon the process and nature of personification in the fifteenth century. Nervous questions about personification seem to converge on the figure of the imagination in these texts. By the time we reach *The Palis of Honoure*, imagination has been internalized to the extent that its personification is no longer possible.

The imagination as a divided figure facing a crisis of personification poses a challenge to an accepted narrative about fifteenth-century developments in psychological theories of imagination. Historians of science argue that the fifteenth century witnessed a new “eclecticism” in faculty psychology and Aristotelian science in general.²⁸⁰ As William Wallace contends, by the fifteenth century, this tendency toward eclecticism is perpetuated by an inclination for commentators to “pick [...] and choos[e] theses that suited their purposes and seemed most consistent with their own experiences.”²⁸¹ Wallace admits that the history of the diffusion of developments of Aristotelian science from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries is still a highly under-researched topic. Yet he contends that, although the “diversity of schools and

²⁸⁰ See William Wallace, O.P. “The Philosophical Setting of Medieval Science,” in *Science in the Middle Ages*, ed. David C. Lindberg (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 91-119, for a summary of the scholarly consensus on this eclecticism. See also Pearl Kibre and Nancy G. Siraisi, “The Institutional Setting: The Universities,” in *Science in the Middle Ages*, ed. David C. Lindberg (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 120-44.

²⁸¹ Wallace, “The Philosophical Setting of Medieval Science,” 113-14.

movements continued,” this diversity continued with “a noticeable relaxation of the fierce partisan loyalties that had characterized debates in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries.”²⁸²

The literary imagination in this century demonstrates, by contrast, a contentious division of the faculty into two parts: the personified imagination and the internalized psychological faculty. So far from being eclectic, the imagination is contentious and self-defeating. The division of the imagination detectable in these texts does, however, make sense in light of faculty psychology’s *via moderna*. As Katharine Park notes, in the period between 1400 and 1520, psychological theory “fragmented into a number of rival approaches grouped under the two main rubrics of *via antiqua* and *via moderna*.”²⁸³ Faculty psychology’s *via moderna*, a movement that began gaining ground in around 1350, replaced the pre-existing Galenic splitting of the brain into three parts with a scheme of five cognitive parts. The partitioning of the three-pronged Galenic model into five parts had consequences for the imagination, as it split the imagination into two parts, one with the traditional function of storing images and the other with a more creative function of formulating new combinations of stored images. This firm division is

²⁸² Ibid., 113-14.

²⁸³ Katharine Park, “Albert’s Influence on Late Medieval Psychology,” in *Science in the Middle Ages*, ed. David C. Lindberg (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 502-3, suggests that the *via moderna*, a modification of a three-cell Galenic model of the brain to a more Avicennan five-cell model of the brain, appeared after 1300 and became a particularly widespread theory in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. See also *The Medieval Craft of Memory: An Anthology of Texts and Pictures*, ed. Mary Carruthers and Jan M. Ziolkowski (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 20. See Harvey, *The Inward Wits*, pp. 52-53, for an explanation of the way in which Avicenna split Galenic *phantasia* into two faculties: *sensus communis* and *imaginatio*, thus resulting in a more segmented view of the traditional “*phantasia*,” or imagination. See also Bundy, *The Theory of Imagination*, 192.

detectable in contemporary philosophical texts by individuals such as Reginald Pecock, who delineates the separation between “imagination” and “fantasy.”

The three texts explored in the chapter represent heightening consequences of this division of the imagination. *Hickscorner* (1497-1512) presents an unstable imaginative figure that can easily transform and convert; *The Court of Sapience* (mid-fifteenth century) introduces a personified form of imagination that has nothing to do with the natural world or the natural occurrence of the non-personified imagination; and *The Palis of Honoure* (c. 1501) demonstrates how the naturally occurring, internalized psychological imagination has the capacity to produce terror and ultimately renders personification of the imagination impossible.

Significantly, the imagination becomes a locus for consideration of the process of personification. This fragmentation of the imagination results in larger, uncomfortable questions about the ability of personification to reflect upon nature and the ability of the imagination to reflect upon the natural world. Through the exploration of the personified figure of imagination as prone to conversion and internally fragmented, these texts all ask a fundamental question: what exactly does the personified figure represent? This literary collapse of the personified imagination represents an important counter-history to an imagination that seems increasingly powerful in contemporary philosophical theory. I will thus first explore the fifteenth-century philosophical imagination before broaching the three texts investigated in this chapter.

Reginald Pecock's Imagination

How does the representation of the imagination in these allegorical texts relate to concurrent developments in faculty psychology? A brief look at the case of Reginald Pecock suggests that the view of imagination as a psychological entity was undergoing significant change in the fifteenth century. Pecock writes at a time when the imagination is in the process of being divided into multiple parts, as the *via moderna* takes hold of scholastic philosophy. Once just one entity, the imagination now splits into two parts: one part recalls images previously seen and one part invents new images. At the same time, imagination has considerable, and new-found, powers, and particularly the ability to assume the capacities usually assigned to judgment and reason. If Chaucer subtly signaled the possibility of imagination's triumph over reason in *The House of Fame*, Pecock and some of his literary counterparts seem to explore this possibility with renewed vigor.

Pecock was born in Wales in around 1390 and educated at Oxford. He studied theology at Oriel College Oxford from 1416 until 1424. He was made Master of Whittington College in 1431, appointed Bishop of St. Asaph in 1444 and Bishop of Chichester in 1450. Pecock had scholastic training but worked to make his technical knowledge accessible to lay readers. As Kirsty Campbell argues, Pecock's "educational corpus" may be viewed as an attempt to "transfer the rudiments of a university education in the arts to the vernacular, through his instruction on terminology, on rules of logic, and

on the syllogism.”²⁸⁴ This translation of academic material to vernacular readers is in keeping with the contemporary trend in Oxford’s faculty of theology.²⁸⁵

Pecock’s *Donet*, probably written between 1443 and 1449, is meant as an introduction to philosophy, religion and theology for a lay audience.²⁸⁶ His philosophy is mainly “the Aristotelian, scholastic type of mind that reverences Reason and the syllogism.”²⁸⁷ In the *Donet*, the faculties of the inward wits are split into five different types: “Comoun witt, ymaginacioun, fantasye, Estimacioun and mynde.”²⁸⁸ Pecock’s explanation of the work of the imagination is only part of what we see in thirteenth-century Aristotelian commentaries. By Pecock’s fifteenth century, the work of the imagination as conceived in the thirteenth century is split across the common wit, the imagination and the fantasy. The “comoun witt” is not only the conglomeration of the external senses but it “perceyueth alle suche thingis in her absence whiche mowe be knowun of outwarde wittis in her oonli presence.”²⁸⁹ The idea of perceiving something in its absence is normally the vocation of the imagination, but here a piece of imaginative function is relegated to the work of the “comoun witt.”²⁹⁰ The comoun witt has the ability

²⁸⁴ Kirsty Campbell, *The Call to Read: Reginald Pecock’s Books and Textual Communities* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), 13.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 14.

²⁸⁶ Pecock, *The Donet*, xvii.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, xxi.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 9.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 10.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 10.

to distinguish between different sensory perceptions, a standard feature of the common sense in Aristotelian philosophy:

And also he iugith and deemeth bitwix tho thinges, whiche thingis noon oon outward witt may knowe, and therfore noo oon outward witt may iuge and deeme bitwix hem: as ben whitnes and swetenes, he mai not discrive and juge the diuersite bitwix hem. And sithen touche mai not knowe and perceyue to gider bothe hardnes and sourenes, He mai not discryue and iuge the diuersite bitwix hardnes and sourenes.²⁹¹

The common witt may therefore discriminate among different types of sensory input and provide the brain with categories that characterize sensory input such as “whitnes” and “swetenes.”

The imagination includes the work of the “commune witt” (“it is all the same whiche is seid of commune witt”) and additionally has a storing function: “kepe[s] in store alle the same now seid knowingis with her fundamentis, whiche ben called ‘similitudis,’ ‘liknessis,’ or ‘ymagis’ of thingis, that thei falle not soone aweie.”²⁹² Thus the imagination encompasses the common wit, with a suggestion of a hierarchical structure of the faculties in which faculties located farther back in the brain encompass the functions of those farther forward in the brain and add greater levels of sophisticated cognitive capacity to them. The notion that the imagination “kepe[s] in store” all the images “that thei falle not soone aweie” is a traditional description of the imagination with a commemorative capacity. The memory of images that are no longer present incorporates the traditional Aristotelian memorial capacity of the imagination.

²⁹¹ Ibid., 10.

²⁹² Ibid.

Pecock's description of the imagination is highly image-focused, reiterating that the imagination stores not only images but also "similitudis," "liknessis" and "ymagis," a repetition that emphasizes the imagination's involvement in the human brain's affinity for image-making and cognition with images. "Similitudis" means both a pictorial representation or image and also a mental image. "Mental image" implies the specific work of the imagination in Pecock's writing. This meaning of the term is much in keeping with a tradition of contemplative writing in fourteenth-century English, including *Treatise of the Perfection of the Sons of God* (1370s), which urges a form of contemplation rising above the use of mental images, arguing that "if that we wille taste god...it is necessary...that...we intende god, abydyng ther ydle, that is to saye frome alle ymagynacioun and feynynge of alle erthly symylitudys, lyftyng vp be loue oure mynde into the manyfeste barnesse."²⁹³ Here, as in Pecock's text, "ymagynacioun" and "symilitudys" are nearly synonymous, but "symilitudys" emphasizes the prerogative of the imagination to have the capacity to make images. "Liknessis" also focuses heavily on the imagistic capacity of the imagination, traditionally meaning both a "visual image," the process of vision by which an object makes an impression on the eye, and the visual image that is retained in the *imaginatio*. Therefore we can see how Pecock's definition of imagination is highly focused on the most traditional sense of the faculty as a part of the brain that can retain and even form images.

Pecock's account of imagination's judgment and discretion is striking and unusual. Since imagination involves all the faculties of common wit, it too integrates the ability to distinguish between "whitnes and swetnes" or "hardnes and sourenes" as

²⁹³ *MED*, s.v. similitudis.

sensation alone cannot. This faculty of discrimination is unusual in earlier, Aristotelian descriptions of imagination, which would normally assign these capacities to the estimative or cognitive faculty.²⁹⁴ Again, the suggestion that imagination is used exclusively for particular knowledge, inevitably inferior to the generalizing abilities of the intellect, is not fully espoused here. Pecock's account of the imagination, then, affords it more power than it might otherwise have in traditional thirteenth-century *De anima* commentaries.

Pecock's description of "fantasie" summarizes what might be called recombinative imagination. Much debate arose beginning in the thirteenth century over whether "fantasie" and "imagination" comprised the same faculty or whether they were two separate cognitive functions. In general, models that followed the *via antiqua* kept "imagination" and "fantasy" together as one faculty under the rubric *phantasia*, while the *via moderna*, after an Avicennan model, separated them, sometimes into *imaginatio* and *sensus communis*, sometimes into *imaginatio* and *fantasia*, as we see in Pecock.²⁹⁵ Pecock again follows the *via moderna* in his separation of imagination and fantasy, an important and complex division of the imaginative faculty.

Pecock's "fantasie" has a generative function, capable of creating new images out of combinations of stored images from the imagination: "Sone, it is to forge and compowne, or to sette to gedir in seemyng, thingis whiche ben not to gedir, and whiche maken not oon thing in kynde: As if a man feyn a beest to be made of an horsis heed and

²⁹⁴ Aristotle, *De anima*, 210.

²⁹⁵ Harvey, *The Inward Wits*, 52-3. In "Albert's Influence on Late Medieval Psychology," Katharine Park notes that debate between the *via antiqua* and *via moderna* really erupted between the second half of the fourteenth century and 1520, rendering the *via moderna* a much more prominent presence in the fifteenth century than before (502-3).

of a kowys body and of a lyouns taile, and so forth of othire masis whiche bifallen in dreemys, whilis a man slepith. For in tyme of sleep a mannys inward bodily wittis ben breemest [wondrous] and to wirche rediest, and her worchingis ben to be perceyued sunnest.”²⁹⁶ Pecoock’s “fantasie” refers to a recombinative imagination that has a creative aspect, capable of forging new images out of the components of images once observed in reality. The resulting images are often hybrids, such as a “beest...made of an horsis heed and of a kowys body and of a lyouns taile.”²⁹⁷ This ability to “forge and compowne... thingis whiche ben not to gedir” is regular to dreams, “whilis a man slepith.” The work of “forging” certainly suggests a way in which imagination or “fantasie” now subsumes the work of Nature, who is typically associated with the “forge.”

At the same time that fantasie takes on the work of Nature, it also engages in producing markedly *unnatural* products. Fantasie combines different components of creatures observed in nature to create new hybrids that could never be fathomed in the natural world and represent distortions of nature’s work. Fantasie has a capacity to create new, abnormal and highly unnatural creatures that can haunt and terrify the mind in the course of a dream. At the same time, Pecoock’s description of imagination as exercising the capacity for judgment and discrimination affords the faculty a new kind of intellectual ability that was never its prerogative in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century faculty psychology. Even in Pecoock’s short treatment of the imaginative faculty, and one that seems relatively “conservative” and true to its Aristotelian sources, it is possible to detect a battle between the unduly powerful imagination and the imagination as a respected

²⁹⁶ Pecoock, *The Donet*, 10.

²⁹⁷ Pecoock, *The Donet*, 10.

psychological faculty that elevates the cognitive function of the mind over the mere input of the senses.

Pecock's affinities with fifteenth-century thought involve not only this assumption of the imagination's power over nature but also, as Campbell notes, a form of writing steeped in a kind of heterogeneity characteristic of fifteenth-century thought as a whole. Campbell's study of Pecock attempts to shed light on the "plurality" of fifteenth-century thought and culture through a close look at the various allegiances of Pecock himself.²⁹⁸ Pecock's own "vernacular theology" is derived from the university setting, teachings in pastoral theology extending back to Lateran IV, and has some similarities to the Lollard "intellectual terrain."²⁹⁹ Jeremy Catto further notes that "most of what Pecock taught is the standard orthodox teaching of the schools." Pecock, then, begins to appear as a fifteenth-century scholastic thinker, "drawing upon authoritative traditions."³⁰⁰ Pecock's writing can thus be taken as representative of contemporary fifteenth-century university thought on the faculties of the mind.

The power that Pecock at times affords the imagination is also prominent in medical texts newly translated into English in the fifteenth century. A translation of a fourteenth-century French surgery manual, Guy de Chauliac's *Inventarium*, appears in English in the fifteenth century under the title *The Cyrurgie of Guy de Chauliac*. More than 30 manuscripts of the original Latin *Inventarium* written in Avignon in 1363

²⁹⁸ Campbell, *The Call to Read*, 4-5.

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

³⁰⁰ Cited in *ibid.*, 12-13.

survive. The English translation was similarly popular in the fifteenth century.³⁰¹ Another translation of the *Inventarium* called the *Inventorye of Guydo de Chauliac* also circulated in fifteenth-century England, and the two translations together formed a significant presence in this century's scientific output.³⁰² Chauliac draws upon an Avicennan theory of imagination that remained controversial throughout the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries in Europe. This view of the imaginative faculty affords it the capacity to exert control over the body.³⁰³ This imagination's power to change the state of the body is also well-represented in the writing of another influential fourteenth-century philosopher, Nicole Oresme, who concedes that the condition of the body can change according to the work of the imagination: "Ex ymaginatione etiam appetitus mutatur quia quidam evomunt cibum pro sola ymaginatione, et quidam appetunt comedere unum cibum si et cetera, et quidam sudant ex ymaginatione et cogitatione forti circa aliquid et cetera, et aliqui oscitant videntes alios et cetera, et quidam appetunt mingere ex cogitatione, et genitalia moventur ex et cetera."³⁰⁴ For Oresme, one may vomit, sweat, yawn, urinate or have an erection by imagining alone ("pro sola ymaginatione").

