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Mark E. Amsler

The Quest for the Present Tense:
The Poet and the Dreamer in Douglas'
The Palice of Honour



Of all the Middle Scots poets associated with the court of James IV, only Gavin Douglas is known more for his work as a translator than as an "original" poet. But Douglas' *The Palice of Honour* deserves more careful notice. Some recent critics have sought to renovate the received opinion that the poem lacks substantial narrative coherence or unity. Priscilla Bawcutt, for example, regards the structure of *The Palice of Honour* as "reasonably coherent...more varied and more complex than a mere sequence of processions."¹ However, the coherence of *The Palice of Honour* goes deeper than this and reveals the generic implications of the work as a dream vision as well as the role of the poet and the theme of poetry in the poem. The poem is not only about honor, but the connections among honor, virtue, and poetry. Unlike the dreamers in many other medieval visions, Douglas's dreamer is not a lover or a spiritual traveller but a fledgling poet. Reflecting Douglas' debt to Chaucer's *Hous of Fame*,² the dreamer in *The Palice of Honour* receives a variety of instructions about the nature and craft of poetry. But unlike the benighted Geoffrey, Douglas' fully competent narrator continually enters into the narrative and provides a sharp contrast to his previous, incompetent dreaming self. Douglas constructs this retrospective narrative by creating two voices in the poem,

one in the past tense and one in the present. Through these two discourses, he develops both the dynamic perspective of the dreamer's education and the more static, teleological perspective of the narrator, who, speaking from "remembrance" (1280),³ informs the reader about how to interpret the various actions and responses of his former self. As a result, the completed poem is itself the product of the dreamer's experience. *The Palice of Honour* becomes at once an allegory of the poet's psychic and creative growth and the net result of the process delineated in the allegory, the plan for the poem and the poem itself.

Recently, Gerald B. Kinneavy has called attention to the "purposeful pattern" wherein "the speaker's view of his art" grows in the course of the poem.⁴ But Kinneavy deemphasizes the respective positions and functions of Douglas the poet, Douglas the narrator, and Douglas the dreamer.⁵ In the Middle Ages, the dream vision was, among other things, the characteristic vehicle for introspective, personal narrative. Its conventional first-person discourse and retrospective form suggest generic comparisons with the *Bildungsroman* and autobiography, both literal (Augustine's *Confessions*) and fictional (*Jane Eyre* and *The Sorrows of Young Werther*). It is in this generic scheme, rather than among the fourteenth- and fifteenth-century sources and analogues for Douglas' poem (Lydgate's *Reson and Sensuallyte*, *The Floure and the Leafe*, or the *Court of Sapience*), that we may profitably comprehend the complex interplay of dreamer and narrator in the poem.

In first-person narratives such as autobiography and the dream vision, the narrator generally seeks to achieve coherence and avoid personal, cultural, or spiritual dissociation by ensuring that his past self arrives in the present at the point where his present self already is, that is, by ensuring that the past becomes the immediate present. Thus the narrator in a work like Augustine's *Confessions* exists in the narrative present tense and confronts his former self who is realized primarily in the past tense. From his retrospective vantagepoint, the narrator often comments (explicitly or implicitly) on the narrative events and signals--through the juxtaposition of past, present, and future tenses--the direction in which his past self will develop.⁶

Not all medieval dream visions are precursors of the *Bildungsroman*, but the comparison is instructive.⁷ When we examine certain medieval works, such as Guillaume de Lorris' portion of the *Roman de la Rose*, the *Commedia*, *The Kingis Quair*, and *The Palice of Honour*, from the perspective of autobiography as a form predicated on the manipulation of narrative tenses, we discover some important structural coherences.

In Dante's poem, for instance, the pilgrim stumbles toward a perception of reality and truth embodied in Dante speaking as a poet. While the pilgrim operates in the past tense and faints in sympathy at the story of Paolo and Francesca, the poet, whose present-tense discourse is fortified by the beatific vision, unflinchingly places Francesca in Hell. Tense manipulation also plays an important role in the *Roman de la Rose*. E.B. Vitz has described the narrative movement in the *Roman* as one from *narrative* tenses (preterite) to *discourse* tenses (present, future, and *passé composé*). The narrator in the present comes to associate himself with the idealistic dreamer and so creates a new narrative present which combines the past's idealized conception of love with the narrator's more objective present-tense perspective.⁸ Of course, the *Roman* and the *Commedia* clearly differ in their respective thematic developments. But as dream visions they have important formal and generic principles in common--in particular their uses of tense manipulation to express the intersubjective relationship between the present narrating self and the past dreaming self.⁹

The Palice of Honour contains a similar dialectic between the narrator's present and past selves. Douglas' persistent use of tense manipulations in his narrative alerts the reader to one of the principal ways of construing meaning in the poem. Moreover, combining the retrospective form of the medieval dream vision with later medieval humanism's notions of poetry and the stature of the poet, Douglas constructs a moral narrative wherein the dreamer discovers, through the growth of his poetic powers, that poetry itself is a legitimate pathway to the Palace of Honour. *The Palice of Honour*, then, is essentially a poem about the nature and making of poetry; its narrative form reduplicates the process by which the dreamer becomes the narrator who is able to write the poem. As the dreamer learns, poetry's impetus is from the immortal realm of God and Honor, and it is the poet's task to convert those spiritual values into sublunary (albeit inspired) forms.

In his Prologue, Douglas establishes the context for the distinction between the present time of the narrator and the past time of the dreamer. The poem opens with a conventional medieval description of a May garden where the dreamer has gone to perform his "obseruance" (6). Such a place, with its gem-like flowers, harmonious birds, and sweet aromas, is a familiar location in medieval dream visions; and while the first three stanzas of the Prologue display poetical expertise, they are not unique in medieval allegory.

