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RÉSUMÉ – La poésie anglaise de Charles d'Orléans s'inspire du langage de la solitude religieuse dans le but de suggérer une piste d'innovation poétique ; en dernière analyse, elle rejette toutefois la possibilité d'une esthétique de la poésie contemplative. Intégrer Charles d'Orléans à l'étude de la théologie vernaculaire permet d'envisager de nouveaux contextes pour la poésie du Duc et de comprendre comment la spéculation théologique peut engendrer une pratique formelle et esthétique.

ABSTRACT – The English lyrics of Charles d'Orléans draw on the language of religious solitude in order to suggest an avenue for poetic innovation, yet it ultimately rejects contemplative poetics as an aesthetic possibility. To incorporate Charles d'Orléans into the study of vernacular theology suggests new contexts for the duke's poetry and reveals the way theological speculation can engender formal and aesthetic practice.

CHARLES D'ORLÉANS AS VERNACULAR THEOLOGIAN

The form of my title is meant, in part, to evoke the persistent appeal of the notion of vernacular theology, as nearly every Middle English text written during the late-fourteenth and early-fifteenth centuries seems at some time or other poised to enter this capacious field. Yet the fact that my recruitment of Charles d'Orléans for this area of study remains surprising ought to draw attention to the somewhat arbitrary limitations critics have imposed upon the way vernacular theology is to be understood. Charles is French, courtly, and, by all accounts, orthodox, characteristics that would seem to exclude him from accounts of vernacular theology as they have taken shape in recent decades. The critical locution "vernacular theology" now usually conjures a contrary set of associations, primarily related to popular English writings of a theologically subversive bent. As a result, the political implications of the intersections of vernacularity and theology have attracted the bulk of the critical attention. The unique appeals to contemplative theology found in the English poems of Charles d'Orléans point, however, to other, primarily aesthetic, considerations that these political preoccupations have tended to overlook. By calling attention to the language of religious solitude within the English poems of British Library, MS Harley 682, this essay explores the latent aesthetic resources that contemplative theology might offer the study of vernacular courtly poetics. I suggest that in Charles's English sequence the language of religious contemplation and solitude expand beyond a liminal role as metaphor for a lover's isolation and instead offer a potential, if ultimately rejected, recourse for poetic innovation.

Before turning to the duke's lyrics, it may be necessary to provide a brief survey of the transitional status that vernacular theology holds in current critical discourses. Having emerged as a useful, if not entirely

unproblematic, means to frame the discussion about contemplative and catechetical texts written in the vernacular, the phrase “vernacular theology” quickly came to mark the theological interests of various Middle English works not explicitly instructional or devotional¹. In addition to Julian of Norwich, Walter Hilton, Richard Rolle, Margery Kempe, and the *Cloud*-author, we can now readily speak of Langland and the Gawain-author in these terms². Such associations may seem appropriate enough at the moment, but this was not always the case. In 1981, Valerie Lagorio was arguing for “the broader and less restrictive mysticism [defined] as the progressive spiritual life of the Christian from purgation through contemplation to unity”³. Determining the mystical canon as such meant looking past a particular religious estate or experience and allowing for “works concerned with the methodology of mysticism”⁴. The extension of the term “mysticism” was controversial enough in the early 80s for Lagorio to be pressing the point, yet it anticipated the even more comprehensive purview that vernacular theology was to take within the next two decades.

The mingling of previously distinct canons was most effectively enabled by the broad definition of vernacular theology given by Nicholas Watson’s influential article on the subject, “Censorship and Cultural Change in Late-Medieval England”⁵. Here, Watson defines vernacular theology as “any kind of writing, sermon, or play that communicates theological information to an audience”⁶. Intentionally phrased as a “catchall”, the breadth of this definition diminishes the strict generic

1 The phrase was first used by I. Doyle, “A Survey of the Origins and Circulation of Theological Writings in English in the 14th, 15th and Early 16th Centuries with Special Consideration of the Part of the Clergy therein”, vol. 1, PhD dissertation, Cambridge University, 1953, p. 5-7. B. McGinn uses the phrase to characterize a widening of genres and languages used for theological investigation in the thirteenth century. See McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism: Men and Women in the New Mysticism (1200-1350)*, New York, Crossroads, 1998, p. 19-24.

2 See N. Watson, “The Middle English Mystics”, *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*, ed. D. Wallace, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 539-565.

3 V. Lagorio, “Problems in Middle English Mystical Prose”, in *Middle English Prose: Essays on Bibliographical Problems*, ed. A. S. G. Edwards and D. Pearsall, New York, Garland, 1981, p. 133.

4 *Ibid.*

5 N. Watson, “Censorship and Cultural Change in Late Medieval England: Vernacular Theology, the Oxford Translation Debate, and Arundel’s Constitutions of 1409”, *Speculum*, 70, 4, 1995, p. 822-864.

6 Watson, “Censorship and Cultural Change”, n. 4.

boundaries that perpetuate a divide between literary and non-literary texts. The immediate results suggested in Watson's definition are thus two-fold: writings formerly corralled under the category of "mysticism" would gain new life and relevance apart from their insular sub-field, while the works once distinguished as "literary" would no longer retain a singular claim on the study of Middle English literature. Despite the expansive promise of Watson's definition, however, the larger argument of "Censorship and Cultural Change" remained tethered to Arundel's Constitutions of 1409, and the article's effect has been to highlight the increased levels of suspicion regarding vernacular writings at the turn of the fifteenth century. Watson's article expresses its intentions carefully and with nuance, yet its extensive influence on the study of vernacular theology has meant a predominant critical focus on the political implications of the vernacular within a very narrow period of time.

It is this particular model of vernacular theology that has most recently been the object of scrutiny. Critics like Kathryn Kerby-Fulton argue that the "draconian" influence of Arundel has been overstated, while others, employing related critiques, note the usefulness of extending vernacular theology's purview beyond the chronological boundaries set by Watson's focus on the Constitutions¹. Reflecting on this limited chronology, Vincent Gillespie suggests that "it might now be better to work with the assumption that each sub period in medieval England produced multiple, interlocking, and overlapping vernacular theologies, each with complex intertextual and interlingual obligations and affiliations"². The expanded terrain decidedly alters the political stakes, making clear the fact that not every theological work written in the vernacular felt the shadow of Arundel. This is obviously true pre-1407, and increasingly so after the first quarter of the fifteenth century. And even within Watson's limited timetable, the extent to which Arundel's Constitutions held sway has been convincingly challenged³. While vernacular theology may always be a political act, as Watson affirms in

1 K. Kerby-Fulton, *Books under Suspicion: Censorship and Tolerance of Revelatory Writing in Late Medieval England*, Notre Dame, Ind., University of Notre Dame Press, 2006; see also E. Duffy, "Religious Belief", *A Social History of England, 1200-1500*, ed. R. Horrox and W.M. Ormrod, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006, p. 293-339.

2 V. Gillespie, "Vernacular Theology", *Middle English*, ed. P. Strohm, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 406.

3 See Kerby-Fulton, "Appendix A: Arundel's Constitutions of 1407-1409", *Books under Suspicion*, p. 397-401.

his most recent assessment of the topic¹, the power struggles outlined in “Censorship and Cultural Change” no longer delineate the field.