³⁰¹ *The Cyrurgie of Guy de Chauliac*, ed. Margaret S. Ogden (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), v-vi.

³⁰² *The Cyrurgie of Guy de Chauliac*, vi.

³⁰³ See, for example, E. Ruth Harvey, *The Inward Wits*, 50, in which she explains Avicenna's view that men with particularly strong imaginations have the capacity to see waking what only others can see sleeping and that this kind of strong imagination sometimes constitutes prophecy. The idea of a form of prophetic imagination was something to which Aquinas was particularly opposed.

³⁰⁴ Bert Hansen, *Nicole Oresme on the Marvels of Nature: A Study of De causis mirabilium with Critical Edition, Translation, and Commentary* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1985), 210: "The appetite, also, is altered by imagining since some people vomit solely from imagining. And some desire to eat one food if etc. And some sweat from imagining and

Chauliac uses this potential strength of the imagination as a method of healing medical problems. He recommends for the healing of “a wounde and of flowynge of blood of the veynes and of the arteryes” that

...the eyen of the pacient be schette, or stonde he in a derk place that he may nocht se his owne blood, ne thathe byholde no rede thinges, but say hym always that it bledeth no more and that, if it blede, it is for his profit. And so is the natural vertu confortd by the contrarie ymaginacioun.³⁰⁵

In this surgical manual, the work of the “contrarie ymaginacioun” is proposed as an antidote to a physical ailment such as excessive bleeding. All the patient need do is *imagine* that he is not bleeding in order to overcome the physical fact of his bleeding. Chauliac explicitly mentions Avicenna’s view on the power of the imagination to overwhelm the physical condition of the body:

And therfor Auicen saith that movynge of the blood and folwynge therof is of the kynde of the accidentes of bestes that moven her ymaginacioun, the whiche is redy therto when it is mykel purposed to consider rede thinges.³⁰⁶

Avicenna’s account of the strong imagination, condemned and distrusted by many thirteenth- and fourteenth-century European commentators, is a major source of authority for Chauliac’s explanation of the power of the imagination to overcome the body. Chauliac depends upon Avicenna’s explanation of the fact that the “ymaginacioun” may move the “blood” in order to justify his own use of imagination as a cure for serious wounds and excessive bleeding. This fifteenth-century translation of a fourteenth-century

vigorous thinking on something etc. And some yawn when they see others yawn. And some desire to urinate from thinking. And the genitals are moved from etc.”

³⁰⁵ *The Cyrurgie of Guy de Chauliac*, 224-5.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

text, circulating widely in fifteenth-century England, indicates the exposure a figure like Pecock would have had to a set of scientific texts that fully embrace the power of the imagination over the body.

Yet even as the imagination may be a powerful cure for illness, Pecock's own theological writing suggests a deep concern over an overly powerful and potentially dangerous imagination. Despite Pecock's defenses of image viewing and the imagination, implications that the imagination may have an uncontrollable nature abound. Orthodox conflicts over images and imagination in fact come to seem standard in the fifteenth century, as James Simpson has observed. In some cases, orthodox anxieties about images come "perilously close" heretical positions.³⁰⁷ Pecock explains that viewing images is advantageous, especially for the frail, sick or old, because it works to stabilize the viewer's own imagination. In describing the process of viewing images in a church, Pecock writes that:

...bi biholding upon ymagis or upon such peinting his witt schal be dressid and lad forthe euener and more stabili and with myche lasse peyne and labour, than forto wrastle withinneforth in his owne ymaginaciouns withoute leding withouteforth had bi biholding upon ymagis; as experience vndoutabili wole schewe.³⁰⁸

Pecock worries that, "as experience vndoutabili wole shewe," imagination has the capacity to lead people astray, and that viewing images directed at a certain kind of thought or contemplation is much safer than "forto wrastle withinneforth in his owne

³⁰⁷ James Simpson, "Orthodoxy's Image Trouble: Images in and after Arundel's Constitutions," in *After Arundel: Religious Writing in Fifteenth-Century England*, ed. Vincent Gillespie and Kantik Ghosh (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), 92. On Pecock's equivocation about images in particular, see p. 113.

³⁰⁸ Cited in Gayk, *Image, Text, and Religious Reform in Fifteenth-Century England*, 167.

ymaginaciouns.”³⁰⁹ As Shannon Gayk observes, Pecock here expresses how images can “direct and stabilize the viewer’s ‘ymaginaciouns,’” which may sometimes be incapable of forming proper images from the input of a sermon since their imaginative faculties may be too feeble.³¹⁰ Ironically, in a 1457 letter from Viscount Beaumont to Henry VI, Pecock was himself accused of using his “ymaginatiff wittes” to bad effect to “sett all [his] studes to hurt our faith.”³¹¹ Yet even though Beaumont’s letter serves to condemn Pecock, there is a surprising similarity between Beaumont’s language and Pecock’s on the subject of the imagination: both admit the possibility of the imagination’s deleterious effect and the way in which it can be crafted for dangerously unorthodox outcomes.

Imagination’s Conversion: Hickscorner

The morality play *Hickscorner*, written in the late fifteenth century, at first represents imagination as an arbiter of Vice but then involves the figure in a dramatic and troubling conversion. This conversion immediately, and uncomfortably, signals the divided nature of the imagination and the instability of its personification. *Hickscorner* was probably composed between 1497 and 1512 and was printed in 1512 by Wynkyn de Worde. It also appears in a fragment printed in 1520 and was printed again by John Waley sometime between 1546 and 1586.³¹² The play begins with a lament by Pity, Contemplation and Perseverance about the lack of morality in their time. Freewill and

³⁰⁹ Cited in *ibid.*

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹¹ *Ibid.*, 182.

³¹² *Hickscorner*, ed. John C. Farmer (London: The Tudor Facsimile Texts, 1908), v.

Imagination soon enter to recount to these three allegorical virtues their recent pranks and battles against the law. Hickscorner, a traveler, appears on the scene and promptly provokes an argument with Imagination. When Pity returns to keep the peace, Imagination and Freewill imprison him and leave the scene. Pity is released by Perseverance and Contemplation and sets out in search of Imagination and Freewill. Perseverance and Contemplation finally convert Imagination and Freewill to the side of virtue.

As Blair Hoxby points out, a major difference between dramatic allegory and narrative allegory is that dramatic allegory “makes its meaning in part by imputing allegorical significance to the performance space in which the actors will move and their audience will watch.”³¹³ Indeed, as Hoxby notes, performances of these plays often made extensive use of dramatic space in order to create a spiritual map of the struggle between Vice and Virtue.³¹⁴ Imaginacioun’s conversion may have an immediacy that it would not have in a narrative allegory such as the *Roman de la Rose*, in which the imaginative Genius figure is also in a state of flux.

There is no question that Imaginacioun is at first portrayed unequivocally as a thief and criminal in *Hickscorner*. Upon entering, Imagination immediately details his tactics for tricking authorities into releasing thieves and other criminals:

And yet I can imagine things sublte
For to get money plenty.
In Westminster Hall every term I am;
To me is kin many a great gentleman;

³¹³ Blair Hoxby, “Allegorical drama,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Allegory*, ed. Rita Copeland and Peter T. Struck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 203.

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*

I am known in every country.
 And I were dead the lawyers' thrift were lost,
 For this will I do if men would do cost;
 Prove right wrong, and all by reason,
 And make men leese both house and land;
 For all that they can do in a little season.
 Peach men of treason privily I can,
 And when me list, to hang a true man.
 If they will me money tell,
 Thieves I can help out of prison.
 And into lords' favours I can get me soon...³¹⁵

Imagination's own use of the word "imagine" here, in terms of being able to "imagine things subtle/For to get money plenty," indicates a less frequently expressed concept of imagination that has to do with the ability to plan toward certain goals or ends. Often, this sense of imagination conveys the notion of planning for a particularly deceitful goal, although this is not always the case.³¹⁶ "Subtle" came to mean "deceitful" through exaggerations of the definition "cunning." However, most of its definitions are not related to outright trickery but have more to do with intelligence, perspicacity and inventiveness.³¹⁷ A nearly identical phrase, "sotill ymaginacioune," appears in the fifteenth-century *Tale of Beryn*. This tale details the legal entrapment faced by the merchant Beryn upon traveling to a foreign land. The people of the foreign town, who eventually persecute Beryn, are initially described as of "sotill ymaginacioune": "In al the world wyde, so fals of hir lyvyng/ Was no pepill under sonne, ne noon so dessyvabill/ As

³¹⁵ *Two Tudor Interludes: Youth and Hickscorner*, ed. Ian Lancashire (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1980), ll. 215-229. All further quotations of this text will be taken from this edition.

³¹⁶ *MED*, s.v. imagen.

³¹⁷ *MED*, s.v. sotyll.

was the pepill of this town, ne more unstabill,/ And had a cursed usage of sotill ymaginacioune.”³¹⁸ *The Tale of Beryn*, similarly composed in the fifteenth century, uses the word “imagination” in the context of crafty scheming to win legal battles.³¹⁹ The word appears to have this meaning in *Hickscorner* as well, and the common use of the phrase in these two texts suggests a somewhat popular equation of imagination with trickery in the fifteenth century.

Significantly, this passage enacts a process of personification, as the imagination appears on stage and steps into his own self-described role. Imagination draws attention to his ability to “imagine,” which may mean both “imagine” and “produce images.” This self-awareness of his own enactment of a particular mental function draws attention to the process of personification. The narration of repeated action also suggests a form of self-awareness on the part of this personified figure. When Imagination relates that “In Westminster Hall every term I am;/To me is kin many a great gentleman,” he describes personified figures that extends back those on the outside wall of the Garden of Pleasure in the *Roman de la Rose*. He describes himself as a static figure. The repetition of the word “can” draws attention to the fact that Imagination here describes himself in general terms, as a personification of an idea rather than as an individual. Exploration of imagination and exploration of personification have become inextricably intertwined.

³¹⁸ *The Canterbury Tales: Fifteenth-Century Additions and Continuations*, ed. John M. Bowers (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1992), ll. 1620-1623.

³¹⁹ The date of composition is somewhat uncertain. The manuscript in which it appears has been dated to 1450-1470, but Peter Brown suggests a composition date closer to 1420. Most scholars agree that the text was composed between 1420 and 1460. See Peter Brown, “Journey’s End: The

Prologue to the Tale of Beryn,” in *Chaucer and Fifteenth-Century Poetry*, ed. Julia Boffey and Janet Cowen (London: King’s College Centre for Late Antique and Medieval Studies, 1991), 150-3.

Given the inextricable connection between the concept of imagination and of personification in this text, imagination's subsequent internal division is troubling. The first signs of internal rupture appear when Contemplacion enters the scene. Contemplacion and Mercy free Pyte from the chains with which Imaginacioun has bound him. Perseverance turns to Contemplation to help him convert Free Will and Imagination: "I think they will come hither again,/ Free Will and Imagination, both twain./ Them will I exhort to virtuous living,/ And unto virtue them to bring/ By the help of you, Contemplation."³²⁰ Imagination is here thoroughly divided against itself. Contemplation may be a primarily religious form of thought, but it is traditionally a kind of "imagination." It involves a kind of thinking with images that may escalate into an ecstatic vision but nonetheless has its basic roots in imaginative function. Traditionally defined, "contemplacion" is simply "reflection" or "thinking" that involves the visual senses and may be "divine."³²¹ While "contemplacion" is in a different category of visual thought than pure "imagination," they are not essentially polarized psychological activities but part of the same overall imaginative functioning. Yet here a firm distinction arises between Contemplacion and Imagynacyon so rigid that they exist on opposite sides of a moral battle. They are nothing short of polar opposites, one on the side of virtuous living and honesty, the other on the side of vice and deception.

More troubling is Imagination's conversion at the end of the play. Frightened by Perseverance and Contemplation about the horrors of hell, Imagination repents on stage:

No thing dread I so sore as death;
Therefore, to amend I think it be time.

³²⁰ *Hickscorner*, ll. 616-620.

³²¹ *MED*, s.v. contemplacion.

Sin have I used all the days of my breath,
With pleasure, lechery and misusing,
And spent amiss my five wits; therefore I am sorry.
Here of all my sins I ask God mercy.³²²

In a scene that evokes the “miraculous” conversion of the Jews at the end of the *Croxton Play of the Sacrament*, Imagination is in an unusual position. The spending “amys” of the five wits suggests an imagination that has the capacity to deceive the senses. The immediacy of the conversion is emphasized by the use of the word “Here” and the reference to “time,” drawing attention to this very moment and the act of conversion. Imagination is suspended for a moment in a divided state, between his identity before conversion and after. At this moment, he is two completely opposed beings.

Imagination’s first appearance suggests his representation of the process of personification. In this opening scene, Imagination dramatically enacts the process of personification. Yet the imagination’s stability is clearly called into question at the equally dramatic moment of the conversion, and thus, simultaneously, personification itself seems to crumble. A locus for contemplating personification, imagination’s instability causes allegory to enter into crisis.

Imagination in the Natural World vs. Imagination Personified: The Court of Sapience

In *Hickscorner*, Imagination suddenly divides against itself at the closing moment of conversion. In *The Court of Sapience*, however, the imagination is already firmly divided from the start. In this text, there are in fact two imaginations: one existing in the natural world and one existing as a personification inside Sapience’s court. It is almost as though *The Court of Sapience* picks up where *Hickscorner* left off, providing an

³²² *Hickscorner*, ll. 996-1001.

exploration of the personification of a figure that is already firmly divided. This particular division between the natural world and the “allegorical” world results in questions about both the process and nature of personification and its ability to represent the natural world, always posing the question: what exactly does personification represent? The valorization of nature in this text suggests a discomfort with the unnaturalness of both personification allegory and the imagination.

The Court of Sapience is an anonymous fifteenth-century allegorical poem written in rhyme royal stanzas that enjoyed significant popularity in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The date of the poem is difficult to establish. The *terminus ad quem* can be surmised from Caxton’s printed edition dating from 1480 to 1483.³²³ References to Chaucer and Gower in the poem suggest a date after Gower’s death in 1408, and Robert Spindler argues that linguistic features point to a date later than Lydgate, who died in 1449.³²⁴ On the basis of linguistic and historical evidence, E. Ruth Harvey proposes that the most precise dating for the text is the middle third of the fifteenth century.³²⁵

The Court of Sapience survives in three manuscripts: British Library Harley 2251, Trinity College Cambridge ms R 3 21, and Columbia University Library Plimpton ms 256. The poem was attributed to Lydgate in the sixteenth century probably by Stephen Hawes, although Spindler has refuted this attribution through analyses of versification, language and meter.³²⁶ The poem begins with a narrator imagining himself playing chess

³²³ *The Court of Sapience*, ed. E. Ruth Harvey (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), xxii. All quotations from this text will be taken from this edition.

³²⁴ *Ibid.*, xxii.

³²⁵ *Ibid.*, xxiv.

with the World and Dame Fortune. Reason, scolding him for his youthful folly, prays to God to lead him to Sapience. The dreamer then promptly falls asleep. After dreaming that he is lost in an unforgiving wilderness, he meets Sapience, Intelligence and Science beside a river. In a diversion that occupies the entirety of the first book, Sapience tells the dreamer the story of the four daughters of God. In the second book, Sapience leads the dreamer to her castle, and on the way they pass a broad range of natural wonders, which the dreamer catalogues in detail. In the castle live seven virtues and Dame Philosophy. The dreamer is led through the courts of Science, Intelligence and Sapience and finally meets Theology and the seven liberal arts. The poem ends abruptly and unfinished shortly after this point.

In *The Court of Sapience*, Nature and Imagination are equally valorized as parts of philosophical learning in Sapience's court but are treated differently in the natural world outside the allegorical house. Once inside Sapience's court, the pure realm of Aristotelian philosophy suggests equal respect for Imagination and Nature as part of the discipline of natural philosophy. However, on the way to Sapience's court, the dreamer's interaction with the "real" natural world indicates an actual suspicion of imagination and fantasy. Thus the imagination of the "natural" world and the imagination of the "allegorical" world are two separate figures. The non-correspondence of Imagination personified and imagination as an entity in the world represents a problem for the very concept of personification, in which Imagination with a capital "I" has no other function than to represent "imagination" with a lowercase "i."

