Boethian Influence in Chaucer's

_Troilus and Criseyde_

by

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I. Introduction

Of the problems involved in tracing the development of Boethius' influence on Chaucer, the central obstacle is the position Boethian philosophy plays in medieval thought. In pointing out Boethian influences on Chaucer, it is not so simple a matter as to say that Chaucer one day read The Consolation of Philosophy and later incorporated much of it in his own writings. Boethius was a major medieval philosopher; his writings were on one hand a masterful rethinking, reworking, and organization of prevalent ideas, and also a major influence on other medieval writers. But his philosophy was a part of medieval philosophy; Chaucer would have been influenced not only by Boethian thought but also by similar medieval philosophical writings and religious beliefs. The problem is to dissect and isolate Boethian philosophy from the whole of medieval philosophy.

There is no doubt that Chaucer was profoundly influenced by Boethius. Chaucer translated Boethius' The Consolation of Philosophy as Boece and directly quoted or mentioned Boethius as a reference in Troilus and Criseyde, The Canterbury Tales, The Legend of Good Women, and "Words Unto Adam." In Chaucer's translation of The Consolation of Philosophy, there is evidence that he was not working from "pure" Boethius. It is generally conceded that he consulted a French translation (probably Jean de Meun's) and a commentary on the work by Nicholas Trivet. ¹ Although these additional works probably helped him arrive at an understanding of obscure passages, they also assisted

in corrupting others. More than a hundred errors have been pointed out in Chaucer's translation. But even if Chaucer was not a perfect translator, he did make Boethius' thought part of his own.

II. Boethius and the Consolation of Philosophy

Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius was a Roman philosopher born approximately in the year 480 A.D. nearly a thousand years before Geoffrey Chaucer. He was born into a distinguished Roman family, fathered two sons who became Consuls, and until the end of his life lived in great favor with the emperor. In 524, Boethius was charged with treason and sentenced to death by the Gothic Roman emperor, Theodoric. When charged, apparently falsely, he was sorrowed by his change of fortune and attempted a rational and Stoic explanation in his Consolation of Philosophy. In this treatise, he is visited by Lady Philosophy, who consoles him in his despair. Through Lady Philosophy, Boethius details an exposition of Fortune, Fate, Predestination, and Foreknowledge.

Although Boethius was later canonized as St. Severinus, his Lady Philosophy did not so much extol the virtues of Christianity as she did classical (pagan) philosophy. Boethius, born in the fifth century A.D., wanted not so much to Christianize his contemporaries as to shed some of the classical light of Ancient Greece on the intellectual life of his time. His burning ambition was to translate all the works of Plato and Aristotle which, had it not been for Theodoric, he might have realized. He did, however, write an interpretation of Euclid, a treatise on music based on the mathematical theories of Pythagoras, and thirty books based on Aristotle's philosophy. His other writings were concerned with arithmetic,
geometry, music, astronomy, theology, and philosophy.\(^2\)

It appears paradoxical that Boethius lived in the fifth and sixth centuries, since he seems more at home in either ancient Greece or the later Renaissance than in medieval Rome. His topics in *The Consolation of Philosophy* (Fortune, Fate, Foreknowledge, and Predestination) lie at the heart of medieval philosophy. Yet Boethius idealized classical philosophy and hoped for a return to it; the consolation his Lady Philosophy brings is the understanding of medieval realities (and through these realities an acceptance of Fortune). But despite Boethius' intellectual leanings toward classical philosophy, his topic of discussion in *The Consolation of Philosophy* is the central focus of medieval religion. The concepts of Fate, Foreknowledge, and Destiny are part of Christian religion to some extent; but they are also paganized explanations of reality. These are apparent paradoxes. His philosophy is medieval yet classical, Christian yet pagan.

*The Consolation of Philosophy* consists of five books. Within each book Boethius composes several alternating "metres" and "proses." The metres, or poems, are used mainly for rest; the prose sections contain the philosophical writings in the pattern of a dialogue between Boethius and his mentor, Lady Philosophy.

### III. Chaucer and *Trollus and Criseyde*

*Trollus and Criseyde* is essentially a tragic tale that recounts Troilus' despair over his unreturned love for Criseyde; his momentary happiness when their love is constant; and his final tragic ending when Criseyde proves unfaithful to him. Chaucer explicitly describes the poem as the "double sorwe

of Troilus."

The immediate source for Chaucer's *Troilus* is Boccaccio's *Il Filostrato*. The story is originally mentioned in Benoit's *Roman de Troie.* In 1287, Guido delle Colonne paraphrased Benoit's poem as *Historia Trojanana*. Both Benoit and Guido based their Trojan histories on accounts by Dares the Phrygian and Dictys the Cretan. Dares was supposedly an eyewitness who was present in Troy in the period of time before the city was captured. Dictys was a soldier who participated in the Trojan invasion and kept a journal written in Phoenician characters. His journal, buried with him in a tin box, was discovered centuries later when an earthquake upheaved his grave, and was translated into Greek by order of Nero (emperor at the time of the earthquake) and translated into Latin by Septimius Romanus. Benoit used these accounts as the basis for his history, but expanded the story to include the account of Criseyde's unfaithfulness to Troilus. In Dares' account there is frequent mention of Troilus as a great warrior but not as a lover. Boccaccio evidently took his story from Benoit; Chaucer wrote from the *Il Filostrato*, making subtle but vital changes in characterization and minor events.

