1935

The Doctrine of Fortune in the Works of Chaucer

Josephine B. Davidson

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.butler.edu/grtheses

Part of the English Language and Literature Commons

Recommended Citation
https://digitalcommons.butler.edu/grtheses/156

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate Scholarship at Digital Commons @ Butler University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Thesis Collection by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Butler University. For more information, please contact omacissa@butler.edu.
THE DOCTRINE OF FORTUNE IN THE WORKS OF CHAUCER

by

JOSEPHINE BLANCHE DAVIDSON

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts
Department of English
Butler University

Division of Graduate Instruction
Butler University
Indianapolis
1935
It is the purpose of this paper to show how Chaucer regarded Fortune in his early writings; how his conception of Fortune was altered by his acquaintance with \textit{The Consolation of Philosophy} by Boethius; and how he transcended the conception of Boethius, and came to regard Fortune as Fate.
CONTENTS

CHAPTER PAGE

I. THE GODDESS FORTUNA...........................................1

II. BOETHIUS' CONCEPTION OF FORTUNE.........................7

III. FORTUNE IN THE EARLY POEMS OF CHAUCER...............15

IV. FORTUNE IN TROILUS AND CRISEYDE.........................20

V. FORTUNE IN THE CANTERBURY TALES............................29
CHAPTER I

THE GODDESS FORTUNA

Before attempting to show how Chaucer handled the doctrine of fortune in his writings, it is necessary to investigate the conceptions of fortune which were in existence at the time he was writing. This study takes us back to the Greeks and Romans, and even back of them to the Chaldeans.

The Chaldeans were the first people to feel that there was an inflexible necessity which ruled the universe, to which even the gods were subject. People in earlier times had believed that the gods were free to indulge their passions without being curbed by any higher power. The Chaldeans observed that there was some unchangeable law which regulated the movements of the heavenly bodies, and they extended the application of this law to all moral and social phenomena. They called this necessity Tyche, or chance. As a goddess, she was the mistress of mortals and immortals, and took delight in playing with the lives of men. This theory of absolute determinism was a menace to the religious beliefs of all the pagan world. It took away the significance of prayer. If the gods themselves were ruled by the inexorable goddess Tyche, it was futile to pray to them. They could not answer prayers if they would. Consequently, the people of the higher classes continued to offer sacrifices to their gods, but had no hope of any return. All attempts to pray were given up.
Tyche was not a goddess who could be moved by prayers and tears. A fatalistic resignation prevailed among the people of the higher classes, whereas the common people ceased to worship the gods at all, and lost all their faith in their old religion. Thus we see that from the first Tyche was the cause of a falling away in the morale of her worshippers.

In the Alexandrine period the cult of Tyche became prominent in Greece. She gained a foothold because the old Greek religion was in a degenerate condition. The religious fervor which had swept Greece at the end of the Persian War had been quenched by a long series of disasters. At the close of the Persian War the Greeks felt sure that the gods were on their side, and had helped them drive the enemy from their shores. The beautification of the Acropolis at Athens, and the treasures of religious art of the fifth century bear witness to the devotion with which the Greeks worshipped their gods at that time. However, in the last half of the fifth century, the Peloponnesian War came. Those long years of war, plague, famine and defeat left Athens, the cultural center of Greece, bankrupt, disillusioned, and bitter. The gods had failed her in her hour of need. The freedom-loving spirit of the Greeks was broken forever. When Alexander conquered the Greek world, it was ripe for just such a doctrine of fate as the worship of Tyche upheld. This doctrine removed all responsibility from the individual. All men were pawns which capricious Tyche moved hither and yon. Before the Alexandrine
period there had been a goddess Tyche in the Greek calendar, but she was an inconspicuous minor deity who acted as a personal daimon, presiding at the birth of babies, and endowing them with good or bad luck. Because she was often kind, she was also worshipped as a goddess of plenty. When the new cult of Tyche was introduced from the east, this inferior goddess was exalted above the other gods, and worshipped as fate. She was the essence of all that was incoherent, unexpected, and unjust in the world. She had no moral sense, no mercy. She was supposed to preside over various cities throughout the Greek world. A famous statue represents the Tyche of Antioch. She was also supposed to preside over all public games. In the degenerate Alexandrine period, she was regularly invoked at the beginning of any public occasion. The establishment of her worship was a death blow to the old Greek religion. In art she was usually represented as a winged figure poised on a ball.

The Italian name for Tyche was Fortuna. The introduction of the cult of Fortuna into Italy is attributed to Servius Tullius, the seventh king of Rome. Ovid tells the following legend about Servius and Fortuna: Servius dedicated a temple to Fortuna, who was in love with him, and was in the habit of visiting him secretly. In the temple of Fortuna was a statue of Servius. The daughter of Servius, in order to get the throne for her husband, caused Servius to be foully murdered, and drove her chariot over his face as he lay dying in the street. Later, when the daughter came into the temple, the statue of Servius covered his face with his robe, and said he

(1) Cumont, Franz The Oriental Religions in Roman Paganism pp. 179-182
did not wish to see the face of his daughter. Thereupon the
goddess ordered that the Roman people should keep the face of
the statue covered for all time. A robe was still kept over
the face of the statue in Ovid's day.

The Fortuna whose worship was introduced by Servius was
not the goddess of chance. She was the goddess of plenty and
fertility, and the protectress of women in childbirth. Her
full name was Fors Fortuna, Fortuna being a cult name. Long
after the time of Servius, after Rome had conquered Greece,
Fortuna became identified with the Greek and oriental Tyche
as the goddess of chance. As had happened in Greece, as soon
as Fortuna became the goddess of chance, her popularity in­
creased. Her worship spread all over Italy. Her head was
represented on Osca coins. At Naples she was regarded as
the protecting genius of the country. In that city was locat­
ed the shrine of Fortuna Panthea. This cognomen indicated that
Fortuna embodied in herself the powers of many other gods.
At Puteoli, two statues of Fortuna were found. Both statues
represented her as a draped female figure holding a steering
oar in her right hand, and a horn of plenty in her left.
The steering oar signified that she controlled the destinies
of men, whereas the horn of plenty was a remnant of her wor­
ship as the goddess of plenty. In Rome the festival of Fortuna
was celebrated on the twenty-fourth of June. Ovid describes
the festival as follows:

(1) Ovid, Fasti, translated by Sir James Frazer, VI, 569ff.
(2) Peterson, Roy, The Cults of Campania, pp. 7, 122, 248, 340
How quickly has come round the festival of Fors Fortuna! Yet seven days and June will be over. Come, Quirites, celebrate with joy the goddess Fors! On Tiber’s bank she has her royal foundations. Speed some of you on foot, and some in the swift boat, and think no shame to return tipy home from your ramble. Ye flower-crowned skiffs, bear bands of youthful revellers, and let them quaff deep drafts of wine on the bosom of the stream. The common folk worship this goddess because the founder of her temple is said to have been of their number and to have risen to the crown from humble rank. Her worship is also appropriate for slaves, because Tullius, who instituted the neighboring temples of the fickle goddess, was born of a slave woman. (1)

