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## Food, Dream, and Writing in *Wynnere and Wastoure*

Liu Jin

### ABSTRACT

*Wynnere and Wastoure* is one of the earliest dream poems in medieval English literature. The poem, mainly a debate between allegorical figures Winner and Waster, is generally held to be a topical satire on the English King Edward III and the economic policies of his court. By looking closely at the poem's feasting scenes and multilayered dream narrative, this article argues that the poet is more concerned with maintaining his own position at the court as a professional "maker of myrthes" than criticizing the extravagant lifestyle of the nobles. The detailed descriptions of the king's drinking party and Waster's banquet, as well as of the tournament-like pageantry and the heraldry blazoning, suggest the circumstances in which the poet presents his work and implies his dependence on courtly patronage. Subtly hidden across the complicated narrative framework and between the lines is the poet's desire not to be excluded from the king's court and favor as well as his confidence in his poetic creation, or rather, his oral performance, hence his worthiness at the court.

**KEYWORDS** *Wynnere and Wastoure*, minstrel, food, dream, oral performance

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*Ex-position*, Issue No. 46, December 2021 | National Taiwan University  
DOI: 10.6153/EXP.202112\_(46).0001

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Food and feasting are common in medieval English literature. They serve different narrative or thematic purposes in different texts. In romances such as *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and *The Alliterative Morte Arthure*, scenes of sumptuous banquets contribute to the majestic courtly atmosphere; in the religious, allegorical dream of *Piers Plowman*, excessive eating and drinking is depicted as signaling moral corruption; and in *The Canterbury Tales*, food “frames the tales” since Geoffrey Chaucer sets the prize for the pilgrims’ story-telling contest as a free dinner at the Tabard Inn (Boyce and Fitzpatrick 5). *Wynnere and Wastoure*, one of the earliest medieval English dream poems, describes drinking and eating in several places. The most conspicuous are the details piled up on Waster’s lavish feasts (ll.332-67), which are almost unanimously interpreted as showcasing—along with hawking, hunting, and fashionable clothing—the extravagant lifestyle of the nobility. Besides, other lines about food consumption are scattered throughout the text. Such is the case with lines 213-15, showing the king inviting Winner and Waster to drink; and lines 216-17, a call for refilling the cups. This article, looking closely at food and feasting in the poem, argues that in *Wynnere and Wastoure* a feast provides the stage where the poet orally performs the dream poem and functions as one of the narrative levels and, through the complex multilayered narrative framework thereby constructed (composed of a prologue, an oral performance, and a conventional dream poem), articulates his deepest concern for food and favor as closely related with poets’ status in his days.

Extant in a single manuscript, British Library Additional MS 31042, *Wynnere and Wastoure* is believed to have been written around 1352, one of the earliest poems of the Alliterative Revival in the fourteenth century.<sup>1</sup> As a dream poem, its alliterative lines and predominantly moral concern set it within the non-Chaucerian tradition of dream poetry, along with *Pearl*, *Piers Plowman*, *The Parlement of the Thre Ages*, *Mum and the Sothsegger*, and *Death and Liffe*, but it is produced earlier than all major dream poems in both Chaucerian and non-Chaucerian traditions.<sup>2</sup> The poem, in its present incomplete state, includes a prologue (ll.1-30) and the dream poem proper (ll.31-503). The prologue con-

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<sup>1</sup> As is the case for most medieval poems, there has been a great deal of controversy over the date and authorship of *Wynnere and Wastoure*. For example, J. R. Hulbert dates the poem to a period between 1351 and 1366 in his article “The Problems of Authorship and Date of ‘Winner and Waster.’” I adopt the date proposed by Israel Gollancz, the first editor of the poem, in his *A Good Short Debate Between Winner and Waster* (Gollancz ii).

<sup>2</sup> A. C. Spearing uses the term “the Alliterative Tradition” to describe this group of dream poems in his monumental monograph *Medieval Dream-Poetry*. In my study of medieval dream visions, I borrow John Speirs’s term “the Non-Chaucerian Tradition” from his book *Medieval English Poetry: The Non-Chaucerian Tradition* and put dream poetry into two categories, namely, the Chaucerian tradition and the non-Chaucerian tradition.

