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CHAUCER AND THE GODS

by

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Introduction

When a civilization disintegrates, the gods it worshipped usually perish along with it, often suppressed as devils by conquering peoples. Sometimes the names of these gods are recorded, often in the chronicles of the conquerors, as the names of Dagon, Moloch and Baal were recorded by the Old Testament Israelites. One might have expected that after the fall of Rome, the classical gods too would fade from memory. They had long ago lost their power to attract the educated, and had been on the decline for centuries; in the late Roman Empire, they had begun to yield place in the public imagination to the mystery religions, the cults of Isis, Attis-Cybele and Mithras, with their intense emotionalism and their promise of immortality. Finally, they were superseded by the dying god of a new, more powerful religion, Christianity.

But the classical gods were more than objects of worship. Since the days of Plato and Aeschylus the legends about them had served as themes for poets and philosophers; they had become an inextricable part of classical culture. As is well known, the Church Fathers were unable and often unwilling to discourage the study of Latin literature and philosophy, in which they had themselves been educated. In addition, pagan learning was a practical necessity, for Latin was the only language in which civilized men from different parts of the Western world could communicate, and one learned Latin by reading pagan authors. Grammar and rhetoric, the most important parts of a general education, were mastered through the study and imitation of classical

models--passages from Virgil, Ovid, Lucan, Horace, Juvenal, Statius and others.

In the eyes of the Church Fathers, of course, sentimental attachment and educational tradition were no justification for the reading of pagan authors by Christians. Fortunately, however, allegorical interpretation, which developed rapidly despite initial opposition, supplied such a justification. Speculation on the allegorical significances of the gods, which had begun with the pre-Homeric philosophers, was periodically revived.[1] Thus the Roman Stoics, eager to encourage popular faith yet unable to believe the traditional stories, had interpreted the gods as manifestations of a single power; Cicero had explained, "Deus pertinens per naturam cuiusque rei, per terras Ceres, per maria Neptunus, alii per alia, poterunt intelligi."[2] In the late classical period, allegorical interpretation reached a new height of popularity reflected in poetry as well as in philosophical treatises; in Statius' Thebaid, for example, the gods are close to becoming personifications.[3]

Early Christian scholars applied to the works of Virgil and Ovid the very same allegorical methods by means of which the ancients themselves had tried to reconcile traditional tales of the gods with philosophical truth.[4] Like the Stoics, they discovered insights into the workings of nature or hidden moral content in the stories of earlier writers. Virgil in particular came to be regarded not only as a model of style but also as a great philosopher and theologian. Quoting Aristotle to the effect that the first

theologians were poets, Christian apologists claimed that writers of genius born before Christ had not been polytheists after all; the gods were merely "inventions" with which they clothed profound moral and philosophical truths in order to hide them from vulgar eyes.

Through such reasoning, the classics not only survived, but were studied assiduously in the schools and quoted constantly in theological writings. While statues of Venus and Jupiter were being destroyed and their temples turned into churches, the memory of their names and deeds was being fostered in the schools. The gods' survival was thus assured by their appearance in Latin literature which was destined to outlive the old religious cults.

The new meanings the Christian exegetes discovered in their old books were most often moral truths, and moral allegory was destined to become the most permanent and poetically fruitful of the various ways of interpreting the gods. The earlier moral allegories usually appear in learned commentaries on classical poetry. Fulgentius, for example, allegorizes the gods to conform to his idea that the real subject of Virgil's Aeneid is the story of the struggles and temptations which the human spirit experiences within the prison of the body; thus the shipwreck denotes the birth of man, who enters upon the storm of life with pain and sorrow; Juno, who brings about the storm, is the Goddess of Birth , and Aeolus, who does her bidding, is Perdition. The Dido episode signifies the young man's devotion to love and hunting; he is overcome by his passions (the storm) until he

is finally brought back to his senses by the Intellect or Mercury.[5] Bernard Silvestris continued this tradition and moralized the first six books of Virgil's epic; his Commentum in turn influenced the allegorizations included in John of Salisbury's Policraticus, Boccaccio's De Genealogia Deorum, and other books. Seeking the truth of philosophy beneath Virgil's fables inevitably led to allegorical thinking about the gods.

Not all Christian interpretations of the gods were allegorical. The Fathers also adopted the euhemeristic theory, the idea that the gods were really only famous kings or men of outstanding abilities like Hercules and Romulus, who had been idolized and eventually deified by ordinary mortals.[6] Just as similarities were found between pagan wisdom and the wisdom of the Bible, the gods were placed alongside the Patriarchs as guides and teachers of humanity. St. Augustine, tracing the parallel events of Greek history and the old Testament, explains that Mercury was a human contemporary of Moses, that he was famous for his skill in many arts and a great teacher, who was subsequently deified. Although euhemerism was originally used as a weapon against paganism, after the victory of Christianity was secure, it gave the gods a certain protection.

The gods could also be accommodated within the Christian framework itself. In the Old and New Testaments, the heathen gods had been identified with devils[7] so it was not difficult to equate the classical gods too with the fallen angels.

It was not necessary to choose among these interpretations; more than one could be accepted. St. Augustine, for example, appeals most frequently to the euhemeristic theory in his discussions of the pagan gods, claiming that there are scarcely any gods who have not been men.[8] But he also considers the possibility that the gods are deified forces of nature in the world which the true God made, or were creatures ordained as principalities and powers according to the will of the Creator--angels. The Greeks and Romans worshipped gods, he says,

> sed talibus diis, qui licet magni homines tamen homines fuerunt aut mundi huius, quem verus Deus fecit, elementa sunt aut in principatibus et potestatibus pro voluntate Creatoris et suis meritis ordinati.[9]

For Augustine, as for Servius and Dante, one interpretation need not exclude others; ancient myth is polysemous.

The gods thus attained a secure place in Christian culture during the early Middle Ages. The various kinds of mythological exegesis--euhemerism, moral, theological and natural allegory--which the Church Fathers applied to pagan stories about the gods would all be developed in later centuries, reaching a climax of popularity in the twelfth century, when even Ovid came to be looked upon as a mine of sacred truth. There would be no basic change in approach for more than a thousand years. In the fifteenth century, we find Gower, Lydgate and Caxton explaining that the gods were

once men and women, just as St. Augustine did, and Gavin Douglas' footnotes to his translation of the *Aeneid*, the first "Renaissance" translation, expound the same kind of allegorical meanings Fulgentius had discovered. But despite the long life this tradition enjoyed, pagan literature never shared the exalted typological status of the Old Testament, and, as Miss Tuve has pointed out, only a few of the thousands of allegorizations which the exegetes produced established themselves as commonplaces.[10] In fact, only a handful of the imposed meanings became standardized, for most of the mythographers, while collating the work of their predecessors, felt free, as Boccaccio did, to add their own interpretations, so that in many cases a bewildering variety of equivalences developed for a single image.

Mythological information was transmitted in several different kinds of scholarly writings; in addition to the exegeses of specific classical texts, such as Fulgentius', and encyclopedias, beginning with Bede and Isidore of Seville and ultimately reaching enormous size in the compilations of Vincent of Beauvais and Brunette Latini, there were special mythographic handbooks which conveniently brought together and summarized the most important commentaries. These anthologies of allegorical information about the gods began to appear in the twelfth century. Like the compilers of florilegia, who selected sententious extracts from the work of classical and post-classical authors the mythographers drew upon and condensed a variety of sources, often not the ancient

poets themselves but writers of late antiquity, medieval scholars like Servius, Fulgentius and Macrobius and particularly one another.[11] Among the most authoritative of the mythographic handbooks were the *Liber ymaginum deorum* (whose author is various referred to as "Mythographus tertius," "Albricus" and Alexander Neckam), the *Ovide Moralisé* of Petrarch's friend Pierre Bersuire, the *De Deorum imaginibus libellus* (Albricus II) which brings together Bersuire's descriptions of the gods without the allegorical commentaries , and finally, on a higher level of scholarship, Boccaccio's exhaustive survey, the *De Genealogia Deorum*.

There is considerable evidence that these works were popular and highly regarded. They constituted a useful guide for the Christian reader who wished to discover the truths hidden behind pagan fictions. But the handbooks were not valued for their edifying commentaries alone. In some of them (the *Libellus*, for example) the moralizations are omitted altogether, and the pictorial emphasis of the descriptive formulas often suggests that they are intended as artists' manuals. Poets too sometimes used the mythographic handbooks for visual rather than moral effects. Petrarch consulted Albricus when he was composing the descriptions of the Olympic gods painted on the walls of the palace of King Syphax in canto III of his Latin epic *Africa*, but he omitted the mythographers' morals. Chaucer too probably consulted Albricus or another handbook for the statues of Venus and Mars in the "Knight's Tale." As in *Africa*, these gods are described in typical, classic attitudes, and Chaucer, like

Petrarch, omits Albricus' edifying interpretations.

The later Middle Ages also produced a group of allegorical enthusiasts who perceived in mythological stories not only general moral truths but specifically Christian doctrines: the Incarnation, the Passion, Christ's loving pursuit of man's soul. Books like Christine de Pisan's Épitre d'Othéa, John Ridewall's Fulgentius Metaforalis, and Robert Holcot's Moralitates record what are undoubtedly some of the most bizarre readings in the long history of allegorical interpretation, although, as Miss Tuve shows, "far-fetched" allegory is not necessarily bad allegory.[12]

Access to the learned traditions about the classical gods was available only to the small literate minority of medieval men and women. It was astrology which assured the survival of the gods in the popular imagination. The association of the gods with stars has a history as long as that of allegorical interpretation. In the Timaeus, the planets are divine and living bodies, the true gods. The later Greeks, influenced by oriental religions, believed that the planets, though not themselves divine, were each under the guidance of a divine spirit.[13] Around the time of Cicero, god and planet were identified, and this identification, despite the vigorous efforts of the Church Fathers, became permanent. Almost all the writers of the Hellenistic age agree in regarding the sun, moon and stars as gods. When Christianity triumphed, it found belief in astrology nearly universal.

Christian thinkers considered astrology to be even more pernicious than ordinary paganism because of its implications of fatality and its denial of the freedom of the human will. So successful were their attacks that astrology practically disappeared from the intellectual life of Europe for eight centuries, not to be revived until the twelfth century along with the general renewal of interest in pagan philosophy, literature and science and the availability of Arabic texts on astronomy and astrology in translation.

It was through astrology that the ancient gods entered the mainstream of late medieval life. As Miss Tuve has suggested, "belief in the stars' power over men's destinies gave complete meaningfulness and often a frightening truth to innumerable stories and conceptions of power of pagan deities, which would otherwise have glanced off the shield of a different religious faith."[14] Literature reflects this preoccupation; for example, beginning with Bernard Silvestris, the opportunity for the discussion of planetary influence provided by the journey through space, one of the most popular medieval "plots," was seldom neglected.

The various traditions concerning the gods mingle in Dante. Virgil's introduction of himself as having lived "al tempo delli dei falsi et bugiardi" (Inf. I, 72) represents one end of the spectrum of attitudes, the uncompromising orthodox repudiation of pagan idolatry. But Virgil's comment occurs in the first canto of Inferno, and nowhere else in the Commedia are the gods referred to in such harsh terms.

In general, the gods are swept along in Dante's vigorous and determined assimilation of the classical past to eternal Christian truth. The pagan gods might not have been so categorically condemned had this passage been written later.

Almost all Dante's other references to the gods emphasize their conformity with the truths of Christianity. The typological illustrations along the mountain of Purgatory elevate classical examples of the sins and their corresponding virtues to the same level with examples from Christian sacred history. Thus in the flames which purge lust, the name of Diana is linked with that of the Virgin Mary, and in the pictured pavement of canto XII, the dead Briareus is placed alongside Satan.[15] Men and women who offended the classical gods through pride, blasphemy and boasting, such as Niobe and Arachne, are placed alongside Old Testament examples.

Dante's treatment of Jupiter suggests that he followed allegorical tradition in equating the King of Olympus with the Christian God. There are no references to Jupiter's love affairs. Blasphemy against him, for which Capaneus is punished, is apparently equivalent to blasphemy against God; Capaneus himself makes no distinction between the "dio" who struck him from the walls of Thebes with a thunderbolt forged by Vulcan, and the Christian God (Inf. XIV,52). Jupiter was "arcanamente giuste" when he destroyed Phaeton and the chariot of the sun (Purg. XXIX, 120). Of course, Dante's most daring step in this direction is his identification of Christ as

"somme Giove." (Purg. VI, 118-120).

But isolated examples do not suggest the power and conviction with which Dante assimilates the classical past in general. Figures known only from ancient literature, like Capaneus, Ulysses and Jason, are presented with the same vigor, concreteness and realism as the fourteenth century Florentines Dante had known personally. As Erich Auerbach has pointed out, the earthly character of these various representatives of humanity, or, in the case of the classical figures, what Dante thought of as their earthly character, "is preserved in full force in their places in the beyond."[16]

In addition, Dante continually calls upon mythology to illuminate details of his vision, thereby asserting the validity of classical story in describing Christian experience.[17] In his insistence on dealing with the classical past in a creative way, reinterpreting it in light of Christian knowledge, Dante thus resembles the mythographers. But while the mythographers for the most part thought of themselves as modest scholars uncovering universal truth, in Dante the synthesis of mythology and Christian experience is accompanied by a sense of poetic pride and by a poetic self-announcement. Dante's validation of classical myth and his sense of poetic pride influenced Chaucer's journey of poetic discovery, the House of Fame.

But the gods are most fully integrated into the Christian framework of the Commedia in their planetary form. Scientific astrology, the idea of planetary influence, is of

course the basis of the structure of Paradiso; each redeemed soul returns to the star which most influenced its human character. In addition, the planets influence the action of the poem itself; Venus presides over the landing in Purgatory I and the dream of Rachel and Leah in Purgatory XXVII.

Dante makes it clear that the stars are not independent, amoral forces, each acting in accord with its own nature. They are the instruments of God. Their powers come from the Divine Intelligence and are activated as the smith activates the hammer (Par. II, 127-128). The goddess Fortune is a part of the same scheme; she too is permitted to govern human affairs under God and like the stars she is part of the universal order.

The fact of astrological influence becomes both an explanation of and an apology for pagan worship. Because men are influenced by the stars, Beatrice explains, they were once led to identify the stars with gods, to worship the intermediary powers rather than the source, God (Par. IV, 60). The pagan gods, then, were not demons. Far from idolatory, pagan worship appears to be a reasonable, if ultimately misguided form of religious belief.

The philosophic bases of this theory are elaborated in the Convivio, where, following St. Augustine's identification of the gods with good and bad angels in De Civitate Dei, Dante declares that the movers of the third heaven are substances separate from matter, Intelligences or Angels. Plato called them Ideas, and the Gentiles called them gods and goddesses "avvegna che non così filosoficamente intendessero

quelle come Plato."(Convivio II, 4,6)

The syncretism of Dante, his effort to include the gods in the universal framework of Christian knowledge, is also apparent in other medieval poems which are equally ambitious, but very different in most other respects. The writers of allegorical epics incorporated the gods into their poems as characters, reinterpreting them as Dante had reinterpreted Virgil and Statius for special functions in the Commedia. Because the action was allegorical, the most popular gods were those who lent themselves easily to expository aims. Thus in the De Nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii of Martianus Capella, we find Apollo, Mercury, Juno and Natura sharing the action with such heterogeneous characters as Virtus, Philologia, Phronesis, Athanasia, Epimelia and Agrypnia, as well as the three Graces the four cardinal virtues and the seven liberal arts. In the twelfth-century philosophical romances, which drew upon Platonic as well as classical and Christian sources, the mixture is equally heterogeneous. But although they are hauled into new contexts and made to discourse in a learned manner, most of the old gods do not undergo any advance in meaning. Two important exceptions are Fortuna and Natura.

Natura, a late addition to the classical pantheon and a relatively unimportant goddess in ancient times, was revived and endowed with a new meaning by the poets of the twelfth century School of Chartres. She eventually became one of the most popular goddesses of the Middle Ages.[18] Her first medieval appearance occurs in De Mundi Universitate,

Bernard Silvestris' cosmological epic which attempts to reconcile the account of creation in Plato's Timaeus with that in Genesis. Bernard's poem affirms that the universe is both intelligible to man and beautiful, a perfect image of its perfect Creator. Bernard's sense of the beauty of creation is embodied in the figure of Natura. She is the mater generationis, the embodiment of God's creative energy and of His order, the vital intermediary between spirit (she is a sister of Urania) and matter (Physis). She begins the poem by asking that God endow inchoate matter with the gift of form, and she ultimately oversees the creation of man. Her province includes not only the plants and animals indigenous to earth, but also the stars and planetary influences, which are explained in some detail as Natura journeys to Earth from the highest heaven through the spheres of the planets.

Bernard's allegorical celebration of the fertility and abundance of the natural world proved to be one of the highly influential works of the Middle Ages. But while his followers, despite their enthusiasm, found figures such as Noys and Physis too esoteric to be suitable for their own less learned poetry, Natura was eagerly adopted, first by Alanus de Insulis and then by the vernacular poets.

Alanus' De Planctu Naturae provided the most systematic and famous of all the descriptions of Nature and was the source of many popular portrayals. At the same time, Alanus made Bernard's goddess specifically Christian; she is God's

vicar on earth, "vicaria Dei auctoris." She governs the sublunar world, joining all things with the knot of concord, and, like Bernard's goddess, is concerned about propagation through sexual love. But the Natura of Alanus feels that part of her work is defective; she weeps for the sins of men and, specifically, attacks sexual perversion.

Alanus' poem was in turn the inspiration for Jean de Meun's portrayal of Nature, the longest image in the Roman de la Rose. She is still vicegerent of God, ineffably beautiful. But Jean fails to describe her magnificent garments, and his Nature has no concern with wedlock and other civilized forms; the Hymen who appeared in De Planctu Naturae is conspicuously absent. Jean also places Nature's complaint in a new context; while it had comprised the sole subject of Alanus' poem, in the Roman de la Rose it is only one of a series of speeches which constitute what Alan Gunn has called "a protracted debate about love."[19]

In two recent studies, D.W. Robertson Jr. and Rosemond Tuve have suggested that to some extent Nature's exhortation to amoral, unceasing sexual activity, which has so often been identified with Jean's own view, is carefully qualified.[20] Jean makes Alanus' Natura a spokesman for a single definition of love, one which we are meant to see as being partial and insufficient.

Like her counterpart in De Planctu Naturae, Jean's Nature complains about man's unnatural behavior. But the Roman de la Rose goddess, unlike Alanus', does not represent order and concord; she does not bind the elements together or

consort with Reason. For her, men are simply another kind of animal, and the continuance of the cycle of generation is all she values. As Miss Tuve has explained, Nature erects "the only law she knows into the sole and entire end of all things--work unceasingly according to your nature, which for planets is 'turn,' for elements, 'mix,' for plants, 'grow,' for men 'reproduce'; for all things, quite simply 'live; process is all.'"[21] She recognizes no order of reality greater than her own and she has no understanding of the spiritual realm. Therefore, for her, death is the supreme danger. Far from being opposed to the execesses of man, as Alanus' Natura had been, she represents a kind of excess herself.

It is, then, no accident that Chaucer, in the _Parlement_, alludes to Alanus' description of Natura in the "Pleynt of Kynde" rather than to Jean de Meun's in the _Roman_. For his Nature is to combine concern with fertility and procreation with love of moderation and order; she presides over the birds' mating with calm dignity, admiring her finest work and tolerating the impatience of some of her subjects. She recognizes, as the _Roman de la Rose_ Nature never would, the necessity of temporarily postponing fulfillment of her own ends in some cases. The concern Chaucer's Nature shows with finding the proper mate for each of her subjects so that no party shall be forced into an undesired union demonstrates her close relation to Reason.

A more powerful and ubiquitous medieval goddess was Fortuna, the embodiment of Chance. Poets and artists seem never to have tired of inventing new similes to describe her

activities and of invoking the old commonplaces about her. The turbulence of the medieval period, the continual wars and plagues which made life so dangerous and the sense of impending calamity which Huizinga describes so vividly obviously lent particular relevance to the personification of life's uncertainty.[22] The emphasis was most often on Fortuna's duplicity and on the losses men suffer through chance, and the lament for past happiness uttered by Chaucer's Ugolino, "Allas, Fortune, and weylaway," is one of the most familiar lyric utterances of the Middle Ages.

Fortuna was not originally the goddess of Chance; in pre-Christian times she was simply the bringer of men's fates. Only later did she come to personify the bringing of a man's destiny in a particularly capricious way.[23] As one would expect with so popular a goddess, Fortuna was the subject of a great number of stereotypes and conventions in medieval art and literature. Most often she is characterized as a cruel deity; her gifts are like brittle glass or like the wind; she is blind.[24] She is responsible for loss of wealth and honor, and even for death. While medieval writers generally relied on classical texts for the descriptions of Venus, Mars and the other gods who were not personifications, they felt free to devise new similes for Fortune's mutability. Chaucer enters this tradition in the _Book of the Duchess_, contributing to the repertoire of Fortune imagery the ideas that Fortune walks upright and limps, and has a monster's head, as well as including some comparisons suggested by the _Roman de la Rose_: the game of chess between Fortune and the

lover, the image of filth covered with flowers and the identification of the goddess with a scorpion who makes merry with her head and stings with her tail.

Fortune was also the subject of elaborate pictorial allegory. In the _dits_, Fortune, like Venus, was portrayed in her court like a queen, surrounded by attendants and dispensing her awards, including fame and infamy, to various subjects.[25] Among the most popular motifs was the description of her dwelling place, which probably originated in Claudian's treatment of the home of Venus in _De Nuptiis Honorii et Mariae_. Located in a flat plain on top of a high, inaccessible mountain, enclosed by a golden wall, the realm of Claudian's Venus includes a garden protected from storms and a brilliant palace. Only the double fountain suggests the contrasts which in Alanus' _Anticlaudianus_ were to be applied relentlessly to all parts of Fortuna's domain.

Alanus' is the first description of Fortuna's dwelling: it is situated on a steep mountain in the midst of the sea, beaten by wind and waves. The flowers and trees on it thrive and die by chance, there are two streams, one sweet and one dark and noisome, two winds, Zephyr and Boreas, and the house is made partly of mud, partly of gold, silver and precious gems:

> resplendet pars una domus; pars altera vili
> materie deiecta jacet. Pars ista superbit
> culmine sublimi, pars illa fatiscit hiatu.
>
> (VIII, 10-12)

Jean de Meun took over and elaborated this account in the

Roman de la Rose, and variations of it appear in several of the *dits*. J.A.W. Bennett traces the contrasting houses of Fame and Rumor in the *House of Fame* to this prototype, and perhaps the double image of love in the *Parliament*, the temple of Venus and the park of Nature, owes something to its influence.[27]

While Fortuna was generally condemned for her falseness, yet she is not always treated in a negative way. Sometimes she is a moral force and a punisher of vices, pride in particular, as in the case of Lucifer and Nero in the "Monk's Tale." Such punishments typically come when they are least expected; such was the case with Croesus as the Monk recounts it:

> Fortune alwey wole assaille
> With unwar strook the regnes that been proude;
> For whan men trusteth hire,thanne wol she faille,
> And covere hire brighte face with a clowde.
> (2763-66)

But the most positive interpretations made the fickle pagan goddess a part of the Christian scheme. The tremendously influential view of Fortuna as an instrument of God was developed first in Boethius' *De Consolatione Philosophiae* and later in the *Commedia*. Chaucer was, of course, acquainted with both of these works.

The references to Fortuna in Boethius' treatise are scattered, and many are traditional: Lady Philosophy points out that Fortune teaches men who their true friends are (II, pr. 8, 22-5), and in the discussion of mutability in

Book II explains that Fortune plays games with men, first flattering them with gifts of power and fame and then removing these gifts. The familiar image of her wheel is alluded to. Philosophy speaks of the "felefolde colours and deceytes of thilke merveylous monstre Fortune" who "useth ful flaterynge famylarite with hem that sche enforceth to bygyle" (II, pr.1).[29] She is a "blynde goddesse" with a "double visage" and she "casteth adoun kynges that whilom weren ydradd" (II, m. 1).

But Lady Philosophy eventually turns to a kind of defense of Fortuna (II, pr. 2), explaining that Fortuna's gifts are her own and do not belong to man. Since the world is her realm, she can do as she likes in it, just as the heavens can change day into night and as the sea is free to alternate calm waters with violent tempests. In the act of receiving her gifts, Philosophy says, a man swears allegiance to Fortuna as queen and must therefore abide by her laws. Only after death is he out of her reach. Fortuna is thus ruler of the mutable world. In the final book of the De Consolatione, however, Boethius affirms that "fortune, that semeth as it fletith with slakid or ungoverned bridle, it suffreth bridelis (that is to seyn, to be governed), and passeth by thilke lawe (that is to seyn, by the devyne ordenaunce)" (V, m. 1, 13-15).

These ideas about Fortune influenced Chaucer profoundly, particularly in the "Knight's Tale" and Troilus, which incorporate Boethian ideas about the relations among Fortune, Destiny and Providence.[30] But it is the balade "Fortune"

which, in the form of a dialogue between the poet and the goddess, conveys most fully the Boethian vision of Fortune and affirms the idea that the fickle goddess is subject to a higher power, "the magestee that al purveyeth."

Boethius dwells only briefly on the idea that Fortune is an instrument of God, using her primarily as a symbol of the uncertainty of life. It remained for Dante to formulate this relationship in a systematic way, to connect Fortuna with the powers that guide the planets.

Dante incorporates Fortune into the Christian universe in a characteristically daring way. Virgil in Inferno VII explains that Fortuna is an angel who governs the distribution of earthly wealth just as the Intelligences govern the celestial spheres. The transfer of "li splendor mondani" from one race to another is comparable to the control the angelic powers exercise in the different heavens. Fortuna is not sudden or arbitrary; "questa provede, guidica, e persegue/suo regno come il lore li altri dei" (VII, 86-87).[31] Dante gives the commonplace association of Fortuna with a serpent a new significance; her judgment is inscrutable to men, "occulta come in erba l'angue." Chaucer translated part of this speech to explain the fall of Troy in Troilus and Criseyde (V, 1541-47), and the idea that Fortune acts under God is also present in the Kingis Quair and the Testament of Cresseid. The conception passed down to Renaissance art and literature; Seznec quotes a poem of Lorenzo Bonincontri which affirms that Fortuna, like the stars, is an agent of God, and which echoes Dante's designation of her as "general

ministra e duce."[32]

The distribution of wordly glory and infamy, traditionally one of Fortuna's functions, was also the particular province of Fama, one of the minor personifications of medieval mythography. As might be expected, her iconographical attributes are similar to those of Fortuna; she has great size and is connected with the wind, and the pattern of opposites and doubles by which her fickle sister's unpredictable nature is often described is also applied to her.[33]

"Fama," of course, meant something quite different to classical writers. To Virgil, Ovid, and Statius, Fama was a mere bearer of tidings, usually ill-tidings, and "fama" or "rumor" was distinguished from "laus" or "gloria," which was considered to be worth gaining--Mercury, we recall, uses the promise of "gloria" to convince Aeneas to desert Dido. Although the Middle Ages knew the classical passages dealing with Fama well, they often used the word in the sense of "renown" or "glory" which was always treated in a negative way, as one of Fortuna's vain and impermanent gifts. In the _Anticlaudianus_, for example, Fama is on the side of the Vices. Philosophical discussions of fame contributed to this negative treatment. Both the _Somnium Scipionis_ and _De Consolatione Philosophiae_, as Bennett points out, emphasize the emptiness of human fame, considering the smallness of the earth in contrast with the vast magnitude of the heavens.[34]

Literary portrayals of Fama generally reflect the Christian attitude towards worldly renown. Petrarch's Fama is conquered by Time, suggesting the transience of worldly

achievement, and Chaucer's Fame is capricious and unjust. At the same time, Chaucer's Italian contemporaries suggest the attitude toward fame associated with the Renaissance, the idea that the longing for personal renown is not sinful but an object of legitimate aspiration. The "Gloria del popol mondano" of Boccaccio's Amorosa Visione is, like the goddesses of the Trionfo della Fama and the House of Fame, portrayed as a queen, adored by countless worshippers. Yet Boccaccio's Gloria has none of the grotesque and negative qualities of Chaucer's Fame; she is an august lady with "aspetto magnanima e possente." The differing attitudes of the three poets toward Fame's worshippers is even more revealing. As Clemen has observed,

> Behind the ranks of illustrious kings, heroes and statesmen which pass before us in both Petrarch's Trionfo della Fama and Boccaccio's Amorosa Visione, we can discern the concept of "greatness"... Petrarch portrays his famous figures in a spirit of wrapt [sic] reverence for their illustrious greatness; but Chaucer adopts a skeptical attitude and is critical and matter-of-fact towards the numerous figures in his palace of Fame."[35]

In Spenser, of course, we have the unequivocal praise of poetic fame as assuring immortality, and a rejection of the stationary medieval goddess in favor of a return to Virgil.

Yet Spenser betrays his debt to medieval readings, for like Chaucer, he identifies the classical goddess who flies over rooftops with renown and not rumor:

> But Fame with golden wings aloft doth flie
> Above the reach of ruinous decay,
> And with brave plumes doth beate the azure skie.[36]

******

Because of the medieval preoccupation with love, Venus and Cupid occupy a unique position in the literature of the Middle Ages, presiding over the hundreds of poems and treatises which make up the literature of _amour courtois_. The classical Cupid evolved into two distinct figures. The nude, winged boy armed with bow and arrows who was a familiar figure in Roman and Hellenistic art became the property of the moralizing mythographers, who interpreted his attributes in a negative way--his arrows, for example, are poisoned--and who also pictured him as blind. The mythographic tradition made him an embodiment of passion, and pictured him battling against Virtue and Chastity. The Cupid of this tradition appears in the temple of Venus in the _House of Fame_ and the "Knight's Tale."

The God of Love in Chaucer's "Prologue" to the _Legend of Good Women_ and the "Cupide, oure lord" who appears in the _Parlement of Foules_ garden developed from a completely different, specifically medieval conception of love. Some of the attributes of this second figure are borrowed from classical sources; the God of Love is still winged and carries a bow and arrows or, as in the "Prologue," two darts. But in spirit

this deity, a descendant of the "signor di pauroso aspetto" of Guido Cavalcanti, Dante and Guillaume de Lorris is totally different. No mere embodiment of fleeting passion, "Le dieu Amour" is great and powerful; he is often compared to an angel. He appears in visions as a handsome, regal young man wearing a crown or wreath, often accompanied by a retinue of servants or personifications. He appears in a vision or dream, often seated on a throne or in a beautiful garden. Like the Christian God, he has the power of reward and punishment after death, the power of excommunication, a list of commandments; his subjects pray, sin and repent.[37]

While Cupid appears almost exclusively in sophisticated, courtly literature, Venus is invoked in popular lyrics, philosophical treatises and allegorical epics as well. The Platonic distinction between the sensual Venus <u>Pandemos</u> and the celestial Venus <u>Urania</u> was widely known in the Middle Ages.[38] But the treatment Venus received and the kind of love she symbolized depended largely on genre and context. In hundreds of popular spring lyrics she is the Lucretian "alma Venus," like Natura, the embodiment of natural fertility. She is associated with the reawakening of love when winter disappears; hopeful lovers pray to her and deck her altars with fresh flowers.[39]

But Venus was also known to the Middle Ages in the psychomachias and other moral works in which she appeared in a less favorable light. Her flaming torch, comb and mirror identified her iconographically with the vice Luxuria or Libido.[40] When she is contemplated from a Christian perspec-

tive, she is necessarily on the side of Vice, her torch is ineffectual and she is ultimately defeated.

The philosophers of the School of Chartres inspired another interpretation of Venus in which the wild, passionate torch-bearer of the psychomachias, while still representing *voluptas carnis*, is no longer an outcast but has a necessary place in the universe and a vital function to perform. This group of writers, deeply concerned with the continuation of the species, the replacement of the gaps left in the scale of being by Death, emphasized the nobility of sexual reproduction and condemned abstinence or homosexuality. Thus for writers like Alanus ab Insulis and Jean de Meun, the Venus signifying sexual passion, although unruly and willful by nature and deviating from her original purpose, is divinely ordained. In *De Planctu Naturae*, Natura explains that God appointed her to make sure the new copies--the offspring of man and the other species--keep coming out right, and made Venus her under-deputy

> ut ipsa sub meae praeceptionis arbitrio,
> Hymenaei conjugis, filiique Cupidinis
> industria suffragante, in terrestrium
> animalium varia effigiatione desudans...
> humani generis seriem indefessa continuatione
> contexeret.[41]

Alanus' treatment of the carnal Venus is thus quite unorthodox; she takes on a certain nobility and becomes a legitimate part of the Christian universe instead of a scorned outsider.

Essentially the same Venus, equated with sexual activity,

amoral and ever at war with chastity and reason, appears in the _Roman de la Rose_, and this is the literary protrayal which would probably have been most familiar to Chaucer. Jean de Meun, borrowing from Alanus, has Nature explain the divinely ordained function of her good friend Venus. In the _Roman de la Rose_, however, Venus fulfills this role. She makes possible the ultimate victory of Cupid and his barons by shooting a flaming arrow into the castle, whereupon its defenders flee. Yet the considerable irony of Jean's treatment of Venus severely qualifies the "love" that she helps to consummate.

While retaining Alanus' identification of Venus with unambiguous sexuality, Jean de Meun has given her a personality distant indeed from that attributed to her by classical writers. She is vigorous, aggressive and colloquial, addressing Honte, for example, as follows:

> "Vie! orde garce, a vous que monte,"
> dist ele [Venus], "de mei contrester?
> Vous verreiz ja tout tempester
> Si li chasteaus ne m'est renduz;
> Par vous n'iert il ja defenduz.
> Encontre nous le defendreiz!
> Par la char Deu! vous le rendreiz,
> Ou je vous ardrai toutes vives
> Come doulereuses chaitives."
>
> (20720-28)[42]

She is described as being fashionably dressed, like a well-to-do lady with a penchant for exhibitionism, with ornaments which include a brooch, girdle and golden headdress.

In her right hand she carries a ruddy firebrand. In what may be a reminiscence of the scene in Book I of the *Aeneid* in which Venus appears to her son in the guise of a Carthaginian huntress, she tucks up her skirts and uses a bow and arrows.[43]

Jean de Meun may have recalled the image of Venus throwing a firebrand from another work of Alanus', the *Anticlaudianus*. In that poem, Venus has quite a different role; instead of being a servant of God she is on the side of Allecto and the Vices, who war on the perfect man whom Natura creates. However, her torch, unlike that of her counterpart in the *Roman*, proves ineffectual; the newly-created youth kills her with an arrow, although she manages to give a dying speech about her power to subdue even the gods. This contrast illustrates how much the treatment of a figure like Venus depends on context, and we will find this to be true of Chaucer's treatments of her as well. Sexual passion appears in a very different light when a poet is concerned, as Alanus is in *Anticlaudianus*, with spiritual regeneration rather than with the perpetuation of the species.

Chaucer's treatments of Venus reflect the influence of all these various traditions. The portraits in the *House of Fame* and the "Knight's Tale" follow closely the descriptions in the mythographers' manuals: Venus is pictured naked, floating in the sea, she wears a garland of roses on her head and is accompanied by doves and by her blind son Cupid. There are a few variations in the description: in the "Knight's Tale" she is covered "fro the navele doun" with green waves,

she carries a "citole" and Cupid carries a bow and arrows, while in the House of Fame she has a comb and is accompanied by Vulcan.

T.R. Lounsbury suggested long ago that Chaucer probably consulted Bersuire, Albricus or the Libellus de deorum imaginibus when he composed these descriptions of Venus, and more recent scholars have confirmed his findings.[44] The mythographers' manuals, backed up by centuries of learning, would probably have seemed like an authoritative source to Chaucer, perhaps one more in the intellectual mainstream than the daring Jean de Meun.

In general, the mythographers treated Venus harshly. Boccaccio's comments in De Genealogia Deorum are representative.

> Natantem autem ideo Venerem pingunt, ut infelicium amantium amaritudinibus inmixtam vitam procellis agitatam variisque et eorum naufragia crebra demonstrent... Illi rosas in tutelam datas aiunt, eo quod rubeant atque pungant quod quidem libidinis proprium esse videtur. Nam turpitudine sceleris erubescimus et conscentia peccati vexamur aculeo; et sicut per tempusculum rosa delectat, parvoque lapsu temporis marcet, sic et libido parve brevisque delectationis et longe penitentie cause est.[45]

As D.S. Brewer explains, this interpretation of Venus

apparently originated at the beginning of the sixth century with Fulgentius, who conceived of the daughter of Saturn as an allegory of carnal lust which arises out of excess, and of course strongly disapproved of her.[46]

But the idea of Venus transmitted in these compendia is not quite so simple and unambiguous as is sometimes assumed. Most of the mythographers recognized at least two Venuses and a number of them, through such diverse methods as the analysis of etymologies and interpretation of classical stories and properties of Venus the planet, arrived at as many as four or five significances for her, many of which were favorable.[47] Many of the interpreters disagree with one another, as Bennett shows with regard to Boccaccio and the _Ovide Moralisé_.[48] Thus, brief contact with the studies of the mythographers leaves the impression that the meaning of Venus is anything but a simple matter, and Chaucer's 'reticence' (the word is Bennett's) about her in the _House of Fame_ may well have something to do with his perception of her complexity. Certainly the tone of the "Knight's Tale" portrait (her statue was "glorious for to se") does not suggest a summary dismissal of her as the "mater omnium fornicationum." The portraits Chaucer derived from the mythographers, while unmistakably emphasizing the pains of love, do not therefore dismiss Venus and her servants as symbols of uncontrolled appetite. A writer with such a keen interest in exploring the complex nature of love as Chaucer shows does not treat Venus with the moral severity of Fulgentius.

In addition, some of the mythographic manuals which

appeared in Chaucer's day omitted the moralizations altogether. For example, the Libellus, as Seznec points out, "offers us a clear text, determinedly profane and purely iconographical."[49] The fact that each god is described in a single posture and setting and the recurrence of the term "pingebatur" suggests that the Libellus was a manual for artists, and in fact a number of illustrations of it are extant.

Thus the mythographers' manuals do not invariably equate Venus with concupiscentia, nor does Chaucer in the descriptions he derives from them. The inclusion of Vulcan in the House of Fame portrait is evidence of this. Had Chaucer really been bent on displaying the carnal Venus, he would probably have included Adonis, as Jean de Meun does, rather than Vulcan, who, as the husband of Venus, is often associated with the virtuous as opposed to the voluptuous Venus.

While Chaucer appears to have the reposeful Venus of the mythographers in mind in his two extended portrayals, briefer references to the goddess of love, both in the Canterbury Tales, seem to allude to Jean de Meun's rather different treatment. In the "Merchant's Tale," Venus appears briefly at the wedding of January and May, dancing around before the wedding party "with hire fyrbrond in hire hand." With one exception, this is the only place in Chaucer's poetry where Venus carries a torch or appears as a person at a public gathering.[50] The fact that she is described as a human being in the Roman may have suggested to Chaucer the idea of including her among January's guests.

Certainly it would have been impossible to conceive of Venus as portrayed in his earlier work--naked, passively floating in the sea, or barely covered, reclining on a golden bed--in this new context. The active, aggressive Venus of the Roman also reflects the aggressive nature of Januarie's lust, which ignores the feelings and desires of others, and of Damian's, once he has been smitten, for Venus hurts the squire too "with hire brond,/As that she bar it daunsynge in hire hond," and afterwards he burns "in Venus fyr ... [so] that he dyeth for desyr."

Chaucer's audience may well have been familiar enough with the Roman de la Rose to pick up the allusion and connect the Venus at Januarie's wedding with Jean de Meun's embodiment of blind lust. Certainly the mythographers' seaborne Venus, a complex symbol encrusted with centuries of interpretation, would have been far less appropriate in this context than the torch-bearing goddess of Alanus and Jean de Meun, who is associated unambiguously with sexuality. The presence of Venus appears to be yet another among the wildly hyperbolic allusions which describe the wedding feast--the music was such that neither Orpheus nor Amphion could have equalled it, the "loud mynstralcye" at every course was beyond the abilities of Theodamas and Joab, the "poete Marcian" would have had difficulty describing it--and which ironically emphasize the distastefulness of the marriage. Yet it is completely appropriate that Venus should be present, laughing, at this wedding, "for Januarie was become hir knyght," as indeed he has always been.

There is another echo of Jean de Meun's Venus in the "Nun's Priest's Tale" passage in which the goddess of love is incongruously invoked along with Destiny and "Maister Gaufred" to save her "servant," Chauntecleer.

> O Venus, that art goddesse of plesaunce
> Syn that thy servant was this Chauntecleer,
> And in thy servyce dide al his poweer,
> Moore for delit than world to multiplye,
> Why woldestow suffre hym on thy day to dye?
> (3342-3346)

In support of the "purity"of Chauntecleer's devotion to Venus, the narrator contends that the magnificent rooster was inspired by no such extrinsic motives as procreation--in other words, he served Venus alone and not Nature, whose concern is repopulating the world. The humorous idea that Venus is "served" by sexual activity is also suggested in the "Knight's Tale," when Palamon, praying for her aid, swears that he will serve her by fighting chastity.

Perhaps Chaucer neglected Jean de Meun's Venus in his earlier portraits because she was so clearly and unequivocally equated with sexual appetite. For a poet who wanted to explore the possible meanings of a great symbolic figure and to modify it with details of his own, the <u>Roman</u> Venus offered little scope.