The dreamer meets Nature personified in Sapience's Court, who, along with her sisters Dame Ethica (or Morality) and Dame Logyca (or Reason), acts under the

³²⁶ Ibid., xxi.

jurisdiction of Dame Phylosophye. Nature as an allegorical figure in this poem is Aristotelian, represented primarily as natural philosophy, with her twins moral philosophy and logic. Dame Phylosophye may be viewed as a figure for Aristotle himself, while the three branches under her jurisdiction may stand for Aristotelian texts on the mind, ethics and logic. Nature as a form of natural philosophy teaches about “the cause of every thyng,/ His propre kynd, his kyndely properte”; Dame Etyca gives “Knowlege of vertues and of honeste”; and Dame Logyca represents “resoun” in a somewhat moral sense, helping individuals distinguish between “evyl and good.”³²⁷ Sapience’s companions, Dame Intellygence and Dame Scyence, represent intellect and imagination and the common senses respectively, with Intellygence conveying knowledge of “creatures in heven and erthe” while Dame Scyence has exclusive knowledge of “thynges temporal.” Both of them, heavenly knowledge and “temporal” knowledge gained through the senses, have a place in Sapience’s court. Here, Scyence keeps company with natural philosophers, many of whom wrote commentaries on the faculties based on *De Anima*, including Aristotle himself, Averroes, Avicenna and Alhazen.

In Sapience’s court, the dreamer meets three figures who may be said to represent senses and imagination, contemplation, and intellect. “Scyence,” associated with knowledge gained through experience, is presented as the purely sensual realm but also encompasses the work of the imagination.³²⁸ Thus Scyence knows about “eche thyng temporal” as well as what man is “in body and in bloode.” Intellygence, the second figure

³²⁷ Ibid., ll. 1590-1592, l. 1593, ll. 1596-1597.

³²⁸ *MED*, s.v. scyence.

in the triumvirate of Science, Intellegence, and Sapience, can be viewed as a type of contemplation. Intellegence is associated with knowledge that goes just beyond the senses:

Oure wyttes fyve when they begyn to fayle,
As in eche invysyble creature,
Intellegence must yeve us than counsayle—
By her we have parfyte knowlege and pure;
When eye, nose, ere, mouthe, hand eke is unsure,
And we by them may gete no pure scyence,
Than must us renne unto Intellegence.³²⁹

Intellegence is explicitly associated with the “contemplatyve,” a type of imaginative thinking taken to an extreme.

Science, in contrast, is defined as general knowledge or the knowledge acquired through memory. More importantly, it has the sense of knowledge gained through experience or contained in an individual person’s mind.³³⁰ “Science” therefore relates to specific knowledge based on the actual experience of the senses, a precise definition of the work of the imagination, especially insofar as it relates also to memory and the retaining of images. On the other hand, “sapience” means wisdom or understanding on a broader level, and “intellegence” is associated with contemplation and the ability to understand general truths.³³¹ Therefore it is possible to view a form of Aristotelian faculty psychology taking shape among these allegorical figures: “Science” performs the functions of the senses and imagination and “Intellegence” denotes contemplation and universal understanding, as well as knowledge of heavenly things.

³²⁹ *The Court of Sapience*, ll. 1702-8.

³³⁰ *MED*, s.v. scyence.

³³¹ *MED*, s.v. sapience; s.v. intellegence.

“Scyence,” which encompasses imagination, is by no means exiled from Sapience’s court but is fully integrated into the greater scheme of Sapience and her subordinates. Dame Scyence’s court represents the knowledge gained through natural philosophy and the functioning of the senses. Importantly, the philosophers in Dame Scyence’s court, including “Arystotyl, Averous, Avycenne,” are all associated with complex theories of the senses and the imagination circulating at the time *The Court of Sapience* was written. The philosophers in Intellygence’s court, such as Bonaventure, are instead associated with religious contemplation. Scyence, a figure for the senses, imagination, and cognition, is by no means exiled from Sapience’s court but instead integrated as a valuable member of the allegorical house’s long list of illustrious personifications.

While Scyence is valorized as an allegorical figure in Sapience’s court, imagination in the natural world is held in suspicion. A long section on the stones viewed on the way to the Court provides a detailed explanation of each one’s medicinal value. The descriptions are all derived from Bartholomeus Anglicus’ *De Proprietatibus Rerum* (1240).³³² Here, the dreamer encounters a particular kind of stone called the “grene smaragde,” known to be “right medicynable/ Ayenst tempest, sykenes, and fantasye.”³³³ “Fantasye” translates Bartholomeus Anglicus’ phrase “phantasmata daemonum,” so “fantasye” here is nearly synonymous with the kind of delusion resulting from demonic possession. The other stones work against veritable ailments such as “eyen sore,” “wit

³³² *Court of Sapience*, 110, notes to ll. 1072-1073.

³³³ *Ibid.*, ll. 1072-1073.

lost,” and general “infyrmyte.”³³⁴ Still others work against demons, including the “precyous crisolyte,” which “fendes fleen and holden in despyte.”³³⁵ The “grene smaragde” combines these different remedies, being effective against both “sykenes” and the “fantasye” possibly perverted by demonic influence. The “fantasye,” as a figure for the imaginative faculty, which creates and stores images or “phantasmata,” here becomes synonymous with illness.³³⁶ While a place for the imaginative faculty exists within the realm of Aristotelian natural philosophy in Sapience’s Court, the poem includes another realm in which imagination and its subsequent *phantasmata* are suspicious signs of illness that must be eliminated. Interestingly, the personified figure of Intellygence reveals absolutely no overlap with the imagination as it exists in the natural world. Although Sapience and her minions, Intellygence and Scyence, accompany the dreamer along this route on the way to Sapience’s court, mention of them is conspicuously absent in this long section detailing the marvels of nature. The split between the imagination of the natural world and the personified imagination is absolute.

This rift between the personified Imagination and the natural imagination presents a problem for the concept of personification: if Imagination does not represent imagination, what does it personify? The idea that personification confronts a crisis in

³³⁴ Ibid., ll. 967-970.

³³⁵ Ibid., ll. 972-973.

³³⁶ Although “fantasie” becomes increasingly separated from “ymaginacion” in late medieval faculty psychology, the primary use of the word “fantasie” to refer to the general functioning of the imaginative faculty is still in use in the fifteenth century. However, new meanings of “fantasies” as “illusion,” “delusion,” or “phantom,” with the sense of an appearance without reality, begin to emerge in the last decade of the fourteenth century and become prominent in English usage in the fifteenth century. It is safe to assume that the author of *The Court of Sapience* uses the word “fantasye” to refer generally to the imagination as a faculty of the mind but that he also draws upon a newer sense of “fantasye” specifically as an illusory subtype of the imagination. See *MED*, s.v. fantasie.

fact precedes the introduction of the problem of Intellygence versus imagination in the text. The story of the four daughters of Wisdom that Sapience repeats to the dreamer upon her arrival functions as a frame setting up the personification crisis. Although the story itself is borrowed from Grosseteste and Bonaventure, with elements, particularly the introduction of Sapience as judge, attributed to Deguileville, the author of *The Court of Sapience* takes considerable liberties.³³⁷ Moreover, the choice of this story as a frame indicates a wider concern with the stability of personified figures. The story of the four daughters of Wisdom presents a contentious fight among allegorical figures that threatens each and every one of them. At the center of the story lies the question of who among Pees, Mercy, Truth, and Ryghtwesnes should rule. When Pees decides that all should obey Mercy, an argument immediately arises among the allegorical figures. First Truth dissents: “‘Late be,’ quod Truth, ‘to yow I nyl assent.’” Then Ryghtwesnes refuses to follow Pees’ injunction: “‘No more wyl I, ywys,’ quod Ryghtwysenes.”³³⁸ This dissent causes mayhem for Pees and Mercy. Pees is exiled, and Mercy lies in a swoon. At this point, in an outpouring unique to this version of the story, Sapience voices an outburst about concepts that are stripped of their essences:

Woo worth debate that never may have pees!
 Woo worth penaunce that asketh no pyte!
 Woo worth vengeaunce that mercy may not cees!
 Wo worth jugement that hath none equitye!
 Wo worth that trouth that hath no charyte!
 Woo worth that juge that may no gilty save!

³³⁷ Hope Traver, “The Four Daughters of God: A Study of the Versions of this Allegory with especial reference to those in Latin, French, and English” (Ph.D. dissertation, Bryn Mawr College, 1907), 158.

³³⁸ *Court of Sapience*, l. 394.

And wo worth ryght that may no favour have!³³⁹

Sapience laments a world deprived of these allegorical figures and concepts, particularly Pees and Mercy. In the process of this lament, Sapience exclaims “Woo worth penaunce that asketh no pyte!” The essence of penance is to ask for pity, and the fear that penance may be emptied of this essence suggests a conscious fear about the threat to allegory and personification posed by the battle among allegorical figures. As a frame for the text, the story of the Four Daughters of Wisdom seems to exhibit some of the text’s central problems with personification. Personified figures, and personification itself, are perpetually on the verge of collapse.

While the inklings of the divided imagination appear in *Hickscorner*, *The Court of Sapience* presents a more alarming situation in which the imagination is irreparably split into two completely opposing parts. *The Palis of Honoure*, written two decades after *The Court of Sapience*, expands upon this terrifying representation of the naturally occurring imagination, except now the personified figure, having collapsed irreparably, disappears entirely.

Imaginative Terror: The Palis of Honoure

The “smaragdane” stone fighting the ill effects of imagination and fantasy reappears in Gavin Douglas’ dream vision *The Palis of Honoure*, a “rewriting” of Chaucer’s *House of Fame*. By the time we reach this poem, the imagination has become an arbiter of fear. At this point, the imagination’s “allegorical” figure has disappeared, and all that remains is the imagination as a faculty of the mind. This non-allegorical imagination proves a terrifying figure that the dreamer manages to purge from his mind

³³⁹ Ibid., ll. 463-9.

by the end of the text. After collapsing as a personified figure in both *Hickscorner* and *The Court of Sapience*, the imagination has become entirely internalized and non-allegorical.

The Palis of Honoure, completed in 1500 or 1501, is addressed to King James IV of Scotland. David Parkinson suggests that the poem is a mirror for princes, presenting to a “noble personage” the rules of “proper comportment.” The “uncomprehending dreamer” serves “as a foil to the noble reader for whom the poem is intended.”³⁴⁰ The theme of “honor” was popular in contemporary French dream visions, including Jean Molinet’s *Trosne d’Honneur* (1467), Octavien de Saint Gelais’s *Sejour d’Honneur* (1490-95), and Jean Lemaire de Belges’ *Le Temple d’Honneur et de Vertus* (1503).³⁴¹ The poem begins with the poet walking in a beautiful garden when he falls into a trance (or dream) and the beautiful garden transforms into a terrifying wilderness. The dreamer makes a complaint to Fortune and pledges allegiance to Nature and Venus. After a procession featuring Diana, Venus and Minerva, the dreamer sings a ballad criticizing Venus and is tried in Venus’ court for his blasphemy, found guilty and awaits punishment. Calliope intercedes on behalf of the dreamer, who is released on the condition that he compose poetry in praise of love. Douglas ascends to Honour’s palace, situated on top of a mountain made of marble.

The Palis of Honoure seems to evoke *The Court of Sapience* several times, making the absence of a personified figure of imagination all the more keen. As the

³⁴⁰ Gavin Douglas, *The Palis of Honoure*, ed. David Parkinson (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1992), 6. All quotations of this text will be taken from this edition.

³⁴¹ Priscilla Bawcutt, *Gavin Douglas: A Critical Study* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1976), 31.

dreamer wanders in a “desert” similar to the place from which the eagle rescues Geoffrey in *The House of Fame*, he is met by a splendid queen who turns out to be Sapience herself. This meeting mimics the dreamer’s meeting Sapience and her two minions Intelligence and Science in *The Court of Sapience*. At least one medieval reader made this connection, writing the words “The quen of sapyence with hyr court” in the margin next to the identification of the queen as Sapience.³⁴² Once inside the Palis of Honoure, the dreamer meets Sapience once again. This time she appears alongside Science, but Intelligence, who was aligned with the imagination in the *Court of Sapience*, is nowhere to be found. The specific omission of Intelligence, an intermediary between the senses and the intellect, suggests that the personification of imagination has become impossible in this text.

Moreover, the presence of the “smaragdane,” which fights the imagination, as a fundamental part of the structure of the Palis of Honoure suggests an expulsion of the imagination from the allegorical realm. The Palis of Honoure is populated by allegorical figures and presents itself as an allegorical structure, just as in the Court of Sapience. Only here, the smaragdane forms an intrinsic part of the structure of the allegorical house, suggesting that the imagination must be expelled from the allegory. The “smaragdane” appears among a long list of “prectius stonis” seen hanging on the roof of the palace: “Hang full of plesand lowpyt saphyrs clere./ Of dyamantis and rubys, as I ges,/ Wer all the burdis maid, of mast riches./ Of sardanus, of jaspe and smaragdane/ Trestis, formys and benkis wer, pollist plane.”³⁴³ Embedded in the fabric of the construction of the Palis,

³⁴² Douglas, *The Palis of Honoure*, 84, n. 202.

³⁴³ Douglas, *The Palis of Honoure*, ll. 1913-1917.

then, is a stone used to fight the “illness” of the fantasy or imagination. The personification of the imagination is no longer a possibility in this text.

Instead, the imagination becomes increasingly internalized in the psyche and is repeatedly identified as a source of terror. The dreamer attempts to appeal to Nature, who seems to have entirely abandoned the natural world:

“O Nature Queen and O ye lusty May,”
Quod I tho, “Quhow lang sall I thus forvay,
Quilk yow and Venus in this garth deservis?
Reconsell me out of this gret affray
That I maye synge yow laudis day be day.
Ye that al mundane creaturis preservis
Confort your man that in this fanton stervis
With sprete arrasyt and every wit away,
Quakyng for fere, baith puncys, vane and nervis.”³⁴⁴

The dreamer is stuck in a battle between Nature and Venus (“Quhilk yow and Venus”), which seems a kind of recapitulation of the development of these two allegorical figures between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries. In the twelfth century, Venus must be chastised for her disastrous disobedience of Queen Nature. By the fourteenth century, in Gower’s *Confessio Amantis*, Genius has become subordinate to Venus alone and Nature is nowhere to be found. By the time *The Palis of Honoure* is written in the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century, an argument has developed about the allegorical dominance of Venus and Nature. To whom is the dreamer subordinate? To whom is Imagination or Genius a servant? Not only do the answers to these questions seem unclear but the conflict is voiced much more prominently than it was in the fourteenth century, a reflection of the divided and nearly “psychomachian” nature of fifteenth-century debates over imagination and its allegorical status.

³⁴⁴ Ibid., ll. 91-9.

Furthermore, the experience of visions, phantoms and phantasms, the work of the imagination in a dream, is immediately cast as a form of terror in this text. The dreamer calls upon Nature to “Reconsell me out of this gret affray”³⁴⁵ and to “Confort your man that in this fanton stervis/ With sprete arrasyt and every wit away,/ Quakyng for fere, baith puncys, vane and nervis.”³⁴⁶ The “fanton,” which the dreamer begins by calling a “vision,” makes the dreamer to seek “comfort,” since it causes his “sprete” to be “arrasyt” and his “wit” to disappear. He is utterly terrified, “quaking for fere.” Part of his fear arises from the way in which “fanton” harasses the normal function of the imagination. The “fanton” implies some form of deception—a specter, apparition, illusion, or even hallucination. It is associated with nightmares and delirium but also implies something that attacks or deceives the imagination and senses.³⁴⁷ In this dream vision, we witness a view of the imagination gone wrong: its capacity for utter deception and terror is made clear by its ability to be infiltrated by deceptive images and illusions such as the “fanton.” The construction of the line “Confort your man that in this fanton stervis” suggests the intertwined nature of the dreamer and the “fanton.” This “fanton” arises from within the dreamer and not in the form of an externalized personification.