tains elements of complaint against a degenerate age tainted by cleverness, deceit, and treachery, as well as elements of prophecy about a time when waves become wild and walls are down, low-born boys marry fair ladies, hares take up the hearth, and the end of the world is imminent. Most importantly, the prologue laments lords' recent neglect of poets in favor of mere buffoons. In the dream poem proper, we find a short pre-sleep prelude (ll.31-46), where the first-person narrator speaks about his wandering alone in the west and falling asleep on the bank of a stream, and a long dream (ll.47-503). Upon falling asleep, the dreamer sees two large armies in the woods confronting each other across a green plain. A king and a princely knight appear beside a red cabin on a cliff, and the king sends the knight to stop the gathered forces from fighting. The representatives of the two sides agree not to fight but to debate (ll.47-217). The remainder of the poem dwells upon the debate between Winner and Waster, two allegorical personifications (ll.218-455), and the king's judgment (ll.456-503). This poem is held by a string of critics to be a topical satire aimed at Edward III, a criticism of his court's economic policies. Israel Gollancz claims that "*Wynnere and Wastoure* is a pamphlet of the day; and its main purpose is to set forth the outstanding problems of Edward III's reign, more especially between the dates of Crecy and Poitiers" (ix). His view is reinforced and expanded in Thomas H. Bestul's monograph *Satire and Allegory in Wynnere and Wastoure*. Other scholars downplay the satirical elements in the poem but observe that the poem offers insight into contemporary life by inspecting two antagonistic tendencies: saving and spending. These scholars agree that the poet tries to keep a balance between the two extremes as both seem necessary for the economy of a kingdom (Spearing, *Dream-Poetry* 129-34; Speirs 263-89). More recent critics are drawn to the poem's ambiguities and try to justify its shifting views in various ways.<sup>3</sup> While most discussions recognize this poem as a dream vision, they do not pay enough attention to the function and effect of the dream narrative devices, neither do they give full credit to the role of feasting in the narration.<sup>4</sup> However, if we look

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<sup>3</sup> Harrington studies indeterminacy in *Wynnere and Wastour* by Wolfgang Iser's theory of aesthetic response; Jacobs, starting by looking at different types of debates, argues that the debate in *Wynnere and Wastour*, although intended to be balanced and resolved, is actually biased; James reads the poem as something akin to a burlesque of the stock conventions and regards the poet as a mocking humorist; and Trigg explores the "excess of signification" in the poem and draws attention to the poet's hesitation in distinguishing the two central figures ("Rhetoric of Excess" 105). See Harrington; Jacobs; James; and Trigg, "Rhetoric of Excess."

<sup>4</sup> In a previous article, I had approached the poem by scrutinizing two different emendations of one poetic line in the prologue and analyzed how the minstrel-poet narrator, faced with a dilemma where he has to both entertain and teach his courtly audience, resorts to subterfuges and indirections to cope with his situation (Liu). In that paper, I had noticed the multilayered dream narrative, but it was the TACMRS (Taiwan

closely at the multilayered narrative framework exquisitely made up by the prologue, the oral performance, the pre-sleep scene, and the dream, we will see the central place of food in this poem. On the one hand, a feast provides the stage where the poet performs his poem and strings together all narrative levels. On the other hand, on each narrative layer, there are subtle suggestions that the poet is more concerned with protecting his own position as a poet—more exactly, a professional minstrel dependent on the nobility—than with imparting economic or moral lessons to his audience.

### **The Feast and Oral Performance**

Dream poetry, Chaucerian or non-Chaucerian, in its more sophisticatedly framed narrative form, usually includes a prelude describing an often troubled narrator falling asleep with some difficulty in an otherworldly landscape, the dream itself, and a wake-up scene closing the whole poem. The narrative thus unfolds on two different levels: the usual pre-sleep and post-sleep scenes depicting the narrator's real life and the dream narrative dealing with the dreamer's experiences in the dream world. However, the *Wynnere and Wastoure* poet subtly fixes an outer narrative level embracing the dream poem in a recitation and thus delicately implies the narrator's identification with a minstrel-poet. This level is constituted by a few simple lines, which depict the narrator in the middle of orally performing the dream poem to an audience:

Bot I schall tell yow a tale that me bytyde ones (l.31)<sup>5</sup>  
(But I shall tell you a tale that happened to me once.)

And he that wilnes of this werke to wete any forthire,  
Full freschely and faste, for here a fitt endes. (ll.216-17)  
(And he that would like to hear more of this work,  
Fill up freshly and fast, for here a fitt ends.)

And he that wilnes of this werke to wete any forthire,  
Full freschely and faste, for here a fitt endes. (ll.366-67)

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Association of Classical, Medieval and Renaissance Studies) conference *Food: Sacrificial, Spiritual, and Secular* that inspired me to recognize the important role food plays in both the structure and content of *Wynnere and Wastoure*.

<sup>5</sup> All quotes from this poem are drawn from Warren Ginsberg edition. I provide the modern English version, but with John Gardner's translation as a constant reference.

While there is no trouble at all as to the function of line 31 as the opening of the poet's recitation, much confusion and different opinions have evolved around the other lines, which are actually the same two lines repeated in two different places. Intriguingly, the context for both consists of the only two drinking/eating scenes in the poem. At one point, the king invites Winner and Waster to drink:

The kynge waytted one wyde, and the wyne askes;  
Beryns broghte it anone in bolles of silvere.  
Me thoghte I sowpped so sadly it sowrede bothe myn eghne. (ll.213-15)  
(The king looked aside, and called for wine;  
Servants brought it soon in bowls of silver.  
It seemed to me that I drank so much it bleared my eyes.)