* * * * * *

It can be seen from these treatments of Venus that Chaucer avoided the cruder aspects of mythography--there is no trace of euhemerism in his work, and there are no out-

right equations, no dogmatic drawing of parallels. Yet he shared with the mythographers a sense of the lasting truth of ancient myth. The portraits of Venus and Nature in the *Parlement* and the gods' temples in the "Knight's Tale," for example, make use of the traditional significances of the gods, and the Venus of the *Troilus* is a many-faceted symbol carefully built up from traditional meanings. Unlike many of the mythographers, Chaucer evokes significances which have already been part of the ancient images rather than imposing new ones.

But the poet's use of myth is fundamentally different from the mythographer's; for Chaucer the gods and their meanings are not data to be collected but are part of a literary heritage which can be assimilated into his own work. The figures of Fame, Aeolus and the House of Rumor in the *House of Fame* and Alceste in the "Prologue" to the *Legend of Good Women* represent attempts, some more ambitious than others, to bring ancient images into a new literary structure and through selective amplification to make them contribute to a new meaning. In the *House of Fame* Chaucer has followed the mythographic practice of collecting and analyzing passages on fame from a great variety of sources; the figure of Fame herself reflects a moral, Christian reading of Virgil's and Ovid's descriptions. The poet, however, not only discovers the moral significance inherent in the classical images, but also absorbs and integrates them into a new unity of his own.

The possibility of reinterpretation of classical images

common to both allegorists and poets was one of the products of the medieval blindness to historical perspective. Medieval men had no sense of the classical past as constituting a historical phenomenon complete in itself; they assumed that the ancients talked, dressed, loved and worshipped as they did. Thus in medieval manuscript illustrations, Jupiter is portrayed as a judge with gloves in his hand and Mercury as an old scholar or a bishop.[51] Likewise, twelfth century drawings of Troy, Athens and Thebes resemble medieval cities, just as Troy in Chaucer's _Troilus_ is modelled in many of its details on fourteenth century London. In the world of scholarship, this blindness encouraged allegorical reading with its emphasis on ultimate meaning rather than faithfulness to the original texts, and its willingness to ignore inconvenient details and to stress those which fit the sought-for pattern. It led to the assumption that the ideas of ancient philosophers and the stories of ancient poets are merely imperfectly understood gropings towards one's own "fulfilled" knowledge.

Not until the Renaissance was antiquity conceived of as a distinct historical period irrevocably detached from the present. This new attitude, which Petrarch was the first to express, led to the development of classical archaeology and classical philology, and ultimately to a much more accurate picture of what ancient life was really like. However, it also resulted in the loss of a living tradition of classical literature. The cozy medieval familiarity with the ancient gods and heroes was gone; to the Renaissance, Antiquity became a lost paradise whose remains were to be revered. The sense

of immediacy which had made it possible for poets such as Alanus, Jean de Meun and Chaucer to adapt or recreate classical figures for their own purposes, no longer existed. Ultimately, the classics would be used only as models for direct imitation or, in rarer cases, for outright parody. Although the medieval authors had a distorted idea of the classical past, it was for them a living tradition and provided a far greater variety of poetic possibilities than were available to their more sophisticated successors.

NOTES

[1] On the history of allegorical exegesis in the late classical and early Christian periods, see Gilbert Murray, Five Stages of Greek Religion (New York, 196-), pp. 72-75, 158-164; Jean Seznec, The Survival of the Pagan Gods, trans. Barbara F. Sessions (New York, 1961), pp. 84-95; Henry Osborn Taylor, The Medieval Mind; A History of the Development of Thought and Emotion in the Middle Ages (Cambridge, Mass.,1951), I, 41-60; Jean Pépin, Mythe et Allégorie: Les Origines Grecques et les contestations Judéo Chrétiennes (Paris, 1958).

[2] Cicero, De Natura Deorum, trans. H. Rackham, Loeb Classical Library, XIX (London, 1967), Bk. II, chap. XXVIII, lines 71-74.

[3] See C.S. Lewis, Allegory of Love (London, 1936), pp. 48-56.

[4] The allegorical technique was also familiar to early Christians from sources other than classical authors. The Alexandrian Jews had taken over from Rabbinical tradition the allegorical method of interpreting Hebrew Scriptures in order to reconcile the Old Testament with the teachings of philosophy. Allegory was, however, to enjoy only a brief popularity in Judaic scholarship. The Christian Fathers themselves had made use of allegory to discover profound meanings and prefigurings of Christian truth hidden behind the words of the

Old Testament. And, of course, the New Testament itself contains much allegorical thinking. For a fuller account of medieval moralizations of the _Aeneid_, see Domenico Comparetti, _Virgil in the Middle Ages_, trans. E.F.M. Benecke (New York, 1929), p. 110 ff.

5 Fabius Planciadis Fulgentius, _De Allegoria Librorum Virgilii_ (Virgiliana Continentia),in _Auctores Mythographi Latini_, ed. Augustino Van Staveren (Amsterdam, 1742), pp. 737-766.

6 On euhemerism, see Seznec, p. 11-36, and J.D. Cooke, "Euhemerism, A Medieval Interpretation of Classical Paganism," _Speculum_, II (1927), 396-410.

7 In _Leviticus_ 17.7, _Deuteronomy_ 32.17, I _Corinithians_ 10, 20-21.

8 Saint Augustine, _The City of God Against the Pagans_, trans. David S. Wiesen, Loeb Classical Library, III (Cambridge,Mass., 1968), Bk. VIII, chap. XXVI.

9 Saint Augustine, _The City of God Against the Pagans_, trans. Eva Matthews Sanford and William McAllen Green, Loeb Classical Library, V (Cambridge, Mass., 1965), Bk. XVIII, chap. XIV.

10 Rosemund Tuve, _Allegorical Imagery_ (Princeton, N.J., 1966), p. 319.

11 For further information about the mythographers, see Seznec, p. 170-179, and Erwin Panofsky, _Renaissance and_

<u>Renascences in Western Art</u> (Stockholm, 1960), p. 75-79.

12 Tuve, p. 231 ff. Miss Tuve discusses <u>L'Épitre d'Othéa</u> at length in <u>Allegorical Imagery</u>, p. 33-45. For Holcot and Ridewall, see Beryl Smalley, <u>English Friars and Antiquity in the Early Fourteenth Century</u> (Oxford, 1960), p. 109-202. Attempts to read classical myth in allegorical terms did not die with the Middle Ages. They were revived during the Romantic period by mythographers hoping to prove that all religions shared the same essential dogmas. Like their medieval predecessors, they used "philological" analysis to show that heathen tales were subtly disguised Scriptural truth. Just as Boccaccio and his colleagues helped make classical mythology available to medieval poets, so the nineteenth century allegorists helped rescue classical myth from the disfavor of the eighteenth century critics. See Albert J. Kuhn, "English Deism and the Development of Romantic Mythological Syncretism," <u>PMLA</u>, LXXI (1956), 1094-1116.

13 On the astrological tradition, see Murray, p. 126-146; Seznec, p. 37-83; and Theodore Wedel, <u>The Medieval Attitude Toward Astrology</u>, Yale Studies in English, No. 60 (New Haven, 1920).

14 Tuve, p. 226.

15 The fact that the giants of Greek legend were identified with those in <u>Genesis</u> accounts for their prominence here as well as their imprisonment in the ice along with Nimrod in the

lowest level of hell. (*Inf*. XXXI)

[16] Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. Willard Trask (Princeton, N.J., 1953), p. 174.

[17] For example, the vivid and detailed evocation of the madness of Athamas and of Hecuba in *Inf*. XXX, 1-27, the comparison of the wandering of Delos with the shaking of the mountain of Purgatory in *Purg*. XX, 124-133, or the comparison of Dante's own awakening with that of Achilles on Scyros in *Purg*. IX, 34-39. Citations from Dante are to *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri*, with translation and comment by John D. Sinclair, 3 vols. (New York, 1961).

[18] For the history of the goddess Natura, see J.A.W. Bennett, *The Parlement of Foules* (Oxford, 1957), p. 194-212; *The Parlement of Foulys*, ed. D.S. Brewer (London, 1960), p. 26-30; Ernst Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. Willard Trask (New York, 1953), p. 106 ff; Edgar C. Knowlton, "The Goddess Natura in Early Periods," *JEGP*, XIX (1920), 224-253.

[19] A.M.F. Gunn, *The Mirror of Love: A Reinterpretation of the Romance of the Rose* (Lubbock, Texas, 1952), p. 17-60.

[20] D.W. Robertson, Jr., *A Preface to Chaucer* (Princeton, N.J., 1962), p. 199 ff. Tuve, p. 267-76. For the identification of Natura's views with those of the poet, see Gunn, p. 232-255, 396-410 and Curtius, p. 126.

[21] Tuve, p. 279. See also John V. Fleming's discussion of the "poetic diminishment" of Natura by Jean de Meun. _The Roman de la Rose: A Study in Allegory and Iconography_ (Princeton, N.J., 1969), p. 194 ff.

[22] Johan Huizinga, _The Waning of the Middle Ages_, trans. F. Hopman (London, 1924), chapter 1.

[23] On the early history of Fortuna, see H.R. Patch, _The Goddess Fortuna_ (New York, 1967), p. 10-16, and Murray, p. 126-129.

[24] Patch, p. 51.

[25] On the _dit_ courts of Fortuna, see Patch, p. 60 and Wilbur O. Sypherd, _Studies in Chaucer's House of Fame_ (London, 1907), p. 1-6, 126-128.

[26] Claudian, _Epithalamium De Nuptiis Honorii Augusti_ in _Claudian_, trans. Maurice Platnauer, Loeb Classical Library (London, 1922), p. 246-249, lines 49 ff., 86 ff. For the dwelling place of Fortuna, see Patch, p. 123-146.

[27] J.A.W. Bennett, _Chaucer's Book of Fame_ (Oxford, 1968), p. 106 ff.

[28] All citations from Chaucer are to _The Complete Works_, ed. F.N. Robinson (Cambridge, Mass., 1933).

[29] Citations from Boethius are to _Boece_ in the Robinson _Works_.

[30] Bernard L. Jefferson, <u>Chaucer and the Consolation of Philosophy of Boethius</u> (New York, 1968), p. 49-60, 120-132, 134-135, 137-143.

[31] The entire passage from Inf. VII runs as follows:

> Colui lo cui saver tutto transcende,
> fece li cieli e diè lor chi i conduce
> sì ch'ogni parte ad ogni parte splende,
> distribuendo igualmente la luce;
> similemente alli splendor mondani
> ordinò general ministra e duce
> che permutasse a tempo li ben vani
> di gente in gente e d'uno in altro sangue,
> oltre la difension di senni umani;
> per ch'una gente impera ed altra langue,
> seguendo lo giudicio di costei,
> che è occulto come in erba l'angue. (73-84)

[32] Seznec, p. 82

[33] On Fama, see Patch, p. 43; Wolfgang Clemen, <u>Chaucer's Early Poetry</u>, trans. C.A.M. Sym (London, 1963), p. 102-105; J.A.W. Bennett, <u>Chaucer's Book of Fame</u>, p. 108-112; Sypherd, <u>Studies</u>, p. 105-114; and B.G. Koonce, <u>Chaucer and the Tradition of Fame</u> (Princeton, N.J., 1966), p. 13-45.

[34] Bennett, <u>Chaucer's Book of Fame</u>, p. 110-112; Boethius: II, pr. 5, 43-44; II, pr. 7, 1 ff., 40-45.

[35] Clemen, p. 103.

[36] "The Ruines of Time," *The Complete Poetical Works of Spenser*, ed. R.E. Neil Dodge (Cambridge, Mass., 1936), lines 421-423.

[37] On Cupid, classical and medieval, see Erwin Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology* (New York, 1962), p. 95-128.

[38] Bernard Silvestris, for example, identifies the celestial, "legitimate" Venus with mundana musica, the equal proportion of worldly things pervading the elements, the stars and every animate being, in contrast with the other shameful Venus, who is the mother of all fornications. The two Venuses are discussed in some detail in Robertson, *A Preface to Chaucer*, p. 125 ff. and Koonce, *Chaucer and the Tradition of Fame*, p. 85-95.

[39] Venus *Caelestis* and Natura were closely related in Chaucer's time and in fact the two figures appear more or less interchangeably through Latin and vernacular poetry to Spenser and beyond. Both appear in the well-known spring opening *topos*. See Rosemond Tuve, "Spring in Chaucer and Before Him," *MLN*, LII (1937), 9-16; and *Carmina Burana*, ed. Alfons Hilka and Otto Schumann (Heidelberg, 1941), p. 235 (#140), 254 (#150), 270 (#161).

[40] See Adolf Katzenellenbogen, *Allegories of the Virtues and Vices in Medieval Art* (New York, 1964), p.2; Emile Mâle, *The Gothic Image: Religious Art in France of the Thirteenth*

Century, trans. Dora Nussey (New York, 1958), p. 103.

41 *De Planctu Naturae*, ii, 470 in Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, CCX.

42 All citations from Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun are to *Le Roman de la Rose*, ed. Ernest Langlois, 5 vols., *SATF* (Paris, 1914-1924).

43 The portrayal of Venus and the other gods as contemporary men and women was common enough in the Middle Ages, but Jean's interpretation is original. In most medieval pictures, Venus is shown as a fashionable young lady playing the lute or smelling a rose; Jean has adapted this image to express vigorous carnality rather than the social aspects of love.

The *Roman de la Rose* became the subject of a literary controversy in which Jean de Meun's portrait of Venus played a part. Guillaume Deguileville, whose opinion of lawless sexuality is less subject to misinterpretation than Jean's, responded to the *Roman* with his own portrait of Venus; in the *Pélerinage de la Vie Humaine*, she is a filthy old hag, spattered with dung, who carries on a perpetual war with Virginity. She claims the *Roman de la Rose* as her book. See Gunn, p. 34 ff.

44 T.R. Lounsbury, *Studies in Chaucer: His Life and Writings* (New York, 1892), II, p. 381-382; E.H. Wilkins, "Descriptions of Pagan Divinities from Petrarch to Chaucer," *Speculum*, XXXII (1957), 511-522; Bennett, *Chaucer's Book of Fame*, p. 16-24.

45 Giovanni Boccaccio, *Genealogie Deorum Gentilium Libri*, Scrittori D'Italia, No. 200 (Bari, 1951), I, p. 151-152.

46 *The Parlement of Foulys*, ed. Brewer, P. 30.

47 Boccaccio seems to distinguish at least four different Venuses. Scotus, in his commentary on Martianus' *De Nuptiis Mercurii et Philologiae*, mentions four meanings, two of which Boccaccio does not mention; for him Venus signifies, among other things, "bonas ac naturales humanae animae virtutes," which proceed from proper use of his rational nature. See Richard H. Green, "Alan of Lille's *De Planctu Naturae*," *Speculum*, XXXI (1956), 649-674.

48 Bennett, *Chaucer's Book of Fame*, p. 17-24.

49 Seznec, p. 176.

50 The exception involves Venus as planet in the *Parlement*; see my Chapter II, p. 92-93

51 See Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology*, p. 18-31.

II The Book of the Duchess

The House of Fame

The Parlement of Foules

I

Chaucer's three early poems, the Book of the Duchess, the House of Fame and the Parlement of Foules share a common structural pattern. We are introduced to a narrator who is also a poet and who is to some degree troubled or uncertain. The initial reading of a book (or, in the House of Fame, viewing the story of Aeneas in the temple of Venus) only troubles him further. In all three poems, the journey to a new and magnificent dream world provides release from the narrator's private musings and leads to some new understanding, although in the House of Fame and the Parlement his questions are never fully answered. Paradoxically, the narrator of the Book of the Duchess, by far the most deeply troubled of the three, is the only one whose doubts are fully resolved. He is awakened from a state of total apathy and dejection to a lively interest in the affairs of others and to the power of poetry to strengthen private memories and recapture the joys of past days.

Unlike his counterparts in the two later poems, the Book of the Duchess narrator meets no classical gods in the dream world he visits. In contrast to the densely populated dream landscapes of the House of Fame and the Parlement, that of the Book of the Duchess has only one character of any importance aside from the dreamer himself. Yet through the utterances of the Black Knight, Fortune, Nature and to a lesser degree the God of Love, three deities through which so much medieval thinking found expression, become participants in the action. Through these gods, the conditions of human existence, to which the mourner must finally reconcile him-

self, are defined.

It seems unlikely that the narrator who introduces himself in the opening lines of the *Book of the Duchess* will prove to be an attentive and discerning reader. His long sleeplessness has resulted in apathy:

> I take no kep
> Of nothing, how it cometh or gooth
> Ne me nys nothyng leef nor looth. (6-8)

The heightened powers of feeling and perception so essential to the poetic vocation are paralyzed:

> For I have felynge in nothyng
> But, as yt were, a mased thyng,
> Alway in poynt to falle a-doun. (11-13)

His reading of the story of Ceyx and Alcione releases the narrator from his bewildered and depressed state. Yet his perceptions are so dulled as a result of insomnia that he fails to understand the author's meaning. He admits that he is not really in a receptive mood; he has picked up the book out of boredom, as a way to "drive the night away" better than playing chess or backgammon. So preoccupied is he with his own sleeplessness and the fear of impending death that he misinterprets the Ceyx and Alcione story and distorts it in his retelling, overemphasizing the Morpheus episode and making it appear comic, while failing to appreciate the human significance of the story.

Chaucer's lively portrait of the irritable Juno and her unintelligent messenger, and the description of the

awakening of Morpheus have long been appreciated as early evidence of Chaucer's humor and realism,[1] foreshadowing other encounters with the gods or their representatives: the mid-air dialogue between Geffrey and the loquacious Eagle in the *House of Fame*, the trial of the poet by the God of Love in the "Prologue" to the *Legend of the Good Women*, and the squabbling of Pluto and Proserpine in the "Merchant's Tale."

But the appropriateness of this comic treatment to the poem as a whole has been questioned. The boisterous Morpheus episode seems to intrude upon the stark, tragic story of the royal lovers and to diminish its effect. Charles Muscatine refers to it as "a moment of intense, comic practicality in the midst of conventionalism ... at odds with the dominant tone of the poem."[2] It seems as if Chaucer is deliberately disrupting his elegy by replacing the usual passive and unindividualized observer of the French *dits* with an unperceptive narrator absorbed in his own private concerns, whose reconstruction of what he has read is comically inaccurate.

Although the *dit* poets, Machaut and Froissart, believed in the gods no more than Chaucer did, they treated mythological episodes solemnly. The Juno in Machaut's version of the Ceyx and Alcione story directs her messenger in a calm and dignified manner. There is no suggestion of the transformation Chaucer is to effect:

> 'Enten a moy.
> Bien sai que moult yès aperte et legiere.
> Va t'en au dieu qui het noise et lumiere,

Qui de dormir aimme toute maniere
Et het effroy.' (574-578)[3]

From these lines Chaucer took the suggestion for the vigorous "Go bet...to Morpheus" and the offhand, almost parenthetical second line--"Thou knowest hym wel, the god of slep." Because the additional information Machaut supplies about the god of sleep("qui het noise et lumiere," etc.) might have detracted from the colloquialism of the speech, Chaucer saved it for the description of the cave of sleep.

The five lines which comprise the second part of the speech of Machaut's Juno, on the other hand, are developed into fourteen in Chaucer:

'Tu li diras que devers li t'envoy
Et le meschief d'Alchioine et l'anoy
Di li, qu'il moustre Ceyx le roi
Et la maniere
Qu'il fu peris, et comment, et pourquoy.'
(579-783)

For the flat and impersonal "Tu li diras," Chaucer substitutes the colloquial "Sey thus on my half," and for "qu'il moustre Ceys le roi/Et la maniere/Qu'il fu peris," the remarkable, explicit instructions which establish Juno's imperious, peevish personality. Juno addresses her messenger with the words "Go bet," a phrase used to address animals, and adopts a condescending and annoyed tone in giving instructions, suggesting that perhaps the messenger has not

acquitted himself well on previous assignments ("Now understond wel, and tak kep!").

The messenger's arrival at the cave of sleep is also comic by virtue of deflation and incongruity: the classical scene is stripped of its mystery and grandeur as categories appropriate to human beings are applied to the slumbering gods. Instead of naming one of Ovid's gods of sleep, Chaucer chooses Froissart's Enclympastyr, whom he identifies as "the god of slepes heyr"--the reasoning seems to be that if a god can have a son, why not an heir? In the idea that sleeping was their "werk," Chaucer appropriates yet another concept from the human world.

The narrator's reaction to his reading further emphasizes his self-absorption. The story took his mind off his troubles, not because of its human content but because it suggested a useful means of getting to sleep. He expresses over and over his wonder at the revelation of the gods of sleep, "thilke Morpheus" and "hys goddesse, dame Juno." He conceives of them, not with the reverence usually accorded divine recipients of sacrificial offerings, but as merchants --Morpheus will receive"fees" and Juno, says the dreamer, will consider herself "payd." The nature of the narrator's gift, a feather bed fitted out with expensive trimmings, and the familiar terms in which the offer is couched, are a reminder that we have seen this story only at second hand, through a distorting filter.

The narrator's emphasis on the scenes involving Juno and the gods of sleep directs attention away from the tragic

quality of the tale. By making the existence of such gods an issue and by having the narrator react not to the story itself but to the wonderful powers of Morpheus and Juno, Chaucer leaves in abeyance the effect of Alcione's grief and the ghost's consolation.

No reader has failed to observe the change which occurs when the dream itself begins. "The mood that pervades the whole opening dream section, where we see the poet waking and looking around him, is one of joy, of relief, of happy expectancy, yet also it is one of frank astonishment at such incomparable splendour."[4] At last the dreamer emerges from his self-absorption and becomes aware of things around him. Delighted by the beauty and perfection of the new world in which he finds himself, he forgets his sorrows and experiences renewal, just as the natural scene before him "had forgete the povertee/That wynter ... Had mad hyt suffre" (410-412). The birds just outside his room, singing "of oon acord" (316), suggest the harmony of experience this new world is to offer. In reading of the shipwreck of Ceyx, the narrator has been exposed to the harsh, destructive side of nature; here he will learn to associate nature with creativity, stability and "mesure."

But the new environment embraces art, specifically literary art, as well as nature. The illustrations from the _Roman de la Rose_ which decorate the walls of the dreamer's room are a reminder of the literary relations of the paradisal dream landscape. This early appearance of the most famous of the _arts d'amour_ also suggests the kind of action

which is to unfold during the dream. For as he tells the story of his wooing of Blanche, the knight is to emphasize those details which bring his own life into conformity with the archetype of Amant and thus absorb a private experience into the broad stream of courtly tradition. The presence of characters associated with Troy in the room's decorations suggests another area through which the knight's experience is to be amplified; a number of allusions to men and women connected with the fall of Troy are to elaborate the meaning of the knight's story, to release its potential power to excite pity in those who hear it, and to place it in the perspective of history. Thus decorations in the bedchamber not only "suggest momentous events yet to come," as Muscatine observes,[5] they also suggest the nature of those events.

Chaucer emphasizes the completeness of these literary decorations; apparently this room has no limitations of size, for the wall paintings depict "bothe text and glose/Of al the Romaunce of the Rose" (333-334) and the windows show "holly al the story of Troy." As if to convince us further that he has in mind the whole history and not merely the fall of Troy, the narrator lists such early participants as Lamedon, Medea and Jason in addition to Hector, Priam, Achilles and others whom we might expect. Richard A. Rand, in an ingenious interpretation of the entire dream as an allegory of the act of writing, suggests that this room is a metaphorical equivalent of Chaucer's poetic language, which through its inclusion of traditional stories embraces the past, and in the person of the poet himself suggests the literary future.[6] The fullness

and beauty of the chamber and the "gret joye" it inspires contribute to its appropriateness as a symbol of poetic creation which, as the dreamer is ultimately to learn, brings forth the order and meaning inherent in private experience by discovering its relation to tradition.

Many readers have noticed the correspondences between the Black Knight's emotional condition and the dreamer's earlier state of depression.[7] Like the narrator at the beginning, the knight is unaware of what is happening around him. He is oblivious to the stranger's approach, and the narrator's reference to the "lawe of kynde" provides a verbal link to his own earlier condition:

> Hit was gret wonder that Nature
> Myght suffre any creature
> To have such sorwe and be not ded. (467-469)

The man in black, despite his sorrow, seems to share in some degree the perfection of the natural setting: he is "a wonder wel-farynge knyght" (425). And although his distress mirrors the narrator's recent suffering, it is different in important respects. Unlike the narrator, who could not identify the cause of his insomnia, the knight knows why he is suffering and his grief takes an articulate and ordered form, so ordered,in fact, that it is expressed poetically, in a complaint "of rym ten vers or twelve," (463) of which the beginning is quoted. The poem is a direct, classic formulation and makes use of sharp contrasts: present sorrow and past joy, the "bryght" lady and her eclipse by death. The

knight's grief is far from being mastered, but it has assumed ordered, comprehensible form. Perhaps, as Rand suggests, the narrator's interest in the knight is "not just a matter of tender fellow feeling" but a specific interest in learning about the art of poetry from one who is clearly an accomplished practitioner.[8]

The conventionality of the knight's account and its conformity to literary ideals have always received critical attention. C.S. Lewis pointed out that "the bereaved lover has passed through all the same phases as the dreamer in the Roman [de la Rose]," paying homage to the God of Love as a young man and finally being admitted as one of the god's elect;[9] Clemen observed that the knight describes the wooing and winning of Blanche "in the familiar phrases and in the tradition of fine amour," linking his experiences "with the lofty ideals already embodied in the romances."[10] The heavily rhetorical language, rich in paradox and metaphor, which is the knight's idiom, further contributes to the fullness of Chaucer's idealization and emphasizes the literary quality of the world in which these lovers moved. The knight at many points indicates ways in which his experience parallels or transcends those of literary and historical exempla: Blanche's goodness equalled that of Penelope and Lucrece (1080-1082), he would have loved her had he possessed the beauty of Alcibiades, the strength of Hercules, and so forth (1055-1074).

The knight's sorrow, then, unlike the narrator's, is an idealized, refined emotion which finds expression in a

classic form and is mediated by literary predecessors. And although the dreamer was unable to come to grips with his own painful experience, he evidently finds sorrow both comprehensible and interesting in its new, literary form. He not only listens attentively to the knight's account, but also actively contributes to the elegy which commemorates Blanche. He shares the knight's own sense of being a member of a community of men and women, their lives stretched out through history, who suffered great pain for love. Thus in warning his new acquaintance against suicide, the narrator alludes to Medea, Phyllis, Dido, Echo and Samson, some of them morally ambiguous figures, but all famous and tragic lovers. If some of them occasionally appear to be examples of romantic folly--Samson and Medea, we recall, appear in the temple of Venus in the "Knight's Tale" and Dido in the _Parlement_--yet elsewhere, in the _Legend of Good Women_, Medea, Phyllis and Dido are praised as saints of love, worthy of hagiographies.

The knight's description of his love affair in literary, idealizing terms, and his skill in associating an individual loss with the experiences of noble and renowned historical figures thus excites the narrator's interest and participation. But the Knight's paean also reaches out into the broad stream of common human experience. References to Nature and Fortune associate the knight's loss with the lot of ordinary humanity.

As we might expect, Nature is invoked in her role of creatrix of beautiful women; in the course of her lover's tribute, Blanche is praised as "chef ensample" of Nature's

work (911, 1195-1198). Blanche's "pure lokyng" (870-871) is also attributed to "Dame Nature." But Nature is most often cited as a norm, as in the suggestion that she does not "suffre any creature" to survive excessive loss of sleep (16-21) or excessive grief (466-469), and in the narrator's advice to "Have some pitee on your [the knight's] nature/ That formed yow to creature" (715-716).[11] Blanche herself is an embodiment of Nature's moderation: "In alle thynges, more mesure/Had never, I trowe, creature" (881-882). She is associated with Nature's friend, Reason: "reson gladly she understood;/ Hyt folowed wel she koude good" (1011-1012). Blanche's sweet temperance, her submission to Nature, constitute an implicit criticism of the mortal who defies Nature by excessive grieving.

Against the normative "mesure" established by Nature, the "lawe of kynde," is set the injustice of Fortune, who is "Withoute feyth, lawe or mesure" (632). Chaucer draws on the "Remède de Fortune," the *Roman de la Rose*, and other *dits* for a series of brief, picturesque images, representing the goddess as a force of unmitigated evil, which comprise the knight's tirade against Fortune.[12] Some of the details, her "false whel" (644) and the allegorical equivalents which indicate her double nature--one eye laughing while the other weeps (634-635)--are traditional. But the knight singles out for special emphasis details suggesting grotesqueness and disfigurement, which oppose the beauty and perfect proportions of the lady; Fortune is "the monstres hed ywrien,/As fylthe over-strawed with floures" (629-630).

The only consolation against the blows of Fortune which the narrator suggests is that embodied in the exemplum of Socrates, "For he ne counted nat thre strees/Of noght that Fortune koude doo" (717-718). Of the Boethian consolation with which Esperence provides the knight's counterpart in the "Remède de Fortune," the advice that instead of depending on Fortune he should place his trust in Bonneürte, the perfect good which comes from God, there is no mention in the Book of the Duchess.[13] In fact, as Clemen has observed, Chaucer's treatment of the elegy is remarkable for the absence of the Christian perspective, which is usually manifested in reflections on the transience of everything earthly and on the next world.[14] Perhaps Chaucer felt that the introduction of a Boethian perspective would suggest that the love the knight and his lady enjoyed was somehow of less value than the mourner himself believed it to be. As Payne remarks in relation to the ending of the Troilus "the 'worldes blisse' that lasts so little while must be seen as real bliss, within its limits desireable [sic] and worth desiring, and its loss [as] a real loss which requires hard-won reconciliation."[15]

But a Christian ending would also overwhelm and overshadow the poetic consolation which the poem has carefully built up. For although the Black Knight does not discover that his beloved has been resurrected in heaven, he does learn that in a special sense she is not dead, for he has brought her to life again through recollection and through poetic art. And just as Blanche was a source of poetic

inspiration for her knight, so the entire dream experience inspires the narrator to "put this sweven in ryme" (1332). The love affair which was, as Donne might have said, a pattern for lovers, also becomes a pattern for the poet. Through the absorption of his individual experience into the literary past, the knight has shown the dreamer a way to cope with the chaos of experience and to transform it into something noble, beautiful and consoling.

II

The *House of Fame* is the first English poem to show the strong ties to the classical literary past and the high regard for poetry which we usually associate with Chaucer's Italian contemporaries, Dante and Petrarch. Its basic motifs--the journey, the supernatural guide, the allegorical goddess who judges her subjects, the concern with love--connect it with the French dream visions. But the range of its interests and its learning place it in the company of medieval literary ascents through the heavens to marvellous imaginary places, the dwellings of gods and other mythological personages. The allegorical journey had become a capacious framework which could accommodate practically unlimited visits to planetary gods and daemons, beautiful gardens, muses, nymphs and personified abstractions, as well as any amount of philosophical speculation and instruction. That Chaucer had several such precedents in mind is clear, for the airborne dreamer compares his own observations of "alle the hevenes region" with those of Martianus Capella and Alanus ab Insulis.

The literary past is brought to bear not only on the flight in general, but on many particular moments; the *House of Fame* is full of allusions to the Bible, popular legends, medieval epics and classical mythology; everything the dreamer sees seems to remind him of something he has read or heard about. He thinks of Romulus and Ganymede, his "Avisyon" is more "sely" than those of Scipio or Turnus, among others, he flew higher than Alexander, Dedalus or

Icarus. Even the natural world is to some degree seen through the eyes of mythology; the Eagle, pointing out the Milky Way, recounts Phaeton's misadvanture. Geffrey's journey not only has the search for knowledge as its explicit goal, but also, like the journey of Alanus' Natura and her predecessors, includes a great deal of educational information along the way. There is no attempt, however, at providing a comprehensive education in the liberal arts, a theory of the universe, or the information that would ensure the soul's salvation. The House of Fame has two concerns: the nature of earthly renown and the search for poetic tidings.

The journey the House of Fame recounts is in some ways an ironic, frustrated journey. Announcing itself as a search for knowledge and brimming over with information, the poem also contains many admissions of ignorance. While the dreamer searches for new poetic material, he calls attention to the unstrustworthy form in which new knowledge inevitably comes; as Payne has noted, the authorities of books, dreams and experience are successively cast into doubt, producing "unresolvable ambiguities."[16] This pervading skepticism about the meaning and value of the poem's material, which is mirrored in the frequent, abrupt changes in tone, is present from the beginning of the House of Fame in the narrator's inability to make sense of the undifferentiated mass of information about dreams. The dreamer is perplexed by the bewildering number of different categories of dreams and their causes:

Why that is an avisioun
And this a revelacioun,
Why this a drem, why that a sweven,
And noght to every man lyche even. (7-10)

The narrator's reaction to such vexing questions is wonder; he commits himself to "noon opinion."

It is perhaps one of the poem's larger ironies that while the narrator expresses skepticism and baffled wonder about the extent and variety of human knowledge, the poem itself seems to affirm the value and unity of such knowledge. For the _House of Fame_ is constructed of bits of information gleaned from a great variety of sources and carefully put together in such a way that their inherent relatedness becomes apparent. Old knowledge and new, classical gods, Aristotelian science and Christian philosophy are assimilated. The brief descriptions of Fame and her dwelling in Virgil and Ovid which are the basis of Chaucer's poem are amplified by information from several different areas of knowledge.

The classical passages are broken down into their component parts and incorporated into the _House of Fame_ piecemeal, and in the process they are given new meanings. Thus, for example, Ovid's mountain located midway between earth, sea and sky becomes in the _House of Fame_ a mountain of ice, and the mere addition of this single detail in Chaucer's new context gives Ovid's image an entirely new direction. Similarly, the magnifying power of Virgil's Fama takes on an entirely new significance when Chaucer specifies that the walls of her mansion are made of beryl, a substance which

both magnifies and distorts.

Payne has demonstrated the extent to which Chaucer considered "remembraunce" to be the basis of poetry and shown that, at the same time, "remembrance is never by itself quite adequate to produce ... the best art," that the poet must "illuminate, activate, [and] even add to what remembrance provided for him." In order to make the past relevant, "the poet can, out of his own 'sentement,' correct or re-emphasize the effects latent in his materials."[17] Payne's study demonstrates the extent to which these ideas operate in many of Chaucer's poems; they can also be seen as the principles according to which the House of Fame is constructed. To revive and recreate the work of great writers of the past by assimilating their art to pagan mythology, scientific knowledge about the cosmos and to Christian wisdom appears to be Chaucer's aim in the House of Fame.

These basic ideas about art and the past are, of course, also shared by the mythographers and were the foundation of the whole medieval practice of reading classical images in an allegorical way. Chaucer's sense of the significance of the literary past and his desire to seek out its truths, collate them, and make them available to his contemporaries also motivated the mythographers, and the labor of examining past literature for imagery and information pertaining to a single idea, in this case Fame, which must have preceded the composition of the House of Fame, was one Chaucer shared with Albricus.

Chaucer is, of course, far more artful than the mytho-

graphers; he allows the classical images their freedom and the meanings he recovers from them often seem inherent in the images themselves. His imposed meanings never strike us as absurd or radical, and he indulges in none of the allegorists' relentless moralism. Such allegorical images as the portrait of Fame and her palace, the descriptions of Aeolus and the House of Rumor surely belong in Miss Tuve's category of imposed meanings which "enriched rather than impoverished what was inherited" and which "extend the life of earlier products of men's imaginations by enabling them to refer to living questions with a vital contemporaneity."[18]

Chaucer would have been aware of the literary possibilities of moral rereading from Dante, who of course shared the concern with reinterpretation of the past in light of present knowledge. Unlike the mythographers, Dante was interested not only in recording and analyzing information from the classical past, but with reinterpreting it; thus the classical figures like Minos, Statius, Cato and of course Virgil, are recreated and given new roles to play in a Christian afterlife, and Dante systematically employs mythological similes and metaphors in an effort to validate the classical world for Christian poetry.[19]

But Chaucer's efforts to revalidate the classical world are frequently marked by hesitation and a sense of skepticism about the reliability of the knowledge books transmit, along with a concomitant recognition of the difficulties of poetic communication. In the House of Fame, the narrator's wonder and bafflement before the confusing mass of evidence about

dreams in the Proem is carried over into the briefer and less boisterous description of the temple of Venus. The decorative elaborateness of the temple seems to echo the overwhelming variety of dream theories:

> ther were moo ymages
> Of gold, stondynge in sondry stages,
> And moo ryche tabernacles,
> And with perre moo pynacles,
> And more curiouse portreytures,
> And queynte maner of figures
> Of olde werk, then I saugh ever. (121-127)

Although the dreamer is able to identify this structure as the temple of Venus, he can offer "noon opinion" on its significance.

Thanks to Professor J.A.W. Bennett and earlier researchers, we now have a good understanding of the iconographical background of Chaucer's portrait of Venus. Bennett has demonstrated the correspondence between the details Chaucer mentions and the descriptions of Venus in the Ovide Moralisé and other mythographic treatises and shown that her nakedness and her floating in the sea by themselves "would not justify us in equating her with the meretrix or harlot of the moralizers" but that the mention of roses, doves, and the presence of a blind "daun Cupide" and Vulcan combine to create a portrait that "conforms closely to the pattern of the moralizing mythographers."[20]

Yet Venus was such an important and ambiguous goddess,

and Chaucer is so carefully noncommittal about her that it is well to bear in mind her other associations. The mythographers themselves, of course, recognized two Venuses. Moreover, because of the intimate connection between love and poetic composition, Venus was also a goddess of poetry; Chaucer invokes Cytherea in her planetary form in the *Parlement* and asks her assistance in communicating his vision in poetic form: "So yif me myght to ryme and ek t'endyte!" (119). In Book III of the *Troilus* she is asked to enable the poet to feel the "sentement" which he must convey to his listeners. The favor of Cipris is, of course, also invoked at the beginning of Book II of the *House of Fame*, for it was devotion to Venus and Cupid which caused Geffrey's journey to be granted. Gavin Douglas, in a poem which draws a great deal from the *House of Fame*, was to be more explicit in his ambivalence with regard to Venus. She is the goddess of false and inconstant love, yet she is also a means to Honor, and her mirror is an unending source of literary material.

But the meaning of the temple of Venus in the *House of Fame* and the tone of the first book as a whole are largely determined by the treatment of the story of Aeneas, particularly his affair with Dido. By calling attention to the injustice of the gods in the lives of these classical lovers, Chaucer seems to foreshadow the nature of Fame. And by raising questions about the accuracy of the story, he prepares us for the House of Rumor.

The story of Aeneas, like the portrait of Venus, was the subject of many different interpretations. It had been

reordered, adapted and abbreviated many times during the Middle Ages, and Chaucer was no doubt aware of several different treatments.[21] To begin with, there were discrepancies between the two best known Latin accounts, Virgil's and Ovid's. Virgil portrays Dido as angry and vengeful and justifies Aeneas' departure as the unavoidable response to a clear divine commandment. Ovid has heightened the pathos of desertion and made Dido a sympathetic heroine, and the medieval authors of the Roman de la Rose and the Roman d'Énéas had followed the Heroides account, making Dido the pitiable, deserted queen. Aeneas was even more controversial. On the one hand, Virgil had glorified him as the founder of Rome, and he was a direct ancestor of all Englishmen, who were theoretically descended from Trojan Brutus. Yet Dares and Dictys had charged that Aeneas was a traitor to his own country and the romance writers had portrayed him as a villain. Other aspects of Virgil's poem were in dispute; medieval writers since Dares and Dictys had cast doubt on the veracity of the supernatural events the Aeneid recounted, and they often omitted such episodes as Aeneas' descent into hell and the changing of the ships into sea nymphs by Juno and Allecto, as Chaucer's version in the Legend of Good Women does.

Chaucer may also have been familiar with a distinction between the historical Dido, represented as a faithful widow who chose to burn rather than remarry, and the Dido of Virgil. This distinction, which goes back to Macrobius, was familiar to Petrarch and Boccaccio, who uses it to support his claim that poets may justifiably distort history for moral purposes.[22]

Familiarity with this distinction would of course cast further doubt on the accuracy of Virgil's reporting of historical events.

In addition, allegorical readings of the Aeneid provided a whole set of new equivalents for each of Virgil's episodes. The labors of Aeneas became a series of stages in the pilgrimage which the human spirit must undergo while in the prison of the body.[23] Although this tradition produced many far-fetched equivalents, its reading of Aeneas' desertion of Dido as a return to the path of virtue from sloth and concupiscence is closer to the spirit of Virgil than the versions of the medieval romancers were. Dante's placement of Dido in the circle of the lecherous in Inferno reflects the same interpretation of the story.

Chaucer's treatment of the Aeneid in the House of Fame suggests a sense of dissatisfaction with the story which may have something to do with his awareness of the many different treatments it had received. The dreamer appears to be uneasy about the interpretation of the Dido and Aeneas story in the text before him; his sympathies are with Dido and it seems to him that Aeneas is nothing but a worthless deceiver. The discrepancy becomes open when the dreamer admits with apparent reluctance that the book excuses Aeneas for his "grete trespas." He is never punished and goes on to win a new wife in Italy. The narrator's references to other famous lovers who deserted their mistresses, illustrating the notorious "untrouthe" of men, again suggests his dissatisfaction with the story and implies that this particular version is the work

of a writer prejudiced in favor of Aeneas.

