

dered if he thought: *What if my cousin was born in America?* I threw my senses to my feet. My soles perched on the wooden legs of my chair. I remembered the feeling of the day before when I pushed pedals thirty miles on a rusty cruiser bike along the coast. Sweat poured out of my skin, and pain clicked in my ankles. I would never hate that feeling. I wanted that feeling of gearing through thirty miles of thick humidity and earth swallowing sun. I wanted the ability to see small villages with squared wooden homes, oxen pulled carts, and the smell of sour fish. I wanted to hear tires crunch the asphalt. I wanted to see scenes of a rock island calmly sleeping under the protection of night where the moon hung spherically in the sky and yelled white light onto the ocean and road.

Huynh looked at the bar top and told me Vietnam did not have any places like Shriners. He had family members who were in England trying to get his cousin to Hong Kong or America where a surgery could be done, but they lacked money to make it happen. I asked him if he could ever go to college.

“No, it’s not like America. We don’t get the same schooling. No university near here,” he said with a crushed face and lowered head. A breeze rolled on top of the counter and slapped the leaves that dangled from the roof.

I crunched my jaw. I felt guilty for complaining about taking a test, writing papers, and attending classes. Huynh maybe wanted the stresses I had in college. He might like opportunity to travel, to take college classes, to ride a bike up the coast of a foreign country, to visit with the locals, or not to work at the Wax bar.

I grabbed my calves and squeezed. Why was I born in America and

Huynh’s cousin born in Vietnam? I had the luck to be born in a place that fixed my deformed bones for the cost of nothing, a place with skillful surgeons who gave me a vehicle to experience the world. I could sweat and grind up the coast of Vietnam, travel from my homeland, see Mui Ne’s beauty, and meet Huynh without needing a wheelchair. I was born in a place where I didn’t have to work in a restaurant as a waiter my whole life. I could become a fully educated person and gain the tools to give something back to the world and visit parts of it. I released my calves and took a deep breath.

It was time for me to leave. I asked Huynh to write down his contact information and the word for smile in his first language: *cười*. Something I asked every local I met. The other yellow shirted staff came over to see what Huynh was writing. They began smiling and laughing.

After Huynh was done writing, he straightened his back and made a declaration. “You are coming to dinner tonight with us. And you will eat a traditional Vietnamese meal with us.”

I painfully turned down the offer. Huynh looked saddened. I gripped my camera in my bag. Huynh did not have a camera. He lacked the luxury to capture this moment in a photo or of any moment around him in beautiful Mui Ne. For that moment, I wanted to own the memory in the same way as Huynh. I left the digital camera in my bag.

I walked onto the beach away from the Wax restaurant and wished I had one more night. I waved goodbye to Huynh and to the other staff members who wore yellow shirts, smiles, and blurred hands. I smiled back and felt the hot sand pile over my bare feet.

Wonder as a rhetoric of ineffability in ekphrasis and translation in Chaucer’s *The Book of the Duchess* and Coleridge’s “The Garden of Boccaccio”

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“The Garden of Boccaccio” (1828), a poem by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, is probably not a direct imitation of Geoffrey Chaucer’s longer poem, *The Book of the Duchess* (circa 1370). However, the two works overlap in one significant respect: they are both narrations from the first-person point of view in which the author “wonders” at a work of art but struggles with the problem of incomplete or defective expression. The speaker of each poem describes his own relation to the subject work of art in terms of wonder and has difficulty with the ineffability or inexpressibility of that relation. The narrator of Chaucer’s poem is freed from chronic insomnia when he “wonders” at a romance (a medieval genre characterized by courtly adventure) he finds in a dusty old book. The saving knowledge he gleans from its pages affects him so profoundly that he falls asleep, experiencing wonder again in his dream but again failing to express this experience in the poem he writes afterward. Coleridge’s speaker instead eagerly surrenders his own mature mental state to gain a childlike ignorance, thereby more closely appreciating the art that is the subject of his poem but shutting out his readers in the process. Both poems, then, are ekphrastic in that they describe other works of art; furthermore, both express their meaning by failing to express it. Even though won-

der is demonstrated differently in the two poems, both Chaucer and Coleridge choose to fuse the occasion of ekphrastic wonder with the rhetoric of ineffability, a structure which in turn prompts their readers to have the same kind of experience by “wondering” at the poems they are reading.