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When the representatives of the two opposing armies come to pay their respect to the king, the king asks for wine and the servants bring it immediately in silver bowls. Dream narrators often use the expression "Me thoghte" in order to describe what they believe they experience in the dream. It creates the impression of blurry memory. Here the dreamer is no longer just an observer of what is going on; instead, he is invited to drink together with the king and the army representatives. This may be interpreted as an indication of his real desire to be near the king and especially to be part of his entourage so as not to be left out of the drinking party. The dreamer drinks so much that the wine blears his eyes. This line is very skillful in that it connects the dreamer's state (he is sleeping, so his eyesight must be blurry) with his dream experience. Besides, in the dream, when Winner berates Waster on his tavern revelry, he uses the phrase "blerren thyn eghne" (blear your eyes), thus linking the dreamer asleep, the drinking dreamer with Waster rioting in the tavern. It would suggest to the perceptive reader (or listener) that, if the dreamer enjoys the drinking party so much, what would be so wrong with Waster's spending money on wine? In a way, this cross-reference undercuts Winner's attack and downplays Waster's sin.

It is in such a context that the lines "And he that wilnes of this werke to wete any forthire, / Full freschely and faste, for here a fitt endes" appear, seemingly quite out of place. Scholars have different interpretations of these confusing lines. David V. Harrington's understanding goes as: "All (including the audience) fill their glasses before proceeding with the debate" (247-48), which does not make sense at all since he totally ignores what is suggested by "here a fitt endes" and says nothing about the poem. John Conlee, in his footnote to these two lines, correctly points out that "this embellishment is used to suggest a 'minstrel's call'

in an actual oral performance, in addition to signaling a division of the narrative” (80), but he fails to explain why a minstrel’s call appears *here*, in an actual oral performance. Derek Brewer keenly realizes that two different levels exist in these lines, the “fictional level” and the level that is “outside”:

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The poet breaks the frame here, destroying all perspective, putting himself completely *in* the poem at the fictional level (drinking the same drink as the characters) and in the next line putting himself right outside with his advice to the audience to fill up their cups, in parody of a minstrel’s call for a drink to help him along. (145-46)

It is strange, however, for Brewer to say that the poet “[puts] him completely in the poem at the fictional level (drinking the same drink as the character)” since here the poet is within the dream, first as onlooker and then as participant of the drinking party. In the next line, just as Brewer points out, the poet addresses his audience directly and asks them to fill up their cups before he goes on with the tale. From the above analysis, we can deduce two narrative levels. On one level there is the dream experience as presented by the poet, and, on the other level, the poet pauses in the middle of his oral performance for filling up the cups.

The call for drinks is repeated in lines 366-67, immediately after Winner’s detailed account of Waster’s profligate banquet (ll.332-59). Winner says that Waster entertains his four or five friends with so many dishes that each man in the world may “weep for sorrow.” He describes Waster’s luxurious dinner course by course. The table overflows with splendid dishes and looks like “a rayled rode with rynges and stones” (jeweled cross with rings and diamonds) (l.343): a boar’s head, bucks’ hindquarters, venison, roasted pies, meat pies, roast fowls, barnacle geese, swans, larks and linnets, rabbit stews, etc. In order to highlight the excess of Waster’s feast, Winner offers his own simple meals as a contrast: he eats “noghte bot worttes with the flesche, withowt wilde fowle” (nothing but vegetables with the flesh, without wild fowl) (l.346). However, the “disproportionately long” and “extremely evocative” catalogue backfires (Westphall 490). With his frugal meals, Winner appears pathetic if not envious. Regarding the debate, Speirs aptly observes: “It is doubtful who gains or loses more in the argument by the evocation of the feast, Winner or Waster” (283). More significantly for the development of the poem, it is only natural that the narrator pauses here and asks his audience to fill up their cups. As Thomas L. Reed has remarked, “the exhaustive description of delicacies appears to titillate more than to admonish the narrator, who again calls for a fitt to end—and for cups to be filled

in celebration” (276).<sup>6</sup> Just as the first call for drinks occurs when the dreamer sees the king and his guests drink, here the dreamer hears Winner give such a sensual and enticing list of foods that he, in the middle of his performance, cannot help asking for some refreshments for both himself and the audience.

