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The Doctrine of Fortune in the Works of Chaucer

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THE DOCTRINE OF FORTUNE IN THE WORKS OF CHAUCER

by

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of the requirements for the degree
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PREFACE

It is the purpose of this paper to show how Chaucer regarded Fortune in his early writings; how his conception of Fortune was altered by his acquaintance with The Consolation of Philosophy by Boethius; and how he transcended the conception of Boethius, and came to regard Fortune as Fate.

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THE DOCTRINE OF FORTUNE IN THE WORKS OF CHAUCER

CHAPTER I

THE GODDESS FORTUNA

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

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

Tyche was not a goddess who could be moved by prayers and tears. A fatalistic resignation prevailed among the people of the higher classes, whereas the common people ceased to worship the gods at all, and lost all their faith in their old religion. Thus we see that from the first Tyche was the cause of a falling away in the morale of her worshippers.

In the Alexandrine period the cult of Tyche became prominent in Greece. She gained a foothold because the old Greek religion was in a degenerate condition. The religious fervor which had swept Greece at the end of the Persian War had been quenched by a long series of disasters. At the close of the Persian War the Greeks felt sure that the gods were on their side, and had helped them drive the enemy from their shores. The beautification of the Acropolis at Athens, and the treasures of religious art of the fifth century bear witness to the devotion with which the Greeks worshipped their gods at that time. However, in the last half of the fifth century, the Peloponnesian War came. Those long years of war, plague, famine and defeat left Athens, the cultural center of Greece, bankrupt, disillusioned, and bitter. The gods had failed her in her hour of need. The freedom-loving spirit of the Greeks was broken forever. When Alexander conquered the Greek world, it was ripe for just such a doctrine of fate as the worship of Tyche upheld. This doctrine removed all responsibility from the individual. All men were pawns which capricious Tyche moved hither and yon. Before the Alexandrine

period there had been a goddess Tyche in the Greek calendar, but she was an inconspicuous minor deity who acted as a personal daimon, presiding at the birth of babies, and endowing them with good or bad luck. Because she was often kind, she was also worshipped as a goddess of plenty. When the new cult of Tyche was introduced from the east, this inferior goddess was exalted above the other gods, and worshipped as fate. She was the essence of all that was incoherent, unexpected, and unjust in the world. She had no moral sense, no mercy. She was supposed to preside over various cities throughout the Greek world. A famous statue represents the Tyche of Antioch. She was also supposed to preside over all public games. In the degenerate Alexandrine period, she was regularly invoked at the beginning of any public occasion. The establishment of her worship was a death blow to the old Greek religion. In art she was usually represented as a winged figure poised on a ball. (1)

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

(1) Cumont, Franz *The Oriental Religions in Roman Paganism*

did not wish to see the face of his daughter. Thereupon the goddess ordered that the Roman people should keep the face of the statue covered for all time. A robe was still kept over the face of the statue in Ovid's day. (1)

The Fortuna whose worship was introduced by Servius was not the goddess of chance. She was the goddess of plenty and fertility, and the protectress of women in childbirth. Her full name was Fors Fortuna, Fortuna being a cult name. Long after the time of Servius, after Rome had conquered Greece, Fortuna became identified with the Greek and oriental Tyche as the goddess of chance. As had happened in Greece, as soon as Fortuna became the goddess of chance, her popularity increased. Her worship spread all over Italy. Her head was represented on Oscan coins. At Naples she was regarded as the protecting genius of the country. In that city was located the shrine of Fortuna Panthea. This cognomen indicated that Fortuna embodied in herself the powers of many other gods. At Puteoli, two statues of Fortuna were found. Both statues represented her as a draped female figure holding a steering oar in her right hand, and a horn of plenty in her left. The steering oar signified that she controlled the destinies of men, whereas the horn of plenty was a remnant of her worship as the goddess of plenty. (2) In Rome the festival of Fortuna was celebrated on the twenty-fourth of June. Ovid describes the festival as follows:

(1) Ovid, Fasti, translated by Sir James Frazer, VI, 569ff.