Before beginning a discussion of wonder in Chaucer, we should first qualify “wonder” by briefly tracing this concept from the Greeks to Chaucer’s day. Aristotle and Plato both named wonder (*thaumadzein* in Greek) as the beginning of philosophy, but neither discussed it at length.¹ Subsequent philosophers did not change this function of wonder: its relationship to philosophy as the founding passion was a consistent one from the Greeks to Dante Alighieri.² One sense of what the Greeks meant by wonder is particularly useful to trace to Chaucer: *paradoxos*, a Greek synonym of *thauma* (that which causes one to marvel). *Paradoxos* is that which is “contrary to or surpassing common opinion or belief.”³ This sense of wonder finds its way into the *Consolation of Philosophy*, a prosimetrical (written in alternating verse and prose sections) work written in Latin in the sixth century by the Roman-born philosopher and statesman Boethius.

The Consolation is very important for studying Chaucer, even without the link of *paradoxos*, because he, more even than most other medieval figures, felt Boethius' influence acutely. He was one of several prominent figures, including Alfred the Great and Elizabeth I, to translate *The Consolation* into English. Boethius wrote the work in prison in the time between being stripped of his wealth and status and being executed. It is set up as a conversation between the allegorical figure Lady Philosophy and Boethius himself in which she "consoles" him. At one point in *The Consolation*, Lady Philosophy impersonates Fortune in order to impress on Boethius the legitimacy and naturalness of Fortune's caprice. It is at this point that *paradoxos*, the source of wonder discussed above, appears as the mental tactic with which Lady Philosophy causes Boethius to wonder. As Dennis Quinn summarizes and explains,

Dame Fortune was constant to her own nature, which is to be fickle. This is more than a clever turn of speech; it is a paradox in the literal sense of the term, a teaching that seems contrary to common opinion, which expects fortune to be faithful. Paradox is a rhetorical trope that evokes the emotion of wonder precisely because it seems to express a contraction.⁴

In Quinn's interpretation here the English word "paradox" is used to signify specifically the thing that causes wonder - the source of wonder.

We might parse this apparent source of wonder even further, however, by questioning the functional difference between paradox and anything that cannot be known. Does Boethius wonder at paradox in and of itself, or does he wonder at paradox because it is one in a group of things which cannot be known—which, when observed, summon an awareness of ignorance? (For clarity's sake I will henceforth refer to "awareness of ignorance" as "awe," though the word "awe" is not usually defined this narrowly.) If no words adequately express paradox, then it cannot be known and therefore reminds the observer or reader of this lack of knowledge. As Wilbur Urban asserts, "Truth . . . is always a function of expression, and the relation between an expression and that which is expressed can only be one of adequacy."⁵ If no language is adequate to express a paradox, then that paradox cannot be known fully and "awe" results.

This barrier to understanding would seem to cause the viewer to give up, but Lowry Nelson suggests that poetry which uses the "rhetoric of ineffability"⁶ works by convincing the reader to join the speaker in his or her impossible task. Nelson writes: "In particular, mystical poetry is fraught with a basic paradox—the impossibility of expression and, though doomed to fail, the attempt at it."⁷ Both the speaker and the reader make this attempt: "we find ourselves, as readers, committed to paradox."⁸ (Nelson's interest is in classifying "mystical poetry," but his discussion is useful whether or not we classify Boethius' text as mystical.)