Just as the Proem had suggested bafflement about the various theories of dreams which books report, the treatment of the story of Aeneas in Book I suggests a skeptical attitude about the accuracy which written reports of old stories provide. How can modern readers,whose only source of information about the past must of necessity be second hand, distinguish truth from falsehood? This question is to be considered again, in somewhat different terms, in Book III. In the process of learning the answer to it, the dreamer is to see further evidence of the disagreements of interpretation among authorities in regard to the story of Dido and Aeneas and to learn something about the sources of poetry.

Chaucer's version of the Aeneas story in the House of Fame also strongly emphasizes the interference of the gods, particularly in comparison with the far more naturalistic version of the story in the "Legend of Dido" and in view of the tendency to pass over the supernatural parts of the story in most other medieval versions. Venus' part in the action is given particular attention; the narrator, observing the burning of Troy, saw

> how Venus
> Whan that she saugh the castel brende,
> Doun fro the heven gan descende,
> And bad hir sone Eneas flee. (162-165)

The"Legend of Dido," in contrast, gives more detail about the historical circumstances than the House of Fame version,

mentioning, for example, the appearance of Hector's ghost and the fact that Sinon had pretended that the wooden horse was an offering to Minerva, but treats the gods either much more briefly or omits them entirely.

The unforgetting ire of Juno and her visit to Aeolus, causing the storm and the shipwreck of Aeneas, which are "nat to purpos" in the "Legend," are also treated in the *House of Fame* version, and Chaucer makes Venus the instrument by which the storm is ended instead of following the *Aeneid*, in which Venus goes to Jupiter only after Aeneas and his men have already landed on the Carthaginian shore.[24] Venus' kindness and helpfulness are emphasized throughout; after Aeneas has been shipwrecked

> she gan hym comforte thoo,
> And bad hym to Cartage goo,
> And ther he shulde his folk fynde,
> That in the see were left behynde. (235-238).

There is no mention in the "Legend" of comforting or of finding his lost comrades; there Venus only explains who Dido is and how she came to Carthage. Moreover, in the *House of Fame*, Venus is held responsible for making Dido fall in love with Aeneas, while in the "Legend," the Carthaginian queen's love is ascribed to more natural causes: her "routhe" for Aeneas' fall from high estate, his "gentil" knightly quality and handsome face, his strength and (a Chaucerian addition to Virgil) the fact that he is a stranger.

The dreamer makes no comment on the story as a whole.

He reacts only to the richness of the temple:

> "A, Lord!" thoughte I "that madest us,
> Yet sawgh I never such noblesse
> Of ymages, ne such richesse,
> As I saugh graven in this chirche." (470-473)

He moves quickly outside amid continued confessions of ignorance--he does not know where he is or who created the murals--and we are left with what appears to be, in Clemen's words, an _exemplum in vacuo_.[25] What are we to make of this famous story? The narrator makes no allusion to the dubious moral which La Vieille in _Le Roman de la Rose_ had drawn from the desertions of Dido, Phyllis and other victims of men's untrouthe: that a woman should act in the same way and not entrust her heart to a single lover.[26]

Chaucer's emphasis on divine intervention has had the effect of demonstrating the gods' lack of concern for justice in the lives of mortals. How could Venus have lent her assistance to such a scoundrel as Aeneas? Why do the gods favor one person and destroy another? On these subjects the narrator has no comment at present, but, like the questions about literary transmission, they are considered again and dramatized in Book III. The essential quality of Fame, her unpredictable irrationality, is an intensified version of the partiality of Venus and Juno, just as Fame's dwelling is a grand and monumental version of Venus', involving the fate not only of lovers, but of all men. The strident tones and fantastic appearance of Fame are her own, yet she, like Venus

and the other gods, governs the lives of helpless mortals and she grants or withholds her favors according to her own whim rather than the suppliant's merit.

The concern with accurate literary transmission which the story of Aeneas seemed to suggest appears again in the invocations to the three books of the House of Fame, where the problem of the narrator-reader becomes the problem of the poet. Appreciation of the ironic and mock-heroic elements of these invocations has generally taken precedence over their serious subjects: the difficulty of transposing private experience into poetry, and the poet's inability to predict audience reactions, his lack of control over his own work once it is completed.

Thus in Book I he invokes Morpheus to help report the dream accurately and asks Him "that mover is of al" that listeners who receive it charitably be rewarded. The Proem thus shows the same concern which the distorted version of the Morpheus episode in the Book of the Duchess had suggested: the fear that certain members of his audience may have pre-dispositions or even prejudices which could cause them to misunderstand his poem. In the Book of the Duchess, the problem was the reader's inattention; here it is the possibility of downright malice, hate, scorn or envy. Chaucer gives "negative recognition," as Payne explains, "to the possibility that poetry may fail not through its own fault, but through that of its readers."[27] The invocation to Book II indicates a renewed concern about reporting the dream accurately, perhaps prompted by an uneasiness about the

accuracy of the story the dreamer has just seen unfold.

But the invocations to Books II and III, with their debt to Dante, suggest not doubt, skepticism and a sense of the inaccessibility of the literary past, but creative energy and a sense of being part of a poetic continuum. Bennett remarks in reference to the invocation to Apollo at the beginning of Book III,

> behind Chaucer's appropriation of this prayer lies the fact that he is the first Englishman to share Dante's sense of the worth of poetry and of the act of poetic creation.[28]

No less significant in this regard is the fact that Chaucer also follows Dante in creating a poetic *persona* for himself; he goes on his aerial journey not as an Everyman but specifically as a poet.[29]

It may well have been his reading of the *Commedia* which connected in Chaucer's mind the assimilation of classical story to other kinds of truth with the sense of a poetic vocation, a connection Boccaccio had also made in his defense of poetry in the final books of the *De Genealogia Deorum*. Thus Chaucer chooses a classical myth, in fact, one specifically suggested in the action of the *Aeneid*, as a model for his own specifically poetic journey. In Book II we discover that the aid Jupiter has given to Aeneas at the prayer of Venus is to be repeated in his reward to Geffrey.

It was not, of course, necessary to provide an ex-

planation for a journey into space; in many poems the fact of the dream itself is considered sufficient explanation for any supernatural occurrences. But for Chaucer, under the influence of the Commedia, the invention of a mythological action is an act of poetic self-announcement, an assertion of his own participation in the European poetic tradition and of the usefulness of the pagan past for discovering truths valid in the Christian present. As Dante had remodelled Virgil, Statius, and other classical figures, freely altering their historical personalities and their beliefs to fit the higher truth of his own poem, so Chaucer creates a personality for Jove's eagle and to a lesser degreee re-creates Jove himself.

Jupiter had a special ambiguity in fourteenth century European literature, of which Chaucer was able to make use both in the House of Fame and elsewhere. On the one hand, there was the mythological "Jupiter the likerous," as Chaucer refers to him in "The Former Age," the god whose amorous adventures, familiar to the Middle Ages through Ovid, might give him a special interest in love tidings. But the mythographic syncretists had done their work well enough that medieval writers could also use the name "Jupiter" in referring to the Christian God without any apparent sense of impropriety. Boccaccio explains that Jove was once a man who had lived on Crete, was deified by erring mortals and subsequently confused with the true God, and Dante refers to God as "sommo Giove."[30] But even poets who were far less daring

and less devoted syncretists than they identified the two: Deschamps speaks of "Jupiter come from paradise."[31] Chaucer takes advantage of this ambiguity most fully in Troilus and Criseyde, where "Jupiter" is sometimes the mythological deity, as in the reference to his adventures with Alcmena in III, 1428, sometimes the planet, as when he is joined with Saturn in Cancer (III, 625), and sometimes indistinguishable from the Christian God: he is "thow Jove, o auctor of nature" (III, 1016), he gives "grace" (IV, 1602) and has "purveyaunce" (V, 1446).[32]

Chaucer takes advantage of this ambiguity of Jupiter in the House of Fame to make him into a "character" appropriate to that of his subject, the unwilling visionary Geffrey. As Geffrey is a comic, deflated version of mankind, so "Jupiter" is a deflated God, a God addressed familiarly as "daun Jupiter," who had Ganymede as a "bottiler" rather than a cupbearer. In the House of Fame, Jupiter is seen as a kind of thoughtful employer, who, seeing that one of his industrious if not overly intelligent clerks is overworked, gives him a few days' vacation, with the hope that some "disport and game" (664) will improve his spirits "so that thou wolt be of good chere."(671) All the machinery of the vision literature is domesticated; the poet is rewarded not because he is a special being who has strayed from the path of virtue, but because he has worked hard composing verses in honor of Venus and Cupid. As the Eagle explains,

> Certeyn, he [Jove] hath of the routhe,
> That thou so longe trewely

Hath served so ententyfly
Hys blynde nevew Cupido,
And faire Venus also,
Withoute guerdon ever yit,
And never-the-lesse hast set thy wit--
Although that in thy hed ful lyte is--
To make bookys, songes, dytees,
In ryme, or elles in cadence,
As thou best canst, in reverence
Of Love, and of his servantes eke,
That have hys servyse soght, and seke;
And peynest the to preyse hys art,
Although thou haddest never part. (614-628)

This prosaicized version of the celestial journey has the same humorous incongruity as the offer of a feather bed to Morpheus and Juno in the Book of the Duchess. The attribution to the classical gods of considerations appropriate to housewives and merchants, the idea of Jupiter thinking in terms of "quyting" a mortal "In som recompensacion/ Of labour and devocion" foreshadows Chaucer's later comic misapplications.

Yet at many points Jupiter and God almost seem to blend. The Eagle speaks of the "Commaundement" of his master and of the "grace" manifested by rewarding the poet for his devotion to Cupid. The creator and the son of Cronos are cheerfully mingled in the strange, folksy Jupiter, as limited in mystery and greatness as Geffrey is apparently limited in courage and intelligence, whom Chaucer half-borrows, half-creates, to set into motion the machinery of

his celestial journey.

Study of the relation of the House of Fame to its classical sources reveals the care with which Chaucer manages the gradual absorption of Virgil's and Ovid's details about Fame and her dwelling into the account of his own journey and the skill with which he assimilates these classical descriptions to more modern ideas. He demonstrates the usefulness of the past by reactivating inherited truth in the present. Thus, for example, Ovid's location of the palace of Fame "Ryght even in myddes of the weye/Betwixen hevene, erthe, and see" (714-715) is, as Bennett points out, validated by Aristotelian cosmology[33] while the fact that it is located on a mountaintop is temporarily ignored. In general, Book II deals with the purely physical aspect of Fame's dwelling, while the details with moral implications, such as the mingling of true and false, are saved for III.

But Chaucer not only synthesizes the scattered truths of the past, he also, like many of the mythographers, superimposes upon them a meaning or a moral direction of his own. Thus his palace of Fame is not approachable from the ground, as Virgil's and Ovid's were, but requires an aerial journey away from the earth. The concomitant change of perspective, as Chaucer recalled from Boethius and Macrobius, suggests even before the destination is reached that the reputations of individual mortals are insignificant.

It soon becomes clear that the abode of Fame is modelled on the dwelling of Fortune, and the traditional associations of this dwelling provide a moral focus to which the details

of Ovid's description can be assimilated.[34] Thus the traditional connection of Fortune with glass obviously suggested the related idea of placing Fame's dwelling on a mountain of ice.[35] But ice, which changes its state slowly, is more appropriate as an image of Fame than glass; for the loss of fame is gradual, not abrupt. The names Geffrey sees engraved in the ice, melted away on one side and "fresh as men had writen hem here/The selve day ryght" (1156-1157) on the other, recalls the symmetrical details usual in descriptions of the abode of Fortune.[36] But while the Fortune imagery drives home the lesson that all things change, that nothing, including earthly reputation, endures, the allegorical detail Chacer has added indicates, paradoxically, that some reputations do endure, even though they may not be those of the most deserving men.

Sypherd long ago pointed out that Chaucer, in presenting Fame as a queen in her court, was influenced by the love vision courts of Fortune, Venus and Cupid. But Chaucer's development of the idea is altogether different, for his journey has a double goal, the search for specific poetic knowledge as well as for general moral truth. Thus, for example, Chaucer departs from his predecessors in the matter of servants at the court. Traditionally, Fortune's subjects and attendants were the people whose lives she affected most dramatically. The lists often include a number of personages whose stories are related in the "Monk's Tale": in the *Chevalier Errant* of Thomas of Saluzzo, Penthesilea, Pope Gregory, Agamemnon, Caesar and Hector appear; Christine de

Pisan's version of the court of Fortune in La Mutacion de Fortune includes princes, dukes, and cardinals, among them Richard II and Pierre de Lusignan. The nine worthies also appear in the court of Fortune.[37]

The personages named in the analogous courts of Venus are famous lovers like those painted on the wall in the Parlement or the faithful ladies who attend Cupid in the "Prologue" to the Legend of Good Women. Sometimes, as in the Kingis Quair, the lovers are organized into groups: lovers forced into convents and monasteries against their will, women forced to marry men they detested, and so on. But Chaucer emphasizes not men and women whose lives Fame has actually affected, of whom only Hercules and Alexander are mentioned. The emphasis is on Fame's transmitters.

Fame's messengers fall into two sharply distinguished categories, those outside the palace and those within. Outside is a great crowd of "mynstralles," "gestiours," harpers, pipers, magicians, trumpeters and sorcerers, in which good men and villains mingle and which includes representatives from diverse historical periods and parts of the world. Orpheus is placed alongside Bret Glascurion and Calypso is with Colle Tregetour, just as in Venus' temple and other catalogues Achilles appears with Tristan and in the circles of Inferno thirteenth-century Italians like Brunetto Latini and Guido da Montefeltro mingle with Capaneus and Ulysses. Within the palace, Geffrey encounters heralds wearing various coats of arms; they are the servants not of Fame herself, but of influential mortals trying to court

Fame. The poets and historians, however, who comprise the second category of Fame's servants, are set apart from the motley array of mere transmitters and heralds.[38] They are within, raised up above the crowd on pillars, a detail which suggests both honor and permanence, as does the language of the poet's description:

> But though they [the pillars] nere of no rychesse,
> Yet they were made for gret noblesse,
> And in hem hy and gret sentence;
> And folk of digne reverence. (1423-1426)

Critical discussions of the poets in the House of Fame usually emphasize the "medieval conception of the poet" Chaucer's description reflects. These poets, as Clemen has pointed out, are not in the House of Fame by virtue of their own renown, but because they serve the goddess.[39] Yet even though their ostensible reason for being in the palace is the particular hero or civilization they described and not their abilities, nearly all are famous poets. And it is clear that Chaucer was composing a catalogue of important poets, and not a list of representative heroes and events which have survived through Fame. For although the list begins with important civilizations and heroes--the Jews, described by Josephus; Thebes and Achilles by Statius; Troy by Homer and the others; Aeneas by Virgil--Ovid is included on the basis of having "ysowen wonder wide/The grete god of Loves name," (1488-1489) even though no other gods are mentioned. Thus the implication is clear that these writers are set apart from the rabble and singled out for mention because of their

talent and not because of the importance of the subjects they treated. It seems that heroes and societies rather than poets are subject to Fame's whims, that only through the arbitrary favor of Fame was Aeneas given a Virgil to hand down the record of his life to posterity. Although other men equal to Aeneas no doubt existed, most of them have been forgotten because Fame did not choose to provide poets or historians to make their lives memorable.

Although numerous catalogues of poets had been compiled during the Middle Ages, it is likely that Dante's high valuation of the great poets of antiquity influenced Chaucer. In the Commedia, the poets constitute a special community set apart from the vulgar herd, just as in the House of Fame they stand high above the noisy crowd of suppliants. In Inferno IV, Dante describes an island of light, set off from the darkness of hell, in which an honorable company of pagan philosophers, heroes and poets, "spiriti magni," dwell. Within this group, the poets form a smaller community, as Dante indicates by having Homer, Horace, Ovid and Lucan come forth to greet the returning Virgil. These people are set apart, Virgil explains, by their honorable name:

> L'onrata nominanza
> Che di lor suona su nella tua vita
> grazia acquista nel ciel che si l'avanza. (76-78)

There are other declarations of the lasting quality of poetic fame in the Commedia, among them the many tributes to Virgil "di cui la fama ancor nel mondo dura/e durerà quanto 'l mondo

lontana" (Inf. II 57-59). In the same canto which suggested the invocation to poetic genius at the beginning of Book II of the House of Fame, Purgatorio XXI, Chaucer would have read Statius' periphrastic identification of himself as a poet: "col nome che più dura e più onora/era io di là" (85-86).[40]

But even while the poets are exalted, the palace of Fame also suggests, as the account of Aeneas' adventures in Book I had, the necessarily biased and subjective nature of literary communication. The pillar arrangement, in which a single author bears the responsibility for sustaining almost every hero or civilization, implies that in most cases we are dependent on the writings of one man for our understanding of that historical period. The possibility of distortion is made explicit in the account of the poets holding up the fame of Troy:

> But yet I gan ful wel espie,
> Betwex hem was a litil envye.
> Oon seyde that Omer made lyes,
> Feynynge in his poetries,
> And was to Grekes favorable;
> Therfor held he hyt but fable. (1475-1480)

This observation foreshadows the amoral nature of Fame. She permits seven writers, some of whom disagree--Homer, Dares, Dictys, Lollius, Guido della Colonna and "Englysshe Gaufride"--to hold up Troy, presumably with equal authority, rather than selecting the most accurate accounts and letting the others be forgotten. While we have no information at all about some

events, we have conflicting reports about others. If even writers who were supposedly eye witnesses to the Trojan War wrote conflicting accounts of it, how can we be sure any written records approximate the truth?

The basis of Chaucer's description of Fame herself is Virgil's description of Fama in Aeneid IV.[41] But while the classical Fama flew swiftly through the air spreading gossip, mixing truth with falsehood, Chaucer's Fame is a stationary goddess who, like Venus, Fortuna and Cupid in the love visions, holds court and passes judgment on numerous suppliants. In his portrait of Fame, Chaucer does not develop the Virgilian details in any particular moral direction, as he had done in specifying that her mountain was constructed of ice and the walls of her palace of beryl. Instead he makes her, in Clemen's words, "a strange, slightly grotesque and common creature, envisaged as a quite ordinary human being."[42] He omits the Virgilian epithets "monstrum horrendum" and "ingens" and makes no explicit negative judgments. Fame's meaning does not become clear until she acts.

Because Chaucer's Fame does not fly, the feathers which covered the body of Virgil's Fama, beneath each of which was located an eye, an ear and a tongue, can be transformed into a metaphor: "as feele eyen hadde she/As fetheres upon foules be" (1381-1382). The insistent attention to concrete detail results in a mixture of magnificence and grotesqueness. The grotesqueness is a product of Chaucer's insistence on making such details as the goddess' changing size visually immediate. This detail, as Bennett reminds us, was a common

enough property of allegorical beings: in Boethius, Philosophy has her head among the stars, and Deguileville and Brunetto Latini present Natura touching the stars with her head.[43] In each case, the allegorical detail is readily translatable into an intangible relation--Philosophy's height, for example, presumably indicates that she represents a means of attaining heavenly wisdom.

But Chaucer, by describing his observations of these changes in the first person, focuses our attention on the physical phenomena and we forget to seek out the allegorical significance:

> For alther-first, soth for to seye,
> Me thoughte that she was so lyte
> That the lengthe of a cubite
> Was lengere than she semed be.
> But thus sone, in a whyle, she
> Hir tho so wonderliche streighte
> That with hir fet she erthe reighte,
> And with hir hed she touched hevene. (1368-1375)

Chaucer's similes amplify Fame's visual magnificence: her feathers were as numerous as the feathers on birds, or those on the beasts in Revelation, her hair was like "burned gold," she had as many ears and tongues as beasts have hairs. Chaucer replaces Virgil's"pernices alae" with the more concrete "partriches wynges" and covers Fame with precious jewelry--"perry and richesse."[44] The "hevenish melodye" sung by the Muses suggests the connection of her court with literary art,

a suggestion developed in the catalogue of her poet-servants.

In this descriptive use of concrete and precise images, the influence of Dante is again discernible. Although it is not usually possible to point to specific analogues, the *Commedia* shares with the *House of Fame* a reliance on certain kinds of images to explain the sights and sounds of a visionary world: precise indications of scale and number, geographical comparisons and technological imagery.[45] But more significant than any specific similarities of this kind is the attitude such a procedure reflects, the sense that all these different spheres of reality are valid subjects for poetry.

The ensuing scene, in which Fame deals arbitrarily with the various groups of suppliants, dispensing good renown and infamy irrespective of desert, is the moral center of the poem, the allegorical working-out of the traditional Christian attitude toward earthly fame. The philosophical background of this idea is too well known to require further documentation here, and the influence of Boethius' discussion of the vicissitudes of Fortune on Chaucer has been the subject of several studies.[46] But even though the judgment scene concentrates the moral significance of earthly fame, it is not the climactic episode of the poem. In a way, it is anticlimactic, for it demonstrates something the dreamer knew before in a general way, even if not in specific details (1897-1906). The allegorical judgment, with its drawn-out moral exposition, seems thin and one-dimensional compared with the rich, assimilative images which surround it. In

Book III, two such images, Aeolus and the House of Rumor, follow the judgment scene, but like the more extensive portraits of the goddess and her palace, they contribute little to the moral lesson of the vanity of earthly fame.

The idea of making Aeolus the executor of Fame's decrees may have come, as Bennett suggests, from a recollection of the specific role of the god of winds in the Aeneid; there, in obedience to Juno's commands, he brings about the storm which causes Aeneas and his companions to be shipwrecked.[47] Chaucer had, of course, already paraphrased Aeneid I, 52-56 for his description of the temple of Venus in Book I. But it was simply Aeolus' lordship over the winds which provided the necessary link between classical and Christian worlds, for Christian writers had long associated fame and worldly honor with wind; Dante, for example, had written "Non è il mondan romore altro ch'un fiato/Di vento."[48] In addition, the mythographers had endowed Aeolus with a pair of trumpets, instruments which were already associated with fame, and it was no doubt the resemblance of Triton's mythological conch to a horn which drew him into Chaucer's poem.[49] The pair of trumpets is easily assimilated into the double pattern characteristic of Fortune imagery, and Chaucer amplifies the contrast between the two and makes it graphic by describing the different colors and odors which issue from the two trumpets. The Eagle's discussion of the transmission of sound has laid the foundations for Chaucer's substitution of Aeolus' trumpets for the classical methods of spreading news; in Virgil and Ovid, Fama herself flies over rooftops.

Thus in even so brief an image as that of Aeolus, classical myth is blended with Christian belief, "modern" science, the traditional imagery of Fortune and the poet's own inventions.

As the visit to the House of Rumor draws to a close, we have another glimpse of Aeolus:

> Ther myghte y seen
> Wynged wondres faste fleen,
> Twenty thousand in a route,
> As Eolus hem blew aboute. (2117-2120)

The image of Aeolus blowing the winged tidings about like birds in a storm recalls, despite vast differences in tone and context, Dante's picture of the carnal sinners buffeted about like starlings by the harsher winds in Inferno V:

> E come li stornei ne portan l'ali
> nel freddo temp a schiera larga e piena,
> così quel fiato li spiriti mali.
> Di qua, di là, di giù, di su li mena. (40-43)[50]

There are other interesting similarities between the later parts of the <u>House of Fame</u> and the early cantos of <u>Inferno</u>. Both Dante's description of the wind which tossed the lovers about like birds and Chaucer's of the wind Aeolus produces immediately follow scenes of judgment. Minos, like Fame, is a monster of classical origin who has been made a judge in a Christian otherworld. Like Fame, Minos categorizes the sinners who come before him, giving their sin a name and deciding which circle they will be assigned to:

Sempre dinanzi a lui ne stanno molte
vanno a vicenda ciascuna al giudizio,
dicono e odono, e poi son giù volte. (V, 12-14)

The movement and crowding of the House of Rumor also seem to echo the early cantos of Inferno with their vast numbers of souls:

si lungo tratta
di gente, ch'io non averei creduto
che morte tanta n'avesse disfatto. (III, 55-57)

But which a congregacioun
Of folk, as I saugh rome aboute,
Some wythin and some wythoute,
Nas never seen, ne shal ben eft;
That, certys, in the world nys left
So many formed be Nature,
Ne ded so many a creature. (2034-2040)

But the main connection is the extraordinary materiality both of Dante's dead souls and Chaucer's bearers of tales. In the House of Fame, as in the Commedia, there is the sense of a huge, barely tapped potential of millions of stories. Just as Dante the pilgrim can stop to listen to only a few tales from the representative figures he happens to encounter, so in the House of Rumor the quoted scraps of conversation are merely a tiny fraction of the tidings that are ceaselessly transmitted. As the dreamer himself observes, the sheer quantity of potential literature far exceeds men's ability

to transcribe it:

> al the folk that ys alyve
> Ne han the kunnynge to discryve
> The thinges that I herde there. (2055-2057)

The House of Rumor, the last of the great allegorical images in the House of Fame, is based, of course on Ovid's description, which is amplified both by references to other classical buildings, such as the "Domus Dedaly," and by imagery connected with the House of Fortune, as well as by matter gleaned from the "tresorie" of the poet's own brain.[51] As with the palace of Fame, the composite description comes first and the allegorical action afterwards.

Even before he is carried into the building, the dreamer is aware of the variety and number of tidings (1966-67). But the moral crux can only be understood from within: the magnifying power of Fame, already re-created once in the description of the goddess' changes in size, is re-embodied in the phenomenon that each bit of news is related "evermo with more encres/Than yt was erst" (2074-75). No tale remains unchanged; all are magnified as they are transferred from person to person. And the materiality with which Chaucer presents the personified rumors makes possible the invented scene in which "a lesyng and a sad soth sawe," (2089) meeting by chance at the same window, argue--"Lat me go first!" "Nay, but let me!" (2097) -- and finally agree to go forth together, henceforth inseparable, in a vivid realization of Virgil's "tam ficti pravique tenax quam nuntia veri." At

this point, of course, the poem ends, leaving only the tantalizing possibility that in the man of great authority Chaucer was about to recreate yet another figure from the classical past; Bennett has suggested someone like Scipio Africanus, other commentators, Boethius.[52]

In a sense, the House of Fame is an account of two journeys with two different conclusions. The visit to the allegorical palace of Fame ends, as in a Christian poem it must, in a recognition of the emptiness of earthly renown and the futility of trying to achieve it. The dreamer properly and inevitably renounces fame (1873-1882). The second journey, explicitly a search for poetic tidings, also pays homage to the great poets of the past, considers the nature of poetic tradition and affirms the value of great poetry. But it also shows the futility of trying to distinguish truth from falsehood in accounts of the past. Even if the poets themselves have the best motives, the materials they must work with are inaccurate even before they reach Fame's palace. As Fame's actions show, the transmission of stories is largely a matter of chance; some are completely forgotten, others transmitted in reasonably accurate form, and others greatly distorted. Geffrey comes no nearer to finding out which literary works are most faithful to the experiences they record.

III

In its treatment of the gods, the *Parlement of Foules* is perhaps the most traditional of Chaucer's poems. While in the *House of Fame* he had re-created from classical texts a goddess of his own, Fame, in the *Parlement* he turns to two of the best-known deities of the Middle Ages, Venus and Nature. Chaucer's use of these popular goddesses in a poetic exploration of love places him in the midst of a tradition of imaginative allegory extending from Jean de Meun through Spenser.

The *Parlement* also follows the allegorical tradition in its structure and its indirect approach to the subject through a series of broad images, each of which casts a different light on the meaning of love. Like other allegories, the *Parlement* utilizes a number of different techniques: description (the park and temple), quoting of authorities and paraphrasing of books (the *Somnium Scipionis*) and finally dramatic action (the birds' debate). The *Parlement* also shares the allegorical tendency to avoid explicit statement, communicating its meaning instead through choice of details and manipulation of traditional meanings. This is the procedure Miss Tuve has called attention to in the allegorical technique of Jean de Meun, the "careful government of the decorum of details ... magnifications and diminutions tending unobtrusively but irresistibly in one direction."[53]

In the *Parlement*, this indirect, exploratory quality extends beyond technique to the meaning of the poem. We have been shown that the *Parlement* is built on contrasts of many

kinds, extending in scale from the major <u>contentio</u> of Venus and Nature and the diverse attitudes the birds express, down to the smaller rhetorical units, the stanza and even the single line.[54] The existence of a variety of apparently contradictory thoughts and attitudes about love is considered to be the "essence of the poem."[55] The paradoxical nature of love is announced in the balanced phrases of the opening stanzas, echoed in the double inscription over the entrance to the garden and suggested in the mixed emotions of confusion and pleasure which result from the narrator's encounters with love's different aspects.

The opening lines of the <u>Parlement</u> are a reminder of the inescapable quality of love, the combination of delight and pain--"dredful joye"--it involves, and at the same time an introduction to the narrator's emotional involvement:

> Love, that myn felynge
> Astonyeth with his wonderful werkynge
> So sore, iwis, that whan I on hym thynke,
> Nat wot I wel wher that I flete or synke. (4-7)

From the beginning, Love is personified; he is a "lord and syre" (12) who can perform "myrakles" and exhibit "crewel yre" (11). The kind of love over which he presides receives further elaboration in the garden, in which "Cupide, oure lord" appears with his daughter "Wille," or carnal desire,[56] preparing the arrows which cause "his strokes ... so sore"(13).

The narrator's habit of reading books supplies a link between the brief introductory remarks about the God of Love's

powers and the lengthier summary of the Somnium Scipionis. The Somnium, like the goddesses Venus and Natura and so many other creations of pagan culture, had been interpreted in accord with the tenets of Christianity, and Chaucer's summary emphasizes the Christian outlook which Macrobius and later readers had read into Cicero's account.[57] With its emphasis on the insignificance of man's life and the "lytel erthe," the "Drem of Scipioun" is a classic formulation of the contemptus mundi theme.

The invocation to Cytherea which interrupts the dream just as it is beginning serves as a reminder that love is still the subject of the poem, even though it was apparently lost sight of in the account of the Somnium. At the same time, the invocation relates Venus in her planetary form to the learning one acquires through books, suggesting that the goddess of love sent Africanus to "quyte" the poet's diligence and study, as Jupiter had sent his Eagle in the House of Fame.[58] But Venus is not only the source of the vision, she is also asked to contribute to its appearance in written form--"So yif me myght to ryme and ek t'endyte!" (119). The planet Venus was generally considered to have beneficent effects and the mythographers often distinguished the planet from the goddess.[59] In the Parlement, such a distinction is clearly intended, for the joyous invocation to Cytherea contrasts with the marked lack of enthusiasm which accompanies the description of Venus' temple. It is noteworthy that Dante too insists on the distinction, explaining that the planet is not to be confused with the wanton goddess to whom ancient

peoples, in their error, sacrificed.[60] From her, he says, the planet Venus takes only "il vocabol"--only its name.

The Parlement calls upon many of the different traditional meanings of Venus. When the sparrow is called "Venus sone," the goddess is being associated with sexual appetite, but when the formel eagle asserts that she will not serve Venus or Cupid as yet, we are doubtless meant to think of the legitimate Venus of honest and virtuous love who helps Nature carry out her divinely inspired functions. In this use of Venus' different meanings, the Parlement contrasts with Troilus and Criseyde, in which planet and goddess are blended into a single symbol; the Venus who is invoked to assist in the labor of poetic composition in the Proem to Book III is both planet and pagan goddess.[61]

If the celestial Cytherea burning in the sky suggests the benevolence of divine love, the Venus of the temple and Nature seem to represent different kinds of earthly love. The alterations Chaucer made in Boccaccio's description seem designed to intensify the contrast between Venus and Nature; Bennett has described most of these changes and characterized their effect as making Chaucer's temple "more sultry, more sinister, and at the same time more voluptuous" than the temple in the Teseida.[62] The Parlement temple is also richer and more artificial than its prototype; Chaucer substitutes jasper for Boccaccio's copper columns and makes the whole temple of brass rather than of branches, as in the Teseida, no doubt in intentional contrast with the dwelling of Nature, whose halls and bowers were "of braunches."

Chaucer also emphasizes the idolatrous worship in the temple. There are a number of different worshippers: first, the women "in kertels, al dischevele" (235), who dance around the temple like priestesses and, we are informed, "that was here offyce alway, yer by yeere" (236). In the Teseida both "giovinetti" and "donne" dance around, but not because this was their "offyce"--Boccaccio only says that this was how they spent the day (VII, 57).[63] In Chaucer's version, the men appear inside the temple setting fresh garlands on the head of Priapus; another pair of worshippers who have no counterpart in the Teseida are the two young folk who are on their knees, begging Venus for her help.[64] The contrast between the easy, unthinking respect of the birds for Nature, who is active and concerned with their welfare, and the idolatrous worship of Venus' unhappy suppliants in unmistakable.

Chaucer also eliminates the sense of anticipation that accompanies the presentation of Boccaccio's Venus. In the Teseida, the list of lovers and of erstwhile devotees of Diana precedes the description of Venus, and the sense of anticipation is increased by the fact that the speaker looks for Venus and is mysteriously directed to her:

> Ma non vedendo Vener, le fu detto,
> ne conobbe da cui: "In più secreta
> parte del tempio si sta a diletto;
> se tu la vuo', per quella porta cheta
> te n'entra." Ond'essa sanz'atro rispetto,

> in abito quale era mansueta,
> là s'appressò per entrar dentro ad essa,
> per l'ambasciata fare a lei commessa. (VII, 63)

Chaucer's introduction of Venus herself, on the other hand, is deliberately blasé; she is treated matter-of-factly, as just another of a series of items one might come across in the temple, and after he has devoted a few words to her, the narrator goes on to explore further instead of remaining to amplify the description of her charms, as Boccaccio's narrator does. Chaucer's wanderer appears bored and anxious to be off. In Boccaccio's poem, Venus herself represents the end and climax of the description; in the Parlement she comes just about in the middle. She is surrounded with none of Boccaccio's mystery; the dreamer does not need to be directed to her through a secret door, but comes upon her almost by accident, it seems--"in a prive corner in disport/Fond I Venus" (260-261).

Small changes in wording and carefully slanted translation results in a marked change in tone, so that even a word like "noble" finally acquires a sinister meaning. Boccaccio's Richezza seems to deserve much reverence "le parve assai da reverire" (64); Chaucer's Richesse, who serves no observable function, as there is no door to guard, is described less flatteringly as "full noble and hauteyn of hire port" (262). In the Teseida, the darkness seems to increase the mysteriousness of the temple; in the Parlement it is simply a matter of information; "derk was that place" (263). Chaucer's omission of Boccaccio's comments about

Venus' beauty is of course more conspicuous; in the Teseida she is lying nude "sopr'un gran letto assai bello a vedere" (64), while in the Parlement we are simply told that she lay on a bed of gold, another suggestion, like the brass and jasper of the temple, of the artificial richness associated with her. Chaucer completely omits Boccaccio's stanza 65, which describes her beauty in detail; he only mentions her "gilte heres" (267).

The description of the goddess herself is equally flat. The narrator remarks that Venus was covered well enough in his opinion and specifies that she was wearing a "coverchef of Valence" (272), an undeniably prosaic garment. The colloquial language and such blandly matter-of-fact comments as "thus I let hire lye" (279) contribute to the deflating effect. The application of standards and categories from the human world to the gods, broadly comic in the adventures of Morpheus and Juno, here produces a vague uneasiness and disappointment; this Venus is not glorious or magnificent as the descriptions of the park has led us to expect.

The list of lovers whose stories were painted on the wall of Venus' temple confirms the general negative impression. For these men and women, love was indeed a "joy ... that slit so yerne" (3), bringing them grief and usually early death. For some of the lovers Boccaccio mentioned, Chaucer substituted names listed by Dante in the circle of the lustful (Inferno V), a canto from which he also drew other suggestions,[65] and Francesca's simple words might serve as an epitaph for all: "Amor condusse noi ad una morte" (106). Unlike Boccaccio,

Chauce places his list at the end of the description, where, as Clemen observes, they are "like a warning epilogue to the whole passage."[66]

Both the example of Boccaccio and the <u>dit</u> pattern lead us to expect that Venus' temple is situated at the heart of the garden, for gods' dwellings were frequently the final goals of journeys through the <u>dit</u> parks. Thus it is with some surprise that we discover that the narrator, instead of listening to Venus lecturing or answering questions, abruptly leaves her and moves outside the temple to the domain of a second goddess of love. The movement from Venus to Nature is accompanied by a change from the descriptive method to the mode of dramatic action through which Nature's relations with her creatures are illustrated. The subject also shifts from a consideration of love's psychological elements, its pains and pleasures, to an examination of the different attitudes toward love among different kinds of individuals.

Chaucer establishes the philosophical background of his Nature in a few allusions so brief and casual that they do not impede the forward movement of the action. He indicates her ancestry in Alanus (316) and echoes the language of <u>De Planctu Naturae</u>; Nature is "the vicaire of the almyghty Lord" (379). Chaucer also suggests that his Nature is a figure of universal harmony: "That hot, cold, hevy, lyght, moyst, and dreye/Hath knyt by evene noumbres of acord" (380-381).[67] Unlike her counterpart in the <u>Roman de la Rose</u>, she is not identified with mindless fecundity; in fact,

she identifies herself with Resoun (632), the arch-enemy of Jean de Meun's Nature, and governs by "statut" (387) and "ryghtful ordenaunce" (390). The number and variety of birds present indicates the plenitude of living creatures under her control; unlike Venus and Cupid she is not selective, but governs even the lowliest creatures.

The idea of a conflict of interests between Nature and the creatures who are reluctant to do her work is, of course, present in De Planctu Naturae, and the Roman de la Rose. But unlike her predecessors, Chaucer's Nature does not lump such creatures together and brand them as perverse; instead we are made aware that there are many different kinds of love and given some sympathetic insight into the forces in human personality which work against Nature. We find that some of the highest and most refined creatures, the formel who is Nature's pride and the two lesser male eagles who refuse to yield gracefully, oppose fulfillment of her purposes, and this disobedience is presented not as perversion, as in the Roman, or unthinking lecherousness, as in De Planctu, but as a result of honest indecision and a sense of immaturity on the part of the formel, and individual preference on the part of the eagles.

By making his Nature understanding and tolerant of the elements in human personality which impede and postpone procreation, Chaucer suggests that these elements are themselves "natural." Unlike Alanus' Natura, the Parlement goddess is not complaining, nor is there a suggestion of Jean de Meun's sense of her limited concern with her own interests. She is aware of the possibility that two creatures perfectly

suited for one another in every outward respect may still be incompatible, and is willing to postpone the fulfillment of her own mission until the right mate can be selected. Nature also recognizes that rivalries between males who desire the same mate are inevitable, and that some suitors must ultimately be disappointed, will perhaps die without procreating, as Arcite did. Yet she does not even suggest that the two lesser eagles find another lady, recognizing that such decisions must come from within. By postponing the formel's decision for a year, Nature allows for the possibility which would accord best with her own purposes, that one or two of the rivals may become discouraged and direct his attention to an easier object. Like Theseus, a human ruler, she is flexible and shows compassion, the "pleyn benygnete" that Alceste commends in a king.

The highly-praised birds' debate suggests how intractable the material that Nature has to work with can be, for it soon becomes clear that a great many lovers are stubborn or selfish. In the course of their comments on the eagles' wooing, the birds reveal a variety of attitudes toward love; Bennett has suggested that this part of the *Parlement* follows the *disputatio* pattern of the *Roman de la Rose*.[68] But there is no apparent attempt, as there is in the *Roman*, to hold a systematic debate or to develop individual arguments at length. Few of the participants actually respond to the points their colleagues have made with anything but personal insults: the turtle dove questions the authority of the cuckoo to "entermeten hym of such doinge" (515), the "sperhauk" attacks the goose with an

argumentum ad avem, the tercelet criticizes the duck and the merlin insults the cuckoo. The spontaneity of the discussion makes possible a series of pointed observations showing the lack of reason with which these birds conduct their affairs; for example, the three eagles seize upon the idea of battle as a solution before the tercelet has even finished speaking. The fact that the first speaker asserts the futility of argument in solving the present problem--"I can not se that argumentes avayle" (538)--casts an ironic light over the ensuing exchanges.

To add to the confusion, the participants change the focus of the discussion; they forget about the original problem--how to decide which of the three contenders loves the formel most--and turn to the question of whether or not a lover should remain loyal despite a lack of encouragement. As in other Chaucerian debates, no progress is made and no one is convinced of anything; as Nature herself observes "I have herd al youre opynyoun,/And in effect yit be we nevere the neer" (618-619).

The debate, despite its charm and humor, makes us aware of the impatience and unruliness of the creatures Nature governs. Aside from the possibility of destructive battle among the rivals, she must contend with the threat of disruption from the other birds, who are unsympathetic and eager to be dismissed. Yet Nature arbitrates the conflicting claims of these unruly creatures with vigor and skill, minimizing the pain the three tercelets must endure and matching every bird with its mate "By evene acord" (668). The subject

of Love, defined initially as the powerful strokes and "cruel ire" of Cupid, then as the languor of Venus, is finally presented as the "blisse and joye" (669) Nature's subjects experience.