But the narrator has concerns other than the description of a conventional *locus amoenus*. The love garden in which

the dreamer finds himself is also the scene of Nature's regenerative powers. The garden has been "Replenischt" (29) by the rejuvenating power of the Sun:

The new collour that all the nicht lay deid
Is restorit, baith foulis, flouris and Rice
Recomfort was throw Phebus' gudlyheid. (34-6)

The use of the past tense in line 36 indicates that the action took place when the dreamer was in the garden, when he was the dreamer and not the narrator. But a few lines later the same idea is expressed in the present tense when we are told how the earth was formed

Be goldin bemis viuificatiue,
Quhais amene heit is maist restoratiue. (42-3)

Such a mixture of tenses leads the reader to infer that the "Richt hailsome" season of the year (46) is part of both the present and the past perspectives in the poem. What changes, however, is how the dreamer understands, in terms of poetic creativity, the regenerative powers of Phoebus and May to expell "all that nature infestis" (75).

Like the narrator, the dreamer is affected by rejuvenating Nature, but not in quite so "hailsome" a manner. The dreamer is unable to determine if he saw a prefiguration of some sort of truth (*vision*) or an illusion (*fantone*) (60). In medieval dream theory, as codified by Macrobius and others, there was a great deal of difference between the two.¹⁰ Furthermore, the dreamer, unable to understand what is going on in the May garden itself, hears the unknown voice in the garden and becomes "Soir affrayit, half in ane frenesie" (90). He calls out for Nature and May to

Comfort 3our man that in this fanton steruis,
With spreit arraisit and euerie wit away,
Quaiking for feir, baith pulsis, vane and neruis.
(97-9)

The "fanton" is not a dream but the waking reality. So, for the reader, the effect of this episode is to associate the dreamer with illusory perception, fear, and feebleness of wit.

The narrator, on the other hand, sees the importance of the ensuing vision (as the dreamer in the garden cannot) and alerts the reader to his more enlightened retrospective perspective:

I sall discryue--as God will giue me grace--
Myne Visioun in rurall termis rude. (125-6)

Of course, the diction of the Prologue is anything but "rurall" or "rude." From the perspective of the poem's fictional premise, the opening stanzas, with their aureation and elaborate rhyme, indicate to the reader the narrator's poetic competence which is the result of the action subsequently described in the poem.

Because the dreamer's vision is the result of an "ouir excelland licht" (113) and a prefiguration of truth rather than illusion (as the dreamer at first suspects), the conflict between a divine vision, written with God's grace, and the only available terms in which to relate that vision, human poetry, becomes extremely important. As we shall see, this problem of visionary poetry rendered in human terms becomes increasingly significant as the poem progresses. Also, the narrator's invocation of God's grace to help in describing the vision forces the reader to come to terms with the distinction between the dreamer's perception of a "fantou" or "dreidfull terrour" (117) and the narrator's present view of the dream as a true vision. Clearly the narrator possesses a more knowledgeable perspective on the course of the visionary journey and he injects that understanding into his account of his past self's experiences. The narrator's notion of the dream as a "vision" in the Prologue is derived from a teleological awareness of how the action turns out. The dreamer in the garden, however, with his fearful frenzy and feeble wit, cannot be trusted as a reliable evaluator of his own perceptions since he is uncertain as to what the vision will produce. The only thing he knows for certain (and this is where the reader begins to comprehend the nature of the vision about to be related) is that he is searching for the poetic inspiration by which to sing praises to May and Nature (94-5).¹¹ The reader, then, must understand the very existence of *The Palice of Honour* as testimony to that desire, although not in the precise way the dreamer seems to expect.

Thus the Prologue to *The Palice of Honour* sets forth the important distinction between the feeble-minded dreamer in the past time who would be a poet and the narrator in the present whose perceptions are more nearly valid because they are understood in the context of the entire vision. The "impressioun" of "ouir excelland licht" (105, 113) which causes the dreamer first to tumble into the shrubbery and then faint and dream must be associated with the only other source of light in the Prologue--Phoebus--whose golden beams are described as "viuificatiue" and "maist restoratiue." So the

dreamer fears as a "dreidfull terrour" the "ouir excelland licht" which the reader and the narrator perceive as a potentially regenerative supernatural force.

Emphasizing his former self's misperception, the narrator then describes the ensuing vision in terms which contrast sharply with the previous view of light and paradise:

I thoct me set within a desert place
 Amyd a Forest by a hyddeous flude
 With grysly fische.... (122-4)

Such a nightmarish landscape does not seem the likely result of an "ouir excelland licht" until the reader realizes that the desert represents the impoverished state of the mind of the dreamer. Drawing upon the *Hous of Fame*, the vision in *The Palice of Honour* begins with a barren world full of "fisch zelland as eluis schoutit" (146), a world which is as illusory in one way as the May garden had been in another. With fish and birds transformed into monsters, the "wildernes abhominabill and waist, / In quhome nothing was nature comfortand" (155-6) is the May garden stripped of its glitter and turned inside out as a result of the dreamer's inability to understand Nature's regenerative power.

While the dreamer finds himself at the beginning of Part I without much hope for recovering from his feeble wit and "dreidfull terrour," the narrator has divorced himself from such a barren position. Part I opens with an address by the present narrating self to his past self, the dimwitted dreamer:

Thow barrant wit, ouirset with fantasyis,
 Schaw now the craft, [th]at in thy memor lyis.
 Schaw now thy schame, schaw now thy bad nystie,
 Schaw thy endite, reprufe of Rethoryis,
 Schaw now thy beggit termis mair than thryis,
 Schaw now thy rymis and thine harlotrie,
 Schaw now thy dull, exhaust Inanitie,
 Schaw furth thy cure and write thir frenesyis,
 Quhilks of thy sempill cunning nakit the.
 (127-35)

Some critics have seen this stanza as a conventional apostrophe to the narrator's own feeble wit,¹² but it actually represents the narrator's mockery of his former self's "barrant wit" which was unable to utilize correctly the craft and rhetoric of poetry. The narrator's mind is not "ouirset with fantasyis" nor full of "dull, exhaust Inanitie." These are qualities of the dreamer's mind, the narrator's unenlightened

former self. Therefore, when the dreamer composes a complaint against Fortune (165-92), the reader must be alert to the context which the narrator has established for understanding the dreamer's actions. Regardless whether modern readers consider the complaint to be conventional,¹³ the narrator says it is "reprufe of Rethoryis" because it is the product of an uninformed understanding. Like the dreamer Boethius before Lady Philosophy has set him straight, the dreamer in *The Palice of Honour* rails against a world which he mistakenly suggests is ruled by Fortune, not God. Similarly, when the dreamer is approached by the Court of Sapience on its way to the Palice of Honour, he only has the courage to confront the two disreputable camp-followers, Sinon and Achitophel (229ff). The dreamer recognizes the two as "wretchit Catius" (269), but he cannot discriminate between proper and improper motives for Honour.