New political contexts evoke new questions². What do more orthodox instances of theology in the vernacular, or simply those existing outside of Arundelian suspicion, tell us about vernacularity? What are the forms and genres associated with vernacular theology, and how are they used? And what role might theology play in the increasing professionalization of vernacular poetics³? The questions raised by disassociating the study of vernacular theology from the censorship of Arundel open the discussion to other consequences of using the vernacular to communicate “theological information to an audience”, consequences which require analysis apart from their political immediacy. Using the vernacular to communicate theological information, even to “do theology”, can often mean drawing attention to the ability – or, in the case of the *Cloud*-author, the inability – of language to access divine wisdom or to bring about personal reformation⁴. Indeed, the extent to which such matters of literary form interact with theological content still requires much critical attention. It is thus my broader, corrective argument here that the aesthetic and ethical valences of vernacularity demand closer attention, especially when invested with theological import. More particularly, the English lyric sequence of Charles d’Orléans, found in Harley 682, provides a striking instance of the interplay between poetic form and ethical obligations, as its extended narrative juxtaposes the religious notion of contemplation with the attempted lyric project. By situating Charles’s English lyrics within the context of fifteenth-century contemplative theology, we are better able to see how their frequent references to religious solitude mark an internal critique of the moral legitimacy of their vernacular aesthetics.

1 N. Watson, “Cultural Changes”, *English Language Notes*, 44, 1, 2006, p. 127-137.

2 For new directions in vernacular theology see especially the cluster of responses to the influence of Watson’s “Censorship and Cultural Change” in *English Language Notes*, 44, 2006, p. 77-126.

3 On “proto-professional poetics” in late medieval English literature, particularly its relation vis-à-vis the Benedictine monk John Lydgate, see R. Meyer-Lee, *Poets and Power from Chaucer to Wyatt*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007. For the role of monasticism in the “the creation of a category of literature”, see C. Cannon, “Monastic Productions”, *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*, 1999, p. 316-348, at p. 321.

4 For the cross-period implications of such considerations, see T. Betteridge, “Vernacular Theology”, *Cultural Reformations: Medieval and Renaissance in Literary History*, ed. B. Cummings and J. Simpson, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010, p. 188-205.

Even if we are to allow that vernacular theology in late medieval England must now account for a multilingual and decentralized literary environment, the usual critical descriptions emphasize the French duke's formal ingenuity or sensuous appeal, not his theological rigor¹. But considering both the matter of poetic influence as well as an evident personal interest in theology, there are, in fact, good reasons to examine the relationship between theology and Charles's poetic corpus. Specifically, the fifteenth century saw a newly charged investment in the theological significance of Boethian poetics, and I would like to suggest that Charles's English sequence provides a commentary on this larger religious turn. Moreover, the codicological efforts of Gilbert Ouy have drawn attention to the "période d'intense activité spirituelle" which characterized the duke's twenty-five year captivity in England, yet there has been little thought given to the way theological interests may have surfaced in his vernacular works².

Ouy's extensive research presents a useful point of comparison for the Harleian poems: the *Canticum Amoris* found in one of Charles's personal notebooks (BnF ms. lat. 1203)³. This Latin devotional poem, patterned on a Victorine model of ascent towards mystical contemplation, reflects the theological potential signaled within the duke's English book, which, like the *Canticum Amoris*, expresses a desire to be understood as "contemplatif"⁴. But where the Latin lyric confidently displays a distinct

1 Although D. Poirion often mentions the religious temperament of many of Charles's lyrics, the precise nature of this religiosity is not thoroughly explored. See Poirion, *Le Poète et le Prince: L'évolution du lyrisme courtois de Guillaume de Machaut à Charles d'Orléans*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1965, p. 534-539. B. Newman's category of "imaginative theology" demonstrates, however, the extent to which courtly literature and conventions provided a space for theological investigation. See Newman, *God and the Goddesses: Vision, Poetry, and Belief in the Middle Ages*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003, p. 294-303. I retain "vernacular theology" here in order to emphasize the different approaches to theology evident in Charles's vernacular and in his Latin.

2 G. Ouy, *La Librairie des frères captifs: les manuscrits de Charles d'Orléans et Jean d'Angoulême*, Turnhout, Brepols, 2007, p. 145.

3 The *Canticum Amoris* is also transcribed in BnF ms. lat. 1196.

4 I accept the arguments that identify Charles d'Orléans as the author of both the Harleian English sequence and the *Canticum Amoris*. For the authorship of the English sequence, see M.-J. Arn, "Charles of Orleans and the Poems of BL MS Harley 682", *English Studies*, 3, 1993, p. 222-235; see also M.-J. Arn, *Fortunes Stabilnes: Charles of Orleans's English Book of Love. A Critical Edition*, Binghamton, New York, Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1994, p. 32-37. For the authorship of the Latin work, see G. Ouy, "Un poème mystique de Charles d'Orléans", *Studi francesi*, 3, 1959, p. 64-84.

level of ingenuity in its engagement with contemplative theology, the vernacular sequence breaks down after summoning the possibility of “contemplatijf” poetics. Ultimately, the generic and formal constraints assumed by the vernacular composition make its theological aspirations nearly absurd. In its failed attempt to inscribe itself within the religious life of solitude, Charles’s English production undermines its own aesthetic insularity, while at the same time delimiting the extent to which a vernacular courtly poetics might satisfactorily appropriate the self-sustaining model of spiritual contemplation.

With what follows, I chart how the language of religious solitude provides a locus for the Harleian sequence’s engagement with the moral and ethical implications of aesthetic practice. As the frame narrative moves away from a traditional epistolary relationship, the theological resonances of the speaker’s solitary condition intensify, and this intensification reflects a growing concern for poetic legitimacy. Detached from the usual expectations furnished by a traditional love narrative – the stimulated but unfulfilled desire that incites a constant need for more poetry – the sequence explores possibilities for poetic innovation through its various formal transitions. As Mary-Jo Arn has suggested, the two most prominent fixed forms, the ballade and the roundel, each come to represent a distinct compositional practice: the ballade exhibiting a traditional love narrative, and the roundel signifying a novel departure from this tradition¹. As it turns out, however, the allure of novelty does not suffice as a compositional warrant. At a pivotal moment in the work’s narrative, Venus arrives to challenge the speaker’s new lyric mode, one that no longer can claim the goddess’s license. While this moment is usually understood exclusively as the return of erotic desire within the speaker, Venus’s appearance can also be understood as a metacommunicative gesture demanding an ethical affiliation to the poetic process². The speaker’s attempts to characterize his situation

1 M.-J. Arn distinguishes the functions of the two forms as such: “The roundels are an art form rather than a rhetorical one”; Arn, “Poetic Form as a Mirror for Meaning in the English Poems of Charles of Orleans”, *Philological Quarterly*, 69, 1, 1990, p. 17.

2 On the ways fifteenth-century French poets regularly used conventional matter as a means of metacommunication within an environment of social poetry, see J. H. M. Taylor, *The Making of Poetry: Late-Medieval French Poetic Anthologies*, Turnhout, Brepols, 2007. For further discussion of metacommunicative poetry, see A. Marotti, *John Donne, Coterie Poet*, Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1986.

as that of an anchorite and his lyrics as the products of contemplation disclose an aesthetic desire to identify an ethically legitimate ground for lyric innovation apart from the traditional epistolary form.

“LO NYS HIT CONTEMPLATIJF?”

