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THE MEDIEVAL ESTHETIC IDEAL OF PROPORTION IN CHAUCER'S LONGER POEMS

Vincent L. Gadbow
B.A. Montana State University
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Approved:

H S Merrill
Chairman, Board of Examiners

W. P. Clark
Dean, Graduate School

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

This is a study of structural technique. It attempts to show that the development of Chaucer's structural technique, from The Book of the Duchess through The House of Fame to Troilus and Criseyde and The Knightes Tale, was a gradual process which, in the course of its development, absorbed the formal ideal of Dante and the organic plots of Boccaccio and fused them in a carefully planned artistic form designed to achieve the maximum of formal symmetry. The main purpose of this study is to show that Chaucer's later structural technique aimed at the realization of proportion, the quality which the medieval mind considered most essential to objective beauty, in the form of his longer poems. Such a study is valuable because it reveals how Chaucer transformed his borrowed subject matter, ideas, verses,

and plots, into a highly unified, symmetrically shaped art form.

With about five hundred years intervening between Chaucer's death and the present day, it is not surprising that almost every major aspect of Chaucer's life and works has been thoroughly analyzed. At the same time, it is even more surprising that one of the most important features of his works, the structural technique which they reflect, has been almost completely slighted. Except for general references to the pleasing, balanced structures of the Troilus and The Knightes Tale, or to the failure of the structure of The House of Fame, there has been no thorough concern on the part of scholars for Chaucer's structural technique. None of the critics who have mentioned the careful planning which they feel must have gone into the composition of Chaucer's longer poems has attempted to show how completely the forms of Chaucer's works reflect a progressive development toward the achievement of a narrative structure which is both formally symmetrical and organically unified.

Apparently only three critics have more than mentioned the significance of the formal symmetry which characterizes the Troilus and The Knightes Tale. Each of these critics, Thomas R. Price, Percy Van Dyke

Shelley, and Hildegard Engel, notices the principle of proportion at work in Chaucer's structural technique in one or more poems, but none of them follows the development of this aspect of Chaucer's technique from the earlier to the later poems, and none of them relates the principle upon which that technique is based to the thought of the period. Their general tendency is to view Chaucer's technique as more modern than medieval, more in the spirit of the Renaissance than in the spirit of the Middle Ages.

Thomas R. Price analyzes Troilus and Criseyde in order "...to show...the evidence of Dr. Lounsbury's summary of Chaucer's poetical character, the evidence of deliberate and careful calculation, of cool, self-conscious, almost infallible skill."[1] But Price, after noticing the "absolute symmetry of proportion" in the scenes he finds in the Troilus, goes on to prove that the structure of the poem is a dramatic structure, one which "...anticipated the evolution of the modern drama and romance."[2] He examines the poem as he would a sixteenth century play and compares it to Shakespeare's

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1. Thomas R. Price, "A Study in Chaucer's Method of Narrative construction," MLA (II), New Series 41, 1896, p. 307.
2. Ibid., p. 315.

treatment of the same tale. His conclusion, that Chaucer's management of the action where it differs from Shakespeare's is an anticipation of the practice of modern dramatists, does not tell us much about the actual form of Chaucer's poem. He is concerned with the movement of the action, but not with the organization of the parts of the action and the relation between that organization and the formal pattern of the poem.

By neglecting the structural changes Chaucer made in adapting Boccaccio's Filostrato to his own design, Price fails to observe the significance of the five part form in which Chaucer molded the organic plot he borrowed from Boccaccio. Attempting to prove that Chaucer was ahead of his age in dramatic technique, Price overlooks the fact that Chaucer was a highly skilled artist according to the standards of his own age, an age which saw proportion and symmetry as essential aspects of beauty, not only in cathedrals, for instance, but in literature as well.

Although Percy Van Dyke Shelley is interested in proving that Chaucer was more modern than he was medieval in another sense -- in his use of realistic description and characterization -- he, too, is con-

scious of the balanced form of Chaucer's narrative poems. He notices, for example, that the Troilus, in its scenes and as a whole, has "...acquired nicer proportion and symmetry than the earlier works possess."[3] But, since Shelley's concern is not with this aspect of Chaucer's technique, his references to it are not continued throughout his examination of Chaucer's works. When he discusses The Knightes Tale, for instance, he fails to mention its formal symmetry. His final judgment on The Knightes Tale reflects his particular interest and reveals his failure to note the importance of form in a study of Chaucer's development as an artist:

> Thus, into The Knightes Tale, which belongs to a literary type that is usually relatively deficient in realism and in character portrayal, Chaucer has succeeded in introducing a great deal of realism and not a little character interest without sacrificing its essentially romantic atmosphere. It is a poem full of pageantry and action, and it moves with a grave and stately beauty.... 4

An investigation of the form and structure of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales made by Hildegard Engel in 1931 is more thorough than those of Price and Shelley. In her attempt to reveal Chaucer's methods of construction by an analysis of the design of his poems, Miss Engel notes that one of the qualities of the form and structure of The Knightes Tale is its symmetry.

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3. Percy Van Dyke Shelley, The Living Chaucer, Philadelphia, 1940, p. 44.
4. Ibid., p. 240.

She pays particular attention to Chaucer's parallelism, his method of balancing speeches and scenes. She notes that "Chaucer's parallelism often extends to numerical proportions"[5] in the number of lines he devotes to balanced elements. In her attempt to work out a symmetrical pattern in the poem as a whole by comparing the structure of the poem with the structure of a modern symphony, however, she is led away from the actual literary form of The Knightes Tale. Describing the form of the poem in terms of preludes, motifs, themes, interludes, and movements is interesting, but irrelevant to Chaucer's method of literary composition. Often the failure of the tale to fit into the symphonic scheme makes Chaucer's technique seem inadequate to the material he was working with. The contrary is true, however; Chaucer's art was adequate to shape his material into a successful art form. Viewed as a piece of literature in terms of the arrangement of the parts of the action within the formal design of the poem, The Knightes Tale is an almost perfectly constructed poem. Valuable and interesting as is Miss Engel's study, it does not, in its treatment of The Knightes Tale, throw a great deal of light on the essential characteristics of Chaucer's literary technique.

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5. Hildegard Engel, Structure and Plot in Chaucer's Canterbury Tales, (A dissertation) University of Bonn, 1931, p. 38.

In contrast to these studies, this paper aims at a fairly thorough analysis of the form of Chaucer's longer poems. As a study in technique, it is concerned almost entirely with technical considerations, with the problem of composition rather than with problems of realism, characterization, interpretation, and versification. Technique, here, is used in the same sense that Joseph Warren Beach used the term to describe "the structural art of the novel: the method of assembling and ordering...elements of subject matter."[6] Other terms which are used consistently throughout this paper are defined in the following list:

Formal: Bare, external design or outline of a poem as distinguished from the matter composing it.

Organic: Possessed of a systematic, co-ordinated, interrelated structure. Applied to the matter within an external design. For example: Episodic plots are not organic; the episodes follow one another for no apparent reason; they are not related to one another by the necessary or probable working out of a problem situation.

Form: The shape and structure of a poem. It describes the relationship between the external design and the internal structure.

Structure: The arrangement of the parts of the subject matter of a poem.

Episode: A set of events that stand out or apart from larger pieces of action as of particular moment. Episodes are essential pieces of action from which a plot is constructed.

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6. Joseph Warren Beach, The Technique of Thomas Hardy, Chicago, 192[illegible], p. vi.

Symmetry: Due or balanced proportions; beauty of form arising from such balance. Applied here to the correspondence in size, shape, and arrangement of the parts of the structure in the formal design of a poem.

Proportion: The balanced disposition of the various parts of an action among themselves, and of the various parts to the whole.

As the kind of terms defined here implies, this is a study of craftsmanship, of artifice, rather than a study of Art. The concern here is with the mechanical principle Chaucer followed in order that he might mold his materials into a shape which for him was an artistic ideal, an end to be achieved by the proper arrangement of his subject matter. The purpose of this study is to describe the way in which Chaucer applied that principle by dividing his subject matter, balancing the parts of it within the whole, and attempting to maintain a logical relation between the structure and the design in order to realize a medieval esthetic ideal.

CHAPTER II

The Medieval Esthetic Ideal

Perhaps the inclination to think of Chaucer's work apart from its intellectual background has obscured the significance of the form of Chaucer's poetry. It is impossible to appraise the esthetic quality of Chaucer's long narrative poems unless we do understand the kind of form he was using in which to embody the stories, ideas, and attitudes he took from other authors. And we cannot understand that form unless we realize that in shaping the contents of his work in particular ways, Chaucer was trying to achieve in literary art an ideal which medieval philosophers had described as the essence of beauty. Unless we come to our reading of Chaucer with some knowledge of medieval esthetics, it is impossible either to appreciate thoroughly or to evaluate Chaucer's work. We can recognize the importance of form in

Chaucer's poems only by recognizing that form as a graphic representation of a medieval artistic ideal.

It is impossible to assume, however, that Chaucer's contact with medieval esthetic theory was a direct one, that he read the scattered remarks made by St. Thomas, for instance, on the nature of beauty, and immediately incorporated in his poems the esthetic qualities St. Thomas discusses. Nor was it possible for him to come in contact with a body of critical writings which analyzed the nature of beauty in literary art, for literary criticism had not as yet become a pastime for writers or a problem for philosophers. During the Middle Ages, literature was not recognized as a fine art,[1] and no attempt was made to view literary works as objects which reflected beauty as their sole function.

During the age of Chaucer, the artist subordinated the purely esthetic qualities of art to the ethical doctrines art was supposed to communicate. If art received any sanction at all, it was a moral sanction. At least, the content was judged on moral grounds when it was judged as art by the officials of the society. But moral principles were not the only principles by which the medieval artist worked. If moral considerations usually determined the content of his work, it did not determine his technique.

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1. Katharine Everett Gilbert and Helmut Kuhn, A History of Esthetics, New York, 1939, p. 157.

In this respect he was limited only by his ability and his knowledge. The consideration of technical matters, of ways of arranging his material and giving form to the content of his work, freed him from the domination of moral principles. Thus freed, with certain formal principles in mind, he could strive to achieve in his work an approximation of his esthetic ideal.