After the narrator reminds the reader of the topsy-turvy perception of the dreamer ("The stichling of a Mous out of presence / Had bene to me mair vgsun than the Hell"--308-9), the Court of Chastity appears, also bound for the Palice of Honour. Critics have not been very successful in explaining the rationale for Chastity's appearance at this point in the poem, and I am not certain that I shall be any more successful. Since the feeble-minded dreamer has been "Desirand fast sum signes or sum tokin / Of Lady Venus or hir companie" (314-5), the appearance of the Court of Chastity here affirms once again the poem's norm of the unexpected as far as the dreamer is concerned. Also, the description of Diana emphasizes Chastity's vengeful power, while the transformation of Actaeon corresponds to the transformation motif throughout the poem.

But the real significance of the Court of Chastity in Douglas' poem is that it sets the stage for the more important appearance of the Court of Venus. The narrator remarks, "All chast and trew virginite professys, / I not, bot few I saw with Diane hant" (335-6). For the enlightened narrator in the present ("not"), Chastity is constant but without numbers, proportion, and "dulcet" sounds, all the things which make the Court of Venus so attractive and which will later help establish the important connections between nature and poetry.

When Venus finally does appear, she is preceded by a "schynand licht" (359) reminiscent of the "ouir excelland licht" of the Prologue. But she also appears within the context of the dreamer's "daisit heid" (355) and of the monstrous landscape "Quhair dragouns, lessertis, askis, edders swatterit" (349). The dreamer is pleased by the sweet harmony which accompanies the Court of Venus, but he is ignorant of its source. In other words, the dreamer is not yet a poet con-

cerned with the materials of his art, as the enlightened narrator certainly is. As the narrator describes the pageant of Venus' court through the dreamer's eyes, we find that the dreamer cannot distinguish secular from pious poetry. To the dreamer, Venus' harmonies "semit nathing ellis / Bot Ierarchyes of Angellis ordours nine" (443-4). As the episode progresses, however, the aural harmony dissolves into legalistic conflict. Also, the transformation motif reappears as the dreamer creeps on all fours before the Court (646-7) and fears that he will be "transfigurat... / As in a Beir, a Bair, ane Oule, ane Aip" (740-1). In a sense, then, the Courts of Chastity and Venus present two halves of the whole toward which the the argument in the poem works. Chastity is constant but unadorned, while Venus is adorned but inconstant. The appearance of the Court of Rhetoric presents the dreamer with a synthesis of poetry and honor which is both constant and adorned.

Although the dreamer does not understand the nature of the celestial harmonies which precede Venus' court, the narrator takes the opportunity to digress on the nature of harmony, order, and sound, the materials of the poet's art (361-81). Based on a similar digression in the *Hous of Fame* (765-81), the narrator's rational explanation of how sounds travel in waves through the air contrasts with the dreamer's inability always to perceive the sweet harmony in its fullest sense. Although the scrambling of past and present tenses in the digression somewhat confuses the benighted-enlightened scheme, there is still a sustained movement in the passage from the dreamer's perception in the past tense ("Proportion sounding dulcest hard I peip"; 361) to the dreamer with an enlightened voice ("In Musick number full of Harmonie / Distant on far was caryit be the deip"; 362-3) to the enlightened narrator in the present (364-81) to the narrator in the present tense with a benighted voice ("Aneuch of this--I not quhat it may mene"; 382) and finally back to the dreamer in the past tense with his "dreidfull dreme" (384). The narrator's plea of ignorance is parodic, since he clearly does understand the meaning of the phenomenon he has just described. A few lines later the narrator mocks his own narrative repetition (388). These and other instances of parody in the poem are only comprehensible as parody if the general benighted-enlightened scheme operates insistently throughout the poem. The reflexivity of the narrator's retrospective view encompasses his own creative act as well as the actions of his former, dreaming self.

The dreamer is interested more in the musical accompaniment in Venus' court than in Venus herself, even though he has not

yet been impelled to any realization of harmony and order. However, the narrator understands, from his retrospective vantage point, what will be the end of the dreamer's visionary journey and it is he who explains in another digression the true nature of music.

That music and poetry are related (and often synonymous) in classical and medieval thought is a commonplace which should hardly need to be mentioned. In medieval literary theory, Orpheus and David were the pagan and Christian archetypes of the medieval poet. When the narrator describes the harmony accompanying Venus' court, he uses highly technical musicological language which John Hollander describes as "no mere display of misunderstood terms, but instead a carefully constructed exposition of the nature of music."¹⁴ Douglas certainly expected his audience to recognize the erudition of this digression, so it is particularly significant when the narrator says of Venus' train,

Na mair I vnderstude thir numbers fine,
Be God, than dois a greik or a swine,
Saif that me think sweit soundis gude to heir.
(517-9)

Taken together, the two digressions on sound and music point up both the dreamer's movement away from the desert world, full of unrhythmic sound and inarticulate speech, where "fisch zelland as eluis schoutit" (146), and his increasing contact with *harmonia* and order in the form of poetry. To be a poet, the dreamer needs what the narrator possesses: an understanding of the aural/verbal quality of poetry. But, as we shall see, the aural quality alone is not enough; it must be accompanied by an awareness of poetry's proper context and moral purpose.