This crisis is where another source of wonder, "esteem," comes into play. Quinn holds that these two sources, ignorance and esteem, commonly appear in pre-modern and early modern literature—from Homer to Milton, in fact.⁹ Esteem is a favorable reaction to that which is known, just as awe is a favorable response to that which is unknown. (We can also name, with questionable usefulness, the two possible "negative reactions": peremptory dismissal of what is unknown and informed disapproval of what is known. These would not result in wonder at all but rather kill it. That which one knows thoroughly is subject either to deserved criticism or to informed praise; that which one does not yet know, like an unread book, or that which

cannot be fully known, like a paradox, is subject either to dismissal or awe.) If the reader does not esteem the art he will not "commit to the paradox" but rather reject it in skepticism. Fortunately, in Boethius' case, veneration for Lady Fortune and her songs abounds. After she sings a certain lyric, he is left amazed: "*me audiendi avidum stupentumque arrectis adhuc auribus carminis mulcedo defixerat*"¹⁰ - The song has "made me remain astonished, attentive, and desirous to hear her longer."¹¹ It is an expression of astonishment, delight, and, notably, a desire to sate his mental appetite by continuing to listen to Lady Fortune. Her song, since it is plagued by ineffability, has not been able to sate his curiosity, so paradoxically he desires more.

In Chaucer's *The Book of the Duchess*, wonder appears similarly; the work also contains several instances of ekphrasis, a word I intend to use in a sense which differs from its usual meaning. The word is traditionally defined as "a verbal description of, or meditation upon, a non-verbal work of art, real or imagined, usually a painting or sculpture."¹² But this study concerns works of art that cannot be easily relegated to pure text or pure image. In *The Book of the Duchess*, the narrator's experiences with artworks involve many that are probably heavily illuminated with colorful illustrations, designs, and initials. Even more generally, in an age before printing, the text alone on the page was not merely a functional notational system but a labor of scribal love that when finished constituted an expensive physical product of skilled craftsmanship. Coleridge's poem, too, blends the text and the image of the artwork into one entity by its focus on a pictorial representation of the location of literary creation. The name of the poem, "The Garden of Boccaccio," references the garden of a country estate where the stories that make up Boccaccio's *Decameron* were told. The premise of the work's frame narrative is that a group of highborn citizens have gathered at a country house to escape the plague that is ravaging their cities; they pass their time by telling stories to each other in the garden. The speaker in Coleridge's poem has come upon a work of art that depicts this garden. Even though the subject work of art is visual, then, it is a visual work of art whose significance rests upon yet another piece of literature. For all these reasons, "ekphrasis" in the usual sense of the word will not suffice; I use it in this study to mean a verbal meditation on verbal or non-verbal artworks. (I address the fine distinction between this use of "ekphrasis" and "intertextuality" below.)

The narrator in Chaucer's *The Book of the Duchess* has an experience with a romance that is similar to Boethius' experience with Fortune, though less overtly philosophical. The structure of *The Book of the Duchess* is unique and somewhat complex. The poem opens with a first person narrator complaining of insomnia and the accompanying unhealthy state of "sorwful ymagynacioun"¹³ and "melancolye."¹⁴ (We may compare the narrator's state to the "stupor"¹⁵ of Boethius.) He then picks up a romance "that me thoughte a wonder thing,"¹⁶ reads it, and reproduces it for his reader in paraphrase. One notable element in the romance is that a character Alcione prays to Juno to cure her of her insomnia. This "saving knowledge" causes him to wonder: "Me thoghte wonder yf hit were so, / For I had never herd speke or tho / Of noo goddes that koude make / Men to slepe, ne for to wake."¹⁷ After he finishes reading, he is immediately freed to sleep and begins a long dream which occupies the greater part of the work.

From the beginning, the narrator's wonder is variously plagued by problems of expression. After praying for sleep and receiving it, the narrator enters a "sweven,/ so wonderful that never yit/ Y trowe no man had the wyt/ to konne wel my sweven rede."¹⁸ The events of the entire dream, then, are expressly incapable of being interpreted or understood fully. Similarly, he attempts to describe the music he hears at the beginning of his dream, a technically impossible task given the

fundamental differences between the two media of art. He cannot even paraphrase the music as he could the romance. He has to resort to comparisons: "Was never herd so swete a steven / But hyt had be a thing of heven."¹⁹ At a loss to duplicate the musical sound precisely through the linguistic means of poetry on a page, the narrator spends nineteen lines comparing the sound he hears to other music and repeating adjectives like "mery," "swete," "mete," and "crafty."²⁰ He has been spurred by an experience that defies expression. "When wonder begets poetry," Quinn writes, "it very often takes the form of praise, which is an acknowledgement and expression of that which is beyond the poet."²¹ This is exactly the process that the *Duchess* narrator has undergone.