(2) Peterson, Roy, The Cults of Campania, pp. 7, 122, 248, 343

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

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

(1) Ovid, Fasti, translated by Sir James Frazer, VI, 773-784

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

In the picture of the fickle goddess, and inspired him with hope because of the very transient nature of Fortune. She showed him that virtue was the highest good, and took him on an imaginary trip to heaven, where together they inquired into the nature of chance and destiny, providence and free-will, time and eternity. He was thus enabled by philosophy to rise above all the vicissitudes of human life, and perceive the truth. Although in this writing Boethius does not directly mention Christ, the teachings are in accord with Christian doctrine. He treats his

(1) Patch, Howard R. The Goddess Fortuna

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CHAPTER II

BOETHIUS' CONCEPTION OF FORTUNE

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

It was during his imprisonment that he wrote The Consolation of Philosophy. In this work he represented himself as pining away in prison, and blaming Fortune for her inconstancy to him. In the midst of his distress, there appeared to him Philosophy, in the guise of a beautiful woman, and inspired him with hope because of the very inconstant nature of Fortune. She showed him that virtue was the highest good, and took him on an imaginary trip to heaven, where together they inquired into the nature of chance and destiny, prescience and free-will, time and eternity. He was thus enabled by Philosophy to rise above all the vicissitudes of human life, and perceive the truth. Although in this writing Boethius does not directly mention Christ, the teachings are in accord with Christian doctrine. He treats his

subject from the standpoint of a philosopher, not a theologian. However, we have conclusive evidence that Boethius was a Christian from a fragment of Cassiodorus, one of his contemporaries. Cassiodorus tells us that Boethius wrote a theological work on the Trinity, in which he expounded Christian doctrines. This writing has been found, and is now included among the works of Boethius. So we know that he was a Christian, possibly even a martyr, as some critics think. (1)

The Consolation of Philosophy was very popular in the Middle Ages. It was translated into German, French, Greek, Spanish, and English. The earliest English translation was made by King Alfred the Great. This edition has many footnotes written by the king. Chaucer's was the second English translation. A passage in Jean de Meun's Roman de la Rose (2) suggested to Chaucer that he undertake to translate the work of Boethius.

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

(1) Stewart, H.F. and Rand, E.K., Boethius, Introduction, p.xi

(2) Jean de Meun, Roman de la Rose, ll. 5052-5056

9.

Thou wenest that Fortune be chaunged ayein thee; but thou wenest wrong, yif that thou wene. Alwey tho ben hir maneres; she hath rather kept, as to thee-ward, hir propre stable-ness in the chaunginge of hirself. Right swich was she whan she flatered thee, and deceived thee with unleveful lykinges of fals welefulnesse. Thou hast now knowen and ataynt the doutous or double visage of thilke blinde goddess Fortune. She that yit covereth hir and wimpleth hir to other folk, hath shewed hir everydel to thee. Yif thou aprovest hir and thenkest that she is good, use hir maneres and pleyne thee nat. And yif thou agrysest hir false trecherye, despyse and cast away hir that pleyeth so harmfully; for she, that is now cause of so muche sorwe to thee, sholde ben cause to thee of pees and of joye. She hath forsaken thee, forsothe; The whiche that never man may ben siker that she ne shal forsake him....

Holdestow than thilke welefulnesse precious to thee that shal passen? And is present Fortune dereworthe to thee, which that nis nat feithful for to dwelle; and, whan she goth away, that she bringeth a wight in sorwe? For sin she may nat ben with-holden at a mannes will, she maketh him a wrecche whan she departeth fro him. What other thing is flittinge Fortune but a maner shewing wrechednesse that is to comen? Ne it ne suffyseth nat only to loken on thinge that is present biforn the eyen of a man. But wisdom loketh and amesureth the ende of thinges; and the same chaunginge from oon into another, that is to seyn, from adversitee into prosperitee, maketh that the manaces of Fortune ne ben nat for to dreden, ne the flateringes of hir to ben desired. Thus, at the laste, it behoveth thee to suffren with evene wille in pacience al that is don in-with the floor of Fortune, that is to seyn, in this world, sin thou hast ones put thy nekke under the yok of hir. For yif thou wolt wryten a lawe of wendinge and of dwellinge to Fortune, whiche that thou hast chosen frely to ben thy lady, artow nat wrongful in that and maketh Fortune wroth and aspere by thyn inpatience, and yit thou mayst nat change hir? Yif thou committest and bitakest thy sailes to the winde, thou shalt be shoven, not thider that thou weldest, but whider that the wind shoveth thee. Yif thou castest thy sedes into the felde, thou sholdest han in minde that the yeres ben, amonges, other-whyle plentevous and otherwhyle bareyne. Thou hast bitaken thyself to the governaunce of Fortune, and forthy it bihoveth thee to ben obeisaunt to the maneres of thy lady. Enforcest thou thee to aresten or withholden the swiftnesse and the sweigh of hir turninge whele? O thou fool of alle mortal fooles, if Fortune bigan to dwelle stable, she cesede thanne to ben Fortune.(1)