The dreamer achieves a small measure of discrimination when he sees the variety of true and false loves in Venus' court and then complains against Venus' inconstancy. But Part I ends with the dreamer "rolland thus in diuers fantaseis" and completely bereft of any rational or creative powers ("My febill minde seand this greit suppryis / Was than of wit and euerie blis full bair") (763, 770-1). He has encountered the Courts of Sapience, Chastity, and Venus but has received no real help from them. In fact, the dreamer's imminent danger from Venus at the end of Part I represents the furthest inversion of the May garden/paradise described at the beginning of the poem, a garden over which Venus should presumably preside. In the Prologue the benighted dreamer's obseruance" focused on the regenerative and creative powers

of Nature, but now at the end of Part I he is without creativity. As the action of the first part of the poem demonstrates, technical expertise is not enough to make one a poet. The poet's faculties, e.g., his "hailsome" mind, also require judgment and the powers of moral discrimination, qualities which the narrator has been at pains to show were not possessed by his former self.

Part II of the poem begins at this low point in the dreamer's fortunes, and also with the by now familiar distinction between the narrator and the misapprehending dreamer. The first stanza of Part II embodies the narrator's perspective and attributes to God his salvation from Venus' court:

He that quhilk is eternall veritie,
The glorious Lord ringand in persounis thre,
Prouydit hes for my Saluatioun
Be sum gude spreitis Reuelatioun. (775-8)

In contrast, the second stanza reflects the dreamer's noncomprehending viewpoint:

All haill my dreid I tho forzet in hy
And all my wo, bot zit I wist not quhy
Saue that I had sum hope till be releuit.
(781-3)

The dreamer is in search of the Muses' inspiration because he desires to be a poet, but he does not fully understand the real source of his salvation and of all poetry--God. The enlightened narrator, however, does comprehend the relationship between God and poetry and signals to the reader the kind of salvation which his past self is about to receive.

When the Court of Rhetoric appears, with many singers and "castis quent, Rethorik colouris fine" (819), the dreamer is overwhelmed with the ability of the poets in the Court of Rhetoric.

I had greit wonder. of thay Ladyis seir,
Quhilks in that airt micht haue na compeir;
Of castis quent, Rethorik colouris fine,
Sa Poeit like in subtell fair maneir
And eloquent firme cadence Regulair. (817-21)

His easy association with the Court highlights the teleological nature of the poem: the dreamer will discover that poetry itself is his path to Honor. When he meets the court, the dreamer is emboldened by the Muses without knowing why (829),

although the present tense form *wait* (or *wate* in the London edition) is misleading. But he does understand that he is "payit of thair estait" (830) which, he says, is "Sa Poeit like" (820). As the narrator observes, "thay war folk of knowledge, as it semit" (831), precisely the sort of advisors the dreamer most needs. Moreover, the narrator recounts how a descriptive catalogue of the "lustie Musis" (892) "refreschit my perplexitie, / Reioysand weill my Spreit, befoir was cauld" (887-8). In essence, the Court of Rhetoric assumes the restorative function similar to that enacted by Nature and May in the Prologue. But whereas before the "hailsome" season ironically reflected the dreamer's illusory world of the May garden, it now gives him strength when he simply perceives what the Muses are, that is, when he understands that their "estait" as poets is his own.¹⁵ This association of Nature and Poetry is fundamental in Douglas' poem because it derives from the medieval analogy between God and the poet, both of whom speak and so create.¹⁶ The *ordo* of medieval poetry was thought to be equivalent to the divine act of creation, and so in some sense sanctioned by that divinity. Douglas concretizes this analogy in the description of poetic creation in terms of bees making honey (compare lines 42-5 with 2065). Such an association makes more compelling the way in which the Garden of Rhetoric at the end of the poem represents the earlier May garden restored.

But for all the changes in the dreamer's state of mind as a result of the arrival of the Muses, he still remains at the mercy of Venus' court. Calliope, therefore, intercedes on his behalf and asks Venus to deliver him over to her. If she does, says Calliope, the dreamer "sall efter deserue neuer mair blame" (966), because "on my heid he standis now sic aw" (965). What Calliope affirms is that the feeble-minded dreamer now belongs to her because he is in awe of the Court of Rhetoric. The pun on "aw" ("awe/fear" or "owned") indicates both the cause and the effect of the dreamer's recognition of the restorative powers of the Muses.¹⁷ Because he understands that poetry is a special "estait," the dreamer becomes, at least potentially, a member of the Court of Rhetoric.

Once Calliope procures his release from Venus, the dreamer is restored to "hailsome" wit; but we must understand that from the narrator's viewpoint this rejuvenation is different in kind from that which occurred in the Prologue. Venus imposes a penance on the newly-whole dreamer, that he write a poem in praise of her as well as perform an additional task at her request (perhaps an allusion to Douglas' plans to translate the *Aeneid* into the Scottish vernacular). Instead, "At command of prudent Calliope" (1007), the dreamer composes

a poem of thanksgiving for his whole wit having been "diliuerit of dangair" (1015). So, having assented to Calliope's dominion and the "estait" of poetry, the dreamer moves a step closer to becoming a true poet by establishing and calling attention to his poetic and imaginative powers. Delivered from Venus' judgment, the dreamer then does genuine homage to Calliope, in the style of hymns to the Virgin, calling her

My Protectour, my help and my supplie,
My souerane Lady, my Redemptioun,
My Mediatour quhen I was dampnit to die....
(1055-7)

But Calliope quickly cuts him off and entrusts him to a nymph in order that he may learn "wonderis moir" (1069). What the nymph shows the dreamer are the nature and substance of poetry.

