



eCOMMONS

Loyola University Chicago  
Loyola eCommons

---

Master's Theses

Theses and Dissertations

---

1956

## Fortune in Chaucerian Tragedy

James Joseph Donnelly  
*Loyola University Chicago*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc\\_theses](https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_theses)



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Donnelly, James Joseph, "Fortune in Chaucerian Tragedy" (1956). *Master's Theses*. 977.  
[https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc\\_theses/977](https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_theses/977)

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses and Dissertations at Loyola eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master's Theses by an authorized administrator of Loyola eCommons. For more information, please contact [ecommons@luc.edu](mailto:ecommons@luc.edu).



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 License](#).  
Copyright © 1956 James Joseph Donnelly

FORTUNE IN CHAUCERIAN TRAGEDY

by

James J. Donnelly, S.J.

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School  
Of Loyola University in Partial Fulfillment of  
the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Arts

April

1956

## VITA AUCTORIS

James Joseph Donnelly, S.J., was born in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 5, 1929.

He attended S.S. Peter and Paul grade school, Norwood, Ohio, from 1935-1943. He attended St. Xavier High School, Cincinnati, Ohio, from 1943-1947, graduating in June, 1947. In August of that same year he entered Milford Novitiate of the Society of Jesus, and was registered at Xavier University, Cincinnati, Ohio. In August, 1951, he took up residence at West Baden College, West Baden, Indiana, and transferred to Loyola University, Chicago, Illinois. He graduated from Loyola in June, 1952, with the degree of Bachelor of Arts.

He began his graduate studies at Loyola University, Chicago, in July of 1952.

From September, 1954, to June, 1956, he taught Latin at St. Xavier High School, Cincinnati, Ohio. In November, 1955, he was appointed by his religious Superiors to Patna, India.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION: SOME DEFINITIONS. . . . .	1
A. Tragedy in Boethius and Chaucer. . . . .	1
B. Fortune in Boethius and Chaucer. . . . .	2
1. a power which is subordinated to God. . . . .	4
2. who fortune is. . . . .	4
3. how one comes to be ruled by Fortune. . . . .	8
C. Tragedy and Fortune defined. . . . .	11
II. FORTUNE AS SEEN HISTORICALLY. . . . .	13
A. Universality of the Notion of the mysterious . . . . .	13
B. Tragic poets and critics . . . . .	14
1. Grecian authors . . . . .	14
2. Roman view. . . . .	17
3. Medieval view . . . . .	18
Modern authors . . . . .	20
C. Summary and conclusion . . . . .	22
III. TRAGEDY AND FORTUNE PRIOR TO CHAUCER. . . . .	23
A. Medieval Tragedy prior to Chaucer. . . . .	23
1. There is no connection between medieval and ancient drama . . . . .	23
2. Plays reappear in the tenth century . . . . .	24
3. Tragedy is used with a new meaning. . . . .	26
4. Definitions of tragedy. . . . .	27
5. Boethius' definition, Chaucer's source. . . . .	28
B. Fortune in the Medieval Scholastic Tradition . . . . .	29
1. St. Augustine . . . . .	29
2. John of Salisbury . . . . .	34
3. Roger Bacon . . . . .	35
4. St. Thomas. . . . .	36
C. Fortune in Boethius, <u>De Consolatione Philosophiae</u> . . . . .	38
1. Summary of this work. . . . .	38
2. The tragic theme in Boethius. . . . .	40
3. A description of Fortune. . . . .	42

a. Externally . . . . .	42
b. Internally . . . . .	43
c. The wheel of Fortune . . . . .	47
d. Summary. . . . .	49
IV. FORTUNE IN CHAUCERIAN TRAGEDY . . . . .	51
A. Chaucer reflects Boethius. . . . .	51
1. Chaucerian tragedy depends on Fortune . . . . .	51
2. Particular reflections. . . . .	52
a. The prison theme . . . . .	53
b. Fickle Fortune . . . . .	54
c. A balanced view towards Fortune. . . . .	64
B. The tragic hero yields to Fortune. . . . .	65
1. Yielding to Fortune and renouncing God. . . . .	65
2. Fortune and Reason. . . . .	66
3. Higher and lower reason . . . . .	68
4. Fortune in <u>Troilus and Criseyde</u> . . . . .	70
a. Book One . . . . .	70
b. Book Two . . . . .	74
c. Book Three . . . . .	76
d. Book Four. . . . .	77
e. Book Five. . . . .	78
5. Summary . . . . .	79
V. CONCLUSIONS . . . . .	80
A. Chaucer depends upon Boethius for his Concept of Fortune. . . . .	80
B. Chaucer and Boethius used a Christian concept of Fortune. . . . .	81
C. Fortune had a direct causality upon Chaucerian Tragedy. . . . .	81

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION: SOME DEFINITIONS

The purpose of this introductory chapter is to determine what Boethius and Chaucer meant by the terms "tragedy" and "fortune". Once it has become clear what Boethius and Chaucer meant by these terms they will be used in the remainder of the thesis with those meanings.

Boethius alludes only once to tragedy to explain the downfall of King Croesus of Lydia. "What other thing doth the outcry of tragedies lament, but that fortune, having no respect, overturneth happy states?"<sup>1</sup> Chaucer adds a gloss upon this line. "Tragedie is to seyn, a dite of a prosperitee for a tyme, that endeth in wretchedness."<sup>2</sup> It is apparent that Boethius' and Chaucer's concepts of tragedy and Fortune are but slightly understood in these few lines, and hence details must be added.

---

1 Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius, The Consolation of Philosophy, tr. H.F. Stewart, The Loeb Classical Library, London, 1926, II, 11, 38-40.

2 Geoffrey Chaucer, "Boece", The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, Student's Cambridge Edition, ed. F.N. Robinson, Boston, 1933, 387.

Since tragedy in Boethius and Chaucer is explained in relation to their idea of Fortune, their meaning of Fortune must be clearly understood. Boethius and Chaucer had a Christian attitude toward the goddess Fortune. Of Boethius it has been stated that his purposes

were highly serious, as in Fortune he saw the instrument of God. By her he attempted to make a logical explanation for the apparently illogical and unjust uncertainties of life.<sup>3</sup>

Boethius "at times had made Fortune seem identical with Fate, and Fate itself as changeable as Fortune."<sup>4</sup> Although Boethius used "Fate" in the following passages, the reader may substitute for it the word "Fortune" and still keep Boethius' meaning. Boethius has declared that Fate is subject to Divine Providence.

The generation of all things, and all the proceedings of mutable natures, and whatsoever is moved in any sort, take their causes, order, and forms from the stability of the Divine mind. This, placed in the castle of its own simplicity, hath determined manifold ways for doing things; which ways being considered in the purity of God's understanding, are named Providence, but being referred to those things which He moveth and disposeth, they are by the ancients called Fate. The diversity of which will easily appear if we weigh the force of both. For Providence is the very Divine reason itself, seated in the highest Prince, which disposeth all things. But Fate is a disposition inherent in changeable things, by which

---

<sup>3</sup> B.L. Jefferson, Chaucer and the Consolation of Philosophy, London, 1917, 50.

<sup>4</sup> Howard R. Patch, The Goddess Fortuna in Medieval Literature, Cambridge, 1927, 19.

Providence embraceth all things together, though diverse, though infinite; but Fate putteth every particular thing into motion being distributed by places, form, and times; so that this unfolding of temporal order being united into the foresight of God's mind is Providence, and the same uniting, being digested and unfolded in time, is called Fate.<sup>5</sup>

In more summary fashion Boethius declared: "So that all that is under Fate is also subject to Providence, to which Fate itself obeyeth."<sup>6</sup>

Hence Fate is the hidden working out in time of the eternal decrees of Divine Providence. "Fate is the disposition inherent in movable things by which Providence binds each by its order."<sup>7</sup>

Chaucer follows Boethius rather closely by making Fortune also dependent upon God.

But O Fortune, executrice of wyrdes,  
 O influences of this hevenes hye!  
 Soth is, that under God ye ben oure hierdes,  
 Though to us bestes ben the causes wrie.  
 This mene I now, for she gan homward hye,  
 But execut was al bisyde hire leve  
 The goddes wil; for which she moste bleve.<sup>8</sup>

Later on Chaucer repeats this idea.

---

5 Boethius, The Consolation, II, vi, 21-44.

6 ibid., II, vi, 60-62.

7 Howard R. Patch, The Tradition of Boethius, New York, 1935, 149.

8 Geoffrey Chaucer, Troilus and Criseyde, The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, III, 617-623.



Fortune, which that permutacioun  
 Of thynges hath, as it is hire comitted  
 Thorough purveyaunce and disposicioun  
 Of heighe Jove, as regnes shal be fitted  
 Fro folk in folk, or when they shal be smytted,  
 Gan pulle away the fetheres brighte of Troie  
 Fro day to day, til they ben bare of joie.<sup>9</sup>

These two passages, just quoted from the Troilus and

Criseyde

regarding the Christian conception are deliberately introduced by the poet to show that Fortune is the shepherdess of us poor beasts only under the direction of 'heighe Jove', . . . and that therefore the plot does not move by chance but in accordance with an actual if concealed plan that does not exclude free will.<sup>10</sup>

Several questions must be answered before Boethian and Chaucerian tragedy can be defined. The first question is: Who is Fortune?

Regarding Boethius' belief, Patch says he shows "confusion of goddess and type".<sup>11</sup> Patch is merely stating more clearly here what he had said previously. "While Boethius is philosophically consistent, he is not consistent in his portraiture of Fortune."<sup>12</sup>

---

9 ibid., V, 1541-1547.

10 Patch, The Goddess Fortuna, 31.

11 Howard R. Patch, "The Tradition of the Goddess Fortuna", Smith College Studies in Modern Languages, Cambridge, III, July, 1922, 193.

12 ibid., 192.

However the problem of Boethius' twofold outlook toward the word "fortune" does not exist in this thesis. The author has carefully investigated Patch's article and he has concluded from Patch's discussion that in Books I, II, and III of the De Consolatione Philosophiae Boethius uses Fortune as a goddess. In Books IV and V he uses Fortune as an abstraction.<sup>13</sup> Therefore the Boethian Fortune in this thesis is always the goddess Fortune.

How did Chaucer consider Fortune? That is most important in this thesis. Robertson has stated: "The implications of Chaucer's usage of Fortune are not always immediately clear."<sup>14</sup> According to Patch however the usage of Fortune in Chaucer is clear.

Chaucer considered the problem of Fortune in "The Knight's Tale" and the Balade on "Fortune", where he borrows from Boethius and Dante to describe Fortune as an angel of grace subservient to God; the same idea is twice presented at important moments in the story of the Troilus.<sup>15</sup>

Since the specific references Patch mentions are the bulwark of

---

13 "Alfred who translated Fortune the goddess by worldsaeld, and fortune the abstraction by wyrd, kept the distinction clear". Patch, *ibid.*, 194. Also see Patch, The Tradition of Boethius, 49.

14 D.W. Robertson, Jr., "Chaucerian Tragedy", Journal of English Literary History, Baltimore, XIX, March, 1952, 2.

15 Patch, The Tradition of Boethius, New York, 1935, 71.

the Chaucerian concept it is clear that Fortune in Chaucer is a personal goddess. Root had previously arrived at the same conclusion as Patch. "Particularly Dantesque is Chaucer's method of incorporating into his poem the philosophy of Boethius."<sup>16</sup>

Therefore in this thesis Chaucerian and Boethian Fortune refer to a personal goddess, not a type or abstraction. But this is not a complete explanation.

Boethius and Chaucer were Catholics, and as such believed in one God. Hence any belief in the goddess Fortune as a physical person was repugnant to their religious beliefs and to the truth. Their Fortune could not be a goddess as such, but they rather conceived Fortune as a symbol. Of what did Boethius and Chaucer make the goddess Fortune the symbol? They have already answered that question. Fortune was a symbol expressed as a goddess of Divine Providence. But Fate and Fortune of which Boethius and Chaucer speak do not refer to a general working out in time of Divine Providence. Rather they are the symbol of the working out in time of a particular Divine Providence. Saint Thomas Aquinas has explained the point in question on Providence.

For human Providence is included under the Providence of God, as a particular under a universal cause. God,

---

<sup>16</sup> R.K. Root, quoted in Patch, "Troilus on Determinism", Speculum, Cambridge, VI, April, 1931, 233.

as Creator however extends His Providence over the just in a certain more excellent way than over the wicked. . . . But from the fact that He does not restrain the wicked from the evil of Sin, He is said to abandon them; not that He altogether withdraws His Providence from them.<sup>17</sup>

Divine Providence foresees the good that will come from evil by purifying a soul through evil. Hence God's permissive Will allows evil. Boethius and Chaucer knew and believed in this doctrine. The wretched downfalls of men of which Boethius and Chaucer speak are "included under the Providence of God", and they used the symbol of the goddess Fortune to explain the tragic downfalls in individuals corrupted by vice, and consequently abandoned by God.

A word of caution must be given concerning Fortune in Troilus and Criseyde. A Catholic author wrote a tragedy in which the plot and characters are derived from pagan antiquity. Chaucer quite naturally sets the ideas of the tragedy and the characters' words in the pagan background of Troy. As Chesterton stated:

The tale of Troilus and Criseyde is an anachronism, an anomaly; in some sense a prodigy and a portent. . . . It is a posthumous Pagan myth belatedly born centuries after the death of Pagan mythology. . . . Finally, it is a Christian story entirely about Pagans.<sup>18</sup>

---

17 St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica, tr. English Dominican Fathers, 2nd, London, 1920, 1, 22, 2, 312-313.

18 G.K. Chesterton, Chaucer, London, 1932, 142.

Consequently the ideas of the characters and of the whole work are not necessarily the ideas of the author, and the words the characters speak are not necessarily words the author would use. Although Chaucer's characters speak about the goddess Fortune, he might not personally give a nod to the idea.

Having gone this far in Boethius' and Chaucer's discussion of Fortune the author of the thesis will give one man's superficial discursive definition of their concept of Fortune. "Fortune is the power completely subservient to another God."<sup>19</sup>

How do Boethius and Chaucer allow for free will in a man's downfall? Lady Philosophy explains to Boethius in one sentence "Fortunae te regendum dedisti".<sup>20</sup> The important word is dedisti. Lady Philosophy tells Boethius that he freely handed himself over to Fortune permanently. Regendum, as a gerundive, expresses the necessity of the unhappy following events, meted out by Fortune. Once a person has dedicated himself to Fortune, he becomes a "slave" of this ruling goddess.

