After considering the contexts of the dream vision and its proximate origins in medieval rhetoric and philosophy, it is finally possible to examine how the poems operate. This examination will be divided into two stages: a formal description of the structure of the dream vision using traditional models and terminology and an affective analysis of this structure. The purpose of this two-stage discussion is to illustrate what I have already suggested about the twofold content of the poems: the poem about a dreamer and a dream, the fabric of the figmenta of a troubled dreamer, is simultaneously about the ideas for which those figmenta stand and the mind which created the figmenta.

The Shape of the Poem

Like any other poem, the dream vision begins by announcing itself to be a certain kind of experience: it does this by introducing a certain sort of persona or speaking voice and determining a specific relationship between that persona and the reader. The text is in the hands of or proceeds from the muse of a specific individual, and all of the words have this person as their ultimate source. Thus, the lyric persona is both the reporter of the narrative (or complex of emotions) and also the text's ultimate (and probably only) subject.

This much is true of all lyric poetry by definition, and the dream vision is a species of the lyric mode. All lyrics are finally about their singers and their subjects—their external topics and the internal
responses of the lyric poets to these topics—in ways that frequently make subject and object indistinguishable. The situation in the dream vision, however, complicates even this subtle, often murky configuration because here neither the event nor the reporter are stable, sharply determined entities. The event is ambiguous, of course, because it is a dream and one that is not, in all likelihood, a communication from beyond. Indeed, the “events” reported in dream visions are probably not events at all but, as Augustine and others might have said, are gratuitous, random representations of thoughts and memories given imaginary life in the *figmenta* of the dreamer’s brain.

The other element of the lyric mode, the persona, is also especially troublesome and indeterminate in the case of the dream vision. We have noted already that the dreamer is regularly depicted as troubled, depressed, and alienated from the comforts of society: he may be suffering from love languor or be in mourning or he may, like “Long Will” or the dreamer who dreams of the Palace of Fame, be suffering from a deeper, more pervasive anguish or depression. In any case, he is the sort of person who has dreams, the sort of sensibility we might expect in a lyric poet but one in whose hands we might not feel terribly secure.

It could reasonably be objected at this point that the anxious or distracted persona is a feature of all lyric poetry and not unique to the dream vision—after all, why do lyric poets write if they are not moved to do so by some desire to express the overwhelming emotions they feel? The difference, that between the conventional lyric persona and the poet-dreamer, is one of fictive intention: the lyric persona, moved by some emotion to write a poem, goes ahead and writes a poem about that emotion and about the events that engendered it, while the poet-dreamer never sets out consciously to expose his feelings. The elliptical descriptions of dreamers at the beginning of dream visions never include explicit statements about just what is troubling this poor wretch—Geffrey refuses to discuss the question rather brusquely in the *Book of the Duchess* (the “physicien but oon” passage, lines 30–43). It is thus impossible to begin a
dream vision without a sense of intrusion, as when the person sitting next to us on the bus begins to tell us his life story (and we have the window seat); on beginning the poem, the readers discover that all before them promises to be a projection of the troubled mind introduced at the poem's beginning.

These two ambiguities about both halves of the lyric structure—the fantastic event and the unreliable reporter—create radical lyric expectations in the reader; however indirectly, the dream report promises to be an expression of emotion like any other lyric except that here the central sentiment is not one about which the poet is being honest and forthright. Such expectations prepare the reader for strange, enigmatic details within the dream reports:

En icelui tens deliteus,
que toute rien d'amer s'esfroie,
songai une nuit que j'estoi.
Lors m'iere avis en mon dormant
qu'il iere matin durement;
de mon lit tantost me levé,
chaucal moi et mes mains lavé
lors tres une aguille d'argent
d'un aguillier mignot et gent,
si prins l'aguille a enfiler.
Hors de vile oi talant d'aler
por oir des oisius les sons,
qui chantent desus les buissons
en icle saiso n noteworthy.

And in this sesoun delytous,
Whan love affraiteth alle thing,
Me thought a-nyght, in my sleping,
Right in my bed, ful redily,
That it was by the morowe erly,
And up 1 roos, and gan me clothe.
Anoon I wishe myn handis bothe;
A sylvre nedle forth y drough
Out of an aguler queynt ynough,
And gan this nedle threde anon;
For out of toun me list to gon
STRUCTURE

The song of briddes forto here,
That in thise buskes syngen clere.2

What does this mean? The passage seems to violate the rules of logic, sequence, and narrative succession. The very first image of the dream, the wonderfully wrought picture of Amant rising and bast­
ing his sleeves with the silver needle, shows by its prominent posi­
tion in the narrative that it is a crucial motif but offers readers abso­
lutely no clue as to what that motif or image might mean. Explanations for the detail abound in editions of the poem, but none fully accounts for the extraordinary vividness and power of this striking, truly dreamlike image. To say that this intense picture of Amant basting his sleeves in advance of his meeting with le Dieu d'Amors captures the real experience of dreaming is fine and true, but such an appreciation does not begin to account for its power and enigma.

