

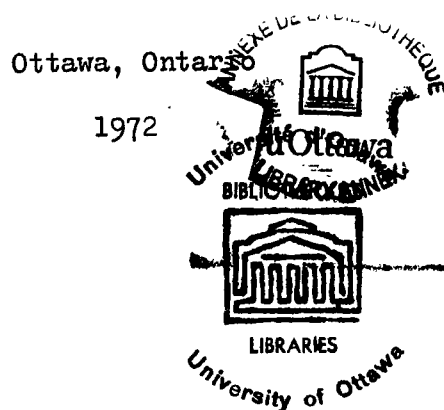
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THE MEDIEVAL TRAGIC MODE  
AND THE REPRESENTATION OF TRAGEDY  
IN MIDDLE ENGLISH LITERATURE:  
A STUDY OF MORTE ARTHURE, PEARL,  
TROILUS AND CRISEYDE, AND THE TESTAMENT OF CRESSEID

by

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A Thesis  
submitted to the School of Graduate Studies  
of the University of Ottawa  
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the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy



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## Preface and Acknowledgements

To exonerate the guiltless, I would like to note that unless otherwise credited, the translations appearing in this dissertation are mine.

Also, I would like to thank my supervisor Dr. Laurence Eldredge for his encouragement and careful criticism; my typist Margaret Gouin for her prompt and reliable work; the girls in the library, especially in the Interlibrary Loan, for their cheerful assistance; and my wife for her patience over the last few years.

### Curriculum Studiorum

William Couch was born May 30, 1944, in Sudbury, Ontario. He received a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Western Ontario in 1966, and a Master of Arts degree from Carleton University in 1970.

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## Introduction

It is difficult for the student of tragedy with a point of view that has been shaped largely by Aristotle's famous definition, to evaluate properly the medieval representation of tragedy. The reason for this is that the entire medieval concept of tragedy differs significantly from the Aristotelian. The difference is, as Eric Auerbach explained, one of a mode of thought, a way of comprehending reality.

The underlying idea of tragedy which I have used as a touchstone is comparatively simple: the fall of a man or woman from an elevated status to a lower one. That this is equally true of Lear and Oedipus, of Adam and Samson, is probably obvious. But it is obvious too that enormous differences of tone, of causality, of consequences, of puport separate these four examples from one another perhaps even more decisively than their falls draw them together. What I am attempting is to identify and describe the concatenation of tone, causality, consequences and prport that accompanies various falls in medieval literature.

The expression of tragedy in the Middle Ages, as it usually has been regarded, is characterized primarily by the figures of Fortune and her wheel and the de casibus motif. It is true that Fortune and her associates are very much a part of medieval tragedy, but they are only that part which lies upon the surface. They are the imaginative or figurative representations of that tragedy which is to be observed in the world-- material losses, losses of fame, honour, glory, physical suffering. Because they are so strikingly visual and appropriate it has been an easy thing to define medieval tragedy by them.

However, as D.W. Robertson not so very long ago

<sup>1</sup>Mimesis, trans.W.R. Trask (Princeton:Princetcn U.P., 1953).

observed, medieval tragedy is far more accurately characterized by Christian tradition and Christian beliefs.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the medieval view of creation, the fall, the world, man's place in it, man's true nature, sin, salvation, damnation, in fact the whole of reality as it is embraced by the concept of 'salvation history' is essential to any but the most superficial understanding of medieval tragedy. Accordingly, underlying the imaginative representation is the Christian idea that every man is potentially a victim of a far greater tragedy than Fortune's mutability--the loss of his soul. Legatee of the tragic consequences of Adam's fall, but freed from the responsibility for it by reason of baptism in Christ, the individual Christian is free to choose his course in the world. The way of the rational spirit will lead to the comedy of eternal life; the way of the irrational flesh will lead to the tragedy of eternal death.

Fortunately for man in the world, the medieval Church provided spiritual enlightenment through her teaching. With her guidance and by the practice of virtue, the rational soul can come to know its true nature, the value of the world, the providential plan of God, and consequently

<sup>2</sup>"Chaucerian Tragedy" (1952) in Chaucer Criticism, Vol. 2, eds. R. J. Schoeck and J. Taylor (Notre Dame: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1961), pp. 86-121; see also his A Preface to Chaucer (Princeton: Princeton U. Press, 1962).

mould its will to God's as Adam should have done. Unfortunately, however, the paths are not quite so easy to choose, for although the Christian is released from Adam's guilt he must at the same time remain part of fallen creation unaltered by Christ's sacrifice. Man must make his way in a body subject to the appetites of the world. By his animal nature, man is ignorant of his true good and is drawn immoderately to the false goods of the world. Hence, instead of following the path of virtue, he turns into the byways of the world. Instead of moulding his will to God's he turns it to his own selfish pleasure. Weak by nature, the man who fails to be guided by the Church, to practise virtue, to exercise reason easily succumbs to the false goods of the world, gifts of a fickle irrational Fortune. Caught up in the pattern of 'wele and woe,' the worldly man is first a victim of the tragedy of the turning wheel, but more than this he becomes a victim of Satan, for enslavement to Fortune leads to sin and finally to damnation.

This then, is the consciousness that underlies the real concept of medieval tragedy. It is a completeness of thought which makes a synthesis of the tragedy of Fortune and the potential tragedy of damnation. It is a mode which is the result of viewing the world from two perspectives, from two philosophies, the human and the divine, the

materialistic and the Christian.

To explain in this introduction any but these bare details of the mode that represents the medieval tragic consciousness is impossible. The purpose of this entire dissertation is to do that. Just as the expression of any major consciousness of an age involves the examination of many complex relationships built up from the entire background of the literature and thought of the age itself, so does this examination of the expression of medieval tragedy. Let it suffice for now to say that the mode of medieval tragedy is Fortune, her wheel, the de casibus and all Christian belief together. It is a consciousness out of which all medieval tragedians alike work, although not expressed equally or consistently by all.

It is my intention in this dissertation, then, to show both separately and in synthesis the full dimension of the medieval tragic mode. At the same time it is my intention to demonstrate how the respective poets of Morte Arthure, Pearl, Troilus and Criseyde and The Testament of Cresseid understood, emphasized and capitalized upon the mode for the tragic effectiveness of their poems.

## Chapter One

### The Fortuna Tradition of Medieval Tragedy

#### I

#### The Poetics and Medieval Tragedy.

Although it can easily be demonstrated that the Poetics of Aristotle was influential subsequent to the Middle Ages, one would be hard pressed to show that the great work had any direct influence upon the concept of tragedy as it appeared in the Middle Ages. Indeed, one critic goes so far as to argue that this lack of influence extends even into the early Renaissance.<sup>1</sup> Regardless of this aspect of the argument, it is true to say that to the medieval tragedian the Poetics was essentially an unknown quantity. Almost all critics agree that this is so. J. E. Spingarn notes that the Poetics "was entirely lost sight of

<sup>1</sup>A. Philip McMahon, "Seven Questions on Aristotelian Definitions of Tragedy and Comedy," Harvard Studies in Clas. Phil., 40 (1929), 97-198, who says that "During the Renaissance and afterwards, both on the continent and in England, ideas of the tragic and comic, of tragedy and comedy, were not radically or immediately altered by the recovery of Aristotle's Poetics, but continued fundamentally to depend on the traditional conceptions." (p. 198) However, it must be noted that McMahon qualifies his argument by explaining that these "traditional conceptions" are not "un-Aristotelian."

in the Middle Ages."<sup>2</sup> J. W. H. Atkins and Bernard Weinberg more accurately qualify this by adding "practically unknown."<sup>3</sup> J. M. Bremer in his recent study of hamartia supports these older conclusions with his own rather biased conclusion that "People in the early Middle Ages from the fall of Rome onwards were not very much concerned with anything as sophisticated as Aristotle's Poetics. . . ."<sup>4</sup>

It is a fact that the Poetics was available to medieval scholars, at least by the middle of the thirteenth century. Although the first actual translation from the Greek did not come until 1498 when Giorgio Valla made his translation, there were several earlier translations of Arabic versions. Hermannus of Germany (c. 1256), William van Moerbeke (c. 1278), and in the fourteenth century, Mantinus of Tortosa, made such translations. Of Hermannus' version Spingarn observes: "Hermann's version seems to have circulated considerably in the Middle Ages. . . ."<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup>A History of Literary Criticism in the Renaissance (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1908; rpt. 1912), p. 16.

<sup>3</sup>English Literary Criticism: The Medieval Phase (Gloucester: Peter Smith, 1934; rpt. 1961), p. 192; "From Aristotle to Pseudo-Aristotle" in Aristotle's Poetics and English Literature, ed. E. Olsen (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1965), pp. 192-200.

<sup>4</sup>Hamartia (Amsterdam: Adolf M. Hakkert, 1969), p. 65.

<sup>5</sup>Spingarn, p. 16.

Unfortunately, these translations failed to make much of an impression on the medieval attitude towards literary tragic representation. Of Hermann's "popular" version, Spingarn adds: ". . . it had no traceable influence on critical literature whatsoever."<sup>6</sup>

Perhaps the failure to impress was because these earliest Latin translations were made from Arabic versions themselves largely imperfect and obscure. The extensive attendant commentaries of the Arabic philosophers reduced the value as translations of Aristotle considerably. Indeed, the obscurity was compounded by the very number of translations through which the Greek version likely had gone. The Arabic versions were themselves translations of earlier Syriac translations.<sup>7</sup> However, since this did not seem to affect the enthusiasm with which other imperfect versions of Aristotle's works were met, it is possible to assume other reasons for the failure of the Poetics to influence at least the later medieval tragedians like Boccaccio, Dante, Chaucer or Lydgate.

<sup>6</sup>Spingarn, p. 16.

<sup>7</sup>See Bremer, p. 65-66; Spingarn, p. 11; Weinberg, p. 192; and others. Marvin Theodore Herrick, The Poetics of Aristotle in England (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1930), also notes that Roger Bacon held in contempt the translations by Hermann and William. Worse than useless, Bacon thought them, by reason of their garbled translation. (pp. 8-13)

One such reason is that medieval concern was not very much with poetics per se. The early Church fathers discouraged the consideration of poetry and poetic theorizing for its own sake. Indeed, they discouraged the vain study of profane learning.<sup>8</sup> In his De Spectaculis, Tertullian speaks out most strongly against all sources and forms of pagan literature ("You, O Christian, will hate the things, when you cannot but hate the authors of them."),<sup>9</sup> urging instead the reading of Christian works which are "neither fables, but truth, neither artifice but simplicity."<sup>10</sup> And Jerome and Augustine, though moderates, are nonetheless not entirely well disposed to the ancient writers.<sup>11</sup> What was allowed was, as Augustine temperately

<sup>8</sup>Pierre de Labriolle, History and Literature of Christianity, trans. H. Wilson (London: Kegan, Paul, Trench, Tübnner & Co., Ltd., 1924), pp. 6-32.

<sup>9</sup>"Oderis, Christiane, quorum auctores non potes non odisse," trans. T. R. Glover, Loeb Library Editions (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1953), pp. 260-61.

<sup>10</sup>". . . nec fabulae, sed veritates, nec strophae, sed simplicitates," Ibid., pp. 296-97.

<sup>11</sup>In a letter Jerome tells of how he was reprovved by God, for his love of classical learning. Living as an ascetic he found consolation in the works of Cicero and Plautus rather than in the words of the Prophets whose style he disliked. In a dream, a divine judge demanded of him his state in life. Jerome replied, "I am a Christian." The judge rebuked him: "You are not a Christian: you are a Ciceronian: where your treasure is, there also is your heart." Following this he was soundly lashed until he promised never again to be bothered with profane literature, but to read only the divine works. Epistola XXII, "De Custodia Virginitatis," P.L. XXII, 416-17. "Itaque miser ego

noted in the De Doctrina Christiana, only by reason of

lecturus Tullium, jejunabam. Post noctium crebras vigi-  
lias, post lacrymas, quas mihi praeteritorum recordatio pec-  
catorum ex imis visceribus eruebat, Plautus sumebatur in  
manus [al. manibus]. Si quando in memetipsum reversus, Pro-  
phetas legere coepissem, sermo horrebat incultus; et quia  
lumen caecis oculis non videbam, non oculorum putabam culpam  
esse, sed solis. Dum ita me antiquus serpens [al. hostis]  
illuderet, in media ferme Quadragesima medullis infusa  
febris, corpus invasit exhaustum: et sine ulla requie (quod  
dictu quoque incredibile sit) sic infelicia membra depasta  
est, ut ossibus vix haererem. Interim parantus exequiae, et  
vitalis animae calor, toto frigescente jam corpore, in solo  
tantum tepente pectusculo palpitabat: Cum subito raptus in  
spiritu, ad tribunal judicis pertrahor; ubi tantum luminis,  
et tantum erat ex circumstantium claritate fulgoris, ut  
projectus in terram, sursum aspicere non auderem. Interro-  
gatus de conditione, Christianum me esse respondi. Et ille  
qui praesidebat: Mentiris, ait, Ciceronianus es, non Chris-  
tianus: ubi enim thesaurus tuus, ibi et cor tuum (Matth.  
6.2.). Illico obmutui, et inter verbera (nam caedi me jus-  
serat) conscientiae magis igne torquebar, illum mecum ver-  
siculum reputans: "In inferno autem quis confitebitur tibi"  
(Ps. 6.6)? Clamare tamen coepi, et ejulans dicere: Mise-  
rere mei, Domine, miserere mei. Haec vox inter flagella  
resonabat. Tandem ad praesidentis genua provoluti qui asta-  
bant, precabantur, ut veniam tribueret adolescentiae, et  
errori locum poenitentiae commodaret, exacturus deinde cru-  
ciatum, si Gentilium litterarum libros aliquando legissem.  
Ego qui in tanto constrictus articulo, vellem etiam majora  
promittere, dejerare coepi, et nomen ejus obtestans, dicere,  
Domine, si unquam habuero codices saeculares, si legero,  
te negavi. In haec sacramenti verba dimissus, revertor ad  
superos; et mirantibus cunctis, oculos aperio tanto lacry-  
marum imbre perfusos, ut etiam, incredulis fidem facerem ex  
dolore. Nec vero sopor ille fuerat, aut vana somnia, quibus  
saepe deludimur. Testis est tribunal illud, ante quod jacui,  
testis iudicium triste, quod timui: ita mihi nunquam con-  
tingat in talem incidere quaestionem. Liventes fateor  
habuisse me scapulas, plagas sensisse post somnum, et tanto  
dehinc studio divina legisse, quanto non ante mortalia  
legeram."

In his Confessions (I, 15-18), Augustine relates  
his displeasure with classical learning. He refers to it  
as straying in the footsteps of "poetic fictions" ("figmen-  
torum poeticorum vestigia errantes sequi cogebarum") and

its inherent moral uprightness,<sup>12</sup> or by reason of its

cries out, "Behold, is not all this smoke and wind? Thy praise, Lord, Thy praises might have supported the tendrils of my heart by Thy Scriptures; so had it not been dragged away by these empty trifles, a shameful prey of the fowls of the air. For there is more than one way in which men sacrifice to the fallen angels." Whitney J. Oates, The Basic Writings of St. Augustine (New York: Random House, 1948), vol. I, 17. "Nonne ecce illā omnia fumus et ventus? itane aliud non erat, ubi exerceretur ingenium et lingua mea? laudes tuae, domine, laudes tuae per scripturas tuas suspenderent palmitem cordis mei, et non rapererunt per inania nugarum turpis praeda volatilibus. non enim uno modo sacrificatur transgressoribus angelis." Confessionum, ed. Martinus Skutella (Stuttgart: B. G. Teubneri, 1969), p. 21.

<sup>12</sup>"But we should not think that we ought not to learn literature because Mercury is said to be its inventor, nor that because the pagans dedicated temples to Justice and Virtue and adorned in stones what should be performed in the heart, we should therefore avoid justice and virtue. Rather, what every good and true Christian should understand that wherever he may find truth, it is his Lord's. And confessing and acknowledging this truth also in the sacred writings, he will repudiate superstitious imaginings and will deplore and guard against men who "when they knew God . . . have not glorified him as God, or given thanks; but became vain in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. For professing themselves to be wise, they became fools. And they changed the glory of the incorruptible God into the likeness of the image of a corruptible man, and of birds, and of four-footed beasts, and of creeping things." (II, 18) trans. D. W. Robertson, On Christian Doctrine (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Co. Inc., 1958). Neque enim et literas discere non debuimus, quia earum repertorem dicunt esse Mercurium; aut quia iustitiae virtutisque templa dedicarunt, et quae corde gestanda sunt in lapidibus adorare maluerunt, propterea nobis iustitia virtusque fugienda est. Immo vero quisquis bonus verusque Christianus est, Domini sui esse intelligat ubique invenerit veritatem, quam confitens et agnoscens etiam in literis sacris superstitiosa figmenta repudiet, doleatque homines atque caveat, qui cognoscentes Deum non ut Deum glorificaverunt, aut gratias egerunt, sed evanuerunt in cogitationibus suis, et obscuratum est cor insipiens eorum; dicentes enim se esse sapientes

value as a means of revealing and teaching scripture.<sup>13</sup>

What was compatible with Christianity could be if not assimilated, then at least tolerated. That which encouraged moral living and fostered understanding was acceptable; that which did not, was not; and for the most part a study of poetics did not. Later, when already in receipt of the vast bulk of Aristotelianism, scholastic thinkers, following the earlier traditions, were simply not interested in evaluating poetry. "Poeticus enim modus infirmior est inter modos philosophiae,"<sup>14</sup> observes Albertus Magnus. And from his comprehensive and formidable study E. R. Curtius concludes that scholasticism produced no poetics or fine arts theories, but maintained its "opposition to the auctores, rhetoric and poetry."<sup>15</sup>

Perhaps too, Aristotle's Poetics had no discernable influence because the Middle Ages already had its own

stulti facti sunt, et immutaverunt gloriam incorruptibilis Dei in similitudinem imaginis corruptibilis hominis, et voluerum et quadrupedum et serpentium. (II, 18) Car. Herm. Bruder, ed. (Leipzig: Ernesti Bretii, 1906).

<sup>13</sup>See especially the latter part of Bk. II, Bk. III and Bk. IV of the De Doctrina.

<sup>14</sup>Summa Theologiae, I, q. 5, mem. 2 in Opera Omnia, vol. 31, ed. Steph. Caes. Aug. Borgnet (Paris: Ludovicium Vives, 1895).

<sup>15</sup>European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages, Willard Trask trans. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1953), p. 218 ff.

particular kind of poetics. Despite scholastic disregard, medieval literary theoreticians placed strong emphasis upon the study of rhetoric for the sake of discourse generally—"a dominion of rhetoric over poetry,"<sup>16</sup> Curtius suggests. Accordingly, one might conclude that insofar as poetry is concerned the thirteenth-century poetics of Mathew de Vendome and more especially of Geoffrey de Vinsauf<sup>17</sup> epitomize the tradition of rhetorical poetics in the Middle Ages; and by any estimate Geoffrey's Poetria Nova is a rhetorician's handbook.<sup>18</sup> It is true that these theoreticians and commentators often refer to poetic genres, but their interests are for the most part either descriptive or prescriptive in nature. Theirs is not a concern with developing a medieval poetic beyond that which rhetoric offered, but a means of cataloguing or categorizing that classical material which was already available to them.

Thirdly, the kind of style which tragedy represented in classical Greek and Roman literature was alien to the medieval Christian mentality. The concept of high, middle, and low styles, while preserved in commentaries

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 148.

<sup>17</sup>Les Arts poétiques du XII<sup>e</sup> et du XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle, ed. Edmond Faral (Paris: Librairie Honoré Champion, 1958).

<sup>18</sup>See Joseph de Ghellinck, L'Essor de la Littérature latine au XII<sup>e</sup> siècle, Tome II (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1946), pp. 243-52.

on the classics, bore no relevance to medieval literature which ordered its subject matter indiscriminately within such a structure. Indeed, the very idea of a tragic hero in the high classical tradition was incompatible with Christian tradition. The story of Christ with its combination of the lowest common reality and the highest human tragedy made subsequent 'high' style tragedy impossible.<sup>19</sup>

For these reasons then, theological, philosophical and stylistic, the Middle Ages had no immediate use for such a definition of tragedy as Aristotle's and when it did come along it could safely be ignored. Unlike the philosophers and theologians who much needed the revitalizing contribution that the corpus of Aristotle's other writings brought, the rhetoricians and literary theoreticians of the Middle Ages were secure in their concepts and definitions of tragedy and eminently content.

## II

### Early Notions of the Tragedy of Fortune

Indeed, medieval tragedy seems to reflect very few of the tenets of the Aristotelian definition of

<sup>19</sup>Auerbach, pp. 554-57, offers a summary of these ideas.

tragedy. It is not dramatic; rather, it is narrative. There is very little regard for unity of tragic action; rather, episodes are often haphazardly put together one after the other: between the beginning and the end many events occur which can be seen as only marginally, if at all, related to the tragic ending. The idea of the tragic representation evoking fear and pity in order to purge these emotions in the audience is completely absent; in fact, the medieval concern is for tragic action to evoke fear alone in order to create distrust in the goods of the material world and hence draw sinners to the bosom of Holy Mother Church. There is no special importance given to the 'flaw' in the character of the tragic hero, for in medieval terms, the 'flaw' becomes the very general tendency to sin, but since all men are born in sin and inherently prone to sin, the concept is largely meaningless for most medieval tragedians.

Truly, not only is the essence of Aristotelian tragedy missing, but the very substance of what Aristotle considered 'bad tragedy' is imitated.<sup>20</sup>

It clearly follows that, in the first place, good men must not be seen suffering; a change from prosperity to misfortune; this is not fearful or

<sup>20</sup>This is also the opinion of Ashley H. Thorndike, Tragedy (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1908), pp. 24-25.

pitiful, but shocking. Nor must the wicked pass from misfortune to prosperity; this of all things is the least tragic; nothing happens as it should, it is neither humane nor fearful nor pitiful. A thoroughly wicked man must not pass from prosperity to misfortune either; such a plot may satisfy our feeling of humanity, but it does not arouse pity or fear.<sup>21</sup>

Yet, such is the substance of medieval tragedy.

The good or the bad may rise or fall without apparent cause or reason.

For sothe it is, that, on hir toltter quhele,  
 Euey wight cleuerith into his stage,  
 And failynge foting oft, quhen hir lest, rele  
 Sum vp, sum doune; is non estate nor age  
 Ensured, more the prynce than the page  
 So vncouthly his werdes sche deuidith . . .<sup>22</sup>

In the Consolation of Philosophy, which figures very much in the ideas expressed in the Kingis Quair, Boethius complains to Dame Philosophy that in life the good are humbled and the evil exalted, citing his own tragic misfortunes by way of example. He complains:

For the desire of doing evil may be attributed to our weakness, but that in the sight of God the wicked should be able to compass whatsoever they contrive against the innocent, is altogether monstrous . . . methinks I see the cursed crews of the wicked abounding with joy and gladness, and every lost companion devising with himself how to accuse others falsely, good men lie prostrate with the terror of my danger, and every lewd fellow is provoked by impunity to attempt any wickedness, and by

<sup>21</sup> On Poetry and Style, trans. G. M. A. Grube (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Co. Inc., 1958), p. 24.

<sup>22</sup> The Kingis Quair and The Quare of Jelusy, ed. Alexander Lawson (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1910), Stanza IX, p. 6.

rewards to bring it to effect; but the innocent are not only deprived of all security, but also of any manner of defence.

(I, pr. 4)<sup>23</sup>

It then becomes Lady Philosophy's responsibility to show him that such is not really the truth and that he is "confused" as to the purpose of things when he views them this way. But such is matter for consideration later in this dissertation.

Although my observations about the Poetics' lack of influence on medieval tragedy are warranted by the facts, it has been argued that there is much about medieval tragedy that does seem Aristotelian--enough perhaps to insist upon some degree of influence of Aristotle in the tragic theory of the Middle Ages. Like Aristotle's definition, medieval tragedy is most often defined and characterized by the fall of a great man, by the vision of tragic events as an imitation of happiness and misfortune, by a strong contrast of reversals of fortune, and quite often even reversals accompanied by recognition on the part of the tragic figure. To A. Philip McMahon these medieval

<sup>23</sup>"Nam deteriora uelle nostri fuerit fortasse defectus, posse contra innocentiam, quae sceleratus quisque conceperit inspectante deo, monstri simile est . . . Videre autem uideor nefarias sceleratorum officinas gaudio lactitiaque fluitantes, perditissimum quemque nouis delationum fraudibus imminentem, iacere bonos nostri discriminis terrore prostratos, flagitiosum quemque ad audendum quidem facinus impunitate, ad efficiendum uero praemiis incitari, insontes autem non modo securitate, uerum ipsa etiam defensione priuatos." trans. "I.T.," rev. H. F. Stewart, Loeb Library Edition (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U. P., 1952), pp. 148-55.

elements are entirely Aristotelian in their origins, but deriving not from the Poetics, but from a lost dialogue he calls On Poets, to which only secondary evidence of fragmentary nature is extant. Because of the dissimilarities between medieval tragedy and Aristotle's formulation of it in the Poetics, this must have contained those elements so often defined by medieval commentators on tragedy from Donatus to Lydgate.<sup>24</sup> The immediate concern of McMahon is irrelevant to this present study except insofar as he demonstrates the continuity of a basic concept of tragedy that extends from classical times into the Renaissance. In fact, from the point of view of this argument it would seem more reasonable to admit that these elements are more attributable to a very general classical genesis, as J. E. Spingarn does,<sup>25</sup> than to a hypothetical Aristotelian genesis. To this extent even the Aristotelian exponent McMahon is forced to agree: ". . . the chief characteristics of tragedy and comedy as formulated by Aristotle and his successors were based on current, popular phrases. . . ." <sup>26</sup> In the light of this, it might even be safe to voice the opinion that such elements as these

<sup>24</sup>"On the Second Book of Aristotle's Poetics and the Source of Theophrastus' Definition of Tragedy," Harvard Stud. Clas. Phil., 28 (1917), 1-46.

<sup>25</sup>Spingarn, pp. 64-67.

<sup>26</sup>McMahon, "Seven Questions," p. 105.

which manifest themselves in classical, medieval, and Renaissance sources are intrinsically a part of the human condition; or at least a part of an intrinsic, human, universal tragic vision.

It is no matter, for the continuity of the expression of tragedy from classical times itself gives a basic consistency to the medieval expression and even though different aspects of the whole expression were emphasized at different times in the Middle Ages--the idea of Fortune as a goddess, the wheel being turned by Fortune, Fortune herself on the wheel<sup>27</sup>--the concepts of a reversal of fortune from good to bad and the consequent fall of a man from an elevated to a low position (as it appears at the height of the Middle Ages) remained central to the definition of tragedy. This transmission of the tragic view from Theophrastus through "the Alexandrines . . . to the Romans, including Cicero, Varro and Suetonius . . . to the Middle Ages,"<sup>28</sup> has already been documented by Patch, Atkins, and McMahon. That Donatus and Diomedes together "determined what most men held to be the meaning of traged,

<sup>27</sup>H. Patch, The Goddess Fortuna (1927; rpt. New York: Octagon Books, 1967).

<sup>28</sup>McMahon, "Seven Questions," p. 105.

and comedy for fourteen centuries"<sup>29</sup> is demonstrated ably by the above studies.

Thus, it may be considered that insofar as the basic idea of the reversals of Fortune is concerned with tragedy, the patrological commentators remained relatively consistent with the simple tradition. "What other thing doth the outcry of tragedies lament, but that fortune, having no respect, overturneth happy states?" (II, pr. 2),<sup>30</sup> asks Lady Philosophy of Boethius. "The matters of tragic actions are tears . . ."<sup>31</sup> observes Isidore, and adds somewhat moralistically, "Tragedians are those who portrayed the ancient stories, in fact the crimes of evil kings, in sorrowful song to watching audiences."<sup>32</sup> Subsequent to him most other commentators agree, since most, according to McMahon, take their definitions from the Etymologiarum.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 129.

<sup>30</sup>"Quid tragoediarum clamor aliud deflet nisi indiscreto ictu fortunam felicia regna uertentem?" De Consolatione, trans. "I.T.," pp. 180-81.

<sup>31</sup>"Item tragicorum argumenta ex rebus sunt luctuosus . . .," Etym., VIII, vii (P.L., LXXXII, 658).

<sup>32</sup>"Tragoedi sunt qui antiqua gesta atque facinora sceleratorum regum lectuoso carmine, spectante populo, concinebant," Etym., XVIII, xlv (P.L., LXXXII, 651).

<sup>33</sup>Uggrucione da Pisa's definition in the Magnae Derivationes, which Paget Toynbee, Dante Studies and Research (London: Methuen & Co., 1902), pp. 97-103, acknowledges is the direct source for Dante's definition, is

Since these definitions are relatively consistent and do demonstrate that there is a basic traditional concept of tragedy in the Middle Ages which is considered literary even by the Church fathers, and since the focus of my study is primarily literary, I will turn now to the expression of this in literature, especially though not exclusively Middle English literature.

### III

#### The Fellowship of Fortune and the Representation of Tragedy

The usual figurative literary expression of tragedy in the Middle Ages is a combination of three elements—the de casibus element, the goddess Fortuna element, and the symbolic wheel of Fortune element. This combination of elements is an important one insofar as any understanding of traditional medieval tragedy is concerned. To see one to the exclusion of the others is to misunderstand the nature of traditional medieval tragedy. This has often been the case, especially by those who, fooled

itself taken largely from Isidore, as is that of John of Salisbury in the Polycraticus and of Vincent of Beauvais in the Speculum Doctrinale. The Catholicon of Johannes Januensis "another storehouse of medieval learning" is equally derivative, and makes the definition of tragedy in accordance with tradition; McMahon, "Seven Questions," pp. 137-40.

by Chaucer, cite the Monk's definition as "the definition of" medieval tragedy. Nevertheless, if one always keeps in mind the close relationship among these three elements, a separate examination of them can prove rewarding in that one may more easily recognize the fulness of the Fortuna aspect of the medieval expression of tragedy in its parts.

There can be no denial of the importance of the de casibus element in medieval tragedy. Every scholar agrees that it is the first principle towards the complete understanding of medieval tragedy. It is Willard Farnham's opinion that "the story of a fall from felicity into misfortune cast in the terms in which Boccaccio devised bore the name of tragedy down through the Middle Ages and even later."<sup>34</sup> Howard Patch agrees: "High to low is the great theme in the Middle Ages as well as in classical times. Since the change in men's fortune is what really constitutes the medieval idea of tragedy we may call this the tragic theme."<sup>35</sup> D. W. Robertson more specifically concludes of Chaucer's concept of tragedy: ". . . it is clear that the subject of a Chaucerian tragedy is not only a man of high degree, but also a man who has allowed himself to

<sup>34</sup>The Medieval Heritage of Elizabethan Tragedy  
(New York: Barnes and Noble, 1936), p. 71.

<sup>35</sup>Patch, p. 68.

be elevated spiritually by 'good' fortune. Having achieved this eminence, he is beset by 'evil' fortune or adversity before which he falls."<sup>36</sup>

The de casibus element does have a sound basis in English medieval literature. It is certainly true that Chaucer regards the de casibus element as one aspect of tragedy. In his prologue, the Monk defines his concept of tragedy in just such terms:

Tragedie is to seyn a certeyn storie,  
As olde bookes maken us memorie  
Of hym that stood in greet prosperitee,  
And is fallen out of heigh degree  
Into myserie, and endeth wrecchedley.  
(VII, ll. 1973-77)<sup>37</sup>

Unquestionably, Chaucer knew Boccaccio's de casibus stories. It is quite possible that he also knew Dante's definition, "In the beginning a tragedy is awesome and tranquil; in the violent end, it is stinking and horrible,"<sup>38</sup> either directly or from similar sources. However, it is indisputable that for Chaucer the most influential explanation of tragedy and the nature of tragedy comes from his own translation of Boethius' De Consolatione and from

<sup>36</sup>Robertson, "Chaucerian Tragedy," p. 91.

<sup>37</sup>F. N. Robinson ed., The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, 2nd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin & Co., 1961), p. 189. All further references will be made to this edition parenthetically within the text.

<sup>38</sup>"Tragoedia in principio est admirabilis et quieta, in fine sive excitu est foetida et horribilis." Paget Toynbee ed., The Letters of Dante, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), p. 175.

Nicholas Trivet's glosses on Boethius. From his translation we read:

What other thyng bywaylen the crynges of tragedyes  
but oonly the dedes of Fortune, that with unwar  
strook overturneth the realmes of greet nobleye?  
(Glose. Tragedye is to seyn a dite of a prosperite  
for a tyme that endeth in wrecchidnesse.)  
(Boece II, pr. 2)

However, as we have seen there is more to medieval tragedy than the bare rather unsophisticated de casibus element. Chaucer was able to recognize these greater dimensions and capitalize on them. For example, although the Monk omits the role of Fortune from his definition proper, it is most likely that the omission is intended to be a part of an ironic comment on his poor recollective faculties and his misspent life of self-indulgence than intended as a complete definition of tragedy. Certainly Chaucer knew the more complex nature of Fortune and her wheel from his work on Boethius. Indeed, not only for Chaucer but for most medievals, Boethius' De Consolatione provides the most immediately identifiable source for the visual concept of Fortune and her wheel. Chaucer translates:

Whan Fortune with a proud ryght hand hath turned  
hir chaungynge stowndes, sche fareth lyk the maneres  
of the boylyng Eurippe . . . She cruel Fortune  
casteth adoun kynges that whilom were ydradd; and  
sche, desceyvable, enhaunceth up the humble chere  
of hym that is discourfited. Ne sche neither heereth  
ne rekketh of wrecchide wepynges; and she is so  
hard that sche laugheth and scorneth the wepynges  
of hem, the whiche sche hath maked wepe with hir  
free wille. Thus sche pleyeth and sche proeveth  
hir strengthes, and scheweth a greet

wonder to alle hir servauntz yif that a wyght is  
seyn weleful and overthrowe in an houre.