This is the literal center of Douglas' poem, the point at which Calliope gives the dreamer over to a spiritual guide. Douglas schematizes the dreamer's transition from one level of vision to another by placing the episode at the exact middle of his poem. Depending upon whether one counts the envoy to Prince James in the total number of lines, the center of the poem occurs at either "We war caryit in twinkling of ane Eye" (1084) or "Than scho me hes betaucht in keiping / Of ane sweit Nimphe, maist faithfull and decoir" (1070-1). Both places are suggestive in slightly different ways, but they both clearly reveal that *The Palice of Honour* is structured symmetrically around the moment when the dreamer begins an imaginative journey which will take him out of linear time to Helicon and to the source of true poetry, the Palice of Honour. With the rest of the Muses, the dreamer and the nymph travel together "Als swift as thocht... / to se quhat thay wald mene, / Quhilks sang and playit bot neuer a wreist zeid wrang" (1077, 1079-80). The dreamer is now rejuvenated and correctly able to learn and see (literally and intellectually) since his perspective has been righted following his salvation by Calliope. In order to teach the would-be poet, the nymph carries him in the "twinkling of ane Eye" (1084) over all the places of the world, both legendary (Helicon, Parnassus, the well of Acheron) and actual (Germany, Italy, Egypt). As the dreamer discovers, the poet's lore is universal, including man's imagined truth as well as his more factual circumstances. In terms of the "truth" which poetry embodies, myths and legends are indistinguishable from historical and geographical facts, and all are capable of conveying moral truth.

As the nymph and the dreamer approach the "Musis Caballine Fontane" (1134), the narrator's voice begins to assume a different tone. Before, when dealing with the Courts of Chastity, Sapience, Venus, and Rhetoric, the narrator was conscious of his poetic skill and careful not to exceed his intentions by being "ouir prolix" (927). Now at the "Caballine Fontane" he finds the heavenly joy of the troupe beyond his descriptive powers:

The world may not consider nor discriue
 The heuinlie Ioy, the blis I saw belieue,
 Sa Ineffabill, abone my wit sa hie.
 I will na mair thairon my foirheid riue
 Bot breiflie furth my febill proces driue.
 (1162-6)

This is not a falling off of poetic power but rather a shift in the quality of the material which the narrator is about to relate. Echoing the language of John's *Revelations*, the narrator declares that what his past self has seen is beyond worldly limits.¹⁸ The Feast of Poetry which he describes is essentially a spiritual banquet, with "Delicait meitis, dainteis seir alsua" (1179). Various poets from Calliope's Court--Ovid, Virgil, Terence, Juvenal, Martial, Lorenzo Valla, and Poggio--perform at the banquet, acquainting the dreamer with a variety of poetic forms and including for discussion not only the *materia* of classical poetry but also that of the more recent literature of Renaissance Italy.¹⁹ The narrator is properly humble before the prospect of relating a spiritual vision which contributed to his ability to write the poem in the first place.

Following the banquet, the repasted dreamer, his guide, and the rest of the Court of Rhetoric journey on "Ouir mony gudeliie plane" (1243) and at the last come to "the finall end of our trauaill" (1248)--the Palice of Honour. This section of the poem is strongly reminiscent of Statius' remarks to Virgil in Dante's *Purgatorio*: "You it was who first sent me toward Parnassus to drink in its caves, and you who first did light me on to God" (XXII.64-6). In Douglas' poem, the dreamer's use of the plural pronominal adjective indicates that he has completely identified himself with the Muses' court. Also, the phrase "finall end" suggests something of the teleological perspective which the narrator has been operating from throughout the poem.²⁰ In essence, this is the moment when the dreamer is about to "become" the narrator, the moment when the past self catches up with the present self. It is significant, therefore, that while the dreamer

rides to the Pallice of Honour "With singing, lauching, merines and play" (1252), the narrator begins to tremble with fear to write what

The hart may not think nor mannis toung say,
The Eir nocht heir nor zit the Eye se may,
It may not be Imaginit with men
The heuinlie blis, the perfite Ioy to ken
Quhilk now I saw; the hundreth part all day
I micht not schaw thocht I had toungis ten.
(1255-60)

But the narrator's fear is not the dreamer's often comic fear and trembling which we encountered in the earlier parts of the poem. Rather, his fear (like St. John's) is a result of his concern for the adequacy of his medium and his own ability to render effectively the vision he has seen:

Howbeit I may not euerie circumstance
Reduce perfitelie in remembrance,
Myne Ignorance zit sum part sall devise
Tuitching this sicht of heuinlie sweet plesance.
(1279-82)

Such has been the narrator's concern at several places in the poem, but this is the most heavily emphasized instance and the most crucial. The narrator's echo of the language of Biblical vision suggests that he has seen a holy vision. Therefore, despite what "Ianglaris" may say about the validity of dreams and visions (1267-9), he recognizes that because of his vision "all veritie be kend" to him (1270) and that poetry based on divine truth can easily withstand the backbiting scorn of nonbelievers.

Having established the framework for resolving the distinction between his former self and his present creative self, the narrator proceeds, "Traistand in God my purpois to escheif" (1278). Priscilla Bawcutt, in her recent study of Douglas, has declared Part III to be didactic, pedestrian, and "the least satisfactory section of the poem."²¹ But I read Part III as the climax of the poem since it represents at once the narrator's accomplishment of his avowed intention to relate his vision and the dreamer's accomplishment of the "finall end of our trauaill." While the narrator invokes the Muses' aid in successfully writing his poem, the dreamer fearfully climbs up the hill to the Pallice of Honour. In a sense, the narrator's request that the Muses "Teiche me zour facund castis Eloquent" (1290) is the dreamer's request, too.

Likewise, the dreamer's fearful ascent to the Palice is also the narrator's creative ascent to reach through poetry the seat of all honor and virtue.

Part III extends the instruction of the dreamer to the realm of moral judgment, a quality which is essential to the development of a Christian humanist poet and one which the dreamer has been noticeably lacking. Atop the marble mountain, the nymph shows the dreamer a "grislie sicht" (1314): "piteous pepill" (1334) who, having fallen into sloth, now burn in a "terribill sewch" (1316). As the dreamer experiences a *contemptus mundi* feeling, the nymph explains the allegory of the "Carwell of the State of Grace." The lessons which the dreamer learns here are precisely the ones he needed to have learned in Part I when he complained against Fortune. Fortune, he discovers, is based on worldly values and is therefore by nature transitory. This Boethian perspective is not especially innovative, but it does demonstrate the nature of the dreamer's education. Later, in the Palice of Honor, the nymph explains that

"eirdlie gloir is nocht bot vanitie
That as we se sa suddanelie will wend,
Bot verteous Honour neuer mair sall end."
(1978-80)

Such knowledge indicates how far the dreamer has come from his earlier complaint against Fortune.