The meaning of the passage, of course, is secondary to this rhetor­
cical power: if the basting of the sleeves has any meaning at all, this meaning is obviously suppressed to allow the image to remain a radically lyric enigma. Guillaume shows us his dream-self basting his sleeves with the silver needle as the birds sing to underscore the total conflation of text and persona here and to reinforce the sense of enigma and intrusion already felt by readers at the opening of the poem. In this radical lyric situation at the beginning of the dream report, the image is tauntingly enigmatic for readers who are not privy to the dreamer's secret distress; the image calls forth a reac­tion of hushed, respectful ignorance like that of the rustici watching a Macrobean "ritual drama." Like parallel opening enigmas in many other dream visions—the whelp (Book of Duchess), the "huyl" (Pearl), the "shroudes" (Piers Plowman), and the daisy (Legend of Good Women)—this image shouts its meaningfulness but remains silent on its meaning. It is an image, sure enough, but one presented to demonstrate to readers that the ritual drama of this text is, so far, beyond the ken of the uninitiated.

This relationship can be neatly expressed in terms of Viktor
Shklovsky's concepts of "story" and "plot," a pair of terms he first used to analyze *Tristram Shandy.* By "story," Shklovsky means the real chronological and external events that are the subject of a narration; by "plot" he means the verbal or stylistic character, pace, and progress of the narrative. Applying the terms to the rhetorical situation at the beginning of the dream vision, with its enigmatic but hypnotic images, we could say that story and plot are indistinguishable, for it is clear from the prologue of the poems that the efficient subject of the poem is to be the dreamer, which makes the dream, the representation of the dreamer's inner life, the "story." At the same time, however, the character and development of the text—the "plot"—are equally reflections or representations of that same subject. Thus, as we might expect in a lyric, the dream vision begins by asserting its expressiveness, though it soon demonstrates the practical inexpressibility of its story; the poem effectively declares that the narrative it is to tell is really no narrative at all but the *insomnia* of one who has refused to name the vexation that caused it. This means, therefore, that both the text and its content are equally the personal products of the distressed dreamer—that story is indistinguishable from plot—and that both are insulated from the readers' comprehension by their fundamental lack of communion with the dreamer. In other words, *basting the sleeves* must mean something to Guillaume de Lorris (the origin of the dream of Amant), but this meaning is unavailable to all who do not share in Guillaume's unidentified distress.

Perhaps the best example of this initial conflation, of dream and dreamer, of story and plot, occurs early in the *Book of the Duchess:*

```
I was go walked fro my tree,
And as I wente, ther cam be mee
A whelp, that fauned me as I stood,
That hadde yfolowed, and koude no good.
Hyt com and crepte to me as lowe
Ryght as hyt hadde me yknowe,
Helde doun hys hed and joyned hys eres,
And leyde al smothe doun hys heres.
I wolde have kaught hyt, and anoon
```
Hyt fledde, and was fro me goon;
And I hym folwed, and hyt forth wente
Doun by a floury grene wente
Ful thikke of gras, ful softe and sweete.

(lines 387–99)

There are few more traditionally lyric moments in all of Chaucer. The whelp is all but pure symbol, a little unit of passionate lyric expression that is allusive without reference, all vehicle and no ten­or. In the hands of the courtly lover-persona of the Book of the Duchess, the whelp is little more than sentimental window dressing, an occasional emblem of love and fidelity to warm the questionable heart of Madame Eglantine. The whelp surfaces and disappears without a trace in the space of only thirteen lines, leaving behind the sense that it has no place in a rational allegorical or narrative structure. Yet, in this radical lyric opening of the dream vision, where all is quite palpably the mindscape of the distressed dreamer, the errant image seems perfectly congruent. Were such an "event" to happen, say, in Spenser, we would demand a meaning (and sooner or later would get one); here, we hardly even wonder, for this is not a narrative and the voice is not that of a rational, meticulous allegorist: this is the fevered lyric expression of poor, love-languishing Geoffrey, in which text is teller, story is plot.

As the dream report continues, however, this identity of story and plot, this conflation of dream and dreamer, begins to break down in a process we might call "narrative normalization." At a distance from the dream prologue (where the lyric sense of the poem is the strongest), two subtle changes occur which begin to shift the dream report out of its lyric mode: the splitting of the dreamer and the foregrounding of the iconography of the text.

The first of these changes, the splitting of the dreamer, is less a change than a manifestation of a state of affairs that has obtained from the beginning of the poem. At the start of the dream report, the reader tacitly accepts the identity of the poem's persona with the "I" of the dream report. A passage from the Roman de la Rose should illustrate:
Et li dex d'Amors m'a seii
endementieres aguetant
con li vanieres qui atant
que la beste en bon leu se meite
por lessier aler la saeste.