In defense of Fortune, Philosophy says that she had received

(1) Boethius, The Consolation of Philosophy, Bk.II, Prose I
Chaucer's translation.

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

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

'The engendringe of alle thinges,' quod she, 'and alle the progressions of muable nature, and al that moeveth in any manere, taketh his causes, his ordre, and his formes, of the stablenesse of the divyne thought; and thilke divyne thought, that is y-set and put in the tour, that is to seyn, in the height, of the simplicitee of god, stablissheth many maner gyses to thinges that ben to done; the whiche maner, whan that men loken it in thilke pure clenness of the divyne intelligence, it is y-cleped purviance;

but whan thilke maner is referred by men to thinges that it moveth and disponeth, thanne of olde men it was cleped destinee. The whiche thinges, yif that any wight loketh wel in his thought the strengthe of that oon and of that other, he shal lightly mowen seen, that thise two thinges ben dyverse. For purviaunce is thilke divyne reson that is established in the soverain prince of thinges; the whiche purviaunce disponeth alle thinges. But destinee is the disposicioun and orddinaunce clyvinge to moevable thinges, by the whiche disposicioun the purviaunce knitteth alle thinges in hir ordres; for purviaunce embraceth alle thinges to-hepe, although they ben infinite; but destinee departeth and ordeineth alle thinges singularly, and divyded in moevinges, in places, in formes, in tymes, as thus: lat the unfoldinge of temporel ordinaunce, assembled and ooned in the lokinge of the divyne thought, be cleped purviaunce; and thilke same assemblinge and ooninge, divyded and unfoldin by tymes, lat that ben called destinee. And albeit so that thise thinges ben dyverse, yit natheles hangeth that oon on that other; for-why the order destinal procedeth of the simplicitie of purviaunce. For right as a werkman, that aperceyveth in his thoght the forme of the thing that he wol make, and moeveth the effect of the werk, and ledeth that he hadde loked biforn in his thoght simply and presently, by temporel ordinaunce; certes, right so god disponeth in his purviaunce, singularly and stably, the thinges that ben to done, but he administreth in many maneres and in dyverse tymes, by destinee, thilke same thinges that he hath disposed. Thanne, whether that destinee be exercysed outhere by some divyne spirits, servaunts to the divyne purviaunce, or elles by som sowle, or elles by alle nature servinge to god, or elles by the celestial moevinges of sterres, or elles by the dyverse subtilitee of develes, or elles by any of hem, or elles by hem alle, the destinal ordinaunce is y-woven and accomplished. Certes, it is open thing, that the purviaunce is an unmoevable and simple forme of thinges to done; and the moveable bond and the temporal ordinaunce of thinges, whiche that the divyne simplicitie of purviaunce hath ordeyned to done, that is destinee. For which it is, that alle thinges that ben put under destinee ben, certes, subgits to purviaunce, to whiche purviaunce destinee itself is subgit and under. But some thinges ben put under purviaunce, that surmounten the ordinaunce of destinee; and tho ben thilke that stably ben y-ficched negh to the firste godhed: they surmounten the ordre of destinal moevabletee. For right as of cercles that tornen aboute a same centre or aboute a point, thilke cercle that is innerest most withinne joyneth to the simplesse of the middel, and is, as it were, a centre or a poynt to that other cercles that tornen abouten him; and thilke that is outterest, compassed by larger envyrninge, is unfolden by