Perhaps the most distinguishing structural feature of the English poems found in Harley 682, when compared with their French counterparts, is the inclusion of the elaborate narrative section in which Venus appears to the speaker in a dream in order to interrogate him about how he has been occupied since departing her service¹. The speaker, nearly despairing, signals his reclusive lifestyle, asking, “Lo nys hit contemplatijf?”². Venus’s reply is curt (“No, certis”), and the goddess quickly proceeds to incite the speaker’s return to amatory pursuit (v. 4864-4865)³. While the extended comic exchange which includes this arresting moment has attracted much commentary, the speaker’s peculiar language of religious solitude is often left unexamined. Not only does the speaker claim a “contemplatijf” justification for his works and attempt to portray himself “as an ancre” (v. 4802)⁴, he later goes so far as to address a complaint to an actual anchorite. Taken individually, these forays into the discourse of religious solitude may appear to be simply a perfunctory extension of the long-established interdependencies of courtly and religious verse. But, as Barbara Newman has demonstrated,

1 The French counterpoints are part of a much larger, trilingual (though primarily French) body of verse found in the partially autograph BnF ms. fr. 25458, the whole of which has been newly re-edited by J. Fox and M.-J. Arn, *Poetry of Charles d'Orléans and His Circle*, Tempe, Arizona, ACMRS and Brepols, 2010. For a discussion of the relationship between the English poems of Harley 682 and the autograph, see Arn, *Fortunes Stabilnes*, p. 119-122. Arn dates the making of the autograph manuscript slightly prior to the Harley manuscript, which she dates in the last years of Charles’s imprisonment (1439 to 1440); see Arn, “Two Manuscripts, One Mind: Charles d’Orléans and the Production of Manuscripts in Two Languages”, *Charles d’Orléans in England, 1415-1440*, ed. M.-J. Arn, Cambridge, D.S. Brewer, 2000, p. 61-78.

2 See, is it not contemplative?

3 All line numbers for the English poems of Harley 682 come from Arn, *Fortunes Stabilnes*. The translations provided in the footnotes are mine and are included to aid the reader, although they do not always convey every nuance of the original.

4 As an anchorite.

such borrowings very often comprise theoretical experiments, whether reinterpreting the theological conception of love or staking off new terrain for literary composition¹. As the Harleian speaker's desire for a licit reclusiveness unfolds, the anchoritic appeals prove to be more than merely an inventive trope. The language of religious solitude provides instead a pivotal reflection on the moral legitimacy of the non-amatory lyric endeavor. By infelicitously attempting to code an aesthetic process as a means of religious contemplation, the speaker's conversation with Venus activates an internal critique that questions the work's increasingly solipsistic poetic practice. Janus-like in scope, the language of religious solitude redefines the value of the roundel collection that preceded it, while inflecting a tonal shift in the ballades that follow.

The tripartite structure of Charles's English sequence is well known². In the barest of outlines, it can be described as a kind of formal triptych, with the first and third sections comprised primarily of ballades and the middle section containing mostly roundels. Two sections of narrative verse could then be said to form the "hinges" connecting three lyric "panels". To an extent, this metaphor is apt. The aggregate nature of the lyric sections, paired with the changes in lyric type, reinforces the sense that each section of the larger work exists separately as a distinct unit. Indeed, the number of lyrics amassed seems at times to encourage a narrative stasis, most dramatically in the central series of roundels. But a much more dynamic picture emerges overall on account of the narrative movement expressed within and across the entire mixed form sequence, simultaneously foregrounding and resisting the aggregation of non-narrative lyrics. Even the miscellaneous accumulation of roundels in the work's second part is redirected towards narrative significance when set in contrast to the surrounding ballades. More precisely, its significance changes from representing a poetic act having social value to one lacking any identifiable meaning. Where the roundels are at first glance identified as a banquet of the "swettist mete" (v. 3120), intended to be both edifying – "sum thing y trust in this bok is / To fede them on" (v. 3128-3129)³ – and painstakingly crafted – "with laboure y haue it

1 See especially Newman, "Love Divine, All Loves Excelling", *God and the Goddesses*, p. 138-189.

2 Discussed in Arn, "Poetic Form".

3 I trust there is something in this book to feed [or sustain] my audience.

for hem bought" (v. 3132)¹ – the extended verse narrative which follows recoils from this initial optimism, demanding a more socially-accepted orientation for this poetic "laboure".

The optimism that inspires the lyric banquet hopes to accompany a revitalized approach to the act of lyric composition, one that does not depend on the usual love narratives. "And for folk say 'short song is good in ale' / That is the cause in rundell y hem write" (v. 3118-3119)². By introducing a change in form, the roundels mean to herald a convivial departure from the "grose mete" (v. 3111) of his previous compositions to the "deynte" (v. 3110) of "short song"³. The new form promises light-hearted concision and temporal brevity, no longer wedded to the sustained narrative of the first ballade sequence. There, the narrative tracked along the conventional trajectory between lover and lady. As might be expected, we find in the work's first ballade series the vicissitudes of fortune and the lady's restraint pitching the speaker to and fro emotionally, while allegorical figures from the *Roman de la rose* tradition (e.g., "Daunger") appear at times to discourage the relationship. But the sudden death of the lady provokes a surprising twist to a familiar story. Confronted by Old Age, the speaker sheds his servitude to the God of Love and retreats to the Castle of No Care. The "Iewbile" (v. 3104), or celebration banquet, that the speaker commences after an unspecified amount of time attempts to reboot a poetic practice left dormant (v. 3046-3047)⁴. This time, no longer originating out of devotion to a particular lady, the series of roundels that follow are framed as a way to continue the lyric vocation without amatory incentive. Indeed, the separateness of the endeavor from the usual affiliations even forces the speaker to speak apologetically for his novelty:

The speche of loue so fresshely depaynt is
With Plesere, where loue settis hertily
That ay from fresshe to fresshe them aquayntis
To speke for that as doth vnto them ly,

1 I bought it for them with my labor.

2 Since folk say "short songs are good for drinking", that is why I write in roundels. [The folk saying appears to equate short song with festivity.]

3 The language suggests a contrast between "fatty meat" and lighter "fine food".

4 The optimism inherent in the "Iewbile" is made clear in the definition provided by the *Middle English Dictionary*; using only examples from Charles's Harleian lyrics, the *MED* defines the term as "a feast of rejoicing; – used *fig.*" (*Jūbilē*, n. 4).

For when that y was in ther company
 I for my silf gan fast seche wordis gay –
 And fond them well – that now ly in decay
 (So haue y them forspent), y wot not whare,
 And, tho that are bileft me oon or tay,
 Mi tunge hem wrestith fer out of aray,
 Forwhi y fynde him rollid in No Care.

But here y make my Newbie or y day,
 To doon louers for my sowle to pray. (v. 3093-3105)¹

Though the project forebodes greater difficulty without recourse to the “speche of loue” which moves “from fresshe to fresshe”, the speaker chances it, believing that this new turn will yet maintain the celebratory exuberance invested in his naming it a “Iewbile”². No longer part of the “company” of lovers, he ventures forward, forging an uncharted approach to poetic practice.

The new compositional territory embarked upon not only ushers in a new lyric form in its use of the roundel, it also provokes a breakdown of narrative altogether. Critics have regularly commented on the miscellaneous complexion of the work’s second lyric grouping, and the internal circularity of the roundel itself threatens to isolate the individual lyrics from external narrative context³. Codicological evidence further supports the fact that, in presentation, these roundels are recorded as “simply a collection of lyrics”⁴. At first, the roundels may

1 Love’s speech is so vibrantly decorated with Pleasure (where Love assuredly sits), which [i.e., Pleasure] always moves them [i.e., lovers] to speak in constantly fresh terms about their condition. When I was in their [i.e., the lovers’] company, I quickly sought out appealing words – and found them easily – but these now lie in decay (as I have worn them all out); where they are now, I know not. And, although one or two words are left to me, my tongue has wrenched them all out of sorts, since I find him [i.e., my tongue] wrapped up in No Care. But here I will make my Jubilee, or a day to motivate lovers to pray for my soul.

2 The expanded role of this term in the English poems of Harley 682 is noted in D. Poirion, *Le Lexique de Charles d’Orléans dans les ballades*, Genève, Droz, 1967, p. 89. Arn notes, “The idea of a *jubilé* is completely undeveloped in the Fr[en]ch poems”, *Fortunes Stabilnes*, p. 486, n. 3104.