As to the date of the poem, there is no need to quibble with Root's findings. There is substantial evidence to show that the *Troilus* was written between early 1385 and early 1387. In the poem Chaucer mentions a conjunction of Jupiter, Saturn, and a crescent Moon in the sign of Cancer. (Book III, 624–625). Chaucer likely placed the incident in the poem because of a recent actual occurrence as he was writing the poem, or at least shortly before. Root notes that such a conjunction actually happened on April 13, 1385, for the first time in over 600 years. If Chaucer had inserted the event into the poem at the suggestion of the actual conjunction, *Troilus and

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3 written between 1155 and 1160.
Criseyde could not have been completed any earlier than the Spring of 1385. By the early months of 1387 Chaucer had written the first version of the Legend of Good Women in which he mentions the story of Troilus and Criseyde. Also, by 1387 Chaucer was at work on The Canterbury Tales. Thus, according to the evidence (and Root's interpretation) Troilus and Criseyde was completed between 1385 and 1387.

IV. Textual Comparison

Throughout the Troilus, Chaucer borrows from Boethius' Consolation of Philosophy. Some of the borrowings are direct translations from Boethius; others are passages which hint at a similarity of ideas and phrases. The following are passages (in chronological order) in the Troilus for which there are corresponding passages in Boethius' Consolation of Philosophy. All quotations cited from Boethius are from Boece, Chaucer's translation.5

In the first few lines of Book I, Chaucer as narrator describes the tragedy of Troilus and Criseyde as "fro wo to wele, and after out of joie" (I.4). In Boece, Lady Fortune describes her fickle nature to Boethius:

I resceyved the nakid and nedy of alle thynges, and I norissched the with my richesses, and was redy and ententyf throu my favour to sustene the— and that maketh the now inpacient ayens me; and I envyrounde the with al the habundaunce and schy­nynge of alle goodes that ben in my ryght. Now it liketh me to withdwawe myn hand. (II.p2,16-24)

This is little more than the similarity of different phrases referring to the nature of the Wheel of Fortune. Fortune is fickle and plays no favorites. I am not saying that Chaucer was directly influenced by this passage and as a result condensed it to "fro wo to wele, and after out of joie." He could as easily have been inspired by the biblical, "many who are first will be last and the last first." The importance of these two passages is that they illustrate the same subscription to the doctrine of the Wheel of Fortune by both Boethius and Chaucer.

Later in Book I, Troilus first sees Criseyde:

And of hire look in him ther gan to quyken
So gret desir and such affeccioun,
That in his hertes botme gan to striken
Of hir his fixe and depe impressioun. (I.295-299.)

In Boece: "ymages and sensibilities were enprientid into soules fro bodyes withoute-forth. . ." (V.m4.6-10.). This passage in Troilus and Criseyde, besides being part of the intrinsic love story, is also an example of the violation of Boethian "stedfastnesse." Fortune is, as Boethius explains, dangerous only to those who subject themselves to it by setting their hearts on earthly rather than spiritual goods. One of these non-spiritual earthly goods is external "ymages and sensibilities."

By yielding to his affection for Criseyde, Troilus allows himself to become vulnerable to Fortune. He is not keeping his mind on God, but rather on the admittedly beautiful Criseyde. Although this task of mental chastity may be too much to expect of a human being, it is still expected in order to free the self from the whimsy of Fortune. As I later intend to show, this forsaking of the divine for the earthly is the mistake which precipi-

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tates Troilus' fall from his previous good fortune. And if it is a
super-human feat to keep one's mind on the divine, then Troilus' tragic
flaw is also humanity's tragic flaw.

Along the same lines as the preceding comparison is a similar
quotation from the *Troilus*:

> Thus gan he make a mirour of his mynde,
> In which he saugh al holly hire figure;
> And that he wel koude in his herte fynde,
> It was to hym a right good aventure
> To love swich oon, and if he dede his cure
> To serven hir, yet myghte he falle in grace. . . (I.365-360.)

When Pandarus consoles Troilus, he echoes the words of Boethius'
Lady Philosophy: "By his contrarie is every thyng declared"(I.637.).
Chaucer translates Lady Philosophy as saying, "if thow knowe clerly
the freelenesse of yvel, the stedfastnesse of good is known"(IV.p2.15-17.).
Pandarus is here defending his right to console Troilus. Because he has
been unsuccessful in love, he argues, it is possible for him to help Troilus
become successful in love. He continues by saying, "For how myghte evere
swetnesse han ben knowe/ To him that nevere tasted bitternesse?"(I.638-639.).
Boethius had said, "Hon, is the more swete, if mouthes han first tasted
savours that ben wykke"(III.m1.5-6.).

Troilus, after wailing and moaning according to the dictates of
courtly love, lay silent on his bed "as stylle as he ded were" when Pan-
darus comes to him saying, "What? slombrestow as in a litargie?/ Or ar-
tow lik an asse to the harpe?"(I.730-731.). Similarly, Lady Philosophy
comes to Boethius in a dream saying, "Knowestow me nat? Why artow stille?"
(I.p2.11-13.). In a later section of *Boece* Lady Philosophy asks "Artow
like an asse to the harpe?"(I.p4.2-6.).
Pandarus, to an extent, portrays the role of Lady Philosophy within the *Troilus*. It is Pandarus who "consoles" Troilus, just as it is Lady Philosophy who consoles Boethius. Troilus, like Boethius, cries out against Fortune; Pandarus then comforts him in the words of Lady Philosophy. In a passage of two stanzas, Pandarus explains the workings of Lady Fortune to Troilus, using the arguments given in the *Consolation* in the first three prose sections of Book II:

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Quod Pandarus, "Than blamestow Fortune For thow art wroth; ye, now at erst I see Woost thow nat wel that Fortune is commune To everi manere wight in som degree? And yet thow hast this comfort, lo, parde, That, as hire joies moten overgon, So mote hire sorwest passen everechon.