And thus while I wente in my play,
The God of Love me folowed ay,
Right as an hunter can abyde
The beest, tyl he seeth his tyde
To shoten at good mes to the der,
Whan that hym nedeth go no ner.  

Because of the fundamentally lyric situation at early stages such as this in the Roman, there is no particular reason to make nice distinctions between the character in the dream and the narrator of the poem: in this case, since this is manifestly a poem about Guillaume's experiences in love, it is entirely reasonable that he should portray himself as being stalked by li Dieu d'Amors. Nonetheless, it is Amant the dreamer-character that sees the God of Love stalking him as his prey; it is Guillaume the dreamer-narrator that supplies the detail.

Such a point may seem tedious and over-subtle, but the fact is that the "two Amants," the dreamer-character and the dreamer-narrator, become thoroughly distinct—split—in the very next lines of the poem, as the omniscient narrator records a mistake made by his fallible alter-ego in the dream:

Dedenz une piere de mabre
ot Nature par grant mestrise
soz le pin la fontaine asise;
si ot desus la pierre escrits
el bort amont letres petites,
qui disoient, ilec desus
 estoit morz li biau Narcisus.

And springyng in a marble ston
Had Nature set, the sothe to telle,
Under that pyn-tree a welle.
And on the border, al withoute,  
Was written in the ston aboute,  
Letters smal, that sayden thus,  
"Here starf the fayre Narcisus."

The one-line inscription on the well diverts the text into a new, didactic mode. For the next seventy-odd lines, the physical narrative is deferred as Guillaume rehearses the story of Narcissus from *Metamorphoses*. The rehearsal is brisk, accurate, and entertaining, but the digression distracts the reader’s mind (and certainly Amant’s) from the physical object to its mythological history as interpreted by this new, detached persona. The interpretation of the legend (and, thus, of the well), is made explicit in the final lines of the digression:

Dames, cest essample aprenez,  
qui vers vos amis mesprenez;  
car se vos les lessiez morir,  
Dex le vos savra bien merir.  

Ladyes, I preye ensample takith,  
Ye that ageyns youre love mistakith;  
For if her deth be yow to wite,  
God can ful well youre while quyte.⁶

The warning is racy and urbane—to the point of a possible pun on “full well” in the translation—and the meaning it imposes on the image is not applicable to any but “proude-hertid” loved ones such as Amant’s.⁷ Specifically, the interpolated gloss fails to suggest that the well represents any danger to Amant:

Quant li escrit m’ot fet savoir  
que ce estoit trestot por voir  
la fontaine au bel Narcisus,  
je me suis trez un poi ensus,  
que dedenz n’ousai esgarder,  
ainz comangaï a coarder,  
que de Narcisus me sovint  
cui malement en mesavint.  
Mes me pensai que a seür,  
sanz peor de mauvés eür,
This carefully wrought passage allows Guillaume to have it both ways. The first six lines (1543–48) tease the reader with a cautious, sensible reaction to the well of Narcissus. The dreamer-character has not noticed (recall) that the God of Love has been stalking him all this while, but the readers and the dreamer-narrator have noted this. Readers, I suspect, know "full well" that the well represents a danger to Amant, and these first few lines of the passage allow readers to savor the danger. Lines 1549–52, however, show that the dreamer-character does not realize the danger and, following the cue of the rehearsal of the Narcissus legend and its sanguine sentence, Amant approaches the well, looks in, and falls under the spell of the lady's eyes, represented by the crystal stones.

Thus, the dreamer-character has made a mistake. He has misinterpreted the meaning of the well, with the help of the "glossator," whose redaction of Metamorphoses suggested that it represented no danger. On the rhetorical level, story has diverged from plot, first, since images have been introduced into the vision that the dreamer-character has misinterpreted and second, since this misinterpretation is immediately manifest to the readers. The two dreamer-figures have been split—into an omniscient dreamer-narrator and a naive dreamer-character, one who knows what the well holds in store and one who cannot predict this.

This splitting "normalizes" the text by freeing the readers from the exclusive perspective of the dreamer-character's consciousness.
More than this, by giving readers a perspective on the action that is superior to or at least different from that of the dreamer-character, this splitting also frees the text from the lyric mode, in which the meaning of an image is never totally independent of the lyric "I." Instead, the splitting of the dreamer seems to place the readers in a classic narrative structure in which no character is favored and in which the readers and the narrator are the final arbiters of the sequence of events and their meaning.