Besides Conlee and Brewer, Stephanie Trigg, a recent editor of *Wynnere and Wastoure*, also comments on these repeated lines. She thinks that they “seem to be a stylistic remnant of the minstrel’s art” and that “the lines calling for wine are part of the poet’s overall fiction, reminding us of the dreamer’s presence, like the address to the readers at line 31” (*Wynnere and Wastoure* 31). While it is insightful for Trigg to relate these lines to line 31, she is vague about “the poet’s overall fiction” and hardly clarifies the location of “the dreamer’s presence,” which is essential for our understanding of the dreamer’s circumstances. Looking at line 31, lines 216-17, and 366-67 together, we can see that they make up another narrative level, which we can call the oral performance level. It is distinct from the dream narrative level, which is immediately inside the oral performance level. The dream narrative contains a pre- and post- sleep frame depicting the real experience of the dreamer, and the dream itself, which Brewer calls the fictional level. It is this oral-performance frame that reveals the circumstances in which the minstrel-poet performs his poem. It is a lavish party where the nobility gathers and, among other amusements, watches a minstrel performance. Knights and ladies and many other guests sit and enjoy food and drinks while listening to the oral performance. The minstrel-poet starts his performance with “Bot I schall tell yow a tale that me bytyde ones” (l.31). The “tale” formally begins in line 32. The minstrel-poet goes on about how he falls asleep and has a dream and then talks about his dream until near the end of section one. Trigg is right to point out that “certainly the fitt divisions perform little formal or structural function as the poem is too short (barely longer than a single fitt of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*) and its action too continuous to require these pauses” (*Wynnere and Wastoure* 31). Thus, the only reason for the poet to pause here and call for fresh drinks is because of the drinking scene in the dream or, more exactly, the drinking scene he is talking about. When the minstrel comes to this part, the king’s offer of wine reminds him that it is time for a drink. After this short pause to fill up, the minstrel continues his narration until—interestingly enough—another feasting scene. Since the two calls both appear immediately after a drinking or feasting scene, Trigg mentions that they “[have] been regarded as an ironic

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<sup>6</sup> Allan F. Westphal has expressed a similar understanding: “Interestingly, even the narrator finds Wynnere’s account inviting. Rather than just remain silent, he drops his fictional illusions by encouraging the audience to fill up their glasses before he proceeds with his next fitt” (490).

comment on the action of the poem, following the king's offer of wine and then the account of Wastoure's feast" (*Wynnere and Wastoure* 31). Nevertheless, instead of being ironic, by stopping twice in the eating (or drinking) scenes the poet highlights the importance of food's social function. In making the call for filling up the cups, he expresses his desire to socialize with his noble audience.

Therefore, by fixing an oral performance as the overall frame embracing the whole poem, the poet highlights his position as a professional minstrel whose job is to give an oral performance as part of the festive activities held at baronial or royal courts on important occasions such as weddings, ceremonies, and tournaments. Doubtlessly, as a minstrel-poet, how to satisfy his audience and secure his position and meals is of the utmost importance for him. Such a desire permeates the whole work by subtly cross-referencing all layers of the narrative, including the prologue, the prelude to the dream, and the dream itself.

## The Prologue

Gollancz believes that the poet in *Wynnere and Wastoure* is "certainly a professional minstrel, of humble rank" (ii); Albert C. Baugh also observes that the poet is "in all probability a professional minstrel of the old school" (204). Their judgment is mostly based on the prologue, where the narrator laments his threatened career and expresses his desperate wish for his talent to be recognized, among other things. The prologue contains three themes: unprecedentedly strange things are going on in the present age; there are ominous signs indicating the approach of the Doomsday; and true poets have fallen out of favor with their lords. Although deemed a commonplace complaint and prophecy of contemporary vernacular poetry (Turville-Petre; Flood; Bestul 55-65), the prologue conveys a central complaint that minstrel-poets, who used to be appreciated by their lords, are now neglected, their rightful place being usurped by child-entertainers who have no poetic talent and cannot compose real poetry:

Whylome were lords in londe that loved in thaire hertis  
To here makers of myrthes that matirs couthe fynde,  
And now es no frenchipe in fere bot fayntnesse of hert,  
Wyse words within that wroghte were never,  
Ne redde in no romance that ever renke herde.  
Bot now a childe appon chere, withowtten chyn-wedys,  
That never wroghte thurgh witt this words togedire,  
Fro he can jangle als a jaye and japes telle,

He schall be levede and lovede and let of a while  
 Wele more than the man that made it himselfen. (ll.19-28)  
 (Once there were lords in the land who loved in their hearts  
 To listen to makers of mirth that could find matters,  
 And now there is no good will among companions but faintness of heart,  
 Wise words within that were never wrought,  
 Nor ever read in any romance or performed.  
 But now a child upon face, without a beard,  
 Who can never compose through wit three words together,  
 For he can jangle as a jay and tell jokes,  
 He shall be believed and loved and esteemed for a while  
 Much more than the man that composed the poem himself.)