In the Middle Ages, before Chaucer’s time, the goddess Fortuna still played a very important role, in spite of the efforts of the monks to suppress her worship. Men still recognized that there was some capricious force in this world, which seemed to delight in playing with men, now raising them to heights of prosperity, now plunging them into the depths of poverty and despair. They called this power Fortune, and made her a goddess, as the Romans had done. But Christian teaching forbade that any power should control God. So Fortune was made one of the servants of God, and helped carry out divine Providence among men. It was the business of Fortuna to lower a man when he rose too high. She carried out the destinies of men which God had written in the stars before the beginning of time. She was fond of playing games with men, especially chess and dice. She was closely associated with death, because she so often caused men to seek death as a refuge from her caprices. She was often compared to the moon for her changeableness, and to glass for her fragile and brittle temper. In medieval

(1) Ovid, Fasti, translated by Sir James Frazer, VI, 773-784
pictures she was often represented as having many hands, with which she gave and took away her gifts. She was usually blind, but when she was not, she laughed with one eye, and wept with the other. Again she was pictured steering a frail craft on a stormy sea. Humanity was in the boat, and the sea was the sea of life. Wealth and Honor were her handmaidens. The most common attribute of the medieval Fortuna was her wheel. Many pictures showed her turning the crank of a large wheel resembling a ferris wheel, on which men were bound. The king in his royal robes was at the top of the wheel, and the beggar in his rags was at the bottom. Around the rim of the wheel, at various levels, appeared the scholar, the churchman, and others. The writer who has most clearly set forth the medieval conception of Fortune, is the Latin writer, Boethius. Chaucer was so impressed with the work of this writer that he translated it into English. Since Boethius had such a marked influence on Chaucer's conception of Fortune, let us study in some detail what the Latin writer said about the fickle goddess.

(1) Patch, Howard R. *The Goddess Fortuna*
CHAPTER II

BOETHIUS' CONCEPTION OF FORTUNE

Boethius (480-524 A.D.) was the most learned philosopher of Rome in his day. He was well versed in all the works of the Greek philosophers. His writings contain frequent references to Plato, Aristotle, Homer, and Euripides. His greatest writing, The Consolation of Philosophy, is steeped in the philosophy of Socrates, as set forth by Plato. When Theodoric the Goth conquered Italy, Boethius became one of the chief men at his court. He was very high in power, and lived to see both his sons consuls of Rome at the same time. However, his fortune suddenly changed. He was falsely accused of sedition, and was put in prison at Pavia. After spending a long time in prison, he was finally put to death by strangling and beating.

It was during his imprisonment that he wrote The Consolation of Philosophy. In this work he represented himself as pining away in prison, and blaming Fortune for her inconstancy to him. In the midst of his distress, there appeared to him Philosophy, in the guise of a beautiful woman, and inspired him with hope because of the very inconstant nature of Fortune. She showed him that virtue was the highest good, and took him on an imaginary trip to heaven, where together they inquired into the nature of chance and destiny, prescience and free-will, time and eternity. He was thus enabled by Philosophy to rise above all the vicissitudes of human life, and perceive the truth. Although in this writing Boethius does not directly mention Christ, the teachings are in accord with Christian doctrine. He treats his
subject from the standpoint of a philosopher, not a theologian. However, we have conclusive evidence that Boethius was a Christian from a fragment of Cassiodorus, one of his contemporaries. Cassiodorus tells us that Boethius wrote a theological work on the Trinity, in which he expounded Christian doctrines. This writing has been found, and is now included among the works of Boethius. So we know that he was a Christian, possibly even a martyr, as some critics think.

The Consolation of Philosophy was very popular in the Middle Ages. It was translated into German, French, Greek, Spanish, and English. The earliest English translation was made by King Alfred the Great. This edition has many footnotes written by the king. Chaucer's was the second English translation. A passage in Jean de Meun's Roman de la Rose suggested to Chaucer that he undertake to translate the work of Boethius.

At the beginning of the work, Boethius is lying in prison bemoaning his misfortunes. He complains that he is old and helpless; that he has been falsely accused; that he has been exiled from home and friends; and that Fortune, who was formerly so kind, has turned against him. Philosophy appears and seats herself beside him. She reminds Boethius that Fortune is not being unkind; she is merely revealing to him her real changeable nature, thereby ceasing to deceive him. Because of the fickleness of Fortune, it is still possible that she may again exalt him on her wheel. Philosophy goes on to describe the character of Fortune as follows:

(1) Stewart, H.F. and Hand, E.K., Boethius, Introduction, p. xi
(2) Jean de Meun, Roman de la Rose, 11. 5052-5056
Thou weneest that Fortune be changed ay in thee; but thou weneest wrong, yif that thou wene. Alway tho ben hir maneres; she hath rather kent, as to theee-ward, hir propre stableness in the chaunginge of hirself. Right swich was she whan she flatered thee, and deceived thee with unlevelul lykings of fals welefulnesse. Thou hast now knowen and ataynt the doutous or double visage of thilke blinde goddesse Fortune. She that yit covereth hir and wimpleth hir to other folk, hath shewed hir everydel to thee. Yif thou aprovest hir and thenkest that she is good, use hir maneres and pleyne thee nat. And yif thou agryaest hir false trecherose, despise and cast away hir that playeth so harmfully, that is now cause thou doest to thee, sholde ben cause to thee of pees and of joye. She hath forsaken thee, forsothe. The whiche that never man may ben siker that she ne ahal forsake him....

Holdestow than thilke welefulnesse precious to thee that shall passen? And is present Fortune dereworthre to thee, which that nis nat faithful for to dwelle; and, whan she goth awey, that she bringeth a wight in sorwe? For sin she my nat ben with-holden at a marked wille, she maketh him a wrecche when she departeth fro hir. What other thing is flittinge Fortune but a maner shewing wrecchednesse that is to comen? Ne it ne suffyseth nat only to loken on thine that is present biform the eyen of a man. But wisdom loketh and ameBureth the ende of thinges; and the same chaunginge from oon into another, that is to seyn, from adversitee into prosperousitee, maketh that the manaces of Fortune ne ben nat for to dreden, ne the flateringes of hir to ben desired. Thus, at the laste, it behoveth thee to suffren with evene wille in pacience al that is don in-with the floor of Fortune, that is to seyn, in this world, sin thou hast ones put thy nekke under the yok of hir. For yif thou wolt wryten a lawe of wendinge and of dwelinge to Fortune, whiche that thou hast chosen frely to ben thy lady, artow nat wrongful in that and maketh Fortune wroth and aspere by thyn inpatience, and yit thou mayst nat chaunge hir? Yif thou committest and bitakest thy sailes to the winde, thou shalt be shewn, not thider that thou weldest, but whider that the wind shoveth thee. Yif thou castest thy sedes into the feldes, thou sholdest han in minde that the yeres ben, amonges, other-whyle plenteuous and otherwhyle bareyne. Thou hast bitaken thyself to the governaunce of Fortune, and forthy it bhoveth thee to ben obeisant to the maneres of thy lady. Enforcest thou thee to arresten or withholden the swiftnesse and the sweigh of hir turninge whale? O thou foolys; falletho, altho, if Fortune sheweth stable, she cesede thanne to ben Fortune.(1)

In defense of Fortune, Philosophy says that she had received

Boethius as a babe in her lap, and as a good nurse had showered him with riches and honor all his life. She had bestowed her gifts freely, and it was in her power to take them away. The person who puts his trust in Fortune, as Boethius had done, must suffer from the caprices of that goddess. Then Philosophy proceeds to explain how one may rise above the jurisdiction of Fortune, and be less subject to her buffetings. She shows that all the gifts of Fortune are transitory, but that the man who has tranquillity of spirit has that which Fortune cannot take away from him. She next says that Fortune is kinder to men when she is adverse than when she smiles on them, because she enables them to know her true nature, and to find out who their real friends are.