Further descriptions of the contents of the dream provoke a form of terror in the dreamer. He calls his dream a “dreidfull dreme with grysly fantasyis” and exclaims

³⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, l. 94.

³⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, ll. 97-99.

³⁴⁷ *MED*, s.v. fanton.

directly about his fear “But now God wate quhat ferdnes on me lyis!”³⁴⁸ Later, when the dreamer reaches the entrance to the palace with his nymph guide and views a series of engravings on the outside, he becomes afraid to go inside, expressing further possibilities of the dangers of fantastical marvels of the imagination:

Wondrand here on, agane my wyll but lete
My Nympe in grif schot me in at the yet.
“Quhat devil,” said scho, “hes thou not ellis ado
Bot all thy wyt and fantasy to set
On sic dotyng?” and tho for fere I swet
Of her langage, bot than anone said scho,
“List thou se farlyes, behald thaym yondir, lo;
Yit study not ovir mekil a dreid thow vary,
For I persave the halflyngis in a fary.”³⁴⁹

The nymph first chastises the dreamer for his hesitation, shoving him inside the entrance to the palace and demanding that he leave behind his trance and “sic dotyng.” However, even as she dismisses the dreamer’s fears and relentlessly pushes him inside the palace of which he is momentarily terrified, she simultaneously warns him of inspecting engravings and images inside the palace too closely, advising he “study not ovir mekil a dreid thow vary” for fear that he may fall into an irretrievable trance (“halflygis in a fary”). The nymph here admits a fear about the power of images and the work of the imagination to overwhelm the physical body and reduce a person to a state of paralyzed trance. Similarly, earlier on when the dreamer is reflecting upon his delivery from punishment, he describes his previous feelings of dread, noting that the “intercessioun” on his part has dismissed all his “imagination”:

Lo, thus amynd this hard perplexité
Awaytand ever quhat moment I suld de

³⁴⁸ Douglas, *The Palis of Honoure*, l. 387.

³⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, ll. 1864-1873.

Or than sum new transfiguration,
He quhilk that is eternall verité,
The glorious Lord ryngand in personis thre,
Providit has for my salvation
Be sum gude spretis revelation
Quhilk intercessioun maid, I traist, for me.
I foryet all imagination.³⁵⁰

Here, “imagination,” meaning something like “fanciful notions,” is certainly negative, associated with feelings of dread upon awaiting a possible punishment such as execution. The dismissal of “imagination” is associated with the concomitant flight of terror and fear.

As in *Court of Sapience*, Douglas’ poem presents an imagination that may be viewed as an illness requiring “medicine” to be cured and expunged. Yet unlike in the *Court of Sapience*, which produces two imaginations, one personified and one occurring naturally, *The Palis of Honoure* has no option of personification of a force that proves terrifying. The dreamer’s delivery from a possible death sentence in *The Palis of Honoure* is associated with a purgation of the imagination. This purgation indicates not only obvious distrust of the imagination but also an attempt to expel the imagination from the dreamer’s psyche as a key to psychological health. The internalized force of the imagination is presented as a frightening, destructive figure, but, at the same time, its ability to be externalized as a personification has been eliminated. The only way the dreamer may find safety is to attempt to expel the psychological force of imagination from his own brain.

As imagination divides against itself and collapses as a personified figure in the fifteenth century, it may symbolize a larger crisis for allegory as a genre. In her study of

³⁵⁰ Ibid., ll. 772-780.

Skelton's *Bowge of Court*, Helen Cooney argues that allegory came under attack in the fifteenth century, in part because of the dissemination of humanist texts, proclaiming that there was "a fundamental conflict between humanism and allegory."³⁵¹ The humanist philologist, Cooney notes, is never concerned with the abstract quality of language but with the individual situation of the speaker and the "adaptability and instantaneousness of the word."³⁵² Cooney locates allegory itself as a site of urgent questioning in the late fifteenth century, when this dominant form of literary expression was beginning to face the challenge of philological humanism.³⁵³

A general crisis about allegory may be seen enacted in the troubles of personifying the imagination in the three fifteenth-century texts examined in this chapter. Yet a few other reasons may explain why the imagination as allegorical figure in particular collapses in the fifteenth century. In the wake of Wycliffism and Arundel's *Constitutions*, fifteenth-century English authors confronted an environment increasingly hostile to images. The collapse of the externalized, allegorized imagination may have something to do with contemporary suspicion of both the worship of images and of images themselves. Externalized representations of images, like the personified imagination, were not to be trusted. At the same time, increasing emphasis was being placed on the internal, individual interpretation of images. As Shannon Gayk observes, Wyclif argued that the *reception* of images was as important as their form. This meant

³⁵¹ Helen Cooney, "Skelton's *Bowge of Court* and the Crisis of Allegory in Late-Medieval England," in *Nation, Court and Culture: New Essays on Fifteenth-Century English Poetry*, ed. Helen Cooney (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2001), 160.

³⁵² *Ibid.*, 161.

³⁵³ *Ibid.*

that image-viewers were responsible for the way in which they worshipped images and whether their mode of worship was idolatrous.³⁵⁴ At the same time, lay learning and devotion was becoming more prominent, and clergymen like Pecock insisted that laypeople had the means to learn by themselves with the help of images.³⁵⁵ These factors created an environment in which internal processing of images was emphasized over the value of external, actual images, which were the target of much suspicion. In this environment, then, it makes sense that the externalized allegorical imagination might fall in prominence while the internalized psychological form of the imagination might rise in prominence. As the personified imagination becomes increasingly internally divided and collapses on itself, a new form of psychologized imagination comes to the fore as a deceitful and terrifying force that is nevertheless entirely integral to the mind. This seemingly fragile figure arises anew as a powerful one not only in fifteenth-century philosophy but also in its psychologized, non-allegorical literary form. Nonetheless, once again, literature develops a much more nuanced imagination than philosophy, starkly dividing the personified imagination from the internal, psychologized force of imagination. Fifteenth-century literary texts advance a weakened form of personified imagination that seems to run counter to a philosophical history of an increasingly powerful imagination, one that is even capable in some instances of healing. The idea of an imagination that harasses an individual's psychology will be picked up again by Spenser in a yet more frightening display of the imagination's capacities almost an entire century later.

³⁵⁴ Gayk, *Image, Text, and Religious Reform in Fifteenth-Century England*, 10.

³⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 159-60.

Chapter 5

The Fragmented Imagination: Historical Rupture and Shattered Self in *The Faerie Queene*

The late fifteenth century left us with a personified imagination in the midst of depletion. Over the course of the fifteenth century, the imagination became increasingly a source of internalized psychological terror and decreasingly an externalized personified figure. In the sixteenth century, in the wake of the Reformation, the imagination continues to become more of a terrifying psychic force; while the fifteenth-century imagination was prone to self-division, the sixteenth-century imagination is now a source and driver of external fragmentation. A divided and suspicious figure, Spenser's imagination resonates with Alan of Lille's twelfth-century Genius, a simultaneous source of good and evil creation. At the same time, the imagination is a locus for considering historical fragmentation and the separation of the early modern moment from the medieval. The sixteenth-century imagination thus comes to represent a major historical

break, even as its personification recombines ongoing concerns common to the representation of the imagination since the twelfth century.

In his *Allegorical Epic*, Michael Murrin suggests that Spenser's *Faerie Queene* demonstrates a troublesome fear and suspicion of the imagination.³⁵⁶ Murrin notes the problematic nature of this suspicion for Spenser, whose imaginative, monumental work cannot comfortably embrace the imagination. Murrin further observes Spenser's suspicion of the human imagination based on three main figures: Archimago, Phantastes, and Genius, the porter of the Bower of Bliss.³⁵⁷ Murrin argues that Spenser's suspicion of the imagination is a product of an apprehensive Renaissance attitude toward the faculty.³⁵⁸

Yet Spenser's imagination in many ways continues the medieval literary imagination that precedes it. Spenser's imagination, a fragmented figure who also comes to represent fragmentation of the self, body, and historical rupture, is a stark descendent of the divided imagination of the fifteenth century. Indeed, the Bower of Bliss' destruction of imagination is similar to the fifteenth-century *Palis of Honoure*'s attempt to expel and erase the personified figure of imagination. Imagination's "divorce" from reason, as Murrin points out, is also a prominent feature of Chaucer's fourteenth-century imagination. Even fragmentation is a feature of the imagination that extends back to Alan of Lille, whose imagination creates good with his right hand and evil with his left.

³⁵⁶ Michael Murrin, *The Allegorical Epic: Essays in Its Rise and Decline* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 134.

³⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 134.

³⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 134-5. See also Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola, *On the Imagination*, ed. and trans. Harry Caplan (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1930), 50-53, 56-7, 60-61. See also Michael Murrin, "The Varieties of Criticism," *Modern Philology* 70 (1973): 342-356.

Imagination in the sixteenth century is poised at and conscious of an extreme kind of historical rupture. Yet even this feature of Spenser's imagination has precedents in the thirteenth-century literary imagination. This same feature is true of Jean de Meun's Genius, who remains permanently suspended between a forward-looking Aristotelian recombinative imagination and a past-looking Silvestrian and Alanian imagination. Furthermore, Archimago is explicitly a protean figure, constantly changing clothing and disguises, challenging the premise of easily identifiable allegorical figures, much like Jean de Meun's Genius. Spenser's sixteenth-century imagination represents a culmination of the medieval literary imagination and unexpectedly signals a form of continuity within rupture. Spenser's imagination, however, has been taken to an extreme of division and fragmentation and has been rendered more explicitly dangerous against the backdrop of iconoclastic vigor in his milieu.

The key concept at the center of Spenser's representation of the imagination is fragmentation. The imagination in the guise of allegorical figures Genius, Archimago, and Phantastes is itself fragmented, just as it is in medieval literature. The novelty of the sixteenth-century imagination is its capacity for *producing* fragmentation. The imagination is not only itself under attack as an allegorical figure, as it often is in medieval literature, but it also now has an explicitly sinister capacity as an agent of fragmentation. In the House of Alma episode, the imagination disrupts the body and is even aligned with historical rupture. For a number of scholars, Spenser supposedly offers an illustrious example of the emergence of the self in the Renaissance. Redcrosse Knight's and Guyon's *aventures* spanning the first two books of the epic are considered processes of self-establishment, as each hero emerges as a fully formed and

psychologically unified individual by the end of the book.³⁵⁹ Genevieve Guenther contends that the workings of the imagination depend upon the presupposition of a fully formed subject who has some kind of internal desire for the images presented in the imagination.³⁶⁰ In their focus on the early modern period's establishment of the "self" and its emphasis on introspection, these accounts tend to occlude the extent to which Spenser's epic bears the burden of both psychic and historical fragmentation at every turn. As much as the early modern period attempts to build a stable, introspective subject, the period is equally invaded by iconoclasm, rupture from the medieval past, and an upsurge in medical explorations of the dissected body. The period's attack on images also resulted in an attack on the psychological faculty of the imagination and a growing concern about its independent ability to formulate images *ad infinitum*. A closer look at the figure of Archimago, the Bower of Bliss episode, and the House of Alma indicates that psychological unity and the emergence of the self do *not* occur so assuredly in these first two books of Spenser's epic. Specifically, the imagination becomes a locus for contemplating fragmentation of both the self and of history.

Indeed, even as the Renaissance is traditionally figured as a moment of self-recognition and self-development, many scholars have duly noted an increasingly fragmented view of the self and body in this period. As Michael Schoenfeldt argues, the renewed attention to Galenic physiology and humoral theory resulted in an "introspection

³⁵⁹ See A.C. Hamilton, *The Structure of Allegory in The Faerie Queene* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), 92-3. On the other hand, see Sean Kane, *Spenser's Moral Allegory* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989), 36, who discusses Redcrosse's "human weakness" and consistent error throughout the course of Book I.

³⁶⁰ Genevieve Juliette Guenther, *Magical Imaginations: Instrumental Aesthetics in the English Renaissance* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 41.

whose focus was physiological as well as psychological.”³⁶¹ Spenser’s “self” is “fragile and unstable,” according to Schoenfeldt, a being “assailed on all sides” and “eternally under construction.”³⁶² This theory of the imagination’s control over the body as a powerful force working out of tune with the body may be viewed in a wider context of a culture that externalized the workings of the mind and fragmented the body. Jonathan Sawday has termed the early modern period a “culture of dissection” due to a significant fascination with the body in parts as well as the increasing prevalence of the actual practice of dissection.³⁶³ Although dissection was common in Italy and southern France from the late thirteenth century, the phenomenon did not appear in northern Europe until the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.³⁶⁴ The medical and scientific culture of dissection certainly made its way into literary culture as well. As Katharine Park has observed, human dissection was not limited to colleges and universities but also took place in private homes and religious institutions. The average person in Spenser’s milieu would have had ample exposure to human dissection.³⁶⁵

The allegorized figure of the imagination, Archimago, as a locus for the representation of this form of fragmentation makes sense in light of the Reformation’s concern about the power of the imagination to invent images. As Reformation thought

³⁶¹ Michael C. Schoenfeldt, *Bodies and Selves in Early Modern England: Physiology and Inwardness in Spenser, Shakespeare, Herbert, and Milton* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 22.

³⁶² *Ibid.*, 73.

³⁶³ See Jonathan Sawday, *The Body Emblazoned: Dissection and the Human Body in Renaissance Culture* (Routledge: London, 1995), 2 for a discussion of “dissective culture.”

³⁶⁴ Katharine Park, *Secrets of Women: Gender, Generation, and the Origins of Human Dissection* (New York: Zone Books, 2006), 20.

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 15-18.

urged the destruction of images in worship, a campaign to demonize and externalize the natural functioning of the imagination in the mind emerged. The effects of this campaign are well-represented by Archimago's thought-inserting techniques. It is my contention that the imagination in Spenser's epic becomes a central component in a crisis about self-fragmentation and historical rupture. This divided self, rather than the fully-formed introspective self sometimes posited by early modern scholarship, comes to the fore in Spenser's epic. The exact nature of this fragmentation is necessarily altered according to the historical context in which Spenser writes, but the character of the imagination remains surprisingly continuous from the medieval period.

This process of psychological externalization and fragmentation occurs within the context of a text that laments a dramatic form of historical rupture. Spenser uses the figure of the imagination to depict a world in which paranoia and fragmentation, both of the self and of the historical moment, are rife. Phantastes' chamber contains tomes of British history, suggesting an alignment of imagination with the past and with historical rupture and fragmentation. Yet Guyon's discovery of the tomes disrupts the description of Phantastes and thus suspends imagination in a space between the present and the past.

Even as Spenser's imagination indicates some key continuities with its medieval counterparts, the historical circumstances that produced more extreme suspicion of the imagination in the early modern period might help account for the scale of paranoia about the faculty in *The Faerie Queene*. Problems with the imagination are ubiquitous in Spenser's milieu in part because of pervasive political and religious debates over images. Churchwardens' accounts indicate a constant putting up and taking down of religious

images between Henry VIII's and Elizabeth's reigns.³⁶⁶ Altars were systematically removed, and iconoclastic activity was common in London.³⁶⁷ The year 1559, during Spenser's lifetime, witnessed especially brutal and widespread iconoclasm.³⁶⁸ Tudor homilists attacked the imagination in particular, often suggesting that idolatry is just as much a preoccupation with mental images as with real images.³⁶⁹ Despite widespread iconoclasm, it should be noted that the attitude toward images during Elizabeth's reign was decidedly ambivalent. As Margaret Aston has noted, Elizabeth was often opposed to the actions of some of the fiercest iconoclasts.³⁷⁰ At the same time, Elizabeth was herself capable of considerable imagistic destruction.³⁷¹ Fear and destruction of images also resulted in considerable fear and destruction of the mind's image-making capacity, the imagination. As will be discussed in this chapter, the surrounding cultural and religious ambivalence about images can also be seen in Spenser's ambivalence toward the imagination. The imagination is both a powerful externalized force that has the potential to terrorize and fragment and a necessary arbiter of history and cultural memory. Elizabeth's ambivalence about images resulted in a kind of suspension between the

³⁶⁶ J.J. Scarisbrick, *The Reformation and the English People* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984), 89.