The esthetic principles which Chaucer must have known were expressed all through the Middle Ages until a definite theory of beauty had become a part of the medieval mind. The essence of this theory is reflected in the many similar definitions various medieval thinkers give for beauty:

> St. Augustine, following Cicero whose definition had become a platitude, defined beauty as "proportion of the parts, together with a certain agreeableness of color". Other medieval definitions vary only slightly the way of conceiving the formal harmony. Albertus Magnus defined beauty as "elegant commensurability"; St. Thomas, as involving the three conditions of integrity, proportion, and brightness. Wherever the medieval philosophers found these qualities and relations, there they found their beauty, whether in the whole spectacle of the universe, in man, in buildings, or in songs.... 2

The emphasis on proportion in these definitions indicates the reliance of the medieval mind upon geometry. In St. Augustine, for instance, the concept of beauty becomes so formal at times as to be a complete interpretation of

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2. Ibid., p. 129.

beauty in the light of mathematical principles:

> The formal principle of beauty as the many-in-one determines for St. Augustine the most beautiful geometrical figure. He says an equilateral triangle is more beautiful than a scalene, because the scalene contains less equality. But the triangle in gneral equality connects sides and angles, while in the square, equality connects identities: that is, sides with sides, and angles with angles. So the square generally possesses more equality than the triangle and is to be preferred from the esthetic standpoint. 3

When applying this geometrical theory of beauty to architecture, St. Augustine says,

> One is shocked at any unnecessary inequality in the parts of fabricated things. One is not content, for instance, if a house has one door on the side and another almost in the middle but not quite. On the contrary, one is satisfied if there is a window in the middle of a wall and a window at each side of it at the same distance from the middle.4

Although St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274?) was not concerned with esthetics as a separate branch of philosophy, there are reflections upon the nature of beauty scattered throughout his writings.[5] In the definitions he gives for beauty, St. Thomas stresses the quality so important to St. Augustine. When he shows that beauty is not merely subjective, but a property of objects we designate as beautiful, St. Thomas says, "Beautiful things

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3. Ibid., p. 132.
4. Ibid., p. 133.
5. Leonard Callahan, A Theory of Esthetic According to the Principles of St. Thomas Aquinas, (A dissertation) The Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C., 1947, p. 20

are those which please when seen; wherefore, beauty consists in due proportion."[6] In another place, he shows the relation between beauty and the senses and again emphasizes proportion:

> Beauty consists in due proportion; for the senses are delighted in duly proportioned things, as in what is after their own kind; because sense is a sort of reason, and so is every cognitive faculty. [7]

In a detailed analysis of beauty, St. Thomas reduces the objective qualities of beauty to three: integrity, proportion, and splendor. Of the three, St. Thomas stresses proportion.

> Aquinas...seems to have given greater importance to this factor than to the other two which he has laid down, for in certain passages, proportion alone is mentioned as a condition of objective beauty. Proportion consists in the correct disposition of the various parts of an object or action among themselves, and of the various parts to the whole. It is perhaps the most striking element of all those which are associated with the concept of order, since it represents order completed. It is undoubtedly for this reason that Aquinas has chosen this condition for particular mention among the qualities of objective beauty rather than such affiliated notions as variety, unity, and harmony -- all of which are implied in the idea of proportion. Variety denotes nothing more than a multiplicity of diverse things or actions, or successive changes; through the work of arrangement or proportion, these various units are set in harmonious relations, thus effecting the unity of the object or work. [8]

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6. Ibid., p. 30.
7. Ibid., p. 52.
8. Ibid., 60-1.

It is necessary to emphasize the definition of the principle of proportion given here, for the idea of "the correct disposition of the various parts of an object or action among themselves, and of the various parts to the whole" as indispensable for beauty is an idea which we find reflected again and again in medieval art. It is an application of the kind of beauty St. Augustine finds exemplified to perfection in geometrical forms. And it becomes an application of geometry, of the balance of masses, not only to the plastic arts, but to literary art as well. Used poorly, the principle results in the attainment of balance or proportion at the expense of the content's unity; thus the integrity of the work is destroyed. When it is used correctly, the formal pattern and the organic content are equally emphasized, and we get a logical, formal plan blending perfectly with the action described.

Proportion, then, is the single principle which dominates the esthetic sense in the Middle Ages. Everywhere in medieval art the principle is reflected. The facade of the medieval cathedral is designed to conform to an ideal of symmetry. Medieval painting shows the imposition of geometrical form on religious subjects and themes. And medieval literature also reflects the geometrical bent of the medieval mind. The balanced formal

outline, which constituted beautiful form in the Middle Ages, is most clearly represented in literature in Dante's closely proportioned Divine Comedy. The completely ordered design of the poem is a representation in literary form of the philosophical concept which dominates the formal arrangement of the subject matter in other kinds of medieval art.

Every part of the Divine Comedy is completely planned and ordered on the basis of the principle of proportion. There are three main parts; each part is divided into thirty-three cantos with an introductory canto in the first part. The cantos are quantitatively balanced with only a margin of thirty-eight lines between the longest and the shortest. The formal symmetry is carried out further by the division of the three main parts into nine sections each. From the smallest detail to the plan of the whole, The Divine Comedy is dominated by a concern for symmetry and proportion.[9]

The adherence to proportion in the form of literary art was not limited to Dante, however, for the ideal was not the property or the creation of a single writer. Nor was the application of the principle of proportion to literary form restricted to Italian writers. In Eng-

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9. G. G. Coulton, Medieval Panorama, Cambridge, Eng., 1939, p. 213.

land, about the time Chaucer was writing The House of Fame, another medieval artist was at work applying the principle to the form of narrative poems. The structural technique of this anonymous writer parallels the meticulous technique reflected in The Divine Comedy. In one of his most famous works, Gawain and the Green Knight, the formal outline and the internal arrangement of the parts exhibit the same careful planning for "due proportion" as the Italian poem, but without the complete precision that characterizes Dante's work. Although it lacks the wide scope and vision of The Divine Comedy, Gawain and the Green Knight is one of the greatest of our medieval masterpieces, a work created by a writer whose "...sense of fitness and proportion entitles him to high rank as an artistic writer."[10]

The artistry of this unknown author was an artistry dominated by medieval ideals. In addition to having an ethical and religious purpose, the tale embodies the medieval esthetic ideal of proportion in its structural framework. In the four parts of the poem, which divide the tale into four well balanced episodes, the method of arranging and proportioning the stanzas is based upon a clear recognition of the need for a correct disposition of the parts in order to achieve symmetry and proportion. By devoting

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10. George Lyman Kittredge, A Study of Gawain and the Green Knight, Cambridge, Mass., 1916, p. 3.

an almost equal number of stanzas to each of the important incidents of the tale, the author achieves a balanced form for his narrative. The breakdown of the subject matter from a whole to parts, to episodes, to incidents, and finally to stanzas moves always toward a finer division of the tale into smaller, evenly balanced elements.

George Lyman Kittredge, in his description of the structure of Gawain, says that it breaks naturally into two parts, one devoted to the adventure of the Challenge, and one devoted to the adventure of the Temptation. He does not, however, follow the structural division any further than this.[11] With this much of an analysis, we see Gawain as a tale divided into four books with two books covering each of the two adventures. But within the two main parts themselves, there is a further division, for each of the adventures is broken into two episodes with a book employed for each episode. Thus from the two parts of the structure, the Challenge and the Temptation, there is a division into books which treat respectively the four episodes of the beheading, the journey, the chastity test, and the courage test.

Within the books, there is a further division of the episodes into incidents. Book I (the beheading) is

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11. Ibid., p. 8.

concerned with the entrance of the Green Knight and with the compact between Gawain and the Green Knight. Book II (the journey) describes the wanderings of Gawain and the exchange compact between Gawain and the lord of the castle. Book III (the chastity test) comprises three incidents. Each of the three days Gawain is tempted by the lady of the castle makes one incident in the book. Book IV (the courage test) returns to the pattern of the first two, and we find two incidents in it, the trip from the castle to the Green Chapel and the test at the Chapel. In this final incident, the two adventures, the Challenge and the Temptation, are brought neatly together in a denoument which relates the two threads of the plot.

The planning for proportion is even more meticulous than this, however, for each of the books is given further balance by an application of a definite number of stanzas to each of the incidents within the books. Book I, which has a total of twenty-one stanzas in it, has eleven given to the first incident and ten to the second. Book II, which has twenty-four stanzas, has twelve for the first incident and twelve for the second. Because of the extra incident, Book III is just about half again as long as the other two books. Its thirty-four stanzas are divided so that eleven stanzas cover the first incident, eleven the second, and twelve the third. The

fourth book, with twenty-two stanzas, returns to the double incident pattern of the first two books and continues the even distribution of the stanzas. Eleven stanzas are devoted to the first incident and eleven to the second.

With the smallest units of the tale balanced so nicely, and the larger units proportioned with the same consideration for symmetry, the author of Gawain achieves in this medieval romance the beauty of proportion that the medieval mind considered necessary in works of art. The mechanics involved in producing the final effect of the poem is not immediately noticed by the reader because the unknown artist skillfully blended his formal pattern with his completely organic content to create a unified, ordered work of art.

When we come to our study of medieval literature, and to the works of Chaucer particularly, aware of this principle of the medieval esthetic in theory and practice, it is impossible to speak as Marchette Chute does of a "...blithe, <u>medieval</u> disregard of the principles of balance and construction....",[12] and of a "quite <u>unmedieval</u>"[13] respect for structure and proportion which she finds characteristic of some medieval poets. Rather we are inclined to think of a disregard for the principle of proportion in art as unmedieval, and of the respect

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12. Marchette Chute, <u>Geoffrey Chaucer of England</u>, New York, 1946, p. 90. (Italics are my own).
13. <u>Ibid</u>., p. 76

for structure and balance as distinctly medieval. Among the more self-conscious artists, such poets as Dante, the Gawain poet, and Chaucer, we would expect to find a reflection in the form of their work of the principle of proportion, the fundamental principle in the medieval concept of beauty. However, by thinking of the medieval poet apart from the medieval attitude toward beauty, we fail to recognize the significance of the regard for proportion when we find it reflected in the poetry of the period. Perhaps this failure to see the relation between the medieval concept of beauty (or the failure to recognize a medieval esthetic at all) and the formal beauty of many medieval poems is responsible for the neglect that has been accorded the form of Chaucer's long narrative poems.