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The poet complains about how, in the past, lords wholeheartedly loved to listen to “makers of myrthes” (minstrel-poets), but now there is no good will or favor in noble company, which, according to Turville-Petre, may mean that “patronage, the material expression of a lord’s love, has given way to a cowardly feebleness of heart” (25); besides, now the “wyse words” spoken in noble society are empty and false and never put into action (l.22). Such false words can never be uttered or read in any romance, since romance is “the record of noble deeds, the reflection of the true values of courtly society” (Turville-Petre 25). Furthermore, during this period, young boys who can only repeat jokes without being able to put three words together by their own wit are more appreciated than the man who composes his own original poem. At the end of the prologue, the poet, despite his sense of loss and unhappiness, expresses his confident belief that, as time passes, his talent will earn him recognition:

Bot, never-the-lattere, at the laste when ledys bene knawen,  
 Werke wittnesse will bere who wirche kane beste (ll.29-30)  
 (But nevertheless, at the last when things are known,  
 Work will bear witness who can work best

These last two lines reflect a strong, assertive attitude on behalf of a “true poet” who will work to prove his ability in the poem that follows.

Although nothing is known about the *Wynnere and Wastoure* poet, we may infer from the prologue that he may have been from the west. He is worried about the present state of the world, although not so much as to believe the end of the world is just around the corner. He fears that true poets may not get what

they deserve but lose it to those jesters and janglers. In Turville-Petre's words, we learn of his "occupation and preoccupation" in the prologue (26). We can even agree with Spearing when he states, "The prologue conveys a conception, surprisingly elevated for an English poem of this date, of the vernacular poet as something more than an entertainer" (*Autobiographies* 24), but it is a shame that, for the *Wynnere and Wastoure* poet, it is only a conception revealing his wishful thinking. In the real world, unlike later poets (Chaucer, Langland) who hold relatively secure social positions and are in a position to worry about the status of poetry, minstrels are more dependent upon the patronage and favor of their lords, just as Spearing observes, "Earlier, vernacular poets had been no more than minstrels and story-tellers, entertainers who were of no special interest or dignity in themselves and whose mode of existence was justified simply by the satisfaction they gave to their audiences" (*Dream-Poetry* 5). Minstrels are proud of their performance, but they count on an appreciative and generous audience for a living. They hold this resentment against "child-entertainers" not only because these japers and buffoons bring shame to the minstrels' profession but because they prove a threat to their subsistence. The poet's anxiety about "food" and his earnestness to demonstrate his poetic skills will be felt in the poem to follow. The dream vision turns out the best form to conceal his deepest worry and desire.

### **The "Tale"**

The oral-performance frame and the prologue not only establish the identity of the poet as a professional minstrel but also reveal his worries about his position and his desire to be appreciated and accepted for his talent. In order to make a living by delivering oral performances, the minstrel-poet needs an audience. He has to work hard to win their hearts. The "tale" (the dream) he tells further conveys his innermost desires, understandably via insinuations. Besides, he seizes the opportunity to demonstrate that he can compose poetry about serious issues such as saving and spending, issues that profoundly affect people's daily lives and even the country's economy. Nonetheless, he has to be cautious in doing so because minstrel-poets are not in a position to "claim authority for themselves" or to impose "moral directives on their audiences" (Harrington 249).

Discussing the dream form in *Wynnere and Wastoure*, Thomas H. Bestul writes: "The dream vision has the capacity for allowing the author to conceal his intentions, or rather to express his point of view by indirection" (29). The poet in *Wynnere and Wastoure* masterfully uses a multilayered framing device to con-

vey his inner thoughts. Since the manuscript of *Wynnere and Wastoure* is not complete and the poem ends abruptly in line 503, there is no way for us to know whether the original contains the awakening of the dreamer or not. But Gollancz reasonably observes that, “[P]robably very little of the poem is lost. The dreamer no doubt was roused from his vision by the sound of trumpets, and found himself resting by the bank of the burn, the tale ending with some pious reflection, by way of conclusion” (ii). Notwithstanding what happens in the end, the pre-sleep stage and the dream are closely related and echo each other.

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The dream prelude is quite conventional at first sight. The narrator goes west, wandering alone on the bank of a stream. The sun is bright. There is a lovely wood beside a pleasant meadow, and many flowers bloom wherever he sets his foot. He lays his head upon a hill beside a hawthorn. Up to this point, it seems that the narrator is right in the “stock garden of dream delights—birds, hills, thickets, and stream,” as Jerry D. James suggests (246), but the birds and the streams are not the same as in other dream landscapes; instead, they are especially noisy and boisterous: The thrushes argue sharply against each other; the woodpeckers from the lowly hazels shout up to other birds; barnacle geese with their beaks make a ringing sound on the bark of trees; the bluejay chatters on high; the rough stream rushes wildly; the waves reach so high (ll.37-42). The dreamer complains that, because of the noise of the water and the birds, he cannot fall asleep until it is almost nighttime (ll.42-43). Brewer remarks that “this western landscape is harsher than the soft charms of the French and Latin originals of the conventional sunny May-morning opening of a dream-vision poem” (145). While it may be true that the western landscape itself is harsher, whether the birds are singing or arguing, whether the rushing stream is mesmerizing or disturbing mainly depends on the wanderer’s mood. The dreamer, in his state of anxiety over the future of the world but mostly over his own position, is not in the mood to enjoy the otherwise pleasant scene. Instead, by deliberately referring to the jay jangling (“The jay jangled one heghe, jarmede the foles” [l.39]), the poet hints at the real reason for his difficulty in falling asleep: when he hears the bluejay chatter, he cannot help thinking of those beardless usurpers who “can jangle als a jaye and japes telle” (l.26), and, consequently, the surroundings become annoying. Conversely, if the dreamer falls asleep against a background of upsetting noises and debates, it would be understandable that he witnesses conflicting armies and fierce contentions in his dream. There is another point to be made about these birds, which is well remarked by James: the birds’ “arguing and debating is an early announcement that the principal form of the tale is already breaking into the yet-idyllic countryside” (249). When the poet asserts that he