For if hire whiel stynte any thyng to torne, Than cessed she Fortune anon to be. Now, sith hire whiel by no way may sojourne, What woostow if hire mutabilite Right as thyselven list, wol don by the, Or that she be naught fer fro thyn helpynge? (I.841-853.).
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The passage in *Boece*, spoken by Lady Philosophy, says the same things:

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Yif Fortune bygan to duelle stable, she cessed thanne to ben Fortune. (II.p1.114-115)

Natheles dismeye the nat in thi thought; and thow that art put in the commune realme of alle, desire nat to lyven by thyn oonly propre ryght. (II.p2.83-86)

... for thynges that semen now sory passen also. (II.p3.78-79.)
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This similarity between *Troilus* and *Criseyde* and The *Consolation* of Philosophy illustrates the closeness with which Chaucer follows
Boethius in working out an imaginative dramatization of *The Consolation of Philosophy*. If Boethius' influence upon Chaucer resulted merely in a sprinkling of Boethian ideas and quotations from the *Consolation*, Chaucer could add a Boethian flavor thru narration or at most thru the speeches of Troilus. However, he goes one step further and creates in Pandarus not only the go-between Pandaro found in Boccaccio's *Il Filostrato*, but also a character who parallels Boethius' Lady Philosophy.

Pandarus continues in his role as Lady Philosophy, advising Troilus that if he wants to heal his sorrow, he must first reveal the "wounde" of his sorrow:

> For whoso list have helpynge of his leche,  
> To hym bykoweth first unwre his wounde. (I.857-858.)

Lady Philosophy, in an almost identical passage, tells Boethius that "Yif thou abidest after help of thi leche, the bykoweth discovre thy woundes"(II.4.6.).

In Book III, Criseyde reacts to Pandarus' news that Troilus has been told of her possibly forsaking him for Horaste, an insignificant character mentioned only in this instance:

> "O God!" quod she, "so worldly selynesse,  
> Which clerkes callen fals felicite,  
> Imedled is with many a bitterness!" (III.813-815.)

A similar passage in *Boece* reads: "The swetnesse of mannes welefulness is spraynd with many bitternesses..."(II.p4.119-120.).

Criseyde continues with her speech, bemoaning the loss of earthly joy:
O brotel wele of mannes joie unstable!
With what wight so thow be, or how thow pleye,
Either he woot that thow, joie, art muable,
Or woot it nought; it not ben oon of tweye,
Nor if he woot it nought, how may he seye
That he hat verray joie and selynesse,
That is of ignoraunce ay in derknesse?

Now if he woot that joie is transitorie,
As every joie of worldly thyng mot flee,
Than every tyme he that hath in memorie,
The drede of lesyng maketh hym that he
May in no perfit selynesse be;
And if to lese his joie he sette a myte,
Than semeth it that joie is worth ful lite. (III.820-836.)

The corresponding passage in Boece is:

And yit more over, what man that this
towmblynge welefulnesse ledeth, eyther he
woot that it is chaungeable, or elles he woot
it nat. And yif he woot it nat, what blissful
fortune may ther ben in the blyndnesse of ignor­
aunce? And yif he woot that it is chaungeable,
he mot alwey ben adrad that he ne lesse that
thyng that he ne douteth nat but that he may
lesen it. . . . Certes esk that is a ful
litel good that is born with evene herte what
it is lost. (II.p4.150-165.)

One of the more important questions dealt with by Boethius in
The Consolation of Philosophy also arises in Book III of Troilus and
Criseyde. Troilus, in one of his prayers asks one of the eternal ques­
tions: why do good men suffer while evil men appear to prosper? Troi­
lus is attempting to reconcile the doctrine of predestination with the
undeniable goodness of God. If predestination through the providence of
God exists, how can a just God predetermine what appears to be injustice?

But O, thow Jove, O auctour of nature,
Is this an honour to thi dayte,
That folk ungiltif suffren hire injure,
And who that giltif is, alquyt goth he? (III.1016-1019)
Boethius, too, questions God's justice:

And folk of wikkide maneres sitten in heie chayeres;
and anyynge folk traden, and that unrightfully,
on the nekkes of hol men; and vertu, cleer
and schynynge naturely, is hidde in derke derknesses;
and the rightful man bereth the blame and peyne
of the feloun. (I.m5.37-43.)

In another passage where Pandarus explains the nature of Fortune to Troilus, Pandarus warns him of the necessity for caution when he is at the height of his bliss and happiness—that is, when he is riding on the top of the Wheel of Fortune:

For of fortunes sharpe adversitee
The worste kynde of infortune is this,
A man to han ben in prosperitee,
And it remembren, when it passed is. (III.1625-1628.)

This is a paraphrase of a speech directed to Lady Philosophy: "For in alle adversites of fortune the moost unseely kynde of contrarious fortune is to han ben weleful"(II.p4.7-9.). The point here is that a man should not be too sure of his good fortune because he will be more unfortunate when his fortune fails by remembering his past happiness.

Troilus' Song in Book III is a paraphrase of Metre 8 in Book II of Boece.

That that the world with feith, which that is stable,
Diverseth so his stowndes concordynge,
That elementz that ben so discordable
Holden a bond perpetuely durynge,
That Phebus mote his rosy day forth brynge,
And that the mone hat lordshipe over the nyghtes,—
Al this doth Love, ay heried be his myghtes!
That the sea, that greedy is to flowen,
Constreyneth to a certeyn ende so
His floodes that so fiercely they ne grownen
To drenchen erthe and al for evere mo;
And if that Love aught let his bridel go,
Al that now loveth asondre sholde lepe,
And lost were al that Love halt now to-hepe. (III. 1751-1764.)