³⁶⁷ Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, 1400-1580* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 568.

³⁶⁸ Margaret Aston, *England's Iconoclasts Volume 1: Laws Against Images* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 302.

³⁶⁹ Kane, *Spenser's Moral Allegory*, 32-3.

³⁷⁰ Aston, *England's Iconoclasts*, 304. See also William P. Haugard, *Elizabeth and the English Reformation: The Struggle for a Stable Settlement of Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 208.

³⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 318.

medieval past's celebration of images and the Reformation's destruction of them. In a similar manner, imagination in Spenser's epic remains poised and suspended between the medieval past and the early modern present.

I first examine the figure of Archimago as an imagination fragmented from its place inside the mind and equally as an arbiter of internal self-fragmentation. Then I discuss Phantastes and the House of Alma as a testament to Spenser's suspicion of the imagination and its role in the fragmentation of the body. Next I investigate the Bower of Bliss episode, arguing for its emphasis on the destruction of the imagination, an extreme and more explicit version of what happens to the allegorical imagination in the fifteenth century. Finally, I demonstrate how Phantastes and thus allegorical imagination is aligned with melancholy over historical rupture and desire for the past. In imagination's suspension between the past and the present, Spenser's allegorical character is still very much the transformative figure we saw especially clearly in the *Roman de la Rose* and *De planctu Naturae*.

Archimago and the externalized imagination: psychic fragmentation

Archimago's name has stirred considerable debate in Spenser scholarship, since the combination of terms "arch" and "imago," with the embedded term "mage" results in a variety of possible meanings.³⁷² As Harry Berger has pointed out, Archimago's name may be divided in a variety of ways, including "Archi-mage" and "Arch-imago." The two different divisions result in divergent meanings. "Archi-mage" means "arch-magician,"

³⁷² *The Spenser Encyclopedia*, ed. A.C. Hamilton (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), s.v. "Archimago."

while “arch-imagō” means the “arch-image.”³⁷³ As the “arch-image,” Archimago represents the psychological faculty of the imagination.³⁷⁴ His dwelling place, a “hidden cell,” is not only a ruse to deceive Redcrosse and Una into believing he is a holy hermit but also a reference to the *cellula phantastica*, the imagination’s dwelling place in the human brain.³⁷⁵ Many Spenser scholars have attempted to reconcile Archimago’s “imaginative” function with his “magician” identity. Some, such as A. Bartlett, have taken the magician-aspect of Archimago’s name combined with his imaginative function to indicate that Archimago is the representation *par excellence* of the illusory poetic imagination and even an embodiment of Spenser’s own mind.³⁷⁶ Others, such as James Nohrnberg and D.P. Walker, claim that Archimago is primarily a magician, but his ability to induce illusory images within human imaginations reveals the “idolatry of the natural imagination.”³⁷⁷

Yet these attempts to “unify” Archimago may be somewhat misguided. The tension between Archi-mage and Arch-imagō can in fact be seen as essential to Spenser’s personification of the faculty of the imagination. The imagination is a faculty integral to the human mind, dwelling in the “hidden” *cellula phantastica*; yet it is also, by virtue of a play on words, an externalized magical force, a magician with strong and secret powers.

The imagination, in this view, abuses itself. It is both agent and patient. As Berger points

³⁷³ Harry Berger, *The Allegorical Temper: Vision and Reality in Book II of Spenser’s Faerie Queene* (New Haven: Yale Press, 1957), 71.

³⁷⁴ See Kane, *Spenser’s Moral Allegory*, who calls Archimago “unchecked fantasy.”

³⁷⁵ *Spenser Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Archimago.”

³⁷⁶ Guenther, *Magical Imaginations*, 38.

³⁷⁷ See James Nohrnberg, *The Analogy of The Faerie Queene* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 126-7. See also D.P. Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic from Ficino to Campanella* (London: Warburg Institute, 1958).

out, “archimago” is simultaneously the “strongest of the strong,” a magician with supernatural abilities, and the weakest of the weak, a passive and sometimes abused imagination.³⁷⁸ Archimago’s “dual” nature solidifies the idea of the aesthetic of fragmentation in Spenser’s poem in general. Much like the fifteenth-century imagination, Spenser’s imagination has split into two parts, one internal and one external to the human psyche. The imagination in this text is also responsible for fragmenting other individuals. As Harry Berger suggests, Archimago both divides Redcrosse from himself and splits Una into two.³⁷⁹

Our first vision of Archimago, as a disguised hermit fetching dreams from Morpheus, fashions him not only as a deceptively protean figure but also as a figure exterior to Redcrosse’s psyche. The precise process by which Archimago obtains the dream to “abuse” Redcrosse’s imagination is depicted as a detailed chain of events that highlights the extent to which the dreaming process originates outside the mind of the dreamer. Archimago sends a “Sprite” to visit Morpheus in the hopes of obtaining dream material:

Hether (quoth he) me *Archimago* sent,
He that the stubborne Sprites can wisely tame,
He bids thee to him send for his intent
A fit false dreame, that can delude the sleepers sent.
The God obayde, and calling forth straight way
A diuerse dreame out of his prison darke,
Deliuered it to him, and downe did lay
His heauie head, deuoide of careful carke,
Whose sences all were straight benumbd and starke.

³⁷⁸ Berger, *Allegorical Temper*, 71.

³⁷⁹ Harry Berger Jr, *Revisionary Play: Studies in the Spenserian Dynamics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 64.

He backe returning by the Yuorie dore,
Remounted vp as light as chearefull Larke,
And on his little winges the dreame he bore,
In hast vnto his Lord, where he him left afore.³⁸⁰

The fact that Archimago sends a messenger to Morpheus to fetch a dream to then place in Redcrosse's mind suggests the myriad steps between the imaginative thought and its manifestation in the mind of the dreamer. The very process of imaginative thinking seems fragmented here, as the number of figures intervening between Archimago and Redcrosse multiplies. The dream itself also entails a notion of multiplicity. Morpheus is said to present Archimago's Sprite with a "diuerse dreame." "Diuerse" most immediately means various, different, or not alike in some fashion. Yet it may also imply endless multiplication and multiplicity. While "diuerse" may simply mean "several" or "sundry," it may also encompass the sense of "an indefinite number."³⁸¹ Already the work of the imagination and its contents are figured as detached, externalized, and, most importantly, fragmented. The detail of the messenger carrying the dream on his wings ("And on his little winges the dreame he bore") only further emphasizes the distance between the imaginative content and the psyche of the dreamer whose mind will soon be inhabited by this imaginative content.

The work of the imagination has become an externalized, physical object, able to be carried on the spirit's wings. The sense of imaginative thought as physical object becomes more prominent in the description of the origin of Redcrosse's dream:

Now when that ydle dreame was to him brought,

³⁸⁰ Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, ed. A.C. Hamilton (London: Pearson Education Ltd., 2001), I.i.43-44. All further quotations of this text will be taken from this edition.

³⁸¹ *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "divers."

Vnto that Elfin knight he bad him fly,
Where he slept soundly void of euil thought,
And with false shewes abuse his fantasy,
In sort as he him schooled priuily:
And that new creature borne without her dew,
Full of the makers guyle with vsage sly
He taught to imitate that Lady trew,
Whose semblance she did carrie vnder feigned hew.

Thus well instructed, to their worke they haste,
And coming where the knight in slomber lay,
The one vpon his hardie head him plaste,
And made him dreame of loues and lustfull play,
That nigh his manly hart did melt away,
Bathed in wanton blis and wicked ioy:
Then seemed him his Lady by him lay,
And to him playnd, how that false winged boy,
Her chaste hart had subdewd, to learne Dame pleasures toy.³⁸²

Just before Archimago's messenger inserts the dream material into Redcrosse's head, Spenser reminds the reader of Archimago's image-making capacities. We are reminded that Redcrosse sleeps beside the false Una, a "new creature" who is "Full of the makers gyle." This Una, an imitation of the original ("He taught to imitate that Lady trew") is a mere feigned "semblance." False Una is herself described as an image here, with the use of the word "semblance" and the concept of imitation. It is no coincidence that Spenser emphasizes Archimago's role as imager moments before describing the process by which the dream Redcrosse is about to have originates in his mind. This description of Archimago solidifies his role as "imagination."

Yet if Archimago is truly Redcrosse's imagination, a figure of a faculty inside his psyche, the process by which the dream comes to be in Redcrosse's mind is uncomfortably foreign. Spenser highlights the extent of Archimago's agency here by rendering the origin of Redcrosse's dream a highly physical process. Archimago does not

³⁸² *Faerie Queene*, I.i.46-47.

simply influence Redcrosse's thoughts. He physically places the dream inside his head: "The one vpon his hardie head him plaste." The use of the preposition "vpon," paired with the highly corporeal term "plaste," suggests that Archimago literally inserts the dream into Redcrosse's mind. This clear delineation of the imagination placing the imaginative material into the mind of the dreamer, who then is forced to experience a certain fantasy, not only suggests a particular form of paranoia about the external world's control over the mind's image-making capacities but also results in a profound fragmentation of the psyche. Redcrosse's imagination is in many ways not his own, and this "outsider" status of what should be an integral psychic power speaks to a form of subjective severing.

Archimago inherits certain terms that were often paired with imagination in the medieval period. In his pursuit of Una, Archimago is described as "subtill," a term aligned with "imagination" in many fifteenth-century English allegories and poetic works, including the pseudo-Chaucerian *Tale of Beryn* and *Hickscorner*.³⁸³ In his battle against Redcrosse in Book 2, Archimago is said to utilize his "subtile engins." The use of the word "engin" recalls a long medieval tradition of the association of imagination with genius as well as specific passages in the *Roman de la Rose* in which both Nature and Genius are said to utilize their "engins."³⁸⁴ The medieval tradition of ingenium is an

³⁸³ Ibid., I.ii.9; *Tale of Beryn*: "In al the world wyde, so fals of hir lyvyng/ Was no pepill under sonne, ne noon so dessyvabill/ As was the pepill of this town, ne more unstabill,/ And had a cursed usage of sotill ymaginacioune" (ll. 1620-1623); *Hickscorner*: "And yet I can imagine things subtle/ For to get money plenty" (ll. 215-16).

³⁸⁴ "Comment ele puisse comprendre/Par son enging en ses figures/Proprement toutes creatures" (*Le Roman de la rose*, ll. 16031-16033).

ancient one, extending back to at least Isidore of Seville in the sixth century.³⁸⁵ These references to the medieval tradition of the personified imagination suggest a form of continuity for the figure. Archimago, a fragmenting and fragmented figure, is, however, more explicitly threatening and terrifying than his medieval counterparts. He does not perhaps represent a complete severing from the medieval imagination but a continuation of a fragmented figure who now also has the frightening power to induce division in others.

Archimago may be even more explicitly connected to certain medieval iterations of the allegorical imagination. In particular, Archimago's protean nature is reminiscent of Jean de Meun's Genius. When we first meet Archimago, he is dressed like a hermit, and he routinely changes clothes, a key characteristic of Genius in the *Roman*. This veiled presentation of an allegorical figure is striking in the context of other Book I figures such as Sans Joi, Sans Loy, and Sans Foy, who display their identities prominently. Upon his first entrance, Archimago is already the slippery, difficult-to-identify figure that Genius is in the *Roman*. Spenser explicitly aligns Archimago with Proteus in Canto 2:

He then deuisde himselfe how to disguise;
For by his mighty science he could take
As many formes and shapes in seeming wise,
As euer *Proteus* to himself could make:
Sometime a fowle, sometime a fish in lake,
Now like a foxe, now like a dragon fell,
That of himself he ofte for feare would quake,
And oft would flie away. O who can tell
The hidden powre of herbes, and might of Magick spel?³⁸⁶

³⁸⁵ Britton J. Harwood, *Piers Plowman and the Problem of Belief* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 59.

³⁸⁶ Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, I.ii.10.

Archimago is capable of assuming a multitude of disguises, accompanied by frequent changes of clothing. Spenser's list of the various "formes and shapes" that Archimago might assume, including "fowle," "fish," "foxe," "dragon," necessitates a pause in the text in which Archimago occupies a completely transformative state. This transformative capacity, and especially the way the text pauses over and relishes it, is reminiscent of Genius in Jean's *Roman*. Archimago has inherited a feature of the medieval personified imagination. This particular feature, transformability, upsets the ease with which personified figures are normally identified and once again questions the stable nature of allegorical figures. At the same time, this allegorical transformability, while not explicitly frightening in Jean de Meun's text, is an immediate source of terror in Spenser's epic. Archimago's changing costumes often cause even him "for feare" to "quake." The final line of this particular characterization of Archimago encapsulates the urgent fear this personified imagination figure evokes. Archimago uses his protean nature to deceive with the "might of Magick spel[s]."

What begins as a clear alignment with the medieval transformative imagination becomes much more explicitly sinister and terrifying in Spenser's text than it ever was in Jean de Meun's. While Spenser's personified imagination may recombine elements of the medieval imagination, it is nevertheless more explicitly threatening and capable of effecting real damage. In particular, while the medieval imagination may be transformative and internally divided, Spenser's imagination is not only internally divided but also capable of *producing* fragmentation. Archimago is himself a divided figure, existing simultaneously as Archi-mage and Arch-imago, and functioning both inside and outside of Redcrosse's psyche. At the same time, Archimago produces

fragmentation by creating false Una and thus dividing Una into two figures. Imagination in this text is thus more explicitly an agent of destruction than we found in medieval texts. Not surprisingly, then, in the Bower of Bliss episode, the imagination, not external images, becomes the true great evil that must be expunged and destroyed.

Phantastes, the House of Alma, and the Imagination's Attack on the Body

The double fragmentation of the imagination from the psyche and from itself observed in Archimago resonates strongly with the fragmentation of the body that occurs in the House of Alma. All of this fragmentation relates to the culture of dissection identified by Jonathan Sawday, particularly well illustrated by the House of Alma's representation of the body in parts.³⁸⁷ Importantly, the House of Alma represents not only a terrifying and suspicious imagination in the form of Phantastes but also suggests that the imagination may itself engender fragmentation of the body. The House of Alma is attacked by various hybrid figures that mimic the inventions of the imagination, demonstrating how an externalized psychological figure such as Archimago might come to attack and fragment the body. The imagination is thus both itself fragmented, as it often is in medieval literature, but can also, in a new twist, engender fragmentation.

The fragmentation of the body inherent in Archimago's fragmentation from Redcrosse's body is heightened in the vivid dissection that occurs in the House of Alma episode. As Leonard Barkan has noted, a "major component" of Spenser's work is "the image of wholeness," and yet "an equally strong vector is a fragmentation of the

³⁸⁷Sawday, *The Body Emblazoned*, 2.

wholeness into a multitude of component parts.”³⁸⁸ This is partially and necessarily the work of allegory, with its representation of fragmented concepts as individual abstractions. Nowhere is this “strong vector” of fragmentation more potent than in the House of Alma. The House of Alma at once represents a fully formed human body and yet at the same time depicts a body in pieces, as Guyon and King Arthur explore its component parts. Most significant in any exploration of the imagination is Guyon and Arthur’s wanderings in Alma’s brain and particularly the figure of Phantastes:

His chamber was dispaunted all with in,
With sondry colours, in the which were writ
Infinite shapes of thinges dispersed thin;
Some such as in the world were neuer yit,
Ne can deuized be of mortall wit;
Some daily seene, and knowne by their names,
Such as in idle fantasies doe flit:
Infernall Hags, *Centaurs*, freendes, *Hippodames*,
Apes, Lyons, Aegles, Owles, fooles, louers, children, Dames.