Having tried to describe a sound, Chaucer's narrator then relates the images on the walls of his cell. Once again, he attempts to convey his awe for a work of art to the reader; this time, though, his references to the art pieces have diminished from description to name-dropping. In his room are depictions of two very important texts, *The Iliad* and *The Romance of the Rose*. "Hooly al the story of Troye"²² is depicted in the stained glass windows of his cell, and "Alle the walles with colours fyne / Were peynted, bothe text and glose, / Of al the Romaunce of the Rose."²³ The first thing to notice is that these texts are not represented partially but "hooly al" is present and even present in multiple media of expression. The word "all" appears three times in eight lines and is each time stressed by the meter of the line. For *The Romance of the Rose*, there is "bothe text and glose."²⁴ This phrase is strange enough for Larry Benson to spend a note on it in *The Riverside Chaucer*, suggesting many possibilities but commenting at the end that it is "perhaps simply a formula meaning 'the whole story.'"²⁵ For us the phrase helps to emphasize that the entire *Romance of the Rose* was available to the narrator as a work of literature at this moment in time; the presence of a "glose" (an in-line glossary) even removes any barriers to comprehension. His consciousness has been exposed to the entire utterance of the poem, not merely a paraphrase.

We, however, are obviously not told the entire poems. Our experience of the art the narrator mentions is a paraphrase for the romance, a description for the music, and a mere flourish of proper names for the two poems. Cleanth Brooks would suggest that not even Chaucer's paraphrase of the romance is adequate for expressing the original text. Brooks agrees with Wilbur Urban that "what [a poem] 'says' can be rendered only by the poem itself."²⁶ In Brooks' theory, it is impossible for Chaucer to express the romance without repeating it word for word in its original language. To complicate things, contemporary textual evidence suggests that when the poet Chaucer was reading this romance to include it in his poem, he used a medieval French translation, the "Ovide moralisé," as well as the original Latin poem written by the Roman poet Ovid.²⁷ Therefore, its reproduction in *The Book of the Duchess* is in a language different from either of his sources as well as significantly reduced in content.²⁸ The Ovidian tale that we read in Chaucer's text is therefore different from the poem that Chaucer read in Latin or in French. Unless we have just come from reading this passage in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* in Latin, we will understand the *Duchess* narrator's experience differently, basing our reaction to his wonder on the tale he has summarized for us instead of on the tale he has read. The same is true for the music he hears and for the "text and glose" of *The Romance of the Rose* and *The Iliad*.

It may be objected here that there is difference between a reader's and a speaker's consciousness of other works of art in virtually any work in the Western tradition and that this is merely the reality of intertextuality, not ekphrasis proper. In responding to this, it is useful to distinguish between what the *Duchess* narrator seems to believe is common knowledge and what he believes is too obscure or too

important not to attempt to relate for the reader. He chooses to paraphrase the Ovidian tale and tries to describe the music he hears in his dream, but the two other texts he merely mentions by name, knowing that his medieval readers would be familiar with the "story of Troye"²⁹ and *The Romance*. The wonder he felt at reading about Juno's gift of sleep was so powerful that he wanted to relay that story in a work of art along with the emotions and the dream it caused him to have.³⁰ The narrator believes he is producing for his reader the only representation of these artworks that his reader will ever have the opportunity to experience; his writing is translation in the case of the Ovidian tale and ekphrasis in the case of the music. Ultimately, however, Chaucer's narrator can only express his reaction to the Ovidian tale instead of the tale itself, creating another poem in the process. The poem therefore exemplifies a hermeneutic, "testing" a certain type of reader response within a second poem.