In Book IV we come to the heart of the discussion, in which the author sets forth most clearly his ideas of Fortune. Boethius in his despondency very naturally asks Philosophy to tell him why Fortune often seems to favor the wicked and frown upon the good. The answer which Philosophy gives sets forth Boethius' views on divine Providence, destiny, and Fortune. It will be best for the sake of clarity to quote at length from Boethius on this subject:

'The engendringe of alle thinges,' quod she,'and alle the progressions of mutable nature, and al that moeveth in any manere, taketh his causes, his ordre, and his formes, of the stablenesse of the divyne thought; and thilke divyne thought, that is y-set and put in the tour, that is to seyn, in the height, of the simplisticite of god, stablisheth many maner gyses to thinges that ben to done; the whiche maner, whan that men loken it in thilke pure clennyss of the divyne intelligence, it is y-cleped purviencë;
11. but whan thilke maner is referred by men to thinges that it moveth and disposeth, thanne of olde men it was cleped destinee, the whiche thinges, yif that any wight loketh wel in his thought the strengthe of that oon and of that other, he shal lightely mowen seen, that thise two thinges bederly. For purvuance is thilke divyne reason that is established in the soverain prince of things; the whiche purvuance disposeth alle thinges. But destinee is the disposicioun and ordinaunce clivinge to moevable things, by the whiche disposicioun the purvuance knitteth alle thinges in hir ordes; for purvuance embraceth alle thinges to-hene, althoug they ben infinite; but destinee departeth and ordaineth alle thinges singularly, and divided in moevinges, in places, in forms, in tymes, as thus: lat the unfoldinge of temporal ordinaunce, assembled and oometh in the lokinge of the divyne thought, he cleped purvuance; and thilke samme assemblinge and oninge, divided and unfoldin by tymes, lat that ben called destinee. And albeit so that thilse thinges ben dyverse, yit natheles hangeth that oon on that other; for why the order destinal procedeth of the simplicite of purvuance. For right as a werkman, that aperceyveth in his thought the forme of the thing that he wol make, and moveth the effect of the werk, and ledeth that he hadde loked biforn in his thought simply and presently, by temporel ordinaunce: certes, right so god disponeth in his purvuance, singularly and stably, the thinges that ben to done, but he administrith in many maneres and in dyverse tymes, by destinee, thilke samme thinges that he hath disposed. Thanne, whether that destinee he exercysed outher by some divyne spirits, servaunts to the divyne purvuance, or elles by som soale, or elles by alle nature servinge to god, or elles by the celestial moevinges of sterres, or elles by the dyverse subtilitie of develes, or elles by any of hem, or elles by hem alle, the destinal ordinaunce is y-woven and accomplished. Certes, it is open thing, that the purvuance is an unmoveable and simple forme of thinges to done; and the moveable bond and the temporal ordinaunce of thinges, whiche that the divyne simplicite of purvuance hath ordeyned to done, that is destinee. For which it is, that alle thinges that ben put under destinee ben, certes, subgits to purvuance, to whiche purvuance destinee itself is subgit and under. But some thinges ben put under purvuance, that surmounten the ordinaunce of destinee; and tho ben thilke that stably ben y-floche negh to the firste godhed: they surmounten the ordre of destinal moevabletee. For right as of cercles that tornen aboute a same centre or aboute a point, thilke cercle that is innerest most withinne jonyeth to the simplesse of the middel, and is, as it were, a centre or a poynet to that other cercles that tornen abouten him; and thilke that is utterest, compassed by larger envyronnings, is unfolden by
larger spaces, in so much as it is forthest fro the middel simplicitee of the poyn; and yif ther be anything that knitteth and felawshippeth himself to thilke middel poyn, it is constreined into simplicitee, that is to seyn, into unmoevablete, and it ceseth to be shad and to fleten dyversely; right so, by semblable reason, thilke thing that departeth forthest fro the first thoght of god, it is unfolded and summitted to gretter bondes of destinee: and in so muche is the thing more free and laus fro destinee, as it axeth and holdeth him ner to thilke centre of thinges, that is to seyn, god. And yif the thing clvyeth to the stedefastnesse of the thought of god, and be withoute moevinge, certes, it sormounteth the necessitee of destinee. Thanne right swich comparisoun as it is of skilinge to understondinge, and of thing that is engendred to thing that is, and of tym to eternte, and of the cerelc to the centre, right so is the ordre of moevable destinee to the stable simplicitee of purviaunce. Thilke ordnaunce moeveth the hevene and the sterres, and attempreth the elements togider amonges hemself, and transformeth hem by entrechaungable mutacioun; and thilke same ordre neweth ayein alle thinges growinge and fallinge a-doun, by semblable progressions of sedex and of sexes, that is to seyn, male and female. And this ike ordre constreineth the fortunes and the deedes of men by a bond of causes, nat able to ben unbounde; the whiche destinal causes, when they passen out fro the beginnings of the unmoevable purviaunce, it mot nedes be that they ne be nat mutable. And thus ben the thinges ful wel y-governed, yif that the simplicitee dwellinge in the divyne thoght sheweth forth the ordre of causes, unable to ben y-bowed; and this ordre constreineth by his propre stahletee the moevable thinges, or elles they sholden fleten folly. For which it is, that alle thinges se­men to ben confus and trouble to us men, for we mowen nat considere thilke ordnaunce; natheles, the propre maner of every thinge, dressinge hem to goode, dispomon hem alle.(1)

The conclusion of the argument comes when Philosophy ex­plains that everything which happens in the universe is in ac­cord with the plan of God; therefore, everything is ultimately right:

Thanne, what-so-ever thou mayst see that is don in this world unhoped or unrened, certes, it is the right ordre of thinges; but, as to thy wikede opinion, it is a confus­sion, ....Thanne the wyse dispensacioun of god spareth him, the whiche man adversiteit mighte enpynen; for that god wol nat suffren him to travaile, to whom that travaile nis

(1)Boethius, The consolation of Philosophy, Bk.IV, Prose VI Chaucer's translation.
nat covenable......And god yeveth and departeth to othre folk prosperitees and adversitees y-sadled to-hepe, after the qualitie of hir corages, and remordeth som folk by adversitee, for they ne sholde nat waxen proude by longe welefulnesse..... And many othre folk han bought honourable renoun of this world by the prys of glorious deeth..... To othre folk is welefulnesse y-yeven unworthyly, the whiche overthroweth hem into destructioum that they han deserved.... nothing nis withouten ordinaunce in the reame of the divyne purvisance; sin that the right stronge god governeth alle things in this world.(1)

Book V deals with the age-old question of the part that chance or hap plays in human life. Boethius asks whether there is any such thing as chance in the world, and Philosophy defines it as follows:

Hap is an unwar bitydinge of causes assembled in thinges that ben don for som other thing. But thilke ordre, procedinge by an uneschuable bindinge to-gidere, which that descendeth frou the welles of turvisance that ordeineth alle things in hir places and in hir tymes, maketh that the causes rennen and assemblen to-gidere.(2)

Then she explains that all hap is controlled by the foreknowledge of God, but because human beings cannot know the plan of God, many circumstances seem to come about by sheer reasonless accident.