can compose poetry, he means it. Now he is showing his talent by referring back to the prologue and by foreshadowing the dream's content.

This dream of the narrator, according to Macrobius's medieval dream theory, belongs to the category of the *insomnium*, which "is caused by mental or physical distress, or anxiety about the future" and arises "from some condition or circumstance that irritates a man during the day and consequently disturbs him when he falls asleep" (qtd. in Kruger 21).<sup>7</sup> The narrator, weighed down by the troubles of his times and especially of his own and bothered by the surrounding noises that remind him of his rivals, falls asleep with much difficulty and is swiftly swept into a dream. Just as the foreshadowing implies, the dream is, in large part, an indirect expression of the poet's admiration for the luxury and extravagance and of his desire not to be excluded from such a world of pomp and pleasure. To put it simply, he longs to be recognized and accepted by the nobles' world. Whether in the scene leading to the debate or in the debate itself, we can see the poet's unconscious and conscious revelation of his innermost preference. Immediately upon entering the dream, the poet claims that he thinks he is "in the world" although he does not know where ("Me toghte I was in the werlde, I ne wiste in whate ende" [l.47]). This emphasis on "in the world" is intentionally meaningful: the differentiation from the more paradisaical and otherworldly setting of most dream visions is a clue to the poet's focus on this world, on economic and moral issues such as gaining and expending, avarice and extravagance, on the earthly life spiced up by tournaments, pageantry, banquets, and other lavish activities hosted by the king. As a poet who writes and performs for a courtly audience, he knows their concerns and passions well. "[S]peaking their language" is one way to win their favor and secure his position.

The poet makes no efforts to hide the identity of the king in the dream, but rather expects his audience to recognize him as Edward III and the knight as the Black Prince by means of an elaborate description of the emblems and motto of the Order of the Garter. The motto in question is "Hethyng have the hathell that any harme thynkes" (Evil for everyone who thinks on evil) (ll.59-68). Some of the emblems include the coat of arms the herald bears (ll.70-82), the king's costumes (ll.86-100), and the knight's armory (ll.109-18). King Edward III achieves some of the most glorious victories over France during the Hundred Year's War, which won him much acclamation and loyalty. Donald R. Howard, in his biography of Chaucer, describes the reign of King Edward III as "an age of ambition

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<sup>7</sup> Macrobius defines five categories of dreams in his *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio: oraculum, visio, somnium, visum, and insomnium*. See Kruger 21-23.

and an age of spectacle”:

As far as [Chaucer] could remember, English glory and chivalry were in the air. The royal household of his younger days was heady with the great victories of the age—Sluys in 1340, Crecy in 1346, and that most stunning of victories at Poitiers in 1356 when the French king had been taken captive. . . . The extravagance and ostentation of Edward and Philippa were part of the vibrancy of those times; when the nation was not at war, spectacular tournaments were held—in 1347, the year after Crecy, there had been nineteen, and there were many in the 1360s after the Treaty of Brétigny. (110)

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Edward III loves pomp and pageantry and enjoys hawking and hunting, jousting and feasting. As Howard puts it, he means “his reign to be a golden age of chivalry,” so he not only has a Round Table built but also creates the Order of the Garter (110). The *Wynnere and Wastoure* poet, as a professional minstrel, is naturally drawn to such extravagant activities in the hope of finding a performance job as part of the entertainment. He is fairly familiar with the procedures and facilities. The dream is a projection of this world which he longs to enter.

The opposing armies are like two companies of knights at the point of starting a jousting session.<sup>8</sup> The “caban,” with all its fancy decorations, is a pavilion set up at the tournament. The “wodyse” (a.k.a “Wildman”) bearing the coat of arms of the king could be the herald here. According to Ginsberg, “the Wildman was a popular figure of untamed strength in medieval pageantry, art, heraldry, and literature” (32). Besides, “‘dressing up’ had become common in tournaments by the end of the fourteenth century and the Wildman was one of the figures people dressed up as” (Ginsberg 32). After he conveys the king’s order to the two forces, the knight starts to list the various constituents of each army by describing the banners of different groups. The long description here is sudden and awkward. Whether it is made by the knight, as held by most editors (Gollancz; Trigg; Ginsberg), or by the narrator, as John Conlee insists, it seems a strange thing to do at this stage. The purpose of the poet, however, is to show his familiarity with the herald’s blazoning of the coat of arms. Gollancz remarks on the poet’s delight in the picturesque and deems it unnecessary to attempt to identify the heraldic devices since they are “wholly fanciful” (xii). It is quite probable that the poet has witnessed quite a few of Edward III’s tournaments and is much im-

