Or for a variety of reasons, the dream vision is a late medieval phenomenon: while poems of this form can be found in ancient and modern literature alike, they lack for the most part the vigor and immediacy of those written in the fourteenth century.

In part, as I have argued, this flowering of the form is the result of a confluence of literary and philosophical currents, notably the maturity of the notion of the fabulous narrative, the derivative nature of medieval dream lore, the rise of conceptualism. These factors came together in the later Middle Ages to offer new challenges and new freedoms to poets. Most crucial to dream vision poets, however, was the freedom to depict simultaneously the way of the world and the way of the mind, to offer a *speculum mundi* whose images were dangerously ambivalent. Were these images true reflections of the world observed and captured in the consciousness of the dreamer-poet? Or are they waves and imperfections in the glass and thus revelatory more of the glass' character than of the scene reflected?

The dream vision was a way to exploit this ambivalence and, as we have seen, the great dream visions of the fourteenth century returned insistently to this theme of authority and vision, reflection and refraction, personal and universal revelation. Chaucer especially found in the dream vision a useful device for evading authorial authority: his Geffreys speak with the authority only of dreamers, and require their readers to decide whether they have any claim to
broader revelations. We must decide in part by intuiting how like we are to these Geffreys (is this glass imperfect as ours is?) and in part by judging how well the vision coheres with ours (is the scene viewed through the glass familiar to us?).

Seen in this way, the fourteenth century dream vision is a wondrous authorial disappearing act, the sceptical poetic form which requires readers to pass simultaneous judgment on vision and visionary. Unlike the traditional allegorical forms of the Middle Ages, the dream vision made the personality (and occasionally the pathology) of the poet-dreamer as central to the experience as the iconographic terrain of the vision. This insistence—on the imperfections in the speculum—is what gives the dream vision its stunningly circular experience: we can know the vision only if we accept the dreamer, while we can know the dreamer only in accepting the dream (see above, pp. 9 and 14).

Apart from its rhetorical effectiveness, this interdependence of dream and dreamer is a profound gesture of respect for readers, invited but not required to partake of the visions of Pearl or of the fair field full of folk or of the palace of fame. As I have suggested above, the evasive lyricism of the form is the source of this liberation: neither quite a narrative nor quite a lyric, the dream vision draws drama and objectivity from the former, passion and involvement from the latter, and allows the reader to choose which responses—which mode, in effect—to accept.

This subtlety, even fragility, of the dream vision is the subject of this epilogue. I will examine here a very few late medieval and post-medieval poems which seem to have lost or misplaced some of the energy we have seen in the form. This examination may then suggest reasons why the form’s flowering was so short-lived, and specifically why Renaissance dream visions and related poems seem pale and errant compared to the masterpieces of the fourteenth century. These exemplary theses can only suggest and illustrate—not demonstrate—the erosion of the form: the currents under discussion here are too broad to permit a thorough examination.

The anonymous satire “Mum and the Sothesegger,” written probably within ten years of the death of Chaucer, strikingly illus-
trates the fragility of the form. The dream vision included in the poem begins at line 875, after a lengthy debate between the narrator and "Mum," a personification of silence in the face of abuses in the Henrican court. Weakened by the confrontation, the narrator wanders until he nearly drops from exhaustion:

Yet was I not the wiser for way that I wente,
This made me all mad, as I moste nede,
And well fleuble and faint, and fell to the grounde,
And lay down on a linche to lithe my bones,
Rolling in remembrance my renning aboute
And alle the perilous pathes that I passed had,
As priories and personages and pluralites,
Abbayes of Augustin and other holy places,
To knyghtes courtes and crafty men many,
To mayers and maisters, men of high wittes,
And to the felle fretes, alle the foure ordres,
And other hobbes a heep, as ye herd have,
And nought the neer by a note! This noyed me ofte,
That thurgh construing of clerkes that knewe alle bokes
That Mum sholde be maister most upon erthe.¹

The weight of these thoughts induces sleep and the dream of the Sothesegger:

And ere I were ware, a wink me assailed,
That I slepte sadly seven houres large.

Thenne mette I of mervailles mo than me luste . . .

(lines 869-71)

These "mervailles" ultimately center on the "Truthsteller" who, like Justinus in the Merchant's Tale, can say what needs to be said, and whose example inspires the narrator to disclose his "bag of truths" to the king.