The next question which Boethius asks is again one on which there has been controversy since the beginning of time. He wants to know whether there can be any free will in a scheme of things in which everything is controlled by the foreknowledge of God. Philosophy replies that there is freedom of the will in that each person is endowed with reason and judgment. As long as he uses his reason and judgment, he is exercising free will, but his will is in accord with the divine providence as long as

(1)Boethius, The Consolation of Philosophy, Bk. IV,Prose VI
Chaucer's translation.
(2)Ibid.,Bk.V,ProseI
he is able to see clearly. It is when he allows the delights of the body and of the senses to rule over his reason and judgment that he becomes subject to the workings of chance and Fortune. It is because his will is in conflict with the divine will that his plans have to be changed for him. The man who keeps free from the dominance of the body is able to live in close harmony with God, and rise above the vicissitudes of Fortune. The following passage in which this is explained, smacks strongly of the *Ode on The Intimations of Immortality,* written centuries later by Wordsworth:

Wherfore in alle thinges that resoun is, in hem also is libertee of willinge and of millinge. But I ne ordeyne nat, as who seyth, I ne graunte nat, that this libertee be evenelyke in alle thinges. For why in the soveraines devynes substaunces, that is to seyn, in spirites, jugement is more cleer, and wil not y-corumped, and might redy to speden thinges that ben desired. But the soules of men moten nodes be more free when they loken hem in the speculacioun or lokinge of the devyne thought, and lasse free when they sliden into the bodies; and yit lasse free when they ben gadered to-gidere and comprrehended in erthely membres. But the laste servage is whan that they ben yeven to yvoes, and han y-falle from the possession of hir propre resoun.(1)

At the end, we find that Boethius has ceased to lament his fate, because he has found in Philosophy a remedy against all earthly troubles.

CHAPTER III

FORTUNE IN CHAUCER’S MINOR POEMS

It is interesting to see how Chaucer’s conception of Fortune matured after he became acquainted with the writings of Boethius. From the first he seems to have recognized one fact which Boethius also stresses: namely, that adverse Fortune is kind in that she reveals to us our true friends. However, not until the latest of his minor poems does Chaucer accept Boethius’ theory that Fortune acts under the direction of God.

In the Book of the Duchess Chaucer was writing an elegy on the death of Lady Blanche, the wife of John of Gaunt. In the course of the poem he has much to say about the cruelty of Fortune, the Pagan goddess, with no suggestion that she is only the humble agent of a wise providence. The story is a conventional dream vision. Chaucer dreams that he is participating in a royal hunt. He becomes separated from the rest of the party, and is attracted by the figure of a man dressed in deep mourning. He approaches the mourner and asks the cause of his grief. The man then pours out a complaint against Fortune. He says that Fortune is a traitress, full of guile; that she is really foul, but appears fair. She is very fickle, taking delight in dashing the hopes of those on whom she has just smiled. Her favorite sport is lying. She laughs with one eye, and weeps with the other. She is like the scorpion, which appears harmless, but carries a sting in its tail. She is an enchantress and a false thief; with one twirl of her wheel she exalts the lowest, and
degrades the highest. The mourner then explains to Chaucer
that by her wiles the fickle goddess enticed him into a game of
chess. Her plays were deceitful, and she won his queen from him.
He complains that if he had known more about chess he might have
kept his queen. But no, he corrects himself, nothing he could
have done would have moved Fortune, when she had decided to take
away his queen. This lament is as follows:

My boldnesse is turned to shame,
For fals Fortune hath pleyd a game
Atte chess with me, alias! the whyle!
The trayteresse fals and ful of gyle,
That al behoteth and no-thing halt,
That baggeth foule and loketh faire,
The dispitouse debonaire,
That scorneth many a creature!
An ydole of fals portraiture
Is she, for she wil sone wyren;
As filth over y-strawed with floures;
Hir moste worship and hir flour is
To lyen, for that is hir nature;
Without feyth, lawe, or mesure
She is fals; and ever laughinge
With oon eye, and that other wepinge.
That is brought up, she set al doun.
I lykne hir to the scorpioun,
That is a fals flatering beste;
For with his hede he maketh feste,
But al amid his flateringe
With his tayle he wol stinge,
And envenyme; and so wol she.
She is the envyous charite
That is ay fals, and semeth wele;
So turneth she hir false whale
Aboute, for it is no-thing stable,
Now by the fyre, not by the table;
Ful many oon hath she thus y-blent.
She is play of enchantement,
That semeth oon and is nat so,
The false thief! what hath she do,
Trowest thou? by our lord, I wol thee seye.
Atte chess with me she gan to pleye;
With hir false draughtes divers
She stal on me, and took my fers
And when I saw my fere awaye,
Alas! I couthe no lenger playe,
But seyde, "Farwel, swete, y-wis;
And farwel al that ever ther is!"
Therwith Fortune seyde "Chek here!"
And "mate!" in mid pointe of the chekkere
With a poune erraunt, alas!
Ful craftier to pley she was
Than Athalius, that made the game
First of the chess: so was his name.
But god wolde I had ones or twyes
Y-kould and knowe the jeurnardyes
That coude the Greek Pithagore!
I shulde have played the he at ches,
And kept my fers the bet therby;
And though wherto? for trerely
I holde that wish nat worth a stree
It had be never the bet for me.
For Fortune can so many a wyle,
Ther be but fewe can hir be glye,
And eek she is the las to blame;
my-selfe I wolde have do the same,
Before god, hadde I been as she;
She oughte the more excused he.
For this I say yet more therto,
Hadd I be god and myghte have do
My wille, when my fers she caughte,
I wolde have draw the same draughte.
For, also wis god yive me reste,
I dare wel swere she took the beste!(1)

Chaucer is at a loss to understand why the mourner is so sad
over the outcome of a game of chess. Further questioning fin-
ally reveals that the queen of the chess game is really his
wife, whom Fortune has removed from him by death.

The conception of Fortune found here is quite immature
and superficial. We are made aware that Chaucer is still a
young man, and has not as yet been able to formulate any philosophy
of life which will enable him to cease railing against Fortune.

By the time that Chaucer wrote his ballad, Fortune, he had
translated the work of Boethius and had absorbed his ideas.

(1) Book of the Duchess, 11. 617-684
This poem in itself presents a contrast between the pagan conception of the goddess Fortuna, and the conception of Boethius. In the poem the plaintiff against Fortune rails against her as a cruel, fickle creature, whom he defies. Her only virtue is that she helps him distinguish his true friends. Fortune in reply explains that man is born into a changing world, and that he must be bound to the wheel of Fortune while he lives. All this is done in accordance with the divine providence which controls all things. The rule of Fortune ends when man dies. It will be well to quote this short poem to show the transition from the old conception to the new:

FORTUNE

I. Le Pleintif contre Fortune

This wrecched worldes transmutacioun,
As wele or wo, now povre and now nonour,
Withouten ordre or wys discrecioun
Governed is by Fortunes error;
But matheles, the lask of hir favour
Ne may nat don me singen, though I dye
'Iay tout perdu mon temps et men labour'
For synally, Fortune, I thee defye!

Yit is me left the light of my resoun,
To knownen frend fro fo in thy mirour.
So muche hath yit thy whirling up and doun
Y-taught me for to knownen in an hour
But trewely, no force of thy redour
To him that over himself hath the maystreye!
My sufficaunce shal be my socour:
For synally, Fortune, I thee defye!

O Socrates, thou stedfast champioun,
She never mighte be thy tormentour;
Thou never dredest hir oporessioun,
Ne in hir chere founde thou no savour.
Thou knewe wel deceit of hir colour,
And that hir moste worshipe is to lye.
I knowe hir eek a fals dissimulour:
For fyally, Fortune, I thee defye!