3 For a comparison between the ballade and the rondeau in Charles’s French, see J. Fox, *The Lyric Poetry of Charles d’Orléans*, Oxford, 1969, p. 116-131. On the miscellaneous nature of Charles’s English roundels, see Arn, *Fortunes Stabilnes*, p. 6, 76-83; A. C. Spearing, “Prison, Writing, Absence: Representing the Subject in the English Poems of Charles d’Orléans”, *Modern Language Quarterly*, 53, 1, 1992, p. 89.

4 Arn, *Fortunes Stabilnes*, p. 489, n. 3311.

appear to present a nostalgic retelling of his past love: where the initial entry states the speaker's disinclination to follow Love's "nyse conseitis" (v. 3139)¹, subsequent lyrics soon turn once more to the expected courtly descriptions of the absent lady's "goodly manere" (v. 3180) and fair looks. But this nascent return to an amatory chronology is almost immediately interrupted, and the majority of the roundels simply proceed one after another without any particular narrative pattern². No longer tracing a precise relationship between the speaker and his lady, the sequence becomes preoccupied with compiling thematic variations, an aesthetic act that emphasizes formal practice rather than social affiliation. Such close attention to form does, of course, have its own social implications, as some of the most recent work on the manuscripts of Charles d'Orléans has demonstrated: the coterie interactions that characterize Charles's poetic practice after his return to France champion a collaborative approach to the lyric manuscript, constantly inviting formal ingenuity³. One of the more remarkable effects of the extended English sequence found in the Harley MS, however, is to question the legitimacy of this kind of poetic practice. With a love narrative no longer in sight, the collection of roundels is judged retroactively to be groundless.

The ethical import of the speaker's withdrawal from amatory narrative in favor of formal virtuosity becomes clear when Venus confronts the speaker in the subsequent narrative. Venus's arrival questions the validity of the mere aggregation of lyric, demanding, as it were, a concomitant love narrative. After the conclusion of the "Iewbile", the suggestion had been that the speaker will continue to write without any personal amatory compunction. He does, in fact, compose a double ballade at the request of a friend on account of his past service to Love. The request comes, as he says, because "y was so moche to Loue biholde /

1 Refined [even conventional] notions.

2 Arn describes the roundels as having "no particular order (except perhaps the order of composition)", *Fortunes Stabilnes*, p. 6.

3 See Taylor, *The Making of Poetry*. A comparison between Harley 682 and BnF ms. fr. 25458 reveals strikingly divergent approaches to the formal gamesmanship of social poetry. As the recent critical edition of BnF ms. fr. 25458 states, "[T]his manuscript contains precious evidence of literary collaboration on many levels"; *Poetry of Charles d'Orléans and His Circle*, ed. J. Fox and M.-J. Arn, p. xvi. The manuscript that Charles brought back to France after his imprisonment could thus be seen as a liberating counterpoint to the more hesitant narrative that I trace in Harley 682.

In my fer afore past dayes olde” (v. 4655-4656)¹. But while his former association with Love may still be remembered by his acquaintances, a personal desire no longer incites his verse making. The only explanation the speaker gives for this favor is that “it must nede be doon, as wot yow what” (v. 4675)². Without personal incentive, lyric composition becomes vaguely obligatory, without a precise aim. Unable to sustain the initial enthusiasm that had initiated the banquet of roundels, the speaker ends up “musyng in...wakyng dremys sad” (v. 4640)³, occupied only by “ydill thought” (v. 4641)⁴. The subsequent turn to the literary convention of the sleeping poet and the dream sequence further implies that the speaker has come to a point where his situation must change.

As in many dits amoureux, the lengthy dream sequence that follows the series of roundels comes at a moment of crisis: the ex-lover has reached an emotional dead-end, and his desperate situation is altered by a dream. The nature of this, the work’s second and more elaborate, oneiric excursus has been explored within the context of medieval dream theory by A. C. Spearing, who argues that “it may be prophetic and it may bring him into contact with powers outside himself, but at the same time it is open to interpretation as a bodily symptom signifying what his body demands”⁵. Venus’s claims on the dreamer support Spearing’s suggestion, since she identifies him as “a man” who “haue of nature als yowre lymys goode” (v. 4869-4870)⁶. I would add that, as an argument explaining the speaker’s return to amorous pursuit, Venus’s statements must also be supplemented by the speaker’s own failed attempts to justify his new “profession” (v. 4803, 4863, 4855). After the speaker finally recognizes the goddess, Venus questions him: “how lede ye yowre lijf? Good, lete vs see” (v. 4801)⁷. His answer, “As an ancre, Madame, in clothis blake” (v. 4802)⁸, simultaneously follows and thwarts the expectations set by Chaucerian dream-poems. In light of Chaucer’s *Book of the Duchess*, black garments might conjure the

1 I was much beholden to Love in past days.

2 It just must be done, as you know.

3 Musing in sorrowful waking dreams.

4 Idle thought.

5 A. C. Spearing, “Dreams in *The Kingis Quair* and the Duke’s Book,” *Charles d’Orléans in England, 1415-1440*, p. 136-137.

6 A man who has by nature all good [and functioning] limbs.

7 How do you lead your life? Well, let us see!

8 As an anchorite, Madame, in black clothes.

image of the lamenting Black Knight, who similarly lost his lady to Death. But this dreamer's description of his own appearance relies on an entirely different set of iconography, which he uses to make a more stirring, certainly a more inventive, justification for his recent poetic practice. In an effort to authenticate his isolated existence, he concludes by repeating his self-identification as an anchorite: "Thus haue y told yow my poore ancre lijf / And what profession that y am to bounde. / How thenke ye lo nys hit contemplatif?" (v. 4862-4864)¹.

Before the authoritative gaze of Venus, the speaker is incited to define the aims of his new "profession". The unaffiliated lyric practice attempted in his series of roundel does not suffice, so he posits a "contemplatif" basis in order to justify himself. But Venus's firm negation of this religious definition is abrupt, even comic, in contrast to the earnest despair of the speaker. Without contemplative justification, he serves no purpose except to "bete þe ground / As that y goo" (v. 4866-4867)². This aimless pacing provides a vibrant image of the speaker's unattached solitude, confirming Venus's assessment: though his appearance might identify his condition with that of a religious recluse, his lack of stability is more characteristic of the wandering hermits whose moral worth was considered, at best, questionable³.

The *vita contemplativa* posited by the speaker at this pivotal moment extends a set of eremitic metaphors first expressed in the earlier ballade series. On their own, these metaphors (which can also be found in the English's French counterparts) provide a vehicle for a fairly conventional expression of passive submission to Fortune's inconstancy. The speaker, for instance, promises no longer to expect Fortune's favor: "y withdrawe from euery gladsom feere, / For woofull folke they doon but comberaunce. / In thought a reklesse thus leue y and prayere" (v. 1501-1503)⁴. Here,

1 Thus I have told you of my poor anchoritic life and of what profession that I am bound to. What do you think: lo, is it not contemplative?

2 Beat the ground as I go.

3 A good overview of the status of hermits in late medieval England can be found in R. Hanna, "Will's Work", in *Written Work: Langland, Labor and Authorship*, eds. S. Justice and K. Kerby-Fulton, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997, p. 23-66. There may be also a reference to the rhythmic plodding of the poetic line, in which case the speaker's compositions would have even stronger association with the speaker's embodied aimlessness.

4 I withdraw from every cheerful acquaintance, since woeful folk are only a burden. I live thus as a recluse in thought and in prayer.

the vow to become a recluse “in thought” emerges as a hedge against overblown expectations or reckless hubris. This submissive posturing not only acknowledges the greater power of Fortune, it also fashions the lover as an object of pity. He means, in fact, to present the “poore balade” to his lady in hopes of winning her favor (v. 1506).