larger spaces, in so much as it is furthest from the middle simplicity of the point; and yif there be anything that knitteth and fellowshipeth himself to thilke middle point, it is constrained into simplicity, that is to seyn, into unmovability, and it ceaseth to be shad and to fleten diversely: right so, by semblable reason, thilke thing that departeth furthest from the first thought of god, it is unfolded and submitted to greater bonds of destiny: and in so much as the thing is more free and laus from destiny, as it axeth and holdeth him near to thilke centre of things, that is to seyn, god. And yif the thing cleaveth to the steadfastness of the thought of god, and be withoute moving, certes, it surmounteth the necessity of destiny. Thanne right swich comparison as it is of skilling to understanding, and of thing that is engendred to thing that is, and of tyme to eternitee, and of the circle to the centre, right so is the ordre of movable destiny to the stable simplicity of providence. Thilke ordinance moveth the hevene and the sterres, and attempteth the elements togider amonges himself, and transformeth hem by interchangeable mutation; and thilke same ordre neweth again alle things growinge and fallinge adoun, by semblable progressions of seedes and of sexes, that is to seyn, male and female. And this ilke ordre constraineth the fortunes and the dedes of men by a bond of causes, nat able to be unbounde; the whiche destined causes, whan they passen out from the beginninges of the unmovable providence, it mot nedes be that they ne be nat mutable. And thus ben the things ful wel y-governed, yif that the simplicity dwellinge in the divyne thought sheweth forth the ordre of causes, unable to be y-bowed; and this ordre constraineth by his propre stabilitye the movable things, or elles they sholden fleten folly. For which it is, that alle things seemen to be confus and trouble to us men, for we mowen nat considere thilke ordinance; natheles, the propre maner of every thinge, dressinge hem to goode, disponeth hem alle.(1)

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

Thanne, what-so-ever thou mayst see that is don in this world unhoped or unwened, certes, it is the right ordre of things; but, as to thy wikkede opinioun, it is a confusion,Thanne the wyse dispensacion of god spareth him, the whiche man adversitee mighte enpeyren; for that god wol nat suffren him to travaille, to whom that travaille nis

(1)Boethius, The Consolation of Philosophy, Bk.IV, Prose VI
Chaucer's translation.

17.
nat covenable.....And god yeveth and departeth to othre folk prosperitees and adversitees y-madled to-hepe, after the qualitee of hir corages, and remordeth som folk by adversitee, for they ne sholde nat wexen proude by longe welefulnesse..... And many othre folk han bought honourable renoun of this world by the prys of glorious deeth..... To othre folk is welefulnesse y-yeven unworthily, the whiche overthroweth hem into destructioun that they han deserved.... nothing nis withouten ordinaunce in the reame of the divyne purviaunce; sin that the right stronge god governeth alle thinges in this world.(1)

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

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

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

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

(1)Boethius, The Consolation of Philosophy, Bk. IV,Prose VI
Chaucer's translation.

(2)ibid.,Bk.V,Prose I

he is able to see clearly. It is when he allows the delights of the body and of the senses to rule over his reason and judgment that he becomes subject to the workings of chance and Fortune. It is because his will is in conflict with the divine will that his plans have to be changed for him. The man who keeps free from the dominance of the body is able to live in close harmony with God, and rise above the vicissitudes of Fortune. The following passage in which this is explained, smacks strongly of the Ode on The Intimations of Immortality, written centuries later by Wordsworth:

Wherefore in alle thinges that resoun is, in hem also is libertee of willinge and of nillinge. But I ne ordeyne nat, as who seyth, I ne graunte nat, that this libertee be evenelyke in alle thinges. For why in the sovereynes devynes substaunces, that is to seyn, in spirits, jugement is more cleer, and wil nat y-corumped, and might redy to speden thinges that ben desired. But the soules of men moten nedes be more free whan they loken hem in the speculacioun or lokinge of the devyne thought, and lasse free whan they slyden into the bodies; and yit lasse free whan they ben gadered to-gidere and comprehended in erthely membres. But the laste servage is whan that they ben yeven to vyces, and han y-falle from the possessioun of hir propre resoun.(1)

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

(1)Boethius, The Consolation of Philosophy, Bk.V,Prose II
Chaucer's translation.