In a study of Chaucer's development as a craftsman of form, an acquaintance with this esthetic tradition is, if not entirely indispensable, at least of great value. It explains and points up the significance of the kind of form into which Chaucer molded his long poems. Tracing the development of his structural technique toward the realization of the ideal of proportion, from the relatively disordered early poems to the "completed order" of the later ones, will show how thoroughly

Chaucer's artistic method is dominated by a concern for formal perfection. It will reveal the principle of proportion as a fundamental aim of Chaucer's later craftsmanship.

CHAPTER III

The Early Poems:

Convention and Experiment in Form

The three minor poems, The Book of the Duchess, The House of Fame, and The Parliament of Fowls, are an interesting series in the sequence of Chaucer's works because they are the products of the formative period in his literary career. They reflect the influence of the French poets, Chaucer's first masters, and at the same time, The Parliament of Fowls and The House of Fame show the beginning of Italian influences which followed shortly after a trip Chaucer made to Florence and Genoa in 1372 and 1373.

Although the three works are recognized by scholars as indubitably Chaucer's, only one of them has been dated with any degree of certainty. Chaucer wrote The Book of the Duchess in commemoration of the death of Blanche, Duchess of Lancaster, first wife of John of

Gaunt in whose service both Chaucer and his wife spent many years of their lives. Chaucer wrote The Book of the Duchess in 1369 shortly after the Duchess died in September of that year.[1]

Neither The Parliament of Fowls nor The House of Fame has been dated in so positive a fashion. Allegorical interpretations attempting to relate these poems to historical events are interesting, but their evidence is, as F. N. Robinson says, too dubious to be of any great help.[2] Internal evidence based primarily upon literary allusions, versification technique, and stylistic innovations, has, however, placed the two poems near The Book of the Duchess -- after rather than before -- but the evidence is not sufficiently conclusive to prove that The House of Fame followed or preceded The Parliament of Fowls. Robert Dudley French assigns the latter poem to the years 1381-2[3] and the former to the years when Chaucer was working as controller of the customs between 1374 and 1385. He suggests that The House of Fame was probably written not long after 1374.[4] Such eminent Chaucerian scholars as R. K. Root, Emile Legouis, and George Lyman Kittredge agree with this general grouping, but none of them assigns precedence to either The Parliament of Fowls or The House

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1. Robert Dudley French, A Chaucer Handbook, New York, 1947, p. 86.
2. F. N. Robinson, The Poetical Works of Chaucer, Cambridge, Mass., 1933, p. xxv.
3. Robert Dudley French, op.cit., p. 93.
4. Ibid., p. 123.

of Fame without question.

John Livingston Lowes differs from most scholars, for he is not convinced that The House of Fame precedes rather than follows The Parliament.[5] The only certainty he can see is that both poems fall between The Book and The Prologue to the Legend of Good Women in which they are both mentioned.[6] For general purposes, Lowes says, this sequence is all that is necessary. This general grouping is sufficient for studies interested in treating the three poems as a group exhibiting characteristics common to the work of the immature artist, but for the purposes of this study the chronological sequence is, if not completely necessary, at least important because of the added light it throws upon Chaucer's progressive development as a craftsman of form.

Lowes notices a strange transformation in Chaucer's poetic spirit in The House compared to the way that spirit is reflected in The Parliament and The Book. This transformation, Lowes finds, is owing to Chaucer's introduction shortly after 1373 to Dante's Divine Comedy.[7] There is another transformation, however, inspired by the Divine Comedy, which presents the influence of Dante's work upon Chaucer's technique in more concrete terms than

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5. For the sake of brevity, the titles of these three early poems will be referred to by the first important word in the title.
6. John Livingston Lowes, Geoffrey Chaucer and the Development of His Genius, Boston, 1934, p.145.
7. Ibid., p. 132.

the vague influence described by Lowes. This transformation is in structural technique. It is a change from the amorphous, haphazard structural plan of The Book to an attempt at a kind of formal symmetry in the plan of The House. In this poem, Chaucer made his first attempt to realize proportion by the imposition of a formal outline upon the content of his work. It was an attempt at the kind of formal perfection Dante achieved so successfully in The Divine Comedy. Although the experiment is a failure in The House, the poem was an effective step toward the achievement of the ideal in the two narratives which followed it, Troilus and Criseyde and The Knightes Tale.

The over-all structural device employed in the three poems to give them some kind of form is the conventional dream-vision which was introduced in the thirteenth century by the popular Romance of the Rose. This poem became one of the most influential works of the later Middle Ages. Chaucer translated the first half of this romance early in his career,[8] and went on to use the devices he learned from it in his early poems. In all three of the poems of this early period, Chaucer adheres closely to the structural pattern of the dream vision.

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8. Robert Dudley French, op.cit., pp. 78-80.

In all three of the poems, the author falls asleep and dreams; his poem is a description of the vision which came to him in his dream. The Book begins with a discussion of sleeplessness, proceeds to a discussion of an old French romance the author has been reading to pass his sleepless nights, and finally describes the vision. In The Parliament, the author is reading the Somnium Scipionus when he falls asleep and dreams. In The House, there is a slight variation. The author falls asleep and in the first part of his dream, he sees the tale of Aeneas painted on the walls of a glass palace. The concise narration of the story of Aeneas constitutes the first part of the dream. In The Book and The Parliament, then, there is a general division of the structural pattern into two parts. The first part is introductory, consisting of a summarized tale, and the second part is the main episode of the poem, the dream itself. The House is divided arbitrarily into formal parts or books. The introductory element is contained within a Proem and an Invocation and the summarized tale becomes a distinct episode in the dream; it is not used as the tale is used in the other poems, as an introduction to the dream.

The best way to understand the different structural methods employed by Chaucer in these poems is

to analyze them with the intention of seeing how the introductory stories function in the structural patterns of The Book and The Parliament compared to the way in which the tale of Aeneas functions in The House. An analysis of this kind shows immediately that there is a difference in the function of the introductory stories in the two structural patterns. In the two former poems, the tales function organically; they are closely interwoven in the complete fabric of the poems, not only by mechanical devices which connect them to the main episode of the poem, but also, (in The Book, for instance) by foreshadowing the theme of the main episode so that the tone of the poem is set before the main episode is introduced. In The Parliament, the tale describes a dream and leads directly into the dream of the author, the main episode of the poem.

In contrast to this, the introductory tale of Aeneas in The House is not so closely related to the main episodes of the dream. It is a curious episode in itself with only a bare, formal relationship to the other episodes in the poem. Instead of being subordinated to the main part of the dream, as the summarized tales are in the other two poems, the tale of Aeneas becomes an independent element, a story narrated for its intrinsic interest, not for the appli-

cation it might have to the rest of the poem. The importance it assumes in the poem as a whole is reflected in the number of lines it takes up in the first book; about 400 of the 508 lines of this book are devoted to the tale of Aeneas.

Contrary to the opinion of most critics, George Lyman Kittredge considers The House a well constructed poem. He defends the length of the summarized tale of Aeneas on the grounds that it is an integral part of the whole poem, not a mere digression or simply a decoration as most critics consider it.[9] His argument, however, is not convincing. It is true that the tale is a love story and that what plot there is in the poem is motivated by the author's journey to hear tidings of love, but the connection other than this is negligible. The motivation which carries the author from the temple of glass to the House of Rumors is the one slim thread which attempts to bind such heterogeneous elements together as the tale of Aeneas, the flight of the eagle with its numerous digressions, the description of the House of Fame and the long account of the audience before Queen Fame, and, finally, the description of the House of Rumors, a complete surprise to the reader,

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9. George Lyman Kittredge, Chaucer and His Poetry, Cambridge, Mass., 1915, pp. 78-9.

coming as it does when the poem seemed to be near its end. Rather than agree with Kittredge that the introductory tale is an integral part of a well planned poem, we are almost forced to agree with the majority of critics that the construction of the poem is poor, that there seems to be no aim in the progression of the poem, and that it completely lacks a plan. The introductory tale is merely another episode in an episodic poem; it is not organically related to the rest of the narrative.

This curious divergence from the structural pattern of two closely related parts found in The Book and The Parliament marks The House of Fame as a distinctly different kind of poem from the other two dream-visions. It is distinctly different in structure and design, so different that we are immediately led to a consideration of The House as an experiment in form as well as an experiment scholars have noticed in verse, style, and theme. In order to see the relevance of this experiment to a study of Chaucer's technique, it is necessary to find out by a detailed analysis how the artistic completeness of the poems is affected by the use of a unified, single episode structural pattern in The Book and The Parliament, and how such completeness is affected by a divergence from this pattern in The House of Fame.

CHAPTER IV

The Single-Episode Form

The Book of the Duchess is a conventional dream-vision closely modeled after Machaut's Roy de Behaingne. Chaucer deviates from the regular use of the device only by adapting the familiar type of poem to the uses of an elegy. "Sometimes," F. N. Robinson says, "he follows his model so strictly that the description of Blanche seems to be drawn as much from Machaut as from life."[1] The regular features of the dream-vision are present in the poem. There is the introductory device of reading a book before falling asleep, the discussion of dreams, the dream setting in May or in the early spring, the guide (which in many poems of this kind takes the form of a helpful animal), the personification of abstractions, the meadow full of daisies or the walled garden, a great forest, and the singing

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1. F. N. Robinson, op.cit., p. 815.

birds. Chaucer makes no innovations in the conventional structure of the dream-vision.

The poem deals with a single episode, the meeting between the dreamer and the Black Knight. The dialogue which ensues between the two leads the reader slowly up to a climax in the discovery of the pathetic fact the whole poem has been pointing toward, the fact that the knight's lady is dead. The emphasis is not upon action, but upon tone. There is no definite motive for the development of the narrative except that of finding out, after the dreamer sees the knight grieving, why he is sad. Everything happens accidently, and the incidents occur one after the other without apparent reason. Proportion is disregarded; passages are developed for their own sake, rather than for their significance in the whole poem.