(Boece II, m. 1)

And,

Swich is my strengthe, and this pley I pleye  
continuelly. I torne the whirlynge wheel with the  
turnynge sercle; I am glad to chaungen the loweste  
to the hyste, and the hyste to the loweste.

(Boece II, pr. 2)

Hence, although the Monk limits his definition in the beginning, by the end of the tales Chaucer has worked into the whole the figure of Fortune, slowly developing, gradually emerging and becoming a part of the definition of tragedy. Tale by tale, the Monk begins to recollect the fuller definition.<sup>39</sup> For example, in the story of Petro of Cyprus, he adds:

Thus kan Fortune hir wheel governe and eye,  
And out of joye bryng men to sorwe;

(MT, VII, ll. 2397-98)

and in the story of Hugh of Pisa:

. . ."Alas, Fortune, and weylaway!  
Thy false wheel my wo al may I wyte;"

(MT, VII, ll. 2445-46)

until in the last lines Fortune has become the full focus and force behind the tragedies:

Tragediës noon oother maner thyng  
Ne kan in syngyng crie ne biwaille  
But that Fortune alwey wole assaile  
With unwar strook the regnes that been proude;

<sup>39</sup>E. M. Socola, "Chaucer's Development of Fortune in The Monk's Tale," JEGP, 49 (1950), pp. 159-71.

For whan men trusteth hire, than wol she faille,  
 And covere hir brighte face with a clowde.  
 (MT, VII, ll. 2761-66)

The Monk has finally recollected his Boethius, long neglected. It seems likely that Chaucer would have expected his audience to remember their Boethius and hence to recognize the irony of the Monk trying to redeem himself from the disaster of being associated with the Daun John of the Shipman's Tale by attempting to show himself a serious and learned man recounting erudite tales of tragic lives. Instead, he demonstrates only his poor understanding of medieval tragedy and aligns himself even more closely with the scoundrel Daun John.

If Chaucer had expected his audience to be equally as conscious as he was with regard to the fuller definition of tragedy, he would not have been expecting anything particularly esoteric. Truly, if one figure might be called to mind from medieval art and literature generally to characterize the ups and downs of medieval tragedy it would be Fortuna, and more particularly Fortuna spinning her wheel, first lifting a man up to glory, then capriciously dropping him into the mud. The recognized authority on Fortuna, Patch, states: "No symbolic attribute is so familiar in accounts and pictures of Fortuna as her wheel."<sup>40</sup>

<sup>40</sup>Patch, p. 147.

"Regnabo; regno; regnavi; sum sine regno"<sup>41</sup> is by far the most typical statement of tragedy in the Middle Ages. It embraces the whole concept of Fortuna, the wheel, and the de casibus tradition. Although there are many others,<sup>42</sup> one of the best figural renderings of it is the thirteenth century illumination reproduced in Hilka's and Schumann's edition of the Carmina Burana (see Plate 1). Fortune is shown in the centre of the wheel. Ascending at her right is the fortunate who will reign--regnabo; at the summit of the wheel is a man crowned and sceptred who is reigning--regno; descending on Fortune's left, head downward, crown tumbling is the unfortunate overcome by Fortune--regnavi; and lying prostrate and crushed at the bottom of the wheel is a man discarded by Fortune, his tragedy complete--sum sine regno.

Literature, too, reflects these same very descriptive qualities of Fortune and her wheel. Together these elements are effective images for the poet to draw upon in order to represent the nature of tragedy in his poetry. The theme runs for example through a host of lyrics across

<sup>41</sup>Alphons Hilka and Otto Schumann, eds., Carmina Burana (Heidleberg: Carl Winters Universitätsbuchhändler, 1930), Vol. I, pt. 2, p. 77.

<sup>42</sup>See especially the many illustrations in Pierre Courcelle, La Consolation de philosophie dans la tradition littéraire (Paris: Etudes Augustiniennes, 1967), from which I have selected a few examples; see Plates 2, 3, 4.

the eleven centuries of the Middle Ages, ranging in complexity of expression from a rather complete treatment in the lyrics of the Carmina Burana through various degrees in many Middle English verses, to this fine four line expression:

**D**e leudi fortune is bope frende and fo,  
 Of pore che makit riche, of riche pore also,  
 Che turne3 wo al into wele, and wele al into wo,  
 No triste no man to þis wele, the whel it turnet so.<sup>43</sup>

Brief as it is the complex relationships of the various elements of the descriptive aspect of medieval tragedy are only too plainly evident here. More fully, in "O Fortuna levis" and "O Fortuna velut luna,"<sup>44</sup> the poet cries out against the inconstancy of Fortune's very fickle affections. In the former, her gifts are recognized for what they are, "bonum sed non durabile bonum"; the fickleness of her ways made strikingly clear: "Quos vult, sors ditat, quos non vult, sub pede tritat" (Whom she wishes, fortune enriches; whom she does not, she tramples under her feet). The seekers are recognized as already betrayed men for him "qui petit alta nimis retro lapsus ponitur imis" (who seeks out the high seat too eagerly, on the contrary is given the falling one). In the latter poem, the poet is bitterly

<sup>43</sup>Carleton Brown ed., Religious Lyrics of the Fourteenth Century (Oxford: at the Clarendon Press, 1952), p. 56.

<sup>44</sup>All quotations from the Hilka and Schumann edition.

resentful of Fortune, who in her ways "semper crescis aut decrescis," has given him wealth and power only to strip him bare. He is a man who has learned the tragic fate attending him who trusts to Fortune's wheel. Perhaps an even sharper example of the betrayal of Fortune is that of the lyric "Fortune plango vulnera," again from the Carmina Burana, in which the poet also laments his losses. He first explains the course of his good fortunes:

In Fortune solio  
 Sederam elatus,  
 prosperitatis vario  
 flore coronatus;  
 quicquid enim florui  
 felix et beatus . . .

(In Fortune's seat I sat exalted, crowned with the inconstant flowers of prosperity. Indeed I abounded in joy and blessing.)

He sadly observes the pattern of the fall:

Fortune rota volvitur  
 descendo minoratus  
 alter in altum tollitur  
 nimis exaltatus . . .

(The wheel of Fortune is turned, the boastful one falls and another in the high seat is raised, much too exalted.)

And he gives a warning:

rex sedet in vertice--  
 caveat ruinam!

(The king is sitting on the apex--Let him beware ruin!)

The English lyricists also represent Fortune

as mistress responsible for the many tragedies large and small that collapse and impoverish the spirits of men. In the dream vision "Summer Sunday,"<sup>45</sup> the dreamer encounters Fortune as "A wifman wip a wonder whel" (l. 34), "A wifman of so mucche my3th,/ so wonder a whelwry3th," (ll. 62-63) that he is astounded at her glory, splendour and power. He knows that "ffortune frend & fo, fayrest fere,/ ferli fals, fikel to fonde is ifounde" and that "þe whele 3e torneþ to wo, fro wo into wele þat were,/ in þe ronyngge ryngge of þe roe þat renneth so rounde" (ll. 40-43), but an admitted slave to her, he nevertheless hearkens to her "louelich lere." With her, he encounters "a be-gyngge gome gameliche gay,/ Bry3t as þe blostume" (ll. 67-68), reaching for the glory Fortune offers him. To the dreamer, he exults:

"sestou, swetyng,  
**Þ**e crowne of þat comely kyng  
 I cleyme be kynde.  
 Be kynde it me com  
 to cleyme kyngene kyngdom  
 kyngdom be kynde.  
 to me þe whel wile wynde.  
 wynde wel, worþliche wy3th;  
 fare fortune, frendene fly3th  
 fflitte forþ fly3tte  
 on þe selue sete to sitte."  
 (ll. 76-86)

The knight is self-assured and Fortune does smile favourably

<sup>45</sup>R. H. Robbins, ed., Historical Poems of the XIV and XV Centuries (New York: Columbia U. P., 1959), pp. 341-43).

on him. Indeed, the poet sees him immediately successful:

Sitte I say & seþe on a semli sete,  
 Ry3th on þe rounde on þe rennyng ryng  
 Caste kne ouer kne as a kyng kete,  
 comely cloþed in a cope, crowned as a kyng.  
 Hey herte hadde he of hastif hete,  
 He leyde his leg opon lip at his likyng;  
 fful loþ were þe lordyng his lordsschipe lete;  
 He wende al þe world were at his weldyng  
 ful wy3th.  
 On knes I kyped þat kyng:  
 He seyde, "sestou; swetyng,  
 How I regne wip ring,  
 Richest in ry3th

"Richest in ry3th, quen & knyth  
 kyng conne me calle;  
 mest men of my3th,  
 fair folk to fote me falle.  
 Lordlich lif led i,  
 no lord lyuynde me iliche.  
 No duk ne dred i,  
 for I regne In ry3th as a riche."  
 (ll. 87-107)

But like Arthur's in the Morte Arthure, the glory of this king's moment is all too short. In the very next stanza, capturing the very precipitousness of the fall itself, the poet abruptly lays bare the tragedy:

Of riche þenkeþ rewþe is to rede & to roune,  
 Þat sitten on þat semeli sete & seþþe Wip  
 sorwe þornout sout.  
 And I beheld on hadde an heued hor als hor-howne;  
 Al blok was his ble in bitere bales browth;  
 His diademe of dyamans droppede adoun;  
 His weyes were a-weyward wroþliche wrout;  
 Tynt was his tresor, tente, tour, & toun.  
 Nedful & nawthi, naked & nawth  
 I-nome.  
 (ll. 108-16)

The king himself laments his tragedy:

a word he warp & wepte wip,  
hou he was crouned kyng in kip  
and caytif become.

"Be-comen a caytif a-cast,  
Kyngus king coupe me calle  
ffram frendes falle  
long, lupe, litel, lo! last.  
Last litel lordene lif,  
fikel is fortune, nou fer fro;  
here wel, here wo,  
here knyth, her kyng, her caytif"  
(11. 118-28)

The tragic action is complete with the king's humiliation and total rejection by Fortune. Even his subsequent death is almost anticlimactic. Although the poet attempts to invest the poem with a deeper tragic meaning in the knowledge that once dead not even whimsical Fortune, if she should choose to, can restore a man to former glory, one realizes that the tragedy was completed with the king's complaint "fikel is fortune, nou fer fro."

The figure of Fortune as perpetrator of the tragedies in life is carried to the smaller tragedies as well. Lovers are equally bound to Fortune's wheel as are kings. Their successes are as joyful as is the crown to a king: their failures as final and as tragic as "regnavi." This poet in "A Lover's Distress" cries out:

Alas, alas, and Alas, why  
hath fortune done so crewelly,  
ffro me to take Away þe seyte  
Of þat þat gewrt my hert lyte.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>46</sup>R. H. Robbins, ed., Secular Lyrics of the XIV and XV Centuries, 2nd ed. (Oxford: at the Clarendon Press, 1952), p. 156.

And this one in "A! mercy, Fortune," pleads:

A! mercy, Fortune, have pitce on me,  
 And thinke that thu hast done gretely amisse  
 To parte asondre them whiche ought to be  
 Alwey in on. Why hast thu doo thus?  
 Have I offended thec? I? Nay! Iwisse.  
 Then turne thu whele and be my frende again,  
 And send me joy where I am nowe in pain.<sup>47</sup>

This poet in "Complaint to Fortune" groans:

My hert ys so plungyt in greffe  
 ther may no barn my balyes on-bynd,  
 tyll y onys may sse my leffe  
 it wyll not com owt off my mynd,  
 a-lace ffortwne, þou art on-kynd!  
 Why ssuffrys þou my hart to breke yn two?  
 ffor y may not my lady ffynd,  
 y wot y dey ffor greffe and wo.<sup>48</sup>

And this one in "A Lover's Plaint Against Fortune" beseeches:

O Thou, ffortune, whyche hast the gouernaunce,  
 Of alle thynges kyndly mevyng to and fro,  
 Thaym to demene aftyr thyn ordynaunce,  
 Ryght as þou lyst to graunt hem wele or wo;  
 Syth that thou lyst that I be on of tho  
     That must be reulyd be thyn avysinesse  
     Why wyltow not wythstand myn heuynesse?<sup>49</sup>

Albeit the subject of these love lyrics is inconsequential in the shadow of the greater tragedies, nevertheless the utilization of Fortune and her attributes to evoke the sense of tragic loss for each of these lover's complaints demonstrates quite clearly the degree to which the concept of Fortune as perpetrator of tragedy pervaded the mentality

<sup>47</sup>R. T. Davies, ed., Medieval English Lyrics (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern U. P., 1964), p. 243.

<sup>48</sup>Robbins, Secular Lyrics, p. 151.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., p. 185.

of the Middle Ages. For such a common use to be effective or at all meaningful, it must have expressed a very wide understanding.

My purpose to this point has been to demonstrate the traditional concept of tragedy in the Middle Ages generally. I have deliberately limited my examples, for although there are many, another<sup>50</sup> is at present studying this same tradition and redundancy is both unnecessary and undesirable. That tragedy in its literary expression is recognized and expressed in the figurative terms of Fortune and her wheel operating together to bring about the tragic fall of man has been my immediate concern and is, I believe, now evident. Accordingly, my next chapter is free to deal exclusively with a further, more complex aspect of medieval tragedy—the Christian aspect.

<sup>50</sup>Marice Bezdek is at present working on a dissertation entitled "Medieval Literary Concepts of Tragedy and Comedy with Consideration of Chaucer"; however, in a letter to me she explains that it is of a traditional nature, and that there is no emphasis on moral didacticism, the direction in which my work is leading.

## Chapter Two

### The Christian Concept of Medieval Tragedy

#### I

#### The Viability of Christian Tragedy

That Fortune, Fortune's wheel and the de casibus elements are all integral parts of the traditional concept of medieval tragedy seems irrefutable. To this extent Robertson's observations on Chaucerian tragedy are accurate, that we ". . . cannot understand what he meant by tragedy unless we understand also what he meant by Fortune. . . ." <sup>1</sup> This is true for medieval tragedians generally. The cause of tragic action is within the hands of the goddess Fortuna. The tragedies of Hercules, Zenobia, Peter of Spain, Hugalino and most of the others in the Monk's Tale, indeed, the tragedy of all men, is not presented in terms of a particular tragic "flaw" that sets them apart from other men, but in the wheel, where a mere spin at the whimsey of a capricious Fortune can lift a poor man high or cast a successful man low. Patch accordingly

<sup>1</sup>"Chaucerian Tragedy," p. 37.

observes:

. . . it is clear that if tragedy deals with mankind, the unpleasant ending must be brought about by the ultimate suffering of some human figure. To cause this suffering is the particular work of Fortune. We see her lowering man's estate again and again in the medieval authors. The victim thinks he is secure in his greatest glory and suddenly falls.<sup>2</sup>

However, the definition of medieval tragedy is not complete with these ideas only. The full nature of medieval tragedy is more complex and profound in that it consists of the underlying tragic consciousness of Christian doctrine as well as the superficial elements of Fortune and her fellowship. As Patch has pointed out, the idea of Fortune is pagan in sentiment;<sup>3</sup> but the Middle Ages is a Christian age, with Christian sentiments, and this too must be taken into any account of medieval tragedy.

This unfortunately poses a difficulty, for it has been argued almost convincingly that tragedy is incompatible with Christianity. In The Death of Tragedy, George Steiner claims that nothing can alter the fact that "the Christian vision of man leads to a denial of tragedy";<sup>4</sup> R. B. Sewall says that "Christianity reverses the tragic

<sup>2</sup>The Goddess Fortuna, pp. 68-69.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 10 ff., 17, 24 ff., 26f., 30, 32, 34, 35.

<sup>4</sup>Steiner, The Death of Tragedy (New York: Hill and Wang, 1961), p. 341.

view and makes tragedy impossible";<sup>5</sup> Laurence Michel that "there is a basic incompatibility between the tragic and the Christian view";<sup>6</sup> Christianity being "intransigent to tragedy" which "bucks and balks under Christianity."<sup>7</sup>

What these men claim is to a certain extent true. Christianity with its promise of salvation for mankind does eliminate tragedy in a sense. Yet on the other hand it allows for a potential both in thought and in literary expression which is undeniably tragic. The very fact of eternal damnation makes of every Christian a tragic victim and of every life a possible tragedy. As a result these same critics are forced to acknowledge if only inadvertently or by the inadequacies of their arguments the existence of a Christian tragic consciousness and therefore at the very least a potential for Christian tragedy.<sup>8</sup> Even

<sup>5</sup>The Vision of Tragedy (New Haven: Yale U. P., 1959), p. 50.

<sup>6</sup>"The Possibility of a Christian Tragedy," in L. Michel and R. B. Sewall, eds., Tragedy (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1963), p. 233.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 232.

<sup>8</sup>Farnham realizes this tragic potential in Christianity, Medieval Heritage, p. 173; and so does Thorndike, Tragedy, pp. 26-29, and J. M. R. Margeson, The Origins of English Tragedy (Oxford: at the Clarendon Press, 1967), pp. 1-59. However, Thorndike's opinion is that no "formal tragedy" resulted in the Middle Ages even though "the drama had been the vehicle for ethical instruction and for the presentation of the most terrible and pitiful events. The

as Steiner attempts to sound the knell of tragedy in the light of Christian (and Marxist) doctrine, he announces and reaffirms its existence and continuing viability. For example, by way of discounting Eliot's Murder in the Cathedral he can only weakly and insufficiently say: "An actor who has often played the role of Becket put the matter succinctly: 'I know I am being murdered on stage, but not once have I really felt dead'";<sup>9</sup> or of Paul Claudel's eminently Christian characters, he observes that they "experience destinies which are tragic because they are detours or deflections from the meridian of God's purpose."<sup>10</sup> But he forgets that the fact of Christianity does not ensure salvation, and Christian tragedy involves precisely just such a deviation.<sup>11</sup> Herbert Muller comes nearest to pin-pointing the answer when he notes that "the Christian ritual pattern has no tragic potentialities

miracle plays had long familiarized men with tragic action, tragic conceptions in the drama, and tragic power in the treatment of situation." The problem here is that Thorndike was basing his evaluation of tragedy on classical definitions. The opinion of Margeson is far more accurate in terms of the Middle Ages and medieval tragedy.

<sup>9</sup>The Death of Tragedy, p. 341.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 335.

<sup>11</sup>Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1957), observes: "The other reductive theory of tragedy is that the act which sets the tragic process going must be primarily a violation of moral law, whether human or divine; in short, that Aristotle's hamartia or 'flaw' must have an essential connection with sin or wrongdoing." (p. 210)

until some element of uncertainty or doubt enters."<sup>12</sup>  
 However, he does acknowledge that the potential is there  
 "in the human aspect of Jesus"—in his doubts, his fears,  
 his uncertainties ("My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken  
 me?" Matt. 28:46).

The fact of the matter is that for the Christian  
 there must always be that element of doubt insofar as his  
 own individual salvation is concerned. No Christian has  
 the right to expect that he will be saved without his  
 living the life of a Christian. As Jesus warned: "Not  
 every one that saith to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into  
 the kingdom of heaven." (Matt. 7:21) Paul tells the  
 Corinthians: "If I speak with the tongues of men and  
 angels, and have not charity I am become as sounding brass,  
 or a tinkling cymbal." (I Cor. 13:1) The Christian must  
 continually strive towards it as a goal. He must put on  
 the armour of faith, for Christ said: "I came not to send  
 peace but the sword." (Matt. 10:34) For the Christian  
 life is not one of ease but of devotion and a faithful  
 heart, prayers of acknowledgement and corroborating works.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup>The Spirit of Tragedy (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1956), p. 122; see also H. Weisinger, The Paradox of the Fortunate Fall (East Lansing, Mich.: Michigan State U. P., 1953), pp. 267-68.

<sup>13</sup>Albertus Magnus, Ennarationes in Evangelium Matthaei in Opera Omnia, vol. 2, ed. Borgnet (Paris, 1893). "'Perfecta invocatio conficitur ex tribus, ex devotione et fide cordis, et confessione oris, et operis attestazione': et tunc perfecta est invocatio. Aliter est mendax."

Although it ultimately depends upon the grace of God, the reality of an individual's salvation, because it is to a certain extent contingent upon his earthly conduct for its actualization, is ever in doubt. St. Paul (Phil. 2:12) counsels: "My dearly beloved . . . with fear and trembling work out your salvation." The play Everyman presents just such a predicament most clearly. Although it is not a tragedy in itself, it points towards the tragic potential in the life and death of Everyman, whose Christian soul is never very far from eternal damnation.

Christianity and tragedy, it would seem, can and do exist together. Walter Kaufmann in Tragedy and Philosophy puts the matter, as he sees it, forthrightly. "If the suffering in the body of the play is intense enough, a drama in which the hero is saved in the end might still be called a tragedy."<sup>14</sup>

And as far as a drama in which the salvation of the hero falls into the slightest doubt, such as Murder in the Cathedral or his own example of Rolf Hochhuth's The Deputy, there is no question of its being a Christian tragedy. Of The Deputy he goes so far as to doubt "that a tragedy more Christian than that is possible."<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup>Kaufmann, Tragedy and Philosophy (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1969), p. 386.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 387.

Indeed, far from being alien to it, the very fabric of Christianity seems to feed the tragic mentality with doubts, suffering, two archetypal tragic heroes, Adam and Christ, and far more terrible consequences than the classical tragic view of misfortune and reversal ever offered. Of these possibilities the medieval tragedian was extremely conscious. His whole conditioning, his whole Weltanschauung was attuned to and structured around this tragic consciousness, and his literature reflected both the fact of this possible Christian tragedy and the full worth of its potential.

## II

### The Fall of Adam and the Representation of Tragedy

For the Christian in the Middle Ages, the history of man begins with the creation of Adam by God, and ends with the final judgement of man by Christ. Within this range lies the entire spectrum of human experience, tragedy included. Created by God to live in the glory and splendour of Paradise, Adam and Eve in the pre-lapsarian condition knew only the joy and the bounty of God. The pre-lapsarian experience of man did not include the elements of the suffering body or spirit, or the reversals of good fortune and happiness so elementary to the tragic

situation.<sup>16</sup> Paradise was a constant with all things in it designed for the eternal comfort of man.

However, man was also created with a freedom of will to make choices between alternatives. He could either mould his will to his creator's and obey his commandment or he need not. With the commission of the first sin, Adam and Eve brought upon themselves and all mankind through their parentage the woes of a hostile, mutable, temporal world (see Plate 5).<sup>17</sup> To Eve, sinner and mother, God said:

I will multiply thy sorrows and thy conceptions. In sorrow shalt thou bring forth children, and thou shalt be under thy husband's power and he shall have dominion over thee.

(Gen. 3:16)

And to Adam, father, he said:

Because thou hast hearkened to the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree whereof I commanded that thou shouldst not eat, cursed is the earth in thy work; with labour and toil shalt thou eat thereof all the days of thy life. Thorns and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat of the herbs of the earth. In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread till thou return to the earth out of which thou wast taken: for dust thou art, and into dust thou shalt return.

(Gen. 3:17-19)

From the constancy and joy of Paradise man was plunged into

<sup>16</sup>In his reference to Adam as being at the top of the wheel of Fortune while in Paradise, Frye (p. 212) is, I believe, in error; unless, of course, one views it as a stationary wheel not yet begun to turn.

<sup>17</sup>"He enters a world in which existence is itself tragic . . ." Frye, p. 213.

a world of toil, suffering and sorrow. What is more, the tragedy was not to be a mere translation from comfort to travail; it was to be a withholding from him of the "tree of life." ("And he cast out Adam; and placed before the paradise of pleasure Cherubims, and a flaming sword, turning every way, to keep the way of the tree of life" [Gen. 3:24]). Henceforward, for man there would be no return to the garden whence he came. For man, suffering on earth could lead only to final and absolute death.

In this contumely of Adam, medieval man recognized the full implication of man's tragic existence. As a result of the teaching of the Church, he knew that all mankind's suffering began with this first disobedience. In the fifth century, St. Augustine teaches of the sin of Adam and Eve:

By them so great a sin was committed, that by it human nature was altered for the worse, and was transmitted also to their posterity, liable to sin and death;<sup>18</sup>

and again more fully:

Wherefore we must say that the first men were indeed so created [good], that if they had not sinned, they would not have experienced any kind of death, but that having become sinners, they were so punished with death, that whatsoever sprang from their stock should also be punished

<sup>18</sup>The Basic Writings of St. Augustine, Whitney J. Oates (New York, 1948), Vol. II, p. 239. ". . . a quibus admissum est tam grande peccatum, ut in deterius eo natura mutaretur humana, etiam in posteris obligatione peccati et mortis necessitate transmissa." B. Dombart ed., De Civitate Dei, Vol. II (Leipzig: B. G. Teubneri, 1877).

with the same death. For nothing else could be born of them than that which they themselves had been. Their nature was deteriorated in proportion to the greatness of the condemnation of their sin, so that what existed as punishment in those who first sinned, became a natural consequence in their children. For man is not produced by man, as he was from the dust. For dust was the material out of which man was made: man is the parent by whom man is begotten. But as man the parent is, such is man the offspring. In the first man, therefore, there existed the whole human nature, which was to be transmitted by the woman to posterity, when that conjugal union received the divine sentence of its own condemnation; and what man was made, not when created, but when he sinned and was punished, this he propagated, so far as the origin of sin and death are concerned.

(CD, XIII, III)<sup>19</sup>

In the twelfth century, the very popular encyclical of Innocent III "De Miseria Humane Conditionis" is painfully

<sup>19</sup>Oates, p. 212. "Quapropter fatendum est primos quidem homines ita fuisse institutos, ut, si non peccassent, nullum mortis experirentur genus; sed eosdem primos peccatores ita fuisse morte multatos, ut etiam quidquid eorum stirpe esset exortum eadem poena teneretur obnoxium. Non enim aliud ex eis, quam quod ipsi fuerant, nasceretur. Pro magnitudine quippe culpae illius naturam damnatio mutavit in peius, ut, quod peonaliter praecessit in peccantibus hominibus primis, etiam naturaliter sequerentur in nascentibus ceteris. Neque enim ita homo ex homine, sicut homo ex pulvere. Pulvis namque homini faciendo materies fuit; homo autem homini gignendo parens. Proinde quod est terra, non hoc est caro, quamvis ex terra facta sit caro; quod est autem parens homo, hoc est et proles homo. In primo igitur homine per feminam in progeniem transiturum univ-  
sum genus humanum fuit, quando illa coniugum copula divinam sententiam suae damnationis excepit; et quod homo factus est, non cum crearetur, sed cum peccaret et puniretur, hoc genuit, quantum quidem adinet ad peccati et mortis originem." De Civitate Dei, Vol. I, Dombart ed.

explicit about man's tragic existence. Although Innocent acknowledges that Adam was spotless in creation because he was made of "virgin earth," the subsequent generations were conceived from "unclean seed" ("Behold, I was conceived in iniquities and in sins did my mother conceive me" [Ps. 50:7]), all because of Adam's transgression which Innocent recognizes as sexual. For this reason he castigates man, reminding him of his natural and tragic condition. Man, he says, as he defines the theme of his encyclical, "was born to toil, dread and trouble; and more wretched still, was born only to die."

He commits depraved acts by which he offends God, his neighbor, and himself; shameful acts by which he defiles his name, his person and his conscience; and vain acts by which he ignores all things important, useful and necessary. He will become fuel for those fires which are forever hot and burn forever bright; food for the worm which forever nibbles and digests; a mass of rottenness which will forever stink and reek.

(I, i)<sup>20</sup>

Again and again the literature of the Middle Ages demonstrates this same tragic consciousness. It is

<sup>20</sup>On the Misery of the Human Condition, D. R. Howard ed., Margaret M. Dietz trans. (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Co. Inc., 1969), p. 6. "Natus ad laborem, timorem et dolorem: quodque miserius est ad mortem. Agit prava, quibus offendit Deum, offendit proximum, offendit seipsum; agit turpia, quibus polluit famam, polluit personam, polluit conscientiam. Agit vana quibus negligit seria, negligit utilia, negligit necessaria. Fiat cibus ignis, qui semper ardet et urit inexstinguibilis; esca vermis qui semper rodit et comedit immortalis; massa putredinis, qui semper fetet et sordet horribilis." Michele Maccarrone, ed. (Lugano, Switz.: Aedibus Thesauri Mundi, 1955), p. 8.

for this reason that Chaucer's Monk's tragedies, like those of Boccaccio and Lydgate begin with Lucifer and more especially with Adam. This is the meaning, too, of the fine fourteenth-century lyric "Lollai, litil child whi wepistou so sore?" It is as Rosemary Woolf says "a sad statement to the child of man's condition in the world."<sup>21</sup>

The whole of it is worth quoting.

Lollai, l⟨ollai⟩, litil child, whi wepistou so sore?  
nedis mostou wepe, hit was iʒarkid þe ʒore  
euer to lib in sorow, and sich and mourne euer,  
as þin eldren did er þis, whil hi aliues were.

Lollai, ⟨lollai⟩, litil child, child lolai, lullow,  
Int-o vncup world icommen so ertow!

bestis and þos foules, þe fisses in þe flode,  
and euch schef aliues, imakid of bone and blode,  
Whan hi commip to þe world hi doþ ham silf sum gode--  
Al bot þe wrech brot þat is of adam-is blode.

Lollai, l⟨ollai⟩, litil child, to kar ertou bemette,  
þou nost noʒt þis world-is wild bifor þe is isette.

Child, if be-tidip þat þou ssalt þriue and þe,  
þenç þou wer ifostred vp þe moder kne;  
euer hab mund in þi hert of þos þinges þre,  
Whan þou commist, what þou art, and what ssal com of þe.

Lollai, l⟨ollai⟩, litil child, child lollai, lollai;  
Wiþ sorow þou com into þis world, wiþ sorrow  
ssalt wend awai.

Ne tristou to þis world, hit is þi ful vo,  
þe rich he makip pouer, þe pore rich al so;  
Hit turneþ wo to wel and ek wel to wo--

Ne trist no man to þis world, whil hit turnip so.  
Lollai, l⟨ollai⟩, litil child, þe fote is in  
þe whele;

þou nost whoder turne to wo oþer wele.

<sup>21</sup>English Religious Lyrics in the Middle Ages  
(Oxford: at the Clarendon Press, 1968), p. 155.

Child, þou ert a pilgrim in wikidnis ibor,  
 Þou wandrest in þis fals world, þou loke þe bi-for;  
 deth ssal com wiþ a blast vte of a wel dim horre,  
 adam-is kin dun to cast, him silf hap ido be-for.  
 Lollai, l<sup>(i)</sup>ollai, litil child, so wo þe worp adam,  
 in þe lond of paradis þroȝ wikidnes of satan.

Child, þou nert a pilgrim bot an vncupe gist,  
 Þi dawes beþ itold, þi iurneis beþ icast,  
 whoder þou salt wend norþ oper est,  
 deþ þe sal be-tide wiþe bitter bale in brest.  
 Lolla<sup>(i)</sup>, l<sup>(i)</sup>ollai, litel chil<sup>(d)</sup>, þis wo adam  
 þe wroȝt,  
 Whan he of þe appil ete, and eue hit him betacht.<sup>22</sup>

The same demonstration of tragedy and tragic consciousness is true for the drama cycles as well, and when D. D. Raphael suggests that "in the Middle Ages . . . there is no tragic drama,"<sup>23</sup> he shows a singular lack of sensitivity or understanding towards the Middle Ages. Insofar as the tragic fall of Adam is concerned, the cycles do present a distinct awareness of the nature of that tragic action. The Chester Creation and Fall play, the Coventry (Hegge) Creation and Fall play and more severely the earlier Anglo-Norman Mystère d'Adam show very clearly that the action surrounding the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the garden was to be regarded in its place in the cycles as tragic action—the first tragedy in the history of mankind's tragedies.

<sup>22</sup>Brown, Religious Lyrics, p. 35.

<sup>23</sup>The Paradox of Tragedy (London: Allen and Unwin, 1960), p. 81.

In the Mystère,<sup>24</sup> God makes the punishment  
to Adam and Eve painfully explicit.

Ore issé hors de paradis!  
Mal change avez fet de païs.  
En terre vus frez maison:  
En paradis n'avez raison!  
N'i avez rien que chalengier  
Fors isterez sen recoverer:  
N'i avez rien par jugement.  
Or prenez aillors chasement!  
Fors en issez de bonaürté;  
Ne vus falt mais faim ne lasseté,  
Ne vus falt mais dolor ne paine  
A toz les jors de la semaine.  
En terre avrez malvais sojour;  
Après morrez al cheif de tor;  
Despois qu'averez gusté mort,  
En emfer irrez sans desport.  
Ici avront les cors eissil,  
Les almes en emfern peril:  
Satan vus avra en baillie.  
N'est hom que vus en face aïe:  
Par cui soiez vus ja rescos  
Se moi nen prenge pité de vus?