II. La responsa de Fortune au Plentif

No man is wrecched, but himself hit wene,
And he that hath himself hath suffisaunce.
Why seystow thanne I am to thee so kene,
That hast thyself out of my governaunce?
Sey thus: 'Graunt mercy of thyn haboundance
That thou hast lent or this: Why wolt thou stryve?
What wostow yit, how I thee wol avaunce?
And eek thou hast thy beste frend alyle!

I have thee taught division bi-twine
Frend of affect, and frend of countenaunce;
Thee nedeth nat the galle of noon hyene,
That curseth even defte fro hir restonuce;
Now seest thou cleer, that were in ignoraunce.
Yet hal! thyn ancre, and git thou mayst alryve
Ther bountye bert the keyes of my bouteaunce:
And eek thou hast thy beste frend alyle.

How many have I refused to sustene,
Sin I thee fostred have in thy plesaunce:
Wolt thou then make a statut on thy queen
That I shal been at thyn ordinansaunce?
Thou born art in my reyne of variaunce,
Aboute the wheel with other most thou stryve.
My lore is bet than wikke is thy grevaunce,
And eek thou hast thy beste frend alyle.

III. La responsa du Plentif countre Fortune.

Thy lore I damone, hit is alversitee,
My frend maystow nat reven, blind godesse!
That I thy frendes knowe, I thanke hit thee.
Tak hem agayn, lat hem go ly on presse:
The negardye in kepyn hir richessee
Prenostic is thou wolt hir tour assyle;
Wikke appettyt comth ay before sekenesse.
In general, this reule may nat fayle.

La responsa de Fortune countre le Plentif.

Thou pinchest at my mutabilitee,
For thee I lent a drone of my richessee,
And now me lyketh to with-drawe me.
Why sholdestow my realtee oppresse?
The see may ebe and flower more or lesse;
The welkne hath might to shyne, reyne, or hayle;
Right so mot I kythen my brotelnesse.
In general, this reule may nat fayle.

Lo, th' execution of the magesee
That al purveyeth of his rightwinesse,
That same thing 'Fortune' cleven ye,
Ye blinde bestes, ful of lewdnesse!
The hevene hath prepared of sikernessse,
This world hath ever resteles travayle;
The laste day is ende of myn intresse:
In general, this reule may nat fayle.
CHAPTER IV

FORTUNE IN TROILUS AND CRISEYDE

The scene of Troilus and Criseyde, Chaucer's longest complete work, is laid against the background of the Trojan War. Throughout the story, the reader is aware of the doom which is hanging over Troy, and knows that a happy ending for the story is impossible. The plot is briefly as follows:

Troilus, the son of King Priam of Troy, is a scoffer of love, and makes his boasts that Venus shall never get him in her power. One day he sees the beautiful Criseyde, a widow, and daughter of the soothsayer, Calchas. He is at once overcome with love of her, and appears in such a melancholy state that he is questioned by his bosom friend, Pandarus, who is the uncle of Criseyde. Troilus tells Pandarus that he is in love with Criseyde, and must enjoy her love, or die. Pandarus arranges for them to meet at his house. Criseyde returns the love of Troilus, and the couple are deliriously happy for a short while. Then comes the word that Criseyde is to be sent to the Greek camp in exchange for a Trojan who has been held captive by the Greeks. The lovers can scarcely bear up under their grief at the separation, but Criseyde consoles Troilus by promising to return to him in ten days. She is escorted to the Greek camp by the gallant Diomede, who undertakes to revive her drooping spirits by his attentions. Troilus spends the ten days in an agony of expectation, but the tenth day passes without bringing Criseyde. Several more days go by, and Troilus still refuses to believe that she is unfaithful. Then one night he
dreams that he sees Criseyde lying with a wild boar. Cassandra, the prophetess, interprets the dream to mean that Criseyde has forsaken Troilus for Diomede, whose crest was a boar. Shortly afterward, Troilus recognizes on the person of Diomede a brooch which he has given to Criseyde, and is convinced of her infidelity. He rages long in his grief, and tries often to kill Diomede, but is at last slain by Achilles.

In this poem Fortune is closely linked with the Furies, fierce goddesses who take pleasure in destroying the happiness of men. At the very first of the poem Chaucer invokes one of the Furies to help him tell his story, whereas it was customary to invoke one of the Muses. He is loth to tell such a tragic story, and seems to resent the fate which is meted out to Troilus. The invocation is as follows:

*Thesiphone, thou help me for t'endyte*
*This woful vers, that wepen as I wryte!*

*To thee clepe I, thou godesse of torment,*
*Thou cruel Furie, sorwng ever in peyne;*
*Help me that am the sorwful instrument*
*That helpeth lovers, as I can, to pleyne!*
*For wel sit it, the sothe for to seyne,*
*A woful wight to han a drery fere,*
*And, to a sorwful tale, a sory chere.*

The sense of fate dominates the book throughout. The reader is compelled to wait in terror for the catastrophe which he knows is sure to come. Although the scene of the story is laid in ancient times, and although the pagan gods are part of the machinery of the poem, most of the philosophy is distinctly medieval. Boethius' conception of Fortune and destiny is blended with the idea of Fortune as a Fury. Fortune is not a willful,

(1)Troylus and Criseyde, Bk.I, 11. 6-14
hard-hearted goddess, who acts entirely according to her own caprice. She is under the control of God. It will be remembered that according to the theory of Boethius, there were three forces which controlled the life of man: Namely, providence or purveyance, destiny, and Fortune. Providence is the plan for the universe, which exists in the mind of God. Destiny is the blind force which executes the providence of God, and may be exercised through spirits, through Nature, through wandering stars, through angels, or through devils. Destiny sends out influences until they are communicated to another blind force, Fortune, whose office is to direct the affairs of men. Because Fortune is so far removed from the stability of God, her chief qualities are change, instability, and irrationality. Whatever comes to man in this life is the immediate gift of Fortune. There are two kinds of Fortune: common and personal. Common fortune is made up of the experiences which are common to all humanity, such as birth, growth, love, and death, and is governed by Nature as a destinal agent. All other events, which are known as hap, chance, or accident, comprise the personal fortune of an individual.

In Troilus and Criseyde, Chaucer is very much interested in the influence of the planets upon the personal fortunes of the lovers. The stars and planets are destinal agents under the control of God's providence. In Book II, the wandering stars, especially Venus and Luna, exert powerful influence. When Pandarus first sets out to visit Criseyde, in an attempt to interest her in Troilus, he examines the position of the moon to see whether she is favorable to his enterprise. (1) We also learn that Venus was

(1) Troilus and Criseyde, Bk.II, 1. 74
favorable to Troilus at his birth, and works in his behalf in his wooing of Criseyde:

And also blissful Venus, wel arrayed,
Sat in hir sevynthe hous of hevene tho,
Disposed wel, and with aspectes payed,
To helpen sely Troilus of his wo.
And, sooth to seyn she nas nat al a fo
To Troilus in his nativitee;
God wot that wel the soner spedde he.(1)

Troilus has all the qualities of a true child of Venus: he is beautiful, passionate, temperamental, honorable, dutiful, faithful, refined, delicate, and kind. It is because of the working of the planets that Criseyde is forced to stay overnight at the house of Pandarus:

The bente mone with hir horns male,
Saturne, and Jove, in Cancro joined were,
That swhich a rayn from hevene gan avale,
That every maner womman that was there
Had of that smoky rayn a verray fere;
At which Pandare tho laugh, and seyde thenne,
'Now were it tyme a lady to go henne:(2)