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<sup>8</sup> Although Ginsburg reminds us that “Edward III’s tournaments consisted of series of single combats, not the mock battles of an earlier age,” the fact that the poet is here presenting mock battles does not compromise my linking of the poem with Edward III.

pressed by the crowds, the flying banners, and their overall magnificence, so that it would be easy for him to depict such scenes. According to the knight's introduction of the two forces, one side is a mixed army including warriors from all over Europe, the Pope, different orders of friars, lawyers, and merchants; the other side is composed of serious men of arms, bold squires of blood, and many bowmen. Howard notes the popularity of Edward III: "Since the victories at Crecy and Poitiers, Edward III was acknowledged the military genius of his age, and soldiers of fortune from all over Europe, glory and plunder in their hearts, flocked unbidden to Calais to join the English army" (70). It would not be much of a surprise to find such a large, mixed army in England.

In the part that precedes the dream, the poet, besides acting as witness of the gathered forces and the ostentatious pomp embodied by the tournament setting and the fully dressed-up king, herald, and prince, also makes occasional satirical comments on the religious orders and expresses his admiration for and worship of the king and the prince: "He [the king] was worthiere in witt than any wy ells" (He was the worthiest in wit than any man else) (l.56); the king was one of the noblest men. Those who love him deep in their hearts could ever see under the sun with their own eyes (ll.88-89). The prince "was youneste of yeris and yapeste of witt / that any sy in this werlde wiste of his age" (was youngest in age and wisest in wit / that any man in this world know of his age) (ll.119-20). These lines demonstrate the poet's efforts to identify with the dislikes and preferences of his audience as well as his desire to be allowed into the nobility circle, even if only as an entertainer.

Because of the narrator's status as a minstrel, the debate between Winner and Waster, the core of the poem, cannot be "a vigorous denunciation of the degenerate times during the reign of Edward III," as suggested by James (244). *Wynnere and Wastoure* is generally believed to be a critique of the social and economic problems of Edward III's reign. Winner, in his desire to hoard as much wealth as he can, personifies avarice while Waster, squandering away his wealth on horsing, hawking, feasting, and fashion, represents prodigality. Admittedly, since Edward III is in constant financial plight because of his many military campaigns on the continent and various extravagant activities between the wars, it is tempting to think of him as the target when Winner accuses Waster of spending thrifty people's hard-earned money on banqueting and luxurious clothing, of laying waste the land because of excessive revelry and merry-making. However, we should not simply equate the king with Waster. Gollancz has pointed out "the twofold aspect of [Edward III's] character," saying,

There was his love of pomp and magnificence, involving the heaviest expenditure—he was indeed Waster par excellence; and there were his consequent commercialism and dubious methods for satisfying his royal needs, efforts which found expression in his fiscal policy, his Free Trade policy, so that he might well also suggest Winner par excellence. (x)

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In fact, the poet makes great efforts to balance the two sides of the debate: there are in total four rounds of *flyting*, or verbal contention, with Winner as the speaker and Waster the responder. Their speeches take up almost the same number of lines. Whenever there is a charge issued by one side, it is followed by an answer or countercharge. The purpose of the poet is not to write “a satire directed at the extravagance and greed of Edward III” as supposed by Bestul (80) and many other scholars, but to weigh the advantages and disadvantages of saving and spending, accumulation and consumption, and most importantly, to show that he, rather than the janglers, can create serious poetic works on sophisticated topics, which also turns out to be flattering to his nobility audience since he presupposes that they are capable of understanding not only entertaining matters but also significant topics like economic laws. By letting the king judge the case, the poet displays his cleverness: even if he yearns for a chance to display his talent, he has a sense of propriety and knows better than appear to be teaching his audience from a position of authority. The king does not really judge anything but jokingly sends Winner and Waster to the places where they feel most at ease. This is because the poet cannot choose favorably between Winner or Waster.

Although the poet tries to be impartial when presenting the flyting match between Winner and Waster, inadvertently his own situation predisposes him to stand with Waster. The fact that Waster always speaks after Winner puts him in a better position to refute an accusation and launch a countercharge. When Winner calls Waster a destructive thief who destroys the goods he gathers in wisdom and denounces his lavishing spending on riotous revelry in taverns, Waster asks: if there is no waste, then, what is the meaning of hoarded wealth? (1.253). In defense of his willful spending on clothes, Waster claims,

It lyes wele for a lede his leman to fynde,  
Aftir hir faire chere to forthir hir herte.  
Then will scho love hym lelely as hir lyfe one,  
Make hym bolde and bown with brandes to smytte  
To schonn schenchipe and schame ther schalkes ere gadird. (ll.428-32)

(It well befits a lover to maintain his lady-love  
And beautify her fair look to further her heart.  
Then will she love him alone as she loves her life  
Make him bold and brave with brands to smite  
To shun scandal and shame where men are gathered.)