(Mystère, ll. 491-512)

(Now leave paradise! A bad exchange of residence you have made. In the world you will make your home: In paradise you have no right! You have nothing here on which you can lay claim. Out you will go, without return: You can have nothing here by judgement. Now take your abode elsewhere! Go forth from happiness; Neither hunger nor weariness will fail you, nor suffering nor pain through all the days of the week. In the world you will have a difficult sojourn; After, at the end of your tour, you will die; After you have tasted death, into hell you will go without comfort. Here your bodies will have torment, souls in the peril of hell: Satan will have you in fetters. There is not a man who can help you directly: Through whom can you ever be rescued, unless I take pity on you?)

<sup>24</sup>Paul Aebischer ed. (Paris: Librairie Minard, 1963).

The finality of the expulsion is sharpened in the Mystère by the chorus' hymn "In sudore vultis tui" and God's hostile, forceful, and abrupt instructions to the angel.

Gardez moi bien le paradis  
 Que mais n'i entre icist faudis;  
 Qu'il n'ait mais poeir ne baillie  
 Ne de tocher li fruit de vie.  
 O cele spee qui flamoie  
 Si li defendez tres bien la voie!  
 (ll. 513-18)

(Guard paradise well for me, so this outlaw may not enter here again, where he has no more authority or possession, nor touch the fruit of life. With this flaming sword protect ever and well the way against him.)

The instructions of the poet in the stage directions also serve to demonstrate further his personal awareness of the terrible nature of this first tragedy. Adam and Eve are to labour in an unrelenting soil; their fruits are to be thistles; they are to suffer and lament; to reproach each other:

When they will be out of paradise, somewhat sad and confused, they will go bent toward the ground over their feet . . . Then Adam with a spade and Eve with a mattock, will begin to till the earth and will sow wheat in it. After they have sown, they will go to a seat in the locus as if weary by toil and crying they will look towards paradise often, beating their breasts. Meanwhile the Devil will come and plant in their cultivation thorns and thistlès, and he will leave.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>25</sup>Cum fueri [n]t extra paradisum, quasi tristes et confusi incurvati erunt solo tenus super talos suos . . . Tunc Adam fossorium et Eva rostrum, et incipie [n]t scolere terram, et seminabunt in ea triticum. Postquam seminaverint

And finally they are to be led to hell by triumphant devils:

Then the Devil will come, and three or four devils with him, carrying in their hands chains and iron shackles, which they will place on the necks of Adam and Eve. And some will push them, others will drag them to hell; other devils will be near hell awaiting the arrival, and they will make great jubilation among themselves about the perdition of them [Adam and Eve]; and one after another the devils will point to them arriving, and take them and put them into hell. And there they will make to arise a great smoke and they will shout amongst themselves rejoicing in hell, and they will bang their pots and bottles, so that they will be heard without.<sup>26</sup>

In the English drama the same attitude towards the transgression of Adam and Eve is demonstrated though in a less severe way. In the Chester version and more strikingly in the Coventry (Hegge) version, God is as positive about the finality of the expulsion as the God of the Mystère.

ibunt sessum in loco aliquantulum, tanquam fatiga[t]i labore, et flebiliter respicient sepius paradysum, percucientes pectora sua. Interim veniet Diabolus et plantabit in cultura eorum spinas et tribulos, et abscedet. (Mystère, pp. 65-66).

<sup>26</sup>Tunc venient Diabolus et tres vel IIII<sup>or</sup> diaboli cum eo, deferentes in manibus chatenas et vinctos ferreos, quos ponent in colla Ade et Eve. Et quidam eos impellent, alii eos trahant ad infernum; alii vero diaboli erunt juxta infernum obviam venientibus, et magnum tripudiam inter se facient de eorum perdicione; et singuli alii diaboli illos venientes monstrabunt, et eos suspicient [sic] et in infernum mittent. Et in eo facient fumum magnum exurgere et vociferabuntur inter se in inferno gaudentes, et collident caldaria et lebetes suos, ut exterius audiantur. (Mystère, p. 70)

Ffor your synne þat 3e haue do  
 out of þis blysse sone xal 3e go  
 in erthly labour to levyn in wo  
 and sorwe þe xal a-tast  
 Ffor 3our synne and mys-doyng  
 An Angell with a swerd Brennyng  
 out of þis joye he xal 3ow dyng  
 3our welth awye is past.

(11. 357-64)<sup>27</sup>

The angels too are certainly as intransigent in the execution of their duty as those of the Mystère, and Adam and Eve as sorrowful as their suffering suggests.

The consciousness of the hereditary nature of man's tragic existence is also demonstrated in the drama.<sup>28</sup> The Cain and Abel episode reaffirms man's inclination towards wilful disobedience and the representations of the Deluge record God's renewed wrath against the abominable and sinful offspring of Cain. In the Towneley Noah and the Ark, Noah begins by giving a historic account of God's goodness in creation, Adam's transgression and man's continuing contumely even into Noah's own age. He complains:

Bot now before his sight/uevery liffyng leyde,  
 Most party day and nyght/syn in word and dede ffull bold;  
 Som in pride, Ire, and enuy,  
 Som in Covet/ysse/ & glotynty,  
 Som in sloth and lechery.

And other wise many fold.

(11. 49-54)<sup>29</sup>

<sup>27</sup>Ludus Coventriae, H. S. Block ed. (London: Oxford U. P., 1922), EETS ES, 120.

<sup>28</sup>Margeson, pp. 8-20.

<sup>29</sup>The Towneley Plays, George England ed. (London: Oxford U. P., 1897), EETS ES, 71.

"Syn," he exclaims, "is now alod/ without any repentance."  
 God in turn reproves this sinfulness, regrets creation  
 because of man's continuing disobedience and vows just  
 vengeance.

The poet's intention is to show historically  
 that man is continually bringing his tragedy upon himself  
 by his continuance in wilful sin, by his refusal of God's  
 mercy and by his refusal to repent. The poet sees God as  
 giving man his just reward in the same manner as he gave  
 it to Adam. Man's tragedy lies within his own recalcitrant  
 nature inherited with the stain of original sin. The poet  
 of the Cursor Mundi sums up this whole tragic condition.

Als faste as þei had don þat synne  
 Oure wo bigan to bigynne  
 Al maner blis from hem was went  
 For þe brak þat commandement  
 Soone bigan he vengeaunce kipe  
 As lord þat first was meke & bliþe  
 Al bigan to stire & strif  
 Aþeyn adam & eue his wif  
 Bitwene hem self roos strif also  
 Þe strengre beest þe weyke dud slo  
 Vchone of opere to make his pray  
 As we may se now vche day  
 From þat tyme furst coom dep to man  
 And þat tyme al oure wo bigan  
 Þese wrongis þat euen of euel wrake  
 Þere bigynnynges dud þei take  
 Synne & sake shame & strif  
 Þat now ouer al þe world is rief.  
 (ll. 823-40)<sup>30</sup>

From Paradise to the torment of hell, the first

<sup>30</sup>Cursor Mundi, Part I, Richard Morris ed.  
 (London: Oxford U. P., 1874), EETS OS, 57.

tragedy in the history of tragedies is the subject matter for much medieval literature. The sense of man's loss and the tragic nature of his fall from glory is food for meditation, matter for dramatic and lyric representation again and again.

### III

#### The Sacrifice of Christ and the Representation of Tragedy

However, for the medieval dramatist, lyricist or tragedian generally, there is another dimension of man's tragic condition which allows equally for tragic representation, and that is the matter of salvation. Without the mercy of God, the fall of Adam and Eve from grace would have been as absolute as it was universal. Augustine is clear in his mind about the punishment that Adam merited.

When, therefore, it is asked what death it was with which God threatened our first parents if they should transgress the commandment they had received from Him, and should fail to preserve their obedience—whether it was the death of soul, or of body, or of the whole man, or that which is called second death—we must answer, It is all. For the first consists of two; the second is the complete death, which consists of all. For, as the whole earth consists of many lands, and the Church universal of many churches, so death universal consists of all deaths. The first consists of two, one of the body, and another of the soul. So that the first death is a death of the whole man, since the soul

without God and without the body suffers punishment for a time; but the second is when the soul, without God but with the body suffers punishment everlasting. Where, therefore, God said to that first man whom he had placed in Paradise, referring to the forbidden fruit, "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" [Gen. ii, 17], that threatening included not only the first part of the first death, by which the soul is deprived of God; nor only the subsequent part of the first death, by which the body is deprived of the soul; nor only the whole first death itself, by which the soul is punished in separation from God and from the body—but it includes whatever of death there is, even to that final death which is called second, and to which none is subsequent.

(CD, XIII, xii)<sup>31</sup>

Without atonement man could not be reinstated into Paradise; nor could he again partake of the fruit of the "tree of life." And no mere creature could atone for this affront to God's goodness. For man the fall was tragedy in its most absolute sense.

<sup>31</sup>Oates, p. 220. "Cum ergo requiritur, quam mortem Deus primis hominibus fuerit comminatus, si ab eo mandatum transgrederentur acceptum nec oboedientiam custodirent, utrum animae an corporis an totius hominis an illam quae appellatur secunda: respondendum est: Omnes. Prima enim constat ex duabus [secunda] ex omnibus tota. Sicut enim universa terra ex multis terris et universa ecclesia ex multis constat ecclesiis: sic universa mors ex omnibus. Quoniam prima constat ex duabus, una animae, altera corporis; ut sit prima totius hominis mors, cum anima sine Deo et sine corpore ad tempus poenas luit; secunda vero, ubi anima sine Deo cum corpore poenas aeternas luit. Quando ergo dixit Deus primo illi homini, quem in paradiso constituerat, de cibo vetito: Quaecumque die ederitis ex illo, morte moriemini: non tantum primae mortis partem priorem, ubi anima privatur Deo, nec tantum posteriorem, ubi corpus privatur anima, nec solum ipsam totam primam, ubi anima et a Deo et a corpore separata punitur; sed quidquid mortis est usque ad novissimam, quae secunda dicitur, qua est nulla posterior, comminatio illa complexa est." Dombart, Vol. I.

However, by the "undeserved grace of God,"<sup>32</sup> man is not abandoned to the absoluteness of his tragic end. In Christ, God and man become one, as John testifies. "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us" (Jn. 1:14); and as many of the lyrics of the nativity celebrate; for example, this typical stanza from "Mary Bare Both God and Man":

Quan the aungel 'aue' began,  
fflesch & blood to-gedyr ran;  
Marye bar boþe god and man,  
Thorw vertu & þowr dyngnyte;<sup>33</sup>

or this passage from the Cursor Mundi:

. . . þe fader es nou bicumen sone;  
And he þat first na dede miht die,  
Nou es he man made forto drie.  
God bicam man dedly þus,  
Noght for þe nede had to us,  
Bot ellis wid his grace for-þi,  
And he suld suffre dede vs by;  
Þat es to say, ded widuten ende,  
And fra þe feind miht vs defen.  
(ll. 10916-24)

By being born into the flesh Christ, who is God, accepted the nature of tragic suffering man complete with toil, sorrow, doubt, and death (Plate 6). The agony of the Passion is surely evidence enough of this. In the garden of Gethsemane his agony was so great that he sweated blood (Luke 22:42-44). On the cross fear and doubt assailed him. St. Matthew records that at "about the ninth hour, Jesus

<sup>32</sup>Oates, p. 239.

<sup>33</sup>Carleton Brown, The Religious Lyrics of the Fifteenth Century (Oxford: at the Clarendon Press, 1952), p. 11.

cried with a loud voice, saying: Eli, Eli, lamma sabac-  
thani? That is, My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken  
me?" (Matt. 28:46)

As God and man, Christ is able to justify to  
God the disobedience of the first parents and thus to mitigate  
the otherwise absolute nature of the tragic fall. Through  
his sacrifice on Calvary, Christ, taking the bitter vinegar  
of suffering and dying on the cross, redeemed man univer-  
sally from the guilt of Adam's transgression. As St. Paul  
states: "By a man came death; and by a man the resurrection  
of the dead. And as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all  
shall be made alive" (I. Cor. 15:21, 22). And as Christ  
himself said in the last moment of his agony: "consummatum  
est" (Jn. 19:30), meaning that his mission was done, that  
the absolute nature of man's universal tragedy was at an  
end.

Indeed, the fact of salvation represents in  
the medieval tragic view an element of hope for post-  
lapsarian man that the suffering of this world is only a  
precursor to the glory of Paradise whither he may again  
return. Inasmuch as this is true, R. B. Sewall accurately  
observes: "In point of doctrine, Christianity reverses  
the tragic view and makes tragedy impossible. It announces  
a joyous miracle, a moment in history that transforms

history."<sup>34</sup> Steiner adds: "At Gethsemane the arrow changes its course, and the morality play of history alters from tragedy to commedia."<sup>35</sup>

Thus, it is that in the resurrection of Christ the universal tragedy of man is turned into comedy, for the outcome of death now is no longer necessarily death but eternal life--the glory of Paradise regained. As Christ said to Martha at the raising of Lazarus: "I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, although he be dead, shall live: And every one that liveth and believeth in me shall not die forever" (Jn. 11:25, 26). For the Christian, life upon earth becomes a period of waiting, a pilgrimage towards heaven, wherein the only true endeavour is the salvation of his soul for eternal life. Death is merely a release to this splendour. With his sacrifice and his harrowing of hell, Christ freed mankind from eternal bondage and re-opened the gates of Paradise.

In this sense, then, medieval drama about the fall might be considered as not tragic. The medieval audience was fully aware that for the Christian life does not end with death, rather with new life. The absolute sense of tragedy which logically should attend upon the

<sup>34</sup>The Vision of Tragedy, p. 50.

<sup>35</sup>The Death of Tragedy, p. 13.

fall and expulsion is mitigated for the medieval Christian by his knowledge of the complete pattern of divine justice and love. Thus, the dramatic representations of the fall are always followed by a promise of the Saviour to come. The Mystère d'Adam is ended by a procession of Old Testament prophets prophesying the Christ, and the Chester and Coventry (Hegge) Creation and Fall plays end with the guarding angels saying they must stand guard over Paradise until Christ redeems mankind:

3e wrecchis vnkend and ryht unwyse  
 out of þis joye hy3 3ow in hast  
 with flammyng swerd ffrom paradyse  
 to peyn to bete 3ow of care to tast  
 3our myrth is turnyd to careful syse  
 3our welth with synne a-vey is wast  
 ffor 3our ffalse dede of synful gyse  
 þis blysse I spere ffrom 3ow ryth fast  
 here-in come 3e no more  
 Tyle a chylde of a mayd be born  
 and upon þe rode rent and torn  
 to saue all þat 3e haue forlorn  
 3our welth for to restore.

(Ludus Cov., ll. 365-77)

This same consciousness is true for a multitude of lyrics as well, especially those of Advent and Christmas. In them can be found both an expressed lament, either at the sin of Adam specifically or its consequences generally, and as well an expression of joy in Christ's coming. In "Gabriel, fram Hevene King," the poet celebrates the glory of the Annunciation, and man's release from the bondage of Adam's sin. Gabriel's words to Mary contain both the

knowledge of man's tragic condition, the result of Adam's sin, and the joyous promise of salvation.

'Heil! be thu, full of grace aright,  
 For Godes son, this Hevene light,  
 For mannes loven  
 Wile man becomen,  
 And taken  
 Fleaus of the maiden bright,  
 Manken fre for to maken  
 Of senne and Develes might'  
 (ll. 4-12)<sup>36</sup>

The same idea is expressed in "Sing we Yule,"<sup>37</sup> "Man exalted,"<sup>38</sup> "Born is Our God Emmanuel,"<sup>39</sup> "A Maid Hath Born the King of Kings,"<sup>40</sup> and others. In "The Nativity" the poet specifies "To save mankind that was forlorne/ Prime parentes crimine";<sup>41</sup> likewise in "Her Son Recovers Us From Adam's Fall" whose refrain sings out "Tydyngis, tydyngis þat be trwe./ Sorowe ys paste and Loye dothe renewe."<sup>42</sup> Indeed, many in the later Middle Ages carry the joy of salvation so far as to regard the tragic fall of Adam as a paradoxical felix culpa,<sup>43</sup> as for example the

<sup>36</sup> Davies, Medieval English Lyrics, p. 100.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 167.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 195.

<sup>39</sup> Brown, Religious Lyrics, p. 111.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 112.

<sup>41</sup> Davies, Medieval English Lyrics, p. 218.

<sup>42</sup> Brown, Religious Lyrics, p. 119.

<sup>43</sup> Woolf, English Religious Lyrics, p. 290.

well known lyric "Adam lay I-bowndyn."

Adam lay I-bowndyn, bowndyn in a bond,  
fowre þowsand wynter þowt he not to long;  
And al was for an appil, an appil þat he tok,  
As clerkis fyndyn wretyn in here book.

Ne hadde þe appil take ben, þe appil taken ben,  
ne hadde neuer our lady a ben heuene qwen;  
Blyssid be þe tyme þat appil take was,  
þer-fore we mown syngyn, 'deo gracias!'<sup>44</sup>

However, although the universal and absolute nature of man's tragedy is transformed, the fall of Adam is still tragic, for despite the fact of redemption man continues to be born of the flesh and into sin. Consequently the possibility of individual tragedy is still very much a reality. If the individual Christian fails to save his soul, like Adam before him, he merits eternal darkness, death and damnation—the terrible "second death" Augustine speaks about. Such a death after Christ's sacrifice is indeed tragic for man for from it there can be no salvation. This is the terrible potentiality and reality of Christian tragedy; that on one hand it holds out the guarantee of life everlasting, making all earthly suffering nought but the prelude to comedy, and on the other the horror of eternal damnation giving all earthly pleasures the potential for absolute tragedy.

My purpose in this chapter has been to demonstrate both the possibility and the essence of Christian

<sup>44</sup>Brown, Religious Lyrics, p. 120.

tragedy in the Middle Ages. It should be evident from my study that such tragedy is not only possible in potential but also in fact. The very nature of medieval thought based upon its Christian Weltanschauung reflects the tragic view; Church teaching shows it and the popular literature of the period shows it. Nevertheless, there is yet more to the full concept of medieval tragedy than either this Christian aspect or the Fortuna tradition discussed in my first chapter, and that is the synthesis that the Middle Ages made out of these two concepts . It is to the explanation of this all-important synthesis that I now turn.

## Chapter Three

### The Medieval Synthesis

#### I

#### The Problem of Perspective

Before beginning this aspect of my explanation of the full nature of medieval tragedy, which I have designated as a synthesis, I must be particularly clear-- the medieval synthesis of the Fortuna and Christian elements is not definable by any handbook terminology. Like much in the Middle Ages it is a state of mind, a mode of thinking rather than a five-line definition. The problem in comprehending the whole idea of medieval tragedy is much the same as that which has obscured the concepts of courtly love and chivalry, and that is recognizing the interplay that the contributing, sometimes conflicting, parts have with the whole of the concept. The medieval mental process seems to have had a distinct ability to see just such interplay and to synthesize fully understandable and satisfactory concepts out of them, often not even bothering to resolve familiar conflicts which strike the

modern reader as illogical, awkward and sometimes absurdly contradictory. The strange juxtaposition of the sacred and the profane comes most readily to mind.

Indeed, the problem appears to be that it is one thing to recognize separate aspects of the whole and quite another to understand either the function of the parts in relation to the whole or the whole itself. In the study of medieval tragedy, for example, there have been many who have argued that medieval tragedy was Fortune alone (quoting the Monk's definition) or Fortune and the Wheel, or the de casibus alone. Others looking at the profoundly religious Christian Middle Ages have said that medieval tragedy is only analagous to the fall of Adam or less profoundly that because Christianity has no tragic vision there can be no such thing as medieval tragedy. This latter view, I hope, has been resolved at least.

The answer to the problem is to become aware of all the parts and then somehow to see them in their proper relationship to each other. One way is to view the parts as being antithetically opposed to each other and the interplay existing as a "tension" of sorts. There is some validity to this but only when it is considered from a non-Romantic or non-Hegelian point of view. Another way is to reject the idea of polarity and synthesis

completely, as D. W. Robertson does, in favour of a hierarchical opposition.<sup>1</sup> Admittedly, Robertson's theory is valid and to the extent that it reflects my own opinions that concepts exist not in clearly defined parts, but in large complex patterns or modes of thinking, I agree with it. However, in his attempt to assert the idea of continuance<sup>2</sup> rather than bipolar opposition, Robertson plays down the fact that, no matter what the resolution is, things do come into natural opposition to each other in medieval thought--theoretically an absence of good, evil is very much a real and positive thing in the Middle Ages: witness the vast number of treatises on sin; certainly, body and soul are one in man, but it is not the union that is emphasized, rather the conflict between them: witness the debates of body and soul; unquestionably, there is the ultimate harmony of creation in divine Providence, but the world is disharmonious: witness the world. Indeed, the pro and contra dialectic of medieval argumentation reflects this essential pattern of contrasting opposites, and no balanced solution to the problem can neglect this. The preceding chapters, then, have examined the respective parts of medieval tragedy, but merely as parts. Now, they

<sup>1</sup>Preface to Chaucer, p. 17 ff.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 26.

will be put into a complete framework in order to demonstrate the interplay between the elements and the nature of the resolution, for it is this that will give a true and balanced understanding of the mode that is medieval tragedy.

In order to appreciate what the medieval mind did with the Fortuna elements and the Christian elements, it is necessary to recognize that the concept of tragedy for the Middle Ages operates on two distinct planes, one human and material, the other divine and spiritual. Herbert Muller observes:

Now medieval men themselves knew plenty of tension, as appears in the instability of Gothic art. They had to live in two worlds: a City of God, an ideal universal order that was represented by the Church and a Holy Roman Empire; and a City of Earth, a perpetual disorder that was neither holy nor Roman nor imperial. As men they were cut in two. They were immortal souls, next to the angels, the lords of creation, who could hope to rejoin their Creator in an eternity of heavenly bliss; and they were fallen creatures of the flesh, next to the beasts, living on corrupted earth at the very bottom of the universe, and having much better reason to anticipate an eternity of infernal torture.<sup>3</sup>

At the divine level, in the City of God, the drama of life takes place under the authorship and auspices of God. Here all human physical life ending in death is basically a comedy, as Dante realized, since at that moment

<sup>3</sup>The Spirit of Tragedy, p. 118.

when mortal life is done, man is reborn spiritually into everlasting life. Of this St. Paul tells the Corinthians:

Behold I tell you a mystery. We shall all indeed rise again: but we shall not all be changed. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet: for the trumpet shall sound and the dead shall rise again incorruptible. And we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption: and this mortal must put on immortality. And when the mortal hath put on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting?  
(I Cor. 15:51-55)

The only possibility for tragedy in this plane lies in the death of a man who is in the state of mortal sin and whose soul is thereby lost to hell. The stark terror of this most final tragedy is contained in Christ's words for sinners upon judgement day: "Depart from me, you cursed, into everlasting fire, which was prepared for the devil and his angels." (Matt. 25:41)

Book III of Innocent's encyclical, De miseria, concerns itself with precisely this terrible tragic end. Obviously drawing on ideas and images both traditional and popular in medieval Christianity, Innocent notes: "Almost the whole life of mortals is full of mortal sin, so that one can scarcely find anyone who does not go astray, does not return to his own vomit and rot in his own

dung." (II, i)<sup>4</sup> Wicked mankind will suffer in death, however, and he promises them four very real and terrible agonies.

The first is bodily pain, of such greatness and severity as never is or has been in this present life before its end. . . . The second pain occurs when the body, fully wearied, has exhausted its strength: then the soul sees far more vividly in a flash all its good and bad deeds projected before its inner eye. This pain is so great and the revulsion from it so severe because the soul in its deepest perturbation is forced almost to hate itself. . . . The third pain occurs when the soul already begins to judge itself with justice, and sees each act in its own iniquity and the due torments of hell threatening. . . . The fourth pain occurs when the soul, still in the body, sees evil spirits ready to drag it off; at this point the pain and fear are so great that the miserable soul, however lost, holds back as long as it can and would ransom the time of its captivity before it leaves the body.

(III, 2)<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup>Howard, p. 68. "Tota pene vita mortalium mortalibus est plena peccatis, ut vix valeat inveniri qui non deviet ad sinistram, qui non revertatur ad vomitum, qui non computrescat in stercore suo." Maccarrone, p. 76.

<sup>5</sup>Howard, pp. 68-69. "Primus dolor est angustia corporea, tanta et tam gravis quanta vel qualis nec fuit, nec est in presenti vita ante dissolutionem illam. . . . Secundus dolor est, quando iam plene defatigato corpore et suis exhausto corpore viribus, anima multo liberius videt tunc in momento occurrere omnia opera bona vel male que fecit, que omnia reducuntur ante oculos interiores. Dolor iste tantus, et retractio ista tam gravis est, quod anima plurimum turbata cogitur quasi seipsam odisse. . . . Tertius dolor est, quando anima iam incipit tam iuste diiudicare et sibi in iniquitatibus suis singularia et gehenne debita tormenta videt imminere. . . . Quartus dolor est, quando anima adhuc in corpore posita videt spiritus malignos ad rapiendum se patros, ubi tantus dolor est et timor, quod miseria anima, licet extincta, quandiu potest refugiat et tempus sue captivitatis redimat antequam de corpore exeat." Maccarrone, pp. 76-77.

But such ransom is not possible for the damned. Their too late repentance will not save them. They will suffer nine varieties of punishment in hell. The first will be fire (ignis); the second, cold (frigus); the third, stench (fedor); the fourth, the never-failing worms (vermes indeficientes); the fifth, scourges of lashes (flagra percutientium); the sixth, wholesale "palpable darkness" (tenebre palpabiles exteriores et interiores); the seventh, confusion (confusio peccatorum); the eighth, "the horrible sight of the demons" (horribilis visio demonum); the ninth, "the chain of fire with which each of the limbs of the wicked is bound" (ignae catene, quibus impii singulis membris astringentur).<sup>6</sup> And then ultimately on the day of final judgement for the damned there will be horror and suffering before unknown even to the damned.

"The Son of Man shall send his angels and they shall gather out of his kingdom all scandals, and them that work iniquity, and they will bind them as bundles to be burnt, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth," [Matt. 13:41, 42] there shall be groaning and wailing, shrieking and flailing of arms and screaming, screeching and shouting; there shall be fear and trembling, toil and trouble, holocaust and dreadful stench, and everywhere darkness and anguish; there shall be asperity, cruelty, calamity, poverty, distress and utter wretchedness; they will feel an oblivion of loneliness and namelessness; there shall be twistings and piercings, bitterness,

<sup>6</sup>Howard, pp. 74-75; Maccarrone, pp. 83-84 (III, 8).

terror, hunger and thirst, cold and hot,  
brimstone and fire burning, forever and ever  
world without end.

(III, 20)<sup>7</sup>

Of this spiritual tragedy, this "second death," medieval man must have been in terror. Indeed, it would seem as if the threat of eternal death and damnation as the absolute tragedy haunted the medieval consciousness as much or more than did the promise of salvation give him joy. Like Innocent's letter, sermons preached from the pulpit promised death and damnation to unrepentant sinners;<sup>8</sup> stained glass windows, murals, brasses and miniatures showed the inevitable putrefaction of the flesh and the torment of the soul by devils (see Plates 7, 8, 9, 10); popular songs mocked the living with the promise

<sup>7</sup>Howard, p. 89, my italics. "'Mittet ergo filius hominis angelos suos, et colligent de regno eius omnia scandala et eos qui faciunt iniquitatem, et alligabunt fasciculos ad comburendum, et mittent eos in caminum ignis ardentibus. Ibi erit fletus et stridor dentium, gemitus et eiulatus, luctus et ululatus et cruciatus, stridor et clamor, timor et tremor, dolor et labor, ardor et fetor, obscuritas et anxietas, acerbitas et asperitas, calamitas et egestas, angustia et tristitia, oblivio et confusio, torsiones et punctiones, amaritudines et terrores, fames et sitis, frigus et cauma, sulphur et ignis ardens in secula seculorum.'" Maccarrone, pp. 97-98.

<sup>8</sup>G. R. Owst, Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1966), records many examples of such warnings.

of death; in debates and dialogues souls condemned their bodies for their suffering;<sup>9</sup> treatises, poems and plays on Domesday proliferated. For example the Towneley cycle Judgement play has an angel separate the good from the bad with:

Stand not togeder, part in two!  
 all sam shall ye not be in blys;  
 Oure lorde of heuen will it be so,  
 for many of you has done amys;  
 On his right hand ye good shall go,  
 the way till heauen he shall you wys;  
 Ye wykid saules ye weynd hym fro,  
 on his left hand as none of hys.  
 (ll. 73-80)

For the good, the divine comedy becomes a reality. Their

<sup>9</sup>The following lyric (Davies, pp. 73-74), "When Death Comes," successfully combines the debate and the putrefaction themes.

Now is mon hol and soint,  
 And uvel him comit in mund.  
 Thenne me seint aftir the prest,  
 That wel con reden him to Crist.  
 Aftair the prest boit icomin,  
 The feirliche Deit him havit inomyn.  
 Me prikit him in on ful clohit,  
 And legget him by the wout.  
 Amorwen, both in sout and norit,  
 Me nimit that body and berrit it forit.  
 Me gravit him put other ston;  
 Therin me leit the fukul bon.  
 Thenne sait the soule to the licam,  
 'Wey! that is ever in thee com.  
 Thu noldes, Friday, festen to non,  
 Ne, the Setterday, almesse don,  
 Ne, then Sonneday, gon to Churche,  
 Ne Cristene werkes wurche.  
 Neir thu never so prud,  
 Of hude and hewe ikud,  
 Thu shalt in orthe wonien and wormes thee tochewen,  
 And of alle ben lot that her thee were ilewe.'



a view. The whole of the materialistic view is compounded if the loss happens to be followed by death, for after death there is no further opportunity for a return to glory should Fortune once again turn a friendly face.

Because man is what he is, even the Christian is smitten with a worldly sense of tragic loss at such unaccountable reversals—unless, of course, he is strongly conscious of his true purpose on earth—and although the Church tries very hard to make him aware of this spiritual life, it is almost more natural for him to regard his material misfortune and the death of his body as tragic losses. For it is as St. Paul says: "that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural: afterwards that which is spiritual." (I Cor. 15:46)

## II

### The Boethian Solution

With a human materialistic view on one hand and a spiritual and divine view on the other, the Middle Ages effected a kind of synthesis between the two which formulated a full concept of tragedy for them. The formulation was provoked by the figure of Fortune herself and her popular role as independent administratrix of men's

fortunes, as she came into confrontation with the Christian God who created and guided all things, who demanded of all men obedience and love, and who punished spiritually the man who heeded Mammon rather than his own divine ends. The confrontation and the resolution of these views coalesced in the divine and providential plan of God which the medieval Church carefully elaborated for herself and the faithful.

Faced then with the essentially pagan concept of the goddess Fortuna representing the painful vicissitudes of a mutable world, manipulating her wheel, raising man high then dropping him low, causing misery and suffering for no other apparent reason than her whimsy, and with the Christian concept of God providentially regulating all of life, the medieval mind was forced to work an acceptable synthesis between the two. The Church taught that nothing was outside of God's care ("Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? And not one of them should fall on the ground without your Father." Matt. 10:24); all was created by him and all is continually governed by him through natural and positive laws.

However, experience taught that there were reversals in the lives of men, undeserved suffering, wars, plagues and the like, observable in the world and

these events seemed incomprehensible, without, indeed, beyond control. Although the Church could explain that God guided even this, the average man 'knew' that such was fickle Fortune's realm and that man's tragic misfortunes were her fault. In an attempt to take Fortune and all she represented into the divine plan, she was made an agent of God's providence, obeying the natural law he determined for her.

Such an adaptation was an inevitable and logical step for Christian thinkers to make, and in Boethius' Consolation of Philosophy, we see that very synthesis in process.<sup>10</sup> As Jefferson observes: "The purposes of Boethius . . . were highly serious, as in Fortune he saw an instrument of God. By her he attempted to make a logical explanation for the apparently illogical and unjust uncertainties of life."<sup>11</sup> Inverting the order of discussion from that of The Consolation, I approach the question of Fortune's relationship to Providence first, because as an important conclusion, I suspect it is what guided him throughout the formulation of his treatise.

<sup>10</sup> See H. R. Patch, The Tradition of Boethius (1935; rpt. New York: Russell & Russell, 1970), and more especially Courcelle, La Consolation.

<sup>11</sup> Chaucer and the Consolation of Philosophy of Boethius (1917; rpt. Princeton: Princeton U. P., 1965), p. 50.

As well as for this reason, an inverted order emphatically places the importance of a full understanding of medieval tragedy squarely on the interplay between the material goods that Fortune proffers and those spiritual goods of the divine order; which is what initiated the Consolation in the first place.

In Book IV, the dilemma that faces Boethius is that Fortune is inconstant, yet God, who Philosophy has explained governs all that he created, is providential. The two seem to Boethius contradictory and he voices his incomprehension at the idea. "I would," he says, "marvellous if I thought that all things were disordered enough by casual events. Now God being the Governor, my astonishment is increased." Continuing, he remarks on God's apparent fickleness: "He distributeth oftentimes that which is pleasant to the good, and that which is distasteful to the bad, and contrariwise adversity to the good, and prosperity to the evil." He queries: "unless we find out the cause hereof, what difference may there seem to be betwixt this and accidental chances?"<sup>12</sup> Lady

<sup>12</sup>"Minus etenim mirarer, si misceri omnia fortuitis casibus crederem. Nunc stuporem meum deus rector exaggerat. Qui cum saepe bonis iucunda, malis aspera contraque bonis dura tribuat, malis optata concedat, nisi causa deprehenditur, quid est quod a fortuitis casibus differre uideatur?" (IV, p. 15), Stewart, pp. 336-37.