Although Chaucer was to move from the allegorical to the narrative mode, those two friends, Venus and Nature, appear throughout his later work. The Nature who in the _Parlement_ delights in looking upon the most perfect of her creatures also finds joy in beholding the fair Anelida, and speaks of her superiority to art in connection with the creation of Virginia in the "Physician's Tale." And just as in the _Parlement_ Nature tells the birds to choose their mates "as I prike yow with plesauce" (389), so in the"General Prologue" it is Nature who "priketh" the small birds "in hir corages" (11). Venus, a far more ambiguous goddess, is to be associated with every aspect of love from the lecherousness of the Wife of Bath to the Love that is the basis of universal order; in the _Troilus_, Venus takes over Nature's role of knitting the world and its creatures in accord.

NOTES

[1] See, for example, John Livingston Lowes, Geoffrey Chaucer (Oxford, 1934), p. 96, and Charles Muscatine, Chaucer and the French Tradition: A Study in Style and Meaning (Berkeley, 1957), p. 104.

[2] Muscatine, p, 104. Robert O. Payne too considers it to be a"comic intrusion." The Key of Remembrance: A Study of Chaucer's Poetics (New Haven,1963), p. 126.

[3] "Dit de la Fonteinne Amoureuse," Oeuvres de Guillaume de Machaut, ed. Ernest Hoepffner, SATF,III (Paris, 1908-1921), p. 163. Future citations from Machaut in my text are to Hoepffner's edition.

[4] Clemen, p. 39.

[5] Muscatine, p. 103.

[6] "A First Reading of the 'Book of the Duchess': Part I," an unpublished paper (The City University of New York, Spring, 1969), p. 9.

[7] Bertrand H. Bronson, for example suggested that "the knight is the dreamer's surrogate." "The 'Book of the Duchess' Reopened," PMLA, LXVII (1952), 871. See also Payne, p. 122.

[8] Rand, p. 12.

[9] C.S. Lewis, p. 168.

[10] Clemen, p. 45. Bronson too notes that "they [the lovers]

are distanced from reality, and depicted in conventionalized attitudes, like figures in a medieval tapestry," p. 865.

11 On Nature, see Introduction, p. 13-16.

12 See James Wimsatt, Chaucer and the French Love Poets (Chapel Hill, 1968), p. 158-159. On Fortune, see Introduction, p. 16-22.

13 "Remède de Fortune," lines 2685-2856.

14 Clemen, p. 45.

15 Payne, p. 129.

16 Payne, p. 129.

17 Payne, pages 79, 75 and 78.

18 Tuve, pages 226 and 230.

19 See Introduction, p. 11-13.

20 Bennett, Chaucer's Book of Fame, pages 18 and 22. On Chaucer's treatments of Venus, see Introduction, p. 25-33. Koonce discusses mythographic treatments of Venus' temple, p. 89-102.

21 Bennett, p. 27-28 and Louis Brewer Hall, "Chaucer and the Dido and Aeneas Story," Medieval Studies XXV (1963), 149-159.

22 De Genealogia Deorum, XIV, 13. See Charles G. Osgood's note in his edition of the last two books of Boccaccio's

treatise, Boccaccio on Poetry (Princeton, 1930), p. 173.

23 See Introduction, p. 3-4; Koonce, p. 107-125.

24 Bennett explains that he is following Dares, Dictys and the Roman d'Énéas.

25 Clemen, p. 85.

26 Roman de la Rose, 13211-13214.

27 Payne, p. 132.

28 Bennett, p. 101; see also his discussion of the invocation to Book II, p. 54-55.

29 Dante's journey does not, of course, come about because he is a poet, as Chaucer's does. But Dante's identification of himself as a poet is emphasized throughout the Commedia. It is felt most intensely in his relation to Virgil and in his encounters with other poets along the way.

30 De Genealogia Deorum, XI; Purgatorio VI, 118.

31 Quoted in Huizinga, p. 333. Seznec traces some of the researches of mythographers eager to identify Jupiter with Christ, p. 96-99.

32 The use of widely differing traditions involving the gods to amplify particular stages in the action is characteristic of Chaucer's procedure in Troilus and Criseyde.

33 Bennett, p. 80.

[34] See Introduction, p. 18-19.

[35] For the connection between Fortune and glass, see Patch, p. 51, and Bennett, p. 104. In the _Panthère d'Amours,_ which is often cited as a source of the _House of Fame_, the house of Fortune is situated on a rock of ice.

[36] W.O. Sypherd, _Studies in Chaucer's House of Fame_, Chaucer Soc., 2nd Ser., No. 39 (London, 1908), p. 117-119.

[37] For the courts of Fortune, see Patch, p. 143-144.

[38] A fourth category is comprised by the gossipers in the house of Rumor, who only carry Fame's tidings incidentally. In this group, merchants, shipmen and pardoners are particularly active, but it really includes all men who communicate with one another.

[39] Clemen, p. 102-103.

[40] There is some ambivalence in Dante's attitude toward literary fame. The orthodox attitude is expressed several times, most fully by Oderisi, whose discussion of the transfer of honor from one man to another recalls the activities of Fortune as Virgil has described them. Writers and artists are subject to the vicissitudes of fame, just as kingdoms are subject to those of fortune:

> Credette Cimabue nella pintura
> tener lo campo, e ora ha Giotto il grido,
> sì che la fama di colui è scura:

così ha tolto l'uno all'altro Guido
  la gloria della lingua; e forse è nato
  chi l'uno e l'altro caccerà del nido.

(Purg. XI,94-99)

Elsewhere,however, the value of poetic fame is asserted. In Inferno XXIV, Virgil urges Dante with precisely the opposite argument, urging him to seek fame:

seggendo in piuma,
  in fama non si vien, se notto coltre;
sanza la qual chi sua vita consuma,
  cotal vestigio in terra di se lascia,
  qual fummo in aere ed in acqua la schiuma.

(47-51)

[41] Ovid's Fama, in Metamorphoses XII, 60-65, is modelled on Virgil's. See Bennett, p. 72-73.

[42] Clemen, p. 155.

[43] Bennett, p. 130.

[44] Chaucer's description of Fame suggests a rhetorical descriptio of a lady. The first element of the rhetorical model, the eulogy of the care given by God or Nature to the perfecting of his creation, is reversed in Chaucer's description: "never formed by Nature/Nas such another thing yseye" (1366-1367). The ordering of elements follows the rhetoricians' laws in a general way; according to Matthew of Vendome, the descriptio must begin with the head and finish with the feet,

following the order in which God created man. Chaucer follows this sequence in a general way, describing Fame's eyes, hair, ears and finally her feet. But he does not attempt the systematic and exhaustive treatment that the rhetorical treatises encouraged, and he deviates from the prescribed sequence in matters of detail. See Faral, p. 80.

45 For example, lines 1117, 1927-1930, 1643-1646.

46 Bennett, p. 110-113; Sypherd, p. 122-126; Jefferson, p. 87-89, 140-141; Paul G. Ruggiers, "The Unity of Chaucer's _House of Fame_," reprinted in _Chaucer Criticism_ II, ed. Richard J. Schoeck and Jerome Taylor (Notre Dame, Indiana, 1961), 261-274 .

47 Bennett, p. 149-150.

48 Purgatorio XI, 100-101. The same idea is echoed by Henryson's Cresseid: "Nocht is your famous laud and hie honour/Bot wind inflat in uther mennis eiris" (462-463). For the traditional connection between Fortune and the winds, see Patch, p. 101 ff. Koonce has found evidence that Aeolus was considered to be a servant of Fame, p. 229-231.

49 Bennett, p. 151. Fama has a trumpet in _Anticlaudianus_. Robinson cites references to Triton's horn in _Aeneid_ VI, 171; X, 209 and _Metamorphoses_ I, 333 in his notes to line 1596, p. 787.

50 There are several other bird images in this canto; Paolo and Francesca, for example, are compared to doves.

Needless to say, canto V would have been of special interest to a love poet and, as has long been recognized, Chaucer probably drew on Dante's catalogue of carnal sinners for the Parlement. The famous line from Francesca's speech, "Amor, ch'al cor gentil ratto s'apprende" (100) was probably the inspiration for Chaucer's "Pitee reyneth soone in gentil herte."

51 As Bennett observes, "All the mean and impermanent features in the antiphrasis that has earlier contributed to the palace of Fame, Chaucer has reserved for Rumour," p. 166.

52 Bennett, p. 184; Ruggiers, p. 271-272.

53 Tuve, p. 291. The same procedure is, of course, common to a great deal of non-allegorical poetry.

54 In Clemen's words, the contentio is "a rhetorical figure which often recurs in the course of the poem and reflects even on the smallest scale and on a purely linguistic level the basic polarity of the poem," p. 130. See also Dorothy Everett, "Some Reflections on Chaucer's Art Poetical," Essays on Middle English Literature, ed. Patrician Kean (London, 1955), p. 103.

55 The Parlement of Foulys, ed. Brewer, p. 14.

56 See Brewer's note to line 214, p. 108.

57 See Clemen, p. 132-136.

58 See p. 74-76.

[59] On the planetary Venus, see Walter Clyde Curry, _Chaucer and the Medieval Sciences_ (New York, 1960), p. 97-110; on the mythographic treatments, my Introduction, p. 28-31. In iconographic terms, the distinction between the goddess and the planet was not always clearly made. The astrological Venus was considered to be responsible for "likerousness" and was often depicted nude, just as her earthly counterpart was. Chaucer's planet, a "blysful lady swete," has the "fyrbrond" of the goddess.

[60] _Paradiso_ VIII, 1-12. Dante had himself assimilated Venus into his Christian journey; as soon as he reaches the shore of Purgatory , he sees Venus "lo bel pianeta che d'amar conforta" (Purg. I, 9). The dream of Leah, which bears some resemblance to Chaucer's in the _Parlement_, is attributed to Venus' influence (_Purg_. XXVII, 95), and she is referred to as "la bella Ciprigna" (_Par_. VIII, 2).

[61] See p. 123-126.

[62] Bennett, _The Parlement of Foules_, p. 91.

[63] Giovanni Boccaccio, _Teseida_, ed. Aurelio Roncaglia, (Bari, 1941), p. 195. All future citations to the _Teseida_ are to this edition.

[64] Bennett suggests that we owe their presence to the two rival lovers in the _Teseida_. _The Parlement_, p. 100.

[65] See p. 86-87. Howard Schless takes issue with the suggestion originally put forth by Lowes ("Chaucer and Dante"

MP, XIV (1917), 705-735) and accepted by Robinson (The Complete Works, p. 794) that Chaucer combined Boccaccio's and Dante's lists, pointing out that the six lovers allegedly suggested by Inferno V, Dido, Cleopatra, Tristan, Helen, Pyramus and Thisbe, are also the most famous lovers of medieval literature and Chaucer would not need any source but common knowledge to recall them. "Chaucer and Dante," Critical Approaches to Medieval Literature, ed. Dorothy Bethurum (New York, 1960), p. 138-140. For further information on this topos, see Bennett, The Parlement, p. 101-104.

[66] Clemen, p. 147.

[67] For the philosophical background of these lines, see my introduction, p. 13-15; Bennett, p. 123-125; and Brewer's notes to lines 379-381 on p. 118-119 of his edition.

[68] Bennett, p. 22.

III *Troilus and Criseyde*

The *House of Fame* and the *Parlement* followed the pattern of the love visions in describing the gods, their dwellings and their worshippers with traditional detail and in typical, changeless attitudes--Venus reclining on her couch in the *Parlement*, Fame distributing her favors. In these poems, the gods were part of a series of tableaux and otherworld landscapes which the dreamer passed through during the course of his journey. Some of the same gods appear in the *Troilus* and the "Knight's Tale" but in the romances these gods interact with one another and govern the lives of particular men and women rather than existing separately in changeless, symbolic attitudes. Because their great power and their favoritism are now illustrated in the course of a particular story, the gods lose their abstractness; they become embodiments of the insecure conditions of man's life.

Chaucer takes advantage of the pre-Christian background of the *Troilus* and the"Knight's Tale" to explore these insecure conditions and to examine how far man's natural reason, unaided by revelation, can go in the direction of discovering or imposing a measure of security in human affairs. This had been a purpose of Boethius' *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, which Chaucer had translated not long before, and to some degree the gods in the *Troilus* and the "Knight's Tale" perform the same function that misfortune and imprisonment had in the *De Consolatione*.

Although readers have always found it difficult to draw a single, unqualified *sentence* from *Troilus and Criseyde*, criticism has only recently made us aware of the nearly-

simultaneous operation of different perspectives in Chaucer's poem. We have come to realize that, in G.T. Shepherd's words "The view we are required to take of the sens as well as of the matter is being constantly altered and manipulated. The telling demands that we change our filter repeatedly and the changes seem to be quite deliberately devised."[1] Since Muscatine first distinguished two basic stylistic poles in the Troilus and discussed the different attitudes toward experience they embody, E. Talbot Donaldson, Robert Payne and others have contributed to our understanding of specific passages and to the most satisfactory reading that we have of the Troilus as a whole, as a poem affirming the value of different, even opposing kinds of truth.[2]

The most fruitful kind of study of the gods in the Troilus must, it seems to me, proceed in the light of these findings and must recognize the poem's pattern of discontinuities. For despite a number of "Trojanizing" additions, Chaucer shows no particular interest in creating the illusion of a completely pagan environment or in providing information about ancient culture for its own sake. As T.P. Dunning and others have observed, Chaucer's treatment of his source "is at all points artistic and never merely narrative."[3] Whatever historical or mythological information is brought in always illuminates the action in some way.

This is, of course, exactly the kind of treatment we should expect, for medieval people, as we have observed, considered their culture to be part of a long, uninterrupted continuum, and felt that their beliefs and values were not

essentially different from those of ancient people. Not until another hundred years had elapsed would Englishmen begin to acquire a sense of historical perspective.[4]

Thus Chaucer does not look at the records of ancient civilizations with an anthropologist's eye, but considers the meaning of the past in present times, and the narrator's observation that although customs have changed, human feelings have remained constant, seems to echo the poet's own attitude. The principal divinities of his poem, the God of Love, Venus, Fortune and the planetary gods, were those most familiar to a medieval audience and in a sense were not really regarded as "pagan" at all. Not until the last lines of the poem is there any real emphasis on the pagan gods as objects of an alien and misguided form of worship.

Rather than comprising a "Trojan" background, then, the gods, like the other mythological allusions in the _Troilus_, are best understood as part of Chaucer's amplifying apparatus, a group of materials he can draw on according to the requirements of the action. They are one component of what Payne calls "the figurative elaboration ... which realizes the thematic implications of Chaucer's structural rearrangement of _Il Filostrato_."[5]

Perhaps the most obvious function of the gods is their role in achieving a general rhetorical heightening, in giving the _Troilus_ a sense of significance and dignity, the "epic grandeur" which has been attributed to the examples of Dante and Boccaccio.[6] Proems, formal announcements of theme and subject, invocations to the Muses, Furies and gods, many of

them suggested by passages in the _Teseida_, establish a grave and stately tone and reflect the same sense of poetic self-conciousness which the elaborate machinery of the _House of Fame_ suggested. Professor Pratt's researches show how many of Chaucer's _Teseida_ borrowings contribute rhetorical emphasis to specific passages in the _Troilus_; they include periphrastic, often astrological descriptions of time and the seasons, addresses to the gods and references to fate.[7]

The gods are also part of the stylistic management through which Chaucer differentiates among his three main characters. Payne, following a line of research begun by Muscatine, draws our attention to the consistent use of the more complicated elaborative figures as well as a high concentration of tropes and schemes generally in the treatment of Troilus.[8] Apostrophe is established as his particular idiom, perhaps as a reminder both of how much he asks of life and of how much he depends on external occurrences for his well-being. Yet his utterances often have a lyricism and pathos which the other characters rarely attain. In Book IV, for example, he compares himself with Orpheus:

> down with Proserpyne
> Whan I am ded, I wol go wone in pyne,
> And ther I wol eternaly compleyne
> My wo, and how that twynned be we tweyne.
>
> (IV, 473-76)

The example of Orpheus is a measure of Troilus' illusion of heroism, an illusion which, in a slightly different context can be turned into a delicate mockery of his mode of existence.

When at their last meeting Criseyde faints, Troilus, drawing his sword from its sheath, delivers a speech "fulfild of heigh desdayn":

> O cruel Jove, and thow, Fortune adverse,
> This al and som, that falsly have ye slayn
> Criseyde, and syn ye may do me no werse,
> Fy on youre myght and werkes so dyverse!
> (IV, 1192-95)

The elaborate double apostrophe provides an indication of the hero's sense of self-importance, perhaps another manifestation of the pride he displayed before Cupid's arrow struck him, while at the same time it suggests the depth of his feelings. The defiant claim that the gods "may do ... no werse" was probably, even in pre-Shapespearean days, an invitation to the lesson Edgar learns: "The worst is not/So long as we can say 'This is the worst.'"[9] Troilus too is to discover that there is indeed a worse fate than the death of his beloved.

This idealistic refusal to live on any terms other than his own, of which Troilus' railing against the gods is a symptom, is the defining quality of many post-Romantic heroes. To a medieval audience, however, it probably suggested pride and intransigence, or, from a more practical point of view, the fruitless striving of the crock against the wall. But, of course, there is a more immediate irony; Criseyde's reviving, after three stanzas of such language, is bound to undercut Troilus' extravagant self-pity. Later, thinking

he will die of sorrow, Troilus makes elaborate preparations for his funeral, offers Mars his steed, and his sword, helmet and shield to Pallas (V, 305-308). But Troilus does not die of sorrow, as no doubt very few men have; his death at the hands of Achilles is a far more banal matter. Troilus' rhetoric here is a measure of his illusions regarding his own importance; his verbal extravagance reflects his emotional extravagance.

While Criseyde's appeals to the gods occasionally echo Troilus' lyric complaints, they more often suggest indecision and helplessness. Rather than asking for aid in the carrying out of a particular project, she asks the gods to tell her what to do. Her immediate response to Pandarus' news that Troilus loves her is not curiosity but fear and self-pity. She begs Pallas to make a decision for her: "Thow in this dredful case for me purveye/For so astoned am I that I deye" (II, 425-427). But railing against the gods and the uncompromising attitude toward life such hyperbolic rhetoric implies is not consistent with the mental and emotional equipment of Chaucer's Criseyde, and consequently he omits the passage in _Il Filostrato_ V, 6, in which Criseida upbraids Giove, Fortuna and the others.

But it is Pandarus, the most linguistically expansive of the main characters, who invokes the gods most liberally, calling upon them most often to enhance the solemnity of his oaths.

> For nece, by the goddesse Mynerve,
> And Jupiter, that maketh the thondre rynge,
> And by the blisful Venus that I serve

Ye ben the womman in this world lyvynge
Withouten paramours, to my wyttynge,
That I best love. (II, 232-37).

Eventually, however, such invocations appear comic and excessive, particularly when, as in this case, the oaths are too strong for the occasion. As Payne has observed, the resourceful Pandarus can play tricks with words, drawing forth opposite morals from the same proverb according to the kind of consolation required for a given situation, thus demonstrating that rhetoric can defend either side of a given argument equally well.[10]

The gods also help to demarcate the stages in the action of the Troilus: the God of Love dominates the first book and his mother Venus the third, while in Books IV and V, Fortune and the planetary gods become increasingly prominent. In terms of the gods, the poem's focus becomes progressively wider, and finally the God of Love and his prey are seen as inhabiting a small corner of a universe dominated by greater forces: Fortune, Venus, who represent the universal principle of love, and the other planets, which act as intermediaries between God and man. The pattern of moving from a single human experience of love to the powerful forces which govern the universe is, of course, also characteristic of the Roman de la Rose and Dante's Commedia.

In The Allegory of Love, C.S. Lewis showed that Chaucer made use of Guillaume de Lorris' classic description of the psychology of falling in love to supplement the treatment he found in Il Filostrato; that the English poet "modified his

story so as to make it a more accurate representation in action of the orthodox erotic code."[11] Part of this reworking involved making the God of Love a more considerable presence. In the Filostrato, Amor is an abstraction; we can seldom be sure whether Boccaccio has the God of Love specifically in mind or is speaking of Love in general, and it scarcely matters. Chaucer, however, writes of the god Cupid with conviction, making him, as numerous scholars have pointed out, the object of a cult patterned after the Christian. Troilus' falling in love is treated throughout as if it were a religious conversion to the worship of a powerful deity, with as much attention devoted to the god and the inner change his converts experience as to the lady herself.[12] While Boccaccio simply says that Troilo was transfixed by love before he left the temple,[13] the English poet emphasizes this critical point in the action, describing the scene through an ancient and traditional image:

> the God of Love gan loken rowe
> Right for despit, and shop for to ben wroken.
> He kidde anon his bowe nas naught broken;
> For sodeynly he hitte hym atte fulle;
> And yet as proud a pekok kan he pulle.
>
> (I, 206-210)

The casual language and offhand manner of this description provide the image of a Cupid far less glorious than the god Troilus is later to invoke as "O Charite" and is a reminder of the extent to which the Cupid Troilus worships is a

creation of his own imagination. The seven stanza digression which follows, the first of a series of amplifications which interrupt the action at important points, explores the significance of Troilus' fall in several ways, mixing, as Jordan says, the lofty and the common both thematically and stylistically.[14] The comparisons with a peacock and with Bayard the horse introduce a comic perspective on the prince's subjection and at the same time suggest the universal compliance of all creatures with the "lawe of kynde." The digression also provides an early indication of the way in which Troilus' experience is to involve both Fortune and Nature: he is accused of "foul presumpcioun," he "is clomben on the staire" and must decend. The idea that love service is a kind of bondage, which is to have its climactic expression in the Boethian soliloquy in Book IV, is also introduced here in the statements that even the strongest and "grettest of degree" have been overcome. At the same time, in the process of warning his audience to submit to love, the narrator establishes love's wider dimensions. Mention of "the lawe of kynde" identifies the _Troilus_ God of Love, traditionally associated with the possessors of wealth, youth and beauty, with Nature, who governs all living creatures. The digression emphasizes the power of the God of Love, a power quite independent of the lady, whom he has not even seen yet, and at the same time explores the possible meanings of Troilus' fall, suggesting the mixed nature of the love he is beginning to experience.

Even after Troilus has seen Criseyde, he continues to

think about the God of Love, and the religious metaphor pervades this section of the poem. While Boccaccio's Troilo thinks about the beauty of the lady and enumerates her pleasing attributes, Troilus repents "that he hadde evere ijaped/Of Loves folk." Even the stanzas Chaucer incorporates almost verbatim from Il Filostrato are informed by a completely different spirit, a spirit that suggests religious reverence. Thus Boccaccio's Troilo speaks to the God of Love "con pietoso parlar:"

> signore, omai
> L'anima è tua che mia esser solea,
> Il Che mi piace, periocchè tu m'hai,
> Non so s'io dico a donna, ovvero a dea,
> A servir dato. (I, 38)

Troilus likewise speaks to the God of Love "with pitous vois"

> O lord, now youres is
> My spirit, which that oughte youres be.
> Yow thanke I, lord, than han me brought to this.
> But wheither goddesse or womman, iwis,
> She be, I not, which that ye do me serve;
> But as hire man I wol ay lyve and sterve.
> (I, 422-427)

Despite the nearly identical wording, Troilus' language conveys an almost religious feeling, an element which is absent in the original. The small shift which changed Boccaccio's matter-of-fact "L'anima è tua che mia esser solea" into the pious

"now youres is/My spirit, which that oughte youres be" is revealing. Boccaccio's Troilo says that he is pleased that the young lady is so beautiful. But Chaucer, who is thinking in terms of a prayer to a great and powerful god, substitutes the more reverent "Yow thanke I, lord, than han me brought to this."

The religious analogy becomes even more pronounced in the complaint overheard by Pandarus; Troilus addresses the God of Love in language equally appropriate to the Christian God.

> O God, that at thi disposicioun
> Ledest the fyn, by juste purveiaunce,
> Of every wight, my lowe confessioun
> Accepte in gree, and sende me swich penaunce
> As like the, but from disesperaunce,
> That may my goost departe awey fro the,
> Thow be my shield, for thi benignite.
>
> (I, 522-532)

It is possible that such language would have suggested to a medieval audience the confusion of values inherent in Troilus' love, as Payne and Robertson believe it did. But the intensity of the narrator's involvement at this point in the action, his temporary abdication of the historian's role and refusal to face the future and his own superior knowledge, indicate that the language of the church could be adapted to the praise of love with little sense of incongruity.

If Cupid presides over the beginning of Troilus' love, its fulfillment is the province of Venus, and with her

entrance into the poem, the meaning of love is expanded. In the Roman de la Rose, it will be recalled, Venus, who embodies the universal sexual instinct, must be summoned by Cupid, the god of fine amour, before the rose can be won. In Troilus and Criseyde, the same shift is discernible; as the love affair progresses, Troilus moves from worship of the courtly Cupid to a sense of joyful participation in a more universal love. But while the Venus in the Roman had symbolized mindless passion, designed by God to serve Nature but nevertheless often going her own willful way, the Troilus Venus, identified primarily as planet, embodies a far more exalted and majestic idea of love.[15]

Venus enters the Troilus gradually in connection with the winning of Criseyde; when the lady responds favorably to Troilus riding through the streets after a battle, the narrator informs us that the hero's success in love is partially attributable to Venus who "nas not al a foo/To Troilus in his nativitee," and who was in a particularly auspicious position at this time. When Pandarus returns from his niece's house with good news, Troilus casts his eyes up to heaven and praises Venus.

But it is the prologue to Book III which really establishes Venus as the deity presiding over the consummatiion of Troilus' love, and which led one scholar to the conclusion that "To an extent scarcely paralleled in any medieval poet except Dante, Chaucer can see a divine dimension in human love."[16] This celebration of Venus had been the matter of Troilo's song in Il Filostrato. But in the Troilus it is no longer imbedded

in the story and it is not the personal expression of a single character; it gains new authority by becoming part of the chain of generalized narrator's commentary. The connection made in the "O blynde world" passage between the God of Love and the law of nature emerges as the major theme here. The prologue to Book III makes Venus the symbol of the love which inspires all creation, embracing not only men, but also animals, plants and the earth itself. Thus Venus begins to assume some of the qualities of Nature just as Kynde is beginning to conquer Daunger in Criseyde's heart.[17]

The proem brings together a great many conceptions of Venus, from the ancient fertility goddess to the modern goddess of the <u>cor gentile</u>.[18] She is invoked in her astrological capacity as the light of the third heaven and friend of the sun, in her mythological form, "O Joves doughter deere," and finally in more general terms, as "Plesance of love." The love which comes to "gentil hertes" is related to universal love, the "vapour eterne" which all living creatures feel"

> In hevene and helle, in erthe and salte see
> Is felt thi myght, if that I wel descerne;
> As man, brid, best, fisshe, herbe and grene tree
> Thee fele in tymes with vapour eterne.
>
> (III, 8-11)

In Chaucer's version this stanza on universal love ends with a reference to divine love. Boccaccio had included "gli dei" as part of the list of creatures affected by love:

> Gli uccei, le fiere, i pesci con eterno
> Vapor ti senton nel tempo piacente,
> E gli uomini e gli dei. (II, 75)

Chaucer changes "gli dei" to "God," giving the stanza a Christian connotation: "God loveth, and to love wol nought werne."

In other parts of the invocation too, the language is sufficiently ambiguous to cover both mythological and Christian ideas. Stanza III mingles the two traditions in the idea of Jove as Creator.

> Ye Joves first to thilk effectes glade
> Thorugh which that thynges lyven alle and be,
> Comeveden, and amorous him made
> On mortal thyng. (III, 15-18)

The phrase "amorous him made/On mortal thyng" carries suggestions both of Jupiter's erotic adventures and of the Christian God's love of man.[19]

Venus appeases the ire of "fierse Mars," improves human behavior ("They dreden shame, and vices they resygne") and governs human relations on every level, holding together friends, families, and nations. Finally, developing a suggestion in Boccaccio, Chaucer relates Venus to Providence. He begins by translating Il Filostrato directly:

> Tu sola le nascose qualitadi
> Delle cose conosci

Ye knowe al thilke covered qualitee
of thynges.

But he develops this suggestion in quite a different way. Boccaccio continues:

onde 'l costrutto
Vi metti tal, che fai maravigliare
Chi tua potenza non sa riguardare.

Chaucer summarizes this tribute to Venus' power in a phrase--"which that folk on wondren so"--and concludes the stanza with three new lines which seem to credit Venus more specifically with providential foreknowledge:

Whan they kan nought construe how it may jo
She loveth hym, or whi he loveth hire,
As whi this fissh, and naught that, comth to were.

Finally, Chaucer asks this divine creative power to assist him in his own act of creation and prays, as Lucretius had, that the power of Venus may come in the form of inspiration for his work.

Thus Chaucer, while following Boccaccio rather carefully, has made Venus the embodiment of God's love as well as man's. Mythological goddess, beneficent planet and generative force are mingled and Venus is finally identified with divine providence: "Ye knowe al thilke covered qualitee/ Of thynges." By placing this passage at the beginning of the third book instead of the end and making it the narrator's song instead of Troilus', Chaucer establishes the beauty and

holiness of Troilus' love. This Prologue was also to prove fruitful for poets of the next generation; the author of the "Kingis Quair" and other fifteenth-century admirers of Chaucer adopted the wise and sober Venus as a judge of lovers' problems, and Gavin Douglas developed the idea of Venus as a source of literary inspiration in the "Palice of Honour."

Venus and the universal bond of love are kept before us in Book III, which, aside from the invocation has nine references to the goddess of love, more than the other four books combined.[20] Troilus' song, "Love that of erthe and se hath governaunce" at the end of Book III, while omitting most of the purely mythological references of the opening hymn to Venus, echoes some of the philosophical ideas of the proem. Troilus sings of love's beneficent influence not on the individual alone but on society and nature: love joins nations and harmonious couples in alliances, and holds things otherwise discordant in harmony. The paradoxical willed thralldom which has characterized Troilus' subjection to love is extended, as Payne points out, to the natural world; the sea, "gredy" to be free from the bond, is constrained by Love's bridle.[21] As Meech observes, the Prohemium and Troilus' song"serve to bracket the hero's period of joy as a time when love seems all-sufficient-- ... Heaven's manifestation on earth."[22]

At the end of Book III, the narrator bids Venus and the Muses farewell. The God and Goddess of Love who ruled the ascending action of the poem will be displaced by Fortune, who presides over the descending action. Book III also marks the end of the poem's syncretistic phase; in Books IV and V

the various amplifying allusions will work separately and sometimes in contrary directions. While Love had been presented in Boethian and Christian terms, the corresponding view of Fortune, which would justify her existence and explain her place in God's universal order appears in only two brief suggestions.[23] The great majority of the references to Fortune express only the commonplace view of her as the cruel and treacherous embodiment of worldly change.[24]

These references contribute to the sense of human helplessness before impending disaster. They also represent, as Donaldson points out, an attempt on the part of the narrator to distract attention from the role Criseyde herself plays in the tragedy, "to postpone for as long as he can the fact--unmentioned for more than 4600 lines--that regardless of the part played by Fortune, it was Criseyde who was the immediate cause of Troilus' unhappiness."[25] The references to Fortune show the extent to which the narrator has abandoned his role as historian and become involved with the characters; he speaks of the fickle goddess as if she were free to act as she pleases, as if her capricious changes were not subject to the control of a higher authority.

The two stanzas which treat Fortune on a higher level are designed, like the love songs in Book III, to emphasize crucial points in the action, but because the narrator is so fully involved with his characters and is reluctant to reveal his own superior knowledge they are briefer than the songs and the philosophical ideas they suggest are left undeveloped. While the love lyrics had explored the meaning of Troilus'

experience, these stanzas on Fortune merely provide atmospheric effects; the true meaning of Troilus' experience in relation to Fortune will not be revealed until after his death.

The first of the two references is the portentous double apostrophe which the narrator, unexpectedly assuming a cosmic perspective, inserts before the description of the fateful night Criseyde spent at her uncle's house, and which connects Fortune's activities with those of the planetary gods:

> But O Fortune, executrice of wyrdes,
> O influences of thise hevenes hye!
> Soth is, that under God ye ben oure hierdes,
> Though to us bestes ben the causes wrie
> This mene I now, for she gan homward hye,
> But execut was al bisyde hire leve
> The goddes wil; for which she moste bleve.[26]
>
> (III, 617-623)

The dramatic irony of the situation has been appreciated: Pandarus' planning and "execucioun" pale beside the magnitude of divine interference, which goes far beyond what he intended, and John J. O'Connor has called our attention to the fact that the conjunction of the "superior planets" Jupiter and Saturn in Cancer foreshadows the impending fall of Troy. Thus Troilus achieves his highest desire under the auspices of the constellation that will bring about the destruction of his city.[27]

But this stanza, despite its profession of ignorance about the workings of the divine will--"to us bestes ben

the causes wrie" --suggests a whole area of philosophical understanding which the narrator possesses. The knowledge that Fortune and the "goddes" are God's emissaries ("hierdes") leads to the heart of the mystery that Troilus is never able to penetrate, the understanding that what man calls destiny is really, from another point of view, "the purveyaunce that God hath seen before," and that this "purveyaunce" is not incompatible with man's exercise of free will. The torrential rainstorm is an example of the temporal unfolding of destiny, being accomplished by one of God's instruments, "the celestial moevynges of sterres," in the words of Chaucer's translation of Boethius.[28] But the narrator will reveal only a small part of what he knows at this point, for his purpose is to take advantage of the emotional possibilities of the situation, to evoke awe and to emphasize human ignorance and helplessness before supernatural forces, not to reveal truth. So we learn nothing here of the bridles that govern the operations of Fortune.

It is suggested elsewhere in the Troilus that Fortune is like another member of the pagan pantheon, on a par with Venus, Mars and Saturn. She has a "course" just as the planets do (I, 138; v, 1745) and her activities are coordinated with those of the other gods; in addition to her association with Saturn and Jupiter during the night of the "smoky reyne," Cassandra links her with Diana in the speech on Diomede's origins (V, 146)). Troilus himself thinks of her in the same terms as Apollo, Mars and the others; he claims that he honored her above all the other gods (IV, 267-68). However, there is only one other reference which suggests her function

in the Christian hierarchy as Boethius and Dante had explained it; near the end of the poem, Chaucer inserts a few lines translating _Inferno_ VII on the Christian role of Fortune. The narrator, even at this late stage in the story describing events as his characters would, substitutes "Jove" for "God."

> Fortune, which that permutacioun
> Of thynges hath, as it is hire committed
> Thorugh purveyaunce and disposicioun
> Of heighe Jove, as regnes shal be flitted
> Fro folk in folk, or when they shal be smytted,
> Gan pulle awey the fetheres brighte of Troie
> Fro day to day, til they ben bare of joie.
>
> (V, 1541-1547)

But however strongly this Dantean treatment of Fortune anticipates it, the true nature of reality is not to be revealed yet, and the stanza serves less to explain the defeat of Troy than to emphasize the magnitude of the forces which caused that defeat.

The other gods, too, gradually become more conspicuous in the last two books. Chaucer takes advantage of the request of Calchas that his daughter be exchanged to remind us, in much more elaborate terms than his counterpart in _Il Filostrato_ had used, of the various prophecies of Troy's defeat, which have not been mentioned since Book I:

> Appollo hath me told it feithfully;
> I have ek founde it be astronomye,
> By sort, and by augurye ek, trewely. (IV, 114-116)

In addition, Pandarus hints at some mythological background involving the gods:

> For certain, Phebus and Neptunus bothe,
> That makeden the walles of the town,
> Ben with the folk of Troie alwey so wrothe,
> That they wol brynge it to confusioun
> Right in despit of Kyng Lameadoun. (IV, 120-124)

The gods also become more conspicuous in Book V through their connection with time. Astrological time references had heightened and emphasized certain earlier events, such as the feast of the Palladion and Pandarus' visit to his niece. Throughout the poem, while the narrator has been totally absorbed in the present or concerned with the bitter contrast between present and past, the future has been suggested through the gods. Even in their first blissful night together, the lovers are reminded by the coming of dawn that time is their enemy, and the _aube_ lyrics contrast the gods, who have the power to hold time back, with men, who do not. Criseyde, lamenting that her lover must depart, allüdes to the lengthening of the night "whan Almena lay by Jove" and Troilus chides "Titan" for permitting the dawn to leave his side (III, 1427-28; 1463-70). The same book which triumphantly celebrates the love that knits all things together also suggests the limits time places on "al that is engendred" and serves as a reminder that, despite Pandarus' promise, human love may approach "hevene blisse" in intensity, but not in duration.

The last and most important of the astrological time

references is Criseyde's promise to return from the Greek camp before "Phebus suster, Lucina the sheene" (IV, 1591) has passed from Aries, where it is at present, to the end of Leo. Boccaccio's Criseida does not speak of her return in terms of the moon's progress, but only promises "al decimo giorno/Senza alcun fallo qui farò ritorno" (IV, 154). The astrological datings which follow contrast the serene, impeturbable motion of the planet-gods in their heavens and the human failure to meet appointments, concentrating the emotions evoked by the betrayal and bringing about some of the most poignant effects in the entire poem. Boccaccio had described his heroine's fall quickly and bluntly; after Criseida's first equivocal answer only three stanzas are needed to describe the breaking of her vow and her acceptance of a new lover. But Chaucer's narrator, in his pained reluctance to face his heroine's betrayal, uses sixteen stanzas to convey the same information; as Donaldson has observed, "he seems to be having the truth squeezed out of him."[29] In addition to slowing up Criseyde's surrender, Chaucer's narrator avoids the blunt statement that she broke her word, symbolizing it instead by the giving of her glove.

It is at this point, when Criseyde is still vacillating but has provided an unmistakable sign of giving in, that the cosmic perspective is introduced:

> The brighte Venus folwede and ay taughte
> The wey ther brode Phebus down alighte;
> And Cynthea hire char-hors overraughte
> To whirle out of the Leoun, if she myghte. (V,1016-1019)

The astrological description seems to concentrate, as Payne suggests "the emotional possibilities ... in Criseyde's as yet unexpressed decision ... [and] expresses [that] decision before she has consciously made it."[30] The brilliant activity of the planets with whose motion the lovers once felt themselves to be in harmony sets off the motionlessness of Criseyde. The contrast imparts a feeling not of bitterness but of poignant sadness; the beauty of the heavens draws forth the pathos of human imperfection, of the fact that men's high romantic aspirations come to so little.

The same kind of contrast occurs in the astrologized description of the tenth morning, which captures the emotional potential of the visit of Troilus and Pandarus to the city walls.

> The laurer-crowned Phebus, with his heete,
> Gan, in his course ay upward as he wente,
> To warmen of the est see the wawes weete,
> And Nysus doughter song with fressh entente.
>
> (V, 1107-1110)

Like the description of the previous night, this passage too contains echoes of the past, when Criseyde had invoked cosmic order as the principle of her own love:

> That first shal Phebus fallen fro his spere
> And everich egle ben the dowves feere,
> And everi roche out of his place sterte,
> Er Troilus out of Criseyde's herte.
>
> (III, 1495-1498)

But the men who are enduring the final scenes of this sad drama no longer have eyes for the beauties of nature. The identification of the lark as "Nysus doughter," metamorphosed for the betrayal of her father is, as Meech remarks, appropriate for the day of Criseyde's failure to keep her word.[31] But the description also sets the steady rising of Phebus "in his course" against the two stationary men who wait anxiously on the walls, and seems to place human suffering in cosmic perspective.

The concluding stanzas of Troilus mark the final stage in the progress from a small, intimate drama concerning a single, proud mortal conquered by Cupid to a philosophical poem concerning love in a Christian universe. Nowhere else in Chaucer's work is the injunction that the end is every tale's strength taken more seriously. To deal with the problem of supplying the kind of ending the story demands, Chaucer manipulates, for the last time and most drastically, the view we are to take of the sens. The introduction of Christian truth this late in the story was a bold stylistic step, and the narrator's various shifts and turns in the course of the poem's final seventeen stanzas suggest that it was not easily arrived at.

This ending has in the past been condemned as an inartistic blemish.[32] Yet it is difficult to imagine a conclusion that could better capture the emotional potential of Troilus' betrayal and death, or one more appropriate to the poem's noble conception and epic dimension, or one that could provide the same sense of finality, establishing once

and for all the distinction between reality and illusion, truth and falsehood. The ending of Il Filostrato was clearly inadequate; Boccaccio had denounced his hero's love for Criseida as "il mal concetto amore" (VIII, 28), referred to love as an "appetito rio" (VIII, 29) and concluded with some general reflections on the inconstancy of women--"Giovane donna è mobile" (30-32).

Another possibility would have been to conclude with a general philosophical resolution like the one Theseus had supplied in the "Knight's Tale," affirming the existence of a "Firste Moevere." The narrator's intermittent disclosures of the relation of Fortune and the stars to "heighe Jove" and the Boethian passages from which Troilus' soliloquy on predestination were drawn could have provided the basis for such a conclusion. But Troilus has been presented as a lover, ignorant of the complex relationship between a stable creator and corruptible nature which Theseus formulates, and such an ending would ignore whatever was of value in the hero's painful experience just as the conclusion of Il Filostrato did. Chaucer's decision to send his hero to the eighth sphere after his death represents a refusal, unqualified by what follows, to declare the human experience of the poem a waste. As an apparent reward for his fidelity, Troilus is permitted to share the cosmic perspective from which the narrator has intermittently observed the action; the poem's rejection of earthly values comes forth from his own experience.