Chaucer begins by discussing sleeplessness and soon turns to a book he has been reading, "an olde French romaunce", which has passed away some sleepless time for him. Because the story is interesting, Chaucer decides to tell the reader about it. But in addition to its intrinsic interest, the story is the right story to use as the introduction to an elegy. The theme of the tale of Seys and Alcyone is the same as the theme of the Black Knight's story; here the situation is reversed, however,

a lady in the introductory tale is grieving for her lost lord while in the dream, a lord is grieving for his dead lady. A second useful thing about the story is that in it the author learns about Morpheus who actually can help men to sleep. As Chaucer finishes the tale, he continues to think about this powerful being who can cure men of insomnia. If such a thing were true, Chaucer would give anything to have the god put him to sleep. No sooner has he finished his wish, than he falls into a deep sleep and the dream begins.

The introductory tale performs a triple function in the poem. It is interesting in itself, a story completely told even though in concise, summary form. As such, it is the kind of digression enjoyed by the medieval reader. But it is more than a digression. The story also functions as a mechanical device to further the progression of the narrative. By referring to Morpheus, Chaucer leads the reader from the story to the dream which follows when the author falls asleep thinking about the sleep induced in Alcyone by Morpheus. Furthermore, the theme of the tale reinforces and sets the melencholy tone for the whole poem. The grief of Alcyone highlights the grief of the Black Knight. In the main part of the poem, this mournful strain is expanded into

the dominant theme of the poem. The tale of Seys and Alcyone, functioning as it does in these three ways, is an integral part of the poem, not something developed entirely for its own interest.

The dream follows this introduction. With a strange sort of logic, the author's vision unfolds, disclosing the setting and incidents of the typical dream-vision poem. He is aware of small birds singing outside of his chamber on a beautiful spring day. Then it seems to him that the walls of his chamber are lined with wonderful pictures, and just as he notices them he hears the call of a hunting horn. Immediately he is off on his horse to join the hunt. But the others outdistance him, and he is left behind with a little dog who scampers away as the author reaches for him. He is led by the dog to a beautiful grove filled with huge trees and thousands of small animals of all descriptions and kinds. As the dreamer gazes around, he notices a solitary figure dressed all in black who sits with bowed head nearby.

From this point, the main episode of the Black Knight is slowly developed by the use of a conventional question-answer device alternating from short, suggestive questions by the dreamer to long passages of lamentation and description by the knight. There is a long complaint against the goddess Fortune, a description of

the beautiful lady, an account of the knight's courtship, a short description of his wedded bliss, and finally the dreamer asks one more question:

"Sir," quod I, "where is she now?"

After a pause and a reiteration of the greatness of his loss, the knight says,

"She is ded!"

With that the dreamer watches as the knight begins to ride homeward. When he reaches the castle on a distant hill, the tower bell tolls and the dreamer awakens to find the book of Seys and Alcyone still in his hand.

There are two phases in this dream episode. The first one, the hunt, is a short (only 149 lines of the 1334 lines of the poem) transitional incident which serves mechanically to bring the dreamer to the grove where he finds the Black Knight. The second phase, the dialogue, is the main episode for which the rest of the poem has been preparing the reader. About 890 lines or two-thirds of the poem are devoted to this episode. Perhaps the elaborate development could be criticized; it is not at all proportionate to the first part of the poem. But Chaucer is evidently not concerned with the principle of proportion in this poem. The important thing is not formal perfection, but the emotional effect of the knight's story.

As a poem dealing with a static situation and with a single episode, there is little or no need for the kind of balance used so successfully by the Gawain poet in his multiple-episode narrative. Except for occasional long speeches and digressions, The Book is a successful poem. Because it does create the emotional effect it sets out to do, it is an artistic achievement of a particular kind that reflects a great deal of poetic ability. The final and single effect of the poem is made possible by a focus of interest upon one episode, a static situation out of which the theme is developed by description and rhetoric rather than by the narration of dramatic action. There are no formal divisions based upon a breakdown into episodes and incidents because here only one episode is described.

The Parliament is ewen more compact structurally than The Book. As an occasional poem celebrating St. Valentine's Day, it is concerned with one episode, the gathering of the birds in the early spring at the temple of Venus to choose mates. The whole poem is intended to create a single impression through tone rather than action. Here the tone is joyful rather than sad as in The Book. At the end, instead of a climactic discovery device, there is a song which summarizes the gay, joyous tone of the

whole poem.

Again as in The Book each element leads the reader gradually up to the main incident. The discussion of dreams leads to a description of the dream of Scipio which the author has been reading. Out of this dream, Africanus appears to lead the dreamer to the scene of the parliament of birds. After a description of the park in which the dreamer finds himself, the main incident begins. Through a round of speeches from the various birds and Nature, the parliament is described. The quarrel over the formel ends, and all of the birds join in song celebrating the advent of summer.

The Parliament, like The Book of the Ducness, is designed to create an effect by the use of rhetoric and description rather than by the use of dramatic action. The focus of interest is upon a static situation not upon an organically related series of episodes. A consistent tone is maintained to give both poems unity. Because both poems treat one episode, they do not have a formal design divided into parts. Unlike the tapestry effect (the depiction in scenes placed side by side of several related episodes which tell a story) characteristic of the form of Gawain and the Green Knight, these poems are tableaux, vivid

representations of single scenes. Neither of these poems reflects a concern for the principle of proportion. Because they are relatively simple in both external design and internal structure, the poems do not present the artistic problem that Dante and the Gawain poet were concerned with. Chaucer met this problem when he came to treat the multiple-episode structure of his later, more complex poems. His first experiment with this problem was in The House of Fame, a poem which is much more complicated in content and design than these first dream-vision works.

CHAPTER V

The Multiple-episode Structure and the Divided Formal Design

There are two major differences between the structural patterns of the two conventional dream-visions and The House of Fame. First, The House is a much more ambitious work than either The Book or The Parliament. It is three times as long as the latter and twice as long as the former poem. Secondly, where The Book and The Parliament are single and continuous, concentrated and unified in their execution, The House is diverse and expansive, disorganized in execution and divided by formal divisions into three books. The two former poems are concerned with one episode and a single theme. The House treats three distinct episodes and does not have a consistent theme. In contrast to the other poems, The House has

a great deal of movement; it is not concerned with a static scene, nor with a single episode set in one place.

The division of the poem into books is an interesting device, missing in the design of Chaucer's other early poems. The divisions are not arbitrary, nor do they function merely as convenient resting places for the reader. They parallel as an external design the internal structural breakdown of the poem into episodes. Each book comprises one episode in the whole dream. Book I has as its central episode the story of Æneas which the dreamer finds painted on the interior of the glass palace. Book II describes the flight of the eagle from the barren field to the mountain of ice upon which rests the House of Fame. Book III is concerned, as Chaucer says in the invocation, "The House of Fame for to descryve."

A further attempt at formal design within the books themselves is the division of the books into Proem, Invocation, and Story or Dream. This varies somewhat in the different books, but there are at least two divisions in each. Book I has a Proem, Invocation and Story; Book II has a Proem and a Dream; and, Book III has an Invocation and a Dream division. Within the main parts of the books, however, the narrative

is developed haphazardly with numerous digressions. No attempt is made to maintain relations which would unify the poem. The uncontrolled description in the last book, particularly that which comes so unexpectedly with the introduction of the House of Rumors after the author had specifically stated he intended to describe only the House of Fame, adds to the confusion and incoherence of the poem. Although there is some unity within each of the first two books, there is none in the third. In the whole poem, there is quite noticeably some confusion in the author's mind as to the effect he is trying to create.

Book I begins, as do the other dream-visions, with the addition of a formal prologue. A discussion of dreams in the Proem leads to a reference to a particular dream which the author once had. This dream, the poet says, he will relate in the following poem. An invocation to the God of Sleep follows, and then the account of the dream begins in the division marked "Story". The first episode, the story of Aeneas, is narrated in summary form from Aeneas expulsion from Troy to his victories in Italy. Book I ends with the dreamer wandering out from the temple of glass onto a barren field. As he gazes upward, he sees a golden eagle descending toward him.

As yet the only purpose the poem seems to have is to describe a dream. Remembering the pattern of the other two dream-visions, we expect a rapic survey of the usual introductory tags, the singing birds, the painted walls of a chamber, and the beautiful park or grove, but the progression of the movement stops in this poem to permit the poet to develop one of the conventions, the paintings on the walls. The delay becomes a complete digression as the author devotes about 400 lines to the story of Aeneas. The emphasis is upon the love affair between Aeneas and Dido as Kittredge points out,[1] but the love story in no way becomes an organic part of the poem. After it is finished, and the poem is well into Book II, the theme of the poem is disclosed in the dialogue between the eagle and the dreamer. The journey the dreamer is making, we find, is to hear tidings of love at the House of Fame. There is no reference to the tale of Aeneas after the tale is finished in the first book.

From the pattern established in the first book, it would seem that the poet intends to narrate a series of tales within the framework of the dream-vision. Expecting a consistent design, we might look forward to finding in Book II a second tale similar to the one found in

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1. George Lyman Kittredge, Chaucer and His Poetry, p. 79.

the first book. Such a plan Chaucer utilized in The Legend of Good Women, written after The House and essentially the same kind of plan is the basis for the Canterbury Tales, Chaucer's last work. But The House seems not to have such a plan. The story of Aeneas in the first book is not the foundation for a consistently carried out design. The story is told and forgotten. The dream moves on to the journey of the poet to the House of Fame. As Marchette Chute says, "...the poem is such a rambling affair that Chaucer had no clear idea of where he was going...."[2] The poem merely moves along episodically toward the "lytel laste bok", as Chaucer describes it, where the aimlessness is more clearly evident as that little book grows out of all proportion to the other two.