And all the chamber filled was with flyes,
Which buzzed all about, and made such sound,
That they encombred all mens eares and eyes,
Like many swarmes of Bees assembled round,
After their hiues with honny do abound:
All those were idle thoughtes and fantasies,
Deuices, dreames, opinions vnsound,
Shewes, visions, sooth-sayes, and prophesies;
And all that fainted is, as leasings, tales, and lies.

Emongst them all sate he, which wonned there,
That hight *Phantastes* by his nature trew,
A man of yeares yet fresh, as mote appere,
Of swarth complexion, and of crabbed hew,
That him full of melancholy did shew;
Bent hollow beetle browes, sharpe staring eyes,
That mad or foolish seemd: one by his vew
Mote deme him borne with ill disposed skyes,

³⁸⁸ Leonard Barkan, *Nature’s Work of Art: The Human Body as Image of the World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975), 214.

When oblique *Saturne* sate in the house of agonyes.³⁸⁹

Much is unsurprising about this depiction of the imagination, here named *Phantastes* and occupying the middle ventricle of the brain. He is responsible for “dreames,” “visions,” and “prophesies.” He creates “idle fantasies” as his name implies. This description of *Phantastes* takes for granted that imagination can create anew, a debate that occupied many medieval allegories including *De planctu* and *Roman de la Rose*. While the question of whether Genius or Nature was responsible for new creations vexes both Alan of Lille and Jean de Meun, Spenser seems to assume confidently that *Phantastes* can create “Some such as in the world were neuer yit,/Ne can deuized be of mortall wit.” The notion that *Phantastes* brings to life creatures that “were neuer yit” in the world implies a capacity to invent anew.

Phantastes’ most significant inventions are the hybrids reminiscent of characters in Spenser’s epic, such as *Duessa* and *Error*. *Phantastes* creates the material of “idle fantasies,” including “Infernall Hags, *Centaurs*, freendes, *Hippodames*,/Apes, Lyons, Aegles, Owles.” These hybrids invade the brain like ‘flies’ buzzing “all about,” in a similar manner in which *Archimago* inserts thoughts and fantasies into *Redcrosse*’s mind. The work of the imagination is depicted as a series of perpetual and, significantly, unwanted thoughts, like a burden that “encombred all mens eares and eyes.” This view of the imagination as a perpetually harassing force resonates with Calvin’s description of the imagination as a “perpetual workshop of idols.”³⁹⁰ Thoughts provoked by the imagination

³⁸⁹ *Faerie Queene*, II.ix.50-52.

³⁹⁰ See James Simpson, *Under the Hammer: Iconoclasm in the Anglo-American Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 135.

are so frequent and harassing that they are compared to “many swarms of Bees” surrounding “hiues with honny.”

E. Ruth Harvey dismisses this constant “buzzing” as a faithful representation of the work of the *sensus communis*. Yet Spenser’s multiplicity of images describing this constant bombardment is not a simple reiteration of the traditional *sensus communis*.³⁹¹ This unpleasant image of the imagination in fact recalls Archimago’s thought insertion techniques in Book I. Even as the imagination is here somewhat discounted as “leasings, tales, and lies,” the unremitting stream of thought resulting from its activity suggests not only its inevitability but also its power. Here we learn too of the imagination’s prophetic power, as Phantastes is said to be able to “things to come foresee.” While Phantastes may harass the minds of men with swarms of images and false fantasies, he is still credited with “a sharpe foresight” and “working wit.” The idea of the prophetic imagination is a notion that Avicenna developed and appears in a certain fashion in William Langland’s *Piers Plowman*, which Spenser knew.³⁹² Perhaps Spenser is just placing Phantastes in the context of the “memorial” portion of the brain, but the assignation of prophetic power to the imagination does function as an admission of the imagination’s strength, even amidst attempts to discredit it as mere “tales” and lies.

³⁹¹ *Spenser Encyclopedia*, s.v. “psychology”: “The first impression of Phantastes’ chamber is one of confusion: a vast multiplicity of sense impressions pours continually into the front ventricle during waking hours—impression which, for the most part, are not sorted or recorded but simply received. This is the function philosophers called *sensus communis*, where the evidence of all the five senses is collected together.”

³⁹² Michelle Karnes, “Will’s Imagination in *Piers Plowman*,” *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 108 (2009), 6; Ernest Kaulbach, “The ‘Vis Imaginativa Secundum Avicennam’ and the Naturally Prophetic Powers of Ymaginatif in the B-Text of *Piers Plowman*,” *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 86 (1987), 501-2. See also Judith H. Anderson, *The Growth of a Personal Voice: Piers Plowman and The Faerie Queene* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), 2-3.

At the same time, the idea of the imagination as releasing images to attack and harass an unsuspecting brain is not only reminiscent of Archimago's Book I antics but also indicates a form of psychic fragmentation, as the imagination works against and on the exterior of the human mind. Even more importantly, the separation of the mind into its component parts and particularly the extremely detailed narration of Guyon's and Arthur's travels through the anatomy of the mind evokes a profound sense of fragmentation. As Archimago attacks and abuses Redcrosse's mind in Book I, in Book 2 the ability of the imagination to fragment the body becomes apparent. As Sawday has pointed out, the entire House of Alma episode may be viewed as an example of Freud's *unheimlich*. Sawday calls Alma's house a depiction of the human body at once entirely known and entirely unknown, an "entrance into the unfamiliar familiar."³⁹³ This body is both a vision of the self and an alien object needing extensive exploration, explanation and detailed narration, all of which Spenser provides. This idea of bodily fragmentation certainly makes sense in light of growing Renaissance interest in dissection of the human body.³⁹⁴ As Nancy Siraisi observes, an increased interest in anatomy and the practice of dissection in the sixteenth century led to the first Latin translations of Galen's dissection manual *On Anatomical Procedures*.³⁹⁵ Soon thereafter, in 1543, Andreas Vesalius'

³⁹³ Sawday, *The Body Emblazoned*, 161.

³⁹⁴ Ibid., 2; David Hillman and Carla Mazzio, "Introduction: Individual Parts," in *The Body in Parts: Fantasies of Corporeality in Early Modern Europe*, ed. David Hillman and Carla Mazzio (New York: Routledge, 1997), xiii.

³⁹⁵ Nancy G. Siraisi, *Medieval and Early Renaissance Medicine: An Introduction to Knowledge and Practice* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 191.

original anatomical work *On the Fabric of the Human Body* was published.³⁹⁶ This surge of interest in the component parts of the imagination may have resulted in a widespread cultural attitude toward the body as disjointed and even incoherent.

This sense of the anatomical fragmentation of the body coincides with a sense of the body's extreme permeability. The permeable body is also a frighteningly vulnerable one, liable to be influenced and invaded by any number of external factors, including detrimental ones such as Archimago's destructive fantasies. The vulnerability and permeability of the body is nowhere more clear than in the attack on Alma's castle, a representation of the attack of external forces on the body. Significantly, Alma's castle is attacked primarily by a series of hybrid figures who bear considerable resemblance to the products of fantasy. It might be said that the imagination, here presented as an entirely external force, attacks and fragments the body:

The first troupe was a monstrous rabblement,
Of fowle misshapen wightes, of which some were
Headed like Owles, with beckes vncomely bent,
Others like Dogs, others like Gryphons dreare,
And some had wings, and some had clawes to teare,
And euery one of them had Lynces eyes,
And euery one did bow and arrowes beare:
All those were lawlesse lustes, corrupt enuyes,
And couetous aspects, all cruel enimy.

Those same against the bulwarke of the *Sight*
Did lay strong siege, and battailous assault,
Ne once did yield it respitt day nor night,
But soone as *Titan* gan his head exault,
And soone againe as he his light withhault,
Their wicked engins they against it bent:
That is each thing, by which the eyes may fault,
But two then all more huge and violent,
Beautie, and money they against that Bulwarke lent.³⁹⁷

³⁹⁶ Ibid.

³⁹⁷ *Faerie Queene*, II.xi.8-9.

Alma's castle is attacked by hybrids and unusual creatures that almost seem akin to products of the imagination, including "fowle misshapen wightes." These creatures have heads, bodies, and wings that do not all match each other, some with heads of "Owles," others with heads of "Dogs," and still others with heads of "Gryphons." Along with their heads of various different animals, many of them have wings and "Lynces eyes." The description of each body part in a piecemeal fashion suggests that these creatures are not simply "dogs" or "owls" but complex hybridizations of several animals. They themselves and the description of them are highly fragmented in the process, appearing first as heads, then heads with wings, then heads with eyes, and so on. The scattered description of these monstrous figures results in an ekphrastic-like passage, in which each is reduced to its component parts. Yet here, instead of producing the erotic delight that ekphrasis of a female figure in a romance often does, the ekphrastic treatment of the monstrous beasts attacking Alma's castle produces fright and disgust. Immediately following their "ekphrastic" description, the creatures are depicted as "cruel enemyes" and as "huge" and "violent." Significantly, the creatures' "wicked engins" are thought to be the major source of their attack against Alma's castle. The word "engin" not only relates to genius and the imagination but it is also used in Book I in explicit reference to Archimago and his abuse of Redcrosse's fantasy. The attack on Alma's castle thus represents not only the vulnerability and permeability of the body but also reiterates the imagination's particular danger and externalizes it as an alien force that attacks the body. The imagination's power over the body has been established in a manner that fragments mind and body and scatters psychic function into a myriad of disparate and monstrous creatures. As we shall see, this fragmentation is ominously connected with rupture from the past at the end of

the House of Alma episode and suggests a way in which Spenser's obsession with the fragmented, vulnerable body attacked by the external forces of the imagination is just one part of a large-scale lament over the lost past.

Iconoclasm and the Bower of Bliss: Imagistic Fragmentation

If Spenser's text expresses some amount of discomfort with the "iconoclasm" of the human imagination encapsulated by the figure of Archimago, then it might seem that the destruction of the Bower of Bliss at the end of Book 2 can be nothing short of a fully-fledged attack on the culture of images. Spenserian critics have argued endlessly about the meaning of Guyon's destructive act, particularly because he is supposed to represent temperance and yet his parting action in Book 2 is "notably intemperate."³⁹⁸ Many Spenser scholars view this episode as predominantly "morally, psychologically, or spiritually justified." In this view, Guyon becomes a cleansing force, restoring the natural to the decidedly unnatural and perverse state of affairs predominant in Acrasia's bower. Guyon can, in this interpretation, be viewed as a Christ-like figure, coming to harrow hell, or a "cleansing force of Nature."³⁹⁹ Clearly these explanations remain unsatisfactory, as "students and the common reader continue to find the stanza disturbing."⁴⁰⁰

What can this destruction of the Bower possibly mean? James Knapp has argued that, while most of Spenser's epic involves a "meditation on the proper creation of

³⁹⁸ *Spenser Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Bower of Bliss." See also Hamilton, *The Structure of Allegory*, 93.

³⁹⁹ *Spenser Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Bower of Bliss," 106. See Hamilton, *The Structure of Allegory*, 115.

⁴⁰⁰ *Spenser Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Bower of Bliss."

internal images,” the destruction of the Bower of Bliss entails a moment in which this internalization cannot be the only focus. In this moment the problem of external images, rather than the problem of internal images, comes to the fore.⁴⁰¹ No doubt Guyon’s rampage represents on some level an act of iconoclasm eerily resonant with the kind of erasure of the medieval past encompassed by actual Reformation acts of iconoclasm. Yet this episode also contains the equally horrifying and uncomfortable attempt to damage the workings of the human imagination. As Paul Alpers has argued, Spenser is interested in the internal, psychological effects of images.⁴⁰² Guyon’s act in fact does violence to the images that arise not so much in the external world but in the mind as a product of fantasy and the imagination. His seemingly “intemperate” act is in fact an attack on the intemperate imagination. In a strange turn of events, this abuse of the imagination aligns Guyon with Archimago. The destruction of the Bower of Bliss presents a threat to the imagination that involves the internalization of a threat at first perceived to be external. The dangerous nature of images is shown to be present in the internal workings of the mind. After the fragmenting, destructive agency of the imagination has been established by the figure of Archimago and by the House of Alma episode, imagination must be destroyed. This destruction is a more explicit version of what happens to the allegorical imagination at the end of the fifteenth century, as it silently disappeared from allegorical literature.

⁴⁰¹ James Knapp, *Image Ethics in Shakespeare and Spenser* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 97-8.

⁴⁰² Paul Alpers, *The Poetry of the Faerie Queene* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), 9-13. See also John Bender, *Spenser and Literary Pictorialism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), 82.

When Guyon destroys the Bower of Bliss “with rigour pitillesse,” he not merely decimates a physical location but also ruins a place in which the dreamer’s fantasy comes to life. In his destructive rampage, Guyon stops to remind us of Acrasia’s transformative work in the Bower and the presence of monstrous and hybrid beasts in its environs:

The way they came, the same retourn’d they right,
Till they arriued, where they lately had
Charm’d those wild-beasts, that rag’d with furie mad.
Which now awaking, fierce at them gan fly,
As in their mistresse reskew, whom they lad;
But them the Palmer soone did pacify.
Then *Guyon* askt, what meant those beastes, which there did ly.
Sayd he, These seeming beastes are men indeed,
Whom this Enchauntresse hath transformed thus,

Whylome her louers, which her lustes did feed,
Now turned into figures hideous,
According to their mindes like monstrous.
Sad end (quoth he) of life intemperate,
And mournfull meed of ioyes delicious:
But Palmer, if it mote thee so aggrate,
Let them returned be vnto their former state.
Streight way he with his vertuous staffe them strooke,
And streight of beastes they comely men became;

Yet being men they did vnmanly looke,
And stared ghastly, some for inward shame,
And some for wrath, to see their captiue Dame:
But one aboute the rest in speciall,
That had an hog beene late, hight *Grylle* by name,
Repyned greatly, and did him miscall,
That had from hoggish forme him brought to naturall.⁴⁰³

The conversation between the Palmer and Guyon marks a transition between two portions of the destruction of the Bower of Bliss episode and perhaps also between an “external” iconoclasm and the “internal” iconoclasm of damaging fantastic images. The destruction opens with several lines of intensely violent action and then comes to a sudden pause

⁴⁰³ *Faerie Queene*, II.xii.84-86.

with the line beginning “Then *Guyon* askt.” Although the men have been fully transformed into beasts and are not hybrids of the sort seen elsewhere in the *Faerie Queene*, they are suspended in a transition between beast and man that renders them truly hybrid. The Palmer’s proclamation that “These seeming beasts are men indeed” portrays each figure as simultaneously man and beast, even if they have been transformed into beasts and have the appearance or “seeming” of purely non-human beings. Similarly, the realization that the men were turned to the beasts that already resided in their minds (“Now turned into figures hideous,/ According to their mindes like monstrous”) suggests man’s propensity to transform into a beast at any time, particularly as a function of thoughts and fantasies gone awry.⁴⁰⁴ Even when Guyon transforms the beasts back into men, they still present as somewhat beastly: “Yet being men they did vnmanly looke,/And stared ghastly, some for inward shame.” The hog called “Grylle” in particular is shown not to have truly made the transformation from “hoggish forme” to “naturall.” Even in their transformation back to a natural state, these men exist as hybrids, both hoggish and human in form. The idea of a “natural state” has in fact been frustrated by this scene, revealing that “naturalness” might better be viewed as a state of hybridity.