The revelation of Christian truth is gradual and derives much of its power from the generalized and familiar phrases in

which it is formulated; it is conceived not as a condemnation of Troilus' love in particular, but of all human vanity. Although the narrator admits that the early promise of Troilus' love came to nothing, he never characterizes that love as "ill-conceived," as Boccaccio does, and he moves quickly to a higher level of generalization: "Swich fyn hath false worldes brotelnesse" (1832). While Boccaccio had called human love an "evil appetite" which should be restrained, Chaucer, in the analogous passage, gives more general advice: "Repeyreth hom fro wordly vanyte" (1837).

The harshest part of the narrator's denunciation is reserved for the gods. Having assimilated the gods, especially Venus and Cupid, to the Christian universe by broadening their meaning, having more than once suggested the Christian significance of Fortune as a delegate of God, having periodically affirmed the power of astrological influence, the narrator now apparently abandons this syncretist approach for outright repudiation; the gods are dismissed as "rascaille." Yet the gods Chaucer dismisses so easily are actually expendable. Jove, Apollo and Mars have played a minor part in the action and have been surrounded with none of the religious resonances that have accompanied the presentation of Venus and Cupid. In fact, Chaucer refuses to name Venus and Cupid in the "Lo here" stanza, just as he has refused to follow Boccaccio in specifically condemning Troilus' love or attacking "Criseida villana." Even the harshness of the condemnation of "payens corsed olde rites" is mitigated by the couplet which concludes the stanza, gently reminding us, as Donaldson points out,

that this story is the work of "olde clerkis."[33]

Chaucer thus creates a dignified and powerful ending by condemning worldly vanity in general and allowing Troilus and Criseyde themselves to slip away practically unnoticed. Once the possibility of discontinuity of attitude has been accepted, the final illumination which Christian truth provides proves to be an appropriate and satisfying ending; it can both reject the temporary and imperfect felicity of the lovers in favor of the "pleyn felicite" of heaven and at the same time still suggest, however faintly, that human love is not in itself totally without value.

NOTES

[1] G.T. Shepherd, "Troilus and Criseyde," in *Chaucer and his Contemporaries*, ed. Helaine Newstead (New York, 1968), p. 148.

[2] Muscatine, chap. v, p. 132-153; Payne, p. 197-216; E.T. Donaldson ed., *Chaucer's Poetry: An Anthology for the Modern Reader* (New York, 1958), p. 965-980; also two of Donaldson's articles, "Criseide and her Narrator," *Speaking of Chaucer* (London, 1970), p. 65-83; and "The Ending of Chaucer's *Troilus*," *Early English and Norse Studies Presented to Hugh Smith*, ed. Arthur Browne and Peter Foote (London, 1963), p. 26-45; reprinted in *Speaking of Chaucer*, p. 84-101.

[3] T.P. Dunning, "God and Man in *Troilus and Criseyde*," *English and Medieval Studies Presented to J.R.R. Tolkien*, ed. N. Davis and C.L. Wrenn (London, 1962), p. 165. Compare C.S. Lewis' contention that Chaucer approached his work as an 'historial' poet contributing to the story of Troy and that his audience was interested in hearing new bits of the Troy story even if they were extraneous to the main subject. In his emphasis on "medievalization," Lewis perhaps undervalues Chaucer's literary artistry. "What Chaucer Really Did to *Il Filostrato*," *Essays and Studies by Members of the English Association*, XVII (1932), 56-75. G.L. Kittredge first drew attention to Chaucer's "Trojanization" of the poem, "Chaucer's Lollius," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, XXVIII (1917), 50-54.

[4] See Introduction, p. 34-36.

[5] Payne, p. 191

[6] Daniel C. Boughner, "Elements of Epic Grandeur in the Troilus," ELH, VI (1939), 200-210.

[7] Robert A. Pratt, "Chaucer's Use of the Teseida, " PMLA, LXII (1947), 598-621..

[8] Payne, p. 197.

[9] King Lear, IV, i, 29-30.

[10] Payne, p. 210-211. The fundamental suspicion of argument which Pandarus embodies, the sense that "reasoning" is often self-serving and self-deluding, a means of convincing people of what they want to believe, foreshadows episodes in the "Merchant's Tale" and the "Nun's Priest's Tale." All have in common the same comic interplay of devious argument and simple fact. Chauntecleer, January and Pandarus share the illusion that problems can be solved and facts made to disappear by endless learned discussion. Fact, of course, ultimately gets the better of all three.

[11] Allegory of Love, p. 179 ff. See also "What Chaucer Really did to Il Filostrato," p. 66-75.

[12] Analogies between the amatory "religion" of the Troilus and Catholicism have been discussed by a number of critics, beginning with William Dodd, Courtly Love in Chaucer and Gower (Boston and London, 1913), p. 191-203. In more recent treatments, Eugene E. Slaughter discusses the application of the

Christian doctrine of grace and other religious concepts to earthly love in "Love and Grace in Chaucer's Troilus," Essays in Honor of Walter Clyde Curry (Nashville, 1954), p. 61-76; and D.W. Robertson, Jr. attempts to show that "the religious imagery is intended to suggest the values from which the hero departs." "Chaucerian Tragedy," ELH, XIX (1952), 1-37.

13 "Il quale amore trafisse/Più ch'alcun altro, pria del tempio uscisse." The Filostrato of Giovanni Boccaccio, trans. N.E. Griffin and A.B. Myrick (Philadelphia, 1929), Bk. I, stanza 25. Future citations in my text are to this edition.

14 Robert M. Jordan, Chaucer and the Shape of Creation: The Aesthetic Possibilities of Inorganic Structure (Cambridge, Mass., 1967), p. 72-75. P.M. Kean also analyzes this episode; see "Chaucer's Dealings with a Stanza of Il Filostrato and the Epilogue of Troilus and Criseyde," MAE, XXXIII (1964), 36-46.

15 On Venus, see Introduction, p. 25-33.

16 Peter Dronke, "The Conclusion of Troilus and Criseyde," MAE, XXXIII (1964), 50.

17 Pandarus had explained that Kynde and Daunger were warring in II, 1374-1379.

18 The concept of Venus physica, embodying the creative power of nature, is, of course, very ancient, and A.S. Cook has traced it through the classics and Dante with particular reference to Chaucer's invocation. The Latin passages he

quotes (Ovid, Fasti IV, 91-108; Virgil, Georgics III, 242-256, 258-265; Lucretius, De Rerum Natura I, 1-25, 29-40; Seneca, Hippolytus, Act I, 294-5, 299-308, 330-355) emphasize the universality of the procreative impulse, embodied in alma Venus, with particular reference to animals. There are of course no planetary references in these classical passages, nor allusions to the ennobling power of love, nor to love as a bond of social institutions. "Chaucer, Troilus and Criseyde III, 1-38," Archiv für das Studium der Neueren Sprachen und Literaturen, CXIX (1907), 40-54.

[19] The rest of the stanza, however, seems limited in reference to the mythological Jupiter, even though the corresponding lines in Il Filostrato suggest the identification of Jupiter with God and Venus with Mercy. A.S. Cook suggests that Chaucer misunderstood his source here.

[20] There are no references to Venus in Book I, four in Book II, two in Book IV and two in Book V.

[21] Payne, p. 204-205.

[22] Sanford B. Meech, Design in Chaucer's Troilus (Syracuse, N.Y., 1959), p. 78.

[23] For the Christian view of Fortune, see Introduction, p. 19-22.

[24] Fortune's trickery is particularly emphasized: "Fortune his howve entended bet to glaze!" (V, 469); "Fortune hem bothe thenketh for to jape" (V, 1134).

[25] "Criseide and her Narrator," p. 69. Donaldson also observes that occasionally, despite the narrator's efforts, "the distinction between the two women, Fortune and Criseyde, tends to blur, and the goddess' fickleness rubs off on the mortal lady," as in the narrator's remark that Fortune cast Troilus "clene out of his lady grace,/And on hir wheel she sette up Diomede."

[26] Mrs. Loomis points out that despite the popularity of Fortuna in the Middle Ages, this stanza marks the first appearance of her name in its Anglicized form, as well as marking the introduction of the word "influences" into English. Dorothy Bethurum Loomis, "Saturn in Chaucer's 'Knight's Tale'," _Chaucer und Seine Zeit_, ed. Arno Esch (Tubingen, 1968), p. 157.

[27] John J. O'Connor, "The Astronomical Dating of Chaucer's _Troilus_," JEGP, LV (1956), 562.

[28] _De Consolatione_, IV, prosa 6, line 190.

[29] "Criseide and her Narrator," p. 80.

[30] Payne, p. 201

[31] Meech, p. 123.

[32] Most notably by Walter Clyde Curry, _Chaucer and the Medieval Sciences_ (New York, 1960), p. 294-298 and J.S.P. Tatlock, "The Epilog of Chaucer's Troilus," _MP_, XVIII (1921), 625-659.

[33] "The Ending of Chaucer's _Troilus_," _Speaking of Chaucer_, p.99.

IV. The "Prologue" to the *Legend of Good Women*

In the "Prologue" to the _Legend of Good Women_, as in the _House of Fame_, a dream world is the setting for the consideration of literary matters. The fictional situations are in some ways similar: in both poems the dreamer's opinions are elicited by an authoritative pagan divinity or his representative--in the "Prologue," the God of Love; in the _House of Fame_, the Eagle, Jupiter's representative--who judges his work and has the power to reward or punish him for it. In both cases, the narrator at first appears to be bumbling and foolish. As the two poems proceed, however, he unobtrusively communicates an underlying seriousness, a confidence in his own literary judgment and an independence of both the rewards of Fame and the criticisms of the God of Love. The _House of Fame_ is an exploration of the poet's relation to the literary past and an attempt to bring that past into meaningful relation with present experience. The problem of audience misunderstanding, the possibility that poetry may fail to communicate, which is given only brief attention in the _House of Fame_, becomes the main subject of the "Prologue."

It is probably no accident that, in an English poem of the fourteenth century, the setting for these speculations should be a dream world and that the judges should be gods of pagan origin. The _dit amoureux_, being a secular genre limited in style and subject matter, with its own laws and its own authorities, permits the poet to avoid a confrontation with the orthodox view that the communication of Christian truth is the sole justification for poetic composition. It provides

the possibility of suggesting that there may be different kinds of truth without appearing the least bit revolutionary.

For in the dream world of the French *dits*, Christian dogma exists only as metaphor. This world has its own authorities--the God of Love, or occasionally Jupiter--and its own laws. Although the French poets were preoccupied with questions about love rather than with the problems of literary communication that concerned Chaucer, the *dits* constitute a secular tradition of self-conscious writing which he could use as a framework for his own speculations.

The *dits* based on the *Roman de la Rose* introduced a number of new motifs which made it possible to think of the God of Love's garden as a setting in which to consider the problems of poets as well as those of lovers. The main character of the *dits* is not necessarily *Amant*, as in the *Roman*, but often a poet who is not a lover. The nature of the encounter with the God of Love and his servants also changes. In the *Roman*, the God usually lectures, telling of his power, explaining his traditional attributes and enumerating his rules and precepts. But Guillaume's followers modified this prototype, and the God of Love's monologue is often replaced by a conversation, as in Machaut's *Dit de la Fonteinne Amoureuse*.

The basic "plot" of Chaucer's "Prologue" to the *Legend of Good Women*, the court *procès* or judgment, was a popular motif in the French *dits*.[1] The question being judged is usually a *demande d'amour*; in Machaut's *Jugement dou Roy de Behaingne*, for example, the king must determine whether a lady whose husband

has died or a knight whose mistress has left him is more unhappy.

Sometimes a particular sinner is brought to trial. In the _Panthère d'Amours_, and the _Court of Love_, the defendants are guilty of not having entered the service of love voluntarily when they reached the proper age, and are judged by Cupid himself. In other judgments, the culprit is charged with offending against love's law (_Paradys d'Amours_) or with offending women (_Jugement dou Roy de Navarre_).

Two other motifs which the "Prologue" draws upon are the friendly member of the court who comes to the aid of the defendant, and the sinner's atonement by composing verses. In the _Paradys d'Amours_, Plaisance and Esperance come to the aid of the disheartened Amant, and he satisfies the God of Love by composing a lay.[2] Guillaume, the narrator of the _Jugement dou Roy de Navarre_, must perform a triple penance by writing a lay, a chanson and a balade.

The defendants in the _dit_ trials are fearful of punishment. They admit that they are guilty as charged, repent and receive their penance humbly.

Perhaps the closest single parallel to Chaucer's "Prologue" among the _dits_ is the _Jugement dou Roy de Navarre_, in which the poet is brought to trial, convicted and sentenced to expiate his crime by writing poetry. _Navarre_ is distinguished from Machaut's other _dits_ in that the narrator is openly identified by the poet's name. Machaut presents a distinctive self-portrait, "bien vivant at finement nuancé."[3] While the poet appears courteous and gracious at the beginning, during

the course of the debate he comes impatient, finally losing his temper and speaking disparagingly of women:

> Il est certain et je l'afferme
> Qu'en cuer de femme n'a riens ferme
> Rien seür, rien d'estableté,
> Fors toute variableté. (3019-3022)

He further provokes the ladies by declaring

> Mais cuers d'omme est fermes, seürs
> Sages, esprouvez et meürs
> Vertueus et fors pour durer
> Et humbles pour mal endurer.
> (3047-3050

Although the outspoken Machaut who vigorously defends his opinions in Navarre has little in common with the modest, self-effacing poet of the "Prologue" to the Legend of Good Women, Chaucer has clearly followed his French predecessor into the realm of ironic self-portraiture.[4]

Machaut's poem, like Chaucer's reflects the court ladies'reaction to a previous literary work, the Jugement dou Roy de Behaingne, and, like the "Prologue," the Roy de Navarre seems designed to please the angry ladies. Finally, the use of exempla concerning faithful women by Bonneurte and Machaut's other accusers, an element Machaut introduced into the dit, may have suggested the idea of a series of stories about faithful women to Chaucer. As Robinson observes in his notes, some of the details of Chaucer's legends which represent departures from Ovid correspond to Machaut's

treatments as well as to the Ovide Moralisé.[5]

The "Prologue" departs from the conventions of the court procès in a number of interesting ways.[6] Chaucer's dreamer does not hide from the approaching God and his retinue. He notices that the God of Love looked "sternely" as he approached, but he is not as fearful as his French counterparts and he responds to the God's insults courteously but firmly. Unlike his predecessors, he appears genuinely unaware of any wrongdoing and had no idea that the God of Love considers him to be a "mortal fo." And unlike the Guillaume who appears in the Roy de Navarre, who vigorously defends himself and attempts to rebut his accusers, Chaucer does not become involved in the eternal, unresolvable debate about women. As a result of these changes, the "Prologue" raises questions outside the range of the French jugements. Chaucer focuses not on a love problem or the "trouthe" of women, but on a different subject entirely--the problem of audience misunderstanding, "the problem in correlating technique with intention so that effects can be accurately controlled."[7]

The self-portrait Chaucer provides comes into focus only gradually. In the early part of the "Prologue," before the confrontation with the God of Love, he presents himself as a devoted reader of books and gives a low valuation of hiw own abilities: "And as for me, though that my wit be lite,/On bokes for to rede I me delyte" (G 29-30). He is apologetic about his own poetry; others have "lad awey the corn" of poetic matere and he is reduced to "glenynge here

and there" (63), picking up the fragments, and to copying what they have already written. Unlike the vociferous Guillaume, he is silent during the God of Love's speech, disputing neither the accusation of stupidity ("thy wit ... is ful col"), which Cupid speculates is perhaps a result of doting old age, nor the charge of disloyalty, the God's claim that

> of myne olde servauntes thow mysseyst,
> And hynderest hem with they translacyoun
> And lettest folk to han devocyoun
> To serven me, and holdest it folye
> To truste on me. (G249-253)

The condescending tone in which these accusations are made contributes to the impression that the narrator is a dull, unimaginative fellow, an impression heightened by his silence during the debate and the kind of defense Alceste makes, in which there is no reference to the defendant's ability or to the possibility of a different kind of subject matter than the God of Love proposes. As Payne has observed, she offers four different excuses for the kind of poetry Chaucer has written, all of which leave him guilty as charged but plead extenuating circumstances.[8]

Chaucer's brief self-defense to some extent dispels the impression of dullness; his response is courteous and conveys a sense of seriousness and a sureness of his own intentions:

> But trewely I wende, as in this cas,
> Naught have agilt, ne don to love trespas.

For-why a trewe man, withoute drede,
Hath nat to parte with a theves dede;
Ne a trewe lovere oghte me nat to blame,
Thogh that I speke a fals lovere some shame.

(G 452-457)

He points out that he followed his author's meanings faithfully. Yet even before this statement, the God of Love's pompousness and vanity have suggested that his literary criticism is of a very limited kind. Some of Cupid's exaggerations, such as the claim that his servants are all wise and honorable (247) or that no man could be as "trewe and kynde" as was "the leste woman" in ancient times (303-304), must have evoked smiles in Chaucer's listeners. But most disturbing is Cupid's identification of literary quality with subject matter which promotes his interests. From the beginning of his accusation, the implication is clear that he considers the poet to be stupid because of his alleged disloyalty, that any writer who doesn't promote the service of love is by definition "nothyng able." Later, the God identifies "good matere" with stories about good women; good literature, in his view, is literature which serves his purposes.[9] The God of Love's harangue thus contributes indirectly to the defendant's stature, making his silence seem more the result of tact than of lack of articulateness; it is futile to argue against an authority who insists on seeing only those parts of a literary work which pertain to his own narrow interests. Ultimately, it is the loquacious, self-advertising God of Love who sounds foolish.

Not only is the defendant in the "Prologue" far different from his counterparts in the *dit* judgment poems, but Chaucer has also changed the character of the judge as well. The French poets had occasionally substituted a human lord for the traditional God of Love. But the judge, usually the poet's patron, was invariably wise, patient and fair. Chaucer perhaps taking a suggestion from Jean de Meun's treatment of the God of Love, gives his Cupid a far more human character than any judge in the *dits* has. Chaucer's familiar technique of deflation of the gods here serves a new purpose. By making his authority short-tempered and limited intellectually, Chaucer implicitly calls into question the whole idea of prescribed subject matter.

The God of Love, once a commanding figure, was tamed and reduced in the literature of the later Middle Ages.[10] In the first part of the *Roman de la Rose*, written by Guillaume de Lorris, the God of Love retained the tyrannical qualities of Dante's "signor di pauroso aspetto" but he has none of the glory of the god of the *dolce stil nuovo* poets; he is a giver of rules, much concerned with the loyalty of his servants and inclined to be suspicious, more like a feudal lord than a divinity. In Jean de Meun's continuation of the poem he undergoes further deflation. While the implication in the first part and in the *dits* derived from it is that the God of Love, although petulant and difficult to please, can grant *Amant* success whenever he so desires, this is no longer true in the second part. Jean de Meun's God of Love is reduced to calculation and deceit; he has to accept *Faux Semblant* into

his service and even so he has a hard time holding his own against his adversaries. Cupid, symbolizing *amour courtois*, is far less powerful than Venus, the representative of physical passion and Natura, the principle of generation, and it is clear that the God of Love would never have won the castle at all had he not prudently made a truce with his enemies and called forth the two goddesses to assist him.[12]

Not only is Jean's Cupid less powerful than Guillaume's, he is also more cynical and pragmatic. He speaks of love in commercial terms, comparing the love over which Venus presides to the purchase of a horse.[13] He betrays crass motives for aiding the lover; Guillaume is a writer who can return the favor by providing good publicity and thus helping the God to gain converts.[14]

Chaucer follows the description of the God of Love in the *Roman* closely.[15] But he eliminates much of the natural imagery which surrounds the god of Guillaume de Lorris. Thus the *Roman* explicitly states that the god's robe is made *not* of silk as one might expect a lord's to be, but all of flowers, and has on it portrayals of lions, birds, leopards and other beasts in diverse colors, interlaced with rose leaves.[16] In the "Prologue," Cupid's attire is of silk and the "grene greves" and rose leaves are embroidered.

Like the Eagle and like Fame, the "Prologue" God of Love appears to be a magnificent creature:

> For sikerly his face shon so bryghte
> That with the glem astoned was the syghte;

A furlong-wey I myhte hym not beholde.
But at the laste in hande I saw hym holde
Two firy dartes, as the gleedes rede,
And aungellych hys winges gan he sprede.
And al be that men seyn that blynd is he,
Algate me thoughte he myghte wel yse.
(163-170)

As with the Eagle and Fame, too, the God of Love undergoes a deflation; this glorious creature exhibits a distinctly mortal haughtiness and pique, stooping to name calling in order to insult the man who has displeased him.

For the God of Love's lengthy speech of accusation, Chaucer employs a familiar comic device--the quoting of misapplied authorities. Cupid solemnly alludes to Valerius and St. Jerome's _Against Jovinian_; both authors, we recall, were part of the book of wicked wives which so provoked the Wife of Bath, and Jerome's book, although it mentions some good women, is primarily an attack on women and marriage. Some of the other authors the God of Love quotes are not so much misapplied as irrelevant. What do Claudian and Vincent of Beauvais say about good women? Cupid asks rhetorically. The answer would seem to be "not very much." The God of Love believes fervently in books as the source of truth but his recollections of particular books are highly inaccurate.

Alceste's defense of the poet also has the effect of bringing Cupid down to the human level; she casually addresses him as "God" and lectures him on the responsibilities of a deity. Her mingling of Biblical phraseology with the

formalities of parliamentary procedure further serves to deflate Cupid: a god "shal nat ryghtfully his yre wreke,/Or he have heard the tother partye speke" (324-325), although when the other party does attempt to defend himself, Alceste cuts him short. In brief, the Roman de la Rose God of Love is further humanized and his authoritarian character is translated into definite, rigid ideas about what literature should communicate--specifically, it should praise faithful women.

The Roman de la Rose also provides a precedent for the God's concern with his public image and reputation, and for the treatment of relations between the poet and the God of Love. Guillaume de Lorris' relation to Cupid was a relatively uncomplicated matter; he depicts himself as a successful lover writing retrospectively; he writes as Love commands and wills, as Dante claimed he too did.

> Or vueil cel songe rimeier,
> Por voz cuers plus faire esgaier,
> Qu'Amors le me prie e comande. (31-33)

There is no irony Guillaume's treatment of the God of Love, and if he had completed the Roman, the God would probably have had little to say about the subject of poetry, except, perhaps, to instruct the happy lover to write his experiences down.

Jean de Meun's God of Love is, as we have observed, less powerful than Guillaume's and Jean imagines him as being grateful for any publicity he can get. In his speech urging the barons to help conquer Jalousie, Cupid recalls his mourning

at the death of Tibullus, and recalls that Catullus, Gallus and Ovid served him and Venus well:

> Pour cui [Tibullus] mort je brisai mes fleches,
> Cassai mes ars et mes cuirees
> Trainai toutes desciriees
> Dou tant oi d'angoisses e teles
> Qu'a son tomblel mes lasses d'eles
> Trainai toutes desrompues,
> Tant les oi de deul debatues. (10510-10576)

In Jean's section of the poem, the God prophesies that Guillaume, after his success in winning the rose, will serve him further by writing a Roman in which all Love's commandments shall find a place:

> E plus encor me deit servir,
> Car, pour ma grace deservir,
> Deit il comencier le romant
> Ou seront mis tuit mi comant. (10547-10550)

Cupid also foretells the unfortunate death of Guillaume with the book only partly finished and its continuation by Jean de Meun, as yet unborn, whom he lavishly praises as being "au cueur joli, au cors inel" (10566). The God finally claims with pride that Jean will serve him throughout his life

> Senz avarice e senz envie
> E sera si tres sages on
> Qu'il n'aura cure de Raison, (10569-10571)

and prays that Lucina permit him to be born healthy and grant him long life and that Jupiter watch over him (10623-10628).

Had the God of Love's prophetic powers served him better, he would probably have shown less enthusiasm, for Jean's continuation of the <u>Roman</u>, with its cynicism and its antifeminist satire can hardly be the paean Cupid had in mind. If the poem Jean wrote benefits lovers, it does so in a way very different from what Cupid intended. Perhaps, as the God of Love claims, it is true that those who hear it will never die of love--for a reason he does not yet suspect. In the "Prologue," of course, the God of Love criticizes the poet rather than praising him. Yet Jean's treatment of his own relation to a highly partisan, humanized Cupid who extravagantly praises his servant for having no use for Reason may have suggested to Chaucer the literary possibilities of his own relation to such a god.

The second part of the <u>Roman de la Rose</u> thus provides a precedent for a portrait of a tyrannical God of Love who, although intensely interested in books, narrowly defines literature as self-aggrandizing propaganda and has a rather limited idea of what constitutes an Art or Mirror of Love. He makes this god the spokesman for an audience which has a fixed and extremely confined idea about what the proper subject of poetry is and the correct way of treating this subject. At first it appears that the familiar figure of "Geffrey," dull and incompetent, is again to be the butt of Chaucer's humor. But by the end, if anyone comes off poorly, it is the God of Love. Reversing the usual <u>dit</u> situation, Chaucer has made

Cupid the ill tempered complainer, and the usual advice addressed to the lover, that he must be "fermes et estables/ Et non pas si tres variables," is transferred to Cupid.[17]

Chaucer's adaptation of certain motifs of the French _dits_, then, provides him with a dramatic setting in which the difficulties of poetic communication can be considered. He transforms the traditional wrath of Cupid against disloyal lovers into the judgment of a literary career--all Chaucer's poems and prose translations are brought in as evidence, even those holy works which would be of no interest to the God of Love. Despite the modest reference to "lewed folk," there is an unmistakable suggestion of solid achievement in the poetic bibliography which Alceste provides in the course of her defense:

> But wel I wot, with that he can endyte
> He hath maked lewed folk delyte
> To serven yow, in preysynge of youre name.
> He made the bok that highte the Hous of Fame,
> And ek the Deth of Blaunche the Duchesse,
> And the Parlement of Foules, as I gesse,
> And al the love of Palamon and Arcite
> of Thebes, thogh the storye is knowen lite;
> And many an ympne for your halydayes,
> That highten balades, roundeles, vyrelayes;
> And, for to speke of other besynesse,
> He hath in prose translated Boece,
> And of the Wreched Engendrynge of Mankynde,
> As man may in pope Innocent yfynde;

And mad the lyf also of Seynt Cecile.
He made also, gon is a gret while,
Orygenes upon the Maudeleyne.
Hym oughte now to have the lesse peyne;
He hath mad many a lay and many a thyng.
(G 402-420)

Chaucer's defense is brief and carefully worded. He protests his innocence of the charges, claiming, as Jean de Meun had, that he writes about unfaithful lovers only as "ensamples" of"falseness and vice" and that he faithfully transcribed what his "auctour" meant.[18] He appears to accept without question the criteria the God of Love establishes for a good poem. He does not voice any objection to the idea of judging his _Troilus_ in the limited terms the God of Love proposes; he does not contend that the subject of the _Troilus_ goes beyond love _paramours_.

Yet the description of his own intention as "to forthere trouthe in love and it cheryce,/And to be war fro falsenesse and fro vice" (462-463), reveals both a fundamentally moral idea of art and an implicit criticism of the God of Love's narrow definition of what a love poet should write about. A love poet need not defend all women, Chaucer implies, as long as he furthers "trouthe" in love.

But, as Payne observes, "it is precisely what constitutes 'trouthe in love' that is at issue,"[19] and Chaucer does not elaborate further. How does one further truth in love? Are there different kinds of truth? Must love necessarily be defined as love _paramours_? Which books further it? How can

the individual poet know which ones to select? These tantalizing questions are left unanswered.

Chaucer does not call into question the basic assumption of medieval aesthetics: that poetry has a moral end, which is the communication of already discovered truth. But the "Prologue" to the _Legend of Good Women_ suggests that the attainment of such a goal is by no means easy. By making his judge human and fallible, Chaucer calls into question the idea that the methods by which the poet is to further "trouthe" can be easily established or that authorities can establish them at all.

Yet with all his intellectual limitations, his stubbornness and his insistence on conformity, the God of Love is the final arbiter from whom there can be no further appeal. For he is the audience, and no amount of arguing and explaining can alter an audience's reaction to a work of art. The indisputable fact remains that literature fails in some sense if it does not reach him. Thus Alceste cuts Chaucer's explanation short and exacts penance. A declaration of good intentions is no excuse.

Thus, paradoxically, it is through the re-creation of a god that Chaucer examines the problems of anticipating the human response to his poetry. He adapts the powerful and authoritarian God of Love from the _Roman de la Rose_ and the _dits_ as a means of exploring the poet's relation to his audience.

****

While the possible failure of poetic communication is the immediate cause of the dreamer's difficulties in the "Prologue," the poem also explores other ideas about poetic art. Robert O. Payne, in the first serious attempt to analyze this aspect of the "Prologue," has traced Chaucer's discussion of the two main sources of poetic material, the authority of books and direct experience, in this case of nature, in the first part of the poem and shown that the dream, the second part, "figuratively re-enacts and develops" these motifs, particularly in the figure of Alceste, who, as the "figurative transformation of the daisy," blends the poet's experience of the real flower with his reading of ancient legend.[20]

Composite descriptions which unite the worlds of authority and experience were also, we recall, characteristic of the House of Fame. But the "Prologue" has none of the House of Fame's restless movement from one image to another; Alceste, unlike Fame and the House of Rumor, is an ideal which combines the best of both worlds and which reveals more the longer she is contemplated. Her ideal quality is first suggested in the perfection of the daisies in the dream meadow; they surpass all other flowers in scent and beauty (111-112). In the clothing and appearance of Alceste herself the flower's fragility is transformed into a gem's permanence and rareness, the "o perle fyn and oryental" of which her crown is made. Yet she is also a woman, a creation of Nature:

> That in this world, thogh that men wolde seke,
> Half hire beaute shulde men nat fynde

In creature that formed is by kynde.
(176-178)

Her literary background, the connection with other figures from books, is elaborated in the balade (203-223). Ironically the same poem in which a dreamer identified as Chaucer is put on trial by an offended audience and accused of failing to integrate the past with present experience in a satisfactory way, includes a symbol which embodies precisely that integration.

Alceste thus represents a potentiality for successful poetry, but one thus far unrecognized by the poet. Yet the ending seems neither discouraging, nor, Payne to the contrary, "mechanical"; the poet seems a good deal more certain than before of the direction his art should take.[21] The God of Love, while not altering his estimate of the dreamer's ability, is somewhat mollified and he offers some friendly assistance. Like the dit lovers who trespassed in love's domain, Chaucer's dreamer is not to depart without learning something. The God of Love tells him who the kind lady is, and reminds him that her story is contained in one of his very own books; "Hast thow not in a bok, lyth in thy cheste,/The grete goodnesse of the queen Alceste" (498-499). This information sets off a stream of associations in the dreamer's mind. Now he recognizes her and understands that her intercession on his behalf was a kind of reward; Alceste, he says "hath ... quit me myn affeccioun,/That I have to hire flour, the dayesye" (511-512). His delight in reading is also rewarded; with the help of the God of Love, he discovers new relations between

the natural world and the world of books. As a result, other fragments of previously unrelated information about myths and such natural phenomena as the stars fall into place: "No wonder is thogh Jove hire [Alceste] stellifye,/As telleth Agaton, for hire goodnesse!" (513-514). In the same way, the books of "Marcian"and Alanus reinforced Geffrey's observations about the heavens in the House of Fame.

As a result of the "Prologue" dreamer's new insight, other associations come tumbling forth: he is now able to interpret the meaning of Alceste's crown:

> Hire white coroun bereth of it [her goodness] witnesse;
> For also manye vertues hadde she
> As smale flourys in hyre coroun be.
> (515-517)

He also understands the moral significance of another myth he has read about:

> In remembraunce of hire and in honour
> Cibella made the dayesye and the flour
> Ycoroned al with whit, as men may se;
> And Mars yaf to hire corone red, parde,
> In stede of rubies, set among the white.
> (518-522)

Thus the God who judges the dreamer also enables him to experience firsthand the goodness of women, and thereby contributes to making him a better writer. Once the identity of the living figure with the mythological queen has been

pointed out, the effect is inspirational; the dreamer sees how the wisdom of the past can be brought to life in the present in poetry of which the God of Love will approve.

NOTES

[1] The "procès" was probably an outgrowth of the Latin débat, a genre popular since the beginning of the twelfth century. The most famouse example is the _Altercatio Phillidis et Florae_, in which two ladies argue the question of whether a knight or a clerk makes the better lover. The final decision is referred to the court of the God of Love. See Wimsatt, p. 88-89.

[2] Professor Lowes shows that the second part of the "Prologue" to the _Legend of Good Women_, the trial scene, resembles the _Paradys d'Amours_ both in its structural outlines and in a number of details. John L. Lowes, "The Prologue to the _Legend of Good Women_ as related to the French Marguerite Poems and to the _Filostrato_," _PMLA_, XIX (1904), 593-683. W.O. Sypherd argues that the influence of the _Paradys_ is far less extensive than Lowes claims. _Studies in Chaucer's House of Fame_, p. 26-40.

[3] Hoepffner, _Oeuvres de Machaut_, III, lxx. Hoepffner explains that Machaut's explicit identification of himself in _Navarre_ is "contre son habitude qui est de ne donner son nom que par anagramme," lxix.

[4] Wimsatt suggests that "for the Chaucerian probably the most significant aspect of _Navarre_ is the well-developed picture it presents of the individualized narrator of Machaut's later _dits_, a figure that provides a significant precedent for Chaucer's narrator, who first appears in the _Book of the Duchess_," p. 97. He analyzes the "anti-heroic" behavior of

the narrator in Navarre, p. 99-100.

5
See, for example, Robinson's notes to the "Legend of Ariadne," lines 1922-47, p. 851. Both Machaut's and Chaucer's accounts begin with Androgeus and do not designate the Minotaur by name; in both versions, Theseus does not go to Crete voluntarily but because he was chosen by lottery. There are verbal correspondences between the Roy de Navarre and the "Prologue" as well; Machaut, like Chaucer, is accused of "myssaying."

6
There are, of course, two prologues to the Legend of Good Women. The trial of the poet by the God of Love and the merciful intercession of Alceste are central episodes in both and the same issues about poetic communication are raised. The differences between the two do not affect the present discussion except insofar as the lengthy and detailed accusation speech in G develops far more fully the God of Love's intellectual limitations and therefore lends itself better to my argument. All quotations are from G.

7
Payne, p. 99.

8
Payne, p. 103.

9
In F, the accusation is somewhat different, for there is a suggestion that the poet has distorted the original in the God's accusation that "of Creseyde thou hast seyd as the lyst" (F 332). This is a far more serious offense than disloyalty and stupidity, and Chaucer specifically denies having committed it (F 469-470; G 459-460).

10
For the development of Cupid after classical times see Introduction, p. 24-25 and note #37.

11
The language with which Cupid is described in the "Knight's Tale" suggests that a familiar image is being recalled:

> Biforn hire [Venus] stood hir sone Cupido;
> Upon his shuldres wynges hadde he two,
> And blynd he was, as it is often seene,
> A bowe he bar and arwes brighte and kene.
>
> (1963-1966)

In the House of Fame "daun Cupido" is simply identified as Venus' "blynde sone" (137-138).

12
Despite the recent critical disagreements about the ultimate meaning of the Roman de la Rose, the significances of these three gods within the poem have not been seriously disputed. On Venus, see Introduction, p. 26-28; on Nature, 15-16.

13
Lines 10775-10826

14
Lines 10547-10645.

15
Skeat calls attention to this correspondence in his notes to the "Prologue" to the Legend of Good Women. The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, III (Oxford, 1890), p. 297 and 298, notes to lines 213, 227.

[16] "... il n'avoit pas robe de soie,
Ainz avoit robe de floretes,
Faite par fines amoretes,
A losenges, a escuciaus,
A oiselez, a lionciaus,
E a bestes e a leparz
Fu la robe de toutes parz
Portraite, e ovree de flors
Par diversetè de colors.
Flors i avoit de maintes guises,
Qui furent par grant sen assises." (878-888)

[17] The words are those of Plaisance in _Le Paradys d'Amours_, _Oeuvres de Froissart_, ed. August Scheler (Brussels, 1870), I, p. 19, lines 613-614.

[18] "D'autre part, dames enourables,
S'il vous semble que je di fables,
Pour menteeur ne m'en tenez,
Mais aus aucteurs vous en prenez
Qui en leur livres ont escrites
Les paroles que j'en ai dites." (15215-15220)

[19] Payne, p. 109.

[20] Payne, p. 97.

[21] Cf. Payne, p. 110. "... the Prologue closes with the poet ... no more certain than before."

V The "Knight's Tale"

The "Merchant's Tale"

During the later years of his creative life, Chaucer found relatively little poetic use for the gods, except in the *Legend of Good Women*. They have significant roles in only two of the *Canterbury Tales*, the "Knight's Tale" and the "Merchant's Tale." In the "Knight's Tale," as in the *Troilus*, the introduction of the gods broadens the scope of a narrative set in classical times and epitomizes its meaning. In the "Merchant's Tale," too, the gods present a distillation of the human experience of the poem.

The "Knight's Tale" represents Chaucer's most extended poetic use of the classical gods allegorically understood. The poem strongly reflects the feeling Chaucer shared with the mythographers that the stories about the gods were "concrete universals" signifying aspects of human nature and human experience in general.[1] The "Knight's Tale" gods are, of course, presented as forces hostile to man's attainment of happiness; they represent, as Muscatine has said, the potent, everthreatening forces of chaos against which human life erects its noble designs.[2] But the temple descriptions make it clear that this chaos is to some extent the product of man's irrational nature and of irreconcilable conflicts between human beings.

While the allegorical tradition connected the gods to human behavior, astrology provided the idea of invincible, often hostile power exerted from the heavens. The "Knight's Tale" makes use of both kinds of symbolic potential; the gods become symbols of man's inner disorderliness and of the external forces which control his life.

The gods are far more conspicuous in the "Knight's Tale" than in the Troilus; in addition to the astrological references and allusions to Fortune, Chaucer invents the scene in which Mercury appears in a dream to Arcite "arrayed ... as he was whan that Argus took his sleep" (1389-90), as he was depicted by Ovid, and alludes many times to Juno's antipathy against Thebes. Even Arcite's death is attributed to Nature's having abandoned him. From the beginning, references to the gods help organize the experience in the poem and contribute to the ordered, ceremonial tonality, the "pattern of tones and values" which Muscatine has pointed to as the real substance of the poem.[3] In particular, they help stress the insistent doubleness of worldly experience, the immemorial pattern old Egeus knows of: "Joye after wo, and wo after gladnesse" (2841).

Chaucer summarizes and rearranges the first two books of the Teseida in terms of the workings of Mars and Fortune and emphasizes ideas that are to be embodied in concrete images in the temple of Mars. No sooner are we introduced to Theseus, the greatest conqueror under the sun, than he encounters the Theban ladies, who have seen the other side of war. The eldest lady uses Fortune to explain her plight, addressing Theseus as "Lord, to whom Fortune hath yiven/ Victorie" (915-16), a reminder that despite his worthiness, Theseus' successes are to a great extent the work of outside forces. The same point is made more emphatically in the temple of Mars where Conquest, though sitting in "greet honour" (as Theseus is now) is depicted with a sharp sword hanging

over his head "by a soutil twynes threed" (2030), and surrounded by pictures of the death of Caesar, Nero and Antony.

The Theban ladies have had first-hand experience of the other aspects of war later illustrated in Mar's grim temple--death, ire and tyranny. Perhaps most striking is the correspondence between the ladies'mention of hounds which eat the bodies to which Creon has refused burial, and the wolf which devours a man before the statue of Mars.

The two sides of war are evoked again in the account of the winning of Thebes. Theseus' white banner, upon which the red statue of Mars shines so brightly "that alle the feeldes glyteren up and down" is, as Muscatine suggests, "an expression of Theseus' preeminence in war and chivalry," the positive aspect of knighthood which Chaucer dwells on, with great enthusiasm, when he describes the arming for the tournament.[4]

But the siege of Thebes, only a few lines later, once again brings out all the horrors of war. Although Theseus is fighting not for personal glory but out of compassion for the ladies, he still causes great suffering: the innocent people are put to flight and the town destroyed.[5] Even with so compassionate a conqueror as Theseus, the defeated suffer in warfare, just as in the tournament death occurs despite his best efforts.

The first part of the poem ends with another stark contrast, a result of the workings of Fortune and Mars: Theseus crowned as a conqueror, lives in joy and honor "terme of his lyf," while Palamon and Arcite, through no apparent wickedness

of their own but only because they were defeated, are in prison "in angwissh and in wo" (1030).

With the sight of Emelye, Venus enters the action. As war is the source of great honor and deep suffering, so love brings about extremes of joy and sorrow. As in Troilus, love begins with a sweet pain; the beauty of Emelye singing and gathering flowers in the garden and looking like Venus herself evokes from Palamon a cry which his cousin mistakes for a lament. Palamon describes himself as "hurt" and declares that paradoxically "The fairnesse of that lady that I see/Is cause of al my crying and my wo"(1098-99). Throughout the poem, the pains of love receive far more attention than its pleasures, and accordingly there is nothing in the portrait of Venus to suggest the heavenly goddess of Book III of the Troilus.