It is difficult to find this peculiar arrangement anywhere in literature outside of dream-poetry, in which the mistakes of the dreamer-character (a pseudo-eyewitness) are quite common and conventional. A list of such "authorial" miscues might begin with the jeweler's misapprehension of the status of his pearl (Pearl), Drede's misplaced trust of his shipmates (The Bouge of Court), and Geoffrey's fabled obtuseness towards the Black Knight (the Book of the Duchess).

The second movement towards "narrative normalization" is the foregrounding of iconography. This typically occurs simultaneously with the splitting of the dreamer, but it is a sufficiently important feature to warrant notice on its own. The foregrounding is, put simply, the readers' growing intuition that the events and images, the details and the situations of the dream narrative are symbolic and that their symbolism is comprehensible to the readers without the intervention of the dreamer-narrator. This sense, in effect a sense of the divergence of story and plot, is a sort of confidence or familiarity with the scenes and images of the dream, which, just perhaps, may not be inscrutable, enigmatic functions of the psyche of the dreamer. In the extreme, this foregrounding happens when the dreamer-character shows himself incapable of interpreting his own dream or becomes himself an object of interpretation ("Amant," "Drede," and so on, as personifications as well as personae). Even when this does not happen—even when the dreamer-character has not been separated from the dreamer-narrator—the conventional or self-evident imagery of the dream report still comes to militate against the radical lyric expectations of the beginning of the poem,
still suggests that there is something of this insomnium that is comprehensible to the readers. A case in point is the fair field of folk in Piers Plowman:

Thanne gan I to meten a merueilouse sweuene,
That I was in a wildernesse, wist I neuer where.
As I bihelde into þe est, an hiegh to þe sonne,
I seigh a toure on a toft trielich ymaked;
A depe dale binethe, a dongeon þereinne
With depe dyches and derke and dreiful of sight.
A faire felde ful of folk fonde I there bytwene,
Of alle maner of men, þe mene and þe riche,
Worceryng and wandryng as þe worlde asketh.
Somme putten hem to þe plow, pleyed ful selde, . . .

There is nothing in this panoramic image to suggest that it is a dream image, nothing peculiar or personal about it, nothing to suggest that its thrust is different from that of the social panoramas of the morality plays from which it is derived. The effect of such a passage (and of a great deal of the Visio) is to orient the reader in a familiar allegorical framework and then, in time, to call that familiarity into question. Such a familiar orientation invites readers to forget that this is a somatic dream, to embrace the righteousness of the text as a figurative narrative and not as the dream-projection of Long Will.

A final case, in which splitting and foregrounding occur together, is that of Pearl. Early in the dream report, the narrator catches sight of the Pearl maiden on the verge of Heaven and proceeds directly to ask her all the wrong questions:

'O perle', quod I, 'in perle3 py3t,
Art þou my perle þat I haf playned,
Regretted by myn one on nyȝte?
Much longeyng haf I for þe layned,
Sýpen into gresse þou me aglyȝte.
Pensyf, payred, I am forpayned,
And þou in a lyf of lykyng lyȝte,
In Paradys erde, of striyl vnstrayned.
What wynde hat ye hyde my iuel vayned,
And don me in pryss del and gret daunger?
Fro we in twynne weren towen and twained,
I haf ben a joyle3 jueler.11

Unlike the readers, who have already guessed that this is to be an apocalyptic revelation, the narrator does not appreciate or even understand the privilege that has been accorded him and, ignoring the possibilities for beatific eschatological knowledge to be learned from the Pearl maiden, begins immediately to chastise her for leaving him back on earth to mourn her passing. As in the next few stanzas the dreamer-character attempts to elicit an invitation to cross the river into Heaven and to stay there with her forever, both the splitting and the foregrounding become more obvious. *Pearl* even reaches the point where readers begin to wish that this supernal vision might have been granted to one with more foresight and less self-interest, one who, if offered intelligence about the next world, would not play courtly lover and complain of his lady’s “daungere.”

So the second stage or phase of the dream vision is a sort of narrative normalization in which various forces work together to submerge the essential lyric mode of the dream report and to encourage narrative expectations (to the extent that, in *Pearl* and the *Book of the Duchess*, the dreamer is often perceived to be impeding the progress of the epiphany). The dream vision typically remains in this stage nearly until its conclusion. For evidence of this we need only turn to secondary sources, to critical books and articles on specific poems, which attest eloquently to the fact that the body of the dream report is, or seems to be, interpretable independent of the dream frame. The *Piers Plowman Visio* might serve as an example here, for it is taken in large measure from antifraternal and Wycliffite sources and so seems to have a life of its own apart from the dreaming mind of Long Will, a “life” so vivid that many a commentator on *Piers Plowman* all but forgets that the poem is a dream report. The *Book of the Duchess* is an even clearer case: narrative normalization virtually turns this poem against its own dreamer-
persona, the man who cannot see what the dream makes so patently obvious—that the Black Knight has lost his lady Blanche through death. In this case, as in that of Pearl, critics of the poem have actually become impatient with the dreamer, calling him boorish, insensitive, cruel, or at least obtuse. This long-standing view of Chaucer’s character “Geffrey”—a perfectly accurate character description—is the mark of Chaucer’s success in normalizing the lyric experience of the Book of the Duchess, for it shows that readers feel perfectly competent to judge the actions and reactions of the dreamer in what is, remember, his dream.