The attempt to expunge the internal images created by the human faculty of imagination is clearly frustrated by Guyon’s failed effort to transform man into beast. Importantly, the particulars of the description of the beasts Guyon attempts to transform depicts them as the hybrids regular to imaginative thought, the sort of dream-image that particularly fascinated and terrified early modern thinkers. The fact that the Bower entails

⁴⁰⁴ Interestingly, the idea that the idolator turns into the image he worships is a standard topos of iconoclastic discourse. See for example Ps. 115:8 King James Bible: “They that make them are like unto them.”

such representation of a form of imaginative or fantastic thinking suggests that Guyon's destruction of it is also an act of violence against the imagination itself. As Stephen Greenblatt has noted, the art Guyon destroys "does not pretend to image holy things." Although Greenblatt may overstate the case in suggesting that there "could be no charge of idolatry" against the art Guyon demolishes, this episode suggests not that art is idolatrous, as Greenblatt argues, but that the *imagination* is idolatrous.⁴⁰⁵

The presence of Genius as the gatekeeper to Acrasia's Bower solidifies the notion of this space as representative of imaginative function. Genius is synonymous with Imagination throughout the medieval period, and Jean de Meun is especially aware of this association in his representation of Genius in the *Roman de la Rose*, a text whose influence is keenly detectable in Spenser's epic allegory. Genius in Book 2 of *The Faerie Queene* is introduced as a benevolent gatekeeper, a force of life and creation in the universe:

All this, and more might in that goodly gate
Be red; that euer open stood to all,
Which thether came: but in the Porch there sate
A comely personage of stature tall,
And semblaunce pleasing, more then naturall,
That traueilers to him seemd to entize;
His looser garment to the ground did fall,
And flew about his heeles in wanton wize,
Not fitt for speedy pace, or manly exercize.

They in that place him *Genius* did call:
Not that celestiall powre, to whom the care
Of life, and generation of all
That liues, pertaines in change particulare,
Who wondrous things concerning our welfare,
And straunge phantomes doth lett vs ofte forsee,
And ofte of secret illls bids vs beware:

⁴⁰⁵ Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 189.

That is our Selfe, whom though we doe not see,
Yet each doth in him selfe it well perceiue to bee.

Therefore a God him sage Antiquity
Did wisely make, and good *Agdistes* call:
But this same was to that quite contrary,
That foe of life, that good enuyes to all,
That secretly doth vs procure to fall,
Through guilefull semblants, which he makes vs see.
He of this Gardin had the gouernall,
And Pleasures porter was deuizd to bee,
Holding a staffe in hand for more formalitee.⁴⁰⁶

Genius in Spenser's allegory is split across two figures, one who is the creator of life and appears as the guardian of the Garden of Adonis and one who is responsible for death, the Genius here in the Bower of Bliss. Unlike the sprightly and transformative Genius of Jean de Meun's *Roman de la Rose* who flies about with ease, this Genius languishes, "Not fitt for speedy pace, or manly exercize." In an interesting twist on an ongoing power struggle between Genius and Nature that occupies many medieval allegories, Spenser's "evil" Genius of the Bower of Bliss is described as "more then naturall." This Genius is somehow out of the realm and jurisdiction of nature and seemingly supernatural. As a representation of imagination, this Genius is insistently and persistently full of guile. The detail that Genius is of "semblaunce pleasing, more then naturall" suggests that his "semblaunce," a word inextricably associated with the concept of the image, is not only pleasing to behold but also, and perhaps more importantly, extraordinary in a potentially dangerous and unnatural way. Interestingly, this "evil" Genius is also necessarily part of the self, as Spenser delineates that "each doth in him selfe it well perceiue to bee." This detail refers to the theory of the *daemon*, or each person's essential being, which each of

⁴⁰⁶ *Faerie Queene*, II.xii.46-48.

us perceives within. We might recall the idea of Genius, a form of imagination, as a kind of personal conscience or guide-figure from Bernard Silvestris' *Cosmographia*.

After many lines of description, Spenser returns to this insistence on Genius' guile by explicating how Genius makes us "fall" by means of "guilefull semblants, which he makes vs see." The very same "guilefull semblants," products of an imagination gone awry, are now aligned with the deceptive figure of Genius himself, who is described as having a "semblaunce pleasing." The repetition of the particular word "semblaunce" to describe both Genius' appearance and the untrustworthy images he creates suggests that Genius not only produces dangerous and deceptive imaginative illusions but also may himself *be* a dangerous and deceptive image. The fact that this creator of imaginative illusions is the figure who represents and introduces the Bower of Bliss suggests that Guyon's destruction of it is an assault on the powers of the imagination.

The splitting of Genius' character into two entities, a "good" Genius called Agdistes and the evil Genius who guards the Bower of Bliss, is not only a "problematic" treatment of this allegorical figure but also reiterates a form of fragmentation that is central to Spenser's epic as a whole.⁴⁰⁷ At the same time, this fragmentation of imagination recalls both the fifteenth-century imagination and even Alan of Lille's twelfth-century Genius, simultaneously benevolent and evil. In Spenser's allegory, the fragmentation is more explicit and more complete. An entirely different form of Genius reappears in Book 3, Canto 6 as the porter of the Garden of Adonis:

Old Genius the porter of them was,
Old Genius, the which a double nature has.
He letteth in, he letteth out to wend,
All that to come into the world desire;

⁴⁰⁷ *Spenser Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Genius."

A thousand thousand naked babes attend
About him day and night, which doe require,
That he with fleshly weeds would them attire:
Such as him list, such as eternall fate
Ordained hath, he clothes with sinfull mire

And sendeth forth to liue in mortall state,
Till they agayn returne backe by the hinder gate.⁴⁰⁸

Not only does Genius reappear as a different figure, old, benevolent and life-sustaining, but also Spenser here specifically alludes to his “double nature” on the basis of his ability to both give and take away life. He both “letteth in” and “letteth out,” initiating “naked babes” into the world of the living and allowing the dead to “returne backe by the hinder gate.” This is in fact the second instance of Spenser’s focus on Genius’ “double nature,” the other being the description of the evil Genius in Book 2. In the case of the Genius guarding the Bower of Bliss, his description is in many ways more governed by what he is not than what he is. Between the description of his appearance and the description of his abilities to beguile and fool mankind with strange and illusory images is an extensive excursus on this Genius’ antithesis. The passage operates as an extremely complex subordinate clause beginning with “Not” and ending ten lines later when Spenser finally delineates the characteristics of Agdistes’ “contrary.” The description of Genius serves not so much to dwell on his specific characteristics as to linger on the subject of his other half, from whom he has been severed.

Guyon’s destruction of imaginative thought as a corollary to his decimation of idolatrous images has a certain precedent in the religious thought and rhetoric of sixteenth-century England. Concern with the idolatry involved in worshipping external images was quickly extended to anxiety about the idolatry of the human imagination in

⁴⁰⁸ *Faerie Queene*, III.vi.31-32

Reformation thought. A sermon by Stephen Gardiner in 1546 entitled “A Detection of the Deuills sophistrie” illustrates this phenomenon well. Even though Gardiner was a defender of Catholicism, suspicion of imagination in his milieu seems to have been enough for him to cast the faculty in an extremely negative light.⁴⁰⁹ In this sermon, Gardiner argues against the use of images to stir up the memory of the passion or to incite spiritual feelings in the minds of pious people. Instead, he argues that the real presence of Christ’s body and the church itself should more readily evoke spiritual feelings than the psychic results of viewing an image of a holy scene:

If the hearing of christes death, entringe at a mannes eares, or the seyng of a picture or image grauen, representing christes deathe to the bodely eyes, doth styrre vp mans memory to haue remembraunce of that is done by christ for hym: how moche more doth the liuely presence of christes natural body styr such as perfyetely beleue the presence of the same, to the remembraunce of christes passion?⁴¹⁰

Gardiner’s comments here represent a form of distrust of the psychic processes by which images are processed. The associational memory stirred up by viewing an image refers to the memorial functions of the imagination, which may recall absent images. For Gardiner, direct contact with some form of material presence is superior to the conjuring of images once seen or the reliance on memory. In other words, Gardiner is deeply suspicious of mental imaging processes and psychic processes of all kinds.

This distrust of psychic processes is supported by the subsequent ways in which Gardiner uses the term “imaginacion.” The imagination is capable both of abusing and being abused:

⁴⁰⁹ *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, s.v. “Gardiner, Stephen.”

⁴¹⁰ Stephen Gardiner, *A detection of the Devils sophistrie*, EEBO STC (2nd ed.)/11591 (1546), 71.

There resteth now to open the deuils sophistrie, in the peruerse, croked & craftie expositions of dyuers places of scripture, the saienges of holy writers, and of such wordes, as be attribute to signifie and name that moost blessed sacrament vnto vs, wherin hathe ben moche paine taken, & moch craftie imaginacion deuised, to abuse the simple vnlearned wyttes, and vpholde in error, the maliciouse, arrogant and newe fangled iudgementes.⁴¹¹

The “craftie imaginacion” is here “deuised” in a scheming manner in order to mislead and “abuse” the “simple” minds of “vnlearned” people. The “craftie imaginacion” refers to entirely invented expositions of scripture, suggesting that commentary on Biblical text is devised falsely and invented anew, spreading false ideas among uneducated believers. Strangely, even as the imagination works to abuse simple people’s minds it is also abused by these scheming commentators. Gardiner reveals that the false commentators attempt to deny transubstantiation: “But againste this truth, the deuyll striueth, and fyghteth by his ministers, & lewde apostles, with sophistical deuyses, wherwith he troubleth the grosse imaginacions of the symple people.”⁴¹² The danger of the “craftie imaginacion” of the commentators is deception of the “grosse imaginacions” of the unlearned masses.

Not only Gardiner feared the workings of the imagination. A 1544 sermon by Alexander Alesius, a Lutheran theologian and reformer, indicates a similar concern with the abilities of the imagination to deceive.⁴¹³ For Alesius, imagining is akin to blaspheming scripture: “For euery man that hath any witt at all may plainly perceyue that Peter wrote his second pistle against such blasphemers as do imagine a new word of god

⁴¹¹ Ibid., 70.

⁴¹² Ibid., 5.

⁴¹³ *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, s.v. “Alesius, Alexander.”

besyde that which is writton.”⁴¹⁴ Similarly, for Thomas Lever, a Church of England clergyman, the imagination leads to erroneous interpretation of scripture.⁴¹⁵

Now I heare some saye that thys errorr is the fruyte of the scripture in englyshe. No, neyther thys, nor no other erreure commeth because the scripture is set forth in the englyshe tonge, but because the rude people lackynge the counsell of learned menne to teache theim the trewe meanyng when they reade it, or heare it, muste nedes folowe theyr owne Imaginacion in takynge of it.⁴¹⁶

The religious reformer John Knox goes so far as to define blasphemy as a form of imagining: “But what blasphemie is, may some perchance dout... To depart from the true honoring, & religion of God, to the imagination of mans inuentions.”⁴¹⁷ Even Nicholas Sander, religious controversialist, in a 1566 sermon defines the belief that Christ’s body in the Eucharist is the body of a man rather than the body of a divinity as a “grosse imagination.”⁴¹⁸

⁴¹⁴ Alexander Alesius, *Of the auctorite of the word of god agaynst the bisshop of london wherein are conteyned certen disputacyons had in the parlament howse betwene the bisshops a bowt the number of the sacramennts and other things, very necessary to be known, made by Alexander Alane Scot and sent to the duke of Saxon*, EEBO STC (2nd ed.) / 292, 35.

⁴¹⁵ *Oxford Dicionary of National Biography*, s.v. “Lever, Thomas.”

⁴¹⁶ Thomas Lever, *A fruitfull sermon made in Poules churche at London in the shroudes, the seconde daye of February by Thomas Leuer*, EEBO STC (2nd ed.) / 15543, 12.

⁴¹⁷ *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, s.v. “Knox, John.” John Knox, *An answer to a great number of blasphemous cauillations written by an Anabaptist, and aduersarie to Gods eternal predestination. And confuted by Iohn Knox, minister of Gods worde in Scotland. Wherein the author so discouereth the craft and falshode of that sect, that the godly knowing that error, may be confirmed in the trueth by the eident Worde of God*, STC (2nd ed.) / 15060. 106.

⁴¹⁸ *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, s.v. “Sander, Nicholas.” Nicholas Sander, *The supper of our Lord set foorth according to the truth of the Gospell and Catholike faith. By Nicolas Saunder, Doctor of Diuinitie. With a confutation of such false doctrine as the Apologie of the Churche of England, M. Nowels challenge, or M. Iuels Replie haue vttered touching the reall presence of Christe in the Sacrament*. STC (2nd ed.) / 21695, 92-3.

Imagination has thus become both an agent of deception and the passive faculty receiving those delusions. The imagination itself has been fragmented into the sort of “good” and “evil” Genius described in *The Faerie Queene*. If Archimago illustrates how imagination has been severed from the psyche of the subject Redcrosse, the Bower of Bliss episode demonstrates the fragmentation of the imagination itself. Guyon’s destruction of imaginative functioning in the Bower of Bliss episode represents an attempt to rid the mind of idolatrous thinking, in tune with Reformation anxiety about the threat not only of external idols but also of internal ones. Yet the lingering hybrids supposedly transformed back into human beings by Guyon suggest the far greater difficulty of destroying the idols of the imagination. The images in Acrasia’s Bower can be decimated, but the kind of fantasy produced by a figure such as Genius, carefully guarding the Bower and the imaginative thoughts it represents, is not so easily ruined. The destruction of the imagination in the Bower of Bliss is a more explicit version of various fifteenth-century attempts to expel the imagination, both as a personified figure and as part of the dreamer’s psyche. In this way, the sixteenth-century imagination hearkens back to its medieval predecessor. Yet the destructiveness of the imagination has become much more extreme.

The lament for the medieval past: historical fragmentation

The discovery of historical tomes in Phantastes’ chamber begins a foray into history that aligns imagination with historical rupture. At the same time, the focus on historical texts reveals a panic over textuality not usually commented upon in Spenser

scholarship.⁴¹⁹ Phantastes' chamber becomes the locus of melancholy over the past, and imagination becomes a figure poised on the cusp between the past and the present. The link among psychic, bodily and historical fragmentation is made explicit in the House of Alma episode in the transition between the encounter with Phantastes and the discovery of the *Moniments of Britain*. The externalization of the imagination suggested by Archimago's thought insertion in Book I indicates the removal of the imagination from the mind and body of the individual. This removal implies a form of fragmentation in which the imagination is no longer part of the body but becomes dislocated in an act similar to dissection. By the time we reach the House of Alma at the end of Book II, the imagination has not only been dislocated but now becomes an agent of fragmentation itself. Guyon explores the role and the realm of Phantastes when he is suddenly interrupted by the discovery of the ancient book of British history. An explicit connection between psychic and historical fragmentation is made and at the center of it all is the personified imagination

Spenser's melancholy over the loss of historical materials pervades much of *The Faerie Queene*, rendering Phantastes' association with history an implicit association with historical rupture. Imagination becomes a proxy for considering history. Insofar as history in Spenser's text is, as we shall see, necessarily associated with the Reformation's rupture from the medieval past, imagination in Alma's house comes to be associated with actual historical rupture produced as a result of the Reformation. Even as Phantastes

⁴¹⁹ Spenser's attitude toward images is more frequently discussed than his attitude toward text. There are innumerable discussions of Spenser's representations of iconoclasm, but two prominent book-length studies should serve as sufficient example of the kind of extensive interest in the topic in scholarship on Spenser: Kenneth Gross, *Spenserian Poetics: Idolatry, Iconoclasm, and Magic* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985); Ernest B. Gilman, *Iconoclasm and Poetry in the English Reformation: Down went Dagon* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986).

becomes a tool for exploring historical rupture, continuity still lurks in the background, since Phantastes becomes suspended between past and present, much like Jean de Meun's Genius. Nevertheless, in the midst of this continuity, Spenser's imagination reflects a form of violent rupture that was never so explicitly an element of the medieval allegorical imagination. There is no question then that the fragmented Spenserian personified imagination maintains its continuity with its medieval precursors. At the same time, the association of Phantastes with the rupture of the Reformation reminds us that the early modern imagination was also severed in some essential ways from its forebears. It is this simultaneous continuity and severing that so fascinates us in understanding the history of the personified imagination.