Metre 8, which closes Book II of Boece:

That the world with stable feyth varieth accordable chaungynges; that the contrarious qualities of elementz holden among herself allyaunce perdurable; that Phebus, the sonne, with his goldene chariet bryngeth forth the rosene day; that the moone hath comaundement over the nyghtes, which nyghtes Esperus, the eve-starre, hath brought; that the see, greedy to flowen, constreyneth with a certein ende his floodes, so that it is nat levesful to streche his brode termes or bowndes uppon the erthes—al this accordaunce of thynges is bounde with love, that governeth erthe and see, and hath also commandment to the hevene. And yif this love slakede the bridelis, alle thynges that now loven hem togidres wolden make batayle contynuely, and stryven to fordo the fassoun of this world, the which they now leden in accordable feith by fayre moevynges. (II.m8.1-21.)

This comparison of Troilus' Song with Metre 8 of Book II is an example of how true Chaucer remains to The Consolation of Philosophy. In the transmutation of passages from Boece to Troilus and Criseyde he changes very few of the words and phrases of this passage. When the difference between Chaucer's masterly verse and his wretched prose is taken into account, the passages appear even more identical.

Once again Pandarus, in consoling Troilus, speaks the words of Lady Philosophy. In explaining that Troilus has no right to complain of his loss of happiness since his happiness was a gift of Fortune and not his
own "propretee," Pandarus says:

Ne trust no wight to fynden in Fortune
Ay propretee; hire yiftes ben commune. (IV.391-392.)

That is, the gifts of prosperity given by Fortune are common to all men, just as the chances for falling from the grace of Fortune are also common to all men.

In Boece, Lady Philosophy reminds the sorrowful Boethius that Lady Fortune had brought him into the world naked and unprosperous: "What wrong have I don the? What godes have I byreft the that weren thyne?" (II.p2.5-7). Also in the same passage she asks him, 

What ryght hastow to pleyne, yif thou hast taken more plenteously of the gode side. . . ? Nathere dismaye the nat in thi thought; and thow that art put in the commune realme of alle, desire nat to lyven by thyn oonly propre ryght. (II.p2.76-86.)

As Troilus wails and moans, he tells Pandarus that death is (for him) welcome since it ends pain.

For selly is that deth, soth for to seyne,
That, ofte ycleped, cometh and endeth peyne. (IV.503-504)

Boethius, in the opening song of the Consolation says, "Thilke deth of men is weleful that ne comyth noght in yeeris that ben swete, but cometh to wrecches ofte yclepid" (I.m1.16-20.).

Criseyde, in a passage similar in content to Book III, 813-836, speaks this time to Troilus of false felicity, saying that the end of worldly happiness is sorrow.
Chaucer translates Boethius as saying, "Thanne is it wel seene how
wrecchid is the blisfulnesse of mortel thynges. . ."(II.p4.123-124.).
Also, there is a possibility that Chaucer used a biblical source: "Even
in laughter the heart may grieve, and mirth may end in sorrow."7 This
speech of Criseyde's is one of the cornerstones of The Consolation of
Philosophy. If Boethian philosophy could be rationally reduced to a
single statement, it would be close to this: worldly happiness (or false
felicity), because of the workings of Fortune and Destiny, is bound to
result eventually in sorrow. This is the lesson of Troilus and Criseyde:
because they give themselves completely to their love, they seek happi-
ness in sources other than the divine. Thus, they become subject to For-
tune. As a result, their worldly happiness is temporary and ends in sor-
row. Although it is true that all men are subject to Fortune, those men
closer to the divine are less subject to Fortune than others.

At the beginning of Troilus' lengthy speech on predestination, Troilus
resolves himself to the necessity of Providence in his tragic love affair
with Criseyde:

"For al that comth, comth by necessitee:
Thus to ben lorn, it is my destinee.
For certeynly, this wot I wel, he seyde,
"That foresight of divine purveyaunce
Hath seyn alwey me to forgon Criseyde,
Syn God seeth every thyng, out of doutaunce,
And hem disponyth, thorugh his ordinaunce,
In hire merites sothly for to be,
As they shul comen by predesyne." (IV.958-966.)

Boethius has Lady Philosophy present similar ideas:

The whiche thingis natheltes the lokynge of the devyne purveaunce seth, that alle thingis byholdeth and seeth fro eterne, and ordeyneth hem everich in here merites as thei ben predestinat; and it is seid in Grek that "alle thinges he seeth and alle thinges he herith." (V.p.2.43-49.)

This idea of predestination and foreknowledge was certainly not original with Boethius, and it would be foolish to insist that these passages are in direct correspondence. However, it must be remembered that predestination is at the heart of medieval philosophy and that Boethius is one of the most predominant medieval philosophers.

The primary example of Chaucer's use of direct translation from Boece in Troilus and Criseyde is the long soliloquy by Troilus in which he philosophizes about predestination, providence, and foreknowledge. In Book IV of Troilus and Criseyde, Troilus tries to work thru the philosophical tangle of Providence; in Book V of Boece, Boethius explains to Lady Philosophy why he is so troubled. Below are the corresponding passages from the two works arranged side by side for more accurate comparison:

**Troilus and Criseyde**

For som men seyn, if God seth al biforn, Ne God may nat deceyved ben, parde, Than moot it fallen, theigh men hadde it sworn, That purvei.ance hath seyn before to be Wherefore I say, that from eterne if he Hath wist byfornoure thought sh as our deede, We han no fre choos, as thise clerkes rede.