This second phase typically ends with the conclusion of the dream report (if not of the poem), at which a third and final stage is reached. The end of the dream vision always includes a reminder—sometimes explicit, sometimes tacit—that this was, after all and all expectations to the contrary, this one fellow’s dream. The poems frequently employ a “reawakening device” which serves nicely to remind readers that the narrative (or seeming narrative) they have read is and has always been a dream. The best known such device is to be found at the conclusion of the Book of the Duchess:

Ryght thus me mette, as I yow telle,  
That in the castell ther was a belle,  
As hyt hadde smyten houres twelve.—  
Therwyth I awook myselve  
And fond me lyinge in my bed; . . .

(lines 1321–25)

The bell reminds the reader quite neatly that both of the dreamer figures—the dreamer-character who hears the bell and the dreamer-narrator who awakens, “Ryght thus me mette,” to nocturnal “houres twelve”—are the same person, at least in some important ways. They are both clearly the same Geffrey who suffers the eight years’ sickness, both the same disappointed courtly lover. The device, and thus the third stage, reassert the identity of the two dreamer-figures and with it the identity of story and plot. In effect, the third stage restores the integrity of the dream vision: it is not
and never was a narrative with an eyewitness, but from first to last it has been a lyric experience.

A similar device concludes Pearl’s dream report:

I hooȝt hat noþyng myȝt me dere
To fech me bur and take me halte,
And to start in þe strem schulde non me stere,
To swymme þe remnaunt, þag I þer swalte.

(lines 1157–60)

He jumps into the river, begins to swim, and, it seems, the very futile exertion of the attempt awakens him:

For, ryȝt as I sparred vnto þe bonc,
þat brathþe out of my drem me brayde.
Ben wakned I in þat erber wlonk;
My hede vpon þat hylle watȝ layde
þer as my perle to grounde strayd.
I raxled, and fel in gret affray,
And, sykyng, to myself I sayd,
'Now al be to þat Prynceȝ paye'.

(line 1169–76)

The physical exertion of the dreamer-character in trying to cross the river—tossing and turning, as it were—awakens him and discovers him to be the same man with the same enigmatic longing, though now less enigmatic, now identifiable with the orthodox Christian's longing for communion with the “Prince.” At the same time, readers are made to see that the dreamer-character’s futile exertion is analogous to their own futile attempts to put Heaven in earthbound terms, an intellectual thrashing about in a foreign medium that is equally exhausting and equally doomed to fail.

The conclusion of the dream vision (the third phase) thus marks the reunion of the dreamer-character and the dreamer-narrator and with this reunion the reassertion of the lyric mode in place of the symbolic pseudonarrative which the readers have been following: the conclusion of the poem shows that the experience is and always was located in the mind of a dreamer whose secret longing, distress, or distraction has caused his dream. In other words, story and plot
have once more come together as well, since, at the conclusion of the dream report, the story (the seeming narrative of events in the dream report) has been exposed as no "sequence of [external and reported] events" at all but a sequence of internal psychic events— the plot, in Shklovsky's terminology—which took place only in the mind of the dreamer.

This structure may be represented graphically thus:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Mode</th>
<th>Events in the Text</th>
<th>Reader Role</th>
<th>Formalist Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. prologue</td>
<td>lyric</td>
<td>introduction of the dream as a symptom of distress</td>
<td>simple lyric perception: diagnosis</td>
<td>story=plot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. early in the dream report</td>
<td>narrative</td>
<td>the dreamer-character makes a mistake; imagery becomes self-evident to the readers</td>
<td>illusory narrative perception or pseudonarrative; &quot;narrative normalization&quot;</td>
<td>story diverges from plot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. end of the dream report (or epilogue)</td>
<td>lyric</td>
<td>reassertion of the dream report as a symptom</td>
<td>complex lyric perception; communion with the dreamer</td>
<td>true or redefined story=plot</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This table suggests the typical movement of the dream vision, one definable within fairly traditional bounds. The principal movement is one from an initial lyric perception at the beginning of the poem where the dream is introduced as an insomnium, through a second, finally illusory stage in which the dream report takes on the features of a narrative free from any special relationship with the psyche of the dreamer, to a final reassertion of the lyric identity of the whole experience. In effect, this movement is a strategy of misdirection: a lyric experience masquerades for a time as a narrative one only to reveal at its conclusion that it is not and never was a narrative in any traditional sense. Allegory often behaves this way, but seldom does
allegory retreat at its conclusion from the tacit admission or intuitive truth that it represents a universal experience. The dream vision, in its conventional epilogue-reminder that it is a dream, always effects this retreat, always therefore undercutting and devaluing its body. The reasons for this three-part movement, this attempt to mask and then to reassert the lyric integrity of the poem, can now be considered.