Philosophy has long awaited this climactic moment and she is prepared. Her explanation is smooth and precise. Boethius is likewise prepared, for the first three books have focused on this moment. For the ignorant it is enough to believe in the plan of God. They could never understand its simple logic. However, in Boethius' case a fuller explanation can be given. She sings:

Hic enim causas cernere promptum est,  
 Illic latentes pectora turbant.  
 Cuncta quae rara prouehit aetas  
 Staepetque subitis mobile uulgus,  
 Cedat inscitiae nubilus error,  
 Cessent profecto mira uideri.  
 (IV, m. 5)

[Indeed it is easy to see the causes (of natural events), those hidden confound the heart. The ignorant man is amazed by sudden changing things that happen together rarely in a lifetime. The cloud of stupid error gives way, (the hidden things) actually cease to appear marvellous.]

Philosophy begins to explain the relationship of Fortune to divine Providence. "The generation of all things, and all the proceedings of mutable natures, and whatsoever is moved in any sort, take their causes, order, and forms from the stability of the Divine mind." God in his simplicity has "determined manifold ways for doing things." In the "purity of God's understanding," the ways are simply called Providence. In reference to all things controlled, it is called Fate. The two are different,

the latter being subject to the first.

Providence is the very Divine reason itself, seated in the highest Prince, which disposeth all things. But Fate is a disposition inherent in changeable things, by which Providence connecteth all things together, though diverse, though infinite; but Fate putteth every particular thing into motion being distributed by places, forms, and time; so that this unfolding of temporal order being united into the foresight of God's mind is Providence, and the same uniting being digested and unfolded in time is called Fate. Which although they be diverse yet the one dependeth on the other. For fatal order proceedeth from the simplicity of Providence.<sup>13</sup>

In its turn all that is within the mutable world is under the control of Fate. Nature receives her regulations from Fate as does Fortune through an "unloosable connexion of causes" (*indissolubili causarum conexione*). The reason that it all appears confused is that we lack the divine vantage point. Caught as we are on the perimeter of the

<sup>13</sup>"*Omniū generatio rerum cunctusque mutabilium naturarum progressus et quidquid aliquo mouetur modo, causas, ordinem, formas ex diuinæ mentis stabilitate sortitur. . . . Nam prouidentia est ipsa illa diuina ratio in summo omnium principe constituta quæ cuncta disponit; fatum uero inhaerens rebus mobilibus dispositio per quam prouidentia suis quæque nectit ordinibus. Prouidentia namque cuncta pariter quamuis diuersa quamuis infinita complectitur; fatum uero singula digerit in motum locis formis ac temporibus distributa, ut hæc temporalis ordinis explicatio in diuinæ mentis adunata prospectum prouidentia sit, eadem uero adunatio digesta atque explicata temporibus fatum uocetur. Quæ licit diuersa sint, alterum tamen pendet ex altero. Ordo namque fatalis ex prouidentia simplicitate procedit. (IV, pr. 6); pp. 340-41.*

revolving circle, we are confounded by the complexities wrought of mutability, and we fail to understand the truth. What we cannot understand we relegate to chance, to Fortune, when in fact it is only our own misapprehension of the divine order. It is the limitation of the human perspectives spoken of earlier.<sup>13a</sup>

Boethius' subordination of Fortune to Providence to effect the synthesis is only half of the concept of tragedy. The other half is the role that Fortune came to represent in the synthesis; that is to say the interplay between her materialistic gifts and God's eternal ones. In Book II of The Consolation, Boethius represents Fortuna for what she traditionally is: mutable, flattering, deceptive, responsible for giving gifts of wealth, power, fame and glory—and for taking them away again. With this fickle goddess, "Men can be sure of nothing, for she plays just as she likes with free and bond. Absolutely without sympathy, she cares no more for one man than another."<sup>14</sup>

This fickleness Boethius laments because he himself has seen both the high and the low of Fortune's wheel. His bitter complaint "that deserts were not equally rewarded" (non aequa meritis praemia pensari I, pr. 47) blinds him to her true nature and blinds him to

<sup>13a</sup> The problem which might arise here over the

<sup>14</sup> Jefferson, p. 50.

13a cont'd contradiction between fortune (an implied inevitability) and chance (indeterminacy) is completely resolved in the Consolation by Book IV pr. 6. However, to clarify, Boethius further explains:

Wherefore, we may define chance thus: That it is an unexpected event of concurring causes in those things which are done to some end and purpose. Now the cause why causes so concur and meet so together, is that order proceeding with inevitable connexion, which, descending from the fountain of Providence, disposeth all things in their places and times.

Licet igitur definire casum esse inopinatum ex confluentibus causis in his quae ob aliquid geruntur euentum; concurrere uero atque confluere causas facit ordo ille ineuitabili connexione procedens, qui de prouidentiae fonte descendens cuncta suis locis temporibusque disponit. (Bk.V, pr. 1)

In other words, nothing is ever really caused by chance.

More generally speaking, however, the concepts of fortune and chance seem hardly to have caused much concern the person of Fortuna absorbing the qualities of both without any rationale provided or, it would seem, needed.

God's justice. Lady Philosophy's explanation of the true nature of Fortune gives a rationale for these vicissitudes, places them within their proper perspective, and demonstrates how Fortune is very much a part of God's eternal plan. She says to Boethius:

Now I know . . . another, and that perhaps the greatest, cause of thy sickness: thou hast forgotten what thou art. Wherefore I have fully found out both the manner of thy disease and the means of thy recovery; for the confusion which thou art in, by the forgetfulness of thyself, is the cause why thou art so much grieved at thy exile and the loss of thy goods. And because thou art ignorant what is the end of things, thou thinkest that lewd and wicked men be powerful and happy; likewise, because thou hast forgotten by what means the world is governed, thou imaginest that these alternations of fortune do fall out without any guide, sufficient causes not only of sickness, but also of death itself.<sup>15</sup>

Philosophy's purpose is to lead Boethius to a realization that man's life is tragic only if he misunderstands what God has ordained, if he misunderstands his own true purpose on this earth. To see Fortune as a powerful figure beyond the control of God is to lose sight of this purpose. For this reason Lady Philosophy explains the true nature of Fortune to Boethius.

<sup>15</sup>"Iam scio," inquit, 'morbi tui aliam uel maximam causam; quid ipse sic, nosse desisti. Quare plenissime uel aegritudinis tuae rationem uel aditum reconciliandae sospitatis inueni. Nam quoniam tui obliuione confunderis, et exsulem te et exspoliatum propriis bonis esse doluisti. Quoniam uero quis sit rerum finis ignoras, nequam homines atque nefarios potentes felicesque arbitraris. Quoniam uero quibus gubernaculis mundus regatur oblitus est, hac fortunarum uices aestimas sine rectore fluitare-- magnae non ad morbum modo uerum ad interitum quoque causae.'" (I, pr. 6); pp. 166-67.

The method she uses is gently analytical but direct. She tells Boethius: "If thou rememberest (the character of Fortune), thou shalt know that thou neither didst possess nor hast lost anything of estimation."<sup>16</sup> Fortune's character, Philosophy explains, is change; her nature is mutability. In these things she is constant and it would be illogical to expect her to be otherwise. With this established she moves to her next point. If a man is satisfied with Fortune and her ever-turning wheel, then he ought not to complain. However, for the man who is not content with that kind of happiness which is destined to pass away, he must shun the gifts of Fortune. Because they are mutable, they are valueless and what is valueless cannot possibly bring happiness.

After this, Philosophy is free to discuss the nature of true happiness and that which brings it. Since Fortune and her gifts cannot produce it, what can? "If any fruit of mortal things hath any weight of happiness, can the remembrance of that light be destroyed with any cloud of miseries that overcast thee?"<sup>17</sup> Happiness must

<sup>16</sup>"Cuius si naturam mores ac meritum reminiscere, nec habuisse te in ea pulchrum aliquid nec amisisse cognosces." (II, pr. 1); pp. 172-73.

<sup>17</sup>"Si quis rerum mortalium fructus ullum beatitudinis pondus habet, poteritne illius memoria lucis quantalibet ingruentium malorum moli deleri . . ." (II, pr. 3); pp. 184-85.

lie within a man, she concludes. And that happiness must be a constant. Because the gifts of Fortune are unreliable by the law of Fortune, they cannot of themselves bring happiness. Not when compared to the happiness of the highest good of the rational soul which is found in the glory of eternal bliss. It alone is constant and reliable. It alone is true happiness. Thus, Philosophy has given Boethius a clear rational explanation as to the nature of Fortune and her gifts, and how, if he wishes to avoid tragedy, he must regard them.

### III

#### The Focus of the Church

As Boethius argued, so the medieval Church taught: if the mind is set upon the proper good, tragedy, material or spiritual, is quite impossible. For the true Christian, Fortune has nothing to offer because she controls only that which is designated to her control—the goods of the world, which are material, mutable, and not really goods at all. Her operation is wholly within the sphere of temporal existence. However, here she is a powerful figure. Her turning wheel does bring with it prosperity or sorrow. If the mind is swayed by the material goods of Fortune, tragedy will always be near at hand; in the

material sense because she is fickle and nothing that she gives is permanent; in the spiritual sense because <sup>in the medieval imagination</sup> many a Christian soul has been condemned to eternal punishment because of material wealth. Isidore of Seville observes:

If you despise the present, without doubt you will come upon the eternal; if you scorn secular and human things, you will easily and without difficulty gain heavenly grace and reign with him who has lordship over the living and the dead. Riches are never acquired without sin; riches are never administered without sin. To be sure, it is rare that they who possess riches, possess them in death; they who involve themselves in the care of the world, separate themselves from fear of God. He who becomes enchanted in the love of things, delights in God in no wise.

They who are in the care of things turn therefore from the intention of God. No one is able to embrace the glory of God and the world at the same time. It is difficult to serve equally the care of heaven and of earth; to delight in God and the world at the same time. To love both equally is not possible. It is difficult, nay, impossible that one can enjoy the goods of the present and the future; that one can satisfy the gut and the mind; that one can mix allurements (of the flesh?) with the delights (of heaven?), that one can be first in both places and appear glorious in earth and in heaven. For the sake of God, therefore, renounce all the mundane; for the sake of God end in thyself the cares of the world; without the impediments of the world, study to serve God.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>18</sup>"Si praesentia despexeris, sine dubio aeterna invenies; si saeculares res et humanas calcaveris, facile et leviter coelestem gratiam accipies, et cum eo regnabis qui vivis et mortuis dominatur. Divitiae numquam sine peccato acquiruntur, divitiae numquam sine peccato administrantur. Nullus res terrenas sine peccato administrat. Valde rarum est ut qui divitias possident ad requiem tendant; qui cursus terrenis se implicant, a Dei [amore] timore se separant. Qui in rerum [terrenarum] amore defigitur, in Deo nullatenus delectatur. Curae enim rerum ab intentione Dei avertunt. Nemo potest amplecti Dei gloriam simul, et saeculi; nemo potest amplecti Christum simul, et saeculum. Difficile est coelestibus et terrenis curis pariter inservire,

In his treatise De Miseria, Innocent devotes forty chapters to the danger of misdirected materialism. Contempt for these transient goods is what he advises for "Riches beget covetousness and avarice, pleasures give birth to gluttony and lechery, and honors nourish pride and boasting."<sup>19</sup> The medieval Christian must have known very well Christ's answer to the rich young man who came to Jesus asking: "Good Master, what shall I do that I may receive life everlasting?" Jesus replied, "Go, sell whatever thou hast and give to the poor: and thou shalt have treasure in heaven. And come, follow me," and the young man was very much chagrined. Turning to his disciples Jesus said of the rich:

How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God! . . . Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God? It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.

(Mark 10:17-25;  
Luke 18:18-25)

difficile est Deum simul et mundum diligere. Utraque simul aequaliter amari non possunt. Difficile, imo impossibile est, ut praesentibus et futuris quis fruatur bonis, ut et hic ventrem, et illic mentem impleat, ut de deliciis ad delicias transeat, ut in utraque saeculo sit primus, ut in terra, et in coelo appareat gloriosus. Propter Deum ergo renuntia omnibus, a saeculi curis te propter Deum suspende, sine impedimento saeculi Deo servire stude." Synonymorum De Lamentatione Anime Peccatricis (II, 93), PL LXXXIII, 866.

<sup>19</sup>Howard, p. 33; "Opes generant cupiditates et avaritiam, voluptates pariunt gulam et luxuriam, honores nutriunt superbiam et iactantiam." Maccarrone, p. 39.

And they knew too, the fate of the rich man Dives (Luke 16: 29-31), which proved Christ's words, and the daily increasing host in hell who were his companions.

Indeed, the Middle Ages was particularly conscious of the element of the material in the synthesis. The call of Mammon was ever to be frustrated if at all possible. This view was so pronounced that it has prompted one critic to suggest that "Medieval tragedy was written for a purpose—to dissuade men from choosing the way of good Fortune, to persuade men to follow the straight and narrow path of higher reason, of Christian virtue, of restraint, to remain faithful always to Providence, however mysterious be God's ways."<sup>20</sup> Such may well be the case. It is certainly a demonstrable thesis for it is true that the Church did caution her children to use the goods of Fortune with care and better still to spurn them entirely, for by their nature they lead quickly to enslavement and moral destruction. This theme emerges particularly strongly in the Middle Ages as the de contemptu mundi. It forms a strong element within the Christian part of the synthesis and runs counter to the tradition of Fortune, her wheel and the de casibus elements; moreover, it is responsible for a good deal of the interplay so important to the full comprehension of medieval

<sup>20</sup>H. B. Caldwell, The Child Tragic Ballad, unpub. diss. (Nashville, 1968), p. 27.

tragedy.

Although the seeds were sown earlier, the de contemptu mundi theme did not emerge in full flower until the twelfth century.<sup>21</sup> The phenomenal growth of the Cistercian order under Bernard of Clairvaux gives ample testimony to its effectiveness, while the treatise of Innocent indicates the Church's hearty approval. After its publication, as Howard explains, such like treatises appeared everywhere from the twelfth to the fifteenth century<sup>22</sup> in sermons and in religious and secular poetry. The poet of the Cursor Mundi finishes his work with an exhortation centred upon the dual nature of medieval tragedy and urges the way of the Church. The traditional material view he recognizes:

Dame fortune turneþ hir whele anoon  
**Þ**at casteþ down mony on. (ll. 23719-20)

He even includes the possibility that good fortune may come again to those cast down:

Of þat doun cast we may bi chaunce  
 Anent þis world get coueraunce  
 And com to worldes welþ aȝein. (ll. 23721-23)

<sup>21</sup> Donald R. Howard, The Three Temptations (Princeton: Princeton U. P., 1966), pp. 68-69; J. J. Mogan, Chaucer and the Theme of Mutability (The Hague: Mouton, 1969).

<sup>22</sup> Howard, p. 70.

But the possession is uncertain and the ultimate end the same:

A while to hold wip mucche peyn  
 But þerwip fynde we anoþer strif  
 Þet waiteþ noþing but oure lif  
 Deþ vs haþ beset oure strete  
 Wol we or nyl we shul him mete.  
 (ll. 23724-28)

Although he is aware of how difficult it is for man because he is man to view his proper end,

Fals hit is we may se how  
 And we wol algate þeron trow  
 Þis litil lif we haue in hond  
 We wene hit be euer lastond.  
 Deep we wene alwey to stille  
 Þat doþ us muchel spedyng spille  
 Hit blendeþ vs a litil zele  
 Þat we con not oure seluen fele;  
 (ll. 23711-18)

he exhorts:

Þe cristen men aboute þe loke  
 Alle þat euer haþ herde þis boke  
 Of þoure life þat þe here lede  
 Þe turne hit not in to wanspede  
 Who so wol him wel bipinke  
 Þe worlde is fals & ful of swynke,  
 (ll. 23705-10)

lest the false goods of the world cause that most final of tragedies, eternal damnation.

This same advice to scorn the material wealth of the world carries into the lyrics of the Middle Ages generally. Literally hundreds of them advise the avoidance of Fortune's gifts and contempt of the world. The poet

of the earlier quoted "Lollai, lollai, litil child"

drawing upon Fortune's known characteristics advises:

Ne tristou to þis world, hit is þi ful vo,  
 Þe rich he makip pouer, þe pore rich al so;  
 Hit turnep wo to wel and ek wel to wo--  
 Ne trist no man to this world, whil hit turnip so.<sup>23</sup>

In "Contempt of the World,"<sup>24</sup> the poet couples the ubi sunt query to his theme. Where are "the rich levedies in hoere bour?" Where is that "lawing and that song/That trailing and that proude yong?" "Hoere paradys by nomen here," he explains, "And now they lien in hell ifere." In "The Saved Says,"<sup>25</sup> by contrasting the two points of view, the poet effects a similar contemptus mundi warning:

The Saved says:  
 For foule lustes I witstod,  
 In blisse I were 3y3 garlond.  
 The Lost says:  
 Alas! worldes yissing Me haueth scehent,  
 3et euere My soule in helle beth brent,  
 The Saved says:  
 In heuen blisse I am in hele  
 For I forsok 3ys worldes wele.  
 The Lost says:  
 Alas! helle me hath in holt in ruyde;  
 3e deuel in pine for worldes pride.

The riches of the world are temptations which draw men to

<sup>23</sup>Above, p. 45.

<sup>24</sup>Davies, pp. 56-59.

<sup>25</sup>Political, Religious and Love Poems, F. J. Furnivall ed. (London: Kegan, Paul, Trench, Tübnner & Co. Ltd., 1866), p. 269.



more completely than he has the old definitions of Fortune. Chaucer does understand, and so as a result he is able to capitalize on a double irony at the expense of the Monk, daun Piers.

Existing as what might be called a consciousness or a mode of thought, the synthesis of the pagan and the Christian, pre-figured by a Boethian Fortuna who is agent of corporeal man's material gains and losses, and at the same time is administratrix within the divine and providential plan of God, uniquely contains all the parts of the entire concept of tragedy in the Middle Ages. It contains in one sense tragedy represented as the fall from Fortune's wheel; it contains in another sense the tragedy of utter damnation; and in the synthetic or modal sense it contains the expression of tragedy in the material world and the expression of tragedy or of potential tragedy in the spiritual world, together with all the effect that the interplay between them will allow. This inter-relation between the tragic experience of the material plane and that of the spiritual plane is central to the whole concept of medieval tragedy, for it is most often in the dialectic between the two that medieval tragedians find their most significant expressions of tragedy.

Of course, with such a large potential in the

mode, the range of expression stretches from extreme to extreme. Not every poet reflects the entirety of the mode. Hence, the expression of tragedy in the literature of the Middle Ages itself ranges from a limited Fortuna-oriented view such as that of the Morte Arthure, to a more ascetic Christian-oriented view such as that of the Pearl-poet, to a more complex view such as that of Chaucer in Troilus and Criseyde and Henryson in the Testament of Cresseid, whose consciousness of the gamut of men's passions, doubts, fears, of the plethora of tragic experiences inherent in the confrontation of the human and the divine, drives them to explore the wholeness of the consciousness itself. In the next two chapters of this dissertation, I intend to demonstrate from these poems that such is indeed the case.

## Chapter Four

### The 'Morte Arthure' and 'Pearl':

#### Opposite Ends of the Mode

##### I

#### Morte Arthure as a Tragedy of Fortune

Since William Matthews' study,<sup>1</sup> the poem Morte Arthure as an example of medieval tragedy has been almost continually approached from a critically biased point of view. Admittedly, on the periphery a great deal worthwhile has been said about the poem in conjunction with medieval tragedy, but its value has been obscured by attendant attempts to show how the poet is placing some kind of 'war guilt,' or 'sin' upon Arthur for which he is being punished by God thus accounting for his tragic fall. Such attempts are extraneous to a consideration of the poem as tragedy and unwarranted by any careful reading of the poem; indeed they go so far as to pervert the meaning of Arthur's tragedy as it is presented in the poem itself.

<sup>1</sup>The Tragedy of Arthur (Berkeley: U. of California Press, 1960).

Matthews, of course, deserves some recognition for his contributions. He is quite right when he observes that Arthur is the central figure of the poem and that the tragedy is his own. He is also right when he designates the Morte Arthure as "the archetypal form of the tragedy of fortune";<sup>2</sup> the scene with Lady Fortune does occupy a considerable place within the poem and is in the opinion of most, central to any reading of the poem. He is right again when he notes that

The doctrine of man's free will to choose between good and evil, the belief in God's justice, and the opinion that man was inclined toward evil as well as toward good, all predisposed medieval writers to the opinions that even in this present transitory and seemingly unreasonable life the principle of justice commonly prevails and that those who experience miseries often bring them upon their own heads.<sup>3</sup>

However, he is completely wrong when he claims that the poet is indicating that Arthur's tragedy proceeds from the sin of making unjustified excessively cruel wars and of shedding innocent blood in many lands especially in France.<sup>4</sup> Likewise, Lumiansky<sup>5</sup> and Finlayson<sup>6</sup> are wrong

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 114.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 117.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 125.

<sup>5</sup>R. M. Lumiansky, "The Alliterative Morte Arthure: The Concept of Medieval Tragedy and the Cardinal Virtue Fortitude" in Medieval and Renaissance Studies: Proceedings of the Southeastern Institute, no. 3, ed. John Headly (Chapel Hill: U. of North Carolina Press, 1968), pp. 95-118.

<sup>6</sup>J. Finlayson ed., Morte Arthure (London:

when they attempt to salvage Matthews' idea of a 'sinful' Arthur by urging us to believe that only some of the wars are unjust and that these are the cause of his downfall. The tragedy of Arthur is first and foremost a tragedy of Fortune, for which Arthur is responsible but which has absolutely no causal relationship with whatever sins he may have committed during his lifetime of warring.

Matthews' opinion that all of Arthur's wars are imperialistic and unjustifiably cruel simply cannot stand up. Both Lumiansky and Finlayson demonstrate the fallibility of this position very thoroughly in their interpretations. As a king in his own right and as a Christian, Arthur has every just cause to fight against the Romans and their allies, for in combating them he is combating the forces of usurpation in his lands and moreover, the very forces of Satan in the world—"Sowdanes and Sarazenes," "Weches and warlaws," "Geaunts . . . engenderide with fendes" (l. 570 ff.)<sup>7</sup> are the demonic

Edward Arnold, 1967); "The Concept of the Hero in Morte Arthure" in Chaucer und Seine Zeit, Arno Esch ed. (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1968), pp. 249-74.

<sup>7</sup>Morte Arthure, ed. E. Brock, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford U. P., 1871, rpt. 1961), EETS OS, 8.

allies of Rome and the just foes of a Christian king.<sup>8</sup>

But in his turn neither is Finlayson right when, qualifying Matthews, he argues the injustice of only some of the wars:

After defeating the Romans, Arthur embarks on a series of conquests which have no definite connection with his professed reason for going to war; that is, he now indulges in wars of aggression which, according to the handbooks of chivalry, are not lawful but wilful.<sup>9</sup>

Nor is Lumiansky any more right when moving further than Finlayson he accepts the justice of Arthur's wars even after those with the Romans up to his victory in Lombardy, after which, he argues, they are sinful. "No longer," he says, "is the king concerned with anything except conquest, and no longer do we find any indication that the poet would have us consider Arthur as God's champion."<sup>10</sup>

The crux of these arguments about "just and unjust" wars comes ultimately, it seems, to these critical lines:

Walles he welte downe, wondyd knyghtez,

<sup>8</sup>See also J. Finlayson, "Arthur and the Giant of St. Michael's Mount," *MÆ*, 33 (1964), 112-20; and L. Benson, "The Alliterative Morte Arthure and Medieval Tragedy," *TSL*, 11 (1966), 75-87.

<sup>9</sup>Finlayson, "The Concept of the Hero," p. 265.

<sup>10</sup>Lumiansky, p. 110.

Towrres he turnes, and turmentez the pople,  
 Wroghte wedewes fulle wlonk, wrotherayle synges,  
 Ofte wery and wepe, and wryngene theire handis;  
 And alle he wastys with werre, thare he awaye rydez,  
 Thaire welthes and theire wonny [n]ges, wandrethe  
   he wroghte!  
 Thus they spryngene and sprede, and sparis bot  
   lyttille,  
 Spoyles dispetouslye, and spillis theire vynes;  
 Spendis vn-sparely, that sparede was lange,  
 Spedis theme to Spolett with speris inewe!  
   (11. 3152-61)

It is upon these lines that Lumiansky builds his case for Arthur's 'sinful' wars—on a mere ten lines in a poem of well over four thousand. Even so, ignoring this fact, the very lines themselves can only ambiguously be construed to mean what he believes they do. The battle in Tuscany is no less justifiable in terms of Arthur's wars than are any of the others. Earlier the poet had told us that such a war in Italy (exclusive of the Pope's lands) was necessary for a good and lasting peace; "tyranntez of Turkanye" (l. 2408) these allies of Rome, part of the pagan hoard which ravaged Arthur's land, were called. And now, quite contrary to what Lumiansky feels, the poet is showing that these pagans will get their just deserts; lands "that sparede was lange" while the war went on elsewhere are now learning the meaning of war; "wedewes fulle wlonk" (unlike those of Metz) are now learning the widow's proper demeanour. Nor are his deeds here any more violent than when he took Metz:

Mynsteris and masondewes they malle to the erthe,  
 Chirches and chapelles chalke-whitte blawnchede.  
 Stone [s]tepelles fulle styffe in the strete ligges,  
 Chawmbyrs with chymnés and many cheefe inns,  
 Paysede and pelid downe plasterede walles;  
 The pyne of the pople was peté for to here!  
 (ll. 3038-43)

Indeed, the poet even seems proud of Arthur's deeds in Italy. Rather than following up these terrible 'crimes' with reproof, he speaks of Arthur the "valyant" with "solace in herte" joyously celebrating a good victory; of Arthur soon to be crowned emperor thereby attaining finally all those rights described in the beginning of the poem as his due (ll. 271-87).

This tendency to see in Arthur's wars 'sinful' behaviour also leads one to view Arthur's tragedy incorrectly. Weighted down with extraneous matter on unjust and 'sinful' wars, it is easy to misconstrue the warning of the philosopher-priests to Arthur about his dream of the wheel of Fortune; it is easy to jump to the erroneous conclusion that the priests are telling Arthur that his fall is because of his terrible wars, and his effecting the deaths of innocent people.

Thow has schedde myche blode, and shalkes distroyede,  
 Sakeles, in cirquytrie, in sere kynges landis;  
 Schryfe the of thy schame, and schape for thyne ende!  
 Thow has a schewynge, sir kynge, take kepe ȝif the lyke,  
 ffor thow salle fersely falle with-in fyve wynters!  
 ffownde abbayes in ffraunce, the froytez are  
 theyne awene,

ffore ffroille, and for fferawnt, and for thir  
   ferse knyghttis,  
 That thowe fremydly in ffraunce has faye be-leuede;  
   (11. 3398-3405)

However, to think this is to miss the significance of Arthur's tragedy and the meaning of the poem generally. In their interpretation of the dream, the priests tell Arthur that because his fortune is passed, and because he will die in five years, and because in the course of his wars he has shed much blood, innocent or otherwise (if Froille is anything like Feraunt of whom the poet said earlier "the fende was his fadyre" [l. 2761], Arthur is certainly justified in his actions), then he had better begin his acts of repentance and restitution. They do not say that because of unjust wars this fall has taken place and should be considered as a punishment sent by God. That the scene with Fortune follows the last battle and that the priests counsel Arthur to prepare for his death are not valid reasons to argue that Arthur was sinful in his wars and that therefore God is punishing him with this fall from glory. The scene with Fortune clearly follows the last battle because Arthur is then at the height of his career—at the top of the wheel—and there is no other direction for him to go but down, regardless of fault or sin in war. It is the law by which

Fortune governs and is governed. In this sense Arthur is, as Benson noted of the medieval tragic hero, more a victim of a process out of his control.<sup>11</sup>

However, such is not entirely the case. It may seem paradoxical that Arthur, although not guilty of any sin which causes his tragedy, is nevertheless responsible for it; but it is not paradoxical. As I have already explained, the poet never puts Arthur's moral condition into any causal relationship with his tragedy. On the other hand, he very definitely and deliberately links Arthur in just such a causal relationship with Fortune. A passage of description sets the scene for Fortune. Into the meadow "with montayngnes enclosyde" and "with vynes of siluer/Alle with grapys of golde" comes Fortuna in the person of a duchess richly clad in "dyaperde wedis," in "sylke fulle selkouthely hewede," and laden with "bruche and besauntez and other brouchede alle-ouer." She comes in splendour, in the richness and pomp of the glory that she can bestow freely upon any man—and she comes whirling a wheel, a gem-studded wheel with a throne of silver. Arthur approaches her and "wynly hire gretis." To him she offers the throne on the wheel and the sword and crown of empire, which he accepts from her. Before those

<sup>11</sup>Benson, p. 79.





"heigh degree"--will most painfully lose them.<sup>13</sup>  
 and that man is free to choose between the material and  
 the spiritual thus making his own tragedy. However,  
 simply because it is true as an underlying consciousness,  
 it is not necessarily right to conclude that this is the  
 emphasis of the poet. In fact, the poet of the Morte  
 deliberately avoids drawing attention to the Christian  
 elements of medieval tragedy. There is no suggestion of  
contemptus mundi, or that Arthur attached himself unduly  
 to the goods of the world. Nor is there any attempt to  
 suggest that Arthur has endangered his soul beyond what  
 might be expected in the life of a conquering Christian  
 king. Nor is there any suggestion that he will not be  
 saved. The continuation of the poem to its conclusion is  
 proof positive of that.

Instead of making any preparation for death  
 after his dream, Arthur makes preparation to fight a war  
 for the reclamation of his kingdom unjustly usurped by  
 Mordred and his

" . . . sorte of selcouthe berynes,  
 Soueraynes of Surgenale, and sowdeours many  
 Of Peyghtes, and peynymms, and prouede knyghttes  
 Of Irelande and Orgaile, owtlawede berynes;"  
 (ll. 3531-34)

Once again Arthur finds himself in a position of Christian

<sup>13</sup>Benson, p. 79.





he is guilty beyond that of being a man. Arthur, for the poet, is a noble and heroic Christian king who, favoured by Fortune, rose high and then fell because such is the pattern of the goods and the glory of the world--no more.

Lumiansky is quite right when he observes that the Morte is not "an illustration of the tension between earthly power and spiritual renunciation," but he is completely wrong when he concludes that the Morte is not "an example of medieval tragedy."<sup>15</sup> The poet of the Morte Arthure may not be interested in the moralistic background of medieval tragedy. He almost completely avoids the moral implications of Arthur's fall, and exploits not at all the potential for a Christian tragedy of spiritual damnation. However, he is very much interested in demonstrating a tragedy--the archetypal tragedy of Fortune. That Arthur attains salvation detracts not at all from this tragic pattern. Though he has saved his soul, he has still ridden high on the silver throne, only to have fallen quite low. Although it is a poem Christian at its centre, the Morte Arthure reflects a very pronounced tendency towards the Fortuna elements in the medieval tragic consciousness--so pronounced, in fact, that it would be fair to say that the moralistic elements

<sup>15</sup>Lumiansky, p. 117.

of Christian tragedy are virtually not present except by critical interpolation. Before anything else, the Morte Arthure is a tragedy of Fortune, her wheel, and the fall that must attend the man who gives his trust to the rich and powerful but fickle goddess with the ever-turning wheel.

## II

### Pearl as Christian Tragedy

It is evident to me that Pearl is not usually called a medieval tragedy, Christian or otherwise. Recently, Barbara Nolan did make a passing reference to it as a tragedy,<sup>16</sup> but unfortunately she pursued her own insight no further in such terms. Neither do others take up from where she left off. However, there are qualities, elements in the poem which, although up to now (in the course of Pearl's critical history) have been considered only disparately, when considered together do seem to suggest that Pearl might indeed be read as an expression of medieval Christian tragedy. For the Pearl-poet with his Christian system of values and consequently with his tragic consciousness when he considers human nature, the jeweller is a figure for tragedy. A materialist caught up in Fortune's pattern of "wele and woe", he is a man for whom tragedy is an inevitability. As it was in the case of archetypal Adam, the earthly is mistaken for the heavenly, the human for the divine. As it was for Adam, the mistake is a sinful one and deserving of damnation. But equally like to Adam, the sin can be atoned for through the sacrifice of Christ and the turned into the comedy of everlasting life. This the jeweller must learn if he is not to suffer that terrible and absolute tragedy of hell fire. The function of the Pearl-maiden is to teach this lesson to the jeweller,

<sup>16</sup>"An Approach to a Reading of the Pearl", unpub. diss. (U. of Wisconsin, 1967).

just as Lady Philosophy taught the lesson of the proper good to Boethius. She must make the jeweller aware of the limitations of his human nature and show him his divine nature. She must replace his human perspective with the divine perspective.

Indeed, from the general to the particular, all the signs of Christian tragedy are there. The essence, that is, the basic intellectual formulation of the poem is Christian. The purpose of its poetic message is didactic. The lesson it presents is the central truth of Christian dogma; that man is a citizen of both the City of Man and the City of God; that while he inhabits the earth, his true home is in heaven. Accordingly, the very centre of the Pearl-poet's concern for the salvation of every Christian depends upon his learning the lesson of his true nature and proper good. Through traditional Christian themes, the mutability of the world, the concupiscence of the flesh the blindness, ignorance and wilfulness of man, the fall the atonement, the consolatio, the promised rewards of heaven, the poet gives substance to his lesson. Through poetry, structure, dramatically developing symbolism, allegory, the lesson is given vitality and effectiveness.