The complaints of Palamon and Arcite place strong emphasis on the gods, conceived both in their mythological form and as planets. Arcite attributes their plight to Fortune, "Som wikke aspect or disposicioun/Of Saturn, by som constellacioun," and the time of their birth (1086-90). At the same time, as B.L. Jefferson showed long ago, Chaucer, independent of Boccaccio, adapted Boethius' speculations on the relation of Providence to human happiness for the speeches of the two Theban knights, and the philosophical depth which this imparts to the story has been universally recognized. These Boethian additions make the gods part of the philosophical framework of the poem; because of them, the characters' references to Saturn, Fortune and Mars cannot be taken as

simply rhetorical adornments or contributions to the "pagan atmosphere." As Paul G. Ruggiers observes, the Boethian complaints "force upon us the necessity of accommodating the pagan god to the Providence of the Boethian God."[6]

The philosophical issue is most pressingly presented in Palamon's speech adapted from De Consolatione I, metrum 5, in which Chaucer has substituted the opening invocation "O crueel goddes" for Boethius' "O governour." The Boethius passage affirms the existence of a God who orders the heavens "by duwe manere" and asks why "the werkes of men" are not governed in the same way"

> Why suffrestow that slydynge Fortune turneth so grete enterchaungynges of thynges; so that anoyous peyne, that scholde duweliche punysche felons, punysscheth innocentz? And folk of wikkide maneres sitten in heie chayeres; and anoyinge folk treden, and that unrightfully, on the nekkes of holi men; and vertu, cleer and schynynge naturely, is hidde in derke derknesses.[7]

But Palamon sees the order of the heavens in quite a different way; to him it is a manifestation of the force of destiny, "This prescience/That giltelees tormenteth innocence" (1313-14). His rebellious meditation on the human condition seems to foreshadow Donne's disputations with divine authority in some of the Holy Sonnets, particularly in the idea that man's condition is worse than that of beasts. Palamon ends his speech by emphasizing the role of the gods in his own life

which bringsto mind the microcosm illustrations in which man appears with his body divided into parts, each part controlled by a different planet.[8]

> But I moot been in prisoun thurgh Saturne,
> And eek thurgh Juno, jalous and eek wood,
> That hath destroyed wel ny al the blood
> Of Thebes with his waste walles wyde;
> And Venus sleeth me on that oother syde
> For jalousie and fere of hym Arcite.
>
> (1328-1333)

Palamon's complaint does not end in submission, as Donne's sonnets do; such resolution of his questions as the poem provides is deferred until the end. Yet the narrator's carefully noncommittal attitude sets Palamon's monologue in perspective and reinforces its status as the subjective complaint of a single character. Chaucer generally speaks of the gods, especially Fortune and Cupid, in distinctly casual terms; in reference to Arcite's depression, he remarks:

> Right as the Friday, soothly for to telle,
> Now it shyneth, now it reyneth faste,
> Right so kan geery Venus overcaste
> The hertes of hir folk; right as hir day
> Is gereful, right so chaungeth she array.
>
> (1534-38)

Such casualness, shared at times by Theseus, counterbalances the extreme seriousness with which the Theban knights view themselves and their fate. Only at one point, when he pre-

pares us for the coincidental appearance of Theseus' hunting party in the grove where the rivals are fighting, does Chaucer seem to share their fatalistic outlook, speaking of the power of destiny, which "executeth ... the purveiaunce that God hath seyn biforn" (1663-65), much as Fortune was called "executrice of wyrdes" in the Troilus.

It is against this background that the descriptions of the three temples occur, and these descriptions, as Muscatine suggests, "extend the motive of misfortune and disorder ... in ever-widening circles," relating the experience of the main characters to that of mankind in general.

All three follow the same basic pattern: first, the listing of personifications, then a description of the god's "home," examples from ancient history and legend, and finally a portrayal of Venus, Mars or Diana. The tone of the temple descriptions is informal and colloquial with the suggestion, particularly in the oratory of Venus, that the poet is reminding the audience of something familiar, and indeed a large proportion of the details are traditional. But Chaucer's descriptions seem far more concise and more selective than those of his predecessors, and a comparison with the Teseida temples of Venus and Mars reveals to what extent Chaucer has condensed Boccaccio's descriptions and made their import unmistakable. He has eliminated all the luxuriant, elaborate decoration: Priapus, Ceres and Bacchus are gone, along with the bows and arrows of Diana's former devotees and the "Sospiri" which run about and make the altars burn more brightly "di nuove fiamme nate di Martiri."

Chaucer had, of course, used the <u>Teseida</u> description of Venus' garden and temple before, in the <u>Parliament</u>. But in the "Knight's Tale" the beauty and remoteness of the otherworldly paradise evoked in the earlier poem are gone. The idyllic garden filled with singing birds and gentle animals is conspicuously absent and the description begins instead with a list of the "pitous" sufferings that accompany love, of which Palamon and Arcite have experienced so many: "the broken slepes, and the sikes colde,/The sacred teeris, and the waymentynge/The firy strokes of the desirynge..."(1920-22).

The personifications are an apparently random mixture of good and bad concomitants of love. But in comparison with the <u>Parliament</u> list, the emphasis here is on love's negative aspects: Peace and Patience, who sat before the temple door in the <u>Parliament</u> are omitted, along with three positive qualities--Curteysie, Delight and Gentilesse. Hope, Lesynges, Dispense, Bisynesse, Bauderie, Richesse, Charmes and Force have been added. Jealousy is the only one of the personifications who receives special attention, for Chaucer mentions that she carries a garland of marigolds and a cuckoo. The emphasis on Jealousy again reflects the experiences of the two cousins from the moment they both set eyes on Emelye.

Of Venus' home, "al the mount of Citheroun," Chaucer mentions only a few details and uses terms which suggest the recalling of something familiar:

> With al the gardyn and the lustynesse.
> Nat was foryeten the porter, Ydelnesse,
> Ne Narcisus the faire of yore agon.

But even while he implies that he is describing something easily recalled, Chaucer carefully rearranges. He substitutes the porter of the Roman de la Rose garden, Idleness, for Delight, who is porter in the Teseida. Narcissus too comes from the Roman and not from Boccaccio.

The list of exemplary figures "shewed on the wal in portreyinge" has only one example, Hercules, in common with the Teseida list.[9] But Chaucer was apparently thinking less of famous lovers than of men and women known for their power, whose subjugation by love is therefore the more impressive. Thus the strength of Hercules, the "hardynesse" of Turnus, the wisdom of Solomon, the wealth of Cresus and the magical powers of Circe and Medea could not match the power of love. The narrator himself draws the moral:

> Thus may ye seen that wysdom ne richesse,
> Beautee ne sleighte, strengthe ne hardynesse,
> Ne may with Venus holde champartie,
> For as hir list the world than may she gye.

The description of Venus' statue was probably derived from a mythographer's handbook, perhaps that of Albricus.[10] But Chaucer has separated the mythographers' description from the mythographers' meaning. Until now, the pains lovers endure and the power of love have been emphasized, but the "glorious" statue suggests the attractiveness of Venus, the waves which cover her are "brighte as any glas," and her garland of roses is "fressh and wel smellynge." This Venus is far indeed from the sensuous Venus of the Parlement. But

she is equally far from the goddess in the Troilus, who was identified with the bond of love, the force that holds together heaven and earth. In Troilus, the power of love, which affects all living creatures, was celebrated in a whole-hearted, unqualified way. Here we have the acknowledgement of great power, at least as regards the lives of human beings, without the praise. Far from holding things together, Venus pulls them apart. As we have seen, the friendship of sworn brothers disintegrates into bloody fighting under her power, and her subjects forget all other responsibilities to family and country.

Of the three temples, Mars' receives the most attention. Boccaccio's account of Mars' temple was more in accord with Chaucer's own design than was the case with Venus, and the English poet does not alter the Teseida description but expands it to emphasize the miseries of the human condition. For the location of the temple, Chaucer suplemented the Teseida description with details from Statius. He places less emphasis on the coldness of Thrace than his authorities, omitting such details as tempests, clouds, hail and rain, but emphasizing the barrenness; neither man nor beast dwelt there. There are a few small changes in the description of the temple itself, most of them eliminating any possible pleasant connotations. Thus while Boccaccio's temple is "tutto d'acciaio splendido e pulio," Chaucer's is simply "wroght al of burned steel" (1983). The entrance, of which Boccaccio simply wrote "tutta di ferro era la stretta entrata," in the"Knight's Tale" becomes "the entree/Was long and streit,

and gastly for to see." (1983-84) A further detail for which there is no suggestion in the *Teseida* is the noise: "And therout came a rage and swich a veze/That it made al the gate for to rese." (1985-86)

But the most striking and consistent of Chaucer's modifications are in the direction of increased concreteness; thus in the *Teseida* light is reflected from the polished steel of the building; Chaucer elaborates

> The northren lyght in at the dores shoon
> For windowe on the wal ne was ther noon,
> Thurgh which men myghten any light descerne.
> (1987-89)

Chaucer's description of the door and pillars of the temple similarly intensifies the original and makes it more concrete; where the *Teseida* reads

> e le porte eran d'etterno adamante
> ferrate d'ogni parte tutte quante.
> E le colonne di ferro costei
> vide che l'edificio sosteneno.
> (VII, 32-33)

Chaucer has

> The dore was al of adamant eterne,
> Yclenched overthwart and endelong
> With iren tough; and for to make it strong,
> Every pyler, the temple to sustene,
> Was tonne-greet, of iren bright and shene.
> (1990-94)

Chaucer's phrases--"Yclenched overthwart and endelong" and "tonne-greet"--have the concreteness and colloquiality which become more pronounced as the description proceeds. This temple may be distant, but it is not exotic.

Of Boccaccio's personifications, Chaucer uses only the most concrete. For example "l'Ire rosse come foco/ e la Paura pallida" are included as "The cruel Ire, reed as any gleede... and eek the pale Dreed," but such abstractions as "l'Impeti dementi," "cieco Peccare" and "Omei" are omitted. Others are made more immediate; "le 'nsidie con giusta apparenza" becomes the celebrated "smylere with the knyf under the cloke," (1998) "l'allegro Furore" becomes "Woodness, laughynge in his rage," (2011) "la Morte armata ... con volto sanguinoso" is transformed into the extraordinary "The colde deeth, with mouth gapyng upright" (2008), with its echo of the classical yawning mouths of the dead. "Conteck, with blody knyf and sharp manace" (2003) is Boccaccio's "Discordia," who has a "sanguinenti ferri ... in mano."[11] In identifying these personifications, Chaucer almost consistently chooses the Anglo-Saxon word corresponding to Boccaccio's Latinate term--Contek for Discordia, Woodnesse for Furor, and so forth.

Most remarkable of all, however, is the succession of one-line images with which Chaucer embellishes the temple of Mars. These are familiar, ordinary calamities, most of them, as Curry has shown, commonly associated with the planets.[12] Listed apparently at random, they range from the unhappy consequences of war--"The shepne brennynge with the blake

smoke" (2000)--to domestic misfortunes--"The sowe freten the the child right in the cradel/The cook yscalded, for al his longe ladel" (2019-20). These vignettes have a stark, realistic power far from the remoteness of the Teseida. All together, they form an overwhelming catalogue of minor, ordinary tragedy.

Following the pattern of the temple of Venus, Chaucer includes next the classical examples, and again the emphasis is not on martial prowess or political power but on death and astrological influence. Finally, there is the statue of Mars, derived, like that of Venus, from the mythographic tradition, which in its grisly concretness is an apt epitome of the entire description. Chaucer's treatment of the temple of Mars is only eight lines longer than Boccaccio's, yet in effect is far more devastating. He condenses the Teseida descriptions, makes them more concrete and vivid, and adds many images of of his own. The antiquarian remoteness of Boccaccio's version is replaced by a sense of symbolic immediacy; the ancient conquerors are no longer legendary or half-mythological figures but men, subject to the same forces that affect modern barbers and blacksmiths.

The aspects of human life over which Diana has influence, "huntyng and shamefast chastitee," are far more limited than the spheres of Venus and Mars. Diana's temple includes no personifications analogous to those in the neighboring temples, nor a description of her "home," but has instead paintings of several mythological figures who met with misfortune through the goddess: Calisto, Daphne, Actaeon, Atalanta and Meleager.

These are followed by a description of the goddess herself, a portrait which associates her with her astrological counterpart, the moon, and with Proserpine: "And undernethe hir feet she hadde a moone,--Wexynge it was and sholde wayne soone ... /Hir eyen caste she ful lowe adoun,/Ther Pluto hath his derke regioun" (2077-82). The woman in childbirth who is before her crying "ful pitously" (2085) to Lucina, establishes for Diana's temple a realistic dimension. The woman is the last of a wide-ranging series of images of human suffering which are so impressive in these temples, analogous in position to Cupid, who stands before the statue of Venus, and the red-eyed wolf before the feet of Mars.

The image of the gods projected in the temple descriptions is further extended in the monologue of Saturn, "the culminating expression of an ever-swelling undertheme of disaster."[13] Because Saturn had been treated favorably by allegorizers like Albricus and Ridewall, Chaucer turns to the astrologic tradition. Although Saturn is represented as the father of Venus and, as Mrs. Loomis points out, identified with wisdom in the tradition of the allegorists, for the most part he is conceived in astronomical terms, and the description of his powers Chaucer composes is similar to those of Ptolemy, Albumazer and other early astronomers.[14] Saturn emerges from this description as a force of sheer malignity and disorder, not counterbalanced by any pleasure or virtue. His speech reinforces and extends the view of human life taken by Arcite and Palamon; the gods seem to preside over a world in which meaningless calamity is part of the normal course

of events. Like the description of the temple of Mars, Saturn's speech emphasizes everyday tragedies, misfortunes which befall "the mynour or the carpenter," along with well-known catastrophes such as the death of Samson.

The continual references to the gods and the long descriptions of their temples prepare us for their intervention in the tournament and the brief picture of their "family life." Venus' reaction to Arcite's victory is as childish as her behavior before it; she weeps in frustration, and Saturn responds with apparent annoyance "Doghter, hoold they pees!" (2668).[15] This exchange would be comic, in the manner of Juno's directions to her messenger, if it were not for the tragic context of these remarks.

Theseus' affirmative "First Moevere" speech, which reveals "a perception of the order beyond chaos,"[16] is generally recognized as the philosophical culmination of the "Knight's Tale." Its authoritative tone and richness of allusion, its expression of faith in the stability of the divine order and its acceptance of life's inevitable suffering suggest the resolution which the Boethian questionings of Palamon and Arcite demand. Yet Theseus' speech touches on none of the specific philosophical problems which the story has suggested. There is no explanation of the relation of the gods to God; Theseus does not attempt to show, as we might expect, that the stars are agents of Destiny which is in turn an agent of God, as Dante might have done. As a recent commentator remarks, "Theseus relates man to a transcendent stable order, but he says remarkably little about the nature

of this order."[17] Passing over the violent ups and downs of the story's action, he instead discusses life in terms of long cycles of growth and decay. There is no reference to the disruptive forces in the story or to the irreconcilable elements inherent in human life. While in the Troilus Chaucer finally revealed himself as a fourteenth century man and told of truths beyond the grasp of pagan religion which made all earthly events appear insignificant, the "Knight's Tale" concludes with the philosophy of a man who, unable to perceive more than his historical limitations allow, defines the limited and temporary rewards life offers.

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The "Merchant's Tale," although different from the "Knight's Tale" in almost every other way, is similar in respect to the roles the gods play. Like Venus, Mars and Saturn in the "Knight's Tale," Pluto and Proserpine interfere in the natural course of events, exerting their magical powers on behalf of favored mortals. In both poems, human quarrels are echoed in disagreements among the gods, and in both Chaucer's use of the gods' allegorical or other traditional meanings broadens the scope of his stories.

In the case of the "Merchant's Tale," however, the idea of having the pagan gods of the underworld appear was Chaucer's own. In most of the analogues to the pear tree story that are extant, the old husband's sight is restored by the Lord God at the urging of St. Peter. Chaucer perhaps felt it to be inappropriate to invoke the Christian God to perform such a

trivial miracle; at any rate, he substituted Pluto and thereby added a further symbolic dimension to the story.[18]

The simple, predictable plot of the "Merchant's Tale" develops amid a tangle of learned allusions, conflicting authorities and inflated descriptions. The elemental, barely articulate cry of pain to which January is finally (but, it turns out, only momentarily) reduced, stands out sharply:

> And up he yaf a roryng and a cry,
> As dooth the mooder whan the child shal dye:
> "Out! help; allas! harrow!" he gan to crye...

It is practically the only unintellectualized occurrence in the tale, the only emotion which has not been obscured and rationalized by lengthy discussion or elaborate commentary.

The inflated style and continual intellectualization of events is blended with a narrative tone of boundless enthusiasm for every aspect of the story. The narrator is free with superlatives: January's wedding fills him with delight, but so does May's sudden "pitee" for Damian and her ingenuity in having the key duplicated.[19] The effect of all his cheerfulness is, however, far from cheerful. The narrator's praise is bestowed on precisely those subjects better left unmentioned or covered briefly; as a result, descriptions ostensibly intended to be positive are often ambiguous or downright negative in effect. Sometimes he uses the familiar technique of misapplied learning, as when Rebecca, Sarah and Judith are put forth as examples of wifely devotion. Authorities and classical stories are misapplied with the same apparently gay

abandon: May and Damian are incongruously linked with Pyramus and Thisbe as illustrations of the proverb "Love will find a way." In the description of January's wedding, the narrator's insistence on "outdoing"[20] with a series of superlatives serves to draw attention to the underlying unpleasantness of the situation: the narrator praises the food and music, then goes on to explain that the music was of such excellence"that Orpheus, ne of Thebes Amphioun/Ne maden nevere swich a melodye." The comparisons become more far-fetched and more inappropriate; martial music does not seem particularly desirable at a wedding, yet we are informed that the "loud mynstralcye" heard at every course was such

> That nevere tromped Joab for to heere,
> Nor he Theodomas, yet half so cleere,
> At Thebes, whan the citee was in doubt.

Bacchus, Venus[21] and Hymen are present. The narrator's final comparison is the most preposterous of all:

> Hoold thou thy pees, thou poete Marcian,
> That writest us that ilke weddyng murie
> Of hire Philologie and hym Mercurie,
> And of the songes that the Muses songe!
> To smal is bothe thy penne, and eek thy tonge,
> For to descryven of this mariage.
> Whan tendre youthe hath wedded stoupyng age,
> Ther is swich myrthe that it may nat be writen.

When precisely the narrator's enthusiasm crosses the line

between eulogy and irony is impossible to say. But the result is that, by forcing upon us every overblown detail, he ultimately emphasizes the grotesqueness of the marriage of "tendre youthe" and "stoupyng age." The incongruity between style and subject matter emphasizes the incongruity of the marriage itself.

On other occasions the narrator misses the obvious point of an occurrence and provides elaborate, irrelevant explanations. Thus he considers a host of possible causes of May's kindness to Damian:

> Were it by destynee or aventure,
> Were it by influence or by nature,
> Or constellacion

omitting the obvious answer--her strong distaste for January. But it is not only the narrator who inflates and intellectualizes. January, who bears a close resemblance to Jean de Meun's Le Jaloux and whose marriage is to have the same unhappy future, is also a master of the sophistical argument and the quoting of learned authorities.[22]

January's walled garden is probably the last chronologically of Chaucer's treatments of the dream vision garden of love, and it departs farthest from the original prototype. The garden, which January himself has built, is a symbol of the paradise, the heaven on earth, he supposed marriage to be. As J.A. Burrow notes, this garden takes over the image of the "paradys terrestre" in the first part of the poem, where the narrator uses the term "paradys" to describe

wedlock.[23] Like May herself, the garden is beautiful, and January, in his jealousy and possessiveness, has surrounded it with stone walls, just as he has tried to keep May from any contact with the outside world. The garden also reflects the conception of marriage as security, "sikernesse," which has been emphasized in the early part of the poem; one of January's initial motives in seeking a wife was his desire to be sure of salvation and the priest accordingly has made all "siker ynough with hoolynesse."[24]

The garden's links with literary tradition are established in a brief, off-handed way. The narrator casually mentions the <u>Roman de la Rose</u> and Priapus as a way of indicating the garden's surpassing beauty. As in the wedding description, he reverts to the familiar "outdoing" <u>topos</u>. Neither "he that wroot the Romance of the Rose" nor Priapus could describe the beauty of January's garden. The stone walls, the well, the tree and the wicket by which one enters further suggest the model of the <u>Roman</u>.

The traditional garden of love, described in scores of <u>dits</u>, specifically excluded Vieillece along with Covoitise, Avarice and Envie. January, old and physically unattractive, has vainly tried to recreate a private facsimile garden. But the mimicking of external features cannot bring forth the true qualities of the original, just as the lavishness of January's wedding and the due completion of all formalities cannot compensate for the absence of love at the core of the marriage, and January's garden, although beautiful enough to behold, is visited not by the God of Love and his associates

Deduit and Leece, but instead by Pluto and Proserpine "and al hire fayerye," who dance and make music around the well, just as the fairies glimpsed in the "Wife of Bath's Tale" had.

There are a few precedents for this unusual identification of the god and goddess of the underworld with fairies. Fays occasionally appeared in the _dit_ gardens of Cupid alongside gods of classical origin.[25] But _Sir Orfeo_ is, according to Laura H. Loomis, the only work before the Canterbury Tales in which Pluto is king of Fayerye and Proserpine is queen.[26]

The garden and its inhabitants are introduced at that point in the action when May has granted Damian her love and the squire has miraculously recovered, in order to prepare the reader for the denouement. Yet Chaucer also recognized the importance of not revealing too much and thereby reducing the impact of the ending. Because Pluto and Proserpine are introduced as sportive fairies in the narrator's usual innocent and casual way, the symbolic impact these gods are to have on the story is postponed. The mention of Pluto and Prosperpine is offhand and casual, like so many of the poem's other learned allusions: it is only later that their somber classical associations are invoked and the obvious implication of their presence made clear: January's marriage is not a paradise, as he had hoped, but a hell.

When the garden is first mentioned, Pluto and Proserpine are identified only as fairies. But when, after the wicket key has been copied and the assignation arranged, we return to the garden, the narrator recalls, again in a casual aside,

the classical story as retold by Claudian, in which Pluto "ravysshed" his wife "out of Ethna/Whil that she gadered floures in the mede," and "fette" her in his "grisely carte." Although the treatment of the king and queen of hell in De Raptu Proserpina contains little to suggest the divine couple in the "Merchant's Tale," the appropriateness of the infernal deities to the kind of marriage the tale depicts has been observed by a number of critics; Donaldson, for example, suggests that Pluto and Proserpina "represent the archetype of the kind of marriage depicted in the 'Merchant's Tale.'"[27] The similarities between January and Pluto are striking--both men decided they wanted to marry and bear children in old age and May, while she acquiesced in her marriage and was not forcible carried off, obviously has no real affection for her husband.

But as soon as Pluto and Proserpine begin to speak, it is clear that Chaucer's conception of them is very distant from both the mysterious, beautiful fairies of medieval tradition and their fierce classical prototypes.[28] Their colloquial accents and prosaic concerns indicate their kinship with Juno and Morpheus, the Eagle and Fame; they are deflated, down to earth versions of their classical counterparts. And it is soon clear that they are to recreate, on another level, the familiar debate about women and to echo the arguments January and May are just beginning to experience--in response to January's admonitions, May, in her first speech of the poem, has accused men of being "evere untrewe." Thus far, however, her tone has been modest and ingratiating, the tone

of wronged but still subordinate wifehood, rather than the commanding and imperious accents, similar to those of her protectress Prosperine, which she is to assume in her second and last speech.

The argument between Pluto and his wife thus represents another chapter in the eternal, unresolvable debate about women, and at the same time comes close to suggesting the futility of that debate. Like the narrator and like January, with whose absurdly optimistic opinions about marriage the tale began, both gods indulge in foolish generalizations: Pluto condemns women's "untrouthe and brotilnesse" while his queen insists on the goodness of women; neither will yield an inch and there matters rest, for the time being at any rate. Further, Proserpine's comically illogical rebuttal to her husband's accusations, along with the fact that both use the _same_ authority to support opposite arguments, serves as a final assertion of the futility of trying to prove a point through recourse to old books; anyone who disagrees with a particular authority can always claim that his adversary is quoting out of context or can dismiss the authority altogether. Proserpine uses both tactics; she claims first that Pluto has misinterpreted Solomon's meaning: "I prey yow take the sentence of the man;/He mente thus ... " She follows this with the argument _ad hominem_ that Solomon was a lecher and an idolater, who built a temple to false gods.

Just as Pluto and Proserpine are more appropriate to the ironic "Merchant's Tale" than the Lord God would have been, so too it is appropriate that they should have a

futile argument. Authorities, sententiae and proverbs have been invoked in abundance throughout the poem in support of one opinion or another. Yet in all the arguments no one has ever convinced anyone else of anything he did not want to believe in the first place. Each speaker has persisted in interpreting events in his own way, in reducing the complexities of experience to a desired moral. The Pluto who insists on seeing May's perfidy as an illustration of "the tresons whiche that wommen doon to man" rather than as an example of the speed with which a marriage based on avarice and lust will be destroyed is no less blind than the mortal he vainly hopes to free from illusion. The fact is that one can find an authority or a proverb to support just about anything: Placebo can even cite Solomon to support his philosophy of always agreeing with one's social superiors. Furthermore, it is easy enough to scoff at an authority for an argument one disagrees with; just as Proserpine dismisses Solomon as a lecher and an idolater, January turns a deaf ear to the wise counsels of Justinus with a contemptuous "Straw for the Senek" and turns to the more pleasing advice of Placebo. In short, people will continue to believe what they want to believe and find authorities to support them. The same idea was suggested more gently in the "Prologue" God of Love, whose only criterion for good poetry is that it enhance his reputation and who thinks St. Jerome's <u>Against Jovinian</u> is a book praising women. When people cling tenaciously to their preconceived ideas, nothing they read or observe will make them reconsider their judgments.

This point is, of course, made most devastatingly in the scene which follows. In another part of the garden, human beings are re-enacting another domestic dispute. Just as Proserpine changed the subject from the trouthe of women to the character of Solomon, May skillfully manages to divert her husband's attention from herself and Damian to his miraculous cure. But partial credit for this masterly exercise in argument must go to January himself. So much does he want to believe in his private "fantaisie" that he allows himself to be convinced by May's preposterous explanation.

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The "Merchant's Tale" combines two of Chaucer's characteristic ways of treating the gods. The comically incongruous arguments of Pluto and his wife recall the playful quality of the earlier treatments--the Morpheus episode in the _Book of the Duchess_, the folksy Jupiter and didactic Eagle of the _House of Fame_. But the introduction of Pluto and Proserpine is also typical of Chaucer's use of the gods to illuminate the human experience of the poem in which they appear. True, their allegorical meanings are not carefully explored and traditional descriptive details are not drawn in, as had been the case with the gods in the _Parlement_, the "Knight's Tale" and the _Troilus_. Nevertheless, Pluto and Proserpina indicate the nature of January and May's marriage just as clearly as the celestial Venus suggests the dimensions of Troilus' love. The gods of hell, unlike Venus, are so unequivocal in meaning and their very appearance in

January's garden is so suggestive that further elaboration would be superfluous.

NOTES

1 On the mythographers, see Introduction, p. 6-8.

2 Muscatine, p. 190.

3 Muscatine, p. 183.

4 Muscatine, p. 183.

5 It has been pointed out that the "Knight's Tale" version of the conquest is more brutal than the account Chaucer found in the Teseida. In Boccaccio's poem, the Thebans flee and the Athenians enter the city unopposed, and Boccaccio mentions the men Theseus sent out to care for the dead and wounded, while Chaucer speaks only of the "pilours." See Joseph Westlund, "The 'Knight's Tale' as an Impetus for Pilgrimage." PQ, XLIII (1964), 528.

6 Paul Ruggiers, "Some Philosophical Aspects of the 'Knight's Tale,'" CE, XIX (1958), 298.

7 Boece, I, m. 5, lines 34-42.

8 See Seznec, p. 65-68.

9 The Teseida temple includes the stories of Semiramis, Pyramus and Thisbe, Hercules and Iole, Biblis and Cauno.

10 See Robinson's note to line 1955, p. 676-677.

11 The "sharp manace" comes from lines later in the same stanza--"e tutti i luoghi pareano strepenti/d'aspre minacce

e di crudele intenza." In this context, the phrase "aspre minacce" is rather vague, but Chaucer places it alongside "blody knyf," lending the sharpness of the knife to the sharpness of the menace.

12 Walter Clyde Curry, Chaucer and the Medieval Sciences (New York, 1960), p. 122-124.

13 Muscatine, p. 189.

14 Dorothy Bethurum Loomis, "Saturn in Chaucer's 'Knight's Tale'," Chaucer und Seine Zeit, ed. Arno Esch (Tubingen, 1968). p. 156-159. Mrs. Loomis modifies Curry's earlier conclusion that Chaucer's Saturn is "entirely the planet."

15 This image of a squabbling human family is far indeed from the analogous passage in the Teseida, where Venus and Mars work things out harmoniously; they look down on the tournament and discuss the situation in reasoned, dignified tones. (IX, 2-3).

16 Muscatine, p. 190.

17 Joseph Westlund, "The'Knight's Tale' as an Impetus for Pilgrimage," PQ, XLIII (1964), 534.

18 Germaine Dempster, "The Merchant's Tale," Sources and Analogues of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales, ed. W.F. Bryan and Germaine Dempster (Chicago, 1941), pp. 341-356.

19 The narrator's indiscriminate praise calls into question the traditional characterization of the Merchant as an

embittered, antifeminist husband and lends support to Robert M. Jordan's argument that the diversities of attitude and tone which the narrator's comments show "cannot be compressed into a unified characterization." Chaucer and the Shape of Creation (Cambridge, Mass., 1967), p. 143. For the older view, see J.S.P. Tatlock, "Chaucer's 'Merchant's Tale'," MP, XXXIII (1936), 367-381; G.G. Sedgewick, "The Structure of the 'Merchant's Tale'," UTQ, XVII (1948), 337-345; Germaine Dempster, Dramatic Irony in Chaucer (New York, 1959), 46-58.

20 On the panegyrical "outdoing" topos, see Curtius, p. 162-165.

21 On the iconographical origins of the "Merchant's Tale" Venus, see Introduction, p. 31-32.

22 Like Le Jaloux, January thinks of his wife as a piece of property; both husbands compare the choosing of a wife to buying a horse. Le Roman de la Rose, lines 8619-25.

23 Lines 1264,65, 1332, 1822. The Roman de la Rose garden too was called a "parevis terrestre" (line 635). J.A. Burrow, "Irony in the 'Merchant's Tale'," Anglia, LXXV (1957), 199-208.

24 Lines 1279-80, 1355, 1390.

25 For example, in Machaut's "Dit de la Fonteinne Amoureuse,"

les nimphes e les fees
Y [i.e. in the garden] faisioient leurs assamblees
Et ... encor souvent y venoient

E leur parlement y tenoient,
Leurs greus, leurs festes, leurs caroles
E leurs amoureuses escoles. (1401-1406).

Les Oeuvres de Guillaume de Machaut, ed. Ernest Hoepffner (Paris, 1908-1921), III, 193.

26
Mrs. Loomis concludes that Chaucer must have read Sir Orfeo, for "to assume that this precise and most singular parallel [the identification by both poets of Pluto and Proserpine as king and queen of Fayerye] was achieved without reference to Orfeo is to stretch credulity too far." "Chaucer and the Breton Lays of the Auchinleck MS," SP, XXXVIII (1941), 29. She presents other evidence that Chaucer knew the Auchinleck manuscript in "Sir Thopas," Sources and Analogues, p. 489-491.

27
Donaldson, Chaucer's Poetry, p. 922. For other comments on the appropriateness of the gods of the underworld to the "Merchant's Tale," see Tatlock, "Chaucer's 'Merchant's Tale'," p. 372; Sedgewick, "The Structure of the 'Merchant's Tale'," p. 342; and D.S. Brewer, Chaucer (London, 1967), p. 168. Karl Wentersdorf discovered a number of parallels between the "Merchant's Tale" and Claudian's De Raptu Proserpinae,many of which appear far-fetched. See his "Theme and Structure in the 'Merchant's Tale': The Function of the Pluto Episode," PMLA, LXXX (1965), 522-527.

Two other critics, however, regard the episode not as another manifestation of the tale's ostensible bitterness,

but as a comic interlude. See Jordan, p. 148-149 and Bertrand H. Bronson, "Afterthoughts on the 'Merchant's Tale'," SP, LVIII (1961), 593-596.

28 On the fairies of medieval tradition, see C.S. Lewis, The Discarded Image (Cambridge, 1964), 122-138; and M.W. Latham, The Elizabethan Fairies (New York, 1940).

VI The Gods After Chaucer: The Kingis Quair
The Testament of Cresseid
The Palice of Honor

I

The new material about the gods which Chaucer had incorporated into his poetry from popular astrology and the writings of Dante, Boccaccio, Boethius and the mythographers was an important part of his poetic legacy, a precious addition to the repertory of rhetorical adornments which his fifteenth century successors valued so highly.[1] Although in general fifteenth century English and Scottish poets preferred to retain the older forms--the dit amoureux and the courtly complaint--rather than writing philosophical romances, the "Knight's Tale" and the Troilus provided new content which was eagerly exploited. Chaucer's learned allusions, such as invocations to Clio and Callipe and astrological dating, became commonplaces of fifteenth century courtly literature, and bits of Chaucerian information about classical antiquity were ubiquitous.

Most often, the fifteenth century poets borrowed not from a single work but gathered suggestions from several, a procedure Chaucer himself followed in his own borrowings. The Kingis Quair, for example, draws from the Parlement the preliminary reading of a philosophical book, the portrait of Venus and many details of the paradisal park, although it is Fortune who appears in the park, not Venus or Nature; from the "Knight's Tale" the account of the first view of the lady, and from the Troilus the bidding of prayers at the end of the poem, the prayers to Venus and the conception of the goddess of love as presiding over a holy bond.

Chaucer's sense that there is something comic about the

gods, of which there are traces in most of his early poems as well as in the Knight's and Merchant's tales, was not imitated except by Gavin Douglas in The Palice of Honour. Nor do these later poets aim for the philosophically suggestive interplay of gods with men and events which occurs in the "Knight's Tale" and the Troilus. Rarely either do the gods embody the unforeseen perils of human life and the entanglements of human emotion, as they did in Chaucer's work. In most of the poems of Chaucer's successors, the gods are straightforward and one-dimensional in meaning. They are usually repositories of moral wisdom, which they impart at great length. Rather than examining the meaning of gods in the gradual unfolding of a man's life, these poets transform the gods into spokesmen for virtue or eternal truth.

Nevertheless, Chaucer's innovations brought about a major change in the subject matter of the dits. The astrological gods whom he incorporated into poetry were, after all, considered to be real forces in the universe, not mere mythological fictions. The deities in these fifteenth century poems almost always have heavenly dwellings which require an aerial journey, usually to a planet, rather than living in gardens or on islands, and such a journey usually is accompanied by a belittling of worldly concerns and a sense of solemnity.

Another particularly striking change in the fifteenth century dit involves the literary conception of Venus. She eclipses the God of Love in importance, and he becomes a mere adjunct. It is now Venus who prescribes rules of conduct for

lovers. But because she has been Christianized, the rules are very different in kind. Although the conception of Venus as a giver of life, like Nature, the *alma Venus* of Lucretius, was represented throughout the Middle Ages in hundreds of popular spring lyrics, this idea had not been appropriated by the French court poets whose work derived from the *Roman de la Rose*, in which Venus is simply a symbol of unthinking sexual passion. Venus' wider significance at last becomes part of the *dit* tradition in the fifteenth century through Chaucer's synthesis of goddess with planet in the *Troilus*.[3]

Thus, for example, in the *Confessio Amantis*, Venus is sober and thoughtful, a sister of Raison rather than an enemy, as she had been in the *Roman*. Genius is her priest, instead of Nature's, and he hears confession from the lover on the seven deadly sins. Venus herself expounds the difference between charity and selfish passion, and advises him, before ascending to heaven, to place his mind on God. This reasonable Venus, so distant from the indiscriminate sexual force of Alanus and Jean de Meun, is also present with slight variations in the "Kingis Quair," Lydgate's "Temple of Glass" and numerous other fifteenth century *dits*. Old and new motifs appear in varying combinations. In the *Court of Love*, for example, the lovers are on their knees with petitions in their hands, as in the traditional *dits*. However, they address Venus as "blisful planet" and make a speech which echoes Book III of the *Troilus*.

The popularity of the heavenly Venus of the *Troilus* was in fact only a part of the tremendous influence of that poem,

which brought a new philosophical dimension to the dits and new material to other kinds of poetry as well. Troilus' questioning of divine justice, his soliloquy about free will and destiny and his tributes to the power of the God of Love are incorporated into a great many love complaints. In Lydgate's "Complaint of the Black Knight," we have a tribute to the power of Love couched in the anaphoric accents of the condemnation of the pagan gods at the close of the Troilus:

> Lo! how that love can his servants quyte!
> Lo! how he can his faythful men despyse...
> Lo! how he doth the swerd of sorowe byte.[4]

Philosophical passages from the Troilus, isolated from their original contexts, become part of the repertoire of poetic topoi. Lydgate's "Epithalamium for Gloucester," a tissue of Chaucerian quotations, gives a good idea of the superficial and desultory ways in which these ideas were often used. It begins:

> Thorugh gladde aspectis / of the god Cupyde
> And ful acorde of his moder deere
> fful offt sythes / list aforne provyde
> By cours eterne / of the sterres cleere
> Hertis in love / for to Joyne in feere
> Thoroughe bonde of feyth perpetuelly tendure
> By influence of god and of nature.[5]

The language is familiar: the"gladde aspectis" and "influence," the connection of Venus and Cupid with the "sterres cleere" all seem to evoke the conception of human love as part of the

universal order, as Chaucer had in the proem to Book III of Troilus and Criseyde. But in fact Chaucer's ideas have become meaningless clichés; we have the familiar language without the intellectual substance that lay behind it. Lydgate's general point seems to be that the stars, Cupid and Venus have something to do with making people fall in love. But the words have become mere counters, they have lost their astrological meaning. Cupid, not being a planet, has no "gladde aspectis" nor do god and nature have "influence." Yet despite its intellectual vacuousness, this passage and numerous others like it bear witness to the tremendous impression Chaucer's poem made on fifteenth century learned poets.

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Because Chaucer's early poetry was itself part of a well-established French tradition and because the books he read, particularly the Roman de la Rose and the dits, but also Boethius and perhaps even Dante, were also available to his fifteenth-century admirers, Professor Denton Fox has suggested that it is impossible to make an accurate estimate of Chaucer's contribution to fifteenth-century allegorical writing.[6] Nevertheless, in some cases, the various lines of influence can be discerned and their interaction evaluated. Such is the case with three in particular of the fifteenth-century "Chaucerian" poems, the "Kingis Quair," the "Testament of Cresseid" and the "Palice of Honor." Of these, the first two are considered to be of high literary quality. But all three are interesting because they reflect the different ways in which Chaucerian

ideas were assimilated to the traditional love *dit*.

II

The _Kingis Quair_[7], long attributed to King James I of Scotland, resembles the _Troilus_ and the "Knight's Tale" in that it combines a love story with philosophical speculation about human destiny. Although it contains some suggestions of narrative,[8] the _Quair_ goes back beyond Chaucer to the _dits_ for its basic structure and for many of its motifs: the visit of the distressed lover to the court of Venus, along with the description of her temple and the recounting of her "law" constitute a familiar love vision sequence. But the _Quair_ poet has increased the number of visits to three--in addition to Venus, he visits Minerva and Fortune--and has expanded the symbolic dimensions of these goddesses to such a degree that the poem is not merely the allegorical representation of a single man's experience in love, but an education about the conditions of life and the nature of the universe.

Although the idea of assimilating Boethian philosophy to a love story probably came from the "Knight's Tale" and the _Troilus_, as did many individual details, the results are very different from Chaucer's. The _Kingis Quair_ is a thoroughly optimistic, affirmative poem. It is written retrospectively--the poet is high on Fortune's wheel and he looks back on his own passage from woe to weal. His Venus and Minerva are wise and moral, and are apparently always favorable to true and honorable lovers. Even Fortune, whose wheel is set in an idyllic garden amid nature's plenty, is cordial and benign.

In Chaucer, as we have seen, the gods who rule men's

lives are never treated in such an unambiguously positive way. Viewed from the vantage point of God's Providence, they may indeed be disciplined agents of heavenly "purveiaunce," as Theseus claims, but to men below they seem to embody disorder, passion and injustice. Moreover, Chaucer rarely emphasizes the positive side of Fortune, as the Quair poet does, but associates her with tragic occurrences.

Different too are the poets' attitudes toward love. The author of the Quair shows none of Chaucer's preoccupation with love's tragic and destructive aspects, none of his English mentor's emphasis on the way consuming, irrational passion can absorb all of a man's energies so that he loses his sense of proportion and ignores his responsibilities. The idea the Quair expresses that human passion can be rationally ordered and can lead to intellectual enlightenment places its author in the tradition of Dante and of classical *fine amour*.

The Quair poet introduces the theme of Fortune with a device familiar from Chaucer's early poetry: he begins by explaining that one night, unable to sleep, he took down his copy of Boethius' *De Consolatione*. A series of reminders brings him to his own story; he recounts the basic outlines of the book, and continuing to think about Fortune's "tolter quhele," the "unsekernesse" of youth in particular and his own good fortune in love, hears the matins bell which suggests "Tell on, man, quhat the befell."

