

Shattering the dream (vision)



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

But if, Sir Knight, you let me knowThe cause of this tremendous ill, As sure as God gives help, I will, If power is granted to me, remove it..." The Book of the Duchess" 548-551Throughout the study of medieval literature, certain trends define the genres. Whether the hero be of a certain estate, conquer insurmountable foes, or finally unite with his lover, specific standards serve to differentiate the epic from the Breton Lai. " The Book of the Duchess" breaks the rules of dream vision literature through its subtle adaptations of the expected elements. Although this passage embodies only one aspect of this adaptation, it serves as a standard of all of the alterations throughout the text. Formerly the focal point of all other dream vision tales, the dreamer becomes a mere accessory in this piece, functioning as a medium through which other tales are exposed. Furthermore, the setting — be it a garden or forest — enables the dreamer to escape from societal distractions; in this passage, however, the dreamer awakens to the bustle of horses and marksmen. The final and perhaps most noteworthy aspect of this anti-dream vision revolves about the fact that the dreamer does not change his former way of living upon awakening from his reverie. Through these aspects, the dream motif strays from its typical parameters while still being recognizable as a tale of that genre. Within this particular tale, the dreamer serves more as the guide figure than a wandering soul. In the opening of this account, the dreamer reads a tale of King Ceyx and Queen Alcyone to grant him reprieve from his insomnia. This tale follows the typical plot of a dream vision wherein the dreamer suffers in life, falls asleep, and finds the answers she seeks within her dream. Chaucer therefore proves his awareness of the formula for the " dream vision" poems but chooses instead to alter that expectation within the actual plot of his poem. Eventually, the dreamer falls asleep,

awakens within his own reverie and happens upon a sorrowful knight. This encounter likewise permits the dreamer to expose someone else's story. Through his questions and intent listening, the dreamer serves as more of a guide figure for the knight. Here, the dreamer witnesses an emotional outpouring and strives to ease the knight's pain. Acting as little more than a pawn, the dreamer in this tale enables the other characters to unveil their stories and articulate their emotions. Not only does the dreamer serve a different role, but he also finds himself within an atypical dream vision setting. The dreamer awakens within the confines of his bedroom. Although birds, colored windows, and gorgeous weather permeate this space, the dreamer rouses indoors and not in a garden or natural landscape. Although these natural images evoke a vision of a garden, they nevertheless remain elements of a man-made, controlled environment. Therefore the dreamer does not immediately escape the distractions of society. Furthermore, upon hearing the blow of the huntsman's horn, the dreamer eagerly leaves his garden-esque room to join in the festivities of hunting day. Chaucer breaks the tradition of the genre by portraying a dreamer who initially leaves isolation in favor of the chaos surrounding the hunt. By altering the setting of the story, Chaucer alters the "dream vision." Overlooking the role of the dreamer and the setting of the dream, Chaucer adapts the most standard aspect of the dream vision: the ending. Traditionally, dream visions end with the dreamer waking from sleep and choosing to modify his way of life because of the events of the dream. In some cases the dreamer discovers the importance of love, in others the character stops mourning and strives to lead a better life. Here, however, the dreamer makes no noticeable changes. Apparently, the horn sounds, he wakes and decides to record the events of

his dream. Likewise, the knight (perhaps interpreted as the fallible or changeable character) makes no changes in his life: he continues to mourn endlessly for his deceased wife. This tale offers no comforting anecdote or lesson to be learned from the tale, thereby straying from the typical dream vision. Although typical dream visions consist of a dreamer, garden setting, and moral, Chaucer modifies these elements to create a world still reminiscent of that genre but perhaps more advanced in its scope. By evidently straying from the anticipated plot, Chaucer invites a dialogue between the readers and the text. Immediately, the readers demand to know the role of the dreamer because he is so notably different from the average dreamer. They question his motives and sympathize with his questions. Furthermore, the setting in this tale is similar to the setting in many readers' rooms: perhaps the readers read this tale because they cannot sleep and fall into a dream-state. In addition, the readers, being of the first estate, would be familiar with hunting day festivities. Finally, the readers must look at the dream and interpret it for themselves rather than be spoon-fed the moral. Chaucer typically questions convention and modifies his tales to force the readers to do the same. By changing the standards and toying with the expectations of the dream vision, Chaucer challenges readers to question the actual meaning and purpose of the tales.