The remarkable effect of a poem like this is that it, too, inspires wonder through the discourse of ineffability. The reader of Chaucer's poem gets a taste, even a plot summary, of the original subject art but is denied that art in its entirety. He is made aware of something (the Ovidian tale) of which he is ignorant but his desire to know (read) that subject art is not satisfied. Since ignorance is one of the sources of wonder, the reader is invited to "wonder" at the original work of art. Wonder is inspired in him from "esteem" as well: the reader is prompted to imitate the *Duchess* narrator's praise. *The Book of the Duchess* demonstrates the cyclical tendency of poetry containing translation to adopt the discourse of ineffability in attempting to produce in its reader the wonder it expresses.

Before leaving Chaucer, I will take a more synchronous perspective to discuss briefly another conception of wonder particularly relevant to the Middle Ages: the vice of *curiositas*. Christiane Deluz summarizes the condemnation of this emotion from Augustine until the advent of humanism: it was "refusée par Augustin comme 'concupiscentia oculorum', condamnée par Bernard de Clairvaux comme contraire à la 'stabilitas', opposée par Thomas d'Aquin à la 'studiositas.'"³¹ Chaucer's view in this poem seems to be an exception to this Christian fear of curiosity, especially since *The Book of the Duchess* contains a romance and pagan gods. A desire to know is never dogmatically condemned as what Augustine calls the "disease of curiosity."³² In fact, Chaucer's wonder heals him of the disease of insomnia. Wonder is an overwhelmingly positive emotion in this work.

A convenient and somewhat necessary stepping stone between Chaucer and Coleridge is the Renaissance poet Edmund Spenser (1552-99), who attempted to sound Chaucerian by using archaic words and spellings in his poetry and was generally highly regarded and imitated by Romantics like Coleridge. Despite the fact that Spenser actually created a false and fantastical sense of what Chaucer's English was like, later figures like John Dryden (1631-1700) praised Spenser for his quaint medievalism. Dryden spoke of the "infusion sweete" of the Chaucerian past in Spenser's poetry, claiming that "the Soul of Chaucer was transfus'd into his Body; and that he was begotten by him Two hundred years after his Decease."³³ Dryden may have only been interested in praising Spenser, but many Romantics might have read this as a belittlement of Chaucer. Thomas Warton (1728-1790), for instance, insists that Spenser's "archaic diction . . . had 'much improved upon [Chaucer's].'"³⁴ Warton's sentiment is an early indicator of the widespread worship and imitation of Spenser that would develop throughout the Romantic era.³⁵ Coleridge was no exception: his "Lines in the Manner of Spenser" is not in Spenserian stanzas but uses Spenserian rhymes and diction like "ypluck'd,"³⁶ "wight,"³⁷ and "bowers."³⁸ "The Garden of Boccaccio," the poem whose mode of ekphrastic wonder is of interest to this study, also exhibits

strong features of the Spenserian style.

The Spenserian elements of the poem are worth a brief discussion if only in order to articulate the stylistic connection between two poems that may never have been paired so specifically as they are in this essay. "The Garden of Boccaccio" is organized into heroic couplets, echoing (even if only incidentally) the Chaucer's preferred metrical mode. The rhymes also take on a Spenserian quality:

Even in my dawn of thought—Philosophy;
 Though then unconscious of herself, pardie,
 She bore no other name than Poesy;
 And, like a gift from heaven, in lileful glee, ...³⁹

"Pardie" especially stands out as somewhat archaic, though the *OED* finds uses consistently up until Rudyard Kipling in 1930. The subject matter is also clearly medieval, though in the following passage it is specifically Spenserian:

Fair cities, gallant mansions, castles old,
 And forests, where beside his leafy hold
 The sullen boar hath heard the distant horn,
 And whets his tusks against the gnarled thorn;
 Palladian palace with its storied halls;
 Fountains where Love lies listening to their falls;⁴⁰

Even more than diction, rhyme, or subject matter, however, the poem exhibits a Spenserian psychology. Romantics identified a certain interiority in Spenser, a "self-reflexive 'inshape.'"⁴¹ Coleridge called it "mental space"⁴² and in this poem we see it in the private and introverted concentration of the poet on Thomas Stothard's illustration of Boccaccio's garden: "Gazed by an idle eye with silent might / The picture stole upon my inward sight."⁴³ This interiority is distinctly Spenserian and becomes an interesting addition to the Chaucerian model of ekphrastic wonder.