Even given the fact that the dream frame is here only part of a larger and looser satiric framework, we can clearly see that "Mum and the Sothesegger" is out of touch with the subtlety and complexity of the Chaucerian dream vision. Most obviously, personification and realism interpenetrate the dream-world and the waking world:
the disputation with Mum precedes the dream, a nicety forgivable in political satire certainly, but one not to be found in *Pearl* or *Piers Plowman*. This detail—which shows that the dream does not represent a modal shift from the phenomenal to the figmental—is a crucial one. If Mum is recognizable in the waking world, then there is no psychological or artistic reason requiring the dream frame for the introduction of the Sothesegger. More than this, the dream frame here lacks the ambivalence of the more traditional pattern: because Mum is our waking experience in common with the dreamer's, we have no reason to entertain suspicions that the Sothesegger is a *figmentum*, that momentary uncertainty that is so central to the dream vision. If, simply depressed at the corruption of the court, the narrator dreamed of the Sothesegger, the reader could wonder for a moment if the dream were a wish fulfillment. We are not allowed that moment here.

Further, the crucial motif of the "dreamer's distress" is, paradoxically, missing here. The diatribe of lines 854-68 certainly indicates distress, but the dreamer's discomfiture has none of the psychic energy that empowers the classical dream vision. Closest to the surface, this passage differs from the "dreamer's distress" in that the source of the distress is identified: unlike readers of the *Hous of Fame* or the *Book of the Duchess*, for example, we know precisely what is troubling this narrator because he tells us. As I have argued above, the mystery surrounding the introduction of this "dreamer's distress" is central because it isolates the dreamer-poet from the reader and creates the tensions that motivate the dream vision. Because the "dreamer's distress" here is indistinguishable from reasonable and laudable political diatribe, the passage does not separate the dreamer from the readers as do the mysterious ailments of Long Will, the jeweler, or the various Geffreys: because it is specified and righteous, the distress actually unifies the dreamer and the reader. This man's sensibilities are ours.

I am not suggesting here that "Mum and the Sothesegger" is a bad poem or that it would have been a better poem if it were a more classic dream vision. I am suggesting that it is a poem whose author was acquainted with the dream vision but who was out of sympathy
with it. There are easily enough traditional motifs here to illustrate that the poet of "Mum and the Sothesegger" knew Piers Plowman (for example); the use of these motifs here shows equally clearly that the poet did not appreciate the subtle conceptual hold which Piers Plowman exerts on its readers. For this satirist, the dream is simply a vehicle for solving his narrator's problem: there is no hint here of the ambivalence that haunts the Hous of Fame or Piers Plowman. Like The Kingis Quahir (the Parlement of Foules) or Lydgate's "Complaynt of a Loveres Lyfe" (the Book of the Duchess), this poem seems inarguably inspired by a dream vision but only in the most superficial ways. The complex arrangement of parts and the fragility of their operation are lost on this poet, for whom they have become merely traditional or conventional motifs.

As a second example of the obsolescence of the dream vision, we can turn to The Temple of Glass, a poem religiously adherent to the conventions of the form and to its undisguised model (the Hous of Fame), but for all this, a poem unable to capture the spirit and complexity of its original. The Temple of Glass begins with a virtual precis of the state of the dreamer in the Hous of Fame:

For thought, constreint and greuous heuines,
For pensifhede, and for heig distres,
To bed I went nov his obir nygt
Whan þat Lucina wip hir pale ligt
Was ioyned last wip Phebus in Aquarie,
Amyd Decembre, when of Ianuarie
Ther be kalendes of þe nwe yere,
And derk Diane, ihorned, nobing clere,
Had hir bemys vndir a mysty cloude . . .

The difference between this opening and "God turne us every drem to goode" nicely typifies the difference between medieval and Renaissance dream visions. Chaucer's character embodies what Lydgate's only describes: Lydgate's opening strains to include all of the salient diagnostic details at the expense of a credible patient, while Chaucer, fully in touch with his form, simply allows his dreamer to take shape on his page. The real problem with the Lydgate
dreamer is thus his meticulousness: with a stunning vocabulary and
nicely measured phrases, he declares in stark, objective, clinical
terms that he is beset to the point of distraction. The point of the
"dreamer's distress" is, again, to awaken suspicions as to his credibil­
ity and visionary fitness: this dreamer sounds, his assertions nor­
withstanding, just fine, nothing like the haggard Geffrey, blessing
himself and rambling about the uncertainty of dreams. Lydgate stud­
ied the form so well that he missed its point.

But Lydgate continues his imitation of the *Hour of Fame*:

WiJ?in my bed for sore I gan me shroude,
Al desolate for constreint of my wo,
The longe nyght waloing to and fro,
Til atte laste, er I gan taken kepe,
Me did oppresse a sodein dedeli slepe,
Wipin pe which me pouȝte þat I was
Rauysshid in spirit in a temple of glas—
I nyste how, ful fer in wildirnes—
That foundid was, as bi liklynesse,
Not opon stele, but on a craggy roche,
Like ise ifroe.