An even more desperate version of the eremitic metaphor appears in the subsequent ballade, where the speaker’s hapless situation is illustrated in starker terms: “My poore hert bicomen is hermyte / In hermytage of Thoughtfull Fantase” (v. 1511-1512)¹. A forced reclusion on account of “false Fortune, so full of gret dispite” (v. 1513)², this image of eremitism again is presented to the lady in an effort obtaining her “grace” (v. 1544-1547). In both of these examples taken from the first ballade series, religious solitude is figured as a pitiful estate analogous to the lover’s uncertain condition. Yet, the effect of the speaker’s claim to a contemplative “*profession*”, found only in the extended narrative passage unique to the English sequence, is quite different. The speaker’s confrontation with Venus proves to be a turning point in the English text, and the claim to be “*contemplatif*” moves beyond the eremitic conceits of the earlier ballades by providing a self-reflective critique of the poetic autonomy suggested by the roundel sequence. As a commentary on the roundels’ unaffiliated aestheticism, the language of religious solitude reveals the speaker’s need to identify his poetic compositions with ethical purpose, whether this purpose be erotic or religious.

BOETHIAN RE-FASHIONING AND THE *VITA CONTEMPLATIVA*

By characterizing his “*profession*” as “*contemplatif*”, the speaker momentarily chooses a non-amatory basis for his lyric practice, where initially this practice depended exclusively on the socio-political backing of the courtly tradition. His choice is significant: divorced from its original erotic context, the speaker assumes that he must have religious

1 My poor heart has become a hermit living in the hermitage of Thoughtful Fantasy.

2 False Fortune, so full of great malice.

authentication in order for his lyrics to be considered valid. Personal entertainment, formal virtuosity – these justifications do not present themselves as adequate grounds for the poet. The idea of poetry that is forwarded depends, for him, upon an ethical orientation, defined either in courtly or religious terms. Having quit Love's service, making his "bond be rent" (v. 2892), the speaker finds himself unaffiliated, unmoored from any meaningful attachment: "dwelle y so lijk as a masid man / That hath a bidyng and wot not where" (v. 4814-4815)¹. An unsatisfying effort to provide advice to his fellow banqueters serves to highlight the fact that the only legitimate way the speaker can find to account for his isolated existence outside of courtly practice is religious asceticism:

Now felle me when þis Iubile þus was made
 Not kowde y ellis but wandir vp & downe
 Musyng in my wakyng dremys sad.
 Myn ydill thought so besy gan me rowne
 That alle the hertis dwellyng in a towne
 Ne nad (no, no) so small to doon as y,
 For in No Care thus lyvid y, wot ye whi. (v. 4638-4644)²

This description of this restless state as a kind of "wakyng dremys" parallels the language used by Bernard of Clairvaux to describe the monastic life³, anticipating the conversation with Venus where the speaker makes the connection more explicit through direct reference to contemplation. Even the "ydil thought" here suggests the sin of *acedia*, a vice particularly threatening to monastic *otium*⁴. Given the passage's monastic inflections, one might even expect a kind of religious conversion to intervene and to redirect the narrative towards more explicitly moral conclusions. But despite the speaker's "esy lif" (v. 4649), he finds that of "alle the hertis dwellyng in a towne / Ne nad (no, no) so small to doon as y". His *otium* is

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- 1 I dwell much like a dumbstruck man, who has a dwelling place but does not know where it is.
 - 2 Now it happened to me that when this Jubilee was made I could not do anything but wander back and forth, musing in sorrowful waking dreams. My idle thought occupied me so constantly that not one of all the hearts dwelling in any town had so little to do as I did, for I lived in No Care as you know.
 - 3 See J. Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God: A Study of Monastic Culture*, trans. C. Misrahi, New York, Fordham University Press, 1982, p. 67.
 - 4 See S. Wenzel, *The Sin of Sloth: Acedia in Medieval Thought and Literature*, Chapel Hill, North Carolina, University of North Carolina Press, 1967.

not the *negotiosissimum otium* of monastic reclusion¹. Nor is it Augustine's *otium sanctum* that enables the search for truth (*caritas veritatis*)². At a pivotal moment of recognition, Venus's rebuttal to the speaker's monastic suggestion exposes the speaker's confused desires: "Ye do yowre silf confound!" (v. 4865)³. The fact that Venus is successful in her objection exposes a limitation in the speaker's poetic practice: the solitary kind of lyric he attempts can in no way be identified as contemplative. The only recourse available to the speaker, then, is to return to his former bond.

If the speaker's wish to label his lyric as the product of a contemplative existence signals a need for ethical affiliation to legitimize his work, Venus's successful refusal of the speaker's religious identification marks a distinct posture taken by the poems of Harley 682 towards the tradition that believes this conversion viable. As the language of religious contemplation suggests, the isolation of the speaker after his lady's death could possibly initiate a search for metaphysical, rather than physical, consolation. The most famous instance of this psychological trajectory would, of course, be Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*, a text that exerts an undeniable influence on Charles's poetry. One novelty of the Harleian sequence, though, is to turn a Christianized reading of Boethius on its head. Much like Lady Philosophy in the *Consolation*, Venus challenges a solitary writer whose lyric compositions have become misguided. But where Lady Philosophy famously banishes the Muses, who only encourage a self-pitying form of lament, in order that she might redirect the narrator to her more transcendent songs, Venus requires that the narrator pursue physical appetites through the traditional epistolary means. In the Love Goddess's domain, amorous impulses provide the only true ethical imprimatur. The fact that Venus's case triumphs so conclusively over the speaker's feeble claims for "contemplatijf" lyric may in fact express a discomfort with the increasingly theological versions of Boethian poetics. As fifteenth-century Boethian poetics capitalized more and more on the devotional implications of the *Consolation*, the poems of Harley 682 display a significant reluctance to assimilate this Boethian devotionalism as a means to justify a non-epistolary form of lyric composition.

1 Leclercq, *Love of Learning*, p. 67.

2 *De civitate dei*, 19.19.

3 You are confounding yourself! [Venus's retort suggests that the speaker is confusing himself for someone he is not.]

Such hesitancy was by no means universal. By the fifteenth century, Boethius's most widely read work had morphed into a variety of literary styles, from scholastic commentaries to illustrated love poems. In many of these interpretations, the appeals of Lady Philosophy modulated towards a more explicitly theological key, particularly through recourse to contemplative theology. Of the earliest surviving vernacular versions of the *Consolation*, the Old Provençal *Boeci* has been described as an "elaborate allegory of moral-spiritual ascent" that has "no counterpart in either the *Consolation* itself or the commentary tradition"¹, suggesting that the spiritualized interpretations that make up a large part of later versions of Boethius's work inhabit relatively new territory. But if the Provençal version represents an isolated phenomenon in the eleventh century, during the years of Charles's imprisonment devotional rewritings of Boethius's text flourished as an alternative to the socio-political demands of courtly composition. Sylvia Huot has, for instance, demonstrated how Alain Chartier reworks the classic Boethian narrative with an "overtly Christian, rather than philosophical, message" in his late work, *Le Livre de l'Espérance*, written in 1430². For Chartier, the Boethian narrative of the isolated writer instigates "a movement away from the courtly poetry of his earlier career", and *Espérance* substitutes, in Huot's reading, a truly consolatory devotional lyric in the stead of the love songs of youth³. Consolation is thus made possible by the Christian theological content invested in the form of lyric. Contrasted with the impermanent expressions of amorous desire, religious lyric provides lasting respite from the "mental deterioration" recorded in the work's prose sections⁴. Douglas Kelly's separate treatment of Chartier's work confirms Huot's reading and points to other late medieval writers, like Christine de Pizan and Jean Gerson, who likewise read and rewrite Boethius in explicitly theological terms⁵. By turning to sources of prayer and religious contemplation, late medieval writers augment what

1 W. Wetherbee, "The *Consolation* and Medieval Literature", *The Cambridge Companion to Boethius*, ed. J. Marenbon, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009, p. 282.