In choosing to preface his poem with Boethius, the Quair poet was obviously influenced by the *Parlement*. The Scottish

poet, like Chaucer, gives some indication of the contents of the book, but he makes its relevance much clearer. Chaucer does not comment on his reading of the Somnium except to remark that it left him "Fulfyld of thought and busy hevynesse" (89) and he adds somewhat cryptically "For bothe I hadde thyng which that I nolde,/And ek I nadde that thyng that I wolde." (90-91) The Kingis Quair poet, on the other hand, leads carefully from his philosophical "matere" to his personal story and the thematic relevance of the book to the poem as a whole is made clear. His summary of the Consolatio is, in fact, accurate only in the broadest sense and serves, as Von Hendy points out, to organize the narrator's own experience rather than to provide any but the vaguest information about Boethius.[9]

> Discryuing first of his prosperitee,
> And out of that his infelicitee;
> And than how he, in his poetly report,
> In philosophy can him to confort. (IV)

The Scottish poet is not interested in De Consolatione for its own sake; it is the immediate parallel to his own situation that strikes him. There is no suggestion of the fascination of the book itself, as in Chaucer, and no suggestion of a search for something undefined which continues to elude the poet. In a sense, then, the Kingis Quair may be considered more unified than the Parlement, but it has none of the tentative, exploratory quality of Chaucer's poem. The Quair poet is perhaps more typical of his age in being sure of his

direction, affirmative and didactic.

As in the "Knight's Tale," the reverse of Fortune has taken the specific form of imprisonment, which leads to philosophical speculations of the kind Chaucer's Theban knights utter, although the anguish Chaucer's poem communicates is absent. As Palamon compares the human condition with that of animals, complaining

> That man is bounden to his observaunce,
> For Goddes sake, to letten of his wille,
> Ther as a beest may al his lust fulfille
> (1315-17)

so the narrator of the Quair observes

> The bird, the beste, the fisch eke in the see
> They lyve in fredome everich in his kynd;
> And I a man, and lakkith libertee;
> Quhat schall I seyne, quhat resoun may I fynd,
> That fortune suld do so? (XXVII)

This lament is followed by another familiar motif: looking out from the window of his prison, the narrator sees a lady walking in "ane herbere grene" and, overcome "with plesance and delyte," he immediately becomes her servant.

But the Chaucerian ideas have undergone a significant rearrangement. The heroes of the "Knight's Tale" and Troilus fall in love involuntarily and unexpectedly, and even, in the case of Troilus, against their will. And in neither of Chaucer's narratives is love presented as an answer to the metaphysical questions about free will and predestination;

the philosophical complaints of Palamon, Arcite and Troilus occur after they have been stricken by Cupid's darts, and love makes their metaphysical problems more acute. The Kingis Quair poet, on the other hand, wants to be initiated into Cupid's service. After his meditation, he listens to the nightingales singing "ympnis consecrat" in praise of Love and recalls the God's reputed power "to bynd and lous and maken thrallis free." He prays to be admitted to Love's service because he senses that it may be a means of release from his present imprisonment. Immediately afterwards, in answer to his prayer, he sees the lady.

The advent of love is presented as another kind of imprisonment, but one far different from the prison of stone walls and iron bars. The prisoner of love embodies the paradox of freedom in bondage, expressed in what C.S. Lewis identified as a "beautiful oxmoron": "sudaynly my hert become hir thrall/For ever of free wyll."[10] This is the beginning of his progress through Love to Philosophy.

After his first sight of the lady, the lover turns his attention from the God of Love to Venus; his prayer to her echoes those of Palamon and Troilus:

> "O Venus clere; of goddis stellifyit!
> To quhom I yelde homage and sacrifis,
> Fro this day forth your grace be magnifyit,
> That me ressavit have in suich wise,
> To lyve under your law and do servis;
> Now help me furth, and for your merci lede
> My hert to rest, that deis nere for drede." (LII)

The "Quair" lover's prayer, unlike those of Chaucer's lovers, however, contains only the barest suggestion of pre-Christian worship. As the first line makes clear, it is the planet, not the goddess, which is being invoked. The lover speaks of "sacrifise," but because the term is coupled with "homage" the pagan connotations are minimized. There is no mention of Mars, Adonis or Vulcan. On the other hand, some of its phrases suggest the language of Christian prayer: "your grace be magnifyit/That me ressavit have," "for your merci lede/My hert to rest."

In this prayer and throughout his portrait of Venus, the Scottish poet seems determined to remove all ambiguous or negative connotations from the love goddess and her gifts. The goddess of rules and laws in the courtly vision is assimilated to the "wel-willy" planet of Chaucer and becomes wise and moral; her servants learn virtue and ultimately wisdom.

The hopelessness of his lot causes the lover to fall into a state of depression; he sighs, weeps and compares himself to Tantalus, until finally the day ends and, exhausted, he lays his head down on the cold stone. Suddenly he sees a blinding light at the window and hears a voice saying "I bring the confort and hele, be noght affrayde" and is magically raised by his arms through air, water and fire, from sphere to sphere until he reaches the "glade empire/Off blisfull Venus." The blinding light recalls Dante's temporary blinding in the higher heavens and the first sight of the Eagle in the "*House of Fame*,"the sympathetic guide is also a familiar

feature, although it is nowhere else, as far as I know, a disembodied voice.

The description of Venus' "glade empire" mingles elements from all the traditions we have encountered thus far. The crystal stones of which her palace is built may have their origin in the palace of beryl of Chaucer's Fame; palaces of Venus in the _dits_ are also commonly contructed of crystal or glass. But as Patch has shown, crystal also predominates in the construction of otherworld buildings in traditions far removed from the _dits_, such as Biblical and Celtic descriptions of paradise.[11] And it is a particularly appropriate material for a palace located, as the _Quair_ Venus' is, in one of the crystalline spheres. But although Venus' palace is derived from secular models, the arrangements within seem to reflect those of a Christian heaven.

The dreamer enters a spacious chamber in which he sees "mony a mylioun" of men and women "of every nacioun" who ended their lives in love's service. There is no list of famous individual lovers and no mixture of faithful and unfaithful as, for example, in Chaucer's and Lydgate's temples of Venus. Instead, there are groups of lovers who endured the same fate, an arrangement like the one Dante described. In the "hiest stage" the dreamer finds aged men and women who served Love all their lives, princes who fought great battles for their ladies, poets of love such as Homer and Ovid. In the next stage are "yong folkis," who died in battle or in despair. In a third area are those who were once monks or nuns, who served love in secret. The members of this group

look "half cowardly" and wear hoods as a sign of repentance:

> And for thay first forsuke him [Love] opynly,
> And efter that therof had repenting,
> For schame thair hudis our thaire eyne thay hyng.
> (LXXXIX)

Each of these "martris and confessouris" is assigned a particular place to stand with his beloved.

Only those love vision personifications are retained who, like Good Will and Curage, represent positive qualities; they are joined by another figure of religious provenance, who never set foot in the garden of Guillaume de Lorris--Repentance. The Quair poet also incorporated the dit motif of Venus as judge of lovers' complaints. But the kinds of problems are somewhat different from the typical demandes d'amour. Some of the lovers in the heaven of Venus have been forced into the cloister in youth or into distasteful marriages. Others, who had been happy in love until their mistresses were suddenly taken from the world "withoutin cause" are complaining against Fortune.

The Quair poet's portrait of Venus herself is apparently patterned after the description in the Parlement, but Chaucer's negative suggestions are carefully omitted or altered. For example, the Quair poet says that the goddess is "in a retrete lytill of compas," thus avoiding the negative connotations of Chaucer's phrase "in a prive corner" while preserving the meaning. He omits altogether "in disport" and Chaucer's suggestion that Venus rests until nighttime. Although the

Quair goddess, like the Venus of the Parlement, is found "upon hir bed," she is modestly dressed with a "mantill cast over hir schuldris," unlike the Parlement Venus who is "naked from the brest unto the head"(269) and wears her hair unbound. The Quair poet also omits the Parlement narrator's deflating, matter-of-fact comments, and provides Venus with a garland of roses: "And on hir hede, of rede rosis full suete,/A chapellet sche had, fair, fresch, and mete." The Venus of the Parlement, associated with artificiality rather than with naturalness[12] has no roses, but the Quair poet would have found them in the "Knight's Tale" and in many other descriptions. Even the hot sighs associated with Venus' temple are explained in a positive way:

> Depeyntit all with sighis wonder sad,
> Noght suich sighis as hertis doith manace;
> Bot suich as dooth lufaris to be glad.
>
> (XCVI)

The porter, Richesse in the Parlement of Fowls, is replaced by "Fair-calling, hir uschere ... and Secretee, hir thrifty chamberere."[13]

Cupid, too, is an amalgam, although the poet has not gone out of his way, as was the case with Venus, to make him a wholly positive figure. As in the Parlement, he is subordinate to Venus. His bow and different varieties of arrows (in this case, three) to whose effects a stanza is devoted, are part of the Roman de la Rose tradition, as are his "long yalow lokkis schene" and his crown--a chaplet "all of leuis grene." On the other hand, Cupid's blindness stems from the

mythographic tradition and the "Knight's Tale," for in the Parlement and in the <u>dits</u> the God of Love can see.[14]

In the dreamer's address to Venus, the <u>Quair</u> poet carefully blends references to goddess and planet, and again avoids mythological references that might have negative suggestions. Venus is saluted as "Hye quene of lufe! sterr of benevolence!/Pitous princes, and planet merciable!" His address is couched in the language of Christian worship:

> As ye that bene the socour and suete well
> Of remedye, of carefull hertes cure,
> And, in the huge weltering wawis fell
> Off lufis rage, blisfull hauin and sure. (C)

Venus' response shows the same assimilation of elements. She advises the lover, just as any of her <u>dit</u> forerunners might have, that he take his <u>aventure</u> patiently, and says that he is utterly unworthy of such an excellent lady, being as unlike her as the cuckoo is unlike the nightingale. But she describes her own powers in terms of planetary influence as well as of royal rule. It is her responsibility, she says,

> In lufis lawe the septre to governe,
> That the effectis of my bemes schene
> Has thaire aspectis by ordynance eterne. (CVII)

Just as Henryson explains that his planetary gods are acting in accord with "divine sapience," the <u>Quair</u> Venus identifies herself as part of "ordynance eterne." It is a view of the gods occasionally implied in Chaucer, in Theseus' "cheyne of

love" speech, for example, and in the Troilus narrator's commentary beginning "But O Fortune, executrice of wyrdes," but not explicitly stated.

Although she herself is favorably disposed, Venus continues, other influences are working against the lover:

> Quharefore, though I geve the benvolence,
> It standis noght yet in myn advertence
> Till certeyne coursis endit be and ronne.

In order to bring the time of his "cure" closer, Venus announces that she will send the lover to Minerva. The Quair poet thus implies that the planets are not capricious or insensitive to human wishes;[15] they have simply withheld their favor until the lover proves himself worthy of success. He must prove himself, not by performing the numerous "observances" the God of Love traditionally demanded but by attaining moral virtue. Planetary opposition apparently ends when Minerva is convinced of the lover's sincerity and wisdom.

Before the lover, escorted by Good Hope, departs for Minerva's palace, Venus delivers a complaint. Here again suggestions of many kinds are fused, although none of them is developed to any great extent. Picking up a detail from her counterpart in the "Knight's Tale" and the "Envoy to Scogan," Venus claims that men's negligence in her laws makes her weep. But while in Chaucer this was a whimsical detail, the Scottish poet develops it in a rather serious way.

"And for," quod sche, "the angir and the smert
Off thaire unkyndenesse dooth me constreyne,
My femynyne and wofull tender hert,
That than I wepe; and, to a token pleyne,
As of my teris cummyth all this reyne,
That ye se on the ground so fast ybete
Fro day to day, my turment is so grete."

(CXVI)

The Quair poet plays a number of minor variations on this theme: when she stops weeping, Venus explains, the flowers grow, which in turn remind men to "Be trewe to lufe, and worschip my servise"; her weeping makes the birds so sad that they stop singing.

And all the lightis in the hevin round
Off my grevance have suich compacience,
That from the ground they hiden thair presence.

(CXVIII)

But although the responses of the birds, flowers and heavenly lights to the "effectis" of Venus suggest a wider conception, like the Venus Lucretian caelestis of the invocation to Book III of the Troilus or Boethian Love, by which all created things participate in the bond which holds the universe together, this suggestion is never developed. The Quair Venus remains basically the goddess of the dits, her powers somewhat amplified by Chaucerian additions. The stress is placed on the duty of man to pay homage and do "servise" to the love goddess. The birds and flowers of which Venus speaks are conceived of primarily as her emissaries, whose

function is to remind men of their obligation to love, and not as themselves being part of the great chain of love. The kind of worship the Quair Venus has in mind comes from the love dits; she does not upbraid men for failing to love one another or to produce offspring, as Jean de Meun's Nature would have, but scolds them for their failure in "observances" of a rather limited kind:

> Quhare is becummyn, for schame!
> The songis new, the fresch carolis and dance,
> The lusty lyf, the mony change of game,
> The fresche array, the lusty contenance...
>
> (CXXI)

Finally, Venus' complaint takes on tones of Christian indignation. "Bid thame repent in tyme, and mend thare lyf," she warns. The threatened punishment for failure to repent is not eternal pain in hell or divine retribution, as it would be in an explicitly Christian poem like the Commedia, but an astrological vengeance. Venus threatens to form malefic combinations with Saturn and other planets to cause misfortunes such as Cresseid's leprosy. But Venus' final words are very Christian in feeling:

> Worschip my law, and my name magnifye,
> That am your hevin and your paradise;
> And I your comfort here sall multiplye,
> And, for your meryt here, perpetualye
> Ressave I sall your saulis of my grace,
> To lyve with me as goddis in this place.
>
> (CXXIII)

The _Quair_ poet, like so many of his contemporaries, found Christian language to be a fit vehicle for the praise of human love.

Venus' speech thus moves back and forth among the various meanings of love. Her powers are described in terms of planetary "aspects" and she embodies some suggestions of the universal rejuvenating force of nature. Yet the _Quair_ poet's treatment never has the breadth of implication of his more famous predecessor's. There is no revelation of a Boethian bond of love, holding the universe in place. The lover's heavenly journey does not lead to any sense of love as having implications beyond personal virtue and well-being. Although the new Venus is wise, sober and at least superficially Christianized, the love over which she has power is still essentially the courtly love of the _dits_.

During the dreamer's visit to Minerva, the true philosophical direction of the poem becomes clear. The _Quair_ poet is interested, not in the universality of the bond of love, but in love as a means to a specific kind of knowledge--the understanding of fortune and predestination. The suggestion for Minerva's discussion of this question no doubt came from Troilus' soliloquy in Book IV. But the problem has an obvious relevance to the _Quair_ narrator's own situation, for he himself has blamed Fortune for his imprisonment earlier in the poem and questioned the divine order which permits such apparent injustice.

The palace of Minerva is conceived of as being roughly similar to that of Venus. However, as Minerva is not a

planet, there were no descriptions of her dwelling in astrological literature, and the Quair poet was apparently not interested in supplying her with the appurtenances which he could have found in the mythographers or in a few of the love dits. He merely mentions that her porter is Patience and that hers is a royal court, noble and benign. The Quair poet does not share the delight of so many of his contemporaries, including Chaucer and Gavin Douglas, in the descriptions of symbolic places. He is much more concerned with communicating moral truth directly.

In Minerva's palace, then, no time is wasted on decorative details; we come right to the goddess' speech. She makes a number of different didactic points in no discernible sequence: (1) she warns that she will help the dreamer only if his love is set on virtue and (2) advises him to pray "unto His hye purvenance/Thy lufe to gye," and to be patient and (3) attacks the "lust and bestly appetite" of hypocrites in love. Finally satisfied that the lover is virtuous, Minerva promises to intercede with Fortune on his behalf, and this promise leads into the philosophical core of the poem--a discussion of the problem of free will and necessity based on the De Consolatione. Unlike the similar passage in the Troilus, as Von Hendy points out, the argument in the Kingis Quair proceeds to an orthodox, more or less Boethian solution.[16] Necessity exists, Minerva explains, only in the sense that certain events occur in all human lives, "in commune," and such events are referred to collectively as "Fortune." The wiser a man is, the more aware he is of what may befall him,

and therefore the less subject he is to Fortune:

> Fortune is most and strangest evermore,
> Quhare leste foreknawing or intelligence
> Is in the man. (CXLIX)

Because God foreknows everything, Fortune may not affect Him at all. This speech explains the meaning of the last episode of the poem, for although the narrator allows himself to be placed on the wheel of Fortune, he is no innocent climber, as Troilus was. He knows that disappointment and certain death are part of the human condition, and is prepared for what the future will inevitably bring.

When the dreamer descends to earth, he finds himself in a "lusty plaine," where he sees gay flowers and trees ripe with fruit; as he walks along the banks of a river, he sees great numbers of fish upon whose bright scales the sun glitters. There is a huge abundance of diverse animals. We are in the familiar locus amoenus, adapted largely from the "Parlement."[17] Finally, the dreamer sees "a round place, wallit," within which are Fortune and her wheel along with a huge crowd of people.

The Quair poet's placing of Fortune in the traditional domain of Nature in this last episode is an impressive demonstration of his ability to modify traditional images to fit the logic of his own design. The interview with Minerva has enabled him to come to terms intellectually with Fortune, to be reconciled to the uncertainties of earthly life, and his acceptance of a place on the wheel of Fortune is an

appropriate allegorical image for this new attitude. But the usual dwelling places of Fortune were fundamentally incompatible with the sense of optimism and security which resulted from the dialogue with Minerva. The traditional contradictions and opposites, the house half of gold, half of straw, the gentle and harsh winds, the blooming and withered flowers, and the inaccessible location of Fortune's house are characteristics which indicate a deep suspicion of the goods of this world.[18] It is no accident that the Scottish poet ignores this tradition and substitutes the paradisal park of Nature. The gifts of his Fortune are not great wealth and fame, rewards which are difficult to attain and which only a few mortals can enjoy. For him, Fortune's realm teems with natural life in all its variety and abundance, and this realm is evoked through an idealized description of nature. The Boethian discussion of Fortune thus brought about a new attitude toward the ancient goddess; for the first time she is presented in a positive way, associated with natural process, fulfilling her appointed role under the ever-watchful guidance of divine Providence. Her gifts are no longer scorned, but accepted. But although the conception of Fortune's role is new, MacQueen is no doubt correct in tracing the fundamental attitudes suggested in this account of Fortune's realm to the naturalistic Platonism of Bernard Silvestris, Alan of Lille and the school of Chartres.[19]

The Quair poet also uses the figure of Fortune to express a more typically medieval attitude, symbolizing life's uncertainty by her wheel and the ugly pit beneath it and by the portrait of the goddess herself, who is described in traditional

imagery: she wears a "surcote" of diverse colors and a mantle furred with white ermine, yet full of black spots.

> And quhilum in hir chier thus a lyte
> Louring sche was; and thus sone it wold slake,
> And sodeynly a maner smylyng make,
> As sche were glad; for at one contenance
> Sche held noght, but ay in variance. (CLXI)

Although man should not (and cannot) avoid Fortune's gifts, the poet suggests, he must never forget the conditions under which they are given.

The conclusion of the Quair affirms the two paradoxical values of involvement in life and detachment from it which also inform the Troilus and so many of Chaucer's lyrics. First, in an apostrophe derived from Troilus, the narrator expresses the traditional view that life is a pilgrimage and heaven man's proper home. The line "O wery goost, that errest to and fro," (IV, 302), which expressed Troilus' longing for death, is transformed by the Quair poet into a Christian expression of religious longing. The transformation is a reminder of how closely Troilus' utterances approach Christian sentiments, and shows that the Quair poet could obviously recall the Troilus as Chaucer himself could recall images and phrases from Dante and adapt them to his own poetic purposes.

A second apostrophe to Venus, which echoes the bidding prayer at the beginning of the Troilus, is a reminder that love is a means to virtue; the goddess of love is invoked

by the lover, who has by now awakened and won the lady, to help her servants, "Thair lif to mend and thair saulis auance." The next to last stanza formulates the Boethian-Dantean idea which has provided the basis for the poem's allegorical structure, that planetary influences work under God's direction. But the language and syntax show that once again the Troilus was the immediate source.

> And thus endith the fotall influence
> Causit from hevyn, quhare power is commytt
> Of governance, by the magnificence
> Of him that hiest in the hevin sitt.
>
> (CXCVI)
>
> Fortune which that permutacioun
> Of thynges hath, as it is hire comitted
> Thorugh purveyaunce and disposicioun
> Of heighe Jove.
>
> (V, 1541-44)

The Quair poet skillfully assimilates and rearranges conventional motifs into an original pattern. Although his poem follows the basic model of the love vision complaint--the lover's plea for assistance and the goddess' reply--the substance of their discussion is far broader in scope than the usual dit speeches, echoing the philosophical concerns of the "Knight's Tale" and Troilus. But perhaps most remarkable is the Scottish poet's location of Fortune and her wheel in the midst of a fruitful earthly landscape and the acceptance of natural process that this implies.

III

Henryson was, as far as I know, the only fifteenth century admirer of Chaucer to follow his master in making the gods part of a realistic narrative. But Henryson goes beyond Chaucer in developing the gods' astrological roles, and he draws upon the "jugement" motif of the _dit_ tradition, making the planetary gods, along with Cupid, the judges of an unhappy lover who has insulted them. The "Testament of Cresseid" is remarkable for its unusual portrait of Venus, who is described in terms usually reserved for Fortune. As the heavenly Venus of Book III established the nature and value of human love in the _Troilus_, so the Venus-Fortune of the "Testament" symbolizes the love experience of Henryson's poem.

The "Testament" returns to the moral concerns of the _Troilus_ as well as continuing its plot. Henryson brings Cresseid, as Chaucer had brought Troilus, to a full understanding of the conditions of life. But while Troilus' understanding comes after a slow, excruciating disillusionment and is complete only after his death, Henryson's Cresseid gains insight after a briefer period of intense suffering and before she dies. While both poems follow the same tragic pattern "from weal to woe," the _Troilus_ is a poem of varying moods, recurrent waves of hope and anguish; characters and circumstances interact in such a way that there is little question of affixing blame in a single place or extracting a single moral. Contrasting attitudes toward love and the nature of the world co-exist and cast their light on one another. There are no such shiftings of perspective, no relative or partial

truths in the "Testament." It is a poem of harsh contrasts: great beauty and extreme ugliness, wealth and poverty, a "burely bed" in a chamber embroidered with tapestries, and a bed of straw.

Henryson handles the matter of pagan worship much as Chaucer had, minimizing the differences between pagan and Christian religious ritual. Just as Chaucer describes the feast of the Palladion and other details of pagan worship in terms which would make the ancients seem almost like contemporaries to a fourteenth century audience, so Henryson's references to pagan religious customs are respectfully worded and avoid any suggestion of disdain: "This auld Calchas, efter the law was tho,/Wes keiper of the tempill as ane priest." (106-107)[20] He describes the people going to the temple to sacrifice "as custome was" (113);they are "devoit in thair maneir." (115)

But in its treatment of the gods and the philosophical issues they raise, Henryson's poem reflects more the influence of Chaucer's other pagan love story, the "Knight's Tale." In the Troilus, the gods did not constitute a uniform, unchanging background; they were invoked at particular points in the action for rhetorical emphasis rather than for unchanging philosophical significance, and consequently their meanings shifted. They were, at different times, heathen idols, natural forces governing "wedder and wind" as in Henryson, embodiments of human desire, planets which govern men's lives through their influences, and objects of worship scarcely distinguishable from the worship of Christ and the Virgin.

But in the "Knight's Tale," as in the "Testament," the gods constitute a unified, overwhelming and largely destructive force against which man can do nothing. Fox has observed the similarity between Cresseid helpless before the omnipotent planet gods and Palamon and Arcite in the arena, "dwarfed and made into puppets by the overtowering figures of the gods."[21] The "Knight's Tale" conclave of Mars, Venus and Saturn may well have been in the back of Henryson's mind when he created his own parliament of gods, and the idea of conveying a sense of overwhelming power through parallel descriptions of the gods may have been suggested by the temples in the "Knight's Tale" and Saturn's speech, although the "Testament" concentrates on the gods' physical appearances rather than their mythological homes and their powers.[22] Moreover, in both poems the intervention of the gods comes about specifically on account of Saturn's willingness to assist his daughter.

The stylistic strategies of the two poems are also similar in some ways; like other medieval poets, Chaucer and Henryson contrast concise narrative with non-dramatic descriptive elaboration. The descriptions occur not only in the sections devoted to the gods, but also in the long, stylized speeches of the main characters, with their generalizing of human experience: the prison laments of Palamon and Arcite and the complaint of Cresseid. There is the same thematic contrast between blossoming and decay, the opulence of court life and the repulsiveness of disease and death. The elaborate preparations for the tournament and for Arcite's funeral and the richness of Theseus' court are from this point

of view analogous to the luxuriousness of the life in Troy which Cresseid recalls so vividly, and the meticulously clinical description of Arcite's dying corresponds to the ugly details of Cresseid's leprosy. The violent contrast between glorious worldly display and physical corruption which Huizinga describes as characteristic of the late medieval period receive vivid literary expression in these poems.[23]

The profound sense of the fragile, perishable nature of all worldly things which pervades both poems finds its metaphorical equivalent in the gods. Like Chaucer's Theseus, Henryson suggests that the planets are under the control of a higher power; following an Augustinian tradition of interpretation he has Cupid remind the other gods that they are "all sevin deificait,/Participant of devyne sapience." (288-289) The narrator himself expresses the common notion that the planets have "power of all thing generabill/Wedder and wind and coursis variabill/To reull and steir be thair greit influence." (148-149)[24]

Yet the emphasis is on destruction. In both the "Knight's Tale" and the "Testament," decrees of the gods or planets suggest the insecure conditions of human life. Both sets of deities inflict seemingly unmerited disaster on men and women; the gods in the "Knight's Tale" as we have seen (except for Diana), obstinately support their favorites and deal heartlessly with the others, while in the "Testament" the punishment of Cresseid is presented as an arbitrary vengeance, overly severe considering the gravity of her crime, and the narrator himself challenges her sentence as "too

malitious"(324)and "wraikfull." (329)[25] Yet the "Testament" is more severe, because Henryson is consistently astrological. In the "Testament" only the planetary gods appear, not Diana or Minerva, and the action is determined to a greater extent by astrological information than the action in Chaucer's poem is. In the "Knight's Tale." Chaucer had used astrological detail to deepen the symbolic meaning of the gods and had added such exclusively astrological passages as Saturn's description of his powers, but he had not altered the mythological machinery of the Teseida plot, retaining such non-astrological details as Saturn's calling up of the infernal fury at Venus' request. In Henryson's poem, the supernatural action is consistently astrological, not mythological, and hence more terrifying; Cresseid's leprosy is, of course, caused by a conjunction of Saturn and Cynthia.[26]

Thus, in the end the "Knight's Tale" seems less pessimistic. Henryson's poem has no character analogous to Theseus, for Troilus, although noble and virtuous, can neither avert tragedy nor provide consolation. And the advice of the lady leper, to make a virtue of necessity, provides little comfort without the philosophic premises which accompany similar advice in Theseus' "Firste Moevere" speech. The stable, ordering force of which Theseus affirms the existence is only faintly suggested in the "Testament."

If Henryson followed Chaucer in having the planetary gods govern the pagan universe, he followed a very different tradition in the matter of plot. The idea that the god Cupid is easily offended had, of course, been commonplace

since antiquity, and the trial of a sinner against love, often for the particular crime of blasphemy, was a common motif in the *dits amoureux*.[27] Henryson was no doubt familiar with the relatively recent and witty treatment of this motif in Chaucer's "Prologue" to the *Legend of Good Women*, as well as with some of the French sources. But the courtly sophistication and the air of inconsequentiality about the French love trial is altered to so great an extent in Henryson's poem that the precedent of the *dits* probably does not even occur to most readers. For the defendant here is not the dreamer of a love vision but a character in a realistic narrative, and the trial, which in the *dits* was usually only one in a series of fantastic and equally stylized events, takes on a nightmarish quality when it becomes the single major event in an otherwise realistic context. Henryson's judgment scene includes all the gods, not just Venus or Cupid, as is usual in the *dits*, and in his poem the accused can neither defend herself nor is there a merciful Alceste who can intervene to save her. And, finally, there is no comparison between the severity of Cresseid's punishment and such earlier penalties as the writing of verses or swearing fealty to Venus. The overwhelming impact of Henryson's judgment scene is thus partly a result of a careful blending of the courtly love trial with the astrologized gods. Extending the traditional harshness of Venus and Cupid, the gods of the *dits amoureux*, to the astrological gods, Henryson suggests the harshness and insecurity of human life. The ability to blend motifs which previously existed in separate genres, which Henryson shares

with Chaucer, is characteristic of fifteenth-century writers; rather than being innovators, they put existing ideas together in new ways. It is perhaps not too far-fetched to see in this process an analogy with Dante's fusion of the <u>donna</u> of Provencal poetry with divine wisdom in the figure of Beatrice. In each instance, a poet has taken a figure or motif from a relatively narrow literary form as the basis of a work of much larger significance.

Henryson's description of the gods has generally been recognized as an exercise of poetic virtuosity. A.C. Spearing, in a recent analysis of the striking visual effects Henryson achieves through the enumeration of concrete details and the use of a wide and ornate vocabulary, has shown how brilliantly the Scots poet uses the Latinate aureate style in order to suggest the irresistible and largely destructive powers of the gods.[28] The planet portraits of the "Testament," even though they take up over a fifth of the poem, are remarkably compact and economical, and the temple descriptions of the "Knight's Tale" seem a little cumbersome beside them. By choosing to describe the gods as planets rather than in their mythological form, Henryson freed himself from the necessity of explaining their powers.

The descriptions themselves are arranged in order of the planet's distance from the earth, with Saturn appearing first. Henryson apparently drew suggestions from a number of different sources for these descriptions, but in general he avoids purely mythological details (except for the horses of the sun). Instead, he creates a personification from astro-

logical hints. Thus the portrait of Saturn is a personification based on astrological information[29] and Henryson ignores such strictly mythological elements as the veil, crutch, sickle or scythe and mattock, standard adjuncts in the mythographers' descriptions of Saturn as well as in classical art.[30] The same is true of Jupiter, who is represented as helping to counteract the effects of Saturn: in contrast to Saturn's sterility and cold, he is "nureis," he is young and handsome where Saturn is old and repulsive. Here again, the description derives from astrological literature and not from mythology; indeed, the mythologic tradition would run counter to Henryson's intentions, for the Jupiter who overthrew and castrated his father would certainly be able to overrule him in this instance as well. The handsome youth with clear eyes and golden hair whom Henryson describes is distant in conception from the majestic ruler of Olympus. He and Phebus, the only other planet presented in a positive way, are either unwilling or unable to do anything in Cresseid's behalf, and permit Saturn and Cynthia to decide the outcome.

Venus stands out from the other gods in Henryson's parliament. Of all the descriptions, only hers and that of Phebus are given three stanzas, the other gods having two each. But the portrait of Venus is striking for another reason. Although Venus is usually classified as a beneficent planet and although earlier she appeared to the narrator as "fair Venus, the bewtie of the nicht,"(11) there is no suggestion of favorable influence in her portrait, nor has Henryson used any of the traditional descriptions--the naked goddess floating

in the sea of the mythographers and the "Knight's Tale," the huntress of Aeneid I, nor the aggressive, torch-brandishing lady of the Roman de la Rose. There is no appealing quality, none of the loveliness traditionally associated with her. Instead, the emphasis is on her instability, a quality which receives little stress in the astrologic treatments; this Venus has the unmistakable appurtenances of Fortune.

The close connection between Fortune and the goddess of love in late medieval poetry may well have its source, as John Fleming suggests, in the Roman de la Rose, for an extended description of Fortune's isle is included in this widely read Art of Love.[31] Both goddesses are, of course, traditionally unstable and, as has already been observed, the dwelling of Venus, as Claudian described it, provided a model for the home of Fortune.[32] To some degree, as H.R. Patch explains, the iconographies of Venus and Fortune were interchangeable: both use arrows or darts, and Venus occasionally takes over Fortune's wheel.[33] Fortune's house was traditionally in the midst of a stormy sea, and Venus is depicted by the mythographers floating in the sea. In the "Kingis Quair," it will be recalled, Fortune controls the course of the love affair, the usual province of Venus.

But Henryson systematically transfers to Venus much of Fortune's traditional imagery and the familiar rhetorical pattern of contrast and antithesis by which she is often described; her attire is "ane nyce array,/The ane half grene, the uther half sabill blak," (220-221) and the treatment of her eyes was probably suggested, as Stearns notes, by a

detail in the Black Knight's arraignment of Fortune in the Book of the Duchess: "With ane eye lauch, and with the uther weip."[34] The "now--now" formula, which in the "Knight's Tale" is applied to Venus' servants

> Now in the crope, now doun in the breres,
> Now up, now doun, as boket in a welle
> (KT, 1532-33)

and also to Arcite's sudden change of fortune

> Now with his love, now in his colde grave
> (KT, 2777)

is adopted by Henryson to describe the love which Venus governs

> Now hait, now cauld, now blyith, now full of wo,
> Now grene as leif, now widderit and ago.
> (237-38)

The image of the serpent and the emphasis on dissimulation are also part of the traditional description of Fortuna.

Henryson's Venus nevertheless remains a recognizable human being. He includes none of the grotesque details which are sometimes part of allegorical descriptions of Fortune--the tremendous size, the multiple hands, the double face, half black and half white.[35] Venus' traditional golden hair is mentioned, although it is now tied back rather than flowing loose or held with a golden thread, as in the Parlement. She is presented not so much as a goddess who gives and takes away earthly goods, but as the personification of an inconstant lover, "provocative with blenkis amorous"

(226) at one moment, "angrie as ony serpent vennemous" (228) at the next.

In contrast to the other portraits, which are full of concrete details, Venus' has only a few; much of the description is taken up with moralization:

> In taikning that all fleschelie paramour,
> Quhilk Venus hes in reull and governance,
> Is sum tyme sweit, sum tyme bitter and sour,
> Rich unstabill, and full of variance.
>
> (232-35)

She is, in fact, the only one of the gods whose significance is specifically explained.

Not only does the portrait of Venus-Fortune stand out from those of the other gods, but she is also at the thematic heart of the poem. For although Cresseid does not realize it at this point in the action, this portrait of Venus' instability and "greet variance" (223) is in a sense a portrait of herself.

The theme of Cresseid's spiritual progress toward inward purification and the stages through which she passes in reaching an understanding of herself have been examined by several critics, especially Tillyard and Fox.[36] But the persistent fortune imagery and the figure of Venus-Fortune have not been stressed. Words like "fickill," "frivoll," "frivolous," and "brukkilnes," which apply both to Fortune and Cresseid, echo through the poem. While in Chaucer's Troilus Fortune had been an external force, working against the lovers, in the "Testament" Love and Fortune are identified.

Yet Henryson's Fortune is not wholly negative; in fact, she performs the very functions which Boethius' Lady Philosophy attributes to her. Her punishments have an educative purpose, for they strengthen virtue and increase understanding.[37] The words Fortune utters in self-defence in Chaucer's Boethian balade "Fortune" could be directed equally well to the Cresseid who humbly confesses her sinfulness at the end of the poem: "Now seestow cleer, that were in ignoraunce."

The portrait of Venus contains the first of a series of increasingly significant references to Fortune in the course of the poem, as Cresseid comes closer and closer to identifying herself with the goddess. At the beginning, recently deserted by Diomede, she angrily blames the gods and complains that "all in cair translatit is my joy."(130) Misfortune at this point means merely the absence of a lover to depend on. After the gods' convocation, Cresseid's anger has turned to weeping as she regrets her "fraward langage."(352) At this point , she thinks that her sin is simply blasphemy. By nighttime, however, she has moved to the hospital at the town's end, and has gained more perspective on her misfortune; she sees it now not as a personal punishment but as one form of a condition which affects mankind generally.

The tone of Cresseid's "complaint" is no longer angry but elegiac; in it, Henryson succeeds in fulfilling the rhetoricians' goal of reactivating old truths and making them come to life again in the present through expressive amplification. Although the "complaint" is constructed around the <u>ubi sunt</u> theme, it emphasizes neither the death of

illustrious persons nor the passing of physical beauty. It is instead the idealized recollection of the life of courtly elegance, and many aspects of this life are evoked in vivid images. Cresseid recalls the pleasures of nature as well as of art, not only the fine food and magnificent furniture she once enjoyed but also the garden where in May, like Emily in the "Knight's Tale," she used "to walk and take the dew be it was day." The social aspects of the courtly life are also included, as Cresseid remembers the "ladyis fair in carrolling." (431) The control of such temporal goods as these and of "greit triumph and fame"(434) is, of course, traditionally the province of Fortune.

The "complaint" derives much of its power from a steady accumulation of vivid images, most of them simple and lowly, like "mowlit, breid, peirrie and ceder sour,"(441) others, like the "garding ... quhilk the Quene Floray/Had paintit plesandly on everie pane,"(425-427) more elevated and rooted in courtly literary tradition. The rhetorical pattern of contrasting phrases, which we observed in connection with the portrait of Venus and which is common in Fortune literature, is the basic syntactic unit of the "complaint," and the lubgubrious movement, heavy alliteration and internal rhymes emphasize the balance of the phrases:

> Fell is thy fortoun, wickit is thy weird;
> Thy blys is baneist, and thy baill on breird.
> (412-413)
>
> This lipper ludge tak for thy burelie bour,
> And for thy bed tak now ane bunche of stro.
> (438-439)

Spearing's observation in regard to the earlier descriptions of the gods, that the native vocabulary is given great force by the dignified rhetorical context in which it is set, is equally appropriate here.[38] Sometimes the repetitions are more concentrated and emphatic; for example, Cresseid's once clear voice now "Is rawk as ruik, full hiddeous, hoir and hace." (445)

Cresseid concludes her "complaint" by reflecting that "Fortoun is fikill, quhen scho beginnis and steiris." (469) Although she now realizes that her misfortune is not an isolated event, but a part of the human condition, as yet there is no self-knowledge, no identification of herself with Fortune. The poise and restraint of the "complaint," and its lyric beauty, have the effect, as Troilus' lyrics do, of ennobling the speaker and raising her to tragic stature.

As Fox has remarked, Cresseid's "complaint" concludes with neither of the traditional consolations: the advice to turn to the one true God who "nyl falsen no wight" or to seize the joys of the present while one may.[39] Being a pagan, Cresseid knows only the cruel gods, and Henryson, unlike Chaucer in the Troilus, does not go beyond the historical limitations of the pre-Christian era. If any positive force balances to some degree the bleak picture of the human situation Cresseid paints in her "complaint," it is Troilus himself, for he embodies human nature at its best. It is his appearance which brings about Cresseid's final recognition.

The scene in which Troilus, riding through the town "with greit tryumphe" is accosted by the company of lepers

is reminiscent of Theseus' meeting with the Theban women on the road outside Athens in the "Knight's Tale." And Troilus, like Theseus, exhibits disinterested knightly "pietie," even before his partial recognition of the deformed Cresseid. Only after she is informed that the generous lord of "greit humanitie" was Troilus himself, does Cresseid attain insight and realize that she was subject to Fortune, "[efflated]... in wantones,/And clam upon the fickill quheill sa hie," (549-550) and that she has herself taken the part of Fortune in her relations with Troilus: "All faith and lufe I promissit to the/Was in the self fickill and frivolous." (551-552) This speech has none of the leisurely descriptive amplification, none of the meditative quality of the earlier "complaint." Its shorter stanza and brisk, concise expression reflect not the tentative exploration of a problem but the rendering of an insight already discovered. But despite the new sense of certainty and the quicker movement of the verse, the rhetorical _contentio_ we have seen accompany the theme of Fortune earlier is retained in the refrain: "O, fals Cresseid, and trew knicht Troilus."

Cresseid thus realizes that she has in fact been "brukkil as glas," as fickle as Fortune herself and a true daughter of the variable Venus who punished her. The poem's persistent fortune imagery gives force to the ending.

The "Testament" is one of the few poems which depends heavily upon another poem for its effects. Not only must the "plot" of Chaucer's poem be fresh in our minds, we must also recall the ideals Troilus embodied. For the "Testament"

shows the earthly triumph of Troilus as well as the punishment of Cresseid. As if by magic, time is turned back, Troy has not been defeated, the noble knight is not dead, but the winner, riding forth "with greit tryumphe and laude victorious," just as, for a moment in the burning sands of hell, Dante's friend Brunetto is not the loser, but the winner. Cresseid, in recognizing her own shortcomings, finally understands the nobility of which human nature is capable. While the gods as agents of Fortune, and particularly Venus, represent the negative pole of the poem, the unshakable "treuth" of Troilus represents its positive pole. In the poem's grim world of darkness and misfortune, his nobility is a brief light.