**Boece**

For yif it so be that God loketh alle thinges byforn, ne God ne mai nat ben deceyved in no manere, thanne moot it nedes ben that purveaunce of God hath seyn byforn to comen. For which, yif that God knoweth byforn nat onl the werkes of men, but also hir conseilles and hir wiles, thanne ne schal there be no liberte of arbitrie; ne certes tialr ne may be noon other deede, ne no wil, but thilke which that the devyne purveaunce, that ne mai nat ben disseyved, hath felid byforn.
For yf ther myghte ben a variaunce  
To writen out fro Goddis purveyingne,  
Ther mere no prescience of thyng comynge,  
But it were rather an orynyoun  
Uncerteyn, and no stedfast forseynge.  
And certes, thane an abusioun,  
That God sholde han no parfit cler wytynges...  
... They seyn right thus, that thyng is  
For that the prescience hath seyn byfore  
That it shal come; but they seyn that  
Therefore  
That it shal come; therefore the purveyaunce  
Woot it byforn withouten ignoraunce;  
And in this manere this necessite  
Retorneth in his part contrarie agayn.  
For nedfully byhoveth it nat to bee  
That thilke thynges fallen in certayn  
That ben purveyed; but nedly, as they seyn,  
Byhoveth it that thynges which that falle,  
That they in certayn ben purveyd alle.  
I mene as though I laboured me in this,  
To enqueren which thyng cause of which  
As whethir that the prescience of God is  
The certeyn cause of the necessite  
Of thynges that to comen ben, parde;  
Or if necessite of thyng comynge  
Be cause certeyn of the purveyinge.  
But now n'enforce I me nat in shewynge  
How the ordre of causes stant; but well  
Woot I  
That it byhoveth that the byfallynge  
Of thynges wiste byforen certeynly  
Be necessarie, al seme it nat therby  
That prescience put fallynge necessaire  
To thyng to come, al falle it foule or faire.  
For if ther sitte a man yond on a see  
Than by necessite byhoveth it  
That, certes, thyng orynyoun sooth be,  
That wenest or conjectest that he sit. ...  
For yf that thei myghten  
Writen away in othere manneres than  
thei ben purveyed, thanne ne sholde  
ther be no stedfast prescience of thing  
to comen, but rather an uncerteyn opyniouen;  
the whiche thing to tronen of  
God, I deme felonye  
... and unlevylfel ...  
For certes thei seyn that thing  
is nat to come  
for that the purveyaunce of God hath seyn byforn  
that it is to comen, but rathir the contrarie;  
and that is this; that, for  
that the thing is to comen, that  
therefore ne mai it nat ben hidd  
fro the purveyaunce of God;  
and in this manere this necessite  
slideth ayelin into the contrarie partie;  
me it ne byhoveth nat  
nedes that thinges betiden that ben  
ipurveied, but it byhoveth nedes  
that thinges that ben to comen  
ben ipurveied;  
... to enqueren the whiche thing  
is the cause of whiche thing,  
as whethir the prescience  
is cause of the necessite  
of thinges to come, or elles  
that the necessite of things to comen  
is cause of the purveyaunce.  
But I ne enforce me nat now to schewen  
it, that the bytidynge of thingis iwyst  
byforn is necessarie, how so or in  
what manner that the ordre of causes  
bath itsel; although that it ne  
seme naught that the  
pre sceince bringe in necessite  
of bytydinge to thinges to comen.  
For certes yf that any wyght sitteth,  
it byhoveth by necessite  
that he sitte. ...
Thus in this same wise, out of dountance, I may wel maken, as it semeth me, My resonynge of Goddes purveyaunce And of the thynges that to comen be; By which resoun men may wel yse That thilke thynges that in erthe falle, That by necessite they comen alle.

For although that, for thyng shall come, ywis, Therfore is it purveyed, certeynly, Not that it cometh for it purveyed is; Yet natheles, bithoveth it nedfully That thing to come be purveyed, trewely; Or elles, thynges that purveyed be, That they bitiden by necessite.

And this suffiseth right ynoough, certeyn, For to destroye oure fre chois every del. But now is this abuseloun, to seyn That fallyng of the thynges temporal Is cause of Goddes prescience eternal. Now trewely, that is a fals sentence, That thyng to come sholde cause his prescience.

What myght I wene, and I hadde swich a thought But that God purveyeth thyng that is to come For that it is to come, and ellis nought? So myghte I wene that thynges alle and some, That whilom ben byfalle and overcome, Ben cause of thilke sovereyne purveyaunce That forwoot al withouten ignoraunce.

And over al this, yet sey I more hereto, That right as what I wot ther is a thyng, Ywis, that thyng moost nedfully be so; Eek right so, what I woot a thyng comyng, So mot it; and thus the bifallyng Of thynges that ben wist bifoire the tyle, They move nat ben eschued on no syde.

(IV.974-1078.)

Thus scheweth it that Y may make semblable skiles of the purveyaunce of God and of thingis to comen.

But for to wenen that God purveyeth the thynges to comen. .. for thei ben to comen,— what oothir thing is it but for to wene that thilke thinges that bytiden whilom ben causes of thilke sovereyne purveyaunce that is in God?

And hereto I adde yit this thing; that ryght as whanne that I woot that a thing is, it bithoveth by necessite that thilke selve thing ben; and eek whan I have knownen that any thing schal betyden, so bithoveth it by necessite that thilke same thing betide; so folweth it thanne that the betydenyng of the thing that I wiste byforn ne may nat ben eschued.

(V.p3.8-99.)