2 S. Huot, "Re-Fashioning Boethius: Prose and Poetry in Chartier's *Livre de l'Espérance*", *Medium Ævum*, 76, 2, 2007, p. 268.

3 Huot, "Re-Fashioning Boethius", p. 270.

4 Huot, "Re-Fashioning Boethius", p. 272.

5 D. Kelly, "Boethius as a Model for Rewriting Sources in Alain Chartier's *Livre de l'Espérance*", *Chartier in Europe*, ed. E. Cayley and A. Kinch, Cambridge, D. S. Brewer, 2008, p. 15-30.

Kelly calls the “Boethian model”, thereby uncovering a possible source for poetic invigoration. The fact that a writer like Chartier wishes to progress beyond a defunct form of courtly love lyric does not mean that poetry itself must be relinquished. Rather, “it is in devotional lyric that Chartier finds the combination of sweetness, pleasure, and edification that Boethius attributes to Philosophy’s songs”¹.

If Boethius’s platonic gestures toward metaphysical truth readily served Christian rewritings, despite noted hiccups, such as Boethius’s problematic notion of the “world soul,” the devotional appeal of the *Consolation* can be located in the way its numerous translations from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries employ a Latinate vocabulary rich with devotional implication. It is well known that vernacular translators of the *Consolation of Philosophy* regularly embed the explanatory glosses from their Latin sources into their translations, often with significant variations². Less acknowledged, though, is the way these vernacular works simultaneously reposition the semantic field within the text, moving from a philosophically inflected language to a theologically inflected one. In the famous ekphrasis which details the letters embroidered on Lady Philosophy’s garment, Boethius’s Latin reads, *Harum in extremo margine π Grecum, in suppremo margine θ, legebatur intextum*³. Later glosses on the Greek letters, however, significantly alter the philosophical terminology of *theoria* and *praxis* that the letters originally denoted. Jean de Meun’s vernacular translation of a Latin commentary on the Greek letters thus reads “une letre grezesche, tele [P] qui senefoit la vie active, et pardesus ou plus haut oule une autre letre, tele [T] qui senefoit la vie contemplative”⁴. Chaucer too conveys this identification into English, translating the same passage: “In the nethereste hem or bordure of thise clothes, men reddden ywoven in a Grekissch P (that signifieth the lif actif); and aboven that lettre, in the heieste bordure, a Grekyssh T (that signifieth the lif contemplatif)”⁵.

1 Huot, “Re-Fashioning Boethius”, p. 270.

2 See *The Medieval Boethius: Studies in the Vernacular Translations of De Consolatione Philosophiae*, ed. A. J. Minnis, Cambridge, D.S. Brewer, 1987.

3 *Sources of the Boece*, ed. T. W. Machan, Athens, Georgia, University of Georgia Press, 2005, p. 28. The library of Charles d’Orléans and Jean d’Angoulême contained a copy of Jean de Meun’s translation among numerous other versions of Boethius’s text. See Ouy, *La Librairie*, p. 121.

4 Machan, *Sources of the Boece*, p. 27, 29.

5 *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. L. D. Benson, Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1987, p. 398.

The explanatory glosses embedded in these vernacular translations invest the philosophical language implied by the Greek letters with the more religious implications of a Latinate lexis. Most notably, the move from *theoria* to vernacular versions of the Latin *contemplatio*, though typical, is not a pure translation without remainder. As Frédéric Nef has expressed in regards to the larger philological tradition of this kind of translation, “While *theoria* is a concept of philosophical origin, keeping a certain ambiguous ground between theology and philosophy, *contemplatio* is a concept bound to Latin Christian theology and, more specifically, to one of its subdivisions, spiritual theology”¹. Given a theological inflection, the scene detailing Lady Philosophy’s gown does not, in this case, suggest the superiority of philosophical vision; now it reproduces ecclesiastical discussions about the relationship of the *vita contemplativa* to the *vita activa*. On this topic, biblical exegetes would point to Jesus’s preference for Mary’s devotion over Martha’s busyness, where Mary, signifying the life of contemplation, chooses the “best part”². The influential Boethian translations of both Jean de Meun and Chaucer thus transmit a hierarchy which would be primarily understood as a monastic privileging of the contemplative life as spiritually superior to the active. Moreover, it should be remembered that in the fifteenth century the *vita contemplativa* was not exclusively the reserve of contemplative monastic orders. Personalized devotional practices that circulated in the vernacular made this elite form of devotion increasingly available to lay readers, as figures like Walter Hilton and Nicholas Love applied versions of the monastic contemplative life to popular lay piety well beyond the confines of the monastery³.

1 F. Nef, “Contemplation”, *The Encyclopedia of Christian Theology*, 3 vols, ed. J.-Y. Lacoste, London, Routledge, 2004.

2 See G. Constable, “The Interpretation of Mary and Martha”, *Three Studies in Medieval Religious and Social Thought*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995, p. 1-142.

3 This transmission may be understood in terms of the distinction between the monastic “contemplative life” and the devotional “contemplative attitude” described by M. E. Mason, *Active Life and Contemplative Life: A Study of the Concepts from Plato to the Present*, ed. G. E. Ganss, Milwaukee, Marquette University Press, 1961. For the application of monastic forms of living to lay piety, see W. Hilton, “Epistle on the Mixed Life,” *English Mystics of the Middle Ages*, ed. B. Windeatt, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994, p. 108-130. See also Nicholas Love’s notion of “solitary being” in N. Love, *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ. A Reading Text*, ed. M. Sargent, Exeter, University of Exeter Press, 2004, p. 24.

The laicization of monastic values, promulgated mainly through late medieval vernacular manuals, helps to explain the devotional tendencies of later Boethian poetics, since, for fifteenth-century lay readers of the *Consolation*, references to the *vita contemplativa* would signal a set of religious practices that emphasized interiority and spiritualized reading over externalized monastic rituals. For vernacular poets like Chartier or Christine de Pizan, Boethian devotionalism offered an accessible alternative to the traditional courtly models of epistolary exchange, although, as Daniel Hobbins's reading of Gerson suggests, the tendency may find its fullest expression in Jean Gerson's *Consolation of Theology*, finished in 1418, the most ambitious demonstration of the theological re-fashioning of Boethius for literary purposes¹.

What Boethian devotionalism offered to literary practice was an avenue for innovation, since it conceives of a textual dynamic quite different from that of the traditional love lyric. While the epistolary lyric maps onto a relationship of power where the lover must constantly assume a submissive stance, contemplative lyric opens up an opportunity for a more self-sufficient utterance. Placing the poems of Harley 682 within this emergent tradition helps to explain their repeated recourse to anchoritic imagery. In their presumed insularity, the selection of roundels sought the textual freedom that contemplative lyric offered. But where others unhesitatingly appropriated theological material for literary innovation, Charles's sequence fascinatingly resists this impulse, even though it seems to desire a compositional autonomy. Instead of introducing a suitable substitute for the epistolary practice of courtly love poetry, the speaker's attempt to justify his lyric practice as "contemplatif" fails to effect the desired transformation and the poetically conventional demands of Venus prevail.

The rejection is not simply a matter of the duke's disinclination for religious material. As evidence to the contrary, we might look briefly to the Latin devotional poem, *Canticum Amoris*, which Charles most likely wrote during the years 1429-1430 in concert with his frequent associations with the Grey Friars of London². Here, the contemplative life that

1 D. Hobbins argues that Gerson's *De consolatione theologiae* "reveals Gerson's ambition for permanence". See Hobbins, *Authorship and Publicity Before Print: Jean Gerson and the Transformation of Late Medieval Learning*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009, p. 78.