This explanation poses another question: "How does one 'yield himself to fortune's sway'?" The answer to this question

---

19 Patch, The Goddess Fortuna, 22.

20 Boethius, The Consolation, II, i, 58. Stewart's translation of this sentence runs as follows: "Thou hast yielded thyself to fortune's sway."

involves the flaw Boethius and Chaucer see in a specific person's character through which he yields to Fortune. This flaw is the hero's tragic error. Briefly, the hero gives himself over to Fortune by failing to exercise reason through an inordinate seeking for superfluities of the gifts of nature, riches, power, etc. In thus sinning the hero gives himself over to Fortune. Boethius says:

Is the condition of things so changed that a living creature, deservedly accounted divine for the gift of reason, seemeth to have no other excellency than the possession of a little household stuff without life? All other creatures are content with what they have of their own; and you, who in your mind carry the likeness of God, are content to take the ornaments of your excellent nature from the most base and vile things, neither understand you what injury you do your Creator. He would have mankind to excel all earthly things; you debase your dignity under every meanest creature. For if it be manifest that the good of everything is more precious than that whose good it is, since you judge the vilest things that can be to your good, you deject yourselves under them in your own estimation, which questionless cometh not undeservedly to pass; for this is the condition of man's nature, than then only it surpasseth other things when it knoweth itself, and it is worse than beasts when it is without than knowledge. For in other living creatures, the ignorance of themselves is nature, but in man it is vice.<sup>21</sup>

Boethius states that uncontrolled desires put a man in chains.

But neither can riches extinguish unsatiabable avarice, nor power make him master of himself whom vicious lusts keep chained in strongest fetters. And dignity

---

<sup>21</sup> Boethius, The Consolation, II, v, 72-89. The underlined words are not italicized in the original.

bestowed upon wicked men doth not only make them worthy but rather betrayeth and discovereth their unworthiness.<sup>22</sup>

Boethius expresses much the same idea in a later chapter of his work.

'For it followeth,' quoth she, 'out of that which is granted, that all their fortune, whatsoever it be, who are either in the possession or increase or entrance of virtue, is good; and theirs, which remain in vices, the worst that may be.' 'This,' quoth I, 'is true, though none dare say so.' 'Wherefore,' quoth she, 'a wise man must be no more troubled when he is assaulted with adversity, than a valiant captain dismayed at the sound of an alarum. For difficulties are the matter by which the one must extend his glory, the other increase his wisdom. For which cause virtue is so called, because it hath sufficient strength to overcome adversity. For you, that are proficients in virtue, are not come hither to be dissolute with dainties or to languish in pleasure. You skirmish fiercely with any fortune, lest either afflictions oppress you or prosperity corrupt you. Stay yourselves strongly in the mean! For whatsoever cometh either short, or goeth beyond, may well contemn felicity, but will never obtain any reward of labour. For it is placed in your power to frame to yourselves what fortune you please. For all that seemeth unsavoury either exerciseth or correcteth or punisheth.<sup>23</sup>

22 ibid., II, vi, 56-61.

23 ibid., IV, vii, 35-55. The underlined words are not italicized in the original. See also Boethius, The Consolation, II, v, 38-44: "Why rejoicest thou vainly? Why embracest thou outward goods as if they were thine own? Fortune will never make those things thine which by appointment of Nature belong not to thee. The fruits of the earth are doubtless appointed for the sustenance of living creatures. But if thou wilt only satisfy want, which sufficeth Nature, there is no cause to require the superfluities of Fortune."

Chaucer believes that sin is a departure from reason. In "The Parson's Tale" he says that a man should subject his desire for worldly satisfaction or "sensuality" to reason, and subject his reason in turn to God. When the sensuality rules, the reason loses sight of what Chaucer called the "verray good".

And ye shul understande that in mannes synne is very manere of ordre or ordinaunce turned up-so-doun. For it is sooth that God, and resoun, and sensualitee, and the body of man been so ordeyned that everich of these foure thynges sholde have lordshipe over resoun, and resoun over sensualitee, and sensualitee over the body of man. But soothly, when man synneth, al this ordre or ordinance is turned up-so-doun. And therefore, thanne, for as muche as the resoun of man ne wol not be subyet ne obeisant to God, that is his lord by right, therefore leseth it the lordshipe that it shoulde heve over sensualitee, and eek over the body of man. And why? For sensualitee rebelleth thanne agayns resoun, and by that wey leseth resoun the lordshipe over sensualitee and over the body. For right as resoun is rebel to God, right so is bothe sensualitee rebel to resoun and the body also.<sup>24</sup>

The author of the thesis will now define the terms "tragedy" and "fortune".

Tragedy meant to Boethius and Chaucer that a man suffers a downfall. His downfall is caused through the error or flaw he makes by misusing his reason. In departing from reason he yields himself to Fortune. Therefore, tragedy is the downfall

---

24 Chaucer, "The Parson's Tale", Canterbury Tales, 279.



which a man partially brings upon himself by his misuse of reason, and which Fortune then completes.

Fortune is therefore a symbol of particular Providence expressed as that goddess who has the power of causing a man's tragic downfall, a power given to her by God which she uses on those men who have failed to exercise proper reason in the use of creatures. Fortune may also bring good to a man, but in the end Fortune causes his downfall.

These are the meanings the author of the thesis will intend when he speaks of "tragedy" and "Fortune" in this thesis in reference to Boethius and Chaucer.

## CHAPTER II

### FORTUNE AS SEEN HISTORICALLY

The concept of the incalculable has been written about by poets, dramatists, and other writers throughout history. To go in and out among Fate, Fortune, Destiny, and similar conceptions falls to the lot of most writers on tragedy.

As one period of literature shades into another, and poets of different environments and cultures produce works of tragedy the use of Fortune will, of course, undergo a change. The relative use of Fortune depends upon the authors' philosophies and religions, as well as the period in which they write. As Patch has observed: "In tracing the history of the goddess we cannot always be sure of the precise conception for which she was a symbol."<sup>1</sup>

A cloud, we know, descends upon each age as it recedes in time, the cloud of change, so that for its motives, preferences, prejudices, its beliefs, opinions, acts and arts the intellectual sight grows dim.<sup>2</sup>

---

1 Patch, The Goddess Fortuna, 9-10.

2 W. Maçneile Dixon, Tragedy, London, 1924, 23-24.

A change in terminology might also evolve. Agamemnon may blame the goddess Fate for evil he has suffered. "In Grecian times the word Fortune implied pure Fate and was parallel with that of tuche. However it was not at all identical with the goddess of Chance, for in this period the Greeks saw the universe ruled by order."<sup>3</sup> In modern terms the prevailing practice is to deify Heredity and Environment and blame them for a fall out of success. So it is, and always has been that an individual likes to feel that his future depends upon his own decisions, but the mishaps of the past were thrust upon him.

Let us look to the Grecian poets to learn again from these bards the truth that Fortune, or Fate as they generally called it, plays an important part in their drama. Herodotus, speaking of a warning of the Delphic Oracle proclaims, "Evil was fated for him. . . . A greater power than we can contradict has thwarted our intents."<sup>4</sup> And that is the end of the matter!

For Aeschylus one thought governs all others, the thought of man's relations to the eternal powers. One of the insights Aeschylus showed with regard to this relationship was his acceptance without murmuring the burden of human suffering. He accepts sorrow and pain without complaint, as part of the

---

3 Patch, The Goddess Fortuna, 10.

4 Dixon, Tragedy, 91.

natural order. There is an unresolved struggle within the universe, a struggle which we know today as a conflict between God and Satan, but which Aeschylus knew as a war between the Good and the Evil. "For Aeschylus the thought of man's relations to the eternal powers governs all other thoughts, so that his chief concern is to accommodate the gods of Greece."<sup>5</sup>

For Aeschylus Fortune holds a dependence upon an hereditary curse or blessing. Events flow from events. Behind today stands yesterday. Long ago the clothes we wear were made; the towns, customs, language, even the lands were fashioned in ancient mills. Aeschylean drama rests upon a consciousness of the partnership of man with nature and of one generation with another. Men are unable to shake themselves loose from the past. The present dwelling place, hence is a dwelling of necessity.

Man is a fated sufferer, surrounded by indifferent powers; there is injustice in the very fabric of the world, written over it indeed in letters of fire; the stricken are not the guilty only nor yet the foolish, but often the noblest, the wisest, and the best--to this creed, honest, true and simple, we may cite Aeschylus as a clear if unwilling witness, 'a yeasaying without reserve to suffering's self, to guilt's self, to all that is questionable and strange in existence.' There is neither nervousness nor sentimentality in his creed. Sin and error are the dark inheritance of the human race and the misery that accompanies them; yet they have their commendable uses, for though transgression, whether god-ordained or of human choice, be a sad necessity and suffering

---

5 ibid., 73.

its close companion, on the ladder of knowledge and of power there are these steps.<sup>6</sup>

Socrates viewed Fortune as something bad, connected with evil. Fortune meant bad fortune, and was synonymous with evil. Socrates says, "Evils, Theodorus, can never pass away, for there must always remain something which is antagonistic to good."<sup>7</sup>

The Greeks believed their gods were subject to the same emotions as mortals. Hence it was possible for the gods to be evil and envious of a prospering individual. If a god looked enviously at a man, sorrow would soon be inflicted upon him. Thus a catastrophe can be traced to the success or prosperity of the victim. Divine dislike for a rival's power, influence, glory or success was the motive for the misery meted out to the victim. The lofty peaks attracted the thunderbolts of Fortune.

Success itself, which carried a man to great heights of wealth, fame, victory, fortune, seemed in the Greek view to bring forth, as its natural fruit, disaster, to be dangerous, an offense to the masterful gods, who were careful to restrict rather than enlarge the sphere of human happiness.<sup>8</sup>

This belief is consistent with the ancient Greek adage: Nothing

---

6 ibid., 78-79.

7 ibid., 178.

8 ibid., 84-85.

in excess. Jealousy, then, seems to be the motive for the spiteful and retributive gods of the Greeks to strike down misfortune upon men.

In Roman history Fortune was one of the pagan deities. In this period Fortune was a fickle goddess. The Romans regarded the universe as the realm of the mutable and haphazard forces, which we characterize and generalize as "chance". "In the Roman period, in which order was rejected and caprice emphasized Fortune meant the goddess of chance."<sup>9</sup> By references in Saint Augustine, which will be given in the next chapter, it is clear that Fortune had remained alive among the people to his time. Special fidelity was paid to Fortuna Muliebris, Fortuna Dux, Fortuna Barbata, and the like. Fortune was identified with the term chance or caprice; here her chief characteristic is the personification of disorder.

Epithets such as saeca, fragilis, and meretrix grace this goddess; numerous temples were dedicated to her honor. In the Empire of Rome Fortune, the goddess of chance, grew in stature feeding upon the scepticism of the times. Men felt that life showed no signs of fairness. Whatever lies beyond death is at best dubious, so the most a man can do is to take what comes his way. Fortune represented for the Romans a useful, if at times, flippant, summary of the way things go.

---

<sup>9</sup> Patch, The Goddess Fortuna, 11-12.

The Romans tried to oppose her by showing courage, or by using reason, or by living the life of wisdom, or less commonly by devoting one's life to virtue.

By thus limiting her power, Fortune ceases to be considered as the only important goddess in the skies. By degrees she became a subordinant figure.<sup>10</sup>

In Christianity a new concept of Fortune was found in the idea of a rational God. We must not believe though that all Christians were ready to accept the idea of a rational God who gave a meaning to virtue. There were many who continued to see things in the same old way. The goddess remained as a convenient, and familiar figure. Worship to her survived in the Middle Ages, though not on the grand scale of the Roman Era.

Readjustment was necessary for the Roman goddess to flourish in her new background. Complete fickleness, formerly assigned to the goddess, was incompatible with the belief that even the hairs of a man's head are numbered. The opposition of Catholic writers of the medieval period will be dealt with in the following chapter. Let it be stated here that despite the attempts of Catholic writers to rule her out of existence altogether a compromise was successfully worked out by many of the poets, notable among whom was the great Italian, Dante. He

---

10 ibid., 13.

united the pagan and Christian traditions, the capricious goddess becoming a ministering angel completely subservient to the Christian God. She still appears to be arbitrary but has her own method concealed in her apparent madness.

And Dante, in that strange passage of the Inferno, assigns to her capricious deity a place in the Creator's scheme. 'This fortune, of whom thou speakest', he asks his guide, 'who is she,' and is answered that Transcendent Wisdom has ordained her place, with power to change the possession of life's vanities from race to race, from family to family. Beyond human knowledge are her ways, her permutations cease not.<sup>11</sup>

Dante's concept of Fortune was the best representation in the Medieval period. She was also constantly praised and portrayed as a very powerful goddess by other authors or artists.

Fortune as represented in Medieval art and literature was a living, potent, and terrible force. . . . Fortune allegorically, was made to explain all the ups and downs of the violent times in which the people of the Middle Ages lived. In fact, so vividly did she come to be conceived that in their literature she is represented as a real and actual force, a goddess as powerful as was Minerva or Juno to the Romans.<sup>12</sup>

Boethius is the source of the Chaucerian concept of Fortune, as is apparent from the quotations in Chapter One. Boethius was Christian in his concept of Fortune, for he subordinated the fickle Fortune to Divine Providence. In the fol-

---

11 Dixon, Tragedy, 43-44.

12 Jefferson, Chaucer and the Consolation, 49.



lowing two chapters the author of the thesis will show in detail the connection between Boethius and Chaucer regarding Fortune.

Fortune did not disappear in literature after Chaucer. Modern writers wrote about her. Consider Shakespeare's view of Fortune. Shakespeare has turned from the discussion of great world wide problems to personal psychological interests. He used Fortune as a pale, conventional deity, regarding her as the sign of change or chance. Emilia says, "That handkerchief. . . I found by Fortune, and did give my husband."<sup>13</sup>

In Hamlet Shakespeare portrays a hero who is entangled by the accident of his birth, from no personal choice, and wholly against his will in the knot of circumstances. A simple explanation of this tragedy would be to place the blame, not on Hamlet, but on Fortune's workings.