The nymph now calls the dreamer's attention away from grace and "gude warkis" (1394) to a more literary activity. Poetry, the nymph suggests, is an act of faith comparable to other Christian good works and, like them, is founded on Christ and God's grace. Everything the dreamer sees, she says, is for his benefit as a Christian poet:

Consider wonders, and be vigilant
That thow may better endyten efterwart
Things quhilkis I sall the schaw or we depart.
Thow sall haue fouth of sentence and not scant.
Thair is na welth nor weilfair thou sall want.
The greit Palice of honour thow sall se.
Life vp thy heid, behald that sicht...."
(1398-1404)

The description of the vision of the Palice of Honour, then, relates the manner in which the narrator has accumulated the material used, in effect, to write the poem. Later, the nymph rebukes the dreamer for standing "stupifak" before the

Pallice and enjoins him to observe carefully: "Quhat now thow seis, luik efterwart thow write" (1464). In contrast, the narrator's problem is how to embody his divine vision in earthly terms:

Bot to discriue this mater, in effek,
Impossibill war till ony eirdlie wicht.
It transcendis far abone my micht
That I with Ink may do bot paper blek.
(1407-10)

This is a problem voiced by many medieval poets when confronted with the dilemma of using a finite medium to relate an infinite experience. It is the dilemma of all visionary allegory. The narrator's resolution of the problem is to substitute his poem for the vision of the Pallice of Honour. This solution may sound rather simplistic until we realize that to do so means to embody virtue and honor in the poem itself. Thus, the lengthy catalogues of human history, literature, and heroes from Adam to the Second Coming, which the dreamer perceives in Venus' mirror, are intended by the narrator as not only illustrations of the instruction he received at the Pallice but also moral instruction for the reader. As such, these digressions reshape the moral and intellectual context for the two earlier digressions on the aural/verbal aspects of expression. The healing quality of the mirror--"For quha that woundit was in the Tournement / Wox hail fra he vpon the Mirroure blent" (1484-5)--emphasizes this function of moral instruction and makes the vision in Venus' mirror in effect a "poem." The same thing can be said for the allegory of the Carwell of the State of Grace and the nymph's extended sermon on the nature of honor and virtue.

Once the dreamer is inside the Pallice of Honour, various allegorical personifications are presented to him as he proceeds to Honour's court. The dreamer is still somewhat fearful, presumably because of the overwhelming wonder of his vision and the Pallice's "warkmanschip exceeding mony fold / That precious mater, thocht it was fynest gold" (1862-3). The dreamer's concern accords well with his increased stature as a poet aware of the craft in art; it is also close to the narrator's concern for the adequacy of his art and thus unlike the dreamer's earlier fear that Venus would turn him into a beast. The narrator's apprehension when describing the scene inside the Pallice of Honour arises from his sense of the need for poetic craft and skill to create truly great art.

By the time the dreamer reaches the door to Honor's court,

he has come to perceive the Palice as a "perfitte Paradise" (1899), unlike the illusory, lapidarian world of the May garden. Coaxed by the nymph, the dreamer peeks into Honor's chamber through a crevice and beholds on the throne

ane God Omnipotent,
On quhais glorious visage as I blent,
In extasie be his brichtnes atanis
He smote me doun and brissit all my banis.
(1921-4)

C.S. Lewis has referred to the pun on "ane" (meaning *one* or *a*) as the "nerve of the whole allegory," the moment when the dreamer discovers that honor is with God.²² The dreamer realizes that God is the true source of all poetry and truth and thereby achieves the teleological perspective which the narrator has delineated throughout the poem. The dreamer and the narrator become one with the sight of God in Honor's court. The fact that the dreamer sees God only through a crevice instead of meeting Him face to face signifies that the poet can see God directly only after death. After the dreamer is struck down by the ecstatic brightness, the nymph seems to recognize his earthly limitations:

"I will na mair," quod scho, "the thus assay
With sic plesance quhilk may thy spreit affray."
(1954-5)

Instead, the nymph delivers her sermon on the nature of true honor and virtue.

The nymph's sermon, profusely illustrated with *exempla* of illustrious men and women, is in a sense an affirmation of the power of words (poetry) to translate divine truth into mortal terms. Because the dreamer was unable to withstand the visual experience of knowledge when he peeked through the crevice, he is instructed verbally about the nature of honor and virtue. The nymph, we recall, is from Calliope's court, and therefore her instruction of the dreamer can be viewed as an action parallel to the narrator's instruction of his audience through his own poem.

The nymph concludes her sermon with a capsule summary of what the dreamer would have seen had he not been of "megir hart":

Thow suld haue sene, had thow biddin in 3one art,
Quhat wise 3one heuinlie companie conuersit.
Wa worth thy febill brane, sa sone was persit.

Thow micht haue sene remanand quhair thow was
 Ane hudge pepill puneist for thair trespas....
 (2030-4)

The reason, of course, that he did not see "zone heuinlie companie" is that the dreamer has yet to learn fully what it means to be a poet. Only after his entire vision, when "all veritie be kend" to him (1270), can he truly be considered a poet. And only then can he write *The Palice of Honour*.

Following her sermon, the nymph prescribes a literary remedy for the dreamer's "persit" brain--a walk in a luscious garden where

Our Ladyis zonder, bissie as the beis,
 The sweit flureist flouris of Rethoreis
 Gadderis full fast, mony grene tender plant.
 (2065-7)

The garden is a veritable poetic arsenal wherein the dreamer might find renewed strength and a truly virtuous angle of vision. But the way into the garden is "Sa perrellous" that his "spreitis wox agast" (2081-2). Trembling with fear, the still unproven dreamer falls over into the water which surrounds the garden and abruptly wakes from his dream. Because the dreamer has not yet fully become a poet, he cannot enter the garden of rhetoric. Only when he completes the poem which describes his divine vision will he be considered a true poet. Membership in the garden club of rhetoric is by accomplishment only. Later, when the dreamer-now-narrator composes his ballade in commendation of Honor, he says,

Delite the tite, me quite of site to dicht,
 For I apply, schortlie, to thy deuisse.
 (2141-2)

These are the final lines of the ballade and of the poem, and they stand as the fullest fusion of the voice of the dreamer with that of the narrator.