The Poem and the Readers

We have been able to describe, in the terms of traditional literary criticism, "what happens in a dream vision": put simply, the poems' essentially lyric identity becomes submerged in what seems to be a typical figurative or allegorical narrative. The dream reports are usually long and paratactic enough to allow and even encourage readers to forget that the poems are the reports of dreams, or, more accurately, to encourage readers to try to make sense of the narrative of "events" independent of the dream nature of those events. The illusion of eyewitness narrative is lifted at and by the poems' conclusion, as the readers are reminded—either explicitly or tacitly—that the dream images are and always have been the interior imaginative events of the still-troubled dreamer.

But this is not all and, in fairness, there are those who would claim that this sort of formal description is nothing at all, is itself illusory. Proponents of affective stylistics, for example, can claim that there is no "in a text" because there is no text, because, finally, a text is nothing other than a reader's experience of it. We have seen that there existed a medieval version of this position, found chiefly in Augustine's De Doctrina Christiana, and that this "affective" rhetorical stance is at the heart of the appeal of the dream vision. A glance at Augustine shows that this theory differs from modern ones only in Augustine's avowal of a level of communication or communion anterior to human language, a meaning to be sought with the heart, not expressed in words.

This notion of a text somehow communicating at a level beneath its graphic words is strengthened by the impact of nominalism and its effect on medieval ideas of abstraction. While Ockham was no
existentialist or agnostic, his critique of the Platonic notion of extramental universals does represent a movement away from the text as naively didactic—of books as analogues to the Book of the World. The movement is towards a text that is interactive and experiential: the *ficta* or *figmenta* of the brain record or show the character of the maker, even more credibly than these images represent their phenomenal originals. To use an example which Ockham might have considered, when we read five or six *Commentaries* on the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard—a required exercise for masters of philosophy at Oxford in Ockham’s day—do we learn more about Peter Lombard or more about the five or six commentators? The answer is the paradox of pluralism: in reading one or two such commentaries, we see most clearly the characters of the writers, and can trust our sense of the makers’ signatures more than we can trust their individual sense of the *Sentences*. After several commentaries, however, we can begin to see what the diverse individual minds of the various commentators perceived together and can begin to make judgments when the commentators differed—in short, we can begin to learn something of Peter Lombard. Thus, to read is to experience both subject and object, to see both the maker and, through the maker’s eyes (and *nomines*), the object of the discourse. Writing can only be trusted as this complex of representations.

The dream vision can be called “affective” in this broad, Augustinian-nominalist sense. The form operates as a giant trope or scheme which initially taunts readers by its artifice and irrelevance to their experience—for what, after all, could be less relevant than another person’s *insomnium*? Properly “alienated” from sympathy with the experience, readers discover in the dream report that the images and events it records are *not* quite so alien (foregrounding of iconography) and that the perspective of the pseudo-eyewitness is not always correct in its interpretation or construction of the events (splitting of the dreamer). Finally, at the conclusion of the poem, readers are reminded that this is a dream and thereby that they are in a peculiar communion with the dreamer insofar as they share that person’s *insomnium*, share that person’s *ficta* or *figmenta*.
The best example of initial, radically lyric alienation in the dream vision is the infamous crux at the beginning of the Book of the Duchess:

But men myght axe me why soo
I may not sleepe, and what me is.
But natheles, who aske this
Leseth his asking trewely.
Myselfen can not telle why
The sothe; but trewely, as I gesse,
I holde hit be a sicknesse
That I have suffred this eight yeer,
And yet me boote is never the ner;
For there is phisicien but oon
That may me hele; but that is don.
Passe we over untill eft;
That wil not be mot nede be left; . . .

(lines 30–42)

Arguments on the passage’s courtly reticence notwithstanding, the inarguable effect of this passage on the reader is one of total and unequivocal alienation. Men might ask “what me is” and, in a private lyric designed to illuminate this very point, the question would be entirely proper, but its answer here is not forthcoming. Instead of an explanation, the reader is given a teasing reference to a mysterious “phisicien,” the identity of whom could be the now-absent Blanche, Jesus Christ, the comfort of death which comes when it will, or perhaps Joan of Kent or some other lady to whom young Geoffrey Chaucer paid the respects of the courtly lover.