Many other English literary writers ascribed power to Fortune. Listen to the poet Milton.

Milton, too, for all his faith in the divine government of the world, allowed to Fortune, a power beneath the moon, dominion over mortals and makes the lofty, grave tragedians of the classic stage treat 'of fate, and chance, and change in human life'.<sup>14</sup>

Among philosophers is Hegel, the famous father of the

---

<sup>13</sup> William Shakespeare, Othello, ed. Henry N. Hudson, Boston, 1909, V, 11, 226.

<sup>14</sup> Dixon, Tragedy, 43.

German school of dialectical process, the process of thesis, antithesis, and the resolution of the two opposites through synthesis. Hegel speaks of Fortune as chance in tragedy.

In this strange art we are brought, Hegel tells us, face to face with the terrible facts of existence, the unspeakable miseries, the triumph of evil, the tyranny of chance, the pitiable destruction of the guiltless. To these it gives their proper prominence.<sup>15</sup>

Schopenhauer makes room for a mighty and malignant deity, a personage of the greatest importance, to whom the ills of humanity are ascribed. He called this deity Antitheos.

"Schopenhauer was of the opinion that the representation of a great misfortune is alone essential to tragedy, and that blind Fortune might be the agent of it."<sup>16</sup>

Another German philosopher of the same tradition, Nietzsche, assigned a place in tragedy to the unknowable element of life, holding tragedy to be "the dancing ground of divine accident."<sup>17</sup>

The Romantic poet Shelley argued that "even crime in tragedy is disarmed of half its horror and all its contagion by being represented as the fatal consequence of the unfathomable

---

15 ibid., 188.

16 ibid., 42.

17 ibid.

agencies of nature."<sup>18</sup>

Thus from a short look at the history of tragedy the author of the thesis has shown that Fortune has been assigned a function in it. Indeed there is no doubt from experience that the downfall of men more often than not has been caused by some force outside man's control, a force which man is wont to call Fortune.

Think of life or tragedy as a divine law court, in which the dooms are proportioned to the mistakes of head or heart, and we wholly deceive ourselves. Conceive it rather under a different figure--the tide setting against the wind, the seas leaping high when the current of character makes against the gale of circumstance.<sup>19</sup>

The door to tragedy has turned for ages upon the hinges of Fortune!

In summary there have been three main attitudes toward Fortune. The first can be called the autonomous attitude which held that Fortune is an independent ruling power. The second can be called the compromise attitude which held that Fortune is a power which shares the universe with some other force. The third is the Christian attitude which holds that Fortune is completely subordinated to Divine Providence.

---

18 ibid., 138.

19 ibid., 42.

## CHAPTER III

### TRAGEDY AND FORTUNE IN THE MEDIEVAL TRADITION

In this chapter the author of the thesis will focus attention upon the medieval period. Three related topics will be considered. First, what did the medievals mean by tragedy? Secondly, how did Catholic philosophers look upon Fortune? And lastly, what was Boethius' concept of Fortune in detail?

Medieval drama in England owes practically nothing to the tragedy of glorious Greece and haughty Rome. Before the latter era of the Fathers of the Church these were closed accounts. Ecclesiastical writers from Tertullian and Saint Augustine onward vigorously condemned the current satires and farces. The theatre, which by this time had become degenerate, finally disappeared during the barbaric invasions of the sixth century. However a tradition of impersonation, which when accompanied with dialogue, amounts to drama, survived among the *mimi* or *histriones*, the actors dispossessed at the collapse of the theatre. These professional are similar in spirit to the *joculatores* and the *minstrales* of a later date. These types of

actors and story tellers form the physical link between the old drama and the medieval drama.<sup>1</sup>

When the Empire disintegrated, and the Roman Theatres were abandoned, the mimi and pantomimi survived. Since they had long been largely independent of the regular stage, they could find occupation, throughout the provinces, in private entertainments and in popular gatherings. The art of the pantomime, being more fragile and subtle, maintained itself, presumably, with some difficulty; but the coarser offerings of the mimes were readily marketed. It is generally believed that the mimi were absorbed into the great body of medieval nomadic entertainers who, in small groups, wandered along the routes of trade and pilgrimage, offering amusement at tavern, castle, or cross-roads along the way. Such groups might be known as minstrels, jongleurs, or joculatores, and among their activities might be included those of that ancient narrative poet and reciter, the German scop.<sup>2</sup>

When the plays reappeared in the medieval period during the tenth century, they had shaken off all contact with the Grecian drama, and studied only one Roman dramatist, Terence, who was honored as a master of life during the early medieval drama. His vogue as a school author was early and enduring, and the whole of medievalism with the exception of some few Catholic moralists, hailed him as a master of the wisdom of life. Terence in the words of Dr. Ward led a "charmed life in

---

1 E.K. Chambers, English Literature at the Close of the Middle Ages, 2nd, Oxford, 1947, 1.

2 Karl Young, The Drama of the Medieval Church, Oxford, 1933, I, 9-10.

the darkest ages of learning."<sup>3</sup>

In the tenth Century Hrothswitha, a Benedictine nun of Gandersheim, in Saxony, had taken Terence as her model for half a dozen plays in Latin prose in glorification of chastity and the constancy of martyrs. It is unlikely, however, that they were intended for representation.

Clearly Hrothswitha was one of the many whom Terence's style had enticed into reading salacious stories. Hence she purposed to employ his dramatic form for bringing before her readers not shameful themes such as his, but accounts of the laudable chastity of holy virgins. Her plays were to be an anti-Terence! She confesses that, even in the legends which she treats, the amorous blandishments of evil men caused her to blush; but she adhered to her purpose in the conviction that the greater the temptation of her heroines, the greater their glory.

.....  
 Although Terence was Hrothswitha's inspiration, she did not imitate him slavishly.<sup>4</sup>

At the beginning of the eleventh century, Notker Labeo, a monk of St. Gall, writes that he had been invited to turn the Andria, of Terence, into German. However, outside of Hrothswitha, the influence of classical tragedy or comedy cannot be found in any of the medieval plays. Liturgical plays were extensive at the time, but in manuscripts these, and other plays, are called Officium, Ordo, Ludus, Miraculum, Representatio, and the like, but very rarely

3 E.K. Chambers, The Medieval Stage, Oxford, 1930, II, 207.

4 Young, The Drama of the Medieval Church, I, 3-4.

comedy or tragedy, and never before 1204.<sup>5</sup>

For a proper understanding of tragedy in the medieval period its correlative, comedy, must be considered with it, for many medieval authors consider the two together.

The medieval notion of tragedy and comedy began to take a definite pattern in the middle of the thirteenth century. The two characteristics which really differentiate the drama from other forms of literature, dialogue and scenic representation, drop out of account, the latter entirely, the former nearly so. After being stripped of these two qualities, both tragedy and comedy are regarded among Latin writers as forms of narrative. Johannes Januensis writes in 1286 that tragedy is a narrative which concerns persons of high degree; it is written in lofty style, and beginning happily comes to a sad conclusion. Comedy on the other hand concerns itself with ordinary persons, uses humble and everyday language, and resolves its complication in a fortunate ending.<sup>6</sup> Even these distinctions are not all consistently maintained, according to Vincent of Beauvais, at

---

5 E.K. Chambers, The Medieval Stage, II, 210.

6 ibid., 209. The words of Johannes Januensis, from his Catholicon are: "Differunt tragoedia et comoedia, quia comoedia privatorum hominum continet facta, tragoedia regum et magnatum. Item comoedia humili stilo describitur, tragoedia alto. Item comoedia a tristibus incipit sed cum laetis desinit, tragoedia e converso."

about the same time, and the sad or happy event becomes the only fixed and invariable criterion.<sup>7</sup>

From such Latin authors the medieval notion of tragedy and comedy was transferred to similar compositions in various vernacular languages. Dante's Divine Comedy in Italian is just a story which begins in hell and ends in Paradise. The Latin version of his works gives Dante's concept of comedy and tragedy, as varieties of narrative poetry, with a cheerful and a melancholy note respectively.

Est comoedia genus quoddam poeticae narrationis. . . . Differt ergo a tragoedia in materia per hoc quod tragoedia in principio est admirabilis et quieta, in fine sive exitu est foetida et horribilis . . . comoedia vero inchoat asperitatem alicujus rei, sed ejus materia prospere terminatur. <sup>8</sup>

The distinctions between tragedy and comedy which were held before and during Chaucer's time have been prepared in a useful outline form by one author.

- i. The characters in tragedy are kings, princes, or persons who are great leaders; those in comedy, humble persons and private citizens.
- ii. Tragedy deals with great and terrible actions; comedy with familiar and domestic actions.

---

<sup>7</sup> ibid., 209. Vincent of Beauvais' words are the following: "Comoedia poesis exordium triste laeto fine commutans. Tragoedia vero poesis a laeto principio in tristem finem desinens."

<sup>8</sup> ibid., 210.



- iii. Tragedy begins happily and ends terribly; comedy begins rather turbulently and ends joyfully.
- iv. The systematic style and diction are elevated and sublime in tragedy; while those of comedy are humble and colloquial.
- v. The subjects of tragedy are generally historical; those of comedy are always invented by the poet.
- vi. Comedy deals largely with love and seduction; tragedy with exile and bloodshed.<sup>9</sup>

Tragedy, then, for the medievals prior to Chaucer's time, stood for "tragical legend" in narrative. Tragical legend meant that tragedy is the story of a noble man who stood a period of prosperity for a time by the aid of Fortune, but then falls from his high degree due to the wiles of fickle Fortune, and ends wretchedly. Implied then in the medieval concept of tragedy is the influence of Fortune. It already has been seen briefly that Boethius and Chaucer each directly attributed to Fortune the downfall of men. This influence will be explained more fully in the latter part of the present chapter as well as in the next chapter.

Fortune existed in a Christian form during the medieval period. The pagan goddess Fortune had nearly disappeared by the medieval period, but the poets, knowing the minds and hearts of the people, worked out a Christian compromise, creating a genuinely Christian figure which retained the title of Fortune with

---

<sup>9</sup> Henry Hitch Adams, English Domestic or Homiletic Tragedy, 1575 to 1642, Columbia, 3-4.

a lessening of the pagan cult.

Some Catholic philosophers of the medieval period strenuously endeavored to convince the people of the fact that Fortune did not exist, that she did not have any "being" at all. For instance, in one place Saint Thomas Aquinas, discussing the Physios of Aristotle, argues that Fortune had no esse or existence.

Et similiter est in omnibus aliis quae dicuntur esse a fortuna; quia habent aliquam aliam causam praeter fortunam. Et sic fortuna non videtur esse causa alicuius, et per consequens nec aliquid esse: quia non ponimus fortunam nisi in quantum aliqua ponimus esse a fortuna.<sup>10</sup>

Several centuries before St. Thomas' time there lived a famous light of Christianity, one of the Fathers of the Church, St. Augustine. He was not only influential upon his own age, but, through Anselm, his works and doctrine have been well known and employed down through the succeeding generations to our own times.

In his City of God, written between the years 413 and 426 A.D., St. Augustine condemns the goddess Fortuna Muliebris, the feminine Fortune. She is one of the traditional Roman goddesses, a goddess whom the Romans worshipped freely.

---

<sup>10</sup> Saint Thomas Aquinas, In VIII Libros Physicorum Aristotelis, in 8 volumes, Louvain University Press, n.d., II, 23.

To this supposed Deity, whom they call Fortuna, they ascribe so much, indeed, that they have a tradition that the image of her, which was dedicated by the Roman matrons, and called Fortuna Muliebris, has spoken, and has said, once and again, that the matrons pleased her by their homage; which, indeed, if it is true, ought not to excite our wonder. For it is not so difficult for malignant demons to deceive, and they ought the rather to advert to their wits and wiles, because it is that goddess who comes by haphazard who has spoken, and not she who comes to reward merit. For Fortuna was loquacious, and Felicitas mute; and for what other reason but that men might not care to live rightly, having made Fortuna their friend, who could make them fortunate without any good desert? And truly, if Fortuna speaks, she should at least speak, not with a womanly, but with a manly voice; lest they themselves who have dedicated the image should think so great a miracle has been wrought by feminine loquacity.<sup>11</sup>

This goddess, a subordinate of Jupiter, had to obey Jupiter in all things. "Or does Jupiter send her too, whither he pleases? Then let him alone be worshipped; because Fortune is not able to resist him when he commands her, and sends her where he pleases. Or at least, let the bad worship her."<sup>12</sup>

An earlier work of St. Augustine's is the Contra Academicos which he wrote to prove that man can attain certitude, and therefore need not be content with the merely probable in the realm of knowledge. St. Augustine directed this book, written at

---

<sup>11</sup> St. Augustine, The City of God, tr. Marcus Dods, 2 vols., New York, 1948, I, 156.

<sup>12</sup> ibid.

Cassiciacum in 386 A.D., as an attack upon the sceptics of his time. In several places St. Augustine deals with Fortune. He speaks of Fortune first of all as unreliable and fickle.

O Romanianus, would that from the grasp of stubborn fortune, virtue could snatch a man fitted for herself, just as surely as she suffers no man to be snatched away from her by fortune. In that case she would long ago have laid hands on you, and proclaimed you to be rightfully hers. She would have led you along to the possession of the most reliable kind of goods; and she would not have suffered you to be a slave to transitory things--even to those of fairest promise. But, either in accordance with our own merits or by virtue of nature's law, it is so appointed that the divine mind indwelling in mortals, shall never gain entry to the port of wisdom--where it cannot be tossed about by either a favorable breeze or an adverse gale of fortune-- unless fortune herself lead it thereto, either by manifest favor or by seeming adversity.<sup>13</sup>

Fortune however is governed by a higher cause, or as St. Augustine say, "a hidden order".

But perhaps what is commonly called Fortune, is itself governed by a certain hidden order. And what we call a matter of chance, may be only something whose why and wherefore are concealed. And perhaps nothing fitting or unfitting happens in a part, which is not suited and advantageous to the whole.<sup>14</sup>

---

13. St. Augustine, Answer to Sceptics, tr. Denis J. Kavanaugh, O.S.A., of St. Augustine's Contra Academicos, New York, 1943, 3 and 5. The underlined words are not emphasized in the original.