When he awakens to find himself back in the May garden, the dreamer sees his own paradisiacal surroundings with a changed eye:

The birdis sang nor zit the merie flouris
 Micht not ameis my greuou greit dolouris.
 All eirdlie thing me thocht barrane and vile.
 Thus I remanit into the Garth twa houris,
 Cursand the feildis with all the fair coluris,

That I awolk oft wariand the quhile.
 Always my minde was on the lustie Ile.
 (2098-2104)

The dreamer's recognition of the sterility of the original conventional May garden strengthens the view that the poem's action takes place entirely within the narrator's psyche, in the "twinkling of ane Eye" (1084). The garden of rhetoric in Part III is a restorative garden, reminiscent of the May garden in the Prologue, "Quhair precious stanis on treis dois abound / In steid'of frute chargeit with peirlis round" (2069-70). Similarly, the ecstatic vision of God/Honor--whereby dreamer and narrator become one--resembles in part the "ouir excelland licht" which earlier had caused the dreamer to faint and dream. In a sense, the whole vision happens in an instant, and what the poet discovers in the dream are the real nature and source of the inspirational light which he saw in the Prologue but did not yet fully understand. (The reappearance of Venus in Part III can also be viewed in this manner.) The poem, therefore, is circular in its description of the process by which the poem came to be written and also in the sequential character of the dreamer's perceptions of allegorical phenomena.

What remains is for the dreamer to prove himself worthy of being called a poet. The elaborate ballade in commendation of Honor, with its copious internal rhyme and almost incantational quality, demonstrates something of the dreamer's newly acquired technical accomplishment as well as his understanding of the moral nature of poetry. Perhaps, in this respect, there is some significance in the apparent progression of the stanzaic patterns in *The Palice of Honour* from a nine-line stanza with two rhymes in Parts I and II to a new and different nine-line stanza with a concluding couplet in Part III. At any rate, the ballade is an aural/verbal imitation of the divine vision which the dreamer, dazed by the ecstatic light, was unable to see completely. Words become the moral translation of divine knowledge, and poetry is the conveyor of moral instruction. The use of elaborate rhymes and diction in part reflects the medieval concept of *ornatus*, which counted the poetic act as an imitation of the divine act of creation and established through *amplificatio* the aural equivalent of a visual reality.²³

But the real test of the dreamer's recent education is the writing of *The Palice of Honour* itself. The poem becomes not only an account of the narrator's visionary education but also the testament in mortal (i.e., verbal) terms to the ability which qualifies him as a member of the Court of Rhetoric, and

hence of the Court of Honor. The fusion of the poet's past and present selves in the course of the poem represents the entrance of the dreamer-turned-narrator into the realm of poetic truth and moral responsibility. By discovering that true honor is virtue and that it ultimately resides in God, and by choosing poetry as the pathway to Honor, he comes to understand fully the nature and function of poetry and the office of the poet. In this, *The Palice of Honour* stands as an extended and elaborate articulation of humanistic poetics, and more directly so than Chaucer's *Hous of Fame*. As Priscilla Bawcutt has pointedly remarked, Douglas was interested mostly in "ethical problems, history and legend, and, above all, poetry and the interpretation of poetic myth."²⁴ All poetry is derived from God; the utmost scholarly knowledge is not itself sufficient to understand the truth and value of poetry. Poetry not only immortalizes the virtuous deeds of men and women; it also regenerates and renews the individual to a "hailsome" state of mind and can restore men to the right and moral path by which to achieve honor through virtue. As such, Douglas' poem strongly urges that poetry and morality are one and the same, that the individual's task to comprehend himself is itself a poetic act and the very material of visionary narrative. The confrontation of the present self with the past self in the framework of the dream vision represents the most dramatic sort of self analysis and reflection, the kind of selfconsciousness which produces poetry and divinity.

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NOTES

¹For earlier views of the poem, see G. Gregory Smith, *Scottish Literature* (London, 1919), p. 11; Janet M. Smith, *The French Background of Middle Scots Literature* (Edinburgh and London, 1934), pp. 109, 117; Agnes Mure Mackenzie, "The Renaissance Poets: (I) Scots and English," in *Scottish Poetry: A Critical Survey*, ed. James Kinsley (London, 1955), pp. 35-6; Kurt Wittig, *The Scottish Tradition in Literature* (Edinburgh and London, 1958), p. 81; *Virgil's "Aeneid" translated into Scottish verse by Gavin Douglas*, ed. David F.C. Coldwell, STS, Ser. 3, Vol. 30 (Edinburgh and London, 1964), I, 78, 81, 86-7; *Selections from Gavin Douglas*, ed. David F.C. Coldwell (Oxford, 1964), pp. xv, xviii.

For Bawcutt's view, see *Gavin Douglas: A Critical Study* (Edinburgh, 1976), p. 52. Other positive views, which still deny the poem's narrative unity, include Denton Rox, "The

Scottish Chaucerians," in *Chaucer and Chaucerians*, ed. D.S. Brewer (University, Alabama, 1966), pp. 196ff.; Florence Ridley, "Did Gavin Douglas write *King Hart*?" *Speculum*, 34 (1959), 404, 409 (cf. her earlier "The Minor Poems of Gavin Douglas," Diss. Radcliffe, 1957, pp. xxi, xxiii); C.S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love* (New York, 1936), pp. 290-1, and *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century* (Oxford, 1954), p. 78. Curiously, John Speirs, in *The Scots Literary Tradition*, 2nd ed. (London, 1962), says nothing at all about *The Palice of Honour*.

²See Ridley, "Did Gavin Douglas?" pp. 407-8 (and notes); W. Paul Lange, *Chaucer's Einfluss auf die Originaldichtungen des Schotten Gavin Douglas* (Halle, 1882).