Whether in terms of mystical allegory, moral

didacticism, or theological debate, critics have looked to Pearl's spiritual basis for its meaning. All critics, even the earliest whose stress was upon the purely elegiac and autobiographical nature of the poem recognized its inherent spiritual qualities.<sup>17</sup> But more than the autobiographical, it was the early arguments explaining Pearl variously as an allegory on purity,<sup>18</sup> as a theological heresy,<sup>19</sup> as a doctrine of the Holy Eucharist,<sup>20</sup> as a message of salvation and recovery of lost innocence,<sup>21</sup> as a journey into and out of "spiritual dryness,"<sup>22</sup> that laid the grounds for the continuing debate over the allegorical and

<sup>17</sup>Richard Morris, ed., Early English Alliterative Poems (London: Trübner & Co., 1894), EETS OS 1; Israel Gollancz, ed., Pearl (London, 1891; rpt. New York: Cooper Square Publs., 1966); Charles Osgood, ed., The Pearl (Boston: D. C. Heath & Co., 1910).

<sup>18</sup>W. H. Schofield, "The Nature and Fabric of The Pearl," PMLA, 19 (1904), 154-215.

<sup>19</sup>C. F. Brown, "The Author of the Pearl Considered in the Light of his Theological Opinions," PMLA, 19 (1904), 115-53.

<sup>20</sup>R. M. Garrett, "The Pearl: An Interpretation," Studies in English, U. of Washington Publications, 4 (1918), 1-48.

<sup>21</sup>J. B. Fletcher, "The Allegory of The Pearl," JEGP, 20 (1921), 1-21.

<sup>22</sup>Sr. M. Madeleva, Pearl: A Study in Spiritual Dryness (1925; rpt. New York: Phaeton Press, 1968).

spiritual meaning of Pearl. In addition, both Fletcher and later W. K. Greene added significantly to the interpretation of Pearl as Christian tragedy. Observed Greene: "It is clear that the discussion between the dreamer and the maiden is a literary device for imparting spiritual teaching."<sup>23</sup> Recently, A. C. Spearing completed this idea by adding that "it is unlikely that the poem has any concealed allegorical meaning" and that the Pearl-maiden herself provides the necessary exegesis in the manner of a medieval sermon.<sup>24</sup> Fletcher in his contribution recognized the wider frame-work for the meaning of the poem afforded in the concept of salvation history. How central his idea was is best expressed by Barbara Nolan who concludes:

The story of the Pearl is important, but it must be understood within a much larger frame-work encompassing the whole of salvation history from the fall of Adam to the final harvest of the saints.<sup>25</sup>

Over the years the contributions of such scholars as René Wellek (the symbolism of the pearl comes

<sup>23</sup>"The Pearl: A New Interpretation," PMLA, 40 (1925), 814-27.

<sup>24</sup>"Symbolic and Dramatic Development in Pearl," MP, 60 (1963), p. 2A.

<sup>25</sup>Nolan, p. 37; my italics.

to represent the whole realm of heaven),<sup>26</sup> James Oakden (the poem is symbolic of the rite of baptism),<sup>27</sup> D. W. Robertson (the poem works on four levels from lost innocence to heavenly reward),<sup>28</sup> W. S. Johnson (through imagery and diction, the poet contrasts heavenly and earthly),<sup>29</sup> filled various lacunae in the background of Pearl, and cleared away such critical red-herrings as the extended debate over the poet's inclination to heresy which occupied critical endeavour for over fifty years.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>26</sup>"The Pearl: An Interpretation of the Middle English Poem," (1933) in R. J. Blanch, ed., Sir Gawain and Pearl: Critical Essays (Bloomington: Indiana U. P., 1966), pp. 3-36; also Prague Studies in English, 4 (1933), 5-33.

<sup>27</sup>Alliterative Poetry in Middle English (Manchester: The University Press, 1935; rpt. 1937), pp. 74-76.

<sup>28</sup>"The Pearl as Symbol," MLN, 65 (1950), 153-61.

<sup>29</sup>"The Imagery and Diction of The Pearl: Towards an Interpretation," ELH, 20 (1953), 161-80; also in Middle English Survey, ed. Edward Vasta (Notre Dame, 1965), pp. 93-115.

<sup>30</sup>Rising to Brown's conclusions of the poet's sixteenth-century heretical mind, Sister Madeleva accused him of "scampering blithely about in the fields of the Post-Nicene Fathers, Scholastic theology and Pelagianism in its various degrees" and dismissed his accusations as non-sequiturs and completely irrelevant (pp. 15-16). Rising to defend more positively the poet's theological opinions, René Wellek stated emphatically that the poet was "in line with orthodox teaching" (p. 27). James Sledd, "Three Textual Notes on Fourteenth-Century Poetry," MLN, 55 (1940), 379-82; Sister Mary Vincent Hillmann, "Pearl: 'Inlyche' and 'Rewarde'," MLN, 56 (1941), 457-58; and Marie Hamilton, "The Orthodoxy of Pearl 603-4," MLN 58 (1943), 370-72, agreed and demonstrated that the poet is completely orthodox concerning heavenly

However, it is really not until John Conley's study<sup>31</sup> that these more particular issues find their eistedfodd in his more comprehensive approach. The irony of the title of his article (although it may have been unintentional) seems striking in terms of much of the scholarship preceding it, which most definitely had lost sight of the meaning of Pearl—of the proverbial forest in searching for theological trees. Conley avoided getting entangled in the myriad of smaller issues by concerning himself with the large one.<sup>32</sup> By centring upon the paradox of "homo animalis, carnalis, sensualis"<sup>33</sup> seeking true happiness while in a false, mutable, material world, he brought into focus ideas which are at the core of Christian tragedy, not the least important of which is Sister Mary Vincent Hillmann's<sup>34</sup> passed-over opinion that the

rewards. And finally D. W. Robertson administered what might be considered an academic coup de grâce to unorthodoxy in his defence of the poet against the heresy of Jovinian, "The Heresy of The Pearl," MLN, 65 (1950), 151-53, were it not for the fact that the whole issue was or should have been long dead.

<sup>31</sup>"Pearl and a Lost Tradition," JEGP, 54 (1955), 322-47.

<sup>32</sup>". . . the nature of happiness, specifically false and true happiness"; Ibid., p. 341.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 343.

<sup>34</sup>"Some Debateable Words in Pearl and its Theme," MLN, 60 (1945), p. 241.

narrator is both materialistic and sinful.

As a result of this initiative, scholars moved to explore more fully this background tradition in which Conley indicated the real meaning of Pearl lay. V.E.Watts<sup>35</sup> verified the consolatio element; R.W.Ackerman<sup>36</sup> joined in relating the Pearl-maiden to Lady Philosophy in Boethius' De Consolatione and to Grace Dieu in Deguileville's Pelerinage de la vie humaine. Indeed, scholarship for the most part has come to agree that the best answer to the meaning of Pearl lies in its Christian background. And this meaning, I maintain, is that Pearl is an example of Christian tragedy.

The three most important things to grasp in any reading of the Pearl are the structure of the poem, the figure of the jeweller-dreamer and the symbolic nature of the pearl itself. One might go so far as to say that if one comprehends these and the relationship among them fully, one comprehends the poem fully.

As Schofield, Spearing and Heiserman<sup>37</sup> and others note, the nature of the pearl as symbol is a dynamic one, changing in meaning as the narrative advances. It may even be this very ambiguity in its meaning which engages jeweller and audience in mysterious pursuit of its

<sup>35</sup>"Pearl as a Consolatio," MÆ, 33(1963), 34-36.

<sup>36</sup>"The Pearl-maiden and the Penny," RPh, 17 (1964), 615-23.

<sup>37</sup>"The Plot of Pearl," PMLA, 80 (1965), 164-71.

learning of the lesson of his true nature and his proper good. Through traditional Christian themes, the mutability of the world, the concupiscence of the flesh, the blindness of man, the consolatio, the fall, the atonement, the rewards of heaven, the poet gives substance to his lesson. Through poetry, structure, dramatically developing symbolism, allegory, language, the lesson is given vitality and effectiveness. That Pearl is a poetic lesson, carefully, subtly and skilfully integrated is undeniable. The course of scholarship has demonstrated it. That Pearl is a Christian tragedy—an expression of the medieval tragic consciousness of the tragedy or potential tragedy of damnation must follow. It is the only possible logical step to take if the pattern of interpretive criticism established over eighty years is itself to remain coherent and logical.

For the Pearl-poet with his Christian system of values and consequently with his tragic consciousness when he considers human nature, the jeweller is a figure for tragedy. A materialist caught up in Fortune's pattern of "wele and woe," he is a man for whom tragedy is an inevitability. As it was in the case of archetypal Adam, the earthly is mistaken for the heavenly, the human for the divine. As it was for Adam, the mistake is a sinful

one and deserving of damnation. But equally like to Adam, the sin can be atoned for, through the sacrifice of Christ and the tragedy turned into the comedy of everlasting life. This the jeweller must learn if he is not to suffer that terrible and absolute tragedy of hell-fire. The function of the Pearl-maiden is to teach this lesson to the jeweller, just as Lady Philosophy taught the lesson of the proper good to Boethius. She must make the jeweller aware of the limitations of his human nature and show him his divine nature. She must replace his human point of view with the divine one.

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<sup>37</sup>"The Plot of Pearl," PMLA, 80 (1965), 164-71.

discovery.<sup>38</sup> However, its meaning is never so ambiguous that definite points of its depth cannot be plumbed and charted. For example, no matter what the dynamics of the pearl symbol may reveal of its various meanings, one aspect of its nature can be readily understood. Its value for each character is that of a summum bonum.<sup>39</sup> In the jeweller's eyes the pearl of his loss is a "pryuy perle," a "precios perle," so valuable to him that before all the gems he has ever priced, this one he placed "sengely in synglere" (l. 8).<sup>40</sup> In the Pearl-maiden's eyes, the pearl is a "makelle; perle," (l. 733), a "perle maskelles" (l. 744), indeed, as the dreamer terms it in accordance with her eulogy of it, a "perle of prys" (l. 746).

However, although there is accord in this, there is a great variance in their respective understanding of the meaning of the pearl as a summum bonum. The Pearl-maiden is certain of the identity of her pearl. It is "My Lorde the Lombe, þat schede hys blode" (l. 741), "My makelez Lambe þat al may bete" (l. 757), "my dere destyné"

<sup>38</sup>Heiserman, p. 116AB.

<sup>39</sup>Ian Bishop, Pearl In Its Setting (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1968), p. 93.

<sup>40</sup>All quotations will be made by line reference to E. V. Gordon, ed., Pearl (Oxford: at the Clarendon Press, 1953).

(1. 759). On the other hand, the jeweller-dreamer as he moves through the narrative is at first sure, then not so sure of what the pearl is. For him it begins as a very real material object only to become confused with the Pearl-maiden, his soul, the Lamb, and finally with the vision of Paradise.<sup>41</sup> Once the dream has begun, the only certainty about the identity of the pearl is the maiden's and this the dreamer never quite comprehends.

The jeweller is characterized by the poet as being very human. In the opening stanzas of the poem, he is presented to us as a man, like the Boethius of the De Consolatione, full with the joys and sorrows of the world. Throughout the first section we see him as a man who measures his "wele" in terms of the world. As he thinks of it, the pearl is "a real not a symbolic treasure."<sup>42</sup>

<sup>41</sup>The psychology of the dream-vision allows it to assume these various identities without the slightest incongruity. Each identity rises out of its proper place in the dream for the advancement of the lesson; each subsides in the progression of the next; and each maintains its own identity. Yet all are as one, for all are unified in the logic of the dream, much in the same way as Macbeth's vision of the lineage of the Scottish kings is unified. To understand this is to come to know the pearl, for it is in this progression of pearls that the lesson resides. It is upon the duality of pearl as material object and pearl as spiritual symbol that much of the dramatic tension and effectiveness of the poem lies. See Milton Stern, "An Approach to The Pearl," JEGP, 54 (1955), 684-92.

<sup>42</sup>Patricia Kean, The Pearl: An Interpretation (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967), p. 153.

It is a "perle plesaunte to prynces paye" (l. 1).

This material worth is further evident both in the descriptions the jeweller gives it and in the comparisons he makes between it and other precious and beautiful things. The courtly description suggests the pearl's refined physical qualities:

So rounde, so reken in vche araye,  
So smal, so smoþe her sydez were . . .  
(ll. 5-6)

in a deliberately visual and tactile manner.

Its preciousness is stressed in the relationship that is established between it and spices ("Per wonys þat worþyly, I wot and wene/My precious perle wythouten spot," ll. 47-48), which in the Middle Ages were relatively rare and expensive, and with the beauty of nature at large.

Þat spot of spyse3 mot nede3 sprede,  
Per such ryche3 to rot is runne;  
Blome3 blayke and blwe and rede  
Per schyne3 ful schyr agayn þe sunne.  
Flor and fryte may not be fede  
Per hit doun drof in molde3 dunne;  
For vch gresse mot grow of grayne3 dede;  
No whete were elle3 to wone3 wonne.  
Of goud vche goude is ay bygonne;  
So semly a sede mo3t fayly not,  
Þat spryngande spyce3 vp ne sponne,  
Of þat precios perle wythouten spotte.  
(ll. 25-36)

The metaphor of regeneration effectively draws together the sensuality and materiality of the pearl. The

beautiful flowers generate beautiful flowers when their seeds are put into the ground.<sup>43</sup> Therefore, this beautiful seed should do likewise now that it is lost in the ground. In addition to this, the very choice of harvest time for a setting with its fulness, richness, ripeness--the bounty of nature come to satisfying completion--suggests earthly "wele" and sensual indulgence. Thus, it is quite clear that for the jeweller, the pearl is on the whole an object of worldly delight.

The dreamer's appreciation of his situation is also demonstrably materialistic and worldly. His vision of the forest is resplendent in the most mundane of fashions. The leaves of the trees are "as bornyst syluer" (l. 78); the banks of the river "bene of beryl bryȝt" (l. 110); the stones under the water are "emerad, saffer, oþer gemme gente" (l. 118); the very gravel under his feet are "precious perleȝ of oryente" (l. 82), nearly as valuable as his own lost pearl. This garden is not just temperate, beautiful and rich. It is excessively so. Everything glitters and shines so much that one is led to agree with Patricia Kean, that the garden is "a studied appeal to the senses."<sup>44</sup>

<sup>43</sup>Edward Vasta, "Pearl: Immortal Flowers and the Pearl's Decay," JEGP, 66 (1967), 519-31.

<sup>44</sup>The Pearl, p. 96.

The dreamer's expressed attitude towards this garden is equally mundane. As the jeweller, he found little enduring consolation in the first garden for his great loss. However, as the dreamer, in this garden he exults. He is so overcome with the splendour of the place that the unbearable grief he felt only moments before, a grief so fierce that it denied him the consolation of the "kynde of Kryst" (l. 55), quite utterly vanishes.

The adubbemente of þe downeȝ dere  
 Garten my goste al greffe forȝete.  
 (ll. 85-86)

The uncircumscribed wealth is so great a comfort to him that he repeats his statement of complete restoration only a few lines further on.

The dubbement ȝe dere of doun and daleȝ,  
 Of wod and water and wlonk playneȝ,  
 Bylde in me blys, abated by baleȝ  
 Fordidden my stresse, dystryed my payneȝ.  
 (ll. 121-24)

That the dreamer's refreshment and his concern lie purely within the physical wealth and adornment of the place is amply clear from the use of the word "adubbement" (or some variation of it) which occurs a total of ten times in the space of sixty lines—an average of once every six lines. Wealth in surfeit it would seem is the jeweller-dreamer's basic criterion for joy.

The excesses of material decoration and ornamentation are quite in keeping with the theme of this

garden, too. As Heiserman notes of the opening of the vision, we with the dreamer "rise on a crescendo of 'more and more' delight."<sup>45</sup> Indeed, as far as the dreamer is concerned, "more and more," is the theme of the garden: "More and more, and yet wel more" (l. 144). So much that the dreamer is astounded by it all.

More of wele wat3 in þat wyse  
 7en I cowþe telle þa3 I tom hade,  
 For vrbely herte my3t not suffyse  
 To be tenþe dole of þo gladne3 glade.  
 (ll. 133-36)

Indeed, it could very well be the paradise the dreamer thinks it is.

The concatenation of delight heaped upon delight climaxes for the dreamer when he encounters the figure of the Pearl-maiden. Although we may not be so certain, the dreamer is convinced that she is his lost pearl.<sup>46</sup> Once again, however, it is his materialistic sensibility that is manifested through his joy at finding her. He is overcome entirely with her physical appearance and the hope that he will never again lose her. He lingers appreciatively over the wealth of her habiliment, "hir

<sup>45</sup>Heiserman, p. 167A.

<sup>46</sup>That the pearl as object can also be represented convincingly in the dreamer's eyes as a maiden is not in the least illogical. The very machinery of dream-vision allows such associations to be made. See Constance B. Heatt, The Realism of Dream Visions (The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1967).

araye ryalle" (l. 191) decorated with pearls of "ryal prys."  
 Her mantle is "bounden bene/Wyth þe myryeste margarys at  
 my deuyse/þat euer I seþ 3et with myn ene" (ll. 198-200);  
 "Her cortel of self sute schene,/Wyth precios perleþ al  
 vmbepy3te" (ll. 203-4); her crown "Of mariorys and non  
 oper ston/Hiþe pynakled of cler quyrt perle./Wyth flurted  
 flowereþ perfet vpon" (ll. 206-8). All this richness of  
 dress impresses his mundane sense of values, but before  
 the pearl set on her breast even the dreamer's materialis-  
 tic mind boggles:

A manneþ dom mozt dryþly demme,  
 Er mynde mozt malte in hit mesure.  
 (ll. 223-24)

That the poet intends the jeweller to be regarded in the  
 light of his materialism and worldliness is evident. The  
 richness, the fineness of detail, the appeal to the senses  
 in these first four parts all point to that fact.

However, there have been indications as well  
 throughout these sections that the jeweller-dreamer is a  
 misguided man. For example, the dreamer's joy at finding  
 his jewel and his great desire to possess it as he formerly  
 did consumes his spirit and blinds him utterly to the  
 significance of the intuition which he had earlier ("I  
 hoped þat gostly watþ þat porpose," l. 185) when he first  
 espied the Pearl-maiden approaching. Further, the maiden's

pointed remark "'Sir 3e haf your tale mysetente'" (l. 257) emphasizes the jeweller-dreamer's miscomprehension both of the meaning of his complaint and of the meaning of the experience through which he is going.

Through the Pearl-maiden's criticism the poet is indicating quite explicitly that the pearl has for the jeweller-dreamer an inordinate attractiveness. From the first it caused him to disregard the spiritual aspect of his nature. It even caused him to forget his own "wrange".

Syþen in þat spote hit fro me sprange,  
Ofte haf I wayted, wýchande þat wele,  
Þat wont wat<sub>3</sub> whyle deuoyde my wrange  
And heuen my happe and al my hele.

(ll. 13-16)

The jeweller's "wrange" that he so readily forgets strongly suggests his covetousness of the pearl and inordinate grief over its loss.<sup>47</sup> The jeweller is so agonized over its loss that his "breste in bale bot bolne and bele" (l. 18) and returns to the site often waiting "wyschande þat wele". In anguish he wrings his hands and collapses (Bifore þat

<sup>47</sup>Hillmann, "Some Debateable Words", p. 241; also her edition The Pearl (Notre Dame: Notre Dame U.P., 1961), p. 78, n. ll. 14-18; Conley, "Pearl and a Lost Tradition", p. 332. Admittedly Sister M.V. Hillmann's glossing of "deuoyde my wrange" as "to make nought of my sin" (Pearl, p.3) does seem to stretch a little the meaning of "deuoyde" if not "wrange". Even so allowing Gordon's gloss, "to cast out my sorrow", to assume priority the meaning implicit in the passage is the same; that the jeweller has allowed a material object to assume too great a control over his state of well-being--greater in fact than "kynde of Kryst".

spot my hond I spenned/For care ful colde þat to me caȝt"  
ll. 49-50).

Indeed, it is a sympathetic heart we might extend to the jeweller were it not for the poet's cautionary directives. The jeweller's grief is a "deuely dele," a "dreary sorrow" as Gordon glosses it, but also it is a "wicked grief" as Hillmann glosses it,<sup>48</sup> because the grief moves beyond all bounds of reason. Its source is a wretched wilful will that ignores the consolation offered to it. It ignores the "kynde of Kryst," a phrase obviously carefully chosen for its consolational dimensions which undoubtedly include the natural consolation of the garden, the consolation of natural reason, the consolation of Christ's example, and the consolation of the teaching of the Church. In the light of the jeweller's stubborn wilfulness before reason, Conley sees added to the jeweller's sin the guilt of stultitia "which consists of a man plunging his sense into earthly things, whereby his sense is rendered incapable of perceiving Divine things."<sup>49</sup>

<sup>48</sup>The M.E.D. gives the meaning "dull and desolate" for defli (deuely) as an adjective and the meaning "fiendishly and wickedly" for develi (deuely) as an adverb. It is certainly possible that there was some fluidity of meaning between the two.

<sup>49</sup>Conley, p. 344.

Just as his occupation with the mundane is not forgotten as the jeweller 'becomes' the dreamer, neither is the idea of his <sup>covetousness</sup> forgotten. The garden "per oper<sup>50</sup> gayne þo bonke<sub>3</sub> brade" (l. 138) which he thinks is Paradise is clearly not Paradise. This garden of delight which gives "more and more" is not a summum bonum in any but the most blatantly worldly sense. Like the things of this world it is an antithesis of the very nature of summum bonum. Where it should satisfy, it indulges and inflames desire. By giving "more and more" it leads the dreamer into further excesses of delight and into further dissatisfaction. As he sees what new delights await him over a hill he advances eagerly, hungrily, covetously.

The poet gives another brief hint that this is not Paradise. He suggests that the dreamer believes himself to be led on by Fortune ("Þat fryth þer fortwne forth me fere<sub>3</sub>," l. 98) and he notes that it is the property of Fortune to give "more and more."

As fortune fares þer as ho frayne<sub>3</sub>,  
 Wheþer solace ho sende oper elle<sub>3</sub> sore,  
 Þe wy<sub>3</sub> to wham her wylle ho wayne<sub>3</sub>  
 Hytte<sub>3</sub> to haue ay more and more.

(ll. 129-32)

<sup>50</sup>I have rejected Gordon's emendation of "oper" to "ouer." the MS gives "oper" and the meaning is quite clear. Facsimile Reproduction of Cotton Nero A.x (1923; rpt. London: Oxford U. P., 1955), EETS 162.

The association of these delights with the gifts of Fortune is important because for the dreamer who responds as he does to these goods there is grave danger. Caught in Fortune's snare of materiality, he will discover with the "more," the less--the tragedy of Fortune's fickle ways. But more importantly he will find himself forever caught in the grips of sin and he will suffer the terrible tragedy of damnation.

The purpose of the Pearl-maiden is to teach the jeweller-dreamer the nature of his proper good if he is to avoid the tragedy into which he is heading. Ignoring the dreamer's question if she is his pearl, for the question is quite irrelevant to her, she proceeds directly into her instruction, for as Ackerman says, she takes "her teaching duties seriously."<sup>51</sup> Her criticism is centred very explicitly upon the dreamer's materialistic frame of mind and worldly point of view. Using a dialectic of reason, the Pearl-maiden directs her first arguments to the dreamer's intellect in order to make him recognize his deficiencies. Allowing the pearl to assume an undetermined abstract nature, the maiden explains that this fate he laments for the pearl would certainly not be cause for such grief as

<sup>51</sup>Ackerman, p. 618.

his, for here the pearl is safe and secure. Allowing the pearl to assume a more physical quantity (the way he understands it best), she remonstrates with his "mad porpose" in grieving for a transient thing. In his eyes, the pearl is to be exclusively possessed and to be grieved in loss. In her terms, it is only a "raysoun bref," it is "bot a rose ~~that~~ flowred and fayled as kynde hyt gef" (ll. 269-70). Next the maiden tries to make the dreamer conscious of the providential plan of God. His complaint against "wyrd," she understands to be a complaint against the very scheme which God has devised for man, since "wyrd" is itself divinely guided. Indeed, she even uses the argument Lady Philosophy used on Boethius:

"And þou hat3 called þy wyrde a þef,  
~~Þ~~at o3t of no3t hat3 mad þe cler;  
~~Þ~~ou blame3 þe þote of þy meschef,  
~~Þ~~ou art no kynde jueler."  
 (ll. 273-76)

However, the dreamer's intent is so much upon the Pearl-maiden as an object to be possessed that, although he remarks that her words are "genty1 sowe3," it is evident that he has missed completely the point of her criticism and the meaning of her instruction. It is obvious in his expression of joy at what he doubtlessly regards as his good fortune.

"Iwysse," quod I, "my blysfol beste,  
 My grete dystresse þou al todraweþ.  
 To be excused I make requeste;  
 I trawed my perle don out of daweþ.  
 Now haf I fonde hyt, I schal ma feste,  
 And wony wyth hyt in schyr wod-schaweþ,  
 And loue my Lorde and al his laweþ  
 Þat hatþ me broþt þys blys ner.  
 Now were I at yow byþonde þise waweþ,  
 I were a ioyful jueler."

(ll. 279-88)

His lack of wisdom in knowing the limitations of his own human nature and in asserting his obedience to God's laws only now that he has found his pearl, provokes the maiden. Her strong and emphatic response to his stupidity ("Wyborde 3e men? So madde 3e be!" l. 290) is indicative of how we are to regard his "ioye."

Realizing that her pupil has not understood what she has rationally explained about Providence, much less his own place within the divine scheme, she tries another tack to break through the affinity he has with the world which blinds him to the larger view. She attacks his lack of faith in what he cannot comprehend. ("I halde þat iueler lyttel to prayse/Þat leueþ wel þat he seþ wyth yþe," ll. 301-2). As Thomas the Apostle was, so is he able only to comprehend and to accept what manifests itself concretely before him. The realm of the spiritual escapes him, just as it escapes him that he can see the maiden but that she is not there materialiter. His mistrust, she

explains, is of God. His trust in his own senses, she defines as "sorquydryȝe"--both pride and presumption--presumption that he is right because he deems he is; pride in his ability to judge that right for himself as he judges good pearls. He even presumes to join the maiden, yet he demonstrates no real knowledge of what or where either of them are. To his presumptuous decision to remain with her, the maiden has this reply:

Me þynke þe burde fyrst aske leue,  
 And ȝet of graunt þou myȝteȝ fayle.  
 (ll. 316-17)

The concern of the maiden (and of course the poet) is to establish in the dreamer's consciousness by means of reason or by reason of belief the importance and the reality of the salvation-damnation truth. However, all the dreamer comprehends is that he may lose possession of the pearl again.

'Demeȝ þou me,' quod I, 'my swete,  
 To dol agayn, þenne I dowyne.  
 Now haf I fonte þat I forlete,  
 Schal I efte forgo hit er euer I fyne?  
 Why schal I hit both mysse and mete?  
 My precios perle dotȝ me gret pyne.  
 What serueȝ tresor, bot gareȝ men grete  
 When he hit schal efte wyth teneȝ tyne?  
 Now rech I neuer for to declyne,  
 Ne how fer of folde þat man me fleme.  
 When I am partleȝ of perle myn,  
 Bot durande doel what men may deme?'  
 (ll. 325-36)

In his stubbornly materialistic way, the dreamer still

regards her as an object of his own rather than the divine agent as she now appears to be to us. In the midst of the delight of his rediscovery of her, he is in fear and anguish lest he lose her again. He is obviously still bound tightly to the wheel of Fortune as he has been throughout.

Taking yet another tack, the maiden now rebukes him for his manifest selfishness and appeals to his sense of spiritual impotence. "**D**ow demeꝝ noꝝt bot doel-dystresse" (l. 337), she criticizes. Such sorrows are "lureꝝ lesse" in comparison with what is really at stake here. Besides, before God what ability has he to shape his own ends? Accordingly she counsels him to humility and to pray for God's mercy. Strangely enough, at this the dreamer seems to acquiesce. Before this reminder and these counsels his selfishness and his pride seem to collapse. His speech takes on tones of contrition and humble apology:

'Ne worþe no wrathþe vnto my Lorde,  
 If rapely I raue, spornande in spelle.  
 My herte watꝝ al wyth mysse remorde,  
 As wallande water gotꝝ out of welle.  
 I do ay in hys myserecorde.  
 Rebuke me neuer wyth wordeꝝ felle,  
**V**aꝝ I forloyne, my dere endorde,  
 Bot kyeꝝ me kyndely your coumforde,  
 Pytosly þenkande vpon þysse:  
 Of care and me ȝe made accorde,  
**F**at er watꝝ grounde of alle my blysse.'  
 (11. 362-72)

Although he seems to demonstrate some comprehension of divine mercy, it is evident that even in this contrite pose, his self-interest is foremost in his mind. He still looks upon her as his pearl and it is still from his being with her that he derives his joy.

'My blysse, my bale, 3e han ben bope.  
 Bot much þe bygger 3et wat3 my mon;  
 Fro þou wat3 wroken fro vch a woþe,  
 I wyste neuer quere my perle wat3 gon.  
 Now I hit se, now leþe3 my loþe.  
 (ll. 373-77)

One quickly discovers that it is not her lesson that has moved him so much as her anger working upon his fear that he will once again lose possession of the pearl. In his fear he indulges her even to engage her with further conversation. His wish is to keep her with him at any cost, and not to antagonize her.

Her pleasure, "'Nowe blysse; burne, mot þe bytyde'" (l. 397) at what appears to be his progress is very quickly dissipated when his materialistic outlook reveals itself once more. Assuming a spiritual identification with him,<sup>52</sup> which he fails to grasp very clearly,

<sup>52</sup>Sister M. V. Hillmann in her edition suggests that the maiden here symbolizes the jeweller-dreamer's own soul, "If as an artist he [the poet] must make the vision-maiden express herself in such a way as to sustain the dreamer's delusion that she is his lost pearl, as a teacher he is careful to keep before his readers, or listeners, the important lesson of the poem, namely, that attachment to earthly treasure is a hindrance to eternal salvation. Hence, the maiden reminds the dreamer that when his pearl fell to the ground, his soul--which she here symbolises--was spiritually immature." p. 89, n. ll. 411-12.

she proceeds to explain the nature of her joyful heavenly condition. However, he demonstrates himself to be much less concerned with her joy than with her rank and how she merits it. He is incredulous when she explains her position, and she explains that for God all things are possible.

'The court of þe kyndom of God alyue  
 Hat3 a property in hytself beyng:  
 Alle þat may þerinne aryue  
 Of alle þe reme is quen oþer kyng,  
 And neuer oþer 3et schal de pryue,  
 Bot vchon fayn of opere3 hafyng  
 And wolde her coroune3 wern worþe þo fyue,  
 If possyble were her mendyng.  
 Bot my Lady of quom Jesu con spryng,  
 Ho halde3 þe empyre ouer vus ful hy3e;  
 And þat dysplese3 non of oure gyng,  
 For ho is Quene of cortaysye.

(ll. 445-56)

But such is beyond the dreamer's power of evaluation and whereas his former query ("Blysfyl,' quod I, 'may þys be trwe?/Dysplese3 not if I speke error'" ll. 421-22), if somewhat indignant was polite, his objection now he expresses vehemently. "'Þysself in heuen ouer hy3 þou heue'" (l. 472), he accuses her. "'I may not traw, so God me spede, /þat God wolde wrype so wrange away'" (ll. 487-88).

The injustice that he perceives here is based upon the same worldly outlook that has marked him throughout. Relying wholly "upon his earthly standard of value he" cannot begin to accept such a departure from what he

considers true injustice."<sup>53</sup> He can only conceive of and measure reward by earthly standards because his vision is so entirely earthbound. He demonstrably lacks the rational ability to understand what she tells him, and the faith to accept it.

Patiently with the parable of the vineyard, she tries to explain the justice of divine rewards and the mercy inherent in it; that for God "þer is no date of hys godnesse" (l. 493). However, because the dreamer has not learned the lesson of faith that the maiden tried to impart to him earlier, the parable and its pointed moral are completely lost on him. The dreamer has no place in his hierarchical system of values for the concept; indeed, he "refuses to acknowledge, or even to recognize her point of view; instead, he continues to advance earthly standards in opposition to her heavenly ones."<sup>54</sup> From irrationality, he urges her to reason!

'Me þynke þy tale vnresounable.  
 Goddeȝ ryȝt is redy and euermore rert,  
 Oþer Holy Wryt is bot a fable.  
 In Sauter is sayd a verce ouerte.  
 Þat spekeȝ a poynt determynable.  
 "Þou quyteȝ vchon as hys desserte,  
 Þou hyȝe kyng ay pretermynable."  
 Now he þat stod þe long day stable,

<sup>53</sup>Charles Moorman, The Pearl-Poet (New York: Twayne Pubs. Inc., 1968), p. 59.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., p. 59.

And þou to payment con hym byfore,  
 Þenne þe lasse in werke to take more able,  
 And euer þe lenger þe lasse, þe more.'  
 (ll. 589-600)

By his earthly standards equal pay demands equal work.

There can be no other way, no other justice.