But enough, Chaucer says: “That wil not be mot nede be left.” By these lines, the reader is decisively shut off from the experience that forms the basis of the dream that follows. Pearl’s “huyl,” Long Will’s disguise, and even the blather of lore that begins the Hous of Fame achieve the same effect. Alienated from the persona of the poem and able to look forward to nothing other than this mysterious figure’s day residue dream, the reader is forced effectively into a “diagnostic” relationship with the text; knowing Macrobius and the rest, this reader may only hope to be able to uncover the
dreamer's distress by examining the imagery and structure of the dream, thereby affirming the lyric expressiveness of the artifact. By reading the dream as a symptom, the reader can hope to discover the lyric thrust of the poem and see the dream as an objective or somatic correlative of the dreamer's unnamed and unshared distress.

This alienated diagnostic kind of reading, a "simple lyric perception" of the text as the expression of a powerful authorial emotion, continues as long as the dream report remains solely the proprietary creature of the dreamer. The tacit reduplication of the dreamer into two figures, the dreamer-narrator and the dreamer-character, does nothing to eliminate or reduce the alienation of the reader as long as these two dreamer-figures, between them, seem to be invested with reportorial and interpretive omniscience, that is, as long as story does not diverge from plot. If the poems were to continue in this mode, they would be little more than weird, random collections of images that, at best, might satisfy only this diagnostic urge in readers, little medieval detective stories with the glandular appeal of, say, Browning's "Porphyria's Lover." They would be experiences like Pertelote's of Chaunticleer's dream in the Nun's Priest's Tale, empty somatic experiences referable only to the pathology of the dreamer.

But the medieval dream vision does not typically end this way—no more than does the Nun's Priest's Tale end with Pertelote's sense of Chaunticleer's dream. The splitting of the dreamer and the foregrounding of imagery or inconography, in the service of "narrative normalization," crucially though subtly change the reader's experience of the dream report. Considering the effect of the first change, when the dreamer-character makes a mistake or otherwise is shown to be differentiable from the dreamer-narrator, the reader's perception of the text changes from that of the pre-emptive lyric experience of the dreamer to one in which the reader's palpable representative in the text (the dreamer-character as erstwhile eyewitness) is capable of error. This demoting of the dreamer-character from pseudo-narrator to fallible "hero" does not require a blatant or critical error such as that of Amant; a subtle, barely perceptible naïveté or failure of insight such as displayed by Long Will or Geffrey in the Hous of Fame is sufficient to split the dreamer-character off
from the narrator and to establish the former as normative narrative protagonist of the dream report.

This splitting of the dreamer into one who writes the poem and another who lives in the dream world serves to complicate the initial lyric expectations. The change makes it clear that the poem is other than the report of a personal internal experience of a single integral consciousness: Geffrey in the *House of Fame* seems shaken by the discrepancy of Vergilian and Ovidian views of Dido; the *Pearl*-narrator seems surprised that he cannot cross the river of mortality and visit the Pearl maiden; another Geffrey wonders what the Black Knight is doing in *his* love vision. Such events in dream narratives seduce their readers away from diagnostic reticence and deference to the controlling consciousness of the dream-experience and awaken a confidence in their own ability to understand the dream for themselves. In formalist terms, this phenomenon is the divergence of story from plot, of the narrative of events (presumably objective, like the chronology of Tristram Shandy’s life) from plot, the authorial imprint on the narrative (highly subjective, like Tristram’s digressive rehearsal of his life story). In the dream vision as in *Tristram Shandy*, this divergence effectively releases the reader to examine and investigate the narrative, to separate it (it would seem) from the obtrusive shape given it by the narrator and to discover, for example, that Tristram was illegitimate or that this Black Knight is John of Gaunt or that the Pearl maiden’s enigmatic statements about the Heavenly hierarchy mean this or that.

Simultaneous with this splitting is the foregrounding of imagery or iconography. This feature, the introduction of scenes or images or exchanges which are either conventional or are naively interpretable without reference to the somatic framework, completes the process of narrative normalization. No longer able to rely on the dreamer-character’s internal commentary to interpret the text, the reader suddenly discovers that this lost crutch is no longer necessary and begins to recognize, even in the unlikely venue of another person’s *insomnium*, images and scenes which make sense and ultimately begin to describe or suggest a theme. Estates satire, conven-
tional hints of raptures into Heaven, or even the recognizable figure of the melancholy John of Gaunt begin to appear, making this *insomnium* the impossible relevant dream, something more, perhaps, than the anxious somatic experience of a distressed individual.

As the dream report continues in this normalized narrative mode, the readers become increasingly confident in their own interpretive abilities and even begin to feel superior to the dreamer-character as analysts of the poem, an urge to competition easily found in the criticism of the *Book of the Duchess* or *Pearl*, for example. This is not a dream but a poem, the reader feels; an understandable poem, a poem about universal or at least communal problems or emotions or concerns. Elizabeth Kirk makes the point nicely:

> The self-contained dream-world, that artifact accessible and intelligible only in terms of the greater reality beyond on which it is dependent, has turned out to be "real life"; it is human society in all its concreteness, human existence susceptible of the pattern and significance characteristic of art or of religious and philosophical systems but with the pattern suspended until we have been immersed in the reality.  