Book II continues the account of the eagle from the time the dreamer is picked up to his arrival at the mountain of ice. During the flight, the eagle reassures the poet when he is frightened, and tells him why they are making the flight. It seems that Jupiter, recognizing Chaucer as a servant of love is going to reward him by having him taken to the House of Fame where he will learn more about love. Here we get the first statement of what precisely the poem is about. From this

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2. Marchette Chute, op.cit., p. 110.

point, the progression of the dream is motivated by the search for news of love. The theme is not developed in the second book, however, after it is stated; the focus of interest is upon the brisk, humorous monologue of the eagle on the law of the universe, the nature of sound and speech, and the wonder of the heavens. They arrive at the mountain and the eagle leaves the dreamer to carry on alone.

In the invocation to Book III, the poet states that he intends to describe the House of Fame in this last book of the poem. Here the lack of planning for proportion and unity is more marked than in the preceding books. The third book is twice as long as either of the other two books without their individual unity; it is rambling, seemingly without an end in sight. There is the possibility that with the entrance of the "man of grete auctoritee" at the end of the manuscript, the dream might be coming to a close. It would be impossible, however, for even a great authority to bring the poem to a conclusion that would somehow give a semblance of unity and coherence to the poem as a whole.

The third book expands out of all proportion to the other books, but little is accomplished toward developing a theme. Apparently in desperation, the poet

shifts from the House of Fame to the House of Rumors in an effort to terminate his poem, but the House of Rumors proves as interesting to the poet as the House of Fame, and the book begins to grow again with the minute description of the chaos of Laboryntus.

In spite of the external design, the division of the subject matter on the basis of episodes into formally divided books, The House of Fame is a complete structural failure. The confused content with its unrelated structure of episodes and its lack of proportion in the parts fails to achieve the kind of order that the external design indicates was attempted. It is a more ambitious and a more interesting poem than either The Book or The Parliament, but it does not attain the artistry of these less complex poems.

The failure of this experiment in form is significant because it suggests that in The House of Fame Chaucer was not only taking off on a poetic flight under the inspiration of Dante, as Lowes maintains, but that he was attempting to build a long narrative poem which would be quite different in form from his other poems. Both The Book and The Parliament are artistically successful in handling the one episode with which they are concerned. In The House, however, the attempt to weave together a long poem consisting

of more than one episode, with a great deal of movement in it, ends in total failure. The appearance of symmetry is here in the formal division of the parts of the subject matter, but it is external symmetry only; there is no internal set of relationships to give the poem unity. Nor is there the balance of the three parts, the kind of balance that would have realized the symmetry which the formal plan indicates was an objective.

If we accept the opinion of Lowes that a sudden introduction to Dante inspired Chaucer to heights beyond his reach, we have only half the answer to the problem presented by the unfinished poem. If this work is the first long narrative of Chaucer's which shows decidely the influence of Dante, how is this influence reflected beyond the level of poetic inspiration? What definitely does the form of the poem have that neither of the other dream-visions have? Or to put it another way: What could Dante offer another literary craftsman in addition to inspiration?

What Dante had was, as Lowes describes it, "...a sense of artistic unity (which) was uncompromising as steel",[3] and further, as we have seen, a structural technique which had as its ideal "due proportion", the fundamental mark of beauty for the medieval mind. Chaucer's

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3. John Livingston Lowes, op.cit., p. 29.

attempt to realize this formal symmetry, and his inability to retain unity at the same time made The House of Fame an artistic failure. The attempt to set up a logical relation between an external design and the episodes of his subject matter indicates that Chaucer was trying to achieve the same kind of form that Dante achieved in The Divine Comedy. This technical experiment is a concrete reflection of the influence Dante could have had on Chaucer's artistic technique.

It is quite possible that Chaucer was aware of the medieval principle of proportion before studying The Divine Comedy, but the absence of any attempt at formal symmetry in The Book and The Parliament suggests that the ideal of formal symmetry came into his technique as a working principle with his introduction to Dante's work shortly before he wrote The House of Fame. An artist so aware of technique as Chaucer would surely notice the symmetrically shaped form of The Divine Comedy. That he would attempt to imitate that form is almost certain, for Chaucer was an artist who borrowed freely from other craftsmen to perfect his own artistic method.

It is unlikely that Chaucer came in contact with the literary use of this principle through an acquaintance with the works of his contemporary, the Gawain poet. The dialect of this unknown writer, that of the north of England, precludes the possibility of Chaucer's

knowledge of his work because Chaucer's dialect was that of the South Midlands.[4] Chaucer's taste in literature and his knowledge of languages was continental rather than regional; his culture was more of France and Italy than of his native England. It is more than likely that The Divine Comedy was the first literary work in which Chaucer could have noticed a thorough and successful adherence to the principle of proportion. It is likely also that in the first work after an introduction to the work of Dante, Chaucer would experiment with the principle of proportion that he found in the formal design of The Divine Comedy. The unsuccessful experiment in The House of Fame was Chaucer's first use of a structural technique which culminated in the achievement of a symmetrical form in his later poems.

This analysis of the structural patterns of the three early poems does not definitely prove that The Parliament preceded The House of Fame. But it does establish some evidence for the possibility of the later composition of The House of Fame. It is logical to see Chaucer's technical development as a progressive one away from the single-episode structure of The Book and The Parliament toward the multiple-episode structures of the later poems. Yet there is the possibility also that the failure of the

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4. Marchette Chute, op.cit., p. 66.

of the structural technique in The House caused Chaucer to return to the simple pattern of the first poem and to write another of the same kind, The Parliament. In the next long poems, however, the Troilus and The Knightes Tale, the same form as that attempted in The House is used, in these poems with remarkable success. Thus it seems just as probable that Chaucer moved directly from the failure of The House of Fame to a successful experiment with the same formal design in mind in the later poems.

When Chaucer wrote The House of Fame, he apparently had not yet learned the necessity for organic unity although, as we have seen, he had begun in this poem to make use of a formal design to give some kind of order to his work. It was from another Italian's works, those of Boccaccio, that Chaucer borrowed the kind of content that he needed to give unity to his long narratives. In his later poems, the Troilus and The Knightes Tale, Chaucer combined a technique based upon the medieval ideal of proportion with the organic plots of Boccaccio to create works of art which successfully achieve the quality of beauty important to the medieval mind, the quality of formal symmetry.

CHAPTER VI

Troilus and Criseyde:

Organic Unity with the Formal Design

Neither Troilus and Criseyde nor The Knightes Tale has been dated precisely. Scholars agree that the two pieces belong to Chaucer's later phase as a writer, that phase just preceding the composition of The Canterbury Tales and immediately following the second journey to Italy in 1378. French places them in the period from 1382 to 1385. Primarily because The Knightes Tale is a part of The Canterbury Tales, which Chaucer was working on at his death in 1400, it is placed after the long romance of Troilus in the chronological sequence of his works.[1] Whatever the sequence of their composition, it is possible to consider them both as products of the mature artist and

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1. Robert Dudley French, op.cit., p. 392-3.

see them as works which reflect the finished technique Chaucer appears to have been striving for in The House of Fame.

Most of the studies of Troilus and Criseyde have been concerned with finding a theory by which to explain the behavior of the characters and by which to evaluate them as psychologically true characterizations. Few studies of the form and structure of the poem have been made. Thomas R. Price's analysis of the Troilus as drama was a step in this direction, but not a complete one. In his study, he concentrates upon the development of dramatic action, and sees the five part design of the poem as something extraneous. His five stages of the action cut across the formal divisions Chaucer gave the action by dividing the story into books, and break the formal design into five unbalanced parts.[2] Other than this analysis of Price's, the study of form in the Troilus has not been extended beyond an investigation of the relationship between Chaucer's plot and the plot of Boccaccio's Filostrato from which Chaucer's

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2. Thomas R. Price, op.cit., pp. 321-2. (Price's disregard for the five part design of the poem is reflected in the disproportion of the five stages he imposes on the action of the poem: (1) protasis: the first 266 lines; (2) epitasis: the next 5406 lines; (3) scene of climax: the next 619 lines; (4) fourth stage: the next 1820 lines; and (5) "as closing stage of the action" is the scene of 50 lines at the end. Price completely overlooks the actual formal design which blends with the disposition of the episodes to make the poem a balanced work of art.

story is derived. The conern for plot and characters has obscured much of what makes Chaucer a highly skilled artist, for, in addition to being a skillful manipulator of borrowed plots and a master at human portraiture, he was also a medieval craftsman of form, a writer aware of the need for beauty in the whole work of art as much as for beauty in the parts.

That Chaucer, by the time he came to write the Troilus, was conscious of a need for formal design and an ordered content is certain. His unsuccessful attempt at formal perfection in The House of Fame, after his introduction to the "completed order" of The Divine Comedy, probably emphasized for him the necessity for planning not only the external design, but also the internal arrangement and unity of the parts. The structural failure in The House of Fame perhaps highlighted for him a piece of advice about composition which Chaucer had learned earlier in his career, but which up to this point he had not applied. In planning the Troilus in advance, as Marchette Chute says,

> ...Chaucer was following one of the few good pieces of advice that he derived from the textbooks on rhetoric; for the method used here is the one originally recommended by Geoffrey de Vinsauf:
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> "If one has a house to build, the impetuous hand does not rush to the act; the innermost line of the heart measures the work

> in advance, and the inner man prescribes a course according to an established plan; the hand of the mind fashions the whole before that of the body....When a plan has arranged the subject in a secret place of the mind, poetry will come to clothe the matter with words."
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> Chaucer was well aware of this excellent piece of advice when he sat down to write Troilus and Criseyde; he quotes the first five lines of it in his own poem, so accurately that he had either just read de Vinsauf's advice or already knew it by heart. 3

Miss Chute continues her interpretation of this information by applying it to Chaucer's concern for plot, for a well motivated and closely interwoven piece of action. It is quite possible that this concern on Chaucer's part was more for total form, for the whole "house", than it was for a well knit plot. The pattern of arrangement of the parts of the action in the Troilus seems to indicate that the principle of proportion, of "the correct disposition of the various parts" in their relation to one another and to the whole, was as fundamental to his technique as was his concern for the movement of the action.

This analysis of the Troilus focuses upon the external design as well as upon the action within that design and examines the total form of the poem, not merely one aspect of it. By getting away from a con-

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3. Marchette Chute, op.cit., pp. 158-9.

cern for plot alone, it is possible to see the total pattern of the Troilus, a pattern which makes use of Boccaccio's organic plot for its internal structure, and the traditional design borrowed from medieval romance for its formal plan. The way in which this formal design conditions the arrangement of episodes in the action will demonstrate how carefully Chaucer planned his poem to realize a medieval esthetic ideal, the ideal of proportion.