Troilus has a firm belief in the influence of the planets and stars, as is shown when he prays to all except Saturn to help him win Criseyde. He asks to be delivered from the influence of Saturn, because Saturn is cold and dry, and brings misfortune, prison, poison, disease, and storms.(3)

The passages where Fortune is directly mentioned are strongly reminiscent of Boethius. In Book I, Troilus is complaining to Pandarus because Fortune has caused him to fall in love with

(1) Troilus and Criseyde, Bk. II, ll. 680-686
(2) ibid., Bk. III, ll.624-630
(3) ibid., Bk. III,11.715-734
Criseyde, who, he thinks, will never return his love. Pandarus' consolation is very similar to the answer given by Philosophy to Boethius, when he was bemoaning his hard lot:

Quod Pandarus, 'than blamestow thou Fortune
For thou art wrooth, ye, now erst I see;
Wostow nat wel that Fortune is commune
To every maner wight in som degree?
And yet thou hast this comfort, lo, pardee:
That, as hir joyes moten over-goon,
So mote hir sorwes passen overichoon.

For if hir wheel stinte any-thing to torne,
Than ceased she Fortune anoon to be:
Now, sith hir wheel by no wey may sojorne,
What wostow if hir mutabilitie
Right as thy-selven list, wol doon by thee,
Or that she be not fer fro thy helpinge?
Paraunter, thou hast cause for to si·uge(1)

The medieval idea of Fortune as the executrix of the will of God is clearly expressed in the following passage:

But O, Fortune, executrice of wierdes,
O influences of thiese hevenes hye;
Soth is, that, under god, ye ben our hierdes,
Though to us hestes been the causes wyre.
This mene I now, for she gan homward hye,
But execut was al bisyde hir leve,
At the goddes wil; for which she moste bleve.(2)

The fate which hangs over Troy, is under the control of God,
as is shown in the fifth book:

Fortune, whiche that permutacion
Of thinges hath, as it is hir committed
Through purveyaunce and disposicion
Of heighe Jove, as regnes shal ben flitted
Fro folk in folk, or when they shal ben smitted,
Gan pulle awey the fetheres brighte of Troye
Fro day to day, til they ben bare of joye.(3)

The passage in Book IV, in which Troilus discourses at

(1) Troilus and Criseyde, Bk.I,11.537-854
(2) ibid., Bk.III,11.617-623
(3) ibid., Bk.V, 11.1540-1547
length on predestination versus free will, has been taken
directly from Boethius, Book I, Prose III. Chaucer has been
severely censured for introducing this argument here, but there
are several justifications for doing this seemingly inartistic
thing. Troilus has been raging at Fortune for taking Criseyde
away from him. He has lost faith in God. By the time he gives
this speech, he has had time to calm down, and realize that God
has thus arranged his fate; that all his raving can avail noth­
ing. He asks himself how there can be such a thing as human
free will, if God knows everything which is going to happen; he
concludes that there cannot be. This speech is the youthful
Troilus' way of saying, "I never had a chance." He is not ma­
ture enough to carry the argument as far as Boethius does, and
to realize that if he had controlled his emotions by the use of
his will, he could have risen superior to the dictates of Fortune.
W.C. Curry, in defense of this speech says:

The speech of Troilus on predestination is the most power­
ful element of the poem in the confirming of that fatality
which governs the tragic action; it makes clear that the
ultimate power behind the destinal forces inherent in mov­
able things is the arbitrary will of God, whose plans for
the universe do not include human free will.(1)

We have the picture of the medieval goddess and her wheel
given in Book IV:

But al to litel, weylawey the whyle,
Lasteth swich joye, y-thonked be Fortune!
That semeth trewest, whan she wol bygyle,
And can to foles so hir song entune,
That she hem hent and blent, traytour comune;
And whan a wight is from hir wheel y-throwe,
Than laugheth she, and maketh him the mowe.

From Troilus she gan hir brighte face

(1) Curry, W.C., "Destiny in Chaucer's Troilus," PMLA, 45:156
Awey to wrythe, and took of him non hade,
But cast him clene oute of his lady grace,
And on hir wheel she sette up Diomed;
For which right now myn herte ginneth blede,
And now my penne, alas! with which I wryte,
Quaketh for drede of that I moot endyte.(1)

Troilus' blind lament against Fortune when he learns that
Criseyde is to be taken to the Greek camp, is again reminiscent
of Boethius' first complaint against Fortune when she cast him
down from high estate:

Than seyde he thus, 'Fortune: alias the whyle!
What have I doon, what have I thus a-gilt?
How mightestow for reuthe me bigyle?
Is ther no grace, and shal I thus be spilt?
Shal thus Criseyde away, for that thou wilt?
Alas! how maystow in thyn herte finde
To ben to me thus cruel and unkinde?

Have I nought thee honoured al my lyve,
As thou wel wost, above the goddes alle?
Why wiltow me fro joyes thus deprewe?
O Troilus, what may men now thee calle
But wreche of wrecches, out of honour falle,
Into miserie, in which I wol biwyle
Criseyde, alias! til that the breeth me fayle?

Allas, Fortune: if that my lyf in joye
Displesed hadde unto thy foule envye,
Why me haddestow my fader, king of Troye,
By-raft the lyf, or doon my bretheren dye,
Or slayn my-self, that thus compleyne and crye,
I, combre-world, that may of no-thing serve,
But ever dye, and never fully sterve?

If that Criseyde allone were me laft,
Nought roughte I whider thou woldest me stere;
And hir, alais! than hastow me birhaft.
But ever-more, lo! this is hy manere,
To reve a wight that most him is dere,
To prove in that thy gerful violence.
Thus am I lost, ther helpeth no defense.(2)

It is significant that inTroilus and Criseyde, the three
Fates are made subordnate to Jove, by whom Chaucer means God.

(1) Troilus and Criseyde, Bk.IV,1. 1-14
(2) Troilus and Criseyde, Bk.IV,11. 260-287
This is contrary to the pagan belief. In ancient times, the three Fates worked independently, and were subject to no higher power. This again shows the influence of the philosophy of Boethius. In the first lines of the fifth book, Chaucer speaks of the Fates as follows:

Aprochen gan the fatal destinee
That Joves hath in disposicioun,
And to yow, angry Parcas, sustren three,
Committe, to don executioun;(l)

Dreams are used as a destinal force in this story. In the last book Troilus has the dream of the wild boar, as has already been related. When he is inclined to treat this dream seriously, Pandarus, the worldly-wise man, makes fun of him, and advises him to dismiss the dream from his mind, saying:

Thy swevenes eek and al swich fantasye
Dryf out, and lat hem faren to mischaunce;
For they procede of thy malencolye,
That doth thee fele in sleep al this penaunce.
A straw for alle swevenes signifiuance!
God helpe me so, I counte hem not a bene,
Ther woot no man aright what dremes men.

For prestes of the temple tellen this,
That dremes been the revelacions
Of goddes, and as wel they telle, y-wis,
That they ben infernals illusions;
And leches seyn, that of complexious
Proceden they, or fast, or glotonye.
Who woot in sooth thus what they signifye?