CHAPTER III

FORTUNE IN CHAUCER'S MINOR POEMS

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

In the Book of the Duchess Chaucer was writing an elegy on the death of Lady Blanche, the wife of John of Gaunt. In the course of the poem he has much to say about the cruelty of Fortune, the Pagan goddess, with no suggestion that she is only the humble agent of a wise providence. The story is a conventional dream vision. Chaucer dreams that he is participating in a royal hunt. He becomes separated from the rest of the party, and is attracted by the figure of a man dressed in deep mourning. He approaches the mourner and asks the cause of his grief. The man then pours out a complaint against Fortune. He says that Fortune is a traitress, full of guile; that she is really foul, but appears fair. She is very fickle, taking delight in dashing the hopes of those on whom she has just smiled. Her favorite sport is lying. She laughs with one eye, and weeps with the other. She is like the scorpion, which appears harmless, but carries a sting in its tail. She is an enchantress and a false thief; with one twirl of her wheel she exalts the lowest, and

10.
degrades the highest. The mourner then explains to Chaucer that by her wiles the fickle goddess enticed him into a game of chess. Her plays were deceitful, and she won his queen from him. He complains that if he had known more about chess he might have kept his queen. But no, he corrects himself, nothing he could have done would have moved Fortune, when she had decided to take away his queen. This lament is as follows:

My boldnesse is turned to shame,
For fals Fortune hath pleyd a game
Atte ches with me, allas! the whyle!
The trayteresse fals and ful of gyle,
That al behoteth and no-thing halt,
That baggeth foule and loketh faire,
The dispitouse debonaire,
That scorneth many a creature!
An ydole of fals portraiture
Is she, for she wil sone wryen;
As filth over y-strawed with floures;
Hir moste worship and hir flour is
To lyen, for that is hir nature;
Without feyth, lawe, or mesure
She is fals; and ever laughinge
With oon eye, and that other wepinge.
That is broght up, she set al doun.
I lykne hir to the scorpioun,
That is a fals flatering beste;
For with his hede he maketh feste,
But al amid his flateringe
With his tayle he wol stinge,
And envenyme; and so wol she.
She is the envyous charite
That is ay fals, and semeth wele;
So turneth she hir false whele
Aboute, for it is no-thing stable,
Now by the fyre, not by the table;
Ful many oon hath she thus y-blent.
She is pley of enchaument,
That semeth oon and is nat so,
The false theef! what hath she do,
Trowest thou? by our lord, I wol thee seye.
Atte ches with me she gan to pleye:
With hir false draughtes divers
She stal on me, and took my fers

And whan I saw my fers aweye,
 Alas! I couthe no lenger pleye,
 But seyde, "Farwel, swete, y-wis,
 And farwel al that ever ther is!"
 Therwith Fortune seyde "Chek here!"
 And "mate!" in mid pointe of the chekkere
 With a poune erraunt, allas!
 Ful craftier to pley she was
 Than Athalus, that made the game
 First of the ches: so was his name.
 But god wolde I had ones or twyes
 Y-koud and knowe the jeopardyes
 That coude the Greek Pithagore!
 I shulde have pleyed the be at ches,
 And kept my fers the bet therby;
 And though wherto? for trerely
 I holde that wish nat worth a stree
 It had be never the bet for me.
 For Fortune can so many a wyle,
 Ther be but fewe can hir begyle,
 And eek she is the las to blame;
 my-selfe I wolde have do the same,
 Before god, hadde I been as she;
 She oghte the more excused be.
 For this I say yet more therto,
 Hadde I be god and mighte have do
 My wille, whan my fers she caughte,
 I wolde have draw the same draughte.
 For, also wis god yive me reste,
 I dare wel swere she took the beste!(1)

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

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

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

(1) Book of the Duchess, ll. 617-684

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

FORTUNE

I. Le Pleintif countre Fortune

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

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

O Socrates, thou stedfast champioun,
 She never mighte be thy tormentour;
 Thou never drestest hir oppressioun,
 Ne in hir chere founde thou no savour.
 Thou knewe wel deceit of hir colour,
 And that hir moste worshipe is to lye.