Chaucer has captured not only the spirit of Boethius' ideas, but also many of the same words and phrases which he had used earlier in translating Boece. The passages are amazingly similar when we consider that Chaucer was transposing the passage to verse.
In Book V Criseyde, after leaving Troy and Troilus, complains that she cannot foresee the future:

\[
\text{On tyme ypassed wel remembred me,}
\text{And present tyme ek koud ich wel ise,}
\text{But future tyme, er I was in the snare,}
\text{Koude I nat sen; that causeth now my care. (V.746-749.)}
\]

In Boece, Lady Philosophy presents a similar idea in her explanation of eternity:

\[
\text{For certis yit ne hat it nat taken the tyme}
\text{of tomorwe, and it hath lost that of}
\text{yesterday. And certes in the lif of}
\text{this dai ye ne lyve namore but right as}
\text{in this moevable and transitorie moment. (V.p6.22-26.)}
\]

Perhaps the most problematic passage of Troilus and Criseyde is Troilus' ascension into Heaven. After Achilles kills him in the Trojan war, Troilus ascends into Heaven ("the holughnesse of the eighthes spere"), looks down at "this litel spot of erthe," and laughs at the "wo of hem that wepten for his deth so faste." The question here is: why does Troilus laugh? Is it a laugh of joy or a laugh of bitterness? Is he laughing at Criseyde, laughing at himself, or laughing at the world? Perhaps the answer lies in the stanza immediately preceeding his enigmatic laughter:

\[
\text{And down from thennes faste he gan avyse}
\text{This litel spot of erthe, that with the se}
\text{Embraced is, and fully gan despise}
\text{This wrecched world, and held al vanite}
\text{To respect of the pleyn felicite}
\text{That is in hevene above; and at the laste,}
\text{Ther he was slayn, his lokyng down he caste. (V.1814-1820.)}
\]
The phrase, "the pleyn felicite that is in hevene above" is the central idea of The Consolation of Philosophy. The consolation that Lady Philosophy brings to Boethius is the consolation of the spiritual, the rational, the divine as opposed to the false felicity of the earth. Boethius' woe is caused by his emphasis upon his worldly position and his tragic fall from earthly grace. Lady Philosophy consoles him by righting the direction of his happiness toward the divine, toward the philosophical. Likewise, Troilus' woe is caused by his emphasis upon the false felicity of earthly love as opposed to divine love. His laughter, then, is a reflection of his realization that his happiness is found in the simple joy of heaven ("the pleyn felicite that is in heaven above") rather than in the unstable felicity of earthly happiness.

Although there is no direct passage-to-passage correlation for the stanza quoted above, there is a similarity in a passage of the apocryphal translation of Roman de la Rose that appears to connect Troilus and Cresseide with the Consolation.

He is a fool, withouten ware,
That trowith have his countre heere.
"In erthe is notoure countre,"
That may these clerkis seyn and see
In Bocc of Consolacioun,
Where it is made mencioun
Of oure contre pleyn at the eye.
By taching of philosophie,
Where lewde men myght lere wit
Whoso that wolde translaten it. (Romaunt of the Rose, Fragment B.5657-5666.)

The italicized lines are an addition in the English translation of the original French poem. The phrase, "oure contre pleyn at the eye" is reminiscent of "the pleyn felicite that is in hevene above." Altho
it is not possible to assign the authorship of the translation completely to Chaucer, Robinson points out that "... the whole work, if not Chaucer's, is conspicuously Chaucerian. The original Roman, moreover, of which about one third is represented in the English translation, probably exerted on Chaucer a more lasting and more important influence than any other work in the vernacular literature of either France or England." 8 This passage illustrates that the conception of heaven as man's "true country" was recognized in Chaucer's time as Boethian. The three inserted lines add additional weight to the argument that Chaucer was the author of both phrases concerning the "pleyn felicite of hevene." Also, W.W. Skeat points out that these lines of the Roman de la Rose may have been Chaucer's inspiration to translate the Consolation in order that "lewid men myght lere wit." 9


V. Conclusions

In attempting to show that *Troilus and Criseyde* is a dramatic representation of *The Consolation of Philosophy*, it is necessary to examine the Boethian concepts of predestination, the Wheel of Fortune, and false felicity in order to understand how Chaucer uses them to create a tale of courtly love.

*Troilus and Criseyde* is essentially a tale based upon the workings of destiny. Troilus is a fatalistic character, the type of man who cries out against Fortune. He recognizes that he is bound by the necessity of situations already predetermined by the divine. In his soliloquies and prayers, Troilus attributes his misfortunes not to the actions or mis-actions of himself or Pandarus, but to his predestined fortune. In this regard he parallels the character of Boethius who also rails against Fortune and is consoled by Lady Philosophy.

The actions of the love affair between Troilus and Criseyde are decidedly acts of destiny rather than overt, purposeful acts by the lovers themselves. Criseyde commits no overt act; rather, she is led step by step by Pandarus, by unique circumstances, and by her own curiosity. Pandarus, of course, does commit overt acts. He initiates the love affair of his own will; however, it must be remembered that he is a link in the chain of fate which is beyond Troilus' control.

Even casual occurrences in *Troilus and Criseyde* reflect the prevailing mood of destiny and the fatalistic character of Troilus. In
Pandarus' first visit, Troilus asks, "What cas or what aventure hath gyded thee to see my languisshinge?" (I.568-569.). Even this minor occurrence is assumed to be directed rather than volitional.

The background of the tale illustrates the importance of destiny in Troilus and Criseyde. Chaucer throws the history of the two lovers against the background of the Trojan war. There are inferences within the poem which reveal that at this point the war is near its climax of the fall of Troy. This coming fall of the Trojan city aids in foreshadowing of the tragedy of the lovers since it is a known fact with which the reader is familiar. Walter Curry also points out that "the sense of coming doom is emphasized through the prophecies of Calchas received from Apollo through the oracle."10

It is evident that Chaucer has provided the minor touches which reflect the prevailing sense of destiny in the poem thru character, plot, and setting. The sense of destiny becomes unavoidably evident in Troilus' long soliloquy in which he reflects upon the philosophy of predestination. This passage has several purposes. First of all, it places before the reader the paraphrased philosophy of Boethius. Secondly, it aids the convention of courtly love by showing the melancholy nature of the love-sick Troilus. Thirdly, it consciously directs the mood of the poem toward a mood of fatalism and destiny. C.S. Lewis points out another purpose of the passage: padding.