Other than this internal psychology and the related Romantic preference for the wonder of childhood (which is discussed below), Coleridge's "The Garden of Boccaccio" is strikingly similar to *The Book of the Duchess* in its structure and treatment of ekphrastic wonder. It, too, begins with a helpless speaker trapped in a "numbing spell"⁴⁴ who is awakened from his stupor by an illustration depicting the garden from the beginning of *Decameron*, Day 3, where the various tale-tellers told their stories.⁴⁵ This image, placed on the speaker's desk by a "Friend,"⁴⁶ transforms his mental state from a "dull continuous ache"⁴⁷ to standing "possest."⁴⁸ The first four lines describing his reaction to the picture express such a spontaneous rush of praise for Boccaccio that they lack a main verb. The syntax is that of a list:

Boccaccio's Garden and its faery,
 The love, the joyance, and the gallantry!
 An Idyll, with Boccaccio's spirit warm,
 Framed in the silent poesy of form.⁴⁹

These lines seem to be the product of a rush of emotion from the speaker's memory of the *Decameron*. They have so much of the tone of familiar reminiscence that the reader is excluded if his reaction to a mention of the *Decameron* is less enthusiastic. The awe inspired by the painting is ultimately aimed at the soul of Boccaccio: "With old Boccaccio's soul I stand possest, / and breathe an air like life, that swells my chest."⁵⁰

Nearer the end of the poem, after the poet has been drawn out of his dull ache, he is moved to describe for the reader several images in

Stothard's illustration:

Praise the green arches, on the fountain clear
 See fragment shadows of the crossing deer;
 And with that serviceable nymph I stoop,
 The crystal, from its restless pool, to scoop.⁵¹

In the illustration, a series of arched hedges forms a backdrop for a central fountain near which some deer are grazing. Twelve people stand or sit near the fountain, and a woman is stooping to touch the water.⁵² Obviously, the meaning of the lines is clearer if the reader also views Stothard's illustration (or, indeed, Boccaccio's description of the garden in the introduction to *Decameron*, Day 3). Like Keats' "Ode on a Grecian Urn," the horizon of the speaker is consumed by a single work of art. And, as in *The Book of the Duchess*, its summary or description of that art excludes the reader precisely because it is less perfect than duplication. Like the sweet music the *Duchess* narrator hears, Stothard's visual art fails to translate accurately into poetry, but the poet persists in attempting the impossible. This rift between the speaker's experience of the original artwork and his reader's experience of it is a constant of ekphrastic poetry, and that claim stands *a priori*. This "constant" is significant because it characterizes the cyclic nature of wonder in original and subsequent artists/readers. Any degree of ineffability between the speaker of the intermediate poem and the subject art begets wonder from ignorance in the final reader. Reading Coleridge's poem about Stothard's illustration and Boccaccio's *Decameron*, one is struck by novelty and reminded about one's own ignorance of Boccaccio and Stothard, desiring to know more but kept from doing so as long as one is a reader of the poem at hand and not of another.

To contextualize this argument, it would be best to consider two philosophers who wrote about "wonder" between the times of Chaucer and Coleridge: Hobbes and Descartes. Hobbes suggests that wonder is a "hope and expectation of future knowledge from anything that happeneth new and strange."⁵³ He further divides the word into two quasi-synonyms: the "passion which we commonly call *admiration*" and the "appetite . . . *curiosity*."⁵⁴ Note that this dual sense corresponds somewhat to the two pre-modern sources of wonder, esteem (admiration) and awe or the awareness of ignorance (curiosity). Descartes writes that wonder is a "sudden surprise of the soul"⁵⁵: "L'admiration est une subite surprise de l'âme qui fait qu'elle se porte à considérer avec attention les objets qui lui semblent rares et extraordinaires."⁵⁶ For both Hobbes and Descartes, wonder ends with the arrival of full and complete knowledge.⁵⁷ We might therefore say that for the modern era, wonder no longer means an emotion that is inspired by "esteem." (This contrasts starkly with Boethius: "It is clear in Boethius . . . that knowledge does not quench wonder at all. Indeed, the wonder of Boethius increases as the dialogue proceeds."⁵⁸) Awe of the unknown is thus more important for Descartes, and indeed for Coleridge, as the source of wonder.