14 ibid., 5.

Later on in this same work St. Augustine considers why Fortune is needed to help a man acquire wisdom. St. Augustine believes that Fortune isn't necessary for a man who is wise, but it is most necessary for a man to become wise.

I say. . . that fortune is necessary for a man who is desirous of wisdom, but not for a man who is already wise. . . .

Do you think that fortune is of any aid towards the contemning of herself?

I do think so; for it is through the aid of fortune that he will be the kind of man who will be able to contemn her.

. . . . .  
 For instance, no one crosses the Aegean Sea without a ship or some other means of transport, or. . . without any suitable equipment or some kind of occult power. Yet when he has crossed over--provided, of course, that he have no other purpose than to reach the shore--he is ready to throw away and to contemn all the means by which he was borne. I believe that, in like manner, fortune is necessary for any man who wishes to reach the port of wisdom and, as it were, the most steadfast and pleasant country; for, to say nothing about other defects, if a man happens to be blind and deaf--and that is something which lies within the power of fortune--he cannot attain the object of his desire. But as he has attained it, although he is to be regarded as needing certain things that pertain to the well-being of the body, yet it is obvious that he needs them, not in order to be wise, but so that he may live among men.<sup>15</sup>

Summing up his argument St. Augustine believes that man's life is in the hands of Fortune. Obviously though he means man needs Fortune only to attain wisdom. "Yet, since life itself,

---

15 ibid., 131 and 133.

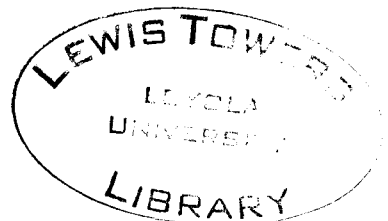
as we live it here, is in the power of fortune, and since only a living man can be wise, must we not admit that we need fortune's favor in order to be drawn to wisdom?"<sup>16</sup>

St. Augustine clarifies his meaning of Fortune in the Retractationes. He first defines it negatively by denying that Fortune is a goddess, then states positively that she is a "fortuitous issue of circumstances". Finally he makes clear that Fortune is frequently confused with Divine Providence, that what men commonly attribute to Fortune is actually a manifestation of God's Will.

I did not intend that term fortune to be understood as designating some goddess: I employed it to designate a fortuitous issue of circumstances in good things or in evil, whether they be of our own bodies or outside them; for although no religion forbids us to employ the words: by chance (forte), perhaps (forsan), by luck (forsitan), peradventure (fortasse), by accident (fortuito), yet the total event is to be attributed to Divine Providence. In fact I did not entirely neglect to refer to this; for I said: 'But perhaps what is commonly called fortune, is itself governed by a certain hidden order. And what we call a manner of chance, is perhaps only something whose cause and explanation are concealed.' Although I made that observation, I nevertheless regret the fact that in those books I made such frequent mention of fortune; for I see that men are woefully accustomed to say, 'Fortune has decreed this', when the expression ought to be, 'God has willed it'.<sup>17</sup>

16 ibid., 133.

17 ibid., 234.



Seven centuries after St. Augustine there flourished another famous philosopher, John of Salisbury. Despite this gap of time between the two philosophers, an echo of St. Augustine is found in John. He warns his fellow men to be careful of the fickle Fortune. He stated that it is the greatest danger to be one of the favorites of Fortune. John argues that man must fear Fortune because she destroys the reason, makes man a brute, and ultimately causes his destruction. In the next chapter the author of the thesis will develop this idea that Fortune destroys a man's reason.

The most dangerous situation, in my opinion, that men of eminence have to face lies in the fact that the enticements of fawning fortune blind their eyes to truth. The world heaps upon them its wealth and its pleasures and thereby kindles and fosters their craving for self-indulgence. The soul, deceived by allurements of many kinds, proving false to its own inner light, by a sort of self-betrayal goes astray as a result of its desires amid the deceptions of the outer world.

Success, implacable foe of virtue, applauds its devotees only to harm them, and with its ill-starred prosperity escorts them on their joyous way to bring about their ultimate fall by first pledging them in cups of sweet wine and, when they are intoxicated thereby, mixing in the draught deadly poison or anything conceivably worse. The more brilliant the success the denser the clouds that gather around their dazzled eyes. As the darkness thickens truth vanishes, virtue withers with severed roots, and a crop of vices sprouts; the light of reason is extinguished, and the whole being is carried headlong into the abyss of destruction.

Thus the creature of reason becomes a brute; thus the image of the Creator is translated into a beast by virtue of a sort of similarity in character; thus man degenerates and falls from his pinnacle, having become like to vanity for the reason that, swollen

with pride because of honors acquired, pride has destroyed his understanding.<sup>18</sup>

John of Salisbury left another indication of his mind on fickle Fortune when he stated that "If fortune wills, she makes a counsel teach; She wills again and lo! the teacher takes The consul's seat."<sup>19</sup>

John is as definite as St. Augustine on the point of denying Fortune exists.

What sadder exit to former joy! What unhappy end of a happy life! This is the way of those who are not in the labor of men nor are they scourged like other men. The counsel of God indeed casts them down while they were lifted up. All this is assuredly to be ascribed to Him rather than to Fortune, which is itself from Him or, as I am inclined to believe, does not exist at all: Thou shouldst not deem the goddess Fortune blind. There is no such being as she.<sup>20</sup>

Roger Bacon assumes a slightly different view toward Fortune. He believed that Fortune can have evil influences and cause misery to a man. Man should use bad fortune as a way of growing in virtue by suffering ill fortune for the love of God.

Ecce spectaculum dignum ad quod respiciat intentus operi suo Deus; ecce Deo dignum, vir fortis cum fortuna mala compositus! . . .

Ignominiam judicat gladiator cum inferiore componi, et scit eum sine gloria vinci, qui sine periculo vincitur. Idem facit fortuna: Fortissimos sibi

---

<sup>18</sup> John of Salisbury, Policraticus, tr. Joseph B. Pike, Minneapolis, 1938, 11-12.

<sup>19</sup> ibid., 173

<sup>20</sup> ibid., 173-174.



pares querit. . . .

Magnus es vir? Sed unde scio, si tibi fortuna non dat facultatem exhibendi virtutis? Miserum te judico, quo nunquam fuisti miser. Transisti sine adversario vitam. Nemo sciet quid potueris, ne tu quidem ipse; opus est enim ad noticiam sui experimento. Quid quisque possit nisi temptando, non didicit.<sup>21</sup>

St. Thomas More wrote a work on the topic of Fortune.

Unfortunately this book is out of print, and no copy is available to the author of the thesis. The title and a brief description are:

The Wordes of Ffortune to ye People: the Boke of the fayre Gentyl woman, that no man shulde put his truste or confydence in. . . . The remedy for injuries received from the goddess. . . is love virtue, it alone is free.<sup>22</sup>

St. Thomas Aquinas, the greatest philosopher of the scholastic tradition, is a follower of St. Augustine on the point of resolutely refusing to ascribe power to the figure of the goddess. Each makes it clear that in the final analysis what seems to come from Fortune has really a proper cause of its own. St. Thomas affirms that one deludes himself if he thinks the personified figure has a basis in reality.

Et dicit quod quibusdam videtur quod fortuna sit causa, sed immanifesta intellectui humano, ac si sit quoddam divinum et supra homines. Volebant enim

---

21 Roger Bacon, Moralis Philosophiae, ed. Eugenio Massa, Turici, n.d., 104-105.

22 Patch, The Tradition of Boethius, 110.

quod omnes fortuiti eventus reducerentur in aliquam divinam causam ordinantem, sicut nos ponimus omnia ordinari per divinam providentiam.

Sed quamvis haec opinio habeat veram radicem, non tamen bene usi sunt nomine fortunae. Illud enim divinum ordinans non potest dici vel nominari fortuna; quia secundum quod aliquid participat rationem vel ordinem, recedit a ratione fortunae. Unde magis debet dici fortuna causa inferior, quae de se non habet ordinem ad eventum fortuitum, quam causa superior, si qua sit ordinans. Praetermittit tamen inquisitionem huius opinionis, tum quia excedit metas scientiae naturalis, tum quia infra manifestat quod fortuna non est causa per se, sed per accidens.<sup>23</sup>

And further St. Thomas states:

Considerandum est autem quod si ea quae fortuito vel casualiter accidunt, idest praeter intentionem causarum inferiorum, reducantur in aliquam causam superiorem ordinantem ipsa; in comparatione ad illam causam non possunt dici fortuita vel casualia; unde illa causa superior non potest dici fortuna.<sup>24</sup>

The thought of these philosophers, while sound logically and generally representative, was not official nor definitive. Despite their courageous efforts to disprove the existence of Fortune, she continued on her primrose path through the medieval period.

One of the most influential figures of the medieval age, the remarkable Boethius, sets forth in a clear picture the figure of the goddess.

---

<sup>23</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, In VIII Libros Physicorum Aristotelis, II, 24.

<sup>24</sup> ibid., 33.

Since Boethius greatly influenced the thought of Chaucer, and since the purpose of this thesis is to indicate definite examples of this influence, the author of the thesis will show the development of Fortune in Boethius.

Boethius' celebrated work, De Consolatione Philosophiae, was widely read and imitated in the medieval period. No book was translated earlier into the vulgar tongue, the English translations beginning with that of Alfred the Great. One author describes it as a book "which it is hardly an exaggeration to call the source of all that is best in the literature of Western Europe."<sup>25</sup>

It is written with considerable literary skill in alternate passages of verse and of prose. The lady Philosophy appears to Boethius in his prison and listens to his account of griefs. He describes his former prosperity, his conscientious use of it, and his unmerited fall. In the second book Philosophy expounds to him, in the traditional manner of ancient philosophy, how the wise man is superior to Fortune, for his happiness depends on things which Fortune cannot take away.

The third book deals more analytically with the nature of good. It begins with a conventional but forcible refutation of the views which would find the good in wealth, honor, power,

---

25. D.J.B. Hawkins, A Sketch of Mediaeval Philosophy, London, 1946, 19.

reputation or pleasure. The latter part of this book has greater originality, for it develops a positive theory of the good in which the stimulus comes from Plato, its results, however, being applied not to an impersonal Platonic Idea of the Good but to a personal God. True happiness, therefore, consists in communion with God.

In the fourth book Boethius raises the obvious question how, if the world is governed by a benevolent Providence, the wicked are allowed to prosper and the good to suffer. Philosophy sets out to show that, while the good are independent of Fortune, the wicked become worse off in their prosperity by not knowing and not attaining the only real good. In reality any kind of Fortune is good for the good, for they can make themselves better by means of it, and any kind of Fortune is evil for the wicked, for it always gives them an opportunity of indulging their wickedness. The world is the scene in which good and evil work themselves out, but its apparently capricious fortunes are really the effect of an invincible fate which in its origin is the rational Providence of God.

This has raised the problem of Providence and free will, and the fifth and last book embarks on a discussion of the relationship of human free will to the divine foreknowledge and Providence. The solution is found in the contrast of the temporal character of human existence with the timelessness of God, to

whom all times are eternally and simultaneously present. God knows future free acts because they are present to him, and His eternally perfect knowledge entails that no accident can interfere with the dispositions of His Providence. Hence the last word of philosophy is that our hope and consolation is in God, who sees and governs and judges all things.

Boethius states that the greatest injuries one can receive from Fortune consist in the fall from a high degree, that is, from a state of happiness, success, or honor. "High to low" is the great theme in the medieval period. "Since this change in man's fortune is what really constitutes the medieval idea of tragedy, we may call this the 'tragic theme'."<sup>26</sup>

The tragic theme in the main effected the lives of kings.

Fortune, as represented in mediaeval art and literature, was a living, potent, and terrible force. Wars, violence of all kinds, and plagues made life very uncertain. The position of kings was especially hazardous.<sup>27</sup>

Boethius states that "both former and present times are full of examples that many kings have changed their happiness with misery."<sup>28</sup>

---

26 Patch, The Goddess Fortuna, 68.

27 Jefferson, Chaucer and the Consolation, 49.

28 Boethius, The Consolation, III, v, 3-5.

Boethius elaborates upon this tragic theme by several examples, thereby presenting short accounts of some tragedies. The first one concerns Croesus.

Wert thou ignorant how Croesus, King of the Lydians, not long before a terror to Cyrus, within a while after came to such misery that he should have been burnt had he not been saved by a shower sent from heaven.<sup>29</sup>

Death is meted out to Busiris, another tragic hero.

We read that Busiris, wont to kill his guests, was himself slain by his guest Hercules. Regulus had laid fetters upon many Africans taken in war, but long ere he found his own hands ever environed with his conqueror's chains.<sup>30</sup>

Finally, he tells of Nero's tragic end.

We know what stirs he made  
 Who did the Senate slay and Rome with fire invade,  
 Who did his brother kill,  
 And with his mother's blood his moistened hand did fill;  
 Who looked on that cold face  
 Tearless, and nicely marked her members' several grace.  
 Yet his dread power controlled  
 Those people whom the sun doth in the east behold,  
 And those who do remain  
 In western lands or dwell under Bootes' wain  
 And those whose skins are tanned  
 With southern winds, which roast and burn the parched sand.  
 Restrain the furious rage of wicked Nero's spite?  
 Mishap most bad, which doth the wicked sword  
 To cruel poison add!<sup>31</sup>

Boethius has described Fortune in a very picturesque

---

29 ibid., II, ii, 34-36.

30 ibid., II, vi, 34-38.

31 ibid., II, metron vi.

manner in his famous work. As Jefferson says, "In the Consolation, chiefly in Book II, Boethius was the first to visualize Fortune in this most personal manner. He imagines Fortune concretely, as coming to him and herself arguing her case with him."<sup>32</sup>

The author of the thesis will now proceed to see how Boethius describes the goddess. She has two faces, one beautiful, the other ugly, and she changes her countenance toward us. He says, "Thou hast discovered the doubtful looks of this blind goddess."<sup>33</sup>

As to her garments, her costume changes, just as her manner. Fortune is both kind and unkind. She has about her a bland air, ready to deceive anyone. Her deceptive way merits the epithet of "monster". "I know the manifold illusions of that monster, exercising most alluring familiarity with those whom she meaneth to deceive."<sup>34</sup>

Boethius reminds the reader of her unpleasant reputation for being unclean, reminiscent of the whited sepulchre.