2 G. Ouy, "Un Poème mystique de Charles d'Orléans: le *Canticum Amoris*"; see also Ouy, "What Their Manuscripts Have to Tell", *Charles d'Orléans in England*, p. 47-60.

the Harleian poems seem so eager to join is given precise expression. Employing the language and sentiment of popular religious lyric (as Ouy describes it, “ce véritable pastiche de poèmes anglais du XIII^e siècle”)¹, the *Canticum Amoris* unflinchingly mines the poetic potential of religious contemplation, even as it conspicuously conforms to the linguistic and generic expectations of religious devotion. Patterned after the mystical ascension of a *scala perfectionis*, its devotional movement occurs in a shift from the outer to the inner life, where the mind and imagination provide the means to follow the spiritual injunction, *Contemplare trepidans thronum majestatis*². In its formalized ascent, traversing the visible world of nature upward to a mystical vision of the divine, the *Canticum Amoris* offers a performative experience – encouraged by repeated direct addresses to the soul – of the act of contemplation that it describes.

Exhibiting direct influence from the thirteenth-century, Anglo-French Franciscan John of Howden, Charles’s *Canticum Amoris* presents an affective devotionalism that remained popular in fifteenth-century England through the work of Richard Rolle, Walter Hilton, and others³. Its name, too, imitates the particular Canticles-inspired devotional genre practiced by Howden and Rolle, who each wrote their own *Canticum Amoris*⁴. But where these writers tend to focus attention on a visual object of meditation, most specifically through lengthy ekphrastic passages about the Passion or the Virgin Mary, Charles’s *Canticum* traverses quickly through such moments, evincing a greater interest in the broad imaginative survey attempted. Descriptions of fish, birds, beasts, trees, flowers, and fields preoccupy this wider vision (v. 61-108). So do the inner faculties of memory, intellect, and will (v. 109-184). The Passion does provide moments of pause – *Ecce Dei Filius* (v. 273) – and the suffering of Christ receives some elaboration in order to incite pity – *Tui nudum conspice corpus amatoris / Ac procera brachia tensa Salvatoris* (v. 290-291)⁵

1 Ouy, *La Librairie*, p. 153.

2 Contemplate fearfully the throne of majesty. All citations from the *Canticum Amoris* of Charles d’Orléans are from Ouy, *La Librairie*, p. 154-176. Translations are mine.

3 One of the books that Charles brought back to France after his captivity was a collection of religious verse by John of Howden (BnF ms. lat. 3757).

4 *Canticum Amoris, The Poems of John of Hoveden*, ed. F. J. E. Raby, London, Surtees Society, 1939, p. 206-240; “The *Canticum Amoris* of Richard Rolle”, ed. G. Liegey, *Traditio*, 12, 1956, p. 369-391. Translations are mine.

5 Ouy, *La Librairie*. See the naked body of your lover and the arms of the Savior stretched high.

– but such individuated moments of vision play relatively minor roles in a wide-ranging view that encompasses the world, the poet's inner life, and the heavenly realms. Even the adoration of the Virgin, which is central to Howden's influential *Philomena*¹, appears only briefly as a part of the celestial hierarchy surveyed in Charles's poem. In his description of the Virgin Mary, we find nothing of the close physical detail provided, for example, in Rolle's *Canticum*, similarly influenced by Howden: *Fronsque serenissima facit hunc languentem; / Crines auro similes carpunt conquerentem* (v. 14-15)².

Although the devotional topoi most central to this affective tradition do occur in Charles's poem, the *Canticum* presses forward in leaps and bounds, more interested in the capacity of the mind to encompass a universal vision than in any particular piece of that vision. Its primary concern seems to be the activity of the mind *percurrrens lucidas celi mansions* (v. 541)³. In tension with this constant movement is the problem of earthly transience, which such contemplative visions are meant to surpass. Movement suggests change, and change would seem to contradict divine permanence:

*Anima – heu! – misera, cur infatuaris
Ut quid transitorii usquam delectaris?
Nonne cum doloribus transeunt amaris
Cuncta temporalia quibus jocundaris?* (v. 605-608)⁴

With orthodox fervor, the passage suggests that the *temporalia* that entice the soul only lead to sorrow because they will inevitably pass away. The instability of earthly things belies their attractive appearances. As may be expected, heavenly stability counteracts earthly transience, providing the antidote to the inevitable sorrow that mortal life entails:

*Ibi semper, anima, mente conversare,
Non cessas ad gloriam illam anelare;*

1 "John Hovedens Nachtigallenlied", ed. C. Blume, *Hymnologische Beiträge*, 4, Leipzig, Reisland, 1930.

2 "The *Canticum Amoris* of Richard Rolle", ed. Liegey. The most serene face makes him languish; locks like gold seize the lamenter.

3 Ouy, *La Librairie*. Running through the bright mansions of heaven.

4 Ouy, *La Librairie*. Alas, wretched soul! Why are you fooled, why are you delighted in any way, by passing things? Do not all of the transitory things in which you take pleasure pass away with bitter laments?

*Hinc gemens et lacrimans disce suspirare,
Ad banc quoque properans jam noli tardare.* (v. 617-620)¹

This vision of heavenly stability must come simultaneously (*jam*) with the *gemens et lacrimans*, since it is to be entertained at all times. The stability implicit in the imperative *conversare* works with and against the repeated calls to action (*non cessas... properans jam noli tardare*). Contemplative stillness, the work suggests, requires a paradoxically active energy—a hurried, unceasing effort. The sweeping vision of Charles's *Canticum* formally enacts this energetic stability by drawing the imagination through a universalizing depiction of the natural world, the inner life, and heaven. What emerges as the most distinctive theological implication of this Latin devotion is given poetic expression through a formalized attention to the breadth of the imagination. By not settling on a single object of meditation, Charles's *Canticum* attributes an exorbitant capaciousness to the contemplative life.

Remarkably, this ability to sublimate the speaker's restlessness within an act of spiritual contemplation is exactly what Charles's English sequence declines. Instead, as Arn has stressed, the notion of "stabilnes" becomes co-opted by the inconstancy of Fortune². Compared with the devotional tactics of the *Canticum Amoris*, the Harleian work inverts the relationship between stability and transience such that stability is located within transience, rather than the other way around. Perhaps the most dramatic example of this ground of inconstancy appears in the arrival of the speaker's new love interest. Occurring simultaneously with the speaker's vision of Fortune, the second lady's appearance is further accompanied by an unsettled language that revolves almost as quickly as Fortune's wheel: asked by Venus, "But is hit and yowre lady that ther sit?"³, the speaker replies confusingly, "O yee – O nay, no, nyst – O yes, dowltes!" (v. 5108-5109)⁴. From the start, the speaker's "new serving" (v. 5349)⁵ betrays the uncertainty intrinsic to the amatory relationship, just as it hints at the speaker's betrayal of his former love. The implication is that the love pursuit provokes a lack of stasis, even

1 Ouy, *La Librairie*. Always dwell there mindfully, Soul. Do not cease to gasp before that glory. In this life, groaning and weeping, learn to sigh. And do not delay now your hurrying to this glory.

2 Arn, *Fortunes Stabilnes*, p. 9-11.

3 But is it your lady that sits there?

4 O yes – O no, no, it isn't – O yes, undoubtedly!

5 New service.

to the point of displacing the object of desire. But where the *Canticum* repositions transience within devotional stability, validating the poet's visionary movement, the chiasmic inversion of these concepts makes even stability suspect, perversely redefining the term as "fortunes stabilnes": Fortune's stability, a constant inconstancy. In the speaker's return to amatory pursuit, the concept of stability devolves into something lesser, as love's vacillations are mapped once more in the epistolary ballads that constituted the first part of the larger work. Within the reconstituted frame of the courtly love narrative, formal stability becomes monotony.