... To the unjaded appetites of Chaucer's audience mere thickness in a wad of manuscript was a merit. If the author was "so courteous beyond covenant" as to give you an extra bit of doctrine (or of story), who would be so churlish as to refuse it on the pedantic ground of irrelevance?11

Lewis does have a point here, but I take issue with his statement that the passage is irrelevant. True, the passage does intrude into the story if it is viewed either primarily or wholly as a tale of courtly love. But if the story is also viewed as an exercise not only in courtly love but in Boethian philosophy, the passage is very relevant. The modern reader might find the lengthy passages of moaning and "love-sickness" irrelevant to the story; these passages, however, are part of the courtly love exercise. Chaucer does not intend for these passages to be taken completely seriously; he is writing, partly, tongue-in-cheek when he describes Troilus as the typical courtly lover. He is probably doing the same when he includes the lengthy passage on predestination. He is perhaps playing at the game of edifying his readers, teaching a moral based on the philosophy of Boethius. Although he is sincerely serious in this, he does not allow his example of the fallen Troilus to interfere with either his empathy with Troilus as his hero nor with his portrayal of Troilus as the typical courtly lover. Chaucer is doing all of these things at once; any passage or occurrence which adds to either of these aspects of the poem is certainly not irrelevant.

Generally, the mood of *Troilus and Criseyde* is deterministic; this mood is specifically portrayed through the role of the Wheel of Fortune. The Wheel of Fortune is the direct force which determines the good and bad fortune of Troilus, and also of all human beings. The Wheel of Fortune appears to be an unsympathetic force which takes one from rags to riches and, in the case of Troilus, returns him again to proverbial rags. Curry writes that Fortune only seems to be illogical and capricious to those who are ignorant or blinded by success or adversity.
What through ignorance is called chance is nothing more than an occurrence whose causes are not understood. . . . The causes for this and for everything else, though perhaps not perceived by finite men, stretch back in an unbroken order through Destiny to the divine plan in God's mind. . . . But the philosopher whose thought is stayed upon the stability of God may rise in some measure above the vicissitudes of Fortune. 12

Curry's idea is Boethian. In Book IV, prose 6, of Boece, Boethius uses an illustration of a circle to prove a point about Fortune. As in a circle, Lady Philosophy tells Boethius, the center is less moveable than the rim. That is, a point on the rim of a moving circle will travel a greater distance than a point nearer the hub of a circle. So also, "by semblable reson, thilke thing that departeth ferrest fro the firste thought of God, it is unfolden and summitid to grettere bondes of destyne. . . ." That is, the further one's mind departs from thoughts of God, the more susceptible one is to the ever-turning Wheel of Fortune.

The item in question here is the time-old problem of "why do the righteous suffer and the wicked go unpunished?" C.S. Lewis, in examining The Consolation of Philosophy, paraphrases Boethius in this way:

Providence is wholly good. We say that the wicked flourish and the innocent suffer. But we do not know who are the wicked and who are the innocent; still less what either need. All luck, seen from the centre, is good and medicinal. The sort we call "bad" exercises good men and curbs bad ones— if they will take it so. Thus, if only you are near the hub, if you participate in Providence more and suffer Destiny less, "it lies in your own hands to make your fortune what you please." 13

12 Curry, pp. 224-225.
In the Boethian model of Destiny, Boethius pictures for us a circle. The center of the circle is Providence, the divine will. The outer edge of the circle is Destiny. If a man places his mind close to the divine will (near the center of the circle), he will be less susceptible to movement (that is, movement of the Wheel of Fortune). But if he does not center his mind on the divine, he is on the outer edge of the circle and more liable to movement (and more or less riding recklessly on the Wheel of Fortune).

With this model in mind, we are now able to understand what Chaucer translates from the Consolation as "fals felicite." Boethius points out that men seek many kinds of happiness. Righteous men will seek true happiness, which is found when one is in harmony with the divine will (Providence). Other men will seek worldly pleasures rather than spiritual happiness. These worldly pleasures are examples of false felicity. As D.W. Robertson explains,

Fortune is, as Boethius explains, no menace to the virtuous, but only to those who subject themselves to it by setting their hearts on a mutable rather than an immutable good. Such persons are those who abandon reason for the sake of false goals. . . .14

In an allusion to Orpheus in Hell in Boece, Chaucer adds explanatory information to Boethius' moral to the story of Orpheus.

For whoso that evere be so overcomen that he fische his eien into the pit of helle (that is to seyn, whoso sette his thoughtes in erthly thinges), al that evere he hath draw of the noble good celestial he lesith it, whanne he looketh the helles (that is

to seyn, into lowe thinges of the erthe). (III.m12,63-70.)

The influence on Troilus and Criseyde is more evident here in Chaucer's parenthetical information than in Boethius' original ideas. The relationship can be restated as: 1) earthly things are false goods; 2) he who sets his thoughts on earthly things allows himself to lose any of his previous good fortune.

In Book III, prose 2, Boethius enumerates some of the false goods men desire: honor, power, glory, pleasure, nobility, and fame. Theodore Stroud points out that romantic love is not mentioned in Boethius' list: "... Many medieval readers were probably conscious of a glaring oversight in Boethius' treatment of 'false goods.'" This is probably true, although to call it a "glaring oversight" is probably excessive percussion in the symphony of literary criticism. For Boethius, romantic love was not that pertinent. His tragic losses for which he needed consolation were loss of position, money, fame, and his cherished library. He he himself a Criseyde to forsake him, romantic love might have been high on his list of false goods.