In fact, Descartes helped to pave the way for the Romantic notion of childlike wonder by suggesting that full knowledge ends wonder and that wonder therefore belongs to childhood.⁵⁹ Coleridge intensifies the naivety with which his speaker experiences everything by adopting a childlike mental state. The speaker paradoxically takes on the mental state of a child in order to "know" the experience of Boccaccio's spirit more deeply and intensely. In this sense his path to knowledge is a deliberate feigning of ignorance. The Wordsworthian preference for childhood in Coleridge's poem is very clear: the picture brings him "[a]ll spirits of power that had most stirred my thought / In selfless boyhood."⁶⁰ Equipped with the immense curiosity of a young mind, he can now "wander through the Eden of thy hand."⁶¹ "Eden" signifies the freshness and novelty of the speaker's experience, and the phrase,

“of thy hand,” reminds us that it has been crafted. The images in the rest of the poem are renewed knowledge. The old, experienced mind of the speaker pretends he is young, exploring his own memories with all the wonder of new encounters. The Wordsworthian neo-Platonist notion of the immortality of the child increases the speaker’s appetite for wonder.

This preference for a childlike state becomes abundantly clear in Coleridge’s personification of Philosophy and Poesy as the same “matron.” He writes,

And last, a matron now, of sober mien,
 Yet radiant still and with no earthly sheen,
 Whom as a faery child my childhood woo’d
 Even in my dawn of thought—Philosophy;
 Though then unconscious of herself, pardie,
 She bore no other name than Poesy.⁶²

In this passage there is an intriguing reversal of the normal order of the states of mental maturity. The poem even implies at the beginning that adulthood brings along with it a state of “vacancy”⁶³ and “dull continuous ache,”⁶⁴ since the only time at which the speaker operates out of his adult consciousness is before the painting strikes him with wonder. Though he treats Philosophy and Poesy as two sides of the same entity, he associates Poesy with childhood, the preferred mental state of the poem. The implication is that he leaves Philosophy behind, unlearning his knowledge, but to do so is not possible. The speaker’s action, rather, is akin to adopting the wisdom of knowing how little one knows. His mental transformation, spurred by an intense connection with Stothard’s illustration, reaches several successive levels of completeness. First, his visual faculties are freed: “Thanks, gentle artist! now I can descry / Thy fair creation with a mastering eye, / And all awake!”⁶⁵ Then, several lines later, he ceases viewing and begins to inhabit the imagined garden: “I see no longer! I myself am there, / sit on the ground-sward, and the banquet share.”⁶⁶ His intense inward focus and a Spenserian sense of a distant medieval past together cultivate wonder in the mind of the speaker. While he loses himself in his imagination, however, the reader of *his* poem is excluded from the exchange of ideas. The aforementioned lack of verbs and broken syntax further indicate the reflexivity of his conversation, as though he is in dialogue with his own memory of Boccaccio and the reader is an eavesdropper. Unlike Chaucer’s narrator, it may be possible for Coleridge’s speaker to relate to the reader his own experience with the art, but his Spenserian interiority precludes it. The reader is thus left, as before, with the paradox of a poem not fully expressed - a paradox that I see as the germ of new wonder.