(lines 10–20)

And so the dream begins, indistinguishable from the popular icon­
ographic visions, waking and sleeping, that are so common in fif­
teenth century English poetry. There are neither characters nor dia­
logue for over three hundred lines, at which the Lady, involved in an
adulterous love triangle, begins an ornate appeal to Venus. In the
course of the entire poem, the narrator remains an observer, anx­
ious only that he might forget crucial details of the vision (lines
1369–77).

In many ways, *The Temple of Glass* is the subtlest and most faith­
ful of the fifteenth century dream visions: its only departure from
the paradigm is in its one-dimensional narrator, a figure all but for­
gotten once the dream begins. There is in Lydgate none of the lyri­
cism of the Chaucerian personae, for, in truth, the poems are no
longer about these figures and their relationship to the readers.
These poems and the visions of Hoccleve, Henryson, Dunbar, and Spenser are truly obsolescent dream visions, poems that keep alive the forms of the old poetic kind without the energy that produced it.

Why did the dream vision grow so old, look so tattered, so soon? Among the reasons we could consider might be the rise of science and the parallel collapse of Scholasticism and the oneiromantic tradition which was a part of it. The Renaissance was, if anything, more inquisitive and credulous about dreams, visions, and the occult than the fourteenth century sceptics were and, with the withdrawal of a church which forbade revelation in dreams, the Renaissance could fantasize more freely than the Middle Ages did. 

A related cause is the rapid decline in speculative philosophy, especially conceptualism. We have seen that the dream vision works only within a very carefully articulated psychology, one associated with only the first and second generation or conceptualists and nominalists in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. As Gordon Leff and others have shown, later developments in conceptualist or nominalist thought, those of Nicholas of Autrecourt or John of Mirecourt, for example, degraded what was initially a carefully conceived critique of Platonism into riddles, conundra, and attacks on the possibility of a divine nature. Fifteenth century nominalists at the universities, speaking their own language of contradiction and absurdity, become the butts of student satires and ultimately, the personifications of a senescent theology ridiculed, attacked, and finally forsaken by the Reformation.

With conceptualism, the Renaissance lost the conceptualist image of communion or communication as the synonymy of two persons' figmenta, and without this notion, there is no drama in another man's dream. In the instant when one mind embraces the icons of another, the conceptualists revealed a sympathy more powerful than any that mere rhetoric could produce. Without this psychology of the individual, the by-product of Scotus and Ockham, the dream vision had no purpose.

The most compelling reason for the dramatic disappearance of the dream vision was not political or philosophical or psychological: it was a literary reason. Put simply, the Renaissance rediscovered
lyricism, the immediate depiction of powerful emotions in verse, a
discovery which made the fragile, complex, allusive structure of the
old dreams useless. Of what use are feints and slights, self-
effacement and misdirection, frames and persona, in an age whose
poetic herald is Thomas Wyatt:

They fle from me that sometyme did me seke
With naked fote stalking in my chambe.
I have sene theim gentill tame and meke
That nowe are wyld and do not remembre
That sometyme they put theimself in daunger
To take bred at my hand; and nowe they raunge
Besely seking with a continuell chaunge.

This is neither the vulnerable voice of Geffrey nor the cold voice of
Lydgate: this persona boldly drops without warning into extended
metaphor. He knows the reader cares about his life and his feelings;
he feels no need to assert higher or universal import to his expe-
riences. They are here presented—emotions, experiences, mem-
ories—in a new dramatic language which needs no frame.

Thancked be fortune, it hath ben othrewise
Twenty tymes better; but ons in speciall,
In thyne arraye after a pleaasunt gyse,
When her lose gowne from her shoulders did fall,
And she me caught in her armes long and small;
Therewithall swetely did me kysse,
And softely saide, dere hert, howe like you this?

(lines 8–14)

The lyric continues, creating its persona as a character neither by
description nor by dream report; what we learn of this man we
surmise, from errant turns of phrase, from the erupting bitterness
as the metaphor (among other things) is dropped, from the sudden,
passionate encounter. The picture of the embittered lover that
Wyatt creates here in seven lines would have taken Chaucer a poem
the size of the Book of the Duchess to achieve—though only because
this new lyricism would have seemed to Chaucer a brash and vulgar
shorthand.
EPILOGUE

It was no dreme; I lay brode waking.
But all is torned thorough my gentilnes
Into a straunge fasshion of forsaking;
And I have leve to goo of her goodenes,
And she also to use new fangilnes.
But syns that I so kyndely ame served,
I would fain knowe what she hath deserved.

(lines 15–21)

Thus, what for Chaucer would have been a "straunge fasshion" and "new fangilnes" is a poetry written by and for people who are ready to express, accept, and sympathize with the deepest and most powerful emotions, writers and readers who do not need the device of the shared dream to knit together their individual sensibilities. A tide had turned, the oldest verities had been questioned and even forsaken, a new poetry had replaced the old.