With the emphasis on courtly love later in the medieval period, romantic love evidently became more important as an example of false felicity. Romantic love as false felicity was indeed one of the essential threads in Troilus and Criseyde. Chaucer's poem is, after all, not simply an exposition of Boethian philosophy; it is rather a literary dramatization of Boethian philosophy with a new emphasis: courtly love. It is because love is an example of false felicity in Chaucer's treatment of Boethius that the themes of courtly love and Boethian philosophy are so compatible.

In Chaucer's poem, Troilus is overcome by Criseyde's beauty. He re-

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ceives a "fixe and depe impressioun" of her face and begins to "make a mirour of his mynde." He has proceeded from the sight of Criseyde to daydreaming of her (supposedly while he should have been dwelling on the beauty of the divine). In accordance to the doctrine of courtly love, he begins to wail and moan out of his love for Criseyde (hardly the most spiritual of activities), and finally he is so love-sick he desires death to relieve him of his suffering. The reader, tho, is still not won over to the Boethian argument. No matter how much one can believe that Troilus is seeking a false goal, the reader is still in sympathy with Troilus. And so is Chaucer. Romantic love is a familiar part of everyday experience; and if romantic love is sin, no one escapes from sin.

Man, then, allows himself to be vulnerable to the Wheel of Fortune if he follows false felicity (worldly goods) rather than true felicity (heavenly goods). Love (of the human variety) is basically worldly and thus a type of false felicity. Since Troilus participates in the false felicity of love, he becomes vulnerable (that is, more vulnerable) to the Wheel of Fortune. This, then, is a type of tragic fault, or at least the precipitating factor in Troilus' fall, fitting rather nicely the Aristotelian definition. But Troilus is not wicked; he is merely frail. And so Troilus' fault is also humanity’s fault; the tragedy of Troilus and Criseyde is in a larger sense the tragedy of humanity.

I have contended that Troilus and Criseyde is a dramatic "working-out" of Boethian philosophy. It would be tempting now to draw the conclusion that Chaucer is wholly Boethian and is following the Boethian model point by point. This is, in fact, what many critics have concluded
in an attempt to package their thesis too neatly. The problem with this contention is that Chaucer is not neatly explained by a single hypothesis. Chaucer received the story line of *Troilus and Criseyde* from Boccaccio's *Il Filostrato*; it appears that he saw the implications of Boethian philosophy within Boccaccio's tale and then molded the story to fit *The Consolation of Philosophy*. But he did not fit *Troilus and Criseyde* too tightly into the Boethian mold; there are several inconsistencies pointed out by critics which illustrate this. Altho Curry proposes that Chaucer wrote the story in close relation to the Boethian conception, he bemoans the untragic epilogue to a seeming tragedy. Others point out the seeming inconsistencies between the Christian and pagan elements, and between the courtly love and philosophical Stoic elements.

Readers, as well as critics, expect far too often to get a neatly presented point of view by the story-teller. Readers would be more than pleased for Chaucer to present a Christian point of view in *Troilus and Criseyde*. They could even reconcile themselves to a Chaucerian pagan point of view. But it seems difficult to believe in a Christian-Pagan Chaucer.

Much of the problem involved with unravelling the apparent inconsistencies results from the nature of critics and modern readers of Chaucer. No matter how versed they may be, they can never divorce themselves from a modern viewpoint. Boethian philosophy contains incongruent Christian and pagan ideas compatibly. Chaucer also holds many of these ideas; modern readers expect a Christian viewpoint from him, and this they do get—with a smattering of seemingly incongruent pagan leftovers.
Another aspect of this inconsistency is that readers expect Chaucer, as well as other writers, to be completely sincere. One of the inconsistencies in *Troilus and Criseyde* is the epilogue. The argument runs that Chaucer has written a classical (and pagan) tragedy with a Christian moral. Those who are impressed with the tragic nature of the poem insist that the Christian moral is "tacked-on." Those who are impressed with the moral insist Chaucer was a sincere Christian and therefore subordinated the major portion of the poem to the Christian moral. Chaucer is seen to be sincere about either one section or the other. I contend that he was moderately insincere about both.

For example, a major portion of the poem deals with courtly love traditions. Courtly love is essentially a set of literary conventions concerned with an idealized type of behavior. Courtly love traditions were examples of how the courtly lover should behave, not explanations of how lovers actually did behave. Courtly love is, in a sense, a type of game which the writer plays for amusement and for art. People in the medieval age no doubt held courtly love to be an idealized form of behavior, but the argument cannot be made that courtly love was actually in practice in Chaucer's day.

Christianity itself is a form of idealized behavior. Christians, no doubt, believe that people should behave according to the precepts of Christianity. It would be difficult, however, to make a case for Christianity being in widespread practice today. Likewise, Chaucer can be using the ideas of tragedy, pagan and Christian religion, and Boethian philosophy much in the same way that he uses courtly love. The reader can be expected to believe in it for the time being; he is expected to
suspend his disbelief for the interim. Meanwhile he can be amused, he can enjoy and appreciate the art of the system, but he does not have to believe in the system forever and ever after reading the poem. Boethian philosophy is essential to the art of Chaucer's Troilus; it is not essential that we insist that Chaucer believed completely and wholeheartedly in the system of Boethian philosophy. Boethian philosophy, in this respect, is like courtly love. They both are like classical mythology: you need not believe religiously in the classical gods to appreciate the artistic effect.

Chaucer, in writing *Troilus and Criseyde*, was greatly influenced by Boethius' *The Consolation of Philosophy*. It is evident from examination of both texts that there are extensive similarities. Within *Troilus and Criseyde*, Chaucer uses many transposed Boethian ideas as well as borrowed phrases and paraphrased passages. Further, there is evidence that *Troilus and Criseyde* is patterned after *The Consolation of Philosophy* in the comparison of similar ideas and similar structure. However, it is not necessary to make of Chaucer a Boethian disciple in order to admit that he was at least artistically influenced by the Roman philosopher.
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