The salvation of baptized infants, the sorrow of England over the death of the Duchess Blanche, the inequities of a society polluted by Lady Meed—the more central such issues become in the dream report, the less relevant the dream frame seems to become and the more universal or apocalyptic becomes the status of the text. This is no mere *insomnium*, those few might say who even consciously remember that it was so introduced.

But it is an *insomnium*, always was and always will be, and the reawakening of the dreamer, that same fallible, mysterious fellow, demonstrates this and thus explodes the illusion of narrative. Of course the dreamer-character is not an eyewitness; of course this figure is a character in the "story," but the other "I" of the dream report, the other consciousness that has lurked in the background all this while—the dreamer-narrator—is a witness, a privileged interpreter, and the ultimate lyric subject-object of the poem. This inescapable fact, obscured from readers since the opening frame, returns
to the foreground at the end of the poem and demands a giant adjustment, a major rethinking of the significance of the experience of the dream report.

This rethinking is usually not painless. The reappearance of the dreamer-narrator at the conclusion of the dream vision reasserts more than the fundamental lyric nature of the whole poem, for this figure appears *ipso facto unchanged by his experience*. He could not be changed, of course, because—lyric mode—he has written this poem after the fact: he is the "reawakened dreamer" in the prologue, after all. The fact that we tend to forget this, forget that the Geffrey who bemoans the chaotic state of oneiromantic learning or the Geffrey who suffers an "eight years' sickness" is the same Geffrey throughout the poem, is a testament to the power of the form's narrative normalization. The experience should change the dreamer, we think: what experience? which dreamer?

This perception is true even for poems like *Pearl*, the prologue of which describes the state of mind of the dreamer before his dream. The conclusion of *Pearl* (or of *Piers Plowman* or of the *Bouge of Court* or of the *Legend of Good Women*) does not show readers a rehabilitated dreamer but only one whose problem or distress has been *redefined* by the experience of the dream. Specifically, the *Pearl*-narrator is still longing for his "perle," though this image seems now to refer to his own place in Heaven and not to the earthly "Pearl maiden" which he has "lost"; the *Book of the Duchess*-narrator still has, we assume, his eight years' sickness, though now it is put into a larger perspective and compared with more realistic sorrows and losses; Long Will is still an outcast in society, though now, perhaps, he begins to understand that alienation is the only possible relationship a right-minded person can have to a society that is itself so distant from the City of God.

So the reappearance of the dreamer-narrator does not suggest that his dream has been recuperative of anything more than his perception, his perspective. The real import of this re-emergence, this reassertion of the lyric mode, is for the community of readers, who are suddenly required to accept the impossible contradiction: they have been seduced into experiencing another man's *insom-
nium, and the experience has changed from an odd diagnostic and alienated one at its inception to one which they have understood, comprehended, or "embraced," as Augustine would have said. In short, the readers have discovered themselves enrolled in the experience, and this enrollment, this communion, entails enrollment in the "dreamer's distress" as well: in order to have embraced the insomnium, the readers must necessarily have shared—unwittingly at first—in the emotional knot, the distraction, the perturbation that produced the dream experience. In one sense, the dream vision is nothing more than the impossible insomnium that truly speaks to human needs and concerns; in a more important sense, it is the medieval poet's special vehicle for generating a recognition of communion in the truth. The dream vision is the wonderful, impossible insomnium of all those who feel, of all those who speak the special language, all those who dream the dream, creatures who may have failed to comprehend but who have run together the cuniculus figurarum and have completed a journey as humble as a meaningless dream in the reading but as sublime as their common human spirit in the embrace.

A second chart might summarize:
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<th>Stage</th>
<th>Mode</th>
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<th>Reader Role</th>
<th>Formalist Description</th>
<th>Literary Context</th>
<th>Scientific Context</th>
<th>Reader Relationship</th>
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<td>introduction of the dream as a symptom of distress</td>
<td>simple lyric perception: diagnosis</td>
<td>story=plot</td>
<td>dream as narrative event</td>
<td>inomnium</td>
<td>alienation from the dreamer</td>
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<td>2. early in the dream report</td>
<td>narrative</td>
<td>the dreamer-character makes a mistake; imagery becomes self-evident to the readers</td>
<td>illusory narrative perception or pseudonarrative; &quot;narrative normalization&quot;</td>
<td>story diverges from plot</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. end of the dream report (or epilogue)</td>
<td>lyric</td>
<td>reassertion of the dream report as a symptom</td>
<td>complex lyric perception; communion with the dreamer</td>
<td>true or redefined story=plot</td>
<td>anomalous final literary context</td>
<td>anomalous final scientific context</td>
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