Chaucer Essay, Research Paper

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Response II

The introduction of the Black Night in the Book of the Duchess, provides an interesting redirection of focus regarding the narrator?s tale of suffering. Such focus turns towards the Black Night and his story as the narrator gains compassion beyond himself and probes into the pains of the knight. However, the dynamics between them are not founded in brotherly-like support; instead, the narrator, although actually inferior to the knight, ironically appears emotionally superior, acting more like a fatherly figure willing and able to resolve the knights conflicts, while concurrently offering the narrator insight into, as well as alleviation from, his own pains. Interestingly, in taking a psychological perspective, the narrator seems to have created another ?self? in his dream in order to resolve his own love sickness.

Although the narrator does not digest most of the knight?s complaint, he creates an illusion that he listens well to the Black Knight?s story and offers confirmation of this inconsistency ?Ye han wel told me herebefore/ Hyt ys no nede to reherse it more? (lines 1127-1128). Ironically, the narrator prompts the Black Knight to continue his story and offer more details ?But wolde ye tel me the manere/ To hire which was your firste speche? (lines 1130-1131), yet the end of the story shocks the reader into the realization of the constant discrepancies

within the narrator?s character and whether he is truly understanding the knight?s complaint. However, one can merely interpret the narrator?s incoherency as a social defect, or in the alternative, as a necessity, enabling him to probe himself and listen to his own tale of love and loss at a distance, while ensuring that no part of the grieving process is left un-addressed.

Indeed, while it is acknowledged that almost any knight could fill the role of a heart-broken lover, it seems particularly relevant that the narrator specifically encounters the Black Knight. Perhaps it is to foster this idea of emotional likeness, as class does not differentiate for the purpose of love sickness, death or unfaithfulness. Certainly, little variation is noted between the stories of the knight and the narrator.

Lines 710-13 are indicative of this self-revelation. The compassionate narrator feels the Black Knight?s pain ?whan I herde hym tel thys tale/ Hyt dyde myn herte so moche woo? (lines 710,13), the same compassion he felt while reading Seys and Alcyone. However, in the next few lines (715-19) he becomes hypocritical as he advises the Black Knight to ?Have some pitee on your nature/ That formed yow to creature? while the narrator himself is unable to fulfill this task.

Thus, although emphasis is re-directed to the Black Knight?s complaint, the shift is essentially inclusive of the narrator?s tale, since he created the story as well as this other half of himself.