I knowe hir eek a fals dissimulour:
For fynally, Fortune, I thee defye!

II. La respounse de Fortune au Pleintif

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

I have thee taught divisicoun bi-twene
Fren^d of effect, and frend of countenaunce;
Thee nedeth nat the galle of noon hyene,
That cureth eyen darke fro hir penaunce;
Now seest thou clear, that were in ignoraunce.
Yit halt thyn ancre, and yit thou mayst arryve
Ther bountye berth the keye of my substaunce:
And eek thou hast thy best frend alyve.

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

III. La respounse du Pleintif countre Fortune.

Thy lore I dampne, hit is alversitee.
My frend maystow nat reven, blind goddesse!
That I thy frendes knowe, I thanke hit thee.
Tak hem agayn, lat hem go lye on presse:
The negardye in keping hir richesse
Prenostic is thou wolt hir tour assayle;
Wikke appetyt comth ay before seknesse:
In general, this reule may nat fayle.

La respounse de Fortune countre le Pleintif.

Thou pinchest at my mutabilitee,
For thee I lent a drope of my richesse,
And now me lyketh to with-drawe me.
Why sholdestow my realtee oppresse?
The see may ebbe and flowen more or lesse;
The welkne hath might to shyne, reyne, or hayle;

Right so mot I kythen my brotelnesse.
In general, this reule may nat fayle.

Lo, th' execucion of the magestee
That al purveyeth of his rightwisenesse,
That same thing 'Fortune' clemen ye,
Ye blinde bestes, ful of lewdnesse!
The hevене hath prepretee of sikernesse,
This world hath ever resteles travayle;
The laste day is ende of myn intresse:
In general, this reule may nat fayle.

The story is interesting, and is briefly as follows:
Troilus, the son of Priamus of Troy, is a lover of
love, and when his mother's death made him very young
her death. He was the friend of Hector, a friend
and daughter of the soothsayer, Calchas. He is at once capti-
vated with love of her, and appears in such a miserable state
that he is despised by a friend, Cressida, who is the
uncle of Calchas. Calchas tells Hector that he is to love
with Cressida, and must enjoy her love, or die. Pandarus ar-
ranges for her to meet at his house. Cressida returns the
love of Troilus, and the couple are delightfully happy for a
short while. But when the word that Cressida is to be sent
to the Greek camp as a hostage for a Trojan who has been held
captive by the Greeks, the lovers can scarcely bear up under
their chief affliction, but Cressida consoles Troilus
by promising to remain with him ten days. She is escorted to
the Greek camp by the old man Diomedes, who undertakes to revive
her drooping spirits by his attentions. Troilus spends the ten
days in an agony of expectation, but the tenth day passes with-
out bringing Cressida. Several more days go by, and Troilus at
length reflects to himself that she is unfaithful.

CHAPTER IV

FORTUNE IN TROILUS AND CRISEYDE

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

Troilus, the son of King Priam of Troy, is a scorner of love, and makes his boasts that Venus shall never get him in her power. One day he sees the beautiful Criseyde, a widow, and daughter of the soothsayer, Calchas. He is at once overcome with love of her, and appears in such a melancholy state that he is questioned by his bosom friend, Pandarus, who is the uncle of Criseyde. Troilus tells Pandarus that he is in love with Criseyde, and must enjoy her love, or die. Pandarus arranges for them to meet at his house. Criseyde returns the love of Troilus, and the couple are deliriously happy for a short while. Then comes the word that Criseyde is to be sent to the Greek camp in exchange for a Trojan who has been held captive by the Greeks. The lovers can scarcely bear up under their grief at the separation, but Criseyde consoles Troilus by promising to return to him in ten days. She is escorted to the Greek camp by the gallant Diomedes, who undertakes to revive her drooping spirits by his attentions. Troilus spends the ten days in an agony of expectation, but the tenth day passes without bringing Criseyde. Several more days go by, and Troilus still refuses to believe that she is unfaithful. Then one night he

dreams that he sees Criseyde lying with a wild boar. Cassandra, the prophetess, interprets the dream to mean that Criseyde has forsaken Troilus for Diomede, whose crest was a boar. Shortly afterward, Troilus recognizes on the person of Diomede a brooch which he has given to Criseyde, and is convinced of her infidelity. He rages long in his grief, and tries often to kill Diomede, but is at last slain by Achilles.