³All references are to the Edinburgh (1579) version of the poem, as printed in *The Shorter Poems of Gavin Douglas*, ed. Priscilla J. Bawcutt, STS, Ser. 4, Vol. 3 (Edinburgh and London, 1967).

⁴"The Poet in *The Palice of Honour*," *ChauR*, 3 (1969), 280-303, esp. 280-1. Cf. his "Metaphors of the Poet and His Craft in William Dunbar," in *Aeolian Harps*, ed. Donna G. and Douglas C. Fricke (Bowling Green, Ohio, 1976), pp. 57-63.

⁵Kinneavy, "The Poet," pp. 297-8. Bawcutt and A.C. Spearing also undervalue the important distinctions between poet, narrator, and dreamer. See Bawcutt, *Shorter Poems*, p. xxxix, and *Gavin Douglas*, p. 52; Spearing, *Medieval Dream-Poetry* (Cambridge, 1976), pp. 202-12. Spearing does corroborate some of the general conclusions presented here about the generic properties of the dream vision. See also Paul Piehler, *The Visionary Landscape: A Study in Medieval Allegory* (London, 1971).

⁶My thinking about the functions of time and tense in autobiography has been nourished by Roman Jakobson, "Shifters, Verbal Categories, and the Russian Verb," in *Selected Writings* (The Hague and Paris, 1971), II, 130-6; Emil Benveniste, "L'appareil formel de l'enonciation," *Langages*, 17 (1970), 12-18, and *Problems in General Linguistics*, tr. Mary Elizabeth Meek (Coral Gables, Florida, 1971), pp. 195-215; Kate Hamburger, *The Logic of Literature*, 2nd Ger. ed., tr. Marilyn J. Rose (Bloomington, Indiana, 1973); W.J.M. Bronzwaer, *Tense in the Novel; an investigation of some potentialities of linguistic criticism* (Groningen, 1970); and G.A. Starr, *Defoe and Spiritual Autobiography* (Princeton, 1965), Chapter 1.

⁷Cf. David H. Miles, "The Picaro's Journey to the Confessional: The Changing Image of the Hero in the German Bildungsroman," *PMLA*, 89 (1974), 980-92. Miles draws attention to the Bildungsroman's confessional form wherein time is experienced "as being complex, multilayered, and psychological (in the sense of being nonchronological); the self of the confessor does not exist a priori, but must be recollected, summoned up out of the remembrance of things past--a process launched by crises and ending in a 'conversion' to a new self." Miles finds "a prime example of an early, psychological Bildungsroman" in Augustine's *Confessions* (pp. 980-1). Cf. pp. 983-4, 989.

⁸"The I of the *Roman de la Rose*," *Genre*, 6 (1973), 49-75, esp. 62, 64-5, 69.

⁹Other scholars have hinted at the presence of this literary form in other medieval works: e.g., Lois A. Ebin, "Boethius, Chaucer, and *The Kingis Quair*," *PQ*, 53 (1974), 321-41; Nicolai von Kreisler, "Henryson's Visionary Fable: Tradition and Craftsmanship in *The Lyoun and the Mous*," *TSSL*, 15 (1973), 394; and Dorothy Sherman Severin, *Memory in "La Celestina"* (London, 1970).

¹⁰See, e.g., Macrobius, *Commentarii in Somnium Scipionis*, 1, 3, 3-10.

¹¹In some respects, *The Palice of Honour* can be read as a veritable gloss on late medieval poetics. See Gerald B. Kinneavy, "An Analytical Approach to Literature in the Late Middle Ages: the 'Prologues' of Gavin Douglas," *NM*, 75 (1974), 126-42.

¹²E.g., Kinneavy, "The Poet," pp. 283-4.

¹³Bawcutt, *Shorter Poems*, p. 176.

¹⁴*The Untuning of the Sky* (Princeton, 1961), pp. 82-84; Bawcutt, *Shorter Poems*, pp. 180-1.

¹⁵Cf. Kinneavy, "The Poet," pp. 288-90. In Douglas' translation of the *Aeneid*, Virgil demonstrates that Genius (the power to create *delectio* in poetry) will not operate without joy or mirth; see Kinneavy, "An Analytical Approach to Literature," p. 35.

¹⁶See Thomas J. Hatton, "Nature as Poet: Alanus de Insulis' *The Complaint of Nature* and the Medieval Concept of Artistic Creation," *L&S*, 2 (1969), 85-91; Winthrop Wetherbee, "The Function of Poetry in the 'De Planctu Naturae' of Alain de Lille," *Traditio*, 25 (1969), 87-125.

¹⁷Cf. Kinneavy, "The Poet," pp. 290-1.

¹⁸For a convenient summary of the doctrine of accommodation and the inexpressability topos, see Leland Ryken, *The Apocalyptic Vision in "Paradise Lost"* (Ithaca, New York, and London, 1970), pp. 7-24. On the related topos of *humilitas*, see E.R. Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, tr. Willard R. Trask (Princeton, 1953), pp. 407-13.

¹⁹Cf. lines 895-924. Also cf. *HF*, 1491-1515. For an account of the rise of Italian humanism in Scotland and England, see R.D.S. Jack, *The Italian Influence on Scottish Literature* (Edinburgh, 1972), pp. 1-4, 22-7. Cf. John MacQueen, "Some Aspects of the Early Renaissance in Scotland," *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 3 (1967), 201-22; Roberto Weiss, *Humanism in England During the Fifteenth Century*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1957), pp. 13-38.

²⁰It is not too ingenious, I think, to suggest that in line 1248 ("We se the finall end of our trauaill") the present tense verb unites the dreamer's journey to the Palace of Honour with the reader's journey through the poem. But the desire for perfect unity and consistency in a poem (especially a late medieval poem) should not blind us to the fact that a few instances, though by no means a significant number, confuse the pervasive tense scheme in Douglas' poem.

²¹Gavin Douglas, p. 63.

²²*The Allegory of Love*, p. 290.

²³See Curtius, pp. 544-6.

²⁴Gavin Douglas, p. 36.