The analysis will involve a comparison of the Troilus with the traditional formula for the construction of the medieval society romance and with the formal arrangement of the Filostrato, the source of Chaucer's story. Some of the questions which this analysis will attempt to answer are: Why did Chaucer change the arrangement of the parts of the story he found in Boccaccio's work from eight cantos to five books? How does Chaucer's arrangement of the parts of the story differ from Boccaccio's and why? How does Chaucer achieve a balance in his arrangement that adds to the symmetry of the whole?

When Chaucer read the Filostrato, he found a sorrowful tale of two lovers who were separated by an incident of war, never to be together again. Because of the unfaithfulness of Criseyde, who falls in love with one of the enemy, Troilo is disappointed in love

and during one of his anguished attempts to find Criseyde's new lover, to avenge himself in battle, he is killed. Boccaccio divides his story into eight cantos with an added canto commending the book to the lady for whom it was written. Each canto is devoted to one episode in the action of the story. The first three cantos describe the inception and consummation of the love between Troilo and Criseyde. The last five cantos describe the separation of the lovers, the unfaithfulness of Criseyde, and the death of Troilo.

The division of the parts of the action is purely mechanical in Boccaccio's version of the story. Each canto describes one episode, with equal emphasis given each episode as it arises in the progression of the tale. A list of the cantos and the episodes they deal with reflects the simplicity of Boccaccio's plan:

1. Troilo falls in love with Criseyde.
2. Criseyde learns of Troilo's love.
3. The lovers meet for the first time.
4. The prisoner exchange.
5. Criseyde leaves Troy.
6. Diomede courts Criseyde.
7. Troilo waits for Criseyde.
8. Troilo learns of Criseyde's unfaithfulness.

This is the series of episodes which Chaucer retells in Troilus and Criseyde. Chaucer follows the plot of the Filostrato so closely that every episode that advances the action significantly in the story becomes

a part of the action of the Troilus. An outline of Chaucer's poem illustrates the close similarity between the action of the two poems:

Episodes in the Troilus	Action of the story
Book I	
1. Treason of Calchas.	Criseyde alone in Troy becomes the object of Troilus' love. He confides in Pandarus.
2. Palladione's feast.	
3. Pandarus visits Troilus.	
Book II	
1. Pandarus visits Criseyde.	Pandarus plants seed of love and helps court Criseyde; he arranges a meeting between Troilus and Criseyde.
2. Exchange of letters.	
3. Deiphebus episode (first part).	
Book III	
1. Deiphebus episode (second part).	Criseyde is won by Troilus and their love is consummated.
2. Episode of surrender (first part).	
3. Episode of surrender (second part).	
Book IV	
1. Exchange of prisoners.	Lovers are to be separated.
2. Effect on the lovers.	They are filled with anguish.
3. Criseyde's decision.	Criseyde promises to return.
Book V	
1. Criseyde leaves Troy.	Diomede begins courting Criseyde and wins her love.
2. Diomede courts Criseyde.	
3. Troilus learns of Criseyde's infidelity.	Troilus learns of his loss. He dies in battle.

From the outlines of the plots of the two poems, it is evident that Chaucer deviates hardly at all from the plot of the Filostrato. It is noticeable, however, that he compresses some of the cantos into one book and expands others into books by themselves. What he adds to

Boccaccio's poem is a new plan. Instead of dividing the action into eight parts as Boccaccio did, Chaucer divides it into five parts. The new design indicates that Chaucer had de Vinsauf's advice clearly in mind when he prepared to adapt Boccaccio's story to his own uses. He did not accept Boccaccio's plan because he had a definite plan of his own by which to give form to to the tragedy of Troilus and Criseyde. He measured the work in advance and "prescribed a course according to an established plan", a plan long established by the writers of the medieval society romance.

The formula for the construction of the society romance grew out of the theory of the psychological development of love. Originally there were four stages described by the troubadours in the degelopment of love: (1) Love aspirant, (2) Love suppliant, (3) Love recognized, and (4) Love accepted. However, the influence of the medieval adventure story with its motives of quest and ordeal added a fifth stage to the course of true love; its development, therefore, came to be described in these five phases: (1) Incipiency, (2) Development, (3) Betrothal, (4) Ordeal, and (5) Union.[4]

This description of the course of love became for

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4. Sarah F. Barrow, The Medieval Society Romance, New York, 1924, p. 9.

the romancers the plan upon which they developed the action of their love stories. From the episodic structure of the adventure tale, the romance under the influence of the psychology of courtly love "gained the logical structure which distinguishes plot from mere chronicle."[5] The finished formula for the action of the romance followed this plan:

I Beginning: (1) Opening situation: an opportunity for love with some barrier to union; (2) inciting force: falling in love.

II Development: Initial struggle (1) against fear of repulse and (2) against pride or indifference.

III Culmination: Temporary success: betrothal.

IV Reversal: Separation or estrangement. (period of complication and trial).

V Denoument: (1) Decisive victory over the last obstacle to union, or final defeat; (2) union and the assurance of permanent happiness, or the death of the lovers. 6

In addition to this five part plan, the formula had a further general division of the action based upon the two characteristics the courtly lover was supposed to possess. First, he was required to be an irresistable lover; and second, he was supposed to be able to remain faithful to his loved one. These two duties divide the formula for the romance into two parts, the one chiefly psychological and the other concerned more with action.

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5. Ibid., p. 68.
6. Ibid., pp. 68-9.

The first was confined to the problem of how to bring the lovers together, and the second was devoted to a test of the lovers' fidelity.[7]

This was the formal outline which was ready at hand when Chaucer prepared to cast the Filostrato into a mold of his own. The general structure of this formula was divided into five parts, each part dealing with a different phase of the course of courtly love. Along with this, there was a recognized division of the whole into two parts, the first dealing with psychological analysis (the beginning, development, and culmination parts of the formula), the second with action (the reversal and denoument parts of the formula). Here was a formal plan which Chaucer could use as a design for the arrangement of the parts of his poem.

An analysis of the action in each of the books of the Troilus shows that the division of the action by books follows perfectly the formula of the courtly love romance. By placing the development of the action in Chaucer's poem parallel with the development of courtly love and the plan for the romance, Chaucer's use of the conventional formula in outlining the form of the Troilus can be clearly seen:

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7. Ibid., p. 69.

Troilus and Criseyde	Psychology of Love	Formula of the Romance
Books:	Steps:	Phases:
I Troilus sees Criseyde and falls in love with her, but cannot find a way to make his love known.	1. Incipiency.	1. Beginning: (1) Opening situation: An opportunity for love with some barrier to union.
II Intrigue carried on by Pandarus to win Criseyde for Troilus.	2. Development.	2. Development: Initial struggle: (1) Against fear of repulse or (2) against pride or indifference.
III Troilus wins Criseyde through the seduction plot promoted by Pandarus.	3. Betrothal.	3. Culmination: Temporary success: Betrothal.
IV Prisoner exchange separates lovers.	4. Ordeal.	4. Reversal: Separation or estrangement of the lovers. (period of complication and trial)
V Diomede wins Criseyde; Troilus in despair dies in battle.	5. Union.	5. Denoument: (1) Decisive victory or final defeat. (2) Union and the assurance of happiness or the deah death of the lovers.

In addition to the parallel of the five books of the Troilus and the five phases of the romance formula, it should be noted that there is a general division of the structure of Chaucer's poem into two parts which con-

forms to the division of the romance plot into psychological analysis and action, the first dealing with the love affair through its consummation, and the second with the trial of the lovers. In the Troilus, the first three books are concerned with the love affair and are an expansion from the first three cantos of the Filostrato. This expansion by the addition of greater attention to the psychology of the two lovers is in keeping with the first part of the course of love. The books conform to the plan for a detailed psychological analysis of the lovers. Following the formula, Chaucer groups the last five cantos of the Filostrato into two books describing the action which separates the lovers. The last two books seem more hurried than the first two because of the lack of psychological analysis, but they do not destroy the design of the whole poem. Their treatment agrees perfectly with the formula Chaucer chose as a plan for his poem.[8]

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8. Sarah F. Barrow, in her analysis of the 12th and 13th century society romance, does not analyze Troilus and Criseyde. In an appendix she has this note on Chaucer's poem: "This is the most significant society romance in Middle English. Coming to it from the Old French representatives of the type, one is conscious of a new treatment. Not only is the plot more dramatically handled than those of the older romances, but the theme shows a different treatment: courtly love does not stand the test of real life to which it is subjected; Chaucer's reaction against conventional sentiment suggests that

The effect of this plan upon Chaucer's treatment of the story he borrowed from Boccaccio can be seen when we compare the arrangement of the single-episode cantos of the Filostrato to the multiple-episode books of the Troilus. In Boccaccio's poem the formal design has nothing to do with the phases of the action. Each episode is treated in one canto formally isolated from the rest of the poem. Chaucer groups the episodes into books each of which is devoted to a phase of the action. By utilizing the traditional plan for such a romance, Chaucer gives a natural formal design to his poem that corresponds strictly to the divisions of the subject matter. The formal divisions are woven together by overlapping episodes. The visits of Pandarus to Troilus and Criseyde securely bind the second book to the first one. The Deiphebus episode (an addition Chaucer made to Boccaccio's plot) provides a mechanical link between the second and third books. There is no overlapping episode between the third and fourth books because the third book ends one part of the total action, the part devoted to the love affair. The second part of the story is linked together in the fourth and fifth books by the focus of attention on Criseyde, on her decision at the end of the fourth book and her departure from

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of recent fiction against the old-fashioned sentimental novel of fifty or sixty years ago." Sarah F. Barrow, op.cit., p. 123.

Troy at the beginning of the fifth book. These changes and additions to the formal design of Boccaccio's poem give Chaucer's work a complex form totally different from that of the Filostrato. It makes the Troilus a more tightly constructed and better proportioned poem than the Filostrato.