Both of the poems in this study inspire wonder precisely because they take part in the rhetoric of ineffability. Because the poet expresses his reaction to the previous artwork instead of duplicating that artwork, he expresses wonder; wonder is necessarily inexpressible because it is a state before knowledge. Also, the writer of poetry containing translation wrestles with “the resistance which any good poem sets up against all attempts to paraphrase it”⁶⁷ and the writer of ekphrasis struggles with the barriers between media. The art on which a poem focuses is not and cannot be expressed in it (only paraphrased, referenced, described, or compared), and thus our experience of the poem is necessarily somewhat ignorant of the total utterance that is its subject. The ekphrastic poem or translation does not and cannot reproduce the art exactly, and therefore, by itself, it lacks total knowledge of its source. In signifying another work of art imperfectly, it reminds us that we do not at that moment “know” that other work of art (i.e., we have not finished reading it a moment ago or have not memorized it) and thereby prompts wonder in us.

Wonder in Chaucer’s *The Book of the Duchess* follows the Boethian tradition closely. The narrator’s awe combines with esteem to inspire wonder and frees the narrator from eight years of insomnia. But despite his newfound track toward knowledge, his attempts to recount his experience through translation and ekphrasis fail because his reader cannot have experienced the artworks as he has. In Coleridge’s poem also, the speaker is saved from mental apathy by a work of art, but he, too, is plagued by the void between his subject art and his reader. Furthermore, the intense and introverted conversation with his own memory that ensues cripples the poem which his experience prompts him to write. Despite their significant differences and disparate chronological moments, these two poems unite powerfully in generating awe for the mysterious process of reading and wondering at a poem by rendering that process impossible to comprehend within another poem. Furthermore, if not for the complex and unique force of wonder during ekphrasis and translation, the protestations of expressibility which these poems contain would challenge the validity of poetic expression and comprehension so much that they would undercut themselves. Wonder is the only positive presence that can fill the void left by the crisis of the inexpressible and is therefore the best creator of meaning among works which interrogate the possibility of poetic meaning and comprehension.

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Shades of color

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Courtney joined me in the lounge and settled into the chair across from my own. Right away I was captivated by her story. "When I hear music, I see colors," she said. "When I smell certain smells, I see colors. Or even when I think of a person, there is a very strong color association with that person."

Courtney Van Evera is a charismatic, 24-year-old woman with a giggly personality and a curiosity toward her environment and everyone in it. What she experiences is called synaesthesia. The Greek root *syn* means "together," and *aisthesis* means "sensation."¹ This phenomenon is best explained as a cross-wiring in the brain causing the onset of one sense to trigger another.²

Her face lit up and she did her best to contain her giggling. It looked as if she had a secret that had to be told. "What I experience is – with every sense like hearing, taste, touch, smell –" she counted off on her fingers, "I see colors...All my senses are involved with it, so it's kinda like they all get crossed into sight with colors."

Many cases of synaesthesia have been documented starting as early as 1880 when a paper was published in *Nature* on this condition by Francis Galton, a cousin of Charles Darwin.¹ However, it wasn't until recently in 1999 that scientists started to explore synaesthesia as a "genuine sensory experience."¹ Before then, it was just assumed that these experiences were either being made up or that they were a prod-

uct of the use of drugs such as LSD.¹

The senses of a person who experiences synaesthesia can become intertwined in many different ways. Because synaesthesia occurs with any combination of intersecting senses, psychologists have counted more than 100 different existing combinations.¹ The most common of which are colored-hearing synaesthesia, where a sound triggers the perception of color, and letter/number to color synaesthesia, where numbers and letters are perceived to be in assigned colors no matter the coloring of the ink on the page.³ Courtney experiences both of these, as well as color synaesthesia triggered by tastes, smells, and even concepts of people's personalities. Studies show that people who have one type of synaesthesia are likely to have another type as well.¹

Courtney explained that she used the colors that she sees associated with numbers and letters to help her through elementary school. Through Courtney's eyes, numbers and letters are not seen as the black print on a page but instead appear slightly different in colors and shades. She said that this was how she learned to spell – by memorizing the color patterns of the letters in words. As for math, Courtney memorized what colors equal other colors. She said it is her own personal internal categorizing system. "Colors help me memorize things. I did well in spelling and vocabulary and I very easily memorized math and multiplication tables...I mostly memorize things that