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

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

To thee clepe I, thou goddesse of torment,
Thou cruel Furie, sorwing ever in peyne;
Help me that am the sorwful instrument
That helpeth lovers, as I can, to pleyne!
For wel sit it, the sothe for to seyne,
A woful wight to han a drery fere,
And, to a sorwful tale, a sory chere.(1)

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

(1) Troilus and Criseyde, Bk.I, ll. 6-14

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

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

(1) Troilus and Criseyde, Bk.II, l. 74

favorable to Troilus at his birth, and works in his behalf in his wooing of Criseyde:

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

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

The bente mone with hir hornes pale,
Saturne, and Jove, in Cancro joyned were,
That swich a rayn from hevne gan avale,
That every maner womman that was there
Had of that smoky reyn a verray fere;
At which Pandare tho laugh, and seyde thenne,
'Now were it tyme a lady to go henne!(2)

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

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

(1) Troilus and Criseyde, Bk. II, ll. 680-686
(2) *ibid.*, Bk. III, ll.624-630
(3) *ibid.*, Bk. III, ll.715-734

Criseyde, who, he thinks, will never return his love. Pandarus' consolation is very similar to the answer given by Philosophy to Boethius, when he was bemoaning his hard lot:

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

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

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

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

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

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

The passage in Book IV, in which Troilus discourses at

- (1) Troilus and Criseyde, Bk.I, 11.837-854
- (2) ibid., Bk.III, 11.617-623
- (3) ibid., Bk.V, 11.1540-1547

length on predestination versus free will, has been taken directly from Boethius, Book I, Prose III. Chaucer has been severely censured for introducing this argument here, but there are several justifications for doing this seemingly inartistic thing. Troilus has been raging at Fortune for taking Criseyde away from him. He has lost faith in God. By the time he gives this speech, he has had time to calm down, and realize that God has thus arranged his fate; that all his raving can avail nothing. He asks himself how there can be such a thing as human free will, if God knows everything which is going to happen; he concludes that there cannot be. This speech is the youthful Troilus' way of saying, "I never had a chance." He is not mature enough to carry the argument as far as Boethius does, and to realize that if he had controlled his emotions by the use of his will, he could have risen superior to the dictates of Fortune.

W.C. Curry, in defense of this speech says:

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

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

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

From Troilus she gan hir brighte face

(1) Troilus and Criseyde, Book I, Prose III, 1-14
 (2) Troilus and Criseyde, Book I, Prose III, 260-287

(1) Curry, W.C., "Destiny in Chaucer's Troilus," PMLA, 45:156

21.

Away to wrythe, and took of him non hede,
But cast him clene oute of his lady grace,
And on hir wheel she sette up Diomedé;
For which right now myn herte ginneth blede,
And now my penne, allas! with which I wryte,
Quaketh for drede of that I moot endyte.(1)

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

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

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

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

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

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

- (1) Troilus and Criseyde, Bk.IV, ll. 1-14
(2) Troilus and Criseyde, Bk.IV, ll. 260-287

This is contrary to the pagan belief. In ancient times, the three Fates worked independently, and were subject to no higher power. This again shows the influence of the philosophy of Boethius. In the first lines of the fifth book, Chaucer speaks of the Fates as follows:

Aprochen gan the fatal destinee
That Joves hath in disposicioun,
And to yow, angry Parcas, sustren three,
Committeth, to don execucioun;(1)

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

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

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

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

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

(1) Troilus and Criseyde, Bk.V,11.1-4
(2) ibid., Bk.V,11.358-378

which the dream had given him. We read:

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

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

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

(1) Troilus and Criseyde, Bk.V,11. 1443-1449

CHAPTER V

FORTUNE IN THE CANTERBURY TALES

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

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

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

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

(1) ibid., ll. 915-916

(1) Knight's Tale, l. 915

(2) ibid., ll. 925-926

When Theseus arrives at Thebes, he takes prisoner the youths, Palamon and Arcite, and returns with them to Athens, where he places them in a strong tower. While they are languishing in their prison, Arcite expresses his fatalistic views as follows:

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

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

Allas why pleynten folk so in comune
Of purveyaunce of God, or of Fortune,
That yeveth hem ful ofte in many a gyse
what bettre than they can hem-self devyse?
Som man desyreth for to han richesse,
That cause is of his mordre or greet siknesse.
And som man wolde out of his prison fayn,
That in his hous is of his meynee slayn.
Infinite harmes been in this matere;
We witen nat what thing we preyen here.
We faren as he that dronken is as a mous;
A dronke man wot wel that he hath an hous,
But he noot which the righte wey is thider;
And to a dronke man the wey is slider.
And certes, in this world so faren we;
We seken faste after felicitee,
But we goon wrong ful often, trewely.
Thus may we seyen alle, and namely I,
That wende and hadde a greet opinioun,
That, if I might escapen from prisoun,
Than hadde I been in joye and perfit hele,
Ther now I am exyled fro my wele.
Sin that I may nat seen yow, Emelye,
I nam but deed; ther is no remedye.(2)

(1) Knight's Tale, ll. 1086-1091

(2) ibid., ll. 1252-1274

Palamon, on the other hand, is exceedingly bitter because Arcite is free, and has some chance to raise an army, conquer Theseus, and win Emily for his wife. He rails at the gods who control the universe because they allow such unfairness to prevail in human affairs. It would seem that all the pent-up bitterness in Chaucer's nature bursts forth in this speech which he puts in the mouth of Palamon:

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

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

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

(1) Knight's Tale, ll. 1303-1322

55.

Yet somtyme it shal fallen on a day
That falleth nat eft with-inne a thousand yere.
For certeinly, our appetytes here,
Be it of werre, or pees, or hate, or love,
Al is this reuled by the sighte above.(1)

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

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

'My dere doghter Venus, 'quod Saturne,
 My cours, that hath so wyde for to turne,
 Hath more power than wot any man.
 Myn is the drenching in the see so wan;
 Myn is the prison in the derke cote;
 Myn is the strangling and hanging by the throte;
 The murmure, and the cherles rebelling,
 The groyning, and the pryvee empoysoning:
 I do vengeance and pleyne correccioun
 Why! I dwelle in the signe of the Leoun.
 Myn is the ruine of the hys halles,
 The falling of the toures and of the walles
 Upon the mynour or the carpenter.
 I slow Sampson in shaking the piler;
 And myn be the maladyes colde,
 The derke tresons, and the castes olde;
 My loking is the fader of pestilence.(1)

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

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

(1) Knight's Tale, ll. 2452-2469

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

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

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

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

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

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

(1) Knight's Tale, ll. 3035-3040

(2) Man of Law's Tale, ll. 190-203

50.

doon in hope of fortune is perilous and uncertein, thanne have ye no other remedye but for to have your recours unto the sovereyn juge that vengeth alle vileinyes and wronges; and he shal venge yow after that him-self witnesseth, wher-as he seith: "leveth the vengeance to me, and I shal do it." (1)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

O sodeyn hap, o thou fortune instable,

(1) Tale of Melibeus, 42 (2) Monke's Tale, ll. 3185-3188
(3) ibid., ll. 3330-3332 (4) ibid., ll. 3430-3435
(5) Monke's Tale, ll. 3953-3956

Lyk to the scorpioun so deceivable,
 That flaterest with thyn heed when thou wolt stinge;
 Thy tayl is deeth, thurgh thyn envenyminge.
 O brotil joye! o swete venim queynte!
 O monstre, that so subtilly canst peynte
 Thy yiftes, under hewe of stedfastnesse,
 That thou deceyvest bothe more and lesse!(1)

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

(1) Marchantes Tale, ll. 2057-2067

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