Eek othere seyn that thorough impressiouns,
As if a wight hath faste a thing in minde,
That ther-of cometh swich avisious;
And othere seyn, as they in bokes finde,
That after tymes of the yeer by knide,
Men dreem, and that th' effect goth by the mone;
But leve no dreem, for it is nought to done.(2)

Troilus, however, could not shake off the impression of evil

(1)Troilus and Criseyde, Bk.V,1.1-4
(2) ibid., Bk.V,1.358-378
which the dream had given him. We read:

This dream, of which I held have eek biforn,
May never come out of his remembrance;
He thoughte ay wel he hadde his lady lorn,
And that Iovess, of his purvlaunce,
Him shewed hadde in sleep the signifiaunce
Of hir untrouthe and his disaventure,
And that the boor was shewed him in figure.(1)

Thus we see that dreams are used by God to execute his providence. This dream was sent to Troilus to reveal that Crisseyde was untrue to him.

There is still one other destinal force in the story. That is the influence of one soul upon another. As has been said, man may escape the destinal forces if he clings close to God himself. The will and the intellect are not corporeal unless they are corroded, so to speak, by the passions, which are corporeal. Then the soul is weighed down, and subject to Fortune, and the working of the destinal forces, which lie in the personalities of other people. Troilus was emotionally unstable, and therefore utterly unable to think clearly in situations where his emotions were involved. He became the sport of human influence, as exerted by Pandarus and Crisseyde, neither of whom had stability of character. In such a situation, nothing but disaster could result for the luckless Troilus.

(1) Troilus and Crisseyde, Bk.V, l. 1443-1449
CHAPTER V

FORTUNE IN THE CANTERBURY TALES

In Chaucer's Knight's Tale we have a combination of a medieval romance and a classical epic. The tournament scene is like those found in medieval romances, but the intervention of the gods is characteristic of the classical epics. There is a heavenly plot which runs parallel with the earthly plot; the scene shifts rapidly from heaven to earth.

The action of the story is concerned with the conflict between the wills of mortals and the decrees of Saturn, whom Chaucer makes the supremacy in this poem. All forces which influence the lives of mortals are under his control. Saturn is a sombre, morose god, very dignified; his decrees are absolute. Fortune, the stars, and all the other destinal agents obey him. He is not the benevolent providence which Boethius speaks about; his is rather inexorable fate, against whom mortals are powerless.

The thread of the plot runs as follows:

At the beginning of the story, Theseus is returning to Athens in triumph. He is met by a group of Theban women, who beg him to go to Thebes and bury their husbands, whose bodies lie unburied, a prey to beasts and birds. They address Theseus as "Lord, to whom Fortune hath given victorie," (1) and blame their own misfortune on that goddess, saying,

"Thanked be Fortune and hir false wheel,
That noon estat assureth to be weel." (2)

(1) Knight's Tale, l. 915
(2) Ibid., II. 925-926
When Theseus arrives at Thebes, he takes prisoner the youths, Palamon and Arcite, and returns with them to Athens, where he places them in a strong tower. While they are languishing in their prison, Arcite expresses his fatalistic views as follows:

Fortune hath yeven us this adversitee.
Som wikhe aspect or dispecioun
Of Saturne, by som constellacioun,
Hath yeven us this, al-though we hadde it sworn;
So stood the heven whan that we were born;(1)

Both young men fall in love with Emily, the sister of Theseus, whom they see from their prison window. Some time later, Arcite is released from prison, on condition that he never show his face again in Athens. He laments because he can no longer be near Emily, and says:

Alas why pleynen folk so in commune
Of surveyaunce of God, or of Fortune,
That yeveth hem ful ofte in many a gyse
what bettre than they can hem-self devyse?
Som man deseareth for to han richesse,
That cause is of his mordre or great siknesse.
And som man wolde out of his prison fayn,
That in his hous is of his meyne alayne.
Infinite harneis been in this matere;
We witen nat what thing we preyen here.
We faren as he that dronken is as a mous;
A dronke man not wel that he hath an hous,
But he nought which the righete way is thider;
And to a dronke man the way is slider.
And certes, in this world so faren we;
We seken faste after felicitee,
But we goon wrong ful often, trewely.
Thus may me seyen alle, and namely I,
That wende and hadde a great opinion,
That, if I might escapen from prison,
Than hadde I been in joye and perfite hele,
Thow now I am exyled fro my walle.
Sin that I may nat seen yow, Emily,
I nam but deeth ther is no remedye.(2)

(1) Knight's Tale, 11. 1086-1091
(2) Ibid., 11. 1252-1274
Palamon, on the other hand, is exceedingly bitter because
Arcite is free, and has some chance to raise an army, conquer
Theseus, and win Emily for his wife. He rails at the gods who
control the universe because they allow such unfairness to pre-
vail in human affairs. It would seem that all the pent-up bit-
terness in Chaucer's nature bursts forth in this speech which
he puts in the mouth of Palamon:

Tho seyde he: 'O cruel goddes, that governe
This world with binding of your word eterne,
And wryten in the table of athmaunt
Your parlement, and your eterne graunt,
What is mankinde more unto yow holde
Than is the sheep, that rouketh in the folde?
For slayn is man right as another beste,
And dwelleth eek in prison and areaste,
And hath siknesse, and greet adversitee,
And ofte ty'res gil telees, or else
What governaunce is in this prescience,
That giltelees tormenteth innocence?
For Goddes sake, to letten of his wille,
Theras a beast may al his lust fulfille.
And when a beast is deed, he hath no peyne;
But man after his deeth moot weere and rleyne,
Though in this world he have care and wo:
With-onen doute it may stonden so.(1)

Later, Arcite returns in disguise, and insinuates himself
into the good graces of Theseus. Palamon escapes from prison,
and is hiding in the woods, when he meets Arcite. They fight
over Emily. At this critical moment, Theseus happens to come
along. Chaucer explains Theseus' unexpected coming in this way:

The destine, ministre general,
That executeth in the world over-al
The surveynance, that God hath seyn biforn,
So strong it is, that, though the world had sworn
The contrarie of a thing, by ye or may,

(1) Knight's Tale, ll. 1303-1322
Yet sometime it shall fallen on a day
That falleth nat eft with-inne a thousand yere.
For certainly, our anopyrightes here,
Be it of werre, or pees, or hate, or love,
Al is this reuled by the sights above.(1)

Theseus stops the fight, and decrees that the two knights shall
fight for the hand of Emily in the lists, each with his follow-
ers. With the medieval fondness for painting rich word pictures,
Chaucer describes the elaborate preparations for the tournament.
On three sides of the lists are shrines to Venus, Diana, and Mars,
the patrons of Palamon, Emily, and Arcite, respectively. On the
morning of the tournament Palamon seeks the shrine of Venus and
prays that he may win Emily, or die in the tournament. The god-
dess promises to grant his prayer. Shortly afterward, Emily
sacrifices to Diana, praying that she may always remain a maiden.
Diana, knowing that it is useless to act against the other gods,
tells Emily that she will marry one of the young men, but does
not reveal which one. Arcite, the warrior, then comes to the
shrine of Mars, and prays to be victorious in the tournament.
From the recesses of the temple, he hears the word "Victory".
As the tournament is about to begin, the scene suddenly shifts
to heaven, where Venus and Mars are quarreling because each has
promised victory, and neither will give in. Then Saturn, the
august, gloomy father of all, steps in and settles the matter.
He decrees that Arcite shall win the tournament, and that Palamon
shall win Emily. His speech is the one which reveals most clearly
Chaucer's new fatalism:

(1) Knight's Tale, 11. 1663-1673
34.