And how far doth this error of yours extend, who think they can be adorned with the ornaments of another? Which can in no wise be. For if any adjoined

---

32 Jefferson, Chaucer and the Consolation, 49.

33 Boethius, The Consolation, II, 1, 33-34.

34 ibid., II, 1, 6-8.

thing seem precious, it is that which is praised, but that which is covered and enwrapped in it remaineth, notwithstanding, with the foul baseness which it hath of itself.<sup>35</sup>

Boethius does not dwell at length upon the external appearance of Fortune. Rather he concentrates upon the internal character of the goddess. He tells us that she does not feel shame and pity. "Was not Fortune ashamed, if not that innocency was accused, yet at least that it had so vile and base accusers?"<sup>36</sup>

In general she is an envious creature and the flattery she may give is only momentary, for she soon causes disaster.

I shall not need to labor much to bring these things to thy remembrance, for thou wert wont, when she was present, and flattered thee most, to assail her with manful words, and pursue her with sentences taken forth of our most hidden knowledge.<sup>37</sup>

Her envy is a manifestation of her inconstancy. When she envies a man's prosperity or success she soon deprives him of it.

When in public assembly, thou, standing betwixt thy two sons, didst satisfy with thy triumphant liberality the expectation of the multitudes gathered together, I suppose thou flatteredst Fortune, while she fawned thus upon thee, as her dearest friend. Thou obtainedst more at her hands than every other private man before thee. Wilt thou then reckon with

---

35 ibid., II, v, 89-94.

36 ibid., I, iv, 70-71.

37 ibid., II, i, 11-15.



Fortune? This is the first time that ever she frowned upon thee.<sup>38</sup>

Her inconstancy or fickleness manifests itself in a variety of ways. Her moods are sudden and unexpected.

If thou thinkest that Fortune hath altered her manner of proceeding toward thee, thou art in an error. This was always her fashion; this is her nature. She hath kept that constancy in thy affairs which is proper to her, in being mutable; such was her condition when she fawned upon thee and allured thee with enticements of feigned happiness.<sup>39</sup>

Fortune would cease to be Fortune if she ceased to change with her moods.

Thou has yielded thyself to Fortune's sway; thou must be content with the conditions of thy queen. Endeavor-est thou to stay the force of the turning wheel? But thou foolishhest man that ever was, if it beginneth to stay, it ceaseth to be fortune.<sup>40</sup>

She is deceitful but has tried to "cover with a cloud" her deceitful face.

While trustless Fortune me with vain favors crowned,  
That saddest hour my life had almost drowned:  
Now she hath clouded her deceitful face,  
My spiteful days prolong their weary race.  
My friends, why did you count me fortunate?  
He that is fallen, ne'er stood in settled state.<sup>41</sup>

As the sun changes from day to day, and the winds vary,

---

38 ibid., II, iii, 32-39.

39 ibid., II, i, 27-31.

40 ibid., II, i, 58-62.

41 Ibid., I, dedication, 17-22.

and the sea changes from calm to turmoil, so is Fortune's temperament frail and brittle. Boethius describes her manner as caducis fortunis.

When Phoebus with his rosy team  
 Showeth his lightsome beam,  
 The dull and darkened stars retire  
 Yielding to greater fire.  
 When Zephyrus his warmth does bring,  
 Sweet roses deck the spring;  
 Let noisome Auster blow apace,  
 Plants soon will lose their grace.  
 The sea hath often quiet stood  
 With an unmoved flood,  
 And often is turmoiled with waves,  
 When boisterous Boreas raves.  
 If thus the world never long tarry  
 The same, but often vary,  
On fading fortunes then rely,  
 Trust to those goods that fly.  
 An everlasting law is made,  
 That all things born shall fade.<sup>42</sup>

She is spoken of as a mother who nurses her child and then turns against the child.

When Nature produced thee out of thy mother's womb, I received thee naked and poor in all respects, cherished thee with my wealth, and, which maketh thee now to fall out with me, being forward to favor thee, I had most tender care for thy education, and adorned thee with the abundance and splendor of all things which are in my power. Now it pleaseth me to withdraw my hand, yield thanks, as one that hath had the use of that which was not his own.<sup>43</sup>

---

<sup>42</sup> *ibid.*, II, metron iii, 1-18. The author of the thesis has underlined the translation of caducis fortunis in this passage.

<sup>43</sup> *ibid.*, II, ii, 9-16.

In describing the characteristic of fickleness of Fortune Boethius has dwelt upon the inconstancy in dealing out her gifts. But Boethius also refers to her power, and her desire to show it. "You must take in good part whatsoever happeneth unto thee within the reach of Fortune, when once you have submitted your neck to her yoke."<sup>44</sup>

Fortune is very much at home at court. Consequently she deals particularly in royal favors, bestowing kingship, empire, and crown, and taking them all back at will.

The pride of fickle Fortune sparèth none,  
 And like the floods of swify Euripus borne,  
 Oft casteth mighty princes from their throne,  
 And oft the abject captive doth adorn.  
 She cares not for the wretch's tears and moan,  
 And the sad groans, which she hath caused, doth scorn.  
 Thus doth she play, to make her power more known,  
 Showing her slaves a marvel, when man's state  
 Is in one hour both downcast and fortunate.<sup>45</sup>

Since she shows her power at court, it is natural that she is represented as a queen. She is crowned and has power to rule her realm. "Thou must be content with the conditions of thy queen."<sup>46</sup>

She is considered as a giver, bestowing various kinds of dignities, such as honor, glory, and fame, and also the

---

44 ibid., II, 1, 49-51.

45 ibid., II, metron 1, 1-9.

46 ibid., II, 1, 59.

greatest of mundane gifts, riches.

Contend with me before any judge about the possession of riches and dignities; and if thou canst show that the propriety of any of these things belong to any mortal wight, I will forthwith willingly grant that those things which thou demandest were thine.<sup>47</sup>

She is known to be mean, and inflicts a wound upon Boethius. "I begin to think myself not able to encounter the assaults of Fortune."<sup>48</sup> The wound of which Boethius speaks is his imprisonment. But the more normal type of wound which she inflicts is the type treated above, the fall from a high position. Time and time again Fortune lowers man's estate. The victim thinks he is secure and when he least suspects it he suddenly falls.

Boethius associated the fall of a hero with the turning of Fortune's wheel. Boethius was the leader among the medievalists to develop the figure of the wheel of Fortune.

He was the first among medieval writers to set forth the picture of the Goddess Fortune and her wheel with anything like a full and proper characterization. Henceforth those who wrote dialogues of the kind, short of long, or who composed apostrophes or complaints to her, are in some measure indebted to The Consolation.<sup>49</sup>

---

47 ibid., II, 11, 5-9.

48 ibid., III, i, 6-7.

49 Patch, The Tradition of Boethius, 121-122.

According to Boethius the wheel does not stop. He relates that it is useless to attempt to stop it, that it revolves ceaselessly. "Endeavourest thou to stay the force of the turning wheel? . . . if it beginneth to stay, it ceaseth to be Fortune."<sup>50</sup>

Man is invited to play a part of the game of turning the wheel of Fortune. A person is invited to ascend with the wheel. He freely submits to endure the turns of Fortune, hoping that he may somehow struggle to the top, and having arrived there, he may manage to secure his position.

And shall the insatiable desire of men tie me to constancy, so contrary to my custom? This is my force, this is the sport which I continually use. I turn about my wheel with speed, and take a pleasure to turn things upside down. Ascend, if you wilt, but with this condition, that thou thinkest it not an injury to descend when the course of my sport so requireth.<sup>51</sup>

Fortune's wheel always turns, bringing the proud to low estate.

The wheel. . . means relative exaltation or humiliation in worldly dignity. It is turned by Fortune, and man is often actually attached to the rim, where he suffers the consequent changes of position.<sup>52</sup>

---

50 Boethius, The Consolation, II, 1, 59-62.

51 ibid., II, 11, 28-33.

52 Patch, The Goddess Fortuna, 159.

But it is important to keep in mind that the hero could determine beforehand whether he wished to get on the wheel of Fortune.

Boethius dwelt at length upon the picturesque and grotesque features of Fortune's character. The casual reader might become wrapped up in these phases of Fortune without averting to the control put upon the goddess. "Boethius suggested that Fate or chance, all that is apparently casual and changeable, is in the last analysis under the control of a rational God."<sup>53</sup> "His Fortune or his mobile Fate may justly be regarded as a personification of Aristotle's 'incidental cause' which is ultimately subservient to a rational deity."<sup>54</sup>

Of a connection with Providence, Fortune herself does not seem to be aware, for she works blindly and wantonly. But behind her and governing her, is the all-wise Providence. Through the adversities of Fortune, Providence creates in men what we now call character. Through adversity they are made strong.<sup>55</sup>

In summary Medieval tragedy had no connection with ancient drama. During this period dramas were written by few authors; the only notable author was Hrothswitha. Furthermore medieval tragedy, which was devoid of dialogue and scenic repre-

---

53 Patch, The Tradition of Boethius, 41.

54 Patch, ibid., 118.

55 Jefferson, Chaucer and the Consolati on, 50.

sentation differed greatly from the traditional concept. Medieval tragedy stood for a tragical legend, or a narrative in which a man suffered a downfall.

Philosophers discussed Fortune at some length. St. Augustine denied Fortune is a goddess. John of Salisbury and St. Thomas Aquinas argued that Fortune did not exist. Roger Bacon believed that the evils men suffered, which were attributed to Fortune, could benefit the person if he bore them for love of God. Finally, St. Thomas, commenting upon Aristotle's Physics, explains that Fortune is a per accidens cause.

Boethius scorned the arguments of some philosophers that Fortune did not exist. He took over the pagan concept of Fortune, baptized it, as it were, by subordinating Fortune to God, and then made extensive use of the figure in The Consolation of Philosophy. To Fortune he attributed the downfall, or tragedy, that men suffered.

## CHAPTER IV

### FORTUNE IN CHAUCERIAN TRAGEDY

In this chapter the author will establish two facts. First he will show the dependence of Chaucer on Boethius for his concept of Fortune. He will prove by examples that Chaucer's concept of Fortune reflects Boethius's concept. Secondly he will show how Boethius and Chaucer believe the tragic hero is a victim of his own failure by yielding to Fortune, using Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde to illustrate the theory.

Chaucer's definition of tragedy is embedded in a discussion of Fortune.

I wol biwaille, in manere of tragedie,  
The harm of hem that stode in heigh degree,  
And fillen so that ther nas no remedie  
To brynge hem out of hir adversitee.  
For certein, whan that Fortune list to flee,  
Ther may no man the cours of hire withholde.  
Lat no man truste on blynd prosperitee;  
Be war by thise ensamples trewe and olde.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Chaucer, "The Monk's Tale", Canterbury Tales, 3181-3189. "The Monk's Tale" is merely an amplification of the theme of The Consolation, III, v, 3-5: "But both former and present times are full of examples that many kings have changed their happiness with misery."



Fortune is also mentioned in the Story of Balthasar.

His sone, which that highe Balthasar,  
That heeld the regne after his fader day,  
He by his fader koude nocht be war,  
For proud he was of hearte and of array;  
And eek an ydolastre was he ay.  
His hye estaat assured hym in pryde;  
But Fortune caste hym down, and ther he lay,  
And sodeynly his regne gan divide.<sup>2</sup>

Fortune appears in summation at the close of the last story.

An hanged was Cresus, the proude kyng;  
His roial trone myghte hym nat availle.  
Tragedies noon oother maner thyng  
Ne kan in syngyng orie ne biwaille  
But that Fortune alwey wole assaille  
With unwar strook the regnes that been proude;  
For whan men trusteth hire, thanne wol she faille,  
And covere hire brighte face with a clowde.<sup>3</sup>

In the Troilus and Criseyde this same idea occurs.

Thou most a fewe of olde stories heere,  
To purpos, how that Fortune overthrowe  
Hath lordes olde; thorough which, withinne a throwe,  
Thouwel this boor shalt knowe, and of wat kynde  
He comen is, as men in bokes fynde.<sup>4</sup>

Hence the "dedes of Fortune" cause the downfall of the tragic hero, usually a person of the royalty, when he trusts her.

It was observed earlier that the usual type of injury Fortune

2 ibid., 3373-3380.

3 ibid., 3951-3956. It is significant to observe that in Boethius and Chaucer the definition of tragedy follows the account of Croesus.

4 Chaucer, Troilus and Criseyde, V, 1459-1463.

causes consists in a fall from a high position. However, one of the particular kinds of debasements Fortune may cause is to lead a hero to prison by her deceit. The prison theme, common in medieval literature, is particularly pertinent to this thesis, because its origin is in The Consolation of Philosophy. Boethius attributed to Fortune his unjust condemnation to prison. In real life, then, Boethius exemplified the prison theme which is referred to in several places in Chaucer.

In "The Knight's Tale" Arcite and Palamon are sent to prison for life on account of Fortune's wrath. "For Goddes love, taak al in pacience Oure prisoun, for it may noon oother be. Fortune hath yeven us this adversitee."<sup>5</sup>

In "The Monk's Tale" Bernabo, Visconti of Lombardy, is cast into prison, after his downfall from a high estate, and there he is killed.

Why sholde I nat thyn infortune accounte,  
Sith in estaat thow cloumbe were so hye?  
Thy brother sone, that was thy double allye,  
For he thy nevew was, and sone-in-lawe,  
Withinne his prisoun made thee to dye,  
But why, ne how, noot I that thou were slawe.<sup>6</sup>

And of Count Hugelino it is stated:

But litel out of Pize stant a tour  
In which tour in prisoun put was he,

---

5 Chaucer, "The Knight's Tale", Canterbury Tales, 1084-1086.

6 Chaucer, "The Monk's Tale", Canterbury Tales, 3591-3596.

and with hym been his litel children thre;  
The eldeste scarsly fyf yeer was of age.  
Allas, Fortune! it was greet crueltee.<sup>7</sup>

There is a modern Basque proverb which says, "Wind, women, and Fortune change like the moon", thus emphasizing the fickleness of these creatures of God. Chaucer, like Boethius, usually refers to the grotesque side of Fortune, especially to her inconstancy. Her fickleness includes her treachery in dealing with Zenobia.