Forced to counter his challenge that she has taken her reward unjustly the maiden attempts once again to explain to him the great mercy of God, the nature of baptism, in essence the great providential scheme of salvation. Although her arguments may touch upon the same matter as the fourteenth-century disputes over the doctrines of grace and merit in the plan of salvation, the emphasis here is not one of such disputation. Just as she was not concerned with the ranking of the blessed, she is not concerned with the quantification of grace. Her concern is with stripping away the film of exactly such worldliness, materialism and self-interest that blinds the dreamer to the fact of salvation and the measureless mercy of God who rewards all equally to their fullest capacity.<sup>55</sup>

All the maiden's teaching ultimately focusses upon the sacrifice of Christ and the need of men for the saving grace of baptism. "Þe grace of God is gret innogh"

<sup>55</sup>It is true that the maiden says that the just man who pleads only righteousness to heaven "may be innome" (l. 703). However, she is not saying that good works are of no avail; rather, that there is doubt as to whether the righteous man who has not accepted the message of Christ and availed himself of baptism--the virtuous pagan will be saved simply because of his righteousness. This cannot be known for it lies within the inscrutable will of God.

to work this salvation, the poet has her repeat five times in as many stanzas. It is great enough to atone for the sin of Adam through which

Al wer we dampned for þat mete  
 To dyȝe in doel out of delyt  
 And syþen wende to helle hete,  
**P**erinne to won wythoute respýt;  
 (ll. 641-44)

and to save the children of Adam, who are born in and ever prone to sin. This is the nature of the justice she knows and this is the core of the lesson that she has been trying to teach the dreamer all along--that he must come to believe fully in Christ and the efficacy of God's plan of salvation. To do this he must come to understand fully the difference between the earthly and the heavenly, between the material and the spiritual, between the wilful self and the innocent self. Hence, she urges him to be like the jeweller in Matthew 13:45 who "solde alle hys goud, boþe wolen and lynne,/To bye hym a perle watȝ mascelleȝ" (ll. 731-32). She counsels him in the traditional counsel of the Church to "forsake þe worlde wode/And purchase þe perle maskelleȝ" (ll. 743-44).

However, the end of all this instruction is still not apparent to the dreamer. He wants only to know "quat kyn offys/Bereȝ þe perle so maskelleȝ" (ll. 755-56).

Of the relationship of the maiden to the Lamb all he can remark is:

Quat kyn þyng may be þat Lambe  
**Þ**at þe wolde wedde vnto hys vyf?  
 Ouer alle oþer so hyȝ þou clambe  
 To lede wyth hym so ladyly lyf.  
 So mony a comly on-vnder cambe  
 For Kryst han lyued in much stryf;  
 And þou con alle þo dere out dryf  
 And from þat maryag al oþer depres,  
 Al only þyself so stout and styf,  
 A makeleȝ may and maskelleȝ.

(ll. 771-78)

The dreamer reveals himself to be no further ahead in his comprehension of this lesson than at the first of it. To this incredible dullness and obstinacy there is no rational reply possible. The maiden gives up her argument. Reason, parable, exposition have all failed to make him conscious of his blindness. All that remains is, as Heiserman notes, for her to appeal to his will, to his desire.

Abandoning exposition for simply descriptive explanation, she tells him of the nature of the heavenly reward possible for him. Her speech betrays the perfection of her joy and he begins to desire what he could not comprehend by reason nor accept by faith. His desire to hear more evokes from him what no amount of argument could. "I am bot mokke and mul" (l. 905) and "bustwys as a blose" (l. 911), he acknowledges. Yet although his desire is awakened, his comprehension is not much improved.

He thinks of her Jerusalem in terms of the earthly city, and he requests to be brought to it as he formerly requested to remain with her. Before his desire, it seems, even God's laws must give way. She quickly and emphatically dispels this notion. "'~~I~~at God wyl schylde'" (l. 965). However, he is to be granted a vision of it, since it seems that it is the only way through which he might learn the lesson she has spent so long in giving.

The vision he has of the Heavenly Jerusalem is in striking contrast to the vision he had of the garden. Where the garden was characterized by indiscriminate adornments and ever-increasing wealth, the Heavenly Jerusalem is characterized more by the symbolic gems of the twelve tribes of Israel, and with sweetness, light and joy than with its other splendours. What is particularly of importance in this description is that the joy, the delight, is stressed as being complete and constant. There is no increase of it, no "more and more and yet wel mare" as in the earthly garden. Here the summum bonum is a constant. Nothing, no one "pat bereȝ any spot an-vnder mone" (l. 1068), can enter, for that which is mutable, fallen, earthly is excluded from the Heavenly Jerusalem. The dreamer does not hear this, as he has not heard any of the lesson or the counsel the maiden has given him. The delight of it

overcomes him and he desires to possess it as he once possessed the pearl. Impetuously, selfishly, insanely, he tries to cross the stream. The result is tragic for him, for he loses his marvellous vision.

Like the dichotomous symbol of the pearl, the figure of the jeweller and the figure of the narrator are separate and different. I do not mean by this that they do not share character similarities. Because they are one in the person of the jeweller-dreamer, quite obviously they do share. By separate and different, I mean that their roles and fates are different. It is the figure of the jeweller who begins and ends the narrative, while it is the figure of the dreamer who actively participates in the adventure. The dreamer experiences the tragedy, while the jeweller remains potentially tragic—sadder but wiser at the end of the poem.

The jeweller is a man caught in the machinations of the material world. Limited in his vision by his humanity and his obvious desire for the goods of the world, he does not even suspect that his spiritual life might be endangered. His existence is either a celebration of the bounty of Fortune's "wele" or a lament for its loss. Thus, both in terms of the world and in terms of heaven, the jeweller is a tragic figure. Already he has suffered

the tragedy of Fortune in his possession and loss of the pearl. Latently, he is a potential victim of spiritual tragedy for his materialism has led him into sin.

Through the allegory of the dream-vision, the jeweller as dreamer is given both a lesson on his spiritual nature and his proper good, and as well an example of the tragedy that awaits him should he fail to appreciate his situation and reform his life. What is happening to the dreamer, allegorically is what could happen to the jeweller if he were to continue stubbornly and blindly as the dreamer does. The vision reveals that the dreamer, blinded by his materialism and his fallen human nature cannot and will not see. Through all the Pearl-maiden's instruction even to the vision of the Heavenly Jerusalem, he has persistently advanced his own wilful self-interest before the truth of her lesson. At the end he is no further ahead than when he began his adventure into the garden. Despite her two previous warnings that he cannot be with her, despite the displeasure he knows she will take from his rash action, he wilfully advances the cause of his own pleasure.

Delyt me drof in y3e and ere,  
 My mane3 mynde to maddyng malte;  
 Quen I se3 my frely, I wolde be þere,  
 By3onde þe water þa3 ho were walte.

I þoʒt þat noþyng myʒt me dere  
 To fech me bur and take me halte,  
 And to start in þe strem schulde non me stere,  
 To swymme þe remnaunt, þaʒ I þer swalte.  
 (ll. 1153-60)

The dreamer's end is tragic. Rather than being allowed to participate further in the glorious vision, he loses it.

Of raas þaʒ I were rasch and ronk,  
 ʒet rapely þerinne I watʒ restayed.  
 For, ryʒt as I sparred vnto þe bonc,  
 Þat brathþe out of my drem brayde.  
 (ll. 1167-70)

It is but a short step to see the poet's message. The dreamer's loss of the vision of the Heavenly Jerusalem is the same damnation awaiting the jeweller, if he fails to learn the lesson of the maiden. But although the poem allows for this moral to be drawn for the "life" of the dreamer, the poem itself is not completed. The effect of this tragic event upon the jeweller must yet be measured. This is done in the closing frame to the whole.

It is true that by association with the dreamer, the jeweller can be viewed as a tragic figure. In a sense it is he as well who loses the vision. Indeed, he does know that he has lost something joyous through his actions as dreamer and he grieves.

Me payed ful ille to be outfleme  
 So sodenly of þat fayre regioun,  
 Fro alle þo syʒteʒ so quyke and queme.  
 (ll. 1177-79)

However, it is only by this association that we can say that the jeweller has suffered a spiritual tragedy. Like the confusion he feels towards all of this ("I raxled, and fel in gret affray," l. 1174), we too must be doubtful. The distinction between the jeweller and the dreamer that the poet has drawn is not intended to be precise. The psychology of the dream is never clear in an objective sense. Besides, unlike the dreamer, the jeweller has learned something from the tragic events he has witnessed.

Ouer þis kyul þis lote I laȝte,  
 For pyty of my perle enclȝin,  
 And syþen to God I hit bytaȝte  
 In Kyrsteȝ dere blessyng and myn  
 Þat in þe forme of bred and wyn  
 Þe preste vus scheweȝ vch a daye.  
 He gef vus to be his homly hyne  
 Ande precios perleȝ vnto his pay.  
 (ll. 1205-12)

The most we can demonstrably conclude of the jeweller is that he remains a potential for tragedy should he ignore the lesson he seems to have understood. But then that is very much the essence of most of the Christian tragedies of the Middle Ages. It is sufficient to point out the actual tragedy of Fortune's ways and the potential for the tragedy of damnation. After all, the controlling purpose of Christian tragedy is to teach men how to avert that final tragedy to which they are heading if they obey the call of Hammon over the promise of God. Hence the significance of the lines "My goste is gon in Godeȝ grace" (l. 63) and "I hoped þat gostly watȝ þat porpose" (l. 185). The purpose of the whole dream is indeed "gostly" and the spirit of the jeweller is indeed guided by the grace of God. As the Pearl-maiden explains, "e grace of God is gret inoghe" to save allsinners. Through the events of the vision, the jeweller is given the opportunity to learn the nature of his sin and the danger in which his soul lies should he pursue such obstinate and material ways as he did in the opening stanzas as jeweller and in the dream as dreamer. Accordingly, with the lesson learned he can turn his

own potential tragedy into the comedy of everlasting life.

The perspective of the poet is that of the divine. He knows that through salvation mankind's tragedy can be turned to comedy if one attends to one's spiritual good. The lesson of the Pearl is this lesson learned and lost. The jeweller has learned, but the dreamer has lost. For the audience, to whom the lesson is really directed, the outcome should be, if not more positively successful, then at least not more tragic. As men the audience remain potential tragic victims, but as beneficiaries of the double instruction of the lesson of the Pearl-maiden and of the example of the jeweller-dreamer such tragedy should be averted. Through the experience of the dreamer we have seen the result of worldliness. By objective evaluation, we can hopefully replace our own attachment for the world with love of the spiritual; replace our earthly vision with the divine perspective and be saved both from the tragedy of Fortune and of damnation. Although the dreamer has suffered his tragedy, both the jeweller and the audience can avert theirs. This process of learning is the purpose, the action, the essence of Christian tragedy.

## Chapter Five

### 'Troilus and Criseyde' and 'The Testament of Cresseid':

#### The Idea of the Whole

##### I

#### Troilus and Criseyde:

Chaucer's Understanding of the Tragic Mode.

Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde is a tragedy both in the Fortuna sense of the medieval tragic mode, and in the Christian sense as well. More properly speaking, then, it is a tragedy of the synthesis—the complete mode. Using conventions which are partly in the tradition of Fortune<sup>1</sup> and partly in the Christian perspective, Chaucer presents an example of a tragedy of frustrated love underlying which is the potential for a far greater spiritual tragedy inherent in the very fabric of human nature

<sup>1</sup>References to Fortune and her attributes are many. For example: I, ll. 138-40, ll. 215-17, ll. 835-54; II, ll. 281-94; III, ll. 617-23, l. 1420, ll. 1714-15; IV, ll. 1-14, ll. 260 ff., ll. 323-26, ll. 384-92, ll. 600-2, l. 1189, ll. 1586-89, ll. 1681-82; V, ll. 463-64, ll. 1457 ff., ll. 1541-47, ll. 1714-15, ll. 1744-45, ll. 1758-64. F. N. Robinson ed., The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, op. cit.. All quotations will be made to this edition parenthetically within the text.

itself. Accordingly, when Fortune, the wheel, the de casibus, mutability, felicity, free will, contempt of the world, divine providence unite in the tragedy of Troilus, Chaucer not only demonstrates the fulness of his tragic sensibility, but his nature as a Christian and a serious thinker.<sup>2</sup> The expression of tragedy, and the potential for tragedy is the full "purpose" and "sentence" of Troilus and Criseyde.

Chaucer sees the pivotal centre of the tragedies of Troilus and Criseyde to lie in the nature and pursuit of happiness—true felicity—as it can be attained by man. Just as Boethius did, Chaucer recognizes that this is the essential purpose of man. As well, he sees directly related to this pursuit the operation of fortune, destiny, free will and providence. Hence, in the poem the relationship that both Troilus and Criseyde see between their respective pursuits and each of these functionalities determines the nature and degree of the

<sup>2</sup>Despite the habit of compulsive ironists to turn the poem upside down in search of irony, the tendency in Troilus scholarship is and has been to view the poem seriously. That Chaucer himself intended his tragedy to be considered in a serious light is evidenced by his dedication to Gower and Strode. It is a sincere dedication of a careful and thoughtful poem to serious and thoughtful men. Even if one chose to read ironically Chaucer's dedication to these men, its ultimate dedication "to that sothefast Crist" (V, l. 1860) cannot be construed in any other than a serious way.

tragedy. The intended moral, the lesson of the tragedy is the enlightenment of the audience to the real nature of tragedy and to their own potential as tragic victims should they fail to recognize the message of the poem.

Both Troilus and Criseyde pursue "joie," although each seeks it from a different motivation and understands it differently. That love becomes the means to this perfect end is appropriate. Chaucer has cut directly through most of the other felicities Boethius ultimately rejects to arrive at the one human relationship that draws closest to true felicity. Because it is love that created the universe, love that orders and guides it, love that enables salvation, it is love that ennobles men and binds them to each other and to God. However, although love is the highest of human felicities, it is also the most unstable and must be recognized in this light. Although it is "part of the direction which nature, by her laws, gives to all living beings," "love like Fortune, imposes a pattern of ascent and descent, natural death as well as natural life."<sup>3</sup> It is within this paradox

<sup>3</sup>Patricia M. Kean, "Chaucer's Dealings with A Stanza of Il Filostrato and the Epilogue of Troilus and Criseyde," MAE, 33 (1964), p. 39 and p. 43; see also Sister Anne Barbara Gill, Paradoxical Patterns in Chaucer's Troilus (Washington: The Catholic U. of America Press, 1960), p. xviii.

that Chaucer effectively examines the personal tragedies of Troilus and Criseyde.

As Bernard Jefferson notes, Criseyde displays "an intellectual interest in felicity. Above all things she desires the highest happiness possible of attainment."<sup>4</sup> How intellectual this pursuit is, is debatable. What is more important, however, is that Criseyde does very much desire to be happy and to be secure in that happiness. As she herself claims: "Felicite clepe I my suffisaunce" (V, l. 763). Indeed, throughout the poem Chaucer closely identifies happiness in Criseyde's mind with her personal security.<sup>5</sup> From the time that Calchas deserts her, to the time when she picks up with Diomedes, they are her only concern. For her the two are virtually interchangeable, and when she does act, it is always towards attaining security and happiness.

Security is Criseyde's felicity. Her tragedy is in its exclusive pursuit. Her initial fears of Trojan

<sup>4</sup>Chaucer and the Consolation, p. 126.

<sup>5</sup>C. S. Lewis, The Allegory of Love (London: Oxford U. P., 1936; rpt. 1959), pp. 185-87, also sees security and fear as playing a central part in her tragedy; see also Pasquale di Pasquale Jr., "'Sikernesne' and Fortune in Troilus and Criseyde," PQ, 49 (1970), 152-63, who regards security as the pursuit of both of them.

reprisal for her father's treason ("Wel neigh out of hir wit for sorwe and fere," I, l. 108), are turned to happiness by Hector's promise to her:

"Lat youre fadres treson gon  
Forth with meschaunce, and ye youreself in joie  
Dwelleth with us, whil yow good list, in Troie."  
(I, ll. 117-19)

Further she finds security and happiness in the strict practice of the widow's virtues. To Pandarus' invitation "Do wey youre book, rys up, and lat us daunce,/And lat us don to May som observaunce" (II, ll. 111-12), she replies with horror:

"I? God forbede!" quod she, "be ye mad?  
Is that a widewes lif, so God yow save?  
By God, ye maken me right soore adrad!  
Ye ben so wylde, it seemeth as ye rave.  
It sate me wel bet ay in a cave  
To bidde and rede on holy seyntes lyves;  
Lat maydens gon to daunce, and yonge wyves."  
(II, ll. 113-19)

However, this "joie" she has is challenged in two ways by the intrigue of Pandarus on behalf of Troilus. It first threatens her present security and secondly it suggests to her the promise of far greater security and far greater happiness in the love of Troilus. That Criseyde feels threatened by Pandarus' initial advances and his invitation to love, Chaucer makes amply clear. Her initial reaction is full of fear: "God forbede! . . . be

ye mad?/By God, ye maken me ryght soore adrad!" The advice to love is equally met with doubt and fearful depression.

"Allas, for wo! Why nere I deed?  
For of this world feyth is al agoon.  
Allas! What sholden straunge to me doon,  
When he that for my beste frend I wende  
Ret me to love, and sholde it me defende."  
(II, ll. 409-13)

This impression of Criseyde is underscored by the Narrator's own comment:

Criseyde, which that wel neigh starf for feere,  
So as she was the ferfullest wight  
That myghte be, and herde ek with hire ere  
And saugh the sorwful ernest of the knyght,  
And in his preier ek saugh noon unryght,  
And for the harm that myght ek fallen moore,  
She gan to rewe, and dredde hire wonder soore.  
(II, ll. 449-55)

It is further completed by Criseyde's own remarks that she must play carefully if she is to preserve her security in the community ("What men wolde of hit deme I kan nat seye:/It nedeth me ful sleightly for to pleie." II, ll. 461-427).

More than any supposed code binding her to love, and more than any fear for loss of her chastity,<sup>6</sup> Chaucer sustains Criseyde's psychological motivation by suggesting that what leads her to accept Troilus' love is largely the fear that she could be blamed for both

<sup>6</sup>S. Nagarajan, "The Conclusion to Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde," EIC, 13 (1963), p. 3.

Troilus' and Pandarus' deaths.

And with a sorowful sik she sayde thrie,  
 "A! Lord! What me is tid a sory chaunce!  
 For myn estat lith now in jupartie,  
 And ek myn emes lif is in balaunce;  
 But natheles, with Goddes governaunce,  
 I shal so doon, myn honour shal I kepe,  
 And ek his lif"--and stynte for to wepe.

"Of harmes two, the lesse is for to chese;  
 Yet have I levere maken hym good chere  
 In honour, than myn emes lyf to lese."

(II, ll. 463-72)

Indeed, Pandarus has worked his plan well, for from this basic insecurity which he arouses, Criseyde begins to see the possibility of a greater security and a greater felicity in love and she comes to desire it. The difficulties that she perceives in a love relationship-- "jalousie," "thrallen libertee," "dredful joie," a "stormy lyf"--are easily dispelled by Antigone's song warmly praising the bond of love and its promise of security and bliss.

"For nevere yet thi grace no wight sente  
 So blisful cause as me, my lif to lede  
 In alle joie and seurte, out of drede."

(II, ll. 831-33)

Criseyde's query, "Lord, is ther swych blisse among/These loveres, as they konne faire endite?" (II, ll. 885-86) reveals her curiosity about love. The narrator's own comment suggests that this curiosity has even at this point been resolved in Criseyde's heart.

And ay gan love hire lasse for t'agaste,  
 Than it did erst, and synken in hire herte,  
 That she wex somewhat able to converte.  
 (II, ll. 901-3)

Since there will be no loss to her present security if  
 she should love, and there might be in refusing,

"If I wolde outrelliche his sighte flee,  
 Peraunter he myghte have me in dispit,  
 Thorough whicch I myghte stond in worse plit;"  
 (II, ll. 710-12)

and since Troilus is handsome, strong and a prince of Troy,  
 she allows herself to be slowly manipulated into a total  
 involvement with Troilus, and a total happiness.

Criseyde's story is a process of seeking  
 felicity. Her tragedy is that she never finds it. Her  
 father, her marriage, the Trojan court, and finally the  
 perfect love, all fail her; all these "joies" for her  
 are fraught with instability and sorrow. As Criseyde  
 herself observes about felicity and the way of the world:

"O God!" quod she, "so worldly selynesse,  
 Which clerkes callen fals felicitee,  
 Imedled is with many a bitternesse!  
 Full angwissous than is, God woot," quod she,  
 "Condicoun of veyn prosperitee;  
 For either joies comen nought yfeere,  
 Or elles no wight hath hem alway here.

"O brotel wele of mannes joie unstable!  
 With what wight so thow be, or how thow pleye,  
 Either he woot that thow, joie, are muable,  
 Or woot it not; it mot be oon of tweye.  
 Now if he woot it nought, how may he seye

That he hath verray joie and selynesse,  
That is of ignoraunce ay in derknesse?

"Now if he woot that joie is transitorie,  
As every joie of worldly thyng mot flee,  
Than every tyme he that hath in memorie,  
The drede of lesyng maketh hym that he  
May in no perfit selynesse be;  
And if to lese his joie he sette a myte,  
Than semeth it that joie is worth ful lite."  
(III, ll. 813-33)

Indeed, the world is a transitory and mutable place where "wele" is too soon turned to "woe," and it is tragic to be part of this instability. However, this is not the limit of Criseyde's tragedy merely to fail in finding true felicity. More, her tragedy is that she continues to seek her happiness where she has never yet found it, and where she seems to know it cannot be found. Her problems and concerns in the Greek camp are the same as those in Troy. The progression (though rapidly increased) and the end result are the same. Acting as both a Pandarus and a Troilus in one, Diomedes increases Criseyde's insecurity by telling her Troy is doomed, and affords her the security and happiness she is so desperately seeking. ("And thenketh wel, ye shal in Grekis fynde/A moore parfit love, er it be nyght,/Than any Troian is, and more kynde,/And bet to serven yow wol don his myght." [V, ll. 918-217]). Criseyde takes the opportunity. The wheel turns again.

Although she knows the world is mutable she continues to place her trust in it just as though it were not.<sup>7</sup> She is like both aspects of her argument (III, ll. 813-33): in fear that "joie" will pass; in darkness and ignorance about true felicity. She fails to comprehend that part of the problem lies within her own inconstant nature and the inconstant nature of the objects of her trust. However, Criseyde does not see this for she is continually limited by her own self-interest. For her, felicity must always be identified with what is best for her.<sup>8</sup> Ignoring experience and reason she chooses Diomede, "syn I se ther is no bettre way" (V, l. 1069), "syn I no bettre may" (V, l. 1072). Her "To Diomede algate I wol be trewe" (V, l. 1071) promises the kind of future Henryson so accurately suggests in Testament of Cresseid.

<sup>7</sup>Murray F. Markland, "Pilgrims Errant: The Doubleness of Troilus and Criseyde," RS (Washington), 33 (1965), p. 69, extends the same idea to Troilus (with which I agree) and to Pandarus as well (with which I disagree, not believing that Pandarus ever deceives himself).

<sup>8</sup>J. L. Shanley, "The Troilus and Christian Love" (1939) in Chaucer, ed. E. Wagenknecht (New York: Oxford U. P., 1959), p. 390; Howard Patch, On Rereading Chaucer (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U. P., 1939), pp. 75-76; Charles Muscatine, Chaucer and the French Tradition (Berkeley: U. of California Press, 1957), pp. 153-57. Nagarajan's conclusion that Criseyde "is miserable when she falses Troilus because the dogma that she must love, that love is obligatory is stifling her instinct for loyalty" (p. 6) is so much nonsense. Criseyde chooses Diomede because she deems it opportune to do so.

As D. W. Robertson strongly remarks:

She meant to be true to Troilus too, but she is actually faithful only to her own selfish desires of the moment. As one of the most distinguished of her critics has said, Criseyde "takes the easiest path." She drifts in the world's winds, a "gilded butterfly." Her beauty is sensuous beauty of the world and her fickleness is the fickleness of Fortune.<sup>9</sup>

Chaucer's exposition of the nature of true happiness and the tragedy attending upon the pursuit of false happiness is at most only partly complete in Criseyde's tragic experiences. Full of the limitations of human nature, vain, self-interested,<sup>10</sup> like Eve she is weak and unable to stand fast in the "trouthe" she perceives.<sup>11</sup> Her conclusions that the world is false lead her (and lead us) no further than once more upon the wheel of Fortune. Her example provides no answer. It merely tells the old stories of the Monk's Tale once more.

However, if Criseyde's tragedy in the pursuit of felicity leads to no conclusion, Troilus' pursuit certainly

<sup>9</sup>"Chaucerian Tragedy," pp. 115-16; see also Charles Berryman, "The Ironic Design of Fortune in Troilus and Criseyde," Ch.R., ' (1967-68), p. 2; L. J. Durham, "Love and Death in Troilus and Criseyde," Ch.R., 3 (1968-69), p. 2.

<sup>10</sup>T. P. Dunning, "God and Man in Troilus and Criseyde," in English and Medieval Studies, eds. Norman Davis and C. L. Wrenn (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1962), p. 181.

<sup>11</sup>Shanley, p. 390.

does lead somewhere. For Troilus, if love is to be (and it appears that it must, "For may no man fardon the lawe of kynde," [I, l. 238]), then it must be an ideal perfect love—the ideal of felicity itself—a happiness free from the mutability of the world, free from the turning of Fortune's wheel. It must be like the celestial love that he recognizes as the guiding principle of the universe.<sup>12</sup>

"Love that of erthe and se hath governaunce,  
 Love, that his hestes hath in heuenes hye,  
 Love, that with an holson alliaunce  
 Halt peples joyned, as hym lest hem gye,  
 Love, that knetteth lawe of compaignie,  
 And couples doth in vertu for to dwelle,  
 Bynd this acord, that I have told and telle.

"That that the world with feith, which that is stable,  
 Diverseth so his stowndes concordynge.  
 That elementz that ben so discordable  
 Holden a bond perpetuely durynge,  
 That Phebus mote his rosy day forth brynge,  
 And that the mone hath lordshipe over the nyghtes—  
 Al this doth love, ay heried by his myghtes!

"That that the se, that gredy is to flowen,  
 Constreyneth to a certeyn ende so  
 His flodes that so fiersly they are growen  
 To drenchen erthe and al for evere mo;  
 And if that Love aught lete his bridel go,  
 Al that now loveth asondre sholde lepe,  
 And lost were al that Love halt now to-hepe.

"So wolde God, that auctor is of kynde,  
 That with his bond Love of his vertu liste  
 To cerclen hertes alle, and faste bynde,  
 That from his bond no wight the wey out wiste;  
 And hertes colde, hem wolde I that he twiste  
 To make hem love, and that hem liste ay rewe  
 On hertes sore, and kepe hem that ben trewe!"  
 (III, ll. 1744-71)

<sup>12</sup>Dunning, p. 166.

Troilus' story is a pursuit towards the ideal of felicity. Accordingly, he tends to view his love with Criseyde in the most idealistic sense<sup>13</sup> and to measure his success against this ideal vision. For Troilus, the mark of the ideal is constancy, fidelity, in short "sothfastnesse."<sup>14</sup> Unfortunately, and this is where Troilus' tragedy begins, he fails to realize that if not the love he is experiencing then the object of that love and the means whereby he comes to attain that love are in themselves not free from the deceit of the world.

Pandarus is certainly no agent of Divine Providence. More than one critic has suggested his attachment to the world and his servitude to Fortune. Theodore Stroud refers to him as "the philosophical antithesis of Troilus as he defends Fortune against Troilus' strictures."<sup>15</sup> Robertson characteristically goes so far as to call him "a blind leader of the blind (I, 625-30), a priest of Satan."<sup>16</sup> Certainly his attitudes and his methods are

<sup>13</sup>Muscatine, pp. 132-36; Durham, p. 9.

<sup>14</sup>Dunning, p. 166; Alfred David, "The Hero of the Troilus," Spec, 37 (1962), 566-81.

<sup>15</sup>"Boethius' Influence on Chaucer's Troilus," MP, 49 (1951), p. 6A.

<sup>16</sup>"Chaucerian Tragedy," p. 99.

of the world. His intrigues on Troilus' behalf are not much short of Mephistophelian or Machiavellian. Chaucer's depiction of him retiring from the lovers' chamber ("And bar the candle to the chymeneye" [l. 114]) leaves no doubt in mind as to his expectation of the two lovers' tryst.

But this Troilus ignores, for the attaining of Criseyde is all he sees. This in turn puts his ideal love into a different perspective. Although Troilus speaks idealistically, perhaps it is merely a euphemism to cover his real motivation. "The blynde lust, the whych that may not laste" (V, l. 1824) where "lust" becomes more particularly the pleasures of sexual indulgence. As Ida Gordon observes: "If Troilus' love had been of the kind he praises in his hymns he would not have been subject by it, as he was, to Fortune's rule."<sup>17</sup> Perhaps such sexual allusions as those in Troilus' apostrophe to Criseyde's house, so observantly noted by Robertson<sup>18</sup> and John Adams,<sup>19</sup> and expanded upon by Gordon<sup>20</sup>

<sup>17</sup>The Double Sorrow of Troilus (Oxford: at the Clarendon Press, 1970), p. 40.

<sup>18</sup>"Chaucerian Tragedy," p. 116.

<sup>19</sup>"Irony in Troilus' Apostrophe to the Vacant House of Criseyde," MLQ, 24 (1963), 61-65.

<sup>20</sup>Gordon, pp. 133-44.

are intended to point out ironically Troilus' sexual subjection to Criseyde. Indeed, Troilus does seem to love Criseyde in a very sexual way.<sup>21</sup> Because it is an important and a beautiful passage, I quote it at length:

This Troilus in armes gan hire streyne,  
 And sayde, "O swete, as evere mot I gon,  
 Now be ye kaught, now is ther but we tweyne!  
 Now yeldeth yow, for other bote is non!"  
 To that Criseyde answerde thus anon,  
 "Ne hadde I er now, my swete herte deere,  
 Ben yold, ywis, I were now nought heere!"

O, sooth is seyde, that heled for to be  
 As of a fevre, or other gret siknesse,  
 Men moste drynke, as men may ofte se,  
 Ful bittre drynke; and for to han gladnesse,  
 Men drynken ofte peyne and gret distresse;  
 I mene it here, as for this aventure,  
 That thorough a peyne hath founden al his cure.

And now swetnesse semeth more swete,  
 That bitternesse assaied was byforn;  
 For out of wo in blisse now they flete;  
 Non swich they felten syn that they were born.  
 Now is this bet than bothe two be lorn.  
 For love of God, taken every womman heede  
 To werken thus, if it comth to the neede.

Criseyde, al quyrt from every drede and tene,  
 As she that juste cause hadde hym to triste,  
 Made hym swich feste, it joye was to seene,  
 What she his trouthe and clene entente wiste;  
 And as aboute a tree, with many a twiste,  
 Bytrent and writh the swote wodebynde,  
 Gan ech of hem in armes other wynde.

<sup>21</sup>This despite Patch's suspicion: "I cannot help wondering whether in Troilus' real lack of stamina (to draw it mild), the lack of forthright masculinity, she was left a little unsatisfied, readier perhaps to move elsewhere." On Rereading Chaucer, p. 89.

And as the newe abaysed nyghtyngale,  
 That stynteth first whan she bygynneth to synge,  
 What that she hereth any herde tale,  
 Or in the hegges any wyght stiryng,  
 And after siker doth hire vois out ryng,  
 Right so Criseyde, whan hire drede stente,  
 Opned hire herte, and tolde hym hire entente.

And right as he that seth his deth yshapen,  
 And dyen mot, in ought that he may gesse,  
 And sodeynly rescous doth hym escapen,  
 And from his deth is brought in sykernesse,  
 For al this world, in swych present gladnesse  
 Was Troilus, and hath his lady swete.  
 With worse hap God lat us nevere mete!

Hire armes smale, hire streghte bak and softe,  
 Hire sydes longe, flesshly, smothe, and white  
 He gan to stroke, and good thrift bad ful ofte  
 Hire snowisshe throte, hire brestes rounde and lite:  
 Thus in this hevене he gan hym to delite,  
 And therwithal a thousand tyme hire kiste,  
 That what to don, for joie unnethe he wiste.

(III, ll. 1205-53)

And very discreetly even the narrator absents himself to  
 leave the lovers in their moment of bliss.

However, even if we assume that Troilus is  
 enjoying this love from his idealistic point of view, he  
 is still twice deceived: by himself and by Criseyde.  
 There have been warnings that such a love as Troilus  
 envisions cannot be. Troilus' first encounter with love  
 is full of woe. For the first while after he set eyes upon  
 Criseyde he was plunged in grief. His song, "If no love  
 is, O God what fele I so?" (I, ll. 400-34) is a typical  
 lover's complaint. His subsequent progression in love is  
 an alteration of "joie" and misery for him. Either the

progress is too slow ("Frend, shal I now wepe or synge?"  
 [II, 1. 952]), or else the success is shadowed with future  
 failure. The very moment of greatest bliss is marred  
 first by the argument about jealousy and then mocked by  
 the arrival of morning. Criseyde laments:

"Myn hertes lif, my trist, and my plesaunce,  
 That I was born, allas, what me is wo,  
 That day of us moot make disseveraunce!  
 For tyme it is to ryse and hennes go,  
 Or ellis I am lost for evere mo!  
 O nyght, allas! why nyltow over us hove,  
 As longe as whan Almena lay by Jove?"