Although it would seem that Chaucer's elaboration of some of Boccaccio's episodes should destroy the proportion of the poem as a whole, the Troilus achieves a balanced form by the grouping of episodes into books. The larger units in Chaucer's work enables him to retain a proportionate whole by equalizing his expansion of some episodes by a corresponding compression of others. To achieve a balanced structure, he had only to concern himself with the length of each book not the length of each episode. In addition, his method of grouping episodes made it possible for him to have greater symmetry of the whole by a fairly even distribution of the episodes among the five books. The design Chaucer chose for the form of his poem gave him complete freedom in modifying his internal structure to realize the end he was working for,and, at the same time enabled him to retain the logical relation between his external design and the five phases of his action.

Although there is no exact plan for the distri-

bution of the episodes in the Troilus, there is a general breakdown by episodes and a distribution of them among the books which reinforce the logical relation between the formal design and the internal structure. If those episodes which directly promote the action of the story are isolated and listed under the books in which they are treated, we can see that they are distributed evenly throughout the five books. The outline of the action by episodes on page 55 illustrates the mechanical kind of balance which lies behind the movement of the action. This balanced disposition of the episodes is not readily apparent to the reader because of the thread of narrative, philosophical digression, and description woven around the bare outline of the plot. Nevertheless, that bare mechanical background is directly responsible for the success of the poem as a closely knit, symmetrical whole.

In the Troilus, three things contribute to the symmetry of the form of the poem. The logical relation between the formal divisions and the five phases of the action, the balance of the lengths of five books, and the fairly even distribution of the episodes among the books indicate that Chaucer was consciously attempting to achieve symmetry through adherence to the principle of proportion in the con-

struction of his poem. The artistry achieved in this poem is clearly based upon a concern for "due proportion" for that esthetic principle which depends for its realization on "the correct disposition of the various parts of an action among themselves, and of the various parts to the whole."

The reason why Chaucer succeeded here with the formal design where he failed in The House of Fame was most likely due to his realization that he had to blend his internal structure with his formal plan to achieve the symmetrical completeness he desired. Also, he probably saw that a successful form could only be attained by unifying the parts of a poem which made up this symmetrical whole. From Boccaccio he borrowed the organic plot which gave him the unity he lacked in The House of Fame, and from the society romance he took the plan in which to mold his story. Applying the principle of proportion to this over-all design, he fused his external divisions with his internal structure and attained that "equality in fabricated things" which, for the medieval mind, was essential for beauty.

CHAPTER VII

The Knightes Tale

Chaucer took the plot of The Knightes Tale from a work by Boccaccio also. Here, however, instead of elaborating upon Boccaccio's poem as he did in transforming the Filostrato into Troilus and Criseyde, Chaucer reduces his poem to about one-fifth the size of his model. He compresses the 9,896 lines of Boccaccio's Teseida into the 2,250 lines of The Knightes Tale. And the reduction helps the story. The poorly constructed poem by Boccaccio becomes in Chaucer's hands a highly unified, swiftly moving narrative. He retains the essential elements of Boccaccio's plot, but excludes everything from his version of the story which he does not find necessary for the progression of the action.

The Teseida is essentially the story of a struggle between two knights for the same lady. The slim plot

is over-burdened with elaborate descriptions of action irrelevant to the main conflict between Palamons and Arcita. In his effort to make into an epic what is really a short romance, Boccaccio extends his poem out of all proportion to what the slight plot will bear. Although the main action of the story does not begin until the two knights catch sight of Emilia and fall in love, Boccaccio devotes two long books to the background of the action. After the action starts, he stops at times to give long accounts of subsidiary action. The sixth book, for instance, is devoted almost entirely to a description of each knight who comes to fight in the tournament to decide which of the two lovers is to have Emilia. Book eight, instead of concentrating upon the fight between Palamons and Arcita, describes individual encounters that are taking place about the field. Finally, books ten and eleven are long,drawn-out descriptions of Arcita's illness, death, and funeral. The denoument of the story is delayed for no apparent reason than the interest Boccaccio has in describing Arcita's death and elaborate funeral.[1]

The changes Chaucer made in transforming the *Filostrato* into the *Troilus* are paralleled by the changes

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1. W. F. Bryan and Germaine Dempster, *Sources and Analogues of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales*, Chicago, 1941, pp. 93-105. (Summary of the *Teseida*.)

he made in transforming the Teseida into The Knightes Tale. He borrows the plot, but compresses it, divides it differently, and arrages it into a form of his own. A schematic comparison of the two poems indicates the correspondences and differences between the plots of the two poems:

The Teseida: Books and Episodes	The Knightes Tale: Parts and Episodes
I	
a. The capture of Ipolita and Emilia by Tesio.	
II	I
a. Capture of Palamone and Arcita by Tesio.	a. Theseus meets ladies of Thebes.
III	b. Capture of Palamon and Arcite.
a. Palamone and Arcita fall in love with Emilia.	c. Palamon and Arcite fall in love with Emelye.
b. Arcita is released from prison.	d. Arcite is released from prison.
IV	II
a. Arcita returns to Athens.	a. Arcite returns to Athens.
V	
a. Palamone escapes from prison.	b. Palamon escapes.
b. Tesio discovers the two fighting in the grove.	c. Meeting of the two in the grove.
	d. They are discovered at their next day's meeting by Theseus.
VI	III
a. The forces gather for the tournament.	a. The tournament lists.
VII	b. Return of Palamon and Arcite with their Knights.
a. Prayers to the Gods	c. Prayers to the Gods.
	d. Intervention of Saturn on side of Venus.
VIII	IV
a. The battle.	a. Palamon is disarmed.
IX	
a. Arcita is injured.	b. Arcite is injured.
X	
a. Illness and death of Arcita.	c. Death of Arcite.
XI	
a. Arcita's funeral.	
XII	
a. Palamone weds Emilia.	d. Palamon weds Emelye.

The most notable difference between the two arrangements is the way in which the parts are separated by formal divisions. Chaucer groups the twelve books of the Teseida into four parts, each of which deals with a clearly defined phase of the action. Actually Chaucer uses only twelve of the episodes listed in the outline of the Teseida. He omits as episodes for development the capture of Ipolita and Emilia, the detailed description of the tournament battle, and Arcita's funeral. The others receive almost equal emphasis and become definitely emphasized points in the development of the action. He adds to these adopted episodes by giving importance to the meeting of Theseus with the ladies of Thebes, by dividing the meeting of Palamon and Arcite into two separate meetings, by adding the description of the building of the tournament lists, and by adding Saturn's intervention on the side of Venus.

With this change in the formal design of the poem there is a corresponding change in the disposition of the episodes. Chaucer groups the episodes in The Knightes Tale into four phases in contrast to the separate treatment of episodes in individual books in the Teseida. Chaucer, recognizing the four natural divisions of the action, the four distinct phases which advance the action in blocks, gives his poem a formal design of

four parts instead of twelve, and groups the episodes within those parts so that a decisive episode in the action falls at the end of each part. At the end of part one, the release of Arcite ends the static situation in which the two lovers are unable to do anything about their love. At the end of part two, Theseus makes the decision for the resolution of the conflict between the two lovers. Saturn's promise of aid to Venus at the end of part three provides the motivating force for the victory of Palamon, and in the final episode of the fourth part, the conflict is resolved as Palamon weds Emelye.

This balanced division of the action is reinforced within the four main parts of the poem. Chaucer discards as fully developed episodes the whole first book of the Teseida. In a short exposition of 19 lines, he covers the first 1,296 lines of the Teseida, and brings the reader directly to the beginning of the episode which bears directly upon the story of Palamon and Arcite. From that point, Chaucer uses sixteen concisely described episodes to fill in his formal design of four parts. The compression of the whole story from the extended treatment it is given in Boccaccio's poem brings each episode closer to the others and gives The Knightes Tale a more tightly constructed

organization than Boccaccio's poem. The even distribution of the episodes adds the symmetry that is also lacking in Boccaccio's poem.

In the first group of episodes, Chaucer lays a basis for the action by describing the situation and introducing the element of complication, the motivating force for the development of the action. After a quick survey of the story's background, Chaucer describes the meeting of Theseus and the ladies of Thebes, the first fully developed episode of his poem. In this episode, the reason for Theseus campaign against Creon, during which Palamon and Arcite are captured, is established. In the second episode, Palamon and Arcite are taken captive and brought to Athens and imprisoned. The capture and imprisonment of the two knights sets the scene for the episode of complication when the two knights are estranged by their love for Emelye. In this episode, Chaucer's use of the principle of proportion to balance the parts of his poem is reflected in his use of parallelism. He often devotes approximately the same number of lines and the same pattern of development to speeches and descriptive passages. For instance, after Palamon and Arcite see Emelye walking in the garden, they voice their love in two balanced monologues in which each knight defends his priority in love and

appeals to the friendship of the other for the recognition of that priority. Following this are two more symmetrically arranged monologues in which each of the knights complains against fortune. Arcite's complaint of 52 lines is evenly balanced by the 53 lines of Palamon's complaint.

The parallelism is continued to the end of the first book throughout the last episode, the release of Arcite from prison. Hildegard Engel has shown the symmetrical pattern Chaucer uses here by arranging the balanced speeches in the following outline;

(1) Contrast between his unfortunate lot and his rival's happy fate. (Arcite 17 lines and Palamon 18 lines).
(2) Meditations upon human destiny. (Arcite 17 lines and Palamon 22 lines).
(3) Return to personal lament. (Arcite 7 lines and Palamon 6 lines). 2

Up to this point, the end of part one, Chaucer has, in four episodes, described the situation out of which the action develops, brought in the element of complication which creates the conflict, and begun the development of the action. Within the episodes he has balanced various elements so that the symmetrical scheme extends from the whole to some of the smallest parts. He gives the most extended treatment to the third episode, the beginning of the love affair, one of the most

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2. Hildegard Engel, Structure and Plot in Chaucer's Canterbury Tales, (A dissertation) University of Bonn, 1931, p. 37.

important episodes in the entire plot.