Allas, Fortune! she that whilom was  
Dredeful to kynges and to emperoures,  
Now gaureth all the peple on hire, allas!  
And she that helmed was in starke stoures,  
And wan by force townes stronge and toures,  
Shal on hire heed now were a vitremyte;  
And she that bar the ceptre ful of floures  
Shal bere a distaf, hire cost for to quyte.<sup>8</sup>

Fortune's fickleness is brought out in her action of fitting a cap of glass on her victim. "Fortune his howve entended bet to glaze!"<sup>9</sup>

Criseyde once exclaimed that Fortune's wheel is brittle and fickle. "O brotel wele of mannes joie unstable."<sup>10</sup>

---

7 ibid., 3599-3603.

8 ibid., 3557-3564. This passage is reminiscent of caducis fortunis in The Consolation, II, met. 3, 15.

9 Chaucer, Troilus and Criseyde, V, 469.

10 ibid., III, 820.

She is vindictive and malign in her treatment of Nero in "The Monk's Tale". Thereby she has manifested her fickleness in another direction.

Now fill it so that Fortune liste no lenger  
 The hye pryde of Nero to cherice,  
 For though that he were strong, yet was she strengere.  
 She thoughe thus, "By God! I am to nyce  
 To sette a man that is fulfild of vice  
 In heigh degree, and emperour hym calle.  
 By God! out of his sete I wol hym trice;  
 When he leest weneth, sonnest shal he falle."<sup>11</sup>

Later on in the same story the monk says, "Hymself he slow, he koude no bettre reed, Of which Fortune lough, and hadde a game."<sup>12</sup>

Fortune is equally vindictive to the two lovers in Troilus and Criseyde.

But al to litel, weylaway the whyle,  
 lasteth swich joie, ythonked be Fortune,  
 That semeth trewest whan she wol bygyle,  
 And kan to foolles so hire song entune,  
 That she hem hent and blent, traitour commune!  
 And whan a wight is from hire whiel ythrowe,  
 Than laugeth she, and maketh hym the mowe.<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> Chaucer, "The Monk's Tale," Canterbury Tales, 3709-3716. See the similarity to The Consolation, II, metron 1, 7: Thus doth she play, to make her power more known."

<sup>12</sup> ibid., 3739-3740.

<sup>13</sup> Chaucer, Troilus and Criseyde, IV, 1-7. Lines 6-7 are similar to The Consolation, II, metron 1, 1-9. Line 3 reflects metron 1, lines 6-9.

The pride of fickle fortune spareth none,  
 And like the floods of swift Euripus borne,  
 Oft casteth mighty princes from their throne,  
 And oft the abject captive doth adorn.

As another sign of her fickleness she gave honey and gall to Zenobia. "But ay Fortune hath in hire hony galle."<sup>14</sup>

This same notion of her inconstancy in dealing with men is illustrated in the games she plays with men; chief among these is the game of dice.

Wel hath Fortune yturned thee the dys,  
That hast the sighte of hire, and I th'absence.  
For possible is, syn thou hast hire presence,  
And art a knyght, a worthy and an able,  
That by some cas, syn Fortune is chaungeable,  
Thow maist to thy desir somtyme atteyne.<sup>15</sup>

Fortune throws an ace, the lowest possible throw of the dice in the game of Hazard. "Thy dys Fortune hath turned into aas, And yet for thee ne weep she never a teere."<sup>16</sup>

Fortune laughs at the two lovers in Troilus and Criseyde. "Fortune hem bothe thenketh for to jape!"<sup>17</sup>

---

She cares not for the wretch's tears and moan,  
And the sad groans, which she hath caused, doth scorn.  
Thus doth she play, to make her power more known,  
Showing her slaves a marvel, when man's state  
Is in one hour both downcast and fortunate.

14 Chaucer, "The Monk's Tale", Canterbury Tales, 3537.

15 Chaucer, "The Knight's Tale", Canterbury Tales, 1238-1243. This and the following quotations are developments of The Consolation, II, ii, 28-29: "And shall the insatiable desire of men tie me to constancy, so contrary to my custom?"

16 Chaucer, "The Monk's Tale", Canterbury Tales, 3851-3852.

17 Chaucer, Troilus and Criseyde, V, 1134.

Fortune deals inconstantly in the gifts she bestows. She is a generous giver, but she frequently takes back those gifts she has bestowed.

In "The Pardoner's Tale" she is mentioned as the donor of the treasure. "This tresor hath Fortune unto us given."<sup>18</sup>

She is the giver of a wife in "The Merchant's Tale".

A wyf is hire yifte verrailly;  
 Alle othere manere yiftes hardily,  
 As londes, rentes, pasture, or commune,  
 Or moebles, alle been yiftes of Fortune.<sup>19</sup>

Another of the gifts mentioned as sometime coming from Fortune's hands is victory in war. "Lord, to whom Fortune hath given victorie, and as a conqueror to lyven."<sup>20</sup>

And still another gift she gives is that she aids men by increasing their expectations. "Thanne shal I yeve Emelya to wyve to whom that Fortune yeveth so fair a grace."<sup>21</sup>

Fortune's deceit in giving gifts is borne out by the following strong words of condemnation. The reference Chaucer makes to Fortune acting like a scorpion is a comparison not frequently found in Medieval writings.

---

<sup>18</sup> Chaucer, "The Pardoner's Tale," Canterbury Tales, 779. See The Consolation, II, ii, 5-6: "Contend with me before any judge about the possession of riches and dignities."

<sup>19</sup> Chaucer, "The Merchant's Tale", Canterbury Tales, 1311,-1315.

<sup>20</sup> Chaucer, "The Knight's Tale", Canterbury Tales, 915-916.

O sodeyn hap! O thou Fortune unstable!  
 Lyk to the scorpion so deceyvable,  
 That flaterest with thyn heed whan thou wolt styng;e;  
 Thy tayl is deeth, thurgh thyn envenymynge.  
 O brotil joye! O sweete venym queynte!  
 O monstre, that so subtilly kanst peynte  
 Thy yiftes under hewe of stidefastnesse,  
 That thou deceyvest bothe moore and lesse!<sup>22</sup>

Queen Zenobia was unable to maintain her crown. Fortune bestowed this gift upon the Queen but she later took it away. Zenobia displays admirable physical competence, virtue, wisdom, generosity, and learning. But her costly array, her dignity and her power are gifts of Fortune to which Zenobia devotes herself, and like all gifts of Fortune, they are unstable. "This myghty queene may no while endure. Fortune out of hir regne made hire falle to wrecchednesse and to mysaventure."<sup>23</sup>

Fortune traps and ensnares men as though they are common birds, first caught and thrown into a cage. "Allas, Fortune! it was greet orueltee swiche briddes for to putte in swich a cage!"<sup>24</sup>

---

21 ibid., 1860-1861.

22 Chaucer, "The Merchant's Tale", Canterbury Tales, 2056-2064.

23 Chaucer, "The Monk's Tale", Canterbury Tales, 3537-3540. This passage is another elaboration of The Consolation II, metron 1, 3: "Oft casteth mighty princes from their thrones."

24 ibid., 3603-3604.

Concerning one of the imprisoned knights in "The Knight's Tale", it is said, "Now wol I turne to Arcite ageyn, that litel wiste how my that was his care, Til that Fortune had broght him in the snare."<sup>25</sup>

In the case of Balthasar Fortune deprived him of his friends. Also in the tragic fate of Balthasar there is given an illustration that lordship presents no security because Fortune takes away both the great riches and the friends of lords.

For whan Fortune wole a man forsake,  
 She bereth away his regne and his richesse,  
 And eek his freendes, bothe moore and lesse.  
 For what man that hath freendes thugh Fortune,  
 Mishap wol maken hem enemys, I gesse;  
 This proverbe is ful sooth and ful commune.<sup>26</sup>

Fortune is often a hostile person; in "The Monk's Tale" she is called the enemy is Julius Caesar. "And sitthe of Rome the emperour was he, til that Fortune weex his adversarie."<sup>27</sup>

---

<sup>25</sup> Chaucer, "The Knight's Tale", Canterbury Tales, 1488-1490.

<sup>26</sup> Chaucer, "The Monk's Tale", Canterbury Tales, 3431-3436. This same idea is the main theme of The Consolation, III, v, especially lines 39-42: "Are we the better for those friends which love us not for our virtue but for our prosperity? But whom prosperity maketh our friend, adversity will make our enemy. And what plague is able to hurt us more than a familiar enemy?"

<sup>27</sup> Chaucer, "The Monk's Tale", Canterbury Tales, 3838-3839.



She strikes blows and causes wounds. "No man may  
alwey han prosperitee. With evens herte I rede yow t'endure  
the strook of Fortune or of aventure."<sup>28</sup>

In another passage Fortune is known as a good friend  
of a hero before she turns on him and brings him to his downfall.

And to Swetoun, and to Valerie also,  
That of this storie writen word and ende,  
Now that to thise grete conqueroures two  
Fortune was first freend, and sitthe foo.  
No man ne truste upon hire favour longe,  
But have hire in awayt for everemoo;  
Witnesse on alle thise conqueroures stronge.<sup>29</sup>

The tradition of Fortune causing downfalls and death  
is widespread and continuous, and takes an important places in  
Chaucer's works. In many of the following examples the disaster  
is wrought upon the hero by a turn of Fortune's wheel.

Consider Fortune's influence upon the Troilus and  
Criseyde. She causes disaster and death. Early in the story  
Fortune is active. "And thus Fortune on lofte, and under eft,  
gan hem to whielden bothe aftir hir cours, ay while that thei  
were wrothe."<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>28</sup> Chaucer, "The Clerk's Tale", Canterbury Tales, 810-  
812. See The Consolation, III, i, 6: "I begin to think myself  
not unable to encounter the assaults of Fortune."

<sup>29</sup> Chaucer, "The Monk's Tale", Canterbury Tales,  
3910-3916.

<sup>30</sup> Chaucer, Troilus and Criseyde, I, 138-140, This  
quotation and the following eleven are reflections of four  
passages of The Consolation. 1) II, i, 59-60: "Endeavourrest

Criseyde imagines Troilus under Fortune's sway. "I se hym deyen, ther he goth upryght and hasteth hym with al his fulle myght for to ben slayn, if his Fortune assente."<sup>31</sup>

Troilus laments fortune's cruelty.

Than seyde he thus, "Fortune, alas the while!  
 What have I don? What have I the agylt?  
 How myghtestow for rowthe me bygile?  
 Is ther no grace, and shal I thus be spilt?  
 Shal thus Creiseyde away, for that thou wilt?  
 Allas, how maistow in thyne herte fynde  
 To ben to me thus cruwel and unkynde?"<sup>32</sup>

---

thou to stay the force of the turning wheel?" 2) II, 11, 28-34: "And shall the insatiable desire of men tie me to constancy, so contrary to my custom? This is my force, this is the sport which I continually use. I turn about my wheel with speed, and take pleasure to turn things upside down. Ascend, if thou wilt, but with this condition, that thou thinkest it not an injury to descend when the course of my sport requir-eth." 3) III, xii, 100-109: "We neither play nor mock," quoth she, "and we have finished the greatest matter than can be by the assistance of God, whose aid we implored in the beginning. For such is the form of the Divine substance that it is neither divided into outward things, nor receiveth any such into itself, but as Parmenides saith of it: 'In body like a sphere well-rounded on all sides, it doth roll about the moving orb of things, while it keepeth itself unmovable'." 4) III, metron 12, 32-37:

"The guilty souls with pains opprest,  
 Moved with his song began to weep  
 Ixion's wheel now standing still  
 Turns not his head with motions steep.  
 Though Tantalus might drink at will,  
 To quench his thirst he would forbear."

31 ibid., II, 333-335.

32 ibid., IV, 260-266.

In the same soliloquy Troilus curses Fortune.

Allas, Fortune! if that my lif in joie  
 Displeased hadde unto thi foule envye,  
 Why ne haddestow my fader, kyng of troye,  
 Byraft the lif, or don my bretheren dye,  
 Or slayn myself, that thus compleyne and crye,  
 I, combre-world, that my of nothyng serve,  
 But evere dye and nevere fulli sterve?<sup>33</sup>

Troilus warns lovers not to ascend with Fortune's false wheel.

O ye loveris, that heigh upon the whiel  
 Ben set of Fortune, in good aventure,  
 God leve that ye fynde ay love of stiel,  
 And longe mote youre life in joie endure!  
 But whan ye comen by my sepulture,  
 Remembreth that youre felawe resteth there;  
 For I loved ek, though ich unworthi were.<sup>34</sup>

Troilus believes that through wrathful Fortune Criseyde has died.

O cruel Jove, and thow, Fortune adverse,  
 This al and some, that falsly have ye slayn  
 Criseyde, and syn ye may do me no werse,  
 Fy on youre myght and werkes so dyverse!  
 Thus cowardly ye shul me nevere wyne;  
 Ther shal no deth me fro my lady twynne.<sup>35</sup>

When Troilus and Diomedes met in combat, "Fortune it naught ne wolde, of oothers hond that eyther deyen sholde."<sup>36</sup>

---

33 ibid., IV, 274-280.

34 ibid., IV, 323-329.

35 ibid., IV, 1192-1197.

36 ibid., V, 1763-1764.

In the Canterbury Tales this same theme is frequently used. In "The Knight's Tale" the ladies have lost their husbands in war.

For, certes, lord, ther is noon of us alle,  
That she ne hath been a duchesse or a queene.  
Now be we caytyves, as it is wel seene,  
Thanked be Fortune and hire false wheel,  
That noon estaat assureth to be weel.<sup>37</sup>

Fortune turns the wheel on Peter, King of Cyprus, causing his downfall.

For no thyng but for thy chivalrie  
They in they bed han slayn thee by the morwe.  
Thus kan Fortune hir wheel governe and gye,  
And out of joye brynge men to sorwe.<sup>38</sup>

Fortune's wheel has also brought sorrow and death to Hugelino, count of Pisa, and his three little children.