'My dere Joghter Venus, 'quod Saturne, My cours, that hath so wyde for to turne, Hath more power than wot any man. Myn is the drenching in the see so wan; Myn is the prison in the darke cote; Myn is the strangling and hanging by the throte; The murmur, and the charles rebelling, The growynge, and the pryve eyngosynge; I do vengeance and playn correccloune Whyl I dwelle in the signe of the Lescun. Myn is the ruine of the hye halles, The falling of the tounes and of the walles Upon the mynour or the carpenter, I slo w Sampson in shaking the riler; And myn be the maladies colde, The darke tresons, and theastes olde; My loking is the fader of pestilence.(1)

The scene returns to earth. As the tournament progresses, Arcite is victorious, and is declared the winner of Emily. However, at this critical moment, Saturn, in fulfilment of his promise to Venus, causes Pluto to send a fury from Hell to frighten Arcite's horse. The horse rears, Arcite is thrown on his head, and dies from his injuries. After a decent intervall of mourning, Theseus gives Emily to Palamon in marriage.

We see here that Chaucer has progressed beyond the conception of Fortune and providence which he had taken over from Boethius. He maintains Boethius belief that Fortune is ruled by a higher power, but that power has become a dark, gloomy fate, against which there is no appeal. He has rejected Boethius' idea that because providence guides the universe, therefore all is right. In the last speech of Theseus we find the same fatalism expressed, although here he calls the almighty power Jupiter instead of Saturn:

(1) Knight's Tale, 11. 2452-2469
What maketh this but Jupiter the king?  
The which is prince and cause of alle thing,  
Converting al unto his propre welle,  
From which it is deryved, sooth to telle.  
And here-ageyns no creature on lyve  
Of no degree availleth for to stryve.(1)

In the Man of Law's Tale, we have again presented the idea  
that the stars are forces in the working out of destiny:

Paraventure in thilke large book  
Which that men cleepe the heaven, y-wrtyen was  
with sterres, whan that he his birthe took,  
That he for love shulde han his deeth, alas!  
For in the sterres, clerer than is glas,  
Is written, god wot, who-so coude it rede,  
The deeth of every man, withouten drede.

In sterres, many a winter ther-biforn,  
Was witen the deeth of Ector, Achilles,  
Of Pompey, Julius, er that they were born;  
The stryf of Thebes; and of Hercules,  
Of Sampson, Turnus, and of Socrates  
The deeth; But mennes wittes been so dulle,  
What no wight can wel rede it atte fulle.(2)

In Chaucer's own Tale of Melibeus, we find one reference  
to Fortune. She is here the goddess whom we meet in the first  
part of Boethius' work, in whom it is folly to put one's trust,  
His wife, Prudence, advises Melibeus:

'Certes, 'quod Prudence, ' if ye wol werke by my conseil,  
ye shul not assaye fortune by no wey; ne ye shul nat lene or  
bewe unto hir, after the word of Senek: for "things that been  
folly doon, and that been in hope of fortune, shullen never  
come to good ende." And as the same Senek seith: "the more  
cleer and the more shynynge that fortune is, the more brotil  
and the soner broken she is." Trusteth nat in hir, for she nis nat  
stidefast ne stable; for whan thow trowest to be most seur  
or siker of hir help, she wol faile thee and deceyve thee.' And  
wheras ye seyn that fortune hath norissed yow fro your child-  
hede, I seye, that in so muchel shul ye the lasse truste in hir  
and in hir zit. For Senek seith: "what man that is norissed  
by fortune, she maketh him a greet fool." Now thanne, sin ye  
desyre and axe vengeance, and the that is doen after the lave  
and bifore the juge lyketh yow nat, and the yvengeance that is

(1)Knight's Tale, 11. 3035-3040  
(2)Man of Law's Tale, 11. 190-203
doon in hope of fortune is perilous and uncertain, thanne have ye no other remedye but for to have your recours unto the sovereign juge that vengeth alle vileinyes and wronges; and he shal venge yow after that him-self witnesseth, wher-as he seith: "leveth the vengeance to me, and I shal do it." (1)

There are many references to Fortune in the Monk's Tale.

The monk says in the beginning that he is going to recount the fall of great men, after the manner of the Greek tragedies.

Therefore Fortune is presented throughout as the leveling agent which degrades men when they become too powerful. The following passages illustrate this conception:

For certein, whan that fortune list to flee,
Ther may no man the cours of hir with-holde;
Lat no man truste on blind prosperitee;
Be war by thise enamples trewe and olde.(2)

Beth war, for whan that fortune list to gloze,
Than wayteth she hir man to overthrowe
By swich a wey as he wolde leest suppose.(3)

For whan fortune wol a man forsake,
She bereth away hir regne and hir richesse,
And eek his freendes, bothe more and lesse;
For that man that hath freendes thurgh fortune,
Mishap wol make hem enemys, I gesse;
This proverbe is ful sooth and ful commune.(4)

Tragedie is noon other maner thing,
Ne can in singynge oeye ne bewaille,
But for that fortune wol assaille
With unwar strook the regnes that ben proude;
For when men trusteth hir, than wol she faille,
And covere hir brighte face with a cloude.(5)

In the Marchantes Tale only does Chaucer hark back to the bitter railing against Fortune as a pagan goddess, a brutal monster. She is described as follows:

O soden hap, o thou fortune instable,

(1) Tale of Meltheus, 42  (2)Monke's Tale, ll. 3185-3188
(3) Ibid., ll. 3330-3332  (4) Ibid., ll.3430-3435
(5) Monke's Tale, ll. 3953-3956
Lyk to the scorpium so deceivable,
That flatterest with thyn heed when thou wolt stinge;
Thy tayl is deeth, thurgh thyn enveniminge.
0 brotil joye! o swete venim queyte!
0 monstre, that so subtilly canst peynte
Thy yiftes, under hewe of stedfastnesse,
That thou deceyvest bothe more and lesse!(1)

From this survey of The Canterbury Tales, it is possible to see that Chaucer still presents Fortune as the agent of divine providence. When in the Marchantes Tale he describes again the classical deity, it is because the tale has a classical setting. It is an artistic device. The view of Boethius is too prevalent in all the later works of Chaucer, for us to believe that he ever reverted to his youthful conception of Fortune. We may safely give to Boethius the credit for the change in Chaucer's attitude toward Fortune.

(1) Marchantes Tale, 11. 2057-2067
BIBLIOGRAPHY

I BOOKS

Carter, Jesse B. The Religious Life of Ancient Rome. Houghton, 1911
Cumont, Franz The Oriental Religions in Roman Paganism. Open Court, 1911
Fowler, William Warde The Religious Experience of the Roman People. Macmillan, 1911
Fowler, William Warde The Roman Festivals of the Period of the Republic. Macmillan, 1902
Hammond, Eleanor F. Chaucer: a bibliographical manual. Macmillan, 1908
Kittredge, George L. Chaucer and His Poetry. Harvard Press, 1915
Legouis, Emile Geoffrey Chaucer. E. P. Dutton, 1913
Lowell, James Russel My Study Windows. Houghton, Mifflin, 1871
Murray, Alexander S. Manual of Mythology. Henry Altemus, 1897
Patch, Howard P. The Goddess Fortune. Cambridge, 1927
Peterson, Roy W. The Cults of Campania. Rome, American Academy, 1919
Shannon, Edgar F. Chaucer and the Roman Poets. Cambridge, Harvard, 1929
Skeat, Wallace The Student's Chaucer. Macmillan, 1895
II ARTICLES