This historical rupture is directly related to the fragmentation of the body and the alienation of the imagination from the body in the House of Alma episode. Indeed, Michael O'Connell has identified the House of Alma as "man's cultural memory" and Phantastes, whose chamber serves as an introduction to Guyon and Arthur's history lesson, as "pure imagination."⁴²⁰ In the chamber of Phantastes, Guyon and Arthur encounter Anamnestes and Eumnestes. In the midst of their awe at Eumnestes' "tossing and turning," they are distracted by the library in his chambers:

The knightes there entring, did him reuerence dew
And wondred at his endlesse exercise,
Then as they gan his Library to vew,
And antique Regesters for to auise,
There chaunced to the Princes hand to size,
An auncient booke, hight *Briton monuments*,

⁴²⁰ Michael O'Connell, *Mirror and Veil: The Historical Dimension of Spenser's Faerie Queene* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1977), 69. See also Michael Murrin, *The Veil of Allegory: Some Notes toward a Theory of Allegorical Rhetoric in the English Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 75-97, for an evaluation of allegorical poetry itself as memorial.

That of this lands first conquest did deuize,
And old diuision into Regiments,
Till it reduced was to one mans gouernemente.⁴²¹

Importantly, history appears within the confines of imagination's chambers, as Phantastes reigns over Eumnestes and Anamnestes. The imagination thus becomes a locus for considering English history, especially medieval English history and its rupture from the present.

The association of history with deterioration, destruction and rupture is well-supported by Guyon's confrontation with historical "rolls" and documents (or "moniments") in Phantastes' chamber. The House of Alma is furnished, quite like a monastic house, with chronicles:

The yeares of *Nestor* nothing were to his,
Ne yet *Mathusalem* though longest liu'd;
For he remembred both their infancis:
Ne wonder then, if that he were depriu'd
Of natiue strength now, that he them suruiu'd.
His chamber all was hangd about with rolls,
And old records from auncient times deriud,
Some made in books, some in long parchment scrolls,
That were all worm-eaten, and full of canker holes.⁴²²

The antique quality and deterioration of the "rolls," "books," "old records" and "long parchment scrolls" may simply be meant to convey an image of antiquarianism or historical authenticity. However, the "worm-eaten" parchment scrolls and the books "full of canker holes" may not be such an innocuous depiction of old historical books. This image of books, with essential historical information no less, decaying and fragmented,

⁴²¹ *Faerie Queene*, II.ix.59.

⁴²² *Ibid.*, II.ix.57.

their materials occluded by their deterioration, is evocative of the panic of vast textual destruction that pervades the description of Errour's book-vomit.

Spenser's recognition of this nightmarish quality of history is most readily apparent in many of the monstrosities, particularly the fertile female ones, in *The Faerie Queene*. Of these monstrosities, Errour in Book I provides an apt case study of Spenser's vision of historical development out of fragmentation and rupture. In Errour's case, the discourse of anxiety surrounding images, idolatry and iconoclasm has been transferred to the book-as-object and to the representation of specifically monastic reading practices which as a concept represent a now-destroyed past. Errour's vomit encapsulates the complexity of the objectified book in this text:

Therewith she spewd out of her filthie maw
A floud of poyson horrible and blacke,
Full of great lumps of flesh and gobbets raw,
Which stunck so vildly, that it forst him slacke,
His grasping hold, and from her turne him backe.
Her vomit full of bookes and papers was,
With loathly frogs and toades, which eyes did lacke,
And creeping sought way in the weedy gras:
Her filthie parbreake all the place defiled has.⁴²³

Linda Gregerson reads Errour's "great lumps of flesh and gobbets raw" as a reference to the "Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation," and the "indigestible body of Rome's 'deformed masse.'"⁴²⁴ In this reading, Errour becomes part of Spenser's project of Protestant propaganda, a monstrous representation of Catholic, Papist "doctrinal error."

However, this reading overlooks the reference to monastic *ruminatio* also present in the representation of book-vomit. This moment encompasses a strange explosion or

⁴²³ Ibid., l.i.20.

⁴²⁴ Gregerson, *The Reformation of the Subject*, 96.

rejection of theories of medieval reading, which dictated that texts were to be chewed and eaten, as is explicitly the case in monastic *ruminatio*. The Monk of Farne, to take only one example, records an elaborate metaphor involving the concept of eating books as a form of devotional practice.⁴²⁵ The monster's vomit suggests a thorough reversal of and literal rejection of this theoretical model. Digested books, perhaps devotionally consumed, must be rejected from the body in the most violent manner. The bits and pieces of old texts in the vomit, insofar as they represent a fragmented representation of material which has been destroyed but not wholly discarded, recall the reluctance to complete destruction of the relics of the medieval Catholic past in Elizabethan England and may be a figure for the manner in which the Elizabethan settlement reintegrated the remains of the Catholic past into new, Protestant ritual. Error represents Papist doctrinal error, per Gregerson's view, but lurking behind this figure is another, diametrically opposed reading. If Error's book-vomit is a violent rejection of the medieval, Catholic, monastic consumption of and rumination of devotional texts, then Error is a cynosure for the *Protestant* destruction of medieval, monastic texts, Catholic rituals, and reading

⁴²⁵ See Karma Lochrie, *Margery Kempe and Translations of the Flesh* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), 36; Mary Carruthers' two books, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) and *The Craft of Thought* both insist upon the centrality of *ruminatio* in monastic reading, both for the purposes of memorial strategy and for contemplative purposes. See also James Simpson, "Desire and the scriptural text: Will as reader in Piers Plowman," in *Criticism and Dissent in the Middle Ages*, ed. Rita Copeland (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 226. See also Jean LeClerq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God: A Study of Monastic Culture* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1982), 73, 89-90. The idea is regular in twelfth-century exegesis, for example: William of St. Thierry, *Tractatus de natura et dignitate amoris*, Patrologia latina 184: 379-408 (at col. 399); Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermones in cantica canticorum*, Patrologia latina 183: 779-1198, Sermon 85.8 (at cols. 1191-92) and 85.9 (at col. 1192). It is also found in thirteenth-century scholastic contexts, as in Alexander of Hales, *Doctoris irrefragabilis Alexandri de Hales summa theologica*, 4 vols (Quaracchi: Collegium S. Bonaventurae, 1924-48), question 1, article 2, response 9.

practices. Errour's monstrous hybridity, half-female and half-serpent, renders her the sort of product of the imagination in its dreamlike state and its capacity to invent new combinations out of sights once seen in nature. If Errour is in this way a representative of the imagination, then her book-vomit, insofar as it represents a rejection of a medieval way of reading, closely aligns the imagination itself with the rupture of the present historical moment from its most recent medieval past.

Unlike the sheer terror involved in the description of Errour's relationship to textuality, Spenser's bibliographic melancholy in the depiction of the decaying historical tomes in the House of Alma strikingly resembles commentary by the Henrician bibliographers John Leland and John Bale. Leland was commissioned by Henry VIII for a particularly perverse task to "serche and peruse the Libraries of hys realme...before their utter destruccyon." As James Simpson has suggested, Leland's project "to make a search after England's antiquities, and to peruse the libraries of all cathedrals, abbies, priories, colleges,' and also 'all places wherein records, writings and secrets of antiquity were reposed" drove him to an early death, in a "heroic yet doomed attempt to seal off the 'medieval' past."⁴²⁶ Bale notes that many of the new owners of what were once monasteries in England "reserved of those lybrarye bokes, some to serve theyr iakes, some to scoure theyr candel styckes, and some to rubbe their bootes. Some they solde to the grossers and the sope sellers, and some they sent over the see to the bokebynders, not in small nombre, to the wonderynge of the foreyn nacyons."⁴²⁷ Even more poignantly, he comments, referring to the destruction of monastic libraries, that "oure posteryte maye

⁴²⁶ Simpson, *Reform and Cultural Revolution*, 8.

⁴²⁷ *Ibid.*, 9-10.

wele curse thys wycked facte of our age, thys unreasonable spoyle of Englandes moste noble Antiquytees.”⁴²⁸ Bale was correct in his view of posterity’s reaction to the “spoyle of Englandes moste noble Antiquytees,” as can be readily detected in Spenser’s inheritance of this lamenting tone.

Furthermore, the lament over the destruction of monastic and Catholic texts, images and other objects of worship by no means ended under Elizabeth, whose reign represented another moment, albeit perhaps less dramatic than Henry VIII’s, of destruction. The thoroughness of the divided consciousness of early Protestant bibliographers in the wake of the Dissolution of the monasteries was certainly not lost on Elizabethan commentators, such as William Lambarde, an antiquary and lawyer, in his 1570 *Perambulations of Kent*.⁴²⁹

little had all these casualties of fire and flame beene to the decay of this town, had not the dissolution and final overthrow of the Religious houses come also upon it... And therefore, no marvaile, if after wealth withdrawne, and opinion of holynesse removed, the places tumbled headlong to ruine and decay: In which part, as I can not on the one side, but in respect of ye places themselves, pitie and lament this general desolation, not only in this Shyre, but in all places in the Realme: So on the other side, considering the maine Seas of sinne and iniquities, wherein the world (at those dayes) was almost whole drenched, I must needs take cause, highly to praise God, that hath thus mercifully in our age delivered us.⁴³⁰

Lambarde’s commentary, practically an Elizabethan analogue to Leland’s project, evoking a similar image of an antiquarian roaming the English countryside confronted with the devastating program of annihilation that engendered the Protestant present,

⁴²⁸ Ibid., 18.

⁴²⁹ *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, s.v. “Lambarde, William.”

⁴³⁰ Moroney, “Spenser’s Dissolution,” 107.

indicates the poignant cultural memory of the Dissolution even 40 years later. The anonymous *Description of the Rites of Durham* of 1593, an exhaustive catalogue of the Catholic items of worship, images and books destroyed under Elizabeth, reveals the continuity of the nostalgia and melancholy of the earliest Protestant bibliographers and antiquarians now roughly 60 years after the Dissolution.⁴³¹ Spenser's violently fragmented view of history can thus be set against this backdrop.

The literary imagination in the sixteenth century is certainly heavily influenced by "philosophical," or more accurately religious, developments in imaginative theory. The internalized, psychological imagination becomes more explicitly nightmarish in ways that reflect particular fears of the power of the imagination among sixteenth-century iconoclasts. Yet once again, literature depicts a richer version of the imagination, in this case one that is much more linked with its medieval past than might seem the case in religious treatises. In particular, narrative strategies associated with personification allegory, particularly the ability to give the personified imagination jurisdiction over medieval historical texts in Alma's castle.

Even as Spenser's imagination becomes the pathway through which to contemplate history and historical rupture in this text, the imagination Spenser represents is continuous with its medieval counterparts. Spenser's imagination is in many instances a suspicious, untrustworthy figure, but this suspicion of imagination and its terror-producing capacity has been a regular feature of the imagination since the twelfth century. Imagination is also always a transformative and divided figure, often representing the space of rupture. Spenser's *Phantastes* certainly picks up on this theme

⁴³¹ Moroney, "Spenser's Dissolution," 113.

when the text fragments and ponders the medieval past in Phantastes' chamber. Most importantly, the imagination remains rooted in the past, often resisting the forward movement of history in the thirteenth century, in the fifteenth century and again here in the sixteenth century. Even in the midst of a dramatic historical break, the sixteenth-century imagination represents a culmination and even recombination of the development of the figure throughout the medieval period. This is not to say that the sixteenth-century allegorical imagination is unaffected by extreme events in Spenser's historical context, events that transformed attitudes toward images and imagination. Even so, the literary development of the imagination displays striking continuities. In fact, Spenser's fragmented imagination makes manifest sinister capabilities that were always latent in the medieval allegorical imagination. The imagination of the twelfth century, perpetually dividing into a simultaneously benevolent and evil figure, is in many ways the imagination of the sixteenth century, who sits poised and fragmented on the cusp of historical rupture, contemplating its very own past.

Conclusion

Unlike memory, a faculty of the psyche that was of great interest to medieval philosophers and scientists, imagination has not been extensively studied by modern neuroscientists, and we still know very little about how the imagination actually works. The aura and mystery surrounding the imagination has persevered throughout the centuries, certainly emerging with particular force among Romantic poets. Most unfamiliar to us is the idea that imagination per se is locatable as a concrete entity in the brain, and the notion that imagination recombines and recalls images once seen in nature. The “memorial” capacities of the medieval imagination are perhaps most distant from our modern notion of the concept.

Even so, these striking features of the medieval imagination are not entirely lost on us. Interestingly, “creativity” has largely subsumed the medieval concept of the recombinative imagination in modern thought. While “imagination” is a purely fanciful, sometimes derogatorily-regarded, force, as evidenced by phrases such as “Use your

imagination” and “You’re just imagining that,” “creativity” has emerged as a concept that is potentially both locatable in the brain and also capable of a form of recombination. A 2012 paper suggests the location of creativity in the front of the brain, functioning as part of executive functioning. Even more intriguing, this creativity culls the memory of stimuli from the posterior part of the brain.⁴³² A number of psychiatrists furthermore believe that creativity derives material from the subconscious and, indeed, recombines and refashions this material into something new.⁴³³ Although at first glance the medieval concept of imagination seems wildly foreign, when we think more closely about a wider variety of terms that have come to represent imaginative processes, we see much more continuity than we might expect.

This kind of continuity has been one of the most important aspects of the imagination throughout this dissertation. No longer can we view the imagination’s medieval and early modern history as clearly divided into distinct historical periods, ranging from the twelfth-century Neoplatonists to the sixteenth-century iconoclasts. We have instead seen much more fluidity in the way the imagination is depicted throughout this entire five-century period. We have seen that old views of the imagination die hard, often creating a diverse, rich, and heterogeneous imagination that culls simultaneously from a variety of traditions. Most importantly, we have seen that this kind of heterogeneity is no more subtly, carefully, and dramatically depicted than in literature. A close examination of the literary-allegorical imagination provides us with a slightly

⁴³² A Collins and E Koechlin, “Reasoning, Learning, and Creativity: Frontal Lobe Function and Human Decision-Making,” *PLOS Biology* 10(3):2012.

⁴³³ See N.C. Andreason, *The Creating Brain: The Neuroscience of Genius* (New York: Dana Press, 2005).

different, perhaps more continuous and more continuously conflicted, view of the imagination than philosophy alone. This investigation of the literary imagination also suggests that similar examinations of other seemingly purely “philosophical” concepts could cause them to emerge as quite different concepts with quite different histories if studied instead through a literary lens.

Even in times of great schism, such as the Reformation, certain continuities can be detected when particular concepts are examined more closely. This has been the case with the literary imagination. There is no doubt that the sixteenth-century allegorical imagination bears the weight of Reformation debates about images and surrounding iconoclasm and emerges as a considerably more dangerous and frightening figure than its medieval counterpart. However, there are a number of key similarities between the sixteenth-century allegorical imagination and its medieval forebears. From certain perspectives, the sixteenth century may seem entirely divorced from the medieval period. Yet isolating particular concepts and figures, such as the allegorical imagination, clearly demonstrates more continuities than we might expect. The same could even be said of the relationship between the modern and medieval periods. They are, of course, worlds apart, but, as we have seen, certain strong tendencies in the definition of the medieval imagination still persist today.

We have seen that intense questioning of the imagination and fascination with its particularly *literary* capacities is by no means an invention of the Romantics. Fascination with the imagination produced simultaneous developments in religious ideology, philosophical thought, and literary exploration of the figure in the medieval and early modern periods. In a way, then, the medieval imagination is not so far removed from its

Romantic counterpart. This dissertation has shown that it is time to abandon a view of the medieval imagination as an isolated, negative force that has no correlates in later periods in history. When we take a complete look at the imagination, and especially at its literary representation, a dynamic, ever-mutating and always fascinating figure emerges, whose core elements never entirely disappear. Even in the age of modern neuroscience, we are still mystified and delighted by the ungraspable force of the imagination.

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