Chaucer uses the second group of episodes in a swift development of the action. The return of Arcite to Athens, the escape of Palamon, their first meeting in the woods, and their discovery the next day by Theseus increasingly intensify the conflict until it is brought to a focus in the struggle in the grove. With Theseus' decision to settle the issue in a formal tournament, the stage is set for the resolution of the conflict. Chaucer's tendency to parallel parts is reflected in this part in his alteration of Boccaccio's account of Palamon's escape to correspond with the description of Arcite's release from prison.[3]

The third part of the poem is devoted to a description of the preperation for the tournament. The detailed description of the lists appears to be included for its value as a colorful addition to the story and as a balancing element to fill out the four episode scheme of each part. Here again is the kind of parallelism Chaucer utilizes to gain symmetry. In Boccaccio's poem there are descriptions of two temples, those of Mars and Venus. Chaucer adds a description of the temple of Diana to this first episode to realize

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3. Ibid., p. 38.

the tripartite symmetry which he carries on as a pattern for the third episode, the prayers to the Gods.[4] The second episode, the arrival of Palamon and Arcite with their knights, also has a parallel structure. The incidents are balanced by similar development patterns and also by the number of lines devoted to each of them. The following outline illustrates the internal balance of this episode:

(1) Description of the arrival of the two groups: 21 lines.

(2) Description of Palamon and Lygurge: 39 lines.

(3) Description of Arcite and Emetrius: 35 lines.

(4) Description of the pre-tournament feast: 18 lines.

In the third episode of this part, Chaucer returns to the tripartite pattern of the first episode and develops each of the three prayers in "the same intentional order, each being composed of a descriptive introductory passage, followed in the main part by a monologue which is answered by a god's token...."[5] There is a general balance in the length of the three incidents: Palamon's prayer has about 60 lines, Emelye's about 90, and Arcite's about 70.

This episode is given emphasis by greater elaboration

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4. Ibid., p. 38.
5. Ibid., p. 39.

similar to the emphasis Chaucer gives the episode of complication in the first part, for it is here that the final resolution of the conflict is given its justification. The way in which the two lovers phrase their requests to the gods determines which of the two is to win Emelye. Palamon asks Venus,

> ...I ne axe nat tomorwe to have victorie,
> Ne renoun in this cas, ne veyne glorie
> Of pris of armes blowen up and doun;
> But I wolde have fully possessioun
> Of Emelye, and dye in thy servyse.

Arcite prays to Mars and asks,

> ...help me, lord, tomorwe in my bataille,
> For thilke fyr that whilom brente thee,
> As well as thilke fyr now brenneth me,
> And do that I tomorwe have victorie.

In the final episode of this part, Saturn intervenes and promises that, although Mars shall help his knight win the tournament, Palamon shall win the lady. In this way, boccaccio had solved the problem of which knight, both equally worthy, should win Emilia. Chaucer, recognizing the value of Boccaccio's solution to the problem, transcribes this episode almost word for word. As H. M. Cummings says, "Where the perfectness of his technique can be maintained by the assistance of the Italian poet, Chaucer is not loth to borrow."[6]

In the fourth part, the contestants are granted

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6. Hubertis M. Cummings, The Indebtedness of Chaucer's Works to the Italian Works of Boccaccio, (A dissertation) Princeton University, 1914, p. 142.

the boons for which they prayed. In the first episode, Palamon is disarmed by Arcite who is aided by Mars. In the second episode, Arcite is injured when his horse becomes frightened by a "furie", "From Pluto sent at requeste of Saturne". The last two episodes completely resolve the conflict. Arcite dies, and Palamon weds Emelye. As part of the final episode, Theseus gives a long speech of over 100 lines, little of which has to do with the action of the story. It is the one thing, Thomas R. Lounsbury says, "...that impairs in the least the perfect unity and proportion of The Knightes Tale."[7]

The fourth group of episodes remarkably illustrates Chaucer's fine sense of selection in transforming the Teseida into the swiftly moving, tightly constructed Knightes Tale. Instead of describing the tournament by a detailed description of individual battles, he describes the general chaos when the two forces come together and focuses his attention upon Palamon and Arcite. He omits the long description of Arcite's lingering illness and the elaborate description of the funeral and moves his narrative immediately to the final unravelling of the plot. In-

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7. Thomas R. Lounsbury, Studies in Chaucer, New York, 1892, p. 372.

stead of the drawn-out, amorphous structure of Boccaccio's poem, Chaucer constructed a unified, symmetrically shaped poem, a work which is perfectly gauged to the slim plot that is so overburdened in the Teseida.

The organic unity and the formal symmetry of The Knightes Tale reflect the same technique that Chaucer used to fuse a formal design with an organic content in the Troilus. The modifications Chaucer made in the plan of Boccaccio's poem again indicate that his major concern was for form, for a symmetrical whole that was ordered and complete. The changes show clearly that one of the dominant principles of his technique was the principle of proportion. By applying this principle he created a finished art form. The almost perfect union of form and content that was the result of his mature artistic method in the Troilus and The Knightes Tale show how completely Chaucer realized the medieval esthetic ideal of proportion in his later works. In the words of his master, Geoffrey de Vinsauf, Chaucer in these poems carefully measured the work in advance and "prescribed a course according to an established plan", a plan aimed at the achievement of "completed order" in the form of his poems.

CHAPTER VIII

Conclusion

The structural craftsmanship reflected in Chaucer's later narratives, the Troilus and The Knightes Tale, was the product of deliberate, self-conscious artistry. Contrasted with the lack of formal technique in the earlier works, the technique of these two carefully planned and executed poems stands out distinctly as one of their most significant qualities. It marks the difference between the apprentice craftsman and the finished artist. The technique, based as it is upon a concern for a mechanical union of formal design and internal structure, seems almost primitive today, yet the works it produced still retain a quality universally essential to beauty in art, the quality of formal symmetry.

The medieval esthetic is the theory upon which Chaucer's technical ideal is based. The concern for due proportion of medieval philosophers and of medieval art in general is basic to an understanding of the kind of form Chaucer achieved in his later works. When Chaucer distributed the parts of his action in balanced groups divided formally one from the other according to a preconceived design, he was graphically representing the principal idea in St. Augustine and St. Thomas's concept of beauty, the idea that proportion is essential to objective beauty. Probably Chaucer became conscious of this principle at work in literature when he read Dante's Divine Comedy, the medieval work which most successfully achieves the completed order desired by the medieval mind. It is significant that only those works written after his first trip to Italy, when he probably came in contact with Dante's works, reflect the formal symmetry which results from a close concern for proportion.

The gradual development Chaucer made in perfecting his structural technique was a development toward greater complexity in both substance and external design. His early works treat one episode. There is little or no movement in them. They depend for their

effect upon tone to develop the theme. As occasional poems, this static treatment aiming at highlighting one idea is entirely successful. Judged by the artistic standard Chaucer evidently held later in life, however, they are not successful works of art; they lack the formal beauty which attention to the principle of proportion would have given them.

The House of Fame marks the transitional point in the development of Chaucer's structural technique. Here a one part design is replaced by a three part design. Instead of the treatment of one episode, there is a treatment of three episodes. There is movement in the poem; it does not focus on a completely static situation. The focus of attention, however, is again upon theme rather than upon action. The poem is a step toward the fusion of external design with a formally divided internal structure, but it is one which ended in failure. Although there is a logical relationship between the formal parts of the poem and the subject matter (one episode to each formal division), the poem lacks unity. The parts are not held together by any necessary relation between them. This episodic plot, most likely unplanned to begin with, makes The House of Fame a chaotic, amorphous experiment doomed to failure because Chaucer failed to unify it with an

organic content.

Chaucer found in the works of Boccaccio the organic plots he needed to unite successfully his formal design with his content to realize symmetry and still create unified works of art. By imposing his formal design upon these borrowed plots, he successfully completed the experiment begun in The House of Fame. The complex formal design with which he experimented is retained in his later works. The more complex internal structure, the multiple-episode plot, is retained also. But the resultant form of these later works is a far cry from the truncated form of The House of Fame. The organic plots Chaucer borrowed from Boccaccio gave him the kind of subject matter he needed to achieve the artistic form that is lacking in The House of Fame.

The changes Chaucer made in the form of the Filostrato and the Teseida indicate that form was one of his major concerns. Upon the plot of the Filostrato he imposed the formal design of the traditional society romance, fusing the five phases of the action with the five-part formal design. To make the material completely conform to his plan, he added episodes and expanded his material where he needed to, deleted episodes and compressed his material

where he found it necessary. He balanced the parts of his action among themselves and evenly distributed them throughout the whole. The result was the symmetrically shaped and organically unified Troilus. He used the same technique in transforming the Teseida into The Knightes Tale. Recognizing the action of Boccaccio's poem as material for a short romance rather than as matter for an epic, he compressed the story into a poem one-fifth as long as the original. His formal design of four parts conforms perfectly with the four natural phases of the action. He distributed his episodes evenly among the four parts, modifying the plot where it suited his purposes. Again the result was a symmetrically shaped and organically unified poem.

Parallel to this development toward complexity of design and structure, Chaucer's technique reflects an additional development from an interest in theme evoked by tone and statement to an interest in the development of theme by dramatic action. In the early poems, a static situation is the focus of interest; out of this situation grows the theme developed by the debate technique common to medieval literature. In the later poems, the focus of interest is upon a dynamic situation and

the action that follows inevitably from that situation. Out of the whole sequence of episodes, from the original episode of complication to the denoument, the theme is gradually developed. This interest in action, in organically related episodes, was one of the primary reasons why Chaucer successfully created the unified form of his later works.

In retrospect, it seems strange that this aspect of Chaucer's technique should have been slighted, for the form of his longer poems reveals, as much as does his attention to verse patterns, how meticulous an artist he was. Furthermore, an understanding of the technique with which he created that form, and an awareness of his relation as an artist to the esthetic of his day shows that structural technique and a concern for total form was a dominant aspect of his literary craftsmanship. All of this knowledge contributes to our estimate of Chaucer as a highly skilled, self-conscious artist, a careful, deliberate workman who, in his mature work, set out to embody in literary form an esthetic ideal of the thinkers and artists of his age. The finished artistry of Troilus and Criseyde and The Knightes Tale is the evidence we have that he was successful in achieving that ideal.

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