"O blake nyght, as folk in bokes rede,  
 That shapen art by God this world to hide  
 At certeyn tymes wyth thi derke wede,  
 That under that men myghte in reste abide,  
 Wel oughten bestes pleyne, and folk the chide,  
 That there as day wyth labour wolde us breste,  
 That thow thus fleest, and deynest us nought reste."

"Thow doost, allas, to shortly thyn office,  
 Thow rakle nyght, ther God, maker of kynde,  
 The, for thyn haste and thyn unkynde vice,  
 So faste ay to oure hemysperie bynde,  
 That nevere more under the ground thow wynde!  
 For now, for thow so hiest out of Troie,  
 Have I forgon thus hastili my joie!"  
 (III, 11. 1422-42)

And Troilus too complains:

"O cruel day, accusour of the joie  
 That nyght and love han stole and faste iwryen,  
 Acorsed be thi comyng into Troye,  
 For every bore hath oon of thi bryghte yēn!  
 Envyous day, what list the so to spien?  
 What hastow lost, why sekestow this place,  
 Ther God thi light so quenche, for his grace?"

"Allas! what have thise loveris. the agylt,  
 Dispitous day? Thyn be the peyne of helle!"

For many a lovere hastow slayn, and wilt;  
 Thy pouryng in wol nowher lat hem dwelle.  
 What profrestow thi light here for to selle?  
 Go selle it hem that smale selys grave;  
 We wol the nought, us nedeth no day have."

And ek the sonne, Titan, gan he childe,  
 And seyde, "O fool, wel may men the dispise,  
 That hast the dawyng al nyght by thi syde,  
 And suffrest hire so soone up fro the rise,  
 For to disese loveris in this wyse.  
 What! holde youre bed ther, thow, and ek thi Morwe!  
 I bidde God, so yeve yow bothe sorwe!"  
 (III, ll. 1450-70)

Of this mutability, of this uncertainty Troilus is aware, but like Criseyde he chooses to ignore it. In the same way that she pursued security, he pursues his ideal of love. As Charles Berryman observes, Troilus tries to make the fact of his love arrest the movement of Fortune's wheel.<sup>22</sup>

Troilus' discovery that the love he believed would be perfect felicity is subject to the laws of mutable Fortune is tragic. Accordingly, his realization is met first with lamentation:

"Fortune, allas the while!  
 What have I don? What have I the agylt?  
 How myghtestow for rowthe me bygile?  
 Is ther no grace, and shal I thus be spilt?  
 Shal thus Criseyde away, for that thow wilt?  
 Allas! how maistow in thyn herte fynde  
 To ben to me thus cruwel and unkynde?"  
 (IV, ll. 260-66)

<sup>22</sup>Berryman, "The Ironic Design," p. 3.

and then with complaint against the gods of all nature,  
as the narrator tells us:

He corseth Jove, Appollo, and ek Cupide,  
He corseth Ceres, Bacus, and Cipride,  
His burthe, hymself, his fate, and ek Nature,  
And, save his lady, every creature.  
(V, ll. 207-10)

However, this simple realization that love is subject to fate and Fortune is by no means the extent of Troilus' tragedy. This he could live with. Rather, his tragedy is compounded and made insufferable. The heightening of Troilus' tragedy Chaucer effects by allowing Troilus the process of rationalizing his own tragic situation. From his consideration of free will and determinism, Troilus concludes that his life has been destined tragic and there is nothing he can do to prevent it. He must accept his fate. But one might counter that simply acknowledging his fate as predetermined does not move Troilus' tragedy beyond Criseyde's with her acknowledgement that the world is mutable. It matters little whether one is caught in Fortune's wheel or Providence's destiny, the end results being much the same. What heightens Troilus' tragedy is that despite this recognition he blindly pursues his ideal of love.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>23</sup>Walter Clyde Curry, "Destiny in Troilus and Criseyde," in Chaucer Criticism, eds. Schoeck and Taylor, vol. 2, p. 65.

Whereas Criseyde's tragedy is the acceptance of Fortuna's control, and a compromise of love with practicality and self-interest, Troilus' tragedy is a refusal to compromise his love at all:

"I wol not be untrewe for no wight;  
But as her man I wol ay live and sterve,  
And nevere other creatures serve."

(IV, ll. 446-49)

This dogged perseverance both leaves him with his tragedy of Fortune and at the same time increases it because he ultimately discovers that the object of his constancy, Criseyde, in whom he blindly placed all his trust and hope, is in her love unstable.

Than spak he thus, "O lady myn, Criseyde,  
Where is youre feith, and where is youre biheste?  
Where is youre love? where is youre trouthe?" he seyde.  
"Of Diomede have ye now al this fēeste!  
Allas! I wolde han trowed atte leeste  
That, syn ye nolde in trouthe to me stonde,  
That ye thus nolde han holden me in honde!

"Who shal now trowe on any othes mo?  
Allas! I nevere wolde han wend, er this,  
That ye, Criseyde, koude han chaunged so;  
Ne, but I hadde agilt and don amys,  
So cruel wende I nought youre herte, ywis,  
To sle me thus! Allas, youre name of trouthe  
Is now fordon, and that is al my routhe.

"Was ther non other broche yow liste lete  
To feffe with youre newe love," quod he,  
"But thilke broch that I, with teris wete,  
Yow yaf, as for a remembraunce of me?  
Non other cause, allas, ne hadde ye  
But for despit, and ek for that ye mente  
Al outrely to shewen youre entente.

"Thorough which I se that clene out of youre mynde  
 Ye han me cast; and I ne kan nor may,  
 For al this world, withinne myn herte fynde  
 To unloven yow a quarter of a day!  
 In corsed tyme I born was, wellaway,  
 That yow, that doon me al this wo endure,  
 Yet love I best of any creature!"

(V, ll. 1673-1701)

His tragedy of Fortune and the world he is able to live  
 with; this second he is not.

"And certeynly, withouten more speche,  
 From hennesforth, as ferforth as I may,  
 My owen deth in armes wol I seche."

(V, ll. 1716-18)

What I have already said of the tragedies of  
 Troilus and Criseyde by no means exhausts what there is to  
 say about the poem. I have pointed out only Chaucer's  
 demonstration of the tragic "facts of life"—"joie"  
 becomes "woe," the world is mutable, man is subject to  
 Fortune's inconstancy--the elements of the Fortuna tradi-  
 tion. Chaucer has much to say of the Christian tragic  
 experience and the whole idea of tragic potential, and  
 this also requires analysis if the full meaning of  
Troilus and Criseyde as tragedy is to be realized.

Although Troilus' tragedy is made the more  
 pathetic of the two, and although the narrator's sympathies  
 seem to be more with Troilus than with Criseyde, the  
 conclusions to which Troilus comes about the tragic con-  
 dition of man and the nature of his tragedy are as

untenable as final conclusions as is Criseyde's acceptance of Diomedes. Those who would agree with Troilus--

"Troilus and Criseyde thus are victims of a concatenation of circumstances largely outside of their control";<sup>24</sup>

"Fate dominates in the Troilus. . . . There is no escape for anybody. . . . The case is hopeless . . . and Chaucer bows to its everlasting antinomy. . . ." <sup>25</sup>--that Troilus' sorrows are both unavoidable and unmerited fail to realize that aspect of medieval tragedy which precludes such an opinion. Patch's observation that Troilus' discussion on predestination leads essentially nowhere<sup>26</sup> is, as far as Chaucer is concerned, absolutely right. In Willard Farnham's words, "Chaucer has deliberately given Troilus the arguments of Boethius which represent the shortsighted opinions of a sufferer blinded by his misfortune, and he has omitted the answer of Philosophy to the erring Boethius which triumphantly provides for free will."<sup>27</sup> Troilus' denial of free will is only an attempt to avoid responsibility

<sup>24</sup>Jefferson, p. 121.

<sup>25</sup>George L. Kittredge, Chaucer and His Poetry (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U. P., 1915; rpt. 1946), pp. 112-14.

<sup>26</sup>"Troilus on Predestination," (1918) in Chaucer, ed. E. Wagenknecht, pp. 377-82.

<sup>27</sup>The Medieval Heritage, pp. 145-46.

for playing a part in his own tragedy.<sup>28</sup> Although Troilus is allowed his opinion, that does not mean it is a right one; nor does it make it Chaucer's own. Chaucer is no determinist.<sup>29</sup> He is completely orthodox—"Chaucer the Christian lived according to Christian morality based on the commandments of God, the teaching of Christ and of His Church"<sup>30</sup>—and therefore for him man is responsible for his choices and their consequences. As Max James observes:

Man, therefore, in Chaucer's view is not the puppet of mechanical destinal forces. Created in the image of God, man—like God—has free will rooted firmly in reason. Man is responsible for his choices. If he allows reason to rule, all his inner forces will be under proper control.<sup>31</sup>

For Chaucer and his audience, the tragedies of Troilus and Criseyde are not so much the fault of fate or Fortune as they are the fault of Troilus and Criseyde themselves who in their all-consuming search for perfect "joie," love "not wisely but too well" (Othello, V, ii,

<sup>28</sup>Patch, "Troilus on Predestination," p. 374; J. Huber, "Troilus' Predestination Soliloquy: Chaucer's Changes from Boethius," NM, 66 (1965), p. 125.

<sup>29</sup>Patch, "Troilus on Predestination," pp. 370-73; On Rereading Chaucer, pp. 108-20.

<sup>30</sup>A. J. Denomy, "The Two Moralities of Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde," (1950) in Chaucer Criticism, eds. Schoeck and Taylor, p. 147.

<sup>31</sup>"Pre-Chaucerian and Chaucerian Concern with Providence," unpub. diss. (Claremont Graduate School, 1966), p. 154; see also D. W. Robertson, "Chaucerian Tragedy," pp. 88-89.

1. 344).<sup>32</sup> Although they claim to know it, they fail to accept the fact that the world is mutable, transitory and imperfect and they rely upon their love for each other for escape from it. As Shanley says: "The ultimate reason for Troilus' woe was not that he trusted in a woman but that of his own free will he placed his hope for perfect happiness in that which by its nature was temporary, imperfect, and inevitably insufficient."<sup>33</sup> Such is Criseyde's reason as well. Neither Troilus nor Criseyde can find anything but tragedy in the love they have for each other, for it is not each other they seek but perfection and security—the higher perfect love which orders the constant universe. To seek this in a basis of obvious mutability is "blindnesse" and "ignoraunce" and doomed to tragic failure as Chaucer knows.

The problem appears to be one of perspective. The limitations of Troilus and Criseyde are human ones. Neither of them can see beyond the world wherein they live. Criseyde never comes to a view any greater than Fortune's wheel. Troilus on the other hand, although while he is in the world he is "al stereless withinne a boot" (I, l. 416), does come to a greater perspective at the end of the poem.

<sup>32</sup>The Complete Works of William Shakespeare, ed. Hardin Craig (Chicago: Scott Foresman and Co., 1961).

<sup>33</sup>Shanley, p. 386.

Troilus escapes the limitations of his humanity when upon death he is lifted to the "holughnesse of the eighth spere." From this fixed vantage point, he is able for the first time fully to realize the nature of the world, true felicity, and the meaninglessness of life founded upon "The blynde lust, the whych that may nat laste" (V, l. 1824). With this "divine" perspective, he can realize his misdirection and laugh not with the bitterness of his first impression ("and fully gan despise/This wrecched world" [V, ll. 1816-17]), but with sympathy for those who follow his former tragic way of the mutable world; sympathetic laughter attendant upon the irony gained from proper perspective.

The tragedies of Troilus and Criseyde are based in the final analysis, upon Christian principles; so much so that the poem suggests, more, demands a final evaluation based upon such principles. Although the poem is about the tragedies of Troilus and Criseyde, it is readily apparent that Chaucer's real concern is not with these tragedies of Fortune per se. Troilus and Criseyde are pagans and go wherever pagans go when they die. Rather, he is concerned with his audience who while in the world are potential subjects for the Christian tragedy of damnation which underlies Troilus and Criseyde. This is not to

say either that Troilus or Criseyde suffer any spiritual tragedy in the Christian sense. If anything, it might be argued that in attaining the divine perspective of the spheres, Troilus realizes the relative unimportance of the worldly tragedies of Fortune, and hence iterates the comedy of life that ends in salvation. Such an argument is well made and in part right. Troilus' vision does give comic overtones to the tragedy. However, this does not detract from the tragedy through which Troilus has gone before attaining this perspective. Instead, it heightens the entire scope of the poem as tragedy, for the essence of Christian tragedy is that through wilful "blindnesse" and "ignoraunce" a man forgoes his eternal comedy for the false goods of the world. More than the actual tragedies of Fortune, through which Troilus and Criseyde move, it is the potential for Christian tragedy underlying these actual tragedies which is the meaning of the poem.

The tragedy of Troilus and Criseyde is one that can make tragic victims of all men who are not able to understand more about the nature of the world, their primary good, their rational nature, their human limitations than did Troilus and Criseyde. Chaucer's purpose is to explain by example how man is part of the divine

plan, how he must not proceed if he is to attain salvation.

To this end Chaucer counsels:

O yonge, fresshe folkes, he or she  
 In which that love up groweth with youre age,  
 Repeyreth hom fro worldly vanyte,  
 And of youre herte up casteth the visage  
 To thilke God that after his ymage  
 Yow made, and thynkyth al nys but a faire  
 This world, that passeth soone as floures faire.  
 (V, ll. 1835-41)

Nor is Chaucer counselling to forgo the "joie" of the world; rather, he is saying to enjoy it for what it is, transient as a "faire" that one appreciates today but which is gone unlamented tomorrow. He is counselling to put faith where it belongs, in Christ "the lyght of the sovereyn sothfastnesse" (Boece, V, pro. 2, ll. 35-36) who "nyl falsen no wight" (V, l. 1845).<sup>34</sup>

The tragedy of Troilus and Criseyde is a tragedy of Fortune and her tradition, but only after it is a tragedy of ignorance, self-interest and insufficient perspective. Indeed, Chaucer effectively brings together both pagan and Christian elements of the medieval tragic consciousness in an expression of tragedy perhaps not generally understood today, but centred fully upon the modality that is medieval tragedy.

<sup>34</sup>Shanley, p. 395.

## II

The Testament of Cresseid:

## Henryson's Understanding of Chaucer

Many have noted the striking similarities between Chaucer's Troilus and Henryson's Testament.<sup>35</sup> "The most obvious fact about the Testament," Fox states, "is that it is a continuation of Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde, and a companion-piece to the fifth book of that poem."<sup>36</sup> However, in their solicitude over Henryson's individuality and integrity, most are quick to play down the relationship and to assert the "originality" of the poem. They argue: the Testament "is in no sense a sequel to the Troilus,"<sup>37</sup> and "Chaucer's Troilus is a

<sup>35</sup>M. W. Stearns, Robert Henryson (New York: Columbia U. P., 1949); Tatyana Moran, "The Testament of Cresseid and The Book of Troilus," Litera (Studies in Language and Literature, Istanbul), 6 (1959), 18-24; Charles Elliott, ed., Robert Henryson: Poems (Oxford: at the Clarendon Press, 1963), John MacQueen, Robert Henryson (Oxford: at the Clarendon Press, 1967); A. W. Jenkins, "The Mind and Art of Robert Henryson," unpub. diss. (U. of California Berkeley, 1967); Denton Fox, ed., Testament of Cresseid (London: Nelson, 1968); Del Chessell, "In the Dark Time: Henryson's Testament of Cresseid," Crit. Rev. (Melbourne), 72 (1969), 61-72.

<sup>36</sup>Fox, p. 20.

<sup>37</sup>MacQueen, p. 40.

misleading standard by which to measure Henryson's work . . ." <sup>38</sup>

The complete relationship between the two is, however, very significant and no discredit to Henryson. The degree of this complexity is realized by an astute Fox:

But the Testament is also about Chaucer's poem, in the sense that a critical essay is about a piece of literature, or in the sense that the moralitas of one of Henryson's Fables is about the fable. It offers, by implication, remarkably accurate and penetrating analysis of Troilus. <sup>39</sup>

Even Henryson himself suggests this close relationship with this tongue-in-cheek observation:

Quha wait gif all that Chauceir wrait was trew?  
Nor I wait nocht gif this narratioun  
Be authoreist, or fenzeit of the new  
Be sum poeit, throw his inuentioun  
Maid to report the lamentatioun  
And wofull end of this lustie Creisseid,  
And quhat distres scho thoillit, and quhat deid.  
(ll. 64-70) <sup>40</sup>

Indeed, Henryson's understanding of Chaucer's purpose in Troilus and Criseyde is very precise. He knew that for Chaucer, Criseyde was a good example of human

<sup>38</sup>Jenkins, p. 164.

<sup>39</sup>Fox, p. 21.

<sup>40</sup>All quotations will be made to Fox's edition parenthetically within the text.

tragedy: a victim of Fortune, she was blind to and ignorant of her own nature and her own proper good; she accepted the mutable for the immutable, the false for the true, and her own interests above all else. He knew that when Chaucer set Criseyde on her way to the Greek camp and to Diomedes, he set her once more upon Fortune's cycle of "wele and woe." But Henryson also knew that Chaucer was only partly interested in Criseyde. His concern was with Troilus and his audience too. Thus while he sent Criseyde blindly on her tragic way with only the sympathy of the narrator, Chaucer raised Troilus beyond the limits of his tragedy to the eighth sphere and the discovery of the why of his tragedy.

Henryson comprehended perfectly the significance of Criseyde's tragic pattern and Troilus' flight into the heavens, just as he comprehended the full implication of the medieval tragic mode. In the Testament of Cresseid, he demonstrates how complete his understanding is first by recounting the tragic end of Cresseid's wanton life, ". . . the fatall destenie/Of fair Cresseid, that endit wretchitlie" (ll. 63-64), and secondly by doing for Cresseid what Chaucer did for Troilus. It might even be suggested that the Testament be regarded as Cresseid's palinode.

Henryson recognized in Cresseid a tragic figure. The source of her tragedy he saw rooted in her blindness and ignorance of her own nature and manifested in her lust and enslavement to Fortune and the mutable world. Orthodoxly Christian and equally Boethian as Chaucer,<sup>41</sup> Henryson undoubtedly accepted that virtue, constancy, truth and perfect love were the only means to felicity. As Elliott notes:

Henryson accepts, and assumes in his audience, the medieval ethos; the paths of right and wrong and towards bliss or bale are clear and separate. Awareness of felicity beyond the grave compels him to denigrate this life as a compound of fleeting pleasures and perilous temptations.<sup>42</sup>

There is no question of what is the proper order of the world in the Testament. The introduction and the parliament of the gods quickly make that sufficiently clear. Cupid's summons is heard "fra heuin vnto hell" (l. 145), that is, throughout all creation, and the gods

Quhilk hes power of a thing generabill,  
To reull and steir be their greit influence  
Wedder and wind, and coursis variabill . . .  
(ll. 148-50)

order the cosmos by divine principles. They are agents

<sup>41</sup>Jenkins, p. 204: ". . . more aptly a Scottish Boethian, and his (Henryson's) indebtedness to Chaucer's work is limited almost entirely to its Boethian elements."

<sup>42</sup>Elliott, p. xi.

of Providence and act according to laws that have been set for them by a higher agent. Scholars are in agreement on this point. Henryson intends this parliament, if not openly, then allegorically, to represent the power of Divine Providence in the universe. The gods are "destinal forces,"<sup>43</sup> "Divine Harmony,"<sup>44</sup> "in some sense surrogates for God."<sup>45</sup> And as some have more fully observed, their powers and functions are balanced between generation and death, the very process of life itself.<sup>46</sup> Their movements are a demonstration of celestial constancy, and love.

Henryson also makes clear his understanding of the proper order of things in his introduction to the narrative proper. The echoing similarity of the first stanza to the Prologue of the Canterbury Tales is no "by chance" similarity. Henryson deliberately evokes the springtime motif. Spring is the proper time for the regeneration of life; when Natura brings forth the bounty of the world. But more than this, spring is the time for spiritual regeneration, for the sacrifice of the

<sup>43</sup>Elliott, p. xiii.

<sup>44</sup>Jenkins, p. 194.

<sup>45</sup>Fox, p. 34.

<sup>46</sup>Jenkins, p. 194; E. Duncan Aswell, "The Role of Fortune in The Testament of Cresseid," PQ, 46 (1967), p. 476; Fox, p. 34.

pleasures of the flesh for the good of the soul. This is the proper theme of the Canterbury pilgrimages made ideally out of proper service and love of God, for repentance of sin and the salvation of the sinner-- symbolically, the pilgrimage of life towards the City of God.

However, the echo is only that, for the springtime of the Testament is entirely in contrast with the proper order.

Ane doolie sessoun to any cairfull dyte  
 Suld correspond and be equialent:  
 Richt sa it wes quhen I began to wryte  
 This tragedie; the wedder richt feruent,  
 Quhen Aries, in middis of the Lent,  
 Schouris of haill /gart/ fra the north discend,  
 That scantlie fra the cauld I micht defend.  
 (11. 1-7)

In this world, Venus is presented as the counterpart to Natura's role as generatrix. She is the goddess of night, the purveyor of sensual pleasure for its own sake as in Troilus or the Parlement of Foules. The dreamer in the Parlement describes her voluptuousness.

And in a prive corner in disport  
 Found I Venus and hire porter Richesse,  
 That was ful noble and hautayn of hyre port.  
 Dark was that place, but afterward lightnesse  
 I saw a lyte, unnethe it myghte be lesse,  
 And on a bed of gold she lay to reste  
 Til that the hote sonne gan to weste.

Hyre gilte heres with a golden thred,

Ibounden were, untressed as she lay,  
 And naked from the brest unto the hed  
 Men myghte hire sen; and, sothly for to say,  
 The remenaunt was wel kevered to my pay,  
 Ryght with a subtyl coverchef of Valence—  
 Ther nas no thikkere cloth of no defense.  
 (ll. 260-73)

But further unlike these goddesses, Henryson's Venus is cold, redressing in a sense, the balance of Troilus and Criseyde. He has seen through her role as goddess of the hot and lusty game to the other half of her nature as sterile opponent to the natural generative order. Accordingly, the narrator professing to seek the heat of youthful vigour ("My fadit hart of lufe scho wald mak grene," l. 24), turns instead to "ane drink" and the warmth of his fire. Age presumably brings at least a little wisdom.

The stark, cold setting introduces well the tragedy of Cresseid. Contrasted to the proper order of things, her attitudes towards the world, herself, and love are like the spring of the introduction: cold, barren, perverted. As Jenkins notes, Cresseid's springtime pilgrimage is not towards heaven but towards whoredom.<sup>47</sup> Indeed, Henryson through the narrator, continually refers to her activities in the cause of love as lust. First by implication in his simple and dignified rendering of

<sup>47</sup>Jenkins, p. 158.

Troilus' altering hope and sorrow,

Of hir behest he had greit comforting,  
 Traisting to Troy that scho suld mak retour,  
 Quhilk he desyrit maist of eirdly thing,  
 For quhy scho was his only paramour.  
 Bot quhen he saw passit baith day and hour  
 Of hir ganecome, than sorrow can oppres  
 His wofull hart in cair and hevines;  
 (ll. 50-56)

then by association with Diomedes who "had all his appetyte, / And mair, fulfillit of this fair ladie" (ll. 71-72, my italics), Cresseid's character and motivation are impugned. Finally, she is forthrightly revealed by her reported whorish activities in the court. The narrator's reticent "And sum men sayis" (l. 77) only serves to underscore his own critical attitude towards her activities.

Although the narrator accuses her of going "among the Grekis air and lait, / Sa giglotlicke takand thy foull pleasaunce!" (ll. 82-83), he pities and does not blame her. Observantly, Stearns notes that Henryson "declares that Fortune is to blame and that Cresseid is guiltless." However, he is completely wrong when in a footnote he adds that Henryson "taking Cresseid's guilt for granted, found it easy to slip into the habit of blaming it all on Fortune."<sup>48</sup> Rather, although Henryson might disapprove of her activities, any overt judgement of

<sup>48</sup>Stearns, p. 52.

Cresseid on the part of a somewhat sentimental narrator would be out of place, uncharitable, and presumptuous. Cresseid's judgement must come from a greater power than the narrator, or from Cresseid herself. Thus, the narrator safely says:

3it neuertheles, quahat euer men deme or say  
 In scornfull langage of thy brukkilnes,  
 I sall excuse als far furth as I may  
 Thy womanheid, thy wisdome and fairnes,  
 The quhil<sup>l</sup>k Fortoun has put in sic distres  
 As hir pleisit, and nathing throw the gilt  
 Of the--throw wickit langage to be spilt!  
 (ll. 85-91)

The narrator's sympathy is appropriate too, for it is precisely as Cresseid views herself: very much a victim of Fortune's machinations. Throughout most of the poem, she thinks of herself and her love as being manipulated in this way. "Sic is my wickit weird," (l. 385) she laments. "Fell is thy fortoun, wickit is thy weird./Thy blys is baneist, and thy baill on breird!" (ll. 412-13), she complains. Be warned by "My frivoll fortoun, my infelicitee" (l. 454), she advises. "Fortoun is fikkill quhen scho beginnis and steiris" (l. 469), she concludes. Indeed, the content of her complaint characterizes only too well the world that in Cresseid's eyes is a transient and tragic place. Her ubi sunt lament,

'Quhair is thy chalmer wantounlie besene,  
 With burely bed and bankouris browderit bene;

Spycis and wyne to thy collatioun,  
 The cowpis all of gold and siluer schene,  
 Th[y] sweit meitis seruit in plaittis clene  
 With saipheron sals of ane gude sessoun;  
 Thy gay garmentis with mony gudely gown,  
 Thy plesand lawn pinnit with goldin prene?  
 All is areir, thy greit royall renoun!

'Quhair is thy garding with thi greissis gay  
 And fresche flowris, quhilk the quene Floray  
 Had paintit plesandly in euerie pane,  
 Quhair thou was wont full merilye in May  
 To walk and tak the dew be it was day,  
 And heir the merle and mawis mony ane,  
 With ladyis fair in carrolling to gane  
 And se the royall rinkis in thair ray,  
 In garmentis gay garnischit on euerie grane?

'Thy greit triumphant fame and hie honour,  
 Quhair thou was callit of eirdlye wichtis flour,  
 All is decayit, thy weird is welterit so;  
 Thy hie estait is turnit in darknes dour;  
 This lipper ludge tak for thy burelie bour,  
 And for thy bed tak now ane bunche of stro,  
 For waillit wyne and meitis thou had the  
 Tak mowlit breid, peirrie and ceder sour;  
 Bot cop and clapper now is all ago.

'My cleir voice and courtlie carrolling,  
 Quhair I was wont with ladyis for to sing,  
 Is rawk as ruik, full hiddeous, hoir and hace;  
 My plesand port, all vtheris precelling,  
 Of lustines I was hald maist conding--  
 Now is deformit the figour of my face;  
 To luik on it na leid now lyking hes.  
 Sowpit in syte, I say with sair siching,  
 Ludgeit amang the lipper leid, "Allace!"  
 (ll. 416-51)

and her memento mori advice,

'O ladyis fair of Troy and Grece, attend  
 My miserie, quhilk nane may comprehend,  
 My friuoll fortoun, my infelicitie,  
 My greit mischeif, quhilk na man can amend.  
 Be war in tyme, approchis neir the end,  
 And in 3our mynd ane mirrour mak of me:

As I am now, peradventure that 3e  
 For all 3our might may cum to that same end,  
 Or ellis war, gif ony war may be.

'Nocht is 3our fairnes bot ane faiding flour,  
 Nocht is 3our famous laud and hie honour  
 Bot wind inflat in vther mennis eiris,  
 3our roising reid to rotting sall retour;  
 Exempill mak of me in 3our memour  
 Quhilk of sic thingis wofull witnes beiris.  
 All welth in eird, away as wind it weiris;  
 Be war thairfoir, approchis neir [3our] hour;  
 Fortoun is fikkill quhen scho beginnis and steiris.  
 (ll. 452-69)

exemplify this most directly. Even the narrator's earlier  
 identification of Venus with Fortune<sup>49</sup>

Venus was thair present, that goddes [gay],  
 Hir sonnys querrell for to defend, and mak  
 Hir awin complaint, cled in ane nyce array,  
 The ane half grene, the vther half sabill blak,  
 [With] hair as gold kemmit and sched abak;  
 Bot in hir face semit greit variance,  
 Quhyles perfyte treuth and quhyles inconstance.

Vnder smyling scho was dissimulait,  
 Prouocatiue with blenkis amorous,  
 And suddanely changit and alterait,  
 Angrie as ony serpent vennemous,  
 Richt pungitiue with wordis odious;  
 Thus variant scho was quha list tak keip:  
 With ane eye lauch, and with the vther weip.

In taikning that all fleschelic paramour,  
 Quhilk Venus hes in reull and gouernance,  
 Is sum tyme sweit, sum tyme bitter and sour,  
 Richt vnstabill and full of variance,  
 Mingit with cairfull ioy and fals plesance,  
 Now hait, now cauld, now blyith, now full of wo,  
 Now grene as lif, now widderit and ago.  
 (ll. 218-38)

is made appropriate by it, for judging by Cresseid's general

<sup>49</sup>See also Patch, The Goddess Fortuna, p. 95 ff.

attitude, they are undoubtedly so identified in her own mind. Love is also a part of this deceitful world. Indeed, Fortune's inconstancy, "wele to woe," the fickle world, these to Cresseid are the cause and essence of tragedy.

Henryson allows Cresseid her opinion. However, he realizes that there is more to her tragedy than these elements. As Chaucer showed in Troilus, the cause of tragedy is not the world, but ignorance of its true value and one's place in it. Throughout most of the poem Cresseid is totally unaware of the real cause and nature of her tragedy. She sees only the externals of it. She accuses Cupid, Venus, the "craibit goddis," all but herself. And although she seems to admit her guilt by claiming that it is her blasphemy that has brought on her tragedy,

'My blaspheming now haue I bocht full deir;  
 All eirdlie ioy and mirth I set areir.  
 Allace, this day; allace, this wofull tyde  
 Quhen I began with my goddis for to chyde!  
 (ll. 354-57)

we should immediately realize that neither is this correct nor is it any true felt admission of guilt: not correct because the blasphemy is only another example of her blindness and ignorance of herself which are the real causes of her tragedy; no felt admission, because only moments later in the presence of her father, she again

blames her "wicket weird." As Jenkins notes, the blasphemy is merely an attempt on Cresseid's part to blame the gods for a course she set herself and for which she is loath to accept the responsibility.<sup>50</sup> In her "complaint" too Cresseid demonstrates this same attitude. Her lament that wealth is gone, fame and honour gone, physical beauty "decayit," leading to her admonition to all ladies to set example by her, advances her nothing. Rather it is a wallowing in self-pity, "O sop of sorrow, sonkin in cair,/O catiue Creisseid . . ." (ll. 407-8), that leads, if anywhere, into further blindness.

Obviously, then, the cause of Cresseid's tragedy is not blasphemy. Henryson makes it more than clear that her tragedy, although superficially one of Fortune and her wheel, a fall from "wele to woe," is primarily one of blindness and ignorance of herself, the world, and the virtuous life. The cause of Cresseid's tragedy is Cresseid herself. However, just as Chaucer did not leave Troilus in his ignorance, neither does Henryson leave Cresseid in hers. He leads her to see the fulness of her tragedy and its cause.

Against Cresseid's perverted idea of love, Henryson meaningfully juxtaposes Troilus' ideal love. In

<sup>50</sup>Jenkins, pp. 160-61.

his charitable act, Troilus manifests the goodness, nobility and constancy of his love. And the narrator makes certain no one misses it.

For knichtlie pietie and memoriall  
 Of fair Cresseid, ane gyrdill can he tak,  
 Ane purs of gold, and mony gay iowall,  
 And in the skirt of Cresseid doun kan swak;  
 Then raid away and not any word he spak,  
 Pensiwe in hart, quhill he come to the toun,  
 And for greit cair oft syis almaist fell doun,  
 (ll. 519-25)

When Cresseid discovers from the "lipper folk" who it is and why he has given so generously (for Troilus' motivation is necessary to heighten her grief),

"~~S~~one lord hes mair affectioun,  
 How euer it be, vnto 3one Lazarous  
 Than to vs all; we know be his almous";  
 (ll. 530-32)

she falls prostrated by the instant realization of the fulness of the tragedy which she knows she has perpetrated both upon herself and upon Troilus.

'O fals Cresseid and trew knight Troilus!  
 Thy lufe, thy lawtie, and thy gentilnes  
 I countit small in my prosperitie,  
 Sa efflated I was in wantones,  
 And clam vpon the fickill quheill sa hie.  
 All faith and lufe I promissit to the  
 Was in the self fickill and friuolous:  
 O fals Cresseid and trewe knight Troilus!  
 (ll. 546-54)

The relationship between what is true and constant, and what is false and mutable, what is felicity and what is

tragedy she now perceives. The fault she now realizes lay not in Fortune or the mutable world, but in herself who "sa [efflated] in wantones . . . clam vpon the fickill quheill sa hie." Cresseid in her own eyes is seen as responsible for her tragedy.