Thus day by day this child bigan to crye,  
Til in his fadres barm adoun it lay,  
And syde, 'Farewel, fader, I moot dye!'  
And kiste his fader, and dyde the same day.  
And whan the woful fader dded it say,  
For wo his armes two he gan to byte,  
And seyde, 'Allas, Fortune, and weylaway!  
Thy false wheel my wo al may I wyte'.<sup>39</sup>

At the conclusion of the story a summary is given.

Hymself, desperied, eek for hunger starf;  
Thus ended is this myghty erl of Pize.

---

37 Chaucer, "The Knight's Tale", Canterbury Tales, 921-926.

38 Chaucer, "The Monk's Tale", Canterbury Tales, 3585-3586.

39 ibid., 3629-3636.

From heigh estaat Fortune away hym carf.  
 Of this tragedie it oghte ynough suffice;  
 Whoso wol here it in a lenger wise,  
 Redeth the grete poete of Ytaille  
 That highte Dant, for he kan al devyse  
 Fro point to point, nat o word wol he faille.<sup>40</sup>

Finally, Cresus suffered death by hanging from Fortune's hands.

This riche Cresus, whilom Kyng of Lyde,  
 Of which Cresus Cirus soore hym dradde,  
 Yet was he caught amyddes al his pryde,  
 And to be brent men to the fyr hym ladde.  
 But swich a reyn down fro the welkne shadde  
 That slow the fyr, and made hym to escape;  
 But to be war no grace yet he hadde,  
 Til Fortune on the galwes made hym gape.<sup>41</sup>

A fitting way to conclude the first part of this chapter is to present again Chaucer's balanced toward Fortune. The goddess Fortune was considered subordinate to God and His Providence. The author of the thesis pointed out this dependence in Chapter One.<sup>42</sup> Chaucer again states for us his convictions on this matter in his poem "Fortune".

Lo, th'execucion of the majestee  
 That al purveyeth of his rightwysnesse,  
 That same thing "Fortune" clepen ye,  
 Ye blinde bestes, ful of lewednesse!  
 The hevene hath proprettee of sikernesse,  
 This world hath ever resteles travayle;

---

40 ibid., 3645-3652.

41 ibid., 3917-3924.

42 Chaucer, Troilus and Criseyde; Confer III, 617-623; V, 1541-1547.

Thy laste day is ende of myn intresse;  
In general, this reule may nat fayle.<sup>43</sup>

Certainly it is clear that Chaucer was familiar with Boethius' De Consolatione Philosophiae. Chaucer's translation of Boethius and the similar passages in Chaucer and Boethius bear conclusive witness to the fact that he used Boethius as the important source for his idea of Fortune in his tragedies.

In the remainder of the chapter the author of the thesis will explain wherein lies the tragic flaw in Chaucerian tragedy. To say that Fortune alone brings about the tragic downfall of the Chaucerian hero is not only superficial, but incorrect. For the hero must yield to Fortune, or, conversely, he must renounce God. The concept of Fortune appears in Isaias, where the prophet shows some of the implications of trusting her.

And you, that have forsaken the Lord, and have forgotten my holy mount, that set a table for Fortune, and offer libations upon it, I will number you in the sword, and you shall fall by slaughter: because I called and you did not answer: I spoke and you did

---

43 Chaucer, "Fortune", The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, 65-71. See The Consolation, IV, vi, 32-36 for a like statement: "For Providence is the very Divine reason itself, seated in the highest Prince, which disposeth all things in their due order," and V, metron i, 11-12:

So Fortune, though it seems to run with careless reins,  
Yet hath it certain rule, and doth in order flow.

Concerning the idea expressed in line 71 of "Fortune", Boethius has said the following in The Consolation, II, iii, 48-50: "For although things subject to Fortune seldom keep touch in staying, yet the end of life is a certain death, even of that fortune which remaineth."

not hear, and you did evil in my eyes, and you have chosen the things that displease me. Therefore thus saith the Lord God: Behold my servants shall eat, and you shall be hungry: behold my servants shall drink, and you shall be thirsty. Behold my servants shall rejoice, and you shall be confounded: behold my servants shall praise for joyfulness of heart, and you shall cry for sorrow of heart, and shall howl for grief of spirit.<sup>44</sup>

The exiles Isaias speaks of are persons who submit to false doctrines, thinking everything is governed by Fortune. In De Consolatione Philosophiae Boethius explains that if a man forsakes God, he becomes an exile, in a spiritual sense, from his own land.

For if thou rememberest of what country thou art, it is not governed as Athens was wont to be, by the multitude, but 'one is its ruler, one its king', who desires to have abundance of citizens, and not to have them driven away. To be governed by whose authority, and to be subject to her laws, that is, reason, is the greatest freedom that can be.<sup>45</sup>

It is of the utmost importance to observe that the speaker's distress is his own responsibility. His plight could have been avoided if he had used his reason and free will properly.

St. Bernard has given an original twist to the unfortunate results of renouncing God. In one of his sermons, entitled "Sermon on the Canticle of Canticles", he says:

---

44 Isaias, The Holy Bible, Douay Version, Baltimore, 1914, 65, 11-14.

45 Boethius, The Consolation, I, v, 9-15.

Man alone among mortals can resist the constraining power of nature, and he alone among earthly creatures is therefore free. But even he becomes subject to coercion when he falls into sin. This coercion is not from nature, but from his own will, so that not even then is he deprived of his native liberty; because whatever is voluntary is free. And it is altogether owing to sin that 'the corruptible body weigheth down the soul', and not at all by the weight of its mass, but by the force of its concupiscence. For the fact that the soul is now incapable of rising of herself to fall, is due to the will, which, weakened and prostrated by the depraved and vicious love of a corrupted body, cannot simultaneously admit the love of justice. And so, I know not in what wicked yet wonderful way, the will, when turned towards evil by sin, imposes a constraint on itself; so that on the one hand such constraint, since it is voluntary, cannot avail to excuse the will, and, on the other hand, the will, being drawn away and allured, is unable to resist the constraint. This constraint, I repeat, is in some sense voluntary.<sup>46</sup>

Through free will, man can be master of himself and "surmount the ordinances of Fortune."<sup>47</sup>

We cannot say that the victim or 'hero' of a Chaucerian tragedy is either the victim of chance or the victim of an inevitable destiny. Like the speaker in the De Consolatione, he is the victim of his own failure.<sup>48</sup>

---

46 St. Bernard, "Sermon on the Canticle of Canticles", Jean Mouroux, The Meaning of Man, New York, 1948, 172-173.

47 Boethius, The Consolation, IV, 6.

48 D.W. Robertson, Jr., "Chaucerian Tragedy", Journal of English Literary History, XIX, March, 1952, 4.



A man foregoes his freedom and becomes a "slave" to Fortune when he sets his heart upon any worldly goods, wealth, Honors, fame, power, dignity, carnal pleasure, or the like. True freedom is above these attractions, and cannot be affected by them. "Wherefore, they which have reason in themselves have freedom to will and nill."<sup>49</sup> It follows that if a man uses his reason he will not be subject to Fortune. But if he does not follow his reason in seeking false and unreasonable worldly desires he is subjecting himself to Fortune.

It is necessary to enter more deeply into the question of the use or abuse of reason in Chaucerian tragedy to grasp the whole meaning of Fortune in Chaucerian tragedy. In medieval times the difference between higher reason, sapientia, and lower reason, scientia, was fairly well known.

Peter Lombard writing about this difference in his Libri VI Sententiarum says: "Et illa rationis intentio, qua contemplamur aeterna, sapientiae deputatur; illa vero, qua bene utimur rebus temporalibus, scientiae deputatur."<sup>50</sup> And: "Carnalis autem vel sensualis animae motus, qui in corporis sensus

---

49 Boethius, The Consolation, V, ii, 11-12.

50 Peter Lombard, Libri IV Sententiarum, ed. at the College of S. Bonaventure, Rome, 1916. Liber II, Dist. XXIV, Caput V. Quoted from St. Augustine, De Trinitate, c. 14, n. 22 (PL 42, 1009).

intenditur, nobis pecoribusque communis est, qui seclusus est a ratione sapientiae, rationi autem scientiae vicinus est."<sup>51</sup>

Peter Lombard also draws a comparison between a man, and Adam, Eve, and the Serpent. These latter three correspond respectively to the higher reason, the lower reason, and the movement of the senses in an individual.<sup>52</sup> The function of the higher reason is wisdom, and of the lower reason worldly wisdom. The higher reason understands the laws of God; the lower perceives the laws of nature. The higher should dominate the lower, first as the husband should rule the wife.<sup>53</sup> The higher reason, however, will consent to a temptation if the lower reason is left unchecked in pleasurable thought. When the pleasurable thought prevails, the higher reason bows to the lower, and the individual thereby becomes a slave to Fortune. There results the "up-so-down" position of the individual of which the Parson spoke. The tragic hero due to a misdirected worldly love becomes a carbon copy of the fall of Adam.

The following discussion will show how the Troilus and Criseyde is a Chaucerian tragedy, according to the definition

---

51 ibid., II, Dist. XXIV, Caput V. Quoted from St. Augustine, De Trinitate, c. 43, n. 17 (PL 42, 1007).

52 ibid., II, Dist. XXIV, Ch. vi-xiii.

53 ibid., ch. viii.

given in Chapter One. It is clear that Chaucer intended this work to be a tragedy from two lines in the Troilus and Criseyde: ". . . how his aventures fellen from wo to wele, and after out of joie",<sup>54</sup> and "Go, litel bok, go, litel myn tragedye."<sup>55</sup>

Troilus, the tragic hero, will be the subject of attention for the following pages.

Troilus subjects himself to Fortune early in Book One of the story. When his eyes fall upon Criseyde for the first time, he is caught up by her external appearance, and tempted by her attractiveness. The opening wedge of yielding to Fortune is this temptation of the senses.

And upon cas bifel that thourght a route  
His eye percede, and so depe it wente,  
Til on Criseyde it smot, and ther it stente.

And sodeynly he wax therwith astoned,  
And gan hir bet biholde in thrifty wise.  
'O mercy, God,' thoughte he, 'wher hastow woned,  
That art so feyr and goodly to devise?'<sup>56</sup>

As Troilus continued to stare at Cressida a deep impression is left in his heart. As Robertson says, "The initial reaction is confirmed, passing from the eye to the heart."<sup>57</sup>

---

54 Chaucer, Troilus and Criseyde, I, 4.

55 ibid., V, 1786.

56 ibid., I, 271-277.

57 Robertson, "Chaucerian Tragedy", 14.

And of hire look in him ther gan to quyken  
 So gret desir and such affeccioun,  
 That in his hertes botme gan to stiken  
 Of hir his fixe and depe impressioun.<sup>58</sup>

Thus Troilus experiences the movement of the senses, stimulated through the eye. His temptation is to the "aungelik beaute" of Criseyde. Herein lies the invitation to pleasurable thought, and a deeper rooted yielding to Fortune.

Troilus' reaction to the temptation is exactly the wrong one. He retires alone to his chamber. Here he makes a mirror of his mind in which he sees Criseyde. He indulges in immoderate thought about her beauty.

Thus gan he make a mirour of his mynde,  
 In which he saugh al holly hire figure;  
 And that he wel koude in his herte fynde.<sup>59</sup>

---

58 Chaucer, Troilus and Criseyde, I, 295-298.

59 ibid., I, 365-367. Reflections of this passage are found in two places in The Consolation, the first of which is V, metron iv, 1-15:

Cloudy old prophets of the Porch once taught  
 That sense and shape presented to the thought  
 From outward objects their impression take,  
 As when upon a paper smooth and plain  
 On which as yet no marks of ink have lain  
 We with a nimble pen do letters make.  
 But if our minds to nothing can apply  
 Their proper motions, but do patient lie  
 Subject to forms which do from bodies flow,  
 As a glass renders empty shapes of things,  
 Who then can show from whence that motion springs  
 By force of which the mind all things doth know?

The second is from the same metron, 29-40:

And yet in living bodies passion's might  
 Doth go before, whose office is to incite,  
 And the first motions in the mind to make.

Troilus has now yielded to the goddess Fortune. He wishes to have Criseyde as his own, not as a wife, nor because of her wisdom, virtue, or reason, but as an object of his lustful thoughts. Troilus has gone so far astray in his desires that no other fear assails him except that of losing Criseyde. "Alle other dredes weren from him fledde, both of th'assege and his savacioun."<sup>60</sup>

Troilus realizes that he has yielded to Fortune, and begins to complain about her. He claims that she is his quickly acquired enemy.

'Ye, so thow seyst,' quod Troilus tho, 'allas!  
 But, God woot, it is naught the rather so.  
 Ful hard were it to helpen in this cas,  
 For wel fynde I that Fortune is my fo;  
 Ne al the men that riden konne or go  
 May of hire cruel whiel the harm withstonde;  
 For, as hire list, she pleyeth with free and bonde.<sup>61</sup>

Pandarus defends Fortune, claiming that she is common to men, and no one can escape the sway of this fickle goddess.

---

As wehn the light unto our eyes appears,  
 Or some loud voice is sounded in our ears,  
 Then doth the strength of the dull mind awake  
 Those phantasies which she retains within;  
 She stirreth up such notions to begin,  
 Whose objects with their natures best agree,  
 And thus applying them to outward things,  
 She joins the external shapes which thence she brings  
 With forms which in herself included be.

60 ibid., I, 463-464.

61 ibid., I, 834-840.

The friendly answer given by Pandarus has many parallel passages in Boethius.

Quod Pandarus, 'Than blamestow Fortune<sup>62</sup>  
 For thou art wrooth; ye, now at erst I see,  
 Woost thou nat wel that Fortune is commune<sup>63</sup>  
 To every maner wight in som degree  
 And yet thou hast this comfort, lo, parde,  
 That, as hire joles moten overgo,<sup>64</sup>  
 So mote hire sorwes passen everchon.

'For if hire whiel stynte any thyng to torne,  
 Than cessed she Fortune anon to be.<sup>65</sup>  
 Now, sith hire whiel by no way may sojourne  
 What woostow if hire mutabilite  
 Right as thyselfes list, wol don by the,  
 Or that she be naught fer fro thyn helpynge?<sup>66</sup>  
 Paraunter thou hast cause for to syng.<sup>67</sup>

---

62 see The Consolation, II, ii, 16: "Wherefore do you lament?"

63 see The Consolation, II, ii, 45-47: "Notwithstanding, lose not thy courage, and, living in a kingdom which is common to all men, desire not to be governed by peculiar laws proper only to thyself."