Critics have generally observed a tonal shift that characterizes the third lyric series in Charles's English manuscript. It is "less moving", "less carefully executed"; it contains "a lack of closure"¹. Not to be viewed as an aesthetic flaw, as these critics have rightfully argued, the sense of decline in the sequence's third part, both formally and tonally, provides an interpretive perspective on the work as a whole. I suggest that we can account for this "lesser" section by recognizing it as the formalized aftermath of a failed attempt to revitalize the lyric project. Such a reading does not require the equation of the speaker with the poet, but it does not exclude this association either. What becomes clear in this reading is that the practice of poetry is a central concern for the work as a whole, as its tripartite structure plays out a heuristic exploration of the possibilities available to courtly lyric. Having expressed a desire to depart from the traditional model of amatory pursuit, the speaker fails to locate another convincing option, so he returns, almost half-heartedly, to the same form of epistolary love relationship of the sequence's first part. The appeals of contemplative theology appear, in this reading, as a desire for a new kind of poetic practice.

Even as the sequence moves into its final phase, there remains a final trace of this desire for a poetics revitalized by contemplative theology. Lamenting the inability to stabilize his lyric project, the speaker compares his condition once more to that of an anchorite. But rather than identifying himself "as an ancre", this time the speaker addresses an anonymous anchorite as a "thou", cementing the difference between his life of instability and the recluse's stillness:

O Sely Ankir, that in thi selle
Iclosid art with stoon and gost not out,

1 Spearing, "Prison, Writing, Absence", p. 99; Arn, "Poetic Form", p. 26.

Thou maist ben gladder so forto dwelle
 Then y with wanton wandryng þus abowt
 That haue me pikid amongis þe rowt
 An endles woo withouten recomfort,
 That of my poore lijf y stonde in dowt.
 Go, dul complaynt, my lady þis report.

The anker hath no more him forto greue
 Then sool alone vpon the wallis stare,
 But, welaway, y stonde in more myscheef,
 For he hath helthe and y of helthe am bare,
 And more and more when y come where þer are
 Of fayre folkis to se a goodly sort—
 A thousand fold that doth encrease my care.
 Go, dull complaynt, my lady þis report.

It doth me thynke, Yondir is fayre of face,
 But, what, more fayre yet is my ladi dere.
 Yond on is small, and yonde straight sides has;
 Her foot is lite, and she hath eyen clere,
 But all ther staynyd my lady, were she here.
 Thus thynke y, lo, which doth me discomfort,
 Not for the sight but for y nare hir nere.
 Go, dull complaynt, my lady þis report.

Wo worthe them wich þat raft me hir presence!
 Wo worth the tyme to y to hir resort!
 Wo worthies me to be thus in absence!
 Go, dull complaynt, my lady þis report! (v. 5784-5811)¹

Contrasting his estate with the anchorite's, the speaker asserts that the religious figure is the happier of the two, even though the recluse

1 O Simple Anchorite, who in your cell are enclosed by stone and do not go out, you must be happier to dwell as you do than I am, who, wandering wantonly about, have chosen from among the crowds an endless woe that is without consolation, so that I stand in doubt of my own life. Go, dull complaint, report this to my lady. The anchorite has nothing else to worry him than to stare all alone at the walls. Alas! I stand in a worse plight, for he has health and I am bare of health. And I get worse when I arrive where there is a good variety of fair people in view—this increases my care a thousand times. Go, dull complaint, report this to my lady. It makes me think, "She over there is fair of face, but my dear lady is more fair. That one is slim, and she over there has straight sides; that one walks delicately; that one has clear eyes. But my lady would overshadow them all if she were here." So I think and, look, it makes me ill—not the sight that I see but the fact that I am not near her. Go, dull complaint, report this to my lady. Woe unto them who took me from her presence! Woe unto the time until I return to her! Woe unto me to be in this absence! Go, dull complaint, report this to my lady!

must remain in one place, “Iclosid... with stoon”. The physical barrier that prevents the anchorite from living within the world ultimately proves to be a blessing, providing a stability that the speaker’s own “wanton wandryng” lacks. The anchorite’s changelessness thus defies any potential negative connotations of the adjective “sely” – simplicity suddenly appears attractive. Formally, a single a-rhyme on “selle” and “dwelle” distinguishes the anchorite from the cacophonous world, highlighting the authenticity of dwelling in a single location, while an extended b-rhyme, which holds its resonance down to the penultimate line of the stanza, emphasizes a publicness in its first three rhymes (“out”, “abowt”, “rowt”) that the concluding rhyme, “dowt”, invests with a negative ambiguity. The free mobility that the speaker’s active life allows pales in comparison to the authenticity of anchorite’s dwelling.

Returning once again to the monotonous instability of the epistolary love narrative, the speaker can find no way to attain the moral – and, consequently, the compositional – rejuvenation suggested in a work like Chartier’s *Livre de l’Espérance*. Instead, he approaches despair, uttering one of his most strident sets of curses in the entire work (“Wo worthe them wich þat raft me hir presence! / Wo worth the tyme to y to hir resort! / Wo worthis me to be thus in absence!”). Even the ballade’s dreary refrain reflects a moral instability (“Go dul complaynt my lady þis report”), as the imperative “Go” contrasts with the anchorite who “gost not out”. The lyric’s own mobilization betrays a culpable association with the speaker’s “wanton wandryng”. The “dul complaint” assumes the repetitive drudgery of merely reporting the speaker’s miserable situation, a constant motion fraught with communicative difficulty. In pronounced contrast, the anchorite does not attempt any such utterances; he “hath no more him forto greue / Than sool alone vpon the wallis stare”. The silence of the anchorite reproves and diminishes the lyric endeavor that leaves the speaker “bare” of health. The speaker remains stuck in a fruitless compositional cycle, reiterating amatory platitudes bereft of precise meaning: (“Yondir is fayre of face”, “Yond on is small”, “yonde straight sides has”).

As this ballade makes clear, the life of solitude continues to entice, even after the return to the social form of epistolary lyric has been made. So the question remains: why does the speaker not resign from the social obligations that make him feel so wretched? Why does he not at least allow himself a “contemplatijf” poetics? Various psychological reasons

may be hypothesized, but I am suggesting that this refusal may be seen as the poet's metacommunicative concern for aesthetic propriety. If by the fifteenth century Boethian carceral poetics had come to suggest a means to lay spiritual ascent as well as a revitalized lyric practice, such possibilities are lacking here. Charles's English sequence shows itself to be aware of its theological potential, yet its Boethianism remains stringently secularized and amatory. As a commentary on the Boethian devotionalism of its day, the poems of Harley 682 cast a skeptical eye on the courtly appropriation of theological material. Yet if we are to assume the *Canticum Amoris* to be a product of the same mind that crafted the English sequence, we must not discount the poet's willingness to engage in theological speculation. The difference tellingly occurs along linguistic lines, even at a time when theological invention in the vernacular could claim numerous precedents. As a vernacular theologian, or at least as a theorist of vernacular theology, Charles d'Orléans may thus be more readily aligned with the linguistic reservations of the *Cloud*-author than with the lyric optimism of Richard Rolle. What theological information the Harleian sequence transmits comes in negation: a wary rejection of the possibility for courtly vernacular lyric to provide any kind of spiritual consolation.

It is worth noting, finally, that this rejection of contemplative theology as an *ars poetica* is nevertheless furnished with dramatic expression. While Charles's vernacular composition fails to assume the theological bravado of the Latin, its formal development relies upon a theological negation, so what may seem at first to be merely a conservative theological position – that theological language in vernacular poetry is, at best, awkwardly appropriated, if not misleading – becomes an important part of the sequence's subsequent unfolding. Its central thematic concerns of stability, consolation, and the intersection of art and life emanate from its extended performance of a compositional impasse. The religious life of solitude may not provide a fitting expression of the life of the vernacular poet, but it seems that debating the legitimacy of a contemplative vernacular poetics can.

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