In the Testament of Cresseid, Henryson points not only to the actual tragedy of Cresseid, but to the potential for tragedy inherent in human nature. When man fails to recognize his true purpose in life and his proper good, he finds himself a tragic victim just as Cresseid was a tragic victim. Thus Henryson, contrary to what many scholars think, points out no specific sin of pride, lust, anger or blasphemy--one might safely include all seven deadly sins--as the reason for Cresseid's tragedy. Rather, he is pointing to that general propensity in man to seek out his humanity instead of his spirituality. Cresseid's tragedy is the result of her preference for those things immediately pleasurable to her: sexuality and frivolous love instead of the loyal and constant love of Troilus. Accordingly, she manifests all the other weaknesses of the flesh as well, for she is entirely of it. As she herself testifies: "My mind in fleschelic foull affectioun/Was inclynit to lustis lecherous." (l. 559)

To this extent, then, Henryson's purpose is

moral. It is to illuminate this tendency in man to seek out the false felicities of the world--those lamented by Cresseid in her complaint, those scorned by Lady Philosophy--and direct it towards a better more perfect goal in virtue, constancy and perfect love. It is for this reason that he shows Cresseid the reason for her tragedy. Like Troilus' vision of the "little earth," it leads her from ignorance to self-knowledge, from the limitations of the human perspective, to the omniscience of the divine. Though not so spectacular as the flight of Troilus, Cresseid's attainment of the divine perspective is equally evident. Her bequest of her body to the worms ("Heir I beteiche my corps and carioun/With wormis and with taidis to be rent" [l. 577-787]) shows that she now sees it in its proper place; and her bequest of her spirit "to Diane, quhair scho dwellis" (l. 587) shows that she now wishes her soul in its proper sphere. Together with her admission of guilt ("Nane but myself as now I will accuse," [l. 5747]), these statements are tantamount to confession and salvation.

Indeed, to have this intent is to know the proper order of things. As Jenkins notes, the poem assumes the overtones of the Divine Comedy of Dante,<sup>51</sup> and it does.

<sup>51</sup>Jenkins, p. 185.

However, just as the palinode in Troilus makes that poem no less a tragedy, neither does this 'palinode' make the story of Cresseid any less a tragedy. Nor does it detract from its power of exemplification of tragic potential. Instead the comic overtone heightens the tragedy, first because it brings Cresseid to the painful realization that she alone is the cause of her tragedy and secondly because it warns, by implication, the Christian of what he will lose if he does not repent in time. Be as Cresseid, Henryson warns, and you will suffer not only as she suffered in the pattern of Fortune's wheel, but the tragedy of the spirit too, for espousal of the world leads to sin and damnation.

Thus, it is evident from Testament of Cresseid that Henryson not only perfectly understood what Chaucer was doing in Troilus and Criseyde, but also understood perfectly the full nature of medieval tragedy. Man can be saved it is true, but only if he first knows what he is, and his citizenship in the City of God, and he makes its attainment his only goal. Otherwise he will expend himself in the pursuit of false felicity, and make himself a victim of Fortune, the mutable world and Satan.

## Chapter Six

### Conclusion

Medieval tragedy must be considered from a critical perspective which is not biased by the famous definition of Aristotle, or else the consideration will be a distorted one. The Middle Ages had no good translation of the Poetics available to it nor did it have much interest in classical poetics per se, so that even the poor translations failed to make any impression on medieval tragedians. Indeed, the only aspect of anything resembling a definition of classical tragedy was gleaned from post-classical writers and that only for the purpose of generic classification.

However, the Middle Ages did have a concept of tragedy which shared something with a classical pagan tradition; the idea of tragedy being the reversal of men's fortunes. In the Middle Ages, this simple idea emerged in a complexity which surpasses by far any classical concept, even perhaps Aristotle's definition.

On the surface the medieval idea of tragedy found its figural representation in the person of Fortune, who at her own whimsy could give men good fortune and material happiness, and then quite arbitrarily take it away again. Together with the wheel image and the de casibus motif, the fall of a man from success, glory, wealth and power to painful humiliation and poverty was conventionally the representation of tragedy.

However, such were largely the superficial trappings of tragedy. The full concept in the Middle Ages was one which was shaped by Christian principles. The idea that man from creation had free will to make moral choices and that to choose wrongly (to sin) leads to tragic consequences, was perhaps the most essential part in the concept of tragedy as a whole. As a result of Adam's wrong choice all mankind lost the benefit of Paradise. As a result of his own wrong choice, an individual loses his soul to eternal perdition.

The Middle Ages knew and understood Adam's fall and the commission of sin as resulting in tragedy. Both were represented very fully in all forms of art and literature. However, this is not to suggest that the Middle Ages misunderstood the sacrifice of Christ as a great miracle which turned spiritual tragedy into the

comedy of everlasting life. Indeed, no age has been more conscious of this than the Middle Ages. Nevertheless, at the same time they were conscious that for the individual salvation came only as the result of virtuous living, and that men were much prone to sin. Salvation as the goal of life's pilgrimage, which could just as easily (or perhaps more easily) be lost as won, instead of alleviating the medieval tragic consciousness fed it and heightened it. Even in the same breath with which salvation was promised, damnation was suggested, threatened and guaranteed. Although the comedy of eternal life was real, the tragedy of eternal damnation and the potential for that tragedy in the lives of men was hardly less real.

Because of these controlling principles, the medieval mind tended to regard and to represent the full concept of tragedy not as Fortune only, nor as damnation only, but as a synthesis of both—a mode wherein Fortune is united and bound by those very principles by which the Middle Ages themselves were bound.

The synthesis found its most popular origin in Boethius' De Consolatione Philosophiae wherein the figure of Fortune was made subject to Divine Providence while at the same time retaining her control over the distribution of the goods of the world. To climb upon her wheel

Boethius showed, was to invite tragedy, for by her nature and the laws by which she governs and is governed, Fortune and all her gifts are mutable.

These ideas found compatibility and thematic development within the Church which, appreciating the fact that the man with his mind upon his proper good would neither be subject to Fortune nor the inherent spiritual danger attendant upon the goods she proffers, counselled contempt for the world. From her vantage point of the divine perspective, she strove to explain how the limitation of the human perspective is the cause of both spiritual tragedy and the tragedy of Fortune. When man is ignorant of his true nature, the true nature of the world, of Fortune, when he does not comprehend his place within the divine plan of God, he is easily confounded by Fortune and lured by her false goods upon her wheel into the tragic pattern of "wele and woe" and finally into perdition. Fortune is the agent, but the fault is man's own. The tragedy is not simple but very complex.

Because of the synthesis between the Fortuna tradition and the Christian concept, medieval tragedy is represented figuratively or superficially by the tragic fall of a man from the wheel of Fortune. Either represented directly or more usually underlying the tragedy of Fortune

is the potential spiritual tragedy of damnation. However, this synthesis exists as a mode or consciousness within the Middle Ages not as a strict definition or formula. Because of this not every tragedy of the Middle Ages represents the full complexity of the mode. Although the mode is equally available for all medieval tragedians to draw upon, as it were, not all utilized its possibilities in the same way or to the same extent. Usage was undoubtedly dictated by the poet's purposes, his interests and his abilities.

The poet of the Morte Arthure, it seems, chooses to make use of the Fortuna element of the mode. He does not of course dismiss the possibility of spiritual tragedy entirely though. After his dream of Fortune, Arthur is counselled to make preparation for his death lest he die in sin and go to hell. However, this aspect of the poem is in no way linked to the Fortuna elements of the actual tragedy. The focus of the poet is upon Arthur's heroic representation, his climb through Fortune's favour to the height of the wheel and then in the very moment of his greatest glory, his fall. Arthur's tragedy is very consciously and deliberately a tragedy of Fortune, no more.

On the other hand, the poet of the Pearl chooses to represent those Christian elements of the

medieval tragic mode. The jeweller-dreamer is very clearly a man whose materialism is leading him into a spiritual tragedy. Of course, Fortune's role is not forgotten here; the jeweller is also a victim of the mutable world; rather, it is played down by the poet who obviously favours the . . . . . approach of the Christian themes. The message is didactic and purposeful. It is the Christian lesson of salvation and damnation conveyed without much use of the figural elements available within the mode.

However, in Troilus and Criseyde and the Testament of Cresseid, both Chaucer and Henryson demonstrate their understanding of the full concept of medieval tragedy and make full use of its possibilities. Using Fortune as a figural representation of Troilus and Criseyde's earthly tragedies, Chaucer also underscores the tragedies with the potential for spiritual tragedy and then heightens them all by giving Troilus the perspective to see the insignificant nature of material tragedy thereby stressing the terrible nature of the other. The same is true for Henryson who, fully conscious of the tragic mode recognized Chaucer's capable treatment of tragedy in Troilus' flight, worked the same kind of effect with the tragedy of Cresseid. Cresseid's tragedy of Fortune (Venus) is rooted in the limitations of her humanity and it has led her into a

potential spiritual tragedy as well. By giving her the perspective to realize her own culpability, Henryson works the same heightening of tragic effect as Chaucer did. For their somewhat comic endings, these tragedies are not diminished but in fact made greater. Such is the fullest understanding of the medieval tragic mode possible. Such is its fullest and greatest and most successful utilization.

To my mind, in order to appreciate medieval tragedy fully, it must be understood fully. It does little good to know it only by its figural representation or even by its separate parts. When it is understood as a mode or consciousness shaped by the Christian attitudes and thought patterns, and with all its various tensions and interplays, then it has meaning. To foster such understanding and to demonstrate its value as a critical tool in the study of medieval literature has been the purpose of this dissertation. In however small way, I hope this has been done. In conclusion I should like to quote these few lines from the Knight, who has patiently attended to what I have said:

"Hoo!" quod the Knyght, "good sire, namoore of this!  
That ye han seyde is right ynough, ywis,  
And muchel moore; for litel hevynesse  
Is right ynough to mucche folk, I gesse."

(Prol. NPT, VII, ll. 2767-70)

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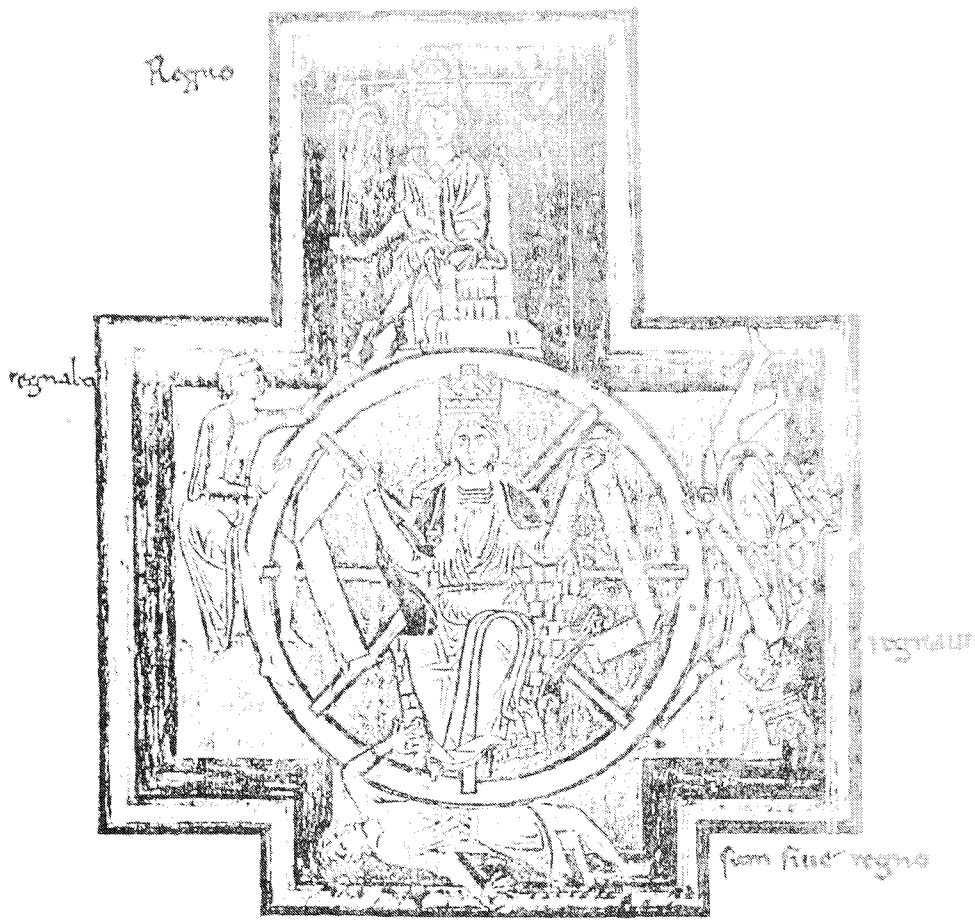
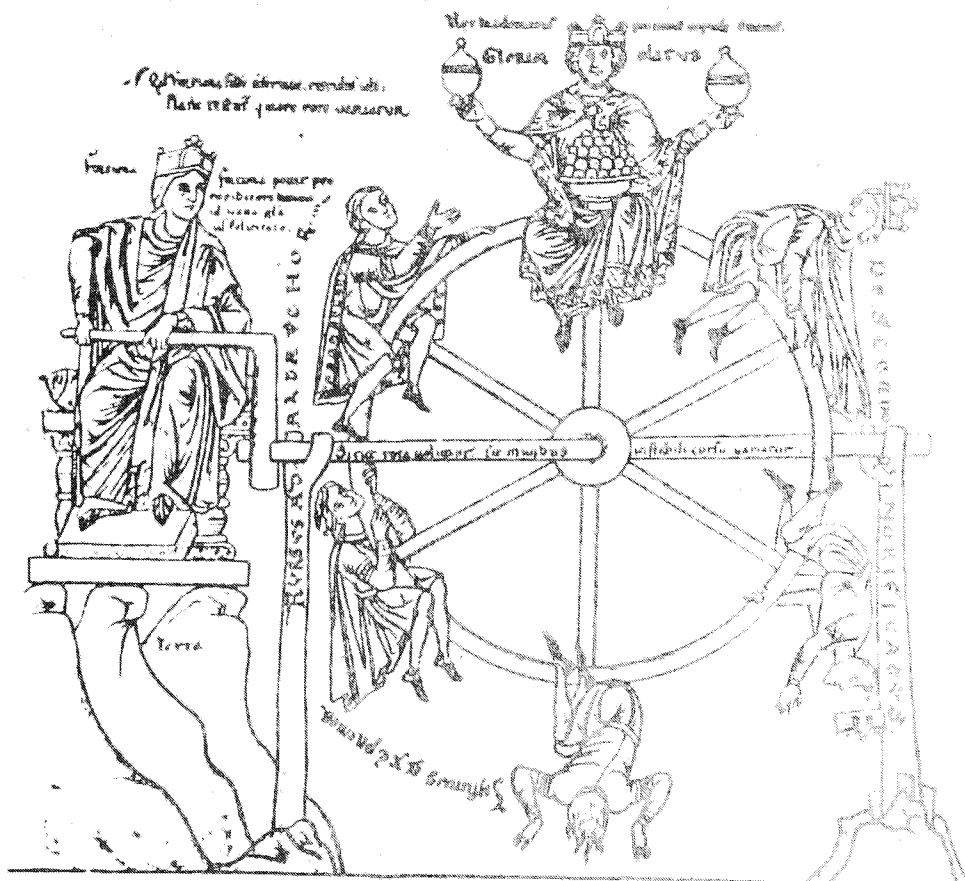


PLATE 1.

Hs. fol. 10: Das Rad der Fortuna. S. XIII



Fol 215

PLATE 2. Herrade de Landsberg, *Hortus deliciarum*, fol. 215 r<sup>o</sup>, s. XII.



PLATE 3.

Heiligenkreuz, 130, fol. 1 v<sup>o</sup>, s. XII; inédite.

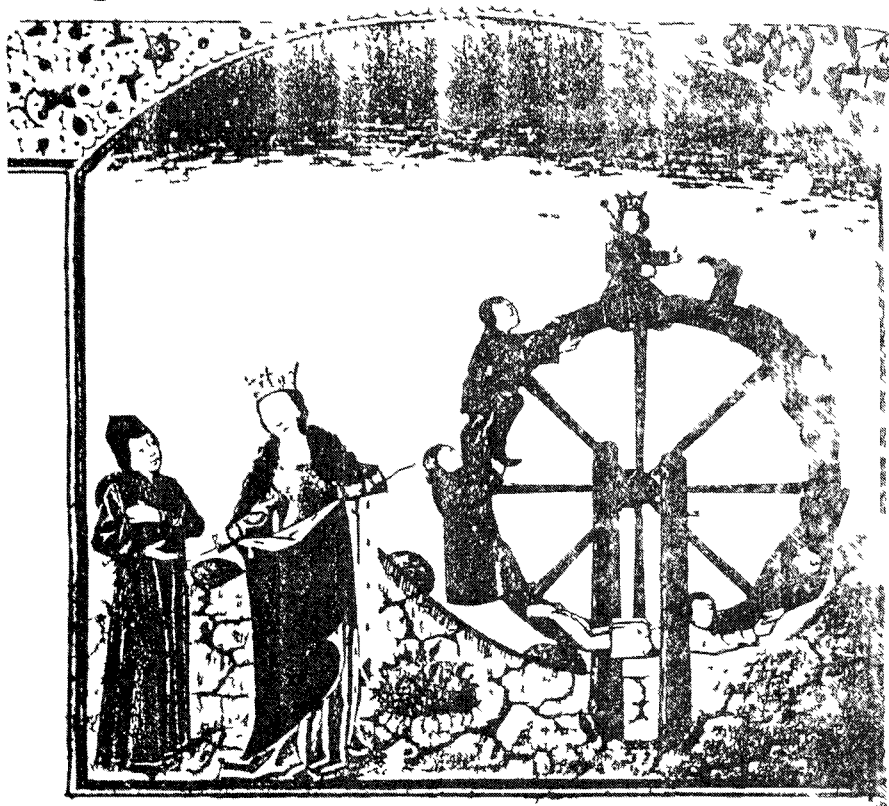


PLATE 4.

Rouen, 3045, fol 22 v<sup>o</sup>, s xv in , inédite

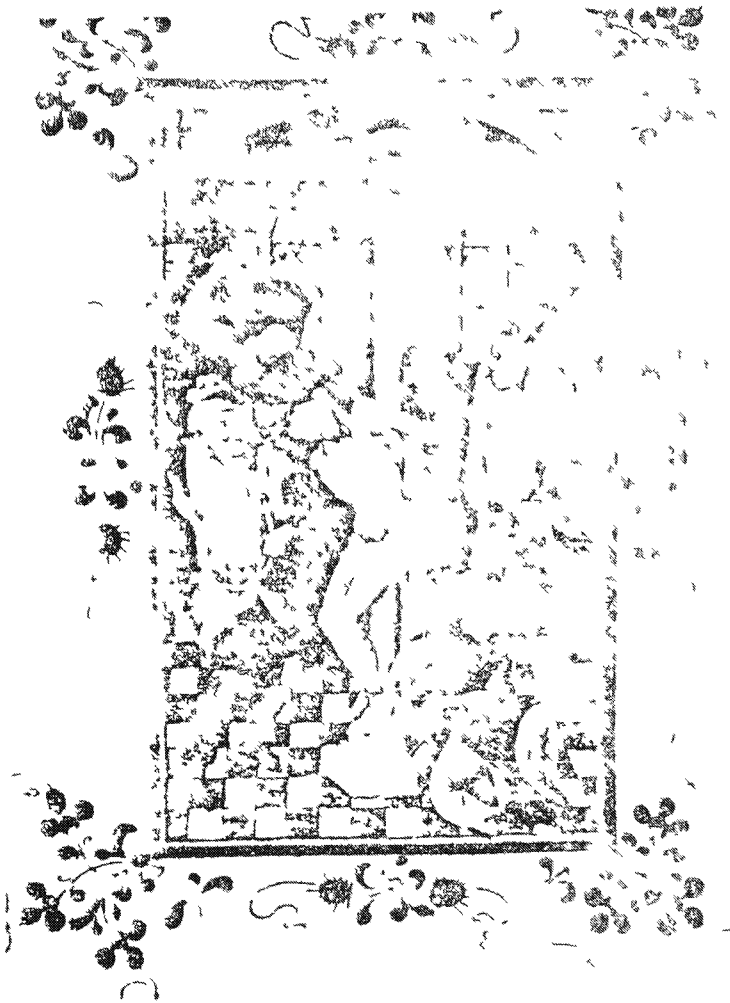


THE ORIGIN OF TRAGEDY:

ADAM AND EVE ENTER THE WORLD OF SUFFERING AND DEATH

PLATE 5.

From *Boccace des Nobles Malheureux* (1906)



Lod y Uver at Un... MS...

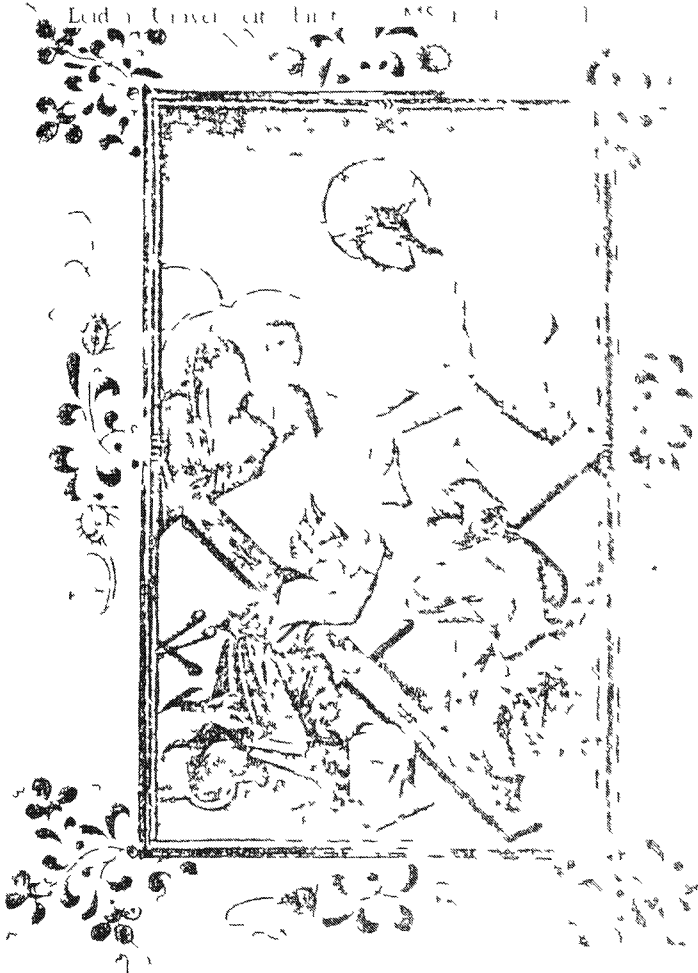


PLATE 6. XVth c. St. Lod y Uver at Un... MS...

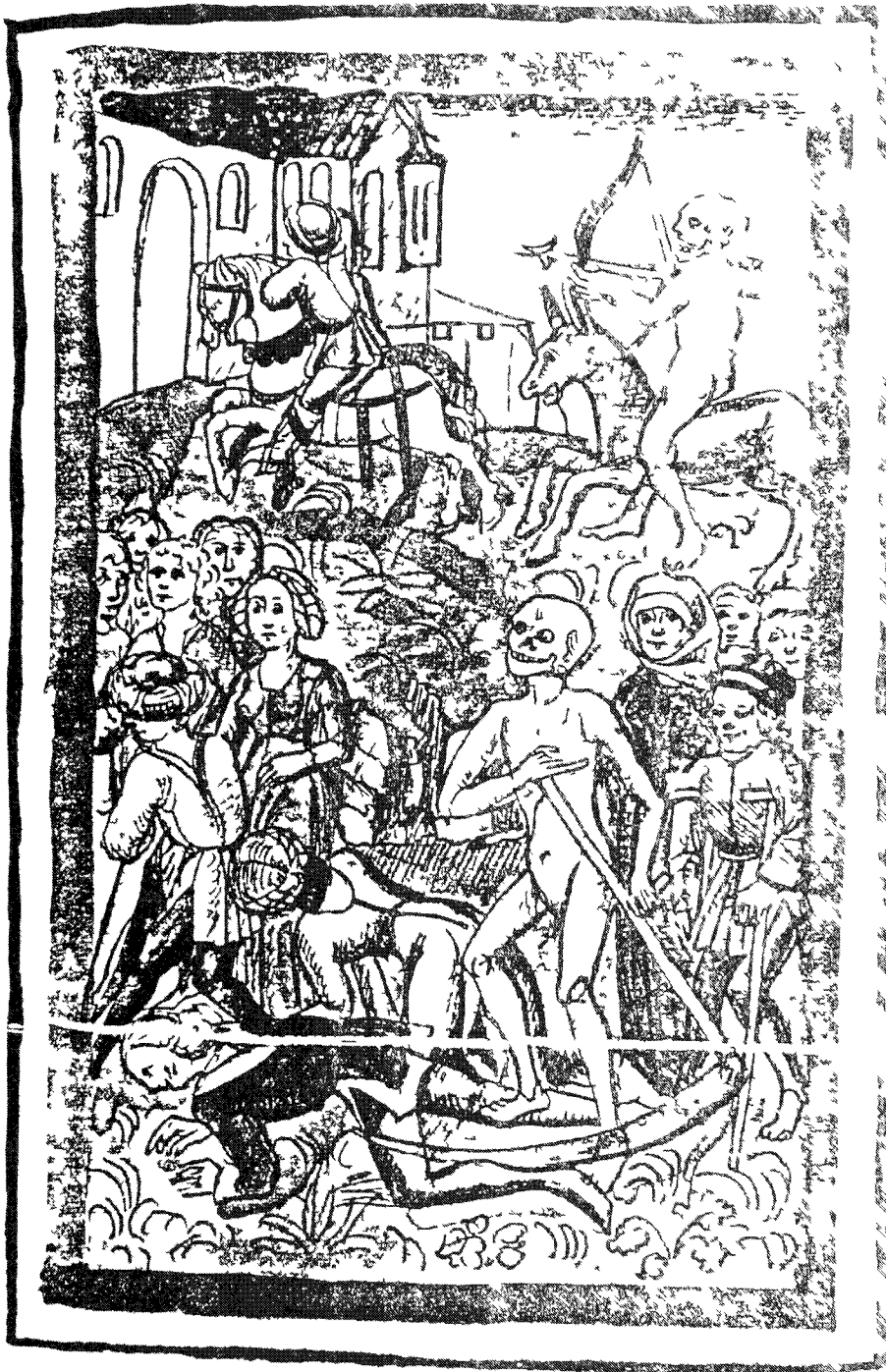


PLATE 7.

Johannes von Saaz *Der Ackermann aus Bohmen* (The Plowman of  
Central Germany), c. 1475 (see p. 12)



Deus in adiutorium  
meum intrade. Do-  
mine ad adiuuandum  
me festina. Gloria patri et  
filio et spiritui sancto. Qui  
cum esset in principio et nunc  
et semper. et in secula seculorum.  
amen. Vniuersus

PLATE 8. The corpse of the deceased: The Hours  
of Catherine of Cleves, XVth.c.

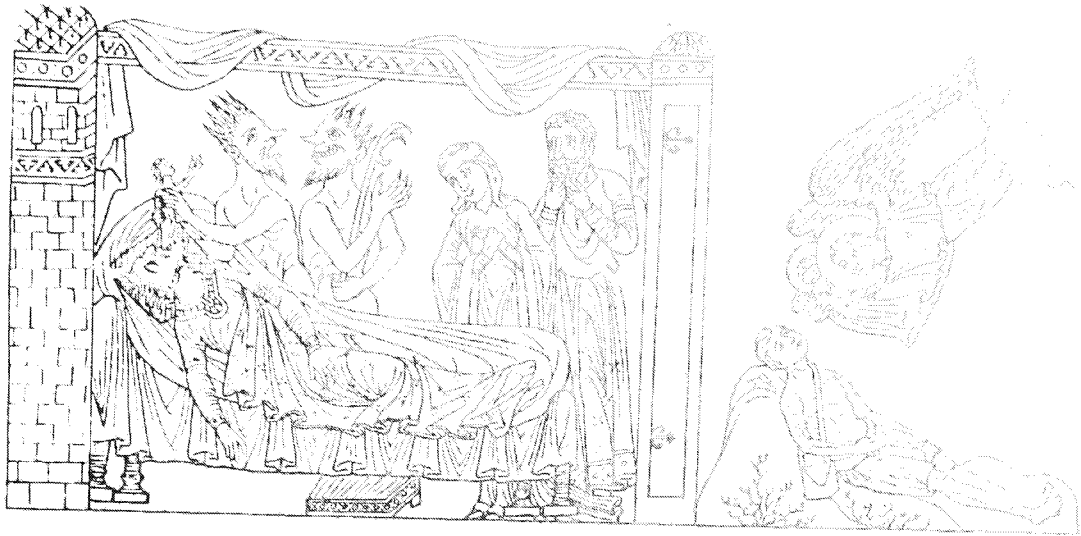


PLATE 9.

40. Hortus fol. 123v  
Mort du Mauvais Riche

S. XII

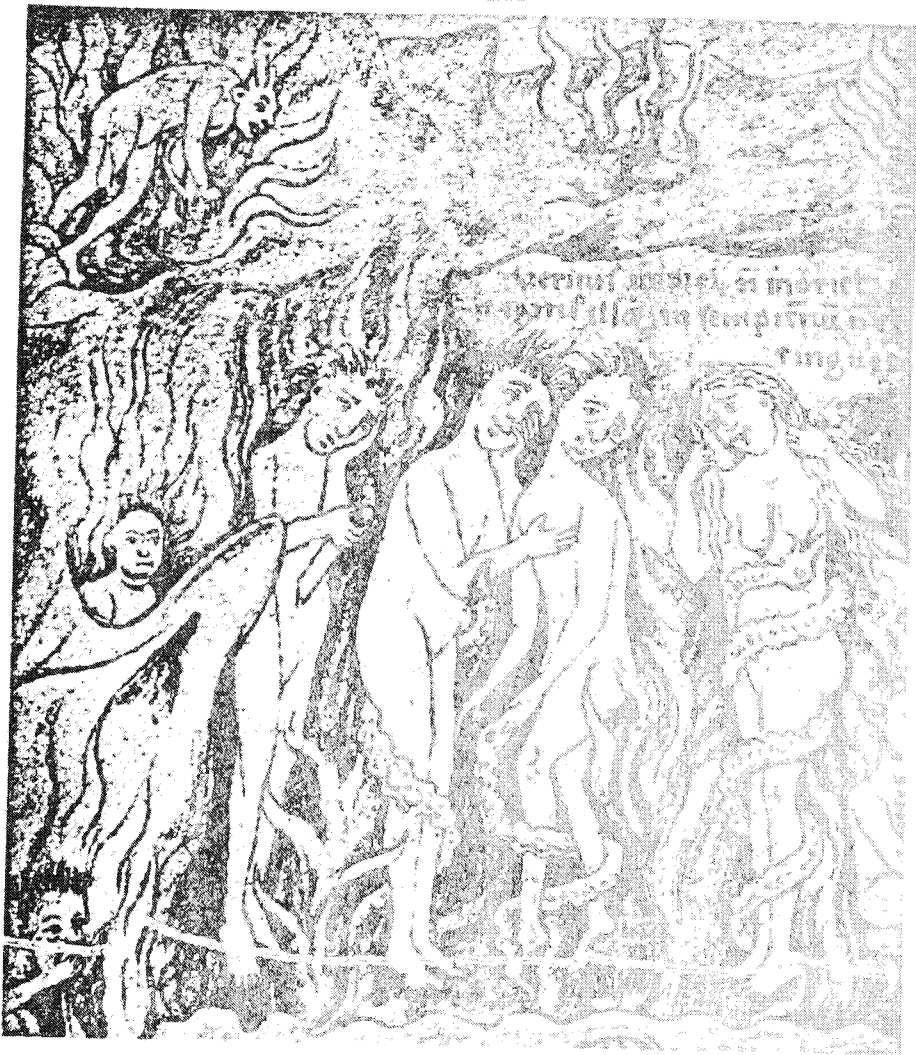


PLATE 10.

38. Hortus fol. 255  
Enfer: à gauche, damné se poignardant

S. XII



PLATE 11. Souls in hell: The Hours of Catherine  
of Cleves, XVth.c.

## Abstract

Aristotle's definition of tragedy as contained in his Poetics, though important to the Renaissance, had little discernable influence on the Middle Ages for various reasons, the primary ones being that the Middle Ages had its own concept of poetics and its own concept of tragedy.

Tragedy in the Middle ages is a mode or consciousness defined by Fortune, her wheel and the de casibus theme in a complex synthesis with the elements which make up Christian tragedy: free will, sin and damnation. Not any one of these elements alone but all of them, medieval tragedy is contained in and conditioned by the concept of a divinely ordered universe in which man's sole purpose is to attain salvation.

For this reason, the expression of tragedy in the Middle Ages through the figurative representation of Fortune and her fellowship is almost always accompanied either by an overt spiritual tragedy of a soul damned to hell or more usually by a reminder of the potential for such tragedy in life.

This is not to say that all tragedies reflect the fulness of the synthesis. The poet of the alliterative Morte Arthure presents the tragedy of Arthur primarily

in the Fortuna tradition, while the Pearl-poet presents the tragedy of the jeweller-dreamer primarily in the Christian tradition. On the other hand some poets do present the fulness of the medieval tragic mode. Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde and Henryson's Testament of Cresseid are examples of these.

The purpose of my dissertation is to explain the tradition of the components of medieval tragedy, the concept of tragedy as a synthesis and mode and finally to demonstrate the above-mentioned poems in terms of this mode.