64 see The Consolation, II, iii, 39-44: "If thou considerest the number and measure of thy joyful and sad accidents, thou canst not choose but think thyself fortunate hitherto; and if thou esteemest not thyself fortunate because those things which seemed joyful are past, there is no cause why thou shouldst think thyself miserable, since those things which thou now takest to be sorrowful do pass."

65 see The Consolation. 1) II, i, 26-32: "Wherefore, O man, what is it that hath cast thee into sorrow and grief? Thou hast, methinks, seen something new and unwonted. If thou thinkest that Fortune hath altered her manner of proceeding toward thee, thou are in an error. This was always her fashion; this is her nature." 2) II, i, 60-62: "But thou foolishlest man that ever was, if it (Fortune's wheel) beginneth to stay, it ceaseth to be fortune."

66 see The Consolation, II, ii, 42-45: "What if I be

Pandarus personifies lower reason by insisting that no one can rise above Fortune.

From this point on in the story Pandarus assumes the function of an intermediary between the victim and the object of his love. Pandarus encourages Troilus in his love for Criseyde during the remainder of the first book. Unwittingly Pandarus will work hand-in-hand with Fortune in her plans for the ultimate destruction of Troilus.

In Book II Troilus is left in the background, while Pandarus expends his energies trying to win Criseyde for Troilus. Pandarus arranges to secure a meeting between the two, by convincing Troilus to feign illness. Pandarus returns to Troilus' chamber and tells him to listen to reason.

And al so siker as thow list here by me,  
And God toforn, I wyl be ther at pryme;  
And forthi, wek somewhat as I shal seye,

---

not wholly gone from thee? What if this mutability of mine be a just cause for thee to hope for better?

67 Chaucer, Troilus and Criseyde, I, 841-855: The main allusions to Fortune in Chaucer's poetry consist of three long connected passages: 1) Book of the Duchess, lines 618-718. 2) Troilus and Criseyde, Book I, 834-855. 3) The poem "Fortune". The first is not Boethian in origin, but rather was strongly under the influence of the Roman de la Rose. The last two extended passages are Boethian in origin. As is clear from the above footnotes it is fairly well established to how great an extent Chaucer had copied Boethius in Troilus and Criseyde, Book I, 834-855.

Or on som other wight this charge leye.

Do now as I shal seyn, and far aright.<sup>68</sup>

He bids Troilus write a love letter to Criseyde, expressing all the sentiments of his heart, or those which he should feel under the circumstances. Troilus wrote the letter.

First he gan hire his righte lady calle,  
His heartes lif, his lust, his sorwes leche,  
His blisse, and ek thise other termes alle  
That in swich cas thise loveres alle seche;  
And in ful humble wise, as in his speche,  
He gan hym recomaunde unto hire grace;  
To telle al how, it axeth muchel space.

And after this, ful lowely he hire preyde  
To be nought wroth, thogh he, of his folie,  
So hardy was to hire to write, and seyde  
That love it made, or elles most he die;  
And pitousli gan mercy for to crye  
And after that he seyde, and leigh ful loude,  
Hymself was litel worth, and lasse he koude.

And that she should han his koonyng excused,  
And litel was, and ek he dredde hire soo;  
And his unworthynesse he ay acused;  
And after than, than gan he telle his woo;  
But that was endeles, withouten hoo;  
And seyde he wolde in trouthe alwey hym holde,  
And radde it over, and gan the lettre folde.<sup>69</sup>

Troilus has begun his ascent to the false heaven of Fortune's favor. Pandarus has developed in Troilus worldly wisdom. Troilus can think of nothing other than Criseyde. At this time he is seen kissing the folded letter, at other times

---

68 ibid., II, 991-994 and 999.

69 ibid., II, 1065-1085.



guidance of his actions."<sup>71</sup>

At the opening of Book IV Chaucer remarks that "But al to litel. . .lasteth swich joie, ythonked be Fortune."<sup>72</sup> Fortune is able "to fooles so hire song entune"<sup>73</sup> that they are completely duped. Troilus is one of these fools. He now begins to reap the sorrow of selling his freedom for the fleeting joys of Fortune. The "unwar strook", that circumstance which most unbalances him, takes place when he learns that Criseyde will have to leave Troy in exchange for Antenor. Unable to prevent the exchange, he becomes as despondent as a bare tree.

And as wynter leves ben biraft,  
 Ech after other, til the tree be bare,  
 So that ther nys but bark and braunche ilaft,  
 Lith Troilus, byraft of ech welfare,  
 Ibunden in the blake bark of care,  
 Disposed wood out of his wit to breyde,  
 So sore hym sat the chaungynge of Criseyde.<sup>74</sup>

As he mourns in the privacy of his chamber he acts like a beast rather than a man. This is naturally a result of his acting contrary to reason.

He complains bitterly against Fortune, asking 'is ther no grace?' He has honored Fortune above all other gods always; his subjection to her is com-

---

<sup>71</sup> Patch, Howard R., "Troilus on Determinism", Speculum, April, VI, 235.

<sup>72</sup> Chaucer, Troilus and Criseyde, IV, 1-2.

<sup>73</sup> ibid., IV, 4.

<sup>74</sup> ibid., IV, 225-231.

plete and self-confessed. . . Actually the difficulty is of his own making. 'Nothyng is wrecchid but whan you wenest it.' Nothing destined him to subject himself to Fortune, but now his reason has lost 'the lordshipe that it sholde have over sensualitee.'<sup>75</sup>

The result of the process of corruption of Troilus' character is the confusion, shame, and despair which bears down upon him.

Book V is a picture of hell on earth which results from Troilus' efforts to make earth a type of heaven. Troilus found out that the harmony which should have existed in his life was destroyed when he sought out one of God's creatures for its own sake. He placed the creature above the Creator, and from this choice there resulted the confusion and chaos of a satanic Babylon. "The destiny he brought upon himself by preparing a table for Fortune, by substituting the feast of the flesh for the feast of the spirit, descends upon him. He is hypersensitive, sentimental, a romantic hopelessly involved in a lost cause."<sup>76</sup>

After Troilus' death he is able to smile at his former foolishness, since he has then risen above Fortune's realm. He recognizes the foolishness of his earthly desires.

---

75 Robertson, "Chaucerian Tragedy", 29.

76 ibid., 32.

Chaucer. . . gives definite expression to a Christian point of view, adopting from Boethius and Dante the description of a Christian Fortuna, which removes the elements of caprice from destiny, and restores the control to a rational rather than an arbitrary God; and in the Epilogue, expressly interpreting the whole plot on Christian terms.

Chaucer encourages his readers to have a sounder judgment and a stronger will than Troilus lest they too allow Fortune to take control of their lives. Any wrong love, no matter what form it takes, will lead to subjection to Fortune.

Hence the pattern of a hero's downfall in Chaucerian tragedy is epitomized in Troilus. Troilus gives himself to Fortune by permitting the physical attraction to Criseyde to corrupt him. When he allows his senses to be moved, and proceeds to indulge his mind in pleasurable thought, he has then corrupted his lower reason. He destroyed his higher reason when he attained the object of his desires. At this moment he has turned away completely from divine love, while at the same time he has become a complete slave to Fortune.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSIONS

Chaucer's concept of Fortune depends upon Boethius. Boethius' De Consolatione Philosophiae may well be considered a lament against Fortune. He explains who the Goddess Fortune is, and how a person comes under her sway. Chaucer followed Boethius in very many details of Boethius' concept of Fortune, as well as reflecting Boethius' general mind on Fortune.

Neither Chaucer nor Boethius completely express the thought of many Medieval philosophers, because the philosophers strenuously attempted to disprove the existence of the goddess. Chaucer and Boethius tailored the concept of Fortune to the circumstances of a Christian world, retaining the usage of the goddess, but making her dependent upon the will of God as expressed in a particular Divine Providence.

Fortune had a great influence upon Chaucerian tragedy. The extent of her influence was carefully investigated both in the little tragedies in "The Monk's Tale", and in the great Chaucerian tragedy, Troilus and Criseyde. Fortune was not a

completely independent and unruly goddess in Chaucerian tragedy. For she was subordinated to the rule of Divine Providence. But when a person neglected to follow his reason, God permitted Fortune to raise up the individual on her wheel only to cast him down when he had reached the peak of his quest. Fortune therefore has direct causality in the tragic downfall in Chaucerian tragedy, provided that the tragic hero has first allowed himself to become a slave of Fortune through a misuse of his reason.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### I. PRIMARY SOURCES

- Augustine, Saint, Answer to Skeptics, tr. Denis J. Kavanaugh, O.S.A., of St. Augustine's Contra Academicos, New York, 1943.
- Augustine, Saint, The City of God, tr. Marcus Dods, 2 vols., New York, 1948.
- Aquinas, Saint Thomas, In VIII Libros Physicorum Aristotelis, 8 vols., Louvaine University Press, n.d.
- Aquinas, Saint Thomas, Summa Theologica, tr. English Dominican Fathers, 2nd, 15 vols., London, 1920.
- Bacon, Roger, Moralis Philosophiae, ed. Eugenio Massa, Turici, n.d.
- Boethius, Anicius Manlius Severinus, The Consolation of Philosophy, tr. H.F. Stewart, The Loeb Classical Library Series, New York, 1926.
- Chaucer, Geoffrey, The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, Student's Cambridge Edition, ed. F.N. Robinson, Boston, 1933.
- Chaucer, Geoffrey, The Canterbury Tales, tr., Nevill Coghill, Harmondsworth, 1951.
- Chaucer, Geoffrey, Troilus and Criseyde, tr., George Philip Krapp, New York, 1932.
- Holy Bible, The, Douay Version, Baltimore, 1914.
- Lombard, Peter, Libri IV Sententiarum, ed. Professors at Saint Bonaventure College, Rome, 1916.

Salisbury, John of, Frivolities of Courtiers and Footprints of Philosophers, tr., Joseph B. Pike of John of Salisbury's Polycraticus, Minneapolis, 1938.

Shakespeare, William, Othello, ed. Henry N. Hudson, Boston, 1909.

## II. SECONDARY SOURCES

### A. BOOKS

Adams, Henry Hitch, English Domestic or Homiletic Tragedy, 1572 to 1642, New York, 1943.

Barrett, H.M., Boethius, Some Aspects of His Times and Works, Cambridge, 1940.

Bennett, H.S., Chaucer and the Fifteenth Century, Oxford, 1947.

Brewer, D.S., Chaucer, London, 1953.

Butcher, S.H., Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art, New York, 1951.

The Cambridge History of English Literature, eds. A.W. Ward and A.R. Waller, 15 vols., New York, 1932.

Chambers, E.K., The Medieval Stage, 2 vols., Oxford, 1930.

Chambers, E.K., English Literature at the close of the Middle Ages, Oxford, 1947, second edition.

Chesterton, G.K., Chaucer, London, 1932.

Chute, Marchette, Geoffrey Chaucer of England, New York, 1946.

Cooper, Lane, A Concordance of Boethius, Cambridge, 1928.

Cory, Herbert E., The Significance of Beauty in Nature and Art, Milwaukee, 1937.

Curry, W.C., Chaucer and the Medieval Science, London, 1926.

Davis, H.W.C., Medieval England, Oxford, 1925.

- Dawson, Christopher, Medieval Religion and Other Essays, New York, 1934.
- Dodd, W.G., Courtly Love in Chaucer and Gower, New York, 1932.
- Dixon, William Macneile, Tragedy, London, 1924.
- French, Robert Dudley, A Chaucer Handbook, New York, 1941.
- Hawkins, D.J.B., A Sketch of Medieval Philosophy, London, 1946.
- Hazlitt, W.C., The English Drama and Stage, Oxford, 1869.
- Huber, Paul, S.J., Foreknowledge and Free Will in Chaucer, Unpublished Master's Thesis, Loyola University, Chicago, 1939.
- Huizinga, J., The Waning of the Middle Ages, London, 1950.
- Jefferson, B.L., Chaucer and the Consolation of Philosophy, London, 1917.
- Jusserand, J.J., English Wayfaring Life, London, 1950.
- Kane, George, Middle English Literature, London, 1951.
- Kittredge, George Lyman, Chaucer and His Poetry, Cambridge, 1939.
- Ker, M.P., English Literature: Medieval, New York, 1912.
- Lewis, C.S., The Allegory of Love, Oxford, 1951.
- Literary History of England, A, ed. A.C. Baugh, New York, 1948.
- McWilliams, J.A., S.J., Physics and Philosophy, Washington, 1945.
- Mouroux, Jean, The Meaning of Man, New York, 1948.
- Patch, Howard R., The Goddess Fortuna in Medieval Literature, Cambridge, 1927.
- Patch, Howard R., On Rereading Chaucer, Cambridge, 1939.
- Patch, Howard R., The Tradition of Boethius, New York, 1935.
- Powicke, F.M., The Christian Life of the Middle Ages, Oxford, 1935.



- Root, R.K., The Poetry of Chaucer, Boston, 1925.
- Salzman, F.L., English Life in the Middle Ages, Oxford, 1926.
- Schofield, W.H., English Literature from the Norman Conquest to Chaucer, Oxford, 1906.
- Spiers, John, Chaucer, the Maker, London, 1949.
- Tunison, J.S., Dramatic Traditions of the Dark Ages, Oxford, 1907.
- Waddell, Helen, The Wandering Scholars, New York, 1927.
- Wells, John Edwin, A Manual of the Writings in Middle English, 1050-1400, New Haven, 1916.
- Young, Karl, The Drama of the Medieval Church, Oxford, 1933.

#### B. ARTICLES

- Patch, Howard R., "The Tradition of the Goddess Fortuna", Smith College Studies In Modern Language, III, Northampton, July, 1922, 179-235.
- Patch, Howard R., "Troilus on Determinism", Speculum, Cambridge, VI, April, 1931, 225-243.
- Robertson, D.W., Jr., "Chaucerian Tragedy," Journal of English Literary History, Baltimore, XIX, 1952, 1-36.

APPROVAL SHEET

The thesis submitted by Mr. James J. Donnelly, S.J., has been read and approved by three members of the Department of English.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

April 7, 1956  
Date

Rev. John P. Burke, S.J.  
Signature of Adviser