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The idea that a lover should please his lady so that she makes him brave in battle while avoiding scandal and shame is familiar to a noble audience as part of the code of courtly love. The knights and ladies in the audience would easily agree with Waster here, who seems to speak out for the aristocrats. However, Waster's loudest endorsement of class distinction occurs when he tries to defend his overflowing banquet table. He maintains that it is only proper that people from different classes live in different ways and "lords" and "lads" be entitled to luxurious or plain food according to their social status:

Woldeste thou hafe lordis to lyfe as laddes on fote?  
Prelates als prestes that the parischen yemes?  
Prowde marchandes of pris as pedders in towne?  
Late lords lyfe als tham liste, laddes as tham falls;  
Thay the bason and beefe, thay botours and swannes,  
Thay the roughe of the rye, thay the rede whete,  
Thay the grewell gray, and thay the gude sewes (ll.375-81)  
(Would you have lords to live as lads on foot?  
Prelates as priests that look after the parishes?  
Proud and wealthy merchants as peddlers of the town?  
Let lords live as they like, and lads as befalls them;  
These on bacon and beef, these, bitterns and swans,  
They the rough of the rye, they the rich wheat,  
These upon gray gruel, and they on good sauces)

Waster argues that privileged people like lords, high-rank clergymen, and rising merchants have a right to luxurious food while commoners, lower clergymen, and peddlers should subsist on rough provisions only. In Bestul's words, here Waster "portray[s] himself as an upholder of the stability of an aristocratic society, since luxurious dress and an expensive lifestyle are ways of properly differentiating the social classes" (76). Doubtlessly, the noble audience of the minstrel-poet would find such arguments appealing.

Waster's refutation of Winner's accusation of his lavish spending does not

stop with food consumption as indexing conformity with one's social class. He also argues that his expensive lifestyle helps feed the poor by making wealth flow:

With oure festes and oure fare we feden the pore;  
It es plesynge to the Prynce that Paradiyse wroghte.  
When Cristes peple hath parte Hym payes alle the better  
Then here ben hodorde and hidde and happede in cofers  
That it no sonn may see thurgh seven wyntter ones (ll.295-99)  
(With our feasts and our travelling we feed the poor;  
It is pleasing to the Prince that Paradise made.  
When Christ's people have a part it would please Him better  
Than if goods be here hoarded and hidden and kept in coffers  
That no sun sees through once for seven winters.)

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It may be arrogant for Waster to bring Christ into the picture by saying He would be pleased to see money circulate rather than be hoarded in chests. It is a complex matter to decide the extent to which extravagant expenses contribute to improving the life of the masses, but the idea of "feeding" is important for a lord and his loyal followers. When Winner and Waster are summoned by the king, they say, "Wele knowe we the king; he clothes us both, / And hase us fostered and fedde this five and twenty wyntere" (Well know we the king; he clothes us both, / And has us fostered and fed this five and twenty winters) (ll.206-07). The king is looked upon as someone who clothes and feeds his people. He is expected to be generous to his servants. If we think of the position of the minstrel-poet, we will realize that he is fed by the king's profligate feasts. The various parties and feasts are the stage for him to show his talent and thus earn his living.

Therefore, it is not difficult to see that the minstrel-poet cannot really satirize the king and the nobility. His central concern is food, and he writes and performs poetry to earn it. Trigg insightfully comments on the last two lines of the prologue as "the poet's advertisement for his own skills in the poem which follows" ("Rhetoric of Excess" 92). After the poet claims, "but nevertheless, at the last when things are known, / Work will bear witness who can work best," he begins his narration: "But I will tell you a tale that once happened to me." The "but" seems to remind himself that it is unnecessary to complain or talk empty; instead, he should get down to business by relating something serious. During his oral performance, he pauses twice for refreshments, asking the audience to fill up their cups and, more importantly, giving himself time to fill up his own cup, for it is he who needs food and drink to go on with his work. Thus, his call for drinks

seems to be saying this: those who want to know more about the tale please do not forget to fill up *my* cup, or I may not be able to finish it. Once the minstrel-poet is refreshed, he will carry on his performance, which the audience can enjoy along with wine and food. However, by stringing together the oral-performance frame, the prologue, the pre-sleep scene, and the dream, the poet in *Wynnere and Wastoure* subtly conveys to his “lords” that only when true poets are appreciated and well provided for can they serve well-wrought poetry along with exquisite food.

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\*\*Manuscript received 1 Dec. 2020,  
accepted for publication 15 Oct. 2021