IV

The *Palice of Honor* lacks the coherence and unity of the *Kingis Quair* and the *Testament of Cresseid*. Douglas is eager to treat a great many of the traditional love vision motifs and he does so with unflagging zest, even though the relevance of these familiar materials to his own story is not always clear. Oblivious to contradictions and inconsistencies, he works for immediate effects, often introducing a *topos*, it seems, simply because it provides an excuse for yet another ornate description or an exercise in a new rhetorical mode. The *Palice of Honor* is the work of a young poet (Douglas was about twenty-six when he wrote it) who is, as C.S. Lewis observes,

> too delighted with the whole world of poetry, as he understood it, to control his delight ... All his reading, too often in the form of mere catalogue, pours into his poem.[40]

It no doubt seemed only natural for an aspiring poet to emulate the master himself, "Geffray Chauceir... *a per se* sans peir." But while most of Chaucer's fifteenth century admirers had drawn on the *Parlement*, the *Troilus* and the "Knight's Tale," Douglas chooses the *House of Fame*.[41] Like the *House of Fame*, the *Palice of Honour* is a dream vision journey in a comic mode to the home of an allegorical deity, and a great many of its details were apparently borrowed from Chaucer.[42] Both poets suggest that there are different

kinds of Fame and Honor: in Chaucer's poem, the Fame the narrator observes has under her control man's earthly, variable reputation, and heavenly Fame is present in the poem only by implication. The Honor of Douglas' palace, on the other hand, is identified with God, and the nymph expounds at some length on the nature of true honor.[43]

But Douglas follows Chaucer into areas which attracted few others; like Chaucer, he identifies his traveller as a poet, not a lover, and attempts to examine what such a vocation means. Like Geffrey, he is taken on a journey through the air which in some sense constitutes a poetic education. Their ultimate concerns, however, are very different. Chaucer, in describing the mingling of truth and falsehood in the House of Rumor and in showing that the transmission of all knowledge is subject to chance, calls into question the accuracy of our literary and historical records of the past. Douglas, on the other hand, is not concerned with problems of literary communication, but with a young man's initiation into the European poetic tradition. While Chaucer in the _House of Fame_ leaves Venus and her temple permanently behind, Douglas rejects the goddess of Love initially only to rediscover at the end of his journey that she is the source of poetry.

The allegorical action of the _Palice of Honor_ combines the motif of the lover's choice among personified alternatives with a series of allegorical processions. In the _Roman de la Rose_, we recall, the lover rejects _Raison_ and accepts _Amis_. The idea of the lover's choice was developed and given wider range in the Old French _Les Échecs Amoureux_, which was trans-

lated, with considerable additions, by Lydgate as Reson and Sensuallyte. In this poem "l'aucteur" repeats the choice of Paris; walking through the allegorical garden of love he encounters Juno, Venus and Pallas, who represent three modes of life and offer him various kinds of advice. In the Palice of Honour, the courts of Minerva, Diana, Venus and the Muses, seem to represent four possible ways of reaching Honor.[44] Each of the first three processions includes a queen in a golden chariot drawn by white horses and surrounded by her followers. Minerva, who appears first, is surrounded by twelve damsels who are identified as the"prudent Sibillais full of blis" and accompanied by Cassandra, Deborah, Circe and Judith, as well as "clerkis diuine" including Solomon, Aristotle, Ulysses, Cicero and Josephus. Sinon and Achitophel, those medieval types of the misuse of wisdom are tagging along behind; they claim that they do not presume to enter the palace, but only wish to see it and they perform the useful function of identifying the various members of the company for the narrator.

The narrator's preference for Venus is obvious. While the courts of Sapience and Diana are treated somewhat matter-of-factly (only two stanzas are devoted to Diana's contingent, which, he notes, is rather small), Venus is awaited with excitement. Her approach is signalled by a light shining out of the northeast sky and by distant music; her court is described in a series of delighted exclamations:

> Of the maist plesand Court I had a sicht
> In warld adoun sen Adam was creat.

Quhat sang! Quhat Ioy! Quhat Harmonie! Quhat licht!
(401-403)

As they come closer, he remarks "That Angellike and godlie companie/Till se me thocht a thing Celestiall."(416-417) Venus' court is rich in material splendor; her chariot is drawn by twelve coursers wearing green velvet and having golden harnesses. In contrast, the followers of Sapience rode on lowlier "haiknayis," reflecting the poverty of scholars. Venus is not described in concrete detail aside from the mention of golden hair and a crest of diamonds, but in superlatives, such phrases as "In hir had nature finischit hir cure." (455) Her beauty is described in terms of light; she shone "like Phebus in hiest of his Spheir." (451) Like Chaucer in the "Prologue" at the approach of the God of Love, he is temporarily blinded by the brightness of her beauty.

As in the Kingis Quair, the negative aspects of Venus' court seem to be embodied in Cupid, who is described as a hunter with the traditional appurtenances: he is dressed in green, is blind and carries a bow. The usual golden arrows are omitted, and the only ones mentioned are darts "haw as leid." (478) The narrator refers to Cupid as the most deceiving ("disauabill") god. Mars rides near the chariot and the procession headed by Arcite, Palamon and Emily, includes lovers of all kinds--the ill fated, models of patience and modesty, and so forth.

Douglas chooses this singularly inopportune moment to sing a ballad of inconstant love, a tactless outburst which is reminiscent of Machaut's antifeminist speech in the Juge-

ment dou Roy de Navarre.[45] In an apparent reference to a personal disappointment in love, he laments the "panefull cairis infinite"(609) of his own "cruell fait." But Douglas' "ballat" is more than an expression of personal distress; he also associates Venus with "this warldis frail unsteidfastnes." (610) In significance this perception goes far beyond Guillaume's attack on feminine inconstancy, and in a different kind of poem it could easily be an initial step on the road to salvation. But for this narrator, the road to Honor is the composition of secular poetry, of which unstable, earthly love is, as he is eventually to discover, the basis. Douglas' poem thus includes a variation of the paradox which lies at the heart of Chaucer's Troilus: a commitment to praise the kind of love Venus represents as the highest earthly good man can know and the most compelling of poetic subjects, combined with an awareness of the limitations and shortcomings inherent in human love.

The "ballat" is overheard, and the offender is caught and haled before the Queen of Love for a trial which is apparently modelled on Chaucer's "Prologue" to the Legend of Good Women. Venus' celestial beauty, like the "Prologue" God of Love's, does not prepare us for an unpleasant personality; the tones of this haughty goddess remind us less of Chaucer's coy, feminine Venus than of Juno or Fame. Her magnificent appearance contrasts with the irritable quality her speech reveals. As in the "Prologue," the culprit is identified as a poet rather than as a lover; he is accused of having "blasphemit" Venus in his "rime" just as Chaucer is accused of

having dishonored the God of Love by translating the Roman de la Rose and retelling the story of Criseyde. Both divinities accuse the poets of disturbing their servants; Venus attacks clerks in general, saying

> Ye bene the men with wicket wordis feill
> Qhilk blasphemis fresche lustie young gallandis
> That in my seruice and retinew standis.
>
> (720-722)

Cupid's accusation in the "Prologue" is similar:

> Thou lettest folk to han devocyoun
> To serven me, and holdest it folye
> To truste on me...
> That is an heresye ageyns my lawe,
> And makest wise folk fro me withdrawe.
>
> (G, 251-257)

There is, however, no question of misunderstanding here, as in the "Prologue." The offense against Venus and Cupid was intentional, as was Machaut's against the ladies in Navarre, and Douglas defends himself in a spirited and occasionally arrogant manner; he claims that as "a spirituall man," a lady cannot judge him, and mentions other legal points.

The role of Alceste is filled in Douglas' poem by the timely arrival of the Court of the Muses, "ane hevinlie rout," (787) "with lawreir crownit in robbis side all new." (790) Accompanying the Muses are a great many "fresche nymphes of water and of sey," (881) and all the poets, not only Homer, Virgil, Ovid, Dares and Dictys, but also "Francis

Petrarche," "Boetius," "Bocchas," Gower, Lydgate and Dunbar.

Arranging to have himself rescued by the Muses is a remarkable idea of Douglas'. Chaucer's pardon was effected by the intervention of a merciful lady and was ostensibly a reward for his worship of the daisy, rather than for his poetic achievements. But Douglas takes a hint from a Chaucerian invocation in the House of Fame, extending it in a way the English poet would never have dreamed of. For while Chaucer prays for the assistance of Calliope and the other Muses, in Douglas' poem, they help him very literally. Douglas' rescue scene reflects a conception of himself and of poetry fundamentally different from Chaucer's. In the House of Fame, poets perform a strictly utilitarian function; they serve the goddess by holding up the fame of heroes of the past, but are not honored themselves. But in the Palice of Honour, poets are not just perpetuators of the deeds of others; they have a claim to Honor in their own right. The idea that poets constitute a community and that poetry is a way of distinguishing oneself and a road to Honor as important as Love and Wisdom (and, in fact, separable from wisdom) was alien to Chaucer and to most other medieval poets. Dante is one of the few authors in whom this sense of the poetic community exists. In the Commedia, the ancient poets (although not the moderns), along with the philosophers and heroes of antiquity, are set apart from the darkness of Limbo in a place full of light. Virgil explains that their honorable name (not their poetic talent) sets them apart from the rest of hell:

L'onrata nominanza
che di lor suona su nella tua vita,
grazia acquista nel ciel che si la avanza.
(Inf. IV, 76-78)

The group, which includes Homer, Horace, Ovid, Lucan and Virgil, constitutes a "bella scuola," set apart from the rest of hell and possessing, if not happiness, at least dignity and honor. They make Dante one of their company, just as the Muses include Douglas in their court.

Douglas' sense of the value of poetry is evidenced in another way in his translation of the Aeneid, the first such translation in which there is no tampering with the meaning of the original work, although Douglas does expand and elucidate the original. In the "Prologue" to Book I, Douglas discusses the difficulties of translating, severely criticizing earlier translators for their distortions of Virgil. He insists that Caxton "schamefully that story [the Aeneid] dyd pervert" (145), provides several examples of misinterpretation, and concludes that Caxton's version and Virgil's are "na mair lyke than the devill and Sanct Austyne" (143).[46] Chaucer too, according to to Douglas, "gretly Virgill offendit" (410) by his treatment of Aeneas in the "Legend of Dido"; Virgil, Douglas explains, "dyd diligens/But spot of cryme, reproch or ony offens/Eneas for to loif and magnify" (419-421)

The court of the Muses, it becomes clear, is closely related to the court of Venus; there is, in other words, an intimate connection between poetry and love. Each court is full of music--there is much heavenly singing and the members

of both courts play lute, harp and psaltery. Beautiful ladies appear among the throng in the court of the Muses, as well as wise and eloquent men. Although the members of the court recite "history, greet in Latine toung and Grew," (797) the emphasis is on love--the only specific "history" Douglas names is the Epistles of Ovid, which the ladies sing, and some of the lovers who appeared in Venus' court, including Phyllis and Penelope, are there. Love, it appears, is the most important source of poetry, and in the Muses' court of "plesand steidfastnes," (844) and "ioyous discipline" (846) those who listen to poetry are identified with lovers by the phrase "gentill hartis":

> Quhilk causis folk thair purpos to expres
> In ornate wise, prouokand with glaidnes
> All gentill hartis to thair lair Incline.
> (847-49)

The relation between the courts of Venus and the Muses is confirmed at the meeting of these ladies--the Muses and Venus salute one another reverently. Venus rises and like a cordial hostess invites them to alight; they reply, no, they cannot tarry long. Perhaps poets are more eager than lovers to reach the court of Honor. Venus addresses Calliope as "sister" and complains: "Yone Catiue had blasphemit me of new/ For to degraid and do my fame adew," (946-47) and pronounces the doom of "yone bysning schrew": "He hes deseruit deith. He sall be deid." (952) Calliope pleads in his defence, using some of the same arguments Alceste did and begging her

"sister" to dismiss her anger:

> To slay him for sa small ane cryme, God wait,
> Greitar degrading war to your estait,
> To sic as he to make conter pleid,
> How may ane fule your hie honour chekmait?
>
> (957-60)

Calliope promises that he will proclaim Venus' law in the future, the Queen of Love goes off satisfied, and the narrator henceforth follows the court of the Muses with a nymph who has been assigned to guide him.

The marvellous horseback journey Douglas takes in the company of the Muses "als swift as thocht," covers a large part of western Europe and the Near East. Like Geffrey in the <u>House of Fame</u>, he sees a great many of the places he has read about, but Douglas' journey, focussing on rivers and mountains, is much more oriented towards literary landmarks than Chaucer's. He sees "the twa toppit famous Pernasus," (1102) the "mont Emus/Quhair Orpheus leirit his harmonie maist fyne," (1103-4) "the hill of Bacchus Citheron,/And Olympus the mont of Macedon." (111-112) Although the nymph provides no instructions along the way, as the Eagle had, this journey constitutes an important part of a rhetorical education.

They finally arrive at the Muses' home, a private realm open only to the privileged, modelled on the traditional dwelling place of Love. It is, as might be expected, a <u>locus amoenus</u>.

> ane plesand plane,
> Law at the fute of ane fair grene Montane

Amid ane Meid schaddowit with Ceder trees;
Saif from all heit.

(1144-47)

All kinds of herbs, flowers, fruits and grains grow there, birds sing and ladies play diverse instruments, making a heavenly sound. There is also a palace and a feast is held. Between courses, the diners occupy themselves with the same "problewmis" members of the court of Venus might have discussed: who the truest lovers were. Calliope summons Ovid and other poets to give evidence on this question. He recounts the deeds of Hercules, Perseus, Theseus and Achilles, then Virgil tells of Daphnis and Corydon, followed by Terence, Juvenal and Martial, who provide further entertainment. But poetry is not a totally intellectual matter, and afterwards there is more singing, laughing, riding and merriment. Thus Douglas describes, allegorically, a poetic education; the court of the Muses provides access to famous stories as well as to the "rethorik colouris fine" and "polit termis" necessary to an accomplished style. It is not as ambitious and inclusive an education as others had proposed; the natural sciences and philosophy are certainly slighted. But aside from this, Douglas' preparation accords reasonably well with the prescriptions of Boccaccio in <u>De Genealogia Deorum</u> from which Douglas probably derived some of his mythological information:

> Hinc et liberalium aliarum artium et moralium atque naturalium [in addition to grammar and rhetoric] saltem novisse principia necesse est, nec non et vocabulorum valere copia, vidisse

> monimenta maiorum, ac etiam meminisse et hystorias nationum, et regionum orbis, marium, fluviorum et montium dispositiones.[47]

Having undergone a poet's education, Douglas is now able to understand the true relation of love to poetry. When, at the end of his journey, he finally arrives at the outskirts of the palace of Honor, he sees the goddess of Love once again, this time in an enclosed garden (a "garth") seated on a magnificent throne. She now has beside her a mirror in which one may see at a glance what everyone on earth is doing. This mirror, like the House of Rumor, is a storehouse of literary material, as well as of Biblical and classical history; it is recorded "eurie famous douchtie deid/That men in storie may se or Chronikill reid," (1693-94) and, in addition, it shows the future:"I saw the Feind fast folkis to vices tyst,/And all the cumming of the Antechrist." (1700-1)

Douglas' treatment of Venus' mirror is strikingly original. Iconographically, her mirror connected Venus with the vice of Luxuria, and the mythographers interpreted it as a symbol of vanity.[48] But there is no suggestion of moral allegory in Douglas' description. Neither is there any apparent connection between the _Palice of Honour_ mirror and the mirror of Narcissus, in which _Amant_ first saw the reflected image of his beloved, nor with Virgil's magic mirror, in which one could detect the approach of enemies.[49]

If Douglas' Venus is not the personification of carnal

love, neither is she a spiritual force. He does not identify her with the beneficent planet or with the Boethian "holy bond" which holds the elements in concord, in the manner of Chaucer's Troilus. Nor does the goddess of Love become a philosophical spokesman, as in the Kingis Quair. Neither Venus Pandemos nor Venus Urania, she presides over all varieties of literary material; her mirror displays the deeds of such local heroes as Raf Coilyear, Piers Plowman, Finn MacCoul and Robin Hood.

Now that the Muses have educated him in the possibilities of poetic expression, Douglas is ready to make use of the subject matter the goddess of Love can provide. Venus, who has become conciliatory, gives him a book, presumably the Aeneid, to translate. While in the House of Fame Venus and her temple, in which the Aeneid played an important part, were left behind as Geffrey rose through the air to the new, more varied wonders of the palace of Fame and the house of Rumor, in the Palice of Honor there is no such movement. Venus may be irritable and proud, but there is nothing narrow and stultifying about her domain; her mirror reflects the diversity of life and provides subject matter for poems not only about love but also about hundreds of other subjects. Hers may indeed be "the court sa variabill/Of eirdly lufe quhilk sendill standis stabill," (484-85) but earthly love is the very basis of secular poetry.

Like the House of Fame, the Palice of Honour is an exploration of the poetic past in a comic vein. Despite the high value he places on poetic creation and his idea

that poetry is a valid means of achieving Honor, Douglas' poem is in a sense less daring, less adventuresome, than Chaucer's. His journey ends almost where it began, with the recognition of Venus as the source of poetry. Chaucer's journey, on the other hand, suggests a permanent dissatisfaction with traditional procedure and it takes him to the palace of Fame and the house of Rumor which, although overwhelming and bewildering, represent a new departure, a daring synthesis of traditional literary ideas. What the poems share, however, is a sense of literary excitement, the stimulation of contact with the themes and techniques of their predecessors, both ancient and modern, and the joy of writing poetry.

NOTES

1 On the question of Chaucer's influence on fifteenth-century poetry, see C.S. Lewis, English Literature in the Sixteenth Century (Oxford, 1962), 74-76; Denton Fox, "Chaucer's Influence on Fifteenth Century Poetry," Chaucer and Chaucerians: Critical Studies in Middle English Literature, ed. D.S. Brewer (London, 1966), p. 164-171.

2 Blending the characteristics of planet and mythological goddess became very popular in the fifteenth century; in the Troy Book, for example, describing the meeting of Paris and Helen, Lydgate says that Venus marked them with her firebrand "and inflawmed [them] be sodeyn influence." Lydgate's Troy Book, ed. Henry Bergen, E.E.T.S., ext. ser. XCVII (London 1906), Bk. IV, line 3716. In the post-Chaucerian dits, Venus' home is usually in heaven and it is often modelled on the Christian paradise, although the wicket and garden of the Roman de la Rose continue to appear. In general, there is less attention to her mythological attributes. The negative, psychomachia Venus also continued to survive, for example in Deguileville's Pélerinage de la Vie Humaine.

3 The Minor Poems of John Lydgate, Part II, ed. H.N. MacCracken, E.E.T.S., O.S. 192 (London, 1934), lines 401-404.

4 English Verse Between Chaucer and Surrey, ed. Eleanor Prescott Hammond (New Yorkk, 1969), p. 145, lines 1-7.

5 Fox, p. 396.

7 Quotations are from the W. MacKay MacKenzie edition of *The Kingis Quair* (London, 1939). The numbers refer to stanzas and not to lines. The attribution of the "Kingis Quair" to James I,first made by the scribe who finished copying the single mansucript which has come down to us, is not universally accepted. As Derek Pearsall points out, the details of James' life were well known and could easily have been used by a less illustrious contemporary as the basis for his own allegorical *dit*. "The English Chaucerians," p. 227.

8 Particularly the accounts of the shipwreck and imprisonment. C.S. Lewis and MacKenzie read the *Quair* as a realistic, autobiographical poem. "Its importance lies in the fact that it is ... the literal story of a passion felt by the author for a real woman." *Allegory of Love*, p. 235. More recent criticism, however, has emphasized the poem's conventionality. See particularly, Andrew Von Hendy, "The Free Thrall: A Study of the 'Kingis Quair'," *Studies in Scottish Literature*, II (1965), 141-151; John MacQueen, "Tradition and the Interpretation of the 'Kingis Quair',: *RES*, XII (1961), 117-131; John Preston, "Fortunys Exiltree: A Study of the 'Kingis Quair'," *RES*, VII (1956), 339-347; Derek Pearsall, "The English Chaucerians," *Chaucer and Chaucerians*, p. 226-228.

9 Von Hendy, p. 143

10 *Allegory of Love*, p. 236

11 Howard R. Patch, The Other World According to Descriptions in Medieval Literature (Cambridge, Mass., 1950), p. 3, 13-14, 39 ff. Sypherd also surveys otherworld palaces of love divinities, p. 132-138.

12 See Chap. II, p. 94-98.

13 Lydgate is less successful in finding a way of describing his heavenly Venus in the "Temple of Glass." While the "Quair" poet adapts the portrait in Chaucer's Parlement Lydgate turns to the "Knight's Tale" and mentions offhandedly that the lovers presented their bills to Venus "So as she sate fletyng in the se"! He also changes Venus' traditional roses for white and green hawthorn. In other respects, however, Lydgate's Venus is closely related to the "Quair" poet's: she is prayed to as "blisful star" and she is wise and prudent, her advice being similar to the "Quair" Minerva's--let reason bridle desire. Poems, ed. John Norton-Smith (Oxford, 1966), p. 68.

14 Erwin Panofsky traces the two traditions in some detail in "Blind Cupid," Studies in Iconology (New York, 1962), p. 95-128. The "Quair" poet elects to place the mythographers' Cupid, indicating amor carnalis, alongside the virtuous Venus, suggesting, perhaps, that passion is kept in check by a higher, more all-encompassing kind of love. For the Cupid of fine amour, see Introduction, p. 24-25; Chap. IV, p. 150-152.

15 Minerva, of course, is not a planet, which is rather inconvenient for the poet's scheme, but he proceeds as if she

were.

16
Von Hendy, p. 148.

17
The three stanzas in which various beasts are enumerated are modelled after the tree catalogue in Chaucer's poem:

> The lytill squerell, full of besyness;
> The slawe as, the druggar beste of pyne;
> The nyce ape; the werely porpapyne;
> The percyng lynx, the lufare unicorne." (155)

MacQueen cites a related passage in the Book of the Duchess, lines 416-420; 427-433. "Tradition and the Interpretation," p. 123-124.

18
On the house of Fortune, see Introduction, p. 18-19.

19
MacQueen, p. 131.

20
Citations to Henryson in my text are to The Testament of Cresseid, ed. Denton Fox (London, 1968).

21
Fox, p. 34.

22
The descriptions of the gods in the "Testament," like those in the "Knight's Tale," have been traced to the mythographic tradition and to Albricus in particular. Fox suggests that Henryson's first three portraits in particular "are stylistically similar to the short chapters of the Libellus de imaginibus deorum," even though there are few iconographic correspondences. P. 97.

[23] J. Huizinga, The Waning of the Middle Ages, trans. F. Hopman (London, 1924), chap. XI.

[24] On the planetary powers, see Introduction, p. 8-9, 11-12.

[25] With this interpretation, many critics disagree; compare for example, Fox, who considers Cresseid's leprosy to be both a symbol of her sin and "the inevitable and proper punishment for a corrupt, unnatural and sinful life," a punishment sent by God, p. 34-37. However, if Cresseid's punishment is just, then the narrator, who disputes it, must himself be a sinner, and Fox finds that he too is "an example of foolish and sinful attachment to sensuality," an "unredeemed man, corrupt, and concupiscent." P. 55. Among other critics who take this view are John MacQueen, Robert Henryson: A Study of the Major Narrative Poems (Oxford, 1967), p. 61-62; and E.M.W. Tillyard, "Henryson, The 'Testament of Cresseid'" in Poetry and its Background (London, 1955), p. 5-29. The opposing view is argued by A.C. Spearing, "Conciseness and the 'Testament of Cresseid'," Criticism and Medieval Poetry (London, 1964), p. 118-144; and Douglas Duncan, "Henryson's 'Testament of Cresseid'," EIC, XI (1961), 128-135.

[26] For details about the astrological causes of Cresseid's leprosy, see Marshall Stearns, Robert Henryson (New York, 1966), chap. V; or Fox's Introduction, p. 31-34.

[27] It occurs, for example in Froissart's "Paradys D'Amours." See Chap. IV, p. 145.

28 Spearing, p. 132-133.

29 See Stearns, p. 75 and Fox, p. 97.

30 Seznec quotes several mythographic treatments of Saturn, p. 176. For a historical account of the different treatments of Saturn, see Erwin Panofsky, "Father Time," _Studies in Iconology_, p. 69-93.

31 Fleming, p. 112.

32 Introduction, p. 18-19.

33 Venus takes over Fortune's wheel in _Les Échecs Amoureux_ and Gower's _Confessio Amantis_. See Patch, _The Goddess Fortuna_, p. 90-98 and Fox's notes, p. 105-106.

34 Stearns, p. 91-92. On the iconography of Fortune, see Introduction p. 17.

35 Patch, p. 43. On the pattern of contrasts typical of Fortune imagery, see Patch, p. 55-56.

36 Tillyard, p. 12-18; Fox, p. 37-52.

37 See Introduction, p. 19-21.

38 Spearing, p. 33.

39 Fox, p. 44.

40 C.S. Lewis, _English Literature in the Sixteenth Century Excluding Drama_ (Oxford, 1954), p. 78.

41 The House of Fame was responsible for the fact that a good many fifteenth century deities live on mountaintops rather than in gardens or on islands; Lydgate, for example, adapts a number of details from Fame's palace for the Temple of Glass: Venus' temple is situated on a "craggy roche like ise ifrore," which shone like crystal, rather than in the usual plesance. But as far as I know only Douglas uses the House of Fame in a systematic and continuous way.

42 Douglas may have derived some of these details from the Temple of Glass or other fifteenth century imitations of Chaucer. Denton Fox discusses many of the parallels between the Palice of Honour and the House of Fame in "The Scottish Chaucerians," Chaucer and Chaucerians: Critical Studies in Middle English Literature, ed. D.S. Brewer (London, 1966), p. 193-200.

43 Honor had been treated before in the love vision genre; Froissart wrote a "Temple d'Onnour" which consists primarily of a sermon by Honor himself on the moral virtues necessary to reach his palace. For further discussion of this tradition, see Priscilla Bawcutt's edition of the Palice of Honour. The Shorter Poems of Gavin Douglas, Scottish Text Society (Edinburgh, 1967), xxix. The earlier poems dealing with Honor show no particular interest in the subject of poetic composition.

44 The procession is a common motif in the French dits; the God of Love appears to the dreamer surrounded by his followers

in the <u>Paradys d'Amours</u> and in Deschamps' <u>Le Lay Amoureux</u>, and of course in the "Prologue" to the <u>Legend of Good Women</u>. The idea of a series of courts or processions becomes popular in the fifteenth century, e.g. Petrarch's <u>Trionfi</u>, <u>The Flower and the Leaf</u>, the <u>Kingis Quair</u> and <u>Reason and Sensuality</u>. But the idea of contrasting processions en route to the same place seems to be Douglas'. See Bawcutt, xxxiii.

45
See Chap. IV, p. 145-146

46
<u>Virgil's Aeneid, Translated into Scottish Verse by Gavin Douglas</u>, ed. David F. Coldwell, Scottish Text Soc., 3rd. ser., No. 25 (Edinburgh, 1957), II.

47
Giovanni Boccaccio, <u>Genealogie Deorum Gentilium Libri</u>, ed. Vincenzo Romano (Bari, 1951), II, p. 700.

48
Emile Mâle, <u>The Gothic Image: Religious Art in France of the Thirteenth Century</u>, trans. Dora Nussey (New York, 1958), p. 119, fig. 59.

49
Douglas was probably familiar with the magic mirror in the "Squire's Tale" which the strange knight presented to Cambuscan (132-141). Chaucer's mirror, however, only revealed danger to the kingdom or showed the lady her lover's treachery and had no specific association with Venus and no literary function.

VII Conclusion

Few writers of any generation absorb the traditions of the past into their own work in a way that excites the imaginations of their contemporaries. In our own era, perhaps only Joyce, Eliotand Pound reintegrated the literary past in ways that struck a deep, responsive chord, and their influence has continued to grow to the extent that we now consider the view of the past they provided to be characteristic not only of their own generation but also of the twentieth century as a whole. That Chaucer too performed this labor of literary reintegration has not, I think, been sufficiently recognized. Although Chaucer's conventionalism has been explained and his debts to various sources elucidated, he is still sometimes regarded merely as an artful adapter who knew how to use other men's stories to suit his own purposes rather than as an imaginative syncretist who drew together many traditions in a way his successors found poetically fruitful and which influenced the course of poetry for centuries.

Discussions of Chaucer's portrayals of the gods, in particular, often tend to dwell on the comic, playful episodes, to emphasize the poet's irony and demonstrate the extent to which he abandoned the earlier allegorical forms. In general, however, as I have tried to show, Chaucer's portrayals of the gods reveal him at his most allegorical, and this side of his literary personality was one of the factors which established him as a master in the eyes of his contemporaries and made him the most admired, imitated poet of his day.

Chaucer was one of those rare literary figures, a poet

who guided his successors through the tangle of their intellectual heritage. He taught English and Socttish poets to see the gods as being rich in symbolic potential, as images through which meaning could be released, just as Wordsworth was to teach his contemporaries to regard the incidents of common life and the language really used by men as the basis of poetry. Chaucer bequeathed to his successors that sense of the lasting truth of ancient myth and the desire to penetrate its hidden meaning which he shared with the mythographers.

Chaucer's exploration of the gods' meanings resulted in a transformation of the *dit* genre, at least its English language branch. In thehands of the French poets of the *Roman de la Rose* tradition, the courtly vision had been a comparatively narrow and essentially frivolous literary form, highly stylized and limited in scope to a small segment of aristocratic intellectual and emotional life. The *dits* of Machaut and Froissart present a society in which a man's whole attention can be devoted to mastery of the art of love; all other, more prosaic aspects of human life can be ignored. With Chaucer and his followers all this changes. If Love is still an essential part of the *dits*, it is no longer their only subject. The diverse materials Chaucer brought to his portrayals of the gods helped to broaden the scope of the courtly vision form and make it the vehicle for a wider range of interests and significances. Chaucer's fifteenth century successors absorbed the lesson of the "Knight's Tale" and *Troilus*, that love cannot be isolated from the rest of life.

For these writers, love is a means to wisdom or morality, the understanding of philosophical issues or the writing of poetry.

Chaucer's treatments of the gods, as we have seen, vary greatly in mode and depth. His portrayals do not have the uniform, systematic quality characteristic of such medieval writers as Dante. Yet Chaucer's gods demonstrated, to a greater extent than Dante's, how useful and flexible the literary past could be. Portraits of the gods, composed of details carefully selected from a number of different sources, showed how powerfully and succinctly the past, properly directed, could illuminate poetry written in the present. The _House of Fame_ offered the most daring and dramatic example of this procedure; in the description of Geffrey's aerial journey, bits of information gleaned from a wide variety of sources are arranged in such a way that their inherent relatedness becomes apparent. The portrait of Fame herself epitomizes this method; Chaucer's judicious mingling of details from Virgil's and Ovid's descriptions of Fama, suggestions from the Book of Revelation, and imagery connected with Fortune resulted in an entirely new and richly assimilative portrait of Fame.

But Chaucer's assimilative technique was carried farthest in his portraits of Venus. His "matere" drew him again and again to descriptions of the goddess of Love, and he utilized a wide variety of sources: for the _House of Fame_ and the "Knight's Tale" he adapted the mythographer's portraits of Venus, for the _Parlement_ he used the _Teseida_, and for Venus' brief appearance in the "Merchant's Tale," the _Roman de la_

Rose. Far more ambitious and influential than any of these, however, was Chaucer's celebration of Venus as symbol of the love which inspires all creation in the Troilus. The treatment of the goddess of Love in Book III blends Venus' astrological role, her mythological status as daughter of Jove and mistress of Mars, the courtly goddess of the cor gentile, and the heavenly love which governs nature in order to suggest the divine dimension of Troilus' love for Criseyde.

One of Chaucer's first successors to show the influence of the Lucretian Venus of Book III and of the master's assimilative method in general was the author of the Kingis Quair. In the Scottish poem, Venus appears in person; like her counterparts in the French dits, she expounds the laws to which aspiring lovers must adhere and advises the suppliant to wait patiently for his lady to show mercy. But the court of this "wel-willy" planetary Venus is located in the third heaven, not in an earthly garden, and the Quair poet goes beyond Chaucer in having the goddess herself speak of human love in Christian language: Venus claims that she will "ressave" the souls of her faithful through her "grace" and that they will live eternally in her heaven "as goddis."

This portrait of Venus also shows how fully the Quair poet absorbed Chaucer's technique of utilizing mythographic information while ignoring mythographic meanings. He incorporates traditional iconographic details while at the same time modifying their moral direction to fit the needs of his own design. In adapting the description of Venus from the Parlement, the Quair poet meticulously avoids the

negative and ambiguous suggestions of Chaucer's portrait.

Henryson, while following a Chaucerian suggestion in substituting the planetary gods for mythological ones, departs even more dramatically from the conventional portraits of Venus. Disregarding the favorable qualities traditionally attributed to the planet, he systematically transfers to his goddess of Love much of the imagery connected with Fortune and creates a personification of an inconstant lover, a kind of mirror image of Cresseid, as she finally comes to recognize when she admits that she has taken the part of Fortune in her relations with Troilus.

Gavin Douglas' Venus also represents a dramatic departure from tradition; a representative of neither carnal nor spiritual love, neither beneficent planet nor Boethian holy bond, she presides over all varieties of literary material and provides subject matter for poets.

In such profound modifications of the traditional gods as these, we can see the literary consequences of Chaucer's deep concern with the meanings of the ancient divinities. In the hands of the Scottish poets of the fifteenth century, the _dits_ acquire new moral and philosophical significance. The _Kingis Quair_ and the _Testament of Cresseid_ take up not only the concern expressed in the _Troilus_ with the effect of love and loss on human spiritual development, but also Chaucer's cosmic speculations; the _Quair_, in its Boethian treatment of the problem of free will and predestination, the _Testament_, in its depiction, through the gods, of a harsh and unfriendly universe.

In the Palice of Honor, the center of attention shifts from love and cosmic speculation to poetry. Yet Douglas' poem too is in a sense a sequel to the Troilus; it begins where Chaucer's poem ends, with the rejection of earthly love and "this warldis frail unsteidfastnes" and concludes with a recognition that love which is the province of Venus, unstable as it may be, is nonetheless the basis of poetry and the most compelling of poetic subjects.

But Venus was not the only goddess whose literary significance was broadened by astrological material. The poetic use of the planetary gods was one of Chaucer's most significant legacies. His introduction into the "Knight's Tale" of the astrologically malevolent figures of Saturn and Mars, images of overwhelming cosmic forces against which human beings are helpless, had transformed Boccaccio's narrative into a philosophical epic. In the Testament of Cresseid this Chaucerian idea is carried further; in Henryson's poem the supernatural action is consistently astrological, not mythological as in the "Knight's Tale," and hence more realistic and terrifying. Cresseid's leprosy is caused by a conjunction of Saturn and Cynthia.

Chaucer's successors, however, went beyond him in justifying the existence of malevolent planets in a Christian universe. Chaucer refers only rarely and indirectly to the tradition which goes back to St. Augustine, and is reiterated in Boethius and Dante, that the stars act under God. Although Theseus' assertion that a stable and eternal "First Moevere" governs the universe may be said to imply such a doctrine, it

is never made explicit. In the Troilus, the fateful smokey rain which forced Criseyde to spend the night at her uncle's house calls forth from the narrator a double apostrophe to Fortune and the "influences of thise hevenes hye" which, he informs us, are our "hierdes" or shepherds, acting under God. But the area of philosophical understanding which this passage suggests, the knowledge that Fortune and the planets are God's servants, instruments of his "purveyaunce," is never fully revealed, and the momentary illumination fades into the background as the action continues.

Chaucer's successors, however wanted to be more explicit about the place of the planetary gods; the Kingis Quair Venus declares that her power is governed "by ordynance eterne," and in the Testament of Cresseid, Cupid reminds the other gods that they are "all sevin deificait,/Participant of devyne sapience."

The new concern with philosophical significance among Chaucer's followers is reflected in the increasing prominence of Fortune in the Scottish dits and in the new kind of treatment she receives. Chaucer had rarely placed Fortune in a Boethian and Christian perspective; she is generally spoken of as if she were free to act as she pleases, as if her capricious changes were not subject to the control of a higher authority. In the Troilus, there are two brief references which suggest the traditional Christian justification for her existence, but the great majority of the passages on Fortune express only the commonplace view of her as the cruel and treacherous embodiment of worldly change.

The Scottish poets went beyond their master in incorporating the Boethian view of Fortune into their work. In the Kingis Quair, the narrator encounters the goddess after the visit to Minerva, during which he has come to intellectual terms with Fortune, and his voluntary acceptance of a place on her wheel represents a hard-won reconciliation to the uncertainties of earthly life as well as its rewards. Fortune's appearance in the traditional realm of Nature amidst the teeming abundance and endless variety of natural life rather than in her traditional insecure dwelling place is an appropriate allegorical image of this new sense of optimism.

The Testament of Cresseid, which presents a far less sanguine view of earthly existence, makes use of the Boethian Fortune in a different way; through the workings of the fickle goddess, Cresseid comes to understand the conditions of life. Fortune is identified with both the unstable Cresseid and, in the portrait of Venus, with the instability of Love itself: "all fleschelie paramour.../Is sum tyme sweit, sum tyme bitter and sour."

In changing the literary character of the gods, Chaucer also inevitably changed some of the particular dit motifs, perhaps most obviously the court jugement, the trial of the sinner against love for blasphemy. Chaucer's treatment of this motif in the "Prologue" to the Legend of Good Women replaced the air of sophisticated inconsequentiality characteristic of the jugements of Machaut with a seriousness more appropriate to the consideration of literary questions. Instead

of a _demande d'amour_, the question to be decided involves a poet's competence, and all Chaucer's writings are brought in as evidence. As the God of Love reveals himself to be a dogmatic judge who equates literary quality with subject matter which promotes his interests, we become aware of the intellectual limitations a poet's readers may show and the difficulties of communicating with such an audience.

Gavin Douglas uses a trial scene modelled on that in the "Prologue" as the springboard for a literary journey during which the young man is initiated into the secrets of poetic art. Like Chaucer, Douglas provides a distinctive and self-disparaging portrait. But while Chaucer, although accused of incompetence and disloyalty, finally emerges, in a dignified self-defense, as a serious artist sure of his intentions, the trial of Douglas' narrator reveals a brash, immature young man who has composed a ballad which unambiguously condemns love. Not until he has toured the world of literary landmarks in the company of the Muses and been entertained by Virgil, Ovid and other poets, will he return to the court of Venus, knowing the place as if for the first time, and discover that her mirror is an endless source of poetic material, containing all the stories in the world. The "Prologue" portrait of the God of Love as arbiter of poetic standards is thus obviously extended in Douglas' conception of Venus as the guardian and preserver of poetry. The _Palice of Honour_ reveals a sense of the importance of poetry beyond anything suggested in Chaucer; in Douglas' poem, poetic composition is as legitimate a means to Honor as Love, Wisdom or Chastity.

In Henryson's adaptation of the dit trial, the lightness and frivolity traditionally connected with thismotif are absent. Although the offended gods are Venus and Cupid, Henryson's tribunal includes all seven gods, who appear in their planetary form and are for the most part cruel and threatening. The defendant, Cresseid, has no opportunity to defend herself and no kind Alceste or Calliope intervenes on her behalf. The sentence of the astrological court is inexorably and painfully carried out.

Chaucer even revitalized so ancient and standard a topos as the locus amoenus. His exploration of the paradoxical nature of love in the Parlement through the juxtaposition of Venus and Nature in a paradisal garden apparently inspired his followers to modify the garden image in new, imaginative ways. The culminating allegorical image of the Kingis Quair which blends an idealized garden with the figure of Fortune and her wheel to communicate the narrator's sense of both the variety and abundance of natural life and its uncertainty, has already been mentioned. Douglas adopts the locus amoenus to describe a specifically poetic paradise; the Muses' home is "ane plesand plane" teeming with all kinds of herbs, flowers and fruits. All suggestions of pain, whether caused by unrequited love or by misfortune are absent, and the dwellers experience continual, unadulterated pleasure in singing, riding and laughing, to which are added the more sophisticated literary entertainments provided by the ancient poets. In the Palice of Honour, the venerable paradisal park is modified to suggest the joy and excitement which servants

of poetry experience.

The intense interest in exploring the human meaning of the gods which characterizes all Chaucer's portrayals, beginning with the unobtrusive appearance of the great normative figures of Nature, Fortune and the God of Love in the Book of the Duchess, thus suggested new literary possibilities to his followers, and transformed the courtly French dit into a vehicle for conveying truths of the greatest importance and the most universal implications. Yet not all Chaucer's successors shared his interest in the gods' symbolic significance, as the Quair poet, Henryson and Doulas had. Although poetic descriptions of the gods became more and more popular in the century after Chaucer's death and although the number of gods who appear increases, exploration of their meaning begins to decline. In such poems as Dunbar's The Golden Targe and Lydgate's Reason and Sensuality, the desire to manipulate conventional descriptive motifs and ornate language outstrips interest in the communication of meaning.

The increasingly didactic character of the love visions contributed to the decline of the gods as poetic symbols. In the hands of writers lacking an interest in exploring their meanings, the gods' potentially rich associations harden, and they become stilted,lifeless figures. As the dit form moves farther away from its traditional subject matter, love, the gods lose their symbolic richness and become spokesmen for wisdom and morality and repositories of encyclopedic learning.

Finally, in the poetry of Hawes and Spenser, the dit

amoureux merges with another equally popular genre, the chivalric romance. To this marriage, the dits contributed their allegorical dimension, that sense of heightened significance which had become particularly strong since Chaucer, and their gods, particularly Venus and Cupid. But the gods are no longer the only figures in the allegorical landscape, as they had been in the "Knight's Tale," the Kingis Quair and the Testament of Cresseid; we find the symbolic weight of the Faerie Queen primarily entrusted to figures of more recent invention, such as Acrasia, Duessa and Mammon. Two centuries after Chaucer's death, the gods which he had revitalized and transformed into rich and fascinating poetic symbols gradually begin to lose their position as the central figures of English literary allegory.

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